


Schoolboys' Pocket Library

4^d
N^o. 1

THE RIVAL SCHOOLS

A dynamic illustration in a classic comic book style. In the center, a schoolboy in a blue suit and a top hat is falling into a large, yellow and blue net. Several other schoolboys in red uniforms are surrounding him, some holding the net's ropes. The background shows a school building with arched windows. The scene is filled with energy and movement, suggesting a playful or competitive event.

by **Reginald Browne**



Schoolgirls' Pocket Library

PRICE **4**D.

- No. 1 Decima at Dane's Court School** by Rosemary Gray
No. 2 The Rival Captains by Jean Ashley
No. 3 Mavis the Mysterious by Edna Lake
No. 4 The Twins at Tower School by Rosemary Gray

READY SHORTLY

- No. 5 Margot's Mystery Mascot** by J. A. Jordan
No. 6 Sunnydene School by May Sullivan
No. 7 Chums of Sunnydene School by May Sullivan
No. 8 Sunnydene School Again by May Sullivan

ALL COMPLETE STORIES. NO SERIALS

*Obtainable from your local Newsagent or
Direct from the Publishers, 5d. Post Free*

General G. Swann Ltd
37-38-39 BURNE STREET MARYLEBONE
LONDON · N · W · 1



THE RIVAL SCHOOLS

By Reginald Browne

CHAPTER I

● BACK TO SCHOOL

"Len, old lad, it looks as though our wily scheme has sprung a leak."

Alan Wilkins, the popular captain of the Fifth Form at Whitelands, made that remark in a wry voice as he and his chum, Len Bradford, passed through the barrier at Waterloo Station and strolled leisurely on to the departure platform.

"Not my scheme, Alan—yours," said Bradford pointedly.

"I'm not denying it was I who evolved the masterly plan," agreed Wilkins, who favoured a somewhat flowery flow of language. "However, the situation is not so murky as I had first feared: We may yet travel down to Whitelands in that dignified exclusiveness to which we are accustomed."

"Not a chance. The platform is swarming with juniors."

This was an exaggeration. There were only about half-a-dozen Whitelands juniors in sight. They were Goodman and Davis and Hunt, of Study No. 4; Tim Charters, Will Osborne and Pat Warren.

"Let me point out, Len, that the redoubtable Goodman is included in this unhappy picture," observed Wilkins, with a shake of his well-groomed head. "And Goodman, let me remind you, is the equivalent, when it comes to a matter of noise, of at least half-a-dozen ordinary Fourth Formers."

"Well, let's go and say 'how do' to the young beggars, anyhow," said Bradford good-naturedly. "It's the first day of term, and we haven't seen them during the vacation."

Wilkins and Bradford had deliberately missed the earlier train for Whitelands, for that train was generally packed to suffocation with noisy shouting Fourth Formers and fags. They had waited until later hoping that they would be able to make the journey in peace and comfort. But here, on the platform, were a few stragglers, such as themselves. It was the first day of term, and there was no actual law as to which train the fellows should travel by. The majority took the early train, but a few generally preferred to come later on.

The two seniors joined the little crowd and there was a general chorus of greetings. Wilkins noticed that Charters and Osborne were looking rather anxiously towards the barrier. They were waiting for their chum, Dick Sylvester, captain of the Whitelands Fourth, who shared Study No. 3 with them, in Mortimer's House. He had promised to meet them at the train, and the time was getting short.

"Here he comes!" said Osborne, with relief.

A well set-up, sturdy figure had just passed through the barrier, and he now came striding briskly up, a cheery smile on his face.

"Hi, gang!" he greeted.

"You're late," said Charters.

"Better late than never, my son," retorted Dick. "We'll be taking our places."

They piled into a compartment, and it was noticeable that Wilkins and Bradford were already seated within. Wilkins, in particular, had a partiality for junior society. In spite of his talk about wishing to travel in dignified comfort he preferred noise and bustle.

"Come on, Stan," said Bob Davis. "The guard's getting his flag ready."

"Blow the guard," said Stan Goodman, as he eyed the compartment with disfavour. "I'd rather get into another carriage. When I travel, I like to travel in comfort."

"You silly ass!" said Charlie Hunt, in exasperation. "You're as bad as that spoofer, Wilkins! You know jolly well that you don't want to travel alone."

"I'm a spoofer, am I?" said Goodman, glaring. "I'm fed up with all these arguments, and you chaps can go and eat coke. I'm going to find a compartment for myself!"

"But the train doesn't stop until we get to Market Tunley," protested Davis. "It's a non-stop and——"

"All the better," interrupted Goodman. "I shall have some peace."

He was a big, burly, ram-headed youth with untidy hair who always managed to get into any trouble that was going. Impulsive and wilful, always determined to have his own way; he was nevertheless good-hearted and generous, and popular with most of the other Fourth Formers. His chums, Davis and Hunt, were as loyal to him as a couple of porous plasters.

A few other juniors came bustling along at that moment, and they piled into the compartment, too. Stan Goodman frowned at them, and looked more obstinate than ever.

"Look out, Stan," said Charlie Hunt. "The guard's just unfolding his flag."

"Fine!" said Goodman, as he strode off up the train. "I told you I was going to travel alone—and I meant it!"

He opened the door of an empty compartment, hopped in, and triumphantly slammed the door. Of course, he was bluffing. He had a fancy for treating his chums like this; it pleased him to have them begging of him to reconsider his decision. But this time he made a little blunder. He was taken at his word.

There was a sudden rush of juniors, and Goodman could see that Dick Sylvester and Pat Warren and Tim Charters were now supporting Davis and Hunt.

"What's the trouble here?" asked Dick briskly.

"No trouble," replied Goodman.

"Why aren't you joining us?"

"Because of those two fatheads!" replied Goodman, indicating his chums. "I've been talking to them about football, and they seem to think that I'm no good as a centre-forward."

"But you're our goalie, old man," said Dick gently.

"Are you going to take up the same stand as those two boneheads?" demanded Goodman. "I know I'm goalie! But this term I'm going to lead the forwards——"

"Well, we won't argue," said Dick Sylvester, with a grin. "The train's just going——"

"Good! Let it go!"

"Aren't you coming with us?"

"I'll travel alone, thanks," replied Goodman tartly.

"Quite sure of it?" asked Sylvester, as he produced a railway key. "You won't change your mind?"

"Not in a million years."

"Then we're all satisfied," said Dick sweetly.

He inserted the key into the lock of the carriage door, and turned it. And this particular carriage was not one of the modern type—it was not a corridor coach. Stan Goodman gave an ejaculation of dismay.

"Hi! Unlock this door, you grinning asses!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You're going to travel alone, Stan!" chuckled Bob Davis, with rare enjoyment. "And if you want to argue, you can argue with yourself."

Goodman was rather flabbergasted.

"You—you funny rotters!" he shouted. "I was only spoofing. Lemme out! Of course I'd rather travel down with you chaps. I don't want to be in a compartment all to myself!"

"Too late, old chap," said Dick. "There goes the guard's whistle! So long!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

They went off, yelling, and Goodman leaned out of the window staring after them in high indignation. He saw them pile into another carriage farther down the train.

"Take your seats, please!"

The officials were shouting, and the guard gave his whistle a preliminary flourish.

"Here! Let me out! roared Goodman violently.

A portly inspector, who was just passing, gave the burly junior a cold look.

"Now then, sir—now then!" he protested.

"If you don't let me out, I'll climb through the window!" yelled Goodman.

He commenced scrambling out head first, but the portly inspector, without hesitation, pushed him back.

"If you want to get out, young man, you'll open the door in the proper way!" he said severely.

"I can't!" howled Goodman. "It's locked!"

At that moment there was a big commotion at the barrier, and a number of laughing shouts were heard. There was a sound of running feet, too, and Dick Sylvester, who was looking out of a carriage window farther up the train, gave a chuckle.

"Well, well!" he murmured. "Our old friends of Greendale."

There were six of the new arrivals—Roddy Mitchell, Fred Simmons and John Ellis, the recognised leaders of the Junior School at Greendale; and Ferner, Tunstall and Hickman. The Whitelands rivals had evidently been delayed, for they were catching the train by the skin of their teeth.

"Here you are, my lads!" said the portly inspector briskly.

The guard's whistle sounded imperiously, and the train was on the point of moving. Mitchell and Co., seeking seats, made a rush for the inspector; and the latter, whisking out a key, unlocked the door of Stan Goodman's compartment.

"Young rascals!" grunted the inspector. "You're lucky not to be left behind."

Goodman seized the opportunity to get out, but only succeeded in colliding violently with Roddy Mitchell, who was just dashing in. Goodman went reeling over backwards, to sit down hurriedly on the floor on the other side of the compartment. The Greendale boys piled in, and the door slammed. The train went gliding out of the station.

"Well, that's that!" panted Mitchell cheerfully.

His companions were much out of breath, but they were satisfied. As

yet, they did not know the identity of their fellow traveller. The first day of term at Greendale School coincided with the first day of term at Whitelands College; and as the two establishments were situated within a couple of miles of one another near the coast of rural Dorset, there was a keen and active rivalry between the two factions. Whitelands, being by far the larger school, was apt to look down upon its more modest neighbour—which only caused the Greendale fellows to assert their own superiority with greater vehemence.

"Well I'm jiggered!" said Fred Simmons suddenly. "Look who's here!"

"That Whitelands ass, Goody!"

Goodman was sitting on the floor, having just managed to extricate his head from under one of the seats.

"Well, that's funny!" said Roddy Mitchell, in astonishment. "I thought I biffed into something soft as I came in, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"How goes it, Goody, old man?" asked Tunstall genially.

Stan Goodman got to his feet, he glared at the Greendale juniors, and then he glared at the view outside the train.

"We're moving!" he said thickly.

"Go hon!"

"The train's started!" roared Goodman.

"We wouldn't dream of contradicting you," said Mitchell nodding. "It's a funny thing, but the train has actually started. I wonder why the train started, you fellows?"

"I daresay, because the engine driver opened the throttle," said Verner solemnly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Goodman was exasperated, but he was helpless. Instead of travelling alone, he now found himself in the company of these six Greendale rivals. And the train was not due to stop until it reached Market Tunley, the junction for Greendale.

"You silly fatheads!" he said wrathfully. "I'm not going to travel down in your company! I'm going to join the other Whites, farther up the train!"

"Can't be done, old son," said Mitchell, shaking his head. "At least, not unless you indulge in a sort of film stunt, and walk along the running board while the train's going. You'll have to put up with us Greens. Better make the best of a bad job."

"Oh yeah?" said Simmons tartly. "We're the ones who'll have to make the best of a bad job, Roddy! Are we going to stand any rot from this White trash?"

"We are not!" said the Greens, in one firm solid voice.

CHAPTER II

ALL ABOUT A CAP

Stan Goodman was filled with wrath and indignation. Mainly owing to his own stubbornness he was doomed to travel with the Greendale juniors, and there was no method of escape.

"Well, it can't be helped, I suppose," he said gruffly. "As long as you chaps behave yourselves I shan't mind so much."

"And supposing we don't behave ourselves?" asked Roddy Mitchell with interest.

"Then I shall be compelled to biff you."

"You silly ass!" said Hickman. "We're six-to-one against you."

"Six Greendale ratheds against one Whitelands chap," nodded Goodman. "That just about makes it equal!"

There was an immediate roar, but Roddy Mitchell grinned and held up his hand.

"Let him have his delusions," he said kindly. "Life's too short, my sons. Besides, it's the first day of term, and we don't want to start any scrapping—yet."

His companions cooled down.

"All the same, there's going to be plenty of scrapping later on in the term," said Verner grimly. "We're not going to let these Whitelands wasters have everything their own way."

"These Whitelands what?" demanded Goodman.

"Wasters!" said Verner, with relish.

"Why, you—you—" Goodman gulped. "Did you hear that, Mitchell? This—this idiot called me a waster!"

"No, I didn't," said Verner. "It's a general term, embracing all you Whites. And we're going to make you sit up this term, my lad! We're going to beat you at sports, at japes, and at everything else."

"At least," said Mitchell modestly, "that's what we're going to try for."

For a moment it seemed that Stan Goodman was going to hurl himself at his rivals, but he changed his mind. He was a reckless youth and he seldom counted the odds. But there was something about the expressions of Mitchell and Co. that made him pause. After all, it was rather like the case of Daniel in the lions' den—only these lions were not quite so harmless.

"I don't see why I should demean myself by entering into a brawl with you Greendale rotters," he said indifferently. "What's that dotty cap you're wearing, Mitchell?"

"Dotty cap?" repeated Mitchell, removing his headgear. "You mean this?" There was a touch of pride in his voice. "It's my new skipper's cap."

"Never heard of such a thing," said Goodman, with disdain. "We don't have skippers' caps at Whitelands."

"Of course not," agreed Mitchell sweetly. "Whitelands is behind the times. But an up-to-date school like Greendale——"

"Are you saying that Whitelands is out-of-date?" broke in Goodman hotly.

"Easy, old man," grinned Mitchell. "The fact is, I'm skipper of the Junior School at Greendale, and this is my captain's cap. It's not a sports cap, in the ordinary way. It's simply a symbol of office, as it were."

"A which of what?"

"It's a special cap," explained Mitchell patiently. "Nobody else in the Junior School can wear it except the skipper. It's a new idea—only came into force this term."

Mitchell was proud of that cap. It was a brilliant orange in hue, and the badge was worked in glittering gold. All the other Greendale boys were wearing the ordinary blue-and-red caps of the school.

"And what," asked Goodman, "if you lose it?"

"I shan't lose it," replied Mitchell. "It's the only one in the school like it. The senior skipper's cap is purple."

"H'm!" grunted Goodman. "I'll bet you prize that cap!"

"You bet I do," said Mitchell enthusiastically. "If I lose it I shan't get another until next term—if at all. The Head made the announcement before the vacation, and he made it quite clear that there wasn't to be any fooling about."

"But that's rot," said Goodman. "If a chap loses a cap, he's given another. At least, his people buy it for him."

"Yes, but it's different with the skippers' caps," explained Mitchell. "The cap is an exclusive honour, and if any captain hasn't got enough sense to look after his symbol of office, then he isn't fit to be captain. So he doesn't

get another lid. In a way, it would be next door to saying good-bye to the captaincy if I was careless enough to lose this headgear."

And he replaced his cap on his head with an air of satisfaction.

The journey progressed quite uneventfully for a time, and the Greendale fellows discussed cricket and the coming football season, and various other subjects of a similar nature. The burly Whitelands fellow felt rather "out of it." This was mainly because he was invariably told to dry up if he ever chipped into the conversation. And as he had chipped in every two or three minutes he was rapidly becoming fed up with the whole thing.

He was heartily glad when the train unexpectedly came to a standstill. He got to his feet and looked out of the window—only to be unceremoniously elbowed aside by Simmons and Ellis

"Signal's against us," announced Simmons "We're somewhere between Fordwater and Market Tunley, aren't we?"

Ellis suddenly turned, his eyes gleaming.

"I say, you chaps!" he said quickly. "We're all fed up with Goody, aren't we?"

"And now!" chorussed the others.

"Well, what's wrong with pitching him out?" suggested Ellis brilliantly. "The train's stopped, and there's a lovely grassy bank out here."

Roddy Mitchell's eyes twinkled

"I didn't think you had it in you, Ellis, old man," he said. "That's not an idea. It's a brainwave. Come on—all together!"

"Hi!" howled Stan Goodman, trying to back away. "Keep your beastly paws off—"

But the Greendale fellows were quite keen on the wheeze. As Ellis had said, the train was at a standstill and there could be no danger. The bright afternoon sunshine was streaming into the compartment, and outside the sky was blue. A little fresh air would probably do Stanley Horatio Goodman a world of good.

Somebody obligingly opened the door—and Dick Sylvester and Tim Charters from a window farther up the train, saw the manoeuvre, and stared in astonishment.

"Now!" said Mitchell. "Out with him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Goodman shot out through the open doorway like a stone from a catapult. A yell of laughter accompanied his unceremonious exit. He struck the grassy bank and rolled over.

Slam!

Mitchell closed the door and waved a hand.

"Well, that's that!" he grinned. "So long, Goody, old bean!"

Mitchell and Co. had believed that Goodman would pick himself up and then climb back into another compartment. But an unexpected development arose. For Goodman, after striking the grassy ground, found that he could not check himself. He gathered speed and went tumbling over and over—from the top of the embankment to the bottom.

Splash!

Suddenly he vanished, much to the astonishment of the grinning Greendale boys.

"Great Scott!" gasped Mitchell. "He's fallen into a ditch, or something."

There was a wild commotion at the bottom of the embankment. The grasses and reeds waved about fantastically, and a second later Stan Goodman came into view again. But he had changed his appearance considerably. He was smothered from head to foot with thick clinging mud, and the picture he presented was so excruciatingly funny that Mitchell and Co. fairly shrieked with merriment.

Goodman, however, failed to see the point of the joke.

CHAPTER III

THE REPRISAL

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The yells of laughter from the Greendale bunch came dully to Goodman's clogged ears. The celebrated leader of Study No. 4 was in no way hurt, but he was excessively dirty. And when, at last, he managed to open his eyes sufficiently to see, he was startled by the spectacle of the train gliding along on its way.

"My only sainted aunt!" he mumbled dizzily.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Toodle-oo, Goody, old scout!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"See you later, old son!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mitchell and Co. were apparently quite callous. They regarded the whole distressing affair as a first-class joke. But farther along the train, nine Fourth Formers of Whitelands College were looking grim and purposeful.

"Are we going to stand this, you fellows?" asked Pat Warren, as he turned away from the window.

"We are not!" said Dick Sylvester grimly.

"Not likely!" ejaculated Bob Davis excitedly. "The rotters! Pitching old Goody out of the train like that! He might have been injured——"

"Cheese it!" interrupted Dick. "Don't lose your sense of proportion, old son, for goodness sake! It was only a jape, after all. Mitchell and Co. wouldn't injure anybody."

"But—but to chuck him out like that——"

"An insult to Whitelands," agreed Dick, nodding. "As for Goody, he's all right. He'll probably walk to the next station. But I'm jiggered if we're going to see one of our fellows treated like that—and do nothing to wipe out the stain!"

"We shall be in Market Tunley soon," said Will Osborne. "Then we'll get busy."

"A question of necessity, dear boys," agreed the aristocratic Kenneth Pyne, with a sigh. "Personally, I hate soiling my clobber, and I positively loathe brawling in public. But there are exceptions to every rule, and Mitchell and Co. need a sharp lesson. I've an idea that the platform at Market Tunley will soon resemble a gory battlefield."

"Hadn't we better wait until we get to Greendale St. Mary?" asked Sam Kennedy dubiously. "It's a smaller station, and it'll be quieter——"

"Not on your life!" interrupted Dick Sylvester firmly. "This isn't a case that can wait. The instant this train stops, and as soon as Mitchell and Co. pile out of their compartment, we're going to pulverise them!"

In the meantime, Mitchell and Co. were chuckling hugely. A premature chuckle, since they were in sublime ignorance of the fact that a crowd of other Whitelands fellows was on the train. One or two, perhaps—but certainly not the better part of a dozen. So, when the train steamed into the station at Market Tunley, they piled out cheerily on to the platform. It was necessary to change here into the "local," which was already standing on the opposite platform. But the Greendale sextet never reached the "local." There was a sudden rush, a scamper of feet, a chorus of yells, and the fight was on.

"Down with Greendale!"

"Hurrah!"

"Hi, what's all this?" gasped Mitchell wildly. "You—you Whitelands fatheads——"

"We saw what you did to old Goody!" roared Davis. "We're going to wipe you up! This is a reprisal!"

"Whitelands for ever!"

The fight was terrific. Porters came running up, with the valiant intention of putting a quick end to this conflict; but after they had received several jabs in the ribs and numerous punches in the face, they retired, a baffled and beaten force.

Sedate townspeople of Market Tunley were scampering away, uttering exclamations of indignant horror. Scraps were more or less common on the first day of term, for the Whites and the Greens were old rivals, but it was very seldom that there was such a free fight as this.

"Pax!" gasped Hickman, in the middle of it. "Chuck it, you asses!"

"Pax be blowed!" roared Charlie Hunt. "I daresay you got fed up with old Goody and his gas, but that was no excuse for chucking him out of the train!"

A fist came out of nowhere and he reeled away. Somebody went down with the beginnings of a splendid black eye. Caps were lying all over the platform, to say nothing of satchels, crumpled collars and tattered neckties.

"Stop!"

A thunderous voice broke out, and the stationmaster himself came striding into the thick of the conflict. He was a big, important man, and it would have been difficult to ignore his commands.

"Now then, young gentlemen—now then!" he said, with great diplomacy. "We don't mind a little fun, but isn't this going too far? Don't you think you've had enough of it?"

"Just about!" mumbled Tunstall feeling his front teeth.

The Whitelands crowd made a final rush and the Greendale force was routed. Mitchell and Co. went staggering down the platform, "beaten to the wide

"Trophies!" said Dick Sylvester briskly. "Better pick up these caps and things you chaps. They're trophies of the victory."

"What-ho! Rather!" said Tim Charters, as he secured a couple of caps. "The spoils of war."

"Hullo! This is a rummy looking headgear," said Dick Sylvester, as he secured a bright orange-coloured cap, and dusted it. "Never seen one like this before. Must be something new at Greendale."

"Who does it belong to?" asked somebody.

Dick glanced inside.

"Mitchell, by Jove," he grinned. "This is rich, you fellows! We've bagged Roddy Mitchell's cap! This is a trophy, if you like!"

But even the skipper of the Whitelands Fourth did not quite realise that this particular trophy was, indeed, a prize amongst prizes.

CHAPTER IV

THE TROPHY

Within five minutes all signs of the fight had vanished. Dick Sylvester and Co. were sitting sedately in a compartment of the local train. And Roddy Mitchell and Co. had vanished. In all probability they had decided that it would be safer for them to proceed to Greendale School on foot. Better than taking the risk of arriving at Greendale St. Mary, only to find

a still bigger crowd of Whitelands fellows at the little station. They had had enough scrapping for one afternoon.

"It'll be a lesson to them for the rest of the term," said Dick comfortably. "Nothing like starting right. If these Greendale fatheads think that they can handle a Whitelands fellow with impunity, they've made a mistake. We've put them in their places on the first day of term—and we'll take care to keep 'em there!"

"Hear, hear!"

By the time the little station of Greendale St. Mary was reached the juniors were all feeling thoroughly satisfied with themselves. They were glad that the old rivalry between Whitelands College and Greendale School had burst into full flame, and it was all to the good that Mitchell and Co. had received a sharp lesson at the outset.

The unfortunate Goodman hardly received a thought, and it was not until a good hour after the rest had reached Whitelands that he turned up. His chums, Davis and Hunt, were in the quad, talking with some of the other fellows when Stanley Horatio came limping through the gateway, looking like something which the cat had rejected. He was still caked with mud and very grimy. Davis and Hunt ran across to meet him.

"How did you get here, Goody?"

"Hitch-hiked," said Goodman, in a thick tense voice. "Somebody gave me a lift—brought me as far as the village, and I walked the rest. By crackers! Those beastly Greendale rotters! Didn't you fellows see what happened?"

"You bet!" said Charlie Hunt. "We were looking out of our own carriage, but the train started before we could do anything."

"They chucked me out!" said Goodman, breathing hard. "Me, you know! They chucked me into a ditch!"

"Hard lines, Goody, old son," said Dick Sylvester, as he came up with a crowd of others.

"We've got to do something to wipe out the stain," roared Goodman. "I've been planning it as I came along. Who's with me? We'll go to Greendale and——"

"Steady, old man," interrupted the Fourth Form captain. "There's no need for that."

"No need for it!" echoed Goodman, aghast. "You're not going to let them get away with it, are you?"

"Well, I rather thought that the thing was settled——"

"Settled!" howled Goodman. "But what about the insult to Whitelands?"

"You don't know all the facts, old man," said Bob Davis soothingly. "As soon as the train arrived in Market Tunley we jumped on Mitchell and Co. and made mincemeat of them."

"Well, of course, that's different," admitted Goodman reluctantly. "But it's a swindle, all the same. I wanted to take a hand in that giddy reprisal, and now I'm dished." He looked at the others suspiciously. "You're sure you really made mincemeat of them?"

"For the love of Jiminy Cricket!" said Kenneth Pyne. "Dear old fellow, the battlefield was littered with debris by the time we had done. Haven't you noticed this priceless thick ear of mine? We picked up trophies by the dozen."

"Trophies?"

"And one particularly special trophy," nodded Dick Sylvester. "Mitchell's cap, to be exact."

And he pulled the orange-coloured headgear out of his pocket. Stanley Horatio Goodman took one look at it, his face went red, his eyes bulged, and he emitted a roar of triumph.

"Mitchell's cap!", he yelled. "By crackers! You *have* got a trophy!

"No need to make such a song about it——"

"What!" roared Goodman. "Don't you understand what you've got there?"

"Yes—a school cap. That's all."

"All!" grinned Goodman. "My dear chap, this cap is a trophy of trophies! It's a special sort of thing, only just brought into force at Greendale. This is the first day that Mitchell has worn it."

"So I imagined," said Dick, examining the cap with fresh interest.

"It's a thingummy of office."

"A which?"

"A—a symbol," said Goodman. "That's it! . A symbol of office! Only the junior captain of Greendale can wear that orange-coloured lid. And if he loses it, it's a tragedy."

"Then, dear boy, it's a tragedy," said Kenneth Pyne. "Because he's certainly lost it!"

"He won't be able to get another until next term," grinned Goodman, his good humour thoroughly restored. "Mitchell was telling me all about it. In fact, he said that if he ever lost his cap, it would be a sign that he isn't fit to be junior skipper. And he can't get another one, even if he pays five hundred quid for it. His headmaster won't allow it."

"My only aunt!" said Dick, with a whistle. "Then it certainly is valuable! What a corking triumph for the first day of term! This ought to put those Greens in their place for weeks! They won't be able to show their faces."

A fag came along to inform Dick Sylvester that Mitchell wanted him on the 'phone—on important business.

"I think I can guess what that important business is," chuckled Dick. "Come on, you chaps! This is going to be good!"

They hurried into Mortimer's House, and arrived in the common room, where a telephone box was installed. There was a similar box in every common room at Whitelands.

"Hullo!" said Dick, as he picked up the receiver. "You there, Mitchell, old son?"

"Yes!" came an anxious voice. "Look here, Sylvester, did you happen to see an orange cap on the Tunley platform, after our scrap?"

"Why, yes," said Dick sweetly. "What about it?"

"Well, we don't want to keep up any animosity, do we?" came Mitchell's voice, with a display of over-eagerness. "We chucked Goody out of the train, and you wiped us up on the Market Tunley platform. That squares the thing, doesn't it?"

"So what?" said Dick cautiously.

"All right, then," said Mitchell, with relief. "About that cap. It's mine."

"I know it is," agreed Dick. "I've got it here. Your name's on the lining."

"Good egg! I've been worrying like the dickens about that cap, Sylvester. It's all right, I suppose? Not torn, or anything?"

"Only a bit dusty."

"Thank goodness! Can I have it?"

"If you come over to Whitelands, we'll see about it," replied Sylvester calmly.

"What do you mean—see about it?" came Mitchell's voice, with a slightly suspicious note.

"Well, if you can come here and get it, all well and good," replied Dick good-naturedly. "You're perfectly welcome to the cap, Mitchell—if you can come and get it."

"Thanks awfully," said Roddy Mitchell, with relief. "I'll come along right away, Sylvester. Cheerio."

"Cheerio," said Dick, grinning.

He hung up the receiver, and he found the other juniors looking at him in astonishment.

"What did you tell him?" asked Warren.

"I told him that if he can come along and get his cap, he's welcome to it."

"Why, you silly ass!" roared Goodman. "It's a trophy, and we're going to stick to it! You must be dotty, Sylvester!"

"Not quite so dotty as you think," chuckled Dick. "If Mitchell can get his cap, all well and good. But just let him try and get it!"

CHAPTER V

NOTHING DOING!

There were many chuckles when Dick Sylvester's meaning became known and understood. It would be one thing for Roddy Mitchell to present himself at Whitelands and ask for his skipper's cap—but quite another thing for him to secure it!

There was a good deal of activity during the twenty minutes. The fellows had been preparing for tea, but they forgot these important details. Tea, for the moment, was shelved. Tea had to wait.

When Roddy Mitchell arrived he was accompanied by Simmons and Ellis, his two study chums. None of the other Greendale fellows had come. It was, after all, a peaceful mission. Mitchell was now wearing an ordinary school cap, and he was painfully aware of the fact.

"Pax!" he said cautiously, as a crowd of Fourth Formers came across the quad to meet him.

"Pax it is," agreed Dick Sylvester. "We've wiped you up once to-day, Mitchell, and we're satisfied."

Roddy Mitchell grinned rather feebly.

"I came along to get my cap," he explained.

"So I understand," said Dick, while many of the other Fourth Formers chuckled. "Just come indoors, will you?"

"Indoors?"

"Into our common room," explained Dick.

"But why? Can't you give me the cap here?"

"Not very well," said Dick Sylvester. "It's in the common room, you see."

"But these other caps are here, if you want them," remarked Pat Warren obligingly. "I daresay their owners will be glad to get them back."

Several caps were handed over with much solemnity. Also one or two neckties, and a collar or-so. Mitchell and Co. took them gladly, and the Whitelands juniors were quite ready to let them go. As trophies, they were insignificant and hardly worth keeping.

"Hold everything," said Roddy, as they arrived at the doorway of Mortimer's House. "There's no—no jape about this, Sylvester?"

"Jape?" repeated Dick in astonishment.

"You're not going to jump on us when we get inside?"

"Didn't I tell you it was pax?" said Dick reproachfully. "I'm the junior skipper, and surely you can trust me? As long as you fellows don't start any trouble of your own accord, you can walk about Whitelands just as you please. Nobody will interfere with you."

"Good enough!" said Roddy Mitchell, with relief. "Right-ho, then! Lead on, Macduff!"

The three Greendale boys went indoors with a feeling of perfect confidence. They knew that they could take Dick Sylvester's word. They were ushered into the junior common room. The room was more or less crowded even before they arrived. Almost the entire Fourth had congregated there.

"Why all this fuss?" asked Mitchell, in astonishment.

"No fuss," said Dick, pointing. "There's your cap, Mitchell, old son. If you want it—try and get it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A roar of laughter went up and Roddy Mitchell and Co. became more certain than ever that there was something behind all this. They were not being interfered with, it is true, but there could be no doubt that the Whites were alive to some joke.

"Great Scott!" gurgled Mitchell suddenly.

He found himself looking at his orange-coloured cap. There it was, hanging on the wall, on the other side of the common room. But it wasn't hanging on an ordinary hook.

On the wall there was a large square of drawing board, and an amateur caricaturist had drawn an excellent sketch. It represented the head of a donkey, and yet, in some vague way, the face of the donkey bore a striking resemblance to Roddy Mitchell. And perched on the top of the donkey's head, between the ears, was the precious orange-coloured cap, held in place by a couple of drawing pins.

And this was not all. Underneath the sketch were the words: "Roddy Mitchell, skipper of the Greendale Junior School, wearing his Symbol of Office."

Mitchell and Co. were wearing sickly expressions as they gazed at that caricature. But they were in the lions' den, and they could not very well start any trouble.

"Very funny," said Roddy feebly. "You fellows will have your joke, won't you? Can I have my cap now?"

"Certainly," said Dick Sylvester agreeably. "Go ahead, my son—try and get it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Try and get it!" roared the Fourth in one yell.

"You—you funny lunatics!" roared Roddy Mitchell. "I don't believe you mean to let me have my cap at all!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But you told me to come over——"

"We wanted you to see your latest portrait," chuckled Dick. "Besides, what I said over the phone, I'll repeat now. If you can get your cap, Mitchell, you're welcome to it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's my skipper's cap," protested Mitchell, in alarm. "I only put it on to-day for the first time, and there'll be awful trouble. I shan't be able to get another."

"Exactly," said Dick Sylvester. "That's why we're keeping this one. We want it to be a constant reminder, Roddy, old son, that you and your fellow asses are everlastingly inferior to the Whites. If you can get that cap back, you'll prove that you're our masters."

Mitchell and Co., utterly flabbergasted, took their departure. Outside in the lane, they halted. Simmons and Ellis were looking furious and hot, but Roddy Mitchell himself was only anxious.

"The rotters," said Simmons fiercely. "The spoofing, kidding, rotters!"

"A bunch of cads!" said Ellis indignantly.

Their leader shook his head.

"Rats!" he said. "Don't talk rot!"

"Yes, but——"

"But nothing," interrupted Mitchell. "If we were in their position, we should do exactly the same."

"Eh?"

"Exactly the same!" repeated Mitchell. "They've bagged my cap, and they're holding it as a trophy. I don't blame them. All the same, we've got to get it back!"

His chums adjusted their focus, so to speak.

"Well, if you put it like that, I suppose you're right," admitted Simmons, cooling down. "And when you come to think of it, Roddy, it was partly your own fault."

"How do you make that out?"

"Well, didn't you tell Goody about your skipper's cap?"

"That's nothing," said Mitchell. "They would have found out, sooner or later. And it's just as well to have this thing settled straight away. I'm going to get my cap back this evening—now."

"You're crazy!"

"It only requires nerve," said Mitchell coolly. "Think it over, my sons. All those Whites have now gone out of the common-room, and we can be certain that they've left my cap hanging on the wall. You see, they'll never dream that I should be rash enough to come back straight away."

"Why assume that they've left the common-room?"

"It's teatime," said Roddy. "They'll be in their own studies. We can take advantage of all this. Now, you fellows have got to stay outside here, behind the wall."

"You hopeless idiot!" said Simmons. "You're not going to try to get in—alone?"

"It's the only way," replied Roddy. "You fellows stay here, and be on the look-out. If I can grab the cap I shall bolt across the quad and sling it over the wall. As soon as you get it run like the wind—and keep on running."

"That'll be easy enough," said Ellis. "But what about you?"

He was off before they could protest further. He slipped in through one of the gates that led into the rear drive, and soon came to the back of Mortimer's House. There was only a very small section of a quiet square to be crossed, and nobody was in sight.

"Good egg!" murmured Mitchell.

He took the precaution of stuffing his school cap into his pocket. Then he walked boldly across, and within a few seconds he was inside Mortimer's. His heart was beating rapidly now, and he was rather startled at his own audacity. He sped down the passage, and he was overjoyed to find that the place was deserted. He could hear shouts of laughter coming from various studies, accompanied by the rattle of crockery. As he had assumed, the juniors were at tea.

At last he arrived outside the door of the common-room. He had his fingers on the handle, and he was about to turn it, when the door opened—and Enoch Wicks and Crocker, of the Fourth, came out. They stared at him open-mouthed.

"Mitchell!" bleated Enoch Wicks.

Roddy Mitchell took one quick glance beyond the two Fourth Formers, and he saw that the common-room was otherwise empty. It was now or never—and Wicks and Crocker, weedy and pasty, the sneaks of the Fourth, were not going to stop him!

"I'm sorry about this," said Roddy tensely, "but it's just got to be done!"

Wham! Zam!

His right fist came out and struck the flabby Enoch in the chest: his left swung round and caught Crocker on the nose. They both went over

howling wildly. In a flash Roddy Mitchell shot round them, dived into the common-room, and slammed the door.

Click! He turned the key in the lock and looked round triumphantly. There, on the wall, all present and correct, was his precious cap.

"Hi! Help!" came a bellow from the other side of the door. "Raiders! Greens! Rescue, Fourth!"

Mitchell sped across the common-room, tore his cap down, and leaped for one of the windows. Diving headlong out he found, to his dismay, that a number of fellows were coming across the square from Little Side. They started running towards him, in order to head him off.

"Crumbs!" gasped Roddy.

He swerved and dashed into the quad—just in time to see a bunch of Fourth Formers pouring out of the main door of Mortimer's House. As he tore off towards the school wall they were on his heels like a pack of wolves.

"Grab him!"

"He's got that cap!"

"He can't escape—he's trapped!"

And this seemed to be the case. Another group of juniors stood in the gateway, and it was quite certain that they would never allow Mitchell to pass. But Mitchell had no intention of attempting the impossible. He was thankful that he had taken the earlier precautions. Simmons and Ellis were waiting for him in the lane.

"Coming over!" he yelled, at the top of his voice.

He had nearly reached the wall, and he slung the cap upwards and outwards— But at the crucial moment a gust of wind came along, caught the cap, and caused it to hover in mid-air. Then, to Roddy Mitchell's chagrin and disappointment, it fell—inside!

"Collar it!" yelled Pat Warren.

In a flash the cap was seized, and Roddy Mitchell found himself surrounded by a hot, excited throng.

"Well, I nearly did it!" he said breathlessly.

"You—you bounder!" grinned Dick Sylvester, slapping Roddy on the back. "Nice work—nearly! You almost deserved to get away with it for your cheek."

"Blow that gust of wind," growled Mitchell. "Simmons and Ellis would have been off like a shot—"

"I don't doubt it," nodded Dick. "But this ought to prove that the cap is our property, my lad—ours by right of conquest."

"Hadn't we better put it under lock and key—or hide it?" suggested Will Osborne. "If we don't Greendale fatheads will be after it day and night!"

"We shall!" said Mitchell frankly.

"And as I said before—try and get it!" said Dick Sylvester. "As for locking it away, there's nothing doing, my sons. It would simply be an admission that we're afraid of these pitiful Greens!"

"By crackers! So it would!" agreed Stan Goodman.

"So it will remain in the common-room," said Dick firmly. "I'm not saying that we shall keep it pinned up, as it was. That was a bit too exposed, perhaps. But it'll be in the common-room—in full sight."

"Good enough," said Mitchell, nodding. "I've failed this time, but what you've just said, Sylvester, is a challenge—and I'm jolly well going to get my cap back!"

"No burgling!" said Pat Warren warningly. "No sneaking in at dead of night—"

"Be yourself!" interrupted Dick. "Think I'd risk the sack by breaking bounds? I'll promise that we won't make any raids after bedtime—or even during lesson time. We'll get the lid back in a sportsmanlike way, and at a time of day when all you fellows are free."

"Spoken like a man," grinned Dick Sylvester.

"That's my skipper's cap," said Roddy, a grim note creeping into his voice, "and I've got to have it."

He nodded to the Whites in general and walked off. And the Whitelands Fourth knew that the war was now definitely and irrevocably declared.

CHAPTER VI

THE NEW BOY

"Well, it was a fizzle," said Ellis bluntly.

They were walking across the fields towards Greendale. The River Tunn was on their left, and the countryside was looking very peaceful.

"A lot of fuss over a cap!" said Simmons gruffly.

Roddy Mitchell shook his head.

"It isn't the cap, old man," he replied. "That's really nothing. It's what the cap stands for. These Whitelands fellows have captured it, and they mean to hold it. It's a trophy, signifying that we're the bottom dogs. And until we recover it we *shall* be the bottom dogs."

"It's all very well to talk about recovering it, but how the dickens is it going to be done?" asked Ellis gloomily. "They'll protect the cap like—like the Crown Jewels! They'll probably have guards on duty all the time."

When they arrived at Greendale they were immediately surrounded by an excited crowd. Verner and Tunstall ran up with Hickman and a number of others.

"You didn't get it?" echoed Verner, aghast, when he heard the news.

"No," growled Mitchell. "They're keeping it—as a trophy of war!"

There was a roar of indignation and fury. And the excitement increased when Mitchell explained all the details. The Greendale Junior School was seething.

"It's a challenge!" said Tunstall. "That's what it is, Mitchell—a challenge! Beaten by the Whites on the first day of term!"

"If I haven't got my cap back within a week," said Mitchell, "and if I haven't made the Whites sing small within the same period, I'll resign from the captaincy."

"That's fair enough," said Tunstall. "Let's back him up, you fellows. We'll give him a week."

"Hear, hear!"

And so the matter was more or less settled. But Roddy Mitchell knew that he had a heavy task in front of him.

Most of the boys broke up and went indoors, to their own studies, or into the gym or the common-room. And Roddy Mitchell found himself looking in some surprise at a new face. Simmons and Ellis were talking with a slim, slight junior, who was evidently a newcomer.

"Hullo!" said Roddy, walking up. "Who's this?"

"New chap," said Simmons, with a grin. "I don't know what his name is yet, but I've got a good nickname for him."

"Oh?" said the new boy. "And what's that?"

"Sissy!" said Simmons blandly.

But the new boy, instead of colouring, merely grinned.

"It's my misfortune," he said calmly. "I know I've got a slim figure, and small hands and feet—and it's not the first time I've been told I look like a girl. But you needn't chip me about it."

The new Greendale boy was certainly a bit girlish. His skin was fresh and fair and his eyes were of innocent blue. He had a small mouth, and

a very feminine nose. Yet those blue eyes of his contained a mischievous twinkle, while Roddy Mitchell & Co. gave him the once-over.

"Well, what's your name, anyhow?" asked Mitchell.

"Denis Langley."

"Denis Langley?" repeated Mitchell, screwing up his face. "That's rummy! There's something very familiar about that name."

"That's not improbable," remarked the new boy. "You're thinking of my pater, I expect."

Roddy started.

"Why, yes, of course. Are you the son of Denis Langley, the famous comedian who's now appearing at the Frivolity Theatre?"

"Yes," admitted Langley.

"My sons, this is interesting," said Mitchell, regarding the new boy keenly. "Greendale is looking up! Jolly glad to have you here, Langley, my lad! I saw your pater in a film the other day, and he was a scream. If you're a chip off the old block you must be a stunning actor."

"Well, I hope to go on the boards one day," said Langley easily.

"And lemme see," went on Roddy, frowning thoughtfully. "I was reading something about you in one of the papers during the holidays."

"Yes?" murmured Langley.

"Weren't you mixed up in some rag over at Richmond?"

"And what a rag!" said Langley. "My old school is at Richmond."

"Then you're the chap I read about in the paper," said Roddy Mitchell with a whistle. "My hat!" He turned to his chums. "He looks as innocent as a babe, you fellows—but, according to what I read, he's an unholy terror!"

In the common-room that evening Denis Langley was very much of a "lion." Nobody had taken much notice of him at first, but when it became generally known that he was the son of the world-famous screen star, Denis Langley, his popularity was assured. For Denis Langley senior was an extraordinarily clever comedian. Mr. Langley was not a comic of the "red-faced" type, but a polished actor on the West End stage. His family, indeed, was a very exclusive one. The Greendale fellows soon discovered, in fact, that one of Langley's uncles was a bishop, and another an admiral in the Navy.

Quite a number of Langley's exploits came out, and were much talked about. There was no doubt about it—Denis Langley, of Greendale School, was a terror. At his previous school he had been the leader of all the mischief. His very air of innocence had saved him from many a dire scrape.

And before the evening was over Roddy Mitchell conceived a brilliant idea. Somebody had asked Langley if he had ever impersonated a girl, and Langley had promptly laughed coyly, and had replied in a sweet feminine voice. In fact, he had startled everybody.

"One of my favourite roles," he admitted, in a modest voice. "But I couldn't do much of it towards the end, at my other school. You see, everybody got accustomed to it."

"But nobody here knows you!" said Mitchell shrewdly. "Nobody at Whitelands, anyhow. And you're a Greendale chap now, my son—you're one of us."

"And jolly pleased to be," said Langley, nodding.

"You'll have to help us in our campaign against Sylvester and Co.," continued Mitchell. "My son, there's a chance for you to distinguish yourself in your first week at Greendale! Are you game to go to Whitelands tomorrow afternoon, rigged out as a girl, and——"

"I'm game for anything," said Langley promptly. "Just try me!"

"You'll do!" chuckled Roddy Mitchell.

And at Whitelands the Fourth Form was very much on the alert. A few fellows were in the common-room, momentarily expecting some activity.

"Those Green bounders are certain to be here during the evening," said Tom Pettitt. "But they're not going to get that trophy, are they?"

"Not likely!"

And there was a roar of laughter from the others as they glanced at Roddy Mitchell's cap. There was, perhaps, some sound reason for their confidence. The cap was in full sight, but it was no longer pinned openly on the wall. It was inside a little metal case—the latter being, in fact, a commonplace bathroom fitment. Some genius had borrowed it from upstairs, and had screwed it on to the common-room wall. The door was securely locked, but in the centre of that door there was a square of plate-glass. And there, within the cabinet, in full sight, was Roddy Mitchell's orange cap.

"We've kept our word, anyhow," said Dick Sylvester. "We told Mitchell that his cap would remain in the common-room—and here it is. But, by Jingo, if any of those Greens make a sudden dash and try to get the thing, they'll find themselves dished."

"Ha. ha ha!"

"They can't pull the cabinet down, because it's screwed on too hard," said Dick. "And if they break the glass somebody is bound to hear. I rather think we've got them on toast."

But nothing happened during the evening, and after locking-up the Fourth Formers knew that the cap was safe. Roddy Mitchell had given his promise that nothing would be done in the "off" hours.

Next morning Whitelands was busy in settling down. Very little work was done in the form rooms, but most of the masters were quite satisfied if their forms made some pretence of shaking back into place.

"We shall have to be jolly careful this afternoon," said Dick Sylvester, after dinner, as he stood on the steps of Mortimer's House in the sunshine. "Mitchell and Co. did nothing yesterday evening, but they're certain to get busy to-day. They'll probably attempt to get into the school by means of some dodge."

"Well, they won't be lucky," chuckled Osborne. "We're going to take it in turns to keep guard during the afternoon. I'd like to see any of those Greendale fellows——"

"Hullo, Hullo!" drawled Kenneth Pyne, as he gazed towards the gates. "What have we here, dear old boys? Well, well! Surely this cannot be—— For the love of Jiminy Cricket!"

A stranger had just wandered through the gateway; a smallish, be-whiskered gentleman in a frock coat and battered topper. He wore enormous horn-rimmed spectacles and peered about him inquisitively.

At a casual glance he seemed genuine enough, but Sylvester and Co. were on the lookout for anything suspicious. And if this wasn't suspicious——! The be-whiskered old gentleman looked decidedly fishy.

"Poor old Mitchell!" said Dick sadly. "Surely he doesn't think he can get away with this? I rather think we'd better go across to this elderly bloke and find out what he wants."

"I rather think we had!" said Kenneth Pyne drily.

CHAPTER VII

NOT QUITE A SUCCESS!

The bloke with the whiskers peered amiably at the schoolboys as they surrounded him. And the Fourth Formers, for their part, gave him the most pitying looks. For it was as obvious as daylight that the whiskers were false, and that the enormous spectacles were unnecessary.

"Can we do anything for you, sir?" asked Dick politely.

"Eh? Yes, yes, to be sure," said the be-whiskered old bloke, in a hoarse false kind of voice. "Thank you, boys. Thank you! I—er—I am anxious to look over your school."

"Particularly Mortimer's House, no doubt, sir?" asked Kenneth Pyne blandly.

"Yes, yes! Exactly," said the stranger. "How remarkable! You are quite right, my boy—particularly Mortimer's House. That is to say——"

"And the common-room—the junior common-room—will presumably be of special entertainment to you, sir?" asked Dick Sylvester grimly.

"Eh? Well, I don't know——"

"Come off it!" said Dick, making a grab at the whiskers. "Ellis, my lad, you're hopeless!"

"I—I—I——" stuttered the stranger sheepishly.

Dick gave the whiskers a jerk, and they came away in his hand. John Ellis, of Greendale, stood there looking alarmed and flabbergasted.

"Oh, my goodness!" he said blankly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My poor lunatic, it was simply dire!" said Dick sympathetically. "Your voice gave you away in a tick."

"I—I was half afraid of it," said Ellis glumly. "You rotters! I was all right otherwise, wasn't I?"

"First rate!" said Stan Goodman, with heavy sarcasm. "A wonderful disguise, my lad. Except for the whiskers and the spectacles and the wig and the topper you were pretty good!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The crowd of Fourth Formers gathered round menacingly, and Ellis looked at them with a wary eye.

"Well, I've failed," he said carelessly. "Just my tough luck. I'd better be going."

"Oh yeah?" said Stan Goodman, reaching out a hand. "You surely don't think you're going to walk out like that, do you? The nerve! Calmly barging into our quad as though you owned the place! What are we going to do with him, you chaps?"

"Duck him in the fountain pool?" suggested Pat Warren.

"Why not?"

"Hi, leggo!" howled Ellis wildly. "You—you fatheads! A master might spot you——"

"A chance," said Dick, "that we've got to take!"

He and his chums were apparently indifferent to the risks. Johnny Ellis was seized, by many hands; he was rushed across to the fountain pool and he was pitched into the water head first.

Splash!

The unfortunate Ellis vanished under the surface, and when he came up again he was looking very much like a drowned rat. He hauled himself out, and the White-lands fellows backed away yelling with laughter.

"Crawl back to Mitchell and give him our compliments," said Dick sweetly. "Tell him that he'd better try something a little more convincing."

Ellis duly crawled away, leaving a trail of wetness behind him. And the Fourth Formers grinned cheerily.

"Well, so much for that dodge," said Goodman. "I'm surprised at Mitchell. I thought he had more brains. Surely he doesn't think that we can be sucked in by such idiotic wheezes?"

"Well, it hardly seems up to Mitchell's standard," admitted Dick. "Perhaps he hasn't got into the swing of things yet. The term's hardly started, remember. He's been too hasty in getting out a wheeze——"

"By crackers!" said Goodman, with a jump.

A telegraph boy had just ridden briskly through the gateway, and he was now pedalling towards Mortimer's House, and there was something about the appearance of that telegraph boy which caused all the Fourth Formers to look at him very, very closely. In the first place, his bicycle was too red. It was glaringly red and had obviously been freshly enamelled that morning. And the telegraph messenger's uniform was somehow reminiscent of stage "props." The peaked cap was too big, and the tunic was too small. Besides, this particular telegraph boy was a total stranger to the school.

"Do you see what I see?" murmured Kenneth Pyne.

"After him!" roared Goodman, in alarm.

For the telegraph boy had reached the steps of Mortimer's House, and was already dismounting. Before he could make a quick dive into the building he was seized and held.

"I—I've got a telegram!" he stammered. I—I mean——"

"Simmons!" yelled Pat Warren.

"Oh, crumbs!" said the telegraph messenger bleakly.

His face was ruddy—extraordinarily ruddy. There was a kind of lump on his nose, but it did not look convincing. Goodman reached out a fist and knocked the lump off. Then he pulled one of the telegraph messenger's eyebrows, and jerked this off, too.

"Hi, steady!" gasped Simmons, of Greendale.

"Another of 'em!" said Dick Sylvester grimly. "What's the game, my pitiful chump? Surely Mitchell doesn't believe that this sort of thing can fool us, does he?"

Fred Simmons grunted.

"You're too jolly cute for us," he growled. "What's the good of trying a jolly decent dodge like this?"

He looked mournfully across the quad, and was just in time to see Mr. Mortimer, the Housemaster, strolling through the gateway in the company of an exceedingly dainty and pretty girl. Simmons tried his utmost to keep a little glint out of his eyes, and succeeded. He turned his gaze quickly away.

"Well, you've got me," he said resignedly. "It's a fizzle. What are you going to do?"

"Duck you in the fountain pool," said Goodman, without hesitation.

"We can't do that, ass," said Pat Warren. "Not with old Mortimer looking on—I say, that's a jolly pretty girl with him!"

"Eh?" said Goodman, starting round. "By crackers! I wonder who the dickens she can be?"

"Somebody's sister, I suppose," said Dick. "We'd better finish with this ass straight away. We'll let him off the ducking though."

"Just bump him, eh?" suggested Pettitt.

And the proposal was carried unanimously. Simmons, much to his indignation, was bumped hard. He was bumped several times. Then he was allowed to get on his bicycle and escape. And as he cycled out through the gateway he was grinning happily—almost forgetting his aches.

"They think they're jolly smart—but we're going to diddle 'em yet!" he murmured joyously. "My only Sunday topper! That chap Langley is a marvel!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE SWEET YOUNG THING.

Denis Langley was perfectly comfortable and at ease.

Walking sedately beside Mr. Horace Mortimer he had a sensation of absolute security. What a bit of luck it had been running into the Housemaster in the lane! He could not have entered Whitelands in a more con-

vincing manner! For here he was, escorted by one of the masters! Mr. Mortimer had readily offered to take the "young lady" into the school grounds—and here "she" was, very self-possessed and very confident.

Nobody could be blamed for failing to detect *this* deception. Langley's impersonation was a sheer triumph. Not only did he look the part, but his acting was perfect. His very walk, his very look, his every action—all were supreme. Indeed, before starting out from Greendale, Langley had succeeded in fooling several senior boys of his own school. So what chance was there for these Whitelands juniors?

It was incredible—ridiculous—that this remarkably pretty girl could really be a boy. It was such an outrageous idea that nobody ever thought of it. For a more charming girl never existed—at least, so far as appearances went.

Dick Sylvester and Co. saw a slim, graceful schoolgirl of about fifteen. Her skirt was fashionably short, revealing neat silk-clad legs. Her high-heeled shoes were small, and her delicate fingers were adorned with one or two simple rings. Her frock was a light confection, with a delightful little hat to match. And from beneath that hat smiled one of the prettiest faces that the Whitelands juniors had ever seen. The blue eyes were frank and friendly, and there was something roguish about the girl's little nose, and her small, resolute mouth. Exquisite little waves of hair peeped out from beneath her hat, and added to the general charm of her appearance.

In a word, this girl was a stunner.

Mr. Horace Mortimer hadn't the faintest idea that she was anything but what she pretended to be. Her voice was soft and alluring; it contained a note of truly feminine sweetness. It was a voice that one could listen to for hours.

But then, Denis Langley had every chance. Not only was he slight in figure, and small of feature, but he was the son of a brilliant actor-father! This sort of thing was second nature to him—it was born in him. And being a youngster of colossal nerve, he carried the thing through with a sang-froid that was quite remarkable.

Mr. Mortimer paused as he and his companion approached the centre of the quad.

"I think you said that you want to find Wilson, of the Fourth Form?" he asked smilingly.

"Yes, my brother," said the girl, with a nod. "I do hope that Harry is here."

"Oh, I think he is certain to be," said Mr. Mortimer. "Just one moment, Warren," he added. "Do you mind coming here?"

"Certainly, sir," said Pat Warren promptly.

He and Dick Sylvester and Goodman and a crowd of others came up, doffing their caps deferentially and looking at the sweet newcomer with admiring eyes.

"This is Miss Wilson," said the Housemaster. "She would like one of you to find her brother."

"By Jingo!" said Warren. "Wilson never told us he had a sister, sir."

"Was there any real reason why he should do so?"

"Er—no, I suppose not, sir," said Pat. "Awfully pleased to meet you, Miss Wilson. Your brother is in our Form—belongs to Selby's House. I'm Warren."

"And I'm Goodman, of Mortimer's House," said the burly Stanley Horatio cheerfully.

They all swarmed round her, and the deceiver was in no way flustered. He had expected this. It was by no means his first attempt at this sort of thing, and he was a past master in the art.

"Well, if you don't mind, Miss Wilson, I will leave you in the hands of these boys," said the Housemaster. "I have no doubt that they will fly to obey any commands that you may give."

"Thank you so much!" said Langley softly.

Mr. Mortimer went off, and Langley knew that he was now, indeed, in the very midst of the enemy. But he was enjoying himself immensely. This jape was going to be rich. The Whitelands fellows were fooled up to the gills. Even Dick Sylvester, alert for trickery, suspected nothing.

"So you're Harry Wilson's sister?" asked Warren, with interest. "This is fine, Miss Wilson! I hope you'll come down often!"

"I can't promise that," smiled this remarkable young lady, giving Pat a dazzling glance. "I'm rather annoyed with Harry for not having mentioned me."

"We'll scrag him when we find him," declared Goodman. "Any chap who has such a ripping sister ought to boast about her! By crackers! I've never seen a lovelier—I—I mean—Crumbs! Where's Wilson?" he added, looking round in confusion.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Anybody seen Wilson?" sang out Tom Pettitt.

"He's gone out," said Morgan, of Selby's, as he came up. "Well, you chaps, I hope you're going to introduce me."

"This is Miss Wilson—Wilson's sister."

"My hat!" said Morgan. "And that ass, Wilson, never told us!"

Roddy Mitchell had made it his business to find out that Harry Wilson was going over to Market Tunley that afternoon, with one or two Fourth Formers of his own House. Thus the coast was clear.

"It's too bad," said Langley, with a little laugh. "Of course, I didn't tell my brother that I was coming, and so I can't really blame him. Have you any idea when he'll be back?"

"About teatime, I think," said Morgan.

"Good egg!" chimed in Goodman. "Perhaps you'll allow us to show you round the school, Miss Wilson?"

They all pressed round her, offering their services. But Langley, after glancing from one to the other, moved a step nearer to Stan Goodman.

"I would just love you to show me round, if you don't mind," she said coyly, linking her arm with Goodman's. "You will be nice and escort me, won't you?"

And Stanley Horatio Goodman went hot and cold all over, and bestowed a triumphant glance on the others.

CHAPTER IX

A LITTLE MISTAKE!

"Well, I'm blowed!" said Dick Sylvester, scratching his head.

"Nerve!" said Pat Warren, indignantly.

They watched in consternation as "Miss Wilson" walked off arm-in-arm with the victorious Goodman. But, of course, they could do nothing. She had chosen for herself, and although the other fellows were mystified regarding her choice they could not very well object.

"But why did she choose him?" asked Morgan in astonishment.

"There's no telling with girls!" said Pat sadly.

"Ye gods and little fishes!" ejaculated Tim Charters, with a sudden jump.

He was staring at the main gates. The others stared, too. Goodman and his charge had vanished round one of the buildings, and the quad was now empty, except for one or two groups of juniors. But a stranger was just entering, and there was something suspicious about his appearance.

"Oh-ho!" murmured Dick. "What have we here?"

The stranger was a smallish man, attired in blue overalls. He carried a little bag of tools slung over his shoulder, and a greasy peaked cap was set at an angle on his head. His face was rather ruddy, and he wore ginger side whiskers.

"Come on!" said Dick grimly.

They bore down upon the new arrival and surrounded him. Their expressions, as they examined him more closely, became more determined than ever.

"Well?" said Dick. "Who are you, and what do you want?"

"Afternoon, young gent!" said the newcomer briskly. "Now, about these 'ere telephones——"

"What telephones?"

"There's some repair work to be done in Mr. Mortimer's House, ain't there?" said the man. "Line's out of order in the box in the common-room——"

"Common-room!" roared all the Fourth Formers.

"'Ere!" protested the stranger. "There's no need to——"

"Cheese it, Mitchell," said Dick, with a pitying note in his voice. "My hat! You surely didn't think that you had spoofed us, did you?"

"Mitchell?" repeated the man. "'Ere, what's the game, young gent? I've come 'ere about the telephones——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Dick Sylvester had reached forward and one of the side whiskers had come off in his hand. The next moment Roddy Mitchell himself was revealed. He looked at the juniors in a startled way at first, and then his expression became sheepish.

"Dished and diddled!" he said complainingly. "My goodness! You chaps are too smart for us!"

"Try again, Roddy—and try something a little better," said Dick genially. "My poor, deluded ass! We knew in a flash that you were a fake."

"Your best to sneak into our common-room, eh?" chuckled Dick. "And once there, you thought you'd grab your precious cap! We're not quite so green, Roddy, my son!"

"What are we going to do with him?" asked Warren.

"Duck him in the fountain pool and chuck him out."

"Hi!" howled Mitchell. "You—you——"

His protests were useless. He was dragged to the fountain pool, ducked in, and then rushed off the premises. He was deposited in the middle of the road outside the gates. And a yelling crowd of Fourth Formers watched him bolting down the lane—but they did not see the satisfied grin on Roddy's face. The red herrings were successfully drawing the Whites' attention away from the real scent.

"That's the way to deal with 'em!" said Dick Sylvester, grinning. "We'll show these Greendale fatheads that we're not blind."

"Yes, rather," said Sam Kennedy. "It doesn't matter what disguises they come in, we'll spot them!"

"Here, I say!" gasped Bob Davis suddenly. "Look! Look at that man coming round the gym!"

They all turned round and stared across the quad. A little wizened man had just appeared in sight from round an angle of the gymnasium. He was looking up at the building with peering interest. He was an untidy man.

with a hat that was too large for him—and to make things worse, he wore huge, blue-tinted spectacles.

"Well, my hat!" said Dick indignantly. "This is getting too thick! There are swarms of the beggars! Come on!"

"Hear, hear!"

"No questions—no inquiries," said Dick. "We'll duck this one straight away."

"Good egg!"

There was a rush, and the little man in the blue spectacles gave a howl of astonishment and alarm as the juniors swarmed round him and swept him off his feet.

"Good heavens!" he panted. "What the—. Release me! How—how dare you? You unmitigated young rascals—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Into the pool with him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Stop!" shrieked the unhappy victim. "Desist I shall complain to your Headmaster—. Good heavens! This—this is outrageous! You young hooligans! I command you to release me—"

"Cheese it, you Greendale fathead!"

With a big rush the unhappy man was whirled across to the fountain pool, he was raised up in the air, and he was allowed to drop.

Splash!

He descended into the water with much noise, and he wallowed about helplessly. Pat Warren leaned forward and grabbed a handful of the stranger's long, untidy grey hair.

"Off with this wig!" he said cheerfully.

But the stranger gave a fiendish yell of agony—and Pat found that the "wig" refused to come! A startled, anxious expression came over Pat Warren's face.

"It's stuck!" he gasped.

"You young demons!" screamed the victim. "Where is Mr. Selby? Where is my friend, Mr. Selby? Find him at once! I come to this school innocently enough, and before I know where I am, I find myself beset by—by hoodlums—"

"Great corks!" gurgled Charlie Hunt. "We've made a bloomer, you chaps."

"What-a-at!"

"He's not disguised at all—he's a real man," babbled Hunt.

"Oh, my only sainted aunt!"

"Cave!"

They bolted in all directions. As it happened they were only just in time. For as they vanished into various doorways and arches the stranger pulled himself out of the fountain pool, and Mr. Adam Selby, the most unpopular Housemaster at Whitelands, came into view.

"Help—help!" moaned the stranger feebly.

"My dear Potterby!" shouted Mr. Selby, aghast. "Upon my soul! What on earth are you doing in this condition?"

He ran up, and helped the luckless Mr. Potterby towards his House, listening to the latter's tale of woe as he did so.

"Outrageous—abominable" came Mr. Selby's indignant voice. "Yes, to be sure! I shall make inquiries, my dear Potterby. I will look into this and find out who is responsible. An outrage—a positive outrage!"

They vanished, and Dick Sylvester and Co. mopped their heated brows.

"Phew!" whispered Dick. "That was a narrow shave, you chaps! We shall have to go easy after this."

"It's becoming a nightmare!" said Pat Warren breathlessly.

CHAPTER X

STANLEY HORATIO ENJOYS HIMSELF

Stanley Horatio Goodman hardly knew whether he was on his head or his heels.

In the first place, he was gratified and overjoyed by the fact that "Miss Wilson" clung to his arm closely and affectionately. There was no getting away from it—her delicate little hand was gripping his arm quite strongly. And Goodman was not used to this kind of thing.

There was something clinging about her, something so excessively feminine. Which, considering that "she" was masculine, was all the more surprising! But Denis Langley was an extraordinarily clever young actor, and in Goodman he had selected the easiest of all victims.

Needless to say, Langley had received precise instructions from Roddy Mitchell before starting out, and his selection of Goodman was deliberate. He had never seen Goodman before, but there could be no mistaking the burly, bluff Fourth Former.

Langley was going to work cautiously and with deliberate cunning. He had already passed the test and was not suspected. He could wander about with Stanley Horatio and nobody would ask awkward questions. Langley knew that Mitchell himself had already visited Whitelands, attired in the garb of the telephone man—and this had actually been the signal for Langley's own activity.

He was filled with inward amusement. These Whitelands fellows thought they were very clever to unmask the tricksters one by one, but little did they realise that they, themselves, had been fooled from the start! Little did they guess that Roddy Mitchell had *intended* them to see through all those imperfect disguises! It was part and parcel of the plot. The one disguise that was to be kept a real secret until the last moment was Langley's—and Langley was doing his job superbly.

There was no immediate hurry. The last of the supposed raiders had gone, and now the Whites would be on the alert for more. Time for Langley to have a little fun at Goodman's expense—and the innocent Goody was without any suspicion.

At the moment he was standing in the quad, pointing out the beauties of the architecture to his fair companion. And "she," for her part, listened with intent interest to all he had to say.

"Of course, it's a frightfully old place," remarked Goodman proudly. "So jolly old that lots of people don't know when it was first built."

"Yes isn't it wonderful?" murmured the supposed girl, giving his arm another squeeze. "So rugged, so eloquent of strength. Do you know, these buildings remind me of you!"

Goodman felt himself going limp.

"I—I beg your pardon?"

"Rugged and eloquent of strength," murmured "Miss Wilson." "Oh, I do love ruggedness and strength!"

Oh, rather!" mumbled Goodman breathlessly.

"Isn't your first name Stanley? Won't you let me call you Stan?" went on this extraordinary girl. "It's such a wonderful name—Stan."

"I—I—I——"

"If you do, I'll let you call me Pamela," murmured Langley coyly. "Do you like my name—Pamela?"

"It's—it's topping!" gasped Goodman.

He happened to glance round, and he found those blue eyes turned full upon him. They were charged with gentle admiration, and he gazed into their liquid depths, and a kind of lump threatened to choke him.

"I—I—— Oh, my hat!" he panted. "Let's—let's go and have a look at the other buildings."

Stanley Horatio was now completely in the grip of his companion. He was like putty in "her" hands.

"Must we look at more buildings?" she whispered, in that slightly-husky, alluring voice of hers. "Oh, please, Stan! Can't we go indoors?"

"Yes, if—if you want to," stammered Goodman.

"I want to see your study," said the "girl" tenderly. "The room where you work—the room where you spend so much of your time. I want to sit in the chair that you sit in!"

"Oh, corks!"

"I like you, Stan," she went on dreamily. "You're so different from the other boys. So big—so powerful—so strong!"

At the moment, Stanley Horatio Goodman was feeling about as powerful and strong as a half-set table jelly.

"Let's—let's go indoors, then!" he said, in a kind of gulp.

Wilson's alleged sister was coming to the conclusion that the time was ripe for action. As "she" and Goodman went down the corridor, Langley reluctantly came to the conclusion that he would have to put an end to this little comedy. For one thing, Mitchell and Co. were waiting for him outside—it had all been arranged. They would be quite close, and at a given signal they would swarm into the quad in force—pretty nearly the whole of the Greendale Junior School. Everything would depend upon speed.

The next item on the programme was to locate the common room. Langley, of course, had never been to Whitelands before, and it would have been fatal to make any reference to the prized trophy. With Goodman as an innocent accomplice, however, everything was comparatively easy.

"Isn't there a big room where all you boys congregate together? Where you talk about football and boxing?"

"You mean the common room?"

"Yes," "she" murmured. "Is it anywhere near?"

"Only down the corridor," replied Goodman. "We'll go along there, if you'd like to see it."

"I should love to," said the "maiden," pressing his arm with affectionate force. "Oh, it's so good of you, Stan, to take all this trouble over me."

"No trouble at all?" said Goodman promptly. "I—I love it! This is the common room. This door leads—"

"Don't let's go in for a moment, please," said his companion. "There might be somebody there—and I want you alone! Perhaps we ought to have gone to your study first, after all."

"Oh, my only hat!"

"What a pity it is we're so far from the shops," added the "girl" regretfully. "I thought perhaps an ice-cream——"

"Ice-cream!" echoed Goodman, with a jump. "Why, yes! You can get ice-creams in the school tuck shop."

"Oh, can you?" cried the fair one. "How splendid! Would you mind very much——?"

"I'll buzz off like a shot!" said Goodman eagerly. "I'll get you a whacking great cone, Miss Wilson!"

"Miss Wilson?" she repeated, looking straight into his bewildered eyes.

"I—I mean—Pamela!" he stammered.

Then he escaped, running down the corridor in a whirl of confusion. Never in his life had any girl treated him like this! He was in the throes

of bewilderment. And as he vanished round the corner his late companion became brisk.

Denis Langley had timed the thing well. He had worked up the dialogue in such a way that Goodman had been only too ready to escape on any pretext. This was the moment for action. Goodman would probably be away for three or four minutes—and in three or four minutes the whole job could be accomplished.

Langley turned the handle of the common room door and walked in. And "she" was not altogether surprised to find a couple of juniors in that big apartment. They were Sam Kennedy and Hal Robinson—and very obviously they were on guard.

During that first glance Langley spotted Roddy Mitchell's orange cap. He was somewhat startled. For there was the cap behind its protection of plate glass, in the metal case—and not hanging pinned to the wall, as Mitchell had led him to believe. Still, it was only a trifle. The metal case was not particularly big, and he could easily bag the whole contraption.

Kennedy and Robinson jumped to their feet as the supposed girl came in.

"Oh, I'm so sorry," murmured Langley, hesitating.

"That's all right!" said Robinson gallantly. "We didn't expect——"

"I'm just looking round, you know," said Langley, giving the pair a dazzling smile. "If you would just let me sit down for a few minutes— So this is the common room? Isn't it lovely? How lucky you boys are to live in such a wonderful school!"

"Yes, it's not bad," said Kennedy.

"I—I don't quite know why my head feels so swimmy," went on the "girl," as she sank into a seat. "It's only a little faintness, I believe. If there is any water——"

She broke off—and Kennedy and Robinson ran towards her full of alarm and concern.

"Here, I say," burst out Kennedy. "Is—is there something the matter?"

"Just a little water—please," murmured the visitor softly.

"I'll get it!" said Kennedy promptly.

"No, I will!" shouted Robinson.

They both dashed off—just as Langley had anticipated. He had been prepared, however, to ask the second junior to "find" a handkerchief—a mythical handkerchief—which had been dropped somewhere outside. However, there was no necessity for this. Kennedy and Robinson had swallowed the bait whole.

The instant they had gone Denis Langley leapt to the door and closed it. Then he rushed across the common room, grabbed the metal box containing the precious cap—and a wild howl of surprise and anguish escaped those rosy lips!

CHAPTER XI

BOWLED OUT

Denis Langley received the shock of his life—in a double sense.

A second earlier he had told himself that the game was won. Sylvester and Co. were beaten, and the Greendale fellows would now be able to crow unceasingly over their great triumph. For what could be easier than to unhook this little metal box, dive through the window and get away?

And then, all in a flash, the whole programme crashed to the ground.

For as Langley seized the metal box he found his whole frame tingling with agony, and in spite of himself he gave a wild shriek.

The metal box was electrified!

It is to be feared that this dainty, charming miss cut a most undignified figure at that moment! Goodman, coming back with the ice-creams, to say nothing of several unwanted Fourth Formers, paused in consternation as he hurried into the common-room.

He and the rest beheld the alleged young lady dancing madly and spasmodically against the opposite wall, and giving vent to frantic howls at the same time. Worst of all, "her" hat had been jerked off during the last few moments, and the wig was askew.

"Great guns!" gurgled Goodman.

"Look!" yelled somebody else. "Her hair! I don't believe she's a girl at all."

"WHAT" bellowed Stanley Horatio.

In his excitement he tossed the ice-creams into the air. One of them struck Tom Pettitt in the middle of the face, and the other splashed down the front of Kenneth Pyne's aristocratic waistcoat.

"Good gad!" shrieked Kenneth. "You frightful blighter! What the dickens——"

"Quick!" yelled Dick Sylvester, as he came running in. "It's a spoof, you chaps! We've been diddled—and if the metal box hadn't been electrified we should have been done!"

Nobody could quite understand the situation. There could be no denying that the fair visitor was a deceiver, for the wig had now completely come off, revealing a sleek, well-brushed head of hair.

"My hat!" said Bob Davis breathlessly. "That was a good stunt of yours, Sylvester, to connect up the electric wires with the box and make it into a kind of 'shocking' instrument. She—if she is a she—can't let go!"

"You silly fatheads!" roared Goodman. "Playing tricks like this on a girl I expect she took hold of the box by accident. Why don't you cut off the current?"

Goodman was very excited. He could not believe that "Pamela" was false. It was too incredible—too outrageous.

Dick Sylvester pulled a key out of his pocket and ran swiftly across to the now gasping Langley. He inserted the key in the lock of the metal case—getting none of the current, since he did not touch the electrified metal with both hands. The door came open, and Dick clicked the switch.

"Oh, thank goodness!" breathed "Pamela," sagging away.

Goodman caught the supposed girl in his arms, and held "her" tenderly.

"Water, you chaps!" he said, locking round. "She's nearly fainting."

Even now quite a number of the juniors still believed that they were in the presence of a girl. Perhaps she had had an Eton crop and did not like the style, and so was wearing a wig. Undoubtedly Langley still looked astonishingly feminine. But he gave himself away. He took it for granted that he was bowled out.

"Well, that's that!" he said, when he had partially recovered. "I'm dished. You—you tricky rotters! Electrifying the box like that! Mitchell didn't tell me——"

"Mitchell!" shouted Goodman. "But—but——"

"Cheese it, you big stiff!" said Langley. "I'm not a girl! I'm a Green-dale chap!"

"My only sainted aunt!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Then—then——," began Goodman, turning pale, and then violently red. "Then—then you were spoofing—— Oh, crumbs! You rotter! You—you——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Dick Sylvester grinned with appreciation.

"I don't know who the dickens you are, my lad, but you're as smart as they make 'em," he said frankly. "By Jove! You fooled the lot of us! I've never seen a more perfect impersonation. Congrats, old son!"

"Thanks!" said Langley feebly. "Not that that's much consolation. I'm a new chap at Greendale, you know. Langley's my name—Denis Langley."

"Pleased to meet you!" chorussed the juniors, crowding round.

"It was Mitchell's idea," went on Langley. "But how were we to know——"

"Exactly," murmured Dick. "You can go back and tell Mitchell that we weren't born yesterday! Of course, now I understand the reason for those other impersonations. What a deep bounder Mitchell is!"

"These Greens nearly got the cap back," remarked Tim Charters, with a whistle. "In a way, I'm sorry for them. They jolly well deserved to win. Langley, you're a marvel."

"Thanks."

"Wait until you hear how he spoofed old Goody!" grinned Robinson. "Somebody was telling me——"

"Dry up!" hooted Goodman wildly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, Stan!" said Langley, in a soft, alluring voice. "Won't you come and sit with me, Stan, and hold my hand? I like you so much! You are so rugged—so strong——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Lemme get at him!" howled Goodman. "Great pip! He was pulling my leg all the time! And I thought——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Compliments were showered upon Langley unceasingly. All the Fourth Formers were full of enthusiasm for his clever performance. He was allowed to don his wig and hat again, and then he was escorted off the premises. The juniors solemnly crowded round the "girl," displaying the utmost gallantry in taking her to the main gates. Nobody else suspected that anything was wrong. But Mitchell and Co., who had been waiting and watching, were sad at heart.

Langley joined them two or three minutes later as he was walking down the lane—and after the grinning Fourth Formers had waved their hands to him. Quite a number, in fact, affectionately kissed their hands—much to the amazement of the scandalised Mr. Selby, who happened to witness the incident from his window.

"Well, it was a fizzle, you chaps," said Langley, reluctantly, after he had explained. "I did my best, and I spoofed them up to the eyebrows. But how the dickens was I to know they'd keep your rotten cap in an electrified box?"

"It wasn't your fault," said Mitchell, with a deep sigh. "This has knocked me all of a heap. I thought we should do the trick as easily as winking. These Whitelands chaps are brainier than we gave them credit for being."

"And your skipper's cap is still in their possession!" said Simmons grimly.

CHAPTER XII

FIFTH COLUMN!

Enoch Wicks, of the Fourth Form, took a deep, deep breath. He was standing in the junior common-room in Mortimer's House, and he was alone. It was this latter fact which had given him an idea that made him jump a foot into the air.

Alone in the common-room—alone with Roddy Mitchell's orange-coloured cap!

There it was, just inside the metal case—and the door of the metal case was unlocked, and the electricity was switched off! It was indeed a chance in a million.

In the rush to get "Pamela Wilson" off the premises nobody had thought of relocking the precious case. And nobody had taken any notice of Enoch Wicks. He was a nonentity, anyhow.

"Great guns!" whispered the sneak of the Fourth.

He was a brainless sort of junior, but what he lacked in cleverness he made up for in cunning. He was for ever cadging, snooping, and doing all those things which the majority of the fellows detested. And although it was so early in the term he was already broke to the wide.

And here was a chance of obtaining wealth!

He knew how much the Greendale fellows wanted to get that cap back. And, according to Enoch's way of thinking, they would surely be willing to pay handsomely for its return. They could not get it themselves—but supposing somebody went to them and offered it?

The Whitelands Fifth Columnist chuckled greedily.

There was no time to be lost—no time for deep thinking. Enoch Wicks made up his mind on the spot. He was startled by his own audacity, but fate had played into his hands, and the temptation was too strong to be resisted.

Cautiously he went to the metal box and touched it. He received no shock. A hasty glance over his shoulder assured him that he was alone. He still had the common-room to himself.

Swiftly he opened the glass-fronted door, took the cap out, and stuffed it into his pocket. He raced for the door. But he need not have worried, for there was still nobody in sight.

Breathless with triumph, Enoch Wicks scooted for Study No. 2, and bolted inside. His study mate, Crocker, was not there. With trembling fingers Enoch took the cap out of his pocket, gazed at it gloatingly, and then hid it away beneath a pile of books and papers in a corner of the cupboard.

"Good egg!" he whispered exultantly. "That's done the trick—but I shall have to be pretty careful!"

He left the study, strolled out through the lobby, and joined a crowd of juniors who were just coming in. Nobody gave him a glance. If any of those fellows had been asked, they would probably have declared that Enoch Wicks had been with the crowd all the time.

"Well, that's that!" said Dick Sylvester genially. "It was a near shave, you chaps, but they didn't succeed."

"When I get hold of Langley I'm going to punch his nose!" said Goodman fiercely. "He picked on me, didn't he?"

"Naturally, dear old boy," drawled Kenneth Pyne.

"Why naturally?"

"I'll leave you to guess!" said Pyne blandly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Goodman was about to grab Pyne by the shoulder when there was a sudden interruption. Charters and Osborne came running helter-skelter out of Mortimer's House.

"Hey, Dick!" bellowed Charters. "Have you got Mitchell's cap?"

"Of course not," said Dick. "It's in the box——"

"Oh, yes? It's gone!"

"Gone!" roared everybody.

There was a mad rush for the common-room. And it was soon discovered that the story was too true. The priceless trophy had disappeared! Dick Sylvester was unstinted in his abuse—of himself.

"Idiot! Ass! Fathead! Dolt!"

Steady on, you ass——"

"I'm talking to myself!" snapped Dick. "I must have been dotty! Why on earth didn't I lock that door?"

"But how did the rotters get in?" asked Pat Warren blankly.

"I don't know," said Dick. "Perhaps they didn't get in," he added, with a startled look. "Have we got a Fifth Columnist at Whitelands? A traitor in the camp?"

The Fourth could only gnash its teeth with helpless rage. Not that this did much good. Enoch Wicks, who had had a short spasm of heart failure at Dick's reference to a traitor, was soon feeling more comfortable. And later on in the afternoon his confidence was supreme. Nobody suspected him, and now he was free to carry on with his little scheme.

He went to Study No. 2, got the cap out of the cupboard, and stuffed it carefully into his pocket. He went out through the gates, and not a soul asked him where he was going. Easy! He went down the lane, reached the stile, and took the footpath through Greendale Wood.

He hurried his pace after he had gone through the wood, and in due course he came within sight of Greendale School. It was a picturesque range of buildings, standing near the river.

Something warned Enoch that it might be unwise for him to carry the cap into the school grounds. So, as a precautionary measure, he dived into the hedge opposite the main gates and concealed his prize behind a clump of heavy ferns. Then, taking his courage in both hands, he entered the school grounds. A number of shouts rang out, and Enoch hesitated. He found a swarm of Greendale fellows bearing down upon him.

"Here, pax!" he gasped nervously.

"Pax, my foot!" said Verner, with suspicion. "What are you doing here, you Whitelands bounder?"

"Better look out, in case there are some others!" said Hickman.

"No, there aren't any others," ejaculated Enoch hastily. "I—I'm all alone. I've come here on a matter of business."

Roddy Mitchell pushed his way through the crowd.

"What's that?" he said. "You've come here on business, Wicks?"

"Yes, please, Mitchell."

"Then, if I know anything about you, it'll be dirty business!" said the leader of the Greendale Junior School, in an ominous voice.

CHAPTER XIII

THE BARGAIN

Roddy Mitchell had every reason to look 'grim.

He was well acquainted with Enoch Wicks's record, and Enoch's presence here, with this unwonted show of effrontery, was significant. Mitchell knew, at once, that the sneak of the Whitelands Fourth had not been sent by Dick Sylvester.

"Oh, really Mitchell!" protested Enoch. "I—I—— You see, I thought you might want that cap of yours."

"I do want it," replied Mitchell bluntly.

"Then you can have it—for a quid!" said Enoch, in an eager voice. "If you give me a quid, Mitchell, I'll——"

"Hold on!" said Roddy. "And who the dickens do you suppose you are to make me an offer like that? How can you promise to give me the cap?"

"Because I've got it!" said Enoch triumphantly.

"Got it!"

"Yes!"

"Grab him!" yelled Verner. "Come on, you chaps! Let's search him—"

"Hi, leggo!" howled Enoch. "I haven't got it on me, you asses! You don't think I'd be as rash as that, do you?"

"Leave him alone," said Mitchell, more ominous than ever. "How did you get hold of this cap of mine, Wicks? Out with it!"

"I don't see that it matters to you," protested Wicks. "As long as I've got it, and as long as I'm willing to give it back to you——"

"Give it? For a quid?"

"Well—I—I mean, I'll sell it——"

"Never mind!" said Roddy. "Let it go. You've got this cap? Before I promise you anything I want to know how you got hold of it."

"I don't see why I should tell you," argued Enoch stubbornly. "There's no reason why you should know that Sylvester left the case unlocked and——"

"That's enough!" said Mitchell curtly. "So Sylvester left the case unlocked—and you seized your opportunity and bagged the cap. And now you've come here to let me have it back—for a consideration. Is that it?"

"Yes, that's it," said Enoch eagerly.

Roddy Mitchell was disgusted. He was angry, too. He badly wanted that precious cap—but not in this way. He meant to obtain it by fair means, and not by taking advantage of Wicks's treachery. But it occurred to Roddy that it might be a good idea to lead the young rascal on.

"You're too modest, Wicks," he said smoothly. "Altogether too modest. It's quite evident that you have secured my cap at some risk, and, naturally you want something in return."

"Yes, rather," said Enoch. "I can tell you, it was a jolly dangerous business! I only just managed—— Ahem! Still, I'll take a quid—or two quid——"

"Why mention money, in actual terms?" asked Mitchell. "It's pretty dangerous, my lad! I think we can understand one another quite well if we don't go into exact details."

"Look here, Mitchell——" began Ellis excitedly.

"Leave this to me, old man," interrupted Roddy. "Now then, Wicks, you've actually got my cap somewhere handy?"

"Yes."

"And you want me to give you—well, we'll say two?"

"Two what?"

"Now then!" said Roddy, with a wink. "Surely you can guess what I mean?"

"Oh, rather," grinned Enoch Wicks. "My word! You're a cute one, Mitchell! All right, then. If you give me two—or three——"

"Four, if you like," said Mitchell generously. "I'm very anxious to get the cap back, and I don't mind how many I give you."

"All right—make it five," said Enoch breathlessly.

"Done!"

"You—you howling ass!" said Simmons indignantly. "You're not going to give the young rotter five quid for your cap, are you?"

"That cap of mine is valuable," said Mitchell sternly. "It's not the actual cost that matters—it's what it stands for. All right, Wicks. That's a bargain. As soon as you give me my cap, I'll give you your five."

"Honour bright?"

"Honour bright."

"Good!" gloated Enoch. "Wait just a minute! I'll be back in no time."

He ran off, and during his brief absence the other Greens gathered round Mitchell, indignant, excited and angry. But in a flash they altered. A few words from Roddy caused them to stare, and then to grin. Finally, they laughed uproariously.

"Cheese it!" warned Roddy. "He's coming back."

Enoch Wicks appeared, triumphantly carrying the orange-coloured skipper's cap. Mitchell took it lovingly, and looked at it with fond eyes.

"So near—and yet so far," he murmured.

"What are you mumbling about?" asked Langley, who had just joined the crowd. "And, I must say, Mitchell, I don't altogether like this. I mean, taking the cap in this way——"

"All's fair in love and war," grinned Enoch Wicks with egregious complacency. "Now then, Mitchell. You've got the cap. What about my five quid?"

"Your five what?"

"Five quid."

"My poor ass, you must be dreaming," said Mitchell kindly. "I made no mention of five quid."

Enoch Wicks started.

"Yes, you did," he said excitedly. "You distinctly promised me——"

"I promised you five," said Mitchell. "There was nothing said about what the five would be. I appeal to all you other fellows," he added, turning to the crowd. "Did I promise Wicks five quid?"

"No, you didn't!" answered the crowd solidly.

"Did I promise him five—without saying what the five would be?"

"Yes, you did," thundered the crowd.

"Good enough," said Roddy. "You've heard all these witnesses, Wicks? You've given me my cap, and now we'll proceed to give you your five."

"My five—what?" asked Enoch, in bewilderment.

"Bumps!" snapped Mitchell.

"Here, I say——"

"Your five bumps!" said Mitchell indignantly. "You young rotter. You treacherous little blighter! You Fifth Columnist! Pinching that cap from Dick Sylvester and bringing it here to sell! Grab him, chaps!"

"Hi, leggo!" hooted Enoch wildly. "You—you rotters! You swindlers! You promised five quid——"

Bump!

Enoch hit the ground with terrific violence. His howls were also terrific.

Bump!

Again and again he was bumped, and the sorer he got the wilder he howled. And even when his punishment was over he was not allowed to escape.

"Come on," said Mitchell gruffly. "We're going to take him back to Whitelands."

"Good wheeze!"

"We're taking this cap back, too."

"Here, what rot!" protested Verner. "You've got your cap back now——"

"My dear chap!" protested Roddy. "You don't think I'm going to keep it, do you? Not like this! When I get my cap, I'm going to get it by fair means. Why, we should never be able to lift our heads again if we took a mean advantage of this young rotter's treachery."

"Yes, by Jove, I suppose you're right," admitted Verner, after thinking for a moment or two.

All the others agreed. Never could they be a party to this despicable act. And then and there Enoch Wicks was hustled back to Whitelands. He

was in a rare state of funk, too—for there could be little doubt that when he arrived at his destination he would be given a fresh dose of punishment. And he would certainly deserve it.

CHAPTER XIV

A DESPERATE IDEA

"Look out!"

"Greendale rotters!"

"Rally round, Whites!"

There were many shouts in the quad as the strong force of Greendale fellows marched in through the gateway. Roddy Mitchell was in front, leading Enoch Wicks by the scruff of his neck.

"Pax!" he said gruffly. "This isn't a raid."

"Just as well for you," said Dick Sylvester cheerfully, as he walked up. "You bounders! How the merry dickens did you manage to do the trick, after all?"

"We didn't do it," replied Mitchell bluntly. "Here's the cap—you'd better take it."

"Well I'm jiggered!"

"My only sainted aunt!"

"The ass is giving it back!"

There were all sorts of exclamations as Roddy Mitchell calmly handed over the orange-coloured cap. Dick was surprised as he took it. This was an unexpected development.

"But—but why?" asked Dick. "You got hold of it fairly enough, didn't you?"

"I'm afraid not," replied Mitchell. "It was this young thug who pinched it—probably while you were showing 'Miss Wilson' off the premises. He brought it to us and offered to sell it back for a quid."

"The—the young rotter!" said Stan Goodman furiously, as he turned upon the shivering Enoch. "So that's how it happened? By crackers! I'm going to biff you to pulp——"

"Oh, let him go!" said Roddy. "We've given him a terrific bumping, and he's sore in every limb. Naturally, we've brought the cap back."

"Mitchell, you're a sportsman," said Dick frankly.

"I hope I am," replied Roddy.

The Whites, indeed, were enthusiastic. The Greendale fellows were cheered for their sportsmanship, for it must have been a sore temptation to them to keep the cap, once it had found its way back into their possession.

"Well, that's that," said Roddy, at length. "You'll stick to your promise, Sylvester, and keep the cap in the common-room?"

"Yes, we'll stick to it," nodded Dick Sylvester.

"Okay. We'll get it," said Roddy Mitchell cheerfully. "One of these days we'll do the trick, my sons!"

"And the next time," added Denis Langley thoughtfully, "we'll wear rubber gloves!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Sylvester and Co. were looking at the new boy curiously. Langley was attired in an ordinary suit now, and although he was slight, and although his

features still looked a trifle effeminate it was quite obvious that he was actually a boy.

Amid further cheering Mitchell and Co. took their departure. Matters were now "as you were" after all the excitements of the day. Once again the priceless cap reposed in the common-room in Mortimer's House. And once again Mitchell and Co. racked their brains for some likely scheme. But the problem was becoming more and more difficult.

After tea Roddy and Simmons and Ellis had occasion to go into Greendale St. Mary, and while they were strolling down the village street Mitchell was looking very thoughtful.

"It's getting tricky," he growled. "Those Whitelands blighters will be suspicious of everything. It'll be almost impossible to fool them again."

A big car came rolling by—a stately limousine. Mitchell and Co. caught a glimpse of Dr. Chesterton, the Headmaster of Whitelands, and they respectfully doffed their caps. The Head acknowledged the salute with a smile.

"He's not our Old Man, but there's no harm in showing due respect," said Mitchell. "He's a decent old boy——"

He broke off, and a startled expression came into his eyes.

"By Jove!" he said, in a quivering voice. "I wonder if——Great Scott! If only I dare!"

"What's the wheeze?" asked Ellis breathlessly.

"Look here, my sons," said Roddy. "Dr. Chesterton is going out, and he wouldn't take the car unless he was going a fair distance, would he? Market Tunley, at least. The odds are he won't be back for an hour——"

"But—but——"

"Back to Greendale!" exclaimed Mitchell. "This is going to be one chance in a thousand—and it may come off!"

They arrived at Greendale hot and panting, and Simmons and Ellis were still very puzzled. Roddy led the way to his own study, and he roped in Denis Langley on the way. Then Roddy shut the door and produced a photograph of Dr. Chesterton.

"See that, Langley."

"Of course. What about it?"

"That's Dr. Chesterton, the Head of Whitelands."

"Not a bad-looking old boy."

"Listen, Langley! You're a dabster at disguising and making up," said Mitchell. "Do you think you could make me look anything like Dr. Chesterton?"

An amused expression came into Langley's eyes.

"Oh-ho! So that's the wheeze, is it? Yes, I think I might manage it, Mitchell."

"Good man! Get busy!"

"Ye gods!" gurgled Simmons. "But, I say, Roddy! Why not let Langley make up as the Head?"

"Too small," replied Mitchell. "He couldn't ever look the part. I'm a big bloke—broad and hefty. And I'm not such a duffer at acting, either," he added defensively.

Denis Langley entered into the spirit of the thing with great heartiness. And during the next half hour Roddy Mitchell's appearance was amazingly altered. Under the skilful hands of Langley the make-up was completed. Mitchell's resemblance to Dr. Chesterton was startling. In a strong light he would never have survived for a second. But in the dusk, or in the shade, he might manage to pass muster.

The next move in the game was tricky.

Roddy Mitchell and a crowd of other Greens reached Whitelands by a roundabout route. Cautiously, they crept over the wall into Dr. Chesterton's garden, and then Roddy took leave of his fellow conspirators. In the dusk

he managed to creep round behind bushes and trees until at last he was hidden in the midst of some laurels close to the Head's front door.

So far, so good. The great question now was—had all this trouble been for nothing? Had the Head got back? If so, the Greens would be out of luck. Mitchell waited in a fever of impatience as the dusk grew deeper and deeper. There was an additional reason for his anxiety. It was getting near to call-over, and after call-over nothing could be done.

"Thank goodness!" breathed Roddy suddenly.

He had just begun to think that he had made a fool of himself—and then he caught a glimpse of the Headmaster's car returning. It drew up to the doorway and Dr. Chesterton stepped out.

Now was the crucial moment!

CHAPTER XV

HONOURS EVEN

Slam!

Dr. Chesterton had gone indoors and the chauffeur was just preparing to engage gears. Now was the moment for action—the only moment! Roddy Mitchell stepped hurriedly from cover and prayed fervently that his movements had not been observed.

"One moment!" he said loudly, trying to imitate the Head's voice.

The chauffeur, who had just set the car in motion, applied the brakes and stopped. He glanced round, and it seemed to him that the Head was standing there, in the porch. Mitchell stepped forward boldly, opened the door of the car, and waved an imperious hand.

"Drive me to Market Tunley," he said briefly. "Stop at the post office."

"Yes, sir," said the chauffeur, touching his cap.

Mitchell sank back into the rear seat. His heart was thudding like a trip-hammer. He knew what a risk he was running—but he was trusting that his identity would never become known.

And now the remarkable astuteness of Roddy Mitchell's plan became clear.

If he had walked into Mortimer's House in his disguise he would almost certainly have been suspected by the watchful Fourth Formers. But when the fellows saw him drive up in the Head's own car how could they suspect the truth? It was a master stroke on Mitchell's part. Roddy's heart gave another jump when he saw a crowd of fellows on the steps of Mortimer's. It was not quite time for call-over, and the juniors were taking a breath of fresh air before going indoors to answer to their names. Nothing could have panned out better.

"Just a moment!" said Mitchell, leaning forward and addressing the chauffeur. "Stop outside Mr. Mortimer's House."

"Yes, sir."

The car stopped near the steps, and Dick Sylvester and Co. raised their caps respectfully as they caught sight of the Head's figure in the rear of the car. Dr. Chesterton was evidently going somewhere in a hurry, for he stepped briskly out of the car and ran up the steps. In the dusk the deception was very difficult to detect. Besides, the fact that this figure had stepped out of the Head's car was clear proof that he was the Head in person.

"Wait!" said Roddy curtly to the chauffeur.

The Fourth Formers drew aside. Roddy crossed the lobby hot with anxiety. The electric lights were burning here and the danger was greater. However, it was a bad habit to stare at the Head, and Mitchell was relying upon the fellows to dodge away before him, or to lower their gaze.

In any case, there was no time for fancy work. He reached the common room, opened the door and strode in. There were only a few juniors present, and they jumped to their feet at once. In the first glance Roddy Mitchell knew that he would have to "look lively." He would never be able to take this crowd on single-handed.

"What is this thing?" he said sternly, as he pointed to the electrified box.

He strode across to it, and before anybody could answer he produced a small hammer with a short handle.

Crash!

With one blow Roddy smashed the glass door to smithereens. Then he grabbed his cap with a yell of triumph, turned, and bolted out of the common room. It had all been done in a flash.

"Hi! Stop him!" yelled somebody. "He's not the Head!"

"Greendale raiders!"

"After him!"

There was a wild rush, but the juniors only jammed themselves in the doorway. In the meantime, Mitchell was tearing down the passage at full speed. He rushed through the lobby, swept like a gale past the crowd on the steps, and was out in the dusk before anybody could understand what was happening.

The Headmaster's car was still standing there, but Mitchell took no notice of it.

"After him!" came a yell from behind.

"Raiders—raiders!"

"He's got Mitchell's cap!"

Instantly, there was tremendous confusion.

"Great Scott! I'll bet it was Mitchell himself," panted Dick Sylvester. "What a wheeze! That bouncer has diddled us, after all."

"By crackers!" roared Stan Goodman.

They went tearing across the quad, but by this time Roddy Mitchell had reached the main gates. His heart was singing a song of triumph—until he collided full tilt with somebody who was just coming through the gateway.

"Steady, young man—steady!" said a calm voice.

"Mr. Mortimer!" gasped Mitchell hopelessly.

Mr. Horace Mortimer, the Housemaster, held on to Mitchell very tightly. With rare presence of mind Roddy whisked off his wig and false whiskers. He hoped fervently that Mr. Mortimer had not seen whom he was impersonating.

Crowds of Fourth Formers came swarming round, and in the gloom they failed to recognise Mr. Mortimer at first. The Housemaster was nearly bowled over.

"Well, boys, what's all the excitement about?"

Roddy tried to wriggle free.

"Well, I've got my cap!" he said defiantly. "I should have got away if Mr. Mortimer hadn't stopped me. It's a victory for Greendale!"

"Which cap is this?" asked the Housemaster curiously. "Oh, I see! This is the headgear, no doubt, that has been hanging in the junior common-room?"

"Yes, sir."

"H'm! Perhaps I had better not inquire too closely," said Mr. Mortimer drily. "However, it is obvious that the cap belongs to Mitchell. Is that so?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then, Mitchell, you had better keep it."

"Thank you, sir."

"I imagine that you boys have been holding it as a kind of trophy," continued Mr. Mortimer. "Well, I'm not sure that I quite approve of it. We don't want these escapades every few hours at Whitelands. And if the cap is back with its rightful owner all risks will be over."

"But that's our cap, sir," protested Goodman. "Ours by right of conquest."

"I do not doubt it, Goodman," agreed the Housemaster. "But I think it will be far better if you let the affair end here and now. I am all in favour of this healthy rivalry between the two schools. Continue it, boys! It does you good—and as long as you don't overstep the mark nobody will grumble at you."

"Thanks awfully, sir."

"I shall not make any inquiries as to why the Headmaster's car is now stationary, and empty, outside my house," continued Mr. Mortimer, with a twinkle. "However, I think I can guess—and I will give the chauffeur a word, and tell him that he can put the car up."

With a chuckle he walked away.

"By jingo, he's a brick!" said Roddy Mitchell enthusiastically. "You chaps are lucky to have a Housemaster like that!"

"You're telling us?"

"And as for this cap business, it's over," went on Roddy amiably, as he donned the coveted headgear. "I suppose we can call it honours even, eh?"

"That," said Dick Sylvester, "is just about the size of it."

THE END.

BATWING MOPS UP

by Dallas Kirby

Out of the shimmering haze that danced above the desert came a man on a horse—a tall, lean man, with broad shoulders and slender waist, calm and strong of face, and in his narrowed eyes a cold light of confidence. The horse was big, black, with deep chest and long, muscled legs. An impressive, well-matched pair, the silence, the desolation, dismayed them not at all. With the same easy assurance, the same inflexibility of purpose that had carried them across the desert, for three blistering, windless days they pressed ever onward. Westwards, ever on towards the purple hills that rimmed the far horizon.

Over arid, rolling country dotted with spiky cactus and acatillo, shiny clumps of greasewood and feathery mesquite, slashed with arroyos and sandy draws, the pair rode steadily on. Until at last, as the sun of the third day was dropping, they wound down a broadening trail that angled a broken hillside, and made camp upon a rocky plateau where a stream sparkled and chuckled in a channel of its own making.

The rider swung down out of the swellfork, wriggled the saddle-kinks out of his back, and went about the business of preparing a meal. His was a striking, almost forbidding figure. His rig-out, from high-crowned Stetson to fancy-worked riding boots, was black—like the horse. Black silk neckerchief, black woollen shirt, black guns with the smooth sheen of long use sagged in well-greased, black holsters that rode low on his thighs. Only the glints of carefully chosen silver fittings saved the ensemble from being sinister. About his powerful legs, flapping as he moved, were the black leather chaps from which his name had sprung. For this was Batwing.

His horse attended to, his own preparations completed, Batwing beat the alkali dust from his clothing and seated himself on a flat slab of rock that gave an uninterrupted view of the country below. He made a slow meal of cold bacon pie and black, steaming coffee.

Away to the west, winding like a silvery snake through the vivid green of the *bosque*, the tangled wilderness of willow, cottonwood, and tornillo that hemmed it in, the Rio Grande could be glimpsed. The country was undulating and green, broken here and there by fantastically-weathered monuments of rock, dappled with mottes of greasewood and yucca. There were countless crawling dots that he knew were cattle, and, in two directions, so distant as to be without detail, he made out patchwork clusters that were unquestionably ranch buildings. It was rich, fruitful cattle country, in the process of development.

From a shirt pocket he took a sack of tobacco and rolled a cigarette. He lit it with a stick from the dying fire, returned the sack to his pocket. Beneath the pocket flap, exposed for an instant, a small gold star gleamed. He blew twin streams of smoke from his nostrils.

“Tarpot,” he mused, addressing a slow, easy drawl to the cropping horse. “Down there’s as nice a piece of God’s country as eyes could hope to behold.

Yet men must build their places there, pollute it with their thieving and their lying, with murder and dirty schemings. There's a town down there, Tarpot, a town called Grande. A town gone tough, needing what we've come to give it—a good mop up!"

The stallion eyed his master, twitched one ear knowingly, snorted, and went back to the sweet grasses that engaged his attention.

"Yeah," Batwing nodded. "That's how much you——"

He broke off, listening. Sound came to him above the babbling of the stream. He got swiftly to his feet. Growing rapidly louder, there could be heard the mad drumming of a horse's hooves—coming up the trail from below. Mechanically, he stamped out the dying fire. Caution was a part of him. He gathered up his kit, led the black by one bit-ring, and went across the shelf and around an out-thrust shoulder of rock. Even as he moved, his trained ears took the swelling sounds, analysed them. The oncoming horse was labouring, and there was another horse, stronger and steadier, in close pursuit. The trail crossed the shelf, and Batwing, interested but quite detached, crushed his cigarette underfoot, and positioned himself behind a growth of young mesquite that hugged the rock.

The first animal, a pinto, came scrambling up over the rim. It stumbled, recovered itself desperately and lunged on. The rider, to Batwing's surprise, was a girl. He wondered, in that instant of identification, whether she would ride on—and why she rode so at all. He was not left long in doubt. Close behind came a wild-looking roan that made light of the up-grade. The man in the saddle had a flat, scarred face.

"Hold—yuh little she-cat!" he roared.

The girl, her pretty features etched deeply with fear, set her pony at the slope. The man swore, checked his horse, whipped out a long-barreled Colt and fired twice. The pinto squealed, fell down kicking madly. The girl cried out as she threw herself clear. The man holstered his gun, watched her get dejectedly to her feet with a triumphant grin.

"Next time, yuh'll mebbe do as yore told, my pretty!" he rasped.

Motionless, Batwing watched. The man had surprised him more than the girl, but by no expression did he manifest the fact.

"You beast! You cruel, wicked beast!" the girl blazed wildly. "Denlin's got Bob Hartman—but *you'll* never have *me*! And it's not over, yet, don't forget."

The man swung from his horse, laughed thickly, said:

"No? It's as near over as don't figger. Sun-up t'morrer'll see Hartman swingin' from a cottonwood. I told yuh, once, I'd have yuh—an' now I'm aimin' t' collect. Or mebbe yuh figgers t' stop me?"

He moved towards the cornered girl—and Batwing stepped into the open.

"She don't—but *I* do, hombre," he drawled, a thin smile on his lips.

The man whirled. His gaze locked on that black-clad form, on the silver-ornamented chaps, then lifted slowly to their wearer's bleak face. He froze.

"Seems we've met-up before, feller," Batwing intoned softly. "A long time ago, up in the Black Buttes country. Remember, Mr. Snakey Dawson—remember what I promised if we tangled again? You were riding an old prospector who'd struck it, then; this time it's a helpless girl. Well, here it is, you polecat—reach for 'em!"

The man licked dry lips. Grey pallor showed beneath the tan, and in his too-small eyes was a mingling of hate and fear.

"Batwing—damn yuh!" he whispered hoarsely. His hand sped down in the lightning draw that had permitted him to blast his way out of so many difficult situations

Calm and poised, his eyes gleaming like chips of ice, Batwing stood quite still. Then, when Dawson's gun was clear and lifting, his right hand blurred

in motion. One of the black guns seemed to leap into his palm, belched once, and slid back into the holster. The draw supreme. A blue-edged hole sprang into being between Dawson's eyes, spurted blood suddenly as he toppled backwards. Trigger action that was purely reflex fired his gun, the ricochet screaming skywards from the rock. The cliff rolled the magnified thunder of the guns out across the great basin.

Batwing approached the girl, regarded her gravely. His smile was gentle, friendly. Erect, a striking figure in corderoy riding habit, she gave back his gaze steadily. And in this strange man who killed with such deadly ease she found nothing to fear. She smiled.

"Plumb fortunate I happened to be around," Batwing drawled casually. "Strangers, there's no reason why we shouldn't remain so. Or can I serve you further?"

It was his way of telling her there was no obligation. Women never interested him.

"But we aren't *exactly* strangers," she exclaimed. "You see, I've heard of you before. Once, my—my father spoke of you."

Batwing's voice came swift and hard.

"He said?"

"He said," the girl replied, a ring in her voice. "He said it was high time law came to this basin—*Batwing* law! I asked what he meant, and he told me a little about you. I think, at the time they—they shot him, he had decided to send for you."

Batwing nodded sombrely.

"He had—and did! You, then, are Johnny Rinsford's daughter. And Johnny—Johnny's gone. I'm plumb sorry about that. Well, I came here to do a certain thing, and I aim to do it. To know how things are, would sure help."

For some moments the girl seemed lost in thought. Batwing built a smoke, used a match from his hatband. He waited. Then:

"I don't know all, but I can give you an outline," she said. "There were five outfits in this basin—three big and two small. Then Denlin came to Grande and took over the Silver Dollar Saloon. He prospered by crooked ways, but only became of consequence when, in an all-night poker game, he cleaned out Buck Perriman and became owner of the Double-Slash. Perriman swore the play was crooked—and got bushwhacked for it. From that point, Denlin has slowly but surely been getting control of the basin."

The girl paused. Batwing asked tonelessly:

"Didn't it occur to anybody to stop him?"

She shook her head.

"It needs somebody mighty big to stop Denlin. Our men were game enough, I guess, but—well, they just didn't assay up. Denlin has a gang of gunmen behind him. One of them, a gambler named Carver, manages the saloon. Kurt Rigger followed Perriman—disappeared overnight, and Denlin claimed Kurt had sold his spread to him and headed North. Rustling has become open and barefaced. That, and the bushwhacking of riders, have brought the rest of us to the point where selling out is the only thing left. I guess it's pretty weak—but to fight is suicide."

Batwing spun his butt over the rimrock, watched it fall, said:

"Hartman—where does he fit in?"

A flush swept up the girl's throat, but she replied without hesitation.

"Bob and I love each other—planned to marry. When things got real raw, our foreman was one of the first to get shot. Dad knew how things were between us, and had a chat with Bob. Bob merged his spread with ours, and took over the foreman's job. He's a fighter. He organized the boys enough to enable us to hold our own. Less than a week later, we found

dad on the trail--dead. There were--three rifle bullets in his body." She stopped, fought for control, went on: "They made two attempts on Bob's life, but he beat them each time. Yesterday he rode into Grande to arrange about stores. A man named Fink challenged him and drew his gun. Bob was faster. Then, the Marshal and two of Denlin's thugs jumped from nowhere and pinned him, swore he'd shot Fink without cause. They're holding him, to go for trial. But they mean to lynch him to-morrow morning by what Dawson said. And now, you--one man alone I don't see. . . ."

"You don't have to," Batwing interrupted softly. "It isn't woman's work. Grande is going to get the sweeping it needs. It'll be hot, whilst it lasts, but when the smoke clears, Grande will be clean, and ready to make a fresh start. Take Dawson's cayuse and fog back to the Tumbling R. Stop there--wait. Before morning Bob Hartman shall come back to you. That's all."

She looked up at him, strange expressions struggling for mastery on her face. Doubt, fear, hope--a dawning confidence. The ghost of a smile quirked Batwing's lips, faded almost at once. He whistled. Tarpot came stepping delicately out from behind the shoulder of rock. The girl understood; it was her dismissal. She drew in a deep breath.

"Thank you, Batwing--and God protect you!" she whispered, then ran to Dawson's horse, swung into the saddle, and sent the animal off down the trail with a snort of surprise. Batwing watched her go, Tarpot nuzzling affectionately at his ear.

It was dark when Batwing rode into Grande--a warm, still darkness luminous with starlight. After studying the town carefully through glasses, he had waited for dark before riding in. He wanted Grande to know of his presence only when he himself announced it.

Grande, as a town, had bloomed with the trail herds, and grew with the development of the basin. When Denlin came, Grande got hard. Batwing had heard about Grande more than once--a small place, but so chock full of wickedness that sensible men avoided it as a plague spot, and desperate men were drawn to it as are filings to a magnet. Grande started to grow again, and prosper in its wickedness.

It was quiet when Batwing rode down the one-and-only street--a street formed by two, straggling lines of buildings, some of dobe, but most of sun-bleached, weather-warped framing. False fronts, board sidewalks roofed over, hitch rails, a water trough, the roadway rough under a heavy layer of dust. Just another cowtown--for looks. He dismounted at an empty hitch-rail, shot a quick look up and down, and faded into the black maw of an alley.

A smoking lamp illuminated the Marshal's office--shed its light impartially upon bare walls checkered with WANTED bills, upon the littered desk against the blind-covered window, the worn, knotted boards of the floor, and the four men who sat in various attitudes of discomfort. Smaley, the Marshal, a big fleshy man with a purpling face, occupied the one armchair by right of ownership. The one other chair was filled by a young cowman who, with bruised and bloody face, and torn clothing, looked much the worse for wear. He was lashed to the chair, iron manacles confining his wrists. The other two men, hard-faced, conventionally-garbed, shared a bench against one wall. Both packed guns and looked able to use them. The room had two doors, both closed.

The Marshal stirred restlessly. He scowled at the prisoner, let his eyes drift to the two on the bench.

"There ain't no sense in this a-tall," he grunted. "All these durned fancy precautions--an' what for, I'd like t' know?"

One spat noisily.

"Aw--shut up, Smaley!" he snarled. "Yuh bin bellyachin' all evenin'. I'm sick of hearin' yore voice. It's enough that Denlin says this hombre's

gotta be watched until—until mawnin', anyway. If yuh don't like it, go an' tell him—he's in th' Dollar."

The bound man grinned twistedly.

"Don't yuh know, Marshal," he said sarcastically, "there's a hangin' bee at dawn? Denlin's aimin' to be sure I'm there. I'm framed, like a picture on th' wall. An' you, yuh dirty——"

"Shut yore trap—or I'll slam it shut, with a gun!" Smaley rasped savagely.

The gun man who spoke guffawed loudly. His companion paused in the act of licking down a cigarette he had rolled, looked hard at Smaley.

"Yore touchy, Smaley—an' childish," he sneered. "Hartman's got it straight, so why argue? Yuh talks big, but if he was free yuh'd run a mile. I've a mind t' blow that star offn yore fat belly—just t' show yuh what a gun is for!"

A door opened silently, the form of a man in black, batwing chaps filled the doorway. An ominous voice drawled:

"I'll do that, gents—if it's necessary!"

As if controlled by a single string, four heads jerked around. They stared at the man in the doorway. His guns were in their holsters, but the menace of him was the more potent. The Marshal sagged. The prisoner showed interest. The two men on the bench became still, tense. Then, the one who had spoken last dropped his cigarette, got slowly, carefully to his feet. He was short, thin but wiry, with a sallow face and beady eyes. His stare became fixed.

"Batwing!" he exclaimed softly, thickly. "Well—I've heard of yuh—bin wantin' t' meet yuh. I figger yore over-rated."

"Now's your chance to find out—but you'll never know the answer!"

Batwing's voice was flat, emotionless. Yet, somehow, he looked so unprepared. His right hand was resting on the door frame, far enough away from his guns. Only, there hung about him that aura of latent danger, the cold promise of death.

The gunman sank slowly into a crouch. His eyes, glittering balefully, probed the other's bleak stare. Then:

"Yeah," he whispered. "Over-rated!"

Fluttering hands swooped with sudden speed. For a split-second it seemed that Batwing was surprised into inactivity, outclassed. The gunman's weapons were clear of the holsters before he moved. His right hand remained on the door frame. His left disappeared in a blur of astonishing movement. There was an instant when it stilled, when the others glimpsed a black gun that spat flame once, then went back to the holster in the same blur of movement. The gunman's head snapped back as lead slammed into his brain. The *thud—thud* of his falling guns sounded a requiem as he crumpled, followed them down.

His companion saw Batwing re-noister his gun, thought it was the slight margin he needed. He exhaled gustily and drew without getting up. And, drawing, knew he had failed—yet could not stop. It was as if this Batwing possessed supernatural powers. One moment that idle right hand was upon the door frame—the next, it was snuggled against his hip, filled with gun. He saw the flame, but didn't hear the report. Lead ploughed his heart. He died with an incredulous look on his face, tumbled sideways off the bench.

Bleak, unmoved, Batwing's gaze travelled to the prisoner, on to the fat, terrified form of the Marshal. Contempt curled his lips.

"You!" he snapped. "Get up—loose that man. If you're careful, you *might* live!"

Smaley's haste was grotesque. Death, and the threat of death, hung in that room. He twice dropped the key of the manacles. His teeth chattered

audibly, sweat poured from him. When Hartman was free, he stood back, his eyes roving anywhere but to that watching form. Hartman flexed cramped limbs cautiously, with profane comment.

"Smaley!" Batwing's voice cracked like a whip. "Take off that star—get out of Grande as fast as horseflesh will carry you. And—don't—ever—come—back!"

Smaley gulped. With fumbling fingers he removed the badge. For want of somewhere handy to put it, he gave it to Hartman. Head bowed, weak with fear, he fled from the room. Batwing lounged forward. The atmosphere of dreadful power had gone from him. But he was still hard, cold.

"You'll wear that star, Hartman, and be true to it—until the folks of this basin can get organized. I have the power to appoint you, and do so because there must be somebody capable of carrying on after I leave. Now get out to the Tumbling R.—there is a worried girl waiting for your coming. But waste no time, for there's work to be done. Send riders and gather into a posse every honest man you know—then come back and take hold of what will be left of Grande. Don't ever let Grande get hard again."

Hartman looked at the star in his palm, looked squarely into the eyes of Batwing. And that which he read therein made him stiffen weary shoulders, hold high his aching head. He pinned the star to his shirt. Words formed on his lips, but Batwing shook his head.

"There's nothing to say," he intoned flatly. "Only do as you're told. Obedience, and the intelligence to think out and execute your orders are two of the prime requirements of a good lawman. I've told you—there's no time to waste. I'm going to the Silver Dollar—to interview this Denlin I hear so much about."

There was a note of finality in his voice that precluded all argument. Hartman nodded acceptance, scooped a gun up from the floor, and strode out. Batwing stood alone with the dead, and a long sigh escaped him.

Thoughtfully, he built a cigarette, lit it. Smoke dribbled from parted lips, climbed his cheek. He nodded to himself, removed the little gold star from beneath his pocket flap and pinned it on the outside. He looked once about, and went from the room—not by the back door and dark alley of his entry, but boldly, confidently, out through the front.

He emerged on to the hot, dusty darkness of the street, and stood a moment to survey its quiet emptiness. Ordinarily, night time in any normal cowtown is an occasion of life and activity, with riders coming and going, and every form of entertainment in full blast. Shots rarely escaped investigation, however casual. Yet, outwardly, Grande was dead—and deaf! But then, he told himself, it was by no means a *normal* town. There hung over it an incongruous calmness, an ominous, dangerous calmness—the calm that precedes the storm. He smiled crookedly, strode off across the dusty way—his destination the Silver Dollar. The storm was about to break.

He climbed wooden steps, crossed the board sidewalk, and pushed in through swing doors. He halted inside, looked around a room typical of its kind. A bar ran the length of the right-hand side, well-stocked shelves behind it. A square floor was scattered with tables and chairs. Across the far left corner stood a battered piano. There was a closed door at the far end, a window in the left wall. A brass lamp hung by chains from the ceiling, its double burner shedding strong light.

There were seven men in the room exclusive of the glass-polishing bartender. Three men sat around a table littered with cards, but were not playing. There was a man seated backwards and straddle-legged on a chair before the piano, elbows resting on the chair-back. A brown Stetson was hung on his hands, hid them from view. At the bar were three in a bunch, talking, drinking. His entry had apparently interested none of them.

"Gents, I'm looking for the owner of this place," he drawled, voice raised. "Happen he's around?"

The three at the bar looked him over deliberately. One was a Mexican gaudily dressed in velvets, the white handle of a knife sticking boldly from the sash about his waist. One was a cowman, sheepskin chaps on bandy legs, two guns swinging low. The third was tall, dark—saturnine. His clothes branded him for what he was—a professional gambler. He broke away from his companions, lounged towards Batwing.

"That'll be me," he jerked harshly. "I'm Carver. What d'you want?"

"Nothing," Batwing drawled. "I'm a Special Ranger. I don't want trouble, unless you do, but—I'm closing this joint up!"

"Yore—*what?*" Carver bellowed.

"Closing the place," Batwing repeated. "I'll give you twenty-four hours to cash in and pull your freight."

Carver laughed discordantly.

"Yeah an' I will—like hell!" he snarled. "Special Ranger yuh may be, but don't forgit this—yore a long, long way from home, feller! Six of yore breed wouldn't be enough t' close this place. Special Ranger—bah!"

He spat with a wealth of contempt. Batwing looked slowly down to the wet blotch alongside his foot, up again to Carver's face. Somebody sniggered. Then, Batwing seemed to slide forward, rippled into movement. His right fist travelled a short, terrific arc. Bone crunched on impact. Carver slammed over backwards, unconscious before he hit the floor. Batwing looked the watching men over mockingly.

"Anybody else—got ideas?" he asked.

There was an undercurrent of restrained movement, of muttered speech. The Mexican emptied his glass, swung towards the Ranger. He stepped springily on his toes. He was tall and lithe, tigerish. In front of Batwing he halted.

"Yess," he said, his voice liquid but edged with temper. "Me—Juan—I 'av idea. I theenk—yess—I keel you. Carver—he iss *my* good frien'. So——"

He erupted into lightning movement. Batwing confessed to himself he had never crossed a faster human. There was a smooth swiftness, an animal-like ferocity, about this Mexican that was as paralysing as it was deadly. The white-handled knife was suddenly in a brown hand, making a glittering, bayonet-like thrust. Swift the Mexican was, but not swift enough. When it seemed that nothing could prevent the knife plunging into Batwing's throat, he swayed sideways and down. The Mexican's arm slid across his shoulder. The man was momentarily off balance. Batwing's hands flashed up, took hold. The two bodies surged together, twisted. There was an instant of straining immobility. Then the Mexican screamed. Bone broke with a horrible crackling. The velvet-clad form catapulted over Batwing's heaving shoulder, hit the side of the bar with a terrific crash, and slid to the floor in a still heap, the broken arm twisted awkwardly. Again Batwing's eyes snapped back to those other men.

In the moment when the defeat of the Mexican had been apparent, restraint had given way to savage action. The solitary man at the bar cursed and went for his guns as Batwing looked up. The three at the card table were on their feet, hands plunging for weapons. The man seated before the piano was the only one who had not moved. He watched intently, fiddling with his hat. The barman's hands were down out of sight, but the mirror behind showed the shotgun he was lifting. Batwing saw it all in that one, flashing glance, weighing the possibilities and danger of each item of movement even as he saw it. And he went into action.

The two black guns were suddenly in his hands, roaring and flaming. Blue fumes eddied upwards about him. The man against the bar dropped

without firing a shot, blood pouring from a hole in his right temple. Two of the three about the table died in swift succession. One fired a shot that tugged at the cloth on his shoulder—and went down like a shovelful of dirt, a hole where one eye had been. The other was dragging at a weapon concealed inside his shirt, cursing monotonously. His curses chopped off as lead tore a widening path through his heart. He took a bird-like hop backwards, toppled, and took the table down with him. The third man stood frozen, empty hands above his head, a terrified amazement in his wide eyes. The barman had got the snout of the shotgun above the counter when a bullet slammed through his throat and broke his spine. He fell back against the shelves, went down in a shower of smashing glass. The reek of alcohol mingled with cordite fumes.

The silence, after that crashing flurry, was intense, almost painful. The man by the bar had fallen with his head in a cuspidor, and blood, dripping from his wound, went *tic-tic-tic* on the brass. The smell of blood was in the hot air. Batwing's eyes flicked contemptuously over the man with elevated hands, sped on to the man on the chair. The man was watching him steadily, face set, a wild gleam in his eyes. He still held the hat.

"Get up, you!" Batwing barked.

The man got slowly to his feet. His eyes never wavered from Batwing's face. The two black guns returned the stare, and their owner said, menacingly:

"Drop that—hat!"

Surprise twitched at the man's handsome, dissipated face, and fear built its mark on it for the first time. He became tense, set—then breath left his lungs in a long, shuddering gasp. He dropped the hat. There was a heavy *thud* as it hit the floor, and it rolled aside and exposed the Colt that had been hidden beneath it. His mouth worked soundlessly. Batwing's smile was a terrible thing.

"Didn't have the stomach to chance it after all, eh?" he sneered. "You shouldn't have waited. But I'd figured a gun was under the hat from the start—saw the empty holster. Well, you wouldn't take the chance—and you've lost out. You know me, maybe?"

The man nodded.

"I know yuh—Batwing," he whispered thickly. "Saw yuh, that night in Laramie yuh shot it out with Breed Ingals and Diamondback. I lit out—figgered I was clear."

Batwing became rigid as the doors behind him slammed open and men came tramping in. A voice called: "It's Hartman, Batwing!" A slight nod was his only acknowledgment. His eyes, like chips of sun-kissed ice, were on the man by the piano.

"Yeah, you got away," he drawled. "But I swore I'd get you, some day, Linden. But I didn't think I'd find you here. Yet, perhaps, I should have guessed. The crookedness of this place has all your earmarks. And Denlin is only Linden, re-shuffled. Well, you've lived your rotten life long enough. You've robbed, cheated, murdered. And now——"

"No! No!" Linden gasped, his face a horrible mask of fear. "Yuh can't—yuh mustn't shoot me, Batwing. I—yuh——"

"Enough!" Batwing snarled abruptly. "You killed a Ranger, Linden—fancied yourself a great man, an expert with a gun. They called you 'Lightning' Linden. I'll show you what gunplay is—and if you hope to live—*don't move!*"

Batwing's guns broke into sudden, roaring life. Motionless, except for the kick of recoil, they blasted a swift hail of lead. Behind him, the bunched men stood still and staring, eyes wide, mouths sagging. They witnessed a display of gun mastery and control such as they had never dreamed possible.

They were privileged to glimpse, for a moment, something of the amazing capabilities of this grim, strong man whose name was a hated byword amongst the lawless of the country.

Linden screamed as those deadly guns barked and spat at him. But he stood like a man turned to stone. Lead smacked the knot of his neckerchief to shreds, whisked the silk from about his throat. A sudden furrow was ploughed through the tangled mat of his hair. His arms twitched like those of a rag doll as bullets shattered the fancy bone buttons that secured his leather cuffs. Lead tore through the extreme points of his riding boots, ripped open the leather without touching his toes. Then the double click of spent shells heralded the end of the grim display. The guns fell silent. Batwing grinned icily through the rolling fog of smoke, allowed the hot weapons to sag.

A low, astounded murmur swelled from the watching men. Fascinated, incredulous, their eyes regarded the living target, swung with awe to the relaxed form of the Special Ranger. A sobbing gasp escaped Linden, and he shook from head to foot like a reed in a wind. There was a wild, awful look in his eyes. He groaned, sagged, went down to his knees. And then an evil grin of triumph leapt on to his face. The show of weakness left him. His hand snaked out, scooped up his Colt.

"Empty guns, Batwing—so th' las' trick's mine!" he almost screamed, steadied for the shot.

Batwing's grin became derisive. One of his guns flicked up, boomed once. Linden was slammed backwards, a surprised, dreadful look on his face. His Colt exploded, the slug gouged wood from the edge of the bar. He dropped the gun, rolled over. Slowly, he hoisted himself on to one elbow. Blood stained the left breast of his shirt. He glared malevolently.

"Damn yuh!" he gasped. "Yuh tricked me. Kept one shot, an' worked th' empty gun twice."

Batwing nodded.

"That's how it was, Linden," he drawled. "But you tricked yourself. You never could make an honest count—of anything belonging to anybody else. If you'd tallied, you'd have known I'd only fired eleven shots."

A hiatus followed. Then:

"Well," Linden snarled weakly. "Yuh'll never get me t' Laramie. I'll cheat th' Law, anyway."

"Not you," Batwing told him. "Because—I *am* the Law! As for Laramie—I never did reckon to tote you, all that way. The new Marshal shall have the doubtful honour of planting you here in Grande. Your tombstone shall stand as a warning to others of your kind. And me—I'm pushing on. There are so many of your breed, Linden. Men who are retarding the progress of a great people in God's finest country—and they must change their ways, or go under!"

And in a tremendous, breathless silence, that sombre man strode out into the night. Batwing had mopped up!

THE END.

THE PERFECT ROBBERY

by Hedley Trembath

"I've got a cast-iron alibi in case things go wrong. This is what they call the perfect robbery." But both robber and robbed received a surprise.

DANNY BLAIR, diminutive page-boy at the Chatsworth Stores, brought the lift to a halt at the first floor of the biggest store in London. Placing his cap at a rakish angle he stepped out on the polished floor and did a little tap-dance of delight as he realised he had mastered the evasive secret.

That secret had evaded him for years, but he was master of it now!

It was nearly six-thirty in the evening, and Danny had just taken a tea tray up to Martin Chatsworth, grey-haired owner of the store, who was going to work late in his office that evening. His daughter Marian was getting married on the following day, and Martin was catching up on his work to have the day off.

The exuberant Danny was a great favourite with Marian, and she had invited him to the wedding too.

As it was nearing closing time the vast store presented an animated scene as customers and shopwalkers bustled around. Danny's blue eyes twinkled as he saw a tall, well-dressed man push his way through the crowd. He came towards Danny with a confident swinging stride.

He stepped into the lift, and Danny followed him and closed the gate. "Mr. Chatsworth's office, please," said the stranger crisply.

"I'm sorry, sir," replied Danny. "You can only see Mr. Chatsworth by appointment."

"I know, I know," remarked the stranger impatiently. "This is different. He'll see me instantly if you will take me to him. It's about his daughter's wedding."

Danny's eyes clouded, he replaced his cap to the correct position, and then set the lift in motion. As it travelled upwards he glanced at the stranger and saw that beneath his outwardly confident manner he was highly nervous. He had taken his hat off and was twirling it aimlessly in his left hand. His hair was crisp and black, ever so faintly touched with grey.

With a whirr of hidden power the lift came to a halt at the top floor, and Danny opened the gate for the stranger. The tall man stepped out easily, turned to Danny and barked, "All right, sonny. Lead me to the boss."

Danny twisted sharply, startled at the menace in the stranger's voice. The colour drained from his face as he saw the snub end of an automatic concealed under the tall man's hat. The stranger laughed a little wildly, and Danny shuddered as unsmiling grey eyes stared down at him:

They were the eyes of a killer. Small, deep set, and cold.

"Remember, sonny boy," warned the stranger, "no tricks or you'll get hurt. Now take me direct to Chatsworth."

Danny felt bristles rise on his back as he walked down the corridor on rubbery legs. The silence was uncanny, and Danny stifled a sob as he knocked on the door of Chatsworth's office.

"Open the door and step inside the office," whispered the stranger.

Danny did as he was told, and through eyes, brimful of tears, saw a look of astonishment appear on Martin's face as he gazed up from his desk. "Here, here, what's the meaning of this?" asked Chatsworth.

The tall man showed the automatic which he was holding in his left hand. "Shut up bawling," he growled. "Put your hands up and step away from that desk."

Chatsworth's eyes smouldered, but he held his hands up, and the stranger said, "Reach that ten thousand pounds worth of ice out of your safe now and place it on your desk."

"Don't be silly," remarked Chatsworth. "You'll be caught easy enough. You'll never be able to get away with robbery here. Why, my secretary will be coming into this room shortly, and some of the departmental managers."

"That will be just too bad—for them," sneered the crook. "Get a move on there, Chatsworth, or—you won't go to your daughter's wedding."

Martin pulled the tip of his ear. "You know about that too, do you?"

"Sure, Father Christmas. You bought the ice as a wedding present for her. But I'm taking it. I need the dough." The crook laughed. "Incidentally, it may interest you to know that I haven't got a police record in this country. On top of that, pop, I've got a cast-iron alibi in case things go wrong. This is what they call the perfect robbery."

Danny's heart pounded like a trip-hammer as he watched Chatsworth open the safe, and his eyes widened in amazement as Martin calmly placed the shimmering jewellery on the desk.

An hour later Chatsworth's bemused secretary discovered her employer and Danny bound up. It took her several minutes to free them, and as soon as Martin was loose he got through on the telephone to Scotland Yard.

Shortly afterwards the office was full of plain clothes men from the "Yard," and Chatsworth rapidly related what had happened.

"Describe the crook," said Inspector Danvers quietly.

Martin ran his hand through his grey hair. "Well, he was tall, not bad-looking, and rather tough."

"That description tags a million guys."

"I suppose it does, but that's the best I can do, Inspector."

Danny took a deep breath. "The crook was dark and left-handed, too, Mr. Chatsworth," he said.

"Upon my soul. So he was, Danny."

Inspector Danvers looked down at Danny with interest. "What else do you know, boy?" he enquired gruffly.

The vein at Danny's temple throbbed wildly. "Well, I can impersonate the crook's voice, sir," he said eagerly.

Some of the plain clothes men laughed, and Danny's face turned a scarlet red.

"Fire away then, boy," remarked the Inspector kindly.

Danver's face mirrored bewilderment as Danny fired away in the crook's voice, "Incidentally, it may interest you to know that I haven't got a police record in this country. On top of that, pop, I've got a cast-iron alibi in case things go wrong. This is what they call the perfect robbery."

"The perfect robbery hasn't been committed," growled Danvers grimly. "I've heard that voice a million times. It's Digger Murdock's. The description fits him too. He hasn't a police record in this country, but we know he's a crook. He's an Australian, and it will not be long before we put him behind bars now."

A smile hovered around Martin's mouth as he looked at his page-boy. "We'll have to tell Marian about your secret, Danny," he chuckled.

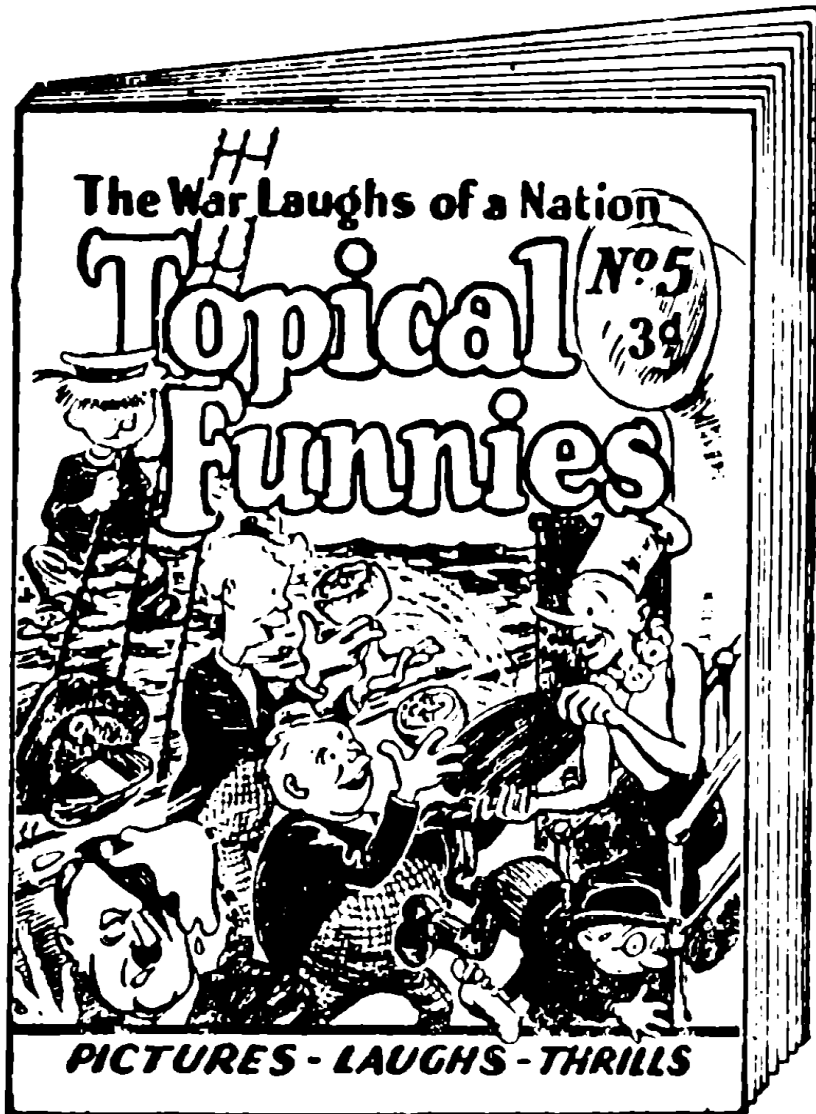
"Yes, yes, sir," gulped Danny. "But you—see—see, sir, Miss Marian has been teaching me the secrets of voice throwing."

Danvers grinned as he saw the expression on Martin's face. His mouth had sagged open as wide as a fishing net.

LAUGHITOFF

with our

**Mighty
3d.
Comic
Books**



NEW FUNNIES :: TOPICAL FUNNIES
WAR COMIC :: THRILL COMIC
SLICK FUN :: FRESH FUN

PACKED WITH LAUGHS AND THRILLS

One Title on Sale Every Week. Comic
and Thrill Pictures from Cover to Cover

*Obtainable from your local Newsagent or
Direct (4d. Post Free) from the Publishers*

General G. Swann Ltd
37-38-39 BURNE STREET · MARYLEBONE
LONDON · N.W.1





ROMANCE Pocket Novels

4D. NET

96 pages of reading

TWO BOOK LENGTH COMPLETE
ROMANCES IN EVERY NUMBER

- No. 6 **LOVE'S MAGIC POWER** by Florence Hodgkinson
and **KIDNAPPED**
- No. 7 **GLAMOROUS LOVE** by Mabel Faire
and **FROM FACTORY TO FAME**
- No. 8 **CABARET LOVE** by Ida Forbes
and **UNDER FALSE COLOURS**
- No. 9 **WAS SHE GUILTY ?** by George Adair
- No. 10 **HER MARRIED LOVER** by Maud Isidore Douglas
- No. 11 **A TYPIST'S DECEIT** by Edith Watts

*Available now from your Newsagent or
direct (5d. post free) from the Publishers*

Gerald G. Swann Ltd
57-58-59 · BURNE STREET MARYLEBONE
LONDON · N · W · 1

