

Thayer '76
THE FINEST SCHOOLBOY FUN AND FICTION—INSIDE!

The GEM 2^d

THE BURGLAR'S BREAK FOR
FREEDOM!—A thrilling moment in
"RACKE'S REVENGE!"
—the Powerful St. Jim's Yarn Within.





Blake Answers Back!

Jack Blake's here to answer your letters and deal with your queries. Write to him c/o The GEM, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Be as candid as you like—Jack Blake likes a plain speaker, being by nature a John Blunt himself! But keep your letter SHORT, and enclose if possible a photo of yourself for reproduction on this page. No photos can be returned and no replies given by post.

"Earnest Inquirer," of Rhydymwym, Flintshire, writes:

"I don't want to sound flinty, but I've been searching all over the map of Sussex to locate St. Jim's College. I can't find Wayland or Rylcombe, though I've got a fine crop of little places with out-of-the-way names, like Little Slumpton-in-the-Wald and Popcorn-on-the-Hill. What I want to do is to call at St. Jim's and get the autographs of every master and boy in the building. Come on now. Where is St. Jim's?"

Answer: St. Jim's, -Mr. Detective, of Rhydymwym, is on the right as you go in at the gates. I note you have a fine crop of little places. Did you find Stickleback-in-the-Pond, Seventeen Windmills, or Jigglehampton-under-the-Hedge? No? Gosh, what do you know about Sussex? I applaud your zeal as an autograph hunter, but if you drop in one morning at St. Jim's to collect upwards of three hundred autographs, you'll be as unpopular as a London fog! So, in the interests of seclusion, I feel I'd better leave you still foggy as to the exact whereabouts of St. Jim's.

"Fly Jack," of Liverpool, writes:

I was up in an aeroplane the other day, in a thick fog, and couldn't see a thing. I had no compass, and I wanted to know which direction I was flying in. What did I do?"

Answer: You took out your watch, whirled it round your head, and let it go. It went west! And that told you the direction you were flying in, I suppose?

K. S., of Dymchurch, writes:

Try this: A man aged forty-two pointed to another man and said: "That man's father is my father's son." What relation was the first man to the second?"

Answer: Since you sent me this, the sole subject of conversation in Study No. 6 has been "That man's father, etc.," until I for one am heartily sick of it. Gussy obstinately maintains that the second man doesn't exist, and that the

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first man is looking into a mirror and referring to himself; but you needn't take any notice of Gussy. I say the second man is the son of the first. Am I right? Yes. Thank you!

"Two Hikers," of Norwich, write:

Next summer we are going to walk from Land's End to John o' Groat's. The snag is, we can't make up our minds whether to start from John o' Groat's or Land's End. We have nearly come to blows over this. For goodness' sake settle the matter once and for all. Which is the best way to go—north or south?"

Answer: Well, if you go from south to north it will get gradually colder, and if you go from north to south it will get warmer. Judging by the state of your tempers, you don't want to get any warmer—so I suggest Land's End to John o' Groat's. John Groat or Groat built an octagonal house at the extreme point of Scotland in 1600, with eight doors, so that the various members of the family, who appear to have been a quarrelsome lot, could enter separately. That ought to suit you two!

"Voracious Reader," of Truro, writes:

I want to see a GEM of 100 pages or so, with every story dubble or treble length. Why can't we have it that way?"

Answer: Have a heart, fellow! Have you ever sat down to write 30,000 or 40,000 words? No? Your own letter contained only twenty-five words—and even then (forgive me for mentioning it) you couldn't spell "double."

J. B. G., of Cardigan Bay, writes:

Good-morning!

1. Where are the Lost Isles? 2. Where is the Sargasso Sea? 3. Have you ever seen a mermaid? 4. Are you pleased to hear from me?"

Answer: 1. Mislaid. 2. It is a region in the Atlantic Ocean. 3. My hat, no! 4. Delighted, old fellow!

Good-night!

(Continued on page 22.)

Fate Plays Into The Hands Of Racke When He Seeks Revenge on Talbot. But Fickle Fate Proves Just As Treacherous As Racke Himself!



RACKE'S REVENGE!

In the rays of the moon Racke's figure was plainly discernible as he made his way to Talbot's bed. Gore's eyes gleamed as he watched the cad of the Shell pick up Talbot's jacket and slip the purloined articles into the pockets.

CHAPTER 1.

Talbot Takes a Hand!

"TAKE that!"

"Ow! Yow! Leggo!"

"And that!"

"Oh, lemme go! Yow-ow-ow-cw!"

Racke of the Shell was in a spiteful mood.

Racke's temper was never of the sweetest, but at the present moment it was beyond all control.

The cad of St. Jim's stood in the Fourth Form passage, gripping tightly the wrist of Jameson of the Third.

Jameson was one of the fighting men of the fag tribe, but he was no match for the bullying Shell junior.

Racke gave the fag's wrist another vicious twist.

Jameson screamed with pain.

"Oh, let me go, you beast!" he cried. "Don't twist—ow! You beastly bully! Yow!"

Racke's eyes gleamed spitefully as he glared at the Third Former.

"Say you're sorry for putting soot in my shoes!" he exclaimed angrily.

"I didn't do it!" moaned Jameson. "I didn't, really, Racke!"

"If you didn't do it, you jolly well know who did!" said Racke. "Now, then, own up at once, or—"

Jameson looked up almost pitifully at the vengeful Shell fellow.

"I don't know, honest Injun!" he muttered haltingly. "And if I did, it's not fair for you to make me tell tales of another fellow."

"Oh, isn't it?" snapped Racke. "We'll see about that." He twisted the fag's wrist harder than ever. "Now will you do what you're told?"

"Ow-w-w-w! You beast! Lemme go!"

"Own up, then!"

"You rotter! I'll kick you, you brute!"

"Oh, will you?" said Racke, giving the fag's wrist another twist.

"Ow! Yow! Oh!"

Racke laughed cynically. "I thought you'd think better of it," he said.

Who tried to burgle the Head's study at St. Jim's? The vengeful scheming of Aubrey Racke and the force of circumstances throw the blame on Reginald Talbot—leaving the Toff no chance of proving his innocence.

By

MARTIN CLIFFORD

"Now, I'll forgive you for what you've done, if you say you're sorry."

"I'll be hanged if— Yow!"

Racke had twisted the fag's arm again.

"Now say 'I'm sorry, Racke, for—'"

"I won't! Yow-ow! Help! Oh, help!"

The plucky fag had tried to fight his own battle with the bullying junior, but Racke was more than two years older than he, and naturally stronger.

Jameson had stood a good deal, but he could stand no more. He screamed for help, and his screams echoed down the passage.

"Shut up, you rotter!" exclaimed Racke.

"Help! Help!"

Had the junior studies been occupied, someone would have come to the fag's assistance before. But the juniors were on the footer ground, and not a single door opened in response to the fag's cry.

"What did you yell like that for?" said Racke. "Anybody would think I was putting you to torture."

"So you are, you low-down beast!"

"Do you want me to give you another twist?" asked Racke spitefully.

"N-no, please don't, Racke!"

"Well, then, say—"

Racke broke off suddenly.

The sound of footsteps thudding along the passage had become suddenly audible to his ears, and he turned and looked in the direction from which it came.

A figure was running towards the bully and his victim—running hard.

Racke released his grip on the fag. Jameson leaned helplessly against the wall.

The Shell junior stood in a crouching attitude, staring down the passage to see who the newcomer was.

Darkness was falling fast, and the corridor was unlighted. Racke could not see very far ahead.

Next moment he stepped back a pace as the newcomer became revealed to him. It was Talbot of the Shell.

Talbot had just entered the School House, when Jameson's call for help had fallen upon his ears. He had pelted hard down the passage.

There was a look of cool determination upon Talbot's face as he faced the bully of the Shell.

Then he caught sight of the fag leaning on the wall, and his face flushed with uncontrollable anger.

"You rotten cad!" he exclaimed hotly.

"What do you mean?" said Racke, endeavouring to be calm and collected.

"You've been bullying that youngster!"

"I've been minding my own business!" said Racke suavely. "I don't know that I asked you to interfere in mine."

Talbot looked at the Third Former. He caught sight of the marks on Jameson's wrist, where Racke had gripped it so viciously.

"Put 'em up!" he exclaimed.

Racke shifted uneasily.

"What do you mean?" he inquired.

"Mean!" ejaculated Talbot. "I'm going to give you a thrashing, the biggest thrashing of your life! You've been torturing that youngster, you rotter!"

"I—I—I—"

"Put 'em up at once!"

"I—"

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Smack!

Talbot could restrain himself no longer. His right fist swung out, and crashed between Racke's eyes. Racke staggered backwards.

Talbot followed up quickly, and sent his left to the bully's head.

Racke put up his hands in a vain effort to ward off Talbot's onslaught, but Talbot was in a determined mood. He hated bullying, and the sight of Jameson's wrist had filled him with determination to make Racke suffer for his savagery.

He swept Racke's hands aside, and dealt out two hard punches on the nose.

"Ow! Yow! Stop it, can't you?" growled Racke.

"You don't like it, then?" exclaimed Talbot. "But you're going to have a lot more yet. There's one on the nose, another on the head, and—you might as well have that one between the eyes!"

Talbot had no mercy on the bullying junior. He hit him continuously on face and body.

He had beaten Racke almost to the end of the passage, when the Terrible Three and the four chums of Study No. 6 came up the stairs.

They had just returned from the footer field.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Tom Merry, in surprise. "What's happening here?"

"Nearly finished," said Talbot, with a smile. "I'm just giving Racke a dose of his own medicine!"

"Oh, good!"

Smack!

Like a piston-rod, Talbot's fist swung out from his shoulder, and, crashing into Racke's face, sent him hurtling to the floor, where he lay perfectly still.

"Well done, Talbot, old son!" said Jack Blake.

"Jolly good, Talbot, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Now you've knocked Wacke out, pewwaps you wouldn't mind tellin' us what the wow is all about?"

"Come along with me," said Talbot.

He led the way down the passage to where Jameson was leaning against the wall, rubbing his injured wrist.

"Look at that kid's wrist," said Talbot. "It's Racke's doing!"

"The rotter!" exclaimed Tom Merry indignantly.

"Did Wacke weally do this?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"Yes."

"Bai Jove! I weally think I ought to give Wacke a thwashin'—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Talbot. "I reckon Racke's had about all he can do with for a little while."

"He'll have a black eye for a week, at any rate," said Jack Blake.

"Serve him right!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Yaas, I weally think it does serve him wight!" said Arthur Augustus.

And that opinion was shared generally by the juniors.

Racke had been punished severely for his treatment of the Third Former, but he had not received more than he deserved.

As the footballers moved down the passage he rose to his feet, and glared at Talbot.

The look on Racke's face was evil to see. Bitter hatred for Talbot was in the bully's heart. Already vague plans for seeking revenge upon his enemy were in his mind.

CHAPTER 2.
At Dead of Night!

BOOM!
The clock in the old tower at St. Jim's commenced to chime solemnly.

It was midnight!
In the Shell dormitory all was quiet and peaceful, save for the soft, breathing of the juniors, sound asleep in their beds.

It was a cold moonlight night, and the faint rays of the full moon shone through the windows of the dormitory across the juniors' beds.

Suddenly a figure started up in bed and glanced round him. The moon's rays lighted upon his face—a face that was bruised and cut—the face of Racke!

The juniors had been in bed for fully two hours, but Racke had not slept.

Talbot had given him the worst hiding he had had in his life, and his face had smarted and pained him all the evening.

But it was not solely his aches and pains which had kept him wakeful. He had a desperate scheme in mind—a scheme for getting his revenge on Talbot for the thrashing he had received that afternoon.

After listening for a few moments to make sure no fellow was awake, Racke slipped noiselessly out of bed.

He picked up his coat, slipped his hand into the inside pocket, and drew forth his pocket-book.

Then he walked quietly towards Tom Merry's bed, and, picking up the waistcoat belonging to the captain of the Shell, brought to view the latter's gold watch.

He drew away from Tom Merry's bed and made his way in turn to the beds belonging to Manners and Lowther and Gore.

He made a careful search of the clothes belonging to the three juniors, and replaced them only after he had purloined at least one article from each.

As he drew forth a gold watch-chain from Gore's waistcoat pocket he little realised that the eyes of the latter, although apparently closed in sleep, were carefully watching his every movement.

George Gore was awake, an aching tooth making it hard for him to get to sleep.

He had watched Racke's stealthy marauding, and had wondered what purpose he had in view.

He was soon to learn.

In the rays of the moon Racke's figure was plainly discernible as he made his way towards Talbot's bed.

Gore watched him with eyes that gleamed through the gloom—watched him pick up Talbot's jacket and slip the purloined articles into the pockets.

At last Racke finished his treacherous task.

Gore saw his purpose plainly enough.

Racke, smarting under the hiding he had received at Talbot's hands, had adopted this means of getting his own back.

There would be a great outcry among the juniors when they found their things missing. Racke counted upon Talbot being accused of theft and getting into disgrace with the Form.

But Racke had reckoned without George Gore!

Gore remained awake for at least another half an hour. Then he decided it was time for him to play his part.

He crawled silently out of bed, and in a few seconds he was holding in his hand the jacket belonging to Talbot in which Racke had placed the purloined articles.

He took them all out of the pockets. Then he

moved slowly towards Racke's bed, and, without making the slightest sound, put them, one after another, into the pockets of the coat belonging to the cad of the Shell!

Racke's cunning scheme was recoiling on his own head.

Gore smiled to himself as he thought of the way in which he had turned the tables on the cad.

Then he went back to his own bed, and was soon between the sheets and fast asleep.

The Shell juniors slept on until the rising-bell clangled out the next morning.

Clang, clang!

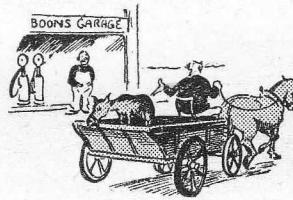
Tom Merry sat up in bed and looked around him sleepily.

Dawn was only just breaking, and the dormitory was still dusky.

"Time to get up, you fellows!" he said. "Come on, Manners, old son, get a move on!"

Manners did not move.

Tom Merry shook him by the shoulder.



"One thing this motor-car business taught me — always carry a spare!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to C. Andrew, "Somerdale," New Road, Rumney, Cardiff.

"Wharrermarrer?" murmured Manners.

"Time to get up!"

"What's the time, then?"

"Soon tell you."

Tom Merry picked up his waistcoat and felt for his watch.

"By Jove!"

The captain of the Shell gave a startled ejaculation, but still Manners did not move.

Tom Merry shook him furiously by the shoulder.

"Here, Manners, old scout, wake up!"

"Whaffor?"

"My watch has been stolen!"

"Ph?"

"It's a fact. I can't find it anywhere. Burglars have been here in the night!"

"I wonder whether anything of mine has gone?" said Manners in natural concern.

He felt in the pockets of his coat.

"Great Scott! My penknife's gone, and I paid half a guinea for it only two terms ago!"

The alarm was spreading. In another moment most of the juniors were out of bed, making a careful search of their clothes.

"Have you lost anything, Monty?" asked Tom Merry.

"I don't know," replied Monty Lowther, feeling in all his pockets in turn. "I— Here, who's boned a quid note of mine?"

"No doubt it was the same chap who bagged my watch," said Tom Merry.

"But—"

"Anybody else lost anything?" sang out Tom Merry.

The juniors were still searching.

"Nothing of mine gone," said Crooke.

"What about you, Gore?"

"Oh, it's all right!" said Gore, with a grin.

"I've only lost a gold watch-chain."

"Only!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"That's all. It doesn't matter much. I'll soon get it back."

"What do you mean?"

"You'd better get my pocket-book back for me, then," said Racke nastily. "There were ten blessed quid notes in it, and every one of them's gone!"

"Hallo! You've lost something, too, Racke?"

"I should jolly well think I have!" replied Racke.

Gore laughed.

"Nothing to laugh about!" snapped Racke.

"It's no joke to lose ten quid like that!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Monty Lowther. "Fancy a millionaire like Racke kicking up a fuss at the loss of a few paltry quidlets!"

"Look here, Lowther—" began Racke.

"Isn't it time we got dressed?" asked Talbot, slipping on his trousers. "We shall have Kildare up here soon."

"Yes, it is," replied Tom Merry. "But it's jolly queer about all these things being missing! If it was a burglar, I can't make out how he could get in here without waking one of us."

"Supposing it wasn't a burglar?" remarked Racke casually.

"What do you mean?" snapped Tom Merry.

"If you're suggesting that there's a thief in the dormitory—"

"I'm suggesting nothing," replied Racke indifferently. "But—"

"But you think it's quite possible," concluded Gore.

"Well, you never know."

"Quite so," said Gore. "I quite agree with Racke. I reckon that before we make any complaint to the Head we ought to make a careful search of everybody's pockets."

"Good idea!" said Crooke.

Tom Merry's eyes flashed. He did not like the idea of anybody in the Shell dormitory being suspected of theft.

"You'd better turn your pockets out first, then, Crooke," he said.

"Oh, certainly!" said Crooke; and he proceeded to feel in all his pockets.

But there was no sign of the missing articles in Crooke's clothes.

"Now you, Merry!" said Gore.

The captain of the Shell looked decidedly huffy.

"Look here, Gore, if you think—"

"Not at all," said George Gore in an unusually earnest tone. "I'm not suspecting you, old son. All the same, we must make a thorough search."

Tom Merry turned out his pockets, without any result.

"You're next, Racke."

Racke was busy washing.

"Leave me till last," he said. "My hands are too wet for me to feel in my pockets."

"Oh, I'll do it for you!" said Gore.

He picked up Racke's waistcoat and searched the pockets.

"Nothing here," he said.

"Didn't expect to find anything, did you?" growled Racke.

"No, but— Hallo! What's this little lot?"

The juniors gathered round closer as Gore picked up Racke's coat.

Racke's face had gone as white as a sheet.

Gore proceeded with his search. He dug his hand deep in the outside pocket of Racke's coat,

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and when he brought it to view it gripped tightly a russia-leather pocket-book.

"This yours, Racke?"

"I—I—I—" faltered Racke in surprise.

"Ye-e-es, that's mine."

"Thought you said it had been stolen?"

"So I—"

"Perhaps the burglar had a fellow feeling towards you and put it back when you weren't looking," remarked Lowther.

"Why, he's put some more things back, too!" exclaimed Gore.

He had plunged his hand into another pocket of Racke's coat.

Next instant he brought it out full, and the juniors gasped with amazement as they saw what it contained.

"My watch!" exclaimed Tom Merry in amazement.

"My quid note!" ejaculated Monty Lowther.

"And my pocket-knife!" said Manners.

"Who on earth put them there?" asked Talbot.

"That burglar must have been rather a humorous sort of johnny," remarked Lowther.

"Fancy boning a lot of things like that and putting them in Racke's pockets!"

Racke stood stock still, his face as white as chalk.

"What's Racke got to say about it?" asked Manners.

"Been starting in the burglary line, Racke?" asked Monty Lowther.

"I—I—I—" stammered Racke.

"Perhaps Racke couldn't sleep, and did it for a bit of fun," remarked Gore.

"Well, he looks as though he'd had a bad night," said Monty Lowther.

"There's some trickery here!" said Racke angrily. "Somebody's—"

"You'd better not try to put the blame on somebody else," said Gore.

"Supposing the things had been found in Talbot's pockets, you'd have been the first to condemn him!"

"I—I—I—"

Racke boggled and stammered. The mention of Talbot's name had struck him almost dumb-founded.

He saw at once the meaning of Gore's remark. Gore was playing with him, as a cat plays with a mouse.

Gore knew all, Racke felt sure of that, and he shuddered as he thought of the punishment that the juniors would mete out to him when they learned of his cunning scheme.

"Hallo! Here comes Kildare!"

The door of the dormitory opened, and in walked the captain of St. Jim's.

"What, not dressed!" he exclaimed.

"Shan't be a minute, Kildare!" sang out Monty Lowther. "We've just been discussing the weather. Think we're going to have a fine day!"

"I think you're going the right way to get a licking," said Kildare, "if you don't hurry up and get dressed!"

"All serene, old scout! Be down in five minutes!"

"Mind you are!"

Kildare left the dormitory, and the juniors dressed with lightning speed.

Racke said nothing more. He thought a good deal, however. His cunning scheme for bringing about Talbot's disgrace had been frustrated by someone. Was it Gore?

And when he saw Gore talking quietly to Tom Merry & Co. he knew that the game was up.

There was a sorry time in store for the cad of the Shell.

CHAPTER 3.

A Ragging for Racke!

"WHERE'S Racke?"

"Anybody seen Racke?"

"Where's that rotter got to?"

The Terrible Three and Jack Blake & Co., with Gore and Talbot, were crossing the quad at St. Jim's.

Lessons were over for the morning, and the juniors were hot on the track of Racke of the Shell.

Racke was nowhere to be seen. Realising that

"Sorry!" said Monty Lowther. "We quite forgot to send in our cards. Look here! Have you seen that bounder Racke?"

"Which I 'ave seen Master Racke," answered the old porter grumpily. "He went out about five minutes ago, running as hard as he could."

"Oh, good!" said Tom Merry, turning away. "Come on, you fellows!"

They trooped after their leader.

Tom Merry rushed out of the gates into the lane. He gazed up and down the road, but there was no sign of the missing junior.

Jack Blake strolled back to the gate and looked across the quad. Next moment he returned to his chums.



"You've been torturing that youngster, you rotter!" exclaimed Talbot. "Put up your hands!"

"I—I—I—" stuttered Racke. Smack! Talbot could restrain himself no longer. His right fist swung out and crashed between Racke's eyes.

the enemy would be on his track, he had slipped quickly out of the class-room and made himself scarce.

But Racke was not to escape as easily as he had thought.

He had made arrangements to meet Crooke outside the school gates, and at the moment the juniors were crossing the quad he was hiding on the outside of the school wall.

"The rotter's vanished!" said Manners.

"Let's go and ask Taggles if he's gone out," said Tom Merry.

Taggles was sitting in his lodge when Tom Merry & Co. burst in excitedly.

"What I sez is this 'ere," he said. "Nice manners you young rips 'ave got to come interruptin' an old porter like this."

"Crooke's just coming out," he said. "I bet he's going to meet Racke somewhere. Suppose we hide, and—"

"Good idea," said Tom Merry quickly. "Come on, you fellows, get behind the hedge, and keep your eyes on Crooke!"

In another moment the juniors were hidden behind the hedge, watching intently for Crooke to emerge into the lane.

Crooke passed through the gates, and, after looking up and down, walked quickly in the direction of Rylcombe.

He had not gone more than fifty yards when a figure came out from the side of the road and joined him.

It was Racke of the Shell.

"Come on, you chaps!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Collar the cad, and yank him to the pump!"

The juniors broke away from their hiding-place and pelted down the road for all they were worth.

Racke heard the sound of running feet, and looked round. Then the cad of the Shell took to his heels. But it was too late.

The juniors were well into their stride, and it did not take them long to catch up with Racke, who was a poor runner.

Tom Merry was the first to come up, and, clutching Racke by the arm, pulled him up short.

"Got you!" he exclaimed.

"What are you after?" gasped Racke, in feigned surprise. "I'm in a hurry. I've got an appointment, and—"

"It'll have to wait, at any rate, for an hour or so!" said Tom Merry resolutely. "Buzz off, Crooke! We shan't want you!"

"Confounded nerve you chaps have got!" said Crooke. "We shan't want you! What do you want with Racke?"

"We're going to duck him underneath the pump, and you, too, if you don't clear!" said Jack Blake emphatically.

Crooke cleared. He had never been accused of being a hero, and the warlike looks on the juniors' faces warned him that trouble was ahead.

"Now then, you fellows!" said Tom Merry.

"Get him along to the pump!"

"Right-ho!"

Racke struggled.

"It's no good your kicking like that, Racke, you rotter!" exclaimed Jack Blake.

"Let me go!" shouted Racke.

"Not until you've been punished for trying to get old Talbot into trouble!" said Tom Merry firmly.

"But—"

"It's no good arguing. We've heard all about your little scheme for getting Talbot accused of theft, and I'm jolly glad you've been bowled out!"

"Here we are!" sang out Monty Lowther.

The juniors reached the old school pump with their captive.

"Who's going to work the handle?" asked Tom Merry.

"Oh, I'll attend to that!" said Monty Lowther.

"Good! Every time we swing him underneath the nozzle, you work the handle."

"Right-ho!"

"Now then, are you ready, Blake?"

"Yes."

"Then go!"

Blake and Digby were holding Racke's feet, whilst Tom Merry and Manners had his arms tightly gripped.

They swung the cad right under the nozzle, and Lowther worked the handle of the pump.

"Ow! Yow! Yaroooooh!" yelled Racke, as the rush of water drenched him.

"That's one for pinching my watch!" said Tom Merry. "Swing him!"

Racke was swung outwards and backwards once again, and he spluttered furiously as the water splashed over his face.

"That's for boning Manners' knife!"

"Yaroooooh! Grooooo! Lemme go!" howled Racke.

But Racke was not to go just yet.

Six times more he was swung backwards and forwards, and each time the water swished upon his helpless form. Then in a dripping, drenching state he was released.

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"Now you can hop it!" said Blake. "And remember, if you ever try to get Talbot into trouble again, we'll give you something worse than this!"

"Grooooooh! You just wait!" mumbled Racke, shaking himself like a dog. "I'll go straight to Mr. Railton, and—"

"Cut along!" said Blake. "In fact, we'll go with you, if you like. Railton might like to hear that there's a fellow in the school who needs sacking!"

"Hang you!" exclaimed Racke. "I shan't forget this!"

"I bet you won't!" laughed Monty Lowther. "And you won't forget the hiding Talbot gave you yesterday!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Racke gave the laughing juniors an evil glare, and then strode in at the gates. He crossed the quad at a quick pace, and, entering the School House, went straight upstairs to the Shell dormitory.

Vowing vengeance against the juniors in general, and Talbot in particular, he changed into dry clothes. Truly, the way of the transgressor is hard!

CHAPTER 4.

Crooke's Scheme I

"MY word, Racke, old man, you are a giddy sight!"

Thus spoke Crooke of the Shell as he sat down in his study that afternoon with Racke.

Racke had changed into dry clothes, but he still bore many signs of his fight with Talbot.

It was a half-holiday at St. Jim's, and most of the juniors were on the playing fields.

Racke and Crooke, however, did not care for football. All sports were boring to them. A game of nap in the dirty bar-parlour of the Green Man in Rylcombe was their idea of enjoyment.

"I know that," said Racke curtly.

"Your right eye's nearly closed."

"Well, don't rub it in!" snapped Racke.

"Sorry, old chap," said Crooke. "But look here, I wonder you put up with it."

"Put up with it, be hanged!" growled Racke.

"What can I do? I can't tackle all the cads myself. You funked it when they collared me."

Crooke adopted an injured air.

"Now, what could I have done?" he said. "I couldn't fight a giddy score of 'em!"

"Oh rats!"

"Look here," said Crooke. "What's the good of getting waxy with me? Why don't you try to think of another wheeze for paying out that cad Talbot?"

"What else can I do?"

"What about Lodgey?"

"Lodgey?" exclaimed Racke, in wonder. "What could he do?"

"He could do a good deal, if you care to pay him well," explained Crooke. "He's an artful rotter, but he'd do anything for money."

"I don't catch on," said Racke.

"Lodgey's a pretty hefty chap."

"I know he is."

"Well, suppose he met Talbot outside the school after lights out," said Crooke. "And supposing he went for Talbot. Talbot might have a face like yours, then!"

"You leave my face alone!" snapped Racke indignantly.

"Well, you see what I mean," said Croke. "Lodgey would probably want a fiver for the job, but it would be worth it from your point of view."

"H'm! It isn't half a bad notion. Shall we go down to the Green Man now? Lodgey's bound to be there, and we can fix up everything with him, and get him to carry out the job to-night."

"But how are we to get Talbot out of the school?" questioned Racke.

"Oh, that's easily done!" said Croke. "I'll arrange that with Lodgey."

"Good!"

The two cads left their study, and lost no time in getting to Rylcombe. Just as they reached the Green Man, out walked the very person of whom they were in search.

Mr. Lodgey slouched towards the juniors.

"Very pleased to see yer, young gents," he said, with coarse affability. "Come to 'ave a little game o' nap?"

"No," said Croke; "we've come to see you."

"Very good!" said Mr. Lodgey. "And what can I do for yer?"

"Come over here," said Croke, turning away from the Green Man. "We don't want anybody to hear what we're talking about."

"Oh, it's like that, is it?" said Mr. Lodgey artfully.

"It wouldn't matter very much if anybody did hear," said Croke, quite unconcernedly. "But, look here, can you do with a fiver?"

"Can a duck swim?" asked Mr. Lodgey, winking a bleary eye.

Croke drew nearer to the burly rascal, and lowered his voice.

"You've got pretty hefty fists, haven't you?" he asked.

Mr. Lodgey caressed his bristly chin.

"Well, they ain't powder-puffs," he said. "By the way, might I ask what's happened to your face, Mr. Racke? If you don't mind my saying so, it do look a bit damaged like."

"That's just why we've come to see you," explained Croke quickly. "A rotten brute at the school did it, and we want him to be beaten up for it. Do you see?"

"I see, young gents. You don't feel as though you could manage it yourselves, so—"

"Nothing of the kind!" interrupted Racke. "I'd give the cad a blessed good hiding to-morrow, but I don't want to soil my hands on him."

Mr. Lodgey winked knowingly.

"All right, young gents," he said. "I understand. You want me to bash him a bit, so that he looks a bit worse than Mr. Racke—eh?"

"That's it!"

"Very good! Who's the young gent?"

"Chap named Talbot," explained Racke.

"Talbot!" ejaculated Mr. Lodgey. "That guy!" He pursed his coarse lips. "H'm! He's a pretty hefty fellow, ain't he? I remember he and me 'ad a bit o' a tussle once before. He's 'ot stuff, 'e is!"

"Well, don't you fancy the job?"

"Oh, I fancy it all right!" said the rascal.

"But it's going to be a stiff job!"

"Can't you get a pal to help you?" asked Croke.

"Oh, yes, I'll manage it. You don't mind springing another quid?"

"Not a bit!"

"Very good. I'll get old Biff Hoggins to 'elp me. Biff's got some fists, I can tell you. Now,

what about getting young Talbot out of the school?"

"That's easy enough!" said Croke promptly. "You send him a note saying that you want to see him most particularly to-night, because you know that John Rivers—I dare say you remember John Rivers—has been accused of theft at his job, and he's bunked. Of course, you can tell him that John Rivers couldn't write for fear of his letter being opened."

"Very well, Mr. Croke," said Mr. Lodgey eagerly. "I can manage that all right. You trust me! I'll send young Talbot a note that'll bring him out all right; then me and Biff'll give him socks. What about the quidlets?"

"We'll bring you them to-morrow," said Croke.

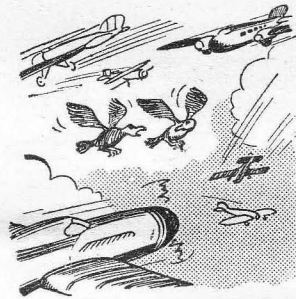
"You wouldn't like to give a poor chap a quid in advance, I suppose?" said Mr. Lodgey whiningly.

Racke handed the rascal a pound note.

"Here you are!" he said. "Now, mind you make a good job of it!"

Mr. Lodgey laughed carelessly.

"I'll do it right enough," he replied. "You young gents coming inside for a game o' nap?"



"Let's go down and walk!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to C. Ralph, The Dawn, Little Burstead, Essex.

"Not just now," replied Croke. "We'll promise you a game to-morrow."

"Very good!"

The two cads turned on their heels, and started towards St. Jim's. Their faces were wreathed in smiles. They already saw their foul scheme meeting with success.

But they little realised what startling events this scheme of theirs was to lead to.

CHAPTER 5.

A Note for Talbot!

"TALBOT!"

"Hallo! Who's wanting me?"

Talbot was returning, tired and ruddy, from the footer field with Tom Merry & Co., and the chums of Study No. 6.

"Kid here with a note for you," said Kangaroo of the Shell.

"Note for me?"

"Yes!"

"Hand it over, then!"

A youngster from the village stepped forward and handed a rather dirty note to Talbot.

Talbot took the note in surprise, and opened it. Next moment he started backwards, and his face, which a moment before had been flushed and hot, turned pale.

"Good heavens!" he gasped.

"Bad news?" asked Tom Merry sympathetically.

"No—yes—that is——" Talbot broke off.

"Any answer, sir?" asked the lad.

"No!" said Talbot.

And, turning on his heel, he walked straight into the School House and went upstairs.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I weally think Talbot must have received bad news!"

"Same here," said Blake. "I've never seen a chap's face change so quickly!"

"Neither have I," agreed Tom Merry. "It must be pretty bad, whatever it is. I wish he'd told us what it was."

"So do I," said Blake. "We might have been able to help him if he'd confided in us."

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy!" said the swell of St. Jim's.

Meanwhile, Talbot had gone to his study in the Shell passage. Gore and Skimpole, his study-mates, were absent. The junior sat down in the armchair and opened the dirty missive which had been handed to him in the quad.

Talbot read the ill-spelt communication again and again, and his face gradually assumed a drawn, worried expression. For the letter ran:

"Dere Mr. Talbot,—Eksuse me riting to you, but I am doing so by request of Mr. Rivers, who you know. Mr. Rivers is in trouble. I saw him only yesterday, and he looks very bad. He was accused of pinching money from his pals, so he run away from his job. Course, I know as well as you do that he ain't guilty; but, all the same, he's under suspishun like. He's hiding near Rylcombe, hoping that the culprit will be caught, and he will be able to go back to his job. He thinks you might help him in this, so if you care to meet me in Rylcombe here to-night at eleven I will take you to him. He would have ritten to you himself, but he's afraid somebody mite open the letter—see? Hoping to meet you to-night, I remain,

"Yours respectfully,
"JOE LODGEY."

Talbot folded up the note and slipped it in his pocket.

John Rivers was in trouble!

He was hiding from the police—hiding, perhaps, within a few miles of St. Jim's.

At first Talbot was inclined to doubt the genuineness of the note. He thought it very strange that John Rivers should make a confidant of Lodgey, whom he must have known in the past as a scoundrel.

Maybe, however, Rivers had been unable to get in touch with anybody else, and he made use of Lodgey as a last resource.

And who could blame him? thought Talbot.

The hours could not pass quickly enough for Talbot. He waited eagerly for the time to go to bed to arrive.

Talbot was the most loyal of friends, and John Rivers meant much to him. There was Marie, his daughter, the school nurse, too. It would almost break her heart if her father were arrested as a thief.

Talbot was sitting in the Common-room reading when Kildare came in.

"Bed-time, you kids!" said the captain of St. Jim's.

"Right-ho!" sang out Monty Lowther, who was

engaged in a game of chess with Tom Merry. "One minute!"

"That's about all you'll get," said Kildare.

The two chess enthusiasts went on with their game; but Talbot, his face still white and careworn, went up to the dormitory.

Racke and Crooke watched him go.

"He's bitten," said Crooke, with a malicious grin.

"Yes," said Racke bitterly. "He's bitten all right, and I hope that Lodgey lets himself go all out. What a time we'll have when Talbot shows himself in class to-morrow morning!"

"Well," said Crooke, "I shall be jolly glad to see him a bit damaged!"

"And you can bet I shall!" said Racke. "I've been longing to get my own back on that rotter, and I'm going to do it now with a vengeance!"

"Hear, hear!"

Still discussing their cunning scheme, the two cads wended their way to the Shell dormitory. When they arrived Talbot was in bed, apparently dozing off.

But Talbot was awake—very much awake!

CHAPTER 6.

After Lights Out!

BOOM! Eleven o'clock rang out from the old clock tower at St. Jim's.

Talbot raised himself on his elbow and peered up and down the dormitory.

"Anybody awake?" he asked softly.

There was no reply.

Next instant Talbot was out of bed and quietly slipping on his clothes.

At last he was fully dressed. He had put on a pair of canvas shoes in order that his movements should be silent.

He tiptoed towards the door of the dormitory, and very quietly slipped out into the passage.

No sooner had the door shut behind Talbot than a soft chuckle came from one of the beds.

Racke had watched Talbot leave the dormitory, and he meant to lie awake until the breaker of bounds returned.

The anticipation of seeing Talbot return from his nocturnal adventure bruised and damaged was very satisfactory to the cad of the Shell.

Talbot made his way to the box-room window and let himself out on to the leads of an outhouse. Then he dropped to the ground, and silently moved off across the dark and deserted quad.

He hurried towards the school wall. It did not take him long to scale the wall by the slanting oak. Then he dropped quietly into the road, and walked at a steady pace in the direction of Rylcombe.

The moon shone brightly, and Talbot could see some distance ahead.

Suddenly a figure was discernible in front of him, and Talbot judged it to belong to Lodgey, the man whom he was to meet.

Talbot slackened his pace and waited for the man to draw up to him.

"Well, 'ere yer are," said Mr. Lodgey affably. "I'm very pleased to see yer. We ain't exactly been on the best of terms in the past, 'ave we?"

"Well, not exactly," said Talbot slowly.

"That can't be 'elped," said Mr. Lodgey. "I don't bear no malice. I'm a really decent sort of chap to them that treat me properly, but once I'm riled I'm riled. D'you understand?"

LAUGH THESE OFF!

—with Monty Lowther.



Happy New Year, Everybody!

Do you play ping-pong? Remember, it is better to have pinged and lost than never to have pinged at all!

Misprint from the "Wayland Gazette": "A young man arrested by P.-c. Crump was fined for not having two efficient rakes on his motor-cycle." Oh, help!

A new film is to be called "The Chess Player." Slow motion photography is indicated.

Tom Merry produced an impromptu play at Christmas, with Blake and Gussy and the rest in the cast. "What part am I to play?" demanded Baggy Trimble, who had wedged in. "You play Sir Wilmot Wilberforce," said Tom Merry. "Oh, then I'd better practise speaking like a baronet," said Trimble. "No need to," said Tom Merry; "Sir Wilmot is stabbed ten years before the curtain goes up!"

"Film Star Gets £900 A Week." By Jove! At that rate I shall soon be getting dissatisfied with the £750 a week I get for writing this column!

Even the purest air has rubbish in it, states a scientist. Every radio listener knows that!

Kangaroo's uncle, visiting him from Australia, complains that our Christmas weather didn't agree with him at all. It didn't agree with some of our meteorological experts, either.

News: Toy soldiers and war weapons are now banned in Guatemala. Even a nursery cannon on the billiard table may get you into trouble!

"That horse is as intelligent as I am," said Farmer Blunt to a friend. "Well, I shouldn't tell everybody," rejoined his friend; "you might want to sell the horse some day!"

Always remember, a brain is as strong as its weakest think.

How do film scenario writers get their new ideas? asks a film fan. Who says they do?

Rumour has it that Wayland Football Club was haunted last season. Must have been the team spirit the trainer was always talking about.

Straight Tip: If you are a boxer, always look out for the rights of others.

Chin, chin, chaps!

The rascal reeled towards Talbot, and the latter stepped backwards at the scent of whisky that assailed him.

Evidently Mr. Lodgey had been having a good time with Racke's pound note.

"I understand," replied Talbot abruptly. "You wrote to me."

"Oh, yes, I remember!" said Mr. Lodgey, staggering slightly. "I sent you a note about Mr. Chivers—"

"Rivers," corrected Talbot quickly.

"That's right, Rivers. Jolly nice chap, ain't 'e?"

"Yes. Where is he?"

"Ah, where is 'e?"

"Tell me at once!" exclaimed Talbot.

Mr. Lodgey extended a grimy hand and pushed Talbot away. Mr. Lodgey's mind was in a jumbled state, but he was recovering his reasoning powers and remembering his job.

"Don't be in such a blooming 'urry!" he said.

"You want to see Mr. Rivers, don't you?"

"That's what I've come for," said Talbot.

"Hurry up and tell me where I can find him!"

Mr. Lodgey gave another lurch.

"Mr. Rivers is in a bad way, 'e is," went on Mr. Lodgey.

"He's been accused of embezzlement, and he's done a bunk."

"You said 'theft' in your note," corrected Talbot.

"Well, theft, then. Same thing, ain't it? 'E ran away from his job and hid—hid in case the police should nab 'im. See?"

"Yes."

"Yes."

"Yes."

"Yes."

"Yes."

"Yes."

"Yes."

"Yes."

"Yes."

"Yes."

"Well, now 'e's in want. 'E wants money badly. 'E came up to me yesterday, 'e did, and begged me to write to you for money. I didn't much care about it, but I sent you that note."

"Well?"

Mr. Lodgey held out his hand.

"Ave yer got it?" he asked.

"Got what?"

"The cash, of course!" snarled Lodgey. "To you mean to say you 'aven't brought it?"

"I—I didn't—"

"You young fool! What do you think Mr. Rivers is going to do without money?"

"Take me to him!" urged Talbot. "Let me see him, for goodness' sake! Then I can arrange with him about money. Where is he hiding?"

"Look 'ere, you can't go over to Abbottsford this time of night. Give me the money and I'll 'and it to Mr. Rivers when I see 'im to-morrow."

"Abbotsford!" ejaculated Talbot, in amazement. "But you said in your note that he was hiding near Rylcombe, and that you would take me to him to-night."

"Blow the note!" snapped Mr. Lodgey, as he lurched against the St. Jim's junior. "That ain't got nothing to do with it."

"But—"

Talbot's mind was in a maze. Suddenly a suspicion flashed through his mind—a suspicion that the rascal was hoaxing him and that John Rivers was not in need, after all.

It might be only a ruse on the part of Mr. Lodgey to extort money from him!

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Mr. Lodgey gripped him by the arm.

"Are you going to pony up, or ain't you?" he mumbled.

"Let me go!" exclaimed Talbot hotly. "I believe you've been lying to me, you scoundrel!"

"I ain't going to let you go just yet!" growled Mr. Lodgey.

The rascal had meant to let Racke's scheme fall through and try a dodge of his own to get money out of Talbot. But Lodgey's own scheme had fallen flat. Now the only thought in his mind was to make a success of Racke's scheme.

Talbot struggled to free himself, but the rascal had him in a grip of iron.

"It ain't no good you struggling!" muttered Mr. Lodgey. "I'm going to give you a good hiding, and——"

Smack!

Out flashed Talbot's fist. It landed full between the scoundrel's eyes, and, releasing his hold on the St. Jim's junior, he staggered and almost lost his footing.

"Young whelp!" said Mr. Lodgey. "I'll—Ow! Yow!"

Once again Talbot sent his fist into Mr. Lodgey's face. This time the rogue crashed to the ground.

"Serve you jolly well right!" exclaimed Talbot indignantly. "Next time you try to get money out of me I'll hand you over to the police!"

Mr. Lodgey rose slowly to his feet, and by the time he had recovered his equilibrium Talbot had disappeared.

Muttering oaths, the rascal turned in the direction of Rylcombe.

Talbot was well out of sight. He had taken to his heels and was fast approaching St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 7.

The Alarm!

RACKE did not sleep.

He remained awake, waiting eagerly for Talbot to return, damaged and bruised, to the Shell dormitory.

Racke felt that his hour of triumph was at hand. His revenge on Talbot would be complete. Talbot was to be made to suffer for having crossed Racke's path.

But why should he not be made to suffer still more? thought Racke. Why shouldn't he be compelled to remain out in the cold, deserted quad until early morning?

Racke did not debate that question long. He decided at once. He jumped out of bed and put on his coat and a pair of slippers. Then he left the dormitory.

He passed quickly along the passage, and in a few moments he was standing in front of the box-room window through which Talbot had passed.

He closed the window noiselessly and laughed to himself as he slipped back the catch, thus barring Talbot's return to the dormitory.

It was cold and bleak out in the passage, and Racke did not stay there long. His cunning task finished, he turned to make his way back to the dormitory.

But suddenly the cad of the Shell pulled up short.

A mysterious sound had fallen upon his ears, a sound as of diamond cutting glass. Somebody was breaking into the school!

Could it be Talbot? No! Racke dismissed that possibility from his mind at once.

"Burglars!" muttered Racke.

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He listened again. Once more the sound was repeated, and as far as Racke could make out it came from the direction of the Head's quarters.

Racke's teeth chattered with the cold and fright. What should he do? He could not tackle the midnight visitor alone. If he went back to the dormitory and awakened the juniors they would want to know what he was doing out of bed.

And then a thought, cunning and desperate in nature, occurred to the crafty Racke. Why shouldn't his scheme for getting his revenge on Talbot be carried further?

Racke did not waste time. He ran back to the dormitory at top speed and flung the door wide open.

"Wake up, you chaps!" he exclaimed excitedly. "Wharremarrer?" came a sleepy voice from one of the beds.

"Wake up, for goodness' sake!" cried Racke. Tom Merry sat up in bed just at the moment Racke turned on the light.

"What's up?"

"Talbot's up to his old games!"

"Talbot?"

"Yes." Racke pointed to Talbot's empty bed. "He's gone downstairs and he's breaking into the Head's study."

"Rot!"

By this time most of the fellows in the Shell dormitory were wide awake.

"You've had a nightmare, Racke," said Monty Lowther. "Since Talbot gave you a good hiding you've——"

"I tell you he's burgling the Head's study!"

"Piffle!"

"Well, where is he, then?" asked Racke, with an air of conviction.

The juniors gazed vacantly at Talbot's empty bed.

"Well, he's not here," said Lowther carelessly.

"Of course he isn't," said Racke. "I tell you he's up to his old games! I followed him downstairs and saw him enter the Head's study."

"You followed him?"

"Why didn't you stop him?"

"I—I—because he's got a blessed jemmy or something in his hand," said Racke. "I wasn't going to run the risk of getting a crack over the head."

"Doubtless you thought it was sufficiently cracked already," remarked Monty Lowther humorously.

"Look here," said Racke impatiently, "are you coming downstairs or aren't you?"

"Oh, we'll come!" said Tom Merry willingly. "But, I say, I wonder where old Talbot's got to?"

"Haven't I told you he's burgling the Head's study?" snapped Racke.

"Bosh!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Talbot's certainly not here, but it's jolly certain he's not doing that!"

"All right then," said Racke, with an air of finality. "You come downstairs and see."

"Come on, you fellows!" said Tom Merry. "I expect we shall find it's a mare's-nest, after all!"

The juniors slipped on coats and trousers and shoes, and left the dormitory.

Downstairs they went, and at length they emerged into the passage in which the Head's study was situated.

"Quiet!" said Tom Merry, leading the way.

He approached the Head's study on tiptoe, and, putting his ear to the keyhole, listened.

A faint sound was audible—the sound of somebody moving stealthily about the room.

Racke was right, after all. Somebody was in the act of burgling the Head's study.

"Can you hear anything?" asked Lowther, in a whisper.

"Yes, there's somebody moving about inside."

"By Jove!"

Tom Merry bent towards his chums.

"I'm going in," he said resolutely. "You chaps follow me. We'll all make a rush for the chap, and tackle him before he can hit out."

"Right!"

Tom Merry turned the handle of the door, and at a bound the juniors dashed into the study.

The dim light of the moon shone into the study, and Tom Merry's gaze lighted on a crouching figure by the window.

The man there was holding a sack in his hands, but at the sight of the juniors he dropped it like a red-hot coal, and leaped through the broken window. There was a sound of breaking glass as he did so.

"After him!" shouted Tom Merry.

The captain of the Shell darted through the window quickly.

The other juniors followed at his heels.

"There he goes!" shouted Tom Merry, pointing ahead. "He's making for the gates!"

The figure was only just discernible, running hard at some distance ahead.

"Look! He's climbing the gates!" exclaimed Manners.

"After him!"

The juniors were hot on the scoundrel's heels, and no sooner had the latter dropped on the other side of the gates than Tom Merry's head rose above them.

Tom landed on the other side, and peered ahead.

The man was still running.

Tom Merry and his chums pelted in pursuit.

"He's fallen!" exclaimed Noble suddenly.

"Now we've got him!"

It was true. The scoundrel had evidently tripped and crashed to the ground.

The juniors increased their speed, Tom Merry still in the lead.

The figure was just rising, but, before he could get to his feet, Tom Merry had leaped on him.



Tom Merry & Co. swung Racke right under the nozzle and Lowther worked the handle of the pump. "Ow! Yow! Yaroooooh!" yelled the cad of the Shell, as the rush of water drenched him. "That's one for pinching my watch!" said Tom Merry.

He threw himself upon the figure.
 "Got you, you villain!" he exclaimed, holding tightly to his captive.
 "Here, leggo! What's the game?"
 Tom Merry started.
 "Talbot!" he exclaimed.

CHAPTER 8. Accused!

"**TALBOT!**"
 The juniors gathered round Tom Merry and his captive in a state of dismay.

"What on earth are you chaps doing out of bed at this time of night?" exclaimed Talbot, in surprise.

"We're chasing a burglar!"
 "Well, you've jolly well lost him!"
 "Rot!" exclaimed Racke gloatingly. "We've got him!"

"Where is he?" asked Talbot.
 "Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Racke. "I like that! I suppose you'll say next that you haven't burgled the Head's study?"

"I burgled the Head's study?"
 "Yes, you, you rotter!"
 Talbot struggled to his feet, and stared incredulously at the amazed juniors.

"I don't understand," he said.
 "Piffle!" exclaimed Racke. "You don't want to understand. You've been trying to pinch the Head's silver, and—"
 "You're mad, Racke!"

"Oh, am I?" said Racke. "Well, if that's the case, perhaps you'll tell us what you've been doing out of the dormitory?"

"I—I—" Talbot turned to Tom Merry.
 "Look here, Tom, what's the silly ass talking about?"

Tom Merry did not reply. He was too amazed to say anything. When Racke had rushed into the dormitory with the startling news that Talbot was burgling the Head's study, he had thought it was sheer imagination on the cad's part.

But now he did not know what to think. He had certainly seen somebody in the Head's quarters. He had given chase, and had run the fellow to earth.

And that fellow had proved to be Talbot. What else could Tom Merry believe but that the burglar was his chum?

"Great Scott!"
 Tom Merry turned round as Racke made a startled exclamation.

"What's the matter?"
 "Look here!" cried Racke. "If this isn't proof enough, I should like to know what is!"

The cad of the Shell picked something up from the ground, and held it out at arm'slength. It was a silver ash-tray.

"Bai Jove!"
 The juniors gasped.

"Where did it come from?"
 "Better ask Talbot," said Racke, with a sneer.
 "Ask me!" ejaculated Talbot, dumbfounded.

"What have I to do with it?"
 "You've burgled the Head's study!"
 "You cad! I've done nothing of the kind!"

"Well, how did this get here?"
 Talbot made a hopeless gesture.
 "How should I know?" he said. "Unless—unless it was dropped by the silly ass who barged into me, and sent me flying."

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"A likely story," sneered Racke. "You can't cover up your guilt in that way."

"Oh, shut up, Racke!" said Tom Merry.
 "There must have been some mistake, and—"
 "Mistake, be hanged! Talbot's burgled—"

"You're lying!" said Talbot indignantly.
 "Well, where have you been?"
 "I—I— What's that to do with you?"

Racke laughed scornfully.
 "That's sufficient for me," he said, with a sniff. "If you can't explain where you've been, there's no doubt in my mind as to who has burgled the Head's study."

"Nor mine," added Crokee.
 "Let's get back—" began Tom Merry. But he broke off abruptly as two dim figures were discernible in the distance.

"Nice goings on, I must say."
 It was the voice of Taggles, the school porter.
 The juniors stared at the approaching figures, and started back as they recognised one of them as their Housemaster.

"Mr. Railton!" gasped Manners.
 "Yes, it is I," replied Mr. Railton. "What are all you juniors doing out of your dormitory?"
 "There's been a burglary!" explained Racke eagerly.

"Burglary!" ejaculated Mr. Railton, in surprise.
 "Yes, sir. The Head's study has been broken into, and—"

"Good heavens! Has the scoundrel escaped?"
 "No—that is—er—er—"
 Racke broke off abruptly.

The other juniors did not speak.
 "Come, then!" said Mr. Railton impatiently.
 "Tell me what has happened! You, Merry, give me an explanation at once!"

"We thought we heard burglars, sir," said Tom Merry slowly, "and—"
 "Go on!"

"We came downstairs, sir, and— and entered Dr. Holmes' study, and found a man just making off. We followed him, and— and—"

Tom Merry broke off.
 "What happened after that, Merry?" asked Mr. Railton. "Did you catch the burglar?"

"Er—er—no, sir!"
 "He's escaped?" Mr. Railton's electric torch shone upon Talbot's hand, which was covered with blood. "Good heavens! You have been hurt, Talbot!"

Talbot looked at his right hand, which was bleeding.
 "I hadn't noticed it before, sir," he said. "It's nothing much."

"How did you do it?"
 Talbot did not reply.

"The window in Dr. Holmes' study was broken, sir," volunteered Racke.

"H'm! I presume you injured your hand in jumping through the window?" said Mr. Railton.
 "I don't think so, sir," said Talbot uneasily.

"Well, bind it up with your handkerchief," said Mr. Railton. "And remember to have it attended to in the morning." He turned to the other juniors. "It is very wrong of you boys to break bounds at this time of night, but all the same, I appreciate your good intentions. It is unfortunate that the burglar has escaped, but we must trust he has been defeated in his evil designs upon Dr. Holmes' property."

"We hope so, sir," said Tom Merry.
 "You may go back to your dormitory now," said Mr. Railton. "I will report the matter to



Detective Kerr Investigates

No. 24.

BAGGY TRIMBLE'S SPRINT.

AT the height of the merriment at the New Year party given by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy to his friends at Eastwood House, roars of laughter were caused by Baggy Trimble, who had claimed to be a champion at eating an apple suspended in midair, but who was unexpectedly beaten by George Herries at the tricky art! As a forfeit, Tom Merry & Co. decreed that Trimble should rise on New Year's Day at six-thirty—and sprint the length of the drive! Next day the juniors rose a little later than usual after the party, and were astonished to find Trimble strutting about, boasting to all and sundry that he had been first up, and had done the sprint, as agreed. Nobody believing Trimble, "Detective" Kerr investigated.

KERR: You mean to say, Trimble, that you got up at six-thirty this morning?

TRIMBLE: Earlier than that, Kerr. I must have been up at six o'clock.

KERR: But it was pitch dark at six. The forfeit was only meant as a joke. Nobody really expected you to get up and do it.

TRIMBLE: Oh, I just thought I'd show you slackers what an athlete I am! I've quite shown Tom Merry up, I think.

KERR: Well, that's rather exaggerating it.

TRIMBLE: Is it? Tom Merry was snoring in bed at six this morning, you know that, Kerr. Fine example for the junior captain of St. Jim's to set, I must say. Not one of you was down before eight o'clock, I'm sure.

KERR: Admitted. We were all tired after the party.

Dr. Holmes, and no doubt he will want to see you all in the morning."

The juniors trooped back through the gates into the quad.

Mr. Railton opened the door of the School House, and the juniors passed through.

In another five minutes they were back in their dormitory again, and diving between the sheets.

"Sack for somebody in the morning!" said Racke. "I—Ow! Yow!"

A shoe, deftly aimed by Monty Lowther, caught the cad of the Shell on the head.

Racke subsided, and lay back in his bed.

He was looking forward to the morrow—to the moment he would be able to give his evidence before Dr. Holmes, and secure the expulsion of Talbot.

Things were working out very well indeed from Racke's point of view.

TRIMBLE: Tired? You should have seen me doing a hundred yards in twelve seconds along the drive in the light of the dawn. I timed myself—so I know!

KERR: I say, Smithson!

SMITHSON: Yes, Master Kerr?

KERR: As Lord Eastwood's head gardener, you are usually about pretty early, I dare say?

SMITHSON: Yes, sir. I'm usually in the glass-houses by seven.

KERR: Were you any earlier this morning?

SMITHSON: No; I was a little late. I remember winding my watch at five minutes past seven.

KERR: Where were you then, Smithson?

SMITHSON: I had just unlocked the door to go out on the terrace, sir.

KERR: Did you see anything of Trimble? You know which fellow I mean—the fat one.

SMITHSON: No, I can't say that I did, sir. No, I saw nobody but Lord Conway, sir.

LORD CONWAY: Smithson was quite correct, Kerr. I remember following him out on to the terrace to get a breath of the morning air.

KERR: And did you see anything of Trimble, Conway?

LORD CONWAY: Not a sign of him.

KERR: Yet Trimble says he was out at six-thirty. Could he have got out without anybody seeing him?

LORD CONWAY: I suppose so. There are the french windows. He could easily have unfastened them.

TRIMBLE: Well, Kerr, are you satisfied, now that you've asked Lord Conway?

KERR: Not quite, Trimble. Did you see anybody about this morning? Smithson, the gardener, for instance?

TRIMBLE: Didn't I tell you I was the first down? I went out by the door on the terrace, and I shut it very carefully behind me, so as not to wake Lord Eastwood.

KERR: Very considerate of you, Trimble, I'm sure. Which way did you return?

TRIMBLE: I entered by the front door—it was unlocked by then.

(Trimble has made a slip—did you spot it? Turn to Kerr's solution on page 35.)

CHAPTER 9.

The Head's Sentence!

"TALBOT!"

"Burgled the Head's study!"

"Who'd have thought it?"

Rumour was rife at St. Jim's the next morning. Racke had played his cards cunningly.

The cad of the Shell had gone out of his way to spread the yarn that Talbot had been guilty of burglary.

The yarn got to Blake & Co., and they were literally dumbfounded.

"You've been dreaming, Racke!" said Jack Blake. "Talbot's true blue, and—"

"Oh, is he?" said Racke. "You wait and see. Talbot's hours are numbered. He'll be sacked before the day's out, you take my word!"

"Bosh!"

"All right, then! Wait and see! I'm just

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going along to the Head's study to explain a few things to him. I expect you'll be summoned to Hall soon."

Racke grinned evilly, and marched off to the Head's study.

Tap!

"Come in!" sang out the Head, in response to Racke's knock.

Racke entered.

Dr. Holmes was sitting at his desk, with Mr. Railton at his side.

"Oh, Racke!" began Dr. Holmes quietly. "I have sent for you because I understand you were the first to give the alarm last night."

"Yes, sir."

"Tell me how it all happened."

"Somehow I couldn't sleep last night, sir," explained Racke. "I lay awake, and it must have been about eleven o'clock when I saw someone get out of bed and leave the dormitory."

The Head looked up quickly.

"Who was he?"

"I—I could not see, sir," said Racke hesitatingly. "It was rather dark. I thought it best to follow the fellow, in case he intended to break bounds. I made up my mind to bring him back."

"Quite so," said Dr. Holmes. "An excellent motive. Did you overtake him?"

"N-no, sir."

"What happened then?"

"I lost sight of Tal—I mean I couldn't see the fellow in the darkness," faltered Racke uneasily. "I got downstairs, and then I heard somebody trying to break into your study."

"What did you do then?"

"I rushed back to the dormitory and woke the other fellows up," explained Racke.

"Surely you noticed then whether anybody was missing?" asked the Head.

"Yes, we—we did, sir," stammered Racke.

"Who was he?"

Racke did not reply.

"Come, come!" said the Head impatiently. "I quite understand your motive in trying to hide the name of the boy, but I insist that you shall tell me."

"It was Talbot, sir," said Racke at last.

"Talbot?"

"Yes."

"I presume you do not mean to suggest that Talbot is in any way connected with the burglary?" said the Head, in measured tones.

Racke looked at the carpet without speaking.

"Come!" said Dr. Holmes. "Why do you remain silent?"

"I hope you'll excuse me, sir," faltered Racke. "But I'd rather not say anything more. You see, Talbot and I, I am sorry to say, are not very friendly, and if I say anything against him, the fellows will think it's spite on my part!"

The Head looked inquiringly at Mr. Railton.

The Housemaster nodded.

"Very well," said Dr. Holmes. "I will send for Merry, and question him."

The Head rang the bell, and a minute later Toby, the page, entered the study.

"Tell Master Merry I wish to see him at once!" said the Head.

"Yessir!" said Toby.

The door closed after him.

A few moments later it opened and in walked Tom Merry.

"You sent for me, sir," said the captain of the Shell.

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"Yes, Merry. I want you to give me an account of what happened last night. I understand that Racke informed you that somebody was burbling my study."

"That's right, sir."

"What did you do then?"

"We all went downstairs, sir," explained Tom Merry. "We heard somebody moving about in your study, so we rushed in and tried to collar the chap."

"You did not succeed?"

"No, sir; the chap was just a bit too quick for us."

"H'm!"

The Head tapped his desk with a pen. He looked up suddenly and stared straight at Tom Merry.

"Now, Merry," he said sternly, "I am given to understand that before this alarm was given, a certain junior had left the Shell dormitory. Is that correct?"

Tom Merry's eyes flashed, and he looked straight at Racke.

"I asked you a question, Merry," said the Head. "When you were awakened, did you discover that a junior was missing from your dormitory?"

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry slowly.

"Tell me his name."

Tom Merry did not answer.

"Was it Talbot?" went on the Head.

Tom Merry started back in astonishment.

Dr. Holmes noticed the movement. The answer to the question was plainly written on Tom Merry's face.

"We will resume," said the Head. "Now, Merry, has it occurred to you that Talbot might in any way be connected with this burglary?"

Tom Merry clenched his fists tightly and turned to Racke.

"You rotter!" he exclaimed hotly. "Have you—"

"Silence!" commanded the Head severely. "How dare you behave in such a manner in my presence!"

"I am sorry, sir," said the captain of the Shell, "but I'm sure Talbot is absolutely innocent!"

"I am very glad you hold such a high opinion of your schoolfellow," said the Head kindly. "At the same time, you must learn to restrain yourself in my presence."

Dr. Holmes turned to the Housemaster.

"Will you please fetch Talbot, Mr. Railton?" he said.

"Certainly, sir," said Mr. Railton—and he went in search of Talbot.

The Housemaster returned in less than five minutes.

Talbot followed him into the Head's study, his face pale and anxious.

"Talbot," said the Head, "I have learned with much regret that you broke bounds last night."

"Yes, sir," said Talbot straightforwardly.

"Why did you do so?"

"I received a note stating that a friend of mine was in trouble, and particularly wanted to see me," explained Talbot.

"Who was the friend?"

"John Rivers."

"Did you see him?"

"No, sir," said Talbot. "It was a hoax. The note was sent by a rascal named Lodgey, for the purpose of extorting money from me."

"Dear me!" said Dr. Holmes, in surprise. "What happened when you left the man?"

"I came straight back to St. Jim's," said Talbot, "and met the fellows chasing the burglar."

"You didn't take part in the chase from my study, then?"

"No, sir."

"Then how came you to cut your hand?" said Dr. Holmes deliberately.

"I really don't know, sir," said Talbot—"unless I fell on a piece of broken glass when the burglar rushed into me."

"The burglar rushed into you?"

"I presume it was the burglar, sir. I couldn't see his face in the dark."

The Head did not reply for a few moments. He was thinking deeply. The rumour that Talbot was guilty of the burglary had reached his ears. He had heard that Talbot had cut his hand in jumping out of the window, and Talbot's answer to the contrary puzzled him.

Was Talbot telling the truth? The Head could not make up his mind on the question.

Dr. Holmes glanced at first one junior and then another. At length his gaze became fixed on Racke's hand, which was fumbling in his pocket. Racke drew out his hand and tried to place it behind his back. But he was not quick enough.

The Head had caught sight of the article which Racke was holding in his hand.

"Racke, what have you got there?"

"It's n-nothing, sir," said Racke uneasily.

"Nonsense, boy!" exclaimed the Head. "It belongs to me. It is one of my silver cigarette ash-trays."

"Oh!"

Tom Merry and Talbot gasped.

"How did this come into your possession?" asked the Head.

"I found it," said Racke, shifting from one foot to the other.

"Where did you find it?"

Racke made no answer.

"Come, come," said the Head, losing patience. "What motive can you have for not wishing to tell me where you found the article?"

"I'd rather not, sir."

"Why not?"

"Well, you see, sir, it—it might throw suspicion on an innocent person."

"Nonsense, boy! It might help us to discover the perpetrator of the crime. I command you to tell me! Where did you find this ash-tray?"

"By Talbot's side as he lay in the road, sir."

It was out at last!

Tom Merry looked daggers at the cad of the Shell.

"Talbot," said the Head, "can you prove to me that you went to see this man Lodgey?"

"Yes, sir. I will show you the note I had from him."

Talbot felt in his pockets for the note. He went through his trousers pockets, and then those of his jacket. But the note was not there. It had disappeared.

"I cannot find it, sir," said Talbot slowly. "I must have lost it!"

"Lost it?" said the Head deliberately. "Did you ever have it?"

"Yes, sir," said Talbot, his eyes flashing. "I—"

"I am sorry to doubt your word, Talbot," said the Head austerely, "but on the evidence, I am forced to do so. Your breaking bounds, the cut on your wrist, the finding of my ash-tray, all point to one fact. You have been tempted and

have fallen. You deliberately broke into my study for the purpose of robbery."

"No, sir, I—"

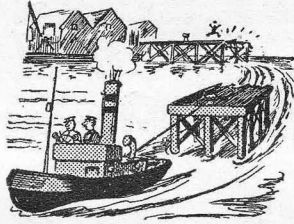
The Head put up his hand for silence.

"Argument will not help your case," he said. "I am surprised, amazed! Before finally deciding upon your expulsion, I will send for the man Lodgey and question him. For the time being, you will remain in the punishment-room. I will send for you later. Perhaps, Mr. Railton, you will attend to this wretched boy."

"Certainly, sir!" said Mr. Railton quietly.

"Racke and Merry, you may go!"

Tom Merry followed Racke out of Dr. Holmes' study. Neither spoke. Tom Merry's mind was



"She ain't as fast as usual!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to J. Bradley, 108, Summerhill Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

crowded with conflicting thoughts. His faith in Talbot was unshaken, but the mystery was too deep for him.

Racke dashed off to his own study. The cad of the Shell knew he had to move quickly if his cunning scheme were not to fail at the eleventh hour.

CHAPTER 10.

Mr. Lodgey Does As He Is Told!

RACKE rushed into his study. Crooke looked up in surprise.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Crooke. "What's up?"

"Talbot's booked for the sack if we can only square Lodgey!" replied Racke.

"Square Lodgey?" exclaimed Crooke. "What do you mean?"

"Why," explained Racke quietly, "the old boy's practically convinced that Talbot was the burglar, and he's only waiting to find out whether Lodgey sent that note before he gives Talbot the order of the boot."

Crooke's face suddenly went pale.

"Great Scott!" he gasped. "Suppose Lodgey swears we put him up—"

"You fool!" cried Racke. "We're going to square Lodgey to swear that he never saw Talbot last night, and that he knows nothing about the note."

"Oh, I see!"

Racke picked up his cap, and darted out of the study.

(Continued on the next page.)

DUKE OF YORK'S, st. Martin's Lane, W.C.2.
 (Temple Bar 5122.)
 MATINEES ONLY. DAILY at 2.30.
THE BOY WHO LOST HIS TEMPER
 An Enchanting Musical Christmas
 Play for Children and Grown Ups.
 By RICA BROMLEY TAYLOR. Music by GEOFFREY HENMAN.

He went downstairs, and made straight for the bicycle-shed. In another moment he had his bicycle out, and was pedalling down the road to Rycombe as fast as he could go.

Racke knew where to find Mr. Lodgey. He jumped off his bicycle at the Green Man, and, passing through the back gate, entered the dingy bar-parlour.

Mr. Lodgey was there, and he jumped quickly to his feet as Racke entered.

"'Allo, Master Racke!" he said. "Wot—"

Racke beckoned the man outside.

Mr. Lodgey stepped forward, and closed the door of the bar-parlour after him.

"Look here!" said Racke firmly. "Why didn't you do what you were told last night?"

"Sorry, sir," said Mr. Lodgey regretfully. "I did try, but that young feller Talbot twigg'd the game. 'E's a 'efty 'andful, 'e is, and he landed me such a one that—"

"Well, never mind what happened!" said Racke impatiently. "You didn't do what you were told, so you won't get the money. All the same, you can have a fiver if you care to earn it."

Mr. Lodgey's bleary eyes gleamed greedily.

"That's very kind o' you, Master Racke. What is it you want me to do?"

"Very little," said Racke craftily. "A chap from St. Jim's is coming down here to fetch you to the school."

"Fetch me? Whaffor?"

"Oh, nothing much!" said Racke. "There's nothing for you to be alarmed about. The Head wants to find out whether you sent a note to Talbot."

"Oh, I see!"

"Now, this is where you earn the fiver. Swear that you never sent the note, and that you never met Talbot last night, and the money is yours."

"That's very good o' you—"

"Will you do it?"

"'Course I will!" said Mr. Lodgey.

"Well, here's a couple of quid!" said Racke, handing the rogue a couple of notes. "You shall have the other three when the job's finished."

"I'm on to it!"

"I must be going now," Racke said, mounting his machine. "Mind, whatever you do, don't let on that I've been down here this morning!"

"You can trust me, Master Racke," said Mr. Lodgey.

And he went back to the bar-parlour, where Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, found him half an hour later.

Kildare explained to the rogue that the Head particularly wanted to see him, and requested him to go along to St. Jim's immediately.

Mr. Lodgey went, and entered the gates of St. Jim's with Kildare.

The juniors stared at Mr. Lodgey as he crossed the quad, but their stares were lost upon Mr. Lodgey.

He walked along with his discoloured nose high in the air. Mr. Lodgey felt very lofty and superior at that moment.

The man was shown into the Head's study where Dr. Holmes was seated, talking to Mr. Railton.

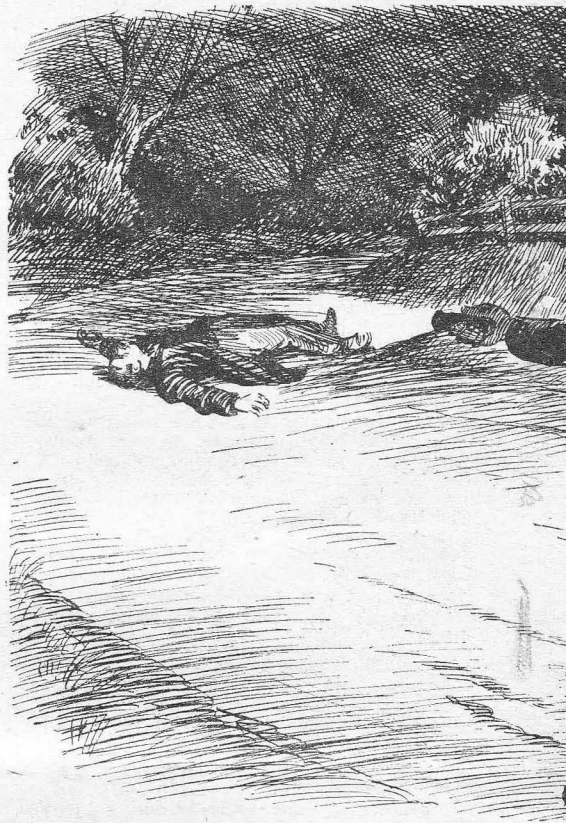
Mr. Lodgey took off his hat, and stood facing the Head in a deferential manner.

"You are the man Lodgey, I presume?" said the Head.

"That is my name, guv'nor!"

"Very good!" said Dr. Holmes quietly. "I have sent for you because I want to ask you one

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"Look!" gasped Talbot, pointing his torch ahead so that Gore. "There's some-

or two questions. Do you happen to know a boy in this school named Talbot?"

"Talbot?" said Mr. Lodgey.

"Yes."

Mr. Lodgey scratched his head, pretending to think hard.

"No; I can't say as 'ow I know 'im, guv'nor," he said at length.

"You have never written to a boy named Talbot?"

"Not me, guv'nor!"

The Head pursed his lips.

"I suppose you didn't happen to meet a St. Jim's boy in the road last night?" asked the Head.

"Wot time, guv'nor?"

"H'm!" muttered the Head. "I suppose it would have been between ten and eleven o'clock."

Mr. Lodgey shook his head.

"That would 'ave been impossible, guv'nor," he said, "seem' as 'ow I went to bed early 'cause I 'ad an attack of rheumatics. I was in bed long afore ten o'clock!"

"Thank you, Mr. Lodgey! I am obliged to you for coming here," he said.

"Not at all, guv'nor!" said Mr. Lodgey.

The Head rang for Toby, and a moment later the page boy put in an appearance.



some distance up the road. "By Jove!" exclaimed in the road!"

"Toby," said Dr. Holmes, "show this gentleman out, please."

Mr. Lodgey said good-day to the Head and took his departure.

Dr. Holmes faced the Housemaster.

"What do you think, Mr. Railton?" he asked slowly.

Mr. Railton shook his head sadly.

"I am sorry—very sorry," he said; "but there seems no doubt that Talbot is guilty. It's a pity—a great pity!"

"I am in agreement with you, Mr. Railton," said Dr. Holmes. "I had come to look upon Talbot as an honourable, upright lad. I could have sworn that he would never have taken the downward path again; but now—now I've only one course before me—to expel him from the school."

"You do not think a flogging—"

"I can quite appreciate your sympathetic motives, Mr. Railton," said the Head, "but a flogging will certainly not meet the case. The boy is proved a thief, and, as such, I cannot allow him to contaminate his schoolfellows. He must be expelled. Please be good enough to bring Talbot to me."

Mr. Railton left the study, and a few moments later returned with Talbot.

The Head gave the junior a severe glance.

"Talbot," he said firmly, "in spite of your protestations of innocence, I have, I am sorry to say, received proof conclusive that you lied to me this morning. I had sincerely hoped that the man Lodgey—the man you were supposed to have met last night—would have borne out your story, but such is not the case. He flatly denies having sent you a note, or having met you at all. Therefore—"

"The man's a liar!" exclaimed Talbot. "He—"

"Silence!" rapped out the Head angrily. "Your guilt has been proved conclusively. You have been found guilty of having attempted to steal my property; you have stooped again to crime. I have, therefore, no course left to me but to expel you from St. Jim's. You will remain in the punishment-room until arrangements have been made for your departure from this school."

The Head glanced at Mr. Railton meaningly.

The Housemaster took Talbot by the arm and led him out of the study.

Talbot's cup of sorrow was full to overflowing. A cunning web of intrigue had been woven around him—a web from which he saw no escape.

He was to be expelled from St. Jim's!

CHAPTER 11.

The Last Hope!

"TALBOT'S sacked!"

The news rang through the length and breadth of St. Jim's.

Tom Merry & Co. heard it and gasped.

"Can't be true!" said Tom. "There's been some mistake somewhere."

"Well, Talbot's locked up in the detention-room," said Manners. "Kildare told me so just now. He's booked for the sack in the morning!"

"Oh, rot!" exclaimed Tom Merry staunchly. "Talbot's as innocent as you or I."

The door of the study opened, and George Gore walked in.

"You've heard the news, then," he said, noticing the glum looks on the juniors' faces.

"About Talbot?"

"Yes."

"We've heard it," said Tom Merry. "It's rotten—beastly rotten! I guess the Head must be off his chump to think old Talbot could be such a rotter!"

"Same here," said Gore. "I'd bet anything that Talbot's innocent. There's some mysterious hand at work, and I wish we could get to the bottom of the affair."

"So do I," said Tom Merry anxiously. "But what can we do?"

Gore shook his head regretfully.

"Nothing, that I know of," he said. "But I'm going along to speak to Talbot. Maybe, he'll be able to suggest something."

"Right-ho!"

It was plain that Gore felt keenly the sacking of his studymate. But Talbot had done much for Gore, and, due to Talbot's influence, Gore had become in every way a far more decent fellow. And now he was to show that there was more loyalty in him than anyone had guessed.

Gore left the study and walked along to the detention-room; he put his mouth to the keyhole.

"Talbot!" he breathed.

"Hallo! That you, Gore, old chap?" said Talbot. "I take it you've heard that I'm booked for the sack?"

"Yes, worse luck!" said Gore. "Of course, it's all rot! We know you're innocent——"

"The Head doesn't think so," said Talbot.

"Hang the Head!" exclaimed Gore. "He's gone off his dot!"

"But the facts were against me, old son."

"Blow the facts!" snapped Gore. "We know you're innocent, and that's an end of it. Now, look here, haven't you any idea who's been working this business against you?"

"None at all."

"Can't you suggest anything that could be done to clear you?"

"Nothing. By Jove! I wonder——"

Gore put his ear closer to the keyhole.

"Thought of anything?" he asked eagerly.

"Yes," replied Talbot. "It might help if—— I say, Gore, old scout, would you care to run the risk of breaking bounds to-night?"

"Do anything if it will help to clear you," said Gore loyally.

"Right-ho! I'll meet you out in the quad at eleven o'clock," said Talbot. "I'll climb out of the window and get down by the ivy."

"I'll be there."

"By the way, if you can possibly manage it, bring an electric torch with you," said Talbot.

"We shall want it."

"All right," said Gore. "I won't fail you."

When bed-time came that night, and George Gore went up to the Shell dormitory, he did not sleep.

He waited until about a quarter to eleven, and then he got out of bed. The rest of the juniors were fast asleep. Gore dressed himself hurriedly and left the dormitory.

He made his way to the box-room window, by which Talbot had let himself out the previous night.

Two minutes later he was outside. He crossed the quad, and met Talbot beneath the window of the punishment-room.

The two juniors climbed the wall, and were soon standing in the lane leading to Rylcombe.

"Got the torch?" asked Talbot.

"Yes."

"Good! Hand it over."

Gore passed the torch to his chum; and Talbot shone the light on the quiet, deserted road.

"Now, look here," said Talbot, "you remember I had a note from that beast Lodgey the other day, asking me to meet him after lights out, because he wanted to tell me something about John Rivers?"

"Yes."

"Well, it was a rotten trick! The scoundrel only sent the note to try to get money out of me."

"Great Scott!"

"It would have been all right if the rascal had admitted to the Head that he sent the note, but he didn't. He denied flatly ever having seen or written to me."

"The rotter!" exclaimed Gore. "But—but surely you showed the note to the Head?"

"I would have done if I'd had it," said Talbot.

"It must have fallen out of my pocket when I was struggling with Lodgey, or when I barged into that burglar johnny."

"By Jove!"

"My only chance now is to find the note," said Talbot. "It may have been blown away by the wind, or it may still be lying in the road. That's why I brought you out to-night."

"Oh, good! Let's get along!"

The two chums trod slowly along the road

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leading to Rylcombe, Talbot shining the torch-light from side to side and up and down.

They walked slowly, yard by yard, examining every inch of the ground.

They progressed at a snail's pace, and at length had covered quite fifty yards without meeting with success.

"I guess it must have got caught in the wind," said Talbot, "and——"

"Keep on," replied Gore. "We haven't half searched yet."

"Look!" gasped Talbot, pointing his torch ahead, so that it shone some distance up the road.

"By Jove! There's somebody lying in the road!" exclaimed Gore.

"Come on!" said Talbot, and he dashed ahead. Talbot shone his torch on the prostrate man.

"He's been run over!" he said.

"Yes," said Gore. "And he's in a pretty bad way."

"It's Lodgey!"

"So it is!" said Gore, in surprise. "I wonder how he got here? I suppose he's been knocked down by a motor-car."

"Looks like it."

"What had we better do?"

"Carry him to St. Jim's," said Talbot quickly.

"He wants looking after at once."

"He's unconscious and——"

"But the note——" protested Gore.

"Oh, hang the note!" said Talbot. "That can wait. Come on, Gore, old chap, give a hand with him."

Gore took hold of the man's feet, whilst Talbot grasped his arms, and the two started back for St. Jim's.

They arrived at the gates and rang the bell loudly.

Taggles came out and glared through the bars of the gate.

"What I says is——" began the old porter.

But Talbot cut him short.

"Buck up and fetch Mr. Railton!" he said.

"But——"

"Hurry up, I tell you! There's a chap here seriously injured."

"Good evyngs!" gasped Taggles, and he marched off in quest of Mr. Railton.

A few minutes later the gates of the school were opened, and Mr. Railton, looking stern and startled, stood before the juniors.

"What is the meaning of this?" exclaimed Mr. Railton severely.

"We've got a chap here who's in a pretty bad way, sir," explained Talbot. "He's been run over, I think, and he's unconscious."

Mr. Railton did not wait to ask the juniors why they had broken bounds.

"Bring him along to the sanatorium," he said. "I will see that he is attended to immediately."

Talbot and Gore carried their charge to the sanatorium, where they laid him carefully upon a bed.

At the same moment Lodgey's eyes began to quiver, and he began to mutter inaudibly.

His words at first were undistinguishable, but gradually they became clearer.

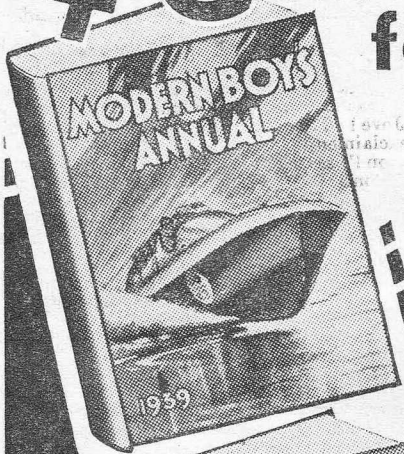
"It ain't no good, Mr. Racke!" murmured Mr. Lodgey. "You promised to pay and you ain't."

Mr. Railton looked at the man in surprise.

"It's all right for you, Mr. Racke," continued the man, in low tones. "But it ain't no good for me. I sent that note to young Talbot, although I told your 'Ead I didn't. It was all through you, and—— Oh dear!"

(Continued on page 22.)

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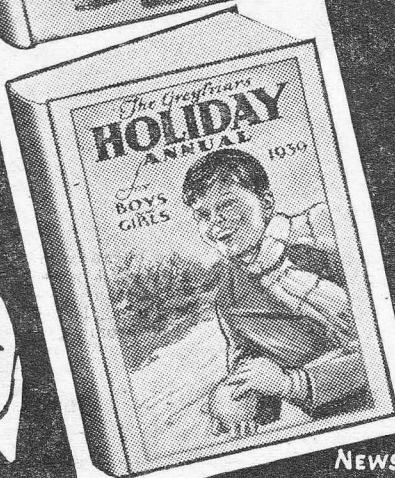
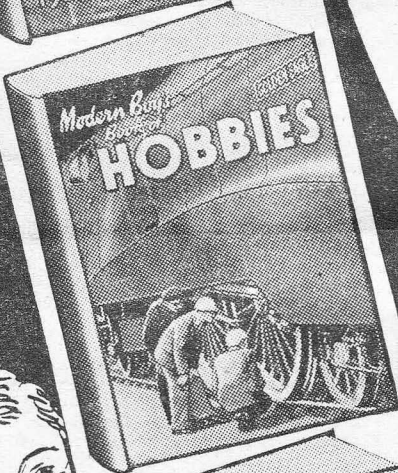
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ON SALE AT ALL NEWSAGENTS AND BOOKSELLERS

The man's head sank on the pillow, and the two juniors and Mr. Railton gazed at one another in dismay.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Mr. Railton. "Did you hear what he was saying?"

"Yes, sir," said Talbot. "Something about the note he sent me."

"Yes, I wonder——"

Mr. Railton stopped speaking as Lodgey commenced to mutter again.

"Pay up, Mr. Racke," he murmured. "I'll go straight to your 'eadmaster if you don't, and I'll tell 'im that you paid me to write to young Talbot and—— Oh-h-h!"

With a long-drawn-out moan, the injured man subsided.

"Amazing!" exclaimed Mr. Railton. "Then—then it appears that you were speaking the truth, Talbot."

"My hat!" said Gore thankfully. "That's sufficient to prove Talbot's innocent, sir."

"H'm!" muttered Mr. Railton. "It is all very strange. It is clear there has been a mistake somewhere. I shall have to go into the matter in the morning. You boys had better return to your sleeping quarters. I will attend to this man."

"Very well, sir," said the juniors, and they left the sanatorium.

"By Jove!" said Gore, when they were alone. "I'll give Racke the hiding of his life for this!"

"Racke?" questioned Talbot.

"Yes, Racke," said Gore. "Can't you see that he's the cause of all the trouble? He's been scheming to get you sacked. That was to be his revenge for the licking you gave him. I don't think you lost Lodgey's letter, either. I shouldn't be surprised if Racke took it from your pocket. Every-

thing worked out very well for him, but he's going to get a nasty surprise in the morning."

And Racke did!

"Talbot's cleared!"

The next morning Gore rushed into the study shared by Tom Merry & Co.

"Really?"

"Yes," said George Gore, and he explained to the Terrible Three of his adventure of the previous night.

"Lodgey's recovered consciousness," he concluded, "and he's told the Head all about the note he sent to Talbot. Racke paid him to do it, the scheming rotter!"

"Racke?" cried the Terrible Three, in chorus.

"Yes," said Gore. "He's been working to get old Talbot kicked out of St. Jim's, and he would have succeeded if we hadn't picked up Lodgey in the road."

"The rotten outsider!" exclaimed Tom Merry heatedly. "He ought to be expelled."

"Well, something's going to happen," said Gore. "He's just gone along to see the Head. I'm going to wait and see him come out."

"Oh, good! We'll come as well."

The Terrible Three followed Gore out, and they made their way to the Head's study.

A few moments later the cad of the Shell made his appearance. His face was white, and he was groaning as though in bitter anguish.

The Head had decided not to expel him, but had given him a severe thrashing.

The juniors who saw him emerge had no sympathy whatever for him. Not for the first time the black sheep of the Shell had discovered that the way of the transgressor is hard.

Next Week: "TOM MERRY'S BOAST!"

BLAKE ANSWERS BACK!

(Continued from page 2.)

"Detective Fan," of West Norwood, writes:

I noticed in a newspaper report that a boy said he got mixed up in a crime through being keen on detective plays on the wireless. Do you think a wireless play might influence me to take to crime?

Answer: If you have a weak mind to start with, almost anything you see or hear or read may influence you, but if you are a normal, healthy sort of chap, I expect you will go on enjoying detective plays and stories till your dying day—without even one solitary crime on your conscience.

"Photographic Fiend," of West Hartlepool, writes:

I usually print my snaps on daylight paper, but I did some by gaslight, and when I took the gaslight paper out of the frame there was nothing on it. Was the paper faulty?

Answer: No, it was you who slipped up. You expected to see the picture in sepia and white as you do on a daylight paper before you fix

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it, but with a gaslight print you can see nothing until it comes up in the developer. Read the instructions on the packet. They're quite useful.

"Tough Guy," of Oklahoma, writes:

Pipe down now, everybody! I'm gonna tell ya. For a kinda high-hat English galoot, I reckon Martin Clifford ain't no dumbbell. But you gotta get outa the habit o' classin' all us Americans as cowboys or gangsters. Some of us is eddicated—see? Like those Oxford and Cambridge hombres, we know sump'n. We may not wear little mortar-boards on our cabezas, fella, but we sure got learnin' under our sombreros, jes' the same. While we're a-ridin' the range, us boys is a-thinkin', an' sometimes we thinks an awful lot more than the folks up at the White House—or yore Parlyment at Westminster Ranch—would kinda believe. Adios!

Answer: Well, I kinda like your letter, buddy. I'm quite willing to believe that even a tough guy can think, and I agree that it's tough that all the credit for serious thought goes to the delegates at the White House or to the M.P.'s at Westminster. Next time I do any heavy thinking, maybe I'll hire a bronc and go for a canter over Wayland Moor. Yippee!

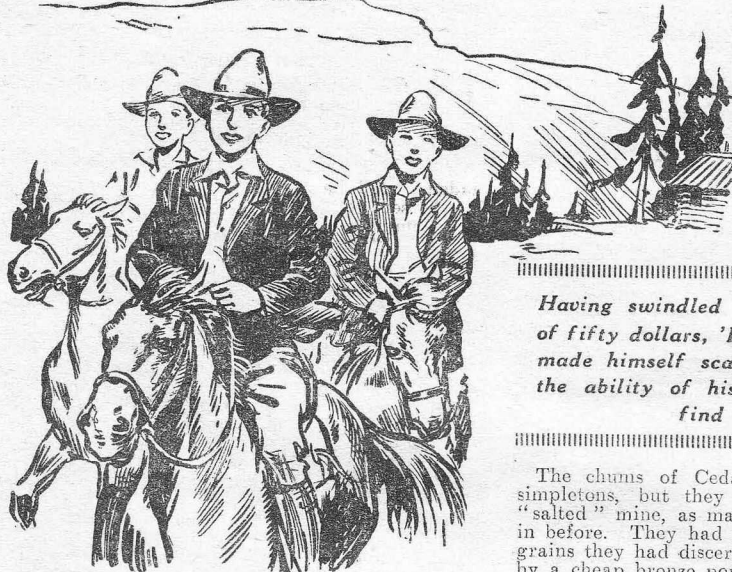
"Star Gazer," of Rugby, writes:

How many stars are there in the sky?

Answer: Just a tick, old chap, while I count 'em!

The Trail of 'Frisco Jo!

By
**MARTIN
CLIFFORD.**



Vamoosed!

IT was growing late, Frank Richards & Co. stood in the main street of Thompson Town, looking tired and exasperated. Gunten's store was already closed, and the lamps at the Red Dog Saloon were being extinguished by the Chinese barkeeper.

"Thompson's going to bed," said Frank Richards, with a faint grin. "It's about time we did the same."

"I guess so," said Bob Lawless dismally.

"Better get home, I suppose," said Vere Beauclerc slowly. "But—"

"But what, Cherub?"

"We're pretty late as it is," remarked Beauclerc. "We've taken an inch, so we might as well take an ell."

"But the game's up," said Frank Richards. "We've hunted through the town for that scoundrel Lopez. He's gone, plain enough."

"Vamoosed the ranch," grunted Bob Lawless; "and our fifty dollars gone with him! He's lit out, Cherub. Didn't Lawrence tell us he saw him taking the trail, mounted on Mulligan's old hoss, bother him?"

"Why shouldn't we take the trail, too?"

"Oh!"

"It's a clear moon to-night," said Beauclerc. "And there's still a good bit of snow on the trail. That horse of Lopez isn't fit for much. We've got good horses. And if we can catch that Mexican rascal, we can handle him easily enough—the three of us."

Beauclerc's chums exchanged a glance. They were quite ready to act on the suggestion of the Cherub. It was an exasperating position for Frank Richards & Co.

'Frisco Jo, the Mexican, had sold them a share in a gold-mine for fifty dollars. He had departed with the cash, leaving them to discover that the gold-mine was a swindle, and worth no more than the rest of the rocks in the Thompson foothills.

Having swindled Frank Richards & Co. of fifty dollars, 'Frisco Jo has promptly made himself scarce—never counting on the ability of his schoolboy victims to find his trail!

The chums of Cedar Creek School were not simpletons, but they had been taken in by a "salted" mine, as many another had been taken in before. They had not suspected that the gold grains they had discerned in the rock were made by a cheap bronze powder carefully dusted there by the astute Mexican.

They would have given a good deal more than the fifty dollars to get to close quarters with Jose Lopez, and tell him what they thought of him—with appropriate action.

"Why not try it?" continued Beauclerc. "You fellows will get into a row for being so late, anyway."

"I guess so," assented Bob.

"May as well put in another hour or two, if there's a chance of roping in that swindling greaser."

"What about you?" asked Frank.

"I shan't be missed at home," said Beauclerc quietly. "My father will most likely be absent all night."

Frank was sorry the next moment that he had asked the question. He knew something of the habits of Beau's father, the remittance man of Cedar Camp.

"Right-ho!" exclaimed Bob Lawless hastily.

"Let's try it. If we run down that rotten greaser, we'll make him hand back the dollars fast enough!"

"And Mulligan's horse," added Beauclerc; "he's stolen that. Mulligan was hiring it to him, but he won't see it again now."

"I reckon not. Come on!"

"Hold on a minute," said Beauclerc quietly. "There'll be a good many hoof-tracks on the trail. We can get an old shoe from Mulligan. You remember he told us his horse was shod this week."

"Good old Cherub—you've got the brains."

The three chums made their way at once to Mulligan's cabin, which lay back from the street behind Gunten's store. A light was burning there, and the door was opened by Mulligan himself when Bob Lawless knocked.

"You young' gossoons again!" exclaimed Mr. Mulligan. The chums had been there before that evening, inquiring after Jose Lopez.

"Us!" said Bob Lawless. "We're going after that greaser, Mr. Mulligan, and if we rope him in, we'll bring your hoss home for you."

The big Irishman grinned.

"Sure, Frisco Jo will be too slippery for yez," he said. "But I wish you luck."

"Your horse was fresh shod this week——"

"Thru for yez! The yaller villain was already thinking of lighting out, I can see that now," said Mr. Mulligan.

"Is the old shoe knocking about?"

"It's in the yard."

"I suppose we can take it?"

"Take it an' welcome," said Mr. Mulligan, smiling. "I'll show yez a loight."

He came out with a lantern, and in a couple of minutes Bob Lawless picked up the discarded shoe of Frisco Jo's horse.

"Is that it, Mr. Mulligan?"

"That's it."

"Thanks! Good-night!"

"Good-night to yez, and good luck!" grinned Mr. Mulligan, and he went back into his cabin, evidently not placing much faith in the ability of the three schoolboys to run down the elusive greaser.

The chums returned to their horses, which were hitched on one of the posts outside Gunten's store. They mounted and rode out of the town to the south, the trail taken by the Mexican, according to the information they had received from Bill Lawrence, the elder brother of one of their friends at Cedar Creek School.

Outside the town there was snow from a late fall on the trail, and the ruts were thick with it. But near the town the trampling of many hoofs and boots had obliterated the tracks they were looking for.

They did not expect to pick up the Mexican's trail so near at hand.

They rode on at a trot. Overhead, the full, clear moon sailed high in a velvet sky, shining down in a flood of silver light upon the valley and the wide river, and the foothills beyond. It was almost as light as day on the trail.

Half a mile from the town the three schoolboys halted and jumped down. Here the trail was clear of the many tracks that had gathered near the settlement, and only a few tracks were to be seen in the velvety carpet of snow.

Bob Lawless, who was skilled from childhood in woodcraft and scoutcraft, examined the tracks attentively.

"Only three horsemen have been along here since sundown, coming away from the town," he remarked.

"And one of them was Lopez?" said Frank Richards.

"You bet!"

"Pick out the trail, then"

"I guess I can do it; and, by gum, here it is!"

With the cast shoe of Mulligan's horse in his hand, Bob easily identified the track of the animal.

Leading their horses, the schoolboys followed the track. Here and there it disappeared, as on higher or rougher ground the snow was thinner, or had been scattered by the wind. But it was always easy to pick up again where the snow lay deeper.

For a good mile the chums of Cedar Creek tramped on, and then Bob Lawless halted with a sudden exclamation.

"The rotter left the trail here!"

The hoof-track turned off abruptly from the snowy trail, and was lost on a rising ridge of

stony ground that left no trace. For ten minutes the chums sought for a further track, but the hard stones held no trace, and they gathered in the trail again, angry and disappointed.

Not Beaten Yet!

FRANK RICHARDS frowned, and Beauclerc compressed his lips.

It looked as if the pursuit had come to a sudden and disappointing end.

Bob Lawless knitted his brows in deep thought.

"No go, Bob?" asked Frank at last.

"I'm not so sure," answered Bob Lawless.

"The Mexican cleared off the trail at this point, and there's no track at hand, and that's a cinch. But——"

"He guessed he might be followed," remarked Beauclerc.

"Yes; he might have reckoned that Mulligan would come looking for his hoss," grinned Bob.

"But he may have had another reason, too. He's crossed this ridge to the eastward, and there's no known trail over that ground. But about six miles away, if he keeps on, he comes to the Kootenay Camp, and I guess that's where he's making for."

"But——"

"Figure it out," said Bob. "He won't be camping out on a night like this. He's a Mexican, too, and those Southern galoots don't like cold. Depend on it, he won't camp out at night. He's heading for Kootenay Camp, because it's off the known trail, and he calculates that he'll be safe there. I guess he'll sell Mulligan's horse there, and light out again to-morrow."

"Likely enough," assented Beauclerc. "We couldn't get to Kootenay Camp to-night, though, unless you fellows are ready to make a night of it."

"No good if we did," replied Bob. "The place would be fast asleep, and we couldn't wake up all the town, asking after a Mexican horse-thief."

"Ha, ha! No!"

"But we can get there to-morrow morning, bright and early," said Bob, with a glint in his eyes. "Lopez isn't the kind of pilgrim to be an early riser. And it's likely enough he'll stay on to sell the horse before he goes farther. He won't want to keep a stolen horse with him in the section."

"He may light out for the States," suggested Beauclerc.

Bob shook his head.

"There's that salted mine in the Thompson Hills, Cherub. Lopez didn't fix that up simply to corral fifty dollars. He's going to sell a share in that mine to every greenhorn in the Thompson Valley before he leaves the section. I guess he will keep within easy riding distance of that salted mine for some time to come."

"Right-ho!" agreed Frank.

"Anyway, we'll look for him at Kootenay Camp to-morrow," decided Bob Lawless. "If he's there, he certainly won't be expecting us, and we may catch him napping. Is it a go?"

"You bet!"

And the three chums remounted and rode homeward.

"What about this gee-gee?" asked Beauclerc, when they came to the fork in the valley trail where their paths divided.

Beauclerc's horse belonged to Lawless Ranch, and Bob had lent it to him for that evening's ride to Thompson.

"Get home on it," said Bob. "Meet us here at dawn."

"Right you are!"

And the chums parted.

It was long past midnight, as the chums galloped off to the Lawless Ranch in the bright moonlight.

"The popper will be rather wild," Bob remarked, as they drew near the ranch. "We've fairly made a night of it this time. I suppose we shall have to explain. But he will yell when he hears that we've bought a share in a wildcat mine."

"Can't be helped," said Frank.

"And I owe Billy Cook twenty-four dollars out of the fifty we gave Lopez," said Bob dismally. "I wouldn't have borrowed it, only we'd seen the gold in the mine, and I thought— By gum, fancy being taken in by a salted mine like a tenderfoot from Mugsville!"

"We owe it, you mean," said Frank. "We'll save up and square with Billy if we don't get it back from Lopez. But I hope we shall."

There was a light burning in the ranch when the schoolboys came in. Mr. Lawless was waiting up for them with a somewhat stern face.

"Well, you young rascals, what have you to say for yourselves?" he demanded grimly.

"Sorry, popper!" said Bob meekly. "I'll tell you."

He told the story of the salted mine, and the vain search for the Mexican who had corralled the dollars.

The rancher's stern brow relaxed, and he burst into a hearty laugh before his son had concluded.

"You young donkey, Bob!" he exclaimed. "Ha, ha!"

Bob crimsoned.

"I was an ass, dad," he admitted. "But—but we saw the gold there, you know—saw it with our own eyes. We never thought of the mine being salted."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the rancher. "Next time you buy a gold-mine, take your father into your confidence, and let him give you some advice."

"We were going to surprise you with it, dad."

"Ha, ha! Well, you have surprised me," grinned the rancher. "I should never have thought it of you, Bob. And where did you get fifty dollars from to pay this greaser for his mine?"

"All our savings," said Bob ruefully. "And—and one dollar of Chunky Todgers'—it was that young ass first told us about it—and I borrowed twenty-four dollars."

The rancher frowned a little.

"I reckoned it was such a sure cinch, dad," said Bob.

"You young duffer!" growled the rancher. He groped in his pocket. "I'll give you the money to settle your debt. As for your own money, you deserve to lose it for your foolishness."

Bob took the twenty-four dollars very shamefacedly.

"If—if we get the dollars back from the greaser, dad, I'll hand you back every cent," he said.

Mr. Lawless burst into another roar.

"I guess that's a big if!" he exclaimed. "Don't make me laugh any more, Bob. Go to bed!"

And the chums of Cedar Creek went to bed, not feeling at all pleased with themselves.

Taking the Trail!

EARLY next morning Bob Lawless led the way to Billy Cook's cabin. It was Sunday morning, and the hour was early; but the ranch foreman was already up, and a kettle was singing on his stove as the chums looked in at his open doorway.

"Hallo, hallo!" boomed the foreman. "You up already? What's your little game?"

"Off on a ride for the day," said Bob. "We'll have some of your coffee and crackers, Billy, if you feel inclined to be hospitable."

The ranchman grinned.

"I'll shove in some more coffee for you," he answered. "And there's crackers and ham. Help yourselves."

"Good man!"

The schoolboys ate, standing beside their ponies. They had no time to wait for the breakfast in the ranch-house.

Frank and Bob enjoyed that hurried breakfast, washed down by draughts of nearly boiling coffee in tin pannikins.

"And here's your twenty-four dollars, old scout," said Bob Lawless. "And thanks very much for the loan."

"You didn't want it, after all?" asked Billy Cook.

"Well, yes; but"—Bob coloured—"Frisco Jo, of Thompson, sold us a part share in a gold-mine."

"Haw, haw, haw!" roared the ranch foreman.

"Funny, isn't it?" said Bob dismally. "The popper's given me the tin to square you, Billy; but we're going to get it back from Lopez and square popper."

"Not in a month of Sundays!" grinned Billy Cook.

"You'll jolly well see, you doubting Thomas!"

"Haw, haw! Are you going gunning after Jose Lopez this morning?" spluttered Billy Cook.

"That's the game!"

"I guess I'd corral you here, an' not let you go, only I know you'll never get inside a ten-mile ride of him," chuckled Billy Cook.

"Oh, rats!"

The chums helped themselves to a goodly portion of Billy Cook's supply of provisions, which they crammed in their saddlebags.

"Tell the popper we've gone after the greaser, Billy," said Bob, as he finished packing his saddlebags.

"Haw, haw, haw!" was Billy Cook's reply.

And the chums rode away, leaving the big ranchman guffawing.

They soon reached the forked trail, where they found Vere Beauclerc waiting for them with his horse. He mounted at once and the three rode on together.

"Are you going Thompson way?" asked Frank.

"I guess not—we're not following any trail," answered Bob. "We've got to cut across country."

To Frank, and perhaps to Beauclerc, it was a mystery how Bob Lawless found his way, which he did almost unerringly.

Belts of forest, stretches of rolling plains, rocky ridges and deep creeks, seemed all the same to him. He rode on without a halt.

Once or twice they met and exchanged greetings with some rider, but for the most part that early morning ride was solitary.

The sun was setting high when they came in sight of Kootenay Camp at last. The camp, busy

enough in the summer-time, was almost dead now; deserted by more than half its inhabitants, and little going on.

The store was open, and several horses were hitched outside, it, and Bob Lawless dismounted there to look at the animals.

"Good luck!" he exclaimed. "Mulligan's horse!"

"Oh, good egg!"

The three chums had seen the horse before, but only Bob had recognised it. Mulligan's horse had changed somewhat in appearance. It had been brown, with some whitey-grey patches before. Now it had a white muzzle, white patches on the neck, and one leg was half white.

Only a keen eye would have detected that the colouring was assisted by paint skilfully applied.

"Sure that's the gee?" asked Frank, a little doubtfully.

"You bet your sweet life!" said Bob Lawless emphatically.

"Yes, that's the gee right enough," said Vere Beauclerc, with a nod. "It's got up pretty skilfully, though. Has Lopez sold it already, I wonder?"

Bob knitted his brows.

"He got here too late for that last night," he said, "and the morning is still young. However, we'll see. Whoever's got possession of the horse now is in the store, as the gee's hitched up here. Come on!"

Bob quietly took the rifle from his saddle and slipped in a cartridge.

He dropped the weapon into the hollow of his arm as he led the way into the camp store. Frank Richards and Beauclerc followed him in, their riding-whips in their hands, and their hearts beating a little fast.

If the Mexican was there they were booked for trouble, and it might turn out to be very serious trouble indeed. But they did not hesitate for a moment.

A Shock for 'Frisco Jo'

"BUEN caballo, senores—a good horse. What do you say?"

The lisping Spanish voice greeted the ears of Frank Richards & Co. as they entered the store of Kootenay Camp.

There were half a dozen men in the store, cattlemen or lumbermen, some of them taking "nips" of whisky that cold morning.

'Frisco Jo was talking to them, in his lisping English. His face was partly turned from the newcomers, and he did not see them for a moment.

And from his remark they knew that they had arrived in time to prevent Mulligan's horse finding a new and illegal owner.

"Buen caballo!" grinned one of the cattlemen. "Good hoss—spavined old bag of bones, you mean, Don Whiskers!"

The Mexican made a deprecating gesture.

"I ask not a thousand dollars for my horse," he said. "I sell him for ten dollars."

"I guess I'll look at the critter!"

"Same here!"

Bob Lawless strode forward.

"No need to look at the critter, boys!" he chimed in. "That horse is stolen and that greaser is a horse thief!"

'Frisco Jo spun round with a gasp. His black eyes seemed to bulge from his head as he stared at the chums of Cedar Creek.

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Evidently the enterprising merchant in salted mines had never dreamed that his dupes would be able to track him to his new locality. He had intended to linger at Kootenay Camp only long enough to dispose of Mulligan's horse.

But he had lingered a little too long.

The loungers in the store stared at the three boys.

"Hallo, where did you spring from, younker?" demanded the big fellow who had announced his intention of looking at the "critter."

"I guess I'm from the Lawless Ranch up the valley," answered Bob, "and I can swear that that horse belongs to Mr. Mulligan of Thompson."

"And so can we!" said Frank Richards at once.

The Mexican recovered himself.

"It's a lie!" he said. "I have never seen these ninos before."

"Oh, my hat!" shouted Frank Richards. "You tricky scoundrel, didn't you sell us a salted mine yesterday in Thompson?"

"I have never seen you before, nino."

"You are a horse thief and a swindler!" exclaimed Vere Beauclerc. "We are here for the fifty dollars you robbed us of yesterday, Jose Lopez!"

"As well as Mulligan's horse!" said Frank.

'Frisco Jo shrugged his shoulders.

"Senores, you are mad, or dreaming," he said coolly. "I am quite a stranger to you!"

"You're not 'Frisco Jo?" demanded Bob.

"My name is Enrique Garcia, of Montana!"

"You were 'Frisco Jo of Thompson yesterday!"

"It is false, pordios!"

"I kinder calculate I'm not buying that hoss!" drawled the big cattleman, and there was a laugh.

"I can sell my horse elsewhere," said 'Frisco Jo. He made a movement towards the door. Frank Richards & Co. stood grimly in the Mexican's way.

"Not yet," said Bob. "You owe us fifty dollars, Jose Lopez!"

"I owe you nothing!" exclaimed the Mexican, his black eyes glinting savagely. "Let me pass."

"You don't pass till you've shelled out what you robbed us of," said Bob, "and if you make any bones about it we'll collar you and ride you back to Thompson and hand you over to the sheriff!"

"Let me pass!" shouted Lopez.

"Stand where you are!"

The Mexican panted. He was fearful that any moment the onlookers might take a hand in the proceedings. Horse thieves were not beloved in the Canadian West.

He drew back a little, like a puma of his native country crouching for a spring. His hand went under his jacket.

"Let me pass!"

"Rats!"

The Mexican made a spring forward, and there was a gleam of steel.

The ruffian fully expected the boys to break aside at the cold glitter of the poignard. But they did not.

Bob Lawless thrust up his rifle, and the muzzle fairly struck the Mexican on the chest, and he stopped.

The Canadian lad looked at the panting, furious Southerner along the barrel of the rifle.

"Drop that knife!" he rapped out.

'Frisco Jo stood panting, the weapon gripped in his swarthy hand.

Bob's eyes glittered.



The Mexican made a spring forward, fully expecting the schoolboys to break aside at the cold glitter of steel. But Bob Lawless thrust up his rifle and 'Frisco Jo stopped as the muzzle struck him on the chest. "Drop that knife!" rapped out Bob.

"If you don't drop that sticker, 'Frisco Jo, I'll put a bullet through your shoulder!" he said. The Mexican glared, but the knife clattered from his hand to the floor.

"Bravo, sonny!" roared the big cattleman.

Bob kept the rifle at a level.

"Get out, Lopez!" he said.

"Carambo! I—"

"Get out! We're going to take you back to Thompson!" said Bob determinedly.

'Frisco Jo clenched his swarthy hands convulsively. But the levelled rifle and the cool, glittering eye along the barrel daunted him.

He shuffled away to the door, the cattlemen in the store shouting with laughter as he went.

In the street 'Frisco Jo fixed a savage glare upon the schoolboys.

"Now—" he muttered.

"You're coming back to Thompson!" said Bob.

"You'll get on Mulligan's horse and ride him home with us."

"I—I—" panted Lopez.

"Sharp's the word!" rapped out the Canadian lad.

"Senor"—the Mexican's manner changed—"I—I give in. I will hand you the money. I will repay the dollars. And let me go."

"Oh, rather a different tune now!" grinned Bob. "What do you say, you fellows? Shall we take the dollars and let him vamoose?"

Frank Richards nodded.

"Let the rotter go," said Beauclerc.

"Shell out, Lopez!" said Bob laconically.

"Fifty dollars."

"I have but forty!" whined Lopez. "Ten dollars were taken by my friends in Thompson. They would have betrayed that the mine was salted if I had not paid them."

"Very likely," agreed Bob. "But you can't pay your precious friends with our money. You've got to hand over fifty dollars, or face the sheriff at Thompson."

'Frisco Jo gritted his teeth.

"Be it so!" he snarled. "It is in my saddlebag. I will hand it to you."

"Good!"

The Mexican shambled towards Mulligan's horse and fumbled in the saddlebag.

Bob dropped the rifle under his arm, and the three schoolboys gathered round the Mexican, greatly elated at the successful result of their chase.

The Mexican's surrender seemed complete. But he was not at the end of his resources yet.

With a sudden movement he flung off the rope that hitched the horse to the post and struck the animal in the ribs. The startled horse jumped and ran, and the Mexican, flinging himself in the saddle, was borne away down the street, pomeling fiercely at the horse as he lay across its back.

Run Down!

"LOOK out!"
"After him!"

Watchful as they were, the chums had been taken by surprise. The Mexican was out of reach before they could grasp him, and as they

rushed after him they were left behind at once by the galloping horse.

"Hold on! The horses!" shouted Frank.

The chums rushed back to their horses.

Bob Lawless, for a moment, was tempted to send a bullet after the fleeing Mexican. But he would have been more likely to hit the horse than the man sprawling on its back.

He clambered on his pony instead and rode in pursuit, with Frank Richards and Vere Beauclerc galloping on either side of him.

'Frisco Jo, after the first fifty yards, had scrambled into a sitting posture on the galloping horse. He glanced back over his shoulder, and his black eyes glittered as he saw the three chums in hot pursuit.

The ranch ponies were faster than Mulligan's horse, and there was not much doubt how the chase must end.

"We've got him, I guess!" said Bob Lawless between his teeth. "I guess we've got the rotter. Put it on!"

At almost every stride the long-limbed ranch ponies were gaining. 'Frisco Jo was urging on his sorry steed to its full powers. He glared over his shoulder again and again, grinding his white teeth as he saw his pursuers nearer and nearer at hand.

If he had possessed a firearm there is little doubt that 'Frisco Jo would have tried a potshot at the schoolboys of Cedar Creek. But his only weapon, the Mexican knife, lay on the floor of the store, and 'Frisco Jo had no other.

Bob's pony's muzzle was only a couple of yards from the whisking tail of Mulligan's horse when the Mexican gave up the vain flight.

It was a mile from Kootenay Camp now, on the Thompson trail. By the side of the trail a steep acclivity rose, clothed in firs and larch.

The Mexican, without drawing rein, suddenly leaped from the back of the gasping steed and plunged into the timber. Mulligan's horse ran on a dozen yards or more and stopped, dead beat.

The Mexican had vanished into the trees.

Frank Richards & Co. rode on, unable to stop for a minute or two, and passed the spot where the Mexican had dismounted. But they speedily spun their ponies round in the trail and drove them into the thin timber.

Mulligan's horse was left contentedly cropping on the edge of the timber.

The chums crashed through the thickets. Beyond the belt of timber by the trail the hillside lay almost bare, and there they sighted the Mexican again, tramping desperately up the ascent.

The rise was steep, but not too steep for the active, wiry-limbed Canadian ponies. The three riders gained rapidly on the desperate Mexican.

Lopez halted, breathless, and turned.

"Carambo!" he muttered between his teeth.

"Surrender, or we'll ride you down!" shouted Bob.

The Mexican bounded aside and doubled back to the timber. The ponies were almost upon him as he ran.

He reached the timber again, and then the pursuers had to slacken speed. Once on the trail again the Mexican had no chance, and he knew it. Only a few yards ahead of the pursuers, he clambered into a big tree.

Gasping for breath, he dragged himself into the branches, and Frank Richards & Co. halted under the tree, sitting their steaming ponies there and looking upward.

"Treed!" said Bob Lawless laconically.

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He dismounted from his horse, and his chums followed his example. The ponies were hitched in the timber, and the schoolboys gathered under the big tree. 'Frisco Jo was cornered, but he was not yet captured.

And how he was to be captured was a puzzle, for he could scarcely be handled in the branches of the tree without both parties falling and breaking their limbs, perhaps their necks.

"He can't get away, anyhow!" said Frank Richards breathlessly.

There was a yell of defiance from the Mexican.

"Come up! Carambo! Come up, if you will, senores!"

"I guess you can have that tree to yourself, greaser," said Bob Lawless coolly. "But I reckon you won't keep it long."

He examined the breech of his rifle with deadly calmness. Frank Richards caught his arm.

"Bob, you don't mean—"

"I mean to bring that greaser down," said Bob. "We can't stay here for a day, or two days, waiting for him to fall like a ripe apple. He's coming down, or he's going to be brought down, and he can take his choice."

Bob Lawless stood back from the tree, and pointed the rifle at the Mexican, crouched like a puma upon a high branch.

"'Frisco Jo, come down, or you'll be dropped! Take your choice."

"You dare not!"

"Are you coming?"

"No!" yelled the Mexican.

Bob Lawless did not speak again. He pulled the trigger.

Crack!

Corralled!

THE report of the rifle rang through the timber and far over the hillside. There was a fearful yell from the Mexican as his hat was spun away from his head by the bullet.

Bob Lawless had handled a rifle from childhood and was a crack shot. He had shot off the Mexican's hat with perfect ease.

From the branch he was extended upon the Mexican glared down with hate and terror in his face. It was some moments before he realised he was not hit.

"Carambo!" he mumbled. "Por todos los santos! Oh!"

Bob drew a fresh cartridge from his pouch.

"Are you coming down, Lopez?" he asked.

He threw up the barrel again.

There was a gasping howl from the cornered horse thief.

"Stop! Hold your fire!"

"Are you coming down?"

"Si, si, senior!"

"Get a move on, then!"

Savagely, sullenly, the Mexican clambered down the tree. The game was up, and 'Frisco Jo realised it at last.

"Collar him as he lands," said Bob. "If he puts up a fight I'll let him have it in the legs."

Frank Richards and Beauclerc stood ready to receive the Mexican. They grasped him as he dropped to the ground.

'Frisco Jo did not resist. He was beaten, and he knew it.

"I guess this is where you sing small, 'Frisco Jo," smiled Bob Lawless. "You should have stayed in Mexico to play your game; you're

bound to run into trouble playing it in Canada. Where's that fifty dollars?"

The Mexican fumbled in his jacket and drew out a little buckskin sack.

"Hand it over!"

"There is more—" muttered Lopez.

Bob gave a sniff of disgust.

"We only want our own, you rotter! Give it to me."

The Mexican sullenly yielded the sack, and Bob opened it, dropping the rifle into the hollow of his arm, while his chums held the Mexican secure.

There were sixty dollars in the buckskin bag. The Mexican had apparently found other victims as well as the chums of Cedar Creek.

Bob Lawless took out the fifty he was entitled to, and tossed the bag, with the remainder, to the Mexican.

"I guess that doesn't belong to you," he remarked. "But it doesn't belong to us, and we won't touch it. Now you can come along to Thompson and see the sheriff. He will be glad to see you."

"You have your money—you have the horse of Senor Mulligan—spare me," mumbled the Mexican. "I—I shall get work at Kamloops, on the railway, and live an honest life."

"Oh, come off!" growled Bob. "I guess we don't want the trouble of yanking you back to Thompson, if you come to that. You can vamoose, and get out of this section. If I see you again—"

"I will go, senor!"

"You'd better!"

The Mexican was taken back to the trail, where the schoolboys secured Mulligan's horse to make sure of it before they released Lopez. Then 'Frisco Jo was allowed to go.

He tramped away down the trail with a black brow, and Frank Richards & Co. cheerfully remounted their horses and rode away homeward.

It was late in the afternoon when Frank and Bob, having left Vere Beauclerc at his home, arrived at the Lawless Ranch.

Mr. Lawless met them as they dismounted at the door. He was smiling. Evidently Billy Cook had given him his son's message, and the rancher fully expected the cousins to report a failure after a hopeless chase.

"Well, what luck, sonnies?" asked the rancher good-humouredly.

Bob smiled.

He sorted out twenty-four dollars in bills, and extended that sum to the astonished rancher.

"There's your twenty-four, dad."

Mr. Lawless took the bills mechanically, and blinked at them.

"Great Scott!" shouted the rancher. "You don't mean to say that you've run down 'Frisco Jo?"

"I guess we do!" grinned Bob.

"Yes, rather!" said Frank Richards, laughing.

"And made him pony up?" exclaimed Mr. Lawless blankly.

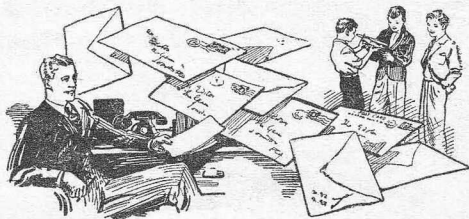
"You bet!"

"Well, by gum!" said the rancher, in great astonishment.

And the chums of Cedar Creek chuckled.

The next morning they rode off to Cedar Creek School in great spirits. They knew that Chunky Rodgers would have spread the story of the salted

(Continued on page 36.)



THE EDITOR'S CHAIR

Let the Editor be your pal, Drop him a line to-day, addressing your letter: The Editor, The GEM, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

HALLO, CHUMS! Before another number of the GEM reaches your hands we shall be into the New Year, and so I take this early opportunity of extending to all readers the time-honoured wish,

A HAPPY AND PROSPEROUS NEW YEAR!

As is the usual custom at the beginning of a new year, many of us will be making good resolutions, and by the time January has run its course many of us will have broken them! But it's something, at least, to make the attempt to improve on 1938. There is one resolution which I always make and take great pains to keep. That is to give readers a still better GEM. It's not an easy task, because the old paper has always maintained such a high standard during its thirty-two years' existence. But I shall do my very best. I've got some ripping stories and features up my sleeve for you.

A new feature appears in this issue for a start. How do you like "Blake Answers Back"? He doesn't mince his words, does he? But I think readers will like his replies all the better for that. Don't take Jack too seriously—and don't forget to let him hear from you. Be as candid as you like. Blake's there to be shot at—if you can hit him!

"TOM MERRY'S BOAST!"

In our first issue of 1939 there is another grand programme awaiting you. The chums of St. Jim's figure in a bright and breezy football story.

It is not like Tom Merry to be boastful, but in the heat of an argument with Figgins & Co. over the superiority of the rival Houses on the Soccer field, Tom rather lets his tongue run away with him. He says the School House could lick the New House with Baggy Trimble in goal and Grundy in the half-back line! Figgy promptly takes him at his word, and it's left to Tom Merry to make good his boast. But in saner moments he realises that the School House haven't a chance with two such hopeless passengers as Grundy and Trimble in the side! What happens? Make sure you don't miss reading about the most amazing football match ever played at St. Jim's.

"POKER PETE'S LOSING GAME!"

Martin Clifford is in fine form, too, with the next gripping adventure of the chums of Cedar Creek. The story tells how Frank Richards and Bob Lawless take the law into their own hands in dealing with Poker Pete when the Thompson cardsharp is ill-treating a horse. In consequence, Poker Pete tries to make trouble for the chums; but for once the sharper who earns his living by winning at cards plays a losing game in dealing with Frank and Bob.

In the Benbow yarn—called "Bucks on the Warpath!"—Daubeny & Co. try a new dodge to prevent Jack Drake from swotting for the exam. But unfortunately for the bucks it proves all too painful!

All the other popular features—including another batch of snappy replies from Blake, more laughs from Lowther, and with Kerr on the track of another "criminal"—will be up to their usual high standard.

Cheerio, chums!

THE EDITOR.

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Jack Drake's Enemy Strikes At Him Again—Making It Impossible For Jack To Swot For The Exam That He Simply Must Win!



There was a prolonged and anguished squeak as Tuckey Toodles drew out the concertina to full length. "Shut up that row!" said Drake sharply. "Do you think a fellow can work with that unholy noise going on?"

Toodles the Musical!

"YOU fellows want the study this evening?" Tuckey Toodles asked that question in Study No. 8 after tea. Jack Drake was already getting out his books, while Rodney cleared the study table. The chums of the Fourth were preparing to swot when Tuckey Toodles propounded his query.

Drake glanced at him. "Want the study?" he repeated. "Of course we want the study, fathead! I'm working for the exam next week."

"Oh, bother your exam!" said Toodles peevishly. "Blessed if I hear anything but exam, exam, exam, morning, noon and night! I must say I'm getting rather fed-up with your exam, Drake. Now, look here, the fact is, I'm going to do some practice."

"What practice?" "Music! I'd rather you fellows cleared out of the study, but if you stay you'll have to keep quiet. I can't be interrupted."

The chums of the Fourth stared blankly at Tuckey Toodles. Music was not a subject in the curriculum at St. Winifred's, and there was no musical instrument larger than a violin on board the old Benbow. Tuckey's statement was, therefore, surprising.

The grubby junior was opening a cheap leather case as he spoke. From the interior of the case he produced a concertina.

It was not an expensive concertina. There are concertinas from which sweet music may be extracted. But Toodles' instrument was not one of that variety. And even if there were sweet

THE HAND OF HIS ENEMY!

By Owen Conquest.

music to be extracted from it, Tuckey Toodles most decidedly was not the fellow to extract it. "What on earth's that?" demanded Drake gruffly.

"My concertina," answered Tuckey Toodles proudly. "I play by ear, you know. I haven't played very much, so far, but I'm really going to practise at it now I've got an instrument of my own."

"Practise at that—here?" "Yes, I wish you fellows would let me have the study to myself for a bit. You're not musical and your presence disturbs me. Still, if you keep very quiet—"

"Well, my only hat!" said Drake. Tuckey Toodles drew out his fearsome instrument to full length and closed it again. There was a prolonged and anguished squeak as if the concertina were painfully protesting against such usage.

"Shut up that row!" said Drake sharply. "Squeak!"

"Do you hear, Toodles, you fat duffer? Do

When every moment of study is precious to Jack Drake's chances of winning the Founder's Scholarship, he finds himself up against an organised persecution to prevent him from swotting!

you think a fellow can work with that unholy noise going on?"

"Squeak, squeak!" "Lovely tone, isn't it?" said Toodles. "Pity you haven't an ear for music, Drake. You'd enjoy it if you had."

"Ass! You can't make that row in the study!" "I suppose I can do my music lessons in my own study, can't I?" howled Tuckey Toodles indignantly.

There was a pause, and Drake and Rodney looked at one another in dismay. Tuckey Toodles had a certain amount of right on his side. It was his study—there was no mistake about that. And it was hard if a fellow couldn't practise his concertina in his own study, if the spirit moved him to do so.

But swotting at Latin under such an infliction was hopeless.

It really seemed that Jack Drake's difficulties in the way of steady work would never come to an end; and this was the last straw.

All through the term he had been aiming at steady work for the exam, and one thing or another had cropped up to interfere with it. His old enemy, Daubeny of the Shell, had furnished most of the difficulties—chiefly in an underhand way that was hard to reckon with. Drake knew well enough by this time that Vernon Daubeny was determined to "dish" his chance of the scholarship if he could; and he was on his guard against the chief of the bucks of St. Winny's. But, so far, he had not thought of Rupert de Vere Toodles as an obstacle.

The days before the exam were few now—alarmingly few—and Drake had lost time to make up for. One of his competitors, at least—Frank Estcourt of the Fourth—had been hard at it the whole term, and it was doubtful whether he would beat Estcourt at the finish. And at this precise time, Tuckey Toodles found the spirit move him to develop his musical abilities.

"Squeak, squeak, squaaaak!"
"Topping, isn't it?" said Toodles enthusiastically. "What would you fellows like me to play? Name anything you like. I play by ear, you know."

"Toodles, you ass——"
"Listen to this," said Toodles
"Squeak, squeak, squaaaawk!"
"Shut up!" roared Drake.
"Rot! You listen!"
"Squaaaawk!"

Jack Drake made a stride towards the musician, and raised his foot. The concertina flew over Tuckey's head the next moment, and Tuckey gave a loud yell.

"Oh! Yah! You cheeky rotter, if you've damaged my concertina——"

"I'll damage your silly head if you kick up that row!" exclaimed Drake angrily. "How's a fellow to work with that row going on?"

"Blow your silly work! Go and work somewhere else! I gave ten bob for that concertina!" howled Toodles. "I got it cheap."

"Tenpence would be nearer the value, I think," said Dick Rodney. "And where did you get ten bob from, you fat rascal?"

"Daub lent it to me."
"What?"

"Daub!" ejaculated Drake.

"Why shouldn't my pal Daub lend me ten bob?" demanded Tuckey Toodles, examining his instrument to see whether it was damaged. "I think it was jolly decent of Daub. I happened to be short of money, owing to having a pound note blown away——"

"Daub!" repeated Drake.

"He's a good sort," said Toodles. "I had quite a long jaw with him in his study to-day. He asked me whether I was musical, and I told him I was. Precious few things I can't do, if it comes to that. He said he'd seen a concertina at a shop in Chade—only ten bob. And when I told him about my pound note being jolly decent, he offered to lend me the ten bob. Jolly decent, I call it."

Jack Drake burst into a laugh. He saw more in that friendly transaction than the obtuse Tuckey did. It was one more of Daub's astute moves for interrupting work in Study No. 8.

"Now I'm going to practise," continued Tuckey Toodles. "You fellows can listen, or not, just as you like. But you're not going to stop me, Drake. You mind your own business!"
"Squeak, squeak, squawk!"

The concertina was going again. Tuckey

Toodles ground away at it industriously, glaring defiance at Drake and Rodney as he ground.

Music Hath Charms!

"**T**OODLES!"

"Shurrup!"

"Look here, Tuckey——"

"Shurrup, I say! Don't you know better than to interrupt a musician?" exclaimed Toodles warmly.

Drake looked at Rodney.

"I suppose I'd better chuck the thing into the river," he said.

"Hold on!" murmured Rodney.

"It's another of Daub's tricks——"

"I know. But——"

"We can't work with that fearful row going on."

"Let's get along to the Form-room," said Rodney. "After all, we can work there, and we shan't be interrupted. This is Toodles' study as well as ours, old fellow, and if he chooses to be an inconsiderate beast——"

"I promised Daub I'd stick to practice," said Toodles. "In fact, he lent me the ten bob on that condition."

"Oh, go and eat coke!" growled Drake. "Come on, Rodney! I suppose we can work in the Form-room."

Drake and Rodney quitted the study with their books, followed by the wild wailing of the concertina.

Pierce Raik of the Fourth was in the passage outside, and he looked at them with a grin.

"What's the row?" he asked. "Somebody killing a cat in your study?"

"Toodles has taken up music."

"Oh, my hat! Ha, ha, ha!"

Drake and Rodney walked away to the Fourth Form Room, aft on the main deck of the old warship. They were glad to get out of range of Tuckey Toodles' musical instrument.

Raik looked after them with a peculiar grin. It was probable that the cad of the Fourth knew more of Daubeny's little plans than Drake was aware just then.

Raik looked into Study No. 8. Tuckey Toodles was sawing away at the concertina with great energy.

"You can shut up that row now," Raik remarked. "You've cleared them out. You'll have all the Fourth down on you soon."

"Blow the Fourth!"

And Tuckey Toodles sawed away. Raik shrugged his shoulders and lounged off. But he was right with regard to the Fourth. Tuckey's solo performance had not lasted ten minutes when Estcourt came out of Study No. 4 with homicide in his eye.

He put his head in Study No. 8 and shook a furious fist at the amateur musician.

"Stop it!" he shouted.

"Eh? Don't you like music?" asked Tuckey Toodles in surprise.

"Music!" hooted Estcourt. "Do you call that music, you dummy?"

"Yes, I jolly well do!" said Tuckey warmly. "You've got no ear, Estcourt."

"Well, you've got a jolly big ear, and you'll get it pulled if you don't stop that row."

"Can't a fellow play a concertina in his own study?" bawled the indignant Toodles.

"You can't, that's pretty certain. If you could play it, it wouldn't be so bad."

"Rats! Get out!"

Seesaw went the concertina. Tuckey was standing up for his rights. Estcourt seemed to be on the point of raving. He, like Drake, was working hard for the exam. He had been sweating when the sweet strains from Study No. 8 reached him, and called him forth. He shook his fist at Toodles again.

"Will you stop, it?" he shrieked.

"No, I won't."

"Then I'll jolly well stop you."

Estcourt was a peaceable fellow, seldom or never mixed up with "rows." But the strains of Tuckey's concertina would have roused a saint to anger. Estcourt rushed into the study and collared Tuckey Toodles and his instrument of torture together, and there was a crash as Tuckey rolled on the carpet, where he was belayed with the instrument.

The concertina was silenced—not so Tuckey Toodles. He made more noise as he sprawled than the concertina at its worst.

"Yaroooooh! Yow-ow-ow-woop! Oh! Ah! Yah!"

"Now keep quiet!" gasped Estcourt. "You begin that fearful row again and I'll come back with a cricket stump."

And he tramped out of the study and slammed the door.

"Wow! Ow!"

Tuckey Toodles scrambled up breathlessly, and grabbed up his concertina.

Then he paused.

The poet has told us that music hath charms to soothe the savage breast. But there were evidently breasts in the Fourth too savage to be soothed by music—Tuckey's music, at all events.

With great prudence, Tuckey Toodles locked the door before he restarted after the interval, so to speak.

Then he seized his instrument again, and the sweet strains rolled forth in an orgy of discord. Tuckey Toodles seemed to be enjoying it. He was the only fellow in the Fourth Form passage who was, however, as a loud hammering at the door soon testified.

"Stop that row!" yelled Estcourt through the keyhole. "Unlock this door! I'll slaughter you! Let me in."

"Yah!"

Bang! Bang! Thump! Thump! Crash!

Tuckey Toodles grinned and continued his performance. Any amount of thumping on the door did not matter to him; it only made an accompaniment to his music, quite as musical itself.

"Shut up that row!" yelled Rawlings, outside.

"Toodles, you villain—"

"Toodles, you lunatic—"

But Tuckey Toodles answered not, neither did he heed; and still the music streamed from the sawing concertina, while the Fourth Formers kicked and thumped and shouted outside the study.

Move On!

DRAKE and Rodney had settled down in the Form-room. They had the big room, with its windows overlooking the waters of the Chadway, to themselves, and they were out of range of the amateur musician.

But their sweating in the Form-room was destined to be interrupted.

They had been at work about a quarter of an

hour when Pierce Raik sauntered in. Chetwynd of the Fourth followed him in.

"Hallo, you fellows working here?" said Raik.

Drake glanced up.

"Yes; want anything?"

"Oh, no! We're only going to try my foils," said Raik carelessly.

"You've not come here to fence?" exclaimed Rodney.

"Yes; why shouldn't we?"

Drake and Rodney gave each other a hopeless look. Raik had a pair of wooden foils, with basket hilts, under his arm. There was no reason, certainly, why a couple of juniors shouldn't fence in the deserted Form-room. But fencing with wooden foils was likely to disturb very considerably any brain work that was going on there. Drake and Rodney had no special right to raise any objection, so far as they went; but it certainly looked as if they were "dished" again.

Raik and Chetwynd handled their foils, standing up to fence in the middle of the room. There was a loud crashing of wood on wood, a tramping of feet to and fro.

Jack Drake rose to his feet with a glitter in his eyes. It was quite impossible to work with that disturbance going on in the room.

"Look here, you fellows," said Drake as calmly as he could. "We've come here to work, and we were here first. Would you fellows mind fencing somewhere else?"

"No room in the study," grinned Raik.

"You can go into the gym, I suppose?"

"The fact is, we're not specially good at it yet, and we don't want to show off rotten fencing before a lot of fellows. That's why we've come to a quiet place," said Raik.

Drake set his lips.

"We can't work with that row going on," he said.

"Clear off to your study, then."

"Toodles is kicking up a row there."

Raik shrugged his shoulders.

"That's not my fault. Come on, Chetwynd. We're wasting time."

Chetwynd chuckled, and the fencing recommenced. It was not so much fencing as crashing and clashing and trampling. Jack Drake gave Rodney a bitter look.

"Is this another of Daub's tricks?" he asked.

"They're friends of Daub. This is the first I've heard of Raik taking up fencing."

Rodney looked troubled.

"I—I suppose they have a right here," he said.

"I don't see how we can turn them out."

"It's either them or us," growled Drake. "If I were sure that Daubeny had put them up to it—"

"Oh, we'll find somewhere else," said Rodney.

"We don't want a fight now; it will put you off your work, old chap."

Drake hesitated. He was strongly inclined to begin warlike operations, but he realised that Rodney was right. A fight was not the way to get himself in trim for work.

He controlled his temper and gathered up his books once more. The two chums left the Form-room, leaving Raik and Chetwynd still crashing and clashing. But the disturbance stopped as soon as they disappeared.

"Have a bit of a rest," chuckled Raik. "We can begin again if they come back."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The two fencers sat on a desk, waiting to see

whether the unfortunate "saps" would come back. But Drake and Rodney did not return.

With clouded faces the chums of the Fourth looked for a quiet corner to work. Drake thought he could see the hand of his old enemy in what was happening, though he was not sure yet. But he was getting into a dangerous temper.

"This will suit us," said Rodney.

It was a quiet corner, a window-seat near the entrance to the canteen amidst the tables. There was no table, but the seat was ample, and the sunset streamed in at the window in the side of the old Benbow. The two chums sat down and deposited their books. It was not a very convenient place for study, but it was at least quiet.

But ten minutes had scarcely elapsed when three Shell fellows came along, laughing and chatting together. They were Daubeny, Torrence, and Egan. Drake knitted his brows, but the bucks of the Shell passed on into the canteen, without glancing at the "saps" in the window-seat.

Their voices could be heard giving orders to Mr. Capps in the canteen for a few minutes. Then they emerged, Egan carrying a bag of tarts, and Torrence a little tray with three glasses of ginger-beer on it. Daubeny had his hands in his pockets. He glanced round carelessly.

"Here you are, you fellows," he drawled.

And the bucks sat down with their tuck in the window-seat, a yard or so from the unhappy swots.

Not a Success!

DAUBENY & CO. did not even glance at the two Fourth Formers. They did not even seem aware of their proximity. But it was clear enough to Drake and Rodney that the Shell fellows had tracked them out, and had deliberately arrived in the window-corner to interrupt the study that was going on there.

They ate their tarts and drank their ginger-pop, and talked in loud voices, keeping up an incessant buzz.

Drake's eyes had a dangerous glitter in them now. He could not doubt, if he had doubted before, that Vernon Daubeny had laid another of his little schemes, and that wherever he sought quiet to work he would find Daubeny or his myrmidons in the way. Tuckey Toodles' concertina had driven him out of the study; Raik's sudden taste for fencing had driven him out of the Form-room. Now he was to listen to loud chatter while he worked—if he could work under such conditions.

He couldn't; and besides, the annoyance and anger he was feeling militated against study. It is never easy to work in a bad temper, and Drake's temper was growing very sore.

He remained silent for a few minutes in the hopes that the bucks would get tired of their peculiar amusement and take their departure. But the bucks showed no sign of getting tired. Seeley of the Shell came along and joined them, and a fresh supply of ginger-beer was brought out of the canteen.

Daubeny & Co. had evidently come to stay—so long as Drake and Rodney stayed, at all events.

Drake's eyes met Rodney's.

"Shall we shift?" asked the latter in a low voice.

"No! Those cads are going to shift!" said Drake between his teeth. "We're going to shift them."

"Oh, all right! I suppose it would come to that sooner or later."

Drake rose to his feet.

"Daubeny!" he said quietly.

Vernon Daubeny was speaking to his comrades, and he did not heed. He continued to speak, taking no notice of the Fourth Former.

"Daubeny!"

Still no reply. Drake did not waste time in further words. He stepped towards Vernon Daubeny and grasped him by the shoulder.

"Out of it!" he said.

Then Daubeny spun round towards him.

"Let go my shoulder, you cheeky cad!" he shouted furiously.

"Get out!"

"What the thunder do you mean?" exclaimed Daubeny, jerking his shoulder away savagely. "I suppose I can sit here if I like."

"You've come here to interrupt my work—"

"What rot! You shouldn't be workin' here," answered Daubeny. "Fellows come here to chat, not to work. I'm certainly stayin'."

"I should think so!" exclaimed Seeley.

"Oh, quite!" grinned Egan.

"You're not staying!" shouted Drake, his anger getting the upper hand at last. "You're going, or you'll be kicked out!"

"By gad! We'll see about that."

"Are you going?" panted Drake.

"No fear!"

Drake strode at him, and the buck of the Shell shouted to his comrades, as a powerful grasp closed on him.

"Back up, you fellows!"

"You bet!"

Egan, Torrence, and Seeley rushed to their leader's aid. Rodney sprang to back up his chum.

The next moment a terrific fight was in progress.

The bucks were two to one, but Drake and Rodney were the heftiest fighting men in the Lower School of St. Winifred's, and the bucks were anything but hefty in that line.

The odds were heavy, but the Fourth Formers quite held their own. Egan was soon on the planks, and seemed to prefer to stay there.

Rodney had closed with Seeley, and had his head in chancery; and Drake was attacking Daubeny and Torrence so savagely that they gave ground before his lashing fists.

In the midst of the uproar Lovelace and Armitage of the Sixth came along to the canteen.

The two prefects stopped and fairly glared at the struggling crowd of juniors.

"My hat!" ejaculated Lovelace. "Stop that! Do you hear? Stop it at once!"

DETECTIVE KERR INVESTIGATES.

Solution:

KERR: Trimble had certainly "cooked up" a good story—but for one thing. He had overlooked the fact that the door leading to the terrace was locked at night. Lord Conway had pointed out that Trimble could have got out via the french windows—but Trimble said he had closed the door quietly behind him. Yet Smithson, the gardener, unlocked that same door at five minutes past seven to go on to the terrace. Trimble's jaw dropped when this was brought home to him—and he even forgot to reiterate his preposterous claim to have done the "hundred yards in twelve seconds!"

And as the excited juniors did not stop, the two big Sixth Formers rushed into the fray, cutting vigorously right and left.

The combat ceased then—quite suddenly.

"Now, what is this row about?" exclaimed the captain of St. Winifred's, as the juniors stood gasping round him.

"Not our fault, Lovelace!" panted Daubeny. "The cads wanted to clear us out of here—for nothin' at all."

"We were doing our work here," began Drake, "and—"

Lovelace interrupted him.

"This isn't the place for doing your work. What the thunder do you mean? You were turning these fellows out—"

"Yes, we—"

"Like your cheek!" exclaimed Lovelace. "I've never heard of such cheek! Take fifty lines each, and clear off to your study! Now then, don't jaw! Clear off, or I'll warm you!"

Drake and his chum gathered up their books hopelessly and cleared off. There was nothing else to be done. The word of the captain of the school was law—and Lovelace's decision was just, so far as he was aware.

Daubeny & Co. grinned as Lovelace and Armitage went into the canteen. The elegant bucks were rather dusty and dishevelled, and Daub was wiping a nose that streamed crimson; but he was feeling satisfied, all the same. His latest scheme seemed to be working quite well.

Terrible for Toodles!

"WHERE now?" asked Rodney.

Drake knitted his brows.

"Come along to the study," he answered.

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"But Toodles—"

"I'll deal with Toodles."

The strains of the concertina were going strong as the chums came back to their own quarters. The crowd had cleared off, as the merciless musician was not to be got at. They had howled bloodcurdling threats through the keyhole before they went. But Tuckey Toodles did not seem to mind. He was sawing away at his instrument of torture in a perfect ecstasy of discords.

Only Estcourt remained, still breathing threats through the keyhole, which fell upon deaf ears within.

Drake thumped on the door.

"It's locked," said Estcourt. "When I get at the villain—"

"Toodles!" shouted Drake.

"Hallo! Is that you, Drake?"

"Yes; let us in, you fat idiot!"

"That depends," answered Tuckey Toodles cautiously. "Are you going to interrupt my music practice?"

"Let me in, you idiot!"

"On the whole, Drake, I think I prefer to be alone while I'm playing the concertina."

"Get a chopper or something, Rodney," said Drake, breathing hard. "I'll break the lock."

"Here, I say, don't you damage your own study door, Drake!" exclaimed Tuckey Toodles in alarm. "I don't mind letting you in, old chap, if you won't interrupt the music."

"I give you one second!" howled Drake. "If I have to break the lock, I'll break you, too, I give you my word on that!"

"I—I say, old fellow—"

"Get the chopper, Rodney."

"It's all right—I'm opening the door, dear old scout!" exclaimed Tuckey Toodles, and he turned back the key at last. "No larks, you know! I'm going on with my music!"

Drake and Rodney strode into the study and thumped down their books on the table. Toodles eyed them rather uneasily.

"Now, look here, you fellows—" he began. "Yaroooh!"

The grubby junior was suddenly interrupted.

Estcourt had followed the chums in, and he did not waste time in speech. He seized Tuckey Toodles by the collar.

"Yow-woop! Leggo!" howled Toodles. "You cheeky beast! This isn't your study!"

Tuckey's voice died away in a breathless howl as Estcourt shook him furiously.

"Groogh! Ow! Wow! Drake, lend a hand— Yooogh! Rodney, you rotter, help me— Grooch! Stand up for your own study— Wow-wow!"

Shake—shake—shake!

Yoooop!"

Drake and Rodney did not lend a hand. Estcourt was welcome to handle Rupert de Vere Toodles as he liked; and he seemed to like to handle him roughly. And he did.

Drake picked up the concertina and hurled it into the passage. It fell with a crash.

"There, you noisy rotter!" panted Estcourt.

"Now, you kick up any more row, and I'll come back and burst you!"

And Estcourt stamped away.

"Ow—ow—ow!" gasped Toodles. "Look here, Drake, I'm going to play my concertina in my own study—"

"Bring it into the study again, and it goes out of the window!" said Drake.

"Look here—"

(Continued on page 36.)



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THE HAND OF HIS ENEMY!

(Continued from page 34.)

There was a shout from the passage. The crash of the falling concertina had made several fellows look out from their doorways. Rawlings rushed at the instrument. He reached it with a bound, and landed on it with both feet.

There was an agonised squeak from the concertina; probably the last squeak it was capable of.

"Pass!" yelled Sawyer major.

Rawlings passed the concertina, and Sawyer major took the pass, sending the instrument with a fine kick along the passage, where it was captured by Furley, who passed it again. The juniors seemed to have mistaken Tuckey's musical instrument for a football.

"My concertina!" howled Tuckey.

He rushed out of the study to the rescue of his beloved instrument. But it was too late for rescue. The concertina was going through an exciting career as a football, in the midst of a chortling crowd of juniors.

"Shoot, Sawyer!" yelled Rawlings. "That's the style!"

"Please, you fellows," wailed Tuckey Toodles, "give me my concertina! I—Oooch!"

His last remark was caused by the instrument, propelled by the foot of Sawyer major, catching

Tuckey a terrific blow in the region of his bottom waistcoat button.

"Ha, ha, ha! You've got it now!" roared Rawlings.

"Good shot!"

"Well stopped, Tuckey!"

But next moment a crowd of juniors were "on the ball" again, and the concertina restarted on its gay career. It was passed and jumped on, and was fast losing all appearance of a concertina. Tuckey rushed into the crowd and found himself lying breathless on his back the next moment. While he lay and gasped, the concertina went through the final stages of its short but eventful history.

There was peace in Study No. 8.

Drake and Rodney were at work at last; though it was now time for prep, and extra study for that evening had to be given up. The two juniors had settled down to work, when a dusty and dishevelled figure came panting into the study—holding up a thing that looked as unlike a concertina as it well could look.

"Look at it!" moaned Tuckey Toodles. "I—I can't get a note out of it—not a note!"

"Hurrah!"

And Drake and Rodney went on with their prep, while Tuckey Toodles regarded his dilapidated instrument of torture, that was never to torture again, with a look like unto Rachel of old, who mourned and could not be comforted.

Next Wednesday: "BUCKS ON THE WARPATH!"

THE TRAIL OF 'FRISCO JO!

(Continued from page 29.)

mine, on which he had lost his solitary dollar, before they arrived there.

But they had something to add to Chunky's story now.

There was a howl of laughter from a dozen Cedar Creek fellows when Frank and Bob and Vere Baudlerc came into the school ground.

"Hyer come the innocent jays!" roared Eben Hacke.

"Look at the merry mine-owners!" roared Hopkins.

"Rolling in gold-dust! Ha, ha!"

"Nothing to laugh at, you dummies!" said Chunky Todgers sorrowfully. "That Mexican villain had my last dollar—the last and only!"

Bob Lawless felt in his pocket.

"I guess we've got your dollar back, Chunky," he said calmly.

"Did you get it out of the mine?" grinned Lawrence.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No, my son; we got it out of the Mexican," said Bob Lawless, as he tossed the dollar to the delighted and amazed Chunky. "It's right enough, 'Frisco Jo did us with a salted mine. But it's right enough, too, that we ran him down and made him disgorge, and we're not a penny the worse."

"You made that rustler shell out?" yelled Hacke.

"You bet!"

Chunky Todgers was elated by the recovery of his dollar, which seemed to him more important than the recovery of the other forty-nine.

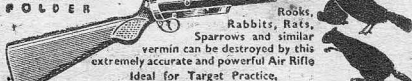
Before sundown that day the dollar was expended in administering to the demands of the inner Chunky—the plump youth evidently having decided to run no further risks with it.

Next Wednesday: "POKER PETE'S LOSING GAME!"

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