

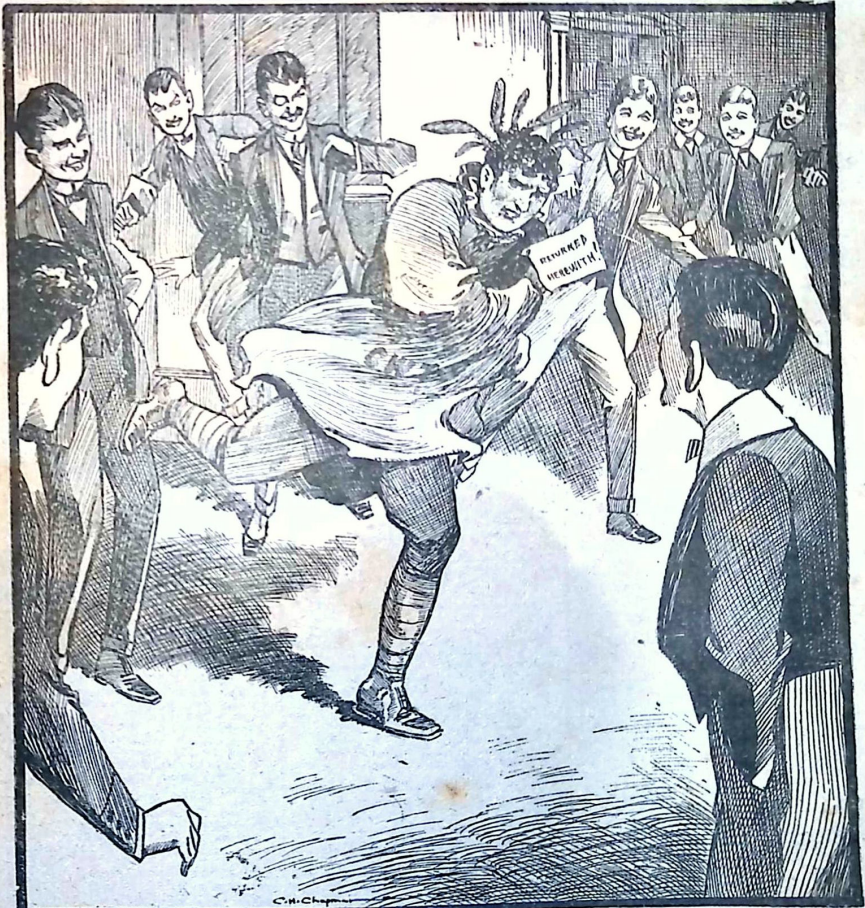
LONG STORIES OF GREYFRIARS, ROOKWOOD, AND ST. JIM'S.

The Penny **1½**  
Popular

Week Ending  
November 8th, 1919.

No. 42.  
New Series.

Three Complete Stories of—  
HARRY WHARTON & CO.—JIMMY SILVER & CO.—TOM MERRY & CO.



**WIBLEY IN THE WARS!**

(An Exciting Scene in the Magnificent Long Complete School Tale of the Chums of Greyfriars.)





A Magnificent New Long Complete  
Story of HARRY WHARTON &  
Co., of Greyfriars.

.. BY ..

FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.  
"Situation Vacant."

"TODDY! Where are you, Toddy?"  
The dulcet voice of Bob Cherry  
broomed along the Remove passage.  
Bob strode along, shouting as he  
went. His vocal efforts would have done  
credit to a town-crier.

"Toddy! Shake a leg, Toddy!"  
A door opened lower down the passage, and  
the face of Micky Desmond appeared.  
"Faith, an' what's all the row about,  
Cherry darlin'?"

"I'm looking for Toddy."  
"Well, I wish you'd do it a little more  
quietly," protested Micky, who had also been  
disturbed by Bob's clarion voice.

"Toddy!" thundered Bob Cherry, with the  
full force of his lungs. "Toddy! Toddy!"  
Quite a number of study doors were thrown  
open at this juncture, and an indignant  
chorus arose.

"Shut that row!"  
"How the thump can we do our prep when  
you're making a noise like a blessed footer  
enthusiast!"

"Keep off the grass!"  
Bob Cherry glared along the passage.  
"Anybody know where Toddy is?" he  
demanded.

"Here I am, my dear Cherry!"  
The lean figure of Alonzo Todd came into  
view.

Bob Cherry gave a snort.  
"I don't mean you," he said. "I mean the  
other silly ass!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"  
"You are looking for Peter?" said Alonzo.  
"Yes."

"You will find him in the gymnasium. He  
is indulging in a friendly bout of fisticuffs  
with Dutton."

"Thanks, Loney!" said Bob Cherry.  
And he hurried along to the gymnasium.

He found Peter Todd and Tom Dutton  
engaging with each other with the gloves.

"Oh, here you are, Toddy! You're  
wanted!"

Peter Todd promptly lowered his hands.  
But Tom Dutton, who, to use his own words,  
was "slightly hard of hearing," was not  
aware of the interruption, and he boxed on.  
He shot out his left with full force, and Peter  
Todd recoiled from a terrific blow on the  
nose.

"Yar-cooch!" yelled Peter. "You silly  
nut! What did you want to do that for?  
Couldn't you see that the scrap had  
stopped?"

"Dropped?" said Dutton, misunderstanding  
as usual. "Yes, you nearly did it. A bit  
more force behind that punch, and you'd  
have bitten the dust!"

"You—you—"  
Tom Dutton blinked at Peter in surprise.  
"Aren't you going to light it out?" he  
asked.

"It's over!" roared Peter.  
"Yes, I know I'm in clover; but I haven't  
finished yet!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry.  
Peter Todd seized Tom Dutton by the  
shoulder, and bellowed into his ear.

"The scrap's finished—over—ended—done  
with! See?"

"Oh!" said Tom Dutton, comprehending at  
last. "You've had enough—eh? Why  
couldn't you say so before?"

"Oh, my hat!"  
"Buck up, Toddy!" said Bob Cherry.  
"You're wanted!"

"Who by?"  
"Quechly!"

"Great pip! Have I got to go in to  
Quechly with a nose like this?"

The organ in question was already be-  
ginning to swell visibly.

Bob Cherry clucked.  
"You'd better explain to Quechly that you  
fell under a steam-roller!" he said.

Peter Todd removed his boxing-gloves, and  
put on his jacket. Then he went along to the  
Form-master's study.

Bob Cherry accompanied him as far as the  
door.

"Any idea what Quechly wants me for,  
Bob?" asked Peter.

"Not the faintest notion, old man!"  
"Is it a licking, do you think?"

"May be. On the other hand, it may be  
an invitation to tea on Sunday."

"I don't think," granted Peter.  
He rapped on the door of the study, and  
Mr. Quechly's voice bade him enter.

"Bless my soul, Todd!" exclaimed the  
Remove-master, as Peter came in. "What  
have you been doing with your nose?"

"Ahem! I was having a friendly scrap  
with Dutton in the gym, sir—"

Mr. Quechly frowned.  
"Friendly scraps, as you call them, do  
not usually terminate in this way, Todd!"

"It was a misunderstanding on Dutton's  
part, sir."

"Very well. I will say no more about it.  
I sent for you, Todd, to acquaint you with  
the fact that you are to be captain of the  
Remove for a week."

"Oh!"  
"As you are aware, there are five candi-  
dates for the position, and one of them—  
Vernon-Smith—has already been given a  
trial week. It is now your turn to take a  
trial week."

"Good!" murmured Peter.  
He had not been thinking of the cap-

taincy when he had received Mr. Quechly's  
summons. He had imagined that the Remove-  
master was about to take him to task for  
some boyish transgression.

Harry Wharton was no longer captain of  
the Remove. He had left the Form down  
basely in the matter of a Highlife raid; and  
the outcry against him had been so violent  
that Mr. Quechly had ordered him to relinquish  
his position. Whether he was to relinquish  
it for good, or merely for a matter of a few  
weeks, remained to be seen.

The position of Form-captain was left  
vacant; and there were five candidates for  
the post—including Wharton himself. Each  
of the candidates was to be given a week's  
trial; and when they had all been given a  
chance to prove their mettle, the Remove  
were to vote. The fellow who had distin-  
guished himself most during his trial-week  
would be elected to the captaincy.

Vernon-Smith's week, which had just  
finished, had been a thrilling one. The  
Bonder of Greyfriars had exerted himself  
to the utmost, and a big list of successes  
stood to his credit.

At the finish, however, Vernon-Smith had  
lumbered badly. He had allowed Ponsibly &  
Co., of Highlife, to work off a gigantic  
beat on the Greyfriars Remove.

The "nuts" of Highlife had hired a  
man—probably a broken-down actor—to ap-  
pear at Greyfriars in the guise of a Form-  
master.

Both the Head and Mr. Quechly had been  
away at the time, and the ruse had worked  
admirably.

The Removites had been furious when they  
discovered the hoax. They considered that  
Vernon-Smith, as temporary Form-captain  
ought not to have walked blindly into the  
trap.

The Bonnder had been badly bumped, and,  
like Wharton, he had fallen from favour.

It now remained for the other candidates  
to show what they could do.

Besides Peter Todd, Dick Russell was in the  
running for the captaincy; and another  
aspirant for the honours was Billy Butler!  
The Owl of the Remove was hardly likely to  
be elected—unless the age of miracles  
returned.

Peter Todd's eyes were gleaming as he  
stood before Mr. Quechly.

The leader of Study No. 7 intended to make  
a bold bid for the vacant position. Where  
Vernon-Smith had failed, he hoped to  
succeed.

"I trust you will acquit yourself well during  
your trial week, Todd," said Mr. Quechly  
kindly.

"Thank you, sir!"  
"You will consider yourself nominally cap-



tain the Remove for a week from now. That is all, Todd."

"A crowd of fellows were waiting in the passage when Peter Todd came out.

"Here he is!"

"What did Quechly want you for, Todd?"

"Was it a licking?"

Peter Todd confronted the inquiring crowd.

"Clear the passage!" he rapped out.

"Eh!"

"Don't hang about here! Get back to your kennels!"

"Hum-mum-my hat!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"How you speak, Todd, or did the wind blow?" asked Bolsover major.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Clear out, when your Form-captain tells you to!"

"Since when," said Skinner, "have you been Form-captain, Todd?"

"My trial-week started two minutes ago."

"Oh!"

"Yah! I'm going to keep you fellows in order!" said Peter Todd grimly. "There's going to be no slacking during my term of office, I can assure you! The Remove's got to hold its own against all comers!"

"That," murmured Hurree Singh, "is the steamed stuff to indifferently give them!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Peter Todd evidently meant business.

Slowly the crowd melted away, excitedly discussing the situation as they went.

"I say, Todd!" Billy Bunter rolled up to the temporary captain and blinked at him through his little eyes. "Hearty congratulations, old man!"

"Go to Jericho!" snapped Peter. "And take your congratulations with you!"

"Oh, really, Todd? Now that you're captain of the Remove, don't you think we ought to have a big feed to celebrate it?"

"No, I don't!" growled Peter. "During my week of office, I'm going to put my foot down on gluttonous orgies!"

"My hat!"

"A fellow who overfeeds is no good either to himself or to his Form. He gets sleepy and stodgy. And I'm going to see that everybody's awake and alive this week—including you, my fat tulip! If I catch you stuffing yourself with jam-tarts, look out for squalls!"

"He, he, he, chuckle, chuckle, Billy Bunter. "He will have his little joke, bless him!"

"I'm not joking," said Peter grimly.

"Eh!"

"Vamoose the ranch!"

Billy Bunter saw that he would get no chance out of his study-mate. He retreated along the passage, and when at a safe distance he flourished a fat fist in the direction of Peter Todd.

"Yah! Heast! I hope you come a cropper! I hope you make a mess of everything, and get mobbed at the finish! I hope—"

Peter Todd made a sudden rush towards the fat junior, and when at the distance he wanted to say what else he hoped, he hopped!

**THE SECOND CHAPTER.**  
**A Council of War.**

"WHAT did Quechly want you for, Todd?" inquired Tom Dutton, who had just returned to Study No. 7 from the gym.

"I'm to be skipper," said Peter Todd shortly.

"What a queer thing!" exclaimed Dutton.

"Eh!"

"Fancy Quechly giving you the skipper?"

"You silly chump!" shouted Peter. "You've got hold of the wrong end of the stick—as usual; I'm to be skipper of the Form!"

Tom Dutton gave a shudder.

"What are you shuddering for, you ass?" demanded Peter.

"You say it's warm, but I find it jolly cold myself—perishing, in fact!" said the dear junior.

"Oh, help!"

Carrying on a conversation with Tom Dutton was a difficult and a dangerous task.

Peter Todd gave it up. He seated himself at the table, and prepared to draw up an announcement.

He was in the middle of his task when there was a knock on the study door.

"Come in, inthead!"

The "inthead"—there were three of them—proved to be Skinner, Stott, and Bolsover major.

These three solemnly advanced into the study, and bowed low, until they almost grovelled at the feet of Peter Todd.

"What the merry dickens—" began Peter, in amazement.

"Hail, O Great White Chief!" said Skinner.

"Hail!" said Stott.

"Hail!" added Bolsover major, manfully trying to keep his face straight.

Peter Todd glared at the trio.

"Clear out!" he exclaimed. "This study isn't the place for pantomime rehearsals!"

"Well, what—" began Skinner, with owl-like gravity.

"Well, having come, you can turn round and go back again!"

"We came to convey to you our congratulations—"

"Our warmest congratulations!" said Stott.

"On having been appointed to the giddy post of captain, and bottle-washer to the Remove!" concluded Skinner.

Peter Todd knew, of course, that Skinner & Co. were indulging in the pastime of leg-pulling. At the same time, he was interested in a neat little plush box which Skinner carried, and his curiosity proved greater than his anger.

"What have you got there?" he asked.

"This," said Skinner, "is a little present which has been subscribed for by your loyal and useful subjects!"

"Yes, verily!" said Stott.

"And in good sooth," added Bolsover major.

Peter Todd steeled.

"You—you mean to say you've got up a subscription for me?" he exclaimed.

The trio nodded their heads solemnly.

"What's in that box?" asked Peter.

"A costly and mysterious gift," said Skinner, "which will nearly knock you down when you see it!"

Peter Todd's perplexity increased.

"Hand it over!" he said.

Skinner made another sweeping bow, and opened the door.

Peter turned the box over in his hand, and as he pressed it open Skinner & Co. edged to the door.

At that instant Peter Todd had the shock of his life.

The lid of the box flew back, and something shot upwards and smote the leader of the study No. 7 with great violence under the chin.

"Varooooooh!" yelled Peter.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the practical jokers.

The little plush box had contained a goliath attached to an exceptionally powerful spring, and, as Skinner had predicted, the "gift" had nearly knocked Peter Todd down.

With a howl of rage, the victim sprang to the door.

But Skinner & Co. had already made themselves scarce, and the sound of a chuckle floated to Peter Todd from the end of the passage.

With a snort, the temporary captain of the Remove turned back into his study. Tom Dutton, who had witnessed the proceedings, was shaking with merriment, but he disengaged himself to convert a chuckle into a cough.

Peter Todd hurled the precious goliath into the fire, and resumed the task which the practical jokers had interrupted.

When the announcement was finished, Peter posted it up on the school notice-board.

There was a rush of juniors to the spot.

"Hallo! Hallo! Hallo!" ejaculated Bob Cherry, with the other members of the Famous Five. "What's Todd's latest?"

"A call to arms, by Jove!" said Harry Wharton.

And he read the notice aloud:

"There will be a Mass Meeting of the Remove Form in the Junior Common-room this evening half an hour before bed-time. P. Todd will take the chair. The subject under discussion will be: 'How to Get Our Own Back on Highlife.'"

"Attendance at the meeting is not optional, but compulsory, and any fellow who fails to turn up will get it where the chicken got the chopper!"

(Signed) P. TODD.

"Captain of the Remove."

"What awful cheek!" exclaimed Frank Nugent.

"Attendance not optional, but compulsory!" gasped Johnny Bull. "Did you ever?"

"No, never!" said Bob Cherry solemnly. "Todd's really got me going, asking for trouble!" murmured Hurree Singh.

"Like his cheek to think he can bully us into turning up at a meeting!" growled Squiff.

"What's the verdict, Harry?" inquired Bob Cherry, turning to the ex-captain. "To go or not to go?"

Wharton hesitated.

"I think we ought to step along," he

said at length. "After all, it's only fair trial week. We rallied round Smithy, and candidates except Bunter!"

"Oh, really, Wharton?" protested the fat junior, who was standing in the doorway.

"Well, I was for your support—you'll never find it!" said Frank Nugent.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Famous Five decided to turn up at the meeting.

A good meeting, however indignantly declared time came their curiosity got the better of them, and they went.

Peter Todd, as he mounted a form in the Common-room, had a mixed recollection.

"First of all," he began, "I'll call the roll!"

"What?"

"My hat!"

"I want to make sure there are no absentees," said Peter. "Answer your names! Bulstrode!"

"I'm not here, my lord!" said Bulstrode.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bolsover, Brown, Bunter—"

The juniors answered in turn, most of them sarcastically. It was a novel proceeding for a Remove to conduct the roll-call of its own Form.

When the last fellow on the list—little Peter Todd—had answered "No present!"

"Now, you fellows," he exclaimed, in ringing tones, "listen to me!"

"I am all ears!" said Bolsover major.

"Any ass can see that!" retorted Peter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bolsover scowled, and Peter Todd warmed to his subject.

"Only a few days ago," he said, "we were divided, and, done by the Highcliffe club."

"Can't you talk about something more pleasant, Todd?" growled Vernon-Smith.

"I know it's unpleasant, but it's got to be faced. I'm no use pretending we don't care. We do. We don't like to be fooled by any body, least of all fellows of the Pansoby type."

"What's the use of crying over spilt milk?" said Ogilvy.

"I'm not doing anything of the sort. But it would be sheer idiocy to let things be where they are. We shall have Highcliffe pot dogs, and all the rest of it. They've made us look small, and they'll never let us hear the end of it, unless—"

"Unless the Remove takes revenge! That is the object of this meeting—to discuss ways and means of getting even with Highcliffe. We shall never be able to hold up our heads again until it's done."

Peter Todd's words made an impression.

The juniors felt their discomfiture keenly. It was maddening to think they had been duped by Pansoby & Co., and Peter Todd's policy of ruthless revenge struck most of the fellows as being very desirable.

"I'm captain of the Remove for a week," continued Peter, "and I mean to make good, so that I can lay the job for a permanency."

"You'll never do that!" said Bob Cherry, with conviction. "Wharton's got you back!"

"Hear, hear!" said Nugent loyally.

Aud Hurree Singh remarked that the "hear-hear"fulness was a host from the anti-Whartonites.

"Eats!"

"Wharton's no good!"

"He let us down," growled Bolsover major, "and he's been kicked out, as he deserves!"

"But he's coming back!" repeated Bob Cherry, getting no honour in his own Form, but you see if I'm not right!"

"Yah!"

"There was no mistaking Harry Wharton's unpopularity."

Peter Todd raised his head.

"Order, there!" he rapped out. "It will be bed-time in a few minutes, so we can't afford to waste time. Now, are you all agreed that we should be revenged on Highcliffe?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Be quiet, all the cads!"

"Give 'em sock!"

"Very well, then," said Peter Todd. "Put out your suggestions! How shall we set about it?"



"Raid them in force tonight!" said Bob Cherry promptly.

"A midnight raid, do you mean?"

"Yes."

"Can't be done," said Peter.

"Why not?" demanded several voices.

"We should have to go over to Highcliffe in big numbers, and it would be impossible to do that without being bottled out."

"But the Highcliffe fellows did it!" said Sniff.

"They came over here one night and painted and feathered us in our beds."

"Yes, but there's no discipline to speak of at Highcliffe. The sergeant can come and go as they like. Mobbs, their Form-master, pretends not to know anything about it when Ponsoby & Co. break bounds. But at Greyfriars it's different. It's hard enough for one fellow to break bounds without being spotted, let alone twenty or thirty!"

"Today's night," said Harry Wharton. "It would be jolly nice to pay a surprise visit to Highcliffe, and give Ponsoby & Co. a drubbing; but it can't be done—not at night, at any rate."

"I say, Toddy, why not raid their tuck?" suggested Billy Bunter. "You couldn't have a revenge more crushing than that. If we raided all the junior studies at Highcliffe, I'd undertake to see the grub safely home."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Nobody except Billy Bunter seemed to be in favour of the tuck-raiding scheme, which presented the same difficulties as an ordinary raid."

"Several of the juniors put forward suggestions, most of which were ruled out as impracticable."

"The council of war was still in progress when Wingate of the Sixth looked in."

"What's going on in here?" he exclaimed.

"Just a friendly discussion on the weather," Wingate said Bob Cherry.

"Wingate looked suspiciously at the juniors."

"If you want to know my opinion," he said, "I think it will be stormy before long!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But he had turned to the captain of Greyfriars."

"Can't you give us just five minutes longer, Wingate?"

"Very well. If this room isn't empty by the end of that time, I'll get amongst you with an asphalt!"

Wingate went out, and Peter Todd, looking very excited, turned to his schoolfellows.

"I've got it!" he exclaimed.

"Got what?" chorused the juniors.

"I've got Peter. A wheeze for making Highcliffe sit up!"

"Good!"

"Let's have it!"

And the Removites hung on Peter Todd's words.

### THE THIRD CHAPTER.

#### Wibley Takes a Hand.

"WELL pay them back in their own coin," said Peter Todd. "The Highcliffe bouncers sent an impersonator to Highcliffe!"

"Sounds all right," said Bob Cherry, "but who's the giddy impersonator going to be, and who's he going to impersonate?"

"Peter Todd had a ready reply.

"The Head of Highcliffe," he said, "is advertising for a drill-sergeant. I saw the advertisement in the local rag. Why shouldn't one of our fellows rig himself up as a drill-sergeant, and bag the job?"

"My hat!"

"He'd only keep it for a few hours, of course. But in that time he would be able to make the fur fly! Imagine him drilling Ponsoby & Co., and putting them through their paces!"

"The Remove did not exactly fall in love with the idea at first, but they soon began to see its possibilities.

"To-morrow's a half-holiday," said Peter Todd. "Ponsoby and his pals will be looking forward to an afternoon's amusement in the way of card-playing, and so forth. Instead of which, they'll be forced to devote the time to drill."

"And the drill-sergeant will be one of us!" chuckled Sniff.

"Exactly."

"But which one?" asked Frank Nuncent.

"Wibley's the man for the job, look you!" said Morgan.

"Hear, hear!"

"Let Wib take it on!"

Wibley of the Remove had long been renowned for his clever impersonations. He had been known to baffle the whole school before now. As an actor, he was little short

of marvellous; and his disguises were impregnable.

"Are you game, Wib?" asked Peter Todd.

"Yes, rather!"

"What about the fog?"

"There is a sergeant's uniform among the props of the Amateur Dramatic Society," said Wibley. "It will suit me down to the ground. I shall have to had my suit out of course, and wear boots that will make me look taller, but that's easily done!"

"Peter Todd was smiling now. He felt that the Remove was on the verge of working off on Highcliffe one of the biggest pieces of the term—if not the biggest.

"You're sure everything will be all right, Wib?"

"Positive!"

"But supposing Wib doesn't get the job?" said Vernon Smith.

"You leave that to me," said Wibley. "I'll talk to Highcliffe like a Dutch uncle. I'll blow my own trumpet, and make myself out to be the finest drill-sergeant who ever strutted on parade!"

"What shall you call yourself?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Sergeant Billings—late of the Buffs!"

"The Buffs, you mean?" chuckled Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't see why Wib should be selected for the job! You want a fellow of martial bearing—a chap with a personality—me, for instance?"

"There was a fresh burst of laughter, which was checked by Wingate of the Sixth, who strode into the Common-room at that moment, with a frown on his face and an asphalt in his hand.

"I've given you another five minutes, you kids!" said the captain of Greyfriars. "That was ten minutes ago!"

"Oh crumbs!"

"I don't think I'd like the look of Wingate's asphalt, and they stampeded for the door.

There was a crush in the doorway, reminiscent of a number of people trying to board an omnibus at the same moment; and Wingate did great execution with his asphalt.

"Lash! Lash! Lash!"

"Varnishes!" "Chauchit!" "Stopit!"

The Removites roared and yelled with anguish as they wriggled through the doorway.

Billy Bunter, owing chiefly to his huge bulk, was the last to get clear, and he received a cut with the asphalt which caused him to curl up.

In the Remove dormitory Peter Todd's remarks were discussed at great length, and the juniors chuckled to themselves as they pictured Wibley drilling the Highcliffe Nuts.

"It ought to work like a charm!" said Monty Rowland. "But you'll have to be jolly careful, Wib. If Ponsoby & Co. were to twig your disguise, your life wouldn't be worth living!"

"You'd have to be brought back to Greyfriars by a stretcher," said Bob Cherry.

"I doubt it he'd come back at all," said Johnny Bull. "He'd be torn limb from limb!"

Wibley laughed.

"Ever since I left the cradle I've been taught how to look after Number One! He said, 'I shall top myself up in such a way that the Highcliffe fellows can't possibly smother me!'"

"It will come rather hard on Frank Courtenay and the Caterpillar, and all the decent fellows in the Highcliffe Fourth," said Harry Wharton thoughtfully.

"Yes, ever about them," said Wibley. "I shall be mighty meanly, they'll have to drill with the others, of course; but I shall single out Ponsoby & Co. for special treatment!"

"Mind you give 'em to them hot and strong!" said Skinner.

"Make 'em hop and run and turn backwards, and all the rest of it!" said Rowland in a rage.

Wibley nodded.

"They'll be pretty sick by the time I've finished with them!" he said.

"Good!"

The Removites turned in with great spirits. They gloated as they thought of the sorry time in store for Ponsoby & Co.; and their only regret was that they would not be on the spot to see the fun.

Peter Todd, in particular, was very cheerful.

If the jape came off successfully—and there seemed to be no reason why it shouldn't—it would be his feather in Peter's cap. When the election of a per-

manent Form-captain took place, the fellows would remember this brilliant operation against Highcliffe, and Peter Todd would scoop in quite a lot of votes. So he hoped, anyway.

Everything depended on William Wibley. And although the enterprise would have been difficult, almost impossible, to a fellow who wasn't a born impersonator, Wibley could be relied upon to make a successful job of it. He was a post-master in the delicate and sometimes dangerous art of impersonation.

Wingate saw lights out in the Remove dormitory, and long after he had retired the juniors continued to discuss the forthcoming jape. Some of them—including Peter Todd and Wibley—did not get to sleep until past midnight, with the result that they were tired and heavy-eyed the next morning.

After breakfast, Wibley got all his equipment ready, and polished the buttons of the sergeant's tunic he was to wear.

The task occupied him so long that he was late for school, and Mr. Quetch frowned at the belated junior.

"You are late, Wibley!"

"I'm sorry, sir!"

"Your sorrow does not impress me in any way," said the form-master dryly. "You will take a hundred lines!"

Wibley grinned as he went to his place.

He didn't mind the imposition in the least. The only thing which would have really upset him, had he been detention for the afternoon. Such a punishment would have knocked the whole scheme on the head; and Wibley was careful to be on his best behaviour during the morning.

Mr. Quetch found his pupils very trying; but he had no further fault to find with Wibley. At length the time of dismissal came, and in the interval before dinner Wibley performed a little rehearsal in his study before an admiring audience.

He wore the sergeant's uniform, together with a curling moustache of the Hebenzellerian variety. His chest was well padded, his eyebrows had been thickened, and his lower jaw protruded in a bullying manner.

Altogether, Wibley looked a typical drill-sergeant of the more aggressive type.

"Att! Front! Stannattee!" he shouted.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good-old Wib!"

"Now then, Ponsoby, lift them feet off the floor, or I'll tickle you up with this 'ere cane!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wibley grinned, and resumed his natural voice.

"Think I'll pass muster, you fellows?"

"Yes, rather," said Peter Todd. "Nobody will guess you're anything but an old soldier. You can play the part to the life!"

"Carry on, Sergeant Billings!" checked Bolsover major. "And mind you take it out of the Highcliffe cads!"

"Hallo! There's the dinner-bell!" said Peter Todd. "Back up, Wib!"

"I'm not coming in to dinner," said Wibley. "I prefer to wait until I've finished my job at Highcliffe. Then I'll come and join you in a study feed, Toddy."

"My son," said Peter Todd, solemnly, "if you carry this through successfully, you shall have a hundred feet that ever adorned a junior study!"

And Peter Todd meant it.

### THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

#### High Jinks at Highcliffe!

"WELL, HIS'S this merry merchant!"

It was Cecil Ponsoby who asked the question.

The Highcliffe blades were lounging in the school gate when a corpulent and fery-looking sergeant came in sight.

"Yaas, who is he, begad?" asked Vavasour.

"One of Courtenay's poor relations, I expect," chuckled Monson.

And there was a laugh. Frank Courtenay, the captain of the Highcliffe Fourth, was not exactly beloved of the "nuts." Ever since he had first come to Highcliffe as "The Boy Without a Name," he had been a target for their cheap sneers.

The sergeant came on with martial tread. When he drew level with the school gateway he thrust out his jaw, and glared at Ponsoby.

"Is this 'ere 'Ighcliffe School' he demanded.

"Pon nodded.

"You've dropped your aitches!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"





Peter Todd had the shock of his life. The lid of the box flew back, and something shot upwards and smote the leader of No. 7 Study with great violence under the chin. "Yaroooh!" yelled Peter. "Ha, ha, ha!" roared the practical jokers. (See page 3.)

The sergeant brandished his swagger-cane, and advanced towards Ponsoby. The latter backed away in alarm.

"Hold on!" he gasped. "What's the little game?"

"Which I don't stand on impertinence from young rips like yourself!" growled the sergeant.

And he gave Ponsoby a playful flick with his cane.

"You! Keep him off!" panted Poo.

The others were about to hunt themselves at the sergeant, but his next words checked them.

"Now, listen to me, young shavers! I'm going to be the drill-sergeant at this 'ere 'Ome for Incuriablans, an' I ain't going to stand no nonsense!"

The Highcliffe "nuts" fairly gasped.

"You—you're comin' here as drill-sergeant?" stammered Galsby.

The sergeant nodded gravely.

"Wat's more, I mean to put you through the mill!" he declared.

"Oh crumbs!"

The juniors exchanged glances of dismay.

"I'm Sergeant Billings, of the Buffs, an' I believe in buff's an' cuffs!" said the sergeant poetically.

Ponsoby glared.

"We don't want any confounded Bolsheviks here!" he exclaimed.

The sergeant flourished his swagger-cane.

"Silence!" he stormed. "Conduct me at once to the 'Eadmaster's study!"

Ponsoby hesitated. He didn't like the look of the new drill-sergeant, and would dearly have loved to pitch him neck and crop into the roadway. But such a course would mean trouble with the Head, and, although Ponsoby & Co. snapped their fingers at Mr. Mobbs, they stood in awe of Dr. Voysey.

"This way!" said Ponsoby sullenly.

And he led the sergeant across the quadrangle.

Sergeant Billings was the cynosure of all eyes as he was escorted to the Head's study.

The news of his arrival swiftly spread, and quite a crowd of fellows—seniors and juniors alike—turned out to get a glimpse of him.

The impersonator's courage did not waver when the deep voice of Dr. Voysey bade him enter.

The sergeant advanced two paces into the study, brought his heel together with a smart click, and came up to the salute.

"Afternoon, sir!" he said. "I've called to see you with reference to your advertisement for a drill-sergeant."

Dr. Voysey fixed his keen eyes upon the newcomer. He seemed perfectly satisfied with his scrutiny.

"You look the right sort of man for my purpose, sergeant," said the Head at length. "May I see your credentials?"

Sergeant Billings—alias William Whitley—had not foreseen the possibility of this request.

"He was momentary thrown off his balance.

Without betraying his uneasiness, however, he proceeded to go through the pockets of his tunic. Finally, he gave an exclamation of annoyance.

"Confound it! I've left all my papers at 'ome, sir!"

"That is a pity," said the Head.

"Still, you can surely take me at my face-value, sir? I'm Sergeant Billings, of the Buffs, an' my brilliant work 'as caused many sensations in the past!"

"But—but you have no ribbons on your breast!" protested Dr. Voysey.

"Ribbons, sir!" snorted the sergeant.

"Which I don't believe in self-advertisement, sir. The men who did the really big things

in the war don't wear ribbons. I'm one of them—one of the strong, silent sort of men."

The Head smiled.

"Your silence does not appear to be greatly in evidence now, sergeant," he said. "However, as I previously remarked, you look the right sort of man for my purpose. As the post I am offering is only a temporary one, I will not press for your credentials."

Whitley felt immensely relieved. He smiled, too, at the mention of a "temporary" post.

It would prove to be more temporary than the kindly old Head imagined! The junior would be obliged to resume his normal place in the Greyfriars Remove by nightfall.

"There has lately been a good deal of slackness in the Fourth Form here, sergeant," said the Head. "A certain section of the boys seem to shun physical exercise. They slunt themselves up in study studies, or wander aimlessly in the village. I think a strenuous course of drill and discipline would do them good."

"All the good in the world, sir!" agreed the sergeant. "Which I shall be most 'appy to put the young rips through their paces, sir."

There was a knock on the Head's door, which opened a moment later, admitting Mr. Mobbs, the sour-looking master of the Highcliffe Fourth.

Mr. Mobbs eyed the sergeant with extreme disavour.

"Who is this man, sir?" he inquired, in tones of contempt.

"He has been engaged by me in the capacity of drill-sergeant, Mr. Mobbs," said the Head.

"Indeed! I cannot say that I altogether approve of your selection, Dr. Voysey!"

The Head flared up at this.

"Really, Mr. Mobbs, it is not for you to criticise my actions!" he said heatedly.

"But this man—this repulsive-looking scoundrel—"



"Who are you callin' a scoundrel?" demanded the sergeant. "Scoundrel yourself, you satchel-faced little whippersnapper!"

Mr. Mobbs never fell down.

"Sir!" he gasped, turning to the Head. "Am I to be insulted in this outrageous manner?"

"It is your own fault, Mr. Mobbs," said the Head, without sympathy. "You should not have referred to Sergeant Billings as a scoundrel."

"May I not speak the truth?" said the Form-master sullenly.

"That is not the truth."

"Really, sir—"

"No, another word, Mr. Mobbs! Sergeant Billings!"

"Sir!"

"You will proceed to muster the members of the Fourth Form, and drill them at your discretion."

"Very good, sir!"

The sergeant saluted, and withdrew, leaving Mr. Mobbs to expostulate with the Head on the subject of introducing iron discipline to Highcliffe. But Mr. Mobbs expostulated in vain.

Wibley, chucking softly to himself, stepped out into the quadrangle.

He brought a whistle with him to Highcliffe, and he blew it loudly in order to summon the Fourth.

There was no immediate response.

Ponsonby & Co. were still lounging in the school gateway, and they were deaf to the shrill blast of the whistle.

"Fall in!" bellowed Sergeant Billings at the top of his voice.

Ponsonby's chums glanced inquiringly at their leader.

"Shall we or shan't we, Pon?" murmured Gadsby.

"Looks as if we've got no choice in the matter," growled Pon. "The head is standing just beneath the Head's study window, an' if we don't obey him there will be ructions!"

"Oh crumbs!"

Very reluctantly, Ponsonby & Co. lined up in front of the sergeant.

"Get into line!" rapped out the latter.

"Fallest on the right, shortest on the left! We're your name, pie-face!"

The question was addressed to Gadsby, who writhed, but was helpless, owing to the proximity of the Head's study.

"Obedy, sergeant!"

"Very good! Where are the rest of the young cubs?"

"Playin' football," said Gadsby.

"Jest you run along an' fetch 'em, then!" Gadsby grinned.

"They're likely to come—I don't think," he said.

"Well 'em, it's the 'Ead's orders. A that'll fetch 'em fast enough!"

Gadsby went along to the football ground, where Frank Courtenay & Co. were indulging in shots at goal.

"Hallo!" exclaimed the Caterpillar, as Gadsby approached. "Goin' to give up your bad old ways, Gaddy, an' chase the boundin' leather, for a change?"

Gadsby scowled.

"You're wanted," he said—"all of you!"

"Wanted!" echoed Frank Courtenay. "By whom?"

"There's a beast of a sergeant come here to drill us. He's waitin' in the quad now!"

"My hat!"

"Let him wait!" said Flip Derwent.

"Yes, rather!"

"It's the Head's orders," said Gadsby.

"Then!"

"In that case, we'd better go along!" said Frank Courtenay. "But I'm dashed if I like the idea of drill on a half-holiday!"

None of the other fellows liked it, either. But the Head's orders were not to be disobeyed.

The football was left neglected in a pool of muddy water, and the Fourth-Formers wended their way to the quadrangle.

"Double up!" rapped out Sergeant Billings.

"Ye gods! The man's a holy terror!" gasped the Caterpillar. "Look at his Prussian jaw!"

"And his Hohenzollern moustache!" said Smithson.

The appearance of Sergeant Billings was not prepossessing, and the Highcliffe juniors lined up with sullen faces. But for the fact that they were directly beneath the Head's window they would probably have rebelled, and the sergeant would have received a rough handling.

"Now, my merry imps," said the sergeant—and he appeared to be gloating with satisfaction.

"You're goin' through the mill! Party, shun!"

The juniors shuffled up to attention.

"Attention!" thundered the sergeant. "Number yourselves up, can't you? You're like a box of tin soldiers!"

The juniors caught sight of Dr. Voyses's face at the window, and they went through the motions smartly, though their cheeks were burning with humiliation, especially as a number of fellows in other Forms had gathered round to laugh at their expense.

"Right turn!" bellowed the sergeant. "By the right, quick march!"

And the Fourth-Formers, baffled and furious, started to march through the quadrangle.

## THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

### "Returned Herewith!"

UNDER the stern eye of Sergeant Billings, the Highcliffe juniors continued to march to and fro.

Besides the humiliation of the situation, they felt its monotony. For upwards of a quarter of an hour they continued to march; and every inch of the ground was familiar to them by the time the sergeant had a welcome to them.

Frank Courtenay & Co. were fit and fresh, and the exertion had not told on them. But Ponsonby and his cronies were perspiring profusely, and gasping under their breath.

"Hope he's goin' to chuck it now," murmured Gadsby.

But the hope was ill-founded.

The sergeant rapped out the order, "Double march!" and the juniors were compelled to double backwards and forwards at an increasing rate of speed.

"Oh crumbs!" panted Ponsonby. "This is a—"

"A sell collapse in a minute!" groaned Gadsby.

"Same here!" mumbled Merton.

"That's the giddy limit!" was Drury's verdict.

"Absolutely!" moaned Vavasour.

But there was no rest for the wicked. Ponsonby & Co. had to go through with it, and it was their own fault that they were not in fit condition to bear up under the exertion.

Frank Courtenay and his chums were not enjoying the experience. Far from it. But they tried to soldier.

Ponsonby, however, slowed up, and came to a standstill. His cronies followed his example.

"Now, then," barked Sergeant Billings, "get move on, there!"

"Rats!" panted Ponsonby.

"Wat! Wat!"

"I've had enough!" growled Pon.

"I've had enough of us," declared Gadsby.

The sergeant looked grim.

"Double up!" he exclaimed. "Or you'll get a taste of this cane!"

Ponsonby & Co. stood pumping in breath. They refused to budge, and Sergeant Billings carried out his threat. He brought his swagger cane into action, and a chorus of yells arose.

"Get on!" roared the sergeant.

"Chuck it!"

"Give over, you beast!"

"Double up, then!" commanded the sergeant.

The Head's face again became visible at the window, and Ponsonby & Co. deemed it prudent to obey.

With fury in their faces, they doubled up. And they were on the verge of "doubling up" in more senses than one.

"Pick your feet up, there!" thundered the sergeant. "Pull yourselves together! Left-right-left-right-left!"

Frank Courtenay & Co. were beginning to feel "whacked." The sergeant was very hot, and the sergeant was relentless.

"Phew! I shall go on strike in a minute, Frank!" panted the Caterpillar.

"But the Head's watchin' us, old man!"

"Can't help that, dear boy. This is beginnin' to get on my nerves!"

The Fourth-Formers all had bellows to mend when Sergeant Billings gave the order to halt.

Gasping and panting, they stood in a dejected-looking row in the quadrangle.

Wibley was enjoying himself immensely.

His scheme—or, rather, Peter Todd's scheme—was working better than the wisdest expectations of either of them. There had been no difficulties in the way. It had all been so beautifully simple.

Wibley was flushed with triumph.

When he thought of the mischief which

would be created in the Greysfriars Remove, he had to draw his hand across his mouth to hide a smile; and in drawing his hand across, he disarranged his moustache.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Wibley.

And he made a frantic effort to set his moustache right.

But the Caterpillar's keen eyes had taken in the situation.

Regardless of the consequences, the Caterpillar broke through the ranks, and rushed at the drill-sergeant.

"Caterpillar!" shouted Frank Courtenay, in alarm. "Come back, you silly idiot!"

"Come back, echoed the rest of the juniors, who feared that the Head, having turned away from the window, might soon return.

But the Caterpillar did not heed.

With a sudden decisive movement, he wrenched off the impostor's moustache, and knocked off his hat.

Wibley saw that the game was up, but he fought like a tiger. Doubtless he would have got away unscathed, had not Frank Courtenay and Flip Derwent joined the Caterpillar.

The latter drew out his handkerchief, and rubbed at Wibley's eyebrows, which came away in solid chunks. Then he ripped open the Caterpillar, pulled out the padding, and revealed an

A yell went up which might almost have been heard in the village.

"Wibley of Greysfriars!"

"Spoofed, by gum!" shouted Ponsonby.

"Dished an' done!" said Gadsby.

"Quick!" muttered Frank Courtenay. "Get him out of sight before the Head comes to the school passage."

Despite his struggles, Wibley was seized by many hands and borne rapidly away in the direction of Frank Courtenay's study in the Fourth Form passage.

The Fourth followed as one man.

"Thank goodness we've bowled him out!" exclaimed Ponsonby. "Think what a tale he would have told at Greysfriars!"

"He'll tell it now," growled Merton.

Ponsonby chuckled.

"We shall have the laugh of him at the time," he said. "We'll send him back to Greysfriars in such a state that they'll soon know him. Even his best pal will fight shy of him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Some of the Highcliffians were laughing, but a good many were really furious.

"Just think of it!" gasped Flip Derwent. "Fancy a Greysfriars bouncer having the nerve to jape us like this!"

The Caterpillar chuckled.

"Methinks it will be a case of the japer japed in the long run," he said.

Wibley was dragged willy-nilly into Frank Courtenay's study, and dumped on to the couch.

"What are you going to do?" he panted. "Give you my jolly good bumping, for a start!" said Frank Courtenay promptly.

"Hear, hear!"

Willing hands laid hold of the bogus sergeant, and he descended to the floor of the study with an impact which made his teeth rattle.

"Yoooop! Give over!" he gasped.

But the Highcliffians did not desist until they had bumped him six times. Even then Ponsonby & Co. were not satisfied, but Frank Courtenay forbade any further bumping.

"What shall we do with him now?" asked Smithson.

"Send him home in a sack, dear boy!" chuckled the Caterpillar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wibley gave a start.

"You—you wouldn't dare—" he began.

"We'll soon see about that!" said Frank Courtenay grimly. "You might nip down to the coal-cellar and get the blackest sack you can find, Flip!"

With pleasant grimace Flip Derwent. "And he left the study."

"Look here," protested Wibley, "this has gone far enough!"

"Bats!"

"We mean to do unto you as you did unto us," said the Caterpillar.

"Yes, rather!"

A few moments later Flip Derwent returned, dragging a large grimy sack after him.

Wibley was thrust feet foremost into the sack, which was drawn fairly tight round his neck so that he escaped from his ludicrous position was impossible.

"Stick some feathers in his hair!" said Ponsonby.

"Ha, ha, ha!"



Wibley's curly head was adorned with feathers and by the time his tormentors had finished with him he looked an extraordinary freak.

"Now you can clear out!" said Fishk Courtney.

Wibley glared.

"How the dickens do you think I can walk like this?"

"You'll have to do your best."

"But I shall never get back to Greyfriars to-night!"

"That's your general!"

There was no help for it. Wibley was given a prod, and he pitched headlong into the passage.

He scrambled to his feet again, struggled along for a few yards, and then fell a second time.

The Highcliffe juniors crowded into the passage, rocking with laughter.

"Stick it out, Wibley!"

"You'll get back to Greyfriars by the middle of next week—"

"If you're lucky!"

Wibley would have flourished his fist in the grinning faces around him, but he was helpless, his hands and arms being hidden from view by his bushy neck.

"Good-bye, Blackbell!" sang out Pansyberry.

How Wibley ever managed to get clear of Highcliffe he hardly knew. His progress consisted of a scurrying a few yards, coming a cropper, and stumbling on again.

In this way he ran the gauntlet of a hilarious crowd in the quadrangle, and finally vanished through the school gateway.

On his breast the Caterpillar had pinned a placard, consisting of two words only:

#### "RETURNED HEREWITH"

With the laughter of the Highcliffe fellows still ringing in his ears, Wibley set out on the long, long trail to Greyfriars.

#### THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

##### Peter Todd's Fate!

UNFORTUNATELY for Wibley, it was not yet dusk when he reached the gates of Greyfriars.

Quite a crash of fellows thronged the Close, and a yell went up as the victim, chased in the sack, stumbled through the old gateway.

"Who—what is it?" gasped Bob Cherry, in amazement.

"A human sack, by Jove!" exclaimed Nugent.

"Kate!" said Harry Wharton. "How can a sack possibly be human, you ass?"

"Well, it's walking!" said Nugent.

Peter Todd was the first to identify the contents of the sack.

"Wibley!" he yelled.

"Oh, my hat!"

"What on earth's happened?"

Mr. Quelch rustled on the scene at that moment.

The Remove master nearly fell down when he caught sight of the strange apparition.

"Bliss, my soul!" he exclaimed. "Who—what—"

Mr. Quelch's voice trailed off in blank amazement.

"It's a sack-race, sir," explained Skinner, "and there's no other competitor."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Quelch did not laugh. His frown was terrible to behold.

"Wibley!" he rumbled. "How dare you! How dare you enter the school precincts in that extraordinary garb!"

Wibley staggered to a halt. He could do nothing but gaze the journey from Highcliffe to Greyfriars had been a nightmare.

"Do you hear me, Wibley?" exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

"Yes, dear," gasped Wibley. "I—I'm not doing this from choice, sir! Will somebody untie this heaviest sack for me?"

"Wharton!" rapped out Mr. Quelch.

"Pray release Wibley from his present ludicrous position."

Harry Wharton obeyed, and Wibley crawled out of the sack. He wrenched the

feathers out of his hair, and scattered them in the Close.

"You appear to have been the victim of a silly practical joke, Wibley," said Mr. Quelch, his anger abating a little.

"That's so, sir."

"Tell me, who played this trick on you?"

"I'd rather not say, sir."

"Very well, I will not press for the information. But I must insist upon knowing why you wear the uniform of a sergeant in His Majesty's Army!"

"I—I—it was a little joke, sir."

"To whom does that uniform belong?"

"—Oh, it's F. O. B. S. sir."

"The—what?" gasped Mr. Quelch.

"The Remove Form Amateur Dramatic Society, sir," explained Wibley.

"Oh, you have been indulging in amateur theatricals!"

"Something of the sort, sir."

Mr. Quelch seemed satisfied with this explanation, and to Wibley's relief, he did not press for details.

"You will remove that garb at once, and make yourself presentable!" said the Form-master.

"—Oh, good, sir!"

When Mr. Quelch had gone Wibley was made to explain to his schoolfellows what had happened at Highcliffe.

Harry Wharton & Co. saw that Wibley had done his best; but the others were unreasonably furious with Wibley. And their fury extended to Peter Todd.

"A jolly fine Form-captain you'll make I don't think!" sneered Bolsover major.

"Smitty came a cropper last week, and now you've come a bigger one!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Todd's no good!"

In vain Peter Todd protested that he was not to blame for the failure of the lunge against Highcliffe. Feeling run strongly against him, and both he and Wibley spent a very unpleasant evening.

During the days that followed, Peter Todd made strenuous efforts to redress his post-made mistakes.

He explained the Remove Eleven on the football field with a fair measure of success. The Remove defeated the Upper Fourth, and drew with the Fifth; and even admitted that some hostile opponents had to admit that this wasn't bad.

On the last day of Peter's trial-week a very curious thing happened.

A drill-sergeant arrived at Greyfriars in just the same way as a drill-sergeant had arrived at Highcliffe. And the Head instructed him to put the Remove through their paces.

It was understood that Sergeant Burke, for that was the man's name—was only to occupy a temporary post at Greyfriars.

After dinner the Removites were lined up under the sergeant's stern eye.

Most of the fellows were sullen and depressed, for it meant losing an afternoon's football.

Peter Todd, however, was heard to chuckle. His suspicions were aroused, and he was quite convinced, in his own mind, that Sergeant Burke was one of the Highcliffe fellows in disguise.

Peter confided his suspicions in an undertone to his Form-fellows, and a murmur of amazement and indignation passed through the ranks.

"Shall we mob him, Toddy?" muttered Peter Todd.

"No, no!" said the sergeant.

"Shall we rip off his disguise?" whispered Ogilvy.

"Wait till I give the order!" replied Peter Todd.

The sergeant Burke frowned.

The muttering subsided, and a few moments later the juniors marched in an orderly procession through the Close.

As was the case at Highcliffe, the head-master was viewing the proceedings from his study window.

For upwards of half an hour Sergeant Burke made merry. He kept his chin on the ground, and whenever they showed signs of slacking he threatened to apply the cane.

At length Peter could stand it no longer.

He was hot and tired, and, in spite of the fact that Dr. Locke might still be looking, he deemed it high time that the impostor was exposed in his true colours.

"Get ready!" murmured Peter to the fellow in front of him.

And the signal was passed on.

"Come out and behold the sergeant! Put your feet into it! I've n't dished with you yet, by long chalks!"

And then Peter Todd's voice rang out:—"Rush him! He's an impostor!"

"Throwing caution to the winds, the juniors broke up their formation, and darted with one accord in the direction of Sergeant Burke.

The sharp cry of Dr. Locke could be heard; but the excited Dr. Locke could be seen; but the excited Removites.

The sergeant stood his ground like a British soldier, though he might well have been excused for turning tail at that moment.

"You—you cheeky young cubs!" he spluttered. "Stand back!"

But the juniors came on with a rush.

Bob Cherry knocked the sergeant's hat off, and Peter Todd tucked up his moustache.

"Yarooooo!" yelled the sergeant.

Todd yelled gasped. For the moustache, instead of coming away in his grasp, remained tightly fixed to the sergeant's upper lip!

Johnny Bull ripped open Sergeant Burke's tunic, exposing to him articles of schoolboy garb behind it. But the only thing Johnny saw was an Army shirt of the usual pattern.

"Mum-mum-mum hat!" stuttered Peter Todd.

"He's a fine impostor, after all! He's a genuine article!"

"Great Scott!"

The juniors fell back, staring at each other in blank dismay, while Sergeant Burke caressed his face, on which half a dozen hands had been eagerly experimenting.

"Oh, help!" muttered Bolsover major.

"What's fairly done it now!"

"They had."

Dr. Locke thrust his head through the open window, and his voice seemed to cut the air like a knife.

"Todd! Wharton! Cherry! Bull! How dare you! This is outrageous! You have organised a deliberate and wanton attack upon your drill-sergeant!"

"Oh, erms!"

"Which I've a good mind to bring an action against them for assault, sir!" spluttered Sergeant Burke.

"I am indeed sorry, sergeant, that you have been victimised in this way," said the Head.

"But you may rest assured that these boys shall be adequately punished. I intend to cane the entire Form!"

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Bob Cherry.

"You will go at once to your Form-room, all of you, and I will visit you there!" said the Head.

And he kept his word.

The Remove passed through a very unpleasant half-hour, during which time every fellow in the Form was caned in turn. Peter Todd, as ringleader, received a double dose.

There was weeping and gnashing of teeth in the Remove studies that evening. And Peter Todd's popularity was at a very low ebb indeed. It was Peter who had him cased, and his schoolfellows did not let him forget it! On every side he met black looks. The only person who still supported his claims to the captaincy was his cousin Alonzo; but one solitary vote was not likely to prove of much value to Peter Todd.

And Peter's golden dreams of becoming captain of the Remove were rudely shattered. As Bolsover major remarked, he would have to make way for a better man.

But who was the better man likely to be? THE END.

(Another grand, long complete story of Harry Wharton & Co. next week, entitled "Fighting to Win!" Order your copy in advance.)

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 42.

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### THE FIRST CHAPTER.

All in Coventry.

**B**ULKELEY, the captain of Rookwood, spotted Smythe of the Shell in the passage, and beckoned to him.

"Smythe!"

Smythe came reluctantly.

Smythe of the Shell did not like being called up like a fag. Adolphus Smythe was a great personage in the Shell, and he really thought that Bulkeley might have known better. Bulkeley, the captain of the school, seemed somehow quite oblivious of the greatness of Adolphus. He beckoned to him as he might have beckoned to an inky-fingered fag of the Second Form.

"Yes, Bulkeley?" said Smythe as sullenly as he dared.

"Tell Silver I want him."

Smythe scowled.

"Silver of the Fourth?"

"Yes."

"I—I say, Bulkeley——" stammered Smythe.

"Well, why don't you go?"

Smythe did not quite like the look in Bulkeley's eye, but he stood his ground. He did not intend to go upon that errand to Jimmy Silver's study if he could help it.

"I—I—I say, Bulkeley, I can't, you know. Silver's in Coventry—nobody's speaking to him, you know. The cad's been cut by the whole school."

Bulkeley nodded.

"Yes, I've noticed that," he remarked.

"What's the trouble?"

"He's acted like a rotten rotter!" said Smythe. "Everybody's disgusted with him by gad!"

"But what's he done?"

"Everything" that he shouldn't," explained Smythe. "He's a cheeky young cad, you know, and his pals are cheeky young cads, and we're givin' 'em a lesson. I really can't speak to him, you know. He's in Coventry."

Bulkeley's asphalt slid from under his arm into his hand.

Smythe of the Shell eyed it uneasily.

THE PENNY POPULAR—No 42.

"Do you want a hiding, Smythe?" asked the captain of Rookwood pleasantly.

"N-n-nunno, Bulkeley."

"Then go and tell Silver to come to my study."

Bulkeley stepped back into his study, and Smythe stood in the passage, his hands clenched and his eyes gleaming.

He was greatly inclined to defy the authority of the prefect, Jimmy Silver & Co. were in Coventry, and Smythe wasn't going to speak to any of them—not if he knew it. But—there was a big "but"—Bulkeley's asphalt was not to be argued with. In the Shell the dandy of Rookwood was monarch of all he surveyed, but Bulkeley would have thought nothing of licking him like any fag.

Smythe decided to obey orders. He took his way towards the Fourth Form studies in a bad temper.

He reached the end study—the famous apartment which was the headquarters of Jimmy Silver & Co., the Fistical Four of the Fourth. He did not trouble to knock at the door; he kicked it open, and glared into the study.

The Fistical Four were all at home.

For fellows who were sent to Coventry by all the Lower School, Jimmy Silver & Co. looked pretty cheerful.

They were having tea in the end study—a rather late tea—having just come in from footer practice. Oswald of the Fourth, the new boy, was having tea with them. The five juniors were chatting cheerily when Smythe of the Shell looked in.

Jimmy Silver stared at the dandy of the Shell. Lovell and Raby and Newcome, his chums, stared too. They had not expected a visit from their chief enemy, the leader of the movement against them in the Lower School at Rookwood.

"Silver!" rapped out Smythe.

Jimmy Silver did not answer. He poured out tea.

"Another cup, Oswald?" he inquired.

"Yes, thanks," said Oswald.

"Same here," remarked Lovell, pushing forward his cup. "I wonder what

that image is blinking into our study for? Did you ever see a face like that?"

"Never!" said Raby. "Never, excepting a gargoy!"

Smythe scowled furiously.

"Silver!" he roared. "Bulkeley wants you!"

"Sugar, Oswald?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"Yes," said Oswald, laughing. "Bulkeley wants you in his study, you young cad!" howled Smythe. "Don't think I've come here to speak to you! I've just brought Bulkeley's message, that's all!"

"Pass the milk over to Oswald, Lovell."

"Here you are, Oswald."

"Anybody say cake?" asked Newcome.

"Cake!"

Smythe of the Shell clenched his hands. It was bad enough for so dignified a person as Adolphus to be sent on a message like a fag to fellows who were in the cold shades of Coventry. But to be treated like this was a little too much. The Fistical Four and their guest ignored his presence and his remarks.

"I suppose you think that's awfully clever, you young sweeps?" said Smythe bitterly.

"They've forgotten to put the currants in this cake," said Raby.

"I've found one," said Jimmy Silver. Smythe glared at them, Jimmy Silver & Co. being sent to Coventry by the Rookwood juniors, they had retorted by the novel idea of sending the Shell and the Fourth to Coventry in their turn, so they could not speak to Smythe. He and the rest of the Lower School were all in Coventry so far as the Fistical Four were concerned.

It was rather an original idea, and just like Jimmy Silver. Jimmy Silver was famous for striking ideas.

"This tea's too jolly weak!" said Jimmy Silver. "I think I'll chuck this lot away and make some more."

Jimmy Silver picked up his teacup and "chucked" his tea away. It was certainly a slovenly proceeding to empty a

# Standing BY THE Outcast!

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

By . . .

## OWEN CONQUE ST.



full teacup by slinging its contents through the doorway into the passage. Jimmy Silver was not accustomed to emptying his teacup in that manner. Perhaps he did it this time because Smythe of the Shell was in the doorway. Silas!

The steaming contents of the teacup smote Adolphus just under the chin. Smythe of the Shell staggered back with a gasping howl.

"Wow!"

"Now we'll make some more tea," said Jimmy Silver, without even a glance at Adolphus Smythe.

His companions chuckled irresistibly as Jimmy Silver rose and jammed the kettle on the fire.

Smythe's face was a study. His face, his necktie, and his elegant waistcoat were streaming with tea.

"You—you—you, young villain!" yelled Smythe.

"Where's the tea-caddy?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Smythe gave a whoop of wrath, and rushed into the study. Adolphus was not a fighting-man as a rule, but there were limits. He made a bound like a tiger at Jimmy Silver.

"You young cad, I'll smash you!" roared Smythe.

The chums of the Fourth were on their feet at once. But Jimmy Silver did not need any assistance. He closed with Adolphus, and in a twinkling Adolphus was on his back on the floor, descending there with a heavy bump. Jimmy Silver picked up the kettle again and proceeded to pour the water over Adolphus. Fortunately it was barely warm.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Fourth-Formers shrieked as the stream descended upon the unfortunate Smythe.

Smythe gasped and spluttered, and wriggled away, and made a wild dive for the door, already repenting his rash entry into the study. He was drenched by the time he reached the door and escaped into the passage. He paused there for a second to shake a furious fist at the study, and bolted.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Curious that that fellow can't understand that he's in Coventry, and we can't speak to him!" remarked Jimmy Silver.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You'd better go to Bulkeley, all the same," grinned Lovell.

Jimmy Silver nodded.

"Right ho! We haven't sent Bulkeley to Coventry yet—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And Jimmy Silver left the study to obey the Rookwood captain's summons—following a wet trail left in the passage by the drenched Adolphus.

## THE SECOND CHAPTER.

### LOYAL JIMMY.

JIMMY SILVER presented himself cheerfully in Bulkeley's study.

The captain of Rookwood wore a thoughtful frown. He fixed his eyes upon Jimmy Silver with a peculiar expression. Jimmy stood by the table, quite meek and modest, looking as though butter or cream would not melt in his mouth, but inwardly wondering what was "up," and which of his many delinquencies had happened to reach the ears of the great man of the Sixth.

"You sent for me, Bulkeley?" said Silver meekly.

"Yes, I want to speak to you."

"Nothing wrong?" ventured Jimmy.

"I've not sent for you to lick you, if that's what you mean."

"Oh, good!" said Jimmy Silver, in great relief. "All serene! Only the pleasure of a little conversation—what!"

"I've had my eye on you for some days," said Bulkeley, unheeding Jimmy Silver's cheery remark. "What's up with you young duffers lately?"

"Up!" repeated Jimmy vaguely.

"Yes. There's some nonsense going on, and I want to get to the bottom of it. The fags are all at loggerheads. Now, I don't want to inquire too closely into fag affairs, but I think this has gone on long enough, and I want to know what's the matter, and set it right, if possible. See?"

Jimmy Silver nodded. He saw! It was just like old Bulkeley. Most of the Sixth were loftily and serenely indifferent to what went on in the ranks of the Fourth, and probably would not have noticed if a junior had been sent to Coventry for terms on end. But old Bulkeley took a keen interest in all the youngsters who were under his authority; and though he seldom or never interfered, he had often helped to compose little disputes by a kindly and timely word of advice.

"It seems that you and your friends have been sent to Coventry by the juniors, and it's been going on for a week or more," continued Bulkeley.

"Well, in a way," assented Jimmy Silver. "The fact is, we've sent the Shell and the Fourth to Coventry, and we're not speaking to them."

Bulkeley stared.

"Oh," he said, after a pause. "That's it, is it?"

"Yes, that's it."

"And what's it all about?"

Jimmy Silver hesitated.

"Well, they're duffers," he said.

"I've heard a good deal of chatter," said Bulkeley.

Bulkeley stared. "It seems that there's been a set-to against the new kid, Oswald, and he's taken his part."

"Well, yes."

"And your friends are backing you up?"

"Yes."

"What has Oswald done?"

"Nothing."

"I mean what is wrong with him?"

"Nothing. He's really a decent chap."

"Then why are all the juniors down on him?"

Jimmy Silver was silent.

"Now, I want to get at the facts of this matter, Silver," said Bulkeley quietly. "It's getting serious, and the masters will begin to take notice of it soon. You needn't mind telling me what there is against the new kid. I can learn it myself enough by inquiring."

"I suppose so. Well, he's a good sort," said Jimmy. "But there is something against him. I suppose any of the chaps would tell you if you asked them—Smythe would be glad to. The fact is, he was at Minhurst before he came here."

"—that's a school in Yorkshire. Well, Smythe happens to have a brother at Minhurst, and he wrote to Smythe that Oswald had been sacked from there."

"Expelled?"

"Yes."

"Is it true?"

"Well, yes," said Jimmy reluctantly.

"Oswald admits it."

Bulkeley pursed his lips.

"What was he sacked for?"

"He—he was accused of rotten things—breaking bounds at night, and publicizing, and that kind of thing," said Jimmy. "But I know there was some mistake, and so I'm sticking to him."

"How do you know there was a mistake?"

"Well, I know a decent chap when I see one, you know. Besides, he's done here for weeks now, and he's done nothing of that kind here. There isn't a more decent chap in the school. A leopard can't change his giddy spots, you

know. If he was that kind of rotter at Minhurst, he would be the same kind of rotter here. But he isn't."

"I suppose the Head of Minhurst knew what he was about when he sacked him?"

"I—I suppose so. But Oswald says he didn't do it, you know, and I believe him. There was some mistake, I fancy he was hauled up for somebody else. I don't know the rights of it, and Oswald is very close about it; but I know he's all right. But the fellows think it's a check of him to come here after being sacked from his own school; and they think he must have deceived the Head somehow, or he wouldn't have been let into Rookwood. So they're down on him."

"And you're standing by him?"

"Yes, rather! I'm not going to go back on him, when I know he's all right. My pals think the same as I do. They didn't at first, but I brought 'em round."

Bulkeley looked very thoughtful.

"It's nonsense about Oswald having deceived the Head," he said. "Dr. Chisholm must know the circumstances—He would know all about the fellow before he was admitted here; and must have seen some reason to give Oswald a new chance at Rookwood."

"Just what I think," said Jimmy Silver. "But Smythe and the rest don't think so. They won't have Oswald at any price, so they've sent him to Coventry—and so, because we stand by him, so we've sent the whole crowd of 'em to Coventry, on our side, and—there we are."

Bulkeley smiled.

"I see—Don Quixote of the Fourth!" he remarked.

"I don't quite know about that; but I think it's the only decent thing," said Jimmy Silver. "I dare say the fellows will come round in time. If they don't, they can go and eat coke!"

"It's a queer business," said Bulkeley. "Don't you find that this state of affairs interferes with the football?"

"Yes," said Jimmy ruefully. "It means that the matches will be played by a Modern side, and, of course, that means defeat. We've got to stand out of the junior team while this rot goes on, and that leaves only one or two Classics in the eleven. But it can't be helped. We're not going to throw Oswald over."

Bulkeley nodded, and the interview being at an end, Jimmy Silver quitted the study. The captain of Rookwood was left in a very thoughtful mood. Jimmy Silver returned to his own quarters to finish his tea.

"What did Bulkeley want?" demanded four voices as he came in.

"It was about Oswald."

"About me?" said Oswald, colouring.

"Yes; it dawned on his mighty brain that there's something going on in the Fourth, and he wanted the whole story. He thinks that Dr. Chisholm must have known all about you before you came here, Oswald."

"He did," said Oswald. "My father told him all about it, of course. I shouldn't be likely to wedge in under false pretences."

"The other fellows won't believe that," said Lovell with a shake of the head. "What the dickens did you get sacked for, you young duffer? While this rot goes on, we're shoved out of the football."

"I'm sorry," said Oswald, his flush deepening. "I—I shouldn't mind if you dropped me, you know. I've no right to expect—"

"Oh, rot!" said Jimmy Silver. "We're sticking to you until the fellows come round. But it's rotten, there's no mistake about that. The St. Jim's match is coming off soon, and it will

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mean a licking if we're not in the team. Tommy Dodd is ratty about it, and so am I. But it can't be helped. Pass the jam."

Jimmy Silver finished his tea quite cheerfully. It was a worry about the football, and the attitude of the Fourth was a worry, too; but Jimmy Silver seldom or ever allowed worries of any sort to affect his spirits. Whatever might happen, Jimmy Silver's motto was "Keep smiling!"

### THE THIRD CHAPTER.

#### A One-sided Conversation.

"COME ON!" said Tommy Dodd. "Twon't be any use," said Tommy Cook.

"Sure, they won't even speak to us!" said Tommy Doyle. "The silly gossens here sent the whole school to Coventry, you know."

"Bow-wow! Come on!"

Tommy Dodd was looking very determined. When Tommy Dodd was determined, he always had his way. Tommy Dodd's word was law on the Modern side at Rookwood, so far as the juniors were concerned.

The three Tommies crossed over to the Classic side. They were going to see the Fistical Four—on business! But Cook and Doyle looked very doubtful. But Tommy Dodd was in a grim humour. Tommy Dodd was now junior football captain, and the well-being of the junior football team came before everything else with Tommy Dodd.

Plenty of fellows on the Modern side advised him to leave the Classical four to stew in their own juice, as they elegantly expressed it. They advised him to make up a School eleven wholly of Moderns. They carried their generosity so far as to offer their own services to fill the places left vacant by the Classical fellows who were in Coventry. But Tommy Dodd wasn't taking any.

He was a patriotic Modern, but he wanted to play a winning team, and so he needed players like Jimmy Silver and Lovell, and he didn't intend to leave them out when he took his men over to St. Jim's to play Tom Merry & Co.

But it was a difficult position. The Fistical Four could not be let out of Coventry, so to speak, for the occasion of the match, and then sent to Coventry again. They weren't likely to play on those conditions. But Tommy Dodd's idea was that it had to be arranged somehow. So the three Tommies presented themselves at the end study in the junior passage on the Classical side.

It was a couple of days since Smythe's visit there, and during that time the Fistical Four and their new chum Oswald had languished in the shades of Coventry, without, however, seeming much depressed by it. Indeed, they seemed to flourish in Coventry.

It was evening, and Jimmy Silver & Co. were at work on their preparation. They did not suspend their work as the three Tommies looked in. They appeared oblivious to the existence of the three Tommies.

Tommy Dodd frowned at them.

"Busy?" he asked.

"Pass the dick, Lovell," said Jimmy Silver.

"I've come about the footer," roared Tommy Dodd.

Jimmy Silver calmly opened the dictionary and sought for the word he was in need of. "You know we're playing St. Jim's next week," said Tommy Dodd. "Now, it would serve you Classic worms right if I left you out of the eleven. But I want Silver to play."

Having found his word, Jimmy Silver went on with his work.

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The three Moderns looked at one another with exasperated expressions. The Fistical Four seemed stone deaf.

"Do you hear me?" bellowed Tommy Dodd.

Jimmy Silver looked up with a pained expression.

He did not reply, but he rose to his feet, took a stump of chalk, and chalked on the looking-glass, by way of answer:

"CAN'T TALK TO YOU!"

"Why not?" demanded Tommy Dodd angrily.

Jimmy Silver wrote again:

"YOU'RE IN COVENTRY!"

Tommy Dodd gave an expressive snort.

"How long are you going to keep this rot up?" he demanded.

No reply.

"Do you hear me, Jimmy Silver?"

Silence.

"Are you deaf too, Lovell?" Lovell's pen scratched away. It was the only sound that came from him. The Fistical Four were very grave and serious, and very much in earnest. The three Tommies might have been three flies buzzing away in the doorway for all the regard they received from the Classical quartette.

"Look here, I'm fed up with this!" yelled Tommy Dodd. "I want to know whether you are going to play next Saturday. If you are, you've got to practise with the team."

Frozen silence.

Tommy Dodd clenched his hands. He was inclined to commit assault and battery upon the spot. That would certainly have been an effectual way of breaking the icy silence in the end study. But it would not have secured the services of the Fistical Four for the junior team.

"I tell you I've had enough of it!" said Tommy Dodd. "We're willing to let you out of Coventry. You'd never have been sent there if you hadn't been silly, obstinate asses. We'll let the whole matter drop."

Jimmy Silver chalked on the glass again:

"NOW YOU'RE TALKING!"

"Well, is it a go?" demanded Tommy Dodd.

The chalk chalked that came:

"OSWALD TOO?"

"No!" roared Tommy Dodd.

"Oswald's a rank outsider, and you know it! Wasn't he kicked out of his own school for disgracing it? What right has he to come here and disgrace Rookwood too? We're not going to take any notice of him. You know you can't expect it. If you've got a taste for blackguards, we haven't!"

Again Jimmy Silver had recourse to the chalk:

"THEN IT'S NO GO!"

Tommy Dodd gave a snort like an infuriated war-horse.

You thumping ass! You silly Classical chump! I've a jolly good mind to wade in and wipe up the study with you!"

Jimmy Silver smiled, and chalked:

"WADE IN!"

Tommy Dodd clenched his hands.

"We're willing to be reasonable!" he howled. "You can talk to your pet butcher till you're black in the face. Don't ask us to talk to him, that's all.

We're not going to swallow him. That's reasonable. And I can, jolly well tell you if you don't do the right thing you'll jolly well be ragged!"

"RATS!"

chalked Jimmy Silver.

"Sure, we'll call a meeting to deal wid ye!" said Tommy Doyle.

"We'll scrag him, and make him clear out of Rookwood!" said Cook.

"You hear that?" roared Tommy Dodd.

The chalk chalked once more.

"BOW-WOW!"

That was too much for Tommy Dodd. His temper was already at breaking point. He made a rush at Jimmy Silver. Cook and Doyle rushed in after him.

Like one man the Fistical Four rose to the occasion.

Four Classics piled upon three Moderns, and three Moderns went flying into the passage, where they landed with three heavy and painful bumps.

"Was it?"

"Ow!"

"Wow!"

Jimmy Silver chalked on the door and slammed it. Tommy Dodd & Co. picked themselves up, gasping, and blinked at the door. On it appeared the single word, in chalked letters:

"GOOD-BYE!"

"Come on!" gasped Tommy Dodd, with concentrated fury. "We'll hold a meeting, and get the whole Form to deal with the bounders. Come on!"

The three Tommies limped away, breathing fury. In the end study Jimmy Silver & Co. went on cheerfully with their preparation.

### THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

#### The Order of the Boot.

THE junior Common-room was crowded.

Nearly all the Fourth and the Shell were there, Classical and Modern Sides being equally represented.

For once, Classics and Moderns met without a row.

They were at one for once.

All the junior footballers were angry, all the fellows who were down on Oswald were furious, and all the enemies of Jimmy Silver crowded to the meeting, glad of a chance to score against him. Smythe & Co. came along in great force. The "Giddy Goats" of Rookwood were keen for a chance of scoring off the end study.

It was felt on all sides that the present state of affairs couldn't go on.

As a rule, sending a fellow to Coventry was considered a heavy punishment, and the unlucky sufferer was wont to take it very seriously and sadly. But that irrepressible fellow Silver actually seemed to be enjoying it. Instead of being properly crushed, beaten, defeated, reduced to reason, and utterly downhearted, he had had the unparalleled nerve to retort by sending the Lower School to Coventry in his turn. And it was not merely "gas"; he was keeping it up. Such unheard-of cheek could not possibly be tolerated.

Every fellow who had a down on Jimmy Silver was enraged, and the fellows who really liked him—the great majority—felt that the cheeky brayer ought to be brought to reason. If only for his own sake, he had to be brought to reason. Only Jimmy Silver could possibly have thought of sending the





The ragers, with Oswald in their midst, reached the fountain. "Duck him!" Oswald was swept into the air. "Stop!" It was the voice of the Head. With fluttering gown and angry brow, Dr. Chisholm swept down upon the angry crowd. (See page 13.)

junior Forms to Coventry, and Jimmy Silver had to be taught a lesson.

Tommy Dodd mounted upon a chair to address the excited meeting. So did Smythe of the Shell. Smythe of the Shell felt that it was up to him to take the lead. But the juniors were in no humour to listen to Adolphus' drawing voice.

"Shut up, Smythe!" shouted Tommy Cook.

Smythe turned his eyeglass for a moment upon Cook, but did not deign to reply.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I've called this meetin'—"

"No, you haven't!" roared Tommy Dodd. "I've called this meeting. And it's a meeting, not a meetin', you stuttering ass!"

"I've called this meetin'—"

"Knock him over!"

"Shut up!"

"Shove that duffer over, somebody!"

James minor kicked away the legs of Adolphus' chair, and the great Adolphus came to the floor with a bump and a yell.

"Go it, Tommy Dodd!" shouted a score of voices—Classical as well as Modern.

Tommy Dodd went it.

"Look here, you fellows, this rotten state of things is sickening! We want those silly idiots in the footer team."

"Hear, hear!"

"They're standing out against the whole school for the sake of a fellow who was kicked out of his show—"

"Shame!"

"They're good sorts enough, and it's only pigheadedness. They've got to be taught that they can't treat the Fourth like this."

"Hear, hear!"

"As for that worm Oswald, he's got to go!"

Loud applause.

"I'm not the chap to be down on any fellow without reason," pursued Tommy Dodd. "But you all know how it is. That fellow Oswald was kicked out of Minihurst in disgrace. He had the nerve to come here. Sooner or later he'll break out and disgrace us, too. Not that I want to judge anybody; but we can't swallow a blackguard like that."

"Never!"

"He ought to have cleared off when he was found out. Is Rookwood a refuge for seedy blackguards who're kicked out of their own school?"

"Shame!"

"He must have taken in the Head. It stands to reason that Dr. Chisholm wouldn't have let him in if he'd known the facts. Now, we can't sneak to the Head about him, rotter as he is. But we're not going to stand him here."

"Bravo!"

"He ain't satisfied with sneaking into

our school and disgracing us with his beastly presence here, but he's got four of our best footballers under his rotten influence somehow, and set them against us. Shows he's an awfully deep beast—in fact, a dangerous character."

"Rotter!"

"Outsider!"

"Worm!"

"Yass, a regular blackguard," said Smythe. "A dangerous beast, you know. Maybe leadin' them into his own goin's on."

Smythe was determined to have something to say, even if he was not allowed to make a speech.

"So I put it to this meeting," said Tommy Dodd. "We take as our motto—O.M.C."

"What the thunder does that mean?" demanded Hooker.

"Oswald must go."

Roars of applause.

"It's sickening!" said Tommy Dodd. "We're not standing it! It's a disgrace to have him here, considering what he's done. Rookwood isn't going to take in a rotter like that! That-fathered Silver says there was some mistake, and Oswald must have been innocent all the time. No blessed evidence, you know. Must be so because Jimmy Silver thinks it is so, and we've got to think the same."

"No fear!"

"Besides, if he's got anything to say for himself, why doesn't he say it? Smythe's brother at Minihurst says he

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was caught outside his school at midnight. He hasn't denied that. If he was innocent of what they accused him of, what was he doing outside his school in the middle of the night? He hasn't said a word about it—not a blessed word!

"It's clear as daylight," chipped in Adolphus. "My minor at Minihurst has given me the whole story. They'd known for a long time that a Minihurst chap was haunting pubs and dealing with bookies, and going out at night, and had been seen squiffy, too—seen staggerin'—and they set a watch to catch him, and they caught Oswald. He hadn't a word to say. My brother says he never even opened his lips. All the fellows there were down on him. Even his own pal, the headmaster's son, hadn't a thing to say for him, though they'd always been awfully pally. Dr. Frye just booted him out, and served him right!"

"Nothing could be clearer than that," said Tommy Dodd. "Now, I put it to the meeting—Oswald must go!"

"Oswald must go!" churched the juniors.

"Hauds up for O.M.G.!"

Every hand went up. Some of the fellows, in their enthusiasm, put up both hands. The meeting was unanimous.

"Good!" said Tommy Dodd, surveying the meeting. "That's settled. Now we've got to tell him so. Fetch him in, somebody."

"He won't come," said Lucy.

"Yank him in by the hair if he won't come."

A dozen fellows rushed out in search of Oswald. A few minutes later there was a sound of a scuffle in the passage, and the new boy came hurtling in, with a dozen fellows grasping him.

The prisoner was fairly hurled into the crowded Common-room, and the door slammed shut. He was received with hoots and jeers, as he stood panting, his handsome face flushed.

"Oswald!" rapped out Tommy Dodd.

Oswald looked at him, still panting.

"We've put in the vote about you," said Tommy Dodd. "We don't want you at Rookwood. We want you to go."

"Get out!"

"Clear off!"

Oswald crimsoned.

"I cannot go," he said quietly. "I cannot ask my father to take me away."

"Why not?" demanded Cook.

"I can't let him know the trouble I've got into here for one thing, and I can't give him such a disappointment for another."

"You can wedge into some other school where they don't know you," sneered Smythe.

"I mightn't be able to. Dr. Chilsom was very kind, but—"

"You mean you've taken him in?" roared Cook.

"No, no! But—"

"Enough said! You've got to go!" said Tommy Dodd. "Now, you can't be very comfy here. You'd better clear off for your own sake. You're a worry to everybody, and you're getting Jimmy Silver and his friends into trouble. It's up to you to ask your people to take you away."

"Can't!"

"You mean you won't, I suppose?" bellowed Tommy Dodd.

Oswald's lips set.

"Well, I won't, then," he said.

There was a roar of wrath. The angry juniors closed in round the Outcast, but Tommy Dodd jumped off the chair and waved them back.

"No ragging—yet!" he said. "We'll give him a day to think it over. If he isn't gone by to-morrow night we'll make him go."

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"Better start by raggin' the cad," said Smythe.

"You shut up!" said Tommy Dodd automatically. "I'm running this show! You're here for the verdict, Oswald—you've got twenty-four hours. Time enough for you to write to your people and clear off. If you're here after to-morrow you'll be regularly ragged till you get out. We're fed up with you! You're not going to disgrace Rookwood as you did your own school. That's final. Now kick him out!"

Oswald was forthwith bundled into the passage.

Then the meeting broke up excitedly, discussing the situation. Oswald of the Fourth had received the order of the boot. It remained to be seen whether he would go.

## THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

### "O.M.G."

THOSE mysterious letters the next day attracted a good deal of attention at Rookwood, especially on the Classical side.

The seniors observed them, written or chalked up in various places, and wondered what they might possibly mean.

But all the juniors knew.

Those letters appeared everywhere. In Oswald's study they were chalked on the glass and inked on the walls, and even cut into the door with a pocket-knife.

That study had been shared by the new junior with Jones minor and Hooker, but his study-mates never entered it now. They preferred to leave the Outcast severely alone, and they did their prep in other studies. Oswald was always welcome in the end study, but the fear of bringing more trouble upon his four friends caused him to keep away.

"O.M.G."

It was chalked up in the passages, in the quadrangle, even in the Form-room. In the afternoon Mr. Bootles, the master of the Fourth, found that cryptic legend confronting him when he entered the Form-room.

In big chalked letters it looked at him from the blue-washed wall. Mr. Bootles adjusted his glasses very carefully, and blinked at it in astonishment. Then he turned to the Fourth Form, who were all in their places, and waiting.

Mr. Bootles pointed a finger at the inscription on the wall.

"What's that work of any member of my Form—what, what?" asked Mr. Bootles.

No reply.

"Can any boy here tell me what it may mean?"

Apparently there was no information to be gained from the Fourth. Nobody opened his lips.

Jimmy Silver was looking savage, and Lovell and Raby and Newcome frowned. The three juniors were backing up their leader against the school, in spite of their very strong doubts of the wisdom of Jimmy's proceedings.

Oswald sat pale and troubled.

Mr. Bootles waited a full minute for a reply, and as none was forthcoming, he knitted his brows.

"I presume that this is a joke of some kind," said the Form-master. "Jokes of any kind must not be played in the Form-room. Silver, you will take a duster and obliterate those letters."

Jimmy Silver obeyed promptly.

"Every member of the Fourth Form will take a hundred lines of Virgil!" added Mr. Bootles.

There was an angry murmur, and dark looks were cast at Oswald. Somewhat unreasonably, the juniors put the hundred lines down to his account. He was the cause of all the trouble, anyway.

But there were no more inscriptions in the Form-room. But outside that apart-

ment the letters caught the eye at every turn.

"O.M.G."

It was chalked up everywhere, and Jimmy Silver, who had taken to carrying a duster about with him to rub out the inscriptions, gave it up at last. They reappeared faster than he could rub them out.

Bulkeley called to him a little later, and pointed to the "O.M.G." chalked up on the library door.

"Is that one of your little jokes, Silver?" he asked.

"No fear!"

"What does it mean?"

Jimmy Silver assumed a thoughtful expression.

"The letters stand for something, I suppose, Bulkeley," he said.

"I suppose they do. I'm asking you what they stand for," said the captain of Rookwood.

"O.M.G.," said Jimmy Silver, very thoughtfully. "Only Muddling Geese," Bulkeley.

Bulkeley looked astonished.

"And what is that chalked up all over Rookwood for?" he demanded.

"Better ask some of the geese," said Jimmy Silver.

Bulkeley looked at him very hard, and soon afterwards he was seen inquiring of Smythe of the Shell, Adolphus enlightened him at once as to the true meaning of "O.M.G." Bulkeley walked away, looking very thoughtful.

Presently a notice appeared on the board, in the handwriting of the captain of Rookwood.

"Any junior found chalking on doors, walls, etc., will be gated for two half-holidays."

G. BULKELEY.

That put a stop to the inscriptions. "O.M.G." gradually disappeared, and was not seen again. But everyone at Rookwood, even the Head, had seen it, and knew what it meant.

So insignificant a person as a new boy in the Fourth Form was the subject of conversation from one end of the school to the other.

Oswald himself felt that it could not last. It was probable that even the Head would send him away, if only for the sake of peace. In his study the Outcast of the Fourth sat wearily at work, but hardly seeing what he read. He knew that the blow was coming. Whispers and footsteps in the passage warned him that the threatened ragging was at hand.

He drew a letter from his pocket—a letter in a sprawling schoolboy hand, and read it through, for perhaps the tenth time. His eyes lingered on a few lines:

"You stood by me like a brick, Oswald; I sha'n't ever forget it. If you hadn't done it, I couldn't have faced the pater—I should have run away. I hope you're getting on all right at Rookwood, and that you've found a better pal than I was to you."

Oswald sighed.

"Thanks for your good advice," the letter went on. "You know I never was like you, and it ain't easy for a leopard to change his spots, you know. But I'm jolly grateful anyway, and you needn't be afraid that I sha'n't get into trouble. I'm really going to do as you advise, only it ain't easy to begin—Your old pal,

TED FRYE."

Oswald crumpled the letter into his pocket again.

"It wasn't worth while," he muttered miserably—"it wasn't worth it! And now I've got to go through it again! What will the pater say if I have to go?"

He took up his pen again, and strove to fix his attention upon Latin declensions. But his brow was clouded, and his thoughts wandered.



## THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

## A Regular Riot.

OSWALD started as the door of his study suddenly opened, and four juniors came hurriedly in—the Fistical Four of the Fourth. He rose quickly to his feet.

"They're coming!" said Jimmy Silver.

"I know! Don't you fellows stay!" said Oswald. "No good your going through it, too!"

"Rat!"

"I don't want to get you into it," said Oswald, in great distress. "I can stand it, but there's no reason why you—"

"Rot!" said Lovell. "We're standing by you! We'll lock the door for a start." He turned the key. "Now we're going to stand a siege!"

"They're awfully wild," said Newcome. "They'll bust the lock!"

"Then there'll be a scrap," said Jimmy Silver.

"I'd rather face it alone," said Oswald. "Bosh!"

There was a rattle at the handle of the door a few minutes later, and a loud tramp of feet in the passage. The ragers had arrived.

"Why don't you open the door, Tommy Dadd!"

"It's locked!"

"Bang on it!"

Thump, thump, thump!

"Hallo," called out Jimmy Silver.

"So you're there, are you, Silver?"

"You bet!"

"Open this door!"

"Low-wow!"

"Oswald, are you going to let us in?"

"We are not going to let him!" said Jimmy Silver.

Bang, bang, bang!

"Don't make that thundering row!" came Smythe's voice. "You'll have the masters here, Dadd! Get something and make the lock!"

"I'll get my screwdriver," said Hooker.

"And a hammer," said Tommy Dadd.

There was a pause, and the garrison of Oswald's study exchanged glances. The enemy were evidently in deadly earnest.

"Better leave me alone, you fellows!" said Oswald, in a low voice.

"Oh, cheeso it!"

There was a grinding sound at the door, and the blows of a hammer. A screwdriver was being driven in between the door and the jamb. Then there was a loud snap.

"Oh, you ass, you've broken my screwdriver!"

"Blow your screwdriver! The rotten thing must have been made in Germany!" growled Tommy Dadd. "I'll jolly well smash the lock! No good fooling about!"

Crash, crash, crash!

The lock was not a weak one, but it was not built to stand assaults from a heavy hammer, wielded by a powerful arm. It crashed to pieces, and the door flew open.

There was a rush of juniors into the study.

They halted as they found themselves confronted by the study table and other furniture piled across the room, and behind that barricade five juniors ready for battle. The two parties glared at one another across the barricade.

"Rush 'em!" yelled Smythe from the passage. Adolphus was very wisely keeping out of the war zone. The Fistical Four were dreadfully hard hitters, and Adolphus, like the celebrated Duke of Plaza Toro, preferred to lead his regiment from behind, because he found it less exciting.

"Now, we haven't come here to jaw,"

roared Tommy Dadd. "We want Oswald."

"Go and eat coke!" said Oswald.

"We're standing by him," said Jimmy Silver. "If you don't get out of this study, there's going to be trouble."

"Rush the rotters!"

"Don't jaw! We shall have the prefects here soon."

" cellar that eat!"

"You can hand Oswald over, or you can be ragged along with him," said Tommy Dadd. "We're going to frog-march him round the quad and duck him in the fountain, and jam him all over! That's for a start, just to warn him what to expect. If he don't go, we shall begin on him in earnest after that."

"I'm not going!" said Oswald.

"Hark at the call! Rush 'em!"

There was a wild rush, led by Tommy Dadd. The ragers came scrambling over the furniture. The defenders hit out at once. Jimmy Silver's right and left came out, and Tommy Dadd and Tommy Cook rolled over among the feet of their friends. Doyle dragged the table away, and the ragers rushed on. There was furious hitting on all sides. All the juniors were angry and excited now.

Never had the Fistical Four put up so tremendous a fight. And Oswald, too, showed himself a mighty man with his hands.

But the odds were too great.

Numbers told.

The ragers fairly swarmed over the defenders of the study. Tommy Dadd, with a screaming noise, scrambled up and came on Jimmy Silver, fighting like a hero, was borne to the floor and pinned there. Lovell and Raby and Newcome, resisting desperately to the last, went down.

The ragers swarmed over them, and the unfortunate four simply disappeared from view under their swarming assailants.

Oswald, struggling furiously, was dragged out of the study.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were still resisting, but they were held down by numbers. They had done their best, but their best had not availed them.

Oswald was flung into the passage, and caught there by the crowd and rushed away. His collar and tie were torn off, his jacket split, his hair like a mop. But he was still fighting, till numbers of hands grasped him on all sides, and he was frog-marched helplessly down the passage, amid yells of triumph.

"Get him!"

"Give him the frog's-march!"

"Hurrah!"

Down the wide staircase went the swarming juniors, with Oswald in their midst.

They reached the lower passage with a rush, and found Bulkeley and Neville there, with their aspirants in their hands.

"Stop that at once!" roared Bulkeley.

For once the juniors were deaf to the voice of their head prefect, the popular captain of Rookwood. They rushed on pell-mell to the door and streamed out into the quadrangle.

"Do you hear me?" yelled Bulkeley, amazed and furious.

The juniors heard, but they did not heed. Round the quad they went in a yelling throng, frog-marching the Outcast of the Fourth.

"My only hat!" gasped Neville of the Sixth. He had been shoved aside as unceremoniously as a bag. "It's a giddy revolution!"

Bulkeley strode out angrily into the quad, gripping his aspirant. The ragers were streaming away, their victim in their

midst. They had reached the fountain, and there was a halt.

"Duck him!"

"Hurrah!"

Oswald was swept into the air.

"Stop!"

It was not Bulkeley's voice this time. It was the Head's. With fluttering wings and angry brow, Dr. Chisholm swooped down upon the excited crowd.

Then the ragers stopped.

"Put that boy down at once!"

Oswald, panting, was set upon his feet.

"Now, tell me, what is the meaning of this disgraceful scene?" Smythe, I presume that you are the leader."

"By gad!" murmured Adolphus, in dismay.

"No, he isn't. I'm the leader, sir," said Tommy Dadd. Smythe was only too glad to retire into the background. He hadn't the least desire to dispute Tommy Dadd's claim to the leadership just then.

Dr. Chisholm fixed his stern glance upon the Modern junior.

"So you are the leader, Dadd?"

"Yes, sir," said Tommy Dadd sturdily.

"Tell me what this means."

"We don't want that cad here, sir," said Tommy Dadd.

"What—what!"

"He's been sacked from his own school, and he'd no right to come here," called out a voice from the rear.

Dr. Chisholm compressed his lips.

"So you take it upon yourselves to judge in that matter. Do you think I was unaware of that boy's history when I admitted him to Rookwood?"

"Oh!" ejaculated Tommy Dadd.

"We—we thought—we—we believed he had—had taken you in, sir."

"Indeed! I presume you mean you believed that I had been deceived?"

"Yes, sir."

"There was nothing of the kind. I had reason to suppose that an injustice had been done to Oswald, and I deemed it right and expedient to give him another chance here. You have acted disgracefully!"

Tommy Dadd's face set sulkily.

"We don't want a fellow here who's been kicked out of his own school, sir. If he's not good enough for Minhurst, he's not good enough for Rookwood."

"That is not for you to decide, Dadd. This boy was unfortunately expelled from Minhurst. At the present moment, Dadd, you are perilously near to being expelled from Rookwood yourself."

"Oh!" said Tommy Dadd blankly.

"Oswald, you will go into the house and make yourself tidy at once. I shall deal with you later," added the Head, his eye scanning the rioters. "If this scene should recur, every participant shall be flogged and the ringleaders expelled."

Dr. Chisholm swept away, leaving the ragers dumb. After that the most truculent rager of them all was not inclined to continue. But as the rioters dispersed there were furious mutterings among them. Their remarks were not loud, but deep. There could be no more ragging, that was evident. But, as Tommy Dadd said before, he had seen his teeth. There were other ways of getting rid of the outsider. The motto of the Lower School at Rookwood was still "O.M.G."

## THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

## The Clouds Roll By.

"WHAT'S ON?"

That question was on nearly every lip at Rookwood on the following day.

The order had gone forth for the whole school, Classics and Moderns, to



assembled in Big Hall after lessons to be addressed by the Head.

Tommy Dodd and Adolphus Smythe and other leaders of the raging outbreak heard the news with great indignation. No punishments had been handed out yet, and they had only too much reason to fear that the order meant a flogging for somebody—they could guess whom.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were feeling somewhat downhearted that day. The terrific "scrap" in Oswald's study had left its mark on them. Fistic had so often were, they had never before shown such signs of combat, and their damages were great. And they felt that, in spite of their efforts, it was all up with Oswald. The authority of the Head had checked another outbreak, so far. But there were signs that it would not be long delayed. The feeling against Oswald was more bitter than ever. In spite of even the Head, another ebullition must soon occur.

Jimmy wondered whether Dr. Chisholm had already decided to send the new boy away, for the sake of order in the school. There was certainly something to be said for the attitude of the rioters. They didn't want a fellow at Rookwood who had disgraced his own school and been kicked out of it. They were determined that that they would not stand it, and the Lower School was in a ferment. Unless Oswald went, the state of affairs would grow dangerous. Fellows were talking of writing home to their people and getting a deputation of them to visit the Head.

When the school assembled in Big Hall Oswald's appearance in the ranks of the Fourth was greeted with loud huzzas. It was vain that Bulkeley and Knowles and the other prefects shouted for silence. It was not till the Head came in that the hostile demonstration died away.

Dr. Chisholm held up his hand, and there was silence at last. All the fellows wondered what was coming.

"Boys, I have called you together to make a communication to you," said the Head. "It concerns the new boy in the Fourth Form, Richard Oswald."

Tommy Dodd drew a breath of relief. It wasn't a flogging, at any rate. Some of the fellows looked very hopeful. They hoped that the Head had decided to "sack" the Outcast, and relieve Rookwood of his presence.

"When Oswald came here," resumed the Head, "I was aware that he had been compelled to leave his former school, Minhurst. I will explain why. For some time the headmaster, Dr. Frye, had been aware that a certain boy belonging to that school had been seen in disreputable haunts, and, indeed, under the influence of liquor, and he resolved to discover the identity of the boy in question, and expel him from the school. A watch was set, and Oswald was found outside the school at a late hour of the night. He had no explanation to make, and he was condemned and expelled."

There was a deep groan for Oswald.

"Silence!" exclaimed the Head. The groans died away. Tommy Dodd looked very satisfied. He felt that the Head must be coming to the point now, and that it meant the "sack" for Oswald.

A considerable time has passed since then," the Head resumed. "Mr. Oswald called upon me, and asked me to take his son here. He explained the whole circumstances to me, with the addition that his son had confessed to him that he was shielding another boy, whose name he refused to give.

"Knowing both Mr. Oswald and his

son very well, I was inclined to believe this story, and I resolved to give Oswald a chance in this school. The other masters and myself have observed Oswald very carefully during the few weeks he has been with us, and he has shown no sign whatever of any vicious tendency, which confirmed me in my opinion.

The Rookwood fellows stood silent and wondering. It was evidently not the sack for Oswald that was coming, after all. But on that earth was coming?

"To-day," continued the Head, "I received a letter from Dr. Frye, at Minhurst. He has told me a very painful story. It appears that soon after Oswald left that school it was discovered that a Minhurst boy was again acting in the disgraceful manner for which Oswald had been expelled, and only yesterday he was discovered in a low public-house, and the truth came out. This boy was Edward Frye, the headmaster's own son!"

"Oh!" murmured the Rookwood fellows.

Oswald gave a start, and bit his lip hard.

"The boy, thus completely exposed, made a full confession. He was the only culprit, and Oswald, who had been his best friend, had made every effort to win him from his evil ways, but without success. On the night when Oswald was caught out of bounds he had learned that a watch was being kept, and, knowing that Frye was in his usual haunts, he had gone out to warn him. This, of course, was very injudicious of Oswald, but it was not a crime. He was caught, and he was condemned, and the sake of his friend he kept silent. Perhaps he expected Edward Frye to have the courage to own up to the truth; but Frye kept silent to save himself, and allowed Oswald to suffer in his place. Oswald said no word to betray him from a mistaken sense of loyalty."

"My hat!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver.

Tommy Dodd's face was a study.

Even Adolphus Smythe looked a little shamefaced.

"Frye, having made this full confession when silence served him no longer, has enabled early justice to be done to the boy who suffered for his sake," said the Head. "Dr. Frye has acquainted me with the whole story, and informed me that Oswald is welcome to return to Minhurst as soon as he chooses, where he will be received with every honour!"

"Oh dear!" murmured Tommy Dodd, Jimmy Silver's face glowed.

"What did I tell you, you silly asses?" he demanded, in a voice that could be heard by everyone in Big Hall. "Didn't I tell you he was as straight as string? Why couldn't you trust your Uncle Jimmy?"

The Head smiled.

"Oswald, come here!"

Dick Oswald, with a crimson face, came up the hall; but there were no dark looks cast at him now. The boy who had suffered so much rather than betray a reborn was the kind of fellow Rookwooders could admire. Bulkeley patted him on the shoulder as he passed up the hall, and there was a subdued cheer.

"Oswald," said the Head, "your character is completely cleared. You acted impulsively and somewhat recklessly, and you took an exaggerated view of your duty to your friend. That is all that can be said against you. The choice is now open to you of remaining at Rookwood or of returning to your old school. And I trust that the boys who could not rely upon their headmaster's judgment, and who have treated you with contumely, will properly express their regret."

"It's up to you, Tommy!" murmured half the Fourth, with one voice.

Tommy Dodd stood out, red but resolute.

"We're all sorry, sir!" he exclaimed. "I beg Oswald's pardon, for one. If—if we'd known this, it would have been different. We're sorry!"

The Head made a gesture.

"Very well. If Oswald elects to remain at Rookwood, I trust you will make some endeavour to show your regret for what you have done. Dismiss!"

Jimmy Silver and Lovell caught Oswald's arms, and marched him to triumph out of Big Hall, with the rest of the Fourth thronging round him. Oswald's face was flushed, and his eyes were bright. He had thanked the Head in faltering tones, but he could not fully express his gratitude. The Head's public explanation had set him right with Rookwood, and his juniors were all eager to testify to their repentance, and to shower congratulations upon him. Even the great Adolphus told him that he was sorry, by gad!

Jimmy Silver, at one bound, had jumped back into more than his old popularity.

Jimmy Silver had been in the right, after all—right all along the line. He had stood by the Outcast; and the Outcast had been cleared, and proved to be the right sort. It was a triumph for Jimmy Silver; but, in his great glee and satisfaction, he nobly forbore to say, "I told you so!"

"It's all over now," said Tommy Dodd, shaking Oswald's hand for the fifth time. "I'm sorry—we're all sorry! We couldn't guess, you know. You see, you were an ass to stand by a ratter like that chap Frye, on a snafu, as it is. Jelly lucky he got spotted at last! Why, what are you scowling about?"

Oswald smiled faintly.

"I'm not scowling. Only—only I'm sorry for Ted. I—I hoped he'd have sense enough to run straight after such a narrow escape; but—but—"

"Oh, rot! It's lucky it's come out," said Jimmy Silver. "The question now is, are you going back to Minhurst, or sticking to us? Better stick to us!"

"I—don't care about going back," said Oswald. "There's rather painful associations at Minhurst for me now. I—I'd rather—"

"Stick to us!" said Tommy Dodd. "I'll tell you what—you stick to Rookwood, and I'll put you in the eleven for the St. Jim's match!"

Oswald laughed.

"Done!" he said.

As Oswald stayed. His name was cleared at the old school, and that was all he cared about. He did not want to leave Jimmy Silver & Co., especially Jimmy Silver, who had been his firm friend in time of trouble. And that evening the list for the St. Jim's match was posted up on the board, and after the name of the Fistic Four came that of Dick Oswald.

The clouds had rolled by at last. "Cecosity" was no more heard of, and any fellow who suggested ragging Oswald would certainly have been ragged himself, and Oswald and his friends rejoiced—especially Jimmy Silver; for Jimmy Silver had stood by the Outcast through thick and thin, and upheld the reputation of the end study for never making a mistake; and Lovell and Raby and Newcome declared solemnly that never, never again would they doubt the judgment of their Uncle Jimmy.

THE END.

(Another extra long complete tale of Rookwood School, entitled "Up Against Parkley." By Owen Conquest. Order your PENNY POPULAR in advance.)





# DIGBY'S SECRET

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

## THE FIRST CHAMP.

### Digby in the Dumps.

**W**HAT is the match, Dig, dear boy?

It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, who asked that question.

His chin, Robert Arthur Digby, looked up with an unusually moody expression upon his face.

"Who said anything was the matter, chump?" he snapped.

The swell of the Fourth advanced farther into the study—No. 6, on the Fourth Form passage—which these two shared with Jack Blake and George Herries.

But Blake and Herries were out at the moment, and Gussy had only just come in. Digby, on the other hand, had gone up to the study directly after classes were over, and had stayed there till Gussy's advent, close upon tea-time.

"It is not necessary that you should bite my head off, Digby, even if I—"

"What do you ask silly questions for, then, 288?"

Arthur Augustus stared.

This was not like Digby.

Dig had a keen sense of humour, and he looked fun at Gussy as freely as did Blake and Herries, and, for that matter, all Gussy's friends.

But Dig was hardly as rough as Herries in his chaff, hardly as outspoken as Blake in his criticisms. One might have listened to Dig, as a rule, without getting the impression that he considered Gussy a born idiot, whereas that impression was about what one would have got from Blake and Herries, if one had failed to understand their peculiar mode of showing affection.

"Weally, Digby, I must say—"

"No, you needn't! Don't say anything at all, give your clapper a rest, and let me alone!"

"If you are in trouble—"

"Suppose I were? Do you think I should come to a fathead like you to be helped out of it?"

Gussy stiffened at that, as well he might. For he was always ready to stand by his chums in trouble, and Digby's speech seemed to him grossly unfair.

"I have only to say, Digby," said the swell of the Fourth, in his loftiest manner, "yet in a tone that showed he was really hurt, 'that I expect my friends to approach me if they are in trouble, and that I never could consider—"

"Oh, dry up, do!"

The look that Gussy gave his chum was of wounded sorrow and anger. It was but a fleeting look, for almost in giving it he turned and stalked to the door.

"Here, come back, you stiff-necked donkey!"

Digby was sorry now that he had been so rough on Arthur Augustus.

But his sorrow came too late. Gussy marched on.

"Gussy, you ass!"

"I utterly refuse to have anything what even to say to you, Digby, and I beg that you will not address me again until you have apologized for your gross rudeness!"

"That isn't a very easy one, Gustavus," spoke the cherry voice of Jack Blake from the passage.

Blake and Herries, ruddy and muddy from the passage, were coming along to No. 6 in full expectation of particularly decent about things.

Digby was unfortunately decent about things of that sort, and often did more than his fair share of them. The best-tempered and most easy-going of the four chums, he was seldom downcast or moody, seldom quarrelled with anyone.

"What isn't easy, Blake?" asked Gussy.

"Dig's apologising before he speaks to you again, duffer!"

"He could put it into 't'it'n, I suppose!" replied Gussy crushingly.

"Oh! Yes, I suppose he could do that. But I don't think he will, somehow. Eh, Dig, old top?"

But Digby did not answer.

"What's he got to apologise for, anyway?" growled Herries.

"He can tell you that himself, if he chooses to do so," returned Gussy.

"Here, Gustavus, you haven't got tea ready!" yelled Blake, as the swell of the Fourth moved away.

Gussy halted.

"I am naturally awash of that 'fact, Blake," he said.

"Well, come back and get it! Herries and I are hungry. I don't mind so much about Herries, but it's serious when it's me."

"I utterly refuse to do anything of the sort, Blake!"

And with that Arthur Augustus stalked away.

"Why haven't you got tea ready, Dig?" demanded Herries, in spite of a warning glance from Blake.

Herries was not quite the quickest person in the world at taking hints.

"Don't want any tea," replied Digby.

"Why, you silly ass, what does that matter? We do. I don't know which is the maddest, you or Gussy!"

Digby turned away, with a gesture of impatience. He did not find any of his chums easy to bear with in his present mood, and Herries was the most difficult of them all.

Blake laid a hand on the arm of George Herries, and shook his head slightly.

"Is that so?" Then he shrugged his shoulders, as one who says, "Well, I can't help it, anyway!"

Blake poked the fire, and put on the kettle. Herries went to the cupboard.

Digby walked out, his head drooped, dejection plainly marked in his bearing.

"What's the matter with the chap?" asked Herries, with his head in the cupboard.

"Don't know," replied Blake, laying the cloth.

"It isn't like Dig to hump," Herries continued.

"That's right. Must be some good reason for it, I fancy."

"Well, why doesn't the silly ass tell us?"

"That is just my query, Herries," said Gussy, reappearing.

"It's partly your silly fault, I guess," Blake rejoined. "You worried him."

"I did nothing of the kind, Blake! I merely asked him what the 'mattah was."

"Well, don't stand there like a glazed dumpty! Bustle about and get tea."

"Is Dig comin' to have it?"

"Says he doesn't want any."

"Then I do not want any, either. I am goin' atah Dig."

"Come back, you fathead!" yelled Blake.

But Gussy paid no heed.

He sighted Digby in the quad, and hurried after him. At the gates he caught him up.

"Are you goin' out, Dig, dear boy?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Then I will come with you."

"No, you won't! I don't want you!"

"It's late to be goin' out, Dig. Gettin' dusk already. If you are goin' to Wylcombe the gates will be shut before you get back."

"I didn't say I was going to Rycombe, did I?"

"No. But—"

"I thought you weren't going to speak to me again until I had apologized?"

"I have reconsidered that decision, Dig, an!"

"And that I wasn't to speak to you again till I had done that?" went on Dig, with the ghost of a grin.

"When my friends are in trouble, Digby—"

"You're a beastly nuisance to them, aren't you? But I'm not going to let you be a nuisance to me any longer! Ta-ta!"

And Dig vanished into the gathering twilight.

Arthur Augustus turned and went saily and slowly back to No. 6. But it was Digby's trouble, not Digby's rudeness, that made him sad.

He arrived just in time to be too late. A glance at the table showed him that Blake and Herries had cleared up everything but the beef of a loaf.

"I shall be obliged if you will inform me what you have done with my tea!" he said, with triple dignity.

"Now that's a dead easy one, Gustavus!" replied Blake. "We've eaten it."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Herries, to whose somewhat crude sense of humour that appeared.

"Perhaps Gussy's sense of humour was more refined. Or perhaps Gussy had found his appetite in the quad. Anyway, he did not see the joke."

"I wgewet to say that I am compelled to consider you fellows as gwedday homicidat!" he said.



"Don't worry," replied Blake. "We don't mind how you consider us."

"I sha'n't ask Rake to stop you. If I think, Blake."

"We did. We considered you an ass for bumping off like that!"

"And there wasn't much, anyway, Gussy," said Herries. "I ate your kipper, and Blake ate a pig. They were skinny little beasts!"

"I am a coward," said Dig. Gussy said, regarding him as to the loss of his life.

"No good worrying," Blake answered. "He'll tell us when he thinks fit, I suppose."

## THE SECOND CHAPTER.

### Racke and Crooke in the Know.

**B**UT Dig had no intention of telling his chums. His trouble was too much of a family affair for that. In his pocket was a letter from his Uncle Justin—an uncle of whose very existence he had barely been aware until that day.

Uncle Justin was Digby's mother's brother. Sir Robert Digby, his father, had no brothers. Lady Digby had none but this one, and Dig had believed him dead long ago, if he had ever thought about him at all. He had never seen him; but he could dimly remember some disgrace that had grieved his mother greatly when he was a mere kid, and he was sure that his Uncle Justin had brought that disgrace upon his father.

That he could remember the details was not strange, for he had never heard them. All that he did recall was confused—a child's dim memory of a mother's fearful face and a father's hot anger, supplemented by the notions of a boy who had come to see an uncle to understand something about the ways in which a man might sin past forgiveness without putting himself in danger of the law.

Uncle Justin admitted in that letter that he had been a prodigal. There were cynical references to "eating the husks," and that kind of thing in it that Dig did not like at all. Justin Carruthers did not appear to be a repentant prodigal.

But he appealed to Dig's affection for his mother, and Dig could not make up his mind to resist that appeal.

"I know that it is of no use my going to them," his uncle wrote. "Your father would order me out at once, and that would distress your mother. I think she must have some feeling left for the boy who was her best pal in childhood days; but I give her credit for having concealed it carefully from me, so you, my boy, not only to hear about her, but for other reasons."

As Dig strode through the gloom he was thinking about that letter, which he almost knew by heart now.

He could guess what those other reasons were. Uncle Justin admitted being desperately hard up. If there was anything much besides that Dig would be surprised.

Robert Arthur Digby was not kept short of pocket-money. He had it as much as was good for a schoolboy at times. Fivers did not come his way with the frequency that they came the way of his chum D'Arcy. What he had was likely to be no more than a drop in the bucket to a man with the expensive tastes that Justin Carruthers might be supposed to have.

Uncle Justin had written that he was staying at the Green Man Inn at Ryelombe, and had hinted that he was coming up there, a hint that he had not the wherewithal to meet.

Dig hated that. The Green Man had a very bad name. St. Jim's fellows did go there, but not fellows of Digby's type.

Doubtless Uncle Justin was unaware what a bad reputation the place had.

But would it have made any difference to him had he known?

Dig thought not. It was likely enough that the Green Man was a quite suitable place for Justin Carruthers. But it did not seem to Dig at all a nice place for his mother's brother.

A voice hailed him out of the gathering gloom, and two fellows jumped from their bikes.

It was Racke who had hailed him, with "Hallo, Digby" in what Dig considered an altogether too familiar tone. Crooke was with Racke.

Dig did not like those two. He barred them as completely as his chums did, though, being less blunt than Blake or Herries, and less given to riding the high horse than Arthur Augustus, he might not show it as much.

"Hallo, Racke!" he replied now, not at all generally.

Crooke sniggered.

"Oh, chuck that!" said Racke. "It isn't a chap's fault if he has a rather sportive uncle, I suppose? Thing might happen to any chap. I'm not blaming Digby for it, y'know!"

Dig's heart sank.

It was easy for him to guess that these fellows had been to the Green Man, and had met Justin Carruthers there.

But it was altogether too rotten that Carruthers should have told them who he was.

"He is a bit sportive, isn't he?" sneered Crooke. "Rather more than that, I should say. After all, a fellow ought to be able to carry his liquor like a gentleman—oughtn't he, Digby?"

"I don't know anything about it," replied Dig, with an effort not to show his feelings.

"Carrying liquor—or having much to do with people who carry it—in my line."

"Oh, your uncle will put you up to the ropes," Crooke said.

"Not! It will be the other way round. That chap will pull himself together after he's had a bit of the bottle."

"Probably only being so horribly down on his luck that he has driven him to the bottle," said Dig. He wanted to see you as soon as possible, y'know, Digby. He asked me to tell you so."

"It isn't," answered Dig.

Though he felt sure that Racke had much the same sentiments as Crooke about the matter, Racke's manner was far less objectionable than Crooke's, which seemed to Dig absolutely unendurable.

"I shouldn't go now," Crooke sneered.

"You won't like the state you'll find your dear uncle in!"

"I'm not asking you when I shall go," snapped Digby.

"You'd do better to take that tone with me! You've posed long enough, as an example of spotless virtue; and you needn't be surprised if it amuses us to find that you've some dashed relations who are quite the clean potato!" snarled Crooke.

"Dry up!" said Racke warningly.

"Sha'n't! I'm going to say what I dashed well like, an'—"

"I sha'n't ask Rake to stop you. If you say another word, you'll get my fist in your face!" rapped out Dig.

"Go an' play with your boozey uncle!" retorted Crooke.

Dig's chin flashed out. Crooke took it and went down.

He was well and above Digby's weight; but the Fourth-Former had put all he knew into that punch. Crooke had had fair warning, and he ought to have known that Robert Digby was in the way of keeping his word.

Nevertheless, Crooke had not expected so prompt a punch. And Dig had quite forgotten that Crooke was holding his bike by the handle.

In falling Crooke mixed himself up with the mud on the handle, and the rat-trap pedal scored him right down one cheek.

He got up, full of fury, holding his hand to his face, incoherent in his pain and wrath.

Dig was taken aback. He had not intended anything like that, of course.

"I'm sorry," he said. "But you fairly asked for it."

"Sorry, are you?" howled Crooke. "That's a lie! But you're going to be sorry, mark my words! Oh, I'll be even with you for this!"

"Don't threaten, Gerry!" said Racke. "After all, Digby's right. You did ask for it."

Dig wondered. This was very unlike Racke, and he had no clue to the motive of Young Moneybags.

Crooke wondered even more than Dig. He looked at Racke in positive amazement.

These two pals were not exactly renowned for their meanness to stand by one another in really tight places.

But they were two to one now, and Dig was a member of the fraternity whom they regarded as common enemies. He was not one of its most redoubtable members, either, though he could punch hard.

Racke and Crooke would have hesitated to tackle Tom Merry, or Talbot, or Blake. But the two of them were certainly more than a match for Dig.

"Come along, Crooke!" said Racke.

"Oh, I'll come! I'm not in any condition to wipe the floor with that young sweep, after getting a hot blow like that. But I'll see to him later."

They passed on together towards the school, and Dig stood for a moment looking after

them before he continued his way to school.

It was not difficult to understand Crooke's attitude; but Racke's puzzled Dig completely. There was something behind it, he was sure.

Aubrey Racke was incapable of generosity or even of common decency. That was his conviction, because no one liked to be means of getting even an utter rotten ass. But he had never shown gratitude or repentance.

There was not much to choose between him and Crooke; but the general opinion leaned towards Racke as rather the worst of the two.

He had not seemed the worse just then; he had said nothing to which Dig could reproach, though the tone of his reference to Carruthers had not been pleasant. He even tried to restrain Crooke.

Why? It was a problem that Dig had to give for the time being.

When he had started out he had not made up his mind to go to the Green Man. He had rather thought of leaving that unpleasant visit to the morrow.

But he meant to go now. Racke and Crooke knew his secret, and within half an hour a might be a secret no longer. The sooner it could get Justin Carruthers away the better.

Jolliffe, the rascally landlord of the inn, was standing outside talking to Banks, the bookmaker. Both were in a bad way.

Both feared, and he saw Banks wink at Jolliffe.

"You have a gentleman staying here?" said Dig.

"Yes, a gentleman staying here, and I pretend that he could not hear. Digby was not one of the St. Jim's juniors who stood high in Jolliffe's opinion. He was 'no good' to the Green Man."

"Eh?" said Jolliffe.

"You've a gentleman staying here, I think?" Dig said more loudly.

"Not that I know of," replied Jolliffe.

"Ha, ha, ha! Ho, ho, ho!" rumbled Banks, as if he considered that speech a great joke.

It was intended to be insulting, as Dig quite easily guessed. Banks was the kind of person to whom any insult to one whom he disliked would seem a joke.

But Dig took no notice of Banks.

"A Mr. Carruthers," he said stiffly.

Arthur Augustus himself could hardly have been stiffer.

"What? I thought you said a gentleman!" sneered Jolliffe. "You'll find him in that room—through the bar-parlour is the way to it. P'raps you'll excuse me announcing it to you?"

"Certainly!" replied Dig.

He marched boldly into the inn. The bar-parlour was deserted.

He pushed open the door of the room which Jolliffe had indicated by a jerk of the thumb towards its window.

The sound of snoring came to his ears, and he saw a man lying on the couch, huddled up in a drunken slumber.

On the table was a brandy bottle nearly empty, and a glass lay on the floor. The carpet near it was damp. Plainly, Mr. Carruthers had tried to swallow more after he had lost the power even to carry the glass to his lips.

The whole atmosphere of the place, the appearance of the man he had come to see, sickened Digby. He had all the natural fastidiousness of the clean, well-bred youngster, which does not shy from roughness or from dirty work, but recoils instinctively from the sordid.

So this was his Uncle Justin—the brother of the sweet and gracious mother whom he idolised!

The man's face was turned towards the back of the couch, and Dig had to bend over it to get a look at him.

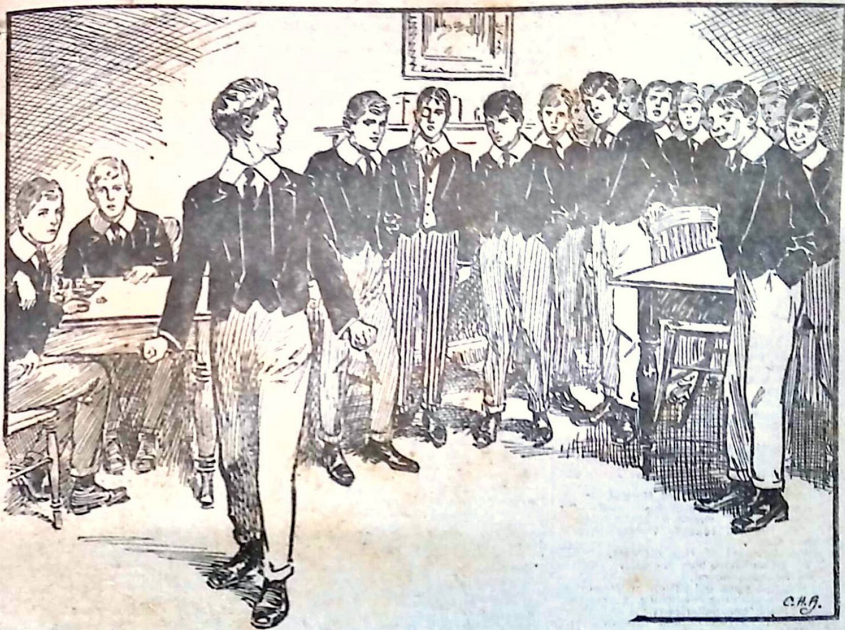
He could discern no likeness whatever to Lady Digby. But that fact told him nothing. And he had never seen a portrait of his uncle.

It was a bad face that he saw—a face scarred by evil living and puffy with drink.

But it was bad in a manner different from that of Jolliffe and Banks.

This man might have been a gentleman





C.M.P.

"It's up to you to explain, Digby," said Gore. "I tell you I hit Crooke with my flat!" replied Digby. "Ask Raake and Crooke, they know what happened. I've said all I mean to say." And he walked out of the room amid a silence only broken by a derisive laugh from Crooke. (See page 12.)

ence. He lacked the heavy brutality of those two. He might be worse, more dangerous, than either—though both were rascally enough—but even in his drunken sleep he hardly looked as low.

It was no use to think of talking to him then. Dig saw that.

He was outside again, sick at heart, but holding his head high, within two minutes.

"Well, did you have a nice talk with the—gentleman, Master Digby?" sneered Jeliffe.

"Ha, ha, ha! Ho, ho, ho!" rumbled Banks. Dig walked past them without a word.

### THE THIRD CHAPTER. No Explanations.

IT was in silence that Raake and Crooke made their way to St. Jim's after their meeting with Digby. Crooke was too furious to talk, and Raake was waiting for his precious pal to cool down and listen to reason.

Crooke went to the study for sticking-plaster, and then betook himself to the bathroom. The sharp-edged pedal had made quite a nasty scratch, and it was certainly advisable to wash and strap it. But it was not so dreadful an injury as Crooke was disposed to—breathe it out. Most of the St. Jim's juniors would have treated it lightly.

"Now, I want to know what you meant by the dashed line you took, by god, Raake!" Crooke snarled, when he re-entered No. 6 in the Shell passage.

"Don't get on your ear again, my good chap," said Raake coolly. "Here, have a cigarette! That may make you feel better. An' in a minute or two I shall have a strong cup of tea ready for you. Don't say I'm not a pal!"

"But that's just what I do say," retorted Crooke bitterly. Nevertheless, he took a cigarette from the case Raake extended.

"You were wrong all through," said Raake, watching him light up.

"But! Dashed rot! When we have the chance to score over one of those smug hypocrites—"

"There really isn't a lot of the hypocrite about Digby, y'know, dear boy. You're talkin' through your hat! He's more civil to us than most of that crowd, an' we might have worked this so that we could get on the right side of him."

"Oh, that was your little game, was it? I don't see any sort of dashed use in it, let me tell you! You tried that on with Blake last term, an' it didn't even begin to work. You've tried it on with that idiot, D'Arcy more than once, an' what good has it ever been?"

"Well, come to that, you've tried it on with your dear Cousin Reginald without any very marked success," sneered Raake.

"Tallot! Oh, that was a dam! I always hated the chap like poison!"

"I hate them all!" flashed Raake. "But that wouldn't keep me from pretending to be friendly with any of them—even Levison, or Cardew, or Merry—if I could see my advantage in it."

"Don't see where that comes in with Digby," growled Crooke, a trifle mollified by Raake's assurance that he had not the least real good feeling towards Dig.

"It might come in with any of them. See here, you an' I are in worse odour just now than we ever have been before—there's no use in denyin' that. There was my attempt to get Cardew sacked last term, when he played that trick on old Selby. Hang the old huns! If he'd had the pluck of a mouse Cardew would have had to go!"

"Yas; an' there was the bogus Mill-hizny! That was another of your Bloomers!" said Crooke.

Raake scowled.

"It wasn't any worse bloomer than puttin' Snuppy on to swim in that ass, Skimpole, an' you thought of that first," he said.

"Oh, yas! But whuse notion was the roost-raidin'?"

"Mine. An' a jolly good idea, too, if it

hadn't been for the rotten interference of those cads! But it's no use blamin' one another. The point is that gettin' a bit friendly with Digby, by lettin' him know that we knew about this blackguard uncle of his, but not lettin' on about it, might have helped. You've spoiled that."

"Yas; An' I'll dashe I soon let them know about the prodigal uncle, too!"

"No, you won't, dear boy. I know a better game than that."

Raake's calm assurance rather impressed Crooke.

"What's your game?" he asked.

"Play your face for all it's worth, of course!"

"Eh? My face? What is it worth, anyway?"

Raake looked at it critically.

It was really a better-looking face than his own. Crooke could hardly have been described as ugly, though his countenance was not a pleasant one.

"Dashed little, as a face," replied Crooke's pal. "But it looks damned, an' that's where my game comes in. I'd rather score over any one of a dozen or more of them than over Digby, as a matter of choice; but the chance has come our way in his case. An' some of the others won't like it, by gad!"

"You're talkin' in riddles," said Crooke irritably.

"Oh, no! Merely addressin' the intelligence which you appear to lack, that's all. Digby struck you a foul blow, an' I'm a witness to the fact."

"They won't believe it. He'll tell them

"He'll tell them nothin', chump! He's got the hozy uncle to keep dark."

"I begin to tumble," said Crooke. "An' are we goin' to keep the uncle dark, too?"

"Yas; As long as it suits our look—not a moment longer."

"It's a rippin' good idea," Crooke said.

"Let's go down to the Common-room now.



If that young cad isn't there, some of his chums are sure to be."

"They went down at once to the Junior Common-room."

Blake and Arthur Augustus were there, standing before the fire talking with Cardew, Levison, and Clive. For the rest, only Manners and Roylance were present, and they were at chess, Manners instructing his New Zealand man.

"Racke and Crooke would have preferred a bigger assembly. They might have walked till more had come along, but that Cardew said—

"Have you fallen down an' bitten your face, Crooke?"

"No, I haven't," snarled Crooke. "I owe this little decoration to a foul blow."

"By whom struck, may I inquire?" said Cardew politely.

"Perhaps it would be better not to mention names. Some fellows here might be offended," Racke said.

"And he looked hard at Blake as he spoke. "I haven't any friends who strike foul blows," Blake said contemptuously.

"Isn't Digby a friend of yours?" snapped Crooke.

"Dig? Dig's one of my best pals, and if you say that—"

"Weally! Crooke, if you repeat that accusation—"

"Digby wouldn't do a thing like that," said Levison.

"It's impossible!" agreed Clive.

"But these gentlemen aver that he did," said Cardew. "Are they not to be believed?"

"No, on your blessed oaths when they say that sort of thing," answered Blake hotly.

"Herries came in just then, with Julian and Kerruish.

"What's the row?" asked Herries.

"Wacko says I mean Crooke says—"

"We both say," struck in Racke coolly. "That Dig did that to Crooke's face!"

snarled Gussy.

"Herries glanced at Crooke's face.

"I'll go and fetch Dig," he said.

And he went at once.

Silence fell upon the junior Common-room. Manners and Roylance made no further move. Blake and Gussy, Levison and Clive, Julian and Kerruish drew together, and away from Racke and Crooke. Only Cardew did not stir.

There was a sudden inrush of Shell and Fourth—Tom Merry and Lowther, Talbot and Gore, Hammond and Kelly, Noble and Diane, Grundy, Gunn, and Wilkins, and half a dozen more.

"Quakers meeting?" asked Lowther.

"Oh, don't try to be funny!" snapped Blake.

Tom Merry saw the division of those present, and noted the looks on the faces of Racke and Crooke.

"Anything wrong?" he asked.

Crooke turned his face so that the long strip of sticking-plaster could be seen.

"Someone's in the wars, apparently," said Kangaroo; "but, as it's only Crooke, I don't feel specially sympathetic myself."

"He says that Dig did it!" Blake said angrily.

At that there was a hubbub among the newcomers.

In the midst of it Herries and Digby appeared.

"Here's Dig, to answer for himself!" said Herries. "I haven't told him a word except that he was wanted in the Common-room."

"That cad says you struck him a foul blow, Dig!" snapped Blake.

Digby looked at Crooke, and his face reddened.

"It wasn't a foul blow," he said. "I warned him."

"But what was it all about?" demanded triumphantly.

"That's my affair!" returned Digby.

"I suppose we shall have to ask Crooke, then," Grundy said.

"I shall say no more than this—Digby didn't like something! I said to him, 'he struck me, don't this,'" said Crooke, touching the strip of sticking-plaster.

"We're quite willin' to explain what it was all about if Digby has no objection."

"It would have been better if Dig had let them explain. He might have been sure that his secret was safe no longer than it suited them to keep it."

But he had no time to think that out. His feeling was that the secret must be kept at all costs.

"I do object!" he said.

"That suits our lips, of course," said Racke.

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A cynical smile played about the lips of Ralph Redness Cardew as he looked at Racke.

As Racke had answered, so might any decent fellow have spoken. But no one was so certain than Cardew that there was no spark of decent spirit in Blake.

"But look here, Dig—"

"I'm not going to explain, Blake."

Dig had more than a dozen friends there, and only two enemies—the fellows who held his secret.

Every one of his friends stared at him in astonishment. But his enemies did not start. Things were going their way quite nicely.

"You admit you hit Crooke?" said Tom Merry.

"Yes."

"But you say you warned him first?"

"Yes, I warned him."

"It isn't really any business of ours what the squabble was about," Tom said.

"I'm not asking you that, though I do believe you might as well say—"

"You wouldn't be answered if you did as you supposed, I'm entitled to keep my own affairs private."

Still they stared. It was amazing to hear the good-tempered Dig talking to Tom Merry like this. Tom had many friends, but Dig and his chums belonged to the inner circle. Only Manners and Lowther, and Talbot stood nearer to the general slipper of the Lower School than did those four, with Fergus and Kerr and Wyn.

"But I do ask you this," said Tom, serious, but unruined. "What did you hit him with?"

"What do you think? My fist, of course!"

Everybody looked at Crooke now. It was so very evident that no blow from a fist could necessitate some seven or eight inches of sticking-plaster. It was not so certain that Crooke might not be shamming hurt.

"Yes," Digby, dead boy—had Jove, y'know—"

"Do you think I used a blessed knuckleduster, you idiot?" snapped Dig.

"Well, if that's all that's required is needed—I don't say it is—you might have used a mowin'-machine!" drawled Cardew.

Racke and Crooke both knew how that happened, and they were not surprised.

Racke opened his eyes very widely. Crooke blinked. Digby was playing right into their hands.

"What do they think he needs all that sticking-plaster?" put in Grundy, with an air of almost preternatural acuteness.

"Oh, I dare say he does," replied Dig.

"Time for you two to speak out!" said Kangaroo.

"Us? What can we tell you?" returned Racke.

"I only know that he struck me before I knew he had any notion of doin' it, an' that this is the result," Crooke said, again touching the plaster.

Digby looked round him almost desperately.

"It's up to you to explain, Digby," Gore said, with rough kindness. "Your word's worth a heap more than theirs."

"I'm not going to explain!" replied Dig.

"I've said all that I mean to say."

And he walked out of the room amid a silence broken only by the derisive laugh of Crooke.

#### THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

##### Digby's Uncle.

"HERE'S Dig!" asked Blake, after classes next morning.

"He went to the hiked-up, got out his signals, an' wode o' directly we came out," replied Arthur Augustus.

"I flashed to go with him, but I wgewet to say that he was wude. I shall not make him such an ollah again for a long time to come."

"Look here, you two, something's got to be done about Dig," said Blake. "He's behaving very queerly. Chaps are going about saying that they believe he did strike Crooke a foul blow, and that it couldn't have been with his fist, either."

"If I hear anybody say that I'll punch the rotter's head!" snapped Herries.

"Don't be an ass! Mind, I might do the same thing myself, but it's no sort of use, Dig ought to have explained."

"But he won't—not even to us!" said Herries dimly.

"My considered opinion is—"

"All rot, as usual!" struck in Blake.

"It is nothin' of the sort, Blake, and I think that you might at least wad to hear it before condemnin' it. Aftah all, Dig is as much my pal as yours."

Perhaps that touched Blake, for it was

easy to see that Gussy was very much in earnest.

"Let's have your considered opinion, fathead," he said. "It can't do much harm, if it can't do any good."

"I think that this is all mixed up with Dig's trouble, an' that is why he will not explain."

"Well, I shouldn't wonder. But that doesn't help us, for we haven't the choost of a notion what his trouble is," Blake answered.

"He's hardly said twenty words since yesterday morning," remarked Herries.

"An' he had a litch then," said Gussy. "I saw him through the window."

"I believe, dear boys, that that litch is at the bottom of the mystery!"

"We can't go prying into it, if that's all," Blake said.

"Dig knows that we shall be stand by him through thick and thin, whatever the trouble is. If he doesn't tell us— But I think he's sure to, sooner or later. We've just got to wait."

"I'm not going to have chaps saying Dig struck Crooke a foul blow!" growled Herries.

"There will be no waiting if that's said in my hearing, I can tell you!"

If Digby had heard that conversation he would have been surprised, for he had never heard of any charge such as Crooke had made against him. But it had not occurred to him that outside the inner circle of his friends there might be anyone doubtless well disposed towards him in an emergency, wad to make matters very unpleasant for him.

Nor had it occurred to him as yet that his refusal to say anything was hardly fair to his chums, who were calling upon them for a good deal. Why should he not explain?

But Dig was not thinking of Crooke at all as he pedalled swiftly towards Elycombe.

His thoughts were busy with the problem of how to get this blackguard uncle of his away as quickly as might be, and with trouble as to how his mother and father should be kept by the rector of the parsonage if they came to know of it.

He did not want them to know of it. He was prepared to go short of pocket-money all the same, in order to buy off Justice Carruthers.

For buying him off was what it came to—Dig saw that.

On the one hand, it appeared pretty clear that Carruthers recognised the fact that he had something to hope for from Sir Robert Digby.

It is not so certain that he might not try his luck with his sister, seeking to induce her to leave the matter from her husband.

That was just what Dig wanted to avoid. Lady Digby was not in the best of health, and any worry was likely to make her worse.

On the other hand, there was not really much chance that Carruthers would be satisfied with the sum Dig could provide him with. It would not pay his bill at the Green Man for a week.

It was a big problem for a boy under sixteen to face.

Dig faced it manfully, however. All his usual light-hearted irresponsibility had fled now.

Again he found Jollife outside the public-house. This time Banks was not with him, and Dig was glad of that, at least.

"Come to see your respected relation?" asked Jollife, with an ugly leer.

"I've come to see Mr. Carruthers," answered Dig.

"That's him, Nice old bundle of tricks to be brother-in-law to a real live baronet, ain't he, Mast'ah Digby?"

"I don't want any of that sort of talk from you, Mr. Jollife," said the Fourth-Former quietly.

"My dear boy, with his arms akimbo, and looked down at Dig, leering more than ever.

"That one," he said, nodding towards the window of the room next to the bar-parlour. "owes me a bill. It will be time for you to give me tip when he's paid it—not afore!"

"I'll pay it at once," replied Dig. "How much is it?"

"Can't tell you off-hand. I'll trot in and get it for you. P'raps you'll take a glass of somethin' alonger me while I'm makin' it out!"

There was a slight change for the better in Jollife's manner. He was evidently pleased at the notion of having a such as ever.

Heerred, and Dig hated him as much as ever. "No, thank you!" he said.



"Oh, I don't mean anything hard," said Jolliffe. "Try a soft drink. I have to keep the Fussbudget stuff, though it ain't my own here."

"No, thank you," repeated Dig. "I'll stay here till you've made out the bill."

It was not until Jolliffe had disappeared into the house that it occurred to him that he would hardly like anyone from St. Jan's to see him waiting outside the Green Man. But his obstinacy was aroused, and he would not shrink the consequences. Moreover, he had no desire to spend a moment longer than was necessary in the spirit-laden atmosphere of Mr. Jolliffe's mastery.

The man was gone some time. Dig grew impatient, but he waited. He wanted that bill paid before he saw his uncle again.

"Hallo, Digby! Didn't know this sort of thing was in your line!"

Dig growled inwardly. It was Percy Mellish who had spoken; and, with the possible exception of Baggy Trimble, Mellish was the worst fellow at St. Jan's.

"It's not," said Dig.

"Well, you're safe enough as long as you keep outside," Mellish remarked, grinning.

He had dismounted from his bike. Mellish's curiosity was insatiable, and, of course, he wanted to know what Dig was doing there.

"Then Jolliffe came out."

"Here's the little account, Master Digby," he said.

Mellish's green eyes opened to their widest extent.

Dig looked at the bill. It was a heavy one for the time Carruthers had spent at the Green Man; but a single glance was sufficient to show that it was heavy. Brandy is expensive anywhere in these days, and Mr. Jolliffe was not the man to charge fees for it at others.

Under the fixed stare of Mellish a fever came from Dig's pocket-book, and was handed to the publican. There would not be a lot of change out of that note.

Mellish gasped.

"You haven't half been going it, Dig!" he said.

"Go away!" snapped Digby.

"Cut! Don't you understand plain English?"

"What should I cut? I've as much right here as you have!"

"I'll punch your head if you don't get!" flashed Dig.

It was foolish, and he knew it; but he had lost his temper now.

"Jolliffe won't let you do that," said Mellish.

"I shan't interfere," the publican said, with a hoarse laugh. "I like a little scrap as well as anyone, but you ain't any special customer of mine, Master Mellish."

"Not so good a one as Digby, anyway," replied Mellish, with a grin of malice.

"If you don't go—"

"You'll use a buckle-master to me, I suppose!" sneered the sneak of the Fourth.

"That was too much for Dig. He hit out. Mellish sprawled. Mellish was the kind of fellow who always goes down easily, lest we forget him. But there was plenty of power behind that punch."

He got up, his nose streaming.

"All right, Digby!" he said viciously. "You'll hear more about this!"

And he went off, wheeling his bike and muttering his name.

"Not much fight in that one," observed Jolliffe critically.

Dig did not answer that. He was sorry he had hit Mellish. The fellow had forced him to it; but it would only make matters worse. The one redeeming feature of the affair from Dig's point of view was that Mellish had gone off without hearing anything about Justin Carruthers.

"Is he in?" Dig asked.

"You'll find him where you saw him yesterday, better fit to yarn with you, but in a bad temper," replied Jolliffe.

Perhaps it was some impulse of good-nature that moved him to his next speech. The payment of the bill had mollified him considerably, and he had enjoyed seeing Mellish tumbled over.

"Don't you have anything more to do with him than you're obligated to, Master Digby," he said. "Your uncle he may be; he says so when he's in drink. A gent he may have been once; I don't know. But he's no good to me now!"

Again Dig did not answer. He could not thank the man, though he believed that he

meant well. It was horribly galling to have to listen to this kind of talk from him.

He walked in. The man he had seen the day before looked up as he entered.

"Mr. Carruthers, I believe!" said Dig stiffly.

"If you're young Bob Digby I'm your Uncle Justin," was the answer.

"Shake hands, young shaver; I'm pleased to see you!"

Digby shook hands in silence. The band extended to him was a trifling shaky; but on that point Mr. Jolliffe's guest was in better fettle than Dig would have expected after seeing him in that drunken sleep the day before.

"You might manage to look a little more friendly," said the man.

"I don't feel friendly," answered Dig. "I thought you were dead, and I'm not going to pretend that I'm glad you're not."

"So that's the tone, is it? I presume you've heard from your stiff-necked Pharisee of a father that I'm n.g.—eh?"

"I never heard my father speak of you. I hardly know how I remember what I do, and it isn't very clear to me, at best. But I know that it wasn't for any slight reason that my mother gave up the only brother she had!"

"They accused me of cheating at cards. That was a lie. There were other things that were more foundation; but they were no more than most men do, and no worse. I dare say you'll paint the town red one of these days, and one money that you don't know how to use, and—"

"But you're wrong in your innocent ears by talking about the other little sins."

His tone was hateful to Dig. Men did not show their wild oats. Dig was old enough to know that. But more foundation; he was sure, had never been guilty of such things as Justin Carruthers hinted at. And he never meant to be himself. After all, he was straight and live cleanly in spite of all temptations. And forgiveness of past sins was not easy to accord to a fellow who had evidently gone on sinning without remorse.

"I don't want to talk about what you have done, Dig. I only want to know why you have written to me."

"Isn't that clear enough? Look at this!"

Carruthers waved his hand, as if to indicate that the quantity in which he found himself out of all what he had been used to.

Digby's dislike for the man increased with every moment.

"You came here by your own choice," he said. "I've paid your bill up to date. And I don't want any more have. That's all I can do for you. And I know that it's only that sort of thing you want."

"Oh, you know that, do you? If ever there was a man who did block you're one! I'll take your five, but if you think that's a quitance in full you're very much mistaken. Clear out now! You'll hear from me again."

Dig was so smart about that he found himself getting any pleasure out of this meeting. He had not exactly expected gratitude. But this reception was worse than anything he had thought possible.

## THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

### More Trouble.

At the gates he met Blake, Herries, and Arthur Augustus.

But the three looked very serious.

Dig dismounted from his bike, and faced them without speaking.

"Well!" said Blake.

"Well!" returned Dig.

"There really did not seem anything else he could say."

"We've seen Mellish," Blake said.

"So have I, and Mellish had felt me!" replied Dig with the ghost of a grin.

But there was no answering grin on any of the three faces.

Blake looked stern. Herries worried, and Gussy sad.

"What did you punch his nose for?" asked Blake.

"Because he interfered in my business?"

"Well, I'm going to interfere. Shall you punch mine?"

"I don't think I shall, but I won't promise not to," replied Dig.

"You've been jolly mysterious this last day or two. What are you up to?"

"I think you know very any right to ask that?"

Blake considered that question a moment before he answered.

Digby did not like the situation at all.

He could see that nothing but friendship was behind the meddling of these three.

Yet, from his point of view, it was impossible that he should let them meddle. He could not tell them all about it, he felt; and nothing short of telling them all was of any use.

"Yes, I really think I have—we have. I mean," said Blake gravely. "Look here! We four have been through a jolly long time. Gussy's kicked over the traces now and then—"

"But Jove, Blake—wally, you know—"

"Dry away! You have, and you know you have. But I don't think I don't think there's ever been a time when any of us has really quarrelled with you, Dig. You're not an easy chap to quarrel with."

"I don't think I am," said Digby. "But you seem to have made up your minds to do it now."

"We haven't! It's the last thing we want. But that sweet Mellish says you were trying a bill at the Green Man. Is that true?"

"That was true, though it was Mellish who said it, Blake."

"What was the bill for? Whose bill was it?"

"I can't tell you that."

"Was it yours?"

"I can't answer that, either."

"Did you go out for that dog-hole of a place?"

"I don't think you need ask that, for I'm certain Mellish waited about to see whether I did or not."

"Then you did?"

"Yes."

"And you won't explain why?"

"No, I won't!"

Except for Gussy's exclamation, Blake and Digby had done all the talking thus far.

Now Herries broke in.

"Don't set your back up, Dig, old chap! It's no use. You've only got to say that it's on the sly, and we'll take you."

Herries meant well; but his speech only had the effect of putting Dig's back up.

"You fellows know me!" he said hotly. "Why should you expect me to assure you that I haven't been pub-haunting?"

"Dig, dear boy—"

"Dry up, Gustavus! That isn't the thing. Digby won't behave for any one of this day or two. We don't believe, of course, that you struck Crooke foully—"

"Do you want me to make oath that I didn't do that?" snapped Dig.

He and Blake had both lost their tempers now.

"No. Hang it all, I don't care whether you did or not! You're quarrelling with everybody, even the fellows who've always been your best chums. You're settling bills at the Green Man. You're stealing off on your own instead of—"

"—ough, Blake! I won't listen to another word! I see how it is—because I won't tell you all about my private affairs you fellows have made up your minds that I'm a rotter! You want to get rid of me, well, I don't care!"

"That's rot, Dig! No one wants to get rid of you," said Herries.

But Herries was growing angry now.

"Dig, dear old boy, tell us your trouble, whatever it is, an' wely upon us to stand by you!" pleaded Gussy, his voice choking.

"I'll tell you nothing—noting!" retorted Dig hotly.

"And he dashed on past them.

"That does it!" said Blake.

"Wally, you might have handled him more tactfully, Blake! Dig is not exactly the kind of chap to accept a wough ultimatum."

"We'll think Dig was the sort of chap to go to the Green Man, or to strike a fellow foully—"

"If you say that Dig did that," Blake, I shall stand by you."

Gussy was the last of the four to lose his temper; but he had lost it row.

Luckily, Blake was not willing to quarrel with him.

"No. I don't really think that," he said. "But I should like to know a bit more about what he went for both Crooke and Mellish. And I can't treat him as usual while he's behaving like this."

Arthur Augustus turned away.

"Where are you going to, chump?" demanded Blake.

"I am going to Dig. Are you comin', Herries?"

"Ain't he indecision made itself manifest upon the ruge-l face of George Herries. He was like nothing so much as a dog who sees his master go one way, his mistress another, and does not know which to follow."

On the whole, he thought Blake.



right, and he had at any time more respect for Blake's judgment than for that of Gussy. But he was very fond of Dig.

"I— No, I shan't come, Gussy," he said, at length. "And I think it would be better if you left him alone just now."

"Dig is in trouble, and I decline absolutely to leave him alone!" replied Arthur Augustus, in his most stately manner.

"I fancy you'll wish you had," answered Blake.

And he and Herries went moodily out of the gates together, while Gussy hurried off to No. 6.

He found Digby there, tying up a load of books.

"What are you doing, Dig, dear boy?" he asked mildly.

"Can't you see? I'm clearing out of here."

"What staidy are you going to?" Arthur Augustus inquired.

It was on the tip of his tongue to say that when it was known why Dig had quarrelled with his chums he was hardly likely to find harbourage with any fellows who would suit him.

But he had the discretion to refrain from saying that.

Dig had thought of it, though.

"I'm not going to any study," he said. "You chaps don't want me, and I don't suppose anybody else will. I shall do my prep in the Form-room and have tea in Hall."

"I wearily think you are makin' a mistake, Dig."

Something in Gussy's moderate, appealing tone spoke straight to Digby, angry as he was.

"Perhaps you fellows will find out some day that you are making the mistake," he answered. "I feel that I don't care if I never speak to Blake again! And Herries—he asked me to say that I was on the square!"

"But you're an old ass, Gussy, and you've put up with a lot from me. I won't quarrel with you."

"That's wight, Dig! Look heah, I will rove my books, too, an' have tea in Hall, an'—"

"You won't! I'm not going to have you sacrificin' yourself for me! But, I shall know you are my chum still, and—"

"If you need any help, you will let me help you? Promise, Dig!"

Both Gussy's eyes and Digby's were misty now. Gussy took his monocle out of its right eye, looked at it in a wondering way, and then wiped it carefully.

"One moment, Dig hesitated.

"Yes, old man, I'll promise that. But you'll have to take me on trust. I shan't explain things."

"I am quite prepared to take you on trust, Dig," answered the swell of the Fourth.

## THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

### Hard Up Against It.

"HERE comes your affectionate nephew!" said Aubrey Raake.

The man to whom he spoke scowled. It was the fellow who whom Digby believed to be his uncle.

Crooke scowled also. Crooke's feelings towards the "affectionate nephew" of Carruthers were as little friendly as those of Digby were to his supposed uncle.

Raake and Crooke, in funds again, the people at home having relented in both cases, had come to know Carruthers better through a visit the night before to the Green Man, where the waster had shared in a sitting at nap with them, and Jolliffe and Banks.

"Ah, then you must excuse me, my young friends," said Carruthers as Dig drew nearer. "I have something to say to my nephew."

Raake and Crooke passed Digby without speaking to him. But both grinned, and Dig felt that he could have slain them with pleasure. It was not the least of his troubles that these two should share his secret.

They had kept it now for three days—why was more than he could guess. But that it was out of no goodwill towards him he was certain.

"Gerry, dear boy," said Raake. "I don't believe that bouncer is Digby's uncle at all."

"Oh, by gad! I know you're a crafty beggar, Raake; but I can't see how you make that out. He's blackmailin' the nasty young sweep, that's a dead-sure thing, an' he couldn't do it."

"Hold hard! Of course he's blackmailin' him—that's what he's here for. But what can he get out of Digby? Ten pounds, maybe—twenty, if Digby borrows from his pals."

"Can't! He's off with them," said Crooke. "Never mind that!" broke in Raake sourly.

"How do you make out that the Carruthers-berd isn't what he pretends to be?" asked Crooke.

"Because if he was he'd go for Dig's father—or, anyway, for his mother, if he's afraid of Sir Robert Digby. He could get more than the paltry amount he'll ever make out of Digby from either of them. They'd let him do clear out, I should think. I know I would, if I'd a specimen like that in my family."

"Who is he, then?"

"That's more than I can tell you, but I should say someone who knew all about the real Carruthers, an' who knows that he's dead. He can do down Digby, who never saw his uncle; but he'd be bowled out like a shot if he tried on his game at Digby's home."

"How on earth did you get at all that, Aubrey?"

"The bouncer talked a good deal last night, after he'd got well primed with brandy. You an' Jolliffe an' Banks didn't take much notice, but I listened. It wasn't any connected story, but a word here an' there put me on the track of this, an' the more I've thought of it the surer I feel that I'm right."

"I say, though, you're not goin' to let on to Digby, are you?"

"Do I love Digby? Is it likely? Let the brute blackmail him!" said Raake spitefully.

"I've been thinkin' that if he could only be persuaded to come along well soaked to the school an' claim Digby—but if he isn't his uncle."

"What's that matter, as long as he makes out he is? There are possibilities in the scheme, Gerry. We'll see what can be done. Meanwhile, you have the pleasure of knowin' that your dear pal Digby isn't enjoyin' himself much!"

Dig certainly was not enjoying himself. And he felt that Raake and Crooke were worth next of his meeting with Carruthers did not alleviate the misery he felt.

"I told you that you would hear from me again, young man!" said the waster.

"I know you did," answered Dig. "But this can't go on, you know. I paid your bill

the other day—Jolliffe was insolent about it, and I felt it was up to me—and I handed you over a fiver. That left me a little over a quid, and I shouldn't have had as much if I hadn't been saving up for something."

"You can get more."

"Where from?"

"From your mother, of course. I shouldn't advise your applyin' to your father. He might ask awkward questions. But mothers are always soft where their boys are concerned."

"I never do ask the mater for money behind the pater's back, and I won't—that's flat!"

"Then I fear that I must go to her. I do not disguise from you the fact that I don't expect her to be pleased to see me. But that does not matter greatly to me."

"You can't go to her! She isn't well, and it would upset her badly!"

"Either you or her, my boy! Cash I must have. What are you going to do about it?"

Dig thought hard. This was no better than blackmail, he knew. It made no difference that the man was his uncle. Dig had no such suspicion as the crafty Raake had concerning the man's name, all the same.

But the alternative? Dig could not bear that. More and more he hated the thought of this man in contact with his mother. There was the tie of blood between them, as he believed; and to him they seemed to belong to different worlds.

"You won't go to the mater," he said. "But I might borrow a few pounds. See here, if I let you have ten pounds more, will you clear out, once for all? I'm not going to pretend what I don't feel. I never want to see your face again, and I won't have you go near my mother if I can help it. But I'll shell out a tenner."

"By to-morrow!" asked the waster sharply. "Yes, by to-morrow."

Dig knew that Gussy was in funds, and counted on that.

"Very well. Meet me here to-morrow at this time with the money. Or I will look you up at St. Jim's, if you prefer that."

The alternative fairly made Dig shudder. This fellow might be good enough company for Raake and Crooke—but the notion of showing him to St. Jim's as a relative did not appeal to Dig.

"No, I'll be here," he said.

Carruthers smiled evilly.

"You don't seem proud of your uncle, my boy," he said, in a tone that might have been reproachful but that it was so evidently sneering.

"I'm not!" snapped Dig, turning away.

He was thinking very hard as he went back to St. Jim's.

That Gussy would lend him the money, and wait till next term for repayment, he was as sure of the fact that the sky was above him. He did not like borrowing it, but that was the least of his troubles.

"He must ask Gussy to trust him, as not one fellow in a thousand would trust another in such a case."

He could not help it. He had to protect his mother; and now he dared not tell his father, as he saw he might have done at the outset. Sir Robert would be bitterly angry with him for his weakness.

"Where was it all to end?"

He could not guess. But if he had even dimly glimpsed what was to happen he would have dared his father's wrath and contempt, if only for his father's sake!

THE END.



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