

IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT FOR ALL READERS INSIDE!

(See Pages 18 and 19.)

THE GEM
2¢

*Silverson
on the
Spot!*





Blake Answers Back!

We bid au revoir to Jack Blake in this number, but not good-bye. Meet Jack again next week in the grand long complete St. Jim's story in the "Triumph."

R. L. H., of Hackney, writes:

Ready to receive? Now hold this one! Can anyone beat Antidiseestablishmentarianism—23 letters? My favourites are the Levison brothers, Talbot, Monteith, Darrell, Mr. Rilton, and Redfern, to say nothing of Towser. Cheerio!

ANSWER: *Antidis—not again, brother! Exact number of you who've sent that word impossible to compute. I've passed on your approbation to the fellows concerned, and have given Towser a special pat! Chin, chin!*

Jill, of Gillingham, writes:

Why do you consider smoking unhealthy as well as shady? I know a person who, at 17, has won 6 cups for sports and yet smokes a good deal. It

hasn't put him off his form yet. My favourite is Talbot. It's a shame the way you treat Gussy. It's a wonder he hasn't got grey hairs! Or has he? May you never grow whiskers!

ANSWER: *What, only 6 cups! Now isn't it plain that if your friend kept off the smokes he would by now have won 8, 10, 16, or perhaps 30 cups? It will be a "grey" dawn when we haven't Gussy's leg to pull. Dunno what we'd do without the old fathead. May your curls increase daily!*

Patricia Lowry, of Hinckley, Leicestershire, writes:

Do the Shell ever do any work?

ANSWER: *(from 30 or more Shell throats!): YES!!! (And if you weren't a charming young lady, they'd add: SCRAG HER!)*

N. D. Modak, of Dhawar, Bombay Presidency, India, writes:

How do Fatty Wynn and Baggy Trimble eat a whole cake by themselves? Why don't you and all your friends come to India next hols?

ANSWER: *It doesn't take both Fatty and Baggy long to dispose of a whole cake. You'll need two whole cakes if they ever come to India—and let me warn you, kind as you are, that the champion gourmands of St. Jim's are soon ready for another two cakes after that! In fact, they each "take the cake"!*

F. Thorne, Llandudno, Wales:

Your 58-letter place name was sent in by Iris Bristow last week. So you won't have to eat your GEM! Not such a bad meal, perhaps, for a "voracious reader"!

Alfred McLaughlin, of Belfast, Ireland, writes:

Look here, Blake, you fearful back-chatting ass, you silly burbling clown, you frabjous, chortling cheeky, fatheaded son of a savage! (CENSORED—Ed.) What Zoo did they find you in?

ANSWER: *Sure, it's excited ye are, entirely, isn't it? Pipe down, now—ye'll be blowin' so hard, there'll be a gale in the Irish Sea directly. Pout!*

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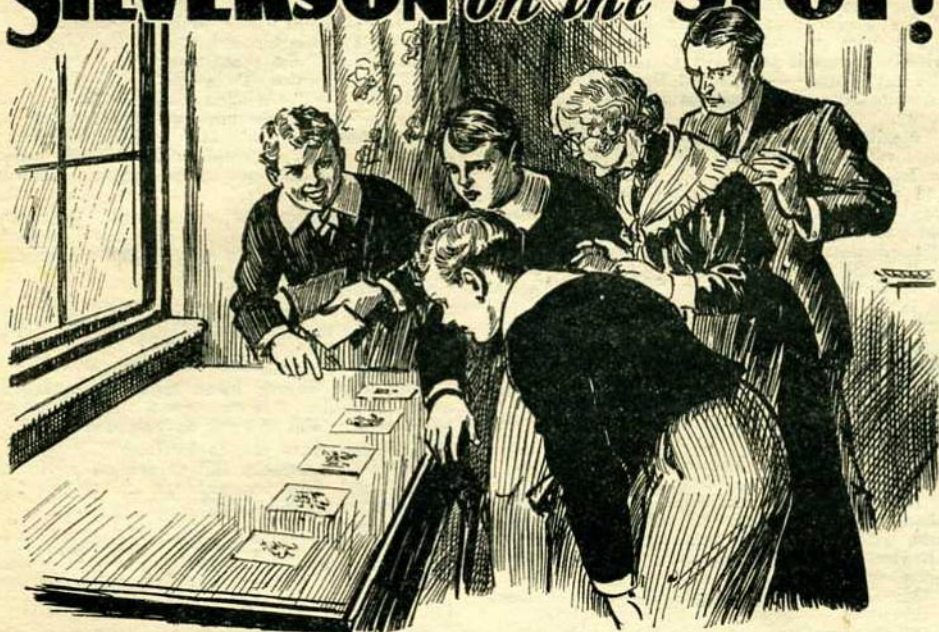
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TOM MERRY'S ENEMY THINKS HE'S GOT TOM "ON THE SPOT"—BUT THERE'S AN ELEVENTH-HOUR SHOCK FOR THE CROOK MASTER!

SILVERSON *on the* SPOT!



Manners spread the tell-tale photographs in a row on the table. Tom Merry and Lowther gazed at them breathlessly. Miss Priscilla gazed at them dumbfounded. James Silverson gazed at them with staring eyes.

NOT A PARTY!

"TOM MEWVY—"

"Yes!"

"Lowthah—"

"Right!"

"Mannahs—"

"Oh, yes!"

"That's thwee!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Thwee to begin with!"

And Arthur Augustus wrote down three names in his neat little pocket-book, with a smile of satisfaction on his aristocratic countenance.

D'Arcy of the Fourth was standing on the study landing in the School House, with pocket-book and pencil in hand.

His friends, Blake and Herries and Digby, stood leaning in a row on the banister—grinning!

Baggy Trimble, the fattest member of the Fourth Form, hovered in the offing, with his gooseberry eyes fixed on Arthur Augustus.

Three Shell fellows, coming across the landing, were hailed by Arthur Augustus, who held up his pocket-book and waved his pencil. And Tom Merry, Manners, and

Lowther, apparently understanding what was implied thereby, gave answers in the affirmative.

"Thank you vevy much, deah boys!" went on Arthur Augustus. "I wathah expected you to play up! You thwee fellows are thwee—"

"By gum!" said Monty Lowther. "Gussy's getting jolly good at arithmetic!"

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus cheerfully. "I have already got Figgins & Co. on the list—that's anothah thwee. Thwee and thwee make six—"

"Sure?" asked Monty.

"Eh? Yaas, wathah!"

"He does these complicated figures in his head!" said Monty Lowther. "What a brain!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

POWERFUL LONG STORY OF THE CHRISTMAS HOLIDAY ADVENTURES OF TOM MERRY & CO.

By

MARTIN CLIFFORD

"That's six!" said Arthur Augustus, unheeding, as the Terrible Three, laughing, went down the stairs. "And you thwee fellows will make nine!" continued the swell of St. Jim's, turning his eyeglass on Blake & Co. "I take it for gwanted that I can wely on my own pals! Aftah all, Chwistmas comes but once a year! Shall I put your name down, Blake?"

"Any old thing!" said Jack Blake.

"Yours, Hewwies?"

"Oh, yes!"

"And yours, Dig?"

"Shove it in!" said Dig.

"That's nine!" said Arthur Augustus. "Now I will wun wound and see Levison and his fwends, to see if they will go on the list."

"I say, Gussy—" bleated Baggy Trimble.

Arthur Augustus's eyeglass turned on the fat Baggy.

"Weally, Twimble, I wish you would not ad-dress me as Gussy!" he said. "I am Gussy to my fwends."

"I say, you're making up a big party," said Baggy Trimble. "I say, does your pater know that you've got all those names down?"

"Lord Eastwood doesn't know anythin' about it, Twimble!"

"Oh jiminy!" said Baggy. "But will he stand for it?"

"I fail to undahstand you, Twimble!" said Arthur Augustus, puzzled. "My patah certainly would-approve of this, if that is what you mean. I trust you do not suppose that I should do anythin' of which my fathah would not approve?"

"Can you put down as many names as you like?" asked Baggy.

"Eh? Of course! The more the mewwiah."

"What about putting mine down, then?"

"Bai Jove! Do you mean that, Twimble?" asked Arthur Augustus. "I will put your name down with pleasuah, if you weally mean it!"

Baggy Trimble grinned from one long ear to the other.

"My dear chap, it's a go!" he said. "Shove it down!"

Arthur Augustus gazed at the fat Baggy in some surprise. Blake and Herries and Dig gazed at him, and grinned.

It was the day before break-up at St. Jim's. It was known that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was going to have a party of St. Jim's fellows at Eastwood House, his noble pater's residence, for Christmas. Baggy Trimble—evidently—took it for granted that Arthur Augustus was making up the list for that party. Why else should he be making up a list at all?

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake suddenly.

Arthur Augustus glanced round at him.

"Bai Jove! What's the joke, Blake?" he asked.

"Trimble!" answered Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Herries and Dig.

Arthur Augustus looked puzzled.

"I fail to see any reason for mewwiment," he said. "I think it is wathah decent of Twimble to ask me to put his name down! You are suah that you mean it, Twimble?"

"What-ho!" said Baggy. "I shall enjoy it, old chap!"

"Will you, weally?"

"Oh, quite!"

"Well, I am glad to heah you say so, Twimble! You seem to have a kindah heart than I evah supposed! Of course, Taggles is a vewy worthy man, though wathah ewustay—"

"Taggles!" repeated Baggy. He did not see what the school porter had to do with a list for D'Arcy's Christmas party.

"Yaas, wathah! I am suah Taggles will be vewy pleased at the fellows wemembewin' him! If you weally mean that you want your name to go down on this list, Twimble—"

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"Yes, rather!"

"Vewy well—I will put it down." Arthur Augustus wrote B. Trimble in his list. "That makes ten. Thank you vewy much, Twimble! Pewwaps, as I may not be seein' you again, you may as well hand me the half-crown now."

Baggy Trimble blinked at him.

"The what?" he ejaculated.

"Tife half-crown, Twimble."

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Blake & Co.

"Bai Jove! I do not quite see what you fellows are laughin' at," exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Pway hand ovah the half-crown, Twimble, as I may not see you again befoah we go home for the hols."

"You may not see me again!" ejaculated Baggy Trimble. "My dear chap, you'll be seeing me again all right! In fact, I shall travel down to Hampshire with you."

"Bai Jove!"

"You may have to lend me my fare!" said Baggy. "I've run rather short of cash. That will be all right, I suppose?"

"Weally, Twimble—"

"But what do you mean about half-a-crown?" asked Trimble. "If you want me to lend you half-a-crown, I'm sorry I haven't one—"

"I do not want you to lend me half-a-crown, Twimble! I uttably fail to see what you are dwivin' at! Did you not ask me to put your name down on this list?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Then pway hand ovah the half-crown! If you haven't one, I had bettah crows your name out again! It is no good puttin' your name down unless you can stump up the half-crown, you know."

"Oh jiminy!" gasped Baggy Trimble. "Do you charge your guests at Christmas a half-crown each, or what?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Blake & Co.

"Are you wandewin' in your mind, Twimble?" asked Arthur Augustus. "Nobody is talkin' about guests at Christmas, that I know of."

"Then what's that list?" howled Baggy.

"Eh? I supposed you knew what it was, Twimble, as you offahed to have your name put down! It is a subscription list—"

"A whatter?" gasped Baggy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway, don't keep on cacklin', you fellows! There is nothin' whatevah to cackle at that I can see. This is a subscription list, Twimble—evewy chap whose name goes down puts up half-a-crown for a Christmas-box for old Taggles—"

"What?" yelled Baggy.

"If you desiah me to put your name down—"

"You ass!"

"You had bettah hand over the half-crown—"

"You—you goat!"

"In case I don't see you again befoah we bweak up."

"You idiot!"

"Weally, Twimble—"

"You blithering dummy! Yah! Go and eat coke!" snorted Baggy Trimble, and he rolled away to the stairs, and went down—evidently not desiring to shell out a half-crown towards a Christmas-box for old Taggles!

Arthur Augustus gazed after him, and then gazed at Blake & Co. He was quite perplexed.

"I shall have to crows out Twimble's name now!" he said. "What the dooce did he ask me to put it down for, if he was not weally meanin'?"

to subscribe to the Chwistmas-box for old Taggles?”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Weally, you fellows—”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“I quite fail to see what is amusin’ you fellows—”

“Ha, ha, ha!” yelled Blake. “Baggy fancied that was the list for a Christmas party!”

“Oh, cwumbs! Do you weally think so, Blake?”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“What a vewy extwaordinawy misunderstandin’—”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Bai Jove, you know, Twimble is an ass—”

“Not the only one here!” grinned Herries.

“Wats!” said Arthur Augustus, and he marched off, with pencil and pocket-book, to collect further subscriptions for Taggles’ Christmas-box, leaving Blake & Co. chortling.

NICE FOR TOM MERRY!

“MERRY!”

“Yes, sir!”

Mr. Railton called to Tom Merry as Tom came down the stairs with Manners and Lowther. Tom hurried across to the Housemaster. His chums glanced after him rather uneasily.

Miss Priscilla believed in James, and trusted him; and Tom hesitated to open her unsuspecting old eyes on the subject of the schemer who had been his unscrupulous enemy at St. Jim’s.

He wondered, now, whether he was going to hear anything about James.

However, whatever it was, he had to hear it, and after a moment’s hesitation, he picked up the receiver, and put it to his ear.

“Is that you, dear?” he asked. “Tom speaking.”

“Yes, my dearest Tommy!” came Miss Priscilla’s voice from the other end. “How are you, my darling?”

“Fine!” answered Tom.

“You are not catching cold in this dreadful weather? You are careful not to get your feet wet?” asked Miss Priscilla anxiously.

Tom Merry grinned. The sturdy schoolboy, captain of the Shell, and the finest junior footballer in his House, was still, in Miss Priscilla’s affectionate old eyes, the darling little Tommy of years ago, when Laurel Villa had been thrown into commotion if the little darling sneezed!

“Right as rain, dear!” answered Tom. “I shall see you to-morrow! Is there anything special—”

“Yes, my pet! James—”

Tom Merry suppressed a groan. He was going to hear about James.

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BIG NEWS FOR YOU!

(See centre pages.)

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Tom had been in so many rows that term that they wondered whether another was cropping up on the last day of the term.

But the expression on the School House master’s face was quite kindly. Rows, for Tom Merry, were ending with the term. Since James Silver-son, the temporary master of the Fourth Form, had left, Tom had not been in a row. And, as a matter of fact, Tom’s Housemaster, as well as his Form-master, knew now that the troubles of that troubled term had been due to James Silver-son. It had been a case of the “wolf and the lamb”—and the “wolf” was now gone from St. Jim’s.

“You may take a telephone call, Merry!” said Mr. Railton. “Miss Fawcett wishes to speak to you.”

“Oh, thank you, sir!” said Tom.

And he went into the Housemaster’s study, where the receiver was off the telephone.

Tom Merry stepped to the instrument, but he did not immediately pick up the receiver.

He was always glad to hear the kind old voice of Miss Priscilla Fawcett, and he had no doubt that his old guardian was going to speak about the Christmas holidays. On the following day he was going home to Laurel Villa, at Huckleberry Heath, in Hampshire, taking Manners and Lowther with him.

That Christmas holiday was not so attractive as usual, however, as he knew that he was to see James Silver-son again at Laurel Villa. He had hoped that James was done with when he left the school, but James was going to turn up again like a bad penny.

“I am sure you are glad, Tommy, that dear James will be with us for Christmas. It will be nice for you.”

“Oh! Ah! Um!”

“What did you say, darling?”

“I shall be as glad to see James as he will be to see me!” said Tom Merry—a reply that savoured more of the wisdom of the serpent than of the innocence of the dove! Still, it was perfectly veracious. He knew exactly how much his distant relative, James Silver-son, would be glad to see him!

“I am so pleased to hear you say so, dear!” came Miss Priscilla’s voice. “I am afraid that you have not liked James so much as I hoped, when he was at your school. I cannot understand why, as he is so attached to you, and so anxious for your welfare.”

“Oh, my hat!”

“What did you say?”

“Oh! Yes, dear! Go on.”

“James has called to see me since he left the school, and he has talked about you in the most delightful way!” went on Miss Priscilla. “He is absolutely convinced, dear Tommy, that all your faults are on the surface—”

“Very kind of him!”

“Yes, is it not, Tommy? He has been greatly pained by the trouble you have been in this term, and he thinks it is less due to you yourself than to the influence of thoughtless friends.”

“The rotter—”

“What?”

"I—I mean, carry on."

"I am afraid, Tommy, that you do not trust James!" said Miss Priscilla, with a sorrowful note in her voice. "And he speaks of you so kindly. He fears that the influence of your friends, Manners and Lowther, is not so good for you as he could wish—"

Tom suppressed the reply that rose to his lips.

"Now, dearest Tommy," went on the old lady at Laurel Villa, "it is understood that your friends are coming home with you for the holidays, and, of course, any friend of yours is welcome here. But do you think that, perhaps, it might be better for you not to see them during the holidays?"

"What?"

"James thinks that their influence over you, which he fears is not for your good, might weaken if you did not see them again till next term. What do you think, darling?"

Tom Merry breathed hard.

He could not be angry with the kind old lady who was as easily deceived as a baby, and who, evidently, had been hearing a good deal from James. But his feelings towards the schemer were deep.

"Never mind what James thinks, dear!" he answered at last. "James doesn't know what he's talking about."

"My dearest Tommy!"

"Don't let him worry you!" said Tom. "It's all right! Manners and Lowther are the best fellows breathing!"

"You don't think, my darling, that you had better act on James' advice?"

"Hardly!"

"He is so kind, so thoughtful—"

"Oh, blow him!"

"Wha-a-t?"

"I—I—I mean, never mind James!" said Tom hastily. "It's all right."

"Very well. Perhaps you know best, my dearest boy," sighed Miss Priscilla. "Certainly I have always liked your friends, and have never seen any harm in them; but James thinks—"

"Bother him!"

"Tommy!"

"I mean, it's all right! Is that all, dear?"

"Now about to-morrow, Tommy! I cannot bear to think of your making that long train journey unprotected, in these dreadful times. If James had remained at the school till the end of the term, he would have travelled home with you. But he has very kindly offered to meet you at Wayland Junction, near the school—"

"What?"

"And accompany you on the journey! Suppose, my darling child, that there should be a dreadful air-raid? James will protect you."

"I can see him doing it!"

"My darling—"

"Oh, all right!" groaned Tom. "If you like, I'll travel home with dear James!"

"I shall feel so much easier in my mind, darling!"

"O.K."

"And you will be sure not to forget to put on a warm muffler in these cold winds?"

"Oh, yes!"

"And do not forget to have a hot water bottle put in the carriage."

"Eh?"

"But no doubt the headmaster will think of that."

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"Oh, my hat! I—I mean, no doubt!" gasped Tom.

"Then good-bye, dear, till to-morrow!"

"Good-bye!"

Tom Merry put up the receiver and left the study. His sunny face was clouded as he went out into the quad to rejoin his chums.

MONTY MAKES ARRANGEMENTS!

"THE worm!" said Manners.

"The rat!" said Monty Lowther.

Those were the comments of Tom Merry's two chums when he told them of the talk on the telephone. The prospect of seeing James Silverston at Laurel Villa at all was not pleasant; the prospect of making the journey to Hampshire in his company far from attractive.

"You'll have to put Miss Fawcett wise to the rat, Tom!" said Manners. "You can see that he hiked down to Hampshire when he was kicked out of St. Jim's, to pull the wool over her eyes and make more trouble for you at home."

"Yes," said Tom. "But—"

"She ought to know the cad as he is!" said Lowther.

"Well, yes; but—"

"But what, fathead?"

"Well, she trusts him," said Tom slowly. "It would hurt her a good deal to find out what a treacherous reptile the fellow is. She's such an innocent old duck, you know!"

"If she knew he's tried to get you sacked here by playing dirty tricks, she would turn him down like a shot!" grunted Manners.

"I know. But—"

"Are you going to let him dish you at Laurel Villa as he's tried to do here because you're too jolly soft to hit back?" snorted Manners.

Tom Merry coloured.

"Oh, don't be an ass, old chap!" he said. "I'll hit back at James hard enough—but I can't worry a dear old soul who has always been kindness itself to me. I shall have to stand Silverston somehow over Christmas. After all, he won't be back here next term; we shall be done with him."

"He's got some scheme on for the hols, you ass! That's why he would like to see your pals left out, if he could wangle it! He thinks we shall have an eye on him there—as we jolly well shall!"

"I don't see what he can do."

"If you could, it wouldn't be much use the rat trying it on! But you can bank on it that he's got it out and dried!"

"And making the journey with us is part of the game!" said Monty Lowther, with a nod. "He doesn't want to make that trip in your company, Tom, as I suppose you know?"

"Yes, ass! But—"

"A row in the train, very likely," said Manners, "and Tom's uncontrolled temper to blame for it when they get in!"

"Oh!" said Tom. "Well, I'll be jolly careful not to row with the cur on the train, if that's what he wants! It takes two to make a quarrel!"

"And two to keep the peace!" grunted Manners.

"Well, it can't be helped!" said Tom. "I'm not going to do or say anything to upset Miss Priscilla, if I can help it. After all, we're

going to have a jolly Christmas, James or no James! Why grouse?"

"Well, we shall be there, anyhow," said Lowther. "We won't let the innocent little lamb be gobbled up by the Big Bad Wolf!"

"Fathead!" said Tom.

"And we all go over to D'Arcy's place on Boxing Day," said Manners. "Even that cheeky rat won't have the neck to barge in there! We shall be shut of him then, at any rate. But I can tell you, Tom, that he's got something up his sleeve for you. This holiday at Laurel Villa is his last chance, and he won't let it pass him by like the jolly old sunbeams!"

Tom Merry looked a little worried.

"Well, look here," he said. "You fellows keep the peace if you can. If Silverson hunts for trouble, dodge it as much as you can. You can travel down in a different carriage if you like and leave the brute to me!"

"And leave the poor little lamb at the wolf's mercy!" said Monty.

"Ass!" roared Tom.

"My dear chap, we're sticking to you like glue!" said Lowther. "I shouldn't wonder, too, if Silverson changes his mind about travelling down with us!"

"Too much luck!" said Tom ruefully.

"You never know!" said Lowther; and, leaving Tom Merry and Manners, Monty strolled away and went into the House.

His footsteps led him to Study No. 6 in the Fourth, where he found Blake and Herries and Dig sorting out things for packing. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was still busy on his collection for Taggles' Christmas box.

"You men remember Silverson?" asked Monty, as he looked into the study.

The three Fourth Formers looked at him.

"Just a few, fathead!" answered Jack Blake. "Think we've forgotten the rat already when he was only turfed out last week?"

"Like to see him again?"

"No fear!" said Dig.

"Well, I would!" said Herries. "I'd like to boot him! Chap can boot the rat now—he isn't a St. Jim's master any more!"

"Good egg!" said Blake heartily. "If you know where he's to be found, Lowther, cough it up and we'll go and boot him!"

Monty Lowther chuckled.

"He will be at Wayland Junction to-morrow for our train, to travel home with Tom—because he's so fond of him!" he explained.

"The spoofing worm!"

"I was thinking," went on Lowther, "that something might happen to prevent him catching our train. Yours goes a bit later, I believe. Did you ever notice that there's a terrific lot of snow banked up at the back of the platform at Wayland Railway Station?"

"Yes. What about it?"

"Tommy can't do anything, or that rat will yowl out to old Miss Fawcett that Tommy's lost his bad temper again. We can't do anything—as we're going to stay at Laurel Villa! But you fellows might like to give Silverson a tip about what you think of him!"

"By gum!" said Herries. "We'll snowball the brute all over the shop! He jolly well won't catch that train!"

"Hear, hear!" grinned Dig.

"It's a go!" said Blake. "Leave him to us! I'll speak to Levison and Olive and Cardew.

They'll be there, and they love Silverson just as much as we do! We'll give him jip!"

"Good man!" said Monty Lowther; and he left Study No. 6, smiling, and went out of the School House and crossed over to the New House.

Three juniors closed round him as he entered that building. Before he knew what was happening, Monty Lowther was bumping on the floor, with Figgins, Kerr, and Fatty Wynn grinning down at him.

"Ow!" gasped Lowther.

"So kind of you to walk in!" grinned Figgins. "Give him another, you men!"

"I say—"

Bump!

"You silly asses!" roared Lowther. "I say—yaroooh!"

Bump!

"Wow! Leggo! I tell you—"

"Pax!" yelled Lowther. "I came in here to speak to you, you potty New House piffers—not for a row!"

"That's all very well!" said Figgins. "Look here, we'll have a row first, and you can speak to us afterwards—that's fair!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Chuck it, you chumps!" hooted Lowther; and Figgins & Co. kindly chucked it, and Lowther was released. "Look here, it's about Silverson!"

"Silverson!" repeated the three. No Fourth Form man of St. Jim's had yet forgotten James Silverson, who had wielded the cane not wisely but too well in the Fourth Form Room.

"He will be at Wayland to-morrow!" said Monty.

"Will he, by gum?" said George Figgins. "I hope I shall see him there. I'll let him know we haven't forgotten him!"

"What-ho!" said Kerr.

"You bet!" agreed Fatty Wynn.

"He thinks he's travelling home with Tom Merry and us," said Lowther. "I think he isn't—if he gets enough snowballs. He might lose the train sorting himself out of a snowbank or something of that sort."

Figgins & Co. chuckled.

"Rely on us," said Figgins.

And Monty Lowther departed from the New House satisfied. James was going to begin trouble, if he could, on the journey home to Hampshire; but Monty Lowther's arrangements made it probable that James would catch a later train than that taken by the Terrible Three. James, probably, did not look for trouble with fellows who had been in his Form at St. Jim's—it was the unexpected that was going to happen.

And when, on the morrow, St. Jim's broke up, and the school omnibus rolled off to Wayland with a cheery cargo of juniors crammed in it, Monty Lowther was smiling with happy anticipation.

SNOWBALLS FOR SILVERSON!

JAMES SILVERSON stood on the platform at Wayland Junction, looking over the merry crowd of schoolboys, going home for the holidays, who swarmed into the station. And a greenish glitter shot into James' narrow eyes as they fixed on the cheery face of Tom Merry of the Shell.

Tom was not looking round for him. He had

a faint hope that James might miss him in the crowd at the station.

He felt that he had to pay regard to Miss Priscilla's wishes, and if James turned up he was going to be as civil as possible to him; but he hoped that James might not, after all, turn up.

Mr. Silverson was not in a hurry to approach the Terrible Three, though he spotted them as soon as they came on the platform.

He watched Tom Merry with a black and bitter look.

For almost a whole term at St. Jim's James had schemed and plotted against his schoolboy rival for a fortune, and the ultimate outcome of unscrupulous rascality had been what James might really have expected—he had not only failed, but he had had to leave the school in disgrace himself.

But that disastrous outcome of scheming and plotting did not make it clear to James that honesty was the best policy. Like most rogues, James had a sort of blind spot, and he could not see what he did not want to see. He still had faith in his cunning and duplicity, badly as those estimable qualities had let him down.

As Manners had said, this holiday at Laurel Villa was his last chance. James was going to make the most of it.

James had at least one advantage—Tom Merry hated the idea of worrying poor old Miss Priscilla with rows and disagreements. James had no scruple whatever on that point. James' cue was to pose as an affectionate and misunderstood elder relative, who was anxious to keep a reckless, hot-headed youth from hunting trouble—and he had very carefully implanted that impression in Miss Priscilla's simple old mind. A row in the train with that hot-headed youth, after his kindness in taking the trouble to accompany him on the journey, looked like good business to James.

He scowled at the sight of Manners and Lowther, evidently going with Tom in spite of what had been said over the telephone.

James would greatly have preferred to have Tom at Laurel Villa without his friends, especially Manners, whose watchful eye he rather feared. But it was clear that his hint to Miss Priscilla had not produced the desired effect.

The three passed near him without noticing him, and he heard their cheery voices.

"Here's the train!" said Tom. "Come and bag a carriage before they fill up."

"Is that your camera, Manners?" asked Lowther, tapping a leather case slung over the shoulder of Harry Manners' overcoat.

"Eh! Yes!" answered Manners.

"You're taking it?"

Manners stared at him.

"Taking it! Of course I am, ass! Think I was going to leave it behind?"

"Wasn't this going to be a holiday?" asked Lowther.

Tom Merry laughed. Harry Manners did not. Manners was insensible to humour on the subject of his beloved camera.

"Idiot!" said Manners. "Fathead! Chuckle-head! Dummy!"

"Come on!" said Tom, laughing. "Here's an empty carriage."

The three Shell fellows reached the carriage, and James left his post of observation and followed them.

Manners got in, and Lowther followed. Tom Merry was about to follow Manners when there was a tap on his shoulder.

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He glanced round—at James Silverson.

His face fell. Silverson smiled sarcastically as he noticed it.

"You do not seem pleased to see me, my dear boy," he remarked.

"No!" answered Tom.

"That is frank, at all events!" sneered James.

"What's the good of talking rot?" said Tom Merry. "I loathe the sight of you, though I don't hate you as you do me. I'd be sorry to feel like that to anybody. But if you're going to travel with us I'm willing to be civil if you are! No need to rag."

"None at all," said James, through his closed lips. "But you may take it from me that I shall stand no insolence, you young cub!"

Tom's eyes gleamed.

"Is that how you are going to begin," Mr. Silverson?" he asked. "I think you'd better take another carriage."

"Not in the least," said James coolly. "I am going to take the same carriage, and keep an eye on you during the journey. I shall see that you behave yourself now that you are out of sight of schoolmasters. And if you do not behave yourself I shall have no hesitation whatever in boxing your ears."

"You'd better not, I think," said Tom. "If you try anything of the kind, Mr. Silverson, I shall knock you down as I did once at St. Jim's."

"That will do!" said James. "Be silent!"

Tom Merry breathed hard and deep. James was losing no time, evidently. There was going to be trouble on that train journey.

"Now get in!" snapped James. "I am waiting to follow you, and you are in the way! Don't loiter about the doorway—get in! Don't answer me back, for I may as well say plainly—Yurroooooop!"

James broke off with a spluttering howl.

At the back of the station platform, which was open to the weather, snow was banked high and thick. Quite a number of Fourth Form fellows had been busy at that snowbank, kneading snowballs. Having provided themselves with ammunition, they were now commencing hostilities.

An unexpected snowball, whizzing from he knew not where, interrupted James by squashing over his mouth. It came from Jack Blake's deft hand.

He staggered back spluttering, his mouth full of snow.

"Ooogh!" he gurgled.

Tom Merry stared round. He knew nothing of Monty Lowther's arrangements, made the day before. From the carriage Manners and Lowther grinned.

Whiz! Whiz! Whiz!

Crash! Smash! Squash!

"Oooooogh!" spluttered James, staggering under a volley. "Groogh! Who—what—wooooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go it!" yelled Figgins.

"Give him toco!" roared Blake.

"Yaas, watah!" chortled Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Wag the wottah! Wag the wascally wapsallion! Wag the weptile!"

Whiz! Smash! Whiz! Squash!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Give him some more!" bawled Herries.

"Let him have it!" chuckled Dig.

"Go it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh my hat!" gasped Tom Merry.

Lowther reached out and grabbed him by the arm.

"Get in!" he said "I want to shut the door. Snowballs are no respecters of persons! Get in!"

"But Silverson—"

"Get in, fathad!"

Lowther fairly dragged Tom Merry in. Manners shut the door.

But James Silverson was not thinking at the moment of forcing his unwelcome presence into that carriage. James was too busy dodging snowballs—though he did not succeed in dodging them.

They fairly rained on him.

Figgins & Co., Levison & Co., and Study No. 6 pelted him right and left. Other fellows, recognising the former unpopular master of the Fourth, joined in the game with great zest. Even Baggy Trimble grabbed up a snowball for Silverson's benefit. They rained and showered and streamed on him.

James tottered under the fusillade.

Half a dozen snowballs, squashing over his features in a volley, up-ended James as he sprawled on the platform.

Round him gathered a merry crowd, whizzing snowballs. Quite a hurricane of snowballs squashed on James as he rolled and sprawled dizzily.

Twenty fellows at least were snowballing him now, and James hardly knew whether he was on his head or his heels.

Again and again he scrambled up, spluttering with fury, but as fast as he scrambled up, volleying snowballs knocked him over again. James lived and moved and had his being in a world of smashing snowballs.

There was a shriek from the engine. James did not even hear it. He sprawled, and spluttered, and howled, and yelled, unaware even that the train was getting into motion.

From a carriage window, as the train rolled out of Wayland Station, three grinning faces looked back.

The last Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther saw of James, he was sprawling and spluttering under a volley of squashing snowballs. Then he was lost to sight—and the Terrible Three rolled off cheerily on their journey—without James!

HOME FOR CHRISTMAS!

"DARLING Tommy!"

Miss Priscilla Fawcett beamed.

"Dear little pet!"

Manners and Lowther manfully contrived not to grin. Miss Priscilla's kind old face beamed with affectionate happiness as she greeted the stalwart captain of the Shell as a dear little pet!

Miss Priscilla was so happy to see her darling Tommy that she quite forgot the existence of dear James, and did not even notice that Silverson had not arrived with the juniors.

"And your dear little friends!" went on Miss Priscilla. She shook hands with Tom's dear little friends.

Hannah removed overcoats. Thomas carried away bags. Tom Merry & Co. went to their rooms to remove the signs of travel, and came down to tea in the garden-room, with cheery faces and good appetites.

The December dusk was falling—but it was not yet black-out. From the french windows the garden could be seen, gleaming white with snow. Within, all was cosy and bright, Miss Priscilla

presiding over the teapot with a happy, smiling face, the fire glowing and crackling, a scent of hot muffins in the air, and the tea-table almost groaning under a mountain of new-laid eggs and home-made jams and jellies, that would have delighted the fat heart of Baggy Trimble.

"But where," asked Miss Priscilla, at last, "is James? Did you not see dear James, Tommy?"

"Yes, he was at the station," answered Tom.

"But did he not travel down with you?"

"I—I think he lost the train!"

"Dear me!" said Miss Priscilla. "That was rather careless of James—and he is usually so very careful in such matters. Then you little boys have travelled down by yourselves. Thank goodness that you have arrived safely. No doubt James will come on by the next train."

"Is Silverson staying here?" asked Tom.

"Yes, my dear; that will be very nice, won't it?" said Miss Priscilla. "He is so fond of young society. He has told me how the little boys in his Form at the school all liked him—how sad they were when he left."

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Tom.

He could not help grinning as he remembered that scene at Wayland Junction, and James' happy experience at the hands of the little boys of his Form at St. Jim's.

"While you and James are together here, I hope that you will come to understand James better!" went on Miss Priscilla. "I am afraid there have been some misunderstandings at school—you did not realise how attached James was to you, how anxious he was for your welfare! Did you, Tommy?"

"Not at all!" admitted Tom.

"James has told me about this! It has made me very sad," said Miss Priscilla. "But I am sure it is all over now. You will try to understand that James is your very best friend, Tommy."

Tom Merry made no reply to that.

It was not very easy to answer.

"And after tea you must tell me about your little difficulties at school, Tommy, and I shall advise you."

"But I haven't any, dear!" said Tom. "I'm getting on fine at St. Jim's—since Silverson left, I mean."

"My dear, dear boy, that sounds almost as if you fancy that James was to blame in some way, while he was at your school!" said Miss Priscilla, with gentle reproach.

Again Tom Merry took refuge in silence.

After tea, Manners and Lowther exchanged a glance, and went to their rooms to unpack.

Then Miss Priscilla settled in her favourite armchair by the fire, and took up her knitting—both Miss Priscilla and her faithful retainer, Hannah, being fearfully busy these days with knitting socks for soldiers.

"And now, Tommy dear, tell me all!" said Miss Priscilla.

Tom Merry stood by the fire, feeling perplexed and puzzled. He certainly did not intend to tell his kind old guardian all—it would have been too severe a shock to her.

But how he was to get through the holidays with James about the place, and without trouble, he really did not know.

"First of all," went on Miss Priscilla, "take this key and open the top left-hand drawer in the bureau."

"Yes!" said Tom, mystified.

An immense ancient oak bureau almost filled one end of the room. Tom took the key that Miss Priscilla handed him from her bag, and opened the top drawer on the left-hand side, as bidden.

"Do you want something from it?" he asked.

"No! No! Look into it, my dear."

Tom Merry looked in the drawer of the bureau. He stared at what he saw there.

It was a wad of banknotes.

"My dear!" he ejaculated. "What—"

"There is a hundred pounds there," said Miss Priscilla.

"A hundred pounds!" exclaimed Tom. "My dear, it isn't safe to keep all that money about the house."

"It is for you, Tommy!"

"For me?" ejaculated Tom blankly.

"To pay your debts—"

"Mum-mum-my debts!" stammered Tom.

"Surely it will be enough?" asked Miss Fawcett.

"Enough!" gasped Tom. "My dear, do you fancy that a St. Jim's fellow ever runs into debt to the tune of a hundred pounds? He would be jolly well turned out of the school, if he did."

"Yes, yes, if it was known! How very fortunate that your headmaster did not know, Tom!"

"But I—I—never—"

"James assures me that nothing was known at the school, though, of course, there was talk!" said Miss Priscilla. "Although it placed him, as a master, in a somewhat invidious position, he would never utter a word that would cause you harm, Tom."

Tom Merry looked at her.

"James!" he said, between his teeth.

"Do not think, my child, that I blame you!" said Miss Priscilla. "You have been led astray, my poor innocent darling! James has assured me, over and over again, that you have fallen under bad influences. Indeed, had he expressed any opinion detrimental to you, Tom, I should never have listened to him—but he never, never has! It was bad influence."

"Oh!" breathed Tom.

"I cannot think," said Miss Priscilla, "that those two nice boys who came home with you are the cause of this dreadful state of affairs—they seem such nice boys, and very attached to you, Tom. James, I think, is mistaken on that point. There are others—"

"Oh, the cur!" breathed Tom.

"I hope, dear Tommy, that you will listen to James' good counsel during the holidays, and will avoid any such troubles next term at school. But you see, my dear, that you must be completely cleared of debt—that is very urgent! I will not ask you for details, my dear! You will simply use that money to pay all your debts, and avoid, I hope, such difficulties in the future."

"Has Silverson told you that I am in debt—that it runs into such a sum as that?" asked Tom.

"He does not know the precise amount, of course, as you have never, never confided in him, Tommy. But he fears that it is a large amount, and he advised me to have that sum in readiness—"

"Listen to me," said Tom. "All the money I owe at St. Jim's is half-a-crown I borrowed from old Talbot, and forgot to settle before we broke up."

"But your debts, my dear, which, I understand, have been the talk of the school—" exclaimed Miss Priscilla.

"Dear James made them the talk of the school!" exclaimed Tom Merry savagely. "It was all lies from beginning to end!"

"Tom!"

"I must tell you," said Tom. "Manners said that I should have to speak out—and I can see that I must! I never owed any money at St. Jim's—I've never got into debt! There was nothing at all in it, except Silverson's lies! And now that the cur has been turned out of the school, and can't tell any more lies there, he's telling them here!"

"Tom! Do you mean that James is mistaken?"

"No! I mean that he's telling lies!" said Tom. "He knows perfectly well there is not a word of truth in it—it all came from him! Send that money back to the bank—it will be safer there!"

"If James is mistaken—"

"James is a rascal and a rotter!" roared Tom Merry. "His game is to disgrace me here with you, as he tried to disgrace me at school!"

"My dear, dear boy, that is impossible! It is unjust—it is unlike you!" exclaimed Miss Priscilla, in great distress. "James is so good, so kind—so thoughtful for others. Only yesterday, Tom, James asked me for ten pounds to take to a worthy poor man in distress—only yesterday, Tom!"

"Did he?" said Tom. "I suppose some book-maker was dunning him for money."

"Tom!"

"The man is a rascal," said Tom—"a scheming, plotting rascal! I've got to tell you—that's what he is! He's such a cur that he fancies that I think about your money—and he never thinks of anything else himself! He has cheated you, and as good as robbed you, for years—and now his game is to get you to turn me down! I'm sorry to have to tell you. I've held my tongue about it all through the term, with that villain plotting against me all the time. But that's the truth, and I've got to tell you now!"

Miss Priscilla put her handkerchief to her eyes.

"Tom! Tom! Try not to misjudge dear James. He may be mistaken—anyone may be mistaken. But—"

"I've told you the truth!" said Tom.

"Yes, yes, you believe so, my poor dear deluded boy, but you must try to think better of James. Promise me!" sobbed Miss Priscilla.

"How can I think better of a plotting cur and rascal?" exclaimed Tom.

"You must try—you must try, my dear! Promise me!"

"Oh dear, all right!" There were tears in Miss Priscilla's eyes, and that was too much for Tom. "I—I—I'll try, if you like!"

"That is my own good, dear, kind little Tommy!" said Miss Priscilla. "And—and if you remember later some debts that you have forgotten, Tom—"

"There aren't any to remember!"

"Very well. But if you do, the money is there," said Miss Priscilla, "and you have only to speak a word to me."

Evidently, James had done his work well!

"He knows—" said Tom, between his teeth.

The french window opened from the garden. James Silverson came in.



As the train rolled out of Wayland Station three grinning faces looked back. The last Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther saw of James, he was sprawling and spluttering under a volley of squashing snowballs.

Tom looked at him.

"Oh, here you are, safe and sound!" said James. "My dear Miss Fawcett, I suppose Tom has told you that I lost the train at Wayland? Some merry young rascals snowballed me—boys of my Form at the school—the happy exuberance of youth—but unfortunately it caused me to lose my train. I hope you had a good journey, Tom, old fellow?"

Tom did not reply.

He could not.

"I was sorry not to travel with you, Tom—we should have had a pleasant journey together!" said James. "But now we are here, we shall have a merry Christmas—what?"

Miss Priscilla gave Tom a reproachful look. James' manner was so genial and pleasant that Tom, if he had not known him so well, might have been taken in. As it was, the man's hypocrisy gave him a feeling of sickness. Without speaking a word, he went out of the room and shut the door after him.

JAMES GETS WET!

"FINE!" said Manners.

He slung on his camera-case with a cheery look.

"What about skates?" asked Tom.

"I'm going to take some snaps. You and Monty can skate. I'll take a snap of you on the ice. The light's fine for photographing!" explained Manners.

At which Manners' comrades grinned. According to Monty Lowther, if Manners happened to be around when the Crack of Doom sounded he would want to take a snap of the event.

Still, the local scenery was attractive for a keen amateur photographer; it was a pretty spot in Hampshire. Manners was going to enjoy his morning with his camera while his friends disported themselves on the ice.

The stream that flowed past the bottom of the garden at Laurel Villa was frozen hard. It was a cold and frosty morning, and three faces were bright as the chums of St. Jim's left the house—Manners slinging on his camera, Tom and Monty swinging their skates.

The keen frosty weather was enough to buck any fellow. And the three were glad to get away from James.

Not that James had been unpleasant. He had been remarkably pleasant at breakfast—a cheery, smiling James, respectfully attentive to old Miss Priscilla, cheerily chatty to the three juniors. Had they been previously unacquainted with James, the three would have found him agreeable company enough.

Schoolmaster as he was, James did not "come the beak," as Monty expressed it. But the truth was that James was not a schoolmaster at heart. He had drifted into that noble profession for want of any other opening. His personal tastes were not in the educational line; they ran rather to horses, bookmakers, cigars, and expen-

side drinks. James loathed schools and school-mastering, and hoped to be done with both; if only he could oust Tom Merry from a wealthy old lady's favour and take his place as heir to a fortune—with a generous helping to go on with while he waited for the rest. Once James had succeeded in that, James would never have touched a book again—except the book he would have made on the races on every day in the year that races were run!

However, James could be pleasant when he liked—and he liked now. With cool unscrupulousness, he was setting himself to put Tom in the wrong—and certainly Tom did not show up very well!

Miss Priscilla had given him many sad glances as he failed to answer James' genial remarks, or answered only with grunts.

Tom could not help it. He wanted to keep the peace, but he could not be friendly with a man whose every look was false, and whose every word was a falsehood.

Knowing James-Silverson's feelings, thoughts, and intentions, how could he be friendly with the man? He simply could not.

But he was aware that James was getting the best of it—posing as a misunderstood man who was only anxious to be on the friendliest possible terms with a sulky boy who refused to be civil.

It was a relief to get into the fresh air—after James!

The three juniors tramped down the long garden to the stream, where Tom and Monty sat on an old bench to put on their skates.

Manners got his camera out. His friends slid out on the ice in the wintry sunshine, and Harry Manners proceeded to take several snaps of them as they skated.

He was sighting his camera for another snap, when he received a sudden jolt, and the camera slipped from his grasp and dropped.

Manners gave a howl. He glared round at James, who had arrived on the bank and given him that jolt in the back.

Silverson smiled at him.

"So sorry!" he said. "My foot slipped!"

Manners gave him a look, and, in silence, stooped to pick up the camera. Luckily, it had dropped into a clump of frozen grass, and was not damaged. He examined it carefully with deep feelings. That precious camera might have been damaged; and, had it been damaged, Manners felt that he could not have kept his hands off James. He was quite well aware that that jolt had not been accidental.

However, the camera was not damaged, and Manners moved along the bank to get away from Silverson.

James strolled after him.

"Not going on the ice?" he asked.

"No!" grunted Manners.

"Slacking about, I suppose?"

"You can suppose what you like, Mr. Silverson!" said Manners. "But do you mind keeping your suppositions to yourself?"

"Why should I?" smiled James. "No need to stand on ceremony with a cheeky, silly schoolboy that I know of!"

Manners looked at him. Out of sight and hearing of Miss Fawcett, James was not keeping up the friendly game—which was no doubt irksome enough to him, though it suited his purpose. Probably it was a relief to him to get away from hypocrisy for a time and make him-

self unpleasant, as he desired to be, to Tom Merry and his friends.

"That isn't how you were talking at brekker, Mr. Silverson!" said Manners contemptuously.

James laughed.

"There is no old fool on hand to listen now," he said coolly.

"So that is how you speak of Miss Fawcett?"

"Why not?" said James.

"Would you like me to tell her what you have just said?"

"I've no objection! I should hardly admit its accuracy!" grinned James. "You young fool, he went on, "do you fancy that you are a match for me?"

"Not in sneaking, lying, and treachery!" said Manners. "You wouldn't find your match outside Pentonville or Dartmoor, I expect."

James' eyes glinted. He was not ashamed of those estimable qualities in his make-up; but he did not seem to like the description.

"You young cub!" he said. "Why are you here—and the other lout? Both of you know that you're not wanted."

"Not by you!" said Manners. "You can't get by with any foul trick on our pal, while we're here to keep an eye on you, Mr. Silverson."

James cast a quick glance round towards the house in the distance. The windows were shut off by the branches of leafless trees. Then he made a quick step towards Manners, and smacked at his head.

But Manners was on his guard—James' surreptitious glance round towards the house, to make sure that no eyes were on him, had given warning.

Manners stepped quickly back, and at the same time swung round the leather camera-case, landing it on James' ear with a bang.

James gave a startled howl, slipped, and stumbled on the ice. He scrambled up, but the ice was slippery, and he went on spinning.

With a gasping yell, James spun away, in the path of the two skaters—who, at the sight of trouble on the bank, were speeding towards the spot.

James sprawled in their path—and they had no time to avoid him—if they wanted to! Perhaps they did not want to. Anyhow, they stumbled over James, and came down on him, hard and heavy.

"Oooooogh!" spluttered James, as they landed.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Manners, from the bank. Crack!

The ice gave under the concussion. With crack on crack, it split right and left.

Tom Merry and Lowther scrambled up in time. But James went through up to his neck, clutching wildly at broken edges of ice.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Tom.

"Oh, scissors!" exclaimed Monty.

"Gurrooogh!" gurgled James, clutching frantically. "Help me out—yurrooh! You young scoundrels—grrroogh!"

"Is it wet in there?" asked Monty.

"What? You young fool!"

"Bit damp?"

"Will you help me out?" shrieked James.

He grabbed and clawed at ice-edges. They cracked and crumbled under his frantic clutches. Tom Merry and Monty, steering clear of the gap in the ice, laughed. James had got exactly what he deserved, in their opinion; and if James did not like it, he could lump it!

"Help me, you young rascals!" howled James.

"Is that your polite way of asking a favour?" inquired Monty Lowther.

"You—you—you—" panted James.
 "Me—me—me!" agreed Lowther.
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Will you help me? I am soaked—drenched—catching cold—grooogh!"
 "Of course we'll help you, old bean!" said Monty. "But there's no hurry, that I can see. You needn't be afraid of getting drowned—you know the old proverb, I suppose—a man who's born to be hanged cannot be drowned!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Still, you may as well put it politely," went on Monty. "Let's have some of that jolly old politeness you were shoving on at brekker."
 "Good egg!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "Go it, Mr. Silverson! You were bursting with politeness only an hour ago."
 "Yes, turn it on!" chuckled Manners. "Turn it on, just as if Miss Fawcett were here to hear it."

James glared from the ice, panting with rage. He did not seem in a mood to turn on politeness.
 "Will you help me?" he howled, as the broken edges of ice cracked in his clutches.
 "Put it politely!" grinned Monty Lowther. "Say 'My dear boys'—just as you were saying at brekker."
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "You—you young scoundrels!" hissed James.
 "That isn't what you were calling us at the breakfast-table!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Help me out!" yelled James.
 "You haven't called us dear boys yet."
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

If looks could have slain, James' look at Monty Lowther would probably have laid him lifeless on the ice.

But James had to toe the line! He could not get out—and the water was cold, as well as wet.
 "Help me out, my dear boys!" he hissed.
 "Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Terrible Three. The contrast between James' words, and the tone in which he uttered them, was really extraordinary.
 However, they gathered round, grasped James, and pulled him out. He was landed, gasping and spluttering and streaming, on the bank.

He headed for the house at once. James was in need of a quick change—and he did not even stay to tell the Terrible Three what he thought of them. He disappeared up the garden at a rapid run—leaving the chums of the Shell chortling.

FOUL PLAY!

"Tommy darling!"
 "Yes, old dear!" said Tom cheerfully.
 It was a couple of days later, that Tom Merry, coming in at the french windows of the garden room, found Miss Priscilla searching through her bag, with a worried and distressed expression on her old face.

Tom's face was merry and bright.
 Even James was not clouding his cheery spirits now. Since the episode on the ice, James had been a little more careful—and the schoolboys had had no trouble with him.

James' game, it seemed, had been to play the affectionate elder relative when Miss Priscilla was present, and indemnify himself by being as unpleasant as possible on other occasions. But the ducking seemed to have warned James off. It had dawned on him that Tom Merry & Co. could be unpleasant, too!

So James, though he kept up his game when

Miss Priscilla's eyes were on him, at other times rather avoided the schoolboys—much to their satisfaction.

Tom's cheery look changed as he saw the trouble in the kind old face of his guardian.

"Anything amiss, old dear?" he asked.
 "The key," said Miss Priscilla.
 "You've lost a key?" asked Tom. "Right-ho! I'll hunt for it—I'll call the other chaps. We'll find it all right."

"No, no! Do not call your friends in, Tom!" said Miss Priscilla hastily. "The key is not lost—it cannot be."

"Then what?" asked Tom, puzzled.
 "It is gone!" said Miss Priscilla.
 "Well, if it's gone, it must be lost!" said Tom.
 "What—"

"It could not fall out of my bag, dearest Tommy! You see how safe the fastening is! I have never lost anything from this bag, and I have had it for forty-four years—ever since your Uncle Frank gave it to me—and in all that time, Tommy, I have never lost anything from it."

Tom Merry's face became very grave.

It was true that the careful and meticulous old lady had never lost anything from that bag! But she would leave it about anywhere—and if Hannah and Thomas had not been honest as the day, they could have helped themselves regularly from its contents. But if something was missing from that bag, and it had not been lost, it had been taken.

"Sure it's gone?" asked Tom.
 "Yes, yes, my dear. I have searched the bag five times over."

"Well, that ought to settle that!" agreed Tom.
 "Was it a special key?"

"It is the key of the money drawer in the bureau—the one I handed you the day you came home from school, and which you then gave back to me," said Miss Priscilla.

"Oh, my hat! Then it's got to be found!" exclaimed Tom. "There's a hundred pounds in that drawer, you told me."

Miss Priscilla looked at him, a strange expression on her face. She was very near to tears.

"Tommy!" she faltered. "Tommy darling! What is in that drawer, and all I have besides, is for you—and you only! Tommy, if you are, after all, in need of money, you—you will tell me—you will be frank, Tommy darling!"

Tom gave a great start.
 His face became quite pale as he read the doubt that was in Miss Priscilla's mind.

"Do you think—" he gasped.
 "No! No! Never! But, darling Tommy, the key has been taken from my bag, when I must have left it somewhere, and—and—and—the money is yours, darling, if you want it—but you would tell me—"

For a moment or two, fierce anger took possession of Tom Merry. But that passed quickly. He could not be angry with the poor old lady whose simple mind had been worked upon by a designing rascal.

Miss Priscilla believed what Tom had told her—yet the doubt lingered in her mind that Tom Merry had secret debts that he did not care to tell her about. It was James' work—and he had done his work well! Now the key of the money-drawer was missing, and who had taken it?

"Listen to me, dear!" said Tom Merry at last, quietly, though there was a tremble in his voice. "No such thought would ever have entered your

mind before that reptile came into the house, like a snake-in-the-grass. I've no need of money—and if I had, I should tell you. Taking it without your knowledge, though you've offered it to me, would be stealing! That villain can't have made you think that of me."

"James has nothing to do with this, dear—he doesn't even know that the key is missing!"

"Doesn't he?" said Tom, between his teeth.

"No! No! No! Dearest Tommy, if—if—if you—you have——" Miss Priscilla's voice trailed away; she could not put it into words.

"Oh, that cur!" breathed Tom. "It's not you speaking—it's that cur James Silverson speaking with your voice! He has put this into your head."

"I tell you, my dear, James knows nothing."

"The rotter! The cur! James Silverson is at the bottom of this!" exclaimed Tom Merry savagely. "Only James Silverson!"

There was a step at the door.

"What about James Silverson?" drawled the owner of that name. "Surely, my dear Tom, you are not speaking against me behind my back?"

Tom Merry's eyes blazed at him as he lounged into the room.

"I'll speak before your face fast enough!" he shouted. "You lying rascal and cur, you have taken a key from my guardian's bag, to make her fancy that I have taken it!"

"Tom!" exclaimed Miss Priscilla, in great distress.

James stood silent for a moment. Then he turned and shut the door.

"We had better not let the servants hear this!" he said in a quiet tone of contempt. "Miss Fawcett, have you missed a key?"

"Yes, James!" faltered Miss Fawcett. "But—but——"

"And that scoundrel has it in his pocket at the present moment!" roared Tom Merry.

"Tom! Tom! Control your temper, my dear, my dear! Think of the trouble it caused you at school last term!"

"It was that plotting cur caused all the trouble! Let the rotter turn out his pockets!" exclaimed Tom. "He has taken that key to make out that I have taken it."

"Impossible!"

"Let the rotter turn out his pockets, then!" roared Tom.

James' lip curled.

"You could not possibly ask me to do so, Miss Fawcett!" he said. "But since this boy has dared to make such an accusation, I shall insist upon doing so immediately, in your presence."

"No! No, James——"

"I insist!" said Mr. Silverson. "And I have a right to insist that Tom shall do the same, and you shall judge between us, Miss Fawcett."

"No—no—no!"

"Yes!" said James firmly. "If Tom is not afraid!" he added contemptuously.

Tom Merry gave a scornful laugh.

"I will turn out my pockets fast enough!" he snapped. "You will do the same—and I shall see that you hide nothing, you villain!"

"Very well—let us proceed!" said James, with a bitter sneer.

He stepped to the table, and began to turn out his pockets. Tom Merry did the same. Miss Priscilla watched them both, with deep distress in her face.

Click!

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A key dropped on the table! It dropped from Tom Merry's inside jacket pocket, as he pulled out the lining.

"Tom!" moaned Miss Priscilla.

James laughed.

Tom Merry stood for a moment, stunned. Then his face crimsoned with rage. He had been caught—caught like a rabbit in a snare—well as he knew James and his ways. Only a couple of weeks ago at St. Jim's this very trick had been played on him, yet he had fallen for it like a baby.

"You villain!" Tom's voice was choking with rage. "You've planted this on me! You cur——"

"I!" exclaimed James, with a stare of astonishment.

"Yes, you—you villain!"

"You will not find it easy to make Miss Fawcett believe such a tale," said James Silverson contemptuously.

"Tom!" wailed Miss Priscilla.

Tom turned to her, his eyes blazing.

"I tell you that scoundrel played this very trick on me at school!" he exclaimed. "He ragged his own study, and sneaked into my dormitory and planted the key in my pocket—and I should have been sacked for it, only old Gussy spotted him! I tell you, that's why he had to get out of St. Jim's—it all came out, and he had to go! This is the same dirty trick over again."

"Tom! Tom!"

"You don't believe me?" gasped Tom.

"Yes, yes, yes! But—but——"

"If you don't believe me," said Tom, white to the lips, "I can't stay here. I must leave this house—I can't stay where I'm not trusted."

"No! No! Never! But——"

"One word!" said James quietly. "Miss Fawcett, what you may decide about Tom, I will not inquire—it does not concern me. But my presence in this house has now become impossible! If I may give a word of advice, I should advise you to forgive this boy—to make allowances for him——"

"You hound!" roared Tom, almost beside himself.

"But my part is already decided upon!" said James Silverson. "I leave this house to-morrow! I would leave it to-day, but I must make some arrangements—to-morrow I go! I understand, Miss Fawcett, that you are paying a visit to Eastwood House to-morrow. I shall be gone when you return!"

"But—James——"

"I can do nothing else, madam, in the pass things have now come to," said James, with an air of quiet dignity. "I hope and trust that this boy will acknowledge, sooner or later, the injustice he has done me. I will leave you now, madam—the boy seems unable to control his temper in my presence, and such a scene as this makes you suffer severely—as I can see, if Tom does not choose to see!"

James turned to the door.

At the door he looked back at Tom.

"To-morrow, I shall be gone," he said. "You will never see me again in all probability. I shall hope that you will repent—that you will reform—that you will try to make yourself worthy of your guardian's love and trust! Those are the last words I shall ever speak to you, Tom Merry."

And with that, James stepped out of the room and shut the door after him, before Tom Merry could reply.

MORE TO FOLLOW !

"TOM, old man!"
 "What the dickens—"
 Manners and Lowther were in the garden, cheerfully snowballing one another, when Tom Merry came tramping out. At the look on his face, they joined him, their own faces anxious.

"That cur!" Tom Merry choked.
 "Silverson?" asked both together.
 "Who else?" said Tom bitterly.
 "But what—" asked Manners.
 "What's the latest, Tom?" asked Lowther.

In a few words, Tom Merry told them. They listened in silence—and Manners gave a whistle when Tom had panted it all out.

"But Miss Fawcett believes you surely, Tom?" asked Monty Lowther.

Tom laughed savagely.
 "Yes—she does, or tries to. But she doesn't believe that James snaffled that key and sneaked into my room with it last night! She can't! She can't get such an idea into her simple old head!"

"But if she doesn't believe that he did, she must believe that you did," said Lowther. "She must believe one or the other."

"She's too fond of me to believe anything against me. She doesn't know what to believe. But she can't believe that James would play such a foul trick—the very trick he played at St. Jim's, and was booted out for!"

"You shouldn't have fallen for it, old chap!" said Manners. "As soon as the cur suggested that you should turn out your pockets, you might have guessed where that key was!"

"I—I suppose I might! But I never thought—how could a fellow think of such things?" said Tom. "I'm no match for him—how could a fellow be a match for a villain like that?—he's got me beaten easily."

"He hasn't got me beaten!" grunted Manners. "You can't do anything! The fat's in the fire now. The poor old dear is trying her hardest to believe me. But how can she when she believes James at the same time? I've a jolly good mind to clear out of the place!" exclaimed Tom passionately.

"You can't do that."
 "No; I know I can't! I can't do anything that would hurt her. I've got to stand this!" said Tom between his teeth. "It may be forgotten after he's gone, perhaps! Thank goodness he's going!"

Manners gave him a pitying look.
 "You fathead!" he said. "Do you think he's going?"

"He said so. It can't be nice for him here, I suppose," said Tom. "I've accused him to his face of pinching that key and planting it in my pocket, as he did at St. Jim's. He's got to swallow that, the cur! Even a thick-skinned brute like Silverson can't like that! He said he was going to-morrow!"

"Why not to-day, if he thinks of going at all?" asked Manners, with a curl of the lip.

"Well, I suppose he's got to make arrangements, just on Christmas and all that!"

"Yes, he's got to make arrangements," agreed Manners. "I've no doubt about that! He's got some arrangements to make—to finish this game. You born ass, do you think this is the finish?"

"He's made my guardian doubt me."

"Not to the extent of cutting you out and getting his name down in the will in place of yours!" jeered Manners.

"No, not so bad as that—"
 "Not so good as that, from Silverson's point of view," said Manners. "That's the game that he put in a whole term at St. Jim's for. Now he's playing the last round here! He's made a good start—we've got to give him full marks for that. But what's the good of it to him if he leaves it where it is, to blow over?"

Tom Merry gave an impatient shrug of the shoulders.

"He's going," he said—"that's a cert! I shan't stay in the house if he stays! I've had enough of his treachery. Miss Priscilla's taken in by him, but she'd rather he went than I. He will have to go!"

"Yes, he will have to go," said Manners. "But if you're not a blithering ass you'll see that he will finish the job before he goes."

"I don't see what he can do."

"Neither do I for the present. He can't burgle the bureau and land the loot in your pockets to-night—it would be a bit too palpable, with him in the house. He can't come back and do it after he's once gone! I don't see his game at present. But you can bank on it, Tom, that he's got the knock-out blow up his sleeve, and he's going to hand it over before he goes."

"Looks like it to me," said Monty Lowther, with a nod. "But if he does nothing to-night I don't see how he will work it, Manners. Early in the morning we're all going over to Eastwood House to see Gussy and make the jolly old arrangements for the party on Boxing Day."

Manners wrinkled his brows.
 "James will be left here on his own—is that it?" he asked. "Hannah will be going with Miss Fawcett—she goes with her everywhere. We three shall be with her. Only Thomas will be left in the house—with James. Thomas could be sent to the station with his luggage—"

"But what—" exclaimed Tom.
 "Where's that key now?" asked Manners.
 "In Miss Priscilla's bag. It's not likely to be missing again, if that's what you're thinking of."

Manners shook his head.
 "No," he said. "That's not it! No! I don't get it at present, but you can bet your Sunday silk socks that James has got it all cut and dried, and that he's staying over to-morrow morning to put in the knock-out jolt. That's as certain as that Hitler's potty."

"You don't think this is the end of it?" asked Tom doubtfully.

"No," said Manners quietly. "I think it's the beginning. And if we can catch that villain on the hop we may be able to open Miss Fawcett's eyes, and then he will go for good."

"Oh, let's get out on the ice!" said Tom. "I want to take the taste of this out of my mouth."

"Let's!" agreed Manners. "Lots of time for thinking it out. James won't be getting busy again yet, dear man!"

And the three juniors fetched their skates and went out on the ice, where the clear frosty air helped to restore Tom Merry's cheery spirits.

When they came in to lunch, however, the expression on Tom's face was rather grim.

He did not know what he was going to do, but he knew that he was not going to be civil to James Silverson—that he was not going to sit at the same table with him and break bread with him.



With crack on crack the ice split right and left. Tom Merry and Lowther scrambled up in time. But James went through up to his neck, clutching wildly at broken edges of ice.

"Horses can't wait about in this weather, old chap!" said Tom. "Your camera will be all right."

"My dear boy," said Miss Priscilla gently. "Nothing could possibly happen to your camera; it is perfectly safe."

"You can't be too careful with a camera, ma'am!" said Manners, shaking his head. "I'd rather cut back. I'll cut after you on a bike—Gussy can roll on. It's all right."

"You're an ass, old chap!" said Tom. "That blessed camera—"

"And a fathead!" added Monty. "That blinking camera—"

"Thanks!" smiled Manners. He turned back to Arthur Augustus. "Roll on, Gussy—I'm coming on later on a bike."

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"I shall beat you to Eastwood House, old man."

"Wats!"

Arthur Augustus drove on.

Manners did not cast a single glance after the carriage as it rolled away. He cut quickly through a gap in the hedge.

If it was only on account of his precious camera that Manners was going back to Laurel Villa, his proceedings were rather singular.

He did not approach the house from the front. He cut across a field, and reached the bank of the stream at the bottom of the garden.

Then he entered the garden, and instead of following the path up to the house, dodged among the trees with his head ducked.

In fact, an Indian hunter had nothing on Harry Manners for caution as the Shell fellow of St. Jim's made his way back to Laurel Villa.

In cover of a high bank of frosty laurels near the house, Manners watched for several long minutes before he ventured nearer.

But he was satisfied at last that he was not observed. James' room was at the front of the house—if he was still there! If he was not, Manners had a strong suspicion that he would be in the garden-room, at the front. Thomas was not in sight.

Manners cut forward at last and ran up the steps of the old-fashioned veranda that extended the whole length of the back of the house.

The three rooms occupied by the juniors all opened on that veranda.

The windows were closed, but one of them—that of Manners' room—had been left unfastened—by Harry Manners! Swiftly, Manners opened

(Continued on page 20.)

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that window, stepped in, and shut the window after him.

He stood breathing rather quickly.

Manners of the Shell was back in the house now—unknown to James Silverson. And Manners of the Shell was going to know what James' game was, while he had the place to himself—if, indeed, the plotter and schemer had any game on! And Manners did not doubt for one moment that he had!

MANNERS ON THE SPOT!

JAMES SILVERSON stood at his window watching the carriage out of sight—and smiled, an unpleasant smile.

James had been packing his suitcase, ready for departure.

He had said his affectionate and dutiful good-byes to Miss Priscilla—he was going.

But, as his train from Woodford did not leave till twelve, he was, naturally, remaining at Laurel Villa until it was time to leave for his train.

After the carriage had disappeared, James still stood at the window for some time, watching the frosty landscape. James had work on hand that morning before he went to catch his train; but James had to make sure that all eyes were off the scene before he set about that work. Somebody might come back for something—James did not want to be spotted, if by chance Tom Merry & Co. were not yet clear of Laurel Villa! In what James had to do next he could not be too careful, and he could not afford to leave anything to chance.

He waited, and watched—smiling in his cat-like way.

But he was satisfied at last. Far in the distance, where the lane rose over a hill, he glimpsed the carriage again before it disappeared for good.

It was gone.

Certainly James had no suspicions that one of the occupants of that carriage had left it, cut back by devious ways, and was now, at this actual moment, in his room at the back of Laurel Villa! No such idea crossed James' cunning mind for a moment.

Tom Merry & Co. were gone. Miss Priscilla was gone—and Hannah with her. Only Thomas remained in the house with James Silverson. And, having watched the distant carriage disappear over the hill, James turned from the window at last—ready for business.

He came out of his room, and crossed the old oak landing to the staircase. There was a creak from the old stairs as he went down.

James did not care whether the stairs creaked or not. He did not even notice the creak. Certainly he would not have supposed that it reached any ear but his own—unless it was that of Thomas, downstairs.

But as James reached the foot of the staircase a door above opened silently, and Manners, noiseless in felt slippers, stepped out.

He glanced over the banisters and stood listening.

"Thomas!"

James' voice floated up.

"Sir!"

Thomas came from the regions at the back of the house.

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"I am going to walk to Woodford, Thomas. It is such a beautiful morning for a walk!" said Mr. Silverson.

"Yes, sir!" said Thomas.

"Can you manage to take my suitcase to the station, Thomas?"

"Easy, sir, on the carrier of my bike."

"I should be much obliged if you would, Thomas."

"Yes, sir!"

"It is ready in my room, Thomas."

"I'll fetch it down, sir."

Manners slipped noiselessly back into his room and shut the door. Within, he listened to the stairs creaking under Thomas' tread, and, a minute later, to Thomas going down again with the suitcase.

When Thomas was clear, Manners was quickly on the landing again. James was clearing Thomas off the scene—as Manners had foretold.

In the hall below, James was putting on hat and overcoat.

"I am starting now, Thomas," he said. "It will take me much longer to walk than you to cycle, of course. Take every care to lock up the house safely when you leave."

"Oh, yes, sir!" said Thomas. "I'm always very careful, sir."

"Very well, Thomas; I shall see you again at Woodford Station. Wait for me there if you get in first."

"Yes, sir!"

The front door closed behind James Silverson.

Manners stepped to the front window on the landing. From that window he watched James walk down the garden path to Huckleberry Lane, turn into the lane, and walk briskly away in the direction of Woodford.

There was a rather perplexed expression on Harry Manners' face.

Thomas was left behind to lock up the house before he left. James was gone. It all looked above-board; and Manners wondered for a moment or two whether he had been unduly suspicious, and whether James, after all, was going, and was done with.

But he was going to be sure, at all events.

He heard Thomas moving about below, securing doors and windows for safety when the house was left empty. He returned to his room and slipped inside a wardrobe, in case the careful Thomas should look to the bed-room windows.

He was glad that he had done so a few minutes later, when Thomas came in to see that the window on the veranda was safe.

Quite unaware that a Shell fellow of St. Jim's was parked in the wardrobe, Thomas fastened the window and went out again.

Manners stepped out of the wardrobe, stepped to his door, and listened—and waited.

He heard, at last, a door close behind Thomas.

He was alone in the house now. He went to the front passage window and spotted Thomas wheeling his bicycle round the house, with James' suitcase strapped on the carrier of the machine.

Thomas wheeled that bike into the lane, mounted, and disappeared in the direction of Woodford.

Manners was left watching the landscape.

He sat down on a chair by the window, keeping well in cover of the curtain, and watched patiently.

If James was gone for good, he was missing a pleasant drive in the bright winter's morning

and a merry lunch party at Eastwood House—for nothing! But was James gone for good?

Thomas was a witness, if one was needed, that James had left the house first, and was at a good distance before Thomas left. Thomas, no doubt, would pass him on the road on his bike—probably a good quarter of a mile on his way to Woodford. Thomas had left the house locked up, and James was not supposed to have any key for admission. But had he, all the same?

If he had, he was coming back—after making it clear that he had left first, with Thomas to witness the same. And Manners, though he was perhaps beginning to doubt, expected James to come back.

Almost half an hour had elapsed when his doubts were suddenly resolved—by the sight of a figure in overcoat and bowler hat coming in at the gate of Laurel Villa.

It was James Silverson; and Manners smiled sarcastically as he saw him.

James evidently was not walking to Woodford. James, only too clearly, had turned back after Thomas had passed him on his bike.

How was he going to get into a locked house, of which he was supposed to possess no key?

Manners' lip curled. He had no doubt that James, during his residence at Laurel Villa, had taken impressions of any keys he was likely to want and had provided himself with the same.

The next minute he knew that he was right, as there was a click in the Yale lock of the front door. James had unlocked the door, and was coming in.

Manners cut back silently to his room.

His heart was beating rather fast now. He was alone in that house with an unscrupulous rascal who was bent on carrying out some treacherous scheme. If James discovered him there, it was likely to go hard with him—with no one at hand to help.

But James was not going to discover him. James, it was quite clear, had not the faintest suspicion that anyone was in the house. He knew Thomas' careful habits, and knew that the house would be safely locked up.

Keeping his door an inch or two ajar, Manners listened with bated breath. He heard a sound of a low laugh from the hall below; then James' footsteps crossed the hall to the garden-room, and he entered that room, and shut the door after him.

What did James want in the garden-room—the room where a hundred pounds was packed in the money drawer in the bureau?

Manners did not need telling!

He had told Tom Merry that something was to follow—that what had happened already was only a preparation for what was to follow. This was what was to follow—and now it was coming!

What was James Silverson doing in the garden-room?

As well as if he could have seen him, Manners knew that he was forcing open the money drawer in the old bureau and taking out the banknotes. Why?

Not to keep them! If that had been his game, he could have done it easily enough when the key was in his hands. He had not—even James!—come down to pinching, though what he had planned was as bad—perhaps worse. Manners knew what James was going to do.

It was on James' insidious advice that Miss Priscilla had that sum of ready money in the house at all. James had planned this from the start; he had had it all cut and dried before

Tom Merry and his friends came home for the holidays.

The doubt was implanted in Miss Priscilla's mind that Tom Merry had secret debts—the result of wild days at school—that he did not dare to tell her of. She had been made to suspect that, while refusing to admit anything of the kind, or to take the money openly, he had purloined the key with the intention of helping himself surreptitiously. What was she going to believe when James had carried out his plan?

Manners gritted his teeth.

It was futile to denounce the scoundrel. Miss Priscilla would not take even Tom Merry's word against James—dear James! She would certainly not have taken Manners' if she had not taken Tom's. James, denounced, would deny everything—and they would be left where they had started, with the rascally schemer free to carry on at the next opportunity.

But Manners gave a sudden start as an idea flashed into his mind.

He could defeat this cunning scheme; he knew that the banknotes were to be landed, somehow, on Tom, and he could defeat it. But that was not all that he wanted. What he chiefly wanted was to open Miss Priscilla's eyes, over which the cunning schemer had pulled the wool—to draw James' teeth, and make him harmless in future. That was what Harry Manners had hoped to do, and now he knew how he was going to do it. He turned from the door, a gleam in his eyes.

On the table lay the camera. Manners picked it up. He did not need to examine it; he knew that it was ready for use.

Camera in hand, he stepped out on the landing and silently shut the door after him.

A glance over the banisters showed him that the door of the garden-room was still shut. James was busy in the garden-room—Manners knew how.

Softly—remembering that the old oak had creaked under James' feet—Manners stepped along to Tom Merry's room, went in, and shut the door.

The bright wintry sunlight streamed in at the windows. It gleamed on the polished steel locks of Tom Merry's suitcase. On either side of the window were thick, heavy hangings, which were drawn across for the black-out at night, shutting in every glimmer of light, but were now bunched on either side.

Manners backed out of sight behind the heavy hangings on one side of the window. With an unusual disregard for the property of others, he cut a slit in the thick dark material with his penknife.

Through that slit he was able to watch the whole room, unseen himself; and the nose of the camera was placed to that slit.

Behind the curtain Manners waited—to see what was going to happen in Tom Merry's room, with his faithful camera ready to place it on record.

CAUGHT IN THE CAMERA!

MANNERS drew a quick, silent breath as the door of Tom Merry's room opened.

With a stealthy step—even though he knew the house to be empty, James was still stealthy—James Silverson entered and shut the door after him.

Softly he turned the key in the lock—an excess

of caution in an unoccupied house, but James was always cautious, as well as stealthy.

Then he stood for a few moments breathing hard.

In James' hand was a wad of crisp papers. The schoolboy behind the curtain knew what they were and whence they had come; they were the banknotes from the money drawer in the old bureau downstairs.

James Silverson looked about him.

He did not glance towards the window, or the heavy curtains bunched on either side of it. James was as suspicious as a rat, but certainly he did not suspect that anyone was hidden in Tom Merry's room in Laurel Villa.

If he had thought of Harry Manners at all, he would have supposed that that youth had already arrived with his friends at Eastwood House, many a long mile distant. But James was not thinking of Harry Manners.

One glance about the room was sufficient, then Silverson stepped towards Tom Merry's suitcase.

The eye at the slit curtain watched, and noted the sardonic grin on James' foxy face. James was striking his last blow—the blow that was to end, in his favour, the long contest—to bring off the coup he had failed to bring off during a whole term at St. Jim's; to cover Tom Merry with disgrace, as with a garment; to destroy for ever old Miss Priscilla's faith and trust in him.

The fact that he had failed, again and again, to succeed in his rascality had taught the rascal no lesson; James was as confident as ever in his cunning and duplicity. This time he had, so to speak, spotted the winner!

He bent over the suitcase.

The hidden schoolboy was not surprised to hear the sound of a key clicking. James had provided himself with a key that fitted Tom's suitcase!

There was another, fainter click, across the wide room. But that faint sound, muffled by the heavy hangings, did not reach James.

He remained happily unaware that he had been photographed in the very act of inserting a key into the lock of Tom Merry's suitcase!

He opened the suitcase and looked into it.

Again there was a faint click behind the curtain. James, grinning down sardonically into the opened suitcase, was again placed on record.

Silverson proceeded to remove some of the articles within. Having done so, he placed the wad of banknotes at the bottom of the suitcase. And the camera behind the curtain registered the hand with the banknotes in it as it hovered.

Still grinning that sardonic grin, James replaced the articles he had removed, carefully concealing the banknotes from sight.

Then he relocked the suitcase and drew out the key, a fourth photograph registering that action!

Manners had eight films in his camera, and he was prepared to expend the lot on James if necessary. He had never taken a series of snaps that interested him more.

James' work was finished now. It had occupied him only a few minutes. Manners heard a low chuckle.

Silverson stepped back to the door, unlocked it, and went quietly out of the room. And, as he went, a fifth photograph caught him nicely at the door.

The door closed.

James went grinning down the stairs, unseen now. Manners, behind the curtain, was grinning.

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too. The grin was on Manners' side, if James had only known it. James was destined to learn once more that dishonesty is the worst policy!

Manners did not stir till he heard the front door snap shut below. Then he emerged from cover, and went quietly to the front landing window.

From that window he smiled at the sight of Silverson going out at the gate on the lanc.

James disappeared, walking off briskly in the direction of Woodford. He walked very quickly; he did not want Thomas at the station to notice specially that he had been rather a long time on that walk.

Manners turned from the window, smiling.

The purloined banknotes had to remain where they were; Manners was not, like James, provided with keys to other people's suitcases! But that did not matter in the least, considering what was on record in Manners' camera.

There was a garret at the top of Laurel Villa, which had been fixed up as a dark-room for the special behoof of Manners when he was staying with his chum. Manners headed for that room now—to get busy under the red lamp.

He spent quite a happy time in the dark-room, and his friends at Eastwood House, though they probably wondered what was keeping Manners all this time, certainly never made the remotest guess at what it was.

Presently, Manners strolled out into the garden behind Laurel Villa. The sunshine was bright, cold as it was, and quite good for printing-out.

When Manners was engaged on photographic stunts he was forgetful of time and space. He did not even realise that it was long past lunch-time, and that he was hungry.

Not till he had a set of satisfactory pictures did Manners begin to think of lesser matters.

He grinned happily over those pictures. Then he packed them carefully into a little wallet, which he placed in an inner pocket.

Then, at length, it dawned upon Manners that he was hungry, and he penetrated into Hannah's department to scrounge a rough-and-ready meal.

After which he wheeled a bike out of the shed and pedalled away for Eastwood House, which he reached in time for tea. And his friends were not wholly surprised to hear that he had arrived so late because he had been putting in some work with his camera—though Manners, when he told them so, did not go into details. They were well aware that, if Manners got near his camera on a sunny day, he was liable to forget everything else.

"Bai Jove, you know, you are weally a fwithful ass about that camewah, Mannahs, old chap!" said Arthur Augustus.

"I've taken a ripping set of pictures!" said Manners, with a smile.

And he left it at that!

THE FINISH!

JAMES SILVERSON knocked at the front door of Laurel Villa at quite an early hour in the morning.

A cheery party had gathered in the garden-room after breakfast. The party had returned from Eastwood House at rather a late hour the previous night, and gone straight to bed. They were up bright and cheery in the morning—all the brighter and cheerier because the sardonic

of caution in an unoccupied house, but James was always cautious, as well as stealthy.

Then he stood for a few moments breathing hard.

In James' hand was a wad of crisp papers. The schoolboy behind the curtain knew what they were and whence they had come; they were the banknotes from the money drawer in the old bureau downstairs.

James Silverson looked about him.

He did not glance towards the window, or the heavy curtains bunched on either side of it. James was as suspicious as a rat, but certainly he did not suspect that anyone was hidden in Tom Merry's room in Laurel Villa.

If he had thought of Harry Manners at all, he would have supposed that that youth had already arrived with his friends at Eastwood House, many a long mile distant. But James was not thinking of Harry Manners.

One glance about the room was sufficient, then Silverson stepped towards Tom Merry's suitcase.

The eye at the slit curtain watched, and noted the sardonic grin on James' foxy face. James was striking his last blow—the blow that was to end, in his favour, the long contest—to bring off the coup he had failed to bring off during a whole term at St. Jim's; to cover Tom Merry with disgrace, as with a garment; to destroy for ever old Miss Priscilla's faith and trust in him.

The fact that he had failed, again and again, to succeed in his rascality had taught the rascal no lesson; James was as confident as ever in his cunning and duplicity. This time he had, so to speak, spotted the winner!

He bent over the suitcase.

The hidden schoolboy was not surprised to hear the sound of a key clicking. James had provided himself with a key that fitted Tom's suitcase!

There was another, fainter click, across the wide room. But that faint sound, muffled by the heavy hangings, did not reach James.

He remained happily unaware that he had been photographed in the very act of inserting a key into the lock of Tom Merry's suitcase!

He opened the suitcase and looked into it.

Again there was a faint click behind the curtain. James, grinning down sardonically into the opened suitcase, was again placed on record.

Silverson proceeded to remove some of the articles within. Having done so, he placed the wad of banknotes at the bottom of the suitcase. And the camera behind the curtain registered the hand with the banknotes in it as it hovered.

Still grinning that sardonic grin, James replaced the articles he had removed, carefully concealing the banknotes from sight.

Then he relocked the suitcase and drew out the key, a fourth photograph registering that action!

Manners had eight films in his camera, and he was prepared to expend the lot on James if necessary. He had never taken a series of snaps that interested him more.

James' work was finished now. It had occupied him only a few minutes. Manners heard a low chuckle.

Silverson stepped back to the door, unlocked it, and went quietly out of the room. And, as he went, a fifth photograph caught him nicely at the door.

The door closed.

James went grinning down the stairs, unseen now. Manners, behind the curtain, was grinning,

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face of James Silverson was no longer in the offing.

But James was on hand again. Hannah admitted him, and James came smiling into the garden-room. He was greeted with kind hospitality by Miss Priscilla, though she was surprised to see him.

Tom Merry and Lowther stood silent; Manners gave him a curious look. Manners had rather wondered how James was going to fix what he had done on Tom, for it might have been weeks before Miss Priscilla missed the banknotes from the money-drawer, and even then, she would hardly have thought of looking for them in Tom's suitcase! James had to get things moving—and he had dropped up again with that object in view!

"My dear madam," said James smoothly. "Probably you are surprised to see me again so soon—"

"It is a pleasure, my dear James!" answered Miss Priscilla cordially. "I was so sorry you felt you had to leave—and perhaps Tom—"

"You are very kind, madam," said James. "But my return must be very brief. After reaching London, I remembered a matter which I certainly should have thought of mentioning before I left. May I advise you, madam, or rather beg of you, not to keep a sum of money in the house in these unsettled times—it really is not safe, with no man in the house but Thomas."

"Perhaps not!" said Miss Priscilla doubtfully. "But—"

"I am sure that Tom will agree, though he agrees with me so seldom," said James, with a glance at Tom Merry.

"My guardian will do as she thinks best, Mr. Silverson!" said Tom Merry. "And if that is all, I don't see why you couldn't have said it over the phone."

"My dearest Tommy—" murmured Miss Priscilla.

James shrugged his shoulders.

"I am aware that I am not welcome here, so far as Tom is concerned," he said. "But, my dear madam, if you will take my advice, I will convey the banknotes to the Woodford bank, on my way back to the station. Any night they may be missing—" His glance dwelt on Tom's face.

Tom Merry's eyes gleamed at him.

"Have you come back to begin that again, Mr. Silverson?" he asked, between his teeth. "I warn you—"

"Tommy darling, James means it only for the best!" said Miss Priscilla. "It was very kind of James to return so long a distance for such a kind and thoughtful purpose. But I think, James, that the money is quite safe—"

"I doubt it!" said James. "I doubt it very strongly, madam! If the money is still safe where you placed it, I recommend you most earnestly to return it to the bank."

"If!" shouted Tom. "You cur!"

"Be silent, Tom—oh, please be silent!" exclaimed Miss Priscilla. "Do not quarrel with dear James. The money, of course, is quite safe, James. I have the key in my bag."

"A bureau drawer could be opened with a schoolboy's pocket-knife!" sneered James. "I am not, of course, alluding to Tom."

"You are, you lying cur!" said Tom Merry. "Have you been meddling with that money-drawer to put it down to me?"

"Tommy darling, such dreadful suspicions—"

"I despise such suspicions!" said James Silverson. "I only hope that Tom may regret having uttered them. Thomas can tell you, if you care to inquire of him, that I left the house yesterday before he did—"

"My dear James, it is unnecessary to assure me. I know—"

"Better look at that money-drawer!" drawled Manners.

James gave him a sharp, sudden look. Manners gave him a genial smile in return.

"Miss Fawcett," said James quietly, "after what Tom has said, I must beg you to examine that money-drawer. I can only attribute his words to a guilty conscience; and if that money has been tampered with during the night you will know what to think of his affected suspicions of me."

"Nonsense! Absurd! James, how can you suggest—how dare you suggest—" stammered Miss Priscilla.

"Please examine that money-drawer, madam."

"I will do so to satisfy you, but—"

Miss Priscilla, with a distressed face, stepped to the bureau. The next moment she gave a startled cry.

"Oh!"

The money-drawer, which had been left locked, came open under her hand. The lock had been cracked—whether by a schoolboy's pocket-knife or not. It slid open under Miss Priscilla's hand, and she gazed into it. It was empty.

She stood resting one hand on the bureau, her face pale. Her eyes sought Tom's face.

"You cur!" breathed Tom. "That was why

(Continued on the next page.)



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you stayed after us yesterday! You did that after we went!"

"Tom!" wailed Miss Priscilla.

James set his lips.

"I stand accused," he said. "Miss Fawcett, I have no alternative but to demand a search. I am prepared to call in a police officer——"

"No, no, no!" wailed Miss Priscilla.

"I demand a search!" said James. "I demand that that boy shall hand over his keys, and that his belongings shall be searched in the presence of witnesses! I have a right to demand this, and if it is not granted I shall call in a police officer before I leave this house!"

"No, no! My dear James——"

"May I speak?" asked Manners. "Let him call in his police officer! The man will be wanted to take him in charge for burgling your bureau, Miss Fawcett, and planting the money in Tom's suitcase!"

James gave a sudden bound.

"What?" he panted. "You young rascal! A locked suitcase! The key in Tom Merry's own keeping!"

"Draw it mild, Manners, old man!" said Tom. "The rascal has done this, but he can't have got at my suitcase. I've got the key in my pocket, and I had it with me at Eastwood House yesterday."

"Ever heard of false keys?" yawned Manners. "You see, I happen to know that Silverson planted the banknotes in your suitcase yesterday, because I saw him do it!"

"What!" gasped Tom.

"I'll tell you now why I came back yesterday," went on Manners. "I got into the house by the window of my room from the veranda, and had an eye on that scoundrel all the time——"

James panted.

"It is false!" he breathed. "You——"

"Manners!" gasped Tom.

"I was only waiting for him to get on with it, to spin the yarn!" went on Manners, with cheerful coolness. "He went out before Thomas, and, after Thomas was gone, let himself in with a key."

"I have no key!" roared James. "I——"

"Then he shut himself up in this room," continued Manners, while all eyes were fixed on him blankly, "and I went into Tom's room, knowing what was coming next, parked myself behind the curtain, and watched him through a slit when he came up——"

"Oh!" gasped Miss Priscilla.

"And watched him open Tom's suitcase with a key, and park the banknotes in it, hidden under other things, and lock it up again!"

"My dear boy, you are dreaming!" gasped Miss Priscilla. "James is incapable—quite incapable of——"

"I am glad to hear you say so, madam," said James Silverson. "This boy's story is, of course, false from beginning to end!"

"Is it?" smiled Manners. "I've got proof!"

"It is false!" roared James. "There is not a word of truth in this, madam! Let the young rascal produce his proof!"

Manners chuckled.

"I told you fellows I was busy with my camera when I was so late after you at Eastwood House," he said. "Well, I was. I told you I'd taken a ripping series of pictures; I didn't tell you where. Well, I took them in your room, Tom, through

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the slit in the curtain while I was parked behind it."

"Oh!" gasped Tom.

"Oh, holy smoke!" ejaculated Lowther.

"And I've got them here," said Manners, taking a wallet from his pocket—"a set of five pictures, good enough to land that scoundrel in the prison he ought to have gone to long ago! Look!"

Manners spread five photographs in a row on the table in the sunlight from the window.

Tom Merry and Lowther gazed at them breathlessly. Miss Priscilla gazed at them, dumb-founded. James Silverson gazed at them with staring eyes.

"The first picture," said Manners, pointing to it, "shows dear James unlocking Tom's suitcase. You can recognise the room, and the suitcase with Tom's initials on it, Silverson standing over it with the key."

"Oh gum!" breathed Monty Lowther.

"Second picture," said Manners, "Silverson looking into the suitcase——"

"The villain!" muttered Tom.

"Third picture, Silverson shoving the banknotes in——"

"James!" moaned Miss Priscilla.

"Fourth picture, James taking out the key after locking the suitcase up again——"

"Oh, James—James!"

"Fifth picture, James sneaking out of the room, grinning like a Cheshire cat," continued Manners.

"Got him, by gum!" said Lowther.

The wretched schemer stood as if thunderstruck, his eyes bulging at those telltale photographs.

This was the finish for James. He knew that only too clearly. This was the ultimate outcome of cunning rascality.

Miss Priscilla gazed long and hard at that series of pictures. Then she turned to James.

"Go!" she said. "Leave this house, and never return! You have had only kindness from me, and this—this is what you have done! You almost—almost made me doubt that dear boy, wretch that you are! Go! Go at once, and never let me see your wicked face again!"

James gave one look round the room. It was the finish. All his schemes had come crashing down round him, and there was nothing that he could do—nothing that he could say. In savage silence, he turned to the door and went.

Monty Lowther winked at his chums.

"James is going for good this time!" he said. "Hadn't we better see him off?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Let's!" he said.

And the Terrible Three hurried after James to see him off. And a series of fearful yells that floated back told that they were seeing him off in the most strenuous manner!

It was a merry Christmas, after all, at Laurel Villa, followed by a jolly Boxing Day at Eastwood House. James was done with, dismissed from mind, and forgotten.

"And it's going to be ripping next term at St. Jim's!" Tom Merry declared.

"What-ho!" agreed Manners and Lowther.

Look out for the great St. Jim's story, "THE RIVAL SCHOOLMASTERS!" in next Tuesday's "TRIUMPH." Order your copy to-day.

MAD CAREW'S DAWN PATROL



DEATH OF A TEST PILOT!

THE "Bad Lads"—the young war-hawks of Mad Carew's famous Squadron No. 333 of the British Flying Corps, in France, in 1916—were crowded outside the door of the "Glory Hole"—their mess-hut—their eyes glued upon a little gyrating dot high up in the wintry sky, where Captain Jimmy Reed, the popular commander of A Flight, was performing breath-robbing aerobatics in a new French Aigle Fighter.

The French Government were contemplating taking up the Aigle Fighters for many Escadrilles of their Air Force, and before definitely signing contracts with its designer, Max Aigle, they had requested their British Allies to allow two of the new fighters to be given a thorough testing under War conditions by the man acknowledged to be the foremost air ace on the Western Front—Mad Carew.

After the exacting test flights, Mad Carew and Jimmy Reed were to report themselves to the French Air Ministry in Paris to express their opinions of the new fighter machines.

Mad Carew was now standing upon the tarmac, dressed in full flying kit. All around him stood British and French staff officers, watching the gyrating plane overhead with great interest.

Max Aigle and his trusted mechanic, Jules Lemoix, were at Mad Carew's side. The designer's face was afire with excitement, whilst the mechanic seemed no less agitated.

Mad Carew crossed over to where a second Aigle Fighter was standing upon the fringe of the tarmac, looking like a crouching eagle, poised with outspread wings, as it waited eagerly to launch itself up from the snow-mantled ground.

Its engine was turning over slowly, and Mad Carew's experienced ear had no fault to find with its soft, musical purr, hinting at bottled-up power and fury.

In fact, Mad Carew had secretly decided that if this new plane was as good as it looked, then it would not be long before every French fighter squadron in France would be equipped with Aigle Fighters.

The Aigle was beautifully streamlined, whilst its fuselage and wings were camouflaged in wavy blue-and-gold lines. Its lower wing span was 25 ft., and its length 20 ft. 3 in. All its tail-assembly controls were encased inside its tapering, tubular metal fuselage.

Max Aigle, its designer, claimed that, with its 300 h.p. Hispano-Suiza engine, the machine was capable of a speed of 130 m.p.h.—which was 5 m.p.h. faster than the German's latest torpedo-shaped Phalz Scout D.III.

Captain Jimmy Reed brought the Aigle

Fighter screaming down towards the tarmac in a high-powered dive that made many of the generals look as if they wanted to bolt for cover. The plane almost skimmed the snow-covered flying field, and then zoomed up over the tarmac, missing the roof of the hangar by bare inches.

Mad Carew's eyes gleamed.

"Good work, Jimmy!" he muttered. "You've got the hang of her well. She seems good to me—but now to find out whether she is or not!"

He climbed into the cockpit of the French plane, and carefully examined the ammunition in the belts of its twin Vickers to satisfy himself that they were all blank cartridges.

Then he lowered his goggles, settled himself in the bucket-seat, opened the throttle, and raised his gauntleted hand as a signal for the chocks to be jerked from in front of the wheels.

He took his new plane up into the sky in a manner that wrung cries of admiration from the lips of every watching airman on the ground.

Within an incredibly short time he was circling at 4,000 ft., watching Jimmy Reed's Aigle with rapier-swift eyes.

The two planes circled, like boxers taking stock of each other before lunging into the attack.

Suddenly Jimmy Reed twisted his plane round upon one wing-tip and came down at Mad Carew with both his Vickers barking their deep, angry chatter of blank cartridges.

But those guns were pointing at their target for no longer than the barest of split-seconds. Mad Carew jerked up the Aigle's nose in a wing-testing zoom, and then, with tail pointing earthward, kicked sharply at his rudder-bar. The Aigle skidded sideways, and the next moment Mad Carew reversed his direction without losing altitude, and was diving straight at Jimmy Reed, his Vickers spluttering red-tipped fury.

The spectacular Immelmann turn brought involuntary grunts of admiration from the watching generals of two nations.

"Mon Dieu, but that man can fly!" gasped a famous French general. "There is none other like him in all France, on either side of No Man's Land! Voila, look at him now!"

Mad Carew and Jimmy Reed were making their mock dog-fight look so real that the aerial duel was thrilling even the Bad Lads to the core, using though they were to sky battles.

In breath-robbing succession came bank turns, spirals, side-slips, spins, rolls, Immelmann turns, inside loops and outside loops, Chandelles and reversements, sharp dives, and zooms.

Jimmy Reed was an ace with eighteen confirmed victories to his credit, but though he was putting-up a magnificent fight, he was being out-

manœuvred again and again by Mad Carew's almost uncanny sky-tactics.

"Jim's mustard—but, crumbs, the major's red-hot!" Joker Jameson chortled. "If there were real bullets in Mad Carew's Vickers, old Jimbo would now be a very good imitation of the business end of a pepper-pot. Look, the major's got him now!"

An involuntary cheer echoed up from the Bad Lads, whose experience enabled them to appreciate the clever moves of both contestants.

Mad Carew had climbed into the wintry sun, where, momentarily lost to view to Jimmy Reed, he had brought off a swift reversal which had enabled him to come down right on his opponent's tail.

Jimmy Reed was now trying every trick he knew to throw his plane off Mad Carew's sights—but all in vain. The little air ace was following him through every manœuvre like his own shadow, seeming to be able to anticipate every move which his skilled flight-leader attempted.

"Got you, Jimmy!" Mad Carew barked triumphantly, his gimlet eyes afire with the excitement of the battle. "I think that if there were real bullets in these guns, you'd be spinning earthward now, old son—probably in flames!"

Mad Carew's Vickers were vibrating spitefully on their mountings; the glittering belts which fed the blank cartridges to the guns were dancing madly; his opponent's cockpit was bisected by the cross-hairs of his ring-sight.

Jimmy Reed stared back over his shoulder, and his teeth gleamed in a grin which was an admission that he had met his master.

And then it happened.
Cr-ump!

A stab of vivid flame flashed from out of the engine of Jimmy Reed's plane, and the Aigle lurched like a bird shot on the wing.

Mad Carew's face tensed with sudden abject horror and amazement as he saw this happen through the ring-sight of his guns—in just the same manner that he had frequently seen a German Fokker shudder and then burst into flames from the murderous streams of Vickers lead that he had poured into it.

Mad Carew's fingers leapt from the gun-trips as though they had suddenly become red-hot. But it was too late!

With eyes almost bulging out of his head, he saw Jimmy Reed throw his arms into the air—just as if deadly bullets had struck their hammer-thud blows home into the centre of his back.

Then the Aigle Fighter skidded over into a spin and raced earthward, twirling round and round, its pilot huddled in a lifeless heap over his instrument-board, flames lapping like hungry tongues as they coiled from beneath the engine cowlings to encircle his cockpit.

"Jimmy—Jimmy!" Mad Carew shouted hoarsely. "Blue thunder, I've shot him down! My own pilot—a flamer!"

He wanted to drag his eyes away from the spinning plane, but they were held fascinated and spellbound.

As the doomed plane raced towards the ground he saw its pilot stir, but he knew instinctively that it was too late for Jimmy Reed to do anything to save himself from crashing.

The plane pulled up out of its spin—which proved that the pilot had regained consciousness; THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,663.

but it still raced earthward at well over three miles a minute.

The flames vanished, and then the doomed Aigle struck the ground in a wooded, snow-covered stretch of waste land over a mile from Squadron No. 333's aerodrome.

With a sharp intake of breath, Mad Carew watched it bounce into the air, crumpling its wings like paper. Then it somersaulted over and over, hurling snow up in a cloud from the frosty ground, and finally becoming stationary—a heap of scarcely recognisable wreckage with a torn and buckled fuselage pointing skyward like an accusing finger.

Now at last Mad Carew was able to drag his horror-charged, dismayed eyes from the ghastly spectacle.

Many and many a time he had seen a German Fokker, or a Phalz Scout, a Halberstadt, or an Albatros go down to destruction in just such a manner as this; but never in his wildest nightmare had he ever thought that the day would come when he would see one of his own loyal pilots fall from out of his ring-sight and career away to his doom.

Slowly, and as if with a torturous effort, Mad Carew's eyes wandered to the cartridge-studded belt which fed the two guns in front of him. He examined the unfired bullets closely.

Blanks! All blanks! Not a single live cartridge among them.

"Then how did it happen?" he muttered thickly. "I suppose—through somebody's carelessness—there was a small strip of one belt which wasn't changed to blanks. Purple thunder, I'll find out who was responsible for this piece of criminal neglect, and make him rue the day he was born! I'll—"

His words died away on his lips in a hollow groan. Not all the "chewing-up" in the world of whoever was responsible for this ghastly tragedy would bring back to life the ace pilot whose mangled remains were now tangled with the debris of the crashed Aigle Fighter.

With a choking lump in his throat, Mad Carew threw forward his joystick and headed down for the wrecked plane.

FOUL PLAY!

WITH a grim expression on his war-bitten face, Mad Carew watched the ground rising up to meet him. Covered with snow, it was impossible to tell what hidden pitfalls were waiting for him down there.

The smoothest stretch seemed to be just alongside where the wrecked plane had come to rest. A tiny wisp of smoke was now coiling up from the centre of the crashed plane, and Carew knew he would have to act quickly if he was to make a bid to drag its hapless pilot clear.

Despite the fact that he was handling a strange plane, Mad Carew brought off a perfect three-point landing.

The landing-wheels sank deeply into the loose snow—but not too deeply. The snow served as a brake, clogging the wheels as the Aigle bumped over the rough ground towards the wreckage.

Suddenly, as the plane drew alongside the smoking wreckage, its starboard wheel thudded heavily down into a deep hole, and the plane lurched to such a sudden standstill that Mad Carew was hurled heavily forward against his instrument board.

A myriad stars blazed dazzlingly before his

eyes as he pressed himself up, fighting desperately against an invading dizziness that threatened to rob him of consciousness.

A little stream of blood trickled down over his war-calloused face from an ugly wound across his forehead.

With an almost superhuman effort he pressed himself to his feet, a fire-extinguisher from his cockpit clasped tightly in his hand. He threw one leg over the rim of the cockpit, and then hurtled headlong, like a sack of potatoes, down to the ground.

The thick snow broke his fall. Through a red mist that was gathered before his eyes he saw little tongues of flame creeping up among the wreckage where, previously, he had seen the coiling smoke. A smell of petrol assailed his nostrils.

Barely ten yards separated the two planes. Mad Carew well knew that if the petrol leaking from the crashed plane's tank burst into flames, the fire would swiftly spread to his own plane, and he would be caught like a rat in a trap between two raging walls of fire.

But with no thought for his own safety, the little air ace, bullying strength back into his failing limbs, staggered forward.

The hissing chemicals from the extinguisher quickly beat the flames out of existence.

Then, with his heart in his mouth, Mad Carew started his terrible task of searching the wreckage for his friend.

A hollow groan reached his ears. He tore the wreckage madly to one side—to see, at last, in the battered cockpit, a blood-smeared face with two pain-filled eyes looking up into his own, the mellow warmth of friendship shining from them.

"Lo, major! Done for—'fraid."

Jimmy Reed's whispered words were so low that they were barely audible.

"Rot! Soon get you out of this, Jimmy!" said Mad Carew thickly.

He began frienziedly, yet with amazing gentleness, lifting parts of the wrecked plane from above the injured pilot, until he came to a heavy piece of the engine which was pinning Jimmy Reed down at the waist.

Mad Carew's eyes filled with pain. He saw at a glance that it would be more than he could manage to lift that heavy piece of jagged iron—and that even if he could perform this herculean feat, it would be of no use.

Jimmy Reed's number was up; it could only be a matter of minutes now before all his earthly troubles were over.

"Don't worry about me—I'm finished, major. I know it." Jimmy Reed whispered, in laboured words. "Nothing wrong with the plane. It was—was no accident. Someone—"

Mad Carew tried twice to speak, and failed.

"I know," he managed to gasp at last. "Those bullets—"

A look of amazement crept into the dying officer's pain-filled eyes.

"Bullets? There were no bullets, major," he gasped weakly. "It was sabotage! There was a time-bomb—hidden somewhere in the plane!"

"A what?" Mad Carew gasped, in incredulous tones.

"Look, major!" the dying pilot gasped. "I found this on the floor of my cockpit just now. It's in German, and it proves that—"

In his faltering right hand he held a small piece of crumpled paper. His words died away,

and a look of abject horror gleamed in his pain-filled eyes.

With an almost superhuman effort he grasped Mad Carew's arm in frenzied appeal.

"Major, leave me, please," he begged. "There may be another bomb concealed on your Aigle Fighter. It's nearly twenty minutes since you took off. You can't help me. Please leave me and save yourself."

Highly puzzled, Mad Carew opened up the piece of paper which he had taken from Jimmy Reed's feeble fingers. Evidently it had fallen unnoticed from the pocket of someone who had bent over the cockpit just before Jimmy had started out on his test flight.

Suddenly Mad Carew's eyes narrowed to pinpoints of angry fire.

The note, torn from the foot of a larger letter, was written in German. Swiftly Carew read its contents, and as he did so his war-bitten face grew as dark as a thundercloud:

"... and place the infernal machines one under the floorboards of each of the Aigle Fighters. If you follow the instructions which you will find upon them, the mechanism of the bombs will be started up when the propeller is set into motion. The bomb will explode twenty minutes later, and by that time the Aigle Fighter should have been taken up on its test flight.

"Yours in the cause of the Vaterland,

"THE BLACK FALCON."

Jimmy Reed's hand tightened its grip on Mad Carew's arm.

"Please leave me, major," he gasped again. "You see—sabotage!"

Mad Carew's eyes flashed fire. So it had not been bullets from his Vickers which had caused Jimmy to crash. A time-bomb had been smuggled aboard his plane, and it had exploded just at the moment when he had had the Aigle Fighter in his ring-sight.

Then Jimmy Reed was right. There was possibly another bomb on board his own plane, and the engine of that plane had been running now for the best part of twenty minutes.

At any moment that bomb might explode—and then when the ambulance arrived upon the scene it would be to find two corpses to convey back to the squadron's mortuary!

Common sense told Mad Carew that his only sane course was to bolt for his life, but nothing would induce the little air ace to desert his dying pal. He could not move Jimmy from the wreckage, therefore he would stay at his side.

"Major, please go," Jimmy Reed pleaded feebly. "I'm done for, anyway; but the squadron can't spare you. Save yourself, please!"

"Balderdash!"

Mad Carew snapped that reply over his shoulder as he leapt towards the cockpit of his own Aigle Fighter and began tearing up the floorboards.

An angry hiss escaped his lips as, with the second board that came up beneath his swiftly working fingers, he exposed to view a small, square, mahogany box.

As he tore it from the structural crosspiece to which it had been tied he felt a movement inside it, like the faint ticking of a clock.

It was the clockwork mechanism of the time-bomb ticking away the fateful seconds! At any moment the mahogany box might explode, blasting him to eternity.

He tried to tear open the lid of the box, only to find that it was securely locked; and at that moment his sharp ears caught the sound of approaching motor-engines.

He jerked a swift, startled glance up over the padded rim of the cockpit, and a cold hand seemed to close around his heart.

A motor-cycle, ridden by Captain Tubby Hart, Adjutant of Squadron No. 333, was bounding over the rough field towards the two planes. In the motor-cycle's wake followed a grim cavalcade consisting of the squadron fire-engine, its ambulance, private cars, containing the visiting French and British generals, and lorries crowded with the Bad Lads.

In a few minutes now all those crowded cars and lorries would be encircled round the wrecked planes, and the time-bomb, if it exploded in their midst, would cause death and destruction.

Mad Carew had stopped the Aigle Fighter's engine; the plane was helplessly trapped in the deep snow, and it would have to remain there until a gang of mechanics had hauled its landing-wheels from the hole into which they had sunk.

Leaping down from the plane's wing with the mahogany box concealed beneath his arm, Mad Carew turned to meet the approaching motor-cycle.

"Quick, Tubby, off that bike!" he roared. "Let me have it!"

Every one of the Bad Lads had learnt that it was wisest not to argue when Mad Carew barked an order in that tone of voice.

Not realising that the little wooden box under Mad Carew's arm was a deadly infernal machine, liable to explode at any moment, Tubby Hart brought the bike to a standstill, and leapt from the saddle.

A split-second later Mad Carew was astride the machine, desperately twisting open its throttle, the mahogany box resting upon the petrol tank between his legs.

Wh-r-r-rrr!

The ticking inside the deadly box had changed now to a more ominous sound—like the first metallic purr from an alarm clock.

The next moment the sound was drowned in a deep-throated roar from the motor-bike's exhaust.

Skidding madly, its revving back wheel hurling a wave of snow high into the air, Mad Carew drove the motor-bike crazily away. Every beat of its engine carried the deadly bomb farther from the crowd of vehicles that were pulling up around the two planes.

Mad Carew expected every second to be his last. He was convinced that it could only be a matter of moments now before the box perched between his knees would disintegrate in a blinding flash of flame.

Fifty yards from the wrecked planes Mad Carew—watched in blank amazement by generals and the young pilots of Squadron No. 333—gripped the box tightly in one hand, and, raising it high above his head, hurled it with all his strength over the hedge of a sunken lane bordering the field.

Then he dropped flat in the snow.

The mahogany box had scarcely topped the snow-capped hedge when it became transformed into a ball of blinding flame, and a deep, staccato report echoed through the air.

A rushing blast of air swept over Mad Carew; earth, stones, and pieces of hedge rained down on him and the motor-bike. For several seconds

he was too dazed and winded to move. He had escaped death by a hair's-breadth!

When he began to rise to his feet, it was to find the Bad Lads, led by Tubby Hart, tearing anxiously towards him.

"All right—all right!" he snapped. "There's nothing wrong with me; there's nothing to make a fuss about! Free Captain Reed, and get him into the ambulance as soon as you can, and—"

The words died on his lips, and as he walked slowly back towards the wrecked Aigle Fighter he raised his hand to his head and drew off his flying helmet.

The Bad Lads, their horrified eyes turning towards the wrecked plane, slowly followed his example.

Captain Shaw, the squadron's medical officer, kneeling beside the wreckage, was shaking his head slowly from side to side, and reluctantly covering Jimmy Reed's bloodstained face with a handkerchief.

"He's gone, chaps," Joker said hoarsely. "Poor old Jimmy!"

BETRAYING FOOTPRINTS!

HALF an hour later all the Bad Lads were in the air, hurling their Bristol Fighters about the sky as if engaged in furious aerial combat against an invisible foe.

It was an unwritten law of the Royal Flying Corps that when a plane crashed within sight of the aerodrome, all the pals of its hapless pilot must at once take to the air, so that the horror of the spectacle which they had witnessed should not affect their nerves.

Mad Carew was up with them, in his Bristol Fighter.

After a while the Bad Lads came sliding down to the tarmac one by one, but Mad Carew remained aloft, circling round and round in the gathering twilight, a thoughtful, angry frown corrugating his war-bitten brows.

One of his best pilots had been killed by foul play. Someone, the tool and agent of a German who called himself the Black Falcon, had placed that bomb on board the plane that he was testing.

But those two Aigle Fighters had, for the past forty-eight hours, been locked up in a hangar under the eagle-eye of Sandy Mactavish, the dour-faced Scots chief mechanic.

The chief mechanic had sworn that nobody, excepting the designer and his mechanic, had entered the hangar. Then how could that bomb have been placed in Jimmy Reed's plane?

That was what Mad Carew was determined to find out.

It could not bring Jimmy Reed back to life again; but until this mystery as to who was the traitor in Squadron No. 333 was cleared up, the shadow of suspicion must rest upon every man in the squadron.

Mad Carew stared thoughtfully down towards the ground—and then stiffened in the bucket-seat of the Bristol Fighter.

He had suddenly espied a clear set of footprints in the snow leading from a country lane that passed along one boundary of the aerodrome, across the undisturbed, unbroken snow, to a small window in the back wall of the small hangar in which the Aigles had been kept locked ever since their arrival at the aerodrome.

Slipping his Bristol Fighter down to the tarmac, Mad Carew made his way by a circuitous route towards the back of the hangar

When he was sure that he was unobserved, he closely examined the window.

Normally it was kept securely fastened on the inside, but now the bolts had been withdrawn, and it could be easily opened from without.

"Blue thunder, that's strange!" Mad Carew muttered. "Max Aigle and his mechanic, Jules Lemoix, are the only ones who've been allowed to enter the hangar, and so it seems that one of them must have unbolted his window from the inside. Why? So that he could get in himself later—or so that a confederate could get in."

Mad Carew was thoughtful for several seconds.

"I wonder if that fellow Lemoix is the traitor?" he muttered then. "He's a shifty-eyed specimen, and there are plenty of people in Germany—of whom it seems the Black Falcon is one—who would pay a big price to prevent the French from getting hold of something that is faster in the air than Germany's own Psalz Scout."

Mad Carew turned his attention to the double trail of footprints in the deep snow. One set led to, and the other away from, the hangar.

A muttered exclamation escaped the little air ace's lips.

"The man who made these tracks is either a fool or a novice at the sabotage game," he told himself. "Nobody in his right senses would leave such a clearly marked trail through the snow unless—"

Mad Carew looked along the trail to the distant road.

"Unless he's nothing to do with Squadron No. 333 at all," he concluded. "I may have done Lemoix an injustice."

The major followed the trail back to the road. One thing struck him about the footprints—they all seemed very small.

"They might almost have been made by a woman," he muttered. "But that, of course, is absurd. There are no women as near the front line as this."

He reached the road, the centre of which was now covered by flattened, frozen snow. The foot-steps ceased, of course, as soon as this harder surface was reached.

"May not be anyone connected with Squadron No. 333 at all," Mad Carew mused, looking up and down the road. "Whoever it was could have been well out of sight soon after he had planted the bombs. But then he must have had a confederate; either Max Aigle or Jules Lemoix must have opened the window for him from the inside."

Mad Carew was about to turn away and return to his quarters when his gaze was caught by a tiny footmark at the side of the road.

Across the aerodrome the snow was so deep that the exact size of the footprints was hard to judge, because the snow had splayed out under the man's weight. But here at the edge of the lane the snow was crisp and only about an inch deep.

"Almost looks as though he picked out a smooth surface of snow to make the imprint," Mad Carew muttered. "But it proves beyond a shadow of doubt that the agent of the German spy had very small feet."

Mad Carew retraced his steps to his orderly-room.

His first words to Captain Hart surprised the adjutant considerably.

"Tubby, will you find out for me if any officer or man of Squadron No. 333 wears small boots

MOST IMPORTANT!

So as to make sure that you will be able to read the further adventures of Tom Merry & Co., and Mad Carew, you should go along to your newsgiant and make it clear to him that you will want "TRIUMPH" next Tuesday. As the GEM is ceasing publication as a separate paper he may or may not order "TRIUMPH." The chances are he will order no papers at all for you unless you tell him to. Be on the safe side and tell him that you want "TRIUMPH" next Tuesday. Best of all, fill in the form below:

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or shoes—as small as size six, I should think it would be."

He vouchsafed no explanation, and though Tubby yearned to ask for one, he knew his major too well to voice his curiosity.

Whilst Tubby Hart went to make the necessary inquiries Mad Carew strolled across to the Glory Hole.

Many of the officers of Squadron No. 333 were there. Mad Carew glanced at their feet, but the smallest shoe or boot worn by anyone present must have been a size eight.

Max Aigle and Jules Lemoix were also in the room. Mad Carew looked at their feet, too, but they also were wearing boots size eight or larger.

The major strolled back to his orderly-room, and Tubby Hart returned a few minutes later.

"Sandy Mactavish is positive that no man takes a smaller boot than an eight, sir," he reported.

It was just after the dawn patrol had returned on the following morning that Mad Carew ordered all his officers to assemble in the Glory Hole.

He asked Max Aigle and Jules Lemoix to be present, too.

Tubby Hart did not call a roll, but the way he looked over those present more than hinted that he was making sure no one was absent.

The atmosphere was tense and uneasy, and the Bad Lads sensed that something sensational was about to occur.

Mad Carew himself had not yet put in an appearance when there came the sound of marching feet outside the Glory Hole.

Joker Jameson glanced out of the window and saw a couple of score of ac emmas forming a ring round the building. Jameson noticed, with surprise, that all the men were carrying arms.

Jameson opened his mouth to say something,

then evidently thought better of it, for he closed it again without uttering a sound.

"What is it?" asked Jules Lemoix. "What are those men doing outside?"

Before anyone could answer him the sound of Mad Carew's brisk footsteps could be heard approaching.

The door opened, and the flying major stood on the threshold. Behind him was a sergeant and two men with fixed bayonets on the rifles they carried.

Jules Lemoix suddenly gave vent to a snarl of fury and rushed at Mad Carew, but the Bad Lads bounded forward and surrounded him.

The crafty-faced French mechanic had seen a pair of boots that Mad Carew held in his hand. They were a remarkably small-sized pair of boots—size six, to be exact.

Mad Carew held them up.

"The man who wore these boots made a trail from the road to the hangar in which the Aigle Fighters were housed," Mad Carew announced. "That man murdered Captain James Reed by putting a time-bomb in his machine! He put one in mine, too, but Captain Reed warned me of its presence in time. M. Jules Lemoix, what have you to say for yourself?"

"I?" Jules Lemoix exclaimed, in a rather late attempt to bluster. "How dare you hint that I would do such a thing! Where are these footmarks? Lead me to them; I would like to see them. I'll go under guard if you think I might try to escape."

Mad Carew laughed.

"No need for you to see the footmarks," he replied. "You planned an alibi, didn't you, Lemoix? But that is exploded now."

The Mystery of

Wharton Lodge

Grand Long
Christmas
Yarn by
Frank
Richards

Tuck galore has been disappearing from the larder at Wharton Lodge, where Harry Wharton & Co. are staying for the Christmas holidays. Who is the mysterious midnight marauder? Read all about it in this tip-top story starring Harry Wharton & Co. and Billy Bunter, of Greyfriars fame.



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THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,663.

He threw the boots on to the floor at Lemoix's feet.

"I found those boots hidden in deep snow a short distance down the road. Put them on, Lemoix!"

Mad Carew barked the last four words in his fiercest tones.

With shaking hands, Lemoix picked up one of the boots. Then he gave a nervous, shaky laugh.

"Why," he said, "I could never get these on! Look! I wear eights. These are only—they are much smaller."

"Take off the boots you are wearing!" Mad Carew commanded.

Max Aigle was standing by, listening in amazement to what was passing, and seeming every moment on the point of interfering.

"Come here, Cinderella!" Joker Jameson called grimly, and seized hold of Jules Lemoix.

"It's an insult!" the French mechanic whined. "You shall pay for this! I take size eight, I tell you! They will not fit me!"

But he was seized by the Bad Lads. One of his boots was torn off, and the small boot drawn on to his foot.

It fitted perfectly!

"I thought so!" Mad Carew said grimly, carefully examining the Frenchman's discarded boot. "This boot is a size eight, but it has been skillfully padded to fit a smaller foot! I found that out while you were sleeping last night, Jules Lemoix. I suppose a size-six foot was considered too betraying a handicap for a professional spy, and so you had special boots constructed to make it appear that your feet were of a more normal size!"

The expression on Jules Lemoix's face told that Mad Carew's deductions were correct.

"But you decided to make use of your small feet to prove an alibi in case suspicion should turn towards you," Mad Carew continued. "You were just a little too clever when you made that clear impression on the side of the road. I suppose your idea was to lead us to the footprints, and then prove that they were made by someone with small feet—someone not known at Squadron No. 333!"

Realising that his game was up, the spy broke down and confessed that the Black Falcon had offered him a rich reward if he could make the test flights of the Aigle Fighters a failure. When, in consequence, the French Government had turned the plane down, its designer would have received another tempting offer for it from a neutral country, but with Germany as the backer of the offer.

"Where is the Black Falcon now?" barked Mad Carew.

"At an aerodrome behind the German lines, not far from here—at Pouvaire!" Jules Lemoix gasped.

Mad Carew turned to his Bad Lads.

"Come on, boys!" he cried. "The Black Falcon must pay for arranging the murder of Jimmy Reed! This cur will be safe in custody to await his deserved fate! We'll go and visit the Black Falcon! Get your bomb-racks loaded! In ten minutes time the whole squadron will set off on a bombing raid on the Black Falcon's drome at Pouvaire!"

Next week's story of Mad Carew will be twice the length of this one. Your newsagent will want your instructions, as he won't be able to get the GEM for you next week. Tell him you want the "TRIUMPH."

THE FAG'S FEAR!

By Frank Richards.



NUGENT MINOR SAYS "NO"!

"DICKY'S coming!"

"Oh!"
Four voices said "Oh!" in various tones, and not one of them displaying any pleasure.

Frank Nugent flushed.
"If you don't want my young brother—" he began.

"Hem!"
"Hum!"
"Of—of course, he's very welcome," said Harry Wharton. "In fact, he can steer for us. All right."

"The wantfulness is terrific, my esteemed Franky," murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh soothingly.

"In fact," said Bob Cherry, with an effort, "we—we'll be glad to have your minor, Frank. We don't really see much of him."

"Enough, though!" murmured Johnny Bull; but he did not let Frank Nugent hear that murmur. Even Johnny Bull could be tactful sometimes.

Nugent looked moody.
The Famous Five of the Greyfriars Remove had settled what was to be done that Saturday afternoon; they were going up the river. It was quite at the last moment that Nugent mentioned the fact that his young brother, Nugent minor of the Second Form, was to come. It was a pill for his chums to swallow, and they manfully got it down.

It was a case of "Love me, love my dog!" Anybody who chummed with Frank Nugent had to be tactful on the subject of his minor.

Not that the Co. disliked Dicky Nugent in any way. They rather liked him—at a reasonable distance. He was a good enough fag, in his way. But he was spoiled, he was wilful, and he was often cheeky. And Remove fellows did not yearn for the company of Second Form fags at any time.

"Dicky will steer," said Nugent. "He—he will want to make himself useful if we take him on the river."

"Right-ho!" said Bob, with great heartiness. "Let him come! May keep him out of mischief." Nugent gave a sort of impatient shake. That was the very reason why he wanted to take Dicky in the Remove boat; but somehow he did not like to hear the remark from Bob.

"Well, where is he?" asked Harry Wharton hastily. "It's time we got off, Frank."

"He's about somewhere," said Nugent. "We'll find him in a few minutes."

"Oh, all right!"
The Famous Five proceeded to look for Nugent minor. In the opinion of at least four members of the famous Co., that proceeding was utter rot. The Famous Five were great men in the Lower School of Greyfriars, and a Second Form fag was nobody and nothing—less than nobody and less than nothing, if possible. And here they were wasting an afternoon rooting around for Nugent minor!

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" bawled Bob Cherry, as Drake and Rodney came by. "Seen Nugent minor?"

Jack Drake paused. He was careful not to look at Frank Nugent. At that moment he seemed to feel again the blow Nugent had struck him in the Remove dormitory a few days ago—the coward's blow, which he had not returned. Since that incident Jack Drake had had little to say to the Famous Five. It was not an incident to be forgotten, though Bob Cherry had forgotten it for the moment.

"Don't talk to that cad, Bob!" muttered Nugent.

The words were muttered low, but they reached Drake's ears. The colour stole into his face.

"Shut up, Frank!" whispered Wharton.
Nugent shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"We're looking for Nugent minor, Drake," said Bob Cherry, unheeding Nugent. "Seen him about anywhere?"

"I saw him go out ten minutes ago," answered Drake curtly; and he walked on with Rodney.

"Out of the gates?" called out Bob.

"Yes."
"Which direction?"
"Towards Friardale," answered Drake, over his shoulder.

"Thanks, old scout!"
Drake and Rodney walked on rather quickly. "Well, if the kid's gone out—" began Johnny Bull tentatively.

"He can't have gone far," said Frank.
"Do you want us to go after him?"

"You can please yourselves, of course," said Nugent tartly. "I'm going after him, anyhow."

"Oh, all right!"

Four juniors looked very resigned as they followed Frank Nugent out of the gates.

It began to look as if the trip up the Sark would be indefinitely postponed.

They walked very quickly down the lane towards the village, in the hope of sighting Dicky Nugent. They passed Drake and Rodney in the lane, and Nugent gave the two juniors a dark look.

Nugent had not lost his bitterness towards the fellow he regarded as his enemy.

He had had the best of the trouble in a way, as Drake had taken the coward's blow, and still refused to fight him.

But Nugent knew—as all the Remove knew—that Drake could have handled him with ease, and that it was a generous forbearance that had caused him to take the insult quietly. The fellow who had defeated Bolsover major in a terrific fight was not likely to be called a funk. Nugent had been spared, and he knew it, and it irked him bitterly to know it; the incident in the dormitory did not redound to his credit in any way. Even his own chums condemned him for it, though they did not say so.

"Doesn't Dicky know he's to come with us this afternoon, Frank?" asked Wharton, after a long silence.

"I told him."

"He must have forgotten, then," said Johnny Bull gruffly. "If he doesn't want to come—"

"I want him to come."

"Oh, all right!" said Johnny, with deep resignation.

Nugent bit his lip.

"Look here, you fellows," he said in a low voice. "I've a reason for wanting my brother to come. I—I'm afraid he's getting himself into trouble again; there's talk among the fags that he's been seen with that blackguard Banks, of the Bird-in-Hand. Sammy Bunter's seen him, and talked about it. I've got to keep an eye on him somehow. But I don't want to bother you fellows. You get off to the river."

"We're sticking to you, old bean," answered Bob Cherry loyally. "It's all right. We'll spot young Dicky soon."

Bob Cherry spotted him a few minutes later. Nugent minor was sighted ahead, trudging along towards the village, with his hands in his pockets, and his head drooping a little. The Famous Five broke into a run and overtook him.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here you are!" exclaimed Bob. "You're wanted, young 'un!"

Dicky stared round.

"Who wants me?" he snapped.

"We do, dear boy."

"We're going on the river, Dicky," said Frank Nugent. "We want you to come and steer for us."

"I don't want to steer for you."

"Well, you needn't steer," said Frank patiently. "We'll let you pull an oar, if you like."

"I don't want to."

"Come on, Dicky! It will do you good—a run on the river," said his brother.

"I don't want to go on the river."

"Do come, Dicky!"

"I won't!"

Four juniors, elaborately unconscious of that brotherly argument, looked attentively at THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,663.

scenery. It was for Nugent major to settle matters with Nugent minor.

The Co. had nothing to do with it, and they nobly restrained a keen desire to thump Nugent minor.

"Where are you going, then, Dicky?" asked Nugent in a low voice.

"Friardale."

"What for?"

"That's my business!"

"I told you I wanted you to come out in the boat this afternoon, kid."

"And I told you I wouldn't!"

There was a pause. Harry Wharton & Co. still admired the scenery.

Nugent's face was flushing deeply.

"Dicky, do come!" he urged. "We—we want you."

"Rot!" said Dicky.

"Then tell me what you are going to the village for?" exclaimed Nugent, showing signs of anger at last.

Dicky Nugent looked obstinate.

"There's been some talk among the fags of your meeting that bookmaker Banks," said Nugent, compressing his lips. "If you're getting yourself into trouble, Dicky—"

"I suppose Drake has told you—"

"Drake?" repeated Nugent. "Drake has told me nothing. What do you mean?"

"Nothing."

"I don't speak to Drake," said Nugent, frowning. "It's not likely, since I found him bullying you, Dicky."

Dicky grinned slightly.

"You're an ass, Frank!" he said. "What have you got your knife into Drake for? You pitched into him and got licked. I could have told you you'd be licked. Now I hear that you wanted to fight him again, and gave him the coward's blow. Do you like being licked?"

"Dicky!"

"Jolly lucky for you Drake let you off, I think!" pursued Dicky. "Don't you go around as the champion of the oppressed, Frank! You aren't hefty enough for the job!"

Nugent's face was quite pale.

"I fought him on your account, Dicky," he said in a low voice. "It was because he was pitching into you—"

"More fool you!" said Dicky coolly. "Now you buzz off, and give me a rest! I've got no time to waste!"

"Tell me what you are going to the village for, then?"

"Find out!"

"Dicky—"

"Ask Drake if you want to know!" sneered the fag. "He could tell you, I fancy. Now let me alone."

Dicky Nugent swung away down the lane.

Frank made a stride after him, as if to stop him by force. But he restrained himself.

"Shall we get off?" asked Bob Cherry, turning his attention from the scenery at last.

"I'm ready!" said Nugent in a choked voice.

The Famous Five turned their steps in the direction of the river. But it was not a happy party that pulled up the Sark that afternoon.

THE SURE SNIP!

"THAT young ass again!" growled Rodney. Drake and Rodney had strolled along the towing-path by the Sark, down the river. Near the village the towing-path ran by

a gate of the Bird-in-Hand garden, which reached nearly to the Sark. As the chums of the Remove came along, chatting merrily, they caught sight of a diminutive figure stopping at the gate, half-hidden by trees.

Drake glanced round as his chum spoke, and recognised Dicky Nugent. He frowned.

"The blithering little donkey!" said Drake. "Suppose a prefect had been coming along the towpath—"

Dicky Nugent was fumbling with the latch of the gate. He had cut through the fields from the lane after leaving his brother.

Drake hesitated a moment, and then he ran forward.

"Don't go in there, Nugent minor!" he called out.

The fag started and spun round.

"Oh—you!" he ejaculated.

He stared defiantly at the two Remove fellows.

"You awful young ass!" said Drake. "You know that den is out of bounds for all Greyfriars chaps! Don't play the goat!"

"Are you going to meddle again?" sneered the fag. "It didn't turn out so jolly well last time, did it?"

"What the thump do you want to shove into such a den for, kid?" asked Drake. "It means a flogging for you if you're found out!"

"That's my bisney!"

"By Jove!" said Drake, with a gleam in his eyes. "I've a jolly good mind to take you by the scruff of the neck, Nugent minor, and march you straight home to Greyfriars!"

"I'd jolly well kick your shins!" retorted Nugent minor.

Rodney caught his chum's arm.

"Let's get away, Drake," he muttered.

"What's the good of chipping in? Last time you interfered between that young cad and Banks you had a fight on your hands with his brother. Let him alone."

"You'd better!" sneered Dicky.

Drake hesitated.

A fat man, with a cigarette in his mouth, loafed down the garden through the ill-kept shrubbery. It was Mr. Joseph Banks, who honoured the Bird-in-Hand by residing there.

"'Arternoon, Master Dicky!" he said affably. "Been expecting you."

Then Mr. Banks' eyes fell on Drake, and he scowled. He had not forgotten the handling Jack Drake had given him.

"Ho, you 'ere—hey?" he exclaimed. "You give me any of your sauce now, and I'll call the bar 'ands to deal with you!"

"Come on, Drake!" urged Rodney. "For goodness' sake, don't get mixed up in a row at a pub!"

Drake reluctantly assented, and the chums went on by the towing-path, followed by a hoarse chuckle from Mr. Banks. That gentleman unlatched the gate, and Dicky Nugent went in, grinning. The fag appeared to be in high feather that afternoon.

"Glad to see you, sir!" said Mr. Banks. "Come and sit down."

He led the way into an untidy arbour, and squatted upon a bench, breathing hard. He breathed an aroma of mingled rum and tobacco, and the fag shrank away a little. It seemed to the reckless young rascal very daring and "sporting" to meet the bookmaker in the forbidden precincts of the Bird-in-Hand; but Mr. Banks' close proximity certainly was not pleasant to the fastidious fag.

"'Ave a smoke?" continued Mr. Banks hospitably.

"I don't mind a cigarette, Banks," said Nugent minor.

"Elp yourself," said Banks, extending a box.

Nugent minor helped himself, and lighted a cigarette. Mr. Banks eyed him with a covert grin. Dicky would probably have been surprised if he could have read Joseph Banks' real opinion of the sportsman of the Second Form. All was grist that came to Mr. Banks' mill; but he could not help feeling a cynical contempt for his foolish victim.

"Now, about that race?" said Nugent minor, with quite the air of a man of the world, as soon as his cigarette was fairly going.

"Yes, about the race," said Mr. Banks genially. "'Orrid surprise that was for heverybody that backed your 'orse, Master Nugent."

Dicky started.

The brightness in his face fled at once, and he stared at Mr. Banks with startled eyes.

"You—you don't mean to say that Morning Dew hasn't won, Mr. Banks!" he exclaimed shrilly.

"You could 'ave seen it in any evening paper."

"I never see any evening papers. Hasn't Morning Dew won?" exclaimed Dicky Nugent excitedly.

"Lost by a length," said Mr. Banks.

"Oh!"

"Sportsmen has their ups and downs," said Mr. Banks philosophically. "You has to take the bad with the good. Better luck next time—what?"

"But—but you told me he was certain to win!" stammered Nugent minor, with wide eyes fixed on the bloated face before him.

"I told you I was sure," corrected Mr. Banks. "So I was—put a tenner on 'im myself, I did, and it's gone. It was a dead-sure snip, too."

"Straight from the stables, you told me!" mumbled the fag.

"So it was," said Mr. Banks. "But they was keeping a dark 'orse up their sleeve—and there you are, Master Nugent!"

Dicky Nugent gasped for breath. His cigarette had dropped unheeded to the ground.

"Then—then—then I've lost my money?" he said blankly.

"Course you 'ave, when the geegee's lost the race," said Mr. Banks. "You backed 'im to win. I'm glad to see you this arternoon, Master Nugent, 'cause we've got to settle. Short reckonings make long friends, I say. Now, you put four pun on that 'orse, at three to one agin."

"I—I was going to win twelve pounds," said Nugent minor faintly.

"So you would 'ave, and fingered the money spot-cash, if the 'orse 'ad pulled it off. But, you see, he didn't."

"Oh!"

"You 'anded me two quids cash," said Mr. Banks. "I put on four for you, and that leaves you owing me two. That's square, ain't it?"

"I—I haven't got two pounds," stammered Nugent minor. "You—you told me—"

He broke off. An extremely nasty look was coming over Mr. Banks' bloated face.

"You ain't got the money to pay your debts!" ejaculated Mr. Banks, in a tone of surprise.

"I—I thought—"

"Debt of honour, too," said Mr. Banks, shaking his head. "There ain't no law to collect a debt of honour 'Sides, you're a minor, too. I

couldn't get that money out of you in the law courts, Master Nugent."

"No, of course," assented Dicky, a little reassured.

"I could only come up to your school and ask the 'eadmaster's advice about it," said Mr. Banks sorrowfully.

Nugent minor jumped.

"I dessay Dr. Locke would pay, rather than see a poor man done out of his money," suggested Mr. Banks.

"He wouldn't!" gasped Dicky. "He—he'd flog me; I know that. He might turn me out of Greyfriars! You—you can't come up to the school!"

"I don't want to, I'm sure," said Mr. Banks. "Between friends, there's no need to be nasty. If you ain't got the money on you—why, bless your boots, I'll wait a day or two."

Nugent minor gazed at him almost wildly. A day or two! Where was he to get two pounds in a day or two? It was an unexpected tip from a wealthy uncle that had already gone into Mr. Banks' pocket. Certainly there was no prospect whatever of a Second Form fag raising the sum of two pounds in a day or two.

Mr. Banks looked at his watch, and rose.

"I've got to see Cobb," he remarked. "Don't you worry, Master Nugent. You jest drop in in a day or two with the money. If you can't manage to come, I don't mind calling at the school, say, Wednesday. 'Arternoon, Master Nugent!"

Dicky Nugent sat dumb. He recognised the veiled threat in the bookmaker's words. Mr. Banks walked away up the garden path, breathing stertorously. The hapless fag sat for a full ten minutes before he dragged himself to his feet and limped out of the garden to the towpath. His face was white and strained.

His castles in the air had been suddenly shattered. His "sure snip" had turned out remarkably unsure—as sure snips so often do. The net result of his little gamble was that he owed Mr. Banks two pounds, and towards that sum he had two halfpennies jingling in his pocket. What was going to happen now?

He tramped miserably along the towing-path. There was only one gleam of light in the shadow that had fallen upon him—the thought of his brother. Frank could help him; Frank must help him—somehow! Frank had saved him from scrapes before; Frank must save him again—somehow! The thought of Frank came like balm to his troubled mind.

NUGENT MAJOR MAKES A DISCOVERY!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"

There was a tramp of feet in the Remove passage, and five ruddy-faced juniors poured into Study No. 1. A pale-faced fag started up out of the armchair.

It was Dicky Nugent. He was waiting for his brother to come in; he had been waiting a couple of hours. Frank Nugent was looking a good deal more cheerful as he came in than he had looked when they left Dicky in the lane. The pull up the river had done him good.

"Hallo, Dicky," he said, with no trace of resentment, as if he had forgotten the terms on which they had parted. "Stay to tea, kid?"

"Do!" said Wharton politely.

"Oh, do!" said Bob Cherry. "We've brought

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in the tuck with us, and we—we'll be glad of your company."

"The gladfulness will be terrific."

Johnny Bull gave a faint grunt. What it was meant to express was known only to Johnny.

"I—I haven't come to tea." Nugent minor's manner was very subdued; there was no trace now of his cheeky flippancy. "I—I wanted to speak to you, Frank."

"Right-ho!" said Frank. "Go ahead!"

Dicky cast a glance at the other fellows. Apparently what he had to say had to be said in private.

"You fellows can confab while we're poaching the eggs," said Bob Cherry. "Don't mind us."

Nugent drew his minor out of the study. But there were several Remove fellows about coming in to tea.

"What's the matter, Dicky?" he asked, in a low tone.

"I'm in a scrape."

"Can't you tell me before the fellows?"

"No."

"Come along, then."

In the deep window-seat at the end of the Remove passage they were out of hearing of others, though several fellows glanced at them in passing, coming from the stairs. Dicky sank wearily into the seat, and Frank stood before him, watching him anxiously. The lines of trouble in the fag's face told him that there was indeed a "scrape" at last, and he could guess that it was in connection with Master Dicky's recent plunge as a sportsman.

But Nugent's manner was very gentle as he said:

"Get it off your chest, kid."

"Can you let me have two pounds, Frank?"

"Two pounds! Of course not!"

Dicky's lip trembled.

"I've got to have two pounds," he said. "I—I must! I—I shall get into awful trouble if I don't!"

"Is it that man Banks?" asked Nugent, compressing his lips.

"I owe a man some money."

"Is it Banks?"

"Yes," muttered Dicky half defiantly.

"What do you owe him money for?"

"What does that matter? If you can't lend it to me, I shall have to get it somewhere else."

"Have you been betting?"

"Suppose I have?"

"I know you have!" muttered Nugent.

"Then you needn't ask."

Dicky Nugent seemed to be recovering some of his old manner now that he was aware that his brother could not help him financially.

"The rotter has swindled you, of course," said Nugent.

"Nothing of the kind. I backed a horse and it lost, if you want to know. He only put the money on for me."

"You young ass, he pocketed your money and never put it on a horse at all!" snapped Nugent. "What you've given him he's robbed you of, and you owe him nothing."

"I owe him two pounds, and if I don't pay he's going to see the Head."

"I don't believe he would dare come near Greyfriars."

"He says he will. And he's not robbed me. He gave me the tip about the horse, and offered to get the bet put on; he made nothing out of it himself," said Dicky. "I gave him two, and I

owe two more—the bet was four pounds. I should have bagged twelve if the horse had won."

"You little ass, he tipped you a horse that couldn't possibly win, and pecked the money."

"Rot!" said Dicky.

"Do you think he would take you seriously as a sporting man, you young owl?" exclaimed Nugent. "He was laughing at you in his sleeve all the time."

Dicky gave his brother a bitter look. Nugent's words were true enough, but Dicky did not believe it, or did not choose to believe it. And he was deeply wounded at the suggestion that he, the reckless young plunger, should have been regarded as a noodle by Mr. Banks, and laughed at in that gentleman's sleeve.

"If that's all you've got to say, you may as well shut it, Frank. You're always bothering me—always telling me to come to you if I want help, and now I've come you've got nothing better than that to say. Go and eat coke!" Nugent minor turned away, and then stopped. "But—but I've got to have the money somehow; I've got to pay. I'll let you have it back, Frank—I will, honour bright! Can't you manage it somehow?"

"You know I can't."

"You could borrow it from your pals."

"I can't!" said Nugent savagely.

"There's Drake," muttered Dicky. "He's got tons of money. His father's a millionaire, I've heard—owns gold-mines in Nigeria. Drake could lend it to you without missing it."

Frank Nugent flushed scarlet.

"Drake? You—you think I'd borrow of Drake, after—after—"

"Oh, you're such an ass!" said Dicky scornfully. "What did you want to row with Drake for, the only fellow who's soft enough to lend a hand to a fellow for nothing? You needn't have fought with the chap, and kept it up, too, as you did! Look here, he's an awfully good-natured chap, and if you went to him—"

The look on his brother's face stopped Dicky's tongue.

"You young cad!" said Frank Nugent, between his teeth. "Haven't you a rag of decency left? Drake, the fellow I gave the coward's blow—"

"More fool you!" snarled Dicky.

"The fellow who was bullying you only the other day—"

Dicky gave a scornful laugh.

"More of your rot!" he sneered. "Why can't you have some sense like other chaps? Drake pitched into me because I chucked a stick at his head. I've been pitched into before, I suppose, and I'm not made of putty or glass. I never asked you to make a fool of yourself. Drake was a silly meddling ass, just like you! I chucked the stick at him because he knocked Banks down and stopped me—"

"What!" yelled Nugent.

"So now you know!" sneered Dicky.

Frank Nugent stared at the fag. He made a sudden movement forward, and caught Dicky by the arm, so forcibly that the fag gave a howl.

"You young rascal!" His voice was almost hissing in its intensity. "You never rightly told me what happened that day. I found Drake pitching into you and tackled him, and now you tell me— Is it true, you young sweep?"

"Let go my arm!"

"What did Drake do?" In his excitement Frank shook the fag roughly. "Tell me the truth, or I'll shake it out of you!"

"He found me talking to Banks in the wood,

and chipped in and made Banks clear off—knocked him down and made him go," said Dicky sullenly.

"And that is all?"

"That is all."

"And—and you let me pitch into him!" Nugent panted.

"I never asked you to. You're always meddling in my affairs, and making a fool of yourself!"

Nugent released the fag and leaned on the wall. He was almost overcome for the moment. So that was Drake's offence—that was why he had earned Nugent's hatred, and a bitter insult before all the Form! Because he had tried to keep this reckless young rascal from falling into trouble and disgrace!

"And I—I struck him—I gave him the coward's blow!" muttered Frank huskily. "I wouldn't

PEN PALS

A batch of Pen Pal notices appears in this week's
"MAGNET"

let him explain. I—I—never thought—never imagined—"

"His voice trailed off.

"What does it matter?" granted the fag. "Look here, Frank, you can help me with the two pounds somehow."

Nugent was not even listening. Dicky looked at him angrily and bitterly. His last resource had failed him. There was no help to be had from his brother.

He turned and tramped away savagely and sullenly. Nugent looked after him for a moment or two; and then turned; it was towards Jack Drake's study that he went.

MAKING AMENDS!

JACK DRAKE knitted his brows as the door of Study No. 3 opened and Frank Nugent came in. His natural thought was that the visit meant further trouble, and he was fed-up with trouble from Nugent's direction. Rodney and Ogilvy and Russell were all in the study, and they looked on grimly, in anticipation of a row. There was a hurried footsteps behind Nugent at the passage, and Harry Wharton looked in.

"Frank—"

"It's all right, Harry!" Nugent smiled faintly. "It's not a row this time."

"Oh, good!" said Harry, rather puzzled, however.

"The goodwillness is terrific," murmured the Nabob of Bhanipar, over Wharton's shoulder.

Nugent turned to Jack Drake. His cheeks were burning.

"I—I want to ask your pardon, Drake," he said, in a faltering voice. "I—I'm awfully sorry—"

Drake's expression changed.

"What's up?" he asked.

"I—I've just found out from my minor—that what happened the other day when—I thought you were hallying him," said Nugent haltingly.

"Oh—"

"I—I know now—"

"I'm afraid I didn't do much good," said Drake. "I meant it all for the best, though."

"You found him with that blackguard Banks—"

"That was it," said Drake. "I chipped in, and there was some trouble with Banks; but he was too fat and boozy to give much trouble. Then Nugent minor heaved a stick at my napper." Drake rubbed the back of his head. "Perhaps I overdid the spanking part of the bisney—"

"You didn't!" grunted Rodney.

"I—I was a hasty fool!" muttered Nugent painfully. "I—I came up and saw you pitching into my minor, and I never guessed what had happened, and Dicky didn't tell me. Of—of course, he would have, only he's rather thoughtless. I was a fool, I've done worse since." His cheeks burned. "I—I can only say I'm sorry, Drake."

"All serene, old top!" said Drake cordially. "Don't worry about it. I'm glad you can see I'm not such a rotter as you thought."

"I was a fool to think so," said Nugent repentantly.

Drake held out his hand with a smile, and Frank Nugent took it in rather a shame-faced way.

Then he left the study quickly.

Drake's face was much clearer as he turned back to the tea-table. The trouble with Study No. 1 was over, and he was very glad of it.

"I told you Nugent was a good sort, Rodney."

THRILLING PICTURE-STORY



With the body of the unconscious man slung across his saddle, Derickson Dene makes a desperate bid to escape capture. He is pursued by rebel soldiers.

Above is an incident taken from the intensely exciting picture-story which appears in next week's

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"You did!" said Rodney, with a smile.

"And I'm jolly glad I didn't take on that scrap with him when he wanted me to."

"You were right, old chap," said Rodney quietly. "There aren't many fellows who would have acted as you did, but you were right."

When the Remove fellows came into the Common-room that evening, a good many of them were surprised to see Drake greet Frank Nugent with a cheery nod, which was returned with a smile.

And the next morning they were seen walking amicably in the quadrangle together. Dicky Nugent, coming along with a moody brow, stopped to stare at them, evidently in surprise. When Nugent went away to join his chums, Dicky came up to Drake.

"You seem to be jolly friendly with my major, all of a sudden," he said.

"No thanks to you!" answered Drake.

"Well, it's not my fault Frank's a bit of an ass," said the fag. "I'm always telling him of it."

"And I suppose it's not his fault you're a bit of a rascal," remarked Drake.

Dicky Nugent eyed him. He was wondering whether Drake's new friendship with his major offered him grounds enough for touching Drake for the two pounds he so sorely needed. He reflected that he had nothing to lose by trying.

"Will you lend me two quid?" he asked.

Drake laughed.

"I'm in an awful hole," muttered Dicky, his lips quivering. "I—I—I can't get it out of Frank. He says he's hard-up. He'll have to find it somehow, though. If there's a row, the pater will rag him, I know that."

"Tell me about it," said Drake quietly.

Nugent minor told him hopefully. Drake took compassion on the wretched fag, and handed over two pounds.

In the Remove passage that evening, Frank Nugent came up to Drake with a flushed face.

"I owe you two pounds," he said quietly. "I'll settle by the end of next week."

"But—" began Drake.

"I'm much obliged," said Nugent. "It was jolly decent of you to help the young rascal out. He—he's more sinned against than sinning, you know—a bit wild, but there's no real harm in him. I'll settle next week; and it's worth the money if it's a lesson to him. And I think it will be."

And Drake, who had his own opinion on that subject, did not give it utterance. He liked Frank Nugent too well to tell him what he thought of his minor.

THE END.

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