

COMPLETE
SCHOOLBOY TALES

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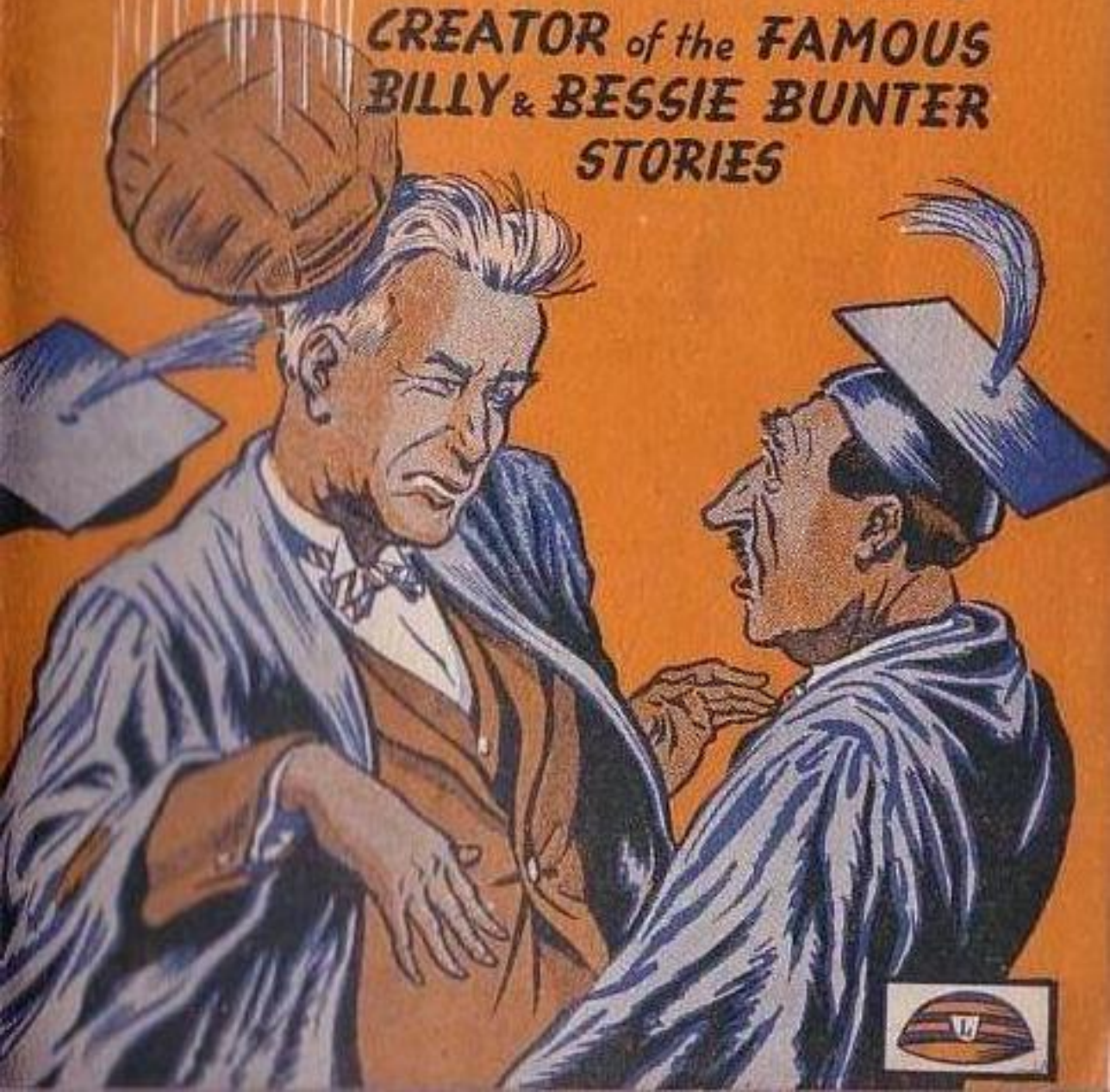
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FOURTH FORM AT LYNWOOD

by

FRANK RICHARDS

*CREATOR of the FAMOUS
BILLY & BESSIE BUNTER
STORIES*



● Frank Richards is a name well known throughout the country. In fact as a writer of school stories both for boys and girls he is without parallel and his writings have been read by millions of people throughout the world. He attained fame in creating the characters of Billy Bunter for the boys school tales and that of Bessie Bunter for the girls. His pen-name for the girls was Hilda Richards. We hope to publish a series of these tales

STORIES CONTAINED IN THIS BOOK

**Fourth Form at Lynwood * Mick of the Spindrift
Bunker Bates on the War-Path**

By FRANK RICHARDS

★

Steven Stern, Detective

By W. HOLTON

★

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CHAPTER I

CHUCKED

"**N**OTHING doing!"
"But——"
"And that's that!"
"But——"

Bob Rawlings, captain of the Lynwood Fourth, gave an impatient grunt. His rugged face, generally pleasant and good-tempered, was frowning.

There were three fellows in Number Five Study.

Bob Rawlings, sitting at the table, had a football list before him, and a pencil in his hand. Jimmy Carroll, his study-mate, was sprawling more or less elegantly in the window-seat. Valentine Wilmot-Jones stood just inside the doorway, his handsome face flushed, his dark eyes gleaming, in the worst temper ever.

He looked, indeed, as if he could barely restrain himself from coming across the study, and punching the frowning face over the table.

Jimmy Carroll had a watchful eye on him, lazy as he looked,

sprawling in the window-seat, Jimmy was ready to intervene promptly, if the scapegrace of Lynwood let his temper rip to that extent.

"It's no good butting, W. J., rapped out Bob, "You're out of the Hockley game to-morrow. A man who doesn't turn up for games practice can't expect to play in matches. I told you you'd be dropped if you cut games on Saturday. And you walked off just the same. Didn't you?"

"Yes, I did!"

"Well, then, that's that! Shut the door after you."

"W. J. doesn't think he needs so much practice as us common mortals," remarked Jimmy Carroll, sarcastically, from the window.

Wilmot-Jones gave him a glare.

"You can shut up, Carroll!" he snapped, "I'm talking to Rawlings."

"You're done talking to me," said Bob, "I'm putting Vernon in, in your place. He isn't so good a winger as you are, but he doesn't set up to boss the show. You do, W. J. And it won't wash."

"You can't chuck me out of the match."

"You're chucked," said Bob tersely, "I warned you, and you didn't care a bean. You knew it was coming."

Val Wilmot-Jones breathed hard and deep.

He was the handsomest, as well as the wealthiest, fellow in the Fourth Form at Lynwood—the best-dressed junior in the Lower School: a good man in class, and a good man at games: the best junior winger in the school. He had a big place in the eyes of his form: and a still bigger place in his own eyes. It irked him to toe the line: and he had tried his skipper's patience very often—and now, at length, once too often! Now he was "chucked", just as if he had been a nobody like Banks, or Baker, or "Rag" Hankey! He could imagine the grins in the Lounge when the Hockley list went up without his name in it. He came a few steps nearer the study table. Bob Rawlings did not heed him: but Jimmy Carroll sat up and took notice.

"That won't do, Rawlings," W. J.'s eyes were glinting. "Mean to say that you've put another man in my place?"

"I'm not playing ten men in a Soccer match, if that's what you mean," grunted Bob.

"You cheeky rotter!" breathed Wilmot-Jones.

"That will do!" exclaimed Bob, gruffly, "Get out of my study. You can blow off steam at poor old Rag in Number Seven—you can't here. You're chucked—and you'll stay chucked till you learn to toe the line like the other fellows. Now hook it."

"You've left my name out of that list?"

"I've told you so!" exclaimed the captain of the Lynwood Fourth, impatiently. "Don't you understand English? Now give a chap a rest."

"Then I'll show you what I think of it."

Wilmot-Jones reached suddenly across the table, and grabbed the football list. His temper had been on the boil: and now it boiled over. Bob Rawlings caught at the paper, too late. Jimmy Carroll jumped up from the window-seat.

"Let that alone!" he shouted.

"Give me that paper!" bawled Bob.

Unheeding either of them, Wilmot-Jones tore the paper across, and across again. Then, as Rawlings leaped up with a roar of wrath, he pitched the fragments into the face of the Fourth-form captain.

"There!" he panted, "and now——"

He got no further.

Bob Rawlings came round the table with a rush. Jimmy Carroll came round the other side at equal speed. They collared W. J. simultaneously.

"Outside!"

"Chuck him out!"

The dandy of the Lynwood Fourth whirled in the grasp of two pairs of sturdy hands. He struggled frantically: and, slim and elegant as he was, there was plenty of strength in W. J. For a minute, he gave the chums of Number Five quite a lot to do. Then, with arms and legs flying wildly, he was whirled forward.

A plump and chubby face, with round eyes rather like a parrot's, looked in from the passage. It belonged to "Rag" Hankey.

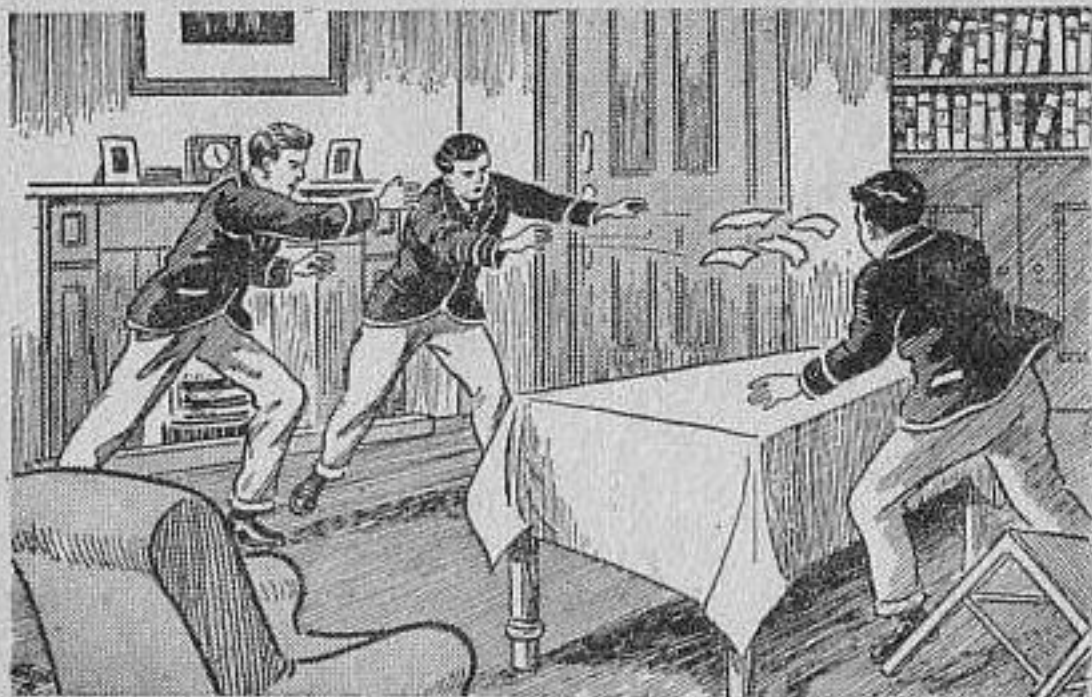
"I say, what's the row?" inquired Rag, "What—Oh, scissors! Oh, crumbs! Oh, crikey!"

It was a spot of ill-luck for Rag that he looked in at that moment. For at that moment, Valentine Wilmot-Jones came hurtling through the doorway like a stone from a catapult.

There was a terrific crash in the doorway.

Rag, with a yell, went over backwards, and sprawled in the passage. W. J. with another yell, sprawled over him, knocking almost every ounce of wind out of Rag's plump body.

"Ooooooh! Ooooh! Ooooh!" gurgled Rag, "Wooh! oogh! wooh!"



"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Bob, staring from the doorway. "Rough luck, Rag, old man! What did you get in the way for?"

"Rag all over!" chuckled Jimmy Carroll.

"Oh! ow! Oh! Ow! wow!" spluttered Rag, "Gerroff will you? You're squish-squish-squashing me—I'm winded—wow!"

Valentine Wilmot-Jones scrambled to his feet. Bob Rawlings and Jimmy Carroll eyed him grimly, as he turned towards them, with fists clenched and eyes flaming.

"Want any more?" growled Bob.

"Do come in and have another spot!" invited Jimmy.

For a moment or two, W. J. looked like taking him at his word, and charging back into the study. But second thoughts—proverbially the best—supervened: and he turned and tramped up the passage to his own study. The door of Number Seven banged after him, with a bang that rang the length of the Fourth-form passage.

"That's that!" grunted Bob. And he went back to the study table to write out the list again: the first list for a junior School match that season in which the name of V. Wilmot-Jones did not appear as outside right!



CHAPTER II

RAG ASKS FOR IT!

MR. PRANCE jumped. In fact, he almost bounded.

It was enough to make Prance, or any other form-master at Lynwood, jump, clear of the form-room floor. An ink-ball, landing suddenly

in a beak's eye, was absolutely certain to have a very startling effect on that beak.

Rag was the culprit. It was, as Jimmy Carroll had remarked the previous day, Rag all over. Rag had earned his nickname in the Lynwood Fourth by his propensity to rag. He was perpetually ragging. But he never had much luck with it. No fellow was oftener in the soup than Hankey of the Fourth. But this time Rag had out-done himself!

It was third hour on Wednesday morning. Virgil was the order of the day, and Bob Rawlings was on "con". Bob was a better man at Soccer than at the classics: and just at present his thoughts were much more on the Hockley match, which was to be played that afternoon, than on the great works of P. Vergilius Maro. His translation was not giving Mr. Prance satisfaction. Jimmy Carroll, who had the lesson almost by heart, would gladly have whispered a tip or two to his chum. But that was not feasible under Prance's wrathful eyes. So Bob stumbled on, with Prance's sarcastic attention fixed on him.

Which seemed to Rag Hankey an excellent opportunity to get going. Rag had his missile ready in his hand—compounded of blotting-paper kneaded with ink. It was intended for Valentine Wilmot-Jones.

Hankey of the Fourth had the pleasure—or otherwise—of sharing Number Seven Study with W. J. When W. J. let his passionate temper rip—as often he did—life was a little hectic in Number Seven. And since the row in Number Five the previous day, W. J. had been at his worst. Certainly it was not Rag's fault that W. J. was out of the Hockley match, and that fellows in the Lounge had grinned over the football list, and remarked that W. J.'s nose would be out of joint. But Rag had most of the benefit of Wilmot-Jones's temper, all the same. Hence the ink-ball hidden in Rag's plump inky palm, ready for projecting at W. J.'s handsome face at the first favourable opportunity. Rag quite liked the idea of streaking that handsome face with ink.

The opportunity came, with Mr. Prance's attention fixed on Bob Rawlings and his stumbling "con". Wilmot-Jones was listening to Bob, with a sneering smile, which annoyed Rag. W. J. was clever in class, as he was clever in everything: but that was no reason why he should sneer at old Bob, who was worth a dozen of him. It was quite a joyful idea to Rag, to contemplate wiping out that sneering grin with an ink-ball.

Quietly, under his desk, Rag transferred that ink-ball from his palm to his thumb-nail, and placed his forefinger in position for flipping it, with deadly aim, at W. J.'s handsome face, unseen and unsuspected by Prance.

It was as easy as winking—for any fellow but Rag. Every man in the Fourth—excepting Rag himself—knew that Rag was cack-handed. Rag had never realised it. That was how and why it happened.

The ink-ball whizzed.

Unluckily, it whizzed past Wilmot-Jones with a foot or more to spare. That was pretty good for Rag, who was more likely to miss by a yard.

In other respects, it was pretty bad! Every bullet has its billet: and the same law applies to an ink-ball. That missile, missing W. J.

by a foot or more, shot on its way, and was stopped by the first object that intercepted its flight, which happened to be Mr. Prance's eye!

It was no wonder that Prance jumped!

Up to that moment, his attention had been wholly fixed on Bob Rawlings, struggling with "Tuus, o regina, quid optes, explorare labor"—which was not really very tough, but seemed to present difficulties to Bob. But as the ink-ball landed in his eye, Prance forgot all about Aeolus and Dido, and bounded.

"What—what—what?" spluttered the Fourth-form master.

The ink-ball dropped at his feet. His hand went to his startled eye—and his fingers came away inky.

The expression that came over Mr. Prance's face, as he realised what had happened, was simply terrific.

Rag sat frozen with horror, as he saw what he had done. He could hardly breathe. Many, if not most, of his "rags" had unfortunate endings. But this was easily the worst of all. Only one hope sustained him: Prance wouldn't and couldn't know who had buzzed that ink-ball.

"Upon my word!" gasped Mr. Prance.

He gazed at his form. His form gazed at him. That ink-ball had been very inky. But the Fourth-form fellows dared not grin. The expression on Mr. Prance's speaking countenance told only too plainly that it was no time for grinning. Streaks of ink did not hide his terrific frown.

"Who threw that ink-ball?" Prance's voice was not loud, but deep.

There was no answer from the Fourth. Two or three fellows had seen Rag's action: but they were not likely to mention it to Prance. Least of all was Rag Hankey likely to speak. Rag sat tight, trying to look as innocent as he could.

"Who threw that ink-ball?" Prance's voice was louder and deeper.

Dead silence.

Mr. Prance compressed his lips in a tight line. He stepped to his high desk, and picked up his cane therefrom. Then he faced his form again.

"Every boy will stand up!" he rapped.

The Fourth Form stood up.

"Every boy will raise his right hand, with the palm outward."

"Oh, scissors!" moaned Rag.

He realised that he might have guessed it! Prance was as sharp as a razor. Rag's palm was black as the ace of spades. His thumb and forefinger were stained with ink! He was a lost man! The moment Prance's pin-point eye fell on that inky paw, Prance would know.

Up went a forest of hands. Prance scanned them. Rag kept his inky paw down. It was not of much use, with Prance: but Rag, as a last wild hope, raised his left instead of his right.

That, of course, fixed Prance's attention on him.

"Hankey!" thundered the master of the Fourth.

"Oh! Yes, sir!" gasped Rag.

"Hold up your right hand at once."

"Oh, scissors!"

Up went the unhappy Rag's right hand. Prance's eyes fixed on the inky palm, the inky thumb, the inky forefinger, with the glare of a basilisk. His grip closed on his cane.

"Hankey! Stand out before the form!"

"I—I didn't mean it for you, sir——!" stammered Rag.

"Stand out!"

"I meant it for Wilmot-Jones, sir——!" groaned Rag.

"This instant, Hankey!"

Rag almost drawled before the form. His plump legs seemed hardly able to carry him.

"Poor old Rag!" murmured Bob. "He's for it!"

"Rag all over!" said Jimmy Carroll. "Isn't he the man to ask for it?"

Rag stood limply before his form-master. Mr. Prance pointed to a desk with his cane. Only too clearly Rag was "for it".

"Bend over that desk, Hankey!"

"I—I really never meant it for you, sir——it was an accident——I—meant it for that tick——I—I mean Wilmot-Jones——I—I——"

"BEND OVER!" thundered Mr. Prance.

Rag bent limply over the desk. Up went the cane. It came down with a crack like a rifle-shot. Prance was a rather bony gentleman: but his bony arm packed plenty of muscle. The dust came from Rag's trousers: and from Rag himself, a yell that woke all the echoes of the form-room and the corridor outside.

Six times the cane rose and fell, and every time it was a swipe. Rag yelled at every swipe—he simply couldn't help it. When the execution was over, it was a limp and suffering Rag that crawled back to his place—where, till the bell went for the end of third hour, he wriggled like an eel.

CHAPTER III

ONE FOR HIS NOB

"OW!"

"Poor old Rag!"

"Wow!"

"Still feeling it?"

"Yow-ow-ow!"

Judging by his remarks, Rag was still feeling it! Bob Rawlings and Jimmy Carroll were sympathetic, when Rag came wriggling into the Lounge after third hour. But they could not help grinning. What had happened was so exactly like the clown of the Fourth.

Bob and Jimmy, and five or six other fellows, were talking Soccer, when Rag wriggled in. But Rag seemed to have lost interest in Soccer for the time. Mr. Prance had laid on that "six" not wisely but too well.

"Squat down in this armchair, old chap," said Bob.

"Wow! I don't want to sit down!" moaned Rag. "I shan't be able to sit down at dinner! I shall have to feed standing up, like a horse."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You asked for it, old man," said Baker.

"Wow!"

"Begged for it," remarked Vernon.

"Yow-ow!"

"We're going to punt a footer before dinner, old bean," said Jimmy Carroll, "You'll forget all about it——"

"I shan't forget all about it for days," moaned Rag, "And I'm jolly well going to remind Prance of it, too. I'll make him sit up! Wow!"

"Don't be an ass, Rag," said Bob Rawlings brusquely, "You can't land an ink-ball in a beak's eye without getting jip. Forget it."

"I told him I meant it for that twerp W. J.," hooted Rag, indignantly, "It was a pure accident that Prance got it."

"But he got it! Forget all about it."

"I'm going to make him sit up somehow."

"Better steer clear of Prance, Rag," grinned Baker, "You'll only get another six, old man!"

"Rats!" growled Rag, "Prance ain't going to whop me as if he was beating a carpet. I say, Bob, you back me up in getting back on Prance."

"Fathead!" was Bob Rawlings' reply.

"What about you, Jimmy?"

"Don't be an ass, old chap!" answered Jimmy Carroll.

"Then go and eat coke, the pair of you!" hooted Rag, and he wriggled out of the junior day-room: angry and indignant: leaving the fellows there still talking Soccer—a subject that still didn't interest Rag.

His eyes fell on two figures in the doorway of the House; the long lean figure of Mr. Prance, his form-master, and the short stubby one of Mr. Towle, the master of the Third Form. Towle had a camera in his hand, and he was speaking to his colleague as they went out.

"The light is excellent, Prance—I think I shall get some very good pictures——"

Mr. Towle was a photographic enthusiast. Often and often was Towle seen lurking about the precincts of Lynwood with his camera. Artful fags in the Third had been known to get off lines by asking to see Towle's photographs.

For Mr. Towle and his photographic stunts, Rag Hankey did not care two hoots, or even one. His round eye fixed inimically on Mr. Prance's back, as the two masters went out into the quadrangle. Rag was going to make Prance sorry for that "six" if he could.

Rag was not a man to bear grudges, as a rule. Generally he forgot offences as easily and quickly as he forgot his lessons. But that "six" had made Rag squirm. He did not feel that he had deserved it. He had meant that ink-ball for Wilmot-Jones, not for Prance: and Prance had whopped him all the same. One whop, Rag considered, was enough, for chucking ink-balls in class. Prance had given him six, simply because the missile had landed in Prance's eye! Prance might consider his eye six times as important as anybody else's eye: but Rag did not agree! So long as the sharp twinges of that "six" lingered, Rag was not likely to forget or forgive!

He watched Prance from the doorway. In the quad the masters separated—Towle going across the quad with his camera, and disappearing among the old Lynwood beeches. Prance, as usual, was taking a walk before dinner: and his walk led him along the path under the study windows. Rag, frowning, pondered on the possibility of dropping something unpleasant on his head from the window of his study in the Fourth! That would make Prance sit up—indeed, it might make him sit down! Rag grinned at the idea of giving Prance "one for his nob" in that manner.

Then Prance came to a halt. Monsieur Bon, the French master, had come up, and Prance stopped and chatted with him.

Rag's eyes gleamed.

Prance had stopped directly below the window of Number Five Study in the Fourth. The vague idea of dropping something on Prance's nut crystallized in Rag's mind. It was easy enough, if he stayed there a few minutes talking with Mossoo—and there was nobody in Number Five Study to interfere—Rawlings and Carroll were both in the junior day-room.

Rag's mind was quickly made up. He shot away to the staircase, cut up to the study landing, hurtled across it into the Fourth-form passage, and nearly ran into Valentine Wilmot-Jones, who was coming out. W. J. side-stepped just in time.

"You clumsy ass!" he exclaimed, "Where are you barging?"

Rag panted.

"I say, W. J. Keep cave for me, will you?"

"What's the game? One of your rags?" jeered Wilmot-Jones, "Got an ink-ball for the wrong man's eye, you clown?"

"I'm getting Prance from the window of Number Five," breathed Rag, "Look here, keep cave in the passage—don't be a rotter."

"Oh, all right."

Rag shot into Number Five Study. Wilmot-Jones remained outside the door, keeping one eye on the landing and the staircase beyond, and the other on Rag in Bob Rawlings's study. Leaving him to keep "cave", Rag shot across to the study window and opened it.

He looked out.

He was in plenty of time. Below, on the gravel path that ran under the windows, Prance was still standing, in conversation with Monsieur Bon. Rag grinned joyously. Often and often his "rags" failed to have happy endings. But this time it was a winner.

He stared round the study for something to drop on Prance's "nut". A Latin dictionary would have served his turn: but Rag was a good-natured fellow—he did not want to hurt Prance: only to give him a jolt. Bob's football lay on the study table. It was just the thing! It would give Prance a jolt—make him, in all probability, jump nearly out of his skin—but without doing any real harm. Rag clutched up the soccer ball and whirled back to the window.

It was the work of a moment, then!

The Soccer ball dropped from Rag's hands, straight as a plummet to the mortar-board on the head below. Rag popped back, the instant he had dropped it, with marvellous celerity, before anyone could possibly look up. But he heard the "plop" of a footer on a mortar-board, and a startled howl from Prance. The next moment he was out of the study.

"O.K.," he chuckled, breathlessly, to Wilmot-Jones, "I got him—right on the napper."

The dandy of the Fourth laughed.

"Better cut," he said, "Prance will take your skin off, you silly clown. Not that way, ass—Prance won't be long coming up—come by the back stairs."

"Good egg!" agreed Rag. "Come on."

They cut up the passage and vanished—to escape unseen by the back stairs. The Fourth-form passage was vacant when, a minute later, Bob Rawlings came up, and went into Number Five for his football—which he was not likely to find there!

CHAPTER IV

BAD LUCK FOR BOB!

"OH!" gasped Mr. Prance.

"Mon Dieu!" ejaculated Monsieur Bon.

Life is full of surprises. No doubt Mr. Prance, master of the Lynwood Fourth, had had his share of them. But never had Mr. Prance been so surprised as when something unexpected fell suddenly on his head, knocked off his mortar-board, and caused him to stagger against the wall of the House.

"Oh!" he repeated, blankly and breathlessly.

He put his hand to his head, which had had a startling jolt. He blinked at the mortar-board on the ground. He stared at a Soccer ball, rolling past Mossoo. For some moments he was only astonished, confused, dazed. Then the surprise in his face gave place to wrath.

"A—a—a football!" he ejaculated, "Where—how—why—where did that football come from? No one was kicking a football near this spot! Where—how—?"

He stared up.

Nobody had been kicking a Soccer ball anywhere near the two masters standing on the gravel path. That ball hadn't been kicked. It had fallen, from above. Prance was quick on the uptake. Above him, directly in line with his head, was an open window—the window of Number Five Study in the Fourth Form. In less than a minute after the Soccer ball had landed, Prance had realised that it must have been dropped from that study window, twenty feet over his head.

Had Rag Hankey kicked that ball, nobody could have guessed where it would be likely to go. Rag was as cack-footed as he was cack-handed. But dropping it on an object exactly below had been easy work, even for Rag. It had landed fair and square. Rag was gone—only the open window met Prance's eyes as he stared up. But he knew that it was from that window that the footer had dropped.

Prance's teeth came together with a snap. His eyes gleamed up at that study window.

Monsieur Bon picked up the mortar-board. With a bow he presented it to Prance. Prance grabbed it and replaced it on his head.

"Je ne comprends pas," said Monsieur Bon, "Zat ball, he fall from a vindow—how he fall from a vindow?"

"That ball did not fall from the window," said Mr. Prance, in a voice compared with which the filing of a saw might have been considered musical, "It was deliberately dropped from that window—on my head! It could not have fallen! Did you see—?"

"Nozzing, sair! Rien."

Breathing hard, Mr. Prance picked up the footer. Leaving Monsieur Bon staring up at the study window, Mr. Prance shot away to the doorway of the House. Hardly more than a minute had elapsed since the impact of the footer on his mortar-board. There was a chance, at least, of catching the delinquent in the study. If there was such a chance, Prance was not the man to lose it.

He whirled into the House.

A dozen fellows stared at him, as he rushed for the stairs. It was very unusual for a form-master of Lynwood to rush, especially Mr. Prance. Leisurely dignity was more in his line. But Prance was pressed for time now—and he rushed. His gown billowed as he whisked up the staircase. He traversed the study landing like a thunderstorm. He billowed into Number Five Study in the Fourth. And a startled junior there stared at him as he billowed in.

"Rawlings!" thundered Mr. Prance.

"Yes, sir," answered Bob, blankly.

Of what had happened outside the House Bob naturally knew nothing. He had come up to the study for his football, to punt about before dinner: and not seeing it, he was looking for it. He was simply amazed when Mr. Prance, breathless and almost crimson, billowed in, and could only wonder blankly what his form-master wanted there—all the more astonished to see Prance carrying a Soccer ball under his arm.

"Rawlings!" repeated Mr. Prance. "You are here! I find you here."

"Yes, sir," said Bob.

"Is that your property?" Mr. Prance tossed the footer on the table, "That is, I think, yours, Rawlings."

Bob looked at it.

"Yes, sir! That's my footer," he said, "I was just looking for it—"

"You threw it from the window?"

"Eh?"

"Upon my head!"

"Wha-a-at?"

Bob fairly stuttered. It was amazing enough for Prance to rush up to the study with Bob's footer under his arm. But this unexpected accusation quite took the junior's breath away. He blinked at Mr. Prance—in fact he goggled at him!

"I—I—I—I—I did?" he stuttered.

"You did!"

"But I—I—I didn't!" gasped the bewildered Bob, "I—I came up to the study for that footer, sir—I'd left it here on the table, but it was gone, and—and—"

"Do you deny dropping it from the window upon my head, Rawlings, as I stood on the path below?" thundered Mr. Prance.

"Of—of course, sir! I—I never did—"

Mr. Prance scanned his flushed face sharply, almost wolfishly. He could hardly doubt. He had rushed up to that study for the culprit, and found Bob there—and nobody else in the offing. But he was a just man. He was going to make sure.

"Was anyone else in this study during the past few minutes, Rawlings?"

"Not since I came up, sir."

"Did you see any other boy leaving the study, or in the passage, when you came up?"

"No, sir."

"Was any other boy likely to be here?"

"Only Jimmy, sir—I mean Carroll—but he's in the Lounge—I—I mean the day-room—," stammered Bob.

"Then the matter admits of no doubt," said Mr. Prance, "I shall confiscate that football, Rawlings—."

"Oh, sir. I—."

"And give you detention for every half-holiday this term—."

"But, sir—."

"And report you to your head-master for further punishment. Dr. Walpole will deal with you later. You must expect a flogging. You will go to him after six!"

"But—!" gasped Bob, "I never—."

"Enough!"

Taking up the football again, Mr. Prance swept out of Number Five Study: leaving the unfortunate Bob overwhelmed with dismay.

A couple of minutes later Jimmy Carrol looked in. He stared at Bob's dismayed and dismal face.

"Why didn't you come down?" he asked, "Anything up? I say, I just saw Prance come down, looking like thunder. Has he been here?"

"I'm for it," muttered Bob.

"What on earth—?"

"Prance says that somebody dropped my footer on his head from the window. He thinks I did it."

Jimmy Carroll whistled. "You didn't?" he asked.

"No, you silly ass! But Prance rushed up and found me here, and thinks I did. I've got detentions for the term, and I'm going to be reported to the Head for a flogging!" groaned Bob, "Somebody must have done it a moment or two before I came up. Some mad ass—."

"You didn't see anybody about?"

"Nobody. I was looking for the ball when Prance pranced in with it. I—I say, this mucks up the Hockley game. I shall be out of it this afternoon."

"Oh, rotten."

Bob Rawlings drew a deep breath.

"It's putrid!" he said, "Just putrid! The team's lost its best winger—now it's losing its skipper—."

"Which means that Heckley will walk all over us!"

"Oh, it's putrid!" growled Bob.

And Jimmy Carroll, his usually sunny and careless face deeply clouded, could only agree that it was undoubtedly and absolutely "putrid".

A CHANCE FOR W. J.

"LOOK here, W. J.—"

"Oh, leave me alone!" snapped Wilmot-Jones.

W. J. was feeling neither merry nor bright, as he strolled under the old Lynwood beeches, his hands driven deep in his trousers' pockets, a deep pucker in his brow.

It was a fine, clear, cold day: ideal for football. Hockley were coming over that afternoon: and the Hockley men always played a good game. W. J. would have given a term's pocket-money—ample as his pocket-money was!—to have been playing Soccer that afternoon. At the bottom of his heart, he could not blame his skipper for having "chucked" him, after what he had done. But he resented it savagely and bitterly, all the same: and was feeling equally inclined to kick himself and to kick his skipper.

W. J. carried his head high in the Lower School at Lynwood: and he was well aware that a good many fellows were amused to see him taken down a peg. That added to his bitterness. He was too good a man to be left out—at least he had always taken as much for granted. And he had been "chucked"—and for once was to be only an onlooker while other fellows played for School. So when Bob Rawlings came up to him under the beeches, he found him in a mood to fly off the handle at the first word.

"Look here——!" repeated Bob.

"You'd better keep your distance, Bob Rawlings," said Wilmot-Jones, "I'd as soon knock you spinning as look at you. You've chucked me—now leave me alone. I'm going to the pictures at Lynford this afternoon—instead of playing football. All because——"

"Will you let a chap speak?" exclaimed Bob, impatiently, "I've got something to say to you——"

"Go and say it to somebody else," snarled W. J., and he turned on his heel. The next moment a powerful grip on his shoulder swung him back.

"Listen to me, you dithering ass," snapped Bob.

W. J. clenched his hands, his eyes gleaming.

"You're asking for it," he said, "You turfed me out of your study yesterday, with your pal to help. Now put up your hands, on your own."

"Will you listen to me?" hooted Bob.

"No, I won't! Put up your hands, or——"

"It's about the footer, you hot-headed ass," howled Bob.

"Oh!" Wilmot-Jones's expression changed, and he unclenched his hands, "What about the footer? Changed your mind?"

"Old Prance has changed it for me," growled Bob, "I've got a detention this afternoon, and can't play."

Wilmot-Jones stared at him, and burst into a laugh.

"So you're out too! Serve you jolly well right! Precious ass you must be, to get a detention on a match day."

"I didn't—some mad ass got it for me! Prance thinks I dropped

a footer on his silly nut from my study window, and he's gone off at the deep end. Goodness knows who did—I didn't."

The dandy of the Fourth gave a violent start. The expression on his face was quite extraordinary, as he stared at the captain of the Fourth.

"A footer—from your study window!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, and Prance thinks——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Wilmot-Jones.

Bob Rawlings gave him a glare.

"Do you think that's funny, when I've got detentions for the term, and a row with the Head thrown in?" he roared. "I've got to see the Big Beak after six."

"Don't they know who did it?" grinned Wilmot-Jones.

"They're not trying to find out, as Prance has settled that I did," growled Bob. "It may come out—but that won't help now. Look here, W. J., you'll be wanted. You're vice-captain, and you'll have to take my place."

"Oh!" exclaimed W. J. His eyes danced.

That was very unexpected!

"You want me to captain the side?" he asked.

"No, I don't—but there's no choice about it. I can't do anything else now. I put Vernon in, in your place. You'll have to take mine. I pushed you out for your cheek—now I've got to eat my words and let you in again," said Bob, savagely, "and if you don't take that grin off your face, I'll punch it off."

Wilmot-Jones laughed.

"Keep your temper," he said, "I'll play up, of course. You wouldn't let me in if you could help it——"

"No, I wouldn't."

"Glad you can't help it, then," grinned W. J. "But——"

"But what?" growled Bob.

"You don't know who did that stunt at your study window?"

"Of course I don't! If I did, I'd boot him till he walked into Prance's study and owned up! But I haven't the foggiest."

Wilmot-Jones eyed him curiously.

It was almost on the tip of his tongue to tell the captain of the Fourth that he knew. And it certainly would not have been necessary to "boot" Rag Hankey into owning up, once he knew how matters stood. Rag was a fathead, and no end of a clown: but the minute he heard that Bob Rawlings had been "nailed" for what he had done, Rag would have shot off to Prance like an arrow from a bow to own up. Christopher Cuthbert Hankey might be the biggest ass at Lynwood School, but he was not the fellow to let another fellow take his gruel.

But W. J. did not utter the words that were on the tip of his tongue. He was glad that Rag was not on the spot. This was too good a chance to lose.

Rag, after his exploit at the window of Number Five Study, had gone for a walk out of gates, sagely deciding that it was just as well to be off the scene, when the prefects were looking for the man who had bonnetted Prance. Not for a moment had it entered Rag's fat head that the wrong man might be nailed for it. But he knew that there would be a tremendous row, and he intended to keep out of the public eye till the dinner-bell rang. Out of sight was out of mind.

W. J.'s active brain worked rapidly.

This was just "pie" for the dandy of the Fourth. He had been "chucked" from the team: now he was to captain the side, while his hapless skipper sat in the detention-class—if only Rag could be kept quiet till after the kick-off. If W. J. felt anything like a scruple, he banished it at once. W. J. was accustomed to thinking of himself first, last, and all the time. He had no sympathy to waste on lame ducks!

Rag had to be prevented somehow from hearing what had happened. He had to be kept off the scene. Otherwise the clown would rush off to Prance and get Rawlings out of it—and W. J.'s last state would be no better than his first.

W. J.'s eyes danced with amusement as he looked at Bob's rugged, troubled countenance. Bob's brow grew darker.

He had not the remotest suspicion of what was in W. J.'s mind. But W. J. was amused—and it was not amusing for the captain of the Fourth to cut a Soccer match, and sit in the detention-class, pottering over French verbs with Monsieur Bon. He was half-sorry that he had made up his mind that Wilmot-Jones must play after all.

"Well, that's that!" he grunted, "You'll captain the side—unless it comes out pretty soon who bonnetted Prance. That's all."

And he walked away, with knitted brows.

Wilmot-Jones smiled at his departing back. It was not likely to "come out soon" who had bonnetted Prance: the dandy of the Fourth was going to take care of that. He stood for a minute or two in thought, and then went into the House and tapped at Mr. Prance's study door.

Mr. Prance was not looking amiable when he entered. Prance had far from recovered his serenity. But his frowning relaxed as he saw Wilmot-Jones: W. J. was so good in class, that he had a special place in his form-master's good graces.

"What is it, Wilmot-Jones?" asked Mr. Prance.

"If you please sir, my father's in Lynford to-day, and would like me to lunch with him, with your permission, sir."

"You have my permission, Wilmot-Jones," said Mr. Prance, graciously.

"May I take a friend, sir—Hankey of my form?"

"Certainly."

Wilmot-Jones thanked him, and did not grin till he was outside the study. He almost shot out of the House and hurried down to the gates. On the Lynford road, at a distance, a plump figure was strolling. W. J. covered that distance at a trot, and joined Rag Hankey. Rag gave him a cheerful grin.

"Did I land it on his nut?" he chuckled, "Right on his top-knot, what? Did I? Ha, ha! I say, heard anything? Prance hasn't thought of me, has he?"

"He hasn't a clue," answered Wilmot-Jones, "You're O.K., old man—but you may as well keep out of view. Look here, I've got leave to lunch at Lynford, and take a pal. Like to come?"

Rag blinked at him. He was W. J.'s study-mate in Number Seven, but W. J. was seldom chummy. W. J.'s opinion of Rag was that he was a clown, a fathead, and a dithering dummy, and he never hesitated

to tell him so. And just of late W. J.'s temper had been more unpleasant, and his tongue more bitter, than usual. So this friendly invitation came as a surprise to Rag. Hankey of the Fourth was not a suspicious fellow: but he stared, doubting.

"Pulling my leg?" he asked.

"Not at all! I'll be jolly glad if you'll come. I've got leave for two. Will you come, old boy? Lunch at the Lynford Rialto!"

"Will I?" grinned Rag, quite happy now that he was convinced, "Why, who wouldn't? Think I want the scrag in hall if I can give it a miss? I'll be glad not to meet Prance's eye, too—he might think of me!"

"Come on, then."

Rag walked away happily to Lynford with the dandy of the Fourth. Never had W. J. been in so pleasant a mood, and such a cheery companion. Rag liked good food, and plenty of it: and the lunch at Lynford was the best that W. J.'s ample cash could buy. And after lunch, there were the best seats at the Lynford Picture Palace—and Rag, deeply absorbed in a wild and whirling film, hardly noticed that Valentine Wilmot-Jones slipped quietly out and left him there—safely booked till the film ran out about four o'clock!

CHAPTER VI

WHERE IS RAG?

"SEEN Rag?"

"No. He cut tiffin."

"I know! But where is he?" growled Jimmy Carroll.

"Couldn't say."

Jimmy Carrol gave an angry grunt. Since dinner, Jimmy had asked a dozen fellows whether they had seen Rag Hankey. But nobody seemed to know where Rag was.

He joined Bob Rawlings. Bob was leaning against one of the old stone buttresses, with his hands in his pockets, and a gloomy frown on his face. Most times Bob looked one the the cheeriest fellows at Lynwood. But the disaster that had fallen on him that day had dashed his cheery spirits.

He was booked for the detention class at two o'clock. That was not pleasant: and still less pleasant was the interview with his head-master, to come. But Bob was not, at the moment, thinking of either of those unpleasant things. He was thinking of the football match, from which he had to stand out, and in which W. J. was to play in his place.

"You haven't seen old Rag, I suppose?" asked Jimmy.

"Blow old Rag," grunted Bob.

"But have you seen him?"

"No, not since he was in the Lounge before tiffin. What about him?" asked Bob, with a touch of irritation. "W. J. cut tiffin too—I daresay they're out together—W. J. can always get leave from Prance."

"Well, if he's with W. J., they'll be in before three," said Jimmy, "W. J. will have to get back in time for the game."

" Bother them both! " grunted Bob, " What the thump are you bothering about Rag for? Why does Rag matter? "

" This much, " answered Jimmy Carrol, quietly, " You've told me that you didn't bump that footer on Prance's nut. I've been asking questions up and down the form, and nobody seems to know anything about it. Well, somebody did it. "

" Did you work that out in your head? " asked Bob, with unusual sarcasm. " What a brain! "

Jimmy Carroll smiled. He was too loyal a pal to mind old Bob getting a little shirty, even with his best friend, in the distressing circumstances.

" Who's silly idiot enough to play such a potty prank on a beak, Bob? " he asked. " Isn't it just in that clown's line? "

" Oh! " said Bob. He started a little, " I hadn't thought—but now you mention it—yes, Rag all over. "

" Well, if it was Rag, he would own up like a shot, when another man was nailed for it, " said Jimmy, " If the howling ass hadn't walked off somewhere to parts unknown, it would be all right—if it was Rag. "

Bob's clouded face cleared a little, and he looked eager.

" Sure he isn't about? " he asked.

" I've gone all over the school with a small comb, and can't comb him out. He must be out of gates. If he's with W. J. I suppose he will come in with him, and that will be in lots of time for the match. "

Bob glanced up at the clock-tower over the beeches.

" A quarter to two, " he said, " I've got to report to Mossoo for detention at two. Rag may have come in—he doesn't pal much with W. J., and they may not be out together. Let's have a look round for him. "

" Let's, " agreed Jimmy.

Bob was eager, and they lost no time. Bob was not quite so keen as his chum, and he had not thought of Rag. But if the culprit was Rag, it was only necessary to find him and let him know what had happened. Rag was a clown, but he was straight as a die. It was sheer ill-luck that Rag should be missing, the first time on record that he was badly wanted.

Up and down and round about went the chums of the Fourth, asking every fellow they met for news of Rag. They even asked Brimble of the Fifth, who stared at them and inquired whether they fancied that he ever noticed whether fags were ranging about! They asked Campion of the Sixth, the captain of Lynwood: and that tremendously great man smiled good-humouredly and shook his head. And coming on Mr. Towle, the master of the Third, in the quad, happily engaged in printing-out the photographs he had taken that morning, they even ventured to ask Towle.

Mr. Towle, with his printing-frames set out on one of the old oaken benches, in a favourable light, was watching them lovingly, and did not want to be interrupted.

" Eh? What? what? " said Mr. Towle, over his shoulder, as Jimmy Carroll addressed him.

" If you don't mind, sir, we're looking for Hankey of our form, and can't find him. If you've seen him anywhere, sir— "

" Eh! Nonsense! I have not seen the boy that I remember! Don't bother," said Mr. Towle.

And he concentrated on his printing-frames again, and forgot the existence of Hankey, Carroll, and Rawlings.

The chums walked on, as the chime of two came from the clock-tower. Bob Rawlings gave a snort.

" He can't have come in," he said, " I've got to cut in now, Jimmy. You keep an eye open for Rag, and nail him if he shows up."

" Leave it to me," said Jimmy.

Bob went moodily into the House, to join the hapless nine or ten who were booked for the detention class in the French master's classroom—there to join in the more or less exhilarating pursuit of knowledge in the shape of French irregular verbs.

Jimmy Carrol walked down to the gates, to keep an eye open for Rag. It was certain now that Hankey of the Fourth was out of gates, and Jimmy could only hope that he would come in before the Hockley men arrived. If he was with Wilmot-Jones, it seemed safe enough, for W. J. was quite certain to come in in plenty of time for the match. And it was a probable inference that two fellows who had cut " tiffin " were out together.

It was about half-past two when Jimmy sighted a figure on the road from Lynford. He knew the elegant figure of Valentine Wilmot-Jones at a glance. But W. J. was alone.

He waited impatiently for him to arrive. But the dandy of the Fourth was sauntering in his usual leisurely manner, and it was more than five minutes before he reached the school gates. He gave Carroll a careless glance as he came in.

" Seen anything of Rag, W. J.?" asked Jimmy.

Wilmot-Jones started, ever so little. There was a wary gleam in his eyes, as he looked at Jimmy's anxious face.

" Rag?" he repeated, " That clown? Want him?"

" I want him jolly badly, but he seems to have got into a hole and pulled it in after him," growled Jimmy.

" What on earth do you want him for? First time I've ever heard of anybody wanting that clown."

" I've got an idea that it was Rag who bonnetted Prance. It's just maddening for him to disappear like this, when there's still time to get old Bob off, if he turned up."

" Oh!" breathed Wilmot-Jones.

" Well, have you seen anything of him?"

Wilmot-Jones did not reply for a moment. He was breathing rather hard.

The dandy of the Lynwood Fourth was a curious mixture, in many ways. He had absolutely no scruple in lying to masters and prefects: whom he regarded, from his own peculiar point of view, as fair game. It had cost him nothing to lie to Mr. Prance, as an excuse for cutting the school dinner and getting out of gates. But among his own associates, fellows of his own standing, he disdained to lie. His code was very elastic, but it would not stretch to that. In the Fourth Form, W. J.'s word was, as a rule, as good as that of Bob Rawlings himself.

He had not expected to be asked questions about Rag. What he had done was, of course, bound to come out later. But that would be

after the Hockley match, and he did not care. He was prepared to face the consequences, if any, with his usual cool hardihood. He was going to captain the side in the match, he was going to play a brilliant game, and win for Lynwood: he was going to prove, thereby, that the Lynwood junior skipper had been in the wrong in "chucking him": and for what fellows said, or thought, or did, he did not care a bean. But he did care about answering Jimmy Carrol with a falsehood: and little as the scapegrace was given to hesitating, he hesitated now.

"Well?" rapped Jimmy, impatiently.

"Yes, I've seen him," said Wilmot-Jones, slowly, "In fact, we had a spot of lunch together at Lynford."

"Did you leave him there?"

"Yes: he's there for the afternoon—it's a half-holiday, you know." And with that, W. J. pushed past Jimmy to go in.

Carroll caught him by the arm.

"Hold on, W. J. Look here, there's still time for me to cut down to Lynford on my bike and pick him up, if I know where he is. Do you know where he's parked himself?"

W. J. drew a deep, deep breath.

There was no help for it now. In his mind's eye he saw Jimmy Carroll scorching the half-mile to Lynford, rushing into the cinema, dragging out the astonished Rag, and rushing him home to see Prance—and his own cunning scheme knocked into a cocked hat.

"No!" he said, distinctly.

"You've no idea where he is?"

"No!"

Wilmot-Jones walked on into the quad. Jimmy Carroll followed him in, with a troubled and downcast face. The last hope was gone. It was twenty minutes to three, and Hockley might arrive at any moment. If he had known where to pick up the elusive Rag, there was time—but obviously it was hopeless to think of rooting about a town like Lynford in quest of him without a clue.

When the Lynwood junior footballers gathered in the changing-room Bob Rawlings was sitting in the detention-class, listening to Monsieur Bon's drone, and thinking of Soccer, in the dimmest spirits ever. And he was still there when the Soccer team from Hockley arrived at Lynwood.

CHAPTER VII

AT THE ELEVENTH HOUR!

MR. PRANCE suppressed a sigh.

He had settled down comfortably in a deep armchair, before a crackling fire in his study. That afternoon was a half-holiday not only for the Fourth but for the Fourth Form-master. The Fourth Form had a rest from Prance—and Prance had a rest from the Fourth Form. The juniors were thinking of Soccer—but Mr. Prance had reached a time of life when an armchair had more appeal. And he had a book in hand that was of deep interest to him—though one glance at it might have made a junior's head ache!

But just as Mr. Prance was beginning to enjoy the "Seven Against Thebes", in the entrancing pages of Aeschylus, there came a tap at his door, and Mr. Towle came in, with photographic prints in his hands.

It was really too bad!

Prance was not in the least interested in Towle's hobby. He knew as little about photography as Rag Hankey knew about Greek—and cared about as much. But courtesy to a colleague made it necessary to affect at least a faint and polite interest. So he suppressed a sigh, laid down Aeschylus on the arm of his chair, and postponed for the moment the enjoyment of perusing once more the "Epta epi Thebas".

"My dear Prance," Towle was beaming, "I hope I am not interrupting you——"

Prance gave a polite murmur in reply to that ill-founded hope!

"But I am sure that you will be interested," beamed Mr. Towle, "The light was very good this morning, Prance—remarkably good for this time of the year—and I have some excellent prints. One of them, I think, will be of the greatest interest to you."

Mr. Prance doubted it!

"A fine view of the House," continued Mr. Towle, "The range of study windows comes out with really wonderful distinctness. And at one of the Fourth Form study windows, Prance, there is a boy of your form."

Mr. Prance would have said "Very interesting". But really, he couldn't! He could not feel the faintest interest in the circumstance that Towle, taking a snap of the House, had snapped a Fourth Form boy at the window of a Fourth Form study. Prance couldn't have cared less!

"The boy," continued Mr. Towle, "is Hankey, of your form, Prance."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, indeed! Taken in the act of dropping a football from the window!" beamed Mr. Towle.

"What?"

Mr. Prance sat up and took notice at that. Aeschylus, and the Seven Against Thebes, disappeared entirely from his mind.

"You will remember, Prance, that I was taking my photographs in the quadrangle, when that extraordinary occurrence took place, of a football dropping on your head from a study window——"

"I remember——"

"At the distance, I had no idea of what was going on, naturally," said Mr. Towle, "The object was much too small to attract my notice in the view-finder. Neither did I particularly notice it in the process of developing the film. But having printed out the negative, Prance, I observed it——"

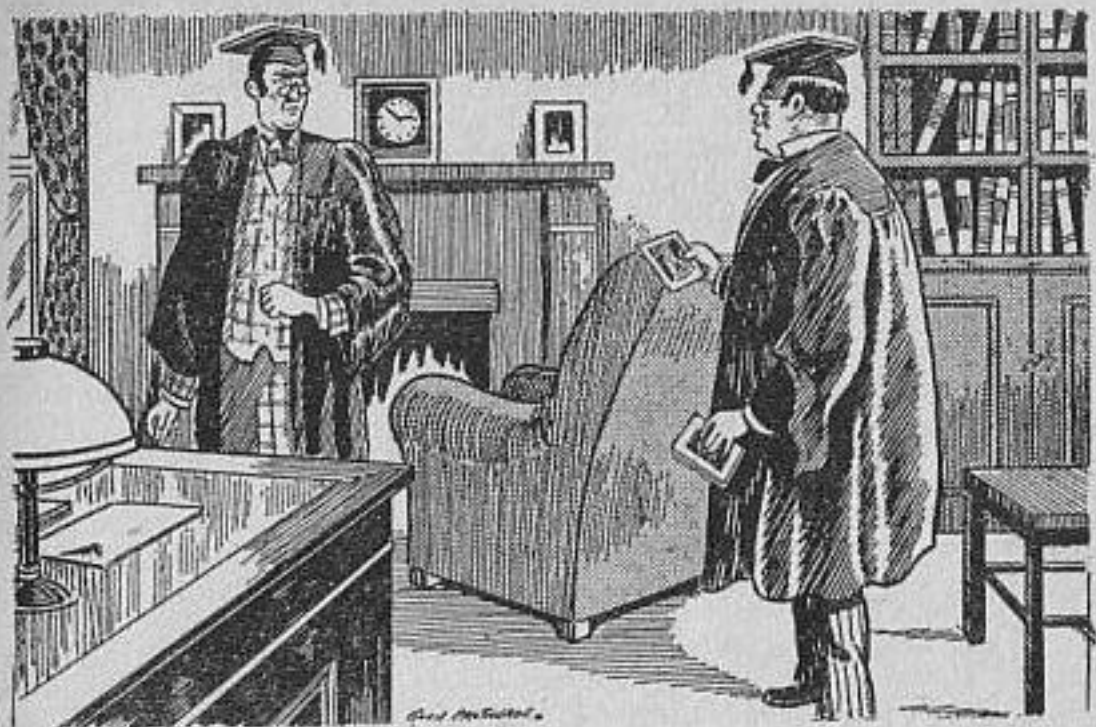
"Did you say the boy was Hankey?"

"I did."

"In the act of dropping a football from a Fourth Form study window——?"

"Precisely."

"Please let me see the photograph!" exclaimed Mr. Prance, hastily.



"I thought you would be interested," beamed Towle, "Such an occurrence—such a very disrespectful prank on a member of the staff—requires to be dealt with severely. And if you have not yet discovered the offender, Prance, here is indubitable proof of his identity."

Mr. Prance coloured slightly. He had—as he supposed at least—discovered the offender; and at that very moment Robert Rawlings of his form was sitting in the detention class in consequence. He had had no doubt—how could he have had any doubt in the circumstances?

But Mr. Towle's camera, it appeared, told another tale! Prance stretched out his hand quite eagerly for the photograph.

If this was correct, he had inadvertently been guilty of injustice to a boy in his form. And if that was so, he was only too anxious to set it right.

Towle, beaming all over his chubby face, handed him the print. Mr. Prance examined it carefully.

There was no doubt! The picture showed the Fourth Form study windows, and one of them was open, and a junior was leaning out, with a football in his hands, just dropping from them. And the plump face and round parrot-like eyes of that junior were not to be mistaken. It was Hankey, of the Fourth Form.

Long and hard Mr. Prance gazed at that photograph. He drew a deep, deep breath.

He had made a mistake! Hankey—that obtuse, irresponsible boy whom he had caned in class that morning, was the culprit. And Rawlings, who had had nothing to do with it, was in detention, and was to be taken before the Head. Mr. Prance could not help feeling

disturbed and irritated. He did not like making mistakes. But he was very glad indeed that he had learned the facts.

"An excellent picture, is it not?" bubbled Mr. Towle, "It could not have come out more clearly—what? what?"

"Quite!" said Mr. Prance, "I am very much obliged to you, Towle. Perhaps you will leave this photograph in my hands for the moment. I must look into this matter at once."

"Certainly, certainly. If you would care to see the other prints—"

"Another time, Towle!"

"Some of them are very good—especially one of the clock-tower—"

"Later, Towle—I must see to this immediately." Prance rose from his armchair. "Pray excuse me now."

And Prance left the study, leaving Mr. Towle with his hands full of prints. The Fourth Form master hurried away to the detention-room. He was very anxious to see Hankey of his form: but first of all came justice for the junior who had been put in detention by mistake.

He opened the door of the French-master's class-room. Monsieur Bon's drone greeted him as he stepped in.

"Ecoutez, you Rawlings! I tell you vunce more, ouvrir, zat is to open. J'ouvre—zat is to say I open—"

"Pray excuse me, Monsieur Bon."

The French-master looked round.

"Mais oui, monsieur," he said politely.

"Rawlings!"

"Yes, sir!" Bob stood up.

No face was merry or bright in the detention-class: but Bob's was easily the gloomiest of all. It was five minutes to three: and the Hockley match was due to begin at three: and Bob's thoughts had been on Soccer, and he simply hadn't been able to fix his attention on that useful verb "ouvrir". He gave his form-master a dismal look as he answered him.

"Rawlings!" Mr. Prance coughed. "You will be released from detention at once. I regret to say that an error was made—hem! The boy who played that insensate prank with a football this morning has been discovered—"

"Oh!" gasped Bob.

"I regret the error, Rawlings. So far as you are concerned, the matter ends here," said Mr. Prance, "It transpires that it was Hankey who threw the football from the window of your study—"

"Oh!" repeated Bob. Evidently, Jimmy Carroll had guessed right! It was the clown of the Fourth who had bonnetted Prance.

"Hankey will be dealt with," said Mr. Prance, his face setting grimly for a moment, "But now that I am aware that Hankey was the offender, Rawlings, you are of course exonerated. You may leave this class-room."

"Oh! Thank you, sir!" gasped Bob.

His rugged face had been deeply clouded. Now, all of a sudden, it looked rather like the sun at noonday! He was sorry for old Rag, of course: Rag simply couldn't help playing the clown, and now he was "for it". But it was Soccer that was uppermost in Bob's mind.

There was still time—a rapid rush to the changing-room—Bob fairly bounded out of the detention-class, and ran for the door.

"I regret very much, Rawlings——." Mr. Prance was going on.

"Oh! Yes, sir! M-m-may I go now? The football——."

"Eh?"

"It's kick-off in five minutes, sir——."

"Eh? Oh! Yes." Prance stared at Bob for a moment, and then smiled, "Certainly—you may go at once, Rawlings."

Bob shot out of the French class-room like a bullet from a rifle. He almost danced along the corridor. In a matter of seconds, he came into the crowded changing-room with a breathless rush.

CHAPTER VIII

IN THE CHANGING ROOM

"BOB!" yelled Jimmy Carroll.

"Rawlings!" stuttered Wilmot-Jones.

"You've come——."

"But what——?"

"How——?"

Every fellow in the changing-room stared at Bob Rawlings, as he charged breathlessly in. Six or seven voices exclaimed at once. Most of the fellows had finished changing, and were ready to go down to the field. But Bob was in time—though how and why he was there, nobody could guess so far.

"Rawlings!" repeated Valentine Wilmot-Jones, staring at Bob as if the junior captain had been the ghost of a Lynwood junior. Indeed, a ghost could hardly have startled him more.

All had gone well and successfully, from W. J.'s peculiar point of view: Bob Rawlings in detention, Rag Hankey safely planted for the afternoon at Lynford cinema—the facts impossible to come out till after the game. Wilmot-Jones, looking very fit and handsome in the blue-striped shirt of Lynwood, was ready—in a few minutes more, the teams would have been in the field, the game in progress, and W. J. captaining the home side. And now——!

Now the whole thing seemed to have fallen in pieces round him. For once the scapegrace of Lynwood lost his usual cool self-possession. In his angry excitement, he grabbed Bob by the shoulder.

"What are you doing here?" he almost shouted, "If you've cut detention——."

"Don't be a goat, W. J." Bob shook off his hand, "I'm let off! Where's my boots, Jimmy?"

"You're let off!" exclaimed Jimmy Carroll.

"Yes—where's my shirt?"

"You're playing?" panted Wilmot-Jones.

"Think I'm going to stand round and look on, now I'm out of detention? Don't be an ass! Where's my bags?"

"Look here——."

"Where's my boots? Lend a man a hand, Jimmy." Bob Rawlings kicked off his shoes, "Where——?"

"Here you are, old man," chuckled Jimmy Carroll, "You're in time, Bob, and never mind how or why, so long as you're here to play—"

"Prance never let you off!" panted Wilmot-Jones, his face white with rage, "He wouldn't—he couldn't—why should he?"

"He jolly well did!" grinned Bob, as he plunged into his football shorts, "You don't look glad to see me here, W. J.—"

"Glad?" hissed Wilmot-Jones.

"Well, you ought to be," snapped Jimmy Carroll, "It's Lynwood that's playing Hockley, W. J.—not you on your own. Can't you think of the School?"

"Oh, shut up, you!" snarled Wilmot-Jones. He was not likely, at that moment, to think of the School, or of anything else but his own passionate rage and bitter disappointment.

"You'll play at outside-right, W. J.," went on Bob, "For goodness' sake keep your temper—do you want to show off your tantrums to the Hockley men?"

"Prance couldn't have let you off—"

"You see, they've got the right man," said Bob, "It's come out somehow—"

"What?"

"You'd guessed right, Jimmy, it was that ass, old Rag," said Bob, "Just the sort of potty thing he would do. Where's my other boot?"

"Hankey!" exclaimed several voices at once.

"Yes—Prance said so."

"But how did they know—?"

"Goodness knows! Prance said that it was Rag, that's all I know, when he came to let me out of detention. Poor old Rag—he's got it coming! Gimme that boot."

"He's the man to ask for it!" sighed Jimmy. "Has he come in and owned up, or what?"

"Ask me another." Bob finished lacing his football boots, and stood up, "It's okay now, anyway—"

"The fool! The idiot! The clown." Wilmot-Jones, in his rage and disappointment, hardly knew what he was saying, and did not care.

"Then he never stayed at the cinema after all—. The fool—the ass—the dithering fathead—the—the—the—." Words failed W. J. Jimmy Carroll spun round on him.

"At the cinema! You know he was at the cinema! You told me you never knew where he was, when I asked you—"

"What's that?" exclaimed Bob.

"The fool—the fool!" breathed Wilmot-Jones, heedless of Jimmy, and of a dozen fellows staring at him, "The silly clown—"

"Why didn't you tell me where he was?" roared Jimmy, "I could have cut after him—I told you so—if I'd known—and fetched him in—why didn't you—?"

"Find out!" snarled Wilmot-Jones, "The fool—!"

Jimmy Carroll made a stride towards the dandy of the Fourth, his fists clenched, and his eyes flashing.

"You rotter! You knew where he was, and told me a lie about it! You knew old Rag would own up like a shot, if he knew that Bob was in the soup, and you wanted to keep him out of the way—"

"Draw it mild, old chap!" interposed Bob.

"You ass!" shouted Jimmy, "Isn't it as plain as the nose on your face? Why, I'll bet that W. J. knew all the time that it was Rag, as well as I did, and that's why he marched him off to Lynwood for tiffin——."

Bob caught his breath. For the moment, he forgot the Soccer match, and the Hockley men, looking on curiously from the other end of the changing-room.

"Is that the truth, W. J.?" he exclaimed.

"Find out!"

"You worm!" breathed Bob, "So that was it! Old Rag would have owned up if he'd known—and you got him out of the way—you worm! You—you—oh, there isn't a word for you, W. J. You can get out of those things—you won't be wanted."

"I'm playing in this game——."

"You're not!" roared Bob, "I'd have played you at outside-right, if this hadn't come out—now, I'd as soon play a snake-in-the-grass. You'll be wanted after all, Vernon. Now, then, you men, if you're ready——."

"I tell you——."

"That's enough from you, W. J. Another word, and we'll boot you before we go out," snapped the captain of the Fourth. "Ready, you fellows."

Valentine Wilmot-Jones stood, with his hands in the pockets of his football shorts, his face white and set, as the footballers went down to the field. That was the end of his cunning and unscrupulous scheming; and he was left alone in the changing-room, with feelings that he could not have expressed in words.

CHAPTER IX

RAG SEES IT ALL!

"HANKEY!"

Rag did not heed. He did not even hear.

The voice that addressed him was that of no less a personage than Mr. Prance, his form-master. It was a voice that, as a rule, made the Fourth Form at Lynwood jump to attention when they heard it. Yet Rag Hankey passed it by like the idle wind which he regarded not.

The fact was, that Rag had just yelled "Goal!" at the top of his voice, and was about to yell "Goal!" again in the same manner. And a fellow yelling "Goal!" with frantic enthusiasm was liable to be a little heedless of other things.

Rag had come in merry and bright at about a quarter past four. Completely and happily unaware of everything that had been happening at Lynwood during his absence, Rag was in jolly spirits. He had enjoyed a jolly good lunch with W. J. at Lynford; he had enjoyed a thrilling film afterwards; and he had rolled back to the school in time to see the finish of the football match—and he found that finish glorious and exciting. So why shouldn't Rag have felt merry and bright?

He trotted in at the gates, and he trotted down to the junior foot-

ball ground, unaware that Mr. Prance's eye fell on him from his study window as he trotted. He was not thinking of Prance, who—so far as the happy Rag knew—hadn't a clue to the fellow who had bonneted him.

He joined the crowd on Little Side, found that Lynwood and Hockley had captured a goal apiece so far, and was just in time to see a hot attack on the visitors' citadel. The red shirts of Hockley fell back to pack their goal: but the blue shirts of Lynwood came irresistibly on, attacking all the time. Once, twice, thrice, the leather came back from the Hockley custodian, a good man between the posts; and the third time it went out to the wing, but Jimmy Carroll was on it like lightning, centring to Bob Rawlings, who slammed it in before the Hockley goal-keeper dreamed that it was coming. And a roar went up from the crowd round the field, in which Rag Hankey joined with vigour and enthusiasm, and as if striving to rival Stentor of ancient days.

"Goal!"

"Good old Bob!"

"Goal! Goal!"

"Hankey!" snapped Mr. Prance.

Prance, after what he had learned, was anxious to see Christopher Cuthbert Hankey. He was very anxious indeed to see him. And, having seen him from his study window, he had come out of his study, rather like a lion from his lair, and here he was, at Rag's elbow, yapping at him. Rag, still unheeding, roared:

"Goal! Goal! Oh! my hat—ow!" Rag gave a startled howl, as a finger and thumb that felt like a steel vice closed on one of his plump ears from behind, "Look here—who's that larking—what silly ass—?—OH!"

Rag broke off, as he saw Prance. He blinked at him.

"Oh! You, sir!" he stuttered, "I—I didn't know—Ow!" Rag rubbed his ear, "I—I—I—do—do you want me, sir?"

"I do!" said Mr. Prance, grimly, "Follow me to my study, Hankey."

"Oh scissors! I—I mean, is—is anything the matter, sir?" stammered Rag, "I—I'd like to see the finish here, sir, if—if you don't mind—it's only a few more minutes now, sir—. M-m-mum-may I stay a few minutes, sir?"

"You may not, Hankey. Follow me."

"Oh! Yes, sir!" Rag felt a deep tremor. Did Prance, after all, know anything about what he had done at the window of Number Five? Yet how could he? Nobody knew but W. J., and W. J., whatever he was, was surely no sneak. Rag stole an anxious look at his form-master's frowning face. "Have—have I done anything, sir?"

"What?" barked Mr. Prance, "You know very well what you have done, Hankey. You threw a football on my head from a study window this morning—!"

"Oh, scissors—!"

Rag's jaw dropped. So Prance knew! But how did he know? Nobody could have given Rag away excepting Wilmot-Jones. Had he?

"Come!" barked Mr. Prance.

"But sir—I—I—I—," Rag babbled, "I don't see why you—"

you should pick on me, sir—I—I—if—if anybody's told you——."

"What? What? Certainly I was told, Hankey—your foolish and disrespectful action was reported to me! Follow me at once."

Rag, in the lowest of spirits, trailed after Prance, as his form-master stalked away to the House. The Soccer match went on to its exciting finish, a victory for Lynwood with two goals to one, unwitnessed by the hapless Rag. His plump face was dismal as he followed Prance—but his wrath was as deep as his dismay. The game was up for poor Rag—he had to face the music now—somebody had told Prance! Rag knew, or at least was sure that he knew, who that "somebody" was! Who but Wilmot-Jones?

Of Mr. Towle and what he had found in the photograph, Rag, of course, knew nothing at all. He knew that nobody had seen him in Number Five Study excepting Valentine Wilmot-Jones. Nobody but W. J. knew that Rag had done it! Prance had been told! Who but W. J. could have told him, when nobody else knew? W. J. must have given him away to the beak! It seemed clear enough to Rag, and he fairly boiled at the thought! Rag saw it all—at least, he had no doubt that he did!

"That rotter!" breathed Rag, "That sneak——."

Mr. Prance glanced round.

"Did you speak, Hankey?"

"Eh! Oh! No."

Mr. Prance frowned and stalked on. Valentine Wilmot-Jones, in the doorway of the House, glanced at him, and at Rag following, and his lip curled in a sneering grin. That clown was for it, anyway; and W. J. seemed to derive some consolation from the thought.

Rag's eyes blazed at him. He was already boiling, and that sneering grin on the handsome face of the dandy of the Fourth put the lid on, so to speak. Rag breathed fury and vengeance as he followed Mr. Prance up the steps of the House.

Wilmot-Jones stepped aside, for Mr. Prance to pass in. Prance walked in past him. Rag stopped in the doorway.

"You rotter!" he breathed, "You sneak! You gave me away! You—you—you—you smear! You smudge! Take that!"

Valentine Wilmot-Jones "took it" before he knew what was coming. "It" was a sudden punch in the eye; a hefty, indeed, a terrific punch, with all Rag's weight, and all Rag's wrath, behind it. W. J. staggered away under that sudden terrific jolt, and brought up against the wall, gasping.

Mr. Prance spun round like a humming-top.

"Hankey!" he fairly shrieked.

"By gad!" Wilmot-Jones, for a second, put a hand to his eye. It was almost closed, and already blackening. The other eye blazed with fury. He came at Rag with clenched fists. "By gad! I'll——"

"Stand back, Wilmot-Jones!" Mr. Prance stepped between, "Stand back at once! Hankey, how dare you——?"

Rag panted.

"I don't care! He gave me away—he told you I did it—nobody else knew——"

"What? what? Wilmot-Jones told me nothing!" thundered Mr.

Prance, "Are you in your senses, Hankey? You were reported to me by Mr. Towle."

Rag almost fell down!

"Mr. Tut-tut-Towle!" he babbled, "I—I thought—Oh, scissors—I—I didn't know anybody knew but W. J.—oh, crikey!"

"You utterly stupid boy, follow me."

Rag almost crawled after Mr. Prance to his study. Valentine Wilmot-Jones stood with his hand to a black eye as they went. A minute later, he was bathing that eye—doctoring it in every way he could—but it booted not. That eye was black as the ace of spades—the blackest eye that had ever been blacked—and when the dandy of Lynwood was seen in public again, he was adorned with an eye that fairly leaped to every other eye in Lynwood School.

CHAPTER X

RAG ALL OVER!

"RAG all over!" chuckled Jimmy Carroll.
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Ow! ow! wow!"

There were sounds of mingled merriment and woe in Number Five Study.

Bob Rawlings and Jimmy Carroll were teeing there, merry and bright after beating Hockley at Soccer, when Christopher Cuthbert Hankey rolled in, with a long lugubrious face.

After his visit to his head-master, in company with Mr. Prance, Rag looked as if he had gathered up all the woes in the universe, and a few over.

Bonnetting a form-master with a Soccer ball had, no doubt, seemed to Dr. Walpole a more serious matter than it had seemed to Rag! Only too clearly, the Head had laid it on!

Bob and Jimmy were sympathetic. They felt sympathetic, and they tried to look sympathetic. But what Rag had to tell them was really too much for them! He had dropped that footer on Prance's nut, just when Towle had his camera focused, and had been snapped in the act—just the sort of thing that would happen to Rag. And before learning that fact from Mr. Prance, he had, in the belief that W. J. had given him away, punched W. J. in the eye, and given him the blackest black eye ever seen at Lynwood School or anywhere else!

Rag wriggled and mumbled and uttered painful ejaculations. Bob and Jimmy roared. They could not help it.

"The Head packs a lot of muscle," moaned Rag, "Did he lay it on? Ow! Fancy that old ass Towle snapping me——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! wow!"

"It had to come out, old chap," said Bob, comfortingly, "You wouldn't have left it on me——"

"Ow! No! I'd have owned up—wow! But that doesn't make it feel any better," said Rag, pathetically, "Wow! I feel it just the same, you know! Wow! And W. J.'s as mad as a hatter——"

" Ha, ha, ha! "

" Of course I thought—— "

" Ha, ha, ha! "

" I believe he's waiting for me in Number Seven now. And—— "

" He isn't," chuckled Jimmy Carroll. " Here he comes."

There was a step in the passage, and Valentine Wilmot-Jones stared in the doorway. The handsomest face in the Lynwood Fourth did not look handsome now. It looked horrid. One of W. J.'s eyes was swollen and black, with a tinge of blue—it was likely to be days and days, perhaps weeks and weeks, before the dandy of the Fourth was his own handsome self again. His other eye gleamed at Rag.

" You're here, are you? Now—— "

" I say, W. J., it was all a mistake," gasped Rag. " I thought—— "

" Ha, ha, ha! "

" Just a mistake—— "

" Ha, ha, ha! "

" There won't be any mistake, when I give you two to match this one! " Wilmot-Jones rushed into the study—but he did not reach Rag. He rushed into the arms of Bob Rawlings and Jimmy Carroll.

" No, you don't, W. J.," said Bob, cheerfully. " Rag's a prize idiot—but you've earned that black eye, W. J., for what you did—though you didn't do what Rag thought. You won't lay a finger on Rag, or you'll get such a batting on your bags that you won't be able to crawl for a week. And now get out."

And W. J. got out—landing in the passage in a heap.

THE END

MICK of the

SPINDRIFT



& Frank Richards

I

"FELLER boat stop along sea, sar."

Kikilongolulo, the Kanaka mate of the schooner Spindrift, spoke. His brawny figure towered over the wheel, his brown face glimmering in the light of the binnacle lamp.

Mick of the Spindrift, standing by the taffrail, stared over the shadowed sea. It was a dark night, the Southern Cross hidden by clouds, hardly a star glimmering in the dark vault of the sky. But the Spindrift, with almost every stitch of canvas set and drawing, was making ten knots, her red and green lights gleaming ahead in the darkness. Michael Corkran, the boy skipper and Island trader, had good reasons for haste, and he was getting every ounce of speed out of his schooner on her course for Kamavama.

"No see, eye belong me, Kicky," he said.

Mick was the only white man on the schooner. His mate was from the island of Raiataea: his crew of six were Nukahiva boys. To mate and crew he spoke habitually in the "pidgin" English of the Pacific Islands: the only English they understood.

Kikilongolulo grinned.

"Me no see, sar, eye belong me," he answered, "Me hear, sar, ear belong me. Feller chug-chug boat he stop along sea."

Mick put his hand to his ear to listen.

Faintly, from the darkness of the Pacific, a sound came to his ears. It came more clearly as he listened with intentness.

Chug-chug-chug!

"A motor-boat!" he said.

The Kanaka's keen ear had first caught the distant sound. But Mick could hear it now, and it was growing nearer and clearer. Somewhere, on the dark waters, a motor-boat was racing, and it was approaching the Spindrift, and sounded like cutting across her course.

But nothing was to be seen of it: not a glimmer of a light. Mick stared over the dark Pacific, with knitted brows.

"What lubberly swab's that, going all out, without a light on a dark night?" he grunted, "Asking for trouble!"

Chug-chug-chug!

Judging by the sound, the unseen motor-boat was coming from the direction of Kamavama, a good twenty miles distant to the west. Eastward, at a greater distance, lay Kolomo, a port of call for the

Sydney steamer. Mick could guess that some trader of Kamavama was in haste to get to Kolomo, perhaps to pick up the steamer, due the following morning. Whoever he was, he was going all out, and he was showing no lights—a reckless game on a sea as black as a hat. Craft of any kind were few and far between in those lonely waters, but the man in the motor-boat was running the risk of collision, if only with some Island canoe.

Chug-chug-chug-chug!

The chugging of the motor was close at hand now, on the port beam. Mick's face grew anxious. He had nothing to fear from a collision in the dark: the schooner's prow would have gone over the boat, hardly feeling the shock: but it would mean sudden destruction to the other—a wrecked boat and a drowning man left in the wake of the Spindrift.

"Feller boat he comey, sar!" exclaimed Kikilongolulo, suddenly, and without waiting for an order from his skipper, he jammed the wheel over.

Something dark seemed to leap, for a moment, out of the darkness. Mick was barely able to make out the shape of the boat, as it shot by the port quarter, with hardly a fathom to spare.

"You lubber!" he roared.

Chug-chug-chug! came back from the sea: the motor-boat was fleeting on, after so narrow an escape that it made Mick catch his breath.

"Brain belong that feller no walk about, me tinkee!" said Kikilongolulo.

"Some mad reckless fool!" growled Mick, "But a miss is as good as a mile, I reckon! Keep her steady, Kicky."

The schooner boomed on her course for Kamavama, under the dark sky, and the chug-chug-chugging of the motor-boat died in the distance. For a minute or two Mick of the Spindrift wondered about it—and then dismissed the matter from his mind. But he was to be reminded of it, when under the rising sun the Spindrift ran the reef passage into the lagoon at Kamavama.

II

"Harrack's gone!"

"What?"

"You're too late!"

Mick Corkran stood quite still. His handsome boyish face paled just a little, under its tan.

In the lagoon of Kamavama, his schooner lay at anchor. The whaleboat that had brought him ashore was tied up at the coral quay, where the brown-skinned boat's crew lolled lazily in the tropic sunshine, while they waited for their master.

The sun blazed down on Kamavama, on the shining lagoon, and the shelving beach of dazzling white sand and powdered coral. Natives in white lava-lavas lounged on the beach, or chattered under the tall palms. Back of the beach were the bungalows and warehouses of

the white traders, of whom there were a dozen or more on the island. The handsomest bungalow, and the largest warehouse, belonged to Isaac Harrack, reputed the richest trader in the Islands between Fiji and the Marquesas.

And it was to see Isaac Harrack that Mick of the Spindrift had come in haste to Kamavama. For a rumour had spread on the beaches that all was not well with the rich trader whose speculations extended over a hundred islands: that accounts long overdue had been met with excuses instead of cash: that traders once anxious to do business with him on almost any terms, now hesitated to give him credit for a day.

That rumour came as a rough jolt to Mick Corkran. He was a trader, but he was little more than a boy, and he was more a sailor-man than a trader—and he had allowed Harrack's account with him to pile up to an amount which meant utter disaster if Harrack should default. He had never doubted that his money was as safe with Harrack of Kamavama, as in the bank at Sydney. Three hundred pounds was a small sum to Harrack—but it was a large sum to Mick of the Spindrift: and that rumour had started him at the top speed of the schooner for Kamavama, to see Harrack at once. And now—

In the shady verandah of Harrack's bungalow, a man sprawled in a rocker, smoking a Manila cheroot. But it was not Harrack. It was Ira Garrup, the American trader of Kamavama. There was a faint grin on his leathery face, as he looked at the boy skipper of the Spindrift.

"Harrack owe you anything?" he asked.

"Three hundred pounds," muttered Mick.

"I guess you can say good-bye to it!"

"But——" Mick breathed hard, "He can't be gone! Do you mean that he's—that he's bolted?"

"Sure! And I guess you're only one of the lame ducks, if that's any comfort," said Garrup, "I'll say plenty guys knew that Harrack was getting near the finish, though nobody guessed that he would pull out sudden like this. He's been turning all he had on the island into cash, and I reckon he had a packet when he went. He sold me this bung only two days ago."

"The rogue!" breathed Mick, "The rascal! I heard a rumour that he might fail—but he's filled his pockets and bolted. When did he go?"

"Last night!"

"And where?"

The American trader chuckled.

"I guess he never confided that to any guy. He was at the Planters' Club last evening, as cool as you please—he was gone this morning. If you want him, you can look all over the South Seas for him."

"If I want him!" said Mick, with a blaze in his eyes, "By gum if I could lay hand on him, I'd twist that fat neck of his till he coughed up what he owes me to the last penny. He's gone with my money in his pockets—and other people's money, too. By gum, if I knew his course, I'd crack every inch of sail on the Spindrift and get after him, and follow him to the other end of the Pacific."



"I guess there'll be plenty guys looking for him," drawled Garrup. "I wouldn't wonder if he's got ten thousand pounds on him—and he owes ten times as much up and down the Islands, I guess."

Mick set his lips.

"What craft did he said in? There may be a chance——"

"Not in your lifetime!" grinned Garrup. "You figure that a cute guy like Harrack would pull out in a trading ketch or a whaling brig? I'm telling you that he had this planned, and was salting away other people's money for a long time ready to bolt. He was sure no bonehead!"

"Then how did he go?"

"His motor-boat's gone—the only thing he had on Kamavama, I guess, that he hadn't sold!" chuckled Garrup, "I sure woke last night and heard it, but never guessed that it was Harrack pulling out—till this morning."

Mick jumped.

"He ran in a motor-boat—last night?"

"He sure did."

"By gum!"

Mick of the Spindrift swung on his heels, and ran down the verandah steps. Ira Garrup stared after him.

"Say, what's biting you, bo?" he called out, "You've got all the Seven Seas to choose from, looking for that motor-boat——"

Mick did not answer. He did not even her. He was going down the coral path to the beach with long strides.

A dozen Kamavama traders were gathered in front of the bungalows, excitedly discussing some topic—Mick could guess what it was, after what he had heard from Ira Garrup. The white community on Kamavama had been thrown into a spasm of excitement by the sudden flight of the man once reputed the richest trader in the Islands.

Two or three of the traders called to Mick, as he passed: but he did not heed. He broke into a run, and reached the coral quay panting.

"You feller boy!" He shouted, as he came, to the staring boat's crew. "You jump along boat plenty too quick."

"Yessar."

The Nukahiva boys scrambled into the boat, and loosed the painter. Mick jumped in after them.

"Washy-washy along schooner, plenty too quick altogether," he rapped.

The whaleboat shot away from the quay, brawny arms pulling at the oars. Swiftly as the Nukahiva boys pulled, they were too slow for Mick's impatience. But in a few minutes the boat was bumping on the side of the anchored schooner.

Mick caught the rail, and swung himself on deck.

Kikilongolulo, sitting on the taffrail, chewing betel-nut, stared at his white master in astonishment.

"You no stop long time along white master Harrack, sar," he said. "What name you comey back along schooner altogether too quick?"

"Up hook!" rapped Mick.

"We go along sea, sar?" exclaimed Kikilongolulo. "We no stop along Kamavama?"

"Aye, aye! We're after Harrack!" panted Mick. "He's bolted, Kicky—bolted with his pockets full of other people's money—mine among the rest—he pulled out last night in a motor-boat——"

"Feller chug-chug boat!" exclaimed the mate of the Spindrift. "Me savvy, sar!"

"That's it," said Mick, his eyes gleaming under his knitted brows. "That's why that motor-boat was going all out, and showing no lights—ten to one, a thousand to one, it was Harrack's—and he passed us in the night. He was heading due east, Kicky—and that means Kolomo." Mick clenched his hands. "A thousand to one, Kicky, it was Harrack—heading for Kolomo to pick up the Sydney steamer there—he means to pull right out of the Islands, with his pockets crammed with other people's money! Up hook!"

Kikilongolulo was already off the taffrail, his betel-nut stowed away in his thick hair. He roared to the crew. The Nukahiva boys, who had expected a run ashore while the schooner lay in the lagoon, and their skipper attended to matters of trade, were astonished by sudden orders to put to sea—but they jumped to orders, and the Spindrift throbbled with activity. The whaleboat was swung up to the davits: the anchor came up from the coral bed of the lagoon: canvas was shaken out, and the schooner glided away by the reef passage for the open sea.

Outside the reef, with all the speed that a skilful skipper could make, progress was not rapid. The wind from the south-east had brought the Spindrift swiftly to Kamavama: but to reach Kolomo, sixty miles east, means long and weary tacking. The Spindrift could sail a point nearer the wind than most Pacific traders, and Mick could get the best out of his ship: but he knew that he had a hard row to reach Kolomo in time.

But he would not give up hope.

That the motor-boat that had passed in the night was Harrack's, he could not doubt. That it was heading for Kolomo he was as good as certain. That could be for only one reason—the absconding trader intended to pick up the steamer for Sydney, and vanish from the Island world with his loot. Already, no doubt, he had had time to get to Kolomo in the motor-boat. Already, likely enough, he was on board the Sydney packet. But Mick knew the steamer's time: she did not pull out of Kolomo for Australia till late in the day. If he reached Kolomo before the Sydney steamer pulled out, he had his man!

With a following wind it would have been a sure thing. With tacking and wearing it was a chance. But it was something like ruin for the boy trader, if Isaac Harrack escaped with Mick's money in his pockets, and he was going all out to make the utmost of his chance.

III

"Smoke stop along reef, sar!"

Mick did not need Kikilongolulo to tell him that. His eyes were already on the column of dark smoke rising, as it seemed, from the blue water. And he watched it with knitted brows and set lips.

Far to the north of his course for Kolomo lay the Whale's Back Reef, out of sight from the schooner. It was a dangerous reef, and no skipper who could help it sailed within a sea-mile of it. Many a wreck had piled up there on the sharp teeth of the coral. Most of the reef was submerged: here and there it rose to a height of five or six feet above the water—no tree, not a blade of grass, grew on it; and a man ship-wrecked there could only live, if he lived at all, by scraping shell-fish from the rocks, and lapping water from rain-pools in the hollows. And that column of smoke rising from the sea, and rolling down the wind, told of a castaway—of some hapless ship-wrecked sailorman cast on the lonely reef, watching the sea for a sail.

"Oh, the rotten luck!" breathed Mick of the Spindrift.

He watched the smoke. It was a signal-fire on the reef—seaweed, dried like tinder in the burning sun, fragments of wreckage gathered on the rocks, had gone to build it: it could have been lighted by a ship-wrecked man, in the desperate hope that it might meet the eyes of some passing skipper, humane enough to turn out of his course, and approach a dangerous reef, to save a castaway from slow but certain death.

Mick of the Spindrift was the man to do that very thing. Time and trade would have counted for little with him, in comparison with saving a fellow-sailorman from so terrible a fate. But now it was not merely time and trade that counted. He was a ruined man, if he did not overtake the defaulting trader at Kolomo. He had bills to meet with traders, on which he could not default as Harrack had done. He might lose even his ship.

Every minute was precious. His all, or almost his all, depended on getting to Kolomo before Harrack escaped in the steamer for

Sydney. He had a chance—and he was making the most of that chance. And now——!

If there was a struggle in his mind, it was brief. If ruin came, it must come—he could not leave a ship-wrecked man to death.

Kikilongolulo watched his troubled face, curiously. Kicky knew how much there was at stake, and he wondered how the boy skipper of the Spindrift would decide.

“We’re for it, Kicky!” said Mick, at last, bitterly, “If we turn out of our course to save that man, we don’t make Kolomo in time! But—it’s up to us!”

And he rapped out orders to the crew. The Spindrift swung out of her course, and headed north for the Whale’s Back.

Mick, with a moody brow, watched the smoke-signal, thicker and darker as the schooner approached the reef. It was hard luck—the hardest luck he had ever struck: he had to let Harrack escape, and save an unknown man wrecked on a lonely reef. It was a skipper’s bounden duty: and Mick was not the man to shrink from the call of duty, howsoever hard it was. But it came hard—very hard.

The reef rose into sight at last—masses of rock over the water that broke on it in incessant surf and spray. As the schooner drew nearer, the flame of the signal-fire, under the masses of smoke, could be discerned: and a figure bending by the fire, feeding it with fragments of driftwood and dried sea-weed. Then, suddenly, the castaway seemed to become aware of the approaching sail. He leaped up, his smoke-blackened face turned towards the Spindrift, holding out both hands towards the ship in a beseeching gesture. He was shouting, crying out in his eagerness and anxiety, but the wind carried away his voice. The sight of the Spindrift’s tall sails meant life to him, instead of the terrible death that had seemed certain.

“That feller plenty too glad, along he see this feller ship, eye belong him,” grinned Kikilongolulo.

Mick drew a deep breath.

“We’ve got it coming, Kicky! But I’m glad—glad we saw the signal—smoke—glad we gave up the run to Kolomo—we shall save that man!”

The Spindrift glided swiftly on. But at a couple of cables’ length from the reef, the sails dropped, and the schooner hove-to. Mick shouted an order, and the whaleboat dropped from the davits.

Mick stepped down into the boat. Two brawny Nukahiva boys took the oars, to pull to the reef.

On the reef, the castaway stood, waving, shouting, the smoke eddying round him. Mick waved back.

“Washy-washy plenty too quick, you feller boy!” he rapped. And the whaleboat shot swiftly on.

Mick steered into an inlet of the reef, and as the Kanakas made the boat fast, jumped ashore. And the castaway, babbling incoherent words in his joy and relief, ran to meet him as he strode across the reef.

" Isaac Harrack! "

Mick gasped out the name.

He could hardly believe his eyes, as he stared at the smoke-grimed face of the castaway—recognizable now that he saw it close.

He had abandoned the run to Kolomo to catch the defaulting trader—and it was the defaulting trader of Kamavama that he found on Whale's Back Reef! In a flash he understood. That reckless run in the motor-boat on a dark night had ended in disaster. The fleeing trader, in his reckless haste, had narrowly escaped a collision with the Spindrift. He had not escaped the reef! The motor-boat had piled up on the Whale's Back, and it was Isaac Harrack—the man whom Mick had believed to be already at Kolomo—who was wrecked on the reef, and who had lighted the signal-fire.

" Isaac Harrack! " repeated Mick of the Spindrift, blankly.

The trader of Kamavama rubbed his smoke-grimed eyes.

" You, Captain Corkran! I reckoned I knew your packet," he said, " I'm thankful that you saw my signal—you've saved me."

" Aye, aye," said Mick, " I've saved you, Harrack! "

" I must have missed my course in the dark last night," muttered Harrack, " My boat piled up here—— "

" More haste, less speed! " said Mick, grimly. " You were pushed for time, I reckon."

" That's so. I've got business at Kolomo—and there may yet be time—a hundred pounds, Corkran, to run me to Kolomo, as fast as your packet can push."

Mick laughed.

" You scum! " he said, " I know your business at Kolomo. I reckon you've lost the Sydney steamer, even if I gave you a passage there. I'm fresh from Kamavama, Mr. Harrack, and I've had the news."

The trader's jaw dropped.

" You scum! " repeated Mick, " You were running with my money, and other people's money, too. You've got your pockets crammed with loot, you scum. You've left a hundred creditors to whistle for their cash, and you were going to get out of the Islands with your belt full! "

" A passage to Kolomo! " muttered Harrack, hoarsely, " I'll pay all I owe you, Captain Corkran, and a thousand pounds over, for a quick run to Kolomo."

Mick laughed again.

" You'll pay all you owe me, before I take you off this reef! " he said, " And then you'll go back on my packet to Kamavama, to face the music! You dog, you offer me stolen money to help you escape—you dog! "

" Five thousand pounds! " breathed Harrack, " Five thousand pounds for a run to Kolomo! It will make you rich—— "

" I'm not out for that sort of riches, Mr. Harrack. You'll pay the three hundred pounds you owe me, and I'll give you a receipt. And then I'll give you a passage back to Kamavama—or leave you on this reef—take your choice! "

The Spindrift, under full sail, stood westward before the wind for Kamavama. A smoke-grimed man, with savage eyes, leaned limply on the rail—Isaac Harrack, going back to Kamavama to face the music. Black and bitter were the looks he cast on the boy skipper who had rescued him from death on the reef. But Kikilongolulo, with his brown hands on the wheel, was grinning with glee; and there was a cheery smile on the face of Mick of the Spindrift.

STEVEN STERN

THE
DETECTIVE.



"YOU say that you are my niece, Susie Flint. Why, I have never heard of you!"

The hard-faced, richly-dressed elderly woman standing in the great hall of the big house nestling under the South Downs glared at the young girl in front of her.

"But—but I don't understand," stammered the girl. "My father said that if he never came back from Africa I was to come to you and you would help me."

"Nonsense, you are just making it all up, trying to worm yourself into my home," was the snapped-out reply. "Johnson," she added, turning to the footman behind her, "see this girl off the estate and if she returns, telephone the police at once."

Tears came into Susie's eyes as the woman turned and marched slowly up the broad staircase. Not so much tears of disappointment at the lack of welcome from a woman who was supposed to be her father's sister-in-law, but tears of indignation that she had been accused of being deceitful.

"Now then, young woman, skip out of it," came the footman's instruction, "and don't let us find you round here any more, or we carry out Madame's orders."

"I won't worry her any more, she can be sure of that," said Susie, with a touch of pride in her voice. She picked up her little case and walked slowly down the drive.

All her plans had gone by the board, she would have to make new ones. Aunt Alicia who was to be such a help in trouble had proved to be a broken reed. Of course the woman must remember her but she did not wish to be burdened with a poor relation.

Moving down the lane that led to the big house Susie turned matters over in her mind. She would earn her living, in a shop or somewhere,

and find lodgings in a small cottage. She would make a good shop assistant, being quick at figures and always polite; also—but there was the roar of a powerful motor cycle behind her, she tried to skip sideways but the sidecar attached to the machine caught the case she was carrying and sent her crashing into the ditch. She did not even see the driver of the combination except as a dim figure crouching over the handle-bars, as he raced on.

It was some few seconds before Susie managed to drag herself out of the ditch, she felt very bruised and a lock had been torn off her case so that it was bulging open. She must have looked in a sorry plight for an M.G. car that was speeding past suddenly pulled up and a keen-faced young man looked out enquiringly. Next moment he flung open the door and came running across to her.

"You look all in, my dear," he said. "Had a spot of trouble?"

There was such kindness in his voice that Susie burst into tears. As she mopped her eyes she told him about the motor cycle and then, encouraged by his sympathy, explained about Aunt Alicia.

"So you have nowhere to go?" asked her companion.

"Oh, I shall find somewhere," declared Susie.

"Not in the state you are in," was the answer. "Come and rest in my car while I think things out."

Inside the car Susie's new friend said:

"My name is Steven Stern!"

Susie gasped; even at school she had heard of the young detective famous for his uncanny skill and reckless daring.

"Now my trouble is that I am in the middle of a job so I am afraid that I cannot help you so much as I would like for the moment," went on Steven Stern. "I was trailing that motor cycle and sidecar when I pulled up. The man driving it is Pierre Leclerc, the notorious jewel robber; he has just finished a nice job with the Belman diamonds and is off with them to his hidey hole. I was hoping to catch him up, but now"—and Steven Stern shrugged his shoulders ruefully—"I have lost too much time."

"Oh, I am so sorry," said Susie, "it is my fault, you should not have stopped. . . . But," she went on, "there are the tracks of his motor cycle on the road. Cannot you follow them?"

The detective shook his head.

"Leclerc is too cunning, he would go into hiding at the first sight of this car creeping along with me following his tracks. No, I have missed the chance."

But Susie was not having that.

"Well, he would not be suspicious of me, would he?" she demanded. "I will follow the tracks and I can leave a trail for you to follow. Look, like that!"

And she pointed to a thin line of scrap paper that lay on the side of the road, left by the hares in a paper chase.

Steven Stern's eyes began to sparkle, there was still a chance.

"I have got a gym suit in my case," went on Susie, "I can get into that while you tear up any paper you may have."

"But it might be risky," suggested the detective.

"You were willing to help me, I want to help you," said Susie. "Please," she added.

Stern could not refuse after that.

"Very well," he said. "But I shall not be far behind you."

Within a minute or two Susie was off, looking almost like a little schoolgirl in her gym clothes. Over her shoulder she carried a satchel made from a tool bag and a strap, filled with torn-up note books.

"See you later," she called out and went off at a trot.

It was easy to follow the trail, the close double track of the motor cycle and the single tyre track of the sidecar. If Susie lost them she had only to go on a few yards and she could pick them up again in a patch of dust or soft dirt. But it was a little trouble at times and from the driving seat of a car, it would have been impossible.

"What I cannot understand, though," she said to herself as she trotted along, "is why this successful thief is content with a motor cycle combination, I would have thought he would be using a powerful and speedy car."

Half a mile further on Susie understood. There was a narrow track leading off the road up through a spinney to a hill-top. The tyre marks were showing on that track, the combination could just squeeze through, but no car could have made that twisting journey. At times the sidecar must have been high up on the bank and calling for great skill on the driver's part to save him turning over.

Susie began to move more carefully, she had a feeling that she was nearing the end of things. Rounding a bend she found she was on the edge of an ancient stone quarry; to one side stood a quarryman's cottage, half in ruins; and almost hidden under a big alder bush next to it was the motor cycle and sidecar. Susie took a quick glance out of the corner of her eye at it just as a man came out of the cottage and stared across at her. But all he saw was a schoolgirl flicking a paper trail out of a satchel for a paper chase as she ran along the edge of the quarry towards the hill-top. Susie never looked back until she was hidden from sight of the cottage, then she dropped to the ground and squirmed her way back. Keeping out of sight she could see the man still busy about his motor bicycle; first he took a small package out of the sidecar and disappeared with it inside the cottage, then he returned to pile up dried grass over the machine so that it was completely hidden. After that he went back into the cottage again.

"If I am to learn anything more I must get closer to that cottage," decided Susie.

Spreading her paper trail rather thick at the spot to mark where she turned off, she moved down towards the cottage under the shelter of an old hedge. There were the remains of a garden behind the cottage and a broken stone wall hid her from view until she reached the building itself. No sound came from inside so she lifted her head and peered through the broken window gap. The little room was empty but in one corner was a big square hole in the floor. Next moment Susie was inside the room and peering down that opening.

Rough stone steps led down to what looked like an old quarry workings a few feet below and as there was still no sound of any movement, she crept down. It was a strange world below; the place appeared to be honeycombed with these passages where in past centuries quarrymen had dug out the stone, shaping it in a number of little openings, like rooms, they had excavated on the side. Light came through in



various odd openings scattered high up in the walls. Since they were first made, those galleries must have proved valuable to all kinds of runaways seeking shelter, and as a hidey-hole for a jewel thief, could not be bettered.

"But where has this man gone?" was the question in Susie's mind. Then she stopped; ahead came the sounds of tapping, metal on stone. Noiselessly she crept forward and in one of the little chambers she found him.

He was on his knees with a hammer and chisel working at enlarging an opening in the wall. On the floor by his side lay a little pile of gleaming jewellery, gold chains, rings and brooches flashing with precious stones, and numerous little leather cases. The man was just finishing his task. He lifted a great stone and fitted it into the opening and gave a grunt of satisfaction. Taking it out he packed in the treasures, stopping to open one case from which he lifted a diamond necklace that glittered in the dim light like liquid fire. Susie remembered the Belman diamonds that were missing, that must be them.

After a moment or two of admiration the man slipped the case in with the others and sealed the opening with the great stone. Susie had seen enough, she turned and tiptoed back. To return the way she had come appeared a simple task, but a few yards along there was a fork in the galleries. Which was the way? Taking one she found that she was wrong and had to retrace her steps; she felt a little shiver of fear pass over her, would she be able to get away now? Being a little scared she tried to hurry, making more noise, and it was that which gave her away. As she rounded a bend in the passage-way a shadowy figure rose to meet her. Susie caught a glimpse of a thin pale face and a black moustache, and a brown leather jacket stained with motor oil, before

something was whisked over her head and two powerful arms gripped her into helplessness.

"What you do here, eh?" snarled a voice.

Susie kicked and plunged but it was fruitless, she felt herself carried a few steps then flung on the ground.

"You stay there while I think what to do," said the voice again.

A door slammed and when Susie fought herself free of the blanket which covered her, it was to find that she was in one of the little workshops with the door barred tight; a prisoner. Up on the wall, almost out of her reach, was one of the little window openings.

"But it is far too small for me to creep through," decided Susie.

Still, it served one purpose. Susie still had her satchel of paper over her shoulder, and it did not take her many moments to push through the opening a handful or two of the trail paper.

"If Steven Stern is anywhere near he will see that and know I am here," she declared.

She had every confidence in the young detective; he had never been known to fail. Susie made herself comfortable on the floor, prepared to wait.

Half an hour went by, an hour; then, in the distance, came the crack of a revolver shot and a man shouting. Susie sat up, things were happening.

It was a few minutes, however, before the light from the opening was dimmed by a man's head and Steven Stern peered in. There was an anxious look in his eyes but as soon as he saw Susie was safe and well, he grinned with pleasure.

"Ah, there you are, then. Our friend has made you a prisoner?" he said.

"Be careful, he is around here," said Susie.

"I have already fixed him up, he is lying in the old cottage neatly roped up, thanks to your help with the paper trail. When I asked him about you, he told me to find out for myself. But this stuff fluttering from the window gave me the clue I wanted at once. Now to get you out."

A little levering of one of the side stones shifted it enough to enable Susie to be pulled out.

"But I don't want you to go yet," she said to Stern, "I've something to show you."

She led the way back through the cottage to the galleries; they passed Leclerc lying in the corner, gagged and bound. His black eyes were glittering with anger as he saw them go down the stairway. Susie led the way to the jewel thief's hiding place.

"Leclerc's loot is hidden in this room, can you spot it?" she asked.

Steven Stern looked round and shook his head.

"Nowhere here is anything hidden," he said.

Susie laughed and went across to where she had watched Leclerc at work. But she had to tug at two or three stones before she found the loose one and was able to drag out the priceless treasure behind it.

With Leclerc a sullen and angry prisoner in the back seat and Susie with a lap full of treasure by his side, Steven Stern drove his little M.G. to the nearest police station.

A red-faced sergeant, almost pop-eyed with amazement, quickly had the jewel thief safely under lock and key. A local bank manager was recalled to his office to put the treasure in his strong-room for the night.

"A very successful day, my dear," said Steven Stern. "You played your part very well and made a fine job of our first case together."

Susie gave a little gasp.

"Our first case together," she repeated.

"Yes, you are looking for a job and I am looking for an assistant," said Steven Stern. "I've a hunch we shall do very well together."

"There is nothing I would like better," said Susie.

"Fine," replied the detective, "and I rather think one of our cases in the near future," he went on thoughtfully, "is to try and discover why your Aunt Alicia treated you as she did. It appears very queer to me."

BUNKER BATES on the WAR-PATH



By FRANK RICHARDS

I

OH! Oh! Oh!
It was a sound of woe from Study Seven, in the Fourth Form at Tipdale. Tom Ridd and Bob Wake, as they came along to their study, heard it, and exchanged a grin.

"That's Bunker!" said Tom.

"In trouble again!" sighed Bob.

They looked into the study. The junior standing at the study table did not look round. He was busy.

His occupation was a curious one. With a ruler in one hand he was stirring the fluid contents of a large tin can. With the other he was rubbing an ear which was crimson in hue, and seemed to have a pain in it.

From moment to moment he ejaculated "Oh! Oh! Oh!" From which woeful sounds his friends correctly deduced that Buncombe Bates—who was always called Bunker—was in trouble again! Bunker was generally in trouble of some sort. He seemed born to trouble as the sparks fly upward.

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" said Bunker, "Oh! My ear! I'll show him! Oh!"

"What's that game?" asked Tom Ridd.

"Mixing a poultice for your ear?" inquired Bob Wake.

Then Bunker Bates looked round, at the voices of his chums. Bunker's freckled face, as a rule, was placid and amiable. Now it was dark with wrath. Something, evidently, had roused Bunker's deepest ire.

"That smudge Buller——!" he said, "Buller of the Fifth! He pulled my ear! Hard! I'll show him! Oh! I'll make him sit up! Oh! Just because I trod on his foot when I was running down the passage! As if I could help it! Oh!"

At which Bunker's chums chuckled. Poor old Bunker was always doing something that he couldn't help. Any other Lower boy at Tipdale could have run down a passage without treading on a Fifth-form man's foot. Not Bunker!

"But what are you mixing there?" asked Tom.

"Treacle and ink."

"Oh, my hat! Do you like ink with your treacle?" gasped Tom.

"Taint for me," explained Bunker, "It's for Buller! I'd jolly well punch his nose for pulling my ear, if—if I could, you know. But Buller's too big for me. I'm going to give him this instead. On his napper!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

Tom Ridd and Bob Wake gazed at Bunker in something like consternation. As Buller of the Fifth had pulled Bunker's ear, they sympathised with his desire to "show him". But what would happen to Bunker, if he buzzed that horrid mixture of treacle and ink at a Fifth-form man's head, staggered the imagination.

"Just let him wait!" said Bunker. He rubbed his reddened ear with one hand, and stirred the mixture with the other, "I'll get him all right! I'll show him whether he can pull a Fourth-form man's ear!"

"You awful ass!" gasped Tom Ridd, "If you buzz that stuff at Buller, he will strew you in small pieces all over Tipdale."

Bunker chuckled.

"He's not going to see me do it! I've got it all cut and dried. I'm going to get him looking out of his study window. See? Then I'm going to drop this on his top knot from the box-room window just above. After he's scraped it off he can try to guess who did it! See? Pretty deep, what?"

"You—deep!" said Tom. "You're the biggest ass at Tipdale, and then some! If you get anybody you'll get the wrong man. Even if you get Buller, about half Tipdale will see you doing it! Chuck it, Bunker."

"I'm going to chuck it——"

"Good!"

"——over Buller——"

"Oh, you ass!" said Bob Wake, "Buller will make mincemeat of you."

"He won't know! You fellows might muff it—not me," said

Bunker, "I've got brains. Most of the brains in this study, if you come to that. If you fellows had as much brains in your nappers as I have in my little finger, you'd be twice as clever."

"Now, look here, Bunker——!" urged his two chums together.

"'Nuff said!" interrupted Bunker Bates. He gave the mixture a final stir, and laid down the ruler. He gave his crimson ear a final rub, and picked up the tin can in both hands, "If you fellows want something to do, you can walk round the quad, and watch Buller's study window. You'll see him get it! Ha, ha!"

"Bunker, you ass——!"

"Bunker, you fathead——!"

Bunker Bates did not heed. With the tin can in his hands, he marched out of Study Seven, and headed for the box-room stair at the end of the passage. Tom Ridd and Bob Wake gazed at one another in dismay.

"I wonder who'll get that mixture!" said Tom.

"Anybody but Buller!" sighed Bob.

"Even if he gets Buller, he'll get spotted."

"Of course."

"No good talking to him!"

"None at all!"

"Perhaps he'll stumble on the box-room stairs, and drop it—over himself!" said Tom, hopefully.

"Let's hope so!" agreed Bob.

Bunker Bates had declared that he had it all cut and dried—but his chums had not the slightest doubt that something would go wrong with Bunker's plans. Something always did go wrong with Bunker's plans! Bunker claimed to be the brainy man of the study; but Bunker's brain moved in mysterious ways its wonders to perform. His anxious friends could only wonder what was going to happen, hoping—as the best thing possible for Bunker—that he would stumble on the box-room stair and get the mixture himself!

II

It worked like a charm.

For once, at least, Bunker's luck was in.

He had a moment of uneasiness when, marching up the Fourth-form passage with the tin can in his hands, he passed his form-master, Mr. Moon, coming down the passage. Mr. Moon glanced at Bunker and his tin can. But it was only a casual glance, quite uninterested. Mr. Moon went on his way, and Bunker Bates went on his, and mounted the stair to the box-room.

Bunker, according to his friends, couldn't touch a thing without bungling it. He couldn't open his mouth without putting his foot in it! That Bunker Bates could lay a plan, and carry it out without a hitch, no fellow in the Tiptdale Fourth could ever have believed.

Yet, on this occasion, it seemed that Bunker Bates could!

True, he did stumble on the box-room stair. He did spill about

half a pint of his ghastly mixture of treacle and ink. But what did that matter? He had lots left for Buller of the Fifth.

He arrived at the box-room window, opened it, and deposited the tin can on the window-sill, ready for use. He was not spotted by fellows in the quad below. One of the old Tiptdale beeches conveniently screened the window from general view. Really, it was safe as houses.

Bunker, grinning, let down a string from the box-room window. On the end of the string was tied a stone. Buller's study window was precisely underneath. Jerking the string rattled the stone against a pane. That was to draw Buller to his study window. It was quite astute. It showed that Bunker Bates could think things out!

Clink! clink! clink! clink!

Now, when a fellow in his study heard an incessant clinking at his window, his natural reaction was to go to the window and see what was happening there. That was what Buller of the Fifth did. He was annoyed by that clinking at his window. Evidently—so far as he could see—some cheeky fag was buzzing pebbles at his window, and Buller wanted to identify that fag, with a view to administering toco for his cheek. Buller opened his window, put out his head, stared round for the supposed fag.

Then it happened!

Bunker Bates, grinning down from above, inverted the tin can, exactly over Buller. The horrid contents of mixed treacle and ink shot out in a stream, and landed with great precision on top of Buller's head. Hardly a drop was wasted. Buller of the Fifth got the full benefit of it, utterly astounded to find himself all of a sudden drenched, smothered, and soaked with a horrible sticky mixture that seemed to have fallen from the sky.

The roar that came from Buller of the Fifth woke most of the echoes of Tiptdale School. His treacly and inky head disappeared into the study. Bunker, above, backed at once into the box-room, the instant he had delivered the goods. He did not linger there. How long it would take Buller to guess that he had been treacled and inked from the box-room above, Bunker did not know: and it was not judicious to wait till he learned. Bunker, grinning all over his freckled face, shot out of the box-room, and vanished into space.

It was several minutes later that a treacly and inky Fifth-form man came up to the box-room, raging. But when he got there the box-room, like Mother Hubbard's cupboard, was bare! There was no trace of the treacled and inker—no clue to him! Buller of the Fifth, still raging, had to give it up, and go for the wash he badly needed.

With feelings too deep for words—though he uttered a good many quite expressive words!—Buller, at the sink in the lobby, rubbed and scrubbed, and rubbed, expending soap and hot water at a reckless rate, cleaning off ink, and disentangling his hair from treacle. Quite a number of amused fellows gathered round to watch him: what time Bunker Bates put a grinning face into Study Seven in the Fourth—with a grin so wide, that it looked almost like going right round his head and meeting at the back.

"Come on, you chaps," said Bunker.

"You've done it?" exclaimed Tom Ridd.



"What do you think?" chuckled Bunker.

"Buller will pulverise you!" said Bob Wake.

"Ha, ha!" trilled Bunker, "He don't know a thing! I say, come on—lots of fellows are laughing at him—come on!"

The three Fourth-formers joined the crowd in the lobby. They stared at the Fifth-form man at the sink, in his shirt-sleeves, with his collar off, breathlessly and furiously struggling with treacle and ink. Buller took no heed of them. Evidently he had no suspicion of Bunker!

Bunker Bates gurgled with glee. Tom Ridd and Bob Wake were more astonished than anything else. Bunker Bates had pulled it off! He had laid his plan—he had carried it out—there had not been a hitch! Buller, labouring with soap and hot water, with a red and furious face, did not even glance at him. Bunker, amazing to relate, had done the whole thing without a single hitch!

Or had he?

III

"Bates!"

Mr. Moon, master of the Fourth, glanced into the crowded lobby. Buller of the Fifth, rubbing and scrubbing breathlessly, did not heed. But the amused crowd watching him glanced round. Bunker Bates was annoyed—he did not want to be bothered by his form-master, just then, when he was enjoying to the full the happy sight of Buller of the Fifth rubbing and scrubbing at treacle and ink. But he looked round and answered:

"Yes, sir!"

"Bates!" Mr. Moon was frowning. "A quantity of some adhesive substance, apparently treacle, has been spilled on the stairs."

Bunker jumped.

" Oh! " he ejaculated.

" A short while ago, Bates, I saw you carrying a can, containing fluid of some kind, to the box-room stair."

" Oh! " gasped Bunker.

" I can only conclude, Bates, that you spilled the treacle on the box-room stairs. The House-dame has trodden in it, and reported the matter to me. You are a very careless boy, Bates."

" Oh! " gurgled Bunker.

" You must learn to be more careful, Bates," said Mr. Moon severely, " You will take fifty lines, Bates."

Mr. Moon walked away, with that. He was done with Bunker.

But there was someone else who was not done with him! Buller of the Fifth had turned a face streaming with water, lathered with soap, round from the sink. Through the lather, his eyes gleamed at Bunker Bates.

" You! " he roared.

" Oh, crumbs! " gasped Bunker.

He blinked at Buller like a startled rabbit. Buller came across from the sink with a rush.

" Oh, my hat! " gasped Tom Ridd.

" Hook it, Bunker! " yelled Bob Wake.

Bunker did not need telling! He made a frantic bound for the doorway. But a large and heavy hand grasped him, and hooked him back into the lobby.

" You! " roared Buller.

" Oh, crumbs! "

" I'll pulverise you! "

" Oh, crikey! "

" Poor old Bunker! " gasped Tom Ridd.

" Poor old Bunker! " sighed Bob Wake.

" Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh! roared Bunker Bates.

" Ha, ha, ha! "

The crowd in the lobby were yelling with laughter. Bunker Bates was yelling too. But not with laughter!

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