



# The MODERN BOY 2<sup>D</sup>

EVERY SATURDAY  
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*Desert  
Speed!*

## Night-birds at the SCHOOL FOR SLACKERS get their Feathers Badly Singed!



They sat down to the show, Bob—between Teddy and Aubrey—blind and deaf to what went on on the stage and sobbing from the bottom of his heart that he hadn't come.

### A Staggering Invitation!

"I'm not botherin' about a dashed usher!" said Aubrey Compton, the dandy of the Fifth.

Teddy Seymour grinned, and Bob Darrell frowned.

The "dashed usher" to whom the magnificent Aubrey alluded was no less a person than James McCann, the new headmaster of High Coombe.

There was a chuckle from five or six seniors in Big Study.

"Usher!" remarked Corkran of the Sixth. "That's good!"

"Oh, good!" said Tredegar, captain of High Coombe. "I'd like the Blighter to hear that—what?"

Carter, the funny man of the Fifth, gave Aubrey quite an curious look. Carter wished that he had said that.

All sorts of names had been found for the new Head who had introduced

the anarchic element of work into the School for Slackers. Generally, he was called the Blighter; but he was called other things as well, such as the Barge, or the Bonnier, or the Nigger-driver.

Being everything that was bad—for did he not make fellows work?—no name was too bad for him.

But it was Aubrey who first thought of alluding to him as an "usher."

There was an appreciable favour of contempt about that, pleasing to the ears of the High Coombs. They loathed Jimmy McCann so intensely that they would have liked to despise him, too. But McCann was not an easy man to despise.

A fellow might hate him, but somehow he had to respect him. The brute was so strong, and so fit, and so quietly determined! He never flinched like Chard, master of the Fifth; but his quiet tenor carried an authority Chard had never dreamed of possessing. Compared with old Dr. Chetwode—the former Head, known as the Venerable Bank—McCann was,

as all High Coombs agreed, a most grievous bouncer. Yet all High Coombe obeyed him, as they would have laughed at the idea of obeying the Venerable Bank. The word "usher" introduced that desirable element of contempt.

"A dashed usher!" repeated Aubrey. "The man comes here from nowhere, looks like a commercial traveller, and acts like a prison governor. He barges into the old Head's place, and fancies himself a headmaster! Headmasters are gentlemen!"

"Hear, hear!" concurred all Big Study. High Coombe expected a master to be a gentleman. And the chief qualification of a gentleman, by the High Coombe definition, was that he shouldn't expect a fellow to work.

There was no doubt that Jimmy McCann fell far short of that high standard. Jimmy not only expected a fellow to work, but saw that he did. Obviously, no gentleman!

"A glorified usher!" said Aubrey. "Well, so I said, I'm not botherin' about a dashed usher. I hope no other fellow here is goin' to bother about him, either?"

"Never!" declared Faverill of the Fifth.

"We're carryin' on," retorted Aubrey, "exactly the same as if Dr. Chetwode was still here!"

"Here, here!" said Carter.

"I don't mean that we can carry on quite the same in the Form-rooms," went on Aubrey. "That old man, Chard, is makin' a show of gettin' some work done, since the Blighter threatened to take the Form out of his hands. But out of the Form-room we go on just the same!"

"But—" said Bob Darrell.

"You shut up, Darrell, old man!" said Corkran. "If you can see some good in McCann, nobody else can,

# DORM THREE'S NIGHT OUT!

BY

Charles Hamilton

and we don't want to hear your views!"

Bob Darrell granted.

"What's coming out for games practice?" he asked.

There was a howl of indignant protest in Big Study.

"Oh, shut up, Darrell!"

"Give us a rest!"

"Park it, old man!"

Games practice did not appeal to the fellows who were adorning the comfortable armchairs in Big Study with their elegant persons. Randall of the Sixth, laziest man even in the School for Slackers, lifted his head from a pile of cushions, and said:

"You idiot!"

After which effort, Randall's head sank back again.

"I was sayin'—" said Compton.

"Go it, Aubrey!" That chorus of encouragement showed how much more popular Aubrey's remarks were than Darrell's in Big Study.

"I was sayin' that no man here is goin' to change his manners and customs to please a meakin' usher from some dirty little private school."

"Hear, hear!"

"We're makin' up a little party for the Oldham Theatre to-night, just the same as if the Venerable Bank was still here and the Blighter back in the slam he came from," said Aubrey.

If Aubrey Compton expected the chorus of encouraging approval to be renewed, he was disappointed. Not a sound came from the Fifth and Sixth Formers in Big Study. Indeed, Tredegar of the Sixth, who was leaning on the door, opened it and strolled out, as if he had suddenly remembered business elsewhere. Corkran half-risen, but, catching Aubrey's eye, sat down

## Dorm Three's Night Out!

again, looking rather uncomfortable. Carter winked at Bob Farrell, who laughed. Aubrey knitted his handsome brows with vexation.

Instead of rising to his words with enthusiasm, the seniors looked as if he had given them a cold shower-bath.

"If any man hanks, he can stick in," said Aubrey, with a curl of the lip. "I'm goin' exactly the same as if the McCann man had never blown in."

"There'd be a row if he spotted us breakin' out!" murmured Frevvill.

"There'd have been a row if Chard had spotted us in the old days!" answered Compton. It was not so very long since Jimmy McCann had blown into High Combe, but the happy days of the Venerable Brak seemed ages ago to the fellows suffering under the new disposition. It was only a matter of weeks, but the days of Dr. Chetwode were near the dear, dead days beyond recall.

"But Chard was always careful never to spot a man," argued Carter. "He wouldn't have been popular if he'd spotted a man! McCann doesn't care a botled bean for popularity!"

"Too jolly risky!" said Raymond. "Where's the risk?" Aubrey sneered. "Even the Blighter hasn't taken the prefect's keys away yet! You're a prefect, Corky, and you've still got your key to the lobby, and your key to the gate."

"And I'm keepin' them," said

Corkran. "on my key-ring, and my key-ring in my trousers pocket, old bean! I'm not askin' that under to sack me from High Combe!"

"It's the sack for breakin' out at night if a fellow gets snaffed!" said Frevvill. "Not good enough, Aubrey, old man!"

"I dare say the brute would be jolly glad to make an example of a man!" said Carter. "It would be like him!"

"Not!" answered Aubrey. "He made out that he was goin' to sack me his first week here, but Chard talked him round. And I'm jolly certain he wanted to be talked round. He don't dare sack a man. The governors would pretty soon call him to order if he started sackings!"

"Um!" said Corkran. "I'm goin'!" said Aubrey Compton. His eyes were glowering; his handsome face set and obstinate. "Who's comin' with me?"

Dead silence! Enthusiasm in Big Study had absolutely petered out.

Blighter, and Harpe, and Bousler the unspeakable McCann might be—a dashed under, in fact! But it was plain that he had put the wind up the School for Slackers. Nobody—unless it was the superb Aubrey himself—was going to carry on as in the days of the Venerable Brak, exactly the same as if McCann had never blown in! Teddy Seymour opened his mouth—but Bob Farrell gave him a glare, and he shut it again. A pin might have been heard to fall in Big Study.

"Don't all speak at once!" said Aubrey, with better sarcasm.

Nobody spoke.

"I'm goin'!" Silence!

"You men all lettin' me down!" Still silence! Apparently they were.

"You're leavin' me your key, Corky, if you're not comin'!"

Slowly Corky shook his head.

"No, old man! Better check it—"

"I'm not askin' for your advice—I'm askin' for your key."

"Nothin' doin'!" said Corkran. "I'm a prefect, and—"

Aubrey Compton walked to the door. He threw it open, then turned his scornful glance on the men in Big Study. They all looked at him uneasily. They all liked and admired old Aubrey, hailed him as a leader in the resistance to McCann and all his works. But—

There was a big "but." McCann had the eye of a hawk. Suppose he swooped like one on a fellow out of bounds after lights out! It was, as Frevvill had said, not good enough!

Under Aubrey's scornful stare, only one mouth opened. It was Teddy's. But again a glare from Bob stopped him and Teddy shut it up again, his words unspoken.

"So nobody's comin' with me tonight!" said Aubrey. He did not lower his voice, though the door was wide open and his words were perfectly audible in the passage outside.

"Well, I'm goin'." With that, Aubrey stalked out of

Big Study and slammed the door after him, with a slam that echoed through the House. Which was quite an unaccustomed thing in that dwelling-place of elegant and fastidious slackers!

### At the Head's Telephone!

HERE was considerable, if suppressed, excitement in High Combe that afternoon. Excitement was unusual, or had been unusual, in the School for Slackers. But things were not as they had been. High Combe had fallen upon new and exciting times. Under the Venerable Brak, nothing special had ever seemed to happen. Now something or other always seemed to be happening.

The school was roused from its dreamy calm. It was really as if the Blighter McCann had stirred up the place like a cook stirring up a pudding with a spoon.

Only a few weeks ago, Aubrey's proposal in Big Study would have been hailed with delight. Half a dozen fellows would have made up a party for Oldham, unimpeded—or, at least, unobserved—by the Braks. It was said that Mr. Chard had actually met members of his Form in the High Street at Oldham at eleven p.m. and turned his partly head the other way! Popularity Peter was not the man to see things he was not wanted to see. But it was all so sadly changed now.

What, a few weeks since, would have been quite a normal proceeding on the part of the High Combe seniors was now regarded in the light of a risky adventure—a wild adventure!

Aubrey's scorn stung the fellows who refused to back him up in hurling such defiance at McCann. But they admired him more than ever for his nerve. Was he really going? they asked one another. Would he have the nerve to break out and chance it with McCann? If he did, would the Blighter spot him? And if the Blighter spotted him, what then?

In theory, at least, it was the sack, short and sharp, for any fellows breaking out after lights out. If theory became practice, High Combe was in danger of losing its bright particular star.

Was he really going? He had said that he was, and he was met the fellow to back out. Either was he the fellow to rush on his fate, scarce than admit that he was dunted.

Corkran, as head prefect, was worried and antsy. Head prefect's duty, of course, was to put a stern stop to that sort of thing. Worry about duty had never bothered Corky very much before the coming of McCann. But he did not want to be called over the coals by the Blighter. He did not want to be deprived of his prefectship, perhaps of his Sixth Form privileges!

He considered that Aubrey might have taken care not to mention the matter in his hearing. As for lending the breaker of bonds his key, wild horses would not have dragged that key from Corky's trousers pocket.

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Edited by Jack Payne

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In the Sixth, in the Fifth they discussed it, and as dusk fell over High Cosmo and blotted out the green meadows and the blue Atlantic, excitement grew. The juniors, of course, got hold of it. Ferguson of the Fourth carried the news to the Barrow, and spread it among the fags.

Ferg had been Compton's fag before Mr. McCann abolished fagging for the Fifth Form. Compton, stuck in most things, had been rather severe as a fag-master, and Ferg had not enjoyed his days of fagging. Compton's view had been that the fags should join up with the seniors in resistance to the Blighter's tyrannical decree.

Which view, he discovered, was not in the least shared by the fags? Had they gone on fagging of their own accord, indeed, unwhipped, just because they liked it, it would have been rather a favor for McCann. But it transpired that they didn't like it—that they were glad to get what of it and regarded this tyrannical decree rather as a charter of freedom.

Fagging for the Fifth was done as a deorum at High Cosmo. Only the Sixth had fags now, and it was a disconcerting fact that the fags of the Sixth contained a hope that McCann would carry the reform further.

Compton regarded this kind of thing as disloyalty to the school—for was it not the duty of the whole school to stand up as one man against the unspeakable McCann? For which reason Ferg, though he was no longer whipped as a fag, was sometimes kicked in the passages by his late fag-master. When Ferg found of what was planned for that night, he rushed into the Barrow to tell the other "men," greatly excited and delighted.

"Compton's asking for it!" said Ferguson. "Sitting up and begging for it, you men!"

"Checking McCann again?" asked Fatty Eya.

"More'n that!" said Ferguson.

"Not another busy trap?" grinned Leon. "He caught Chad in the last one. Peter was shirty for days."

"More'n that?" said Ferg.

"Well, what?" asked a dozen voices.

"Breaking out to-night to go down to Okeham?" said Ferguson impressively. "I heard it from Carter and Raymond—they were jaring in the quad. Lots of fellows know! Just as if the Venerable Beak was still here, you know?"

"Oh, I say!" said Donkin, otherwise the Donkey.

"The Blighter will catch him out!" said Ferguson. He wagged his forefinger to give emphasis to his words. "I tell you, McCann will spot him. I don't like McCann, any more than the next man—you know what pop's like in the Fourth when he barges in—but he's no fool! Some of them think that he doesn't know anything about the senior men breaking out after lock-up, but I tell you he knows—knows it all. Compton kicked me when he ran into me after three today." Ferg wagged an impressive

finger again. "He mayn't be here to-morrow to kick a man! You wait and see!"

"Oh, I say!" gasped the Donkey. "Do you really think McCann would dare to sack a man like Compton?"

"Like a shot!" said Ferg.

And a delightful thrill of excitement ran through the whole Barrow at the idea of the magnificent Aubrey getting sacked.

They knew of Compton's plan in the Sixth. Habtie declared that old Compton was a sportsman, and that he only wished he'd ask him to go. The dandy of the Fifth certainly was not likely to ask for the company of a junior in the Sixth. Had he done so, however, it was probable that this would have changed his mind.

For though all High Cosmo agreed that this was frightfully daring and sporting of Aubrey, not a man, senior or junior, wanted to break out with him. In this matter, the rebel of High Cosmo had to plough a lonely furrow. Which showed how great a change James McCann had already wrought in the School for Stickers!

**B**OB DARRILL was deeply worried. Like Ferguson, he knew that McCann was not a man to be trifled with. At toasting in Study No. 3, Bob's ragged face was almost as long as a fiddle, while Teddy Seymour looked unreasonably grave. Aubrey was cheery and smiling. He was enjoying the excitement that was thrilling the school. Common prudence would have dictated a little more caution.

The superb Aubrey declined prudence and caution. He liked to be

looked at and admired as the one fellow who had the nerve to stand up to the McCann man and treat a dished usher as a dished usher ought to be treated.

"You're a silly ass, old man!" Bob said, for about the tenth time. "What's the good of playing the giddy ox? The man's headmaster, and he means business. And it's a silly notion gone breaking out at night."

"No harm in goin' to a theatre, Bob!" Teddy pointed out.

"I know that!" granted Bob. "But fellows who break out don't generally go to theatres. It's against the rule to go out at night, and what's the good of pretending that it's not a necessary and good rule? McCann's bound to enforce it—he would deserve to be booted out if he didn't! You're doing wrong, Aubrey, and you know it."

"Quite!" agreed Aubrey. "That's the attraction in it!"

"Oh, don't be a silly ass!" retorted Bob.

"Which of you fellows is comin' with me?" asked Aubrey calmly.

"I'm not," growled Bob. "Nor Teddy, either."

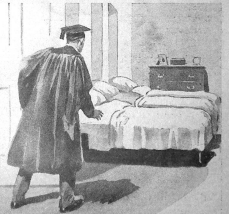
Compton raised his eyebrows.

"Are you Teddy's fag-master, by any chance?" he inquired.

"Don't be a silly ass!"

"You're repeatin' yourself, old bean! You're comin', Teddy? Ho a ho!"

Teddy hesitated, looking from one to the other. As usual, he was pulled two ways—between Bob's steady common sense and the attraction of Aubrey's recklessness. After all, where was the harm in going to a theatre? It was not as if it was an



Jirrey switched on the light, hoping to see three fellows asleep in bed. . . . For fully five minutes he stood in the empty dorm, thinking

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excursion to some shady place where they played cards or billiards—Teddy drew the line at that, though some High Combe men did not. It was only breaking a rule, after all! True, it was rather an important rule. Even Compton did not maintain that it would be a good thing, generally, for schoolboys to keep all hours and roam about at midnight at their own sweet will!

"You're not going, Teddy!" growled Bob. "Don't be a fool!"

"Teddy's not lettin' a pal down," said Aubrey. "Teddy's not gain' to grease up to McCann."

Bob rejoined.

"Who's greasing up to McCann?" he howled.

Aubrey raised a well-manicured hand.

"Dear man, Chard will hear you across the quad at that rate!" he said. "You're comin', Teddy?"

"Well, I'd like to," said Teddy, "but—"

"You're not!" growled Bob.

"Well, you see—" said the uncertain and unhappy Teddy.

"I'll look two seats!" drawled Aubrey, rising from the table.

They stared at him.

"How the blump are you going to look seats?" stammered Bob. "Asking leave to go down to Okeham from McCann?"

"I'm going to phone!" said Aubrey calmly. "The Blighter has a telephone in his study."

"You—you—you're going to look seats for to-night and see McCann's telephone?" articulated Bob.

"Why not?"

"Aubrey!" gasped Bob. "You and see—"

The dandy of the Fifth strolled out of No. 3, Darrell and Seymour looked at one another.

"By Jove!" said Teddy. "Old Aubrey's a card!"

Bob went after his reckless chum. He found Aubrey in the passage, chatting with some of the Fifth.

"Just six!" Aubrey was saying. "The Blighter always leaves his study at six! He's as regular as clockwork. But I'll give him five minutes."

"You're really——" exclaimed Carter. The Fifth Form men were buzzing with it! This was the climax!

If Aubrey had desired to add one more thrill to the excitement already reigning, this would have done it! Not only was he going to break out that night, in spite of McCann, but he was going to use the Blighter's own telephone to look seats at the Okeham Theatre. It was the limit!

"Aubrey, old man——" Bob's voice was almost hissing.

"Pathetic!" was Aubrey's reply.

From a window many eyes spotted the stocky figure of Mr. James McCann leaving the House for his usual walk on the Beaks' Grind, down the oobles to the banks of the Cleary. Aubrey waited till the Head was out of sight, then scurried along to the Head's study. Follows followed him there—they

watched from the corridor window for the possible reappearance of McCann. They heard Aubrey in the study ask for his number—the number of the box-office of Okeham Theatre.

Bob Darrell, torn between a friendly anxiety for Aubrey and an unfriendly desire to kick him hard, lurked in the half-open doorway.

"For goodness' sake, be quick!" he breathed. "You after me, suppose McCann came back!"

Compton glanced round from the telephone.

"The barge always walks out for an hour. But I'm not heatherin' about ushers, anyhow."

Bob shook a fist at him.

Aubrey turned to the telephone again. Calm and unharmed, he talked to the Okeham box-office. A dozen fellows heard him hock two stalls for that evening. When he rang off Bob yapped from the door:

"Now come out, you feathered!"

But Aubrey was not finished yet.

He rang up another Okeham number. The group of fellows at the doorway looked at him, and at one another, as he coolly and calmly ordered a taxi to pick him up in Coombe Lane at nine-thirty.

"Isn't he a card!" breathed the admiring Teddy.

"Isn't he a silly ass, and isn't he asking for the sock!" blazed Bob.

Aubrey put up the receiver and strolled out of the study. All eyes were on him. The Fifth Form men regarded him almost with awe.

"That's that!" drawled Aubrey, with smug calm. "If you'd like to come, Bob, I'll ring up and book a third seat."

"Idiot!" was Bob's answer.

Aubrey laughed and scuntered away. Breathless admiration from the Fifth was the reward of his superb nerve.

### At the Feet of the Steps!

**S**TUDY No. 3 became, at night, Dorm No. 3. After prep that useful creature, the boys' maid—of which species there were many at High Combe—wrought magic changes. Beds appeared from nowhere, and a luxurious study became a handsome and well-appointed bedroom for three. In the morning, during first school, a similar magic change was wrought, and the bedroom became a study again.

Last roll was at nine, taken personally by Mr. McCann in Big Hall. It was therefore impossible for the most daring breaker of bounds to get out before that hour. Cutting roll was now a thing of the past at High Combe, though in the dear old days the fellows had cut roll as often as they pleased. Chard, in those days, had generally taken calling-over, the Venerable Beak being much too venerable for such duties. The finest excuse had been good enough for Popularity Peter.

No excuse whatever was good enough for Mr. McCann. Even those great and glorious beings, prefects of the Sixth Form, were not allowed to cut roll; even Corkran, head prefect, had to be there to say "am" to his name. It was sickening, of

course, but then everything was sickening under the rule of the Blighter McCann!

Not till the fellows went to their various dormitories, therefore, could Aubrey carry on with his own little game.

This meant cutting off the early part of the show at Okeham Theatre, a sad change from the time when a fellow could do as he liked, and Popularity Peter would pretend to know nothing about it. Still, a show was a show, even if a fellow saw only half of it. Above all, it was a defiance of McCann—it was a glorious example set to a hesitating school, by a determined rebel who had no use for dashed wishes!

In Dorm No. 3 Compton did not change into his silk pyjamas. He changed into evening clothes, under Bob's avert and Teddy's admiring eyes. Undoubtedly he looked very elegant and handsome, in well-cut evening clothes, with a tiny diamond glancing in his speckles shirt, the dinner jacket that fitted him like a glove, the trousers that would have delighted a tailor's heart, the natty shoes that would have been the pride of a bootmaker. His tie was tied as only Compton of the Fifth could tie a tie. Carefully he polished his silk hat. Bob's avert grew even more saucy.

He was angry with Aubrey, but much more anxious for him. Follows-breaking out at night did not generally get themselves up in evening clothes and a top hat. It was like Aubrey! Okeham Theatre was not, perhaps, a particularly posh place. Still, he was going into the best seats, and he was going to dress the part. His taxi was already waiting at the corner of the lane a hundred yards from the school. He had not far to walk in his handsome outfit.

"Aren't you changin', Teddy?" he asked.

Teddy looked at Bob and looked at Aubrey. Long had Teddy been undecided. Having practically no will of his own, Teddy always did either what Bob did or what Aubrey did. Now the balance was inclining to Aubrey's favour.

Looking as handsome and debonair, he certainly seemed more attractive company than the gloomy, worried, scowling Bob. Teddy had got as far as removing his outer garments. He hardly knew whether he was going to get into his pyjamas or into posh clothes.

"Be a pal!" urged Aubrey. "I'm not sayin' there's no risk! I'm askin' you to share it."

That settled it for Teddy! He made a dive for his evening bags. Bob gave an angry snort.

"You're a fool, Teddy!"

"You came too, old chap!" urged Teddy.

"Idiot!" said Bob.

"Oh, leave Bob here!" drawled Aubrey. "If the Blighter comes spyin' about, Darrell can tell him what a good boy he is, and how he loves obeyin' his kind teachers!"

Teddy chuckled.

Bob became crimson.

Aubrey's handsome face, his beautiful shirt-front, and his incomparable tie had a narrow escape! Bob



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them to a waiting taxi. The taxi ran them swiftly over the mile or so to Okham. The theatre was not crowded, and it was easy enough to book a third stall for Bob.

They sat down to the show—Teddy Seymour fully enjoying it in his volubile way, and bewitching other matters from his mind; Bob, hifid and deaf to what went on on the stage, and wishing from the bottom of his heart that he hadn't come; Aubrey, superbly calm, rather patronising than enjoying the show, and wishing chiefly that Bob's was in evening clothes!

It was over at eleven. Bob would have rushed out to the taxi, which had orders to be waiting ready. But it seemed that it was essential for coffee and cigarettes in the lounge to come first. Aubrey had coffee and cigarettes; Teddy had coffee; Bob, who had neither, sat and scowled at them. It could not be denied that Bob was rather a wet blanket.

"Are you ever coming?" he growled at last. "The place is empty—we shall be turned out soon."

"Might stagger along!" assented Aubrey.

And they staggered along. As they came down the steps of the theatre in the glimmer of the lights, a waiting figure detached itself from a pillar and stepped to meet them. But it was not the expected taxi-man. It was quite another person.

"I hope," said Mr. McCann gravely, "that you have had a pleasant evening?"

### Whisked to the Wife!

**J**AMES McCANN, an Ferguson of the Fourth had remarked in the Barrow, was no fool.

Whoever he was—blighter, harpog, boomer, or whatnot—it was

absolutely certain that he was no fool. And, really, a headmaster would have to be a bit of a fool not to have noticed that there was something "on" that day at the School for Slackers.

It pleased Aubrey to let everybody know about it and wonder at his nerve and his dashing rocklessness; but that, of course, was not the way to keep it dark. What Mr. McCann may have noticed, he mentioned to nobody; what he thought, he kept to himself. But he did not go to bed at his usual early hour. Instead of doing that, he made a round of the senior dormitories.

That was really Charv's duty, and Charv had done it in his usual way. Charv's system was to lean his partly form on a massive wooden novel post at the foot of the stair, chat a few minutes with some of his Form, smile benignly at one of Carter's little jokes, and then his duty was done, and he would roll off to his rooms; not sure, by any means, that all the Fifth were in their dorms, but sure, at least, of popularity in his Form!

Jimmy McCann was more thoughtful. But his round of the senior dormitories was brief—for he started with Dorm Three. Compton was the man on whom Jimmy had a special eye, so he began and ended with them Three.

Tapping on the door, he opened it and scribbled on the light—hoping, but not expecting, to see three fellows asleep in bed. And when he saw three roused beds, Jimmy's face became very grave indeed.

He had expected this of Compton. He was not surprised at it in Seymour, a fellow easily led. But he had not expected it of Bob Darrell—a fellow of whom he had great hopes—in whom, in his mind's eye, he saw a future captain of High Coscombe—captain of a school no longer slack!

Jimmy had had a lot of knocks and worries since he had become headmaster of High Coscombe, but this was

a real blow to him. He stood staring at Bob's sleepy bed as if he could not believe his eyes.

If there was one thing Jimmy was determined to stamp out at High Coscombe, with a ruthless heel, it was breaking out at night—a game carried to great lengths under the Venerable Book. He hated the thought of expelling any fellow—he hoped and trusted to be able to pull things round at the School for Slackers without any such drastic step as that. But there was a limit—and this looked like the limit. Three of the Fifth were out of beds, late at night—one of them a fellow whom he liked and trusted.

For fully five minutes Jimmy McCann stood in the empty dorm, thinking. He had trusted Darrell, and Darrell had gone with the others—where to, and for what? Slowly a smile dawned on Jimmy's face, relaxing its grimaces. If he had been mistaken in Darrell, it was the biggest mistake of his life. But he was sure that he had not been mistaken.

This escapade did not mean that Compton had dragged a better fellow into anything shady. Whatever the three had gone out for, it was nothing dinky or rotten, or Darrell would not have joined up in it. It was a reckless and rebellious act, but it was not a matter that would drive him to expelling a High Coscombe man.

Which was a greater relief to Mr. McCann than any High Coscombe man could have imagined.

Compton, of course, was the leader, and Seymour followed him like a sheep. But Darrell? There was nothing sheep-like about Darrell, that was certain. A bound about junking might have done it—it was not so very long since Jimmy had been a boy himself, and he knew boy-nature. Five minutes of quiet thinking gave Jimmy a pretty clear view of the whole thing. And he smiled. He guessed where the three had gone.

Among the endless mysterious whispers that had floated about the school that day there had been mention of Okham Theatre. This was not a sample of dinky blackguardism that required drastic action; it was a reckless lark, to be dealt with much less severely—though with sufficient severity.

Jimmy went back to his study and got on the telephone. He guessed where they were, but he had to be sure. In a couple of minutes he was sure. Then he put on coat and hat and walked down the lane to Okham. It was a fine, starry night, and Jimmy enjoyed the walk. He was a great walker!

Outside the Okham Theatre Royal he waited with classical patience, his keen eyes on the leaving crowd till the three he wanted came out.

The three stopped dead as McCann greeted them.

Bob Darrell caught his breath, his face crimsoning. Teddy Seymour looked blankly dismayed. Even the superb Aubrey was taken aback, and for a moment lost his accustomed aplomb. They blinked at the Blighter.

Teddy was the first to speak. "Sniffed!" he said dizzily.

"Quite!" said Mr. McCann.

Aubrey recovered at once.



As they came down the steps of the theatre in the glimmer of the lights a waiting figure came to meet them. "I hope," said Mr. McCann gravely, "that you have had a pleasant evening?"

"These fellows came with me, sir," he said coolly.

"You need not," said Mr. McCann quietly, "tell me what I know already, Compton."

Bob looked out with an angry snarl. "Don't be a silly ass, Aubrey! We're all in this together!"

"I think," said Mr. McCann, "that that taxi is waiting for you. Please tell the man he will not be wanted."

The taxi was dismissed.

"Now come with me," said Mr. McCann.

Why he chose to walk back to the school, instead of taking the taxi, the delinquents did not know. But they were used to know.

Once outside Chatham Mr. McCann turned from the lane. The three, starting, stopped at the corner.

"Excuse me, sir," said Aubrey politely, "that's not the way! We keep right on for High Combe."

"Straight up the lane, sir," said Teddy.

Bob did not speak. He caught a faint, fleeting smile on McCann's face, and wondered what it meant.

"You will be kind enough to follow me," said Mr. McCann. "It is a beautiful night for a walk."

"We're not exactly fixed for a walk, sir," said Aubrey.

"Indeed!" said Mr. McCann.

They walked on.

THE way led them to the open moor. There was bright starlight, and a keen wind from the Atlantic. Certainly it was, as McCann said, a beautiful night for a walk. But fellows in light evening shoes were not, as Aubrey had remarked, fixed for walking on rugged moorland tracks.

Bob Darrell thanked his lucky stars that he had not changed, and that he still had his wool shoes on—put, stout shoes. Likewise was he thankful that he was not in a hatted shirt and a topper.

But what did the man mean? A headmaster who caught three fellows out of bed, at half-past eleven at night, might do, or say, all sorts of things—except what McCann did and said. Not a word about punishment—and even a word of reproof—only a remark that it was a beautiful night for a walk! Was the man mad?

By the direction McCann was taking, circling round the wide moor, they had about ten miles to cover to get back to High Combe. Was he so mad as a hatter?

Teddy really wondered whether McCann had gone cracked. Aubrey Compton very soon discovered that there was, at least, method in his madness. And a grin dawned on Bob's face.

They walked—and walked! McCann was tireless. That thick-set, stocky young man seemed impervious to anything in the nature of fatigue. Bob stood it pretty well. But Aubrey's face was pale with fury, and Teddy shivered and grunted dismally. After four miles McCann had to slacken his elastic stride, or his companions would have tumbled off behind him. Another mile and he had to slacken still more. But he did not

seem to mind. He was, apparently, prepared to make a night of it.

Bob, breathing hard, tramped on doggedly. Aubrey and Teddy limped on with aching legs and painful feet. On the slopes of High Top they almost looked down.

But there was nothing for it but to keep on. They were five miles from the school now, and those miles had to be covered to get back to bed. Bob haunted their thoughts like a fascinating mirage. They could not slacken their pace. They could not slacken their pace. They had chosen to take a night out. Now they were getting it—with a vengeance!

Bob Darrell, straggled and stammered of the Fifth Form, was tired to the very bone. Compton and Seymour were not merely tired—they sagged as they tramped. They almost doubled-up, like penknives. The pace slackened till it resembled the rate of progress of a snail.

Teddy Seymour began to think he would finish on his hands and knees, crawling. Aubrey limped on, too frankly fatigued even to hate McCann. He was hardly conscious of anything but a desire to rest. "Bob—Bob—Bob—if only a fellow could get to bed!"

Breaking out at night, darning the Blighter, winning the wonderful admiration of every fellow at High Combe—these were things of little worth compared with going to bed and going to sleep! Was that delightful walk ever going to end?

It did end, and it seemed almost too good to be true when Mr. McCann unlocked his private gate and let them into the school. The breakers of bonds felt then that it was beyond their remaining powers to utter across to the House. However, they battered. McCann let them into the House, and saw them into Dorm Three.

In the doorway the headmaster laid them a pleasant good-night. There was no sign of fatigue about the Blighter. He was very pleasant and cheerful.

"Good-night, my boys!" said Jimmy generally. "Next time I meet you out of bounds after lights out we will have another pleasant walk together—what?"

He closed the door and went.

Bob Darrell managed to get his things off and turn in. Aubrey and Teddy threw themselves on their beds just as they were. Their toppers fell on the floor and lay unheeded. Bob was asleep as soon as his head touched the pillow. Teddy gasped out one remark to Aubrey:

"You fool! You silly, idiotic, blithering, blithering jackass!"

Then there was silence, and slumber. Three fellows had to be excused first school the following morning. In second school they sat through the lesson like fellows benumbed. No, it was not a happy day for the breakers of bonds.

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