

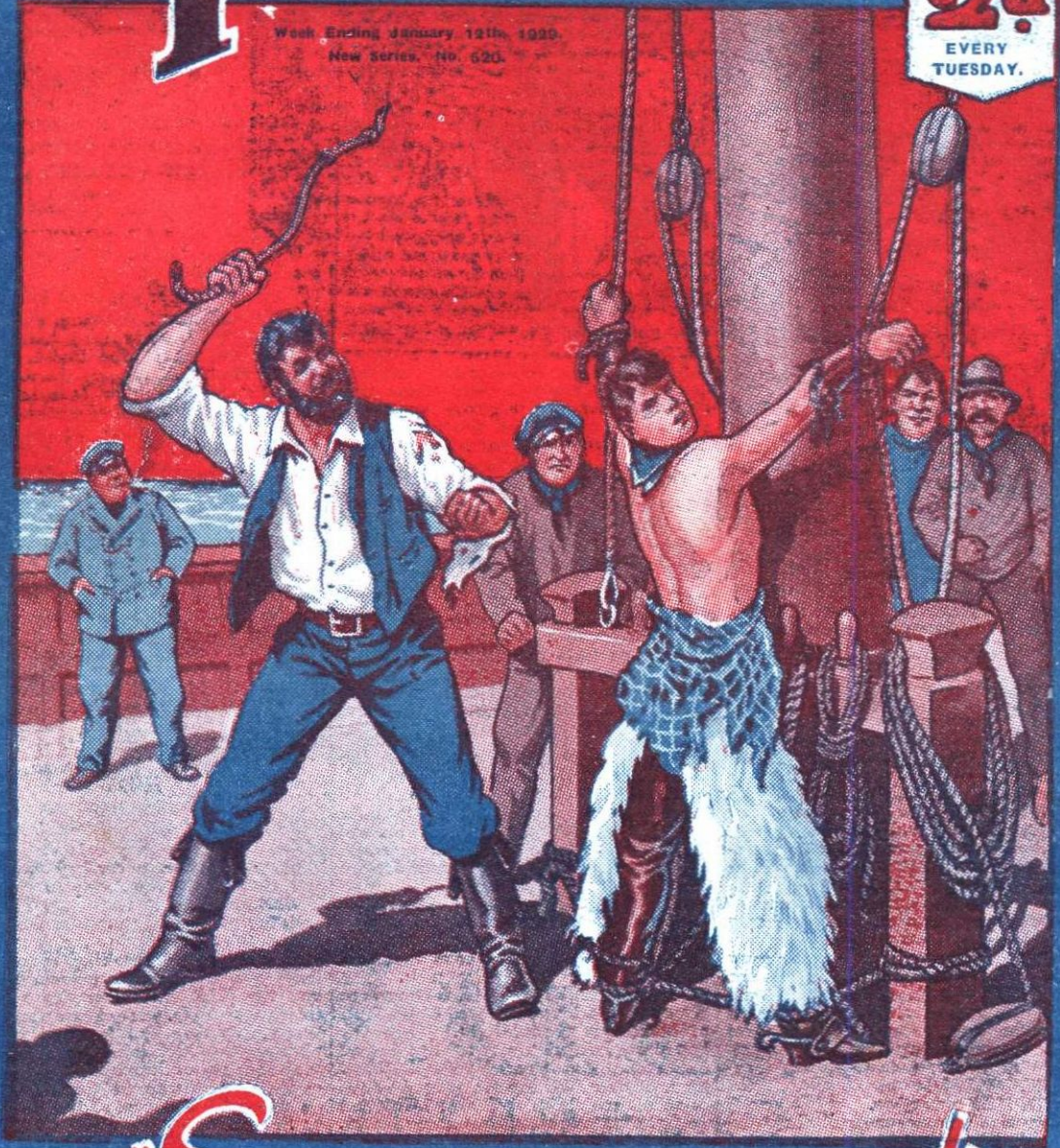
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# The POPULAR

Week Ending January 12th, 1929.  
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EVERY  
TUESDAY.



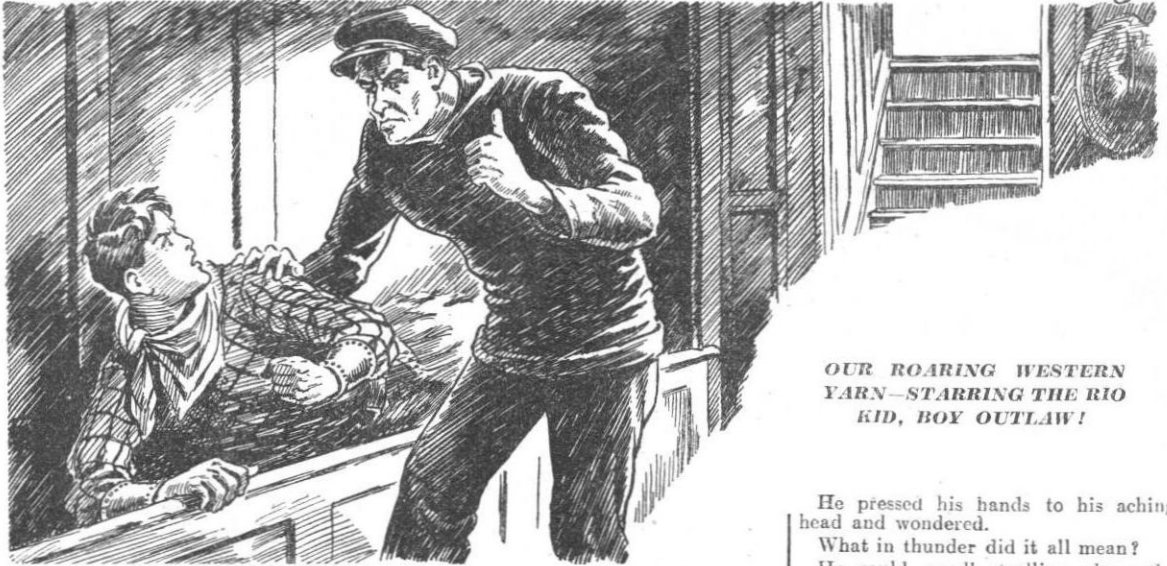
## "SHANGHAIED!"

Sensational Story of The RIO KID, BOY OUTLAW, at Sea —

The Rio Kid has been in many tight scrapes in his adventurous career, but never so amazing and perilous a plight as the one in which he finds himself this week!

# SHANGHAIED!

By Ralph Keedway



## THE FIRST CHAPTER.

### Afloat!

WHAT had happened the Rio Kid did not know.

He knew there was a terrible ache in his head, and he knew that he was lying in black darkness, and that the hard boards on which he lay were in motion, rocking like a buck-jumper.

That, for a long time, was all he knew.

In that semi-conscious state, lying in darkness and pain, it seemed as if days, weeks, years, passed. But it could only have been a matter of hours. Twice or thrice he made a movement, only to sink back again. He was hurt. He knew that he was hurt. But what had hurt him, and why, he did not know, and was in no state for guessing.

Slowly, slowly his dazed mind struggled back to fuller consciousness. His head still ached bitterly, and his throat was dry with thirst. Blackness lay on him like a blanket. He was lying on hard boards, and for a long time his dizzy brain puzzled with the mystery of it, how those boards could be in incessant motion. He fancied that he must be dreaming. If he was lying on the floor of the bunkhouse that floor was as solid as the earth under it, and only in a fantastic dream could it be pitching like this. But his brain grew clearer, and he knew that it was no dream. He was in motion. At one minute his feet were higher than his head; the next minute his head was higher than his feet. There was no possibility of doubt, though it was inexplicable.

He tried to remember.

There was a nauseous smell about the place. The Kid did not know the smell of bilge. But he knew that this was no ranch smell. He was not at the Sampson ranch now. That was a cinch. But if he wasn't at the Sampson ranch where was he? In some building in the little coast town of San Pedro? But no building ought to have been rocking like

this, unless San Pedro, and the whole coast of Texas, was in the grip of an earthquake. Earthquakes were not unknown in the Rio Kid's experience. But he knew that this was not an earthquake; the motion was too regular for that. It came into his mind with a sudden flash that he was afloat.

### Afloat!

He started up to a sitting position, and the pang of pain that passed through his bruised head was so sharp and terrible that he sank back again on the plank floor, dazed and bewildered, and for many minutes he did not move again. Could he have seen his face he would have seen that it was as white as chalk under its tan. But his thoughts were getting busy again; he knew that he was afloat on some vessel, and he was trying to figure how it had happened, and what he was doing there.

He remembered turning out of the bunkhouse at the ranch that morning. Jeff Barstow, the ranch foreman, had sent him and Santa Fe Sam down to San Pedro. Since the Kid had become Old Man Sampson's partner in the ranch he had still remained a member of the outfit, bunking with the rest, riding range with the rest, a cow-puncher, like the rest. Jeff had wanted two men to ride down to the coast town from the ranch with a bunch of cows that had been sold to a San Pedro man. The Kid remembered the drive down to the coast, the blue brilliance of the Gulf of Mexico in the sunlight. The cows had been handed over to the buyer. Santa Fe Sam wanted to roll round town a piece, looking for pulque in the Mexican posada there. The Kid had no taste for pulque, or any strong liquor, and he had strolled down to the inlet to look at the shipping, while he waited for Sam to rejoin him. They had left their horses hitched to the big coiba that stood in the plaza of San Pedro, and separated, to meet again in an hour or two. That was all clear in the Kid's mind. It was what followed that had him beat.

OUR ROARING WESTERN  
YARN—STARRING THE RIO  
KID, BOY OUTLAW!

He pressed his hands to his aching head and wondered.

What in thunder did it all mean?

He could recall strolling along the bank of the swampy inlet that jutted in from the sea at San Pedro. There were a couple of luggers there, and a schooner, and three or four seafaring men had been hanging about. The Kid remembered that he had seen a seafaring man come stamping back from the town, swearing—a hefty man, with cross-eyes, who seemed to be in a rage, and from what he said, loudly and profanely, the Kid understood that he was mate of the schooner, and that he had been after two members of the crew who had got ashore and deserted. The Kid had reflected that it showed hoss-sense on the part of the deserters to hustle ashore and vamoose, considering the extremely unpleasant looks of that cross-eyed man. The Kid had seen him take boat for the schooner and heard his profanity floating back across the sluggish water. After that—

After that the Kid's mind was a blank.

He had a vague recollection of the earth and the sky suddenly falling to pieces round him, and that was all.

That, of course, never had happened. But that recollection, coupled with the big bruise he could feel under his hair, and the pain of it, put him wise. He had been knocked on the head and stunned. Some sneaking coyote had dealt him a sockdolager from behind, and the Kid had fallen like a roped steer, insensible. He knew that now. The blank that had followed was explained; he had lain insensible since that fearful crash on his head. And now—the Kid's brain jumped to it—he was on board one of the vessels he had seen lying in the inlet. His thoughts, working further, figured it out that the vessel was now at sea. The Kid knew little of ships or shipping, but he knew that a ship would not be pitching like this in the waters of the San Pedro inlet. He was on one of those craft, and the craft he was on had put to sea while he was unconscious.

How long it had taken the Kid's aching head to work all this out he never knew—hours, as likely as not. But he had it all clear at last—he had been stunned by a blow from behind in San Pedro and roped in on board a ship, and the ship was at sea. The reason was still to seek. It couldn't be robbery, he reckoned. The Kid's roll was safe at the ranch, in Old Man Sampson's iron safe. He hadn't more than half a dozen dollars about him, and, anyhow, nobody at San Pedro knew anything about his roll. Besides, if they robbed him they would leave him where he was robbed. What would be the use of carrying him off to sea? It sure wasn't that. But what was it?

"Oh, shucks!" murmured the Kid. In that corner of Texas, on the coast of the Gulf of Mexico, three hundred miles and more from the Rio country, the Kid had felt certain that he was unknown, unsuspected. Nobody in that section knew that he was the Rio Kid, with a thousand dollars reward offered for him at Frio. To all who knew him there he was just Carfax, a puncher on the Sampson ranch. But had some galoot from the valley of the Pecos or the Rio Grande happened into town and recognised him? Had that galoot knocked him on the head, as the easiest way of cinching him, to carry him back to where he belonged, a prisoner, to be handed over to a sheriff?

It seemed unlikely, yet it was the only explanation that the Kid could think of. He was a prisoner on this vessel, that was certain, and it was only as the outlaw of the Rio Grande that he could be wanted.

His hand went to his belt. He was not surprised to find that his guns were gone.

Since he had joined the Sampson outfit the Kid, outlaw no longer, had still packed the old walnut-butted guns that had served him so well, though he had packed them chiefly for old times' sake. They were old friends, with whom he couldn't bear to part. They had been holstered to his belt when he came down to San Pedro, and they had been taken from him. The Kid was disarmed.

These galoots had lifted his guns, but had not taken the trouble to bind him, having him safe on the ship. But any man who had roped in the Rio Kid knowingly would have bound him fast enough. He concluded that it wasn't that, after all. It was no sheriff's deputy or reward-hunter who had cinched him. But what, and who, was it? The Kid had to give up that puzzling problem.

But his strength was returning now, and he rose from the hard floor on which he had been lying. There was a slightly uneasy feeling inside the Kid. He was not accustomed to the motion of a ship. The smell, too, was nauseous. He reckoned that this ship, whatever it was, wasn't a clean ship.

Having gained his feet, the Kid groped his way about carefully. In the darkness he felt the outlines of several bunks, not unlike those in a ranch bunkhouse, but close packed. He stumbled at last on some wooden steps, and groped his way up them, and felt the outlines of a door. But the door was fast.

A lurch of the ship sent him stumbling down the steps, and he found himself on the floor again.

"Thunder!" ejaculated the Kid. He picked himself up.

His head still ached, and he was dizzy. To get at the men who had made him a prisoner he had to get through that locked door. The Kid sagely opined that he could wait. Sooner or later they would come to

him; and then he would know what to do. Whoever they were, and whatever they intended, they would find a tough mouthful in the Rio Kid. That uncertain feeling in his stomach troubled him, too. The Kid groped to a bunk, crawled into it, lay down on a rough mattress, and slept.

## THE SECOND CHAPTER.

### Shanghaied!

**S**HAKE, shake, shake!  
The Rio Kid opened his eyes.  
He had slept soundly.  
The strange position in which he had found himself had not disturbed the Kid's slumbers.

The Kid had slept soundly in a calaboose, with a lynch mob growling round the walls. He had slept soundly in a dug-out in a chaparral, with a sheriff's posse hunting him, passing and repassing. And he had slept soundly in the bunk on the unknown ship on which he had been brought a kidnapped prisoner.

He opened his eyes on the light of day, as a rough hand shook his shoulder, and stared up at the man beside the bunk. With the first glance he recognised him as the cross-eyed man who had gone off in the boat swearing over the missing seamen.

The man glared down at him.  
"You want to sleep all the way to Jamaica?" he bawled. "Say!"  
"Oh, sho!" said the Kid. "I guess not! If you figure that I'm going to Jamaica, feller, you've got another guess coming. Dog-gone my boots if I know where it is!"

"Get out!"  
The Kid stretched himself and yawned.

There was still an ache in his head, but it did not trouble him very much now. The Rio Kid was as hard as nails.

He rolled out of the bunk.  
The cross-eyed man pointed to the steps, on which the Kid had stumbled the previous night. The door at the top was open, letting in light and air.  
"Get on deck, you!"

"On deck?" repeated the Kid.  
The Kid was quick enough on the uptake, but he was unaccustomed to nautical terms.

"Blue blazes!" howled the cross-eyed man. "You pesky puncher, don't you know what a deck is?"  
"I guess I've handled a deck of cards," remarked the Kid.

"A deck of cards! Holy smoke! Git!" roared the cross-eyed man; and he followed up the order with a string of oaths.

The Kid eyed him for a moment. The cross-eyed man was a powerful fellow; but the Kid would have had no hesitation in handling him. But he decided to know more about this strange matter before he started anything. He tramped up the steps, and came out on the deck of the schooner.

Sunlight was on the rippling waters of the Gulf of Mexico. Far away to the west was a dim purple line, which the Kid figured to be the coast of Texas. Somewhere beyond that purple blur lay the Sampson ranch and the outfit he had been riding with. They were far enough away now. The Kid hoped that Santa Fe Sam had taken his mustang safely back to the ranch. It was like the Kid to think of his horse at that moment.

But his thoughts came quickly back to his surroundings.

The Kid knew a lot about horseflesh and saddlery and ranching and cows; but he knew little about ships and their

ways. Still, he knew that he was on a schooner; Santa Fe Sam had pointed out this craft to him in the inlet, and told him it was a schooner, rather proud of his knowledge.

Mainsail, topsail, and foresail were spread to the breeze, and were drawing; and the schooner was pitching at a good rate over the shining waters of the Gulf.

Five or six men stared curiously at the Kid and grinned. A cowboy in goatskin chaps was doubtless new on board the schooner.

On the afterdeck was a fat man in a peaked cap. He had a face tanned to a mahogany colour, a pair of fierce, sharp eyes deeply sunken, and a big Mexican cigar stuck, unlighted, in a corner of his mouth. The Kid, glancing at him, guessed that he was a man in authority. The fat man, for the moment, was staring up at the canvas, and did not heed the Kid.

A burly man who carried a whistle slung to a lanyard, came across to the Kid and stared at him.

"You been punching cows?"  
"Sure!"  
"Oh, thunder! Go and tell the old man."

"The old man?" repeated the Kid.  
"The skipper, you durned hobo!"  
"Skipper?" said the Kid.

"Carry me home to die!" ejaculated the boatswain. "The captain, you dog-goned cowman!"

"Oh!" said the Kid. "I get you. Who's the captain?"

The boatswain pointed to the fat man aft.

"That's Captain Shack. Mind how you speak to him, if you don't want blazes knocked out of your carcass!"

The Kid's eyes glistened.  
"I guess there'll be loose hair flying around, afore blazes are knocked out of me to any extent," he remarked. "So that's the captain, is it? I guess I'll ask him what this stunt means, anyhow."

The Kid walked aft.  
On the pitching deck of the schooner it was not easy for a landsman to keep a steady footing. The Kid was accustomed to something more solid under his high-heeled boots. He gave a lurch as the schooner rolled and unexpectedly tumbled over, and there was a chuckle from the seamen who were looking at him.

The Kid picked himself up, a little breathless. He glanced at the grinning seamen, with gleaming eyes. The Kid had never felt clumsy before; but any landsman requires time to get on his sea-legs, on a small sailing vessel on a choppy sea. The Kid wished he could have had that bunch on cow-ponies on the Sampson ranch; he opined that the chuckle would have been on his side then.

But he was anxious to know what all this meant, and he continued on his way aft. A grip on a rail helped him to the after-deck without another tumble.

Captain Shack withdrew his gaze from the canvas aloft and shifted it to the newcomer.

He stared at him blankly.  
"Who the thunder are you?" he demanded.

"You can call me Carfax," answered the Kid. "But I reckon it's me that's going to ask questions. I want to know what this hyer game is, and I want to know it quick!"

"What?" roared Captain Shack.  
"I've been knocked on the head and brought here," said the Kid. "I belong to a ranch back of San Pedro, and I reckon I'm honing to get there, pronto."

I want to know who brought me here; I guess I'm going to make that galoot feel pretty considerable sick of himself!"

The captain glared at him and then shouted:

"Starboy!"

The cross-eyed man, who had come up out of the forecabin, hurried aft.

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"What's this?" roared Captain Shack, pointing at the Kid. "Mean to say you've shanghai'd a gol-darned puncher on board this hooker?"

"Ain't we four men short?" demanded Starboy. "Was it a time for picking and choosing? He's a handy lad, from the look of him, and can be licked into shape."

Captain Shack poured out a stream of profanity. The Kid looked at him. He had heard some tall language on the ranches, but he had never heard anything to equal this seafaring man's flow of eloquence.

"Licked into shape!" snorted the skipper, when he had come to an end of his expletives. "How long is it going to take to lick a cowboy into a seaman? I guess he'll be trying to cinch the helm, and hog-tie the binnacle. You durned goat, what's the good of a puncher on a ship?"

"Give me two days, and I guess I'll make a handy man of him," answered Mr. Starboy. "I've made a seaman out of a Jamaica plantation nigger. I'd make a seaman out of the Governor of Texas, if I had him on this hooker, with a length of rope. That boy's all right."

"Well, the job's yours," snarled Captain Shack.

"Leave him to me," said the mate. "I guess he won't look so durned unhandy when he's got them rags off, and some seaman's clothes on. Git back to the fo'c'sle, my man, and I'll tell the bo'sun to chuck you some dungarees."

The Rio Kid had listened, almost like a fellow in a dream. He hadn't known what to make of this strange turn of affairs, and even yet he did not quite know what to make of it. Of what went on in the rough coasting towns of the Texas seaboard, the boy puncher was quite ignorant.

"Let up a piece, you'uns," said the Kid, quietly. "I don't rightly get on to this. What's the game?"

The captain, who was turning away, turned back and stared at him.

"You don't savvy, you mossheaded puncher. You're shanghai'd!"

"Shanghai'd?" repeated the Kid.

The word was quite new to him.

"Blue blazes!" gasped Mr. Starboy. "He don't know what shanghai'd is."

"Put a pilgrim wise," suggested the Kid.

"You pesky mosshead, you're a seaman on this hooker now—can you understand that?"

"I reckon not," said the Kid. "I ain't looking for a berth on any hooker. I sure belong to the Sampson ranch."

"You belong to the Pond Lily, now," grinned the skipper. "Forget all about that ranch, my man, and turn to and obey orders."

"I guess I ain't obeying any orders in this outfit," said the Kid. "I reckon I ain't going to sea, neither. I'm asking you to turn this gol-darned tub round, and take me back to San Pedro, pronto."

Captain Shack eyed him for some moments, in dumb amazement. Then he burst into a yell of laughter.

"Take him away Starboy," he gasped. "Take him away! He's yours."

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Starboy tapped the Kid on the shoulder.

"Git forrard!" he rapped.

"Go slow a piece," said the Kid. "I'm asking you now, which galoot it was tapped me on the cabeza and roped me in."

"Here, Hacker," called out the mate. "This boob wants to know who tapped him one in the cross-trees." The boatswain came up grinning. "Give him another of the same if he keeps fresh."

"You bet," said the boatswain.

The Kid looked at him.

"It was you that gave me that sock-dolager, and roped me into this cutfit?" he asked.

"Sure," answered Hacker.

"Then I reckon you're the galoot I want to see," said the Kid.

And with the spring of a tiger, he leaped at the boatswain of the Pond Lily.

### THE THIRD CHAPTER. Hard Measures!

CRASH!

The burly boatswain of the schooner hit out savagely as the Kid came at him.

But that did not save him. The Kid's left came like a lump of iron into his eye, and as he staggered, the Kid's right drove on his jaw, and he went to the deck with a terrific crash.

He lay where he had fallen, gasping faintly.

There was a howl from the hands forward on the schooner. It seemed like a miracle to them, to see the burly boatswain handled in that style. Hacker, powerful as he was, was quite knocked out by those two fearful blows. He lay on the deck half-stunned.

The Rio Kid turned to the captain and mate, who stood rooted, as if in a trance with astonishment.

"If you'd left me a gun," said the Kid, between his teeth, "I'd sure wade in and wipe out this durned rustling outfit to the last dog-goned scallywag in it. Make me a seaman, will you, you dog-goned ginks! You'll rope me in and put me into this outfit whether I like it or not, will you, you gol-darned loosed jaspers! By the great horned toad, I reckon you've got another guess coming."

Captain Shack, gasping, dragged a revolver from his hip pocket. He backed off, and levelled it at the Kid.

"Hold on," shouted the mate. "Leave him to me."

"Ain't this hyer mutiny?" yelled the enraged Shack.

"I guess I'll larn him to toe the line, captain," said Mr. Starboy. "We only got six hands on this hooker, and we sure can't afford to throw a man into the Gulf."

The Kid was tensed for a struggle.

He was watching the captain like a cat, ready for the shot if it came, ready to make a desperate attempt to seize the revolver. Once he had a six-gun in his grasp, there were not enough men on the Pond Lily to hold the Kid. The Kid would have given all the roll that lay in Old Man Sampson's safe at the ranch, for a loaded six-gun, at that moment.

But Captain Shack was not intending to pull the trigger on the shanghai'd cow-puncher. It was fear for his own safety that had made him draw the weapon. Undoubtedly, he would have shot the Kid dead on the deck, had the puncher advanced on him. But the Kid knew too much to rush on a levelled six-gun.

The boatswain was sitting up on the deck, holding his head in both hands. He rocked himself dizzily, and groaned.

"You sure can use your hands some, said the mate, as if half admiring the prowess of the new member of the schooner's crew. "But you're too fresh, boy, you've got to larn. Git forrard."

"Guess again," sneered the Kid.

Starboy grinned.

"You ain't obeying orders?" he asked.

"Not any."

"Hyer, you loafin' lubbers," shouted the mate, addressing the staring crew. "Get a holt of that man, and trice him up to the rigging."

And as the seamen came forward, the mate led them, with a jump at the Kid. The next moment, the Rio Kid was mixed up in a wild struggle.

There were six men to him, and all of them were husky fellows, rough and muscular. But the Kid was like a wild-cat in their hands.

By the time he was got down on the deck, every man in the crew had damages to show.

But he was got down at last, and a rope run round his limbs, and drawn tight, and knotted.

Helpless now, the Kid was triced to the rigging, and his shirt was torn away by a rough hand, leaving the back bare.

"Git a move on, Hacker," snapped the mate.

Hacker had staggered up now. He still seemed dazed, and one of his eyes was blackening fast, and almost closed. His rough stubbly face was convulsed with fury.

He knotted a length of rope, and stepped up to the bound Kid.

What followed was like an evil dream to the Rio Kid. He had been in many a "rough house" in the ranches, in the cow towns, in the round-up camps. But he had still something to learn, and he was learning it now. The roughest bulldozer on a ranch, or in a rodeo, was a gentle Rube compared with the boatswain of the Pond Lily. The boatswain's sinewy arm rose and fell in incessant blows. The Kid was hard as nails, and he shut his teeth to keep back a cry. But the pain of that fearful lashing was too much for flesh and blood, and at last the shanghai'd puncher hung fainting in the ropes that secured him, and the mate signed to Hacker to quit.

"Give him salt water," snarled out Captain Shack. "Give him plenty, and chuck him into the fo'c'sle."

Salt water was swamped over the Kid's scored back, and he was roughly dragged away and tossed into the forecabin. He was only half-conscious now, and he lay where he had fallen.

Mr. Starboy walked back aft, smiling.

"That boy'll be useful yet, captain," he opined. "I've had 'em as fresh before, but in two days, I got 'em to feed out of my hand! He's sure fresh, but he'll toe the line, I'll tell a man."

"If he don't toe the line," said Captain Shack, with a string of oaths. "I'll make him believe that the deep pit is a pleasant place to this hooker. I sure will, and you can bet your bottom dollar on that!"

### THE FOURTH CHAPTER. Getting a Gun!

THE Rio Kid lay in a bunk in the dirty forecabin of the Pond Lily, for the rest of that day, undisturbed. When the rough crew of the schooner came down, they looked at him and grinned, but gave him no other heed. With a captain and mate like Esau Shack and Bill Starboy the schooner was not likely to have a choice crew, and her company was made up of the roughest scum of New Orleans. The Kid crawled painfully out of his bunk for food and water, and crawled back

again, jeered by the crew, and answering no word. It was not till sundown that Mr. Starboj looked into the fore-castle, grinned at the Kid, and looked him over.

"You've sure had a rest," he remarked. "I guess we ain't running a hospital ship. It's you for duty."

The Kid made no reply.

He had learned to school his emotions, and he gave no sign of the fierce and deadly rage that was burning like a flame in his breast. With his hands, good as they were, he could do nothing against the odds; he could do nothing till he got a grip on a six-gun. Until that happened the Kid had to talk turkey, and he knew it. But when once his grip closed on the butt of a gun—

"You obeying orders now, Carfax?" chuckled the mate.

The Kid followed the mate on deck, with his cowboy garb under his arm. Starboj waved his hand to the rail.

"Chuck them into the Gulf."

The Kid hesitated. A moment's hesitation was enough for the mate. He clenched his huge fist and drew back his arm.

Splash! The cowboy garb went into the sea.

"Jest in time!" said Mr. Starboj

watch, and he eyed the Kid malevolently. Sick and weak as the Kid was feeling now, there was a look in his eyes that warned the bully to keep his hands off him. But all through that weary watch his savage voice was heard cursing and threatening.

The Kid said no word.

What he was told to do he did, but his thoughts were elsewhere. Somewhere on the schooner were the old



**STRAIGHT FROM THE SHOULDER!** "It was you that gave me that sockdolager and roped me into this outfit, was it?" said the Kid. "Then I reckon you're the galoot I want to see!" And he leaped at the boatswain. Crash! The boy outlaw's left came like a lump of iron into the ruffian's eyes, and the man went to the deck with a crash! (See Chapter 3.)

"Sure!" said the Kid. "What's the good of a cayuse kicking agin the wall of a corral?"

"I reckon that's hoss sense," said the mate, with a nod. "You've had yours, and you've had it hard; and if it's taught you manners already, so much the better for you. I'm goin' to make a seaman out of you, boy; and afore we hit Jamaica I'm goin' to have you feedin' from my hand. You get me?"

"I sure get you," said the Kid.

"Tumble up, and get on deck."

"It's your say-so," said the Kid.

He rolled out of the bunk quietly, though every movement cost him pain. The mate eyed his cowpuncher garb contemptuously.

"Strip off them rags and get into these," he said, and he threw down a dirty suit of dungarees. "Sharp!"

It was bitter to the Kid to discard his puncher outfit. But, for the present, the Kid was playing a soft game. There was nothing else for it, until he could get hold of a gun.

He stripped off the cowboy clothes and dressed in the dungarees. The change they made in his looks was remarkable.

"Bring them rags on deck," said Starboj.

grimly. "Only jest! You're l'arnin', boy—you're l'arnin' fast. How's your back?"

"Purty considerable painful," answered the Kid.

The mate chuckled.

"Nothin' like what it'll be if you don't jump to orders," he said. "I ain't holdin' it agin you that you was fresh when you come aboard. That was nat'ral, seeing as you was a puncher afore you took to the sea. But if you don't jump to orders now you're a seaman, I pity you, I sure do. You're in the port watch, if you've got savvy enough to know what that means, and you're under Hacker's orders. Chew on that!"

The mate strode aft.

It did not take the Kid long to learn that the crew was divided into two watches, port and starboard, alternately on duty; though he learned also that the Pond Lily was so short-handed that both watches were sometimes wanted together. There had been desertions at other places as well as at San Pedro; and the Pond Lily was large for a schooner, and needed a good many more hands than sailed in her at present. Hacker, the boatswain, was in the port

notched, walnut-butted guns that had been taken from him. The Kid thought of the guns with a fierce longing. Once they were in his hands he was ready to face the whole crew of the schooner, with a smile on his face, and show them how he had learned to shoot on the Double-Bar ranch in the Frio country. The captain and mate packed guns, he knew, but there was little chance of getting hold of them. More than once, during the watch, he eyed the boatswain. Hacker berthed forward with the men, and if he packed a gun—The Kid's thoughts ran on that.

The Kid heard eight bells strike, without knowing what it implied. The starboard watch came up, and the port watch went to their bunks; and as the Kid went with them, Hacker, who was going into the fore-castle, shoved him roughly aside.

For an instant the Kid turned on him with a blaze in his eyes. The boatswain caught that blaze and jumped back, his hand going to his hip.

The Kid went quietly into the fore-castle.

His heart was beating fast.

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The boatswain packed a gun; that instinctive movement towards his hip-pocket told as much. There was a gun in the fore-castle, where the Kid bunked; and if the Rio Kid had not lost all his cunning, that gun would be in his grip before the night was out.

There were four men below—the boatswain, the Kid, and two seamen. There were bunks for twice as many, but the Pond Lily was short of hands. The Kid turned in very quietly, but not to sleep. The boatswain had flung himself into his bunk fully dressed as he was, and his deep breathing soon announced that he was asleep.

The Rio Kid's eyes were closed, but he had never been wider awake.

A dim, smoky lamp swung in the foul fore-castle of the schooner, shedding a dim light. From his bunk the Kid watched, while he waited. But he did not wait long.

The three men slept very soon. The night was warm, and the scuttle was open, and at intervals a sound of voices came from the deck. The Rio Kid slipped from his bunk.

He knew that he might be seen from the deck, but he had to take chances. Taking chances was not a new experience to the boy outlaw of the Rio Grande.

He stopped beside the snoring boatswain.

The ruffian was lying half on his back, the hip-pocket beneath him. To get at the gun without awakening him was impossible. The Kid had no weapon—nothing but his hands. With a grim

look on his face, a glitter in his eyes, he bent over the boatswain.

Hacker suddenly awakened, with a grip of iron on his throat. His eyes came wide open, and he glared at the Kid. Before he could utter the yell which trembled on his lips, the Kid had lifted his head and dashed it with fearful force against the wooden head of the bunk. It was a crashing blow that might have cracked a thinner skull, and it stunned the boatswain of the Pond Lily. One faint groan came from his bearded lips, and he collapsed insensible in the bunk.

"I guess I owed you that, feller," murmured the Rio Kid. "You was altogether too handy knocking a galoot on the cabeza from behind. I kinder reckon that puts paid to you, you dog-goned coyote!"

He rolled the huge body over, and groped for the revolver in the hip-pocket. His eyes danced as his fingers closed on it and he drew it out. He stepped back from the bunk, and examined the weapon swiftly. It was a heavy Navy revolver, six-chambered and loaded in every chamber. The Kid hummed a tune as his grasp closed hard on the butt. Two startled faces stared at him from two bunks. The seamen had been awakened by the crash of Hacker's hard head on the solid wood.

The Kid smiled at them pleasantly. "You 'uns want to keep quiet," he said in a soft drawl. "I ain't got any hunch for spilling your vinegar; but if you let out so much as a yaup, you get yours, and you get it sudden."

"Jumpin' Moses!" murmured one of the men. "What do you reckon you're goin' to do with that gun?"

"I kinder reckon I'm goin' to talk with the galoots that shanghaied a cow-puncher, as they call it," said the Kid. "I've got a hunch that this outfit is goin' to turn right round an' take me back to San Pedro. I reckon that is a sure cinch, feller; and if you want to take a hand in the game, you only got to get on your legs and say so."

"No sugar in mine!" answered the seaman, with a grin; and he settled down in his bunk again, the other following his example.

"You're sure wise," said the Kid agreeably. "You're an ornery bunch of dog-goned coyotes, but I ain't got no hunch to spill your juice, if you stand clear of the rookus. But I'm sure honing to get a bead on that dog-goned mate and skipper. If you don't want yours, keep where you are, and don't horn in."

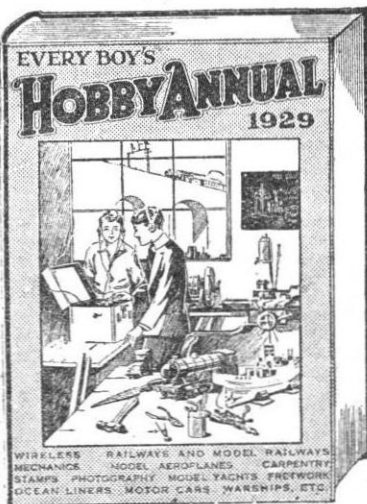
He stepped to the door of the fore-castle. From the deck came the sound of Starboy's rough voice, cursing one of the watch. The Kid listened and smiled. Overhead sailed a full, round moon. The schooner floated in a sea of silver. The Rio Kid ran lightly up the steps and stepped out on the deck.

THE END.

(Captain Shack has certainly caught a Tartar in the Rio Kid. This young outlaw is not a fellow to take a defeat, as he is proving. Don't miss: "TURNING THE TABLES!" next week's roaring Western yarn.)

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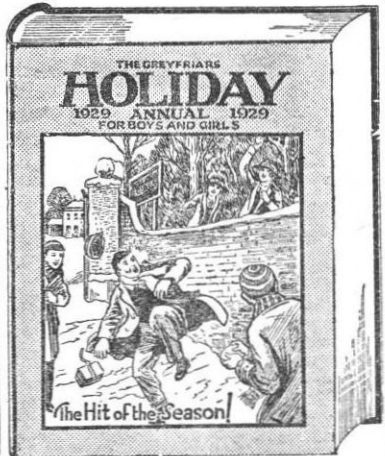
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# The Worst Master at Rookwood!

ANOTHER ROUSING LONG COMPLETE TALE OF JIMMY SILVER & CO., THE CHUMS OF ROOKWOOD,

BY  
OWEN CONQUEST.

## THE FIRST CHAPTER. The Elusive Half-crown!

IT was Arthur Edward Lovell's idea. Lovell rather prided himself upon being a fellow with ideas.

Generally, Lovell's chums did not think much of his ideas. But Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome admitted that this particular idea was rather funny, and might afford entertainment.

There was a wait of twenty minutes at Latcham Junction for the local train to Coombe, the station for Rookwood. Rookwood fellows swarmed the platform at Latcham, gathering from all corners of the kingdom for the opening of the new term. Fellows of all Forms loafed about the platform, or consumed refreshments in the buffet, or exchanged greetings and cat-calls with friends and foes while they waited for the local train. And Arthur Edward Lovell weighed in with his little scheme for passing the time in an entertaining manner.

It was quite simple. Lovell was the happy possessor of a "lucky" half-crown; that is, a half-crown in which some individual, regardless of the laws upon the subject of defacing the King's coinage, had bored a hole.

By means of that bored hole Lovell had attached a thin string of elastic to the half-crown.

The half-crown lay near Lovell's right boot, on the platform, glimmering in the wintry sunshine.

It looked like a coin that had been dropped and forgotten—a lost coin that anybody might have picked up.

But the string of black elastic, invisible against Lovell's dark trousers, held it captive, in spite of appearances.

The other end of the elastic was in Lovell's hand.

His hand, to all appearance, was shoved into his overcoat-pocket for warmth that cold day. In reality it was shoved through the slit in the lining, and held the end of the elastic attached to the coin, ready to jerk the half-crown away as soon as someone stooped to pick it up.

Lovell and his chums stood in a row near a waiting-room door, apparently quite unconscious of the half-crown so near them on the platform. They were waiting for victims.

And a victim was not long in coming. Leggett of the Modern Fourth came along the platform, and his sharp eyes fell at once on the dropped coin. Leggett paused.

He was not on friendly terms with the Fistical Four, and had had, until that moment, no intention of greeting them. Now he edged towards them with a friendly grin.

Jimmy Silver & Co. grinned, too. They were quite aware of what Albert Leggett was after.

"Hallo! You fellows back?" said Leggett cordially.

"Yes, here we are again," said Jimmy Silver.

Leggett blew his nose, and dropped his handkerchief skilfully on top of the half-crown.

It was really done quite skilfully on Leggett's part, and had that half-crown been a lost coin, undoubtedly Leggett of the Modern Fourth would have captured it, and it is much to be feared that he would have kept it.

Leggett stooped—for his handkerchief.

His bony fingers slid under the handkerchief for the half-crown. His fingertips just touched it.

Then it moved.

Leggett was so surprised as the coveted coin slipped away from his fingers that he gave quite a jump. A half-crown that was endowed with the power of motion, on its own, was a surprising sort of coin.

He grabbed up the handkerchief.

The half-crown was gone.

The elastic had jerked it up under Lovell's overcoat. But Leggett was not yet aware of that fact.

His expression, as he stood with the handkerchief in his hand, blinking at the blank spot where the half-crown had been, was bewildered—almost idiotic.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Fistical Four yelled. They had meant to keep up an air of detachment, but Leggett's expression was too much for them. They yelled.

"I—I say—" he stammered.

Arthur Edward Lovell allowed the lucky half-crown to dangle down below his overcoat. Leggett saw it fluttering there, and then he understood:

"Oh!" he ejaculated.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Leggett, with a very red face, stalked

away. Arthur Edward Lovell chuckled loud and long.

"That's the first giddy victim," he remarked. "There'll be another soon. Here comes Tubby Muffin."

Reginald Muffin of the Classical Fourth rolled up to greet the Fistical Four. His eyes fell at once on the half-crown, now lying on the platform in its former place.

Tubby did not think of adopting strategy as Leggett had done. He made a plunge for the coin at once, his fat hand extended to clutch it.

It seemed like black magic to Tubby when the half-crown whisked up under Lovell's overcoat, a second before his fat fingers could reach it.

"Oh!" gasped Tubby.

"Try again!" grinned Lovell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yah!" said Reginald Muffin, and he rolled away in great annoyance, without wasting any greetings on Jimmy Silver & Co.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver looked at his watch. "Train's due in five minutes," he remarked.

"Oh, we'll catch two or three more in that time!" said Lovell cheerfully. "Who'll be the giddy next, I wonder?"

The half-crown, glimmering on the platform, remained unnoticed for a minute or two—or, at least, unregarded. Then a rather tall, thin gentleman came out of the waiting-room door near at hand. The Fistical Four noticed him casually. Without looking at him they were aware that he had paused, and that the glance of two rather close-set, greenish-grey eyes was fixed upon the "lost" coin.

They looked away across the line towards the opposite platform, with an elaborate air of unconsciousness.

The thin, green-eyed gentleman looked about forty; and certainly they had not expected to catch so old a bird with so simple a trick. Also they were rather shocked at him. They felt, rather than saw, that he had designs on the half-crown; and really, at his age, he ought to have known better. As the half-crown lay so near Lovell's boot it looked as if Lovell had dropped it; and anyone who bothered about it at all ought to have drawn Lovell's attention to it, as presumably it was his.

But the thin, green-eyed gentleman did not do that. He moved along towards the Fistical Four with a sliding movement.

He did not stoop for the half-crown. Before Lovell could guess his intention he had placed his boot on it.

Lovell jerked the elastic—but he jerked in vain. The coin was pinned to the platform by the thin gentleman's boot.

Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome grinned—but Lovell did not grin.

The thin gentleman glanced at the juniors.

"Is this the right platform for Coombe?" he asked. No doubt the thin gentleman asked that question as a sort of explanation for stopping so close to the juniors.

"Yes, sir," said Jimmy Silver.

"Thank you!"

Lovell hoped that the thin gentleman would move on. But he did not. He waited; and it dawned upon the juniors that he was hoping that they would move and give him a chance of picking up the half-crown unnoticed. They were not likely to do so.

"The train's signalled!" said Raby.

"There'll be a rush," remarked Newcome. "Don't let those Modern cads bag all the carriages."

"No fear!" agreed Jimmy. "Better get a move on!"

Arthur Edward Lovell gave another vain jerk at the elastic. The thin gentleman's boot pinned the half-crown to the platform; and evidently he had no intention of moving. Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome were growing more and more entertained, and Lovell was growing uneasy and restive. He did not want to lose his half-crown. He had had several little jokes with it, but he did not want to pay half-a-crown for the entertainment.

"Here comes the train!" said Jimmy.

"We shall have to shift, Lovell!"

Lovell looked at the thin gentleman.

"Would you mind getting off my half-crown, sir?" he asked politely.

The thin gentleman started.

"What! What!"

"You're standing on my half-crown, sir—your left foot," said Lovell coolly.

The thin gentleman's greenish eyes glared at him.

"Nothing of the kind! Don't be impertinent, my boy!"

"Look here, sir—"

"Nonsense!"

"Well, my hat!" ejaculated Lovell, in angry astonishment. "Look here, sir, that's my half-crown, and I want it! See? Take your boot off it!"

The thin gentleman did not move. But the train was coming in now, and there was no more time to waste. Lovell gave the thin gentleman a slight shove, and the boot had to move. The half-crown was revealed.

"You young rogue!" exclaimed the thin gentleman sharply. "That coin is mine; I must have dropped it—"

"Rats! It's mine!"

"Stand back!" snapped the thin gentleman.

He stooped for the half-crown, and his long, thin fingers fairly clutched at it. Lovell jerked at the elastic at the same moment, and the coin was jerked up from the platform, and vanished under Lovell's overcoat.

For an instant the thin gentleman stood dumbfounded. Then he flushed a deep crimson. And then—

Smack!

The thin gentleman's bony hand shot out and boxed Arthur Edward Lovell's ear—with a terrific box!

"Ow!" roared Lovell, staggering

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back against the waiting-room window. "Oh! Ow! Ooooh!"

The thin gentleman strode away, and was lost in the surging crowd on the platform.

## THE SECOND CHAPTER.

### Trouble in the Train!

"H A, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. roared. Lovell, knocked spinning by that terrific box on his ear, staggered and almost fell. He recovered his balance, however, and stood rubbing his ear, his face blazing with wrath.

This unexpected ending to his little joke struck Jimmy Silver & Co. as irresistibly funny—the funniest part of the whole episode, in their opinion. It did not impress Arthur Edward Lovell in the same way.

"Why, the—the cheeky rotter!" howled Lovell. "I'll go after him, and—and—and—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at, you silly chumps?" hooted Lovell. "My head's singing—ow! Why, I'll hack his shins—I'll—" Lovell glared round for the thin gentleman.

Jimmy Silver caught him by the arm.

"Hold on, you ass!"

"I tell you I'll—"

"You jolly well won't!" chuckled Jimmy Silver. "Come on and catch the train; we don't want to get left!"

"I'll hack his shins! A beastly thief—that's what he is!" hooted Lovell. "Saying it was his half-crown—he knew jolly well it wasn't, though he didn't know it was on a string. A rotten pickpocket—"

"Come on; we're losing the train!"

"Blow the train! I—I—"

But Lovell was rushed away by his comrades towards the train, which was filling rapidly. A good many of the fellows had to wait for the second train; and, though the wait was not a long one, nobody wanted to wait. Something like a battle was going on between a crowd of Classical fellows and another crowd of Moderns, and Jimmy Silver & Co. were never "backward in coming forward" on such an occasion.

"Back up, Classics!" shouted Valentine Mornington. "Pile in, you slackers!"

"Go it, Moderns!"

"Oh, my hat! Ow! Oooop!"

Tommy Dodd & Co. were swept back from the open carriage door. Jimmy Silver and a crowd of Classics poured into the carriage—the Fistical Four and Mornington and Erroll and Rawson and Gunner and Dickinson minor and Oswald and two or three more fellows. There was no room in the carriage for so many, especially as there was already a grown-up passenger inside, but the juniors found room somehow.

The whistle screamed, doors slammed, and the train began to move.

"We've done those Modern cads in the eye!" grinned Lovell. "I say, let a fellow sit down!"

Lovell was standing at the window till the train moved, prepared to repel boarders. Now he made the cheerful discovery that all the seats were bagged. In the far corner sat a tall, thin gentleman, frowning at the noisy crowd of schoolboys; and there were five other seats, occupied now by eight or nine juniors.

"Standing room only, old bean!" said Mornington.

Lovell grunted.

Then his eyes fell on the gentleman in the far corner, sitting bolt upright with a grim face, and he recognised the claimant to his half-crown, who had boxed his ears.

"Hallo! That rotter!" exclaimed Lovell.

"Eh, what?"

"Look out for your pockets!" said Lovell.

"What the thump do you mean?" exclaimed Mornington.

"Cheese it, Lovell!" murmured Jimmy Silver. "We don't want a row here."

Lovell snorted.

"I didn't want my head thumped by a fellow who was trying to bag my half-crown!" he retorted.

The thin gentleman glanced across at Lovell. His close-set, greenish eyes glittered at the Rookwood junior. His face was rather red, under the curious looks of the juniors. Lovell met his angry stare undauntedly.

"You can scowl!" he said coolly. "You tried to bag my half-crown, and you know you did!"

"You insolent young rascal!"

"Oh, can it!" said Lovell.

The thin gentleman glared across at Lovell as though he would have liked to bite him—as perhaps he would.

"You young rascal! Will you hold your tongue?" he exclaimed. "Another word of insolence and I will lay my stick about you!"

"Rats!"

The thin gentleman started up in his place, grasping his walking-stick. He plunged towards Lovell.

But it was not easy to get along a carriage crowded by twice the regulation number of passengers. Two or three feet came in the thin gentleman's way—perhaps by accident. He pitched forward and dropped on his hands and knees among innumerable feet.

"Oh! Ah! Oh!"

"Try again!" grinned Lovell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The thin gentleman struggled up, with a furious face. Two or three hefty "licks" from his walking-stick elicited loud yells from some of the Rookwooders. Then the thin gentleman was on all fours again, and someone jammed down the back of his head, and his nose ground into the dusty floor of the carriage.

"Make it pax, sir!" suggested Mornington.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! Young rascals—scoundrels! Yaroooh! Groooh!"

"Hallo! Here we are! Coombe!" called out Rawson.

The train slowed down in the village station. Lovell hurled the carriage door wide open.

"Ow! Oh! Release me! I—I—" The thin gentleman was spluttering on the dusty floor.

Jimmy Silver & Co. streamed from the carriage on the platform at Coombe. Jimmy glanced back into the carriage and saw the thin gentleman struggling to a sitting posture, gasping for breath and covered with dust. Then he joined the stream of Rookwood fellows pouring out of the station.

## THE THIRD CHAPTER.

### An Unpleasant Discovery!

"THE Bull's gone!"

Mornington loafed along the Classical Fourth passage that evening and looked into the end study to make the remark. It was an item of news on the first night of term.

Mr. Bull was mathematics master. Generally he was spoken of with the definite article before his name instead



of the "Mister" to which he was entitled "Rotten!" said Lovell. "What's the Bull gone for? Is he gone for good?"

"Crooked, I hear," said Mornington. "Winter sports in Switzerland, and a tumble. Can't get back for the term, and mayn't show up again for weeks. They'll have to have a new man in his place. Let's hope he'll get into a railway accident comin' down."

"Ha, ha, ha!" Mathematics, though a valuable study, did not really appeal to the heroes of the Classical Fourth.

Tubby Muffin rolled along to the end study.

He rolled in and blinked hungrily round. The Fistical Four had finished tea, but there was a bag of tarts on the table. Reginald Muffin helped himself to a tart.

"You fellows heard?" he asked.

"Heard which?" "There's a new maths beast instead of the old maths beast," said Tubby. "Beast named Skinforth. What a name, you know!"

"Oh, they've got a new man already, have they?" grunted Lovell. "Might have given us a week's rest at least."

"Catch them!" said Tubby. "I say, I don't like the man's looks. I saw him in masters' Common room. Mr. Dalton was introducing him to old Greely Looks a hard nut to crack."

"Oh, he won't be worse than the Bull," said Morny. "The Bull made us work, and nobody can do worse."

"What's he like to look at?" asked Newcome.

"Long-legged sort of a merchant," said Muffin. "Looks a bit foxy, if you ask me—greeny sort of eyes, close together, you know. Sharp as a beastly razor."

Lovell started a little. The description recalled the thin gentleman he had encountered that day at Latcham Junction.

"He came along with us, if we'd only known it," went on Muffin. "I remember seeing him on the platform at Latcham, only I didn't know then that he was coming to Rookwood."

"Oh!" said Lovell. "Phew!" murmured Mornington.

Morny and the Fistical Four exchanged glances. It dawned upon them that the thin gentleman, whose nose had been rubbed on the dusty floor of the railway carriage, was a Rookwood master!

Tubby Muffin annexed another tart. He was annexing a third, when Lovell rapped his fat paw with a ruler, and Reginald Muffin took the hint and rolled out of the end study, seeking for other worlds to conquer.

"Well, this beats it!" said Valentine



**HEAVY HANDED!** "I shall not trouble to report your insolence to your Form-master," said Mr. Skinforth, to Arthur Edward Lovell. "I shall punish you myself!" And the new master suited the action to the word. Lovell staggered under a terrific box on the ear. "Oh! Ow! Whooop!" he yelled. (See Chapter 4.)

Mornington. "We shall have a jolly time in the maths set this term. Who'd have thought that skinny merchant was a new master for Rookwood?"

"Keep smiling," said Jimmy Silver cheerily. "I dare say the man will let the matter drop. If he reports us to the Head, we can explain that we didn't know who he was—and anyhow he started with his giddy walking-stick, and he smacked Lovell's head at Latcham, too. He's in the wrong."

"After all, it mayn't be the same chap," said Lovell hopefully. "Let's go down to Hall again and see. He's bound to be about somewhere."

To which Lovell's chums assented, and, the tarts being finished, the Fistical Four sauntered down the Fourth Form passage and went down to Hall.

Hall was crowded, as was usual on the first night of term. Some of the masters were to be seen there, but not the new mathematics master. Jimmy Silver & Co. strolled along in the direction of masters' Common-room, where they found Mr. Greely, master of the Fifth, in sole possession, with an evening paper. Mr. Greely's lengthy and dictatorial comments on the news in the evening paper had cleared the other masters out of Common-room.

"Where's the beast hiding himself?" grunted Lovell

"Gone to bed, perhaps," said Jimmy Silver. "We'll see him to-morrow, anyhow."

"I want to see him to-night," growled Lovell. "I want to know whether there's going to be a row to begin the term, fathead. I was up before the beak just before we left for Christmas, and I don't want to be up before him again to begin the term ass. Let's rout out the bounder!"

"I suppose he'll have the Bull's old room," suggested Raby. "Maybe unpacking his things there. Any excuse for going up to his room?"

The Fistical Four pondered over that. They really were anxious to know whether Mr. Skinforth actually was the thin gentleman whom they had so unluckily handled in the train to Coombe.

"After all, we don't know officially that there's a new maths beast," said Lovell. "Let's go up as if we thought it was the Bull there, and say how-d'ye-do. We were friendly enough with the old Bull."

"That's all right," agreed Jimmy Silver.

And the Fistical Four proceeded upstairs again, and stopped at the room which had been occupied the previous term by Mr. Bull.

There was a light under the door, which indicated that the occupant was at home.

Lovell tapped at the door.

The juniors heard the sound of a movement in the room. Footsteps crossed to the door, and it was unlocked. They heard the key turn back in the lock, softly but quite clearly, with some surprise.

Mr. Bull's room was a double apartment, the bed-room opening out of the sitting-room; and there was no apparent reason why the sitting-room door should have been locked.

The door opened.

"What is it?"

A tall, thin figure stood before the juniors, and two close-set, greenish-grey eyes were fixed on them in annoyed inquiry.

They had a glimpse of half-unpacked bags in the room; and the thin gentleman's look and tone showed that he did not like being interrupted in his unpacking.

They recognised him at once—it was the thin gentleman at Latham. He recognised them almost at the same moment.

"Oh!" he ejaculated. "You!"

His brows knitted darkly.

"You!" he repeated. "Give me your names! I have not yet reported your ruffianly conduct to the headmaster. I will take down your names at once."

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Lovell, rather wishing that he had not "routed out the bouncer," as he had expressed it.

"Your name?" snapped Mr. Skinforth, whipping out a pencil and notebook and fixing his eyes on Lovell.

"You're going to complain of us to the Head?" asked Lovell.

"Certainly! Your name?"

Lovell closed one eye at his chums.

"Jones," he said—"Jones primus, of the Shell."

Mr. Skinforth wrote it down.

"Your name?"

"Jones secundus," said Raby. "Same Form."

"And yours?"

"Jones tertius," said Newcome, entering cheerily into the joke. "Same Form."

"And yours?"

"Jones quartus," said Jimmy Silver. "Same Form."

Mr. Skinforth eyed them sharply. Perhaps he was surprised at meeting so many Joneses all at once. Still, Jones was not an uncommon name, and there were bound to be Joneses at Rookwood. "Very good!" he snapped. "You will hear more of this!"

He shut the door in the faces of the Classical chums, and they heard the key turn again. Then there was a sound of Mr. Skinforth rummaging among his bags.

Jimmy Silver and Co. walked away, wondering what would be the outcome when Mr. Skinforth reported four non-existent Joneses of the Shell to the Head.

## THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

### Looking for Jones!

**D**R. CHISHOLM frowned a little. He had had a busy day and a busy evening. He had retired to his study for a quiet half-hour, and everybody who knew the

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manners and customs of Rookwood School knew that he did not want to be interrupted there.

A new master, however, could not be supposed to be well acquainted, so far, with Rookwood manners and customs, and the special manners and customs of the headmaster. So Mr. Skinforth, the new mathematics master, tapped at the Head's door and came confidently in.

Mr. Skinforth had already, of course, made the Head's acquaintance, and been duly inspected, so to speak, by that stately gentleman. The Head was not in the least desirous of another interview. He was desirous of devoting his whole and undivided attention to Euripides—what would have been a severe punishment to any Rookwood fellow was a mild and genial relaxation to the headmaster.

"What is it, Mr. Skinforth?"

"I trust I am not interrupting you, sir."

"As a matter of fact, Mr. Skinforth, you are interrupting me," said the Head ruthlessly. "However, what is it?"

Mr. Skinforth coloured faintly.

"I have to place before you, sir, a matter of some seriousness. On my journey here to-day I was treated with great disrespect in the railway train by a number of Rookwood boys. I have now ascertained their names."

"Indeed! That certainly is a serious matter!"

"I was sure you would think so, sir. The boys names are—they are all named Jones—"

"Four boys, did you say?"

"Four, sir. There were others, but these four were ringleaders."

"I was not aware of four boys named Jones at Rookwood. To what Form do they belong?"

"The Shell."

"In any case, Mr. Skinforth, you need not have troubled me in the matter. Minor details of discipline are left to the Form masters."

"Oh!"

"I refer you to Mr. Mooney, the master of the Shell."

"Oh! Very good, sir!"

Mr. Skinforth retired from the study with slightly flushed cheeks.

Then he walked down the corridor with a knitted brow. He could not say to the Head what he would have liked to say, but he could, no doubt, "take it out" of the offending Joneses.

Meeting Bulkeley of the Sixth in the corridor, he inquired his way to Mr. Mooney's study, only to find that apartment untenanted. Mr. Mooney, the master of the Shell, was in Hall; and Mr. Skinforth sought him there. He found the Shell master in conversation with Mr. Dalton and Mr. Wiggins, comparing notes on the subject of the holidays, and the three masters welcomed him into their group very civilly and pleasantly.

Mr. Skinforth, however, had not come there to be pleasant.

"The Head has referred me to you, Mr. Mooney—"

"Indeed, sir!"

"In a matter of reporting four members of your Form for disrespectful conduct," said Mr. Skinforth.

"Indeed sir," repeated Mr. Mooney, very dryly.

Mr. Dalton and Mr. Wiggins exchanged a glance and moved away a little.

"Ruffianly conduct, I may say," added Mr. Skinforth.

"I trust that no member of my Form is likely to be guilty of ruffianly con-

duct," said Mr. Mooney, drier than ever.

"Unfortunately, your trust is misplaced in that case," said Mr. Skinforth tartly. "These four young rascals—"

"Kindly do not refer to boys in my Form by such a epithet, Mr. Skinforth," said the master of the Shell. "I shall, of course, inquire into the matter, as you say that the Head has referred you to me. What are the names of the boys in question?"

"Jones, sir!" snapped Mr. Skinforth.

"Jones!" repeated Mr. Mooney.

"Jones!" said Mr. Skinforth, more snappishly than before.

"Not all of them, I suppose?"

"Yes, all of them."

Mr. Mooney smiled slightly.

"There is a mistake somewhere," he said.

"There is no mistake, sir," said Mr. Skinforth. "I demand the exemplary punishment of these juniors. I—"

"There is not a single boy in my Form of the name of Jones, sir," said Mr. Mooney calmly. "And certainly not four of the same name."

Mr. Skinforth started.

"What! What! Are you sure of that?"

"I am very well acquainted, sir, with the names of the members of my Form," said Mr. Mooney.

The new master set his teeth, his face flushing with anger. He realised that his leg had been pulled by the Fistical Four when they had given in their names.

"So I have been deceived!" he stammered.

"It would certainly appear so," said Mr. Mooney, smiling. "No doubt you will be able to point out the boys, if you care to step into my Form-room to-morrow."

"Yes, yes; no doubt—"

"But as they have—ahem—misled you with regard to their names they may also have misled you with regard to their Forms," suggested the master of the Shell. "In that case, I cannot help you."

Mr. Skinforth did not take the trouble to reply. He turned, and stalked away, and left Hall with a glint in his green-grey eyes. He did not leave a very pleasant impression on the other masters.

For some time, Mr. Skinforth was making angry inquiries. He learned that there were two Jones at Rookwood—not four—and that they were Jones major of the Sixth, and Jones minor of the Fourth. Only the latter afforded a possible clue; and, having ascertained the number of Jones minor's study in the Classical Fourth passage, Mr. Skinforth repaired thither, in the hope of discovering one at least of the delinquents.

There were four fellows in Study No. 2 in the Fourth when Mr. Skinforth arrived there—Jones minor, "Putty" Grace, Tubby Muffin, and Higgs. They were devoting their attention to a large cake which Higgs had brought back to school with him. Mr. Skinforth threw open the door without knocking, and strode in.

The four juniors stared at him.

"It's the new maths man!" murmured Tubby Muffin.

"Is Jones here?" snapped Mr. Skinforth.

"Yes, sir," said Jones minor.

"You are Jones?"

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Skinforth would gladly have boxed Jones minor's ears; he was feeling, by this time, almost feverishly anxious to box somebody's ears. But Jones minor was a complete stranger to



**THE COLD SHOULDER FROM HIS OWN PALS!**

From being one of the most popular boys in the school, Ernest Levison now finds himself an outcast! What is the meaning of this amazing state of affairs?

# Clearing his Name!



BY

**Martin Clifford.**

Author of the well-known tales of TOM MERRY & CO., OF ST. JIM'S, appearing in the "Gem" every Wednesday.

**THE FIRST CHAPTER.**

What's Up!

**L**EVISON!"

"Well?"

Levison of the Fourth spoke coolly and quietly.

He was standing by the window at the end of the Fourth Form passage in the School House at St. Jim's, looking out into the dark quadrangle, when Cardew and Clive came along.

His face was almost expressionless as he turned to look at them.

Only that afternoon Ernest Levison had returned to St. Jim's, after his long stay at Greyfriars. Cardew and Clive were his best chums at St. Jim's. But no stranger to them would have guessed it, seeing them now—seeing the cold, steely look with which Levison met them.

Nor could anyone have guessed from Levison's look the bitter disappointment he was feeling at his reception in his school after his long absence. It had wounded him to the quick. But Ernest Levison was not a fellow to wear his heart on his sleeve. There was not a sign on his face of what he was feeling.

Cardew and Clive might have been the merest acquaintances by the way Levison carelessly glanced at them.

"You're back," said Sidney Clive awkwardly.

"Yes."

"I'm sorry we were out when you came."

"If we'd known——" began Cardew. Levison smiled.

"No need for you to stay in that I know of," he answered. "It's been a ripping afternoon—better out of doors than indoors. I hope you had a good run in the car."

"That was all right," said Cardew. "But——"

"Good!" said Levison lazily. "Lucky bargee, to get a car to run about in on a half-holiday! I've been sticking

for hours in a common or garden train."

"Have you had your tea?"

"Oh, yes! I tea'd with Frank when I came in."

"Come along to the study," said Clive.

Levison shook his head.

"I'm taking a stroll round to look at the old show," he said. "Mr. Lathom's letting me off prep this evening as it's my first day back."

"I wasn't thinking of prep," said Clive. "I—I want to hear about you at Greyfriars."

Levison yawned.

"Nothing much to tell," he said. "Nothing that would interest you chaps."

"Does that mean that you're not going to tell us?" asked Ralph Reckness Cardew very quietly.

"Why should I bore you with trifling affairs of no interest?" asked Levison.

He nodded carelessly to the two juniors, and made a move towards the staircase.

"Hold on a minute!" said Clive.

"Well?"

"What have you got your back up about?" asked Sidney Clive in his direct way. "I'd like to know what we've done."

"Yes, give it a name," said Cardew, with a nod.

"My dear men, you've done nothing," said Levison, with a stare. "And I've not got my back up. Why should I?"

"I don't know why you should," answered Clive quietly; "but it's pretty clear that you have."

"What rot!"

With that Ernest Levison walked away to the staircase, leaving his two study-mates looking at one another very oddly.

"Bai Jove! It's Levison!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth met the returned junior on the landing.

"Little me," assented Levison.

"This is wathah a surprisive, deah boy."

"Is it?"

"I nevah expected to see you to-day," explained Arthur Augustus.

"No," said Levison genially. "That seems to be the general state. I seem to have dropped in like a bolt from the blue."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Unpleasant sort of shock, I suppose," remarked Levison. "But don't blame me. I had to come back, you know. This happens to be the school I belong to, you see."

"Yaas, I undahstand that, Levison," said Arthur Augustus. "I am vewy glad to see you, of course."

"Thanks!" said Levison dryly.

"I am sowwy about you at Gwey-fviah's," continued the swell of St. Jim's. "As you used to belong to that school, your visit there was a great opportunity to set yourself wight with your formah schoolfellows. It has worked out wathah wottenly."

Levison looked at him.

"Is that your opinion?" he asked.

"Yaas, natuwally."

"You don't think it barely possible that you may be mistaken?" asked Levison sarcastically.

"Weally, Levison——"

"You don't think it possible that even your powerful brain might be a little off-side?" asked Levison.

Arthur Augustus adjusted his celebrated eyeglass in his eye, and looked hard at Levison. He was not an observant youth, as a rule, but he could feel an undercurrent of bitterness here that surprised him.

"I twust, Levison, that you are not watty?" he said, with dignity.

"Not in the least."

"I had an impression that you were speakin' as if you were watty."

"Simply your obtuseness, old bean."

"What?"

"Obtuseness."

"Weally, Levison—"

Levison moved on.

"Pway do not walk away while I am speakin', Levison," said Arthur Augustus, more warmly. "I have not finished yet."

"You never have finished, you know," said Levison, over his shoulder. "Would you mind going and boring some other fellow for a bit? Don't give it all to me on my first day back."

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stared blankly after Levison as the Fourth-Former went downstairs. He was quite taken aback. He glanced round, and spotted Cardew and Clive by the passage window, and bore down on them.

"What's the mattah with Levison?" he asked.

Cardew shrugged his shoulders, and Clive shook his head.

"Is he watty about somethin'?"

"Looks like it!"

"I have just seen Wacke of the Shell comin' in—"

"Bother Racke!" grunted Sidney Clive.

He was too worried to be interested in Aubrey Racke just then.

"Yaas; but he had a pwize nose!" said Arthur Augustus. "Levison must have passed him comin' f'rom the station, I think. I asked Wacke who had been punchin' his nose, and he only uttahn an oppwobwious expression which I disdahn to wepeat. Do you think Levison wowed with Wacke in the lane?"

"Shouldn't wonder."

"It is wathah odd that Levison should punch Wacke's nose on his way heah, and cut up wusty with his old fwinds as soon as he awwives," said the perplexed swell of St. Jim's. "I suppose that twouble at Gweyfwiahs is weighin' on his mind."

"Very likely."

"Has he told you how it turned out?"

"No."

"Is he still undah suspicoun there?"

"He's told us nothin', so we can tell you just as much!" answered Sidney Clive.

"I weally do not undahstand Levison now, deah boys."

"Same here!" said Cardew, with another shrug of the shoulders.

Arthur Augustus walked away to Study No. 6, to inform his chums, Blake and Herries and Digby, of Levison's unexpected return—and of his still more unexpected rattiness. He was quite perplexed; and for once his well-known tact and judgment were at fault. He had to admit that he couldn't catch on.

## THE SECOND CHAPTER.

### The Cold Shoulder!

LEVISON of the Fourth glanced round him in the lower passage, and called to Piggott, who was lounging in sight. Piggott of the Third Form was looking at him with a covert grin.

Levison noted the grin, though he did not appear to do so. He thought he understood it. His cold and neglectful reception after a long absence from the school was, doubtless, becoming a sort of joke in the House—even the fags of the Third grinned over it. Levison was inclined to take Piggott by the scruff of the neck, and knock his head against the banisters, in repayment for that covert grin. But he refrained.

"Seen my minor, Piggott?" he asked quietly.

"Oh, I've seen him!" assented Piggott.

"Where is he?"

"Mooching in the quad," said Piggott. "Looking for Wally and Reggie. He won't find them. They ain't back from the pictures at Wayland yet."

And Piggott chuckled.

"What's the joke, dear boy?" asked Levison, with a dangerous glitter in his eyes.

Reuben Piggott promptly backed away. He did not like that look in Levison's eyes.

"Oh, nothing!" he said. "Your friends are jolly glad to see you back, what? Frank's friends, too. Ha, ha, ha!"

And with that Piggott of the Third scuttled away, still grinning. Levison drew a deep breath.

His anger was growing deeper and deeper; but he would not make himself ridiculous by chasing a cheeky fag along the passages. That shady little rascal, Piggott of the Third, was not worth resentment. His resentment, which grew more bitter with every passing moment, was visited upon older heads than Reuben Piggott's.

He strolled out of the School House. Racke and Crooke of the Shell were loafing by the steps, and Racke was rubbing his nose. He gave Ernest Levison a black scowl.

"Get a jolly hearty reception in your study, Levison?" he called out.

Levison stopped, and fixed his eyes on Racke.

"You made a remark like that when I met you in the lane, Racke," he said quietly.

"Now I'm makin' it again!" sneered Racke.

"I punched you for it," said Levison.

"Do you want another?"

Aubrey Racke made no answer to that question. Apparently he did not want another. He contented himself with shrugging his shoulders and sneering, and Levison walked on without heeding him further. Crooke grinned as he disappeared into the dusky quad.

"He's carrying his head high, but I'll bet you he's jolly hard hit," said Crooke shrewdly.

"You bet!" said Racke. "It's worked out better than I dreamed. I fancy I've put a spoke in the cad's wheel this time."

"There'll be trouble when it comes out about the telegram."

"Who's to know anythin'?"

"It was risky. I wish you'd told me nothin' about it!" muttered Crooke uneasily.

"No risk that I can see. The telegram came from Greyfriars, signed with that cad's initials. He can't even find out that Skinner of the Remove sent it—and if he did, how could he nose out that I put Skinner up to doin' it? Safe as houses!"

"Well, I hope so!" said Crooke. But he seemed to have a lingering doubt.

Without bestowing a thought on the two cads of the Shell, Levison of the Fourth looked round the quad for his minor. It was close upon lock-up now.

He found Frank Levison of the Third hanging about, with a very disconsolate look on his face.

"Hallo, young 'un!" said Levison.

"They haven't come in, Ernie."

"Who haven't?"

"Wally D'Arcy and Reggie Manners."

"They can't be long now, or they'll be locked out."

"I—I say, Ernie, I—I feel rotten!" muttered Frank miserably. "They might have stayed in gates when they knew I was coming back this afternoon—mightn't they?"

Levison's lip curled sarcastically.

"Well, I hear that Racke of the Shell gave them reserved tickets for the pictures," he said. "They couldn't resist that."

"I think it's rotten of them. I've a good mind not to speak to them when they come in."

Levison's lips tightened.

The same neglect and coldness that had been shown towards himself had been shown towards his minor. Levison resented that more bitterly than his own treatment.

He could harden his heart, like Pharaoh of old, and take what came with a cool, grim philosophy. Frank was not built that way. The sensitive little fellow was feeling deeply the indifference displayed by his friends.

He did not share his brother's cool, sarcastic temper. He was hurt; and he could not take refuge in anger.

But the hard look passed from Levison's face as he saw Frank's sensitive lip quiver, and he forced himself to smile.

"My dear kid, don't worry," he said. "You'll find your pals as right as rain. They don't think much in the Third. They haven't got old heads on young shoulders like you, you know. It's just thoughtlessness."

Levison's minor brightened.

"Well, they might have thought a bit," he said. "But—but I don't want to be sulky with Wally and Reggie. I'll speak to them when they come in."

"That's right," said Levison. "Go down to the gates, and you'll see them in a few minutes now."

"That's a good idea," said Frank.

And he trotted off.

Levison turned back to the School House. He had comforted his minor, and that was something. Knowing the happy-go-lucky disposition of the average Third Form fag, he had little doubt that Frank would soon be on his old cheery terms with his pals in the Third. It was better for him not to nourish resentment for a slight—much better. No good ever came of sulks.

Levison could see that clearly enough in his brother's case. He did not seem to see it in his own.

When he went into the School House again Clive and Cardew were in sight, talking to Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther of the Shell. They looked at him, and made a move to join him. Levison walked on into the junior Common-room as if he had not seen them.

Clive coloured, and Ralph Reckness Cardew smiled faintly.

Tom Merry noted the incident, and looked puzzled.

"Anything up with Levison?" he asked.

"Looks like it!" grinned Lowther. "He seems to have something up against us," said Clive. "Blessed if I know what. He won't tell us a word about Greyfriars or the trouble there."

"Why not?"

"Blessed if I know."

"How is it he's here to-day, after his telegram telling you not to expect him?" asked Manners.

"He hasn't told us."

"The dear man's got his jolly old back up!" yawned Cardew. "He seems to take it personally because we were out in the car. Apparently expected us to guess that he's changed his mind again an' decided to come. But even my powerful intellect wasn't equal to guessin' that."

Tom Merry with a thoughtful look on his cheery face, went into the Common-room. Levison was there in an arm-

chair, reading. He did not look up as the captain of the Shell arrived.

"Deep in it?" asked Tom,

"Eh? Oh, yes, a little!"

"Did you leave things all right at Greyfriars, after all?"

"After all?" repeated Levison. "I left things all right there, certainly! Why not?"

"Oh, I thought—"

Levison laughed.

"You thought that, having been a jolly old black sheep when I was a Greyfriars chap, I must have broken out again in the old surroundings—what?" he asked.

"Nothing of the kind. But—" Tom paused. "If you don't want to tell me anything, I don't want to ask, of course!"

"There's nothing to tell."

"Oh! If that's so, all the better!" said Tom; and, as Levison's eyes were already on his book again, Tom Merry walked away, considerably puzzled and not at all pleased.

Levison's eyes remained on his book. But he was not reading. His face was cool and careless, but in his breast there was a black bitterness that surprised himself.

### THE THIRD CHAPTER.

#### Startling News for Levison Minor!

"FRANKY!"

Two fags of the Third Form shouted the name together.

Wally and Reggie had dodged in just in time to save lock-out.

RECORDS—

and particularly cricket records, may have much or little significance, according to the circumstances under which they are set up. The value of an innings, for instance, cannot be reckoned by the number of runs scored.

Forty or fifty runs, made by a batsman when the conditions are all in favour of the bowler, and when every other batsman is failing, must be said to be an infinitely better innings than two or three hundred scored under perfect pitch conditions. The same thing applies to bowling. A bowler who gets rid of three or four good batsmen on a perfect pitch for forty runs, say, is deserving of greater praise than a bowler who dismisses the whole side for that total on what cricketers call a "glue-pot."

But though we know that figures can tell lies, can give a false impression, we are all fascinated by them just the same. We love to hear of new records made and of old records broken, don't we? It is impossible to say how many new records in various directions will be set up during the present series of Test matches between England and Australia. But it is already certain that the games will be memorable for some new records at least, because several were set up in the very first Test match of the present series.

#### Records of the First Test.

HERE are some of the records of the first Test match of the present tour—the one played at Brisbane.

For the first time in the history of Test matches in Australia an English captain declared his innings closed.

In being set the task of scoring 741 in the fourth innings, the Australians were given the biggest number of runs to score in any game between the two countries.

And as they were scudding across to the School House, to save call-over, they almost ran into Frank Levison.

Their surprise was great; but their pleasure equally so, as Frank could see even in the dusk.

"You're back?" exclaimed D'Arcy minor.

"Back again, old bean!" said Reggie Manners.

"Didn't you expect me to-day?" demanded Frank, wondering now whether there could have been some mistake, somehow—though how a mistake could have been made, he simply could not imagine.

"Expect you?" repeated Wally. "Why should we, fathead?"

"We thought you'd be staying with your brother, of course," said Manners minor. "Don't you always stick to your silly major like glue?"

"Yes. But—"

"Well, of course we thought you were sticking," said Wally. "Never even dreamed you'd come back without him!"

"But I haven't come back without him!" exclaimed the bewildered Frank.

"Ernie came back with me, of course!"

"Did he?"

"Of course he did!"

"Did the bobbies let him?"

Frank Levison almost fell down.

"The—the bobbies?" he babbled.

"Yes! How did they let him go?"

asked Reggie Manners. "Of course, we don't believe he did it, as he's your major. Do we, Wally?"

"Oh, no!" said Wally. "Wouldn't think such a thing of Frank's major. Wouldn't tell Frank so if we did!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Have you gone potty?" yelled Frank. "What do you mean? Tell me what you mean, you duffers!"

"Come on!" shouted Wally. "We're late! We'll be shut out of Hall in another two ticks!"

"Tell me—"

"Come on, you ass!"

"But I—"

Wally and Reggie were racing away for the House. Frank Levison followed; there was nothing else to be done. He was utterly bewildered; but there was no chance then of explanation of the fags' mysterious words.

Wally & Co. squeezed into Hall just in time to answer "adsum" to their names. Wally glanced across at the ranks of the Fourth, and saw Ernest Levison there with the rest, and nudged Manners minor.

"He's really come back!" he said in a whisper.

"Then he's not arrested!" breathed Reggie.

Frank caught his breath.

What this could possibly mean, he had not the faintest idea, unless insanity had set in at St. Jim's during his absence at Greyfriars.

After the roll had been called, Wally and Reggie linked arms with Frank Levison and marched him out of Hall

(Continued on opposite page.)

## Test Record Makers!

An Article of Topical Interest, Specially contributed by "Umpire."

In being dismissed for 66 in their second innings at Brisbane, the Australians created a new record—and one which no side will wish to copy—for the smallest score made by either an England or Australian side in a Test match in Australia.

#### Ponsford, the Mighty!

THERE are many men playing in the series now who have established reputations as record-breakers. The Australians certainly have a record-breaking batsman in W. H. Ponsford, the sort of fellow who apparently sets up new records of his own, and then proceeds to knock those records down. Anyway, this is what Ponsford has done in recent years.

For a very long time the highest score ever made in a first-class match anywhere, stood to the credit of A. C. Maclaren, who on one occasion scored 424 in one innings against Somerset. But in the 1922-3 season in Australia, Ponsford, playing for Victoria against Tasmania, at Melbourne, passed Maclaren's total, scoring 429 with his own bat.

Ponsford was not satisfied with this record, however. He attacked it vigorously in a match for Victoria against Queensland in the last Australian season, and did not give up until he had amassed the huge score of 437.

To say that Ponsford is a glutton for run-making is to put it mildly. Soon after he had made his record score he played another innings of 352, and together with Woodfull—the Australian

who went through two seasons in that land without ever being bowled out—indulged in a partnership of 375 for the first wicket for Victoria against New South Wales.

I don't know whether, thinking about these figures, you feel sorry for the fellows who had to get such batsmen out, but I do. The total of Victoria's innings in the match to which I have referred mounted up to 1,107—a world's record.

#### British Giants!

ENGLAND has her record-makers out in Australia, too. I am going to give you a bowling one, by way of a change, though goodness knows bowling records are not often set up in these days; the big doings are nearly all to the credit of the batsmen. But on the tour before the present one Maurice Tate, the England bowler, took more wickets in the five Tests—38—than had ever before been secured by one bowler in one series of Test games between England and Australia. And in the same series of matches Herbert Sutcliffe—but this is going back to batsmen—scored more runs than any batsman had ever obtained in one series of Tests. His total for the five games was 734.

Then Jack Hobbs is a record-breaker, too. Apart from anything he does in the present series of games, he has scored more centuries in first-class cricket than any player before him, and possibly more than any other batsman will ever obtain. Not even W. G. Grace could set up a record which would keep Jack Hobbs under. In England both Hammond and Hobbs have scored a thousand runs in the month of May.

These are only a few of the records which stand to the credit of men now playing for England and Australia in the struggle for the Ashes.

between them. Obviously they were glad to have their chum back.

They marched him to the Third Form-room, the general meeting-place of the Third, which they had to themselves until Mr. Selby should come in to take his Form in evening prep.

"Good old Franky!" said Wally cheerily. "If you'd let us know you were coming, we'd have had a spread ready."

"We would, rather!" agreed Reggie.

"But I wrote—"  
"I know that, fathead!"

"You answered the letter!" exclaimed Frank.

"Of course I did! I say, was it very rotten in sanny at Greyfriars?" asked Wally sympathetically. "I say, even old Selby was a bit sorry when we heard you were on your beam-ends there!"

"They were very good to me," said Frank. "But, of course, I'm jolly glad to be back!"

"Seen the Head?"

"Yes."

"Did he rag you?"

"Only a bit of a jaw," said Frank. "But, look here, I want to know why you fellows didn't expect me to-day, after I wrote you that I was coming Wednesday, and you answered the letter? Have you gone off your silly rockers?"

"I think you must have," answered Wally. "Think we'd have gone to the pictures this afternoon if we'd known you were coming? How long have you been in?"

"Hours!"  
"Rotten! Us at the silly old pictures all the time!" said Wally. "I wish Racke hadn't given us the tickets now. It was decent of him, though—and he's not very decent as a rule!"

"The pictures were good!" said Manners minor. "There was one of Chumpy Choplin—"  
"Blow Chumpy Choplin!" exclaimed Frank. "I want to know about this. You knew I was coming—"

"Don't I keep on telling you that we thought you'd be staying with your major?" howled Wally.

"But you knew he was coming!" exclaimed Frank. "I told you in my letter we were coming together!"

"I know that," said Wally. "But, of course, when he said he wasn't coming we thought you were staying on with him!"

"When he said he wasn't coming?" repeated Frank.

"Yes. Now, what about some supper before old Selby comes along?" said Wally. "I've got a bit of the cake left—"



Piggott grinned as Levison came slowly down the passage. He could see that the Shell fellow was knocked up by the cold reception he had received on his first day back at St. Jim's. Levison turned to the fag. "Have you seen my minor?" he asked. "Yes, he's mooching about in the quad," said Piggott, "looking for his pals. But he won't find them!" (See Chapter 2.)

"Blow supper!" yelled Frank. "What do you mean by saying that my brother said he wasn't coming?"

"For goodness' sake give it a rest, Frank," said Wally impatiently. "I'm hungry, if you're not! We got nothing to eat at Wayland except some chocs, and we missed tea. 'Tain't my fault if your silly major keeps on changing his mind, is it?"

"Blow your major, if you come to that, Frank!" said Reggie. "We hear too much of your major, take it from me!"

"Ernie never said he wasn't coming!" roared Frank. He understood by this time that there was something more than a "mistake" here. There had been some kind of a deception, as he realised clearly enough.

"Bosh!" said Wally. "Do you mean to say he never told you about the telegram?"

"What telegram?" shrieked Frank. "The one he sent to Clive to-day."

"He never sent a telegram to Clive!"  
"Bow-wow! It was handed in in class, and Mr. Lathom let Clive read it," said Wally. "I had that from Trimble."

"It wasn't from my major. Ernie never telegraphed."

"Then he didn't tell you!" said Wally in wonder. "Why didn't he? But you must have known about the row!"

"What row?" gasped Frank.

"The row at Greyfriars."

"There wasn't any row at Greyfriars!"

"Cheese it, Franky! That won't do! Mustn't tell whoppers to your old pals."

"Who's telling whoppers?" yelled Frank.

"You are! There was a row at Greyfriars," said Wally. "How could the police be called in without a row?"

"The—the police!"  
"Yes. Don't say you didn't know."

"There wasn't any police," babbled Frank in blank amazement. "What do you mean? We left Greyfriars all right. What should there be any police for?"

"The missing money, of course."  
"What money?"

"The money your major bagged—I—I—I mean, the money they thought he had bagged."

Frank Levison stared at the fags. "Are you potty?" he asked at last. "Where did you get all this silly rot from? Who's been pulling your leg?"

"Like to see anybody pull my leg!" said Wally disdainfully. "Mean to say it isn't true?"

"Not a word of it! Not a syllable!" Wally winked at Reggie Manners.

"Oh, all right!" he said resignedly. "It isn't true, if you like. Anyhow, your major seems to have got out of it all right."

"There wasn't anything to get out of!" yelled Frank.  
"All right—all right—there wasn't!"  
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said Wally soothingly. "Now what about some supper before old Selby blows in?"

"Blow supper! I've got to know about this, and my major's got to know!" said Frank savagely. "Somebody's been spinning a rotten yarn about him. Was it Trimble?"

"Don't be an ass, Frank! It was all in the telegram. We've both seen the telegram. You see," explained Wally patiently, "my major, old Gussy, had a wheeze of giving Levison a reception when he came back—all hands rallying round at the station, and that rot. Just like old Gussy—putting his silly old foot in it! Well, the fellows were all ready to start, and Clive simply had to show them the telegram, to explain why the giddy reception was off. Otherwise, he'd have kept it dark, I suppose. Of course, he'd have mentioned you weren't coming, as he knew we were going to Wayland Junction to meet you."

"There wasn't any telegram!" roared Frank.

"Perhaps we dreamed we saw it, then!" suggested Manners minor, with sarcasm.

Frank controlled his excitement and wrath. He tried to calm himself.

"You mean to say that Clive of the Fourth had a telegram from my major saying that he wasn't coming back to St. Jim's to-day?" he asked, as quietly as he could.

"Yes, ass, and we saw it!"

"Then it was a bogus telegram!" said Frank. "I'm jolly well going to see Clive about this!"

"Hold on!" roared Wally. "Don't you want any supper, you young ass?"

Apparently Frank Levison wasn't bothering about supper. He rushed out of the Form-room, and sped away to the Fourth Form passage, leaving his chums staring.

#### THE FOURTH CHAPTER. Study No. 9 Gets a Shock!

"STEADY, the Buffs!"

Tom Merry made that remark, with a laugh, as Frank Levison came across the landing with a rush. He nearly rushed into the Terrible Three of the Shell, and Tom stopped him just in time. He caught the excited fag by the shoulder, and Frank spun almost entirely round him.

"Ow!" gasped Frank.

"Understudying the 'Charge of the Light Brigade'?" asked Monty Lowther cheerily.

"Leggo, you ass!"

"Looking for your major?" asked Manners, as Tom released the breathless fag. "You seem to have come home in better spirits than the other chump. You're not sulking."

Frank Levison's eyes flashed.

"Ernie's not sulking, and you're a silly ass!" he retorted.

"Thanks!" said Manners, unmoved. "You've picked up a lot of politeness during your stay at Greyfriars. Did you learn it from Billy Bunter?"

"Oh, don't gas!" said Frank. "Look here, did Clive of the Fourth get a telegram—"

"Of course he did! Think it wasn't delivered?" asked Lowther.

"It was a swindle!" gasped Frank. "My brother never sent a telegram!"

"Eh?"

"What?"

"Bosh!"

"Oh, you're all silly duffers!" said Levison minor; and, leaving the Terrible Three to digest that, he rushed on to the Fourth Form passage, and arrived breathless at the door of Study No. 9.

He hurled the door open with a crash. Generally, Frank's manners were THE POPULAR.—No. 520.

quite nice, and he was quite a good example to the rather unruly young ruffians in the Third. But his good manners had quite deserted him now in his excitement.

Clive and Cardew were in the study.

Both of them stared at the fag—Clive with a slight frown, Cardew with a sarcastic smile.

"Ernie not here?" gasped Frank.

"Do they knock at doors of Greyfriars, before butting into a study?" asked Cardew. "We do here."

"Oh, don't rot!" said Frank. "You're a silly ass, and you've been taken in! Wally says Clive had a telegram from Ernie to-day, from Greyfriars."

"Wally, as usual, is perfectly correct in his statements," said Cardew gravely. "But it's no news to you, I suppose? Levison didn't venture to keep his proceedings secret from his youthful mentor—what?"

"Fathead! Ernie never sent a telegram!"

"The excellent Ernie has been keepin' secrets from his minor," said Cardew solemnly. "We must speak seriously to Ernie about this!"

"Don't rot, I tell you!" shouted Frank. "If Clive had a telegram, it was spoof, and Ernie never sent it! Why should he?"

"Because he'd changed his plans."

"But he hadn't!"

"He seems to have changed them a second time, since he's here!" remarked Cardew. "But—"

"Let me see the telegram!" exclaimed Frank. "If it's not a silly jape, show me the telegram!"

"I've got it here," said Clive.

He took the crumpled telegraph-form from his pocket. Frank almost grabbed it. He smoothed it out, and read it with starting eyes, the two Fourth-Formers watching him curiously, and Tom Merry & Co., who had followed him to Study No. 9, looking in at him with equal curiosity.

"Don't expect me to-day. In trouble here. Money missing. Police called in. I know you will believe in me, but they think me guilty here. Writing.—E. L."

"Handed in at Courtfield," muttered Frank, when he had finished reading that precious message. "And you silly chumps believe that Ernie sent you that telegram?"

"Didn't he?" growled Clive.

"Of course, he didn't!"

"Oh, rot!"

"Isn't there any trouble at Greyfriars?" asked Tom Merry, from the doorway. "No money missing, or—"

"No."

"Do you mean to say that nothing's happened?"

"Of course not!" cried Frank angrily.

"Not?"

"The Head and Mr. Quelch shook hands with Ernie when he left, and Wharton and a crowd of fellows came to see us off. There was nothing amiss—nothing at all!"

"Great Scott!"

Frank struck the telegram with his clenched fist.

"Some rotten cad sent this, to dish old Ernie when he got back!" he exclaimed fiercely. "Some measly worm—some rotter! Skinner, perhaps! Ernie got on well with every fellow but Skinner, and one or two of Skinner's friends."

"My only hat!" said Clive blankly.

Cardew whistled.

"It's spoof—spoof from beginning to end!" said Frank, more calmly. "You ought to have known it!"

"How could we know it, if it's so?" said Clive rather gruffly. "Telegrams generally mean what they say."

"If there was money missing, they wouldn't suspect Ernie!" snapped Frank, scornfully. "They'd know better!"

"Well—ahem—"

"I'm going to take the telegram to Ernie!" exclaimed the fag. "Where is he?"

"In the Common-room downstairs," said Tom Merry.

Frank rushed out of the study with the telegram clutched in his hand.

The juniors looked at one another. They had been taken utterly by surprise.

It had never crossed a single mind at St. Jim's that the telegram was a bogus one. It was signed with Levison's initials. It had been handed in at Courtfield, near Greyfriars. No St. Jim's fellow could possibly have got so far afield to send it, if any of Levison's enemies at St. Jim's had thought of such a dastardly trick. In spite of Frank's excitement, Tom Merry & Co. even now did not know what to think.

"Did Levison send that wire?" said Manners blankly.

"If he did, his minor never knew," said Cardew.

"But if there were serious trouble over at Greyfriars—money missing and Levison suspected and police called in—Frank would be bound to know about it."

"It couldn't be kept from him," said Tom.

"I—I suppose so."

"Let's go and see what Levison says," said Clive abruptly.

"Good! Nothin' like information straight from the horse's mouth!" assented Cardew.

The Fourth-Formers left the study and followed Frank, and the Terrible Three of the Shell followed on. They were curious to hear the explanation of this very surprising episode. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stopped them on the landing.

"You fellows know what's w'ong with Levison?" he asked, turning his eyeglass inquiringly on the Terrible Three. "Somethin's up. Blake thinks pewwaps he ate a railway-bun comin' home, you know, and it disagreed with him. An uttably widiculous suggestion, in my opinion!"

"Go hon!" grinned Tom Merry.

"Hewwies thinks—"

"Herries does?" asked Monty Lowther, in surprise. "That's somethin' new! When did Herries start thinkin'?"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Come along, Gussy!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "I fancy we're going to hear the giddy history of the mystery now! It's going on in the Common-room!"

"Bai Jove! I'll come!"

Blake and Herries and Digby came, too. The juniors went downstairs in a crowd, and Talbot and Kangaroo and several other fellows joined them, having already seen Frank and learned that something was in the wind. Quite a little army marched into the Common-room to interview Ernest Levison and to hear the "history of the mystery," as Tom Merry expressed it.

#### THE FIFTH CHAPTER. Light at Last!

"ERNE!" Frank gasped out his brother's name as he dashed into the junior Common-room with the crumpled telegram in his hand. Ernest Levison looked up from his book.



"What's the row, Frank?"

"Look at that!"

The fag thrust the telegram fairly under the nose of Levison of the Fourth. Levison stared at it blankly.

"Clive got it this morning!" panted Frank. "They—they thought it came from you!"

"My hat!"

Levison began to understand. He took the telegram and examined it carefully, a bitter smile on his lips. On the other side of the Common-room Racke and Crooke exchanged a glance and strolled out. They could see that the facts were coming to light now, and they did not want to be on the scene.

Levison was still examining the bogus telegram when Cardew and Clive came in. He looked up at them, with a smile.

"You got this, Clive?"

"In class this morning," answered Sidney Clive.

"You thought I had sent it?"

"What could I think? Didn't you?"

Levison laughed.

"No! This is the first I've heard of it!"

Tom Merry & Co. came in in time to hear that statement from Levison of the Fourth.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"You didn't send it?" exclaimed Blake.

"No!"

"Who did, then?" asked Herries blankly.

Levison laughed again.

"Somebody at Greyfriars, I suppose!" he said. "Somebody who wanted to muck it up for me here when I got back. You fellows might have told me you'd had a telegram!"

"Told you?" said Clive. "Why should we tell you we'd had a telegram from yourself?"

"Well, yes, when you put it like that, why should you?" agreed Levison, smiling. "You thought I knew all about it, as I'd sent it. Only, you see, I didn't send it!"

"Then things are all right at Greyfriars?"

"Right as rain!"

"No trouble there at all?"

"None!"

Clive clenched his fists.

"By gad, I'd like to get within hitting distance of the cad who sent that!" he exclaimed, his eyes blazing. "I'd give him a lesson on sending spoof telegrams!"

"I'm jolly glad!" said Tom Merry sincerely. "It was a bit of a shock to all of us, Levison. Of course, we never doubted that it had come from you."

"Wathah not!"

Levison felt a twinge of remorse. The apparent coldness and neglect of his friends were explained now. Where were the grounds of his resentment now?

"You see, deah boy," went on Arthur Augustus, "we were gettin' up a reception for you—"

"A—a—a reception?" stammered Levison.

"Yaas, wathah! It was my ideah!" said Gussy proudly. "Wegardin' you as havin' won a lot of cweid ovah at Gweyfwahs for your school, you know, I woped in all these fellows to weecive you at the station with honahs! That was how we came to know about the telegwam. Clive had to tell us, you see, as we were all weady to start!"

"Oh!" said Levison, rather breathlessly.

"It fairly knocked us ovah, you know!" said Arthur Augustus. "Of course, we believed it would all come

wight. But, naturally, we didn't expect you to turn up to-day, affah that telegwam. Weren't you wathah surprised at not seein' any of your fwiends at the station?"

Levison coloured deeply.

So this was the explanation of the neglect he had resented, which had hit him so hard. A malicious trick, which a few words would have elucidated at once but for the bitterness and resentment he had allowed to govern him. It came into his mind that had Frank yielded to the same feelings the trick might never have been discovered at all. It was only by comparing notes with his friends in the Third that Frank had discovered the truth—that was clear.

There was a moment or two of silence. Clive broke it.

"Did you think we'd have gone out in the car, Levison, if we'd known you were coming?" he said reproachfully. "You might have known us better than that!"

Levison's colour deepened.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus, light breaking at last on his noble mind. "That was why Levison was watty!"

"Go hon!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

Levison of the Fourth rose to his feet. "Would you mind kicking me, Clive?" he asked. "Kick as hard as you like, old fellow!"

"Fathead!" said Clive, laughing.

"Of course, I never dreamed that you'd had a spoof telegram," said Levison. "How could I? And—and—"

"We want to find out that jolly old practical joker," said Cardew. "We can't let this pass."

"Wathah not!"

"It couldn't have been a St. Jim's chap, that's one comfort," remarked Tom Merry.

Levison smiled slightly.

"The telegram wasn't handed in by a St. Jim's chap, that's a cert," he said. "But I fancy it originated here. I had

one or two enemies at Greyfriars—especially a chap named Skinner. But Skinner wouldn't have done this on his own. He wouldn't have spent the money on it, for one thing. Telegrams cost money—especially long ones."

"But somebody must have," said Tom, puzzled.

"Somebody with money to burn," agreed Levison. "Somebody here who wanted to muck up my return. He seems to have succeeded pretty well, too. I suppose it was bound to come out in the long run, and he knew that. But I've had as rotten a few hours since I got back as I've ever had in my life. I think I'll call on Racke!"

"Racke!" exclaimed all the juniors together.

"Racke of the Shell."

"But Racke couldn't have—"

"He couldn't have sent the telegram; but he could have put some pal at Greyfriars to doing it."

"Racke knows Skinner of the Remove!" remarked Manners.

"But, dash it all Levison, wait for a little proof!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Even Racke's entitled to a fair show, you know."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Quite so," agreed Levison. "Skinner may have done this on his own—though I don't believe it. I've reasons for looking after Racke. Racke met me on the way here, and rubbed it in about my friends going off in a car, as if they didn't want me back, or care whether I came or not. Racke gave tickets for the pictures at Wayland to young Wally and Manners mirror. That kept them away for the after-noon, making Frank think they'd thrown him over, after arranging by letter to meet him at Wayland Junction when he came."

"Oh!" said Tom.

"It isn't like Racke to give anything away for nothing," said Levison dryly.

"He spent the money on those tickets specially to get Frank's friends away when Frank was coming home. I see that now."

"Bai Jove!"

"Racke's got a long memory for offences," said Levison. "He wanted to make our coming back rotten for both of us, and he succeed' d."

"It does look suspicious about the cinema tickets," admitted Tom Merry. "But there's no proof about the telegram, Levison. Don't be hasty."

Levison nodded, and left the Common-room with Clive and Cardew. Harmony was restored among the three members of Study No. 9, at all events. The juniors were left discussing the strange affair with some excitement—divided in opinion as to whether Racke of the Shell had had a hand in the trick. Frank Levison cut away to the Third Form room, with a bright and cheery face. He cared little who had played that malicious trick, now that it had been cleared up and he remembered that he was hungry. And in the Third Form room there were great festivities, and all was merry and bright, until Mr. Selby came in to take the Third in prep—after which brightness and merriment were naturally conspicuous by their absence.

THE END.

(Levison intends to find out who played the trick on him and sent that false telegram, and in next week's topping story of St. Jim's he makes a discovery! Look out for "UNDER PIGGOTT'S THUMB!")

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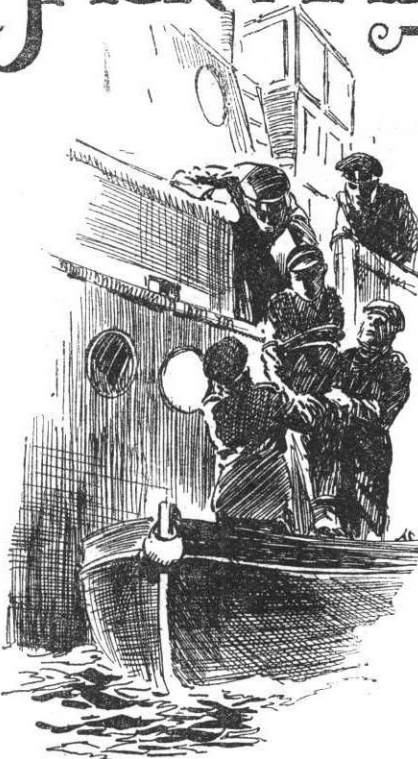
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# JACK MASON'S DARK HOUR

A STIRRING LONG COMPLETE STORY OF THE EARLY ADVENTURES OF THE BOYS OF ST. FRANK'S, NARRATED BY NIPPER OF THE REMOVE!



## THE FIRST CHAPTER. Rogues in Council!

FOR many weeks Jack Mason of the Remove at St. Frank's had been living under the threat of personal violence from Simon Grell, his disreputable uncle, and Grell's crony, Starkey; and now at last the boy had fallen into their hands.

It happened in this wise. Grell, prowling round St. Frank's at night, had found the window of Nelson Lee's study open, had entered and hidden himself behind a curtain. From his place of concealment he had overheard a conversation between the schoolmaster detective and Mr. Strong, the philanthropist, who was responsible for Mason's fees at St. Frank's. He had learned that "Mr. Strong" was in reality a well-known and wealthy baronet, and that Jack Mason was in all probability his long-lost son—if only it could be proved.

After this the rascally Grell, seizing his opportunity, knocked out Nelson Lee with a blow, and gained possession of a golden locket which was engraved with Arabic signs which were the key to a hidden treasure, and which belonged to Jack Mason, for whom Nelson Lee was taking care of it.

Flushed with his success, which was due to a series of lucky chances, Grell rejoined Starkey and made for the village of Bannington. En route, they fell in with Jack Mason and his study mate, Pitt, returning from the village. Knocking Pitt out with a blow, the two rascals secured Mason, and conveyed him in a hired trap to the coast village of Caistowe, where they embarked in a boat, and rowed out to a small coasting-steamers anchored in the offing.

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While Jack Mason, with despair in his heart, was straining vainly at his bonds in the hands of the two rascals, his friend, Pitt, had been following him on a bicycle, keeping well out of sight.

Having tracked his quarry to Caistowe, the astute Pitt returned hot-foot to St. Frank's to report to Nelson Lee.

But Jack Mason was not inclined to suffer his fate without attempting to break away. So far he had had no chance, having been bound almost since the moment of his capture. But the determination was firm within him.

He was worried concerning Pitt, for he firmly believed that that junior had been seriously hurt by Starkey's blow. He was not aware of the fact that Pitt had deliberately lain upon the road, pretending to be injured, whilst only momentarily dazed.

And Mason was also startled with regard to his own position. What could it mean? Why had Grell captured him in this way? It was utterly unaccountable,

because Grell knew well enough that the locket was being taken care of by Nelson Lee.

And the very nature of his adventure was startling. He was not merely being taken to some prepared retreat of Grell's, but to a steamer—a ship that might be bound for some place a thousand miles away. It was small wonder that Jack Mason became rather bewildered and scared.

And to happen on this day, of all days! Just when Mr. Strong had come down to St. Frank's! It was the height of misfortune.

Jack was left in the boat with Starkey while Grell climbed on board the steamer. Fully a quarter of an hour had passed before Grell returned, and then the captive was hauled up to the deck.

The steamer was only a small one, and looked—and smelt—extremely dirty. Apparently, scarcely a soul was on board, for Jack saw nobody until a short man in a shabby uniform appeared out of a deck-house.

This was the skipper, and every member of the crew was at present ashore—although they would come on board within the next fifteen minutes or so, for the tide would then be favourable.

The skipper, Captain Davis, looked at Mason critically.

"Bring him inside, Grell," he said, removing a pipe from between his teeth.

Mason was taken into the grubby deck-house, and the skipper regarded him closely and with great interest.

"So this is the kid?" he said. "Well, Grell, I don't much care for the job, but you're willin' to pay my terms, so I'll take it on. You'd best come with me to the cabin an' we'll talk it over a bit more."

Jack was left in Starkey's care, and Grell followed Captain Davis down the companion into a somewhat foul cabin. Here the pair partook of rum, and then Grell comfortably lit a cigar.

"It's this way, Davis," he said. "You an' me are old pals, an' I took advantage of your bein' in Caistowe with your ship. This job ain't goin' to harm you in the least, an' it'll do me a good turn. The kid's my nephew, an' I've got a right to do wot I like with him. See?"

"That's all very well, but I don't see it," said the other. "I didn't know that a man could treat his relatives like this 'ere-bringin' 'em aboard a steamer, bound up an' gagged. You're likely to git into trouble if the kid's found, Grell—an' then I shall git into trouble, too."

"No, you won't," said Captain Jim easily. "The whole thing's easy. All I want you to do is to take the youngster to London. You're startin' within half an hour, so there won't be no inquiries this end, an' you can't come to no harm. I shan't make the voyage with you, 'cos that 'ud be too risky. Me an' Starkey will go by train, an' we'll be down at Wappin' by the time you arrive. Everything will be arranged, an' all you've got to do is to pocket the brass."

"An' suppose the ship's searched?"

"Well, they can't touch you—"

"Not if the boy's found?"

"No. You can shove him down in a hold or some odd corner, an' keep him there unknown to the crew," replied Grell. "I should pack him away aft, if I were you. If he's found, you can swear you don't know nothin'. Understand? The kid'll be took for a stow-away—an' you ain't responsible for stowaways, are you?"

Captain Davis nodded.

"It ain't a bad idea," he agreed. "You won't be aboard, so there'll be no complications like that. An' the kid will be a stowaway, as you say. I shan't even tell my mate."

"That's the best way," said Simon Grell. "Nothin' can't be proved. You're safe either way, an' you're gettin' your own price. As for grub, the kid won't want more than one feed, an' you can take that down to him in the middle watch—some time arter midnight."

"An' you'll see me in London?"

"As soon as ever you drop anchor in the river," declared Grell. "Me an' Starkey will git up there to-night, an' you won't arrive until to-morrow evenin'. So that gives me plenty o' time to make arrangements."

"Well, you'd best git off the ship as soon as you can," said Captain Davis. "The crew'll be aboard soon now, an' there's no reason for you to be seen."

"You're right, Davis—we'll clear." They went up on deck, and returned to the place where Mason was being guarded by Jake Starkey.

"He's a quiet youngster," said Mr. Grell, regarding Jack. "You won't have no trouble with him, cap'n. I'll

leave it to you wot you do—where you stow him—but I shouldn't think it 'ud be necessary to keep him bound up. Might as well give the kid a bit o' freedom. I'm a soft-hearted man, an' the journey'll be a long one."

"An' wot about us, Simon?" asked Starkey.

"Us?" repeated Grell. "Why, we're goin' straight to London by train, old man—back to our old lodgin's at Mother Hackett's, in George Terrace, Wappin'. Sounds a swell address, don't it?"

"It ain't," said Starkey, with conviction. "Still, you know best, Simon. I'm in your 'ands, but I'm darned if I know wot your game is!"

"I haven't had time to tell you yet, but you'll soon know," replied Grell. "Now, Jack, my boy, don't you be frightened. Jest take it quiet, an' you'll see your kind uncle agin to-morrow evenin'."

Mason was unable to reply, but he was inwardly furious at this treatment. He began to fear that he would have no opportunity of breaking away. Before Grell and Starkey left they helped Captain Davis to take the prisoner below. He was stowed into a small store-room aft, which was well away from the men's quarters and could not be visited without permission from the captain.

It was a noisome hole, small, with iron walls, and a heavy door, the latter being provided with an extra-stout lock.

"This'll do fine," said Grell, looking round approvingly. "He'll be able to yell to his heart's content, an' won't attract no attention."

"Mebbe!" said Captain Davis grimly. "But if I hear 'im yellin', he'll soon git somethin' he don't want. You'll have to do without a bed, kid, until we're at sea. I'll bring you down some blankets an' some grub later on."

Mason's ropes were cut, and the muffer was removed from his face. But the lad knew better than to speak. Any words he uttered would only be jeered at, and, although he felt like shouting out what he thought of his uncle, he kept himself in check and only glared defiance.

"That's right," grinned Mr. Grell. "Look at your uncle as though you'd like to eat him—I don't mind!"

Grell and Starkey took their departure, and Captain Davis looked at the prisoner searchingly.

"What's your name, kid?" he asked. Mason made no reply.

"Sulky, eh?" went on the captain. "Well, it ain't to be wondered at. But it wants a bit o' believin' that a swell kid like you is the nevvie of old Simon Grell. I've got an idea there's some trickery somewhere. Are you Grell's nevvie?"

"Yes," said Jack quietly. "I'm not going to ask you to help me, but perhaps you don't know that you might get yourself into prison for keeping me on this ship? My uncle is an absolute scoundrel—"

"I ain't denyin' it," said Captain Davis. "Grell's a man I don't trust much; but if you say you're 'is nevvie, I reckon I'm safe. No need to look scared, kid. I shan't hurt you while you're aboard this ship."

Just for a moment Jack clenched his fists, intending to make a dash to the doorway. But the skipper forestalled the movement, and closed the door until only an inch or two remained open.

"An' don't git shoutin'," he said. "You'll only make yourself 'oarse, an' git a 'idin' arterwards. I do as I like on my own ship, an' you'll stay in this 'ere store-room till we reach London."

The door closed, and Jack Mason was left in darkness. He heard the key turn

in the lock, and he heard Captain Davis walk along the passage, and then the footsteps died into silence.

In a moment Jack had a box of matches out of his pocket. He shakily struck one, and held the light so that he could survey his prison.

There was not the slightest chance of escape. The only exit was by way of the door, and this was so thick and strong that a battering-ram would have been required to smash it down.

As for shouting for help, Mason bitterly realised that it would be quite useless. Even if his voice was heard, what would be the result? The captain would be brought down, and he would be harsh and brutal. If the crew got to hear that the boy was on board it would make very little difference—for, in that event, Davis might consider it wise to haul Jack up and to make out that he was a stowaway on the ship. There would be no escape, for the vessel would be at sea. And one part of the steamer was as good as another.

Jack had no chance whatever of making a break for freedom—as yet. Later on, as events turned out, he would be able to act in an extremely decisive manner. But that episode cannot be described at present.

The thing that bewildered Jack more than anything else was why on earth he had been kidnapped at all. Grell had not even made any mention of the half-locket and Mr. Strong's sealed package. Until to-day Grell's whole energy had been concentrated upon obtaining the two halves of the locket. And yet he had now succeeded in capturing Jack, but had not even referred to the locket itself. This was certainly extraordinary.

But Jack would not have been so puzzled had he been able to hear the conversation which was even then proceeding between the two rascals who had succeeded in spiriting him away from St. Frank's.

They had left the ship, and even on their way back to the quay had passed a boat filled with loudly talking men—obviously members of the old coasting-steamer's crew. The vessel would take her departure almost at once.

Grell and Starkey paid a short visit to the inn where the trap had been left, arranging that it should be taken back to the White Harp on the morrow. Then they turned their steps towards the station.

"We shall jest be in comfortable time to catch the last train," said Grell. "Things have been happenin' quick to-night, old man—so quick that you're lookin' fair bewildered."

"I ain't only lookin' bewildered, but I'm all muddled up," confessed Starkey. "I can't see wot your game is, Simon. You ain't explained a single word to me. Since you come out o' the school gates we've bin on the go the 'ole time. Wot happened at the school, anyway?"

Mr. Grell chuckled. "You'd never believe it, Jake," he replied. "Talk about luck! I've never had such luck as that of to-night! We've had some disappointments jest lately, but they're all made up for now—every durned one of 'em."

"Well, I can't see it," said Starkey flatly. "It looks like a fool's game to me to take that kid an' shove 'im on that boat. Wot's the good of it, Simon?"

Wot in thunder's name's the good of it?"

"I'm arter making money—that's the good of it," replied Mr. Grell. "I've found out things wot I'd never dreamed of afore this evenin' an' I'll tell you all about 'em. Fust an' foremost, Jake, I've got that locket."

"You 'ave?" said Mr. Starkey incredulously.

"In my pocket at this minnit," went on Grell. "Not only half of it, but the whole thing. An' this old chap named Strong ain't such an innocent cove as he looks. He's Sir Crawford Grey, Baronet."

Starkey halted in the road. "You will 'ave your joke, cap'n," he said weakly.

"You needn't believe it unless you like," went on the other. "But here we are at the station. We'll continue this talk on the platform, while we're waitin' for the train. It'll be in within five minutes."

They took their tickets, and then waited on a secluded seat on the little platform. Starkey was greatly astonished, and more so when Grell proceeded to tell him of the events which had occurred at St. Frank's.

"I heard everything," concluded Mr. Grell. "Ordinary luck ain't in it, Jake; it was wonderful luck, an' no mistake. Mebbe you ain't heard much o' this Sir Crawford Grey?"

"Ain't 'e a Cabinet Minister?" asked Starkey vaguely.

"No, he ain't!" replied Grell. "He's a privit gentleman o' means; he's got piles of money—pots of it. That's why I seized the opportunity to bring Jack along with us. It was only a bit o' chance that brought Jack into our way to-night. But, there, when once my luck sets in, it does it proper."

Starkey shrugged his shoulders. "I don't foller you now," he said impatiently.

"Well, you was born thick-headed, so I don't blame you," said Mr. Grell genially. "Wot about that story I heard? Why, it's pretty certain that that kid ain't my nevvie at all; in fact, I've had an inkling of it for years past. This seems to prove it. He's the son of Sir Crawford Grey, an' the old baronet himself is pretty certain of it, too. Wot will he do when he finds that Jack is missin'?"

"Raise a blazes of a fuss, I should think," replied Jake.

"That's just where you're wrong; he won't do nothin' o' the sort," replied Grell cunningly. "He an' Lee will guess within' an hour that I've took the boy, an' they won't want to make any big fuss of it. They'll try an' find Jack on the quiet, an' won't. Then this Sir Crawford will get a letter from me, sayin' that he can have the boy for keeps if he hands over the sum of five thousand quid."

"Ow much?" gasped Starkey faintly. "Five thousand quid!"

"You're mad—you're stark, starin' mad!" ejaculated the other. "Why, 'e wouldn't pay all that money, Simon."

Mr. Grell laughed softly. "Wouldn't he?" he said. "Well, I'm goin' to try it on, an' that's why I've took the boy. See? The idea struck me all at once, an' I believe it'll work. If I can't git five thousand, I'll git three—or even two."

"You're comin' down," remarked Starkey.

"I shan't go below two—that's the limit," continued Grell firmly. "Wot can the old feller do but pay up?"

"Well, 'e could put the cops on to us—"

"Bosh!" interrupted Grell. "Sir

## "THE TITAN THREE"

The Radio Set You Cannot Do Without

Crawford Grey won't want the whole thing talked of in the papers, don't you make no mistake. He'll do it quiet, an' he'll pay up willin'ly, rather than that boy should be lost. He thinks Jack's his son, an' he's nigh off his head with excitement. I tell you, Jake, we'll get the five thousand easy."

"But it's an awful lot," said Starkey wonderingly.

"Mebbe it is to you. To him it's just a trifle," went on Captain Jim. "He's worth hundreds of thousands, an' a measly five ain't goin' to hurt him for a minute. An' how can he put the cops on us? You seem to forgit, Jake, that Jack Mason is my nevy in the eyes of the law, an' I'm his guardian. Ain't I brought him up since he was a baby? He's under age, an' he's in my care. Nobody can't force me to give him up."

"But you said that 'e's Sir Crawford's son—"

"No, I didn't; I said he might be," replied Grell. "There's no proof of it, Jake, an' until there is proof the boy's mine. If I like to send him to London on a ship, that's my business. I shall tell the old gent that I'll do him a great favour an' renounce all right to the boy for the sum of five thousand o' the best. That's business. There's nothin' crooked in the game at all, an' you an' me are absolutely safe."

Mr. Starkey regarded his chief admiringly.

"My! If you ain't got some brains, Simon!" he exclaimed. "I see it all now. Why, we'll git it; but that there locket business is a different matter. You might stumble over that there, old mate."

"I'm too fly," said Mr. Grell, getting to his feet as the signal went down. "You won't find me comin' no cropper over the locket. Nobody saw me take it—not even Lee himself—an' they can't prove nothin'. An' you don't seem to have realised the importance of this other business."

"Wot other business?"

"Why, bleedin' Sir Crawford for money," replied Grell. "We've got the locket, an' I know for certain now that there's a big treasure tacked on to it. How are we goin' to git it? Who's goin' to pay our expenses? Why, Sir Crawford Grey himself—see? Ain't it rich?"

"That—that five thousand?" gasped Starkey.

"Exactly," agreed his astute companion. "With that money we shall be able to go to Africa in style, an' all our expenses paid. Did you ever look at such a rosy picture, Jake?"

"I ope it ain't too rosy," said Jake cautiously.

Mr. Grell slapped his friend's back.

"You allus was a wet blanket, Jake," he said. "But our luck's fair turned, an' we're in for a good time—you trust me. Gettin' the locket was good, but it wasn't much use to us alone. I've realised that all along. But this way we're goin' to provide ourselves with the brass to do the trip. It's all connected, an' takin' the boy away was necessary."

It could not be denied that Simon Grell's scheme was undoubtedly a clever one. He had seized his opportunities swiftly and without hesitation. Just when things had seemed their blackest the tide had turned.

And now, as Grell himself had said, the prospect was rosy in the extreme. The two rascals had the locket in their possession, and Jack Mason was a prisoner. There seemed nothing in the way of complete victory.

The train steamed into the station and the precious rogues took their seats in a smoking compartment. They left the

scene of their many adventures, not bowed down with gloom, as they had half expected, but buoyed up with the greatest hopes of winning a fortune.

Everything had gone splendidly from their point of view. But they would not have been so easy in mind had they known that nearly all their secret movements of that evening had been watched by Reginald Pitt, of the Remove.

And one thing was certain. Pitt would not keep that information to himself. His one idea was to give the warning—to wreck Simon Grell's plan before it actually developed into anything approaching success.

Things were not slumbering at St. Frank's!

## THE SECOND CHAPTER.

### The Race to Caistowe!

"DEAR fellow, it's appallin'!" exclaimed Sir Montie Tregellis-West, panting hard. "I don't know what it means—I don't really."

"Well, I can tell you," I said grimly. "Both Mason and Pitt have been collared, and it's almost certain that Grell is at the bottom of it. The locket's gone, too, and I'm blessed if I know what we're to do."

I was standing with my chums almost in the centre of the Triangle. We had just been scouring the school-grounds from end to end, but had found no sign whatever of Pitt or Mason.

What we had found, however, was sufficiently significant—and, after all, I suppose it was a sign. In the lane, quite near the school, two or three parcels of catables had come to light. Pitt and Mason had gone to the village to buy things for tea, so it was obvious that they had been attacked on their way back and had been forced to abandon their packages.

The first we knew of it was that Mr. Strong, or, rather, Sir Crawford Grey—came into Study C, asking if we knew where Mason was. We didn't, but had been making inquiries when the gov'nor appeared.

Nelson Lee was looking rather pale, and there was a decided bump showing upon the side of his head. Taking us to his study, he explained that somebody had sprung at him from behind the curtains, had bowled him over, and had succeeded in getting away with the gold locket.

He was simply furious, and Sir Crawford went nearly off his head. But his anxiety was nothing compared with that which followed, for, while hurrying down the road to see if we could find any trace of the thief, we came upon the parcels. They told their own story.

Without the slightest doubt Simon Grell was responsible. He had kidnapped Jack for some reason. Presumably Pitt had been taken as well, but Pitt's inclusion was only because he had been with Mason at the time, and it had been unsafe to take one without the other.

The gov'nor was in a shocking temper at first, but then he became as cool as ice. He knew well enough that Grell must have been in the room during the interview with Sir Crawford. Therefore, Grell knew the truth, and there was a distinct motive for his crime in kidnapping Jack Mason.

Nothing was absolutely certain. We had no evidence of any kind. So Tommy and Montie and I rushed about looking for the missing juniors, on the faint off-chance that our original surmise was incorrect. The College House fellows might have been up to a jape, or something of that kind.

But our quest had been fruitless, and we were now taking a breather in the Triangle. I hadn't taken much active part in this affair so far, but it certainly seemed as though there was excitement brewing now.

Bob Christine, of the College House, had been raving about for some time, but we were not interested in his woes. Some scoundrel, it seemed, had gone off with Christine's bicycle whilst Bob was in a shop. But we did not connect this incident with Mr. Simon Grell—not at first, at all events.

But after every other suggestion had been cast aside, after every field of inquiry had been exhausted, I thought of that affair of the stolen bicycle. It was certainly unusual for a bike to be pinched in Belton. Had Grell taken it in order to aid his flight?

It was just possible, and Nelson Lee was even now busy at the telephone, sending warnings to the police at Buntington, Helmsford, Caistowe, and other surrounding places. Sir Crawford Grey had aged again with this fresh worry, and he scarcely knew how to contain himself.

And while Sir Montie and Tommy and I stood in the Triangle we heard the tinkle of a bicycle bell out in the road. As we turned we saw a machine shoot in at the gateway, and it came straight across to where we were standing.

"Hallo! What's that?" shouted Watson.

"Just the fellows I wanted!" replied a breathless voice.

"Pitt!" I yelled, dashing forward. "Begad! Just as we were bemoanin' your fate, old boy!" exclaimed Tregellis-West. "Where's Mason? Haven't you brought him with you?"

Pitt stood before us, perspiring freely, splashed with mud from head to foot. It was easy to see that he had been riding furiously.

"Poor old Jack is in the wars!" he said tensely. "Where's Mr. Lee? There's not a minute to waste, you chaps. Grell's got Mason, and there's no telling what he's going to do with him. We've got to dash to the rescue!"

"Come on!" I exclaimed. "Good for you, Pitt! I'm blessed if you're not better than all the lot of us put together!"

We were just making for the Ancient House when I paused.

"Whose bike is that?" I asked keenly. "I don't know; Christine's, I think," replied Pitt, grinning. "I found it outside a shop in Belton, and borrowed it—without asking permission."

"So that explains it," I said. "Christine's nearly raving; he'll have your blood later on. But I reckon the emergency was an acute one, and he might forgive you, after you've explained."

There was no time to give Christine the tip that his machine was safe and sound, for Pitt was wildly anxious to see Nelson Lee.

Tregellis-West and Watson were rather doubtful as to whether they should come too, but I told them to chance it. It seemed as though some quick action would be necessary, and we all wanted to be in the excitement.

The return of Pitt meant an enormous lot, for he obviously knew exactly what had happened; his very attitude told that. Besides, he had been riding hard, and I gathered that he had been following the scoundrels and had located their destination.

When we arrived at Nelson Lee's study we found the gov'nor still busy at the telephone. Sir Crawford was pacing up and down restlessly, his hands clasped together, his eyes gleaming with anxiety.

He turned quickly as we entered. "Ah, boys—" he broke off. "Why, what is this? My dear lads! Have you—have you brought news of Jack—"

"Yes, sir," said Pitt promptly. "Thank Heaven for that!" said Sir Crawford fervently. "Did you hear, Lee? Pitt has returned with news—with news!"

Nelson Lee hung up the receiver and turned in his chair.

"You are very welcome, Pitt," he said, eyeing the junior with favour. "I can see that you have been riding rather hard. No doubt you can tell us what happened in the lane, and where Mason is at the present moment?"

Reginald Pitt leaned against the table rather shakily.

"Sit down, my boy—sit down!" said the gov'nor quickly.

"I've been riding rather hard, sir, as

"A very sensible conclusion, Pitt," he said. "Well?"

It's not necessary to give Pitt's full story. He described how he had tracked Grell and Starkey into the wood, how he had followed them to Caistowe, and how he had seen Jack Mason taken on board the steamer.

When he arrived at the conclusion of his narrative, Sir Crawford's agitation was greater than ever. He jumped up, his eyes blazing, his fists clenched.

"The scoundrels!" he exclaimed angrily. "The impudent scoundrels! To place that boy upon a steamer, with the intention, no doubt, of sending him to China, or some such place!"

"I think not, my dear sir," interrupted Nelson Lee. "To my knowledge, the only steamships which call at Caistowe are small coasting vessels. Probably the intention of Mr. Grell was

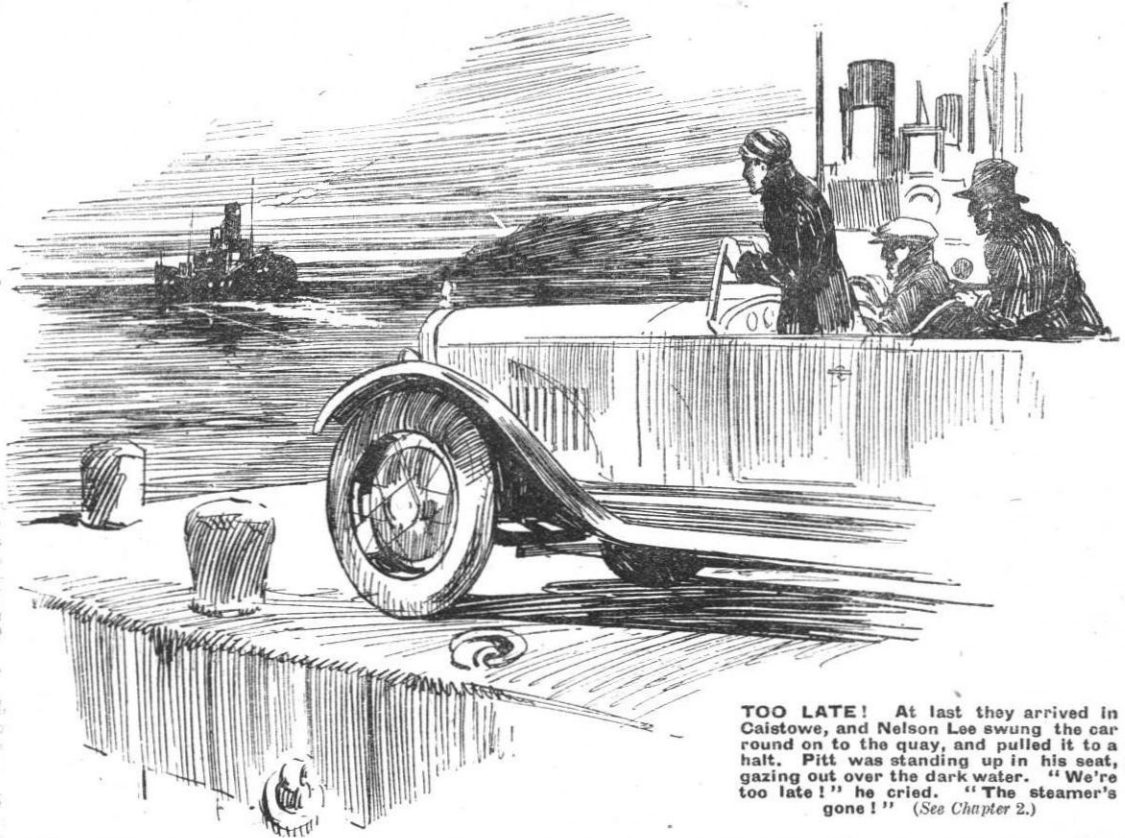
don't know what we should have done had you not acted in this brave and ingenious manner. By your strenuous efforts we now know exactly where poor Jack is located, and we can go straight to the spot and rescue him. I must thank you later on, my boy, for I am too agitated now to choose adequate words."

"Pitt, you're a brick!" I said quietly, slapping his shoulder, and looking straight into his eyes. "You and I haven't been very friendly until recently, but I hope we shall be the best of pals in future. You've done wonders, and we're all proud of you."

"Begad! Rather, old boy!"

"Oh, pile it on!" grinned Pitt calmly. "I've done nothing to make a song about. Can't a chap help his own chum?"

"That's just it!" I said. "You've hit



**TOO LATE!** At last they arrived in Caistowe, and Nelson Lee swung the car round on to the quay, and pulled it to a halt. Pitt was standing up in his seat, gazing out over the dark water. "We're too late!" he cried. "The steamer's gone!" (See Chapter 2.)

you said, and it's taken it out of me a bit," said the junior. "Besides, I had a punch on the head which made me see stars, and that ride hasn't improved matters. Mason's at Caistowe, sir—"

"We must go at once—at once!" interrupted Sir Crawford.

"I really think it would be better to hear Pitt's story from the beginning, Mr. Strong," said Nelson Lee, calling the old gentleman by his assumed name, now that they were in the presence of the juniors. "It will make things so much clearer, and time will be saved in the long run. Now, Pitt."

"Mason and I had been down to the village, sir, to get some supplies for tea," began Pitt. "We were on our way back, when Grell and Starkey came rushing down the road, and they charged into us. I was bowled over, but I pretended to be unconscious, because I knew that I should be smashed up if I resisted. So I lay there, thinking that I should be of more use unconscious than unconscious."

Nelson Lee smiled.

to take Mason up to London, and this method presents the fewest difficulties. I think I can fathom his motive."

"But we must rescue the lad—we must go to him at once!" exclaimed Sir Crawford quickly. "Good heavens! There must not be a moment's loss of time. That wretched steamer must be delayed; it might even now be putting out to sea."

Nelson Lee rose to his feet.

"We must certainly act promptly," he agreed. "Pitt, my boy, I congratulate you heartily upon your achievement. You have shown wonderful ingenuity and persistence, and I am quite sure that you have earned the gratitude of Mr. Strong. You have certainly earned mine. Your behaviour has been splendid!"

"Oh, I say, sir!" protested Pitt, flushing with pleasure. "I—I was only thinking of Jack. He's a friend of mine, and—and I'm anxious."

"Of course you are, my lad—we are all anxious," said Sir Crawford, grasping Pitt's hand warmly. "I am sure I

the nail on the head, Pitt. Mason's your chum, and you've proved your friendship. That's why I'm so jolly pleased. I always knew that you'd turn out to be one of the best."

"Thanks, Nipper," said Pitt quietly.

There was real gratitude in his voice, and I knew why. For some time past he had been anxious to gain the true friendship and esteem of the decent fellows in the Remove. And now he knew well enough that Study C, at all events, would always make him welcome.

Nelson Lee was making active preparations. All his inquiries were now cast aside, and the instructions he had sent broadcast were unnecessary. Pitt had supplied all the information he wanted, and the only thing was to act upon it without a moment's delay.

The gov'nor's plan was quite simple—indeed, it could be nothing else. He would ride to Caistowe without any further delay and detain the ship; if, indeed, it was necessary to detain it,

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The vessel might not be sailing until the morning.

Sir Crawford suggested ringing up the police at Caistowe, but Nelson Lee pointed out that that would be quite useless. Pitt's evidence, although valuable, was not sufficiently strong for the country police. There was no proof that Mason was on board the ship; and, indeed, it would be necessary to obtain a warrant before the authorities could search the vessel. They couldn't walk aboard without any warrant.

If possible, Lee wanted to effect Mason's rescue unofficially. He knew well enough that the police would be useless at this juncture. There would be so many delays owing to red tape that the game would be more trouble than it was worth.

So the gov'nor hurried out and fetched his powerful touring-car out of the school garage; he always kept it ready for instant departure. It was roomy, and accommodated the lot of us—that is, Nelson, Lee, Sir Crawford, Pitt, Tregellis-West, Watson, and myself. Sir Montie and Tommy really had no excuse for accompanying us, but as Nelson Lee didn't order them out of the car when they entered, they naturally stopped there. It wasn't likely that they'd allow this adventure to come to a close without their presence—if they could help it.

The loss of the locket was of secondary importance just now. The main thing was to recover Jack Mason, and, if possible, to get hold of Simon Grell and Jake Starkey. They would certainly have no mercy this time.

Pitt and my chums were rather at a loss to account for Mr. Strong's terrible anxiety concerning Mason. They had always looked upon the old gentleman as a mere friend. But he was now acting as though Mason were his own son, and it was certainly rather mysterious.

I, of course, was in the same boat at the time. But I afterwards learned the truth, as I have set down. Sir Crawford believed that Mason was actually his own son, and he was wild with worry now.

We drove to Caistowe like the wind. It was absolutely a race, and we covered the ground at a terrific speed. But even this was not fast enough for Sir Crawford; he was certainly not nervous.

At last we arrived in Caistowe, and Nelson Lee swung the car round on to the quay and pulled it to a halt. Pitt was standing up in his seat, gazing out into the channel of the River Stowe.

"The steamer's gone, sir!" he exclaimed huskily.

"Gone!"

"It's not there now, sir—"

"How dreadful!" exclaimed Sir Crawford, his voice quivering. "But you must be mistaken, Pitt. There has not been sufficient time—"

"I think the lad is correct," put in Nelson Lee. "If you will look, my dear sir, you will see the lights of the vessel out in the bay. She can only have raised her anchor a short time ago."

We all gazed out, and then faintly saw the steamer's lights in the haze. For a mist was drifting in over the bay, obscuring the headlands and enshrouding the fishing craft which were anchored close by.

"This is disaster—a sheer disaster!" exclaimed Sir Crawford huskily. "Poor boy! To think that he is on that vessel and we can do nothing to aid him. But we must, Mr. Lee, we must!"

"You can be assured, Mr. Strong, that Jack will come to no real harm," said Nelson Lee soothingly. "Pray do

not allow your fears to get the better of your judgment. I urge you to remain calm."

"But can't we do anything, sir?" asked Pitt. "Oh, this is rotten! I thought we should be able to rescue him! There must be some motor-boats in the town, and we could easily overtake that old tramp."

"No doubt, Pitt," said Nelson Lee; "but such a step is impracticable."

"Why is it, sir?" I asked quickly.

"Because, for one reason, the captain of the vessel would almost certainly refuse to allow us on board," replied Nelson Lee.

I realised that the gov'nor was right. It sounded easy enough—to hire a motor-boat and chase a ship; but it was an impossible task. We might catch up with the ship; but that was no guarantee that we should get on board. We couldn't fire revolvers, and act like people in a cinema play.

"Then what is to be done?" asked Sir Crawford Grey, pacing up and down beside the car. "What is to be done, Mr. Lee?"

"Our first plan must be to make inquiries here," replied the gov'nor.

And this plan was carried out. It wasn't long before we learned that the steamer was called the Foreland, and that her port of destination was London. She would drop anchor in the Thames, and was due to arrive on the following evening. A most important point was that she had no intermediate call.

Our next inquiry was at the station, and here we learned that Grell and Starkey had taken train to London. The clerk remembered them perfectly, and this disposed of the idea that the rascals were on board the Foreland.

We collected outside the station, an anxious group, for it seemed to most of us that we had failed miserably, and that there was no telling when we should see Jack Mason again.

But Nelson Lee was calmly confident.

"Let me say at once that the position is entirely satisfactory," he exclaimed.

"There is no cause for alarm whatever. To begin with, the Foreland will not touch land until it arrives in the Thames to-morrow evening. That gives us plenty of time to make our preparations. We can get to London in good time, and be on hand to board the vessel as soon as she drops anchor. Jack Mason will come to no harm meanwhile, although he may spend a rather uncomfortable twenty-four hours. Viewed calmly, the position is really excellent. By careful planning we can rescue Mason, recover the locket, and have Grell arrested. After that, our other inquiry will go forward apace."

Sir Crawford knew exactly what Nelson Lee meant, and he was greatly relieved in mind. He lost his agitation, and actually smiled.

"I trust to you, Mr. Lee," he said simply.

"Thank you," said the great detective. "I hope that I shall prove worthy of that trust, Mr. Strong. At all events, I shall do my very utmost to bring this affair to a satisfactory conclusion to-morrow evening. For the present, we must restrain our impatience and return to St. Frank's."

And that's what we did, hoping for the best.

THE END.

(Now, chums, you must not miss next week's topping long complete tale of the Boys of St. Frank's, entitled: "THE SHIPWRECKED SCHOOLBOYS!")

## THE WORST MASTER AT ROOKWOOD!

(Continued from page 11.)

"What?"

"Rot!"

"Look at it!" gasped Lovell.

Forgetting, in their surprise, the necessity of keeping one eye on the staircase, Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome came into the room. They stared blankly at the bundle of crisp slips of paper.

The top slip in the bundle was obviously a five-pound note. The others seemed to be the same; but if they also were fivers, the sum of money represented there was an amazing one. For there were at least a hundred of the crisp slips of paper, fastened together by a rubber band.

Lovell let the ends run through his fingers, like the leaves of a book. There was a crisp rustling.

"Fivers!" gasped Raby.

"Five-pound notes!" stuttered Jimmy Silver. "Why, there—there's five hundred pounds in that bundle! Is the man a millionaire in disguise?"

"There's another bundle—"

"Phew!"

"And another—"

"Great pip!"

The Fistical Four looked at one another in amazement in something like awe. Who—what was Mr. Skinforth, mathematics master of Rookwood at a moderate salary—and in possession of ready cash to the tune of at least fifteen hundred pounds? One thousand five hundred pounds—and perhaps more, if the juniors had cared to look!

"Well, this beats it!" said Lovell dazedly. "What—what—what can it mean? It can't be his own money! It can't!"

"Go easy, old chap—"

"Well, I think—blessed if I know what to think—"

"For goodness' sake let's get out!" breathed Jimmy Silver. "We've seen too jolly much already! Goodness knows what it means! But it's not our biznez, anyway. Get out!"

Even Lovell was willing to get out now. The light was turned off, and the juniors hurried out of the room, locking the door behind them with Mr. Dalton's key. That key was returned to the door to which it belonged, and then the Fistical Four scudded away.

What Mr. Skinforth thought when he found his rooms ragged and his bundles of banknotes lying on the floor the Fistical Four did not know, and could not guess. They wondered the next day whether they would hear that the new master would guess the identity of the ragers was fairly clear—indeed, when they passed him in the quad that day he gave them a look which revealed that he knew, plainly enough. But he did not speak—and no complaint was made on the subject of the ragging.

Obviously Mr. Skinforth felt that the least said was the soonest mended; and Lovell thought he knew why; the new master did not want anything said on the subject of the bundles of banknotes. But on that subject Jimmy Silver & Co., if they said nothing, thought the more—and the more they thought of it, the more strange and mysterious did it appear to them.

THE END.

(There will be another stirring long story of Jimmy Silver & Co., of Rookwood, next week, entitled: "LOVELL, THE TEC!")

**QUARREL AMONGST THE FAMOUS FIVE!**

Harry Wharton & Co., the famous chums at daggers drawn! How this sensational rift in the lute has come about you will learn in the dramatic story below!



# A SPLIT in the Co.!

By  
**FRANK RICHARDS.**

(Author of the well-known Tales of HARRY WHARTON & CO., OF GREY-FRIARS, appearing in the "Magnet" every Saturday.)



**THE FIRST CHAPTER.**

**Bunter Knows Something!**

"I SAY, you fellows—"  
Billy Bunter of the Remove Form at Greyfriars poked his head round the door of Study No. 1, in the Remove passage.

"Outside!"  
"Buzz off!"  
It was evident from these ejaculations, following so closely on his own, that Bunter's room was preferred to his company—by Harry Wharton & Co., at any rate.

It was tea-time, and the Famous Five, ruddy and cheery from a hardly contested game of football, were hungry. But they were certainly in no mood for the fascinating society of the Owl of the Remove.

"I say, you fellows—"  
Slam!

Bunter jumped back hurriedly, as Bob Cherry slammed the study door in his face.

"Beast!" howled Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows—"

Skinner and Snoop, who were in the passage, chuckled. Billy Bunter thumped on the door of Study No. 1; but it did not stir, and Bunter snorted angrily and backed away.

"No room there for a porpoise—what?" grinned Skinner.

"Awful rotters!" growled Bunter. "Fancy Wharton having Bob Cherry to tea, you know!"

"Why shouldn't he?" said Snoop, in surprise. "Those fellows generally grub together."

"He wouldn't have him if he knew."  
"If he knew what, fathead?"

"That's telling!" said Bunter mysteriously.

Skinner and Snoop were interested. Anything "up against" the Famous Five was interesting to the black sheep of the Remove.

"What have you got hold of now?" asked Skinner. "What's Bob Cherry been doing, then?"

"Well, calling a chap names isn't pally, is it?" said Bunter. "Of course, we all know that Wharton is a swanky ass."

"Hear, hear!" said Snoop.

"Still, when a fellow's a pal—" said Bunter.

Skinner eyed him very curiously. "Do you mean to say that Cherry's

been calling Wharton names," he asked—"behind his back?"

"I know what I know!" said Bunter mysteriously.

Skinner was more and more curious. "Well, you can tell a chap!" he said encouragingly.

"Well, a fellow doesn't want to make mischief," said Bunter. "Sort of thing I never do."

"Oh, of course not! Not your sort!" said Skinner gravely.

"Still, a fellow can't help feeling a bit disgusted," said Bunter. "Going to tea with a chap, you know, and keeping friendly, and then calling him a swanking rotter in a letter—not the thing a fellow does, you know!"

"Gammon!" said Snoop. "Cherry wouldn't! He likes Wharton all right."

"That's all you know!"

"Well, what do you know, then?" demanded Snoop.

"That's telling!"

"If you've been reading Bob Cherry's letters, there's a kicking waiting for you!" remarked Snoop.

"I haven't! Of course, I wouldn't! But if a chap uses a bit of an old letter for a bookmark, and another chap reads the book, I suppose the other chap can't help seeing it, can he?" asked Bunter warmly.

"Oh, that's it, is it?" said Skinner. "Cherry's just careless ass enough to do that. What book was it?"

"Wharton's 'Holiday Annual.' It's in my study now," said Bunter.

"And the bookmark in it?" Bunter grinned.

"No; I've got that in my pocket. Of course, I'm going to keep it dark. I might show it to a pal."

"Let's see it!" said Snoop and Skinner together eagerly.

"Of course, you won't repeat this?" said Bunter.

"Oh, of course not!"

Billy Bunter drew a crumpled scrap of paper from his pocket. Skinner and Snoop fairly stared at it.

It ran as follows:

"ton's not really a bad fellow in the main; only his uppish swank does get on the nerves a bit sometimes, and—"

The black sheep of the Remove had not a very high opinion of human nature generally, it being their custom to judge others by themselves. But those words,

written in Bob Cherry's "fist," startled them.

"Dash it all, that's pretty thick!" said Skinner, with a curl of the lip. "I wouldn't talk about a fellow like that if I were friendly with him."

"Same here!" said Snoop. "I must say I'm surprised. It's not like Bob Cherry. It's his fist right enough."

"He told me there was a bookmark in the book," grinned Bunter. "He didn't know what it was, I'll bet you! Just grabbed the bit up to stick in the book when he was going off to footer practice, you know, without looking at it. He, he, he!"

"So his Magnificence gets on Cherry's nerves a bit, does he?" grinned Skinner.

"Well, he gets on mine a bit, too!"

"Mine, too!" chuckled Snoop. "Lots of fellows! But Cherry always seemed to like him."

"Oh, you never know!" said Skinner.

"What's the joke?" asked Stott, coming along the passage.

The scrap of paper was shown to Stott, and he stared and grinned. Two or three other fellows came along—Fisher T. Fish and Russell and Ogilvy—and they were taken into the confabulation.

Vernon-Smith and Tom Redwing, coming up to their study, stopped to learn what was on, and were told. The Bouncer shrugged his shoulders, but Redwing looked troubled.

"You ought to burn that, Bunter," he said.

"It's not Bunter's," said Skinner. "It's Bob Cherry's bookmark."

"It ought to be burned," said Redwing. "What's the good of making mischief?" And he went on to his study.

A good many fellows who came along the passage were attracted by the chuckling of Skinner & Co., and stopped to inquire. Some of them showed surprise, some repeated Tom Redwing's advice. But Bunter was not disposed to take that advice. His good impulse in that direction had passed long ago.

It was one of Bunter's greatest delights to be the fellow who knew; the chap who had something to tell. Now he knew something—now he had something to tell! And he was not in the least inclined to part with his importance.

"Hallo, here's Angel! Show it to Angel!" said Skinner, who was on rather friendly terms with the black sheep of the Fourth.

Angel of the Fourth sauntered along the passage. His eyes glittered for a moment at the sight of the fragment of paper in Bunter's fat hand.

"Anythin' on?" he drawled.

"Look at that!" said Skinner.

Angel glanced at the scrap of paper.

"Well, what's that?" he asked.

"What about it?"

"It's Bob Cherry's fist!" explained Snoop.

"Is it?"

"Yes, that 'ton means Wharton, of course. That's the way he described his pal."

"Pretty mean, in my opinion," said Angel.

"That's what we all think."

Angel nodded, and walked on, and went up the box room stairs. Not one of the Removites guessed that his visit to their quarters was anything but accidental. Certainly they were not likely to guess that he had strolled along to see whether the rascally scheme of revenge against Bob Cherry he had put in operation was working.

Half the Remo had seen the scrap of paper by this time, and made various comments on it. Meanwhile, the merry party in Study No. 1 had finished their tea, in happy ignorance of what was going on in the passage without.

"I say, take Wharton's book back to him, while Cherry there," suggested Skinner. "Cherry's bound to ask you if you've lost his place, and you can pull his leg about it."

Bunter chuckled.

"Watch me!" he said.

He rolled into No. 7 for the "Holiday Annual," and rolled along the Study No. 1 with it, seven or eight fellows watching him. Bunter pushed open Harry Wharton's study door, and blinked in.

"You can come in, Bunter," said the captain of the Remove, laughing.

"Tea's over."

"I haven't come for tea, Wharton! I've just looked in to bring your book back."

Bunter tossed the "Holiday Annual" on the table.

"Oh, good!" said Wharton. "First time on record that you've brought a book back after borrowing it!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"You should have left it in Study No. 13, though: Bob's not done with it."

"If you've lost my place, Bunter, I'll scalp you!" said Bob Cherry.

He took up the book and looked at it.

"My bookmark's gone!" he said.

There was a chuckle outside, rather to the surprise of the fellows in the study. Bunter grinned.

"Well, I thought I'd remove that bookmark, Cherry," he said.

"You cheeky, fat ass!" exclaimed Bob indignantly. "What the thump do you mean by losing my place?"

"Rather better, I think, considering."

"Is the fat duffer potty?" asked Nugent, gazing at Bunter.

"What are you grinning and guggling about, fatty?"

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"Oh, get out!" said Bob. "You ought to be kicked, but I dare say I can find the place again all right."

"If that's what you call grateful, Cherry—"

"Grateful!" howled Bob.

"Yes," said Bunter warmly. "Seeing that you used a bit of an old letter for a bookmark. Suppose you'd given the book back to Wharton with that bit of letter in it?"

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"What on earth would it have mattered?" asked Harry. "Are you wandering in your mind, Bunter?"

"Blessed if I don't believe he is!" said Bob in amazement. "And it wasn't an old letter—it was a strip off an old exercise I used as a bookmark, I believe."

"It jolly well wasn't!" said Bunter. "It was a strip torn off an old letter you wrote and never posted!"

"Might have been," said Bob. "It doesn't matter, anyhow. I don't think I've ever written anything in a letter that all Greyfriars mightn't see. What are you grinning at, you fat image?"

"You wouldn't like Wharton to see it," grinned Bunter.

"Why not, ass?"

"He, he, he!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came echoing from the passage.

Bob Cherry jumped up.

"Is this a rag?" he asked. "What's the game? Are you fellows trying to make out that I've written something about Wharton that I shouldn't like him to see? That's not a rag—that's a dirty trick!"

"The dirty trickfulness is terrific!" remarked the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"He, he, he!"

"Look here, let's know what all this means!" exclaimed Bob, and he grasped Bunter by the collar. "Now then—"

"Yaroooh!"

Shake!

"Leggo!"

Shake!

"If you don't let go, I'll show Wharton the paper!" roared Bunter.

"Show him, and be hanged, you fat rotter!" exclaimed Bob, and he gave Bunter so hefty a shake that he quivered like a fat jelly.

"Yow-ow-ow! I'll tell Wharton you called him a swanking cad if you don't leggo!"

"What!" roared Bob.

Harry Wharton rose to his feet, his face pale with anger.

"Take a cricket-stump to him, Bob," he said. "Give the rotter the licking of his life!"

"I jolly well will!" gasped Bob. "Hand me a stump, Bull!"

"Here you are!" said Johnny promptly.

"Yaroooh! Help!"

"Let the chap alone!" said Skinner, in the doorway. "He's only telling the truth— Whooop!"

Skinner roared as Bob's left sent him spinning back into the passage.

"You can have some more when I'm done with Bunter, Skinner!" shouted Bob, his good temper quite vanished now. "Now, you fat rascal—"

"It's true!" yelled Bunter. "I've got the paper. I'll show it to Wharton! Leggo, you beast! You daren't let me show Wharton! Yoop!"

Bob Cherry paused, with the cricket-stump in the air. Billy Bunter was evidently in earnest, and Bob's anger changed a little to astonishment. It occurred to him, too, that possibly Bunter's fat leg had been pulled by Skinner & Co. Skinner was as full of tricks as a monkey, and he often found thoughtless victims to act as catspaws.

"I'll give you a chance!" said Bob, breathing hard. "If you've got anything to show Wharton, show it to him!"

"I don't want to see it," said Harry. "I suppose this is some of Skinner's rotten trickery!"

"Look at the paper and see!" yelled Skinner furiously from the passage, as he dabbed his nose. "You'll like to see how Cherry writes to his people about

you. Look at the paper. Show it up, Bunter!"

"If you've got anything, Bunter, show it up before I smash you!" roared Bob.

Thus adjured, Billy Bunter tossed the crumpled scrap of paper on the study table.

## THE SECOND CHAPTER.

### The Scrap of Paper!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. looked at the torn strip. They had not the slightest doubt that this was some wretched trickery of Skinner's, who had used the fatuous Owl of the Remove as a catspaw. But they started as they read what was written in Bob Cherry's well-known sprawling "fist."

Bob, who still had Bunter by the collar, looked round at his chums, not at the paper.

"Well, what is it?" he asked.

Wharton's face grew crimson.

That the "ton" was the termination of his own name there could be no doubt. Dutton was the only other fellow in the Remove with a name that terminated with "ton"; and Dutton, the deaf junior, could not have been referred to in such terms; neither was Bob Cherry likely to mention Dutton at all in a letter.

What was written there was written about Wharton.

Wharton was only too well aware that some of the Remove fellows considered him rather too reserved—"stuck-up" was Fisher T. Fish's description—"swanky" was the word Skinner preferred to employ. Even his own friends had sometimes had little disagreements with him on account of certain little faults of temper.

Wharton was by no means a perfect character; and he was conscious of this little weakness on his part, and had honestly striven to keep it in check. He tried not to be annoyed when Skinner alluded to him as "his Magnificence" or "his Serene Mightiness"; and knowing that he lacked patience, he was very careful to be patient—though, of course, he was not invariably successful.

He did not expect his friends to be blind to his faults, but he did expect them to be tolerant; and that allusion in Bob Cherry's handwriting was a sharp blow to his pride.

His face was crimson, and the crimson faded away and left it very pale. Johnny Bull and Nugent exchanged quick looks of dismay.

Bob Cherry, realising the electric atmosphere in the study, released Billy Bunter's collar.

He faced his comrades with a grim brow.

"Well, what is it?" he asked.

"Look at the paper," said Harry Wharton very dryly.

Bob looked at it—stared at it! The sight of it seemed to deprive him of the power of speech for a moment.

"I'm sorry I get on your nerves, Bob," said Harry, his lip quivering. "I've tried not to. I—I suppose a chap might have called me a bit uppish when I first came here, but I thought that was all over long ago!"

"What utter rot!" said Nugent. "It's rotten—it's a beastly shame! You ought to be jolly well ashamed of yourself, Bob!"

"That's my opinion," said Johnny Bull, in his slow, thoughtful way. "Wharton's got his faults, like the rest of us; but that's not the way a friend would speak of any fellow!"

"My esteemed Bob—" murmured Huree Janset Ram Singh, in great distress.

Bob Cherry was still staring at the



paper, watched by a curious group at the doorway. He raised his eyes to his chums.

"That looks like my handwriting," he said.

"Isn't it yours?" sneered Skinner.

Bob turned his back on Skinner.

"Wharton, you can't be silly ass enough to believe that I'd write in that style about a fellow I was friendly with. I'd cut my hand off sooner!"

"You didn't write it!" exclaimed Wharton blankly.

Bob's eyes blazed. "Do you believe I did?" he shouted.

As Wharton did not answer immediately, being too taken aback to know what to say, Bob repeated his words in louder tones:

"Do you believe I wrote that?"

Wharton's own temper was not of the gentlest, and he was wounded and angry.

"What is a fellow to believe?" he snapped. "Are you denying your own handwriting?"

"It's not my hand!"

"Bob!" muttered Nugent.

"Do you think it is, Nugent?" roared Bob.

"I know it is!"

"I tell you I never wrote it—never thought of such a thing—never dreamed of it!" shouted Bob furiously. "But I know what to think of fellows who believe I'd do such a rotten thing! Go and eat coke, the lot of you!"

Bob Cherry swung round, and tramped savagely out of the study, knocking over Skinner as he went, hardly seeing him.

His heavy footsteps rang along the Remove passage to Study No. 13, and the door slammed.

Skinner reeled against the passage wall.

"Beautiful manners!" he remarked. "The dear man seems to be annoyed at getting found out!"

There was blank dismay in Study No. 1. At the sight of Bob Cherry's handwriting the juniors had had no doubts. But Bob's furious denial shook them.

"What the dickens does the fellow mean?" said Johnny Bull. "There's nobody else's fist like his at Greyfriars—the whole Form knows that scrawl!"

"It was his bookmark, too," said Nugent slowly. "He must have picked it up in his study. Somebody there must have written it."

Wharton's lip curled. He was deeply hurt; his pride was deeply wounded, and he was very angry.

"I suppose he had to deny it," he said. "He couldn't own up to such a mean thing, I suppose. I never thought

**BITTER BLOOD!** "I tell you I never wrote that letter about Wharton—never thought of such a thing!" shouted Bob Cherry furiously. "But I know what to think of fellows who believe I'd do such a rotten thing! Go and eat coke, the lot of you!" Bob swung round, and tramped savagely out of the study. (See Chapter 2.)



he would come down to telling lies, though."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Oh, get out, Bunter!" snapped Nugent. "Why couldn't you shove the thing into the fire instead of bringing it here, bother you?"

"There wasn't a fire in my study—"

"Oh, get out!"

"I wasn't going to show it to you, either," said Bunter. "I showed it to some of the fellows in confidence. Bob made me show you!"

"Get out!" growled Johnny Bull.

Peter Todd looked in.

"Hold on a minute, you fellows," he said. "I've heard what's going on. Bob says he didn't write that beastly thing!"

Harry Wharton shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, I should want a lot of proof to believe Bob a liar," said Peter tartly, "and I'm not so chummy with him as you fellows are! He says he didn't write it. Anybody could imitate Bob's scrawl—a baby could do it. Skinner could, for instance."

"What!" yelled Skinner.

"And I noticed that Skinner put Bunter up to bringing it here," added Teddy.

"Why, you—you awful rotter!" gasped Skinner. "You—you—you accuse me of—of forging Bob's fist—why, I—"

Words failed Skinner. There was terror, as well as indignation, in

Skinner's excitement, for he was well aware that some of the fellows, at least, would believe him capable of such a trick.

"I'm not accusing you," said Peter coolly. "I'm suggesting a possibility that these fellows will look into, if they've got any sense!"

"I never saw the paper before Bunter showed it to me!" raved Skinner.

Wharton drew a deep breath.

"I don't believe Skinner would," he said quietly. "Why should he? He doesn't like me, but he's got nothing up against Bob; and he's not got the nerve for such a trick, either, if he wanted to. But let's go into it, all the same. Bunter knows, and Bunter can tell."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Where did you get that bit of paper, Bunter?" demanded Peter Todd.

"In the 'Holiday Annual,'" gasped Bunter, who was a little scared by this time at the tempest he had raised. "I—I mentioned it to you when you came in from the footer, Peter—about 'ton, you know—"

"I remember. It was a bookmark?"

"Yes, old chap."

"Where did you get the 'Holiday Annual'?"

"Off the table in Bob's study. Wharton told me I might have it."

"And the bookmark was in it then?"

"Of course it was. It dropped out in Study No. 7, when I took the book to my study."

Peter Todd looked perplexed. It was easy enough to see that Bunter was telling the truth, so far as he knew it. Skinner grinned malignantly.

"Well, are you going to make out that I put it there before Bunter got hold of the book?" he demanded.

"Somebody did, unless Bob's telling lies," said Peter. "Cherry says he left a bookmark in the 'Annual,' I think?"

"Yes, he told us so," said Nugent. "That was when we went down to the footer this afternoon."

"Where have you been this afternoon, Skinner?"

Skinner sneered.

"I've been out with Snoop and Stott and Bolsover major," he answered. "We dropped in at the Feathers for a game of billiards, if you want to know. And we went out just after dinner, and didn't get back till nearly tea-time. Ask the lot of them."

"That's all true enough," came Bolsover major's bull-voice. "No good trying to put it on Skinner this time?"

Peter flushed a little. "I'm not trying to put it on Skinner," he snapped. "Skinner's only got himself to blame. He was making as much mischief out of it as he could, anyhow. But I admit Skinner's out of it."

"Thank you for nothing," sneered Skinner, and he walked away with his friends.

"Well?" said Harry Wharton, looking at Peter Todd fixedly.

Peter made a hopeless gesture.

"It beats me," he said. "But I can't believe Bob did it, or that he'd tell lies if he did. It's not like him. But I can't see anything further to be done."

And Peter Todd left the study, and Bunter rolled after him. Harry Wharton picked up the scrap of paper from the table.

"That's done with, anyhow," he said. "It belongs to Cherry, but I suppose he doesn't want it back."

And the captain of the Remove threw the paper in the fire.

### THE THIRD CHAPTER.

#### Lord Mauleverer Takes a Hand!

SLAM!

Lord Mauleverer, the good-natured slacker of the Remove, sighed.

Bob Cherry had just gone into his study, which was close to Lord Mauleverer's, and he had shut the door with an emphasis that told on the sensitive nerves of Mauly.

Sir Jimmy Vivian, on the other side of the tea-table, grinned.

"There's a row on in the Remove, Mauly," he said.

"There always is," sighed Lord Mauleverer. "But, really, Cherry might close his door a little more quietly. He really might, you know. What's the good of slammin' a door? Only makes more row."

"I suppose he's had a shindy with Wharton."

Lord Mauleverer looked across the table at Sir Jimmy, startled by that remark.

"Cherry—rowin' with Wharton?" he said.

"Well, Bunter would be bound to tell them. You know Bunter?"

"Tell them what?"

"About the letter."

"What letter?"

Sir Jimmy grinned. It was utterly unlike Lord Mauleverer to inquire into anything that was going on. Skinner had remarked once that, if somebody

had told Mauly that Mr. Quelch had brained the Head with a ruler, Mauly would have only said, "Did he really?" But evidently there were some matters in which Mauly could take interest, and a dispute between two such old friends as Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry was one of them.

"Like to hear?" asked Vivian.

"Yaas."

Sir Jimmy had been a witness of the scene in the passage when Billy Bunter had displayed the scrap of paper to Skinner & Co. and the other fellows. He related it to Mauleverer, who listened intently, without even looking bored.

"So when Skinner put Bunter up to goin' into Wharton's study, I guessed the fat would be in the fire," remarked Sir Jimmy, "and it is, I fancy. They've had a row—in fact, they're all squabbling now, I expect."

"Rotten!" said Mauly.

"I dare say there'll be a fight," said Sir Jimmy. "Worth watchin', Mauly. Both good men!"

Lord Mauleverer looked greatly distressed.

"There's some mistake in the matter," he said.

"Well, as a matter of fact, there is a little bit of swank about Wharton, though he's a good chap, and I like him," said Vivian. "Still, it was rather strong Cherry puttin' it like that. Might have told the chap himself; but stickin' it in a letter to somebody else—"

"He didn't!" said Mauly.

"Seen it!" said the schoolboy baronet. "Rot!"

"Look here, Mauly! You can see it yourself, if you like to ask Bunter," exclaimed Sir Jimmy, with some excitement.

Lord Mauleverer yawned.

"Couldn't stand Bunter! Pass the cake, old tulip."

Lord Mauleverer was unusually thoughtful over tea. It was not often that he gave his noble brain much exercise. He found it too fatiguing. But he was thinking now.

After tea he detached himself from his chair and ambled out into the Remove passage, and along to Study No. 15.

Bob Cherry gave a growl, not unlike that of a lion disturbed in his lair, as a tap came at his study door and it opened. Lord Mauleverer's serene and amiable face looked in.

Little Wun Lung, the Chinese, was in the study—very silent, in view of Bob's unaccustomed mood. Mark Linley worked silently at the table. Hurree Singh was not present. His lordship glanced round the study, and gave Bob a genial nod.

"Lookin' into things," he remarked pleasantly. "You don't mind my buttin' in—what?"

"I'd rather not talk just now," said Bob bluntly.

"That's all right! I'll do the talkin'," said his lordship amiably. "You didn't write that scrap of paper, Cherry."

"No!" roared Bob.

"Gently, old man. I'm not hard of hearin' like poor old Dutton. I know you didn't!" said his lordship soothingly.

"Oh!" said Bob, taken rather aback. "Then you're about the only fellow in the Remove who takes my word."

"Not the only one, Bob," said Mark Linley, looking up. "I take it."

"Thanks, Marky, old chap!" said Bob more softly. "I shouldn't blame you if you didn't. It looks bad enough, I know. But what I think is that Wharton ought to take my word, when we've been pals for whole terms—not that we shall be pals any longer!"

"Yaas, you will, when this is cleared up," said Lord Mauleverer. "We've only got to find the fellow that wrote that bit of paper in your fist, Bob, and put it in the book to be found."

Bob made a hopeless gesture.

"I can't believe there's a chap at Greyfriars would do such a thing," he said. "Not in the Remove, anyhow. Even Skinner wouldn't, and he's jolly near the limit. I know Bunter wouldn't, and he's a bit of a worm! I simply can't make it out at all. I don't blame the fellows for being down on me—only my own pals might—"

Bob's voice had a catch in it.

"All serene, when we've found the chap," said Lord Mauleverer. "What steps are you takin'?"

"I can't think of anything."

"Lucky you've got me to think for you, then!"

"You, old chap?" Bob Cherry grinned. "My hat! Thinking isn't in your line, Mauly, old man. Don't try!"

"I don't know," said Mauleverer calmly. "After all, you know, practically all the brains of the country are in the House of Lords."

"Oh!" ejaculated Bob. "Are they? Great Scott!"

"Yaas. Nothin' to grin at, Linley; I'm speakin' quite seriously. I'm going into this bizai, if it costs me a headache," said Lord Mauleverer heroically. "Here's five friends of mine, all dis-putin' and quarrellin', and generally makin' asses of themselves. They'll be fightin' next."

"That's pretty certain," said Bob Cherry grimly. "I'm going to ask each of my friends—I mean, the chaps who were my friends—whether they take my word about that scrap of paper. If they don't there will be four jolly good scraps, at least."

"Oh, gad!" said Lord Mauleverer. "Time I butted in, I see. I suppose nothin' would please the fellow more."

"Eh? What fellow?"

"The fellow who shoved that scrap of paper into the 'Annual.' He must have done it to set your crowd by the ears."

"Oh!" said Bob. "You—you think so? Blessed if I can make out why a fellow should have done it at all!"

"Let me think it out for you," said Lord Mauleverer. "We'll get at the bloke, all right. Bunter found it in the book."

"So he says."

"Oh, he found it all right!" said Lord Mauleverer. "Toddy knows that you left the book here?"

"Yes, when I went down to the footer this afternoon. I put a bookmark in my place—an old strip off an exercise, I think it was."

"I remember when you went," nodded Mauly. "No mistakin' your footprints in the passage. How did Bunter come to have the book, then?"

"Wharton told him he could take it when we were going down to the footer."

"That's the puzzling point," said Mark Linley. "It seems that Bunter was told he could take the book at once, and he came into the house for it, just when Bob and the rest were going down to the footer."

"I know it's a puzzle," said Bob. "There doesn't seem to have been time for anybody to get at the book before Bunter got it, and he says he found that scrap of paper in it. I know it wasn't there when I was reading the 'Annual.'"

"Hold on!" said Lord Mauleverer. "Bunter didn't come up for the book at once. Not for more than an hour."

"What?"

"I heard him pass my door, you see," explained his lordship. "I know his tread—fairly solid, you know. You see, Sir Jimmy Vivian—the young ass—was going to bring me some ginger-beer in the study, and he forgot all about it, and went to footer with the other asses. So each time a fellow came along I wondered if it was Jimmy with the pop."

"Each time!" said Mark quickly. "Did any other fellow come along?"

"Yaas, Angel of the Fourth."

Bob Cherry leaped from his chair as if he had received an electric shock.

"Angel!" he roared.

"Yaas," Lord Mauleverer gazed at him in mild surprise.

"You saw him?"

"How could I see him when I was lying on the sofa, and had my back turned to the door?"

"You ass!" roared Bob.

"You see, the door was half open," explained Mauleverer. "I'd sat up, thinkin' it was Jimmy with the ginger-pop. So I saw Angel in the glass opposite the doorway."

"Oh!" exclaimed Bob breathlessly.

"What did you do then?"

"Went to sleep," said Lord Mauleverer innocently.

"Ass!"

"Well, I was tired, and Jimmy hadn't come with the pop. I had a nice doze, till I was woke up by Bunter stumping along. I suppose that was when he came for the 'Annual.'"

Mark Linley smiled slightly.

"No need to look much further," he said. "I never thought of a Fourth-Form chap but you had a row with Angel the other day, Bob, and Nugent licked him. You'd better ask him what he was doing in the Remove passage this afternoon."

"I jolly well will!" panted Bob.

He ran out of the study.

"Oh, gad, what a jolly old whirlwind!" ejaculated Lord Mauleverer, with a gasp. "I want a rest after this."

And Lord Mauleverer ambled peacefully back to his study. Meanwhile, Bob Cherry burst like a cyclone into Study No. 1, and Harry Wharton and Nugent jumped to their feet. Wharton put up his hands instinctively. His first impression was that Bob had come for war.

#### THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

##### Aubrey Takes His Gruel!

"I've found it out!" roared Bob.

"What?"

"Or Mauly has, rather! It was Angel of the Fourth."

"What was Angel of the Fourth?" ejaculated the captain of the Remove blankly.

Bob Cherry panted.

"Mauleverer saw him sneaking along the passage this afternoon, while we were at footer. It was Angel."

"But—but—What—"

Bob Cherry's powerful voice rang along the Remove passage. Peter Todd looked in at the door.

"What's that about Angel?" he asked.

"Angel sneaked into my study this afternoon, before Bunter got the 'Annual' away," gasped Bob. "Mauly was in his room, and saw him tiptoeing past his door."

"Hold on," said Wharton quietly.

"That must have been after Bunter got the book. He went in for it when we left—"

"Not the least little bit," said Peter Todd promptly. "I've already had it from Bunter that he went down to Friardale first. Angel of the Fourth sent him there to get a cake."

"Angel did?" exclaimed Wharton.

"Yes, and I wondered that he trusted Bunter with the money! I know now why he did."

"That settles it," said Nugent. "Angel never got the cake if Bunter fetched it; and he knew he wouldn't! He was simply tipping Bunter."

"Clear enough," said Peter. "Only it's rather odd that Angel knew anything about the 'Annual' in the study."

"He was there!" roared Bob, remembering. "He was standing loafing there while we were talking to Bunter. You fellows remember he was on the steps. He heard all we said to Bunter—must have!"

Peter Todd gave a whistle.

"What a cheery rotter!" he remarked.

"But—but—" gasped Wharton. Bad as he knew Angel of the Fourth to be, thoroughly bad, it was hard to believe any fellow guilty of such baseness as this.

Bob Cherry turned towards him.

"Do you take my word now, or not?" he asked. "Before we see Angel—before we get at the proof? Do you take my word?"

For a single second Wharton did not answer. He had had no time to think; and anger and resentment were still strong within him. But at that moment his good genius was with him. It was hard to look at Bob's honest, flushed face and not believe, and deep down in his heart, angry as he was, Wharton only wanted half an excuse to believe in his old chum again. And after that one second's pause, in which he drove down his hurt pride and anger, his answer came clear and frank:

"I do, old chap. I'm sorry."

Bob Cherry's face cleared as if by magic.

"You couldn't help thinking as you did. I was an ass to cut up so rusty," he said ruefully. "Only—only I—I thought you ought to have felt that I couldn't do a beastly backbiting thing like that."

"So I ought," said Wharton. "I'm sorry. 'Come on. We'll go and see Angel now!'"

And they left the study, called up Johnny Bull and Hurree Singh, and then proceeded to Angel's study in the Fourth—to interview Aubrey Angel.

Aubrey Angel was feeling cheery over tea.

All was secure. And the Famous Five were at loggerheads. Nearly every fellow in the Remove counted it as a matter of hours before Wharton and Bob Cherry started fighting.

And now—From that satisfaction and security Angel came with a jump to doubt and fear. That he was suspected he did not need telling as the Famous Five and Temple & Co. of the Fourth crowded into his study. And that there was more than suspicion was indicated by the fact that they all came together, Bob Cherry and Harry Wharton evidently on their old friendly terms again. Aubrey Angel felt almost sick with apprehension as he stared at the Removites. What had gone wrong?

Bob Cherry did not beat about the bush. He came out with the charge against Angel in a torrent of words, and then in quieter tones Wharton took up the tale.

"I tell you you're wrong," said Angel, although his looks belied his words. "I never went near the study."

"It's no use your denying it," said Wharton quietly. "We've got all the proof we need."

"I do deny it!" said Angel.

"Very well," said the captain of the Remove. "You still deny it? Frank, you go and fetch Mauleverer. Bob, you get Bunter. We're going to the Head, and Angel's going with us. He can deny it before the Head."

Angel gave a stifled cry.

"Stop!" he panted. "I—I'm not goin' before the Head. I—I know he'll take your word, Mauleverer's word before mine! I—I've been up before him too often. Stop!"

"Do you own up?" demanded Bob Cherry. "Last time of asking."

Angel panted.

"Yes."

"And that cringing cur nearly set us all at loggerheads!" said Harry Wharton, with a deep breath. "It ought to be a lesson to all of us, you fellows."

"It's going to be a lesson to Angel, too!" said Bob Cherry.

And it was. And the lessonfulness, as Hurree Jamset Ram Singh put it, was terrific.

THE END.

"IN BORROWED PLUMES!" is the title of next week's stirring long complete tale of Harry Wharton & Co., of Greyfriars. Don't miss it, boys!

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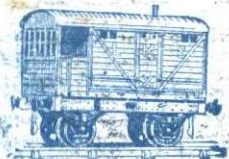
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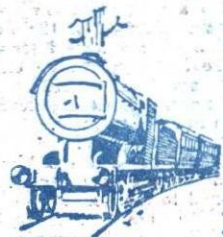
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