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STRAITS SETTLEMENTS

"Vengeance is mine!" vowed the Leader of the Fourth at the SCHOOL FOR SLACKERS . . . The Laughs are YOURS!

# FOURTH FORM AVENGER!

By

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The Warm Turns!

FERGUSON of the Fourth gave Compton the idea. It was quite unintentional so Ferg's part. When he cleaned his bike lamp in the bike shed that afternoon he had not the remotest idea of lurking with Mr. McCann, the new Head of the School for Slackers, any more than of lurking with the man in the moon. Ferg, indeed, was not feeling lucky as he dealt with the lamp. He was feeling more conscious than anything else.

It was an acetylene lamp, and had once been a very nice one. Ferg had bought it second-hand from a fellow who had probably bought it second or third hand already. Anyhow, it was old, rather leaky, never behaved itself as a bike lamp should, and smelt horribly. Carbide of calcium, at its best, could never be mistaken for either of those, and in Ferg's lamp it was at its worst.

In the Fourth the lamp was generally allotted to us Ferg's stink-bomb. Perhaps it was not cleaned out often enough. On the occasions when Ferg did clean it his friends deserted him. Nobody liked that bike-lamp, not even Ferg—who lived in hope of selling it to somebody and buying something less highly scented with the proceeds.

Needless to say, Compton of the Fifth was annoyed when he came into the bike shed and found the lamp cleaning process going on. The dandy of the Fifth was suspected of High Coombe of using acetylene, but certainly not the kind of acetylene that came from Ferg's lamp. Aubrey was struck by an colour that could almost have been cut with a knife. He halted in the doorway, sniffed, almost choked, and stared at Ferg, who was in his shirt sleeves, red-faced, considerably soiled, and savage in temper, scrapping out the half-transmuted and evil-smelling carbide.

"Urrgh!" was Compton's first remark.

Ferguson glanced round at him. He



Headless of the acetylene carbide from the old bicycle lamp—the odour which Ferg almost liked a garment—Compton grasped him by the collar and banged his head on the bench.

was glad that it was not Colman or Bandal, or any other prefect of the Sixth. Ferg had been warned not to let the secret of that lamp leak out, and he knew that he ought to have taken it out into the open air. But a Fifth Form man did not matter. Compton was not even his dog-master now, since the new Head had abolished tagging for the Fifth.

So Ferg, after a glance round, went on with the good work.

"You paid little tick!" said Aubrey.

Ferguson made no answer to that. But his eyes gleamed. Ferg had a temper, and that lamp had roused it. He was not in a mood to stand much from Compton. Who was Compton, anyhow? Had not Ferg, with his own eyes, seen him take six on the hips from James McCann? They called the new Head the Blighter, the Hagger, the Boss, and all sorts of fancy names, but at least Ferg considered he knew how to handle a wrangling ass! Ferg, of course, was down on McCann; everybody at High Coombe, except Harold of the Fifth, was down on McCann. All the same, Ferg admired the way McCann had handled Aubrey.

"Take that filthy object out of once, and chuck it away!" went on Compton.

Ferg did not budge.

"Do you hear?" snapped Aubrey.

"I'm not deaf!" said Ferguson over his shoulder.

Aubrey's eyes gleamed. Ever since McCann had abolished tagging for the Fifth Form Ferguson, save his dog, had been cheeky. Compton made a stride towards the junior. But he stopped. Ferguson at the moment was not nice to touch. The quantity of dimmed carbide he had turned out of

that disgusting old lamp was surprising. Some of it was on the bench, some on the floor, and some on Ferguson. It stung his clothes, it was thick on his hands, and there was a smear of it on his nose, and so Ferguson was extremely disagreeable to the fastidious taste of the dandy of the Fifth.

"Get out!" said Aubrey, breathing hard.

"Shan't!" said Ferguson.

The mere utterance of such a word from a junior to a senior showed how High Coombe had changed in the few weeks that James McCann had been headmaster. It was a word that no junior had ever flung at any senior before McCann blew in. It marked a stage in the deterioration of the School for Slackers.

HEADLESS of acetylene carbide of calcium, which clothed Ferg almost like a garment, Compton strode at him, grasped him by the collar, and banged his head on the bench.

Ferguson roared.

Compton, being no longer a dog-master, had no right whatever to beat a junior. But not only did he beat Ferguson's head, he banged it hard. Ferg's hapless upper lip lay on the bench.

"Yess-whooooop!" roared Ferguson.

"You cheeky little scoundrel!" said Compton, between his teeth. "Do you fancy you can chuck the Fifth because that dashed McCann backs you up? Take that—and that—and that!"

# Fourth Form Avenger!

Bang! Bang! Bang! Ferguson of the Fourth took them because he could not help it. There was plenty of muscle in Aubrey's elegant form, and Ferguson wriggled and squirmed in vain.

When Aubrey released him Ferguson rubbed his painful head with grubby hands. His eyes gleamed, and the blood of the Fergusons looked in his veins. He panted with wrath. Aubrey pointed to the lamp.

"Take that dilly thing out at once!" he said.

Instead of which Ferguson, grabbing up a double handful of diseased carbide, lurched himself at the steady of the Fifth. One beautiful he slapped in Aubrey's face, the other he distributed over the lumberer's waistcoat at High Cosmo's. Aubrey staggered back in astonishment and horror, and Ferguson did the distance to the door at about 60 m.p.h. and vanished!

## The Great Idea!

"LOOK at the dashed order!" said Aubrey Compton. Bob Carroll and Teddy Seymour looked. It was later in the afternoon, and the three strangely assorted but almost inseparable comrades of the Fifth Form were smothering in the quadrangle before tea.

Bob was rather silent and glum. Aubrey was smiling and debonaire. Teddy, as usual, was peace-making and propitiatory. There had been a fearful row in the Barrow, after the episode in the bike shop. Aubrey Compton, after a long cleaning process, had looked for Ferguson with a five-hat, and found him. And the whopping of Ferguson had been so drastic that Corkran of the Sixth, head prefect, had been driven to intervene.

His intervention had not come early enough to save the hapless Ferguson from the licking of his life. Wherefore Bob's drows, Aubrey was his pal and he hated to see him set like a brute. He had not hesitated to tell him that he had been a brute, and Teddy had had some hard diplomatic work in keeping the peace.

Now, however, all seemed calm and bright, as far as Aubrey was concerned. When he joined his friends in that stroll in the quad, Bob scowled and Ted looked uneasy. But Aubrey seemed to have forgotten all disagreements and to be in a high good humour. From which Bob deduced that he had thought of some new move in the game against McCann—a move over the Blighier being almost the only thing these days that could back Compton up. Peering the window of the Head's study, Aubrey drew attention to James McCann sitting within.

The window was wide open, letting in the fresh air and sunlight. The three Fifth Form men could see Mr. McCann sitting at the writing-table in the study, a pen in his hand, busily at work on a pile of papers. His close-cropped hair caught the sunlight with a red gleam. They saw his close-cut

profile—the straight, short nose and the steady, strong jaw.

It was the face of a man—a real live man. Virility seemed to radiate from Jimmy McCann, even as he sat quiet in his study. Just the man, Bob could not help thinking, who was wanted to infuse new life and energy into the School for Shacklers. Quite a contrast to the old Head—the much-regretted Venerable Beak! When High Cosmo fellows had glanced in at old Dr. Chetwode, the old Head, in his study, they had caught a gleam of silver hair. Now they caught a gleam of ginger!

"Bit of a change from Hip van Winkle, what?" said Aubrey, with a contemptuous curl of his lip. "Not even a grasshopper!"

"A man, at any rate!" granted Bob.

The stocky young man in the study did not look up. He was at work, and when Jimmy McCann was at work, he worked! That was another contrast to Dr. Chetwode. For many a long year the old lumberer had drifted aimlessly through existence, leaving everything in the hands of Chord, master of the Fifth. What use he had been to the school it would have pained any High Cosmo fellow to say.

Compton came to a halt, staring in at the window. His friends halted with him, a little uneasily.

"Sitin' in the headmaster's place, fancyin' himself a headmaster?" said Aubrey, without taking the trouble to lower his voice. "The governor must have been badly to send that bouncer here. What does he look like—third-rate commercial traveller, or waler in a tooth-race school?"

"Oh, crack it!" said Bob.

"He's made himself at home in Dr. Chetwode's study! That beast—in the old Beak's place! Chetwode and McCann—Dignity and Impudence!" said Aubrey. "Headmaster, by gum! A giant's note on swarthy lines, an odd old Shakespeare puts it."

"You're gettin' quite eloquent, old bean," said Teddy Seymour. "What about tea?"

"Rather a lark to turf the cheeky waker out of the Head's study, what?" drawled Aubrey.

His friends looked at him.

"Mad?" asked Bob.

"It's like his cheek to be sittin' there, as if the place belonged to him, the master's consider!"

"You see, he'll hear you!"

"I don't care if he does!"

Mr. McCann looked up at that moment. Certainly he must have heard the murmur of voices; whether he had caught any words or not, the Fifth Formers could not be sure. But his clear, steady, strong-grey eyes, legs as an eagle's, fixed on the three, and Aubrey's voice died on his lips. He hated himself for it—hated McCann for it still more—but he had to acknowledge the quelling force of that quiet, steady glance.

"Come away!" muttered Bob, reddening.

They moved off in silence. Aubrey's lips were hard set, but he did not speak. McCann's eyes remained fixed on them as they went—they could

almost feel those eyes—like lancets—pricking the backs of their necks, and they were glad to get out of range of the Head's window.

"Steady-eyed brute!" murmured Teddy.

"Cheeky and!" said Compton, between his teeth.

Bob grinned faintly.

"I believe he heard you," he said. "Some Beaks would have given you six for your cheek!"

Compton's eyes glittered. All the more because he had been quelled by that single look from McCann, he was ready for a row with anybody else. Teddy weighed in at once.

"Don't you men begin raggin' again," he said. "Look here, what about tea?"

"I'm walkin' down to Okham to tea," said Compton.

"You won't be back in time for lock-up, then," said Bob.

"I know that!"

"You've got leave out!"

Aubrey shrugged his shoulders. "Look here, you silly ass, what's the good of asking for a row with McCann?" demanded Bob hotly. "You can talk out of your hat about turling him out of the Head's study, but you'll take six from him if he gets shirty, just like a fag!"

"I'm going to turf him out of that study!" answered Aubrey coolly.

"I've said so, and I generally mean what I say! And I'm goin' down to Okham to tea, Comin'?"

"No!" snorted Bob, and he snarled angrily into the House.

Another slang from Aubrey's graceful shoulders.

"You comin', Teddy?"

Teddy, as usual, hesitated. Also, as usual, he assented. He walked out of the gates with Compton, and they strolled down the lane to Okham. After all, Mr. Chord would make it all right for them if they were late back. Peter Glard—"Popularity Peter"—stood by his Form all he could against the tyranny of the new Head!

IN the "High" at Okham there was a tea-lounge attached to a picture-house which patronised by High Cosmoes. But Compton did not head immediately for the tea-lounge. He stopped, to Teddy's surprise, at a cycle-shop.

Teddy went in with him, and was still more surprised by Aubrey's proceedings in that establishment.

Aubrey had called, it seemed, to buy carbide of calcium.

As Aubrey never used an acetylene lamp but had no imagination for the chemical, Teddy stared.

"What the thump do you want the stuff for, Aubrey?" he demanded. "I should have thought you had enough from young Ferguson this afternoon, from what I've heard."

"That gave me the idea," said Compton.

"What idea?" asked the amazed Teddy.

"The big idea!"

Aubrey explained no further. He gave his attention to the shopman. Seymour could only listen to growing astonishment. Aubrey, having

article of colicium for an imaginable reason, was very particular about it—and particular in a way that was amazing. It transpired, from the shopman, that there were different sorts of qualities of that smelly chemical. A rather more expensive kind, it seemed, was practically worthless—sayes, not at all offensive. There was a cheaper sort that stunk horribly.

An assay was an object with the dandy of the Fifth. Teddy naturally expected him to buy the more agreeable kind. Instead of which, he was very particular indeed to secure the very worst and most offensive variety that the resources of the Okeban establishment could furnish.

The shopman had some that had been in stock a considerable time and for which he did not seem to find a ready sale. Now he found the readiest of sales.

The quantity, as well as the quality, of Aubrey's purchase amazed the staring Teddy. Obviously, he did not want this stuff for a cycle lamp. He bought enough to last a dozen cyclists a year or more. It made quite a large bundle. Carrying a bundle was, of course, an absolute impossibility to the dandy of the Fifth. It was arranged for the shopman to have it delivered at the porter's lodge at High Counts. Compton paid for his purchase and strolled out of the shop with Teddy, who, by this time, was gazing with astonishment.

"What on earth—" gasped Teddy. Compton told him when they were sitting down to tea. Seymour stared, and then he gurgled.

"Oh, my hat! Ha, ha, ha!" Teddy was chuckling all the way back to High Counts.

They were, as Bob Darrell had warned them, late for lock-up. Jupp, the porter, took their names. The happy days were over at High Counts when fellows strolled in and out almost as they liked.

"Listen, or a listening?" asked Bob Darrell, when his friends came into Study No. 2.

"Head's study in the mornin'," answered Teddy, with a cheery grin. Bob stared at him.

"Anything funny in that?" he asked.

Teddy chuckled. "Well, yes, rather! You see, old Aubrey—"

"Shut up, Teddy!" said Compton. "Look here, we can tell old Bob Darrell—"

"Shut up, I tell you!" "Do you think I'd give you away?" roared Bob, getting very red in the face. He could see that there was something "on."

"You're so fond of the McCann animal?" snarled Aubrey.

Bob glared at his friend, stamped out of Number Three, and shut the door after him with a slam.

Bob Darrell did not know, and did not want to know, what was on, though he was aware, without doubt, that it was some move against the McCann. But when he came on his friends later in Big Study he caught a few words.

"I say, Aubrey, is a jolly dangerous stuff?" Teddy was saying. "I mean, it burns when it's dropped, you know, and it doesn't smell with-out, and—"

"Think anybody will be going down with a match?" asked Aubrey.

"Well, no. But—" Seymour seemed uneasy.

"Red?" said Aubrey. Which was all very mystifying to Bob Darrell!

### In the Glory Hole!

FATTY EYE, Dunkin, Lewis, Russ, and several other Fourth Form fellows—were rather nervous about Ferg—rather alarmed for him. They all knew what Ferg was up to, though it seemed too planning to be true. A fellow who hid a five-bat under his jacket, had a vengeful glitter in his eyes, and muttered incoherent remarks about getting his own back and making a beast of it up, and so forth—it was not difficult to guess what such a fellow had in mind. The blood of his ancestors was boiling, or rather seething, in the veins of Ferguson of the Fourth; like Timothius of old, it cried: "Revenge!"

Certainly Ferguson had had a most frightful whopping from Compton. Still, what could a fellow expect who lathered Aubrey—and especially Aubrey's clothes—with diluted outside? Anyhow, you couldn't get back on a Fifth Form man with a five-bat—you simply couldn't! All

Ferg's friends agreed on that. Only Werg did not agree!

His friends gave him rather a wide berth after recognizing in vain. A junior who planned to whop a senior, and succeeded a five-bat about his person with that object in view, was rather a dangerous acquaintance. Ferguson was left to his own devices, which suited him, for he had some staking to do. He had to catch Compton of the Fifth, looking for a chance of handling that five-bat.

He stalked him like a deer. Open attack was, of course, futile; the Fifth Form man, in such circumstances, would simply have taken away the bat and thrashed Ferg with it. Ferg hoped to catch him heading.

After tea—after Aubrey had come back from Okeban with Teddy—Ferg's fiery eye was hardly off him for a moment. He watched Number Three like a hawk. Fifth Form men noticing him hanging about their studies made it clear unto him that fags were not expected to hang about Fifth Form desks. Percival pulled his ear as a gentle hint, Raymond kicked him, Cortez chased him down the passage, and was astonished to see a five-bat slip from under his jacket and crash on the floor as he fled.

Aubrey Compton, going along to Big Study, noticed Ferguson in the act of holding that bat, and kicked him in passing—not because he had the faintest suspicion of Ferg's dandy



"Bottle" in the headmaster's place, thumping himself a headmaster!" glared Aubrey, without taking the trouble to lower his voice. "The school governors must have been lucky to send that boarder here!"

## Fourth Form Avenger!

intentional, but as a reminder that the episode of the bike-robbery was not forgotten.

"You wait!" said Ferguson, addressing Aubrey's back after he was out of hearing. And with the fire-brat in cover again, Ferguson kept an eye on Big Study.

When Compton came out of Big Study he walked away to the Form-rooms, unconscious and forgetful of the existence of an inconsiderable microbe as Ferguson of the Fourth. Ferg, cautious as a Red Indian tracking his prey, trailed him to the Fifth Form room.

Why Compton had gone to his Form-room Ferg could not begin to guess. But he had—and he went in and shut the door. After three o'clock in the afternoon Form-rooms at High Combs were silent and deserted, and were supposed to be locked. Mr. Chard seldom remembered to lock his Form-rooms. Ferg stopped at the door, his hand on the hidden bar. There was nobody in the passage—nobody likely to come along, for that matter. Was this his chance of pitching into the beast, as the beast so richly deserved? But what the thump was Compton up to in that room?

Ferg stopped, and adjusted his eye to the keyhole.

He had a back view of Compton, standing at the Form-room window, which was open. Ferg's eyes gleamed. Why on earth Compton had gone to a deserted Form-room to open the window and look out was a deep and impenetrable mystery. But there he was—his back to Ferg—and this was the glorious chance! A swift step behind him, a fearful swipe on his bags—perhaps there would be time for a couple of swipes—and then instant flight!

Fortune was playing into the hands of the avenger!

**B**REATHING hard, but very silent, Ferg opened the Form-room door and slipped in on tiptoe. Equally silently he closed the door behind him, but it should bang and alarm Compton. He tiptoed past the desks, towards the dandy of the Fifth. Compton did not look round. Clearly, he had no suspicion that anyone had followed him into the room. Ferg gripped the fire-bar tightly by the handle. Another step and—

There was a voice under the open window from the quad—the voice of Seymour of the Fifth:

"Here you are, Aubrey?"

"Good!"

A bundle was passed up, and Aubrey lifted it in. In doing so he turned, and Ferguson had just time to pop down under the desks, and keep out of sight, before he had turned round.

The chance had gone! Sniping Compton on the bags was no longer practical. Indeed, it was Ferg who would get the sniping if Compton spotted him there and guessed what he was after. Ferg, bitterly disappointed, and at the same time very

cautious, crouched under a desk in deep cover and stifled his breathing. Another chance might come!

Compton laid the bundle on the floor, and turned to the window again. Something else was passed up, and Ferg, peering, saw with amazement that it was a can, apparently containing water. Compton laid it beside the bundle, and closed the window.

In Ferguson's breast deadly vengeance was now giving place to amazed curiosity. What in the name of wonder was Compton up to? Ferg could guess that the bundle and the can had been passed in at the window because Compton wanted them in the Form-room, and did not want to draw attention by carrying them there. That was easy enough. But what did he want them there for? And what was the game?

Taking up the bundle in one hand and the can in the other, Compton went to a corner of the Form-room, where he set them down. Ferg's eyes—unsuspected by Aubrey—watched him from under the desk where Ferguson crouched.

In the corner Compton knelt down—almost regardless of the knees of his precious trousers—and prised up a section of the old oak planking of the floor.

Everybody who used the Fifth Form room—excepting Mr. Chard, the Form-master—knew that that board was raised and could be prised off the joists below. In the cavity underneath in the good old days the Fifth Form men had kept all sorts of things—"cribs" for use in Latin lessons, ginger-beer for light refreshment, novels and writing papers to pass lumpy hours when Chard stroked out to chat with other masters instead of doing his duty.

Ferg was puzzled. As Compton's leg, in the old days, he had known all about the Glory Hole, as the Fifth Form men called it. But since McEann had come, the glories of the Glory Hole were things of the past. Chard no longer stroked out and left his Form for an hour at a time. Novel-reading during class was an extinct custom. Light refreshments in lesson-time were no longer partaken of by the Fifth. As Ferguson knew, the Glory Hole had fallen into disuse. So what the dickens was Compton up to?

Ferguson wondered whether he was dreaming when Aubrey lowered himself through the cavity, and lifted down the bundle and the can, then, stepping his head, disappeared under the door.

"My only hat!" breathed Ferg, and rubbed his eyes.

He crept towards the aperture in the corner of the Form-room floor. Compton was gone. Looking down, Ferg could see a winking light—obviously that of an electric torch carried by Compton to light his way in those shadowy and spyglass recesses. There was a space of about five feet between the ancient oak floor and the equally ancient stone paving on the earth below. By stepping his head, even a tall fellow could walk about under the floor with ease. But

why any fellow should want to do so was a mystery.

Certainly Ferguson himself and other lags had once or twice explored those dim recesses. They had discovered nothing but dust and spiders. Compton, perhaps, as a lag in the Fourth, might have done so; but it was unimaginable that the superb dandy of the Fifth had any fancy for such dusty and dismal explorations. Yet there he was—with a light, a bundle, and a can. Ferg would have been much less keen than he was if he had not guessed that something very deep and mysterious was on!

What it was he could not imagine, but he hoped that it was something that would give him a chance of putting a spoke in Compton's wheel. This might turn out better than scoping the beast with a bat on his legs and then running for it.

Ferguson dropped through the aperture.

**I**T was easy enough to follow Compton by the winking light, and to keep in cover among the vast pillars and buttresses that supported the great fabric of High Combs School. Ferg had been over the ground before more than once, and when Compton stopped, Ferg knew where he was—directly under the Head's study. He was not surprised at that, for it was already dawning on him that this mysterious expedition was not unconnected with the feud against McEann.

Peering from behind a stone pillar, Ferg watched.

He saw Compton lay down the bundle and the can, and fit the torch on a buttress so that it showed him light. Then he unpacked the bundle, turning out a number of tins. From each tin he prised off the lid, then arranged them in rows on the stone. And into each of them he tipped water from the can.

Ferg sniffed. An old, familiar scent came to his nostrils. He might almost have forced himself back in the lake-shed, smelling that dreadful old lark of his!

He grinned. He understood!

The floor of the Head's study was of oak, thick and strong and oiled. Boys and there, of course, would be little crevices in it—more than sufficient to allow the passage of that evil scum. It was already ramoured in the Barrow that Compton of the Fifth had bragged that he was going to turn the Brighter out of the old Head's study. This was how he was going to do it! They would cover gaps that it was damped carbide that was seeping under the floor. They would think of drains, dead cats—anything and everything else. Why, by covering the Head's study would be killing as if a dozen stink-bombs had exploded there!

Ferg suppressed a chuckle, and crouched behind the pillar as Compton came back, carrying the light. The Fifth Formers passed within six feet of him, never dreaming that he was there. A minute later Ferg heard the sound of the lock being turned in the Fifth Form Room dropping into place. He was left in darkness—and an uncouthly small!

Ferg finished from behind the pillar, as he was just what Compton was doing a flash of understanding came to him—and he scolded. It was curbside—under the Head's study!

Ferg stopped his nose and then reflected.

"The dangerous one?" was his first reflection. "Suppose a fellow had struck a match and it had caught the spreading fumes of the carbide of calcium?" Ferg shuddered at the thought.

Not far ten minutes did he follow Compton. He had to grope his way in the dark. He pushed up, at last, the loose board in the Fifth Form Room and put his head out, and then had no time in sending.

Compton was gone for good. Ferguson was not! Ferguson had simply gone to borrow Fatty Poy's electric torch. A quarter of an hour later, Ferguson was stepping down into the Glory Hole again.

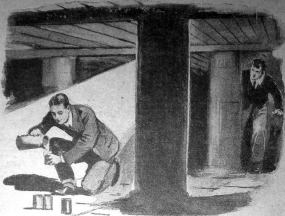
Ferg was grinning. He was no longer carrying the axes ball. He was not thinking of botting that beast Compton now. He knew a trick worth two of that!

Lighting his way with Poy's torch, he arrived under the Head's study. Then for some time Ferguson was busily occupied in carrying those evil-smelling fumes of carbide from where Compton had left them to the space under the Fifth Form Room.

It was a dusty, dirty, disagreeable, and evil-smelling task. But Ferg stuck to it like a man till the whole supply of evil-smelling chemical was garbed under the middle of the Fifth Form Room! Then, tired but satisfied, he clambered out into the Fifth Form Room, thankful to get away from such close contact with the awful stench of the carbide.

He was not quite finished yet! Having replaced the loose board, Ferg set to work with gimlet, screw-driver, and screws. He screwed down that board very securely. Anybody who wanted to step down into the Glory Hole again had a disappointment ahead of him. That portion of the Form-room floor was as immovable as the rest, or more so, when the patient Ferg was finished.

What Ferguson needed now was a wash. He went in quest of one. After which he told his friends in the Barrow that that beast Compton would be sorry to-morrow that he had



whipped him. And he fancied all the Fifth would be sorry, too!

### "They Don't Wash!"

CHARD sniffed. All the Fifth were sniffing.

It was most unpleasant. An odour, difficult to trace, but distinctly disagreeable, hung about the Fifth Form that morning.

It was a bright, fresh, sunny morning. The breeze that blew up the coast from the Atlantic was keen and invigorating. It was so fresh and pleasant that Peter Chard was feeling quite backed and cheerful—feeling almost as if he could endure McCann—till he came into his Form-room to take the Fifth.

Chard was puzzled. He asked Bob Darrell to set the windows wide open, which Bob gladly did. But that did not seem to improve matters very much.

The strange scent, instead of disappearing, seemed to intensify. Where it came from was a mystery. It did not seem possible that there was anything in the Form-room from which it could emanate. But after a time Chard asked the fellows to look round to ascertain whether any such thing was possible there. They found nothing.

Teddy Seymour gave Aubrey Compton rather worried looks. Indiscreet as that detested agent was, Teddy, having the clue, fancied that he could identify it. Compton was frankly puzzled.

He had gone to the Head's study before Fern with Teddy, expecting to find that apartment smelling most horribly. But there had not been the faintest whiff of scent in the Head's study. McCann had given them both

lines for being out after gates the previous day. Little enough Aubrey cared for that if he could have seen the Blighter driven out of his study by an invisible enemy. But nothing had happened, and he could only conclude that the agent had not yet found its way through.

It was simply amazing to find it so strong in the Fifth Form Room. That room was at quite a distance from the Head's study. It seemed incredible that the agent could travel so far and then find a way upward. Apparently, however, it had.

"I say, this is pretty awful, old chap!" Teddy whispered, in second lesson.

Aubrey shrugged his shoulders.

"Think what it must be like in the Blighter's study!" he answered.

Teddy drew what comfort he could from that.

All the windows were wide open. The door was set wide, too, in the hope that a through draught would clear the atmosphere a little. It did not!

Feverill stood up at last. He was looking quite pale.

"If you please, sir," said Feverill, "I—I think there must be something wrong with the drains! I don't think we ought to stay here, sir."

"It's too thick, sir!" said Carter.

"It is most singular!" said Mr. Chard. "It is very singular indeed! I fail to understand it! I—I will ascertain whether this—this disagreeable odour is perceptible in the other Form-rooms." Chard went to the door. "Keep your places!" he called.

Chard did not want McCann to come barging in and find his Form-room in disorder.

He went along the passage and

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spoke in Capes', master of the Fourth, and Pengo, master of the Sixth, in turn. Both were surprised. Neither had noticed any unusual commotion in his Form-room that morning. They came along and looked into the Fifth Form Room, sniffed, and backed away hurriedly.

"Extraordinary!" said Pengo.

"Very odd!" said Capes.

They retreated.

Chard went along to the Sixth, his Form, regardless of his order to keep their places, crowded out into the passage. It was getting altogether too thick in the Form-room. Chard or no Chard, Brighter or no Brighter, the Fifth could not stand it.

"It's divine!" said Ray as he said.

"Scandalous, I call it."

"Nicknamed!" said Burke.

"Horrible!"

"Here comes Chard!"

Chard came back—unaccompanied. Mr. McCann, busy with the Sixth, had declined to come with him.

"Boys—what!" trumpeted Chard, staring at his Form in the corridor.

"We can't stand it, sir!" gasped Powell. "We really can't, sir! There must be a dead cat under the door, or something."

"You must go back into the Form-room at once!" trumpeted Chard. "It is too long now to break!"

"His awful, sir!" wailed Powell.

"Horrible, sir!"

"Really, sir—"

Every voice in the Fifth was raised in protest. It was a trying moment for Popularity Peter. He liked to stand well with his Form. Gladly he would have given them leave from school. In the days of the Venerable Beck he would not have hesitated for a moment. But in the days of McCann he dared not. The secret in the Fifth Form Room was horrible, but the Fifth had to endure it.

Chard shepherded them back into the Form-room.

"You utter ass, Aubrey!" growled Teddy Seymour, with his hand-knifed to his nose. "You idiot!"

Aubrey shrugged. The most fastidious fellow in the Fifth was not enjoying this. He was puzzled, perplexed, and angry. How the dickens had that Someone else travelled in the wrong direction.

The bell rang for break. Never had the Fifth been so glad to hear that bell. Never had Chard been so glad to hear it. They almost tumbled over one another getting out of the Form-room. They sniffed, gasped, coughed. Chard was quite pale. It was a race to the fresh air of the quad.

COMPTON slipped away, and put his head into McCann's study for a moment—the Brighter was not there. His sole comfort was that if the smell was so fearful so far off as the Fifth Form Room, it must be thick enough to cut with a knife in the Head's study. He groined in above amazement, secretly able to believe his nose. There was no want whatever in the Head's study.

Had he made a mistake—the previous day—and loaded his cage in the wrong place? He was sure he had not—yet—! Hearing that deadly scent, Aubrey hurried back to the Fifth Form Room, nose deserted, and ran across to the Glory Hole in the corner. But he strove in vain to press on the loose board. It was no longer loose. It was fast. Gazing at it blankly, he saw that it was screwed down. He also discovered that the heads of the screws had been hammered, so that there were no longer slots for a screwdriver to be inserted—which meant that the screws could not be withdrawn.

Aubrey almost tottered from the Form-room. Somebody had been up to something—but who? And what? As he went out of the House a voice coughed his ears.

"They don't wash in the Fifth! Chard ought to make them wash!" It was the voice of Ferguson.

Aubrey glared at a group of the Fourth, intently discussing this strange phenomenon.

"What else can it be?" demanded Ferguson. "Talk about drains! All rot! Dead cats—pills! They don't wash! Chard doesn't make 'em wash! They do anything they like with Chard! McCann ought to make 'em wash!"

"Ho, ho, ho!"

Aubrey huffed himself at the group of lags, and they swaggered right and left, excepting. He went out into the quad, gritting his teeth.

"You blithering ass!" was Teddy Seymour's greeting.

"Oh, shut up!" scolded Aubrey.

"You've laughed it somehow!" howled Teddy. "There isn't a whiff in the Brighter's study—and we've been struck out of our Form-room. You parked it in the wrong place!"

"I didn't!"

"You must have!" Look here, it's up to you—get down into the Glory Hole and sniff the stuff!"

"I can't!" Some villain's scowled down the board!" growled Aubrey. "I can't make it out. Looks as if somebody must have spotted me and shifted the stuff—do you why has the board been screwed down? But who—"

"Oh, you see!"

Bob Barrett stared at the two of them.

"What?" he exclaimed. "Do you know anything about this, Aubrey?" He grasped it. "That's what you had on yesterday—your account of the Head, and we've got it instead! What is it?"

"Candles—the thickest, strongest, reckoning, Delect, petrified sort the house does could get hold of!" growled Teddy. "Under our Form-rooms—and we've got to sit over it and hatch it out!"

"Ho, ho, ho!" roared Bob. Bewick that morning was a relief from the smothered Form-room, but it was not otherwise enjoyed by the Fifth.

Business spread in High Combe that the whole thing was due to lack of washing on the part of the Fifth!

It was Ferguson who first thought of that brilliant solution of the problem—and he did not keep it a secret!

Chucky lags began to pass Fifth Form girls at a distance, holding their noses. When Compton went up to Treblegar of the Sixth, to speak to him, the captain of High Combe backed away quite hurriedly.

"I say, don't you come too jolly near!" said Treblegar.

Aubrey's eyes glowered at him. "You silly idiot, what do you mean?" he barked.

"Well, look here. Keep your distance," said Treblegar. "You're getting dashed unpleasant in the Fifth. I'm not saying you don't wash, of course, but—"

Aubrey barely refrained from planting a clenched fist in the eye of the captain of the school.

BY the time the bell rang for third school the Fifth were beginning to wish that they had not made so much fuss about that awful smell in the Form-room. The commotion on it were almost more disagreeable than the actual stuff. They, the High Combe Fifth, the most elegant Form in an elegant school, were stuck up fellows who did not wash!

They learned that Mr. McCann had come along in break and investigated, that he had discovered nothing, and had retired peeved. Chard led his flock to the French master's classroom for third school—the Fifth Form Room, at present, was really uninhabitable. It was learned that plumbers had been sent for to investigate drainage mysteries.

Meanwhile, Mr. McCann agreed with Mr. Chard that the Fifth Form Room should not be used, and it was left deserted, save by fellows who went along to stare into it, and sniff, and turn away making unimportant remarks about the Fifth. The Sixth, no longer so lefty a Form, was polite about it, though they made many jesting remarks to one another. But the Shell and the Fourth, as one man, declared that the Fifth had struck themselves out of their Form-rooms (even sheer lack of washing).

Not till the following day was the mystery revealed, when a search under the flooring for possible dead cats or rats revealed neither cats nor rats, but a numerous array of carbide tins.

Jimmy Mellan never knew who had put them there, but the Fifth knew, or thought they did, and every man in the Form told Aubrey Compton with great emphasis and all great length what he thought of his name blundering and bungling.

It is said that great to drink and it must prevail. But even after that discovery under the Fifth Form floor quite a number of fellows preferred to adhere to the original explanation of that odorous outbreak.

"They can say what they like," declared Ferguson of the Fourth, "but the fact is, you men, that the Fifth don't wash!"

The Sixth had a no accountably sharing plan—Next it took—do make Jimmy Mellan's (perhaps) safe —The Perfect's Secret! safe —Use for Public Property!