

GREYFRIARS! — ROOKWOOD! — ST. JIM'S!

The Penny **1½^D** Popular

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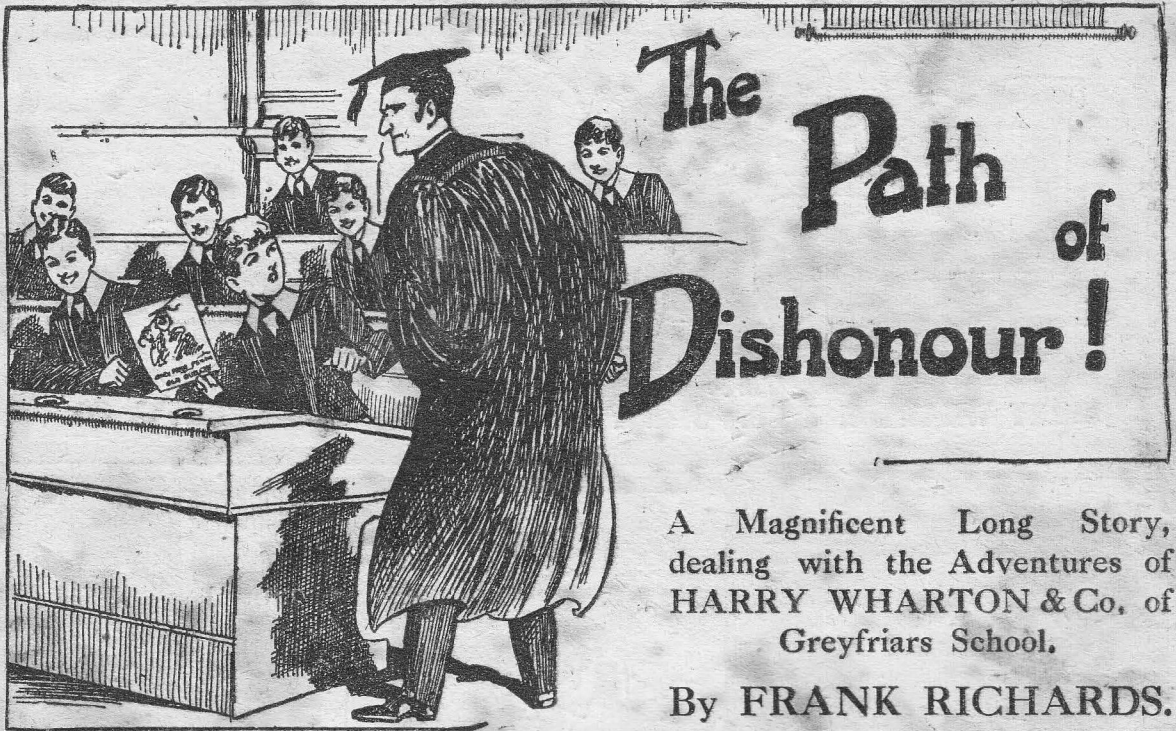
No. 35.
New Series.

Three Complete Stories of—
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A SHOCK FOR THE CADS!

(A Thrilling Scene in the Magnificent Long, Complete School Tale of the Chums of Greyfriars.)



A Magnificent Long Story,
dealing with the Adventures of
HARRY WHARTON & Co. of
Greystriars School.

By FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
The Sword of Defiance!

“NUGENT!”
Mr. Quelch's voice was not loud, but deep.

Morning lessons were in progress at Greystriars, and the Remove were studying—or supposed to be studying—English poetry.

Several of the juniors, however, were otherwise engaged. The next issue of the “Greystriars Herald” was being prepared for the press, and much of the preparation was being done in the Form-room, to the exclusion of Shakespeare and Byron.

Very little escaped Mr. Quelch's eyes, which the juniors likened to gimlets, on account of their penetrating powers. And Frank Nugent was obviously not swotting up English poetry, for a large piece of drawing-board was pinned to the desk in front of him, and he was sketching rapidly, as if for a wager.

“Nugent!” repeated Mr. Quelch, in the same ominous tone.

Frank Nugent looked up with a start. “Ye-e-es, sir?” he stammered.

There was no time to remove the drawing-board from the desk. And it was impossible to camouflage it in such a way as to make it resemble a poetry-book or a Latin grammar.

“What are you doing, Nugent?” rumbled Mr. Quelch.

“Dud-dud-ding, sir?”

“Yes. What is engrossing your attention?”

“Mum-mum-my attention, sir?”

“Do not reiterate my observations in that parrot-like fashion, Nugent! You were sketching something, were you not?”

“Yes, sir!” blurted out Nugent desperately.

“This is most interesting,” said Mr. Quelch drily. “And what, pray, is the subject of your sketch?”

“You, sir,” said Nugent.

And there was a chuckle from the class. Mr. Quelch stood transfixed.

“Do I understand,” he gasped, “that you were engaged upon a caricature of me—your Form-master?”

“That's so, sir,” said Nugent.

The amateur artist fervently hoped that Mr. Quelch would not desire to see his work of art. In that, however, he was disappointed.

Mr. Quelch advanced towards Nugent, and, looking over his shoulder, surveyed him self!

The Form-master would certainly never have recognised himself, had not the writing underneath the sketch explained whom it was meant to represent.

Frank Nugent had drawn a terrible-looking personage in cap and gown. The features resembled those of a gorilla, and a formidable-looking cane was clutched in the right hand. Nugent was a prophet as well as an artist!

Underneath the sketch was written:

“GREYSTRIARS PERSONALITIES.
No. 1—OLD QUELCHY.”

For a moment Mr. Quelch was incapable of speech or action. When he did speak his voice was like a thunderclap.

“So this is how you amuse yourself in class, Nugent! Stand out at once!”

Frank Nugent obeyed, and Mr. Quelch picked up his cane.

“I will endeavour to teach you, Nugent, that it is bad taste to caricature your Form-master! Hold out your hand!”

Swish, swish, swish!

“Now go to your place!” rapped out Mr. Quelch. “Tear up that absurd drawing, and throw it into the wastepaper-basket!”

Frank Nugent obeyed, and morning lessons proceeded.

In certain parts of the room, however, English poetry was being sadly neglected. Literary work seemed to be the order of the day.

Billy Bunter, who was scribbling away industriously, suddenly paused, and nudged Skinner, who was seated next to him.

“How many ‘k’s’ in ‘reflect’?” he whispered.

“None, you ass!” chuckled Skinner.

“Of course there are!” muttered Bunter. “I'm not sure whether it's one or two. Some people spell it ‘r-e-f-l-e-c-k-t,’ and others ‘r-e-f-l-e-k-k-e-d.’”

Skinner chuckled again—so loudly that Mr. Quelch's eye singled him out.

“You were laughing, Skinner!”

“I, sir?” said Skinner. “Certainly not, sir! I—I happen to be troubled with a slight cough.”

Mr. Quelch frowned.

“You will take two hundred lines, Skinner—one hundred for laughing in class, and one hundred for telling a falsehood. If you give offence again, I shall cane you!”

“Oh crumbs!”

There was silence for a time. Billy Bunter thoughtfully nibbled at his penholder.

“Look here, Skinney,” he grumbled at length, “you might be a sport and help a fellow out!”

“Bunter,” rapped out Mr. Quelch, “you were talking!”

Billy Bunter looked the picture of injured innocence.

“I wasn't, sir!” he declared.

“What?”

“You must be imagining things, sir.”

“Boy!”

“It's your nerves, sir, I expect,” said Bunter soothingly. “You're rather jumpy this morning, aren't you, sir?”

Mr. Quelch was certainly “jumpy.” He jumped then, at any rate.

“You are impertinent, Bunter! What is that on the desk in front of you?”

“My poetry-book, sir.”

“There is something else!” said Mr. Quelch grimly.

Billy Bunter bent down and closely scrutinised the surface of the desk as if searching for some minute object.

“I—I can't see anything else, sir,” he said.

Mr. Quelch took a quick stride towards the Owl of the Remove.

Billy Bunter made a frantic attempt to conceal his manuscript under the desk, but the Form-master was too quick for him.

“Hand me that paper, Bunter!”

“Oh, really, sir! It happens to be a private document—”

“Give it to me!” thundered Mr. Quelch.

Billy Bunter saw that the game was up. He handed Mr. Quelch the first-fruits of his brain, fervently hoping that the Form-master would be unable to decipher his spider-like scrawl.

But Bunter's hopes were ill-founded.

Mr. Quelch perused the manuscript, which was in the form of a letter to the editor of the “Greystriars Herald.”

It ran as follows:

“Sir,—I wish to put forward a strong complaint concerning the quality and quantity of the grub which is served up at this school. Take this morning's brekker as an example. It was badly cooked, and the bakon was like lether, and just as tuff. The eggs must have been lade during the grate war. And there wasn't enuff bread-and-butter to go round.

“It is sad to reflect—”

The letter broke off at this point, and so did Mr. Quelch's patience!

“Bunter!”

"Yessir?" gasped the unhappy Owl, his knees fairly knocking together.

"How dare you devote your time in the Form-room to criticising the school fare?"

"Oh crumbs! The—the fact is, sir," stammered Bunter, "I don't get nearly enough to eat. I'm running to waste through lack of nourishment, and I thought I'd better write to the editor of the 'Herald' about it, sir."

Mr. Quelch crushed the precious epistle in his hand, and threw it into the wastepaper-basket. Then he turned again to Bunter.

"Hold out your hand!" he snapped.

"Which one, sir?" said the fat junior, trying to gain time, in the hope that Mr. Quelch's attention might be diverted elsewhere.

The Form-master, however, was not to be put off his stroke. He seized Billy Bunter's right hand, and placed it in a convenient position.

Swish, swish, swish!

"Yow-ow-ow!" wailed Bunter.

"Now the other hand!" rapped out Mr. Quelch.

By the time the castigation was over Billy Bunter had decided that he would write no more letters to the editor of the 'Greyfriars Herald'—not in the Form-room, at any rate.

Profiting by the unpleasant experiences of Frank Nugent and Eilly Bunter, the other fellows who were engaged upon contributions for Wharton's periodical discreetly tucked their manuscripts away in their pockets, and devoted their attention to the English poets.

There was only one exception. That was Dennis Carr, the new boy.

Dennis seemed very interested in a letter which was spread out in front of him. He gave a start as Mr. Quelch called his name.

"Carr! Stand up and recite from memory the first poem in the book!"

Dennis Carr was caught napping, with a vengeance. He could not quite decide whether the first poem in the book dealt with the Battle of Blenheim or the Wreck of the Hesperus. So he compromised, and gave Mr. Quelch a little bit of each, as it were.

"It was a summer evening,

Old Kaspar's work was done;

And the skipper had taken his little

daughter

To bear him company."

There was a ripple of merriment from the class, but it died away as Mr. Quelch produced his cane.

"Carr!" he exclaimed. "Are you presuming to play a joke upon your Form-master?"

"Not a bit of it, sir!" said Dennis. "I'd as soon joke with my own grandmother, sir!"

"Your recitation is hopelessly mixed!" snapped Mr. Quelch.

Dennis knew that he must have made a bad blunder.

He tried to amend matters by reciting a further verse, which ran thus:

"Oh, father! I hear the sound of guns!

Oh, say, what may it be?"

"Ah, that I cannot tell," said he,

'But 'twas a famous victory!'"

Mr. Quelch appeared to be on the verge of an apopleptic fit.

"Come out before the class!" he commanded.

Dennis Carr obeyed.

Unconsciously, he carried in his hand the letter which he had been perusing with such interest.

"Hand me that letter!" rapped out Mr. Quelch.

Dennis gave a guilty start. He deliberately thrust the letter behind his back.

"Do you hear me, Carr?" thundered the angry Form-master.

"This is a private letter, sir—"

"How dare you disobey me?" exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

And he wrenched the letter from Dennis Carr's grasp.

For a moment it seemed to the startled class that the new boy would attempt to reclaim it. But Dennis apparently thought better of it.

Mr. Quelch scanned the letter with knitted brows. He seemed to be coming across quite a number of documents that morning.

The letter was addressed to Dennis Carr, and the sender was Cecil Ponsonby, the black sheep of Highcliffe. It ran as follows:

"The Retreat.
"My dear Carr,—We shall be expecting you this afternoon (Wednesday) at the above resort. Put on your best bib and tucker, and prepare for a really ripping time. There are plenty of attractive items on our programme.—Your sincere pal,
"CECIL PONSONBY."

Mr. Quelch turned to Dennis Carr.
"What and where is the Retreat?" he asked.

Dennis had quite recovered his coolness.
"It's a place of abode, sir—a charming country residence. I can't tell you its precise whereabouts. I'm rather shaky on geography."

Mr. Quelch frowned.
"I strongly suspect, Carr, that there is more in this than meets the eye. From what I know of Cecil Ponsonby, he is not a desirable person to associate with."

"Hear, hear!" murmured a voice, which sounded suspiciously like Bob Cherry's.

"Silence!" snapped Mr. Quelch. "Did you intend, Carr, to keep this appointment with Ponsonby?"

"Yes, sir."
"Then I fear you will be disappointed. You will remain in the Form-room this afternoon, and write five hundred lines, for inattention in class. Go back to your place!"

Dennis Carr sat sullen and rebellious during the remainder of morning lessons.

Life at Greyfriars was not working out as he would have wished. When the fellows weren't down on him, the masters were. Sometimes they were both down on him together.

Over and above these unpleasant experiences, Dennis had recently lost his mother.

Such a tragedy would have had a sobering effect upon most fellows. But the effect it had upon Dennis Carr was to make him wayward and reckless, not caring what happened. Hence his proposed acceptance of Ponsonby's invitation.

When lessons were over, the Famous Five assembled in Study No. 1.

"That fellow Carr's up to no good," remarked Bob Cherry. "He seems to have joined forces with Pon. And you know what that leads to."

Harry Wharton nodded.

"What did Quelch mean by the Retreat?" asked Nugent.

"That's where Pon addressed his letter for," said Johnny Bull.

"Yes; but what is it, and where is it?"

"It's one of Pon's shady haunts, you bet!" said Bob Cherry. "It's up to us to find out where it is, and to smash the place up, if necessary."

"If Carr chooses to get mixed up with those Highcliffe bouncers," said Nugent, "why not let him go ahead?"

"My dear fellow," said Wharton, "Carr's disgraced the Remove quite enough as it is, and we're not going to let him disgrace it still further. If he's up to any shady games with Ponsonby, he's got to be stopped!"

"We must preventfully stop him from going to the esteemed bow-wows dogfully!" said Hurree Singh, in his weird and wonderful English.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Famous Five had no love for Dennis. Rather the reverse. But they were not going to stand idly by and see him bring discredit upon the Remove.

"He can't do anything this afternoon, anyway," said Bob Cherry. "He'll spend the time in the Form-room, grinding out his report."

But Bob Cherry was wrong.

Dennis Carr had already made up his mind to set Mr. Quelch at defiance, and to keep his appointment with Ponsonby. When dinner was over, he strolled towards the school gates.

Mark Linley, who was anxious on behalf of Dennis, hurried after him.

"I say, Carr!" he said. "Have you forgotten your lines?"

"They can rip!" said Dennis.

The Lancashire lad looked grave.

"You're an awful ass!" he said. "Quelch will come down like a thousand of bricks!"

"Who cares?"

It was useless to argue with Dennis Carr when he was in this frame of mind, as Mark Linley knew from past experience.

"I know what an obstinate beggar you are," said Mark. "If you must go, you must, I suppose. But if you take my advice, you'll steer clear of Ponsonby!"

"Why?"

"Well, to put it bluntly, he's a wrong 'un!"

"Would you tell him that to his face?"

"Yes—and I'd emphasise it with a straight left, too!" said Mark Linley warmly.

Dennis Carr smiled.
"You're getting quite a Bolshevik!" he said.

"I don't know about that," said Mark. "But I detest Ponsonby. He'll try to drag you down to his own level."

Dennis shrugged his shoulders.
"Most of the fellows seem to think I'm beneath Pon's level already," he said.

"Well, the sooner you buck up, and give them cause to think otherwise, the better!"

Dennis Carr would have done well to take the advice of the quiet, good-hearted Lancashire lad—the only chum he had in the Remove. But good advice was wasted upon Dennis at this juncture. He had no use for it. His feet were already on the downward path—the path which led to ruin and remorse. The cute and cunning Ponsonby regarded him in the light of a pigeon waiting to be plucked. And the cads of Highcliffe were quite capable of doing the plucking!

"I mustn't hang about here any longer," said Dennis, "or Quelch may spot me. So long, Linley!"

And, nodding to Mark, he went on his way. Crossing the road, he plunged into the wood, in the heart of which was situated Ponsonby's happy hunting-ground—the Retreat.

Had Dennis Carr foreseen at that moment to what depths his folly would lead him, he would have turned back at once.

He was playing with fire—throwing caution and self-respect to the winds—and the sequel was likely to prove a disastrous one.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Not a Pleasant Afternoon.

"WELCOME, little stranger!"
Thus Ponsonby, of Highcliffe, as he threw open the door of the barn and admitted Dennis Carr.

The rest of the Highcliffe knuts were also present. It was rather a tight squeeze, and there was no ventilation, to speak of, in the barn; but the merry blades did not seem to mind.

"Step right inside!" said Gadsby. "Glad you've turned up! Makes quite a convivial little gatherin'—what?"

"Absolutely!" said Vavasour.

"Quite a family meetin', don't you know!" drawled Monson.

And Merton and Drury chimed in with "Hear, hear!"

Ponsonby closed the door, and locked it on the inside.

"Have you had any difficulty in gettin' here?" he asked.

"I'm supposed to be grinding out lines in the Form-room," said Dennis. "I ran foul of Quelch this morning. He happened to see your letter."

Ponsonby turned pale.

"You—you didn't give the show away?" he exclaimed, in alarm.

"Of course not!"

"Quelch didn't smell a rat?"

"Luckily," said Dennis, "you didn't commit yourself in your letter. If you had written, 'Join us at the Retreat in a game of nap, or something like that, it would have been all up. The only thing that puzzled Quelch was the situation of this place.'"

"What did you tell him, begad?" asked Merton.

Dennis grinned.
"I described the Retreat as a charming country residence," he said.

"So it is!" chuckled Gadsby. "It's the seat of Lord Ponsonby—our own pet Pon!"

Ponsonby turned to Dennis Carr.

"Are you goin' to let your lines rip?" he asked.

Dennis nodded.

"That's the spirit!" said Pon approvingly. "Let Quelch whistle for his merry lines! You've got a far more pressin' engagement."

Ponsonby unlocked the cabinet and produced the playing-cards. Gadsby offered Dennis a cigarette, and on this occasion the Greyfriars junior did not refuse.

Dennis almost blushed as he started to smoke. He felt quite a novice—a raw hand, so to speak—in the presence of these experienced "blades." He could not master the cigarette at all. In fact, the cigarette mastered him. He began to cough and splutter.

"What's wrong, kid?" inquired Drury. "Anyone would think that was the first cig. you'd ever smoked!"

"Ugh! It is!" spluttered Dennis.

"My hat!"

The Highcliffe juniors began to regard their

visitor as very green stuff indeed. He was plunging into their shady ways without having had any previous experience.

"What's the game?" asked Ponsonby, fingering the cards.

"Nap!" said Monson. "Does that suit you, Carr?"

"Down to the ground!" said Dennis. "There's just one thing, though. I'd prefer to see that pack of cards put back in the cabinet."

"Do you suggest—" began Ponsonby hotly.

"That they're marked? Well, one never knows. It's as well to be on the safe side. I've got an absolutely new pack here. We'll use these."

"Well, of all the cheek!" gasped Ponsonby, who did not relish being dictated to in this way. "Supposin' I insist upon my own pack bein' used?"

"Then I shall insist upon taking no part in the game!" said Dennis promptly. "It cuts both ways."

Ponsonby scowled. It was pretty evident that Dennis Carr did not trust him.

But it would not do to quarrel with his guest at the outset. Ponsonby had designs on transferring a goodly portion of Dennis Carr's money to his own pocket, and he did not mean to rest until those designs were accomplished.

"All serene!" he said. "We'll play with your new pack."

The game commenced, and Dennis Carr imagined that it would be impossible for Ponsonby & Co. to fleece him. But he imagined a vain thing.

The knuts of Highcliffe had no intention of playing fairly. They were not daunted by the fact that their own marked cards could not be used. Within ten minutes or so the cards with which they were playing were marked—very slightly, of course, but quite sufficiently for the Highcliffe sharpers.

Dennis Carr began to lose, and his recklessness increased with his losses.

He had entered the Retreat with three pounds in his pocket, and in the space of an hour that sum was the joint property of the Highcliffe fellows.

"Carry on!" said Ponsonby, dealing the cards.

"I'm cleaned out!" said Dennis briefly. Ponsonby professed surprise.

"What a pity, begad!" he exclaimed. "Just as your luck was about to turn, too!"

Dennis Carr rose to his feet and stumbled to the door.

The loss of the money did not weigh upon his mind a great deal. It was the atmosphere of the barn which made him unsteady on his feet. Dennis himself had only smoked two cigarettes—they were quite sufficient—but his companions had been smoking incessantly.

"Not chuckin' it already?" exclaimed Gadsby.

Dennis paused in the doorway.

"What's the use of going on?" he said. "You heard me say I was cleaned out."

"That doesn't matter a straw!" said Ponsonby. "Come on! We can trust you to pay up later on if you lose, which is unlikely."

Dennis Carr turned back in the barn, and the game continued.

Ponsonby & Co. continued their fleeing tactics. Before, they had made a pretence of losing every now and again; but they no longer troubled to introduce this subterfuge.

At the end of a further hour's play Dennis Carr was in debt to the tune of seven pounds!

The wretched junior rose to his feet, and there was finality in his tone this time as he said:

"I've had enough!"

"Sure you wouldn't like your revenge?" said Ponsonby.

"That's a pleasure I shall have to defer."

"Just as you like. You owe me five quids, and Gaddy two. Will you give us your note of hand?"

"Certainly!"

Dennis Carr produced his fountain-pen and made out two I O U's.

He was feeling rather scared by this time. He was not poor, but seven pounds was a sum which would take some raising. His father would refuse to send such an amount unless a satisfactory explanation were forthcoming.

Dennis told himself desperately that he must get his "revenge" at the first opportunity. But he could not go on playing now. He longed to get out into the open air, and to fill his lungs with its freshness.

Having handed the scraps of paper to

Ponsonby and Gadsby, Dennis again moved towards the door.

No sooner had he unlocked and opened it than there was a yell from without.

"Here's the place!"

"And here's the merchant we're looking for!"

Dennis Carr gritted his teeth with annoyance. For the intruders were the Famous Five!

"Shut the door again—quick!" rapped out Ponsonby in alarm.

Merton and Drury rushed to carry out the command, but they were too late. Harry Wharton & Co. came surging into the barn.

"Good-afternoon, Pon!" said Bob Cherry cordially. "Still up to your old shady games, I see!"

Ponsonby was on his feet, eyeing the invaders with nervous apprehension.

"Clear out!" he growled.

"Not just yet, my beauty! We've got a little account to square with you first, friend Pon. What do you mean by leading young Carr from the path of virtue?"

"He came here of his own accord!" snapped Ponsonby. "Ask him!"

"That's so," said Dennis. "I must say you fellows seem to be experts at minding everybody's business but your own! Why do you want to come barging in?"

"We're going to save the Form from disgrace!" said Harry Wharton. "And, incidentally, we shall save you from the sack!"

"Very kind of you, I'm sure!" sneered Dennis.

"You're coming back with us to Greyfriars!" growled Johnny Bull. "First of all, though, I should like to tell Ponsonby what I think of him."

And Johnny Bull told Ponsonby—by means of his fist. He shot out his right, and the leader of the Highcliffe "blades" went to the floor with a crash.

Gadsby, with an unusual display of courage, took command during Pon's temporary indisposition.

"Line up, you fellows!" he muttered.

"They'll be smashin' up the happy home if we give them a free hand! Make a fight of it!"

There were six Highcliffe fellows, and Dennis Carr lined up with them, making seven. But the Famous Five were more than a match for their weedy opponents.

The barn resounded to the tramping of feet and the thudding of blows.

Within a few moments the Famous Five had wrought great execution.

Gadsby rolled over on top of Ponsonby, and Merton and Drury pitched on top of both, completing the human pyramid. Vavasour had slunk into a corner, and had ceased to take an active part in the proceedings.

Monson and Dennis Carr alone kept their feet. They stood with their backs to the wall, fighting with the strength of desperation.

Then Monson curled up before a smashing blow from Bob Cherry; and Dennis Carr, seeing that Ponsonby and the others were not disposed to resume hostilities, wisely called "Pax!" He would cheerfully have gone on fighting, but he saw that there was no chance whatever of turning the tables.

In one corner of the Retreat was a long and stout coil of rope. Bob Cherry pounced upon it, and proceeded to string the Highcliffe victims together.

"What's the little game?" gasped Ponsonby.

Bob chuckled.

"We're leaving you here, strung up, until somebody comes along and releases you," he said.

"You—your dangerous lunatic!" said Gadsby. "Nobody will come along for hours and hours! We might be here all night in the perishin' cold!"

"In that case," said Frank Nugent, "you'll have the opportunity of reflecting on the error of your ways!"

Bob Cherry tied up the six Highcliffians in such a way that escape was impossible. Arms and legs were securely bound, and the only way in which Ponsonby & Co. could be released was to shout for help till they were husky. Even then it was quite on the cards that no one would hear them.

His task completed, Bob Cherry took the box of cigarettes from the little table and scattered them outside in the mud, the rest of the Famous Five trampling them underfoot.

The playing-cards were torn to pieces and thrown to the winds, and considerable damage was done to Ponsonby's furniture.

"Pity we haven't a bucket of tar handy,"

said Harry Wharton. "It would be nice to camouflage their chivvies."

Bob Cherry nodded.

"Our pleasures are never perfect," he said.

"Still, we've located this gambling-den," said Frank Nugent; "and, what's more, we've dealt with the gamblers."

"I sincerely hope they will be doomfully destined to remainfully stay here all night!" said Hurree Singh.

"Let us loose, you cads!" snarled Ponsonby.

"Not this evening!" said Bob Cherry. "Some other evening!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Famous Five then turned to Dennis Carr.

"You're coming back to the school under escort," said Wharton.

"Since you're five to one, I suppose I must," said Dennis resignedly.

"Make him march in front," said Bob Cherry. "He'll escape if he gets half a chance."

The procession started off through the wood. A doleful chorus followed them.

"Be a sport, Wharton!"

"Come back and untie us, begad!"

The Famous Five turned a deaf ear to these appeals. They went on their way, leaving the Highcliffe "blades" to their fate.

Billy Bunter was standing in the old gateway when the juniors trooped in.

"I say, Carr," said the fat junior. "Queelch's been hunting high and low for you all the afternoon! He's raving because you haven't done your lines."

"Let him rave!" said Dennis carelessly.

"He—he looks positively Hunnish!" said Billy Bunter. "He's fairly on the warpath, and no mistake!"

"Stand aside, porpoise!" growled Johnny Bull.

And prisoner and escort proceeded to cross the Close.

Just as they were about to enter the school building, Mr. Queelch rustled up. He looked like a raging lion seeking what he might devour.

"Carr!" he rumbled.

Dennis halted respectfully.

"You were ordered to write five hundred lines for inattention in class!" thundered Mr. Queelch. "Where are they?"

"I haven't concentrated my grey matter on 'em yet, sir," said Dennis.

Mr. Queelch resembled a volcano on the verge of an eruption.

"How dare you speak to me in that impertinent manner, Carr? Where have you been?"

"Out for a walk, sir."

The thunderclouds gathered on the Form-master's brow.

"You have kept your appointment with Ponsonby, in defiance of my orders?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, sir!"

"Then your conduct is inexcusable. Follow me at once to my study!"

Mr. Queelch swept away with rustling gown, and Dennis Carr followed. His afternoon's outing had led to a sorry sequel. But he was quite prepared to pay the Piper.

"I will waste no more time in words," said Mr. Queelch, picking up a cane. "You seem to me to be utterly incorrigible, Carr. Hold out your hand!"

Dennis Carr obeyed, and the cane bit into his palm with an acuteness which was nothing if not painful.

Mr. Queelch did not spare the rod; and the Famous Five, who heard the sounds of swishing from the passage, surmised that Dennis Carr was getting it hot.

"That saves us the trouble of giving him a dose ourselves!" said Bob Cherry. "I must say it serves the fellow right."

"We'll keep an eye upon him after this," said Wharton.

And the others nodded.

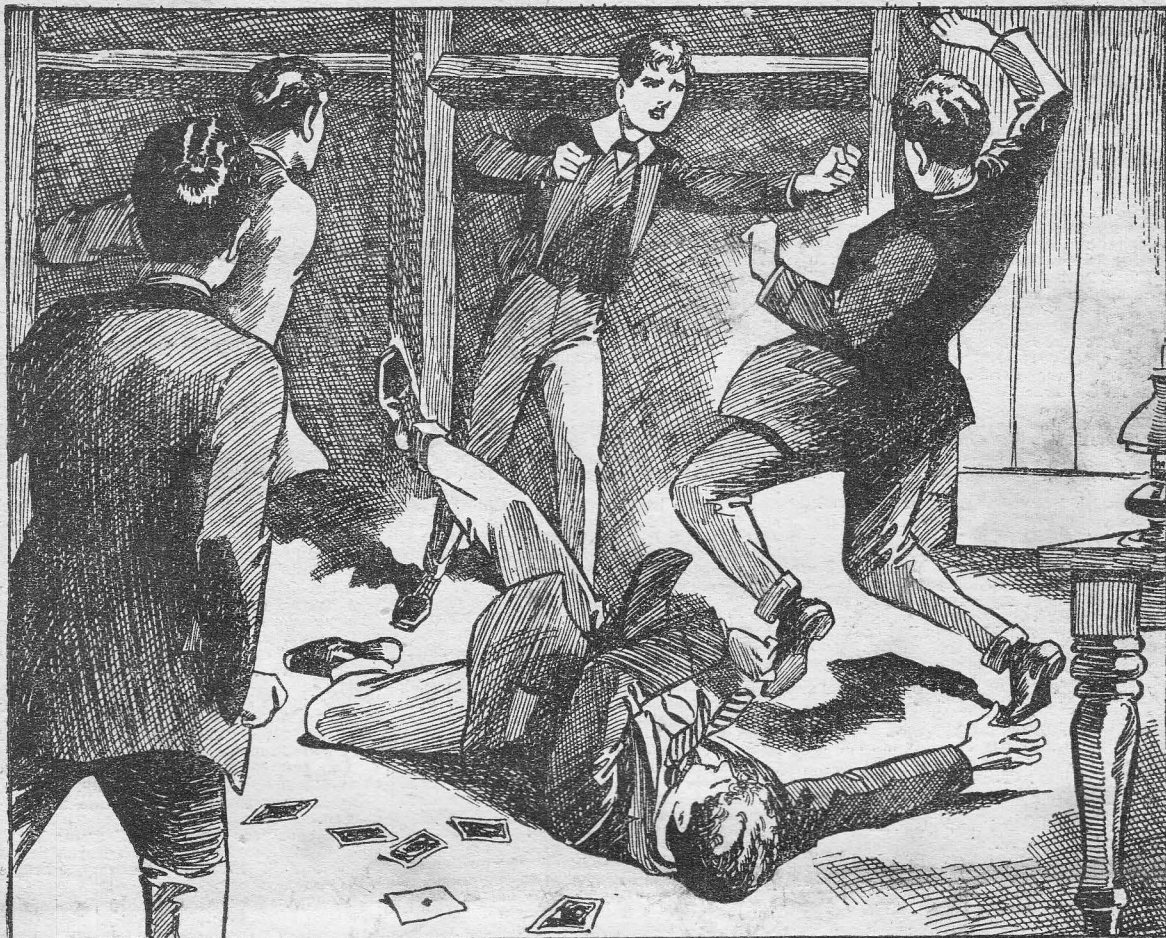
The door of Mr. Queelch's study opened, and Dennis Carr staggered, rather than walked, into the passage. He had received the worst "swishing" he had ever had in his life.

"It was your own fault, Carr," remarked Frank Nugent.

"That's right," said Dennis bitterly. "You chaps seem to have a mania for hitting a fellow when he's down. Pile it on! Never mind me!"

"Oh, come away!" said Harry Wharton impatiently. "He makes me sick!"

And the Famous Five left Dennis Carr to his own devices.



Dennis, with his back to the wall, hit out furiously. He meant to leave his mark on the leering faces of his opponents. The weedy Vavasour was disposed of with a smashing right-hander.

**THE THIRD CHAPTER.
Under Suspicion!**

PRESS day comes but once a year!" murmured Bob Cherry.
"I wish to goodness it did!" growled Harry Wharton, from the depths of the editorial chair in Study No. 1.
"Press day comes but once a week; when it comes, it makes you shriek!" said Frank Nugent.

"Not with laughter!" grumbled Johnny Bull. "Press days ought to be abolished. Why shouldn't we bring out the merry paper just when it suits us?"

Wharton laughed.
"I think the readers would have something to say about that!" he said.

"Ha, ha!" said Bob Cherry. "I think they would!"

The scene in Study No. 1 was an animated one.

The amateur journalists, in their shirt-sleeves, were going strong.

Harry Wharton was trying to write a bright and snappy editorial—a more difficult task than most people suppose.

Frank Nugent, whose pen-and-ink sketch of Mr. Quich had been ruthlessly consigned to the wastepaper-basket, was engaged upon another. Mr. Prout, the master of the Fifth, was the subject this time. Nugent was sketching Mr. Prout in miniature, with a tremendous Winchester repeater in the foreground.

Johnny Bull was at work on his pirate serial. His body was in Study No. 1; his spirit was far away on the Spanish Main.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, in a heroic attempt to master the English language, was writing a football article, entitled, "How to Shoot Goals Kickfully."

Bob Cherry, as the "Special Representative of the 'Greyfriars Herald,'" was writing an account of an imaginary interview with

Dennis Carr, entitled, "The Complete Blade."

It did not occur to Bob that he was placing Dennis Carr in a very dangerous position; for if that article happened to be read by the masters their suspicions would naturally be aroused.

The work did not proceed without interruption.

Peter Todd burst into the editorial sanctum with a Herlock Sholmes story, which he declared beat all its predecessors hollow. "I'll take your word for it," said Wharton. "Chuck the manuscript on the table, and clear!"

Peter, seeing that the youthful editor was not in a conversational mood, promptly obeyed.

He had scarcely taken his departure when his cousin Alonzo came in.

Bob Cherry groaned.

"Hand me down that dictionary, Harry!" he said,

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My dear Cherry," said Alonzo, blinking on the threshold, "I quite fail to see why you should require the aid of a dictionary whilst I am speaking to you. I will endeavour to make my meaning apparent even to a person of your low order of intelligence."

"Why, you—you—" spluttered Bob Cherry.

"I have brought you an article dealing with the spread of Bolshevism in Friardale," explained Alonzo.

"We want no Bolshevism here," said Nugent. "Clear outski!"

"I beg your pardon—"

"Buzz offski!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Alonzo Todd stood firm. "The number of people in Friardale who possess Bolshevistic tendencies is truly

alarming!" he declared. "I had occasion to patronise Mr. Clegg's shop, where I inadvertently smashed a number of eggs. Mr. Clegg was quite rude!"

"So I should think!" chuckled Wharton.

"Shortly afterwards," said Alonzo, "I stopped a man in the street—a casual passer-by—and requested him to mend a puncture in the back tyre of my bicycle. He told me to go and pawn my face. I regard that as a Bolshevistic sentiment."

Bob Cherry rose ominously to his feet.

"Door or window?" he inquired. "Choose your own exit!"

"My dear Cherry—"
"Bolshevism's spread to Greyfriars!" said Bob. "There's going to be an outbreak right now!"

So saying, Bob Cherry brought his boot into action, and Alonzo Todd was precipitated into the passage, where he collapsed like a spent football.

"Now perhaps we shall get a bit of peace!" said Wharton.

But he was wrong.

Other would-be contributors poured in at the rate of two a minute, and the Fighting Editor—Bob Cherry—had his hands full.

At length Harry Wharton was compelled to lock the door on the inside, and the editorial staff was able to settle down to work.

The "copy" was collected, and despatched post-haste to the printer.

Press day, with all its troubles and trials, was over.

A few days later the issue appeared, damp from the printing-press.

It so happened that Bolsover major, during lessons, scanned the "Herald" in vain for an article; he had submitted on the subject of prize-fighting. Unfortunately for Bol-

sover, the gimlet eyes of Mr. Quelch were upon him.

"Give me that paper, Bolsover!" rapped out the Form-master. "And take a hundred lines for making improper use of your time!"

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Bolsover.

And he handed over his copy of the "Greyfriars Herald."

Mr. Quelch, who was very interested in the amateur production—though he would not have admitted it in the Form-room—started to peruse the issue.

A faint smile flickered on his lips when he caught sight of Frank Nugent's representation of Mr. Prout. The master of the Fifth lent himself admirably to caricature; and the absurd size of the Winchester repeater in the foreground gave Mr. Prout a most ridiculous appearance.

Mr. Quelch turned over the pages. He tried hard to preserve a stern and dignified bearing, but at times his facial muscles twitched convulsively. Some of the contributions were certainly very funny.

At length the Form-master's eye rested upon the following:

"THE COMPLETE BLADE;

An Interview with Dennis Carr, of the Remove.

By Our Special Representative."

Mr. Quelch frowned slightly, and proceeded to read the "interview."

It commenced as follows:
"I came across Mr. Dennis Carr at his favourite retreat in Friardale Wood. A Flor de Turnip was clenched between his teeth, and I had to fight my way through a dense volume of smoke.

"Good-afternoon, Mr. Carr!" I said. "I am the special representative of the 'Greyfriars Herald,' and shall be pleased if you will favour me with an interview."

"Delighted!" he drawled. "Won't you have a cigar? I have them in all stocks and sizes. These Flor de Turnips are excellent, and the Jules Radishes are also hot-stuff."

"I don't smoke," I confessed.

"What a pity! Then perhaps you would like to bury your head in the whisky-cask?"

"I again declined.

"Have you backed any winners lately, Mr. Carr?" I inquired.

"Dozens of 'em, old top! I backed Lady Polly for the Dishem Stakes, and she finished second. There were two runners."

The conversation continued in this strain, and Bob Cherry's imaginary interview took up a page.

Mr. Quelch read it through, and compressed his lips.

He knew, of course, that the interview was entirely fictitious; but he believed this to be a case where a true word was spoken in jest.

When the class was dismissed, Mr. Quelch beckoned to Dennis Carr.

"You want me, sir?" said Dennis.

"Yes. I have reason to believe, Carr, that you have formed undesirable associations outside the school. Is that correct?"

"Yes, sir," said Dennis calmly.

"Then I warn you to break off those associations at once!" said Mr. Quelch. "You are an extraordinary boy, Carr. You do not appear to have formed any friendships in your own Form."

"I don't choose my friends from prigs and eads, sir."

"Carr! How dare you slander your school-fellows in that way?"

"What I say is quite true, sir. With one exception the fellows in the Remove are a set of outsiders. They've no use for me, and I've no use for them."

"You are utterly absurd, Carr! How do you imagine you will get through your school career if you are constantly at loggerheads with your fellows?"

"I wish I'd never come here!" said Dennis, in a sudden outburst of passion. "I hate the place! I've never been given a fair chance, and—"

"This is wild and foolish talk," said Mr. Quelch. "You must pull yourself together, Carr, and face the issues manfully. You cannot expect to have friends unless you show yourself friendly. There is still a chance for you to redeem your former folly, and to fill a good and useful place in the Remove."

Dennis Carr was silent.

"I shall keep my eye upon you," continued Mr. Quelch. "And I strongly urge you to break away from the evil influences which seem to be hampering your school career. Should you be discovered in the act of breaking the rules, you will be punished with the utmost severity!"

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"I shall keep my eye upon you," continued Mr. Quelch. "And I strongly urge you to break away from the evil influences which seem to be hampering your school career. Should you be discovered in the act of breaking the rules, you will be punished with the utmost severity!"

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And, with this threat ringing in his ears, Dennis Carr was dismissed from the Form-master's presence.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

A Night Adventure!

DENNIS CARR did not act upon Mr. Quelch's advice. Neither did he act upon Mark Linley's, which was couched in similar terms.

He lay low for a day or two, trying to think out ways and means of raising the seven pounds which was due to the fellows who had swindled him.

He wrote a letter to his father, but destroyed it as soon as it was written.

Mr. Carr was a moneyed man; but he would not dream of handing over seven pounds to his son unless he knew why the money was wanted. And it was more than Dennis dared do to tell him.

"I must have another plunge, and get my revenge!" muttered Dennis, at length. "It's the only way."

He did not stop to reflect that by having another "plunge" as he called it, he might only land himself further in the mire.

Ponsonby's system of marking the cards was infallible, and Dennis Carr's debt of seven pounds was likely to ripen into double that amount.

But Dennis had caught the gambling fever, and he persuaded himself—like many others who have lived to repent of their folly—that his luck must change. He could not remain on the losing side for ever.

There were difficulties in the way of meeting Ponsonby & Co. again.

The Famous Five were responsible for most of those difficulties. They kept a vigilant eye upon Dennis Carr, and none of his movements were hidden from them.

On several occasions Dennis started to walk in the direction of the Retreat, and each time he was conscious of the fact that he was being followed. It was not always by a member of the Famous Five, but by a fellow who was probably their agent.

Ponsonby wrote a friendly note to Dennis, wishing to know when he would again have the pleasure of Carr's company.

Dennis replied to this effect:

"Dear Ponsonby,—It is quite impossible for me to go within a mile of the Retreat—in the daytime, at any rate. Wharton's brilliant spy system is at work, and I am kept under observation whenever I venture out of gates. I am very anxious to try and recover some of my losses, and the only thing to be done in the circles is for us to meet at the Retreat after lights-out. I can manage it all serene at this end. How are you situated at Highcliffe? Please let me know.

Yours sincerely,
"DENNIS CARR."

As a result of this letter a midnight meeting was arranged at the Retreat.

Discipline at Highcliffe was very lax, and Ponsonby pointed out that he and his followers would have no difficulty in breaking bounds at night.

Ponsonby suggested a night for the meeting; and Dennis Carr, his heart beating faster than usual at the prospect of the adventure, and the hope of recovering his losses, propped himself up on the pillows on the night in question, waiting until the chime from the clock-tower announced half-past eleven.

It so happened that on this particular night a big football discussion, in connection with the forthcoming match with St. Jim's, took place in the Remove dormitory.

Various arguments arose concerning the formation of the Greyfriars team, and at ten o'clock the arguments were still going strong.

Dennis Carr lamented his ill-luck.

"Why did the silly idiots want to select this night of all nights for their beastly football discussion?" he asked himself.

As the night wore on the Removeites dropped off to sleep one by one. Most of the arguments were held over till next day; but at one end of the dormitory a heated controversy was still in progress.

"Russell's a better man than Bulstrode, I tell you—"

"Rats! Bulstrode could mop up the ground with Russell!"

"I tell you—"

"I tell you—"

"Look here—"

"Look here—"

The argument—which was between Donald Ogilvy and Peter Todd—got no farther than this interesting stage.

Bob Cherry, sitting up in bed, hurled a boot at the offenders, and hinted that there

were more to follow. Accordingly, Ogilvy and Peter Todd relapsed into silence.

At eleven o'clock, the muttering had ceased, and silence reigned in the dormitory, save for the loud, unbroken snore of Billy Bunter.

When the half-hour struck Dennis Carr concluded that the coast was clear.

"You fellows awake?" he asked softly.

"I am," said a quiet voice.

"Oh crumbs!"

"What's the game, Carr?"

It was Mark Linley speaking. Dennis thanked his lucky stars that it wasn't Harry Wharton.

The new boy slipped out of bed, and groped towards the bed occupied by Mark Linley.

"I'm going out," he explained, in a whisper.

Mark Linley caught at the speaker's arm.

"Don't you think it's high time you chucked this silly lot?" he said.

"Shush! Lower your voice, ass, or I shall be collared!"

"You'll be collared in any case, if you take risks of this sort," said Mark Linley. "You don't mean to say you've hired another caravan?"

Fresh in Mark Linley's mind was the episode of a week or two back, when Dennis Carr, finding the Remove dormitory too hot to hold him, had hired a caravan from a tribe of gypsies, and converted it to his own use as sleeping-quarters.

"The caravan stunt was squashed," said Dennis ruefully. "I'm not caravanning to-night. I've got an appointment to keep."

"With Ponsonby?"

"Yes. Go up one, Sherlock Holmes!"

"Look here," said Mark Linley. "As one who knows Ponsonby a jolly sight better than you do, let me repeat the advice I gave you before, and you ignored. Keep out of Pon's clutches. Friendship with a shady rotter of that sort is a stepping-stone to ruin!"

"You needn't alarm yourself on my account," said Dennis. "I sha'n't let Ponsonby twist me round his little finger, if that's what you mean."

"You seem very cocksure about it. But, as I say, you don't know Ponsonby."

Dennis was silent, but he was not impressed.

"I've been your friend, and I'm your friend still," said Mark Linley. "But if you go on like this you'll strain our friendship to breaking-point."

"You don't understand," said Dennis in a low tone. "If I didn't have something to distract my mind—something to make up for the horrible monotony of this place—I should go mad! And, apart from that, I've come to the conclusion that it doesn't pay to be decent. Whatever I do the fellows can't think any worse of me than they do already."

"I'm beginning to lose patience with you!" growled Mark Linley. "No one will ever convince me that a gay life is worth while. In fact, I don't know why it's called a gay life at all. It's dull—beastly dull—and sometimes tragic as well. You'll find footer a jolly sight more healthy!"

"Footer!" said Dennis scornfully. "What's the use of my playing footer? I'm barred from the Remove eleven—"

"If Wharton sees that you're running straight he'll be only too pleased to give you a trial."

"Never!" said Dennis, with conviction. "If he played me it would mean dropping one of his bosom pals from the team. And I can see him doing that!"

"Take my advice and get back to bed," said Mark Linley.

Dennis glanced at his luminous wrist-watch.

"Quarter to twelve!" he muttered. "My hat! I mustn't keep Ponsonby waiting any longer!"

"You're a silly young idiot—"

"Thanks for the compliment! Now I'll be going."

"If you must take the risk, for goodness' sake mind your eye!"

"Trust me!" said Dennis, with a low chuckle.

And he stole softly from the dormitory.

For quite a long time after he had gone Mark Linley remained staring into the darkness.

The Lancashire lad felt almost inclined to go after his wayward chum, and bring him back to the dormitory by sheer force. But he knew that Dennis Carr would never submit to treatment of that sort.

In the stillness of the night Mark Linley distinctly caught a faint sound from below. He knew what it was. It was the sash of the box-room window being raised.

"Hope to goodness there's no one on the prowl!" murmured Mark. "If he's caught in

the act of breaking bounds he'll be sacked, as sure as fate!"

Five minutes later the wakeful junior heard another sound.

It was the creak of a door this time. Listening intently, Mark Linley heard the soft pad-pad of slipped feet on the staircase.

Two thoughts flashed into the junior's mind—firstly, that the possessor of the slipped feet was Mr. Quelch; and, secondly, that the Remove-master would discover Dennis Carr's vacant bed, and take action accordingly.

Mark Linley realised only too clearly what discovery would mean to Dennis. Quick as thought the Lancashire lad left his own bed and got into Dennis Carr's.

He drew the clothes up about his head, and waited.

The footsteps drew nearer. Through the sheet which screened his face Mark Linley saw a gleam of light.

"Are you asleep, Carr?" It was the voice of Mr. Quelch.

Mark Linley breathed deeply and steadily. The fate of his little scheme was in the balance now, and he knew it.

Even if Mr. Quelch was satisfied that Dennis Carr was in bed and asleep, there was a chance that he might discover Mark Linley's empty bed. And in that case Mark Linley would find it very difficult to render a satisfactory explanation.

For a moment—it seemed an age to Mark Linley—the Form-master stood by the bedside.

Then, apparently satisfied that Dennis Carr was sleeping soundly, Mr. Quelch withdrew. Shortly afterwards his footsteps died away on the stairs.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Price of Folly.

"HERE we are again!"

Ponsonby sang out the greeting. There was a creaking of twigs close to the old barn, and the next moment the moonlight played upon the features of Dennis Carr.

"You're late!" said Gadsby. "It's nearly twenty-past twelve!"

"I came as quickly as I could," said Dennis.

The night was cold, and the new-comer warmed his hands at the stove, the heat of which made the stuffy little barn stuffer than ever.

Looking round, Dennis Carr saw that the Highcliffe "knuts" were present in full force.

"It beats me how half a dozen of you can break bounds without being spotted!" he said.

Ponsonby chuckled.

"It's as easy as pie!" he said. "Mobby, our Form-master, is sometimes on the prowl, but we could easily square Mobby if we were collared."

"Absolutely!" said Vavasour.

The card-players seated themselves round the little table, and the game commenced.

Dennis Carr, though he tried not to betray the fact, was very excited.

He wanted to clear himself of his debt of seven pounds, which clung to him like a millstone. He wanted to get square with Ponsonby and Gadsby.

And his ambition soared higher than that—he wanted to win a few pounds over and above for himself.

He started well. A little pile of silver began to accumulate on the table in front of him.

Inspired by his early success, Dennis increased the stakes. Where he had played for shillings he now played for half-crowns.

Dennis prayed that his good luck—as he thought—might continue.

It didn't.

The little pile of silver melted away, and the Greyfriars' junior began to lose—slight sums at first, which increased as the game went on.

His debt of seven pounds soon swelled to ten. And at this point Dennis, with a haggard look, jumped to his feet.

"I can't go on!" he muttered.

Ponsonby eyed the speaker in apparent surprise.

"You always seem to chuck in your mit just when your luck's on the turn!" he remarked.

"I owe ten pounds—"

"Well, what of that? You can easily raise a trifling sum like that from your pater."

Dennis shook his head.

"He'd never stump up!" he said ruefully.

"Oh, that's all rot, you know!" drawled Gadsby.

"I sha'n't let you down," said Dennis. "But I can't guarantee to square my debts for a month or so—"

"A month!" exclaimed Pon in shocked tones.

"Yes; perhaps longer."

"Look here," said Ponsonby, "if you think we're goin' to wait all that time you're mistaken!" Ponsonby's smooth, smiling manner had quite vanished now. "Speakin' for myself, I want the money within a week!"

"Same here!" said Gadsby.

Ponsonby glared at his victim.

"If you don't pay up within a week," he said, "I shall know what to do!"

"What will you do?" asked Dennis, in alarm.

"Write a nice, breezy letter to your pater, tellin' him that his hopeful son—the apple of his eye, begad!—is on the road to ruin."

"You wouldn't dare—" began Dennis.

"Oh, wouldn't I?" growled Ponsonby.

"We'll jolly soon see about that!"

Dennis Carr stood leaning against the wall of the barn, with his hand pressed to his throbbing temples, feeling utterly at a loss.

On no account must his father know of these "little flutters."

Mr. Carr was a man of rigorous principles and uncertain temper. His son would receive no mercy at his hands; indeed, Dennis had long ago realised the futility of expecting any.

"Of course," went on Ponsonby, his voice softening a little, "there are other means of raisin' the wind, quite apart from tappin' the pater."

Dennis Carr looked up eagerly.

"Tell me how!" he exclaimed.

"There are plenty of fellows in the Remove who are rollin' in riches. There's that stuck-up son of a slackin' peer, Mauleverer. He's your study-mate, I believe. Get on the right side of him, an' ask him for a loan."

"I don't ask favours of fellows who aren't my friends," said Dennis.

Ponsonby gave a snort of disgust.

"You'll have to sink some of your high-flown scruples!" he said. "Who are your friends, by the way?"

"I've only one—Mark Linley."

"That factory cad!" sneered Ponsonby.

Dennis Carr clenched his hands.

"Don't you breathe a word against Linley!" he exclaimed. "Why, you're not fit to black his boots!"

There was an angry murmur from the Highcliffians.

"Go for him, Pon!"

"Don't let the cheeky little beast insult you like that!"

Ponsonby advanced towards Dennis Carr.

"Apologise!" he rapped out.

"Apologise—to a bounder like you?" flashed Dennis.

Smack!

Ponsonby's open palm came with a report like a pistol-shot on the Greyfriars fellow's cheek.

Dennis Carr was in that desperate frame of mind that welcomes a fight. He clinched with Ponsonby, and the next moment the old barn was the scene of a fierce encounter.

The Highcliffe juniors had no sense of fair play.

They sprang to Ponsonby's side; and Dennis Carr staggered under a shower of blows.

"You cads!" panted Dennis. "Stand aside! I'll tackle you one at a time, but not altogether!"

The only answer was a mocking laugh.

Dennis, with his back to the wall, hit off furiously. He would be overpowered, he knew; but before that time came he meant to leave his mark on the leering faces of his opponents.

The weedy Vavasour was disposed of with a smashing right-hander, and then—

Crash!

Gadsby was knocked backwards against the table, which was overturned.

The lamp rolled on the floor, and was extinguished, the barn being in darkness.

Dennis Carr was quick-witted enough to seize this opportunity of escape.

He groped his way swiftly to the door; and, meanwhile, the Highcliffe fellows, hitting out in the darkness, unwittingly pommelled each other.

By the time the hue and cry was raised Dennis Carr was well on the way to Greyfriars.

After a time he slackened his speed, and walked slowly and thoughtfully.

He had enough to occupy his mind.

He had come to Greyfriars with his pockets well-lined, and he had squandered his substance in riotous living.

Nor was this all. He was in debt to the tune of ten pounds, and he could not, for the life of him, see how he was going to raise that sum within a week.

But it had to be done. Ponsonby's threat to write to Mr. Carr was not an empty one. He had been in grim earnest; and the recent scuffle in the barn would have the effect of quickening his resolve.

"I simply must raise the cash, somehow!" muttered Dennis, as he tramped along.

But how was it to be done? The skies would not suddenly open for ten currency notes to flutter to his feet. And borrowing from his schoolfellows was out of the question. Even Lord Mauleverer, although rather an ass in money matters, would not be prepared to extend a helping hand to Dennis, whom he despised.

"That was the worst of it," he reflected. "They all despised him—with the exception of Mark Linley. Even Bunter despised him."

The thought stung Dennis to the quick.

"To think that I'm looked down upon by a worm like that!" he muttered.

And then came the haunting knowledge that Mark Linley was quite right—that going to the dogs was a dull business.

Dennis had sought relief from his mental troubles by chumming up with the cads of Highcliffe—a proceeding which had aggravated and increased his troubles.

He felt that the toils were closing in upon him, that there was no way of escape.

If only he could raise ten pounds!

He was still casting about in his mind for ways and means when he re-entered the box-room window, and stole up to the Remove dormitory.

Why not take Mark Linley into his confidence? Why not tell him the whole wretched story, in the hope that he would suggest a way out?

"That you, Carr?"

It was a whispered question from the Lancashire lad's bed.

Dennis tiptoed in that direction.

"Yes," he muttered. "It's me."

"You're awfully late!" said Mark Linley.

"It's past two o'clock!"

Dennis Carr seated himself on his chum's bed.

For some moments he was silent, debating in his mind whether to take Mark Linley into his confidence.

Finally he spoke.

"I've been an awful fool!" he said.

"You have!" agreed Mark Linley, with candour.

"A bigger fool than you think, Linley!" said Dennis.

Mark Linley sat up in bed. He noticed that Dennis Carr's face was almost ghastly in the moonlight.

"What's wrong?" he asked quickly.

And then, whilst the Remove slept, Dennis Carr told his miserable story. He told everything, and did not spare himself.

Mark Linley listened to the recital in silence—sympathetic silence, it seemed to Dennis.

"So you owe those cads ten pounds?" said the Lancashire lad, at length.

"Yes. Heaven knows how I'm going to raise it! I—I suppose you're not in a position to help me?"

"I could let you have two pounds," said Mark.

"You're a brick! But that would still leave eight. What on earth shall I do?"

"Those Highcliffe cads have your I O U's for the money, I take it?"

"Yes."

"Then we must get them back!"

"But how?"

Mark Linley had to confess that this was a poser. To break into the rival school by night, and attempt to recover those scraps of paper which spell ruin to Dennis Carr was out of the question.

"We'll see what can be done," said Mark Linley. "And now you'd better nip into bed. I thought I heard someone stirring."

Dennis Carr, his nocturnal escapade at an end, crept back to bed.

Mark Linley's cheering words had lightened his gloom somewhat, but he felt far from happy.

There were breakers ahead, the thought of which struck a chill into the heart of the foolish, undisciplined fellow who, thus early in his school career, had set foot upon the Path of Dishonour!

THE END.

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 55.



LOVELL'S TRIUMPH.

A New Long, Complete Story
of JIMMY SILVER & Co., the
Chums of Rookwood.

BY OWEN CONQUEST.



THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Jimmy Silver's Prospects.

"TOP-HOLE!"

Thus Jimmy Silver, captain of the Classical Fourth at Rookwood. He was sitting in his study after church-parade on Sunday morning, and the topic of conversation was football. There had been a match between the Modern House and the Classical House the day before, and the Classics had won by three goals to one.

But that was not what was causing so much jubilation in Jimmy Silver's study.

Bulkeley, the captain of the games for the Rookwood, had personally refereed the junior match for the purpose of finding any talent amongst the juniors which would justify their being given a chance to play for the school.

Bulkeley was not of the kind that believed in playing only seniors in the school matches, if there was a junior good enough to take part.

Apparently he considered that one junior at least deserved a place in the team, for, on coming off the ground after the Modern House match, he had told Jimmy Silver that he would take part in the trial match for the purpose of selecting the Rookwood eleven!

Hence Jimmy Silver's jubilation. The prospect of getting his "cap" for footer was an alluring one.

"Absolutely top-hole!" he said again. "I can't stop still. What do you say to a long walk this afternoon?"

His chums surveyed him critically.

"You're not going to get a fat head, Jimmy, are you?" asked Raby. "This business of honours being thrust upon you—"

"Ass!" said Jimmy Silver witheringly. "As if I should!"

Raby, Newcome, and Lovell chuckled. They had not the slightest fear that Jimmy Silver would "swank" about his cap when he got it.

"A walk's the stunt!" said Newcome. "Do old Jimmy a heap of good for Wednesday, and will pass the time away to-day as well."

Thus it was arranged. As soon after dinner as possible, Jimmy Silver left Rookwood with his chums for a long, steady tramp in the surrounding country.

The mere prospect of receiving the coveted cap seemed to make Jimmy Silver feel fitter than he had ever felt in his life before.

Monday would find him up early for a run and a swim before breakfast, and in the evening his chums would help him down at the playing-fields with a football.

But the plans of men and mice, we are told, oft gang a-gley.

Three juniors watched Jimmy Silver & Co. leave Rookwood, and their faces were far from pleasant to look upon. They were Peele, Gower, and Lattrey, probably the most contemptible fellows at Rookwood.

"He'll get a bigger idea of himself than ever!" sneered Gower. "He'll wear his cap as if it were a crown—swanker than he is!"

Needless to say, Jimmy Silver was not popular with the cads of the Classical Fourth.

"I wish I could get hold of a wheeze that would stop him playing in the match on Wednesday!" said Peele. "I'd—I'd do anything to get the cap business put off!"

Gower and Lattrey nodded. They understood perfectly the feelings of their chum.

"No good wishing!" said Lattrey shortly. "Try and think of one—that's what you want to do!"

Gower did not answer, but he looked very thoughtful as he and his chums walked slowly towards the playing-fields. The three cads liked to lounge under the bushes that bordered the fields in preference to taking a long walk like most of the juniors.

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Jimmy Silver's bright prospects seemed to annoy Peele & Co. immensely. They sat under the bushes until nearly tea-time, hardly speaking a word, so intent were they on thinking out some wheeze whereby they could upset Jimmy Silver's game for Wednesday.

The day passed, and still there was nothing thought of. Monday came, and went, and Peele & Co. began to give up hope of preventing Jimmy Silver from playing in the match.

"Look here, you fellows," said Gower on the Tuesday morning before the trial game, "we've simply got to do something. Why, it's the hardest knock he could have—not to play in the trial match to-morrow!"

"All very well for you to speak of doing something," said Peele irritably. "I've been awake half the night trying to think of something, but I'm blessed if I can strike anything likely to act!"

"Well—" began Lattrey.

He broke off as Jimmy Silver & Co., laughing and talking together, passed down to the posts for a while.

"Oh, to-morrow—to-morrow!" Jimmy was saying. "What will you bring forth?"

"A brand-new cap for a little Classical!" chuckled Newcome.

Peele & Co. could not hear any more that was said, for the simple reason that Jimmy Silver & Co. had passed beyond earshot.

"The rotters!" said Gower vehemently.

"I wish I could give them something lively for the morrow instead of a cap!"

"We could entice him to the woodshed—" began Lattrey.

"Rats!" interrupted Gower rudely. "That stunt is as old as the hills. Enticing chaps away is cheap stuff, anyhow!"

"Well, think of something better!" snapped Lattrey surlily.

"We've only got to-night to work something!" said Peele slowly. "I suppose we couldn't very well bash him about in bed?"

"Ass!" said Gower witheringly. "Besides, that's likely to be found out, and I'm not looking for the sack if you are!"

Gower hit the right nail on the head there. Nothing that had a spice of danger to themselves would do, however well it suited their purpose and upset Jimmy Silver's prospects.

"I'll get hold of something before the night's out," said Gower firmly. "I'm not going to sleep until I do!"

And Gower was as good as his word.

When Bulkeley came to turn lights out in the Fourth Form dormitory Peele & Co. were already in bed. That was unusual, for the cads of Classical House were generally last in bed, and last to rise in the morning.

When the clock was striking the half-hour after ten, Gower rose quickly from his bed and nudged Peele and Lattrey, who slept on either side of him.

"Come on!" whispered Gower. "It's ten-thirty!"

Peele turned over sleepily.

"Leave it alone," he said drowsily. "Let the rotter get his cap!"

"Hang it, we're not going to give in now, surely!" whispered Gower angrily.

Peele growled something unintelligible to Gower, and crept out of bed and quickly dressed. Lattrey was roused, and needed no second urging to rise.

Five minutes later, and the cads of the Classics were climbing the wall that enclosed the quadrangle at Rookwood, and a moment afterwards were walking quickly down the lane towards Coomb.

"Now something's moving!" said Peele. "I'm not sorry I got up now!"

"You might be, if you continue to speak so loudly!" snapped Lattrey.

Peele glowered in the darkness, but did not reply verbally.

"Now, where's Mr. Policeman Boggs?" said Gower quietly. "He's the johnnie we've got to find!"

It sounded curious that Peele & Co. should be anxious to find P.-c. Boggs, the village constable. One would have thought that as the three cads were breaking gates they would be only too anxious to dodge the policeman.

Coomb was deserted when they arrived, and only a few lights burned in the cottage windows. The villagers were firm believers of the old axiom of early to bed and early to rise.

Suddenly there came to the Rookwoodites the sound of heavily-tramping feet.

"Boggs!" said Gower shortly. "Now, don't forget what you've got to do!"

The others nodded, and the juniors hid behind the corner and waited for the officer to come along. P.-c. Boggs came steadily enough, with the measured tramp he was so accustomed to.

As he came to the corner where Peele & Co. were hidden, the three juniors suddenly dashed out, and, as if by accident, bowled the police-officer off his feet.

The next moment, and P.-c. Boggs' hat was knocked over his ears, and he could hardly make out if he was standing on his hands or his feet.

"Young varmint!" he shouted. "I'll have the law on you! Help! Police!"

"Come on, Silver!" said Gower loudly.

"We'll have to bunk!"

And the three juniors settled away back towards Rookwood. They did not pause until they were at the school wall.

"That'll do the trick!" chuckled Peele. "Old Boggs will come tramping up to Dr. Chisholm to-morrow, and say that he was knocked about by Silver. That puts the lid on Silver's game for to-morrow!"

Helping each other up, the three juniors climbed the wall, and dropped into the quadrangle with scarcely a sound. Running across the asphalt, they climbed noiselessly into the staircase-window from which they had left, and reached the dormitory without being seen.

They did not risk speaking as they silently undressed, and crept stealthily into bed. But once between the sheets, Peele could not help chuckling over the success of their despicable plan.

"I'll wager old Boggs' nose is nearly flat!" he whispered to Gower. "There won't half be a dust-up when he comes to the school to-morrow!"

"Go to sleep, ass!" growled Gower, sotto voce.

And five minutes later Peel & Co. were fast asleep, in which happy state was Jimmy Silver, all unconscious of the fact that Peele & Co. had broken gates that night for the sole purpose of stopping him playing in the trial match on the morrow.

Had he known, it was quite likely that Jimmy Silver would not have slept with such a happy smile on his lips.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Detained!

"MASTER SILVER is wanted by the

"Ead, sir!"
The Rookwood page poked his head round the door of the classroom of the Classical Fourth, just as lessons had started on the Wednesday morning to make that announcement.

Mr. Bootles peered over the top of his spectacles.

"Very good!" he said, and turned to the class. "Silver!"

"Yes, sir!"

"Dr. Chisholm requires you to attend his study!" said the Form-master. "Please go at once."

"Yes, sir!"

With a puzzled frown, and followed by the still more puzzled frowns of his chums, Jimmy Silver left his place in the class and walked quickly from the room.

His knock upon the Head's study-door was immediately followed by a stern command to enter. The Head was frowning ominously, and on the opposite of the desk at which he sat stood P.-c. Boggs, the constable from Coomb.

"Ah, Silver!" said Dr. Chisholm. "Police-constable Boggs has come to me this morning with a story I find hard to believe—"

"Ho!" interrupted P.-c. Boggs, with a heavy snort. "Which I beg to point out, sir, that it ain't no story I've told you!"

Dr. Chisholm waved his hand impatiently. "He says, in fact, that you assaulted him last night!" went on the Head. "I—"

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver. "My hat!"

The Head frowned more ominously than ever.

"Please do not make use of those ridiculous expressions, Silver!" he said quickly. "P.-c. Boggs asserts that very late last night—I believe you put the time at nearly eleven, Mr. Boggs?"

"Yes, sir; it was—"

began P.-c. Boggs.

But Dr. Chisholm interrupted him again. "Well, at that time, Silver, you should have been in bed and fast asleep. Yet it appears you were not only out of school, but you deliberately assaulted P.-c. Boggs by knocking him over and smashing his hat—I should say, helmet—over the ears!"

Jimmy Silver simply stared. He was utterly taken aback by the surprise of the accusation.

"Well, Silver, I presume you have something to say?" said Dr. Chisholm icily.

Jimmy Silver found his tongue at last.

"Sir, I've never heard anything so ridiculous in my life!" he said hotly. "P.-c. Boggs has made a mistake!"

"Which P.-c. Boggs ain't made no mistake!" said the constable stoutly. "I assures you, sir, that while I was on my beat last night, a-doing of my duty as a police-officer of the district, I was knocked over!"

"That doesn't signify that I knocked you over!" said Jimmy Silver quickly.

"Ah, but jest you wait, my lad! Then when I was on the ground my helmet was knocked over my ears, and a voice says, 'Come on, Silver! We'll have to bunk!' I 'card it as plain as plain!"

Jimmy Silver looked astounded.

"You've made a great mistake!" he asserted hotly. "I've certainly not started going out at nights—this of all times!"

"What do you mean, Silver?" asked the Head.

"I'm to play in the trial game for the selection of Rookwood's team—football team, that is—and it takes place this afternoon," explained Jimmy Silver; and his eyes flashed for a minute at the prospects before him. "And look here, Mr. Boggs. You say somebody else shouted out 'Come on, Silver!' That shows there were others besides me, doesn't it?"

P.-c. Boggs shook his head.

"I ain't worriting myself with others. I 'card someone say your name, and it's you I'm going to take to the police-station along with me!" said P.-c. Boggs stolidly. "I—"

"To the station!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver in acute dismay.

"Hexactly!" said Mr. Boggs firmly. "The law is dead nuts on them that knocks about police-officers!"

Jimmy Silver, almost gasping for breath, looked appealingly towards Dr. Chisholm. The Head's face showed his keen distress.

"Really, Mr. Boggs," he said, "I think you can leave this matter to me!"

The constable shook his head obstinately.

"It's my duty to take him to the station, sir!" he said. "And as a law-abiding citizen yourself, it isn't for you to try and stop me in the execution of my duty!"

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

"But I can't go! I've got to play in a footer match—"

Even the Head was forced to smile. It was not likely that the law would postpone an arrest so as to allow the prisoner to play football.

"Footer, or whatever you call it, ain't got

nothing to do with me, my lad!" said P.-c. Boggs. "You'll have to come with me!"

And P.-c. Boggs put on his helmet, as if to signify that as far as he was concerned the matter was ended. All that remained to be done was to take Jimmy Silver to the police-station.

But the Head had other views on the subject. He turned to the constable.

"Pray wait a minute, constable!" he said. "I will speak to the inspector on the phone."

P.-c. Boggs looked annoyed. He seldom had a chance of marching a prisoner through Coomb, and even if it was only Jimmy Silver, a junior from Rookwood School, he felt that the arrest would give him a lift in the eyes of the inhabitants.

Dr. Chisholm took up the receiver and gave the number of Coomb Police-station.

"Ah! Is that you, inspector?" he said a moment later. "Dr. Chisholm speaking."

Yes, Rookwood. One of your constables has come here to effect the arrest of one of my juniors. I should be glad if you would leave the matter over for a day or two. What's that? Oh, yes! I'll answer for the boy concerned. It's all right? Thank you!"

And the Head rang off. P.-c. Boggs hardly needed telling that the arrest would not take place. He left the Head's study with his nose high in the air, and stalked out of the school.

Dr. Chisholm turned to Jimmy Silver as soon as the door had closed behind the constable.

"Now, Silver, we'll talk the matter over," said the Head. "It sounds preposterous to me that you were out last night. Your position in the Classical House is one that carries responsibility, and, above all, is one in which you are expected to set a good example to the juniors of the House."

"I assure you, sir," said Jimmy Silver quickly, "that on my honour I was not out last night! Unless—unless—"

"Yes, Silver—unless what?"

"Unless I was walking in my sleep, sir!"

"Do you usually walk down to Coomb in your sleep, Silver?"

"N-n-no, sir."

"Then don't waste time in making frivolous suggestions! Apparently your name was mentioned by somebody else, as if you were there. Do you know of anybody who was out last night?"

"I was asleep, sir, and could not say if anybody went out."

"Your friends are Lovell, Newcome, and Raby, I believe?"

"Yes, sir."

The Head touched a bell on his desk, and told the page, when he appeared, to fetch the three juniors from the class-room.

They arrived in a state of considerable anxiety. They knew not for what the Head required them, and Jimmy Silver's anxious face only served to make them the more anxious when they stood facing the Head.

"Where were you last night, Lovell?"

Lovell jumped.

"Me, sir?" he ejaculated. "In bed, sir!"

"And you, Newcome?"

"In bed, sir, of—"

"Were you out last night, Raby?"

"Certainly not, sir!"

Jimmy Silver turned his head so as not to catch the amazed expression of his chums. They were expressive of such acute surprise as to be almost humorous.

Dr. Chisholme frowned.

"Do you positively assert that you were not out, Silver?" asked the Head quickly.

"Most emphatically, sir!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Then I will investigate further," said Dr. Chisholm. "In the meantime you four juniors will be confined to the House! You understand, you are not to leave the Classical House on any pretence whatever!"

Jimmy Silver almost staggered towards the Head's desk.

"But—but—but the match, sir!" he stammered.

"Don't talk to me about football, Silver, at a serious time like this!" snapped the Head angrily. "You've heard my order. Disobey it at your peril!"

When the Head spoke in that tone it was hopeless to try and argue with him, and Jimmy Silver & Co. left the study, hardly knowing if they stood on their heads or their feet.

Once outside the door, they turned and stared at one another.

"My-my-my hat!" stammered Jimmy Silver.

"D-d-did you ever hear anything like it?"

"Never!" asserted the Co. in unison.

Without thinking where they were going the Co. walked slowly towards their study,

never heeding the fact that morning lessons were still being carried out in the class-rooms.

The blow was a staggering one to Jimmy Silver. Ever since Saturday, when Bulkeley, captain of the school, had told him he was to be given a trial in the match on Wednesday, in order to see if he was good enough to play for the school, Jimmy Silver had walked on air.

But now he was detained! Jimmy Silver dropped heavily into the first chair he came to when he reached the study, and buried his face in his hands.

"Oh, great Jupiter!" he ejaculated. "This is the blessed limit!"

Lovell shrugged his shoulders.

"Let's get down to the practical side of the question!" he said tersely. "We know jolly well you weren't out last night! The thing is to find out who was out!"

Jimmy Silver looked up eagerly.

"That's the ticket, old chap!" he said heartily. "But where are we going to start?"

"Your name was mentioned, I take it?" said Lovell.

Jimmy Silver explained all that he knew of the matter, and the amazed expressions on his chum's faces grew as they listened.

"Knocked old Boggs about!" exclaimed Raby. "My hat! Somebody's got a nerve!"

"And that somebody's a downright rotten cad!" growled Newcome. "Fancy mentioning your name!"

Arthur Edward Lovell tapped gently on the table by way of obtaining attention.

"Look here, you fellows," he said slowly. "It's no good wasting time like this. Old Jimmy has got to play in the trial this afternoon—if—if—if one of us has to own up to going out last night!"

"My hat!"

"No!" snapped Jimmy Silver angrily. "I won't have that!"

"You can't stop it!" said Lovell quickly.

"How do you know where I was last night, for instance?"

"I know jolly well you weren't breaking gates!" said Jimmy Silver hotly. "But—but look here, old scout, that's a bit too thick! It's no end decent of you—"

"Brrrrr! Cut it out!" growled Lovell.

"You're going to play in that trial—that's all I know about it. It's just on eleven now; the match is at three, so we've got four hours to find out who went out!"

"Where are you going to start?" demanded Raby.

"Peele & Co.," said Lovell, after a short pause. "If it was anybody, that's where you'll find 'em—Peele & Co.!"

And, although they did not have much hope of getting Peele & Co. to own up to anything—even if they were responsible for Jimmy Silver's present predicament—the rest of the Co. agreed with Lovell.

Therefore, when morning classes came to an end, Jimmy Silver & Co. were waiting outside the class-room for Peele & Co.

The three cads were the last to come out, and they were immediately confronted.

"Where were you last night, Peele?" demanded Lovell bluntly.

Peele looked surprised.

"In bed, of course!" he said. "Where do you think I was—out on the tiles all night?"

Lovell clenched his fists, and, turning, asked the same question of Gower and Lattrey. But they, too, expressed surprise, and Jimmy Silver had to let them go with his suspicions only half allayed.

"Might have known you'd get nothing out of Peele!" said Raby, when the three cads had gone. "Perhaps it's a little bit too thick, even for them!"

"Oh, hang it!" snapped Lovell. "I've a feeling they know something about it!"

"Feelings are not facts!" said Jimmy Silver practically. "What's to be done now?"

Lovell frowned.

"You chaps go into dinner," he said. "I'm going to think this matter out. Old Jimmy is going to play this afternoon—take my word for that!"

And Arthur Edward Lovell walked quickly down the corridor, leaving Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Newcome to stare after him.

"He always was fond of this detective stunt!" declared Raby. "He's a top-hole fellow, is old Lovell, and if anybody can find out who did the shouting last night, Lovell will!"

Jimmy Silver nodded.

"He's a jolly good chap!" he said slowly. "But—but I don't think I shall have that chance this afternoon, somehow. It's—it's rotten, but can't be helped, I suppose!"

And the three chums went in to dinner.

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THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Lovell's Triumph.

"HANG IT!"

Thus Arthur Edward Lovell, of the Classical Fourth, at Rookwood.

He was pacing the study floor, his brows puckered into a frown, and he was not looking very happy.

The fact of the matter was that Lovell had so far not succeeded in discovering how he was going to enable Jimmy Silver to play in the trial match that afternoon.

The fourth had already been at dinner nearly half an hour, and Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Newcome would soon be coming back into the study.

Lovell had a liking for tackling mysteries of this kind, and had shone on more than one occasion. But it looked as if he was doomed to failure this time!

"Hang it!" he muttered. "Why can't I think of something?"

Suddenly he started, and there came into his eyes a gleam of triumph.

He rushed towards the study door, threw it open, and dashed up to the dormitory. There was nobody about, all the juniors being at dinner, and Lovell had the place to himself.

Once in the dormitory, Lovell began a systematic searching of the boots under the beds. He even examined Jimmy Silver's with the same care as he did the others.

At last he came to Peele's bed, and an ejaculation left his lips:

"My hat! The blessed cad!"

Taking the pair of boots with him, Lovell took up a pair of Gower's and a pair of Lattrey's from under their beds, and hid them behind one of the lockers.

Then, with a gleam in his eyes and a tightening of his lips, Lovell went down to the dining-hall.

Many of the juniors had departed when Lovell arrived, amongst them being Jimmy Silver, Raby and Newcome, and Peele & Co.

"Seen anything of Peele & Co.?" he asked of Teddy Grace, who was talking to Mornington.

Teddy Grace shook his head.

"No," he said. "Going to take them out with you this afternoon?"

Lovell snorted.

"I'll take 'em out when I catch them!" he said darkly.

And, with a nod, Lovell hurried away. He almost ran into Tubby Muffin, the fat junior of the Fourth, who was returning to the dining-hall to see if there was anything left that would fill the empty void in his "innards."

Tubby Muffin had a tremendous appetite, and regarded what most juniors looked upon as a meal as just a snack.

"Seen anything of Peele & Co.?" asked Lovell.

Tubby Muffin stopped.

"Yes; they've gone out—"

"Oh, goodness! Gone out!"

"Yes, they went along the Coomb Road—I saw them go myself. They seemed as if they were in a hurry. Must have a feed on somewhere, I think!"

Lovell did not answer the fat junior. He rushed back into the dining-hall, and took Teddy Grace by the shoulder.

"Putty!" he exclaimed. "Will you do me an extra-special favour?"

Teddy Grace looked surprised.

"Of course!" he said, at once. "Anything reasonable, old chap!"

"Then, will you and Morny get out your bikes, and chase Peele & Co. back to Rookwood?" said Lovell hurriedly. "They've taken the road to Coomb, and unless they are back here very shortly Jimmy Silver won't be able to take part in the trial this afternoon."

"But—" began Mornington.

"Don't ask questions now, old chap!" said Lovell hastily. "I'll explain when you come back!"

Mornington and Grace, although they looked considerably amazed at Lovell's evident anxiety to get Peele & Co. back to Rookwood, forbore to ask any questions, but ran for the bike-shed.

Three minutes later, and the two juniors were riding down the lane towards Coomb, their noses almost touching their handlebars. Lovell ran to the gates, and watched them depart in a cloud of dust.

Then he fell to pacing the ground just in front of the gates. There were few Rookwoodites going out that afternoon, although it was a half-holiday. They wanted to see the trial match.

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Lovell suddenly remembered that Dr. Chisholm had ordained that the Co. should not leave the House, and he scuttled back to the main entrance to the House, and waited impatiently for Teddy Grace and Mornington to return—he hoped—with Peele & Co.

He had almost given up hope when he saw the five juniors entering the gates, and it was as much as he could do to stop running out towards them. But the Head's order kept him back.

"Bring them up to our study, you fellows!" said Lovell excitedly. "No—up to the dormitory!"

And Lovell disappeared into the House. He rushed up to the study, where he found Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Newcome staring disconsolately out of the window.

"Up to the dorm, you chaps!" he shouted. He did not wait for them. He rushed up the stairs, and stood in the dormitory, panting.

"What the merry Jupiter is the matter with you?" demanded Raby, as soon as he appeared.

"Gone potty?" asked Newcome quickly. "You'll see!" said Lovell excitedly. "Just wait a minute—Ah, here's Peele & Co.!"

Peele & Co. looked very sullen and extremely angry. Lattrey looked not a little frightened. Teddy Grace and Mornington, seeing that something was going to happen between Jimmy Silver & Co. and Peele & Co., sidled towards the door as soon as they had seen the cads into the dormitory.

But Lovell called them back.

"Don't go, you chaps!" he said. "Thanks for fetching these chaps back. You may as well hear the rest of the yarn now!"

Teddy Grace and Mornington, looking no less puzzled than Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Newcome, came back into the dormitory and shut the door behind them.

"Now, Peele," said Lovell, seating himself on the edge of a bed, "you said you and your bright chums were not out last night?"

"Look here—" began Peele hotly.

Lovell got up quickly, and shook his fist under Peele's nose.

"If you don't answer my questions," he said fiercely, "I'll jolly well hump you down to the Head, and ask him to make you answer them!"

"What—what do you want to know?" stammered Peele.

The three cads had paled visibly. Lovell evidently knew something!

"You told us you were not out last night, didn't you?" asked Lovell, resuming his seat on the bed. "And Gower and Lattrey did not go out last night?"

"No!" said the Co., in unison.

"Well, I tell you to your face that you lie!" said Lovell angrily.

"Here, I say, Lovell—" murmured Jimmy Silver.

"Shut up, Jimmy!" said Lovell quickly. "Look here, all you chaps know that the boots are cleaned every evening, don't you?"

"My hat! You mean—"

"Exactly!" said Lovell triumphantly. "I came up here, and had a look at all the boots. You can see for yourself that every pair is clean except the three pairs I've hidden—and they belong to Peele & Co!"

"My hat!"

"They are wearing the boots that were cleaned on Monday evening—everybody keeps two pairs of boots going, as you know. Not only that, but there are smudges on the sides of the boots as if the wearers had walked in or against wet grass—"

"There's been no rain for days!" interposed Gower. "So that shows—"

"It shows that you went out last night!" snapped Lovell. "Haven't you cads ever heard of dew?"

"My hat!" gasped Jimmy Silver. "It's like listening to a Ferrers Locke yarn—or Sexton Blake!"

Lovell shrugged his shoulders, and pointed almost dramatically at the white faces of Peele & Co.

"Look at them!" he said. "Do they look innocent? The rotters did it to try and keep you out of the trial, that's all!"

Peele & Co. shuffled their feet uneasily. They were in a terrible predicament, for if Lovell went to the Head with such conclusive proof of their dastardly trick as he had—in the hidden boots, their stay at Rookwood would be short and far from sweet.

"You've run near the border of expulsion several times," said Lovell, "and now you've stepped over!"

Jimmy Silver hesitated. The fact that he would be able to play in the match after all sent him into the seventh heaven of delight, and he looked at the cads in a far more equable manner than he would have done under different circumstances.

"Of course, the rotters deserve to get it in the neck!" he said. "And they'll have to go to the Head!"

"Oh!" said Peele & Co.

"It remains with you what you tell him—you're not particular to a lie or two," said Jimmy Silver disgustedly. "But I'm going to play this afternoon. It's for you to see the Head!"

Peele & Co. looked at each other with whitened faces and troubled eyes. They were in a very awkward position, and they realised it to the full. But something had to be done to get Jimmy Silver & Co. off the sentence of detention, and that very quickly, too.

"Hop it!" said Lovell tersely. "We'll be waiting for you near the Head's study."

And Peele & Co. wandered slowly towards the Head's study, talking in low whispers as they went. Evidently they were planning the yarn they would pitch to the Head in order to make the matter look as bright as possible.

They had not disappeared behind the Head's door many minutes before it opened again, and Lattrey came out. He beckoned to Jimmy Silver, and the leader of the Classical juniors hurried to the study.

"Ah, Silver!" said Dr. Chisholm. "I'm glad to be able to say that the matter affecting P.-c. Boggs and yourself has been cleared up!"

Jimmy Silver did not look half so surprised as he might have done.

"It appears Peele wanted a very urgent letter posted, and forgot to put it in the school letter-box," went on the Head. "So he very wrongly induced his friends to go down to Coomb with him for the purpose of catching the midnight mail at the station. On the way back, it transpires, they ran into the constable, grew afraid, and mentioned your name to get out of an awkward position if they were found out. The policeman's hat was accidentally knocked over his ears by Gower as he stumbled over the officer. You are released from detention. I will deal with these juniors."

And Jimmy Silver, with a single glance of withering contempt that made even Peele & Co. wince, left the study.

But as he made his way, in footer gait, to the playing-fields, there came to his ears many wails of pain. Peele & Co. were evidently being dealt with!

"Told the biggest heap of lies they could think of!" said Jimmy Silver disgustfully to his chums as they walked along. "Blessed if I know how chaps can be such out-and-out rotters!"

"Toads!" growled Raby. "They ought to be sacked!"

Jimmy Silver laughed suddenly.

"Anyhow, old Lovell's kept his word!" he said. "I'm going to play, after all! Quite a triumph for you, old man—and a heap of thanks!"

Lovell blushed furiously, and hastily changed the subject.

Jimmy Silver came out of the trial match with shining colours, and a flush of pleasure was on the young leader's face as he gaily waved his hand to the cheering juniors on having secured his second goal.

Bulkeley did not speak to him at half-time, but when the match was over he went up to Jimmy Silver.

"You shall have your cap, Silver!" he said. "My heartiest congratulations! You played marvellously, considering your age and weight!"

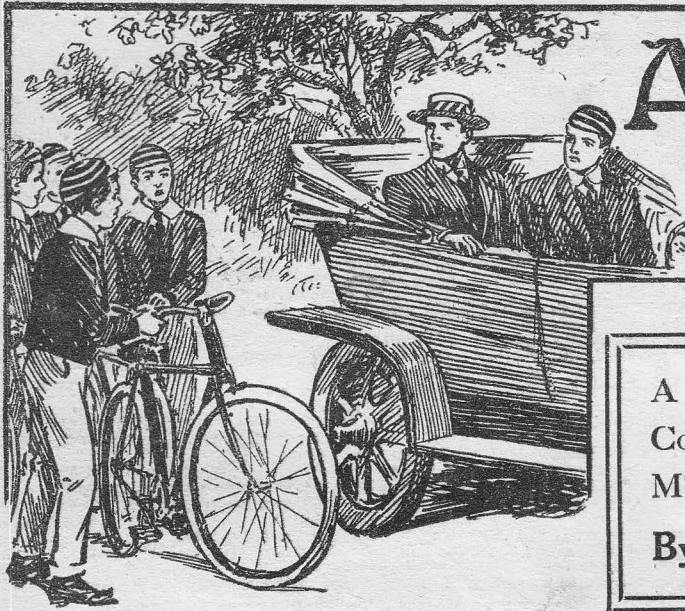
"T-thanks!" stammered Jimmy Silver confusedly.

But, up in the study where a feed was held in celebration of the great occasion, and which was attended by Tommy Dodd & Co., and Teddy Grace and Mornington, Jimmy Silver said that the triumph was only partially his. Lovell had made everything possible, so the honours of the day were really his.

To which Lovell replied very tersely: "Rot!"

THE END.

(Another complete story of Jimmy Silver & Co. next week, entitled "Hanson's Motor-Bike.")



A FOOLS' GAME

A Magnificent New, Long,
Complete School Tale of TOM
MERRY & Co. at St. Jim's.
By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The Hunted.

"IT'S a fool's game!" said George Figgins of the Fourth Form and the New House at St. Jim's.

"It may be all that. Still, it's a game, Figgy," replied his chum Kerr. "I don't mind it, as long as we get enough to eat and don't have to do too many miles a day," observed Fatty Wynn. "Oh, I don't mind it, come to that," growled Figgins.

"We've got to back up Julian," Kerr said. "And you needn't think too badly of Kerruish, old fellow. The chap's hardly responsible for what he does just now."

Figgins glanced towards where, a few yards away, Eric Kerruish lay asleep, while Dick Julian sat by him, fanning the flies from his face with a small branch plucked from a bush.

And somehow or other a softer look came over the face of Figgins.

The place in which the five were, was a wood some fifteen miles from St. Jim's, beyond Wayland, and more or less on the road to London.

The position in which they were was a distinctly strange one; and it was hardly to be wondered at that Figgins, who had less sympathy for Kerruish than any of the other three, should consider their joint enterprise a fool's game.

For technically all five were runaways from school. That is to say, they were all absent without leave.

But actually Kerruish was the only runaway of the five.

Julian was Kerruish's best chum. That explained why Julian had followed the Manx junior.

The trouble into which Kerruish had got himself was closely concerned with Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn. It had all begun through the vengeance they had taken upon him for trying to spoof them.

That explained why Kerr had gone with Julian.

All along Kerr had maintained that Kerruish's refusal to own up that it had been he who had knocked down Mr. Ratcliff, the sour-tempered master of the New House, was less blamable than his chums and St. Jim's generally held it. Not a single harsh word about Kerruish had come from George Francis Kerr, though he had had to bear the brunt of Mr. Ratcliff's ire.

The presence of Figgins and Fatty was due to that of Kerr. They had simply followed their chum, as Dick Julian had followed his.

But soft-hearted Fatty Wynn had now quite come round to Kerr's views. And Figgins, who was very far from being hard-hearted, was coming round to them.

It was difficult to feel resentful with Kerruish, so broken down and distraught the poor fellow seemed. He had taken very hard the contempt of the rest at his failure to do what they held the straight thing.

He had been very thoroughly licked in two fights—with Redfern of the New House, and Sidney Clive. And he certainly had been treated with great unfairness by Ratty—as the New House juniors called their detested tyrant.

The five had four bikes among them. Figgins and Fatty had brought those of Kerr and Julian. Kerruish's was still in the school bike-shed.

Very nearly half St. Jim's was out hunting for them. Kerruish refused to go back unless compelled, and hinted that even if forced back he would run away again as soon as he found a chance.

The other four had agreed to go on with him. They would not leave him, and to give him up in such circumstances was to them unthinkable treachery.

Nevertheless, it was, as Figgy said, a fool's game.

But to admit that is not wholly to condemn it. Folly is not the worst of crimes. It is so often those whom the world labels fools who do the generous, self-sacrificing deeds at which the world, in its moments of stirred emotions, admires.

And the four who were running this risk for the sake of a fellow who was the chum of only one of them were not typical fools. There was much besides folly in them.

Of all the St. Jim's juniors Kerr was the longest-headed, and, in some ways, the cleverest. Figgins had not the mental equipment of Kerr; but he possessed quite average brains. So did Fatty Wynn, though he might be a trifle lazy in using them, being more liable to overwork his stomach than his head. Julian, quiet, thoughtful, rather reserved, was very much the man in his judgment of things, though he was as soft-hearted as any woman to one in trouble.

The five were very unlike in appearance. Kerruish alone of them all was of an ordinary type, not likely to attract a second glance from anyone. Dick Julian, with his crisp, bluish-black hair, his strongly-marked features, and commanding nose, was as unlike Kerr—sandy-headed, lean-faced, with something of the look of a high-bred terrier about him—as Kerr was different from long-legged Figgins, of the rugged countenance, and as Figgins, again, was from Fatty Wynn, with his round, plump face, almost infantile in expression, his china-blue eyes that had so often a look of surprise in them, and his fair hair.

"Do you think we are safe here, Kerr?" asked Fatty.

"As safe as anywhere," replied Kerr. "Of course, there's no knowing when some of the hounds will put their noses round the corner and spot us, and this isn't quite the best of all possible places to clear out of in a hurry. But what can we do?"

"Best lie doggo," said Fatty. "They're all round us. We've seen more than a score of them, and half a dozen or more of them have seen us."

"That was a jolly narrow squeak at Rylcomb," Fatty said. "Another minute, and they'd have nabbed us. And I had to leave a tin of tongue behind—paid for, too!"

"Have you had enough to eat, porpoise?" asked Fatty, in somewhat snappish tones.

"Oh, yes, I've had enough to eat. In fact, I think we've done ourselves very well. But it's necessary, being hunted all over Sussex like this."

"Well, if you've had enough, don't grouse about a tin of tongue, that's all! You don't want it, and if Julian can stand the loss of the oof, I guess we can. It would have been beastly rough on Julian to have been left alone with that poor bounder."

"Thanks, Figgins," said Julian quietly.

"Didn't mean you to hear," growled Figgins.

But perhaps that was not wholly true; and certainly those words dispelled the last vestige of constraint among the four who were standing by Kerruish thus. Until then Figgins had seemed a little less than friendly to Julian, and Julian had not liked Figgins' attitude towards Kerruish.

They had very nearly been captured in a village a few miles away while buying food. Julian had stayed with Kerruish while the other three went foraging; and while Kerr waited outside a shop, Tom Merry, Talbot, Manners, Lowther, Kangaroo, Dane, and Glynn had appeared at the top of the sun-bathed, sleepy street.

Those seven were all good friends of the three; but Kerr was under no delusion as to how far their friendship would carry them in this pass. It would have acted in precisely the contrary direction to that which would have suited the trio. Tom Merry and his comrades would have told them they were silly asses and have taken them back—by force, if force were needed.

So Kerr had given Figgins and Fatty the word of warning, and they had mounted and ridden. They had ridden their hardest, and they had a start. A swerve down a side road, a quick turn into a rutted lane with a bend within fifty yards, and the fact that the road itself made a bend within twice that distance, had saved them.

By the time the hounds had found that they were off the scent the hares were stealing away across the fields to where they had left their companions, through hedge gaps, over gates and stiles, riding their bikes where they could, carrying them where it was necessary, as keen to escape as though they were runaways at heart.

Fatty had been wet through with perspiration and blowing like a grampus by the time they found the safe covert. But he had eaten a hearty meal half an hour later, and had announced himself quite all right thereafter.

"They will have to make tracks for St. Jim's by the time the sun begins to go

down," said Kerr. "That will be our chance to get out of this and farther along the road."

But there Kerr erred, as will be seen presently.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Hunters.

"WELL, what's to be done?" inquired Tom Merry.

The sun was sinking low in the west, and a score or so of St. Jim's juniors had just met together at cross-roads nearly twenty miles from the school.

They included the seven who had so nearly caught Figgins & Co., with Cardew, Levison major, and Clive, Blake, Herries, Digby, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, Roylance, Durrance, Gore, Hammond, and Reilly.

Four separate search-parties were there; but all had chanced to reach the spot within five minutes, from three different roads.

"Go back, I suppose!" growled Blake. "What else is there to do?"

"I don't quite see it that way myself," Tom answered, "and neither do these fellows. We've made up our minds that it would be rather a weak sort of thing to go back like this."

"Oh, well, if there's anything else that can be done, I'm on!" Blake said.

"Anybody seen anything of the five wulfiangs?" asked Arthur Augustus.

Gussy was jaded and weary, caked with dust and perspiration; but the monocle still adorned his eye, and his spirit was indomitable.

"We had the felicity of seein' them at a considerable distance," Cardew replied. "At least, if it wasn't they, it was five of their hunters, for we could make out the colours."

"Ass! Of course it was those five!" said Levison. "One of them was riding on the step of another's bike, and we know that they had only four bikes among them!"

"True, O Sherlock! I stand corrected!" said Cardew blandly. "At the same time, I'd much rather sit. I've been sittin' all day, it's true; but a bike-saddle isn't precisely a dashed armchair, y'know."

And Cardew sank down on the grassy mound which bore the signpost.

"We were nearer three of them than that," said Manners. "So near, that I can't make out now how the bounders dodged us. But they had a machine each, and that made a bit of difference."

"Moreover, the crafty Kerr was there, and that made a heap more," added Lowther.

He sank down by the side of Cardew, and several others planted themselves on the mound, and waited for the rest of the story and for Tom Merry's alternative to a return to St. Jim's.

The story was soon told. All the seven felt a little bit sick with themselves for having been eluded with such apparent ease; and possibly that feeling had something to do with what they proposed now to do.

"My notion is to stay out all night," said Tom. "We know the bounders can't be very far away. They will expect us to bunk off back, and will try to get farther off in the night," said Tom. "We know the bounders can't get very far off in the night. We may catch them if we can get on their tracks first thing to-morrow morning; we may even catch them during the night!"

"Not me!" put in Cardew decidedly. "As some poet or other remarks, 'Night is the time for sleep,' an' though I don't care a scrap where I sleep, I'm dashed well goin' to sleep, an' to sleep soundly, to-night, by gad!"

"Nobody's going to ask you to do anything you don't cotton to, you slacker!" Tom said good-humouredly. "And I wasn't really thinking so much of to-night as of to-morrow morning."

"Which certainly sounds a much more fittin' time for exertion, bein' farther away!" replied the unabashed Cardew. "Proceed, Thomas!"

"Well, if you fellows are game to do what I'm going to suggest, one out of the crowd of us ought to ride back to tell Mr. Raitlon, so that he shouldn't get worrying. And as you're keener on rest than anyone else, Cardew, I should—"

"Not in mine, Thomas! Fancy little me ridin' back all those miles an' miles alone—an' dark before I get there, too! An' you know how timid I am! I'm ashamed an' amazed at you, Thomas!"

"Aho, there!"

Three more of the searchers were coming up the slope from the north. They were

Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence; and Owen rode as if there were something wrong with him.

It turned out that there was. He had had a spill, and hurts to his right leg made pedalling a painful process.

"There you are!" said Blake. "Those three can go. There's a station a mile or two away along the western road. Owen isn't fit to ride back all the way; but he could ride that far all right."

"Where do you want us to go, and what for?" asked Redfern.

"To inform the dear Raitlon an' the dearer Raitcliff—dear at any price, that one!—that their little flocks are not returnin' to-night, but may blow in to-morrow, like Bo-peep, with their tails behind them!" drawled Cardew.

"Wasn't it Bo-peep's sheep that had their tails behind them?" asked Clive, grinning.

"Don't be so horribly literal, Sidney! Doubtless you are right, however. It is ages since I studied nursery literature, where it must have come quite lately into your curriculum."

"Dry up!" snapped Redfern. "I don't get on to this, Tommy!"

"Ratty won't be concerned at all if you three go back," answered Tom. "All the rest of us are School House, and I don't think Raitlon will be very rough on us for stopping out here to-night, so as to start bright and early after those bounders in the morning."

Redfern looked at him with scorn. Lawrence snorted. Poor Owen groaned.

"And you imagine that we're going tamely back while you fellows stay out?" said Redfern hotly.

"Well, Owen must go," replied Talbot. "It's hard cheese for him, but with that damaged leg he can't stay."

Owen groaned again.

"Lawrence and I will go to the station with him," said Redfern, with quick decision. "He'll be all right then. You don't expect us to go all the way with you, do you, Les?"

"No. Don't see why I need go, for that matter," Owen said.

But he really did see. His staying was outside reason. Already he was pretty near to being dead lame.

"That ought to do it all right," Tom said. "But we can't wait for you and Lawrence, Reddy!"

"No odds! Tell us which way you're going, and what you mean to do, and trust us to find you all serene."

"I think we'll take the road by which you've just come. The programme is to find a barn or a rickyard somewhere near a village where we can get a supply of grub. If the place we light on is away back from the road someone shall have to wait for you to make sure you don't run past us."

"That's all right," said Lawrence. "Come on, Dick! Come on, Les, old chap! We may just miss a train if we stand talking here."

Owen's chums helped him to his saddle, and off the three went along the westward road.

A hundred yards along it they were met by three more of the New House—Koumi Rao, Clarke, and Thompson.

"You'll find a crowd of them at the cross-roads," said Redfern. "They won't go home till morning—or till to-morrow night—or next week—or some time."

"Are you going?" inquired Clarke.

"Only Owen. He's crooked, and we're taking him to the nearest station. Then we shall scoot back," answered Redfern.

"Right-ho!" "We'll join the crowd!" said Clarke.

"Old Ratty will kick up an awful dust about this game," remarked Thompson, as the trio rode on.

"Let him!" said Clarke cheerily. "I'm not going to stand out of a bizney like this for his sweet sake. What do you say, Koumi Rao?"

"I, too, will not be out of it," answered the Jam of Bundelpore. "But this chase is not to my liking. Figgins is my dearest friend."

"Never mind, old dusky mug! It won't hurt Figgy if he's caught. He's not really running away, you know; we're all sure of that," returned Clarke.

"None the less will it be a wound to his pride if he is captured," Koumi Rao said.

Clarke chuckled. He was an average English boy, and he could not see things at all the same way as the Indian, with the proud blood of countless generations of fighting princes in his veins. And he did not think that George Figgins would see them that way, either.

Everyone at St. Jim's knew how devoted Koumi Rao was to Figgins. He was wont to say that when the day came for him to rule over his principality in far-off India Figgins

should be his chief vizier, and have an escort of a hundred spears. Many fellows liked "Jammy" well enough now; but it was doubtful whether he cared very much for any of them except Figgy and Tom Merry. And of those two Figgy came first with him.

The crowd that was beginning to melt away from the top of the hill, where the roads crossed, down the northern slope, welcomed the three cheerfully. They would have welcomed any of the Fourth or Shell save a few outsiders, for the more of the two Forms concerned in this night's absence the greater became the chance that the punishment inflicted upon them all might be slight.

But they barred the Third. And so it was that when they met Wally D'Arcy and his little band, tagged out but still cheerful, they were not minded to accede to the proposition of the seven that they should join up.

Tom Merry, Talbot, Blake, Gussy, Manners, Levison, and Cardew halted to argue the case, while the rest rode on.

"We're as much right as you are," said Wally.

"That may be," answered Tom. "But we haven't any right at all, so that won't carry you through."

"We don't care a scrap about Selby or anybody else!" argued Reggie Manners.

"Don't be a young ass! Just cut off back!" returned his major. "There will be a wiggling for you for being late, as it is!"

"Oh, you go to Bath!" retorted Reggie rudely.

"I'd rather you went back, Frank," Ernest Levison said.

Levison minor puckered his brows, and looked wistful.

"I'm sorry, Ernie!" he said. "But I can't if the other chaps won't. And I don't a bit want to!"

"Weally, Wally——" began Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, dry up, Gus! I'm too tired to listen to your chinwag. Look here, Tom Merry, we can't get back to-night! Why, it's ever so many miles, and——"

"There's a station over there," said Blake, pointing.

"Yes, and there goes the last blessed train!" cried Hobbs.

Against the reddened west the smoke of a train floated up.

"You don't know that it's the last!" Manners major said irritably.

"But we don't know that it isn't!" said Curly Gibson.

"Jameson, my hero, the revered Ratty will make you smart for this, by gad!" drawled Cardew.

"What do I care?" replied the one New House fag of the seven. "Old Selby will be down on us, too. We hadn't really leave——"

"Yes," we had!" snapped Wally. "He said——"

"But we all knew it was sarc. He'd have put the stopper on us fast enough if we'd been such asses as to wait. What I say is——"

"In for a penny, in for a pound!" There's a jolly row to come for being out without leave, and we may as well stay out and take all that's coming to us. Don't you see that, you fellows?"

"I certainly don't," answered Tom Merry.

"That settles it! We simply can't have you with us! Cut off to that station! Even if the last train has gone, it won't be more than a couple of miles out of your way!"

"You chaps are funked!" gibed Wally.

"Beastly funked, dear Adolphus!" gibed Cardew.

"You can't come with us, and that settles it!" Levison major said, averting his eyes from the wistful look in Frank's.

And the Shell and Fourth fellows mounted, and rode on.

"It's rotten!" said Joe Frayne.

But Wally grinned.

"If we can't go with them, that's not to say we need buzz off back," he said. "I've a quid note, and we can get grub enough with that. Let the old fogies get ahead. We can do without them!"

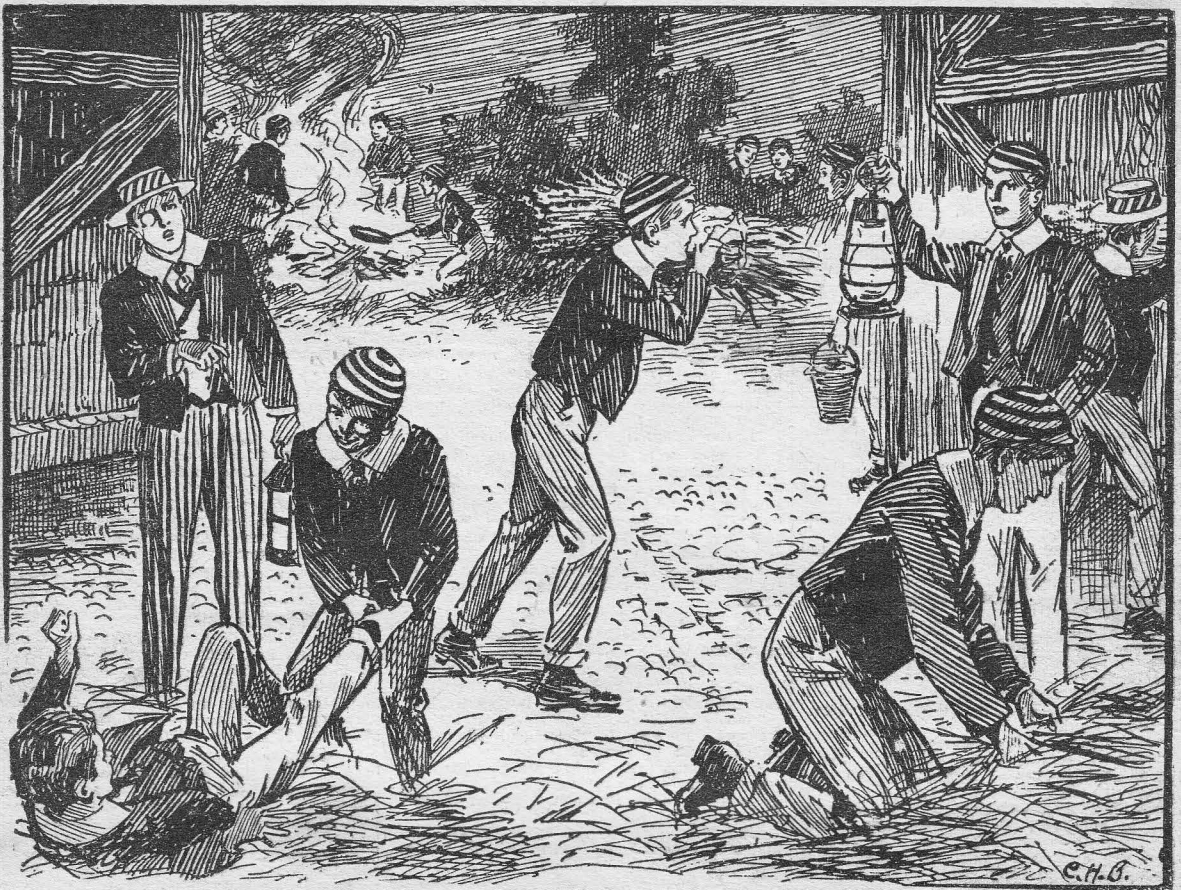
THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Borrowing a Bike!

"MY hat! There's going the wrong way!" said Figgins.

Avoiding the roads, the fugitives had yet made some progress across country, and at the moment when their hunters started to free-wheel down the northern slope from the cross-roads they were less than a mile away along the northern road, sheltered behind a leafy hedge.

Their faces were turned towards the sunset, and now, through the gaps in the foliage,



Figgins and Kerr from behind the hedge watched the lively scene the barn presented. A camp fire blazed merrily, and some juniors were spreading fresh hay on the floor for bedding. "The bounders are doing themselves jolly well!" whispered Figgins. (See page 14.)

they saw junior after junior ride past, their figures black against the red sky.

"Gore—Clive—Durrance," murmured Kerr. "Herries—Digby—Roylance—Clarke," said Kerruish, who was beginning to lose some of his moroseness, and to take more interest in what happened.

"Hammond and Reilly," Julian said, touching the arm of his chum.

Those two meant more to Kerruish and Julian than the rest.

"They might have kept out of it!" muttered Kerruish.

"Lowther—Koumi—Rao—Thompson," said Fatty.

"And Kangaroo, Dane, and Glyn," added Kerr. "But where's the dear Tommy?"

Where's Manners? And Talbot, too? Lowther's there, and it's a bit queer that they should not be."

"And Levison and Cardew—Clive's there," Julian said.

"And Blake and that ass Gussy? We saw Dig and Herries!" growled Kerruish.

But in a few minutes more the seven came riding past altogether. The talk with the fags had delayed them.

"What licks me is where the asses are going to," said Figgy. "That's not the way home."

"Not much mystery in that," replied Kerr. "Of course, they're not going back to-night. I didn't think of that. But Tommy and Talbot and Blake are no fools. They've seen what a start we'd get if they went back."

"They'll get into a row," remarked Julian.

"That won't hurt us," answered Kerr. "It can't be a very terrible one—there are too many of them. And it may help to take the edge off our 'orrid guilt.'"

"Hallo! Some more of them!" said Figgins.

"That was Grundy's bull-bellow, I'm certain! He's yelling to them to stop."

Next moment six more riders fitted past. The great George Alfred Grundy led, shouting as he rode. Lumley-Lumley followed him, and behind Lumley-Lumley streamed Wilkins, Pratt, and French of the New House, and Gunn. Grundy was still full of beans, and the two next to him had something left in them;

but the New House pair had put in nearly all they knew how, and Gunn was plainly done to the wide.

"This is getting hot!" said Kerruish uneasily. "Look here, why don't you fellows chuck it, and let me go on alone?"

"Can't be did!" replied Kerr.

Julian glanced at his chum. It seemed to him that Kerruish was getting more reasonable, as he was certainly getting less sulky.

"Well, let's clear out of this, anyway," the Manx junior said. "We aren't safe here."

"Safer here than anywhere else for the moment," Kerr answered him.

"How do you make that out?"

"They won't come back this way to-night. They'll camp out somewhere along the road. But it's to be hoped we've seen the last of them."

But the last of them had not been seen yet. A few minutes later seven more rode past—the Third-Formers.

Fatty chuckled.

"Those kids in it!" he said. "My word, they've nerve enough!"

"Selby will be down on them like a thousand of bricks, and it's all my fault!" said Kerruish dismally. "And they've been uncommonly decent to me. Young Levison tried to comfort me like an uncle, and Frayne was with him, though he didn't say anything. And Levison minor told me that D'Arcy minor had punched the heads of two of the crew for hissing me."

It was the first time that Kerruish had made any direct reference to the trying period through which he had passed; and his four comrades all understood that at length he had come to look upon them as really comrades.

"Tell us something more about it, old chap," said Figgins, rather injudiciously, though his intention was good.

Kerruish shut up like an oyster. Not yet could he bear to tell them all about it. But, somehow, Julian knew that it would all come out in a burst before long.

"Let's have some grub," suggested Fatty.

"Always thinking about your tummy!" sniffed Figgins.

"Well, if I don't, no one else will," Fatty replied.

They started on a meal—bread and cheese and ginger-beer, the liquid obtained at a lonely pub they had lighted upon in their cross-country wanderings.

The sun had fully set now, but the glory of the afterglow was still in the sky, and the air was warm. Sleeping out would have no discomfort worth mentioning on such a night as this promised to be.

The clanging of a bicycle-bell made them jump up and peer through the hedge again.

"Goo-night!" growled the voice of some homeward-faring rustic.

"Good-night!" answered the voices of Redfern and Lawrence.

"Wonder where Owen is?" said Figgy.

"We might hail them and ask," said Kerr, grinning.

"Rats! It's a fool's game we're playing; but we can't go mucking it up that way. Those fellows—all of them—are the enemy just now, and there's not one of them we could trust not to give us away."

"They're playing the game, too, you see," replied Kerr. "No game's worth much if you don't play it all your're worth. And I've an idea!"

"Tell us!" said Fatty, with his mouth full of bread and cheese and his right hand reaching through the gloom under the hedge for a bottle of pop.

"We want a bike," Kerr said slowly.

"That's news!" growled Figgins.

Kerr took no notice of the obvious attempt at sarcasm.

"We can—er—borrow one now," he went on. "It's only a matter of finding out where those bounders are roosting and collaring one of their jiggers. They won't keep watch, because they won't be expecting a foray by us—see?"

"Oh, good egg!" cried Figgy.

"I'm on!" Julian said. "I think it's all in the game."

"It will give us no end of a better chance, anyway!" agreed Kerruish.

Julian wondered whether he was also coming to think of it as a game.

"You and I will go, Kerr," said Figgins. "I don't mind, I'm sure," Fatty said. "I'd rather have a snooze. And my feet feel too big for my giddy boots."

"I think I ought to go," Kerruish said slowly.

"Rats!" replied Kerr. "You need rest more than any of us."

"I shouldn't go if I were you, Eric," Dick Julian said.

"Oh, all right! But you'll have to stay, too, if I do."

"I don't mind."

"Whose jigger shall we collar?" asked Figgins.

"Tommy's!" said Kerr.

"Old ass Grundy's!" murmured Fatty drowsily.

"Gussy's!" suggested Julian. "It's always good fun playing a joke on Gussy."

"Cardew's!" Kerruish said.

Whomsoever he might have forgiven, he had not yet forgiven Ralph Reckness Cardew.

"I think Reddy's!" said Figgins. "It's like Reddy's blessed cheek to be chasing us!"

But in the event it was not Tom Merry's or Grundy's, the shining steel steed of Arthur Augustus, the equally expensive one of Cardew, or Dick Redfern's well-worn machine that was borrowed.

Within an hour Figgins and Kerr started off. They had to locate the harbourage of the crowd of hunters, and it would be easier to do that before the hunters had turned in for the night.

They took only one bike, riding on the step turn and turn about, and risking the going without a light. It was as dark now as it was likely to be the night through, though the afterglow still lingered.

"Feels good to be alive, Figgy!" said Kerr.

"Oh, rather!"

"Still think it a fool's game?"

"Well, it is, you know, old man. But I like it all the same. I own that. And—and I— Oh, look here, Kerr, you were right about that chap Kerruish. I don't say now that he behaved well, but there are a heap of excuses to be made for him. And he's all right now he's come out of his sulks. But I guess that means he'll want to be heading for home very soon, and—"

"And you're not tired of the fool's game—eh?"

"I am not!" replied George Figgins emphatically.

They had ridden a mile or so when Kerr jumped off the step, with a warning word in the car of Figgy.

The long-legged junior dismounted at once, and they stood listening.

From somewhere close at hand came a cheery babel of voices—the voices of the St. Jim's crowd.

A wood fire burned merrily, and there were pleasant smells of coffee and of frying bacon.

It was plain that Tom Merry and his band had fallen upon their feet. It was also plain—or it would have been so had Kerr and Figgins known of the difficulty—that the Third Former had, after all, been allowed to join their sensors. For the voices of Wally D'Arcy and Reggie Manners were among the easiest to distinguish.

"Let's scout round!" whispered Kerr.

The bike was left in a gateway, and they moved cautiously towards the camp-fire.

Out of the dusk there loomed up a big farmhouse, with lights in many windows, and a big barn, with lanterns moving to and fro in it.

"The bounders are being done jolly well!" murmured Figgins.

For it was easy to see that the spreading of clean straw on the floor of the barn meant bedding down the crowd; and the camp-fire in the paddock hard by, and the savoury smells, pointed to a hospitable reception by the people of the farmhouse.

"They'll sleep all the sounder," answered Kerr.

"We'll have some time to wait, though."

"Well, we've got all the time there is. I hope Fatty and Kerruish won't get worrying about us, that's all. Julian can be trusted to keep calm. But if Fatty thinks we're nabbed he'll want to chuck it."

Silence followed, and lasted several minutes. Silence between the two adventurers, that is; there was noise enough round the camp-fire.

"I don't want the coffee over my bags, Gussy, you ass!"

"Weally, Dane—"

"Do you want all that bacon to your own personal cheek, or may I humbly request a scrap, Thomas?"

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"Cut me a hunk of bread, Talbot, old son!"

"This is ripping!"

"If you can't behave better, young Reggie, I shall send you home!"

"That's where all you kids ought to be!"

Such were some of the scraps of conversation that reached the ears of Kerr and Figgins.

It was Figgins who broke the silence.

"Sounds jolly, doesn't it?" he said. "Aren't we on the wrong side of the fence, Kerr?"

"Rats! Anyway, we're staying on this side."

"Oh, I don't want to turn my coat! Let's go and see where they've put the jiggers."

But it was soon found that there could be no getting at the bikes until the hunters were asleep. They had been put inside the barn, and now some of the more tired of the crowd were making for the barn.

Gunn, Pratt, French, Curly Gibson, and Hobbs were among the first to go. Gunn flung himself on the floor, and the two watchers could see that he was asleep almost the moment he touched it.

"If they're all like that!" whispered Figgy.

But they were not all like that. It was quite half an hour later before the last of them turned in—Tom Merry, Talbot, Kangaroo, Blake, and Grundy. And Grundy had still sufficient energy left to be arguing that he, and not Tom, was really the leader of the band.

The doors of the barn were left open. When voices had ceased Kerr and Figgins stole nearer.

"I'll get it!" said Figgy.

"Take the first that comes, unless it's a small size one," advised Kerr.

Figgins stole inside.

Next moment there came to the attentive ears of Kerr the sound of a hissing whisper.

"Who's that?"

It was all up! In a moment the whole crowd would be roused.

Kerr debated with himself whether his duty was to Figgy or the three left behind. Should he escape and rejoin them, or suffer himself to be captured with his chum?

He knew which course Figgy would have him take, though. No reason why two should be caught because one was.

But he lingered. The alarm had not been given yet.

Two figures came out of the barn together. Kerr stared in surprise.

There was to be no alarm after all, then.

What could it mean?

But in another moment he understood.

"It's Koumi Rao!" whispered Figgy. "He won't give us away. He says we can have his bike!"

"My hat! What a gorgeous stroke of luck!" said Kerr.

"You do not think that it is treachery, Kerr?" Koumi Rao asked in his low, thrilling voice. "I fear that so Tom Merry may hold it. But Figgins is my best of friends, and for him and for you—"

"Come with us, old fellow!" said Kerr, on impulse. "It's only changing sides, and if you'd rather be on ours, why shouldn't you?"

"That I cannot do!" answered the Indian.

"They would say that I was afraid, and I could not bear that. I will stay till morning, and then they shall know what it is that I have done."

"I see, and I won't argue. Get the bike for us now, and give the bounders—particularly old Tommy—our very special blessing in the morning."

"I suppose they won't—" began Figgins, when the Jam had slipped into the barn.

"Oh, there won't be any rough house!" said Kerr confidently. "Some of them will be on their ears a bit, I dare say, but not many. It's a jape, and most of them can stand a jape."

It was some minutes before Koumi Rao reappeared with his bike. He had had to move three or four others to get at it, and to do it in the dark. They rather wondered how he had found his own; it must have been by the sense of touch. But he had made hardly a sound.

"I say, you are a thumping good chap, Koumi Rao!" said Figgins gratefully.

"It is nothing. I would do ten thousand times as much as that for you, my friend," replied the Indian.

He shook hands with them both, and they cleared off, while he went back to the barn.

As they pedalled away through the dusky night Figgy said:

"Can't make out why Koumi Rao likes me so much!"

Kerr did not answer. But Kerr could understand it.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

An Adventure of the Night.

"BRRRRR! Wharrer marrer?" mumbled Fatty Wynn.

"Oh, good egg!" said Dick Julian.

"I say, you fellows, I never thought you'd bring it off. It's taking a heap of trouble and risk for me," Kerruish said.

Fatty had been dozing. Julian and Kerruish had not. They were beginning to feel a bit anxious about the two adventurers before the two turned up with the borrowed bike.

"There wasn't much in it," answered Kerr. "We didn't have to bag it, Koumi Rao lent it to us."

"Shouldn't have thought he'd have done that for me," Kerruish said.

"Well, he really did it for Figgy. They're great chums, you know."

"And I'll ride Koumi's jigger. You can have mine, Kerruish; it will be all right for you with the saddle let down an inch or two."

Kerr knew from that how deeply the Indian's action had touched Figgy. And Kerruish seemed to understand something of it, for he said:

"Yes, that would be best. And—and I'm not surprised that chap thinks a lot of Figgins. I never knew before half what good fellows you three were!"

There was a catch in his voice; but that was partly due to the talk he had had with Julian while Kerr and Figgy were absent and Fatty slumbered.

Julian knew all about it now—all about the doubts and difficulties that had beset his chum, the hot resentment against those three for the trick they had played upon him, the confession to Ratty, and the order to make a fresh confession to Mr. Railton, which Kerruish had disobeyed.

He could see how foolish Kerruish had been. There had been no need for such bitterness against Figgins & Co., no justification to Mr. Ratcliff had been a big mistake; it was only wrong-headed pride that had made him try to set himself right with himself while refusing the chance to set himself right with others. Those others had never been so down upon him as he had imagined, either.

But all that made no difference to Dick Julian's loyal friendship. He had tried to stand by Kerruish all through, and he was ready to stand by him still.

Of one thing in it all Julian heartily approved—the refusal to go to Mr. Railton. He saw as clearly as the master of the School House had seen how grossly unfair that order of Ratty's was. He could not fathom the game Ratty was playing, but he was sure it was an underhand game.

On two points Kerruish was very obstinate. He would not have the whole story told to Figgins & Co. yet. And he would not go back yet.

It seemed as though he wanted to be set clear in some other way before Figgins and Kerr—Fatty did not matter so much, Julian gathered—were told. And if Koumi Rao had only thought of it he would by now have been set clear to them, for Mr. Railton, before allowing the hunters to start, had told Tom Merry and Talbot of the confession, and of course they had told the rest. But Koumi Rao had been thinking very much of Figgins, and hardly at all of Kerruish.

As to going back, that seemed to hang not only upon the clearing of his honour, but also upon the cessation of the chase. Kerruish hated the notion of returning as a captured quarry; and it was almost out of the bounds of possibility that they should get back uncaptured, so that he might give himself up. There would be more hunters out on the morrow, and to head for St. Jim's would mean running into the arms of some of them.

Fatty woke up now.

"Let's have some grub," he said. "I'm empty."

"Why, it isn't more than a couple of hours since you had supper, you greedy porpoise!" snorted Figgy.

"Isn't it? It feels more like a couple of days," replied Fatty, patting ruefully the neighbourhood of his lowest waistcoat button.

"What we've got to do now is to make use of the dark hours to get right away from this neighbourhood," said Kerr. "We've five bikes, and now that it's dark we needn't shirk the main roads."

"There may be bobbles about," remarked Julian.

"There may be horse-marines about, but that's no reason why we should necessarily run into them," Kerr answered. "We simply must get a start of those bounders at the farm down yonder before the sun's up."

"Oh dear!" groaned Fatty.

"You can stay behind if you like!" snapped Figgins.

"Rats to you! I suppose a fellow may groan a bit without being a funk? I've got more to carry than you have, Figgy!"

"Never mind, old dear!" Kerr said, patting him on the back. "We're not going to scorch. We can get twenty miles in the time without that."

"Twenty miles!" came from Fatty, in a hollow groan.

"You fellows on?" asked Kerr.

He knew that Fatty would not be found wanting at a pinch.

"I am," replied Kerruish.

"So am I," said Julian.

There was no need to ask Figgy.

"We'll go straight past where the crowd are," said Kerr, grinning in the dusk. "It will be something to chortle about to Tommy and the fest of them later on."

"And even so they did."


"That's the place," said Figgy, as they passed the low-built, long, comfortable farmhouse, mantled with ivy, screened by trees in garden and orchard, with the great barn that rose high above it, and the rick-yard from which the night breeze brought scents of fresh straw and fragrant hay.

Kerruish and Julian and Fatty gazed with interest at as much of it as was visible to them in the soft gloom.

"I can hear someone snoring," said Figgy. "That would be dear old Grundy," replied Kerr.

And all five laughed. The sound of their laughter seemed very loud in the stillness, and they put on speed.

Soon they mounted a hill, and saw two or three twinkling lights in the valley ahead, seeming to indicate the presence there of a village.

"Birdcot, I'm pretty sure," said Kerr, who appeared to go about with a  of Sussex in his head.

Down the hill they swooped, and almost before they realised it were running between lines of small houses, mostly with gardens in front of them, with here and there a bigger house, and here and there a shop or an inn.

It was late now for a country place, and only a few lights showed. As they drew near the end of the village the road rose suddenly, and their pace slackened. Here was a wide green. The highway cut it in halves, and scattered houses could be seen around it, while to their right loomed up the tall sign of an inn.

"Stop, there!"

The voice came from very close at hand, and it was an authoritative voice. But, naturally, they had no notion of stopping.

"Lam it on!" breathed Kerr.

They lammed it on. But next moment they had lost one of their number.

Kerruish, riding nearest the right-hand side of the road, yelled hard as strong arms clasped his body, and he felt himself dragged from his bike.

"Got yer!" bellowed the voice.

Kerruish did not call for help. His machine had fallen into the road, and he was struggling in the embrace of a big policeman.

The other four jumped down. They had no mind to let their comrade be captured.

"You're one of them runaway schoolboys as I've heard about to-day!" said the constable triumphantly. "Oh, I know! Now, jest you stop wrigglin', an' come alonger me!"

Figgins, letting Koumi Rao's bike fall into the road, was dashing forward; but Kerr held him back.

"Wait!" breathed Kerr.

"An' the rest of you, jest you come along ere!" spoke the authoritative voice.

"Why should we?" demanded Kerr. ("Stand still, Figgy, you fathead!")

"Cause you're runaway schoolboys, an' I represent the lor, that's why!" replied the voice.

"Oh, all serene! We'll come, as you represent the 'lor,'" Kerr said. ("Put your bikes down, duffers! Get right close to him, and rush him when I say 'Now!'")

All four advanced upon the unsuspecting policeman, who was chortling inwardly at the thought of the kudoes that would be his on account of this wholesale capture.

"You're goin' to give yourselves up, fair an' square, an' no hanky?" he said, as they neared him. For, somehow, doubt had come to him all in a second.

"Now!" cried Kerr.

And as one man the four flung themselves upon P.-c. William Brown.

P.-c. Brown went down with a thud, and found himself lying on his back, with three of the runaways sitting upon him. And one of them—the middle one—was heavy, so heavy that Brown, P.-c., fairly groaned under his weight.

"What's this 'ere mean?" he gasped.

"Now, constable, now!" said Kerr soothingly. "Don't be silly! You'll never rise to be a sergeant if you are so very silly. You'll never be anything better than a striker."

"Don't you give me none of your lip!"

"Certainly not! I'm only talking to you for your own good. May I ask what you intend to do with us?"

"Put you all in the lock-up till to-morrow mornin', that's what! It will be a bit of a tightish squeeze for five; but I can't 'elp that!"

"We can, however," replied Kerr coolly. "If anyone goes into the lock-up till morning it will be you, constable, not little us! May I inquire whether you have received instructions to arrest us upon sight?"

Kerr was very doubtful whether Mr. Railton would communicate with the police authorities at all. If he was anxious, it would be about Kerruish, Kerr fancied; the absence of the other four, and their presumed joining-up with Kerruish, would go far to minimise that anxiety. But no doubt the crowd of hunters had woke up the police force in the vicinity to the fact that they were runaways from St. Jim's.

"That ain't your business!" said P.-c. Brown sulkily. "Ere, you fat kid, jest you git off my tunic, or you and me will be quarrellin'!"

Now Kerr was sure. If word had gone out to the police officially this fellow would have said so at once. He had grossly exceeded any authority he possessed in pulling Kerruish off his bike; and if he were handed a trifle roughly after that, the chances were that he would not dare to make much fuss about such handling.

"Have you your handcuffs on you, constable?" asked Kerr politely.

"No, I ain't, then. An' s'pose I had?"

"In that event I should have your little hands handcuffed behind your back. As it is, we shall have to tie them."

"Betcher you don't!"

But P.-c. Brown would have lost his bet had anyone taken it. The five of them easily turned the policeman over, and fastened his hands behind his back with some tough string which Figgy produced.

"No need to tie his legs, I think," said Kerr. "We can be off and on and up and away before he rises to his very substantial feet. But you fellows had better look out that he doesn't kick when you get off his legs. I'm afraid he hasn't quite the sweetest temper in the police force, you know!"

Julian and Figgy, who had sat upon the legs of Brown, P.-c., were careful to avoid his plunging feet as they rose.

Then came a dash for the bikes—a mounting in hot haste—a swift rush up the slope, and a swifter rush when once the crest of it had been gained—a dim vision of a bulky form staggering to its feet—a roar like unto the roar of a bull coming out of the gloom—and the peril was past.

"My hat! You're a knock-out, Kerr!" said Kerruish.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Early in the Morning.

"U PROUSE ye, then, my merry, merry men,
For this is our hunting day!"

chanted the tuneful voice of Tom Merry, in the big barn at Watchett Farm, while the sun as yet hardly showed above the eastern horizon.

"An' a dashed early start for it!" drawled the drowsy voice of Ralph Reekness Cardew.

"You awake, Cardew? Up you get, then!"

"Hallo, Tommy!"

That was Blake.

"Scuffle up, you villain!"

"Right-ho! Gustavus, wake up, you suggard!"

"I do weally wish that you would not awaken me by bellowin' in my eeah, Blake!" replied Arthur Augustus, a trifle peevishly.

"Anything fit for a bathe near at hand,

Tom Merry?" sang out Redfern from the other end of the barn.

"I trust that some arrangements have been made about breakfast!" spoke the autocratic voice of George Alfred Grundy.

"Have you made any, old bird?" asked Tom cheerily.

"I? No, of course—"

"Well, the very last thing you told me last night was that you expected to be recognised as commander-in-chief, so I don't see why you shouldn't have done."

"A commander-in-chief does not—"

"Right-ho! Only you didn't point out that I had been appointed commissary-general, old file! What's that, Wally?"

"I should think I shouted loud enough, Tom Merry!"

"Oh, no fear of that—you always do! But even you can't overwhelm the—what should you call Grundy's way of speaking, Monty?"

"Dulcet whispering," answered Lowther, raising himself on his elbow. "Grundy's just the chap for cooing soft nothings in the ear of some fair maid, or—"

"I never did anything of the sort in my life!" roared Grundy.

"To toy with Amaryllis in the shade. Or smooth the tangles of some other girl's hair," quoted Cardew—imperfectly—from some translation of Horace.

"Rot!" bellowed Grundy.

"The river's only two fields away!" yelled Wally.

"What river?" asked Manners major.

"How should I know what river? And what's it matter, anyway, duffer?"

"Are not Abana and Pharpar, waters of Damascus, as good as the Ryll?" murmured Cardew, as he arose.

"You are a bigger ass than ever this mornin', Ralph!" said Clive.

"It would be the Ryll," said Glyn. "We're not a thousand miles from home, you know."

"Comes from sleepin' on straw, no doubt, Sidney," replied Cardew.

"What about brekker?" asked Gore.

"Oh, that's settled all right!" Tom Merry answered. "Who's for a bathe?"

Within three minutes the barn was deserted, and a stream of lightly-clad juniors was hurrying across the fields.

The absence of towels worried no one—unless it worried Gussy and Cardew, whose tastes were more Sybaritic than those of the majority. To pull on one's clothes over half-dried bodies sounds far worse than it is, though getting socks on to wet feet does usually mean darning operations for someone later.

In half an hour the last of them all—Cardew—was back at the farm, and breakfast was ready for them. Coffee-and-milk ad lib, two gigantic hams, loaves and loaves of home-baked bread, even home-made jam—it was a true feast.

And when it came to the settling-up process Tom Merry found that the good folk of Watchett Farm were certainly not to be numbered among the profiteers, for their charges for thirty-seven hungry juniors, and two meals for each of them, left change out of a fiver—the said fiver being Cardew's, though, of course, the rest had no intention of letting him pay for it all in the long run.

Soon after seven o'clock they took the road, splitting up, as on the day before, into detachments. The Terrible Three and Talbot—Blake & Co.—Levison & Co., with Durrance—Wally D'Arcy and his six—Kangaroo & Co.—Hammond, Reilly, Roylance, and Gore—Grundy, Gunn, and Wilkins—Redfern, Lawrence, and Lumley—Lumley—Thompson, Clarke, Pratt, and French—so were the detachments made up.

Three or four squads had moved off before anyone noticed that Koumi Rao was without a bike. Then Tom Merry spotted the fact.

"Hallo, Jammy!" he said. "What's gone wrong with your jigger?"

"I have it no longer, my friend," answered the Indian gravely. "I have lent it to Figgins."

"I knew that you would have anger against me; but that could not be helped. Figgins is my best friend—dearer even to me than you are!"

That speech disarmed Tom's anger. For a moment he had felt acute annoyance; but perhaps that would not long have endured, in any case.

"I say, you fellow, they've got five bikes now!" he cried. "The handicap's off. Well, I can't say I'm altogether sorry for that, though—"

"But how have they got another?" demanded Blake, while everybody left clustered round Tom and Koumi Rao. "Of course, they could have hired one somewhere, though I

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gress they'd have had to pay a pretty big deposit. But I don't see how you could hear."

"They came in the night and borrowed Koumi Rao's," said Tom, his blue eyes twinkling.

But the Indian would not have it put that way. His British training had at least taught him to face the music.

"I lent it to Figgins," he said. "I do not care for this hunt, and Figgins is my friend."

"Well, I'm blessed!" cried Blake.

"Rotten trick, I call it!" growled Herries.

"I'm not so suah of that, Hewwies, deah boy," said Gussy. "I do not entirely agree with what Koumi Wao has done; but I shaah with Tom Mewwy appweciation of the fact that the handcap is off."

"Well, I don't mind that myself," admitted Herries.

"But since it's off, the sooner we're off the better," said Kangaroo.

"Heah, heah!"

They mounted and rode, and not a single wrathful look was cast at Koumi Rao.

It may have been only because they judged him otherwise than they would have judged any fellow quite one of themselves. But he did not think of that as he stood looking after them.

"They are generous, these English," he murmured to himself. "It may be that after all the land of Hind is the better for the British Raj."

THE SIXTH CHAPTER. A Very Narrow Squawk.

KOUMI RAO set his face towards the south. He had inquired of the people at the farm concerning the nearest railway station, and had been directed to that which Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence had made for the previous night.

He had just reached the top of the hill, where the roads crossed, when he saw coming swiftly towards him a powerful motor-car, with three familiar figures in the tonneau.

Mr. Railton, Kildare, and Darrel!

"Well, it was not surprising. Naturally, the School House master would be anxious to herd home his errant flock. But he and the two prefects had certainly made an early start.

Koumi Rao knew that he was a conspicuous figure as he stood there, outlined against the sky behind him, his dusky face showing up clearly. But he did not attempt to scuttle. His pride forbade that.

Kildare sighted him first, and spoke to Mr. Railton. The master leaned forward, and said something to the chauffeur. Then, as the car breasted the slope, it slackened speed, and at the top it came to a standstill.

The three passengers jumped out.

"Ah, Koumi Rao!" said Mr. Railton coolly.

"Greeting, Railton sahib!" replied the Jam of Bundelphore.

"Where are the rest?"

Koumi Rao waved his hand north and east and west.

"Started again on the hunt—eh? Well, I am not going to waste time by telling you that you and they—but I am wasting it! Get in. You must consider yourself more or less a prisoner."

"It is an honourable captivity, Railton sahib, and not a hard one," replied the princely youngster.

Mr. Railton shot him a sharp glance. But he saw that only courtesy had prompted that speech; there was no mockery in it.

The others got in, and the car sped down the slope at something like forty miles an hour. Koumi Rao saw that those who were on the road it happened to take would have little chance of escape.

But by his time, as he well knew, the detachments were on at least half a dozen different roads. It would be no easy task to round up all of them.

It was plain that Mr. Railton meant to let the matter of his individual breach of discipline slide for the time being. But he inquired how Koumi Rao came to be alone and without a bike, and was answered frankly.

"By Jove, you've a nerve, Koumi Rao!" said Kildare.

Mr. Railton said nothing, but he frowned. What the Indian junior had done had added to his trouble, but he could not find it in his heart to be very angry, for he knew how much Figgins had done to make gentler that wild spirit, and it was something to be sure that Koumi Rao recognised the debt.

They sped on, Koumi Rao sitting by Darrel's side and opposite the master. Trees,

hedges, houses, inns, churches, barns, flitted past them, as it seemed. They flashed over streams; they breasted hills, and swung down them again. But as yet they saw no red-and-white St. Jim's cap ahead.

Till at last, in a shady road that ran between woods, Kildare cried:

"There are four of them, sir!"

And a few seconds later Thompson, Pratt, French, and Clarke jumped off their machines, and stood, looking rather crestfallen, by the side of the halted car.

"You will return to St. Jim's at once!" was all that Mr. Railton said to them. There was sternness in his tone, but no snappishness.

"All New House boys thus far," he said to the prefect when the car glided forward again.

"Oh, we'll come upon some of our own young rascals before long, sir!" replied Darrel.

But they covered another five miles without coming upon any of them.

Then Mr. Railton said quietly:

"Grundy and his faithful henchmen, I think."

Grundy looked round at that moment, and spoke to Gunn and Wilkins. All three put on a desperate spurt, but within a minute there was a gap between Grundy and Wilkins, and a bigger gap between Wilkins and Gunn.

Gunn swerved off the road, as if afraid of being run over, and fell from his machine, gasping. Wilkins was passed, and jumped off.

Grundy held on. Grundy seemed to think himself quite capable of racing a motor-car.

But, of course, Grundy was not. Another minute, and they were alongside him.

"Dismount at once, Grundy!" snapped the master.

Grundy obeyed with such reluctance that the car was pulled up level with him.

"You, and the other two, of course, will at once return!" snapped Mr. Railton. He was really snappish this time.

"Oh, sir!" gasped Grundy, his rugged face working.

"Not another word!"

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"Tain't fair, sir!"

Mr. Railton seemed to be deaf to that plea. He touched the chauffeur on the shoulder, and again the car sped on.

"Five of them this time!" said Darrel a few minutes later.

He was standing up to keep a watch ahead.

"The five, I do believe!" cried Kildare.

"That can't be anyone but young Figgins!"

"Bless the luck that made us turn at that last cross-roads!" said Mr. Railton.

"They've sighted us!" said Kildare. And at the top of his voice he yelled:

"Stop!"

But they did not stop. They pedalled harder than ever. Beads of sweat fell from the brow of Fatty Wynn, and Kerruish blew hard.

Into a side-road they swung, and were for the moment lost to sight.

"Fraid it's no go, Kerr!" said Dick Julian.

"Never say die!" replied Kerr. "Something may happen."

And at that moment something did happen! The side-road constituted an awkward turning, banked up on both sides as it was. In his excitement the chauffeur, into whom the spirit of the chase had entered thoroughly, attempted that turning at a speed that he would never have risked in cooler mood.

Before those in the car realised what was happening, the heavy vehicle was climbing one of the banks, not straight up, but in a very unpleasant slantwise fashion.

None of the four inside lacked courage, and the chauffeur was a man of Mons and the Marne. But all five rather disliked that position.

What the chauffeur did in the emergency the rest never knew, so that whether it was right or wrong they could only guess.

But the result of it was a plunge backward, a bump as the car struck the road, and the jarring sound of a broken axle!

Kerr's quick ears caught that sound.

"Crums! I do believe they've had a smash!" he said.

All five halted, not a hundred yards from the place of the accident, but screened from it by the bend of the road.

"Now we must go back and help them!" said Julian at once.

"Yes," faltered Kerruish, livid under his tan.

"No!" snapped Kerr. "I'll reconnoitre. You fellows ride on slowly. You can stop within another two hundred yards or so. After all, nothing serious may have happened. Take my jigger, Figgy."

He dodged over a stile and made his way along behind the hedges.

In a very few minutes he was back.

"Nobody hurt the slightest bit!" he said gaily. "But the shebang's busted, and the chase is off. Let us push on, brothers!"

"I say! With Railton behind there!" said Fatty.

"Well, he was behind us all the time, wasn't he, chump?" asked Kerr. "Whether he sat in his den at St. Jim's or roamed the roads, he was practically chasing us."

"Bub-bub-but this is different!" stammered Fatty. "Figgy said yesterday it was a fool's game."

"We're not giving it up for all that!" said Figgins sharply. "What do you say, Kerruish? What do you say, Julian?"

"I'm going on, whoever goes back!" replied Kerruish doggedly.

"And I am, too," said Julian quietly.

"Going back alone, Fatty?" asked Kerr.

Fatty Wynn drew a long, deep breath.

"Not likely!" he said.

"Allons, compagnons!" cried Kerr.

"What's that mean?" inquired Fatty.

"It's Hebrew for 'Get along, asses!' answered Kerr, grinning.

"You can't have me like that—it's French!" Fatty said.

So while the four New House juniors made for home, and Grundy argued with Wilkins and Gunn that it would be cowardly for them to obey, for he did not mean to while Mr. Railton and Kildare and Darrel stood with Koumi Rao and the chauffeur beside the broken-down car, while Tom Merry and the rest of the hunters hunted still, while Racke and Crooke plotted a plot which the next story will reveal, the five fugitives went on their way, playing their fools' game to the end.

But little did they guess what that end would be!

THE END.