

LEVISON'S SISTER!

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.



RACING FOR THE LEAD!

Copyright in the United States of America.

A Magnificent,
New, Long,
Complete School
Story of
Tom Merry
and Co.
at St. Jim's.

LEVISON'S SISTER!

By
Martin
Clifford.

CHAPTER I. Trouble Ahead.

"MERRY!"
"Yes, sir!"
Tom Merry came along the passage at once, as Mr. Railton called to him from his study doorway.

The Housemaster's brow was grim, and Tom assumed his most innocent expression as he approached, inwardly wondering which of his delinquencies had come to Mr. Railton's knowledge.

"Merry, kindly find Levison of the Fourth Form, and send him to me at once."

"Certainly, sir!" said Tom, in great relief.

It was not upon his own devoted head that the vials of wrath were to be poured evidently.

Levison of the Fourth was to have that pleasure, and, judging by Mr. Railton's expression, there was trouble waiting for Levison in the Housemaster's study.

Tom Merry hurried away on his mission.

"Seen Levison?" he asked, as he met Manners and Lowther at the end of the passage.

"No, Brother Levison," said Lowther. "We're waiting for you, Tommy. Never mind Levison now!"

"Railton wants him, fathead! I'm to send him in."

"Buck up, then!" said Manners. "I dare say he's in his study."
Tom Merry went up the stairs two at a time. The Terrible Three were due in the gym to meet Figgins & Co. of the New House in a six-handed boxing-match. But Tom was quite willing to fag at messages for Mr. Railton; and, moreover, there was no choice in the matter.

Two Shell fellows were chatting on the landing as Tom Merry came up the staircase. They were Racke and Crooke. They ceased speaking instantly as Tom appeared. Tom Merry did not usually have much to say to the two black sheep of the Shell, but he stopped to speak now.

"Seen Levison?" he asked.
"Is he wanted?" asked Racke, eyeing him curiously.
"Yes, or I shouldn't be looking for him," said Tom.

"Who wants him?"
"What the dickens does it matter who wants him?" said Tom impatiently.
"But it's Railton, if you want to know especially," said Crooke hastily, as D'Arcy of the Fourth came along.

Tom Merry nodded, and walked on. Aubrey Racke looked after him with a grin.

"Railton wants him," he murmured. "I fancy dear old Levison is booked for trouble this time, Crooke—what?"
"Shurrup!" said Crooke hastily, as D'Arcy of the Fourth came along.

The two shell fellows strolled away. Tom Merry hurried on to Levison's study, No. 9 in the Fourth. There was a sound of voices in the study as he approached.

"Haven't you fellows seen a key

anywhere?" Levison was speaking.

"Dashed queer how it's vanished!"

"I haven't seen it," said Clive.

"Looked in your pockets?"

"Yes. It's not there."

"Dropped it somewhere," came the drawing tones of Cardew of the Fourth.

"What does it matter anyway? It will turn up."

"Yes, but—"

Tom Merry pushed the door open and looked in.

"You're wanted, Levison," he announced.

"You're wanted, Levison," he announced.

Levison looked round impatiently.

"Oh, bother! Who wants me?"

"Railton."

"Bless Railton!"

"Lost something?" asked Tom.

Levison was going through his pockets with an irritable look.

"Yes; the key of my desk," said Levison.

"I know I left it on the table this afternoon, and when I looked in for it it was gone. Some silly ass has pitched it somewhere, I suppose."

"Well, Railton wants you now," said Tom. "He looks rather waxy. I hope there's nothing wrong."

"Nothing that I know of," said Levison.

"Can't be anything wrong," said Cardew gravely. "Levison's a perfect character now. He's given up all his old naughty ways, and is a model to all St. Jim's, and a sweet youth that any Housemaster might be proud of!"

"Oh, don't be a silly ass!" growled Levison.

"My dear chap, I'm statin' the facts. If Railton has any fault to find with you, Clive and I will come along an' explain to him that he's off the wicket, an' tell him how you've raised the moral tone of the study."

Tom Merry grinned. Clive laughed, and Levison, frowning, went out of the study.

"Levison's temper hasn't improved since his merry reformation," sighed Cardew. "He doesn't like bein' clipped on the subject. Now, if I were a reformed character I should proclaim it from the house-tops, an' call on all the school to roll up an' admire. What's Railton waxy about, Merry?"

Tom shook his head.

"I don't know, but he looked very thunderous."

"Too bad if Levison gets detention," remarked Cardew. "It seems that his sister's coming along to-morrow afternoon to see us in our native haunts. If Levison gets detention it will be up to us to do the honours, Clive. I shall put on a new necktie and my moost charmin' manners. I hope you will put on a clean collar."

"Fathead!" was Sidney Clive's reply.

"Levison's sister?" said Tom Merry, with some interest. "I don't remember hearing that he had one. Coming to the school?"

"Yes. Levison's gettin' a letter this evenin' to say for certain, I understand," said Cardew. "If the charmin' Miss Doris decides to come we're all goin' to put on our best bibs an' tuckers, an' meet her at the station in great style."

Levison minor, I understand, is goin' to wash his neck for the occasion. Hallo, Racke! Don't trouble to come in!"

Racke of the Shell glanced into the study.

He scowled in reply to Cardew's remark, and went on up the passage. There he paused at the big window, and stood looking out into the quadrangle. Apparently Racke of the Shell had some reason for lingering in the Fourth-Form passage just then.

"Don't go, Thomas," went on Cardew, as Tom Merry was turning away. "Levison's lost the key of his desk, and he won't be happy till he finds it. You can lend us a hand turnin' the study upside down, if you like. I understand that, as a merry scout, you're under an obligation to do a good turn every day. I'll sit on the table and watch you doin' it."

"I'll help you, if you like," said Tom, good-naturedly, and he came into the study.

Clive was searching about the room, Cardew regarding him lazily with his hands in his pockets.

"Tom, you ass!"

"Tom, you clump!"

Manners and Lowther came along the passage with those polite remarks.

"What on earth are you up to?" demanded Lowther.

"Looking for a lost key!" said Tom.

laughing. "Pie in and help instead of growssing."

"Oh, rot! The New House chaps will be waiting."

"Let 'em wait," suggested Cardew.

"It may do them good, and teach them to be patient. It's awfully important to find that key!"

"Oh, if it's important!" said Manners.

"Awfully!" said Cardew. "Levison's got a photograph of his sister Doris in his desk, and he's goin' to show it to us. Can't be done unless the key turns up—see?"

"You silly ass!" said Manners. "Is that important?"

"Awfully, I tell you. Accordin' to young Frank, Miss Doris is the very last word in feminine perfection. Hallo! What's the trouble now?"

There was a sound of footsteps in the passage, and the juniors recognised the Housemaster's step, and turned inquiringly to the door.

CHAPTER 2.

A Startling Discovery!

EREST LEVISON'S brother was clouded as he presented himself in Mr. Railton's study.

Tom Merry had good-naturedly warned him that the School House master was waxy; but, so far as Levison knew, he had no cause to dread an interview with the Housemaster.

The days when Levison of the Fourth had many shady secrets to keep were long past.

The one-time black sheep of St. Jim's was a very different fellow now from what he had been in the past.

Levison's reformation had estranged him from some of the best fellows in the school, while it had made enemies of his

old shady associates—Racke, and Crooke, and Mellish, and the rest.

But Levison was feeling uneasy now. He had a bad old reputation to live down. Any trouble at the present moment would have been especially awkward, as he was expecting a visit from his sister at the school, for the first time.

And Mr. Railton's expression, as he entered, was not reassuring.

The Housemaster's brow was knitted, and his lips were set.

"You sent for me, sir?" said Levison, and there was a touch of sulkiness in his tone.

"Yes, Levison. Look at this! I found it on my table."

The Housemaster pushed a sheet of paper across the table to Levison, who glanced at it in wonder.

On the paper was scrawled, in a backward hand, evidently for the purpose of disguising the writing, the following:

"Sir,—It is my duty to inform you that Ernest Levison, IVth Form, keeps smokes, playing-cards, and sporting papers in his study. I take this step from a sense of duty, having the honour of the school at heart. "WATCHMAN."

Levison stared blankly at the paper. Mr. Railton's eyes were sharply on his face.

"Well, Levison!" said the Housemaster, as the junior looked up at last, with a flush in his cheeks.

Levison's lips curled.

"I suppose, sir, that you do not intend to take any notice of that?" he exclaimed. "You would not believe a cowardly sneak and informer?"

"Quite so, Levison. The boy who placed that anonymous message in my study may have acted from a sense of duty, as he says, but his conduct is certainly that of an informer, and merits contempt. At the same time, Levison, I cannot refuse to take notice of this. I cannot forget that you have been punished several times for such conduct as is here attributed to you, and that on one occasion the Head considered very seriously whether he could allow you to remain in the school. Under those circumstances, I am bound to make an investigation."

"You will do as you think best, sir."

"You assure me, Levison, that the statement of this informer is unfounded?"

"It is a lie, sir!" said Levison.

Mr. Railton coughed.

"I am quite of opinion, Levison, that an informer is more likely to utter falsehood than truth. But, as I said, I am bound to take notice of this. Have you any objection to a search being made in your study?"

"Would it make any difference if I had, sir?" said Levison bitterly.

"That is the point. Please answer my question."

"I have no objection, sir."

"A search of your study, Levison, will clear the matter up, and prove that this statement is false, if it is false. You should welcome it."

"I'm quite ready to take you to my study, sir."

"I'm very good. I will come with you at once."

The Housemaster rose, and the junior followed him from the study. There was a bitter, sarcastic expression on Levison's face.

The handwriting on the informer's missive could not be recognised, but he was quite aware that it could only have proceeded from Racke or one of his friends. It was not the first time that his former associates had attempted to blacken his character.

Mr. Railton rustled into No. 9 Study, followed by Levison. The Terrible Three, and Cardew and Clive, stood to attention, wondering what was going to happen. Mr. Railton seemed surprised to see so many juniors present, but he made no remark on it.

"Levison, kindly turn out your desk, and any box you may have," said Mr. Railton quietly.

"I—I can't open my desk, sir," stammered Levison.

"Indeed—why?"

"I've lost the key."

Mr. Railton's brow set more grimly than ever.

"It is very unfortunate, Levison, that you should have lost the key of your desk at the very moment that you are accused of concealing smokes, playing-cards, and racing papers in your study."

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Cardew involuntarily.

Tom Merry whistled softly.

"I—I can't help it, sir," said Levison.

"The key's lost somewhere; I don't know where."

Mr. Railton's eyes searched the junior's face, as if he would read his very heart. Levison was flushed and dismayed. Even as he spoke, he realised how flimsy his explanation sounded.

"I can only say, Levison, that it is extraordinary that the key should be lost at this particular moment."

"I—I know it, sir; but—but—"

"Do you usually keep the desk locked, Levison?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where do you keep the key?"

"In my pocket."

"Have you ever lost it before?"

"N-no."

"The lining of your pocket torn?"

"The key was in my pocket when I lost it, sir," Levison's face had grown crimson. Every word seemed to strengthen the disbelief in the Housemaster's look, as was not surprising. The story sounded lame enough. "I—I had been to the desk, sir, and my minor came in just when I closed it up. He wanted me to help him out with a Latin exercise, and I laid the key down, and forgot to take it up afterwards. I went out with my minor, and forgot all about it."

"Then the key should still be on the table, Levison?"

"It—it's gone, sir."

"Have your study-mates seen what became of it?"

"No, sir!" said Clive and Cardew together reluctantly.

"May I speak, sir?" asked Tom Merry diffidently.

"Certainly, if you know anything about the matter, Merry."

"We knew that key was lost, sir," said Tom. "Levison said so, and we were all looking for it when you came in."

Levison gave the captain of the Shell a grateful look. It was a point in his favour.

"Indeed! That alters the case to some extent," said Mr. Railton, his brow clearing somewhat. "We will say no more about the key. But the desk must be opened. Have you any objection to forcing it open, Levison? You can see for yourself that the matter cannot be allowed to rest here."

"I don't want to force it," said Levison sullenly. "But I suppose I've no choice in the matter."

"I am afraid I must insist upon it, Levison, as you have been so careless as to lose the key. The desk must be opened."

"Very well, sir."

Levison opened Clive's tool-chest, and took out a cold chisel. The juniors watched him in anxious silence.

They did not believe the accusation against Levison. But they could not

help seeing that the fact that the desk could not be opened was a suspicious circumstance at such a moment. Levison's evident unwillingness to force the desk might be due to his regard for his property, but it might have been quite a different motive.

But there was no help for it now. Levison drove the chisel in under the desk-lid, and forced it up. The lock broke with a loud crack, and Levison threw up the lid and stepped back.

"There, sir!"

Mr. Railton stepped to the desk, watched breathlessly by the juniors.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the Housemaster.

There was a breathless exclamation from the juniors as Mr. Railton lifted two or three packets of cigarettes, a pack of playing-cards, and a folded pink paper from the desk.

He held them up, and Levison's eyes almost started from his head as he looked at them.

"Levison"—Mr. Railton's voice was like iron now—"Levison, what have you to say to this?"

CHAPTER 3.

The Witnesses for the Defence!

TOM MERRY & Co. stood rooted to the floor.

The discovery was utterly unexpected.

Levison had turned quite pale.

He started forward, staring at the articles the Housemaster had taken from the desk. He seemed unable to believe his eyes.

"My word!" murmured Cardew. Clive was looking on open-mouthed, dumb with astonishment.

"Have you anything to say, Levison, before I take you to Dr. Holmes?" asked Mr. Railton sternly.

Levison found his voice.

"I—I—those things are not mine, sir!"

"What?"

"They're not mine," said Levison desperately. "I—I don't know how they came in my desk. I've never seen them before."

"How dare you make such a statement, Levison?" exclaimed Mr. Railton. "You have yourself told me that you keep your desk locked, and carry the key about you."

"I—I—I—"

"I am afraid, Levison, that you have deceived me—deceived me most grossly. I had believed that you had seen the error of your ways, and had resolved to amend your conduct. This discovery—"

"I—I swear—" muttered Levison huskily.

"It is useless to utter falsehoods, Levison!"

Tom Merry made a step forward. There was a blaze in Tom's blue eyes.

"Mr. Railton!" he exclaimed breathlessly.

"Well, Merry?"

"I don't believe those things belong to Levison, sir! I'm sure they don't," exclaimed Tom. "It's a trick—a rotten trick!"

"Merry?"

"You know I wouldn't have a hand in—anything of that kind—I'm sure you know it, sir!" Tom crimsoned. "Well, sir, I know that Levison wouldn't, either. He has been in trouble with the Head about that kind of thing. That's known well enough. But he gave it up; I know he did."

Mr. Railton looked at Tom's flushed, excited face curiously.

"This discovery does not hint that Levison had given it up, Merry!"

"It's a trick, sir!" said Tom. "I'm

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 502.

sure of it. It's been done before. A—rotter—I mean a fellow—that used to pal with Levison planted smokes on him once before, to get him into trouble. We found it out, and proved it, and jolly well ragged him for doing it. All the fellows know it.

"That's so, sir!" chimed in Manners and Lowther together.

Mr. Railton's expression altered. "Are you sure of what you say, Merry?" he exclaimed.

"Quite sure, sir. I—I can't give you the fellow's name, but—but he's a fellow who's friendly with Levison, when Levison was—I mean, when the Head was down on Levison, and had reason to be. That fellow has played tricks like this before—at least, twice, and each time he's been found out, and it's been proved. All the fellows know it, and will tell you the same, sir."

"Do you believe Levison's statement yourself, Merry?"

"Every word, sir."

"At the time when Levison was addicted to the practices for which he was punished, such as smoking and card-playing, you were aware of it?"

"Yes, sir."

"You would be aware if he were guilty of such practices now?"

"Well, things can't be kept dark like that, among the fellows, sir," said Tom. "A chap's ways are generally known."

"So I understand. Can you give me your word, Merry, that to your knowledge, Levison has been guilty of nothing of this kind for a considerable time past?"

"I can, sir," said Tom unhesitatingly. "So can other fellows—fellows who were down on him when he was a smoky rotter—I—I mean before, sir," Tom stammered. "Blake will say the same, and D'Arcy and Herries and Digby and Talbot—all the fellows, sir!"

"And we know it, sir!" burst out Mr. Railton. He was evidently impressed. Levison stood quite silent.

"Yet these things were locked up in Levison's desk, of which only he has the key," said the Housemaster.

"The key's lost," said Levison quietly.

"Or, rather, it isn't lost. I can see now what happened. Some one saw it on my table and used it to open my desk, and put these things in, and then took it away."

Mr. Railton compressed his lips. He had no wish to judge Levison harshly. But the past rose up in evidence against the one-time black sheep.

"That is possible," the Housemaster said. "Do you say, Levison, that there is a boy in the School House so base as to play such a trick?"

Levison smiled bitterly.

"I know there is, sir! So do these fellows."

"It's true, sir," said Tom Merry. "He's mean enough for anything, the fellow I'm thinking of. It's just one of his tricks."

"I will not ask you for his name, Merry, but I shall bear this in mind. Levison, you have to thank your own good conduct during this term for your escape from very severe punishment. I cannot disregard the testimony of your friends. I accept their evidence, and the matter closes here."

"Thank you, sir," said Levison huskily.

Mr. Railton quitted the study. It was possible that a doubt lingered in his mind, but if so he gave Levison the benefit of the doubt.

Levison stood silent for some moments, breathing hard. He realised how narrow an escape he had had; and he realised, too, that it was only his reform, and Tom

Merry & Co.'s belief in it, that had saved him. His voice was husky as he spoke at last.

"It was jolly good of you fellows to speak up for me!" he said. "I—I didn't quite expect that! If you like, I'll give you my word, honour bright, that I never knew those things were in my desk."

"Of course, you didn't," said Tom. He smiled. "If I hadn't been sure of that, old scout, I shouldn't have jawed to Railton as I did. It was Racke, of course, or Crooke."

"The cheery Aubrey!" drawled Cardew. "Spin about and spot in the key cut the merry idea into his head, of course. Two to one it was Racke."

"I think it was Racke," said Levison. "Anyway, it was he or one of his set, and Racke's going to answer for it. If you fellows hadn't spoken up for me, and if Railton hadn't believed you, I should have been taken to the Head to be sacked. My hat!" Levison gritted his teeth. "I'll make Racke pay for that!"

He strode out of the study. Racke of the Shell was in the passage, just disappearing towards the stairs. Levison dashed after him, and caught him by the shoulder.

"Let me go!" yelled Racke furiously. Levison let him go, but at the same moment he struck the cad of the Shell across the face with his open hand.

"Now come on, you cad!" he shouted.

"Hear, hear!" chuckled Monty Lowther. "Go it, Racke! You want a lesson about picking up keys and shoving smokes into desks, and things."

"Whether you did or not, you're going to pay for it," said Levison grimly.

"Keep off, you fool!" yelled Racke. "I tell you— Oh!"

Levison was attacking hotly, and the circle of grinning juniors kept Racke from seceding off, as he would gladly have done. The heir of Messrs. Racke & Hacks, the war-profiteers, was not a fighting man, when he could help it. Levison's knuckles beat a tattoo upon his hard face.

"Hang you!" snarled Racke, fighting at last. "Hang you! I wish you'd been sacked! You cad, I believe you've been crawling out of anything! Hang you!"

"That's an admission," smiled Cardew.

"Crash!" Racke went to the floor, with a yell. "Get up!" shouted Levison.

Racke groaned. He could have got up easily enough, but he did not intend to do so.

"I—I can't!" he gasped.

"Let him crawl away, dear boy," advised Cardew.

"I won't! I—"

"Leave him over for a day or two," suggested Cardew. "He will keep! You don't want a black eye and a thick ear to show your sister to-morrow, do you?"

Levison paused, and dropped his hands.

"All right! Racke, you're going to meet me in the gym on Saturday, and I'll give you the licking of your life. Understand that?"

"Hang you!" gasped Racke.

And the juniors left him, gasping.

CHAPTER 4.

The Stolen Letter!

"FEEL bad?" Crooke smiled, as Racke came into the study—No. 7 in Levison's class—which the two black sheep of the School House shared.

It was more than an hour since the encounter with Levison of the Fourth. It was known all over the School House now, and it had not reflected any glory upon Aubrey Racke.

A good many of the fellows had spoken to him on the subject. Outside Racke's own select circle, the general opinion was that of Tom Merry—that the articles found in Levison's desk had been "planted" on him. The fellows surmised that Racke had done it. Racke's friends did not seem to surmise on the subject. They knew.

And the remarks that Racke received from the School House fellows were, in the language of the celebrated Truthful James, "frequent and painful and free."

It was known, too, that he was to meet Levison in the gym on Saturday, with the gloves on, and quite a number of fellows took the trouble to inform Racke that they hoped he would be soundly licked.

Racke was looking surly and savage as he came into the study. Even his own shady chum, Crooke, was smiling. Crooke was one of those estimable fellows who find something amusing in the misfortunes of their friends.

"Feel bad?" he repeated, as Racke did not answer.

"Oh, shut up!" snarled Racke.

Crooke laughed. "I saw you in the passage with Levison," he said. "He's grown quite a fighting-man since he chucked up smokes and bookies and things. The little scheme doesn't seem to have been successful. Railton found the things all right, didn't he?"

"He has Satan's own luck," growled Racke. "I thought I had him fixed this time. He wriggles out of everything."

"Are you going to meet him in the gym on Saturday?"

"Have you any choice?" snarled the other. "I don't want to be hooded up and down the House as a funk. I dare say I shall lick him, too."

"If you think you can lick him, why not tackle him this evening, and mark him for to-morrow?" asked Crooke, with a grin. "I heard some fellows saying that his sister was going to visit him to-morrow—coming to see the school, and all that."

"I'm not so jolly sure of licking him. Besides, I know a trick worth two of that," Racke's eyes glauced. "I've got to meet him on Saturday, and stand up to a thumping hard fight. Well, I'm going to make the rat pay for it in advance, as I've got to go through with it!"

"More of your merry schemes?" yawned Crooke. "You don't seem to be very successful with them, Aubrey, old man."

"His sister's coming to-morrow," said Racke, unheeding. "I heard some talk in his study. Levison was expecting a letter from her by last post to-day, to say for certain if she was coming. If she's coming, he gets the letter, see? If he doesn't get the letter, he won't expect her."

"Well?"

"Well, there's the letter."

Racke took a letter from his pocket, and thrust it under Levison's table. Gerald Crooke stared at it.

"What's that?" he ejaculated.

"Read it."

Crooke read the letter, his eyebrows going up with astonishment. It was written in a girlish hand.

"Dear Ernie,—I am so glad I shall be able to come to-morrow, Wednesday, afternoon. I can get to Wayland Junction by half-past two; and if I get to Aunt Catherine's at Lexham by six, that will be all right. So I can see you at the school, and go on later to Lexham."

"I have looked out the trains, and find that the local train from Wayland gets

to Rlycombe at three. So if you and Franky can meet me at your station, come at three o'clock.

"I shall be so glad to see you both again, and to see your school. I have always wanted to see your study at St. Jim's."

"Your loving sister,
"DORIS."

Crooke read the letter through, and tossed it upon the table again. Racke regarded him with a grin.

"That's a letter for Levison," said Crooke, puzzled. "Has he had it, and lost it, or what?"

"He hasn't had it, and he's not going to have it," said Racke. "Levison and his dear pals have come down to the gym to see a boxing-match between Tom Merry and Figgins. I've no doubt Levison will look in the rack for a letter when he comes in. He won't find one!"

Crooke started.

"You've taken that out of the letter-rack?" he exclaimed breathlessly.

"Exactly."

"Great Scott! If you were seen taking another chap's letter—"

Racke laughed contemptuously.

"Do you think I should be likely to be seen? Of course I wasn't seen! The post had just come in, and the letters had been shoved into the rack—nearly everybody's out of doors, and I was the first to look at them. There was one for me. I took it—and this, too. Safe as houses!"

"Jolly risky! I call it," said Crooke uneasily. "I wish you hadn't shown it to me!"

"You read it fast enough!" sneered Racke.

He picked up the letter, lighted it with a match, and dropped the charred fragments into the fender.

"That's the end of that," he said coolly.

"Levison won't know that his sister's coming if he doesn't see that letter," Crooke remarked.

"No, I dare say he will wait till to-morrow morning's post, and then he'll decide that she isn't coming, as she hasn't written," grinned Racke.

"I say, that's rather a dirty trick! No joke in keeping a girl hanging about at a railway-station," said Crooke. "She'll expect her brothers there, and they won't turn up. She mayn't even know the way to St. Jim's. She's never been here before. And it's impossible to get a cab these days!"

"I don't suppose she could afford a cab, anyway," sneered Racke. "They're a poverty-stricken lot."

"Can't all make war-profits, even in war-time?" remarked Crooke, with a wink at the ceiling.

Racke scowled. The fact that the Racke family fortunes were founded upon war-profits was a sore point with Aubrey of the Shell; and his dear pals found considerable pleasure in rubbing objection to handling blood-money, as far as that went. But he knew how other fellows looked at it, and he would have been glad to forget the war-profits, if his friends had allowed him.

"You can let the war-profits alone!" he said, between his teeth. "You've been glad enough to borrow some of them sometimes, anyhow. After all, your pate's a swindling financier of the City—not much difference. Your Uncle Lyndon won't speak to him, if he can help it."

"Never mind all that," growled Crooke hastily. He did not want to quarrel with Racke, of whom he was a good deal afraid. "I needn't row about our pater's. I must say, I don't think much of your scheme. Doris Levi-



Incriminating Evidence!
(See Chapter 2.)

son will get here sooner or later—a bit later, that's all. Levison's not likely to go out and miss her, and if he does his minor will be here, I suppose."

"Doris Levison won't get here at all," said Racke coolly. "Levison and his brother won't meet her at the station. But a couple of fellows will happen to be there and see her—"

"Eh? Who will?"

"You and I!" said Racke.

Crooke stared at him.

"What for?"

"Wouldn't you like an afternoon out with a nice girl?" grinned Racke.

"Levison will be pleased when he hears of it—and we love Levison, don't we?"

Crooke laughed.

"But—but—blessed if I want to waste a half-holiday taking a girl about," he said. "It's not in my line at all. I don't believe in wasting either time or money."

"Rats! Dear Doris won't enjoy the afternoon," said Racke, with a sneer.

Crooke made an uneasy movement.

"Look here, Racke, you can leave me out. I'm not going to help you pay out Levison by some rotten trick on a girl. It's not good enough!"

"You mean you're afraid of the consequences!" sneered Racke.

"Well, there'd be a row."

"There'll be a row, anyway, if Levison learns that you helped me plant those smokes in his desk, and write the anonymous letter to Railton," said Racke significantly.

"You wouldn't give me away, you rotter?" said Crooke, breathing hard.

"I only helped you!"

Tap!

Crooke was suddenly silent as the door opened. It was Ralph Reckness Cardew of the Fourth Form who came in.

The two Shell fellows stared at him angrily. They did not want to see Ernest Levison's study-mate and chum.

"Top of the afternoon, dear boys," said Cardew graciously. "You here, Racke? I dropped in to see Crooke."

"You can drop out again," growled Crooke. "I don't want to see you!"

"The absence of pleasure, dear boy, is equal on both sides," smiled Cardew. "I only want to ask you whether you'd rather have it to-day or wait till Saturday, and make a regular day of it, along with Racke."

"What are you driving at?" exclaimed Crooke irritably.

"I'll explain with pleasure," said Cardew urbanely. "A dirty trick was played on Levison this afternoon. Levison has called Racke to account for it. There's goin' to be a big push on Saturday, an' terrific fightin'. Racke is yearnin' for the combat. Look at the light of battle gleamin' in his eye!"

"Oh, shut up!" said Racke savagely.

"Levison thinks Racke was the good angel who played that charmin' trick," resumed Cardew, unmoved. "I agree with him; but I think you had a hand in it, Crooke, and most likely Mellish of the Fourth, as you three rascals always hang together. To make sure of gettin' at the right party, I've made a suggestion, which is approved by my study. You're goin' to have a thrashin' all round!"

"What's at?"

"Clive has gone to see Mellish, to invite him to the merry meetin' in the gym on Saturday. I've come to invite you!"

"You silly ass!" shouted Crooke.

"I'm not going to fight you!"

Cardew nodded.

"Just the answer Clive is expectin' to get from Mellish," he said. "In order to warm up Mellish's blood to fightin' heat, he's goin' to pull his nose—like this!"

With a sudden movement, Cardew seized Crooke's somewhat prominent nose between finger and thumb, and tweaked it.

Crooke jumped up, with a muffled yell.

"Gurrhhh! Led do! Oh! Groogh!"

Cardew let go, and stepped back, smiling.

"You'll see me in the gym on Saturday, dear boy?" he asked. "Otherwise, I shall hunt you up and down the passages every day, pullin' your nose at regular intervals—like that!"

Crooke jumped back just in time. "Hands off, you bound!" he parried. "Right-ho! I'll ask you again this evening, and if you don't say yes, look out for your nose."

And Cardew, with his hands in his pockets, sauntered out of the study, whistling a merry tune.

Crooke clasped his injured nose, crimson with rage. Racker roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!" You're booked for Saturday, Crooke! Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at, you silly fool?"

"Well, you seemed to find it amusing in my case," grinned Racker. "You've got to go through it, old scout! What do you think of my scheme now? Don't you feel inclined to make Levison sit up?"

Crooke gritted his teeth. "I'll come with you to-morrow," he said.

"Done!"

CHAPTER 5.

To Go Or Not To Go!

"THAT'S all very well," grunted Wally of the Third.

"All very well!" snapped Reggie Manners.

"Worry well indeed!" said Frayne. Levison minor laughed. His chums in the Third Form did not seem satisfied; but Frank Levison was apparently in a very cheerful mood.

Evening prep was over for the Third. D'Arcy minor—of the Third—and his friends, were discussing the matter in the Form-room after Mr. Selby had gone.

"All very well!" repeated Wally. "But we're going out to-morrow afternoon, and we want you to come along with us, young Levison."

"It was all fixed up," said Manners minor.

"Can't be helped," said Frank. "My sister doesn't come to St. Jim's every day, you know."

"Your major can look after your sister," suggested Joe Frayne. "I don't suppose she wants to see you. Why should she?"

"Why, you fathead—!" said Frank indignantly.

"I don't see why she should," agreed Wally. "Leave your major to look after her, Frank. It's up to him, as the elder. Elder brothers are supposed to perform all the unpleasant family duties, I know."

"But it isn't an unpleasant duty, you see," exclaimed Frank warmly.

"Oh! Is she a nice girl?" asked Reggie Manners, with some trace of interest.

"Yes, rather! Topping!" said Frank proudly. "You've got sisters at home, too, Reggie."

"They ain't topping," said Reggie, with brotherly frankness. "They pull my ears sometimes."

"Well, I daresay you ask for it," said Manners minor. "One of them hit me with a tennis-racket last vac, just because I tied a tin can to her plait. She said it was cruel to tie it on a dog, so I tied it to her plait instead, and she got waxy."

"I say, s'pose we tie a tin can on Levison's sister's hair?" said Frayne, brightening up at that smart idea.

"That will be fun, if you like! Frank can keep her talking while I tie it on, and—"

"You cheeky ass!" roared Frank, in great wrath. "Let me catch you tying a tin can on my sister's hair!"

"Well, it would be fun, wouldn't it? Fancy her face when the can began to rattle on her back!" chuckled Frayne.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Levison minor did not join in the laugh. He did not seem at all tickled at the idea of a tin can rattling on his sister Doris's back. Doris was his sister, and not Frayne's, or Reggie's, or Wally's; and perhaps that made the difference.

"Girls ain't much fun," said Wally, with the air of an oracle. "Chaps soon get fed up with girls. They're always afraid of getting their clobber spoiled, and they yell if they're hurt the least bit."

"Doris doesn't yell!" said Frank disdainfully.

"Not even if you put a frog on her neck!" asked Manners minor, with interest.

"I put a frog on my sister's neck once, and you could have heard her a mile off."

"I wouldn't play such a rotten trick!" said Frank indignantly. "You're a young beast, Reggie, and if I was your sister I'd let you have the tennis-racket twice a day all the time you're at home, so there!"

"Lucky you ain't my sister, then! You'd get your nose punched if you were!"

"Look here, we're not going to stand Levison minor's sister!" said Wally decidedly. "That's a bit too thick! I know what Frank wants—he wants us all to put on clean collars and our Sunday toppers, in case his sister sees us. I can see that in his eye. Look here, Frank, you'd better come out with us. Reggie's got tickets for a music-hall matinee, and he's got four. You ought to be jolly glad of the chance—in war-time, too."

"Well, so I would," said Frank hesitating. "But—but I—I can't come. Doris will expect to see me. Besides," went on Frank, as if throwing the temptation aside, "I'm jolly well not going to miss her! I'd rather see Doris any day than go to, the Wayland Empire."

"I can see that you're potty about your blessed sister Doris, just as you are about your silly major Ernie!" grunted Wally. "Seems to be a dashed sight too much family affection in your blessed family! What do you see in one another? That's what beats me."

"Oh, rats!" retorted Frank. "Besides, it isn't the Empire we're going to to-morrow," said Reggie Manners mysteriously.

"Eh? That's the only music-hall in Wayland," said Frank—"the only one we're allowed to go to, I mean."

"It's the Friv'ly!" said Reggie loftily.

"That's it!"

"That's out of bounds," said Frank, his face growing very grave.

"That makes it all the more fun to go!" said Reggie, with a chuckle. "The beaks won't know. Of course, we're going to keep it dark. We've got the tickets beforehand, see, and we can just scope of the Shell to get them for me when he was over in Wayland."

"Good wheeze!" agreed Wally.

But Frank Levison's face was very serious.

"Look here, you chaps don't want to go to the Friv'ly," he said. "It's not a nice place."

"How do you know?" demanded Wally. "Have you been there?"

"Of course I haven't, fathead!"

"Then how do you know what it's like?"

"Well, it's out of bounds, for one thing. The Wayland Empire isn't. The Head knows."

"Oh, there's lots of things the Head don't know. No harm in music-halls, that I can see. I don't suppose the Head's been to the Friv'ly," grinned Wally. "Look here, young Levison, you're jolly well not going to preach at us! See?"

"I don't want to," said Frank, with a troubled look. "I know Crooke and Racker go to the Friv on the quiet, sometimes. They like it. Anything they like I couldn't suit us. I've heard it's a beastly place—rotten songs and all that. I wish you wouldn't go."

"Oh, rot!" said Reggie. "How will it hurt us? I dare say the place is quite all right—in fact, I'm sure it is. I know I've spent my ten bob note on four reserved seats."

"Yes; but—"

D'Arcy's minor held up his hand. "Franky, you're a silly ass! Do you think I'd let you fellows go to a place that wasn't quite up to the mark?"

"You don't know what it is like," said Frank.

"Well, you don't, either."

"I know I'm jolly well not going to chuck four half-crown seats away!" exclaimed Manners minor wrathfully. "If you don't want to come, young Levison, you can stay in and be goody-goody on your own."

Frank's face was crimson.

It was humiliating to him to be supposed to be goody-goody and preaching at his chums, but he was feeling very uneasy.

"I can't come, anyway, if my sister comes here to-morrow," he said.

"Oh, you're not sure she's coming?" asked Wally.

"Not unless Ernie gets a letter this evening."

"Well, the post's in long ago!" said Wally. "Go and ask your major, and you'll know for certain. If you can't come to-morrow, we'll take young Hobbs. Mind, not a word to your major about the Friv. Manners major might get to hear of it, and be after Reggie."

"If it's all right, why shouldn't Manners major know that his brother's going there?" demanded Frank.

"Oh, don't jaw! What a fellow you are for jawing!" said Wally. "If you mean that I'd take you to a place that isn't all right, say so at once, and I'll dust up the Form-room with you, you cheeky young cub!"

"And I'll lend a hand!" growled Reggie. "Go and ask your major if your blessed sister's coming, young hopeful, and don't be an ass! And don't say anything about the Friv. I don't want a row with my major, but I know I'm jolly well not going to throw away four half-crown seats!"

"In war-time, too!" said Wally indignantly. "I should jolly well think not! Cut off, young Levison!"

Levison minor left the Form-room and made his way to his brother's study. On his way there he met Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in the Form-room passage. The swell of St. Jim's gave the pair a kind nod and smile, and Frank passed.

"I say, D'Arcy—"

"Yaas, deah boy?" said Arthur Augustus graciously.

"Have you heard of a place in Wayland called the Friv'ly?"

D'Arcy's face became grave.

"What's it like?"

"A vey wotten kind of place, I have heard, Franky. I trust you are not thinkin' of goin' there."

"Have you been?" asked Frank.

"Certainly not!"

"All serene! I wanted to know, you know," said Frank. And he hurried on

before Arthur Augustus D'Arcy could say anything further.

He found Levison, Cardew, and Clive at prep in No. 9 Study. Levison's face was a little clouded.

"Hallo! 'Trot in!" said Cardew, as the fog looked in at the door. "Nearly finished. Shall we all lend a hand with merry old Cassar!"

"It isn't that, this time," said Frank, with a smile. "I've done prop. I only want to ask Ernie a question. Have you heard from Doris, Ernie?"

Levison of the Fourth shook his head.

"No. There wasn't a letter by the last post," Frank.

"Then she isn't coming to-morrow?" asked Frank, his face falling.

"I suppose not. It wasn't fixed, anyway, you know—it was only to be if she had time to spare for it on her way to Aunt Catherine's. There might be a letter in the morning, though," added Levison. "There are a lot of delays in the post now."

"Oh, good!"

Frank returned to the Form-room. His three chums greeted him with rather grim looks. They had taken his observations concerning the Frivility Music Hall as a reflection upon themselves, though Frank had not at all intended that.

Well, is Dora coming—her name's Dora, isn't it?" asked Wally gruffly.

"Doris," said Frank.

"Doris, then. Is she coming?"

"Ernie hasn't had a letter, so I suppose not. There might be a letter in the morning."

"Just like a girl—missing the post!" said Reggie disdainfully.

"Leave it till the morning, then," said Wally.

"If the blessed letter comes, and Levison minor's blessed sister comes after it, we'll take Hobbs. If the letter doesn't come, and Frank's blessed sister doesn't come, either, Frank can come with us—unless he wants to stay in and be superior and good all by himself!" added Wally scornfully.

Frank flushed.

"I'll come, if there isn't a letter in the morning," he said.

"Oh, all right!"

And when the morning came there was no letter, and so it was decided.

Frank was not satisfied in his mind. He did not like the excursion, but he felt it was not the thing to stand out. If his chums went, he could go. It was better to go, though with misgivings, than to appear to be preaching to his chums—at least, it seemed so to the fact. And he did not want to appear ungrateful to the munificent Reggie, who was generously standing the half-crown reserved seats. So it was settled.

CHAPTER 6.

Arthur Augustus Is Not Satisfied!

"WHAT about the river?" said Manners, as the Terrible Three left the Form-room after lessons on Wednesday morning.

"Looks like being a ripping afternoon!"

"I was thinking of the cinema," remarked Monty Lowther.

"Oh, bother the cinema! What's the good of sticking indoors on a fine afternoon? I could get some photographs up the river, too. I've got some new films for my camera."

"You could take your blessed camera to the cinema," suggested Monty Lowther.

"What could I do with a camera at the cinema?" Manners demanded.

"Put it under the seat, and leave it there!"

"Look here, you ass—"

"You gave the casting vote, Tommy!"

said Lowther. "Let it the river and the

camera or the cinema and tea with Mr. Curll?"

"Oh, the river!" said Tom Merry, at once. "Let's keep out of doors so long as there's decent weather, and save the cinema for the winter."

"All serene."

"I was thinking we might take my minor," remarked Manners. "Reggie could steer the boat, and make himself useful, you know."

"Let's take half the Third!" said Lowther.

"If you don't want my minor—" began Manners, rather gruffly.

"My dear chap, your minor's presence would make any party a success," said Lowther blandly. "And now Reggie's given up smoking, we can associate with him without danger of losing our high tone, for which we are justly celebrated

"Oh, don't be a funny ass! Let's go and speak to Reggie—the Third are out."

The Terrible Three accordingly looked for Manners minor of the Third.

Shell fellows did not, as a rule, bother about fags on a half-holiday; but Manners was rather an affectionate major, and he could depend on the good nature of his chums. Reggie had given his major a good deal of trouble at times, and Manners liked to keep an eye on him occasionally.

Reggie was discovered in the quadrangle, talking with D'Arcy minor, Frayne, and Frank Levison.

The fags seemed to be in great spirits, though Frank was a little grave. He was disappointed because his sister was not coming—as he supposed, from the letter having failed to materialise. That the letter had come, and had been purloined and burned by Racke of the Shell, did not occur to either of the Levisons, naturally.

Reggie gave his major a grin. The two brothers had been on very good terms of late, and there was great confidence between them.

"Like to come up the river with us after dinner, Reggie?" asked Manners cheerfully.

"We shall be delighted, dear boy!" said Monty Lowther gravely.

"You can steer," remarked Tom Merry.

"Oh," said Reggie, "I'd like to come—another time! I'm going out with these chaps this afternoon, as it happens."

"Oh!" said Manners. "I forgot about Levison's sister. Your sister's coming, Frank?"

"No. She hasn't written, after all," said Levison minor.

"We're not going out with Levison's sister," grunted Wally. "What a fat-headed idea! We're going to a show at Wayland."

"Oh, all right!" said Manners. "Hope you'll have a good time."

And the Terrible Three walked on.

"I wonder what your major would say if he knew, Reggie?" remarked Frank Levison.

Reggie snorted.

"Rats!"

"Look here, young Levison, if you're going to begin on that again—" began Wally, in great wrath.

"I'm in!" said Frank hastily.

"Well, don't, then!"

Tom Merry & Co. went in to dinner. Possibly Tom and Lowther were not greatly disappointed at the loss of Reggie's company. They liked the fag well enough in a way, especially on Manners' account, and were quite willing to put up with him, but they did not exactly yearn for his society.

After-dinner Wally & Co. sauntered down to the gates in a cheery party. The

matinee at the Frivility did not begin till three o'clock, and they had plenty of time on their hands; but they were anxious to get off before fellows began to inquire where they were going.

To do the fags justice, they did not see any harm in going to the Friv; but it was out of bounds, and the secret had to be carefully kept, as the thoughtless minds of youth there did not seem to be any special reason for keeping within bounds, except that there was a licking for any fellow spotted out of bounds by a master or prefect.

So long as a fellow was careful not to be spotted, there was no harm done. That was the view current on the subject in the Third Form.

Soon afterwards Racke and Crooke came out of the School House, wearing their topers and their best neckties.

Although their feelings were far from friendly towards any member of the Levison family, the two blackguards were not above the desire to make a favourable impression upon Miss Doris when she met her.

Blake & Co. were chatting on the steps, and they glanced at the two Shell fellows as they came by.

Racke and his comrade bestowed a scowl upon them, and walked on, down to the school gates.

"Bai Jove! Wacke doesn't look quite so slovenly as usual!" remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy approvingly. "And Crooke is in his usual gloves. Those two howlid bounds are improvin'!"

"Time they did!" yawned Blake. "I wonder whether it's the Green Man billiard-room this afternoon, or the Friv? Pah!"

"Yaas, I feah those bounds go to the Friv," remarked Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "I wally do not see any attraction in a beastly vulgar entertainment myself. Levison minor was speakin' to me about the Friv yest'her."

"Eh? What does Levison minor know about that den?" said Digby.

"Nothin', I hope."

"Then what was he speaking about it for?" asked Herries.

"Ask me what it was like. I was goin' to give him a warnin' nevah to be seen in such a vulgar place, but he didn't stay to listen to me."

"Queer how fellows never do stay to listen to you, if they can help it," remarked Blake, in a reflective sort of way.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Well, what are we going to do this afternoon?" said Herries. "There's no match on. What about the river? Figgins & Co. are going rowing."

"May as well," said Blake. "It's rather amusing to watch Gussy catching crabs. Let's get off."

"Weally, Blake, you ass—"

Levison of the Fourth came out, with Clive and Cardew. Levison and Clive were in their oldest clothes. They were going to fag on the school allotment.

Ralph Cardew was his usual natty self, however. He was not much given to any work he could get out of.

"You fellows coming on the river?" asked Blake.

"We're diggin'," said Clive. "Levison's sister isn't coming, after all, and we're going to improve the shining hour on the allotment. You can take Cardew if you like—he's too lazy to work."

"I was goin' to watch you," said Cardew.

"Oh, rats!" said Levison. "A pull on the river will do you more good than slacking about. Come and get the spades, Clive."

Levison and Clive went off to the toolshed for their implements. Cardew

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 502.

lingered on the steps. But he made an effort and went after his chums, to get a spade also.

"Well, come on!" said Blake. "What are you moaning about for now, Gussy?"

"I am not mooinin', Blake! I was thinkin'."

"Well, don't! Come on, or we shan't get a boat!"

"I have been thinkin', Blake, that it was wathah odd that young Levison should have been asking me about the Fwiv."

"Bother young Levison, and blow the Fwiv."

"Yaas, but I have been thinkin'. The Fwiv is a beastly vulgah place, and it is cut of bounds. If young Levison intends to go there—"

"What rot! He's not that sort!"

"I trust not. Still, he asked me about it, and he must have had some reason. If he is goin' there, he is not goin' to take my minah. If you chaps will wait for me, I'll speak to Wally, and ask him what he is doin' this afternoon."

"Oh, let your blessed minor rip!"

"Weally, Blake, as Wally's majah, it is my duty to bring him up in the way he should go," said Arthur Augustus severely.

Blake groaned.

"Fwaw don't make ridiculous noises, Blake! Let us go and look for Wally. There's lots of time for the wivah."

"We'll give you five minutes," grunted Blake. "Look sharp!"

The chums of Study No. 6 looked for Wally. As that cheerful youth was more than a mile away by that time, they naturally did not find him. Hobbs and Piggett and Jameson of the Third were questioned, without result.

"They've gone out, I believe," Jameson volunteered. "They were awfully secret about what they were going to do this afternoon, the four of them. Going to rob an orchard, very likely."

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Well, they didn't tell me where they were going," grunted Jameson.

"Sneaked off directly after dinner without saying a word—Wally and Frayne and Reggie Manners and Levison minor. They can go and eat coke, for all I care!" And Jameson walked away whistling.

"Come on, Gussy!" said Blake. "They've gone out, you see."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Oh, come on!"

Blake fairly dragged his aristocratic chum down to the landing-raft. Arthur Augustus was looking thoughtful and worried. He had a very great idea of a major's duties towards his minor.

The Terrible Three were on the raft, taking their boat out. Arthur Augustus hailed them.

"Have you seen my minah, you fellows?"

"Not since dinner," said Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove! Nobody seems to know where he's gone," said Arthur Augustus crossly.

Tom looked at him.

"He's gone to Wayland with his fatty friends," he said. "Manners asked his minor to steer for us, but they were going to some show in Wayland."

"Great Scott!"

"Lend a hand with this boat, fatted!" roared Blake.

"Bothah the boat, Blake! Did they tell you where they were goin', Mannahs?"

"No; only to some show in Wayland," said Manners. "The cinema, I suppose."

"You don't know whether they were goin' to the Fwiv?"

Manners jumped.

"It's out of bounds. My minor wouldn't go there," he said.

"It's all right," grunted Blake. "Levison minor happened to ask Gussy a question about the Fwiv yesterday, and Gussy is going in for his grandfaterly bizney in consequence."

"Wats! Levison minah asked me about the Fwiv, and now they have sneaked off without lettin' their friends know where they are goin'. I am afraid those young duffahs are goin' out lookin' for trouble."

Manners' face had changed.

"Reggie never said where he was goin'!" he muttered. "It's odd that he shouldn't have said, now I think of it."

"Yaas, wathah! I do not feel at all satisfied. Blake, suppose we go and look for those young boundahs, instead of goin' on the wivah? Yawoooh!"

roared Arthur Augustus, as Blake suddenly pitched him into the boat.

"Gwooch! You feahful duffan!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake and Herries and Dig jumped in and pushed off. The boat was pulled out into the river, Arthur Augustus' voice sounding far and wide in indignant remonstrance. But three juniors were pulling up-stream, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's wrathful tones died away in the distance.



CHAPTER 7.

Under Stolen Names.

"HERE'S the trap!" said Rake, with a handsome horse between the shafts, was waiting for the two Shell fellows, in the first turning up the road.

A lad was holding the horse. Rake tossed him a shilling, and gathered up the reins. Crooke sat down comfortably in the cushioned seat. The trap bowed away up the lane.

Aubrey Rake had a good allowance from the paternal war-profits, and he never denied himself any comfort or luxury. Privation in war-time did not suit Rake's ideas at all. He grumbled savagely because he could no longer hire a motor-car for pleasure when he wanted one. But this handsome turn-out was a good substitute, and Rake did not care how much it cost for the afternoon. The war-profits of Messrs. Rake & Hacke were like unto a horn of plenty that was never likely to run dry.

"This is rippin'," remarked Crooke. "Dash it all, Levison ought to be obliged to you for takin' his sister out for the afternoon in a turn-out like this!"

Rake smiled sourly.

"You don't know the game yet," he said.

"Well, what's the game?" asked Crooke, lighting a cigarette, now that they were at a safe distance from St. Jim's.

"When we meet dear Doris, remember that my name's Tom Merry—"

"Wia-a-at?"

"My hat?"

"You see, Levison must have jawed at home about the fellows, and she will know those names," explained Rake.

"If Levison's mentioned us, she would be on her guard at once if she heard our names."

"Yes; that's so. But—"

"Take us for Levison's dear pals, she'll take everythin' we say for merry gospel," grinned Rake. "We've got to spin a yarn about Levison havin' to go away for the afternoon, playin' a match at Greyfriars or somethin', and young Frank goin' with him. Levison's asked us to take care of her for the afternoon, and given us tickets for the Fwiv. See?"

Crooke started.

"You're not going to take her there, Rake?"

"Why not?" sneered Rake.

"Dash it all, it's not a place for a girl!" said Crooke uneasily. "Levison will be as mad as a hatter if he finds out his sister's been taken to that rotten hole."

"That's what I want."

"But—but—"

"What is there to be afraid of?" said Rake contemptuously. "We've both got fights on our hands for Saturday—I with Levison and you with Cardew."

As we're going through it anyway, this won't make it worse."

"Well, that's so. But—"

"Doris Levison won't know what the place is like—till she gets there!" said Rake. "She'll find out then. And she'll go on to her aunt's in Lexham, thinking that Tom Merry and Lowther took her there. We'll let all the fellows know that Levison's sister goes to the Fwiv—"

"Oh!"

"It's a beastly, vulgar den—a bit thick, even for us! Red-nosed, boozey comedians, an' all that kind of stuff!"

grinned, Rake. "Levison will feel happy when he learns that his sister's been there, and that all the fellows know it. It will be amusin' to watch her face—"

"what?"

Crooke shifted uneasily in his seat.

"I—I don't half like the idea," he muttered. "I'm not specially fond of my sisters, but if a fellow took one of them to the Fwiv I'd smash him!"

"Well, Doris isn't your sister—she Levison's. I'm going to stand up to the cork on Saturday, and I don't suppose I shall lick him. But when this gets out about the school I fancy Levison will feel worse than I do." Rake chuckled.

"And it may never come out that it wasn't Tom Merry who took her there, and then there'll be a row between those two—don't?"

"Oh, rats! What's the good of grouching? You're going to get a jolly afternoon for nothing."

Crooke was silent. He threw away his cigarette. His feelings were bitter and revengeful towards Levison of the Fourth, but he would never have dreamed, on his own account, of playing a miserable trick like this, and insulting a girl whom he had never even seen. But there was no doubt that Rake had laid his plans cunningly. What he intended would cause Levison more pain and humiliation than any other scheme he could have devised. And Aubrey Rake had about as much conscience as his worthy partner, the war-profitier.

The trap bowed along through the sunny lanes, and arrived in Wayland in good time.

Leaving the vehicle outside the station, Rake and Crooke entered, and made their way to the arrival platform.

Racke, in the former days of his association with Levison, had seen the photograph of Levison's sister, and he was sure of recognising her. If there was any doubt he had only to watch for the young girl making her way to the platform for the local train to Rylcombe. The train came in at half past two, and the two Shell fellows watched the passengers alight at the junction.

Racke caught his companion suddenly by the arm.

"There she is!"

Gerald Cooke looked with interest at the girl who had alighted from the train.

It was evidently Levison's sister—the likeness to her brother could not be mistaken, though, as Crooke remarked, Doris was a good deal better-looking. She was more like Frank than the elder brother.

It was a kind, sweet face that Crooke was staring at, with rounded, dimpled cheeks, and grave, dark eyes.

"More like Frank than like his major," said Crooke. "Look here, Racke, I—I don't half like your rotten scheme. It's too beastly. You can see that she's a jolly nice girl—"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Racke savagely. "Come on! We've got to introduce ourselves."

"But, I say—"

"Shut up, you fool, and come on!"

Crooke yielded, with inward misgivings, and followed his companion across the platform. Doris Levison had inquired of a porter for the local platform, and was moving towards the bridge over the line when the two juniors intercepted her, raising their hats politely.

"Miss Levison?" asked Racke.

The girl stopped, and looked at him inquiringly.

"That is my name." Her voice was low and clear. She could guess that the two juniors belonged to her brother's school.

"I thought so. Ernie has shown me your photograph, you know," said Racke smoothly. "Ernie told us the time your train would be in, and asked us to be here to meet you."

"Ernest was going to meet me at Rylcombe, with Frank," said Miss Levison.

"Yes, but they're both away for the afternoon, as it happens," explained Racke. "Your letter didn't come till this morning, and it was too late to write. I daresay you know my name—Levison must have mentioned Tom Merry to you some time or another."

"Yes, indeed," said Doris, looking at him with new interest.

"This is Monty Lowther—you may have heard of him—"

"Yes, from Ernest," said Miss Levison. Crooke nodded and grinned. He was fairly committed to the imposture now.

The girl was looking a little dismayed. She never thought for a moment of dining Racke, statements. From the fact that he recognised her, and that he knew when her train was coming in, it looked as if he was a friend of Levison's, to whom Ernest had explained the matter.

"Then—then I shall not see Ernest!" she said. "Or—Frank!"

"No, it's a shame," said Racke sympathetically. "The fact is, Lowther and I ought to have played in the match at Greyfriars to-day, but we got crooked, and it was decided to play Levison and young Frank instead. They've gone over to Greyfriars with the team."

"Oh!"

"They really hadn't any choice in the matter, you know. As members of the team, they were called upon to go, whatever they had to give up."

"Yes, yes; I understand," said Doris,

though she looked disappointed. The girl did not know enough of St. Jim's to know how very unlikely it was that a fag would be played in the school junior eleven.

"So, as we couldn't play in the match, Levison asked us to meet you here, and save you the journey on to Rylcombe," explained Racke glibly. "We were very glad to come, of course."

"Thank you very much," said Doris gratefully. "It will be useless to go on to the school now. I had better find an earlier train for Lexham."

"Oh, no! No need for that!" said Racke hastily. "Your aunt at Lexham won't be expecting you so early, you know. Levison had taken tickets for three at a show in the town here, for you and him and Frank. He's handed me the tickets. He wants you to go just the same. I've got a trap outside to drive to the place. It's an awfully good show—"

"Levison will be disappointed if you lose your afternoon's outing," went on Racke, smoothly. "He was rather cut up at having to clear off. I hope you'll allow us to carry out his wishes, Miss Levison."

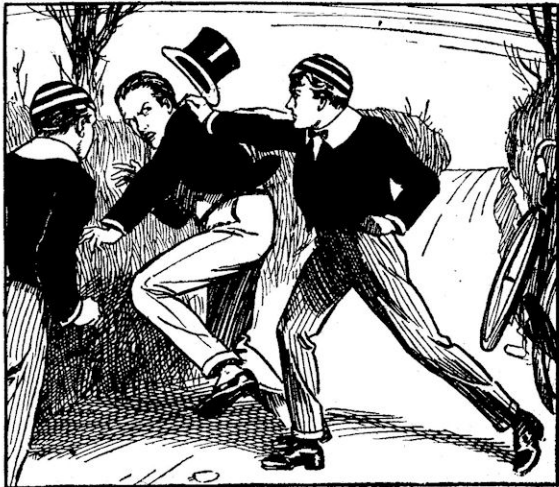
"Yes; but—but—"

"It isn't really as if we were strangers, you know," smiled Racke. "My old pal Ernie has told me a lot about you, and you've heard of me, too."

"Yes, yes. Ernie has often spoken of you," said Doris, ashamed of the vague distrust with which Racke's face inspired her, and driving it resolutely from her mind. "It is very kind of you to take so much trouble on my account."

"It's a pleasure, Miss Doris," said Crooke. "Besides, we'd do anything for old Levison—we're such chums. You wouldn't guess how popular your brother is with all the fellows."

Crooke was rewarded for that remark



Racke Forced to Fight.
(See Chapter 10.)

a little goody-goody, perhaps, but you won't mind that."

Crooke suppressed a chuckle.

Doris Levison hesitated.

She was disappointed at not seeing her brothers, and at missing the intended visit to their school.

It was true that her aunt at Lexham was not expecting her to arrive before the six train from Wayland.

But she did not quite like the idea of going to the place of entertainment with two boys she had never seen before, even though they were friends of Ernest's. Somehow Racke, with all his bland smoothness, had not made a good impression upon the girl.

Doris had heard a great deal from her brother about Tom Merry. She had liked Tom, from Levison's account of him, without ever seeing him. When she heard the name from Racke, she would have expected to find him a cheery, frank-looking fellow, friendly in a kind, boyish way. Racke's hard face and thin, cynical lips did not accord at all with her mental picture of Tom Merry.

with a bright smile from Miss Doris. It was evident that praise of her brother sounded pleasantly in her ears.

"You'll come?" urged Racke. "Levison's booked five-bob seats, and if we don't use them they'll be wasted. It's really an entertaining show—for a charity, you know. You'll get your train for Lexham easily enough afterwards."

For a moment the girl hesitated. But she felt that it would be ungracious to refuse when Ernest's friends had taken so much trouble. Racke had already taken her bag from her hand.

Gerald Crooke looked with interest at last. "I shall be very pleased, of course!"

And the two Shell fellows piloted Miss Levison from the station in triumph. Racke assisted her into the trap, and Crooke followed. Aubrey Racke gathered up the reins.

The trap rattled away from the station-entrance. Racke drove down the High Street and turned into River Street, and

headed for the dingy thoroughfare where the equally dingy Friv. was situated.

As he turned into the street he slackened speed suddenly with a startled exclamation. He had caught sight of four fags of St. Jim's on the pavement, snattering towards the music-hall. To his utter amazement he recognised Levison minor and his chums of the Third.

What Levison minor was doing there was a mystery. But Racke understood that there was no time to be lost. Miss Doris was speaking with Crooke, and had not seen the party on the pavement, neither had the fags taken any note of the vehicle rattling up behind them.

The trap swerved, and dashed into a side street just in time.

Crooke stared at his comrade.

"What's the game?" he ejaculated.

"That's the wrong way, Ra—! I—I—Tom!"

"All serene!" said Racke quietly. "We're going round the other way!"

Crooke looked surprised, but he asked no further questions; he understood that Racke had some motive for his sudden action. The trap bowled on through the side streets to give Frank Levison and his companions plenty of time to get clear before Racke arrived at the Friv with Miss Doris.

CHAPTER 3.

A Startling Meeting!

"WELL, Manners?"

"Tom Merry and Monty Lowther made that remark together."

Manners had let go the cliff, and was standing on the raft, with a corrugated iron.

"Corning?" asked Tom, as his chum did not speak.

Blak & Co. were far out on the river now, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's voice had died away.

"Hold on, Tom!" said Manners.

"What's the row?"

"You heard what D'Arcy said."

"I see—oh, nothing in it, I expect."

"I don't know," said Manners.

"Reggie seems to me to have been rather mysterious about where he was going this afternoon. You fellows know what the Friv is like; I don't suppose those fags do. It's a rotten low hole, with a beastly, vulgar show, not fit for any kid to see. The Head would be frightfully waxy at a St. Jim's chap going there."

"No decent chap would go there," said Monty Lowther drily. "The pictures in their advertisements on the hoardings show what kind of a show it is."

"I don't suppose the fags know anything about that. They'd think it was rather a lark to go to a place out of bounds, not knowing they'd be getting among a crowd of booby, foul-mouthed cads!" said Manners.

"If Reggie's going there, I'm certain he doesn't know what the place is like. But he'd get flogged if he was spotted there, as well as getting the reputation of being a horrid little beast. I don't want that."

Monty Lowther groaned dismally.

"I suppose that means that you want us to spend the afternoon looking after Reggie?" he said.

"No, I don't! You fellows get off, and I'll bike over to Wayland on my own," said Manners.

"Bow-wow! We'll stick to you, and swallow your blessed minor, too!"

"I don't want—"

"Reggie!" said Tom. "We'll come, if you go. Let's get our bikes out, and we'll carry out Monty's idea of the cinema, after all."

"Well, that's a good idea," agreed Lowther.

"All right, that's a good idea," agreed Lowther.

"Well, that's a good idea," agreed Lowther.

"Well, that's a good idea," agreed Lowther.

"Well, that's a good idea," agreed Lowther.

"Well, that's a good idea," agreed Lowther.

"Well, if you choose to come!" said Manners.

Between his anxiety for his minor and his disinclination to burden his chums with his young brother, he was feeling uncomfortable.

Tom and Lowther settled the matter by pulling the skiff back on the raft.

"Hallo! Want a boat?" called out Tom, as Talbot of the Shell came down with Gore and Kangaroo. "Here you are!"

The boat was handed over to Talbot's party, and the Terrible Three walked back to the school.

Manners hurried in with his camera, and his chums wheeled three bicycles down to the gates, where Manners rejoined them.

The chums of the Shell pedalled away cheerfully for Wayland. Manners was looking rather thoughtful.

He was sure that Reggie, if he had gone to the shady place of entertainment in Wayland, did not know the character of the place—almost sure, at least.

But it was possible that Reggie was kicking over the traces again, as he had done before, and Manners was a little worried. Reggie had once fallen under the influence of Racke and Crooke and Scrope, and there had been trouble. And it was no light matter to visit the Friv. Nobody in Wayland who had a reputation to maintain would have ventured to be seen in the place; and for St. Jim's fellows it was severely taboo.

The three juniors arrived in Wayland, and rode round to the back street in which the Frivality was situated. Men with booby faces and precocious postures with pimply complexions were making their way thither. The three juniors left their bicycles in an entry, and walked to the building. They were in plenty of time for the after-noon performance. Only the earliest comers were going in as yet.

"Blessed if I like hanging about here among this crowd!" muttered Lowther, as a red-faced man, exhaling a strong aroma of tobacco and spirits, brushed against him, and muttered a curse. The junior drew away in disgust.

"Need only wait till three," said Tom.

"If the young bounders are coming here, they'll be here by the time it starts."

"You needn't wait—" began Manners.

"Bow-wow!"

The Terrible Three waited, keeping in a doorway near the main entrance of the music-hall, and watching the crowd that went in.

Manners gave a sudden start.

"Look there, he muttered.

Four choovy-looking juniors came along the street, evidently heading for the Friv. They were Wally & Co. of the Third.

They certainly did not look like youths who were bound upon an excursion of a shady character. Their faces were happy and careless, only Levison minor looking rather thoughtful.

"Hallo! Well cleared as he looked at Reggie. The fag's expression was enough to tell him that Reggie was quite innocent of anything more than thoughtless recklessness.

As the fags came abreast of the doorway the Shell fellows stepped out. Wally & Co. came to a halt.

"You folks, cookey!" said D'Arcy minor.

"No!" growled Manners. "And you're not going!"

"We jolly well are!" said Wally emphatically.

"Oh, don't chip in, Harry!" said Manners minor. "It's all right!"

"You didn't tell me where you were going, Reggie!"

Reggie chuckled.

"I knew you'd give me a sermon if I told you we were going out of bounds," he explained. "But it's all right, old scout! Come in with us, and chance it!"

"Reggie," said Manners quietly, "you know I wouldn't interfere with you for nothing. You don't want to go in here, when I tell you it's a beastly low hole, with nasty booby people and nasty conversation going on. The show isn't fit for a decent chap to see."

"You haven't seen it," said Reggie sulkily.

"The place has been threatened with prosecution more than once," said Tom Merry. "Look at that picture outside; that ought to be enough for you!"

Reggie looked the big picture displayed outside the entrance, and coloured. It was a daub full of vulgarities.

"Oh!" he said.

"Cut along to the cinema instead!" said Monty Lowther.

"We've got the seats; they cost ten bob altogether," said Reggie. "Scrope of the Shell got them for me."

"The cad—he knew better!" muttered Manners. "I'll speak to Scrope about that. Now you don't want to go in, Reggie, kid; if you've spent ten bob on the seats, I'll square that next week."

Reggie looked at his comrades.

"I—I fancy Frank was right after all," he said. "If the show's anything like that picture I don't want to see it. What price the cinema?"

"I'll refer, said Levison minor.

"Oh, all right," said Wally.

And Joe Frayne nodded.

Manners looked relieved.

"I say, though, you'll have to stand the cinema, Harry!" said Reggie cautiously. "Look here, I'll sell you these tickets for what I gave for them, and it's a go!"

Manners' minor was evidently a business-like youth.

Manners major fished in his pocket. "I've got five bob," he said. "You chaps lend me half-a-crown each."

And the exchange was made.

Reggie & Co., apparently quite satisfied, marched off, much to the relief of the Terrible Three. They had not expected to find the fags quite so amenable to reason. But as a matter of fact, Wally & Co. had no desire whatever to visit a shady resort, and now that they were convinced on that point, the Friv had no attractions for them.

"All's well that ends well," said Monty Lowther, with a laugh. "You can unrinkle your cheery forehead, Manners."

Manners laughed.

"I was afraid that Reggie might have been getting under Racke's influence again," he confessed. "Racke enjoys a place like this. He finds something attractive in low jokes and vulgar songs, the rotter!"

"Suppose we stay here all the afternoon, in case Racke comes along, and points out to him the error of his merry ways?" suggested Lowther gravely.

"Father!"

Manners did not seem to be in a hurry to depart, however. Perhaps he had a lingering uneasiness that the fags might have been pulling his leg, and would return when he was gone. Tom and Lowther bore with him patiently. They had no minors themselves, but they could bear with a fellow who had.

"May as well get back to the bikes," said Manners, at last.

"Hear, hear!" murmured Lowther.

The three juniors crossed the street, towards the entry where they had left their machines. They wheeled the

bicycles out into the road, just as a trap came clattering round the corner further along. The trap pulled up in front of the music-hall, and the Terrible Three glanced at it carelessly as they lifted their bikes from the pavement into the road. Then Mosley Lowther gave an expressive whistle.

"Racke! By Jove! And Crooke! And— What the merry dickens— Who on earth is that with them?"

And Tom Merry and Manners, looking at the pretty face of the girl in the trap with the two black sheep, exclaimed together in amazement:

"Levison's sister!"

CHAPTER 9.

The Terrible Three to the Rescue.

TOM MERRY stared across the street blankly at the three occupants of the trap.

He was too astounded to move. He had never seen Doris Levison before, but he knew her at once. Only the day before Levison had shown him Doris' photograph; and her likeness to her brothers was plain at a glance.

Tom knew that Levison was not expecting his sister, owing to the failure of her letter to arrive. Yet here she was in Wayland, in company with the two black sheep of the Shell. And—more astonishing still—she was evidently going into the Friv with Racke and Crooke.

"My hat!" murmured Lowther. "That's Levison's sister right enough. What on earth's she doing with those cads? Going to that den, too! Dash it all, I wish we hadn't seen her here!"

"She can't know the kind of place it is," said Manners, shaking his head.

"Hallo, where are you going, Tom?"

"He had let his machine slip on the pavement, and was running across the road. A lad had come out to hold the horse, and Racke was about to alight, to help Doris down.

He started, and a savage glitter came into his eyes as Tom Merry ran up beside the trap. Doris looked down in surprise at Tom's handsome, flushed face. Crooke set his lips hard. Tom Merry's sudden appearance on the scene was utterly disconcerting.

"Miss Levison?" exclaimed Tom, raising his cap. "Excuse me, you are Levison's sister."

"Yes," said Doris, in wonder. "Get away!" shouted Racke, grasping the whip. "Get clear, do you hear, or I'll lay this whip round you! Stand back!"

Tom Merry did not heed him, or even look at him. His eyes were fixed on Doris' startled face.

"Miss Levison, I hope you'll excuse me for interfering," he said quietly. "I'm sure you can't know what kind of place those fellows are taking you into. You ought not to go there."

"His hand clutched the whip hard, but he dared not use it.

"I know you're a stranger here, Miss Levison," Tom Merry went on, still without heeding the furious Racke. "I felt I ought to speak to you. Your brother would be wild if he knew Racke was taking you to a shady hole like this place. Nobody goes there but low rotters, like Racke and Crooke."

"Racke?" repeated Doris, in amazement. "Who is Racke?"

"That fellow!"

"But—but—" Doris stammered. "I don't understand! This is Tom Merry, my brother's friend—"

"What?" yelled Tom.

"What?" roared Manners and Lowther, who had arrived on the scene

now. "Who's Tom Merry? That's Racke!"

"I—I don't understand—"

Racke's face was livid. This unexpected meeting had utterly knocked out his carefully-laid plans. He could not hope to keep up the imposture in the presence of the fellow whose name he had borrowed.

"I—I say, better chuck it, Racke!" muttered Crooke nervously. "It—it was only a joke, Miss Levison. Only a—a joke."

"Miss Levison, that fellow is Racke of the Shell, your brother's enemy!" said Tom, his eyes blazing. "The other fellow is Crooke, as had an egg as he is. My name is Tom Merry. That blackguard has used my name!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Doris.

"It—it was only a joke," stammered Crooke. "I—I never wanted to have a handle for it. I—I tried to stop Racke!"

"Shut up, you cur!" hissed Racke.

"You know I did!" snarled Crooke. "I said it was too thick to take Levison's sister to the Friv. I said it was too rotten! You know I did! I'm not going to have anything to do with it, either!"

And Crooke jumped out of the trap. He was alarmed, and wishing he was well out of the affair.

Doris' fair face had become pale.

But the colour deepened in it again. The altercation had drawn general attention, and a crowd was gathering on the pavement beside the trap. Coarse faces and boozey eyes were peering at Doris as she sat with crimson cheeks. She half rose, and Tom Merry extended a hand to help her from the trap.

Racke's face was livid with rage and chagrin.

He lashed the horse suddenly with the whip, and the animal started forward. The boy who was holding it yelled and jumped out of the way.

"Lash, lash!" shouted Tom Merry furiously.

"Stop!" Racke did not stop.

The horse, frightened and hurt, leaped away almost at a gallop, and the trap went clattering down the street.

Doris sank back into her seat again beside Racke.

The cad of the Shell was utterly reckless. Doris knew him in his true colours now. Even without Crooke's confession, Tom Merry's frank and friendly face would have carried conviction. Racke was beaten. His cowardly scheme for humiliating Levison's sister, and Levison through her, had been utterly defeated by the unexpected interference of Tom Merry. The cad of the Shell, gritting his teeth with rage, lashed cruelly at the horse, and the trap fairly flew down the street.

"Stop!" panted Doris. "Put me down at once!"

Racke gave her a savage look. There was no further use in any pretence at politeness.

"You're coming with me, my dear!" he said, between his teeth. "You can jump out as you like." He laughed with a sneer. "Would you like to go?"

Doris sat still, holding on to keep her seat, as the trap rocked with its speed. To jump out was death. There was an open lane before the rushing vehicle now. Racke had taken the shortest route out of the town. He lashed the galloping horse again as the streets were left behind.

"Where are you taking me?" breathed Doris. "How dare you take me away like this! You lied when you told me that you were Tom Merry! You are not my brother's friend!"

Racke ground his teeth.

"I used to be your brother's friend,"

he said. "I'm his enemy now—and yours, too, and all his family! The sneaking cad threw me over, and I'm going to make him pay for it, see?"

Doris compressed her lips.

"My brother did not ask you to meet me at the station," she said.

"He did not know you were coming," sneered Racke. "He's at St. Jim's, if you want to know—your letter never reached him. I came to meet you—I made him sit up. Do you know where I was taking you? The shadiest hole in all the county—a place that's nearly lost its licence for giving rotten shows, where only boozey wasters go." He grinned as the girl winced. "That was the game, only that meddling hound, Merry, turned up, hang him!"

"You coward!" murmured the girl.

"You coward!"

Racke laughed mockingly.

"Tom Merry's spoiled it all, hang him! Hang him, what was he there at all for? The last fellow I should have expected to see there! Hang him!"

"Will you stop the trap and put me down?" exclaimed Doris. The pace had slackened a little now, but the trap was still going at a good speed.

"No," said Racke coolly; "I won't!"

"If my brother is still at the school, I must go there," exclaimed the girl.

"You must stop!"

Racke drove on.

"Those fellows can go back, and tell Levison you're spending the afternoon with me," he grinned. "It will please dear Ernest. Ha, ha!"

"My brother will punish you for this!" said Dora, her face pale with anger and uneasiness.

"I've booked for a scrap with Levison on Saturday," grinned Racke. "That won't make any difference. You're booked for an afternoon out, my dear—ha, ha! If you're good, I'll put you in the train for Lexham afterwards. How would you like to be left with ten miles to walk to a station?"

"You—you would not—"

"Yes, I would," grinned Racke. "I'd think nothing of landing you in the middle of the moor, and leaving you there."

"You coward!"

"You had better be civil," grinned Racke. "After we've had our drive, I'll take you to the station, if—"

"If what?"

"If you kiss me and ask me nicely," said Racke, with a sneering laugh.

Doris sat silent, her lips compressed. The young ruffian at her side was utterly reckless and unscrupulous, and the repulsion she felt towards him was not unmingled with fear. Aubrey Racke was a new experience for her; for all his expensive clothes, his shining silk topper, his costly gold watch and chain and diamond pin, he was nothing but a hooligan by nature.

Racke grinned at her mockingly, as she did not speak, but shrank as far as possible away from him.

But his expression changed as he cast a glance back along the road.

In a cloud of dust, far behind, three cyclists could be seen. Aubrey Racke gritted his teeth, and lashed the horse savagely. For in the trap, he recognised Tom Merry & Co., in hot pursuit.

CHAPTER 10.

Brought to Book.

THE Terrible Three were riding hard.

The sudden flight of Racke in the trap had taken them by surprise. But they had lost no time.

Leaving Crooke standing in the road, staring, the three juniors had rushed

across the street for their bicycles, and mounted in hot haste.

The trap was still in sight when they came out on the wide country road, and they kept pace with a pedaling lard.

What Racke's intentions might be they did not know, but they knew that it was up to them to run him down, and take Levison's sister out of his hands. Tom Merry's usually sunny face was grim with anger.

Racke had used his name to introduce himself to Doris, and in Tom's mind he had taken the girl to the Friv. Doris, a stranger in the place, and reassured by the false name given, had naturally been unsuspecting. So dastardly a trick was more than enough to rouse Tom's anger. He was very anxious to get to close quarters with Aubrey Racke. And what further trick Racke might yet play he could not guess; but whatever he had in mind, he was going to be stopped.

The three juniors, bending over their handle-bars, made the ground fly under their wheels. Fast as the trap was going, they gained upon it.

Racke had seen them now, and was whipping on the horse pedaling lard.

But the three cyclists held their advantage, and foot by foot they drew nearer to the racing vehicle.

"We're gaining!" grinned Monty Lowther. "What a merry afternoon! Fancy Racke in the character of a jolly kidnapper!"

"The geegees won't stand that pace much longer," said Manners. "He's giving in already."

"Put it on!" said Tom Merry. Tom drew ahead of his chums, putting all his beef into his efforts. Closer and closer he drew to the vehicle ahead. Doris had seen them now, and she was looking back by instinct.

Racke wore with utter recklessness.

More than once the trap had a narrow escape as it dashed past a buzzing motor-car, or swerved round a lumbering market-cart.

Racke did not heed. He had a well-founded apprehension of what would happen to him if the Terrible Three overtook him in that wild race.

His whip was never idle. All the cruelty in his brutal nature was wreaked upon the galloping, straining horse.

He looked back from minute to minute, gritting his teeth.

Tom Merry was only a dozen yards behind now, and a dozen yards behind him came Lowther, with Manners behind. The Terrible Three were strung out in single file.

With a big effort, Tom Merry shot level with the trap at last.

Racke lashed across at him savagely with the whip.

The thong fell on Tom's shoulders as he rode by, but he did not heed. It was only one more item for Racke to pay for when the hour of reckoning came.

The captain of the Shell dashed on, leaving the trap behind, and did not spring down till he was a good fifty yards ahead.

Then he jumped into the road, leaving his machine to spin away to the hedge.

The trap came thundering on. Eye in its path Tom Merry stood, with gleaming eyes.

"Stand aside!" roared Racke, lashing the horse.

Doris' face was white as chalk. Racke did not intend to stop. That was clear. And the horse was thundering down on the junior standing steady in the road.

It seemed inevitable that Tom Merry, unless he jumped back and allowed the trap to pass, would be knocked over by the rushing horse, and crushed to death under the hoofs and the wheels of the trap.

But Tom did not move.

There was only one way of stopping the trap, and he had resolved upon it. He had not come there in order to allow Racke to pass unhindered.

The horse thundered down upon him. Tom's nerves were of steel. At exactly the right moment he sprang at the horse's head, and caught bit and rein.

He was swept off his feet instantly, and carried on by the almost frantic animal.

He lost his hold at that moment, it would have been death—death swift and terrible. Racke's face was deadly white now. For Tom Merry he cared nothing; but for the consequences to himself he cared a great deal.

He ceased to lash the horse.

Tom hung on grimly, dragging down the horse's head, feeling as if his arms were being wrenched from their sockets.

But the wild pace slackened. The horse slowed down, and came to a halt at last, trembling and panting.

Tom stood upon his feet again, smothered with dust, aching and exhausted, but successful.

He held on to the bit.

Racke glared at him from the trap, standing up, and lashing out at him with the whip.

"Let go, you hound! Let go!" he shouted.

Tom's eyes blazed at him, but he did not answer. Manners and Lowther came tearing up, and jumped off their machines, letting them run whither they would.

Lowther was clambering into the trap the next moment.

Racke turned his attention to Lowther, striking at him with the butt of the whip.

But Lowther gripped him, and he had to drop the whip to defend himself.

Manners jumped on the step, and lent a hand. Racke, still struggling, and panting with rage, was dragged out of the trap, and pitched bodily into the grass beside the road.

He lay there, gasping.

The horse was quiet enough now. Tom Merry left him, and came to the side of the trap.

Doris looked at him, unable to speak.

"All serene now, Miss Levison," said Tom.

"I—I was—" stammered Doris. "Oh, I thought you would be killed!"

Tom Merry smiled.

"I knew I could stop him," he said reassuringly.

"You are hurt?"

"Yes, a little bit; it doesn't matter. We thought we'd better come after that cad," said Tom. "You want to go to St. Jim's, as your brother's there."

"Yes, yes. He told me that Ernest had gone to Greyfriars, with Frank, to play in a match there, and had asked him to meet me in Wayland," stammered Doris.

"That said Ernest had given him the tickets for—for that place, and asked him to take me there. I—I did not know—"

Her face was crimson now. "I thought he was Tom Merry; he told me so!"

"I understand," said Tom quietly.

"No harm done, as it happens. We came to that den to look after some fags. That's how we happened to be there. We'll take you to St. Jim's now, Miss Levison."

"Thank you so much!" said Doris gratefully.

Racke staggered to his feet.

Lowther, will you drive Miss Levison to the school? We'll bring your bike along."

"Right-ho!" said Lowther.

"You're not going to take my trap!" yelled Racke.

Tom looked at him.

"We are going to take it," he said coolly.

"Then I'm going in it—"

"You're going to stay here, Racke. I've got something to say to you before you go, and before I go," said Tom quietly.

"I'll tell you—"

"Oh, shut up!"

Monty Lowther, with a cheery smile, climbed into the trap again, and took up the reins. Doris looked uneasily at the juniors in the road. She could guess what was going to happen to Aubrey Racke. Racke certainly did not deserve much consideration from her, but she was troubled.

"Ta-ta, you chaps!" said Monty Lowther. "I'll have you at the school in about an hour, Miss Levison. We've come rather a long way out, owing to Racke giving us such a merry chase. Good-bye, Racke, old scout!"

"I'm going you."

Doris opened her lips to speak, but closed them again. She could not interfere. Manners and Tom Merry raised their caps as the trap drove away, and Doris gave them a tremulous smile.

Lowther, driving in great style, took the nearest turning for St. Jim's. The trap disappeared down the road.

Then Tom Merry turned to Racke of the Shell, who was standing with a sullen look of apprehension on his hard face.

"Are you ready, Racke?" he asked quietly.

"I'm ready to go!" said Racke savagely. "I'll have Lowther's bike, as the rotter has taken my trap away!"

"You won't have any bike," said Tom calmly. "You're going to walk home from here, Racke!"

"You fool!" howled Racke. "It's a good ten miles, cross country."

"That's your look-out! You weren't bound to come here," grinned Manners. "The way of the merry transgressor is hard."

"Well, I'm going, hang you both!" growled Racke.

Tom Merry's grasp, on his shoulder, swung him round, as he would have moved away. Racke's eyes burned at him.

"You're not going yet," said Tom. "I've got the quarks of your whip on my face, Racke. You're going to have a few marks, too, before you go! Step into the field here, will you?"

"No, I won't!" hissed Racke.

"You will!" said Tom grimly.

He took one of Racke's arms, and Manners took the other. The cad of the Shell was marched through a gap in the hedge into the field.

There, Tom Merry threw off his cap and jacket, and pushed back his cuffs. Racke did not move.

"Are you ready?"

"I'm not going to fight you," said Racke sullenly.

"You're going to be licked," said Tom. "You used my name to play a cowardly trick on a girl. You've got to answer for it! You can fight, or you can take a licking without. Put up your hands, or I'll cut a stick from the hedge and fog you!"

"Hear, hear!" grinned Manners.

Racke cast a glance round; but there was no escape for him. Savagely and sullenly he threw off his jacket.

The next ten minutes seemed like a black nightmare to Aubrey Racke. Never, in all his shady career, had the heir of Messrs. Racke & Hacke been so severely handled.

More than once he threw himself into the grass, and was helped to rise by an application of Manners' boot. It was not till he was really at the end of his tether that he was allowed to remain in

the grass. By that time Aubrey Racke's hard face was a study in damages.

"That's enough for you," said Tom Merry, breathing hard, while Racke looked at him from the ground with eyes that glittered like a snake's. "Come on, Manners!"

Manners helped him on with his jacket, and the chums left the spot. They mounted their bicycles, and rode away, Manners wheeling Monty Lowther's machine.

It was some time before Racke picked himself out of the grass, muttering curses, and limped away. He had a long tramp before him, and he was not feeling in good condition for it. Long before he came in sight of St. Jim's, Racke had plenty of reason to repent that he had laid his cunning plans for that afternoon, and to wish that he had let Levison's sister severely alone.

CHAPTER 11.

Tea in Study No. 9.

"DORIS!" ejaculated Levison minor.

Wally & Co. were home from the cinema, and they entered the school gates, as a trap stopped there, with Monty Lowther at the reins, and a charming young lady seated beside him.

Frank ran up breathlessly.

"Doris! So you've come, after all!" Lowther helped Miss Levison down.

"Yes, Frank," Doris smiled. "Ernest is here, isn't he?"

"Yes; he's about somewhere," said Frank. "But how—"

"I'll look for Levison," said Monty Lowther cheerfully. "You can take your sister in, Franky. Taggies, dear boy, please mind that trap till Racke comes in—"

"But—how—" gasped Frank, still amazed.

"In me," said Monty Lowther

solemnly, "you behold a modern edition of the Knight Paladin of old, who rode forth gallantly to the rescue of beauteous damsels in distress."

"Who-a-at?"

"Mounted on my gallant charger—alias my bike—I rode to the rescue, and snatched Miss Doris from the cruel hands of the bold, bad kidnapper—"

"You silly ass!"

"At least, Tom Merry did, and I was in at the death," said Lowther. "I now deliver the rescued damsel into your hands."

Lowther raised his cap to Doris, and walked away to find Levison of the Fourth. Frank piloted his sister across the quadrangle, still in a state of great astonishment. Wally and Prayne and Manners minor capped Miss Doris very respectfully, and turned off. As Wally remarked saptly, girls were all very well, but not quite in their line.

Levison was still at work on the school allotments when Lowther found him. Cardew was sitting on a barrow, resting.

"Hallo! Come to lend a hand?" asked Clive.

"No. I've come for Levison."

"Can't come," said Levison.

"Your sister's arrived."

"What?"

"I had the pleasure of driving her here, explained Lowther. "Frank's taken her in charge. It seems that Miss Levison did write to you, after all, my son, but you didn't get the letter. I suspect that Racke got it, as he had become of it—otherwise, I don't see how he knew the time to meet Miss Doris at the station. But all's well that ends well, and if you want to be nice, you can ask me to tea."

Levison was already speeding away towards the School House.

There was a very merry and very numerous tea-party in Study No. 9.

Tom Merry and Manners arrived in time; and they were there, with Lowther—and Levison, of course, and Frank, and Clive, and Cardew, Arthur, Augustus D'Arcy came along, with Blake and Herries and Digby. Study No. 9 was pretty full; Miss Doris, the guest of honour, presiding at the tea-table with much grace.

Levison had heard the story of the afternoon's adventures, but he said little; he reserved his remarks for after tea, when Doris's reaction should come in. The tea-party was very merry and bright; and afterwards, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy confided to his chums that Miss Doris was "very neatly" as nice as his Cousin Ethel.

Quite a little army of juniors escorted Miss Doris to the station to take the train for Letcham, when her visit was over.

When they came back, Levison looked for Racke.

That estimable youth had not yet come in.

When he did arrive at last, Levison found him—but he did not find him a state to be liked. As soon as he saw Racke, even Levison had to admit that he had had enough for one day.

But the arrangement for Saturday still held good; and on Saturday there were three terrific encounters in the gym, and Racke, Crooke, and Melish went through it; and, needless to say, the victory remained with Study No. 9. And perhaps Racke & Co. wondered whether it would not pay better in the long run, to give up their knavish tricks and learn to play the game.

THE END.

(Don't miss next Wednesday's Great Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's—"THE TRIBULATIONS OF TRIMBLE!" by Martin Clifford.)

The Editor's Chat.

For Next Wednesday: "THE TRIBULATIONS OF TRIMBLE!"

By Martin Clifford.

Baggy in love! Just imagine it! That is the treat in store for you next week; and a very real treat you will find it, I know.

It is with Doris Levison; to whom you have been introduced this week, that the egregious Trimble falls in love—much to the disgust of her brothers.

The tender passion brings out something a bit better than might have been expected in Baggy. He tries to amend some of his ways, though success is not great; and it does look as if he had changed for the better when, though after a very hard struggle with himself, he chooses going to tea with Doris in preference to a heavy feed offered him with the ordinary array of a long bicycle-ride. The presence of the fair Miss Levison also prompts him to an unexpected deed of courage. But he spoils everything by his absurd swank, and is left the Baggy of old. He has seen the gleam, but has soon lost it!

FROM THE GREAT U.S.A.

T. G. B., Jun., writes me from a town in the State of Massachusetts—I hope I have spelled it right, but it was one of the names of places that always bothered me as a boy, like Kamehatchi, which may or may not be right. If I had been a Pilgrim Father—or son—I think I would have called Mass-etc. something else; and, for preference, something shorter! Ohio and Florida and Rhode Island and New York, and quite a lot more of the State names, are easy; but a few of them are twisters, and Louisiana and Illinois are apt to be pitfalls of pronunciation to the boy or girl.

I wonder how many of us could tell off-hand how many States there are, and the names of them all? We shall learn to know them better during the next year, I fancy,

when Virginia and Alabama, New York and Indiana, New Jersey and Mississippi, Carolina—but there are two Carolinas, North and South—and Kentucky, and the rest of them will be playing on the strikes' fields of France and Flanders, and on the other side of the "German Rhine," as we all hope, the same old heroic game that they played when the great battles of Gettysburg and in Wilderness and scores more. Southerners and Northerners alike proved themselves as fine fighting men as the world ever saw; and it is all to the credit of us and our kind-folk over there should come to understand one another better. The old bitterness that they cherished after we had forgotten it—and they had the right, for theirs was the wrong suffered—has passed. Stars and Stripes—Old Glory—has floated side by side with our own brave flag on our proudest buildings, and men of the Great Republic have marched through our streets to the music of ringing British cheers; and henceforth I think we may count the U.S.A. within the brotherhood of the British Empire, for the English, though it might have been, but standing by it for all that is right and fair and worth fighting for!

A LETTER!

At such a time a letter from a British boy who now has his home in the U.S.A. will be

TO THE BOYS AT THE FRONT.

If you are unable to obtain this publication regularly, please tell any newsdealer to get it from

Messageries HACHETTE et Cie.,
111, Rue Reaumur,
PARIS.

read with interest, I am sure. T. G. B., Jun., to whom I referred above—and then used as a kind of text for a short sermon, you may say—writes thus:

"Dear Editor,—six years ago our family left Old England and came to the States. We are now living in the town mentioned above, a few miles from Boston.

"Ever since I first knew enough to appreciate a good story I have read the Gem like my older brother and sister before me. It would be hard to exaggerate my admiration of the old paper, which I introduced to my younger brother, a Canadian friend, and my parents, who all thoroughly enjoyed it. When we came over here a kind uncle of ours offered to send us the Gem, a promise faithfully carried out. But with the war the coming of the issues became irregular, and at length ceased altogether. But when the U.S.A. joined the Allies we got them again. Of course we were very glad; and also, of course, we noticed at once the change in the paper.

"The real point of my writing is to tell you how much we appreciate your efforts to give your readers the best you can under big difficulties. I can understand how much the paper shortage and other things must have hampered you; and I say that the Gem is every bit as good as ever, though it is smaller! The reader who would desert his old friend just because it has fewer pages than you notice what a tragedy it would be for you to know that our family are boosting you hard!

Very sincerely yours, T. G. B., Jun."

Your Editor



THE WINS FROM TASMANIA

Our Great New Serial Story.



NEW READERS START HERE.

PHILIP and PHILIPPA DERWENT—known to their friends as FLIP and FLAP—are bound for school—the girl to Cliff House, the boy to Highcliffe. They have with them Cocky, a cockatoo of remarkable conversational powers. They share a compartment with GADSBY, PONSONBY, VAVASOUR, and MONSON MINOR, of Highcliffe, and Gadsby makes himself very objectionable. He and Flip struggle, Gadsby attempting to hurl Cocky out of the window, and Flip, falling out of the door, is followed by Ponsonby, who surprises his chums by his pluck in taking the leap. The train is slowing down for a junction, and here Flap meets MARJORIE HAZLEBENE and PHYLLIS HOWELL, of Cliff House; and FRANK COURTEY and RUPERT DE COURCY, of Highcliffe, as well as the FAMOUS FIVE, of Greystones, also turn up. With BOB CHERRY as second, and in the presence of the other juniors, Flip thrashes Gadsby after a better fight than Gadsby had been expected to put up.

(Now read on.)

After the Battle.

THEY were parting to the station in three separate bags. Wharton, Nugent, Frank Courtney, and the Caterpillar, made up the first. The Caterpillar found himself in a minority of one in the discussion that took place on the way.

"I don't believe in playing with a chap after you know you can lick him," said Harry Wharton decidedly.

"Some here!" Nugent added.

"An' Franky thinks the same!" said the Caterpillar. "Franky don't say such, you know, but he's a bargar to think! An' a chap who knows him through an' through as I do can read his thoughts in his cloakcase face."

"Don't rot, Rupert! You didn't like it yourself."

"You're wrong, Franky—I did!" answered the Caterpillar, quite sincerely. "I think you chaps must be more really civilised than I am, don'tcherknow? I don't like Gadsby, an' I enjoyed seeing him put through it. My only regret was that it wasn't Pon. I don't think the dear Pon would have kicked, though. That was low—even for Gadsby!"

"But Derwent seems a decent sort, too," Nugent said meditatively.

"Yes," said Courtney.

"If he won't last, Pon's got hold of him, y'know," replied De Courcy, shaking his head.

"Doesn't that rest rather with you fellows?" asked Wharton.

"Not with me," said the Caterpillar. "Franky may be able to pluck Derwent like a brand from the burnin'—I'm not sure. He did it for me, y'know. But it was no go with Pon. An' Derwent—well, I ain't sure that he's so easy-going an' all that as I am. Likes his own way a bit, I fancy. An' thinks Pon a hero—which Pon ain't, by long chalks. Pon jumped out of the train—which is surprising. But I can't help thinkin' Pon must have fallen over Gadsby's foot. I trust I do Pon no injustice."

He did, for Ponsonby had not been tripped up. The chief reason for Pon's act had been a desire to shield before the eyes of Philippa

Derwent. If he had reflected for even a second that desire would not have outweighed the danger. But he had not taken even a second for thought, and the result had been a deed which surprised all who knew Cecil Ponsonby.

Derwent was accompanied from the field of victory by Ponsonby, Bob Cherry, Johnny Bull, and Hurree Singh. But if the three Greystones juniors had known that they were to have Pon's company they might have hurried ahead.

He stayed behind a moment to speak to Gadsby, who was now on his feet, sulky still, but as repentant as one could expect a nut to be.

"You went right over the mark, Gaddy!" said Pon. "Kicking's dead off. But I'll try to put you straight with Derwent."

"I don't care a hang whether you do or not!" snarled Gadsby. "I've no wish to have anything more to do with the fellow!"

"No, I should think you've had enough, Gaddy," grinned Monson.

For indeed Gadsby face looked very much the worse for his dealings with Flip Derwent.

"Not at all!" said Vavasour.

"Then Pon went on, and joined the four ahead.

"I'm sorry about Gaddy, Derwent," he said.

"Gaddy's sorry about himself, I should say," Bull remarked.

"Don't you fellows try to make mischief, by gad!" snapped Pon, turning a dark face up to the outspoken Johnny. "You can't say you have ever known Gaddy to do a thing like that before!"

They were silent. Not one of the three had any faith in Gadsby—or in Pon—as an exponent of fair play. Yet it was true that they had not known the defeated nut resort to kicking in a fight till that day. Gadsby usually threw up the sponge in a hurry.

"Don't sulk about it, Derwent, old sport!" said Pon, laying a hand on the new boy's shoulder.

The hand was not shaken off. But Cocky's cage, which was held by the other hand, swung rather violently.

"Don't—joggle—so—Flip!" shrieked Cocky breathlessly.

"I'm not sulky," said Flip. "If you want it straight, I think Gadsby a rank outsider. But as he's a chum of yours, I—I'll try to make the best of him. I'll shake hands, and I'll never say another word about it. Is that good enough?"

Seeing that Flip was limping painfully from that cowardly kick, it was rather more than good enough. But Pon was limping, too, and only have acquired such an ascendancy over Pon had got that limp in his jump to Flip's rescue.

From the faces of the three Greystones fellows one might have guessed that it struck them as being more—or less, from another point of view—than good enough. The same thought was in the mind of each—that it was a great pity Cecil Ponsonby should so early have acquired such an ascendancy over Derwent, who seemed to them all the right sort.

But they could not say that. It was impossible to give him even a hint of warning.

The third party consisted of Gadsby, Monson, and Vavasour—and Vavasour was only kept by Monson's grip on his arm from going off after Pon.

"You'll have to apologise to the chap, you know, Gaddy," said Monson.

"Oh, absolutely!" chimed in Vavasour, though at heart Vavasour had no rooted objection to kicking—as long as he was not the person kicked.

"Rot!" growled Gadsby, caressing his battered face.

"Pon will expect it, y'know."

"Pon be hanged! What's this dashed new kid to him?"

"Well, you ought to apologise. Kickin' ain't—oh, y'know, there are some things, y'know, by gad!"

"You ain't always so dashed particular!" Gadsby snarled.

And that was true, too. But Monson felt that Gadsby really should ask pardon, and before they reached the station the offender had made up his mind to do it.

But it was not because he had any desire for Derwent's friendship. Rather was it because he hoped to get even more effectually with Flip for the beating he had taken, by helping Pon to make a nut of him, than by helping him into the arms of Courtney and his set.

Also Gadsby knew that the Greystones fellows had chortled over his defeat; and already he could see in his mind's prophetic eye the new arrival Highcliffe standing up to Cherry or Wharton or Bull.

That would be pure joy to Gadsby, for, whoever won, two enemies of his would be hurt. And it would not be hard to bring about. Gadsby was much in error if Pon had not already some scheme of the sort in his mind.

Harry Wharton went straight to Marjorie and Phyllis when he reached the station. Philippa was not with them.

"You can tell his sister he has given Gadsby a good hiding," he said. "His tone was rather grim—for Harry Wharton. Both girls noted that."

"But—was he hurt?" inquired Marjorie, with a little, quick, indrawn breath.

Gadsby: "Oh, rather; he'll be sore for a week," replied Harry, with a grin. It was amusing, after what he had seen, to have anyone asking whether Gadsby was hurt.

"No; Marjorie means Derwent," said Phyllis.

"But why?"

"It's ever so queer, Harry; but his sister was quite all right, and quite sure of him—till—"

"Oh, don't know how to explain! All of a sudden she went white, as if something hurt horribly, and she groaned as if she was hurt, too."

The two girls and the boy looked at each other with wondering eyes. It was Harry who suggested an explanation.

"I never thought there was much in it before, though I've heard of such cases," he said slowly. "The two twins aren't they, and no end fond of one another?"

"Yes; and you know what she said about her other brother and the sister who is his twin—"

"I think I know, Phyllis. I remember a yarn the colonel told me—my uncle, you know. They were men, but it was the same. And in some book I read once—the Corsican Brothers—that was—just the same there. Something did happen. That sweep Gadsby hacked Derwent's shin! It must have hurt, rather; he half thought his leg was broken."

"Oh, I hate Gadsby!" cried gentle Marjorie, with vehemence quite unlike herself.

"I'm not fond of him, and this hasn't made me any fonder," confessed Harry Wharton. "But Derwent's all right—he can walk. He's tough, and no one can box, not sure old Bob could lick him."

"It's absurd to talk as if Bob would ever fight him!" flashed Phyllis.

"My friend!" said Marjorie, with tears in her eyes.

But Harry was not so sure it was absurd. Pon had got hold of Derwent already, and Pon was the enemy as far as being wicked—well, it was too much to expect Harry to think of a fight as that!

Now Flip Derwent came, and in the section of a waiting-room. Flip had his arms around his neck, while the girls stood in front of the door, their backs turned to the twins, for the quite unnecessary purpose of preventing friend or foe from seeing; and their friend nor foe wanted to see; but girls find it hard to understand boys at times!

Flip did not care about being hugged; but he did care about it. And one thing he said showed that he understood more of the strange bond that was between him and Flip than Harry and the girls did.

"The back of my neck," he asked. "And he stooped, and rubbed her right shin as if that, and not his own, had felt Gadsby's foot. 'Never mind; I shall feel it longer than I mean to be glad to get it. I wish to keep it dark. But I think the chap was sorry after he had done it.'"

"Oh, Flip, I wish—I wish—"

"Never mind, old kid! You shall have Gadsby—there."

"Never say die, Phil-ippa!" croaked Cockey.

But it was not Cockey Flip wanted. It was the starting from Flip that she desired. They would not be far apart, of course; but never before had they been away from one another for twenty-four hours.

A train rolled on, and it poured a crowd of boys and girls, with a few masters and mistresses among them.

Among the girls was one to whom Flip Derwent was at once made known. It was Clara Treviva, the close cousin of the two who were already her friends.

"Among the boys were several whom she knew of long ago. There was one fat fellow in a blue-and-white cap at whom everyone poked fun, and another smaller boy exactly like him, except that he looked more discontented. The older of the two smirked at the girls; but Clara Treviva sniffed undisguisedly, and said that it was only that fat hunter, and she was sure no one wanted to talk to him!

And among the masters was a short man, with a disagreeable face, and a manner that was at once pompous and cringing. This was Mr. Mobbs, the master of the Highcliffe Form."

As it chanced, Mr. Mobbs saw the hattered face of Gadsby almost before he was fairly out of the train.

And Mr. Mobbs stood aghast. For Gadsby was one of his pets—not quite so precious as the great Pon, but shining with Pon's reflected lustre, and indisputably highly connected.

"Dear me! Good gracious! Who can have been treating you in this cruel way, Gadsby, my poor boy?" spluttered Mr. Mobbs.

☛Mobby.☛

THAT poor boy, Gadsby, did not seem at all inclined to tell Mr. Mobbs whose hands had beat upon him, but the facial decorations that moved the master of the fourth sympathized.

"It's nothin', sir," he growled. "I don't want to talk about it."

"But some ruffian has been ill-treating you in the most disgraceful manner, Gadsby! I demand to know—"

"It wasn't done at Highcliffe, an' it wasn't done in term-time, an' it wasn't done by any-one you know, an' Gadsby snickered. He "It's nothin', sir," he growled. "I don't want to talk about it."

But, though the nuts of the Highcliffe Fourth were not of the Form-master with deference, there were limits; and Mr. Mobbs' countenance was too valuable to them to be risked lightly.

"The injuries are recent. You are still bleeding," quavered Mr. Mobbs, who hated the sight of blood. But for that he might have been doing heroic deeds over in France or Flanders—or he might not. As

it was, he had got exemption. Nobody thought much about it, for no one who knew Mr. Mobbs looked upon him as even a possible soldier—least of all his pupils. Here, at least, the nuts and the other section of the Form were of one mind.

"Oh, really, sir, you might leave a fellow alone when he doesn't care to talk!" replied Gadsby, in a hurt tone. "I put it up to you, sir, but you said all that you know."

"My dear boy, all that you say makes me only the more certain that you are acting from some misplaced sense of chivalry;" said Mr. Mobbs, with a look of scorn. "Gadsby's actin' out of any sense of chivalry, Franky!" murmured the Caterpillar, in the ear of Courtenay.

"What's that up, you old duffer!" was Courtenay's answer.

The Greyfriars fellows had drawn away. This was a Highcliffe matter. They had been no more than spectators of the fight. And they were not fond of Mr. Mobbs at the best of times.

But all the Highcliffe juniors stood around, and among them Pon and Flip Derwent, side by side. Flip still swung Cockey's cage in one hand.

Mr. Mobbs felt his eagle eyes roam around, but he failed to perceive on any face injuries which he recalled Gadsby's. The only visible mark Flip carried was that made by his antagonist's ring, and now that it had ceased to bleed this showed little. There was faintly on his forehead, on his chin which might have shocked Mr. Mobbs—if it had been on Gadsby's!

"The master scowled as he saw the cockatoe."

"Are you a Highcliffe boy?" he asked sharply.

"Mr. sir? Oh, yes!" replied Flip.

"Then what are you doing with that absurd bird? You cannot for one moment suppose that I should care for it."

"Ain't he got a lovely, lovely face?" cooed Cockey.

Mr. Mobbs flushed. He seemed to suspect Gadsby, and out of it poured a crowd of boys and girls, with a few masters and mistresses among them.

"He's mine, sir. I brought him all the way from Tasmania. And he won't be a nuisance to anyone, I'm sure."

"You mean to say you mean so sure that he would not be?—if which is out of the question—you were allowed to keep him. What is your name?"

"Derwent, sir."

"Ah! Dr. Vosey will no doubt, have something to say to your evident desire to turn Highcliffe into a menagerie!"

"Oh, by gad! What is the dashed place now, with Gaddy an' Pon an' that cheap idiot Vav in it, Franky?" muttered the Caterpillar.

"Shush! I really don't think Mobby loves you like he used to, and you may annoy him," said Courtenay.

"Sincerely how so, by gad! I'm in'pon for my annoyin' Mobby this term—just as an amusement, y'know."

"Ponsonby, I know that I can depend upon you to tell me the truth," said Mr. Mobbs, looking as straight as a slight squint would allow him to look at the aristocratic junior who was the very apple of his eye.

Then Mobby's in a merry minority of one, for there ain't another livin' bein', man, woman, or child, who can trust Pon to do what he says. The Caterpillar's comment Vav wouldn't, an' we all know that Vav is a congenial idiot!"

Pon took the compliment with the coolness of one who feels that it is no more than his rightful due.

"I think that as Gadsby doesn't care to say anything, sir—"

"I don't care," he stated my view that Gadsby is acting from a mistaken sense of chivalry, Ponsonby!"

"Well, sir, you would hardly expect me to be less chivalrous than he is, surely?"

It was quite a diplomatic reply, though the Caterpillar seemed to find it merely amusing. And Mr. Mobbs might have done the inquiry at that point, for he generally gave way to Pon.

But Flip Derwent did not know the extent of Pon's pull with the Form-master; and it was not until Pon's way was clear that he knew what he had done. That was to come, as it comes to most sooner or later.

"Ponsonby won't tell, of course, sir," he said. "I suppose I may as well own up that I did it."

"You, Derwent?—You marked Gadsby in this horrible manner? And you have the audacity to admit it without a blush?"

"I don't really see what I have to blush

for, sir. We fought, and Gadsby got the worst of it—that's all."

"You mean to tell me that you inflicted all these terrible injuries upon Gadsby in the course of a fight? And you are scarcely marked?"

"Oh, stow it, sir," muttered the unfortunate Marjorie, in sheer desperation.

"If anyone is to blame for my not being marked, it's Gadsby, I should think, not me," Flip said, with a note of rebellion in his voice. "At Launceston they had not been wont to mark so much, but here—"

"Still, Gadsby's face was rather a spectacle. Flip could not stop himself from grinning slightly as he looked at it. And, of course, the girls were all staring at him."

"Was the fight fairly conducted?" stormed the master.

"I was there, sir," said Pon deferentially. "What a guarantee! What could ask for more than that? Pon was there, Franky!" said the Caterpillar. And now he spoke loudly enough for all around to hear.

"I require an answer from you, Derwent!"

"It was—on my side, sir, it was Flip's reply. He met Gadsby's eyes as he spoke, and they were full of hatred. But why should he lie to save the coward who had kicked him?"

"I can accept of Ponsonby's assurance, for that, not yours," said Mr. Mobbs. "And as far as Gadsby was concerned, I have no need to ask the question."

"Who ever heard of the merry Gaddy fightin' frair, Franky?" the Caterpillar murmured. "The man ain't an absolute idiot by gad! He knows better than to ask awkward questions of Gadsby. Not that it would matter much, as Gaddy don't exactly occupy the pedestal from which the late lamented General Washington has been deposed to make room for our old Pop."

Was it going to end there? So Flip wondered as Mr. Mobbs turned and stalked away.

Ponsonby went after him. Pon did not want the new fellow to get too deeply into the black books of Mr. Mobbs; and he went to put in a word in season.

Gadsby walked up to his opponent.

"Look here, aristogogue," he said, with an exceeding bad grace.

"That's all right," replied Flip gravely.

"No more to be said, is there?"

"Well, I can't say no more," answered Mobby as you did," crumbled Gadsby.

"I don't see what else there was for me to say."

"Oh, if your conscience is as tender as all that! But never mind—will you shake hands on it?"

"Of course I will!"

And there and then all rancour between them might have been put aside—if Gadsby had been honest. Flip was not malicious, or in an ordinary way, vengeful. He was almost sorry now that he had hammered Gadsby with the whip, and never like the fellow, he was sure; but there was nothing to be gained by hating him!

But Gadsby was not honest. Even as he gripped Flip's hand his mind was full of schemes against him!

☛The Friendly Hunter!

PHILIPPA DERWENT looked round to see what she could do to get out of the line for Courtfield rolled in.

She felt that she was in luck in having run against Marjorie and the other Cliff House girls, and in having made friends with them so speedily.

But now she almost wished that she had still to meet them. For if she had not been with them, Flip would have travelled the rest of the way with her. He would not have left her to travel alone.

As it was, he naturally supposed she did not want him. Or perhaps he was shy, though that had never been a failing of Flip's.

Anyway, it was with Ponsonby, Vavasour, Merton, and Tunstall that he did the rest of the journey.

Merton and Tunstall had come along by the same train as Mr. Mobbs. Flip thought them better specimens than Gadsby, who sought another compartment with Monson. Several of their fellow-passengers had joined Frank Courtenay and the Caterpillar. Flip heard their names mentioned—Smithson, Yates, Benson, the Wilkinsons—and the manner in which they were mentioned led him to him quite unnecessary contemptuous. They looked decent enough, he thought.

The Greyfriars fellows had a heartier welcome for them than he had. He noticed there was no room to spare on the train, and

