

GREAT STORY OF AIR-AGE BIGGLES Inside!

THE
GEM
2P

*The
Masked
Avengers!*





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 Bull himself! But keep your letter SHORT.

"A Tomboy Admirer," of Upper Clapton, E.5, writes:

Can you answer the following:

1. If Martin Clifford dies, who will be his successor?

2. Of Kildare of St. Jim's and Wingate of Greyfriars, who is the cleverest?

Thanks a lot!

P.S.—Am enclosing a small photo. Please publish it!

ANSWER: *I can, and I will.*

1. *Morbid mind you have. Martin Clifford is fit and well, so the Editor is not worrying about a successor.*

2. *Dunno. Both rattling good sportsmen. That's what counts!*

Don't mynch.

P.S. *Sorry, your photo was unsuitable for reproduction.*

P. S., of Surrey (with a Sutton postmark), writes:

I would like a list of Fifth Form studies. Thank you!

ANSWER: *Cutts, Gilmore, Lee, Prye (Cutts' cronny), St. Leger (Cutts' closest pal), Smith major, and Lefevre (Form captain, and a rattling good fellow) are the chief Fifth Formers featured in the stories. Their studies have no numbers. Nice to hear from you. Write again.*

Miss S. Brunow, of Muizenberg, Capetown, South Africa, writes:

1. Whom do you hate most in the Shell and Fourth?

2. Which school is St. Jim's most pally with—Rookwood or Greyfriars?

3. Whereabouts is your home? (Full address, please!)

4. Are you pally with the occupants of Study No. 9?

ANSWER:

1. *The fellow who interrupts me when I am "answering back"!*

2. *Ally-pally with both, madam!*

3. *Get out your map of Yorkshire. Got your finger on the East Riding? Biggish area, isn't it? They tell me they train air pilots by letting them fly over the moors. A hiker missing the road in a fog might easily get lost. Not that I live out on the moors. The name of the town is— (CENSORED.—ED.)*

4. *Very, though Cardew gets in a fellow's hair at times.*

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Victor Temple, of Edgbaston, Birmingham, writes:

I'm fourteen and a half. In what Form should I be at St. Jim's?

ANSWER: *In fine form, I sincerely hope. You'd probably be placed in the Fourth, provided you could beat the jag standard at maths, etc., and provided you weren't such a genius they had to stick you in the Shell or the Fifth.*

John Bee, of West Hartlepool, writes:

Who is your best friend? When are "Detective Kerr Investigates" and "Laugh with Monty Lowther" coming back? How old are you? Who's boxing champ at St. Jim's? Will you ask Gussy how many "window-panes" he has bought while at St. Jim's? P.S.—If this is not answered by next fortnight's issue I'll know you can't answer it. See, big boy?

ANSWER: *I've three "best friends"—Gussy, Herries, and Dig. The return of the features mentioned rests with the Ed. I'm fifteen years three months. Kildare k.o.'s all comers! Gussy says "roughly a score, pawpaws, to give a wound figure!" P.S.—I couldn't answer even Hitler in so short a time as you suggest, unless we stopped the presses. The GEM is printed several weeks in advance, you know.*

J. R. Howell, of New Moston, Manchester, writes:

Names of St. Jim's Cricket Eleven and averages, please! Have you a bowler as good as Hurree Singh, of Greyfriars? I think the GEM is a ripping paper! Cheerio, old bean!

ANSWER: *Junior Eleven and best averages for last season: Tom Merry, 42.65; Talbot, 42.45; Blake (that's me!), 38.74; Figgins, 35; Noble, 30.25; D'Arcy, 27.15. Bowling: Fatty Wynn (every bit as good as Singh), nearly a hundred wickets at 5.43 runs apiece. Best performance: 10 for fifteen against Claremont. Rest of the eleven includes Lowther, Levison, Kerr, Herries. "Cheers!"*

Geoffrey Hookway, of Nunhead, writes:

1. Could Tom Merry beat Figgins?
2. Could you beat Grundy, Gussy, Chowle, Mellish, Racke, and Crooke?

ANSWER:

1. *He could, but wouldn't; they're friends.*
2. *I couldn't; I might; I could; I could; I could; I certainly could (in order)!*

THE CROOK MASTER OF THE FOURTH FORM GETS IT IN THE NECK FROM—

The MASKED AVENGERS!



Splash! Mr. Silverson was sent sprawling over, and he measured his length in deep, thick, slimy mud! "Ha, ha, ha!" came a yell from the masked figures.

ASKING FOR IT!

"**TOM!**"
"Stop!"
Manners and Lowther exclaimed together.

Tom Merry did not heed. He did not seem to hear. With a set face and glinting eyes he passed his two startled and alarmed chums, a letter crumpled in his hand.

They stared after him as he passed them almost like a whirlwind. Then they rushed after him, and grabbed him together as he tramped into masters' passage in the School House.

Tom, it seemed, was heading for a master's study. Obviously, he was not in a frame of mind to call on a master.

"What on earth's up, Tom?" exclaimed Manners.

"Let go!"

"Where are you going?" demanded Lowther.

"Let go, will you? I'm going to see that cur Silverson!"

"Quiet, you ass!" gasped Manners.

Tom's voice was sharp and angry. Any master in any of the studies might have heard it. And Mr. Silverson was master of the Fourth Form—not to be called names with impunity by any junior at St. Jim's.

"Will you let go?" exclaimed Tom. "I'm going to see that rat! I'm going to tell him what I think of him! If you'd seen what's in this letter—"

"Never mind what's in that letter! Come away, you ass, before one of the beaks comes out!" breathed Lowther.

**THERE'S NOT A DULL
MOMENT IN THIS
GREAT NEW STORY OF
THE ST. JIM'S CHUMS**

By

MARTIN CLIFFORD

The two Shell fellows could see part of the letter crumpled in Tom Merry's fist. It was in the handwriting of Miss Priscilla Fawcett, his old governess and guardian. Something in that letter had evidently roused Tom to wild and reckless wrath.

They could guess what it was. James Silverson had been mischief-making again. James used his

position as a temporary master at St. Jim's chiefly, if not wholly, for that one purpose—to sow trouble between Tom and the simple old lady at Laurel Villa, with a greedy eye on Miss Priscilla's money-bags. That was James' game, and the effect of that letter on Tom showed that he had been "at it" again.

But that did not alter the fact that James was, temporarily, at least, a member of the school staff, and not to be told what a junior thought of him.

"Come away, ass!" said Lowther.

"Quick, you fathead!" hissed Manners, in dread of seeing Railton's door open and the Housemaster step out.

"Let go, I tell you!" roared Tom.

"But—"

"Look here—"

"I'm going to see that cur!"

Tom Merry wrenched himself free of his friends' restraining grasp. He tramped on to the door of the Fourth Form master's study.

He did not knock at the door. He wrenched it open, and hurled it wide. No junior at St. Jim's, probably, had ever entered a master's study like that before.

Manners and Lowther could only stare on in utter dismay. If Tom Merry had wanted to play into his enemy's hands, and help him on with his surreptitious scheming, he could not have done it more effectually. But they could not stop him now.

Having hurled the door wide open, Tom Merry tramped into the study, his eyes ablaze.

"You rotter!" he shouted.

James Silverson, master of the Fourth, was seated at his study table. He jumped as Tom Merry tramped in and shouted.

Tom's eyes blazed at him.

In his excitement he did not for the moment notice that someone else was in the study.

But someone else was—no other than Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, sitting by the window, in conversation with the master of the Fourth.

That conversation was suddenly cut short. Mr. Railton stared as if dumbfounded at the angry and excited junior, thunder gathering in his brow.

Tom Merry held the crumpled letter up before the startled eyes of the master of the Fourth.

"Look at this!" he roared. "I dare say you can guess what's in it!"

"Merry!" thundered Mr. Railton. He fairly bounded to his feet.

"Oh—" gasped Tom.

He broke off as he saw his Housemaster.

James Silverson smiled faintly, an amused glimmer in his narrow, sharp eyes. He did not answer Tom. He was more than willing to leave him to his Housemaster.

Tom's face crimsoned under Mr. Railton's grim, angry stare.

"How dare you, Merry!" exclaimed Mr. Railton. "How dare you enter a master's study in this outrageous manner, and raise your voice to him!"

"Oh, I'm to blame, of course!" exclaimed Tom passionately. "If you knew what that man had done—"

"What do you mean?" thundered the Housemaster. "How dare you allude to a master in this school as 'that man'? Are you out of your senses, Merry? All this term you

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have been disrespectful, mutinous, regardless of authority. But this—"

"He has been telling lies to my guardian!" exclaimed Tom. "I've had a letter from her—this letter—full of worry and trouble. I'm not standing it! I won't have her worried like this! I won't—"

"Silence!"

Tom Merry stood panting.

"Am I to understand," said Mr. Railton sternly, "that Miss Fawcett has found some fault with you in that letter?"

"Yes!" panted Tom.

"And can you be surprised at it when you have been going from bad to worse all through the term?" exclaimed Mr. Railton. "I am quite aware that your relative, Mr. Silverson, is in correspondence with your guardian. But bow dare you suggest—"

"Ask him what he has told Miss Fawcett!" panted Tom.

"I am quite prepared to let Mr. Railton, if he so desires, see every word I have written to my respected relative, Miss Fawcett," said Mr. Silverson, in quiet tones. "Your suspicion is utterly unfounded, Merry. I fear that you have a suspicious, as well as a reckless and wilful nature. Miss Fawcett has naturally heard of the incessant trouble you have been in at school, and she has written me several distressed letters, and in every way I have striven to soothe her distress, and—"

"Oh, shut up!" roared Tom Merry. "That may do for Mr. Railton; it won't do for me!"

"Upon my word!" gasped Mr. Railton. "Merry, this passes all bounds! I shall punish you with the utmost severity for this insolence! Another word—one more word, Merry—and I shall take you to your headmaster, and request him to send you away from this school this very day!"

Tom Merry choked back angry words.

He could barely restrain them, but the gloating look in James Silverson's eyes helped him to do so. This was what James wanted—this was what he was scheming for. Another word from Tom Merry, and James had won his game at St. Jim's. Fortunately, Tom succeeded in choking back the words that leaped to his lips. He stood panting.

"Mr. Silverson, will you kindly hand me your cane?" said Mr. Railton grimly.

James handed him the cane.

"Merry, bend over that chair!"

Tom hesitated for a moment.

Mr. Railton's face set like iron. Of the bitterness between the two relatives, one a master and the other a schoolboy, he knew little or nothing, and it did not concern him. But he knew that if his order was not immediately obeyed, the fellow who disobeyed it was going to be expelled from St. Jim's.

James Silverson's eyes glittered. But again he gloated too soon. Tom Merry had lost his temper, and he had rushed into trouble; but he was not going to play into his enemy's hands to that extent.

He bent over the chair.

James looked on, while the Housemaster wielded the cane.

Six times it came down, each time with a crack like a pistol-shot.

Tom Merry did not utter a sound. Outside in the passage Manners and Lowther looked at one another dismally. Tom was going through

it, hard, yet he was getting off cheaply for his recklessness.

Mr. Railton laid down the cane at last. "Go!" he said. "Not a word—go! One word, and it will be the last you utter in this school, Merry!"

Manners and Lowther, in the passage, almost trembled. But Tom Merry left the study without a word. He joined them in the passage, his face white, and his eyes burning. Silently they walked him away.

SAT UPON!

"**W**HAT—" gasped Jack Blake. "Who—" exclaimed Herries. "Is that Gussy!" howled Digby.

The three Fourth Formers were coming into Study No. 6 when they stopped dead, and stared at the strange-looking occupant of the study.

It was rather a startling sight, seen suddenly. The face upon which their eyes fell was an extraordinary one. It had a huge grinning mouth, bushy moustache and eyebrows, and a nose several inches long, bright red, and curled at the tip.

It was enough to startle any fellow! Up to the neck, the figure in the study was the well-dressed and elegant figure of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of St. Jim's. The figure was easily recognised. But the face was startling.

From behind that startling face came a chuckle. "Ha, ha! Did I startle you, deah boys?"

"Yes, you ass!" hooted Blake. "Yes, you clump! Yes, you footling fathead! What the thump have you got a Guy Fawkes mask on for?"

Another chuckle from Gussy. "Think you would wecognise me in this mask, Blake?"

"Not your face," answered Blake. "It's better looking than usual, with that mask on."

"Weally, Blake—" "But I'd know the rest of you anywhere."

"Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that. I shall have to be vewy careful about my clobber," said Arthur Augustus. "It will not do for Silvahson to know me."

"Silverson!" repeated Herries. "Are you going to try to frighten Silverson with a Guy Fawkes mask?"

"No need for that," said Blake. "Try it with your own face, old bean—much more effective."

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus. "But what's the game?" demanded Dig.

Arthur Augustus untied the mask and removed it, revealing his own aristocratic features, with a grin on the same.

"I thought I would try it on you chaps," he said. "But when I try it on Silvahson, I think I will shove an old coat on, or somethin', so that he will not wecognise my clobber! It is wathah a bwright ideah, you chaps! I am goin' to wag Silvahson."

"And how?" demanded Blake.

Every fellow in the St. Jim's Fourth was keen on ragging Silverson—if practicable. New House fellows and School House fellows felt the same about that. Figgins & Co. of the New House yearned as much as Study No. 6 did to make life not worth living to the new master of the Fourth. Never in the history of St. Jim's had a master been so utterly unpopular and so generally disliked as the new Fourth Form master.

But ragging Silverson was a dangerous game—

and Gussy, in the opinion of his friends, was not the man for the dangerous task.

"I've got it all out and dwied!" chuckled Arthur Augustus. "Suppose a chap looked in at Silvahson's studay window—"

"At his window?" repeated Blake. "Yaas, wathah! You see, if he looked in at the door, Silvahson would collah him. Lookin' in at the window, he would be out of weach!"

explained Arthur Augustus astutely. "Well, lookin' in at his window, a chap says: 'Wat!'"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Of course, if a chap looked in in the ordinawy way, and called Silvahson a wat, he would be copped at once, and the Housemaster would give him six on the twousabs!" said Arthur Augustus. "But you see the big ideah? Silvahson is called

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a wat, but he doesn't know who called him one, see?"

"Ob erikey!" said Blake and Herries and Dig all together.

"Wathah bwright, what?" asked Arthur Augustus. "I walk out of the House with this Guy Fawkes mask under an old coat—see? I tap at Silvahson's window, and when he looks out, I say 'Wat!'"

"You say 'Wat!'!" said Blake dazedly.

"Yaas, wathah! Ewery fellow in the Form would like to tell Silvahson what he thinks of him!" grinned Arthur Augustus. "This is a perfectly safe way of tellin' the wottah what we think of him!"

"Help!" gasped Blake. "Standin' undah his studay window out of his weach, I say 'Wat' in vewy contemptuous tones," resumed Arthur Augustus. "He will not have the faintest ideah who is speakin' to him!"

"He—he—he won't!" gurgled Dig.

"Not the foggist, deah boy. He will be in a feahful wage, of course. P'robably he will woah with wage. But I shall go on callin' him names! I shall say 'Wottah!'"

"Oh crumbs!"

"I shall say 'Wasceally wapsceallion!'" said Arthur Augustus. "I shall say 'Pway get out of this coll, you wat; a wotten wascol like you is not wequiahed heah!' Fancy his feelin's!"

"And fancy yours soon afterwards!" gasped Blake.

"That's all wight, deah boy! Havin' slanged the wottah, I shall walk away, and wound the newestest cornah I shall slip the mask into my pocket," explained Arthur Augustus. "Then it will wemain a deep mystewy who slanged Silvahson."

"Ha ha, ha!" yelled the three. THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,656.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy raised his noble eyebrows.

"What are you laughin' at?" he inquired. "Don't you think it's wathah a bwight ideah? I have wathah bwight ideas, deah boys—bein' a fellow of tact and judgment. Without bwaggin', I believe I am the bwainy man of this studay! Nobody else has thought of a way of callin' Silvahson a wat without bein' told to bend ovah aftahwards."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you fellows—"

"You don't think he'd know your voice?" yelled Blake.

Arthur Augustus blinked at him.

"Wathah not! Voices are vewy much alike, Blake! Why should Silvahson pick out my voice from any othah fellow's?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Besides, I could disguise my voice, if you come to that," said Arthur Augustus. "A fellow cannot be too careful in dealin' with a sharp and wawy wat like Silvahson. I could speak in a vewy deep voice, or a vewy shwill voice—see? Then Silvahson would not have a suspish."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He might know your accent!" sobbed Blake.

"It's just barely possible that he might spot it!"

"Wubbish!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's all wight, deah boys—don't you wowwy!" said Arthur Augustus reassuringly. "I am gettin' by with this all wight. I am goin' to tell Silvahson he is a wat, and a wascal, and a wotah, and a wapsallion and wagamuffin—and then walk off, leavin' him in a feahful wage, and wondahin' who it was!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Blake & Co.

They almost wept.

Arthur Augustus apparently was unaware that his noble accent would give him away if he had a Guy Fawkes mask on his noble face, and a gas-mask on, on top of that! Gussy was quite satisfied with this stratagem.

"Well, if you fellows want to cackle, you can cackle!" said Arthur Augustus. "But that's what I'm goin' to do—and I'm goin' to do it now! I will bowwow your old coat from the lobby, Blake, so that I shall not look well-dressed—"

"What?"

"And that will be all wight. You fellows wait here, and when I come back, I'll tell you how it worked."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy picked up the Guy Fawkes mask, and made a step towards the door. But he made only one step. Blake & Co. lined up in the way.

Bright as this idea was, they were not going to let their noble chum carry on with it.

They could not help suspecting that James Silverson would spot Gussy's noble voice, and that the outcome would be six of the best for Gussy from his Housemaster's cane.

"Pway let me pass, deah boys!" urged Arthur Augustus. "Don't play the goat! I want to get through befoah tea—we've asked those Shell fellows to tea."

"You howling ass!" roared Blake. "You're not goin'!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Silverson would know you as soon as you opened your mouth!" howled Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"And you'd get whopped!" hooted Dig.

"Weally, Dig—"

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"Pack it up, Gussy!"

"I wufuse to do anythin' of the kind! I am goin' to call Silvahson a wat and a wascal, and leave him woahin' with wage."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now let me pass, you uttah asses, or I shall push you out of the way!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly.

"I tell you—!" howled Blake.

"Wats!"

"You're not goin'—"

"Wubbish!"

"You'll be spotted first shot!" gasped Blake.

"Now chuck it! You're not goin' out of this study with that mask, fathead!"

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus rushed.

Gussy was going to carry on with that bright idea if he could. But three pairs of hands grasped Gussy, and dragged him back. Blake & Co. were not going to let Arthur Augustus rush on his fate this way if they could stop him. And they could—and did!

"Now, Gussy—!" urged Blake.

"Wefuse me!" roared Arthur Augustus.

"Chuck it!"

"I wufuse to chuck it!"

"Will you stick in this study?"

"I wufuse to stick in this study, and I am goin' down to wag Silvahson!"

"Sit on him!" said Blake. "We can't let old Gussy ask for it like that. Sit on him till he agrees to chuck it!"

"Hear, hear!"

"You uttah asses!" shrieked Arthur Augustus as his loyal chums extended him on the study carpet, and sat on him in a row. "Gewwup! I wufuse to stick in the study! I am goin' to wag Silvahson! I am goin' to call him a wat, and a wotah, and make him woah with wage! Gewwup!"

Arthur Augustus was determined. So were his friends. And it really looked as if Gussy would have to give up that idea—bright as it was. Blake & Co. sitting on him in a row on the study carpet, waired for him to give it up—and in spite of Arthur Augustus' wild and frantic wriggles, they sat tight.

THE LETTER FROM HOME!

"COME on, Tom!"

Tom Merry shook his head.

The Terrible Three were in Study No. 10. It was tea-time, and they were booked for tea with Blake & Co. in the Fourth. But Tom was not much disposed either for tea or for cheery company.

An hour had elapsed since that "six" from his Housemaster in Silverson's study. The worst of the effect had worn off—but Tom was still feeling that six, and was likely to feel it for a long time.

But that did not trouble him very much—he could stand a licking, even an unusually severe one, without grouching. He was in a mood of bitter and savage resentment that was quite unlike cheery, sunny-tempered Tom Merry—and that made his comrades rather uneasy.

They understood his feelings, and they sympathised. His enemy was too cunning for him—again and again he had trapped Tom into some outbreak of disrespect or defiance. Indeed, had James been always able to keep his own temper, and keep Tom perpetually in the wrong, he might have won his game already.

Luckily perhaps for Tom, James Silverson's temper was as evil as Tom's own was hot and easily roused by wrong. Very often had James defeated his own schemes by giving that evil, malicious temper full rein.

But this time James had scored hands down. Railton was not likely to forget Tom's angry rush into a Form-master's study—his angry face and raised voice. Tom had put himself utterly in the wrong, as Silverson had planned and hoped that he would do—more than ever, Tom had made himself a "dog with a bad name."

And his look now showed that, though he realised his imprudence, there was little thought of prudence in his mind.

"See in Study No. 6, you know," said Manners. "You fellows go," answered Tom. "I don't feel like it."

"Well, look here, you'd better come," said Monty. "I don't like the look in your eye, Tom! You've made a fool of yourself once, and you look like making a fool of yourself again."

"Perhaps!" said Tom. "Leave it at that."

Manners and Lowther were not disposed to leave it at that. Their chum was not going to get himself sacked from St. Jim's if they could help it.

They remained in the study—heedless of the fact that they were due in the Fourth for tea.

Tom Merry gave them a look. Then, quietly, he drew a letter from his pocket—the crumpled letter that had been in his list when he barged into James Silverson's study.

"Look at that!" he said.

It was a long letter; epistles from Miss Priscilla Fawcett, at Laurel Villa, Huckleberry Heath, were seldom brief. Tom pointed to a paragraph—a sample of most of the rest. It ran:

"Dearest, dearest Tommy,—I am so shocked, so distressed. If you could think how unhappy you make me by your wild and reckless conduct at school, I am sure, so sure, that you would take thought, my darling boy, and control your temper. James is as distressed as I am—every letter he writes shows how deeply pained he is by your thoughtless actions, by your disrespect to those set in authority over you, and how much he fears that if you do not alter your ways, you may be sent away from your school in disgrace. Dearest Tommy, if you could see the tears in my old eyes, I am sure that you would realise your errors."

Manners and Lowther read that long paragraph, with expressive faces and deep feelings.

"See that!" breathed Tom. "That poor old soul—the simplest old soul that ever was—taken in and fooled, worried and distressed, by that plotting scoundrel—can a fellow stand it?"

His eyes blazed.

"I don't care if I'm sacked! I'll make that rotter stop his treacherous tricks—I'll make him!" he panted.

"Keep cool, old chap!" said Manners quietly. "It's pretty thick—but it's no good playing his game for him."

"Can't you tip the dear old soul?" asked Lowther. "Can't you put her on her guard against that snake-in-the-grass?"

Tom gave a bitter laugh.

"Look at this!" he said.

He laid his finger on another long paragraph, and his chums read it together.

"More than all, I am distressed by your dislike of dear James. His kindness to me, his

affection for you, should surely touch your heart, my dearest boy. Yet you say that he dislikes you—that he maligns you to me—when every letter he writes mentions you in the most affectionate terms, and expresses his grief for the wild way you are going. Oh, Tommy, dearest Tommy, do try to trust James—to give him the faith and trust he deserves at your hands."

"Oh, my hat!" said Monty Lowther. Manners whistled.

"There's lots like that!" said Tom. "Everything that cur has wangled against me this term has been reported at Laurel Villa—and I know that Miss Priscilla has written to Railton—and what could Railton tell her, except that certain things were true? They were true enough—it's true that I got Fourth Form men to out detention for a footer match, when that cur put them in "Extra" to dish me in Soccer—it's true that I called him a liar, when he told lies—it's true that I turned my back on him, and slammed a study door in his face when he insulted me—"

Tom broke off savagely.

"You know it all! What she doesn't know, and what Railton can't see, is that the plotting cur engineers the whole thing. Was I a bad hat, and a dog with a bad name, before he came to St. Jim's?"

Tom crammed the letter into his pocket.

"He's got by with it again!" he said between his teeth. "When I read that letter this afternoon, I saw red—and went down to his study—exactly what he would have liked me to do, of course. Well, I've got into another row with Railton for it, and got whopped—and Miss Fawcett will hear of it. If James wants to give her all the news, he's going to have some more to give her—that he's been licked, too!"

"Tom!"

"You can say 'Tom' till you're black in the face, but James Silverson is going to get it back," said Tom Merry, between his teeth. "So now you can cut off to tea with Blake, and leave me to think it out."

"Don't be a mad ass, Tom!" said Manners quietly. "It's pretty tough—but you don't want to make matters worse! If old Miss Priscilla is distressed already, what do you think she'll feel like if you get home, turfed out of the school?"

"I'm not standing any more!"

"You've got to, Tom!" said Lowther.

"Got to!" repeated Tom Merry fiercely. "I'll—"

"Yes, got to—if you don't want to add to that old lady's worry and trouble!" said Lowther. "You've got to think of her first."

"Oh!" said Tom.

He stood silent for a minute or two. Then he nodded.

"Right!" he said. "He shan't get away with that, if I can help it! But I mean what I said—I'm getting back at the cur! He's getting a knock back for every knock he hands over."

"Hear, hear!" said Monty. "And now come along to tea in Study No. 6—we're late!"

"I don't want—"

"Oh, come on, and don't be an ass!"

Tom Merry gave a grunt—but he came. The chums of the Shell went along to the Fourth—where rather a surprise awaited them.

THE BIG IDEA!

"GEWWOFF!"

"Look here——"

"You uttah wuffians——"

"Will you stiek in the study?"

"I wufuse to do anythin' of the kind! I ordah you to gewwoff, and let a fellow wise!"

"Will you chuck up that fatheaded stunt?"

"Wats!"

"Now, look here, Gussy, old man——"

"Gewwoff! I am goin' to wag Silvahson!"

"Oh, all right—we'll sit this one out, then!" said Blake.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther stared into Study No. 6. It was quite a surprising scene that met their eyes—Arthur Augustus D'Arcy extended at full length on the carpet, and his chums sitting on him in a row.

Arthur Augustus was crimson with wrath and excitement. Blake & Co. were smiling. Every now and then they rocked as Gussy heaved. But they kept their places. Until Gussy gave up that bright idea, he was booked to play the part of a sofa in his study.

"What on earth's this game, you fellows?" asked Monty Lowther, while Tom Merry's clouded brow cleared, and he laughed.

Blake looked round.

"Hallo! Tea's not ready," he said. "All Gussy's fault! Would you believe that Gussy insists on us sitting on him like this, when we're expecting distinguished visitors to tea?"

"Nothin' of the kind, you fellows!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Pway dwag these sillay asses off!"

"But what's the jolly old row?" asked Tom, laughing.

"Gussy wants to jape Silverson! We want to keep him from getting a record licking!" explained Herries.

"Wubbish!" yelled Arthur Augustus.

"Gewwoff! Lemme gewwup! I wufuse to give up the ideah! I have it all cut and dried——"

"Let's hear it over tea, and we'll give you an expert opinion," suggested Tom Merry. "We're all in the same boat, so far as ragging that worm Silverson is concerned!"

"Wight-ho!" said Arthur Augustus. "I shall have to leave it till aftah tea, anyhow, as you fellows have awwived! Now gewwoff, you fat-heads!"

Blake & Co. got off their human sofa. Arthur Augustus rose to his feet, red and ruffled, dusty and dishevelled. He jammed his eyeglass into his noble eye, and gave his chums a withering glare.

"I have a gweat mind to give you a feahful thwashin' all wound!" he gasped. "And if you twy to westwain me aftah tea, I shall do so!"

"Spare us!" gasped Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway don't be a wudicrous ass, Blake! Twickle in, you fellows—we shall have tea weady in a jiffay."

The Terrible Three trickled in, and lent a hand at getting tea. When six juniors sat down round the tea-table in Study No. 6, Arthur Augustus' great scheme was unfolded—greeted with a roar of laughter by the guests from the Shell.

They, like Blake & Co., seemed to think that Silverson would spot Arthur Augustus, in spite of the Guy Fawkes mask, if that cheery youth addressed him as a wat, a wascal, and a wapsallion!

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"By gum, though!" exclaimed Monty Lowther, with a glimmer in his eyes. "Great little fishes! What a wheeze!"

"Bai Jove! You think it a bwight ideah, Lowthah?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"Do I?" exclaimed Lowther. "Don't I jost! Not exactly as you've put it, old bean—but you've got the germ of the ideah! Oh scissors! Why didn't I think of this? This is in my line—the biggest jape ever! How many of those Guy Fawkes masks have you got, Gussy?"

"There are four or five, deah boy."

"We want three!" said Lowther.

"Thwee!"

"Just three!" Monty Lowther jumped up from the tea-table, and rushed at Arthur Augustus. "Gussy, old man, you've rung the bell! You've delivered the goods! Come to my arms, my beamish boy!"

"You uttah ass!"

"Waltz me round again, Willie?" trilled Lowther, and he grabbed Arthur Augustus from his chair and waltzed him forcibly round the study table.

Arthur Augustus struggled wildly.

"Welease me!" he roared. "What are you playin' the goat for, you ass? Lowthah, if you do not stop playin' the giddy ox, I shall hit you in the eye!"

"Gloat!" chortled Monty Lowther. "Gloat, the lot of you! We've got Silverson in our waistcoat-pockets, and it's Gussy who's put him there!"

Monty Lowther banged Arthur Augustus back into his chair, where the swell of St. Jim's sat and gasped for breath. Then he executed a waltz round the table, under the astonished eyes of his chums.

"Gone mad?" asked Manners.

"Gloat!" trilled Lowther.

"What are we to gloat over, you fathead?"

"Silverson!"

"How, which, and why?" asked Blake.

Monty Lowther chuckled explosively. What idea it was that had dawned on his fertile brain, the other fellows could not begin to guess. Gussy's stunt with the Guy Fawkes mask had evidently, suggested it, whatever it was.

"Listen, and I will a tale unfold!" said Monty, as he resumed, at last, his seat at the tea-table.

"What about giving Silverson six?"

"What!"

"Suppose three fellows bagged Silverson, tipped him up, and gave him six?" said Monty.

"What about that?"

"Sack for three fellows," said Herries. "Nobody in this study wants to be bunked, thanks!"

"That's where Gussy's jolly old genius comes in!" chortled Lowther. "The three fellows who whop Silverson will be hiding their good looks under Guy Fawkes masks, see?"

"Oh!" exclaimed Tom.

"Bai Jove!"

"But look here!" said Dig. "Every time anything happens to Silverson, he goes for Tom Merry, first shot! And if three fellows give him beans, he will know it's you three."

"Silverson knows enough arithmetic to put two and two together!" remarked Herries.

"Yaas, wathah! You are an ass, Lowthah!"

Monty Lowther smiled—the smile of superior wisdom.

"But suppose it isn't us three?" he said. "Suppose one of the three calls another one 'Tom,' just to amuse Silverson—and suppose he rushes off to Railton for vengeance—and suppose it turns out that we three nice innocent boys were sitting pretty under the eyes of a beak when it all happened—what then?"

"Oh!" exclaimed Manners.

"Bet you he would jump on this study next!" said Blake.

"Quite! And suppose Figgins & Co. of the New House were the three fellows in the masks—they love him just as much as we do!"

"Oh!"

"Suppose the mystery three are three different fellows every time, what?" grinned Monty Lowther. "Suppose Silverson keeps on accusing fellows who can prove that they never had anything to do with it—and all the time he keeps on getting it in the neck from the mystery three—what?"

"Oh ewikey!"

"Great!" gasped Blake. "Great! Why, nearly every man in the Fourth, New House and School House, would take a turn, and jump at it."

"And nearly every man in the Shell!" said Tom Merry.

"And nobody knows nuffin'!" trilled Monty. "Nobody knows a thing! Levison and his gang will jump at taking a turn. My dear and beloved 'earers, we've got an army to choose from! Some old coats, and three Guy Fawkes masks, and we've got the Worm on toast! Are we going to make him fed-up with St. Jim's?"

"Are we?" chuckled Blake.

"Are we not, deah boys?" grinned Arthur Augustus. "Bai Jove, this is a bwrighter ideah than my ideah, though that was vewy bwright!"

There was quite a happy discussion over tea in Study No. 6. It was, as they all agreed, the "goods" at last. It was the really big idea. Gussy had originated it, Monty had improved on it, and it was carried nem. con.

After tea Blake travelled over to the New House to speak to Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, who heard the big idea, greeted it with enthusiasm, and swore the deepest secrecy.

James Silverson, at tea in Common-room with the other beaks, was in a cheerful mood—feeling that he was getting on. But the plot that was brewing in the School House was likely to make James feel considerably less cheerful when Tom Merry & Co. got going.

MUDDY!

"QUIET, Tom!"

Mr. Silverson gave a start. It was the following day. It was a half holiday that afternoon, and Mr. Silverson was walking over to Wayland.

Mr. Silverson had been heard to mention that he was attending an A.R.P. meeting in Wayland that afternoon. There were some fellows who suspected that Mr. Silverson was more interested in billiards at the Black Bull, at a safe distance from St. Jim's, than in A.R.P.

Anyhow, there was Mr. Silverson, with his hat jammed over his brows, his coat collar turned up against a thin November drizzle, tramping by the footpath through Wayland Wood—solitary enough in drizzly November days.

About half-way to the Wayland road Mr. Silverson heard a rustle in the wet, draggled thickets along the footpath, and glanced round.

Then that low-voiced exclamation fell on his ears.

Somebody was whispering to "Tom" to be quiet! James Silverson, of course, thought of Tom Merry at once.

He spotted three figures in the draggled, wet thickets—three fellows wrapped in shabby old belted coats, with big caps—not school caps—pulled low over their ears.

Certainly he would never have taken them for St. Jim's fellows but for that whispered name.

Now he wondered whether it was Tom Merry and his friends, and whether they had waited for him on that solitary footpath with the intention of playing some trick or other as he passed.

If that was so James had no objection. He was quite keen on having something fresh to report to the Housemaster or the Head.

But as he scanned those three lurking figures, James gave another start. Their faces startled him.

Under the low-drawn cloth caps he sighted three horrible-looking faces, with wide, grinning jaws and hooked noses of remarkable length.

For one moment he was astounded. Then he knew that he was looking at three Guy Fawkes masks, fastened over three faces.

But he had not time to look for long, for the three made a sudden spring from the thicket.

Mr. Silverson had suspected that it might be some trick. But he had not expected a sudden charge that bowled him heels-over-head.

That was what he got.

The Fourth Form master went spinning under the sudden charge, and crashed down in the damp, dead leaves on the footpath.

"Oh!" he gasped as he crashed.

"Get him, Monty!"

"Bag him, Tom!"

"Buck up, Manners!"

The three panting exclamations sounded like one. The masked trio pounced on James Silverson as he sprawled.

They grabbed him on all sides.

Two of them got his arms, holding them with such a powerful grip that James had no chance of getting them loose again. The third grasped him by the collar. They heaved him to his feet.

"You—you—you young rascals!" panted James. "Take your hands off me! You shall be flogged for this—expelled! Tom Merry, you—"

He was interrupted by being hooked off the footpath into the thickets. He struggled savagely.

"Release me, you young scoundrels!" he roared. "I know you—Merry, Manners, Lowther! I know you! Do you fancy that those ridiculous masks make any difference? I shall report this to your Housemaster!"

Wet branches and twigs lashed round James as he was dragged headlong through the thickets.

He resisted furiously. One, or perhaps two, of his youthful captors James might have dealt with, but he had no chance whatever against the three. He could not wrench his arms loose, he could not drag himself free, and he had to go where he was taken.

Half-led, half-dragged, James Silverson went plunging through the wet thickets in the grasp of the three.

He spluttered with rage as he went.

To some extent James was not displeased by this reckless outbreak on the part of Tom Merry & Co. He had, indeed, expected something back

from Tom after what had happened the previous day, and he had hoped it would be something reckless that would be a move in his game for him. This undoubtedly was reckless enough; this meant the sack for all the juniors concerned—or, at least, for their ringleader. All James had to do when he got clear was to report this to St. Jim's, and the chopper would come down on Tom Merry with a crash.

That suited James. At the same time, he was uneasy at what was going to happen to him.

If Tom had taken this wild and reckless course it was very likely that he had made up his mind that he might as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb—in which case, James was booked for a bad time.

James wrenched and struggled, and wrenched and struggled in vain. The three had him, and they kept him.

For three hundred yards or more from the foot-path James went bundling headlong in the grasp of the three. They brought him to the edge of a shallow pond in the heart of the wood.

The pond was surrounded by a wide margin of thick, wet mud. James eyed it in deep apprehension.

"Tip him in, Tom!" came a voice from under one of the masks.

James struggled frantically. Not even for the pleasure of seeing Tom Merry sacked did James want to wallow in that horrid, sticky mud.

But there was no help for James.

Two of the masked trio jerked at his arms. The third tripped up his legs. James went sprawling over.

Splash!

"Ooooo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came a yell from under the masks.

Mr. Silverson measured his length in mud. It was deep mud, thick mud, slimy and sticky mud. James was half-buried in it.

Spluttering with rage and mud, he sat up, streaming.

His face was caked with mud; his hat floated away on the pond, but he had a new headgear of sticky mud. Mud clothed him like a garment. It was oozing down his neck; it was thick on his hair and his ears, and the ooze in which he sat came up to his waist.

"Urrrghh!" spluttered James.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the three.

"Grooogh!"

"Hook it, Tom!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

While James wallowed and splashed in mud, the three masked schoolboys turned and cut back into the wood. They left James to wallow and splash.

It was two or three minutes before the hapless James crawled out of the muddy margin of the pond. He dragged himself to his feet streaming mud and slime. Mud peeled off him in flakes and cakes, but plenty remained.

In that happy state, Mr. Silverson did not think of resuming his walk to Wayland.

Breathing fury, he tramped and squelched away on his way back to the school.

He had one comfort—the prospect of what was to happen to Tom Merry when he got in at St. Jim's. Muddy as he was, wet and draggled as he was, infuriated as he was, James found comfort in that prospect.

He might have found less comfort in it had he been able to see the three young rascals in a

distant coppice divest themselves of coats and masks—revealing the grinning faces of Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn of the New House! But Mr. Silverson did not see that, and had no suspicion of it.

TOM MERRY IS WANTED!

"BAI JOVE!"
"Is that Silverson?"
"He wants a wash!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There were plenty of fellows in the St. Jim's quad when a muddy, draggled figure tramped wearily in at the gates.

James, hatless, caked with mud, squelching slime, drew general attention. Fellows stared at him from all sides. Old Taggles, in his lodge, almost fell down at the sight of him.

Seldom, or never, had a St. Jim's master been seen in such a state before. Mr. Silverson was barely recognisable! He looked as if he had rolled and wallowed in mud—as, indeed, he had.

From a muddy face, his eyes glittered at the sea of staring faces. Fellows of both Houses crowded round to look.

"Bai Jove! It's Silverson!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "He is hardly recognisable—but it is Silverson!"

"Been mud-collecting!" remarked Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!" grinned Arthur Augustus.

"Has anything happened, sir?" Figgins of the Fourth ran up. "Have you fallen over anything, sir?"

Figgins & Co. had been in a quarter of an hour before Mr. Silverson reached the school. They were in the crowd in the quad when he came in.

Mr. Silverson did not answer Figgins' respectful question. He brushed angrily past him, and tramped on.

"Goodness gracious!" Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, was in the quadrangle, and he gazed in horror at the muddy master. "Is—is—is that Mr. Silverson? What ever has happened?"

Linton did not like Silverson. But he was quite concerned about him as he saw his awful state. He hurried up to him.

"Have you had an accident, my dear fellow?" he exclaimed.

"No!" snarled Silverson. "I have not had an accident! I have been attacked—assaulted—duked in mud, sir, by young scoundrels—"

"Is it possible?" exclaimed Mr. Linton, greatly shocked. "By whom, Mr. Silverson? Such an outrage should be reported to the police—"

"By boys of this school, sir!" hooted Silverson. "By boys of your Form, Mr. Linton—by Merry and his friends!"

"Impossible!"

"Pah!" snorted Silverson. And he tramped muddily on—Mr. Railton hurrying out of the School House to meet him as he spotted that extraordinary figure from the study window.

"Mr. Silverson!" exclaimed the Housemaster. "What has happened?"

Dozens of fellows gathered round. A good many of them were grinning, as if they found something comic in James' muddy state.

"I have been attacked, sir, in Wayland Wood, by three boys of this school!" panted Mr. Silverson.

"What!" ejaculated Mr. Railton.

"I was seized, sir, in the wood, and flung headlong into a muddy pond!" gasped James. "Look at me, sir! Look at the state I am in! Look!"



The four masters gazed in amazement and wonder at the figure bound to the leg of the table. "Mr. Silverson!" gasped the School House master. "What has happened here?"

"You are in a terrible state, Mr. Silverson! Is it possible that boys of this school can have done this?" exclaimed the Housemaster. "If they belong to the School House, give me their names."

"Merry, Manners, Lowther!" yapped Mr. Silverson.

Mr. Railton set his lips.

"Merry again!" he said.

There was a murmur in the crowd of St. Jim's fellows. Plenty of fellows knew of the feud between Tom Merry and that distant relation of his, who had taken old Mr. Lathom's place as master of the Fourth. Few fellows, perhaps, were surprised to hear Tom Merry's name.

"Oh, jiminy!" ejaculated Baggy Trimble. "Tom Merry's done it this time!"

"By gum, this is the sack for him!" muttered Racke of the Shell. "Must be a mad ass to rag a beak like that!"

"But was it Tom Mewwy?" grinned Arthur Augustus.

"Silverson says so!" answered Aubrey Racke, staring. "I suppose he knows who collared him."

"Pewwaps not!" chuckled Arthur Augustus.

"Ow! What are you stampin' on my foot for, Blake? I weally wish you would not stamp on my foot, you clumsy ass!"

"If Merry has done this, it is the climax of his

lawless conduct this term, Mr. Silverson!" said the School House master.

"He has done it, sir—with the assistance of his friends, Manners and Lowther!" gasped James. "They seized me suddenly, and in spite of my resistance, dragged me by main force to the pond, and hurled me in, sir!"

"Very well, Mr. Silverson! I will send for Merry immediately. I shall take him to the headmaster, and you will accompany me, precisely as you are, that Dr. Holmes may see what has happened."

James Silverson breathed quickly. He was feeling horribly wet and dirty and clammy and uncomfortable. But it was worth it—to walk to the Head's study with Tom Merry, and see him sacked!

Mr. Railton glanced round over the crowd of St. Jim fellows, gathering thicker and thicker to gaze at the mud-covered Form-master.

He failed to discern Tom Merry or Manners or Lowther in the swarm.

But he hardly expected to after what Silverson had said. Considering what they had done, they could not be eager to meet their Housemaster's eye.

"Darrell!" Mr. Railton called to the School House prefect.

"Yes, sir!" Darrell of the Sixth came up.

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"Please find the three juniors named by Mr. Silverson—Merry, Manners, and Lowther—at once!" Mr. Railton glanced round again. "Does any boy present know where Tom Merry is to be found?" he asked.

"Yaas, wathah, sir!" answered Arthur Augustus cheerfully.

"Do you know where Merry is, D'Arcy?"

"Yaas, sir—he's playin' Soccah!"

"What?"

"I believe there is a pick-up on Little Side, sir," said Darrell of the Sixth. "A pick-up game in the Shell, with two House sides."

Mr. Railton looked puzzled. James Silverson stared. No doubt the masked trio had had plenty of time to get back to the school before James. But they must have lost no time if they were already playing football.

"Tom Merry's playing football, sir," said Blake demurely. "He hasn't been out of gates."

"What!" exclaimed Mr. Railton.

"Blake!" rapped Mr. Silverson, giving that member of his Form a muddy glare. "How dare you make such a statement, after what you have heard me say!"

"Well, I think he can't have been out, sir, as he's playing Soccer this afternoon," said Blake. "I don't see how he could."

"Be silent!"

"Oh! Yes, sir!"

"But Tom Mewwy weally is playin' Soccah, sir!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Silence! Mr. Railton, if these boys are keeping up a pretence of playing football—"

"Darrell! Kindly go and bring them here at once," said the School House master.

"Am I to call them off the field, sir?"

"Certainly!"

"Very well, sir!"

Darrell of the Sixth strode away towards the junior football ground. He was followed by an eager crowd of fellows. Study No. 6 grinned at one another joyously as they went.

"I scarcely understand this," said Mr. Railton, puzzled. "Merry and his friends certainly cannot have been playing football long if they attacked you in the wood, Mr. Silverson."

"Hardly a quarter of an hour at the most, even if they lost no time in getting back to the school!" said James. "But I think I can penetrate their scheme, sir! They hope to escape identification—"

"That is still less easy to understand. I presume there can be no doubt of the identity of the three boys who seized you—"

James had not yet mentioned the Guy Fawkes masks. Now he proceeded to do so.

"Each of the three boys in the wood, sir, was disguised with a cardboard mask, such as is worn on bonfire night," he said. "It was impossible to see their faces—and I have no doubt that they will have the impudence, the effrontery, to deny that they were there at all."

Mr. Railton started.

"Oh!" he exclaimed. "Mr. Silverson! You stated in the most positive way the names of the boys who assailed you! Now you tell me that you could not possibly recognise or identify them. Really, sir—"

"I can identify them beyond the shadow of a doubt!" said James grimly. "They called one another by their names, in my hearing—no doubt forgetting caution in the excitement of the struggle."

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"Oh!" said Mr. Railton again. "You heard them use the names—"

"The names they uttered, sir, were 'Tom,' and 'Monty,' and 'Manners!'" said Mr. Silverson.

"Can there be any doubt?"

"None!" said Mr. Railton. "It only remains to take them to Dr. Holmes, for Merry, at least, to receive the sentence of expulsion."

James smiled under the mud.

A JOLT FOR JAMES!

"MERRY!"

Tom Merry glanced round.

Soccer was going on on Little Side when a Sixth Form prefect arrived on the football ground and shouted Tom Merry's name.

It was not much of a game—a pick-up between two bunches of Shell fellows, School House and New House, six a side. There seemed to be more mud than anything else about.

Keen footballer as he was, that drizzly November afternoon was not the day Tom Merry would have chosen for a football game. But it was strictly necessary for the Terrible Three to be able to prove an unmistakable and undeniable alibi that afternoon. They had to be able to make it clear beyond the shadow of a doubt that they had not been in Wayland Wood when James Silverson was ducked in mud by the masked three! Playing Soccer was an infallible alibi.

So the channs of the Shell plunged about in mud and were content.

The School House side consisted of Tom Merry, Manners, Lowther, Talbot, Wilkins, and Kangaroo. Half a dozen New House men of the Shell had been got together to oppose them.

Considered as Soccer, there was not much in it; considered as an alibi, it was exactly what was needed.

Darrell of the Sixth waved his hand to Tom Merry as the captain of the Shell looked round, with a glimmer in his eyes.

"Come off at once, Merry," called out Darrell.

"We're playing Soccer, Darrell."

"You're wanted at once—you and Manners and Lowther!" called back the prefect. "Come along!"

The game, such as it was, stopped. The Terrible Three walked off the field, the other fellows staring after them.

Twenty fellows at least had followed Darrell, some of them grinning, serious as the matter apparently was.

"Anything up, Darrell?" asked Tom Merry, as he threw on coat and muffler.

"Railton wants you."

"Time to change?" asked Lowther.

"No; shove on your coats and come as you are."

"Yaas, wathah! Come as you jolly well are, deah boys!" grinned Arthur Augustus. "This is feahfully sewious."

"What's happened?" asked Manners blandly.

"He, he! You don't know?" giggled Baggie Trimble.

"Something seems to have happened to Silverson," said George Figgins of the New House. "He's come in muddy."

"Muddy all over!" said Kerr. "Looks as if he's been collecting all the mud he could find on a wet afternoon."

"Rolling in it," said Fatty Wynn.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, that sounds interesting," remarked

Monty Lowther. "But does he want us to see him in that jolly old state? Why?"

"He, he! Didn't you do it?" chuckled Trimble.

"Hardly! We've been playing Soccer."

"He, he!" chortled Baggy. "How long have you been playing Soccer?"

"About an hour."

"Better tell Railton that!" giggled Baggy.

"Come on, you're wasting time!" said Darrell sharply. "Railton's waiting for you at the House."

"Is Silverson accusing us of something or other?" asked Monty Lowther. "Look here, you men, you'd better all come if Silverson is going to make out that we muddled him!" He addressed the other footballers.

"We'll come, certainly!" smiled Talbot.

"What-ho!" said Kangaroo.

And coats were put on, and the whole muddy crowd of footballers joined up as Tom Merry & Co. followed the prefect from the field. Round them surged an excited crowd as they went.

The Terrible Three did not seem perturbed. They had no reason to be—as they had anticipated James' accusation and made elaborate preparations to disprove it.

Mr. Railton eyed the muddy crowd as they came up. James Silverson's eyes glittered at the Terrible Three.

There was, of course, no doubt in James' mind. He would have guessed the identity of his three assailants in any case, but the names they had used in speaking to one another placed the matter beyond any possible doubt. If they had the effrontery to deny the accusation, let them prove where they had been at the time. James did not know or dream that they could prove it with complete ease!

"Merry! Manners! Lowther!" rapped Mr. Railton.

"Yes, sir!"

"You will all three come with me to your headmaster," said Mr. Railton.

"Certainly, sir!" said Tom cheerfully. "But may we go and change first, sir? We're hardly in a state to see the Head!"

"You will come at once, Merry!"

"Oh! Very well, sir."

Tom Merry smiled. He was quite willing for the matter to be referred to Dr. Holmes—in which case Railton, as well as Silverson, would look a fool when the facts were stated.

But Manners broke in:

"May we ask, sir, why we are to go to the Head?"

"You are well aware of that, Manners. You are to go to the headmaster to answer for your lawless attack on Mr. Silverson!" said the School House master sternly.

"Have we done anything, sir?"

"Manners!"

"I can see that Mr. Silverson looks as if something has happened to him, sir! But does he fancy that we had anything to do with it?"

"We haven't been out of gates this afternoon, sir," said Lowther meekly. "I suppose Mr. Silverson was out of gates when he got muddy like that."

Mr. Railton paused.

The cool cheerfulness in the faces of the three accused juniors could not fail to make an impression on him. And he could not help remembering that James Silverson had made mistakes before—that, without evidence, he was always ready to suspect Tom Merry.

"Do you deny this?" he exclaimed.

"We haven't even seen Mr. Silverson since dinner till now, sir," said Manners. "What does he fancy we have done?"

"Such impudent falsehoods—" breathed James Silverson.

"One moment," said Mr. Railton. "Where do you three juniors say that you have been during the afternoon?"

"On the football ground, sir."

"How long have you been playing football?"

"Kick-off was at two-fifteen, sir," said Manners.

"I think it's about a quarter past three now."

"Mr. Railton, please do not waste time listening to this boy's impudent untruthfulness!" exclaimed James Silverson.

"I shall inquire into the boy's statement, Mr. Silverson, before referring the matter to the headmaster," said Mr. Railton quietly.

"I should say so!" exclaimed Mr. Linton. "I should certainly say so! I have no doubt whatever of the truth of Manners' statement."

"Thank you, sir," said Manners. "It's easy enough to prove it—plenty of fellows know when we started the pick-up."

"Yaas, wathah!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

"Mr. Silverson, at what time was this attack made on you by three boys wearing Guy Fawkes masks in Wayland Wood?" exclaimed Mr. Railton. "Please give me the precise time."

"Little more than half an hour ago!" snapped Mr. Silverson. "I left the school just after two o'clock. It would be about twenty minutes past when I was seized on the footpath in the wood half-way to Wayland. It was about ten minutes later that I was ducked in the pond, after being dragged through the wood."

"That would be about half-past two, then?"

"Precisely."

"Where were you three boys at half-past two?" demanded the Housemaster.

"On Little Side, playing in the pick-up," answered Tom Merry.

"It is false!" spluttered James.

"Leave this to me, please, Mr. Silverson!" said the Housemaster sharply. "Can you prove that statement, Merry?"

"I suppose so, sir. We kicked off at two-fifteen, and we've been playing football ever since, till Darrell called us off. We weren't playing full teams—it was six a side—but all the fellows who were playing are present here, and they can tell you the same."

Mr. Railton looked at a dozen muddy footballers. Six of them were School House men—six belonged to the New House. That was overwhelming evidence if the other nine backed up the statements of the Terrible Three.

"Talbot," said Mr. Railton.

"Yes, sir!"

"At what time did this game begin?"

"Two-fifteen, sir."

"Has Tom Merry been present ever since?"

"Yes, sir!"

"And Manners and Lowther?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Do you all say the same?" asked Mr. Railton, glancing over the other footballers.

"Yes, sir!" came a chorus.

Mr. Railton drew a deep breath. This was incontrovertible evidence—he could not possibly suspect that that crowd of footballing juniors were in a scheme to bear false witness!

James could—and did—but the Housemaster, being neither a fool nor a rogue like James, did not make such mistakes. He knew that it

was out of the question; he knew that Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther had not, and could not, have been present at the ducking of Silverson in Wayland Wood.

He was deeply glad that the matter had not, after all, got as far as the Head. This was one more of Silverson's hasty accusations—one more of his many mistakes!

James' face was almost livid under the mud. He could see his victims escaping from his clutches.

"Mr. Railton," he panted, "every word uttered by those Shell boys is false! It is a concocted story—"

"Silence, sir!" exclaimed Mr. Linton.

"What?"

"I will not allow such an accusation against boys of my Form!" exclaimed the master of the Shell. "You should be ashamed to utter it, Mr. Silverson!"

"I repeat—" roared James.

"Kindly say no more, Mr. Silverson," interrupted the Housemaster. "It is proved conclusively that these boys were not concerned in the attack on you in Wayland Wood. You have yourself stated that the faces of your assailants were covered by Guy Fawkes masks. It is quite possible that they did not belong to this school at all."

"I repeat that I heard them address one another by name!" shrieked Mr. Silverson. "The names used were the names of these three boys!"

"That is very singular!" said Mr. Railton. "Possibly, in the excitement of the moment, you made some error—"

"I have made no error, sir!"

"In any case, Mr. Silverson, it is proved that these three boys were playing football here at the time."

"It is not—it cannot be! I—" James gasped with rage.

"It is proved beyond the shadow of a doubt!" said Mr. Railton, raising his voice a little.

"Merry! Manners! Lowther! I am perfectly satisfied that you were not concerned in this matter! You may go!"

"Thank you, sir!"

The crowd of footballers marched off to resume the interrupted pick-up. A grinning crowd marched off with them.

James Silverson stood almost choking.

He had been certain—he was still certain. How could he doubt? Other fellows at St. Jim's were named "Tom," and there might be more than one "Monty,"—but there was no other Manners, except Manners minor of the Third Form. The three names he had heard were the names of the Terrible Three—that was certain!

Proof that they had not been on the spot might satisfy others—it did not satisfy James.

But there was nothing that James could do.

Nothing but tramp into the House to get the bath and change he badly needed—and leave the young rascals to chuckle over their success. Which James did—in the worst temper ever!

SOLVING A PROBLEM!

"WATS!" said Arthur Augustus warmly.

"My dear chap—"

"Wubbish!"

"Now, Gussy—"

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"It was my ideal, at the vewy beginnin'!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus in great indignation. "I wufuse to welinquish my wight to cawwy it out!"

"But—"

"Wing off! I insist!" said Arthur Augustus firmly.

A warm argument was proceeding in Tom Merry's study after tea.

There had been a very cheery tea-party in Study No. 10 in the Shell. The Terrible Three and Study No. 6 were all in high feather.

That bright idea, originated by Gussy, improved upon by Monty Lowther, seemed to be a winner. James had had a severe jolt—and indeed, the heroes of the School House nourished a hope that, in the long run, the "Worm" might be jolted right out of St. Jim's!

Figgins & Co. had played their part. But when next the "mystery three" got on the war-path, Figgins & Co. were going to be prominent in the public view in their own House—in case a suspicious eye might possibly turn in their direction.

And the "mystery three" were going to lose no time. The three were to be picked from Study No. 6 on this occasion, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy claimed to be one of the three.

It was useless to explain to Arthur Augustus that he was an ass, and likely to put his aristocratic foot in it. This fact, clear to Gussy's friends, was quite hidden from the great Gussy himself.

"I wufuse to be left out!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "If we are goin' to tackle that weptle in his study, we shall have to be feahfully cautious about it, and what is wequahed is a fellow of tact and judgment."

"You see—" said Blake.

"I don't!" contradicted Gussy.

"You're such an ass, old chap," said Herries, not very tactfully, perhaps.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"You'd spoil your trousers, clambering in and out of Silverson's window," suggested Dig. "The window-sill's all wet and grimy."

Arthur Augustus paused. This argument touched the right chord. But, after a pause, Arthur Augustus shook his noble head.

"I am pwepared to sacrifice even my twousahs!" he declared. "I am goin' to see this thing thwough and blow the twousahs!"

"My dear chap—" said Tom.

"Wats!"

"Now he sensible, Gussy!" urged Monty Lowther.

"I wufuse to do anythin' of the sort—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I mean—"

"Never mind what you mean, old fellow," said Manners. "Just you sit tight in this study while—"

"I am goin' to take a hand! I am goin' to lead this waid on Silvahson! You will be glad of it latah, Blake, when I save you fwom makin' some feahful blundah!"

"Oh scissors!" said Blake.

"If you are weady we will go!" said Arthur Augustus, glancing round the study. "Two of you fellows come with me! We have to get the coats and masks fwom where Figgins left them. Pewwaps Hewwies and Dig had bettah be with me—you are wathah an ass, Blake!"

"You silly cuckoo!" roared Blake.

"Pway do not woah at me, Blake!" I have mentioned a good many times that I dislike being woahed at!"

"Look here, Gussy—" said Tom Merry.

"Wats!"

Six fellows in Study No. 10 looked at one another.

Arthur Augustus' claim to take part, when Study No. 6 supplied the "mystery three," was really a just one—it was his idea from the beginning. But only Arthur Augustus had faith in his tact and judgment.

The other fellows could not help thinking that, if Gussy joined in the raid on Silverson's study, the Worm would not be long in learning the identity of one, at least, of the mysterious three.

And it was an awfully risky business. That campaign against the Worm was, in the eyes of the juniors, more than justified—but they did not expect Housemaster or headmaster to see eye to eye with them on that subject. Secrecy—the deepest secrecy—was essential.

"Pway wely on me, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus reassuringly. "I shall wemembah to address Dig as Tom Mewwy, and Hewwies as Mannahs or Lowthah—so that that wat will heah the names again and take himself in! I shall say to Dig: 'Buck up, Tom Mewwy!'—and to Hewwies: 'Collah him, Mannahs! What?'"

"Oh, my hat!" said Tom.

"It will be all wight—wight as wain! Now let us get weady!" said Arthur Augustus. "We have got to be on the spot befoah that wat goes back to his studey aftah tea."

"But—"

"We are wastin' time," said Arthur Augustus.

"If you'd stay with us, old chap, while Blake and Herries and Dig—"

"Wubbish!"

Monty Lowther, who was standing by the study window, looked round suddenly.

"Did you lend Trimble your overcoat, Gussy?" he asked—"that new light-grey overcoat of yours?"

Arthur Augustus jumped.

"My new gwey ovahcoat! Twimble! Certainly not!"

"Awful cheek of a fellow to borrow a fellow's

new coat to go out in this filthy drizzle," said Lowther.

"Oh, bother Gussy's coat, and bother Trimble!" grunted Herries. "Never mind Gussy's clobber now—"

"But I do mind my clobber, Hewwies!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus wrathfully. "If that jammay, stickay little beast Twimble has bagged my gwey ovahcoat, I will dwag it off him, and give him a feahful thwashin' into the bargain!" Arthur Augustus rushed to the window. "Where is he, Lowthah?"

"Can't see him now."

"Has he gone out?" demanded Arthur Augustus excitedly. "Bai Jove, if he has gone out in my ovahcoat, to make it all mudday and stickay with jam and toffee— Oh cwumbs!" Arthur Augustus rushed across to the door. "Sowwy, you fellows, to wush off like this, but I have got to stop that stickay little beast fwom baggin' my ovahcoat!"

The study door banged open, and Arthur Augustus' hurried footsteps raced away down the passage.

"Oh, my hat!" said Blake.

Gussy was gone.

Tom Merry laughed.

"Rather lucky you spotted Trimble in Gussy's overcoat, Monty!" he said. "The jolly old problem is solved! You fellows get on with it!"

"What-ho!" grinned Blake. "Let's hope that Gussy won't catch Trimble in a hurry!"

"Oh, he won't catch him in a hurry!" said Lowther. "He will bolt out of gates after him, and Trimble hasn't gone out, so far as I know! Catch Trimble going out in this weather."

"He must be going out if he's bagged Gussy's overcoat!" said Herries, with a stare.

"Has he?" asked Lowther.

"What! Didn't you say he had?"

Monty Lowther raised his eyebrows.

"Certainly not! I asked Gussy if he had lent it to him!"

"Wha-a-t?"

"Think Gussy fancied that I saw Trimble in it?" asked Monty. "I certainly never said so."

The juniors stared at Monty Lowther for a moment. Certainly their impression, like Gussy's, had been that he had spotted the fat

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Baggy from that window, sporting Gussy's natty new grey overcoat. But it seemed that he hadn't. There was a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gussy won't catch Trimble in a hurry—especially if he's looking for a chap in a grey overcoat!" remarked Lowther. "Bet you Baggy's frowning over a fire in a study!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You fellows get going, while Gussy's chasing after Baggy!" added Lowther. "I dare say it will keep him busy for half an hour!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And while Arthur Augustus, in the full belief that Baggy Trimble had gone out in that overcoat, chased in search of Baggy, Blake, Herries, and Dig got going. The problem was solved!

IN SILVERSON'S STUDY!

JAMES SILVERSON gave an angry grunt. He came into his study after tea in Common-room with the other masters, and caught a cold wind, damp with rain.

Then he noticed that the window was open.

There was a grey mist in the quad, and a drizzle of rain. Some of it was blowing into the room through the open window.

Mr. Silverson crossed to the window to shut it. He had not left it open—someone must have slipped in to open it while he was at tea. No doubt it was done to irritate him—by Tom Merry, in all probability.

James' face was dark and bitter. His experience in the muddy pond that afternoon might have made even a good-tempered man cross. And the escape of the culprits enraged James beyond

expression. He had been comforted by the happy prospect of seeing Tom Merry sacked for that outrage—and Tom was not sacked; he was not in trouble at all—there was no means of fixing it on him!

James was still certain on the subject. Nothing could change his belief. But he had his belief all to himself. And in Common-room, Mr. Linton had cut him dead—fed-up with Silverson's baseless accusations against boys of his Form. Mr. Raifon had been distinctly cold. He, too, was getting tired of James' way of attributing everything that happened to that special member of Mr. Linton's Form.

So, as the matter stood, Tom Merry had ducked him in mud, and got away with it, and was laughing over it with the other young tascals—and James was powerless to bring it home to him!

Mr. Silverson slammed the window shut. As he turned away from it, he heard a click. It was the click of a key in a door.

He stared round in amazement.

Someone was in the study. That someone had been behind the door, which had concealed him as it opened. And as James shut the window, that someone shut the door, and turned the key.

James fairly bounded as he stared at him.

That it was a St. Jim's junior, he knew must be the case—but recognising that junior was quite another matter. His face was completely hidden by a Guy Fawkes mask, his form concealed by a shabby old coat, belted at the waist, with the collar turned up.

It was one of the three of Wayland Wood! James could not doubt that. He recognised that grotesque mask as one of the three he had seen in the wood.

"Oh!" gasped James.

The masked junior, after locking the door, faced him, his eyes watchful through the eye-holes of the mask.

James' eyes gleamed. They had got him in Wayland Wood, a mile from the school, but he had never dreamed that they would venture to carry on this extraordinary campaign within the walls of St. Jim's. But one of them, at least, was doing so—and he was in Silverson's hands! The utter recklessness of it surprised James! This junior could not suppose that he would be allowed to escape from the study!

"You!" breathed James. "Tom Merry!"

The masked junior did not answer. The eyes, through the eye-holes, watched James warily. But he did not speak.

"You young scoundrel!" said James. "You have ventured to come here—to my study! I am glad of it! Now—"

He rushed across at the junior at the door. To seize him, and drag him, masked as he was, from the study into the presence of the Housemaster, there to reveal his identity—that was James' idea.

But as James rushed across the study, two other masked figures popped suddenly into view—one from behind the armchair, the other from behind a screen in the corner.

Both jumped at James before he could realise that they were there at all.

One gave him a shove in the back—the other tripped his legs.

James did not reach the junior at the door. He went down on his study carpet, with a crash and a gasping howl.

The junior at the door jumped forward, to join the other two.

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"Quick, Tom!" came a panting voice.
 "Tom" again! But James did not need to hear the name to tell him that it was Tom Merry. He knew that already.

Before James could begin to scramble up, a knee was jammed in the small of his back. Another knee was planted swiftly on the back of his neck. And two hands grasped his back hair, and jammed his face down harder in the carpet. James was not going to be allowed to yell to bring a crowd to the study. The mysterious three did not want an audience, if James did.

Silverson struggled desperately.

But they had him down, and they kept him down! With his features grinding into the carpet, he could only utter choking gurgles.

Suddenly his head was jerked up from the carpet. But it was only that a duster might be jammed over his mouth. James gurgled into the duster.

"Don't let him yell, Tom!"

"No fear, Monty!"

"Quick!"

The ends of the duster were tied behind James' head. He gurgled feebly. Then his arms were jerked round a leg of his study table. A looped cord—evidently got in readiness—slipped over his wrists, and was drawn tight. James was secured—embracing the leg of the table.

There was a chuckle from under the masks.

James being now secure, the three left him on the floor. One of them—he had no doubt that it was Tom Merry—picked up the inkpot from the table. That inkpot was inverted over the back of Mr. Silverson's neck!

A stream of ink shot down.

Splash!

Gurgling horribly, James twisted and turned to dodge the stream of ink. The result was that half the ink streamed over his face.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The inkpot being empty, the junior holding it stooped, and shoved it down the back of James' neck. Then there was a whisper.

"That's enough, Tom! Unlock the door—and let's hook it!"

James Silverson wrenched at his wrists, nearly overturning the table. He gurgled into the duster over his mouth.

But he could do no more.

With frenzied eyes, he watched the masked three cut across to the window. One of them opened it and peered out into the drizzly mist. Another darted to the study door and unlocked it.

Then they dropped, one after another, over the window-sill. James watched them go with blazing eyes.

He understood now why the window had been open when he entered the study. That was how they had got in, nobody being likely to be about in the mist and drizzle to observe them. Now they had departed the way they had entered, and James, though he could see them no longer, knew that they were taking off masks and coats, to reappear in the public eye in their own proper persons.

He gurgled with fury!

They were escaping. Twice in one day they had ragged him, and now they were escaping again as before.

James, wriggling, struggling, gurgling into the duster, with ink trickling down his neck and over his face, was left on the floor of his study, embracing the leg of the table!

NOT TOM MERRY!

"**J**E crois—I zink—zere is somezing ze mattair!" ejaculated Monsieur Morny.

"I think there must be!" said Mr. Linton, sarcastically.

"Extraordinary!" remarked Mr. Selby.

The three masters stood in the passage, looking towards the door of Mr. Silverson's study. The door of that study was closed, but from behind the closed door came strange sounds.

It was very unusual to hear, from a master's study, a sound as if someone was dragging himself over the floor. It was unusual to hear a sound of suffocated gurgling.

Mr. Linton, Mr. Selby, and the French master stood looking at that door. Mr. Railton glanced out of his study.

"Is anything the matter?" he asked.

"I think so," said Mr. Linton. "Something very unusual seems to be proceeding in Mr. Silverson's study."

The Housemaster joined the three in the passage. He gave a start at the strange sounds from Silverson's quarters.

Scuffle, scuffle, scuffle! Gurgle, gurgle, gurgle! In great astonishment, the Housemaster stepped along the passage to that door to ascertain what was amiss with Mr. Silverson.

He knocked on the door.

There was no reply from within save a scuffling and gurgling. Mr. Railton turned the door-handle and pushed the door open. He looked in, and Mr. Linton, Mr. Selby, and Monsieur Morny all looked in.

"Oh!" gasped all four.

They gazed at the figure in the study in amazement and wonder.

Mr. Silverson was half-lying, half-sitting on the floor, clinging, apparently, to a leg of his table, with a duster swathed across the lower part of his face and the upper part streaked with ink.

He glared at them.

For twenty minutes or more since the masked three had gone by the window Mr. Silverson had been striving to draw attention to his plight. But he could do nothing but wriggle painfully round the leg of the table and gurgle into the gagging duster. He had no chance of getting attention till some master passing along the passage heard him.

Now he had been heard at last.

"Mr. Silverson!" gasped the Housemaster.

"What has happened here?"

"Urrrrggh!" gurgled James.

"Is it possible," whispered Mr. Selby, "that he has been drinking, Mr. Linton? For what reason is he clinging to the leg of the table in that extraordinary manner?"

"I—I think his hands are tied round it, Mr. Selby!" gasped the master of the Shell. "Yes, I am sure!"

"C'est vrai!" exclaimed Monsieur Morny. "Ce pauvre homme—one has tied him ze hands!"

"Amazing!" said Mr. Selby.

Mr. Railton stooped over the sprawling, gurgling master of the Fourth. He jerked away the duster, and Silverson found his voice.

"Urrgh! Help me! Release me! Ooogh!"

"This—this is—is amazing, Mr. Silverson! What—" stammered the Housemaster.

"Will you release me?" hissed Silverson. "I have lain here for hours!" It had seemed like hours to James.

"My dear fellow, it is scarcely more than half an hour since tea!" said Mr. Railton. "But—"

"Will you set me loose?"

Mr. Railton loosened the cord that held James' arms round the table leg. Then Mr. Silverson staggered to his feet.

His ink-streaked face was convulsed with fury. "Will you explain this, Mr. Silverson?" asked the Housemaster. "It is beyond my comprehension how—"

"I should think the thing speaks for itself!" hooted Silverson, too enraged to care how he addressed the Housemaster. "I was attacked in this study by the three young scoundrels who attacked me in the wood early this afternoon!"

"Attacked—in this study?"

"Do you fancy that I tied myself up, sir, and gagged myself with a duster?" roared Silverson.

"I do not, Mr. Silverson; but I will thank you to speak to me in a more moderate tone!" said the Housemaster coldly. "I fail to understand this. How three persons could gain admittance to your study unobserved—"

"They were here when I came in!" foamed Silverson. "They had entered by the window; they escaped the same way after attacking me and treating me as you have seen!"

"But who—" exclaimed Mr. Railton.

James ground his teeth.

"Who? The same gang of young scoundrels as before," he panted—"Tom Merry, Manners, Lowther!"

"You saw them?"

"They were wearing the same grotesque masks as before!" howled Mr. Silverson. "I recognised the Guy Fawkes masks worn by the three young rascals in the wood! They were the same, and they—"

"In that case," said Mr. Linton icily, "it was not Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther who came here, as it was proved that they were not—"

"I repeat, sir, that it was those three juniors; and if they are not called to account for this by their Housemaster I shall take the matter to Dr. Holmes!" roared Silverson.

"Calm yourself, Mr. Silverson!" said the Housemaster. "This extraordinary outrage shall certainly be inquired into with the utmost strictness, but wild and unfounded accusations will serve no purpose."

"I repeat that I know their identity perfectly well. One of them used a name as before—one of them was called 'Tom'—"

"Not an uncommon name," said Mr. Linton.

"It was Tom Merry!" bawled Silverson.

"If it was Tom Merry the fact shall be ascertained," said Mr. Railton. "But after this afternoon's occurrence, Mr. Silverson, it will be as well not to make charges without adequate grounds. Mr. Linton, will you ascertain at once where Tom Merry is, and where he has been since tea-time?"

"Certainly, sir!"

The master of the Shell turned away. He gave an expressive grunt as he did so.

More than once James Silverson had succeeded in sowing trouble between Tom and his Form-master, but Mr. Linton was getting tired of this. Obviously, James had no more evidence in this case than in the former case; he had not seen the faces of his assailants, and he could not identify them; he simply accused Tom Merry as a matter of course. That was not good enough for Tom Merry's Form-master.

James was left almost raving in his study while the master of the Shell hurried away in search of

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Tom Merry. But Mr. Linton was not long gone.

He reappeared under five minutes, and James fixed an inky and furious glare on him as he looked in at the study doorway. Mr. Railton gave him an inquiring glance.

"You have found Merry?" he asked.

"I had no difficulty in doing so," answered Mr. Linton. "Merry is in the junior day-room with a number of other juniors. He and his friends have been there since they came down after tea in their study more than half an hour ago."

"That is not so!" roared James.

"More than a dozen boys have informed me that such is the fact," said Mr. Linton coldly.



Tom Merry laid on the cane as if he were beating wriggled, but there was no

"For more than half an hour Merry and Manners and Lowther have been in the company of a whole crowd of boys of the Shell and the Fourth Form. There is not the slightest doubt on the subject."

"There is every doubt on the subject!" panted James. "Every boy who has told you so spoke falsely!"

Mr. Linton's lip curled.

"If Mr. Silverson chooses to bring charges of falsehood against boys of this House in this wholesale fashion I have nothing more to say!" he said curtly; and he turned his head and walked away.

"Mr. Railton!" James panted. "Linton is

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Mr. Railton raised his hand.

"Not another word, Mr. Silverson!" he rapped. "I can make allowances for your excitement, for your exasperation—but I will not allow any such statement to be made, or even suggested! If you were calmer you would realise that Merry was not one of the boys in your study—"

"I know he was!"

"That," said Mr. Railton grimly, "is mere obstinacy, Mr. Silverson, and is, I fear, caused by your personal dislike of the boy in question! Every investigation will be made into this extra-



as if he were beating a carpet! Mr. Silverson howled and yelled and
ed, but there was no escape from the licking.

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ordinary outrage—but Merry will not be concerned in it. Merry is cleared already!"

With that, Mr. Railton walked out of the study—leaving James foaming!

NO LUCK FOR JAMES!

"**B**AI JOVE! The Worm looks watty!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy made that remark the following morning in the Fourth Form Room—not to reach Mr. Silverson's ears!

James undoubtedly did look ratty.

The affair of Mr. Silverson's study remained as deep a mystery as the affair of Wayland Wood!

Neither was a mystery to James; he was quite certain that he could name—and had named—the offenders.

But most others were mystified.

Except for the fellows in the secret, nobody knew whose faces had been concealed by the Guy Fawkes masks.

Everybody wanted to know.

Investigation, as Mr. Railton had promised, was strict. But it led to no discovery. There was, in fact, no clue to the raiders. Almost anybody's face might have been hidden by a Guy Fawkes mask.

Silverson was unpopular. Dozens of fellows would have liked to rag him. Three fellows had found a way of ragging him with impunity!

Who were the three?

Almost everybody thought of Tom Merry & Co., to begin with. But it was proved to everyone's satisfaction—except Mr. Silverson's—that Tom Merry & Co. hadn't, and couldn't have been the three.

That settled that!

Then some fellows thought of Figgins & Co. of the New House—who suffered under Silverson in the Form-room. But Figgins & Co. were soon cleared—for they had been in their own House, in numerous company, at the time three masked fellows were ragging Silverson in his study.

And fellows who thought of Study No. 6 learned that Study No. 6 had been in the quad, under many eyes, at the time Silverson was ducked in Wayland Wood. It did not seem to occur to anyone that the first three and the second three were different threes!

The masks had been the same; Silverson had noticed that. He never dreamed that they covered different faces. He was quite assured that, on each occasion, they had covered the faces of Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther.

Railton investigated—the prefects investigated—but, so far, at least, they had drawn blank. And when Silverson demanded that Tom Merry's study should be searched—not doubting that three Guy Fawkes masks would be found hidden there—Mr. Linton put his foot down at once, with the support of the Housemaster. Tom Merry's study was not under suspicion—that was entirely washed out—and no such search was permitted.

So it was no wonder that James looked ratty in the Form-room that morning—little dreaming that from the ranks of the Fourth the three young rascals of Wayland Wood, and the three young rascals of the study, were regarding him with amused interest.

Lessons began in the Fourth Form Room—and lines fell almost like leaves in Vallombrosa. Twice or thrice the cane whopped. James did not suppose, or suspect, that the culprits were in his own Form—he was simply taking it out of his Form because he had to take it out of somebody.

That was the kind of man James was—and it did not make him popular in the St. Jim's Fourth.

But the lesson was, to the relief of the juniors, interrupted. Instead of carrying on with "con" as usual, James set his Form a Latin paper, and left them to get on with it, going out of the Form-room.

The Fourth breathed a sigh of relief when the door closed on him.

"Bai Jove! It's wippin' to get wid of that wat for a while!" remarked Arthur Augustus.

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"Fwightfully bad form for a beak to be so vewy watty."

Heedless of his Form, Mr. Silverson went to the stairs and made his way to the Shell studies.

While the whole school was in Form, James Silverson had an opportunity to make an investigation there—and he was going to make it.

Mr. Linton, had he known, would have been extremely annoyed—but Mr. Linton was busy with the Shell in his Form-room, and had no idea of the Fourth Form master's proceedings.

If James discovered those Guy Fawkes masks hidden in Study No. 10 in the Shell, as he fully expected to do, it would not matter whether Linton was annoyed or not—Linton would have to admit the proof.

Nobody was about the studies when James arrived there. He stepped into Tom Merry's study, and shut the door.

His eyes gleamed round Study No. 10. He was fairly certain of making a discovery—the only doubt was whether Tom Merry & Co had foreseen such a search. If they had, no doubt they had taken the trouble to conceal their disguises elsewhere.

But James did not think that likely—as the Terrible Three had been exonerated, and had nothing to fear from the Form-master or House-master.

Anyhow, he was going to search that study, and he hoped for the best. He pulled open the table-drawer to begin with.

His eyes blazed into that table-drawer. Nothing like a Guy Fawkes mask was to be seen in it. But something else was—a sheet of cardboard, on which was inscribed, in large letters:

"SPY!"

James gazed at it.

Was that intended for him? Had they, after all, foreseen and expected a surreptitious search of their study, and prepared that to meet his eyes when he carried it out?

He turned from the table-drawer, breathing deep.

There was a desk by the window. James lifted the lid of the desk. It contained books and papers and other things—no Guy Fawkes masks.

But what chiefly caught James' eye was a word chalked on the inside of the desk-lid, which was revealed when the lid was lifted.

"SPY!"

James gritted his teeth.

He could hardly have any doubt now,

They had guessed that this would come, and that word was intended to greet his eyes when he sneaked up to their study to search it.

Obviously, it was not much use to search farther.

Other receptacles in the study might contain such inscriptions to greet him, but were not likely to contain Guy Fawkes masks. He had to search elsewhere if he wanted to discover those masks. With all St. Jim's to choose from, it did not look very hopeful.

James left the study with deep feelings.

When he returned to the Fourth Form Room he heard a buzz of voices within. It died away instantly as he opened the door. Every fellow in the Fourth was sedulously bent over his Latin paper.

James' eyes glittered over the class. He was in such an intense state of exasperation that he simply had to wreak it on somebody.

"Blake!" he rapped,

"Yes, sir!"

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"Take a hundred lines for talking in class!"

Blake breathed hard.

"D'Arcy!"

"Yaas, sir!"

"You will take a hundred lines also."

"Thank you, sir!" said Arthur Augustus imperturbably.

"Figgins!"

"Yes, sir!"

"Show me your Latin paper!"

George Figgins showed his Latin paper. Silverson hardly glanced at it. He was not bothering about George Figgins' progress in the classics.

"Disgraceful!" he snapped. "You will stay in after class and write that paper out again, Figgins."

"What's the matter with it, sir?" asked Figgins.

"Do not answer me back, Figgins, or I shall cane you!"

"I asked you what was the matter with my Latin paper, sir!" said Figgins doggedly.

Whop! Whop!

"Oh!" roared Figgins.

James laid down the cane. He was feeling better. Figgins was feeling that it was time the "mystery three" got to work again; and that next time it had better be something a little more drastic than a ducking in a pond or an inking in a study!

BAD LUCK FOR BAGGY!

"SIX!" said Tom Merry grimly.

Manners whistled. Monty Lowther grinned.

"Sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander," he remarked. "If the Worm hands out sixes he must expect to get one or two back."

"Exactly!" said Tom. "He got me six from Railton—a pretty tough six, too! I've no doubt he's let Miss Priscilla know already that I had to be whopped by my Housemaster for disrespect and insubordination." Tom's eyes gleamed. "Well, next time he spins a yarn at Laurel Villa he can tell how he was whopped himself—for being a treacherous worm!"

"Hear, hear!" grinned Monty.

It was Saturday afternoon. The Terrible Three of the Shell had gone out with a crowd of other fellows, on bikes, to ride over to Abbotsford to see a football match there between Abbotsford Ramblers and an Army side.

But at a safe distance from St. Jim's the three had parked their bicycles in a safe spot and walked through Wayland Wood to the spot where they now stood—at the stile on Rylcombe Lane.

Old trees—almost leafless now, but with thick branches—clustered over that stile; there was plenty of cover for the three. From that cover they watched the lane in the direction of the school.

In the thickets near at hand was an attache-case, out of sight. It contained the three shabby coats and the three Guy Fawkes masks worn by the "mystery three" when they went on the warpath.

That outfit had first been worn by Figgins & Co.; then by Blake, Herries, and Dig. Now it was the Terrible Three's turn.

Keeping in cover, the three juniors watched the lane.

"If he comes—" said Manners.

Tom Merry gave a scornful laugh.

"He will come all right! He was stopped from

going over to Wayland on Wednesday; he's pretty sure to go to-day."

"No A.R.P. meeting to-day!" grinned Lowther.

"No; but billiards, or a card party at the Black Bull!" said Tom, his lip curling. "We know what the rat goes to Wayland for! He missed his usual game on Wednesday; he won't miss it again to-day, I think, if he can help it."

"True, O king!" agreed Lowther.

"He's pretty sure to take this footpath as it's the nearest. If he goes by the other we can cut through the wood and get ahead of him. Ten to one he will come, anyhow."

They watched. Tom Merry was assured that that afternoon James would carry on with his interrupted visit to Wayland, and Manners and Lowther had little doubt of it. Anyhow, there they were, on the watch.

"Look!" muttered Lowther at length.

In the distance, coming up the lane, was a well-known figure.

"Quick!" said Tom.

The three darted into the thicket and opened the attache-case. In a couple of minutes they had disappeared inside the belted coats, and the Guy Fawkes masks were fastened on their faces.

Keeping in the thicket, they watched and waited.

James' footsteps were audible now in the lane. A few minutes more and they saw him arrive at the stile.

Mr. Silverson paused there, looking across the stile at the footpath that wound irregularly through the trees. The hidden juniors noted that he had a thick Malacca cane under his arm, and that as he stood at the stile he slipped it into his hand.

No doubt James was mindful of what had happened to him on that footpath on Wednesday. That thick Malacca was ready to deal with another ambush along the footpath if it occurred. The wary Worm was on his guard.

But evidently it did not occur to him that there was an ambush close at hand, in the thicket just within the fence. His eyes did not turn on that thicket. From deep cover three pairs of eyes, through the eye-holes of the Guy Fawkes masks, watched him intently. The Terrible Three were ready to pounce as soon as James stepped over the stile, and they made no sound while they waited and watched.

As James stood there and the three hidden juniors watched him, there was another footstep in the lane, and a fat figure rolled in view from the direction of the school. It was that of Baggy Trimble.

"Oh jiminy!" ejaculated Baggy, as, turning towards the stile, he saw his Form-master standing there.

Mr. Silverson stared round at him; his brows knitted.

"Trimble!" he rapped.

"Oh! Yes, sir?" stammered Baggy, edging back a little.

"Where are you going?" demanded Mr. Silverson harshly.

"Wayland, sir!" stammered Baggy. "I—I'm going to walk over to Wayland, sir! We're allowed to on a half-holiday, sir!"

"And where are you going at Wayland?" snapped Mr. Silverson.

"The cinema's open this afternoon, sir."

Tom Merry & Co., in the thicket, watched in silence. They guessed that Mr. Silverson did not want the fat Baggy rolling along at his heels

going over to Wayland. It was quite possible that he suspected Baggy of keeping an inquisitive eye on him; he was a suspicious man, and Baggy's prying proclivities were well known. Certainly Mr. Silverson would not have liked to be seen stepping into the Black Bull at Wayland by the tattler of the School House.

On the other hand, he could hardly stop Baggy, who was quite within his rights in walking over to Wayland on a half-holiday if he liked. But it was easy for James to find pretexts for what he wanted to do.

"Trimble!" snapped Mr. Silverson.

"Yes, sir?" mumbled Baggy uneasily.

"Your Latin paper this morning was the worst in the Form. It is not my intention, Trimble, to permit slovenliness and carelessness in the Fourth Form. I intended to speak to you on this subject. You will write that Latin paper over again, Trimble, and see that you do it better."

"Oh jiminy!" gasped Baggy.

"Go back to the school at once," said Mr. Silverson. "Have that paper completed by tea-time, Trimble, or you will be caned."

Baggy blinked at him in utter dismay. In the thicket the chums of the Shell exchanged silent glances.

This was sheer tyranny—a small matter to the worthy James. But the hapless Baggy was overwhelmed with dismay.

"Oh, sir!" he gasped. "I—I say, it—it's a half-holiday, sir!"

"You have heard what I said, Trimble!" rapped Mr. Silverson.

"Oh, yes, sir! But—but you never said anything about my Latin paper this morning, sir! I'm going to the cinema, sir!"

"Another word and I shall cane you, Trimble!"

Baggy Trimble blinked at him.

"Look here, sir—" he mumbled.

"Go!"

"But, I say, sir—" protested Baggy.

Mr. Silverson swished the Malacca in his hand. "That will do, Trimble! Bend over and touch your toes!" he snapped.

"Oh jiminy! I—I—I'm going, sir!" gasped Baggy. "I—I—I'm going back at once, sir—"

"I said bend over and touch your toes, Trimble!" snapped Mr. Silverson. "I will permit no argument from boys of my Form! At once!"

Baggy Trimble, in the lowest of spirits, bent over and touched his toes.

Whack!

"Yaroooh!"

Whack!

"Ow! Wow! Oh jiminy!" yelled Baggy.

"Now go back to the school at once, Trimble, and if your Latin paper is not handed to me by tea-time I shall cane you severely."

"Ow!" howled Baggy. "Wow!"

He rolled back down the lane, squeaking. Baggy's afternoon at the pictures was off now; and as he trundled back to St. Jim's, to write a Latin paper instead, Baggy's feelings were too deep for words.

"The rotter!" breathed Tom Merry.

Mr. Silverson stood looking after the fat Baggy as he trundled away. Not till Baggy was out of sight did the master of the Fourth step over the stile.

Then he stepped over it and started up the footpath.

He made one stride—and then there was a

sudden rustle in the thickets. The next second James Silverson was sprawling on the footpath, with three juniors in Guy Fawkes masks sprawling over him.

SIX FOR SILVERSON!

"OH!" gasped James.

He struggled frantically.

The Malacca cane was jerked away. Three pairs of hands were on James—and they were sturdy hands. Both his arms and the back of his collar were grasped. James struggled and kicked, but he was safely held.

"Oh!" he gurgled.

Those three pairs of hands dragged him up and whirled him round. James wrenched and struggled, panting with rage. But in a moment or two he was slammed down over the stile, head and shoulders in Rylcombe Lane on one side, and his legs wriggling on the other side.

"Got him!" breathed Lowther.

James struggled and kicked—but he had simply no chance. A grip on his collar kept his head down on one side of the stile; a grip on his legs kept his feet down on the other.

Face down on the top bar of the stile, James was favourably placed for a whopping. Tom Merry grasped the Malacca and swished it in the air.

James gave a gasp of apprehension as he heard the swish! He guessed what was coming.

Five minutes ago he had laid that Malacca on Baggy Trimble, with satisfaction to himself, if not to Baggy. Now it was going to be laid on himself—and there was no escape for him. Folded over the top bar on the stile, he wriggled and wriggled and wriggled—but he could only wriggle.

Whop!

The cane came down with a crack like a pistol-shot. The crack was followed by a frantic yell from James.

"Yoo-hoop!"

Whop!

"Oh! Ow! Oooogh!" roared James. "Tom Merry, you young ruffian! Yaroooh! I know you!"

Whop!

"I know you!" roared James. "You shall be expelled for this! Ow! You shall be—Ow! You shall be—wow! You shall be—yaroooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Whop!

"Release me, you—"

Whop!

"Yurooogh!"

James roared wildly. Often and often had James handed out "six" in the St. Jim's Fourth, James liked handling the cane, and the flimsiest pretext was enough for him. But he had never dreamed of getting "six" himself. In his wildest imaginings, that had never crossed his mind. Now he was getting it—hard!

Whop!

Tom Merry laid it on as if he were beating a carpet! James was going to have as good a "six" as that six from Railton a few days ago. And Tom put in a little extra beef on Baggy Trimble's account.

James howled and yelled.

Up went the Malacca for the last whop. It came down with all the force in Tom Merry's arm.

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Whop!

That whop rang along the lane. It rang through the wood. Louder still rang James' frantic yell.

"Oooooooh! Oh! Ooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oooogh! Young rascals—ow! Young soundrels—yow-ow! I will—oooh! I will—Yoo-hoop—oooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry twirled the Malacca in the air and tossed it away into the wood. James could hunt for it if he wanted it again.

Then three pairs of hands gripped James' legs and up-ended him over the stile into the lane. He landed on muddy earth with a bump and a roar, and rolled over breathless and spluttering.

"Hook it!" murmured Monty Lowther.

Three masked figures vanished into the trees. They had disappeared before James Silverson scrambled to his feet in the lane.

Spluttering with fury, James stared over the stile. They were gone! Pursuit was futile, even if James had wanted to run into the three again in the lonely depths of the wood—which James didn't. James stood spluttering, almost raving with rage.

Deep in the wood, three grinning juniors peeled off old coats and Guy Fawkes masks and parked them in the attache-case. Then the Terrible Three threaded their way back to the spot where they had left their bicycles and rode off to join the St. Jim's crowd at Abbotsford.

"NONSENSE!" said Mr. Railton decidedly. "Nonsense!" repeated Mr. Linton, with a snap.

That was all the satisfaction James got from the School House master and the master of the Shell. Really, it was all he could expect when, once more, he howled out an accusation without a jot or tittle of evidence to support it.

"I tell you," James almost shrieked, "it was Tom Merry!"

"So you declared on the two previous occasions!" snapped Mr. Railton. "And on each occasion it was proved that it was not the case."

"On each occasion," snapped Mr. Linton, "it was proved beyond doubt that your accusation was unfounded—utterly unfounded, and made with utter recklessness without a shred of evidence, Mr. Silverson."

"On each occasion," howled James, "it was Tom Merry—"

"It certainly was not," said Mr. Railton.

"Most certainly not!" said Mr. Linton.

"I repeat that it was Tom Merry!"

"Nonsense!" said the Housemaster.

"Nonsense!" said the master of the Shell.

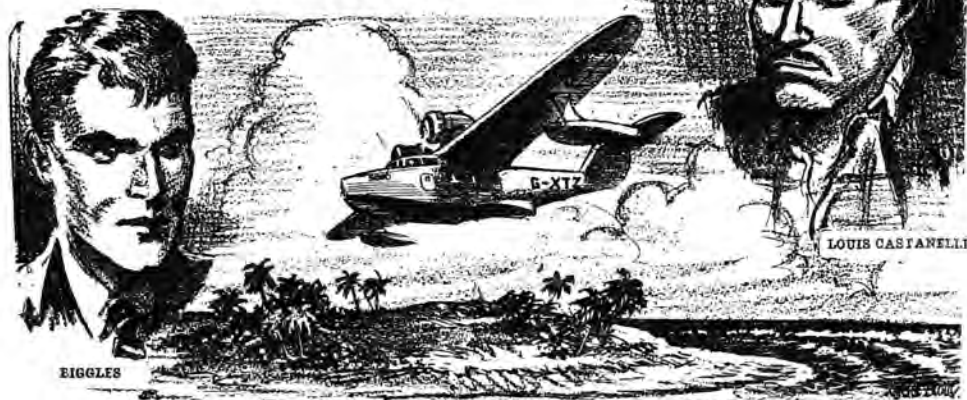
And that was that!

For Next Wednesday:

"GUSSY GETS AWAY WITH IT!"

Featuring Arthur Augustus on the warpath. Don't miss the fun and excitement.

BIGGLES' SOUTH SEA ADVENTURE!



By CAPTAIN W. E. JOHNS.

THE HIDDEN CAVE!

SANDY MACASTER, a Scotsman, has discovered a rich pearl-bed in the South Seas, and he enlists the help of Major James Bigglesworth, the Hon. Algernon Lacey, and Ginger Hebblethwaite in financing an expedition. Sandy's discovery is also known to Louis Castanelli, a Corsican crook trading among the South Sea Islands, but the latter doesn't know the exact location of the pearl-bed.

In a flying-boat, the Scud, Biggles' party arrive at Sandy's Island, and commence diving operations. A rich haul is made, and for safety the pearls are concealed in a cache on the island.

Then, accompanied by Shell Breaker and Full Moon, a Polynesian boy and his girl friend who have joined the party, Ginger Hebblethwaite goes for a bathe in a pool. Full Moon and Shell Breaker dive in, and, to Ginger's horror, fail to reappear!

Ginger was about to run back to the others, in order to tell them what had happened, when the water suddenly parted and a head appeared. It was Full Moon. She let out a ripple of laughter.

"Here, what's the game? You nearly frightened me to death!" cried Ginger angrily, but breathing deeply from relief.

Full Moon's answer was another peal of laughter.

"Me swim!" she called, blowing bubbles on the surface of the water.

"You're not a woman; you're a fish!" replied Ginger.

Shell Breaker appeared. They both swam to the edge of the coral where Ginger stood. Full Moon held up a brown hand.

"Come!" she said.

"Where?" asked Ginger suspiciously.

"Me show."

"Show what?"

"Bottom of sea. Bottom of sea beautiful."

"I can see all I want of that from here!" declared Ginger.

"Come!" said Full Moon again. "Me show."

Shell Breaker joined in.

"Yes, we show," he said. He pulled himself up on the coral and motioned Ginger to dive.

"Take plenty breath, come with me!"

"No fear!"

"White man afraid! Ha!"

Ginger flushed.

"I'm not a blinking eel if you are!" he snorted.

"Anyway, I'll show you if I'm afraid!"

He took a deep breath and dived. He was about to turn upwards when he became aware that Shell Breaker and Full Moon were on either side of him, beckoning as naturally as if they were on land instead of under water. He followed them, and saw that they were swimming towards a gloomy cave about twenty feet under the water. He waited for no more, but, turning away, shot to the surface and pulled himself up on the coral, with his legs dangling in the water.

The two natives appeared.

Full Moon looked hurt.

"You afraid!" she said reproachfully. "You come—plenty air!"

"Air?"

"Plenty air in cave."

"What about octopuses?"

"No feke."

"Right! I'm coming!"

Again Ginger took a deep breath and dived. He saw that the others were beside him, swimming easily towards the cave, and this time he followed them. To say that he was frightened as he went through the gloomy entrance would be to put it mildly; but he set his teeth, and swam on grimly behind the two figures which

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were gliding through the water in front of him, still beckoning. His endurance was nearly exhausted. He felt that he must breathe or die; but he knew that he had already come too far to get back, so he could only go on, hoping that Full Moon's promise of "plenty air" was correct.

Panic seized Ginger as something clutched his arm, and he tore it away, only to see that it was Full Moon trying to help him along. She shot upwards. He followed, and a moment later his head broke the surface. For a little while he could only gasp; then, looking about him, he saw Full Moon and Shell Breaker sitting on a ledge of coral in what was clearly a cave, but such a cave as he could not have imagined. He swam up to them and climbed out, and not until then did he realise fully the wonder of the scene about him.

The cave was only a short one, and led to a larger cavity in the coral, the roof of which was above water level. The beauty of it struck Ginger speechless. It was ethereal, a fairy grotto, blue beyond anything he had ever seen—a deep, unreal, cerulean blue. The water was pure ultramarine and glowed like blue fire. The drops of water that fell from his legs were blue sparks. At first he could not make out where the light came from; then he perceived that it came through the tunnel, and was refracted by its passage through the water. The result was extraordinary. It was as if the place were illuminated by hidden blue electric lights.

Ginger dipped his hand into the water. Instantly it glistened silvery blue, as though he had plunged his hand into cold blue fire rather than water. The whole grotto was charged with such a supernatural light that the appearance of a sea nymph would not have surprised him.

For some time Ginger sat still, enchanted by the scene, staring at the transparent, sapphire water, through which tiny fish moved lazily over a background of white sand, and the reflected dome overhead. And, as he looked, a strange feeling came over him that he was no longer on earth, but was a celestial being sitting in a blue cloud.

"This is certainly the most incredible place I have ever seen!" Ginger told the others at last. "I could sit here for hours! But we must be getting back, or the others will wonder what has happened to us."

He stood up. Now that he knew the secret he was no longer afraid. He dived into the water, striking out vigorously towards the entrance. The others joined him, and together they shot up to the surface of the pool.

"By gosh, we'll bring the others along here!" declared Ginger, shaking the water off himself. "But we won't tell them anything about it yet; we'll keep it a secret until they come, and give them a surprise."

Helping the others to carry the fish, he accompanied them back to the camp.

"You've been a long time," said Biggles.

"We've been having a swim," admitted Ginger casually.

MONSTERS OF THE DEEP!

ON each of the next two days they were up at dawn, and quickly away to the pearl-bed, making the most of the ideal weather which Shell Breaker repeatedly warned them

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might not last, for the season of storms was approaching.

Both Shell Breaker and Full Moon shared Sandy's confidence that there would be no more feke in the locality, and they often swam down to him to keep him company, sometimes bringing a shell up with them.

Their behaviour was that of two children on holiday. They teased Ginger so much about his nervousness of the water that on one or two occasions, when Sandy was up for a breather, he dived with them and tried to swim down near them; but he soon discovered that it was much harder than it appeared.

Full Moon had told him never to look up when he was deep down in the water, because the distance to the surface was always exaggerated, and somewhat frightening. It was better, she said, to imagine that one was only just under the surface. This, however, only induced Ginger to test the truth of it, and, although he was only about thirty feet deep, he was appalled by what he saw, and shot upwards in alarm. Under the expert tuition of the two natives, his ability to swim down and remain under water increased rapidly, and by the end of the second day he was sporting himself with them.

Ginger took a last plunge, determined to get down to forty feet, and so break his own record. Exerting every ounce of strength, he knew that he had succeeded, and was just turning to swim upwards, when he saw a shadow pass slowly above him. He was not particularly alarmed, for he assumed that it was either Shell Breaker or Full Moon, coming down to tease him, as they often did, and he looked up to see which of them it was.

To his unspeakable horror he saw a shark curving round, about twenty feet above him! It was deliberately looking at him. It was not an ordinary shark, but an enormous brute well over twenty feet long, and dirty white in colour.

Ginger gave himself up for lost. He had no knife to defend himself, not that he thought for a moment that he would be able to use one even if he had. The most dreadful thing of all was that he had to go up towards the creature. He could not stay down, for he was at the end of his endurance, and he knew from previous experience, with no danger threatening, that his lungs would be bursting by the time he reached the air.

Struggling desperately to keep away from the great fish, he began to rise. With ghastly deliberation the shark turned towards him. It was then that he saw Shell Breaker and Full Moon coming down, for the scene was as clear as if they were on land. Shell Breaker was swimming with unbelievable speed straight towards the shark.

Ginger was still rising, but his strength was fast ebbing. In a nightmare of horror he watched. He saw the huge brute begin to turn over on its back in order to seize him, as a shark always must to bite its prey. He saw Shell Breaker flash low across its head, saw him strike, and saw a dark stain spurt from the wound. Again Shell Breaker struck. The shark turned swiftly, its mighty jaws agape; but by this time Full Moon was underneath, and she drove her knife upwards into the shark's stomach.

Ginger struggled upwards through water that was no longer clear, but stained with ugly brown patches that he knew must be blood. He saw

no more, for the picture became blurred before his eyes. He was conscious only of a terrible sensation that the shark's jaws would close over his feet at any moment. He was at his last gasp when he reached the surface, to be dragged aboard by Algy and Sandy.

For a few seconds he could only lie on the cabin floor, getting his breath in great gasps, almost overcome by nausea caused by shock.

"Are they up yet?" he managed to get out at last, referring to Shell Breaker and Full Moon.

"Not yet," said Sandy.

"But—there's a shark—down there!"

"I know; we saw it! The kids went down after it!" returned Sandy.

"But it will kill them."

"Not on your life," declared Sandy confidently.

"They're brought up on that sort of thing. A Marquesan is more than a match for a shark. Occasionally one gets grabbed, but that's only when the attack catches him unprepared from behind. Once they see it, I'll bet on the Marquesans every time. Shark-hunting is a sport with them."

"It doesn't sound like sport to me," muttered Ginger, staggering to his feet in order to see what was happening in the water.

Full Moon's head broke the surface, and she scrambled aboard.

"Ane! He was bad that mako!" she muttered.

Shell Breaker followed a moment later, and Ginger saw that his shoulder was bleeding.

"Gosh, he's been bitten!" he exclaimed.

"No, it's only a graze," answered Sandy quickly. "A shark's hide is like sandpaper. He must have bumped into it."

The two Polynesians sat breathing heavily on the flying-boat, talking swiftly in their own language.

"What are they saying?" asked Biggles.

Sandy translated.

"They haven't killed it. A swordfish butted into the fight and attacked the shark, which made off with the swordfish after it. The kids say it was the blood in the water that brought it. Incidentally, they swear the swordfish was bigger than the shark."

"But they're not as dangerous, are they?" asked Ginger.

"I wouldn't say that," returned Sandy. "They don't attack human beings as often as sharks, but when they do—well, it's good-bye. That sword of theirs isn't just an ornament. There's more than one case of a swordfish sticking its sword right through the bottom of a ship."

Ginger looked incredulous.

"You don't believe it, eh? Well, you go and look up the Admiralty records. A swordfish once attacked a Plymouth ship called the Fortune, and put its sword through the copper sheathing, a three-inch hardwood plank, and twelve inches of oak, and punctured an oil barrel on the other side of it. A British man-of-war—I forget its name—was once holed by a swordfish, and had to make for port with all its pumps going. Don't you get the wrong idea about swordfish, young feller."

"Then we'd better be moving," put in Biggles. "I hate to think what one of the brutes could do to a ship like this, with only a fraction of an inch of metal between us and the water." He turned quickly as there was a loud splash in the water some distance away. "Hallo! What's going on?" he ejaculated.

They all stood staring in the direction of the sound. There was nothing to indicate what had

made it, but a patch of foam on the surface of the sea told them that they had not been mistaken.

"Look!" exclaimed Ginger.

The warning was unnecessary, for everyone on the flying-boat saw what he had seen. A huge, grey shark, either the one that had attacked Ginger or another, leapt high out of the water—so high that it seemed to hang in the air before falling back into the sea with a mighty splash. And it was not alone, for an instant later a giant swordfish broke the surface in the same place. It was fully twenty-five feet long.

"Apu!" cried Shell Breaker, alarm in his voice. "Go! Go fast!"

"Better get moving, Biggles! He thinks it's dangerous!" said Sandy quickly. "And if he thinks it's dangerous, you can bet your life it is!"

Biggles dashed to the cockpit, while the others started feverishly clearing the gear that was lying about.

Sandy was still in his diving kit—without the helmet, for he had been resting—but he soon had it off. Glancing up, he saw the swordfish again break the surface less than a hundred yards away. It was coming directly towards the flying-boat.

"Look out, everybody; he means business!" he shouted. "I'm afraid he's spotted us!"

The first engine started; the second followed. But the Scud had only just started to move, when it received a terrific shock that half-lifted it out of the water. Everyone was thrown down. What was worse, Biggles was hurled across the cockpit, and the machine, left to its own devices, yawed wildly before he could regain the joystick.

An instant later the giant fish broke surface about thirty feet away. Biggles jammed the throttle wide open, but used only one engine in order to turn the machine away from the fish; but before the aircraft could gather speed, there was another violent shock. Something crashed against the keel, and five feet of sword appeared in the cabin, missing Sandy by a few inches. It was withdrawn swiftly, leaving a gaping hole through which water started to pour. Algy flung a towel on it, and tried vainly to stem the flow.

"Tell Biggles to take off!" he yelled. "We shall sink in a couple of minutes!"

Ginger dashed forward to the cockpit.

"Get in the air!" he shouted. "We're holed."

"I'm trying to!" snapped Biggles.

Ginger saw the swordfish turning on the surface not fifty feet away.

"He's coming again!" he yelled; and whipping out his automatic, fired shot after shot at the mighty beast.

Whether he hit it, he never knew; not that it really mattered, for by this time the Scud was moving over the water faster even than the fish could travel.

Ginger hurried back to the others, to find the cabin in a state of chaos. In spite of their efforts to prevent it, the water was still pouring through the hole, and the floor was already awash.

"Tell Biggles to keep going!" shouted Algy. "If he can get off, the water will run out!"

Ginger dashed back to the cockpit, and told Biggles what was happening.

"I can't get her off!" said Biggles tersely. "I've tried. What with all that shell, and the water, she won't take it."

"What shall we do?"

"Jettison everything! Chuck the diving gear overboard—that's the heaviest!"

As he shot back to the cabin, Ginger glanced through a side window, and saw that they were still a good two miles from the island. The Scud was taxi-ing at terrific speed, but not fast enough to lift.

"Everything over the side!" he yelled. "Get the diving gear over! It's our only chance!"

Sandy did not hesitate. He dragged the diving kit, with the forty-pound leaden boots, to the side. It disappeared from view. The helmet followed. The pump, lines—everything portable went over the sides into the deep blue sea. Ginger began bringing the oysters out as fast as he could, but Full Moon stopped him.

"No!" she cried. "Me go!" And, without giving the slightest warning of her intention, she went like an arrow into the sea. Shell Breaker followed.

"Stop—stop!" shouted Ginger.

"You needn't worry about them!" snapped Sandy. "It's only a mile to the island, and a mile is nothing to them."

The Scud, relieved of her excess load, rose slowly into the air, becoming more and more buoyant every moment as the water poured back through the leak, and fell into the sea. By the time she skimmed low over the reef all water had gone.

Biggles circled over the lagoon. He beckoned to Ginger.

"Tell the others that we shall sink if I land on deep water," he said. "I'm going to put her down near that sandy part, and beach her. Get out as fast as you can as soon as I touch. The lighter she is the higher up the beach she'll run. We'll get the shell out of her, and drag her higher as soon as we're down!"

Ginger returned to the others, and gave them Biggles' message.

"We'll jump clear as soon as she slows down enough for it to be safe," he said. "Stand by! He's going down!"

Biggles brought the big machine in as slowly as he dared. But her keel was no sooner touching the water than water began pouring through the hole. Straight towards the beach the Scud raced, sinking lower and lower into the water, and slowing down appreciably as water poured through the leak.

Fifty yards from the beach, while the machine was still travelling at a good twenty miles an hour, Ginger jumped overboard, and, coming to the surface, struck out along the creamy wake. Algy and Sandy had followed him, for he could see their heads bobbing up and down just in front of him. The Scud held on her way, and slid smoothly up the shelving coral sand.

By the time the others had reached him, Biggles was waist-deep in water at the cabin door, dragging out the shell. But as soon as the rest of the party joined him, he got back into the cockpit, and, by opening the throttle in short bursts, gradually got the machine up on the sand, inch by inch, as the shell went overboard. When everything portable had been taken out of the aircraft, he switched off and examined the damage.

"Well, I suppose you have to take this sort of thing as it comes in this part of the world," he observed philosophically. "I was fully prepared for the machine to be knocked about a bit on the coral, so I bought some sheet metal

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along, but I must say that I didn't make allowances for fish trying to get on board."

"The sword came right through into the cabin and missed Sandy by an inch," Ginger told him.

"You evidently need armour-plate in these parts," smiled Biggles. "Never mind. It will mean a day's work patching up the hole; but nothing worse, I hope. We can fix it up well enough to get home. And, as far as I can see, now that we have finished pearling, there's no particular hurry."

"Confound it! Of course, we shall have to go home now that we've lost the diving kit," muttered Ginger, in tones of disappointment.

"It looks that way to me," admitted Sandy. "I suppose those kids are all right?"

"Yes. Here they come," Ginger told him. "I've been watching them for some time, otherwise I'd have made Biggles taxi out to pick them up; hole or no hole."

The two natives were not in the least exhausted by their swim.

"Kaoha!" they called, smiling, as if the whole thing was a huge joke.

"All in the day's work, as far as they're concerned," murmured Sandy. "Well, we'd better see about heaving all this shell up, high and dry. I'll spend to-morrow opening it, while you're mending the ship. The kids will help me."

Biggles nodded.

"That's the idea," he said. "If the oysters open up as well as the last lot, we shall have made a good thing out of the trip. I suppose you'll buy a schooner, Sandy, and come back for more?"

Sandy rubbed his chin.

"I'm not so sure," he said. "I'd like to, of course, but in the past my luck with pearls hasn't been too good. Something usually happens to upset the blessed appercart! I think we'd better see about getting this lot home before we talk about more."

"All right, you old pessimist," agreed Biggles. "By to-morrow evening we ought to be back in Rutuona. Come on, let's get the shell ashore ready for an early start in the morning."

MISSING!

THE pink of dawn the following morning saw them all at their respective tasks.

Biggles, Ginger, and Algy working on the machine, cutting a length of sheet-metal, and preparing rivets to seal the hole in the flying-boat, and Sandy, with Full Moon and Shell Breaker, opening the oysters with their knives.

The two natives were a little way along the beach, where the previous day's catch had been dumped. Every now and then a triumphant yell from one of them, or from Sandy, announced the finding of another pearl. And so the day passed pleasantly enough.

By the time the blue of the sky was fading the Scud had been repaired to Biggles' satisfaction, and only a few more oysters remained to be opened. The yield of pearls was not quite as good as the first day's catch, due to the fact that although there were two days' haul there was not so many oysters, for Sandy had been working in deeper water, and progress was consequently slower. Moreover, he had to come up to rest more often. However, he declared that the pearls were well up to average, and, although he had not realised his promise about filling

his hat with pearls, there was certainly half a hatful when the seed pearls were included.

Sandy was quite prepared to continue operations with a new diving suit, if the scheme met with the approval of the others. Biggles promised to consider it, for, as Ginger pointed out, there was no reason why they should not go on after they had refitted.

"What about you kids going and catching some more fish for supper?" suggested Sandy, putting the pearls in the cache with the others.

"A fish nearly made a meal of me," laughed Ginger, with a wink at Full Moon and Shell Breaker, whom he had already thanked for their courageous rescue. Picking up the fishing-line, he accompanied them to the pool where they had had so much luck on the previous occasion.

The sky was ablaze with all the colours of a Pacific sunset as Biggles walked across to make a final survey of the Scud. Happening to glance at his instrument board, he stared hard at it for a moment, and then hurried back to where Sandy and Algy were sitting.

"What's wrong?" asked Sandy, after a glance at his face.

"I don't like the look of the barometer," Biggles told him, with a worried frown.

Sandy glanced round the sky.

"It looks settled enough," he said.

"I don't know anything about that. I'm talking about the aneroid. It's down to thirty."

Sandy started.

"What!"

"I said it was down to thirty, and still falling."

Sandy rose quickly.

"We'd better get packed up," he said. "When the barometer falls like that it means that there's going to be a blow, so we'd better get the machine afloat ready for a snappy take-off. I'd feel inclined to take off right away."

"We can't."

"Why not?"

"I don't think we can move the machine until the tide comes in and lifts her."

"Well, let's try," returned Sandy emphatically.

"At Rutuona I don't think we should take any harm, even if a real stormer came along, but if we were caught out here the machine would be pulp in about five minutes. The seas will come right over the reef if it blows hard. Hark at it now!"

There was as yet only a slight breeze, but already the combers were pounding on the outer wall of the reef with a roar like distant thunder. Columns of spray rose high into the air.

"They're getting it now, somewhere," muttered Sandy. "I've heard the combers talk like that before."

"All right," agreed Biggles. "Let's get down to the machine and see if we can move her. Where are the kids? It's time they were back. Algy, you'd better go and see if you can find them. Tell them not to trouble about the fish. We shan't need it if we're going."

Algy went off at a run in the direction in which Ginger had disappeared, while the others hurried to the machine. Biggles put his weight against the bows, and pushed, but the Scud did not move.

"She's still resting on the sand," he said. "Another ten minutes ought to see the water high enough to lift her off. By James! Take a look at the gap in the reef."

Sandy looked in that direction. The entrance to the lagoon was a swirling smother of foam.

"Ay, it's coming right enough," he said.

"If we're not away in ten minutes, it will be dark before we get to Rutuona, anyway," went on Biggles anxiously. "I don't like the idea of night flying over the open sea, or of trying to get down without any landing lights. That bay is too exposed to be any use to us. We should have to find somewhere under the lee of the island."

Sandy said nothing. He was staring along the beach.

Biggles turned and saw that it was Algy. He was alone.

"What the dickens are the kids doing?" shouted Sandy. "We're waiting to push off."

"I can't find them," answered Algy.

"What do you mean—you can't find them? They must be on the island somewhere."

"I've been from one end of it to the other, but I couldn't see them," returned Algy. "I found Ginger's shoes, and some fish they had evidently caught, but there was no sign of them."

"Where did you find Ginger's shoes?"

"Just a little way along, on the coral, beside a cove."

Biggles looked at Sandy.

"What the deuce can they be up to?" he muttered. "Where are they likely to be?"

Sandy shook his head.

"Don't ask me. Ginger won't have come to any harm, though. Shell Breaker and Full Moon will see to that. They know what they're doing."

"I hope they do," replied Biggles. "Well, we can't go without them. I think the machine's afloat, so we'll get all ready to take off the moment they arrive."

A quarter of an hour passed. The sun was now going down in a blood-red glow, misty and threatening; only the rim of it remained above the horizon. Presently it disappeared in the sea. Darkness fell.

"Well, that knocks on the head any idea of going to-night," said Biggles quietly. "What's happened to those kids? I'm getting worried about them."

"Something's going to happen to the machine if we don't do something about it," put in Algy. "Look at the reef!"

For the first time since their arrival seas were sweeping right over the reef into the lagoon. Angry ripples surged across the normally still water, so that the machine, now afloat, moved up and down uneasily.

"We'd better get some more anchors on her," said Biggles seriously, as he watched the Scud rocking.

"Half a dozen wouldn't hold her if it's a real blow," returned Sandy. "She'll tear herself to pieces in no time."

"There's nothing else we can do," answered Biggles. "Get some humps of coral, the biggest you can lift, and we'll make extra anchors fore and aft. We've plenty of rope."

"As you say, that's the only thing we can do," agreed Sandy.

"I think you'd better go and have another look for those kids, Algy," went on Biggles. "Sandy and I will fix the machine up."

Algy nodded and hurried away.

It was half an hour before he returned, by which time the Scud was riding uneasily at six anchors, any one of which would have been sufficient to hold her in an ordinary sea.

Algy was looking grave.

"I can't see a sign of them anywhere," he said.

"Ginger's shoes are still on the coral. He must have taken them off to bathe. I'm sorry to say that I'm afraid something serious has happened."

Biggles was silent for a moment.

"Yes," he said slowly. "Something has happened, or they'd be back before now. Something has happened to them in the water. It's hard to believe that they can all be drowned. On the other side of the island, in the open sea, they might have got carried away, but I can't see that happening in the lagoon."

"I wonder if a shark would have got them?" muttered Sandy.

"Not all of them, surely! At least one of them would get back to the shore—not that I think Ginger would go far away from it after his recent experience. The only thing I can think of is that they went off to the reef, and were either dragged off by a big wave, or tried to swim and were unable to get back. Well, we can't do anything about it. If it were daylight we might fly round and look for them, but in this darkness we shouldn't see anything unless we were on the water, and taxi-ing is out of the question. I couldn't get the machine through those seas pouring into the entrance to the lagoon—not that it would be any use if I could. She wouldn't live for a minute in the sea that's running outside. Hark at it!"

The deep, incessant boom of the mighty combers told their own story. There was something frightening about the way they hurled themselves on the reef with a power that caused the island to tremble. The palms were beginning to lash to and fro in the wind.

"Well, it's no use standing here," said Biggles at last.

"It's not much use doing anything else that I can see," murmured Sandy.

"We'll make another search," decided Biggles. "It's better than doing nothing. Algy, you take the eastern end of the island. Sandy, you take the middle. I'll do the western end."

So they parted, each heading for his allotted beat, calling loudly the names of the missing.

Biggles was away for an hour. He got back to find that Sandy and Algy had already returned. He did not trouble to ask them if they had any news, for it was obvious that their search had been as unsuccessful as his.

"Well, that's about all we can do," he said bitterly. "We'll stand by until the morning. If the machine looks like being damaged we'll try to get her off and head for Rutuona. I can cruise round until it's light enough to see to land. I think we've enough petrol. Otherwise, from what you've told us, Sandy, if the machine is smashed up we're likely to spend the rest of our lives here."

* A STORMY FLIGHT !

THE night passed slowly, but at long last the eastern sky began to turn pale, and with the coming of dawn the fury of the storm increased. Huge seas were now sweeping right across the reef and flooding into the lagoon. Waves lashed the coral beach which a few hours before had been so silent. The Scud strained at her moorings, throwing herself about like a terrified animal.

"She won't stand much more of that," said Biggles grimly. "Stand fast. I'll go and have a look at the barometer."

With difficulty he waded waist-deep to the cock-

pit. He glanced at the instrument board and came back—or, rather, was thrown back by the sea.

"What is it?" asked Sandy.

"Twenty-nine."

"Sweet spirit of Scotland, then it's coming!" declared Sandy.

"If we don't go now we're here for good," returned Biggles. "Look at the lagoon. I wouldn't have believed that such a sea could have got up in so short a time. And it's getting worse. I'm by no means sure that I can get the machine off, even now; but it's now or never. Well, what shall we do? You've a say in the matter as well as me."

"We'd better go. We can always come back later and look for the kids," voted Sandy. "There's no sense in just standing here and watching the machine break up in front of our eyes. She'll start dragging those anchors presently, or else tear herself to pieces. The sea is getting worse, and if I know anything about it it's going to be a lot worse before it's better. I've had one long spell on this island, and I don't want another; but that's what it will mean if we lose the machine."

"All right," said Biggles. "Get aboard. Be careful; there's a devil of an undertow! It nearly swept me off my feet."

Fighting their way through the waves, they managed to get to the machine and drag themselves on board. Biggles started the engines.

"Cut two ropes fore and aft!" he shouted above the din, for what with the noise of the engines, the crash of the waves, and the lashing palms, it was no use speaking in a normal voice. "You get to the bows, Algy. Yours will be the last rope. Don't cut till I give the signal. I'll wait for her to swing round with her nose into the sea. Right, Sandy!"

Sandy's knife came down on the last rope that held the machine by the stern. Instantly the Scud swung round, dragging at the single rope that held her by the bows. She bucked so violently that Algy needed all his strength to hold on.

"Right!" yelled Biggles, and opened the throttle.

Algy's knife came down across the rope. It parted with a twang that could be heard above the gale. He clambered aft, and fell headlong into the cabin as the Scud rose to the next wave. He lay where he fell, for it was impossible to stand.

The Scud was racing through a blinding cloud of spray that made it impossible to see anything else, so that Biggles had to fly by feel alone. Twice he was sure they were gone, as the machine plunged into a trough, but each time she rose miraculously to the next wave.

Then a sea struck her sideways across the bows, and she yawed into a trough. There was no question of turning. The machine would not answer to her controls in such conditions. But a momentary lull gave Biggles a chance, and he took it. He raced the Scud straight along the bottom of the trough, and as the next wave rolled towards him he jerked the stick back, knowing that if the machine did not rise they were all doomed.

Not until all seemed lost did the machine unstick. She staggered off the water, the wave snatching at her keel as it broke under her. The next moment the machine was climbing up through the cloud of spray that hid the reef from sight.



THE EDITOR'S CHAIR

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

HALLO, CHUMS! Many of you are no doubt in strange quarters these days owing to the general evacuation, and I hope that you have all settled down to the new order of things. The war has changed the whole outlook for most of us, but we must make the best of things and carry on with a smile. That is where the GEM and "Magnet" can help, for with nights seeming much longer now owing to the black-out, it is some consolation to be able to enjoy the cheery and light-hearted adventures of the chums of St. Jim's and Harry Wharton & Co. of Greyfriars. But as I have already told readers, economy in paper has forced me to cut out the number of copies on sale for casual readers. Unless your GEM and "Magnet" are definitely ordered, you will be unable to get them. Avoid disappointment by placing a standing order with the local newsagent.

Biggles settled himself back in his seat, tightened the safety-belt, and headed for Rutuona. To say that he headed for Rutuona would not be strictly true. The wind was across, so in order to reach the island he had to turn his bows towards the open ocean and drift sideways. He noticed that the barometer was down to 28.50.

Rutuona came into view, an oasis of whirling trees in a white-flecked ocean, and Biggles looked anxiously for a landing place. As far as he could see there was only one, a narrow strip of water that ran far inland between two rugged cliffs.

He nosed the machine towards it, and was thankful to see that the protected water was comparatively calm, although the air was full of flying debris, palm fronds, and the like.

But it was no longer a matter of saving the machine. Their lives were in peril, and in such circumstances Biggles was prepared to lose the machine if they could all get ashore safely. Exploring the creek with his eyes, he determined to take the machine to the far end of it, where a scree ran right down to the water's edge, forming a natural slipway.

Biggles brought the machine in under full throttle, and even so his ground speed was negligible. The keel struck the water. The hull veered sideways as a wing-float caught in a tangle of floating bushes, and came to rest in a still larger tangle that had been caught up by a projecting crag. More debris was floating towards the place, so that in a few seconds the Scud was hemmed in by it. The bottom of the scree was about twenty yards away.

Biggles switched off and turned to the others. "Well, here we are," he said evenly. "And

"GUSSY GETS AWAY WITH IT!"

Martin Clifford makes the bell ring again with the next story of the "Silverson" series. The crook master of the Fourth turns to treachery in his next attempt to disgrace Tom Merry at St. Jim's. At the same time, Gussy turns to japing to get his own back on Silverson, while Baggy Trimble also comes into the picture in seeking revenge on Tom Merry. As you will read, there is a conflict of purposes among all three, and it has amusing results—except for the "Worm"!

"BIGGLES' SOUTH SEA ADVENTURE!"

The next instalment of Captain Johns' serial is a thriller, and an exciting incident from it is the subject of our next cover. It shows Ginger Hebblethwaite and Shell Breaker in a storm-tossed sea and in danger from a shark. But that is not the only danger Ginger runs up against in the next chapters. A hurricane hits Sandy's Island, and to cap Ginger's misfortunes, Castanelli comes on the scene!

"PULLING BUNTER'S LEG!"

The title of next week's grand Greyfriars yarn gives some idea of the theme. Jack Drake is fed-up with hearing about Bunter's postal order, and he thinks of a good jape for curing Bunter of his long-cherished illusion. How the jape pans out you will see next Wednesday. But pulling Bunter's leg doesn't have altogether the happy outcome that Drake expects.

Before I close, there is an item of good news for readers. A sparkling new series by Geo. E. Rochester will be starting soon. Look out for it.

All the best, chums!

THE EDITOR.

here we look like staying for a bit," he added. "I shouldn't have minded had it not been for the kids. Still, I suppose it's no use talking about that now. We couldn't do more than we did. We'll get back and look for them again as soon as this wind drops a bit."

"It's going to take us some time to get out of here," declared Sandy. "It will mean a couple of days' work cutting a channel through these bushes, unless we can get to Roaring Wave and persuade him to lend us some labourers. I don't think there will be any difficulty about that. I reckon we are about six miles from the village."

"About that," agreed Biggles. "I think we'd better try to get along, and see what Roaring Wave says."

"If you don't mind we'll stay here until the wind drops," grunted Sandy. "We should get our skulls stove in by falling coconuts before we'd gone a hundred yards. A coconut grove is no place in a gale of wind, believe me."

"Of course," agreed Biggles. "I forgot that. By the way, where did you put the pearls?"

Sandy blinked. "The pearls!" he stammered. "Didn't you bring 'em?"

"No, I left it to you." Sandy's face was a picture. He shook his head sadly.

"I always was an unlucky son of a gun when there were pearls about," he muttered miserably. "They must be still under the rock where we left them!"

(That's a big shock for Biggles—but Ginger, left on the island, gets a bigger one, as you will read in next week's thrilling chapters.)

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HARRY WHARTON AND JACK DRAKE, UP AGAINST EACH OTHER, FIND THEMSELVES FIGHTING SIDE BY SIDE.



BOB CHERRY PUTS HIS FOOT DOWN!

"GENTLEMEN—" "Hear, hear!" "I have only a few words to say—"

"Good!"

"Shut up, Johnny, and give a chap a chance to speak!" exclaimed Bob Cherry warmly.

"Get on with the washing, old scout!" said Frank Nugent. "Wharton will be waiting for us—"

"We don't want to miss the fight," said Johnny Bull. "Can't you talk some other time, Bob?"

"You ass!"

"The postponefulness of the esteemed speech is the proper caper," suggested Hurrree Jamset Ram Singh. "The scrupfulness of Wharton and Drake is the item on the programme—"

"Will you let me speak?" bawled Bob Cherry.

"Hear, hear!" said Squiff.

"Go it, Bob! Shut up, Inky!"

"I was going to say—," resumed Bob Cherry.

"How long will it take?" inquired Johnny Bull.

"Order! Dry up, Johnny, and let him get it off his chest," said Squiff. "He won't be happy till he does it."

"But—"

"Silence for the chair!" rapped out Vernon-Smith.

Bob Cherry was beginning to look excited. Immediately after lessons that day he had shepherded that group of juniors into the Rag, to address them upon a subject that was apparently important.

But he found them rather restive. The fact that there was a fight on seemed to interest most of the juniors much more than a speech from Robert Cherry.

"Gentlemen," said Bob, calming himself, "it's about Wharton's fight with Drake that I'm going to speak. Drake's been japing Wharton, and getting his hair off. Well, it was a harmless

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FROM FOES TO FRIENDS!

By Frank Richards.

joke enough, and Wharton shouldn't cut up so rusty."

"Better tell him that," chuckled Smithy. "He will want to scrap with you next!"

"Drake is a cheeky kid," went on Bob. "But he's a good sort enough. We're not going to see a fight over a silly trifle like a practical joke. It makes Wharton look rather an ass to be taking it so seriously. I've called you fellows together, because you're all friends of Harry's. I want you to back me up in stopping it before it begins."

"That sounds a bit Irish," remarked Vernon-Smith.

"You know what I mean, ass! The scrap isn't going to take place, and it's up to us to see that it doesn't."

The juniors looked serious at that.

They had all chuckled over the pulling of the Remove captain's leg by the new junior; and they all felt that Harry Wharton would have acted more wisely to laugh over the joke, with the rest. But nobody felt inclined to reason with Wharton on the subject.

"Better let 'em rip!" said Johnny Bull. "Wharton will only get angry if we interfere—you know his way."

"He won't listen to us," said Nugent. "It's no good talking, Bob. It's all rot, of course, but there you are."

"I know he won't listen," said Bob. "I'm not thinking of arguing with him. I'm thinking of chipping in. They've gone behind the gym now, and he will be beginning. Well, we're going to rush them—"

"Eh?"

"And give 'em a good bumping for playing the goat," said Bob. "We'll do the same whenever they begin."

"Oh, my hat!"

"If they want to scrap, they can scrap with the Highcliffe rotters," said Bob. "Ponsonby & Co. ragged Bunter only yesterday."

"What does Bunter matter?"

"Nothing. Still, Pon ought to be punished. Anyhow, we ought to stop those two asses punching one another, and I think it's up to us."

"Wharton will be no end waxy."

"Let him!"

Vernon-Smith chuckled.

"Right-ho, then!" he said. "I'll back you up. It's all rot to have a slogging match over a practical joke."

"Come on, then," said Bob.

Bob Cherry, satisfied at having gained his point, led his flock out of the Rag.

"Where's Wharton, Bunter?" he called out, as he sighted the Owl of the Remove in the passage.

Billy Bunter gave a fat grin.

"Just marched off, with his noble nose in the air," he replied. "Frowning like—like— Who was that chap who defied the lightning? Right up on the high-horse! He, he, he! Drake and Rodney have gone with him—they're behind the gym now, I think. I say, you fellows, I hope Drake will lick Wharton, don't you? Yaroooh!"

Bunter wound up with a loud howl as Bob took him by the collar in passing and sat him forcibly on the floor. Bunter's kind wishes for Wharton did not meet with the approval of Harry Wharton's chums—though just then they were feeling rather impatient with their leader.

Bob Cherry & Co. cut across the quad, and they came round the gym with a rush.

They were only just in time.

Harry Wharton and Jack Drake were facing one another, with the gloves on, and a dozen fellows were standing round looking on. Rodney was Drake's second, and Ogilvy was acting for Wharton, as his own special followers had not appeared on the scene. But they appeared now—with a rush that broke up the ring.

"Stop!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

Wharton stared at him.

"What do you mean? We're just going to begin."

"You're not!" explained Bob. "Having held a meeting on the subject, we've decided that there's no reason for a fight, and it's not going to take place!"

"Don't be an ass!"

"My dear chap, it's you that are the ass, and we're going to stop you," said Bob. "Take those gloves off—and you too, Drake!"

Jack Drake laughed.

"What the thump are you interfering for?" he asked. "I don't care a rap one way or the other, but—"

"Nuff said! Take those gloves off!"

"Rats!" retorted Drake.

Harry Wharton set his lips. His temper was already very sore, and he evidently was not pleased with the intervention.

"Stand back, Bob," he said quietly. "I'm not allowing any interference here."

"Beware the thunderbolts of Jupiter!" exclaimed Skinner of the Remove. "His Highness will wither you with a glance, if you don't mind your p's and q's."

"Shut up, Skinner!" growled Bob. "Now, Wharton—"

"Stand back!"

"Will you take those gloves off?"

"No!"

"Collar them!" exclaimed Bob.

"Look here—"

"Hands off!"

But Bob Cherry & Co. meant business. Four rushed on Harry Wharton, and four on Drake. And the next moment the two intended combatants were being bumped on the hard, un-sporting ground.

UNAVOIDABLY POSTPONED!

"LET go!" roared Wharton furiously.

"You rotters!" roared Drake.

"You silly duffers!" yelled Harry Wharton.

"He, he, he! Give 'em some more!" hooted

Billy Bunter. "Give Wharton another! Bump him! He, he, he!"

"Carry 'em home!" said Bob Cherry. "If they won't keep the peace, they've got to be made to toe the line! Carry on!"

In four pairs of hands Harry Wharton was rushed away in one direction, and in another four pairs of hands Jack Drake was carried off. Drake had given up struggling, and he was laughing as he was rushed across the quadrangle.

"Are you going to keep the peace?" inquired Johnny Bull, as the four juniors halted and held Drake's head over the basin of the fountain.

"Oh, certainly!" said Drake. "As long as Wharton does, anyhow. Never was such a peaceable chap as I am."

"Let him go, then," said Squiff, laughing.

And Jack Drake was released. Dick Rodney joined him, with a smile on his face. Rodney was glad enough that the conflict had been prevented. A fight between two champions like Wharton and Drake would have been a serious matter, and which ever way victory inclined, both the combatants would certainly have received very severe punishment.

"I'm glad it's off," said Rodney. "Wharton may have got over his tantrums by to-morrow, and there needn't be a fight at all. It's rather ridiculous of him to cut up rusty like this over a jape."

"I fancy he won't let it stop at this, though," answered Drake. "Still, I'll keep my distance, if he does. I'm not specially anxious for a first-class scrap. I've still got some marks left from scrapping with Bolsover major."

The peacemakers had had easy work with Jack Drake, whose good humour seldom failed him; but their task with Wharton was not so easy. The captain of the Remove was plumped down on a bench under the elms, and Bob, Nugent, Hurree Singh and Vernon-Smith stood round him, on guard. The look that Wharton gave them was not a pleasant one.

"What does this foolery mean?" asked Wharton, a little breathlessly.

"Haven't I explained?" asked Bob cheerily. "You're not going to fight Drake over a fag joke."

"I shall do as I please."

Bob shook his head.

"Not while you've got your old pals to see that you don't!" he answered. "We're going to bump you every time you begin."

"Look here, you silly ass—"

"Slang your old chums as much as you like, so long as you keep the peace," said Bob good-humouredly. "But you're not going to fight Drake."

Harry Wharton made no rejoinder.

He rose from the bench and walked away; and if he had gone in the direction of Drake, his devoted chums were prepared to collar him again.

But he went into the schoolhouse, and they were relieved.

"All serene!" said Bob Cherry. "Didn't I tell you it was a good idea? Old Wharton will get over it by to-morrow, and no harm done."

"Hum! I hope so," said Nugent.

Frank Nugent was rather doubtful, and he looked a little curiously at his chum, when they met at tea in Study No. 1.

But the captain of the Remove was quite cheery, and Nugent was relieved to see that there was no sign of the sulks.

Neither did Wharton make any attempt again that day to seek Jack Drake. They were both in the Common-room that evening, and did not approach one another.

Bob Cherry smiled with satisfaction. He felt that the drastic line he had taken had been a success.

Probably he would not have felt so satisfied if he had seen Harry Wharton draw near to the new junior, when the Remove were going up to their dormitory, and had heard the Remove captain's words. Wharton's eyes gleamed as he spoke to Drake, but he spoke very quietly.

"I'm sorry we were interrupted to-day," he said. "Those asses have made up their minds to stop the fight, and they'll chip in again if they see us meet. To-morrow's a half-holiday. Will you turn up on Courtfield Common?"

Drake shrugged his shoulders.

"Any old thing," he answered carelessly.

"You know the turning of the path to Highcliffe. There's an old hut there——"

"I know it."

"To-morrow at three, alone," said Harry.

"Right!"

That was all that was said. But it was evident that Bob Cherry had congratulated himself too soon.

FALLEN AMONG FOES!

"YOUR deal, Gaddy!"

Ponsonby of the Fourth Form at Highcliffe blew out a little cloud of smoke from his cigarette.

Gadsby shuffled the cards.

There was a gathering of the "blades" of Highcliffe in the old hut on Courtfield Common. Ponsonby, Gadsby, Monson, Vavasour, Merton, and Drury were all there, and cigarettes were going strong. It was Wednesday afternoon, a half-holiday at Highcliffe, as at Greyfriars, and Ponsonby & Co. were enjoying their half-holiday in their own peculiar fashion. Poker was the game, and there was quite a good deal of cash visible on the old bench that served as a table.

"You've got all the luck, Pon," grumbled Vavasour. "Absolutely, you know. Four queens last time!"

"Pon was dealer," remarked Drury.

Ponsonby turned on the speaker with a glitter in his eyes.

"What do you mean by that, Drury?" he demanded.

"Eh? Nothin'!"

"You said——"

"I mentioned that you were dealer. You were dealer, weren't you?" said Drury innocently.

"If you mean——"

"Pony up, and don't rag!" said Gadsby. "Now then, how many cards do you want?"

Ponsonby scowled as he put his "ante" into the pool. He often had excellent hands when he was dealer, but perhaps it was blind chance. "Two!" he snapped.

The others drew their cards, and looked at them, and Vavasour threw his down on the bench.

"Rotten!" he remarked.

The rest of the Highcliffians went on, however, and cash mounted up in the pool.

Vavasour strolled to the doorway, and stood smoking a cigarette and looking out across the common, while he waited for the round to end.

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He gave a sudden start, and removed the cigarette from his mouth.

"Greyfriars cads!" he ejaculated.

"Oh, gad!"

Ponsonby jumped up, and looked out of the doorway uneasily. Ponsonby & Co. were on the worst terms with the Removites of Greyfriars. If the Famous Five of Greyfriars had happened along and found the cheery nuts gambling in the old hut, it was quite probable that the merry blades of Highcliffe would have been chased like rabbits across the common. To Pon's relief, only two Greyfriars juniors were in sight.

The nearest was Harry Wharton; he was coming directly towards the hut. Fifty yards behind him was another junior in a Greyfriars cap, whom Ponsonby did not know by sight.

"How many of the cads?" called out Gadsby. "We don't want any raggin' now."

"Two," answered Ponsonby.

"Then let 'em rip!"

"One's Wharton," said Pon.

"Oh gad! What a chance for us!" said Monson. "The cheeky cad turns up his nose at us when he comes over to Highcliffe to see Courtenay. It's gettin' a bit smoky in here. Let's go an' see Wharton."

"He's rather a beast," said Vavasour doubtfully. "I don't like scrappin' with a brute like Wharton."

"Six of us," said Ponsonby. "This is a giddy opportunity that's too good to be lost. Never mind the cards now. Lie low, and be ready to jump on him if he comes into the hut."

"Good egg!"

The half-dozen Highcliffians waited, peering cautiously round the corner of the doorway.

The captain of the Greyfriars Remove came straight on, and it looked as if he intended to enter the hut. But he stopped a few yards away, and turned his head to look back.

Ponsonby was puzzled.

"He's waitin' for the other chap to come up," he whispered. "I don't know the other fellow—new kid, I suppose——"

"I've seen him before," murmured Gadsby. "His name's Drake—a new kid in the Remove. What are they up to here?"

"Blessed if I know!" said Ponsonby, perplexed. "They can't have come here for a scrap—they could scrap nearer home, if they wanted to. But Wharton looks like it."

"Wait an' see!" chuckled Drury.

Harry Wharton had his back to the old hut as he waited for Drake to come up. The Highcliffians' remarks had been made in whispers, and had not reached his ears. He clearly had no suspicions that the lonely old hut was occupied. Ponsonby & Co. watched him quietly, waiting to see what would transpire.

Jack Drake came up with his elastic stride. He nodded coolly to the captain of the Remove.

"You're here first," he remarked.

"Yes," said Harry. "But I'm early. You're in good time."

"I had to shake Rodney off," said Drake, laughing. "And I suppose Bob Cherry had a fatherly eye on you?"

Wharton did not laugh.

"I managed to get clear," he answered. "No need to waste time now we're here, Drake."

"Not at all."

"If you're ready——"

"I haven't brought any gloves," said Drake.

"Have you?"

"No!"

"Oh!" said Drake. "I thought you would. Do you want to scrap with bare knuckles, then?"

"I don't care."

"Well, I don't care, if you don't!" said Drake, rather sharply. "It's a bit beastly to fight like a pair of hooligans, that's all. But if you want it without the mittens, I'm your man!"

"I don't see any help for it," said Harry Wharton, colouring a little. "I never thought of the gloves."

"Oh, it doesn't matter!" Jack Drake threw off his jacket, and pushed back his cuffs. "Shall we get behind the hut? We don't want to be in full view of the road, I suppose?"

"Just as you like."

Harry Wharton spoke rather slowly. As a matter of fact, the hot temper of the previous day had subsided; he had not really let the sun go down on his wrath. He was beginning to feel, rather uncomfortably, that he had made a mountain out of a molehill, as his hasty temper sometimes led him to do; and that there was something ridiculous in carrying the trivial dispute to this length.

But nothing would have induced him to admit it. There was just a trifle of the "What I have said, I have said!" about the captain of the Remove. He was quite in a mood to accept the olive-branch if offered by Drake; but he did not think of offering it himself. And Drake did not think of offering it. He had accepted Wharton's invitation to a scrap on the common, and he had come there to carry out the contract; and that was all there was about it.

Harry Wharton followed him round the hut, so that the building screened them from the road a little. Neither wished to make the fight an exhibition for any chance passer-by.

Wharton knew, too, that his chums would soon miss him, and that it was probable that Bob Cherry & Co. would come scudding along on their bicycles looking for him before long. It would not take Bob long to guess what the simultaneous absence of Wharton and Drake meant.

"No seconds and no time-keeper," said Drake. "We shall have to keep time for ourselves."

"Call time whenever you want to," said Harry.

"I'll keep time!" said a rather startling voice.

Cecil Ponsonby stepped from the hut, with his followers at his heels.

Wharton started.

"Highcliffe cads!" he exclaimed.

Jack Drake glanced at them. He had heard of the feud between the Remove and Ponsonby & Co., but he had not yet been mingled in any of the numerous rags and scraps that it caused.

"Good!" he said carelessly. "I don't know who you are, but you can keep time if you like."

Ponsonby closed one eye at his comrades. The Highcliffians, strong in numbers, were in a merry humour, feeling themselves masters of the situation.

"This is goin' to be a real fight," said Ponsonby. "I'm goin' to see that there's no shirkin'!"

"Yes, rather!" grinned Gadsby.

"Absolutely!" chuckled Vavasour.

"Bare knuckles, an' stand up to it," continued Ponsonby, with great enjoyment. "First chap that shirks will get a wallopin' from us!"

"That's not in the programme," said Jack Drake quietly.

"I'm arrangin' this programme," explained

Ponsonby coolly. "You Greyfriars cads have got to toe the line."

"Keep your distance, Ponsonby," said Wharton, with a frown. "Drake, if it's all the same to you, we'll leave this over for a bit. I don't want to make an entertainment for these cads."

Jack Drake nodded.

"Just what I was thinking," he replied. "I can't say I like their looks, and if what I've heard about them is true, they're cads enough to rag us when we've knocked each other into a cocked hat. It would be rather a safe spec for them."

"You must be a giddy thought-reader!" chuckled Gadsby.

"I see—that was your game, was it?"

"Absolutely!" said Vavasour.

"You see, you're in our hands," said Ponsonby, with a smile. "We've got a lot of scores against the Greyfriars Remove. A chance like this doesn't often come our way. Now, are you ready to begin?"

"No!" said Harry Wharton curtly. "Not till you cads have cleared off, anyhow."

"Shirkin' already!" grinned Ponsonby. "But I'm the chap that's givin' orders here! You're goin' to fight, and you're goin' to put your beef into it, and we're goin' to see that you do it. Otherwise, you get the raggin' of your lives, and you can take your choice."

"Absolutely!" chortled Vavasour.

Wharton knitted his brows.

He was aware that the Highcliffians would not let the opportunity pass for ragging their old enemy; he had been aware of that from the start. And hefty as the captain of the Remove was, the odds were very heavy.

Ponsonby & Co. had drawn round the two Removeites, as if to cut off any attempt at escape; but Wharton was not thinking of running.

He looked at Drake.

The two Greyfriars juniors had come there to fight out the dispute that had been stopped at Greyfriars. But in the presence of the common enemy, their own dispute sank into the background.

Drake understood Wharton's look, and he nodded.

"Shoulder to shoulder," he said.

"Good man!" said Wharton cordially.

"So you won't fight!" sneered Ponsonby.

"Simultaneous attacks of cold feet, what? I didn't know you were a funk, Wharton—Yooooop!" yelled Ponsonby, as the captain of the Remove made a sudden step towards him and smote with his open palm.

Smack!

Ponsonby staggered under the smack as he yelled. It left a red mark on his cheek.

"That's my answer to that!" said Harry Wharton coolly. "Now come on if you like, you cads!"

Ponsonby recovered himself, his eyes glittering with rage. He made a gesture to Drake.

"You can cut off!" he said. "We don't want you! Wharton's our game. Cut off while you're safe!"

"Thanks!" drawled Jack Drake.

"Well, are you goin'?" snapped Gadsby.

"Oh, no; I'm not going!"

Drake stepped quickly to Harry Wharton's side.

"Stick your back to the wall and let 'em

come on," he said hurriedly. "Shoulder to shoulder now, old bean!"

A shove sent Vavasour and Merton aside, and the two Greyfriars juniors reached the wall of the hut and put their backs to it. With their hands up they faced the enemy. Ponsonby & Co. gathered round them in a half-circle, but they hesitated to rush. They were six to two, but the two looked very dangerous.

"Come on, dear boys!" said Drake, with a laugh. "You don't seem so jolly anxious to go over the top after all!"

"Come on!" hissed Ponsonby.

He led the rush.

The next moment there was a wild and whirling combat in progress.

A FIGHT AGAINST ODDS!

JACK DRAKE and Harry Wharton stood shoulder to shoulder to meet the rush, and they hit out, hard, as the Highcliffians closed in on them.

Ponsonby went over with a crash, and Gadsby sprawled beside him. Merton was the next down, yelling.

Drury caught Harry Wharton round the body, and jammed him against the wall, yelling to his comrades for help. Ponsonby & Co. were up in a moment and rushing on. Drake, grasped by Vavasour and Monson, struggled furiously in their grip as he was dragged away from the wall.

Wharton struck down at Drury and hurled him off, yelling, but at the same time, Ponsonby, Merton, and Gadsby gripped him. Blows rained upon the captain of the Remove as he struggled

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with three assailants. And Drury staggered up again and added his attack.

Heavy as the odds were, the captain of the Remove was putting up a redoubtable fight, and Ponsonby & Co. had their hands full.

Jack Drake was faring better with Vavasour and Monson. In the clutch of the two, he was dragged from the hut; but a terrific upper-cut on the jaw sent Vavasour spinning, and he sat in the grass, clasped his damaged jaw and moaned dolorously.

Vavasour was not of the stuff of which heroes are made, and he had had enough—more than enough.

Drake turned on Monson and drove him back under a fierce assault, till Monson was stretched in the grass, dazed and dizzy. Then Drake spun round to rush to Wharton's aid.

The captain of the Remove, resisting gallantly, was down now, and the four Highcliffians were sprawling over him, pommeling savagely.

Ponsonby & Co. cultivated elegant manners and customs, and prided themselves on being nutty; but on occasion they could act like hooligans, and their hooligan instincts were rampant now. It would have fared very hard with Harry Wharton if Drake had not chipped in promptly to his aid.

Drake came up with a rush and piled into the combat again with terrific vim.

A right-hander fairly between the eyes hurled Ponsonby from his victim, and stretched him groaning on the grass. In another second Gadsby was swept away by a drive under the ear.

Wharton tore himself loose from the other two and jumped up, gasping for breath.

His nose was streaming crimson, and one of his eyes were closing. Ponsonby & Co.'s hooligan tactics had told upon him severely. But he walled game.

"Come on!" panted Drake.

For the moment only Merton and Drury were on their feet, and they backed away hurriedly as they were attacked. Before their comrades could come to their aid, they were driven back under hefty blows and sent spinning into the grass.

Ponsonby and Gadsby were up by that time, staggering rather wildly, and the Greyfriars juniors turned on them.

Gadsby jumped back to avoid the rush, and fairly took to his heels. Vavasour was already scuttling away.

"Ow!" gasped Ponsonby, as he went down once more, knocked off his feet by Drake's vigorous right.

Monson and Merton and Drury closed in again. But they were met in a vigorous style, and they backed off again, defending themselves. Ponsonby scrambled up—to see the three retreating dismally before the two—and instead of joining in, Ponsonby took the path across the common after Vavasour and Gadsby.

That was enough for his dismayed followers.

The three dodged and ran, gasping and spluttering as they went, and did not stop till they were at a safe distance to dab their noses.

Harry Wharton reeled against the wall of the hut, gasping for breath. He had kept it up to the end, till the enemy were in flight; but he was quite spent.

Drake sat on a knoll and pumped in breath with his handkerchief to his nose. He had

(Continued on page 35.)



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FROM FOES TO FRIENDS!

(Continued from page 34.)

hardly looked for victory in the unequal fight; and he was glad enough to see the backs of the enemy.

"Oh! Ow! Wow!" gasped Drake. "We've beaten them, anyhow! Is my nose still there, Wharton?"

"Is mine?" gasped Wharton. "I—I feel rather as if I've been under a motor-car. But we've licked the rotters!"

"Three cheers for the Remove!" panted Drake. "Oh, my nose! Ow, my eye! I say, you're going to have a black eye, I think."

"You've got one!" answered Wharton, with a faint grin.

"Oh, my hat!"

Drake rose, feeling his eye tenderly. In the distance, Ponsonby & Co. were disappearing from sight. It had been a great victory; but it had cost the victors dear.

"There's a pond over there," said Wharton at last. "We—we'd better bathe our chivvies a bit before we go in!"

"Yes, rather!"

They bathed their faces and helped one another as far as was possible to remove signs of the conflict. But there were a good many signs that could not be removed, and that were likely to take a considerable time to wear off.

"You look a pretty picture, old sport," said Drake at last, when they had done all they could.

"Same to you!" said Harry.

"We came here to fight," grinned Drake. "I suppose we should have looked very much like this if we've done it?"

Wharton coloured.

"You've stood by me like a brick," he said. "You could have cleared off if you'd liked to—they offered you the chance—"

"Likely, wasn't it?" grunted Drake.

"Well, we came here as enemies, and you weren't bound to stand by me, and—and—" Wharton's colour deepened. "I shan't forget it, Drake. I—I was rather an ass to cut up so rusty over a joke, and—and I'm sorry I did. I—I can't say more than that."

"Quite enough, too," said Drake cheerily. "I'd much rather be friends than enemies, and surely we've had enough scrapping this afternoon to last any reasonable chap for a good time to come. And I'm sorry I said you had a swelled head, old scout—I didn't really mean it."

The two juniors—quite reconciled now—walked back to Greyfriars together, rather slowly. They were likely to feel the effects of that battle against heavy odds for a long time to come, hardy as they were.

They had nearly reached the gates of Greyfriars, when there was a whirl of bicycles on the

road, and Bob Cherry & Co. rushed up and jumped off their machines.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob. "So you dodged us, did you?"

"And you've been scrapping?" exclaimed Nugent.

"Bump them!" said Johnny Bull. "We told them we would and we will! Collar both of them—"

"Hold on!" gasped Drake. "You silly asses, we've had enough from Ponsonby & Co. for one day—"

"Haven't you been scrapping?" demanded Bob Cherry.

"Only with the Highcliffe cads," said Harry Wharton. "We came out to scrap, but we ran into six Highcliffe cads, and they gave us all we wanted!"

"And a little over!" remarked Drake.

Bob Cherry chuckled.

"Serve you both jolly well right—especially you, Harry!" he said.

"Admitted!" said Wharton.

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"Hallo, hallo, hallo! You're talking sense for once!" exclaimed Bob, in surprise.

"Better late than never," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "Come on, Drake—we've got to see what we can do with our chivvies—they want attention."

"What-ho!" said Drake.

And the rivals of the Remove walked on together very amicably.

Bob Cherry looked after them and grinned.

"Well, that's all right," he said. "All's well that ends well. Let's go and look for Ponsonby."

"Hear, hear!"

And the Co. mounted their machines and pedalled off at a great pace, and ten minutes later they had the pleasure of chasing Ponsonby & Co. in at the gates of Highcliffe, in dismal disorder—what time Harry Wharton and Jack Drake were repairing damages in the Remove dormitory at Greyfriars.

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