

"BIGGLES' SOUTH SEA ADVENTURE!"

By CAPT. JOHNS—INSIDE.

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TOM MERRY HITS BACK!



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

Joyce Townsend, of Gt. Hucklow, nr. Buxton, Derbyshire, writes:

Why can't we have the stories of Tom Merry and Gussy as new boys reprinted? Why do some of the fellows wear striped trousers and some plain? Is Bessie Bunter of Cliff House sister to Billy Bunter of Greyfriars? How far is it round Baggy Trimble's waist? Why don't we have any tales about Skimpole nowadays? List of Shell studies, please! That's all.

ANSWER: My hat, I hope so! Well, Joyce, you had the list of Shell studies some weeks ago. Progressing from the last query to the first (and why not—the Chinese read backwards!) a story of Skimpole will no doubt appear soon. One about Skimpole measuring Trimble's waistline in the interests of science would make good reading. Snag is Trimble's waistline is so cast an affair most fellows give up long before they get all the way round! Yes, Bessie and Billy Bunter are sister and brother. No "love" lost between them, though! Naturally, juniors' tastes in trouserings vary. In the snapshot you forgot to enclose you seem to be wearing a red-and-yellow tie—or am I mistaken? The Editor says the story of Tom Merry's arrival as a new boy has been reprinted. Gussy was already at St. Jim's when Martin Clifford first started writing the stories.

D. Hanson, of Earls Heaton, Dewsbury, writes:

Could you tell me what subjects you have to pass to get a matriculation to a college?

ANSWER: For a matric exam you have maths, history, French, English, physics, and chemistry, and other subjects which your schoolmaster is better fitted to tell you about than I. Maybe you don't like talking over exams with schoolmasters? It gives you that goosey feeling? Me, too!

Edward Wright, "New Reader," of Birmingham 8, writes:

1. How do you pronounce Vere Beauclerc?
2. What is the name of the Battle of June 12th, 1861?
3. Who is the fattest—Billy Bunter or Fatty Wynn?
4. Why does Gussy use the letter "w" instead of "r"?
5. How old are you?
6. Which girl does D'Arcy like most?
7. Which do you like best out of: The Famous Five, Bunter, Lord Maulverer, Wun Lung, Peter

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Todd, Wingate, Vernon-Smith, Redwing, Potter, Greene, Coker?

8. How old is Martin Clifford—and Owen Conquest?

ANSWER:

1. Originally a French-Canadian name; English pronunciation is simply Vere Bowclerk—clerk, not clark.

2. That must have been the one where Captain Kidd sank the old Japanese Naxy with two four-pounders and a peashooter. Was it?

3. Oh, Bunter! Not a "fat" lot in it, though.

4. He's funny that way.

5. Add 34 to 56, subtract 16, and double the number you first thought of. I'm some minutes older than when you began doing that.

6. Vague? All right; fifteen years four months is the entry opposite my name on the Head's register. Overflowing from the last question, am I? Well, I had to evade naming Gussy's choice in girls. That's really up to him!

7. Tom Merry.

8. No birth certificates handy!

Denis Dalton, of Kingsbury, N.W.9, writes:

How does one obtain a scholarship at St. Jim's, or any other school? I'd love to go to St. Jim's or Greyfriars!

ANSWER: Public schools often have scholarships open; you should inquire of the education authorities in your district. Bit of a job to find a place for you at either St. Jim's or Greyfriars. Crowds more would want to come, too, you know! Best regards, old chap!

Rae Frees, of Krugersdorp, T.v.l., South Africa, writes:

Why do you and your friends think Monty Lowther's jokes are not amusing? Why do you always pull the noble Gussy's leg?

P.S.—Don't you think you have rather a lot of cheek for a boy of your age?

ANSWER: Frequently we laugh till we cry over Monty Lowther's humour. Often a whole day passes without any member of Study No. 6 taking even the tiniest tug at Gussy's noble leg.

P.S.—Don't you think you're a bit "sweeping" in your statements? Why not "brush" up your facts?

FED-UP WITH THE PERSECUTION OF THE CROOK MASTER OF THE FOURTH FORM,
TOM MERRY SETS OUT TO GET HIS OWN BACK!



TOM MERRY HITS BACK!

"I am not a burglar!" shrieked the Fourth Form master, struggling under the weight of the excited juniors. "You blockheads, I am Mr. Silverson—release me immediately!"

HEARD IN THE MIST!

"T-O-NIGHT?"

"Yes!"

"Don't go!"

"Rot!" said Tom Merry.

"Now, look here, Tom!" said Manners of the Shell, in a tone of deep earnestness. "Don't play the goat! After dorm to-night, it will be as black as a hat out of doors."

Tom Merry laughed.

"The black-out makes it all the easier," he answered. "Who's likely to spot a fellow out of bounds in a black-out?"

"Well, I think it's rot!" said Manners.

"I think it's potty!" said Lowther.

Tom Merry laughed again, carelessly. And the three Shell fellows walked on—slowly, for it was dim and misty in the old quad at St. Jim's and they did not want to run into anybody, or into a wall, or one of the old elms.

Mr. James Silverson, the new master of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, stood where he was—looking after them till they disappeared in the mist.

Evidently, the three Shell fellows could not have seen Mr. Silverson in the dimness, or they would not have talked so freely as they passed within earshot of him.

That was not surprising, for the visibility was very bad, and any fellow might have passed quite near another without noticing him.

Mr. Silverson smiled—a cat-like smile.

Those careless words, uttered by the chums of the Shell within his hearing, meant—and could only mean—that Tom Merry, the captain of the Shell, was planning to break bounds after lights out that night. His friends, it seemed, were trying to urge him to give up the idea; but clearly Tom Merry was not to be prevailed upon.

Bump!

"Oh! Bai Jove!"

It was a sudden sound from the foggy mist. Out of Mr. Silverson's sight, but within his hearing, the three Shell fellows had bumped into somebody—or somebody had bumped into them. And the ejaculation that followed the bump showed that that somebody was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form.

The voices came quite plainly to Mr. Silverson, standing by one of the old elms in the quadrangle.

"Hallo! Is that Gussy?"

"Can't you see where you're going, D'Arcy, you ass?"

"What are you doing out in the fog, fathead?"

"Weally, you fellows, I wish you would not bump

SPARKLING NEW STORY OF THE CHUMS OF ST. JIM'S

by

MARTIN CLIFFORD

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into a fellow and knock a fellow ovah! You have thwown me into quite a fluttah! I thought for a moment it was that wat Silvahson!"

"What?"

"That wotten wat, Silvahson, is in the quad, deah boys!" went on the voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, floating through the mist to the ears of the master to whom he was referring. "I was lookin' for him—and I was goin' to—Yawooop! Oh ewikey! Leggo!"

For some reason, quite inexplicable to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther suddenly seized him, whirled him off his feet, and swept him away—with his arms and legs wildly thrashing the air.

"Oh cwumbs! Stoppit! What are you mad asses up to? Welease me at once!" came Gussy's startled yell through the mist.

"Only seeing you home, old man, in case you get lost in the fog!" said Tom Merry.

"You uttah ass! Welease me!"

"Carry on!" chuckled Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Voices and laughter died away in the mist, in the direction of the School House. Mr. James Silverson heard no more. But he made a mental note of the fact that D'Arcy of his Form had alluded to him as a "rat"—an allusion for which D'Arcy of the Fourth was to be made sorry later.

In the distance, out of James Silverson's hearing, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was being seen home by the Terrible Three of the Shell.

They carried him bodily, with his arms and legs whirling, his eyeglass streaming at the end of its cord, his noble brain in a whirl. He gasped and gurgled for breath as he went, utterly amazed and exasperated by this sudden and extraordinary outbreak on the part of his friends in the Shell.

They set him down at last, right end up, on the stone steps of the School House, and stood smiling at him.

"Happy landing!" said Monty Lowther.

"Gwoogh!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "You uttah asses! Oh ewikey!" Gussy groped for his eyeglass, jammed it into his eye, and glared at the smiling three. "Bai Jove! I am cwumpled and wumpled all ovah! You uttah wuffians, I am goin' to thwash you all wound!"

"All serene, Gussy!" said Tom Merry, with a chuckle. "Pax, old bean!"

"I wefuse to make it pax!" hooted Arthur Augustus, in great wrath. "You have wumpled and cwumpled me all ovah with your silly twicks! And you have pwevented me fwom gettin' on the twack of that wat Silvahson! I was lookin' for him in the fog! I was goin' to bump the bwute ovah, and make him come a cwoppah!"

"That's what you were just going to tell us when we interrupted you?" grinned Manners.

"Yaas, wathah! And—"

"And Silvahson was standing only three yards away, and heard every word you were saying!" said Tom Merry.

"Eh?"

"We'd just passed him when you bumped into us!"

"Oh!"

"And if we hadn't stopped you, old fathead, you'd have gone on and told him what you were going to do!"

"Oh cwumbs!"

"As it was, he heard you call him a rat, and he will take it out of you, you chump!"

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"Bai Jove!"

"Got it now?" asked Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove!" repeated Arthur Augustus. "I did not see the wat! Are you suah that he was close at hand?"

The Terrible Three chortled.

"Just a few!" answered Monty Lowther. "You see, we'd spotted him—though he never knew we had—and we passed close by him to let him hear us talking!"

"What did you want to let him heah you talkin' for, deah boys?" asked Arthur Augustus, in astonishment. "The wottah is always eavesdwoopin'. But what did you want to give him a chance for?"

"Pulling his jolly old leg!" said Manners. "Putting him on the track of a giddy mare's nest. Giving him something to spy on."

"Oh cwumbs! And did he fall for it?" asked Gussy, with interest.

"I rather think so!" grinned Lowther.

"Bai Jove! If that was why you fellows collahed me, to pwevent that eavesdwoopin' wat heahin' what I was goin' to say, I will excuse you," said Arthur Augustus. "You have wumpled me feahfully, and I shall have to go and change my collah. Howevah, I will not thwash you all wound!"

"Thanks!" gasped Tom Merry.

"I breathe again!" gurgled Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy went into the House to change his collar and tie. Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther continued their stroll in the misty quad—with cheery, smiling faces.

They knew that James Silverson had heard their words in passing, and they had no doubt that he would suppose that he had heard them by chance; he was not likely to guess that such words were intended for his ears. Which was very satisfactory to the three leg-pullers—though the outcome was not likely to be so satisfactory to the "Worm" of St. Jim's.

THE SPIDER AND THE FLY!

"MERRY here?"

"Very!" answered Monty Lowther.

Baggy Trimble of the Fourth put his podgy face into Study No. 10 in the Shell, and asked the question.

Monty Lowther, who never could help being funny, answered.

The Terrible Three were in their study, and, as a matter of fact, they were all merry.

Over tea they had been discussing Mr. James Silverson—and what they had in store for that unpleasant individual.

Tom Merry's enemy had caused him a great deal of trouble that term. He had been in hot water with his Form-master, Mr. Linton; with his Housemaster, Mr. Railton; and he had even been "sent up" to the Head. More than once Tom had had narrow escapes—and once, at least, he had been perilously near the sack. All of which was due to the worthy James' desire to cut him out in the favour of old Miss Priscilla Fawcett—with which object James had jumped at the chance of securing a temporary post at Tom's school.

Now Tom was planning to hit back! James was perpetually on his trail, and he had had some measure of success. Tom Merry was, to some extent, getting to be regarded as a dog with a bad name. Now, like Scipio of old, he was going

to carry the war into Africa. If James got as good as he gave, he might get fed up with the warpath. Tom Merry & Co., at all events, were going to do their best to feed him up.

Baggy Trimble blinked at three smiling faces. "Wharrer you mean, very?" he asked. "I said 'Merry here'?"

"And I said 'Very'!" answered Monty Lowther. "Very merry! But a little less so for seeing you—so travel off!"

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Baggy. "I mean Tom Merry—as you jolly well know, you fat-head! Here, Tom Merry, Silverson wants you."

"Does he?" said Tom dryly.

"He's sent me up to tell you so!" grunted Baggy. "I don't see why he can't send somebody else. He jolly well knows I don't like fagging up the stairs. But it's like him—cad all over."

Tom Merry did not rise from the table, where the chums of the Shell were finishing tea. His face set.

"Well, you're to go to his study!" said Baggy.

"Go back and tell him I won't come!" answered Tom coolly.

"Eh?"

"Tell him I've told him before that he's not my Form-master, and that I don't want any orders from him."

"Oh jiminy!" ejaculated Baggy. "I can see myself telling Silverson that! Why, he would give me six!"

"It might do you good!" suggested Manners. "You don't get whopped enough."

"Yah!" retorted Baggy.

Clearly, Baggy did not want six from Silverson, even if they might do him good.

"Catch me checking Silverson!" he said. "I'm in his Form! He whopped Blake to-day for saying that he wished old Lathom was back. He made out that it was because Blake slewed in court; but we all jolly well knew what it was for! A fellow can't speak without that rat listening behind his back. I say, Merry, ain't you going?"

"No," answered Tom.

"Well, you can tell him so yourself!" grinned Baggy. "I'm not telling him. No fear!"

And Baggy Trimble trundled away, grinning.

Tom Merry went on with his tea. Manners and Lowther looked at him.

"I'd go," said Manners quietly.

"I'm taking no orders from that cur!" answered Tom. "He has no right to send for a Shell fellow to his study."

"Quite!" said Manners. "But he happens to be a distant relation of yours—and he happens to be in regular correspondence with your guardian, Miss Fawcett. He can't send for you as a Form-master—but he can as a relation. Don't play the goat, old man!"

"I'm not going!" said Tom stubbornly.

"If you don't, he will make out that there was some message or other from old Miss Priscilla. He's always got that on tap! He may ask Linton to give it to you, as you refuse to go to his study when asked. That's happened before—and it made Linton shirty."

"Um!" said Tom.

"Go and see what he wants—"

"He wants to get my back up, trick me into checking him, and report me to the House-master!" growled Tom. "Don't I know his game?"

"Yes—but don't let him draw you! Keep your temper—and let him say what he likes. He can't do a thing if you keep cool!"

Tom Merry grunted.

"I'd rather keep clear of the worm!" he replied. "I never see his nose without wanting to punch it."

"If every fellow in this House who wanted to punch Silverson's nose punched it, it would be pushed through the back of his head!" remarked Monty Lowther. "You'd better go, Tom—and keep your temper."

Tom Merry gave an angry grunt, but he rose from the table. His friends were right, and he knew it, but it was not easy for him to take good advice when it meant being civil to James Silverson.

"Oh, all right!" he said. "It's the spider and the fly over again—but I'll walk into the giddy parlour, if you like!" And he went.

A few minutes later, he tapped at the door of Mr. Silverson's study, and entered. James

Don't Forget To Reserve Your GEM.

(See page 15.)

Silverson was sitting at the writing-table, which had been Mr. Lathom's before the old master of the Fourth left.

He gave Tom a very sharp glance as he came in. Tom could guess that he had not expected him to come; and that he had not, as a matter of fact, wanted him to come. What he had wanted was to add one more item to Tom's account as a disobedient and disrespectful junior.

Tom, however, was there; and James had to make the best of that.

"You sent for me, sir?" said Tom, with elaborate respect. He was not going to be caught in James' trap, if he could help it.

"Yes!" said Mr. Silverson. "You may come in, Merry! Don't lounge into my study like that, boy!" he added sharply. "It is slovenly."

Tom's eyes gleamed. But he remembered his friends' advice to keep his temper.

"Certainly, sir!" he answered cheerfully. "Anything else?"

James stared at him. He had expected an angry answer, but he did not get it. He compressed his thin lips.

"I have had a letter from your guardian, Miss Fawcett," he said. "She is somewhat distressed by what she has heard regarding you this term, Merry."

"What has she heard, sir?" asked Tom calmly.

"She has heard that you are getting a bad name in the school—that you have been in continual trouble with the masters for disrespectful and insubordinate conduct!" said Mr. Silverson sternly.

"What lying rotter has told her that?" asked Tom.

"What?"

"Somebody must have been telling her untruths," said Tom. "Do you know who it was, Mr. Silverson?"

"Merry!"

"I'd like to know who the cur was, so that I

could write and tell her not to take any notice of his slanders!" said Tom.

James Silverson breathed hard, and his eyes glittered green at the captain of the Shell. Tom knew, and he knew that Tom knew, that it was from him that old Miss Fawcett was hearing those distressing reports.

"You are well aware, Merry, that you have been in constant trouble this term," said James Silverson. "Do not bandy impertinent words with me. Miss Fawcett has great faith in me."

"She is a very unsuspecting old dear," said Tom.

"She has great faith in me, and she desires me to speak to you very seriously with regard to your conduct," said James Silverson venomously. "It is my intention to do so. You are fast becoming a disgrace to the House and the school!"

"Have you told Miss Fawcett that? If you have, it is a lie!" said Tom Merry, very distinctly; and with that he turned his back on the master of the Fourth and walked out of the study, slamming the door after him.

Manners and Lowther had given their chum good advice. But it had been rather a waste!

SIX OF THE BEST!

JACK BLAKE of the Fourth stared.

"What's up, Tommy?" he asked.

Study No. 6 were on the study landing when Tom Merry came up after his brief interview with the master of the Fourth. Blake and Herries, Digby and D'Arcy, gave his flushed, clouded face startled looks.

"Another row?" asked Herries.

"Oh! Only that cad Silverson!" answered Tom, and he went on his way up the Shell passage.

"Bai Jove! That wat is wight on poor old Tommy's twack!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "There's goin' to be a noothah waw, you fellows! Let's go and see what's the mattah."

Blake & Co. followed Tom Merry to Study No. 10 in the Shell. Tom tramped into that study, and Manners and Lowther gave him rather dismayed looks. It was easy to see that James had succeeded—as usual—in drawing him.

"For the love of Mike, what's happened now?" asked Manners.

"Nothing! I was a fool to go!" snapped Tom. "That cur insulted me, and I as good as called him a liar! That's all!"

"Is that all?" asked Monty Lowther sarcastically. "Why didn't you punch him in the eye while you were about it? You might as well have."

"It may come to that!" snorted Tom.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus in the doorway. "I weally should not let it come to that, Tom Mewwy! It would be the sack, deah boy."

"You ought to keep your temper, dealing with a swab like Silverson, old chap," said Blake. "He draws you as easily as a cork."

"Perhaps he does," said Tom. "But no man is going to tell me I'm a disgrace to the House and the school without being told where he gets off!"

"He said that, did he?" asked Herries.

"Well, he said that that was what I was fast becoming. It comes to the same thing. I told him it was a lie!"

"Oh crumbs!" said Digby.

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"He will go to your beak, or else the House-master!" said Blake. "That's his game. He seems to have his teeth in you, old chap."

"Let him!" said Tom.

"Bai Jove! Heah comes Linton!" murmured Arthur Augustus, glancing along the passage.

"Linton! The cur's lost no time, then!" said Tom Merry bitterly. "I'm for it again. I'll make him sorry for it later. He won't have it all his own way."

Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, arrived in the study doorway. His face was set and grim, and all the juniors noticed that he carried a cane under his arm. They could guess why.

"Merry!" said Mr. Linton sharply.

"Yes, sir!" answered Tom.

"I have received a complaint from Mr. Silverson, the master of the Fourth Form."

"I've no doubt of it, sir," said Tom.

"Probably not, if your conduct has been as described by Mr. Silverson," said the master of the Shell dryly. "I understand that your guardian requested him to speak to you, as your relative, and that he sent for you to his study. Is it a fact, Merry, that you turned your back on him before he had finished speaking to you?"

"Yes, sir."

"And left his study?"

"Yes, sir."

"And slammed the door after you?" demanded Mr. Linton sternly.

"Yes, sir," repeated Tom.

His friends could only look on in silent dismay. It was, as Tom had said, the spider and the fly over again. Tom Merry had no chance of dealing with a cunning enemy—no more than a fly had in the spider's web. James' methods were too insidious for him.

"Upon my word!" said Mr. Linton. He slipped the cane from under his arm into his hand. "How often must I tell you, Merry, that Mr. Silverson, as a member of Dr. Holmes' staff, must be treated with proper respect, whatever your personal feelings towards him may be?"

"Has that man a right to tell me that I am a disgrace to the House, sir?" exclaimed Tom Merry passionately.

"I understand that Mr. Silverson was asked, by your guardian, to speak to you on the subject of your conduct this term, which has been very far from satisfactory, Merry," said Mr. Linton. "A boy who is persistently disobedient and disrespectful may be justly regarded as becoming a disgrace to his House. But whatever expressions Mr. Silverson may have used, that is no excuse for a junior turning his back on a master who was addressing him and slamming the master's door on leaving his study."

Tom was silent.

That was quite true, and he knew it. His temper had betrayed him, as it generally did under James' skilful manipulation. But he had nothing to say in defence of what he had done.

Mr. Linton pointed to a chair with his cane.

"You will bend over that chair, Merry," he said severely. "I cannot let such conduct as this pass."

Blake & Co., in the passage, exchanged glances, and tactfully withdrew from the spot. Manners and Lowther, in the study, stood silent.

Tom, silent also, bent over the chair. He had six coming, and, though it was his Form-master who was handing out the six, he owed them to James. The hand was the hand of Esau, but the voice was the voice of Jacob, as it were.

Six sharp swipes sounded in Study No. 10 in the Shell.

Then Mr. Linton tucked the cane under his arm again.

"I am sorry for this, Merry," he said quietly. "But I can allow no boy in my Form to be insolent to other members of the staff. Please bear that in mind, Merry!"

And the master of the Shell rustled away down the passage.

Tom Merry stood breathing hard when he was gone.

"The cur!" he muttered.

He was thinking of James, who had got by with it once more. He respected Mr. Linton and rather liked him, stiff and severe as he was. And he knew that Mr. Linton was getting more and more the impression that he was a ceaselessly troublesome boy, the kind of boy who, if he did not mend his ways, would have to go in the long run. And he owed it all to James!

"The cur!" he repeated.

"We'll get the rat to-night!" said Monty Lowther.

And Tom drew what comfort he could from the prospect of getting James Silverson when the Worm fell into the trap that had been laid for him.

A BURGLAR ALARM!

THE half-hour chimed.

James Silverson rose from the armchair in Mr. Lathom's old study and threw the stump of a cigar into the dying embers of the fire.

It was half-past ten o'clock.

The School House of St. Jim's—and the New House, too, for that matter—lay buried in silence and slumber. Half-past nine was the bed-time for all under the Sixth Form. Sixth Form men were allowed to sit later in their studies, but at ten they were all in bed and asleep. Masters might be up in Common-room or in their own quarters, no one else.

Mr. Silverson was up, and very wide awake.

He switched off the light in the study and stepped to the window, pulling aside the dark black-out blind. He stood there, looking out into the quad.

The mist of the afternoon had cleared off to a good extent. He could see the steely sky, with a star glimmering here and there. He could make out shadowy blocks of the school buildings.

It was, after all, a fine night.

For several minutes the master of the Fourth stood there, looking out. He was thinking, as he looked, of what he had overheard in the mist that afternoon.

Tom Merry was breaking bounds that night after lights out, unless he had altered his intention. James had no doubt of that.

If he had kept to his plan, he was gone by this time. No doubt he would wait till he was sure the coast was clear, but he must be gone by now. But had he kept to his plan?

There was only one way of ascertaining that—by looking into the Shell dormitory. That was what Mr. Silverson intended to do.

But it was rather a thorny matter. Mr. Linton resented interference with his Form, and he had told Silverson so in the plainest language. Silverson had no pretext for butting into the Shell.

Certainly a master who believed that a junior schoolboy had broken out at night was bound to take action. But that action, unless he were the

boy's Form-master, ought to be to lay the matter before the Housemaster.

There were difficulties in the way of that. James did not want to reveal to the Housemaster his methods of acquiring information.

A master who stood quiet and still, half hidden by a tree-trunk, hidden by the mist, and listened to what thoughtless juniors said to one another was not the kind of master that was wanted at St. Jim's. Neither did Mr. Silverson want to draw attention to the fact that he was specially keen on the track of Tom Merry.

Moreover, if Tom had changed his plans, which was quite possible, he did not want to put the young rascal on his guard for another occasion. He did not want to prevent the junior breaking the rules—he wanted to catch him at it! The Housemaster was not wanted on the scene till he was sure.

Once he was sure, all was well.

Once he knew that Tom Merry was missing from his dormitory at that hour of the night he could act.

Breaking out at night was a very serious matter. It was the kind of thing a fellow was expelled for. It would be a sort of climax to Tom Merry's routinous career that term.

But James had to be careful.

He was going to be very careful! He replaced the blind at last and switched on his light again. Then he slipped a small pocket-torch into his pocket and left the study.

The passages were still lighted with blue A.R.P. lamps, dim and ghostly. Light glimmered under a study door here and there.

James Silverson trod lightly past those study doors. He had a quiet and stealthy step, and he made little or no sound. Mr. Railton, in his study, did not hear the master of the Fourth pass.

James trod equally lightly up the stairs.

The study landing was in darkness. But he did not need a light—he knew his way well enough. He trod quietly across to the dormitory staircase.

He ascended that staircase on tiptoe and reached the dormitory landing above. A minute or two later, he was standing at the door of the Shell dormitory, with bent head, listening.

There was no sound.

Softly he groped for the door. Silently he turned the handle and opened the door.

Not a glimmer of light was in the long, lofty apartment. The windows were blacked out—not a gleam of stars came in. Stygian darkness confronted the spy of St. Jim's.

Standing in the open doorway, he listened. Faintly the sound of breathing came through the silence—a faint sound of many sleepers.

If anyone was awake in the Shell dormitory in the School House there was nothing to indicate the fact.

In the blackness, it was impossible to tell or to guess whether any bed was empty. James did not think of switching on the light. If Tom Merry was, after all, in bed, where he ought to have been, James did not want his visit to that dormitory to become known. In that case, James was going to bide his time and wait for another opportunity.

He made no sound in his soft felt slippers as he stepped into the silent dormitory.

He knew where Tom Merry's bed was. But he had to have a spot of light to pick it out—and to see whether it was occupied or not.

He drew the pocket-torch from his pocket and turned on a gleam. That gleam fell on the box

at the foot of Tom Merry's bed—with the name "T. Merry" painted on it.

Another few seconds and the gleam would have been turned on the bed and James would have known what he wanted to know.

But even as the light glimmered on the name on the box, there was a sound in the dormitory.

Whiz!

Something flew through the air. It crashed on the side of James' head. It fairly banged there!

It was a pillow.

James, startled almost out of his wits, gave a startled gasp as he staggered under the crash.

As he gasped and staggered, there was a shout in the voice of Monty Lowther of the Shell.

"Burglars!"

"Look out!" shouted Manners, the next moment.

"Burglars!" roared Lowther.

"What—?"

"Who—?"

"I say—"

"Oh gum!"

Calling voices came from up and down the dormitory. Every fellow was awake in a moment. James panted.

He had been assured that the dormitory was sleeping. Tom Merry, if he was awake, was gone—if he was not gone, he was asleep in bed. James had made no sound—and that speck of light could have awakened no one. It seemed that Monty Lowther must have been already awake.

Anyhow, the whole dormitory was awake now. Fellows were calling and shouting on all sides. A shadowy figure rushed at the startled and confused master of the Fourth, and there was another crash as the bolster smote him.

James, already staggering, went right over as the bolster landed. He bumped on the floor, the pocket-lamp still gleaming in his hand.

"Burglars!" yelled Lowther.

"Go for them!" shouted Manners.

"Pile in, you men!" roared Grundy, of the Shell. "Where is he? Let me get at him with this pillow!"

"Collar him!" howled Wilkins.

"Get a light, somebody!" shouted Talbot of the Shell.

"Scrag him!"

"Bash him!"

Somebody rushed to the lighting-switch by the door and flashed on the electric light.

In the sudden blaze of illumination, the Shell fellows ought really to have seen that the nocturnal visitor to the dormitory was no burglar, but a member of the staff. But they did not seem to do so! Monty Lowther crashed a pillow on the sprawling James. Manners crashed a bolster. Gore landed a terrific swipe with a slipper. James, lost to all caution in his fury, roared.

"Here he is!"

"Collar him!"

"Got him!"

"Grab him!"

"Don't let him get away!"

"No fear!"

Shell fellows grabbed James on all sides. They swarmed over him, they overwhelmed him. Lowther and Manners were the most active. But they were well backed up by Talbot, Grundy, Wilkins, Gunn, Kangaroo, Glyn, and Dane, and other fellows. Half the Shell seemed to rise to this—just as if they had expected something of the sort, and were ready for it.

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James Silverson wriggled and rolled and struggled and spluttered.

But even in the wild confusion of the moment he noted that he did not hear the voice of Tom Merry and did not glimpse the captain of the Shell. Tom was not in that excited crowd of fellows that swarmed over the spy of the school. He would surely have been in the forefront had he been in the dormitory at all. It seemed that he was not.

"Bash him!" roared Grundy.

"Sit on his head!"

"We've got him!"

James struggled frantically.

"Release me!" he howled. "You stupid young fools—"

"Hallo, he's calling us names!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "Pretty cheeky for a burglar! Give him some more!"

"Scrag him!"

"I am not a burglar!" shrieked James. "You blockheads. I am Mr. Silverson—release me immediately! How dare you lay hands on me! I—Yaroooop!"

James roared as a crashing pillow cut him short.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He makes out that he isn't a burglar!" said Monty Lowther. "Creeping into the dorm like that—he says he isn't a burglar! Jump on him."

"Bash him!"

"Bag him!"

"I am not a burglar!" howled James. "You know perfectly well that I am not a burglar! Will you release me, you young scoundrels?"

"That voice sounds sort of familiar!" remarked Lowther. "Is that really Mr. Silverson?"

"You know it is, you young rascal!" yelled James.

"How was I to know when you came sneaking in in the dark?" asked Lowther. "I shall complain to Mr. Linton of this—coming in here in the dark and frightening us!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was really impossible for the Shell fellows to persist in their mistake any longer. Obviously, in the glare of the light, and with his well-known harsh voice howling, this was Silverson, not a burglar!

They released him at last, and James, crimson with rage, staggered to his feet.

OUT OF BOUNDS!

JAMES SILVERSON panted and panted for breath.

A dozen Shell fellows stood in a ring round him, grinning. James was fearfully rumpled and dishevelled. He had been handled quite without ceremony. Whether the Shell fellows had mistaken him for a burglar, or not, they had given him a high old time. His torch had been trodden underfoot—so had his mortar-board—his gown was ripped, and his collar and tie hung out over his shoulder. His hair looked like a mop. Seldom, or never, had a St. Jim's master ever been in such a state.

"You—you—groogh—you young rascals!" he panted. "I will have you all—gooh!—flogged for this—urrrh!"

"No, you won't!" said Monty Lowther cheerfully. "If you don't want to be taken for a burglar, Mr. Silverson, you shouldn't play at being one! I shall certainly complain to Mr. Linton!"

"Certainly!" said Manners. "Mr. Linton will

not allow you to come here disturbing us like this, Mr. Silverson."

"I should think not!" roared Grundy belligerently. "I'd like to know what you mean by it, Mr. Silverson, for one!"

"What the dooce has he come up for?" asked Aubrey Racke. "He's got no bisney in our dormitory."

"Nosing, as usual," muttered Crooke. "There never was such a nosey parker as that man Silverson."

"I think we'd better call up the Housemaster," said Manners. "Mr. Railton will have something to say about this."

"Certainly!" said Talbot. "We have a right to be protected from disturbance like this in the middle of the night."

James Silverson panted and panted. But while he panted his eyes were on Tom Merry's bed.

That bed was empty.

Most of the beds were, in fact. Racke, Crooke, Skimpole, and one or two others had remained in bed, but the majority of the Shell had turned out at the burglar alarm. But these fellows were, of course, all visible. Tom Merry was not visible.

He was not in his bed. He was not among the fellows ringed round the panting Silverson. He was not to be seen in the dormitory at all.

And James, in spite of his rough handling, and his breathless and dishevelled state, had a feeling of triumph. Tom Merry was gone. He was out of bounds at a quarter to eleven. He was due for the sack. That was a full compensation to James for what had happened.

Headless of the excited voices of the Shell fellows, he scanned the dormitory, and ascertained that Tom was not to be seen. Then he rapped:

"Silence!"

"Oh, draw it mild!" snorted Grundy. "You've come here and woke us all up—"

"Silence! Where is Merry?" thundered Silverson.

"Eh?" Grundy had not noticed that Tom was missing. "Where are you, Merry? Your jolly old relation wants to see you."

"By gum! Where's Tom Merry?" exclaimed Racke.

Crooke whistled

"Tom!" called out Lowther.

"Tom, old man!" exclaimed Manners, staring round.

But there was no answer from Tom Merry, and he was not to be seen. There was a buzz of surprise among the Shell fellows.

Aubrey Racke gave his pal Crooke a wink. Crooke chuckled. Both the black sheep of the Shell had been congratulating themselves that they had not chosen that particular night for one of their dingy excursions out of bounds. But it seemed that Tom Merry had.

"Oh gad!" breathed Racke. "This is a fair cop!"

"Silverson knew he was gone, you bet!" whispered Crooke. "He's always suspected him of pub-crawling. We all know that. He spotted him somehow, and he came up to make sure. That's why he's here"

Aubrey nodded, grinning.

"Tom!" called Lowther. "Where the dickens is Tom?"

"He can't be out of the dormitory at this time of night!" exclaimed Talbot.

"Looks as if he is," muttered Kangaroo. "My hat! This means a row!"

James drew a deep, deep breath.

He was sure now. Tom Merry was gone, and all that remained was to call the Housemaster on the scene. He had had an unpleasant experience, but it was worth it—for this.

"Merry is not here," said James venomously. "Go back to bed! Mr. Railton will be here in a few minutes."

He put the broken torch into his pocket, picked up his mortar-board and replaced it on his untidy head, and stepped to the door.

There he drew out the key.

It was going to take James only a few minutes to call up the Housemaster to see with his own eyes that the captain of the Shell was missing from his dormitory at a late hour of the night. But he was not going to take the remotest risk of Tom getting back while he was gone those few minutes.

If, by happy chance, Tom returned in those few minutes, he would not be able to get back into the dormitory. He was going to be locked out till Mr. Railton had been made aware that he was out of bounds!

"Look here, you've no right to lock us in!" exclaimed Grundy indignantly, as James put the key in the outside of the lock.

Unheeding George Alfred Grundy, James Silverson drew the door shut after him, locked it on the outside, put the key in his pocket, and walked away.

His footsteps died away towards the staircase. Monty Lowther gave Manners a joyous wink.

"Did he fall for it?" he murmured.

"Did he?" grinned Manners.

Talbot laughed.

"We're locked in," he said. "No chance of poor old Tom getting back—if he were out."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This isn't a laughing matter for Tom Merry," said Aubrey Racke, staring at Manners and Lowther, astonished by their merriment in the alarming circumstances. "This means the sack for Tom Merry."

"After all he's done this term, you bet!" said Crooke, with a nod. "There's been a lot of talk about Tom Merry and pub-crawling at the Green Man. This puts the lid on!"

"Oh, shut up, you two!" growled Grundy. "Tom Merry isn't your sort of a worm! He's a bit of an ass, but he's all right. But where the thump is he?"

"Not here!" said Wilkins.

"Do you know where he is, Lowther?" asked Gunn. "Do you, Manners?"

"Sort of," grinned Lowther.

He strolled along the dormitory to a wall cupboard at the end of the long apartment. The door of that cupboard was closed. The whole Shell stared at Monty Lowther as he opened it.

"O.K., Tommy! Come out!" said Monty.

Tom Merry, laughing, stepped out of the cupboard.

"Silverson's gone—" he began.

"Yes; to report to Railton."

"I wish him joy of it!"

"And he's locked the door on the outside so that you can't get in, after your visit to the Green Man, before he brings Railton up," said Manners.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Racke and Crooke stared with popping eyes

at the captain of the Shell. A dozen fellows blinked at him.

"What on earth's this game?" exclaimed Grundy. "Why, you weren't out of the dorm at all!"

"Not a bit," agreed Tom Merry.

"What were you keeping doggo for?" exclaimed Wilkins.

"Oh, just to amuse Silverson!" drawled Tom Merry. "It will entertain him to see me here when he brings Railton up."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh!" gasped Grundy. "Did you know the rat was coming up here spying?"

"Sort of."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry went back to bed, with a cheery grin on his face. The other fellows turned in. Some of them had been in the secret—some hadn't—but all of them knew now that the Terrible Three had expected James' visit to the dormitory, and had made playful preparations for the same.

Grinning, the Shell fellows waited for the arrival of their Housemaster—led to the dormitory to ascertain that Tom Merry was missing, only to discover that he was in bed with the rest of the Shell. It was quite amusing to think of his face when he looked into that dormitory.

NOBODY MISSING!

MR RAILTON glanced inquiringly at the master of the Fourth. James Silverson entered his study with a grave and serious face, that gave no indication of the gloating exultation within. James' cue was to be shocked and grieved by the delinquencies of his young relation.

"What is it, Mr. Silverson?" asked the Housemaster.

His manner was courteous, but he did not like the new master of the Fourth, and he could not be very cordial.

"A very serious matter, I am afraid," said Mr. Silverson. "A junior of this House is missing from his dormitory, sir."

The School House master rose to his feet at once.

"A Fourth Form boy?" he asked.

As Silverson was master of the Fourth, Railton took that for granted.

"No; a boy in the Shell," answered Mr. Silverson. "I regret to say, my relative, Merry."

Mr. Railton looked at him across the table. His face set a little.

"You have seen this boy outside his dormitory at this hour?" he asked. "You are sure of what you say?"

"I am, unfortunately, only too sure," said Mr. Silverson. "I have not seen him, but I have ascertained that he is missing."

"May I inquire how?" asked the Housemaster sharply. "Mr. Linton has been justly annoyed, on more than one occasion, by your intervention in his Form, Mr. Silverson. This matter is in his province. I trust that you are not going to tell me that you have visited the dormitory of Mr. Linton's boys. Any such visit should have been carried out by Mr. Linton."

James breathed rather hard.

He was not playing an easy game. But he had thought this out, and he had a plausible

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tale to tell—now that he was sure that Tom Merry was out of bounds.

"I will explain," he said. "Looking from my study window a short time ago, I fancied that I saw a boy leaving the House, and though I did not see him clearly, I had the impression that it was Merry."

"Oh!" said Mr. Railton.

"I was not sure—and I hoped, most certainly, that such was not the case," said Mr. Silverson blandly. "But I felt it my duty to ascertain. I should have called you, sir, or Mr. Linton, had I felt sure, but I was naturally unwilling to disturb you for what might, after all, have been nothing. It seemed to me the simplest way to glance into the Shell dormitory and see whether a bed was unoccupied there."

"No doubt," assented Mr. Railton. "And—"

"I am sorry to say that Merry was not present. Many of the boys awakened, and I inquired where Merry was, but they could tell me nothing. Most of them were quite surprised to find that he was missing. They knew, at all events, nothing of his movements, except that he was not present in the dormitory."

Mr. Railton set his lips.

"This is extremely serious," he said. "There have been doubts about that boy during the present term, but on every occasion he has been able to set them at rest. If he is actually missing from his dormitory at this hour, the matter is conclusive. He must go before the headmaster in the morning."

"I regret that there is no doubt," said Mr. Silverson. He laid a key on the study table. "I considered it best, sir, to lock the dormitory door after me, as Merry, if he returned before you arrive there, would, I fear, have no hesitation in denying that he had ever left the dormitory at all."

"Very good!" said the Housemaster.

He picked up the key. His face was grim.

Mr. Silverson's positive statement that Tom Merry was not in the Shell dormitory left no doubt on the subject. Vague doubts and suspicions came to a head in Mr. Railton's mind.

One thing was certain. If Tom Merry was proved, beyond doubt, to be the young rascal he now appeared to be, he would not remain at St. Jim's to disgrace his school further. He would go, and the sooner he went, the better.

"I shall go to the dormitory at once, Mr. Silverson," said the Housemaster. "I am much obliged to you for bringing the matter to my notice."

"It was a disagreeable duty for me, sir," said James Silverson. "The boy is my relative, which makes it all the more disagreeable."

Mr. Railton nodded and left the study.

James allowed himself a smile—at the Housemaster's back—and then went to his own study. Having passed on the information to the Housemaster, he was done with the matter. It was Railton who was going to catch Tom Merry out—Railton who was going to report him to the Head—Railton who was going to deal with the whole matter, as Housemaster. James had nothing more to do with it, except to see Tom Merry leave St. Jim's on the morrow, expelled by his headmaster. He smiled at the prospect.

Mr. Railton ascended the staircase with a grim and frowning brow. He was angry, and he was deeply disturbed.

He arrived at the door of the Shell dormitory, and was surprised to hear a sound of chuckling from within that apartment.

He started as he heard it.

According to what Silverson had told him, he had left the Shell fellows all aware that Tom Merry was missing, late at night, which was as serious as a matter well could be. Yet there was a distinct sound of chuckling in the locked dormitory.

He compressed his lips, inserted the key in the lock, and turned it. He threw the door open.

The light was still on. It shone on the long row of beds, every one of them occupied.

Mr. Railton strode in.

Most of the Shell sat up in bed. They all looked at the Housemaster. His eyes turned on Tom Merry's bed.

He gave almost a bound.

Naturally, after Silverson's report, he had expected to see that bed vacant.

But it was not vacant. Tom Merry was sitting up in it, gazing calmly and cheerfully at his Housemaster.

"Merry!" stammered Mr. Railton. He blinked at the captain of the Shell almost dizzily.

"Yes, sir!" answered Tom.

"You—you—you are here!" stammered the Housemaster.

Tom raised his eyebrows slightly in mild surprise.

"Here, sir!" he repeated. "Of course; we're all here!"

Mr. Railton stood staring at him. James had stated that Tom Merry was absent from the dormitory. He had locked the door. It had remained locked till Mr. Railton unlocked it, so obviously Tom had not got back in those few minutes; yet he was here!

The Housemaster's brow grew darker and darker.

Silverson evidently had made a mistake—an utterly stupid mistake! He had meddled once more with what did not concern him, and brought an utterly unfounded accusation against a perfectly innocent junior.

"Merry," exclaimed Mr. Railton, "you have not been out of this dormitory since lights out?"

"No, sir."

"You were here—you must have been here—



"The black-out makes it easier," said Tom Merry. "Who's likely to spot a fellow out of bounds in a black-out?" Mr. Silverson heard the careless words distinctly as the three juniors passed.

when Mr. Silverson was here," said Mr. Railton. "It appears that he did not see you."

"Didn't he, sir?" asked Tom pleasantly.

"He had the impression, Merry, that you were absent from the dormitory." Mr. Railton gave the captain of the Shell a sharp look. "You could not have been in bed, or Mr. Silverson would have seen you, Merry."

"Most of the fellows turned out, sir, when Mr. Silverson made a disturbance here," answered Tom calmly. "Some of the fellows seem to have taken him for a burglar. Hardly anybody stayed in bed."

"I hope we did not damage Mr. Silverson very much, sir!" said Monty Lowther demurely. "But when a man comes into a dorm in the dark with a flashlight, what's a fellow to think?"

"I jolly well thought it was a burglar, and I jolly well banged him with my pillow!" said Grundy. "I don't see why I shouldn't, either."

"Merry!" rapped Mr. Railton.

"Yes, sir!"

"It is very singular that Mr. Silverson did not see you here. I cannot help suspecting, Merry, that you intentionally kept out of his sight in order to delude him on the subject," said the Housemaster sternly.

"That is correct, sir," said Tom Merry coolly.

"If it had been you, sir, or my own Form-master, I should not have done so; but I am not accountable to the master of the Fourth Form, and I did not choose to let Mr. Silverson see me."

"Merry!"

"I did not care what he thought, and he was welcome to think anything he liked," said Tom steadily. "If Mr. Silverson likes to make a fool of himself, sir, it is not my fault. He should not have come here at all, and if he butts in where he is not wanted he must expect to get his leg pulled."

Manners and Lowther looked rather uneasy. That really was not the way to talk to a Housemaster.

Mr. Railton stood silent. He understood now the cause of the chuckling he had heard at the door.

These young rascals were amused at Silverson having made an egregious fool of himself. The whole thing was a mare's nest—nobody was out of the dormitory; nobody was out of bounds. Silverson had made one more of his mistakes, that was all.

Really it was difficult to place any blame on Tom Merry for having kept out of Silverson's sight. Silverson had nothing to do with the Shell—no right whatever to call Shell fellows to account, especially in the middle of the night. If Tom did not choose to be visible while he was present that was his own business, and Mr. Railton had to realise it.

"I am glad, at all events, that nothing is amiss here," said Mr. Railton at last. He turned to the door. "Good-night, my boys!"

"Good-night, sir!"

The light was shut off and the door closed. Mr. Railton's footsteps died away down the passage to the stairs. Then there was a ripple of laughter from bed to bed in the dormitory.

"Bit of a facer for old Railton!" murmured Monty Lowther. "He looked as if he had seen a ghost when he spotted you, Tommy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Anybody envy Silverson the jaw he's going to get from Railton?" asked Manners.

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"Ha, ha, ha!"

"By gum! Railton will comb his hair for this!" chuckled Grundy. "The silly ass—fetching a Housemaster up here in the middle of the night for nothing!"

"I think," remarked Monty, "that we score this time. I think we've made the jolly old Worm wriggle—what?"

"What-ho!" chuckled Tom Merry.

There was no doubt on that point. The schemer of St. Jim's, wary and cunning as he was, had been led by the nose into making an egregious ass of himself, and there was not the slightest doubt that he would get a "jaw" from Railton that would almost make his hair curl! Tom Merry & Co., at their new game of "hitting back," had undoubtedly succeeded in making the Worm wriggle!

TROUBLE IN THE FOURTH!

"**W**ARE beak!" murmured Jack Blake, when the Fourth Form went into their Form-room the next morning.

"Yaas, wathah!" smiled Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

But the St. Jim's Fourth hardly needed warning. The expression on Mr. James Silverson's face was sufficient to put them on their guard.

Mr. Silverson was never good-tempered. But on that particular morning his temper was pure acid.

Figgins & Co. and the other New House fellows in the Fourth wondered what was the matter with the brute. They had not yet heard of the happenings in the School House overnight.

It was only too visible in Silverson's bitter face that something was the matter, and that it behoved the Fourth Formers to walk warily.

Not only had James been disappointed when he had counted at length on complete success, but Mr. Railton, after coming down from the Shell dormitory, had talked to him in extremely plain language. He had, as Grundy put it, combed his hair for him!

Silverson had blundered. He had made a fool of himself. He had made a fool of Railton. And he had done so by intervening in matters that did not concern him—by meddling with another master's Form.

It was not the first time he had done it, nor the second; and the School House master was angry and impatient, and he gave James the full benefit of it.

Neither did the matter end there; though after Mr. Railton's "jaw," James was left in a cold perspiration. Mr. Linton heard of it in the morning—and after breakfast he spoke to James about it. He spoke to him in dry, cold, sarcastic tones, explaining that when he wanted assistance from Mr. Silverson in managing his Form, he would ask Mr. Silverson for it; until which time he begged Mr. Silverson to mind his own business!

It was no wonder that the new master of the Fourth came to his Form-room that morning in a state of suppressed fury.

His greenish eyes gleamed over the Fourth as they took their places. Only too clearly, he wanted somebody on whom to wreak his wrath.

"Herries!" he rapped.

"Yes, sir!" grunted George Herries.

"I have told you before about shuffling your feet noisily! Take a hundred lines, Herries!"

Herries breathed hard and sat down.

"Wynn!"
 "Yes, sir!" said the Falstaff of the New House.

"Your face is smeared with toffee, or some other disgusting comestible. Go and wash yourself at once!"

Fatty Wynn looked at him. It was true that Fatty had disposed of toffee after brekker. There was, perhaps, a spot of stickiness left on Fatty's plump mouth. Only a jaundiced eye would have noticed it.

To be sent out of the Form-room to wash was a fearful disgrace. Such things happened to Baggy Trimble—not to other fellows.

David Llewellyn Wynn did not stir. Fatty was a good-tempered and equable fellow; but at that order from the Worm, fierce Welsh blood boiled in Fatty.

"Do you hear me, Wynn?" snapped Mr. Silverson.

"Yes, sir!"

"Go and wash yourself!"

"I won't!"

"Wha-a-t?"

"I won't!" said Fatty Wynn. "I don't need washing, and I won't!"

"Oh, bai Jove!" breathed Arthur Augustus.

There was quite a sensation in the Fourth. Every fellow in the Form loathed Silverson; every fellow longed for old Mr. Lathom to come back, and for the Worm to go. But no one, so far, had ventured to defy the tyrant of the Fourth in his own Form-room.

Mr. Silverson stared at Fatty Wynn. Then he picked up a cane from his desk. Figgins' eyes gleamed; Kerr set his lips; Fatty Wynn sat tight and stared back at his Form-master.

"Wynn, leave this Form-room instantly and wash your unclean face, or I shall cane you with the utmost severity!" said Mr. Silverson. Obviously he wanted an excuse to use the cane.

"Go, you ass!" whispered Levison of the Fourth.

Every fellow sympathised with Fatty; but a fellow really could not stand up against his beak.

"Bettah go, deah boy!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

Fatty Wynn rose to his feet. He stepped out from the Form.

"I'm going!" he said. "I'm going to the Head! I'm going to the Sixth Form Room, sir, to ask Dr. Holmes whether my face needs washing!"

And Fatty walked to the door.

Mr. Silverson gave a start. The Fourth Form gazed at him breathlessly.

David Llewellyn Wynn was as clean as a new pin—he always was. Save for that speck of toffee, Fatty Wynn might have been fresh from the bath. If Fatty followed that utterly unexpected line, it did not mean trouble for Fatty—it meant that the Head's attention would be drawn to Mr. Silverson's peculiar methods of managing his Form.

"Wynn!" the Worm almost gasped.

"Well?" said Fatty coolly.

"You are not to go to the Head!"

"Every fellow has a right to go to his head-master," answered Fatty Wynn. "If I leave this Form-room I'm going to the Head."

"Good old Fatty!" murmured Figgins.

"One in the eye for the Worm!" grinned Cardew.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Wynn, stand away from that door! I shall

not send you out of the Form-room—I shall cane you! Bend over that desk!" rapped Mr. Silverson.

He swished the cane.

It was surrender on the Worm's part! All the Fourth knew that he dared not, in the circumstances, let David Llewellyn Wynn go to the headmaster.

Fatty Wynn went back to his place.

Silverson glared at him.

"I have told you to bend over that desk, Wynn!" he thundered.

"I won't!" said Fatty. "You're not going to cane me for nothing. You touch me with that cane, and I'm going to the Head."

"Oh cwumbs!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

Silverson stood with the cane in his hand, fury in his face. He made a stride towards Fatty—and stopped.

His temper, as often happened, had landed him in a difficult position. He had picked on the unoffending Fatty as he had picked on Herries, to wreak his temper. He did not want Dr. Holmes to become acquainted with such facts.

He had to retreat.

"Wynn, you will be flogged for this insolence!" he said. "I shall report you to your head-master for a flogging!"

It was the best the Worm could do in the circumstances. Every fellow in the Form-room knew that it was an idle threat—that the Worm had no intention of bringing the matter to the headmaster's notice at all—that his threat was uttered simply to save his face.

Fatty Wynn made no answer.

Silverson's eyes gleamed round over the class. "You are laughing, Trimble!" he rapped.

Baggy, who was grinning, ceased to grin on the spot. A look of dire alarm replaced the fat grin.

"Oh, no, sir!" gasped Baggy. "Not at all, sir! I— Yaroooooooh!"

Swipe!

The cane came down across Baggy's fat shoulders. The whop of the cane and the roar from Baggy rang through the Fourth Form Room.

"Shame!" came a voice from somewhere.

"What! What! Who spoke?" almost raved Silverson.

No answer.

"Ow! Ow! Wow!" roared Baggy Trimble.

"Ow! Wow! Yow-ow!"

"Silence!"

"Yow-ow-ow-ow-ow!" roared Baggy.

"Will you be silent, Trimble?"

"Oh! Yes, sir! Yow-ow-ow-ow!"

Silverson stepped to his desk. Probably he realised that it was necessary to keep some control over his savage temper.

Books were in the Form-master's desk that he needed for the lesson. He grabbed at the lid to raise it. But the lid did not lift.

He wrenched angrily at it. Still it did not move. Then, in angry amazement, he scanned it and discovered the cause. A screw had been driven in by some unknown hand, and the lid was screwed down.

Silverson gasped with rage. He spun round towards his staring Form.

"Who has screwed up my desk?" he thundered.

"Oh cwikey!"

"The boy who has screwed up my desk is to

stand out before the Form!" panted James Silverson, his voice trembling with rage.

Nobody stood out before the Form. If the desk-screw was there, he was not disposed to tell Silverson so. Mr. Silverson stood glaring at a silent Form.

Then, as he glared, it suddenly flashed into his mind. It was not one of the Fourth who had done this—it was Tom Merry! The moment he thought of that, James was sure of it. Tom Merry, of course!

James did not pause to reflect. He was far too savagely enraged and exasperated for that. Leaving his Form staring, he rushed across to the door, left the Fourth Form Room, and swept like a thunderstorm up the corridor to the Shell Room.

NOT NICE FOR JAMES!

"CONTICUERE omnes—all were silent—" Tom Merry was on con in the Shell Form Room.

He was suddenly interrupted.

The door flew open and James Silverson strode in. His face was red, his eyes sparkling; he panted for breath.

All the Shell stared round. Mr. Linton raised his eyebrows. Linton did not like interruptions in class; neither did he like James Silverson.

"Really, Mr. Silverson!" he exclaimed. "What—"

"A boy of your Form, sir, has been guilty of an outrageous act in my Form-room!" hooted Mr. Silverson. "My desk has been screwed up!"

"Indeed!" said Mr. Linton coldly. "His name?"

"Merry!"

Tom Merry stood, with Virgil in his hand, looking at the enraged master of the Fourth. He smiled faintly. Monty Lowther winked at Manners.

"Merry?" repeated Mr. Linton. "Very well; if Merry has been guilty of the act you describe he will be punished severely! Merry!"

"Yes, sir!"

"Did you screw up the desk in Mr. Silverson's Form-room?"

"No, sir!"

"Have you entered the Fourth Form Room at all?"

"No, sir!" answered Tom cheerfully.

"That is false!" hooted Mr. Silverson. "I am perfectly assured that it was Merry; and if it was not he, it was one of his friends!"

"Lowther, did you screw up the desk in Mr. Silverson's Form-room?"

"No, sir!"

"Did you, Manners?"

"No, sir!"

"Did you, Talbot?"

"No, sir!"

"Are you satisfied, Mr. Silverson," asked the master of the Shell, with cold sarcasm, "or do you desire me to question the whole Form?"

"I am not satisfied, sir! I am assured that it was Merry who screwed up my desk—an act, sir, of a piece with his perpetual insolence to me personally ever since I have been a master in this school!" hooted James Silverson. "There is no doubt whatever in my mind, sir, that it was Merry!"

"You have heard the boy's answer, Mr. Silverson!"

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"I do not believe him!"

"You may please yourself about that, Mr. Silverson, but I accept his word without the slightest doubt!" said Mr. Linton. "Now I must point out to you that you are interrupting the lesson—"

"I demand—"

"Will you have the kindness to leave my Form-room, sir?" asked Mr. Linton coldly.

James did not have the kindness to leave his Form-room. He stood where he was, his eyes gleaming at Tom Merry. Tom gave him a cheerful smile—which did not have a cheering effect on the Worm. He was boiling already, and it made him almost boil over.

"I repeat, sir—" he said, his voice husky with rage.

"I desire to hear no more of the matter, sir!" said Mr. Linton. "Please leave my Form-room, and allow the lesson to proceed!"

"I demand that boy's punishment!" panted James.

Mr. Linton gave him a cold and contemptuous look and turned to his class. If James did not go the lesson had to proceed with James there. Anyhow, it was going to proceed.

"You will go on, Merry!" said the master of the Shell.

"Yes, sir!" said Tom.

And he went on with his con.

"Conticuere omnes, intenticue ora teabant—"

"Construe!" said Mr. Linton.

"All were silent, their gaze intent upon him—"

James Silverson stood fairly gasping. Linton was going on, and Tom Merry was going on, just as if he were not there!

"Mr. Linton—" James almost bawled.

"Kindly do not interrupt this lesson, sir!" said Mr. Linton. "Continue, Merry!"

"Inde tore pater Æneas—" continued Tom Merry.

"I repeat—" roared James.

"Sic orsus ab alto—" went on Tom.

"Ha, ha, ha!" came a roar from the Shell.

Really, they could not help it. There was something absurd in James standing there spluttering while Tom Merry carried on with his construe, and the master of the Shell gave him attention regardless of James.

"I tell you, Mr. Linton, that Merry—"

"Will you please be silent, Mr. Silverson, if you remain here?" asked Mr. Linton. "I can scarcely hear the boy's voice!"

"I have told you—"

"Continue, Merry!"

"Then from his lofty seat Father Æneas thus began—" translated Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Mr. Linton, will you listen to me? I have not the slightest doubt—not the faintest doubt that—"

"That will do, Merry! You will go on, Manners!" said Mr. Linton, regardless of the spluttering James.

"Infandum, regina, jubes dolorem—" went on Manners, taking up con in his turn. "Terrible, O queen, is the grief thou bidst me renew—"

"Sir—" James yelled.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence in class!" exclaimed Mr. Linton.

"Continue, Manners!"

"Troianas ut opes—" continued Manners.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence, please!" said Mr. Linton, though his own lips were twitching. James was almost making the Form-master laugh as well as the Form.

"If that insolent boy is not punished, Mr. Linton—" shrieked James. "I repeat that he has screwed up the desk in my Form-room!"

"You will go on, Talbot!"

"Will you listen to me, Mr. Linton?"

"No, sir!" said Mr. Linton. "I will not listen to you while I am engaged with my Form! I cannot neglect my class, sir, though it appears that you can neglect yours!"

James Silverson looked at him. It was plain that he was on the verge of an explosion. The Shell fellows watched him breathlessly. A row between two beaks was a very unusual entertainment seldom enjoyed by St. Jim's fellows. And it looked as if a row was coming; James seemed quite unable to control his exasperation.

"That boy—Merry—" he gasped.

"I am waiting, Talbot!" said Mr. Linton.

"Trojanas ut opes at lamentabile regnum—" murmured Talbot.

"Mr. Linton!" howled James.

The master of the Shell calmly turned his back on him.

That was too much for James. He made a stride—or, rather, a rush—at Linton and grabbed him by the sleeve of his gown to force his attention.

"Now listen!" he hooted.

Mr. Linton turned on him. His face expressed his contempt for a man who could not keep his temper in the presence of a class of junior boys. He spoke in low, icy tones.

"Leave this Form-room, Mr. Silverson!"

"I will not leave until—"

"If you do not immediately leave this Form-room, Mr. Silverson, I will place the matter before Dr. Holmes!" said Mr. Linton. "Go!"

James gave him a look. But he realised that he had reached the point where he had to get off.

Slowly, choking with rage, he turned to the door, and the Shell fellows grinned after him as he went out. Mr. Linton shrugged his shoulders, and resumed construe with the Shell.

It was some little time before James got back

to the Fourth Form Room. He had to find a screwdriver and take it with him.

When he arrived at the Fourth Form Room at last a cheery voice floated out to him:

"Silverson was in a fearful wage, deah boys! Fwightfully had form for a beak to fly into a wage like that—what?"

Mr. Silverson hurtled into the Form-room.

"D'Arcy! Take five hundred lines!" he roared.

"Bai Jove!"

Mr. Silverson unscrewed his desk. The lesson started late in the Fourth that morning. It was not a happy morning for the Fourth.

But when the Shell came out in break three fellows were grinning cheerfully.

"Not you this time, Tommy!" remarked Monty Lowther.

"No!" said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Now you see what comes of taking your Uncle Montague's advice!" said Lowther. "If you'd screwed up Silverson's desk, as you were going to, you'd have been copped, a dead cert! But getting old Kangaroo to do it—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Silverson, when he came out of the Fourth, spotted the laughing faces of the Terrible Three in the quad. He was more convinced than ever—if he needed convincing—that Tom Merry had screwed up his desk. Tom Merry hadn't—he had only lent Harry Noble a screwdriver for the task, and the Cornstalk junior had obliged. Mr. Silverson gazed at those three laughing faces—with deep feelings.

But his time was coming! He had only to wait till Tom Merry carried out that intention of breaking out after lights out—which it seemed that he had, after all, postponed the night before. Then that young rascal was going to pay scot and lot!

UP TO SNUFF!

"**T**HINK so?" murmured Tom Merry doubtfully.

"Bank on it!" answered Monty Lowther.

"Quiet!" whispered Manners.

It was late—and black as a hat on the dormi-

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tory landing in the School House. The chime of ten reached three pairs of ears dully through the wail of the wind.

All was dark—deeply dark. In earlier times there would have been a glimmer of starlight from the high landing windows, but now all windows were blacked out.

Below, on the staircase, a dim blue lamp burned. That was all the illumination there was, and it seemed to make the darkness deeper.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther were leaning on the oak balustrade of the landing, looking down into the deep well of the staircase at that pale blue glimmer of an A.R.P. lamp.

The rest of the Shell, like the other juniors of St. Jim's, were in bed. The Terrible Three had tucked their pyjamas into their trousers, slipped on slippers, and emerged from their dormitory. Now they were watching.

Tom Merry was doubtful. It seemed to him that, after the experience of the night before, James Silverson would realise how his leg had been pulled—that he would guess that he had been intended to hear those words he had caught in the mist—and that he would have sense enough to know that Tom never had had any intention of breaking out at night.

Monty Lowther's opinion was different. And Manners rather agreed with Monty.

"Think so?" repeated Tom. He spoke in a whisper. "I don't! The man can't be such a benighted ass."

"My dear chap," said Lowther, "don't I know him? I tell you he doesn't know we were spoofing him—he simply fancies that you chucked it last night, to go another night!"

"Shouldn't wonder," said Manners. "He's got

it fixed in his silly head that you go pub-crawling, Tom."

"He believes that because he wants to believe it," said Tom contemptuously. "He knows it isn't so."

"Well, he does believe it," said Lowther; "and I'm betting you he fancies that you put it off for some reason last night as you didn't go—and he will jolly well watch to cop you when you do go."

"More power to his elbow!" said Tom. "But I can't believe he's such a fool—and I think we're standing in this draught for nothing."

"James is going to feel a draught if he comes up!" chuckled Lowther. "He won't dare to barge into our dorm again—he's had enough of that! If he did, we'd jolly well take him for a burglar, same as last time. Well, what else can he do to cop you?"

"Only spy on this landing," answered Tom. "A fellow getting away from the dorm would have to come across this landing—no other way of getting out of the House."

"Exactly! And you can bet that the Worm will either stick on this landing, or else on the staircase just below, all ready to grab you when you get on the go," said Monty confidently. "What a jolly old triumph for him—if he could grab you going down and walk you in to the Housemaster!"

Tom laughed softly.

"If he's such a fool—" he said.

"All rogues are fools," said Manners sententiously. "They wouldn't be rogues if they weren't!"

"True, O king!" grinned Lowther. "And Silverson's just as big a fool as he is a rogue!"

"Well, if the cur comes nosing up here we're ready for him!" said Tom. "He will be sorry he came."

"He will!" agreed Lowther. "Awfully, fearfully sorry!"

"But I don't think—" went on Tom.

"Exactly! You never do!"

"Fatehead! I don't think he'll come up."

"Wait and see!" said Monty Lowther with cheerful confidence. "If he doesn't come to-night he'll come to-morrow night—but I'm betting that it will be to-night. He won't take a chance of missing you when you go wandering out on the jolly old tiles, Tommy."

"The silly ass!" grunted Tom.

"He thinks he's up to snuff!" said Lowther. "Well, he will be this time—up to electric snuff! Sneezy thing really!"

There was a suppressed chuckle on the dark dormitory landing. If James Silverson came spying that night a surprise was in store for him. The Terrible Three had made some little preparations for the spy of the School House—chiefly in the form of a packet of electric snuff that Monty Lowther held in his hand as he leaned on the banister.

They waited.

It was a cold night. There was a chilly draught. That vigil in the dark was not enjoyable—except in the way of anticipation.

Certainly it was worth while if Silverson came. The question was whether he was coming.

Monty Lowther pressed Tom's arm suddenly.

"Look!" he breathed.

"Oh!" murmured Tom.

Down below a shadow moved in the bluish glimmer of the A.R.P. lamp on the staircase. The juniors above, in black darkness, were quite

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invisible if James Silverson looked up—as he did! But James, below, was perfectly visible in the bluish glow.

He made no sound.

James was always stealthy—but never had he been so stealthy as now. A cat could not have been quieter than James as he crept up the staircase.

James was prepared to walk Tom Merry in to the Housemaster and announce his capture—if he caught him. But if he did not make a catch James did not want his nocturnal watch to become known. Both the Housemaster and the master of the Shell would have had something very emphatic to say had they known that the Fourth Form master had taken it on himself to watch in the dark for a Shell boy—especially after James' exploit the previous night. Unless something came of it, nobody was to know that James had kept this watch—nobody was to know anything, unless and until he made a catch.

The juniors watched breathlessly.

Tom had to admit that Monty was right. It was Silverson—and his stealthy creeping showed that he was going to keep a secret watch for a supposed delinquent breaking out. Obviously James had not tumbled to the fact that the whole thing was a leg-pull; he was still convinced that Tom was bent on breaking bounds after lights out, and that he had only to keep watch to catch him in the act.

The Worm came quietly on. He disappeared from the eyes above when he reached the study landing. They did not hear a sound from him.

The study landing was as dark as the dormitory landing above it. James was moving in the dark—but he seemed to have the gift of a cat, to get about in the dark noiselessly.

The juniors watched and waited. In the bluish glimmer on the stairs James reappeared—coming stealthily up to the dormitory landing. This time he was a mere shadow.

But the Terrible Three knew who that shadow was. And as James came up Monty Lowther moved a little along the balustrade and raised his hand, holding the little packet, with the end open, in it.

A curving staircase led up from the study landing to the dormitory landing above. James was in the middle of that staircase when Monty Lowther leaned over and, with a quick jerk of the hand, shot out the contents of the packet.

Whooooooooooh!

All over James Silverson, from above, fell the impalpable contents of that packet. Electric snuff descended on him in a shower.

"Ooooooooooh!" came a sudden, startled gasp. James at that startling moment forgot caution.

He gasped and stumbled. His feet were heard on the stairs at last—stumbling. The next moment a loud and raucous sound awoke the echoes far and wide—a wild, rending, roaring sneeze.

"Aytishceooooo!"

It sounded as if Mr. Silverson was sneezing his head off.

"Oh crumbs!" gurgled Tom Merry.

"Cut!" breathed Lowther.

"Quick!" gasped Manners.

"Atchooooooh!" roared from the staircase, "Aytishoo! Woooooooh!"

Gurgling with merriment, the three Shell fellows raced back to their dormitory.

Under a minute, they were in bed—innocent heads lying on white pillows, innocent eyes closed

in happy slumber—fast asleep, to all appearance, if investigating eyes looked into the dormitory. But if they were asleep, they smiled in their sleep.

EXTRAORDINARY!

"**A**YTISHOOO! Wooh! Ooooooh!" James Silverson clung to the banisters and sneezed.

He sneezed and sneezed!

Caution, concealment, were utterly forgotten. James forgot all about caution and concealment; he forgot all about Tom Merry—he forgot all about scheming, and watching, and making catches! He did not, in fact, think of anything. He couldn't! He lived, and moved, and had his being in a wild succession of Gargantuan sneezes.

Those sneezes fairly roared! They almost thundered! They woke every echo of the deep well of the staircase! They boomed along passages! They rang in studies! They reached many wakeful ears. James could not help it. Clinging to the banisters, he fairly bellowed.

Doors opened below. Lights gleamed out in dark passages. James did not hear or heed. Convulsed with sneezing, James sneezed and sneezed, and coughed and coughed, and spluttered and spluttered, and gurgled and gurgled.

"Goodness gracious, what is all this?" It was Mr. Linton's voice from below, unheard and unheeded by the hapless James.

"Extraordinary!" came Mr. Railton's voice. "What can be happening? It is, I think, someone on the staircase."

"Mon Dieu!" It was the squeal of Monsieur Morny. "Ecoutez c'est eternuement—vat you call ze sneeze!"

"But who—what—" It was Mr. Selby's voice, as the master of the Third joined the other three. "Who is sneezing in that extraordinary manner—what—"

"It cannot be one of the boys!" exclaimed Mr. Railton. "They are all in their dormitories!"

"Mais qui—who is it zat sneeze in ze dark?"

"This is very extraordinary!" said the Housemaster.

The four stood staring up the dim staircase. From above came a roar of sneezing.

"Atchooh! Aytishoooh! Woooooooh!"

Mr. Railton, in utter amazement, marched up the stairs. After him went Mr. Linton, Mr. Selby, and Monsieur Morny. What this could possibly mean, they could not imagine, but they wanted to know.

"Aytishooooooh!" roared from above. "Groooh! Wooooh! Young scoundrel—gerrroooooooh! Atchoooh!"

Up to the study landing went the four masters. But that roar of sneezing was still above them. Up the next staircase they went, and Mr. Railton switched on a light on the upper stairs.

Then they beheld a startling sight.

"Mr Silverson!" exclaimed the Housemaster. "C'est ca—c'est Monsieur Silverson!" exclaimed Monsieur Morny. "Mais—but—what for he sneeze comme ca?"

"Silverson!" exclaimed Mr. Linton, while Mr. Selby simply stared.

"Atchoooooh!" roared Mr. Silverson. "Aytishoo! Aytishoo! Whooooooh!"

He was still clinging to the banisters as he sneezed. His nose was red and streaming, and he sneezed and sneezed and sneezed. But he

looked round with watery eyes at the four amazed faces.

"Mr. Railton! I—I—aytishoooh!" Another terrific sneeze caught him. "Oooh! Atchoooh! Woo-hoo-wooooooh!"

He grabbed out a handkerchief at last, and dabbed his reddened nose, letting go his grip of the banisters. He stood, stumbling, dabbing, sneezing, and spluttering.

"Aytishooooooh! Oh dear! Woooooooh!"

"What ever is the matter, Mr. Silverson?" exclaimed the Housemaster. "What can have caused this extraordinary fit of sneezing?"

"I—I— Woooooo! Ooooooo! Goooooh! Atchoooh! I—woooooh!" gurgled Mr. Silverson. "Something was, I think, flung at me! I think it was— Atchooh—choo—chooh—"

"You think it was what?" exclaimed Mr. Railton.

"Atchooh—choo—chooop!"

Mr. Linton sniffed. The snuff was settled, but the master of the Shell seemed to detect a lingering whiff.

"Something—" he began.

"Alors, le tabac!" exclaimed Monsieur Morny, sniffing also. "C'est le tabac a priser—vat you call, ze snuff!"

"Snuff!" repeated Mr. Selby blankly. "Surely, Mr. Silverson, you do not take snuff—and surely not in such quantities as to cause—"

"Aytishooooooh!"

Mr. Silverson sneezed, and gurgled, and choked, and gasped. But the worst of the storm was over, and he recovered his voice. His watery eyes sparkled with fury.

"It is some kind of—groooogh—snuff!" he stammered. "It was thrown over me by some—aytishooooh!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Mr. Railton. He glanced up from the stairs at the dormitory landing—all was black and silent there. "Do you mean that some boy was out of his dormitory?"

"Woooooh!" gurgled the master of the Fourth. "Yes, sir, I mean—atchoooh!—I mean exactly that! This is an outrage by that young rascal Merry!"

"What!"

"The snuff was thrown over me, sir, as I was ascending these stairs!" roared Mr. Silverson. "It was flung over me from above, in the dark. Merry—"

"Did you see Merry in the dark?" asked Mr. Linton, with dry sarcasm. "You appear to have a peculiar predilection, Mr. Silverson, for accusing Merry."

"It was—atchooh!—it was Merry!"

"You saw him?" exclaimed Mr. Railton.

James panted. He came very near to saying that he had seen him. But it was obvious that, in the dark, he could not have seen him, and, after all, it might not have been Tom Merry! James had few scruples—especially in his present frame of mind; but he was not wholly lost to caution.

"I saw no one in the dark!" he gasped. "But I am absolutely certain that it was—aytishoooh!—that it was Merry."

"And why?" asked Mr. Linton coldly. "This morning you came into my Form-room, and delayed the lesson, with an utterly unfounded accusation against Merry, without a jot or tittle of evidence to support it! So you imagine, Mr. Silverson, that your personal dislike of a boy in my Form will be allowed to weigh as evidence?"

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"I have told you to bend over that desk, Wynn!" thundered the master.
"You're not going to ca—"

"It was, Merry!" roared James. "I am assured—"

"It may be interesting to explain why you were here at all, Mr. Silverson," said the master of the Shell. "Am I to understand you were here with the intention of intervening in my Form, as you did last night?"

James gurgled.

"I—I heard a noise above stairs, and came up to see what it was!" he stammered. "I was not concerned with your Form, Mr. Linton, but with my own!"

It was all that James could say.

He was as good as certain that Tom Merry had snuffed him. Somebody, it was certain, had—and he believed that it was Tom. But there was not a particle of proof—and he could not admit to Mr. Linton that he had been on the prowl for one of Linton's boys.

The master of the Shell looked at him very sharply.

"If you were concerned with your own Form, Mr. Silverson, I have nothing to say on the subject!" he retorted. "But if you fancy that some Fourth Form boy was out of his dormitory, your suspicions should turn in that direction, and certainly not to a boy in my Form."



thundered Mr. Silverson. "I won't!" said Fatty.
"I came me for nothing!"

"Quite so!" agreed Mr. Railton.
"It was Merry! Aytishoooh! I am assured of
—oooooh! Atchoooo! I am assured—"

"And how," asked Mr. Linton, with his dry
sarcasm—"how could Merry possibly have known
that you were here, Mr. Silverson—coming up, as
you state, to investigate some noise you had
heard? Is Merry supposed to be able to guess
that, if a noise is made, it will bring you on the
scene, and no one else?"

James gave him a glare.

"Merry, I believe, was breaking bounds, and
came on me in the act of doing so!" he hooted.

It seemed clear enough to James.

It did not seem so clear to Mr. Linton, how-
ever! Far from it!

"An utterly wild and unsubstantiated supposi-
tion!" rapped the master of the Shell.

"I repeat—oogh! I repeat—aytishoooh!"
Again a Gargantuan sneeze caught James.
"Wooooo! Oooooo! I repeat that it was Merry
—and I am assured that he had left his dormitory
to—aytishoooh!—to break bounds!"

"Do you think this possible, Mr. Linton?"
asked the Housemaster.

"I do not, sir!" said the master of the Shell

emphatically "Mr. Silverson has no right what-
ever to suggest, without a particle of proof, that
a boy in my Form was breaking out at night! I
protest against any such suggestion! Indeed,"
went on Mr. Linton, his voice rising, "I will not
permit you to make such suggestions, Mr. Silver-
son! I repudiate them!"

"Let the boy be questioned!" spluttered
James. "Let him—"

"I will not permit you to disturb my Form at
this hour of the night, as you disturbed them last
night!" snapped Mr. Linton. "I will allow
nothing of the kind!"

"Certainly not!" said Mr. Railton, with a nod
of assent.

James looked at them, sneezed, and tramped
down the stairs. Four masters followed him down
—one of them frowning. James disappeared into
his study—a final blast of sneezing waking the
echoes before he shut the door.

ON THE TILES!

"WHOSE topper?"

"Silverson's,"

"Eh!" ejaculated Manners and

Lowther together.

November had set in, dim and drizzily and
wet and windy. Mist hung over the school
buildings and blanketed the old quad with grey.
The old elms were dripping.

In such weather few fellows were disposed to
take walks abroad. Even the Terrible Three of
the Shell, keen as they were on fresh air and
the open spaces, preferred the study. Football
was off; mist and rain were unattractive; and
though nobody was keen on staying indoors on a
half-holiday, most of the fellows did.

The chums of the Shell had plenty of resources,
however. There was a cheery fire burning in
Study No. 10. Monty Lowther sat at the study
table, cudgelling his brains for new wheezes for
the current number of the "St. Jim's Weekly."
Harry Manners was cutting films. Tom Merry
was not in the study at the moment—and when
he came in, he carried a shining silk hat in one
hand and an overcoat over the other arm.

"Silverson's topper!" said Tom cheerily. "And
Silverson's overcoat!" The dear man is in his
study, frowsting over a fire—so I've borrowed
these from his room upstairs."

"And what the thump do you want Silverson's
hat and coat for?" asked Manners, in wonder.

"We're not going to waste this afternoon!"
answered Tom. He laid the hat and coat on
the table and shut the door. "I've asked D'Arcy
—Gussy has taken lines in to Silverson. The
Worm's got a big fire going in his study, and
he's frowsting over it. Thinking out how he's
going to catch me breaking bounds, I dare say."

"But what—"

"Suppose something happened to stop up his
chimney?" said Tom.

"His chimney!" repeated Lowther. "Potty?
You can't get at the chimney of old Lathom's
study—not from here, anyhow."

"Think not?" asked Tom. "Silverson makes
out that I go out on the tiles—well, I'm going out
on the tiles, see?"

"You ass! How—"

"What about getting out of this study window
and getting along the ledge to the roof?" said
Tom Merry.

His chums gazed at him. For a moment they
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did not speak. That suggestion seemed to have taken their breath away.

"You mad ass!" exclaimed Lowther, at last.

"You potty chump!" exclaimed Manners.

"O.K.," said Tom. "I can do it."

"You can't!"

"You shan't!"

"It only wants nerve!" said Tom. "Silverson's chimney is going to be stuffed up with Silverson's overcoat, with his topper on top. The rat is going to be smoked out of his study. And when he jumps to it that we did it, and they come scuttling after us, they'll find the three of us sitting peaceably in the study—hard at work on the 'Weekly.' What?"

Monty Lowther grinned.

The wheeze appealed to him. But his face became grave at once. The risk of climbing along a narrow stone ledge, more than thirty feet from the ground, was altogether too risky.

Tom Merry's face set a little.

"I'm hitting back at that rat!" he said quietly. "I'm going to give him what he's giving me, and a little over. I'm going to make him fed up with St. Jim's if I can! He's making out that I'm a bad hat, and a rebel, and a troublesome brute that can't be managed by the masters. Well, he can't have it both ways! If I'm all that, he's going to have the benefit of it."

"Yes. But—"

"We got him last night, when he came sneaking up spying," said Tom. "He had the snuff—and we got clear. But Linton's been giving me some pretty keen looks to-day. I don't know what the rotter may have said to him, or how much notice Linton took of it—but it's in Linton's mind—he's got his doubts of me this term, and he doesn't feel satisfied. That rat thinks I was going to break out, and I dare say he told Linton so—it looks like it to me."

Tom Merry's blue eyes gleamed.

"Linton's said nothing, but it's in his mind," he went on. "I don't think he believes anything of the kind—but if you throw mud some of it is sure to stick! That's the Worm's game. Well, he's getting something back for it every time, till he's fed up—I'll chuck it when he does—not before."

"My dear chap, we're with you all along the line," said Monty. "But you're not going to risk your neck."

"No risk—if you've got nerve!" said Tom. "And I'm going to carry on—so don't waste your breath, old man."

He stepped to the study window and opened it wide.

Outside there was a misty drizzle. Visibility was not good. Two or three raincoats, and an umbrella or two, could be spotted in the quad below. The weather, favourable for nothing else, was favourable for Tom Merry's design. A fellow on the roof was not likely to be observed.

"But—" said Manners and Lowther together.

Tom glanced round from the window with a cheery grin on his face.

"Safe as houses!" he said. "As soon as I get back, we'll get the whole editorial staff in the study—witnesses that I'm here, see? I don't suppose anybody but ourselves knows that you can get to the study roofs from this window. Easy enough from a window in the Fifth Form passage—they can root in the Fifth for the man, if they like! They won't find him there—and they won't find him here."

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"O.K.—if you get through!" said Manners. "But—"

"Fathead! I shall get through all right! I've got only one neck—think I'd chuck it away ragging Silverson?"

Tom Merry put on the overcoat as the easiest way of carrying it, and jammed the silk hat on his head. Thus equipped, he coolly clambered out of the high window on to the broad stone sill.

From that sill ran the stone ledge along the wall to the corner of a slanting roof. From that slanting roof rose the chimney from Mr. Lathom's old study, now occupied by the Worm. That chimney was certainly in full view from the quad, if anyone there looked up. But there were few persons abroad in the quad, and nobody was likely to look up.

Manners and Lowther, not quite easy in their minds, watched their chum from the window.

It was a feat from which most fellows would rather have been excused; and yet, as Tom said, it required only nerve. There was no danger, unless a fellow lost his head. Tom was not going to lose his head.

With a supporting hand on the wall, he crept along the ledge without a pause, and without a moment's faltering.

In a couple of minutes he was on the slanting roof, where the thick old red tiles gave ample hold.

They watched him reach the chimney-stack. There he rose cautiously and peeled off the overcoat.

From the chimney-pot rose a thick column of smoke. That column was suddenly and almost completely shut off as Tom Merry jammed the folded overcoat into the chimney-pot.

On top of it he jammed the silk hat, jamming it tight.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Manners.

"Oh, Silverson's hat!" grinned Lowther.

Tom Merry came back along the ledge. A little damp and grubby from his climb, he clambered in at the study window again.

"How's that?" he asked, as he dropped to the study floor.

"Good egg!" chuckled Lowther.

Tom Merry closed the study window and fastened it. He dusted down his clothes to remove traces of his excursion on the roof. Monty Lowther hurried out of the study—and came back with Talbot, Kangaroo, Glyn, and one or two other fellows, who ranked as assistant-editors on the numerous staff of the "St. Jim's Weekly."

What was already happening in Silverson's study the Terrible Three could guess. But in their own study all was calm and bright—the numerous editorial staff sitting round the table, happily busy on producing a war number of the "St. Jim's Weekly"—a picture of cheerful innocence if the eye of authority looked in in search of the chimney-stopper!

SMOKED OUT!

JAMES SILVERSON grunted. He was seated in the armchair in his study, smoking a cigar and reading a sporting paper—much reduced in size, and containing much less than formerly of the kind of literature that the Worm liked best.

James was not in a good temper. He seldom was.

Now he was specially disgruntled. He realised that he had been making mistakes, and in his

peculiar position he could not afford to make mistakes.

It was his game to keep on the right side of Tom Merry's Form-master and make him an unconscious ally if he could. Instead of which, he had put Mr. Linton's back up, and the attitude of the master of the Shell towards him was below freezing point.

He knew—at least, he was sure—that Tom had screwed up his desk. But he realised that his angry and excited invasion of the Shell Form Room had been a mistake. He knew—at least, he was sure—that Tom Merry had snuffed him, thus avoiding discovery in the very act of breaking out. But it was clear that it was a mistake to make the assertion without a spot of evidence or proof. Bitter malice and evil temper seemed to be undoing all that he had done by cunning.

These were not pleasant reflections for James. He did not realise that he was, as Manners declared, as much fool as rogue—that he was a rogue because he was a fool. He had the most implicit faith in his own unscrupulous cunning. Still, he had to admit that it did not seem to be getting him anywhere.

In that disgruntled mood James was still further annoyed by a gust of smoke from his study chimney.

He grunted angrily.

It was a windy day; probably many chimneys were smoking. James expected this to clear off.

But it did not clear off.

The gust was followed by another gust, and another, and another! The study filled with smoke.

James rose from the armchair. He grunted and coughed. Smoke whirled and eddied about the room, and he hurried across to the window and threw it wide open.

He was glad of a breath of fresh air. But the smoke rolled in heavy volumes from the grate and poured out of the window.

James coughed and spluttered.

What was causing this, he could not imagine. Chimneys would smoke on a windy day, but this was extraordinary.

He leaned from the window, gasping for breath, smoke rolling out round him in black, thick clouds. It was a cold day, and he had banked up the fire—and there was plenty of smoke.

"Guuurrrgh!" coughed James. "Urrrgh!"

There were few in the quad in the dismal weather. But those few soon had their attention attracted by the sight of smoke rolling out of a study window.

Darrell of the Sixth hurried up to the window.

"Is anything the matter, sir?" he asked. "Is the study on fire, or what?"

"Gurrrrrgh!" gurgled James, half-suffocated with smoke. "No! The—groogh!—chimney is smoking— Ooogh!"

Darrell stared in at the window. The study was black with whirling smoke, and objects in it could hardly be distinguished.

Two or three other fellows came up. There was a buzz of surprised voices outside Silverson's study window.

"Something must have happened to the chimney," said Cutts of the Fifth. "Must be on fire, I should think."

"Grooocogh!"

Mr. Silverson turned back from the window. He groped across the smoky study to the door and threw it wide open.

He hoped that the wind, blowing through the study, would clear the smoke off. The wind blew

through the study—but it did not clear the smoke off. It sent heavy black volumes rolling down the passage. But there seemed to be plenty more! Thicker and thicker it rolled out of the stopped up chimney.

James stood coughing and spluttering and rubbing snarting eyes. From the open window he heard voices—and laughter—from the quad.

"Look!"

"It's a hat!"

"A topper!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

What that meant James did not know. The fellows outside had backed away to look up at the chimney. As soon as they looked up they saw that the chimney-pot was crowned with a top hat! The sight seemed to amuse them, judging by the howls of laughter.

James, unaware of the discovery that had been made outside, coughed and spluttered and gasped in the smoky study.

"What is the matter here?" Mr. Railton came up the passage from one direction, Mr. Linton from the other. "Mr. Silverson, what—"

"Gurrrruuugh!"

"What?" ejaculated Mr. Linton. "What did you say?"

"Yurrruugh!"

"Mr. Silverson!"

"Grooogh! Ooogh! I am almost suffocated!"

Silverson plunged out into the passage, spluttering for breath. "I cannot understand it—there must be something very wrong with the—grooogh!—chimney—it is smoking— Woogh!"

The two masters blinked into the study. It was almost as black as a hat with smoke; through the

(Continued on the next page.)

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smoke the banked-up fire in the grate glowed a dim red.

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Mr. Railton.

"The chimney must be on fire!" said Mr. Linton.

"A chimney on fire would not account for this smoke!" said the Housemaster. "It must have become blocked in some extraordinary manner."

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

Other fellows were going out of the House now, heedless of the drizzle, drawn by the yells of laughter from the fellows outside. And as they looked up and saw the top-hatted chimney they joined in the roar.

"Bai Jove!" yelled Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Look, deah boys, it's a toppah! It's somebody's toppah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's Silverson's chimney!" exclaimed Blake. "Somebody's bunged a hat on his chimney-pot!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Railton plunged through the smoke in the study and looked from the window in great annoyance.

"Cutts! Blake! Herries! What does this mean?" he thundered. "This is not a laughing matter—a smoking chimney—what do you mean?"

"Isn't it?" murmured Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's a hat on the chimney, sir!" called out Darrell.

Darrell was a Sixth Form man and a prefect, but he was laughing like the rest. More and more fellows came out and stared up, and roared. The extraordinary sight of a chimney wearing a top hat seemed to take them by storm.

"A—a—a hat!" gasped Mr. Railton, in amazement.

"A top hat, sir!"

"On the chimney!" exclaimed the Housemaster.

"Yaas, wathah!" chuckled Arthur Augustus.

Mr. Railton stared blankly for a moment; then he hurried out of the smoky study and went out of the House. James Silverson hurried after him. James understood now, and he realised that it was not an accidental smoking chimney—it was a jape! James' face was expressive as he hurried out at Railton's heels.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Railton, as he stared up and saw the topper.

"A—a—a hat!" gasped Mr. Silverson. His face was white with fury. "This is a trick—my chimney has been stopped intentionally—a trick—a—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the whole crowd.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Linton. His face twitched. "What—what an extraordinary trick! Dear me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blacker and blacker the smoke rolled out of the window. High above wisps of smoke curled from under the hat. There were dozens of fellows in the quad now, all staring up and all yelling with laughter. James Silverson stood, gazing up with a face of fury—while round him the crowd of St. Jim's fellows fairly rocked with merriment.

ONCE TOO OFTEN!

"MERRY!"

"What!"

"Merry!" hissed James Silverson.

He glanced round over the yelling crowd. Tom Merry was not there. Neither were his

chums. The Terrible Three seemed to be missing this.

But James, of course, thought of Tom at once. Somebody had blocked his chimney, and stuck a top hat on top. Who but Tom Merry?

But James was, by this time, rather in the position of the boy in the old story, who cried "Wolf!" so often that nobody believed him when the wolf really came. Once more was once too often.

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Mr. Linton angrily. "Can nothing occur in this school, Mr. Silverson, without your immediately levelling an accusation at that boy of my Form?"

"It was Merry!" roared James.

"Really, Mr. Silverson, this passes all patience!" exclaimed Mr. Railton. "You cannot possibly have any knowledge of the offender, yet you name that boy—"

"I tell you that Merry has done this!" almost foamed James. "Where is the boy? He is not here!"

"Blake, do you know where Merry is?" asked the Housemaster.

"In his study, I think, sir," answered Blake. "They're doing the school paper this afternoon."

"Yaas, wathah! Tom Mewwy's in his study," said Arthur Augustus. "He asked me to come there, aftah I'd finished my fashion article for the 'Weekly.'"

"It was Merry!" hooted James. "That chimney can be reached from the window in the Fifth Form passage, and Merry—"

"Perhaps you had better ascertain where Merry is, Mr. Linton," suggested the Housemaster. "But I am bound to say this, Mr. Silverson. I will not allow utterly reckless accusations to be made against any boy in the House of which I am Housemaster. Kindly do not mention Merry's name again, unless you can adduce some proof that he was concerned in this matter."

"I know—"

"You know nothing!" rapped Mr. Linton. "That roof can only be reached from a window near the Fifth Form studies, and no junior could go there without being immediately noticed. You had better inquire in the Fifth Form, Mr. Silverson."

"I repeat—"

"I will not listen to another word!" snapped Mr. Linton, and he stalked away into the House.

With a frowning brow the master of the Shell ascended the stairs. He had heard quite enough of James Silverson's wild and reckless accusations against that boy in his Form. James had, in fact, rather overdone it.

In a few minutes Mr. Linton arrived at the door of Study No. 10 in the Shell. He tapped at that door and opened it, and gazed in on a busy scene.

"This is going to be a special number," Tom Merry was saying, as his Form-master opened the door. "We shall have to cut down the size, but we'll make it up in quality—what?"

"That's the big idea," said Monty Lowther. "I've got to have the usual space for my comic column. Can't cut out the best stuff."

"Can't cut down the photographic article," said Manners decidedly. "That would practically ruin the paper."

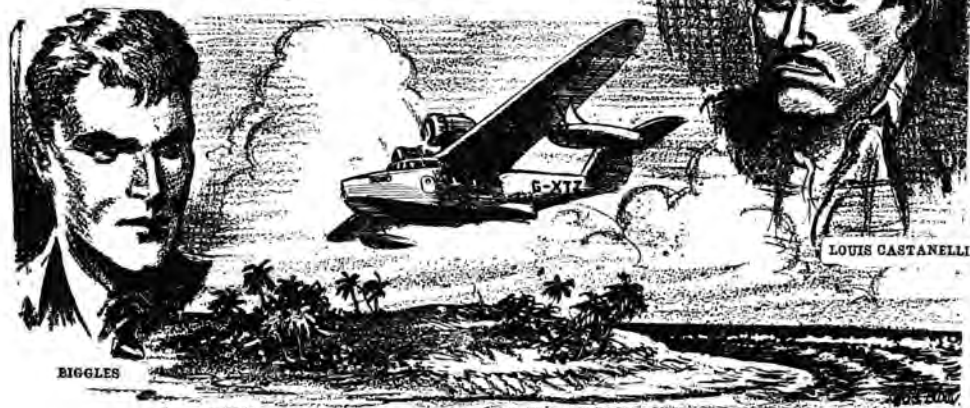
"What about my football notes?" asked Talbot, with a smile. "I don't see how they can be cut down."

"Well, we shall have to cut something," said

(Continued on page 36.)

TRAPPED UNDER THE SEA BY THE TENTACLES OF A DEVIL-FISH! BIGGLES & CO. HAVE TO FIGHT DESPERATELY FOR THE LIFE OF SANDY!

BIGGLES' SOUTH SEA ADVENTURE!



By CAPTAIN W. E. JOHNS.

SANDY IN PERIL!

ACCOMPANIED by Ginger Hebblethwaite and the Hon. Algernon Lacey, Major James Bigglesworth goes to the South Seas on a pearl-diving expedition.

Sandy Macaster, an old Air Force acquaintance of Biggles, has discovered a rich pearl-bed, but unfortunately Louis Castanelli, the crook skipper of a schooner trading in the South Seas, also knows about Sandy's discovery.

In the Scud, their flying-boat, Biggles & Co. reach Sandy's Island, and then try to locate the pearl-bed. Suddenly Ginger sees something deep in the sea, and Full Moon, a Marquesan girl who, with her boy friend Shell Breaker, has accompanied Biggles & Co., slips into the water to investigate.

Ginger watched spellbound as the girl lay on her face on the surface, her head below the water, scrutinising the depths. Then suddenly she sank, and started swimming down with an easy breast-stroke, and barely a perceptible movement of her legs.

Ginger could see her clearly, for the water was of such purity that it seemed to be neither air nor water, and he found it difficult to believe his eyes as he watched Full Moon behaving as though the water was her natural home. She went so low that her body became no more than a shadow. Occasionally a shoal of fish would pass about her.

For a moment she actually disappeared from sight, and Ginger drew a deep breath of relief when he saw her coming swiftly upward. Her hand broke the surface first; in it she held a huge oyster. Her head appeared, and she drew in her breath with a long whistling sound that Ginger was to come to know well.

Sandy let out a yell of triumph when he saw the shell.

"There you are!" he cried. "The bottom can't be more than twenty fathoms. I know why we can't see it. The sun is still too low. It was straight overhead when I first spotted the bed."

"Yes, that might account for it," agreed Biggles.

Full Moon tossed the shell on board and scrambled up herself. She spoke excitedly to Sandy in Marquesan, pointing at the same time.

"She says the bottom under us slopes like the side of a hill," Sandy translated. He pointed towards where the girl had indicated. "She says it's shallower over there. It must be as I thought. The place I spotted is the top of an under-water mountain. Take the machine over a bit, Biggles."

As requested, Biggles gave the engines a burst of power which carried the Scud towards the desired locality.

"Stop her! You'll do!" cried Sandy. "I can see bottom. There it is. I should say it isn't more than six or seven fathoms."

The others, looking over the side, saw that he was right. The bottom of the sea could be seen plainly, exactly as Sandy had described it, gleaming with half-open oyster-shells.

Sandy turned at once to his diving-suit and began to get into it. His face was serious.

"Diving is a dangerous business," he said gravely. "Never forget that. There isn't an insurance company in the world that will insure a diver. We needn't dwell on what might happen. There are all sort of things down there that it's best not to think about. There's only one thing I must mention. One of the worst dangers is the big clams, as big as a bath, and weighing over half a ton. The trouble is, they sometimes lie wide open to feed. If a diver steps into one

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of those—well, he's down for good unless somebody comes down and cuts his leg off. That's why I'm glad we've got Shell Breaker and Full Moon with us; they'll know what to do if that happens." He gave each of them a hatchet and spoke a few words in Marquesan. They both nodded. Their faces, too, were now serious.

Algy and Ginger had already been trained in the business of fastening up the diving-suit.

"Remember the signals," said Sandy, as he picked up the heavy helmet. "There's one I hope you'll never get, and that is four tugs on the line. That means pull till the rope breaks. It's a million to one against it ever being needed, but if you do get it, you'll know that I'm fast on the bottom, so pull—and pull till the rope breaks. But don't ever pull unless you get a signal. You heard that, Biggles?"

"Yes, I heard you, Sandy," replied Biggles quietly.

"Good! Right-ho, screw me up!" continued Sandy, and the helmet sank down into its socket.

Ginger and Algy screwed up the nuts, and Sandy dragged his lead-soled feet to the ladder that had been let down beside the hull. He stopped for a moment while his head remained above water, and smiled through the glass. Then he disappeared. Algy was already turning the handle of the air-pump that was part of the equipment. Ginger paid out the life-line.

A minute later a sudden slackening of the line told him that Sandy was on the bottom, and he nodded to Shell Breaker, who at once lowered a large wire basket for the shell. Full Moon, hatchet in hand, lay staring down into the depths. Several minutes passed; then Ginger felt a single tug on the line.

"Haul up the basket," he told Shell Breaker, and presently it came into view with twenty or thirty huge oysters in it. Under Biggles' direction, Shell Breaker tipped them out on the cabin floor, and again lowered the basket.

This was repeated several times, so that by the end of an hour there was a considerable pile of oysters in the cabin, spread about to balance the weight.

Sandy had cleared the very shallow place, and had moved a short distance away into rather deeper water, but not deep enough to inconvenience him. Occasionally he could be seen crossing a patch of light-coloured coral, or sand; Ginger was not sure which; but against the darker background it was no longer possible to see him.

Comparatively speaking, the water was still shallow, which had this advantage; Sandy could be brought up quickly without risk of the paralyzing cramp which is the bane of diving in deep water, and involves long delays while the diver is brought up in stages so that his body may become accustomed to the change in pressure.

Ginger was relieved when he got the signal that Sandy was coming up. A few minutes later his head broke the surface, and he climbed laboriously into the flying-boat. His helmet was unscrowed and removed.

"We're not doing so badly, eh?" were his first words, accompanied by a smile. "I've come up for a wee bit of a rest."

"What's it like down there?" asked Ginger.

"Pretty fair," replied Sandy, non-committally. "There are one or two nasty precipices that it wouldn't do to fall over—just like you get on an ordinary mountain. The coral worried me a bit. It's all shapes, some of it bad—sort of craggy. I

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have to keep my eye on the life-line and air-tube all the time to make sure they don't get fouled. It's surprising how the current drags them about. You'd better keep them fairly taut. It's the easiest thing in the world to get your line tangled round a lump of coral."

Sandy did not remove his diving-suit, as he declared his intention of going down again.

"Another spell like the last should see us with as much shell as we can carry," he remarked. "Keep an eye on the weather, Shell Breaker. You'll know when it's likely to start blowing. We don't want to get caught in a squall."

Actually, there was no sign of a change in the weather. The sea remained dead calm, and after a short rest, Sandy stood up and prepared to resume his task.

Three-quarters of an hour passed. It seemed much longer to those waiting on the aircraft; but, as Biggles remarked, it probably seemed even longer to Sandy. However, the shells continued to come up, the Scud noticeably settling deeper under their weight.

"We've got enough," said Biggles at last, regarding the pile. "I'm not sure that we haven't got too much."

"Too much?" queried Ginger.

"If it started to blow we might find ourselves in a mess. I don't think we could get the machine off the water with this load, and that, to my way of thinking, is going a bit too far beyond the margin of safety. However, the weather looks settled enough," he added, glancing round the sky.

"Sandy will be up any minute now," said Ginger, feeling the life-line as though he were fishing, hoping to receive the expected signal.

Several minutes passed, but there was no signal.

"It's a long time since we had any shell up," observed Ginger, at last.

Nobody answered. The minutes passed slowly. Biggles glanced at the watch on the instrument-board.

"He's been down over an hour," he said presently.

"He seems to be moving about; I can feel the line twitching," said Ginger. "He isn't caught by one of those confounded clams, anyway, or he wouldn't be able to move."

Full Moon was lying on the hull, staring down into the water. She had not spoken for some time. Suddenly she drew the knife which she carried inside her pareu, and, putting it between her teeth, slipped over the side. Her head dipped downwards, and she began to swim.

Ginger looked at Biggles.

Biggles shrugged his shoulders.

"I suppose she knows what she's doing," he said.

"By gosh, she's coming back in a hurry!" said Ginger sharply.

Full Moon literally flung herself out of the water on the flying-boat.

"Feke!" she cried shrilly. "Big feke!"

"Feke! She means an octopus!" cried Ginger, aghast. His face blanched. "What can we do? Shall we pull him up?"

"He said don't pull unless we got a signal!" said Biggles, in a hard voice.

"Andie fight feke," said Full Moon simply.

"Me no fight—get caught in life-line."

"You keep pumping, Algy," said Ginger, and started to take in the slack of the line. But there was practically none. The line was taut, vibrating slightly.

"This is dreadful! Can't we do something?" Algy panted, for he had been pumping steadily for some time.

"We'd better give him a minute. He may be able to fight it off," said Biggles, whose face was colourless. "If he wanted us to pull he'd send a signal."

"Maybe the thing's got his arms pinned to his sides," suggested Ginger.

"Wait!" ordered Biggles.

After that nobody spoke for a full minute. Ginger stood like a statue, holding the rope.

"Shell Breaker, can you go down to see what's happening?" asked Biggles.

Without a word Shell Breaker dropped the rope that controlled the basket and drew his knife. He was about to dive into the water when a yell from Ginger stopped him.

"He's pulling!" he shouted. "One, two, three—four. That means pull till the rope breaks." He bent his back and pulled, but he might have been trying to lift a mountain for all the effect it had. "Biggles! Shell Breaker—help!" he cried.

They all rushed to his assistance, but not even their united efforts could make the line give an inch.

"We shall tear the air-pipe if we pull any harder!" cried Biggles in a hoarse voice. "Keep pumping, Algy. Now, altogether—pull!"

They threw their weight on the rope until it twisted and oozed water under the strain. But it did not move.

"It's no use. It's holding him down," muttered Biggles through set teeth. "We'll try once more. Full Moon, come and pull!"

With four of them now on the rope, they pulled until the perspiration dripped from their faces and the machine tilted right over on her side under the one-sided pressure. But the rope might have been tied to the bottom of the sea. It did not give an inch.

A FIGHT WITH AN OCTOPUS!

BIGGLES straightened his back and moistened his lips.

"He signalled that we were to pull until the rope breaks," he said in a curious voice. "Well, he's coming up, or I'm going to break the rope. It's his only chance now." He seized the life-line and reefed it round the two steel centre-section bracing struts. "You hold the rope where you are, Ginger," he said tersely. "Cover your face in case it breaks and snaps back. Hang on, everybody!"

He jumped into the pilot seat. His hand closed over the throttle. The gentle ticking of the engines became a roar. The machine surged forward, the life-line tautening like a bowstring. The flying-boat went right over on her side with her wing tip in the water under the terrific pressure, and then began to move in a slow circle.

"What are you giving her?" yelled Ginger.

"Half throttle."

"The rope doesn't move. Go on."

"We'll capsize the ship."

"No—go on."

The roar of the engines became a bellow.

"It's coming—it's coming!" screamed Ginger.

Biggles gave the throttle a moment of full power. The engines roared, and the aircraft jibbed like a young horse that feels the spurs for the first time. The sea was a churning whirlpool of foam.

"It's coming!" yelled Ginger again, hanging on

to the rope. His eyes were bulging out of his head with strain as he heaved and pulled.

Biggles suddenly cut the throttle and dashed to his assistance. Shell Breaker also seized the rope.

"Altogether!" cried Biggles. "Heave!"

The dripping-line began to come in, a foot at a time.

"We've got more than Sandy at the end of this rope," declared Biggles grimly. "Thank goodness it's a brand-new one! Stand by with that chopper, Shell Breaker."

Foot by foot the rope came in, the flying-boat lying on her beam ends under the one-sided weight.

Full Moon had been kneeling, staring down into the water. Suddenly she sprang to her feet.

"Andie, he come!" she shrieked. "He come with feke!" Knife in hand, her lips parted, showing her teeth, she looked what she was—a savage—but ready to fight against something she knew and understood only too well.

A long tentacle broke the surface and coiled menacingly. Ginger ducked as it swished over his head.

"Never mind that—keep pulling!" yelled Biggles.

"It's dragging us under!" screamed Ginger.

"Keep pulling!" shouted Biggles again.

"Here he comes. The beast is hanging on him. Hold the line." Biggles dropped the rope, and, snatching up Shell Breaker's hatchet, began slashing at something just under the water.

"Mind you don't cut the line!" cried Ginger.

Biggles did not answer. A severed tentacle floated up, still coiling and uncoiling like a lasso. Another writhed up and curled itself over the fuselage so that the machine nearly went right over. Biggles severed it with a blow, the blade sinking into the plywood. He snatched it out.

Both Shell Breaker and Full Moon were slashing with their knives; nearly in the water, they were taking the most desperate risks. Ginger hung on the rope. Bending forward to take a fresh purchase, he had a fleeting glimpse of two great, lustreless eyes, as large as saucers. He saw Biggles whip out his automatic and blaze between them, firing shot after shot until the weapon was empty.

Ginger went over backwards at the recoil of the boat as the weight suddenly fell from the line.

He saw a mass of grey-coloured flesh floating away amid pieces of severed tentacles. For a frightful moment he thought that Sandy had gone, too. Then he saw the diving helmet appear above the water as Biggles and Full Moon reached down and dragged Sandy up. He fell motionless across the hull.

"Get his helmet off!" shouted Biggles, and dashed to the cockpit. The engines roared and the Scud surged forward.

"Mako finish feke!" cried Full Moon delightedly, pointing to the water, in which several sharks had suddenly appeared; they were fighting for the remains of the octopus. But Ginger was no longer concerned with it. With trembling fingers he removed the helmet from the motionless figure, to disclose Sandy's face, ashen and streaked with blood.

"He's dead!" he cried.

Algy dashed into the cabin and returned with the emergency brandy flask. He poured a little of the spirit between Sandy's pallid lips.

By this time the Scud was racing towards the

entrance to the lagoon at a speed only just short of flying speed. She did, in fact, leave the water an inch or two more than once. Without slackening speed Biggles tore through the opening of the reef into the still water of the lagoon, and brought the machine to a standstill at her anchorage. Then he switched off and helped the others to carry Sandy ashore.

As they laid him gently on the sloping beach of powdered coral and shell he opened his eyes and gazed at the blue sky above with an expression on his face which Ginger never forgot.

"Ye saved the shell all right, I hope?" he said weakly.

"Why, you old skinflint, of course we did," answered Biggles, with a catch in his voice. "We've got you, that's all that really matters. All right, boys; let's get this diving gear off him. Do you feel well enough for us to take it off, Sandy?"

"Ay, I'm a wee bit bruised, nothing more."

Which was, the others soon discovered, an understatement of fact, for he was bruised from head to foot. Vivid red bands showed where the creature had gripped him with its tentacles. However, he was not seriously injured, and he was soon sitting up, sipping a drop of "whusky"—just to pull him together.

"Well, I suppose this means the end of the show?" said Biggles.

"Why?" demanded Sandy. "Nothing of the sort. That's all part of the day's work in a diver's life."

Ginger stared incredulously.

"Do you mean—you'd go down there again?" he asked unbelievably.

"Certainly. I'll feel safer now than I did before."

"How on earth do you make that out?" asked Algy.

"Because there won't be any more big fellows like that one. He would be king of the roost over a big area. If you have killed him, as I expect you must have done, it will be as safe down there as it is here. These devil fish are the real kings of the ocean; other fish know that and keep out of the way."

"The sharks finished off the pieces," Ginger told him.

"They would," grinned Sandy, rising stiffly to his feet. "The truth is, I was a fool. There was a deep sort of dell-hole in the coral. I didn't much like the look of it, particularly as there were no small fish about, or young octopuses. You can usually see plenty of the little fellows, but they don't trouble you; they scramble about the rocks like big spiders. I thought it was odd that they had all disappeared. But there were some big shell in the hole, so I took a chance."

"In a way I was lucky, because the first feeler settled round my helmet. I guessed what it was, so knowing the tricks of the trade I put my arms straight up to prevent them from being pinned to my sides. A good thing I did, for the next tentacle went round my waist. If my arms hadn't been free I should have been finished, but as they were, I could fight. The scrap must have lasted twenty minutes. It seemed like hours. I could see the thing staring at me from a cave. He was only using four arms on me, so I guessed he was anchoring himself with the others."

"It was no use my signalling to be pulled up while he was holding on to the coral with four

arms; it would have needed a battleship to shift him. But I reckoned that if I could slash one or two of his arms he would bring the others into play, and so weaken his hold on the bottom. My greatest fear was that the line or air-tube would get tangled up with the tentacles—that would have been the end. Luckily, you had kept them taut, as I suggested.

"It was a rare fight between the two of us down there on the sea floor. I cut the ends of two of his arms, and saw him bring out two more. I was tempted to signal to you to pull me up, but I wanted to make sure. But I was weakening, and he knew it. He was trying to drag me towards him all the time. I could see his eyes. You don't know what a temptation it was to go forward and plunge my knife between them; it became a sort of obsession, but it would have been fatal.

"Every now and then the brute squirted out a lot of sepia so that I couldn't see his arms—or anything else, for that matter. He beat me in the end. I was whacked. My arms were like lead from holding them up. Then he got my left arm pinned to my side, and I knew that it was only a question of time before he got the other. By then he had managed to drag me to within a couple of yards of him, so I gave the four tugs. And that's all I remember."

Biggles drew a deep breath.

"It was a grim business," he said. "I don't like the idea of your going down there again."

"A day's rest and I shall be as right as rain," declared Sandy. "Why, mon, there's a fortune down there on the bottom, and a fortune is always worth a bit of risk."

"Well, we'll wash out for to-day, at any rate, and see how you feel to-morrow," decided Biggles. "What shall we do with all this shell?"

"Haul it across to the other side of the island and spread it about on the beach above high-water mark," replied Sandy. "In a day or two we shall be able to see what the luck is like. There isn't a more exciting game in the world than opening shell, knowing that any one might hold a small fortune."

"Right-ho!" agreed Biggles. "We'll have a bite of lunch and then, while you take things easy, we'll shift the shell."

AN AMAZING DISCOVERY!

SANDY was bruised rather more than he had first pretended, and it was two days before he felt able to continue diving. The others were so alarmed at his terrible experience that they were half inclined to abandon the project; but Sandy would not hear of it, insisting that now the big octopus was no longer there, there was nothing more to fear. As he was the one most concerned the others gave way.

So on the third day they again taxied out to the diving ground, where Sandy made several descents, but by lunch-time he was showing signs of strain, and Biggles decided, as time was no object, to suspend operations until the following day.

Sandy admitted that he had nearly cleared the shallow area, and in future it would be necessary for him to work gradually deeper as he descended the slopes of the under-water mountain. Not that he ever intended to go really deep. He admitted frankly that deep-sea work was beyond his strength, ability or inclination. At the same

time he pointed out that it would not be necessary, for if the shell they had already gathered yielded the harvest which might reasonably be expected, it would be both easier and safer to spend part of the proceeds in fitting out a schooner with an experienced crew, and hiring expert divers from Thursday Island, near the North Australian coast, and headquarters of some of the finest divers in the world.

They themselves could superintend operations from the flying-boat, which would at the same time enable them to keep in touch with Tahiti. The work they were engaged on would then no longer be a secret, but as they would have reaped the cream of the bed this would not matter. There would be no need for any of them to take further risks. And this was so obviously sound, common-sense reasoning that the others agreed without demur.

As they taxied back towards the island after abandoning work for the day, Sandy suddenly looked up with a smile.

"Here, I'll tell you what!" he cried. "Let's spend the afternoon examining our first day's catch. The oysters will be dead by now, so apart from the smell, which will not be pleasant, the job should be easy."

A cheer from Ginger greeted this proposal.

"That sounds a fine idea!" he declared.

"We'll stack the shell on the beach as we clean it and get a schooner to pick it up later on," continued Sandy. "It's worth real money, so we might as well have it. In fact, if the pearls don't turn out too well we may be glad of it!"

And so it was agreed, and after a picnic lunch the whole party crossed over to the far side of the island, no very great distance, where the shell had been spread out to rot.

Sandy and the two Polynesians laughed at the expressions of disgust on the faces of the others as they approached the now dead oysters.

"It's a good thing the wind is blowing the smell straight out to sea. If it dropped altogether, or blew the other way, you'd know the meaning of the word fug," said Sandy, smiling. Then suddenly his smile faded, to be replaced by a thoughtful frown.

"What's the matter?" asked Biggles, who was watching him.

"A thought just struck me," returned Sandy, shaking his head doubtfully. "I'm not sure that we were altogether wise to rot the shell, after all. This smell will be noticeable twenty miles

out to sea, and anyone who has ever smelt it never forgets what it is."

"You mean—Castanelli might get a whiff of it?"

Sandy nodded.

"Yes," he said.

"In which case all he would have to do would be to follow it up in order to discover the place where it starts from."

"You bet he would."

"H'm! That's rather a pity, but it can't be helped now. We won't do it again. In future we'll open the shell and bury the refuse as soon as we have finished with it."

"Ay, that's the best way!"

Sandy was carrying a pail and an empty biscuit tin, and on reaching the shell he filled the bucket with sea water. Then under the absorbed interest of the others, he commenced operations. He picked up the shells one by one, and, holding them over the bucket, explored the interior with his fingers before tipping the remains of the dead oyster into the pail. The empty shells he tossed on one side for Shell Breaker to stack into a neat pile.

In this way he had opened nearly forty shells, tossing each one aside with a grunt of disappointment, before he let out a wild whoop and held up a small white object that appeared to glow with inward fire. It was the size of a small pebble.

"Well, there's number one," he declared, as the pearl passed quickly from hand to hand. "Now we've broken our duck we shall probably get on better."

"What's that one worth?" asked Ginger.

"I'll hit the buyer on the nose if he offers me less than five hundred pounds for it!" said Sandy.

"You're going to be a long time getting a hatful at this rate," put in Biggles, smiling.

"Don't you be in a hurry," answered Sandy seriously. "You never know how things are going to pan out at this game. You can open a thousand oysters without finding a seed pearl, and then find six in succession. We're bound to find one or two real big 'uns in all this shell, or I'm going to be very surprised."

As if to confirm his statement, the very next shell yielded five small pearls—not very valuable, Sandy admitted, but they all added to the harvest. And so the work went on.

A high spot occurred when Sandy suddenly held

(Continued on the next page.)

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up a huge, heart-shaped gem. He was more excited even than the others.

"That's something to write home about," he declared enthusiastically. "One day that's going to sit on a queen's crown, or a princess' tiara, and when you see pictures of it in the papers you'll get a kick out of remembering that it was you who helped to fish it up from the bottom of the sea. That pearl is worth five thousand pounds of anybody's money."

"It's lovely!" breathed Ginger.

"It will never again look so lovely as it does at this moment," muttered Sandy regretfully.

The work continued, the little heap of pearls in the tin growing steadily larger and the empty shells making a big mound near the scene of operations. When the last shell had been examined and thrown aside, the total catch was found to be five large pearls of considerable value, nineteen of medium size, one "double button," or two pearls joined together, and a double handful of seed pearls—small pearls of no great value.

"Well, that's a pretty good average, so we can't complain," said Sandy, with satisfaction. "If that little lot doesn't fetch twenty thousand pounds I'll eat my hat!"

"What are these cultured pearls one hears so much about?" asked Ginger. "I've heard that the Japanese run sort of oyster farms to produce them. They put bits of grit inside the shells, or something, to encourage the oyster to spread the nacre over them."

"Pah!" Sandy made a grimace of disgust. "Don't talk to me about cultured pearls. They're not in the same class as real pearls. You'll soon be able to buy 'em ten a penny."

"What's wrong with them?"

"Nothing much, when they first come out of the shell. But they're made too fast, and like most things that are made in a hurry they don't last. They lack the fire of the others, and they're liable to peel. A pearl is made up of a number of skins, like an onion, you know."

While he was speaking Sandy's fingers were groping about in the slush at the bottom of the pail, searching for any pearls that might have been overlooked.

"By jingo! That reminds me!" cried Ginger.

"Of what?" asked Biggles.

"That shell Full Moon fished up when she made her first dive. I kept it by itself. I put it over there by that tree and forgot all about it. I'll go and fetch it." He ran across to the palm he had indicated, and came back with the half-open oyster in his hand. "I'm not very hopeful," he said, eyeing the shell disapprovingly, for, compared with some of the others, it was very small and diseased in places. The outside was covered with barnacles, and it was obviously of great age.

Ginger sat down on the sand and plunged his fingers into the corruption that a few days before had been a live oyster. Suddenly he stiffened and looked up at the others. His eyes opened wide. His face turned pale and his breath came quickly.

"Aha! That's how it gets you when you feel the first one!" declared Sandy.

Ginger slowly withdrew his fingers and held up an enormous round pearl, the size of a marble. It was not white, but pink, and as it lay in his trembling palm it gleamed with an uncanny light, as if it were imbued with life.

Silence fell. It was broken by Sandy.

"Sween Andrew of Scotland!" he breathed, white-faced, staring at the pearl as if it exerted

an irresistible fascination over him. "I've seen some pearls in my time, and some beauties among 'em, but I've never seen anything like that. That baby is going to cause more than a flutter when it reaches Paris."

Ginger had tossed the shell aside, and was about to speak when Full Moon uttered a little cry. She was staring at the shell, which gaped open. The others looked, and saw something pink gleaming between the lips of the shell. In a silence broken only by the harsh rustle of the palms Ginger picked it up and slowly withdrew a second rose-tinted pearl. He laid it on the palm of his left hand with the other. The two made a perfect pair.

GINGER GETS A FRIGHT!

SANDY seemed to have difficulty in speaking. "Look at 'em!" he croaked. "Look hard, boys, because you're looking at something you'll never see again as long as you live. I tell you, men have been pearly in these seas for years, some of 'em for half a century, without ever seeing anything like that. Not many men alive have seen one pearl of that class, let alone two. It makes me feel funny inside to look at 'em."

"Now we can have one each."

"Each?"

"One for us, and the other for Full Moon."

"What!" Sandy nearly choked. "Part a pair like that? You can't do it. It would be criminal. Those two pearls were born together and must always stay together. Don't you realise what it means to have a pair? No, maybe you don't. Either of those pearls alone would be worth ten thousand pounds, but as a pair you could ask your own price—and get it."

"Yes, they'll have to stay together," agreed Biggles.

"But what about Full Moon?"

The girl pursed her lips.

"Me no want," she said simply. "You buy me red beads at Lo Sing's store maybe?"

"Sure we will," agreed Sandy.

"You'll give her a sixpenny string of pearls for one of those?" cried Ginger indignantly.

"She'd rather have 'em. She said so herself and she means it."

"Well, it seems a raw deal to me," grumbled Ginger.

"Me happy," cried Full Moon cheerfully. "Me plenty bead."

"Well, if you say so," agreed Ginger reluctantly. "You help yourself to anything in Lo Sing's store that you like when we get back to Rutuona, and let these chaps pay the bill."

Full Moon clapped her hands delightedly.

"Plenty brilliantine, plenty face powder," she cried.

Ginger looked horrified, but Sandy grinned.

"You wait and see her when she comes out of the store," he chuckled. "She'll look like a French doll and smell like a chemist's shop for a couple of days, and kid herself she's the cat's whisker. Then she'll go swimming and forget all about it." He got up. "We might as well be getting back," he said. "I can do with a nice cup of tea to wash this smell out of my throat. We'd better find a safe place for these pearls. We won't put them on the Scud till we go for good, in case of accidents."

They walked back across the island to the camp, where, before doing anything else, Sandy buried the tin containing the pearls in the soft

sand under a conspicuous crag of sun-bleached coral.

"They should be all right there," he said, as he rejoined the others, who were preparing tea.

After the meal was over Biggles leaped back and lit a cigarette. Sandy lit his pipe.

"I call that a pretty good day's work," he said. "Another load or two and we're all set for an easy life. All I ask is that the weather holds."

"And the food supply," put in Biggles. "We're getting a bit low. I didn't reckon on six mouths to fill when I made up the list of stores."

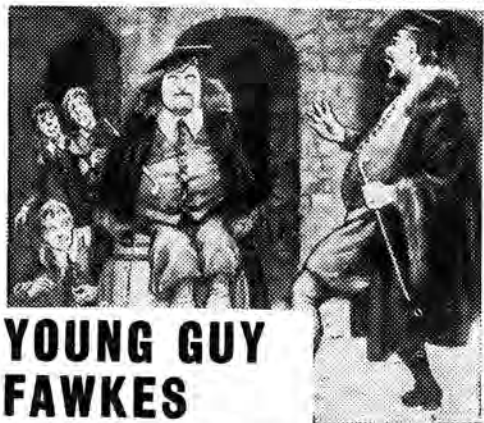
"We ought to help it out with fish," replied Sandy. "There are plenty in the water. There's a line and some hooks over there; I brought 'em for that purpose. Full Moon and Shell Breaker know the sorts worth eating." He turned to the two Polynesians. "You kids go and get some fish," he ordered.

Shell Breaker and Full Moon sprang to their feet and picked up the fishing equipment.

"Hold on, I'm coming with you," Ginger told them, and overtook them as they walked away along the beach of white coral sand.

They went on for some distance, and, after examining several places, Full Moon stopped at a tiny cove, where the coral dropped sheer into a pool such as Ginger had often tried to imagine. Not a ripple disturbed its surface, and shoals of fish could be seen swimming lazily in the crystal-clear water. From the coral edge to the pool was a drop of anything from ten to twenty feet, but there were plenty of natural steps leading down to the water. A final touch of artistry was supplied by a little group of palms, one of which hung far out over the pool, the fronds touching its faithfully reflected image.

Full Moon baited a hook with a piece of shell-



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fish, of which there were vast numbers clinging to the coral, and was soon pulling fish ashore as fast as she could throw out the line. Ginger took a turn, and added to the ever-growing pile of fish of all shapes, sizes, and colours that lay flapping on the bank.

"We've got enough," he said at last. "It's no use killing the poor brutes for the sake of killing them; and it's more like hard work than sport, anyway. I doubt if we shall be able to eat all we've got as it is."

"Me swim."

Full Moon threw the line aside and went into the water like an otter. Ginger watched her for a minute as she turned easily this way and that far under the water, as much like a mermaid as a human being could be. Then he began peeling off his shirt.

"I'm going to have a spot of this!" he told Shell Breaker, who was collecting some fallen coconuts.

Kicking off his canvas shoes, he went to the edge of the water and looked for the girl. The ripples made by her entry into the pool were lapping gently against the coral; he could see the bottom clearly, but of Full Moon there was no sign. He waited, a feeling of uneasiness fast becoming anxiety as the girl did not reappear.

"Hi! Shell Breaker!" he cried in a high-pitched voice. "Something's happened to Full Moon!"

The boy dropped the coconuts he was carrying in his arms and ran to the edge of the pool, his eyes scrutinizing every section of it in quick succession. A puzzled look crossed his face. He stared out towards the open lagoon for a minute, and then started working swiftly round the edge of the cove, examining the rough coral walls as he went. The alarm plainly depicted on his face did nothing to allay Ginger's anxiety, which by this time was not far short of panic.

It seemed impossible that anything serious could have happened to Full Moon in that clear, innocent-looking pool. Yet it was obvious that the girl had met with some disaster in its depths. If not, why had she not reappeared?

Suddenly Shell Breaker drew himself up and dived into the water. Ginger ran to the spot. For a moment he could see nothing owing to the wavelets caused by Shell Breaker's plunge; then as they rippled away and splashed against the coral, he looked eagerly for the Polynesian. There was no sign of him. Ginger stared and stared again, unable to believe his eyes.

A minute passed—two minutes—and still Shell Breaker did not reappear. Ginger knew that not even the Polynesian can stay under water much longer than that, and a terrible fear took possession of him. Never had he felt so utterly helpless. He ran a little way along the coral bank to get a better view of the place where the boy had disappeared, but all he could see was a dark area, as if the water deepened.

It was now more than five minutes since Full Moon had dived into the pool, and he knew that no human being could survive such an immersion. "An octopus has got her!" he thought, sick with horror, and filled with loathing of the beautiful spot where, nevertheless, death lurked.

What has happened to Shell Breaker and Full Moon? Is there some death-dealing monster in the depths of the pool? Look out for next week's thrilling developments!

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JACK DRAKE'S HAT-TRICK!

By Frank Richards.

BUNTER CAUSES TROUBLE!

"**D**RAKE says—"

"Shut up, Bunter!"

"But Drake says—"

Bob Cherry picked up the loaf and took aim at the fat figure framed in the doorway of Study No. 1.

Billy Bunter prepared to dodge; but he stood his ground.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Hook it!" growled Johnny Bull.

"But Drake says—"

"Will you ring off?" roared Bob Cherry.

"We don't want to know what Drake says. Bother Drake, and bother you!"

Harry Wharton & Co. were gathered to tea in Study No. 1 in the Remove passage. Bob Cherry, Hurree Singh, and Johnny Bull were guests in the study, Wharton and Nugent being the hosts.

Four of the Famous Five were chatting away cheerily—only Harry Wharton being rather silent and thoughtful—when Billy Bunter hove in sight in the offing, so to speak. Probably it was the scent of the muffins that had attracted Bunter.

But no inviting voice was raised to request Bunter to step into the study. Instead of that, five steely glares had been turned upon him, and Bunter's hopes of muffins reached vanishing point. So he stood there in the doorway and conferred the delights of his conversation upon the Famous Five of the Remove.

"Yes, cut off, Bunter," said Frank Nugent. "What Drake says, or doesn't say, really isn't interesting. Roll away and tell Toddy."

"But it doesn't concern Toddy," said Bunter. "It's Wharton."

"Hallo, what's that about Wharton?" demanded the captain of the Remove.

"Drake says—"

"Dry up!" roared Bob Cherry.

Wharton's brows had set a little.

Jack Drake, the new junior, did not pull well

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with the captain of the Remove; there had been more than a hint of trouble already. Wharton's chums did not want to see that trouble increased by the officious intervention of William George Bunter.

"He says you suffer from a swelled head, Wharton," continued Bunter, with an eye on Bob Cherry. "He says if this goes on, you'll want a larger size in hats!"

Some of the tea-party in Study No. 1 grinned. Wharton frowned.

The grins round the tea-table vanished at once. Harry Wharton was the best of good fellows, in his own way; but he had his little weaknesses which his chums respected.

"I don't see anything to grin at in a new kid's cheek!" said Wharton rather gruffly.

"The grinfulness is not terrific," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh pacifically. "The esteemed Bunter is too talkful. You should not repeatedly report the cheeky remarks of new kids, Bunter."

"Well, Drake says—" recommenced Bunter.

The Owl of the Remove got no further. Bob Cherry considered it time to intervene with the loaf.

Whiz!

Billy Bunter was on the watch, however. The whizzing loaf came straight for his fat waistcoat; but the fat junior jumped aside in the nick of time, and the missile passed him and shot across the passage.

But it is said that every bullet has its billet, and certainly that loaf had. Two juniors were coming along from the stairs—Drake and Rodney. Drake was just in time to catch the loaf with his ribs.

Crash!

"Oh, my hat!"

Taken quite by surprise, Jack Drake staggered across the passage as the missile smote him, and sat down against the opposite wall with a bump.

"He, he, he!" chortled Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!" came in a roar from Study No. 1.

"Send that ball back, will you?" shouted Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha! Who caught it?"

"The catchfulness was terrific!" grinned Hurree Singh.

"Ow!" gasped Jack Drake. "What blithering idiot—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Dick Rodney gave his chum a hand up. Drake, in considerable wrath, glared in at the open doorway of Study No. 1.

"What thumping ass is buzzing loaves across

the passage when a fellow is coming along?" he roared.

"Ha, ha, ha! Sorry!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "It was meant for Bunter! Kick Bunter for getting out of the way!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Kick him as hard as you like," said Nugent liberally. "That will make it all right, won't it?"

Drake rubbed his ribs. He had had a hard drive there, and he did not seem to like it.

"Give us our ball back," continued Cherry, chuckling.

Drake picked up the loaf.

"You silly asses!" he said. "You ought to have more sense; but I've noticed already that there isn't much sense in this study."

"Didn't you say that Wharton had a swelled head, Drake?" hooted Billy Bunter.

Wharton fixed his eyes on the new Removeite—with a gleam in them.

"Yes, I did, you fat ass!" said Drake.

"Oh, you did?" exclaimed Wharton.

Drake nodded coolly.

"Yes; no harm in commenting upon a perfectly obvious fact, I suppose," he said.

"You cheeky ass!" began Wharton hotly.

"My dear chap, if you do the monarch-of-all-you-survey stunt, you must expect to be called swollen-headed," said Drake cheerfully. "I believe you've described me as a cheeky new kid."

"That's what you are!"

"Well, then, tit for tat," said Drake. "Or mustn't your majesty's humble subjects pass remarks upon your noble majesty?"

"Look here—"

"Chuck that loaf in and clear off, Drake!" exclaimed Bob Cherry impatiently. "You jaw too much, old top!"

"The jawfulness is terrific!"

"Here's your loaf!" answered Drake.

He tossed it into the study—and it landed with a crash in the middle of the tea-table.

"You ass—"

"Oh, you chump—"

There was a crash as the loaf landed. A plate cracked, and the teapot overturned, and the contents of it shot over Johnny Bull's knees. Frank Nugent received what was in the milk-jug.

The Famous Five leaped to their feet in great wrath.

Drake chuckled.

"Sauce for the goose, sauce for the gander," he remarked.

And he walked on with Rodney to his own study.

Johnny Bull mopped his knees, breathing wrath. Nugent dabbed milk from his waistcoat with his handkerchief.

"The cheeky sweep!" said Bob Cherry sulphurously. "It's time those new kids were sat on—heavy! This isn't the way for new kids to treat old hands. Come along and mop up their study."

"Hear, hear!"

The Famous Five were wrathful; and they did not stop to reflect that Drake had received the first offence. They rushed from the study and headed for Study No. 3, into which Drake and Rodney had disappeared.

Billy Bunter blinked after them, and then whipped into Study No. 1, with a fat grin on his face.

In a moment his fat jaws were actively at

work. While the Famous Five were attending to vengeance, William George Bunter attended to the muffins.

TIT FOR TAT!

"HALLO! What—" ejaculated Ogilvy. "Order!" bawled Russell.

Russell and Ogilvy were getting tea in Study No. 3, when Drake and Rodney came in. They had not been in a minute when the Famous Five followed them in with a war-like rush.

"Collar them!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Bump the bounders!"

In a moment the two new juniors were in the grasp of the Famous Five. They resisted manfully and seven struggling juniors staggered to and fro in the study.

"Look out!" roared Ogilvy. "Stop it! You'll have the table over next!"

"Back up!" panted Drake.

"Lend us a hand!" yelled Rodney.

Russell and Ogilvy joined in at once. They did not know what the trouble was about, but they objected strongly to this lawless invasion of their study. It was a terrific melee the next minute, with four on one side and five on the other.

Remove studies at Greyfriars were not planned for battles royal; there was really not enough room for military operations on this scale. The table went spinning, and the chairs were knocked to and fro; the fender kicked out of place, and the fire-irons and coal-bucket scattered far and wide.

For several minutes it might have been supposed that earthquakes and air-raids were active in Study No. 3 in the Remove.

Then the uproar ceased.

Having reduced the study to something like a wreck, the Famous Five retired from the scene, leaving their late adversaries strewn among the wreckage.

They returned rather breathlessly to Study No. 1, feeling that the honour and glory of the Famous Five had been properly vindicated.

But in Study No. 3, as by the yellow Tiber of old, there was tumult and affright.

Four ruffled and rumped juniors sat up breathlessly, and spluttered in the midst of overturned furniture, scattered books and papers, and coal and crockery.

"Ow! Ow! Ow!"

Jack Drake staggered to his feet.

"Come on, and let's mop up the rotters in their own study!" he exclaimed.

"Ow! Ow! Ow!" mumbled Russell. "I've had enough mopping up! What was the silly row about, anyhow?"

"Oh dear!" murmured Rodney.

"Yaroooh!" came a fiendish yell from the passage, followed by the sound of a fall. William George Bunter had been discovered at the muffins by the returning victorious warriors.

Ogilvy picked himself up. He nursed a nose that was streaming red. And he glared at Jack Drake.

"Rowing with Wharton again, you ass!" he said. "What the thump are you always ragging for?"

"Blow Wharton!" said Drake. "I suppose all this is really because I said he had a swelled head!"

"Like your cheek! Wharton's captain of the Remove, and you're only a measly new kid—nobody, in fact!"

"Will you back me up to raid Study No. 1?" snapped Drake.

"No, I won't, but I'll jolly well punch your nose—"

"Here, hold on!" exclaimed Rodney, interposing. "We've had ragging enough here. Suppose we set the study to rights and have tea?"

"Ow! Look at my nose!"

"Look at the study!" gasped Russell.

Jack Drake gave a snort. He was quite prepared to carry the war into the enemy's country; but it was evident that he would not have the support of his study. Even his own study-mates were rather inclined to think that Jack Drake had rather too much assurance for a "new kid." Perhaps he had.

Study No. 3 set itself to rights, and over tea they recovered their good humour. But Robert Donald Ogilvy felt called upon to read Drake a lecture on the subject of new kids keeping their place and not being cheeky to their Form captain; a lecture to which Drake listened with great politeness, but to which he replied only with the ancient and classic monosyllable: "Rats!"

After tea, Drake and Rodney left the study, and on the Remove staircase they passed the Famous Five—who grinned. Drake found that grin of lofty superiority rather irritating.

"Cheeky asses!" he growled, as the chums went downstairs.

Dick Rodney smiled.

"They're all right," he said. "They've been top dogs in the Remove till we came, you know. Wharton is a really good sort—only a trifle touchy."

"Chap oughtn't to be touchy," said Drake.

"Everybody's got his little weaknesses," said Rodney tolerantly. "We may have some ourselves, if we only knew it."

Jack Drake laughed.

"Possibly," he assented. "Still, I can't say I like the Lord-of-Creation air that Wharton carries around with him. He really is swollen-headed, isn't he?"

"Not so bad as that."

"And I've got an idea," continued Drake. "We can't rag his study; but we can pull his leg, and that will make him waxier than ragging his study. Let's go and see if Quelch is out."

"What on earth for?"

"I want to use his telephone."

"But what—"

"You'll see—come on!"

The two Removites reached Mr. Quelch's study and Drake tapped discreetly on the door. He was prepared to ask a question concerning P. Virgilius Maro, if the Remove-master was there. Fortunately, Mr. Quelch was not at home. There was no answer to the tap, and Drake opened the door and looked in.

"All clear!" he said. "Keep an eye on the corridor while I phone."

"But—I say—"

Drake did not heed. He hurried into the study, sat at the telephone, and opened the directory. Dick Rodney, at the study door, kept watch and ward. It was very necessary to vacate the premises without delay if the Remove-master appeared in sight.

Drake was not long in finding his number.

"Courtfield—One-two!"

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"What on earth—" murmured Rodney.

He was quite puzzled by his chum's proceedings; but he followed Drake's lead, as he generally did.

"Is that Perkins?" Drake asked into the transmitter.

"Yes, sir!"

"Have you any top hats in stock?"

"Certainly, sir!"

Rodney stared at his chum, instead of keeping watch in the passage. What on earth Drake's game was was a mystery he could not fathom.

"I'm speaking from Greyfriars," went on Drake. "You know Greyfriars School?"

"Oh, yes, sir! We've supplied Mr. Prout, sir."

"Oh, good! Have you a top hat in a large size?"

"Several sizes, sir."

"Twelve-inch?"

"Oh! Ah! Um! No, sir. I—I think we have them up to eight inches, sir."

"Eight inches will do. Can you deliver one here?"

"With pleasure, sir. What name?"

"H. Wharton."

"Very good, sir. Will ten in the morning suit?"

"Perfectly."

"Rely upon us, sir."

Rodney gasped. He began to comprehend the extraordinary "stunt" that had occurred to Drake's fertile brain. But Drake was not finished yet. He rang off, and rang up a new number.

"Is that Mr. Lazarus, Courtfield?"

"Yeth."

"Have you a second-hand silk hat, large size?"

"Thertainly, plenty of them."

"One is wanted at once. Will you deliver it to-morrow to H. Wharton?"

"With pleasure, Master Wharton."

"Thanks. The biggest you have."

"Yeth, thertainly."

Drake rang off, grinning. Mr. Lazarus often supplied the Greyfriars juniors with "props" for their theatricals, and doubtless he concluded that the big silk hat was wanted for some comic turn. Drake did not mind what he concluded, so long as he delivered the goods.

"Drake, old chap—" murmured Rodney.

"Anybody coming?"

"Nunno; but—"

Drake started on the telephone again. He made two more calls, and was about to make a fifth, when there was a warning from Rodney. Drake jumped away from the telephone at once.

Mr. Quelch had been sighted in the distance, approaching, in conversation with Mr. Prout. The two juniors scuttled away from the study in time. They sauntered into the Common-room.

The Famous Five were there, and they grinned again at the sight of Jack Drake. Drake grinned, too. What Wharton's feelings would be on the morrow when the delivery of the hats began he could hardly conjecture; but he was quite certain that the captain of the Remove would not grin.

DELIVERING THE GOODS!

"EST in conspectu Tenedoes—"

"Go on, Bunter!"

Bunter paused.

The Remove were in class the following morning, and Mr. Quelch was experiencing the pleasure—or otherwise—of hearing Billy Bunter construe. Bunter's Formfellows listened with

pleasure—Bunter's construe was, as Peter Todd had remarked, enough to make a Hun chortle.

"He was expecting a tenner!" translated Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Remove howled—they couldn't help it. Mr. Quelch's look, however, stilled their merriment at once. Sometimes Mr. Quelch was pleased to take Bunter's fatuous blunders humorously; and then it was all very well for the juniors to laugh—in fact, it was their duty.

On this occasion Mr. Quelch was wrathful, and he gave the juniors a look which Skinner, in a whisper, compared unto that of a famished tiger.

There was a silence.

"Bunter!"

"Ye-e-es, sir?"

"Are you so stupid—so utterly crass, sir, as to suppose that Virgil made any written reference to ten-pound notes in the reign of Augustus Caesar?" thundered Mr. Quelch.

"Yes, sir. I—I mean, no, sir. Certainly not, sir."

"Then, Bunter—"

Tap!

Mr. Quelch spun round irritably as a knock came at the Form-room door. He disliked any interruption of lessons—in which his pupils were far from sharing his feelings.

Bunter gasped with relief; his eyes had been very apprehensively cast on the Remove-master's pointer.

"Come in!" snapped Mr. Quelch.

Trotter, the page, entered. He had a baidbox in his hand, wrapped up and tied with string.

"Master Wharton's 'at, sir," said Trotter.

"What?"

"The 'at, sir, for Master Wharton!"

"You should not bring a parcel to the Form-room during lessons!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch irritably.

"Perkins' man is waiting for the money, sir," stammered Trotter. "He says it's the noo top 'at for Master Wharton, sir!"

"Wharton, have you ordered a new top hat?"

"No, sir!" gasped Harry Wharton in utter astonishment.

"There is some mistake, then," frowned Mr. Quelch. "Take it back to the man, Trotter."

"Master Wharton's name is on the box, sir," said Trotter.

"Tell the man there is some mistake, and Master Wharton did not order it, and take it away at once," snapped Mr. Quelch.

Trotter disappeared with the baidbox.

"That's jolly queer!" murmured Bob Cherry.

"What the thump has Perkins sent you a new top hat for, Harry?"

The captain of the Remove shook his head.

"Can't imagine."

"Perhaps they know Wharton needs a larger size in hats on account of his swelled head!" murmured Drake.

Wharton was about to make a sharp reply when Mr. Quelch struck in.

"Cherry, Wharton, Drake! You are talking! Take fifty lines each. If there is any more talking in class I shall use the cane!"

There was no more talking in class. Mr. Quelch was evidently not to be trifled with that morning.

Drake's remark, however, had been heard by a good many of the juniors, and there were some smiles among the Removites, which Wharton found rather exasperating.

Possibly Wharton was, as some of his Form-fellows averred, a little touchy. At all events, he was not in his usual good temper when the Remove were dismissed from lessons that morning.

As the juniors came crowding down the corridor, Trotter came up. He addressed the captain of the Remove.

"The man's waiting from Mr. Lazarus, Master Wharton," he said.

"Man from Mr. Lazarus?" repeated Harry.

"Yessir. He came a quarter of an hour ago, but I wouldn't come to the Form-room, Mr. Quelch being so 'ot last time," said Trotter. "He's waiting in your study, sir, with the 'at."

"The hat?" exclaimed Wharton.

"Yessir."

And Trotter departed, leaving Harry Wharton staring blankly. The Co. exchanged looks of surprise.

"You're not going in for second-hand hats, surely, Harry?" said Nugent.

"Of course not," said Wharton irritably.

"Lazarus doesn't sell new ones."

"I can't imagine what he's sent me a hat for. I never asked him to."

"Blessed if I understand it, then!" said Bob Cherry, puzzled. "This is the second hat sent you to-day that you haven't ordered. Have you been walking in your sleep and ordering hats?"

"Oh rot!"

"Better go and see the man, anyhow, if he's waiting in the study," said Nugent.

Harry Wharton nodded and hurried away to his study, his chums following. Skinner winked at the other juniors.

"Somebody's pulling Wharton's noble leg," he murmured. "Let's go and see the hat. If it's big enough for a swelled head, we'll have a whip-round and buy it for Wharton."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bolsover major. "Come on, you fellows!"

And a crowd of the Remove rushed after the Famous Five. Popular as Harry Wharton undoubtedly was in the Greyfriars Remove, quite a number of juniors seemed to find entertainment in the pulling of his leg. The fact that he could not always keep his temper was a temptation to fellows to chip him when a frown was seen on his brow.

The Famous Five arrived in Study No. 1, and found a rather greasy-looking gentleman sitting on the table awaiting them. The man from Mr. Lazarus had already unwrapped the hat—a second-hand silk hat of gigantic dimensions. The original owner of that hat must have been a genius of the first water, if size of brain was anything to judge by. Probably Mr. Lazarus had not found a ready sale for that hat—judging by appearances, it had been on hand for a long time.

"Morning, sir!" said the shiny young man cheerily. "'Ere's the 'at, sir. Ten-and-six to pay, please."

The Co. stared at the hat. If Wharton had put it on, his head would have been engulfed down to the shoulders—if the shoulders had not been engulfed also. There was shelter in that hat for any two or three members of the Greyfriars Remove.

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Bob Cherry. "Lazarus must think your brain has been developing, Wharton!"

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

Harry Wharton looked round angrily. The

doorway was crammed with grinning faces. Half the Remove seemed to be there, deeply interested in Harry Wharton's new hat.

"He, he, he!" chortled Billy Bunter. "Lazarus knows Wharton has got a swelled head! He, he, he!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" Wharton set his lips. "This is some rotten joke," he said savagely. "I never ordered the hat, and I don't want it. You can take it back, my man."

Mr. Lazarus' man stared, naturally surprised. "You do not want it!" howled Skinner. "Keep it, Wharton! Just a little more swelling in the head, and it will fit you to a hair!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "You cheeky cad, Skinner!" "Draw it mild," murmured Bob Cherry. "Chaps will have their little cackle, you know, old scout."

"His majesty is getting ratty!" chortled Skinner. "How dare you common mortals come between the wind and his nobility!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Ten-and-six, please," said the puzzled, shiny young man. "I've been waiting 'ere for you, Master Wharton—"

"I did not order the hat!" exclaimed Wharton angrily. "Why the thump should Mr. Lazarus think I wanted such a hat as that?"

"Swelled head!" came a howl from the passage.

Mr. Lazarus' young man grinned. "Which Mr. Lazarus s'posed it was for some of your theatricals," he remarked. "It was ordered yesterday."

"Well, I did not order it, and I shall not take it or pay for it!" snapped Wharton.

"Wot am I going to do with this 'ere 'at, then?"

"Anything you dashed well like!" And with that Harry Wharton strode out of the study, shoving his way through a chuckling crowd.

Mr. Lazarus' young man looked rather angry. Bob Cherry slipped a shilling into his hand.

"It's all right, chappy," he said soothingly. "Somebody's ordered that tile for a joke on Wharton."

And Mr. Lazarus' young man departed—after wrapping up the hat. He did not seem pleased, though the shilling had mollified him a little. But evidently there was no sale for that hat at Greyfriars, so there was nothing doing.

Harry Wharton came in to dinner that day with a knitted brow. But every other face at the Remove table wore a smile.

STILL THEY COME!

"MASTER WHARTON—"

"Yes."

"Your 'at, sir!"

"What!" roared Wharton.

The Famous Five were taking a little stroll in the quadrangle after dinner, when a diminutive youth, with a rather large bandbox, came up to the captain of the Remove.

He held it out unspiciously. "Your 'at, sir, from Watkins', Courtfield."

Harry Wharton breathed hard. His chums tried not to smile. But they could not help a little twitching of their faces.

"I have not ordered a hat from Watkins'," said Wharton as calmly as he could.

The lad stared.

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"Yesterday, by telephone, sir," he remonstrated. "I 'eard the order took down myself, sir—order for the largest 'at in the shop."

"Ha, ha, ha!" gasped Bob Cherry, rather unfortunately.

Harry Wharton gave him a steely look. "What are you cackling at, you ass?" "Oh! Ah! Ahem! Nothing!" gasped Bob.

"Somebody has been telephoning in your name, I should say."

"That's plain enough for any idiot to see," answered Wharton curtly. "I'll find out who it was, too, and perhaps he won't be so funny another time."

"Well, 'ere's the 'at, sir," said the boy. "'Ere's the bill, sir, and I'm to wait for the money."

"The hat isn't for me," said Harry. "Some silly chump ordered it for a joke. Take it away and bury it!"

He walked angrily away. "Well, this 'ere is a go!" said the diminutive youth. "'Ere I've walked from Courtfield with this 'ere 'at, and now the bloke says as 'ow he don't want it. There'll be a row when I take this 'ere 'at 'ome."

"Soothe the ruffled youth with a bob, somebody," said Bob Cherry. "Lazarus' man had my one and only."

The youth from Watkins' was tipped and dismissed, and the Co. followed their leader—and a dozen fellows who had gathered round chortled. Everybody in the Remove seemed to be enjoying the joke, with the solitary exception of the victim of it. Wharton's temper was rising higher and higher—all the more because this peculiar persecution seemed so funny to the other fellows.

"His nibs is growing wrathy!" Drake remarked to Rodney. "Somebody's nose will get punched soon. I wonder whose?"

Rodney chuckled. "And there's still another 'at to come!" grinned Drake. "I wish I had made it a dozen now. Wharton's face would have been worth watching while the goods were being delivered."

Most of the Remove seemed to think that Wharton's face was worth watching now. He was, in fact, the cynosure of all eyes: and the more he felt the amused glances of the Removitees upon him, the darker grew his brow.

It was nearly time for afternoon classes, and the Remove fellows were gathering round the Form-room door, when Trotter arrived, with a lurking grin on his face.

"Man from Jackson's, sir," he said. "Jackson's!" repeated Wharton.

"Yessir! He's got the 'at—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the Removitees.

"What size hat?" yelled Skinner. "Big enough for a swelled head?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "I've told the man to come 'ere, sir," said Trotter. "He's got the bill—"

"Tell him—"

"'Ere he is, sir."

Trotter disappeared as the man from Jackson's came up, holding a bandbox in one hand and his own hat in the other. He was a smart young man, and he greeted Wharton politely.

"Here's the hat, sir—sorry we couldn't send it earlier, sir. I told Mr. Jackson I'd run down in my lunch-time on my bike, sir."

"Let's see the hat!" chortled Skinner, while Harry Wharton stood speechless with anger in the grinning crowd. "Is it large enough? That's the question."

(Continued on page 36.)



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JACK DRAKE'S HAT-TRICK!

(Continued from page 34.)

"Largest size in stock, sir, as asked for on the telephone," answered the smart young man. "If you'd given us a day's notice, Master Wharton, we could have got a bigger one—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Trot it out!" howled Bolsover major. "If it isn't big enough for a swelled head, it won't do."

The smart young man looked surprised.

"Take it back!" said Harry Wharton, between his teeth. "It was ordered by a fool, for a practical joke."

The smart young man frowned.

"Indeed, sir? I want sixteen-and-six for that hat; we have no time in business, sir, for practical jokes. If the money is not paid I shall have to go to the headmaster!"

"Well, I'm not going to pay for it!" snapped Wharton. "Do as you dashed well choose!"

He turned on his heel.

"Hoity-toity!" said the smart young man grimly. "Any of you young gents direct me to the headmaster?"

"Time for the merry joker to sit up and take notice!" grinned Bob Cherry. "The Head will soon be rooting after him."

Jack Drake laughed.

"I'll pay for it, if you won't take it back," he said.

"Sixteen-and-six, sir," said the smart young man.

He handed Drake the receipt, and departed

TOM MERRY HITS BACK!

(Continued from page 22.)

Tom. "We— Oh!" He jumped up. "Is that you, sir? Come in, sir!"

Mr. Linton stood looking in.

All the editorial staff of the "Weekly" rose respectfully to their feet. They gave him respectful inquiring looks.

"Merry!"

"Yes, sir!"

"Have you been in the Fifth Form passage?"

"The Fifth Form passage? No, sir!"

"You appear to be very busy here," said Mr. Linton, with a smile.

"Yes, sir; special war number of our paper," said Tom. "Would you like to hear Lowther's poem about Hitler, sir? It's rather good! It begins:

"According to Adolf himself,

The world's greatest human is Hitler.

According to everyone else,

No braggart could ever be littler!"

"Oh! Ah! Very good indeed!" said Mr. Linton, and he faded out of the picture and closed the study door.

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satisfied—leaving the largest size in bowler hats in Drake's hands. Skinner jerked away the bandbox, and burst it open and revealed the hat. He held it up on high for inspection. It was not, perhaps, the best quality in hats, but there was undoubtedly plenty of it. Its size was enormous.

"Here's your hat, Wharton!" yelled Skinner, amid a roar of laughter. "Full size for a swelled head."

Wharton was about to enter the Form-room, with a black brow. Skinner slipped behind him and dropped the hat on his head. There was a shriek from the Removites. The hat descended to Wharton's collar, and his head and face vanished from view.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

In a second Wharton tore off the hat and dashed it to the floor. He strode towards Jack Drake, his eyes blazing. Bob Cherry touched his arm, but he shook Bob's hand angrily off.

"You did this, Drake?"

Jack Drake nodded coolly.

"Guilty, my lord," he answered cheerily. "If the hat isn't big enough for a swelled head, perhaps it will stretch!"

Wharton clenched his hand. At that moment Mr. Quelch came rustling along the passage. The Remove captain dropped his hand.

"After lessons!" he muttered.

Drake shrugged his shoulders.

"Certainly, old scout!"

And the Removites went in to lessons, with a smile on every face but one!

Next Week: "FROM FOES TO FRIENDS!"

The editorial staff of the "Weekly" remained silent till his footsteps had died away.

Then there was a chortle in the study.

"I don't think Silverson will make a catch this time," remarked Tom Merry.

"Not quite," chuckled Lowther.

"And I wonder," remarked Manners, "what he will say when he finds out whose hat was stuck on his chimney?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Study No. 10 roared.

James Silverson said several expressive things when he found out whose hat had been stuck on the chimney. When that chimney was at last unstopped, a coat and a hat were brought to Mr. Silverson, in such a state that it was improbable that Mr. Silverson would ever wear either of them again. James stood in his study looking at them, with an expressive expression on his face, and some very expressive words on his lips. But there was nothing that James could do. James was not getting the best of it now that Tom Merry was hitting back.

Next Wednesday: "THE MASKED AVENGERS!"

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