New TOM MERRY'S Own

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FOREWORD

Here is Tom Merry's Own again.

Here are all our old friends, Tom Merry and Jimmy Silver, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and Billy Bunter, and the rest of the happy crowd, as lively as ever.

Kingdoms rise and fall : frontiers fluctuate : old landmarks are lost : but Tom Merry and Co., like the poet's little brook, go on : to delight—I hope—my young readers while reminding older ones of happy days that are gone. Meet once more Billy Bunter, fattest and most fatuous member of the Greyfriars community : Tom Merry, that cheery specimen of British boyhood : Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the glass of fashion and the mould of form at St. Jim's : Jimmy Silver and his comrades of Rockwood School. And if you enjoy their company as much as I have enjoyed chronicling their adventures—and misadventures—then no one will be happier than,

Your old Friend,

Martin Clifford

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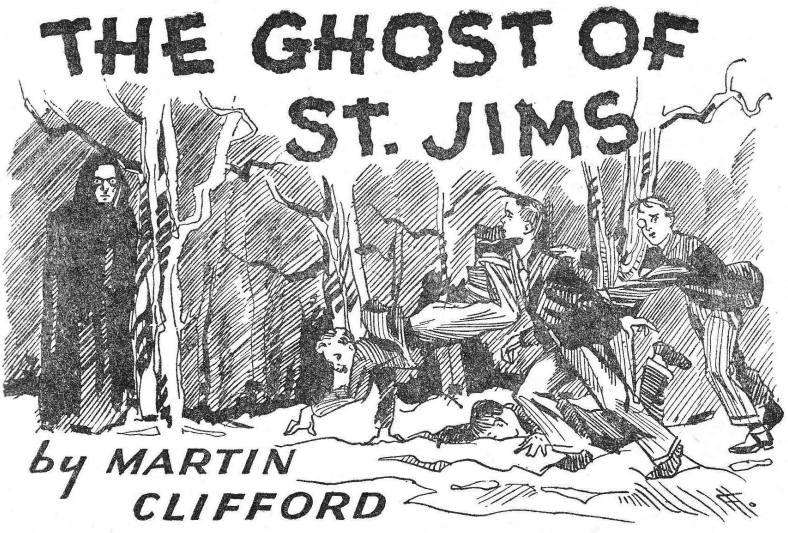


Chapter I

CALLED OVER THE COALS

"Cardew!"

"Yes, sir!"

"Stand out before the form!"

Mr. Lathom, master of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, rapped out the words sharply. All the St. Jim's Fourth sat up, as it were, and took notice.

Generally, Lathom was placid and mild. Now he was frowning, and his voice had an edge on it. Obviously he was not in his usual benignant mood.

And all the St. Jim's Fourth knew that Cardew was booked for trouble again. That was nothing new: for Ralph Reckness Cardew, the scapegrace of the School House, seemed born for trouble as the sparks fly upward.

The juniors had just taken their places in form. But it appeared that there was some other matter to which their form-master was going to attend, before the lesson commenced.

Cardew rose in his place, very slowly, his lips set.

All the other fellows looked at him: his chums, Clive and Levison, rather anxiously; and his noble relative, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with some concern.

"Bai Jove! I wondah what's up now!" Arthur Augustus murmured to Jack Blake. "Looks like a wow!"

Blake shrugged his shoulders.

"Spotted out of bounds, very likely," he answered.

"Or smoking in his study," said Digby.

"Or backing his fancy!" grunted Herries.

"It is wathah wotten to land in a wow, just befoah bweakin-up for Chwistmas. I twust——"

"Silence in the form!" rapped out Mr. Lathom. The whispered words did not reach his ears: but he caught the murmur of voices. Plainly he was in an unusually sharp mood. Whispering among the juniors very often passed unheeded in Lathom's form-room.

"Lathom's in a bait!" whispered Figgins, to Kerr and Wynn. "What has that smudge been doing this time?"

"Figgins!" rapped Mr. Lathom.

"Oh! Yes, sir!"

"Did you speak, Figgins?"

"Oh! Yes! No! Yes," stammered Figgins.

"Take fifty lines."

Figgins did not speak again. Neither did anyone else. Only too clearly, Lathom was in a 'bait.' Nobody else wanted fifty lines. The juniors watched Cardew in silence, as he slowly—very slowly—left his place in form.

He had to pass Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and Arthur Augustus gave him a sympathetic look in passing. They were relatives: but they had nothing in common, and little to do with one another, although they were in the same form and the same House at school. Arthur Augustus disapproved, with a lofty disapproval, of Cardew's shady ways, and had indeed sometimes spoken to him quite severely on the subject. Cardew, for his part, made no secret of his opinion that Arthur Augustus was the most complete ass at St. Jim's or anywhere else. With lofty scorn on one side, and derision on the other, they were not likely to be friends. All the same, Arthur Augustus could feel sympathy for a fellow who was up for trouble with a 'beak': even if it was the fellow's own fault.

"Sowwy, deah boy," he murmured, as Cardew came within hearing of a whisper: at the risk of fifty lines from Lathom. Fortunately, this time the Fourth Form-master did not hear.

Cardew looked at him. The next moment he stumbled over Arthur Augustus's foot and tottered. Apparently he lost his balance, for he fell against his relative, catching at him for support.

"Oh!" gasped Arthur Augustus, almost pushed off his form by the sudden and unexpected impact. He did not even notice that Cardew's hand dived, for a split second, into his handkerchief-pocket, and left something there as it was swiftly withdrawn.

" Clumsy ass! " murmured Herries.

Jack Blake stared at Cardew. His impression was that that stumble was no accident, though he did not detect Cardew's action in so swiftly transferring something from his hand to D'Arcy's pocket.

" Silly ass—larking! " grunted Blake.

Cardew straightened up almost in a moment.

" Keep your feet out of the way, D'Arcy," he snapped.

" Weally, Cardew, my feet were not in the way," exclaimed Arthur Augustus, indignantly. " You twod on my foot—— "

" Silence in the form! Cardew, come here at once," rapped Mr. Lathom.

" Yes, sir! "

Cardew went out, before the form. He had been slow—very slow—in leaving his place. But now he seemed quite brisk.

He stood before his form-master, his manner meek and respectful, yet with a hint of impertinence in it.

Mr. Lathom frowned at him over his glasses. All eyes in the Fourth Form fixed on him. Cardew's ways were well known in his form: and it was a mystery to many fellows why he had never been found out and 'sacked.' But it was clear now that some one of his many delinquencies had come to the knowledge of his form-master.

" Cardew," said Mr. Lathom, sternly.

" Yes, sir," murmured Cardew.

" You were on the path under the school wall shortly before class."

" Yes, sir! We're allowed to walk there," said Cardew, meekly. " Or is there a new rule on the subject, sir? "

" Bai Jove! " murmured Arthur Augustus.

Some of the juniors grinned. Cardew was being meekly and coolly impertinent. He was the only fellow in the Fourth who would have ventured to be " cheeky " in such circumstances.

" What? What? " rapped Mr. Lathom. " Cardew, you were seen to pick up a packet of some sort, tossed over the wall by someone in the road. You were seen by a prefect, who reported to me."

" Indeed, sir! "

" So that's it! " muttered Levison to Clive. Levison and Clive, who chummed with Cardew in No. 9 Study in the Fourth, knew how he obtained his surreptitious supplies of cigarettes. He had been spotted at last. But they were relieved that the matter was no worse. Certainly, smoking among the juniors was an offence. But it was a light matter, in comparison with some of Cardew's little secrets.

" You have been punished for smoking several times this term," went on Mr. Lathom. " I require to know, Cardew, what that packet contains. You will turn out your pockets on my desk."

" Copped! " murmured Blake.

"Serve him jolly well right!" grunted Herries.

"Oh, certainly, sir," said Cardew, quite coolly. He was, as Blake said, 'copped': all the form knew, or guessed, what that packet contained, and Mr. Lathom evidently had no doubt. But the scapegrace of the Fourth was quite cool about it. He might not have been so cool, perhaps, had he still been in possession of the article, whatever it was, that he had so cunningly slipped into Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's jacket pocket. But he was prepared to face the music for smuggling smokes into the school.

He proceeded to turn out his pockets on Mr. Lathom's desk. One article to come to light was a cardboard carton, and the master of the Fourth picked it up, frowning.

The frown intensified on his brow as he examined it.

"Cardew! This packet contains cigarettes."

Cardew made no reply to that. The fact was evident to all eyes.

Mr. Lathom tossed the packet of cigarettes into the form-room fire. They went up in smoke: not in the way intended by the manufacturer. Then he fixed his eyes on Cardew's cool face.

"Cardew! You will be given detention for every remaining day in the term," he rapped.

"Very well, sir."

"You will remain in the form-room for two hours after class every day, and write out the first book of the Æneid."

Cardew's cool face changed, as he heard that. Obviously he was disconcerted. It was a fairly heavy penalty, for there was still a week to run of the term before St. Jim's broke up for the Christmas holidays. Two hours daily, writing Virgil in the deserted form-room after the others were gone, was far from an attractive prospect. But the punishment might have been more severe: some of the juniors had expected Lathom to send him up to the Head. It was rather hard to understand why he was so dismayed. But there was no doubt that his face registered dismay.

"You may now go back to your place, Cardew," snapped Mr. Lathom.

Cardew hesitated.

"If—if you please, sir——"

"What? What?"

"If—you'd cane me instead, sir——"

"What? What? I shall cane you in addition, if you speak another word, Cardew! Go back to your place this instant!"

Cardew, breathing hard, went back to his place.

Lessons began in the Fourth Form-room. Cardew sat through them with a black look. When the form were dismissed, he had to remain behind—his eyes following the graceful figure of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy as it disappeared with the rest. But there was no help for it—whatever it was that he had so cunningly and surreptitiously slipped into D'Arcy's pocket, to keep from his form-master's eyes, had to stay there, for two hours at least—unless, indeed, it was found there by Arthur Augustus before Cardew could get out of the form-room.

Chapter 2

TEA IN TOM MERRY'S STUDY

Tom Merry came into No. 10 Study in the Shell with a bundle under his arm. He slammed it down on the study table: and there was a howl from Monty Lowther, who was sitting at that table, pen in hand, with a scribbled sheet before him. About a dozen blots scattered from the pen, which did not improve the appearance of that scribbled sheet.

"Fathead!" howled Lowther.

"Oh, my hat! Lines?" asked Tom.

"No, you ass! My verses——"

"Oh, that's all right," said Tom, cheerily. "Never mind your verses, old man. Clear the table——"

"You silly ass!"

"Tea-time," said Tom. "And we've got visitors coming——"

"Blow tea!"

"Can't blow tea when we've got visitors——"

"Blow the visitors."

"Manners has gone along to Study 6 to fetch Blake's gang——"

"Blow Blake's gang."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Blow everything and everybody you like," he agreed, "but let's get tea ready. I've got sosses——"

"Bother the sosses."

"And eggs——"

"Bust the eggs."

"And jam——"

"Blow the jam."

"Well, what is it?" asked Tom. "Anything important?"

"Br-r-r-r-r!" growled Lowther. "It's my poem for the *Carcroft Chronicle*. Just like you to interrupt when I'm cracking my nut for a rhyme. I'll read you out what I've written, if you like."

"Oh!" said Tom. "Much of it?"

"Br-r-r-r-r-r!"

"Oh, read it out, old chap," said Tom. "I don't mind—I—I mean, I'll be jolly glad to hear it. Cut on."

The clouds rolled away from Monty Lowther's brow. Monty was always ready to read out verses. The difficulty was to find listeners.

They differed a good deal in No. 10 in the Shell. Tom Merry seemed to his comrades to live for little but football; Manners, for little but his camera; Lowther, for little but writing comic verses and limericks and planning japes. But they bore with one another very tolerantly, as good chums should. If the Greyfriars match was in the offing, Lowther and Manners 'enthused' in tune with Tom. Tom and Monty took, or at least seemed to take, a deep interest in Manners' photographs. And Manners and Tom Merry would often listen while Monty told them his jokes, and laugh quite industriously. 'Give and take' all round worked very well indeed in No. 10.

As Tom had just come in with supplies for tea, and was expecting Manners to arrive any minute with four guests, it was possible that he could have dispensed with Lowther's verses, with considerable fortitude. However, he prepared to listen to Monty's burblings, and to laugh in the right place—if he happened to detect the right place.

"Cut on, old chap," he said. "Blake and his gang may be here any minute——"

"I said blow Blake and his gang."

"Oh! Yes! Cut on."

Monty Lowther cut on.

When deep the snow lies piled upon the ground,
And wild winds fill the air with wintry sound,
While frosty branches crackle in the trees,
And streams, in summer swift, congeal and freeze.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry.

"What are you laughing at?" he yelled.

Tom Merry ceased to laugh, suddenly. Only too evidently, this wasn't the right place!

"Oh! I—I—it's rather funny, you know," he stammered.

"You silly ass!"

"Well, cut on, and get to the funny part."

"You benighted idiot, this isn't a funny poem!" shrieked Lowther. "This is serious!"

"Oh!" gasped Tom. "I thought——"

"You thought!" snorted Lowther. "I'd like to know what you did it with. I'm writing a serious poem for the Christmas number of the *Carcroft Chronicle*, you blithering ass! It's about the ghost that haunts St. Jim's at Christmas time, and it's serious—if you know what serious means."

"Oh! My mistake!" said Tom. "Cut on."

"If you're going to cackle——"

"Sober as a judge, old man. Cut on."

Lowther gave a snort. However, he cut on.

While snowflakes on the air are lightly whirled,
And darkness deep enwraps the sleeping world,
'Tis then that from his unknown hidden den,
The Phantom Monk emerges to our ken,
A spectre haunting still the scene of crime,
When all is silent save the midnight chime.
With terror's eyes we view the spectre monk,

"That's as far as I've got," said Lowther. "I want a rhyme for monk. What do you think?"

"What about funk?" suggested Tom.

"You howling ass!"

"Well, it rhymes with monk——"

"Think you can use a word like 'funk' in poetry?" hooted Lowther.

"Sounds all right to me," said Tom. "What about this?"

With terror's eyes we view the spectre monk,
And can't help getting rather in a funk.

"Idiot!" answered Lowther, ungratefully.

"Well, what about this?" asked Tom.

With terror's eyes we view the spectre monk,
And turn our backs on him, and do a bunk.

"Ha, ha, ha!" came from the doorway. Manners had arrived with Study No. 6, and five grinning faces looked into No. 10 in the Shell.

"Bai Jove! That sounds vewy funnay," remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Is that one of your funnay poems, Lowthah? If it is all as funnay as that, you might wead it out to us ovah tea."

Monty Lowther, breathing hard and deep, tossed his verses on a shelf. The search for a rhyme to 'monk' had to be left till after tea: neither 'funk' nor 'bunk' seemed to satisfy the poet.

Blake and Herries, Digby and D'Arcy, came into the study with Manners. They had been improving the shining hour, after class, by snowballing Figgins and Co. of the New House, and brought in good appetites from the keen frosty air. Tom's bundle was unpacked: revealing sosses, eggs, jam, cake, and several other good things, welcome to all eyes. Even Monty Lowther forgot, for the nonce, that he was a poet, and remembered that he was a hungry schoolboy, quite ready for tea.

Tom stirred the fire, and Manners sorted out the frying-pan. An appetising aroma spread through No. 10 Study.

Seven was rather a crowd in a junior study: but hosts and guests made room somehow, and seven faces were cheery and bright as the 'Terrible Three' and their four guests sat down round the table, to dispose of the good things thereon.

Outside, the December dusk had fallen, and there was a flutter of snowflakes against the window-panes. Within, the fire burned cheerily, and all was merry and bright.

It was, perhaps, that early fall of snow that had put Lowther in mind of the legend of the Phantom Monk of St. Jim's. According to that legend, the ancient monk had been slain in the snow at Christmastide: and the first snowfall was the signal for him to revisit the glimpses of the moon. So now was the time for the shadowy phantom to glide noiselessly in the dim old passages of the School House—though it was not on record that any human eye had ever beheld it doing so.

However, the tea-party in No. 10 Study were not thinking of ghosts, phantoms, spectres or spooks. Their cheery talk ran chiefly on the approaching Christmas holidays: a rather more attractive subject. Only on the aristocratic brow of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was there a shade of thought.

"It's wathah wuff," Arthur Augustus remarked at last. Blake had just remarked that the snow was coming down: but Arthur Augustus was following his own line of thought.

"Seasonable, anyhow," said Blake.

"Eh? I wemarked that it was wathah wuff, Blake."

"Well, it's generally a bit rough in December, isn't it?"

"You misappwehend me, deah boy! I was not alludin' to the weathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "I was thinkin' about that ass Cardew——"

"Oh, bother Cardew," said Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies——"

"What does Cardew matter?" yawned Dig.

"Weally, Dig——"

"Cardew in the wars again?" asked Tom Merry. "What a chap he is for butting into trouble."

"Yaas, wathah! He is stickin' in form while we're havin' this jolly tea, Tom Mewwy—w'itin' wotten lines."

"Hard luck," said Manners.

"He asked for it," growled Herries. "Lathom found cigarettes on him. Might have sent him up to the Head."

"Silly ass!" commented Tom Merry.

"Yaas, he is a silly ass, but it is wathah wuff luck to get detention evewy day till the end of the term," said Arthur Augustus. "I have spoken to him sevewal times, quite severely you know, about that silly smokin'. Pewwaps I had bettah speak to him again."

"Guard with your left, if you do," grinned Blake. "Cardew won't be in the best of tempers when he comes out after two hours of Virgil."

"I shall speak to him wegardless of his tempah, Blake. I think I will wait in the cowwidah when he comes out, and go up to him immediately and say—oh! Cwikey! Wow!"

"What?" ejaculated Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus's hand shot up to his noble nose. On the tip of that noble nose was a blob of jam. Some playful member of the tea-party had interrupted his remarks by projecting a jam-ball across the table, and it had landed fair and square on the target.

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus's fingers came away sticky from his nose. "What silly ass—what uttah wuffian—is chuckin' jam about? Look at my nose!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Six fellows looked at it. It seemed to afford them entertainment. Tom Merry gave Monty Lowther a warning look. In the best circles hosts did not play practical jokes on their guests: a circumstance which Monty did not always remember.

Arthur Augustus breathed rather hard through his jammy nose. Then, in dignified silence, he jerked his handkerchief from his pocket to wipe away the stickiness therefrom.

A folded paper fluttered from the handkerchief, as it came out of the pocket, and fell on the table.

Arthur Augustus, busy rubbing a sticky nose, did not notice it. But six fellows saw it fall, and glanced at it. Cardew, grinding lines in the Fourth Form-room, was wondering savagely whether the article he had slipped into D'Arcy's pocket might come to light before he had a chance of recovering it.

It had!

Chapter 3

MYSTERIOUS!

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy rubbed every speck of jam from his aristocratic proboscis. He restored the handkerchief to his pocket. Then he cast a severe glance round the table.

Schoolboys will be schoolboys: and ink-balls and jam-balls were really not uncommon phenomena in a junior study. But the swell of St. Jim's did not approve of such antics: especially when his own noble nose was the object thereof.

"Weally, you fellows," began Arthur Augustus, stiffly.

"You've dropped a letter, Gussy," interposed Tom Merry, hastily. Perhaps he hoped that a change of subject might head off the lecture which Gussy was evidently about to deliver.

"I have not dwopped a lettah, Tom Mewwy. I was goin' to wemark——"

"There it is beside your plate," said Blake.

"Wubbish! I was goin' to say——"

"It dropped out of your pocket, ass, when you lugged out your hanky," said Herries.

Arthur Augustus glanced at the folded paper beside his plate. But he did not pick it up.

"Weally, Hewwies, it could hardly have dwopped out of my pocket, as I nevah keep anythin' of the kind in that pocket," he said. "I keep my handkerchief in that pocket, and nothin' else. I was goin'——"

"It's yours!" said Digby.

"It is not mine, Dig. And I insist upon sayin'——"

"My dear chap," said Manners. "We all saw that letter fall from your hanky when you pulled it out. You must have shoved it into that handkerchief-pocket without thinking."

"Weally, Mannahs, I nevah do anythin' without thinkin'. I am not a thoughtless ass like some fellows heah pwesent. And I am bound to say that I considah——"

"But it did fall from your pocket!" roared Blake.

"Pway do not woar at a fellow, Blake——"

"I tell you——"

"I have mentioned several times that I dislike bein' woared at, Blake. I weally do not know where that lettah came fwom, but it could not have fallen from my pocket——"

"But it did, Gussy," said Tom Merry, laughing. "We all saw it fall. Hadn't you better field it?"

Arthur Augustus looked puzzled. He was assured that he had never had a letter in that pocket. Yet the evidence of the whole tea-party was to the opposite effect.

"Well, if that lettah dwopped fwom my pocket, I quite fail to undahstand it," he said. "Howevah, I will look at it, and see if it is mine."

He picked up the paper, unfolded it, and glanced at it. Quite an extraordinary expression came over his face as he did so. He stared at what was written on the paper quite blankly.

"Bai Jove!" he ejaculated.

"It's yours, ass," said Blake.

"It is not mine, Blake! It belongs to Cardew——"

"Cardew?"

"It is w'itten in his hand, at any wate. I quite fail to compwehend how a lettah written by Cardew came into my pocket. It must be some silly twick. Here—look at it."

Arthur Augustus held up the letter. It was a half-sheet of notepaper, and the writing on it was in Cardew's neat, elegant hand, which all the juniors knew. The whole tea-party, surprised and intrigued by the strange occurrence, stared at it. How a letter written by Cardew of the Fourth came to be in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's pocket, without his knowledge, was, for the moment at least, a mystery. It was very brief. It ran:

Dear Bill,
O.K. Tuesday at 10.30.
C.

Obviously that brief note had not been written to D'Arcy, in whose possession it was: even if a Fourth Form fellow could be supposed to have any reason for writing to another Fourth Former whom he saw a dozen times a day. It was written to somebody whose first name was "Bill."

'Bill,' whoever Bill was, had not received it: somehow or other, in some inexplicable manner, it had found its way into Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's jacket pocket.

"Well, my hat!" said Tom Merry.

"What the dickens——" said Monty Lowther.

"Who's Bill?" said Manners.

"Goodness knows," said Tom.

Blake gave a whistle.

"Bill?" he said. "Bill Lodgey, at the 'Green Man'—we all know that Cardew goes out of bounds, and why. He knows that man Lodgey."

"Bai Jove!"

"Looks like an appointment," said Manners, staring at the letter. "Ten thirty tomorrow—can't mean anything else."

"But we are in form at ten thirty, Mannahs. Bweak is at ten forty-five, you know," said Arthur Augustus.

Manners shrugged his shoulders.

"Cardew doesn't call on his sporting friends in the morning," he said, drily. "That means ten thirty p.m."

"But it is lights out at nine thirty, Mannahs. Cardew will be in bed at ten thirty p.m."

"Fathead!" said Manners.

"Weally, Mannahs——"

"That's what it means," said Tom Merry, with a nod. "Cardew's game is to break out tomorrow night, after lights out, and that note was written to tell Lodgey so. He must have meant to get out, and post it outside the school. How on earth did it come into Gussy's pocket?"

The juniors stared at the note and at one another.

The meaning of that note was clear enough. Probably Cardew had despatched dozens of such notes, in the term, to his sporting friends at various times. There was nothing surprising in that: they all knew the ways of the scapegrace of St. Jim's. But it was not merely surprising: it was absolutely amazing, for the letter to be in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's pocket instead of in Cardew's.

"Beats me hollow," said Tom.

"Better keep it out of sight, Gussy," said Manners. "That note's enough to get Cardew sacked, if the house-master saw it."

"Bai Jove! If Wailton saw it—bai Jove! But—but do you fellows weally think that it means that Cardew was fixing up an appointment to see that wotten smudge Lodgey after lights out tomowwow?"

"It's as plain as your face, old bean—and that's saying a lot," said Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"You didn't pick it up somewhere, Gussy?" asked Herries. "Cardew might have dropped it——"

"Of course I did not pick it up, Hewwies. I have never seen it befoah."

"Then how did it get into your pocket?"

"I haven't a clue, deah boy!"

Blake gave a sudden yell.

"I've got it! Cardew shoved it there, in form this afternoon. Lathom called him out, and he fell over Gussy's hoofs——"

"Weally, Blake, I wish you would not allude to my feet as hoofs——"

"He stumbled over Gussy," exclaimed Blake, in great excitement. "I jolly well knew he did it on purpose—I thought he was larking, just to cheek Lathom—but that was his game. He had that note in his pocket, and had to get rid of it somehow—and that's how he did it."

"Lathom made him turn out his pockets," said Digby, with a nod. "He had a packet of smokes. If that note had been there——"

"Lathom would have spotted it, when he turned out his pockets," said Herries. "He landed it on Gussy to keep it dark."

"Imposs., deah boys," said Arthur Augustus, shaking his head. "I should certainly have noticed it——"

"Fathead!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"He stumbled over Gussy, and clawed hold of him," said Blake, "and that's why he did it. He knew that Lathom was suspicious, and that he might have to turn out his pockets. He simply dared not chance it, with that note in his pocket——"

"By gum!" said Tom. "It looks like it! Cardew's pretty quick on the uptake."

"Oh, he's wide enough," snorted Herries. "If he wasn't jolly wide, he would have been sacked before this."

"Bai Jove! Do you fellows weally think——"

"Not much doubt about it," said Manners. "That letter got into your pocket somehow—and that was the how."

Arthur Augustus's brow set in a deep frown.

"You think that wottah was makin' use of me to keep out of a wow with Lathom——"

"It would have been more than a row with Lathom," said Blake. "If Lathom had seen that, he would have taken it with Cardew to the Head."

"The jolly old long jump for Cardew," said Lowther.

It was clear enough now to all the juniors in No. 10 Study. What had seemed an inexplicable mystery was solved.

"The uttah wottah!" said Arthur Augustus, in tones of deep indignation. "The howwid wapscallion! Stickin' his wotten lettah to a wacin' man in my pocket——"

"He would have got it back after class, somehow, if he hadn't been detained," said Blake. "Shove it out of sight, Gussy—'tain't our business to get your precious relative bunked, and if anyone saw it——"

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus hastily put the letter into his pocket. There was only one opinion in No. 10 Study as to Cardew's deserts: but no fellow there wanted to have a hand in giving him away.

"Anyone might come in," said Tom. "Keep it dark, Gussy. If some tattling ass like Trimble saw it——"

Tap!

Tom was interrupted by a tap at the study door. Seven juniors looked round all at once as it opened.

CHAPTER 4

ALL CLEAR!

"You may go, Cardew."

"Thank you, sir."

Mr. Lathom's look was grim, and his tone sharp. Neither the grimness nor the sharpness had any perceptible effect on Ralph Reckness Cardew. The fact that his form-master was deeply displeased with him mattered not a straw to the scapegrace of the Fourth. Lathom's frowning glance followed him as he left the form-room.

Cardew's lip curved in a sneering smile, as he went down the passage. Lathom was 'shirty' with him over a packet of cigarettes. What would he have been like if he had known the rest? Ralph Reckness Cardew had been within an ace of disaster that afternoon. Only his quick presence of mind had saved him. Right under Lathom's nose he had rid himself of that scrap of paper, which would have meant the 'long jump' for him if Lathom had seen it. His narrow escape had not perturbed him. He was rather inclined to pride himself upon his quickness of wit and promptness of action. To his mocking mind, it was amusing to have fooled his 'beak' under his very nose.

"Oh, here you are, old fellow."

"Waiting for you!"

Levison and Clive were waiting at the corner of the passage. They joined Cardew as he came along from the form-room.

He gave them a glance, apparently not particularly pleased to see them. The three were great friends, in spite of very wide differences of character. But Cardew

had no use for his friends just then. He was thinking of that tell-tale scrap of paper he had 'planted' on the unsuspicious Gussy, which he was very anxious to recover.

"We've waited tea for you," said Levison.

"All ready in the study," said Clive.

Cardew laughed. He knew what his two friends thought of his smokes, his racing stunts, his breaking out of bounds, and the rest of it: but he never seemed to tire out their patience. They carefully made no allusion to the scene in the form-room.

"Come on," said Levison. "I suppose you're ready for tea."

"Not quite! Seen D'Arcy?"

"Not since class. Do you want him?"

"Well, yes—I want a word with him. Just a friendly word—he's a relative of mine, you know," said Cardew, blandly. "Let's go up—I expect I shall find him in his study."

They went up to the Fourth Form studies together. Cardew stopped at the door of Study No. 6, and Levison and Clive went on to No. 9, where they expected their chum to join them at tea when he had had his 'word' with his relative. But he was not to join them quite so soon as expected.

Cardew tapped at the door of No. 6 and opened it. He stepped into the study, only to find it vacant. He stared round the study, frowning.

"Bother the silly ass! Where is he?" he grunted.

He came out of the study again, and looked up and down the passage. A fat junior loafing by the window blinked at him.

"Seen D'Arcy, Trimble?" called out Cardew.

"Tea-ing with Tom Merry," answered Trimble.

"Oh! All right."

Cardew hurried down the passage again to the landing, compressing his lips with annoyance. He did not want that scrap of paper to come to light, if he could help it, under the eyes of a crowd of fellows. But he was too deeply anxious about it to delay. D'Arcy might have pulled out his handkerchief—and that scrap of paper with it—anywhere, and he was ass enough not to notice it if it fell about the floor. The mere thought of his note to Bill Lodgey laying somewhere about the House, liable to catch any eye—perhaps a beak's—made Cardew feel cold down the back, in spite of his nerve. He had to assure himself about that scrap of paper.

He hurried up the Shell passage and tapped at the door of Tom Merry's study. Deeply anxious as he was, his face had its usual aspect of cool unconcern as he opened the door and looked in. He was not the fellow to give anything away by his looks.

Seven fellows, seated round the table, looked at him. He came in and shut the door after him.

"Sorry to butt in," he said, lightly. "I wanted to see you, D'Arcy."

Arthur Augustus did not reply. He screwed his celebrated monocle into his noble eye, and fixed it on Cardew, his look reminiscent of a refrigerator in its iciness.

Cardew glanced round the circle of faces. Not one of the seven spoke. Cardew

could not have fancied that he was *persona grata* in that study. That did not affect him in the least. But he was deeply anxious about that paper.

"Will you step out into the passage a minute, D'Arcy?" he asked.

Arthur Augustus broke his icy silence.

"If you have anythin' to say to me, Cardew, you can say it heah, in the presence of my fwiends," he answered.

"It's something private, really——"

"I have nothin' pwivate with you, Cardew."

Cardew breathed hard.

"Well, look here, I shoved something into your pocket when I stumbled on you in form this afternoon. It was something I didn't want Lathom to see—a—a note to a friend."

Arthur Augustus's lip curled.

"Weally, I wondah you did not shove the cigawettes into my pocket as well," he said, sarcastically.

"No time, or I would have," said Cardew, coolly. "I couldn't quite have got away with that—but I did get away with the note. It's in your handkerchief pocket. Hand it over, will you?"

"Only a note to a friend?" said Monty Lowther.

"Yes—if you're interested."

"Friend named Bill?" asked Lowther.

Cardew caught his breath. The note had been seen! He knew that now. He would have preferred it otherwise: but after all, it mattered little. No one in that study was likely to give him away. And what they were thinking of him had about as much effect on Cardew as water on a duck.

"I see you know all about it," he sneered. "Well, I want that note, D'Arcy. I had written it when the bell went, and it was in my pocket when we went into form—that's how it was. I could see that Lathom was suspicious, and I had to get rid of it. Lucky I did, as it turned out. I suppose you don't want to keep it?"

"I would not willingly touch your wotten note to a wacin' man with a pokah, Cardew," answered Arthur Augustus, disdainfully.

"Well, hand it over."

"I wegard it as wotten cheek to land your wubbish on me, Cardew," said Arthur Augustus, "and I considah——"

"Speech taken as read!"

"I considah that you are an uttah wottah, and a wotten wapscallion, and a shockin' outsidah——"

"Oh, quite!" agreed Cardew. "How well you know me. Comes of being related to me, I suppose."

"Bai Jove! You are a disgwace to the House, Cardew, and it would have served you wight if Latham had seen that note and taken you to the Head to be bunked."

"Probably," assented Cardew, "but as jolly old Shakespeare remarks, if every

man had his deserts, who would escape whipping? But I came here for that note, old bean—not for a jaw."

Arthur Augustus breathed hard through his noble nose. He took the note out and tossed it across to Cardew, who caught it and promptly slipped it into his pocket. It was an immense relief to him to have it safe in his own keeping again.

"Thanks, old tulip," he drawled. "Thanks for minding it for me."

"Bai Jove! I was not mindin' it for you, you wottah—I had no ideah that you had put it into my pocket—— "

"You wouldn't," agreed Cardew. "That's why I picked on you, old bean—I knew I could rely on you."

"You cheeky wottah! " exclaimed Arthur Augustus, wrathfully. "There is nothin' to gwin at, you fellows, in Cardew's cheek. I have a good mind to punch your cheeky head, Cardew."

"You've a good mind? " asked Cardew.

"Yaas, wathah."

"News to me! I never knew you had a mind at all," said Cardew, affably. "Why don't you use it sometimes? "

"Bai Jove—I—I—— " Arthur Augustus jumped up from the table. Cardew, laughing, stepped out of the study and drew the door shut with a bang.

He walked away cheerily to his own study in the Fourth. Levison and Clive eyed him as he came in.

"Seen D'Arcy? " asked Levison.

"Oh, yes! We've had quite a pleasant chat," drawled Cardew. "Tea ready? "

"It's been ready a long time."

"Well, I'm more than ready. I've got to cut out after tea, so let's get going."

"Oh, don't be an ass," growled Clive. "You can't cut out after gates are closed."

"Dear me! " said Cardew.

"Look here—— " began Levison, frowning.

"Only to post a letter, dear man," said Cardew. "Merely that and nothing more. Couldn't get to it sooner, owing to Lathom and his dashed detentions. I want to catch the post at the box in the lane."

"Why can't you post it in the school box? " demanded Clive.

Cardew laughed. He was not likely to post a letter addressed to Mr. William Lodgey at the 'Green Man' in the school box.

"Never mind why," he said. "Let's have tea."

After tea, Cardew addressed and stamped an envelope, slipped the note into it and disappeared. He was not seen again for some little time, but when he turned up in the junior day-room he was cheerful and smiling, and quite at his ease. His note to Bill Lodgey, after its curious vicissitudes, was on its way: and no doubt the scapegrace of St. Jim's was looking forward to the reckless escapade planned for the morrow night.

Chapter 5

TROUBLE FOR THREE!

"Wherefore this thusness?"

It was Monty Lowther who asked that playful question.

The wintry morning was bright, with a gleam of sunshine on the snow that powdered the old quad and on the frosty branches of the elms. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther came out in break in a cheery bunch: but Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as they came on him in the quad, did not look so cheery. There was a wrinkle of thought on the noble brow of Gussy: he looked like a fellow with a problem on his mind. Hence Monty's question.

In a corner of the quad, Blake and Herries and Dig, Levison and Clive, and a dozen other School House men, were exchanging snowballs with Figgins and Co. of the New House. But Arthur Augustus seemed in no mood for snowballing.

Neither, it seemed, was his relative, Ralph Reckness Cardew, who was sauntering under the frosty elms with his hands in his pockets, regardless of the snow-battle raging at a distance.

Several times Arthur Augustus's glance was turned on Cardew: and every glance was accompanied by a frown. Once Cardew, catching that frowning glance, gave him a wink, which caused Gussy to colour with indignation.

"What's the trouble, old scout?" asked Tom Merry, cheerily. "Thinking out something knotty in maths?"

"Not at all, deah boy," answered Arthur Augustus. "I was just thinkin'——"

"Thinking of coming along and giving those New House ticks a few?" asked Tom.

"Wathah not! The fact is, I am wathah wowwied," confessed Arthur Augustus. "Pewwaps you fellows could advise a fellow."

"What-ho," said Tom. "Tell it to your Uncle Thomas! Lathom on your track for skewing in con?"

"It is wathah more sewious than con, Tom Mewwy."

"Anything happened to your top-hat?" asked Monty Lowther, with great gravity.

"Nothin', deah boy," answered Arthur Augustus, innocently: and the Shell fellows grinned.

"Not so bad as that?" asked Lowther. "Well, give it a name—what's the jolly old worry? We're the fellows who know all the answers."

"It's that wottah Cardew," said Arthur Augustus, with a glance of disfavour at his relative sauntering under the elms. "You are awah that he is welated to me. I am not pwoud of it—but there it is."

"These things can't be helped," said Lowther, consolingly. "We've all got relations not quite up to the mark of our noble selves."

"Pway be sewious, Lowthah, on a sewious subject. Fwom that wotten note that was in my pocket yestahday, it is perfectly cleah that that tick Cardew is goin' to bweak out tonight, goin' to see some wacin' man. It is fwightfully wotten, and vewy wisky. A fellow doesn't want a welation to be bunked from the school, you know."

"Oh, Cardew won't be bunked," said Manners, with a curl of the lip. "He's too jolly wide. Look how he wriggled out yesterday when any other fellow would have been nailed."

"It's rotten, Gussy," said Tom Merry, "but you can't do anything."

"That is what I was twyin' to think out, Tom Mewwy. I have consulted Blake and Hewwies and Dig, and they said I had bettah mind my own business——"

"Oh!"

"But weally, you know, it is wathah my business, as the wottah is welated to me, and he is askin' for the sack."

"Um!" said Tom.

"He will be sneakin' out of the dorm tonight in the dark, cweepin' on tiptoe out of the House, and hikin' off to that disweputable den, the 'Green Man,'" continued Arthur Augustus. "The pwefects would stop him fast enough, but of course a man can't give a chap away. But—he ought to be stopped."

Evidently, Arthur Augustus was considerably worried and troubled. But the problem of keeping his scapegrace relative to the straight and narrow path was too much for his noble brain.

"Talkin' to him's no good," went on Arthur Augustus. "I've twied that! I have spoken to him vewy sewiously, and what do you think he said?"

"What?" asked Tom.

"He told me to put a sock in it," said Arthur Augustus, with deep indignation. "Bai Jove! What are you gwinnin' at?"

"Oh! Nothing!" gasped Tom. "Not much good talking to him, Gussy! Come along and give the New House smudges a few."

"Wubbish!" said Arthur Augustus, and he walked on his way, still with the wrinkle of deep thought on his noble brow. Evidently he was too much concerned about his scapegrace relative to find any attraction in a snow fight with Figgins and Co. of the New House.

Tom Merry frowned.

"It's rotten," he said. "That fellow Cardew ought to be kicked."

"Let's go and kick him," suggested Lowther.

"Let's mind our own business," said Manners.

"I think I'll speak to him," said Tom, and he crossed over to where the dandy of the Fourth was lounging under the elms, followed by his chums.

Cardew gave them a nod and a smile. He was very well aware what the 'Terrible

Three ' thought of him : but it did not seem to perturb him in any way. Probably it amused him.

" Toppin' mornin'," he remarked. " Why aren't you fellows joinin' in the snowballin'? You generally set us an example of the strenuous life."

" Never mind that," said Tom. " D'Arcy's just been speaking to us—— "

" Yes, I saw his chin waggin'," assented Cardew. " Has he been borin' you? "

" Look here, Cardew—— "

" Lookin'."

" A good many fellows know what you've got on for tonight," said Tom Merry, abruptly.

" So glad they're interested."

" Don't you think you'd better chuck it? " said Tom.

" Why? " drawled Cardew.

" You don't care what fellows think of you," said Tom, scornfully.

" Not a lot," admitted Cardew. " Even if I lost your good opinion, Thomas, I think I could bear it with some fortitude."

Tom Merry breathed hard.

" Well, you are a rotter," he said.

" Thanks."

" Half a dozen fellows know that you're going to sneak out after lights out tonight, to see a welsher in a pub, and you don't care! " snapped Tom.

Cardew's eyes gleamed for a moment. Put like that, he did not seem quite to like it. But the next moment he shrugged his shoulders.

" Not my fault if half a dozen fellows know," he drawled. " I can't help fellows readin' another fellow's letter."

Tom's face flamed.

" Who read another fellow's letter? " he almost shouted.

" Didn't you? You seem to know all about it? "

" You—you—you worm! " gasped Tom. " You know perfectly well that that letter fell out of D'Arcy's pocket, where you put it, and that nobody knew what it was till it was looked at—— "

" I know you read it."

" You cheeky cad! " exclaimed Lowther.

" That's enough from you, Cardew." Even the quiet and sedate Manners was roused to wrath. " Collar the cad."

Cardew jumped back.

" Hands off! I—I—oh, gad! Oh! "

The next moment he was whirling in the grasp of the ' Terrible Three.' He came down on the snowy earth with a bump and a yell.

" Leggo! By gad, I—I—I'll—oh! "

" Roll him over," said Lowther, savagely.

Cardew yelled as he was rolled over in the snow. His well-cut clothes, almost

as elegant as those of his relative, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, were sadly rumpled and crumpled. He yelled and struggled and kicked, but there was no help for him. He had not been able to restrain that sneer: but he wished now, perhaps, that he had, as he rolled and yelled. But there came a sudden interruption.

"Merry! Manners! Lowther!"

It was a sharp angry voice: the voice of Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell. The 'Terrible Three' had not noticed their form-master in the offing. But he had noticed them, and he hurried to the spot, with thunder in his brow.

"Merry! Manners! Lowther! Release Cardew at once! Cease this horse-play immediately! Do you hear me?"

"Oh!" gasped Tom.

Cardew was released. He sprawled in the snow, while Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther turned flushed faces to their form-master.

Mr. Linton gave them a stern frown.

"Upon my word!" he exclaimed. "How dare you! Merry, Manners, Lowther, go into the House at once. Remain there till third school. And take one hundred lines each. You will bring me the lines by tea-time. Go!"

In silence, but with deep feelings, Tom Merry and Co. tramped away. Mr. Linton walked away, frowning. Cardew scrambled to his feet. He was snowy and damp and rumpled and crumpled: but there was a grin on his face as he watched the chums of the Shell trail away to the House.

Chapter 6

BIG IDEA!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was a sudden burst of merriment in No. 10 Study in the Shell.

It proceeded from Monty Lowther.

Tom Merry and Manners stared at him, across the table. They did not look much in a mood for merriment. Neither had Lowther, till now. The 'Terrible Three,' in fact, had been considerably disgruntled when they sat down round the study table after class to write lines for Mr. Linton.

No fellow liked lines. There were so many things to do, after class, so much more entertaining than transcribing Virgil.

But that imposition really was undeserved. It was all Cardew's fault. Mr. Linton, of course, could only judge by what he saw: and what he had seen, in the quad, was three fellows of his form suddenly collaring a Fourth Form fellow and rolling him over headlong in the snow. They did not blame Linton. But their feelings towards the scapegrace of the Fourth were deep.

Indeed, Tom Merry had felt very much inclined to look for Cardew and punch him right and left. However, he restrained that impulse. Moreover, Cardew, after class, was detained in the Fourth Form-room, by his form-master's sentence: and was writing Virgil there while the Shell fellows did the same in their study.

Why Monty Lowther burst into that sudden explosion of mirth, neither Tom nor Manners knew. They stared at him.

"Enjoying lines?" asked Manners, sarcastically.

"Having a good time with Virgil?" asked Tom, also sarcastic.

Lowther chuckled.

"Not exactly, old scouts! But I've got an idea——"

"Oh, crumbs!" said Manners. "One of your japes?"

"Just that!"

"Take it away and boil it, then," grunted Manners, and he resumed Virgil: evidently not in the least interested in the bright idea, whatever it was, that had germinated in Lowther's fertile brain.

"The jape of the term," said Lowther, impressively. "Chuck that scribbling for a minute or two, and I'll tell you——"

"Forget it," said Tom.

"Now look here, Tom——"

"Oh, don't be a goat," said Tom. "We've got to hand in these lines to Linton before tea. Like him to double them?"

"I tell you it's priceless," urged Monty. "Absolutely IT! That rat Cardew got us these lines——"

"Yes, bother him!"

"And he's worrying poor old Gussy——"

"What about it?"

"And he's a tick, and a smudge, and a smear, and——"

"All that, and more," said Tom. "Now get on with your impot——"

"And he's going out of bounds tonight," went on Lowther, unheeding. "Gussy said that he ought to be stopped. Well, so he ought to be. Now, you remember those verses I was reading out to you yesterday——"

"Eh? Yes! Blow 'em!" said Tom. "For goodness' sake don't recite them to us now, Monty! Get through your lines."

"Bother the lines! Will you let a fellow speak or not?" hooted Lowther. "The verses about the Phantom Monk——"

"Bless the Phantom Monk."

"Now the snow's falling it's time for the ghost to walk, according to the legend," said Monty Lowther. "Might walk tonight."

"What rot!"

"Suppose——"

"Suppose rats! Let's get these dashed lines done."

"Suppose——"

"Lines!" said Manners.

"Suppose," howled Lowther. "Suppose the ghost was walking in the dormitory passages and Cardew ran into him when he got out of his dorm tonight. Think he would get a scare?"

"I suppose so! But the ghost won't walk, and Cardew won't run into him, and if we don't get through these lines, Linton will double them."

"The ghost will walk," said Monty Lowther, "and Cardew will run into him! That's the big idea."

Keen as they were to get through those lines, Tom Merry and Manners suspended operations for the moment to stare at Monty.

"The ghost will walk?" repeated Tom.

"Just that."

"How?" demanded Manners.

"On his feet."

"You silly ass——"

"Don't you get it?" asked Lowther, impatiently. "You're a bit slow on the uptake. I've told you it's a jape—the jape of the term. It will make that smudge Cardew sit up for his sins, and it will send him scuttling back to his dorm instead of sneaking out to play banker at the 'Green Man.' I know that the ghost will walk, because——"

"Because what?"

"Because I'm going to be the ghost!" grinned Lowther.

"Oh!" exclaimed Tom and Manners together. They caught on now.

"Some jape!" said Lowther. "Cardew couldn't begin to have a suspish. All he will know is that when he's sneaking down a dark passage, the ghastly phantom will suddenly appear before him, out of the dark, enough to put the wind up a stouter lad than Cardew."

Tom Merry laughed.

"I fancy that would put the wind up anybody," he said. "But——"

"We can fix it up as easy as falling off a form," said Lowther, eagerly. "We know what that jolly old phantom is supposed to look like—monk's robe and cowl, face deathly white and unearthly eyes—we've done enough amateur theatricals to be able to fix up a thing like that. You can make a face as white as chalk by rubbing chalk on it, and a circle of luminous paint round the eyes will make them look unearthly enough, in the dark——"

Manners chuckled.

"Keep it dark, of course," said Lowther. "If Cardew got a whisper of it, it would be no go. But taking him by surprise——"

"But——" said Tom.

"Oh, blow your buts! Is it the jape of the term or isn't it?" demanded Lowther. "Has Cardew asked for it, or hasn't he?"

"Well, yes; but——"

"We can fix up the robe and cowl easily enough—that old curtain in the box-room will do all right, with a few stitches and some safety-pins. The ghost walks without a sound—well, he won't make a sound, in my old rubber shoes. I've got it all cut and dried."

"But——"

"Any billy-goats in your family?" asked Lowther. "You keep on butting like one! You fellows can help me make up, in our dorm, after lights out——"

"All the chaps in the Shell will know——"

"That won't matter, after lights out. Nobody will go along to the Fourth Form dorm to put Cardew wise."

"That's so," assented Tom, "but——"

"But what?" yapped Lowther.

"Well, it would serve Cardew right, and would keep him from playing the giddy ox, but——"

"But—but—but——" mimicked Monty.

"But playing ghost is too thick," said Tom, shaking his head. "Might give a chap an awful fright——"

"Serve him right," said Lowther.

"Well, yes; but——" said Manners.

Monty Lowther snorted. He had thought out that jape. The bright idea had flashed into his active mind, and he found it good. If Cardew had a scare, he deserved to have a scare, in Monty's opinion, for sneaking out of bounds after lights out. And a scare would send him scuttling back to his dormitory, instead of paying his intended visit to the 'Green Man': which was ever so much better for him. But probably it was the jape that appealed to Monty most. He was a born japer, and could never resist the lure of a practical joke. His two chums were a little more thoughtful than Monty: and they saw drawbacks to the scheme which Monty quite failed to see.

"Now, look here," said Lowther, "the ghost is going to walk tonight, and I'm going to be the ghost. All you fellows have got to do is to back me up. If you won't——"

"But——" said Tom.

"Billy-goating again!" snorted Lowther. "Never mind your butting. Will you fellows back me up or not?"

There was a moment's pause. To both Tom and Manners it seemed that Monty's big idea was a little over the limit. But when it came to a question of backing him up or not, there was only one answer for Monty's chums to make. No. 10 Study were accustomed to back one another up through thick and thin. Cardew, after all, deserved little consideration, if any: and certainly they were not going to have a dispute with their chum on his account.

"Well, if you're set on it——" said Tom, hesitantly. He did not like to go ahead with such a jape, but Monty seemed set on it.

"Fixed and immutable as the jolly old laws of the jolly old Medes and Persians!" said Monty Lowther, emphatically.

"If you won't listen to a more sensible chap——" said Manners.

"Haven't met one in this study yet."

"Well, it's a go," said Tom, at last.

"It's a go," agreed Manners.

And that point being settled, the 'Terrible Three' restarted on their lines for Mr. Linton. But the scratching of pens was interrupted, from time to time, by a chuckle from Monty Lowther.

Chapter 7

THE GHOST WALKS!

Kildare of the Sixth saw lights out in the Fourth Form dormitory in the School House. The St. Jim's captain certainly had no suspicion that one member of that form had no intention of closing his eyes, or of remaining in bed till rising-bell. Cardew turned in with the rest, and Kildare bade the juniors a cheery good-night, turned off the light, and departed.

It was not till after the door had closed on him that a voice was heard from D'Arcy's bed.

"Cardew!"

Cardew made no reply. There were seven fellows in the House who knew his plans for that night, but they had said nothing on the subject, except among themselves: and his own chums, Levison and Clive, knew nothing so far. He would have preferred them not to know. Certainly he would have taken no heed of what they thought on the subject, but he was not wholly regardless of their opinion. His eyes gleamed in the dark as Arthur Augustus called to him. He remained silent in the hope that D'Arcy would leave it at that and go to sleep. But Arthur Augustus did not leave it at that.

"Cardew!" he repeated.

Still no reply.

"Dry up and let a chap go to sleep if he wants to, D'Arcy," called out Clive.

"Weally, Clive, I am quite suah that Cardew does not want to go to sleep," answered Arthur Augustus.

"That's usually the idea, I've always believed, when a fellow turns in," remarked Levison.

"Yaas, wathah, as a wule," agreed Arthur Augustus, "but circumstances altah cases, Levison. Cardew!"

"Oh, shut up, D'Arcy," snapped Cardew, at last.

"I wefuse to shut up, Cardew! You need not pwetend that you are goin' to sleep, when I am quite awah that you are doin' nothin' of the sort."

"Dry up, Gussy," said Blake. "No good burbling."

"Weally, Blake, I object to havin' my wemarks descwibed as burblin'. Cardew is a welation of mine, and I cannot see him goin' on the woad to wuin without wemonstwatin', at least."

"The what to which?" ejaculated Clive.

"The woad to wuin, Clive."

"Fathead!"

"Will you shut up, you gabbling ass?" breathed Cardew.

"No, nothin' of the kind. I have spoken to you befoah on this subject, and you had the cheek to tell me to put a sock in it——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is nothin' to cackle at in Cardew's cheek," said Arthur Augustus, warmly. "I am goin' to speak to you again, Cardew, befoah it is too late, and I twust that you will dwop the ideah of bweakin' out tonight."

Cardew, in silence, breathed fury. There were exclamations up and down the row of beds. All the Fourth were interested now.

"Cardew at it again!" said Mellish.

"Shady sweep!" said Wildrake.

"He, he, he!" from Baggy Trimble.

"Some fellows keep on hunting for trouble till they find it," said Roylance. "You're a silly ass, Cardew."

"Chuck it, Cardew, and don't be a goat," said Dick Julian.

Cardew listened in silent rage. He would gladly have turned out of bed and punched his well-meaning relative right and left. But a row in the dormitory after lights out would hardly have suited his plans for the night.

"Do you heah me, Cardew?" went on Arthur Augustus's voice in the dark. "I am quite awah that you have not gone to sleep, Cardew. I feah that you are quite indiffewent to the opinion of decent fellows, but even if you cannot help bein' a wottah and a worm, Cardew, you might at least wecollect the wisk. Soonah or latah you will be caught out. Have you thought of that?"

"Will you shut up, you meddlin' fool?" hissed Cardew.

"Certainly not! I considah it my duty to wemonstwate with a fellow who is disgwacin' his House and his welations," answered Arthur Augustus. "It would be vewy disagweeable to me, Cardew, to see you taken up to the Head to be sacked."

Cardew sat up in bed and groped for his pillow. He was fed up to the teeth with his relative.

Levison and Clive had said nothing. They did not hope, like the optimistic Gussy, that remonstrating with Cardew would produce any effect. But Cardew knew what they must be thinking, and he was not wholly without a sense of shame. His feelings towards his cheery relative, at that moment, were almost homicidal.

"Pway give up the ideah, Cardew," said Arthur Augustus, persuasively. "Even you must have a wag of decency in you somewhah——"

Whiz!

"And I weally must say—yawoooooh!"

Arthur Augustus broke off, with a sudden startled howl, as a whizzing pillow landed on his noble head. It took him quite by surprise.

"Oh, cwikey! Oh, cwumbs! What is that?" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Somethin' has bumped on my head——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! It is a pillow——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What silly ass is chuckin' pillows about in the dark?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, wrathfully. "Oh! Was it you, Cardew? You cheeky wottah, your wotten pillow is comin' back."

And Arthur Augustus, grasping the missile with both hands, whirled it in the air, and hurled it in the direction of Cardew's bed.

But Arthur Augustus's aim in the dark was not quite so accurate as Cardew's. There was a fiendish yell from Baggy Trimble.

"Yoooo-hoooooop! Wow! Whoooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! Is that Twimble——"

"You silly owl," yelled Trimble. "What are you chucking pillows at me for?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I weally beg your pardon, Twimble! I was chuckin' it at Cardew——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You potty fathead!" yelled Trimble.

"Weally, Twimble——"

"Ow! Wow! You jolly nearly bowled me out of bed," howled Trimble.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I am weally vewy sowwy, Twimble. I have a gweat mind to turn out of bed and give you a feahful thwashin', Cardew. I shall say nothin' more to you, you wottah—I wegard you as an uttah wepwobate, and if you are caught out and bunked, so much the bettah."

And Arthur Augustus laid his indignant head on his pillow and left it at that: which was, at least, a relief to his relative. But for a good ten minutes there was talk up and down the dormitory, to which Cardew listened with burning ears and glinting eyes.

It died away at last, and there was silence when the hour of ten boomed from the clock-tower. Cardew hoped that the others were asleep, but he had little doubt that some, at least, were still awake, and his feelings were bitter. To slip quietly from the dormitory in the dark, unseen and unheard, was one thing; to go leaving the other fellows in a buzz behind him was quite another. But his determination

was quite unchanged. If only to demonstrate that he was a law unto himself and would carry on exactly as he chose to do, he was going.

He was very silent, as he slipped from his bed and dressed in the dark. But silent as he was, he was not unheard.

"Is that you, Cardew?" came a quiet voice from Levison's bed.

Cardew gritted his teeth.

"Keep your mouth shut," he breathed.

"Won't you chuck it?"

"No!"

"Look here, Cardew——" came Sidney Clive's voice.

"Do you want to wake that babbling fool, D'Arcy?" hissed Cardew.

"I am not asleep, Cardew, and I wefuse to be chawactewised as a babblin' fool!" came another voice. "I wegard you——"

"Don't make a row, for goodness' sake, D'Arcy," said Levison, anxiously.

"I am not goin' to make a wow, Levison. But I considah——"

"Mind Railton doesn't cop you, Cardew," came a squeak from Baggy Trimble.

As the phantom glided nearer, a choked cry broke from him.

"Jolly good thing if he does," growled Herries.

Evidently, a good many fellows were awake! Cardew, breathing hard, finished dressing, hurriedly, and cut across to the door. There was hardly a sound as it opened and shut: but the juniors knew that Cardew was gone.

Outside the dormitory, Cardew stood in the darkness of the passage and listened. A faint murmur came to him of voices from within, which he did not regard. He was listening for other sounds, such as the footsteps of a master or prefect on a late round.

But there was no sound in the silence of the December night. Masters, no doubt, were still up, in their studies or Common Room: some of the Sixth, perhaps, had not yet gone to bed. But in the junior dormitories all was dark and silent and still. The passage was black as a hat: the landing beyond was almost as dark. All was clear for the breaker of bounds.

He had done this before, more than once—it was no new experience to him. All he had to do was to creep silently down the passage, across the dormitory landing, and down the staircase to the study landing below. There was a window by which he had left, and re-entered, the House more than once. It was deeply irritating to have left a crowd of wakeful fellows behind him in the dormitory: surreptitious silence was his cue, on such an excursion as this. But that could not be helped: and he dismissed that from his mind. With soft and silent footsteps he crept down the passage and came out on the wide landing.

It was dark there, but not quite so dark, as there were tall windows from which came a glimmer of wintry starlight and snow. He paused for a moment, looking about him and listening: and then started across the landing towards the stairs, and his way out.

Suddenly he stopped.

There was no sound. He had heard no movement. But something stirred in the darkness and a strange glimmer came to his eyes.

He stood, his heart pulsating.

Was he dreaming?

What was that strange, eerie, unearthly figure that loomed dimly out of the dark?

He had feared masters and prefects. He had never dreamed of this. The legend of the phantom monk was to his mind a childish fable.

But what—what was this?

His feet were rooted to the floor. His heart beat in great throbs. His eyes, dilated, started at the gliding figure. If he was not dreaming, or mad, he saw a figure in monkish robe and cowl, the cowl drawn back, revealing a face white as death, with a strange phosphorescent glimmer on it. Was he dreaming, or out of his senses?

He hardly breathed.

He was not dreaming—he was not mad—it was there—there, and gliding slowly towards him! The phantom monk—the unearthly phantom that was said to haunt

the old House when the snow fell—it was there, and it was gliding soundlessly towards him.

For a long, long moment he stood petrified, appalled, almost stunned. Then, as the phantom glided nearer, a choked cry broke from him: he turned and ran as if for his life.

Chapter 8

A MYSTERY!

"Bai Jove!"

"What——"

"Cardew——"

"Great pip!"

Cardew had been gone hardly more than a minute from the dormitory. Nobody there had expected to see him return. He was not likely to return before the chimes of midnight, softly and silently. There were startled exclamations as the door was hurled open from without, regardless of noise, and Cardew rushed in: breathless, panting, his face white as a sheet, his eyes starting. Even in the dim glimmer from the high windows, his face showed up, a patch of ghastly white.

His wild panting could be heard in the gloom. He had come in with a frantic rush: now he seemed to be tottering.

Levison was out of bed with a bound. In a moment he reached the staggering junior and grasped him by the arm.

"Cardew! What—what has happened?"

"Oh, heaven! I've seen it." Cardew's voice was a croak. He spun round, staring back at the dark doorway. "I've seen it."

"You've seen—what?"

"The monk!" breathed Cardew, shuddering.

"The monk!" repeated Levison, in wonder.

"The—the phantom!" breathed Cardew. "I—I saw it—gliding on the landing—it came towards me—oh!" His voice trailed off.

"The phantom!"

A dozen voices repeated the words in wonder and amazement. Baggy Trimble gave a startled squeak and dived his head under the bedclothes. If the phantom of St. Jim's was on the prowl, Baggy did not want to see it.

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus. "Is the fellow dweamin'?"

"Scared in the dark!" grunted Herries.

"Some shadow——" said Digby.

"Not a jolly old spook, anyway," said Jack Blake. "Cut it out, Cardew! More

likely a pre looking for some shady sweep going out of bounds, and you jolly well fancied the rest."

"Yaas, wathah."

But many of the juniors had serious and startled faces. Ghosts in the day time might seem absurd: but it was not quite so in deep December darkness. Nor was Cardew a fellow to be scared by a shadow. Baggy Trimble might have taken a shifting shadow for a ghost in the dark and bolted yelling. But Cardew, as every man in the Fourth knew, was a cool, clear-headed fellow, with plenty of nerve. And that he had been badly scared was very clear.

Sidney Clive scratched a match and lighted a candle. There were few in the dormitory who did not feel relief at the glimmer of a light.

"Pull yourself together, old chap," whispered Clive. "You can't have seen anything of the kind, really——"

"I tell you I did."

"But—but what——"

"The phantom monk, in robe and cowl—a face like death, and eyes like—like——" Cardew's voice trailed off and he shivered.

"Impossible," said Levison. "You've seen something—goodness know what—but——"

"I did! I did!"

"Get back to bed, old chap," said Levison, soothingly, hardly knowing what to make of the strange affair. "I'll help you get your things off—come."

Jack Blake stepped out of bed. He groped for a pocket torch in his jacket.

"Where did you see it, Cardew, if you saw anything?" he asked.

"On the dormitory landing—it came towards me——"

"Rot!" said Blake. "But if there's a jolly old ghost walking, I'll jolly well put salt on his tail."

"You fool! You fool! I tell you I saw it," said Cardew, huskily. "Keep where you are—don't go out of the dorm——"

"Rot!"

Blake went coolly towards the door. He was startled, but he did not believe for one moment that the phantom of St. Jim's was walking. He went out into the passage, flashing the light of the pocket torch before him, and Herries and Dig and D'Arcy followed, and then Julian and Roylance and Hammond and Wildrake and Tompkins, and several more fellows.

Cardew watched them as they went, but nothing would have induced him to take a single step outside the dormitory. He was not thinking now of breaking bounds, of tramping down the snowy lane to Rylcombe, of meeting his sporting friends at the 'Green Man.' He had forgotten all that. He was thinking of that dread figure he had seen gliding soundlessly in the dark, and he was still shivering.

Blake marched down the passage to the landing with the rest at his heels. The gleam of the torch flashed over the wide dark space: revealing doors, the opening

of passages, the banisters, the stairs. But it revealed nothing else. If the phantom of St. Jim's had been there, it had vanished now.

He gave a grunt.

"Rot, as I said. Nothing here."

"Well, ghosts are all wot, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus, "but Cardew must have seen somethin'. He is not a funk like Twimble; he wouldn't be fwightened by nothin'."

"Nothing here to scare him, anyway," growled Herries. "Let's get back—it's jolly parky here."

They returned to the dormitory. Cardew gave them a look as they came in. He was beginning to recover a little now. Yet he knew what he had seen—he had not fancied or dreamed that phantom figure. He had seen it: and if it was not the ghost of St. Jim's—what was it?

"Seen anything, you fellows?" asked Levison.

"Nothing," answered Blake.

"I—I saw it——" breathed Cardew.

"Bosh!" said Blake, tersely. "I'm going back to bed. Better put your head under the blankets, if you fancy you see spooks."

Cardew's face crimsoned.

He had seen it—he knew that he had seen it. Yet not another fellow in the room believed that he had seen it. He could not have been deceived—his fancy could not have played him such a trick. Yet—— He was recovering now from that sudden panic scare, and he was keenly sensitive to the derision in many faces and the contempt in others. He had been frightened in the dark—as if he had been a weak-kneed, flabby funk like Baggy Trimble—his face burned at the thought.

"Turn in, old chap," muttered Levison, uncomfortably. He was conscious that his chum, who was accustomed to carry his head so high, was cutting a ridiculous figure—a fellow scared by a shadow in the dark!

Cardew gave him an almost fierce look.

"I tell you I saw it," he breathed.

"Yes, yes, but——" Levison hardly knew what to say. "Better turn in now—we shall have Railton up here if there's much more jaw in this dorm."

Cardew set his lips hard. He turned in without another word. Now that his coolness had returned, he was beginning to wonder if not to doubt. But nothing would have induced him to leave the dormitory and cross that dark landing again. Bill Lodgey was not destined to see his young friend at the 'Green Man' that night.

The other fellows were back in bed. But Levison and Clive lingered by Cardew's bedside, uneasy about him.

His eyes turned on them, glinting.

"You don't believe I saw anything?" he muttered.

"Well——" said Clive, slowly.

"You saw something, goodness knows what," said Levison, "but—have a little sense, old fellow. It wasn't a ghost because it couldn't be."

"No!" Cardew muttered. "It—it couldn't, I—I suppose! But what was it?"

"Somebody larking, perhaps," said Clive.

"At this time of night?"

"Well, that's more likely than a ghost."

"Nobody was out of the dorm, excepting myself."

"Well, no. But——"

"You think I'm a frightened funk?" snarled Cardew. "Well, think what you like! Go to bed and leave me alone."

"But, old fellow——"

"Oh, leave me alone."

Levison went quietly to his bed. Clive, about to blow out the candle paused and glanced at Cardew.

"Like me to leave the light?" he asked.

There was a sound of a chuckle from several beds. Cardew's face burned. It was the last humiliation: to be offered a light after bedtime like a child.

"Blow it out, you fool!" he hissed.

"But——"

"Fool!"

"Oh, leave it on," said Blake, sarcastically. "We shall have Cardew yelling ghosts soon, if you leave him in the dark."

And there were more chuckles.

"Will you blow it out?" hissed Cardew.

"All right."

Clive blew out the candle. Darkness settled on the Fourth-form dormitory again. At that late hour the juniors were not long in falling asleep. But sleep came slowly to Cardew.

Had he seen what he believed that he had seen? Was it, could it be, the phantom of St. Jim's, the spectre of the school? Was there truth, after all, in that wild old tale? Was it some trick, some fool playing ghost in the dark, if so, it was not a Fourth-form man; Cardew had been the only Fourth-former out of the dormitory. Commonsense told him that it could not have been a phantom: there was some other explanation, but what? He thought it over, and over and over, wondering and puzzling and doubting. But one thing at least was very clear and certain, as he realised with burning cheeks, every man in the form knew that he had panicked and fled in terror, it was likely to be long before he was allowed to forget that! He could already see the derisive looks, and hear the mocking whispers: even Baggy Trimble would jeer—in the daylight. The feelings of the scapegrace of St. Jim's were far from enviable as he lay sleepless in the dark. But he fell into slumber at last, and his eyes did not open again till the rising-bell was ringing in the dim December morning.

Chapter 9

ONLY MONTY LOWTHER!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was a roar of laughter in the junior day-room in the School House.

Cardew, coming along the passage, paused.

There was a crowd of fellows in the day-room. All of them seemed to be laughing. He paused, his cheeks burning.

Often, no doubt, there was laughter in the junior room. But that day Cardew was very sensitive to such a sound. He was, indeed, rather like the character in the old play, who was sure that 'they must be talking of him because they laughed consumedly.' And, in fact, he had cause, for the strange occurrence in the Fourth-form dormitory over-night had become a standing joke in the morning.

Nobody believed in the ghost. Even Baggy Trimble, who had ducked his fat head under the bedclothes at the alarm, chuckled at it in the morning. In form in the Fourth, Cardew had been bitterly and painfully aware of amused glances and mirthful whispers. News of his wild adventure had spread to the other House: Figgins and Co. in form, grinned at him: Redfern of the New House asked him in a whisper if he had been seeing more spooks: and seemed only amused by the savage look Cardew gave him in reply. Morning school had not been pleasant to Cardew, and he had given little attention to lessons: and had had the sharpest edge of Mr. Lathom's tongue in consequence. At dinner, in the School House, there had been smiles up and down the table: and fellows at the Shell table had looked round at him and grinned: and fags of the Third had been grinning and whispering: and when they came out of hall, Wally of the Third, younger brother of Arthur Augustus, had whispered in passing "'Ware ghosts!"

All of which was gall and wormwood to Cardew.

He had always held his head high. His reckless ways and shady scrapes had kept fellows like Tom Merry and Co. and Study No. 6, at arm's length, but so far from wishing to conciliate their good opinion he found it amusing to affect to be worse than he was. To be regarded as a reckless contemner of authority, a fellow ready to risk the 'sack' merely for the sake of the excitement, rather flattered his vanity. But this was a very different matter, dislike, condemnation, scorn, glanced off him like hail from glass: but to be looked upon as a funky fellow, frightened in the dark, was too bitter. He had been so sore and savage that day that even his pals, Levison and Clive, had left him to himself. They certainly did not join in the general derision: but he suspected them of thinking what they did not utter: he was in a mood to quarrel with friend or foe.

It was a half-holiday that afternoon: but the weather was wild: high winds sweeping over the Sussex downs and snow falling steadily and heavily. Even strenuous fellows like Tom Merry and his friends were soon tired of braving the elements: and the junior room was crowded. Cardew had been up in his study; for once, perhaps for the first time in his life, he felt an unwillingness to face the public eye. But after a time, realising that the fellows would guess that he was intentionally keeping out of sight, he came down: and with the best assumption he could muster of his accustomed cool unconcern, strolled to the day-room. And that loud roar of merry laughter greeted his ears, and made him pause.

His cheeks burned as he stood outside the doorway.

Some joke was on, evidently. He could hardly doubt what it was. It was the ghost story that was making the juniors yell: he was sure of it.

Seldom did Cardew's cool self-assurance fail him. But it seemed like failing him now: for instead of walking coolly into the room, he hesitated outside the door. Voices and laughter came to him from within.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! You ass, Lowthah——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That ass Lowther all the time——"

"Poor old Cardew!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But what a goat to be scared like that——"

"He bolted back into the dorm like a scared rabbit——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Cardew's teeth came together hard. He had not been mistaken: it was the ghost story that was setting the room in a roar.

He almost made up his mind to walk away. But his angry pride came to the rescue: he would not slink off. He drew a deep breath and walked into the crowded room.

All eyes turned on him at once. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther were there, and a dozen other Shell fellows. Blake and Co. were there, and a crowd more of the Fourth. They were all laughing. Even Levison and Clive were grinning. Quiet sedate fellows like Talbot of the Shell and Bernard Glyn were laughing with the rest. Even Skimpole was grinning under his big glasses. Baggy Trimble was chuckling like a series of Chinese crackers. And Cardew's appearance did not cause the merriment to cease. Rather it seemed to add to it.

He gave a glance round: a cold, bitter glance. He was puzzled as well as mortified. Fellows had been chuckling over the ghost and his panic ever since rising-bell. But it seemed to him that there must be something new to have caused this outbreak of Homeric mirth. From what he had heard at the door, his quick mind jumped to it that it was something to do with Monty Lowther, though he did not guess what. Perhaps the funny man of Shell had put it into one of his limericks or something

of the sort. At all events he could see that it was not merely the ghost story, there was some new development.

He was not left long in ignorance. Gore of the Shell shouted across to him.

"Look out, Cardew!"

"He, he, he! Look out!" squeaked Baggy Trimble.

"Lowther's here!" went on Gore.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"'Ware ghosts!" chuckled Herries.

"Yaas, wathah!" chortled Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Pway look out, Cardew—heah's that ass Lowthah."

Quite mystified, Cardew stared at them. What had Lowther to do with it?

"Bolt, Cardew!" called out Dig.

"Run, rabbit, run!" chuckled Blake.

"Ain't you going to panic this time, Cardew?" squeaked Trimble.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It was Lowther, Cardew," said Levison, in hasty explanation. "He's just been telling the fellows——"

Even yet Cardew did not understand. What had Lowther been telling the fellows? Why were they affecting to expect him to panic at the sight of Monty Lowther?

"He doesn't catch on," said Kangaroo. "It was Lowther last night, Cardew."

"The jolly old ghost!" chortled Blake.

"Got up in an old curtain——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"With a chalked face——"

"And a spot of phosphorous paint——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ain't you scared?" roared Herries. "Here's your jolly old ghost, only he's left off that old curtain out of the box-room, and washed his face——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the juniors.

Cardew caught his breath.

He understood at last.

He stood quite still, his face pale with rage. Lowther, the funny ass of the Shell, Lowther, got up as the phantom monk—Lowther, playing ghost, and scaring him into panic flight, the whole thing a fantastic jape! It was Monty Lowther from whom he had fled: leaving him, no doubt, laughing. That was the truth about that dread figure in the dark: he had fled in unreasoning panic from nothing more or less than a practical joker! And now everybody knew! No wonder they were laughing. Only Monty Lowther!

"You!" he said, at last. "So it was one of your japes, Lowther."

Monty Lowther nodded cheerily.

"Guilty, my lord!"

"You—playing ghost after lights out——"

"For your special behoof," explained Monty, genially. "Naughty boys who break out at night need a lesson."

"Yaas, wathah!" chuckled Arthur Augustus.

"You didn't get quite so far as the 'Green Man' last night, I think," added Lowther. "I seem to remember that you went back to your dormitory in rather a hurry——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pressed for time, I thought," remarked Manners.

"Sort of," said Tom Merry, laughing.

Cardew's eyes burned at them. So all three of them had been there, though he had seen only the 'ghost.' They had planned this, to scare the breaker of bounds back to bed, and he had fallen for it like a baby! The rage in his heart was too deep for words. A silly trick, a jape by a practical joking ass, and he had panicked and fled, and made himself an object of derision to every man in the Lower School at St. Jim's.

His impulse was to spring at Monty Lowther, like a tiger. But he restrained that impulse. A fight with the funny man of the Shell would not set matters right: it would only make him, if possible, more ridiculous than he was already.

For a long moment he stood silent, looking at Lowther: the other fellows grinning round him. Then, without another word, he turned, and walked quietly out of the day-room. And another roar of laughter followed him as he went.

Chapter 10

THE GHOST WALKS AGAIN!

"Black as a hat!" grunted Jack Blake.

"Blackah, deah boy," agreed Arthur Augustus.

It was indeed as black as a hat, or blacker, in the old quadrangle of St. Jim's. Hardly a star glimmered in the wintry sky, and the snow that powdered the ground glimmered faintly. A few flakes were still coming down, fluttering on the December wind. A fellow had to be careful to keep to the path, to get from one House to the other, without bumping into a tree, or the fountain, or something or other, especially after just coming out of a lighted House.

Blake and Co. had been tea-ing with Figgins and Co. in the New House. They came out into the darkness, turning up their coat collars against the wind, and heading for the distant lighted windows of the School House. But that glimmer of lights in the distance only seemed to make the darkness close at hand darker and denser.

"Blow!" remarked Herries

"Bother!" concurred Digby.

"Wow!" ejaculated Blake, suddenly.

"Bai Jove! What are you spluttewin' about, deah boy?"

"Ass!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"I've banged into a tree," hissed Blake. "I've knocked my nose! Wow!"

"I am sowwy you have knocked your nose, Blake, but weally, that is no weason for callin' a fellow names," said Arthur Augustus, severely. "Pway be careful to keep to the path. Pewwaps you had bettah hold on to my sleeve and I will guide you, and—— wow! Ow! wow!"

"Well, what are you spluttering about?" snorted Blake.

"Oh, cwikey! I have banged my nose on a twee——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wow! There is nothin' to cackle at, Blake, in a fellow bangin' his nose on a twee! It is wathah painful! Wow."

"Careful to keep to the path," grinned Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies——"

"Perhaps you'd better hold on to my sleeve, and I'll guide you," hooted Blake.

"Wats!"

The four juniors pushed on in the darkness. It was not really easy to keep to a path thick with snow, with snow blanketing the whole quad. A couple of minutes later Blake stopped just in time to escape walking into the granite rim of the fountain.

"Oh!" he ejaculated.

"What are you stoppin' for, Blake? It is wathah parky out heah—the soonah we get in the bettah——"

"Fathead! Think I can walk through the fountain?"

"I wegard that as a widiculous question, Blake. I do not suppose for one moment that you can walk thwough the fountain. Pway come on—I don't think we are vewy neah the fountain. Oh, cwumbs! What's that?" added Arthur Augustus, suddenly, as he bumped.

"Only the fountain," grinned Blake.

"Bothah! We shall have to go wound the beastly thing! Come on."

They circled an invisible fountain in the dark. Then Blake suddenly stopped again, with a gasping exclamation.

"Oh! What—what—what's that?"

"What is what, Blake? Are you wunnin' into somethin' again——"

"Look!" panted Blake.

"Oh!" exclaimed Digby.

"Oh!" repeated Herries, like an echo.

"Bai Jove! What—oh, cwumbs!"

The four juniors halted, staring into the darkness ahead. Something had become dimly visible in the gloom—a shadow that moved among shadows. They were not alone in the dark quad: someone, or something, was near at hand, though they had heard no sound. But what was that 'something'? There was a pale phosphorescent gleam of unearthly light, strange and eerie: a glimpse of a dark-robed form.

Blake felt his heart jump.

"What—who's that?" he panted.

There was no answer, no sound. But the half-glimpsed figure seemed to fade into the blackness.

"What—what——" muttered Herries.

"Who's that?" shouted Blake. "Who's there?"

Silence.

"It—it looked——" muttered Digby. "I—I say, it—it looked like a monk in his robe——"

"Rot!" breathed Blake, but his heart was pumping.

"Bai Jove! It weally looked——"

"Rot! Are you going to be scared like Cardew, last night?" hissed Blake. "I'll jolly soon see who it is! I've got some matches."

Blake groped in his pocket for a match-box. He was startled and had a creepy feeling: but he was not going to be scared as Cardew had been scared. He struck a match and it glimmered out in the gloom.

The next moment the wind blew it out. But that moment was enough! In that moment they saw the dark figure plainly: in a monk's dark robe, the cowl drawn back, showing the face, white as the snow that lay at their feet, the eyes strangely lighted.

Then all was black and they saw nothing more.

They stood still: for the moment petrified. Study No. 6 had plenty of pluck, and were not in the least given to 'nerves': but that strange and ghostly apparition sent an icy thrill through them. Quite probably they would have bolted, as Cardew had done the previous night, in sudden panic: had this been the phantom's first appearance. But even as they stood staring into the dark with bulging eyes, they remembered that Lowther of the Shell had played ghost the night before. Jack Blake recovered himself almost in a moment.

"That japing ass!" he breathed. "Lowther at it again! That fathead——"

"Oh!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "That is it, of course—that japin' ass Lowthah playin' twicks on us as he did on Cardew——"

"Come on," breathed Blake. "We'll jolly well show him whether he can frighten us. Get hold of him."

"Yaas, wathah."

They had been startled. There was no doubt about that. But neither was there any doubt in their minds that this was Monty Lowther playing ghost again. Monty

Lowther's exuberant sense of humour was often too much for him. He did not tire of his japing so soon as other fellows did. It was in fact like him, after his success with Cardew, to carry on the jape and give other fellows in the Fourth a scare. And Blake and Co., wrathfully determined to let him know exactly what they thought of his idiotic japes, rushed forward to collar the 'ghost,' knock him down and roll him in the snow.

It was rather reckless to rush on in such dense darkness. Blake, leading the way, rushed into something: but it was not the ghost. It was much more solid than a ghost, being the trunk of an old elm near the path. He crashed into it and stumbled back with a yell.

"Bai Jove! Have you got him, deah boy?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, in great excitement. "Ow! Ow! What are you bumpin' into me for?"

Arthur Augustus staggered back, as Blake, stumbling, fell on him. He staggered into Herries, who stumbled against Digby. There was a clamouring chorus of exclamations.

"Look out——"

"Mind where you're barging——"

"Oh, cwikey!"

"Clumsy ass——"

"Weally, Hewwies——"

"Oh, my nose!" moaned Blake. "I believe it's pushed right through my head! Oh, crumbs."

Blake extracted a handkerchief from his pocket and dabbed his nose. He could not see in the dark but he knew that that handkerchief was spotted with crimson. He breathed fury as he dabbed.

"Come on," exclaimed Herries. "He will get away."

"Ow! My boko!"

"Bai Jove! I twust that you have not hurt your nose, Blake."

"Idiot!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Think I can bang my nose on a tree without hurting it?" shrieked Blake.

"Pway do not yell at a fellow, Blake! Even if you have hurt your nose, that is no weason for yellin' at a fellow."

"You blithering owl——"

"I wefuse to be called a blithewin' owl, Blake! That wottah is gettin' away while you are wastin' time callin' a fellow names——"

Blake dabbed and dabbed.

"He's got away," he snapped. "I'm not charging into any more trees after him. We can get him in the House. I dare say he's indoors again by this time. Come on—by gum, we'll show the howling ass what we think of his ghost stunt! We'll strew him all over the House! Come on."

Evidently it was futile to hunt the 'ghost' in the darkness, now that 'it' had

vanished. Neither was it necessary—they had no doubt that the 'ghost' could be run down in No. 10 Study in the Shell. With deep feelings and with a deadly determination to make Monty Lowther tired of playing ghost; if not tired of life, they tramped on to the School House.

Chapter 11

ROUGH LUCK FOR LOWTHER!

"Labuntur anni——" murmured Manners.

"Who's Annie?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Fathead!"

"Shut up while a fellow's writing a letter," said Tom Merry.

They were seated round the table in No. 10 in the Shell, all busy. It was not lines: and it was not yet prep. Monty Lowther was giving final touches to his poem on the subject of the Phantom of St. Jim's, intended for the columns of the *Carcroft Chronicle*: Manners, who had a taste for the classics shared by few fellows in the Lower School, was having a 'shot' at Quintus Horatius Flaccus: and Tom Merry was writing a letter home, to his old guardian, Miss Priscilla Fawcett.

Monty, having completed his verses, had a natural desire to read them aloud to his studymates. He looked at Manners and he looked at Tom. Neither caught his eye: but Manners, as if he guessed what was coming, began to murmur Horatian verse aloud, as if to ward off Monty's.

"Oh, chuck it," said Monty. "Never mind Annie, whoever Annie is——"

"You howling ass," said Manners, "I said anni——"

"Yes, I heard you! Know who Annie is, Tom?"

Tom Merry looked up.

"Eh? What? No! Who is she?"

"Somebody Manners knows. Is it the girl at the bun-shop in Wayland, Manners? Look here, you take care how you write to Annie—she's walking out with the postman, and——"

"You burbling cuckoo!" roared Manners. "I'm doing Horace. Labuntur anni, you bleating blitherer."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Cheese it, Monty," he said. "You're too funny to live, old man. Hallo, that sounds like somebody in a hurry."

All three, for the moment, forgot their various occupations as there was a sound of hurried footsteps in the passage and of a voice calling. It was Blake's voice, and it sounded breathless.

"Know where Lowther is, Talbot?"

"Have you seen that ass Lowthah?" came Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's voice, also a little breathless.

"In his study, I think," came Talbot's answer. "What——"

There was a rush of footsteps up the passage to No. 10.

"What on earth's up?" asked Manners in wonder.

"Looks as if they want me," said Lowther, puzzled. "Blessed if I know why."

"What have you been up to?" asked Tom Merry.

"Nothing that I know of. I wonder——"

Lowther was interrupted by the door crashing open. Four excited faces appeared in the doorway.

"Lowther here?" roared Herries.

"Here he is!" exclaimed Digby.

"Yaas, wathah."

"Collar him!" roared Blake.

Before the 'Terrible Three' knew what was happening, the four juniors rushed into the study, and Monty Lowther, greatly to his surprise, was collared right and left. He had no time to jump up: clutching hands closed on him, and he was dragged backwards off his chair, the chair spinning over the floor.

"Look here!" roared Lowther. "What the dickens—oh! Leggo! Oh!

Bump!

Lowther landed on the study carpet with an impact that caused the dust to rise from it. He yelled as he landed.

"Got him!" roared Herries.

"Bump him!" howled Dig.

"Wag him!" shouted Arthur Augustus. "Wag the sillay ass! Wag him wight and left, deah boys."

Manners and Tom Merry jumped to their feet in amazement. What that sudden and wrathful irruption into the study meant, they could not begin to guess.

"Hold on," exclaimed Tom. "What——"

"What on earth has Lowther been up to?" exclaimed Manners. "Some more of your japing, Monty?"

Whatever Lowther had, or had not, been 'up to,' it was clear that Study No. 6 were in a state of great excitement and wrath. Monty Lowther struggled and yelled in their grasp.

"Lend a fellow a hand, Tom! Back up, Manners! You silly asses, are you going to stand there like stuffed dummies? Wow!"

"You fellows keep clear!" exclaimed Blake. "We're going to give the silly ass a lesson about his japing——"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Bump him!" shouted Herries.

"Oh, crumbs! Will you lend a chap a hand?" shrieked Lowther, struggling frantically in the grasp of the excited four.

Tom Merry and Manners ran round the table to the rescue. They had little doubt that some playful jape by the funny man of the Shell had brought this upon him: otherwise it was quite unaccountable. But Fourth-form men could not rag in a Shell study, even for good cause. They rushed into the fray and caught hold of Monty to drag him out of the avenging hands.

But Blake and Co. held on to him. For some moments Monty Lowther was a bone of contention between the two parties, rather like the body of Patroclus between Greeks and Trojans.

Then his own efforts, backed up by his chums, dragged him loose, and he escaped from the avenging grasp in a rather breathless, rumpled and dishevelled state.

"Collar him!" shouted Blake.

"Keep back, you fathead!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "What's the row about?"

"That fathead——"

"That japing ass——"

"He hasn't had enough yet! Collar him!"

"Will you tell a fellow what the row's about?" roared Tom Merry.

"Kick them out of the study!" panted Lowther.

"You jolly well try it on!" hooted Blake. "Look here, Tom Merry, we don't want a row with you, or with Manners, but we're going to rag that japing lunatic. And if you stick in the way, you'll get some too."

"Yaas, wathah," gasped Arthur Augustus. "I shall be sowwy to give you a feahful thwashin', Tom Mewwy——"

"You will—if you begin!" agreed Tom. "What has Lowther done, you burbling fatheads? Can't you give it a name."

"He jolly well knows what he's done," howled Herries. "Trying to scare chaps in the dark with his ghost stunts."

There was a pause in hostilities—but only a pause. Blake and Co. did not want a battle-royal in No. 10: but they were going to rag Monty Lowther, whether his pals intervened or not. They eyed him almost wolfishly as he stood gasping for breath between Tom and Manners.

"Ghost stunts!" repeated Tom. "Do you mean last night——"

"No, we don't!" hooted Blake. "We mean this evening, in the quad, as Lowther jolly well knows. He made us jump for a minute—and we'll jolly well make him jump, too——"

"Well, my hat!" said Manners. "Monty, you ass, have you been playing ghost again? Can't you ever give a jape a rest?"

"Dash it all, Monty," said Tom Merry. "You might chuck it! Even once was once too often: but to keep it up like that——"

"But I haven't!" yelled Lowther. "I don't know what they're talking about. Crackers, I expect."

"Oh, can it!" snorted Blake. "You rigged yourself up as the phantom monk, just as you did last night——"

"I didn't!" howled Lowther.

"Rubbish!" snorted Herries. "If you didn't, who did? Think we're going to believe that it was a real ghost?"

"Wathah not! It was Lowthah——"

"Of course it was Lowther," exclaimed Dig. "Look here, get out of the way—I tell you we're going to rag him——"

"Hold on," said Tom. "Lowther says he didn't——"

"Gammon!"

"He jolly well did!"

"Bag him!"

"Hold on, I tell you! Look here, Lowther, if you've been playing the giddy ox again——"

"Haven't I told you I haven't!" roared Lowther. "Kick those Fourth form ticks out of the study! I expect they've been frightened in the dark and fancied they saw something."

"Bai Jove! We saw you, you japin' wottah——"

"We're going to give him a tip about playing ghost. We——"

"Hold on! When did this happen?" asked Tom.

"Not more than ten minutes ago, in the quad, as we were coming back from the New House," snapped Blake. "Lowther, got up as a ghost——"

"Off-side," said Tom. "Whoever you saw, it wasn't Lowther. Lowther hasn't been outside this study for an hour."

"Wha-a-a-t?"

"We've been here, all together," said Manners, shaking his head. "Lowther hasn't been out of the House—or out of the study."

"Oh!" gasped Blake.

"You howling fatheads, frightened by a shadow!" hooted Lowther. "Barging in like a mob of wild Indians because you fancied——"

Blake stared blankly at the 'Terrible Three.' He was taken utterly aback. He knew, and his comrades knew, what they had seen in the dark quad. Not for a moment had they doubted that it was Monty Lowther playing ghost again, as he had played it on the dormitory landing the night before. Yet if he had been in No. 10 Study at the time with his friends, obviously it could not have been Lowther.

"Look here, is that straight?" said Blake, at last. "Of course we thought it was Lowther, after what happened last night——"

"It's straight, fathead," said Tom. "Lowther's been in the study an hour at least—we've all been here. If you saw anybody it wasn't Lowther."

"What did you see, anyway?" asked Manners.

"The phantom monk," answered Blake. "That is, somebody got up as the phantom monk, like Lowther last night. A dark figure in robe and cowl, with a white face and queer eyes—we—we might have fancied it was the ghost, if we hadn't known that Lowther——"

"Look here, if it wasn't Lowther, who was it?" growled Herries.

"Goodness knows," said Tom. "Somebody may have pinched Lowther's ghost outfit, to play tricks with it—where did you leave it, Monty?"

"Stuck in the bottom of the cupboard here," answered Lowther. He crossed to the cupboard and pulled open the door. "Why, it's here now."

"Oh!"

There it was—robe and cowl in a bundle. Evidently no one had 'pinched' that outfit to play ghost with it. Blake and Co. stared at the bundle and stared at the Shell fellows. They were nonplussed.

"Sure you've been in the study all the time?" asked Blake at last.

"A good hour," said Tom.

"Then—then it can't have been Lowther in the quad?"

"He was here with us, I tell you."

"And that outfit can't have been pinched by anyone while you were in the study——"

"It couldn't!"

Blake breathed hard.

"Well, it beats me," he said. "We saw it all right—I struck a match, and we saw it! If it wasn't Lowther—and I—I suppose it wasn't—who was it—what was it?"

Snort, from Monty Lowther. He was bumped and ruffled and not in the best of tempers: which was, perhaps, not surprising in the circumstances.

"Silly kids, fancying things in the dark——" he snorted.

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"I'm not so jolly sure it wasn't Lowther," grunted Herries.

"Haven't I told you so?" roared Monty.

"Well, if it wasn't you, who was it?" demanded Herries. "Want us to believe that it was a real spook?"

"I don't suppose you saw anything," retorted Lowther. "Just fancy—silly kids scared in the dark——"

Hostilities looked like breaking out again at that. But Blake and Co. realised that Monty Lowther had rather a grievance. He had been bumped on the floor of his study, hard! And it had turned out that he was not the man! They had to admit that they had been a little hasty. Really it was rough luck for Lowther.

"Weally, you fellows, we wathah owe Lowthah an apology, in the circs.," said Arthur Augustus slowly.

"Keep it and get out!" snapped Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"Oh, get out!"

Blake and Co. got out. They were puzzled, perplexed, and still wrathy: but it was clear that the 'ghost' was not to be found in No. 10 Study in the Shell. Lowther kicked the door shut after them.

"Blessed if I make this out," said Tom Merry, wrinkling his brows. "They saw it all right—the description's just like your make-up last night, Monty—but who—and what——"

"And why?" said Manners. "Lowther japed that smudge Cardew because he asked for it, and to scare him back to bed when he was going out of bounds. But nobody's got any reason for wandering about the quad got up as a ghost unless he's crackers."

"They fancied it—silly scared kids!" snapped Lowther.

Tom shook his head.

"They saw it all right," he said. "Goodness knows what it means—but they saw it——"

"Perhaps the ghost of St. Jim's is really walking this Christmas?" suggested Monty Lowther, sarcastically.

"Rot!" said Tom. "But—blessed if I make it out."

And it had to be left at that.

Chapter 12

WHAT DID TRIMBLE SEE?

"Trimble!"

Mr. Railton almost shouted.

A dozen fellows stared round. Mr. Linton stared. Mr. Lathom blinked over his glasses.

Patter, patter, patter!

The house-master of the School House was standing near the foot of the big staircase, in conversation with Linton and Lathom. It was after prep., and most of the juniors had come down from the studies. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther were on the stairs, coming down. All of a sudden a wild pattering of running feet was heard, on the study landing above, and Baggy Trimble of the Fourth came hurtling down the staircase. He was yelling as he came.

Trimble's mouth was open, and his eyes popping from his podgy face, which was as white as chalk. He charged down the stairs in blind haste, not even seeing the 'Terrible Three' in his way.

They looked round, but not in time to dodge Trimble as he came. He crashed into them, sending Manners spinning to the right and Lowther to the left, and Tom Merry rolling.

"Here, look out!" gasped Tom.

"You mad ass!" gasped Manners.

"You potty chump!" gurgled Lowther.

Trimble did not heed.

Leaving the three Shell fellows for dead, as it were, he charged on down the staircase, dozens of startled eyes from below fixed on him.

"Trimble!" repeated Mr. Railton, almost in a roar.

"Upon my word!" ejaculated Mr. Linton. "What is the matter with the boy?"

"Trimble!" gasped Mr. Lathom.

"Bai Jove! What on earth is the mattah with Twimble?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Has he gone cwakahs?"

On came Trimble, heedless even of his house-master. He careered down the stairs, and as he reached the bottom of the staircase, Mr. Railton grasped him by a fat shoulder.

"Trimble! Stop—upon my word!"

That strong grasp on his shoulder checked Trimble's frantic career. But it did not stop him: he was going too fast for that. He spun round the house-master, almost completely circling Mr. Railton. Then he came to a spluttering halt.

"Oooooogh!" spluttered Trimble. "Save me!"

"Boy! What——"

"Keep it off!" yelled Trimble.

"Is this boy of your form out of his senses, Lathom?" inquired Mr. Linton.

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Lathom.

"Trimble!" exclaimed Mr. Railton. "How dare you race down the staircase in that manner? What——"

"Keep it off!" shrieked Trimble.

"The boy has been frightened," said Mr. Linton, staring at the fat Baggy. "Really, most extraordinary——"

Baggy jerked at his shoulder. Apparently he was eager to continue his wild career. But the house-master's grip was like iron.

"Trimble, calm yourself," snapped Mr. Railton. "What is the matter?"

"Ow! Keep it off!"

"Keep what off, you stupid boy?"

"The gig-gig-gig-gig——"

"The what?"

"The gig-gig-gig——" stuttered Trimble. "I—I saw it——"

"You saw what?"

"The gig-gig-gig-ghost——" Trimble got it out at last. "Oh, lor'! Oh, crikey! Ooogh! The gig-gig-gig-ghost—oh, scissors!"

"Bai Jove!" breathed Arthur Augustus. "Has that sillay ass Lowthah been at it again?"

"There's Lowther on the stairs," answered Blake. "Not Lowther this time."

"I—I—I say, leggo!" gasped Trimble. "It's coming after me—I—I saw it—the—the phantom monk—oh, crikey! Lemme go."

"Stay where you are, you foolish boy," exclaimed Mr. Railton, angrily. "Now tell me at once what you fancied you saw——"

"I—I didn't fancy it, it was there, when I came out of my study," gasped Baggy. "It—it came towards me—the ghost of the monk——"

"Absurd!" Mr. Railton frowned. "Someone has been frightening this stupid boy. Kildare!"

"Yes, sir!" The St. Jim's captain came up quickly.

"Please go up and see what has frightened this foolish boy."

"Certainly, sir."

Kildare ran up the staircase. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther had picked themselves up, considerably jolted and breathless. Kildare passed them at a run.

A crowd was already on the spot buzzing with excitement. Most of the School House juniors had heard by that time of Blake and Co's. strange adventure in the dark quad after tea and most of them had concluded that the funny man of the Shell was at his antics again. But that it was not Monty Lowther this time was clear to all, for there he was in full view—he had been on the staircase when Trimble came charging down. Whatever Baggy had seen, if he had seen anything, it certainly was not Monty in his ghost outfit.

Trimble was still shaking like a fat jelly. Evidently he had had the scare of his life. He had found it very amusing to jeer at Cardew's panic in similar circumstances: but Cardew's panic compared with Baggy's was as moonlight unto sunlight, as water unto wine. Baggy was fairly scared out of his fat wits.

"Oooh! Ooogh! The gig-gig-gig-ghost——" mumbled the terrified Baggy.

"Silence!" rapped Railton.

"Oh! Yes, sir! But I saw it——"

"You absurd boy, if you saw anything, it must have been some foolish practical joker," snapped Mr. Railton. "Be silent."

"Oooooooh!"

"Come on, you men," muttered Tom Merry. "If there's a practical joker about, playing ghost, we'll root him out."

"Some silly ass like Monty——" muttered Manners.

"Look here——" hooted Lowther.

"Oh, come on!" said Tom.

The three ran up the staircase after Kildare of the Sixth. Blake and Co. ran up after them, and then Levison and Clive Talbot and Kangaroo, and five or six other fellows. Blake looked back over the banisters.

"Come up and show us just where you saw him, Trimble," he called out.

"Oooogh!!" gasped Baggy. He did not stir. All the king's horses and all the king's men could not have dragged Baggy up those stairs again, at present.

Kildare was already across the study landing, and running into the Fourth-form passage, where, if anywhere, Trimble had seen the 'ghost.' A mob of fellows hurried at his heels.

Nobody was to be seen in the passage except Lumley-Lumley of the Fourth, who was coming out of his study. He stared at the excited crowd.

"Have you seen anybody—anything—here, Lumley-Lumley?" called out Kildare. "Trimble has been frightened by something—the young ass fancies he's seen a ghost——"

"No: I've been in my study. I heard somebody running."

"That was Trimble, I suppose," grunted Kildare. "The young ass!" He stared round him, frowned, and then went back to the staircase. There was nothing unusual to be seen in the Fourth-form passage, and nothing to report to the house-master. If Baggy Trimble had, indeed, seen a ghost in the Fourth-form quarters, that ghost had vanished.

"Bettah look in the studies, you fellows," suggested Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "If somebody has been playin' twicks, he might have dodged into a study."

"Might as well look!" agreed Tom.

They looked into the studies, one after another. But there was nothing to be discovered in the nature of Baggy Trimble's ghost. They had just finished the round of the studies, when a junior came down the box-room stair at the end of the passage. It was Ralph Reckness Cardew, and he stared at the crowd and raised his eyebrows.

"Anythin' up?" he drawled.

"Ghosts!" answered Manners.

"Oh, give that a rest!" snapped Cardew.

Manners laughed.

"Not your ghost of last night—Trimble's seen it, or fancies he has——"

"What rot!"

"He thinks he has, at any rate," said Tom Merry. "He came bolting down the stairs a quarter of an hour ago like a scared rabbit. You've seen nothing?"

"If there's a ghost about, he wasn't in the box-room. I'd have offered him a smoke if I'd found him there. But if somebody's playing the giddy ox, you'd better ask Lowther—he knows all about ghost stunts."

"It wasn't Lowther this time," said Tom curtly. "Lowther was with Manners and me on the stairs when Trimble came bolting down."

Cardew shrugged his shoulders.

"Somethin' in that jolly old legend, perhaps!" he suggested. "The ghost of St. Jim's is walkin', what?"

"Oh, rot," said Tom.

Cardew laughed and went into his study.

"We know it wasn't Lowther this time," said Blake. "Some other silly ass like him, I suppose——"

"Bai Jove! Is there any othah fellow in the House such a silly ass as Lowthah?" asked Arthur Augustus, dubiously.

"Fathead!" said Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah——"

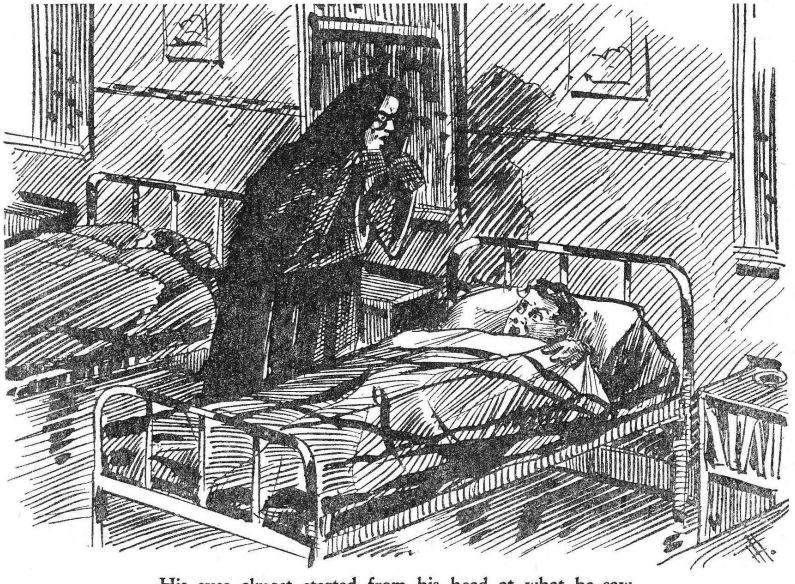
"Oh, let's get down," said Tom. "Nothing here, anyhow."

They went downstairs again: ghost or no ghost, there was nothing to be found. But until bedtime that night there was only one topic among the juniors of the School House—and a good many of the seniors. Trimble's scare had spread the ghost-story all over the House.

That somebody—not Lowther this time—was playing ghost, was the general view. But there was another possibility that made many fellows feel uneasy as bedtime drew near.

Nobody of course believed in ghosts: but—there was that old legend, of the phantom monk who walked the House when the snow was on the ground at Christmastide. There was hardly a fellow who would have admitted that he believed in that wild old tale: but there seemed to be a good many unwilling to go along dark passages and who cast uneasy glances into shadowy corners.

Whether real or unreal, flesh or phantom, the ghost of St. Jim's was causing a very creepy uneasiness in the School House that dark December night.



His eyes almost started from his head at what he saw.

Chapter 13

IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT!

"Oh!" panted Monty Lowther.

His eyes opened, and he cried out, involuntarily.

It was black midnight. The December wind wailed round the old School House, rustling the ivy on the ancient walls, fluttering snow-flakes against the window-panes.

All St. Jim's slept. Some of the fellows had gone to bed in uneasy mood, and there had been talk from bed to bed in subdued tones: and many, half-asleep, had wakened again at the howl of the wind, or the dull thudding of masses of snow rolling from the roofs. But at midnight all were deep in slumber, till Monty Lowther awakened.

For a moment or two he hardly knew what had awakened him, whether he had dreamed an icy touch on his face. Then, as his eyes opened, he saw. And his eyes almost started from his head at what he saw.

Close by his bed, half-bending over him, a dark figure stood: draped in a monkish robe, the cowl drawn back: and a phosphorescent glimmer showed him the deathly white face that looked at him from the darkness.

He lay spell-bound, staring from his pillow.

He had been dreaming of the phantom of St. Jim's. Was he still dreaming? Or was that ghostly face looking at him in the deep gloom, scarcely an arm's length from his own? He could not move. He lay petrified. Was he dreaming?

Then, with an effort, he rose on his elbow, still staring at that face of death. The blood seemed to freeze in his veins.

A moment more and the phantom seemed to fade into the darkness. There was no footfall. If the strange apparition was a thing of flesh and blood, it made no sound as it moved. The spectral face faded into blackness.

"Oh!" repeated Lowther, in a panting, husky voice. "Oh, what—who—what——" His voice choked.

He sat up, his face in the darkness as white as the ghostly face he had seen so close at his bedside. He was shaking from head to foot.

It was no dream, he had seen it. Was it some trick, such a trick as he had himself played, or was it—could it be—— He shuddered from head to foot.

There was a stirring in the next bed. His panting cry had awakened Tom Merry.

"What's that? Anybody up? What——"

"Tom!" Lowther's voice sounded like a husky croak. "Tom—get a light—quick—quick——"

"But what——"

"I've seen it—it's here——"

"Wha-a-a-t——"

"The ghost!" panted Lowther. "A light—a light—quick—quick—it's here, in the dorm.—I tell you it's here—it—it touched me—oh——"

"Monty, old man——"

"A light—quick!" Lowther almost shrieked. "Haven't you got a match, or something—quick——"

"I've got a flash-lamp in my jacket pocket." It was Manners' quiet voice. "I'll get it in a jiffy."

"Quick—quick——"

"Who's that?" came Gore's voice. "Somebody getting up?"

"What's the row?" came a sleepy voice from Kangaroo's bed. Harry Noble was awake, and so were six or seven other fellows now.

Manners groped for his flash-lamp and flashed it on. He circled the light round the dark dormitory.

It gleamed on many startled faces. It revealed Lowther's face, white as the driven snow, the eyes starting, drops of sweat on the forehead. But apart from wakeful and startled faces, it revealed nothing unusual in the Shell dormitory.

"Nobody here," said Manners.

"I—I—I saw it——" muttered Lowther, in choked tones. "It—it touched me—it woke me up—a touch like ice——"

"Dreaming, old man," said Kangaroo.

"I tell you it was here, bending over me——"

"Well, what was it, and where is it now?" asked Glyn.

"It—it was what Blake saw in the quad—what Trimble saw in the study passage—it—it—it was—was——" "Lowther's teeth chattered. "But it's gone—vanished——"

Manners flashed the light on the door. It was shut. No one had heard it: if there had been a midnight intruder in the dormitory, he had gone without a sound. Tom Merry slipped out of bed, crossed to the door, and switched on the electric light.

There was a sudden flood of illumination in the long, lofty room. It came as a relief to all. Every fellow was awake now, sitting up in bed, staring and uneasy.

"Better look round," said Tom. "If anybody's here——"

"Nobody's here," muttered Gore. "Only Lowther dreaming of his own silly ghost stunts——"

"I wasn't dreaming," Lowther's voice shook. "I—I tell you it touched me—it was here, bending over my bed——" He shuddered.

Lowther tried to pull himself together. But he shuddered at the recollection of that icy touch and of the deathly face that had looked down at him in the dark.

Now that the room was lighted, it was easily seen that no one was there, excepting the Shell fellows themselves.

"Somebody's playing ghost!" said Talbot, quietly. "He must have got out before Manners turned his flash-lamp on."

Tom Merry threw the door wide open. He stared out into the corridor. In the light that streamed from the doorway there was nothing to be seen. Beyond that radius was deep darkness.

"See anything, Tom?" called out Lowther. His voice was unsteady.

"Nothing."

"Of course there's nothing," grunted Gore, "only that ass Lowther scared like Cardew last night."

Lowther's pale face crimsoned. Cardew's scare had made him an object of derision and ridicule in the House. It looked as if Monty Lowther might have the same experience.

"Oh, shut up, Gore," said Tom Merry, sharply. "Somebody's been here——"

"Rot!" said Gore. "Go to sleep and dream again, Lowther."

"I tell you—oh!" Lowther broke off, his staring eyes on the doorway. "Oh! Look! Look!"

"What——" exclaimed Tom.

"Look!" Lowther almost shrieked. He pointed with a shaking hand to the doorway. All eyes turned on it.

Framed in the doorway stood a strange, startling figure, visible in the light to every eye—that of a monk in robe and cowl, with a deathly face and strangely staring eyes.

It was only for a moment that it stood there. But in that moment every eye saw it. Then it glided back and vanished in darkness.

"That—that was it." Lowther panted. "That was what I saw——"

Tom Merry set his teeth.

"It's a trick!" he panted. "I'm going after it."

"Tom!" shouted Lowther.

Tom did not heed. He caught the flash-lamp from Manners' hand and ran into the corridor. But the phantom, if it was a phantom, had vanished: if it was a thing of flesh and blood it had gone swiftly and silently. It was gone—there was nothing to be seen.

"Tom!" Manners called anxiously from the doorway.

Tom Merry came back into the dormitory, his lips set.

"It's gone," he said.

"What—what was it?" stammered Lowther.

"Oh, don't be an ass," said Tom, gruffly. "Are you going to begin believing in ghosts, after playing ghosts yourself?"

Manners closed the door quietly.

"I—I say, hadn't we better call the house-master?" stammered Gore.

"And let Railton think us a set of funks!" snapped Tom Merry. "Forget it! I'm going back to bed." He put his hand to the switch to shut off the light.

"Leave the light on, Tom!" breathed Monty Lowther.

"You ass, Monty! Look here——"

"Leave it on, I tell you," muttered Lowther.

"Better, Tom," said Manners, quietly. "We're all pretty jumpy—after that."

"Oh, all right!"

Tom Merry went back to bed, leaving the light burning, glimmering from the high windows into the wintry night and the falling snow. It was very much against the rules: but no one was thinking of the rules just then: all were thinking of that strange, eerie, unearthly apparition. There were few fellows in the Shell dormitory that night to whom sleep came easily.

CHAPTER 14

RUBBING IT IN

"IT'S all rot!" snapped Tom Merry.

"I—I know. But——"

"Some ass larking," said Manners.

"Yes. But——"

"All your own fault, too! You started the ball rolling."

It was the following day and the 'Terrible Three' were in their study after class. They did not seem to be in their usual cheery mood.

One of the three was looking far from his usual self. No one, just then, would have taken Monty Lowther for the funny man of the House. Nobody could have looked more serious.

He could not forget his experience of the night. It had been too disturbing for that. It was all very well for Tom to say that it was all rot, and for Manners to affirm that it was some ass larking, following Monty's own example. Common-sense told Lowther that they were right. Nevertheless, he could not banish from his mind the recollection of that icy touch, or of the ghostly face that had looked at him in the dark. The coming night gave a good many fellows a feeling of uneasiness—Lowther not the least.

"Have a little sense, old chap," said Tom. "You played ghost yourself the night before last, and gave that smudge Cardew a scare——"

"Oh, let that rest," muttered Lowther.

"Now some other silly ass is at the same game," said Tom, impatiently. "And that's all there is to it."

"Who?" muttered Lowther.

"What's the good of asking me that? Plenty of silly asses about—you're not the only one in the House."

"It's touch was like ice——" Lowther shivered at the recollection. "I tell you, it was a hand like ice——"

"Well, a fellow's fingers would be cold, I suppose, wandering about at midnight in December," said Tom, practically.

"Might have dipped them in cold water on purpose," said Manners. "For goodness' sake, Monty, don't be a goat. How could there be ghosts?"

"Well, I—I don't believe in ghosts, of course," said Lowther. "I'm not such an ass as that. But——"

There was a tap at the door, and the chums of the Shell looked round impatiently as it opened and Ralph Reckness Cardew of the Fourth appeared. They gave him far from welcoming looks. The scapegrace of the Fourth was not *persona grata* in that study, especially at present. Cardew was the cause of all the trouble, in the opinion of Tom Merry and Manners, at least. But for his nocturnal escapades, Monty Lowther would never have thought of playing ghost and put the idea into the head of the unknown practical joker who was following his example.

"Well?" rapped Tom.

Cardew smiled. Grim looks from the Shell fellows did not seem to perturb him in any way. He seemed amused.

"Just looked in——" he began.

"Look out again," suggested Manners.

"And shut the door after you," said Tom.

Lowther did not speak. But for the happenings of the night Monty would have been ready with some jest when Cardew came in. But he was not feeling like jesting on the subject of ghosts now!

"I don't seem to be very popular in this study," remarked Cardew: evidently quite unmoved, however, by his unpopularity. "I hear you fellows have been seein' spooks in your dorm. Were you badly scared?"

"Find out!" suggested Manners.

"Not Lowther this time," went on Cardew. "From what I hear, Lowther was the most badly scared of the lot."

Monty's face crimsoned. But he did not speak.

"I hear you kept the light on all night, because you were afraid of the dark," went on Cardew, with a chuckle. "Is that so?"

No reply. But Tom and Manners were red now, as well as Lowther. Tom's hand strayed to a cushion.

"Lucky for you it was a foul night, and nobody likely to be out of the House. If some beak had seen that light and come up to inquire, you'd have looked a pretty set of funks."

Tom Merry breathed hard.

"That will do," he snapped. "Travel."

"Tired of the subject?" grinned Cardew. "You seemed to think it quite funny yesterday for a fellow to be scared by a silly ass got up in an old curtain

with a chalked face and a spot of luminous paint. Doesn't it strike you as funny today? "

"Oh, get out."

Cardew chuckled.

"Are you goin' to keep the light on tonight?" he asked. "By gad, the New-House men will never let us hear the end of it when they find out that School-House men are afraid to sleep in the dark."

Tom gripped the cushion.

"Do you want this in your cheeky face?" he exclaimed, with some heat. "If you don't, get out."

There was another chuckle from Cardew.

"Not at all, dear man! I thought you'd find the subject amusin'—you certainly did yesterday. Queer how a fellow gets ratty when he gets the wrong end of the joke, isn't it?"

"Shut the door after you."

Cardew laughed, stepped back into the passage and shut the door. They heard him laugh again in the passage. Tom gave an angry grunt.

"This is pie to that rotter," he growled. "Nobody can say now that he's the only fellow scared by a fathead playing ghost."

"If that's all it was——" muttered Lowther.

"Of course that's all it was! Are you going to believe in spooks?" hooted Tom. "Only yesterday everybody was laughing at Cardew. Do you want the whole House to be laughing at this study instead?"

Tap!

The door opened and once more the smiling face of Ralph Reckness Cardew looked in. Evidently Cardew was bent on 'rubbing it in.' That, perhaps, was not surprising, considering how he had been made an object of derision and ridicule only the day before for his fancied ghost. It had been bitter enough to a proud and arrogant fellow like Cardew. Now it was his turn, and he was making the most of it.

"Will you keep out of this study?" snapped Tom Merry, his hand closing on the cushion again.

"Sorry to intrude, old beans," grinned Cardew. "But I've a suggestion to make, if you'll condescend to hear it."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, what about askin' the House-dame to sit up with you at night?" suggested Cardew. "She's a kind old soul, and I'm sure she'd sympathise with fellows frightened by the dark——"

Three crimson faces glared at Cardew. Tom's hand went up with the cushion in it. His eyes glinted at the grinning face in the doorway.

"Get out!" he said, between his set lips, "and keep out! If you put your face into this study again, you get this cushion."

Cardew, laughing, backed into the passage again and shut the door. He certainly wanted to 'rag' the 'Terrible Three': but he did not want the cushion.

"By gum!" muttered Tom. "I wish I knew who it was that's playing ghost. I'd like to give him a prize nose to take home for the Christmas holidays. We shall never hear the end of this. That cad enjoys rubbing it in."

Manners shrugged his shoulders.

"Can't wonder at it," he said. "Lowther pulled his leg, and everybody chortled at him—now he's getting his own back. I—I wish that dashed light hadn't been left on last night. Bother Cardew! He won't let us forget about that."

"If he puts his cheeky face into this study again he gets this cushion, right on it," growled Tom. "I'm fed up with him. My hat! There he is again!"

Tap!

The door opened.

The cushion flew. It crashed fair and square into the face that appeared in the door. An elegant figure staggered back and a wild yell woke the echoes of the Shell passage.

"Yawoooooh! Oh, cwikey! Wow!"

Bump!

The recipient of the cushion sat down in the passage. But it was not Cardew this time. It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the ornament of the Fourth Form, who sat on the floor outside the doorway, yelling in a state of great surprise.

Chapter 15

KILDARE WANTS TO KNOW!

"Ooooooogh! Gwooogh! Woooogh!"

Arthur Augustus sat and spluttered.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry, staring blankly at the breathless, spluttering figure in the doorway.

Not for a moment had he doubted that it was Cardew coming back to the study for another gibe. He had taken that for granted. Only too evidently he had taken too much for granted!

"Ooogh! Oh, cwikey! Gwoogh."

"Gussy!" exclaimed Manners.

"Wow! I have been knocked ovah——"

"Oh, crumbs," said Tom, "I—I thought——"

Manners chuckled. Monty Lowther grinned. Tom jumped up, and ran to give the swell of St. Jim's a helping hand. Undoubtedly he had been rather too hasty with that cushion.

"Woogh! I have been knocked wight ovah," gasped Arthur Augustus. "Wight ovah, bai Jove——"

"Sorry, old man——"

"Did you buzz that cush at me, Tom Mewwy?" roared Arthur Augustus.

"Oh! Yes! But——"

"You uttah ass! You fwightful fathead! You burblin' blithewah!" Arthur Augustus seemed quite forgetful of the repose that stamps, or should stamp, the caste of Vere de Vere. "Knockin' a fellow ovah——"

"You—you see——"

"Wow!"

"I thought it was Cardew coming back," explained Tom. "That cheeky smudge has been here ragging——"

"Woogh! Weally, Tom Mewwy, you might make suah befoah you buzz a cush at a fellow's nappah."

"Mistakes will happen, old chap," grinned Manners.

Arthur Augustus tottered to his feet with a helping hand from Tom. He rubbed his noble nose with one hand and groped for his eyeglass with the other. He had had rather a shock. Really, it was quite an unexpected reception.

"Awfully sorry, old scout," said Tom. "That relation of yours is enough to get any fellow's goat. He was here a minute ago——"

"Yaas, I passed him in the passage," said Arthur Augustus. "He was gwinnin' like a Cheshire cheese—I mean a Cheshire cat——"

"Oh! Was he?" said Tom, gruffly.

"Yaas, wathah. He seemed feahfully amused about somethin'," said Arthur Augustus. "Wow! I have a pain in my nose! Wow! You are wathah a thoughtless ass, Tom Mewwy."

"You see——"

"Oh, all wight," said Arthur Augustus. "If it was an ewwah, all wight. You are wathah an ass, but nevah mind. I came to bwing a message from Kildare. He wants to see you in his study."

"Oh!" said Tom.

"I twust it is not a wow, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus, kindly. "I thought Kildare was lookin' wathah watty when he spoke to me. Bettah cut off."

Tom Merry nodded and went down the passage. He thought he could guess why the St. Jim's captain wanted to see him. The ghost story was the one topic among the juniors of the House now, and could hardly have failed to reach the ears of the prefects. Kildare of the Sixth was not likely to believe that the phantom monk of St. Jim's was haunting the old School House: but he was very likely to believe that some practical joker was at work and that the prefectorial ashplant was needed.

Tom passed Cardew on the study landing as he crossed to the stairs. He was speaking to Wildrake of the Fourth, and he raised his voice a little as Tom came by.

"I hear that they're goin' to ask the House-dame to sit up with them o' nights in the Shell, or they'll be afraid to go to bed——"

Wildrake chuckled.

Tom Merry, with ears burning, passed on. Cardew, undoubtedly, was 'getting his own back.' The happening in the Shell dormitory was 'pie' to him, and he was not likely to let it rest.

Tom went down the stairs and tapped at the door of Kildare's study in the Sixth.

"Come in!" came a rasp from within. It did not sound as if the head-prefect of the School House was in the best of tempers.

Tom entered the study. Kildare's handsome, and usually good-tempered, face wore a frown.

"D'Arcy told me you wanted to see me, Kildare," said Tom.

"Yes. What's all this stuff about a ghost walking the House?" asked Kildare, gruffly. "The juniors seem to be full of it. Last evening that young ass Trimble of the Fourth fancied he saw something in the study passage and raised a hullabaloo. Now it seems that there was something in the Shell dorm. last night. Did anything happen?"

"Well, yes," said Tom, slowly.

"You didn't see the ghost of the old monk, I suppose?" asked Kildare, sarcastically.

"We—we saw something——"

"Oh, gad! Are you a scared young ass like Trimble?"

Tom Merry crimsoned.

"I hope not, Kildare," he answered. "I had no doubt that it was some silly goat playing tricks. But—we saw it—and some of the fellows were jumpy——"

"What was it like?"

"Just like what we've heard of the phantom monk—robe and cowl, and death-like face, and queer-looking eyes——"

"That's what Trimble fancied he saw from what he gabbled about it," grunted Kildare. "Some young sweep in the dormitory larking, I suppose?"

"It wasn't that," said Tom. "All the fellows were there when we saw it. It wasn't a Shell man."

"Some silly fag larking. All of you scared, I suppose?"

"I don't think I was scared," answered Tom, quietly. "But it was a bit startling, Kildare, in the middle of the night."

"You don't fancy it was a ghost, I suppose?" rapped Kildare.

"No! But—some of the fellows don't seem to know quite what to think about it. It was—was awfully uncanny."

"Not one of Lowther's practical jokes?" asked Kildare. "It sounds rather like it."

Tom shook his head.

"Lowther saw it first," he explained. "It touched him and woke him up, and he saw it in the dark. And—and he woke us all up. I put on the light. But there was nothing to be seen. But——"

"Well, what?"

"I opened the door and looked out. There was nothing. But—but—a minute or two later we all saw it in the doorway. Only for a moment, but—but we all saw it——"

"And then it vanished, I suppose?"

"Yes."

Kildare knitted his brows.

"Now, make sure you've got it right, Merry," he said. "You're sure that it was not one of your form?"

"Quite sure," answered Tom. "I tell you every fellow was present. Whatever it was—I mean, whoever it was—it wasn't a Shell fellow."

"I've heard that the light was left on all night. Is that so?"

"Ye-e-es."

"Young asses! Now, there's to be no more of that," said Kildare. "I shall see lights out for the Shell myself tonight. If the light's turned on again after I put it out, there'll be trouble. Got that?"

"Yes, Kildare."

"Better tip the others," said Kildare. "That will do, Merry, you can cut."

Tom Merry left the study. The Sixth-Form man was left with an extremely thoughtful expression on his face. Probably he was thinking out measures to be taken for dealing with the phantom monk that so strangely haunted the old School House of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 16

THE GHOST'S LAST WALK!

"TOM!"

It was a whisper in the darkness.

All was dark in the Shell dormitory in the School House. All was silent, save for the wail of the winter wind over the old roofs: till that faint whisper came.

Tom Merry's eyes opened.

He had been sleeping: perhaps not quite so soundly as usual. A good many fellows were finding slumber uneasy. Many had been long in sinking into sleep, with recollection in their minds of the strange phantom figure that had appeared the previous night. Some would have liked to keep the light burning: but Kildare's order had settled that: and all was dark. And all, at last, were asleep, when the

chime of midnight sounded dully through the gloom. But one, at least, was awake again now.

"Eh?" murmured Tom, sleepily.

"Tom!"

The whisper came, faint and almost tremulous, from the next bed. Tom rubbed his eyes and sat up, peering towards Monty Lowther's bed.

"Is that you, Monty?"

"Yes."

"Go to sleep, old chap."

"It—it's here, Tom," breathed Lowther.

"Oh!"

Tom Merry felt a thrill run to his heart. With all his sturdy common-sense, he could not help feeling the eeriness of it. He had heard nothing but Lowther's faint whisper. But as he stared into the darkness, a pale glimmer came to his eyes: a ghostly phosphorescent gleam.

A shiver ran through him. In the daytime, or in the lighted study, or in the crowd in the dayroom, it was easy to laugh to scorn the idea of the legendary phantom walking the dim old corridors. But in the silence and darkness of midnight it was somehow different. Something like a superstitious chill came over him for the moment.

"It—it's here." Lowther's voice was shaking. "The door's open, Tom—I can feel the draught from the corridor. It—it's here."

Lowther's words helped Tom to pull himself together. A bodiless phantom could scarcely need to open a door. If the door-handle had been turned it had been turned by a human hand.

Tom set his teeth.

"Brace up, old chap! I've got a flash-lamp under my pillow," he whispered. "I'll have the light on in a tick."

He groped under the pillow for the flash-lamp, which he had placed there in readiness. A moment more and its light was gleaming out into the darkness, in a long bright beam.

Lowther was sitting up in bed, his eyes staring. There was a stirring from Manners' bed: he had awakened.

"What——" he began.

There was a loud cry from Monty Lowther.

"Look!"

"Oh!" gasped Manners.

Tom had circled the light, till it picked up a dark figure a little distance from the beds. The light fixed on that strange figure, revealing clearly the eerie shape the juniors knew only too well: the robe, the cowl, the deathly white face, the strangely gleaming eyes. The phantom monk was walking again. It was there—there in the gleam of the flash-lamp.

There was a stirring in every bed now. Lowther's startled cry had awakened the dormitory. Startled voices echoed on all sides.

"What——"

"Oh! Look!"

"The—the ghost!"

The light of the flash-lamp picked it out from the blackness. Every eye could see it. Every fellow in the Shell dormitory was sitting up in bed, staring at the apparition with starting eyes.

It moved, receding towards the wide-open doorway. Beyond that doorway was the blackness of the corridor.

For a long, long moment Tom Merry sat, as if spell-bound, the light in his hand, staring at the phantom form. Then, as he made a movement to throw off the bedclothes, the phantom vanished.

There was no sound. It was as if the eerie figure faded into the blackness without.

There was deep silence.

But the silence was brief. It was broken, suddenly, unexpectedly, startlingly,

There was no escape for the ghost of the School House.

by sounds from the dark corridor into which the phantom had vanished. A sharp cry of alarm was heard, and the sound of a struggle followed.

"What—what's that?" exclaimed Manners. "You fellows hear——"

"Something's up!"

"But—what?"

"Oh!" exclaimed Tom. "Somebody's there—somebody's got him——"

There was a trampling of feet from the passage. In the light of the flash-lamp in Tom Merry's hand, a figure reappeared in the doorway—it was the figure of the phantom monk. But it was not gliding silently now with ghostly footfalls. It was panting, struggling, wrenching furiously, in the grasp of a taller figure behind, that gripped it round the neck and propelled it into the dormitory.

"Merry!" rapped out a voice. "You're awake, I suppose—Tom Merry!"

"Yes, Kildare." He knew that voice. It was Kildare of the Sixth in whose strong and sinewy grasp the 'phantom' was struggling frantically, panting as it strove to wrench itself free, and strove in vain. Very clearly now, the 'phantom' of St. Jim's was of flesh and blood!

"Get out and put on the light!"

Kildare's voice came breathlessly. He was more than a match, twice more than a match, for the unknown who struggled in his grasp: but those struggles were so fierce that he had plenty to do to hold his prisoner. But he held him. There was no escape for the ghost of the School House.

Tom threw back the blankets and leaped from his bed. Manners and Lowther jumped out the next moment. And all up and down the dormitory fellows turned out. Nobody was feeling anything like a superstitious thrill now. All knew that the 'ghost' was a trickster: and that the trickster was caught. Thrice the ghost of St. Jim's had walked, and vanished! But he was not to vanish this time! The phantom monk had taken his last walk!

Almost in a moment Tom Merry's hand was on the lighting switch and he flashed on the light. A crowd of fellows in pyjamas stared at the strange scene within the doorway. The St. Jim's captain, too, was in pyjamas. Kildare of the Sixth, a head taller than his prisoner, held him in a grip of iron, struggling, wrenching, panting.

"Oh!" gasped Monty Lowther. "You've got him, Kildare." He stared at the struggling prisoner, a flush in his cheeks. This was the 'phantom' that he had almost half-believed to be a visitant from another world. This was the 'ghost' whose icy touch had so haunted him! The monkish robe had been rent in the struggle and a trousered leg was visible! It was only too obviously a trickster playing ghost, as Lowther himself had played it only two nights ago. His cheeks burned.

"I've got him," said Kildare, grimly. "And now we'll see who he is! Who are you, you young rascal?"

The struggling prisoner ceased to struggle. Evidently he realised that the game was up and that there was no escape for him. A dozen fellows were ready to

grasp him if he broke away from Kildare—the phantom had no terrors for the juniors now.

Every eye was on his face. But that face was quite unrecognisable. That he was a St. Jim's fellow—a School House fellow—was certain: known by sight to all, in his normal state. But the face was so plastered with chalk and luminous paint that his identity could not even be guessed. Had he spoken, no doubt his voice would have been known. But he did not speak.

"So you—you were on the watch, Kildare?" asked Tom Merry. Kildare's sudden appearance was an amazement to all in the dormitory. But it was not difficult to guess how it came about. Evidently the St. Jim's captain had decided on the measures to be taken, after his talk with Tom Merry in his study.

"Yes, you young ass," answered Kildare. "It was pretty plain that the young rascal was some fellow from another dormitory, who seemed to have set himself specially to scare fellows in this dormitory——"

"Oh!" muttered Lowther.

"And I stayed up tonight to wait for the ghost to walk again," said Kildare. "I had a glimpse of him from a distance, when he got here, and was on the spot to grasp him as he came out again, and here he is! And how many of you think he's a real ghost now?"

Some of the juniors laughed. Even Baggy Trimble of the Fourth would hardly have been alarmed by that 'ghost' now!

"But who is he?" asked five or six voices.

"Goodness knows, with his face plastered like that!" Kildare gave his prisoner a shake. "Who are you?"

"May as well own up now, you tick," said Tom.

"Oh, quite!" came a cool, drawling voice. "Right on the wicket, my good Thomas, as you always are! But would you mind lettin' go my neck, Kildare? You're rather chokin' a fellow."

There was an exclamation from every fellow in the Shell dormitory. That cool voice was known, if the strangely disguised face was not.

"Cardew!"

Chapter 17

TIT FOR TAT!

"Cardew!"

Tom Merry and Co. repeated the name, staring at the strange figure in Kildare's grasp.

"Cardew!"

Even now they knew who it was he was not to be recognised. But there was no doubt about it now. The 'ghost' of St. Jim's was Cardew—Ralph Reckness Cardew of the Fourth Form.

"Cardew!" breathed Monty Lowther. "You tricky rotter—playing ghost——"

"I like that—from you!" drawled Cardew. "Who set the ball rollin'?"

"Oh!" muttered Lowther.

Kildare released the prisoner. The scapegrace of the Fourth rubbed the back of his neck. Kildare's grip had been rather like that of a vice. The captain of St. Jim's eyed him grimly.

"You're Cardew of the Fourth?" he snapped.

Cardew nodded, coolly. He was discovered and he knew that he was 'for it': but he was quite cool, indeed nonchalant. In fact he seemed to be rather amused.

"Quite!" he agreed. "You wouldn't recognise my classic features under this make-up, but it's little me! I had to pile it on rather thick, you know, to get away with the ghost stunt. Even Lowther wouldn't have been scared if he'd recognised me as a harmless and necessary Fourth-former."

Monty Lowther breathed hard.

"You young rascal!" said Kildare. "You've been scaring all the juniors in the House——"

Cardew nodded.

"That was the big idea," he explained. "And if you hadn't barged in, dear man, I was goin' to keep it up, right till the break-up for Christmas and give them the time of their lives."

"And why have you played this mad trick?" demanded Kildare.

Cardew shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, I had a reason," he drawled. "I shouldn't wonder if these fellows could guess it, if they put wet towels round their heads and think very hard! You see, a silly ass played ghost and gave me a scare—and set the whole House grinnin' at me! I rather thought I'd give them somethin' else to grin at for a change! One good turn deserves another."

"Oh!" said Tom. "So that was it?"

"That, dear man, was exactly it!" assented Cardew. "Tit for tat, you know. A Roland for an Oliver! *Quid pro quo,* and all that! I rather fancy that the fellow who gave me a scare got a worse scare than I did! I seem to have heard that he couldn't sleep in the dark afterwards."

Monty Lowther crimsoned. Some of the Shell fellows grinned.

"You've spoiled the show, Kildare," went on Cardew. "I had it all mapped out to keep the jolly old ghost walkin' till break-up. I had this attractive outfit parked in the box-room, and only had to slip out of the dorm. and put it on. You've dished the programme."

"That will do!" said Kildare. "I'll take you back to your dormitory now—and after prayers in the morning you'll come to my study——"

"Always glad to see you," said Cardew, affably.

"And you'll get a six that you'll remember till the Christmas holidays!" said Kildare, grimly. "Come along, you young rascal!"

"After you, Cecil!" said Cardew, politely: and he walked out of the dormitory after the St. Jim's captain. In the doorway he looked back.

"Cheerio, Lowther," he called, "you can go to sleep now. No need to keep the light on any more."

And he chuckled and followed Kildare down the corridor, leaving Monty Lowther with a crimson face, and most of the other fellows laughing.

* * *

THE ghost of St. Jim's was 'laid.'

The scare was over: and it was a relief to all, excepting no doubt Cardew, who was seen wriggling like an eel after his visit to Kildare's study in the morning.

Most of the fellows in the House, even Levison and Clive, told Cardew what they thought of him: and all that they thought seemed to be extremely unflattering. Which did not seem to disturb his equanimity very much.

But when, a few days later, the old school broke up for the Christmas holidays, and Cardew, with a grin, called out "Merry Christmas" to the 'Terrible Three,' even Monty Lowther joined with Tom Merry and Manners in the cheery reply "Merry Christmas!"

This is about YOU

By EDWARD NORTHCOTT

No doubt you all remember those lines which girls loved to chant:

Snaps and snails and puppy-dogs' tails;
And that's what little boys are made of, made of.

You can rest assured, however, that there is no truth in the theory. Neither is there any truth in the belief:

Sugar and spice, and all that's nice;
And that's what little girls are made of, made of.

It is comforting to learn—thus putting girls in their place!—that we are all made alike. And that is on the evidence of scientists!

The human body is actually two-thirds water, 61 per cent. to be exact. Bony matter makes up 18 per cent.; fat 15.4 per cent.; minerals 5.5 per cent.; and the odd 1 per cent. consists of starch and sugar.

A fully grown man of 11 stones (154 lbs.) is made up of 88 lbs. of water and 66 lbs. of solids. The dissection works out like this:

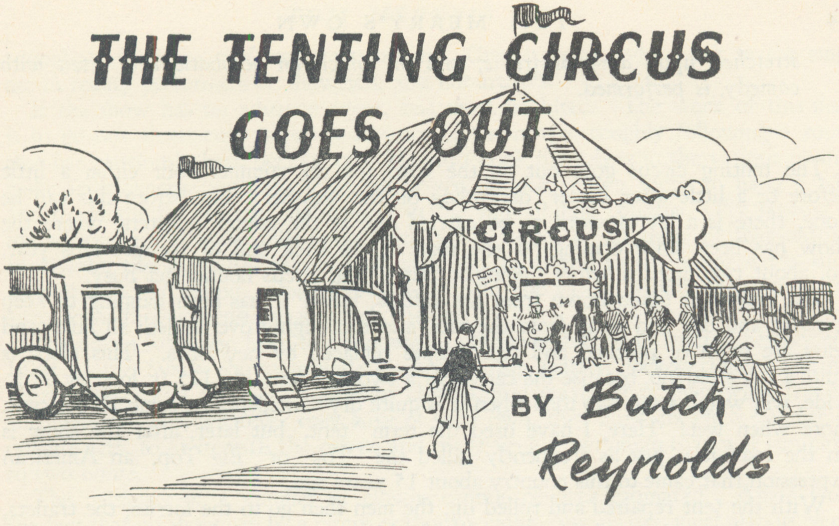
Muscles and tendons, 62 lbs.; bones 25; skin 11; fat 28; brain 3; blood 11; internal organs (heart, intestines, etc.) 14.

Since the nursery rhyme chose to compare a girl with food, it is perhaps only just to 'analyse' a woman in the same way. And this is how it works out.

It has been estimated that a woman's body is equal in composition and amount to one thousand eggs. To equal that amount, three hens would each have to lay one egg every day for practically a year. Some laying! Further 'disintegration' established the following very startling results. A woman is composed of gases, liquids and solids. She has enough oxygen to fill two hundred 36-gallon barrels; enough hydrogen to fill a balloon capable of lifting her more than a quarter of a mile into the air; and of nitrogen there is the equivalent of four and a half pounds. There is also enough carbon to make 9,000 lead pencils; enough salt to fill six salt-cellars; enough phosphorous to make 8,000 boxes of matches—about 40,000 match-heads; and 48 grains of iron, enough to make five tacks. The water constituent would fill a nine-gallon barrel. And yet, to misquote Robert Burns:

A woman's a woman for a' that.

THE TENTING CIRCUS GOES OUT



BY Butch Reynolds

For many, many years now I have been associated with the circus. It's a great life—for the worker. There is no room at all for the slacker, particularly during the height of the season, when shows often mean a 16-hour day. But I enjoy it—and so would you.

It is quite likely that you have seen me at one time or another and at some place or another, for I have travelled a great deal and appeared in many shows, among them:

Tom Arnold's (Harringay); Prince Cox International; Burns Supreme, Chipperfield-Sandow; Ringlands; Rosaire Bros.; Royal George; Parkins International; Skegness Winter Gardens.

There must be few of you who know anything of what goes on behind the scenes. But there must be many who would like to know. Therefore, I hope to reveal in these pages a great deal of the organised effort that is so essential in the making of a successful circus. Here I make use of a number of terms in common use by circus folk like myself. In order to help you understand these terms a glossary is given here rather than at the end of the article. Here are some of the terms:

Homies—men. Chavees—children. Menjarie—food. Char—tea. Flatties—the audience. Cats—lions, tigers, leopards. Living waggon—home of a performer. Building up—putting up the tent. Pulling down—pulling down the tent. Top or Big Top—tent. Tober—circus ground. Trampoline—a sheet of canvas

stretched upon a metal frame, and on which an acrobatic act, often with comedy, is performed.

The tenting circus goes out on the road for the summer tour either a little before or a little after Easter, depending on the weather. But before this can be done, there is a lot of work to be carried out at the winter quarters, where the show has been since coming off the road at the back end of the previous year. So, about two months before 'going-out time,' the circus homies get busy.

The canvas is taken down from the rafters, where it has been hanging to keep it sweet and dry and away from the rats, and thoroughly overhauled; all holes and tears are sewn or patched and worn ropes replaced by new ones. This alone is quite a fair-sized job, because the canvas of a two-pole tent, say 125 ft. long by 85 ft. wide, will weigh some two tons when it is quite dry: incidentally, some 20 per cent. more when wet. Here, I have used the term 'tent,' but later, after the show is on the road it is just as frequently called the 'Top' or 'Big Top,' an American expression that came to this country about 15 years ago.

With the tent repaired and rolled up, the men then go to the lorries, the trailers, the poles, the seating and the props, all of which are painted the show colours, say, red and yellow. The seating, quite apart from anything else, is quite a task, for a tent of that size must hold some 1,200 people. Being made up of wooden brackets, vees and seat boards, much in the same manner as a century ago, the seating has often been considerably knocked about by the thousands of people who sat on it in the previous summer. There are only two kinds of seating, the High and Low Galleries—unless one wishes to count the 50 odd chairs—the former going round the outer edge of the tent and the latter, for the chavees, close to the ring.

Next would come the poles, all of which are the same in any circus top. The two large poles are the king poles; the next 20 odd in size are the quarter poles; and the 60 to 70 on the outer edge of the canvas are the side poles. Not only do these have to be painted, but they must have their top spikes or mushroom tips renewed if necessary. There is also a queen pole, which comes in between the king pole and the quarter poles, but this is seldom used. Other parts of the show which will also need attention are the front, the ring fence, the back entrance, and the band waggon, or the panatrope if electrically amplified record music is going to to be used.

At the same time as all this work is being done, other most necessary things have to be attended to, some during the evening, after it is too dark to see outside.

If the horses have been running in the field they are brought in and thoroughly groomed, to remove their long coats and to make them sleek and shiny. They are then put to their practices daily in an improvised ring, for, like human beings, they are liable to forget some of the tricks they have been taught. And this matter of practice, to get their acts just right, is also true for the 'cat act,' any other

animal act, and the performers themselves. Circus people, who work in the ring, are in reality performers or showmen, and not artistes.

If the show has no advance agent, one must be hired. The work of this man is to go out about two weeks in advance of the circus, roughly following a route that has previously been decided on. He must book the tobers in the various towns; make arrangements with the local bill poster; induce certain shops to hang a bill; and to do the fly posting, particularly in the surrounding country. Fly posting is the sticking up of small bills upon poles, walls, fences or anything of that nature. Invariably, the agent has an assistant with him, to attend to the minor work, such as shop-window billing. Both live and sleep in the van in which they travel, to keep down their expenses as much as possible.

The circus folks also have to get down to obtaining acts or individual performers. Most of the family shows provide their own ring master, jockey rider, ballerina, liberty horses and ponies, a couple of clowns, and maybe their own wire, trapeze and lion acts; but, whatever they have of their own, they must engage a number of outside acts, to fit in with the others and make up a programme that will run close to two hours.

The necessity of a number of clowns cannot be over estimated. Apart from the fact that no show can be a circus without a clown, one or two must always be on hand, not only to go into the ring when props are being carried in or out, but to run in and do a little something when a hitch occurs. No matter how well things are arranged, there are times when an act is late, an animal proves fractious, or something else goes wrong; and it is a law of the circus that 'The ring must never be empty.' While on the matter of clowns—the real circus clown is white-faced; the man in black and white is an auguste; and the others, sort of in between, just joeys.

When the matter of the acts have been settled, the bills and the programmes can be made out. Some shows have a definite bill of their own, but smaller ones use the stock picture bills of their printer, with their own letterpress in their own colours upon it. The most important act is the 'Top of the Bill,' and the second in value the 'Bottom of the Bill,' with the other acts coming in, in varying sized types, according to their importance. Incidentally, a quantity of these bills are given to the advance agent before he sets out, while the programmes, of course, are kept to be sold during the performances.

Now we have the whole show, with the exception of the two grooms and say six tentmen, with two or three of the latter in uniform, to act as ring grooms and handle the props during the shows. These men are not only provided with a waggon or tent to sleep in, but have a canteen which will give them their menjarie, and also a cup of char in the early morning or when the weather is cold or wet.

We will now say that the show is ready. The advance agent has been out for some time and has sent in a short list of the tobers he has booked, for one day, two days or more, according to the size of the place concerned. Everything—canvas, poles, seating, props—is snugly packed away on the various waggons that will carry

the same things for the whole tour. The heavier things, of course, have been put on to vehicles such as a low trailer, to prevent lifting as much as possible. Then, early in the morning of the opening day, the circus sets out for the place where it will commence its season.

This is invariably the town of the circus' winter quarters or a place near by. Not only will the local people turn up in goodly numbers for what they consider 'their own circus,' but it gives the homies a chance to run back to winter quarters for anything that might have been forgotten. Breakfast is always taken after the 'building up' has been partially completed when the show is on the move, but on this occasion is taken first. Then the work commences.

First, the flags are attached to the top of the king poles, which are pulled up and made fast by their main guys. Next, the six sections of canvas are unrolled and laid out flat. After being laced together they are attached to the 'bale rings' and hoisted up the king poles. The side poles and the quarter poles are put in, and the wallings are put up to prevent the wind getting beneath the canvas. A general pull of the ropes all round makes the top neat and taut. The matter of the seating, the ring fence, the chairs, and the back entrance, follow as a matter of course. The sawdust which is put down, though it adds to the decorative effect, is there to prevent the horses from slipping.

When the 'building up' is complete, the paybox, the circus front and the owner's living waggon will be at the front of the show, with the other living waggons possibly distributed round the sides, and the lorries, the horse tent, the lighting set, and the beast waggons round at the back. Many circuses now surround the whole show with a low fence to prevent people from coming round the back or being where they should not be. A fence also allows the circus folk to have a rest on Sundays, their only partially free day during the week; for circus performers have no half day and no bank holidays. In fact, during holiday periods such as Easter they frequently give three shows in one day.

Normally, the circus gives two shows a day, at 4.30 in the afternoon and at 7.30 in the evening. When the chavees are on holiday the afternoon performance begins at 2.30. The first show of the season, however, usually runs some time over the regular period, because it is quite impossible, even with the best regulated programmes, to have it completed first time 'on the dot.' Thus, after a first show has been given, certain alterations are made, such as the moving of an act from one part of the programme to another, or the speeding-up or the cutting of one or two others until the running time is right. Then, with all set, the show will run the same until it comes off the road at the back end of the year. The only changes which may take place might do so through the loss of an act because of accident or sickness or incompetence.

Now, as has been mentioned, the show stays in towns anything from a day to a week or two. But when it moves to hold a one-day stand, the day's programme is something like this:

Rise at five and have a cup of char. Move on to the next tober and build up the Top only. Breakfast. Finish the inside of the Top (by about 11 o'clock). First performance, say, 2.30. Break. Second show, 7.30. Pull down at 9.30. Finish at 11. Cup of char and a bite. And so to bed—after a day of 16 hours.

At five the next morning it may be on the road again.

One must not think, however, that once the circus is firmly on the road and the programme has settled down to its required length, that all the troubles of the season are over. Far, far from it. Very often they are only just beginning. Inevitably, some kind of hitch occurs. There may be an accident to a performer; the death of some valuable ring horse or wild animal; the escape of one of the cats; and the blowing-down of the tent in a gale. These things do occur—and will continue to do so.

It has always appeared strange to us circus folk that people regard the cats as anything but wild. I have heard it said that none of the animals would harm a soul. Don't believe it. There are some chavees who have found, to their cost, that an animal, even one born in captivity, still recognises jungle law—strike first.

At one tober a boy was telling his friend how, at the same ground a year before, a bear had bitten off a finger. His friend did not heed the warning too closely, and slipped under the barrier to the lion's cage. He was very, very lucky. A sweep of a mighty paw just missed the boy but his coat was ripped from his back. On another occasion, very early one morning, a boy was clawed by a lion. Just after the show had drawn on to the tober at Strathaven, the doors to the lions' cages were opened to give the animals fresh air. A boy suddenly appeared as if from nowhere and, despite our warning cries, made for one of the cages and tried to stroke the lion. The animal caught him by the head, and would not let go until the lion tamer himself ran up. The boy had some nasty cuts in his head, and was luck indeed to get off so lightly.

It sometimes happens that an animal will get free—and then the 'fun' begins. The worst offenders are, not unnaturally I suppose, monkeys. These fellows create much confusion, for an escaped monkey is as elusive as anything can be. Some can be very destructive.

One chimp, whom we called Puncture, for the simple reason that he had a habit of hissing which sounded for all the world like air escaping from a cycle inner-tube, was one of the amusing type. We did not suspect his 'qualities' as a comedian until he managed to slip out of his cage one day. The result was terrific!

The performer on the trampoline had been rehearsing a new act and had left it for a moment. And that was just when Puncture got free. He made a dash for the trampoline—and began the funniest act I have ever seen.

Leaping on to the canvas Puncture was, to his surprise, bounced a foot or so into the air. This happened once or twice before we could get near, but by that time the chimp had got the hang of the thing. Using his natural springing powers,

Puncture shot high into the air, fell to the canvas, and went shooting upwards again, somersaulting as he did so. Falling down, shooting up, somersaulting, rolling, twisting—Puncture had every conceivable trick in the bag. It came naturally to him, and he was obviously happy. For many minutes we were convulsed with laughter. But we had to recapture the animal—and quickly. Try as we did all our efforts were in vain. This was serious, because we had to get him back otherwise we dare not carry on the evening performance. Just when we were getting desperate Puncture himself settled the problem. The rascal suddenly dashed across to his cage, leapt in, and settled himself down in the far corner with a look as innocent as a new-born babe's!

One of the worst moments I ever experienced was when a lioness named Ruby escaped during a performance. She ran out and jumped on top of the beast waggon behind her cage, where she crouched, growling and switching her tail in anger as she looked at the flatties. But Ruby's anger was mingled with fear at the strange surroundings, and this kept her to the waggon until the homies had cleared the tent. Then she was driven back to her cage.

Not all the excitement, however, concerns the animals. Some incidents concern the performers themselves, often with a sad result.

You've all probably enjoyed the sight of the ring horses and the bare-back riders or acrobats. One girl whom I knew was well on the way to becoming a star. She rode a horse as if born to the saddle, and her acrobatic feats were accomplished with wonderful precision. Rehearsing one day, her horse shied at a sudden noise, a very unusual thing, because the horses are trained to ignore noise. But this noise upset the horse, and the girl was shot from its back with such force that she badly damaged a leg, and never rode again.

Even clowns have their moments of pathos. One act which never fails to raise a laugh is that with the buckets of water. You've no doubt seen it. Old George was one of the most experienced at this sort of thing, and one of the happiest of men. He was never happier than when in the ring. Doing 'his stuff' one afternoon George fell awkwardly, broke an arm and severely twisted internal organs. Old George's career was at an end, although he still follows the circus.

The most disastrous mishap—from a financial point of view—that I can remember concerns not man nor animal, but the Big Top itself.

The Big Top was blown down during a gale in the Channel Islands a few years ago. I was with Parkins International, the first show of its kind that Guernsey and Jersey had seen since the German occupation during the war. We were then in Jersey, and had built up on a sandy shore just outside St. Helier, the main town. We had put up a large horse tent, for a new horse act, and had small tents for ourselves because the cost of bringing our living waggons would have been too high.

One August evening, just after the evening performance had started, the wind began to blow strongly from the sea. At first we thought that it was but a squall that would quickly fade out, so the large audience, many of whom had come from

distant parts of the island, were not asked to leave. But the wind increased to gale force, the bunting flags ripped and snapped, and the canvas pressed in on one side and billowed out at the other. It was getting dangerous—the flatties were advised to quietly leave the tent. Then things began to happen.

The new horse tent suddenly pulled up its stakes and collapsed on top of the horses. Luckily, they did not make a great deal of fuss and a few homies took them to the shelter of some stables. All hands turned to the Big Top.

The only course to take was to lay everything inside flat on the ground, lower the canvas, and let the wind blow. But this was by no means as easy as it sounds. Besides the seating and a heavy piano on the bandstand which had to be taken down, there was also live electric cable running in from the mains. There were also the quarter poles and other poles which had to be hung on to while the dismantling was being done. What with the strong wind pressing on the tent, the whole top billowing out and flapping like thunder, that was going to take a bit of doing, if it was to be achieved without tearing the canvas to shreds and smashing the poles. But no time was wasted on idle thoughts, so some of the circus folk and a few flatties, who offered to help, hung on to the quarter poles while others worked hard to get everything flat on the ground. The idea of hanging on to these poles in this manner was to prevent them from going right through the canvas. As they were fastened to the canvas, the poles rose with it as the wind blew. It was a hard job, as the wind was tremendous and the poles kicked like mules. What made it worse for me was that a flattie who was giving me a hand sometimes stood on my foot. He was probably under the impression that the wind would take me too!

After much effort, bruising of knuckles and barking of shins, the tent was down. Then we waited for the gale to abate, which it did a few hours later, but not before it had subjected us to a miniature sandstorm. Like a desert tribe we muffled ourselves in tents or anything else that we could find. Eventually we were able to move about, and took stock of the damage. It was frightful.

The electric cable had fused, some poles were broken and the canvas was rent in many places. The small zoo tent had pulled its stakes and its pole was still standing, but the canvas was in shreds. Our sheet-metal front had uprooted, taking a number of railings with it, and had been hurled right over the tent—to crash down on the trampoline and smash it to pieces. A great number of props were thrown a fair distance, either to be totally destroyed or badly damaged. And clothing literally floated in the breeze. A flattie found some of my togs more than half a mile away. It was a very disastrous affair, but considered to be 'all in the day's work.'

Next time you go to a circus spare a thought for those behind the scenes, many of whom risk so much. And remember that what you see is but part of the great effort which goes into entertaining you under the Big Top.

Chin! Chin!

Crab Wise!

by EDWARD NORTHCOTT

HAVE you ever had a nip from a crab? If so, you know only too well what nasty things the claws of even the smallest crab can be.

There are many species around our coasts, but the familiar little green shore crab is easily the most popular—until it starts to nip! The little fellow we see scuttling about on the shore is, indeed, far more likely to resent being picked up than any other species, and he will readily show fight if his dignity is ruffled.

Some crabs make use of camouflage to hide from would-be attackers. The spiny, spider crab, for instance, disguises itself by using seaweed, which is fastened to small hooks on its shell. Others will use a sponge, holding this camouflage 'net' across the shell. If the sponge is pulled away the creature will quickly seek another.

The edible crab also makes use of seaweed. This crab has a love of shallow waters along rocky coasts and is, as perhaps many of you know, rather hard to catch. If you do manage to trap one under a rock the creature seems to have little hope in its future, for it usually gives itself up quite readily. And it will even tuck its limbs and claws tightly to its body as if anxious not to offend! Although the edible crab appears to move rather stiffly it can be very agile, being able to go in any direction without much effort.

It is an advantage that crabs have of being able to move in any direction. Perhaps we have always looked upon them as being able to go sideways only but, in fact, they can go forwards and backwards too. The reason a crab normally moves sideways is because its claws are on either side of its body, thus suitably placed for hauling.

There are occasions when a crab has every right to feel very sorry for itself. That is when it loses its shell, the coverings of its limbs and the coats of its stomach. The shell is a strange thing indeed, for it does not grow as the crab gets bigger. When the creature gets too big for its shell the crab splits it—and hurries for shelter! Without its protective armour the crab is a delicate and defenceless thing, and a tasty morsel for any creature with a liking for crab. In a few weeks, however, the exposed skin will have hardened into another shell.

One other strange thing. In a fight or in escaping from a trap a crab will readily sacrifice a limb—for another will soon grow in its place!

A BARGAIN IN BIKES!

A STORY OF ROOKWOOD

by OWEN CONQUEST

CHAPTER 1
LOVELL KNOWS!

"THIS way!" said Lovell.

Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome looked dubious.

Arthur Edward Lovell spoke positively. But then, Arthur Edward always spoke positively. Being the fellow who knew best, Arthur Edward saw no reason why he shouldn't be positive.

Four Rookwood juniors stood holding their bikes at a spot where two leafy lanes forked. They did not know the way—unless, perhaps, Lovell did.

Jimmy Silver and Co. had had rather a long spin on their jiggers that afternoon. They were now homeward bound: but still at least six or seven miles from Rookwood School.

They had no time to waste: they did not want to be late for call-over at Rookwood. But they had to decide which of those lanes to take. One of them certainly led in the direction of Latcham and Rookwood. The other might have led anywhere.

Lovell put a leg over his machine.

"This way," he repeated. "What are you waiting for?"

Lovell had chosen the lane that bore to the right. Jimmy Silver was disposed to favour the one that bore to the left. Raby and Newcombe had open minds on the subject; except that they regarded it as most probable that Lovell was mistaken. Lovell generally was.

"We can't be sure——" said Jimmy Silver.

"I'm sure!" Lovell pointed out.

"Well, how do you know if you're so jolly sure?" asked Raby.

"Just common-sense, that's all!" answered Lovell. "The way we've been riding, we have to bear a bit to the right to get back to the Latcham road for Rookwood. Well, that lane bears to the right."

"Sure we don't have to bear to the left?" asked Newcome.

"Quite!"

"Well, I was think——" began Jimmy Silver.

"Don't do it," advised Lovell. "Not in your line at all, old man! Just get on your jigger and come on. We're losing time. Six or seven miles to go, and lines if we're late for roll."

"We shan't be in time for roll, if we take the wrong road," said Jimmy Silver, patiently. "Better make sure——"

"Somebody may come along and put us wise," remarked Raby. "See anybody, you chaps?"

Arthur Edward Lovell gave an impatient grunt. The other three scanned the wooded landscape, the lane they had come by, and the two lanes that forked ahead. They had a very pleasant view of delightful Hampshire scenery: brown woods, fields and meadows glowing in the westering sun: deep leafy lanes and high hawthorn hedges. But they had no view of any inhabitant of Hampshire. Nobody was coming along.

"Sister Anne, Sister Anne, do you see anybody coming?" came sarcastically from Arthur Edward Lovell.

Three fellows were nonplussed. The right road would take them back to Rookwood School in ample time to answer *adsum* when Mr. Dalton called the names in hall. The wrong road, obviously, wouldn't! Undoubtedly they were losing time, as Lovell had pointed out, by standing beside their machines at the corner. But taking the wrong road was not likely to save time—quite the reverse, in fact.

Lovell waited a moment or two. But Lovell was not a fellow to wait patiently. Lovell believed in getting things done. Whether he got them done rightly or wrongly was perhaps a minor consideration.

"Now look here, you chaps," said Lovell, "we can't hang about here for ever, waiting for somebody to turn up. This is the road—I'm absolutely certain of that. Well, come on, and don't waste any more time."

"Not till we know the way to go," answered Jimmy.

"I've told you this is the way!"

"Perhaps!"

"No perhaps about it!" said Lovell. "Any chap with a spot of common-sense can find his way anywhere. Leave it to me."

Still no legs were put over machines. Leaving it to Lovell did not seem, to Jimmy and Raby and Newcome, a solution of the problem.

Again they scanned the surrounding landscape for some sign of an inhabitant. Again they scanned it in vain. Well populated county as Hampshire was, the population seemed at the moment to be wholly collected in other quarters.

Arthur Edward Lovell breathed hard and he breathed deep. He was impatient to begin with: now he showed signs of losing his temper. Really, it was irritating to a fellow, who was absolutely certain that he knew, to hang about like this.

"Are you coming or not?" hooted Lovell.

"Not till we know——"

"Well, look here," said Lovell. "I've been late for roll twice this week, and Dicky Dalton told me that next time I was late I should be bunged into Extra. I'm not going to be late to-day, while you fellows moon about like a lot of lost sheep. We've got lots of time to get in for roll if we put it on a bit. You chaps may get off with fifty lines if you're late—but it means Extra on Saturday afternoon for me. I'm going on."

"But if that isn't the right road——" said Raby.

"I've said it's the right road!"

"You don't know——" said Newcome.

"I do know!"

"Better wait a bit," said Jimmy Silver. "You see——"

"Rot!" said Lovell, "I'm going on! If you fellows want to get back to Rookwood, follow on. I'm jolly well not going to be bunged into Extra on Saturday because you want to moon about. I'm going!"

"Look here, old chap——"

Snort, from Lovell. He refused to 'look there.' He plumped into his saddle and pushed at the pedals. He whizzed away down the lane that bore to the right. At the same moment, Jimmy Silver caught sight at last of an inhabitant of Hampshire—a ploughman plodding his homeward way across an adjacent meadow.

"Here's somebody coming!" exclaimed Jimmy. And he shouted, "Lovell! Hold on, Lovell! Hold on, will you?"

Lovell did not even hear. He was already out of hearing: and the next moment he was out of sight, whizzing round a curve of the winding lane.

Right or wrong road, Lovell was gone: putting on speed to make up for lost time.

"Oh, the ass!" breathed Jimmy.

"Well, old Lovell always was an ass!" remarked Newcome. "No good expecting a leopard to change his spots."

"May be the right road after all," said Raby, hopefully.

"Not likely, as Lovell thinks it is," said Newcome, shaking his head.

"We'll soon see," said Jimmy. "That chap will be along here in a few minutes."

The ploughman, plodding across the meadow, was heading for the junction of lanes where the three juniors stood with their bikes. They waited for him to come up. He glanced at the three stranded schoolboys, and Jimmy called to him.

"Can you tell us which of these lanes leads to Latcham?" Latcham was the country town near Rookwood School.

"Yes, zur! That un to the left," answered the ploughman. "Six moile to Latcham from here."

"Thanks."

The ploughman, plodding across the meadow, was heading for the junction of another. They knew the way to Rookwood now—it lay to the left. Lovell had taken the lane to the right! He was far beyond reach of recall: and far, too far ahead to be overtaken in a race! Where he would arrive, if he arrived anywhere, was an interesting but unanswerable question. His friends could only hope that, somehow or other, sooner or later, he would succeed in wandering in at Rookwood: though undoubtedly he would be late—very late—for roll!

"Well, come on!" sighed Jimmy Silver. "We know the way now at any rate! Looks like Extra for Lovell on Saturday! Let's get going."

They got going. That winding lane led them to the Latcham road, and they pedalled through Latcham, and whizzed on to Rookwood, and arrived there ten minutes before old Mack closed the gates. And as they went into hall for calling-over, they wondered where Arthur Edward Lovell was, and whether he had yet discovered that he was on the wrong road.

Chapter 2

IN THE DARK

Crash!

Yell!

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Lovell.

He gasped out that ejaculation as he spun off his machine, and landed on the hard, unsympathetic earth.

It was almost as black as a hat in Coombe Lane: and Lovell was riding without a light! In such circumstances a fellow might have expected an accident. Now it had happened.

It was not, from Lovell's point of view, Lovell's fault. It was just rotten luck all round. Fellows going out for an afternoon spin, intending to get back a couple

of hours before dark, naturally did not take the trouble to plug their lamps on their jiggers—at least, Lovell didn't. Owing to that wrong road, which Lovell had so obstinately believed to be the right one, he had not got in before dark—far from it. Falling night had found Lovell miles from Rookwood.

Lovell had followed that wrong road without a doubt for miles and miles. It was inquiry in a village at least twelve miles from Rockwood that had, at long last, apprised him that he was heading for parts unknown. After which, Lovell negotiated cross-country lanes in deepening dusk: and, more by luck than anything else, found himself on the Latcham road after nightfall. He had still several miles to go: and the laws of his native land required him to put on his light. But how was a fellow minus a lamp to put on a light? It simply couldn't be done.

Minus a light, it was up to Lovell to pay due respect to the law by wheeling his machine. But he was already late, not only for roll, but for prep. Walking it meant that he would be late for dormitory also: which meant a terrific row. Lovell unwisely resolved to give the law a miss and chance it.

So he whizzed along the Latcham road in the dark without a light and by great good fortune passed Coombe, the village near Rookwood, without damaging himself or anybody else. In Coombe Lane he had only a quarter of a mile further to go and he put on speed: anxious to get in, anxious to dodge the last risk of a policeman stopping him and inquiring where his light was. But it was a case of more haste and less speed. Only a quarter of a mile from the school—so near yet so far!—came the crash.

Somebody was tramping in the lane—in the dark. Lovell did not see him, not being a cat able to see in the dark. He, whoever he was, did not see Lovell. Had Lovell's lamp been on, the man undoubtedly would have seen it and avoided the collision. As it was he saw nothing till Lovell landed on him fair and square.

The yell that came from the unseen man as he crumpled up woke echoes far and wide. Lovell, unseated by the shock, landed in the lane, breathless and dizzy.

"Oh! Ah! Ooooh! Strike me pink! Woooooh!" came a howling voice from somebody sprawling in the darkness. "Ow! My leg! Ow! My 'ead! Oo's that? Bust me! Ooooh!"

It sounded like a tramp.

Lovell sat up dizzily. He peered about him. Over-arching branches made the spot impenetrably dark. He could see nothing of the man he had knocked over, though he could hear him quite plainly.

"Oh, crumbs! Oh, dear! Oh!" gasped Lovell, "I—I say, I'm sorry." Even Lovell, irritated as he was by the occurrence which delayed him when he was in a hurry, realised that the other party had a grievance. "I say, I'm awfully sorry——"

"Whur's yer light?" came an angry howl.

"I—I—I——" stammered Lovell, still gasping, "I say, I hope you're not hurt!"

"'Urt? Think you can knock a man spinning without 'urting 'im? I'm 'urt all over, blow yer."

Lovell staggered to his feet. He was sorry—really sorry—if the man was hurt. But he had to get to Rookwood.

He groped for a sprawling bike.

His groping hands, in the dark, contacted, not a bike, but a sprawling man. That man seemed to be in a bad temper, which in the circumstances was not wholly surprising. A fist lashed out of the dark, caught Lovell under the chin, and sent him sprawling again.

"Oh!" spluttered Lovell, as he rolled.

Once more he sat up, gasping for breath, his hand to his chin. He had had quite a hard knock and he was no longer feeling sorry that the man was hurt. Indeed, he was feeling inclined to hurt him some more.

He heard the man scrambling up and a sound from the bicycle. The man in the dark apparently was picking up the fallen machine. Why he was taking the trouble to do so Lovell did not know. But it dawned on him as he heard sounds receding.

He bounded up.

"Here! That's my bike! Give me that bike!" shouted Lovell. He rushed forward. "Gimme that bike! That's my bike! Look here——"

His hands swept empty air. Down the lane was a sound of a bike in motion. Lovell rushed after that sound.

It died away! He rushed on, furiously, but came to a halt at last. He stood staring into the darkness that had swallowed up the bike and the tramp.

Evidently the man was not hurt after all, as he was able to ride a bike. No doubt he had had a very unpleasant shock. That certainly did not justify him in his present measures. And he was riding without a light, just as Lovell had been doing! And he was riding fast! He vanished into the night, leaving Lovell gasping and staring.

"Oh!" breathed Lovell.

He could hardly believe it for some minutes. That tramp—that rascal—that bike-thief—had pinched his bike! He had pinched it and was getting away on it! It was almost incredible—and overwhelming! But that was what was happening.

Arthur Edward Lovell stood almost dazed.

His bike gone: that gleaming, highly polished jigger that was the pride of his heart. It was a good bike—a 'Stargleam'—and Lovell took great care of it: all its bright parts shone like silver: it was in apple-pie condition, and—it was gone! Fellows who ride without a light after dark often meet with unpleasant consequences, but the consequences to the hapless Lovell were really overwhelming. This was worse than meeting an inquiring constable, worse than the spill he had had. That indescribable villain had taken advantage of the accident to pinch his bike. His beloved 'Stargleam' had gone!

"Oh," repeated Lovell.

It was fully five minutes before Lovell could make up his mind that there was nothing to be done. The man was gone. Very likely he was an habitual bike-thief;

certainly he had been very quick to seize this chance. In any case, he was gone: and Lovell was left on foot, to plod his way to the school, bike-less.

It was a dismal, dispirited and exasperated Lovell that turned at last in the direction of Rookwood and tramped away. The sooner he reported the matter to Mr. Dalton the better. Dicky Dalton would telephone to the police-station at Latcham—the bike might be recovered—but in the meantime Lovell had to walk it, with feelings that he could not have expressed in words.

He arrived at last and rang, and old Mack let him in.

"Mr. Dalton's study," said old Mack, briefly.

And Lovell went in to explain to his form-master why he had cut calling-over, cut prep, and arrived just in time for dorm.: and to add that his bike had been stolen.

Chapter 3

BORROWING A BIKE

Jimmy Silver shook his head.

"Better not," he advised.

Grunt, from Lovell.

To say 'Better not' to Arthur Edward Lovell, was practically to spur him on. Opposition had that effect on Arthur Edward.

It was the following day.

Lovell of the Classical Fourth was not in a good temper that day. That was natural enough. A fellow who was booked for 'Extra' on Saturday afternoon, and who had in addition, had his bike pinched, could not be expected to look or feel his bonniest. Lovell was sore and disgruntled: all the more so because he guessed that his chums regarded his disasters as largely his own fault.

They were sympathetic about 'Extra' on Saturday. They were deeply concerned about the loss of his bike: and sincerely hoped that the police would be able to trace it. But, at the same time, they seemed to think that Lovell had as good as asked for it.

Lovell had persisted in taking the wrong road, instead of waiting as his friends had done to ascertain the right one. He had ridden after dark without a light, which was not only reckless, but a defiance of the law. He had knocked a man over, and that man had pinched his bike. Jimmy and Raby and Newcome had got home from that spin without taking wrong roads, breaking the law, knocking people over, and losing their jiggers, and really, they could not help thinking that Lovell might have done the same. Tactfully, they did not say so: but Lovell could guess that they thought him to blame somehow, truly sympathetic as they were.

So, at the present moment, Lovell was less inclined than ever to listen to the voice of reason. He was more than ever the fellow who knew best.

After class with Dalton, the 'Fistical Four' had gone down to the bike-shed. The Rookwood First Eleven were playing cricket at Rookham that day: and a good many fellows were going over, after class, to see Bulkeley and his merry men beating Rookham Ramblers, or being beaten by them, as the case might be. Three members of the Co. had bikes available; one hadn't! Lovell might have borrowed a jigger in the Classical Fourth: but, in the circumstances, jiggers were scarce. In fact, every man who owned a bike wanted it: and in all the Classical Fourth there was no jigger for Lovell to borrow. But, as it happened, three bikes were available if not borrowable. Three jiggers, belonging to Tommy Cook, Tommy Dodd, and Tommy Doyle, of the Modern Fourth, were still on the stands. And Lovell had his eye on the jigger that belonged to Tommy Cook. It was not a 'Stargleam,' like his own precious lost machine: but it was a good jigger and Lovell was not long in making up his mind.

"I'm going," he said. "That jigger will suit me! I shall have to shove the saddle up a bit—you fellows needn't wait."

"Better not——"

Grunt!

"Those Modern chaps will be going over to Rookham, like everybody else," said Raby. "There are some Modern men in the first eleven, you know."

"Cook won't lend you his jigger," said Newcombe.

"I'm not going to ask him," said Lovell, coolly. "Rather a lark on those Modern ticks to walk off with a Modern jigger. Ain't they always japing us?"

"Bagging a man's bike isn't a jape," Jimmy Silver pointed out. "Look here, Lovell, you can get over by train——"

"Twice as long," answered Lovell. "I'm bagging Cook's jigger. If the Modern cads don't like it, well, they can lump it."

"Look here, old chap——"

"Rot!"

"But——"

"Rats!"

Lovell, as usual was not to be argued with. It was true that Classicals and Moderns at Rookwood were deadly rivals and foes: and that alarums and excursions between the rivals of Rookwood were rather the rule than the exception. Still, there was a limit: and in the opinion of three members of the Classical Co. bagging a man's bike was not exactly a 'jape'. Lovell took the opposite view: no doubt owing to the fact that he was disgruntled, and the still more important fact that he wanted a bike to get over to Rookham.

Heedless of the opinion of lesser mortals, he opened the tool-bag for a spanner, to put the saddle up. Lovell was the tallest fellow in the Fourth Form, with an ample length of leg.

"You chaps needn't wait," he said. "I'll overtake you fast enough—I can bike your heads off if you come to that."

"Look here, Lovell——"

"Oh, cut off and don't jaw," said Lovell, irritably.

Evidently, there was nothing doing. Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome wheeled their machines out, mounted at the gate, and pedalled away. Lovell proceeded to deal with the saddle of Tommy Cook's bike.

Having adjusted it to his satisfaction, he replaced the spanner in the tool-bag and wheeled the machine out of the bike-shed—almost running it into three Modern juniors who were coming in.

Lovell caught his breath. As a Classical man he despised all Modern ticks: but even Lovell was aware that he could not handle three Modern ticks in a bunch, and for a moment he was dismayed. Luckily, it did not occur to Tommy Dodd and Co. that it was a Modern bike that the Classical junior was wheeling out.

"Hallo, going over to Rookham, Lovell?" asked Tommy Dodd, casually.

"Yes—my pals have started already," answered Lovell, carelessly.

"I heard that you'd lost your bike——"

"Oh, I've borrowed one," said Lovell, in the same careless tone, and he ran the machine past the three Moderns, put a leg over it, and whisked out at the gate. He grinned as he shot away.

The three Tommies went into the bike-shed for their machines. Then they stared. Where three jiggers should have been there were only two.

"Here, where's my bike?" exclaimed Tommy Cook, in surprise and wrath. "If some cheeky ass has borrowed my jigger——"

"Lovell!" exclaimed Tommy Dodd.

"Oh, howly mother av Moses!" exclaimed Tommy Doyle. "He said he'd borrowed a bike——"

"My bike!" yelled Tommy Cook. "That Classical tick—my bike! Why, I—I—I'll——" Tommy Cook spluttered with wrath.

"And we could have stopped him——" gasped Tommy Doyle.

"We'll jolly well stop him now!" exclaimed Tommy Dodd. "Get out your jigger—quick! You follow on, Cooky, old man—we'll jolly well get that bike back! Come on, Doyle!"

Almost in the twinkling of an eye Tommy Dodd and Tommy Doyle ran their machines out and mounted. Arthur Edward Lovell was still in sight, going strong down Coombe Lane, heading for the road to Rookham.

"Put it on!" breathed Tommy Dodd.

The two Moderns ground at their pedals. Far in the rear, Tommy Cook followed on foot, in the hope of mounting a recaptured bike later. The cyclists were soon out of sight.

Arthur Edward Lovell glanced back over his shoulder. Perhaps he had rather expected pursuit. Whether he expected it or not, there it was.

Little cared Arthur Edward! He was a good man on a bike, almost half as good as he believed he was. He was not in the least alarmed. Certainly, if the

two Moderns ran him down, he had no chance against the two of them. But they were not going to run him down. So far from being alarmed, Arthur Edward Lovell waved a derisive hand at his pursuers and then drove at his pedals.

He whizzed on. After him whizzed Tommy Dodd and Tommy Doyle, going all out. Lovell had no doubt that he could beat any Modern tick in a bike race. Dodd and Doyle, on the other hand, had no doubt that they could beat any Classical tick. They were going to try their hardest, anyway. Three bikes fairly flew along Coombe Lane, and swept out into the Rookham road, Lovell just keeping his distance ahead. A mile—two miles—along the Rookham road, and Lovell was still the same distance. And it was quite possible that Lovell might have kept just that distance ahead, had he not, glancing back over his shoulder at his pursuers, failed to observe a deep rut in the road just in front of him. His front wheel plunged into the rut, and all that Arthur Edward Lovell knew next was that he was sitting on the grass verge beside the road, with Tommy Cook's bike sprawling across his legs: and Tommy Dodd and Tommy Doyle, coming up like the wind, jumping down and jumping at him.

Chapter 4

STRANDED!

Arthur Edward Lovell sat in the grass by the Rookham road and gurgled for breath.

He was feeling tired. He was, in fact, feeling completely 'done in.' He had been through a strenuous time.

Dodd and Doyle had recaptured the borrowed bike. But that was not all. They had lingered a few minutes to make it quite clear to Lovell what they thought of a Classical tick who bagged a Modern man's jigger.

Lovell put up a scrap but that only made his last state worse than his first. The two Moderns rolled him over, bumped and rumpled and crumpled him, and left him for dead as it were. Then they rode away, Tommy Dodd leading Cook's recaptured bike by the handle-bars.

Lovell for quite a long time could only splutter, in a dizzy and breathless state, feeling as if he had been through a mangle. He needed a rest after that strenuous tussle with the Moderns, and he had plenty of time for one, for he was not thinking of walking it to Rookham. Rookham, and the first eleven match there, had to be washed out. And he was in no hurry to walk back to the school which lay several miles behind him.

So he sat and gasped for breath: and a little later, had the pleasure, or otherwise, of seeing three cheery cyclists coming up the road—Dodd, Doyle and Cook of the Modern Fourth.

Tommy Cook, following on afoot, had met his comrades coming back with his bike: and now the three were riding for Rookham: passing Lovell sitting by the roadside.

They grinned at him as they passed and waved derisive hands. Lovell could only glare at them. He did not feel sufficiently energetic even to heave a turf at them as they whizzed by.

They vanished up the road. Lovell sat where he was, gradually feeling a little better. Several more Rockwood cyclists passed him: Rawson and Erroll and Oswald, of the Classical Fourth, and then Tracy and Howard of the Shell. They stared at Lovell in passing, perhaps wondering why he was sitting there. Arthur Edward could only give them sour looks. Hansom of the Fifth, with a bunch of Fifth-form men, swept by: and then three or four more juniors, Lovell's expression growing sourer and sourer as he watched them pass.

But as yet another Rookwood cyclist came in sight a new idea occurred to him. He got on his feet and waved his hand to Valentine Mornington of the Classical Fourth.

Morny glanced at him and slowed down.

"I say, hold on, Morny," called out Lovell.

Morny reluctantly held on, putting one foot to the ground.

"What's up?" he asked. "Cut it short! I'm late—spot of trouble with a tyre. I've got to put it on, if I'm going to see anything of the cricket at Rookham."

"You're going to Rookham?"

"Yes, yes."

"Well, look here, what about giving me a lift behind you on your bike?" asked Lovell. "I could get a foot on the foot-rest, and hold to your shoulders, and——"

Mornington, staring at him, burst into a laugh.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lovell did not laugh. He frowned: or rather, scowled.

"What the thump are you cackling at?" he demanded, gruffly.

"Your little joke, old scout."

"I'm not joking——"

"You are!" said Morny, laughing.

"Look here, will you give me a lift on your bike or not?" roared Lovell.

Morny continued to chuckle. Lovell was heavy. Pulling his weight up hill and down dale, when he was in a hurry, did not seem to appeal to Morny, somehow.

"Not!" he answered, cheerily.

And he shot onward.

Arthur Edward Lovell breathed hard. Really, it was asking rather a lot: but it had been the last and only chance of getting to Rookham. Had Jimmy Silver or Raby or Newcombe been available, no doubt they would have played up. But the Co. were at Rookham by that time, happily unaware of Lowell's misadventures with a borrowed bike, and never dreaming how he was stranded.

He leaned on a wayside tree, with his hands in his pockets, surveying the landscape with a jaundiced eye.

There was nothing for it but to walk back to the school. Slowly, sadly, Arthur Edward Lovell started at last on the home-trail. At a little distance down the road was a stile, giving access to a footpath across the fields, which saved a considerable part of the walk. Lovell headed for the stile to take the footpath.

A man was seated on the top bar, smoking a cigarette, in the shade of the trees. A bicycle leaned against the stile. Lovell glanced at it as he came up. It was as handsome a jigger as his own lost 'Stargleam,' though very different in appearance. Lovell's lost bike shone like silver: but this machine was black from end to end: painted as black as the ace of spades.

Then he glanced at the man on the stile, rather wondering to see so handsome a jigger in possession of so shabby an owner. The man was undoubtedly very shabby. He had a rather battered bowler hat cocked on one side of a rather greasy head and a cigarette in his mouth. Judging by his hands and face, soap was beyond his means: but evidently he could afford cigarettes, for six or seven stumps lay in the grass, with as many burnt matches. He had sharp little beady eyes, which fixed rather furtively on the Rookwood junior. He touched his hat very civilly.

"Had a tumble, sir?" he asked.

"Eh! Oh! No! Not exactly," answered Lovell.

"I see you pass on a bike, sir, some time back," said the man on the stile. "Not an accident, sir, I 'ope?"

"Oh! No!"

"You look a bit dusty, sir—thought p'raps you'd 'ad a spill. If anything's 'appened to the bike, sir, I'd lend a 'and and willing—I'm in the trade, you see, sir, 'Arry 'Arris, second-hand cycles and repairs, that's me, sir. I'm on my way to Rookham now to sell that there bike." He nodded towards the machine leaning on the stile. "Good machine that, sir—p'raps you know something about bikes?"

"Oh! Yes!" said Lovell.

And he came to a halt at the stile.

Chapter 5

A BIKE AT A BARGAIN!

Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome put up their bikes in the bike-shed and went to the House rather wondering what had become of Lovell. They had watched the wind-up of the cricket match at Rookham, and had the satisfaction of seeing Bulkeley's men beat the Ramblers by a handsome margin of runs. But they had seen nothing of Arthur Edward Lovell.

There had been a big crowd on the Ramblers' ground, so it was not surprising that they had missed him there, if he had arrived later. But he was not to be seen among the crowd of Rookwood men coming back after the match: and two or three fellows whom they had asked had replied that they had seen Lovell sitting by the roadside, apparently admiring the scenery. Which was a little puzzling.

"Looks as if he never came after all," remarked Jimmy Silver. "Must have started, as Oswald and two or three other chaps seem to have seen him on the road. Spill, perhaps."

"Even Lovell couldn't have taken the wrong road, going to Rookham," remarked Newcome, thoughtfully. "Of course, if there was a wrong road handy, Lovell would take it."

"Jump at it!" agreed Raby.

"Here, Muffin!" Jimmy Silver called to Tubby Muffin in the quad. "Seen Lovell?"

Tubby grinned.

"Yes! He looked tired when he came in. Dusty all over, too. I asked him if he'd had a fall and he only called me names."

"Well, he's in," said Jimmy, as they went into the House. "He's got back, anyhow, whatever's happened."

They went up to the end study to look for Lovell there, and there they found him.

Arthur Edward was seated at the study table, and seemed busy. He had a pen in his hand, a sheet of paper before him, and a wrinkle of thought on his brow. Apparently he was engaged in some sort of arithmetic. He glanced up as the three came in.

"Oh! You fellows," he said, absently. And he wrinkled his brow again over his arithmetic.

"Did you get to Rookham?" asked Jimmy. "We never saw anything of you there."

"Oh! No! Those Modern cads got the bike away from me, and I was stranded on the road. I walked back."

Three fellows exchanged a smile: but they tactfully forbore to make any remark. Lovell's bright idea of bagging a Modern tick's bike had, evidently, not worked out.

They rather expected Lovell to inquire how the Rookham match had gone. But his mind seemed full of other matters. The figures he had been scrawling on the paper seemed to occupy his attention.

"What's that?" asked Raby. "Something for Dalton?"

"Oh, no. I'm just making some calculations, that's all."

Again Lovell wrinkled his brows. He was no whale at arithmetic. He had been known to get simple sums right. But it had not often happened.

His three chums regarded him curiously. It was utterly unlike Lovell to touch anything of an arithmetical nature, if he could help it. Yet here he was at it of his own accord.

"But what——" asked Newcome.

"Well, look here," said Lovell, "I've got to raise some money. I've paid the man ten shillings on account—it was all I had with me——"

"What man?"

"I'll tell you in a minute: but I want to get this clear. I've got to get hold of four pounds ten somehow."

"Four pounds ten shillings!" said Jimmy, staring. It was a large sum for a Fourth-form junior to contemplate.

"Just that," said Lovell.

"But what the dickens——" asked Raby.

"I've got half a crown," went on Lovell. "Oswald owes me five bob, which I can collect. I lent Towny two bob—that's all right. I can borrow a pound from Mornington—he's got lots. I think I can bank on that. He's rather a jeering ass, but he ain't mean. That's as far as I've got. Well, half a crown, and five bob, and two bob, and a pound—that's one pound twelve and six——"

"Eh?"

"One pound twelve and six——"

"Is it?" gasped Jimmy Silver, while Raby and Newcome grinned.

"Well, isn't it?" demanded Lovell, warmly. "Think I can't do simple arithmetic?" He gave a hurried glance at his scrawled paper. "I—I mean, it's one pound eleven and six—that's it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you fellows have come into the study to cackle like a lot of hens while I'm working this out, you'd better clear," said Lovell, gruffly. "It will be call-over soon——"

"Why not make it one pound nine and six?" inquired Newcome, blandly.

"Oh, don't be an ass."

"That's a bit nearer the mark, old chap," said Raby.

"Rot!" said Lovell.

However, he went over his calculations once more, with a wrinkled brow and an air of deep concentration. Then he looked up, frowning.

"I mean one pound nine and six," he said, "and there's nothing to cackle at, that I can see. How much can you fellows lend me?"

"But what's it all about?" asked Jimmy Silver. "If you've got to raise the wind, old man, you can rely on your pals. But what——"

"It's a bargain," explained Lovell. "A big bargain. Practically the chance of a lifetime."

"But what——"

"A fellow has to have a bike," said Lovell. "From what they said at the police-station, how much chance do you think I have of ever seeing my 'Stargleam' again?"

His chums did not answer that. As a matter of fact, they did not suppose that Lovell had a ghost of a chance of ever seeing his 'Stargleam' again. The police,

of course, would take the matter up, and do the best they could: but as Lovell had not even seen the man who had stolen his bike, and had not the remotest idea of a description of him, prospects could not be considered hopeful. A stolen bike was easy to disguise with a new coat of paint, and it was probably, before this, as hard to identify as the man who had pinched it. Possibly it was still in the neighbourhood, if the bike-thief happened to be a local character. But that was not much to go upon.

"You don't think they'll get it back for me?" said Lovell.

"Well," said Jimmy, "they'll try, of course. But——"

"That's how it stands," said Lovell. "That villain, whoever he was, got away with my bike and it's a goner. Well, that bike cost my pater fifteen guineas: and I just can't ask him for a new one. He might even think it was my own fault I lost it——"

"Oh! Might he?" gasped Jimmy.

"Well, I was riding after dark without a light, and that's how it happened, you know. I wasn't really to blame as it couldn't be helped—but people might not see that," said Lovell, shaking his head. "The fact is, if I asked the pater for a new one he would be more likely to hand me a lot of jaw than a new bike. Besides, it would be rather thick sticking him for a new bike only a few months after he stood me that 'Stargleam.' And as it happens, I can get a second-hand bike to see me through, a first-class machine, practically as good as my old 'Stargleam,' and it's only five pounds."

Lovell's chums began to understand what the unaccustomed arithmetic was about.

"It's a bargain," went on Lovell, "a real genuine bargain."

"Must be, if it's as good as your old 'Stargleam,' for five pounds," said Jimmy Silver. "You've looked it over, of course?"

"I'm not exactly a fool!" said Lovell.

"Not?" asked Newcome.

"Look here, Newcome——"

"It looks like a jolly good bargain, from what you say, Lovell," interrupted Jimmy Silver, hastily, "if you've tried it——"

"Of course I have! The man asked me to give it a test, and I ran it up and down the Rookham road and it ran just like silk," said Lovell, impressively. "So far as I could tell, it was just as good as my old 'Stargleam,' and I fancy I know something about bikes. Well, Harris——"

"Who's Harris?"

"That's the man who's selling it. Harris is letting it go for five pounds—and it's dirt cheap at the price. He deals in second-hand bikes and can't afford to keep stock on his hands for long—that's how it is, as he explained to me. Well, I jolly well examined the bike and tested it on the road, and it was all he said, and more. I'm not losing a chance like that—it's the biggest bargain in jiggers ever at five quid."

Lovell's chums had to agree to that. Five pounds was a low price for a jigger

as good as a fifteen-guinea 'Stargleam': that could not be doubted And in the matter of bikes, at least, Lovell's judgment was reliable. He did know all about bikes.

"Well, that sounds all right," conceded Jimmy Silver, "and if you've made up your mind, old chap——"

"I jolly well have," said Lovell. "I had a ten-bob note, and I paid it to Harris as a sort of deposit. I've got his receipt here."

Lovell pointed to a rather grubby paper, apparently a leaf torn from a pocket-book. His chums glanced at it. On it was written in pencil:

Receeved ten shilings on account.
Sined,
Enry Arris.

"That's leaves four pounds ten shillings," said Lovell. "Well, I've got, or as good as got, one pound eleven and six—I mean one pound nine and six. I've got to raise the rest, to make up four pounds ten, that will be three pounds and eight—er—three pounds and six——"

"Not quite!" grinned Newcome.

"Perhaps you can do simple arithmetic better than I can, Arthur Newcome," said Lovell, with a snort.

"No perhaps about it, old bean. One pound nine and six from four pounds ten shillings leaves three pounds and sixpence."

"Well, if it does, so much the better," grunted Lovell. "You fellows will have to lend me three pounds—I dare say I can manage the sixpence."

Jimmy Silver whistled.

"It won't be easy, old man," he said. "But if you're keen on that bike, we shall have to scrounge it somehow. Next week——"

"Next week isn't much use," said Lovell. "Harris is bringing the bike here to-morrow, after class."

"Well, quids don't grow on every bush, you know," said Raby. "Precious few juniors in the studies at Rookwood that could raise four pounds ten all of a sudden."

Lovell frowned.

"I'm not a chap to ask favours, as a rule," he said, stiffly. "I'm asking you, as my pals, to help me through this. I simply can't let a bargain like that go. But if you'd rather not——"

"Oh, don't be an ass," said Raby. "We'll help all we can. Hallo, there's the bell—that's calling-over."

"Oh, bother the bell," said Lovell, irritably. "I want to get this worked out. I suppose we'd better go down, though."

"Sort of," grinned Newcome.

And the 'Fistical Four' went down to hall for calling-over: Lovell a little worried over the problem of raising the wind, but tremendously bucked at having secured such a bargain in bikes: and his chums wondering how on earth they were going to raise a pound each to lend him in order to secure that big bargain.

Chapter 6

DOUBTING THOMASES!

"Conticuere *omnes intentique ora tenebant*——"

"For goodness sake," said Lovell, "chuck it."

"Prep.! you know," murmured Jimmy Silver.

"Blow prep.," said Lovell, irritably.

"What about con with Dalton to-morrow?" asked Raby.

"Blow Dalton, and con," said Lovell. "I think you fellows might talk sense for once."

It was prep. in the Classical Fourth. In the end study, Jimmy Silver and Co. sat round the table, with a section of the second book of the Æneid to prepare. Lovell, never very keen on prep., was giving it a miss: passing it by as if it did not matter: as, indeed, it didn't, in comparison with that wonderful bargain in bikes.

Jimmy and Raby and Newcome, while duly interested in the wonderful bargain and quite sympathetic on the subject, nevertheless had to remember construe in class in the morning. Lovell eyed them reproachfully and impatiently.

"I've told you that Harris is bringing the bike here to-morrow," he said. "I've got to pay for it when he does. It's not so jolly easy to work it out—without bothering about that rot——"

"We'll talk it over after prep.," said Newcome.

"We'll talk it over now," said Lovell.

"But look here——"

"I can scrounge one pound nine and six—say, one pound ten," said Lovell, unheeding, "if you fellows can shell out a pound each, that will do it. But can you?"

"Um!" said Jimmy Silver. "I've got six shillings."

"I've got three," said Newcome.

"I've got ninepence," said Raby.

"That's nine and ninepence," said Lovell, "Say ten! Oh, gum! That means two pound ten from somewhere else. It wants thinking out—if you're not so keen on prep.!" added Lovell with scorn.

Jimmy Silver sighed. He was not exactly keen on prep.: but he did not want to hand out howlers like Lovell in class. But 'Uncle James' of Rookwood was always patient.

"Well, we shall have to scrounge it somehow," he said, "if the man won't wait for his money. But look here, Lovell, any cycle-dealer will keep a machine for a chap with a deposit paid. Make the deposit up to two pounds, say, and ask him to leave it over till next week——"

"Harris told me that he can't afford to carry stock, that's why he sells second-hand jiggers at cut prices. That machine's well worth a tenner second-hand, and I'm getting it for five. If I don't buy he will sell it somewhere else—he was on his way to Rookham to sell it, in fact, when I met him, but he agreed to hold it over till to-morrow."

"Might ask him, at any rate," said Raby.

"How can I ask him when I shan't see him till he comes along with the jigger to-morrow afternoon?" said Lovell, irritably.

"You know where he lives, I suppose?"

"How should I know where he lives?"

"Well, don't you?" asked Raby, staring.

"Of course I don't, as I never asked him."

Three fellows, quite forgetful of prep., stared across the study table at Arthur Edward Lovell. So far Lovell's chums had taken it for granted that Lovell was buying that bike at some establishment where second-hand bikes were dealt in. Evidently they had taken too much for granted.

"I don't quite make this out, Lovell," said Jimmy Silver. "If you don't know where Harris lives——"

"Haven't I said I don't?"

"Then how the dickens did you get in touch with him at all, and know that he had a bike to sell?"

"I met him on the Rookham road, after those Modern cads stranded me," explained Lovell. "I was walking back and passed him sitting on the stile of Giles's pasture. He'd seen me pass him on a bike, and then saw me walking back, and thought I'd had a spill, and offered to help with the jigger if it needed it, being in the cycle trade. Jolly civil of him, I thought. Then when he mentioned he was taking that bike to Rookham to sell it——"

"But——"

"I was interested, of course, as I want a bike," said Lovell. "I saw at a glance that it was a first-class jigger. When he told me he was asking five quid for it, of course, I made up my mind at once. It was the chance of a lifetime."

"But——" exclaimed Raby.

"Blessed if I know what you're butting about?" said Lovell, crossly. "Think I don't know a good bike when I see one?"

"I dare say the bike's all right. But——"

"You don't know the man?" exclaimed Jimmy. "Had you ever seen him before?"

"Not that I know of."

"You're going to buy a bike for five pounds from a stranger that you've never seen before?" asked Newcome.

"Why not?"

"And you've paid him ten bob on account?" exclaimed Raby.

"That was all I had about me."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"But, my dear chap——" said Jimmy.

Lovell stared from one to another, more and more irritated.

"What the thump are you looking like a lot of moulting owls for?" he demanded. "What's the matter? I tell you it's a splendid jigger—as good as my old 'Stargleam,' or jolly near—I tried it out on the road——"

"How do you know it was his to sell?" asked Newcome.

Lovell stared at him.

"Gone crackers?" he asked. "I suppose the bike was his, as he was selling it. Think he'd be selling somebody else's bike?"

"How do you know he hadn't just pinched it from outside a gate?"

"Oh, don't be an ass."

"Look here, Lovell," said Jimmy Silver, quietly, "the man may be all right——"

"Of course he's all right," snapped Lovell.

"But he's a stranger to you, you've never seen him before, you don't even know where he lives. You simply can't buy a bike from a perfect stranger like that——"

"Can't I?" said Lovell.

"It's not sense," urged Jimmy. "There are plenty of bike-thieves about, and I suppose they must sell the bikes they pinch."

"They look for mugs to sell them to," remarked Newcome.

Lovell breathed hard.

"Let's have this clear," he said. "I've struck a marvellous bargain just when I want a bike. I know it won't be easy for you fellows to help me out with the cash. If that's what's worrying you, put it plain, and don't start a lot of silly difficulties for nothing. Are you going to scrape up that three quid or not——"

"If the man's genuine——" began Raby.

"I don't want any more of that," interrupted Lovell. "I fancy I know my way about and I don't want teaching. You'll see that the man's genuine enough when he wheels in that bike to-morrow."

"When!" murmured Newcome.

Lovell glared.

"Perhaps you think he won't turn up with the bike at all?" he bawled, in a voice audible far beyond the walls of the end study.

Newcome shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't think—I know," he answered. "Honest bike-dealers don't do their business on a stile without mentioning their address. That man, whoever he is, and whatever his name may be——"

"His name's Harris."

"He told you so——"

"Yes, he did."

"Then I expect it isn't Harris——"

"Look here, Newcome——"

"That man, whatever his name is, has got ten bob out of you," said Newcome. "He won't come within ten miles of Rookwood with that bike. He'll be too busy looking for another mug to get ten bob out of."

Lovell rose from the table. His face was crimson with wrath.

"So that's it, is it?" he said. "You fellows think the same, I dare say?" He glared at Jimmy and Raby.

"Looks like it, to me," admitted Jimmy.

"And to me," said Raby, with a nod.

"All right, then," said Lovell, "leave it at that. I'm a mug, and I've been taken in by a diddler—all right! Keep your three quid, if you've got it—I'll raise it somewhere outside this study, and thank you for nothing."

Arthur Edward Lovell tramped across to the door.

"Hold on, old man," said Jimmy. "Prep., you know—look here, Lovell, you ass, you can't cut prep.——"

Lovell did not answer. Whether he could cut prep. or not, he was going to! He tramped out of the end study and shut the door after him with a bang.

Jimmy Silver and Co. looked at one another.

"That ass will get into a row, if a pre. spots him out of the studies in prep.," said Newcome.

"Anyhow, this lets us out," said Raby. "I suppose we could borrow the three quids, scrounging up and down the form: but it won't be wanted, as ten to one the man was only spoofing Lovell and won't turn up at all."

Jimmy Silver nodded. And the three resumed prep. Lovell had no doubts: he was, as usual, convinced that he was the fellow who knew. But none of his chums had any expectation of seeing Mr. Harris turn up on the morrow with that bargain in bikes.

Chapter 7

MR. HARRIS TURNS UP

"Who's that?"

Arthur Edward Lovell smiled.

He could afford to smile!

"That's Harris," he answered, carelessly.

"Oh!" ejaculated three fellows together.

It was after class the following day. The 'Fistical Four' were gathered at the side-gate near the bike-shed. It was the appointed hour when Mr. Harris, cycle-dealer of no known address, was due to arrive with the bargain in bikes.

Only Arthur Edward Lovell expected to see him.

Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome admitted that it was possible. But they did not think it likely. The whole thing seemed to them altogether too fishy. A fellow who would hand ten shillings to a stranger, nothing doubting, was a fellow to be diddled: and there was little doubt in the minds of Lovell's chums that he had been 'done' by a 'diddler.' So three faces registered surprise when a man was seen coming up the road on an all-black bike and Lovell announced that it was Harris.

Jimmy and Raby and Newcome exchanged glances, and then fixed their eyes on the approaching man.

He was a stranger to them, but Lovell, of course, knew him at once. It was the Mr. Harris he had met at the stile on the Rookham road. He was riding the all-black bicycle which, in spite of its low price, was as good a jigger as Lovell's own lost 'Stargleam.' It was natural for Lovell to smile! He was amused by the expressions on the faces of his friends. Three doubting Thomases had to be convinced now. For here was Harris!

The Co. scanned the man and did not like his looks very much. His shifty eyes seemed very watchful under his battered bowler hat, cocked aslant on his greasy head, and he looked as much as ever in want of hot water and soap. Still, here he was, with the bike!

"So that's Harris," said Jimmy Silver.

"That's Harris," assented Lovell.

"And that's the bike?" asked Raby.

"That's the bike!"

"Looks a good jigger," said Newcome.

"Glad you can see it," said Lovell. "I fancy I know something about bikes. Of course, it may be only a fancy," added Lovell, sarcastically, "you fellows seem to think that I'm a mug to be diddled by the first spoofer that blows along. Well, here's Harris: and you can look at the bike when he comes up, and see for yourselves. You'll think it cheap at five quid."

The Co., undoubtedly, were surprised to see Mr. Harris. Possibly they were a little disconcerted also. Feeling bound to stand by Lovell, if the bike did unexpectedly turn up, they had been busy that day 'scrounging' the three pounds that was required to make up the necessary sum. They had succeeded: and now they owed money up and down the form, which was a mortgage on their resources for some time to come. If Mr. Harris had failed to turn up, that cash could have been returned to the lenders, and nobody would have been a penny the worse. Except for Lovell himself. His ten shillings would not have been seen again. Now, of

course, it would be wanted. However, they were going to stand by Lovell and see him through. Certainly they considered it a very rash proceeding to buy a bike from a perfect stranger without even knowing his address. But that was Lovell's business, if he chose so to do. Arguing with Arthur Edward Lovell produced the same effect as water on a duck. The more his friends fancied that he was in the wrong, the more Arthur Edward was convinced that he was in the right. So the Co. did not waste any more breath in argument.

Mr. Harris rode the bike up to the gate, jumped down and touched his battered bowler to the four Rookwood fellows.

"'Ere you are, sir!" he said, addressing Lovell. "Jest on time, sir. And 'ere's the jigger, sir, and I don't mind saying that you're getting a bargain in that there jigger, sir."

Lovell nodded and smiled.

"Let's have a look at it," said Jimmy Silver.

"Look at it all you like, sir," said Mr. Harris, affably. "You'll find that it's a first-class machine, sir."

"Looks like it," admitted Jimmy.

"And it's jest what it looks, sir! Your friend's getting a bargain in that bike, sir."

"Don't I know it," said Lovell, cheerfully. "You fellows look at it—you'll find it all right."

"P'raps you'd like me to make out the receipt, sir, while your friends is looking at it," suggested Mr. Harris. Apparently he did not want to lose time.

"Go ahead," said Lovell.

Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome all looked at the bike very carefully.

Their first impression had been that Mr. Harris was some 'diddler' dealing with a mug, and that having extracted ten shillings from Lovell he intended that to be the end of the transaction. That impression had turned out to be erroneous: Mr. Harris had turned up with the machine, and was waiting to receive the balance of four pounds ten shillings. So, in spite of Lovell's extensive knowledge of the subject, they wouldn't have been surprised to find the bike more or less of a crock, specially brightened up to impose on a 'mug.' But it needed hardly more than a glance to ascertain that that was not the case.

Arthur Edward Lovell might be an ass in some respects, at least in the opinion of his friends, but he did know a good bike when he saw one. It was a first-class machine, fully the equal of Lovell's lost 'Stargleam.' That it was a big bargain at five pounds admitted of no question.

"O.K.," said Raby, with a nod.

"Who'd have thought it?" murmured Newcome. "It's a jolly good jigger, and cheap at the price! Lovell's got hold of a good thing."

"Topping," said Jimmy Silver. "It's practically Lovell's old 'Stargleam' over again! The bike's all right."

"Can't see the make—it's been painted out," said Raby. "But I shouldn't wonder if it was a 'Stargleam' like Lovell's old jigger."

"Here, Jimmy," called out Lovell.

And Jimmy turned from examining the bike. Mr. Harris had made out the receipt on a leaf of his pocket-book, and all that remained was to hand Mr. Harris the sum of four pounds ten shillings.

Lovell had in his hand the thirty shillings he had raised from his own resources. Jimmy proceeded to sort out the three pounds that had been 'scrounged' up and down the Classical Fourth. He could not help noting how greedily Mr. Harris's shifty eyes glinted at the money.

He could not help feeling a misgiving. Mr. Harris's looks did not inspire confidence: and it was, in Jimmy's opinion, not merely rash, but absolutely fatheaded, to buy a bike from a stranger, who for all the Rookwood juniors knew might be a bike-thief disposing of his plunder. But Lovell was not prepared to hear a word on that subject: so Jimmy did not waste words on it. He handed over the three pounds to Lovell, who handed the money to Mr. Harris in exchange for the receipt.

"You won't be sorry you bought that bike, sir," he said.

Mr. Harris touched his hat very affably.

"You won't be sorry you bought that bike, sir," he said. "You'll be satisfied with that there bike."

"I'm sure of it," said Lovell.

And Mr. Harris took himself off, leaving Arthur Edward Lovell in possession of that bargain in bikes, and feeling extremely pleased with himself, with the bike, with Mr. Harris, and with things generally. He was in debt to the tune of four pounds, which was likely to put paid to his pocket-money and tips from affectionate relatives for some time to come. But he was in possession of a bike which was as good as his lost 'Stargleam' over again: and in addition, he had proved to his doubting friends how right he was and how wrong they were. Altogether, Arthur Edward Lovell felt that he had reason to be pleased: and in fact his satisfaction knew no bounds.

But——

CHAPTER 8

UNEXPECTED!

"OH!" ejaculated Lovell.

He was startled.

Startled, indeed, is hardly the word. He was so amazed that he almost fell down. His eyes seemed to pop from his head.

Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome looked at him. What was the matter with Lovell, they could not guess. But only too plainly, something was the matter with him.

Lovell had opened the saddle-bag, and taken out a rag therefrom to wipe off some dust that the bike had collected on its way to Rookwood. Lovell was a particular fellow with bikes. He unfolded that somewhat oily rag from the saddle-bag and was about to wipe off the dust when suddenly he ejaculated, and, holding the rag up in the air, stared at it with popping eyes. A fellow who had suddenly seen a ghost could not have been more startled: but what there could possibly be in a cleaning-rag to startle him to such an extent was a mystery to his friends.

"Oh!" repeated Lovell.

"What——" asked Jimmy Silver, blankly.

"That—that—that rag——" Lovell's voice was almost faint. "L-l-look at it! Look at it! Oh!"

His friends looked at it. Having looked at it, they noted that it was not the usual sort of cleaning-rag that was found in a cycle-bag, but an old worn handkerchief that had been devoted to the purpose. But in that so far as they could see, there

was nothing remarkably out of the common, certainly nothing to produce such a startling effect on Lovell.

"Well?" said Raby.

"What the dickens——" asked Newcome.

"It—it—it's an old hanky——" stammered Lovell.

"I can see that," said Jimmy Silver. "Whoever owned that bike used an old hanky for a cleaning-rag. What about it? You used an old hanky for a cleaning rag on your 'Stargleam.'"

"It—it—it——" Lovell seemed to articulate with difficulty.

"It's what?"

"It's the same rag!"

"WHAT!"

Three fellows jumped.

"It—it—it's got my initials in the corner—look!"

They looked! They gazed! They stared! Undoubtedly, in the corner of that old disused hanky, used as a cleaning-rag for a bike, there were the initials: A.E.L. Amazedly they realised that the cleaning-rag appertaining to that bargain in bikes was the same cleaning-rag that had been packed in the saddle-bag of Lovell's lost 'Stargleam.' There could be no mistake about it—and it was no wonder that Lovell was startled. His friends were startled, too!

"Oh!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"Oh!" repeated Raby and Newcome, like echoes.

"How—how—how did it get there?" asked Lovell, faintly. He hardly needed to ask the question: for already a dreadful suspicion was forcing itself into his mind.

That bike, excepting that it was newly painted all black, was Lovell's lost 'Stargleam' over again! And he had found his own cleaning-rag—that soiled hanky—in the saddle-bag!

"Oh!" repeated Jimmy Silver. "Oh, my only summer hat! Look here, Lovell, what was the number of your old bike?"

"2244642!" answered Lovell.

Jimmy pounced on the bike and examined it for the number. Raby and Newcome gazed at him breathlessly—Lovell almost beseechingly. Lovell wanted him to read out any number but 2244642. That was really too much!

But it was that very number that Jimmy read out:

"2244642!" he said.

"Oh!" almost moaned Lovell.

"Your own bike!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Lovell's own bike!" said Raby. "Oh, crikey! That fellow who calls himself Harris was the man Lovell ran into the other night, and who pinched his bike."

"And gave it a coat of black paint before he looked for a mug to sell it to!" said Newcome. "Oh, scissors! He never knew Lovell, as he never saw him in the dark that night——"

"And Lovell never knew him," said Raby. "Harris is the man who pinched the 'Stargleam' and he's sold it back to Lovell for five pounds."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Oh, holy smoke!"

Lovell stood speechless. It was not to be doubted now. That bargain in bikes was his own jigger—Mr. Harris was the bike-thief who had cut off on it—and, having disguised its appearance, Mr. Harris had been looking for a 'mug' to buy it: and Arthur Edward Lovell had been the mug! And Mr. Harris had walked off with the cash Arthur Edward had paid him for his own bike!

The expression on Arthur Edward Lovell's face was really extraordinary. Speech failed him. But he found his voice at last:

"He—he—he's not been gone ten minutes! I'll—I'll get after him—I'll—I'll—I'll——" Lovell did not state further what he would do if he caught Mr. Harris. He hurled himself on the bike, and tore away in the direction Mr. Harris had taken ten minutes ago.

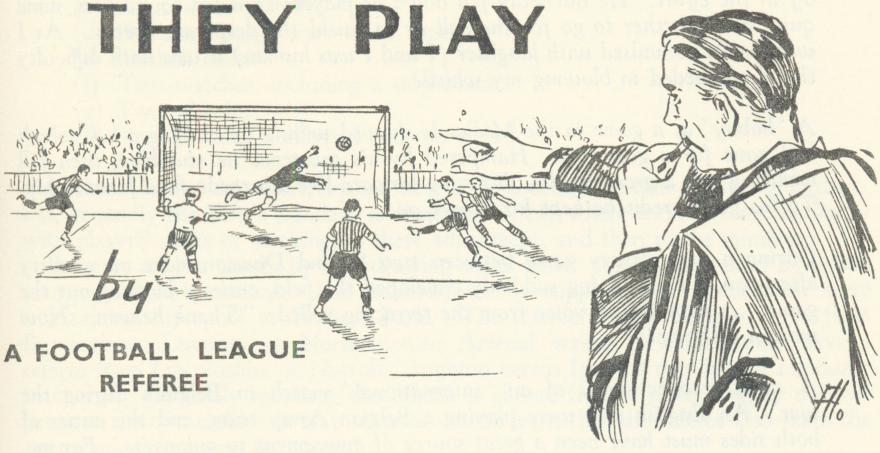
And Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome, like the good pals they were, did not laugh till he was out of hearing.

Then they yelled.

* * *

A TIRED and dusty Lovell came back just in time for calling-over—without having found Mr. Harris. And for days and days afterwards, any fellow in the Classical Fourth who thought it amusing to see Arthur Edward Lovell go off at the deep end, had only to mention that Bargain in Bikes.

I WHISTLE WHILE THEY PLAY



by

A FOOTBALL LEAGUE REFEREE

PHEEEPP! A blast on the whistle and the game is on. Ninety minutes or so later another blast—and the game is over. And in between there have been more pheeepps! —to the delight or dismay of players of both sides; not, of course, forgetting the crowd. Professional footballers work while they play. A referee's job is, indeed, to whistle while they play.

In my career as a Football League referee I have learned many things. And everything I have learned has been of value, not only in getting that split-second judgment so essential in a good referee, but in getting the 'edge' of the game and the 'feeling' of the players. I'm not for one moment claiming to be a good referee; in fact, if one is to judge from the majority verdict of home supporters, I'm far from being even a referee! And as the customer is always right, I'm left with the impression that the crowd takes a dim view of me. But I stoutly maintain that I'm human! And the strong belief that all referees are practically blind is not true. No one can become a referee unless he has good eyesight and is not colour blind. Challenge that if you dare!!!!

Every game, like fingerprints, has no exact copy. There is always something different—humorous and serious, important and trivial. There are many incidents I can recall, enough to fill a book. (But the publisher won't let me fill this one. I wonder why?) However, here are a few which readily come to mind:

The goalkeeper of a London First Division club made a spectacular dive into ankle-deep mud, and emerged without knowing that his shorts had been dragged off in the effort. He hurriedly fell down as players crowded round him, none quite sure whether to go for the ball or to shield the desperate keeper. As I was almost convulsed with laughter (I said I was human) it was with difficulty that I succeeded in blowing my whistle.

A 'bobby' at a game in the Midlands showed willing by chasing a ball which had gone for a goal kick. Hampered by his greatcoat he stumbled, then fell headlong into a great puddle, slithering forward like a torpedo fired from a ship. To his great credit he kept his helmet on!

During a very dreary game between two Second Division sides on a misty afternoon, a bank of fog suddenly enveloped the field, entirely blotting out the game. A very fed-up voice from the terracing yelled: "Thank heaven. Now we can go home!"

A vivid recollection is of an 'international' match in Belgium during the war. An English side were playing a Belgian Army team, and the antics of both sides must have been a great source of amusement to onlookers. For me, it was a despairing and endless attempt at trying to make my decisions understood. An aggrieved Belgian would come gesticulating at the sound of my whistle, while the 'Tommies' roared with laughter. In the effort to make myself understood I too, began waving my arms until, as a 'Tommy' remarked, we looked like racecourse tic-tac men having a quarrel.

You may not realise it, but there is far more in refereeing than the mere control of the game.

A referee must, above all things, be thoroughly fit. You can always read of a side being given special training for any particular game. For a referee, *every* game calls for special training. I don't mean brine baths, golf and all that sort of thing, but the hard graft of physical exercises, sprinting, walking and so on—and twice a week at that. When you realise that the referee must keep up with play for the entire 90 minutes—more in extra time—then you can understand the need for fitness. There can be no question of taking an 'easy,' as any player may do. Nor does any player cover seven or eight miles as a referee will do during a game. Make no mistake about it, you must be *very, very fit.*

A Football League referee must, too, look smart. No team could look with confidence on any official who appeared slovenly in dress. The F.A.'s contention, rightly, is that as a standard of neatness is expected of every side so it should be expected of referee and linesman. Therefore, the F.A. lays down as a pattern for officials to follow:

(a) Blazer of black or navy blue; or battle-dress blouse
(b) White sports shirt
(c) Black or navy shorts
(d) Black stockings, with white tops
(e) Football boots
(f) Two watches, including a stop-watch
(g) Two whistles
(h) Two pencils, a note-pad and score card

In these days of expensive clothes there is, of course, a certain amount of latitude, but, generally the F.A.'s standard is observed. Only where there is some similarity with players' shirts or stockings is there adjustment, and then to the minimum.

Referees are not chosen by the 'drawing-out-of-a-hat' system, but rather by reason of geographical positions. For example, let us suppose that Portsmouth were entertaining Liverpool at Fratton Park. The referee would perhaps come from Birmingham, Leicester or Northampton; Arsenal versus Newcastle may have a referee from Lincolnshire or Norfolk; Brighton versus Ipswich may have a Londoner in charge. Generally speaking, the official is chosen from a place roughly midway between the two clubs. It may surprise you to learn that the referee also takes the return match between the teams.

On arriving at the ground the referee meets club officials, but does not see any of the players until he steps on the field. He meets his linesmen, and they have a tactical talk—signals to be given, parts of the field to control, positions to be occupied. And having come to linesmen, a word or two about them.

It may appear to you that the linesman's sole job is to waggle his little flag when the ball goes out of play. There is more to it than just that. While a referee must also be a good linesman, it is not generally appreciated that a linesman is also a qualified referee. For the job of lining, an entirely different attitude must be adopted. A linesman must learn the meaning of co-operation, for co-operation with the referee is essential. A linesman must not be too eager, but must be ready to give or to support appeals or decisions. This is not an easy task, for his decisions must always be made with the intention of assisting the referee, not with forestalling him. Like the referee, the linesman must know the laws of the game by heart, so that he may interpret any signals which the official controlling a match may give. The linesman must develop the positional technique so that he can be in a position to judge offside, other offences and goal-line decisions. Therefore, to be a good referee you must first of all be a good linesman.

A referee and his linesmen inspect the ground, checking marking-out, position of flags, goal-nets and, of course, the state of the pitch itself. The referee alone decides whether the ground is fit for play—and his decision is final.

In the referee's room is a bell-push communication with the players' rooms. Five minutes before the kick-off he pushes the bell for the teams to turn out. The teams

are, in normal circumstances, on the ground an hour before the kick-off, and there is thus ample time for preparation. Should, however, a team be delayed the official is informed, and he must seek the reason for it. All this is included on the report which he sends to the League immediately after the match. I recall one novel reason for a team turning out three minutes late.

There was an epidemic scare in a South of England district and a London team was playing there. I rang the bell as usual and a few moments later walked out myself, only to be stopped by an official who explained that his 'boys' were not yet on the field because they were busy gargling! I gave them one minute!

All the referee's fees and expenses are paid by the home club. If he has to travel more than 80 miles the referee is entitled to meal allowances, although few have to make a claim. When he arrives at the ground he is often asked how he intends to travel home and what arrangements could be made for him. If he has to catch a particular train soon after the match a taxi or private car is usually ready to hustle him to the station.

There are, perhaps, many of you interested in taking up this less glamorous, yet the most important, job on the field of play. You can, of course, learn a great deal about the art of refereeing merely by watching the official rather than the game. And it is be no means a 'useless' objective, this referee 'lark.'

Every week some 15,000 referees set out for places near and far to control matches under the jurisdiction of the F.A. With very many of this great number there is probably one ambition—to become a star whistler, one worthy of officiating at the greatest game of all, the F.A. Challenge Cup Final at Wembley.

How does one set about becoming a referee? Well—er—well, suppose we take the career of a friend of mine. We'll call him Jim Jones, although that is not his real name.

Jim was only 18 when he felt the urge to take up refereeing. He was advised to get in touch with his County Football Association and ask for registration as a referee. The County F.A. pointed out that he would be considered but that he could not hope for promotion until he was a year older. He was told to write to the County Referees Association, a body which would coach him without charge.

The coaching was designed to make him thoroughly conversant with the 17 Laws of the game, and to interpret them correctly. This gave him confidence to face up to the examination which he had to pass before he could possibly begin his career. In due course he sat for the examination, and at the end of it qualified as a Class 3b referee. Jim was on the first rung of the ladder—or is it the first puff of the whistle?

After taking his first game Jim felt a little more confident. Of course, it was only a local Minor League game and there were no spectators. But he *had* taken charge of a game. The natural fear of making mistakes remained with him for several games, but he soon settled down and did not worry himself into making errors. He found too, that accommodation was not all it might have been, but

comforted himself with the thought that all good referees experienced the same sort of thing.

He went steadily on, match after match, always making progress. He began to referee cup-ties in County F.A. Junior Cup, and travelled outside his locality. Gaining promotion meant that he could act as linesman to at least one of the Senior Amateur Leagues. He was learning the attitude of the crowd, understanding the excitement and the acid remarks. He was also learning that there was something in the oft-repeated story of the referee who asked for the loan of twopence to phone a friend, only to be told 'Here's fourpence. Now phone all your blinking friends!'

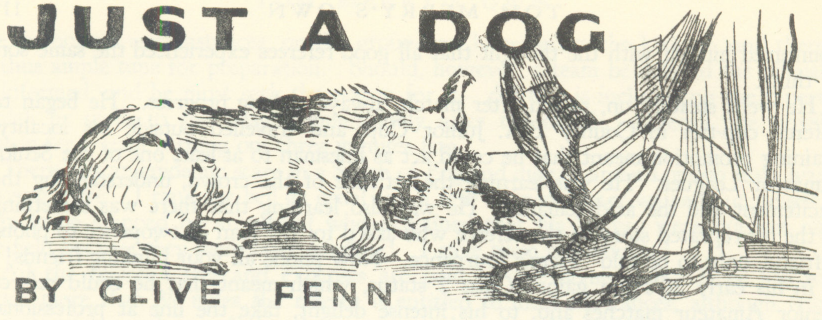
In his early 20's Jim gained Class 2 status, which meant that he could referee Senior Amateur matches and, to his intense delight, take the line at professional matches outside the Football League. His excellent handling of the Amateur games earned him further promotion three seasons later, when he became a Class 1 referee, the highest status which could be granted by his County F.A.

A few seasons later he went a step further, being allowed to take charge of the Professional Reserve games as well as take the line in Football League matches. A referee's qualifications make it necessary to be a referee of the reserve teams, such as in the Midland League, London Combination and so on, in order to be a linesman for the Football League. He was thus well on the way to becoming a Football League referee, an honour which has recently come his way. With luck he should make a great name for himself before he must, under Football League rules, retire at the age of 47. He will be able, however, to carry on after that age, although only taking charge of matches outside the Football League. I hope that long before he retires he will have won his way into the Cup Final at Wembley.

If you're keen on refereeing, take it up. You'll find, as Jim did, that it's hard graft, but well worth it—it makes you whistle!

Pheeeeepppp!

JUST A DOG



BY CLIVE FENN

If it be true, and it seems more than likely, that exquisite music threads its magic way through every noble life and kindly thought, then there must have been some miracle of minstrelsy in the life of Pops. Pops was a dog. He had no special ancestry, that is, as far as old Professor Munt was concerned. The Professor was a sage of the first class. He was accounted enormously wealthy. So he was, in learning and in books, which could not be bought under thousands of pounds. That made folks regard the old and erudite man who lived at the grangy cottage at the end of the village as a millionaire.

Money talks, usually of the most frivolous things.

"He's brought home a dog," grumbled Marion, the stout and voluble housekeeper. She addressed the frying pan in her kitchen.

The useful article said nothing.

As a rule the Professor only nodded, or grunted, so Marion had the conversation in her own hands, but how she did grumble! For one thing her master neglected his meals. Marion was afraid he might fade away.

And now there was the dog!

It was most trying. The sage found the quadruped squatting forlornly by a signpost. He had no name on his collar. Don't blame him. He had no collar. He looked so lonely that the old man stooped and patted him. That was enough for the dog. He followed his new friend home.

"He will mess up my polished boards," said Marion.

"Oh, that can be wiped up," murmured the Professor.

"Who's going to do it?"

"I will," replied the sage, gently.

The dog stayed to supper that first evening, after keeping close to the Professor as the two went home. Why the sage called him Pops was never known. It was far too flighty a name for the animal. Pops was no ordinary dog. He would never have wasted his time baying at the moon. Let that luminary attend to its own

affairs. That was how he would have regarded the matter. He choose to sleep on the mat outside the old man's bedroom. He insisted on accompanying his new friend on all his rambles, more than satisfied if he had an occasional word.

The companions were well suited. They admired the same things—the racing clouds, the woods and fields, the flowers in the garden—Marion's garden—the early morning sounds at the farm, buckets rattling, the intelligent note of the challenging chanticleer .... And when the Professor wrote and read at night in his book-lined room, Pops lay at his feet, cocking his ears from time to time at a sound.

"Only a stray," murmured Marion.

It is not a bit of use trying to conceal the fact that Marion was main hard to please. She lived to attend to her master's comfort, and it was a long, long time before she could accustom herself to the presence of this canine stranger the sage had just picked up. Marion just hated the thought of an alien four-foot trotting about her clean kitchen, soiling her stairs, and yes, squeezing its way into the affections of her master. Pops would have no truck with that line of reasoning. The Professor had been kind to the dog and that was enough. It asked for nothing further. The mat at the door of the sage's bedroom was its napping place, and for the Professor to walk down the garden and into the orchard without the new friend was just an absurdity and might be puffed away like a seed carrier.

There were strange rumours regarding the Professor. In that fantastic old countryside people thought things as they will. But the idea that the old man had big treasure hoarded up—jewels, gewgaws and so forth, which would have been nothing to him—did reach town and with terrible results.

It was a calm enough night when the peace of the haven was broken. Exactly what happened neither Marion nor the old man could have told. Pops was barking furiously, and it was that sound which jerked Marion out of dreamland. She flung her dressing-gown around her and padded to the door, gaining the stairs just as her master was calling desperately "Marion, Marion, the phone, police!"

She was the only one in the house who was handy at the phone, for the Professor hated it. But Marion did know all there was to know, for she often got supplies that way, and she called 999 and then hurled herself into the Professor's room, while Pops was raising the echoes, and the old man was putting up a good fight with a burly stranger. Marion threw herself at the stranger, but was flung aside, and the housekeeper tripped and fell prone. Everything went then. If Pops could have spoken he would have barked "Leave it to me!" He was up and at the marauder's throat, but the ruffian flashed a knife—and the dog knew no more.

The whole story was later picked up, as it were, in the dim consciousness of the Professor. He was helped up, dizzy and helpless, by police. One officer carried the housekeeper to a chair. She was reviving now. There were three officers, one guarding the handcuffed prisoner by the table. "Coming round, sir?"

Yes, he was coming round.

"Better have a sip more brandy, sir."

The gaze of Professor Munt was on the dog.

"Ah, I'm afraid he's got it badly sir. The scoundrel knifed the poor beast."

The Professor struggled up, sitting. His head felt as though it were spinning round and round. The inspector was making a swift examination of the dog.

"Afraid the poor old chap's a goner," he said in a low tone to one of the men. "A bit of a vet. myself—look, the poor old chap." A closer examination. "Get me some linen and a drop of that brandy, ma'am," he said to the housekeeper. His hands were busy about the dog Pops tried to raise his head. Flop, it went back.

"You keep still, old man." The dog watched the kindly friend, then closed its eyes.

"Oh, he's dead," sobbed the housekeeper.

The inspector turned sharply on the woman after swiftly and most deftly bandaging a hideous cut.

"No, ma,am, he's not dead, though it's near as a toucher, but a dog's tougher than us. There, sir," the man went on, and turning to Munt, "I think perhaps there is a fighting chance."

The Professor looked up, but the effects of the crashing blow he had received made him feel helpless.

"He saved my life, officer," he managed to say.

The inspector touched the arm of the old sage.

"Just about what a dog of his breed, or no breed, would do, sir," he said, trying to put good cheer into his voice. "I know 'em, true as steel, a bit of all sorts—all the best of the lot!" He took another swift survey. "He's not going to peg out, sir, take it from me."

And Pops did not die, and if—it's only a feeble 'if'—Marion had quite come round as a dog-worshipper long before, that was nothing to what she was now. Nothing was too good for Pops in the days that rolled on, nothing at all. Marion had been a bit of a scold in the old times, like Xantippe (but, of course, that poor lady had a few things to put up with, Socrates *always* being late of a night, and, besides that, never dependable for a meal) but she was never heard scolding now, not even ticking off a tardy tradesman.

It was days later.

"He's getting well, sir, and I—I'll never grumble any more. I have prayed to God, sir. I have been a bad woman, sir, but I'm trying to make amends."

"My dear old friend!" murmured the Professor, taking the hand of the housekeeper and raising it to his lips.

But there are these immensities of thought and there are times when the dog knows the door which will open on that other world. Roll up a legend in the way it should go, and it may lead to somewhere very good. A dog may not waste time on fanciful conjectures, but perhaps all the same it knows—as it trots on into its own particular world where there is so much understanding.

And who knows what a dog may think?

BAD LUCK for BILLY BUNTER

by FRANK RICHARDS

Chapter 1

ROUGH ON COKER!

"Oh!" roared Billy Bunter.

Bunter was hurt. No fellow could be suddenly grabbed by a large and sinewy hand by the ear without feeling hurt. And Billy Bunter's fat ear was extensive in size. There was quite a lot of it to sustain damage and gave a good hold.

So, when Coker of the Fifth grabbed that fat and extensive ear, Billy Bunter roared: and the Bull of Bashan, famed in ancient times for his roaring, had nothing on Bunter at that moment.

Bunter's roar awoke every echo of the study landing. It echoed and re-echoed up the Remove passage. It caused Harry Wharton and Co. to emerge from No. 1 Study, wondering what on earth was happening at Greyfriars School.

Horace Coker did not heed.

Coker of the Fifth, as he often told his pals, Potter and Greene, had a short way with fags. His way with William George Bunter was very short and very sharp.

Having obtained a good grip on Bunter's fat ear, Coker proceeded to twist the same between a sinewy finger and thumb.

"You fat villain!!" said Coker.

"Yoo-hoop!" roared Bunter. "Leggo! It wasn't me! I didn't—I never wasn't—I mean, I wasn't didn't—oh, crikey! Leggo!"

"Where's my cake?"

"Yarooh! I say, you fellows." Billy Bunter's eyes, and spectacles, fell on the Famous Five, staring out of the Remove passage. "I say! Make him leggo!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" ejaculated Bob Cherry. "Chuck that, Coker! You can't pull Remove ears, fathead."

"Don't you fags butt in!" snapped Coker. "That fat villain's snooped a cake from my study——"

"I haven't!" yelled Bunter. "I've never been near his study, you fellows! Will you make him leggo my ear?"

Harry Wharton and Co. paused. They knew their Bunter: and they were aware that if a cake was missing from any study at Greyfriars, it was extremely probable that W. G. Bunter knew what had become of it. Horace Coker was a lofty youth: altogether too lofty: and Remove ears were not to be pulled with impunity. Nevertheless, if Bunter had snooped his cake——

"Did you see Bunter bag the cake, Coker?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Think he'd let me see him?" snorted Coker. "I'd have burst him all over my study if I'd seen him."

"Then how do you know——" asked Frank Nugent.

"Well, I do know!" said Coker. "Now shut up!"

"The knowfulness cannot be terrific, my esteemed and idiotic Coker," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, mildly.

"I said shut up!" Coker pointed out.

And he gave a fat ear another vigorous twist, eliciting a fearful yell from its suffering owner.

"Stop that, Coker!" said Harry Wharton.

"I've already told you fags to shut up," said Coker. "If you want your own ear pulled, after Bunter's, young Wharton, you won't have to ask twice."

That did it!

"Come on!" said the captain of the Remove.

And the Famous Five, as one man, rushed at Coker of the Fifth. It was reasonable to suspect Billy Bunter if a cake was missing: still, it seemed that there was no evidence, and Coker was not entitled to act as judge, jury, and executioner all rolled into one. Still less could he evolve the bright idea of pulling the ear of the captain of the Remove without trouble to accrue.

Coker of the Fifth was big and hefty. Nature had been a little stingy with Coker in the matter of brains, but had made it up in brawn. But big and hefty as he was, Coker of the Fifth went over like a ninepin under the rush of the Famous Five.

He was strewn headlong on the study landing, roaring even more vociferously than the Owl of the Remove.

"Bump him!" said Bob Cherry.

"Hear, hear!"

"He, he, he!" cachinnated Billy Bunter, as the brawny Horace was grasped in five pairs of hands, swept off the landing, and bumped thereon with a terrific bump.

Bunter was rubbing a fat ear, which had a rather severe pain in it. But he seemed consoled when Horace Coker thumped on the landing. He grinned from his damaged ear to his undamaged one.

"I say, you fellows, go it!" gasped Bunter. "Give him jip! Give him beans! Making out that I had his cake, the beast! Jump on him! You jump on him, Bob—you've got the biggest feet."

"Oooogh!" spluttered Coker. "You cheeky fags—woogh! I'll smash you—I'll spiflicate you—I'll—I'll—ooooooogh!"

Coker exerted his tremendous strength in vain. He could have dealt with one, two, or perhaps three juniors. But five were too many for him. In spite of his frantic struggles he was bumped again on the landing and yet again.

"Go it!" yelled Bunter, almost dancing in his excitement. "Bump him! Squash him! Jump on the beast! Making out I had his cake! I don't believe he had a cake at all—I certainly never saw it in his study——"

"Eh! what?" ejaculated Bob Cherry. "Then you've been in Coker's study?"

"Oh! No! Nowhere near it!" said Bunter, hastily. "I've just come up from the Rag—I mean, I've just come down from the dorm. I say, you fellows, give him another bump! As if I'd touch his cake. I get all the cakes I want from Bunter Court, as you fellows know! Rotten measly cake, too—hardly a plum in it——"

"What?" yelled Johnny Bull.

It began to look as if Billy Bunter did know something about that cake!

"That fat villain had it!" said Bob Cherry. "Let's bump Bunter next——"

"Beast!" ejaculated Bunter.

"Collar him!" exclaimed Frank Nugent.

Billy Bunter did not wait to be collared. He shot away into the Remove passage like an arrow from a bow.

But the Famous Five had no time to think of Bunter. Horace Coker rallied, breathless and dishevelled, but full of beans. He hurled himself at Bunter's rescuers, and for several hectic minutes they had their hands full with Horace Coker. Five sturdy juniors and a big senior rolled on the landing in a breathless heap that seemed to be chiefly composed of arms and legs and tousled heads.

Herbert Vernon-Smith came up the staircase. He paused to look on with an amused grin.

"You fellows seem to be enjoying life," he remarked. "But you'd better chuck it—you can be heard all over the House. Prout's comin' up."

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Bob. "Hook it, you chaps."

They released Coker. It was not very easy to release Coker, for he clung to them, and grabbed at them, and hung on to them: catching Coker was rather like catching a Tartar. But the news that Mr. Prout, the master of the Fifth Form, was coming up made it necessary to finish with Coker. So, with a final combined effort, Harry Wharton and Co. flattened Horace out on the landing: and leaving him for dead as it were rushed back to their own quarters.

Coker remained where he was, sprawling, breathless, winded, his collar and tie gone, his clothes wildly rumpled, his hair a mop, spluttering as he sprawled. Thus he met the majestic view of Mr. Prout, as that ponderous and majestic gentleman arrived on the landing.

"Upon my soul!" ejaculated Prout. He stared at the sprawling Coker as if he could hardly believe his eyes. "Is—is that Coker? Is that a boy of my Form? Is that a senior boy of Greyfriars? Coker! How dare you, Coker? Are you out of your senses? How dare you sprawl on the floor in that ridiculous manner and in such a disgraceful state of untidiness? Answer, Coker!"

"Urrrggh!" spluttered Coker. He sat up dizzily and blinked at his form-master. "Wurrgh! I—I—ooogh! Those fags—goooogh!"

"You have been indulging in horseplay with Lower boys!" boomed Prout. "Disgraceful! Have you no sense of decorum, Coker—no sense of the dignity of a senior Form?"

"I—I—I——" stuttered Coker.

Prout waved a plump hand at him.

"Enough! I will listen to no excuses, Coker! You are a disgrace to your form. I am ashamed of you, Coker! Horseplay on a landing with Lower boys—you, a senior of the Fifth Form—my form——"

"I wasn't!" spluttered Coker. "I didn't—I—I—irrrrggh!"

"Go away at once and make yourself tidy, Coker," said Mr. Prout, sternly. "Then go to your study and write out five hundred lines of the Æneid. If you were not a senior boy, Coker, I should cane you for this unparalleled rowdiness. Go!"

"I—I——"

"Go!" thundered Prout. "Another word and I shall cane you, Coker, senior boy as you are! You will hand me the lines tomorrow morning in the form-room. Now go!"

Coker staggered to his feet. He did not utter another word. With difficulty he suppressed his feelings and tottered breathlessly away off the landing. Prout watched him with a stern brow as he went, and then, with an angry snort, rolled away down the stairs again.

Coker, in his study, breathed fury. Five hundred lines and a threatened caning—just as if he were an ordinary mortal and not Horace Coker at all! No wonder Coker breathed fury!

Chapter 2

GO TO IT!

"He, he, he!"

That unmusical cackle announced the arrival of Billy Bunter in No. 1 Study.

There were six fellows in that study—the Famous Five and Lord Mauleverer. Mauly had dropped in to tea: and now that tea was over, his lordship had stayed for a chat, or partly for a chat, and partly because he was too lazy to detach himself from the armchair in which he was now comfortably stretched. Harry Wharton and Co. were talking Soccer, and Mauly was listening-in with more or less attention, probably rather less than more. Then Bunter happened.

"He, he, he!" cachinnated Bunter.

"Who's letting off that alarm-clock?" asked Bob Cherry, glancing round.

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"I think I'll be pushin' along, you men," murmured Lord Mauleverer. A minute ago, Mauly had seemed a lazy fixture. But the arrival of William George Bunter seemed to have inspired him with a spot of energy.

"I say, you fellows, look out!" chuckled Bunter. "I say, Coker's coming to see you. He, he, he!"

"Coker coming here?" asked Harry.

"He, he, he! I heard him telling Potter and Greene! I say, you fellows, Prout gave him five hundred lines. He says he won't do them."

"Nothing to do with us, I suppose," grunted Johnny Bull.

"That's all you know," grinned Bunter. "He told Potter and Greene that it was through a crew of measly fags—that's you, you know—that he got the lines, and that you've got to do them for him."

"What!" yelled the Famous Five with one voice.

"He, he, he! That's the idea—I heard him tell Potter and Greene," chuckled the fat Owl. "He's coming here to see that you do it."

"The seefulness will not be terrific," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Well, that beats it!" said Bob Cherry. "Coker's the biggest size in idiots that ever was: but if he thinks he can make us do his lines——"

"I can sort of see us doing them!" chuckled Frank Nugent.

"Sort of!" said Bob, laughing. "Poor old Coker! He's dreaming dreams—but we'll wake him up all right if he comes here."

"The wakefulness will be——"

"Terrific and preposterous!" chuckled Bob.

"I say, you fellows, Potter and Greene were fairly begging him to do the lines," said Bunter. "They said Prout would fly off the handle if he didn't. Coker said

he wouldn't at any price. He said it was unjust and he'd be sacked first! I say, you fellows, don't you do them for him! Jolly good thing if Coker was sacked, you know. He said he would make the measly fags do the lines, and if they satisfied Prout, all right—if not, Prout could lump it! He, he, he."

And Billy Bunter, still cachinnating, rolled away from the doorway of No. 1 Study, leaving the Famous Five making a few hasty preparations for war.

If Coker of the Fifth fancied that he could make them do his lines, a surprise was awaiting Horace James Coker. Coker's last state was likely to be worse than his first when he was through in No. 1 Study.

Bob Cherry put a fives bat handy on the table. Frank Nugent refilled the ink-pot. Johnny Bull pushed back his cuffs. Hurree Singh picked up a ruler and Harry Wharton a Latin dictionary. They were soon ready for Coker of the Fifth.

Only Lord Mauleverer did not join in the warlike preparations. Bob glanced round at him.

"Better cut, Mauly," he said. "The fur will be flying here soon. You don't want to be mixed up in a shindy with that Fifth-form fathead."

"Oh, I'll join up if it comes to a shindy," yawned Lord Mauleverer. "I'll keep the poker handy. Coker's a big idiot and every little helps. But—look here, why row with Coker?"

"He's coming here specially to row," said Harry, staring. "We can't very well help ourselves, can we?"

"Yaas."

"Well, how?" demanded Johnny Bull. "You don't think we'd better write his lines for Prout, do you?"

"Yaas."

"What?" roared the Famous Five. They stared blankly at Lord Mauleverer. Giving in to Coker and bowing their heads to his lofty dictation was about the last idea that would ever have occurred to the heroes of the Remove.

"Why not?" asked Lord Mauleverer, placidly. "I'll help if you will. Many hands make light work. Coker's a blitherin' idiot! But he ain't really a bad chap! He can't help bein' a fool—it stands to reason that he wouldn't be, if he could help it. He's just the obstinate, pig-headed, silly ass to refuse to do his lines and get into a fearful row. Prout might whop him, or take him to the Head—goodness knows what. Well, what about seein' him through?"

"Look here——" roared Johnny Bull.

"Let Coker order us about?" said Bob. "Gone batchy, Mauly?"

"What's the odds?" said Mauly. "Coker can't make juniors do his lines—we can chuck him out on his neck, if you like."

"And we're going to!" said Nugent, warmly.

"Oh, all right!" sighed his lordship. "But if we gave him his head, it would keep him out of a fearful row with Prout: and it would be rather amusin' to pull his leg, too."

Harry Wharton and Co. exchanged glances. They were good-natured and kind-hearted fellows. They would have lent a helping hand to friend or foe at any time But to let Coker of the Fifth throw his weight about in No. 1 Study and fancy that he could give them orders for the sole purpose of keeping Coker out of a fearful row with his beak, was a very novel idea.

"If you're serious, Mauly——" said the captain of the Remove, at last.

"Sober as a judge, old scout."

"Rot!" said Johnny Bull, emphatically.

"The rotfulness is terrific."

"Oh, I don't know," said Bob. His eyes glimmered. "It would be rather funny to give old Horace his head, and let him fancy that he can rip. Mauly's rather too good for Greyfriars, and a bit too good for this world altogether, but why not?"

"After all, Bunter did have his cake," said Nugent, "and we did rather handle him on the landing this afternoon."

"We did—rather!" chuckled Bob. "And Prout's come down very heavy. Look here, let old Mauly have his way. Let's jump if Coker says jump! It will be funny to watch him swelling and swelling."

"Here he comes, I think," said Nugent, as there was a heavy tread in the Remove passage, approaching from the landing.

"It's a go?" asked Lord Mauleverer.

"It's a go!" agreed the chums of the Remove.

A few moments later, the door was pitched open, and the burly figure and rugged features of Horace James Coker loomed in the doorway.

Coker of the Fifth had a sheaf of impot paper in one hand. He had a cricket stump in the other. And his brow was dark with grim menace.

"Oh, here you are," said Coker, grimly, stepping into the study. "I'm glad I've found you all here. I've something for you fags to do."

Bob gave his chums a wink.

"What's the orders, boss?" he asked.

Coker stared a little. He had come to No. 1 in the Remove with a fixed resolve. Those fags had caused his lines: those fags were going to write his lines: otherwise, Coker was determined they never should be written, Prout or no Prout. But they would be written all right, because Coker was prepared to wallop the fags all round with that cricket stump if they raised objections. His experience on the landing that afternoon had not taught Coker that the Famous Five were rather too tough a proposition for him to handle. Experience is said to make fools wise. But it had never had that effect on Coker of the Fifth. Still, determined as he was, Coker was a little surprised to find the way so easy. He had expected objections, if not resistance. He was ready to deal with both. But apparently No. 1 Study was in a lamblike mood—quite a new mood for that study—and the cricket stump was not needed.

"Just give your orders, Coker," said Frank Nugent, solemnly.

"The hearfulness is the obeyfulness, my esteemed and preposterous Coker!" murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Give it a name, Coker," said Harry Wharton, mildly.

"Yaas: go it!" murmured Mauly.

Coker's grim brow relaxed. He laid the sheaf of impot paper on the table and put the cricket stump under his arm.

"Well, this is how it is," he said. "You fags kicked up a row on the landing. I'm not going to thrash you for it——"

"That's jolly good of you, Coker," said Bob.

"But you're going to do the lines I've got from Prout," said Coker. "I think that's fair, as you landed me with the lines. I may as well mention that I shall wallop you all round if you don't."

Johnny Bull opened his lips—but closed them again. It was rather a joke on Coker to let him go ahead throwing his weight about, and fancying himself monarch of all he surveyed, instead of pitching him out of the study on his neck. And after all, why not do old Horace a good turn.

"Here's the paper," said Coker. "Whack it out all round, and it won't really be a lot. I suppose you've got a Virgil here. Mind, you'll have to make your writing rather like mine. Prout never looks at a fellow's lines, really, but we may as well be careful. I've written a few lines for you to copy."

"That's jolly kind of you, Coker," said Bob.

"Well, you'll find me kind, if you come to that, so long as you behave yourselves," said Coker, almost genially. "I've a short way with fags—but if you toe the line and do as I tell you, all right."

"We can get your fist all right," said Harry, thoughtfully. "Something like a spider crawling over the paper after swimming in the inkpot, what?"

"I don't want any cheek, Wharton," said Coker, darkly. "I want those lines done. Now, go to it!"

Coker took up a strategic position by the door, stump in hand. Lord Mauleverer made an effort, detached himself from the armchair and joined his friends round the table. And the six juniors dipped pens in ink, propped Virgil up against the inkstand, and went to it!

Chapter 3

CANE FOR COKER!

Mr. Prout frowned.

It was in the Fifth-form room the following morning.

Prout was generally genial. He had a genial and expansive nature really, and

he usually took the "more-a-friend-than-a-schoolmaster" line. Often he would chat with his boys, and was listened to with the greatest respect and attention—wily fellows like Price of the Fifth knowing how to make him run on and on, with a leading remark or two, thus using up quite a lot of time that would otherwise have gone in lessons. Most of the Fifth agreed that even Prout's chats were better than work.

But Prout was neither genial nor chatty on this particular morning. Coker had annoyed him; also, he suspected rebelliousness in Coker. He was not at all sure that Coker had done the impositions imposed on him. If he had, and if it was reasonably satisfactory, well and good. If he hadn't, or if it was not reasonably satisfactory, the thunder was scheduled to roll in the Fifth-form room that morning.

He frowned at Coker and did not at all like the independent expression on Coker's rugged face. Coker saw no reason why he should wilt under his form-master's frown: and Coker did not wilt. Prout breathed hard.

"Coker!" he boomed.

"Yes, sir!"

"Where are your lines?"

"Here, sir."

"Oh!" said Mr. Prout, rather taken aback. He had doubted whether those lines were written at all. But if Coker had them there, it was all right. "Very well, Coker! You may bring them to me."

Coker came out of the form and laid his lines on the form-master's desk. His friends, Potter and Greene, exchanged a glance. They knew, though Mr. Prout did not, that those lines had been written in a junior study by many hands. How and why Harry Wharton and Co. had done it, instead of scragging Coker, Potter and Greene did not know: but they knew that Horace Coker himself had not written more than five or six lines out of the five hundred and they were a little anxious for Coker.

Still, it was well known in the Fifth that Prout hardly looked at a fellow's impot. As Prout often said in Common-Room, he trusted his boys, and they trusted him! Perhaps that trustful system came easier than careful and meticulous attention to detail. Anyhow, Prout never gave a fellow's lines more than a cursory glance. So it looked all right for Coker.

But Prout was not in his usual mood that morning.

In point of fact, Prout, passing the games-study the previous evening, had heard Coker's loud voice echoing therefrom, making the interesting announcement that he was dashed if he would do those lines for Prout!

Prout was not the man to take official notice of words not intended for his ears. But he had not forgotten, and he was in a very unusually sharp and observant frame of mind that morning.

Instead of merely glancing at Coker's impot, and then passing on to the order of the day, Prout picked up the sheaf of paper and scanned it.

Potter and Greene exchanged another uneasy glance. Coker felt a rather uncomfortable jump at his heart.

Even Coker realised that it would be rather serious if 'Old Pompous' tumbled! True, he had set the juniors a model of his 'fist.' Equally true, a fellow only had to scrawl like a very backward fag in the Second Form to make his writing like Coker's. By throwing in as many mistakes in spelling as possible, he could make the resemblance to Coker's work a very good likeness indeed.

Still, there are many ways of scrawling: and though many hands make light work, there might be a lot of dissimilarities among so many hands, if a keen eye looked for them. That morning, unfortunately, Prout's eye was keen.

He examined that impot carefully. Thunder grew in his brow as he proceeded.

"He's spotted it!" Potter whispered to Greene.

Greene nodded.

"Poor old Coker!" he murmured. "Ain't he the man to ask for it?"

"Coker!" boomed Prout.

"Yes, sir!" mumbled Coker, uneasily.

"Did you write these lines with your own hand?"

Silence.

"I have examined your lines, Coker. The hand-writing is bad—as bad as yours. The spelling is worse. Such carelessness, with the copy under your eyes, is very like you, Coker. But——" Prout paused. "But, Coker I have an impression—in fact it is obvious—that these sheets were written by different hands. You have obtained the help of others in writing out this imposition, Coker."

No reply.

"Coker! Answer me! Did you, or did you not, write out these five hundred lines of Virgil with your own hand, unaided?"

That left Coker no choice. Not for worlds would old Horace have told a lie on the subject. Certainly he had hoped to palm off those lines as if he had written them himself. Fellows often did that. But to tell the lie direct on the subject was a very different matter. A fellow like Price would have done it: Hilton might have done it: but it was far outside Coker's limit.

"No, sir!" said Coker.

Prout laid down the impot.

"I thought not," he said. He paused. "Coker, I hardly know how to deal with you. I gave you an imposition and you have not written it—you have attempted to delude me with lines written by other hands. Much as I regret the use of the the cane in this form-room—repugnant as it is to me to cane a senior boy like a junior—you have left me no choice, Coker. I shall cane you."

There was something like a sensation in the Fifth.

The cane lay on Mr. Prout's desk, certainly. But it was never used. Senior men were not caned. Prout had too much sense of the dignity of the Fifth, and of his own dignity, to handle the cane as Mr. Quelch handled it in the Remove room.

Second and Third, Remove and Fourth, even the Shell, bent over under the cane—but never the Fifth! Still, if a fellow asked for it, in fact begged for it, there it was! Prout picked it up.

Coker gasped for breath.

He was not only a Fifth-form man. He was the most important man in the Fifth, at least in his own esteem. He almost wondered whether Prout had gone mad!

"Coker! You will bend over that desk!" said Mr. Prout.

Coker gazed at him.

"I can't be caned, sir!" he pointed out.

"What?" boomed Prout.

"We're not caned in the Fifth!" said Coker. "I'm not a fag!"

"If you act like an irresponsible junior, Coker, I have no choice but to treat you like an irresponsible junior. I have said that I shall cane you, Coker. You will immediately bend over that desk."

Prout flourished the cane.

Coker did not stir.

He couldn't do it. Caning was all very well for Lower boys. Indeed, Coker heartily approved of it—for Lower boys. He thought that it did them good. But caning for Coker of the Fifth—it was wildly impossible. Coker stood like a rock, and did not bend over.

The Fifth Form watched, breathless. Prout waited—but he waited in vain. His portly countenance became gradually purple.

"Do you hear me, Coker?" he boomed.

"Yes, sir! But——"

"Bend over that desk."

Coker did not move.

"Upon my word!" said Mr. Prout, in a gasping voice. "Coker! Do you venture to disobey your form-master?"

Coker did not answer. But still he did not stir. Potter and Greene gave him almost imploring looks. Price winked at Hilton. Every other fellow looked very grave. It was realised that this was a crisis. Prout, obviously, could not retreat. His authority, his prestige, were at stake. But neither, it seemed, was Coker going to retreat. There was an awful pause.

"Very well," said Mr. Prout, breaking the dreadful silence at last. "Very well indeed! You refuse to obey your form-master, Coker! Very well! I shall place the matter before your headmaster, and you will leave Greyfriars this morning. You may now leave the form-room. Wait in your study till you are sent for to receive the sentence of expulsion from Dr. Locke."

Prout pointed to the door with his cane.

Coker looked at the door, and looked at Prout.

Coker had a brain of the densest solidity. But even into Coker's solid brain there crept a realisation that he couldn't get by with this. A fellow who defied his beak

was sacked—sacked on the spot. Coker, if he refused to obey Prout, couldn't carry on in the Fifth-form room like Ajax defying the lightning, but had to get out and go.

As this awful truth penetrated Coker's solid brain, he woke up to realities.

"If—if you please, sir——" gasped Coker.

"Enough, Coker!"

"I—I'll be caned, sir!" stuttered Coker.

He bent over the desk.

Prout paused. He was so intensely exasperated with Coker that for the moment he would have preferred, perhaps, for that obstreperous member of his form to be turfed out of Greyfriars School. But he was, after all, placable—neither did he want an expulsion in his form if he could help it.

"Very well, Coker," said Mr. Prout, at last. "I am glad that you have come to your senses. I shall cane you."

Prout handed out six—and he put all his beef into them.

Coker intended to go through the infliction, since it could not be helped, with all the dignity possible in the painful circumstances. Not a sound was going to escape his lips under the swiping cane.

But as the swipes came down Coker forgot this, and roared. He roared, indeed, as loudly as Billy Bunter had roared on the landing the previous day. His roars woke echoes far beyond the form-room.

Swipe! swipe! swipe!

"Oh! Ow! wow! Oh! ow! Yarooh!" roared Coker.

Swipe! swipe!

"Oooooooooooooooh!" bellowed Coker.

SWIPE!

Prout put terrific energy into the final swipe. It fairly crashed on Coker's trousers. Coker roared like a mad bull.

"Now go to your place, Coker." Prout, breathing rather hard after his uncommon exertions, laid the cane on his desk. "Go!"

Coker almost crawled to his place, doubled up. And lessons, at last, started in the Fifth-form room—one member of the form wriggling and wriggling, like an eel, as if the form he sat upon had become red-hot.

Chapter 4

BEASTLY FOR BUNTER!

"Bunter?"

"Oh! Yes, sir!"

"You are not giving me attention!" rapped Mr. Quelch.

"Oh, yes, sir! I—I heard everything you were saying, sir!" gasped Billy Bunter, in alarm.

Several fellows in the Remove form-room had noticed that Billy Bunter was in a very thoughtful mood: thinking, but obviously not of his lessons. There was a deep wrinkle in his fat brow which showed that his plump brain was hard at work.

There was only one subject upon which William George Bunter ever did any really deep and serious thinking. That was food. So fellows who noticed that the Owl of the Remove was wrapped in thought naturally supposed that he was thinking either of dinner or of something at the tuck-shop in break.

Whatever the subject of his deep reflections Bunter had no attention to waste on Quelch. Unluckily, Mr. Quelch noticed it: and he was not a master to be patient under inattention from his form. Quelch believed that fellows came to Greyfriars to learn things—a view that was not wholly shared by his form, least of all by Billy Bunter.

Called to order by his form-master's sharp voice, Billy Bunter sat up and took notice. Quelch's gimlet-eye glinted at him.

"You heard everything I was saying, Bunter," he repeated.

"Oh, yes, sir! Every word."

"Very good!" said Mr. Quelch, grimly. "Then you will tell me, Bunter, what was the description given by Tacitus of the Roman method of restoring order in a subject province."

"Oh, lor'!" gasped Bunter.

His fat mind had been far away from the Remove form-room. It had been dwelling, as a matter of fact, on a parcel that had been recently deposited in a certain study in the Fifth. Bunter could easily guess what that parcel contained, as it was sent to Horace Coker by his affectionate Aunt Judy. All sorts of schemes and plans for annexing that parcel had been simmering in Bunter's fat mind—to the utter exclusion of what was going on in his own form-room. Bunter did not even know that Quelch was telling his form about Tacitus. He did not, indeed, know who Tacitus was, and did not want to know. He realised that Quelch must have been talking about Tacitus and Roman manners and customs. But, as he had not heard a word, how was he to repeat what the beast had said? Quite plainly, he couldn't.

"Well, Bunter?" said Mr. Quelch, in a grinding voice. "You will repeat the words of Tacitus, which I spoke only a minute ago."

"Oh! Yes, sir! I—I know what he said," stammered Bunter. "I—I heard you quite plainly, sir! He—he said—he said, 'Kiss me, Hardy!'"

Even Bunter would hardly have made such a shot in the dark, had he not been hopelessly confused and alarmed under Quelch's penetrating eye.

"Oh, gum!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter blinked at Mr. Quelch through his big spectacles. The expression

on Quelch's face apprised him that he hadn't got the right answer. Before the Remove master could speak, Bunter hurried on with another shot in the dark.

"I—I—I mean, he—he didn't say 'Kiss me, Hardy!'" gasped Bunter. "He—he said, 'Had I but served Pontius Pilate as I have served Julius Cæsar——'"

"Bunter! Silence! Boys, kindly do not indulge in absurd merriment at this foolish boy's unexampled stupidity. Bunter, I shall repeat the words of Tacitus, and you will write them out a hundred times."

"Oh, crikey!"

"Solitudinem faciunt, pacem appellant!" said Mr. Quelch. "Which means, Bunter, 'They make a solitude, and call it peace.' You will write out both the sentence and its translation a hundred times, after class. And now, Bunter, unless you attend to the lesson, I shall cane you."

After which, Billy Bunter gave his form-master all the attention he could. It was tough on a fellow who wanted to think out ways and means of saving Coker the trouble of dealing with Aunt Judy's parcel. But there was no help for it. A form-master, like a troublesome horse, had to be given his head. Bunter tried to dismiss Coker's parcel from his mind and gave Mr. Quelch his head.

But he was very glad when the Remove came out in break.

While the other fellows streamed out into the fresh morning air the Owl of the Remove negotiated the stairs. On a fine morning, hardly a man was to be found in the studies in break. Bunter hoped to find the coast clear in the Fifth-form studies. But he was uneasy—Coker had been very swift on his track the previous day in the matter of the cake. Bunter did not want to be seen anywhere in the neighbourhood of Coker's study.

But there was nobody in the Fifth-form passage and he almost tiptoed to Coker's door. The door was shut: but all was silent, and the fat Owl ventured to open it and blink in through his big spectacles.

His first blink spotted the parcel, standing on Coker's study table—still unopened. It was amazing, to Bunter, that any fellow could leave a parcel of tuck unopened even for a minute. But there it was—just as it had arrived, and as Bunter had seen Trotter taking it up to the study. That was satisfactory—but Bunter's second blink alighted on a frowning rugged face. He jumped.

Coker was in his study.

Coker was by no means an indoors man. He was almost the last man at Greyfriars School to think of spending the precious minutes of morning break sitting in an armchair in his study. Yet there he was.

He did not, for the moment, observe the fat face peering in at the door.

Coker was in a dark mood.

He had been caned. He was still feeling the twinges of the whopping. But it had worn off a good deal, and Coker was no longer worrying about that. It was the hurt to his dignity that was worrying Coker. That was why he had withdrawn to his study, far from the madding crowd, as it were.

To Coker himself, it seemed almost time for the skies to fall. He, Horace James Coker, had been caned—caned on his trousers, like a fag of the Fourth or the Remove. Of course, he was not going to endure this great wrong patiently. That was unthinkable. But what could a fellow do?

With all that on his mind, it was no wonder that Coker did not join the cheery mob out of doors—no wonder that he passed Aunt Judy's parcel by like the idle wind which he regarded not. He was in no mood for company, and tuck could not heal the damage to his dignity. He sat glooming, too deeply wrapped in dark reflections to heed, for the moment, the fact that his door had opened and that a fat face and a large pair of spectacles glimmered there.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

Coker looked up.

"I—I say, Coker! I—I——" stammered Bunter.

Coker did not get out of the chair. He merely reached out for a book—Dr. Smith's Smaller Latin Dictionary was at hand. He buzzed it at Bunter.

Crash!

It was rather fortunate for Bunter that it was not Dr. Smith's Larger Latin Dictionary. It crashed on a fat chin, and Billy Bunter went over backwards into the passage and sat down quite suddenly with a roar.

"Whoooop! Beast!" roared Bunter.

He was up in a moment, however, and scudding down the passage to the study landing. This, evidently, was no moment for the annexation of Coker's parcel. He fully expected Coker to follow up the dictionary in person: and he did the staircase two at a time in frantic haste.

But the guilty flee when no man pursueth! Coker did not follow Bunter. He did not even field the dictionary. He remained where he was, in deep and gloomy thought—forgetting the unimportant existence of the Owl of the Remove, concentrating on his wrongs, and on his growing determination to get even with Prout.

When a fellow at school thinks of 'getting even' with a beak, it a matter that requires a lot of thought! Coker realised that. He gave it a lot of thought—and Billy Bunter escaped with nothing worse than a pain in a fat chin: and Aunt Judy's parcel remained on the study table, unopened and unheeded.

Chapter 5

WANTED—A CATSPAW!

"I say, you fellows!"

After class that day, Billy Bunter looked for the Famous Five. He found them strolling on the Elm Walk, under the spreading branches, talking football. A Soccer

fixture was coming along, which was a matter of deep interest to Harry Wharton and Co., if not to Billy Bunter.

"I say, you fellows——" squeaked Bunter. "I say, that ass Coker——"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What about Coker?" asked Bob. "I hear that his beak gave him six on the bags this morning. Prout doesn't often whop in the Fifth."

"He's got a parcel in his study——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! I've seen it," explained Bunter, "and I heard that ass Coker tell Potter that it was only a cargo of home-made jam from his aunt—he hasn't even opened it! Jam, you know! Only jam! He actually said only jam! Do you fellows think Coker's mad?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, there it is," said Bunter. "Mind, I wouldn't think of bagging Coker's jam, just for jam. I'm not a fellow to snoop tuck, I hope."

"What a hopeful nature!"

"But look at it," said Bunter. "Coker pulled my ear yesterday. He's a beast all round. My idea is that it would serve him right to bag that parcel. Just to punish him, you know—not because of the jam. I'm not thinking of the jam. All the same, it's jolly good jam—I know Aunt Judy's jam! Luscious! Scrumptious! And it's quite a big parcel! Well, what about it?"

"Nothing about it, you fat cormorant," answered Harry Wharton. "And you'd better steer clear of Coker—he won't be in a good temper, after six whacks on the bags."

"That's what I was thinking of," said Bunter. "He chucked a dictionary at my head just for looking into his study in break. Ten minutes ago he kicked me—just because he saw me in the Fifth-form passage. I dare say he fancied I had an eye on his study—suspicious beast, you know. Now, my idea is this—suppose you fellows start a rag with Coker——"

"Suppose again!" suggested Nugent.

"Do let a fellow speak! You start a rag with Coker—scrag him on the landing like you did yesterday, or catch him in the quad and sit on him, anything you like, so long as you keep him busy while I nip into his study, see? Of course I'll whack out the jam, fair whacks all round. How's that?"

"We're to rag Coker, so that you can pinch his jam?" asked Johnny Bull, staring at the fat junior.

"Well, that's rather a rotten way of putting it," said Bunter. "My idea is to pay him out—the jam's nothing, simply nothing. I hear that he bullied you fellows into doing his lines yesterday——"

"Something wrong with your ears, then," said Bob. "Better give them a wash, if the sudden change wouldn't upset you too much. We did Coker's lines to do him a good turn."

"He, he, he!" chuckled Bunter.

"So you don't believe that," said Bob. "Now then, you men, all kick him together. Lift him right along the Elm Walk."

"I—I mean, of course I believe it, old chap," said Bunter, hastily. "I believe every word of it, though I know it ain't true, of course."

"Oh, my hat!"

"But never mind that," said Bunter. "You fellows owe Coker one. He said you were an obstreperous hooligan, Bob."

"Did he?" gasped Bob.

"Yes, and he said you were a growling bear, Bull."

"Did he?" roared Johnny Bull.

"Yes, and he said you were a milksop, Nugent."

"Did he?" grinned Nugent.

"Yes, and he said you were a black nigger, Inky."

"Did he?" chuckled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Yes, and he said you were a stuck-up swanking fathead, Wharton."

"Did he?" ejaculated the captain of the Remove.

"Yes, and more," said Bunter. "More than I'd like to repeat, really! Now, after all that, you want to pay Coker out, don't you?"

"Well," said Bob Cherry, thoughtfully. "I think we ought to make an example of a fellow who says all those things about us."

"That's just it," said Bunter, eagerly. "Pay him out, you know! I'd forgotten to mention that he said you were a clumsy bargee, Bob, with feet as big as an elephant's. You ought not to take that quietly, old chap."

"I'm not going to," said Bob. He glanced round at his friends, who were all grinning. "You fellows think that a fellow who talks about us like that ought to be jolly well scragged?"

"Yes, rather!"

"The ratherfulness is terrific."

"Then scrag him!" said Bob. "You agree, Bunter."

"What-ho!" said Bunter. "Scrag him bald-headed, you fellows! Make an example of him! Collar him, and—yaroooooooh! Leggo! Wharrer you grabbing me for, I'd like to know? Leggo!"

"But we're going to scrag the fellow who said all those nice things about us," explained Bob. "Go ahead, you men."

"Whoooooop!" roared Billy Bunter, as the Famous Five went ahead. "I say, you fellows, chuck it! It's Coker you've got to scrag, you silly asses! Stop, you fatheads! I say——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bump!

"Yarooooh!"

"Now boot him the length of the Walk," said Bob. "Right up as far as master's gate and back again. Don't go, Bunter! We've hardly started yet."

But Billy Bunter did go. He went as if he were discharged from a rifle. He fairly flew. A roar of laughter followed him as he vanished into space.

About ten minutes later Peter Todd, coming out of the House, discovered William George Bunter leaning on an ancient stone buttress and gasping for breath. Peter paused, staring at him.

"Been running a couple of yards?" he asked. "You look quite winded."

"Beast!" gasped Bunter. "I mean, hold on a minute, Toddy, old chap! I say, Toddy, you and Dutton could handle Coker of the Fifth—at least you could hold him for a few minutes—and you could get Smithy to help—Smithy's always ready for a rag."

"And what are we to handle Coker for?" asked Peter, staring.

"It's nothing to do with his parcel," explained Bunter. "So far as I know, Coker hasn't had a parcel at all, and it's not got jam in it. I'll tell you why, Toddy—Coker said you were a skinny freak, with a nose like a door-knocker and a face like a bath broom."

"Did he?" gasped Toddy.

"Yes, old chap. I was awfully indignant, you being my pal. What about scragging Coker, Toddy? Get three or four fellows to help—Dutton, and Smithy, and Ogilvy, and Bolsover major—I say, he said that your face would stop a clock, Toddy."

Peter Todd gave his fat study-mate a fixed look. Then he suddenly reached out, grasped a fat neck, and banged a fat head against the buttress.

Bang!

"Yoo-hooop!" roared Bunter. "You silly ass! Wharrer you banging my head for?" Bunter had not expected that. Really, he might have, after his recent experience with Harry Wharton and Co. But he hadn't! "Ow! Leggo! Leave off banging my head, you bony beast! Yarooooh!"

Bang! Bang!

"Oh, crikey! Oh, scissors! Help!"

Peter released the fat neck, and walked on, leaving Billy Bunter rubbing the fat head and glaring after him, his very spectacles gleaming with wrath.

"Beast!" roared Bunter.

And he rolled away in search of another catspaw.

"I say, Smithy——" He found the Bounder in the quad and caught him by the sleeve. "I say, Smithy, old chap, I think I ought to tell you what Coker said——"

"Bother Coker, and blow what he said," answered Vernon-Smith, "and don't grab my sleeve with your sticky paw."

"Oh, really, Smithy! I say, Coker said you were a regular young blackguard, and that it would serve you right if the pre's copped you out of bounds——"

"What?" gasped Smithy.

"And he said the sooner you were sacked from Greyfriars the better, old chap! I say, what about scragging Coker, Smithy? He said—yaroooooooh!"

Why Smithy kicked him Bunter did not know. But he knew that Smithy did kick him. On that point no room was left for doubt. Smithy dribbled him quite a distance before the yelling fat Owl escaped.

After that, even Billy Bunter realised that catspaws were not easy to find, and he gave it up. The parcel of jam was still in Coker's study, haunting Bunter's fat thoughts. Bunter simply had to have that jam. But it was borne upon his fat mind that nobody was going to scrag Coker while he annexed the jam, and that somehow he had to solve this knotty problem entirely on his own. And with that problem on his mind, naturally Bunter had no time to write out " Solitudinem faciunt, pacem appellant " a hundred times for Quelch.

Chapter 6

CUT AND DRIED!

" Prep! " said Coker, bitterly.

Potter and Greene glanced at him.

Prep had to be done. Coker spoke of it as if it were the merest triviality: something like Nero fiddling while Rome was burning. Coker showed no sign of bothering about prep.

Seated in the armchair, with his lengthy legs stretched out and a gloomy frown on his brow, Coker regarded his study mates as they got out their books with a scornful and sardonic eye.

" Prep! " he repeated.

" Well, we've got to do it, old chap," said Potter, mildly. " We don't want bother with Prout in the morning."

" Who's Prout? " said Coker.

Really, there was no answering that. Prout was form-master in the Fifth. Coker's question seemed to imply that he was nobody at all, less than nobody, if possible.

" Still feeling it? " asked Greene. He was alluding to the six in the form-room that morning.

" After all, you did get Prout's rag out! " said Potter. " I should forget all about it, if I were you, Coker."

" You might! " said Coker. " I'm not likely to. If Prout whopped you before all the fellows it wouldn't matter a lot so far as I can see. It's a bit different with me, George Potter."

" Oh! Is it? " said Potter, rather warmly.

" I've been whopped," said Coker. " Whopped like a scrubby fag in the Remove. Prout whopped me just as Quelch might whop Bunter. Me! Well, I was whopped

when I was in the Remove, and I dare say it did me good—I believe in whopping juniors. But I can't be whopped in the Fifth. A beak can't whop a senior man without something to follow, at any rate. Prout's asked for it."

Potter and Greene sat down to prep. Coker remained in the armchair, his eye still sardonic. It was only too plain that Potter and Greene were quite unaware that the whopping of Horace Coker marked a crisis in the history of Greyfriars School. They seemed to think it quite an ordinary sort of thing, unusual in the Fifth, no doubt, but nothing to do a song and dance about. It was only too clear that the superlative importance of Horace Coker did not impress them as it impressed Coker himself.

"Prout's asked for it!" repeated Coker, distinctly.

"Not for your impot?" asked Green. "That's washed out by the licking, isn't it?"

"I'm not talking about my impot, Greene. Do you think that Prout can bang his cane on my trousers in the form-room, and nothing happen afterwards?" Coker's lip curled in a sneer. "Well, I'm not the man to take it lying down."

"But you didn't have to take it lying down, you took it bending over," Greene pointed out.

"If you're going to be funny, Greene——"

"Leave it to you, partner," said Greene, affably.

Coker breathed hard.

"What about prep., Coker?" put in Potter, hastily. "You don't want any more trouble with Prout, do you?"

"Yes!" answered Coker.

"Oh!" said Potter and Greene, together.

"If you fellows can leave those rotten books alone for a minute, I'll tell you what I'm going to do," said Coker, scornfully. "You'll have to know anyway, as you're going to help."

"Are we?" murmured Greene.

"Prout's asked for it," said Coker. "Now you know as well as I do, that a man can't walk into his form-master's study and smack his head. That would meet the case, but it can't be done at school."

"Oh, my only summer bonnet!" gasped Potter. "No, old chap, it can't—there's no doubt about that—it just can't."

"But there are other ways," said Coker. "A fellow can hit back in lots of ways, without giving himself away. He can keep it dark, see. Of course, I don't like the idea of being superstitious in any way——"

"Superstitious!" repeated Potter, blankly. "Oh! You mean surreptitious."

"I mean what I say, and I'll thank you not to try to teach me," said Coker. "As I said, a fellow doesn't want to be superstitious: but if Prout knew that I had bunged a bucket of tar over his head he would get me sacked. So I shall have to keep it dark."

Potter and Greene forgot even prep. They just sat and gazed at Horace James Coker in horror.

"A bucket of—of tar!" said Potter, faintly.

"Over Prout's head!" moaned Greene.

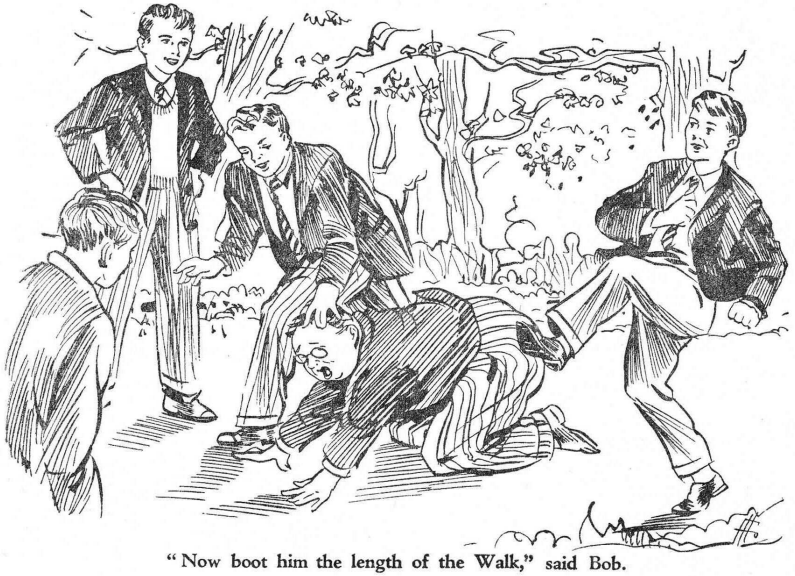
"That's what I've been thinking out," said Coker, with a nod. "Prout will be sorry for himself, I think. But it's rather important not to let him know that it came from me. You see that?"

"Oh! Yes!" gasped Potter. "I—I should think that rather important—if you did it. Thank goodness you can't and won't."

"I can—and will!" said Coker, calmly. "It's up to me to let Prout know where he gets off. I've got it all cut and dried. You know that Prout ambles out into the quad every evening for a trot on the Elm Walk. He's as regular as clock-work, you could set your watch by the time Prout rolls out. Well, it's dark under the elms at night——"

"Dark in lots of places at night!" said Potter, blandly.

"I've noticed that," agreed Greene.



"Now boot him the length of the Walk," said Bob.

Coker gave a suspicious look. But their faces were quite serious, so he passed over these frivolous remarks unheeded.

"Well, Prout's not a cat to see in the dark," he said. "He gets the tar. I know where to get Gosling's bucket that he's been using on the wood-shed roof. That's easy. I parked it on the spot all ready. We drop out on the quiet while Prout's doing his roll on the Elm Walk. You fellows keep cave to make all safe. I handle the bucket and let Prout have the tar. All you two have to do is to keep watch and tip me if anybody blows along. Even you have sense enough for that."

Potter and Greene gazed at him.

Coker evidently meant this. That whopping had deprived him of what little judgment he had—if he had any at all. The iron had entered into his soul, as it were. He was in deadly earnest. Having escaped the 'sack' by taking the caning, he was now going to ask for the sack so emphatically that it couldn't be denied him!

But his friends were not disposed to ask for the same. They could not quite see themselves taking a hand in tarring Prout. Not quite!

"Simple enough, what?" said Coker. "I've thought it out. I'm rather a man for strategy. You fellows could never have thought this out, I fancy."

"Right in one!" gasped Potter. "We couldn't!"

"Hardly!" said Greene.

"Well, it's up to me to do the thinking in this study, having the brains for it," said Coker. "I've thought out the whole thing. It's booked for tomorrow night—if it happened tonight Prout might think of me, after that whopping——"

"He might!" agreed Potter, with a private wink at Greene.

"So I'm leaving it till tomorrow," said Coker. "After prep., tomorrow night, we go down quietly to the form-room, one at a time. I get there first and you fellows join me soon afterwards, making sure you're not spotted. We drop from the window, and after the show's over, get back the same way. We're back in the games-study, with a crowd of fellows by the time Prout staggers in smothered with tar. Rather neatly planned, I think—what?"

"Oh, gum!" said Greene. "Coker, old man, if you tar Prout, you'll be bunked——"

"How will he know? I'm not going to whisper in his ear that it's me doing it when I tip the tar bucket over his napper," said Coker, sarcastically. "Don't argue about it, Greeney. It's settled—all cut and dried. All you fellows have to do is to turn up on time tomorrow night."

"But——" gasped Potter.

"That will do," said Coker. "Don't jaw any more!" Coker heaved himself out of the armchair. "I'd better take a squint at prep.," he added, bitterly. "Prout may put me on con. in the morning! He's capable of it. He would make it an excuse to rag me, if I couldn't translate—he's capable of that, too! I don't know how I stand Prout, really! But he's got it coming."

"But——" gasped Potter, again.

"I said don't jaw any more!" pointed out Coker.

Potter and Greene exchanged a glance and did not jaw any more. They were, in fact, relieved that Coker was apparently not going to jaw any more: prep. had to be done. The three settled down to prep., Coker every now and then indulging in a sardonic chuckle, no doubt thinking of what was coming to Prout.

But when prep. was over, and Potter and Greene went along to the games-study, they exchanged a few words.

"Are we going to ask to be bunked tomorrow night, Greeney?" murmured Potter.

Greene smiled.

"Not a whole lot," he said.

"Can we stop that ass somehow?" asked Potter. "No good talking sense to him, I suppose?"

"Though you bray a fool in a mortar, yet will not his folly depart from him," quoted Greene, with a shake of the head.

"But we can't let him do it."

"Not if we can help it."

"We shall have to think this out!" said Potter.

Coker had thought it out, and regarded it as settled and fixed and done with, unchangeable as the laws of the Medes and Persians. But Potter and Greene had some thinking to do, too. They had to think out how to save Coker from himself if they could: how to keep the great Horace from making an unexampled ass of himself. And with a fellow like Coker, that required some hard thinking.

Chapter 7

THE TORTURES OF TANTALUS!

Billy Bunter smiled genially.

Bunter was pleased.

It was the following day: Wednesday, which was half-holiday at Greyfriars. It was fine weather and most fellows were likely to spend that half-holiday out of doors.

Harry Wharton and Co. were playing a visiting team in Little Side. Bunter was not interested in Soccer, except in so far as it kept interfering fellows occupied, those who might otherwise have barged in between Bunter and jam. A senior Form match was on, too, Fifth against Sixth: and Bunter had rather hoped that Coker might be in the Fifth-form team. But there was no earthly chance of that, Coker's Soccer being of a kind for which his form-captain had absolutely no

use whatever. But Potter and Greene were playing for the Fifth: and now, adorning the doorway with his fat person, Billy Bunter had the satisfaction of seeing Horace Coker stalk out of the House.

He had dreaded that Coker might remain in his study or hang about the Fifth-form quarters somewhere. And there was Coker—stalking out. Bunter's eyes and spectacles lingered on him as he went.

He hoped that Coker was going out of the gates. That would have seen him safely off the scene. But Coker did not head for the gates: he went round the school buildings and disappeared from sight.

Where Coker was going, and what he was up to, Bunter did not know; and did not care so long as it kept Horace away from his study.

Coker had not even glanced at the fat junior as he went out. He was not aware that Bunter had designs on Aunt Judy's jam. Indeed, so inconsiderable a microbe as Billy Bunter was not likely to linger in Coker's thoughts now—thoughts fully occupied with his masterly campaign against Prout. Coker was going round to give Gosling's wood-shed the once-over, to make sure that that bucket of tar was available when wanted. He was quite oblivious of both Bunter and jam.

Billy Bunter revolved on his axis and rolled towards the stairs.

The coast was clear now—Potter and Greene at football, Coker gone off somewhere on his own. Nobody in Coker's study—but a huge jar of jam in the study cupboard. And at Bunter's mercy.

Very likely Coker and Co. had sampled the jam already. But they couldn't have got very deep into it yet. There would be plenty for Bunter. No wonder Billy Bunter smiled a genial smile.

But alas! The hapless Owl of the Remove had reckoned without his host—in the shape of an angular gentleman whose gimlet-eye fell upon him.

"Bunter!"

"Oh! Yes, sir." Bunter spun round, and blinked at his form-master. He wondered what Quelch wanted now.

"You have not brought me your lines, Bunter."

"My—my lines!" stammered Bunter. He had forgotten his lines. And there were a hundred of them!

How could a fellow remember such utter rot as 'Solitudinem faciunt, pacem appellant,' when he was thinking wholly and solely of jam! Obviously a fellow couldn't. Bunter had quite forgotten the words of that famous historian, Tacitus: indeed, he had forgotten that there ever was such a beast as Tacitus at all. Unluckily, his form-master had a better memory.

"Have you done your lines, Bunter!"

"Oh! Yes, sir! No, sir! I mean——"

"You have not done your lines, Bunter!"

"I—I was just going to, sir——" stammered Bunter.

"Very good, Bunter," said Mr. Quelch, grimly. "If you were just going to do

your lines, you may proceed to do them. If they are not handed to me by four o'clock you will be caned."

"Yes, sir!" groaned Bunter.

He rolled away up the stairs, heading, not for Coker's study, but his own. He wanted jam, but he did not want to be caned.

But in No. 7 in the Remove, Bunter did not immediately sit down to lines. He had to do those lines, and he had to hand them in by four o'clock. But the lure of the jam in Coker's study was too irresistible. And the coast might not be clear again in a hurry. Thinking of Quelch's cane, Bunter was moved to write his lines without delay. Thinking of Coker's jam, he was stirred to take immediate action in the direction of Coker's study cupboard. For a minute or two, Quelch's cane and Coker's jam jostled one another as it were in Bunter's fat mind—it was a struggle between the two. But the jam won. Billy Bunter rolled out of his study, rolled down the passage to the landing, and rolled across to the Fifth-form passage.

"Bunter!"

The fat Owl fairly jumped at that sharp voice.

How could a fellow guess that Quelch, whom he had left a few minutes ago downstairs, would be up on the study landing talking to Mr. Prout?

Bunter hadn't guessed that one!

But there was Quelch: and his gimlet-eye fairly gleamed at the dismayed fat Owl as he came to a sudden dismayed halt.

"Where are you going, Bunter?" asked Mr. Quelch.

"Oh! Nowhere, sir!" gasped Bunter. "I—I wasn't going to the Fifth studies, sir. I—I—I was—was just walking about, sir."

"You should be writing your lines, Bunter."

"Oh! Yes, sir! I—I'm just going to——"

"Go to your study at once, Bunter, and do not leave it again till you have written your imposition."

"Oh! Yes, sir!" moaned Bunter.

It was a dispirited and infuriated fat Owl that rolled back to No. 7. Coker's jam had faded out of the picture once more: it had gone from his gaze like a beautiful dream.

This time Bunter settled down to lines. There was no help for it—he dared not risk running into Quelch again with these lines unwritten. Slowly, sadly, the fat Owl sat down to write 'Solitudinem faciunt, pacem appellant,' with the translation thereof, a hundred times.

Bunter was not a quick worker. He was quick at some things—had he got going on Coker's jam, for instance, an arrow in flight would have had nothing on Bunter for speed. But in most things Bunter was slow, and at lines slowest of all. Four o'clock had sounded from the Greyfriars clock-tower before Bunter had finished.

It was a weary fat Owl that trailed down to Quelch's study with the lines, a quarter of an hour late after all his efforts.

Quelch glanced at the lines, expressed his opinion of Bunter's hand-writing with a snort, and, greatly to Bunter's relief, dismissed him.

After such a loss of time the fat Owl could hardly hope to find the coast still clear. And it wasn't. The football match was not yet over: most of the Fifth were still out of the House. But as Bunter tiptoed to the door of Coker's study he heard sounds within, revealing that Horace was at home.

There was a sound of tramping feet, as if Coker were walking up and down his study: and Bunter heard a muttering voice.

"Let him wait! Let him just wait! He will get it all right! Ha, ha!"

It was a laugh—one of those sardonic laughs.

Why Horace James Coker was walking about his study, mumbling and chuckling, Bunter did not know, and he wasn't interested. But he knew that Coker was there, and he rolled away sadly.

After which, all that Billy Bunter could do was to wait on the study landing, hoping that Coker would go down—instead of which Potter and Greene came up, the Form match being over. And Bunter, guessing that there would be tea in Coker's study, with Aunt Judy's jam featured in the programme, just groaned.

It was not Billy Bunter's happy afternoon. Tantalus, of old, was tortured by the sight of good things for ever just out of his reach. Billy Bunter was feeling like Tantalus, only more so. Never, indeed, had a fellow yearning for jam been so tantalised. Bunter rolled away in search of a tea in a Remove study in the lowest spirits.

Chapter 8

BUNTER KNOWS HOW!

"Oh!" gasped Billy Bunter.

His little round eyes danced behind his big round spectacles. Bunter was standing at the open door of a study cupboard, gazing at—jam!

It was sheer luck for Bunter.

After so many disappointments, he had hardly dared expect it. Now it had happened—for there he was, in Coker's study, feasting his eyes on Coker's jam.

It was nearly time for prep. Bunter had been hanging about the study landing. He had seen Potter and Greene go into the games study, at the end of the Fifth-form passage, and shut the door after them. But Coker was not with them—that inexpressible beast, it seemed, was lingering in his own quarters. Then, to his boundless delight, Coker came along and went downstairs.

Blinking over the banisters, Bunter saw him go out of the House. It was not yet lock-up but the dusk was falling quickly, and it did not seem likely that Coker

would be gone long. He was likely, if Bunter had only known it, to be gone just long enough to abstract Gosling's tar-bucket from the wood-shed, get it round to the Elm Walk, and park it there out of sight—ready for the performance booked for later in the evening. That could not be done in broad daylight with a lot of fellows about, so Coker had left it till the latest possible moment before lock-up. But whether Coker's absence was long or short, Bunter had time to whip into his study while he was gone—and he whipped!

Now he stood gloating over Aunt Judy's jam.

As he had suspected, Coker and Co. had sampled that jam. But Miss Judith Coker had sent her beloved nephew Horace a very large supply—many samples might have been taken almost without being missed. It was, in fact, a huge seven-pound jar that stood in the study cupboard. And it was lovely jam. It was home-made jam, and Aunt Judy followed old-fashioned methods in jam-making — she knew nothing of modern scientific discoveries, and made strawberry jam with strawberries, in the old-fashioned way!

Bunter's eyes almost popped through his spectacles at the sight of that vast quantity of gorgeous, scrumptious jam.

Yet even now there were difficulties. He had to get away with his plunder, quickly. Coker might come in any minute. Even strawberry jam would not have consoled Bunter for what would happen if Coker found him there. But how was a fellow to walk off with a seven-pound jar under his arm? Bunter had not thought of that. His fat thoughts had been concentrated on jam, not on transport. But he had to think of it now. Any Fifth-form man might see him leave the study, and if he saw him leaving it with a seven-pound jar under his fat arm—— Bunter realised that that would not do.

Gladly he would have sat down in Coker's armchair, with the jar on his knees, and a tablespoon in his hand. Life would have become one grand sweet song—if only there had been time! But there wasn't!

How was he to get that jar away?

There was a bag in the bottom of the cupboard. Bunter grabbed it and packed the jar of jam in it. The actual jar was out of sight in the bag, and he wondered whether any fellow would notice the bag especially, if he was seen taking it away. He could not help feeling that any fellow would! And he knew there were fellows about—he could hear Hilton and Price talking at the doorway of the next study.

Necessity is the mother of invention. Billy Bunter's fat brain did not often work quickly, but it had to work quickly now. A way had to be found, and he found it. It was the sight of a ball of string among the other things in the study cupboard that set his fat wits going.

He grabbed that ball of string. He tied the end to the handle of the bag. Then he rolled to the window with the bag and pushed up the lower sash.

He blinked out with an anxious blink. But nothing was to be seen but falling dusk.

Somewhere out there in the dusk was Coker of the Fifth. But he might come in any minute and Bunter dared not lose a moment. He heaved the bag to the window-sill, slid it over and paid out the string.

A slackening of the string told him when the bag had landed on solid earth. He dropped the ball of string after it.

Then he shut the window.

His prize was safe now. All he had to do was to get away. He rolled across to the door, opened it an inch, and listened.

Hilton and Price were still talking in their doorway. But to his relief, in a few moments, he heard them go into their study and the door closed.

He stepped out into the passage, closed Coker's door, and rolled away towards the landing as casually as he could.

Blundell, the captain of the Fifth, was standing in the doorway of the games-study, talking to Bland, Fitzgerald, Potter, Greene, Smith major, and other Fifth-form men in the room. Bunter felt a spasm of trepidation as he passed, but his fat hands were empty. Some of the seniors glanced at him, but with no more interest than Fifth-form seniors naturally felt in so insignificant a person as a Remove junior. Had Bunter been loaded with Coker's jam, no doubt the matter would have been different. As it was, he passed scarcely heeded.

He breathed more freely when he was safe on the study landing.

Coker, very likely, would make a fuss when he missed that huge jar of jam. Very likely he would suspect Bunter—he was suspicious beast enough! But if he learned that Bunter had been seen in the Fifth-form quarters, he would learn also that Bunter certainly hadn't been carrying a huge jar of jam or anything at all. That was all right!

The fat Owl rolled away down the staircase.

"Lock-up in a minute or two, fathead," called out Peter Todd, who was in the junior lobby when Bunter rolled in there and across to the door.

The fat Owl blinked at him.

"Oh! I ain't going out, Toddy—I mean, I'm only going out for a minute. I left a jam—I mean a book—in the quad—I've got to fetch it in. I can't do my prep. without a dick."

"You left your dick in the quad!" ejaculated Peter. "What the thump were you doing with a dictionary in the quad?"

"Oh! Nothing! I mean, I was reading it—rather like reading a Latin dictionary, you know—it's jolly interesting, Peter."

"Oh, scissors!" said Peter.

Bunter rolled out and disappeared, leaving Peter Todd staring. Why Bunter was fibbing, Peter didn't know, unless it was from force of habit. Still, he wasn't interested, and the fat Owl was left to his own devices.

Billy Bunter shot away in the dusk, and in less than a minute, he was grabbing up the bag that had been landed below Coker's study window.

It couldn't be left there obviously. There were several windows near at hand, and when they were lighted, that bag would be plainly revealed to any eye, and masters often walked in the quad in the evening. But Bunter's plans were made. He detached the string, and crammed it into a pocket. Then he grabbed up the bag and rolled away with it.

Minutes were precious: any moment now he might hear the lock-up bell. But that bag, with its precious contents, had to be safely concealed. The fat Owl could not walk it into the House under a sea of eyes and carry it up to the Remove. There were safer ways.

The jammy feast had to be left until after prep. But after prep., Bunter was going to let down the string from the window of No. 7 in the Remove, after his study-mates were off the scene. Then he would slip surreptitiously out of the House, field the bag, and attach it to the string. Then, in No. 7 Study once more, he would pull it up. After which, he would revel in jam.

In the meantime, that bag had to be parked in some safe spot where no eye could fall on it.

That was an easy one. Bag in hand, Bunter rolled across to the shadowy old elms.

"Oh, crikey!" he breathed, suddenly.

A burly figure—dim and shadowy, but recognisable as Coker's, emerged from the dimness of the Elm Walk and stalked away to the House.

Luckily, Coker did not glance in Bunter's direction. The fat Owl blinked after him, almost giddy with his narrow escape. He had almost run into Coker, with Coker's jam in Coker's bag in his fat hand!

Why Coker had been lurking under the elms Bunter had no idea. He was thankful that Coker was gone now, at any rate.

He rolled into the Elm Walk. It was dusky in the open quad, quite dark under the spreading branches over the Walk. A safer spot could not have been found within the precincts of Greyfriars School as a parking-place.

Billy Bunter deposited the bag behind a gnarled old trunk. There it was safe till he came out for it after prep. It cost him a pang to leave the jam there. But that could not be helped. Leaving the bag completely blotted from sight under the old elms, the fat junior hurried back to the House.

He was just in time for calling-over.

"Well, did you find your dick?" asked Peter Todd, as a breathless fat Owl joined the ranks of the Remove in hall.

"Eh! What dick?" asked Bunter. Billy Bunter belonged to the class of persons who proverbially ought to have good memories. But, unfortunately for him, he had a bad one.

"Didn't you go out after your dick?" grinned Peter.

"Eh! Oh! Yes! No! I couldn't find it," said Bunter, hastily, "I—I looked everywhere, and—and then came in. Come to think of it, I—I think I left the

jam in my study—I mean the dick—I think I left the dick in my study, Peter, after all, I——"

"Silence!" called out Wingate of the Sixth.

And Mr. Hacker proceeded to call the names. Billy Bunter blinked across at Coker, among the Fifth-form men. Prout was in hall, and Bunter noticed that Coker was looking at the portly Prout, with quite a peculiar expression on his face. Coker seemed interested in his form-master, which did not matter a bean, so long as he was not interested in Bunter!

When the Remove went up to prep., Billy Bunter paused to speak to the Famous Five on the Remove landing.

"I say, you fellows! If Coker blows in——"

"We're not expecting another visit from Coker," said Harry Wharton. "Coker won't blow in."

"Well, he might," said Bunter. "You know Coker—suspicious beast! Look how he jumped on me the other day about a cake, making out that I knew something about it. He might make out I knew something about the jam——"

"You've been scoffing Coker's jam, you fat villain?" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry! So far as I know, Coker never had any jam—if he had, I never saw it in his study. Besides, I haven't been to his study. But if he missed it he might blow in and kick up a shindy—you know Coker! So—so if he blows in, you fellows boot him out, will you? Don't listen to a word he says, just boot him out. You can take my word for it that I never touched his jam, if he had any jam, which I don't believe. You just boot him out, and look here, you keep Coker off, and I'll let you have some of the jam. See!"

And Billy Bunter rolled off to his study, leaving the chums of the Remove staring.

Chapter 9

SAFETY FIRST!

"Coker, old man——"

"Coker, old chap——"

Potter and Greene spoke in anxious tones, after prep. that evening in their study in the Fifth.

They were worried. They hoped against hope, as it were, that Coker had thought better of that wild scheme for getting even with Prout. But it was a very faint hope. Any fellow with a single spot of sense would have thought better of it, while there was yet time. But had Horace James Coker a single spot of sense? Long acquaintance with Coker had convinced them that he hadn't.

Coker gave his pals a cold, grim look.

"Are you going to argue?" he asked.

"Well, you see——" murmured Potter.

"You see, old fellow——" urged Greene.

"Don't jaw," said Coker. "Didn't I tell you that I had it all cut and dried? Am I a fellow to change my mind? You may as well understand, first as last, that when I decide a thing, it's settled, fixed, like the laws of the Swedes and Nasturtiums. So no more jaw on the subject."

Only too evidently, Coker hadn't the necessary single spot of sense!

"All you fellows have got to do," resumed Coker, "is to carry out instructions. Even you fellows can do that. You're not very bright: but you can do that much. I've got the whole bag of tricks ready. I trickled out just before lock-up to bag Gosling's tar-bucket, and I got it and parked it under the elms all ready. It's there when I want it."

"Oh, dear," murmured Greene.

"Now I'm going down," said Coker. "I shall dodge quietly into the form-room, and wait for you fellows to join me there. Come one at a time, and take care that you're not noticed. You five minutes after me, Potter, you five minutes after Potter, Greene. Got that?"

"But——" said Potter and Greene together.

"I said don't jaw!" Horace Coker rose. "I'll be pushing along! Don't forget what I've told you. Better be careful, it's bunking for tarring a beak, if you're not jolly careful. Now I'm off."

Coker strolled out of the study.

Potter and Greene gave one another a sort of hopeless look.

"That fathead means business, Greeney," said Potter.

"So do we," said Greene.

"Well, yes! We're not exactly keeping cave for Coker while he gets himself sacked and us after him," remarked Potter. "Think he'll go without us, if we don't join up?"

"Sure to! Coker's a sticker!"

Potter wrinkled his brows in thought. Neither he nor Greene had the remotest intention of joining Coker in the dark form-room, dropping from the window with him, and keeping 'cave' while he tarred Prout. There was no question of that: the question was, what would Coker do when they didn't join up?

If he came back to look for them, that was all right, they could keep out of sight and the wild escapade would be off, for that night at least. But Potter shook his head. He knew that Greene was right: Coker was a sticker. If his pals did not join up he would sally forth on his own, and carry on without Potter and Greene to keep 'cave.' They would be out of it: but Coker would be in it, in it right up to the neck.

"Better get that clear," said Greene. "Coker's going. That's a cert. We're not, but Coker is. But we can't let him get Prout."

Potter shuddered at the idea.

"Well, we can stop him," said Greene. "Prout's as regular as clockwork taking that trot of his, but a clock can be stopped, you know. We've got to stop Prout taking his trot this evening. Coker can wait under the elms with his jolly old tar-bucket till he gets tired and comes in. Perhaps he'll catch a cold, which will keep him out of mischief for awhile," added Greene, hopefully.

Potter nodded.

"Got the key all right?" he asked.

"You bet!" Greene drew a key from his trousers-pocket. It was a study-door key, to be precise, the key of Mr. Prout's study. Quite unknown to Coker, his pals also had been making plans: they could be as tragic as old Horace.

"Nobody saw you prig it?" asked Potter, uneasily.

"Of course not—easy enough while the beaks were jawing their heads off in Common Room."

"It's frightfully risky, locking a beak in his study."

"Not so risky as letting that mad ass swamp him with tar."

"No!" agreed Potter.

"It's doing Prout a good turn," argued Greene. "He will be wild when he finds his study door locked on him, but he would be jolly glad, if he knew that a pail of tar was waiting to go over his napper. Somebody will pick up the key and let him out later, but getting the tar off his nob would be a longer job. We can't do anything else, Potter, we just can't let Prout go out and collect that tar."

"We can't!" agreed Potter.

They left the study and went downstairs. Greene left Potter at the foot of the staircase and strolled away in a casual manner. With an air of unconcern, he drifted into Masters' passage.

From the corner, he glanced down that passage, and was a little dismayed to see Monsieur Charpentier, the French master, tap at Prout's door and enter. In ten minutes or so more, according to his usual schedule, Prout would be going out for his accustomed trot. The French master, apparently, had dropped in for a few minutes chat with Prout.

"Blow!" murmured William Greene.

He had to lock Prout's door, to save Prout. He did not want to lock Mossoo in also, Mossoo was in no danger from Coker. But it could not be helped. At any price, Prout had to be saved from the tar and Coker from the consequences. Greene made up his mind to it.

Quietly, but quickly, he walked up Masters' passage. It was the work of hardly more than a moment to slip the key into the outside of the lock on Prout's door, turn it, jerk it out, and walk on. As he walked on Greene heard Prout's boom:

"What is that? What?" Prout must have noticed the click of the lock.

"Mon Dieu!" came Monsieur Charpentier's squeak.

Greene did not stop to listen. He vanished into space.

A minute or two later, he was going with Potter into the Fifth-form games-study. Potter whispered:

"O.K.?"

"Right as rain."

"What about the key?"

"Dropped it at the corner. Somebody will find it later."

"Prout's safe."

"Safe as houses."

That was all. In the games-study, Potter and Greene joined in cheery talk with other Fifth-form men. When a sound of banging on a door was heard echoing from the distance below, some of the Fifth-formers went down to see what was up, but Potter and Greene did not go. They weren't interested. They were interested only in saving Coker from himself.

Prout was safe! Coker, waiting in the darkness on the Elm Walk for the beak who was not coming, was safe too. 'Safety first' was the idea, and Potter and Greene were pleased to think that they had secured safety for everybody all round. They felt quite cheerful and satisfied. Coker, waiting out in the cold and darkness under the elms, was very likely neither cheerful nor satisfied, but that could not be helped!

Chapter 10

AT LAST

"Look here, Toddy!"

Billy Bunter, in No. 7 Study, blinked at Peter Todd in great exasperation.

Prep. was over. Tom Dutton had gone down to the Rag. But Peter, instead of going down as usual, had dipped his pen in the ink again and started writing a letter. It was intensely annoying to Bunter.

He wanted the study to himself. He had to let the string down from the window, to be attached to the bag containing the jar of jam. He couldn't do that under Peter's eye. Toddy would want to know what on earth he was up to. Billy Bunter knew what to expect if Toddy discovered the facts. There would be swipes from a fives bat for the grub-raider of the Remove: and, still more serious, the jam would go back to its owner! Bunter could not run that awful risk. He just couldn't begin till Toddy went, and there was Toddy sitting at the study table, writing a long letter home! It was unforeseen and annoying.

"Look here, Toddy, you can write that letter in the Rag," said Bunter.

"Why should I?" asked Peter. "Too much row in the Rag. Roll away and don't jaw while I'm writing."

"I think Wharton wants to speak to you about the football, Toddy. He will expect to see you in the Rag."

Peter looked at his fat study-mate.

"What do you want me to go down for?" he asked.

"Eh! Oh! I—I don't, of course," said Bunter, hastily. "I haven't got anything to do here after you're gone, Toddy, or—or anything. But I don't think you ought to keep Wharton waiting to speak to you about the jam——"

"The what?"

"I—I mean the football. I wasn't thinking about jam—I—I wonder what made me say jam! Hadn't you better go down, Toddy?"

"No," said Toddy, "I hadn't! And if you're wandering in your mind, go and wander in the passage instead."

"Oh, really, Toddy——"

"Shut up, anyhow!" said Peter, and he resumed writing his letter.

Billy Bunter bestowed an exasperated glare on the top of his bent head. But it was clear that Toddy was not going down, which meant that the fat Owl couldn't carry on in his own study. So he rolled out of No. 7, and rolled away to No. 1. Other fellows would be gone down, if Toddy wasn't: and the Owl of the Remove only needed an unoccupied study.

But Wharton and Nugent were still in No. 1 Study when the anxious fat Owl blinked in at the doorway. They glanced at him.

"I say, you fellows, aren't you going down?" asked Bunter.

"Not till Bob comes along," answered Harry.

"Why not go up the passage and call for him?"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"There isn't a spot of grub in the cupboard here," he answered. "So you needn't worry about us going down, Bunter."

"Think I'm after your grub?" hooted Bunter.

"What else are you after?"

"What on earth are you going to do with that ball of string, Bunter?" asked Nugent.

"Eh! Oh! Nothing! I wasn't going to let it down from the window."

"What?"

"Why should I!" said Bunter. "Nothing of the sort, of course. I—I'm going to lend it to Smithy to tie up a parcel. Know if Smithy's gone down?"

"He passed this door a minute or two ago," said Harry.

"Oh, good!" said Bunter.

He rolled up the passage again, to No. 4 Study, which belonged to Vernon-Smith and Tom Redwing. But though Smithy had gone down, Redwing was still in the study, and he gave Bunter an inquiring stare as he blinked in.

"Want anything?" he asked.

"Beast!" answered Bunter, morosely: and he rolled on again.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" Bob Cherry's cheery roar greeted the fat Owl, as he blinked into No. 13 Study. "Pray enter. Come to lend me a hand with my lines, Bunter?"

"Eh! No! I say, Bob, old chap, Wharton's waiting for you——"

"Is he? Tell him I'm coming along when I've finished my lines for Quelch."

Billy Bunter breathed hard and deep. Really, it began to look as if he never would find an empty study. He rolled along to No. 2: but did not need to blink in, the squeaking of Tom Brown's radio could be heard from the passage.

"Beast!" breathed Bunter.

But in No. 3 Study the harassed fat Owl had luck at last: Ogilvy and Russell had gone down after prep. and the study was vacant.

Greatly relieved in his fat mind, Billy Bunter rolled into No. 3 and shut the door. The study was dark, but he did not venture to turn on the light. He rolled across the room to the window and bumped into the table in the dark. The table rocked and there was a sound of an inkpot rolling off and falling to the floor.

But that trifle did not worry Bunter. It was not his study, so it did not matter if ink streamed over the carpet.

He reached the window and pushed up the lower sash. Outside, all was dark and quiet. He attached the end of the string to a chair-back and let the ball fall from the sill. It dropped downward, unwinding as it went, and the listening fat Owl heard a faint 'plop' far below as it landed.

He closed the window and trod quietly back to the door. A moment more and he was in the passage, grinning.

All was clear now. All he had to do was to slip out of the House unseen, field the bag that he had left hidden under the elms and tie it to the string. Then, once more in No. 3 study, all he had to do was to pull it up. And then Bunter's eyes danced behind his spectacles as he thought of what would follow—unlimited jam! His fat face was quite merry and bright as he rolled away down the stairs. He had lost a good deal of time owing to that beast Toddy sticking in the study: but there was still ample time before dorm.

But he had to be careful. A fellow getting out of House bounds after prep. had to be very careful indeed. Beaks were very particular about such things. But Bunter was in luck again. Some sort of a row was going on in Masters' passage, and a good many fellows were heading in that direction—nobody had any attention to waste on Billy Bunter.

But for the pressing matter on his mind, Bunter would have rolled off to Masters' passage to see what was going on there. It was evidently something very unusual. But he had no time to bother about it now. Not a fellow was anywhere near the junior lobby when Bunter rolled in and blinked round him: and it was an easy matter to unlock and unbolt the door, slip out, and shut it after him: and he grinned cheerfully when he found himself out in the quad.

It was all plain sailing now!

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A couple of minutes to roll across to the elms and secure that bag, another couple of minutes to carry it round under the Remove window and tie it to the string from the window of No. 3 Study, then he would be back in the House again, and not a soul the wiser. And then a great and glorious feast, a feast that made his mouth water just to think of it. Coker and Co. had sampled that jam, but five or six pounds remained in the jar; strawberry jam made of real strawberries, Aunt Judy's very best! It was a dream of delight, and it was a happy fat Owl that rolled away in the dark, and groped into the Elm Walk under the black, shadowy, spreading branches. And then——

What happened next Billy Bunter did not know. It was so very unexpected, and so very surprising! Life is full of surprises, of one sort or another, and no doubt Billy Bunter had had his share of them. But never in his fat life had he been so utterly taken by surprise as he was when he rolled under the dark branches of the Elm Walk.

Chapter 11

COKER'S CATCH!

Horace Coker gave a little start, and listened intently.

Coker was getting impatient.

Indeed, he was beginning to wonder whether Prout was ever coming, or whether perhaps he was changing his usual manners and customs for once. That evening trot on the Elm Walk was as regular as a clock, but even a clock may go wrong sometimes. It was exceedingly exasperating to think that Prout had gone wrong, so to speak, on this particular night of all nights, when that member of his form was waiting for him in the dark with a bucket of tar.

Coker was irritated already, before arriving at his ambush. Potter and Greene had failed to join him in the form-room as per schedule. Coker had waited some time before it dawned on his powerful brain that Potter and Greene weren't coming. Then he was tempted to go in search of them and bang their heads together, as they richly deserved. But that meant cutting out the tar for Prout, and the tar for Prout was the first consideration. So giving up Potter and Greene, Coker had scrambled down from the form-room window on his lonely own and headed for the dark elms and ambush.

How long he had been waiting since he did not know—it seemed like hours. The minutes passed very slowly, lurking in black darkness, with a cold wind on the back of his neck.

But Coker, as his pals knew, was a sticker. He had rooted out the bucket of tar from the spot where he had parked it. He had it in his large and sinewy hands,

as he waited, standing in the middle of the shadowy Walk, waiting and watching. He had to wait, but watching was not of much use, for Coker was no cat to see in the dark—and it was very dark. But if he could not see, he could hear, and he used his ears, which were large and reliable. Even if he did not hear Prout, he couldn't miss him when he came, for he stood in the middle of the shadowy path and Prout would walk right into him, when he came.

But was he coming? Had something happened to stop him? It seemed unlikely, but why did he not come? Coker couldn't wait for ever, he had to be back in the House before supper, or he would be missed. It was frightfully annoying to think that, after such careful planning, Prout was going to let him down simply by not turning up.

Then, suddenly, he heard footsteps coming under the dark branches that overvaulted and darkened the Elm Walk. They were heavy footsteps, and Prout had a heavy tread: certainly the unseen person approaching in the dark was a plump and heavy person, and Coker heard, too, a grunt. Prout often grunted, being a little short of wind when he was in a state of locomotion. There were others at Greyfriars liable to grunt in similar circumstances, such as Billy Bunter of the Remove: but Coker, of course, was not thinking about Bunter of the Remove. He was thinking about Prout: and his eyes gleamed, as he heard that lumbering tread and that fat little grunt.

Up went Coker's hands with the bucket of tar.

Did Coker, at that awful moment, hesitate, or feel a spot of doubt, even a spot of dread? It was not likely. Prout had whopped him—on the trousers—before a staring form! Whopped Coker of the Fifth, just as Quelch might have whopped a Remove junior, or Wiggins a Third-Form fag. A beak who did that deserved tar on the napper, in fact, had asked for tar on the napper, sat up and begged for it. Tar on the napper was indeed a mild reprisal; somthing lingering, with boiling oil in it, might have been more suitable. Anyhow, Prout was going to get the tar on the napper: and that was that.

Swooooooosh!

Coker could not see his victim, beyond a dark shadow in darkness, so some credit was due to him for the neat way he handled the situation. The tar-bucket up-ended over an unsuspecting head, it came down with a swoosh of tar and it landed on the head like a bonnet. Prout was not a tall gentleman, Coker in fact was taller than his form-master: but it seemed to Coker that Prout seemed shorter than usual, somehow: anyhow the tar-bucket descended quite easily and neatly on the unseen head, and fitted nicely on the plump shoulders below. Tar streamed out, amid horrible and hideous gurgles from the astounded victim.

Coker gave a gasping, triumphant chuckle.

But he did not linger.

He was not interested in his unhappy victim's frantic asphyxiated gurgles and guggles. He was interested in getting off the scene just as fast as he possibly

could, and showing up as soon as possible in the House, just to make it clear that he hadn't been out. Even Coker realised that the tarring of a form-master would cause a most tremendous row, and that it behoved him to remain unsuspected, unless he wanted to depart suddenly from Greyfriars School, which he did not in the least.

Coker's long legs fairly whisked as he ran back to the House.

Hardly a minute after the tar-bucket had bonneted the hapless victim under the dark trees, Coker was clambering in at the form-room window and dropping breathless within.

Panting, he closed and fastened the window. He paused for a minute or so to recover his breath: then he slipped out of the form-room and lost no time in getting to the games-study. He expected to find a mob of the Fifth there as usual: but, to his surprise, only two Fifth-form men were in the games-study: Potter and Greene.

They stared at him. Everybody else had gone down to see what on earth was up among the beaks. Perhaps it was just as well: for Potter and Greene noticed at once what has escaped Coker, that the signs of guilt were thick on the happy Horace. Even a handy fellow requires to be careful in handling tar, and Coker was not a handy fellow: he was probably the clumsiest fellow at Greyfriars School or anywhere else.

There was tar on Coker's large hands, a spot of tar on his aggressive chin, patches of tar on his sleeves and the knees of his trousers. Certainly the most casual eye, falling on Horace Coker, would have noticed that he had recently been at close quarters with a tar-bucket.

"Chucked it, Coker?" asked Greene. They had no doubt that Coker had tired of waiting in the dark for the beak who did not come, and had 'chucked' the enterprise for that night. They rather expected signs of wrath from Coker, both from his disappointment in failing to get Prout and from his resentment of their desertion. But Coker was not wrathy. He was grinning.

"You bet!" said Coker. "I chucked it all right, bucket and all."

"Not on Prout?" ejaculated Potter.

"Who else?" grinned Coker.

"But—but Prout never went out after all——"

"Didn't he?" chuckled Coker. "That's all you know. He kept me waiting a long time, but I got him."

"You got Prout!" gasped Greene.

"Right on the cokernut," said Coker. "Bucket and all—fitted him like a new hat! I left him gurgling."

"Oh, holy smoke!" gasped Potter.

They gazed at Coker in utter horror. They had done their best, they had stopped Prout from going out, they had banked on the locked door keeping Prout in too long for him to take his usual trot. Certainly it had delayed him, they knew that.

But, from what Coker told them, it seemed that Prout had gone out after all, later than usual: but he had gone, and had got the tar! It was not a case of better late than never! It was awful, it was terrible, it was frightful! How Coker could grin so cheerily, when obviously he was going to be sacked from the school, was quite a mystery to Potter and Greene.

"You—you—you really did it!" moaned Greene, faintly.

"Didn't I say I would?"

"Oh! You idiot!" groaned Potter. "It's the sack! You frightful idiot!"

"Don't be a goat," said Coker. "I'm all right! Wait till you see Prout stagger in—tar from head to foot—ha, ha!"

"You'll be sacked!" hissed Greene.

"Forget it," jeered Coker. "Who's to know?"

"Oh, you dummy!" moaned Potter. "Think they won't go over Greyfriars with a small comb, combing out any man that's got a spot of tar on him, after a beak's been tarred?"

"That's all right," said Coker, cheerily. "I was jolly careful with the tar. I'm no fool!"

"Look at yourself!" shrieked Greene. "Any man who saw you now would know you'd done it, like a shot."

"Eh?"

"You're all tarry!" hooted Potter.

"Oh!"

Coker gave an eye to detail at last. He discerned spots and smears of tar that had hitherto escaped his attention. Coker's rugged face became very grave. It was only too certain that, after a beak had been tarred by a lawless hand, the search for any fellow with a spot of tar about him would be rigorous. And Coker had almost as many spots as a leopard.

"Oh!" repeated Coker.

"You dummy—you chump—you mad ass!" breathed Potter. "You're for it now! You may as well go to the Head and own up."

"I—I'll get a wash—I—I'd better change—oh, crikey!" gasped Coker. Even Coker's solid brain realised the danger. "I shall have to shove these clothes out of sight somewhere—I shall have to get a jolly good scrub—oh, holy mackerel!"

Coker rushed out of the games-study. At any moment the hunt might be up: and a single spot of tar would be enough to get him sacked from Greyfriars. Coker lost no time. He fairly bounded into a bath-room and got going with soap and hot water and a scrubbing-brush.

Potter and Greene exchanged hopeless looks.

"He's done it!" said Greene.

"Done it brown!" said Potter. "They'd know anyway, but in case they didn't he had to spot himself all over with tar. They'll get him, scrubbing off tar! Poor old Coker! Well, we did our best!"

"We did!" said Greene. "Fellows couldn't do more."

That was all the consolation Potter and Greene had for the coming loss of Horace Coker. For that Coker of the Fifth was going to be 'bunked' from Greyfriars School for his exploit in tarring a beak, there could not be the slightest doubt.

Even in Horace Coker's own mind there was little doubt, unless he got that tar off in time. And tar was extremely difficult to get off. But it had to come off, and Coker, in a cloud of steam, rubbed and scrubbed, and scrubbed and rubbed, with almost frantic energy, to get rid of those tell-tale clues. And as he rubbed and scrubbed, and scrubbed and rubbed, till he felt that the skin was coming off if not the tar, his triumphant glee quite faded out: and Coker wished from the bottom of his heart that he hadn't tarred Prout!

Luckily—if Coker had only known it—he hadn't!

Chapter 12

MERELY BUNTER

"Hallo! hallo! hallo!"

"Something's up!"

"The upfulness seems to be terrific."

"What on earth——"

Herbert Vernon-Smith opened the window of the Rag. Fellows crowded round him at the window, staring into the deeply dusky quadrangle. Strange, weird, eerie sounds came out of the deep dusk: how and why and what they meant, were hard to guess. But it was clear that something was 'up.'

"Something's happened to somebody," said Johnny Bull. "Who's out of the House?"

"Goodness knows."

"Sounds like somebody suffocating," said Bob Cherry, in wonder. "What the dickens is going on out there?"

The juniors stared blankly into the dusk. The strange sounds from the night had reached other ears, many ears. There was a sudden flood of illumination in the dark quad, as the House door was flung open and the light streamed out. Mr. Quelch was seen to step out. After him stepped Hacker, master of the Shell, and Wingate of the Sixth.

"Amazing!" said Mr. Quelch. His voice reached the crowd of curious juniors packed at the window of the Rag.

"Extraordinary!" said Mr. Hacker. "Some animal——"

"Whoever or whatever it is, it is under the elms," said the Remove master. "Mr. Prout, I believe, generally takes a walk there about this time——"

"Can't be Mr. Prout, sir," said Wingate. "Mr. Prout's in his study. Somebody's locked the door on the outside and taken away the key."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" came a sudden roar from the window of the Rag. "Look! What's that? What on earth's that?"

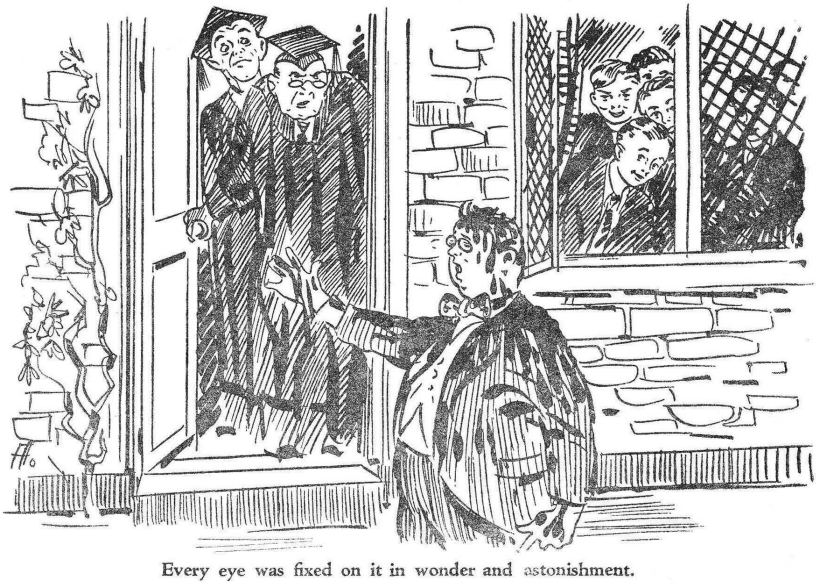
"Goodness gracious!" ejaculated Mr. Quelch.

A figure appeared in sight, in the light from the open doorway and windows, a strange and startling figure, tottering from the direction of the dark trees. It was the most startling figure on which any eyes at Greyfriars School had ever fallen.

Who it was, nobody could guess. It was disguised in tar. Black tar streamed over it, masking the face, trickling round the ears and down the neck. It was somebody—there was no doubt about that—but who, was a mystery. Every eye was fixed on it in wonder and astonishment. It uttered strange sounds as it came—indicating apparently that some of the tar had got into its mouth. It gurgled, it gasped, it moaned and it spluttered.

"Oooooooh! Urrrrrrgh! Gurrrrggh!"

"Who—what——" gasped Mr. Quelch.



Every eye was fixed on it in wonder and astonishment.

"Who the dooce——" stuttered Wingate.

"Some boy——" articulated Mr. Hacker. "It is covered with—with—I think it is tar! Yes, it is tar! Amazing."

"Groooooooooogh! Oooooch!"

A crowd from the House streamed out round the two masters. Among them came Potter and Greene of the Fifth. Who and what that strange figure was, Potter and Greene knew only too well, or fancied they did. This was Coker's work, this was Coker's victim, and Coker, frantically scrubbing off tar in the bath-room, was going to be sacked for this!

"Prout!" breathed Potter.

"Oh, dear!" moaned Greene.

"Who can it be?" exclaimed Mr. Quelch. "Boy! Come here! Who are you? What does this mean? Speak?"

"Ooooooooooogh!"

"It is a boy," said Mr. Capper, joining the staring crowd. "A junior boy, I should think, but who——"

Potter gave quite a jump, and clutched Greene's arm. As the weird figure came clearer in the light, it was impossible to recognise, but its height could be seen. Sideways, the figure was not unlike Prout's portly form: but Prout, though not a tall gentleman, was taller than this, considerably taller. This dread figure was not a master at all—it was not even a senior boy, it was a junior!

"Greeney, old man," breathed Potter. "Look! That ain't—it can't be——"

"Not Prout!" breathed Greene. He touched the captain of Greyfriars on the elbow. "Know where Prout is?"

"In his study," answered Wingate. "Some idiot's locked him in."

"Oh!" gasped Potter and Greene.

Their scheme had been a success after all. Prout, locked in his study, was still there, safe and sound. It was an immense relief.

Coker had not got Prout! But, clearly, he had got somebody. This was Coker's work, there was no doubt about that. Coker had bucketed somebody in the dark with Gosling's tar-bucket, though not his form-master.

"That ass——" muttered Potter.

"That idiot——" agreed Greene.

"But thank goodness——"

"Yes, rather," said Greene, fervently.

Who it was, they did not know. But it was not Prout. Who else it was did not really matter very much, except to the person who had got the tar, of course. So long as it wasn't Prout, it was all right. And it wasn't Prout.

"Boy!" almost shrieked Mr. Quelch. "Will you speak? Answer me! Who are you, and how came you in this shocking state? Speak!"

"Gurrrrrrrggh!"

"Oh crikey!" came a sudden yell from the Rag window, as Bob Cherry

suddenly discerned the shape of a large pair of spectacles, thick with tar and almost hidden by it. "It's Bunter!"

"Bunter!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"Bunter!" gasped the Bounder.

"What on earth was Bunter doing out of the House after prep?" exclaimed Nugent.

"Collecting tar!" grinned Smithy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Urrrgh! Groooogh! I'm smothered." The weird figure seemed to find its voice at last, "Oooooooogh!"

"Upon my word!" gasped Mr. Quelch. "Is—is—is that Bunter? Is that Bunter, of my Form?"

"Groooooooogh!"

"Bunter!" Quelch almost roared. "What does this mean, Bunter? Speak!"

"Wooogh! Ooogh! I'm chuck-chick-choking! Grooogh! It's got into my mum-mum-mum-mouth! Ooogh! It's tar! Wooooch!" gurgled the fat junior. "Ooooch! I can't see—it's on my specs—ooooooogh!"

Mr. Quelch raised his hand to grasp that boy of his form by the shoulder. But he withdrew it hastily. Bunter was not nice to touch.

"This boy must have got out of the House to play some prank with a bucket of tar," said Mr. Hacker. "He must have upset it over himself."

"Oh, crikey!" moaned Bunter. He pushed up the tarry spectacles and blinked at the staring crowd. "Oh, crumbs! I'm all sticky! It came down on my head—ooogh! I got it off, but the filthy tar was all over me—oooogh."

"What were you doing out of the House, Bunter?" roared Mr. Quelch.

"Oh! I—I—I wasn't!" gasped Bunter. "I—I never! I—I—I mean—I—I went out for a—a—a walk, sir. It was nothing to do with jam."

"Jam!" repeated Mr. Quelch, blankly.

"Nothing at all, sir," gasped Bunter. "There isn't a bag hidden behind the trees there, sir, that I know of, and there's certainly no jam in it. I never went out after it, sir. Oooogh!"

"This wretched boy," said Mr. Hacker, "left the House to smuggle in food."

"I—I didn't," gasped Bunter. "I never left the House at all—I—I mean, I—I never went after the jam, there isn't any jam, sir, that I know of, and it's certainly not Coker's——"

"I understand!" said Mr. Quelch. "But how did you get into this disgusting and revolting state, Bunter?"

"I—I don't know!" groaned Bunter. "Oh, lor'! I—I was just going into the Elm Walk after the jam—I mean, there isn't any jam there, that I know of, and then a pail or something came down whop on my head, and it was full of tar, and—and—ooooooch! I—I'm smothered—groooooogh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came a yell from the window of the Rag.

"I'm all sticky!" moaned Bunter. "I don't know who did it, sir, I expect he was after the jam—I mean, there wasn't any jam. I expect the beast did it to keep me from getting that bag, I mean, there wasn't a bag, oh, crikey! Oooogh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Quelch glared round at a window packed with laughing faces.

"This is not a matter of merriment!" he hooted. "Shut that window at once."

"Isn't it?" murmured Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The window of the Rag was shut. But the crowd of juniors evidently thought that it was a matter for merriment, in spite of Mr. Quelch's opinion: for the Rag echoed with laughter.

The Remove master fixed an almost ferocious glare on Bunter.

"Go in by the lobby door, Bunter! You are in a disgusting state. Take care that you do not smother everything with tar. After you have cleaned yourself I will deal with you. Pah!"

"Ooooooooggh!"

A few minutes later, Coker of the Fifth was not the only fellow who was rubbing and scrubbing at tar. Billy Bunter of the Remove was also rubbing and scrubbing at tar, and he had a much more extensive task than Coker's. Coker was spotted with tar, but Bunter was smothered with it, thick with it, reeking with it, he lived, and moved and had his being, in tar, he was of the tar, tarry! He even forgot the jam, still reposing in the bag under the elm as he laboured and laboured wearily at tar. Tar was sticky and hard to get rid of, and Billy Bunter's weary labours did not get rid of it all, only transforming him from a completely black Bunter into a piebald one! It was likely to be a long, long time, before Bunter saw the last of that tar—or forgot it either!

CHAPTER 13

NO JAM FOR BUNTER!

"HA, ha, ha!"

"But who did it?"

"And why?"

"Tarry all over! But who tarred him?"

"The tarfulness was terrific."

Horace Coker felt a qualm. Coker, newly swept and garnished as it were, was coming downstairs: hoping that no signs of tar were left about him to betray who had tarred Prout! There was a laughing crowd below, everybody seemed to be amused about something, and the words he caught, as he came down, apprised

Coker that it was the incident of the tar that had evoked the general merriment. To his surprise he saw Wingate, and Loder, and several other prefects laughing—he would hardly have expected Sixth-Form prefects to regard the tarring of a form-master as funny! It did not seem funny—to Coker! He had changed, and crammed away tarry clothes in a remote corner, but he could not help feeling that danger was in the air, the tarring of a member of the Staff would cause so searching a quest for the culprit that the clues would very likely come to light.

And Coker, realising that the 'sack' impended over his fat head, realised also that he had played the goat and wished fervently that he hadn't. But he assumed as casual a manner as he could, it was his cue to know nothing about anybody having been tarred.

"Anything happened?" he asked, carelessly.

"Haven't you heard?" asked Bob Cherry. "Didn't you see him? Ha, ha! Black as the ace of spades——"

"Black, but not comely!" grinned the Bounder.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But who on earth can have done it?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Goodness knows! Somebody must have bagged Gosling's tar-bucket, but why——"

"Where's Prout now?" asked Coker.

"Prout! In his study, I think," said Bob. "I believe he's still locked in——"

"Locked in!"

"Yes: somebody locked him in; Mossoo too, they've been shouting and banging on the door." Bob was not interested in Prout. Billy Bunter was the topic now. "If you haven't seen Bunter, Coker, you've missed something! Smothered with tar——"

Coker jumped.

"Bunter—smothered with tar!" he ejaculated.

"Caked with it, clothed with it as with a jolly old garment," said Bob. "Somebody got him in the quad with Gosling's tar-bucket, under the elms."

"Eh?"

"Goodness knows why, but you should have seen him."

Coker felt his head turning round.

"S-s-somebody got Bib-bub-Bunter with a bib-bob-bucket of tar!" he stuttered. "As—as well as Pip-pop-Prout?"

"Prout!" repeated Bob. "Nothing's happened to Prout, that I know of, except that he's locked in his study and shouting through the keyhole for somebody to find the key and let him out. But Bunter——"

"Poor old Bunter!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker wondered dizzily whether he was dreaming. Prout was in his study, and nothing had happened to him, and Bunter had been smothered with tar in the quad!

Had Prout stayed in, and Bunter gone out, or what? Had there been a mistake in the dark! Coker spun round at the sound of a booming voice. It was Prout's.

"I shall lay the matter before the Head! It is scandalous, amazing, unparalleled! My study door locked on me! Thank you, Greene, for finding the key, I am very much obliged to you, Greene——"

"Not at all sir," said Greene.

Coker gazed at Prout. There was no sign of tar about Prout. He was not black, he was red, red with wrath. Prout had been locked in his study: but nothing else had happened to Prout. And Bunter—that fat little ass, Bunter of the Remove——

"Oh, crikey!" breathed Coker.

He almost tottered away.

"O.K., old man," Potter and Greene joined him, grinning. "You never got old Pompous after all——"

"I can't make it out!" gasped Coker.

"You got Bunter of the Remove. Goodness knows why he was there, but you got him! Got him a treat, to judge by his looks. I suppose you never saw him, in the dark——"

"Of course I didn't! But——"

"You got the wrong man! Thank goodness you did!"

"After all, Coker would get the wrong man!" remarked Greene.

"Naturally!" assented Potter.

"I—I'm rather glad!" said Coker. "There'd have been a fearful row, they'd have spotted my clobber, I expect, but a dashed fag doesn't matter, there won't be a song and dance over a fag getting tarred. Serve him right for butting in, the fat little idiot! I've a jolly good mind to kick him. Still, it's rather lucky he got it instead of Prout. I—I'm not going to tar Prout, you fellows—I—I think I shall wash out the whole idea. To tell the truth," added Coker, candidly, "I'm rather glad some japing ass locked him in his study, and he never came out and got it. It was lucky it happened. Queer coincidence that it should have happened this very evening, though, ain't it?"

"Very!" said Potter.

"Oh, quite!" agreed Greene.

And they left it at that.

* * *

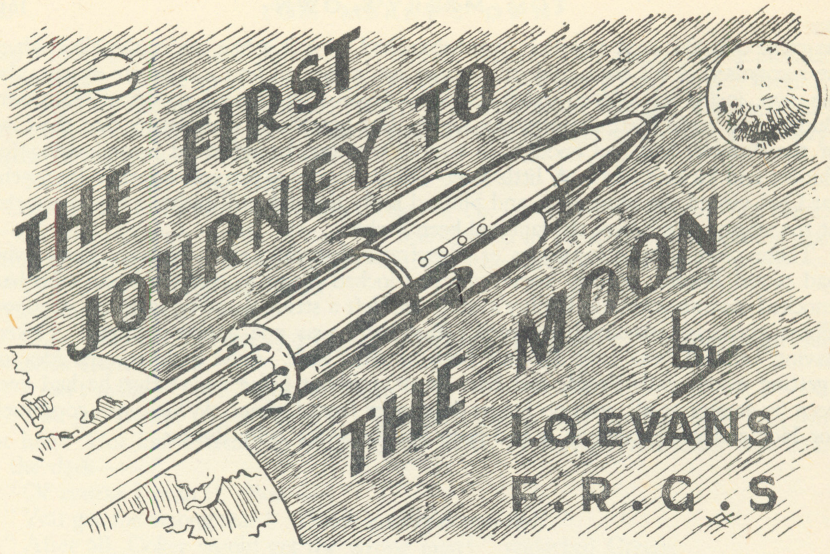
Nobody ever knew who had tarred Billy Bunter, excepting three fellows in the Fifth who kept their own counsel.

It was tough on Bunter. The tar was bad enough, remnants of it clung lovingly to Bunter for days and days. During those days Billy Bunter did an unusual amount of washing, a thing he had never really liked. But worse even than the tar was what happened to the jam. For Coker, revisiting the scene of the crime, as it were, when

he came out, the next morning, was astonished to spot a bag under the elms which he recognised as his own, and still further astonished to find a huge jar of jam, also his own, inside it! After which it slowly dawned on Coker's powerful brain why Bunter had come there the previous night: but generously considering that the Owl of the Remove had had enough, in the way of tar, he refrained from looking for Bunter and kicking him. A little later—Billy Bunter never was an early bird—the fat Owl visited the same spot, and blinked sadly through still rather tarry spectacles at the empty spot where the jam had been parked.

There were several mysteries at Greyfrairs that morning. Nobody knew who had tarred Bunter, nobody knew who had locked Prout in, nobody knew who had knocked over an inkpot in Ogilvy's study and left a string dangling from the window. Those mysteries remained unsolved. But there was one happy outcome. Coker, having realised how near he had been to the 'sack,' quite gave up the idea of 'getting even' with Prout, and Mr. Prout, without being aware that he had ever been in danger at all, was no longer in danger from Coker. Which was good luck for Horace Coker: though it had been Bad Luck for Billy Bunter.

NOTE: The Bunter Books, a series dealing with the adventures of Harry Wharton and Co. of Greyfriars School, are published by Charles Skilton, Ltd., 50, Alexandra Road, London, S.W.19.



MEMBER OF THE BRITISH INTERPLANETARY SOCIETY

WHEN you read exciting stories, or see exciting films, about space-travel, do you ever wonder what it would be like to set out on such an expedition? Or how long it is likely to be before the first expedition sets out?

This may not be so very long. Much good work has been done both practically on experimental rockets and theoretically on the problems of interplanetary travel, of constructing spaceworthy rocket-ships and charting their course. Space-flight is now much in the same position as aeroplane flight was 50 years ago: all that we need is a light powerful fuel. The petrol-motor made aeroplanes possible: the splitting of the atom may do as much for space-ships.

Suppose that you were one of the volunteers—there would be no lack of them—accepted for training in space-craft with a view to helping man the first rocket-ship ever to leave Earth: what sort of experiences would you have to face and what tests would have to be pased?

You would have to pass rigorous tests, preliminary tests; to have done exceptionally well in school and college; to be not only fearless and resourceful and skilled in delicate machine-work, but intelligent and with scientific interests: there would be no use for mere brave dullards in space.

Your heart and lungs, your senses and your power of acting quickly are tested

by methods rather like those used in choosing airmen. Your mind is tested to ensure that you are really enthusiastic for the venture and that you are likely to be able to bear the strange conditions to be found in space. You are whirled rapidly round and round in a sort of giant centrifuge until you suffer a 'black-out'; you are dropped from far aloft with a parachute which does not open until you are near the ground; this shows whether you can stand the strain of life in a rocket blasting into space at ever-increasing speed and then speeding on with its rocket-jets shut off.

Such tests have, of course, 'frozen out' many of the candidates; and some of the applicants, when they realised what space-travel involves, have withdrawn from the training. Nobody blames them, yourself least of all. For you have to admit you have sometimes felt inclined to join them! But you have never done so.

You have to take special courses in the control and repair of rocket-motors, in wireless telegraphy and radar, in astronomy and 'astrogation' (piloting a space-ship by means of the stars). There will be only four of you on the voyage; and in case any of your comrades becomes a casualty you must be trained to carry out all the ship's duties. You have to learn how to make scientific observations, too: for it is useless flying into space unless you can bring the results of the expedition back to earth. This cruise is not just an adventure; it is a branch of research.

Meantime, the engineers and the 'Boffins' have been busy. The space-ship has been built and equipped and tested; now it is being provisioned and fueled—and searched for space-stowaways. Using elaborate calculating machines, the astrogators have worked out the exact moment at which you must take off, the direction and speed of your course and the stars by which you must steer. Any error in the work of the astrogators would be as disastrous as a defect in the space-ship: it might mean that you would crash headlong on the moon or drift aimlessly and for ever through empty space.

On the day of the departure the space-ship is 'christened' in time-honoured fashion. Then the last farewells—with parents, friends, V.I.P.s—are made, and you mount the gangway into the gaping space-port of your vessel.

The space-port is placed about half-way up the side of the vessel. This is shaped something like an artillery shell, but far narrower in proportion to its length. It is beautifully stream-lined, and tapers to a point at its prow, so as to speed with very little resistance through the air. It has a stubby 'wing' on each side, rather like that of an aeroplane, to keep it steady while in the air; it is very important that it should begin its flight into space in exactly the right direction.

Below you, as you enter, are the rocket motors and the tanks of atomic fuel. The base of the space-ship is made of a special alloy, and the ship stands on a strong concrete base, so that the intense heat from the roaring jets will do no damage. Above you are the supplies of compressed air and food and fresh water, and your stores and tools; you climb up between them by means of a ladder, and then clamber through a trap-door, which can be closed in case of need to be perfectly air-tight.

Now you are in the control-room in the space-ship's prow. Small windows, like port-holes, of specially toughened glass enable you to look out. In large cupboards are four space-suits, something like diving-dresses, with which you could leave the ship in empty space. The smaller cupboards contain materials for your first meal, first-aid sets, and books on astronomy and astrogation. There are elaborate scientific instruments and the controls of your ship, and there are also four bunks.

Your bunks are elaborately padded and sprung against the shock of the take-off. You climb into one of them, wriggle yourself into a comfortable position, and strap yourself down. The pilot, who is in command, brings you a drink specially prepared by the doctors; then he too, straps himself down. Conveniently to your hand is a panel of instruments and controls.

Though you have been told to 'relax' you cannot help feeling tense as the pilot counts off the time, first in minutes and then in seconds. You raise your head and exchange tense grins with your comrades.

"Five minutes to go—four—three—two—ONE—thirty seconds—twenty-five—twenty—fifteen—ten—five—four—three—two—one—NOW!"

You grip the sides of your bunk as the pilot throws over the switch controlling the rocket-tubes. There comes a fierce scream, mingled with a clattering roar, and you feel a growing upwards pressure. From being quite gentle, rather like a rising lift—for the blast of the escaping gases gives at first a surprisingly gentle thrust—the pressure increases with the blast and the speed. To economise fuel you have to gain almost at once a speed so great that it will enable you to 'free-wheel,' so to speak, the rest of the way.

Soon the blast is very fierce: its roar is deafening and the whole space-ship trembles at its thrust. You feel your weight growing: you are pressed painfully down in your bunk and your limbs seem too heavy to move. It would take a terrific effort to raise your head to look at the instruments or to lift your hand to throw over a switch. You pity the pilot, who has to cut off the fuel at the proper time, though there is an automatic cut-out to operate if he should fail.

But you begin to feel that something is wrong—surely you have been lying helpless there for far longer than the scheduled time? With a great effort you raise your head to look at the chronometer. No, it is all in order—you have been blasting for only three minutes. Only three minutes—and the rockets have to be kept blasting for eight!

The eight minutes seem to last for hours. Somehow the pilot manages to throw over the switch—he would feel ashamed to leave it to the automatic gear—to cut the rocket blast out. The roar dies down and the pressure of the bunk eases; your weight is plainly getting less. Now it is back to normal, and you can breathe more freely. And now you have no weight at all!

You have had this strange experience before, when you were being dropped during your training and before the parachute opened to check your fall. The reason then was, of course, that though you were falling, the air-tight container in

which you were strapped was falling just as fast, and so you did not 'weigh down' on the straps or on its floor. Now, it is true, you are not falling but rising, but your speed is being checked very rapidly, and from the point of view of your weight and your feelings that comes to just the same thing. You could almost say that your space-ship was trying to fall, but that it was going so fast that all it could do was to slow down! Anyhow, the floor of your bunk no longer presses against you, and that gives you this rather uncanny weightless feeling.

Of course, you have long ago left the earth's atmosphere, but there was little to show this except the meters which record the pressure of the air outside—they have fallen to zero now—and the exterior thermometers which showed its heat. You passed, without noticing it, from the troposphere, in which the air keeps getting cooler, to the stratosphere, in which it remains at much the same temperature, and out into space. The only thing you noticed was that when you passed the Heaviside Layer, seven miles up, the wireless signals you were getting had been suddenly cut off; you will no longer be able to communicate with earth.

The pilot has already unbuckled his strap and is floating weightlessly just above his bunk; for when a space-ship is in the free fall, nothing—and nobody—in it has any weight. He nods to you to follow his example. "Careful, now!" he warns as you pull yourself into a sitting position just above the edge of your bunk—a queer and rather disquieting feeling to be sitting on nothing—and you know his warning must be heeded. A sudden incautious movement would send you hurtling across the control-room, to crash painfully against its walls or roof.

Instead, you reach cautiously out for one of the straps which used to hang downwards but which are swaying weightlessly to and fro. By their aid you cross the control-room without too much difficulty. For the moment you are not on duty, and your one aim is to look out of the porthole, its thick glass reinforced by stout wire-netting, and to see a spectacle which no human eye has ever yet beheld.

All around you are the sky and the stars. But what a sky! And what stars! The sky is not light blue—the blue of the sky, as you know, comes from the scattering of the light by the air, and here there is no air to scatter it—but jet black. Against this dark background the stars are shining more brightly and in far greater numbers than you would ever have thought possible. With powerful field-glasses you can distinguish among them a tiny crescent: that must be Venus. You can see two of the satellites of Jupiter. No good looking for Saturn's rings, they are out of sight on the far side of the sun. Straggling across the black sky, the Milky Way resembles a stream of silvery light formed by thousands of stars.

The glass is specially prepared to cut out glare and so you are able to gaze unharmed at what would otherwise be blinding, the sun. Its disc is not the golden colour to which you are used—that too is caused by the scattering effect of the air—but clear white. And to its sides, like wings, extend stretches of pale silvery light; this is the sun's corona, which—again because of the air's scattering effect—can from earth be seen only during an eclipse.

You pull yourself up a little, steady yourself with the straps, and peer downwards. Far below you is the earth: already it is plainly a sphere, and much of its surface is obscured by gleaming clouds. Between the clouds, however, you can distinguish the outlines of land and sea. You have the feeling of looking down on a map with continents and countries outlined. There is Europe. And there—surely!—by its western coast, are our own islands, looking so small and so helpless. For a moment you feel a wave of homesickness; those beloved islands look so far away, as, indeed, they are.

You move away so that one of your comrades can look out, and busy yourself preparing a meal. This is a tricky business, for in free fall nothing has any weight: neither the food, nor the knives and forks. Everything has to be securely fastened down, or it will get loose and drift about. None the less, eating is not too difficult; it is drinking that gives most trouble. For the hot soup and coffee you have prepared in the self-heating containers cannot be poured out, nor could you drink them in the ordinary way. However, you can suck them up through a straw, and though this seems a queer way of getting them into your mouth, they taste as good when they get there.

Now you would like a wash, but that is impossible, for the water would neither pour out nor 'stay put' in the bowl. The Boffins have not been able to decide how it would behave: whether it would 'conglobulate' into floating spheres or simply spread about the space-ship as a mist, and you do not feel inclined to try. Instead, you content yourself with 'a lick and a promise', simply dabbing your face and hands with a damp cloth.

It is time for you to go on duty, and there is plenty to do. There are observations to make of the planets and stars and sun, of the earth 'below' you and the moon which seems so very large 'above.' There are inspections to be made of the instruments and records to be entered up. There is the ship's log to be written and your own diary to be kept. Above all, there is the radar-screen to be watched for the tell-tale blips that will warn you of an approaching meteor. You are especially careful about this: not only would a direct hit from a meteor wreck the ship, but it is your duty to note the path of such menaces to space-travel so that future adventurers can escape them. The wireless is, of course, still out of action, its waves cut off by the Heaviside Layer.

When you go off duty you give one more glance at the wonders around. Then, for the continued weightlessness somehow makes you very weary, you pull yourself into your bunk, strap yourself down, and go to sleep. Hardly do you seem to have closed your eyes when you are aroused for another spell of duty. You are still very sleepy, but a drink of strong black coffee and a dab with a damp cloth makes you more wakeful, and after another meal you are ready to go on watch.

Each time you come on duty you notice that the earth is much smaller and farther away, and that the moon is larger and nearer. It seems, too, as if it were moving to one side; but that is because you yourselves are speeding not directly towards it

but well clear. You feel disappointed—though at the same time you cannot help feeling relieved—that you are not to try to make a landing. This voyage is only a preliminary survey, to make the observations which will render a future landing possible.

At last the moon is not ahead of you but to one side; your course has been charted so that you are to swing round it—you become a little moon of the moon! Your eyes shielded with dark glasses, for its glare is dazzling, you are busy studying and recording its features: camera and cine-camera, the radar and the scientific instruments have to be kept in action.

Seen from so near, the moon is an endless succession of mountains and 'craters' and the stretches of dusty desert which are miscalled 'seas' on the lunar charts. They are traversed by long straight chasms and by streaks of brightness which stretch inexplicably across the 'moonscape.' Your records may help the astronomers to understand them.

Even when your course brings you to the far side of the moon, never visible from the earth, the prospect does not change. It is incredibly dreary and forbidding, but none the less you eagerly discuss with your comrades the prospects, one day, of landing there. Then again you strap yourselves down on the bunks, for the rocket blast is to be brought into action. But for this, you would circle forever round the moon.

As the rockets roar, you are pressed painfully down into your bunks, but this does not last long: the correct course gained, you hurtle earthwards, once more in free fall. But you may not relax your vigilance: duties must be performed, observations maintained, records kept and so on. And there is always the danger of meteors.

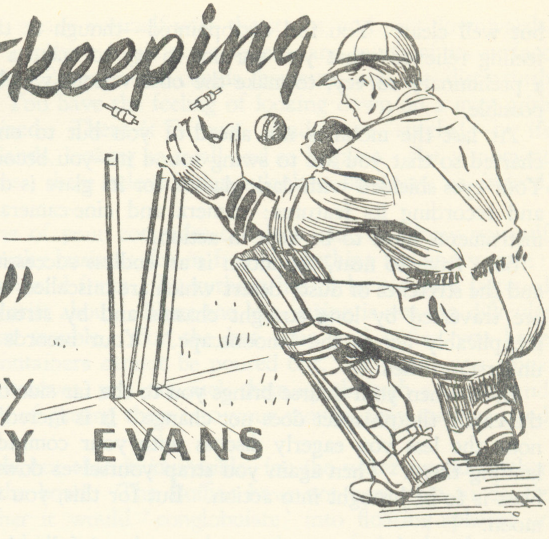
Before you land on the earth you have to reduce your speed, which is now so great that it would burn you in the air as would a meteor. You circle several times round the earth, just grazing its atmosphere; this acts as a brake. Your speed having been reduced suitably, the stubby 'wings' of the space ship come into use, and the action is like that of a jet-propelled aeroplane coming in. A few breathless moments—and you land safely on the space-field from which you set off only a day—week?—month?—space knows no time—ago. Actually it was only a few days—but how much has happened in the time!

And the results of your adventure may mean greater progress in space-flight than was thought possible. The landing on the moon may be much nearer.

Wicketkeeping "Down Under"

by

GODFREY EVANS



WHEN I was chosen in 1946 to become a member of the first post-war M.C.C. party to Australia, one of the first persons to offer me his congratulations was my Kent colleague—and my boyhood idol, incidentally—Leslie Ames. Now Les had made three trips 'Down Under' as England's wicket-keeper, and so, just as I had donned the pads and gloves as Kent's stumper in his place, I had followed him into the England XI.

"Well done, Godfrey," said Les, as he warmly shook my hand. "I'm proud that a Kent man is going to take my place. I know you'll have a grand time, but don't take it too light-heartedly. It will be no holiday. You'll have a lot of fielding to do on those perfect Australian wickets."

I had not been in Australia many weeks before I realised the truth in his words. Cricket out there—and wicket-keeping in particular—is certainly hard work. The conditions make it so.

During my first match on an Australian wicket, I found difficulty in taking the ball cleanly. In the very bright atmosphere I could see the ball quite distinctly coming towards me; I shaped as usual to take it in my gloves, but by the time my hands closed the ball had hit me a painful whack on the chest or thigh. My timing was all at fault.

In the warm, clear air 'Down Under', the ball appears to move through the air more slowly than on our own wickets. Actually, of course, it does nothing of the

sort. The fact that it appears to do so is more or less an optical illusion, due to the clarity of the atmosphere, but it plays havoc with the timing of the ball, and correct timing in the taking of the ball is absolutely vital to the stumper.

One of my biggest thrills soon after my arrival in Australia in 1946 was to meet Bert Oldfield, the greatest Australian keeper of all time. He and I became very firm friends and I shall never forget all the advice he so freely gave me.

When I told Bert Oldfield of my problems behind the stumps, he assured me that I should soon get used to Australian wickets and conditions. It meant a little closer concentration—and how right he was. After a few more matches, I found myself taking the ball as well as I do in this country. Next time I journeyed to Australia, with Freddy Brown's team in 1950, I knew what to expect—but even so, it took me a little time to settle down to the conditions after a season's cricket in England.

Batsmen and fielders share the same difficulties 'Down Under', for conditions differ so much from those that apply in this country. The last half-hour of the day's play is particularly troublesome until you get used to it. You see, over here the sun drops slowly and the light fades just as steadily. Not so in Australia, where dusk follows very quickly after the sun begins to sink low in the sky. This causes heavy shadows to fall across the pitch, and those shadows cause real trouble, especially to the batsmen. This is one of the reasons why batsmen going in towards the end of the day's play so often lose their wickets cheaply.

It really is difficult to see the ball clearly under such conditions, and I well remember one incident that proves my point. It was during my first tour of Australia. Denis Compton was batting and he hit a full toss straight down the wicket. Wally Hammond, our skipper, was at the other end, and the ball from Denis' bat hit him smack in the middle of the back.

It wasn't that the skipper was asleep—he was too alert on the field for that!—but owing to the long shadows darkening the pitch, he just didn't see the ball.

Oh yes, playing cricket in Australia is quite different from playing the game in this country—during a normal English summer, that is. For instance, we have no pitches over here to compare with some of those 'Down Under'. When it rains there, it *does* rain. But it is astonishing how quickly play is possible after the most torrential downpour.

My first experience of this was at Brisbane in 1946. On the third day of the First Test a terrific thunderstorm broke over the ground. Hailstones bigger than I had ever seen before—or since—rattled down, and within half an hour the Brisbane ground was completely under water. If that had happened in this country, the pitch would have been unplayable for at least a couple of days, but cricket was possible on that Brisbane wicket the very next morning. Out came a blistering sun and the wicket was turned into a real 'sticky dog'.

No English 'sticky dog' could be so terrifying as a similar type of wicket in Australia. The ball does everything except sit up and beg, and any batsman who scores runs on it is a hero—and a magician.

There is another remarkable difference between sticky wickets in this country and in Australia. Over here, as you know, a fast drying wicket is a paradise for the spin bowlers. Not so 'Down Under'. It is the medium-fast bowlers who come into their own on a sticky dog. The ball is pitched right up to the bat, and instead of it rising at normal height and pace, it shoots almost straight up into the air.

Even under normal conditions, Australian pitches play differently from our own. I found some difficulty in taking the spin bowlers at first, because the ball rises higher and faster than on our lush, grass-covered wickets. With the fast men, too, I found I needed to stand a yard or two farther back than usual if I was to take the ball neatly at about waist height.

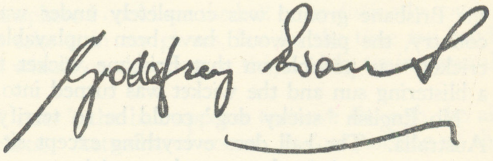
English cricketers playing in Australia for the first time cannot fail to be impressed by some of the wonderful grounds out there—Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide particularly—huge arenas far bigger than anything we have in this country. At Melbourne, for instance, crowds of over 70,000 can watch the cricket in comparative comfort. The pitches themselves, however, cannot compare with ours. The famous Sydney wicket resembles a lightish brown carpet, baked hard by the sun. After rain, too, great cracks appear in the outfield of some of the pitches.

One last point which makes cricket in Australia much more trying than in this country, and that is the heat. Have you ever tried fielding for a whole day in a temperature of more than 100 degrees? But that is a common occurrence 'Down Under'. Adelaide is the hottest Test ground in Australia. When I play there, I usually wear three or four shirts a day, changing each time we leave the field for a welcome break. This humid heat is particularly trying to the bowlers—fast men especially, and I remember even big-hearted Alec Bedser having to leave the Adelaide pitch on one occasion suffering from heat stroke and exhaustion. And it takes a lot to knock big Alec over!

Before I left England for my first trip 'Down Under', Les Ames gave me this tip: 'Always keep something round your neck when you are keeping wicket out there, or you'll find yourself in trouble.'

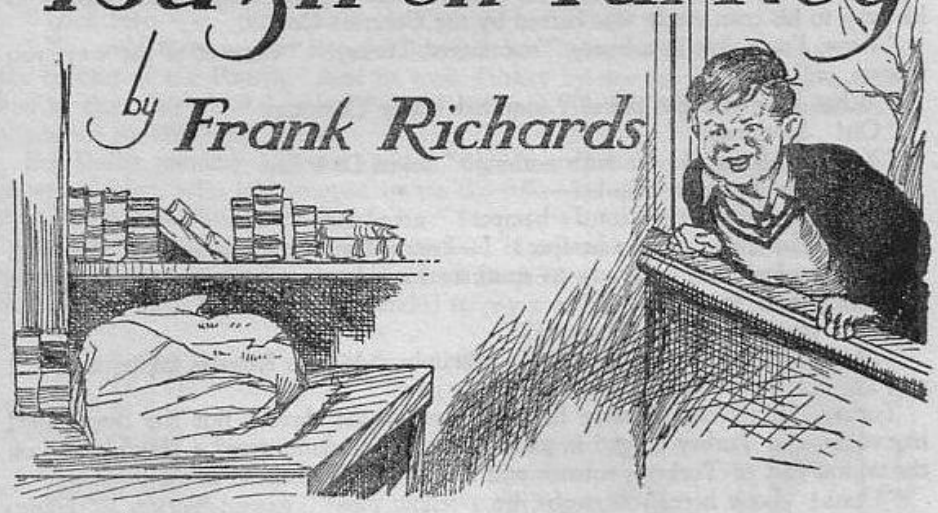
I never forgot that advice, and in Australia I always wear a handkerchief knotted round my neck as protection from the sun.

But despite all I have told you about the difficulties and problems of playing cricket in Australia, I wouldn't have missed one minute of those two wonderful tours I have made. I only hope I shall be chosen to go again .....



Tough on Turkey

by Frank Richards



Chapter 1

A TIP FOR TURKEY

"Halt!" rapped Bob Drake.

"Oh!" ejaculated Turkey Tuck.

Turkey halted.

He had no choice about that, with three fellows lined up across the Fourth-form passage to bar his way.

James Smyth Tuck, who was generally called 'Turkey' in the Carcroft Fourth, was emerging from No. 11 Study, when Harry Compton and Co. came up the passage.

No. 11 Study belonged to Lord Talboys, who, at the moment, was interviewing his form-master, Mr. Roger Ducas, downstairs, on the subject of a hamper of rather unusual proportions which had arrived for his lordship.

Harry Compton, Bob Drake, and Dick Lee did not need telling why Turkey had called in at No. 11 while Talboys was absent.

Turkey was bulging. Every pocket in his garments bulged. Under each arm he had a package. Even his waistcoat bulged. There was not much room under the

fat Turkey's waistcoat for anything but Turkey's circumference, but he had contrived to pack something there for transit.

Turkey was heavy-laden: and his plump visage registered alarm and dismay as his way to his own study was barred by the Carcroft Co.

"I say, I'm rather in a hurry," stammered Turkey. "Gerrout of the way, you fellows, will you?"

"What have you got there?" inquired Harry Compton.

"Oh! Nothing."

"You're bulging all over with nothing?" asked Dick Lee.

"Yes—no—I—mean—I—I——"

"Anything left in the Lizard's hamper?" asked Bob.

"Oh! Has Talboys had a hamper? I—I never knew anything about it, if he had. I—I just looked into his study to speak to him about—about the goal he got in the match with St. Jim's——"

"And you didn't see the hamper?"

"No! Never knew he had one—I certainly didn't see Ruggles taking it up. I say, I'm in a hurry. Look here, let a fellow pass."

Turkey pushed on, to barge his way through the three. But the three stood like rocks, and Turkey barged in vain. Bob Drake administered a playful poke on the widest part of Turkey's equator and the fat Turkey backed away, gasping.

"Oooh! Look here, you swobs, let a fellow pass!" gasped Turkey. "I keep on telling you I'm in a hurry."

"What have you been up to in the Lizard's study?"

"Nothing!" hooted Turkey. "I just dropped in to tell him about Gunter of the Sixth rowing with Packe. We had a little chat——"

"Oh, suffering snakes!" ejaculated Bob. As the three were aware that Lord Talboys was downstairs in Mr. Ducas's study, they were not likely to believe that statement.

"Now let a fellow pass," urged Turkey. "I say, Vane-Carter's waiting——"

"V.C. can wait," said Bob. "You're not walking off with the Lizard's tuck, you fat cormorant. What's in those packets under your arms?"

"Nothing, I—I mean, some books the Lizard lent me. You see, I—I dropped into his study to borrow some books——"

"As well as to talk Soccer, and to tell him about Gunter of the Sixth?" asked Bob. "Let's see the books."

Bob Drake grasped a fat arm and jerked it up. The package under it fell on the passage floor, and burst open. The contents rolled out—half a dozen red ripe apples.

"Oh, haddocks!" gasped Turkey. "I—I meant to say apples, not books. The fact is, Talboys gave me those apples in his study a minute ago——"

"You fat villain, the Lizard is down in Roger's study, getting a jaw about that very hamper."

"Oh! Is he? I—I mean——"

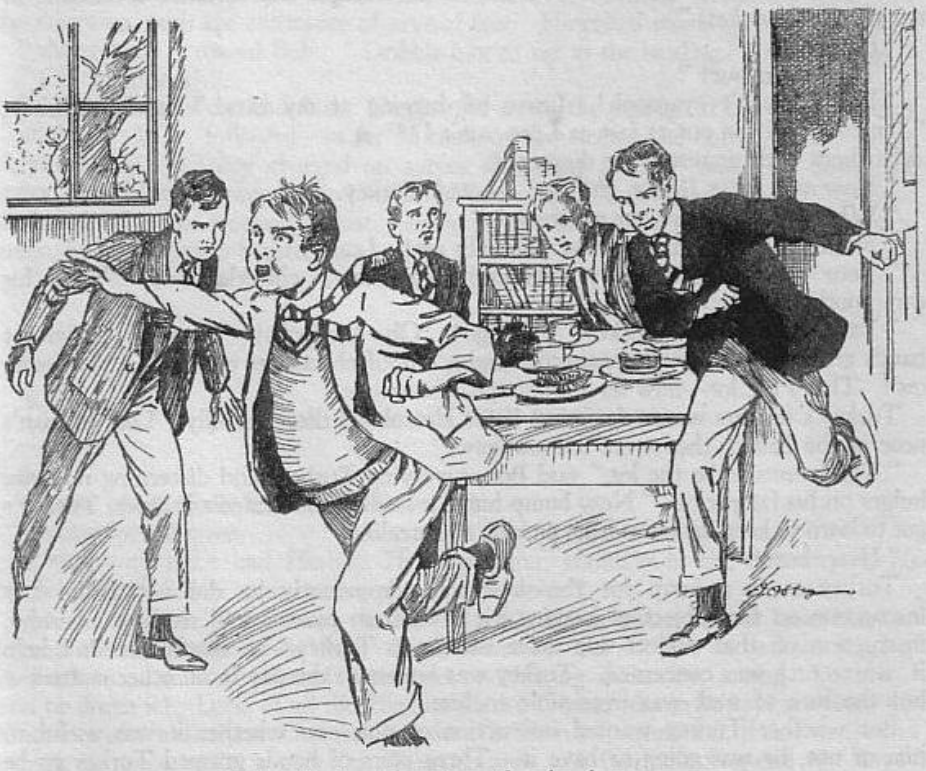
"We know what you mean," said Harry Compton. "Now walk back into that study, and unload. Go to it!"

"Look here——" protested Turkey.

"You field those apples, Bob, while we help Turkey back into the study," said the captain of the Fourth. And he took Turkey by one fat ear, Dick Lee taking him by the other: and they led Turkey back into No. 11, to an accompaniment of anguished squeaks from Turkey.

Bob Drake, grinning, followed them in, with an armful of apples. With him came Jimmy Conlon, who had stopped to see the fun. In order to enjoy the spectacle they seated themselves at the table.

On the study table was an open hamper. It still contained several packages, for which there had been no room in Turkey's pockets or under his fat arms. Perhaps the Cormorant of Carcroft had intended to pay a second visit after landing his first



Turkey Tuck made a jump for the doorway.

cargo in his own study. But Turkey's luck was out—he was not destined to get away even with his first cargo.

Bob pitched the apples into the hamper. Then jerked the other package from under the other fat arm and pitched that in.

"Now turn out your pockets!" he said.

"Look here, you swobs—— Wow! Will you leggo my ears?" yelled Turkey.

"Not till you've turned out your pockets, you fat burglar," said Harry Compton. "Sharp's the word. So long as you've got anything in your pockets, we're going to pull your ears—like that!"

"Yow—ow!"

"And like that!" said Dick Lee.

"Yaroooh!"

Turkey unwillingly turned out a pocket. A jar of jam was pitched into the hamper. From another pocket came a jar of pickles.

"Now let a fellow go!" he yelled. "I haven't got any sardines or biscuits in my trousers' pockets."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Turn them out!"

"But I haven't—yaroooh! Leave off lugging at my ears!" howled Turkey. "I'm turning them out as fast as I can, ain't I?"

Sardines and biscuits were disgorged.

"Now you let a fellow go——" hooted Turkey.

"What's that under your waistcoat?"

"Nothing! Only my tummy, you silly ass! Leago!"

"Your tummy's got a very suspicious bulge on it," chuckled Bob. "Give his ears another lug, you fellows."

"Yarooop!" yelled Turkey. "Leggo! Oh, haddocks! Wow!" Two fat hands groped under a tight waistcoat and a box of chocolates emerged. "Yow-ow-ow! That's the lot—now let a fellow go, you swobs."

Turkey's fat ears were released at last. He rubbed them ruefully. Like Marian's nose in the ballad, they were red and raw.

"That seems to be the lot," said Bob, surveying Turkey, and discerning no more bulges on his fat person. "Now bump him for raiding the Lizard's hamper. Turkey's got to learn to keep his paws from picking and stealing."

"Hear, hear!"

Turkey made a jump for the doorway. Apparently he did not desire any instruction on the subject of keeping his paws from picking and stealing. Besides, instruction on that subject was quite useless to Turkey—he simply couldn't help it, where tuck was concerned. Turkey was honest as the day in all other matters—but the lure of tuck was irresistible to him.

But whether Turkey wanted instruction or not, and whether it was useful to him or not, he was going to have it. Three pairs of hands grasped Turkey as he

jumped for the door, and hooked him back again. No. 11 Study whirled round Turkey, as he was swept off the floor in the grasp of those six hands.

Bump!

"Oh, haddocks!"

Bump!

"Wow! Leggo! Help!"

Bump!

"Oooooooooh!"

Turkey sat and roared. Bob Drake shook a warning finger at him.

"That's a tip!" he said. "Now, listen to this, you fat brigand—if we hear that anything's missing from this study, we'll bump you again, till you burst all over Carcroft. Got that?"

"Yaroooh!"

"Now boot him out!" said Bob.

"Ow! ow! Keep off! I say—oh, haddocks!" Turkey scrambled wildly for the doorway, with the assistance of several feet. He rolled roaring into the passage.

"After him!" roared Bob. "Dribble him as far as the landing."

"Oh, haddocks!"

Turkey bounded up, and fled. He charged down the passage at top speed. Harry Compton and Co. followed—as far as their own quarters, the corner study, where they went in. Turkey charged on across the study landing, and flew down the stairs, crashed into Bray of the Third and left him sprawling, and hurtled out into the quad, where he stopped, at last, leaning on one of the old oaks by the Sixth-Form green, and pumped in breath.

Chapter 2

ALL RIGHT FOR BRAY!

"Boy!"

Gunter of the Sixth Form fairly roared.

Gunter looked cross.

Twice and thrice had Herbert Henry Gunter, standing in the doorway of his study, called 'Boy': but answer there came none.

At the call of 'Boy' from the Sixth-form studies, there should have been an immediate scurry among the fags. Sixth-form men did not like to be kept waiting. A Sixth-form man at Carcroft spoke as one having authority, saying 'Do this!' and he doeth it! Least of all did Herbert Henry Gunter like to be kept waiting: for Gunter was a most important man—indeed in his own estimation, if not in that of others, his importance was practically unlimited. At Gunter's first call of 'Boy!'

Bray of the Third should have appeared as if by magic, prompt as the Slave of the Lamp at the behest of Aladdin.

Instead of which there was no scamper of feet in the passage. No breathless fag arrived to inquire what Gunter wanted. Nothing, in fact, happened, except that the echoes of Carcroft School boomed to the sound of Gunter's powerful voice.

"Boy!" roared Gunter, for the fourth time.

Then, at last, came the expected scamper. A fag, crimson with haste, came bolting up the passage.

"Here!" gasped Bray.

Gunter of the Sixth looked at him. He glared at him. Four times had Gunter had to bawl 'Boy' before Bray materialised. If that did not justify the use of the fives bat on a fag's trousers, Gunter would have liked to know what did.

Gunter was in a hurry, too. His pal Wilson was waiting for him in the quad, and they were going over to Ridgate before tea. Gunter had told Wilson that he wouldn't be a minute. Now he had been several minutes—owing to the delay of a miserable microbe in the Third Form in answering his call. It was no wonder that Gunter was wrathy.

"You lazy young sweep——" began Gunter.

Gunter, big and burly and beefy, towered over Bray. Bray backed hastily away across the passage.

"I say, I couldn't help it, Gunter," he squeaked. "A Fourth-form man barged me over on the stairs, and——"

"I've called you four times!" said Gunter, in an awful voice.

"I say, I'm sorry, Gunter, that fat flump Turkey bowled me over——"

"If I wasn't in a hurry," said Gunter, waving explanations aside, "I'd turn you up in my study and give you six of the best."

"I—I—I say, Gunter——"

"Don't jaw!" said Gunter. "I've no time to waste listening to a fag chinning. I've called you four times, and now you're here. If you think I want to listen to your jaw, you're mistaken. I've no time for it, see?"

Gunter had no time to listen to Bray's 'jaw', but apparently time to listen to his own. He went on:

"When I call 'Boy,' I expect you to come. If you don't you'll jolly well get whopped. I've had to wait for you. Precious state Carcroft is coming to, when a Sixth-form man has to wait for a fag! I've a jolly good mind to give you a jolly good batting, and I would if Wilson wasn't waiting for me."

"Yes, Gunter," said Bray, meekly. "I—I say, what did you want, Gunter?"

"I called you to tell you that I shall be back at half-past five, and shall want my tea to be ready then. If my tea isn't ready when I come in, look out for the fives bat, that's all."

"Yes, Gunter."

"Wilson and Crewe will be coming, so see that there's enough for three, and

ready on the dot at five-thirty. That's all—and think youself lucky that I don't whop you for keeping me waiting."

And with that, Herbert Henry Gunter swung round and stalked down the passage.

"But I say, Gunter——" squeaked Bray. "You haven't——"

If Gunter heard him, he did not heed. His long legs took long strides, and he turned a corner and disappeared.

Gunter was gone. Bray of the Third was left standing in the passage, with a dismayed face.

"Oh, crikey!" said Bray, addressing space.

Gunter was, in fact, a little thoughtless. He had bidden his fag prepare tea for three, prompt at five-thirty. But he had overlooked the trifling detail of handing him the necessary cash to make purchases at the school shop, or signed 'chit' which was equivalent to cash in the case of a Sixth-form senior. Without cash or a chit, Bray's own credit at the tuck-shop was not worth a peanut.

"Oh, crikey!" repeated Bray.

He had to have Gunter's tea ready at five-thirty, or take a batting. Gunter had promised him a batting if tea wasn't ready, and Gunter was a man of his word. Tea for three had to be produced somehow within an hour: and how he was going to produce it, in the circumstances, was a problem to Bray.

His own financial resources were not equal to the strain, being limited to twopence. Mrs. Game, at the school shop, would want either cash, or Gunter's signed order—and Bray was provided with neither. There was nothing doing at the school shop.

"Oh, crikey!" said Bray, for the third time.

He turned away—almost feeling the fives bat on his trousers in anticipation. Really, it was very thoughtless of Gunter. But he was in a hurry, and he had had to wait for Bray, and trifling details had escaped his powerful mind. Gunter was already walking out of gates with Wilson, and he was not likely to remember what he had forgotten. Gunter, as he went, was talking, and Wilson was listening: and Gunter found too deep an interest in his own conversation to think of other matters. Indeed he was not likely even to remember Bray's existence till he came in to tea. Then, if tea was not ready, there was the fives bat for Bray.

That tea for three had to be ready.

Bray knew that. He had to have Gunter's tea ready at five-thirty, though the skies fell. Bray had to scrounge that tea by fair means or foul!

The only question was, how?

Gladly he would have expended his own cash, if he had had any. Gunter would have reimbursed him afterwards. Gunter was, indeed, a generous fellow—often there was a can of sardines, or a cake, or a shrimp paste, left for Bray in his fag-master's study. But twopence was of no use: and Bray, after considering for a few moments the possibility of raising the wind among his friends in the Third, Donkin and Coot and the rest, dismissed that idea, as equally useless. He had to *scrounge that tea.*

It was almost a desperate Bray who went to and fro in the House during the next quarter of an hour, like a lion seeking what he might devour, or rather what Gunter of the Sixth might devour. Transformed for the nonce into a bold bad brigand, Bray of the Third was prepared to lift supplies wherever he could find them, with a total and absolute disregard for the rights of property. And it was quite a windfall to Bray when he came on a group of Fourth-form fellows and caught the word 'hamper'.

He eyed that group stealthily, and listened. Harry Compton, Bob Drake, and Dick Lee were talking with Lord Talboys, the 'Lizard' of the Fourth.

"So it's all right about the hamper, Lizard?" Bob Drake was saying.

"Right as rain, old top," said Lord Talboys. "It was rather a whacker, and the jolly old House dame mentioned it to Roger, and I had to see him. But I explained that we were celebrating beating St. Jim's at Soccer, and that a dozen fellows were comin' to the spread, so Roger said O.K."

"Roger's a sportsman," said Bob. "So it's all clear?"

"Quite. Spread at half-past five," said Lord Talboys. "You fellows are comin', and I'll ask Carr and Scott and old Drum and V.C., and a few more. Lots to go round—I asked them at home to make it a good one, and they did. Let's go and look for the fellows."

Without even noticing the fag hovering in the offing, drinking in every word, Lord Talboys and his friends went out into the quad, to gather the guests for the coming spread in No. 11 Study.

"By gum!" breathed Bray.

He watched the four out of the House. When they were gone, he cut up the staircase and scudded up the Fourth-form passage to No. 11 Study. If the hamper was there, his problem was solved. With a batting from Gunter in prospect if he failed, Bray had no more scruples than the boldest, baddest brigand that ever was. He whizzed into No. 11 Study: and his eyes fairly gloated on the hamper on the table, staked with good things.

"Oh, scissors!" said Bray.

He did not waste time. He stared round the study, spotted a newspaper, picked it up, and proceeded to pack it with good things from the hamper.

That hamper had already had one narrow escape from Turkey Tuck. This time it did not escape. There were marvellous things in that hamper from Talboys Hall—a cold chicken, and chocolates, cakes and scones—all sorts and conditions of good things. Bray's eyes gloated, and his mouth watered, as he selected the best, popping a few caramels into his mouth as he packed. But he did not linger. Lord Talboys or any of his friends might come up to the study: and Bray did not want to be caught there—very much indeed he did not. Rapidly he made a bundle in the *Ridgate Gazette*.

A relieved and happy Bray, chewing caramels, hurried out of the study, and cut for the stairs. Vane-Carter of the Fourth, going into No. 9, glanced at him as he

passed along the Fourth-form passage. But he gave Bray no special heed. Bray's heart beat fast as he passed the Sportsman of Carcroft: but V.C. went into his study unregarding: and the fag flew across the study landing. With a cheery grinning face he headed for Gunter's study in the Sixth.

It was all right now for Bray—and if it was not all right for Lord Talboys and the guests he was gathering for the Soccer celebration, that could not be helped. In an imperfect universe, everybody couldn't be satisfied: but Gunter would be satisfied, Bray would escape the impending batting, and really that was what mattered. Bray marched cheerily into Gunter's study with his plunder, and an almost empty hamper was left to greet the eyes of Rupert Lord Talboys when he arrived in No. 11 with his Soccer party.

Chapter 3

TURKEY'S WINDFALL!

Turkey Tuck stared.

Turkey was leaning on the old oak by the Sixth-form green, still a little breathless, and still feeling several lingering aches from his experience at the hands of the Carcroft Co.

His fat face was pessimistic.

Life, indeed, seemed rather weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable to James Smyth Tuck at the moment.

It had seemed such a happy opportunity, while Lord Talboys was in Roger's study, to annex the lion's share of the hamper from Talboys Hall. But not only had Turkey failed: but he had been bumped, he had been booted, and he had fled from lunging boots: and keen as he was to sample the good things from the Lizard's stately home, he dared not for his fat life venture near No. 11 Study again. That bountiful hamper was gone from his gaze like a beautiful dream: and Turkey, like Rachel of old, mourned for that which was gone, and could not be comforted.

His only comfort, if any, was that, on the Sixth-form green, those swobs Compton and Drake and Lee could not venture to follow him up and boot him again. Turkey, as he leaned his fat person on the trunk of the ancient oak, had a view of the windows of the Sixth-form studies, and under those windows, juniors had to be circumspect. So long as he remained there, Turkey Tuck was safe from being dribbled like a fat football for his sins. Certainly, any Sixth-form man who had noticed him there would have ordered him off such sacred precincts: but there was a senior Soccer game going on, on Big Side, and the green was deserted except for Turkey—and if any Sixth-form man was in his study, he did not look out and observe that fat figure that adorned the landscape.

But Turkey was thinking of getting a move on, for it was tea-time: and at all meal times the inner Turkey was in the imperative mood. He was not keen to join the scramble in Hall, with his fat thoughts lingering on the Lizard's hamper—but tea in hall was better than no tea: and Turkey was about to shift his weight from the massive trunk of the old oak, when something going on in one of the Sixth-form studies attracted his attention.

It was Gunter's study.

Gunter had left his study window open, and Turkey had a view of the interior of the room, which did not interest him in the least, till he saw a fag come into the study carrying a bundle.

It was Bray, whom he knew to be Gunter's fag: and Turkey frowned. Gunter of the Sixth had heaps of money, and was accustomed to do himself very well at study teas. Turkey had no doubt that Gunter's fag was there to get tea ready for his fag-master, and no doubt that it would be an ample spread, in Gunter's usual style. Hence the frown that corrugated his fat brow. Gunter of the Sixth was a swob, in Turkey's opinion. More than once he had kicked Turkey for frowsting about—as if it was Gunter's business whether Turkey frowsted about or not. Turkey would have liked to punch Gunter's bullet head, had such happy things been practicable. And here was Gunter's fag with a spread for Gunter, while Turkey was thinking of doorsteps and dish-water in Hall.

Turkey, frowning, stared into the study.

Bray did not observe him, at a little distance under the oak. Bray did not even glance towards the open window. Bray had no time to waste, for he had his own affairs to think of, which had been interrupted by the call of his fag-master and his brigandish activities since. He slammed the newspaper bundle down on Gunter's table, and left it there, turning back to the door.

It was not yet five o'clock. Gunter's tea was scheduled for five-thirty. Bray, having solved the problem of supplies, and conveyed them to his fag-master's study, was finished for the present. Not for half an hour yet would it be time for him to return and prepare Gunter's tea.

Bray left the study, shutting the door after him, and disappeared from Turkey Tuck's view.

"Oh, haddocks!" breathed Turkey.

His eyes remained fixed, as if fascinated, on the bundle wrapped in the newspaper on Gunter's table.

That bundle, he was assured, was packed with tuck for Gunter's tea. Gunter was the man to spend money like water on a spread. There it lay—waiting till it was time for the fag to prepare tea for his lord and master.

Turkey's mouth watered.

Irresistibly, as it were, he drew a little nearer to the open window. Soon he was peering over the broad stone sill into the study, at the newspaper bundle on the table. He was tempted.

In the Fourth-form studies, Turkey was often a raider of grub. No fellow's tuck was really safe from Turkey. But even the fat Turkey hesitated at the idea of grub-raiding in the Sixth. It was awfully risky.

But it is well said that he who hesitates is lost.

Gunter, as Turkey knew, had gone out of gates with his pal Wilson—he had seen them go. Bray was not likely to return immediately. The coast was clear.

Gunter, Turkey remembered, was a swob. Had he not kicked Turkey on his fat trousers on several occasions? If ever a swob deserved to have his tuck raided, Herbert Henry Gunter did. But the risk——

Turkey squinted round him stealthily. The Sixth-form green was absolutely deserted. Fellows could be seen in the distance: but nobody was at hand: nobody was interested in Turkey or his proceedings.

For a long, long minute Turkey hesitated. Then he clambered over the sill, and dropped breathlessly into the study.

A moment more, and he was peering into the newspaper bundle. His gooseberry eyes gloated, as Bray's had gloated in No. 11, as what he saw.

"Oh, haddocks!" gasped Turkey.

His first idea, on entering the study by the window, had been to help himself to a few unconsidered trifles from the bundle, devouring them on the spot. But as he gazed gloatingly at the contents, his ideas expanded.

There was a cold chicken—just like the cold chicken he had seen in Lord Talboys' hamper. There was a plum cake, a twin to one in the hamper. There were two pots of jam, a jar of jelly, a paper bag of scones, a carton of chocolates, and several other attractive things. This was very nearly as good as the hamper in No. 11 which had so narrowly escaped Turkey's fat paws. It was a windfall to a hungry Turkey—well worth a spot of risk.

Turkey, of course, had not the remotest idea of the true source of that handsome supply of foodstuffs. He knew nothing of Bray's adventures as a bold bad brigand. Turkey took it for granted that this was one of Gunter's customary spreads from the school shop, brought in by his fag: only on a rather more lavish scale than usual. Even Gunter did not often have a cold chicken at tea. To leave such a supply there, for a swob like Gunter, would have been, Turkey felt, a sin and a shame.

The fat junior stepped back to the window, and took a cautious survey of the landscape. The coast was still clear. From a distance came a roar, indicative of a goal, telling that the senior Soccer match was still going on. Fate seemed to be playing into Turkey's fat hands.

He made up his mind.

Stepping back to the table he hurriedly wrapped up the bundle in the newspaper again. He landed it on the window-sill, and after one more stealthy squint round, dropped outside.

The next moment he had lifted the bundle from the sill, stacked it under a fat arm, and was walking away with it.

Gunter's table was left as bare as Mother Hubbard's cupboard. Bray's bold bad exploits as a bold bad brigand had resulted, not in supplies for his fag-master, but in a windfall for Turkey Tuck. Bray, happily as yet unconscious of his doom, was booked for that batting when Gunter came in to tea! There was to be no spread for Gunter of the Sixth.

Little cared Turkey.

All Turkey cared about was to get off safe with his plunder. Those swobs, the Lizard and his friends, were welcome to keep that hamper from Talboys Hall—now! Turkey had enough of his own—at all events, of somebody's, which had now become his own by nine points of the law. This was quite as good a spread as the Lizard's, if Turkey got it safely to his study.

If eyes fell on him, as he walked off with the bundle under his arm, what was there suspicious in a fellow carrying a bundle into the House? Nobody had seen him enter Gunter's study, or emerge therefrom: that was what mattered. It was safe as houses now.

Bundle under arm, James Smyth Tuck walked in at the House doorway, with a casual air. He passed half a dozen fellows who took no notice of him whatever. He went up the staircase, and passed Carr, Scott, and Drummond on the landing, and they did not even glance at him. He walked up the Fourth-form passage, and passed Levett and Leath, who gave him no attention. He arrived at his own study, No. 9, and the door of that study closed on him.

Turkey chuckled.

It was all serene now. Gunter might kick up a fuss, which he was welcome to do. Nobody would ever know that Turkey had lifted a spread from a Sixth-form study.

Luckily his study-mate, Vane-Carter, had gone out, and Turkey had No. 9 to himself. With a grinning fat face, he unpacked the bundle, and started on the cold chicken without delay. Round him, as he gobbled, were ranged the other good things, awaiting their turn—such an array of comestibles as seldom delighted Turkey's eyes. It was a happy and glorious Turkey that gobbled cold chicken, and then started on a pot of jam with a tablespoon.

Chapter 4

FOUND GUILTY!

"What the dooce——" ejaculated Lord Talboys.

His lordship was looking into a hamper on the table in No. 11 Study in the Fourth.

In that hamper the Lizard had, naturally, expected to behold the good things that had arrived from Talboys Hall.

Instead of which, he beheld empty space, save for a few articles that Bray had considerately, or perhaps hurriedly, left therein.

There was quite a crowd of fellows in the study. That spread being designed to celebrate a Soccer victory, all the junior eleven had been asked to the festive board. Compton and Drake and Lee were there: Dudley Vane-Carter, and Scott and Carr and Drummond, Babtie and Licke and Jones. No. 11 was a roomy study, but it was crowded. And the whole party were ready for the spread. It seemed, however, that the spread was not ready for the party!

"Anything up, Lizard?" asked Bob.

"Sort of!" sighed the Lizard. "Looks to me like a frost. Anybody know who's been clearing out this hamper?"

"What?"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Phew!"

A crowd of juniors gathered round, staring into the denuded hamper. Bob Drake gave a roar.

"Turkey!".

"That fat villain!" exclaimed Harry Compton.

"By gum! He came back for it!" said Dick Lee. "Turkey—by gum, we'll scrag him—we'll strew him all over Carcroft——"

"Hold on!" said Lord Talboys, as the Carcroft Co. made a move towards the door. "Don't scrag poor old Turkey till we know whether he did it——"

"No doubt about that," said Bob. "We caught him here, walking off with half the stuff stacked about him, and marched him back, and bumped him, and booted him——"

"And we thought that would keep him off the grass!" said Dick Lee. "We didn't boot him enough."

"Not half enough!" said Harry Compton. "But we'll make up for it now. By gum, we'll make him feel like a Soccer ball this time."

"It was Turkey all right," said Drummond. "Who else?"

"Of course it was Turkey.

"Come on—let's go after him," exclaimed Bob. "He can't have scoffed the whole lot yet—even Turkey!"

"We'll give him the ragging of his life, if he has," said Babtie.

"We'll give him the ragging of his life whether he has or not!" said Bob. "Come on and rouse him out."

"If it was Turkey——" said the Lizard.

"No 'if' about it, fathead! It was Turkey."

"Well, we'll make sure first," said Lord Talboys. "Fair play's a giddy jewel, and it might have been somebody else. We'll ask Turkey first, before we scrag him."

The whole crowd poured out of No. 11 Study. Nobody but the Lizard doubted

that it was Turkey Tuck who had lifted the contents of the hamper: Turkey's manners and customs were well known—and had not the Carcroft Co. caught him in the very act hardly an hour ago? Perhaps Lord Talboys did not doubt very much, for really the thing seemed to speak for itself. But even the fat Cormorant of Carcroft was going to have fair play and the benefit of the doubt, if any.

"He won't be in the study," said Vane-Carter, as the crowd thronged to the door of No. 9. "More likely up in a box-room——"

"Off-side!" said Bob. "Listen!"

From No. 9 Study came an unmistakable sound. It was a sound of gobbling. James Smyth Tuck had been nicknamed 'Turkey' because he gobbled when he ate. That familiar sound from No. 9 indicated that James Smyth Tuck was at home.

Bob Drake hurled the door open.

"Oh!" came a startled ejaculation from within.

Turkey Tuck's left hand held a pot of jam. His right wielded a tablespoon. Jam was disappearing at a great rate on the downward path. Turkey's fat face was sticky. His fingers were sticky. He was sticky all over—the stickiest of Turkeys. Startled by that sudden irruption into his study, Turkey's fat hand stopped on its way to his capacious mouth, and the tablespoon, loaded with jam, remained suspended, like Mahomet's coffin, in mid-air.

"Ooogh!" gurgled Turkey. "Wharrer you fellows want! Making a chap jump! Look here, you get out, see?"

The junior eleven did not get out. They got in. They eyed Turkey almost wolfishly.

"Think it was Turkey now, Lizard!" hooted Bob.

"Sort of," assented his lordship. "Turkey, you fat scoundrel, couldn't you leave a fellow enough for tea?"

"Eh!" Turkey squinted at him. "Wharrer you mean? Look here, I ain't asking you fellows to this spread."

"What?" gasped his lordship.

"You never asked me to yours," said Turkey, "and I ain't asking you to mine. You can all jolly well get out, see?"

They gazed at him.

Evidence of Turkey's guilt was visible to all eyes. The remains of a cold chicken lay on a plate. Cakes and scones and pots of jam and jelly adorned the table. Turkey was not half through the feast when the interruption came. Perhaps, indeed, he could not have dealt with the lot at one sitting—even Turkey had his limit.

"Scrag him!" roared Bob Drake.

"Here, you keep off!" exclaimed Turkey, in alarm. "Wharrer you kicking up a row in my study for, I'd like to know. I say, V.C., you turn that mob out of the study. I'll let you have a whack, as you belong here. Not the others—they can all go and eat coke."

"I'm goin' to have a whack, you fat bandit, but not in this study," said Vane-Carter. "Pick up those things, you chaps, and get them back to Lizard's study."

"Here I say, you leave my grub alone!" roared Turkey in alarm and indignation. "Think you're going to walk off with my tuck?"

"Yours!" ejaculated Lord Talboys.

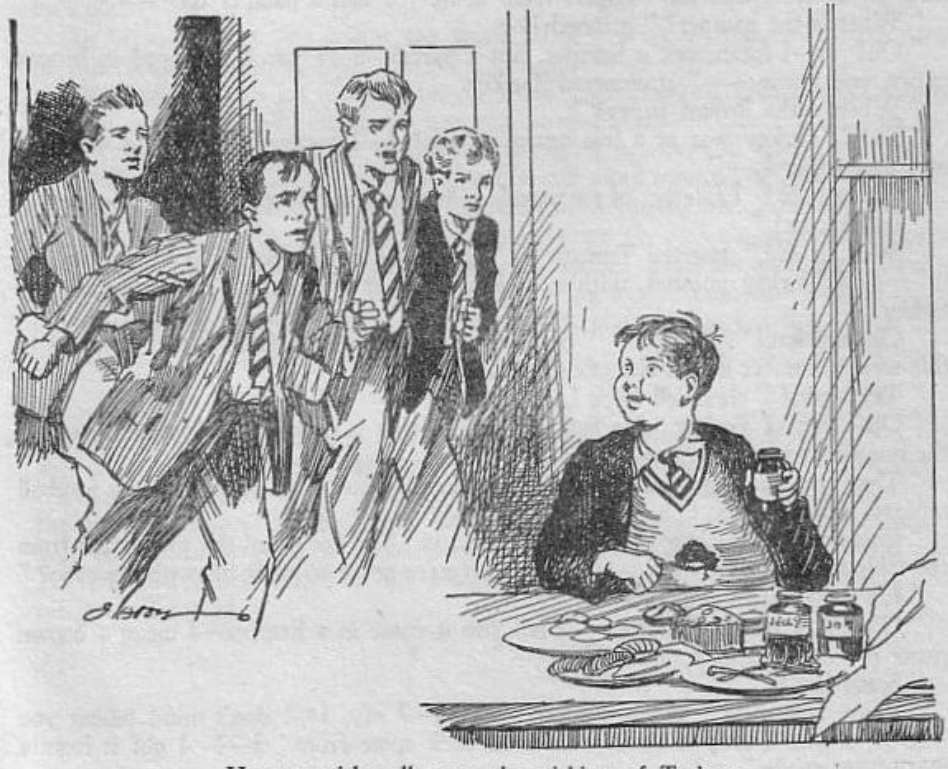
"Yes, mine," snorted Turkey. "You leave it alone, see?"

"Is he going to make out that he never burgled the hamper, when we've found him here scoffing the stuff!" exclaimed Harry Compton, blankly.

"Why, I know that cake—I saw it in the hamper," said Dick Lee, "and those pots of jam—the same——"

"He's finished the chicken," said Bob. "You pie-faced, pilfering, porker, are you trying to make out that this tuck didn't come out of the Lizard's hamper?"

"Eh! Of course it didn't!" gasped Turkey. "I haven't been near the hamper——"



He was sticky all over—the stickiest of Turkeys.

"We caught you at it an hour ago——"

"Well, I put everything back, didn't I?" yapped Turkey. "You jolly well know I did. Wharrer you mean?"

"I mean that we didn't boot you enough, and you went back afterwards——"

"I didn't!" yelled Turkey.

"Oh, scrag him!" exclaimed Vane-Carter.

"Bump him!"

"Burst him!"

"I say, I ain't—I didn't—I wasn't," spluttered Turkey. "I tell you this is my tuck—it ain't out of the Lizard's hamper——"

"Collar him!"

"Hold on," Lord Talboys interposed. "Let him speak! Look here, Turkey, if you didn't raid my hamper, where did all this tuck come from?"

"From home, of course," retorted Turkey, promptly. "Think you're the only chap at Carcroft that has hampers from home? I had a hamper too——"

"Where's the hamper?" grinned Bob.

"Oh! I—I mean, not a hamper, but a parcel—a—a parcel wrapped in brown paper, you know——" stammered Turkey.

"Where's the brown paper?"

"Eh!" Turkey was at a loss again. "Oh! I—I mean, it was—was wrapped in a newspaper——"

"Oh, crumbs! I can sort of see parcels of tuck coming wrapped in a newspaper!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, it did," asserted Turkey. "There's the newspaper, if you want to see it." And Turkey pointed, with a sticky finger, at a crumpled newspaper in the fender.

"Oh, my hat!" said Bob. "So they send you parcels from home wrapped in this week's number of the *Ridgate Gazette*?"

"Try again!" chuckled Dick Lee.

"Oh" gasped Turkey. He had not noticed that it was the local paper in which the bundle had been wrapped. "I—I—I mean——"

"That newspaper was in my study," said Lord Talboys. "I got it for the football reports. Turkey, you fibbing fathead——"

"Leave that cake alone!" roared Turkey, as Dick Lee lifted the plum cake from the table for transport to No. 11. "Think you're going to walk off with my cake?"

"It's the Lizard's cake, you fat spoofer."

"'Tain't!" roared Turkey. "I tell you it came in a hamper—I mean a brown paper parcel—that is, a newspaper——"

"Scrag him!"

"I say, keep off!" yelled Turkey. "I—I—I say, I—I don't mind telling you fellows, if you'll keep it dark, where the tuck come from. I—I—I got it from a Sixth-form study."

"What?" yelled all the juniors together.

"Gunter's study——"

"Oh, holy smoke!" gasped Bob Drake. "And how did the Lizard's tuck get to Gunter's study wrapped in the Lizard's newspaper——"

"'Tain't! I tell you it was Gunter's——"

"Collar him!"

"Leago!" yelled Turkey. "I tell you it was in Stunter's guddy—I mean in Gunter's study, and I—yaroooooop!"

Turkey roared as he whirled in many hands.

It was all up with Turkey.

Nobody was likely to believe that Turkey had had a parcel from home so closely resembling the missing contents of the Lizard's hamper. But still less was anybody likely to believe that he had raided the Lizard's tuck from a study in the Sixth! That seemed to all the juniors the very steepest yarn that even the untruthful Turkey had ever spun.

For once, Turkey was telling the truth. But nobody who knew Turkey could be expected to guess that one!

They collared the fat Turkey on all sides. Turkey had finished the chicken, and had been found devouring the jam, surrounded by the plunder. That was more than evidence enough! He whirled in avenging hands, and smote the floor of No. 9 Study with a resounding bump, and a still more resounding yell.

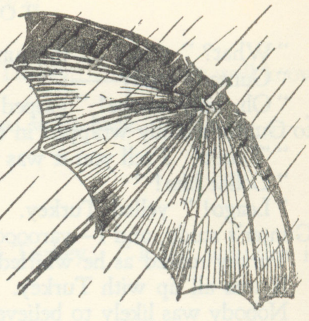
And as he sat and spluttered for breath, Drake shoved the chicken-bones down the back of a fat neck, and Dick Lee followed them up with the jammy tablespoon. Then he was bumped once more, and yet once more. Then the juniors gathered up all that remained on the table, and trooped out of the study, laughing—leaving Turkey sitting on the floor struggling for his second wind, and gurgling horribly.

* * *

Quite a merry party collected in No. 11 Study. Enough had been rescued from the voracious Turkey to provide a spread, and the celebration of the Soccer victory was duly celebrated—what time the hapless Bray was yelling under a fives-bat in the hand of Gunter of the Sixth, and Turkey Tuck was wriggling frantically in wild endeavours to extract chicken-bones and a jammy tablespoon from his fat neck. All was merry and bright in the Lizard's study—though it was, perhaps, a little tough on Turkey!

JUST AN INCH OF RAIN

by Tom Grosvenor



We often hear on the radio or read in the paper that "as much as one inch of rain fell in an hour." Have you ever wondered exactly what one inch of rain means? Rain is water, and as water is measured by the pint and the gallon, how does linear measure enter into the reckoning? An inch of rain actually means that the rain which has fallen at a certain spot has been collected in a rain gauge, and that the amount of water collected has risen to one inch in the scale.

Rain gauges are of all sorts and kinds—metal, porcelain, wood, glass—and the rain is usually collected by a funnel. But the most careful adjustments and calculations are made to ensure that the rain measured in a gauge corresponds to the amount which fell on neighbouring ground and which could not itself be measured because it was all the time soaking in or splashing around or running away.

The rain gauge may be less than a foot in diameter, and when rain is spread over a vast area, a whole county or several counties, or the entire land, the streets of London and Glasgow alike may be dancing with raindrops. The water in the rain gauge may be only an eggcupful: but what is it for the whole country?

Let us suppose that a shower is limited to one square mile in area and that one inch of rain falls on that territory. How much water has actually fallen?

In a square mile there are 640 acres; in an acre there are 43,560 square feet; and in a square foot there are 144 square inches. Therefore, in one square mile, there are just over 4,000,000,000 square inches (our figures, like our raindrops, being round). If all those square inches are covered by rain an inch deep, there will be roughly 4,000,000,000 cubic inches of water, or 2,315,000 cubic feet. One cubic foot of water weighs about 62½ lbs., the exact amount varying with the density of the water. Therefore the weight of one inch of rain covering one square mile will be about 145,000,000 lbs., or something in the region of 65,000 tons.

Let us turn it into gallons. As a gallon of water weighs 10 lbs., a rainfall of 145,000,000 lbs. means 14,500,000 gallons. That is what one inch of rain over one square mile will yield.

Think what it must mean to live in very wet places. In England, the wettest place is Stye Head in Cumberland, where there is a yearly rainfall of 181 inches.

The LITTLE MAN with a BIG HEART

by EDWARD NORTHCOTT

MANY centuries before the birth of Christ the Ancient Greeks held, every four years, a festival of athletics at Olympia. The feats achieved and hardships endured by the young Greeks live in history even to this day. These festivals went on until they were abolished in the year 394. Fifteen centuries later they were revived, in the Olympic Games which we know today.

One of the chief events of the Olympic Games is the Marathon, a race of 26 miles 385 yards, which also has its place in Greek history. It takes its name from the battle of Marathon between the Greeks and the Persians in 490 B.C. The Greeks, far outnumbered, won a great victory, and a courier ran the 22 miles from the battlefield to Athens to deliver the good news, dropping dead as he did so.

Nearly 2,400 years later another Marathon runner almost died with 'Victory' on his lips. His was not the race with news from the battlefield. For him, the only battle concerned that between Mind and Matter—and Mind won. Perhaps never since the Greek courier took the news to Athens has one man done so much to win a battle between a weary body and a determined mind as did Dorando Pietri, who nearly lost his life in the great effort.

On a July day in 1908 the 75 competitors assembled at Windsor Castle for the start of the Olympic Games Marathon. The event attracted a crowd which thickly lined the long route to the White City Stadium in London. As the runners set off there were few indeed among the onlookers who took notice of individuals in

that early stage. To those who looked on, the 75 men were off on a long race which would not necessarily go to the swiftest among them; it was a gruelling race, this Marathon, in which stamina and courage were the essentials. To the few who did, perhaps, take note of individuals, there must have been a great deal of wonderment at the presence of a little, wiry man who appeared as a mere stripling among the more stalwart competitors. The little man was Dorando Pietri, a 23-years-old Italian waiter, who was to belie his frail appearance by a display of courage and endurance that in all the long history of athletics has never been surpassed—nor must it be.

It was a very hot day, and as the miles passed so competitiors were forced to withdraw from the race as the heat sapped their stamina. After covering 20 miles the field settled down with Hefferson, the South African, leading, as he had done for the past 14 miles. Five minutes behind him, in second place, came little Dorando, seemingly indifferent to the heat and conditions. The little waiter gradually quickened his pace until he caught the leader, who was beginning to flag with his effort. Dorando put on a spurt, and at Wormwood Scrubs, with little more than half a mile to go before the Stadium was reached, went into the lead, much to the delight of the warders who lined the prison walls!

In the lead, Dorando set his own pace, but it soon became evident that his effort had taken a great deal out of him, and he began to show signs of distress. His breathing became somewhat laboured and his stride lost its former ease and rhythm; distress was in his face. Although he looked likely to collapse at any moment he went gamely on, calling on all his reserves to force him along until the Stadium was reached—and he entered for the last lap, a mere few hundred yards.

The eyes of 100,000 people turned to a little figure which had appeared on the cinder track, and the Stadium rocked to thunderous applause. Among those who gave their appreciative encouragement to that little figure was Queen Alexandra, wife of the reigning king, Edward VII.

The applause gave way to gasps of wonder and alarm as it became clear that all was not well with Dorando. He turned to make for the winning post, but lost his sense of direction and went the wrong way, for officials to put him right. He had merely gone a few yards astray, but in his distressed condition the distance must have seemed miles. Every step took its toll as the little man went gamely on. Practically foot by foot the small figure dragged weary, leaden legs nearer and nearer to Victory. Then it happened. What so many in that vast sea of onlookers had feared came suddenly—*Dorando collapsed and lay still*!

The noise of the excited 100,000 died away, and the Stadium became almost as silent as if it were empty. All present had their eyes glued to that crumpled heap lying on the track. Officials were faced with a difficult situation for Dorando could not be left lying there. Yet to assist him would mean immediate disqualification. Their problem was solved for them by some doctors who rushed to the Italian's assistance, hoping for the best but fearing the worst.

The doctors dare not move him, for that would have meant immediate disqualification. But the needs of a human overcame all man-made rules, and they acted. The doctors poured water over his head, chafed his feeble limbs, and moistened his bluish mouth. Then, to their intense relief the exhausted man came round, and struggled to his feet.

Never had so gallant an effort been witnessed by those present, and as the pitiful little man reeled forward the thousands remained silent, almost as if in fear that applause would create enough disturbance to knock him down again. Semi-conscious, with glazed eyes and leaden limbs, Dorando went painfully forward—staggering, tottering, shuffling—towards a tape which must have seemed farther off than ever. *Down he went for a second time.*

Gritting his teeth, Dorando somehow got to his feet, and again began that heartbreaking shuffle. The will-power of a man is a wonderful thing, and here it was shown in all its glory as Dorando slowly and painfully dragged feeble limb after limb, each shuffled step taking him towards that strip of tape which meant so much to him. On and on he went until there were barely 10 yards to go, the crowd silent beyond belief as it watched those feeble shuffles. One more step—shuffle, shuffle, shuffle; *then Dorando fell again.*

Women burst into tears, men had moist eyes, and groans of disappointment rolled round that vast Stadium. And then suddenly there came a buzz of excitement, which grew into a roar as the great crowd became aware of another figure on the track. It was the American, J. J. Hayes, who had overtaken and passed Hefferson soon after Dorando had done so.

Lying on the track as water was being poured over his head, the little waiter sensed rather than heard the excited crowd, and his sub-conscious mind worked sufficiently to warn him that another had entered the Stadium, heading for the tape. A superhuman effort, and Dorando was on his feet once more, for a moment swaying like a boxer out on his feet. Then he stumbled forward, and a surge of tremendous courage propelled him onward—to get him across the tape as he fell again, totally unconscious!

The feelings of the crowd had been pent up during those painful moments, but now they could be released. And what a roar there was! It is literally true to say that the Stadium shook to its foundations as cheer upon cheer thundered and echoed. But all this was lost on poor Dorando, who lay where he had fallen while doctors and officials gathered anxiously round. For a long time the doctors worked hard to restore life and feeling to that inert little figure until, as always happens with an unusual incident, rumour went on its pointless way to the effect that Dorando was dead.

Happily it was not so, but for more than two hours the little waiter hovered between life and death, and perhaps owed his salvation to a queen who could not look on such courage unmoved. Queen Alexandra sent a message to the effect that Dorando must be rewarded with a cup in recognition of his gallant effort. This

appreciation probably did more than anything to give Dorando the will to live, which he then asserted as strongly as he had asserted the will to win. In due course he received a cup—a gold one.

All Dorando's efforts were, however, to prove of no avail, for a protest was lodged by the American camp, the claim being made that the Italian had received assistance beyond that allowed by the Rules. At the inquiry there was a great deal of evidence to sift and, of course, witnesses had varying accounts. The committee sat for a long time before deciding that gallant Dorando must be disqualified, and there could have been few who did not wish otherwise. But it had to be, and the race was awarded to Hayes, who had finished barely 100 yards behind the little Italian.

Poor Dorando's efforts had thus been all in vain, and at dangerous cost. It had always been considered rather risky for young, immature men to take part in such a long and gruelling race, those over 30 being more fitted to the demands made on their stamina. And results of a medical examination pointed the moral. Dorando's ordeal took its toll to the extent of *displacing his heart by half an inch and causing a loss of* 10 *lbs. in weight*! Happily he was not disabled, and recovered to race again and beat Hayes in events in the United States.

One will search the Roll of Marathon Winners in vain for the name of Dorando Pietri. But it will survive long after many of those on the Roll are forgotten, for history will always record that race in the heat of a July day in 1908 as 'Dorando's Marathon'.

Could there be greater honour?