

"MYSTERY MILL!" GRIPPING YARN OF SCHOOL AND DETECTIVE ADVENTURE, STARRING THE BOYS OF ST. FRANK'S STARTS INSIDE!

# The GEM 2<sup>d</sup>



# The STAGE-STRUCK SCHOOLBOY!



As Miss Kitty Skitty entered the taxi, Lowther raised his cap, and the actress deigned him a nod in response. "Do come away, for goodness' sake!" urged Tom Merry. "It's past eleven o'clock, you champion ass!"

## CHAPTER 1.

### Breaking Bounds!

**M**ONTY LOWTHER came into Tom Merry's study, in the School House at St. Jim's, with a frown upon his brow.

He flung himself into a chair and stretched out his legs, with his hands in his trousers pockets, and stared at Tom Merry gloomily.

Tom Merry did not look up for a moment. He was writing busily, and, as he was writing a leading article for "Tom Merry's Weekly," he could not be expected to notice for the moment that Lowther was out of sorts. His pen scratched away busily.

Monty Lowther grunted, causing Tom to look up.

"Hallo!" said Tom Merry, observing the deep wrinkle in his chum's brow. "Anything wrong?"

"Yes."

"What's the row?"

Grunt!

"Haven't you done your contribution for the 'Weekly'?"

"Blow the 'Weekly'!"

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Tom Merry indignantly. "What are you grouching about? Just been bowled out for a duck's egg?"

"Oh, blow the cricket!"

"Blow it as much as you like!" said

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Tom Merry. "But what's the matter? Wherefore that worried brow?"

"Kildare's a beast!"

"Oh, it's Kildare, is it?" said Tom Merry, in surprise. "What do you mean by calling him a beast, you ass?"

Tom Merry spoke rather warmly. Kildare of the Sixth, the captain of St. Jim's, was the most popular senior the old school had ever had, and he was

skipper, Monty, so you'll have to grin and bear it."

"That's just what I'm not going to do!" said Monty Lowther determinedly. "I'm going, all the same!"

"You can't do that, Monty," said Tom Merry seriously. "If the skipper says you're not to go, you can't go. You can't ignore him."

Lowther grunted again.

"I'm not going to be bossed! I want to go, and I'm going! What I want to know is—will you come with me?"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Don't be an ass, old man! You can't go without Kildare's permission, since you've asked him! Going out without a pass is breaking bounds!"

"I'm going!" growled Lowther.

"You're not!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "Not if I have to hold you back by the ears, old man! I'm not going to see you make an ass of yourself! Besides, what do you want to see a musical comedy for?"

"Br-r-r-r!"

"That's not an intelligible answer, old man! You can't go!"

"I'm going, I tell you!" exclaimed Lowther.

"Rot!"

Monty Lowther rose to his feet, and, with a frowning brow, stamped out of the study. Tom Merry jumped up.

"Lowther, old man! Monty!"

There was no reply from the Shell

## By MARTIN CLIFFORD

the greatest of heroes in the eyes of the juniors.

"Because he is one!" growled Lowther. "He won't give me a pass out!"

"What do you want a pass out for?"

Lowther snorted.

"I want to go to the theatre in Wayland—the Theatre Royal, you know. There's a London Girl company there, doing 'The Counter Girl'—musical comedy. I want to see it, and Kildare says that a chap ought not to want to see that rot! Cheek!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"I shouldn't wonder if Kildare is quite right," he said. "Anyway, it's no good backing up against our respected

## —OF MONTY LOWTHER WITH A TRAVELLING THEATRE COMPANY.

fellow. His heavy footsteps sounded down the passage; evidently he was in an angry state of mind. Tom Merry's brow wrinkled. He glanced at the valuable literary work he had been engaged upon, and hesitated whether to follow his chum and remonstrate with him further. He was thinking it out when Manners came into the study with a roll of films in his hand.

"Got the scissors here?" asked Manners.

"Blow the scissors!"

"Ass! I want to cut these films! What's the matter?" asked Manners, noticing the troubled frown on Tom Merry's brow.

"That ass, Lowther! He says he's going over to Wayland to the theatre, and Kildare has told him he can't."

"Well, he can't, then! Where's the scissors?"

"But he says he's going, all the same."

Manners whistled.

"There will be trouble if he does. This is what comes of the blessed Amateur Dramatic Society!" said Manners. "Monty seems to be simply stage-struck lately. Look at all that rot he's been sticking up here!"

Manners waved his hand towards the walls of the study. On almost every available space of the walls were stuck pictures and photographs belonging to Monty Lowther. There were portraits of actresses and actors in various stage costumes. One especially large one was a picture of Miss Kitty Skitty, the leading lady in "The Counter Girl" musical comedy.

It was evident that Monty Lowther had lately been smitten badly with stage fever. He did not want to play Hamlet or Othello, like so many youthful aspirants for histrionic honours; his "line," as he explained to his chums, was musical comedy, and lately he had confided to Tom Merry and Manners that he was really wasting his time at St. Jim's, and that there was a big world for him to conquer on the stage. And he had become quite huffy when his chums roared with laughter at the idea.

Tom Merry frowned at the photographs with which the study walls bristled.

"Rot!" he growled. "Fancy old Lowther being such an ass! I shouldn't be surprised at it in D'Arcy, but one of us ought to have more sense."

Manners nodded, and walked over to the window. The sun was setting in the quadrangle of St. Jim's, and the fellows were coming in from the cricket field. Manners caught sight of Monty Lowther in the quad. Lowther was walking quickly in the direction of the gates, which were not yet closed, though Taggles, the porter, had come up to close them.

"He's going out!" said Manners, frowning.

"The ass! Look here, Manners, we'd better stop him! Better than letting him get a ragging from the Head."

"Yes, rather!"

"Come on, then!"

Tom Merry hurried out of the study, with Manners at his heels. The bond of friendship that united the Terrible Three was very strong, and any member of that select band would have done anything for the others.

Tom Merry and Manners ran out into the quadrangle just as Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy, the chums of Study No. 6 in the Fourth, reached the School House, coming in with their bats under

their arms. The four Fourth Formers lined up in front of the Shell fellows.

"Halt!" said Blake.

"Rats!" retorted Tom Merry. "Don't play the giddy goat now—we're in a hurry."

Tom Merry and Manners rushed on; and the four Fourth Formers closed in upon them, and in a moment there was a wild struggle in progress.

"Can't be allowed!" panted Blake, as he whirled round in a terrific struggle with Tom Merry. "Lowther's asked us—Oh!"

Bump!

Jack Blake went heavily to the ground, with Tom Merry on top of him. He clung to the Shell fellow, and they rolled over together.

"You asses!" roared Tom Merry.

"Let us go! Lemme gerrup, Blake, you chump!"

Blake gasped.

"Can't be did! We've promised Lowther! Groogh!"

"Yaas, wathah! Hold 'em, deah boys!" gasped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Let me go!" yelled Manners.

"Sit on 'em!" said Blake cheerfully.

"Now, keep still, you Shell bounders!" The Fourth Formers being two to one, easily obtained the upper hand.

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*Monty Lowther was a happy and care-free schoolboy before the glamour and romance of the stage got into his head . . . . And when one night the roll was called at St. Jim's, there was a junior missing—Lowther had answered the call of the footlights!*

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Tom Merry and Manners were rolled on their backs, and Blake, Herries, and Digby proceeded to sit upon them. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy dusted down his flannels breathlessly.

"Got 'em!" said Blake. "Now, be quiet! Lowther told us you were after him, and asked us to stop you, and we're doing it."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You fathead!" roared Tom Merry.

"Ssh! Take it calmly!"

Tom Merry struggled under the weight of Blake and Digby. He had told Lowther that he would stop him from breaking bounds, and Monty had evidently taken precautions against his being stopped. The chums of the Fourth had been only too willing to oblige Lowther in such a little matter as bumping a couple of Shell fellows.

"You ass!" Tom Merry gasped. "We want to catch Lowther—"

Blake chuckled.

"I know you do!" he said. "That's why Lowther asked us to stop you, I suppose, and we said we would. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"What's the trouble?" asked Digby. "What are you after Lowther for? Family troubles?"

"It's not a row!" snorted Tom Merry. "Lowther's going to break bounds, and we're going to stop him, or he'll get into trouble."

Blake whistled.

"Oh, I see! Why didn't you tell me that at first?"

"Did you give me a chance?" yelled Tom Merry, exasperated.

"No, perhaps I didn't," grinned

Blake. "That alters the case, though. Shall we let the Shellfish off, you chaps?"

"Imposs, deah boy!" said D'Arcy. "We've promised Lowther. He has wathah taken us in the mattah. He didn't say anythin' about bwakin' bounds. But a pwomisé is a pwomisé. We said we'd stop them if they came out."

"Quite so!" said Herries.

"Leggo!" roared Tom Merry. "Gerroff! Rescue, Shell!"

Kangaroo—otherwise known as Harry Noble—Clifton Dane, and Bernard Glyn, all Shell fellows, had come running up to see what the disturbance was about. At Tom Merry's yell they piled in cheerfully. The question whether Blake & Co. should release their victims was quickly settled. The charge of the Shell rescuers sent the Fourth Formers flying, and Tom Merry and Manners, considerably rumped and dusty, scrambled to their feet.

Leaving their friends to deal with Blake & Co., the two juniors dashed down to the gates. Taggles, the porter, had just closed them and locked up.

"Has Lowther gone out?" gasped Tom Merry.

"Yes, Master Merry."

"Open the gates, then; we want to fetch him back."

"Ave you got a pass out, Master Merry?"

"No; but—"

"Then I can't hopen the gates for you," said Taggles, with dignity. And he retired into his lodge.

"Well, he's gone!" said Tom Merry. "He'll be missed at calling-over—"

"And there'll be a row."

"Well, we've done all we could," said Tom Merry. "It's all the fault of those Fourth Form duffers! Let's go and bump them! I feel like bumping somebody!"

"Good!" said Manners, laughing.

The chums of the Shell hurried back to the School House, and lent a hand in bumping Blake & Co., which was a great solace to themselves if not to the heroes of the Fourth.

But the bumping of the Fourth Formers did not bring Monty Lowther back, and when Lowther's name was called at roll-call, he was not there to say "adsum!" And the expression upon Kildare's face was sufficient to show that there was trouble in store for the missing Shell fellow when he returned.

After calling-over Tom Merry consulted with Manners as to what they should do. It was evident that Lowther would not return until the show was over, which meant that he would get back to St. Jim's about half-past eleven. So it was that the chums of the Shell decided that they must try to save Lowther from worse punishment by making him return to the school earlier, and with that object in view Tom Merry set out for the Theatre Royal at Wayland.

### CHAPTER 2.

#### At The Theatre Royal!

THE Theatre Royal, Wayland, was not full.

The posters about the town, and the big bills outside the theatre, announced that Mr. Spodgers' Company was appearing there for one night only—positively one night only—in a performance of the renowned London success, "The Counter Girl." It was the chance of a lifetime for the

Wayland folk to witness that work of art, which would be withdrawn, perhaps for ever, from their gaze after that single performance.

Yet the Wayland folk did not roll up in hundreds. Consequently, when the orchestra of seven struck up the overture, the house was not more than half full, and the opening chorus of "The Counter Girl" was sung with plenty of space to re-echo the voices.

But there was one extremely keen spectator, at least.

It was Monty Lowther of the Shell Form at St. Jim's.

Lowther had taken a stall—stalls at the Theatre Royal, Wayland, were not prohibitive in price—and he had a wide and uninterrupted view of the stage.

The opening chorus of the musical comedy represented the shopgirls and shopwalkers in the great stores of Bulkeley's engaged in chorus singing in the silk department—which, of course, was not a very natural occupation for the employees of a great London store.

The absurdity of the scene did not seem to strike the Wayland audiences any more than it generally strikes London audiences, and Lowther least of all.

Monty Lowther was suffering from a very bad attack of stage-fever, and anything stagey seemed to him at that time beyond mere criticisms.

The hero of the piece was a handsome young Oxford gentleman, the son of the wicked proprietor, and on falling in love with the Counter Girl, the young Oxford gentleman proceeded to re-organise the business on lines more convenient to the employees. That was the plot of the piece, so far as it had any plot, and it seemed to Monty Lowther, as he watched, that he was eminently fitted to take the part of the young Oxford gentleman.

The wicked proprietor, Bulkeley, was played by Mr. Splogders himself, but the great attraction was Miss Kitty Skitty, supposed to be a London actress of great success and renown who condescended to tour the provinces apparently from sheer good-nature.

Lowther watched Miss Kitty with glued eyes.

The lad was too young to take any special notice of the paint that was laid on almost in cakes, of the old, old face that looked through the powder, and the mechanical smile.

To him Miss Kitty was the embodiment of youth and grace and art, and the terrible strains of the "Counter Girl" waltz were music to his ears, since Miss Kitty Skitty was dancing to them.

When the first act was over, and the wheezy strains of the orchestra had died away, Monty Lowther drew a deep breath, like a fellow awakening from a daydream.

"Oh, ripping!" he murmured aloud.

The thought of St. Jim's returned to his mind then.

It was already nine o'clock, and ere long it would be time for the juniors of St. Jim's to be in bed.

Monty Lowther frowned angrily at the thought.

He was determined to see the musical comedy to the finish at whatever cost, but he knew very well that there would be trouble if he did not return to the school till past eleven o'clock.

It seemed to Lowther that he was wasting his time at the school, grinding weary Latin that would never be of any use to him in the great world, and mugging up mathematics that had only made his headache, when there was the

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stage, all the glories behind the footlights, calling and beckoning to him, offering him admission into an unknown world of romance.

"If a chap only had a chance!" he murmured. "I'd take anything—even call-boy—to begin! My hat, I'd cut St. Jim's if I could get into that!"

"Monty, you ass!"

He had spoken aloud, and an unexpected voice replied. He turned his head quickly, and found Tom Merry at his side.

He stared at his chum in amazement.

"Tom! You here, old man!"

Tom Merry frowned.

"You ass, yes! Come back with me now! Look here, I've broken bounds to bring you back, Monty, and paid for admission to this show, too. I knew I should find you here. Come out with me before the next act begins!"

Monty Lowther shook his head.

"I'm not coming!" he said.

"Look here, Monty, it won't do. You must come! You've come out without permission, and if you're out at bedtime, there will be awful trouble!"

Monty Lowther's lips set obstinately.

"I don't care, Tom. I'm not coming!"

"The Head will know about it."

"Let him know!"

"You may get a flogging!"

"I don't care!"

Tom Merry looked at his chum in uneasiness. He had never known Monty Lowther like this before. Lowther had been very keen on private theatricals, and of late he had shown many signs of being stage-struck. But Tom Merry had never expected the glamour of the footlights to seize upon his old chum in this way.

He was perplexed, and did not know what to do. He could not drag Lowther out of the theatre by force, but to let him remain, and to remain himself, was to expose both of them to serious trouble at St. Jim's.

"You'd better go," said Lowther shortly. "I don't want you to get into a row, and you don't care for this, anyway."

"Well, I'd like to see it through," said Tom Merry. "But there will be trouble if we don't get back much before midnight."

"Leave me here, then."

"I'm not going without you!" said Tom Merry decidedly.

Lowther made an impatient gesture.

"You were an ass to come!" he said. "It's no good both of us getting into a row. I'm going to see it through, and that's flat!"

"Look here, Monty, old man, don't play the giddy goat. You must come back."

"Shut up; they're beginning!"

The orchestra had been playing a selection of "Old English Airs," with variations—so varied that their own composers would not have known them! But that discordance died away, and some bars of the great "Counter Girl" waltz were struck up as the curtain rose again. Monty Lowther's eyes were glued upon the stage at once, and Tom Merry relapsed into indignant and worried silence.

The second act would last till ten o'clock, and by that time all the juniors at St. Jim's would be in bed. Lowther and Tom Merry would be missed, and a wrathful prefect would be waiting up for them.

But it was evidently useless to speak to Lowther now, and Tom Merry was not inclined to leave his chum. So he sat there in troubled spirits, while the second act of "The Counter Girl" commenced.

It opened with the extremely improbable scene of the Counter Girl herself dancing with the head shopwalker, who was the leading comedian, while the other employees and the fashionably dressed customers stood around and sang in chorus. This was the great waltz scene.

"Blessed rot!" murmured Tom Merry, in disgust. "Besides, they're playing out of tune. Listen to that cornet!"

"Oh, cheese it!"

Monty Lowther was deaf to such criticisms.

All he saw was Miss Kitty Skitty dancing the celebrated waltz, and he was keenly interested when the young Oxford gentleman rushed upon the scene, jerked the shopwalker from his partner, took his place, and danced on with the Counter Girl, without any interruption of the waltz. They waltzed round the comic shopwalker, who lay on his back kicking up his feet, to the intense amusement of the audience.

Tom Merry was young enough to be amused and pleased by the play, absurd as it was, if he had not been worried about the flight of time.

He looked at his watch as the curtain fell after the second act. It wanted but a few minutes to ten.

He tapped Monty Lowther on the shoulder.

Lowther seemed to come to himself with a start. He turned a glowing face upon the captain of the Shell.

"Isn't it ripping?" he exclaimed.

"Well, the cornet is," said Tom Merry. "I wonder it doesn't rip the roof off."

"If you're going to talk rot—" began Lowther.

"I'm not talking rot," said Tom Merry. "I'm listening to rot!"

"Oh, rats!"

"Let's get out, Monty. You've seen enough."

"I'm staying till the finish."

"What do you think the prefects will say when we get in?"

"I don't care."

"Well, I do," said Tom Merry. "I don't want to be caned and gated for a month."

"Buzz off now, then."

"Not without you."

"Look here, Tom, it's no good your staying. I'm sticking it out till the finish, but you needn't. If I could get a job with that company I wouldn't go back to St. Jim's at all."

Tom Merry stared at him.

"Well, you've got it bad, and no mistake," he remarked.

"I want to be an actor," growled Lowther. "I've asked my uncle about it. He snorted."

"Well, if I'd been your uncle, Monty, I fancy I should have snorted, too," said Tom Merry. "You ass, what about St. Jim's?"

"Blow St. Jim's! Musical comedy's my line!"

"Br-r-r-r!"

"There goes the curtain."

It was the third act. In the course of the act the young Oxonian completely revolutionised the business, and the wicked proprietor became very good, apparently converted to better ways by means of the unlimited use of the "Counter Girl" waltz; and in a grand finale the proprietor of Bulkeley's Stores, and his son, the young Oxford gentleman, and the Counter Girl, and the comic shopwalker, and everybody else joined in a dance and a tableau, and apparently lived happily ever afterwards when the curtain was down for the last time.

"All over!" said Monty Lowther, with a sigh.  
 "Yes, you ass!" growled Tom Merry.  
 "Now let's get back!"  
 And Monty Lowther allowed himself unwillingly to be led from the theatre.

**CHAPTER 3.—  
 Lowther In "Luck"!**

**T**OM MERRY caught a tight hold upon Monty Lowther's arm as they passed out with the throng. He was half afraid that Monty might give him the slip and decline to return to the school even then.

His chum was in a very strange mood, under the influence of the music, the scenery, the dancing, and the excitement. Tom Merry hardly knew what to make of him. This was not the Monty Lowther he had always known—the Lowther of the study, the Form-room, and the cricket field. It seemed to be an entirely new Lowther, with whom Tom Merry was hardly acquainted.

"Come on, Monty!" said Tom Merry, as they left the theatre and the fresh air of the evening blew in their faces.  
 "No hurry," said Monty Lowther.

The Shell fellow still showed a strong desire to linger near the theatre. He drew Tom Merry round to the side of the building to get a view of the stage door. The performers began to leave after a time.

A cab was in waiting for Miss Kitty Skitty as she came out. Monty Lowther raised his cap in an almost worshipping manner, and the lady deigned him a little nod in response.

"Do come away, for goodness' sake!" urged Tom Merry. "Do you know it's past eleven o'clock, you champion ass?"  
 "I haven't seen Curil come out yet."

"Who on earth's Curil?"  
 "Chap who plays Bulkeley junior—the Oxford chap, you know."  
 "What do you want to see him for?"  
 "Oh, rats!"

Mr. Curil came out a few minutes later. In the light of a street lamp, with the grease-paint washed off his face, Mr. Curil did not look quite so handsome as on the stage. Indeed, the young Oxford graduate of the comedy was a gentleman of at least forty in private life.

"That's the chap!" said Monty Lowther.  
 Mr. Curil heard the enthusiastic words, and he glanced round.

"I've just seen your show, sir," said Monty Lowther.

Mr. Curil ran his eye—a very keen eye—over Monty Lowther and his companion. The eager look upon Lowther's face betrayed the stage-struck boy, and Mr. Curil smiled. If he had tried to remember he might have recalled similar feelings in his own breast about twenty-five years earlier. But Mr. Curil had been long enough on the stage to have lost all sense of the glamour of it. To him it meant hard reality and not fairyland; it meant compressing into reasonable limits a figure which had a natural disposition towards stoutness; it meant forcing his voice up into a register beyond the limits intended by Nature; and it meant, as a rule, hard work and short commons.

And at this time Mr. Curil was in very low water indeed, for Mr. Splodgers had not paid his company for three weeks, and the takings at Wayland Theatre Royal did not justify any expectation on the part of his company that he would be able to liquidate the arrears at an early date. Mr. Splodgers, indeed, had only saved his tour from untimely death on two occasions by taking into his company eager young actors who were provided with more money than brains and who were willing to pay for the privilege of being allowed to appear on a real stage with a real company, hoping to use the Splodgers' Co. as a stepping-stone to greater things in the metropolis.

"Oh, you've been in front, have you?" said Mr. Curil kindly.

"Yes, sir. It was splendid—especially your solo, 'The times we have at Oxford!'" said Monty Lowther eagerly.

Mr. Curil smiled with appreciation.

"Oh! You like that?" he said.  
 "It was ripping, sir."

"I'm glad I've met you," said Mr. Curil. "It's encouraging to meet with appreciation and with enthusiasm in these days. Are you walking my way?"

"Yes," said Monty Lowther, without the slightest idea which way Mr. Curil's way. But whatever way it was, Monty Lowther intended to go that way, to gain the inestimable honour and advantage of the actor's company.

Tom Merry tugged his arm.  
 Lowther shook off his grasp angrily.  
 "You cut off, Tom," he whispered.  
 "Let me alone now."

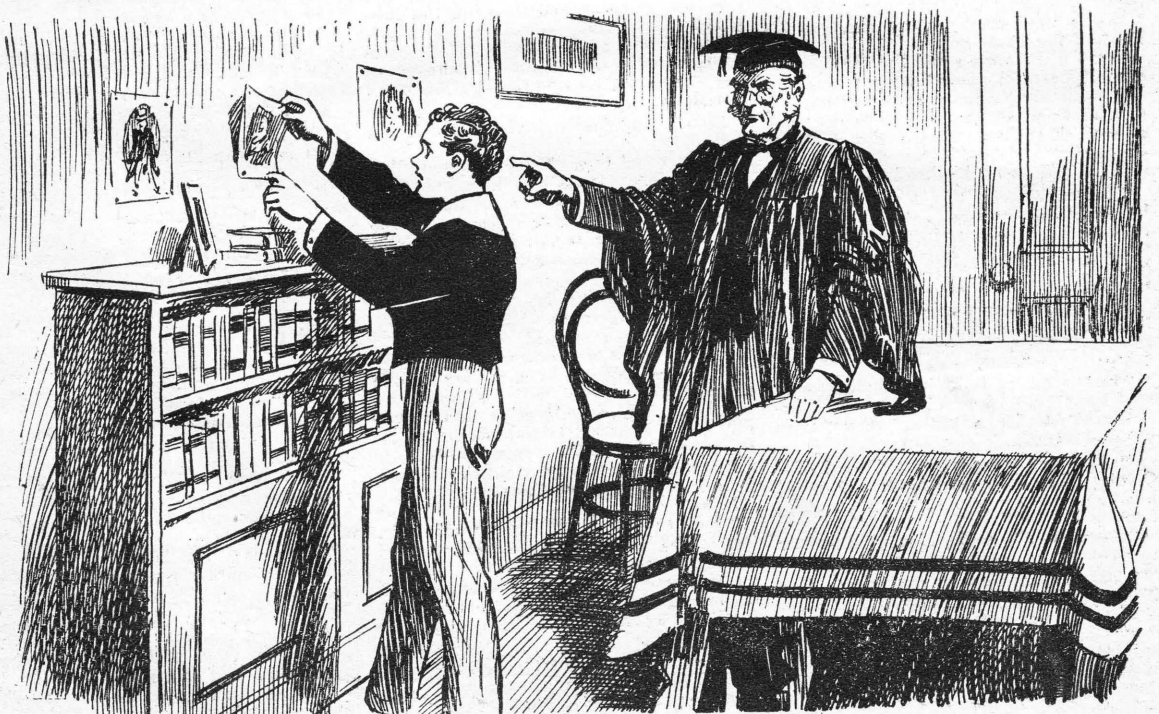
And Monty Lowther walked down the street with Mr. Curil.  
 Tom Merry stood alone.

He was amazed, and he was hurt. He felt inclined to run after his chum, and drag him away by main force; but he refrained. Monty Lowther was in a mood to quarrel with his best chum just then. But Tom Merry did not know what to do. He was unwilling to return without his friend; and yet it was quite clear that Lowther would not return.

Tom Merry stood in troubled indecision, while Lowther and Mr. Curil strode away together. Mr. Curil did not seem to notice the separation of the two schoolboys. He was busy talking—about himself, of course—a subject of never-ending interest to most gentlemen who follow the stage.

Monty Lowther listened entranced to the pearls that dropped from Mr. Curil's lips. They reached Mr. Curil's lodgings in a little street off the old High Street of Wayland, and Mr. Curil asked Lowther if he would like to step in.

There was nothing in the universe that the junior desired more; and he



"Take down those absurd photographs from the wall!" ordered the Head. Lowther hesitated. He cherished those stage pictures. But he had to obey Dr. Holmes. "All of them!" said the Head grimly. "And set fire to them in the grate!"

followed Mr. Curil up a rickety stair, into complete darkness. Mr. Curil struck a match and lighted an unshaded gas-jet, and gave Lowther a cheery smile.

"Excuse the quarters," he said. "These country towns—you understand!"

"Oh, I understand," said Lowther.

Certainly, Mr. Curil's quarters were not palatial. There was a bed in the corner of the room, and a rickety table in the centre; a washstand, with dirty water still in the basin, and a chair that had seen better days long since.

"You'd like to see some of my notices," said Mr. Curil.

"Yes, indeed," said Lowther.

"Sit down. By the way, what did you say your name was?"

Monty Lowther hadn't said that his name was anything, but he gave it now. He did not mention that he was a schoolboy absent without permission from his school. That was not a circumstance likely to interest Mr. Curil.

"Sorry I can't offer you any refreshments, Mr. Lowther," said Mr. Curil. "If we were in town, instead of these rotten provinces, I'd ask you to come round to supper at the Troc. But here—" Mr. Curil made a gesture implying his boundless scorn and contempt for the provinces. "You'd like to see my notices. Here they are! Hardly know why I kept the things, but friends like to see them."

Considering that Mr. Curil hardly knew why he had kept his Press notices, they were preserved very carefully, cut out and arranged and dated. They were chiefly extracts from such powerful organs of public opinion as the "Slocum Gazette," "The Little Pubberton Sentinel," and so forth. But they certainly gave glowing accounts of Mr. Curil. Monty Lowther dimly realised that nobody was suffered to enter Mr. Curil's quarters without reading those Press notices, and he read them manfully. After all, a little harmless vanity was excusable in so great a man as Horatio Curil.

"I'd like to go on the stage," said Monty Lowther bashfully, coming to the thought uppermost in his mind as he finished the Press notices.

Mr. Curil smiled as he lighted a cigar.

"Of course, I should have to learn a lot," said Monty Lowther modestly. "I shouldn't expect to be able to do what you do, Mr. Curil. But I wish I had a chance."

Mr. Curil shook his head.

"It needs money to get on nowadays," he said, with a sigh. "You'd hardly believe that I've been in musical comedy for ten years—ever since I was twenty, in fact, without a chance of getting into what I was born for—grand opera."

Monty Lowther would have imagined that more than ten years had passed since Mr. Curil was twenty, but he was too polite to say so.

"But what you do is splendid, sir," said Lowther. "I wish I had a chance—I don't ask for anything better than musical comedy."

"Even that needs capital," said Mr. Curil. "Mr. Spodgers hatés beginners, but he sometimes puts them on the stage for a premium."

"Does he?" said Monty Lowther eagerly.

"Yes, it costs money, you know. I've had my successes," said Mr. Curil, with a sigh. "You can see that from the few notices I've kept out of the hundreds. But you'd hardly believe it, at the present moment I should be thoroughly glad of the loan of ten shillings."

Monty coloured a little. He hap-

pened to be in funds, and he would gladly have contributed ten shillings, or a pound, to the needs of a follower of the glorious Thespian art. But he shrank from seeming to take Mr. Curil's remarks as a hint, and he only said:

"Indeed!"

"Yes," said Mr. Curil. "Indeed! By the way, if you—" He paused.

It was plain enough at last, and Monty Lowther's hand went into his pocket.

"Might I—I offer—" he stammered.

"Thank you," said Mr. Curil, slipping the ten shillings into his waistcoat pocket. "I'll send you a cheque for this. So you're thinking of going on the stage."

"I only wish I could get a chance."

"Well, as far as that goes I could help you," said Mr. Curil. "I've taken a fancy to you—I shouldn't wonder if I used my influence with Mr. Spodgers, if he could find you an opening in the company. —How would you like to be my understudy?"

Monty Lowther's eyes danced.

"Oh, sir!" he gasped.

Mr. Curil laughed.

"You'd like that, eh?"

"Oh, sir!"

"Well, it could be fixed," said Mr. Curil. "You couldn't get a better opening than in a touring company like the Spodgers Co." Mr. Curil thought of the salary unpaid for three weeks, and of the extreme probable prospect of "The Counter Girl" Company going to pieces on the road, and of its members being left to get away as best they could, and he felt a momentary twinge of conscience. But conscience was too expensive a luxury for Mr. Curil to cultivate to any great extent, and he went on: "In a touring company, you see life—you pick up stage knowledge—you get to know the ins and outs of the business. Then comes your chance. London managers often come down to see a provincial company, to pick up stars for the London stage. If there's anything in you, they spot you, and—there you are!"

"And—and you think you could work this for me?" asked Lowther breathlessly.

"I think I could. Only Spodgers is a business man, you know—he takes on beginners on the usual terms," Mr. Curil explained.

Monty Lowther's joyful face fell a little.

"The usual terms!" he repeated.

"Certainly. You see, he's put to a great deal of expense over it, in one way and another. But if you've got the rhino—ahem! I mean, if you are provided with the necessary capital—"

"I'm afraid I haven't very much," said Lowther gloomily. "I—"

"That's unfortunate."

"How much would be needed?" asked Lowther nervously.

Mr. Curil took a keen survey of the schoolboy.

"Well, Mr. Spodgers' terms generally are a hundred pounds down for an engagement for three months—"

Lowther's face went down to zero.

"Or twenty-five—"

Lowther brightened up.

"Twenty-five would do it," said Mr. Curil. "I should have to talk to Mr. Spodgers and explain to him that it was a personal friend of mine whom I wished to oblige, and I have no doubt that he would see it in the proper light."

"I don't know how to thank you," said Monty Lowther gratefully. "I've got thirty pounds in the bank; it was put there for me, you know, by an aunt, and I can draw it out if I like. My uncle's a bit skinny with the cash,

you know, and this was for me to use if I needed money badly—my aunt's a good sort. I've not touched it so far, but for a reason like this—well, I don't think I could put it to better use."

"Thirty pounds!" exclaimed Mr. Curil.

He looked as if he was going to embrace Monty Lowther for a moment, but he restrained himself.

"The trouble is, we're leaving to-morrow by the afternoon train," he remarked. "Could you come over and see Mr. Spodgers in the morning?"

"Yes," said Lowther recklessly.

"Good! Get here, say at twelve."

"I'll come."

"And you'd better bring the money, and then the whole matter could be settled right away," suggested Mr. Curil.

Lowther hesitated.

"I—I can't do that," he said. "My aunt put the money in the post office for me, and it takes two or three days to get it out."

"Quite simple," said Mr. Curil cheerfully. "Bring the bankbook with you, just to show Mr. Spodgers as a proof of good faith. Of course, I take your word absolutely, but Mr. Spodgers doesn't know you, and he's devilish keen on forms in business matters. You have to send in a notice or something, don't you, to get money out of the post office?"

"Yes; a withdrawal notice."

"I don't have money in that kind of bank myself," said Mr. Curil condescendingly. Mr. Curil might have added with perfect truth that he did not have money in any other kind of bank either. "But that seems to me all right. You send in this—er—notice, asking for the money to be paid to you at a post office in Abbotsford—that's the next stopping-place of the company—and you can draw it out there and hand it over to Mr. Spodgers. It will be quite simple."

Mr. Curil rose, and Monty Lowther rose also. The Shell fellow of St. Jim's shook hands with Mr. Curil, and thanked him with a depth of gratitude which made Mr. Curil feel an uncomfortable inward twinge again.

Then he took his leave, and walked out of the lodging-house with an airy step, with the footlights flashing before his mind's eye, and the strains of music in his ears, and all London at his feet.

## CHAPTER 4.

### Resolved to Run Away!

"MONTY!"

Monty Lowther started. In the deep interest of his talk with Mr. Curil, he had forgotten Tom Merry's very existence, and the voice of his chum brought him back to realities with a start.

"Hallo, Tom! I—I thought you'd gone back!"

"I've been waiting for you," said Tom Merry quietly.

"I'm sorry, Tom. We'll get off now."

"Time we did!" said Tom Merry grimly. "Twelve's just gone from the church."

Monty Lowther did not reply, and they walked away in silence. The last local train from Rycombe had gone long since, and there was nothing for it but to walk back to St. Jim's. They took a short cut through the wood, and walked on in silence for a long time.

It was Monty Lowther who broke

the silence at last, as they came out into the road that led to the gates of St. Jim's.

"It must be half-past twelve, Tommy."

"Quite!" said Tom Merry.

"There'll be an awful row."

"Have you only just thought of that?" asked Tom Merry sarcastically.

Lowther was silent.

"What did you stay with that chap for?" demanded Tom Merry.

"He's going to help me to get on the stage."

Tom Merry stopped short.

"What?"

"You heard what I said," answered Monty Lowther doggedly.

"Are you dotty, Monty?"

"Oh, rats!"

"Help you to get on the stage!" Tom Merry repeated. "You must be rocky. Are you thinking of leaving St. Jim's, then?"

"Yes."

"My hat!"

They walked on in silence again. Tom Merry felt that Lowther, in his present mood, was not to be argued with; the stage-struck junior was past reasoning with. And Tom Merry was far from suspecting the arrangement Lowther had made with the obliging Mr. Curil, and Lowther did not tell him.

The two juniors reached the gates of St. Jim's. It was useless, of course, to think of disguising the fact that they had been out, so Tom Merry rang the bell. It was five minutes before Taggles came down to the gates, and the light of his electric torch gleamed through the bars.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" he said, blinking at them.

"Yes, it is," said Lowther crossly.

"Ho!" said Taggles indignantly.

He opened the gates and the juniors entered.

"You're to report yourselves to Master Kildare," said Taggles. "He's a-waitin' up for you. Nice goings hon, I must say!"

The juniors crossed the shadowy quadrangle towards the School House. A light was burning in the Hall, unaccustomed at that hour. The juniors found the door unfastened, and they entered. Kildare was sitting in the Hall reading. He rose as they came in, his brow very stern.

"Oh!" he said. "You've come in?"

Tom Merry flushed under the accusing eyes of the captain of St. Jim's. Monty Lowther looked dogged.

"Yes," said Tom Merry. "We're sorry, Kildare."

"You've broken bounds and stayed out till a quarter to one."

"The last train was gone from Wayland, when—when—"

"When you came out of the theatre," said Kildare grimly. "I suppose that's where you've been?"

"Yes," said Tom Merry, flushing again.

"I told you, at least, Lowther, that you were not to go there."

Lowther was silent.

"I'm not going to deal with you," said Kildare. "It's too serious for that. The Head asked me to wait up for you, and you're to go and see him immediately after prayers in the morning. If you get a severe caning, it will serve you right."

"You can leave Tom Merry out of it," said Lowther, breaking the silence. "He came over to fetch me back, and only stayed because I wouldn't come."

Kildare's face relaxed a little.

"Well, that's put a different complexion on the matter, so far as you are concerned, Merry," he said. "You'd better tell that to the Head, Lowther. Go to bed now, both of you."

The juniors went up to the Shell dormitory, and Kildare locked up the House, and retired to his own room.

Tom Merry turned on the light in the Shell dormitory, and two or three of the fellows opened their eyes.

"Oh, here you are!" said Manners.

"Yes," said Tom Merry, "here we are."

"What's the time?"

"Nearly one."

"Phew! There'll be trouble," said Kangaroo. "Lowther was a fathead to go, and you were a bigger fathead to go looking for him, Tommy, my son."

"Oh rats!" said Monty Lowther.

The two juniors turned in. Tom Merry was soon fast asleep, but to Monty Lowther the dark hours were wakeful ones. He was thinking—or trying to think—what was to be the outcome of his visit to Wayland Theatre Royal, and the acquaintance he had made with Mr. Curil.

It was not till he was in bed in the sleeping dormitory that he was able to review what had passed quietly in his mind and to think of what it meant to him.

He realised that he had promised Mr. Curil to join "The Counter Girl" Company, and to pay Mr. Spodgers twenty-five pounds for an engagement with that company.

He realised that this meant he would leave St. Jim's. And as he certainly would not get his uncle's permission to leave school and go on the stage, there remained nothing for him but to run away from school.

Run away from school!

He shivered a little at the thought. It was a startling idea, and yet there was nothing else to be done, unless he was to abandon this wonderful opportunity which had opened out before him like a glimpse of fairyland.

And there was the punishment, too, on the morrow. He could save Tom Merry from that by explaining how matters stood; but himself, he could scarcely expect anything less than a flogging for so flagrant a breach of the school rules and such defiance of authority.

It was long before Lowther slept, but before his eyes closed his resolution was taken—to accompany "The Counter Girl" Company when they left Wayland on the following afternoon and to take his chance upon the stage. And as he knew very well that his own chums would prevent his flight if they could,

he resolved to say nothing upon the subject before he departed. He fell asleep at last and dreamed that he was dancing "The Counter Girl" waltz with Miss Kitty Skitty, to thunders of applause from an enthusiastic audience.

CHAPTER 5.

Before the Head!

AFTER prayers the next morning Tom Merry and Monty Lowther went to the Head's study together. They found Dr. Holmes

with a very stern frown upon his brow. Tom Merry coloured as he met the Head's eyes. He knew that there was no excuse to be offered for the happenings of the previous evening; it had been simply a flagrant breach of college rules, without any justification whatever, unless Monty Lowther's attack of stage fever could be taken as some sort of justification.

"You two boys broke bounds last night," said the Head abruptly. "I hear from Kildare that it was considerably past midnight when you returned."

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry.

"Such conduct is utterly unexampled," said the Head. "I am as perplexed as annoyed. It was not like what I know of you, Merry."

Tom Merry flushed more deeply. "I'm sorry, sir," he muttered.

Then Lowther spoke up. "It wasn't Tom's fault, sir," he said.

"He only left the school to come over to Wayland for me, to fetch me back."

"Merry should not have left the school without permission, even for that object," said the Head. "However, if that is the case, I can excuse him, as

(Continued on the next page.)

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his motives were good. But am I to understand that he tried to make you return, and you refused?"

"Yes, sir."

"And then Merry remained, with you?"

"He wouldn't go without me, sir. It wasn't his fault."

"I am quite prepared to believe that," said the Head. "But this makes your conduct all the worse, Lowther. You not only broke bounds and went to a place you were forbidden to visit, but you obstinately remained there after your friend had come, at considerable risk to himself, to point out your duty to you. Have you any excuse to offer?"

Lowther was silent.

"I am waiting for you to speak, Lowther," said the Head. "Merry, you may go. I accept Lowther's statement concerning you, and you are excused."

"Thank you, sir."

Tom Merry lingered for a moment; he was loath to leave his chum to face the music alone, but he could not stay. He quitted the study slowly and with a troubled brow. Monty Lowther remained alone with the Head.

"Well, Lowther, what have you to say? Why did you do this?"

"I wanted to go to the theatre," said Lowther. "I—I want to be an actor, sir. I— You won't understand, I know, but—I—"

The Head looked at the boy's flushed face with keen, attentive eyes. The Head had had an experience of boys extending over twice as many years as Monty Lowther's whole life, and he understood them; he understood Lowther, perhaps, better than the junior understood himself.

He rose from his chair.

"Come with me, Lowther," he said.

"Yes, sir."

Monty Lowther followed the Head in wonder. Dr. Holmes went directly to the Shell passage, to Tom Merry's study. The other boys were in their Form-rooms now, and the passages were deserted. Dr. Holmes entered the study and glanced round the room with a severe eye. He smiled grimly as he noted the theatrical pictures and photographs on the study walls.

"I thought so!" he murmured. "You may go in, Lowther. Take down those absurd photographs from the walls."

Lowther hesitated. But there was nothing for it but to obey. Dr. Holmes stood in the study, frowning, while Lowther pulled down the offending photographs.

"All of them!" said the Head grimly.

Lowther obeyed.

"Put them in the grate and set fire to them," said the Head.

Monty Lowther, with a crimson face, and his heart beating with suppressed wrath, obeyed. There was no choice in the matter. He crammed the pictures, photographs, and gaudy postcards into the grate, and applied a match to them. There was a flare, and Monty Lowther's art gallery was soon burning away merrily.

Not till the heap was consumed did the Head speak again. He fixed his eyes upon the Shell fellow's gloomy face. He was still frowning, but when he spoke his voice was unexpectedly kind.

"I think I understand what is the matter with you, Lowther," he said. "You are what is called stage-struck—the stage possesses your imagination to the exclusion of everything else."

"It is not an uncommon thing, but you must learn to control sentiments of this kind, my boy. You must not bring

any rubbish of that sort into the school again. And you shall certainly never attend a theatre again until you can do so without allowing the place to affect your imagination so strongly. Self-control is a lesson everyone has to learn. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir," muttered Lowther.

"I am going to excuse you for your absurd conduct last night," said the Head. "I shall not punish you. But you must clearly understand that if there is any repetition of it, I shall punish you most severely. You may now go to your Form-room."

Monty Lowther stood for a moment amazed. The unexpected kindness of the Head touched him. He had not expected to escape punishment, and he felt a twinge of remorse as he reflected upon what his secret intentions were.

"I—I am sorry, sir!" he faltered. "I—I wouldn't lose your good opinion for anything, sir. I'm sorry if you should think badly of me."

Dr. Holmes' face softened.

"I shall not think badly of you, Lowther, if you will remember your duty to your people and to your school, and give me reason to think well of you," he said. "Let all this be forgotten, and prove by your conduct that my leniency has not been misplaced."

And the Head left the room.

Monty Lowther made his way slowly to the Shell Form Room. Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, gave him a sharp glance, but did not make any remark upon his being late.

Lowther sat in a dreamy state during the lessons, hardly hearing what was said to him, and answering almost at random.

His thoughts were not in the Form-room at St. Jim's—they were far away on the Thespian boards, and instead of the Form-master's voice the strains of "The Counter Girl" waltz were in his ears!

## CHAPTER 6.

### Monty Lowther is Mysterious!

"FEELING fit?" asked Tom Merry, clapping Monty Lowther on the shoulder as they came out of the Shell Form Room.

Lowther started out of a dream.

"Eh? Oh, yes!"

"You've got some hard batting to do this afternoon," said Tom Merry. "I hear that Fatty Wynn is in better form than ever, and the New House chaps are saying that we're going to have a complete set of duck's eggs in the House match."

"Eh?"

"So we've all got to buck to," said Tom Merry cheerfully, deliberately taking no notice of Lowther's absent-mindedness.

Tom Merry had determined to pass over the events of the evening before without mention. He could see that the matter was still in Lowther's mind, and that his lucky escape from punishment had not changed the current of his thoughts in the least. But it was evident that Lowther was not in a mood to be argued with; and Tom Merry was determined to act as if nothing had happened, in the hope of drawing his chum's thoughts back into their usual channel. As a rule, Lowther was keen enough about a House match.

He did not seem very keen now.

"Figgins & Co. think that they're going to beat us this time," remarked Manners, seconding his leader manfully. "Fatty Wynn's a demon bowler,

and no mistake! You'll have to keep an eye on him, Monty."

"Eh?"

"Lovely weather for cricket, anyway," said Tom Merry. "Hallo, Blake! Feeling up to knocking the ball over the pav?"

Blake grinned.

"I'm as right as rain," he said. "We're going to knock Figgins & Co. sky-high this time. We're all in good form."

"Good!" said Tom Merry. "I'm going to put Reilly in this time, too. Lemme see, the team will be Blake, Dig, Herries, D'Arcy, Kangaroo, Reilly, Manners, Lowther, myself—"

"Don't put me in," said Monty Lowther quickly.

"You're in already," said Tom Merry.

"I can't play this afternoon."

"Why not?" demanded Blake warmly. "There aren't many fellows who'd turn up their noses at batting for the junior House team."

"I can't!"

"Well, put in a chap in the Fourth," said Blake. "There are really too many of the Shell in the team, as a matter of fact. I suggest Macdonald of the Fourth."

Tom Merry frowned.

"Lowther's going to play," he said. "Look here, Monty, you can't cut a House match. Do be reasonable," he said seriously.

Lowther looked worried. He was thinking of his appointment with Mr. Horatio Curil in Wayland, already overdue. If he started for Wayland at once, he would be nearly an hour late for his appointment with Mr. Curil, and he was anxious lest he should be too late. He might miss his engagement with Mr. Splogders—the chance of a lifetime!

"What's the matter with the fat-head?" demanded Blake warmly. "Look here, Lowther, if it's late hours that make you like this, you'd better give 'em up."

"Yaas, watah! I'm surprised at you, Lowthah!"

"I can't play, and I won't!" said Monty Lowther obstinately. "There's plenty of chaps glad to play."

"That's true enough."

"You won't miss me," said Lowther. "I don't feel up to cricket to-day, anyway. I'm thinking of other things. Be a good chap, Tom, and don't jaw me!"

Tom Merry softened at once.

"Well, that's all right, Monty," he said. "I'm thinking of you chiefly. You've been going on in a rotten way lately. Why not make up your mind to play this afternoon, and let the other things slide?"

Monty Lowther thought of Mr. Curil, and coloured.

But he could not confide that to Tom Merry. He knew that if Tom discovered his intentions, he would take care not to let him keep his appointment in Wayland.

"I don't want to play," he said. "Leave me out of it now, for goodness' sake! You don't quite understand, Tommy, and I can't explain. But—but you'll understand presently."

"What do you mean?"

"You'll know how things stand with me before to-night."

"You're jolly mysterious," said Tom Merry, puzzled. "You're not thinking of bolting, are you, I suppose?"

Monty Lowther laughed, but not very heartily.

"Look here, Tom," he said abruptly. "I'm bothered just now. I want to be alone for a bit."



"Oh, all right!" said Tom Merry. He walked away towards the cricket field. Monty Lowther hesitated for a moment. His heart smote him for his harshness with his best chum, and he was tempted to go after Tom Merry and try to explain. But it would not have done, and he had now an opportunity that was not likely to recur for leaving St. Jim's unnoticed.

He hesitated only a few minutes; then he walked down to the gates, and went out into the road. He strolled along with an air of assumed carelessness until he reached the stile, where the footpath led through the wood towards Wayland. He vaulted over the stile, and then broke into a run, and did not pause again until he was through the wood and entering the streets of the old market town.

CHAPTER 7.

Too Late!

"WHERE'S Lowther?" Tom Merry asked the question as he sat down at the Shell table in the dining-hall of the School House.

Manners shook his head. "I haven't seen him," he said. "He went out, I think," remarked Gore.

"The ass!" murmured Tom Merry. "More trouble."

During dinner Mr. Linton noticed that Monty Lowther was absent. The missing junior did not come in, and when dinner was over the chums of the Shell went out, looking very worried.

"I dare say he's gone off for the afternoon," said Manners. "He said he wasn't going to play in the match."

Tom Merry compressed his lips. "The fathead!" he exclaimed angrily. "Linton has got his back up over it already. There will be trouble with the Head again."

"I'm getting fed-up," growled Manners. "Look here! We've got to think about the match, and not about Lowther!"

"I wish I knew where he was." "Gone over to Wayland, very likely, to the theatre again."

"But they're leaving this afternoon," said Tom Merry. "There was only to be the one performance at Wayland Theatre Royal."

"Might be going over to see them off. You say he chummed up with a chap in the company?"

Tom Merry nodded. It was necessary to get ready for the House match. Macdonald of the Fourth had been put in the School House Junior Eleven in the place of Monty Lowther. It was a half-holiday at St. Jim's, and most of the juniors had been looking forward to the House match. Tom Merry did not feel just then, however, that he could put his mind to the game.

"You fellows ready?" asked Jack Blake, coming out of the School House in flannels, with his bat under his arm. "Wherefore that worried brow, my son?"

"Lowther wasn't in to dinner." "No; I noticed that." "He hasn't come in, and he never said anything about being booked up for the afternoon," said Tom Merry. "I don't like it."

Blake sniffed. "I fancy I know where he's gone," he said. "If you don't keep an eye on him he'll bolt."

"He wouldn't be such an ass!" "It will mean a flogging for him if he does," said Blake. "He seems to be

looking for trouble all round. What kind of a chap was that he chummed up with last night that you mentioned?"

"I didn't think much of him." "Lowther got any money?" asked Blake.

"He's got money in the bank," said Manners; "but he's supposed not to touch that, except for necessities."

"He might think it necessary to pay his footing to become an actor," said Blake, with a snort. "Some touring managers help to pay expenses by taking in stage-struck mugs. I've heard Kerr say so, and his father's an actor."

"I—I say, do you think you could skipper the team this afternoon, Blake?" asked Tom Merry hesitatingly.

"Of course I could!" said Blake promptly. "I could do it better than a Shell fellow, as a matter of fact."

Tom Merry smiled faintly. "Well, take it on, then," he said. "Willingly. But I should want you in the team. We must have your batting against Wynn."

Tom Merry shook his head. "I'm going to cut the match," he said.

"Oh, my hat! What utter rot!" "If Lowther's going to make a fool of himself, it's my business as his chum to stand by him and stop him," said Tom Merry. "I'm sorry to cut the match, but—but—"

"Same here," said Manners. "I shall come with you." Blake looked very thoughtful.

"Well, it's rotten for the House match," he said. "I suppose the best thing you can do is to keep an eye on Lowther. If you two stand out, who shall I put in your places?"

"Lumley-Lumley and Clifton Dane," said Tom Merry. "They're both jolly good."

"All serene!" "We may as well get over to Wayland now, Manners, old man."

"I'm ready." "If Lowther's going to make a break, what are you going to do with him?" asked Jack Blake.

"Stop him, of course." "And if he won't listen to the voice of the charmer?"

Tom Merry's jaws looked very square as he replied:

"We'll jolly well collar him and bring him back to the school, if we have to carry him all the way! We're not going to let him ruin himself."

"No fear," said Manners. "Then you'd better take a couple of fellows with you," said Blake. "He might dodge you two. Take Glyn and young Brooke."

"Good idea!" said Tom Merry. "I will!"

Blake walked away towards the cricket field. Bernard Glyn of the Shell and Brooke of the Fourth were not playing that afternoon, and they cheerfully started out with Tom Merry and Manners. Meanwhile, the junior cricketers were gathering on the cricket ground. Figgins & Co. of the New House were there in all their glory. The School House cricketers were mostly there, and a shout greeted Blake as he came up.

"Isn't Tom Merry ready?" "Not playing!" said Blake briefly. "He's asked me to captain the team."

"Bai Jove! It would have been much wiser to ask the best cricketah in the eleven to do that, deah boy." "Well, that's what he's done," said Blake.

"Weally, Blake—" "I want Lumley-Lumley and Dane," said Blake. "They're playing instead

(Continued on the next page.)



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THAT BEAT HIM.

A Scotsman had come down to London to join the Police Force. Having passed the medical test he was being examined in general knowledge.

"How far is it from London to Edinburgh?" asked the examiner.

"Och, mon," replied the Scot, "if ye're goin' to put me on that beat, I'm goin' hame to feed my father's chickens!" Half-a-crown has been awarded to P. Jones, 7, Frankby Avenue, Wallasey, Cheshire.

PERSEVERANCE.

A newspaper man called on a famous politician at the close of a very busy day. When the reporter had been admitted the politician said:

"You ought to feel highly honoured, young man. Do you know that I have refused to see seven of your fellow-reporters already to-day?"

"I know," replied the reporter. "I'm them!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to D. Woolley, 114, Codrington Road, Ashford, Kent.

THE TRAMP'S PROBLEM.

Doctor: "Take a dose of this medicine after every meal."

Tramp: "Yes, sir; but how am I to get the meals?"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to J. Martin, 10, Artesian Road, Bayswater, London, W.2.

NIGHT AND DAY.

Monty Lowther: "I say, Gussy, why did the day break?"

Gussy: "I weally don't know, deah boy."

Monty Lowther: "Because the night fell down, old chap!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to Miss K. Preater, Dursley, St. Michael Avenue, Houghton Regis, Dunstable.

SKYSCRAPER WANTED.

Visitor: "How much are the rooms in this hotel?"

Manager: "Ten shillings on the first floor, eight on the second, seven on the third, and six on the fourth."

Visitor: "Sorry, the building's not high enough for me!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to K. Prebble, 32, Harford Street, Stepney, London, E.1.

of Tom Merry and Manners. It's all right, we shall beat the New House hands down, without those Shellfish."

"I don't think!" grinned Figgins. The House match started, and the juniors soon forgot about the Terrible Three in the interest of the game.

Meanwhile, Tom Merry and his three companions were walking swiftly by the footpath through the wood to Wayland. They arrived at the old market town, and Tom Merry hesitated whether to go to the lodging of Mr. Curil. He was pretty certain that Monty Lowther had been there, though whether he was there still could not be known.

"Better go to the railway station first," said Manners thoughtfully. "If Lowther is really idiot enough to think of bolting, he'll go in the theatre train, you know. We can watch for him at the station if he isn't there."

"Good egg!" They hurried on to the railway station. Brooke glanced up at the town clock as they passed. It was half-past two.

"There's an express leaves at half-past two," said Brooke. "It's most likely the theatre company will go by that."

"Buck up, then!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

They ran to the station. Tom Merry dashed upon the platform. There was a train upon the metals, just starting. Tom Merry glanced up and down the platform. Monty Lowther was not there; but "The Counter Girl" Company were very evidently there. A notice on the train caught Tom Merry's eye: "Reserved for the George E. Splodgers Company."

Tom Merry ran towards the train, with his comrades at his heels.

"Monty!" he shouted.

Monty Lowther was looking out of the window.

He was with the theatre company in the train, and the train was moving out of the station.

Lowther started at the sight of Tom Merry & Co.

He drew a deep breath of relief as he saw that they had no chance. They were racing along the platform, but the train was moving quickly now.

Lowther waved his hand to them.

"Good-bye!" he shouted.

"Monty! Come back! You ass, Monty!"

Monty Lowther laughed.

The juniors halted in dismay on the platform; the train glided out of the station, and Monty Lowther vanished from their sight.

"My hat!" murmured Manners.

"He's gone!"

Tom Merry & Co. turned back. Monty Lowther was gone; they had been too late to stop him. They could do nothing but return to St. Jim's with the news that Monty Lowther had run away from school!

## CHAPTER 8.

### The New Chorus Boy!

**M**R. CURIL glanced rather curiously at Monty Lowther as he sat beside him in the carriage reserved for the famous Splodgers Company.

Mr. Curil was looking very satisfied with himself and with things generally. So was Mr. Splodgers. The manager was in possession of a new pupil now, who was likely to prove more valuable than many other pupils that gentleman had possessed. The handsome, well-

dressed Shell fellow was very welcome to the somewhat untidy "gang" who travelled with Mr. Splodgers.

The fact that he could pay his footing earned him much respect among the Thespian ladies and gentlemen, who were by no means certain whether they would have any dinners the following week. Mr. Curil, especially, owed him a debt of gratitude, as his timely loan of ten shillings the night before had saved Mr. Curil from the disagreeable and awkward necessity of "bilking" his landlady.

The arrangements between Lowther and his new friends had been made simply and easily. They did not mind his being late for his appointment in Wayland. Everything had gone quite smoothly; and he was travelling with them, to the satisfaction of both parties. But the sight of Tom Merry & Co. racing down the platform after the train had put a suspicion into Mr. Curil's mind.

"Friends of yours?" he asked, jerking a fat thumb towards the station that had been left behind.

"Yes," Lowther replied.

"But you've left school, I understand?"

"I certainly have," said Lowther.

"Good! Not going to be any trouble, I hope?"

"Oh, no!"

Monty Lowther spoke more confidently now. It was quite true that he had left school; and he did not intend to tell the Splodgers Company that he had left it by running away. He was sorry that Tom Merry & Co. had seen him in the train; it would furnish a clue to where he had gone. But that had to be risked. It could not be helped now, at all events, and he tried to shut it out of his mind.

He felt that the Splodgers Company would not care to be mixed up in such a business as a junior boy running away from school. It would not be fair on them, either; if there was trouble afterwards it was better for Mr. Splodgers to be able to say that he hadn't the faintest idea that Lowther was evading just authority.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Splodgers had not given the matter a thought. He was too accustomed to stage-struck youths to be surprised at Monty Lowther's action; and the chief thing that concerned him was to get his fat fingers upon the twenty-five pounds premium.

Miss Kitty Skitty was very kind to Lowther. His evident worship of that lady could not fail to be pleasing to her. The off-handed manner of her theatrical friends contrasted very poorly with the deep respect that Lowther showed her. Miss Kitty, although Lowther did not suspect it, was quite old enough to be his mother; but that, perhaps, made her take a somewhat motherly interest in him.

That her face was thickly powdered did not surprise Lowther, or that her eyebrows were pencilled. All the members of the company bore very visible signs of their profession about them, and cared little.

And Lowther did not know that half Miss Skitty's handsome curls had been purchased; and he would not have cared if he had known.

Everything that smacked of theatrical life had a glamour about it that appealed to Monty Lowther at that time.

The talk about him was incessant, and it was all about the same subject—themselves and their profession. That there were other professions in the wide

universe did not seem to have dawned upon these good folk.

He learned that professional jealousy was the reason why everybody present did not rise to the top of his profession, and that there wasn't a person in the company who couldn't have made his mark in the metropolis if only some influential person could have been induced to "put him on."

With it all, he could see that they were all good, kind-hearted people, whose chief fault was a narrowness of vision which prevented them from seeing anything outside the range of their profession. The chief desire of the feminine members was not to be considered great actresses, but real ladies, and all the male members prided themselves on being gentlemen, before anything else.

It was a surprise to the lad, who had expected such trivial considerations to be quite lost sight of in devotion to a great art. But, even in a few hours, he realised that what was art to the outsider was merely the day's round of work to the insider.

Good nature and impecuniosity seemed to be the leading traits in the merry company. They were certainly very merry, with one exception—Mr. Wibbs, who played the part of comic shopwalker in "The Counter Girl."

Mr. Wibbs was funny enough on the stage, but perhaps he expended all his funniness on the boards, for in private life he was quite taciturn.

Mr. Splodgers was beaming with good temper in private life. Certainly, he was very kind, very patient, and very considerate with his company; and, like all managers, he needed plenty of patience.

Even his negotiations with Monty Lowther, in which he was to pocket twenty-five pounds, seemed to him quite an equitable business transaction.

He knew that outsiders might not think it was quite cricket; but his view was that he was giving the kid an opening, if there was anything in him, and that people couldn't get experience without paying for it. Certainly, they couldn't, anyway, if they came to Mr. Splodgers for the experience.

He was going to shove the kid on the very first night, as an extra in the chorus—and that before the money was paid. Surely that was fair play! He had only Lowther's word about the money, so far, and, keen as he was, Mr. Splodgers had sometimes been taken in by persons keener even than himself.

"Do you think you'll like the life, kid?" asked Mr. Curil kindly as Lowther sat lost in a kind of dream.

The junior started.

"Yes, yes. I know I shall!" he said enthusiastically. "I shall never forget your kindness in helping me in this way."

Mr. Curil coughed—that perhaps being caused by the thick cloud of tobacco smoke with which he had surrounded himself.

"We stop in Abbotsford for some days," he remarked. "Do you know where you are going to dig—to put up, you know?"

"No."

"Like to dig with me?"

"Oh, yes, if—if—"

"If what?" asked Mr. Curil, a little grimly. His thoughts ran immediately to the financial side of the matter.

"If I shan't be a lot of trouble to you," said Monty shyly.

"Oh!" said Mr. Curil, relieved. "That's all right. I shall be glad to have you, kid. I can put you through some of the game before we go on."

CHAPTER 9.

Behind the Footlights!

MONTY LOWTHER felt his excitement increase every moment as the evening came on, though he endeavoured to keep cool.

He was not thinking of St. Jim's, or possible search after him. He had nearer anxieties. He was to appear on the stage that evening at the Abbotsford Palace; he was to be a member of the chorus in "The Counter Girl." And, humble as the part was, it was a tremendous thing for the schoolboy. He had appeared often enough in amateur theatricals at St. Jim's, but this was quite a different matter. He was to come on the real boards now, with a real audience in front, and real actors

"Are we—the company—playing to-night?"  
 "What—ho!"  
 "And I—I," stammered Lowther, "I'm really going on the stage to-night?"

"Didn't you hear his nibs say so?"  
 "His—his what?"  
 "The gov'nor, I mean."

"Oh, yes," said Lowther. "But—but it seems too good to be true."

Mr. Curil laughed kindly and patted him on the shoulder.

"That's all right," he said. "You'll go on as an extra in the chorus. The stage at the Abbotsford Palace is bigger than that Wayland hole, and every little helps. Ahem! You will be an extra shopman."

"Shall I have to speak?"

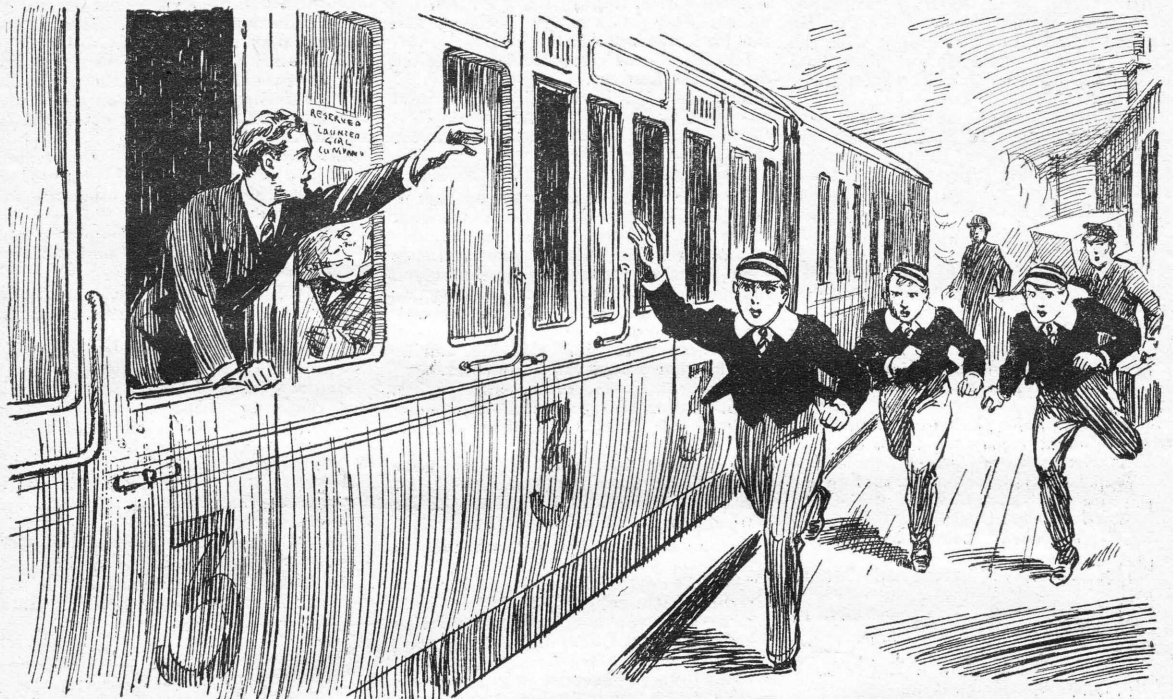
charge of Monty Lowther. He slipped his arm through the junior's, and they walked out into the town. As they passed the post office, Lowther paused.

"Will you wait a minute while I send a wire?" he asked.

"Certainly!" said Mr. Curil obligingly.

Monty Lowther disappeared into the post office, and emerged in a few minutes. He had wired Tom Merry not to say a word of what he knew. Then he accompanied Mr. Curil in search of digs, and they were soon installed in an apartment at the top of three flights of stairs, looking out upon a narrow court.

"If you'd like something better than this you've only got to say so," said Mr. Curil. "It's simply a question of parting."



Too late, Tom Merry & Co. came racing along the platform. The train was already moving quickly. Lowther waved his hand to them. "Good-bye!" he shouted. "Come back!" yelled Tom Merry. "You ass, Monty; come back!"

"Not a syllable."  
 "Oh!" said Lowther.  
 "You'll join in the chorus singing, though," said Mr. Curil encouragingly.  
 "But—but I don't know the music, excepting the waltz tune," said Lowther.

Mr. Curil laughed.  
 "A good many in that boat, as well as you, kid. But I'll run over the score with you if I can dig up a piano at my digs, and give you some tips."

"Oh, thank you; you're very kind!"  
 "Not at all. When you can sing, sing, and don't quarrel with the orchestra more than you can help. When you're beat, shut up, and only move your mouth."

"I'll remember."  
 "And I'll take you as my understudy, if you like. I'll put you up to the whole part of Bertie Bulkeley—if we can fix it."

"I'm sure I shall be jolly glad to fix it," said Lowther.

When the Splodgers Company disembarked at Abbotsford, Mr. Curil took

"Parting!" said Lowther, puzzled.  
 "Paying the piper, you know."  
 "Oh," said Lowther, "I see! No, this suits me all right." As a matter of fact, the shabbiness of the apartment had given him a little chill for the moment, but he felt that he could not be guilty of appearing to want anything better than his friend was satisfied with. "I think this will be ripping."

"Oh, absolutely!" said Mr. Curil.  
 There was a piano in the room downstairs, and although the little parlour where the piano was situated was as shabby as the bed-room, it soon became more than a palace to Monty Lowther, for Mr. Curil's fat fingers glided over the keys, and he rattled off yards and yards of the threadbare jingles that served as music in the weird compositions known as musical comedies. And Monty Lowther, who had a quick ear, found that he was already becoming what Mr. Curil called "O fay" with his part.

He was going on the stage at last! And everything else vanished into the limbo of things that did not matter.

and actresses round him, and a real orchestra grinding away in his ears. He was to appear in company with the great Mr. Splodgers, the inimitable Mr. Curil, the irresistible Mr. Wibbs, and the great and only Kitty Skitty. He was greatly excited as he left Mr. Curil's lodgings in company with that great tenor, and walked round to the Palace.

Mr. Curil had certainly been very kind to him. Whether his kindness was entirely disinterested or not was another matter. He had done his best for the aspirant. He had rattled half through the score of "The Counter Girl" on the tiny piano at his lodging, and had given Lowther all sorts of useful instructions.

Monty Lowther tried to remember them all, but they were buzzing in his mind, along with the tune of "The Counter Girl" waltz, and, as a matter of fact, he hardly knew whether he was treading on the earth or the air as he walked along with Mr. Curil.

Mr. Curil had also kindly helped him in the matter of wardrobe, raking through the trunks in which the company carried their properties until he

found a suit which fitted the slim-built youngster. True, the clothes were threadbare, but Mr. Curil assured Lowther that this would not show from the front.

Monty Lowther felt that he could never be sufficiently grateful to his new friend.

They reached the theatre, which was a small provincial house with the scantiest accommodation for the company.

The performers prepared for their appearance in a large dressing-room common to all, only the ladies of the company having a separate dressing-room to themselves.

Monty Lowther had had vague ideas of palatial dressing-rooms, with rich carpets and gilt mirrors. The reality was something very different. But he was behind the scenes. He was there with a footing in the profession.

Mr. Curil, with untiring kindness, kept close to his young friend. He daubed Monty Lowther's face with the grease-paint to the required pitch, and pronounced that he would do splendidly, and he was satisfied.

With his own make-up Mr. Curil was careless enough. He had a lofty contempt for audiences in the country, founded probably upon the fact that those audiences did not "rise" at him as they should have done. If the people "in front" failed to appreciate Mr. Curil, it was evidently due to their own stupidity, and not to any shortcomings on the part of Horatio himself, or so it appeared to Mr. Curil.

Mr. Curil confided to Lowther that he just walked through his part in these places; anything was good enough. And Lowther marvelled at the coolness he displayed.

It seemed to him that everybody ought to have felt as excited as he did himself.

Miss Kitty Skitty smiled as she saw Lowther. Lowther coloured, though his blush did not show through the daubs Mr. Curil had lavished upon his face.

"Feel nervous?" asked Miss Kitty kindly.

"Yes, horribly!" confessed Monty Lowther.

"There's no need. You don't have to do anything, only walk on."

"I know," said Lowther. "But—"

"You will get used to it if you stick to the business," she said.

"I'm going to do that," said Lowther.

"You haven't had any experience so far?"

"None."

"Well, you'll get experience here," said Miss Kitty, somewhat mysteriously, and without specifying the kind of experience Lowther was likely to get.

Lowther was able to take a peep at the people in front before the curtain was raised. The audience was more numerous than in Wayland Theatre Royal. The orchestra were in their places, and the strains of "The Counter Girl" waltz, played as an overture, were ringing through the building.

The opening chorus of "The Counter Girl" was now forming up on the stage, and Lowther took his place among the supers who played the parts of the shopmen in Bulkeley's Stores.

The boy's heart was beating strangely as the curtain went up.

In the bright light of the stage, which dazzled his eyes a little at first, and the blare of the orchestra, he could hardly grapple with his confusion of mind, and if he had been given any part but a purely passive one, he would certainly have failed to carry it out satisfactorily.

But it was not difficult, even for a

novice, to stand in a row with other supers and open his mouth in an imitation of singers, which was all that Lowther had to do.

All Mr. Curil's instructions as to the words and the music had vanished from his mind, but he remembered the tip he had received—to appear to be singing without making a sound—and he did that easily enough.

It was a marvel to him that Mr. Curil could stroll upon the stage, in the character of young Bertie Bulkeley from Oxford, with as much coolness as if he were entering the stuffy little parlour at his lodgings.

Would the time ever come when he could do that, and burst into melody as Mr. Curil did without a quiver? He wondered.

Mr. Curil was really gifted. Whether his tenor voice was more than a semi-falsetto shriek might be a question, but he certainly knew stage business, and the part was nothing to him.

Lowther was breathlessly excited during the first act.

His head was in a whirl as he went off when the curtain came down. Mr. Curil clapped Lowther merrily on the shoulder in the dressing-room.

"How did it go, kid?" he asked.

Lowther was a little surprised that so old a hand as Mr. Curil should ask him, a novice, how the act had gone. He replied that he thought the audience liked the show; and then he discovered that Mr. Curil was not alluding to "The Counter Girl," but to his own individual solo.

"But my little bit?" said Mr. Curil.

"Oh, your song!" said Lowther.

He might have replied, with perfect truth, that it had gone flat, that being one of the little weaknesses of Mr. Curil's magnificent tenor. He might have replied, too, that it had gone sharp, as it certainly had, in places. Mr. Curil, indeed, had a great gift for merging above or below his note.

But Lowther had too much tact to reply frankly to Mr. Curil.

"Well, I only wish I could do it!" was his diplomatic reply.

"Can't do you best with a band like that," said Mr. Curil disparagingly.

"No, I suppose not."

"Not very encouraging, working among these mugs," said Mr. Curil; "but it's up to me to keep the show alive, and that's what I'm doing."

"It's very good of you," said Lowther.

Mr. Curil cast a sharp glance at the junior to ascertain whether he was speaking sarcastically; but Lowther was quite in earnest.

"Have a sandwich?" said Mr. Curil.

"Thanks, I'm not hungry."

"You will be. Shove it in."

Lowther consented, and "shoved" it in. When the bell rang he went on for the second act with more confidence. But the whole evening seemed like a dream to him.

When the performance was over at last, and he walked home with Mr. Curil, he felt as if he was walking on air. He was on the stage at last—if not an actor, he was on the stage—and the future was bright with rosy dreams.

## CHAPTER 10.

### Money Difficulties!

LOWTHER awoke the next morning with strange, confused ideas in his mind, not for the moment remembering where he was. As he awoke he expected, from force of habit, to see the high walls and white

ceiling of the Shell dormitory in the School House at St. Jim's.

Over his bed there was a low, cracked ceiling, soiled with the dust of ages, and in a corner of it was a cobweb.

Lowther started, and rubbed his eyes, and remembered.

He sat up in bed.

He had gone to bed the previous night tired and happy, without noticing his surroundings much. Now, as he caught the light of the summer morning sun streaming in at the window he realised that the room was not clean.

There were two beds in the room, and in the other one Mr. Curil was still asleep. He was snoring gently as he slept.

Monty Lowther looked at his watch; it was nearly ten o'clock.

"Phew!" murmured Lowther.

He was not out of bed yet; but at St. Jim's the fellows would be all in the Form-room long ago. But it was evident that a fellow who did not go to bed until half-past twelve could not rise at seven like other fellows. In his new profession late hours at night and late hours in the morning could not be avoided.

Lowther was accustomed to sleeping with the windows open in the school dorm, but Mr. Curil was evidently not a believer in fresh air.

The one small window the room contained was tightly closed, and the bedroom was insufferably stuffy.

Monty Lowther felt a little headache, which he knew was the results of the close air.

He stepped out of bed, and jammed down the window and looked out.

He drew in a deep breath of fresh air. But there was little to be seen from the windows save the backs of houses and two or three dirty children playing on the dirty pavement.

A prodigious yawn from Mr. Curil announced that that gentleman was awake.

He sat up in bed, rubbed his eyes, and yawned again.

He looked fifteen years older in the morning light, as Monty Lowther could not help noticing.

"Hallo!" he said sleepily.

"Good-morning!" said Lowther.

"Wharrer you up for?"

"It's ten!"

"I don't get up till eleven," said Mr. Curil drowsily. "'Tain't a matinee to-day. And there ain't any rehearsal, thank goodness!"

"Sorry I disturbed you!" said Lowther.

"Oh, that's all right!" said Mr. Curil, waking up more fully. "How are you feeling this morning, kid?"

"All serene!" said Lowther.

"Bit tired, eh?"

"Yes, a bit."

"You'll get over that," said Mr. Curil. "It's a great life. Freedom, you know—no anxieties, really, if you've got something in you."

Monty Lowther nodded.

"No reason at all why you shouldn't get a good part," said Mr. Curil. "I've got a chance of another shop, but I'm sticking to the old show to pull it through. Between ourselves, not to make a secret of it, the show isn't doing any too well, and it's only my little bit that keeps it from going under."

Monty Lowther had already learned that Mr. Curil was not the only member of the company whose little bit was all that kept the show from going under. But he nodded.

"Now, if I make you my understudy you'd have a chance of stepping into my shoes when I get into another shop."

said Mr. Curil. "What do you think of that?"

Lowther's eyes glistened. "Ripping!" he said. "But it would be a long time, surely?"

"Long or short, I'm ready to give you the chance," said Mr. Curil—"that is, of course, if you're willing to try."

"What-ho!" said Lowther.

"I could give you singing lessons," said Mr. Curil. "I could put you up to all the business of the part, and you can attend all rehearsals, and I'll get a chance of putting you through a rehearsal in the part, too. I don't think any beginner ever had such a chance."

"You're jolly good!" said Lowther, with a falter in his voice. "I really don't know why you should take all this trouble for me, Mr. Curil."

Mr. Curil coughed. "The only question is terms," he remarked.

"Terms!" said Lowther.

"Absolutely!" said Mr. Curil. "You see, I should like to do all this for nothing, but we can't afford to do all that we'd like to do in this world. I should have to give up some other—ahem!—pupils, and—and, in fact, all I could do would be to take you on as a pupil at ridiculously low terms—in fact, bare out-of-pocket expenses. You wouldn't have anything to grumble at in that."

"That's all right," said Lowther.

"The question is, how are you fixed?"

said Mr. Curil.

"I've got thirty pounds in the bank, as I've told you," said Lowther. "Twenty-five is going to Mr. Spodgers. I shall have five left."

Mr. Curil laughed.

"Five pounds isn't much for what I'm undertaking," he remarked.

"I suppose it isn't," agreed Lowther, in dismay.

"But there, something's due to friendship," said Mr. Curil. "I will take the five quid, and put the rest down to friendship."

"You're very generous, sir!"

"The fact is, I mean to be generous," said Mr. Curil magnificently. "I take an interest in you and I'll see you through. Five quid, and it's done. I suppose you've got some other tin to live on?"

"I've got a pound left," said Lowther.

"You'll want that for your board in this place. But I suppose you've got some other resources?" said Mr. Curil.

"No, sir," said Lowther. "I—I suppose I shall be getting some salary with the engagement Mr. Spodgers is going to give me?"

Mr. Curil looked at him very queerly.

"I shouldn't build too much on that," he said. "You'll be getting teaching and experience in return for your premium, and that's fair. As for salary, you'll have to wait for that till you earn some."

"Oh!"

"Not much good a beginner going on the stage unless he has resources. You want something to fall back on, you see."

"I see," said Lowther.

"No room on the stage for genius without cash," said Mr. Curil humorously.

"I—I don't know what I'd better do," said Monty Lowther, in dismay. "I can't live on air. If I hand Mr. Spodgers twenty-five pounds, and you five, I shall have nothing left, and I can't live without a salary. I certainly understood that there would be some salary attached to the engagement. If there isn't, I suppose I'd better give up the whole idea."

# JUST MY FUN



## Monty Lowther Calling

Hallo, everybody! "What should I do to have delicate, white hands?" asks Skimpole. Nothing. Said the solicitor: "After he had blacked your eye, split your lip, and knocked you down, what did he say?" "He told me to go before he lost his temper!" said the plaintiff. A world champion likes a square meal before a fight. To make sure he's not beaten hollow! A billposter has just become a boxer. Ah, he'll give them a good "pasting." "What's the difference between the two-shilling copies and the sixpenny ones?" asked the purchaser. "One-and-sixpence, sir," replied the salesman. Kerr says he has written a musical score so that you can play it without a piano, if you have an organ. "Is Crooks any good with his fists?" asks a reader. Well, last time he fought he made quite an "impression" in the ring. He was floored eight times! Reply to correspondent: If your goldfish does not swim,

Mr. Curil looked alarmed. "You can't do that," he said. "You've made the arrangement with Spodger and you'll have to carry it out—unless you want to throw it up on the plea of being a minor. That's not playing the game."

"I don't want to throw it up," said Lowther eagerly. "I want to keep on. But I can't live without money to pay my expenses, can I?"

"Tap some other resources," said Mr. Curil. "Young fellows who go on the stage generally have some friends they can draw on until they get an opening."

Monty Lowther reddened.

"Dash it all, I can't live by sponging on my friends!"

Mr. Curil stared.

"Why not?" he asked.

"Well—I—I—"

"If you can get a loan or two, take my advice and get 'em, and pay back the money when you're drawing in your hundreds of quids a week," said Mr. Curil. "I suppose you've got some relations with money, haven't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, it's only fair that they should lend you a hand."

"They wouldn't agree to what I've done. I couldn't even write to them."

"What about those young fellows whom you saw at Wayland? Wouldn't they stand by you a bit? They looked well heeled!"

"I can't ask them."

"Well—well, we'll talk about this another time," said Mr. Curil, beginning to feel uneasy about the thirty pounds. "Wait a bit, and I'll use my influence with Spodgers, and perhaps we can arrange about a salary."

Monty Lowther looked at him with some firmness.

"If we can't fix about a salary the whole thing will have to drop," he said, "and it had better drop before I draw the money from the post office."

Mr. Curil gasped for a moment.

"I'll speak to Spodgers!" he exclaimed. "Don't you be uneasy. You've got a friend to stand by you, I fancy I can fix it all right. I just

eat, move or breathe, the time has come to replace it with a live one. A reader wants to know why the "New Firm"—Redfern, Owen and Lawrence—is not "Limited." Possibly because their ambition is "unlimited"! Believe it or not: "Gosh!" gasped the perspiring new Zoo attendant, gazing at the camel. "This is the fourth bottle of embrocation I've used, and still I can't get this hump down!" Third Form flash: "Old Selby is a disciplinarian," said Wally D'Arcy. "Gracious! Is he as old as that?" asked Gibson. "Nother: "What is a congress?" asked Mr. Selby. "A female from the Congo, sir," replied Jameson. "You know that old vase, sir," said the Head's maid, "which you said had been handed down from generation to generation?" "Yes," replied the Head. "Well, sir—this generation has dropped it!" A physical culture expert says he has three times as many pupils this year as last. His business is "developing." "Where is Gibson, D'Arcy minor?" asked Mr. Selby. "Well, sir," said Wally, "he said he was going canoeing, but I think he's probably swimming!" "Thanks for both rides," said the octogenarian, getting out of his grandson's sports speedster. "Both? You've only had one." "My first and last!" retorted the old boy. Snappy story: The parachute-jumping pupil stuttered: "D-d-do I c-c-count t-t-ten before I p-p-pull the c-c-cord?" he asked. "No," answered the instructor; "you count two—and make it snappy!"

wished to know how you stood, that's all. At the same time, if you can raise any capital you will find it useful. Now, if you'll go and tell 'em I'm ready for breakfast I'll turn out."

"Right-ho!" said Monty Lowther.

And he went downstairs, and Mr. Curil rose in a leisurely way, and came down to breakfast at half-past eleven, without the preliminary of shaving himself.

## CHAPTER 11.

### Cash Down!

**M**ONTY LOWTHER was in a thoughtful mood that day.

The excitement of having appeared on the stage before a real audience had not worn off, and he still felt a thrill at being free to enter a theatre by the stage door.

But in other matters he was beginning to think.

Mr. Curil's words had opened his eyes a little to the real facts of the case, and it was only too clear that without money—and a good deal of it—he stood a poor chance of maintaining his footing on the Thespian boards.

That the show was not making a successful tour he knew by the talk of the members of the company, though he did not know yet that most of the salaries were very much in arrears.

To pay for his engagement with Mr. Spodgers and to pay for lessons from Mr. Curil appeared to him reasonable; but when that was done he would have no money left, and unless a salary sufficient to live upon was given him he would be without resources.

The alternative of settling down to sponge upon his friends and relations, which Mr. Curil had so cheerfully suggested, was repugnant in the extreme to Monty Lowther. He felt that he could not do it, and even if he could, that resource would not last for ever. He must have a salary, and he wished that had been made clear before he had taken so serious a step as breaking from

St. Jim's for the purpose of joining the company.

Monty Lowther was stage-struck, but he was no fool. He was determined, in his own mind, that he would have that question of the salary settled before he handed over his little capital to the keeping of Mr. Splodgers.

He was glad now that the money was tied up in the post office. But for the preliminaries necessary before the money could be withdrawn it would have been already handed over, without any security being made for the future. Those preliminaries, which he had regarded as a nuisance, had saved his little capital so far.

He was anxious for the interview with Splodgers. But Splodgers was not accessible that day, and the evening came round without Lowther having seen him. Lowther appeared in the chorus of "The Counter Girl" that evening with less excitement than on the first occasion. He was able to sing his little bit, too, with the rest of the chorus. The music was of the simplest, and he simply had to follow the others.

Mr. Curil pronounced that he was doing well, and complimented him at the finish, and told him as they walked home that he had never seen a fellow he fancied more as an understudy. Mr. Curil stopped for refreshment at two or three places on the way back to his lodgings.

Lowther waited outside for him, for nothing would induce the boy to enter a public-house—not even friendship for Mr. Curil. Mr. Curil was quite willing to leave him outside. After the last halt there was a certain slackness in Mr. Curil's pace as he walked home, and once or twice he had a peculiar stagger in his walk, which seemed to hint that he had been refreshing himself not wisely but too well.

When they reached their lodging it was closed and dark; but Mr. Curil had a latchkey. He felt in his pocket with a great solemnity of manner.

"What on earth are you up to?" demanded Lowther, as he suddenly became aware that Mr. Curil was attempting to insert his watch into the keyhole.

"Won't open," murmured Mr. Curil, turning a glassy eye upon Lowther. "Must have got the wrong key."

Lowther laughed. "You're trying to open it with your watch!" he said.

Mr. Curil gazed glassily upon him. And then gazed at the watch with an expression of the greatest astonishment.

"Strordinary!" he murmured.

"Where's the key?" asked Lowther.

"Why, here it is—you've dropped it."

"Strordinary!" repeated Mr. Curil, with conviction.

Lowther unlocked the door and opened it and pushed Mr. Curil into the passage within. It was quite dark. The stairs opened on the passage, and Mr. Curil sat on the lowest step, leaned his head against the banisters, and began to snore.

Monty Lowther closed the door and stumbled over Mr. Curil.

"What times we have in Oxford!" sang Mr. Curil, waking up. "Town and gown, round the town, a gay young spark, but keep it dark—"

"Shut up, for goodness' sake!" murmured Lowther. "You'll wake the house. Come to bed!"

"Certainly!" said Mr. Curil, with stately dignity.

And to bed Mr. Curil went.

The next morning Mr. Curil was apologetic.

When he woke up—about half-past eleven—he found Monty Lowther gone

out, but the junior came in by the time Mr. Curil was down to breakfast.

He was looking a little grim, and Mr. Curil looked a little shamefaced, but he soon recovered his ease.

"We're all human at times," he confided to Monty Lowther. "I am afraid I was a little too liberal with the rosy last night—it's a thing that practically never happens to me. Don't you ever take to it, my boy?"

"I don't mean to," said Lowther.

"Well, let's say no more about it," said Mr. Curil. "Where have you been? Having a nice healthy walk while I've been in bed, eh?"

"I've had a stroll out of the town," said Lowther. "I've called at the post office, too. I had my letter from the savings bank directed to Abbotsford Post Office, you know, for me to call for."

"Had it come?" asked Mr. Curil eagerly.

"Yes."

"Then you've got the cash?"

"Yes."

"You've drawn it out?"

"Yes," repeated Monty

Lowther.

"Good!" said Mr. Curil.

"We'd better go round and see Mr. Splodgers. Nothing like getting little matters of business settled up without delay."

"I'm ready when you've had your brekker," said Lowther.

"By the way, our own little arrangement may as well be settled up, too," remarked Mr. Curil, looking up from his haddock. "Five pounds was the idea."

"To be taken as your understudy and instructed in singing and playing the part of Bertie Bulkeley," said Lowther. His faith in Mr. Horatio Curil had been considerably shaken by the happenings of the previous night, and he wished to have matters fully understood in a businesslike way.

Mr. Curil nodded readily.

"Quite so!" he agreed. "Absolutely. If you've got the fiver about you I'll write out a receipt at once."

"Here it is," said Lowther.

Mr. Curil's eyes danced at the sight of the crisp five-pound note. He stowed it away in his pocket and wrote out a receipt cheerfully enough. Then, when his breakfast was finished, he walked round with Monty Lowther to Mr. Splodgers' lodgings.

Mr. Splodgers was interviewing Mr. Wibbs when they arrived.

Mr. Wibbs looked very excited, and voices were raised as Mr. Curil and his young friend came in. Mr. Curil coughed, and Mr. Wibbs relapsed into angry silence. Mr. Splodgers was looking very red, too. The discussion had been upon the familiar subject of money, and when Mr. Wibbs was likely to be paid his salary, but Monty Lowther was not aware of that.

"I'll see you later, Wibbs," said Splodgers. "It will be all right."

"It had better be," said Mr. Wibbs.

"I'm fed up. I—"

"Buzz off, Wibby," said Mr. Curil, poking him in the ribs. "My young



As Monty Lowther danced with Miss Skitty a grave-looking not see him as he waltzed to the strains of "The Counter of the Ho

friend has come to settle a matter of business with the boss."

Mr. Wibbs nodded, and his face cleared; doubtless he knew that there was a better prospect when Lowther had handed over his money to the manager.

Mr. Wibbs quitted the room, leaving Lowther considerably astonished that any member of the company should have ventured to use such language to the great Splodgers.

Mr. Splodgers coughed, and bade Lowther good-morning very pleasantly, and asked him to be seated.

"Our young friend is very anxious to get the matter settled about the engagement," Mr. Curil explained.

"No time like the present," said Mr. Splodgers. "There's nothing more to be done, except for the cash to be paid as agreed. It's not of much importance, but it may as well be done."

Lowther turned a little pink. He was nervous about broaching the question of the salary to Mr. Splodgers, who looked very fat and imposing. But he nerved himself to do so. It was worse than useless to leave that important point unsettled.

"I've got the money this morning, sir," he said.

Mr. Splodgers nodded.

"Very well, lad."

"I'm to be engaged for the whole tour, as I understand," Lowther said.

"That's already been gone into,"

said Mr. Splodgers. "I've booked you up for the tour."



A gentleman strode upon the stage. The St. Jim's junior did  
 "Lowther!" The next moment he jumped. It was  
 ad!

"But what about my salary, sir?" said Lowther.

Mr. Spodgers looked at him fixedly. "Your what?" he demanded.

Monty Lowther's heart sank, but he stuck to his guns.

"My salary!"

"I don't remember mentioning any salary," said Mr. Spodgers.

"But I must live," explained Monty Lowther. "You see, this is all the money I have. If I don't have a salary, I shan't join the company."

"I'm giving you training and an opening," said Mr. Spodgers. "If you knew something about the profession, my young friend, you'd know that you're getting a very great deal for this small fee."

"I—I suppose I am, sir," said Lowther. "But—but it's a case of necessity with me, you see. Unless I have a salary, I've got nothing to live on."

"It's not wise to go on the stage unless you've got resources," said Mr. Spodgers seriously.

"Yes; Mr. Curil was telling me that," said Lowther. "But I haven't any, you see. Of course, if I'm not worth any salary, I can't expect you to pay me any."

"I should say not," agreed Mr. Spodgers. "I should certainly say not."

"Only, in that case, it wouldn't be any good my coming into the company at all," Lowther explained.

"Oh, I see!"

"So, if I'm not worth my keep to you,

I—I'm afraid the whole thing will have to drop," Lowther faltered.

"It's not so bad as that," said Mr. Spodgers, smiling. "What salary do you expect?"

"I—I don't know. I should have to have enough to live on, I suppose."

"Well, how much is that?"

"I suppose a chap could live on three pounds a week, perhaps," said Lowther, hesitatingly. "I—I've never been on my own before, you know."

"Three pounds a week!" gasped Mr. Spodgers.

"Well, four, then," said Lowther. "I should try to be very economical."

"Great Scott!" gasped Mr. Spodgers. "Do you know that my principal tenor has only two pounds ten?"

"Oh!" ejaculated Lowther.

"Chorus ladies a pound!" said Mr. Spodgers.

"Oh!"

"London star prices ain't paid in touring companies in the provs," said Mr. Spodgers kindly. "Now, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll stand you ten shillings a week at the start, to be increased to a pound after the first three months."

Mr. Spodgers did not think it necessary to mention that unless fortune changed very much the tour was pretty certain to "bust up" before three weeks were out, to say nothing of three months.

"Can I live on ten shillings a week?" asked Lowther.

"When in doubt apply to your uncle," suggested Mr. Curil.

"My uncle wouldn't help me," said Lowther.

Mr. Curil chuckled.

"I mean your other uncle," he explained. "Ikey Solomon—three brass balls—vat can I do for you, shentlemans?"

"Oh, I see!" said Lowther. "The pawnbrokers, do you mean?"

"If you must live," said Curil, "you must live, you know. And when one way won't do, you must try another."

"I see," said Lowther.

"Oh, dash it all," said Mr. Spodgers. "I'm always ruining myself by my good nature! We'll put it down at fifteen bob."

"You're in luck, my young friend," said Mr. Curil, nodding his head at Lowther.

"You're very kind, Mr. Spodgers," said Lowther, falteringly. "I'll take it, and I suppose I shall be able to manage."

Mr. Spodgers took up a pen.

Lowther laid five crisp, five-pound notes upon the table.

When he left Mr. Spodgers, he was twenty-five pounds the poorer, and Mr. Spodgers was twenty-five pounds the richer; but Lowther had an engagement with the company for as long as the tour lasted at a salary of fifteen shillings a week, increasing to a pound after the lapse of three months. Mr. Curil congratulated him as they walked away.

"You're in luck!" he declared. "And

you'll get on, I feel quite sure about that."

"I hope so," said Lowther; but less hopefully than he would have spoken a couple of days before.

"Now, I must be off," said Mr. Curil. "I've got an important appointment for to-day. You don't mind having your lunch alone?"

"Not at all," said Lowther.

And Mr. Curil departed to keep his appointment, which he had invented upon the spot. He did not return to his lodgings till shortly before the time to start for the theatre; and when he came in, he did not seem to Lowther to be in quite a condition to "go on." And in his pockets there remained very little of the change of Monty Lowther's five-pound note.

CHAPTER 12.

A Shock for Lowther!

THE Spodgers' Company stayed a couple of days longer in Abbotsford, and then moved on to another town.

Monty Lowther was glad of the removal, which took him farther away from St. Jim's. He had thought a good deal about the old school in the past few days, and wondered what efforts were being made to find him. That Tom Merry had kept the secret was clear enough, or otherwise the Head would have known that he was with the theatrical company, and would have known where to look for him.

As he was not found, it was clear that Tom Merry had regarded his request in the telegram, and had kept silent. The Head, doubtless, had not the least suspicion that Lowther had joined a touring company, and so did not know where to send in search of him. But Lowther felt more secure the farther he was from St. Jim's; though, as a matter of fact, he had already begun to wonder whether he had made a fool of himself in running away from school to join the stage.

The people he had found himself among had many good qualities—good nature being the chief of them. But the improvidence he found about him now was not at all in accord with Lowther's character. Living from hand to mouth, and trusting for something to turn up, appeared to him utterly reckless, and likely to end badly for anybody, and he found that there was scarcely any other method of living open to the members of the touring company.

He had learnt by this time, too, that the tour was far from successful; and although wages had been paid in Abbotsford, he could not help suspecting that it was his own twenty-five pound premium which had enabled Mr. Spodgers to meet his obligations to the company in this respect.

As for himself, he was without money, and entirely dependent upon his salary, which he had not received yet.

When the first week became due, Mr. Spodgers made no motion towards payment, and the junior allowed a day to elapse before approaching him on the subject.

The Spodgers Company were then in a country town, where they were to stay for an engagement of three evenings and a matinee, but business was decidedly not good.

Monty Lowther was still sharing the diggings of Mr. Curil, and receiving lessons from him in consideration of the fee of five pounds so rashly paid in advance.

The five pounds had quickly disappeared, and Mr. Curil conscientiously tried to perform his promise so far as a naturally slack and careless disposition would allow him.

Monty Lowther profited by the lesson to some extent; but the high hopes with which he had joined the Spodgers Company were being rapidly dissipated. When he ventured at last to corner Mr. Spodgers and ask for his salary, that gentleman greeted him with a stare of surprise.

"Eh—what is it?" he asked testily. "Can I have my salary, sir?" asked Lowther.

"Oh, your salary!" said Mr. Spodgers.

"Yes, I need it, sir."

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Spodgers. "A man must be fair all round, you know. You must take your turn with the rest. The fact is, takings have been very bad, and some payments will have to be held over for a time. It can't be helped."

Lowther looked at him in dismay.

"But I've got nothing to pay for my lodgings, sir!" he exclaimed.

"All in the same boat," said Mr. Spodgers carelessly. "I warned you that a young fellow shouldn't go on the stage without resources, didn't I?"

"Yes, But—"

"Business will look up, I expect, when we get to Lantham," said Mr. Spodgers. "Look here! You don't want to bust up the tour, do you?"

"Bust up the tour?" repeated Lowther.

"Yes. If they all come to me for money, I shall have to close down the tour!" said Mr. Spodgers irritably. "In fact, I'm only keeping it on now for the sake of the company, and I'm money out of pocket every day. I'm willing to cancel your engagement, if you like, and I can't say fairer than that."

And he walked away.

Lowther stood dumbfounded.

That even the absurd pittance he had been promised should be withheld, surprised him, and utterly dismayed him.

He had not the wherewithal to discharge the debt he had already incurred at his lodgings, which he shared with Mr. Curil, and he began to understand that in the new life he had entered into, improvidence might be pushed perilously near the verge of dishonesty.

Mr. Curil tried to comfort him.

"Keep your pecker up, kid," he said. "Things must mend; they can't very well get worse, anyway. It's certainly time we had a spot of luck. Three of the chorus sloped at Abbotsford."

"But how am I to pay my bills?" said Lowther.

"Your tucker."

"Oh!"

And Lowther's watch found a resting-place with Uncle Solomon. One or two little articles of value that he possessed went along with it, and he found himself in possession of a few pounds. But as he was called upon to discharge Mr. Curil's account at the lodging, as well as his own, the money did not seem likely to last long. Mr. Curil, as he confided to Lowther, was down to bed-rock, and his friendship seemed likely to prove somewhat expensive.

The company moved on to Lantham, and there the prospects of "The Counter Girl" looked up a little. Two or three members of the company had gone, and their places were not filled. Mr. Spodgers, however, in spite of the hardness of the times, contrived to keep himself in considerable comfort, and still smoked shilling cigars. In the course of a week he had smoked away

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Lowther's salary, as the junior could not help feeling. But Mr. Spodgers was far too high and mighty a gentleman to have a matter like that explained to him.

Indeed, Lowther could not help realising that his presence in "The Counter Girl" Company was something in the nature of a joke, and that unless he received a substantial remittance from some quarter, Mr. Spodgers would soon be giving him strong hints that his room would be preferred to his company.

The closing down of the tour, too, was a prospect that could only dismay the junior. His engagement had been booked for the tour; he understood that it was for a long time, but there was nothing written down to bind Mr. Spodgers beyond the extent of that tour. If the tour closed down Lowther would be left stranded, without a penny in his pocket, in whatever town the last performance took place.

Other members of the company would be in the same fix certainly. Most of them, however, accustomed to the vicissitudes of the life, had some resources or other, or some idea how to get fresh engagements, or try to get them. Lowther felt helpless, and he began to understand that it would have been a very fortunate thing for him if Tom Merry had succeeded in stopping his departure from Wayland.

But he could not give up hope yet.

Mr. Curil spoke frequently of the other "shop" that was open to him when he left the Spodgers Company, to which he was sticking out of sheer good nature; and although Lowther's faith in his friend had been very much shaken, he did not yet know that this was only what is commonly called "gas" on Mr. Curil's part.

He reminded Mr. Curil of his promise to make him his understudy, and to give him a chance of taking his place when he went, and Mr. Curil heroically tried to live up to his word. He had a distaste for letting Lowther find him out.

He turned out of bed sometimes before eleven, in order to instruct his young pupil; but his instruction generally lapsed into long talks about himself, his wonderful powers, and his brilliant prospects, and the high opinion newspaper critics had of him.

Monty Lowther experienced most real kindness from Miss Kitty Skitty, who always encouraged him the most. She had taken a liking to the stage-struck youth, founded mostly upon his unbounded admiration for herself. The disillusioned actress had found something very agreeable in the fresh and unsuspecting homage of the eager schoolboy.

One morning Mr. Curil was specially cheerful at breakfast. He had received something of his salary, which looked as if things were looking up. He told Lowther that he used his influence for him, and that he was going to rehearse the part of Bertie Bulkeley, with a view to taking Mr. Curil's place if that gentleman should be indisposed.

Lowther brightened up wonderfully.

"Miss Kitty has consented to go through the part with you in the dance act," said Mr. Curil. "She thinks you can waltz."

"So I can!" said Lowther.

As a matter of fact, Lowther was a very good dancer, and could waltz much better than Horatio Curil.

Mr. Curil smiled indulgently.

"You want knocking into shape," he remarked. "Well, we're going to knock you. There are some new things going to be put in now, and there's

going to be a rehearsal, and I've got Spodgers' permission to shove you into the dance act at the rehearsal, so that you can show what you can do."

"Thank you very much," said Lowther gratefully.

Mr. Curil waved his hand.

"Not at all," he said. "I'm keeping my bargain, that's all. My dear kid, you could look for a real good chance if you had tin enough to see you through. I should really advise you to try your friends. All best wishes have to."

Monty Lowther did not reply to that. His objection to starting in life as a sponge was as strong as ever, but he had the additional reason that he did not wish to betray his whereabouts to his friends, though he did not explain that to Mr. Curil.

The rehearsal was to take place in the afternoon, at the theatre, and Monty Lowther started off with his friend in high spirits. As they walked down the street Monty Lowther suddenly halted. They were passing the railway station, and a gentleman had come out of it, and the junior's eyes had fallen upon him.

It was Dr. Holmes!

For a moment Lowther stood petrified.

The Head of St. Jim's was not looking in his direction, and his presence of mind returned very quickly.

He seized Mr. Curil by the arm and dragged him down a side street. Mr. Curil was so astonished that he went down without resistance.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"I—I've just seen somebody!" gasped Lowther.

"Somebody you don't want to meet?" "Ye-es."

Mr. Curil winked.

"All serene!" he said. "I savvy. I've been there myself. Let's go round the other way to the theatre."

Lowther did not understand, but he nodded; it was only after some time that he realised Mr. Curil supposed he had caught sight of a creditor. He did not correct Mr. Curil's mistaken impression. They reached the theatre without any further encounter, and Lowther breathed more freely when he was within the walls. Whether Dr. Holmes had come to Lantham to look for him he did not know—other business might have brought the Head of St. Jim's there. But Lowther was in a very troubled state of mind as he went on the stage for the rehearsal.

## CHAPTER 13.

### The Return of the Prodigal!

THE theatre was empty, but the orchestra were in their places, and the stage was lighted.

Some new songs and scenes were being introduced into the musical comedy, and a rehearsal was necessary. Mr. Spodgers had consented to Lowther taking Mr. Curil's place in the waltz act. It did not do any harm, as Mr. Curil's own part was unchanged, and he knew it too well to want to rehearse it.

As a matter of fact, he was glad to escape the trouble. And Lowther had been studying Mr. Curil's part so assiduously that it was most likely he would be able to stumble through it sufficiently well for a rehearsal.

Miss Skitty was very helpful to Lowther, and she liked to dance with him. She had very seriously endangered Mr. Curil's friendship with Lowther by remarking frankly that

(Continued on page 28.)





Let the Editor be your pal. Write to him to-day, addressing your letters :  
The Editor, The GEM, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Fleetway House,  
Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

**M**ARTIN CLIFFORD is at the top of his form again next Wednesday with another ripping yarn of St. Jim's. Ernest Levison, the black sheep of the School House, returns to St. Jim's, and at first it seems that he has changed for the better since his narrow escape from expulsion some weeks ago, and which resulted in him having a serious illness. But Tom Merry & Co.—and Arthur Augustus in particular—discover later that it is just a pose—that Levison is playing a cunning game for high stakes, with Gussy as the pawn of his scheming. Every reader will delight in this enthralling yarn.

#### "THE REBELS' PRISONER!"

Slowly but surely the pals of Pack-saddle are getting the upper hand of Job Wash and his roughnecks, and in the next gripping yarn they make a new and startling move against the enemy—which proves just too bad for Job! You'll find all the thrills you want in the next stunning story in this wonderful series by Frank Richards.

How do you like "Mystery Mill!" chums? Great, isn't it? You can trust Edwy Searles Brooks to provide a first-class mystery yarn! There are more

startling developments in next Wednesday's chapters. Look out for them!

#### LOST—AND FOUND!

It's funny the way things turn up after being lost for a number of years. Thirteen years ago an officer of the Royal Scots Fusiliers was on a visit to Malta, in the Mediterranean Sea, when, as he leaned over the ship's rail in Valetta Harbour, one of his War medals fell overboard and was lost in the sea.

A short time ago the same ship, the P. and O. liner Bendigo, was again in Valetta Harbour, and this time, when the anchor was weighed, the missing medal was found buried in the mud clinging to the anchor flukes! The owner of the medal was informed of the find, and he made a special journey to Port Said to meet the Bendigo and receive his property.

#### A RISKY SPORT!

You'd think that aeroplanes and gliders would have put an end to balloon-flying—the earliest means of

flying man invented—but they haven't. There are still hundreds of ballooning enthusiasts in the world, and from time to time they hold races and attempt to break the existing long-distance records. It's a risky sport, of course, for once you cast adrift from the mooring ropes you can only travel in the direction in which the wind is blowing. If the wind makes a sudden change you are just as likely to be blown out to sea or into a dangerous mountain region as over suitable landing ground. Only the other day three Belgian balloonists setting out on a flight into France got caught by a cross-wind blowing at a high altitude, and before they could get back to earth by releasing some of the gas from their balloon they were drifting over the English Channel in the direction of the Atlantic Ocean.

They tried to climb out of the dangerous air current by heaving ballast overboard, but failed. Then they let out some of the gas from the envelope in an attempt to descend. They descended all right—and then had a tough fight with the elements to prevent themselves being dumped into the sea! Eventually, however, they landed safely at Dallington, a hamlet six miles from Battle, in Sussex, twelve hours after the take-off. That is not, of course, anything like a record flight. Some years ago a balloon stayed in the air for six days and nights, travelling from France to South Africa!

#### FLYING THE ATLANTIC!

Talking about long-distance flying reminds me that the first transatlantic plane is now almost ready for her maiden trip, and that its owners, the British Bellanca Company, plan to make the first passenger-carrying flight during this year. The plane is a Bellanca, American-built, and will carry eighteen passengers besides the crew, and will fly from Floyd Bennett Field, New York, to Liverpool. Over a hundred people have already put their names down on the passenger-list!

#### THE EDITOR.

PEN PALS COUPON  
27-7-35



A free feature which brings together readers all over the world for the purpose of exchanging topics of interest to each other. If you want a pen pal, post your notice, together with the coupon on this page, to the address given above.

Miss Paula Cross, Havensworth, Carlisle Road, Buxton, Derbyshire; girl correspondents; age 14-16; Guides, camping; especially U.S.A.

Miss Nan Murrell, 33, Westbourne Road, Holloway, London, N.7; girl correspondents overseas; age 19 upwards.

Ken Smith, 82, Wansford Road, Woodford Green, Essex; Spain; age 13-15.

Keith Spooner, Firbank, Park Side, Bingley, Yorks; England, Canada, South Africa and U.S.A.; age 14-17; films, dance music, scouting.

F. G. Burton, 8, Cordelia Street, South Grove, London, E.3, wants to hear from Arthur Richardson, South Africa.

Miss Kathleen Andrews, 43, Elmira Road, Lewisham, London, S.E.13; girl correspondents; age 16 upwards.

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Miss Betty Musgrave, Holly Lodge, Lenzie, Glasgow; girl correspondents; age 15 up; stamps, films, photographs.

Miss Doreen Rodfern, 138, Church Street, Mudjee, N.S.W., Australia; girl correspondents; British Isles, Canada, Africa, U.S.A.; age 13-15; cricket, swimming, cigarette cards, riding.

Stephen B. Crozier, 65, Windsor Avenue, Grays, Essex; age 12-15; films, old GEMS.

Chua Boon Unn, 1, Chatsworth Road, Singapore, Straits Settlements; music, films, photography, Nature, sports.

Miss Peggie Cunningham, 150a, Leinster Road, Rathmines,

Dublin, Ireland; girl correspondents; age 20-22; hobbies, sports; British Isles, Spain, France, U.S.A., China.

B. Stretton, 3331, Marine Drive, Fraser Arm P.O., Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada; age 14-15; swimming, reading.

Max Harris, Box 176, Mount Gambier, South Australia; age 13-16; sports, stamps.

Miles Percival, Grey Street, Glen Innes, N.S.W., Australia; wants pen pals outside Australia; age 14-16; swimming, match brands, birds' eggs.

B. Morty, Bazley Street, Port Shepstone, Natal, South Africa; age 16-20; stamps, swimming; United Kingdom, Dominions, Gibraltar, Malta.

R. W. Hebbs, The Three Horse Shoes, Garston, near Watford, Herts; school stories, French, science.

Geoffrey Owen, 100, Ormesby Road, Middlesbrough Yorks; age 19 upwards; science, physical culture, music; British Empire.

Jim Lloyd, 5, Rowlett Street, Poplar, London, E.14, wants a pen pal in London; age 16-17.

Geoffrey Bickley, 57, St. Jude's Road West, Wolverhampton, Staffs; Canada and U.S.A.

Billie Lloyd, Albemarle Hotel, Brighton; stamp collectors.

Stanley Duffy, 100, Vivian Street, Wellington, New Zealand; stamps; Canada, Samoa, India.

Jim Harris, 39, Latimer Square, Christchurch, New Zealand; age 10-14.

Miss G. Kellet, 108, Carlingford Road, West Green, London, N.15; girl correspondents; sports; age 21-23.

Keith Swailes, 33, Nelson Crescent, Napier, New Zealand; stamps; age 12-15; West Indies, Canal Zone, Malay States.

Russell Howard, 129, King Street East, St. John's, New Brunswick, Canada; England; hockey, rugby, etc.; age 14-16.

Tony Bawden, 9, St. Augustine's Avenue, South Crondon, Surrey; wants pen pals in Croydon area; age 14-20; meccano, old "Nelson Lees," photography.

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## FIGHTING IS FAST AND FURIOUS ON THE PACKSADDLE FRONT—



Tough as the Packsaddle bunch were, they would have no chance in a hand-to-hand encounter with the dozen roughnecks, so they gave no quarter. As two of the enemy rose to the level of the parapet, cudgels crashed down on their heads. With a yell, Yuma Dave fell back down the ladder!

### In the Hands of the Enemy!

**Y**OU pesky young piecan!" roared Job Wash.

"You rebellious young rascal!" said Mr. Scadder. Elias Scadder, the new headmaster of Packsaddle School, was rather more choice in his expressions than Mr. Wash, the chairman of the Packsaddle school committee.

Dick Carr did not answer either of them.

Job Wash, short and fat, and Elias Scadder, long and thin, glared at him. In the latter's hand was a cane.

The bright sunshine of the Texas morning shone down on the cow town school. It was a bright and cheery morning; but Dick Carr, the tenderfoot of Packsaddle, looked neither bright nor cheery.

Hair-Trigger Pete, the red-bearded roughneck, dragged him out of the fodder shed, in which he had been locked during the night. Unheeding Job and Scadder, he looked across the playground at the schoolhouse on the other side. Planks were nailed across the windows of that building, but the spaces between the planks were crammed with faces, staring out. Among them Dick recognised Slick Poindexter and Mick Kavanagh. The rebel schoolboys of Packsaddle were still holding the fort, though Dick had fallen into the hands of the enemy.

"You piefaced young gink!" went on Job Wash.

"Some further punishment, sir—" suggested Mr. Scadder. He swished his cane.

"You said it, Scadder!" growled Job. "Say, you young guy, I guess you know what's coming to you. I'll say you was the king-pin in that caboodle, and they all jumped when you said jump!"

"Undoubtedly this boy was the ring-leader!" said Mr. Scadder, putting it in

his choicer language, as became a schoolmaster.

"Ain't that so, you pesky young geek?" roared Job.

"More or less," answered Dick Carr. "But the bunch will hold on without me! We're not giving in till Bill Sampson comes back as headmaster, Mr. Wash."

"Bill Sampson nothing!" hooted Job. "Bill's been fired by the school committee, and Bill stays fired. Bill's gone back to punching cows at Kicking Mule, and Bill stays punching cows. I'll tell a man, Mr. Scadder is schoolmaster now, and I'll have that bunch feeding from his hand!"

Dick made no answer. He had already had a severe sample of Elias Scadder's cane, and he did not want

what's coming to you if them geeks yonder don't talk turkey. You get me? You're the king-pin, I guess, and they follow your lead. You're going to get them to throw it up. Bring him along, you Hair-Trigger."

In Hair-Trigger Pete's brawny grasp Dick was marched along towards the barricaded schoolhouse. Job and Elias followed, the latter swishing his cane. After them crowded the gang of roughnecks whom Job had enlisted to deal with the Packsaddle bunch.

They halted within hailing distance of the rebels' stronghold. Hands were waved to Dick through the apertures at the windows.

The bunch could not help him. Only so long as they remained entrenched in the schoolhouse could they hold their own against Job's rough crew. But they watched him with anxious eyes.

"Now, you pesky young skunk," said Job grimly. "You toot to them young geeks. You tell them to come out of that shebang."

Dick stood silent. It was true that he was the leading spirit in the Packsaddle rebellion. But the whole bunch were standing for Bill, and he doubted whether he could have persuaded them to give in, if he had wanted to. Certainly he did not want to, and had no intention of trying. Job Wash seemed to think that he had a trump card in his hand with the ring-leader of the rebellion a prisoner. But Job was making one more of his mistakes.

"You hear me yaup!" roared Job. "I'm not deaf!" answered Dick.

"Get going, you young boob! I'm telling you that if them young geeks don't come out of that shebang, you're going to get such a lambasting you won't have a heap of skin left on your back. Now you sing out to that bunch."

"I won't!"

"You won't!" said Job. "Forget it! Mr. Scadder, you give him a sample of what's coming to him."

## By FRANK RICHARDS

any more if he could help it. It was plain that Elias was keen to get going with that cane again.

"Now, you lissen!" hooted Job, shaking a fat fist within an inch of Dick's nose. "I ain't honing to hang on here, leaving my store, and paying these guys five dollars a day all round. Nope! I guess I was aiming to starve out that bunch, and I was sure getting by with it, and then you get out and got in the eats—you ain't denying that you got in the eats for them young geeks?"

Dick Carr nodded cheerfully.

His only consolation was that he had succeeded in landing the food supply safely in the besieged schoolhouse before he was captured by Job's gang of toughs.

"Waal," said Job, "you lissen! You've had one lambasting, you young gink, but it won't be a circumstance to

## —IN THIS FULL-OF-THRILLS YARN OF THE TEXAS SCHOOLBOY REBELS!

Whack!

The cane came down across Dick Carr's shoulders with a crack that rang like the report of a six-gun.

Dick gave a yell.

Whack! Whack!

Elias seemed to like the work. He laid it on with a heavy hand. Dick struggled and wriggled in Hair-Trigger's grasp. He was strong and sturdy, but he was an infant in the big bullwhacker's hands. Hair-Trigger Pete held him easily, and grinned down at him.

But the grin was washed off his face as Dick Carr landed a sudden kick. His heel crashed on Hair-Trigger's shin.

"Wow!" roared the red-bearded roughneck, and in sudden anguish he released the schoolboy and hopped.

"Ha, ha, ha!" came in a yell from the schoolhouse.

"Beat it, Dick!" shrieked Mick Kavanagh from the window.

Dick Carr, as his collar was released, made a jump to escape. But he was grasped at once by the roughnecks round him. Yuma Dave grasped one arm—Tanglefoot the other.

"Yow-ow-ow!" yelled Hair-Trigger, hopping on one leg and clapping the other with both hands. "Great gophers! Yoooo-hoop! Wurrgrgh!"

"Search me!" gasped Job. "Say, you goobs, you keep a hold on that young scallywag! You get going, Mr. Scadder."

Whack, whack, whack, whack!

"Now, you pesky gink, you tooting to that bunch?" roared Job.

"Ow! Yes! Ow!" gasped Dick.

"I reckoned you would!" grinned Job. "Yep! Now you shoot off your mouth, pronto."

Dick was hustled nearer the window, crammed with watching faces. He was safely held, there was no escape for him, and Scadder's cane was ready. Job's fat face wore a grin now. The tenderfoot was going to talk under the persuasion of the cane.

"Slick! Mick!" called out Dick Carr. "You hear me?"

"Yep, old-timer!" called back Slick Poindexter.

"They've got me!" went on the tenderfoot of Packsaddle. "I'm going to get it hot and strong if you don't surrender. Well, don't let that make any difference to you. Stick to it! You've got the grub now, and you can hold on till Bill comes back. Never mind about me—you fellows just hold on and keep going."

Job Wash's fat face was a picture as he listened to that. It was not what he had expected the tenderfoot to say.

"Carry me home to die!" gasped Job, purple with rage. "You—you—you—Aw, I guess this gets me goat! Mr. Scadder, you get going with that cane! You hear me whisper!"

Whiz! A beef-cane came sailing from the window, and it caught Job on the ear.

"Wake snakes!" yelled the chairman of the Packsaddle school committee, as he clapped a fat hand to his ear. "Yaw-woop!"

There was a rush to get out of range of missiles. Dick Carr was hustled away among the roughnecks.

But they were still in full view of the windows when they halted out of range. And then Hair-Trigger and Yuma held the tenderfoot of Packsaddle stretched over a log, and Elias Scadder got busy with the cane.

And Dick, as he wriggled and yelled under the whacks, realised that the cane

in Mr. Scadder's vicious hand was tougher than the quirt had ever been in Bill Sampson's.

### Roped In!

"I'LL say it gets my goat!" groaned Slick Poindexter.

"You said it!" mumbled Mick dolorously.

"I'd sure give the eats to get him back safe!" said Pie Sanders.

"Forget it!" grunted Poker Parker. "They got him—but I guess we got the eats!"

"Aw, can it, Poker!" growled Slick.

There were "eats" in plenty in the besieged schoolhouse of Packsaddle now. Job's stunt of starving out the bunch was defeated—for the present, at least. But for the capture of Dick Carr, the rebels would have been in high feather.

They had seen him thrashed by Scadder and locked up again in the fodder shed. And they could not help him.

"We're holding on!" said Slick. "We sure ain't talking turkey, not till they fire that guy Scadder and let Bill come back! But it sure does get my goat to see young Carr cinched that-a-way!"

"Say, there's Slim!" said Hunky Tutt, looking from the window.

"Doggone the pesky quitter!" grunted Slick.

Slim Dixon was the only "quitter" in the bunch. And the hapless Slim had

*The enemy thought they were  
spry in attacking the rebels of  
Packsaddle from a new quarter,  
but they'll have to get up earlier  
if they want to catch the cow town  
schoolboys napping!*

plenty of reason to regret having quitted.

The Chinese cook had been scared away by Hair-Trigger and his rough gang, and Slim had been given his job. Scadder's cane, and kicks and cuffs from the roughnecks, kept him to it. Looking from the windows the bunch could see Slim, with a big kettle, crossing to the pump.

Slim did not look happy.

He cast a longing glance towards the schoolhouse. Plainly he would have been glad to be back with the bunch he had deserted.

"The pesky goob!" growled Slick. "If they gave Dick a chance, he would beat it; but Slim ain't got the sand to try it on. I guess he's fed-up with doing the chores for that gang, but he don't dare vamoose."

"Aw, they'd get him if he did!" growled Poker Parker. "There's that guy Scadder watching him."

The long, thin figure of Elias Scadder moved from Small Brown's cabin, where the new schoolmaster had taken up his quarters with Job Wash.

Evidently Mr. Scadder had a suspicion that Slim might make an attempt to rejoin the comrades he had quitted. As Slim filled the big kettle at the pump, Mr. Scadder moved between him and the schoolhouse, to cut off any such attempt.

It was late in the morning. Job Wash had gone down to Packsaddle town to give his store the once-over. Hair-Trigger and his gang were lounging in

the shade of the fence, smoking and playing poker.

They were keeping tabs on the besieged bunch, but in Job's absence they were not taking a lot of trouble about it.

But Scadder was more alert. Scadder, with his appointment as schoolmaster in the balance, was very anxious for the rebel bunch to be brought to heel.

The look on Slim's face, as he stared at the schoolhouse, showed that the thought of beating it was in his mind.

But the long, thin Scadder was in the way, and he gave it up and filled the kettle. Dick Carr would not have hesitated to take the chance, but Dick was locked in the fodder shed and there was no chance for him.

"The doggoned polecat!" growled Slick. "Why don't he hand Scadder a sockdolager with that kettle, and ab-squatulate? I'll tell a man!"

"They'd sure get him!" said Poker. "Ain't we got the door blocked, and all the winders planked and nailed? How'd he get in afore they cinched him, you boob?"

Slick made no answer. He looped his lasso over his arm and ascended the ladder to the trap-door in the schoolhouse roof. Mick Kavanagh grabbed up a rope and followed him.

The schoolhouse roof was protected by a wooden parapet all round. Slick stood at the parapet overlooking the playground, the lasso in his hand.

As Slim glanced towards the building again before carrying the kettle back to the cookhouse, Poindexter held up his hand with the coiled rope in it.

Slim was too far off for calling, but that sign showed him what Slick had in mind. If he had the nerve to run for it, Slim was ready to throw the end of the rope down to him, and pull him up before he could be recaptured.

Slim hesitated.

He was more than tired of the life of a chore-boy. He had quitted because the eats had run out, but he knew now that there were eats in plenty in the schoolhouse.

Slick wondered whether he would make up his mind to take the chance. He was ready to help, if he did.

Five or six more of the bunch came up on the roof. Several of them brought up ropes. There would be no lack of assistance for the wretched Slim if he took his chance. The roughnecks, sprawling under the shady fence, were too far off to stop him; there was only Scadder in the way. Poker Parker waved an encouraging hand to his pal.

Slim Dixon suddenly made up his mind.

He moved off, as if intending to return to the cookhouse with the kettle of water. Then, turning suddenly, he ran for the schoolhouse.

But Elias was watchful.

He jumped into the way, brandishing his cane. The watching schoolboys heard the crack of it as it came down on Slim.

They heard Slim's loud yell. The next moment there was a yell from Scadder as Slim hurled the kettle at him.

It crashed on Mr. Scadder's waistcoat, and he seemed to fold up over it. Water drenched his trousers, and the kettle clanged on the ground at his feet.

For the moment Scadder was winded and Slim had a chance. He dodged round the gurgling Scadder and ran desperately. There was a yell of encouragement from the schoolboys on the roof, packed at the parapet.

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"Beat it, Slim, ol'-timer!" yelled Pocker.

"Put it on, Slim!"

"Burn the wind!"

Slim was burning the wind—but so was Scadder! The long, thin schoolmaster whirled round, and whisked after the fleeing Slim, his long legs fairly twinkling as he rushed in pursuit.

"Oh, great gophers! Scadder'll get him!" panted Pocker.

"He'll sure get him!"

Slick Poindexter's eyes gleamed.

"Say, and I'll sure get Scadder!" he breathed. "You drop a rope for Slim, you Mick—I guess I'm for Scadder!"

Mick chuckled breathlessly.

Scadder was overtaking Slim Dixon fast. But the desperate Slim was running hard, and he was only thirty feet away. Scadder, ten feet behind him, came on hard and fast with outstretched hand.

A few seconds more and that outstretched hand would have grasped Slim Dixon's shoulder and dragged him back.

Poindexter's lasso flew.

The forty-foot rope, uncoiling as it flew, shot towards Scadder. The new headmaster of Packsaddle did not even know what was happening, when a loop dropped over head and shoulders, tightened round his skinny figure, and jerked him off his feet.

Bump!

Elias Scadder hit Texas with a loud bump and a louder yell.

He rolled helplessly at the end of the rope.

Slick dragged on it with all his strength, and howled to his comrades.

"Lend a hand here! I've sure roped that guy! Say, you lend a pull on this hyer riata!"

Pie Sanders and Hunky Tutt and two or three other fellows grasped the rope. They dragged hard.

Scadder rolled and rolled, with flying arms and legs. The loop round his waist had tightened like a band of steel. He had no chance whatever of getting out of it. He rolled, and howled, and raved.

Slim Dixon dashed on and reached the schoolhouse wall. Two or three ropes were already hanging down. He clutched the nearest, and climbed with frantic haste. Four or five fellows pulled to help him up. In a few seconds he was up to the wooden parapet, and they dragged him over and landed him safe on the roof.

Scadder was still rolling and howling. Every roll brought him nearer to the schoolhouse. He bumped and crashed at the end of the rope.

"Say, we got Slim now, Slick!" gasped Pocker.

Slick grinned.

"And I guess we're getting Scadder, too!" he answered. "Pull, you guys—pull, you geeks! Get him afore them galoots can get a holt on him!"

Hair-Trigger Pete and some of his gang were running towards the schoolhouse. But they were too far off to help Scadder.

The drag on the lasso brought Elias crashing against the wall, yelling frantically. Mr. Scadder was jerked off the ground and whisked up to the parapet. The nearest of the roughnecks was a dozen feet away when he was dragged over on to the roof, in the grip of the grinning bunch.

"We got him!" roared Slick.

"We sure got him!" howled Mick Kavanagh

"Urrrggh!" gurgled Scadder, sprawling breathlessly on the roof. "Gurrgh! Release me! Wurrgrgh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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"Aw, carry me home to die!" gasped Hair-Trigger, staring up. "Say, them young goobs have roped in the pesky schoolmaster!"

Slick grinned down at him.

"We sure got Scadder!" he roared.

"And you can tell Mr. Wash that he can have his schoolmaster back when he sends Dick Carr here. You got that, Hair-Trigger? Take this along with it!"

And Slick hurled a rugged chunk of timber, and Hair-Trigger yelled as he received it on his bearded chin.

Elias Scadder, wriggling and spluttering, was bundled down the ladder into the school-room below. It was startling news for Job Wash when he came back from the cow town.

### Quirt for Two!

JOB WASH almost danced.

He had come back—not in a good temper. Job's assistants, in the store on Main Street, were not running the store quite to Job's satisfaction in his absence. Job was an exacting guy. Also, he had found all Packsaddle bubbling with laughter over the state of affairs at the school. Nobody seemed to sympathise with Job in the hefty task he had undertaken of handling that unruly bunch. From Marshal Lick down to the bar-tender down at the Red Dog, all Packsaddle snickered at the fat, important, and exasperated chairman of the school committee.

Had Job been a quitter he would have quit, and been glad to wash his hands of the whole troublesome business. But Job prided himself on being no quitter. Not another member of the school committee would help. Perhaps they wished him luck—but they let him follow a lone trail. Job was none too happy!

As he came up the school trail again, he swore by the great horned toad that he would not quit, that he would keep Bill Sampson where he was, punching cows, and that he would have the school bunch feeding from Scadder's bony hand. He was going to show them citizens of Packsaddle!

And in that mood he learned from Hair-Trigger Pete what had happened in his absence from the cow town school, and he raved, he raged, he almost danced. He came near tearing what was left of his hair!

He talked to the roughnecks in a flow of language that moved them to admiration. For full five minutes he told the toughs, in gorgeous and lurid phrases, what he thought of them for letting the rebels rope his pet schoolmaster. But at last breath failed him, and he could only gasp.

"Boss," said Hair-Trigger, almost awed, "I pass it up to you. I'll say that every guy here can cuss a few, but we sure does pass it up to you, boss!"

"We sure does, boss!" said Yuma, with a nod.

This tribute, flattering as it was, did not calm Job's wrath. But he realised that addressing his toughs in flowery language would not buy him anything. He snorted, and tramped off towards the schoolhouse, to give the rebels a turn. And as he arrived in front of that building a yell greeted him from the bunch within.

"Hyer's Fat Job!" yelled Mick. "Here's the ornery old piccan, looking for his schoolmaster!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We got you Scadder, Job!" roared Slick. "We sure got that ornery bone-

headed mugwump! We got him by the short hairs!"

"You better talk turkey, Job!"

"Say, you want your schoolmaster—you send Dick Carr along!"

"Chew on that, you old Wash!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Job shook his fat fists at the windows packed with grinning faces.

His fat face was purple. So far from getting the bunch to feed from Scadder's hand, the bunch had Scadder, and Job could not help him. In his rage he would have ordered his roughnecks on to a general attack, but he knew how useless it would be. Again and again they had tried that game, and had been beaten to it. But he could not leave his pet Scadder in the hands of the bunch. He brandished fat fists and roared:

"Say, you let Scadder loose! You hear me! You drop that galoot Scadder from a winder! You hear me too?"

"Guess ag'in, Job!" chuckled Slick. "We'll let you have Scadder back in exchange for Dick Carr!"

Job raved with wrath.

"You loosing Scadder?" he howled.

"Not so's you'd notice it."

"We're freezing on to Scadder till we get Dick Carr!"

"Chew on that, bully boy!"

Job turned and yelled to his men, who were looking on, grinning. Job had a card to play yet.

"Hyer, you lazy coyotes!" he howled. "You tote that Carr along hyer! And you bring a quirt, you Hair-Trigger!"

"You said it, boss!"

Some of the toughs rushed off to the fodder shed. They returned, hustling Dick Carr in their midst.

"Glory for us!" chortled Mick. "We're getting him back."

"Sez you!" muttered Slick doubtfully.

He did not read surrender in Job Wash's furious face.

Neither was that Job's intention. The watching bunch saw Dick stretched over a log and held there while Hair-Trigger swished a quirt.

Then Job turned towards them again, spluttering with rage.

"Now, you young geeks!" he roared. "You let loose that galoot, Scadder, or you're going to see that young gink lambasted till you do! You get that?"

"Oh, great gophers!" gasped Mick.

Up went Hair-Trigger's brawny arm, and down came the quirt, with a loud whack across the tenderfoot's shoulders. Dick gave a yell.

Slick Poindexter gritted his teeth.

"I'll say that's playing it low down!" he breathed. "By gum, Job Wash isn't getting by with that! Tote that guy Scadder up on the roof!"

Half a dozen of the bunch grasped Elias Scadder. He struggled and howled; but struggles and howls did not avail the unfortunate Elias.

He was dragged up the ladder and out of the trapdoor on the schoolhouse roof.

"Lay him across!" shouted Slick.

Scadder was hustled to the front parapet. In terror of being pitched over, he yelled and howled, for it was a drop of fifteen feet if he went. But he soon learned that that was not Slick's intention.

He was doubled over the top of the parapet, his head and shoulders outside, his long legs within, and a dozen hands held him pinned there.

Then Slick brandished a quirt.

It came down with a terrific whop on Scadder's bony shoulders, and the yell that Elias gave rang far across the Rio Frio. It might have been heard on Main Street, Packsaddle.

Job Wash stared up, his eyes almost starting from his fat face.

"Say, you big stiff!" roared Slick Poindexter. "You let up on Carr! Your schoolmaster is going to get the same as he does, and then some!"

Whack! came Hair-Trigger's quirt below on the shoulders of the wriggling tenderfoot. Whack! came Slick's quirt above on the shoulders of Scadder!

Whack again from Hair-Trigger. Whack again from Slick, like an echo! Dick Carr yelled. But his yell was a mere whisper to that of Elias Scadder! Job Wash howled with rage.

"Say, you let up on my schoolmaster!" he shrieked. "Don't you dare lambast my schoolmaster!"

"You let up on that tenderfoot!" roared Slick.

Whack! rang Hair-Trigger's quirt again. Whack! rang like an echo, and Elias Scadder howled frantically.

"Mr. Wash! Stop them! Yooop! Yoo-help! Help! Oh! Ow! Mr. Wash!"

Mr. Wash was almost gibbering in his rage. But he was not deaf to the appeal of the hapless Scadder. He made Hair-Trigger a sign to let up with the quirt. Mr. Scadder was going to get lash for lash, and Job had to quit.

Dick Carr was bundled back to the shed and locked in again. Elias Scadder was bundled down the ladder into the school-room. Job had not yet made up his mind to an exchange of prisoners, but the bunch were willing to wait till he did!

**The Attack!**

"I GUESS they're busy, a few!" remarked Pie Sanders.

"But what's the doggoned game?" asked Mick.

"Search me!" answered Pie.

The bunch listened and wondered. From the distance, beyond the bunkhouse, came an almost incessant sound of hammering.

The afternoon was growing old, the sun sloping down towards Squaw Mountain. In the schoolroom, Elias Scadder sat on the floor, bound to a

desk with a rope. The bunch figured that Job Wash, sooner or later, would let them have Dick Carr in exchange for his pet schoolmaster—and Elias hoped from the bottom of his heart that Job would. But, so far, there had come no sign from Job. There came only that sound of busy hammering from behind the bunkhouse.

The rebels watched in vain. The bunkhouse screened from their sight whatever it was that the enemy were doing.

They could guess that it was some new move of Job's. Now that he had failed in his stunt of starving out the bunch, and now that his schoolmaster was a prisoner in their hands, Job had set his fat wits to work, and it was clear that he had thought of some new idea for getting the upper hand of the rebels. But what it was had them guessing.

Hammer, hammer, hammer, rang from the distance. None of the roughneck gang was in sight—only Job was to be seen, occasionally casting a glare towards the schoolhouse. The whole gang seemed to be at work behind the bunkhouse, and they made plenty of noise about it.

"They're sure busy!" said Slick Poindexter. "I guess we'll see what their game is when they're ready to start something. They won't catch this bunch napping, not worth a cent."

And the bunch watched. The hammering and banging ceased at last, and they knew that the work, whatever it was, was at an end. Job Wash disappeared behind the bunkhouse.

When he came into sight again, he was followed by the whole crew of toughs.

And in their midst they carried a gigantic ladder built of pine rails nailed together—a good sixteen feet in

length, and three feet wide. Then the rebels knew!

That was what the hammering had been about. The enemy had been manufacturing a scaling-ladder—and the attack was coming!

Slick gave a startled whistle. "Gum!" he ejaculated. "I guess that's the big idea!"

Five or six of the toughs were carrying the long, heavy ladder as they came tramping across the playground.

The bunch looked serious and grim now. Attacks on the barricaded door and the windows had failed, but if the enemy once succeeded in gaining the roof the game was up. Slick's eyes gleamed.

"I guess we ain't beat yet!" he said. "This way, you 'uns!"

He scuttled up the ladder to the roof. The bunch followed him fast. They lined the wooden parapet above as the enemy drew near. Every hand grasped a weapon of some sort. The Pack-saddle bunch were not beaten yet.

With a rush the roughnecks reached the schoolhouse, and the long ladder was reared in many hands and planted against the parapet.

"Throw it down!" shouted Mick.

But it was impossible to dislodge the ladder, and Hair-Trigger Pete was already on it. He grinned up at the excited faces above.

"I guess we got you cinched this time, you young ginks!" grinned Hair-Trigger.

Job Wash waved them on.

"Get on with it!" he yelled. "Get on! You hear me toot?"

Up the ladder came Hair-Trigger Pete and Yuma Dave side by side. Following them came more of the gang, while others held the ladder.



With arms and legs flying, Scadder rolled, howled and raved at the end of the rope as the rebels hauled on it. Meanwhile, Slim Dixon dashed on for the schoolhouse, where two ropes were hanging down from the roof for him to climb to safety. THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,432.

Job Wash looked on with fierce anticipation. This was Job's big idea, and he figured that it was going to put paid to the Packsaddle rebellion. Once his roughneck gang were at close quarters, the rest was easy. Rough and tough as the bunch were, they had no chance hand-to-hand with a dozen of the toughest guys in Santanta County.

Two stetson hats rose to the level of the parapet. Crash came half a dozen cudgels on them. Yuma Dave gave a fearful yell, and slipped back down the ladder.

In his descent he swept off those who were following, and they mixed up at the foot of the ladder in a wild, howling heap.

But Hair-Trigger, brandishing a quirt, plunged on, heedless of blows, and got his chest across the parapet.

There, he lashed round with his heavy quirt, and the schoolboys jumped back from the swipes.

Two or three of them rolled over under the blows. Hair-Trigger, panting, clambered on, slashing savagely. He roared to his followers.

"Come on, you 'uns! Foller on, you geeks!"

"Get on!" yelled Job. "I'm telling you to get on with it, you pesky piccans!"

Up the ladder scrambled the roughnecks.

Slick Poindexter and Mick Kavanagh jumped at the red-bearded bullwhacker. But a sweep of his quirt sent them staggering back. Pie Sanders and Hunky Tutt were knocked spinning. Hair-Trigger, grinning savagely, got a knee on the parapet, and pitched over on the roof. The stout timbers of the schoolhouse roof groaned under his weight as he pitched.

He was up again in a moment, in the midst of the bunch, slashing round him with his quirt. Poker Parker and Slim Dixon dashed for the trap, and slithered down into the school-room.

But the rest of the bunch were made of sterner stuff. Slick Poindexter yelled to his comrades.

"Get him, you guys, or the game's up! Get that galoot!"

He hurled himself desperately at Hair-Trigger.

Seconds were precious now.

The whole gang of roughnecks were swarming up the wide ladder. Already Tanglefoot's stetson rose over the parapet. Behind him came the rest, urged on by Job's frantic yells. Hair-Trigger had only to hold the bunch off for a few moments, and his gang would come swarming to his aid, and it would be hand-to-hand—and the game would be up!

Slick, unheeding a terrific lash of the quirt, closed with the red-bearded bullwhacker. Hair-Trigger grasped him in his left hand. But Mick jumped in, and hung on the ruffian. Pie Sanders followed on, and then the whole bunch closed with Pete, swarming over him like hounds on a stag. Brawny ruffian as he was, Hair-Trigger staggered under that combined attack, and he could no longer handle his quirt with his arms grasped by many hands.

Back he went, towards the parapet. It was touch and go now—and every fellow in the bunch was exerting himself to the utmost.

Big as Hair-Trigger was there was hardly room on him for all the hands that clutched and gripped.

He struggled and resisted fiercely, but he went staggering back, and tipped over the parapet as Tanglefoot's head came over it. Falling backwards, Hair-Trigger crashed on Tanglefoot's head.

"Over with him!" shrieked Mick.

There was a wild roar below. The ladder was packed with the roughnecks. Tanglefoot, knocked backwards as Hair-Trigger fell on him, shot down, grabbing at the others to save himself. Once more the ladder was cleared.

With a final heave, the bunch sent Hair-Trigger over, and he slid down the ladder head first.

At the foot of the ladder there was a wild mix-up of sprawling toughs. Hair-Trigger Pete landed on them with a terrific bump. Fearful howls came from the roughnecks as fourteen stone landed on them from above.

"Gum!" gasped Slick. "I'll say we've put it across them guys! Heave

that doggoned ladder down afore they get a hold on it agin."

For the moment Hair Trigger and his gang were giving no attention to the ladder. They were too busy sorting themselves out.

The schoolboys grasped the top, and heaved, and hurled it away.

"Say, you geeks!" Job Wash was yelling. "Say, you mosey up that doggoned ladder, and— Whoo-hoop!"

Job did not see the falling ladder coming—till it came! It crashed on Mr. Wash, and flattened him down suddenly on Texas.

"Oh, great gophers!" gasped Mick. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Urrgh!" A horrible gurgle came from fat Job, wriggling under the fallen ladder like a worm under a wheel. "Yurgh!"

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

"Say, Job, you got yours!" yelled Slick Poindexter.

"Wurrrrgh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Hair-Trigger Pete and his gang scrambled up. Battered, bruised, and breathless they turned the atmosphere almost blue with their remarks.

The ladder was down—but if it had been up they would not have set foot on it again. They had had enough—rather more than enough—and they did not even heed Job's frantic squeals for aid—they tramped savagely away to escape the missiles that were beginning to rain down from the rebels on the roof.

Job, wriggling under the heavy ladder, squealed and howled in vain for help.

From above, the rebels looked down at him, roaring with laughter. They pelted Hair-Trigger & Co. till the roughnecks were out of range—then they pelted the wriggling Job. It was several minutes before the chairman of the Packsaddle school committee was able to wriggle out from under the ladder—and he did not enjoy one of them!

Then, foaming with rage, Job tottered away, with empty beef tins clattering on his podgy back as he went.

He had failed once more—his big idea had been a fizzle—and his gang of toughs were in no mood to get to close quarters with the Packsaddle bunch again.

Even Job was beginning to doubt whether he ever was going to get the upper hand of that bunch!

"Hyer's Dick!" yelled Mick Kavanagh.

"Hyer's the tenderfoot!" shouted Pie.

In the sunset Dick Carr walked across to the schoolhouse, free, and grinning.

Job Wash had made up his mind to it—he could not leave his pet schoolmaster a prisoner in the hands of the bunch, and though it got his goat sorely, he had to make the exchange. Slick and Mick, chuckling, helped Dick Carr in at the window—and Elias Scadder was dropped out.

"Gum!" grinned Slick Poindexter. "We've got the tenderfoot back, and we've got the eats, and we've sure beat that crowd to a frazzle! I guess Job's getting wise to it that he can't handle this bunch, and he'll sure be sending for Bill to come back and ride herd!"

And the bunch agreed that it was so. (Job Wash has sprung a few surprises on the rebels. They turn the tables and spring one on him in next week's tip-top yarn, "THE REBELS' PRISONER." Look out for it!)

## SAVED from the SACK!

By FRANK RICHARDS



The  
RASCAL  
of  
the  
REMOVE

Give Ralph Stacey a chance to score over his rival and relative—Harry Wharton, of the Greyfriars Remove—and he seizes it like a hungry dog does a bone. His latest attempt to bring disgrace on the shoulders of his "double" is really the outside edge, as you will learn when you read this week's extra-special school yarn of HARRY WHARTON & CO., the chums of Greyfriars, in

# The MAGNET 2<sup>d</sup>.

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**THIS CRIPPING ST. FRANK'S STORY STARTS TO-DAY!**

# MYSTERY MILL!



"By Jove!" exclaimed Willy, pointing to the water. "Look at these fish—they're gasping on the surface. This is rummy! What the dickens is wrong with the river?"

**By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS.**

## The Early Risers!

**G**REAT Scott! Look there!" ejaculated Handforth blankly. The famous leader of Study D at St. Frank's had emerged from the Ancient House doorway, and his companions paused in mild astonishment as he pointed across the sunlit Triangle.

It was early morning—very early. In fact, the rising-bell hadn't yet rung. The July morning was gloriously fine, with brilliant sunshine, an azure sky, and with a cool, crisp air that was like wine.

Edward Oswald Handforth was accompanied by Church and McClure, his inseparable chums of Study D. Nipper, the Junior skipper, was there also, to say nothing of Vivian Travers and Tregellis-West, Watson, Fullwood, and Russell.

There they were, resplendent in flannels, with pads and bats and stumps tucked under their arms. They were out for some early-morning cricket practice—at Nipper's suggestion.

"What's the matter, Handy?" asked Nipper smilingly. "I can't see anything startling."

"Neither can I!" declared Church, looking up and down the Triangle.

"There—over by the gym!" said Handforth, pointing. "Can't you see my minor?"

"Willy of the Third?" said Fullwood. "What about him?"

"Willy—and two of those cheeky young fags of his!" said Handforth darkly. "Out here—at seven o'clock in the morning! Why, I never heard of such cheek!"

The others chuckled.

"Well, well!" said Vivian Travers mildly. "What are these daring youths

coming to nowadays? How can they have the audacity to get up and to venture abroad without the permission of Handforth?"

"Shocking!" said Church, shaking his head.

"They'll come to a sticky end!" prophesied McClure.

Edward Oswald Handforth started.

"Look here, Travers, you ass, are you trying to be funny?" he demanded, turning to the whimsical Vivian. "Because if you are, I can be funnier. And

*When a strange thing happened in the River Stowe, it was only the beginning of a mystery that was to have surprising and thrilling results for the boys of St. Frank's*

when I'm funny, I drive home the point of my jokes with my fist."

Travers nodded. "Most of your jokes need driving home with a fist," he agreed. "Or, possibly, a sledge-hammer—the latter for choice."

"Keep smiling, Handy!" chuckled Nipper. "Don't take any notice of this fathead's chaff. As for your minor, why worry about him? He's at liberty to get up early if he pleases—"

"I'm not going to have him butting in on Little Side whilst we're at practice!" interrupted Handforth gruffly. "He'll put me off my stroke if he's standing by, criticising! Hi! Willy! Come here, you young fathead!"

Willy Handforth of the Third, as sunny as the morning itself, obligingly came across the Triangle. He was accompanied by Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon, his slaves of the Third.

"Well, wonders will never cease!" said Willy blandly. "Fancy you fellows being up at this unearthly hour! And fancy Ted being out, too! What's the world coming to?"

Handforth ignored these pleasantries. "Where are you kids going to?" he demanded sternly.

"The river!" replied his minor.

"Eh? The which?"

"The river!"

"Oh!" said Handforth, nonplussed by his minor's direct reply, and by its unexpected nature. "The river!"

"That thing across the meadows," said Willy, vaguely pointing. "You know, Ted—the river. It's a sort of winding thing that flows along with lots of water in it."

Handforth turned red.

"You silly young chump!" he roared. "Do you think I don't know what a river is?"

"Well, I wanted to be on the safe side," grinned Willy. "Are we forbidden to go on the river for any reason? Does your royal highness disapprove? Because, if so, we'll go on the river just the same."

The others chuckled, and they were already moving off.

"Come along, Handy," said Church. "We'll waste all the morning here, unless we get a move on."

"As long as you youngsters aren't coming to Little Side, you can do as you please," said Handforth generously, as he turned to his minor. "But I don't

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want you hanging about the nets while I'm practising. Understand?"

"My dear old ass, we won't come within a mile of your silly nets!" replied Willy. "But I can quite appreciate your shyness, Ted. It's only natural that you don't want to make an exhibition of yourself before your own brother. I can see quite enough of you at any ordinary time of the day—without getting up early in the morning for it!"

And Willy & Co. of the Third marched off. Somehow Handforth felt that where mere words were concerned, his minor had him beaten into a cocked hat.

### The Silent Motor-Boat!

**C**HRISTOPHER LEMON—otherwise Juicy—glanced carelessly towards Little Side after the Removites had vanished round the angle of the Ancient House.

"This early cricket practice stunt isn't so bad," he remarked. "It's a lovely morning, Willy. Why not put in an hour at cricket, instead of going down to the river?"

Willy Handforth eyed him coldly.

"We got up early this morning, Juicy, so that we could have the river to ourselves," he replied. "There'll be plenty of time for cricket practice later on in the day."

"Yes, I know that, but—"

"And we're going to the river!" added Willy briefly.

"Oh, rather! Only I was thinking—"

"Then don't!" said Willy. "Thinking isn't your strong point, Juicy, old man. Leave all the thinking to me. In this cruel world there are those with brains, and those without. I needn't say which class you belong to."

Juicy opened his mouth to make some retort, but he thought better of it. Perhaps it was the expression in Willy's eye; perhaps it was because Willy started moving off at that moment. Anyway, Juicy decided to let the matter rest. It was as clear as daylight that Willy had made up his mind to go to the river.

The fags certainly had the Stowe to themselves that morning. There wasn't a soul in sight when the Third Form trio arrived in the neighbourhood of the school boathouse. Up and down the river, the sun was gleaming on the crystal waters. Never had the stream looked more lovely than it looked now. The green meadows on either hand were gay with flowers, and the graceful willows were in full leaf. Birds were twittering and chirping everywhere, and all nature was smiling.

"We couldn't have a better morning for the test," said Willy briskly. "By jingo, look at those rabbits on the other side of the river! As perky as you please!"

Willy was interested in all animals. He had many pets of his own, but wild life was also fascinating to him. Not that he was out for the purpose of studying Nature this morning.

Continuing down the stream the three fags arrived almost opposite Willard's Island. Here they paused, and entered an old ramshackle boathouse which stood half-hidden amidst the willows and a big clump of bushes. This boathouse had really nothing to do with the school, and nobody quite knew to whom it belonged. Not that Willy Handforth cared. He had been utilising it for his own purposes, since nobody else seemed to want it.

The three fags disappeared into the low building, and for some little time

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strange sounds emerged into the morning air. There were knockings, scrapings, and one or two sounds which closely resembled muffled protests.

Then, with a great creaking, doors were opened on the river side of the boathouse. These doors were right over the stream, and the boathouse itself had no actual floor. It had been built over a little backwater, so that boats could be floated right into the shed.

A churning sound now made itself apparent, and if there had been any early sportsmen on the river they would have beheld a surprising sight.

For from that old boathouse emerged a fearsome-looking craft.

It was apparently a motor-boat. A close observer might have detected that the lower portion of it was suspiciously like an ordinary river rowing-boat. But a big superstructure had been added, and the bows were imposing in their height—impressive in their racy length.

From the rakish prow to well past amidships, the craft was covered, and towards the stern, in a sunken cockpit, with a windscreen in front, sat Willy Handforth. A huge wheel was in his grasp, and he was whirling it round so that the queer craft swung round in the river and made off upstream.

Astern, a wake of creamy foam was appearing, caused by the rapidly churning propeller, and from within the mysterious interior of the motor-boat came muffled sounds of whirring chains and other machinery.

Strangely enough, there was now no sign of Chubby Heath or Juicy Lemon. These youths had apparently vanished into thin air. At all events, Willy Handforth was the only occupant of the cockpit, and it was an undoubted fact that his chums were not in the boathouse.

"By jingo, she's doing fine!" said Willy complacently, as he glanced round at the creamy wake. "Not as much speed as I would like, but we'll soon alter that!"

He grasped a short lever, which jutted out from the dashboard, near the wheel. He jerked the lever sharply, and two clanging notes rang out from within the hull.

Almost immediately the remarkable craft increased its speed, and it went swinging past Willard's Island in fine style. There was something majestic in its progress, something almost magical. From stem to stern the craft was blue in colour, with snowy white decks, and she made a fine picture as she swung along, up-stream, in the morning sunlight.

So far as Willy Handforth was concerned everything was fine. But where did Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon come in? Apparently they weren't sharing in the joys of this cruise.

But, then, this was no ordinary craft. Willy was out for a thorough test, it seemed. For, after another few yards, he grasped the control lever again, and swung it over. There was a kind of plate behind this lever, with varicous words painted on it. It was indeed, a kind of engine-room telegraph.

As Willy moved it now, a single clang sounded from the interior, and the lever was pointing to "Stop." The effect was immediate, for the craft now glided forward, and there was no further churning from the stern.

"Now we'll try the giddy reverse," murmured Willy.

Once more the lever was brought into play, and now four clanging notes sounded. The dial read "Full Speed Astern." Again the propeller started, but this time the motor-boat swung

round backwards in the river, with Willy trying all sorts of evolutions with the steering-wheel.

He was so interested in these manoeuvres, in fact, that he nearly ran into the bank. But this disaster was averted. With a swift grab at the control lever, he signalled for "Full Speed Ahead." The craft seemed to shiver from stem to stern. Then she recovered, moved forward, and the danger of going aground was averted.

Once more she glided into mid-stream, and Willy sat back at the wheel, a contented smile on his cheery face.

### Trouble in the Engine-room!

**P**ROGRESS was quite satisfactory for about half a mile, and then there were alarming symptoms of trouble in the engine-room.

The first hint of anything amiss came when Willy's signals for more speed had no effect. Operating the lever, he slung it across to "Full Speed Ahead," but he was convinced that the craft showed little tendency of racing.

On the contrary, the speed became even slower. Once or twice the boat rocked from side to side, as though sinister internal troubles were affecting her. And Willy Handforth's brow became black. Once again he slammed the engine-room telegraph, and the bell clanged with ominous insistence.

Not that this had the desired effect. Indeed, and to Willy's further indignation, the propeller ceased to revolve. The craft lost way, and drifted languidly across the stream.

"Mutiny!" muttered Willy grimly.

The entire forward deck of the boat now opened out on hinges, and the secret of those impressive bows was revealed. For there, now exposed fully to view, were Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon. They were both red-faced and perspiring. They were sitting on a kind of bicycle-like framework, and they were provided with bicycle saddles and handlebars.

"What's this?" demanded Willy, in a cold voice. "Didn't you hear my signals?"

"Rats!" said Chubby Heath, wiping his brow. "It's all very well for you to sit there, steering. But what about us?"

"It's too much like hard work," said Juicy Lemon rebelliously.

Willy did not lose his temper, as his major might have done. He sat there, regarding the "engine" with silent scorn. And the longer he waited, the better Chubby and Juicy liked it—since they were getting a breather.

Upon the bows of this remarkable vessel her name was painted—"New Silent Two." And there was little doubt that Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon were the "silent two." They were, in point of fact, the motor which supplied the power for the propeller.

The whole thing was ingeniously contrived.

The massive-looking covered bows were deceptive. For that space was nothing but housing accommodation for Willy's companions. There, under that light cover, they were supposed to crouch, pedalling away according to the instructions that were signalled to them.

At one celebrated period of the past, Willy had produced his famous "Silent Two." This had been a kind of motor-car, and Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon had been the engine in that masterpiece. This river craft was obviously an adaptation. Indeed, most of the machinery had been lifted out of the original, and was now being utilised in the latest product.



Taking everything into consideration, this "motor-boat" of Willy's was a remarkable achievement. For it did actually go, always providing that the engine supplied the power.

"You're a couple of nice assistants, aren't you?" said Willy curtly. "Luckily, there's nobody looking, but it would have been just the same if the banks had been crowded. Here we are, stuck out here in mid-stream, and—"

"We knew there was nobody about," interrupted Chubby Heath gruffly. "Look here, Willy! We want to make a new arrangement. It's jolly hard work pedalling, cooped under this cover."

"We're nearly exhausted already," added Juicy, in a complaining voice.

"Exhausted!" said Willy with scorn. "Exhausted—after about half a mile! And you chaps have the nerve to call yourselves stalwart specimens of British boyhood."

"Here, I say—"

"Where's your stamina?" demanded Willy sternly. "Where's your will power? Before we started on this cruise, I made a bargain with you fellows."

"Yes, I know; but—"

"Let me finish, Chubby!" said Willy curtly. "We went into this thing in a businesslike way. You chaps agreed to act as the engine-room staff. Is that right, or is it not?"

"Of course it's right!" said Chubby impatiently. "At the same time—"

"You agreed to serve in the engine-room, and we fixed the rate of pay!" continued Willy. "Threepence an hour is the figure we decided upon, and you agreed to it."

"It's not enough," said Juicy Lemon indignantly. "It's—it's a starvation wage! Threepence an hour—for pushing this hulking great thing through the water! Why, you're nothing but a—sweater!"

"That's all!" agreed Chubby. "And we're not going to stand it, my son! Unless you agree to pay us double wages from this minute onwards, we won't do another stroke of work. Sixpence an hour—or nothing!"

They spoke very boldly, but, at the same time, they were eyeing Willy in a wary fashion. The leader of the Third, however, was perfectly cool. He was even grinning. He did not take the things very seriously, it seemed.

"Oh!" he said slowly. "So you're on strike, are you? Sixpence an hour each, or you won't do any more work? Is that it?"

"Yes," said Chubby Heath. "That's it!"

"You're a pair of cunning bounders!" said Willy. "You're like those chaps who help tourists up the Pyramids in Egypt. When they get to a part which can't be negotiated without help, they demand more money. You've struck work in the middle of the river, and you know jolly well that I haven't any oars on board. I rely upon you chaps for motive power. And you've struck work—leaving me stranded!"

Willy's face had become more and more grim, and there was now a note in his voice which sounded distinctly ominous.

### The Strikers!

THE new Silent Two drifted lazily, and almost imperceptibly, down stream. But she kept to the middle of the river. Perhaps Willy was responsible for this, for his hand never left the steering-wheel.

"Well, I've considered this position,"

he said at last, "and I'm not going to stand any dictation from employees. Get back to your work!"

"Eh?" said Chubby, startled.

"Get back to your work!"

"Not likely!" broke out Juicy Lemon.

"We want an advance—"

"Come to me after this cruise is over, and I'll consider your proposals," interrupted Willy. "But I'm the skipper of this ship, and I'm not going to have the voyage held up by my crew. You may regard this as a strike, but it's nothing less than mutiny!"

"Oh, come off it!" grinned Chubby. "You don't realise what hard work it is, pedalling this beastly thing!"

"I don't care how hard it is—I'm not going to have a pistol held at my head!" said Willy grimly. "I'll give you ten seconds to get back to work, my lads!"

"Does that mean that we don't get the double pay?" asked Chubby.

"Yes, it does!"

The members of the crew looked at one another in dismay, but they were obstinate, too.

"All right," said Chubby, with a glare, "we won't do another stroke of work! Will we, Juicy?"

"No fear!" said Juicy Lemon.

Willy was perfectly ready for this.

"All right," he said, "you've given me your ultimatum, and here's mine. Either you return to work at once, at the old rate, or you'll be sacked on the spot."

"Sacked?"

"Sacked!" repeated Willy. "And that will mean— Well, you can guess the rest. When people are sacked from their posts they have to go."

"But—but we're in mid-stream!" protested Chubby.

"Exactly!" said Willy, with a nod.

His meaning was all too clear. Unless the crew went back to work at the old rate of pay, they would be biffed out of the vessel, and Willy, as skipper, would do the biffing. He was quite capable of it, too, as his chums knew to their cost. And, much as they enjoyed swimming, they were not very keen on a plunge in the River Stowe.

"Look here, can't we compromise?" suggested Chubby, who seemed to be the spokesman for the strikers. "How about fourpence-halfpenny an hour—"

"I've said all that I mean to say!" broke in Willy. "If you want more money, come to me at the end of this cruise. Come to me like decent citizens. I'm not going to stand this mutiny. If you have a good case I'll listen to it sympathetically, and I'll probably raise your rate; but not here. We agreed upon threepence an hour each, and threepence an hour is all you'll get. Either that, or immediate dismissal!"

And there was a note of finality in Willy's voice. He was perfectly calm—perfectly collected. Indeed, there was something so nonchalant in his tone that the crew knew, on the spot, that their attempt had failed.

"All right, then—give us half a minute!" said Chubby gruffly. "We want to hold a meeting."

"Granted!" said Willy. "You'll have exactly half a minute. If at the end of that time you haven't reached a satisfactory decision, you'll be sacked. And you'll be kicked out of the vessel."

Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon withdrew into the mysterious interior of the "engine-room." They pulled the covers down upon them, and Willy grinned as he heard excited mutterings.

"That's the way to deal with 'em!" he told himself cheerfully. "It requires a strong man to handle a situation like this!"

He glanced at his watch, and found

that the half minute had expired. With a sudden jerk he clanged the engine-room telegraph, and then there was a yell from below. One of the flaps came up, and Chubby's head appeared.

"You silly ass!" he ejaculated. "What's the idea of clanging like that? You nearly startled us out of our wits!"

"Time's up," said Willy curtly.

"We haven't finished yet—"

"Time's up!" repeated Willy, rising in his seat and rolling up his sleeves. "There's been enough of this foolery, and I want a decision here and now. Are you going back to work, or do you want to get the push? Just say the word!"

Chubby ducked his head down, and whispered fiercely with Juicy for a second or two. Then his head bobbed up again, and he was flushed and hot.

"All right!" he said thickly. "We've had our meeting, and we'll stay on."

"At the old rate?"

"Yes, blow you!"

"Good men!" grinned Willy. "That's the way to deal with a strike, my son! Complete victory for the boss!"

"You know jolly well that you've got us on a piece of string!" said Chubby indignantly.

"I've merely turned the tables—that's all!" replied Willy. "You thought that you had me on a piece of string, didn't you? Well, I wasn't having any. I'm too wise a bird to be caught napping like that. Get back to your work, crew, and don't let's have any slacking. When I give signals they've got to be obeyed."

"That's all very well—"

"And they've got to be obeyed promptly!" added Willy. "We might meet a barge coming down-stream, or a motor-boat—anything. And it'll mean a terrible collision unless you fellows obey orders."

"A—collision!" said Juicy Lemon, poking his head up.

"If my motive power fails me at a crucial moment, anything might happen," replied Willy. "So don't forget that, my lads! And when there's a collision it's generally the engine-room staff that goes down with the ship."

"My hat!" said the engine-room staff blankly.

They hadn't thought of it in that way, and yet, strictly speaking, there was a grain of truth in Willy's alarmist picture. In the event of a sudden emergency, it was highly necessary that all orders should be promptly obeyed. Otherwise the new Silent Two would be out of control.

So, without further ado, and feeling considerably crushed, Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon took their seats once more on the bicycle saddles. The flaps were closed down, and the engine-room telegraph clanged.

The new Silent Two swung slowly round, her propeller churning, and once more she set off sedately up the sunlit river.

### The Beginning of the Mystery!

CLANG—clang! About half a mile had been covered at half-speed, and the engine-room staff was discovering that the work wasn't so very hard, after all. Once they were accustomed to it, indeed, they found that they were able to take things fairly easily. And now the engine-room telegraph had instructed them to go "dead slow."

"My only hat!" came an audible exclamation from the skipper.

Then, almost immediately afterwards, the telegraph clanged again. This time it signalled for a complete stoppage.

"Rummiest thing I've seen for years!" came Willy's voice again.

In the dim gloom of the engine-room Chubby Heath twisted round and looked into Juicy Lemon's face.

"Wonder what's up?" said Chubby. "Goodness knows!" replied the other member of the engine-room staff. "Hadn't we better lift the flaps and have a look?"

"He might get shirty if we do anything like that," said Chubby, with a sniff. "Don't forget that we're only the crew! If we do anything without receiving orders, we shall get the sack. My hat! We'll get even with the bounder for all this!"

However, there was no necessity for them to act without orders. For, a moment later, Willy's voice came down to them.

"Just a minute, you chaps!" he said urgently. "Come up here!"

Up went the flaps, and Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon emerged. They raised themselves and sat on the edge of the engine-room well.

"What's wrong?" asked Chubby, staring round.

"Can't see anything!" remarked Juicy Lemon.

They looked about them with interest. They were in a particularly quiet part of the river, some little distance upstream. St. Frank's was out of sight, hidden by trees. On both sides of the river stretched the meadows, flooded with the bright morning sunshine. In the distance Belton Wood looked impressive and picturesque. Not a soul was in sight, and not even a cottage could be seen from this particular bend of the river. The water was wide here, and the current almost non-existent.

"What's the idea of stopping here?" asked Chubby, looking at Willy Handforth in surprise.

But the young skipper of the Third was taking no notice of his chums. He was leaning out of his cockpit—he had deserted the wheel—and he was staring down at the water. His face was expressive of wonder and concern. Seldom, indeed, was it that Willy looked so grave.

"What's all the mystery about?" demanded Chubby impatiently.

And then Willy looked up.

"Mystery is right!" he said, in a strange voice. "You've hit on the right word, Chubby, my son! There's a mystery here that's got me beaten! I've never seen anything so rummy in all my life!"

Once again the other two fags stared about them, but they saw nothing to warrant Willy's surprising statement.

"Doty!" said Juicy, at length. "The poor chap's gone off his rocker!"

"Clean as a whistle!" agreed Chubby.

But now Willy was pointing even more intently.

"Look down there!" he said. "No, not at the meadows—not at the trees! Look here, on the surface of the water. Can't you see something peculiar?"

"Those fish?" said Chubby, after a long stare.

"Yes, those fish!"

"What about them?"

"Poor little beggars!" muttered Willy, breathing hard. "Just look at 'em!"

Exchanging a surprised glance, Chubby and Juicy gave their whole attention to the surface of the river. And, sure enough, a good many fish could be seen on the surface. Many of them had their mouths out of the water, and they were gasping. But Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon did not see anything remarkable in this sight.

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"I'm blessed if I can understand!" said Chubby, scratching his head. "Everybody knows that the Stowe is full of fish. Roach and tiddlers and—"

"But have you ever seen them gasping like this before?" interrupted Willy grimly.

"Not that I can exactly remember," replied Chubby. "But what about it? I've often seen goldfish gasping in that way at the top of a bowl of water."

"Yes!" agreed Willy indignantly. "Because the water hasn't been changed! Goldfish can't live unless the water is constantly aerated—unless it is pure. All fish are the same, if it comes to that. Haven't you been in an aquarium? Haven't you seen the air pipes in the tanks sending bubbles of air constantly into the water?"

"Yes, but I don't see—"

"This isn't a tank!" continued Willy, waving his hand towards the river. "It's an open stream—aerated quite naturally. Then why are these fish at the surface, gasping? By Jove! Look at this one! Look here, you chaps! Great Scott!"

Willy suddenly leaned over, and the new Silent Two took a big list to starboard. When Willy assumed an ordinary position again he was holding a good-sized roach in his hand. It was quite dead.

"Well, this beats me!" he said, shaking his head. "Look at it, you chaps—dead! And all these other fish are dying! What the dickens can it mean? I've seen a few rummy things in my time, but this beats all!"

It must be confessed that neither Chubby Heath nor Juicy Lemon saw anything sensational in this discovery. But then they were made differently from Willy. He loved all living creatures. His numerous pets, indeed, were the talk of the junior school. And when Willy Handforth saw any of the creatures in difficulties his heart went out to them.

"Yes, there's something wrong here!" he said concernedly. "All the fish are on the surface of the water, and they're all gasping. They're dying, and lots of them are dead. What can it mean?"

### An Unexpected Disaster!

WILLY HANDFORTH was a changed being.

Five minutes earlier he had been sunny, cheery, and light-hearted.

But now his sunniness had vanished. His eyes were full of deep concern, his young brow was puckered. He could not take his gaze from the surface of the river, from those helpless fish.

"I don't see why you should look so jolly startled, Willy," said Chubby Heath at length. "After all, they're only fish!"

Willy turned upon him.

"How would you like to be at your last gasp?" he demanded. "How would you like to be floating at the surface of the water, your eyes glazed, your movements becoming more and more feeble?"

"But I'm not a fish!" protested Chubby hotly.

"We're all living creatures!" replied Willy soberly. "And these poor things are a lot more helpless than we humans. There must be some reason for this tragedy," he went on, leaning overside again and taking a palmful of water in his cupped hand. "H'm! It looks all right, too!"

He sniffed at the water, and then he sipped it.

"Tastes all right," he reported. "As

far as I can tell there's nothing wrong with the river at all."

"What did you expect to find wrong?" asked Juicy Lemon, with a grin. "Do you think the river's poisoned, or something?"

Willy Handforth started. "Poisoned!" he muttered. "By Jove, I wonder!"

"Oh, come off it!" said Juicy, who had only made a chance shot. "How the dickens can the river be poisoned? Talk sense, do! I expect these fish are dying of old age, or something."

"Including these baby ones, eh?" said Willy, pointing to several of the gasping creatures. "No, Juicy, there's nothing natural about this business. These fish are dying by the dozen, and there must be something wrong with the river."

By this time the new Silent Two had drifted broadside across the stream and had slowly glided down towards the bend where the river narrowed slightly. The next reach was not visible, owing to a screen of leafy willows.

Not that Willy took any interest in the local geography. He didn't care how far he drifted. He was looking at the river, wondering what could be the matter with these fish. For, indeed, there was something extraordinarily wrong. To a young naturalist such as Willy the problem was a fascinating one. Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon were altogether too matter-of-fact to be interested in such trifles.

"I believe you're right, Juicy," said Willy, after a short silence. "The river's poisoned in some way. And it must be quite local, too."

"How do you make that out?" asked Chubby.

"Well, half a mile down the river there's not a sign of this trouble," replied Willy. "And that looks as though the water there is fairly pure. The fish, floating down the stream, get out of the poisoned zone, and perhaps they recover. Let's hope that the majority of them do. We'd better make a move again and get higher up. Perhaps we shall be able to locate the cause—"

"Hi!" yelled Chubby suddenly.

"Look out!"

"What the dickens—" began Willy. He swung round, and was just in time to see a long, narrow boat shoot round the curve. It contained four St. Frank's seniors and a steersman, and they were going all out.

"Sculling practice!" said Willy quickly. "Get back to your posts, you chaps; we shall have to get out of the way. We're right in the fairway!"

A lusty shout came from the seniors.

"Hi! Get that tub off the river!"

It was obvious that something would have to be done quickly. Just at this particular point the river was not very broad, and the racing craft, with its extended oars, required all the space. And there was likely to be trouble with the seniors if these fags impeded them.

But Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon got into a bit of a mix-up. They both reached for one of the engine-room covers at the same time on the starboard side. The new Silent Two gave a lurch to starboard and heeled right over. Matters were made worse by Willy, who was bearing over to starboard at the same time. Nobody knew exactly how it happened, but the next moment the strange craft heeled over, and water went pouring down into the engine-room.

"Look out!" roared Willy. Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon became more confused than ever. Chubby, in fact, fell right overboard,

and he grabbed at the side of the boat. It was just sufficient to pull the craft right over. With a slow, sluggish movement, but disastrous, the new Silent Two heeled completely over. Willy was pitched out, and a shout of laughter came from the seniors as they swung by, resting on their oars.

"Carry on!" sang out one of the Sixth Formers. "The water's only shallow there. Those fags can look after themselves!"

And the rakish-looking racing boat sped by, and no attempt was made to help the fags.

It seemed that the seniors were justified in their action. Willy and Chubby were practically standing on the river-bed, for the accident had happened close in to the bank. And there was the new Silent Two, her keel only visible. She had completely turned turtle, and Chubby Heath was splashing about, trying to cling to the stern.

"You silly asses!" spluttered Willy fiercely. "It was all your fault! I warned you long ago that the boat was a bit top-heavy! Why the dickens did you both lean over the same side?"

"It's no good blaming me!" gasped Chubby, the cold water making his voice unsteady. "It was Juicy's fault. I told him not to—Hallo! Where the dickens is he? Where's Juicy?"

"Eh?" said Willy, looking round with a sudden anxiety. "Hi, Juicy! Where are you, you thundering ass?"

"Juicy!" howled Chubby Heath frantically.

Until that moment they had believed that their companion was splashing about in the water with them. But no. There was no sign whatever of Juicy Lemon!

It was a time for quick action, and Willy was the fellow for the job.

A minute before the situation had been purely humorous. The overturning of a freak craft like this was nothing to worry about. Those seniors were still laughing at the incident, indeed.

But now in a flash the comedy had turned to drama. Was it possible that it would change to tragedy? It was a startling thought, a terrible thought.

"Juicy!" yelled Willy, at the top of his voice.

But there was no reply.

There lay the new Silent Two, keel uppermost, and Chubby Heath and Willy Handforth swam round, searching. But Juicy Lemon had gone. In a flash Willy knew the truth. Juicy had been struck by the boat and stunned, and was now lying at the bottom of the river, trapped underneath the overturned vessel.

"Lend a hand with this boat, and look sharp!" Willy gasped. "He's imprisoned underneath."

"Look, look!" gasped Chubby abruptly.

He pointed, and Willy caught his breath in. A few bubbles were appearing on the surface of the water, circling round from underneath the overturned craft.

"Come on!" panted Willy.

Somehow or other they managed to get the boat over. Frantically they pulled at it, half swimming, half wading. Although it seemed a hopeless task at first, they continued their efforts and at length the boat came sluggishly over, and was even half floating.

But the two fags did not notice this at the moment. Their attention was concentrated upon the figure which now came into view—the still, silent figure of Juicy Lemon, floating face downwards in the water.

"Oh, he's dead!" said Chubby, pale to the lips. "He's dead!"

"Keep your hair on!" said Willy. "He hasn't been in long enough to get drowned."

Willy's coolness was all to the good. And, in a businesslike way, he started on the job of getting Juicy Lemon to the bank. Chubby helped with a will, and in less than two minutes, the unconscious junior was stretched out on the grass, and his companions were losing no time in their first-aid efforts.

"Artificial respiration—that's the only thing!" said Willy crisply. "Come on, Chubby—you know what to do. We'll soon put plenty of life into him!"

There was nothing gentle in Willy's treatment. He and Chubby commenced pumping for all they were worth, and the unfortunate Juicy was mauled about in the most drastic fashion. In less than five minutes he was showing signs of recovery.

"That's better!" panted Willy, when he saw these indications. "Keep it up, Chubby—he's coming round."

"He's brought up about half the river!" said Chubby breathlessly. "My only hat! He must have swallowed an awful lot!"

"We've got most of it up," said Willy, in a satisfied voice. "But we only dragged him out of the river in the nick of time, Chubby. Another two or three seconds and he would have been past all hope. Phew! Doesn't it only show you how quickly these things can happen?"

"I wouldn't have believed it!" said Chubby soberly. "I say, what are we going to tell people? If it gets about that Juicy has been nearly drowned, there'll be the dickens of a row!"

"Nobody's going to know anything about it!" said Willy sternly. "He'll be all right before breakfast-time. There you are—he's coming round now! Good man!"

Juicy Lemon had suddenly made a convulsive movement, and now he managed to sit up. There was a rather bleary look in his eyes, and he stared about him dazedly.

"What's—what's all this?" he muttered. "What the dickens are you chaps doing?"

"That's all right!" interrupted Willy. "We all fell in the river, Juicy, old man. You were trapped under the boat, and—"

"I—I don't seem to remember!" muttered Juicy. "Yes, I do, though! That rotten boat of yours came down on top of me, and I was pushed under the water. Then I biffed my head, or something, because I don't seem to remember much more. Ugh! I feel rotten, you know!"

He got to his feet and shivered. The sunshine was warm, but there was a breeze, and he was feeling chilly. Willy and Chubby were quite warm after their energetic first-aid tactics.

"The best thing you can do is to run up and down for a bit," advised Willy. "Yes, that'll be best!" muttered Juicy Lemon.

And then, before he could even take a step, his knees sagged, his jaw dropped, and he collapsed in a heap!

*(What is wrong with the River Stowe? The mystery deepens in amazing fashion in next week's thrilling instalment. Don't risk missing it—order your GEM now!)*



## "HIGH JINKS AT GRIMSLADE"

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## The Stage-Struck Schoolboy!

(Continued from page 16.)

the "kid" danced better than he did. But Mr. Curil loftily assumed that the remark was prompted by the fact that he received more "hands" than Miss Skitty—a fact, indeed, which existed solely in his imagination.

As soon as the rehearsal began, Monty Lowther forgot all about the Head of St. Jim's and the startling encounter with him. With the strains of the music in his ears, all his old keenness came back. He was looking forward eagerly to his waltz with Miss Skitty, and he hoped to prove to Mr. Splodgers that that gentleman might do worse than engage him as Bertie Bulkeley when Mr. Curil departed to fulfil that prosperous engagement he could apparently take up when he liked.

When "The Counter Girl" waltz was rattled off by the orchestra, he led Miss Kitty Skitty out to dance with his heart beating faster.

In the pleasure of the dance he forgot time and space. The strains of the waltz echoed through the empty theatre, and the junior and Miss Skitty danced so gracefully that even Mr. Splodgers turned an approving eye upon them.

But just as Mr. Wibbs was going to begin his comic interlude, when the waltzers were to push him over and waltz round him, there was a startled exclamation from Mr. Curil in the wings.

"Oh, great Scott!"

A grave-looking gentleman strode upon the stage.

Lowther did not see him for a moment; he continued to dance, with flushed and excited face, to the strains of the famous "Counter Girl" melody.

It was not till the new arrival spoke that he was aware of his presence.

"Lowther!"

Monty Lowther jumped.

"Oh!" he gasped. "The Head!" He ceased to whirl. Miss Skitty, suddenly deserted by her partner, fell into a seat in surprise. Every eye was turned upon the headmaster of St. Jim's.

Mr. Splodgers bustled forward.

"What does this mean?" he asked. "Who are you? What are you doing in this theatre? I'll get that door-keeper sacked!"

"It was not the doorkeeper's fault, sir," said Dr. Holmes with quiet dignity. "I explained to him who I am."

"And who are you?" demanded Mr. Splodgers.

"I am that foolish boy's schoolmaster, and I have come to take him back to school. He has been missing for more than a week, and I have only lately learned where to find him," said the Head of St. Jim's.

"Oh!" ejaculated Mr. Splodgers.

"Come with me, Lowther!" said the Head.

Lowther was very pale.

"Do you mean to say that the boy has run away from school?" demanded Mr. Splodgers.

"Yes."

"I never knew that. I consider that I have been imposed upon!" said Mr. Splodgers. "You had better go with your schoolmaster, kid. You had no right to put me in this position. You said nothing about having run away from school. The sooner you clear off the better!"

"I have a car waiting below," said the Head.

Lowther cast a look round the stage. Some of the company looked very sorry for him, some were laughing. Miss Kitty pressed his hand.

"Good-bye, laddie," she said. "Don't be downhearted! This is the very best thing that could have happened for you, and you'll come to understand it yourself before long. You threw up a good thing for a bad one. Good-bye!" Monty Lowther followed the Head from the theatre.

Neither of them spoke as they sat in the taxi, driving to the railway station.

It was not till they were seated in the train, whirling away towards Rylcombe, that the Head addressed the downcast lad.

"You've done wrong, Lowther," he said, "very wrong, indeed. I hope you are able to realise that. Your uncle has been very anxious about you, and the whole school has been disturbed. I hope you are sorry."

Lowther was silent.

"It is only because you are a really good lad, and I think you have been carried away by an absurd obsession, that I shall not expel you from the school," said the Head. "But you will have the choice—either you give me your word of honour not to leave the school again, or else you will be sent home to your uncle. Think it over!"

Tom Merry and Manners were having tea in the old study in the Shell passage. They were thinking of their missing chum when the door opened, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came in. The swell of St. Jim's was smiling cheerfully.

"It's all wight, deah boys!" he announced.

Tom Merry jumped up.

"Lowther—" he exclaimed.

Monty Lowther came into the study, looking somewhat shamefaced.

"Hallo, you fellows!"

"Hallo, you silly ass!" said Manners.

"Hallo, you howling dummy!" said Tom Merry.

Monty Lowther grinned.

"Pile it on!" he said. "I deserve it—and more! I've made an ass of myself, and the Head's overlooked it. He's a brick! You can call me what you like."

"We won't call you anything, old man," said Tom Merry. "We'll have the biggest feed we've ever had in the study, and ask all the fellows to see the prodigal son."

THE END.

(Ernest Levison, the black-sheep of the Fourth, returns to St. Jim's next week in: "THE CHEAT!" It's one of the best stories Martin Clifford has ever written. Be sure you read it!)

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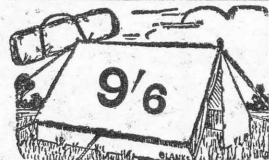
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