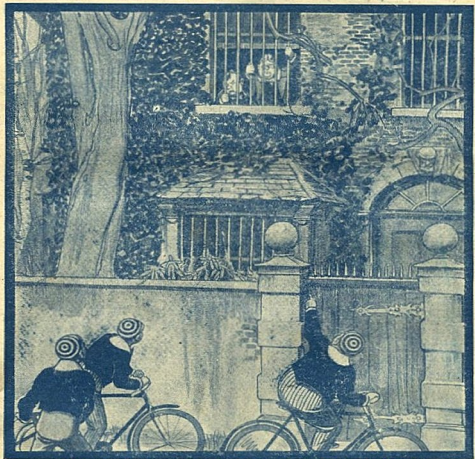




**TWO OF A KIND.**



**NO ESCAPE FOR BAGGY AND BUNTER!**

*(An Amusing Scene in the Magnificent Long Complete School Story contained in this Number.)*

# TWO OF A KIND!

A Magnificent New Long Complete School Tale of the Famous Chums,  
TOM MERRY & CO., at ST. JIM'S.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

## CHAPTER I.

### Paggy Files from Wrath.

"SOMEbody's been at this cupboard!" roared Sidney Clive.

He and Ernest Levison, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, had just come in from a House match in their footer garb, and very muddy. School House had beaten New House that afternoon by three goals to one, and Clive and Levison were happy and hungry.

A wash and a change of clothes were necessary before tea, but they had come along to their study—No. 9 on the Fourth Form passage—for something left behind, and Clive had twiggid the open door of the cupboard.

Behind them, refusing to hurry, immaculately garbed, and looking his laziest, Cardew

stalled in. Ralph Reckness Cardew had not been playing footer. He could play, and play well when he chose. But he seldom chose, and never when conditions were such as they had been to-day. Mud did not appeal to Ralph Reckness, and his attitude towards the game did not appeal to Tom Merry, junior skipper of St. Jim's, who expected anyone who ever wanted a place in the team to be keen all the time.

Cardew had been asked to play that day, in the absence of three or four of the regular side, and had declined, much to Tom's disgust, and the disgust of his own chums—Clive and Levison.

"Looks like it, dear boy," Cardew drawled now. "My eagle eye detects a depleted second shelf."

Clive turned on him wrathfully.

"You silly chump!" he snorted. "You're too jolly slack to play footer, even when you're wanted!"

"Which, to do the good Thomas justice, is seldom," put in Cardew, in the same drawling tone, though, somehow, he always seemed to be able to make those tones audible, even through roaring like unto the roaring of a bull of Basian.

"What can you expect!" said Levison. "Oh, don't argue with the idiot, Levison! He can always twist things round as soon as we start in on that. But if he won't play footer he might at least lock here, and see that no one raids our grub while we're on Little Side."

"Dear Sidney, I am no more a policeman than I am a sandlark!" replied Cardew.

"You're nothing—nothing that's any dashed use, anyway!" snapped Levison.

"Then why blame me?" Ex nihilo nihil fit," said Cardew. "He might as well have said, 'Out of nothing comes nothing!' But he knew that the classical



quotation would be more fitting to his chum.

There came a snort of anger from Clive, and another from Levison.

But both knew that it was of no use to get angry with their whimsical study-mate.

"Baggy or Bunter, Levison!" said Clive.

"Can't say. Just as likely to have been one as the other."

The celebrated eyeglass of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy glistened in at the open door. "Guszy had also been assisting in the victory of his House, and he also was muddy—muddier even than Clive and Levison.

For Guszy had throughout the game been getting the very special attention of the New House right-half—Pratt—and had spent quite a lot of time picking himself up from the ground and gouging mud from his mouth and eyes. Pratt was a stone or so heavier than the slim Guszy, and had developed a habit of exceedingly lusty charging. But the eyeglass was in its place all the same.

"Very do. Very after an afternoon's maul-marking," said Cardew, with a wave of the hand towards the swell of the Fourth. "Recognisable by the monocle, dear boys. These are what is left of Clive and Levison, noble kinsman."

Arthur Augustus ignored Cardew, which, if one had anything particular to say, was quite the best thing to do.

"Did I hear you mention the name of Twimble, Clive?" he asked politely.

"Can't say," replied Clive, who was feeling very snappish. "But I did mention it, and Bunter's, too. Hang the thieving pair of them!"

"I have not seen Bunter since dinner, Clive; but if you really want Twimble I am rather surprised that you have not seen him, for I met him comin' out of this study not five minutes ago."

"Was he wiping his mouth?" asked Levison sarcastically.

"Now that you mention it, Levison, I seem to recall that he was. I wathah fancy so, anyway. What is the match? Has someone been waddin' your cupboard?"

"Oh, no, not at all! Baggy was wiping his ugly mouth because he'd just looked in here for the time by our clock, and our grub's taken to its legs and walked off, I suppose!" snapped Levison. "Come along, Clive! Are you coming, Cardew, you slacker?"

"One moment, Levison, pray!"

Arthur Augustus caught Levison by the sleeve of his blazer as he spoke.

"Well, what is it?"

"I beg that you will not regard what I have just said as in any way evidence against Twimble. I will admit that Twimble is not entirely an honourable or even a strictly honest person; but on—"

"Rats! Leave go, you silly fathead!" But Guszy did not leave go.

"Twimble may have whumped the grub. But, on the other hand—"

"Will you leave go, chump?"

"In one moment, Levison, I promise you. Onlay suffah me to—"

"Oh, if it's suffering you want you can have that all serene! Collar him and bump him, Clive!"

Clive obeyed at once. "Fawwooh!" roared Arthur Augustus, as he smote the floor with bump. He knew that it was all done in quite a friendly spirit, and entirely without malice; but it hurt, nevertheless. "Yeow! Yeow! I shall be reluctantly compelled to administer a fearful thwackin' to—"

"Come back! It is very wude to break away like that while I am addressin' you!"

But Clive and Levison were already at the end of the passage, and their ears were soiled alike to throats and to ex-postulations.

"If you will have the kindness to give me a hand up, Cardew—"

"Can't really, old son. S'm'other day! I'm in a hurry just now."

And Cardew followed Clive and Levison, without, however, the least sign of being in a hurry.

Levison and Clive had made for the quad. Cardew remembered that it was his turn to "circle" next night in his study—No. 2—which he shared with Mellish and Bunter.

He tapped at the door, and looked in without waiting for permission.

Mellish, alone there, gave him an unamiable grin. Only prudence restrained Mellish from being rude. The spy of the Fourth hated Cardew as much as his weak, inoffensive nature would allow of his hating anyone.

"Baggibus?" inquired Cardow.  
 "No here," answered Mellich. "Do you want him?"

"No, not particularly. No; on the whole, I don't think I want him at all, by gad! But you might tell him, with my compliments—Cardew's compliments, you know—that the avengers of blood are on his trail, always like dogs—any thing calculated to make the moment of my fellow-creatures feel happier, y'know, an' that ought to add no end to the joy of Baggibus."

"What's he been doing?" asked Mellich eagerly.

"After his nature, sweet youth, I do not think you will need to set tea for the dear Baggibus to-day."

"Don't you believe it! The fat sweep never has so much but what he can do with more."

Cardow departed. He lounged downstairs and out into the quad, almost deserted now. Everyone had come in from the playing-fields, and tea was the order of the day. But the deprivations of Baggie seemed calculated to make tea in No. 9 a frugal meal.

But the quad was not entirely empty. Clive and Levison were queening it like two hounds on a hot scent. They had just heard from Dick Jolton that he had seen Baggie out there only a minute or two earlier.

For a moment Cardow stood still. Then he saw the obese form of Baggie Trimble steal away from the shelter of a buttress, and make for the gates.  
 "Bada away!" he cried, pointing towards Baggie.  
 "Tally-ho! Yoiho! Yoiho! Yoiho!"

Baggie turned his head, with a puffy look on his pocky face, then ran on harder than ever.

In hot pursuit went Levison and Clive. Cardow followed, at a much slower pace.

At the gates Baggie spied a bicyclist. Someone had left it leaning against the wall just inside.

He collared it at once. He pushed it out of the gates. He mounted lumberingly.

"Oh, really, Trimble, just you leave that jigger alone! That's mine!" bawled a querulous voice of protest from the lodge.

And William George Bunter—when anyone at St. Jim's still supposed to be his cousin, Walter Gilbert—rolled out hurriedly, with Taggles, the porter, behind him.

"Ere, come you back, Master Bunter!" granted Taggles. "Which what I says is this 'ere—a debt is a debt, an' there ain't no use in denyin' of it, you 'ow—"

Clive, dry up, Taggles! Come back, Trimble, growl at 'em! That's my bike!" greeted Bunter.

Levison and Clive dashed past him. They saw that Baggie, flying from their wrath, had gained a distinct advantage by amassing the bike. But they did not give up hope of catching him.

Clive had seen Baggie on a bike before. He might ride without a wheel, but he was so clumsy that a spell within two hundred yards was always likely.

Cardow, following them, halted.  
 "Your bike, Bunter, old bean?" he said.

"I didn't know you had a bike. I had always supposed that the sum total of your possessions was 'at you'd give me an' appetite enough for sixty."

"Oh, don't rot, Cardew! Look here, Taggles—"

"What I says, an' what I stikes to, is this 'ere, Master Bunter. A' bobs you own me an' 'ob, I'm goin' over to 'em, on the reason. My 'ave, or Ephraim Taggles, an' I stands no nonsense from anybody whatsoever!"

"But I haven't got a bob, you silly

idiot! You must wait till my postal-order comes."

Cardew thrust his hand into his trousers-pocket and produced a shilling.  
 "You're an old man, Taggles," he said cheerily, "an' you're pretty sure to be 'yin' in the cold, cold grave, with the daisies a-growin' an' a-blowin' over you, before that postal order turns up. So here's a shilling for you."

Taggles took the shilling, and retreated into his lodge without thanks. He was glad enough to get the cash; but he considered Cardew's allusions to his antiquity, and the probability of his speedy departure from this world, as the very least of his taxes.

He slammed the door to give expression to his feelings.

"I shall regard that as a loan, of course, Cardow," said Bunter loftily. "I could not think of taking money from a fellow of your type as a gift!"

"Better not think about it, old top," Cardow replied. "It's borrowed, but I deludin' yourself, an' you do enough of that, anyway. When did you acquire possession of a bike?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, 'tain't exactly mine," said Bunter cautiously.  
 "Better not say 't." Whose is it? An' do you know it?"  
 "I suppose it's not mine, by any chance."

"Oh, no, Cardew! We're not chummy, and I didn't think you would lend me yours."

"I shouldn't—if I knew it. But we don't always know. Who's the chum you've borrowed it from?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, it's Reilly's."

"Reilly's a chum of yours, is he? I should think he knows as much about that as he does about your borrowin' his bike. Never mind—not my borrowin' his bike, but your borrowin' his. An' don't go claimin' me as a chum, 'cos you may have a speem of vigour with the result that there will be a dead Bunter 'yin' about here—instead of a live one 'yin' about everywhere!"

And Cardew walked off in the direction his Bums had taken.

"Reilly's mad," muttered Billy Bunter, as he rolled across the quad. "Nasty, sarcastic beast!"

## CHAPTER 2.

### The Cross Abandoned.

**B**AGGIE TRIMBLE screwed his fat nose round, and saw Levison and Clive on his track. He put all his strength into his pedalling, and drove the bike through the mud at quite a considerable pace. The perspiration poured down his face, and his body felt as if he were in a Turkish bath; but he ploughed on doggedly.

Both the pursuers were good runners, as he well knew, and they were not the fellows to give up the chase easily.

It can hardly be said that Baggie's conscience was at work. If he possessed a conscience at all—and there were really few signs of that—it was so badly out of tune as to work seldom and weakly.

But he certainly had the sense of guilt which causes a lively foreboding of punishment.  
 It was no mere snack he had taken in No. 9. Levison and Co. had asked visitors to tea—Julian, Kerrioh, Hammond, Reilly, from No. 5—and had dined in an ample spread for seven. Baggie, possibly looking upon himself as a Benjamin, had practically wiped out, by his own unaided efforts, that seventeen portion.

And Ernest Levison was somewhere about the village. Baggie had to expect Baggie to encounter after such a performance at his expense, while Clive and Cardew were not much better.

Again Baggie looked round, though the perspiration which ran into his little, greasy, obscured eyes, told him that he could only see the pair behind as through a veil. But they did not seem to have lost much ground; and if he could not see them very plainly their shouts came clear enough to his ears.

"Stop, you fat cat!" bawled Levison. "We'll get you soon, but in the end it will only be the worse for you if you don't stop now!" shouted Clive.

"Oh dear!" moaned Baggie. "What spiteful chaps they are! Who'd have thought anybody would make such a fuss all about a few mouthfuls of grub! Oh dear, dear, I wish I hadn't eaten so much! How can a fellow be expected to ride a bike with his inside achin' like this?"

But he peddled on harder than ever.  
 "He'll have a side-slip," said Clive hopefully.

"Not likely! Too much mud for that," retorted Levison, biting at it. "It's when there's just a thin coat of mud that a chap gets side-slips."

"Not Baggie. He gets 'em any time. Rides like a bloomed hippopotamus," Clive said.

But the hippopotamus held on, and he did not side-slip, and presently he began to gain.

He looked round once more, and perceived this.

"Yah!" came down the wind to the pursuers.

"I was just—going to suggest—chucking it," panted Levison. "But I'm han' off—I'll chuck it—after that!" Clive did not answer, needing all the wind he had. But he evidently shared his chum's sentiments.

Baggie disappeared round a bend of the road.

"He'll get into—the village—chuck the bike—down somewhere—and scoot into a coop," puffed Levison.

"Don't go sayin' that," said Clive. "They also rounded the bend."

Baggie was not in sight even then, however. He had put on a spurt, and was round the next bend, almost into Ryckomb.

But there were others on the road. The Three-Ton Merry, Manners, and Lowther—still in foxglove attire, came ploughing through the mud from the village.

They jumped off their machines as they met Clive and Levison, and the two Fourth-Formers bawled, not sorry to have an excuse for calling.

"Bog Baggie!" cried Levison.  
 "Couldn't be off it," replied Monty Lowther. "Baggie's not the sort of object that requires a microscope. The naked eye can perceive him, even at some distance."

"We saw and heard him," said Tom Merry.

"He was blowing like a grampus," added Manners. "Worse than you two are, if possible."

"You'd blow if you'd chased that fat bawler all the way to the gates!" said Levison, resentfully.

"We shouldn't chase him," answered Lowther blandly. "I can't imagine us wanting Baggie as hard as all that—can you, Thomas?"

"Not jolly well likely!" said Tom. "What are you after him for?"

"Nid you see him to tea, and was he coy?" inquired Lowther. "Give him up, dear boys, and ask us instead. Our cupboard is distinctly hubblyard, in spite of the better times in the food way that we hear about; and if you'd provided enough for Baggie it will be a treat for us three, presently."

"No. The fat thief asked himself to tea!" snapped Levison.

"And weller what was meant for ourselves and four other chaps," said Clive ruefully.

"Hough luck!" Tom said sympathetically. "What with Baggie and that lot of them a Bunter noising's safe these days! I wonder sometimes what time we can have committed that we should have two such comments inflicted upon us."

"I should chuck it if I were you fellows," said Manners practically. "You'll never catch him now, and you'd best let him sooner or later. I'll give you a lift on my step, if you like, Clive."

"That's the ticket. Come along, Levison!" Tom said heartily.

"Nobody for me to aid!" said Levison pathetically. "And I am a scout, too, and haven't done my good turn for the day! Never mind. After my exertions of the afternoon I've a right to take it easy."

"Tommy and I did nothing, I suppose!" queried Manners.

"I didn't observe either of you doing anything in particular," replied Levison. "But possibly that was due to my own bad luck."

The two Fourth-Formers hopped on to the steps after Tom and Manners had mounted and got fairly started, and the chase of the erring Baggie was definitely abandoned.

They did not meet Cardew on the way. That landed young Tom turned back to the house when they reached No. 9 they found him there.

"You wretched slacker!" said Levison disapprovingly.

"You're the giddy limit, Ralph!" Clive said.

"We have guests comin' to tea, dear boy," said Cardew mildly.

"And ain't you know it!" snipped Levison. "They'll be 'ere in about half a tick, and we can't offer them anything better than they could have got in 'll-'ll-thanks to that scamp Baggie!"

"They gave as good as they sent last week, too!" remarked Clive dispassionately.

"Rotten—that's what I call it!" said Levison.

"I fail to see it, kid top!" Cardew returned, with unabated cheeriness.

"Then you're a fat-headed ass!" growled Clive.

Cardew threw open the door of the cottage, and Levison and Clive entered.

The deprecations of Baggie materialized not at all, as far as the entertainment of their visitors was concerned.

Upon the middle shelf of the cupboard—the shelf which Baggie had so nearly cleared—was a supply of good things all about equal to what had given Baggie such severe internal pains.

"Oh, good!" cried Levison.

"My hat! Who'd have thought it! I take it all back, Ralph!" said Clive.

"And just fancy you carrying all this across from the 'tackshop, yourself! It wasn't you got a giddy pain in the back after it!"

"I haven't. Silvery, dear boy. An' you shouldn't try to be sarcastic. It's not in keeping with the abundantly numerous incoherences of your nature, by god! Franky came in, seekin' his mender an' waler, an' I employed him an' his fellow-men in the 'tackshop. Rem'm'—I crossed to No. 9, an' another in the Third Form-room. Shall one murse the one that treadeth out the corn? Not likely, by gad!"

"That was Cardew all over. He had a damned limited stock of wit, an' he never scratched it. But he couldn't trouble Clive and Levison could really give that to see him 'bout, he

had provided tea for fourteen instead of for seven." Franky and his fellow-rascals meant Wally D'Arcy & Co. of the Third, a brotherhood of which Frank Levison was a prominent member. The best-dressed, numbered seven, very healthy, appetizing, and those appetites were not likely to be stinted by Cardew. Tap!

"Comin' in!" called Levison, and Dick Julian marched into No. 9, with Harry Hammond, Heilly, and Kerruish at his heels. Each carried a chair.

"Pleased to see you," said Cardew politely to the four. "Re'B, is it quite wise to lend Bunter your bike?"

"Sure, an' who's been after lending Bunter a bike? I've not!" returned the boy from Belfast.

"My mistake! No, Bunter's, by god! He seemed to think you said."

"You an' 'ome! If the fat boulder got it now! It's after him I'll be this instant moment!"

"I shouldn't bother, if I were you," said Cardew languidly. "No, I hardly think Bunter's got it now. In fact, I'm pretty sure he hasn't. When I feel you're blagging us, take a good look at the ink on your lip, an' Clive an' Levison here, who are positive fanatics in that way, were takin' exercise after him."

"Was that Heilly's bike?" asked Clive in surprise. "You didn't tell us that."

"Didn't know it would interest you, kid top! Never do know what would interest you. Thee's because of it: the instant mind you possess, I suppose, an' the fact that you're interested in so many things that I ain't bore no stiff."

"Hodad, an' it's all very well for you to take it coolly, Cardew!" fumed Heilly.

"But if 'twas your bike, kid son, Trimble would bring it back or he wouldn't, an' the bike bein' yours, he'll bring it back or he won't, so there's nothin' in that—positively nothin' at all! You're a vigorous sort of fellow, too, an' if the dear Baggies doesn't bring it back you can take it out of both his and Bunter's every day, it whereas it would be a painful an' fatiguing duty to me—and a bore. An' so it was a duty, I probably shouldn't do it at all, by gad! Should I, Silvery dear? Clive says I never do my duty, you fellows."

"Oh, don't rot!" growled Clive, busy in placing the chairs upon the table—a blow in which Cardew showed not the slightest notion of assistance. "I'll admit that you've done more than your duty in the matter of these chairs."

"Re-Rose R!" agreed Levison. "This is mine, and no mistake as most like it is."

"It's the second lot provided for the occasion," remarked Levison.

"Ow, do you mean?" Inquired Hammond.

"Baggie wuffed the first!" explained Clive.

"Oh, that's why you were chasing him, then?" said Kerruish.

"Hodad, an' that's why Levison."

"Hodad, an' that's why the spalpeen took my bike!" exclaimed Heilly.

"I shouldn't be worry about the bike, old chap," said Levison. "Baggie will bring that back all serene. He's too lazy to do it himself."

"Oh, you'll be sure to get it up," said Kerruish, with a grin.

"Faith an' I'll smash him if he does!"

"An' may I be there to see!" said Cardew.

"Take your seats," Levison said, "an' be ready!"

"They'll be here, too. For some time, but when the first argument of appetite had been appeased, talk began."

"Has your guest come to the house yet, Cardew?" asked Julian.

"Come an' gone, thanks be!" replied Cardew. "Unfortunately, she hasn't exactly gone for good. She'll be back any time—to-morrow, or next week, or next year. She's like that."

"Does an' you ain't seem in any hurry to see her back?" said Heilly.

"Your mistake, dear boy. It's her back I greatly prefer to see. She's a nuisance, to speak candidly an' without ill-feelin'. By the way, she ain't really my aunt. She's Durrance's, if you like; but she an' I are only connected by marriage—see? I think I shall turn her over to cousin George. Owin' to circumstances which wouldn't be discussed, he doesn't know her yet; but I'm sure cousin George will eat her much better than I do—he is such a very nice boy! An' he can't get any ideas to tea with her but I'll have a cold, or a tooth-ache, or some other little luxury, an' stay at home. With all your happy smiles' faces around her she will never miss poor miserable me!"

"Sure, how can she be a connection by marriage when she's an old maid?" asked Heilly.

"Cannot others be married—worse luck for them!" returned Cardew.

"But you're not spliced, anyway, an' she's not, an' I ain't see—"

"Eefichten him, Levison, dear boy! The talk is beyond my humble powers of expression, an' I ain't Cardew's tea with her but I'll have a cold, or a tooth-ache, or some other little luxury, an' stay at home. With all your happy smiles' faces around her she will never miss poor miserable me!"

"Looks up an' takes her own maid with her. Pass the others out to gram," replied Cardew. "Leave the key of the shanty with old Pepper—the other's in the house, an' I'll be on to something of Rylboone Lodge. Beans to own quite a lot for the poverty-stricken old power he always makes himself out to be. Let's talk about Pepper. I'm tired of the natural history of ants by marriage."

CHAPTER 3.

BAGGY, THE GOOD SAMARITAN.

W HILE the tea-party in No. 9. Levison was talking about Mr. Erasmus Zeharidge Pepper—though that subject did not really detain them long—Baggie Trimble was honouring that eccentric gentleman with a visit. Baggie and Mr. Pepper were not friends.

But never really had any friends. Mr. Pepper often said that friends were too expensive a luxury for a poor man, and no one at St. Jim's wanted to be friendly with Baggie.

Thus far, moreover, the relations between Baggie and the Rylboone miser had been rather on the hostile side.

But Baggie believed in the maxim of any port in a storm. He did not know that Clive and Levison had abandoned the chase. In his fear, he still seemed to hear their voices behind him. And when he noticed Mr. Pepper's cottage, the front door of which he had the idea of taking refuge there, occurred to him.

He whirled his bike—or, rather, Reilly's bike—to the side of the cottage, and cautiously pushed open the door.

"Who's there?" snarped Mr. Pepper. "It's me, mister," answered Baggie. "The rest of me, mister, transmitted, our particularly clear, for it was hardly to be expected that Mr. Pepper should recognize Baggie's voice.

"The owner of the cottage was not visible. It was some way off being a palatial habitation. There was a view of the sea but it was not in use. The sale came through the roof, and Mr. Pepper was too economical to have popular demand. He lived down below, in a suite of two rooms, one of which served as

kitchen and living-room, the other as a sleeping apartment.

"Who's 'me'?" came his querulous voice from the inner apartment.

"Why, you are, aren't you?" returned Baggie, whose fat brain never worked too quickly. "Mr. Pepper, you know!"

"Oh! that the silly young fool!" muttered Mr. Pepper, who quite audible to Baggie. "I mean, who's 'you'?"

"Why didn't you say so, then? I'm Trimble, from St. Jim's."

"Are you? And what do you want here, Master Trimble?"

Mr. Pepper, though his speech was often made and coarse, was a man of education, and he did not lack brains. Unluckily, his brains were of the sort that run to low cunning. He was always looking out for a chance to add to the accumulated money that was of no real use to him by faking someone in.

Baggy's brains, such as they were—much inferior to Mr. Pepper's, at best—also ran to low cunning. There was nothing to choose between the two in that respect, and almost anyone, without personal interest in the matter, would have watched them trying to do one another down quite untroubled by sympathy for either.

The Fourth-Former breathed hard, looking round the room before he answered.

It was not a comfortable room. It was rather squalid, in fact. Mr. Pepper's notions of house-keeping were quite his own, and cleanliness played no considerable part in them.

But just now it seemed a haven of refuge to the pursued Baggie.

"I just came to give you a friendly look-in, Mr. Pepper," he said, as ingratiatingly as he knew how.

"Better come in here, then. I can't get up, and I ain't sure that I care about trusting you in there alone among my valuables!"

Baggy could not see the valuables. The whole furniture of the living-room would have been dear at a fever, he thought. But he was quite ready to believe all the stories told in Rylcombe about Mr. Pepper's wealth.

He waddled into the inner room.

Mr. Pepper was in bed, propped up by dingy pillows. His gaunt face was even more gaunt than usual, and if that were possible, more dirty. His chin was very bristly, and his long moustache needed cleaning. He wore a red night-cap, which gave the finishing touch to his distinguished appearance.

"Hallo, young sir!" he said. "You needn't be afraid. I've got over the flu. It's a sprained ankle that keeps me here now. And Mrs. Brown, the harrikin that pretends to come in and do for me, ain't been near to-day. We had work-a-days about an extra sixpence as she stood out for, and, I suppose, this is her way of getting even, dar' her!"

A brilliant idea came into the mind of Baggie.

Mr. Pepper was an oddish man, and he looked really ill. He had never shown any signs of gratitude for anything, with Baggie's knowledge; but if it really be said that St. Jim's had ever done anything for which he could be expected to be grateful.

That he would not part with a penny that he could hang on to while alive Baggie was certain. But there was such money as a will, and Mr. Pepper did not appear to have any relations or heirs.

What was to hinder a fellow who played his cards well from inheriting under Mr. Pepper's will? And what was to prevent Baggie Trimble from being that fellow?

It was an unusual thought for a schoolboy; but then, Baggie was no ordinary

schoolboy. He was as full of greed and meanness as anyone hardened by four times his experience of the world could be.

"I'm sorry you're ill, Mr. Pepper!" he said, coming right up to the bedside. "Ugh!" was Mr. Pepper's polite rejoinder. "I ain't really ill. Don't you believe it, young fellow-me-lad! There's a good manly year of the life of Erasmus Eschbacher Pepper to come off the reel yet!"

This speech only confirmed Baggie's notion. It was plain to him that Mr. Pepper had been brooding over the prospect of his early demise. Baggie hoped that he had not made his will yet. But if he had he could surely alter it. And if ever kindness could produce an impression upon his stony heart this was surely the time!



Baggy Trimble stood as if thunder-stricken, for there in front of the fire sat Billy Bunter. "Shush!" murmured Bunter, "No need for him to hear me." (See Chapter 4.)

Baggy resolved to be very kind, indeed, and so end patient.

"I'm sure there are, Mr. Pepper!" he said. "Why, you're only a young man yet, comparatively. It's too bad of Mrs. Brown, though. Look here! Is there anything I can do for you? I've got an hour or so to spare, and I'm always ready to do a kind act if I can."

Mr. Pepper's keen little eyes glared at him from under their shaggy eyebrows.

"What d'ye expect to make out of it?" the village miser asked suspiciously.

"Nothing," replied Baggie, with rather over-acted virtue. "I'll do it for the pleasure of it."

"And not haggle about sixpence, like that old witch?"

"I shouldn't think of taking your money, Mr. Pepper. I hope I'm too high-minded for that!"

Mr. Pepper snorted. It was plain to Baggie that Mr. Pepper did not at all believe in his high-mindedness.

But Baggie showed no resentment.

"I'll make you a bit more comfortable!" he said, taking hold of the bedclothes.

"Just you stop that!" snarled Mr. Pepper. "I don't allow anybody to touch this bed!"

"Money in the mattress!" thought Baggie. "They generally do that sort of thing, three brastly old misers! But I shouldn't think of touching it—not till he'd pegged out, and left it all to me, anyway. I'll make a note of it, though. It's to know where the stuff is in good times."

"What d'ye say?" snarled Mr. Pepper.

"I didn't say anything," answered Baggie meekly. "I was only thinking that if Mrs. Brown hasn't been along to-day you must be hungry."

"I am. That stands to reason, doesn't it? I can get out of bed on one foot, but getting into the next room is a journey to me."

"Can't I get you something?"

"Well, you could, I desay; but I reckon that what you'd be after would be mostly getting something for yourself!"

"That's only fair," said Baggie plaintively. "At least, I don't mean it would be fair to be thinking only of myself. But if I stay to look after you, I shall miss my tea, at St. Jim's, and I really think I ought to have a snack of something to make up for it."

Mr. Pepper grunted. It hurt him even to think of giving anybody anything.

But he had no objection, apart from that, to using Baggie as a far.

"Well, I'm not saying you're wholly in the wrong," he said, after a moment's thought; "and I'm too open-hearted to grudge you bite and sup, I'm sure. There's some sort of broth in a saucepan somewhere out there that you might hot up for me. And there ought to be sixpence to half a loaf about, unless that old witch waddled off with it! But it

was last week's, and she wouldn't eat stale bread!"

The prospects in the matter of tea did not strike Baggy as bright. But his design in thus playing the Good Samaritan went much farther than that sort of thing, and he hoped that he might find something eatable, anyway.

"I shall have to light a fire," he said. "Well, that won't hurt you, will it?" grunted Mr. Pepper. "And you needn't be afraid of soiling your hands, either. They're dirty enough. It's a good thing I ain't too particular about my grub!"

"What am I to have?" inquired Baggy, ignoring the comment to his penny paws. He had often heard about their want of cleanliness that any such remark slid from his back like water from that of a duck.

"Well, there's a tin of corned beef that I opened a week or so ago, before I was took ill," said Mr. Pepper. "There ought to be some of it left, unless Mrs. Brown has made free with it."

Baggy went back to the living-room in a very disgruntled frame of mind. The remainder of a tin of corned beef, opened a week ago, hardly sounded attractive to him.

But a peep into the cupboard caused his fat face to brighten for much less than there besides the tin of corned beef.

That could no longer be considered as food for anyone. The meat had gone quite mouldy in the tin.

But there were other tins. Lots of them!

Not only corned beef—Baggy cared little for that—but salmon, sardines, tongue, pickhards, herrings in tomatoe, beans and bacon, coffee, cocoa—over so many kinds, and several of each!

Baggy's mouth fairly watered.

CHAPTER 4.

Bunter Looks In.

"ARE you getting on with that fire?" snarled Mr. Pepper.

"Ye-m!" faltered Baggy.

But he did not move from the cupboard. He did not know how to tear himself away.

"It doesn't sound like it!" came the snarling voice from the inner room.

Baggy reluctantly left the cupboard, and went to the fire.

He found wood, paper, and coal, and soon had a blaze. Then he put the saucepan to which Mr. Pepper had refused. Its contents did not look appetizing to him; in fact, it made him wrinkle up his pogy nose. But he had no intention of sharing the broth, even if he asked to do so. And his being asked was unlikely.

He went out to the pump, and got some water in a kettle. He meant to have something to drink himself; if he could find no tea he must open a tin of cocoa, though cocoa was not much good without plenty of milk.

Baggy knew something about cooking, and he added a heaping spoonful of the broth to Mr. Pepper's stuff, smelted quite savoury. The bread which accompanied it was hard, but as it would doubtless be soaked, that mattered little to Mr. Pepper, and not at all to Baggy.

"Well, is it all right, Mr. Pepper?" he asked as the miser tasted the stuff.

"Not so bad, considering," admitted Mr. Pepper grudgingly.

"Well, the corned beef ain't," said Baggy boldly.

"What's the matter with it?" snarped Mr. all roundly.

"There's a awful waste! If I sha'n't be ruined ever long!"

"There's plenty more in the cupboard, you know, Mr. Pepper."

"Plenty more what? What d'ye mean?"

"Tinned stuff, you know. Lots of it!"

"Oh, that! That ain't for eating!"

"Non-nun-not fu-ful-for eating!" stammered Baggy.

"What's it for, then?"

"For sale, of course. What d'ye think!"

"I didn't know you sold—"

"You don't know everything, not by long odds, sharp as you think yourself! I sell anything—anything that will bring in a bit of profit, and keep the wolf from the door. Not that there'll be any profit worth speaking of in this."

"How's that?" asked Baggy.

"Bankrupt stock. Lastways, 'th' stock of a grocer what went bankrupt after he'd handed over to me something towards the money he'd had on loan."

Baggy was not obtuse enough to believe that. He knew little about proceedings in bankruptcy; but he had a vague notion that the grocer and Mr. Pepper had both been crooked in this transaction. Plainly Mr. Pepper had managed to steal a march on the grocer's other creditors.

But Baggy did not want to offend Mr. Pepper, so he made no remark about that.

"I sold some of it to Miss Archbold, her that's got Rykcombe Lodge. She's a relation to one of your young gentlemen—Master Cardew. But she wouldn't take the common stuff, such as salmon and corned beef and coffee. Only paste and foie gras and caviare and the best brands of tongue and sardines, and so on."

Mr. Pepper was supping his broth noisily as he talked. He appeared to regard with complete indifference the question of Baggy's tea.

But Baggy did not feel quite so indifferent.

"Look here, Mr. Pepper," he said, "you might sell some of that stuff to me."

"Where's your cash?" asked Mr. Pepper.

He might be very like the pizarra, but Baggy was no Simple Simon.

"I haven't got it here," said Baggy. "I happened to come out without any. But you shall have it to-morrow. I'll take half a dozen tins—"

"You may take half a dozen tins, or as many as you like, when you hand over the cash, Master Trimble—not a store!"

"What I should think you could trust me, Mr. Pepper!" said Baggy.

"So I do. There ain't another young gentleman I know as I'd give the run of my place to like this. But cash is cash, and credit's mere tomfoolishness."

"Well, I suppose you don't mind me pushing one tin for my tea," said Baggy boldly.

"I'll think it over," replied Mr. Pepper drily. "Talking about that Miss Archbold, there's a rum sort for you, if you like! Chucks her money about some ways, and is as tight as tight other some. Comes here and says she's settled down for the summer, and two days afterwards she's walking off, and slams up the house. Hands the keys over to me, and laughs in my face when I tell her as I shall have to make a charge for keeping of it. But she'd best to make no error about that. Erasmus Bechariah Pepper does, neither for nothin', and prances little green eyes, I can tell you!"

"Quite right, too, Mr. Pepper," said

Baggy. "Look here. It's go and tidy up your living-room a bit for you."

Baggy felt no interest at all in Miss Archbold, the eccentric lady relative of Rumph Rackness Cardew; but he felt a good deal of interest in that well-stocked cupboard.

"You can do that if you like," Mr. Pepper said. "I sha'n't charge you anything for the amusement you get out of it, neither. But you keep that 'burned-up nose of yours away from my cupboard!"

"I hope my principles are too high to allow me—"

"I hope so!" struck in Mr. Pepper grimly. "But I don't half believe it!"

"Old hunker!" muttered Baggy, as he turned his back.

He passed into the living-room, and stood for a moment as if thunder-stricken.

For there, in front of the fire, with an open tin of cocoa in his hand, sat Billy Bunter.

"Gosh!" murmured Bunter. "No need for him to hear me."

Baggy, hardly knowing whether to be pleased or angry, passed over to his side. The rest of the conversation between them was conducted in whispers.

"How long have you been here?" demanded Baggy.

"Oh, only a minute or two!" answered Bunter.

"What made you come? Nobody wants you here, you know."

"Oh, really, Baggy. You've got my bike, you know. If I let you off a hiding for taking that, I should think you'd be glad to go halves with me."

"Halves? Halves in what, you fat-head?"

Bunter nodded towards the cupboard.

There was a piratical gleam in the eyes of Billy George Bunter, and it was reflected in the green orbs of Baggy Trimble.

"St. Jim's generally took the charitable view that these two were not so much dishonest as incapable of realising the difference between what they wanted and what belonged to them."

The most recent victims of this incapacity of theirs were apt to be less charitable for a while—as with Clive and Levison a little earlier that afternoon.

Certain it was that Baggy and Bunter were dishonest in act, if not in intention. Their association at the present moment boded ill for the stores of Mr. Pepper.

"I've some cocoa, Baggy!" said Bunter.

"I was going to, anyway," replied Baggy sulkily.

"Well, then, you ought to be grateful to me for getting the stuff ready for you."

"Tain't much without milk," grumbled Baggy, taking the cup offered.

"Oh, really, I'm not a cow. I suppose!" returned Bunter, lifting his voice a little.

"No. You're a pig!" replied Baggy.

"Who's that talking to you, Master Trimble?" snarled Mr. Pepper.

"To his young'n, talking to yourself, hised the Owl at Grayson. I suppose."

"Teach your grandmother to suck eggs!" retorted Baggy, in an ireful whisper. "I was talking to myself, Mr. Pepper!" he said aloud.

"Well, don't do it! It's talkin' Biberly in my house. You'd better goin' now, thank you. But you can be back first."

Baggy, with a sullen and suspicious glance at Bunter, passed again into the bedroom.

Bunter swallowed his cup of cocoa at a gulp, and went to the cupboard on 't'lope.

Inside the cupboard, on 't'lope, hung

several keys. Each bore a label. Hunter held up a candle to examine them.

The first he handled had "Rylocombe Lodge" written on the label.

Hunter thrust it into his pocket. He had heard what Mr. Pepper had said about Cardew's receiver, and it had put a shudder into his heart.

He looked wearily at the second stuff, his mouth watering. If only he had had a whole horse instead of a bite!

But it did not matter so very much. He could take two or three tins, and he would be had the key of Rylocombe Lodge, whose more, and of dainties sorts, was stored.

He slipped a tin of sardines into each trouser-pocket, and buttoned his jacket over a tin of tongue and another of salmon.

Then he married. He did not really want Trimble's company, and these seemed no use in writing him.

It was the opportunity of getting a lift into Rylocombe that had taken him there so soon after Trimble. He had badly wanted to go, anyway; that was why he had borrowed Reilly's bike. From the moment that he had seen that bike at the side of Mr. Pepper's house, and had at once got down. Now he meant to return without doing the business he had come in for. That could wait until the morrow.

He pushed the bike into the road. A glance back showed him that Baggly was not yet visible. His hopes of getting away unseen rose high. And Mr. Pepper had not known of his presence there, so that what he had done was safe to be put down to Baggly's account if discovered.

He Bunter was clumsy, and the tins inside his jacket rattled him.

He made one attempt to mount, and a tin fell out.

"Oh, dash it!" he muttered, as he picked it up and put it back, muddily from its contact with the road.

He made another attempt, but his second tin slipped off the step, and he barked his shin.

Desperation made him chuzzlest than ever. Both the tins fell out at the third attempt, and Bunter and the bike came down together.

"Stop! Bunter, you cad, stop!" howled Baggly from the door of the cottage.

Bunter snatched up the tin of tongue, gave up the salmon as hopeless, and blundered somehow into the saddle.

But he was too late. Baggly came with a howl and a rush, and sang his arms around him.

"You'll have me, you sly idiot!" boomed Baggly.

"I jolly well mean to!" replied Baggly venomously.

And he did it. The bike clattered over on to a heap of stones, with one of Bunter's fat legs underneath it, and all of Baggly's fat body on top of Bunter.

#### CHAPTER 5.

##### An Unhappy Alliance.

**Y**AROOOOOH! You've busted my backbone, you fat beast!" roared Bunter.

"Yoooop! You fat thief! You ain't going off with my stuff like you can tell you!" howled Trimble.

"Never stuff! Oh, really, Trimble, a little too thick for anything!" sneered the Owl, pushing Baggly off by force, and struggling up into a sitting posture, though still painfully aided up with Reilly's bike.

"Well, 'ain't yours, anyway, and you've no right to touch it! If I go back and tell old Pepper—"

"You'd never be such a silly fool!" gasped Bunter.

"Oh, wouldn't I, though! Not so foolish, either. He's got lots of tin, and he's going to leave it to me; that's practically settled. So it will pay me to keep it with the old hunk."

"I don't believe it," replied Bunter, staring at the fat seditionist.

"You can do as you choose about that; it's no odds to me. Why shouldn't he, anyway? He's got no friends, and he's taken a fancy to me. I'm not going to have you butting in and spoiling my chance like this!"

"I don't started still harder. He did not believe Trimble's yarn; but he fancied Trimble half-believed it himself, and he thought he could see some possible profit in pretending to give credence to it."

"I don't want to spoil your chance, old chap," he said affectionately. "Come to think of it, there ain't any reason at all why you shouldn't see the old hunk's bouncer's chink when he's pegged out. He'll take jolly good care you don't touch it before, I'll bet! He, he!"

"Well, you'd have to take those tins back," said Baggly, partially mollified.

"That would be a blessed silly thing to do, indeed," Bunter indignantly.

"A bird in the hand you know. Besides, he'll never miss them."

"I say, you bouncer, you haven't half sneezed up this bike!" said Trimble, in alarm.

Bunter looked at Reilly's bike, from which he had now managed to disentangle himself.

It was certainly a little the worse—in fact, a good deal the worse—for the fall. One pedal-crank was badly bent; the handle-bar had slaved round, and the nut which fastened it had gone; and there was a bent back tyre, besides minor casualties.

"That's your ride at back; that's a sure thing," said Bunter.

He spoke as if that was the only thing which mattered.

"Whose is it? 'Tain't yours, I know. I shouldn't care a scrap if it was. But the chap it belongs to is jolly sure to drop on to me for going off with it."

"That's your fault. Why did you want to go off with it for, you fat idiot!"

"Because those bouncers Clive and Levison were after my ass; and that's what for! You'd have done the same thing, and you wouldn't have cared whose legger it was."

"That's different," said Bunter.

"I don't see where the difference comes in. Whose is it, anyway?"

"Reilly's," replied Bunter. "But he don't know that I—that I borrowed it."

"I'll bet he will know, though, and there will be ructions for you!"

"Oh, really? Why for me any more than for you, I'd like to know. Trimble! Now no more, if you come to that, for the thing would never have been here if you hadn't collared it; and if it hadn't been here it wouldn't have got busted, would it?"

"Oh, you do you-you-see as much!" said Baggly impudently. "I suppose we're both in it—Reilly will think so, anyway. Question is, how are we going to get out of it?"

"Take the thing to the repairer's and leave it there," answered Bunter. "It's no use to us as it is."

"Who's going to pay for repairs?" Bunter opened his eyes widely in surprise.

"Why, Reilly, of course!" he said. "It's his bike, ain't it?"

Baggly looked hard at Bunter. There was no tendency to hero-worship in Bunter, but at times he did feel that in Baggly he had met a superior mind.

"It ain't half a bad idea," he said. "We shall have to dodge Reilly for a bit, but we'll cool down. He always does. And if he has up his tin can pay for him; that blessed Shesey has pots and pots of money!"

The cycle repairer's was only a few yards away, and the machine was taken there. The two fat juniors came away feeling almost friendly, though neither trusted the other.

"It's halves with what you've bagged, Bunt," said Trimble.

"Oh, I don't know about that. I'd half a notion of taking it back, and telling old Pepper that I caught you sloping off with it, and stopped you, because my well-known high principles would—"

"Come off it! I say, you know," gasped Baggly. "The old hunk would go and leave his money to someone else then, sure as Fate!"

"Yes; he might leave it to me," said Bunter simply.

"You ain't!—I say, though, Bunt, be a sport! You couldn't do such a mean thing, I know!"

"No, I wouldn't, Baggly," said Bunter magnanimously. "There isn't a better sport at St. Jim's than I am. Matter of fact, there ain't a real sport there at all except me. I look here, I've a shesey. If you care to come for it, we'll go halves with this, and with a whole whack more, too!"

"What is it?" asked Baggly.

Bunter handed over to him the muddily tin. He had retrieved the salmon.

"You can't see, though," he said. "I'll show you something else."

The custody of the tins went far to mollify Trimble. His eyes goggled when Bunter pulled from one of his pockets a key labelled "Rylocombe Lodge," but he made no protest against the tin's being in possession of it.

"That's yours, isn't it?" triumphantly.

"Well, what about it?" inquired Baggly, half-annoyedly.

"Oh, really! I heard old Pepper say that Cardew's aunt, or grandmother, or whatever she is, had bought a whole lot of those tins—the best stuff, too, mind you! Pals de fois gras—'s you know what that's like, Baggly?"

And Bunter smacked his lips at the thought.

"It—it doesn't belong to us," said Baggly weakly.

"No, it doesn't actually belong to us. But if you'll let me to me, I think I can prove to you that we've a right to some of it."

"I'll listen. But it doesn't matter so much about proving it to me," Baggly said. "The thing is whether you can prove it to old Crump, if he catches us there, or to Cardew, or to—anybody. You know what suspicious beasts people are! They'd think nothing of saying we were thieves!"

"Nothing of the sort!" said Bunter loftily. "I can't answer for you, Trimble, I must say that in some ways you ain't exactly above reproach. But no one can cast a stigma upon my name!"

"Can't they?" murmured Baggly, almost dazed for the moment.

"No, of course they can't! It's like this, Miss Archbold is a friend of mine."

"Oh!"

"You don't seem to believe it, Trimble. Let me tell you that I would scorn to say anything untruthful. That's moi!"

"Go on!" said Baggly.

"She's got pots of tin, and she's a good deal more likely to leave it to me than old Pepper is to leave it to you, I mean to tell you. She's taken so end of a fancy to me."

"Oh!"

"You needn't say 'Oh!' in that bleated, disbelieving way!" said Bunter, warmly. "Why shouldn't an old lady take a fancy to me? Tell me that!"

"I don't see why she shouldn't, if she was silly enough to. And old Pepper says Miss Archbold is no end of a queer old woman."

"Well, then? Even a woman like that shows sense at times, you know. I was passing Rylcombe Lodge the other day, and I stopped to look, because it's always been empty since I've been at St. Jim's, and now I could see it was furnished, and I could see the furniture, too. Well, an old lady came out leaning on a stick, and she said, 'Hallo, boy!' just like that. So I took my cap off, and bowed, and said, 'Good morning, ma'am!' Then she said, 'St. Jim's?' A sharp, quick way of speaking she has. And I told her it was St. Jim's."

"Go on!" said Baggy, as Bunter paused.

Baggy half fancied that the pause was due to a failure of Bunter's invention. But Bunter was not inventing at all; his tale, for though it was furnished, and carried through the inference he drew from what had happened were rather forced.

"Then she said something about natural curiosity. I suppose she was apologizing for speaking to me like that, and means that she was naturally curious about me. Well, she's sharp, and Bunter being at the school, you know."

"He, he, he!" tittered Baggy. "She means you, Bunter!"

"Me, you silly fellow! How could she call me a natural curiosity?"

"That's an easy one—because you're so fat, of course!"

"Fat, you idiot! I'm not fat—I'm only plump and well-proportioned. Now, if it had been you, or Wynn, or my cousin Wai—I mean, my cousin Billy—it would have been a different thing. She might have said something about fat, then!"

"She seems to have said something as it was!" sniggered Baggy.

"Rot! She took a great fancy to me, I tell you. And she's not the first, by long chalk. There's a peculiar sort of fascination about me that a fellow of your type can't be expected to understand. Think!" Bunter said, with a smirk. "The long and short of it was that she asked me to come to tea with her to-morrow."

"Well, you can't go. She ain't there."

"But I'm going, though! And if you like you can come with me."

"I— Oh, look here, Bunter, suppose anyone caught us?"

"Caught us! They can't catch us, and I've been asked there, and if I like to take a pal with me— But don't come unless you like. Mellish will come like a shot, I know."

"I'll come!" said Baggy eagerly. "I dare say you're right, Bunter. If there's a giddy row, we can wangle out of it on the invitation. And me being in with old Pepper helps, you know. I can get the lay-back for you. Don't be silly enough to go and say anything to Mellish."

"I won't. I'd rather have you, Baggy, old fellow. And—well, there's Pepper's stock, too. It'll work in. Serve him right! I expect it's really a hoard, you know."

Thus was the shady alliance made.

#### CHAPTER 6.

##### Cardew Smells a Rat.

"H ALLO, cousin George! Wherefore this moody brow?"

It was Cardew who spoke, and his query was addressed to his cousin, George Durrance, who had come to St. Jim's at Pentecost, but had been discovered to be the long-lost

son of Commander Durrance, R.N., Cardew's uncle.

"Didn't know it was moody. I say, Cardew, did you know that Aunt Euphemia wasn't at the Lodge?"

"Yess, dear boy. Didn't I tell you?"

"No, you didn't, see, or I shouldn't have fagged over there for nothing!"

"Sorry, dear boy! But exercise is good for the young."

"B-r-r-r!" growled Durrance.

"That is hardly an intelligible remark to me, cousin George, though, no doubt, it would serve in a conversation with Yewson. Why did you go to see Aunt Euphemia?"

"Well, I rather thought I ought to," replied Durrance.

"Duty again! You're like the dear Sidney. You won't like her when you know her, y'know?"

"How do you know?"

"She's an eccentric old dear—prided herself on speakin' her mind, an' all that. Wouldn't matter so much if it wasn't the sort of mind she's got, by gad, but—"

"The pater says she's very fond of you," said Durrance.

"Like it, dear boy. Moreover, she disapproves of every dashed thing I do, have done, or am thinkin' of doin'—and she doesn't forget to tell me so. I shouldn't mind much, dear, ingenious George, if she transferred her affections to you; but she never will. There's an dashed little about you that she could disapprove of, an' she finds straightgoers so very uninteresting."

Durrance laughed—a gay, hearty laugh.

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He had come to know Ralph Rockness Cardew better than most people knew him, and in Durrance's eyes his cousin was a far better fellow than he made himself out to be.

He could quite understand the strong feeling the whimsical old lady had for the whimsical boy, who was not really related to her at all; and he had no desire to supplant Cardew, in spite of Miss Archbold's wealth, which would be equal to Newcastle if it ever came to the spoiled grandson of Lord Rockness.

"That, I haven't seen her," he said. "The whimsical boy, who was not really related to her at all; and he had no desire to supplant Cardew, in spite of Miss Archbold's wealth, which would be equal to Newcastle if it ever came to the spoiled grandson of Lord Rockness."

"That's queer," answered Cardew, with knitted brows. "If some fellows had told me that, I should have said it was all imagination. But I'd no more accuse you of imagination, George, old gun, than I would the dear Sidney—an' that's saying a lot."

"You can always talk as though Clive and I were silly kids, years younger than you," said Durrance, half jealously.

"Not exactly silly kids, dear George. I have the highest respect for both of you, on account of your sterling integrity, and all that sort of thing, y'know. But certainly years—years—years—years—years—I am an old fellow."

"Hah! You're a bigger kid than either of us about some things. And you never talk of Lewison that way."

"I do not. Lewison is wide an' wise. I may not talk him up, but he's about as wide an' wise as I am!"

"Saying a fat lot, that is!" snorted Durrance.

"Are you comin' to Rylcombe with me, old bean?"

"What for?" asked Durrance.

"That I cannot reveal at the moment. My widda an' widda might suffer in your eyes if it turned out that—"

"Well, I'm not coming. I've just come back from Rylcombe, and I should have been seeing going if you had told me the old lady was away."

"As you like, dear boy!"

Cardew, having put, with his usual appearance of having nothing on his mind and no object in life, got his bike from the shed, wheeled it languidly to the gates, mounted, and pedaled at a gentle pace towards the village.

He never revisited the cottage with only a casual glance, though he intended calling there later. Two fat faces peered at him from inside a shop hard by; but he failed to notice them—or so the owners of those fat faces thought.

"There's Cardew!" said Bunter.

"Wonder what he's after!"

"What's the odds?" said Baggy recklessly.

Their scheme of the previous day had been fully carried out. Directly afternoon classes were dismissed they had hurried off to Rylcombe Lodge, stopping on the way only as long as was required for the purchase of a loaf of new bread, to be with the rich stuff they expected to find in Miss Archbold's larder and cupboard.

And their expectations had not been disappointed. The aged relative of Durrance and Cardew evidently believed in good living. It was not alone the finest stuff purchased by her.

Mr. Pepper that Bunter and Baggy regaled themselves.

There was a ham in it. There were many other things such as one would have anticipated finding in a house of tenantry.

Bunter and Baggy did themselves most unbecomingly well. It was with a sense of complete repulsion that they sneaked out of Rylcombe Lodge.



Then Baggy remembered an errand he had to do for Knox of the Sixth, and the two went into a shop where cigarettes as well as other things were sold. It was not the other things Knox wanted, by the way.

Cardew passed while they were there. Baggy thought it did not matter. But Bunter was not so sure.

"See here, Baggy," he said, "you'd better take this key back to old Pepper's, you know. You can say you've looked in again to see what you could do for him, and whether he's made his will yet. He, ha, he!"

"That's all very well; but we shall want the thing again to-morrow, duffer!"

"Well, you can't get it again, see! It's safer there, I'm sure. The old girl might turn up any time, and she'd kick up an end of a row if Pepper couldn't hand over the key."

"I don't care about that!" replied Baggy. "Do you think I mind how hard she jumps on Pepper? Not much!"

"He'll know you bagged it," said Bunter.

"No? I never did, then! It was you, you fat thief!"

"No good calling names, Trimble—it's low-bred," said Bunter calmly.

"Pepper doesn't know anything about me—I'm not sure that he can know me by sight. I've never spoken to the fellow, anyway; I'm a cut above misers, I hope."

"He knows you all right," answered Baggy spitefully. "He asked me who that walking bladder of hard with the St. Jim's cap was."

"Didn't he know your name?" inquired Bunter. "You'd better tell him it. You can't get into his will without that, you know. Here, catch hold of this thing, and don't be such a silly ass!"

Baggy took the key with reluctance. The faces of both were turned to Mr. Pepper's cottage at the moment; and neither saw Durrance flash past them on his bike.

But he saw them, and he saw the key handed over.

"My hat!" he muttered. "Now, I wonder whether Ralph suspected that I you never can tell how far the bounder sees into things!"

It almost seemed as though Cardew had suspected it. He showed no surprise when, a minute or two later, Durrance told him what he had seen.

"The dear old boys!" he said, almost affectionately.

"Naughty, sneaking thieves, I call them!" snorted Durrance.

"Don't be uncharitable, cousin George! They can't help it, you know."

"I'd find a way to make them. What are you going to do, Hal?"

"I did think of going to the estimable Pepper to inquire about the key. But your detective skill has rendered that unnecessary, cousin George. On the whole, rather fail to see that there is anything we can usefully do just now. But to-morrow—to-morrow is also a day, old boy!"

"What do you mean to do to-morrow?" asked Durrance.

"Wait an 'ese, old can!" answered Cardew, circularly.

## CHAPTER 7.

### Cardew's Wheeze.

"SIDNEY, dear boy, you are not playing football this afternoon," said Cardew, after morning classes next day, which was a weekday.

"Oh, I'm not! How do you know that?" snapped Clive.

"Because I need you, my infant."

"Well, I don't see that that's any reason," Clive said. "As a matter of fact, I wasn't going to play. Levison and I were just talking about what we'd do. But I've a jolly good mind—"

"Hang on to it, old top!—A jolly good mind will doubtless incline you to help a pal in his need."

"What's up?" asked Levison briefly. "There you are, Sidney! Levison has not the heart to turn me down cold if you have."

"Who wants to turn you down, chump? You know well enough it isn't that. But you're so beastly mysterious, and you expect a fellow to do what you want without knowing why he's doing it—which is not!"

"You've a wheeze on, Ralph!" said Levison.

"You might call it a wheeze. I take

"An elderly lady, I said, Sidney dear. Pray be exact!"

"Same thing, isn't it?"

"The same thing, with a difference. But calm yourself. I should not think of entrusting to you a part of such importance. You would infallibly bungler it."

"Oh, should I? I suppose that I can act, as well as you can if I like!"

"Then your supper is most hopelessly out of gear, my child!"

"Want me to do it!" asked Levison, grinning.

"No, my dear old tulip. You an' Clive here will play inferior parts. I myself will be the elderly lady."

"All serene," answered Levison.

"Where's the play staged?"

"At Rykcombe Lodge, unless things go wrong with my calculations. I have



The perspiration poured down the face of Trimble as his strength drove the bike at a considerable pace through the road. Levison and Clive were on his track. (See chapter 2.)

a more serious view of it. To me it is the proper punishment of a pair of immoral rascals!"

"St. Jim's chapel!" asked Clive.

"Yaas, dear boy."

"I say, immoral's pretty thick, you know!"

"Is stealing immoral, Sidney?"

"Well, yes, yes, of course it is. Who are the two?"

"Guess, old top!"

"Baggy, for one," said Levison, "and Bunter for another. I should say, though they don't generally hunt in couples."

"Got it in once, dear boy!"

"What have they been doing?" demanded Clive.

"That you shall know later. At present you need only be told that it is necessary, in order that proper punishment may be meted out to them, that one of us should assume the disguise of an elderly lady."

"Oh, I thought there was some catch in it!" said Clive indignantly. "But you're jolly well off if it's your fancy that I'm going to get myself up as an old woman!"

put cousin George on the watch. Ha! Here he comes!"

Durrance came in, looking a trifle flushed, and with spots of mud on his trousers.

"They're there, the sweeps!" he said. "Then we must mount and ride, cousin George! Ta-ta, you two! Bo good in my brief an unavoidable absence."

"Here, I say, where are you off to?" called Clive.

"We'll come with you!" shouted Levison.

But Cardew and Durrance had already reached the landing.

"Can't be did!" yelled Cardew.

"Your parts are to be played this afternoon."

"No reason why they shouldn't have come," said Durrance, as the cousins hurried downstairs together. "I like Clive, and I don't mind Levison."

"I love them both," replied Cardew gravely. "But I would not have them always with me."

Durrance knew well enough that to

argued with Cardew was useless. Probably there was nothing in his refusal to back his chums with them; but he would stick to it for all that.

"The dear boys are there!" Cardew said.

"Yes, I watched them go to old Pepper's, and saw them come out—oh, that's wrong—only Baggy went in."

"I rejoice to see, cousin George, that you place a proper value on accuracy of statement," broke in Cardew.

"Oh, rats! They went off to Rylcombe Lodge, and I rode back as hard as I could too. But I can't see how you could be so sure that they would go before dinner, instead of waiting till the afternoon."

"Simply a knowledge of human nature, old gun—if the nature of Bunt and Baggybus can be said to be human, which I will admit to be a moot point. They could not wait until the afternoon—I was sure of that. But, unless our plans miscarry grievously, they will have to wait until the afternoon, nevertheless."

"Why couldn't we—"

"Cousin George, cousin George, what a young man in a hurry you are! It is far, far better that they should wait. The period between the time present and the zenith of that toxin of the soul, the dinner-bell, would be far too short for our play. Moreover, by keeping them shut up for an hour or two we can play properly upon their fears, and reduce them to a state of mind in which they will be ready to believe anything."

"Something in that. But 'p'ose they escape!"

"I am prepared to bet twenty to one in—or shall we say, Brazil notes—that they will not escape. I do not know who has the bars fixed to the upper windows of Rylcombe Lodge; but whoever he may have been, I call him blessed for that deed. As for the lower windows, I rely upon your skill as an amateur carpenter, Cousin George. For my own part, I have never yet been able to distinguish between a screwdriver and a chisel. There is also an instrument called a gimlet, much of the same genus, I believe. I do know a hammer from a saw; but—"

"Oh, dry up! You're wasting breath."

By this time the two had run out their bikes and were on the road to Rylcombe. Cardew grinned when Durrance put on

speed, expecting that his cousin would be hard put to it to keep up with him.

Durrance might ride as hard as he chose; he would not easily outstride Cardew, even though the latter went on talking.

They reached Rylcombe Lodge in very short time.

Having bestowed their machines a short distance away, they stole up to the front door.

Cardew tried it.

"Locked, as I had expected," he said. "Let us make a burglarious entry, dear George!"

He took out a penknife, and inside a minute had slipped the catch of a window.

"Wait by the door, an' thrust back the villain if they take alarm an' try to escape," he told Durrance, as he scrambled over the ledge.

"Not much use in that. If they know we—"

"Obey!" is now your watchword, dear boy! But I do not think I shall alarm them."

Durrance went to the front door. Within two minutes Cardew opened it from inside, lounged out, and locked the door.

"I've seen an' heard the malafactors," he said. "They are do n' themselves extremely well on the provender unconsciously laid in for them by our covered Aunt Euphemia. I do not think that at present they are likely to hood anythin' more short of an earthquake. But it will be well to proceed cautiously when you come to the kitchen window, old top! The sight of your face might frighten them!"

Durrance produced a screwdriver, a gimlet, and a packet of extra long screws.

There were three doors to the house; but Bunter and Baggy had only the key of that at the front, and Cardew had satisfied himself that the other keys were not in their locks. The upper windows were barred; once on a time Rylcombe Lodge had been tenanted by a medical man who took in two or three mental cases, and such a precaution is usual where lunatics are concerned.

Durrance had now to screw up all the windows, so that the free depredators within might find themselves imprisoned when they tried to get out.

He had to do this, if possible, without letting them know anything of it.

But this was not so hard a task as it might seem. Bar accidents, there was no danger anywhere but at the kitchen window. The previous pair were in the kitchen, and Cardew had peeped in at them there without being heard or seen. He thought they were too busy to notice anything that went on at the window, to which both had their backs.

The work was done quickly, and to the entire satisfaction of Cardew, who lavished praise upon his cousin for his skill. The success wased real, and told him to drop it.

At work on the kitchen window, Durrance got a glimpse of Baggy and Bunter, though he kept his head as low as possible, and took great care not to throw a shadow. They did not see him; they also were at work.

"And now let us depart, to return anon, cousin George!" said Cardew. And they departed.

CHAPTER 8.

No Help!

"I SAY, you fellows, look them!" It was Fatty Wynn who spoke, pointing to an upper window of Rylcombe Lodge.

Figgins, Kerr, and Fatty were returning from Westland by way of Rylcombe. It was not the shortest way; but it was the best in such weather as the district was getting just then.

Kerr and Figgy jumped from their bikes. Fatty got off his machine with more deliberation.

What Fatty had seen at the upper window, behind the bars, was the face of William George Bunter.

The two rascals had now discovered the grievous plight.

The door was locked. The key, incautiously left in the lock, had most mysteriously disappeared. Only one window in the whole house which lacked bars would open, and that was the window of the pantry—albeit too narrow for the too, too solid bulk of either Bunter or Trimble.

"What an earth—"

"My hat!"

So spoke Figgy and Kerr. Figgy failed to finish his sentence, but his meaning was obvious.

"I think he's locked in, and can't get out," said Fatty.

"They were corrected him. "There's Baggy, too, and the dear Baggy looks inclined to pipe his eye."

"What's the silly fat idiot yelling?" said Figgins.

"From the motion of his lips I fancy it's something about going round to the back," replied Kerr. "But I can't hear."

Bunter threw up the window-sash.

"Oh, I say, you fellows, we're in an awful hole!" he bawled.

"Looks to me a decent enough place!" Kerr said.

"Too decent to be made a blessed city of!" remarked Figgy politely.

"Oh, really, don't be too big-headed! pleaded Bunter, very near to snoring. "The dinner-bell will be going direct, and we're lull-lull-locked in here and the kuk-can't get out!"

"Go round to the back, please do, you chaps!" urged Baggy. "We can talk you there. 'Tain't safe here. Or Pepper or someone might see us any minute!"

"Well, what's it matter if they asked Figgins.

"We should get into a frightful answered Baggy, quivering like."

"Oh dear! What shall we do? I catch myself being led astray again, Bunter!"

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"Shut up, you fat funk!" hooted Bunter, allowing his companion in misfortune aside.

"Shall we go round, Kerr?" inquired Figgins.

"I think we might, Figgy, though we shall have to ride lolly hard to get in for dinner after it. This little affair strikes me as interesting."

The two fat faces had disappeared now. When Kerr and Figgins looked round for Fatty they discovered that he also had disappeared.

But they found him standing in front of the pantry window, whence looked two podgy and very disgruntled faces.

"These two fat rascals have got in here to bag grub, Figgy!" said Fatty severely.

"Have they bagged it all? Rough on you, Fattibus!" answered Figgins.

"Oh, rats to you! You know very well that I wouldn't have a hand in a low game like this. What's to be done?"

Fatty reflected for a moment. Kerr stood smiling.

Then Figgy said:

"Nothing!"

And the smile of Kerr broadened into a grin.

"Oh, really! Oh, I say, you fellows! You wouldn't desert us like that!"

"Don't be so beastly hard on a chap! You wouldn't joll' well like it if you were in my shoes!"

It was a fair question which of the two, Baggy or Bunter, was the more utterly ingenuous and frightened.

"We couldn't be in them," said George Figgins. "We happen not to be squeaky clean, you know!"

"We're not, either!" howled Bunter. "We were asked here, and we've a right here! At least, I was asked here; I'm not saying anything about Trimble! He's a fat cad, and I don't care a scrap what happens to him!"

"Don't you address to him, you fellows!" hooted Baggy. "It was all his fault, really! Oh dear! I shall be expelled—I know I shall! And Bunter will be expelled, too, and I'm jolly glad of it!"

"Oh, are you?" hooted Bunter.

He collared Baggy round the neck in a loving embrace, and the two podgy faces disappeared.

A crash sounded inside the pantry. The two had come down together upon a big bread-rocket, and the crock was no more.

"Voop!"

"Yaroooh!"

"Cheese it, you bouncer!"

"Stop it, you fat idiot!"

Baggy and Bunter were commencing one another on the pantry floor—that was plain.

"I vote we make tracks!" said Kerr.

"This is funny, all right; but raising a duner doesn't exactly appeal to me as humorous, and we haven't a minute to spare."

"Right ho!" answered Figgins. And the three moved away.

Through the pantry window floated a pair of eyes.

"Oh, really! Don't go, you fellows!"

"No, I say, you chaps, come back! Do so back!"

But the New House trio paid no heed. They remounted, and rode hard for St. Jim's.

"Did you know what they had done for, Fatty?" asked Figgins.

"Don't you open his china-blue eyes as he turned his face to his chum."

"All, ask yourself, Figgy!" he said; "it also could only have gone there."

"Ha!" roared Figgins. "There's nothing in the world besides money that's so important!" said Fatty.

"Not to Baggy and Bunter, anyway!" Kerr said.

"That's what they were after, if it be! Did they admit it, though, Fatty?"

"Yes. They said there was plenty left, and I might have my whack if I got them out!"

"Must have been an awful temptation to you, old son!" said Figgins.

"Fatty snorted wrathfully. It had not been a temptation to him at all, and Figgins knew it. Fatty's appetite was not much smaller than that of Bunter or Baggy; but Fatty's notions as to the straight thing were very different from theirs.

"Did they say who locked them in?" inquired Figgy.

"They don't know, chump!"

"It's a bit of a mystery that," said Kerr. "As for the rest of it, I fancy I can give a guess. The tenant of that place is a relative of our man Cardew. I've seen her—a queer little lady, with a very arbitrary way about her. Come to think of it, I saw her yesterday at the fat foundation of a Bunter the other day as I was passing on my bike."

"But that doesn't explain what they're doing there, or how they got in, old top."

"What they were doing there doesn't need explaining. They were pilaging, the precious rascals! Aren't they always doing it at St. Jim's? Getting a big dangerous when they carry it further afield, though, and bad for the good name of the school. Still, it's more or less in the family, as it's Cardew's aunt's or grandmother's stuff they're st."

"But how did they get in? That's what I want to know, Kerr," persisted Figgins.

"It doesn't matter a scrap. I don't know, and you don't know. I peeped and out if I wanted to, no doubt; but it isn't a point of any real importance."

"What links me is why they can't get out," said Fatty thoughtfully.

"Because they're locked in, chump!" snorted Figgy.

"You don't lock windows, Figgy!" said Wynn mildly.

"My hat! They must have forgotten all about the windows!" chuckled Figgy.

"Ha, ha, ha! I should like to know how many times we had to make our exit through windows. I wonder how long it will be before they remember!"

Kerr shook his head.

"I don't think they've forgotten the windows," he said. "As a matter of fact, I'm pretty sure they haven't. The chap who locked them in didn't forget the windows, either. I saw two pew screws in the sash-frame of the kitchen one."

"My hat, Kerr! I never knew your eyes for wiggling things!" exclaimed Figgins, with honest admiration. "It's a good job we've got you on our side. I think, I know I can never remember half the things I ought to. I think I shall have to go in for a course of Folsom, or something like that."

"Merely a matter of keeping your eyes open, old bean! See here. I shouldn't wonder a bit if it was old Pepper who locked them in. He's agent for plenty of houses round here, and he's a sly old dog. But that isn't any real odd. The thing is what we ought to do about it, and I've got a wheeze—a simply ripping wheeze!"

"What is it?" peated Figgins.

Fatty only gaped. The pace they were going had told on Fatty, and even on Wynn, though Kerr had some on talking as if he did not feel it at all.

"Telt you later. Lam it on, Fatty, old dear! There goes the dinner-bell!"

## CHAPTER 9

## Two Ris'monds in the Field.

"DON'T go near the window, you fat idiot!" rapped out William George Bunter.

"Fat idiot yourself!" roared Baggy hotly. "Why shouldn't I go near the window? How are we ever going to get out if we don't find someone to help us, I'd like to know?"

"A fat cad, he is, your own way. Only don't blame me if the fat policeman comes along and arrests you for being in a prohibited place for an unlawful purpose. That's what they call it, I believe. It won't be my fault. I've warned you!"

Baggy dodged away from the sitting-room window, which he had been gazing with his fat form and discomfited, podgy face.

"I—I—I say, you know, Bunter, if he arrests me he'll arrest you, too! You're just as much in this as I am."

"Oh, really, Trimble! I should think your common-sense would show you that there is a vast difference between your case and mine!"

"It doesn't show me anything of the sort!"

"Then you haven't any common-sense!" replied Bunter loftily.

"Look here, what are you getting at? I don't see how there can be any difference—not a scrap."

"I was asked here," Bunter said.

"Were you?"

"Yes, I was, then!"

"Who asked you?"

"Why, you did, of course! I can swear to that!"

Bunter shook his head sadly.

"Oh, really, Trimble, you must see that's a damn't fresh!" he said.

"Why wasn't it? You did—you know you did!"

"I may have asked you, or I may not. I decline to say anything about that. The point is that I hadn't any right to ask you."

"Oh dear! What a mean beast you are, Bunter!"

"What? You say that again, and I'll punch your fat head for you!"

"Punch it, then, if you dare! Yaroooh! Lemme bo! Take that!"

And Bunter took "that"—on his nose.

It must have been more by luck than by skill that Baggy hit that mark, for it was hardly a conspicuous one, and the skill of Baggy was small.

But hit it he did.

"Ow-yow!" hooted Bunter, as he put up a podgy and dirty hand to his face, and brought it away blood-streaked.

"Look here, you dodo, you fat idiot!"

"Serve you jolly well, right! I'll make your other nose—I mean, your other eye—oh dear, I don't know what I do mean!—I—I can't stand much more of this! Oh, what shall I do! What shall I do?"

And Baggy opened to the fullest extent his very crooked mouth, and fairly howled aloud.

Bunter, with his handkerchief to his bleeding nose, merely snivelled.

More than an hour had passed since Figgins & Co. had left the two stout unfortunates to it. Dinner at St. Jim's must be over by now. Dinner, as we saw, mattered little to Baggy and Bunter, who were fairly loaded up to the Pigmaff line, and beyond. Even the impositions they were safe to get for their absence did not matter much.

But they were in deadly fear of being caught.

F. Crump might come along and find them.

Mr. Railton or Kildare might appear upon the scene.

Baggy thought Mr. Pepper unlikely to be able to get so far. But he might manage it if his suspicions were aroused, as they would be if he discovered the loss of the key.

And there was Miss Archbold herself. No one knew when she might turn up again. She seemed to come and go in the most capricious fashion.

Bunter might tell Baggy that he—Bunter—would be all right even if the old lady did turn up. But Bunter did not believe it.

Another half-hour or so passed. Then something happened.

The station hack stopped at the gate of Rylcombe Lodge, and from it descended a short, rather slight man with a bushy black beard.

He might have been Levison's father, or he might have been Levison himself in disguise!

They followed him another short and rather slight man with red hair and whiskers.

This personage was not unlike Clive in features and expression.

The red-haired man turned, and gallantly helped out of the hack Miss Archbold herself!

At least, Baggy and Bunter had no doubt whatever that it was Miss Archbold.

Neither of them discerned the likeness of the two male arrivals to Clive and Levison, and neither of them even began to suspect that Ralph Beckson's Cardew was made the feminine garments they saw.

Monty Lowther had done his work well. All the props of the School House Amateur Dramatic Society had been placed at the disposal of Cardew when he had explained his wheeze to the Terrible Three, and Lowther himself had made up the principal actor in the drama, and the other two to the hands of less skilled practitioners.

The making-up had been done in a cottage near the village. Talbot and Gore had fetched the station hack, though they had had some difficulty in getting its driver to take on the job. He said that he had another engagement before he met the 8.15 train, as he was bound to do. But double price for a job that would only take him a few minutes persuaded him.

As soon as his three passengers had alighted he drove off.

He drove to the milestone a quarter of a mile on, and then turned to the Rylcombe side. Near that milestone was a barn, and out of that barn, just as he pulled up his old horse in the road, came a figure about caused the driver to rub his eyes and ask himself whether he was dreaming.

It had seemed queer enough to him that one old lady should require to be driven a matter of a couple of hundred yards, or so. But here was another who came out of a barn, and who, except for a slight difference in dress, looked for all the world like the first!

"Who to, ma'am?" he asked.  
"He has been engaged by telephone, and all that he had been told was that he was to pick up a lady at a certain specified time at the milestone. He had thought that queer enough then; he thought it still more queer now."

The old lady's answer mystified him more than ever.

"To Rylcombe Lodge, my good man!" she said politely.

"Oh erikey!" muttered the driver.

But the good lady did not hear, or did not heed, the exclamation.

She got into the hack very nimbly for

one of her apparent age, and the driver whipped up.

Directly the sound of wheels was heard from the road, Figgins and Fatty Wynn ran their bikes' out of the barn, and mounted to follow.

"My! Keer would jolly well take in Cardew himself!" said Figgie gleefully.

"Rather! There's going to be some fun out of this, Figgie, old sport!" replied Fatty.

They rode on slowly. The hack had just reached Archbold's house when they arrived there.

"Crumbl! Looks as if all St. Jim's had twigged our game! And we never let on to a giddy soul!" exclaimed Figgins, in amazement.

It was not quite all St. Jim's that had gathered on the blind side of the hedge. When Figgie looked again he found that the New House was quite unrepresented.

But the School House, Shell, and Fourth Forms were there in considerable force.

Cardew had intended to limit the jape to a select circle, and he had done so. Terrible Three had persuaded him to let a whole crowd of fellows into it. Anything so good ought to be shared out, they said.

So there waited for the signal from within not only Tom Merry and Mansel and Lathor, but also Talbot and Gore and Lumble-Lumley, Jack Blake and IFarcy and Digby and Herrie, Kangaroo and Dané and Glyn, Julian and Kerruth and Reilly and Hammond, Durrocco and Roystance, and some half-score others.

The driver's second fare alighted from the hack and Fatty and Figgie dismounted and joined the crowd.

"How in the wide, wide world did you fellows find out!" asked Figgins.

But no one for the moment heeded this query. They stood fairly agape.

"You they know that Cardew, with his two companions, was inside; and yet here—"

"Bat Jove! There are two Wichmonds in the field!" said Arthur Augustus, letting his monocle drop from his eye.

"My hat! Who can it be?" gasped Mansel.

"Must be the old lady herself!" said Tom Merry.

"Ass!" exclaimed Lowther. "It's Keer, for a fever!"

"Yes, it's Keer," said Figgins. "But what's that silly chump Gussy mean about two Barmonts?"

"Cardew's already in there, playing Aunt Ephemia!" answered Lumble-Lumley, grinning.

"And now," remarked Talbot, "it's only necessary for Miss Archbold herself to turn up to make the whole thing beautifully complete!"

#### CHAPTER 10.

##### Paying the Piper.

"O H. dear! We're done for now, Bunter, and it's all your fault, you fat cad!" howled Baggy.

Bunter did not answer, because he could not. His lower jaw had dropped, and his fat face had taken on an unwholesome, mottled look.

Then he remembered something, and the blood flowed back to his cheeks.

"We ain't done yet!" he said. "She can't get in—there's no key. It was taken away, you know."

"What's the use of that?" wailed Baggy. "We can't get out!"

"Let's hide!" gasped Bunter.

And he made for the staircase.

But he ran right into the arms of the two short, slight gentlemen who had driven up with Miss Archbold. And their arms were around him at once.

Baggy did not even move. Through the open door he saw what was passing, and he stood like one petrified.

"Really, Mr. Maggs! What can this mean?" demanded a shrill and angry voice.

"It looks as if two young tramps had taken up their quarters here in your absence, Miss Archbold," replied a deep, gruff one—suspiciously deep and gruff, had Baggy and Bunter been in any case to notice so small a circumstance.

"Hold him, Mr. Maggs—hold him! And you, Mr. Baggs, pray be good: to assist the nice young villain!"

Mr. Baggs, who might have been Sidney Clive's uncle, advanced, and seized tightly the shivering Baggy.

Miss Archbold tripped into the room. Mr. Maggs followed her, propelling before him by applications of his knee the flustered and frightened Owl of Greyfriars.

Devoutly did Billy Bunter wish himself back at Greyfriars at that moment!

Plenty of unpleasant things had happened to him there. Some had happened—on his account, as it were—his cousin Wally being that youth had been persuaded to change places with him.

But it seemed to Bunter that nothing quite as bad as this had ever chanced to him at his old school.

He did not care about Baggy. What did it matter that Baggy would sack him for a second name? Better! It was all his fault. If he had not collared Bunter's bike—well, Reilly's bike, then, but what did details like that matter?—all this could never have happened.

Yes, it was all Baggy's fault—sucking up to a wretched old miser like Pepper, and trying to get a second name for himself, and meddling with keys that did not belong to him! And if Bunter could put the blame on to his fellow-culprit he meant to do so.

"Why, I really do believe that they are St. Jim's boys!" cried Miss Archbold, looking at her with horror.  
"St. Jim's boys!" and guilty of such a base action as this! What contamination for my innocent nephews to be exposed to!"

"Oh, really, ma'am!" spluttered Bunter. "You ought not to say such things as that, you know! I'm sure I am a much higher-principled fellow than Ralph Cardew! I wouldn't think of doing lots of things he does!"

"Washing your neck, by one!" spoke a voice she Bunter could not identify.

It sounded like a voice he knew well. But for that he would have felt sure that it came from Mr. Maggs, who was holding him by the collar in a grip that made him feel like choking.

"Have I not seen you before?" demanded the old lady sternly.

"No, ma'am—I mean, yes, ma'am—of course you have!" replied Bunter, brightening up.

"Don't you remember?"

"You asked me to kuk-kuk-come to tut-tut with you, and I've kuk-kuk-come! That's all, ma'am, really!"

"And I must say that you have done in excellent time! It is not yet—"

"O'clock, ma'am—that is, yes, I mean I was so keen on seeing you, again that I really did not think about the time!"

"And this—this other—er—person?"

Did he also come to tea with you, Miss Archbold, putting up—"

and favouring Fribble, with—"

gripped by the collar by Mr. Maggs, who was holding him to wilt visibly.

"I—I—"

Bunter broke in upon the stage speech of Baggy.

"No, ma'am! I assure you I never have dreamed of bringing—"

He is quite the most unprincipled

lowest fellow at St. Jim's—ho is, really, I duplicate him too much to want his company. Ho—he forced himself in, and I don't not make him go!"

"Oh, yes—really," I say, ma'am, can't believe him!" wailed Baggie. "It was all his fault, and everybody knows what an awful chap he is for talking liars."

"I am quite sure that neither of you is telling the truth," said the old lady sharply. "But you will set at the truth, however hard you may strive to conceal it by your base prevarications. These two gentlemen, my lawyers, are accustomed to dealing with the criminal class."

"Hardly with such desperate and abandoned criminals as these," Miss Archbold said. "But Mr. Maggs, shaking his head sadly. "But I make no doubt that we can frustrate their knavish tricks, madam!"

Bunter and Baggie giggled in alarm. Two lawyers! This was worse than ever! The look seemed but a small part of the punishment like to be meted out to them. Through the minds of both flickered visions of a prison cell and prison food.

From outside came a loud hum of voices. Mr. Maggs looked out of the window, and ejaculated:

"Mr. hat!"

As he spoke he clutched Miss Archbold by the arm. That lady, as if resenting such a liberty, shook off his hand impatiently. But there was a look on her face as she did so that puzzled both the fat rascals.

It was a look almost of alarm. But it disappeared in a moment, and Mr. Maggs caught a whisper that reached neither Baggie nor Bunter.

"That bounder Kerr!"

The face of Mr. Maggs cleared. But that of Mr. Baggie, who had not caught the whisper, was full of a second old lady.

The two fat rascals could not see outside at all. Mr. Maggs and Mr. Baggie kept them pinned, with their faces turned from the window.

They had no notion that a crowd of St. Jim's juniors had appeared in the front, and that the figure of a second old lady was just passing in at the door!

Next moment in the doorway of the dining-room stood another Miss Archbold!

The first old lady advanced to meet the second.

"My dear sister Belina!" she said, pecking at the made-up face of Kerr. "This indeed is a pleasant surprise! I did not expect you until to-morrow!"

Anyone less cool than George Francis Kerr might have been badly taken aback. Kerr had known nothing of Cardew's where. But the crowd outside had prepared him for something, and his eyes, keener by far than those of Baggie and Bunter, perceived that three desperadoes almost in a flash.

"You speaker, Cardew!" he whispered. "How could he be said!"

"I found that I could make the journey," sister Jenniana."

"Oh, phoemia, ma'am," whispered Cardew. "Oh, they don't know!" replied Kerr. "But for the pair to hear. Then he saw on his high-pitched tones: "And I was here delighted you would be to see me."

"But who are these two beggarly juvenile individuals!"

"The extremely wicked boys known to me in my guilty society," like the beggarly sister Belina!"

"Oh, sister Jenniana—phoemia! You see, they are not, on looking at them."

"I say that I saw not at all more vicious and more wicked than I ever saw in all"

"Oh, really, ma'am!" protested Bunter.

"It's all his fault! He led me into it!" wailed Baggie. "It was he who took me by the hand, Baggie, so it's no use denying it!"

"Now we are learning things!" said Mr. Maggs, who had got over his alarm.

"Yes, indeed," said his colleagues. "Looking, I should suggest a careful examination of the bodies, in order that we may see the extent of the depredations committed for depredations I am sure there have been. I myself will make such an examination, if Miss Archbold wishes."

And he bowed.

"Oh, but really, Mr. Maggs, sister Belina, and yourself, the best here with two such hardened criminals, and only one gentleman to protect us!" said Miss Archbold.

"And that one—not at all the type of man one would choose as a protector!" added Miss Belina, with a critical look at Mr. Maggs.

Mr. Maggs frowned. His cheeks said briefly:

"That is a difficulty easily overcome, Miss Archbold. I perceive outside a number of St. Jim's boys, as I judge from their caps. Shall I call some of them in?"

"Is my dear nephew Ralph there?" asked the old lady.

"No, but next door nephew George is," answered Mr. Maggs.

"Oh, young Durrance, you mean! Yes, you may call him in, and three or four more. But miss, honest-looking boys, please, Mr. Maggs! But young wretches like these!"

Miss Maggs went closer to the window, and held up a hand. She touched the sign of the finger with the forefinger of the other hand, and beckoning to George Durrance, who was nearest.

Next moment Durrance, Tom Merry, Lowther, Blake, and Arthur Armstrong trooped in. They had undertaken Mr. Maggs to mean that five of them might come, including Durrance.

"Your nephew, had'se?" he said, indicating Cardew's cousin.

Neither Cardew nor Kerr could resist the temptation.

"You dear boy!" cried Miss Archbold, clasping Durrance round the neck, and adorning his face with green-paint as she hugged him.

"Dear George!" murmured Miss Belina, feignly grabbing the unfortunate Fourth-Pounder from her sister, and kissing upon his cheeking kiss and a hot red green-paint.

"You silly ones!" growled Durrance, while the other four cringed.

Mr. Maggs went out.

"Will some of you have the kindness to seize the fat scoundrel whom my nephew has released?" boomed Mr. Baggie.

Tom and Blake grabbed Bunter.

"Oh dear! Speak up for me, Merry, there's a decent sort!" pleaded the Owl.

"Blake, old boy, we always were pals, you know—tell her—tell them. I mean, that neither Tom nor Blake responded.

But neither Tom nor Blake responded. Their faces were hard set and grim, though it was by no means easy for them to keep them so.

Mr. Maggs returned.

"I regret to have to inform you, Miss Archbold," said he, "that three or four gentlemen have been guilty of extensive thefts of your jewellery!"

"Oh dear! Bunter said that it would be all right!" moaned Baggie.

"I never said—I-I told you I don't say right to ask you—I mean, I never asked you at all. I—"

"Silence!" roared Mr. Maggs. "What is to be done, Miss Archbold?"

"As they have called the tape, it is for them to pay the paper," replied the old lady. "Your walking-stick is a trifle and this one, Mr. Maggs, I observe. Lay this most improper juvenile upon the table, in a position suitable to the receipt of corporal punishment, and—"

"I won't! You can't! Oh, really—I dare you to touch me!" burred Bunter, to whom the stern old lady had pointed.

"You will!" snapped Tom Merry.

And Tom and Blake dragged Bunter to the table, lifted him, in spite of his frantic struggles, and put him in the desired position.

Through the big bay window looked a crowd of grim faces. Baggie crouched and shivered. Mr. Maggs grinned, Durrance cowered—verybody but the two victims and the two old buffes grinned.

## CHAPTER II.

Who Were the w.o.s.: Raasah? SHALL I—operato, madam?"

asked Mr. Maggs.

"No; I will do that myself!" rapped out Miss Archbold.

"Oh, sister! No, sister! Allow me!" cried Miss Belina. "I am sure that my arm is stronger than yours."

"You can attend to the other improper fit person, my dear Belina. I have a very special dislike to this one."

Bunter and Baggie thought themselves in luck. If this was all—a threatening at the hands of an old lady, no seeking, no police-court nastiness—then they were indeed in luck's way. They had never dared to hope to get out of it so easily.

"Whack!"

"Foop! Ouf! Grawww!"

Bunter had never dreamed that an old lady could hit so hard. He did not guess even yet that the full strength of the arm of Ralph Reckless Cardew was behind that stroke.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Alke from within the room and from outside the window came peals of laughter.

Whack, whack, whack!

"Yow! Oh, don't! Stoppit! Oh, stoppit! Yaroooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Whack, whack, whack!

"Yooop! Yooe killing me! I can't stand any more! Stoppit, I say!"

"Oh crumba!"

It was Mr. Maggs who gave vent to that exclamation. And all the faces at the window were now turned the other way.

For the stolen sack had stopped at the gate for the third time, and out of it was cutting Miss Archbold herself!

"My hat, Ralph! It's Aunt Earlsone!" cried Durrance.

"Oh, hat, hat, hat! Cardew, you see!" said Levinson, in alarm. "Kerr, don't waste a minute!"

"There isn't time," said Cardew calmly. "Believe, auntie ought to be allowed."

"Let's hope she will be," Kerr said, resigning himself to the inevitable, but feeling sure to escape about it.

"Cardew! Kerr!" burred Baggie. "Oh, I say! Oh dear! You've got us all into trouble with your rotten speechee!"

"I'm gone gone!" painted Bunter. "I'm gone gone!" said his faint, "I'm gone gone gone gone gone!"

"There's a very great deal that needs explanation," Baggie spoke the voice of Miss Archbold, as she came into the

room. "I am utterly astonished and shocked! I return to find my house overrun by a horde—"

"Oh, if that was all!" said Cardow cheerily.

"It is not all—it is very far indeed from being all! Why, I really think—it seems impossible, but—are you masquerading as me—me?"

"That was the idea, Aunt Euphemia," Cardow replied, without a blush or a tremor. "Don't you think it's a jolly good get-up?"

"What I think about it I will tell you in private!" snapped the angry old lady. "And who—*who*—is this—this other beddimed female?"

"Poor attempt, isn't it, auntie? That also was supposed to be you—at least, so I believe. But Kerr's only New House! an', of course, no New House fellow can be expected to come up to my standard, y'know?"

"Hear, hear!" murmured Monty Louther.

"And the crowd outside—and these boys—what does it all mean?" demanded Miss Archbold, turning her back upon Kerr, after bestowing upon him one frowning look.

Arthur Augustus stepped forward, monocle in eye, "the glass of fashion and the mould of form," as usual.

"Pway allow me to explain, my dear lady," he began, with a wave of his slim right hand.

"And what part are you supposed to be playing in this stage-play?" snapped Miss Archbold.

"Part? I woadly do not undahstand. I am not—"

"What does this disguise of yours mean?"

"Diagnose, madam? I earthly fail to get your meaning! I am not disguised at all!"

"Then you are a disgraceful dandy, and I cannot bear dandies! Here, boy, you look natural—no tilder and no cleaner than one expects a boy to be. Perhaps you will explain!"

But for once Monty Louther was stricken dumb. It was to him Miss Archbold had turned. Monty did not claim to be a swell; but, as he said afterwards, he did not count himself a mere scrubby fag.

"Perhaps I'd better tell you, aunt," said Durrance.

"Aunt? What do you mean, boy? I do not know you!"

"I'm George Durrance."

"Oh, indeed! Then all I have to say, George Durrance, is that you have given me a very low opinion of you at the very outset of our acquaintance!"

"I'm sorry for that. But I hope you

will not think so badly of any of us when you hear just how things stand."

"Ow! Make them let me get up, ma'am! You asked me to tea—you know you did!" howled Bunter. "Make them let me get up!"

"I was n't my fault, ma'am! It was all Bunter's!" wailed Baggy.

Miss Archbold paid not the slightest attention to either; and Tom and Blake continued to hold Bunter down.

"Proceed, George Durrance!" said the old lady majestically.

Durrance told his tale; and as he told it some of the sugar slipped from the face of Miss Archbold. When he had finished she was smiling.

"What were you doing to that fat boy, Ralph?" she inquired.

"Er—taking some of the dust out of his clothes, aunt," replied Cardow.

"You can go on!"

"Veroooh! Yooop! Yow!"

A dozen more strokes fell. Then Miss Archbold said:

"I think that is enough. Let it be a lesson to you in future, fat boy, to keep your hands from picking and stealing! I shall not expect you to tea with me. You may go!"

Bunter slunk out. From the crowd that again thronged the window came a derisive cheer as he rolled slowly away.

"And now—you!" snapped Miss Archbold, turning to Baggy.

"Ow! I was n't an', do let me off! It was all Bunter's fault, really!"

"I certainly shall not let you off! If you are tired, Ralph—"

"I'm not, old dear!" replied Cardow; and those who heard held their breaths for a second. "Old dear" to Miss Archbold! But she did not seem to mind.

"I'm not a bit tired. But Kerr's entitled to this treat."

Kerr came forward, though he would have preferred to stay in the background; Kerr operated upon Baggy, held down by Louther and Durrance.

Then Baggy also was suffered to slink out.

"Call all the other boys in!" ordered Miss Archbold.

Cardow went to the door and ushered in a rather sheepish crowd.

"None of these boys was concerned in the thefts, I suppose?" said the old lady grimly.

"Oh dear no, aunt! I guarantee them all perfectly honest and respectable," answered Cardow cheerily.

"Now, you two, stand side by side!"

The command was addressed to Cardow and Kerr.

"And you imagine, both of you, that you look like me—me! Of all the

astounding impudence I ever encountered! I really do not know who are the worst rascals—the two depraved fat urchins who have just gone, or you two masquerading young buffoons!"

"I'm very sorry, ma'am," said Kerr. "None of us thought you would see us, you know."

"I'd say I was sorry, too, but I know Aunt Euphemia wouldn't believe me," Cardow said.

"I should not!" snapped the old lady. "Now, having scolded those who deserve it, I want you all to stay and have tea with me, if those two podgy villains have left anything to eat in the larder. But if not, Ralph must go out and forage—though certainly not in that costume! Ralph, take your companions in crime upstairs! Wash that disgusting paint off your faces, and show yourselves in meekly clothed decency!"

Cardow, Kerr, Louther, and Clive disappeared. Miss Archbold turned to Arthur Augustus.

"I fear that I was rather rude to you just now," she said.

"Oh, not at all, ma'am!" said Gussy politely.

"I was! Don't contradict! Are you not young D'Arcy?"

"That is my name, ma'am," replied Gussy stiffly.

"Then we are connected, though not actually related, and you must learn to bear with my snapping ways. Will you and that very nice-looking boy see what there is eatable in the place? I had to leave my maid at the station, but she will be here in a minute or two—not that she is of any use whatever in the kitchen."

Tom Merry flushed, and went off with Gussy.

Miss Archbold told the rat to make themselves at home, and went to her bed-room.

"My hat! Isn't she a knock-out!" said Manners.

"Hanged if I don't like her, though!" returned Oere. "She's a sport! She didn't let those two rat rotters off. Most women would have done, or else kicked up a silly row, and called in the police."

"And she couldn't make up her mind which were the worst rascals—Bunter and Baggy or Talbot and old Kerr!" chuckled Figg.

"Well," said Talbot, "I'm not so jolly sure myself!"

THE END.

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

READ

# "SOLD AGAIN."

A Magnificent School Tale of the Chums of Rookwood

IN

## "THE BOYS' FRIEND."

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# Extracts from "TOM MERRY'S WEEKLY" and "THE GREYFRIARS HERALD."

## BESSIE BUNTER'S

## DAY OUT. . . . . By FRANK NUGENT.

"Hullo, hullo, hullo!"  
 Bob Cherry of the Remove gave a blink of surprise as he picked a letter out of the sack addressed by her name.  
 "Good for you, Bob!" said Wharton. "We're all waiting for remittance from home, and we've all drawn blank—except you."

"Frost it out!" said Johnny Bull, with great satisfaction. "We shan't have to treat of a stale sardine to-day, after all!"

"Hurray!"  
 "The land will flow with the steaming horney milk, and a remittance in time saves trouble in Hall," said Horree Singh.  
 Bob Cherry didn't seem very locked. He had reason to believe that the letter did not contain a remittance, and he told so. "Isn't it from home?" asked Wharton, in surprise.

Bob shook his head.  
 "Blissed if I can make out the hand-writing," he said, "or the postmark, either."  
 He turned the letter over in his hand. Quite a crowd of fellows had lined up by this time.

"Open it, father!" growled Johnny Bull. "Tell us the worst!"  
 Bob slipped open the letter. The next moment his jaw dropped, and his face turned ashy.

"Not bad news, I hope!" I said anxiously.  
 Bob Cherry granted.  
 "Confound! very well be worse," he said.  
 My ball! Talk about cheek! I've a jolly good mind—"

"Who's it from?" he howled impatiently.  
 "Bessie Bunter."  
 "Who?"  
 "What?"  
 "Who?"

"We could not have been more surprised if the letter had come from the ex-Kaiser. What did Billy Bunter's sister want with Bob Cherry?"

"Bessie Bunter, who was wandering in the snow, so to speak, toward quietude."  
 "Why didn't my cousin—I mean my sister write to me?" he exclaimed.  
 "Does it say," said Bob Cherry, with a pointed frown. "This is what she says."

And he read the letter aloud.  
 "Dear Bob Cherry,—I am coming to Greyfriars to-morrow morning, arriving at Fratford Station at ten-thirty. I understand it is a whole day's holiday for you, so you might like to show me round, and make yourself generally useful."

"I'm writing to you, instead of to my brother Billy, for reasons of my own. Billy has mentioned you to me once or twice, and as you are one of his old pals I feel sure you won't mind looking after me. See that there's plenty of grub, there's a good chap, and tell your chums they may have the honour of waiting on me, if they like."  
 — Yours sincerely,  
 BESSIE BUNTER.

"Well, my hat!"  
 "What a nerve!"  
 "And to-morrow we're playing Highgate!" howled Bob Cherry. "Does Bunter's sister suppose that I prefer taking her in tow to knocking up some?"

"Of course, it will be done!" said Wharton. "You must send her a wire, and tell her there's nothing doing. It's up to Bunter to show his cousin, not us."  
 "Hear, hear!" said Johnny Bull. "Send her a wire at once, old second!"

"How can I?" roared Bob. "She hasn't left any address!"  
 "Oh, crumbs!"

"I'll find out at each other blankly. It's not much as we could do to lick her!"  
 "About having the Lordon of a company."  
 "I must do the needful, that's all," said Wharton.

"Last time Bessie was coming she brought her trunk, but he won't let her. I have to meet her here, and entertain her all day, old Bunter!"

"What?"  
 "Oh, come off!" said Johnny Bull. "You can't keep on giving your sister the go-by like this."  
 "You've got in the team once,—be killed by Desmond," said Wharton. "Now, be a good chap, and relieve Bob Cherry of this responsibility."

Bunter shook his head obstinately.  
 "I know what Bessie is," he said, "and I'd as soon meet an untamed tiger!"  
 "Look here," said Bob Cherry, wrathfully. "are you going to leave me to look after your precious sister?"

"She's asked you to—"  
 "Oh, hush the hound!" growled Johnny Bull. "He gets on my nerves! I don't believe he's got a spark of brotherly affection in him!"

"She's been chased upon the fat junior, and he came to earth with a crash."  
 "Yousoop!"

"Give him another!" said Bob Cherry. "I'm just beginning to get my head in."  
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter was well and soundly bumped, and he walked away feeling somewhat mollified. "I've got to sleep quiet, but I shall, in order to be perfectly fit for the match on the morrow."

Johnny Bull had forgotten all about Bessie Bunter's letter. He quite forgot by the time that Bessie would be taken in tow by her brother.

But a thunderbolt came in the morning. When we turned out at rising-bell we found that Bunter had disappeared.

"He's taking an early stroll, perhaps," Wharton suggested.  
 But he was wrong.

Bunter failed to show up at breaker, and no one could give us any information about him. It was only too obvious that he had gone out of gates in order to avoid meeting Bessie when she came, and as it was a whole holiday there would be no knowledge of his gait.

"It's rotten!" said Bob Cherry definitely. "No use searching for the fat beast. I suppose he's somewhere."  
 "No use whatever," said Wharton. "You'll have to put a brass lamp on it, Bob, and set the alarm of dinner."

But a light came upon Bob. "But I'm not going to let it interfere with the cricket-match. You fellows will live on a head, I take it!"

"And as having resigned ourselves to the dreadful task of entertaining Bessie Bunter, we tramped off to the railway-station shortly after six o'clock to meet her."

As for Bunter, we promised him a terrible fate—something lingering, with holding out in it—as soon as he turned up again at Greyfriars.

### II.

**B**ESSIE BUNTER was waiting on the platform when we arrived at the station. There were signs of impatience—as well as signs of suffering on her stamp face.

"My train's been in ten minutes!" she snapped, as we took her cap. "Which of you is Bob Cherry?"  
 "I am," said Bob.

Bessie Bunter looked at him curiously. "You're the chap Billy talked about, isn't you?" she said.  
 "My hat!" exclaimed Bob warmly. "It would take a good many Bunters to lick me!"

"I'll do it myself if you're not polite!" cautioned Bessie, brandishing her umbrella.  
 "Oh, crumbs!" gasped Bob, backing away in alarm.

"I think you are a very rude and uncivil boy! Billy's an awful little beast, but he'd make two of you! I've waited on this platform for half an hour, and I'm fished—staring, in fact!"  
 "Oh!"

"You don't look it!" murmured Johnny Bull.  
 "What did you say?" demanded Bessie sharply.  
 "Ahem! I—I was saying you'd better look at Johnny. He's a very nice boy, and a cricket match will do you good."  
 "You'll take me along to the luncheon

part, of course?" said Bessie. "I don't mind watching a cricket match, but I refuse to walk in on an empty stomach! Lead the way, Bob!"

We exchanged grim glances.  
 Fresh in our memories was the occasion when Snowy of the Remove had treated Bessie Bunter to a breakfast. The bill had been a hefty one; in fact, we had had to help Snop out of the faith.

"What are you waiting for?" snapped Bessie impatiently. "If you're thinking that a luncheon's not good enough for me, don't worry! I prefer a swell restaurant, of course, but there isn't one in this poky hole, so the luncheon will have to do."

With a grim grin Cherry led the way along the village street. He was beginning to wish—and so were we—that he had ignored the letter from Bessie Bunter.  
 However, we were in for it now, and there was no retreating.

We trooped into the luncheon, and Bessie Bunter sat down, looking rather sulky.  
 Two curved-cakes—large ones—a plate of ham, and half a dozen succulent—"

"Excuse me, Miss Bunter," said Wharton, "we've no more succulent-cakes."  
 "No! but I am!" said Bessie.  
 "But—but you ordered half a dozen!"

"Where, who shouldn't I?" demanded Bessie warily.  
 "Nonsense! None at all!" snapped Wharton. "Go right ahead! Never mind me!"

And Bessie Bunter went ahead. The polished top of the curved-cake, she took wiped up the ham, and the sausage-rolls disappeared as if by magic.

"We could only eat half a dozen."  
 "Are you too lazy to eat anything?" asked Bessie, looking up for the first time from her plate, where only a few crumbs remained to tell the tale.  
 "No—no—no!" said Bob Cherry. "We've all had breakfast."

"Well, I wish you'd eat something, just to keep your appetite!"  
 "But you've finished!" said Johnny Bull.  
 "Finished? Why, I've hardly started! Well—well! Bring me that dish of doughnuts!"

The waitress did so, and Bessie Bunter popped the doughnuts into her capacious mouth as if she were playing marbles. We watched her with anxious eyes.

"Be—be—be—be!" said Bessie, "but we don't want to be late for the match!"  
 "Oh! Of course not! I'm coming along right now. I think I'll bring a few of these whipped-cream wafers along with me."

Bessie's "few" consisted of two dozen; and we were looking rather blue by this time. "The fat junior's about six!" muttered Bob Cherry, in tragic tones. "And I've got 100 pence!"

"I can spare a tanner," said Johnny Bull heartily.  
 "And I've a bob!" growled Wharton. "What about you, Franky?"  
 "Shay!" I said.  
 "My hat! One-and-eight-pence won't go very far!"

Horree Singh came to the rescue.  
 "I have the esteemed gentleman," he murmured, "and I'll just get it for you. My damaged and broken Bill; but the bill will have to wait."

"Hurry up!" snarled Bessie Bunter. "Why are you so slow? I'm waiting, old woman!"  
 The bill was paid, and, with grim faces, we set off for Greyfriars.

Frank Courtenay & Co. had arrived by the time we were sitting on the cricket-ground, and they were ready to begin.  
 "Is Billy playing?" inquired Miss Bunter. "I understand in one of your star players."  
 "Yes, your father's gone out for the day," said Bob Cherry.

"In that case, it's jolly lucky I wrote to you, Bob. Very unbrotherly of Billy, to give out the bill, and most unbrotherly to give him a good spanking when we meet again."  
 "Ha, ha, ha!"  
 Bessie, divided over to where Lord Mashmore, the dapper and dandy of the Remove, reclined on a couple of rugs.  
 "Get up, you lazy boy!" she said, lowering a very angry eyebrow at Nandy's side.  
 "Oh! What be that?"  
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Manly shot up as if something had stung him.

"Run away and pick flowers!" said Bessie Bunter. "I want to bow-wow those rugs!"

"Yaas, begad! Yaas, certainly!" gasped Manly.

And he stood aside, blinking, while Bessie availed herself of the rugs.

We were just wondering whether it was safe to forsake Bessie Bunter for the pavilion, when she lifted up her voice.

"I say! I'm jolly thirsty, you know!"

"Oh, help!" moaned Bob Cherry.

"I suppose one of you wouldn't mind cutting along to the tuckshop and getting me a bottle of beer? Six bottles will be enough to go on with, I think."

"Six hob-bob-bottles!" gasped Wharton. "Certainly! And you might get me a bag of cream-buns while you're there."

Wharton almost staggered away. We heard him speak to Vernon-Smith, who was in his element.

"Lend me five bob, Smithy, for goodness' sake!" The Bunter girl's fairy cleaned us out!

Vernon-Smith grinned, and slipped a ten-shilling note into Wharton's palm.

"Bats! I doubt if you'll find ten enough," "Thanks awfully, Smithy!"

Wharton went along to the tuckshop, and returned a few moments later, loaded up with the things which he placed in front of Bessie Bunter.

There was a shout from the Highcliffe cricketers.

"Huck up, you fellows!"

"Are you never going to start?"

We gave Bessie Bunter a moment's glance of appeal. She waved her hand towards the pitch.

"Yes, you'd better begin," she said. "Hope you kick plenty of goals, Bob Cherry!"

"Oh, my aunt!" muttered Bob.

Wharton tossed with Frank Courtney for choice of innings, and lost.

"I shall be off to the first," and we were soon so busy in the field that Bessie Bunter was forgotten.

The Highcliffe fellows made a very good show at first, but were soon stood at six with only five wickets down.

"A rotten game!" said Bessie Bunter emphatically as we came off. "Why did the niggers keep pitching those Highcliffe boys with the ball?"

"Hurree Singh was bowling," said Johnny Bull curiously. "And he's not a nigger, Miss Bunter!"

"Oh, really? I suppose you're a Zulu, then?" said Bessie, turning to Inky.

Hurree Singh made no reply; but we knew that his reply would have been had Bessie Bunter been a boy. It would have been a smashing left-hander, straight from the shoulder.

"I'm feeling awfully peckish!" said Bessie. "What're you having lunch?"

"Under the trees," said Bob Cherry.

"Good! I'm coming along."

And Bessie Bunter came along. She had already eaten several lunches combined, but we didn't care to share to refuse her.

On the tables under the trees on simple repeat had been set out. There were plates of cold ham and cold beef; there were salmon and trout and various sorts of Bessie Bunter samples; them all, she disposed of them so rapidly that we could only sit and gaze.

The Highcliffe fellows were in the tuckshop. The Bessie Bunter girl was with such an enormous appetite before.

"Franky," drawled the Caterpillar, rising from 'em, "I'm awfully sorry, but the very much afraid that this same box-constructor will start on us next!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Anyway, it's a revolvin' sign!" said the Caterpillar, with a stare to refuse her.

The Caterpillar lounged away, and his schoolfellows followed. There was nothing to be gained by staying. Bessie Bunter saw that Bessie Bunter was making a clean sweep of the board.

"This is prime!" she said, looking up from between her legs. "I say, but I don't seem to be eating anything. Are you fit?"

"Very nearly!" murmured Bob Cherry.

"You can see on with the cricket, if you like," said Bessie Bunter. "I'll stay here and eat that nobody sees the grub."

With feelings too deep for words we went back to the cricket.

III.

HIGHCLIFFE were eventually dismissed for 155. It was a very big score, and we knew it would take some time to beat.

Wharton and Vernon-Smith opened the innings for the Remove, and they played stoutly and carefully.

Frank Courtney and Co. were keen as mustard in the field. Wharton was taught in the slips when he had scored a dozen, and Vernon-Smith, stepping out of his ground to a slow ball from the Caterpillar, was smartly stumped.

Mark Inlay and I got together, and we took the score to fifty. Then Frank Courtney got my middle stump spinning.

Bob Cherry was coming in to bat as I walked back to the pavilion.

"Keep your weather eye open, Bob," I remarked, in passing. "Courtney's leg-breaks are holy terrors!"

Bob grinned. By the time I had taken out of my pals he had hit Courtney out of the ground for six.

"Hurrah!"

"Well hit, sir!"

Bob Cherry continued to lay about him, and Mark Inlay backed him up splendidly. The score went up by leaps and bounds.

An hour passed; and Bob and Marky were still together. Our hopes of victory were very high.

Bob's made forty-nine," said Wharton. "Give him a cheer when he gets his fifty."

Bob Cherry took his stand against the Caterpillar.

Down came the ball, and Bob opened his shoulders to it, and was about to smite, when a shrill voice hailed him.

"Hold!"

A stream of dismay went up from the spectators.

Bessie Bunter had walked on to the pitch; and her sudden coming had put Bob Cherry off his stroke, causing him to be clean bowled.

Bob seldom lost his temper, but he came very near it now.

"Miss Bunter," he exclaimed. "Why did you sneak on like that?"

"Oh, really, you know, most boys would feel flattered to be called by their Christian names! The fact is, I was feeling peckish, and I thought you'd kicked this silly game and had tea."

Bob Cherry gazed at the girl speechlessly. He tried to say something, but words refused to come.

"You're having tea in the study, I take it?" said Bessie. "I don't want to hurry you, but I shall expect you to have it ready in half an hour."

Bob glared at Billy Bunter's plump sister as if he would like to roll the pitch with her. Then, without a word, he strode on, and rejoined us outside the pavilion.

"Hard cheese, old man!" said Wharton. "You'd have got your fifty if that awful freak had chipped in."

"I should have got my century, too," growled Bob Cherry, throwing down his bat.

"Of all the brazen cheek!" And now she's added insult to injury by saying she expects tea in the study in half an hour!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"And we're all stony, too!"

"What's to be done?"

"There's only one way out," I said, at length. "Coker of the Fifth is holding some sort of a consultation in his study to-night. We must raid his grub, and pay him back some other time. It's a pretty desperate plan, but it's our only chance."

Wharton and I were the first to start. The tea interval arrived shortly afterwards, and we hurried into the building to carry out the raid.

Everything went without a hitch, and in a very short time the table in Study No. 1 was laden with good things.

Bessie Bunter came in just as we had hoisted the lid, and gave a disapproving glance at the spread.

"What a miserable snack!" she exclaimed. "Do you call that tea for six?"

"Well, we've had our tea," said Johnny Bull untruthfully. "What's left is for you."

"You mean to tell me you've had your tea without waiting for me? Why, even Billy wouldn't do that! I consider you're a lot of pigs!"

"M-m-my hat!"

"You can clear out!" said Bessie haughtily. "If you've finished your tea, there's no need to wait. Go and get on with your homework, or whatever you call it."

For a moment we felt red-hot. But, after all, Bessie was really a girl, so we had to give her her head.

The match was resumed; but Johnny Bull, who was next in, made a wretched show. He was very hammy, and he had no tea and precious little lunch; and his wicket went down before he had broken his duck.

To cut a long story short, Highcliffe whacked us—by 25 runs. They would never have done it but for Bessie Bunter's visit to Greyfriars; that was certain.

Bessie joined us as we came away from the pavilion.

"I'm not staying for supper," she said. "Thank goodness!" murmured Bob Cherry.

"I should love to, but there really isn't time—so don't press me. My train leaves in half an hour."

"We could almost have cheered."

"You will seem me out, of course!" said Bessie.

"Oh, of course!" stammered Wharton.

"So we saw Bessie off; and it cost us another fifteen bob, which we borrowed from Manly before we started. It was needed, too; for Bessie Bunter insisted on having what she called a 'little snack' in the refreshment room just before the train left."

"Oh, I've lost my return ticket!" exclaimed Bessie, at length.

We exchanged sickly glances.

"Let's both go," muttered Johnny Bull.

So we went.

What happened to Bessie Bunter we never knew; though a good account could be given of what happened to her brother.

Wharton turned up in the dorm that night, but had all manner of tortures prepared for him. He was inked and feathered; he was tossed in a blanket; he was scolded, but he never ran the comb out; but for the fact that Whistace came in at that moment to see lights out.

Wharton vowed solemnly that he would never again ask the score of games. And we heartily agreed with him!

THE END.

The Editor's Chat.

The Companion Papers are: THE GEM, THE BOY'S FRIEND, THE PENNY POPULAR, CHUCKLES, Every Monday. Every Monday. Every Friday. Every Friday.

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