

THE

GEM

2P

"BIGGLES' SOUTH-SEA ADVENTURE!"
GREAT NEW STORY INSIDE!

*Gussy
Puts His Foot
In It!*





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.

"Stinker" (Peter Askey—no relation to Arthur Askey!), writes from Manchester:

I heard of Trimble before he came to St. Jim's. In what study is Rook?

ANSWER: Did you? Maybe you bumped into him, some place. If so, you'll never get back that half-crown he borrowed! Rook has left.

No. 7, 2nd M.G.S. Curlew Patrol, Manchester, Lancs, writes:

Our troop camped last Whitsun. My first taste of camping, as I'd never been for more than two days. Now, who is your Scoutmaster? Do you ever have camps or treks? Being a Public school, St. Jim's has long holidays, but how long? Tom Merry & Co. MUST have been late for the beginning of the summer term, surely?

P.S.—Go on—strike for a double page. Get tough!

ANSWER: We camp sometimes at week-ends; Mr. Railton is our Scoutmaster. We have three weeks' holiday at Easter, four weeks at Christmas, and seven weeks in the summer. Special leave was granted in connection with Tom Merry & Co.'s trip to the "Continong." I hope your tent didn't collapse on you during the night—you feel so awfully "in the dark" when that happens!

P.S.—Hand me that tent-pole, O Slave of the Lamp, and I will consider sloshing about me somewhat with a view to enlarging the feature. (Maybe!)

"Reader in E.17" writes:

School stories are my favourites, but lately I have been reading about a drug that produces the same effect as hypnotism. Is there such a drug?

ANSWER: Not sure if "E.17" is London, E.17, or a submarine, but wherever you are, old chap, can you honestly compare school stories with drugs? Lots of drugs will send you "off to sleep"; but it's illegal to dabble with them, and dangerous, too! You must have been reading the wrong sort of stories (not in the GEM!) if they sent you off to sleep. Look out—that's Trimble, that was—on his way to the tuckshop with a five bob postal order that's just arrived!

G. E., "A Scots Reader Abroad," of Alexandria, writes:

How are ye, laddie? Why does the Head wear THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,652.

side-whiskers? Have there been any scraps between School House and New House lately? I agree with R. F. A., of Stoke Newington, about having a badge for GEM readers. Please go ahead.

ANSWER: The Head thinks they look better one each side than one front and one back, I believe. School House defeated New House by twelve thick ears and three swollen noses in a recent encounter. Bone of contention was whether the badge for GEM readers, if issued, should have "School House is Cock House," or "New House is Cock House" on it. Now the Head says neither! Weel, man, I hope ye're no' gettin' into any trouble yerself! (Excuse my Scots accent; plain Yorks suits me best!)

M. P. ("Miss Anonymous") writes:

Why doesn't anything exciting happen to you? Get the Ed. to write a story about you.

ANSWER: I'm surrounded by letters. Postmen labour up to the School House with heavy bags! Telephones buzz! The telegraph-boy mops his brow! Nothing exciting, did you say? Just a tick while I scramble up to the top of this pile of letters for a breath of air. Ahhhhhhh! That's better!

"Talbot's Faithful Admirer," of Cheshire, writes:

I defy you or any reader to deny Talbot is easily the best cricketer and footballer in the Junior School, so there! I believe he could beat Tom Merry at boxing if a proper contest were arranged. If you don't print this, I'll conclude you can't take it, see? Gercha!!!

P.S.—I call upon all other true admirers of Talbot to demand: "A Square Deal for the Toff." Yippee! The war's on!!!

ANSWER: Opinions vary at St. Jim's, and among readers, as to whether Talbot or Tom Merry is the better footballer and cricketer. Let's leave it at that. Tom Merry is the better boxer on points. I showed Talbot your letter, and he smiled. "Nice to have such a staunch admirer," he said. "But tell him I'm getting a perfectly square deal at St. Jim's already. And give him my best wishes, too, will you?"

P.S.—One war's enough for me at present!

TOM MERRY FINDS HIMSELF UP FOR THE "SACK"—THANKS TO GUSSY'S BOOBY-TRAP!

Gussy Puts His Foot IN IT!



Mr. Linton's eyes almost popped from his face. The figure in the doorway was scarcely recognisable as that of Mr. Railton. It looked more like a chimney-sweep!

SOOT FOR SILVERSON!

"MY only winter bonnet!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

He stared amazingly into his study—No. 10 in the Shell.

He was at that moment the most astonished fellow in the School House at St. Jim's.

Tom had run up to the study for an old footer to punt about after class. His chums, Manners and Lowther, being down in the quad, he had expected to find the study empty.

It was not! A slim and elegant youth was there. It was not very surprising to see D'Arcy of the Fourth in his study—Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was as welcome as the flowers in May in that study or any other. It was D'Arcy's occupation that astonished Tom Merry.

The most spotless and elegant junior at St. Jim's was kneeling before the fireplace. He was raking in the chimney with the study poker.

Apparently he was in quest of soot! If so, his

quest was successful. Soot was coming down—a lot of it scattering over Arthur Augustus.

As he heard Tom Merry's ejaculation at the door and turned a startled face towards him. Gussy's aristocratic features were speckled with soot. There was a large spot on his noble nose. There were smaller spots all over his face. There was a black smudge on his chin. He was of the soot, sooty!

Tom Merry gazed at him blankly.

For what mysterious reason the swell of St. Jim's was turning himself into a chimney-sweep was quite a mystery to him.

"Oh!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Bai Jove! You wathah made me jump, Tom Mewwy! Pway shut that door."

"But what——" exclaimed Tom.

"Pway come in and shut the door! I do not want all the House to see me collectin' the soot, deah boy."

"What on earth are you collecting it for?" asked Tom in wonder, as he came into the study.

POWERFUL, NEW LONG STORY OF THE CHUMS OF ST. JIM'S

by

MARTIN CLIFFORD

"That is wathah a secwet, deah boy. I twust you do not mind my baggin' the soot fwom your studay. I should have asked permission, of course, but I wanted to keep the whole thing vewy dark," explained Arthur Augustus.

Tom Merry laughed.

"You're welcome to the soot, old bean, if you want it," he answered. "And you'll keep things dark all right—with that soot! You're as black as a nigger."

"Bai Jove! Is there any on me?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"About half a ton!"

"Oh ewumbs!"

Arthur Augustus hastily grabbed out a handkerchief and wiped his face. In a moment all the spots were smudged blackly over his noble features and the handkerchief was a sooty rag.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry.

"Is that bettah, deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus anxiously.

"Ha, ha! No; worse."

"I shall have to get a wash," said Arthur Augustus. "That will be all wight, when I have got this soot away. Soot is wathah beastly stuff to handle, you know. Chimney-sweeps get wathah gwubby, as I dare say you have noticed. Yaas, I shall certainly want a wash!"

"The study will want a wash, too, I think!" remarked Tom Merry. "You've been spreading soot all over the shop."

"I am feahfully sowwy, deah boy! I should have got it out of the chimney in Studay No. 6, but Hewwies is there, and he would have seen me, and I am keepin' this dark. I am suah I can twust you not to mention it, Tom Mewwy."

"Not a word!" said Tom, laughing. "Never mind the soot on the floor—I'll sweep that up later when I come in. You'll have enough to do getting it off yourself. But what the merry thump are you going to do with it?"

"I had bettah not tell you, old chap," answered Arthur Augustus, shaking his head. "The less any othah fellow knows about it the bettah—especially you."

"Especially me?" asked Tom.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Why specially me?"

"Well, as that wat Silvahson is so much down on you, you know, he might suspect that you had done it! So it would be vewy much bettah for you to know nothin' whatevah about it," explained Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Tom.

His face became grave at once.

Evidently Mr. Silverson, the master of the Fourth Form, was going to get the benefit of Gussy's collection of soot!

Tom had no objection, in principle, to Mr. Silverson getting any amount of soot. He disliked James Silverson as much as any fellow in Silverson's Form.

But he was rather alarmed. Sooting a beak was a fearfully perilous form of amusement. It was the sort of thing a fellow was sacked for.

"Gussy, old man," exclaimed Tom earnestly, "you can't do this! For goodness' sake, wash out the whole idea."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Silverson won't be here for ever, old chap. He's only a temporary master till Mr. Lathom comes back," urged Tom. "He's a brute—but you

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can stand him somehow till he goes, Gussy. What has he done now specially?"

"He is a wat!"

"Yes; but—"

"And a wottah!?"

"Oh, yes! But—"

"And a worm—and an outsiders!"

"Life's too short for you to tell me all the things that Silverson is, old bean! Speech may be taken as read!" said Tom. "The point is that you can't mop soot over a beak—especially your own beak."

"Silvahson is not my beak, Tom Mewwy. Mr. Lathom is my beak, and I wespsect him vewy much. Silvahson is a wank outsiders!"

"Yes—but—"

"I wefuse," said Arthur Augustus. "I uttably wefuse to be wagged by that wat Silvahson without hittin' back! I am goin' to hit back vewy hard! The wat is down on our studay, because we stick to you, old chap, and Silvahson is down on you."

"I know that," admitted Tom. "It's tough, old fellow! But—"

"He has given us two hundred lines each to-day," went on Arthur Augustus, his voice trembling with indignation. "He said that my con was bad. Pewwaps it wasn't vewy good—but a lot Silvahson cares! He is a wotten slackah himself. Then he gave Dig lines for talkin' in class. Dig wasn't talkin'. He gave old Hewwies the same for shufflin' his feet—as if old Hewwies can help shufflin' his feet when he has such vewy long legs to tuck undah his desk, and his feet are so vewy big! And Blake got the lines for dwoppin' a book—and it was that fat ass Twimble who pushed the book off the desk, and Silvahson was perfectly awah of it."

Arthur Augustus paused for breath.

"The man is a tick!" said Tom. "But—"

"Study No. 6 always hits back," said Arthur Augustus. "Silvahson is not goin' to have it all his own way. Pewwaps he will be sowwy for himself when he gets this soot wight in his neck. I twust so."

"My dear chap—" urged Tom.

"I am quite wesoled to make that wottah sit up," said Arthur Augustus. "Don't you wowwy about me, Tom Mewwy. I am keepin' it awfully dark. Blake and Hewwies and Dig don't know anythin' about it even. I am not tellin' them. That's why I am gettin' the soot fwom a Shell studay, see?"

"You'll get spotted, old chap!"

"No feah! I am pwetty cautious. You can wely on a fellow of tact and judgment lookin' out all wight," said Arthur Augustus reassuringly.

"You gummed his armchair once, and Linton sat in it," said Tom.

"Yaas, that was wathah unfortunate—I was quite sowwy for Linton. But it will all wight this time."

"Don't do it, old fellow," urged Tom. "It might be the sack!"

"Nobody is goin' to know who did it!" smiled Arthur Augustus. "That's all wight. I've got it all cut and dwied. I am a bit of a stwategist, you know."

"Oh dear!" sighed Tom. He was absolutely without faith in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's strategy.

"Keep it dark, that's all," said Arthur Augustus. "Don't tell even Mannahs and Lowthah—don't tell anybody! Least said is

soonest mended, you know. I am goin' to park this bag, full of soot, in the box-room till it is wanted."

"But——"

"It's all wight, deah boy."

"I wish you'd chuck up the idea, Gussy!"

"Don't you wowwy!"

"My dear chap——"

"You're wastin' time, Tom Mewwy! The soonah I get cleah with this soot the bettah. The fellows will be comin' up to tea soon, and I don't want to be seen with soot about me."

"Leave it where it is."

"Wats!"

Evidently it was useless to argue with Arthur Augustus. His noble mind was made up—Silverson was going to get that soot! Tom Merry had to give it up, and he picked up the football and left the study, leaving Arthur Augustus to get on with it, only hoping that Gussy would change his mind before he started actual operations with that soot.

TRouble for Tom!

BANG!

"Ooooooooooh!"

It was Mr. Ratcliff's own fault.

A punt-about was going on in the quad with the footer Tom Merry had brought down from his study in the School House.

A little crowd of School House juniors had joined up for the punt-about. There were Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther, Talbot and Kangaroo, and two or three more Shell fellows. There were Levison, Clive, and Cardew of the Fourth, and Blake and Digby of that Form. Herries was labouring over lines in Study No. 6, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was busy with soot, so those two members of Study No. 6 were not present.

Naturally, Figgins & Co. of the New House, seeing a School House crowd punting a footer, rushed into the fray to bag that footer if they could.

So considerable excitement reigned when Mr. Ratcliff, Housemaster of the New House, came out.

Ratcliff was going over to the School House to speak to Mr. Railton, Housemaster of that House. The sight of boyish exuberance never afforded Ratty much pleasure, and he cast a sour glance at the merry juniors. And, as his way took him close by the spot where the tussle was going on, he did not deviate from his way by a single step. Ratty was not the man to make concessions. If any excited junior got into Ratty's way, woe betide that excited junior! Ratty could easily have walked round the tussle; likewise, he could see that the juniors did not observe his approach. But he jerked right on, regardless.

Figgins, Kerr and Wynn of the New House had got the ball. Tom Merry took it fairly from Figg's toe with a swift kick.

The footer flew, and if Mr. Ratcliff had given the juniors sea-room, as a good-natured beak would have done nothing would have happened.

As it was, something did happen!

The footer banged on Mr. Ratcliff's left ear. It banged hard. The New House master spluttered and staggered.

"Ooooh! Oh! Ow! Oooogh!" spluttered Mr. Ratcliff. "What—who——"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Tom.

"Oh scissors!" breathed Figgins. "That's torn it!"

"What did the old ass get in the way for?" said Cardew.

"Shut up, you goat!"

Mr. Ratcliff righted himself. He clapped a hand to his ear—and a smudge of mud there. He turned to the footballers, with an expression on his face to which that of the fabled Gorgon was a sweet smile.

"Who kicked that ball at me?" thundered Mr. Ratcliff.

"I did not see you, sir!" gasped Tom.

"Did you kick that ball at me, Merry?"

"No, sir—not at you," answered Tom. It was Ratty all over to suspect that the ball had been kicked at him intentionally.

"Did you kick it?"

"Yes, sir."

"It struck me."

"I am sorry, sir. I did not see you. I would never——"

"It was quite an accident, sir," said Figgins. "Nobody saw you, sir——"

"Take a hundred lines, Figgins!"

"Oh!" gasped Figgins. "Yes, sir!" He wished at that moment that the footer had whopped a little harder!

"Merry, as you do not belong to my House, I cannot deal with you!" snorted Mr. Ratcliff.

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**Turn to page 23 for the
Opening Chapters of our
GRIPPING NEW SERIAL
Starring Every Boy's
Flying Hero—BIGGLES!**

=====

"Follow me to your House! I shall report this to your Housemaster!"

Tom Merry breathed hard.

"It was entirely an accident, Mr. Ratcliff," he said quietly. "I never saw you, and should not have kicked the footer if I had——"

"Will you follow me to the School House or not?"

"Very well, sir."

Tom Merry followed the New House master, leaving a dismayed crowd behind him.

Mr. Ratcliff walked on with his jerky strides. At the doorway of the School House stood Mr. Silverson, the new master of the Fourth. Silverson had been a witness of the incident.

"I trust you are not much hurt, Mr. Ratcliff?" he said politely, as the New House master came up.

Mr. Ratcliff gave a snort.

"On the contrary, Mr. Silverson, I am considerably hurt!" he grunted. "I have had a very hard knock, sir, from a football. It has made my head ring. If this junior belonged to my House I should cane him with the utmost severity for such an action, accident or not!"

"Does Merry say that it was an accident, sir?" asked Mr. Silverson, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"He does!" grunted Mr. Ratcliff. "But it is

the kind of accident that should not occur, as I have no doubt that Mr. Railton will agree."

"I should certainly not have supposed that it was an accident," said Mr. Silverson. "I saw the whole occurrence from here, and I think I never saw an action so deliberate! I should certainly report the matter to Mr. Railton, sir!"

"It is my intention to do so at once!" said Mr. Ratcliff; and he jerked into the House.

Tom Merry's eyes gleamed at James Silverson as he followed Ratty in. But he said nothing. If James had, as he said, seen the whole occurrence it was fairly certain that he had seen that that goal on Ratty's ear was an accidental one. The man was absolutely without scruple. He had barged in to confirm Ratty's suspicion that Tom Merry had intended to get him with that footer, and Mr. Ratcliff had now no doubt on that point.

He knocked—or, rather, banged—on the door of Mr. Railton's study in the School House and marched in.

Tom Merry, with a crimson face, followed him in.

The School House master rose to his feet. He gave Tom a sharp look. This was not the first time that Tom Merry had been in trouble that term. Ever since James Silverson had come to St. Jim's, trouble had dogged Tom's steps like his shadow.

"Merry again?" said Mr. Railton very quietly. He was getting impatient of seeing that particular junior in his study.

"Yes, sir!" snorted Mr. Ratcliff. "I have been struck, sir—struck on the head—by a football—a muddy football, sir—which this junior kicked at me while I was crossing the quadrangle! I request you, sir, to deal with this boy for such an unexampled outrage—"

"It was an accident, sir!" said Tom Merry, his cheeks burning. "I never saw Mr. Ratcliff! Any fellow who was present will tell you that nobody saw him!"

Mr. Railton looked at him very hard.

"It was no accident!" hooted Mr. Ratcliff.

"Do you feel sure of that, sir?" asked the School House master. "Merry has undoubtedly been a somewhat troublesome boy this term, but such an action—"

"I have no doubt whatever!" said Mr. Ratcliff. "Another member of the staff witnessed the incident, and his impression is that it was a deliberate act."

Mr. Railton's lips set.

"That decides the matter!" he said.

"It does not, sir!" said Tom Merry, his eyes gleaming. "It is Mr. Silverson that Mr. Ratcliff means, and if he saw what I did he knows it was an accident!"

Mr. Ratcliff gave quite a jump.

"Upon my word!" he exclaimed. "Is this boy casting doubt upon the word of a member of Dr. Holmes' staff?"

Mr. Railton paused a moment. He was aware, as he could not help being, that Silverson disliked Tom Merry. On the other hand, he could see no reason why a master who was related to Tom Merry should dislike him without cause. This incident certainly seemed to bear out Silverson's view that Tom was a troublesome, rebellious, and disrespectful Lower boy. Still, it was possible that Silverson's prejudice coloured his judgment.

"It is possible, Mr. Ratcliff, that the incident was accidental, in spite of appearances," said Mr. Railton slowly. "I can hardly believe that Merry

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would be deliberately guilty of an act for which he might be expelled."

Snort! from Mr. Ratcliff. He was a suspicious man, and Silverson had confirmed his suspicions.

"But, accidental or not," said Mr. Railton in a grim tone, "it is a thing that should not have occurred, and that must not occur again! Merry, you will bend over that chair!"

The School House master picked up a cane from the table.

Tom Merry, in silence, bent over the chair. He did not expect such an accident to happen without a caning to follow. Beak's heads were not to be banged with footballs, accidentally or not.

Six was really the least any fellow could expect after such an episode.

But it was a severe six!

Mr. Ratcliff looked on with approval. Generally he disapproved of his colleague's methods as too mild. But on this occasion the severity of the six satisfied even Mr. Ratcliff.

Tom Merry shut his teeth and uttered no sound as the swipes descended. Railton was putting his beef into it, and Tom knew why. There had been too many complaints about Tom that term—and he was being discouraged from appearing so often in his Housemaster's study. It was not really Ratty who was getting him all this—it was Silverson. Tom's feelings towards that distant relation of his, as the cane swiped, were bitter enough.

The sixth swipe rang like a pistol shot, and Mr. Railton laid down the cane. Tom rose with a pale, set face.

"You may go, Merry!" said the School House master quietly. "Let this be a warning to you—let me hear of no more reckless and disorderly conduct on your part!"

"I have not been reckless, and I have not been disorderly!" said Tom Merry between his teeth. "It is not my fault if a man who dislikes me makes me out to be both!"

"Are you aware that you are speaking to your Housemaster, Merry?" asked Mr. Railton in a grim voice.

"Yes, sir, and a fellow expects his Housemaster to see justice done!" exclaimed Tom Merry, too angry and excited at the moment to measure his words.

"Upon my word! I will not cane you again, Merry, but I warn you that you are in danger of being taken to your headmaster!" exclaimed Mr. Railton. "You will take five hundred lines, Merry, for your insolence! Now leave my study! Another word and I will take you to Dr. Holmes!"

And Tom, choking back angry words, left his Housemaster's study.

SOOT FOR BAGGY!

"OH jiminy!" murmured Baggy Trimble. Trimble of the Fourth had stepped into Study No. 10 in the Shell. There was nobody in the study—had any of the owners been at home, the fat Baggy would not have called. But having seen the Terrible Three all engaged in the punt-about in the quad Baggy was aware that he would find the coast clear—so there he was!

Baggy did not mean to stay long in the study. He did not—he hoped—require more than a few minutes to spot the pineapple he had seen Manners take into Study No. 10 before class that afternoon.

Probably that pineapple was intended to grace

the tea-table in Tom Merry's study. But Baggy liked pineapple. Baggy did not care much to whom a pineapple belonged, so long as he had the pineapple.

But the fat Baggy, as he stealthily slipped into Study No. 10, forgot the pineapple for a moment in his surprise.

Tom Merry's study was not always tidy. Carefully as Tom had been trained by Miss Priscilla Fawcett his study at St. Jim's did not resemble the neatness and precision of Laurel Villa at Huckleberry Heath.

Still, it was generally in pretty good order—and if it was sometimes a little untidy, it was never slovenly, still less dirty. Now it was both!

There was a sprawling heap of soot in the fender. There was soot spotted over the hearth-rug. There were sprinkles of soot on the floor.

Seldom had a junior study been seen in such a sooty state. And Baggy Trimble stared in astonishment.

It looked as if some fellow had been raking down soot from the study chimney—as, indeed, some fellow had. Arthur Augustus had not been gone ten minutes with his bag of soot when the fat Baggy trundled in.

"Oh jiminy!" repeated Trimble. "What the dickens have they been up to? They'd get into a row if a beak saw this!"

Baggy trod carefully to avoid scattered spots of soot as he made his way to the study cupboard. He did not want to take any of the soot away with him.

He trod in some of it, all the same. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had had no practice as a chimney-sweep. He had a rather clumsy hand with soot! He had probably spilt as much as he had carried away.

Still, he had taken away quite a lot—amply enough to make Mr. Silverson sorry for himself, if it ever reached Mr. Silverson.

Baggy opened the cupboard door.

"Oh!" he ejaculated.

The pineapple was under his eyes. But it was no longer whole. Baggy had intended to pack it under a podgy arm and scud. But it had already been cut, and sliced, and the slices lay on a dish all ready for eating.

In that state it was hardly practicable to carry it off under a podgy arm.

The next best thing was to devour it where it was. After all, there was plenty of time. Tom Merry & Co. were not likely to come in till tea-time, which was a good half-hour yet. They would not leave that punt-about in the quad till long after Baggy had finished the pineapple.

However, Trimble lost no time!

He grabbed a slice in a podgy paw and started. There was a sound of incessant squelching and munching in Study No. 10 in the Shell.

Standing up to feed, like a horse, Baggy bolted slice after slice of delicious pineapple and enjoyed life to the full.

These were happy moments for Baggy! His podgy face beamed with satisfaction.

But happiness and satisfaction departed suddenly as there was a heavy tramp of footsteps in the passage and the study door was thrown open and Tom Merry tramped in.

"Oh!" gasped Baggy.

With a mouth full of pineapple and a slice in a fat paw. Baggy spun round from the cupboard in dismay.

He had calculated well—but that punt-about in the quad, unknown to Baggy, had been interrupted.

Baggy was quite unaware that Tom Merry had been marched into the House and caned by his Housemaster, after which Tom was not disposed to rejoin the fellows in the quad. He came up to his study after leaving Mr. Railton—rather unfortunately for Trimble.

Still more unfortunately for Trimble, he had not arrived in his usual good and sunny temper.

A sense of injustice, added to a severe whopping, did not make for sunny good temper.

Tom came in with a set face and glinting eyes. The next moment he saw Baggy and glared at him.

"What the thump are you doing here?" he snapped

"Oh! Nothing!" stammered Baggy. "I—I—"

"You fat sweep, have you snaffled Manners' pineapple?" exclaimed Tom. "By gum, I'll shove that slice down the back of your neck."

Trimble jumped back as Tom made a stride at him.

Baggy did not want that slice of pineapple down the back of his neck. Inside his neck, he liked it immensely; outside, it was not nice.

He jumped away, caught his foot in the hearth-rug, and bumped.

"Oh!" gasped Baggy, as he sat on the hearth-rug in the midst of the soot spilt and scattered by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Wow! I say, you know, look here—I—I— Oh jiminy!"

The next moment Tom Merry grasped him by the back of a fat neck. Baggy rolled over on the sooty rug.

"Yurrooogn!" he spluttered as his podgy features rubbed in soot "Oh jiminy! Leggo! Yurrooogh!"

"There, you fat scallywag!" exclaimed Tom.

"Gurroogh! Leggo! Ow! I'm smothered with soot!" yelled Baggy. "Look at my face—oh jiminy! Baggy spluttered frantically. "Ow! I've got soot in my mum-mum-mouth—grooogh!"

"Have a little more, after the pineapple!"

"Yurrooogh!"

Baggy tore himself away and scrambled to his feet. He glared at Tom Merry through a screen of soot.

Tom, looking at him, forgot for a moment the twinges of six hefty swipes and burst into a roar of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gurrooogh!" gurgled Baggy. "Oh jiminy! Look at me—urrrgh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm black all over!" yelled Trimble.

"Better go and get a wash!" grinned Tom Merry. "You need one!"

"Gurrrgh!"

Baggy Trimble tottered out of Study No. 10 spluttering soot. Racke of the Shell, looking out of his study doorway, burst into a roar at the sight of him.

"Ha, ha, ha! Been up a chimney, Trimble?"

"Gurrrgh! That swab Tom Merry swamped me with soot!" spluttered Baggy. "Look at me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Racke as he looked. "But what the thump's Tom Merry doing with soot in his study?" he added.

"Urrgh! It's all over the shop!" groaned Baggy. "The swab rolled me in it—ooooogh!"

Baggy trundled away dismally down the passage. Aubrey Racke stared after him and then stepped to the door of No. 10 and looked in. It was very odd and unusual if there was soot all over the shop in that study.

And there was! It fairly leaped to the eye as Aubrey Racke looked in. Soot seemed to be almost everywhere. Tom Merry had some on him after rolling the fat Baggy on the sooty rug.

"Oh gad!" exclaimed Racke. "What the dickens have you been up to here? Sweeping your own chimney?"

Tom glanced round.

"No! Shut the door!"

"But where did all that soot come from?" asked Racke.

"From the chimney. I should think you could guess that one!" snapped Tom. "Do you think it came in a parcel, or what?"

"But why—"

"Oh rats! Shut that door and cut!"

Aubrey Racke banged the door and went back to his own study. And Tom Merry, with an occasional wriggle, proceeded to clean up the many sooty traces left by Arthur Augustus before Manners and Lowther came in to tea.

SNUB FOR SILVERSON!

"TRIMBLE!"

"Oh jiminy!" groaned Baggy.

Mr. Silverson, the master of the Fourth was on the study landing when Baggy Trimble rolled out of the Shell passage.

It was just Baggy's bad luck. In his present sooty and unclean state, Baggy did not want to meet the eye of a beak—especially his own beak. Mr. Silverson seemed to have a perfect genius for being where he was not wanted.

Silverson stared at the fat Baggy.

"You utterly dirty and disgusting boy! Why are you in that shocking state?" he barked.

"It isn't my fault, sir," mumbled Baggy. "I—I fell over in—in some soot! I—I didn't want to, sir—"

"You fell over in some soot!" repeated Mr. Silverson, staring at him. "What utter nonsense! How could you fall over in soot?"

"I—I—I did!" gasped Baggy. "It isn't my fault if a fellow has soot spilt all over his study."

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Silverson. "I suppose you have been playing some trick with soot. I shall cane you, Trimble! Go down to my study!"

Baggy gave him a sooty glare.

Mr. Silverson was not a very dutiful Form-master. Baggy did not believe that he cared a bean whether a fellow was sooty or not. But Silverson did not like Baggy—nice fellow as he was. Perhaps it was because he had overheard Baggy remarking that it looked as if they were going to have that brute Silverson till the end of the term. Mr. Silverson often heard things not intended for his ears, and often they displeased him.

He pointed to the stairs.

"Go down at once, Trimble!"

"But—but it's not my fault, really, sir!" groaned Baggy. "I haven't been playing tricks with soot, sir. I—I wouldn't! I—I fell over, and—"

"Nonsense!"

"There was a lot of soot about, sir."

"Rubbish!"

"You can go and see for yourself," urged Baggy. "Tom Merry's study is simply smothered in soot, and I—I fell over in it."

"Merry's study?" repeated Mr. Silverson. His greenish eyes glinted at the name.

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"Yes, sir; Merry's study in the Shell. They've upset some soot, somehow. It's spilt all over the study," said Baggy eagerly. "I—I caught my foot in the rug, sir, and—and tumbled over in it."

"Is that the truth, Trimble?"

"Oh, yes, sir! If you look, sir—"

"I have no authority over the Shell," said Mr. Silverson sourly. "But if your statement is true, Trimble—"

"Oh, yes, sir! The study's all smothered with soot. It—it must have fallen out of the chimney, or—or something."

"Follow me!" snapped Mr. Silverson.

"Oh, yes, sir!" groaned Baggy.

He followed his Form-master down the staircase. Dozens of fellows stared at the fat Baggy as he went down. Baggy was never conspicuous for cleanliness. Indeed, it was said in the Fourth that he had never washed his neck since he had been at St. Jim's. But even Baggy had never been seen going about the House in such an exceedingly grubby state as this before.

To Baggy's surprise, Mr. Silverson did not lead him to his own study. He stopped at that of Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, and tapped at the door.

Baggy began to hope that it was not a licking, after all. Though why he was taken to the master of the Shell, Baggy could not begin to guess.

"What is it, Mr. Silverson?" asked Linton, glancing in surprise at the Fourth Form master, and in strong disfavour at the grubby youth who followed him in. He could see no reason why Silverson had brought that grubby member of the Fourth to his study.

"You see the state Trimble is in, Mr. Linton."

"A most disgusting state!" said Mr. Linton dryly. "The boy looks as if he has been up a chimney. But why—"

"I do not desire, sir, to intervene in matters connected with your Form; but Trimble states that he got into that disgusting condition in a Shell study," said Mr. Silverson.

"Indeed!" said Mr. Linton, with a glint in his eyes. Linton did not like complaints about his Form from other "beaks." "If a Shell boy has done this to a boy of your Form, Mr. Silverson, I shall certainly look into the matter. Who did this, Trimble?"

"Oh, nobody, sir!" gasped Baggy. "I—I fell over—"

"You fell over?" repeated Mr. Linton.

"Yes, sir. I—I caught my foot, and—and went down—wallop!"

Mr. Linton stared at him.

"You did not fall up the chimney, Trimble, I presume?" he rapped, in his dry, sarcastic voice.

"Oh, no, sir!"

"Then how did you become covered with soot by falling down in a Shell study?"

"It was all over the floor, sir."

"What?"

"I—I expect it blew down the chimney, sir. The floor was smothered with it, and I—I fell over in it."

"Studies in the House, sir, are not supposed to be in such an uncleanly state that a boy cannot enter them without such results as this," said Mr. Silverson. "I suggest, sir, that you should speak to the boys concerned on this subject."

"In whose study did this occur, Trimble?"

"Tom Merry's, sir."

"Oh!" said Mr. Linton.

His thin lips set. Linton was a precise man, and he abhorred slovenliness. On the other hand, accidents do happen. And Mr. Linton, who was as sharp as a needle, had not failed to notice that James Silverson never lost an opportunity of putting in a word in Tom Merry's disfavour.

"No doubt there has been a fall of soot in the chimney in that study," said the master of the Shell. "Such things occur. I fail to see that Merry is to blame in any way, if such a case."

"The state Trimble is in, sir——"

"The state Trimble is in is due entirely to himself," said Mr. Linton acidly. "He need not have entered a Shell study, neither should he have been so clumsy as to fall over."

"A fall of soot in the chimney, sir, would not account for the state of Merry's study, according to Trimble's description. May I suggest that you should inspect that study yourself?"

"I see no reason whatever for doing so, Mr. Silverson."

"Such slovenliness, such uncleanliness——"

Mr. Linton held up a thin hand.

"Kindly say no more on the subject, Mr. Silverson. I have absolutely no need of assistance in conducting my Form."

Mr. Silverson's cheeks reddened. It was as distinct a snub as one master could have given another.

"Oh!" he ejaculated. "Very well, sir! If you choose to allow your boys to keep their studies in such a state as to be a disgrace to the House——"

"I think you forget yourself, Mr. Silverson," said the master of the Shell. "Kindly let the matter drop."

James Silverson breathed hard as he left the study. He had asked for a snub, and he had got one; but, like many people, he was not gratified at receiving that for which he had asked.

Trimble followed him out.

To his relief, Silverson stalked away to his own study, taking no further notice of him. And Baggy, happy to have escaped a licking, rolled away in search of a wash

MYSTERIOUS!

"**B**OOTHAH the bwute!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Blow him!" said Jack Blake.

"Wouldn't I like to boot him!" sighed Dig.

"Hard!" agreed George Herries.

Study No. 6 were not feeling happy after tea. Only Herries, so far, had done some of the lines, and Herries, who was a slow worker, had not done a lot. Two hundred lines each had to be handed in before prep, so in Study No. 6 in the Fourth there was a ceaseless scratching of pens, to an accompaniment of uncomplimentary remarks concerning James Silverson.

"The bwute!" repeated Arthur Augustus. "Howevah, pewwaps he will be sowwy for himself latah on!"

Snort, from Blake.

"Are you going to gum his armchair again?" he inquired sarcastically. "Linton sat in it last time. Do you want to catch Railton or the Head next?"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Can't get back on the brute," said Digby. "He's too jolly sharp! I don't want six on the bags after the lines."

"Pewwaps somebody will get back on him, Dig," said Arthur Augustus. "Pewwaps somethin' is goin' to happen to the wat!"

"What have you got in your silly nut now?" demanded Blake, with a suspicious glare across the table at his noble chum. "Don't you begin larking with Silverson. He's too jolly dangerous!"

"Wats!"

"Let me catch you at it!" grunted Herries. "I'll jolly soon stop you!"

"Weally, Hewwies——"

"Silverson's got a down on this study," said Digby. "He would jump at a chance of getting us up before the Head! Leave Silverson alone."

"The uttah wottah——"

"He's all that, and more," said Blake. "Perhaps we'll find out a way of making the brute sit up! But you keep clear, Gussy!"

"Weally, Blake, as a fellow of tact and judgment, if would be bettah to leave it entirely in my hands!"

"Fathead!"

"Wats!"

The pens resumed scratching. Every member of Study No. 6 would have been glad to make Mr. Silverson sorry for himself. But three members of that study were unanimous on one point—Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was to keep clear. They were very far from sharing Gussy's own faith in his tact and judgment. They had not the faintest doubt that if Gussy went on the warpath the result would be painful—not for Silverson, but for Gussy, and they were prepared to stop Gussy by main force, if need were, if they found him at it.

Arthur Augustus smiled a superior smile.

His plans were laid, but he was saying nothing of them in his study. He did not want a lot of fatheads butting in.

With great artfulness, Gussy had got the necessary soot out of another fellow's study, not his own, so Blake & Co. were left in entire and happy ignorance of his fell designs on Silverson.

They were going to know nothing till afterwards!

Then, when Silverson got the soot, and the identity of the sooty perpetrator remained an insoluble mystery, they would have to admit that Arthur Augustus was the man for such deeds. They would be glad, then, that they had known nothing, and had not been able to butt in!

The study door was kicked open, and Manners and Lowther looked in.

"You men coming down?" asked Lowther.

Snort, from Blake.

"Lines!" he grunted. "Lines for the Worm!"

"Two hundred each!" growled Herries.

"Hard lines!" said Monty Lowther sympathetically.

This was a joke, but Study No. 6 did not even see the joke. They were in no joking mood.

"Tom's got five hundred from Railton," said Manners, with a knitted brow. "He's working at them now. I've always liked Railton, but——"

"Lines as well as a licking?" asked Blake. "That's tough."

"I fancy he must have cheeked Railton," said Manners ruefully. "That rat Silverson barged in, and made matters worse, and——"

"Bai Jove It's wathah bad form for a fellow to cheek his Housemastah," said Arthur

Augustus, shaking his noble head. "I am wathah surprised at Tom Mewwy."

"Tom's got his rag out," said Lowther. "He thinks Railton's having his leg pulled by that rat Silverson and that he ought to know better."

"Oh, my hat! Did he tell Railton that?" gasped Blake.

"Something like it, I'm afraid."

"The ass!"

Manners and Lowther went on their way, leaving Study No. 6 to write lines. They worked on wearily.

Arthur Augustus finished at last and laid down his pen. There was a thoughtful shade on his noble brow. He crossed to the study window and glanced out into the shadows of the autumn evening.

"It's wathah dark," he remarked.

"It generally is at night," said Blake. "Never noticed that before? Quite a common thing."

"Wats!"

Arthur Augustus, for some reason, seemed to derive satisfaction from the fact that it was dark in the quad. The October evening had closed in, dim and dark, and the visibility, from the window of Study No. 6, was not good.

"A fellow would hardly be spotted out of the House," remarked Arthur Augustus.

"A fellow would be spotted fast enough walking out after lock-up!" said Blake, staring at him. "What do you mean, ass?"

"Not if he droppod from the Form-woom window!"

"Let me catch you dropping from the Form-room window!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"That goat is up to something!" said Blake. "What are you up to, goat?"

"I wufese to be addressed as a goat, Blake!" answered Arthur Augustus stiffly.

"Is he after Silverson?" inquired Herries. "Silverson's not in the quad. We shall find him in his study when we take down our lines."

"Yaas, wathah!" grinned Arthur Augustus. "That's all wight. Silvahson will be in his studay all wight!"

Blake, Herries, and Digby looked very attentively at their aristocratic pal. Gussy was keeping his secret a dead secret, but Gussy had his own inimitable way of keeping a secret. All three could see that there was something on.

"Are you after Silverson?" demanded Blake. "Think he will walk out in the dark to give you a chance at him? And what could you do if he did?"

"Pway don't ask questions, deah boy," answered Arthur Augustus. "It is much bettah for you chaps to know nothin' whatevah about it."

"About what?" howled Blake.

"Oh, nothin'!" said Arthur Augustus airily.

"Silverson's study window looks on the quad," said Herries, eyeing Gussy very suspiciously. "But he always keeps it shut."

"He might open it to see who tapped on it—if a fellow happened to tap!" grinned Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, my hat!" said Blake. "Is that the game?"

"I did not say there was any game, Blake! If you have finished your lines, we had bettah take them down to Silvahson—and then we can make sure that he is in his studay, too!"

Blake & Co. looked at him and looked at one

another. Then Study No. 6 gathered up their lines and went down—delivering them to Mr. Silverson, who, as was now ascertained beyond doubt, was in his study.

TOO PALLY!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY breathed hard.

He was getting irritated.

Friendship is a jolly good thing. Loyal friendship is beyond price. But Arthur Augustus was beginning to realise that it is possible to have too much of a good thing.

He valued the friendship of Jack Blake, Robert Arthur Digby, and George Herries. He valued it highly, and he liked their company. But on this particular evening Gussy was seeking the solitude in the face of which sages have seen charms. And it was really extraordinary the way his loyal chums were sticking to him.

They seemed unwilling to let him out of their sight. Which, of course, was gratifying in its way, but, in the circumstances, irritating and disconcerting.

After delivering the lines to Silverson, the chums of the Fourth went to the junior day-room. From that apartment Arthur Augustus strolled out in a casual sort of way.

But he found Blake with him in the passage.

Apparently giving up his object, whatever it was, Gussy went back to the junior room. Ten minutes later he sauntered away again.

This time he found Digby with him in the passage.

A little later Arthur Augustus went up to the study.

As it was not yet nearly time for prep, there was no ostensible reason why other fellows should come up to the study. But they did! Blake, Herries, and Digby all came up to that study together.

Having picked up a book as an excuse for having come up, Arthur Augustus went down again.

His friends went down with him.

He left the book in the junior room and strolled around to look at the notices on the board. Strange to relate, Blake and Herries and Dig found the notices on the board equally interesting, and looked at them as long as Gussy did!

It was all very well for loyal pals to enjoy a fellow's company, and stick to him. But really, Gussy's pals seemed to be sticking to him like leeches!

At this rate, it looked as if the swell of St. Jim's would never get a chance of slipping away unseen till prep—when it would be too late.

Which was distinctly irritating to a bold, bad japer, who had all his plans cut and dried—and only needed a spot of solitude for carrying them out.

In a secluded corner of the quad there was a bag of soot—hidden. Only Gussy knew anything about that bag of soot. Nobody else was going to know anything about it—till Silverson got it!

Gussy had schemed it out in quite a masterly manner.

Would, not a tap—a persistent tap—at Mr. Silverson's window cause that obnoxious gentleman to open his window to see who the dickens was tapping at it?

Certainly it would!

And when the window was opened, and the



“Ooooh! Oh! Ow!” spluttered Mr. Ratcliff, as the footer banged hard on his ear.
“What—who—”

Worm looked out, could anything be easier than to bang that bag of soot into the middle of his obnoxious features and scut?

Nothing could!

All that was needed was solitude and secrecy. And here were three fatheaded fellows, sticking to Gussy like glue—really as if they suspected that he was up to something, and wanted to stop him from getting on with it.

It was fearfully disconcerting.

“Bai Jove! I forgot that I was goin’ to speak to old Skimpole,” remarked Arthur Augustus, as he turned away from the notice-board. “I think I will cut up to his study.”

This seemed a safe opening to Gussy. Skimpole of the Shell was so portentous a bore that wild horses, as a rule, would not have dragged fellows into his study. Skimpole would talk to fellows about Determinism, and evolution, and the origin of species, and the descent of man, and such abstruse things—about as interesting as the east wind to normal fellows.

So Gussy did not doubt that this would shake off his too-devoted chums.

But it didn’t!

“Good!” said Blake. “Let’s!”

“Yes, let’s!” agreed Herries.

“Bai Jove! I’m afwaid you fellows would be wathah bored!” suggested Arthur Augustus. “Skimmy will be talkin’ about evolution.”

“We can stand it, if you can,” said Digby.

Arthur Augustus was starting for the staircase. But he paused. It was useless to go up to Skimpole’s study if the other three were going

up also. It seemed that they were not to be shaken off.

They drifted back to the junior day-room.

There fortune befriended the harassed Gussy. Levison called on Blake for a game of chess, and Kangaroo of the Shell invited Herries to have the gloves on.

Both of them gave Dig significant looks as they accepted those invitations. Dig winked.

He was quite capable of keeping an eye on Gussy, and seeing that he did not land himself in a fearful row by larking with Silverson.

Manners and Lowther had a dartboard fixed up at the end of the room. Tom Merry was still writing lines in his study.

“Take a hand, you two!” said Lowther, glancing round at Digby and D’Arcy.

“Dig is wathah clevah at darts!” said Arthur Augustus astutely. “Go it, Dig, old chap!”

Dig accepted a dart. Arthur Augustus strolled round the room, and strolled out. He was free at last.

Then there was a pattering step behind him.

“Where are you off to, Gussy?” asked Dig’s voice, over his shoulder.

“Oh cwikey!” breathed Arthur Augustus. His feelings were really deep as he gazed round at Dig. “Aren’t you goin’ to play darts, Dig?”

“Not unless you do, old fellow,” said Dig affably.

“I am not vewy keen on darts, Dig.”

“Same here,” agreed Dig.

Arthur Augustus breathed hard through his

noble nose. Time was passing—it was not long to prep now.

"Bai Jove! Did we leave the light on in the study?" ejaculated Arthur Augustus suddenly.

"I don't think so!" answered Dig.

"Pewwaps I had bettah wun up and see."

"Oh, all right!"

"You need not twouble to come up, Dig!"

"It isn't a trouble!" answered Dig.

And he went cheerfully up with Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. They looked into Study No. 6. The light was not on.

Then Arthur Augustus suddenly made up his mind. If he was going to get away at all, he had to resort to drastic measures. And he did!

He gave Dig a sudden shove in the small of the back that sent him tumbling into Study No. 6.

Dig sprawled and roared in surprise.

Arthur Augustus banged the door shut, and cut across to the staircase at top speed.

He went down the stairs two at a time, absolutely forgetting, in the stress of haste, the repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere!

He was down the stairs by the time the astonished and breathless Dig got out of the study! Downstairs, it was Gussy's intention to cut away at once to the Form-rooms and drop from a window. But as he came down the last three stairs with a bound, a hard, sharp voice fell on his ears.

"D'Arcy!"

"Oh cwumbs!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"Why are you racing about the staircases in that disorderly manner, D'Arcy?" demanded Mr. Silverson.

"Oh deah!"

"Are you aware, D'Arcy, that it is against the rules of the House, or are you not aware that it is against the rules of the House, for juniors to race about passages and staircases?" asked the master of the Fourth.

"Oh! Yaas!"

"Quite so," said Mr. Silverson. "I shall endeavour to impress upon you, D'Arcy, that you will not be allowed to treat the rules of the House with contempt. You will now— Why, what—"

Mr. Silverson broke off and stared up the staircase, as a second figure came hurtling down. It was Dig—in hot pursuit!

"Digby!" he rapped.

"Oh! Dig came to a sudden, dismayed halt. "Yes, sir!"

"How dare you!"

"Oh! I—I—" stammered Dig.

"Both of you," said Mr. Silverson sourly, "will go to your study! You will occupy the time till preparation in writing out lines from the *Æneid*! I shall expect a hundred lines from each of you! Go!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and Robert Arthur Digby went up together. Silverson frowned after them as they went. In Study No. 6 they looked at one another. Then they sat down to lines.

In that hide-out in the quad, a bag of soot remained concealed and unused. Arthur Augustus' performance was unavoidably postponed. There was—as yet—no soot for Silverson!

NOT A NICE HALF-HOLIDAY!

"SOCCER'S off—for me!" said Tom Merry bitterly.

"Rotten!" said Lowther.

"Beastly!" agreed Manners.

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"I've a jolly good mind," said Tom, with a glint in his eyes, "not to hand Railton the lines at all—and let him take me to the Head!"

That remark brought a cloud of anxiety to the brows of his two chums.

It was the following day—and a half-holiday. There was to be a pick-up game on Little Side—but Tom Merry was unable to take part in it. Overnight he had written a hundred and fifty of his five hundred lines. Three hundred and fifty remained to be written—a dismal occupation for a half-holiday, on a fine October day, when the other fellows were playing football.

"I wouldn't, Tom," said Manners. "Old Railton's all right really. It's that worm Silverson at the bottom of all the trouble."

"I know that! Railton ought to see fair play!"

"He doesn't know Silverson as we do, Tom," said Monty. "He must know that the man is down on you—but he doesn't know why."

"A fellow wants fair play!" granted Tom. "I've a jolly good mind—" He broke off.

"Sticking in my study at lines, instead of playing football—because that rat told lies yesterday—that's what it comes to."

"Railton doesn't know all that."

Grunt, from Tom.

Tom had always liked and respected his House-master, as all the School House fellows did! But he was feeling sore and savage now. He was, in fact, rather in danger of becoming—what Silverson was trying to make him out to be—a rebel against authority.

"That rotter's been on my track ever since he butted in here in Lathom's place," he said, "and we know why—"

"Railton doesn't," said Manners quietly, "and it wouldn't be much use telling him that your relation is trying to dish you for old Miss Fawcett's money. We know—but it's not the sort of thing a fellow can say."

"The rat let it out plainly enough that time we saw him at Laurel Villa, in the hols," said Tom. "But I know it wouldn't do for Railton. But I'm not standing much more of this."

"Look here, we'll stick in the study while you do the lines!" said Monty Lowther.

Tom Merry laughed.

"You fathead, think I'm going to let you waste a half-holiday sticking in the study? It's all right—I'm going to do the lines, and take them in to Railton before tea. You chaps get down to the footer."

And Tom repaired to his study, to sit down in solitude to the weary work.

His face was dark as Latin lines ran from his pen.

The task was weary enough, and seemed endless. The golden autumn sunlight gleamed in at the window and from the distant football field he could hear the echo of shouting voices.

But he had no chance of joining in the football; the pick-up game would be over before his task was finished.

It was finished at last; the five-hundredth line written—not, it was true, in Tom's usual careful style. Some of his lines looked more like Baggy Trimble's than his own, and all through the written sheets there were signs of haste. Tom did not care. He was angry and resentful, and in no mood to please Railton, and that was that.

Such as they were, the lines were done at last, and he gathered them up wearily, to take them down to his Housemaster's study. It was getting towards tea-time by then.

Mr. Linton was coming away from his study as Tom arrived at his Housemaster's door. He glanced at the papers in the junior's hand.

"What is this, Merry?" he asked.

"Lines for Mr. Railton, sir!"

"That is surely a very heavy imposition, Merry!" said the master of the Shell, glancing at the lines.

"Five hundred, sir!"

Mr. Linton paused. His eyes were very sharply on Tom's face, which was set in a rather obstinate expression, not at all usual to it.

"I am sorry to see this, Merry!" he said, very quietly. "You must have displeased your Housemaster very seriously to have been given so heavy an imposition as five hundred lines. What have you done?"

"Nothing, sir!" answered Tom.

Mr. Linton raised his eyebrows.

"Nothing?" he repeated.

"Nothing at all, sir!" said Tom stubbornly.

"Do you mean that your Housemaster has given you a heavy imposition for nothing, Merry?" asked the master of the Shell, in a deep voice.

"Yes, sir."

"How dare you make such a statement?" exclaimed Mr. Linton.

"You asked me, sir!"

Mr. Linton looked at him long and hard; and without saying anything further, walked on. But he frowned as he went, and Tom was well aware that he was angry. In his present mood he cared nothing!

He tapped at his Housemaster's door and entered.

Mr. Railton had just put down the telephone receiver. He glanced round at Tom Merry.

"My lines, sir!" said Tom.

"Very good! You may place them on the table, Merry," said Mr. Railton. He did not seem to notice the clouded look on the junior's face, and his manner was as kind as usual. "As you are here, Merry, I shall be glad if you will take a message for me."

"Yes, sir!"

"Dr. Holmes has just asked me to call at his house," said Mr. Railton, "and I am expecting Mr. Silverson here. Please find him, and tell him that I am called away by the Head, and that I shall be glad if he will see me after tea instead. I may be with the Head some time."

Tom set his lips.

He did not want to see James Silverson, or to speak to him. It was hardly practicable to refuse, however.

He said nothing, and Mr. Railton, who was evidently in haste to answer that call from the headmaster, left the study at once.

Tom grunted, and laid his lines on the table. When he went out of the study, Mr. Railton was already out of sight.

He made a step in the direction of Mr. Silverson's study—and paused. That study was only a few steps from Railton's, and even if he was in haste, he did not see why Railton could not have stepped to it and given that message himself.

Then it occurred to him that Silverson was probably not in his study, and that Mr. Railton knew it. It was probable that he was out of the House.

He stood hesitating.

He did not want to speak to Silverson. And he made up his mind that he was not going to. The message had to be taken, but some other fellow could take it. Tom turned his back on Masters' Studies, and went out of the House.

GUSSY GETS GOING.

"SEEN a worm wriggling anywhere?"

"Eh?"

Tom Merry addressed that question to Blake & Co. in the quad. Those four youths, looking merry and bright after the pick-up, were discussing the game, when the captain of the Shell came out of the House.

"I mean your jolly old beak," said Tom. "Railton's given me a message for the rat, and I don't want to see him."

"I quite undahstand your feelin's in that respect, Tom Mewwy," said Arthur Augustus. "Hand it ovah to me, dear boy."

"You don't mind?" asked Tom.

"Not at all, old bean!"

"You see, I want to steer clear of the rat!" said Tom. "I can't speak civilly to him, and it's no good landing in another row."

"No good at all!" agreed Blake. "You've been in enough rows this term already, old bean! Done your lines?"

"Yes; Railton gave me the message when I took them in!" grunted Tom. "If you'll carry it, Gussy, old man—here it is—Railton is expecting the rat in his study before tea; but he's called away to see the Head—so will the rotten worm wriggle into his study after tea instead of before!"

"Is Gussy to put it in those words?" asked Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! I think I will put it a bit more politely than that, Tom Mewwy, old man!" chuckled Arthur Augustus. "I don't want the wat to give me six on my twousahs!"

"I believe Silverson's gone out!" said Herries. "I saw him trotting round with old Selby."

"Well, he will be back before tea, as he's got to go to Railton's study," said Tom. "I'll leave it to you, Gussy!"

"Wight as wain, old thing!"

Tom Merry walked away to the bike-shed. After a stuffy afternoon in his study, he wanted a "blow"—and there was nothing like a bike ride to blow away the cobwebs, and restore good temper. Manners and Lowther were still in the changing-room. Tom wheeled out his machine, and rode away up Rylcombe Lane, trying to dismiss grievances, and injustice, and dislike from his mind—which healthy exercise and fresh air very soon enabled him to do.

Meanwhile, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy went into the House to see whether Silverson was in, and if so, to deliver Railton's message. He knocked at Silverson's door. Evidently, the master of the Fourth had gone out, for the door was locked, and there was no answer from within.

Arthur Augustus decided to walk down to the gates, and catch him as he came in, to deliver that message.

But as he walked elegantly across the quadrangle, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy slowed down, as new ideas began to work in his nable brain.

"Bai Jove!" he murmured.

His eyes gleamed behind his eyeglass.

Last evening his watchful chums had prevented him from carrying on his campaign. The bag of soot was still in its hidden corner unacquainted, so far, with his Form-master's head.

Arthur Augustus turned his footsteps in that direction.

"Bai Jove!" he repeated.

Was this his opportunity.

Railton was gone to the Head. That message

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to Silverson meant that he would not be returning to his study before tea.

The coast would be clear, so far as Railton was concerned.

Silverson—unless he received that message—would go to the study before tea, in Railton's absence.

Suppose that message was delayed till Silverson had gone to the study?

As Silverson was out of gates, it would be easy enough for a fellow to miss him—till he had been to Railton's study.

Not receiving that message in time, certainly he would go to the Housemaster's study! And if a bag of soot was waiting for him there—

Arthur Augustus grinned.

This looked good to Gussy.

Undoubtedly it was rather a serious matter to set a booby-trap in a master's study—especially a Housemaster's.

But nobody would know who had done it.

Not even Blake & Co. knew anything about the soot. Nobody knew but Tom Merry, who had happened to see Gussy collecting it the previous day. Tom certainly would say nothing about it, even to his friends.

It was going to be an absolute mystery—and if Silverson wanted to find out who had done it, he had all the House to choose from.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus for the third time.

It was quite likely that Blake & Co. would keep an eye on him again that evening as they had done before. They seemed, somehow, to suspect that Gussy was up to something—Gussy did not know why. But at the present moment no pally eye was on him.

Blake, Herries, and Dig were not even in sight.

A few minutes later Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was walking into the School House, with a bag under his arm. There was nothing suspicious about that bag—it might have contained a supply from the tuckshop for tea; though, as it happened, it did not.

An eyeglass gleamed down masters' passage. No one was in sight there. Many of the masters had gone out in the fine weather—if any were in their studies, their doors were shut.

Arthur Augustus whipped swiftly into Mr. Railton's study.

Once inside, he was safe from observation.

But he wasted no time. Railton would not be coming back—but Silverson, as he had not had the message, might come in any time.

Gussy's first step was to open the study window—as a line of retreat. Then he placed a chair inside the study door to stand on.

The door was placed a few inches ajar. On top of it Arthur Augustus lodged a cushion taken from the seat of Railton's armchair—a large flat cushion.

That was the foundation of his booby-trap.

On that foundation he carefully emptied the contents of the bag of soot.

Very carefully indeed did Gussy ladle out that soot. He did not want to be in a sooty state when he had finished. In a few minutes there was a small mountain of soot piled on that cushion over the door.

Then Gussy stepped down from the chair and replaced it against the study wall.

All was ready for Silverson now.

As soon as that door was pushed open from outside, down would come the soot-laden cushion—whop!

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Arthur Augustus chuckled.

He rolled up the empty bag as small as possible and squeezed it under his waistcoat. He could not, of course, get out of the study again by the door. But the window was at his service.

For several minutes he stood by the window, waiting till the coast was clear. Gussy was very cautious. He realised that he needed to be after what he had done.

Not till he was sure that he would not be observed did Arthur Augustus drop nimbly from that window and stroll away.

A few minutes later the empty bag was dropped in a quiet corner. Then Arthur Augustus, with a smiling face, walked over to the New House.

It was just as well to be safe off the scene when Silverson got the soot—making assurance doubly sure, as it were. Arthur Augustus decided to pay a call on his friendly foes, Figgins & Co. of the New House—for an hour or so.

Figgins & Co. were sitting down to tea in their study in the New House when there was a tap at the door and an eyeglass gleamed in.

"Hallo, old image!" said Figgins genially. "Come over to this House for a bumping?"

"Not at all, deah boy! Pax!" said Arthur Augustus. "I have looked in to scwounge a tea, if you fellows have anythin' goin'."

"Lucky you got in before Fatty started, then!" grinned Figgins. "Trickle in, old tulip."

"Run out of grub in your study over the way?" asked Fatty Wynn sympathetically. "All right—we've got lots."

Kerr looked very keenly at the swell of St. Jim's.

"What have you been up to?" he asked.

"Weally, Kerr—"

"If it's anything with soot in it, you'd better let me give you a brush down!" said the Scottish junior, grinning.

Arthur Augustus started.

"Bai Jove! Have I got spots on me, Kerr? I was feahfully careful handlin' that soot! I should be vewy glad of a brush down, deah boy."

"What on earth have you been doing with soot?" asked Figgins.

"If you don't mind, Figgay, deah boy, I would wathah not answah that question," said Arthur Augustus. "I know you fellows can be twusted, of course—still, I should pwefer nobody at all to know that I have been doin' anythin' with soot!"

"Oh crikey!" said Figgins.

And Arthur Augustus, having been brushed, sat down to tea with Figgins & Co.—astutely keeping it quite dark that he had been doing anything at all with soot!

NOT FOR SILVERSON!

"THAT ass!" said Blake.

Blake, Herries, and Dig were looking round for Arthur Augustus. It was getting-near time for tea in Study No. 6.

They did not see anything of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy—not thinking of looking for him in Figgy's study in the New House.

But they saw Mr. Silverson coming in at the gates with Mr. Selby, the master of the Third, after his walk.

Silverson was coming in in time to call at the Housemaster's study before tea. And Tom Merry had gone out on his bike, and Arthur Augustus seemed to have disappeared, for which reason

Blake remarked "That ass!" as he saw the master of the Fourth coming in.

"There's Silverson!" he said. "That ass ought to be waiting for him to hand him Railton's message."

"Forgotten, most likely," said Dig.

"Let him rip, and be blowed to him!" suggested Herries.

"Fathead!" said Blake. "A pretty row Tom would get into if that message wasn't delivered. Silverson might kick his heels an hour in the study waiting if he isn't tipped."

"Let him—and blow him!" said Herries.

"I'd let him, and blow him, only poor old Tommy's been in rows enough this term," said Blake. "Railton would think he hadn't delivered that message on purpose just to rag Silverson."

"Oh! I suppose he would!" said Herries.

"Of course he would," grunted Blake. "Silverson could sit in Railton's study and wait till his hair turned grey, for all I care—but it would mean another row for Tom if he did. That howling ass Gussy ought not to have forgotten. If we didn't happen to have spotted Silverson coming in, all the fat would be in the fire!"

"Better tell him!" said Dig.

Jack Blake cut across to intercept Mr. Silverson as he walked over to the School House with Selby.

"If you please, sir—" said Blake.

Silverson gave him a sour glance.

"Well, what is it, Blake?" he rapped.

"A message from Mr. Railton, sir!" said Blake.

"Oh! You may tell me, then!"

"Mr. Railton gave it to Tom Merry, sir, but—as he's gone out he left it with us!" explained Blake. "Mr. Railton has been called away to the Head's house, and will you please go to his study after tea instead of before tea."

"Oh, very well!" said Mr. Silverson.

And he walked on to the House with Mr. Selby. Blake rejoined his friends, little dreaming of what the result of his thoughtful action was to be.

Certainly that message had to be delivered. Tom Merry had entrusted it to Arthur Augustus and Arthur Augustus apparently had forgotten all about it. Naturally, Blake had not the faintest idea that Arthur Augustus had merely postponed the delivery of that message until after Silverson had walked into a sooty booby-trap. Blake knew nothing about the soot, and nothing about the booby-trap, and never dreamed of what was awaiting the next comer in the Housemaster's study.

He had saved Tom from another complaint from Silverson and another row with his Housemaster, and now he dismissed the matter from his mind, all being well, so far as he could see.

The three chums resumed looking for Arthur Augustus; and, failing to find him, concluded that he had gone off to tea in some other study without mentioning the fact—as, indeed, he had.

So they repaired to Study No. 6 for their own tea. Mr. Silverson in the meantime, had gone to Common-room in the School House for tea with the other masters.

Thus it happened that when Mr. Railton, after leaving the Head's house, walked back to the School House, his study in that House was exactly as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had left it.

Arthur Augustus—artfully postponing that message to Silverson till it was too late to save him from the booby-trap—was at tea with Figgins & Co. in the New House. Mr. Silverson,

having received the message from Blake, was at tea in Common-room. And Mr. Railton, entering the School House, walked to his study, never dreaming for a moment what awaited him there.

Mr. Linton stepped out of his study as the Housemaster appeared in the passage.

"One moment, Mr. Railton!" he said.

Railton stopped just outside his study door.

"Yes, Mr. Linton," he answered.

"I wished to speak to you on the subject of Merry, of my Form," said the master of the Shell. "I saw him this afternoon coming to your study with an imposition—a very heavy imposition. I am somewhat troubled in my mind about that boy."

"I quite understand you, Mr. Linton," said the Housemaster, with a nod. "Merry seems to have changed a good deal this term, and for the worse."

"The boy seems to be feeling a sense of injustice, sir," said Mr. Linton. "Such an impression on his mind is, of course, a mistaken one."

"Quite!" said Mr. Railton, with emphasis.

"Nevertheless, sir," said the master of the Shell, "I cannot be blind to the fact that the new member of the staff here appears to entertain a strong—a very strong—prejudice against Merry, and only yesterday he reported an absolutely trivial matter to me—some absurd trifle about soot having been spilt in Merry's study."

He paused a moment.

Railton's face was rather grim.

"I simply desired to inquire, sir," said Mr. Linton, with dignity, "whether that heavy imposition was awarded to Merry on account of some complaint from Mr. Silverson?"

"No, sir," answered Mr. Railton. "Merry was caned for having kicked a football at Mr. Ratcliff—perhaps accidentally. He was given five hundred lines for having given me an insolent answer."

"Oh!" said Mr. Linton, rather taken aback.

"Mr. Silverson was not present, and probably does not know that Merry was given an imposition at all," added Mr. Railton. "He is not concerned in the matter in any way."

"Very well, sir; that is all I wished to ask," said Mr. Linton.

Railton nodded, and turned to his study door.

It was ajar, and he pushed it open and stepped in.

Mr. Linton, turning back to his study, turned back again at the sound of a crash and a suffocated yell.

"What—" he ejaculated

Linton's eyes almost popped from his face.

The figure in the Housemaster's doorway was scarcely recognisable as that of Mr. Railton. It looked more like a chimney-sweep.

The flat cushion, laden with soot, had descended fairly on Railton's head as he stepped into his study!

That mountain of soot, piled on the cushion, landed on the Housemaster in a black, smothering cloud.

It was a most successful booby-trap, so far as that went. The victim had been caught right in it; he had got the full benefit of the soot. It happened to be the wrong victim, otherwise everything went like clockwork.

"Oooooogh!" spluttered Mr. Railton wildly.

He staggered in the doorway, scattering soot in clouds. Soot clothed him from head to foot like a garment.

His mortar-board was loaded with it. It was

all over his face, all over him from top to toe. His features had disappeared under a mask of soot; it was in his ears, in his nose, in his mouth! He stood like a staggering pillar of soot!

"Good heavens!" gasped Mr. Linton, aghast. "Gurrgh!" came a horrible gurgle from the midst of the pillar of soot. "Oh! What—Urrgh! Grooogh!"

"Mr. Railton—"
"Oooooooogh!"

Mr. Railton gouged soot from his eyes. He glared round him with a black and sooty glare. Linton stared at him, transfixed with horror. Under the blackness of the soot, the House-master's face was red with rage.

"Urrgh! Who has done this? Gurrgh!" gasped Mr. Railton. "What young rascal—Ooogh!"

Soot scattered far and wide. Mr. Linton backed away from it. From the Common-room three or four masters came hurrying, startled by the unusual sounds echoing and re-echoing in those usually quiet precincts.

They gazed at the sooty Housemaster in horror. "Good gracious!" exclaimed Mr. Selby.

"Mon cher Railton—" ejaculated Monsieur Morny.

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Mr. Silverson. "Who has done this? Who can have done this? Who—"

"Urrrgh!" gurgled Mr. Railton, still gouging soot. "Urrgh!"

A sudden gleam shot into James Silverson's eyes as he stared at him.

He guessed. He had no doubt. Soot scraped out of Tom Merry's study chimney; Baggy Trimble sooted all over by falling in soot on his study floor; and now a sooty booby-trap in the Housemaster's study!

"Merry!" exclaimed Mr. Silverson.

Mr. Linton's eyes shot a glance at him.

"Merry?" he repeated. "Why do you suggest that—"

He broke off as he remembered Trimble of the Fourth the previous day.

Silverson's eyes glinted. Tom Merry had played his game for him—he had no doubt about that.

"I suggest," said Mr. Silverson grimly, "that you should inquire of Merry, of your Form, sir, what he was doing with soot yesterday—why he had so much soot in his study that a Fourth Form boy could not enter that study without being smothered by it."

Mr. Linton made no answer.

"Merry!" breathed Mr. Railton.

He hurried away, leaving a black trail of soot. The other masters were left in an excited buzz.

TOM MERRY IS WANTED!

"OH, here you are, old bean!" said Monty Lowther.

"Waiting for you," said Manners.

The two Shell fellows were at the bike-shed when Tom Merry wheeled his machine in. Tom's face was bright and cheery after his spin. A run on the bike, up hill and down dale, in the fresh autumn air had had the effect of dispelling gloom, and Tom came in cheerfully, thinking of tea.

"Haven't you fellows had tea?" he asked.

"No. Waited for you, fathead!"

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"Sorry I'm late! I had to get the taste of those lines out of my mouth!" said Tom, smiling. "Come on! I'm as hungry as a hunter!"

The three Shell fellows walked away to the House. Levison of the Fourth met them as they came in, and he gave Tom rather an odd look.

"You fellows heard?" he asked.

"What, and which?" asked Tom Merry. "I've only just come in on my bike. Anything happened?"

"Yes, just a few!" said Levison. "Some benighted idiot fixed up a booby-trap in Railton's study—"

"Railton's!" exclaimed Manners. "What silly ass wants to play tricks on old Railton?"

"Somebody he's whopped, I should imagine!" said Levison, rather dryly.

Tom Merry started, and gave him a sharp look. "Don't be a silly ass, Levison!" he snapped. "I've had nothing to do with it, if that's what you mean."

"I'm glad you haven't, then! There's going to be a fearful row!" said Levison. "It's the sack for somebody!"

"Not for me," said Tom, with a curl of the lip. "I haven't been near Railton's study since I took him my lines this afternoon, and Railton was there then. He was just cutting off to see the Head."

"Oh!" said Levison. "Well, it was somebody. That goat Trimble would never have the nerve to—"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Trimble? Not likely! What on earth makes you think of poor old Baggy?"

"Well, I've heard that he was messing about with soot yesterday—"

"Soot?" repeated Tom, with a start.

"Yes. He was seen pretty black, and I've heard that Silverson jawed him for it. Still, it can't have been Baggy; he hasn't the nerve."

"Soot?" said Tom again. "Sure there was soot?"

Levison laughed.

"I saw Railton cutting off to a bath-room," he answered. "He was black as a nigger from head to foot."

"Oh!" gasped Tom.

His chums, as well as Levison, looked at Tom very curiously now.

"Tom, old man!" breathed Lowther. "You can't have been such an ass—such a silly fool—"

"Tom—" muttered Manners.

"Don't be idiotic!" grunted Tom. "Do you think I'm the sort of blithering goat to rig up a booby-trap with soot for a Housemaster?"

"You—you seemed to know something about the soot when Levison said—"

"Fathead!" said Tom.

Levison gave Tom Merry a very hard look and walked away. Tom glanced at his chums with a knitted brow.

"Are you idiots enough to think—" he began.

"No!" said Manners, with a deep breath.

"But—but, Tom, old man, somebody had been spilling soot in our study yesterday while we were out—and—and you went in before we did."

"It was not I!" said Tom.

"No, no; but—"

"Better say nothing about that," said Tom quietly. "If some mad ass has been getting Railton with soot, the less said about soot the better. I can't make this out—if it had been Silverson—"

"Silverson?" said Manners. "Did you—"

"Don't be an ass! Let's get in to tea."

Tom Merry's face was worried as he went into the School House with his friends.

He had almost forgotten Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's collection of soot in Study No 10. Nothing after all had happened to Silverson, and it looked as if Gussy had changed his mind about that sooty stunt or, at all events, that he had had no opportunity of carrying on with it.

If this had happened to Silverson, Tom, of course, would have known what to think. But it had happened to Railton.

Gussy could not be supposed to entertain hostile designs against Railton. It could not have been Gussy—though the mention of soot, in the circumstances, had startled Tom considerably. Surely it could not have been Gussy! Why should Gussy do anything of the kind?

Then a sudden dismaying thought occurred to Tom.

Silverson generally locked his study door when he went out—perhaps because he was tired of gum in his armchair.

If Gussy had planned a booby-trap for Silverson, he could not lay it in the Worm's own study.

Was it possible that even the egregious Gussy had been ass enough to lay it for him in another study?

But why should he suppose that Silverson was going to that study? The message Tom had handed over to him to deliver would keep Silverson away, though, as it happened, he would have been going there otherwise.

It was a puzzle to Tom—but, in the circumstances, it was clear that the less said about Gussy's collection of soot, the better.

Suspicion, it was certain, would turn on any fellow known to have been handling soot recently. And it was an awfully serious matter—it was fairly certain that the perpetrator would be sacked if discovered.

"You fellows heard?"

Blake, Herries, and Dig met the Terrible Three as they went towards the stairs.

"Just heard," answered Tom. "Did Railton get it bad?"

"Smothered, from what I hear!" answered Blake. "You don't know anything about it, I hope?"

"Don't be an ass!"

"I've heard that your name is being buzzed about among the beaks!" said Herries.

"If it is, I can guess who started it!" said Tom contemptuously. "But Silverson won't get any change out of this, as I had nothing to do with it."

"Thank goodness you didn't!" said Dig. "It's the long jump for somebody. Did you have any soot about your study yesterday?"

"Did I?" said Tom. "Why?"

"Racke's been saying that he saw it spilt all over your study."

Tom Merry compressed his lips. He remembered Aubrey Racke having looked into the sooty study the day before. It was like Aubrey to retail what he had seen, in view of what had happened to Railton. Still, even Racke would not go sneaking to the masters.

"Merry!" Knox of the Sixth came hurrying up to the group of juniors at the foot of the staircase. "I've been looking for you! Where have you been?"

"Out on my bike," answered Tom.

"Keeping out of the way, what?" asked Knox, with a sneer.

"Not in the least!"

"Well, now you've condescended to come in, go to Railton's study!" said the bully of the Sixth. "I dare say you can guess what you're wanted for."

"I'm not good at riddles!"

Knox grinned.

"I fancy you know the answer to that one, all the same!" he said. "Cut off to Railton's study. He's waiting for you."

"Is Silverson there?" asked Tom bitterly.

"Silverson!" Knox stared. "No! Your own beak is! Cut off!"

Tom Merry quietly walked away to his House-master's study, leaving Manners and Lowther exchanging an eloquent look. Tom had said that he had had nothing to do with it; and they believed him. But their hearts were heavy.

FOUND GUILTY!

MR. RAILTON had washed off the soot. He had changed. He was his usual self when

Tom Merry entered his study—except that his face was set as hard as iron and every trace of kindness had gone from it.

Mr. Linton stood by the window, his face troubled and harassed.

Tom, glancing at both of them, could read their expressions easily enough. He was condemned, even before he had been judged. He could read that at the first glance.

But the judgment had yet to come, all the same. He was not dealing with Silverson now, but with two masters who, shocked and incensed as they were by what had happened, had no desire but to elucidate the truth, and see strict justice done.

Tom was quite cool and self-possessed. Silverson would put this on him, if he could. He knew that. But as he had not done it, that seemed

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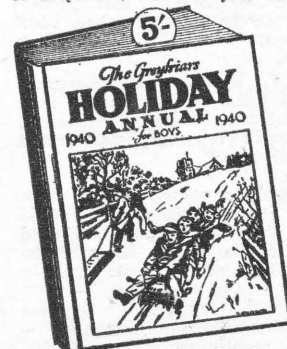
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rather an impossible task, even for the unscrupulous and malignant Worm.

"You sent for me, sir?" he asked quietly.

"No doubt you know why!" said Mr. Railton grimly.

"Not at all, sir!"

"You are aware of what has happened in this study?"

"I heard about it a few minutes ago."

"Do you deny any previous knowledge of it, Merry?"

"Certainly, sir."

"You deny," said Mr. Railton, in a deeper voice, "that you placed a cushion loaded with soot over my study door, to fall upon me as I entered?"

"Yes, sir!" said Tom calmly.

"When you brought your lines here this afternoon, Merry, I had to leave the study somewhat hurriedly, having received a call from the headmaster. How long did you remain after I was gone?"

"I did not remain at all, sir. Only so long as it took me to place my lines on your table. Then I went out."

"You did not remain here to fix up what is called, I think, a booby-trap, and leave by the window?"

"No, sir!"

"Some boy did!" said Mr. Railton. "The window was found open, although I had left it shut. You deny all this, Merry?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Very well!" said Mr. Railton, between his set lips. "We shall see! If you have been guilty of this act, Merry—an act of malicious revenge for the punishment you received yesterday—you will be expelled from this school."

"I hope Mr. Silverson will not have the pleasure of seeing me expelled from St. Jim's, sir!" said Tom Merry, in a clear, steady voice.

"Merry!" exclaimed Mr. Linton, speaking for the first time.

Tom's eyes turned on him.

"I do not mean to speak disrespectfully, sir," he said. "But I know that this accusation comes from Mr. Silverson. There is not a word of truth in it—but I am sure that it comes from him."

"It does not come from him," said Mr. Railton. "Mr. Silverson, it is true, suggested that you should be questioned. That is all."

"He would!" said Tom bitterly. "And why should Mr. Silverson suggest that I should be questioned, any more than any other fellow in the House?"

"For a very good reason, Merry! Mr. Silverson happened to be aware that you had been handling soot yesterday."

Tom Merry started.

"Yesterday," said Mr. Railton, "Mr. Silverson brought a boy of his Form to Mr. Linton in a disgraceful state of dirtiness. That boy explained that he had fallen over in your study, and so had become smothered with soot."

"Oh!" gasped Tom.

"Mr. Silverson merely supposed at the time that your study was in a slovenly state," said the Housemaster. "And Mr. Linton attached so little importance to the matter than he declined to take any official notice of it."

Tom said nothing.

"On seeing the state I was in, after the soot had fallen on me, Mr. Silverson naturally remembered this, and mentioned it," said Mr.

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Baggy Trimble spluttered and gasped as his podgy scallawag!" e

Railton. "Mr Silverson is not connected with the matter in any other way whatever."

Tom stood silent.

"Mr. Linton undoubtedly would have remembered the incident, even had not Mr. Silverson mentioned it," added the Housemaster.

"Undoubtedly," said Mr. Linton. "I did not think of it at the moment, but undoubtedly I should have done so."

"Do you deny, Merry, that your study was in a sooty condition yesterday?" asked Mr. Railton. "If so, I will send for Trimble."

"I don't deny what's true, sir," said Tom steadily. "There was a lot of soot spilt in my study yesterday afternoon, and Trimble of the Fourth tumbled over in it."

"You admit this?"

"Certainly I do! It is true!"

"Very well," said Mr. Railton. "You will now explain how you came to have a quantity of soot in your study, Merry—soot having since been used in this study. The soot, I presume, was obtained from your study chimney?"

"Yes, sir."

"And some, I presume, was spilt in extracting it from the chimney?"

"I suppose so, sir, as it was spilt."

"You suppose so?" repeated Mr. Railton. "You are aware, I presume, whether you spilt any or not?"

"I did not spill any," said Tom coolly. "I



dy features were rubbed in soot. "There, you fat" exclaimed Tom.

never touched soot at all, either yesterday or to-day."

"Merry!" murmured Mr. Linton.

"I can only tell the truth, sir," said Tom. "It is not my fault, I suppose, if some fellow goes to my study and rakes soot out of the chimney?"

Both masters looked fixedly at Tom Merry.

"You share that study with two other boys—Manners and Lowther?" said Mr. Railton. "Do you mean that one of these boys raked the soot from the chimney, and not you?"

"No, sir; I know they did not. Both of them were punting a footer in the quad when I went up, after seeing you here, and cleaned up the soot before they came in."

Mr. Railton drew a deep breath.

"Are you seriously stating, Merry, that a boy who did not belong to your study went there and raked soot from the chimney?" he asked.

"It is not for me to make such a statement, sir," said Tom, with perfect coolness. "I am not a Housemaster, or a Form-master, and it is not for me to find out what happened. I say that I never raked any soot from my study chimney, and that I have not touched soot at all."

Railton breathed harder.

"If you did not do this, Merry, some other boy did!" he barked.

"I know that, of course, sir."

"Can you give me the name of any boy who went to your study, apart from Trimble, who fell in the soot?"

"If I could, sir, I should not," said Tom. "This is the first time you have ever asked a boy of this House to give information against another."

Mr. Railton's face almost flamed.

"Merry," exclaimed Mr. Linton, as angry as the Housemaster, "you will do yourself no good by insolence at such a moment as this."

"I don't mean to be insolent, sir," answered Tom. "I don't know who laid this booby-trap in Mr. Railton's study. But if I did know, I could not give his name."

"I am asking you no such thing," said Mr. Railton, his voice almost trembling with anger. "I am asking you who raked the soot from your study chimney, if you did not."

"I cannot tell you, sir."

"Do you mean that you do not know, Merry?" asked Mr. Linton, in a gentle voice. "You must be aware, my boy, that your whole future may hinge upon this matter. If you have been guilty of this outrage, you will be expelled. Answer frankly. Do you, or do you not know?"

"Yes, sir, I do know," said Tom, after a pause. "It was not Manners or Lowther. It was not a Shell fellow at all. I can say that much."

"It was not, I presume, Trimble?"

"No, sir."

"But you know who it was?"

"Yes, sir, I know who it was," said Tom, after another pause. "And I know, too, that he would never have dreamed of playing this rotten trick on Mr. Railton. He is the very last fellow in the House to do such a thing."

"What was done in this study, Merry, was done by the boy who obtained soot from a study chimney for the purpose," said Mr. Railton harshly. "On that point there can be no possible doubt."

"None whatever!" said Mr. Linton.

Tom was silent.

It looked like it—he could see that. Yet he knew that Arthur Augustus would never have done this, unless, indeed, poor old Gussy had made some extraordinary and incomprehensible mistake. Gussy had meant that soot for Silverson. Gussy would not knowingly have played such a trick on Railton to save his noble life. But there was no doubt that the guilt was going to be placed on the shoulders of the fellow who had collected the soot. Tom Merry was not going to name that fellow.

"So it comes to this," said Mr. Railton at last. "The soot that was used here came from your study, Merry. That is not denied. Your defence is that some unknown boy, whom you decline to name, obtained the soot from your study, which he might as easily have obtained from his own. Do you imagine for one moment that such a defence will carry conviction?"

"I hope so, sir," said Tom. "Last term you would not have believed that I would have done a thing like this."

"Last term, Merry, you were not disrespectful, disobedient, insolent, and mutinous," said Mr. Railton grimly.

"And last term," said Tom, his eyes flashing, "Mr. Silverson was not here."

"I forbid you to mention Mr. Silverson again, Merry! Have you nothing else to say?"

"No, sir, except that I never even knew what

had happened here till I came in a quarter of an hour ago."

"I cannot believe that," said Mr. Railton icily. "An outrage has taken place in this room with soot which, it is acknowledged, was taken from your study. You have said that Manners and Lowther had nothing to do with it, and that, at least, I believe. But that you had nothing to do with it I do not know, and cannot believe for one moment. If you have nothing further to say, Merry, my inquiry ends here, and nothing remains but for you to appear before your headmaster to receive your sentence of expulsion."

Tom Merry drew a deep breath.

"Merry," said Mr. Linton, "if you can say anything further—"

Tom's eyes burned.

"I've nothing to say, sir, except that if Mr. Railton chooses to let a fellow of this House be expelled for nothing, I cannot help it. I could knock the whole thing to pieces by mentioning one name, but I will not mention it. I would be expelled a hundred times over before I would be a sneak and an informer. That is all I have to say, sir."

"It is more than enough," said Mr. Railton. "Go to your study, Merry, and remain there till you are sent for, to be taken to Dr. Holmes."

"Very well, sir!"

Tom Merry turned on his heel, and walked out of the study, his head erect.

THE RIGHT THING!

"SOOT!" said Arthur Augustus. "Ha, ha!" Blake, Herries, and Dig looked at him.

Arthur Augustus had left the New House at last. It was time, Gussy thought, to deliver that message to Silverson. He had undertaken to deliver that message, and so, of course, he was going to deliver it. It was merely delayed in transit—delayed till Silverson had walked into the booby-trap. By this time Gussy was sure that it must have happened. He had allowed a wide margin to make sure. Now he was cheerily on his way back to his own House to see Silverson, when his comrades met him in the quad.

They were talking of soot, and Gussy caught the word soot, and chuckled. Most fellows of the School House were talking of soot about that time. Soot was the chief topic. And at the mention of that word Arthur Augustus had no doubt that his great stunt had come off.

Wherefore did the great Gussy chuckle gleefully.

"Did you fellows say soot?" chortled Gussy.

"Yes, ass!" grunted Blake. "Nothing to gurgle about. It's pretty serious for a beak to get a cargo of soot on his napper."

"Serve him wight!" said Arthur Augustus.

"What!" howled the three together.

The whole House was indignant at that ghastly jape played on its Housemaster. So Gussy's remark was unexpected and surprising.

"Serve him jolly well wight!" declared Arthur Augustus. "If a blightah asks for things, he cannot be surprised at gettin' them! You are suah that he has got the soot?"

"Yes, ass!"

"Did you see him?" grinned Arthur Augustus.

"A dozen fellows saw him—smothered from top to toe—"

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"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Think that's funny?" howled Herries.

"Yaas, wathah! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, you image!" said Blake. Then, as he gazed at the chortling Gussy, a sudden dreadful suspicion smote him. "Gussy! You mad ass! You hadn't anything to do with it, had you?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You had!" shrieked Dig.

"Now that it is all ovah, deah boys, and he has had the soot, I don't mind tellin' you!" said Arthur Augustus. "He would have had it last night if I had been able to get out of the House!"

"You potty chump!" gasped Blake. "So that was it?"

"That was it, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus complacently. "He had it comin'! You fellows stopped me last night, playin' the goat! So I wiggid it up ovah that study door for him to-day!"

"You—you—you did!" gurgled Herries.

"Yaas, wathah! You see, I knew I should twap him all wight!" explained Arthur Augustus. "You wemembah that message Tom Mewwy had fwom Wailton to Silvahson? I told him I would give it to Silvahson. I'm goin' to, of course; but I haven't given it to him yet."

"What?"

"So instead of puttin' off his call on Wailton tjl aftah tea, the wottah was goin' to Wailton's studay befoah tea, as awwanged!" said Arthur Augustus, with a blissful grin. "Now I am goin' to hand on the jollay old message—aftah he's get the soot, see?"

They gazed at him in horror.

"You—you—you rigged up that booby-trap in Railton's study!" moaned Blake, like a fellow in a horrid dream.

"Keep it dark, old chap! Weally, I was not goin' to tell anybody at all, even you chaps! But keep it feahfully dark."

"You—you—you—" Blake seemed hardly able to articulate. "You—you thought Silverson would be going to that study!"

"Yaas, of course, as he hadn't had Wailton's message."

"But he had!" shrieked Blake.

"Wubbish! Tom Mewwy wouldn't speak to the bwute, and I jollay well know that I haven't given him the message, yet!"

"But I have!" yelled Blake.

Arthur Augustus jumped clear of the quad.

"You have?" he gasped.

"Yes, you ass! He had to have the message, and as you'd forgotten—anyhow, you weren't about when he came in, I told him."

"You uttah ass!"

"Think I could let Tom Merry get into a row over it because you didn't give the message?" hooted Blake.

"I was goin' to give it later—"

"Oh, you chump!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Oh, you dangerous maniac!"

"I wufuse to be called a dangewous maniac, Blake! I had it all cut and dwid, as wight as wain, and you should not have barged in!" said Arthur Augustus severely. "However, it does not seem to mattah, aftah all, as Silvahson went to the studay all the same, and got the soot—"

"He didn't!" shrieked Herries.

"Bai Jove! You fellows said that he got the soot, smotherin' all ovah him! What do you mean?" demanded Arthur Augustus warmly.

"Silverson never got it!" groaned Blake. "I can see now that you meant it for Silverson!"

But of all the idiots—to fix it up in Railton's study—”

“I could not fix it up in the wat's own studay, Blake, as he keeps his door locked. It was all wight, if he went to Wailton's study.”

“But he didn't!” moaned Blake.

“Then who—”

“Railton!”

Arthur Augustus bounded.

“Wailton!” he ejaculated.

“Yes, Railton!”

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's eyeglass dropped from a bulging eye. He gazed at his friends, horror-stricken.

“Wailton!” he repeated feebly. “Oh cwikey! Wailton! Did—did you say that old Wailton got it? Oh cwumbs!”

“Silverson never went to the study after he got the message from me! It stuck there till Railton went back!” groaned Blake. “Oh, you ass—you dummy—you chump—you footling footler!”

“Weally, Blake—”

“You burbling blitherer—”

“Weally, Hewwies—”

“We shall have to keep this fearfully dark,” said Digby, his face quite pale. “No good Gussy explaining that he meant it for another beak—we've got to keep it dark—awfully dark.”

“Oh cwumbs! I am feahfully sowwy that Wailton got it—”

“You'll be sorrer if he spots you!” hissed Blake.

Arthur Augustus shook his noble head.

“Imposs, deah boy! I wespect Wailton vevy highly, and I wewget feahfully that he got the soot on his nappah. If it had been that wat Silvahson, I should have wejoiced. But if Wailton got it, I am bound to apologise for such a frightful mistake.”

“What?” yelled the three.

“I twust I speak plainly,” said Arthur Augustus. “I have inadvertently tweated my Housemaster with gwoss diswospect! The least a fellow can do is to apologise.”

“You born idiot, you'll be sacked if it comes out!”

“Even at the wisk of the sack, Blake, I am bound to do the wight thing. Ewewy fellow is bound to do the wight thing, whatevah comes of it!”

“You burbling blitherer, you're not to go near Railton, and you're not to say a single word on the subject!” hissed Blake. “They'll never get you! I believe they're asking Tom Merry about it now—but he's all right, as he never did it!”

You won't be all right, you ass, as you did do it!”

“Wight or not, Blake, I must do the propah thing!” said Arthur Augustus firmly. “I shall not say I meant it for Silvahson. I cannot expect a Housemaster to undahstand that that wat ought to have had it—schoolmastahs have their limits, and a fellow must not expect too much of them. I shall not mention that. But most certainly I shall apologise to Wailton!”

“You ass!”

“You fathead!”

“You chump!”

Arthur Augustus was no more affected by those remarks than a duck by water. He cut short the argument by walking into the School House.

When it was a question of doing the right thing, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was the man to do it, regardless of risks, and regardless of consequences. He had failed in respect to his Housemaster—and an apology was due! Arthur Augustus was going to render the apology that was due, though the skies fell!

ONE GENTLEMAN TO ANOTHER!

MR. RAILTON glanced round impatiently. “What is it, D'Arcy?” he asked, quite sharply. “I am engaged at present.”

Railton was not in the best of tempers. Neither was Mr. Linton. Tom Merry had been dismissed—found guilty! It was a blow to Mr. Linton to have an expulsion in his Form. It was a painful duty to Mr. Railton. But neither of them had any doubt on the subject; and it was settled that the matter was to be placed before the headmaster when the sentence of expulsion would automatically follow.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy tapped at the Housemaster's door and butted in while that consultation was in progress.

Mr. Railton waved a hand in dismissal.

“Another time, D'Arcy!” he said.

“If you please, sir—” said Arthur Augustus.

“I am busy now!”

“Yaas, sir, but if you will have the kindness to allow me to speak, I should like to wendah an apology for this tewwible occuwence!”

“What?”

“I am feahfully distwessed, sir!” said Arthur Augustus, his voice quivering with his earnestness. “I was so tewwibly shocked, sir, when I heard that you had had the soot, that I could scarcely believe my yahs, sir! I have nevah, nevah had so painful a shock!”

(Continued on the next page.)

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"Indeed!" said Mr. Railton, staring at him, while the master of the Shell smiled faintly.

"In the circus, sir, I can do nothin' but apologise!" said Arthur Augustus. "I twust, sir, that you will believe that my wegwet is very weal, and vevy deep, and I would soonah have cut off my hand, sir, than have done anythin' of the kind, if I had known you would get it!"

Mr. Railton gave a violent start.

"D'Arcy! Is it possible that you know anything about the outrage that has occurred in this study!" he exclaimed.

"Yaas, sir!"

"You had some hand in it with Tom Merry?" exclaimed Mr. Railton.

"Eh! Tom Mewwy had nothin' to do with it!" said Arthur Augustus, puzzled. "Tom Mewwy nevah knew anythin' about it!"

"What!" exclaimed Mr. Linton.

"Nobody knew, except myself!" said Arthur Augustus. "I was not likely to mention it to anyone."

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Linton, staring blankly at the swell of St. Jim's. "Is it possible, D'Arcy that you—have come here to confess that it was you who laid a trap in this study?"

"Not exactly, sir!" said Arthur Augustus. "I have come heah to apologise to Mr. Wailton! I was inexpressibly shocked when I heard that he had had the soot. I feel suah that he will believe that it nevah was intended for him. It was a dweadful mistake—"

"Upon my word!" said Mr. Railton.

"I twust, sir," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity, "that you believe that I nevah intended to treat you, sir, with diswespect! It would be vevy painful to me for you to believe anythin' of the sort, sir."

Mr. Railton gazed at him.

"I have nevah, I twust, failed in the wespect due to my Housemaster so fah!" said Arthur Augustus earnestly. "Now I appeal to have done so by a dweadful mistake! I apologise most sincerely, sir, as one gentleman to anothead."

"You confess, D'Arcy, that it was you who placed that cushion, loaded with soot, over my door!" gasped Mr. Railton.

"Yaas, sir! I should pwefer, in othead circumstances, not to mention it, but as I feel bound to apologise, sir, for what happened, I cannot vevy well avoid doing so."

"Was no other boy concerned in the matter?"

"No, sir!"

"No boy of my Form?" asked Mr. Linton.

"No, sir!"

"Were you aware, D'Arcy, that Merry of the Shell has been adjudged guilty of this act?" asked Mr. Railton.

"Eh? No, sir! Tom Mewwy nevah had anythin' to do with it. He was out on his bike when I did it," said Arthur Augustus, in astonishment. "Did you obtain the soot from Merry's study?"

"Yaas, sir!"

"And why?"

"Hewwies was in my studay, sir, doin' lines—and I did not want anybody to know anythin' about it."

"Merry was aware that you obtained the soot from his study?"

"Yaas; he happened to come in to fetch a footah while I was there. He was vevy decent

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about it, though I had made the studay wathah sooty!"

The two masters gazed at Arthur Augustus.

"I suppose you are aware, D'Arcy, that you will be punished with the greatest severity for this action?" said Mr. Railton.

"I suppose so, sir; but I was bound to do the wight thing, wegardless of that!" answered Arthur Augustus. "So long as you believe that I nevah intended it for you, sir, I shall not worry about anythin' else."

"You did not intend it for me?"

"Certainly not, sir! I should wegard such an act as feahfully diswespectful and in the vevy worst taste!" said Arthur Augustus warmly. "I twust, sir, that you do not believe me capable of anythin' of the sort."

"You placed a cushion, laden with soot, over my study door, and did not intend it to fall on me?" said Mr. Railton. "I can scarcely understand—"

"I had weason to suppose that somebody was comin' to this studay, sir, duwin' your absence," said Arthur Augustus. "It was a person whom I wegard with feahful contempt and scorn. By a dweadful mistake he did not come heah, and so the booby-twap wemained where it was till you came back, sir! I nevah dweamed that such a thing could happen."

"I am glad that you have told me this, D'Arcy, so—"

"Yaas, sir! I twust you accept my apology."

"Never mind that!"

"It is a wathah important mattah to me, sir!"

"I suppose," said Mr. Railton slowly, "that you cannot help being an extraordinary and egregiously stupid boy, D'Arcy."

"I, sir?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, in surprise.

He blinked at his Housemaster. Why Mr. Railton should suppose him to be stupid was beyond Gussy's apprehension. Gussy was well aware that he was the brainy man in Study No. 6. Mr. Railton did not seem aware of it.

"I shall consider this matter further," said the Housemaster. "I believe all that you have told me, D'Arcy."

"Of course, sir!" agreed Arthur Augustus.

"I hardly know how to deal with you!" said Mr. Railton. "I shall consider the matter. In the meantime you may go and inform Merry that the matter is at an end."

"Certainly, sir!"

Arthur Augustus retreated to the door. At the door, however, he paused and looked back.

"I twust, sir—" he began.

"You may leave my study, D'Arcy!"

"Yaas, sir! But I weally twust that I have made cleah my pwofound wegwet—"

"Shut the door!"

"Vevy well, sir!"

And Arthur Augustus at last left the study and shut the door. Mr. Railton and Mr. Linton looked at one another. And, the door having shut after Arthur Augustus, both of them smiled.

JAMES SILVERSON jumped.

James was walking in the quad with a smile on his face. James was feeling good! James was thinking of the effect on old Miss Priscilla Fawcett, when Tom Merry arrived home at Laurel Villa, kicked out of school in disgrace.

(Continued on page 36.)

HERE'S THE SERIAL STORY YOU'VE ALL BEEN WAITING FOR—FEATURING MAJOR
JAMES BIGGLESWORTH, AIR FORCE ACE!

BIGGLES' SOUTH SEA ADVENTURE!



By CAPTAIN W. E. JOHNS.

BIGGLES MEETS AN OLD FRIEND!

IT was a perfect morning in early spring as Major James Bigglesworth—better known to his friends as “Biggles”—with his two comrades, the Honourable Algernon Lacey, M.C., and “Ginger” Hebblethwaite, turned into Piccadilly on their way to the Royal Aero Club, where they had decided to take lunch. They walked slowly on the Park side of the great thoroughfare, enjoying the sunshine, and it was with some reluctance that they finally crossed over to the club entrance.

A short, slim, clean-shaven man with bright red hair, closely cropped, and a somewhat belligerent expression on his sun-tanned face, was standing at the top of the steps, smoking a battered briar pipe and gazing reflectively across the greensward opposite.

Biggles glanced at him casually, and was about to pass on when he stopped abruptly and swung round, staring hard.

“Great Scott!” he exclaimed. “If it isn’t the greatest of all Scots—Sandy Macaster, the boy himself. And how’s Sandy?”

The little man with the red hair snatched his pipe from his mouth. His eyes opened wide.

“Biggles! By the beard of St. Andrew! The one and only Biggles! And the fair Algernon—none other! What’s this, a reunion party?”

“It begins to look like it, doesn’t it?” smiled Biggles, introducing Ginger. “Meet Captain Macaster,” he said, “otherwise known as Sandy. Sandy was in our squadron in France—until he hit a telegraph-pole on the wrong side of the lines. I never heard how you came to do that, Sandy; I don’t think we’ve met since. I have a faint recollection of somebody telling me that you were leading a life of ease and luxury on a South Sea island.”

“Then whoever it was he was a liar,” asserted

Sandy promptly. “For I’ve found neither ease nor luxury in the parts I’ve been travelling.”

“But what are we standing here for?” asked Biggles. “This seems to be an occasion for celebration. Have you had lunch, Sandy?”

“No; I was just thinking of going into the Air Force Club for a change.”

“How about joining us? You can tell me about the prize coconuts you grow—or is it bananas?”

“I don’t grow coconuts and I hate the sight of them; so would you if you’d had to chew as many as I have,” muttered Sandy, as they went in through the swing doors and settled themselves at a window table laid for four.

“What are you doing in England?” inquired Biggles, as he passed Sandy the menu card. “Are you home on holiday?”

“Holiday! What’s a holiday? I’ve never heard of it,” grunted Sandy, passing back the menu card. “I think I’ll sink my teeth in a steak if it’s all the same to you.”

The others gave their orders, and Biggles once more turned to Sandy.

“Then what brings you home?” he asked.

“If you want to know the truth, I’m looking for money.”

“Then you’ve come to a bad place, laddie,” declared Biggles seriously. “There are about nine million people in this burg, and they’re all doing the same thing—looking for money.”

“You seem to have found some, anyway,” suggested Sandy pointedly.

“Oh, we’ve managed to pick up a bit here and there!” admitted Biggles lightly. “If you’re short I can let you have a bit.”

“A bit’s no use to me, old comrade,” returned Sandy sadly. “I need a tidy wallop—not just a loan, mind you. I’m trying to get a little company together.”

“What exactly do you mean by a tidy wallop?”

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"I should need about five thousand pounds."

Biggles whistled softly.

"Jumping crocodiles!" he exclaimed. "What do you want to do—buy a whole island for yourself?"

"I don't need an island!" snorted Sandy. "I could have a thousand if that was all I needed. The seas down south are stiff with them; you can just go and help yourself. No, my idea is a wee bit more ambitious than that."

"Well, go ahead; maybe we can help."

Sandy's face lit up.

"Ye really think you can put me in the way of finding the cash?"

"It depends on what you want to do with it, old son. If my memory serves me, some of your ideas in the old days were not exactly what I should call overloaded with sanity. I'm a bit more cautious myself than I used to be, so I'm having nothing to do with any wild-cat scheme."

Sandy set down his knife and fork with studied deliberation. He leaned forward and stared into Biggles' face.

"Would ye call a hatful o' pearls a wild-cat scheme?" he hissed.

Biggles smiled.

"Cheese it, Sandy! Not a hatful!"

"A hatful I said, and a hatful I mean!" declared Sandy indignantly. "And none of your finicky seed-pearls either! It's pearls I mean, pearls the size of peanuts—maybe larger than that!"

"Well, that sounds marvellous," admitted Biggles. He shook his head sadly. "But I'm afraid ye're going to have a tough job persuading the stiffnecks in the City of London that these pearls really exist. Have you got any with you?"

"If I had I shouldn't be here!" snorted Sandy. "But I've seen them."

"You don't mean that somebody else saw them and told you about it?"

Sandy set down his tumbler with a bang. His slight Scotch brogue became more pronounced under the strain of his enthusiasm.

"I tell ye, mon, I've seen 'em—wi' me own eyes. Now, d'ye understand that?"

Biggles nodded.

"Pardon my scepticism, old sharpshooter, but when you saw 'em why didn't you slip a few into your hat?"

"For a thundering good reason. Get me a wee drop o' whiskey and I'll tell ye the story; then maybe ye'll understand."

Biggles passed the order to a steward, laid his cigarette-case open on the table, selected a cigarette, and lighted it.

"Go ahead, Sandy," he said. "I haven't heard a good story in years."

"If ye're no' goin' to believe me, then I'm no' wasting me time a-tellin' ye!" grumbled Sandy.

"You'll stick to facts—no romancing?"

"I'll tell ye just the plain, sober, honest truth—every word of it," said Sandy emphatically.

"Now, this was the way of it. The person who told you that I was down in the South Seas was right up to that point. I couldn't stick civilisation—or maybe civilisation couldn't stick me. Anyway, I couldn't get the sort of job I wanted; the people who gave away the sort of job I had in mind had no time for a feller whose sole qualifications were flying and fighting.

"Ah, weel! I should worry! I just sold every-thing I had—which wasn't much—and bought

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myself a third-class passage to Papeete, in Tahiti, which is the sort of headquarters of those who live on, or around, the islands. Honest men and the scum of the Seven Seas, gentlemen and rough-necks, traders and beachcombers, white men and black men, brown men and yellow men; the odds and ends of every seaport in the world get together sooner or later at Tahiti. On the whole they're a good crowd—but tough, mind ye. You wouldn't expect them to be otherwise. But there are some skunks among them, too—bound to be."

Sandy took a reflective sip of his drink before he continued.

"It's a good spot, Tahiti—which, incidentally, in case you don't know it, is one of the Society Islands. They belong to France now, and, being French, nobody bothers much about anything; you soon get that way in the South Seas. There are a lot of Chinese there; they're all over the islands these days, but, on the whole, they're a decent, harmless crowd.

"The harbour is a fascinating place; all sorts of shipping, mostly schooners for island trading, old and sun-bleached, but tough—like their skippers. Copra, which is dried coconuts, is the chief trade, although there is still a fair amount done in shell and pearls. All the pearls that are found around the islands are brought to Papeete, where they are sold to the agents of the Paris jewel firms. But I must get on with my story.

"Well, I drifted around from one island to another, sometimes doing supercargo on one of the island schooners, sometimes helping a trader to run his store, and sometimes doing nothing at all. The trouble is, you don't have to do anything if you don't want to; you can usually find somebody willing to keep you for the sake of company. If not—well, you can always manage somehow.

"But I didn't want to stay down there for the rest of my life—don't get that idea. There were times when I'd have given the whole blessed boiling of islands, pearls, and lagoons complete for a glimpse of old Scotland on a misty day. I wanted to make a fortune, easily, if possible, but I wanted one, anyway, so that I could come home for a bit when I felt like it. There were plenty of fortunes about, but they always just seemed to miss me. More than once I had one almost in my grasp, but it always just slipped out of my reach."

"How?" asked Ginger, who was very interested.

"How? Oh, I could sit here all day if I started telling you hard-luck stories. But I'll give ye an example. One day I spotted an old diving suit in a trader's store on one of the Paumotus. He agreed to lend it to me on the understanding that if I found pearls I was to give him a third. That suited me. I went off to a chap I knew who had an old lugger and made the same deal with him. So I had a boat and a diving suit, and could keep a third of all the pearls I found. I did well. I worked like a nigger for nearly a year, doing most of the diving myself, by which time I had a nice little bag of pearls—enough to keep me comfortably for the rest of my days even with a third share. So I pulled up my mudhook and made for Papeete. The next day a cyclone hit me. I got ashore at Mareita on a bit of driftwood, with most of the skin burned off my back by the sun. I went to hospital to grow a new hide. The pearls were back where they came from—on the bottom of the sea with the lugger.

THE PEARL BED !

"ANOTHER time I was supercargo on a schooner when we found ourselves becalmed near a Marquesan skin diver,* working with a pal in a canoe. They'd got about thirty big shells, unopened, in the bottom of it. Having nothing better to do than whistle for a wind, I offered them two old pipes and a stick of tobacco for the shells. They jumped at it, naturally, for you can open a thousand shells without finding a pearl. In the long run, it's shell that makes the money, not pearls; there's always a demand for it. In case you don't know, shell is the source of mother-of-pearl. It's worth from a hundred to four hundred pounds a ton, according to quality.

"Well, I squatted down on the deck and started to open the oysters, to see what the luck was like. Incidentally, I'd better tell you that the South Sea oyster isn't a little squib like a Whitstable native; it's a big fellow, weighing several pounds. There was nothing in the first one. There was nothing in the second one, either. Presently I had twenty-nine shells opened on the deck, and not so much as a seed pearl for me trouble. There was only one shell left, and I hadn't much faith in it. It was the smallest of the lot—you always take the biggest first, whatever you are handling, even if it is only a plate of shrimps.

"Well, I cut the shell open and ran my fingers through the muck inside. There was something there. I knew it couldn't be a pearl, because it was too big. It was about the size of a thrush's egg. I took it out. It was a pearl, such a pearl as you never saw in all your life. There it lay on the deck, gleaming with all the iridescent fire that a pearl has when it first comes out of the sea, and is still wet. In Paris it would be worth, maybe, five thousand pounds. It was the loveliest thing you ever saw in your life, with just a faint tint of rose in it. I couldn't believe my eyes. I just sat there blinking at it like an owl, sort of dazed and limp.

"At that precise instant a slant of wind hit the schooner. She heeled over. I went over. So did the pearl—into the sea. I let out a yell as it rolled gleaming across the deck, and flung myself after it. I grabbed—just a tenth of a second too late. My fingers hit the deck not more than an inch behind it. Lying there I could see it going down into the blue depths like a little white electric light. I tell you, I nearly howled. But it was gone. After that I began to think that there was something in the old saying about pearls bringing bad luck, and sooner or later going back where they came from. My trouble was, the pearls always went back before I could sell them. But let me get on with the real story.

"About eighteen months ago I was flat broke, so I took a job as supercargo with a fellow named Louis Castanelli, a dirty little Corsican. He had got a bad name—oh, I knew all about that! You soon get to know about people in the islands. But I'd no choice. As I say, I was broke. Nothing else was available, and he was just off round the Marquesas and the Paumotus in his schooner, the Avarata, a dirty tub with cockroaches and copra-bugs squinting at you out of every crack in her warped deck. I'll tell you

**Skin Diving.*—An expression used for diving without a diving suit; it is confined chiefly to natives, who work nude, except for goggles to protect the eyes.

about these tropical cockroaches one day—they'll eat the soles off your feet if you don't watch out. Well, we set sail from Papeete Harbour, and off we went for a cruise that might last from six to nine months.

"Castanelli was even worse than I expected. He's a foul-mouthed little crook, and his crew of eight native boys he'd picked up some time in the Solomons was not much better. Maybe that's why he selected them. As a rule, the native boys are good—anyway, the Tahitians, Marquesans, and Paumotuans. But those with Castanelli were a bad lot. I heard later that they'd all done time in Australia for cannibalism—and that didn't surprise me. I knew I was in for a rough trip, but if I'd known how bad it was going to be, I'd have stayed on the beach at Tahiti.

"Not until we were at sea did I discover how much booze Castanelli had below. I knew he couldn't drink it all, so I guessed what it was for. It was his 'trade' stock. Now, selling spirits to natives is against the law, and quite right, too. Unfortunately, knowing no better, the natives will always buy it, so crooked traders get round the law by all sorts of dodges—putting brandy up in scent bottles, for instance. The stuff is traded as perfume, or hair-oil—but the natives put it inside, not outside.

"I spoke to Castanelli about it, and he admitted it. He didn't bother about camouflage like scent bottles. He sold the stuff straight. I told him that I didn't agree with that sort of business. We had a row, at the end of which I threatened—foolishly, perhaps—to report him to the first French governor I saw. I say it was foolish, because, knowing Castanelli, I might have reckoned that he'd take steps to see that I never got near the authorities.

"Well, we went on, me keeping to myself, and Castanelli drinking most of the day with his gang of Solomon Island cutthroats. You might ask me how we got anywhere in such circumstances. The answer is—drunk or sober, Castanelli's boys were good sailors. All the island boys are like that. They can weather a big sea in a canoe, and make a landfall two thousand miles away without a compass—and that's no lie.

"First we worked round the Paumotus, which is a long chain of low-lying coral atolls, sometimes called the Low Archipelago; the old navigators used to call them the Dangerous Isles, which was a good name, because navigation there is as tricky as anywhere in the world. We went on towards the Marquesas, which are an entirely different proposition, being volcanic rock covered with jungle. Scientists reckon that the islands are the tops of mountains of a sunken continent, and that's just what they look like. They're all jumbled up with mountains thousands of feet high—some of them are pretty big, too. But I must get on with the story.

"Now, the two groups of islands may look close together on the map—and so they are, comparatively speaking. But they're over five hundred miles apart—not very much when you're in the South Seas, because distances there bear no relation to distances at home. It's all on a much bigger scale. The Pacific is a big place, don't forget, and you can sail before a wind for six thousand miles without seeing so much as a reef.

"It happened that we had got a bit to the east of the Marquesas on account of making the most of a useful breeze, but we were beating up towards them when we made out an island which

even Castanelli said he didn't know—and he reckons to know every reef and atoll between the Galapagos and the Ladrões. Not that we paid much attention to that. There are islands everywhere in the Pacific, and if you called at 'em all you wouldn't get anywhere. We shouldn't have called at this one, anyway, because it was pretty certain that there was nobody on it. And this is where the story really begins—and where my life nearly ended.

"Castanelli had been drinking for days, so I'd got into the habit of taking the ship's position. I'm certain that when we passed that island Castanelli didn't know where we were to within five hundred miles. That's important—you'll see why presently. The sea was flat calm, but there was a swell. There nearly always is a swell in the Pacific, but it may be so big that you don't see it.

"It was midday, and blinding hot. The island, an atoll, had drifted away astern. I had taken our position and put the sextant down near the wheel, in case Castanelli sobered up and decided to check my readings. Thinking that I'd enter up the position in the log later on, I lay down on the deck and stared down into the sea, waiting for a wind. And there I lay, staring down into the blue water, thinking about Castanelli and myself—anything. And it was while I was lying there that I saw something that shook me from me Adam's apple to me insteps.

"The bottom of the sea—where there hadn't been any bottom, you understand—suddenly came up. It came up to within five or six feet of our keel, hung there for a moment or two, and then slowly sank down out of sight again. You won't argue with me when I say that I couldn't believe my eyes. I thought that the sun had got me at last. But I lay there staring, waiting to see if it happened again. It did. Everything was quiet. There was no perceptible movement. Then suddenly I realised what was happening. The bottom of the sea wasn't moving, of course. It was the schooner. Although you couldn't see it, the Avarata was rising and falling on a forty or fifty foot swell. As she came up, the sea bottom disappeared. As she came down, the coral came up to meet us.

"No wonder I was shaken, for we were in shallow water. If the swell got any worse we should come down on the coral with a crash that would crumple us up like a busted eggshell. I let out a yell. Of course, I had no means of knowing how far the shallow water ran. We might have been simply drifting over the top of a submerged peak. I didn't know. I still don't know. But it was clear that we couldn't stay there. It meant manning the longboat and towing the Avarata clear—and quickly.

"My yell brought up Castanelli at a run—and the boys. They were not so drunk as I thought they were. I shouted 'Man the boat!' Castanelli wanted to know what the blankety-blank for—and well he might. I told him to come and look. We all stood there staring. The bottom of the sea came up, a marvellous sight, blue, red, green, and purple coral, like—well, you'd have to see it to understand. But there wasn't only coral. There was something else. Shell! Thousands of oysters, the size of dinner plates, lying in pairs—because the oysters were open.

"They open to eat, and when they do that you can see the gleam of the mother-of-pearl inside. The whole floor of the sea was covered with gleaming discs of shell, lying flat or sticking out

of the coral like big swallows' nests. I felt myself go weak as I realised that in shell alone I was looking at a fortune. It was the sort of thing the old hands dream about. And that very fact warned me to glance at Castanelli. It was a good thing I did. I was only just in time. There was such a look on his face as I hope never to see on any man's face again—and his hand was in his side pocket where I knew he kept his gun. 'I reckon there ain't enough here for the two of us,' he said, with an ugly grin. I jumped aside just as he fired. The shot missed me.

"Now, just imagine my position. We were in the middle of the Pacific, in water crawling with sharks. Castanelli had a gun and was bent on murder. I wasn't even armed. His eight boys were with him, their knives out. I couldn't run. I couldn't hide. There was nowhere on the ship where I could take cover without being shot full of holes.

"But I had one card left to play. If I couldn't get the pearls, then I would see to it that Castanelli shouldn't—that is, if he didn't know where we were. As I told you, I hadn't entered by the log. The sextant was still standing by the wheel where I had put it down. If I could reach it before he plugged me it should go over the side. I made a dash for it. He fired, but missed. I fairly yelled with joy as I snatched up the instrument and heaved it over the rail. Castanelli fired again, but at that moment a squall hit the schooner. I fell. So did Castanelli. But the gang, with their knives in their hands, were at me.

A SWIM FOR LIFE!

"I DECIDED that I'd rather drown than be carved into slices, so over the side I went, and swam for all I was worth. What with the way now on the schooner, and me swimming, by the time Castanelli had got to the rail I was too far away for accurate shooting. He kept on firing, of course; but, although some of the shots splashed the water over me, not one hit me.

"But he wasn't going to let me get away—not if he could prevent it. I saw the boys making sail, and round they came at me. But the wind was now blowing half a gale. You get squalls like that in the Pacific. Twice they brought the schooner past me; but, what with me ducking and diving, and the schooner rolling, Castanelli's shooting was all over the place. Pretty soon he had to pack up chasing me and keep his head into the wind, or he'd have capsized his schooner. Now, I thought, as it drew farther away from me, I'll just drown comfortably by myself. You see, it wasn't much use hoping. What could I hope for? Imagine it. Out in the middle of the Pacific, no land in sight, sharks in the water, and a gale blowing up. Not so good, eh?"

"Pretty grim," admitted Biggles.

"You're right, that's just what it was," declared Sandy, taking another sip at his drink. "I hadn't even a hen-coop to hang on to, as most people seem to have in a shipwreck," he went on. "But there was this about it; the water was warm. It always is down there; and if you can keep afloat, and the sharks leave you alone, you can hang on for hours. I soon stopped swimming. I kicked off my clothes and floated, keeping an eye open for dorsal fins. I saw one or two, but apparently they weren't man-eaters—they're not all killers, you know.

"The schooner disappeared over the horizon,

and I was all alone on the rolling deep—a position in which I hope never to find myself again. Night came. The squall passed. The sea began to go down, and I was still floating. Presently I began to wonder why I troubled to float; it was only prolonging things. However, it's funny how you hang on to life, even when everything seems hopeless. I couldn't hope to be picked up. In those waters there is, maybe, one ship for every hundred thousand square miles of sea, so to expect one to come my way at that moment was to expect too much. Years might pass before one came along.

"But my luck was in for all that. I might have got into a current running to the North Pole or to South America; instead of which, I struck one running towards the island we had passed. I saw it at dawn, quite close. It lay so low, and I was so low in the water, that I could only see the tops of the palms; they appeared to be growing out of the water, but I knew that where they were there was land, and I struck out towards them.

"Funnily enough, having resigned myself to my fate, I had ceased to worry, but now that I had a chance I got frightened again, terrified that the palms might slide past without my being able to reach them, after all. But I just made it, although the surf nearly finished me. I shan't forget those last ten minutes. Nearly every atoll has a reef round it. The lagoon is inside. But it isn't always possible to get to the lagoon, because once in a while there is no opening through the reef.

"You'd have to see the combers breaking on a South Sea reef to understand what they're like. If ever there was a case of an irresistible force meeting an immovable mass, that's it. A wave of a hundred thousand tons of water comes roaring along, majestic, invincible. You'd think that nothing could stop it. Then the coral grabs at the bottom of it and tears its foundations away. The mountain of water hangs for a minute in midair, and then crashes down with a noise like thunder. It spreads itself out into a boiling sea of foam, like white lace; then it rolls back, and there is the reef waiting for the next wave.

"And so it goes on year after year. Occasionally the sea seems to go mad and hurls its entire fury on the coral. That's when a hurricane comes along. I hope you never get caught in one. A man or a boat caught in the surf would be smashed to pulp. Well, I kept on swimming until I found a gap in the reef. The sea picked me up and flung me through—just in time, for a shark was very interested in me and had been keeping me company for some minutes. I finished up like a piece of wet rag on the beach."

"Was anybody there?" asked Ginger quickly. He had followed Sandy's story with intense interest.

"There was not," replied Sandy. "Robinson Crusoe's island was a hive of industry compared with mine. He did at least find a footprint on the beach. I found nothing except sea-shells and coconuts. My great fear was that there would be no fresh water. Fortunately there was; there usually is—although where it comes from in the middle of so much salt is a question I can't answer. So I had a drink, nibbled a coconut, and staggered around the new establishment to see what I'd struck.

"It was very pretty, there's no doubt of that; the lagoon was something to make you gasp. But I wasn't concerned with beauty. Robinson Crusoe stuff may be all very nice to read about, but when you find yourself fixed that way it gives you a

funny sort of weak feeling in the tummy. The more I realised that I was likely to spend the rest of my days by myself, the less I liked it. You see, knowing about the pearls, for the first time in years I had a real object in living.

"I kept a weather eye open for Castanelli's schooner in case he came back; but I never saw him again, which leads me to think that I was right in assuming that he didn't know where we were when he tried to kill me. Otherwise he would certainly have been back for the pearls."

"How long were you there?" asked Ginger.

"Only three months. Oh, I was lucky, there's no doubt of that. I was taken off by a couple of Marquesans from Rutuona in a canoe; a boy and a girl named Breaker of Shells and Full Moon—at least, those are the English equivalents. They are easier to remember than the native names. They had been out fishing for albicore, got caught in a squall, and carried out to sea—not that it worried them much. That sort of thing is always happening to the natives. They are as much at home on the sea as on land. They can swim as soon as they can walk; so, always being used to water, they have no fear of it. Anyhow, they spotted my island and came ashore for a few fresh nuts. Instead, they found me. They thought it was no end of a joke. I was certainly glad to see them. They took me back to Rutuona.

"It took me two months, hopping from island to island in a canoe, to get to Nuku-hiva, the biggest island of the group, where I had to wait another three months before Pierre Loubert came along in his schooner and took me to Tahiti. I found that Castanelli had been back and gone off again, having reported me as lost overboard in a gale. From the fact that he went off again so soon I fancy that he went to look for the pearl bed—as he was bound to. What man wouldn't, with a fortune waiting to be picked up? But without knowing the exact position he might as well look for a particular grain of sand on a beach. There was just a chance that he might find the island if he looked long enough; but even that would be a tall order.

"The end of the story is, I tried to get one of the island skippers interested in my find, offering to go fifty-fifty. But there was nothing doing. You see, the trouble is, every loafer and beach-comber in the South Seas has a tale to tell about a wonderful pearl bed. You are always hearing such stories, but nobody believes them. They just laugh at you. And to tell the honest truth, if I hadn't seen the pearls with my own eyes I should have laughed at anyone who tried to pitch me a yarn like that. There were plenty of such beds years ago, but they've all been worked out—at least, that's what people think.

"I'd picked up a small pearl or two on Rutuona—the natives made me a present of them when I left. The pearls enabled me to get a little money, but not enough to fit out an expedition of my own, with diving gear, which I should need, because with that weight of water going up and down it would be too dangerous for skin diving. The boys would be willing to try, no doubt, but it wouldn't be fair to ask them, although a good Paumotuan will go down over a hundred feet and think nothing of it.

(Continued on the next page.)

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"The only thing left to do was to go to Australia to see if I could raise the money there. I was afraid Castanelli would come back to Tahiti, and if we met face to face one of us was likely to get killed and the other arrested for murder. But it was just the same in Australia. One or two people were mildly interested, but they wanted to know too much. They wouldn't put down the money without my telling them where the pearl bed was, and that was something I wasn't prepared to do. I had just enough money left to bring me back to England, where I thought people might not be so sceptical, but—"

"You haven't succeeded?" murmured Biggles.

"No."

"Frankly, I don't think you will. I'm afraid the proposition is too much of a gamble for most people."

"Gamble!" cried Sandy angrily. "It's no gamble. I could go straight to the spot."

Biggles took out his notebook and pencil.

"How far is it from Tahiti to your island? What's the name of it, by the way?"

"It hasn't a name as far as I can make out."

"All right. For the sake of argument we'll call it Sandy's Island. How far is it from Tahiti?"

"Getting on for eight hundred miles."

"And the lagoon? Is it a safe anchorage?"

"As safe as anything in the South Seas."

"Could you land a flying-boat there?"

"You're not thinking of flying?"

"Why not?"

Sandy scratched his head.

"No reason, I suppose. I've just never thought of it that way. It would probably be more expensive than using a schooner."

THE DUDE SHERIFF



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"It would be quicker."

"It would certainly be that."

"Could we dive from a flying-boat?"

"Certainly—in calm weather, of course."

"You've done some diving?"

"Plenty."

"You'd know all about the sort of kit to get?"

"Of course."

"Then if we provided the flying-boat and paid all expenses would you be willing to split the profits?"

"Would I? You bet I would!" cried Sandy enthusiastically. "You provide the equipment; I'll provide the pearls and we'll split the profits four ways. How's that?"

"Suits us," agreed Biggles, without hesitation, glancing at Algy and Ginger in turn.

"When would you be ready to start?" asked Sandy.

"Just as soon as we can get the equipment together. I'll give you a cheque. You go off and see about the diving gear, and anything else you think we might need, but keep the weight down as far as you can. I'll attend to the machine."

Sandy swallowed the rest of his drink at a gulp.

"I'm on my way," he declared. "The pearls are as good as ours."

"Don't forget to bring your bowler hat to measure them in!" smiled Biggles. "We shall be satisfied with nothing less than the hatful you spoke about at the beginning!"

AN ENCOUNTER WITH CASTANELLI!

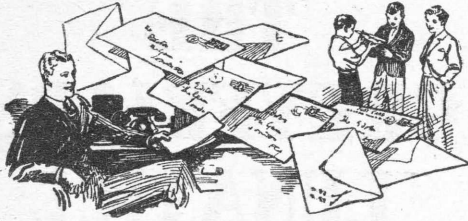
ALTHOUGH they did not waste a single day, it was nearly two months before the expedition arrived at its first temporary base in the South Pacific; for not until Biggles examined the situation closely did any of them realise the difficulties involved in getting an aircraft to the islands. In the first place, there were papers to arrange, although this was comparatively simple to the business of getting the machine where they wanted it. And there was, of course, the matter of the selection of the ideal type of aircraft.

Now, there are two ways of getting an aeroplane to a given destination—it can be shipped there, or it can be flown under its own power. Contrary to general belief, in the case of a distant destination, it is less expensive to ship a machine than fly it, for which reason new machines destined for Australia from Great Britain or America usually arrive on board ship. Naturally, this is not the case with specially organised flights or the regular air lines.

The machine chosen for the arduous duties that would be required of it was a "Scud" twin-engined flying-boat, a high-wing monoplane with long-range tanks that had been built for a company proposing to operate a coastal service round Great Britain. The company, however, had failed financially, and the machine was put on the market. Biggles snapped it up cheaply—a most satisfactory bargain, considering that it suited their purpose admirably.

It was at this juncture, when ways and means of getting the machine to the South Seas were under discussion, that Sandy, having bought such equipment as he considered necessary, suggested that it might be a good thing if he went on ahead by surface craft and made such arrangements as now appeared not only desirable, but imperative.

He pointed out that the arrival at Tahiti of an



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! First of all this week, I want to draw your serious attention to the important notice which appears on page 35. This notice closely concerns every one of you, so turn to it now and read it. Unless a definite order for the GEM is placed with your newsagent, you will be unable to obtain a copy each week. Thus you will miss the further adventures of your schoolboy favourites, and I am sure none of you want that to happen.

Your GEM will cost you no more to place a standing order for it; in fact, you will be sure of receiving your copy every week, which has not always been the case with some of you when you have left it to chance. Fill in to-day the order form on page 35, and make certain of your GEM every week. We can all help a little—chiefly by economy—to win the war, and you can do your bit by helping to prevent paper wastage.

"BIGGLES' SOUTH SEA ADVENTURE!"

In this number of the old paper most of you are meeting for the first time new pals—Biggles & Co.

aircraft the size of the flying-boat could hardly fail to create a sensation, a state of affairs which it would be better to avoid if it were possible. He proposed, therefore, that he cabled to an agent in Australia to forward a supply of petrol and oil to the British island of Raratonga, which is on the main shipping line to Australia.

He would go direct to Raratonga, and, leaving a supply of petrol and oil for the machine when it arrived, would arrange for the transport of the rest by sea to Vaitie, one of the smaller of the Cooke Islands. Vaitie had a large, almost land-locked lagoon which would make a perfect anchorage for the machine while it was being refuelled, after it had been flown up from Raratonga. At Vaitie the machine would pick him up with the fuel, and go on in a single straight flight to Sandy's Island. These arrangements were made to prevent long overseas flights.

This plan was adopted, more for the reason that it was the best one so far suggested than because it was ideal. In Biggles' opinion, it was far from ideal, but for want of a better one he accepted it. The Scud was therefore put on board an Australian-bound steamer calling at Raratonga, and Biggles, Algy, and Ginger travelled with it.

Sandy had departed for Raratonga immediately on the approval of his plan, taking the stores and equipment with him, so that when the others arrived there, nearly a month later, they found that, in accordance with the programme, he had already departed for Vaitie, having chartered a native lugger for the purpose. He had, of course, left a supply of fuel and oil at Rara-

To a very large number of boys, Major James Bigglesworth is as popular as Tom Merry & Co. are with GEM readers, so I am sure you will all welcome the famous Air Force ace and his companions.

Captain W. E. Johns, creator of Biggles, was himself an Air Force officer, and so he is an expert not only as a writer, but also in the telling of flying experiences. Incidentally, a little while back Captain Johns' flying stories of Biggles were voted by British boys to be the most popular of any published.

Next Wednesday's instalment of this great new serial deals with the first adventures of Biggles & Co. in the South Seas—how Biggles makes his presence painfully felt where Castanelli is concerned; how the "Co." manage to arrive at Rutuona Island ahead of the bullying crook; and how Ginger Hebblethwaite has an unpleasant experience with a devil fish! Don't miss the thrills.

"THE BOY WHO VANISHED!"

This is the title of the next powerful new yarn of Tom Merry & Co. Tom, fed-up with Mr. Silverson's persecution, rebels when he is given a detention task by his Form-master for insolence. He goes to a box-room to break bounds via the window, and from that moment vanishes! What happens to Tom, and how his disappearance has an important bearing on Silverson's further scheming to disgrace the Shell captain, makes an exciting yarn that you will enjoy from first word to last.

Finally, we have another sparkling story of Jack Drake's adventures at Greyfriars. It's called "COKER'S CATCH!" Jack is Coker's intended victim, but there's no telling what will happen when Horace James is on the warpath!

Before I close down there is just one more thing I want to mention. The "Holiday Annual," the favourite book of all school-story lovers, is making a bigger hit than ever this year—the year of its coming of age—and I strongly recommend it to all GEM readers. It's the best five shilling's worth on the market—bar nothing!

All the best, chums! And don't forget to fill in the order form on page 35 and hand it to your newsagent.

THE EDITOR.

tonga, more than enough to enable the machine to fly to Vaitie.

A week of hard work had been required to put the machine in an airworthy condition, so that when it arrived at Vaitie it carried three rather weary airmen, who were not encouraged to discover that Sandy had been involved in a mishap. His arm was in a sling, and the story he told apologetically was this:

He had arrived at Vaitie, which was uninhabited, well ahead of time, and, learning that the native skipper of the lugger, a Polynesian named Namu, was going on to Tahiti on business, and would call at Vaitie again for fresh water on the way back, he thought it would be a good plan if he went along with him—having nothing more to do—and pick up such news as he might, particularly anything concerning Castanelli.

One of the very first people he had seen on stepping ashore at Tahiti was Castanelli himself. Before he could get back to the boat trouble had been caused—deliberately, of course—by Castanelli's Solomon Island boys, and, although he had tried to avoid it, in the melee he had been stabbed in the arm.

He had gone straight back to the boat and persuaded Namu to return to Vaitie. He had got back to Vaitie all right, but he was still incapacitated by his arm. That, briefly, was Sandy's story.

(It's a slight set-back to Biggles & Co.'s South Sea quest. But in next week's exciting chapters Biggles runs up against Castanelli—and gives the Corsican something to remember him by!)

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THE GREYFRIARS LUNATIC!

By Frank Richards.

THE ONLY WAY!

“WE don't want to be inhospitable—”

“But—”

Russell and Ogilvy, of the Greyfriars Remove, evidently agreed that there was a “but” in the matter.

“But—” repeated Russell.

“But—” again agreed Robert Donald Ogilvy.

“We don't want any new chaps in this study.”

“Exactly!”

“I believe that chap Drake is rather decent,” continued Russell, “and his pal, Rodney, seems all right. Quite nice chaps, in fact, for any fellow to have in the study—if there was room.”

“If!” assented Ogilvy.

“But there isn't room here.”

“Well, I dare say there's room,” said Ogilvy, looking round. “It's one of the biggest in the Remove. But we had this study to ourselves all last term, and we want it to ourselves this term. This isn't a home for new kids.”

“Just so. They'll muck up my photographic stuff; can't leave films around in the study, with two silly new kids barging about.”

“And they seem to have made friends with Billy Bunter—and we can't have Bunter rolling in here.”

“No fear!”

“The trouble is, how are we going to stall them off!” said Russell, in a very thoughtful way. “They bagged Wharton's study, but Mr. Quelch turned them out and planted them here. I don't see why they couldn't have had Wharton's study.”

“Or anybody's but this!” said Ogilvy. “Lots of fellows might be glad to take them in. They seem attached to Bunter—let 'em go and dig in Study No. 7, along with Bunter and Todd. Bunter would welcome them if they lend him some money, anyhow.”

“Let 'em go where they like, so long as they don't come in here,” said Russell generously.

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“But—but—but they've been assigned to this study, and they seemed to like it, and—and how the thump are we going to persuade them to change out before they get settled down for the term?”

“As Inky would say, the howfulness is terrific!” grinned Ogilvy.

It was a serious question.

Both the chums of Study No. 3 agreed upon that; hence the council of war they were holding in Study No. 3, on the first evening of the term. Greyfriars School had reassembled after the holidays, and among the new boys that had arrived were Jack Drake and Dick Rodney, formerly of the school ship Benbow.

Russell and Ogilvy were good-natured fellows, quite prepared to extend the right hand of fellowship to Drake and Rodney, so far as that went; but they weren't prepared to be crowded out of their study. They wanted to be hospitable, and they wanted to be polite, but they didn't want any new studymates.

“Where's Drake now?” asked Russell suddenly.

Ogilvy chuckled.

“Gone to the Head to be licked, I think, for upsetting the brake coming here. But they've shoved their books and things here, and they're bound to come up soon. We've got to settle it before then. I've got an idea.”

“Get it off your chest!”

“Suppose we could frighten them out—”

Russell grunted.

“Ass! Drake has been scrapping with Bolsover major and Wharton already. He's a hefty brute—about the last chap in the school to be frightened out of anywhere, I should think.”

Ogilvy lowered his voice.

“Suppose you go mad!” he whispered.

Russell jumped.

“What?”

“Mad!” said Ogilvy.

“You silly ass!” roared Russell. “What are you driving at? How can I go mad, you chump?”

“Not seriously, of course. If you did, I shouldn't care to dig with you. But you can pretend—”

“Rot!”

“I'll whisper a warning to them not to excite you,” continued Ogilvy, evidently much taken with his idea. “Just imagine the impression on a silly new kid of being warned not to excite a studymate because he's dangerous when he gets going—”

“You frabjous ass!” said Russell wrathfully.

“Do you think—”

“I tell you it's a topping idea,” persisted

Ogilvy. "It will fairly make their flesh creep."

"It might. But—"

"We'll have supper in the study, and you can begin chucking knives about—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"And talking queer—a bit more than usual—"

"Ass!"

"They'll be scared out of their wits, and they'll go along the Remove passage hunting for another study," said Ogilvy confidently. "It's the only way, as the johnny says in the play. Think it over."

Russell thought it over—with a frowning brow at first. But suddenly he burst into a chuckle.

"It's a jolly good stunt!" he said.

"I thought you'd come to that," said Ogilvy, much gratified.

"But there's just one alteration—"

"Name it!"

"You can go mad instead of me."

"Oh! I—I—"

"You see, you wouldn't have so far to go," explained Russell.

"You silly ass!" yelled Ogilvy.

"My dear chap, it's your own idea, and it's up to you. You go mad, and I'll warn them against you. Nobody would really believe that I was mad. But you're Scotch, you know, so— Here, I say, wharrer you up to?"

The amicable discussion was suddenly interrupted by Ogilvy making a jump at his chum. Apparently Russell's remark had annoyed him.

Crash!

Russell went down on his back on the study carpet, and Ogilvy, taking hold of his ears, proceeded to bump his head on the floor, causing dust to rise from the carpet, and fearful yells from Russell.

"Yaroooooh! Yooooop! Hooooop! Whoooooop!"

The study door opened.

Jack Drake and Dick Rodney, the two new fellows in the Remove, looked into the study in great astonishment.

"What the thump—" ejaculated Drake.

"Is it an earthquake?" inquired Dick Rodney.

"Yaroooooh! Draggimoff!" howled Russell.

"He's mad!"

Bump, bump!

Drake and Rodney rushed at Robert Donald Ogilvy, and seized him by the shoulders, and dragged him off his chum by main force. Russell sat up and panted.

"Hold him!" he gasped.

"We're holding him," grinned Drake. "What on earth's the matter? I thought you two fellows were chums."

"So we are, but—but—when he's sane, I mean," gasped Russell. He was quick to turn the peculiar situation to advantage, in furtherance of the new "stunt" that had just been elaborated. "He can't help it, poor chap; it's in the blood, you know. Not a word about this outside the study."

"Great Scott!"

"B-b-but—" stuttered Rodney.

For one moment Robert Donald Ogilvy looked as if he would jump at his chum again; but he restrained himself. He realised that if the stunt was to "come off," he had to follow Russell's cue. If there was going to be a lunatic in Study No. 3, that lunatic had to be Robert Donald Ogilvy.

Ogilvy was a prominent member of the Remove Dramatic Society. The new fellows, of course, knew nothing about that. They did not

know that Robert Donald's next proceedings were due to his training in the R.D.S.

He gave a sudden start and a shiver, and fixed a wild stare upon the startled new juniors. "What have I done?" he panted. "Have I killed him?"

"Nunno!" gasped Drake.

"Go out a bit, old chap, till it passes off!" implored Russell.

"Blood!" hissed Ogilvy. "I must have blood!"

He stared round the room in search of a weapon. There was a paper-knife on the table, and Drake promptly annexed it. Rodney put his foot on the poker.

"Ogilvy, old chap," implored Russell, "go into the quad for a bit—you know the fresh air always does you good when these fits come on."

Ogilvy gave a wild laugh, and rushed from the study, and the door slammed behind him.

THE LUNATIC!

JACK DRAKE and Dick Rodney looked at one another blankly.

"My only hat!" said Drake, with a deep breath. "This is a precious lunatic asylum to drop into, I must say!"

"Great pip!" murmured Rodney.

They looked at Russell. He had sunk into a chair, and covered his face with his hands.

"I—I say—" began Drake.

"I—I'm sorry," murmured Russell. "I—I'm sorry, you fellows. It's too bad, on your first day here. Poor old Ogilvy!"

"He's not really out of his mind, is he?" asked Drake, with a stare.

"Not always. Seeing him casually, you'd think he was perfectly sane."

"He was in our carriage coming down," said Drake. "I didn't notice anything queer then."

"Sometimes he's all right for weeks together. And—and I can't believe that he'd ever be really dangerous, so long as he was treated with proper care," said Russell sadly. "Outside this study I never breathe a word of it; but, as you fellows are going to dig here, you've got to know, of course. I feel that I ought to put you on your guard."

"But—but—"

"Keep clear of him when there are knives and things about, and don't say anything to excite him," said Russell. "He doesn't have these fits often. It's what the medical johnnies call recurrent insanity, you know."

"D-d-do they?"

"It recurs at intervals, and the worst of it is, even he doesn't know just when it's coming on," said Russell. "Thank goodness you fellows came in when you did. It might have been very serious—"

"Great pip!"

"Luckily, there wasn't a knife about. I dare say he'll be all right when he comes in. If he isn't, just humour him. You see, you'll have to get used to it, if you're going to be in this study. You can help me to bear it."

Drake frowned.

"That's all very well," he said, "but we didn't come to Greyfriars to help you bear lunatics, Russell."

"Does Mr. Quelch know—or the Head?" asked Dick Rodney, after a pause.

"Well, I suppose Ogilvy's people would tell the Head anything of that sort," said Russell.

diplomatically. "Probably—h'm!—Mr. Quelch thinks it safer for me, if you fellows dig in here. Being alone with a lunatic isn't really safe, you know."

"I should jolly well think not!"

"I'll go and look for him, I think," said Russell. "It would be horrible if he threw himself into the fountain, or jumped off the tower, or anything like that. He's my chum, you know, and he can't help having a screw loose, can he?"

"I—I suppose not."

Russell left the study with a grave and troubled face. The gravity and trouble disappeared from his face, however, when the door had closed on him. He winked along the Remove passage.

"I say, Russell—"

Billy Bunter rolled along from Study No. 7. There was a discontented frown on Bunter's fat face.

"What are you grinning at?" he paused to inquire.

"You, old chap," answered Russell affably. "Don't you know your features have that effect on people?"

"Oh, really, Russell! Look here! Are those new chaps in your study yet? I want to see Drake. I told him I was expecting a postal order, and asked him to lend me ten bob on it in advance, but he had to go and see the Head—"

Russell laughed.

"Drake's rather too wide for that, Bunter. Cut it out. But if half-a-crown would be any good, I—"

Russell put his hand in his pocket.

Bunter's round eyes glistened behind his big spectacles.

"My dear old chap, you shall have it back out of my postal order when it comes," he breathed. "I'm expecting one from a titled relation the first post in the morning—"

"Never mind that. Look here!"

Russell lowered his voice to a whisper, and Bunter jumped as he proceeded.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Bunter, when Russell had finished.

"You can do it?"

"Yes, rather!" grinned Bunter.

"Go ahead, then!"

"But that half-crown—"

"Afterwards, old top!"

"Oh, all right!" grunted the Owl of the Remove.

Russell hurried down the passage, and Billy Bunter tapped at the door of Study No. 3.

"Come in!" called out Drake's voice.

Bunter entered.

Drake and Rodney were discussing the peculiar state of affairs in Study No. 3 when the Owl of the Remove came in. They glanced at Bunter, and could not help being struck by his peculiar actions. He blinked round the study very cautiously, as if in terror of his life.

"He's not here!" Bunter gasped at last. "He—he's not here! Hiding behind anything, is he—Ogilvy, you know?"

"He's gone into the quad, I think," answered Drake curtly. "What are you blinking round like a boiled owl for, you ass?"

"Well, you'd be jolly careful how you came into this study, if you knew as much as I do," answered Bunter.

"What do you know, fathead?"

"That's telling," answered Bunter, with a

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mysterious wink. "I'm not going to say anything about Ogilvy. He might go for me next."

Drake and Rodney exchanged a glance.

"Look here! Is there anything wrong with Ogilvy?" demanded Jack Drake abruptly.

"That's telling. I say, you fellows, you remember that I mentioned I was expecting a postal order—"

"Bother your postal order! Tell us about Ogilvy."

"Tain't safe," said Bunter. "If he knew I'd mentioned it, it might bring the fit on suddenly, and he might—"

"What fit?"

"Oh, nothing! I say, about that postal order, Drake. Could you lend me ten bob until it comes—"

"No, I couldn't!" growled Drake. "And now tell us about Ogilvy, before I burst you, you fat boulder!"

He seized the Owl of the Remove by the collar, and shook him. There was a loud and wrathful roar from William George Bunter:

"Yaroooh!"

"Now, then—"

"Yow-ow! Leggo! I—I'll tell you!" howled Bunter.

"Buck up, then!"

Bunter jerked his collar away, his eyes blinking with wrath behind his big glasses. He was more than willing now to enter into Russell's little scheme. Drake and Rodney had been drawn blank, so far as Bunter's celebrated postal order was concerned, and all William George Bunter's friendly feelings towards the new fellows had vanished into thin air.

"Well?" said Rodney impatiently.

"You—you won't tell Ogilvy I told you?" whispered Bunter cautiously.

"Of course not."

"Well, then, he's—mad!" said Bunter, in a thrilling whisper.

"Oh!"

"Russell thinks the fellows don't know outside the study," breathed Bunter, with a wink. "But there's precious few things go on at Greyfriars that I don't know, I can tell you!"

"I can quite believe that!" grunted Rodney, with a look of strong disfavour at the fat junior.

"Oh, really, Rodney—"

"But is this true?" asked Drake suspiciously.

"You'll see for yourself when the fit comes on him," grinned Bunter. "Don't let him get near the bread-knife when he gets excited, that's all. He, he, he!"

The door opened, and Russell came in with Ogilvy. Bunter backed round the table with an exaggerated expression of alarm. He was evidently bent on earning Russell's promised half-crown.

"What's the matter with you, Bunter?" demanded Ogilvy, staring at the fat junior.

"Keep off!" gasped Bunter. "I—I can see it in your eye—it's coming on! Keep off, you beast! Help!"

Bunter made a sudden rush for the door and fled. Ogilvy stared after him, and then turned a wild and rolling eye upon the two new juniors.

"Has Bunter been telling you anything?" he asked suspiciously.

"Ahem! What should he tell us?" murmured Rodney.

"Has he told you anybody's mad?"

"Oh! I—I—he—"

"Are you mad?" demanded Ogilvy.

Drake jumped.

"My hat! No."

"There's a look in your eyes I don't quite like," said Ogilvy, in a peevish, surly tone. "My belief is that you're not quite in your right mind."

"Oh dear!"

"Let's have supper," said Russell pacifically.

Four juniors sat down to supper in Study No. 3 in a rather troubled mood. This was not how Drake and Rodney had expected to pass their first evening at Greyfriars.

MADNESS WITH METHOD IN IT!

"PASS the champagne!" said Ogilvy.

Drake started.

"Champagne?" he repeated.

"Yes, ass! Can't you pass it?" snapped Ogilvy.

"He means the cocoa," whispered Russell.

"Pass it along. Call it champagne, if it pleases him."

"Good gad!" murmured Drake.

Ogilvy sipped his cocoa, and remarked that it was good, but not quite up to Veuve Clicquot. Suddenly he started-up, and hurled the cup and saucer into the fire-grate.

Crash!

Drake and Rodney jumped.

"I—I say, what's the matter?" ejaculated Drake. "Don't you like the—the champagne?"

"It wasn't champagne."

"Oh!"

"It was sherry. Do you think I can drink sherry with my supper?" demanded Ogilvy.

"Pass me that bread-knife, Russell!"

"I—I say, what do you want it for?" stammered Russell.

"I want it! Give it to me."

"Keep it away from him, for goodness' sake!" muttered Rodney, in alarm. "My hat! I'm not standing much more of this!"

Russell slipped the bread-knife into a drawer of the table. Ogilvy burst into a demoniac chuckle.

He crossed suddenly to the door, and locked it.

Then he stared round the study with a rolling eye.

"Wha-a-at do you want?" asked Russell.

"Where's the body?" asked Ogilvy, in a deep and thrilling whisper.

"There—there isn't any body, old chap."

Ogilvy was playing up so remarkably that Russell began to be afflicted with a doubt as to whether he really was a little "potty" or not. The insane junior dropped on his hands and knees, and commenced rooting and sniffing about the study.

"Ogilvy, old fellow——"

"Hush!"

"Wha-at are you looking for?"

"The body!"

"Does the potty idiot fancy that he's a dog, or is he trying to pull our leg?" whispered Drake.

"Hush!" whispered Russell. "For goodness' sake don't excite him! If he takes it into his head that he's a bloodhound, he's quite likely to bite!"

"Ye gods!"

"It isn't often he's like this; you fellows needn't expect this to go on always in this study—only now and then," whispered Russell comfortingly.

There was a deep growl from Ogilvy, and he

made a sudden spring at Rodney. The latter jumped back, and caught his foot in a chair, and went with a crash to the floor.

In an instant Ogilvy was upon him, growling horribly.

"Ow! Draggimoff!" howled Rodney. Rescue!"

Jack Drake ran to his chum's aid, and dragged off the lunatic. Ogilvy went sprawling on his back, still barking.

Drake hurriedly unlocked the door, and drew his chum into the passage. He slammed the door after him. From within the study came a series of loud and ferocious barks, mingled with Russell's voice in soothing tones.

Drake gasped for breath.

"They've no right to have a fellow like that

4 Farthings Equal 1 Penny

12 Pennies Equal 1 Shilling

5 Shillings Equal 1——

"HOLIDAY ANNUAL"!

Have You Got Yours Yet?

loose in a school!" he gasped. "But—but—but is it genuine, Rod, or is it a trick on new chaps?"

"Dashed if it doesn't look genuine," said Rodney. "Listen!"

"Bow-wow-wow!"

"Quiet, Ogilvy! Down, dog! Good old doggie! Be quiet!" came Russell's voice.

"Bow-wow-wow!"

At the farther end of the passage Billy Bunter could be seen, in conversation with the Famous Five. Harry Wharton & Co. were smiling, but they looked grave enough as Drake and Rodney came up.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "You fellows look worried."

"The worryfulness looks terrific," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "Is there any esteemed trouble in your study?"

"Look here," said Drake abruptly. "Do you fellows know anything about Ogilvy being off his dot?"

Five faces of preternatural gravity stared at Drake.

"No good asking us that!" said Johnny Bull curtly. "We're not going to say anything against Ogilvy. He's a good chap."

"But do you know——"

"Things may run in a family," said Nugent. "It's not a chap's own fault if they do."

"But——" gasped Drake.

"He's not dangerous," said Bob Cherry, shaking his head. "Russell looks after him too well for that."

"Then it's true?" exclaimed Rodney.

Bob Cherry looked obstinate.

"I'm not going to say anything. I don't believe he's dangerous, that's all."

"Oh, really, Cherry!" chimed in Billy Bunter.

"What about that time he got hold of Tubb of the Third, and nearly——"

"Shurrup, Bunter!"

"What happened?" asked Drake breathlessly.

"Shut up, Bunter!" said Harry Wharton. "You'll only make these fellows nervous, and they've got to stand Ogilvy, anyhow."

"Have we?" exclaimed Drake warmly. "If he's potty, we're jolly well not going to take on a job as his keepers, I can tell you. He ought to be sent to Colney Hatch."

"He's not bad enough for that," said Wharton; "not nearly bad enough. Treated with tact, he will probably never do any real harm."

"Probably!" hooted Drake. "Probably isn't good enough for me! I want a certainty in a thing like that."

Russell came very quietly out of Study No. 3. His face was grave. Harry Wharton & Co. hurried towards him.

"How is he now?" asked the captain of the Remove in a low voice.

"Calmer!" said Russell. "I—I suppose you fellows have heard him—"

"We couldn't help hearing him. Besides, Bunter's told us it was coming on," said Bob Cherry. "It's hard on you, old fellow."

"Never mind about me," said Russell manfully. "I'm his pal, and I don't mind. It's rather hard on the new kids, but they'll take turns with me to look after Ogilvy, and see that he comes to no harm."

"Will we—just?" broke in Jack Drake. "You're offside there, Russell. If you like chumming with potty lunatics, you can do it, but I'm going to look for another study."

"I should jolly well think so!" exclaimed Rodney indignantly. "Catch me setting up as a keeper! No fear!"

Russell gave them a reproachful look. "He's a good fellow when he's calm," he said, "and he's often calm. When he chucks forks about, you can generally dodge them; in fact, always, if you keep a good look-out."

"Rats!"
"Miau-miau-ow-ow-ow!" came ringing from Study No. 3—a startling imitation of the howl of an excited cat.

Russell groaned.
"He thinks he's a cat now! But it can't last much longer—the fit never does! He'll be quite calm soon. I'd better sit with him, I think. You fellows come in, will you—"

"We—we're just going down to the Rag," said Bob Cherry hurriedly. "There's something going on in the Rag. Come on, you chaps!"

The Famous Five hurried to the stairs. Russell looked at Drake and Rodney and Bunter.

"You fellows come in," he urged. "After all, it's your study."

"Not our study, if we can find another! And if we can't, we'll jolly well manage without a study!" growled Jack Drake. "Come on, Rodney!"

And the two new juniors walked away.
Russell grinned, and went into Study No. 3—and Billy Bunter grinned, too, and followed him in. The stunt had been a perfect success, and Billy Bunter was thinking of his promised reward. And inside Study No. 3 they found a canny Scottish junior who did not display the slightest sign of insanity.

LIGHT AT LAST!

"FIVE bob!" said Billy Bunter firmly.
Jack Drake started.

He was coming towards Study No. 3 with Rodney, when the fat junior's voice smote
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upon his ears loudly. The study door was half open, and Bunter was apparently standing with his hand on the handle.

It was half an hour since the scene of horror in the study, and Rodney and Drake had been inquiring after a study somewhere else along the passage. They had found that nobody was keen on new studymates.

They were coming back now to the study when Bunter's voice smote their ears.

"Five bob!" said Bunter loudly and firmly. "And worth it! You've got rid of them, haven't you? And you couldn't have done it if I hadn't backed you up."

"Oh!" murmured Drake.

He caught Dick Rodney's arm, and they stopped.

"You fat rotter—"

That was Russell's voice.

"You needn't call me names, Russell! I said five bob, and I mean five bob. Of course, only as a loan. I shall return it out of my postal order—when it comes—"

"I promised you half-a-crown—"

"Oh, really, Russell—"

"And you've stuck us for a supper as well," growled Russell. "You fat rascal, you've scoffed all the grub in the study!"

"If you're going to be mean—"

"Oh, kick him out!" said Ogilvy's voice—without a trace of insanity about it now.

"You kick me, that's all!" said Bunter warmly. "I'll jolly well go to those new chaps and tell them you were spoofing."

"You fat fraud—"

"You wouldn't have scared them out of the study without me. Didn't I play up?" demanded Bunter indignantly. "Didn't I tip Wharton and the rest the wink, so that they'd play up? You fellows couldn't have done it on your own! Now you refuse to lend me a measly five bob—and only till my postal order comes, too! I'm surprised at you! Why, I'll bet that Drake would give five bob to know he was being spoofed out of his study."

"I think we've heard enough of this cheery conversation," said Drake, with a chuckle. "I had a suspicion all along the brutes were pulling our leg—only they did it so well. Come on."

He strode on to the door of Study No. 3, and pushed it open. Billy Bunter gave a howl as the door caught his head.

"Yarooooh!"

Jack Drake seized the Owl of the Remove by the collar and spun him into the passage. And as Bunter spun, Drake's boot smote him to the rearward, and William George Bunter went travelling.

Then the two new juniors entered Study No. 3 and closed the door behind them. Russell made a quick sign to Ogilvy. He wondered whether the new fellows had heard anything as they came along.

"Bow-wow-wow!" came a sudden bark from Ogilvy.

He was keeping it up, hoping for the best. "Poor old chap!" said Drake sympathetically. "He still thinks he's a dog! Awfully mad, and no mistake! We've changed our minds, Russell. Instead of changing our study, we're going to help you look after your lunatic."

"Oh!" said Russell blankly.

"Lend a hand, Rod."

"Yes, rather."

(Continued on page 36.)



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G. Garratt, 31, Southend Avenue, Newark, Notts; age 10-14; sports and humour; U.S.A., British Empire, except British Isles.

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GUSSY PUTS HIS FOOT IN IT!*(Continued from page 22.)*

It was such a happy prospect to James that he smiled quite pleasantly and genially.

In that happy mood, expecting to hear every minute that Tom had been taken before the Head, and that he was catching a train home, it was a surprise to James to see the Terrible Three stroll out of the House with happy, laughing faces. It was enough to make James jump.

Tom Merry did not look like a fellow who was bunked. Manners and Lowther did not look like fellows whose best pal had got it right in the neck!

All three looked as if they were enjoying life, as, indeed, after Arthur Augustus had brought his good news to Study No. 10 in the Shell, they were!

James stared at them.

What had gone wrong this time? Something, it seemed, had.

"Spot the Worm!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"Doesn't he look happy?"

Tom Merry laughed.

James did not look happy. The smile had disappeared from his hard face. There was thunder on his brow. His eyes glinted green at Tom Merry.

He strode towards the three Shell fellows.

"Merry!" he barked.

"Yes, sir?" said Tom pleasantly.

"What does this mean? I understand that you were expelled—is not that the case?" almost hissed James.

"Sorry, sir," said Tom politely. "No!"

"Is it possible," said Silverson, between his teeth, "that you have somehow deluded and deceived your Housemaster into believing that you were not guilty of the outrage in his study?"

"Not at all, sir!" said Tom. "I have deceived nobody! I have a relation who is very deceitful indeed—but I am glad to say that I am not at all like him."

Manners and Lowther gurgled.

"What falsehoods have you told Mr. Railton?" hissed James.

"None at all, sir! I leave that kind of thing to the relation I mentioned," answered Tom. "That's in his line—not in mine!"

With that answer, Tom Merry turned his back on the master of the Fourth, and walked away with Manners and Lowther—all three laughing. If looks could have slain, Tom Merry's happy, youthful career might really have been endangered by the look James Silverson cast after him. Fortunately, looks couldn't!

Next Week: "THE BOY WHO VANISHED!"

THE GREYFRIARS LUNATIC!*(Continued from page 34.)*

The two new juniors made a sudden rush at Robert Donald Ogilvy, and before he knew what was happening, he was face down on the hearthrug.

Rodney knelt on his shoulders and pinned him there, and Jack Drake picked up a fire-shovel.

Whack, whack, whack!

"Yaroooh!" roared Ogilvy. "Stoppit! Leggo! Yow-ow! Rescue!"

Russell looked on, dazed.

"Wha-a-at are you fellows up to?" he gasped. "Wha-a-at the merry thump—you—you'll make him worse—"

Drake chuckled.

"Not at all; we're making him better."

Whack, whack, whack!

"Russell, you silly idiot, draggemoff!" howled Ogilvy.

Russell plunged forward to the rescue. The game was evidently up now.

Rodney put out a foot, and Russell stumbled over it, and bumped on the floor. The fire-shovel rose and fell on Ogilvy's trousers with great vim.

"Are you recovered yet?" asked Drake.

"Yaroooh!"

"Feel quite sane? I'm going to whack you till you are."

"You frabjous villain!" bellowed Ogilvy. "Leggo! Stoppit! I was only pullin' your silly leg, and you know it."

"Quite so—we know it," chuckled Drake.

Ogilvy was released, and he scrambled to his feet, dusty and breathless and panting. He glared ferociously, though quite sanely, at the new juniors, who were yelling with laughter.

"You—you—you cheeky rotters, I—I—I'll—" "Make it pax!" chuckled Drake. "You asked for it, you know. You jolly nearly spoofed us out of the study."

Russell broke into a laugh.

"No good ragging," he said. "Cut it out, Ogilvy. You did ask for it, you know. I told you at the first it was a rotten scheme—didn't I? But it jolly nearly came off."

"A miss is as good as a mile!" grinned Rodney.

Ogilvy looked for some moments as if there would be a very serious case of assault and battery in Study No. 3 in the Remove, but his face relaxed at last.

"How did you tumble to it?" he demanded at length.

"Couldn't quite help it, with Bunter yelling it out in the doorway when we came up the passage—"

"All through that fat villain not sticking to a bargain," growled Russell.

Drake laughed.

"And now, why don't you want us in this study?" he demanded.

"Too much of a crowd. But—"

"You really think four's too many?" asked Drake. "If you really think so, of course—"

"You'll change out?" asked Russell eagerly.

"No; you can change out."

"Eh?"

"Sauce for the gander, you know," said Drake coolly. "We're sticking, anyhow. And we'll be on chummy terms or fighting terms, just as you like."

And on reflection, the original owners of Study No. 3 decided that it had better be chummy terms.

Next Wednesday: "COKER'S CATCH!"