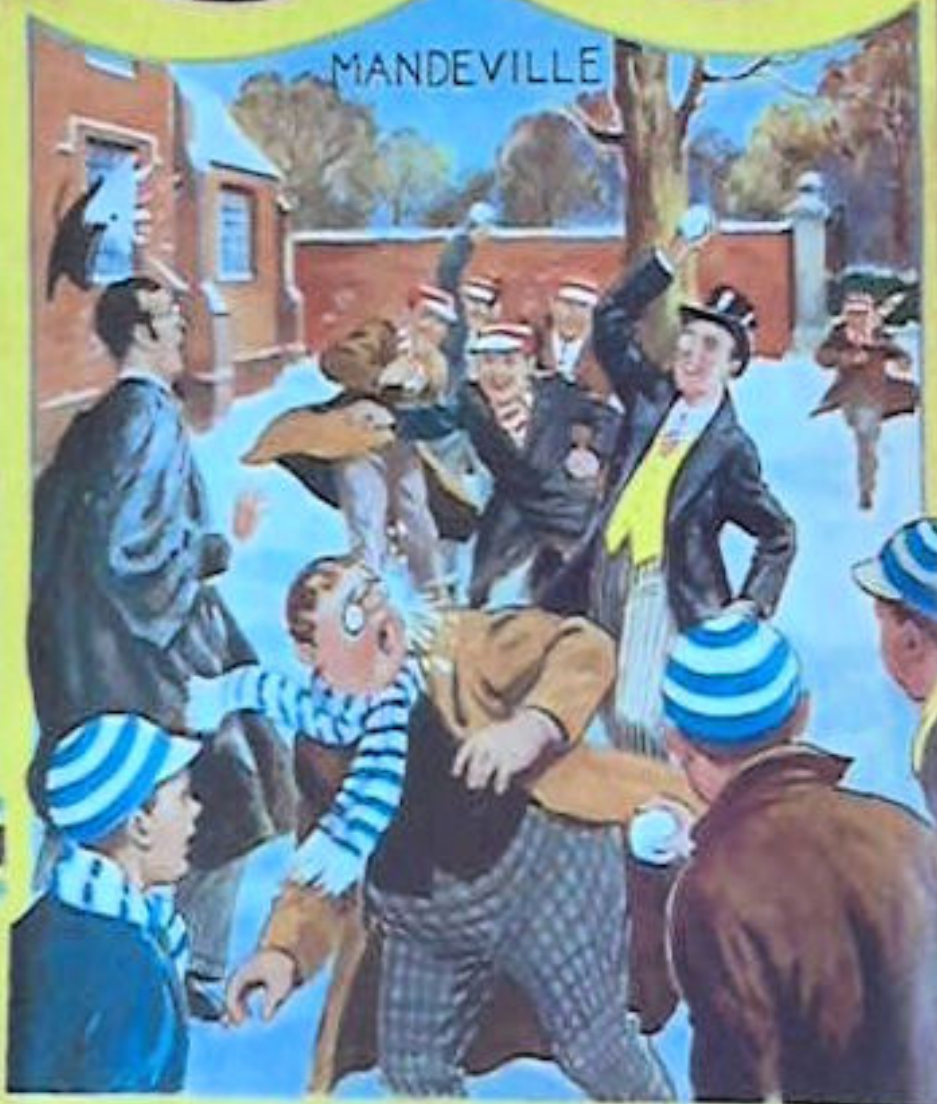


# The TOM MERRYS Own



*Containing an extra long and special story of Billy Bunter*

MANDEVILLE PUBLICATIONS  
10 Queen Street, London, W.1.

# TOM MERRY'S OWN

MANDEVILLE PUBLICATIONS

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## FOREWORD

HERE we are again—the fourth issue of Tom Merry's Own, in happy time for Christmas.

Our first issue was received with flattering acclamation. But one fault was found : Greyfriars School was not represented among the rest. This omission was rectified in the second and third issues : in which Harry Wharton and Co. and Billy Bunter found their place along with Tom Merry and Co. of St. Jim's and Jimmy Silver and Co. of Rookwood. But there was still a fly in the ointment : not enough Greyfriars ! So it was decided that in the present issue the cheery chums of Greyfriars should have a really good innings, in a much longer story—more than half as long, in fact, as a whole Bunter Book ! And here it is !

So once more we offer our readers the “ mixture as before ”—Greyfriars, St. Jim's, Carcroft, and King of the Islands—but with the improvement that the stories about the favourite characters are of more substantial length : and in the hope that our kind and gentle readers will appreciate our efforts to please them, we remain,

Sincerely,

MARTIN CLIFFORD  
FRANK RICHARDS

# The Ghost of Billy Bunter



by

FRANK RICHARDS

## CHAPTER I

### JOLT FOR BILLY BUNTER!

“CHEEK!”

Billy Bunter uttered that word in tones of the deepest indignation. In fact his fat voice fairly thrilled with it.

Billy Bunter was often indignant. He was indignant when Mr. Quelch expected him to know his lessons. He was indignant when a long-expected postal order failed to arrive from the old folks at home. He was indignant when a Remove man kicked him for raiding a study cupboard. But never had he been so indignant as now.

His little round eyes fairly flashed, behind his big round spectacles. He breathed hard through his little fat nose. His plump brow corrugated into a frown rivalling the frightful, fearful, frantic frown of the Lord High Executioner. He glared at the letter in his plump hand, with a glare that might have endangered his spectacles.

“Cheek!” he gasped.

It was morning break at Greyfriars School. A good many fellows had stopped before the letter-rack, to look for letters. Break-up for the Christmas holidays was near at hand: and Billy Bunter, at least, hoped that the approach of the festive season might have loosened the parental purse-strings, and that the spirit of Yuletide might materialise in the shape of a remittance. And

a cheery anticipative grin came over his fat face at the sight of a letter addressed to himself in the hand of Mr. William Samuel Bunter. It was a letter from home, at any rate; and surely Mr. Bunter would not have written to his hopeful son at Greyfriars, just before the Christmas hols, without enclosing something more valuable than parental advice!

But when he had opened that letter, the grin vanished from Bunter's face as if wiped off by a duster. It was replaced by an expression that was almost inexpressible.

A dozen fellows looked round at him.

Bunter did not heed them. He glared at the letter, and for the third time gasped out:

"Cheek!"

"Anything up, old fat man?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Is the upfulness terrific, my esteemed fat Bunter?" inquired Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Cheek—sheer cheek!" gasped Bunter, "Me, you know! Me! I'll watch it. I say, you fellows, it must be a joke! The pater can't mean it, can he?"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"That depends on what it is," he said. "But a fellow's pater generally means what he says, I believe."

"But it's the limit!" howled Bunter.

"What's the limit?" asked Frank Nugent.

"What he says in this letter," gasped Bunter. "He can't mean it! Catch me washing up—!"

"Washing up?" repeated Johnny Bull, staring at him. "Do you mean washing? If your pater's advised you to wash, it's a jolly good idea. You've wanted a wash for a jolly long time."

"Beast!"

Billy Bunter gave the letter from home another inimical glare. Then he crumpled it in a fat hand. He breathed hard, and he breathed deep.

"Me!" he gasped. "Me work in the hols—!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Poor old Bunter!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, gad!" ejaculated Vernon-Smith. "Does your pater want you to do the washing-up for the party of dukes and marquises at Bunter Court this Christmas, old fat man?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a clue to Billy Bunter's breathless indignation now. Apparently that letter from home contained a suggestion that Bunter should do something in the nature of work. Such a suggestion could hardly fail to rouse the fat Owl's deepest and most indignant ire.

"Work!" repeated Bunter, as if dazed by the bare idea. "Me, you know!"

"Not in your line!" grinned Bob.

"Work in the hols! That chap Mark Linley works in the hols, as I jolly well know—"

"And why not?" grunted Johnny Bull.

Sniff, from Bunter!

"Well, he's here on a scholarship, and his people are hard up," he said. "It's all very well for him! But me—"

"You fat frump—!" said Bob Cherry. "Old Marky's worth billions of Bunters."

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"A spot of work won't hurt you, old fat man," said Harry Wharton, comfortably. "Lots of people work, and they seem to survive somehow."

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Think of the dignity of labour!" suggested Frank Nugent, grinning.

"You silly ass!" hooted Bunter. Evidently the dignity of labour had no appeal for the Owl of the Remove.

"If you read Carlyle—"

"Blow Carlyle—!"

"But he's awfully eloquent about the dignity of labour—"

"I'll bet he never did any!" yapped Bunter.

"Oh! No! I suppose not! But—"

"Blow him, anyway! Uncle Carter must have been potty to think of it, and the pater ought to have told him at once where he got off! Cheek!" hissed Bunter.

He breathed wrath and indignation.

"My dear Owl," said Bob Cherry. "If your pater wants you to do a job of work in the hols, you'd better make up your mind to it. Lots of fellows have to. These are tough times, you know."

"Not at Bunter Court!" grinned Skinner. "At Bunter Court they roll in gold on the tessellated marble floors—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bunter's often told us so, at any rate," chuckled Smithy. "Has the glory departed, old fat frump? Are they hard up in the ancestral halls of the Bunters?"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "Not at all! Nothing of the kind! I—I mean—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Really, what Bunter had revealed of that letter from home, did not seem quite to tally with his oft-repeated description of the glories of Bunter Court. Often and often did the fat Owl wax eloquent over the unlimited wealth and luxury of that enviable abode. Really, a "job in the hols" was not quite in the picture.

"I—I mean—!" stammered Bunter.

He realized, rather late, that in his wrath and indignation, he had let the cat out of the bag! It was rather too late to recapture that cat!



"The—the—the fact is, I—I mean that the pater hasn't said anything about work in the hols—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And he's only said it for a joke, too—"

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

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! What—what the pater really says is that I'm to go to my Uncle Carter's for Christmas, because—because he's throwing a magnificent party—"

"Is that all?" chuckled Bob.

"That's all, old chap! There's nothing about washing-up!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My Uncle Carter doesn't keep a boarding-house, you know—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Nothing of the kind, you know. Of course, my pater wouldn't hear of such a thing! It's only his little joke—I—I mean, he hasn't mentioned anything of the kind—not a word—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, you cackling beasts—!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, there's the bell," exclaimed Bob Cherry, as the clang announcing third school was heard. "Come on, you men! Hope you'll enjoy that magnificent party at Uncle Carter's, Bunter—"

"Thanks, old chap—"

"—especially the washing-up—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast!" roared Bunter.

Harry Wharton and Co., laughing, trooped away to the Remove form-room. Billy Bunter rolled after them, with a frowning fat brow, the letter from home crumpled in a fat grubby fist.

That letter, evidently, had given William George Bunter a jolt: a very severe jolt. His only hope—a faint one—was that it might turn out to be merely a horrid joke! Certainly Mr. Bunter seemed hardly likely to have written to his son at Greyfriars School for the sole purpose of pulling his fat leg. Still, it couldn't be true! It was too appalling to be true! Billy Bunter could only cling to that very faint hope like a drowning man clinging to a straw.

## CHAPTER II

### NO GO!

"I SAY, YOU fellows!"

"Hook it!"

"Oh, really, Bull—"

Five fellows, in No. 1 study in the Remove, looked round at a fat face in the doorway of that study. Tea was on in No. 1 study, and the Famous Five were about to begin, when Bunter happened.

Automatically, as it were, Johnny Bull bade Bunter "hook it". But, as he glanced at the fat face, he did not repeat that injunction. There was deep affliction in the fat countenance of the Owl of the Remove.

Generally, Bunter's fat face was cheerful. Now it looked as if the fat Owl was seeking to understudy the ancient king who never smiled again.

His plump brow was gloomy. His eyes blinked dismally behind his big spectacles. Seldom had he looked so pessimistic. The universe, it was clear, was not running to Billy Bunter's satisfaction at the moment.

"Anything the matter, Bunter?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Oh, lor'!" said Bunter: a reply which seemed to indicate that something was indeed the matter.

"Smithy been booting you?" asked Bob Cherry. "Has he guessed where his chocs went?"

"Oh, really, Cherry! I never had Smithy's chocs. I expect he ate them and forgot all about it. Just like Smithy to make a fuss about a few chocs that lasted a fellow hardly a minute," said Bunter, scornfully.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But it ain't Smithy," went on Bunter. "I say, you fellows, I—I'm up against it."

"Quelch after you for your lines?" asked Nugent.

"Blow Quelch!" said Bunter, irritably, "Tain't that!"

"Well, give it a name, old fat man," said Bob. "Has a prefect called you up for six?"

"Blow the prefects! It's worse than that," moaned Bunter.

"Trot in and try a slice of this cake," suggested Harry Wharton.

Billy Bunter's gloomy face brightened a little—just a little. Deep in woe as he appeared, cake offered comfort. There was solace in cake! He rolled into the study, evidently interested.

It was not a large cake. It was, in fact, rather a small one. But in view of the sad aspect of the woeful Owl, Harry Wharton cut a generous slice, detaching about a quarter of the cake from the remainder.

"Here you are, Bunter," he said.

"Thanks, old chap!" said Bunter. He picked up, not the slice, but the bulk of the cake, leaving the slice on the plate.

Munch!

Five pairs of eyes fixed on Bunter as he munched. Apparently he had mistaken the cake for the slice. At all events, he was munching the cake, leaving the slice to be apportioned among five fellows.

Bob Cherry grinned.

"Go it, Bunter," he said, with mild sarcasm.

Munch! munch! munch! Bunter did not need telling—he was going it!

“Like it?” asked Johnny Bull, also sarcastic.

“Eh? Oh! Yes! Not a bad cake,” said Bunter. “Not like our cakes at Bunter Court, of course: but not bad. I say, you fellows.” Bunter’s fat voice came a little muffled through a barrage of cake. “I say, I’m rather in a jam over the Christmas holidays, and I want my pals to help me out.”

“Trot off and tell them!” suggested Johnny Bull.

Billy Bunter disdained to heed that. Apparently the pals to whom he alluded were the fellows in No. 1 study.

“It’s about that letter,” he explained.

“What letter?” asked Nugent.

Billy Bunter blinked at him. That letter from home had haunted the fat Owl all through the day. It had weighed on his podgy mind. It had caused him to be even more inattentive than usual in class, earning him lines from Quelch. But the Famous Five, sad to relate, had forgotten all about it! Somehow or other, their own affairs, not Bunter’s, occupied their minds!

“Oh, really, Nugent! You jolly well know that I had a letter from my pater this morning—!”

“Oh, that!” said Frank. Thus reminded of it, he remembered. “Looking forward to that magnificent party at Uncle Carter’s?”

“Is that what you’re looking so jolly cheerful about?” asked Bob.

“I say, you fellows, it’s awful!” moaned Bunter. “Unless the pater’s joking—think it might be a joke?”

Bunter blinked hopefully at five grinning faces. He drew a crumpled and grubby letter from his pocket.

“Look here, you fellows read it, and tell me what you think,” he said. “I—I can’t make it out, unless the pater’s joking. But—but if he means it, I want you fellows to stand by me and help me out, see?”

The fat Owl laid the letter on the table.

“You want us to read it?” asked Harry.

“Haven’t I said so?” yapped Bunter.

“Oh, all right.”

The Famous Five read the letter together. Billy Bunter munched cake, and watched them as they read, with perhaps a lingering hope that they might be able to reassure him with the opinion that it was some inexplicable joke on the part of Mr. Bunter. The letter ran:

Dear William,

I am requesting your headmaster to permit you to leave school in advance of the vacation. You will proceed to your Uncle Carter’s boarding-house, Aspidistra House, on the Leas at Folkestone, where you will spend your Christmas holidays.

As you are aware, William, these are hard times, and I shall have difficulty

in meeting income tax due in January. In these circumstances, I have no choice but to exercise economy. Your sister Bessie will go to Aunt Jane's for Christmas, and your brother Samuel to Uncle Tuck's. At your Uncle Carter's, everything will of course be provided for you, but you will be expected to make yourself useful in return. Your uncle expects a brisk business with Christmas boarders, and labour is both scarce and expensive. Your chief duty will, I think, consist in washing-up in the kitchen: but if anything else be required of you, you will of course be ready, industrious, and obliging.

Your affectionate Father,

W. S. BUNTER.

Harry Wharton and Co. read the letter through, looked at one another, and looked at Billy Bunter. If Bunter fancied that it might be a "joke", they quite failed to see upon what he founded that fancy. Only too plainly, Mr. Bunter was quite in earnest about it. Neither did it seem to them so fearfully appalling as it apparently seemed to Bunter. The Bunter household was not the only one that felt the pinch of hard times. Washing-up was not, perhaps, a particularly attractive occupation, especially in the hols; but really the prospect was not one to make a fellow look so utterly woebegone. Really and truly, there was no reason why Billy Bunter shouldn't make himself useful for once in his fat life, to ease the family finances.

"Think it's a joke?" asked Bunter, hopefully.

"Of course not, you ass," said Harry.

"Think the pater means it?"

"Of course he does," said Bob.

"But—but—but it's too jolly thick!" gasped Bunter. "All very well for a chap like Linley to work in the hols. But me—"

"Fathead!"

"It's cheek!" said Bunter. "Just pure cheek of Uncle Carter. The pater ought to have shut him right up. I—I say, you fellows, suppose—suppose I—I go home instead of going to Uncle Carter's, what—what do you think the pater will do?"

"I wouldn't chance it!" grinned Bob.

"Well, I ain't going to Uncle Carter's! Catch me washing-up! I—I suppose the pater would be waxy if I took no notice of this, and—and just went home—"

"Don't be a goat, Bunter," said Harry Wharton. "If money's tight at home, it's up to any fellow to help if he can. Look at it like that!"

"Oh, really, Wharton! Money ain't tight at home—"

"Wha-a-t?"

"Nothing of the kind! I've told you often enough that my people are rich—"

"Too often!" agreed Bob Cherry.

"The oftenfulness has been terrific," grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "But the factfulness appears to be a boot on the other leg."

"Tain't that at all," explained Bunter. "It's just the pater's way. He often makes out that he can't afford things, because he has three of us at school. It's that beastly income-tax really! I think it ought to be stopped."

"Hear, hear!" chuckled Bob. "A lot of fellows' paters would agree with that, old fat man."

"You just say 'income tax' to the pater, and he goes right off at the deep end, as if it was a fellow's fault!" said Bunter. "He's thinking about income tax in January, and taking it out of us! Blow the income tax!"

"Everybody gets the income tax in the neck," said Frank Nugent. "It's just one of those things!"

"Well, I jolly well ain't going to Uncle Carter's to wash up for his blessed boarders," snorted Bunter. "But look here, you fellows, if you're sure that the pater means what he says in that letter—"

"Bank on that!"

"Well, I know a way out, and it's up to you, Wharton."

"To me?" said Harry Wharton, blankly: and the other fellows stared at Bunter. No member of the Co. could see in what way the captain of the Remove could save Bunter from the awful prospect of a spot of work.

"Don't you see?" urged Bunter. "Suppose I was fixed up for the hols. already, and you wouldn't let me off, Harry, old chap—"

"But you're not."

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"And if you were, I'd let you off like a shot."

"Beast! I—I mean, look here, old chap, be a pal! Of course I shouldn't tell the pater that I've just fixed it up to keep away from Uncle Carter's. I'll write to him that it's been fixed up for weeks—"

"You fat villain!"

"Wharrer you calling a fellow names for?" demanded Bunter, indignantly. "Look here, I'll come home with you for the vac, see? That will wash out Uncle Carter. I'll explain that I simply couldn't let you down, as you're relying on me for Christmas—"

"But I'm not."

"I wish you'd keep to the point, Wharton," yapped Bunter, peevishly. "The point is to pull the pater's leg and keep clear of Uncle Carter's—"

"Do you think I'm going to help you pull your pater's leg?" roared the captain of the Remove.

"Eh? I'd do the same for you, old chap! I know it will be rather roughing it, at your small place," went on Bunter, thoughtfully. "I mean, after what I'm used to at home. But I don't mind that."

"You don't mind that?" gasped Harry Wharton.

"Not at all, old fellow! I shan't expect too much," assured Bunter. "I know your people can't afford things like I'm accustomed to, but I'm no snob, I hope! I suppose these fellows will be coming home with you—well, if I can stand them at school, I can stand them in the hols. That's all right."

"Thanks!" said Bob Cherry.

"The thankfulness is terrific," chuckled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"And I can jolly well stand your uncle and aunt too, Wharton, if you come to that. They're rather a pair of old frumps—"

"What?"

"Old frumps! But I've stood them before, and I can stand them again. I'm an accommodating chap. That's all right."

"There's one thing you've overlooked," said Harry.

"What's that?"

"They can't stand you!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And now you've said your piece, roll away," added the captain of the Remove. "Nobody's going to help you pull your pater's leg, and if I see you within a mile of Wharton Lodge these hols, I'll boot you all round Surrey and back again."

"Beast!"

"Shut the door after you!"

"Look here, you rotter—I mean, look here, dear old chap—Wow! Wharrer you grabbing my ear for?" yelled Bunter. "Will you leggo my ear?"

Harry Wharton, with a fat ear between finger and thumb, led Billy Bunter to the doorway. There he twirled him into the passage, and released the fat ear.

"Hook it!" he said. And the door closed on Bunter.

"Beast!" came in a howl through the keyhole. "Yah! Rotter! Cad! You come out here, and I'll mop up the passage with you."

"Coming!"

The door reopened. But by the time it was open, Billy Bunter was disappearing across the landing; having apparently decided after all not to mop up the passage with the captain of the Remove.

### CHAPTER III

#### BOOT FOR BUNTER!

"VERNON-SMITH!"

"Yes, sir."

"Please tell Bunter to come to my study."

"Oh! Very well, sir."

Mr. Quelch, master of the Remove, walked on to his study; and as his back was turned to Herbert Vernon-Smith, he did not see the scowl on the Bounder's face.

To Quelch, it was a trifle light as air to tell a Remove fellow to find another Remove fellow and send him in. To Smithy it was not a trifle, as Smithy, it so happened, had no time to waste just then, as he was about to go out.

Certainly, he could not have explained to his form-master that he was going out, as it was after lock-ups, when of course no Greyfriars fellow was supposed to be thinking of going out. Smithy's intention had been to slip quietly out of the House, steal across the dusky quad, and drop from the school wall—secretly, silently, and surreptitiously, unknown to Quelch or anyone else. It was just ill-luck that Quelch happened to call on him to tell Bunter that he was wanted.

It was very irritating to the black sheep of the Remove who had to see Joey Banks that day, if he was to be "on" for the three-thirty at Wapshot on the morrow. He was tempted to disregard Quelch, and cut out all the same. But Quelch was not a man to be lightly disregarded: neither did the Bounder want to call special attention to himself, in the circumstances. So, having scowled at Quelch's departing back, Smithy proceeded to look for William George Bunter, the fat ornament of the Remove.

He did not expect to have to look very far. As tea was over. Bunter was not likely to be in hall or in a study. As it was lock-ups, he could not be out of the House, or in the tuckshop. In cold December weather Bunter was most likely to be found frowning before the fire in an armchair in the Rag, unlikely to heave his weight out of the armchair till the bell went for prep. So to the Rag Smithy directed his footsteps.

He looked in at the open doorway. There were a good many fellows in the Rag, but he did not discern a familiar fat figure among them.

"Bunter here?" he called out.

Two or three fellows looked round.

"Not here," answered Tom Brown.

"Bother the fat ass! Know where he is?"

"Haven't the foggiest."

"Is he up in the study, Toddy?"

"Shouldn't think so," answered Peter Todd, who shared No. 7 in the Remove with Billy Bunter. "Nothing to eat there, that I know of."

"What the dickens do you want Bunter for, Smithy?" asked Skinner.

The Bounder gave an angry growl.

"Think I want him? Quelch has just told me to send him to his study! I hope it's a whopping, bother him."

"Well, he can't be far away, Smithy," said Bob Cherry. "Make a noise like a jam tart, and he will come running."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The runfulness will be terrific," chuckled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Blow him!" grunted the Bounder. "Have any of you fellows seen the fat idiot?"

"He was in my study after class," said Harry Wharton. "Haven't seen him since. That was more than an hour ago, though."

"Anybody seen the blithering Owl since?" yapped the Bounder.

There was no answer to that question. Apparently nobody had. Vernon-Smith turned away, breathing hard.

Generally, Bunter was easily to be found. Now nobody seemed to know where he was, or where he had been for the last hour. It was unusual: and it was very annoying to a scapegrace who had to find him, before he sneaked out of bounds to see a sporting friend.

The Bounder tramped away, inwardly resolving to kick Billy Bunter all the way to Quelch's study when he had found him.

But finding him did not seem easy. He looked into hall, but Bunter was not there. No fat figure was to be seen in the passages. Smithy went up the staircase at last, to look in the studies.

Most of the Remove studies were untenanted, as it was not yet time for prep. Smithy looked into No. 7, and found it empty. Then, with increasing exasperation, he looked into study after study. Most of them were vacant: but he found Hazeldene in No. 2: who, in answer to a snapped question, replied that he hadn't seen Bunter and didn't want to. In No. 6 he found Wibley, pottering about with his property box, but Wibley had not seen Bunter. In No. 12 he discovered Lord Mauleverer, reclining on his sofa with his noble head resting on his hands clasped behind it.

"Seen Bunter?" snapped Smithy.

"Yaas."

"Oh, good! Where is he?"

"Haven't an idea."

"You silly ass, where did you see him?"

"He was cutting away from Wharton's study—"

"When was that?"

"About an hour ago, I think."

"You silly chump!" roared the Bounder. He did not want to know where Bunter had been an hour ago. He wanted to know where Bunter was now.

"Thanks," yawned Mauleverer. "Are you always as polite as that, Smithy, when you butt into a fellow's study?"

"Oh, go and eat coke."

Smithy banged the door and departed. The only other fellow he found up in the studies was Fisher T. Fish. Fishy was sitting at the table in No. 14 with a pencil in his hand, and a paper before him, deep in calculations. He gave the Bounder's frowning face an impatient glance as Smithy looked in.



"Beat it!" he said, tersely. "I'm doing my accounts! Don't spill anything."

"Counting your money?" snapped Smithy.

"Sure! There's threepence I can't track," said Fisher T. Fish, with an anxious pucker in his brow. "I sure got to track it, feller. I know I ain't spent it, and I ain't lent it to any guy—that ain't possible—and I can't have lost it—I got to get on the track of that threepence—"

"Have you seen Bunter?"

"Nope! Shut the door after you."

Vernon-Smith shut the door after him, with a bang that woke most of the echoes of the Remove passage.

He stood in the passage, wondering where Bunter might possibly be. It was quite mysterious. Billy Bunter, generally too much in evidence, seemed to have vanished like the ghost of a fat Owl. Where was Bunter?

Smithy was growing more and more exasperated. He had none too much time to cut out and see Joey Banks, and get back before prep, without wasting a minute. And now he had wasted many minutes, and looked like wasting more. It looked as if he would have to give Mr. Banks a miss, and all because a fat and fatuous Owl had, for some mysterious reason of his own, disappeared from knowledge.

"Blow the fat frump!" hissed Smithy. "I've a jolly good mind to cut, and leave Quelch to find him himself if he wants him, blow him."

But that was merely "hot air". Even the reckless Bounder could not venture to pass Mr. Quelch by like the idle wind which he regarded not. He had to find Bunter.

Where was he? He thought of the boxroom. Skinner and his friends sometimes sneaked up to the boxroom for a quiet smoke. That was not in Billy Bunter's line: and the boxroom, certainly, was an unattractive spot for a sojourn on a cold December day. However, as he had now looked everywhere else, the Bounder went up the stair at the end of the passage, to look in the boxroom.

He crossed the little landing at the top of the stair. There was another stair, narrow and winding, which led up to a disused attic, from the boxroom landing. But it was hardly imaginable that the elusive Owl could have gone up to a cold dark attic, and Smithy did not glance in that direction. He hurled open the boxroom door, and stared in.

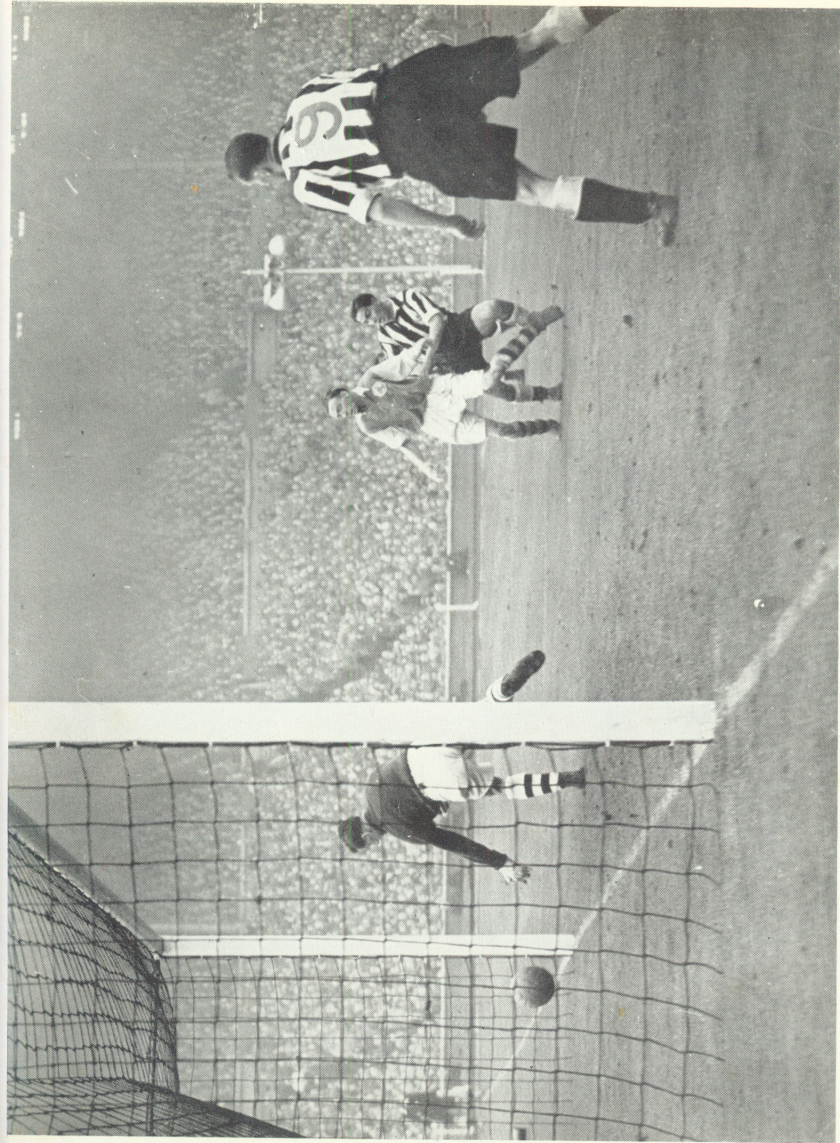
But all was dark within. Bunter was not there.

"Blow him!" hissed the Bounder.

He turned back.

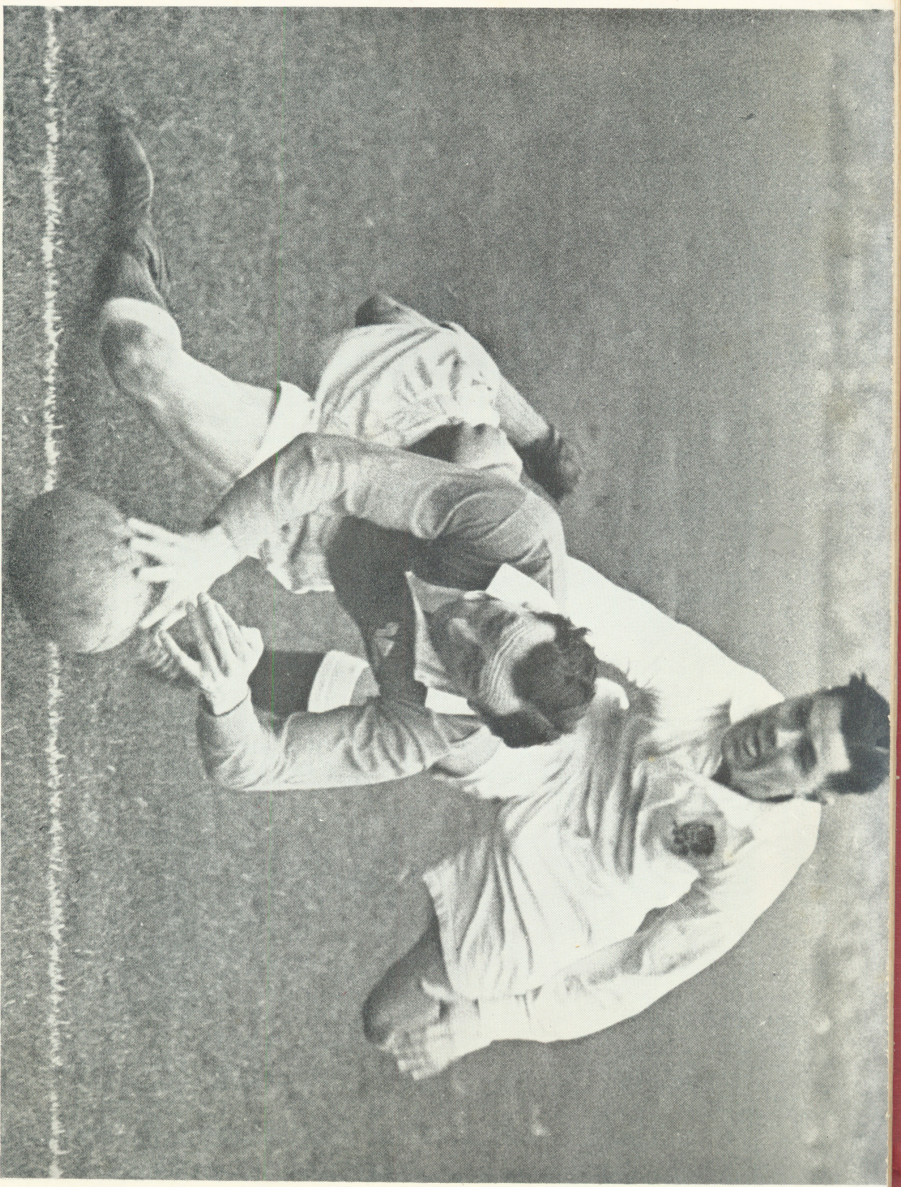
As he did so, a sound caused him to glance towards the narrow attic stair across the landing. To his astonishment, he caught the gleam of a pocket-torch in the darkness on the old stair. Someone was coming down. In the gleam of the light he caught a glimmer of spectacles.

"Bunter!" he roared.



## THE WINNING EFFORT I.

Newcastle's cup-winning goal passes Arsenal's goalkeeper Swindin. Scored by George Robledo who is seen behind Arsenal left-back Lionel Smith. Right Foreground : Newcastle centre-forward Milburn.



## THE WINNING EFFORT 2.

K. J. Jones, Wales, scores the try which gave Wales their victory over England at Twickenham.

There was a startled exclamation on the attic stair, and the flash-lamp was promptly shut off.

"Oh, crikey!"

"Bunter, you fat ass, so you're there."

"Oh! No! I—I ain't here—!" gasped a fat voice. "I—I—I mean—I—I haven't been up in the attics—I—I mean—oh, crikey!"

"You blithering idiot, I've been hunting for you everywhere."

"Oh! I—I—I—"

"You fat scoundrel, have you bagged tuck from somebody's study, and gone up there to scoff it?" hooted the Bounder. That seemed, indeed, the only possible explanation. There was nothing in the top attic to attract Bunter or anyone else: and Bunter hated stairs, having so much weight to carry up them. And it was not uncommon for the fat Owl to annex foodstuffs from a study cupboard, and retire to a secluded spot to devour his prey. Smithy had no doubt that that accounted for Bunter's mysterious disappearance, and for his discovery of him on the attic stair.

"Eh! Oh! No! Yes! I mean—!" gasped Bunter.

"You're wanted, you fat ass."

"Oh! All right! Is it a feed?"

"It's Quelch, you blitherer."

"Oh, blow Quelch! What does he want?"

"You!" snapped Smithy. He groped for Bunter, in the dark, and caught a collar. "Come on!"

"Yaroooh!" roared Bunter, as he came. "Leggo my collar! You've banged my head on the wall! Will you leggo? Whooooooop!"

Smithy did not let go. He yanked the fat Owl down the attic stair, yanked him across the little landing to the lower stair, and yanked him, headlong, down to the Remove passage. There, in the light, Billy Bunter rolled and roared and spluttered, as the angry Bounder landed him in a heap on the floor.

"Yow! ow! ow! Beast! Keep off, Smithy, you rotter! Wow! Ow! I'm all out of breath! Wow! Oooooogh!"

"Get going, you fat freak!" exclaimed Smithy. "I'm going to boot you as far as Quelch's study—!"

"Yaroooh! Stop kicking a fellow!" yelled Bunter, "Oh, crikey! Wow! I'm going, ain't I? Yow-ow-ow-ow!"

Billy Bunter scrambled wildly to his feet. Two or three articles dropped from his pockets as he scrambled. One was a flash-lamp, another was a rather rusty iron key. The fat Owl clutched them up in haste: and, with Vernon-Smith's boot thudding on his tight trousers, tore down the passage. After him rushed the Bounder, dribbling him. It was too late now for Smithy to think of getting out and back again before prep: his interview with Joey Banks had to be postponed. There was some solace in booting Bunter: and the Bounder booted him with tremendous vim, as he raced roaring down the Remove

passage. It was a breathless and wildly spluttering Bunter that escaped, at last, down the stairs—even Smithy not venturing to boot him quite so far as Masters' Studies.

But Bunter, no doubt, had had enough. Certainly he was feeling as if he had had too much. It was quite a little while before he recovered sufficiently to roll along to his form-master's study to ascertain what Quelch wanted.

## CHAPTER IV

## TO GO OR NOT TO GO?

MR. QUELCH was frowning when the fattest member of his form rolled into his study at last. It was half an hour or more since Smithy had been bidden to send Bunter in. Quelch did not like to be kept waiting. His expressive face was a little more expressive than usual, as he glanced up from a pile of form papers at the fat flustered face of a breathless Owl.

"Bunter!" he rapped. "I sent for you half an hour ago—thirty-three minutes ago," added Mr. Quelch, with a glance at the clock. Quelch was always exact.

"Did—did—did you, sir?" gasped Bunter. "I—I haven't had time to do my lines yet, sir—I—I was just going to begin—"

"I have not sent for you about your lines, Bunter. I sent for you—"

"I—I came as—as soon as Smithy told me, sir. I—I think he couldn't find me, sir—I was—was in the library, sir, looking for a book—"

"Very well!" rapped Mr. Quelch. "Now you are here, Bunter—"

"If—if it's about the oranges, sir—"

"Oranges!" repeated Mr. Quelch, staring at him.

"I never had them, sir," said Bunter, earnestly. "So far as I know, Coker never left them in the lobby, sir."

"Coker!" repeated Mr. Quelch, blankly.

"If—if he did, sir, I never saw them there, and I certainly never helped myself—I wouldn't, sir. I didn't know there were oranges in the bag, sir—I never saw the bag at all—Coker may have thought so as he came back and saw me eating one, but—"

"Bless my soul," said Mr. Quelch. "If you have been purloining fruit belonging to a Fifth-form boy, Bunter—"

"Oh, no, sir! Nothing of the kind! I—I thought that Coker wouldn't miss one or two—I—I mean, I—I never touched them—"

Mr. Quelch breathed hard.

"On any other occasion, Bunter, I should cane you for taking oranges belonging to a Fifth-form boy—"

"But—but I—I never!" gasped Bunter. "If Coker says—"

"That will do, Bunter! I shall not cane you, neither need you write the lines, as—"

"Oh!" Bunter's fat face brightened. Quelch seemed to be in an unusually placable mood. "Th-th-thank you, sir! May I go now?"

"Will you kindly allow me to finish speaking, Bunter?" snapped Mr. Quelch. "I was about to say, as you are leaving the school to-morrow, Tuesday, morning—"

Billy Bunter jumped.

"L-l-leaving, sir!" he stuttered. "D—did you say l-l-leaving, sir?"

"That is why I have sent for you, Bunter. Dr. Locke informs me that your father has made a particular request that you shall be permitted to leave before the accustomed date of the Christmas holidays—"

"Oh!" mumbled Bunter. He understood now. It was not Quelch's lines! It was not Coker's oranges! It was Uncle Carter and his washing-up!

"From what the headmaster has told me," continued Mr. Quelch, "your father desires you to go to your uncle Mr. Carter's residence at Folkestone to-morrow, where, I understood, you will pass the Christmas vacation."

That, apparently, was all Quelch knew! He was not aware of the washing-up! Billy Bunter was only too painfully aware of it.

"You will not, therefore, attend classes to-morrow, Bunter," went on Mr. Quelch. "After breakfast you will pack your box, instead of going to the form-room as usual, and you will be given your journey money. You will take the ten o'clock train at Courtfield Station. A taxicab will be here at twenty minutes to ten to take you to the railway station."

"B-b-b—but, sir—!" stammered Bunter. "If—if—if you please, sir, I—I—I'd rather not go, sir—"

"What?" ejaculated Mr. Quelch.

He stared quite blankly at Bunter. That was the very last thing he would have expected to hear from the fat Owl.

Even a studious fellow, keen on school work, would probably have been pleased to get a little extra holiday. Bunter was not a studious fellow. He was very, very far from being keen on school work. So really he might have been expected to beam all over his fat face at the happy prospect of getting away early for the vac. Instead of which, it appeared that he didn't want to go! Quelch, unaware of the washing-up that awaited the fat Owl at Mr. Carter's boarding establishment on the Leas at Folkestone, could only stare.

Billy Bunter blinked at him, not very hopefully. He did not want to go to Uncle Carter's. He jolly well wasn't going to Uncle Carter's if he could help it. If he didn't turn up at Uncle Carter's, Mr. Carter would be obliged to engage a washer-up, even if labour was scarce and expensive: and that, Bunter hoped at least, would see him through for the vac! And surely Quelch ought to sympathise with a fellow who wanted to stay on at school till the very last

minute, absorbing knowledge in the form-room instead of jumping at the chance of an extra spot of holiday!

"I—I'd much rather stay till the end of the term, sir," stammered Bunter. "I—I should miss my—my lessons, sir—"

"What?" Quelch doubted his ears.

"You—you've told me yourself, sir, that—that I'm backward in class, and—and I'm anxious to—to pull up, sir."

"Bless my soul!"

"If you'd kindly let me keep on to the end of the term, sir—" mumbled the fat Owl.

Mr. Quelch gave him a very fixed and suspicious look. It was very true that Bunter was backward in class. It was true that his form-master had told him so, not once but many times. Never before had Billy Bunter displayed the slightest sign of a desire to get a little "forrarder", as it were. Now he was all eagerness. But the change was a little too sudden to impress Mr. Quelch.

It was plain enough that Bunter did not want to go to his Uncle Carter's. But whatever his reason for that, Quelch was not likely to believe that it was a sudden eager desire to add to his stores of knowledge.

"So—so if you'd write to the pater, sir—I mean my father, sir—and—and say that it would be better for me to stay on to the end of the term as usual, sir—" mumbled Bunter.

"I can do nothing of the kind, Bunter."

"Oh, really, sir—"

"I am glad, Bunter, to see this desire on your part to do your form, and your form-master, more credit—if it be genuine!" said Mr. Quelch, grimly. "In that case, Bunter, you will receive every assistance from me—next term!"

"Oh!" moaned Bunter. Next term was of no use to Bunter!

"As the headmaster has complied with your father's request, the matter is not in my hands," continued Mr. Quelch. "If, however, the statement you have just made is sincere—"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"—then I will set you a holiday task—"

"Eh?"

"If that will meet your wishes, Bunter—"

"Oh, crikey!"

To judge by Bunter's look, a holiday task would be far from meeting his wishes. It couldn't have been farther, in fact.

Bunter gave his form-master a horrified blink, and backed to the door. He was glad that Mr. Quelch did not pursue the subject, and that he was able to get out of the study at that.

He gasped as he closed the door. Having closed it, he shook a fat fist at it. "Beast!" he breathed.

Then he rolled dismally down the passage. But mingled with the dismal

pessimism in his fat face, was a look of obstinacy. All his hopes had failed him. He had hoped that that awful proposition of washing-up at Aspidistra House might have been only a ghastly jest: and that hope had failed. He had hoped that Quelch, finding him keen on school work, might have put the stopper on. That hope too had failed. To all appearance, Billy Bunter was booked for Aspidistra House, to wash up, and wash up, and wash up, world without end, for Uncle Carter's boarders in that boarding establishment on the Leas at Folkestone. But the worm will turn! A horse may be taken to water, but cannot be made to drink! Billy Bunter, as a rule, was not stubborn. But there was a spot of obstinacy in him. And if anything could call it forth, it was the prospect of endless washing-up at Aspidistra House. Billy Bunter, now, was not merely obstinate—he was as obstinate as a mule! He was not going to wash up! He was not going to Aspidistra House. Whatever might betide, Billy Bunter's fat mind was made up on that—as fixed and immutable as the laws of the Medes and Persians! And that was that!

## CHAPTER V

## MYSTERIOUS!

“HALLO, HALLO, hallo!”  
Bob Cherry noticed it first, and uttered that surprised ejaculation. But all the Remove fellows noticed it in a moment or two. And they all stared at Billy Bunter's bed in the Remove dormitory.

“Some ass japing—!” said Harry Wharton.

“The japefulness seems to be terrific.”

“What silly ass—?”

“Poor old Bunter! You'll be chilly to-night,” grinned Skinner.

“I—I say, you fellows, my bedclothes are gone!” exclaimed Billy Bunter, blinking at a denuded bed through his big spectacles.

Really, it was surprising. “Japing” was not uncommon in the Greyfriars Remove. This, apparently, was a jape: but it seemed to most of the fellows rather the limit. Billy Bunter's bed had been stripped of blankets, pillow, and quilt. Every other bed was quite in order. But some surreptitious person had entered the Remove dormitory and taken Bunter's bedclothes away. There was no sign of them to be seen.

“Well, of all the silly asses!” said Bob Cherry. “If that's a joke, it doesn't seem to me funny.”

“Must be a joke, I suppose,” said Frank Nugent. “But what silly ass—”

“I say, you fellows, I can't sleep without blankets,” squeaked Billy Bunter. “It's too jolly cold, you know.”



"Your fat will keep you warm, like a polar bear," suggested Skinner.

"Oh, really, Skinner—"

"Was it you, Skinner?" asked Harry Wharton. "If so, you'd better cough up those blankets before Wingate comes in to put off the light."

"Not guilty, my lord."

"Man from another dorm, perhaps," said Vernon-Smith.

"Blessed if I see why he should pick on Bunter," said Johnny Bull. "All the other beds are all right."

Wingate of the Sixth, who was seeing lights out for the Remove that night, looked in at the doorway.

"Now, then," he called out. "What's up there? Turn in."

"Bunter's bedclothes have been taken away, Wingate," said Harry Wharton.

"What?"

The Greyfriars captain came striding in. He stared at the blanketless bed, as all the Removites were doing, and frowned.

"Who's done that?" he rapped.

He glanced round at a crowd of staring faces. But there was no reply. If the unknown japer was in the Remove, evidently he did not intend to reveal the fact. Wingate knitted his brows.

"Do you hear me?" he rapped. "Where are Bunter's bedclothes?"

Still no reply.

"Do you know anything about this, Wharton?"

"Not a thing," answered Harry. "I suppose it's a practical joke, but I don't know who the silly ass is."

"I say, Wingate, I can't sleep without bedclothes," squeaked Billy Bunter.

"I know that, you young ass! They've got to be found! All of you look for them, and look sharp!" rapped Wingate.

Wingate had no doubt that the unknown practical joker had hidden the blankets somewhere in the dormitory. And at his order, all the Remove fellows started searching for them.

But they searched in vain. They looked under the beds, and into the cupboard: everywhere up and down the long room: but not a sign was discovered of the missing blankets, quilt, and pillow. It was soon clear that the missing articles were not in the dormitory at all.

"They're not here, Wingate," said Bob Cherry, at last.

"Somebody's taken them out of the dorm," said Squiff.

"One of you young sweeps, I've no doubt," growled Wingate. "Look here, if this is an idiotic joke on Bunter, it's gone far enough. Whoever took those bedclothes away, go and get them at once."

But not a man in the Remove made any movement to go.

Wingate's frown intensified. His time was being wasted, and a Sixth Form prefect's time was not to be wasted with impunity. Gladly he would have given the unknown practical joker "six": if only he had known who it was.

But there was no clue. If the japer was a Removite, he was very carefully keeping his own counsel: but it was, of course, possible that some fellow from another form had been "larking" in the Remove dormitory.

"Very well," said Wingate, at last. "I shall have to go down and speak to the Housedame. Whoever played this silly trick may expect the licking of his life when I get hold of him."

With that, Wingate tramped angrily out of the dormitory. Evidently Billy Bunter couldn't sleep without blankets on a cold December night: and a fresh supply had to be obtained. Which was a further waste of a prefect's valuable time, as well as a very unusual and extraordinary occurrence. The juniors were left in a buzz as the Greyfriars captain departed.

"I wouldn't like to be in the silly ass's shoes, when Wingate spots him," remarked Peter Todd. "He will get six of the very best."

"But who the dickens can have played such a fool trick?" asked Bob Cherry, "Sure it wasn't you, Skinner?"

"Oh, don't be a goat," snapped Skinner.

"Well, you're always playing some rotten trick or other, you know—you put treacle in a fellow's bed once—"

"Well, I didn't snoop Bunter's blankets," snarled Skinner, "and don't you get putting it into Wingate's head that I did. There will be a row about it."

"If you did it—"

"Don't I keep on telling you that I didn't?" yelled Skinner.

"Oh, all right! If you didn't, you didn't! But if you didn't, I'm dashed if I can guess who did."

A good many fellows were regarding Harold Skinner rather suspiciously. He was well known for his practical jokes, which were seldom good-natured. And his denial did not count for very much, for Skinner was far from being a stickler for facts.

"Look here, Skinner," said Harry Wharton. "If you've hidden Bunter's bedclothes somewhere, you've got time to cut out and get them while Wingate's gone—"

"And the soonerfulness is the betterfulness, my esteemed japing Skinner," advised Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Oh, go and eat coke!" yapped Skinner.

And he turned into bed, scowling. If Harold Skinner was the culprit, evidently he did not intend to let it be known. The other fellows turned in, and all but Billy Bunter were in bed, by the time Trotter, the House page, arrived in the dormitory with a big bundle on his shoulder. That bundle consisted of blankets, pillow, and quilt, from Mrs. Kebble's stores: and Trotter, grinning, proceeded to make the bed. Billy Bunter was grinning, too, as he watched him, though what Billy Bunter saw to grin at in the affair was rather a mystery.

Trotter, his task done, departed, and Billy Bunter turned into his new-

made bed. Wingate of the Sixth came back into the dormitory, still frowning. The mystery of the missing blankets evidently irritated him. He glanced up and down, scanning face after face, as if in search of a clue to the culprit. Then he stared, or rather glared, at Bunter.

"What are you grinning at, you young ass?" he rapped.

A grinning fat face immediately became grave.

"Oh! Nothing, Wingate," stammered Bunter. "I—I mean, I—I wasn't! I—I—I wouldn't! I—I—"

"Do you think it's funny for a prefect's time to be wasted like this?"

"Yes—I—I mean, no—no—nothing of the sort—"

"Do you know who played this silly trick on your bed?"

"Oh! No! It—it wasn't me—"

"You young ass!"

With that, Wingate put out the light, and left the dormitory. The Remove, rather later than usual, were left to slumber. A fat chuckle was heard from Bunter's bed, after the door had closed on Wingate.

"He, he, he!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Who's that letting off an alarm clock?" came from Bob Cherry's bed.

"Oh, really, Cherry—!"

"Bunter seems to think it funny to have his bedclothes snooped," remarked Vernon-Smith.

"He, he, he!"

With that last fat chuckle, Billy Bunter settled down to sleep. It was, according to schedule, his last night at Greyfriars that term: and all the Remove knew that he objected strongly to getting off to Aspidistra House in the morning. All the same it seemed quite a cheery fat Owl: and in a few minutes more his resounding snore was rousing the echoes of the Remove dormitory as he peacefully slumbered.

## CHAPTER VI

### GOOD-BYE, BUNTER!

"GOOD-BYE, BUNTER!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Jolly hols, old fat man."

"Hold on a minute, you chaps!"

"Oh, all right!"

Remove fellows did not always "hold on" when adjured by Billy Bunter

so to do. But circumstances alter cases. On this particular morning, Bunter was leaving Greyfriars, an early starter for the Christmas holidays. For the last week of the term, Bunter was to be absent from his accustomed place. No more would his heavy tread and his fat squeak be heard in the Remove passage—no more would his “howlers” in the form-room cause Quelch to wonder whether, after all, a schoolmaster’s life was worth living: no more would fellows miss tuck from their study cupboards, or be beseeched to advance a fat Owl a little loan on a postal order he was expecting. Greyfriars was losing its Bunter: and it was certain that there would be plenty of dry eyes at Greyfriars following his departure. Nevertheless, as he was going, fellows were feeling kindly: and as he requested Harry Wharton and Co. to hold on, the Famous Five held on accordingly: though the bell for morning school was already beginning its clang.

Bunter was going, while they were in form. When they came out in break at ten-forty-five, he would be gone: gone from their gaze, though not perhaps like a beautiful dream! They were willing to hear his last words before they went into form with Quelch, leaving him to go up to the dormitory to pack his box.

“You see, old fellows,” said Bunter, blinking at the chums of the Remove through his big spectacles. “You see, this is rather sudden—I didn’t expect to be leaving early for the hols like this—missing the last week of term, you know—”

“The suddenfulness is terrific,” agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

“Rushing off like this, I shan’t get a letter I was expecting to-day,” continued Bunter.

“Quelch will see to that,” said Harry Wharton. “If there’s any letters they’ll come along to Aspidistra House.”

“Oh! Yes! But—”

“But what?”

“But I may want the money on the journey,” explained Bunter.

“Eh! What money?” asked Nugent.

“My postal order—”

“What postal order?”

“Oh, really, Nugent! Didn’t I tell you fellows that I was expecting a postal order?” demanded Bunter.

“Oh, my hat! You certainly did! More than once.”

“The didfulness is terrific.”

“Well, I’m expecting that postal order in a letter to-day, see? Now I shan’t get it, hurrying off like this. I suppose one of you fellows could let me have the pound—”

“What pound?”

“Oh, really, Cherry! The postal order will be for a pound! You can take it when the letter comes with the postal order in it—”

"When!" murmured Johnny Bull.

"The whenfulness will probably be preposterous."

"I think you might lend me the pound, Cherry," urged Bunter. "You'll only have to wait till that postal order comes."

"I shall be a tottering old man by that time, getting my old-age pension, and shan't want it," said Bob, shaking his head.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast!"

"Besides, I've only got ninepence," added Bob. "Try next door!"

"I say, Harry, old chap—"

"No good Harry-old-chapping," said the captain of the Remove, sadly, "I've got only a tanner."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Franky, old fellow—"

"No good Franky-old-fellowing!" grinned Nugent. "I've got just half-a-crown."

"Well, if you don't want it, old chap—"

"But I do!"

"Beast! I say, Inky—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, the bell's stopping!" exclaimed Bob. "Dash for it."

The Famous Five dashed for it.

"I say, you fellows," yelled Bunter. "Hold on a minute—don't cut off while a fellow's talking to you—Beasts!"

But the juniors had no choice about cutting off, as the bell was giving its last clang. They shouted their farewells over their shoulders as they cut.

"Good-bye, Bunter."

"Have good hols!"

"Put your beef into the washing-up!"

"Cheerio!"

"Beasts!" roared Bunter, in response to those cheery valedictions: which was the last they were to hear from Bunter, for some time: the last, in fact, that they expected to hear until the next term: though perhaps it was the unexpected that was scheduled to happen. They vanished into the House, and Billy Bunter was left frowning in the quad.

"Bunter!"

It was Mr. Quelch's voice. The fat Owl blinked round morosely at his form-master. Quelch was due to take his form: but apparently he was sparing a minute or two for the departing Owl.

"Yes, sir!" mumbled Bunter.

"You will now go in and pack your box, Bunter," said Mr. Quelch. "You will be ready, at twenty minutes to ten."

"Oh! Yes, sir."

"I trust, Bunter," added Mr. Quelch, with frosty kindness, "that you

will enjoy your extra days of holiday at that very healthy resort, Folkestone."

"Oh! Yes, sir! I—I shall have a splendid time in my uncle's mansion at Folkestone, sir," mumbled Bunter, dismally.

"And I trust, Bunter, that next term I shall see some improvement in you in the form-room."

"Oh! Yes, sir! Beast!" breathed Bunter, in addition, as Mr. Quelch turned away.

The Remove master spun round.

"What? What did you say, Bunter?"

"Oh! Nothing, sir! I—I never said anything," gasped Bunter, in alarm. "I—I didn't think you'd hear me, sir—I mean, I—I never opened my lips—I only said thank you, sir—"

Mr. Quelch gave that fat member of his form a fixed look. Probably it was only Bunter's imminent departure that saved him from the vials of wrath. Mr. Quelch turned away without speaking again, and went into the House. The fat Owl gasped with relief.

"Beast!" he breathed again: but this time not till he was quite, quite sure that Henry Samuel Quelch was safe out of hearing. Bunter did not want to start on that journey to Folkestone: still less did he want to start wriggling with twinges from Quelch's cane.

"Yah!" went on Bunter, addressing Quelch's vanishing back in the distance. "If you jolly well knew!—Yah!"

The fat junior rolled into the House at last. He had his box to pack, and other preparations to make. The House seemed deserted, with all the Greyfriars fellows in the form-rooms. Billy Bunter passed Mary, the housemaid, hoovering the carpet: and on the staircase he passed Trotter, the page, coming down. But his eyes and his spectacles fell on no other person, as he rolled across the study landing to the Remove passage.

Had any eye fallen on Bunter then, his next proceeding would have caused surprise. He might have been supposed to have something to pack, from his study, No. 7 in the Remove: but he did not stop at a Remove study. He rolled the length of the passage, and mounted the stair at the end of the box-room. He rolled into the boxroom, crossed to the little window that looked out on the leads, and carefully unfastened the catch of that window. After which inexplicable and quite mysterious proceeding, he rolled away grinning, and went down to the Remove passage again.

"He, he, he!" chuckled Bunter.

There was no ear in the offing to hear the fat Owl's unmelodious chuckle, and no eye to witness his proceedings in the Remove passage. Billy Bunter's mysterious activities that morning, while everyone else was in form, were known only to Billy Bunter himself.

## CHAPTER VII

## WHOLESALE

HERBERT VERNON-SMITH came into his study after third school that morning, and slammed his books on the table. Then he was about to turn to the door again: but he stopped, suddenly, staring across the room at the study cupboard.

"What—!" ejaculated the Bounder.

He stared blankly.

"What's up, Smithy?" Tom Redwing came into the study.

"Look!"

"Oh, my hat!"

Redwing stared, too.

What met their eyes was a surprise. It would not have been so surprising, had Billy Bunter been still in the school. But as the grub-raider of the Remove was gone—long gone—it was very much of a surprise.

The cupboard door was wide open. It had been left open by a late visitor. On the floor lay a biscuit, evidently dropped, and overlooked, in haste. The Bounder's study cupboard was always well supplied. Smithy had ample pocket money, unlimited credit at the tuck shop, and innumerable parcels from home. No. 4 in the Remove was, in fact, generally like unto a land flowing with milk and honey. Now it was as bare as Mother Hubbard's well-known cupboard. The biscuit that lay on the carpet was the sole, single, solitary representative of what had been there.

"Gad!" said the Bounder. "Look! Cleared out—clean as a whistle! Isn't Bunter gone?"

"He went by the ten train," answered Redwing. "We heard the taxi, in the form-room. He's at Folkestone before this."

"Then somebody's following in his footsteps, now he's gone." The Bounder set his teeth. "By gum, I'll—I'll—but who the dooce was it, Reddy?"

Redwing smiled. He thought he could guess.

"Bunter may have looked in before he went," he said.

"Oh! That's it! The fat scoundrel! While we were all in form!" exclaimed the Bounder. "He had lots of time, and he was gone before break. He couldn't have scoffed the lot—why, there was a cake, and a bag of doughnuts, and a carton of eclairs, and pots and pots and pots—the fat villain must have stacked his pockets, as well as his inside! Crammed every one of his pockets, by gum, walked off with the lot! And—we shan't see him again till next term!"

The Bounder glared into the empty study cupboard. The raider had undoubtedly made a clean sweep. Even Bunter, as a rule, when he paid surreptitious visits to other fellows' studies, did not raid on such a wholesale

scale. This time he had left nothing—nothing but an overlooked biscuit! Evidently the fat Owl had considered it safe to go the “whole hog”, as it were, as he would be far from the reach of reprisals before the Removites came out of the form-room.

“I—I—I’ll!” hissed the Bounder. He stamped out of the study, with glinting eyes.

Skinner stared at him, in the passage.

“What’s up?” he asked.

“That fat villain Bunter—”

“Bunter? He’s gone.”

“He cleared out my study before he went!” roared the Bounder.

“Oh, crumbs! Ha, ha, ha!” yelled Skinner. “Bunter all over! Ha, ha, ha!”

“Think it’s funny?” howled the Bounder.

“Ha, ha, ha!” Skinner, evidently, thought it funny, for he yelled “Jolly glad he picked your study, Smithy, and not mine—I had a parcel from home this morning, and there’s a whacking cake in my study. Ha, ha, ha!”

“You cackling fathead—”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Hallo, hallo, hallo!” Bob Cherry came up the passage. “Enjoying life, you men? What’s the jolly old joke?”

“Bunter,” gasped Skinner, almost weeping with merriment. “He’s gone but he’s left us something to remember him by! Ha, ha, ha! He’s cleared all the grub out of Smithy’s study—ha, ha, ha!”

“Oh, my hat!” ejaculated Bob. “The fat villain! Much there, Smithy?”

“Ha, ha, ha!” chortled Skinner. “Hasn’t Smithy always got lots? Hasn’t he always got twice as much as any other fellow? Bunter knew which study to head for—ha, ha, ha! Regular shop in Smithy’s study—ha, ha, ha! And Bunter’s bagged the lot! He wouldn’t miss Smithy’s study when he was after tuck! Ha, ha, ha!”

The Bounder gave the hilarious Skinner a glare.

“Perhaps he hasn’t missed yours, either!” he snorted. “He had lots of time before he had to catch his train.”

“Oh!” Skinner became suddenly grave. “Oh! By gum—If—if—if!—” Skinner did not stay to finish. He rushed up the passage to No. 11 study, and rushed in.

The next moment a howl of rage was heard from that study.

“My cake! That fat rascal! My cake!”

“Ha, ha, ha!” roared the Bounder. It was his turn to laugh.

Skinner emerged from No. 11 study with a furious face. He had been almost doubled up with merriment over the raiding of the Bounder’s study—Billy Bunter’s farewell to the Remove had struck him as extremely funny. But clearly he saw nothing funny in the raiding of his own study! He breathed fury as he came down the passage.



"My cake's gone!" he howled. "Whacking cake—gone! That fat villain went to my study too—"

"Ha, ha, ha! Funny, ain't it?" chuckled the Bounder.

"I'll—I'll—I'll—," Skinner spluttered with rage. "Bagging my cake before he went—the pilfering porpoise—the—the—the bloated burglar—"

"Oh, gum!" said Bob Cherry. "I wonder if the fat villain called in at any other study before he went."

The Bounder chuckled. The loss of Skinner's cake seemed to have consoled him for his own much more extensive loss.

"Bet you he did," he said. "He had bags of time—shouldn't wonder if he looked into every study in the Remove."

"There's a pie in my study cupboard—"

"Or was!" grinned the Bounder.

Bob Cherry cut into No. 13. Then there was a roar.

"Gone!"

Evidently it was a case of "was".

Bob Cherry came out of No. 13 with a pink face.

"My pie's gone! It came from home only this morning! That fat villain must have had it—why, I'll burst him all over Greyfriars next term—"

Lord Mauleverer came along the passage from No. 12. He glanced at the Remove fellows with a perplexed expression.

"Anybody been larkin' in my study?" he asked.

"Oh, my hat! You too!" exclaimed Bob.

"Anything missing?" chuckled the Bounder.

"Yaas! I was goin' to stand a spot of a spread to some fellows at tea—but—somebody's cleared out the study cupboard—"

"Bunter was busy this morning!" chuckled Smithy.

Hazeldene came out of No. 2 study, with an excited face. All the fellows in the passage looked at him.

"Who's been in my study?" shouted Hazel. "Who's been snooping my pineapple, and Browney's chocs?"

"By gum! That fat villain's made a clean sweep, and no mistake," said Bob Cherry. "Must have been Bunter, of course. But how the dickens did he get all the stuff away? Must have packed a suitcase with tuck, I should think."

"Coming down with that footer, Bob?" called out Harry Wharton, from the Remove landing.

"Bunter's been here," called back Bob.

"Bunter? He's gone!"

"So has my pie, and Skinner's cake, and Smithy's tons of tuck—"

"Wha-a-at?"

"Better look in your studies, you fellows," chuckled Smithy. The Bounder seemed to be quite enjoying the joke now. "I'll bet that that fat owl hasn't forgotten anything!"

Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent cut into No. 1 study. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh went into No. 13, and Johnny Bull into No. 14. They came out again with their faces registering excitement, all speaking at once.

"That fat scoundrel—!"

"Cleared out the lot—"

"Not a crumb left!"

"I'll scrag him!"

"The scragfulness of the execrable Bunter will be terrific."

"Going over to Folkestone to scrag him?" chortled Smithy. "Ha, ha, ha! Bunter wasn't losing a chance like this! By gum, he must have bagged enough to last him for a week! Ha, ha, ha!"

As the news spread, other fellows came up to the studies: and from almost every study in the Remove the sounds of wrath were heard. Every study in the passage had been visited by the grub-raider: and no supply, large or small, had been spared. Bunter had had plenty of time: but he had used every moment of it efficiently. How he had carried off the loot was rather a mystery—even a suitcase could hardly have contained it all. Somehow he must have solved the problem of transport. Anyhow, the plunder was gone: and Bunter was gone: and that was that.

## CHAPTER VIII

### TWO IN THE DARK

HARRY WHARTON stirred in his bed, and opened his eyes.

It was black as a hat in the Remove dormitory. Hardly a glimmer of a star came through the deep December darkness. Something had awakened the captain of the Remove: perhaps the winter wind that wailed round the ancient chimneypots of Greyfriars. But it seemed to him, as he stared round in the deep gloom, that there had been some sound nearer at hand.

The next moment he was sure of it. Faint sounds came to his ears, though he could see nothing. He sat up in bed.

"Who's that?" he called out.

The faint sounds instantly ceased.

"Somebody up?" asked Harry, staring into the darkness. "Is that some fellow out of bed?"

Then a whisper came back:

"Don't shout, you fool! Do you want to wake the whole dorm?"

"Is that Smithy?" Wharton could see nothing, but it was the Bounder's voice.

"Yes: shut up, can't you?"

"What's up?"

"I am."

"But what—?"

"Oh, be quiet!"

"Oh!" Harry Wharton understood. "You silly chump, is this one of your breaking out stunts? Go back to bed and don't be a fool."

"Mind your own business."

The faint sounds from the dark were resumed. They were the sounds of a fellow hurrying on his clothes.

The captain of the Remove knitted his brows. It was no new thing for Herbert Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfrairs, to "break out" after lights out. It was not without reason that he had been nicknamed "The Bounder". It was not exactly any concern of Harry Wharton's: but he had his own opinion about it, which he certainly had no intention of keeping to himself.

"Don't you want to come back to Greyfrairs after the hols, Smithy?" he asked.

"Eh? Yes! What do you mean?"

"You won't, if Quelch spots you to-night."

"Oh, chuck it!" snapped Smithy. "Did you wake up specially to hand out a sermon in the middle of the night?"

"You ought to be jolly well kicked."

"Thanks! Now shut up," yapped Smithy. "You'll be waking all the fellows! Is that what you want?"

"One's awake already," came a quiet voice from Tom Redwing's bed. "Is that you, playing the goat again, Smithy?"

"Find out!"

Redwing was Smithy's chum, and a good chum. But that reply from the Bounder did not sound very chummy!

"Look here, Smithy—!" muttered Redwing.

"Pack it up!"

"If there's a pre. on the prow—"

"Oh, rats!"

"For goodness sake, Smithy, don't be such a fool, and such a rotter! Do you want to risk getting sacked just before Christmas?"

"Rats again!"

That reply was followed by a sound at the door. It had opened and shut softly.

"He's gone!" muttered Redwing.

"Shady sweep!" grunted the captain of the Remove. And he laid his head on the pillow again.

Headless of either of them, Vernon-Smith crept on tiptoe down the dark passage to the landing. He cared a little for Redwing's opinion, perhaps, if not for Wharton's: but certainly not to the extent of giving up his nocturnal

escapade. That there was risk in it mattered nothing to the Bounder: indeed, a spice of danger gave it a zest.

But there was, after all, little risk unless the unexpected happened. It was past eleven o'clock: and all was dark and silent and still. He had only to creep stealthily down to the Remove passage, reach the box-room, and let himself out by the window onto the leads. From the leads an old rain-pipe gave easy descent to the ground. Even Billy Bunter could climb that rain-pipe, and it was nothing to the lithe and active Bounder. Smithy was not thinking of the risk, but of his sporting friends at the Cross Keys, as he crept across the landing to the stairs, and groped his way down with a hand on the banister.

All was dark on the study landing below, with hardly a glimmer of starlight from the high windows. He crossed the landing to the Remove passage, and flitted up the passage, past the doors of the Remove studies, silent as a ghost.

He reached the boxroom stair at the end, and mounted it, silently and swiftly to the little landing, outside the box-room. The attic stair beyond was swallowed up in blackness: but Vernon-Smith had no interest in that direction. He groped to the boxroom door, opened it, and stepped silently in, shutting the door after him with scarcely a sound.

In another moment, he would have been crossing the room to the little glimmering window over the leads. But in that moment, he caught his breath suddenly, and stood perfectly still, his heart beating in jumps. From the dense darkness of the boxroom came a sound—faint but unmistakable—the sound of hurried, suppressed breathing.

The Bounder stood rooted.

He was utterly startled.

Someone was in the boxroom—at that late hour, when all Greyfriars slept. Someone, unseen, his breathing barely audible, was within a few feet of him in the darkness.

Redwing had suggested that a prefect might be on the prowl. Was it possible that a suspicious and watchful prefect might have thought of watching the boxroom? Vernon-Smith's brain almost swam, at the thought that Wingate or Gwynne or Sykes, of the Sixth, might be there, almost within hand's reach of him. It might even be Quelch! More than once, as he knew well, Quelch had had a doubting eye on that particular member of his form. If Quelch had a suspicion that the boxroom window was used as a mode of egress and ingress by a breaker of bounds—!

Or was it some other young rascal like himself, out of his dormitory to break bounds after lights out, and as startled and scared as himself?

He could not tell.

Or might it be some burglarious prowler of the night, who had picked that window over the leads to make his lawless entrance—was it some ruffian, perhaps with a "cosh" in his hand, who lurked in the darkness there?

Smithy had plenty of nerve: but his heart was beating very unpleasantly, as he stood, blotted in darkness, still listening. Many a time had the reckless scapegrace of Greyfriars "broken out" in the dark hours, and sometimes there had been critical moments—but never anything like this! It seemed to him that he could hear his heart thumping. He was alone, in that dark remote room, with someone, someone he could not see, but whose hurried breathing came distinctly to his ears. Who—what—was it? It was a cold December night, but he felt the perspiration trickling down his face.

If it was a prefect, or a master, surely he would speak, or at least turn on a light! If so, the Bounder's game was up—he was discovered, and was faced with an interview with his headmaster in the morning: only likely to be followed by the train home. But—but it could not be master or prefect—whoever it was, knew that he was there, and master or prefect could have no reason for prolonging this anguish of suspense. It was forced into the Bounder's mind that the unseen person in the dark was neither master nor prefect. Either it was a burglar, or it was some breaker of bounds like himself—sharing his fear of discovery, afraid to speak lest his voice should be recognized, doubtless dreading that Smithy himself might be a master or a prefect!

Not a Remove man—Smithy knew that all the Remove were in bed. Angel of the Fourth, perhaps—or Price of the Fifth—both were black sheep like the Bounder. He resolved to speak at last. He had nothing to fear from a fellow scapegrace if that was it.

He spoke in a whisper.

"Who's that? Who's there?"

He heard a faint gasp in the darkness. His whisper had been heard: but there came no reply to it. That was proof enough, if he had needed it, that the unknown was neither a master nor a prefect.

"Will you speak, you fool?" breathed the Bounder. "You needn't be afraid—I'm not a beak or a pre. you fool!"

Still no answer. Was it a breaker of bounds—or was it, after all, some night prowler from without—with a "cosh", perhaps gripped in a ruffian hand? Surely a breaker of bounds would have been relieved to hear his reassuring whisper, and would have answered.

"Will you answer, you fool, whoever you are?" hissed the Bounder.

There was no answer—but there was a sudden rush. The Bounder's hands went up instinctively to protect his head, with the thought of a "cosh" in his mind. But it was not his head that was in danger. Two hands shoved at him from the dark, and that sudden shove sent him reeling.

He reeled helplessly, tripped against a box, and crashed over on the floor.

He lay half-winded by the crash, gasping, and as he lay and gasped, he heard the boxroom door dragged hurriedly open. Whoever it was that had shoved him over, had only wanted to push him out of the way, to escape from

the room. Who was he, what he was like, the Bounder had no idea: only he knew that there had been plenty of weight behind that sudden shove.

He sat up, panting, as the door flew open. He heard a hurried running step—the unknown, still unseen, had darted out of the boxroom to the little landing without.

Panting with rage, the Bounder scrambled up.

Slam!

The door shut after the vanishing unknown, with a hurried, frantic slam, that woke a thousand echoes in the silent night. It seemed to the Bounder to thunder through the silence.

“Oh!” he gasped.

He groped savagely at the door, grasped the handle, and tore it open. As he stared into the dark, a faint sound from a distance came to his ears—from what direction he could not tell. But he knew that it meant that the mysterious lurker in the boxroom was gone—fled without losing a second.

He stood in the dark doorway, gritting his teeth. It was clear now that the unknown could not have been a burglar. Such a night marauder would certainly not have banged a door, rousing out all the echoes of the House, and undoubtedly startling many sleeping ears. It was, after all, Smithy could only conclude, some breaker of bounds like himself, who did not choose to let him discover who he was. Vernon-Smith would have given a great deal to know: and to hand back something for that shove—something with all his beef behind it.

But the unknown was gone: and there was not a clue to him. And the Bounder realized that the sooner he was gone too, the better for him: for it was scarcely possible that the resounding bang of the boxroom door had not awakened a good many sleepers. He was not thinking now of carrying on with his nocturnal escapade: for if there was an alarm, it was very likely that dormitories might be visited, and the discovery of an empty bed in the Remove dormitory would mean the end of things for him at Greyfriars School. Smithy's best guess was to get back to bed in the shortest possible space of time: and he knew that he would be lucky if he succeeded in getting back undiscovered.

He lost no time. The mysterious unknown had vanished, where, Smithy did not know: but his own way lay down the Remove passage—and he cut down the boxroom stair, and past the Remove studies, at a rapid run in the dark. In a matter of moments he was on the study landing again, and running up the dormitory stairs.

He caught his breath, and his heart beat, as he cut across the dark dormitory landing: for he heard the sound of an opening door, and there was a sudden glimmer of light in the gloom. He shot on desperately to the Remove dormitory reached it, and plunged in panting. A second later light was gleaming on the

landing, and he heard the sound of a voice, and then of another. Softly, he closed the dormitory door.

"Is that you, Smithy?" came a whisper.

"Quiet, Reddy, you fool."

"Copped?" came Harry Wharton's voice.

"Do you want me copped?" hissed the Bounder. "Quiet—the beaks are up—quiet, I tell you."

And there was silence in the Remove dormitory, as the Bounder plunged hurriedly into bed.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE MYSTERY OF MAULY'S STUDY

**C**LICK!  
"Oh!" ejaculated Lord Mauleverer.

His lordship was astonished.

He stopped, in the Remove passage, a few paces from the door of his study, No. 12, and stared at that door. He stared at it blankly. Seldom had Mauly been so surprised.

It was third school at Greyfriars, on the day following Billy Bunter's departure. Third lesson in the Remove was Roman history: and for that lesson books were required: and Mauly, as not infrequently happened, had forgotten his book. Mr. Quelch, frowning, had bidden him fetch it from his study, adding that he might take fifty lines for his forgetfulness. Really Mauly did not feel that he was much to blame. He had been reading *Tom Merry's Own* in his study when the bell went: and having had to cut off in the middle of a quite interesting story, naturally he hadn't thought of that history book. However, it was no use explaining all that to Quelch: and Mauly, the richer by fifty lines, hurried up to the Remove: and he was trotting up the passage to his study, when, to his utter amazement, he heard the key click in the lock of the door he had almost reached.

It was quite startling.

During form, nobody should have been in the studies. But somebody, it was clear, was in Mauly's study: and, hearing him coming, had promptly turned the key in the lock to keep him out!

"Oh gad!" murmured the astonished Mauly. "Who—what—?"

He could hardly believe his ears! Who on earth could be in his study, while everyone was in form, locking him out?

Having stared at the door, Mauly marched on again, and reached it. He turned the handle. The door did not open. His ears had not deceived him. It was locked on the inside.

"I say, who's there?" called out Mauleverer, tapping on the door. "Is that Trotter, or Mary, or whom?"

It was possible, though improbable, that the House page, or a housemaid, might have come up to the study for some reason. But there came no reply from No. 12 study.

Tap! tap! tap!

"Here, whoever you are, unlock this door!" called out Lord Mauleverer. "I've got to get a book and get back to class."

No reply.

There was no sound from within. Someone was there, that was certain, or the key could not have been turned inside. But that someone evidently chose to understudy Brer Fox, and "lay low and say nuffin'."

"Well, by gad!" said the perplexed Mauly. "Look here, is that some fellow larkin'? Let me in, bother you."

Silence.

"I tell you I want my book!" shouted Lord Mauleverer. "You silly ass, whoever you are, let me have my history book."

Deep silence.

Lord Mauleverer breathed hard. He was a good-tempered fellow, but his temper was rising. It couldn't be Trotter, or a housemaid, playing a trick like this. Who it was he could not guess. Whoever it was, Mauly would have liked to punch his head.

But evidently there was nothing doing. The door was fast: and the unknown intruder in the study refused to speak. Breathing hard, Mauly turned away to return to the form-room without his book. There was no help for it.

He was half-way down the passage to the stairs, when a sound behind him made him turn his head. It was the thud of a falling object on the floor.

Lord Mauleverer fairly jumped.

The door of No. 12 had opened from within. Nobody emerged—nobody looked out—nobody was to be seen. But a book had shot out of the study and dropped on the floor. It was Mauly's history book, which he had left on the study table beside *Tom Merry's Own*.

"Oh, gad!" gasped Mauly. He turned back, and ran up the passage: not only for the book, but in the hope of reaching the study before the door was locked again, and discovering who was playing this extraordinary trick.

But he had no time for that. Even as he started, the door was slammed from within, and the key clicked in the lock again.

"You cheeky ass!" roared Mauleverer.

He picked up the book. The door was locked: the locker of the door silent: there was nothing doing in that direction. But the history book, after all, was what Mauly wanted, and the mysterious occupant of No. 12 had let him have it. He picked it up and walked away, leaving the unknown visitor in possession of the study.



Mr. Quelch gave him a sharp glance as he came back into the Remove form-room. Mauly had been absent longer than the Remove master deemed necessary for fetching a book from a study. However, Quelch contented himself with that severe glance, and Mauly went to his place and sat down.

Roman history continued on the even tenor of its way in the Remove. But there was one member of that form who was not thinking wholly about the grandeur that was Rome! Lord Mauleverer could not help wondering who was in his study, and what on earth he was up to there: and whether he be still there when form was over. In the latter event, Mauly considered that a ragging would be an adequate reward for locking a fellow out of his own study.

When the Remove were dismissed, Mauleverer joined Harry Wharton and Co. as the juniors went out.

"Come up to the studies, you fellows," he said.

"Eh! Why?" asked Bob Cherry.

Mauly explained the curious occurrence. The Famous Five stared blankly as they heard it.

"Well, that takes the cake!" said Johnny Bull. "Must have been some Fourth Form chap larking."

"Must have been some fellow out of form," said Nugent. "They can always pull Capper's leg, in the Fourth, when they want to get out. But what the dickens did he want in your study, Mauly?"

"Goodness knows! But if he's still there—" said Mauly.

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Not likely!" he said. "Whatever he's been up to, he wouldn't wait to be rooted out. Still, let's go and see."

"I'm jolly well goin' to kick him for his cheek!" explained Lord Mauleverer. "But if it's somebody too big for me to kick, you fellows can lend a hand raggin' him, what?"

"Pleasure!" grinned Bob.

"The pleasurefulness will be terrific, my esteemed Mauly," declared Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Bet you he won't be there now," said Johnny Bull. "Still, we may be able to spot who it was."

Six juniors hurried up to the Remove passage. They had little expectation of finding the mysterious visitor to the study still in occupation: and that he was gone, was soon clear, for the door of No. 12 study was wide open when they arrived there.

"Nobody here," said Nugent.

They tramped into the study, and looked about them. Whoever had been in the study must obviously have had some motive for the visit: and they expected to see some sign of whatever he might have done there. But there was no such sign to be seen. No. 12 study presented its normal aspect: and, having looked round the study, the Famous Five looked at Lord Mauleverer.

"You're sure—?" began Harry Wharton.

"Is the surefulness terrific, my esteemed Mauly, that there was any preposterous person in the study at all?"

"Oh, don't be asses, you know," said Lord Mauleverer. "Think I could fancy that I heard the key click in the lock, and that I couldn't get the door open?"

"Um!" said Johnny Bull.

Really, it seemed inexplicable. There was absolutely no sign of the study having been visited—nothing had been disturbed in any way—the whole thing was a mysterious puzzle. Why any fellow had come there at all, apparently with no object, was not easy to guess.

"Oh!" exclaimed Lord Mauleverer, suddenly. "Where's my *T.M.O.*?"

"Your which?" asked Bob.

"*Tom Merry's Own!*" exclaimed Mauly, staring at a bare table. "I was readin' it here when the bell went—that's how I came to forget that dashed history book when I cut down. It was here on the table—it's gone!"

"Well, my hat!" said Bob. "If you're sure of that, Mauly—"

"Of course I'm sure of that, ass! I left the *T.M.O.* on the table, I tell you, just beside the history book."

"It's not there now," said Johnny Bull.

"The notfulness is terrific."

"Well, this prances off with the Peek Freat!" said Bob Cherry. "If the chap came here to borrow a book, he could have said so, instead of locking you out."

"Dashed if I make it out," said Lord Mauleverer, in great perplexity. "I've lent that *T.M.O.* to six or seven fellows already, and I'd lend it to any other fellow who wanted it. Any chap's welcome. No need to bag it like this. But—he's bagged it."

"Like his cheek!" said Bob. "Look here, let's look for a fellow with a *T.M.O.*, and jolly well bump him for his cheek!"

"Good egg!"

"Yaas," agreed Lord Mauleverer. "I'll let him read it if he wants to, but we'll jolly well bump him first for his nerve."

"Come on," said Bob.

And the juniors went down from the studies, to look for a fellow with a *T.M.O.* It seemed a fairly easy clue: for whoever had bagged that *Tom Merry's Own*, could hardly have taken it for any purpose but to read it: and certainly it was large enough to be seen if it was anywhere about.

But easy as that clue seemed, it led to nothing. Several copies of *T.M.O.* were unearthed, but none of them proved to be Lord Mauleverer's copy. And the dinner-bell rang before the chums of the Remove had made any discovery. One thing was clear—whoever had visited Lord Mauleverer's study during form, had done so to borrow his *T.M.O.* But who he was, and why he had chosen so surreptitious a method to borrow a book which Mauly would willingly have lent to any fellow, had to remain a mystery.

## CHAPTER X

## WHERE IS BUNTER?

“DR. LOCKE?”

“Speaking!”

“This is Mr. Bunter—”

“Oh! Good-morning, Mr. Bunter.”

“Oh! Good-morning! About my son—”

“Your son?”

“Yes, sir! I have to inquire about my son!”

Dr. Locke, headmaster of Greyfriars, blinked at the telephone. Mr. Quelch, master of the Remove, seated by the headmaster's table, caught the words from the telephone, and blinked also. Both were surprised. Neither had expected to hear Mr. William Samuel Bunter on the telephone inquiring about his son.

Headmaster and form-master had, in point of fact, forgotten the existence of the Bunter clan. They were chatting upon the much more interesting topic of Sophocles, a great Greek, whose obscurities they had a scholarly love of endeavouring to penetrate. The ring of the telephone bell interrupted that enjoyable discussion. Neither of them was pleased to dismiss Sophocles in favour of Bunter. However, the parent of a Greyfriar's boy had to receive attention; Sophocles had to take a back seat for the moment.

“I desire to know where he is, sir!” went on Mr. Bunter's fat and emphatic voice over the wires.

“I do not quite understand you, Mr. Bunter,” said the Head. “If you are referring to your younger son, Samuel Bunter of the Second form here, he is in the school—”

“I am referring to my elder son, William, sir.”

“Then I quite fail to understand you, Mr. Bunter. You have not forgotten that you requested me to give Bunter of the Remove leave from school, a week before the holidays, to go to a relative at Folkestone.”

“Quite so, sir! What I desire to know is, why has he not gone?”

“Eh?”

“Why has William not gone to his uncle's at Folkestone, Dr. Locke? Having received your reply in the affirmative, I concluded that William would leave the school for Folkestone on Tuesday—”

“Naturally,” said Dr. Locke. “And he did so—”

“What?”

“He did so—”

“Do I hear you aright, Dr. Locke?”

“I trust so, Mr. Bunter.”

“You are saying that my son William left Greyfriars yesterday, Tuesday, and started for Folkestone?”

"That, at all events, was the instruction I gave," said Dr. Locke. "It must have been carried out. However, the boy's form-master is present, and I will speak to him: your words seem to imply that Bunter of the Remove has not arrived at his uncle's house."

"Certainly he has not arrived there, sir! This morning I received a telephone call from Mr. Carter, inquiring why he had not come as arranged. I rang you up immediately, sir."

"Bless my soul!"

The puzzled Head turned to Mr. Quelch. Mr. Quelch's face had an expression as puzzled as his own.

"Mr. Quelch! The boy Bunter left—?"

"Certainly he did, sir," answered Mr. Quelch. "He left in a taxi-cab at twenty minutes to ten, to take the ten o'clock train at Courtfield Station yesterday morning. Obviously he must have taken the train, and arrived at Folkestone—"

"It appears that he has not arrived at his uncle's house, Mr. Quelch."

"He should have arrived there by mid-day, sir."

Dr. Locke resumed at the telephone.

"Mr. Bunter! Your son's form-master assures me that your son left the school yesterday morning to take the ten o'clock train at the local station. Is it absolutely certain that he has not arrived at his uncle's house?"

Grunt, on the telephone!

"Absolutely, sir! I repeat that Mr. Carter has inquired this morning why he has not arrived."

"Bless my soul!"

"Certainly he is not at Aspidistra House," snapped Mr. Bunter. "Is it absolutely certain that he left the school?"

Dr. Locke glanced at Mr. Quelch.

"Is it absolutely certain, Mr. Quelch, that Bunter left the school?"

"Quite, sir! I myself handed him his journey money, and instructed Trotter to place his box in the cab. The taxi-cab was here at twenty minutes to ten, and Bunter left in it."

Back to the telephone turned the puzzled Head.

"Your son certainly left the school yesterday, Mr. Bunter, in a taxi-cab for the station."

"He has not arrived at Aspidistra House, sir! Was he actually seen to leave the school?"

Dr. Locke gave Mr. Quelch another glance.

"You saw that boy of your form leave?" he asked.

"I was in my form-room, sir," answered Mr. Quelch. "But I inquired of Trotter later, to make sure that Bunter had caught his train: and he reported that Bunter had left in the taxi-cab at twenty minutes to ten, and that he had seen him go, sir."

"That leaves no doubt whatever in the matter, if doubt could be supposed to exist," said Dr. Locke, and he spoke into the transmitter again. "Yes, Mr. Bunter, your son was seen to leave Greyfriars in the taxi."

Grunt again, over the wires.

"Are you assured that he took the train at Courtfield, Dr. Locke?"

"Bless my soul! I certainly assume so," answered the astonished Head. "I can imagine no reason otherwise."

"Except, sir, that he has not arrived at his uncle's house," grunted Mr. Bunter. "I will be plain with you, Dr. Locke. I do not think that my son was in the least anxious to spend his Christmas holidays at his uncle's house at Folkestone. I even think that he would willingly have avoided the visit if it had been possible. And certainly he has not arrived there."

"Dear me!"

"To be quite plain," went on Mr. Bunter, "My son William was expected to make himself useful, in certain ways, at Aspidistra House."

"Oh!" said the Head.

"If he does not arrive within a reasonable time, sir, Mr. Carter will have no choice but to engage some person to perform the duties that it was intended that my son should perform—"

"Oh!" repeated the Head.

"And in that case, sir, William will not be required at Aspidistra House, and will not be welcome there."

"Oh!" said the Head, for the third time.

"However, if you are absolutely certain that William started for Folkestone on Tuesday morning, sir—"

"There is not the slightest doubt on that point, Mr. Bunter."

Grunt!

"Then I need take up no more of your time, sir."

Dr. Locke, probably was glad to hear it. Apart from Sophocles, he had plenty of matters to think about, more important than the antics of a junior in the Lower Fourth.

"Very well, sir! Good-bye, Mr. Bunter."

"Oh! Good-bye!" grunted Mr. Bunter. "The idle young rascal—"

"Eh!" ejaculated the Head.

"Hem! I—I mean William! He did not wish to make himself useful at his uncle's, I have no doubt—"

"Oh!" said the Head, for the fourth time.

"Probably he has gone to some other relative, as he certainly has not gone to Mr. Carter's, and he certainly has not come home—and he must have gone somewhere—"

"Oh!" said the Head: his fifth "oh!"

"Some other relative, no doubt, as it appears that he did leave school, I shall inquire! Good-bye, sir."

And Mr. Bunter rang off.

Dr. Locke replaced the receiver, and looked at Mr. Quelch. Mr. Quelch looked at Dr. Locke. Both frowned.

"This is very extraordinary, Mr. Quelch," said the Head, after a pause.

"Very, sir," said Mr. Quelch.

"Mr. Bunter thinks that the boy may have gone to some other relative, as he had to leave the school, and apparently did not desire to go to his uncle's as bidden."

"It seems probable, sir!" assented Mr. Quelch. "He certainly must have gone somewhere."

"An accident can scarcely have happened to him on the train journey, Mr. Quelch—"

"Scarcely, sir! There would certainly have been news of such an occurrence, long before this."

"It is a relief to be sure of that, Mr. Quelch."

"Oh, quite, sir."

"But the boy's action is very extraordinary, and extremely irresponsible."

"Very much so, sir! The boy is in fact somewhat irresponsible—Bunter is undoubtedly the most stupid boy in my form," said Mr. Quelch. "I must add that he is also the laziest; indeed I can scarcely imagine any boy more unwilling to make himself useful than Bunter."

"Fortunately, our responsibility ends, when the boy has taken the train for home, or for a destination according to his father's instructions," said the Head.

"Quite so, sir! I recall now that Bunter seemed unwilling to take advantage of the opportunity to begin the holidays a week early," said Mr. Quelch, thoughtfully. "Naturally I supposed that he would be pleased, as it meant exemption from a week's form work, for which certainly he has never displayed the slightest keenness or inclination. But I could not help remarking that it seemed decidedly otherwise—in fact, he stated that he would prefer not to go, sir."

"Dear me!" said the Head. "That is very unusual, Mr. Quelch."

"Very, sir! No doubt it was attributable to the fact that he will be expected to make himself useful at his uncle's house," said Mr. Quelch, drily. "Apparently he had a strong objection to anything of the kind. He is very, very far from being an industrious boy."

The Head smiled faintly.

"It is an extraordinary proceeding on Bunter's part, Mr. Quelch—but no doubt he has gone to some other relative, as Mr. Bunter supposes—"

"I can imagine nothing else that he can have done, sir. It seems evident that his object is to avoid—hem—making himself useful during the vacation—"

"I trust that we shall soon hear from Mr. Bunter that his son has arrived safely—somewhere—"

"I trust so, sir."

"But it is really very extraordinary, Mr. Quelch."

"Very, sir."

"There is at all events, from what Mr. Bunter says, no occasion for anxiety on the boy's account."

"None whatever, sir."

"That is a relief, Mr. Quelch."

"Oh, quite, sir."

And having agreed that it was extraordinary, but that there was no occasion for anxiety, headmaster and form-master let the subject drop and resumed Sophocles, whom they seemed to find ever so much more interesting than William George Bunter of the Remove.

## CHAPTER XI

### A SHORT WAY WITH COKER!

"WHERE'S Bunter?"

"Eh?"

"Bunter!" hooted Coker of the Fifth.

Harry Wharton and Co. could only stare.

It was break the following morning. The Famous Five were in the quad, when Horace Coker, of the Fifth form, came out of the House and looked about him with a searching eye—evidently in search of someone. That searching eye having failed to alight upon the person sought, he came striding over to the Co., and propounded that rather surprising question.

Coker was frowning. He had a fives bat tucked under his arm. The frown and the fives bat seemed to indicate that somebody was for it, when Coker found the somebody he was looking for. But it was quite surprising that he was looking for a fellow who had left the school a couple of days ago. He could have found any other Greyfriars fellow: but, in the circumstances, not Bunter. Harry Wharton and Co. could only stare.

"Deaf?" yapped Coker, irritably, as they did not answer.

"The deaf-fulness is not terrific, my esteemed idiotic Coker," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, mildly. "But—"

"I want Bunter!" rapped Coker.

"You want Bunter?" repeated Harry Wharton. "Well, you're not likely to find him, Coker. You see—"

"I'm going to find him!" declared Coker. "I'll jolly well teach him to sneak down from the dorm at night and raid Fifth-form studies."

"What!" ejaculated all the Famous Five, all together.

"The fat young cormorant," said Coker. "He's raided my study more than once, as you young sweeps know. But this is the limit—coming down from the dorm after lights out—"

"But!" gasped Harry Wharton.

"Where is he?" demanded Coker. "I'm going to bat him! I'm going to give him a jolly good hiding. I've brought out this fives bat on purpose, see?"

"But you can't!" exclaimed Nugent.

"Can't I?" growled Coker. "You'll see that I jolly well can! This is going to be nipped in the bud, I can tell you. He's had a cake from Hilton's study, and a bottle of currant wine from Tomlinson's, and a bag of doughnuts from Fitzgerald's—"

"But!" stuttered Bob Cherry. "It couldn't have been Bunter—"

"Don't be a young ass!" snorted Coker. "What other fag has the nerve to raid a senior man's study?"

"But it wasn't—"

"It was!" said Coker. "I'm going to bat him, and chance it, anyhow. Didn't he have my oranges the other day—didn't I catch him scoffing them. Is any fellow's tuck safe from Bunter?"

"Well, no! But—"

"It was Bunter," said Coker, "and he's getting this bat for it. Why, he was in my study, too—I found the cupboard door wide open, and I know it was left shut—Potter and Greene know, too. We left it shut, and found it wide open in the morning. Luckily there was nothing in the cupboard for once—if there had been, Bunter would have had it—"

"But it can't have been Bunter," exclaimed Johnny Bull. "You see—"

"I don't see," contradicted Coker. "And I jolly well know that it was Bunter, so don't give me any jaw! He's going to have a lesson!" said Coker, darkly. "As it happens, I've had a hamper from my Aunt Judy this morning. If it had come yesterday, Bunter would have had it! Think I'm going to let him have it to-night if he comes sneaking down? No fear! I'm going to give him a lesson that will make him tired of grub-raiding in the Fifth!"

"But it wasn't Bunter!" exclaimed Bob.

"Don't be a young ass, Cherry."

"It couldn't have been!" said Harry Wharton.

"Don't be a young idiot, Wharton."

"Bunter's not here!" roared Johnny Bull.

"I can see he's not here," snorted Coker. "What I want to know is, where is he? I've got to wallop him before the bell goes. Now, then, where is that grub-snooping young sweep, what? Sharp?"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"If you really want him, Coker!" he said.

"I jolly well do!" said Coker, with emphasis.

"Then you'd better take the train for Folkestone—"



"What?"

"Bunter left on Tuesday morning," explained the captain of the Remove. "He was let off early for the hols, and he went off Tuesday morning to his uncle's at Folkestone."

"Wha—a—a—t?"

"Better look among the Fifth for the snooper," grinned Bob Cherry. "You see, it wasn't Bunter, as it couldn't have been."

Horace Coker stared blankly at the Famous Five. Evidently, he had not taken heed of the trivial and unimportant fact that a member of the Remove had left the school early for the vac. One junior more or less about Greyfriars was not likely to be noted by the lofty Horace. Tuck had been "snooped" in Fifth-form studies, and Coker had taken it for granted that Billy Bunter was the snooper—and generally he was! Taking it for granted, he was looking for Bunter with a fives bat. It was quite a surprise to him to learn that the snooper couldn't, after all, have been Bunter.

"Oh!" said Coker, at last. "Look here, is this straight?"

"Quite!" grinned Bob.

"The straightfulness is terrific," chuckled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Bunter's really left?" demanded Coker.

"On Tuesday morning! He's been enjoying life at Folkestone the last couple of days, while we've been grinding in form."

"Well, my hat!" said Coker. "If that fat young scrounger ain't at the school, he can't have scrounged tuck in Fifth-form studies last night." That undoubted fact penetrated Coker's somewhat solid brain. "Then—it wasn't Bunter."

"Not this time!" chuckled Bob.

"He had my oranges the other day," said Coker. "I've kicked him out of my study half a dozen times this term. Of course I thought it was Bunter! But if it wasn't Bunter, who was it?"

"Ask us another," said Harry Wharton.

"If some of you young sweeps are following Bunter's example, and taking to snooping tuck in the studies—"

"Don't be an ass, Coker," said Harry Wharton.

"What?" roared Coker.

"Ass!"

"You cheeky little tick, if you want this fives bat—"

"Bow-wow!"

"Somebody was snooping in our studies last night! He must have sneaked down from a dormitory. If Bunter's not here, it can't have been Bunter. I want to know who it was! I'm going to wallop him. If it was one of you—"

"Fathead!"

"Pack it up, Coker!"

"Run away and play."

"Don't be cheeky, Coker!"

"Did—did you say don't be cheeky?" gasped Coker, as if he could hardly believe his ears, extensive as they were. "Is that the way you talk to the Fifth. Why, by gum, I'll give you the fives bat all round—"

Coker, as he often told his friends Potter and Greene, had a short way with fags. He proceeded to put that short way into practice grabbing Harry Wharton by the collar, preparatory to twisting him over for the application of the fives bat: which, in Coker's opinion at least, he richly deserved.

But that grab was the signal for all the Famous Five to go into action at once. It was demonstrated that the Famous Five had a short way with Coker! Five pairs of hands collared him, and in a moment he was up-ended.

Coker never counted odds. But the odds were there, counted or uncounted. Coker found himself rolling in the quad, collecting mud from several puddles: and big and brawny as he was, quite unable to deal with five fellows at once.

The Famous Five rolled him over, and rolled him over again: and as he spluttered breathlessly and sprawled, Bob Cherry grabbed the fives bat and jammed it down his back.

Then the chums of the Remove walked away, a little breathless, but quite merry and bright. They left Coker sprawling, extremely breathless, and neither merry nor bright. He sat up, winded and rumped and crumpled, and spluttered and spluttered for breath, and was still spluttering when the bell went for third school. Then Coker had just time to extract the fives bat from the back of his neck, before he limped away to Prout's form-room.

## CHAPTER XII

### WHO?

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"

"Trot in, Smithy!"

"Why that sunny smile, old bean?"

Tea was in No. 1 study in the Remove, when Herbert Vernon-Smith looked in at the door. The Famous Five were seated round the table, and they all glanced round at the Bounder as he looked in, frowning, or rather scowling. His expression resembled anything but a sunny smile. Only too plainly, Smithy was in a bad temper—which was not infrequent with Smithy.

"You fellows know who's snooping in the studies, now Bunter's gone?" snapped the Bounder.

"Is anybody?" asked Harry Wharton, mildly.

"Yes, somebody is. You know somebody snooped Mauly's *T.M.O.* yesterday—"

"Only borrowed it to read, I suppose," said Bob Cherry.

"Well, he hasn't borrowed the cushions out of my armchair to read, I suppose?" yapped Smithy.

"Oh, my hat! Your cushions!" exclaimed Nugent.

"They're gone! And I want to know who's got them."

"Oh, gum!" said Bob, with a whistle.

"And that isn't all, either," snapped the angry Bounder. "I've just heard that the spirit-stove and bottle of methylated have been snooped out of Russell's study. Think he wanted them to read, Cherry?"

"Oh, don't be an ass," said Bob. "If you're sure—"

"Russell's saying so in the passage—and I know my cushions are gone. And little things, too—Wibley can't find a box of matches he knows he left in his study on the mantelpiece, and Bolsover's missed a bag of jam-tarts he was going to have for tea."

Bob Cherry whistled.

The Famous Five looked at one another, and looked at the Bounder. Their faces were serious now.

"This is worse than Bunter," said Nugent. "Bunter used to snoop tuck! But cushions—and a spirit stove—"

"Somebody larking," said Bob.

"I don't call it a lark," growled the Bounder. "Cushions cost money. Mine cost my pater three guineas, if you want to know."

Really, the Famous Five didn't want to know. They were aware that Smithy's study was expensively furnished, and did not need telling.

"Must be a lark," said Harry Wharton, decidedly.

"The larkfulness is rather terrific," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "And who is the esteemed and execrable larker? According to the estimable and ridiculous Coker, somebody has been snooping in the Fifth also!"

"What's that?" exclaimed the Bounder, sharply.

"By gum, that's so!" exclaimed Bob. "Coker told us this morning that there had been snooping in the Fifth—he thinks somebody sneaked down from a dorm overnight. He thought it was Bunter, till we told him Bunter had left."

"What was snooped in the Fifth?"

"Oh, that was quite in jolly old Bunter's line. Cake and doughnuts and a bottle of currant wine, Coker said."

"And he doesn't know who?"

"Not now he knows it wasn't Bunter! He fancies that the same chap may come down again, after a hamper he's had to-day."

"Well, it's pretty plain that somebody's following in Bunter's footsteps," said Vernon-Smith. "We put up with a lot of things from Bunter because he's such a blithering idiot, and he only snooped tuck, anyway. But bagging the cushions out of a fellow's study is over the limit."

Squiff of the Remove looked into the study, over the Bounder's shoulder. He had a puzzled look.

"Any of you men borrowed a cushion from my study?" he asked.

"You too!" exclaimed Smithy.

"Oh, crumbs!" said Bob. "Is the snooper collecting cushions? What the jolly old thump can he want cushions for?"

"Well, mine's gone," said Squiff. "The old armchair's a bit rocky, and it needs that cushion. If anybody's borrowed it—"

"Somebody's snooped it!" snapped Smithy.

"Oh, rot!" said Squiff.

"Blessed if it doesn't begin to look like it," said Johnny Bull, slowly. "Somebody must have rooted in the studies while we were in form. But who the dickens—"

"Not a Remove man, anyway," said Bob. "Some chap in the Fourth larking. The Fourth were out before us to-day."

"Silly sort of lark, bagging a fellow's cush," said Squiff. "I'll biff it on his napper when I find out who it was."

"Must have been a Fourth-form man," said the Bounder. "Whether he's larking, or whether he's snooping, he's got to be found. I'll cut along and see Temple—Hallo, here he comes."

Cecil Reginald Temple, captain of the Fourth, came up the passage from the landing. Cecil Reginald, as a rule, cultivated aristocratic calm: but he was looking rather excited now. He pushed between Squiff and Smithy, and stared into No. 1 study.

"Look here," exclaimed Temple, warmly. "I heard that that fat snoopin' porker Bunter was gone—"

"He's gone all right," said Bob Cherry.

"Then who's snoopin'—in the studies?" demanded Temple.

"Oh, my hat! Have the Fourth had some, too?" exclaimed the Bounder.

"Somebody's been in my study!" hooted Temple. "Somebody's snooped a pot of jam and all the marger. If some other Remove fag is takin' a leaf out of Bunter's book—"

"Kick him!" said Johnny Bull.

"Don't be a cheeky goat, Temple," said Squiff.

"Well, who was it, then?" demanded Temple. "I suppose my pot of jam didn't walk off, arm-in-arm with the marger, what? Who was it?"

"Echo answers who!" said Frank Nugent.

"Esteemed echo answers that the who-fulness is terrific," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The snoopfulness has also occurred in our studies, and in the Fifth."

"Must have been a Remove man," said Temple, decidedly.

"A Fourth-Form man, I think," said Harry Wharton, shaking his head.

"Oh, don't be an ass!"

"Well, don't you be a cheeky fathead."

"Look here, you tick—"

"Oh, kick him!" said Johnny Bull, again: and he jumped up: apparently to suit the action of the word.

Cecil Reginald Temple retired rather hastily from the spot. Somebody, it was clear, was following the example of Billy Bunter—carrying on the good work, as it were, where the departed Owl had left it off—and on a considerably more extensive scale. Temple had no doubt that it was a Remove man—the Removites were rather disposed to suspect the Fourth. But who it was, and why he had "snooped" such things as cushions and matches and a spirit stove as well as tuck was quite a mystery.

"I've a jolly good mind to go to Quelch about it," growled the Bounder.

"Oh, rot!" said Harry Wharton. "It can only be a silly lark!"

The Bounder gave an angry grunt and stalked away. Squiff went back to his study, puzzled. Harry Wharton and Co. went on with their tea, in a somewhat perturbed frame of mind.

"Blessed if I make it out," said Bob Cherry. "I can understand that tuck going, if there's some tick like Bunter about," said Harry. "It began before Bunter went—you remember somebody bagged all his bedclothes in the dorm the night before he went—"

"By gum, so somebody did!" exclaimed Bob. "I've heard that those blankets never turned up, and our Dame is still inquiring after them."

"Must be hidden somewhere," said Harry, "and so are Smithy's precious cushions, and the other things. There's some utter ass about who thinks it funny to play such tricks."

"Skinner's a practical joking ass—"

"Thanks!" said a sarcastic voice at the doorway; and the Famous Five looked round to see Harold Skinner, with an extremely sour expression on his face.

"Well, was it you?" asked Bob. "If this is your idea of a joke, Skinner, you'd better chuck it, and chuck it quick."

"Oh, don't be a howling idiot, if you can help it," growled Skinner. "What I want to know is, who's taken the cushion out of the armchair in my study. If you fellows know—"

"Oh, suffering cats and crocodiles!" exclaimed Bob. "More cushions! He's got a fancy for cushions, whoever he is."

"I want it back," snapped Skinner, "and if I don't get it back, I'm going to Quelch! I jolly well know I'm not losing it."

"Oh, rubbish!" said Harry Wharton. "It's some idiotic jape, and quite in your own line, too. We don't want a row about it."

"There'll be a row if my cushion doesn't turn up pretty soon," yapped Skinner, and he slouched away scowling.

"This beats the band!" said Bob Cherry. "Some potty practical joker's

stacking up the fellow's cushions—along with Bunter's blankets, I suppose! Must be a bit crackers I should think."

"The crackerfulness must be terrific."

It was a puzzle, and a rather perturbing puzzle, to the Famous Five. But they had not yet reached the end. When they went down after tea, Hobson of the Shell met them at the foot of the staircase. Hobson had a frown on his rugged face.

"Here, look here," said Hobson. "You fellows know anything about somebody snooping in the Shell studies while we were in class?"

"Holy mackerel!" said Bob Cherry. "In the Shell, too!"

"Somebody's bagged the cushions off my armchair—" said Hobson.

"Cushions!" yelled Bob.

"Yes, cushions!"

"Oh, my only winter hat! He's got a mania for cushions, whoever he is! There's cushions missing up and down the Remove."

"Well, I want that cushion!" said Hobson.

"So do Smithy, Squiff, and Skinner want theirs!" chuckled Bob. "Somebody's got a hidden hoard of cushions somewhere! There's a practical joker about, Hobby, and we're going to boil him in oil when we put salt on his tail."

The chums of the Remove went into the Rag, where they found Lord Mauleverer reclining gracefully in an armchair. His lordship glanced at them as they came in. Bob called to him:

"Found your *T.O.M.* yet, Mauly?"

"No! But I say, you fellows got any idea who's snooped the cushions off the sofa in my study?" asked Mauleverer.

"Cushions!" howled the Famous Five, in chorus.

"Yaas! While we were in class, I suppose—they were gone when I went up after class."

"Oh, great pip!"

"What utter ass can be playing this idiotic trick?" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

But nobody had an answer to that question. That some practical joker, apparently with a preference for cushions, was at work, was the only conclusion to which the juniors could come. But who it was, they could not begin to guess.

### CHAPTER XIII

### COKER KNOWS HOW!

"DON'T go yet!" said Coker.

"Eh: why?" asked Potter and Greene together.

It was after prep. There had been a study supper in Coker's quarters. One of Coker's hampers from his Aunt Judith had arrived at Greyfriars that day:

and Coker and Co. had sampled the contents at supper in the study, with complete satisfaction all round.

Three healthy Fifth-form fellows had made a fairly deep inroad into that hamper. But much remained. It was Coker's last hamper before the Christmas holidays, and Aunt Judy had packed it well and truly. Coker, a generous fellow, shared freely with his comrades, and Potter and Greene happily anticipated a reign of plenty in that study till the last day of term. They had enjoyed the supper: even Coker's conversation over the festive board had hardly marred it.

Still, supper was over now, and it was near time for dorm, and Coker's conversation had undoubtedly palled. So when Coker bade them not to go yet, Potter and Greene would have preferred to trot along to the games study for a last chat with the other fellows before dormitory. However, they paused, to hear what Coker had to say: hoping that he would cut it short.

"I shall want you to lend me a hand," explained Coker.

"Lines?" asked Potter, rather dispiritedly. After that ample supper, a fellow could hardly refuse to lend Coker a hand with lines, if that was it.

"Bit late for lines," suggested Greene. "To-morrow—"

"Tain't lines," said Coker.

"Oh!" Potter and Greene were glad to hear it.

"You fellows remember what happened last night," said Coker. "I thought it was Bunter, and went to look for him with a fives bat this morning: but it turned out that that young sweep was away. So it must have been somebody else."

"Must have been," agreed Potter.

"Some Remove kid, I've no doubt," went on Coker. "They're a gang of young sweeps and ticks—some of them rolled me over in the quad to-day—What are you grinning at?"

"Oh! Nothing!" said Potter, hastily. "I say, it's getting late—"

"Never mind that! Now, last night that young villain, whoever he is, raided three studies in this passage," said Coker. "Hilton's, Tomlinson's, and old Fitz's. He was in here too—you remember we found the cupboard door open—but there was nothing there, as it happened. Well, to-night there will be something there—lots! And it's jolly well not going to be snooped by some young scoundrel in the Remove, see?"

"Oh!" said Potter and Greene.

"He may try the same game on again to-night," explained Coker. "As he got by with it all right last night, I expect he will, especially if he's heard that I've had a hamper, as I've no doubt he has."

"Oh!" said Potter and Greene, again. They looked serious now. Certainly they did not want to learn, in the morning, that the good things in the study had vanished overnight, like the cake from Hilton's study, the bottle of currant wine from Tomlinson's, and the doughnuts from Fitzgerald's. Potter and Greene had a deep personal interest in that hamper.

"Well, I've been thinking," said Coker. "I've thought it out!"

Potter and Greene forbore to ask Coker what he had done that with! They only wondered.

"And I'm jolly well ready for him," said Coker, emphatically. "If he puts his head into this study to-night, he's going to get a surprise." And Coker went to the study cupboard. From the lower part of the same, he lifted out, much to the astonishment of his friends, a can of considerable size, which he held up to Potter and Greene's surprised gaze.

"See?" he asked. "Guess what's in that can!"

As the can was splashed outside with whitewash, it was rather an easy guess.

"Oh, jiminy!" said Potter. "That's Gosling's big can of whitewash from the wood-shed! What the dickens—"

"I'll tip Gosling to-morrow, for using his whitewash," said Coker. "That's all right! There's two or three gallons here—as much as we shall want."

"B—b—b—but what do we want whitewash for, Coker?" stuttered Greene. "You—you ain't thinking of whitewashing the study are you?"

"Don't be a silly ass, Greene."

"Prout would jolly well rag us, when he saw it—" said Potter.

"Don't be a fathead, Potter."

"Well, what—?"

"You can't guess what it's for?" asked Coker, sarcastically.

Potter and Greene could only shake their heads. Few things from Coker would have surprised them. But that can of whitewash did. It was a large wide can, wide open at the top, and nearly full of whitewash. Coker had to take both hands to it to hold it up. There were, as he said, gallons of it. What Horace Coker intended to do with gallons of whitewash was simply a mystery to his friends. They even wondered whether old Horace had, at last, gone slightly crackers. They had often thought him near it. They could not begin to guess what he was going to do with that big can of whitewash.

"I'm not going to whitewash the study," said Coker, still sarcastic. "But I'm jolly well going to whitewash that snooper if he comes after my hamper to-night."

"Oh!" gasped Potter. "But—but you can't sit up for him, Coker—"

"Dorm, you know," said Greene.

"Who's thinking of sitting up for him?" inquired Coker. "I'm not."

"You're going to tip that whitewash over him, without sitting up for him?" asked Potter blankly.

"Exactly," said Coker, with a nod. "I shall be fast asleep in the Fifth-form dorm when he gets it. Ever heard of a booby-trap?"

"Oh!" gasped Potter and Greene.

They got it at last! Coker evidently, had been thinking, as he had stated, and that was the outcome of his unusual mental exertions. That big can of



whitewash was to be lodged over the study door, to greet the midnight snooper with a sudden surprise if he came.

"That's the big idea," grinned Coker. "I fancy he won't feel like carrying on with snooping, after getting that on his napper, what?"

"Oh! No!" gasped Greene. "But suppose he doesn't come—"

"Then we come and take it down in the morning," said Coker.

"But—but suppose somebody else came to the study—"

"Rot!" said Coker. "Who's likely to come to the study after dorm? I shall cut along first thing in the morning before the maids are about. Didn't I tell you I'd thought it all out?"

"But—but——!" stammered Potter.

"No time for butting," said Coker, decisively, "if you stand there butting like billy-goats, we shall hear the bell for dorm. Lend me a hand in getting it fixed up, see?"

Potter and Greene exchanged glances. Catching the nocturnal snooper with a can of whitewash on his napper was, they admitted, a consummation devoutly to be wished. After all, it was quite unlikely that anyone would come to the study after dorm—unless the snooper did. Anyhow, they knew from of old that it was futile to argue with Horace Coker. Coker was going to plant that booby-trap at the study door: and that was that.

"Now, you fellows get out of the study," said Coker, briskly. "Stick a chair in the passage for me to stand on, Potter. I'll handle the can—you fellows would slop it all over the shop! You hold the door, Greeney."

Potter placed a chair outside the door. Coker mounted on it, can in hands. The can itself was not heavy, but the whitewash within it gave it considerable weight, and Coker did not find it easy to lift.

"Ooogh!" he gasped, suddenly, as a wave of whitewash, over the edge of the can, deluged his waistcoat. "Wooh!"

Potter winked at Greene, who suppressed a chuckle. Coker seemed to be slopping it all over the shop, as he had expressed it. Still, so long as he slopped it only over himself, his friends did not mind.

"Hold the door steady, Greene."

"I've got it, Coker."

"Wide enough for me to push the can up between the door and lintel, you ass! Not so wide as that, fathead! One edge has got to rest on the door, the other on the lintel, idiot! Will you hold that door steady or not?"

"Look here, Coker——"

"I'm not going to stand here holding this can all night, Greene, while you play about with that door handle. Put the door a little shutter—I mean a bit more shut—no, a little wider open—have a spot of sense, for goodness sake—you'll make me spill some more next——"

"Wooooch!" gasped Greene, as another wave of whitewash came over the edge of the can, this time landing in Greene's collar.

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Potter. "Careful with that can, Coker."

"Wurrrrgh!" gurgled Greene. "It's running down my neck—"

"Shut up, Greeney, and hold that door—"

"Blow the door!" hissed Greene. "And blow you! Ooogh!" And Greene, letting go the door, stamped away, apparently having had enough whitewash down his neck.

"Hold that door, Potter! Do you want to keep me standing on this chair till the bell goes for dorm? Hold it, you ass."

Potter eyed the can of whitewash warily. He was strongly inclined to follow Greene, and leave Coker to it. However, he held the door, and Coker got going again. At last, at long last, all was adjusted: the can, pushed up between door and lintel, was safely lodged, one side on top of the door, the other on the lintel over the doorway. It required but the slightest push at the door to bring it swooping down.

"O.K.," said Coker, and he jumped down off the chair.

"Yaroooh!" roared Potter.

"Eh! What's the matter?"

"Wow! Ow! Wow! Did you have to land on my foot?" shrieked Potter. "You've squash-squish-squashed all my toes—ow! wow! wooh!"

"You should keep your silly foot out of the way, Potter. Don't make that row and get a crowd here—"

"Yow-ow-wow!" wailed Potter, and he limped away down the passage.

"You silly idiot—you frumptious chump—ow! wow!"

"Look here, George Potter—"

"Yow-ow-ow!"

Coker snorted, as Potter trailed away. The door was about a foot ajar, and Coker reached in and switched off the light. The chair could not be replaced, through that narrow aperture: Coker lifted it into the next study. Then he, too, departed. His masterly plan for catching that mysterious and obnoxious snooper had been carried out—at the cost of a whitewashed waistcoat for Coker, a wave of whitewash down Greene's neck, and a set of suffering toes for Potter. These trifling casualties mattered little, in Coker's opinion, compared with catching that snooper. When the Fifth form went to their dormitory that night, Coker, if not Potter and Greene, went in a state of considerable satisfaction. After lights out in the Fifth-form dorm, Coker was heard to chuckle several times before he went to sleep.

. . . . .

And at a later hour, long after Coker was fast asleep in bed, and the rest of Greyfriars bound in slumber's chain, there was a stealthy footfall, and a gleam of a pocket torch, in the Fifth-form passage: and both stopped at the door of Coker's study. And then—!

Swoooooosh!

"Oh! Urrrgh! Grooogh! Wooh!"

A pocket torch crashed to the floor and went out. A wildly-startled figure staggered and gasped and spluttered outside Coker's study—a plump figure drenched in whitewash, soaked in whitewash, clothed in whitewash as in a garment, almost drowned in whitewash.

Coker's masterly plan had been a success. The mysterious snooper had come to Coker's study, and the booby-trap had worked like a charm. Whoever that snooper was, he had undoubtedly got the whitewash! On that point there was no doubt, no possible probable shadow of doubt, no possible doubt whatever!

#### CHAPTER XIV

### A PHANTOM OF THE NIGHT?

"**B**LESS MY soul!" ejaculated Mr. Quelch.

He was quite startled.

Eleven had boomed out from the old clock tower of Greyfriars. Eleven p.m. was Quelch's bedtime, as a rule. On this particular night, he had put in a few extra minutes, having been busy in his study on the term's reports for his form.

Now, however, Quelch had laid down his pen, put his papers tidily away, and was leaving his study. He had switched off the light, and was about to step into the passage. At that moment, the silence and stillness of the sleeping House were broken by strange unexpected sounds.

From somewhere in the House—somewhere upstairs—came those sounds, distant and rather vague, but breaking on the silence of the winter night with startling effect.

Quelch, startled, listened.

The sounds were strange enough. He heard them, but could not account for them. If a grampus had been washed ashore, and had somehow crawled into Greyfriars School, it might possibly have emitted such sounds. Or a rhinoceros in a state of semi-suffocation might have done so.

Quelch was not likely to suppose that either a grampus or a rhinoceros was to be found within the walls of Greyfriars School. So he just couldn't account for what he heard. Somebody, or something, was making a disturbance up among the studies: that was all of which he could be sure.

The Remove master knitted his brows. This was not the first time that there had been sounds of revelry by night, as it were. On Tuesday night Quelch and several other masters had been startled by the sudden and unaccountable banging of a door that had echoed into almost every corner of

the House. Quelch and Hacker and Prout, and Wingate of the Sixth, had turned out: but they had found nothing out of the normal, and had had to go back to bed puzzled. That incident, curious as it was, had been almost forgotten: but Quelch remembered it now, as he listened to the strange wild gurgling and spluttering sounds that came to his ears in the silent night.

Someone, it was certain, had been up on Tuesday night—some surreptitious person for some reason unknown. Someone was up to-night—again disturbing a sleeping House with unexpected noises. This time Quelch resolved to know who it was, and what he meant by it. It was not, he thought, a Remove boy. On Tuesday night he had glanced into the Remove dormitory, and found all his form in bed there! But he was going to know who it was, and what these nocturnal alarms and excursions meant. And on this occasion he did not need to lose time by getting out of bed and donning dressing gown and slippers. This time he had not yet gone to bed. And, after listening for a long moment, Quelch started down the passage with long strides, and up the staircase two at a time! On this occasion Quelch was going to be very quickly on the spot. His long legs fairly whisked up the stairs to the study landing.

The sounds were nearer and clearer when he reached the study landing, which was in darkness. Quelch was about to grope for a switch, when he gave a sudden convulsive start, and stood petrified.

From the darkness came a sound of gasping, spluttering, and gurgling. But that was not all that came. Faintly in the dark a white shadowy figure loomed. It was very dark on the study landing—only a pale glimmer of winter starlight falling in at the high windows over the staircase. In that faint glimmer, a dark object would not have been seen. But a white object was visible—indistinctly but unmistakably. From the direction of the Fifth-form studies, that white figure came—like a spectre from another world in the winter gloom.

Quelch stood rooted. He was too startled to stir. His eyes almost popped from his face at that ghostly form.

“Who—what—who is that?” he stuttered.

A startled gasp came back. The ghostly figure had heard him, and appeared as startled as Quelch.

Then there was silence: and the spectral form flitted swiftly across the landing, and vanished.

“Bless my soul!” breathed Mr. Quelch.

He stood staring. Dimly in the dark, he had a last glimpse of the figure in white, vanishing across the Remove landing into the Remove passage.

It was gone: leaving Quelch staring and blinking.

Quelch had expected to make some discovery by getting so swiftly on the spot. But he had not expected anything like this. He was very far from being a superstitious man: no mind could have been clearer and more practical than Henry Samuel Quelch's. Nevertheless, he was feeling a strange queer eerie thrill at his heart.

What, in the name of all that was strange and mysterious, could be that white ghostly figure that had flitted in the dark before his eyes?

But it was only for a matter of seconds that Quelch stood as if paralysed. Then, with knitted brows and glinting eyes, he dashed across the landing in pursuit of the vanished figure. Ghost or no ghost, mortal or phantom, Quelch was going to know what it was, and who it was.

He stumbled in the dark on the steps that led up to the Remove landing, recovered himself, and cut on. The Remove passage was black as a hat before him. He groped, and switched on the light.

The long passage, lined by the doors of the Remove studies, was suddenly illuminated. The light came on just in time for Quelch to spot a ghostly figure at the other end of the passage, disappearing up the boxroom stair.

It was gone the next second: but Quelch knew the way it had gone. His long legs almost flashed along the Remove passage. A little out of breath he reached the boxroom stair, and looked up.

Nothing was to be seen. Blackness as of the interior of a black hat was all that met his glinting gimlet-eyes.

He mounted the stair. His heart was, perhaps, beating a little faster than usual: but his face was set and determined. Ghost or no ghost, Quelch was after that spectral form like a dog after a bone.

And he knew that he had it now—at least if it was mortal! For that stair led to the boxroom and the attic above, and nowhere else. Either in the boxroom or the attic the phantom would be run to earth, and Quelch had him—unless he dissolved into space as no doubt a genuine spectre might be expected to do.

Quelch stepped firmly on the little landing, switched on the light in the boxroom, and looked in. The room was vacant. One glance satisfied him of that, and he crossed swiftly to the narrow winding stair that led up to the top attic. That—if he was mortal—was the only way the apparition could have gone, and Quelch was close on his track. In a few moments he was on the tiny landing outside the attic door.

Then he heard a sound again. It was a sound of gasping for breath. The stairs, and the haste with which they had been ascended, had apparently told on the phantom.

He heard another sound. It was a sound of fumbling with a key. The phantom, while getting his second wind, seemed to be groping to lock the attic door in the dark.

But Quelch was in time. Before the key could turn in the lock, the Remove master gave the door a violent shove, and it flew open. There was a thud within, accompanied by a sharp squeak. It seemed that the door had banged on the inhabitant of the attic as he fumbled with the key.

There was no light in the attic, save the faintest of faint glimmers from a tiny window. Electric light had not been installed in that remote disused room,

Quelch strode in, in the dark, and stared, or rather glared, about him.

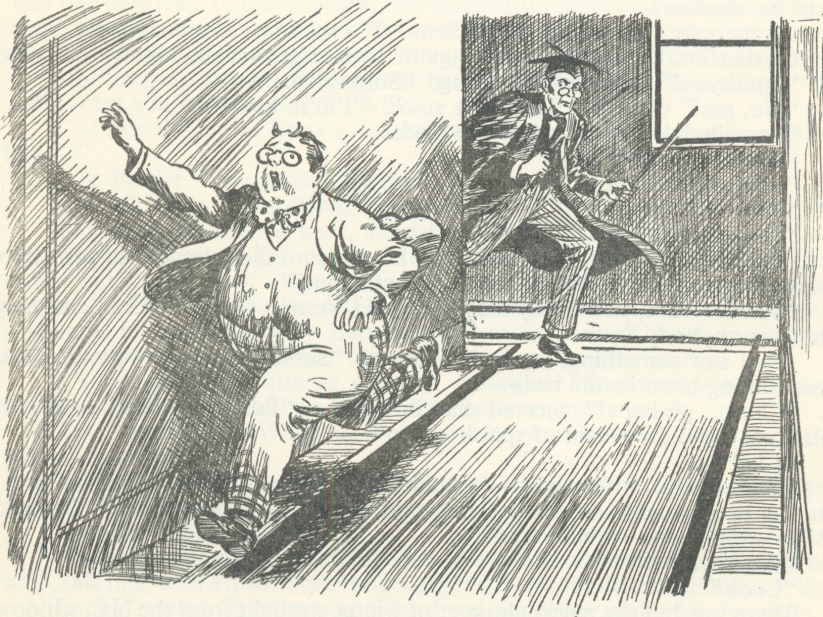
"Where are you?" he rapped. "I know you are here—who are you?—where are you?"

"Oh, crikey!" came a terrified gasp.

Mr. Quelch jumped, almost clear of the floor. There was something familiar in the fat voice that gasped.

But it was impossible—incredible—unimaginable! Billy Bunter was many miles away—he had been gone for days—it could not be the voice that it sounded like!

A glimmer of white met Quelch's eyes. He made a grab at it. His grabbing fingers almost closed on a phantom figure as it shot to the door. But not quite! He touched it—and to his amazement, his fingers came away wet, as the half-seen form eluded him, and bolted out of the attic. He rushed after it, tripped on something unseen on the floor, and stumbled and sprawled upon something that felt like blankets and cushions. And as he lay for the moment winded, a sound of running feet died away down the attic stair. The ghostly figure was gone!



## CHAPTER XV

## BUNTER'S GHOST

"HALLO, HALLO, hallo!"  
"What—?"  
"Who—?"

There were exclamations up and down the Remove dormitory in the dark. Five or six fellows had awakened, and their startled voices woke up others. Fellows sat up in bed, and exclaimed and stared into the gloom.

All the Remove had been fast asleep, after eleven o'clock at night. But sudden sounds in the silence startled them out of slumber. The door had opened, and shut again sharply, almost with a bang, as if someone had dashed in, in the dark, and closed it hurriedly after him. That was followed by sounds of stumbling and spluttering.

"Who's there?" exclaimed Harry Wharton, sitting up in bed, and peering into the shadows.

"Somebody's up—who the dickens—?" exclaimed Frank Nugent.

"Is that Smithy playing the goat again?" came a growl from Johnny Bull's bed.

"Smithy—!" exclaimed Redwing. "Smithy! Is it—?"

"No, ass!" came the Bounder's voice. "I'm in bed!"

"Somebody's there," said Peter Todd.

"Somebody came in—"

"I heard the door—"

"Who the dickens—?"

"Get a match, somebody."

"Oh!" yelled Skinner, suddenly, as he caught a dim glimmer of something white in the gloom. "What—what—what's that?"

"What's what, you funky ass?" snapped Vernon-Smith. "I can't see anything or anybody."

"I—I saw something," gasped Skinner. "Something white—look!—it—it was coming towards the beds—"

"Ghost, perhaps!" sneered the Bounder. "Put your head under the blankets, if you're afraid of spooks—"

"I tell you—I—I saw—!"

"Rot! Why, what—what—what's that?" ejaculated the Bounder, as his staring eyes caught something white that moved in the darkness. "Oh, gad! Who—who—who—what's that?"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Look!"

There was but the palest glimmer of winter starlight from the high windows of the dormitory. But in that pale glimmer, a strange figure, deathly white,

showed up for some moments, and a dozen pairs of startled eyes fixed on it, before it vanished into shadow again.

"Oh!" gasped Harry Wharton. "What—?"

"Did you see it?" breathed Bob Cherry.

"I—I—I saw it," stammered Skinner, through chattering teeth. "Get a light—for goodness sake, get a light."

"Anybody got a match?" called out Harry Wharton. He was deeply startled, and an eerie feeling was creeping down his back, as he sat staring into the darkness. But he was not easily scared. "Don't be an ass, Skinner—it's not a ghost—"

"Who's got a match?" asked Lord Mauleverer. "You've generally got matches, Smithy—or have you chucked smokin' like a good boy?" Mauly, evidently, was not scared.

There was a fumbling sound by Vernon-Smith's bed. Then the scrape of a match on a box was heard. A tiny flame flickered, as the Bounder held up and lighted match.

"Oh!" he gasped, the next moment, and the match fell from his hand to the floor and died out. In that moment, the startled Bounder had seen, in the flicker of the match, a figure in white, within a few feet of his bed, with wildly staring eyes that blinked in the sudden light. It vanished as the match was extinguished.

"Oh!" repeated the Bounder, and he sat with his heart thumping. "Did—did—did you fellows see it? Oh!"

"I—I saw it!" Bob Cherry's voice was shaken. "It—it looked like—like—like—!"

"Like Bunter!" breathed Wharton.

"Only all white—" muttered Nugent.

The juniors sat in their beds, almost petrified.

A dozen fellows had glimpsed that startling figure, in the momentary gleam of the match, and all of them had seen in it a strange resemblance, in its plump outlines, to Billy Bunter. But not Bunter as he had been known at the school—a strange, unearthly, ghostly Bunter, white as the driven snow: his hair, his face, his clothes, deathly white, like a spectre from another world.

"It's his ghost!" muttered Skinner, huskily. "Something—something's happened to Bunter, and—and he's come back to haunt us—"

"Rot!" said Harry Wharton, but his voice was a little unsteady. "It—it looked like Bunter—"

"White as a ghost!" muttered Skinner. "Get a light! Will somebody get a light?" Skinner was almost babbling with fright.

"Another match, Smithy—"

Vernon-Smith pulled himself together. He scratched another match, and held it up, this time with a firm hand. Bulging eyes stared round in the glimmer of light.

"Look!" yelled Skinner. And he dived headlong under his blankets, to shut out the dread sight.



"Oh!" gasped Harry Wharton.

All eyes were on the phantom figure now, as the match flamed. There was no mistake about it now—all could see it. It was the plump figure of Billy Bunter, unmistakable in its circumference: it was the fat face of the Owl of the Remove: but if it was not the ghost of Billy Bunter, it looked like it—deathly white from head to foot: even the spectacles were white, and little round eyes blinked over them.

There was dead silence in the Remove dormitory, as the juniors stared at that strange, startling, unearthly figure, dim in the flickering glimmer of the match, yet visible to all. It was only a moment or two, but it seemed an eternity.

Then there was a sharp exclamation from Vernon-Smith. The match had burned down to his fingers. He dropped it to the floor, and all was dark again. In the darkness the ghostly figure vanished.

Harry Wharton set his teeth. He could not help feeling an eerie tremor. It was Bunter or his ghost that the juniors had seen—and it could not be Bunter! Was it possible—was it imaginable—that something had happened to the fat Owl, since he had left Greyfriars, and that his fat phantom had returned to haunt the place that had so long known him? The captain of the Remove, with set teeth, stepped out of bed. Flesh or phantom, he was going to know what it was, and what it meant.

"Harry—!" came a whisper from Frank Nugent, as he heard his chum's movements.

"I'm going to switch on the light."

Wharton groped to the door, and found the switch by the doorway. He pressed it, and there was a sudden flood of light in the long lofty room. Every corner of the Remove dormitory was illumined. And every fellow stared round dreading to see that spectral form again.

"Where is it?" breathed Bob Cherry.

"It's gone—" muttered Nugent.

"The gonefulness is terrific," muttered Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

The door was still shut. There had been no sound. But the spectral form had vanished. Up and down the long room the juniors stared, but there was no sign to be seen of the ghost of Billy Bunter.

Then, in the dead silence, came a sound from without—of footsteps coming up the passage towards the dormitory door.

## CHAPTER XVI

### ON THE TRAIL!

MR. QUELCH stood in the little dark attic, breathing very hard. He had had quite a jolt in stumbling over. Luckily he had fallen upon something soft, though he hardly knew what it was. The other occupant of the attic was

gone—he had narrowly escaped Quelch's clutch, but he had escaped it. His fleeing footsteps had died away when Quelch regained his feet. For some moments the Remove master stood, breathing very hard and very deep. Then he fumbled in his pocket for matches, struck one, and looked about him, to pick his way to the door without another stumble. But what he saw as the light glimmered, caused Mr. Quelch to stand motionless, staring.

He could see now over what he had stumbled. On the attic floor was a conglomeration of cushions and blankets, unmistakably an improvised bed. Someone had been sleeping in that remote attic.

That was not all. A box, no doubt borrowed from the boxroom, served the purpose of a table. On it stood a small spirit stove and a kettle, and a ginger beer bottle with a candle stuck in it, half burned down. Near at hand lay a volume left open: a copy of *Tom Merry's Own*, the open pages showing marks of candle grease, and sticky fingers.

All this the amazed Remove master saw at a glance: though really it was so surprising, that he could hardly believe his astonished eyes.

Then, as his match burned low, he applied it to the wick of the candle in the ginger beer bottle, and there was light.

"Bless my soul!" breathed Mr. Quelch.

In the candle light, he could see all over the little attic, and further details were revealed. In one corner of the room was a stack of pots and tins and packages—quite an extensive store of foodstuffs. Whoever had occupied the attic had apparently laid in provisions as if for a siege.

"Bless my soul!" repeated Mr. Quelch, blankly.

Somebody had been camping in that attic! That was clear. Who, was a mystery—at present. It could hardly be anyone belonging to Greyfriars: for nobody had been missing—excepting, of course, Bunter, who had left the school. But who, in the name of wonder, could have penetrated into the building, and camped in that disused and never-visited attic?

Quelch's impression, in pursuing the strange fleeing figure, had been that the unknown prowler of the night was merely seeking to escape him by dodging along passages and staircases. Now he realized that the prowler, whoever he was, had been heading for home, as it were—he had been camping in the attic, he had wandered out in the night and he had got back as fast as he could—unaware doubtless that Quelch was so close on his trail, and hoping to be undiscovered in his remote hideout. Now that he had been run to earth in the attic, he had had to abandon it, and was at large in the House.

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Quelch, for the third time.

He was looking at his fingers. They had come away wet after touching the elusive figure in the dark. Now he saw why—staring blankly at fingers that were white as chalk. But it was not chalk that whitened them—it was wet whitewash!

It was amazing—astounding—incredible—but there it was—whitewash!

There must have been wet whitewash on the dodging figure he had touched. In some mysterious and unaccountable way, the unknown inhabitant of the attic must have become drenched with whitewash in his nocturnal wanderings. So far as Quelch knew, there was no whitewash nearer at hand than the large can that Gosling, the porter, kept in the woodshed. Still, there could be no doubt about it—it was whitewash!

And now it dawned upon Quelch's mind to what the prowler's white and ghostly aspect was due. It was nothing more supernatural than whitewash!

Whoever he was, he had left his hideout in the attic, late at night, and gone down to the studies. There, in some unaccountable and unimaginable manner, he had been drenched with whitewash—which accounted for the wild strange splutterings Quelch had heard, as well as for his ghostly appearance. It was some unknown person whitewashed from head to foot that had flitted before Quelch's eyes like a spectre of the night.

But who—how—why? Quelch asked himself those questions helplessly: he could not begin to find an answer to them.

But most certainly he was going to know the answers. Some unknown extraneous person was at large in the House, and Quelch was going to lay hands on him. He was gone—he had vanished—he might be anywhere in the great rambling building—in the passages, in the studies, in the dormitories—anywhere. But there was a clue, which Quelch's gimlet-eye was not likely to miss. Whitewash was splashed right and left. The unknown had been drenched and dripping with it. Quelch realized that, had he turned on a light, he could have followed a trail of whitewash to the top attic. No doubt the fugitive, in his terrified haste, had not had time to think of that—and Quelch, at the time, had been quite unaware of it. But he was aware of it now, and he had little doubt of following that trail to a successful end. Taking up the ginger beer bottle, to light his way with the candle, he stepped out of the attic.

Whitewash splashes on the attic stair glimmered in the candlelight. Quelch descended to the boxroom landing—walking delicately, like Agag of old, to avoid the whitewash as much as possible.

The trail, coming and going, led right across to the lower stair: the prowler had not dodged into the boxroom. Quelch, following it, descended into the Remove passage.

There he switched on the electric light, blew out the candle, and set down the ginger-beer bottle. The whitewash trail led back along the Remove passage to the study landing, which it crossed.

Quelch, following it, arrived at the dormitory staircase. Here the trail grew thinner. No doubt by that time the fugitive had shaken off a good deal of the fluid. But there were still ample signs that a whitewashed prowler had gone up the dormitory staircase; evidently to seek refuge from pursuit among the dormitories.

Up went Mr. Quelch, with grim brow and glinting eye!

On the dormitory landing above, he switched on another light. That light revealed once more the peculiar trail. It was, as it were, growing smaller by degrees and beautifully less: the whitewash had been dripping much less freely at this stage. But there were plenty of spots and blotches of it, and they guided the Remove master unflinchingly. Like a bloodhound on the trail, Quelch followed: up the passage to the door of the Remove dormitory.

The gimlet-eyes gleamed.

If the vanished prowler had taken refuge in that dormitory, Quelch had him at last. If he was there he was cornered. There was no escape but by the door—and Quelch would be at the door! Who he was, what he was, would be revealed at last.

Quelch marched on—unaware that wakeful ears in that dormitory were listening to his approaching footsteps! He reached the door—and stopped. The trail, by this time, was slight. But it was visible—and the spots of whitewash that had dripped from the prowler ceased at that door. He had not gone further. Moreover, the door-handle was whitewashed: a hand clothed in whitewash had evidently turned it! It was the end of the trail!

Quelch, in his turn, turned the handle, and threw open the dormitory door. Then he stared.

The Remove dormitory was not dark, as he had expected to find it. The light was on. One junior was out of bed—the rest were sitting up in bed, with startled staring faces. Plainly there had been an alarm in the room. The prowler, no doubt, was the cause. But where was the prowler?

“Wharton—!” exclaimed Mr. Quelch. He stared at the junior who was out of bed. Then his sharp eyes swept along the dormitory. Where was the prowler? That he had entered, Quelch was certain. But he was not to be seen. There was no figure in white to meet the Remove master’s searching eyes—only the startled faces of the Remove fellows. “Wharton!” repeated Mr. Quelch. “What has happened here—have you seen anyone—?”

“Yes, sir! We—we saw—”

“It—it—it was his ghost, sir!” stammered Skinner. “We—we all saw it, sir—it was his ghost—Bunter’s ghost—”

“What? What? Do not be so absurd, Skinner.”

“But—but we saw it—!”

“Wharton! Tell me at once what you saw!”

“It—it looked like Bunter, sir—strangely like Bunter—only—only it—it looked like a ghost—” stammered the captain of the Remove. “It couldn’t be Bunter, as he’s gone—but it looked like him, only all white—”

“Nonsense!”

“We all saw it, sir—!” stammered Bob Cherry.

“He came into this dormitory” snapped Mr. Quelch. “But it certainly

could not have been Bunter, who is at Folkestone. Neither was it a ghost, if any foolish boy needs reassuring that it was no such nonsense."

"But we saw—!" muttered the Bounder. "—I—I know it wasn't a ghost—but—but what was it?"

Snort, from Mr. Quelch.

"It was some extraneous person, who had somehow become drenched in whitewash," he snapped. "He has dripped whitewash all the way to this dormitory, which is why I am here."

"Oh!" gasped the juniors.

"There are traces of whitewash on the floor here," snapped Mr. Quelch. "Certainly he has been here—where is he now?"

"It—it—it just vanished, sir—!" stammered Skinner.

"Nonsense!"

"It—it—I mean he—he's gone, sir," said Bob Cherry. "Wharton got the light on at once, but it—he—was gone."

Mr. Quelch grunted expressively, and knitted his brows. Had the prowler, after alarming the Remove, dodged out again, before his arrival? Or was he concealed somewhere in the room?

The answer to that question came suddenly and quite unexpectedly. From under one of the beds—Bunter's unoccupied bed—came a startling and totally unexpected sound. It was the sound of a prolonged sneeze!

"Aytishoooooooooooooooooh!"

## CHAPTER XVII

### ONLY BUNTER!

"A YTISHOOOOOOOOH!"

Loud and long, and full of feeling, came that unexpected sound from a hidden sneezer!

Mr. Quelch almost jumped. Every fellow in the dormitory started, and stared. All eyes were directed towards the bed, from beneath which that strange and startling sound had come.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch. "What—?"

"Under that bed—!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"Oh, my hat!" breathed Harry Wharton. "So that's how—"

"Atchoogh! Atchooh! Aytishoooh!" came another sneeze, almost agonized in its intensity. It seemed as if the hidden sneezer had held it back as long as he could, and, when it escaped it escaped with uncommon force. In fact it almost roared. "Ooooooh! Aytishoooh!"

The juniors understood now how the "ghost" had so suddenly disappeared while Wharton was switching on the light. It had not dissolved into thin air!

It had not vanished through a keyhole! It had not faded into nothingness! It had simply ducked under a bed!

"He's there—!" exclaimed Vernon-Smith. "Under Bunter's bed—"

"Oh!" gasped Skinner. "Then—it wasn't—oh!"

"Ghosts don't sneeze!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"And the sneezefulness is terrific," chuckled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Nobody in the Remove dormitory was feeling eerie, or uneasy, or uncanny, now! Many of the juniors were grinning. The most superstitious fellow could hardly have fancied a ghost sneezing! That "ghost" obviously was mortal—so mortal that it had caught a cold—no doubt from being soaked in cold clammy whitewash on a cold December night. That gargantuan sneeze quite banished any idea of the supernatural.

Mr. Quelch, with a portentous frown, strode to the bed. He had run the apparition to earth at last!

"Come out!" he rapped.

"Atchooooooh!" was the only reply from under the bed.

"Emerge at once, whoever you are!" thundered the Remove master.

"Oh, crikey!"

That terrified ejaculation made everyone jump. Only too familiar was the fat voice in which it was uttered.

"Bunter!" breathed Harry Wharton. "Bunter! It can't be Bunter—he's not in the school—but—but—"

"Bunter!" said Bob Cherry, dazedly. "But how—how—?"

"It—it looked like Bunter—Bunter whitewashed!" stuttered Vernon-Smith. "But—but it can't be a chap who isn't here—"

Quelch's face was extremely startled. To his ears also that fat squeaking voice sounded familiar, as it had sounded in the attic.

"Upon my word!" he exclaimed. "Is it possible—upon my word! Emerge from under that bed immediately."

"I—I—I ain't here—!" came a fat gasp.

"What?"

"I—I—I mean—oh, lor'!"

"It is Bunter's voice," said Mr. Quelch, almost dizzily. "It cannot be Bunter, yet—Will you emerge from under that bed?"

"Oh! No! Yes! Oh, crumbs. Atchooooooh!"

"Will you emerge immediately?" thundered Mr. Quelch. And as the hidden delinquent—probably not encouraged by Quelch's voice!—still failed to emerge, the Remove master glanced round, and rapped to Harry Wharton. "Wharton! Assist me to push this bed aside!"

"Oh! Yes, sir!" gasped Harry.

There was a startled squeak from underneath, as the bed was shifted. The "ghost" was revealed at last. All eyes fixed on it—Quelch's almost bulging with amazement.

It was a plump figure that was revealed. It glimmered white all over, and smudgy spectacles glimmered on the fat little nose. It was really no wonder that, in the flickering light of a match, it had looked like the ghost of Billy Bunter: for undoubtedly it was Billy Bunter, and his aspect was of the ghosts ghostly! But in the bright electric light it was a different matter—everyone could see now that there was nothing unearthly about that spectrally white figure: it was not Bunter in a phantom state: it was Bunter soaked and drenched and smothered with whitewash. So far from being eerie or uncanny, now that he was clearly seen he looked funny! There was a chuckle up and down the dormitory as the juniors looked at him.

But Quelch did not chuckle. He looked very far from chuckling. The fabled basilisk had nothing on Quelch, as he glared at that member of his form.

“Bunter!” articulated Quelch. “That—that—that is Bunter!”

“Oh! No!” gasped the whitewashed object. “Tain’t me, sir—”

“What! What did you say?”

“Tain’t me—I—I—I mean, I—I ain’t here—I—I mean—oh, crikey!”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

Quelch stooped, to jerk the sprawling fat Owl to his feet. But he decided not to touch him. Bunter was not really nice to touch, at the moment.

“Rise!” he thundered.

The hapless Owl staggered up. He blinked at Quelch through smudgy spectacles, and backed away.

“It is you, Bunter—!”

“Oh! No! Yes! Oh, scissors!” gasped Bunter.

“What are you doing here? How came you here? Answer me!”

“Aytishoooooh!”

“Answer me at once, Bunter—”

“Atchook—chooh—chooh—”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Silence!” rapped Mr. Quelch. “This boy’s amazing antics are not a matter for merriment. Bunter! You are here—”

“Atchooh! Groogh! Oooogh!”

“You have been hiding in the old attic—”

“Oh! No! Yes! Groooooogh! Atchooh! I—I—I think I’ve caught a kik-kik-cold, sir—I—I—I’ve got a bad—shoo! shoo! aytishoo!”

“Explain yourself,” thundered Mr. Quelch. “You left this school on Tuesday morning—yet you are here! On Wednesday your father notified us that you had not arrived at your uncle’s in Folkestone. Where have you been all this time, Bunter?”

“Oh, lor’! In—in—in—in the attic, sir,” moaned Bunter.

“In the attic!” repeated Mr. Quelch. “Upon my word! Did you not take the train to Folkestone on Tuesday, Bunter?”

"Nunno, sir! I—I kik-kik-kik-came back," stammered Bunter. "I—I didn't want an extra holiday, sir! So I—I came back—"

"Oh, suffering cats and crocodiles!" murmured Bob Cherry. "He never went at all! Oh, holy smoke!"

"No washing-up for Bunter!" grinned Johnny Bull.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence! Bunter, I fail to understand this! You were not seen here again on Tuesday—if you returned that day—"

"I—I came back after dark, sir!" groaned Bunter. "Oh, lor'!"

"Do you mean to say that some other boy in this form let you into the House after lock-ups?" exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

"Oh! No! I—I got in at the boxroom window," gasped Bunter. "I—I'd left that window unfastened, sir, so—so that I could climb in, sir."

"Oh, gad!" breathed the Bounder. He understood now who it was that had been lurking in the Remove boxroom that night, and had shoved him over to escape unseen. "That fat ass—oh, gad!"

"I can scarcely credit this." Quelch almost gasped. "Then—then you had planned this, Bunter! Upon my word!"

"I—I didn't want to go to Uncle Carter's, sir!" wailed Bunter. "I—I wanted to—to stay on to the end of the term, sir!"

"I have found blankets, and cushions, and other things, in the attic, Bunter. You have been inhabiting that attic for days and nights—!"

"Except—except when I—I came out, sir, at night, or—or when all the fellows were in form, sir—!"

"Then it was you, Bunter, who abstracted the blankets from a bed in this dormitory, the night before you left!"

"I—I—I—they were mum-mum-my blankets, sir—" mumbled Bunter. "I—I couldn't sleep without blankets, sir. It was too kik-kik-kik-cold—"

"And the cushions, I presume, were abstracted from the studies!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

"It—it was jolly hard on the floor, sir, so—so I thought of the cushions in the studies, and—and—only this afternoon, sir—"

"You have actually been all this time at Greyfriars, Bunter, when you were supposed to be away!" It seemed as if Quelch could hardly believe it yet.

"Atchoooooooooooooh—"

"And how did you come into this state, Bunter? How did you become drenched in whitewash?"

"That beast Coker—"

"Coker!" repeated Mr. Quelch, blankly.

"It fell on my head, sir!" groaned Bunter. "I—I was pushing open the door of Coker's study, and—and it fell wallop on my head—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"



"Silence! Why were you going into Coker's study, Bunter?"

"Oh! I—I wasn't!" gasped Bunter.

"What?" almost shrieked Mr. Quelch.

"I—I—I mean, I—I wasn't after his tuck," stammered Bunter. "I—I never went into the other Fifth-form studies last night, sir—if anybody did, it wasn't me! I—I suppose that beast Coker thought somebody might come to his study too, and fixed up that booby trap—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Upon my word!" said Mr. Quelch. "Bunter, I scarcely know how to deal with you. It appears that you have not only remained in hiding at this school for several days, but that you have emerged from your hiding place from time to time to purloin food and other things in the studies—"

"Oh! No, sir! I—I knew Mauly wouldn't mind me borrowing his *T.M.O.*, sir—I—I had to have something to read up there, sir—it was pretty slow. And—and I—I knew the fellows wouldn't mind me borrowing their cushions, sir—sleeping on the floor, sir! And—and—as for the grub, sir, I—I never had it! I—I mean, I—I'm going to pay for it, sir! I'm expecting a postal order, sir, and—aytishoooooh! Shoo! Shoo! Groogh! Atchoooh!" There was a volley of sneezes from the hapless fat Owl.

"You appear to have caught a cold, Bunter—"

"Urrrgh! Uuuurgh! Atchooh—chooh—choop!"

"Follow me, you utterly absurd and insensate boy. If you are in a fit state to travel, you will certainly leave Greyfriars in the morning—"

"I—I—I don't want to go to Uncle Carter's, sir!" wailed Bunter.

"What? What? That will do, Bunter."

"But, sir—I—I—I—"

"Follow me at once!" rapped Mr. Quelch, in a voice that made Bunter jump. And the dismal fat Owl trailed after him out of the dormitory, still shedding a few drips of whitewash as he went.

Mr. Quelch shut off the light and closed the door. The Removites were left in a buzz.

"We know who the jolly old snooper was, now," chuckled Bob Cherry.

"The knowfulness is terrific."

"Bunter all the time!" said Vernon-Smith. "That fat villain all the time! I'm going to kick him when he comes back to the dorm."

"Same here!" growled Skinner.

But Billy Bunter did not come back to the dormitory. What had become of him the Removites did not learn till the following morning: when they learned that the hapless fat Owl was in bed in the school sanatorium, where perhaps he wished that he was washing-up at Aspidistra House, instead of sniffing and snorting, gurgling and guggling, and sneezing his fat head almost off!

## CHAPTER XVIII

## MERRY CHRISTMAS!

"POOR OLD Bunter!" sighed Bob Cherry.  
"Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry Wharton and Co. were rather sympathetic towards the unfortunate Owl of the Remove in his many and varied misadventures and misfortunes. But they could not help laughing.

On the last day of term Greyfriars was in a cheery buzz. The old school was breaking up for the Christmas holidays. Boxes banged, voices shouted, footsteps echoed, vehicles came and went: everyone seemed looking forward to the "hols". Lord Mauleverer had already rolled away in his car—Vernon-Smith was gone in his taxi—Harry Wharton and Co. were going by the school 'bus, but had not yet gone. Among the busy crowd there was one fat familiar face missing—that of William George Bunter. It had been expected to be missing—adorning the washing-up department at Aspidistra House on the Leas at Folkestone: instead of which Billy Bunter was in "sanny"—still at Greyfriars, still sneezing, still sniffing, still snorting, and quite unlikely to depart for Aspidistra House or any other destination that day. Coker's whitewash had done its fell work only too well.

Trotter had brought the Famous Five a message from the hapless Owl, as they were taking a last stroll round the old quad. Bunter wanted to see them before they went.

"Poor old Bunter!" repeated Bob. "Fancy the fat ass being here all the time—"

"Might have guessed, really, when the grub went," said Nugent.

"What a jolly artful old planner," said Bob. "He had it all cut and dried. He must have been snooping those blankets from the dorm when Smithy was looking for him that time—"

"And we wondered how he'd got away with the tuck the day he went," said Harry Wharton. "He only had to cart it up to the attic while we were in form."

"Must have been a bit dismal in that attic," said Johnny Bull. "Blessed if I wouldn't rather wash-up."

"Well, washing-up's work, and sprawling in an attic isn't," said Bob, "and he seems to have got out a good deal, when there was nobody about. He wasn't going short of grub, at any rate."

"The time of his life, so far as grub was concerned," said Harry. "Though I expect he wished afterwards that he had given Coker's study a miss."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Just as well for him that he caught that cold," remarked Nugent. "Quelch couldn't very well whop him in sanny."

"And Smithy's gone without kicking him!" said Bob.

"And we're going without kicking him," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "May as well look in and say good-bye to him! He's still got the washing-up to come, now he's been rooted out."

"The kickfulness would not be the proper caper, in the idiotic circumstances," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Come on," said Harry. "We can give him ten minutes before the 'bus goes."

And the chums of the Remove proceeded to the sanatorium, where Miss Prim admitted them to the bedside of the sad sufferer. Billy Bunter was sitting up in bed, with a dismal fat face, and the blink he gave the Co. through his big spectacles was sad and sorrowful.

"I say, you fellows—!" he squeaked.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Enjoying life, old fat man?"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Like this better than the attic?" grinned Nugent.

"No!" hooted Bunter. "I had lots to eat in the attic—and what do you think they give me to eat here?"

"Only as much as is good for you?" asked Johnny Bull. "Poor old chap—it must be awful!"

"The awfulness must be terrific."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at," snorted Bunter. "I say, you fellows, got any toffee about you?"

"Against the rules, old fat frump—"

"Blow the rules!" hissed Bunter. "Have you got any?"

"Not a spot."

"Any chocs?"

"No!"

"Beasts!"

"Is that what you wanted to say to us before we went, Bunter?" asked Harry Wharton. "If that's all—"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Good-bye, Bunter—"

"Have good hols!"

"Merry Christmas!"

"I say, you fellows, don't go yet," howled Bunter. "I say, I'm in an awful jam! I say, I've had a letter from the pater— I say, he's in an awful wax."

"What did you expect him to be in?" inquired Johnny Bull.

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"Is the waxfulness terrific?" asked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"He's frightfully waxy," groaned Bunter. "I don't know why—"

"You don't know why?" ejaculated Bob.

"No! I expect it's the income tax worrying him, and he's taking it out of me," said Bunter. "Quelch was ratty, too—though he couldn't do anything but jaw, as I was laid up with this frightful cold. Of course, I don't expect anything better from Quelch: but it's rather thick the pater cutting up rusty like this. As if I was to blame somehow, you know."

The Famous Five gazed at Bunter.

"The pater's arrangements had been knocked out a bit, of course," admitted Bunter. "It seems that Uncle Carter is annoyed. He's had to engage somebody for the washing-up at Aspidistra House, and it's too late for me to go there—in fact he's said that if I do turn up he will smack my head."

"Well, that's let you out, old fat man," said Bob. "You get out of the washing-up—and think what a gorgeous time you'll have in the marble halls of Bunter Court!"

"But I ain't going home either," groaned Bunter. "There ain't anything at home these hols. My brother Sammy's going to Uncle Tuck's and my sister Bessie to Aunt Jane's: and the pater and mater to Bournemouth—and the pater says he will not think for one moment of altering his arrangements on account of my undutifulness—me undutiful, you know!—and my laziness—he actually said laziness—me lazy—"

"Oh!"

"So there it is!" said Bunter, bitterly. "He says that as I've made my bed I can lie on it, as if it was my fault somehow! I can't go to Uncle Carter's, even if I could stand the washing-up—and I can't go home, because there's nobody there—and I've got to stay at the school over the hols—oh, lor'! If—if—if I'd known that was how it was going to turn out, I'd have gone to Uncle Carter's—washing-up and all! What sort of grub do you think I shall get, sticking here over the hols?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, cackle!" howled Bunter.

The Famous Five tried to suppress their merriment. Really, Billy Bunter's deep and artful scheming seemed to have landed him out of the frying pan into the fire. He had succeeded to the extent that the washing-up was washed out! But the prospect of "sticking" at a deserted school over the hols was apparently even less attractive than the washing-up department at Aspidistra House. It was a forlorn fat Owl!

"Sorry, old man," gasped Harry Wharton.

"The sorrowfulness is terrific, my esteemed absurd Bunter."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Time's up!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Good-bye, Bunter!"

"Merry Christmas, Bunter," said Harry.

"Good-bye!"

"I say, you fellows, hold on," squeaked Bunter. "The 'bus will wait—that's all right! I say— Harry old chap—"

"Cut it short," said Harry.

"You just said 'Merry Christmas!'" said Bunter. "If you mean it—"

"Of course I do," said Harry, staring. "I'll say it again if you like! Merry Christmas!"

"Oh, all right," said Bunter. "I'll come."

"Eh?"

"I expect I shall be up in a day or two, and I'll follow on," said Bunter. "Thanks, old chap! You can expect me."

"Wha—a—at?"

"O.K.," said Bunter, cheerfully. "You'll see me at Wharton Lodge in a day or two, old chap! I'll come all right!"

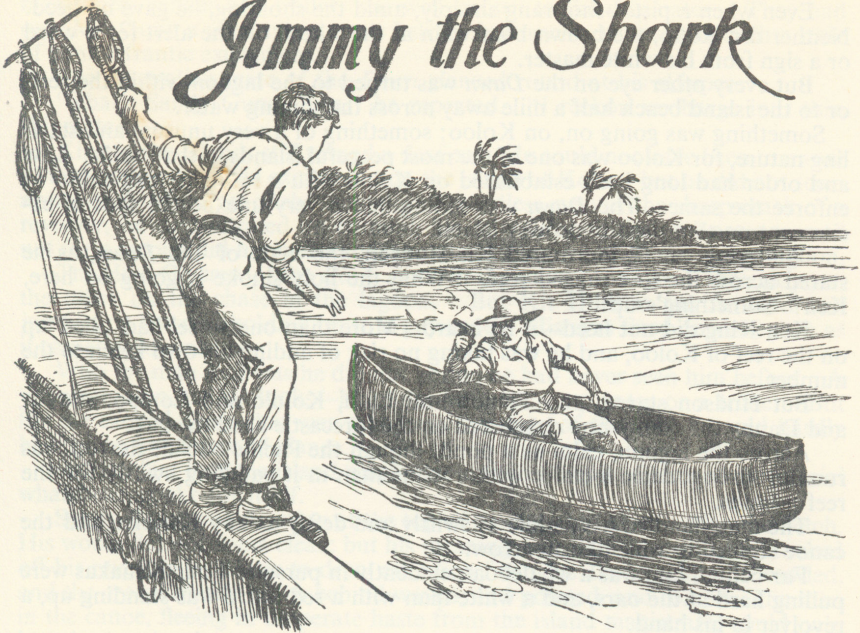
Harry Wharton gazed at him. Apparently wishing Bunter a merry Christmas amounted, in Bunter's estimation, to an invitation to make Christmas merry at Wharton Lodge. For a long moment, the captain of the Remove gazed at Billy Bunter. Then he laughed.

"Oh, all right," he said. "Do!"

And Bunter did.

THE END

# Jummy the Shark



A STORY OF "KING OF THE ISLANDS"

By CHARLES HAMILTON

NO EXIT!

**L**OUND shouts from the lagoon of Koloo reached the ears of King of the Islands, but he did not heed them.

The barrier reef at Koloo was not easy to negotiate. The passage in the reef was narrow and perilous, and a strong sea was running. Even a moment's inattention might have piled up the ketch *Dawn* on the sharp teeth of the coral.

Ken King's attention was wholly concentrated on getting his ketch safely through the reef into the lagoon, and he had neither eyes nor ears for anything else at the moment.

Even when a pistol-shot rang sharply, amid the shouting, he gave no heed. Neither did Koko, the brown boatswain at the wheel, on the alert for a word or a sign from his white master.

But every other eye on the *Dawn* was turned to the lagoon within the reef, or to the island beach half a mile away across the shining water.

Something was going on, on Koloo: something of a very unusual and startling nature, for Koloo was one of the most peaceful islands in the Pacific. Law and order had long been established on Koloo with a resident magistrate to enforce the same. The *Dawn* was sailing into a very unexpected spot of excitement on that usually drowsy island.

"Suffering cats!" murmured Kit Hudson, the mate of the *Dawn*, as he stared across the low rugged reef. "What the holy smoke is going on here, Ken? Something's up!"

Ken King did not heed—if he heard. More than one vessel had piled up on the reef of Koloo, and he was taking no risk of adding his own ketch to the number.

But Hudson stared, and Tomoo and Lufu, Kolulo and Lompo, stared: and Danny the cooky-boy clambered on the forecastle head to stare.

Across the lagoon, calm as a pond, though the Pacific outside the reef was running strong, came a canoe with a white man in it paddling swiftly for the reef passage.

The man handled his paddle as swiftly and deftly as any Kanaka, and the canoe seemed to whiz like an arrow.

Far behind him was a whaleboat, evidently in pursuit. Four Kanakas were pulling hard at the oars, and a white man with a red beard was standing up, a revolver in his hand.

Beyond, on the island beach, was an excited crowd of men, white and brown, watching, shouting, waving; white planters and natives in a wildly excited mob. Even from the distance the roar of voices reached the *Dawn*; and above the buzz came the shouting voice of the red-bearded man standing up in the pursuing whaleboat.

The fugitive in the whizzing canoe was in desperate flight; and he had left all Koloo in wild uproar behind him.

The whaleboat pulled swiftly, but it had no chance of overhauling the canoe before the fugitive reached the reef passage, and escaped into the open sea.

But the *Dawn*, in the reef passage, blocked the way to the open Pacific. The passage was so narrow that it was not easy for even a canoe to pass an incoming vessel without risk of disaster. While it was, on the other hand, quite easy for the crew of the ketch to intervene, and to put a stop to the canoe's desperate flight.

"That's Sandy Gunn!" said Kit Hudson. He recognized the red-bearded Scotsman, standing up in the whaleboat, shouting and waving his revolver. The *Dawn* had traded on Koloo before: and Sandy Gunn, planter and local

magistrate, banker and trader, was well known to the shipmates. They had seen Mr. Gunn a good many times before: but never, certainly, in such a state of almost frantic excitement.

The Australian mate of the *Dawn* glanced round at his skipper.

"That's Sandy Gunn, Ken," he repeated. "I reckon we barge into this, shipmate."

King of the Islands still turned a deaf ear. He could not have been unaware of that outburst of wild excitement on the island of Koloo: but he did not seem aware of it. Heedless of shouting voices, heedless even of the sharp crack of a revolver, he concentrated on conning his ship through the reef passage, and not for a second did his eyes wander to the exciting scene on the sunny lagoon.

The Hiva-Oa crew of the *Dawn* stood at the ropes: one eye on their skipper, the other on the chase in the lagoon. But Kit Hudson ran forward and jumped on the rail, holding on to a guy-rope. His eyes fixed on the canoe as it came rapidly nearer.

Who the man in it was he did not know: he had never seen him before. A youngish man, on his looks—he might have been a planter or a trader. But for the excited chase that was going on, the mate of the *Dawn* would hardly have given him a second glance.

But the fact that the island magistrate was in pursuit of him, in the official whaleboat, spoke for itself.

Sandy Gunn was shouting at the top of a powerful voice, hailing the ketch. His words did not come clear: but his meaning was plain enough. He cracked off his revolver in the air to draw attention from the *Dawn*, while he bawled, and the crowd on the beach behind waved, and pointed, and roared. The man in the canoe, fleeing in desperate haste from the island magistrate, could only be a lawbreaker bent on escape—a man who was badly "wanted" on Koloo: and the mate of the *Dawn* was ready to lend a willing hand in the cause of law and order.

The canoe came on like an arrow. Kit Hudson stood ready to jump into it as it flew by. It had to pass within easy reach of a jump, if indeed it escaped collision with the incoming vessel.

The desperate man in the canoe had seen the *Dawn*. But he did not check his speed for a moment. There was only that one way of escape from Koloo—by the reef passage to the Pacific. Only in that one spot was the circling barrier reef broken by a passage to the open sea. To turn aside meant being imprisoned within the reef, and inevitably run down by his pursuers. It was neck or nothing for the desperate man, and he shot on towards the reef passage.

Suddenly, however, he ceased to paddle. The canoe shot onward by its own momentum, and the man snatched a revolver from the back of his trousers, threw it up, and fired point-blank at the mate of the *Dawn*. He had spotted Hudson, ready to jump: and he fired as the canoe swept by the rail of the *Dawn*.

Hudson gave a startled gasp.



That the man in the canoe was desperate was plain enough: still, he had not expected so desperate an act as this. It was only the wild haste and hurry of the shot that saved him from pitching off the *Dawn's* rail with a bullet through his body. Wild and hasty as it was, the shot went close—terribly close: grazing the mate's arm, cutting away the cloth, and the skin beneath.

But there was no time for a second shot, for the canoe was sweeping under the *Dawn's* rail, and Hudson was jumping.

He crashed into the canoe with an impact that capsized it. The canoe went under, the sea flooding into it, and in an instant Kit Hudson was up to his neck in water as the canoe sank under him.

The man had grasped his paddle again but he could not use it. It slipped from his hand as the canoe sank, and he was swimming.

A few seconds more, and he clambered on the reef. He was running, as Hudson caught a rope thrown him from the ketch. Danny the cooky-boy grinning down at him as he cast the rope.

The barrier reef of Koloo was wide, stretching far out to sea—most of it under water. The running man splashed and plunged with water up to his knees. But his flight now could only have been the extreme of desperation, for his canoe was under water, and he had no means left of getting away.

Sandy Gunn, in the whaleboat, shouted to his Kanaka crew, and the whaleboat shot to the reef. The red-bearded man, revolver in hand, splashed on the reef, to pursue the desperate fugitive springing and bounding from rock to rock.

Kit Hudson, drenched to the skin, was dragged up the *Dawn's* side, and landed panting on deck. The ketch glided on into the lagoon.

The mate of the *Dawn* stood in a pool of water on deck, gasping for breath. The wreck of the canoe, half-submerged, floated out to sea as the *Dawn* stood across the lagoon to Koloo.

## A DESPERADO OF THE SOUTH SEAS

"FIVE hundred pounds!" said Sandy Gunn.

Mr. Gunn's face was as red as his beard, with wrath.

From his veranda, he stared incessantly across the lagoon, growing dusky as the sunset faded, at the circling barrier reef—on which he had failed to run down the escaping man.

Somewhere, out on the dusky reef, was the hunted man: and five or six white men, and two or three dozen Kanakas, were hunting him on the reef. But dusk was falling, and he had not yet been caught. All over the vast barrier reef of Koloo were innumerable crevices and fissures where a desperate man might hunt cover, for a time at least.

"Five hundred pounds!" repeated the Scottish planter. "Do ye hear that—five hundred pounds!" He was telling the skipper and mate of the *Dawn*, who were interested enough, of that sudden, startling outbreak of excitement on the usually drowsy island of Koloo. They sat in the shady veranda of the planter's bungalow, and listened. "Five hundred pounds, ye ken."

King of the Islands' business at Koloo was with Mr. Gunn who was the chief planter and trader on the island as well as the magistrate thereof. The *Dawn* was there for copra, and pearl-shell, and ivory nuts. But Mr. Gunn, though generally a keen man in business matters, seemed to have forgotten business—he simply could not give his mind to copra, pearl-shell, or ivory nuts, at present.

Five hundred pounds, that belonged to Mr. Gunn, were packed on the man who had fled on the reef: and Sandy was, perhaps, more anxious for the recapture of the five hundred pounds in banknotes than of the man who had—so far—escaped with it.

But he was very anxious for both: and as he talked to the skipper and mate of the *Dawn*, his eyes roved incessantly to the reef across the dimming lagoon.

"Is it no a large soom for a mon to lose?" demanded Mr. Gunn, and the skipper and mate of the *Dawn* agreed that it was. "Is it no? But we'll get him—he cannot get off the island—owing to yere mate, King of the Islands, sinking his canoe for him! It was well done, Mr. Hudson, and I'm obliged to ye—it was vairy well done. The villain has lost his canoe—and I'm taking care that he doesn't get hold of another, or of a boat either—I'm taking care of that, ye ken."

"But who's the man?" asked King of the Islands. "Who's woke up Koloo like a hive of bees, Mr. Gunn?"

Both the shipmates were extremely curious on that point. All they knew so far was that the unknown man in the canoe had run with five hundred pounds that belonged to Sandy Gunn.

"It's Jimmy the Shark!" said Mr. Gunn. "Ye'll have heard of him, I've nae doot, King of the Islands."

"Oh!" exclaimed the shipmates, together.

They had never seen the man who bore that strange name. But undoubtedly they had heard of him, many a time, on many a beach. There were few traders or seafaring men in the Pacific who had not heard that name: few beaches on which strange tales were not told of "Jimmy the Shark".

There were islands, like Lukwe or Faloo, where Jimmy the Shark could walk free and unmolested and even find friends. But they were few. At Tahiti, or Apia, or Suva, the handcuffs would have clicked on Jimmy's wrists, immediately he was seen ashore. On other islands, he might have been seized, or ordered to quit, or requested to do so: according to the powers of the law on the spot. Jimmy the Shark was almost a legendary character in the Islands: hunted by the law at which, so far, he had always successfully snapped his

fingers. It was startling news to the shipmates of the *Dawn* that Jimmy the Shark was on Koloo.

"Jimmy the Shark!" repeated Kit Hudson. He rubbed his arm where the bullet had grazed the skin. "Suffering cats!"

The shipmates did not need telling much about Jimmy the Shark. They did not know the man, but they knew his reputation only too well. They had heard a hundred stories of him on the Pacific beaches and in the traders' bungalows. Few names were better known.

A bank robber at Sydney, a pearl poacher in the Paumotus, a smuggler at New Guinea, a nigger stealer in the Solomons—there was hardly a lawless deed that could not be put down to his tally.

All over the islands, from Hiva-Oa to Thursday, he was wanted by the police of three or four nations: and his wild deeds, and his narrow escapes, were legendary on Pacific beaches. Yet in three or four years no hand had dropped on his shoulder. He changed his looks as often as he changed his name: a cunning skill in disguise being a sort of second nature to him. No doubt that helped to see him through.

Kit Hudson gave an expressive whistle. He was not sure that he would have stood on the *Dawn's* rail, to jump down into the canoe, had he known that the man in it was Jimmy the Shark. He would have been more disposed to handle a rifle, had he known.

"He came a week ago," went on Mr. Gunn, his eyes still roving over the reef as he talked, "and nae a man knew him. He had a beard on his face, and the name of Smith, which surely is an honest man's name. Looking for an opening to buy a coconut plantation, he was—I'm telling ye! Twice I'd seen him on business, in my office, and if any mon had told me he was Jimmy the Shark I should have laughed—I'm telling ye, King of the Islands. And this afternoon he came again, on business, and—" Mr. Gunn gasped, and almost gurgled, with rage, "and will ye believe that he put a gun to my head, and made me unlock my safe, and left me tied to my office chair with the office duster in my mouth! I'm telling ye!"

A report came echoing across the lagoon from the distant reef. Sandy Gunn bounded from his Madeira chair, leaped to the rail, and stared over. The shipmates rose too, and looked.

But the dusk was thickening, and nothing could be seen. Whether the shot had been fired by the hunted man, or one of the hunters, they could not tell. Sandy Gunn plumped down into his chair again, and mopped a perspiring brow with a large handkerchief.

"I'm telling ye, King of the Islands!" he went on, "Five hundred pounds in banknotes, and all packed awa' in his pockets, and me sitting in the office chair chewing the office duster, and watching him! Him laughing!" Mr. Gunn gurgled again. "He had it all cut and dried—takin' the key from my chain to unlock the motor-boat—he was going in my motor-boat. I'm telling ye! If

my house-boy Ko had not stepped in, the minute after he stepped out, he would have gone clear! Ye see, he couldn't know that Ko was waiting with a message and only waiting for him to quit before he came in—the best-laid schemes of mice and men gang aft agley, as our national poet puts it, King of the Islands.”

“That was luck!” remarked Ken.

“I'm telling ye!” said Mr. Gunn. “He never had time to get to the motor-boat, which is kept safe locked—he never had time to get away at all, if he had been any mon but Jimmy the Shark. I'm telling ye! I was after him, King of the Islands, and all Koloo was after him: and he pitched a native out of his canoe, and ran in the same—and even in a canoe, I'm telling ye, he would have got clear to sea, if your packet had not been coming in at the reef, and your mate had not made such a pretty jump.”

“That was luck again!” said Ken, smiling. “It's only a matter of time now, Mr. Gunn—even Jimmy the Shark cannot get away from Koloo without a craft of some kind. If you take care of that—”

“Care?” said Mr. Gunn. “Every boat and canoe on the island is taken far up the beach, and watched—he will not get a craft on Koloo. He can't stay on the reef, when the tide's up: he will swim back to the island after dark, if we don't get him before. But he will not get a craft—and you'll be keeping an eye open, King of the Islands, that he does not pack himself away on your ketch—”

Ken laughed.

“Not likely!” he said. “My sainted Sam! it looks as if Jimmy the Shark will be lagged at last, and on Koloo. If he swims back to the island, he can only hide in the bush till he is hunted out.”

“And every native on the island will be hunting!” said Mr. Gunn. “There's a reward for the finding of him. But—he's a slippery customer, and I shall feel safer about my banknotes when they're back in my safe. I'm telling ye.”

Another shot came from the reef, and another. Sandy Gunn jumped up, almost like a jack-in-the-box.

“I'll be going in the boat,” he said. “I'll talk copra with ye to-morrow, King of the Islands, with your leave. I'll be going in the boat.”

There was evidently no business to be done with Sandy Gunn that day. The shipmates walked back to the wharf, and had a glimpse of Mr. Gunn pulling away with his native crew in the whaleboat.

The beach of Koloo was in a buzz, and there was a crowd on the wharf. The *Dawn's* crew were ashore, mingling with the brown natives of Koloo, and taking a share in the general excitement. Already a reward of ten Australian sovereigns was on offer for the desperate man who had failed to get away from the island: and that was a sum sufficient to set every native of Koloo on his track. No reward was needed to make the white men keen: every planter on Koloo was eager to lay hands on the notorious “Shark”. Indeed, the shipmates of the *Dawn* were quite prepared to lend a hand also, if it came to a hunt

in the bush. It looked as if Jimmy the Shark, after his long run of luck, had reached the end of his tether on the island of Koloo.

### KOKO WAKES!

**K**OKO, the brown boatswain of the *Dawn*, sat up, silently, in his berth on the cabin lockers, and breathed hard and deep. His dark eyes glinted in the deep shadows of the cabin. Silently, he groped for the lawyer-cane which was at hand. The sound that had reached him, in the midnight silence, was faint: but Koko was a light sleeper, and his ears were very keen. He made no sound: for he was going to catch Danny, the cooky-boy, before that fat and artful rascal could dodge away in the dark and escape.

The *Dawn* was moored, and all on board were sleeping. King of the Islands and Kit Hudson were in the bunks in the stateroom, forward of the main cabin. The Hiva-Oa crew were in the forecabin, or sleeping on their mats on deck: probably the latter. One of them should have been awake, keeping watch, but in port, at a peaceful spot like Koloo, it was more likely than not that Tomoo had gone to sleep, like his comrades, instead of keeping awake. And Danny, the cooky-boy, should have been asleep also—but when he heard that faint sound in the dark cabin, Koko had no doubt that Danny was very wide awake.

Danny was a good cook—the best in the Islands. For that reason, and because Danny had long sailed with him, Ken King did not kick the fat cooky-boy off the *Dawn*. Danny, good cook as he was, and always in a grinning good-humour, was lazy, and untruthful, and about as honest as a jackdaw. Lying and stealing came as naturally to Danny as breathing. Koko could not have computed the number of times he had laid the lawyer-cane on Danny's brown back for those sins. If any small article was missed, on the *Dawn*, the first place to look for it was in Danny's fuzzy mop of hair.

Sitting up on the lockers, listening, Koko had no doubt that that fat rascal, Danny, was on the prowl again. Few ears would have detected the stealthy step in the companion: but Koko's ears were not to be deceived. Someone had come down, softly and almost noiselessly, from the deck: and was creeping with stealthy softness towards the lazarette, which was aft of the cabin. And Koko had no doubt that it was Danny. None of the seamen could have crept so softly—and none of them would have crept down to the lazarette in the middle of the night—only the light-fingered cooky-boy.

In the daytime, Danny, as cook, had business in the lazarette, where the stores were kept, and where a trap-door gave access to the water-hold, a short ladder leading down to where the casks were chocked. But in the middle of the night, Danny had no business there—unless to pinch something that he had already set aside for surreptitious removal.

Koko, the gigantic boatswain, was nearly twice the size of the fat cooky-boy: but he could be quite as cautious, and quite as stealthy. He slipped from his berth on the cabin lockers, without a sound—the stout lawyer-cane gripped in his right hand, and a grim expression on his brown face. It was almost pitchy dark, in the cabin: but Koko knew every inch of the way, and was not likely to butt into anything. Softly, silently, he crept on the track of the unseen creeper, towards the open doorway of the lazarette. The thievish cooky-boy was booked for a sudden and startling surprise when Koko got within reach for a swipe with the lawyer-cane!

Suppressing his own breathing, Koko caught a breath in the darkness. He knew, as plainly as if he could have seen, that the invisible creeper had reached the doorless aperture that gave admittance to the lazarette, and had paused there. Why had he paused Koko did not know, for Danny knew his way in the dark as well as Koko, or better. But he had paused, as if in doubt: and standing in the doorway, his back to Koko, he was nicely placed for a sudden, terrific swipe of the lawyer-cane—which would be one more warning for him to keep his fat brown paws from picking and stealing.

Koko, as he moved soundlessly closer, lifted the lawyer-cane for a hefty swipe, grinning as he did so. He had heard Danny: but Danny had not heard him, for the figure in the doorway stood still, only the low breathing indicating that it was there. But that was quite a sufficient guide for Koko's brawny arm, and Koko, throwing the lawyer-cane well back, put all his beef into a swipe that was to land on a bare brown back, and startle Danny almost out of his fat brown skin.

Swipe!

Down came the lawyer-cane, fairly crashing, landing fair and square across the back of the unseen figure in the lazarette doorway. The crack, as it landed, rang through the ketch like a rifle shot. It was followed by a fearful yell.

Koko gasped.

Until that yell rang in his ears he had not had the slightest glimmering of doubt that the unseen one was Danny, the cooky-boy, on a pilfering raid in the lazarette. But as he heard that yell, Koko, in utter astonishment, realized that it was not Danny—that it was not a Kanaka at all. It was not a Kanaka who yelled: it was a white man: and if there had been any doubt about that, it would have been banished, the next moment, by the savage oath that followed the yell, unmistakably in a white man's voice.

Koko stood almost gibbering with amazement. There were only two white men on the ketch: the skipper and the mate, both in their bunks forward. But it was a white man who had crept down from the deck, and whose back had received that terrific swipe from the boatswain's lawyer-cane. It was some stranger who had crept on board the ketch from the wharf—it could only be that: but Koko had hardly time to realize that it was so when the unseen figure was springing.

Whether he was springing at the boatswain, or attempting to spring back to the companion to escape on deck, was not clear—in the latter case Koko was in his way. He crashed into the boatswain, spitting with rage as he grasped at him, attempting to hurl him aside. But Koko, astounded as he was by the discovery that the unseen, unknown creeper was a “white master”, was not the man to let him get away. He dropped the lawyer-cane and grasped: and they struggled together in the darkness.

From the state-room came startled voices. Both skipper and mate had been awakened by the loud crack of the lawyer-cane on the unknown back: and had that not awakened them, the frantic yell would certainly have done so. And the sound of savage, desperate struggling followed: and Ken King and Kit Hudson leaped out of their bunks, calling. At the same time there was a startled cackle of Kanaka voices on deck: all the crew had been awakened by the uproar below.

“What the suffering cats—!” exclaimed Kit Hudson.

“Koko!” shouted King of the Islands. “What—”

“White feller stop along this cabin, sar!” came Koko’s panting voice. “Me got that feller, sar, hand belong me. Me—”

Koko’s voice broke off in a wild yell. The shipmates heard the thud of a blow, and the sound of a heavy fall. The boatswain of the *Dawn* sprawled headlong on the cabin floor under a crashing blow from a revolver butt. He sprawled half-stunned, still yelling.

There was a flicker in the darkness. King of the Islands, in the doorway of the state-room, had struck a match.

Kit Hudson gave a yell. Looking over the boy trader’s shoulder, in the glimmer of the match, he glimpsed a figure that leaped from the companion, and darted into it. Only for a second he saw that leaping figure, and the white, set, desperate face, but he knew it: the man of the canoe.

“Jimmy the Shark!” yelled Hudson.

“What—” gasped Ken.

There was a shout on deck. King of the Islands, dropping the match, dashed across to the companion, and tore up the steps, Hudson at his heels. Koko, with a hand to a dizzy head, staggered after them.

On deck the Hiva-Oa boys were gabbling wildly, Danny’s startled squeal loudest of all. Ken, as he leaped out, was barely in time to see a lithe and active figure that had leaped on the rail: even as he saw it, it bounded to the wharf and disappeared. All eyes on the *Dawn* had seen it: but it was gone, running like a hare, vanishing in the darkness.

“White feller along canoe!” gasped Danny. “My word, me savvy that feller too much: him feller stop along canoe.”

“The Shark!” breathed Ken. “But what—?” He stared round at the boatswain who had a brown hand to a dizzy head. “You saw him, Koko—below—”

"No see im, sar, eye belong me, along plenty too much dark!" gasped Koko. "Me tinkee that feller Danny, sar, me givee that feller lawyer-cane along back belong him, along he go along lazarette, sar—"

Kit Hudson chuckled.

"He's got something to remember his visit by, Ken!" he said. "By gum! It's lucky that Koko spotted him—we might have pulled out of Koloo with Jimmy the Shark hidden in the hold, Ken!"

"Oh!" gasped Ken. "That was his game."

"You bet—stowing away to get off Koloo! Koko put paid to it—with the lawyer-cane!" grinned Hudson.

"My sainted Sam!" breathed the King of the Islands. He stared across the coral wharf, in the glimmer of the stars.

But neither on the wharf, nor on the beach, was a sign to be seen of "Jimmy the Shark"—the dark bush of Koloo had already swallowed him.

## THE HUNT IN THE BUSH

IN the bright sunrise, King of the Islands and his mate stepped off the ketch to the wharf with rifles under their arms. Koko followed them with a bush-knife at his belt. And Tomoo and Kolulo and Danny followed on: only Lompo and Lafu being left on board the *Dawn*. The hunt was already up for the desperado in the bush: Sandy Gunn, and a dozen white planters, and more than fifty Kanakas, were setting out. Koloo was a fairly large island, and the interior was thick with extensive bush: but it did not look as if the hunted man had much chance of keeping clear with so many hunters on his track. King of the Islands and his mate were keen enough to lend a hand in securing so dangerous a man as Jimmy the Shark: and the crew of the *Dawn* were glad of a chance at the ten "piecee gold money" offered by Mr. Gunn as a reward for him.

Somewhere in the high, hot bush the man was lurking with the stolen banknotes still packed on him: desperately watching for a chance to get away from the island.

Such a chance seemed little likely to come his way: for every boat and canoe on the island was carefully guarded. The *Dawn* was the only vessel at present in the lagoon, and was watched: though the desperado was hardly likely to show up on a crowded beach in the daylight. Jimmy the Shark was said to be a man of endless cunning and resource: but there were few who doubted that he would be run to earth before the sun set again in the Pacific. He had taken a desperate chance in attempting to stow himself away in the hold of the *Dawn*: it had failed him, and all that remained to him, was to dodge and twist and wind in the bush till he was hunted down.



It was known that he was armed, and not doubted that he would fire if cornered: and it was not improbable that the crowd of Kanakas would run like hares at the sight of him and his revolver. But all the white men of Koloo carried rifles: and the natives, if they were not likely to face his fire, were useful for tracking him in the bush. Ten Australian sovereigns were to reward the man who sighted him: more than enough to set half Koloo on his track.

It was hot in the bush: and for long, long hot hours the hunt went on, planters and Kanakas spreading all over the island, following run-way after run-way: startling innumerable birds and scuttling wild pigs: crashing through dense tropical undergrowths, loosing off shots into thick branches laced with hanging creepers. Shouting voices and echoing shots woke all the echoes of Koloo. But at noontide, the hunted man was still unseen, in some dense and deep cover: and then the hunt slacked off, and the hunters rested. King of the Islands and his mate stopped in a shady spot, and Danny unpacked a basket of provisions. Tomoo and Kolulo were out of sight in the bush: but Koko was with his white masters. The heat in the bush was baking, and even the brawny boatswain was glad of a rest. The fat cooky-boy streamed with perspiration: and by that time, Danny was thinking less of the ten Australian sovereigns than of the fatigue in his fat limbs. When his masters resumed the hunt it was Danny's intention to go to sleep in the shade.

The shipmates had sat down under the shade of the immense branches of a banyan tree that towered over the bush. Kit Hudson leaned back against one of the many stems of the banyan, and fanned his perspiring face with a palm leaf when the meal was over.

"Hot!" he remarked.

Ken smiled.

"The warm place with the lid off!" he agreed. "But we're going to stick it out till sundown, if the swab keeps clear so long."

"We'll get him before that!" said Hudson.

"Likee plenty too much catchee that bad feller!" said Koko, rubbing a big bruise under his mop of hair. "Makee too much pain stop along head belong me."

"Well, here goes!" said King of the Islands, and he rose to his feet, and picked up his rifle.

Hudson followed his example: and Koko looked round for the cooky-boy. Danny was sprawling under the banyan, on his podgy back, his fat legs stretched out, chewing betel-nut. Koko gave him a frown.

"You comey, you feller Danny!" he rapped.

"Me no comey!" answered Danny, without stirring. "Me stop along this place, along sleepie, spose white master no wantee this feller boy."

Koko grunted. Still, as Danny was on shore leave, he was entitled to please himself, and the boatswain left it at that. A sleep in the shade appealed more

to the lazy cooky-boy than the doubtful prospect of ten Australian sovereigns. The three moved away leaving Danny sprawling.

But they did not go far, for Koko's keen eye caught sight of a track in the earth, and he stopped to examine it. Whether it was, by chance, a track left by the hunted man, or by one of the hunters who had passed that way, was not easy to tell: but Koko dropped on his brown knees to examine it, and Ken and Kit stopped to watch him. Danny, stretched luxuriously on his fat back, gazed up into the thick foliage of the tree above, and lazily chewed betel-nut.

But Danny's fat drowsy face suddenly became fixed and intent.

Not twenty feet from him, the skipper and mate and boatswain of the *Dawn* were gathered about the track Koko had spotted in the earth. But the innumerable stems of the banyan hid them from his sight. Something, however, had caught Danny's eyes, as he gazed upward into the shady foliage—and his black eyes almost bulged from his fat face. It was a human foot!

Danny gazed at that foot with his heart jumping. It was followed into view by a leg—then by another foot and another leg! There was no sound—the man in the tree was moving with infinite caution. But Danny knew that there was a man in the tree: and he knew who that man was—on the island of Koloo there was only one man likely to have hunted cover in the branches of a banyan in the bush!

The cooky-boy's mouth opened—and shut again. His white masters, and the boatswain were within sound of his voice, if he called. But the hidden man was dropping from the tree, within a couple of yards of Danny: and terror held the cooky-boy dumb. Only too well the terrified cooky-boy realized what had happened. The hunted man had been hiding among the banyan stems, on that very spot when the shipmates halted there—and had scuttled into the branches above to escape being seen. Now that they were gone he was descending—no doubt unaware that the lazy cooky-boy had remained behind. Danny was very keen to sight "Jimmy the Shark"—from a safe distance. But the desperado close at hand had a terrifying effect on him. Even as he gazed in dumb terror, a lithe form dropped silently, landing hardly more than a yard from him.

But the man had dropped with his back to Danny—his face turned in the direction of the shipmates, screened from sight by the banyan stems and creepers. Danny, dumb, gazed at his back. The man was listening, with bent head, like a hunted animal. ~~through~~ the bush came the voice of Koko.

"Foot belong white feller ~~his~~ feller track, sar! Me savvy too much."

"By gum! If it was the Shark—!" came Hudson's voice.

The hunted man breathed hard and deep, and turned. The next moment he stumbled on Danny before he saw him. The cooky-boy gave a whimper of terror at the set, desperate face and the glimmer of the revolver that leaped at once into the desperate hand.

The muzzle of the revolver was clamped to his fuzzy head. Jimmy the Shark

did not speak. But his burning eyes told enough. There was only one thing that saved the hapless Danny from a bullet through the head: and that was that the shipmates, close at hand, would hear the shot. But if Danny had called out to warn them the shot would have sped at once: and the cooky-boy did not need telling that. Dumb, he gazed up at the set, threatening face, with starting, distending eyes.

A murmur of voices came through the bush. The shipmates were moving a little further off: Koko seeking for more sign. The hunted man, as he leaned over Danny, breathed in great gulps, the sweat dropping from his face. But his eyes were scanning Danny's face, with recognition in them. He bent his head closer, and whispered.

"You belong ship stop along lagoon?"

"Yessar!" breathed Danny. "Me cooky-boy along that ship, sar! You no shootee this poor feller Danny, sar! Me good boy along you, sar."

The Shark scanned the fat brown face. Then he slipped the revolver back into his pocket to Danny's immense relief. The murmur of voices from the bush was receding. Danny's eyes were intently in the Shark's face. He could not read its expression. Some thought was passing in the hunted man's mind that was beyond Danny's guessing.

There was a faint metallic click as the Shark groped in a pocket. Danny's eyes widened as he drew out a handful of gold coins and held them up for the cooky-boy to see. In spite of his terror, Danny's eyes glittered with a greedy glitter. He had joined in the hunt in the bush in the remote hope of fingering ten Australian sovereigns. There were twice as many in that fistful. The Shark, watching him, read in the fat greedy face all that he wanted to know.

"You likee?" he whispered.

"Me likee too much, sar!" breathed Danny.

The Shark listened. A rustle in the bush was receding: he was, for the moment at least, safe. He bent again over the cooky-boy, and whispered—and Danny, as he listened, forgot his terrors, and grinned from one fat ear to the other.

### TAMEETO OF TONGA!

"**R**OTTEN luck!" grunted Kit Hudson.  
"Rotten!" agreed King of the Islands. "But they'll get him to-morrow—though we shan't be here to lend a hand."

The sunset was red on Koloo: dark shadows deepening in the bush. Ken King and Kit Hudson, tired to the bone after day in the bush, were tramping down the beach to the wharf. Lights were beginning to gleam in the bungalows, where the planters were returning, after the day's hunt for "Jimmy the Shark". From Mr. Gunn's veranda a powerful voice with a Scottish accent could be

heard uttering expressive words. The hunt had been long and hard, but the hunted desperado had eluded it; he was still at large, and Sandy Gunn's banknotes were as far as ever from Sandy's safe.

On the morrow the *Dawn* was pulling out of Koloo: the shipmates would not be able to take further part in the hunt for the Shark. They would have been glad, very glad, to see the desperado laid by the heels before they sailed away from Koloo: but time and trade waited for no man, and King of the Islands had dates to keep. They had put in a long hard day: and nothing had come of it. Still, it could only be a matter of time before the Shark was hunted down, if he remained on Koloo; and he had no means of getting away from the island.

Tomoo and Kolulo had already gone on board: but Danny, the cooky-boy, was seated on a packing-case on the wharf as the shipmates came down. He was in talk with a brown-skinned man who lay lazily on the wharf, his fuzzy head and brown shoulders resting against the packing-case on which the cooky-boy sat. He lay in shadow, fanning himself idly with a palm-leaf. King of the Islands stopped to speak to Danny: all the crew had orders to be back on board by sundown.

"You go along ketch, Danny," said the boy trader.

"Yessar," said Danny. He looked round at his white master with furtive eyes. "Spose you likee, sar, me likee too much talk along friend belong me. Him good feller along me, sar, along Tonga—name belong him Tameeto, sar, belong Tonga."

Ken glanced carelessly at the brown figure sprawling in the shade of the packing-case, and smiled. Danny, it seemed, had picked up an old acquaintance on Koloo, and wanted to talk to the Tonga boy. No two Kanakas could ever meet without endless conversation to follow.

"You talk along Tameeto, spose you likee, Danny!" said Ken, and he went on with Hudson and Koko to the ketch. And Danny breathed hard and deep when his white masters' backs were turned: and then grinned down at the brown man whom he had named Tameeto of Tonga. Ken King had given that brown man only one careless glance: but he was worth a second glance, if the boy trader had only suspected it.

In the cool of the evening, cargo was packed on the *Dawn*: Ken was pulling out at an early hour in the morning. Copra and pearl-shell and ivory nuts were brought on board: and after the last item had been checked, Mr. Gunn lingered for a last word with King of the Islands.

"Ye'll take care," he said, "Ye'll surely take care, King of the Islands, when you get the hook up in the morning. I'm telling ye, that villain will get away from Koloo on your packet if he can—he's tried the game on once, and he will surely try it on again: and I'm telling ye, that ye'll sair bestead if ye find yourself at sea with Jimmy the Shark on your packet, and a gun in his hand."

King of the Islands laughed.

"Jimmy the Shark won't have a chance of stowing himself away on the *Dawn*, Mr. Gunn!" he said. "We shall keep watch to-night: but I shall have the whole packet searched, from stem to stern, before we get the hook up in the morning. I'm taking no chances with Jimmy the Shark."

That the South-Sea desperado could get away from Koloo on the *Dawn*, when she sailed, was impossible: King of the Islands and his mate were satisfied on that point. And they were not likely to guess that it was the "impossible" that was destined to happen!

## UP HOOK!

DANNY the cooky-boy came aft, in the sunny dawn, with a tray in his plump brown hands. The ketch was pulling out at an early hour: but she was still moored at the coral wharf when King of the Islands and his mate sat down to breakfast aft. Koko, and the Hiva-Oa boys, were making a final search of the vessel before putting to sea. That the hunted desperado could possibly have stolen on board and stowed himself away was hardly to be thought of: but, more to satisfy Sandy Gunn than himself, Ken had ordered that final search to be made. And it was thorough, extending down to the orlop-deck where the water-casks were chocked in the hold. Only Danny, of the crew, was not taking part in the search, the cooky-boy being busy in his own department.

But Danny did not present his usual grinning cheerful aspect as he came aft with his tray. His brown face was contorted, as if with pain, and he twisted and mumbled and muttered, and set down the tray so clumsily that the coffee spilled in a wave.

"Me solly, sar," mumbled Danny.

The skipper and mate of the *Dawn* looked at him. It was plain that something was wrong with Danny.

"What name you look plenty sick, Danny?" asked Ken.

"Feller big pain stop along inside belong me, sar," mumbled Danny. "Big feller pain altogether too much."

And Danny rubbed his plump stomach ruefully.

Ken looked serious. He was concerned for Danny, and he did not want to sail with a sick cook.

"Tinkee no can cookee, sar, along that big-feller pain stop along inside belong me, sar," went on Danny. "Likee too much stop along Koloo, sar, sposee white master likee."

"We don't want to lose you, Danny," said Ken, and Kit Hudson whistled. A sick cook was not of much use on board a busy trading ketch: but it was rather late to look for a new cook, with the *Dawn* on the point of sailing.

"Me no good, sar, along me go sick," said Danny. "Easy findee 'nother feller cook, sar, spose white master likee. Friend belong me, feller Tameeto, sar, he plenty too much good feller cook, sar."

"Tameeto!" repeated Ken. He remembered the Tonga boy with whom Danny had been in conversation on the wharf the previous evening. "Is Tameeto a cooky-boy?"

"Too much good cook altogether, sar," said Danny, eagerly. "He cook along steamer, sar. Me savvy that feller plenty too much. You likee Tameeto, sar, sponse you takee that feller along place belong me, sar."

"Him good boy?" asked Ken.

"Him velly good boy, sar."

"Where is he?" asked Ken.

"He stop along wharf, sar, sponse you wantee see that feller, eye belong you."

"Call him on board."

"Yessar."

Danny, still twisting and mumbling, went to the rail and gestured to the Tonga boy, who was sprawling on a packing-case, chewing betel-nut.

King of the Islands looked thoughtful.

"If Danny's going sick, better leave him here, Kit, and I can ask Sandy to see that he's looked after," he said. "We can pick him up again on our return trip."

Hudson nodded.

"If the Tonga boy's willing to take his place, O.K.," he said. "No time now to rouse out another man on Koloo."

"Here he comes."

Tameeto of Tonga clambered on board, and, after a few words with Danny, came aft, ducking his fuzzy head to the shipmates. He was clad rather more elaborately than most Kanakas, in a pair of duck trousers and a cotton shirt with bare brown feet. A trickle of red juice from the betel-nut oozed from a corner of his mouth: but otherwise he looked very clean and tidy—a good deal more so than Danny, in fact.

"Feller Danny sing out you likee speakee along me, sar," said Tameeto, in a high-pitched, sing-song voice.

Ken scanned him.

"Name belong you, Tameeto?" he asked.

"Yessar! Me belong Tonga, sar! Feller Danny he say you likee me cook along this hooker, sar, along Danny he go sick. Me likee too much."

"Aye, aye," assented Ken. "You'll take Danny's place, Tameeto, along we comey along Koloo one more time, you savvy."

"Me savvy plenty, sar."

The matter was soon settled, and Tameeto went into the galley with Danny, Kit Hudson's glance following him rather curiously.

"Have I seen that Tonga boy before, somewhere?" he said. "There seems something a bit familiar about the cut of his jib, Ken."

"I thought the same," assented Ken. "But I've never seen the boy before that I know of. I'll have a word with Sandy before we pull out—I want Danny to be looked after."

Sandy Gunn came down to the ketch while the Kanaka crew were making the last preparations for pulling out of the lagoon. He came with a rifle under his arm, at which the shipmates smiled. Evidently Mr. Gunn did not feel quite sure that Jimmy the Shark might not be in the offing.

Danny came out of the galley with a somewhat furtive manner. Tameeto remained in the galley, whence came a sound of clinking pots and pans. Apparently the new cook was getting down to his duties without delay.

"Ye've searched yere ship, King of the Islands?" asked Mr. Gunn. "Ye're sure that that villain hasn't hidden himself aboard?"

Ken laughed.

"Quite sure, Sandy! The Kanakas have searched every inch, down to the, orlop-deck. You feller Koko, you no see Jimmy the Shark along this hooker, eye belong you?"

The boatswain grinned, with a flash of white teeth.

"No, sar! That feller no stop along this hooker."

"He's as cunning as a boat load of monkeys," said Mr. Gunn. "But if ye're sure, King of the Islands, that goes. We'll hunt him out of the bush to-day, I reckon, with my five hundred pounds in his pockets. I'm telling ye I shall be glad to see the banknotes back in my safe. And ye're sure the hooker's been searched from stem to stern?"

"Quite," said Ken, smiling. "And look here, Sandy, my cooky-boy has gone sick, and I'm leaving him on Koloo till we make the return trip. You'll have an eye on him, and doctor him if he needs it."

"Aye, aye, mon, I'll see that he's looked after." Mr. Gunn glanced at Danny, who was twisting and mumbling again. "You feller Danny, you go along bungalow belong me."

"Yessar," said Danny.

And he dropped on the wharf. After a few more words with the shipmates—and a suspicious glance round, as if still haunted by the idea that Jimmy the Shark might be stowed away on the *Dawn*—Sandy Gunn shook hands with the skipper and mate, and went back to the wharf.

Ten minutes later the *Dawn* was pulling out of the reef passage with the open Pacific before her.

But Mr. Gunn, when he returned to his bungalow, did not find Danny the cooky-boy there. Danny, sprawling under the shade of a palm tree, was watching the ketch pull out to sea, with a grin on his plump face, and no sign of sickness about him now.

The tall sails glanced over the reef, and sank into the blue of the Pacific,

and Danny watched till the *Dawn* was out of sight. And the grin on his fat face widened till it almost met his fat brown ears. From the thick fuzzy hair on his head he drew a little packet—and opened it, and with greedy glittering eyes counted twenty-five Australian sovereigns—a fortune to a Kanaka.

“Five-five piecee gold!” murmured Danny, as he counted. “Five-five piecee gold belong me, my word!”

And he chuckled.

Having counted the sovereigns a dozen times, Danny repacked them, excepting one that remained in his brown paw, and concealed the packet in his mop of hair—a Kanaka’s customary place for precious possessions. With a grinning face, and the gold coin in his hand, Danny strolled away along the beach of Koloo. Danny was not “going sick”: Danny was going to have a good time on Koloo, so long as his “piecee gold money” lasted. And that day Sandy Gunn, and most of the inhabitants of Koloo, hunted in the bush for Jimmy the Shark—in vain.

If Jimmy the Shark was still on Koloo, he was not to be found. Where he was hiding himself, with the whole island hunting him, was a mystery. And Sandy Gunn could not help wondering whether, in spite of the vigilance of the shipmates, Jimmy might not have succeeded, by some cunning trick, in stowing himself away on the *Dawn* after all.

## THE MAN IN THE DARK!

“SILENCE!”  
“My sainted Sam! What—?”  
“Silence—on your life!”

King of the Islands wondered whether he was dreaming. It seemed like a dream—as strange and wild a dream as had ever haunted slumber.

It was pitchy dark in the little state-room on the *Dawn*. Ken had left his mate taking his watch on deck, and gone down to his bunk. He had slept soundly—till he was suddenly awakened, with a grip that seemed like steel on his neck, and something dark and shadowy looming over him in the darkness. And as the low whispering voice hissed in his ear, something cold and metallic touched his cheek—a cold metal rim, which he knew was the muzzle of a revolver. It was no wonder that the boy trader fancied, for the moment, that he must be dreaming.

The *Dawn* had been a day at sea, well on her way to Tovuka, her next port of call. She had not been in sight of land since Koloo had been dropped astern in the early morning. The only white men on board the ketch were King of the Islands and his mate. Yet it was a white man’s voice that hissed in his ear



as he lay in his bunk. The amazement of it almost made the boy trader's head spin.

"Silence!" The voice was a husky whisper with a savage note in it. "One call to your mate or your crew, King of the Islands, and it will be the last. They could not come in time to save you."

Ken lay panting.

"You may speak—in a whisper!" went on the hissing voice. "Keep in mind that if I hear a step, I press the trigger."

"Who are you?" breathed Ken. "If I'm not dreaming, how did you get here—out at sea?"

There was a low, faint chuckle.

"I sailed with you from Koloo, King of the Islands. I guess that Sandy Gunn is still hunting me on Koloo."

The boy trader gave a violent start.

He knew now.

It was fantastic—impossible—unthinkable! But it was the hunted desperado, it was Jimmy the Shark who was bending over him in the darkness and whose revolver was pressed to his face. He could not believe it—surely this was some wild dream.

"You!" he breathed. He strove to penetrate the gloom with his eyes, but he could discern only a faint shadow. "You! Jimmy the Shark!"

"You've got it."

"In the name of all that's mad and impossible, how did you get on my ship?" breathed Ken. "Every foot of the ketch was searched, and searched again—"

"Keep your voice low, King of the Islands." There was savage menace in the husky whisper. "I tell you, if they hear, you are a dead skipper: and I guess I may have luck in shooting my way out of this jam."

Ken lay silent, panting. Somehow, it was unimaginable how Jimmy the Shark had packed himself on the *Dawn*, and sailed out of Koloo, unknown to captain and crew. And in the deep darkness of almost midnight he had crept from his lair, wherever it was, and now his grip was on the boy skipper of the *Dawn*, his revolver touching his cheek. King of the Islands was wholly and utterly at the mercy of the South-Sea desperado.

Hardly a dozen yards from him Kit Hudson was on deck. As near at hand was Koko: faintly through the night came the tinkle of the boatswain's ukelele as he sat on the cabin coamings and hummed a Hawaiian melody. So near—yet never dreaming of what was happening below, and utterly unable to help. A call would have reached their ears—but Ken did not need warning that Jimmy the Shark meant every word he said. The desperado was running for his liberty, perhaps for his life, and with either at stake, he was as ruthless as a tiger-shark.

"That's better! You've got sense!" came the desperado's low voice.

"Keep it in mind that your life hangs on a thread, Ken King. You are in desperate hands. But you know that! You've heard about Jimmy the Shark on the beaches, I reckon."

"What do you want?"

"I'll tell you! I've been a day on this hooker—dreading every minute to be spotted. Nobody suspects so far—but any accident, any minute, might give me away. It was a desperate chance to take—but it was the only chance I had—and I took it. It's worked—so far. But I've seen your mate's eyes on me more than once. He knows that he's seen me before, and if he guessed—"

"If he guessed what?"

There was a low chuckle again.

"He hasn't guessed yet, King of the Islands: neither have you—but I reckon it wouldn't last! I've got off Koloo—I've got to get off your ketch—that's the next step."

"You won't get off in a hurry, you sea-lawyer. It's five days run to Tovuka, and—"

"Your hooker won't raise Tovuka in five days, King of the Islands, or in five weeks! The *Dawn* is going to change her course and land me on Faloo to-morrow."

"Are you mad?" muttered Ken. "How you're here, I can't guess—but now you're known, you're going into irons, you scoundrel, to be handed over to the law."

The revolver pressed harder to his face.

"I guess you will never hand me over, King of the Islands! I'm leaving you in your bunk bound hand and foot with a gag in your mouth. That's what I've got to tell you! Lift a finger, or utter a single call, and you get a bullet through the head instead."

"You villain!" breathed Ken. "My mate—"

"Your mate will come down at the shot—to get another!" snarled the voice of the unseen man. "I've got all the cards, King of the Islands! Listen to me! I'm going to pull through this without killing, if I can—not because I value your life higher than a mosquito's, but to keep the rope away from my neck. But if I have to pull trigger once, you go first, and your mate second—and I guess the Kanakas will jump to my orders with the white men over the side. Chew on that for a minute, King of the Islands, and make up your mind whether you want me to pull trigger."

There was silence following the hissing whisper.

Ken lay still: the steely grip still on his neck, the revolver-rim still pressed to his face.

His thoughts were racing.

To fling himself headlong from the bunk, and grapple with the desperado, was his impulse. But he knew that that was futile. A pressure of the Shark's finger on the trigger, and he was a dead man. And what would follow? The

shot would alarm the watch on deck—Kit Hudson would come running down—to be met by the desperado, revolver in hand, and shot down before he even knew what was happening. He would have no more chance for his life than his skipper had. That was so clear, and so certain, that obviously it was, as the Shark admitted, only the fear of a rope round his neck that prevented the ruffian from pulling the trigger now. He was going to pull through without incurring the last terrible penalty of the law if he could. But he was going to pull through, at any cost.

“Well?” came a low snarl.

Ken breathed hard and deep.

“You hold the cards,” he muttered.

“You’ve got sense! You’re keeping quiet?”

Ken King did not answer for a moment. But the answer had to come. It came through his set teeth.

“Aye, aye!”

“Put your hands together.”

It went savagely against the grain to obey. But there was no help for it—his life, and his shipmate’s life, hung on a thread. In the darkness, a loop of tapa cord was passed round Ken’s wrists, drawn tight, and knotted fast. If he had been helpless before, he was doubly helpless now: and no resistance was possible as a gag was driven into his mouth, and secured there with a cord round his head. A minute more, and another cord was knotted round his legs: and he lay in the bunk like a log unable to utter a sound, or to stir hand or foot.

He heard a deep breath in the darkness—a deep breath of relief. Then a match scratched, and in its glimmer, deep-set gleaming eyes looked down at him to make sure that all was secure. And once again Ken King wondered dizzily whether he was dreaming as he looked at the dark brown face and fuzzy hair leaning over him.

It was Jimmy the Shark who had made him a prisoner in his bunk. It was Jimmy the Shark who had struck the match. But it was Tameeto of Tonga whose dark face looked down at him in the glimmer of the match—the Kanaka cook who had taken the place on board of Danny the cooky-boy. No one else was in the little state-room—and Ken’s eyes stared up, almost bulging from his face, at Tameeto. At his amazed, stupefied stare, a grin came over the brown face.

“Do you know me now, King of the Islands?” It was the voice of Jimmy the Shark: nothing like the high-pitched voice in which Tameeto of Tonga had talked. But it came from Tameeto, grinning down at the bound man.

And Ken, at last, understood.

The match flickered out. He heard the desperado, softly leaving the state-room, passing into the main cabin: he heard him shut the door behind him and lock it. And King of the Islands lay helpless, silent, his brain still in a

whirl at that strange discovery. He knew now how Jimmy the Shark had contrived to sail on the *Dawn*: only too well he remembered now the many tales he had heard of the rascal's cunning skill in disguise. He bit into the gag with rage as he realized that Danny must have been a party to this—Danny, who had "gone sick" as a pretext for staying on Koloo, and given his place to Tameeto. Danny had been bribed: a handful of Australian sovereigns, probably, had been his reward for helping the hunted outcast to escape from Koloo. No wonder something in Tameeto's brown face had struck the ship-mates as familiar: they had seen it as a white face, when the rascal was fleeing in the canoe and on the reef. Ken King knew now, knew how he had been tricked: but the knowledge came too late to be of use. Helpless, silent, he could only lie there in the darkness while Jimmy the Shark crept away—Jimmy the Shark, but still, to all eyes on the *Dawn* but Ken's, Tameeto of Tonga.

### THE UPPER HAND

KIT HUDSON sat on the taffrail, his hands in his pockets, swaying to the motion of the ketch, as the *Dawn* surged through the Pacific waters, her red and green lights gleaming into the gloom ahead. Occasionally he glanced up at the sails then out over the dark sea, and once or twice he yawned. The night was fine, but very dark, banks of clouds hiding the glitter of the Southern Cross. The mate of the *Dawn* was thinking chiefly of eight bells, which meant his watch below: not thinking, or dreaming, of anything unusual on board the *Dawn*. Far out at sea, in good weather with a fair wind, the ketch glided on the long stretch for Tovuka, and the thought of danger in the darkness, on board the ketch, would have seemed fantastic. Yet, if the Australian mate could only have known it, danger lurked in the dark shadows.

Lompo was at the helm. The others of the crew, Lufu, Kolulo, Tomoo, slept on their mats on deck. The dusky little forecabin was untenanted: it was only in rough weather that the Hiva-Oa boys took their watch below in the forecabin. Koko, the boatswain, seated on the coamings of the cabin skylight, hummed his song, his brown fingers lightly straying over his ukelele. Where Tameeto was nobody knew or cared. The cook did not take watches with the crew: and if anyone thought of him at all it would have been supposed that he was sleeping among the pots and pans in the galley, as Danny had been wont to do.

But the boatswain, at least, was reminded of him, as a shadow moved in the dimness of the deck, and he ceased to strum on the ukelele, and glanced at Tameeto. His glance was careless: there was nothing in the look of the Tongo boy to awaken suspicion. Koko's eyes were keen as those of an albatross: but he never dreamed of detecting, under the brown skin of Tameeto,

the face of the man he had seen fleeing in the canoe on the lagoon at Koloo. He was only slightly surprised to see the cook awake and on deck at almost midnight.

"What name you comey here, you feller Tameeto?" asked Koko. "What name you no sleepee along mat belong you?"

"Me tinkee smell feller fire, nose belong me," said Tameeto.

Koko was on his feet in an instant. The merest hint of a fire at sea was enough to make him—or any sailorman—instantly alert.

"What place you tinkee smell feller fire?" he breathed.

"Tinkee along feller foc's'le."

"Me see, eye belong me, plenty too quick!" said Koko, and his big bare feet hardly touched the deck as he ran forward.

Tameeto ran at his heels.

In a matter of seconds they reached the open scuttle of the forecstle. All was pitchy dark below as Koko stared down the three steps, and he snuffed the air without detecting any smell of smoke or burning. And then, as he leaned over the steps down into the forecstle, snuffing the air, he received a sudden violent push into the back, and went stumbling and spinning down into the foc's'le, headlong. Tameeto of Tonga put all his strength into that shove, and Koko, taken utterly by surprise, spun down the steps, and crashed.

The headlong crash on the forecstle floor dazed the boatswain, and almost stunned him. He sprawled there in the darkness, gasping.

Swiftly Tameeto of Tonga closed the scuttle and secured it. He grinned breathlessly as he heard the astonished and enraged boatswain scrambling up in the darkness below. Koko's voice came in a roar.

"You bad feller too much, what name you do this thing? You makee this feller Koko fall along face belong him. My word me plenty kill back belong you along lawyer-cane belong me."

It had taken the boatswain only a few moments to recover from the shock. He charged up the steps at the forecstle door, to hurl it open, and grasp the Tonga boy in his powerful brown hands. But the door was closed and secured and Koko crashed at it in vain. And as he realized that the man who had tricked him had made him a prisoner in the forecstle, Koko gave a roar of rage. His big fists beat fiercely on the wood.

"What name you do this thing, you feller Tameeto?" he roared. "My tinkee brain belong you no walk about any more! Me kill back belong you plenty too much along lawyer-cane."

Koko was almost as much puzzled as enraged. There was no smell of burning in the forecstle: it was a false alarm, evidently invented by Tameeto for the single purpose of tricking him there, and making him a prisoner. What reason the Tonga boy could possibly have Koko could not guess, unless he had gone mad—or, as he expressed it, "brain belong him no walk about."

He hammered furiously on hard wood only anxious to get his hands on the Tonga boy, and reward him for his trickery with two or three dozen from the lawyer-cane.

But the Tonga boy did not heed the hammering and shouting from the forecastle. Koko was a prisoner there, safe for the time at least: and Jimmy the Shark was done with him, for the moment. Heedless of the boatswain's fury, he glided away aft.

The uproar from the forecastle reached all ears. Tomoo, Kolulo, and Lufu sat up on their sleeping-mats, staring drowsily. Lompo, at the helm and the mate on the taffrail, could see nothing of what passed, but they could hear. Kit Hudson jumped to the deck as Tameeto of Tonga came hurrying aft. He stared at the Tonga boy in the dimness, and called to him.

"You feller Tameeto! What's up? What name Koko sing out, mouth belong him, along forecastle?"

"Tinkee him fall, sar, break feller leg belong him," answered Tameeto.

"Suffering cats!"

Hudson ran forward, brushing the Tonga boy out of his way. But he did not pass Tameeto. A clubbed revolver swept in the air, and struck the mate of the *Dawn* on the side of the head as he was passing: and he reeled over and crashed on the deck. He lay there stunned by that sudden savage blow, and Tameeto of Tonga bent over him, his weapon for another blow if it was needed. Lompo almost let go the wheel in his amazement and alarm, as he stared at the scene with bulging eyes.

Tameeto did not heed him. The mate of the *Dawn* lay stunned at his feet. For some minutes, at least, he was as helpless as a log. Tameeto's brown fingers worked swiftly, knotting a tape cord round Hudson's wrists, binding them together, Lompo watching him like a man in a dream. Leaving Kit Hudson lying on the deck, his hands bound, and still senseless, Tameeto turned on the steersman. The butt of the revolver was in his hand now, and the muzzle bore on the startled and terrified Lompo.

"You no shoot, you feller Tameeto!" gasped the Hiva-Oa boy. "You no shoot along feller gun along this feller Lompo."

"Keep her steady!"

Lompo almost fell down in his amazement. Tameeto was not speaking in the sing-song voice that had accompanied his Kanaka disguise. It was the sharp voice of Jimmy the Shark that rapped at the steersman. It was all that Lompo could do to keep the wheel steady.

Tomoo, Kolulo, Lufu, were on their feet, staring with amazed eyes at the Tonga boy. Koko's voice was roaring from the forecastle, but they did not heed it: all their attention was concentrated on Tameeto, and the revolver that glimmered in his brown hand. Any one of the three powerful Hiva-Oa boys could have handled Jimmy the Shark with ease: but the firearm daunted them. He could—and undoubtedly would—have shot them down like rabbits if

they had lifted a hand to attack him. They stared at him, almost gibbering with amazement.

The desperado's eyes glittered at them over the half-raised revolver. He had nothing to fear from the native crew with a firearm in his hand. His savage voice rapped out:

"You feller boy! You good boy along me, sposee you no likee feller bullet stop along head belong you. You savvy?"

The Hiva-Oa boys could only stare.

The Shark pointed, with his left hand, to the mate of the *Dawn*, now stirring and showing signs of returning consciousness.

"You feller boy, you carry that feller mate down along cabin, along bunk belong him!" he rapped.

There was a pause, while the Hiva-Oa boys stared at him: then they lifted the mate, and carried him down the companion. Jimmy the Shark gave Lompo, at the wheel, a threatening gesture, and followed them down. He was breathing hard, but there was a grin of triumph on his stained face. King of the Islands and his mate were helpless: the boatswain was a prisoner in the forecabin: the native crew scared into submission: Jimmy the Shark was master of the *Dawn*, free to set what course he pleased, with the wide Pacific and freedom before him.

### BOUND FOR FALOO!

"THAT VILLAIN!" muttered Kit Hudson.

King of the Islands could not speak: the gag was still in his mouth. But his eyes burned at the man who stepped from the cabin into the stateroom, in the bright morning.

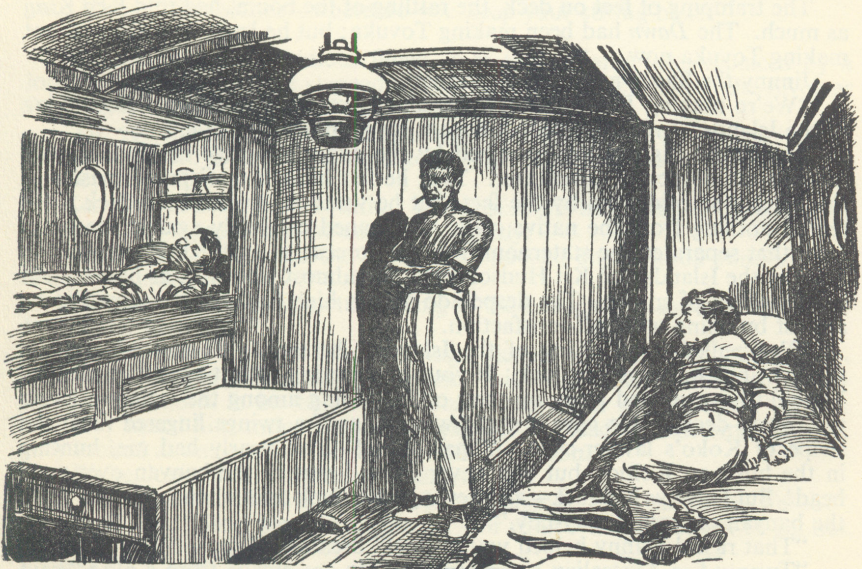
That man did not look much like Tameeto the Tonga "boy". The South Sea desperado was through with the disguise that had served his turn. He had cleaned the brown stain from his skin, combed out the fuzzy hair, and was a white man again: dressed in a suit of spotless ducks taken from Ken King's sea-chest in the cabin. His revolver was in his belt, ready to his hand if needed: but it was little likely to be needed now. If Lompo or Lufu, Tomoo or Kolulo, might have thought of seeking to turn the tables on Tameeto of Tonga, they did not think, or dream, of anything of the kind with Jimmy the Shark. Now that they knew him, knew him as the hunted man of Koloo, as the desperado of whom wild tales were told on every beach in the Pacific, the Hiva-Oa boys eyed him with undisguised terror, and jumped to his orders.

Koko the boatswain was the only Kanaka on board whom Jimmy the Shark might have had cause to fear; his devotion to his white master might have made him dangerous. But there was no danger from Koko now, trapped in the forecabin and confined there. At the desperado's order, a beam had been

nailed across the forecastle door, making assurance doubly sure that the boatswain could not break out. Which was, perhaps, just as well for Koko: for Jimmy the Shark's revolver was ready, if he had emerged on deck.

Single-handed, favoured by surprise and darkness, Jimmy the Shark had seized control of the *Dawn*. It had been a wild and desperate enterprise, as desperate as any in Jimmy's wild and lawless career: and he had undertaken it only as the sole means of escaping from the island of Koloo. But his luck had not failed him—his luck, which was legendary on the Pacific beaches. He was master of Ken King's ship, cool and confident, and had neither doubt nor fear. In the morning sunlight, there was a grin on his hard clear-cut face as he lounged into the stateroom, and glanced at the skipper and mate lying in the bunks.

Through the long night, Ken King had lain there, his limbs aching from the bonds the Shark had knotted on them, his mouth aching from the gag. He knew that Kit Hudson had been placed in the other bunk: and, when the light of dawn came through the port holes, he was able to see him. Hudson, bound like his skipper, was equally helpless, but in worse case, for there was a



“ . . . I've one question for you, King of the Islands—where do you keep your strong box?”



heavy bruise on his head where the pistol-butt had struck, and it ached horribly. For hours the shipmates had been left to themselves: and it was a surprise to Hudson, though not to Ken, when Jimmy the Shark appeared. It was Tameeto of Tonga who had knocked him out with the pistol-butt, and Ken had been able to tell him nothing. Hudson's eyes popped at the sight of him.

"That villain!" he repeated.

Jimmy the Shark glanced at him, and laughed.

"You savvy this feller now, you feller Hudson?" he asked in the sing-song voice he had used as Tameeto of Tonga. "That feller Tameeto he no stop any more altogether." He chuckled, "I saw your eyes on me more than once, you swab," he went on, in his natural voice. "I reckon you'd have tumbled soon or late—if I'd given you time."

"Tameeto!" gasped Hudson. He began to understand. He knew now why the brown face of Tameeto had seemed somehow familiar.

The Shark turned to King of the Islands, and removed the gag from his mouth, grinning down at him. Ken panted.

"You scoundrel!" he muttered. "What are you doing with my ship? You've changed course—"

The tramping of feet on deck, the rattling of the boom, had told Ken King as much. The *Dawn* had been making Tovuka: but he knew that she was not making Tovuka now.

Jimmy the Shark nodded and grinned.

"We're making Faloo," he answered. "I've got friends on Faloo, King of the Islands. I reckon we shall raise it by sundown."

Ken licked his dry lips, numbed by the gag. The rage in his face only amused the desperate adventurer. That he felt himself undisputed master of the ketch was evidenced by the fact that he ventured to leave the deck. He feared nothing from the native crew. He leaned carelessly against the bulkhead that separated the stateroom from the forecabin, and lighted a cigarette. King of the Islands and Kit Hudson eyed him almost wolfishly, as he blew out a little cloud of smoke. The desperado was in high feather: he seemed to be almost bubbling with self-satisfaction.

"I've pulled it off, King of the Islands," he said. "It was a desperate venture: but I always had luck. If your boatswain had not been so watchful, I should have stowed away on your craft—hiding among the water casks on the orlop-deck." He gave a slight wriggle, as if a twinge lingered from the swipe of Koko's lawyer-cane. "That failed! You nearly had me, hunting in the bush on Koloo—but you never knew I was in the banyan over your head! But I always had luck—and never greater luck than when I dropped from the banyan on your cooky-boy."

"That rascal Danny helped you in this!" breathed Ken.

"Twenty-five Australian sovereigns to help me escape from Koloo," said Jimmy the Shark, with a nod. "That was all the cooky-boy knew: I did not

tell him what was in my mind so soon as we got out to sea. The cooky-boy helped me to make up as a Kanaka, and to take his place on your packet—to escape from Koloo. So far as he knew, all I planned was to slip off the ketch at the first island you touched at.” He laughed over the cigarette. “But I knew, if Danny did not, that it couldn’t have lasted—I might have been spotted any minute—I was lucky that it lasted till the time came to strike. Now I am master here, Ken King—sailing your ship for Faloo—and if you ever step ashore at Koloo again, you can tell Sandy Gunn to whistle for his banknotes.”

“You won’t get away with this!” came from Kit Hudson.

The desperado looked round at him, and shrugged his shoulders.

“What’s to stop me?” he said, banteringly. “Your Kanakas are feeding from my hand: they jump to my orders as they never jumped to yours. Your boatswain was a more dangerous man: but I trapped him in the forecastle, and he’s fastened in, to stay there till we raise Faloo. Will either of you get out of those bunks and stop me?” He chuckled. “You’ll stay tied up as you are till Faloo’s in the offing—I’m taking no risks with you. I shall lock that door on you and leave you—when I’m through here. I’ve one question for you, King of the Islands—where do you keep your strong-box?”

Ken did not answer.

The grinning good humour faded from the ruffian’s face, replaced by a look of cold ferocity. He stepped towards the boy trader, jerked the revolver from his belt, and lifted it by the barrel.

“Do you figure that I should not find it if I searched?” he snarled. “But I do not choose to leave the deck too long. Where is the strong-box—and the key—or—!”

Ken drew a deep, deep breath. The rage in his heart was so deep that he could scarcely speak. But he answered, quietly.

“Under this bunk—and the key’s in my pocket, on the hook yonder! But if my turn should come—!”

“You’re welcome to your turn, King of the Islands, if it should ever come! I’m master here now.”

The shipmates watched him, in savage silence, as he unlocked the strong-box. He lounged out of the stateroom: with the money added to Sandy Gunn’s banknotes in his belt. The door to the cabin was shut and locked: and they heard him tramp up the companion to the deck. In bitter silence, they looked at one another across the little stateroom.

“We’re done, Ken,” muttered Hudson.

“What does he plan to do with our ship, Kit, when he raises Faloo?” breathed Ken. “Steal her—or scuttle her—or what? Kit, we’ve got to get out of this!”

But the mate’s only answer was a hopeless look. And in Ken’s own heart there was little hope. They were helpless in the hands of the South Sea

desperado: from Koko, the brave and faithful Koko, there could come no help: and the crew were like sheep at the Shark's orders. There was no hope, as the long hot hours passed: and the *Dawn* surged on through the blue waters: and Jimmy the Shark, smoking cigarettes on deck, sailed Ken King's ship on her course for Faloo.

### KOKO TO THE RESCUE!

"KIT!"

It was a whisper from King of the Islands.

Through the long hot hours they had been almost in silence. It was past noon now. The tropic sun blazed down on the blue Pacific and the gliding ketch. On the afterdeck, Jimmy the Shark sprawled in a Madeira chair, backed to the taffrail—little as he feared the Kanaka crew, he would not give one of them a chance of getting behind him with a capstan bar. Kolulo was at the wheel: Tomoo, Lufu, Lompo, stood ready to jump to the desperado's sharp orders. Jimmy the Shark smoked cigarettes, and glanced up at the belying canvas. The wind was not so favourable for Faloo as for Tovuka, but the *Dawn* was making six knots, and the Shark had no doubt of raising the palm-tops of Faloo before sundown.

To the shipmates, aching in their bonds in the hot stateroom below, he gave no thought. They were safe out of his way: bound hand and foot, locked in the stateroom, the key in Jimmy's pocket: the Hiva-Oa boys could not have helped them even had they dared to make the venture. From the boatswain, in the forecabin, came no sound. He was a powerless prisoner there: and the Shark, had he wasted a thought on him at all, would have had no doubt that he was sleeping, in the heat of the day, with true Kanaka indifference to what could not be helped. But Jimmy the Shark was not thinking either of the shipmates or of the boatswain: he was thinking of Faloo, of his lawless associates there, and of the loot in his belt, and of the cards and drink that it meant to him. At the same time he had a wary eye on the crew on deck, taking no chances. All was going well with Jimmy the Shark: his wildest and most reckless adventure was nearing its successful end.

To Ken and Kit the long hours seemed endless. They had wrestled with their bonds till they were exhausted. There was no hope, or seemed none: the desperado on deck was master of the ship and master of their fate. They had fallen into silence, listening to the swish of the waters on the hull, to the occasional tramping of feet on deck and swinging of the boom, as Jimmy the Shark's sharp voice rapped out orders from time to time. And neither of them gave heed to a faint scratching sound that came among the other sounds to their ears: if they noticed it, it seemed like the sound of a rat behind a bulkhead. But King of the Islands, at last, did give it heed, as it dawned on his mind that it came almost continuously, and from the same spot, at the bulk-

head forward: the wooden partition that separated the little stateroom from the forecabin. And having given it heed at last, he lay for some time listening intently, hardly daring to indulge the hope that was rising in his breast. But at length he spoke, in a whisper, his voice trembling with suppressed excitement.

"Kit! Do you hear that?"

Hudson stirred in his bunk, suppressing an exclamation of pain at the pang in his cramped limbs as he moved. He stared across at Ken.

"What?" he asked.

"Listen!" breathed Ken.

"A rat gnawing," said Hudson. "What of it?"

"Are you sure of that, Kit?" Ken's heart was beating hard, "Speak in a whisper, shipmate—that villain might come down to the cabin. Kit, Koko's in the forecabin—and that sound—"

Hudson gave a start. With an effort, he dragged himself to a sitting position, his eyes fixed on the bulkhead, between the two bunks, which were on either side of the little stateroom. Beyond that bulkhead was the forecabin in which, as they knew, Koko was a prisoner. And the scratching sound came from the other side of the bulkhead.

"Suffering cats!" breathed Hudson. He listened intently.

He turned his eyes on Ken, with a blaze in them.

"Ken! That's not a rat—!"

"No!" muttered Ken.

"It's Koko—he's in the foc's'le—Ken, it must be Koko—it can be nothing else—Ken, Koko has the use of his hands—and he is trying to get to us—"

"Heaven send that it's so, Kit! Listen!"

With their hearts beating almost to suffocation, the shipmates listened. The sound from the other side of the bulkhead was not loud, but it was louder than it had been at first. And as they listened with strained ears, they knew that it could not be the gnawing of a rat—it was the sound of a knife working on wood.

The knife could only be in the hand of the boatswain of the *Dawn*, imprisoned in the forecabin. There was no escape to the deck for the prisoner of the forecabin: and Koko was seeking to cut a way out through the bulkhead into the stateroom below. As they listened, the shipmates were more and more certain of it, and now their haggard faces were flushed with hope.

The long, long minutes dragged by as the shipmates listened to that sound of hope. It was Koko—cutting his way through. Probably he did not know that they were prisoners in the stateroom—he could not know whether they were alive or dead, or that Tameeto of Tonga, who had trapped him, was Jimmy the Shark. But in the forecabin, he had heard the desperado's sharp voice rapping out orders on deck, and he knew that the ketch was in lawless hands, and that his white master was unable to come to his aid. Koko was not

sleeping in the heat of the tropic day, as Jimmy the Shark supposed if he thought of him at all. Koko had never been harder at work.

In deep silence, with beating hearts, the shipmates listened to the sound of the knife, and watched the bulkhead. They dreaded to hear the footstep of Jimmy the Shark in the adjoining cabin—but it was not likely. He had locked them in and left them, and was done with them. If Koko succeeded in working his way through uninterrupted—

“Look!” came in a sudden whisper from Kit. And Ken caught his breath.

A gleaming point of steel appeared suddenly through the wooden wall. Their eyes fastened on it. It was the point of the boatswain’s knife.

Again and again that gleaming point of steel came through the wood. Slowly, slowly, terribly slowly, but surely, the knife was enlarging the tiny opening. Fraction by fraction, inch by inch: till, as the opening grew larger, and the knife had freer play, the work went on more quickly. Then the sound of the steel ceased: and they guessed, rather than knew, that the boatswain’s eye was applied to the opening from the other side, and that he was scanning the stateroom.

Ken panted out a warning whisper.

“Koko! No sing out, mouth belong you—ear belong feller on deck hear, sposee you sing out.”

There was a gasping sound from the unseen boatswain. The voice of his white master reached him, like music to his ears.

“Oh, sar!” came a whisper through the hole in the bulkhead. “Oh, sar! Me tinkee you no stop any more altogether, along bad feller too much stop along deck givee order along Kanaka feller.”

“Stop plenty too much, Koko! Rope stop along foot, along hand, belong us feller,” breathed King of the Islands. “You savvy?”

“Me savvy, sar. Me tinkee you no stop. Me killy feller along he makes you no stop. Me plenty glad hear you sing out, sar, mouth belong you. Sposee you no stop, Koko no likee stop any more altogether. You savvy that bad feller along deck, sar?”

“It’s Jimmy the Shark, Koko. He came on board with a stained skin—Tameeto of Tonga. Now you savvy?”

There was a moment’s silence of astonishment. Then Koko whispered again.

“Me savvy, sar! Me killy that feller bimeby, knife belong me. Me comey, sar.”

There was silence again as the knife in the boatswain’s strong hand worked at the hole in the bulkhead. Splinters and shavings of wood dropped in the stateroom now. And in half an hour more—a century to the anxious watchers—they were able to see the Kanaka working on the other side of the orifice in the wood. The knife was making free play in the widening gap, cutting great slithers of wood away. Koko’s brown face came into view with a flash of white teeth. He grinned at his white master watching from the bunk.

“Me comey, sar!” breathed Koko.

The heavy knife sawed and slashed, and slashed and sawed. And at last—at long long last—the gap was wide enough for the Kanaka to squeeze through, and Koko, breathless and perspiring, stood in the stateroom. And in a few moments more, a few slashes of his knife had freed the skipper and mate of the *Dawn*.

### THE TABLES TURNED!

JIMMY THE SHARK grinned. He rose from the Madeira chair, shaded his eyes with his hand, and stared across the blue waters.

Since pulling out of Koloo, the *Dawn* had glided through boundless waters without a sign of land. On all sides, as far as the eye could reach, stretched the endless Pacific. But now, as the sun was sloping to the west, the line of the horizon was broken at last, by feathery fronds that waved against the azure of the sky.

Far away, those palm tops indicated the island of Faloo: the refuge for which the South Sea desperado was making in a stolen ship. And Jimmy the Shark, gazing at the distant palms, grinned with satisfaction. In less than an hour more, he would raise the island: and before the sun set the ketch would be gliding into the lagoon of Faloo. Fortune had stood his friend: and all was plane sailing now. Standing by the rail, his keen eyes, under the shade of his hand, watched the distant nodding palms, growing nearer and clearer as the *Dawn* surged on, leaning to the wind.

Keenly as he watched that sign of land in the far distance, the tail of his eye was on the crew: the Hiva-Oa boys had no chance of taking him by surprise, if they had ventured to think of it. But he did not see a face that peered from the companion hatch. From that quarter he could never have dreamed of danger.

The two men below were bound in their bunks, the stateroom door locked on them. That the Kanaka boatswain in the forecabin, labouring hour after hour through the hot day, had cut a way with his knife through a solid bulkhead into the stateroom: that he had freed the skipper and mate, and hacked open the lock on the stateroom door, Jimmy the Shark could never have dreamed: any more than he dreamed that the eyes of King of the Islands were upon him from the companion-way.

There had been no sound to warn him. He did not know, and could not dream, that the shipmates of the *Dawn* were free: that they were no longer in the stateroom: that, moving on tiptoe, they had taken revolvers from the arms-chest in the main cabin, and were prepared to deal with the reckless desperado who had seized their ship. Not a sound came to the deck, as King of the Islands, revolver in hand, crept up from below, with Kit Hudson at his heels, and Koko in the rear, knife in hand. The tables were about to be turned on Jimmy the Shark, in sight of Faloo, in the hour of his triumph.

But there was nothing to warn the desperate man of his danger, as he stood looking towards distant Faloo, his hand shading his eyes from the glare of the westering sun.

From the companion, King of the Islands cast a swift glance round the deck, and his eyes gleamed at the man by the rail. Tomoo and Lompo caught sight of their skipper, and stared blankly, amazed to see him. He gave the Kanakas no heed. With his revolver gripped in his hand, he stepped out on deck—and it was then that Jimmy the Shark, sensing danger, spun round, his eyes almost starting from his head at the sight of the boy trader.

For a fraction of a second, his startled eyes bulged at King of the Islands. But instantly, or almost instantly, his hand shot to his belt. But Ken King's revolver was already lifted.

"Drop that gun!"

Ken's voice rang sharp and clear.

But Jimmy the Shark did not heed it. His hand came up with a revolver in it, his eyes blazing at the boy trader.

Bang!

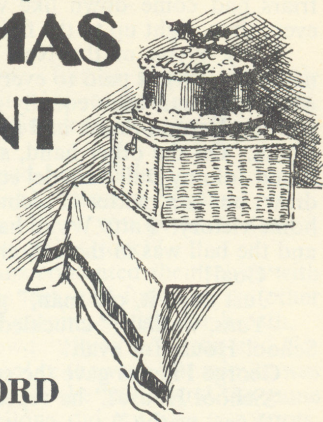
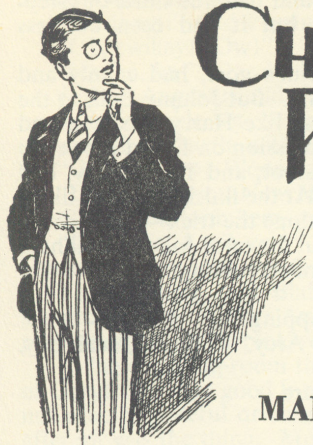
King of the Islands fired as he lifted the weapon. He was only in time. The bullet crashed through the lifting arm, smashing the bone, and Jimmy the Shark staggered, his right arm falling to his side, like the broken wing of a bird, his revolver crashing on the deck, exploding as it fell.

He staggered against the rail, his hard savage face suddenly white. Even then, the desperate man groped for a knife with his left hand. King of the Islands advanced on him, his smoking revolver at a level, his eyes gleaming over it. Kit Hudson followed him on deck, and his revolver was ready—and Koko, knife in hand. But it was only to see the desperado sink to the deck, his nerveless hand unclasping from his useless weapon. Jimmy the Shark, the desperate freebooter feared on every beach in the Pacific, had reached the end of his tether.

Sandy Gunn had the surprise of his life, when the *Dawn*, three days after she had pulled out of Koloo, sailed into the lagoon again: and the man for whom the island planters were hunting in the bush, was handed over to him, with a bandaged arm—Jimmy the Shark, sullen and savage, a prisoner at last, to go behind the prison bars that had so long waited for him. Sandy grinned with glee when the desperado was handed over: and he grinned still more gleefully when he handled, once more, his 500 pounds in banknotes. There was only one on Koloo who did not rejoice: and that was Danny the cooky-boy, when Koko rounded him up with a lawyer-cane. It was a sore and repentant Danny who was kicked into the galley when the *Dawn* sailed again: leaving on Koloo, to be taken to Fiji for trial and sentence, Jimmy the Shark.

THE END

# TOM MERRY'S CHRISTMAS PRESENT



by

MARTIN CLIFFORD

CHAPTER I

## THE WINNING GOAL

“GOAL!”  
“Good old Tom!”  
“St. Jim’s wins!”  
“Yaas, wathah!”  
“Goal! Goal!”

It was quite a tremendous roar on Little Side at St. Jim’s. It echoed far and wide. It was Tom Merry, a School House man, who had kicked the winning goal; but New House men joined as vigorously as School House men in the roar that greeted it. Figgins of the New House, rushed up to Tom Merry and smacked him on the back with a smack that made him stagger. Arthur Augustus D’Arcy waved his eyeglass wildly in the air. Johnny Bull, in the Greyfriars goal, stared at the ball, with a grim stare. He could hardly believe that he had let it pass him. But he had. In the very last minute of a slogging match, with no score to either side, the St. Jim’s junior captain had dispatched the leather home—and that was that!

It was a great occasion—the last football match before the Christmas holidays. And it had been fought hard and fast from the first note of the



whistle. And so far it had been practically a goal-keeper's game. Attack had been energetic on both sides: but on both sides the defence had been too sound for it. Again and again the red shirts of St. Jim's and the blue shirts of Greyfriars had come down like wolves on the fold: but it had been bootless every time, right up to the finish.

Fatty Wynn of the New House, in the St. Jim's goal, had calmly and methodically put paid to every shot from the enemy. But Johnny Bull, at the other end, had been equally efficient. Goal-getters like Harry Wharton and Herbert Vernon-Smith had failed to make any impression on David Llewellyn Wynn. On the other hand, shots like Figgins, Talbot, and Tom Merry, had found Johnny Bull's citadel equally impregnable. At the finish it looked like a draw: but in a matter of seconds Tom Merry had done the trick—and it was a home victory. Fatty Wynn had not failed once: but for once Johnny Bull had, and the ball was in the net, and all the St. Jim's crowd roaring:

"Goal!"

"Just done it, old man," gasped Figgins. "Topping!"

"Yaas, wathah!" chuckled Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Toppin', deah boy. School House for evah!"

George Figgins gave the swell of St. Jim's a glare.

"School House?" he repeated.

"Yaas, watha."

"You silly ass—"

"Weally, Figgins—"

"Where should we have been without a New House man in goal?" demanded Figgins, hotly. "Think you could have stopped them? You were sitting down most of the time."

"Bai Jove! I was doin' nothin' of the sort, Figgins. I considah—"

"Gussy wasn't sitting down most of the time, Figgy," said Kerr. "He was rolling over on his back as often as he was sitting down."

"Weally, Kerr, you New House wottah—"

"It was a School House goal, Figgins," said Jack Blake, "and you jolly well can't walk round that!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Look here—"

"Chuck it, you fatheads!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "This isn't a time for House ragging. It was a St. Jim's goal: and it wouldn't have pulled off the match but for old Fatty between the sticks."

"Hear, hear!" said Figgins, mollified.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Dry up, Gussy," said Kerr. "You talk too much."

"Weally, Kerr—"

"Put a sock in it," said Figgins.

"Bai Jove! I—"

"Bow-wow!"

"I do not wegard that as an intelligent wemark, Figgins, and I wepeat, School House for evah!" said Arthur Augustus firmly. "I wepeat—yaroooooh!"

"Sit down!" said Figgins.

"Oh, cwikey! Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus did not mean to sit down. But as Figgins suddenly hooked his noble leg, he had no choice about it. He sat down on the cold, unsympathetic earth, with a sudden bump, and spluttered.

"Oh! ah! ow! Woooooh!"

"Look here, you New House tick—" exclaimed Jack Blake.

"Well, you look here, you School House freak!" retorted Figgins.

"Chuck it, I tell you," hooted Tom Merry. "Are you going to start a House rag here with the Greyfriars men looking on? Order!"

Thus adjured, Jack Blake and George Figgins contented themselves with a mutual glare. Arthur Augustus tottered to his feet, and followed the other players off the field, pink with indignation, and gasping a little for breath.

In the changing-room there was a cheery crowd. Harry Wharton and Co. of Greyfriars were good losers. That St. Jim's goal in the very last minute was not exactly grateful or comforting: but it was all in the game, and the game after all was the thing. Most of the St. Jim's fellows did not care two hoots, or one, whether it was a School House or a New House foot that had landed the leather in the net: on the occasion of a School match, the two Houses were as one. But the rivals of St. Jim's were always ready to begin an argument: and there was room for argument, if fellows looked for it. For while undoubtedly it was a School House man who had kicked the winning goal at the finish of a hard and gruelling game, it was equally undoubted that it was a New House man's stout defence in goal that had saved St. Jim's a dozen times over.

"Good old Fatty!" said Figgins, after glancing round to make sure that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was near enough to hear. "You pulled the game through, old man."

Arthur Augustus lifted a pink face, from which he was sponging a splash of mud, over a steaming basin.

"That's wubbish, Figgins," he exclaimed. "A soccah match is won by goals."

"And how many would the Greyfriars men have bagged but for Fatty?" demanded Figgins.

"That is quite iwwelevant, Figgins. They did not bag any, and a School House man did—and I wepeat—"

"Your face wants washing, Gussy," said Figgins. "Wash it!" And once more Figgins acted swiftly before Arthur Augustus knew what was coming—this time grabbing a noble neck, and splashing Arthur Augustus's indignant face down into the basin, with a mighty splash.

"Urrrrrrrrgggh!" came a suffocated gurgle from the swell of St. Jim's. "Wirrgh! Gurrrrrrrgggh!"

Arthur Augustus dragged a drenched and dripping head from the basin, dashed the water from his eyes, and glared round for Figgins with a glare that was positively ferocious. But by the time he had cleared his vision, Figgins and Co. had walked out of the changing-room, and were strolling away to the New House, laughing as they went. And Arthur Augustus towelled his noble nut in silence, his feelings being apparently too deep for words.

## CHAPTER II

### BIG IDEA!

"THAT wuffian—"

"What?"

"That wagamuffin—"

"Eh? Who?" asked Jack Blake, staring at his noble chum. Herries and Digby stared also. Three members of study No. 6 in the School House, seemed quite in the dark as to the identity of the ruffian and ragamuffin to whom Arthur Augustus D'Arcy alluded.

Blake and Herries and Digby had come up for prep. They found Arthur Augustus already in the study. There was a thoughtful frown on his brow, which seemed to indicate that his noble intellect had been at work. It indicated also that his placid temper was not quite so placid as usual.

"I am speaking of that New House boundah, Blake," he explained.

"Which?" asked Blake. "They're all bounders, in that mouldy old House. Which particular bounder has come between the wind and your nobility, Gussy?"

Herries and Digby grinned at that question. Arthur Augustus did not grin. Clearly he was not in a grinning mood.

"I am alludin' to Figgins, Blake!" he said, stiffly.

"Oh, old Figgins," said Blake. "That was a jolly neat pass he gave Tom Merry, wasn't it? It gave Tom the goal."

"That Greyfriars man Vernon-Smith nearly had it away from him," remarked Herries. "But Figgy was too quick for him."

"Good man," agreed Digby.

Sniff, from Arthur Augustus.

"If you fellows have finished singin' the pwaises of that New House tick, I will continue my wemarks," he said, coldly.

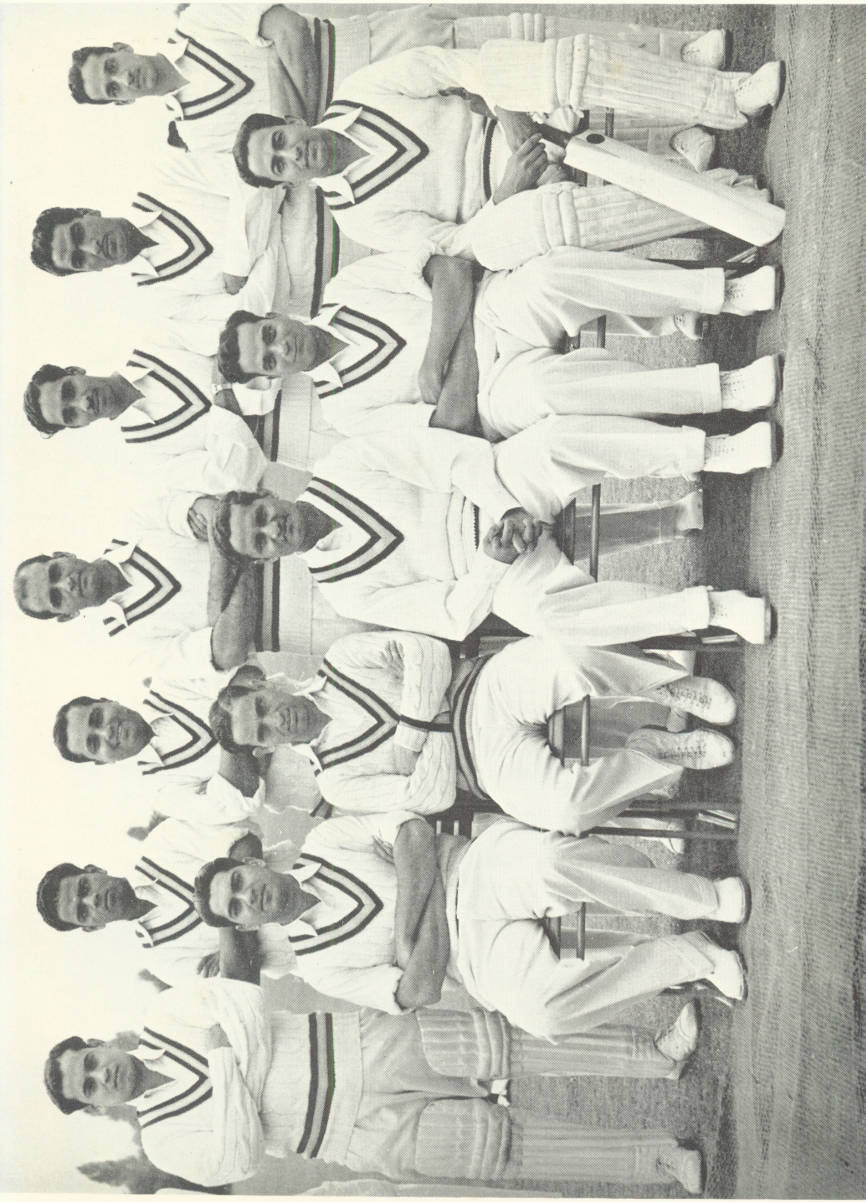
"Better conclude them!" suggested Blake, "prep, you know."

"Weally, Blake—"



## JET NIGHT FIGHTERS

Meteor N.F. 11 night fighters, which take a crew of two, have a very high all round performance, and are able to intercept raiders far from Britain's coasts.



Back row : 1. to 7.—Punkaj Roy, V. L. Manjrekar, P. Sen, Ghulam Ahmed, C. D. Gopinath, G. S. Ramchand, D. K. Gaekwad. Front row : 1. to 8.—D. G. Phadkar, H. R. Adhikari, V. S. Hazare, (Captain), S. G. Shinde, C. T. Sarwate.

## INDIAN TEST CRICKETERS

"Prep!" said Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Anybody seen the dick?" asked Digby. "Where's that Latin dick? Where the dickens—"

"Nevah mind the dictionawy now, Dig. That wuffian Figgins—"

"What are you calling him fancy names for?" asked Blake.

"Pewwaps you have forgotten that he hooked my leg on the football gwound, Blake, and caused me to sit down vewy suddenly and unexpectedly—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you fellows wegard that as funnay—" hooted Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, not at all," said Blake, soothingly. "We'd have scragged him, only Tom seemed to think it might have surprised the Greyfriars men to see St. Jim's men scragging one another on the soccer ground."

"And that was not all," went on Arthur Augustus, with deep indignation. "You all saw him duck my head in watah in the changing-room—I was feahfully dwenched, and dwippin'—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! If you fellows are goin' to cackle whenever a fellow opens his mouth—" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, wrathfully.

"Well, you looked rather a picture, old man," said Blake. "Still, it was awful cheek of a New House tick to duck a School House napper."

"I should watah think so!" said Arthur Augustus.

"We'll duck Figgy's head in the fountain to-morrow," said Herries, consolingly. "And Kerr's and Wynn's too, if they chip in."

"That won't do, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus, shaking his head.

"Well, what do you want us to do?" asked Blake. "Go over to the New House and boil him in oil, or strew the hungry churchyard with his bones?"

"Pway be sewious, Blake. This is a sewious mattah. We do not want a wow with the othah House ovah a football match. It would not be sportin'. Otherwise I should certainly give Figgins a feahful thwashin' for actin' like a wuffian and a wagamuffin. But I shall not thwash Figgins."

At which Jack Blake bestowed a wink on Herries and Dig, and Herries and Dig grinned. Possibly they doubted whether, in single combat, the elegant swell of St. Jim's could have overcome the hefty Figgins.

"Thwashin' him would not meet the case, anyway," went on Arthur Augustus. "It is not a mattah for House wows. Was it a School House goal or not that beat Gweyfwiahs?"

"It jolly well was," agreed Blake.

"It was a School House win really," assented Dig.

"Hear, hear!" concurred Herries.

On that point at least all study No. 6 were of one mind. There had been New House men in the team certainly. Equally certainly, they had played up well and truly. Nevertheless only one goal had been taken, and that had been

taken by a School House man. If that wasn't a win for the House, Blake and Co. would have liked to know what was!

"That fat chap Wynn did jolly well in goal, though," added Herries, by way of afterthought.

"You do not win soccah matches merely by doin' well in goal, Hewwies."

"Oh, no! But if the Greyfriars men had got through—"

"They did not get through, so the question does not awise. A School House man won the match wight on the whistle."

"Well, everybody helped," said Digby. "Especially Wynn—"

"Oh, bothah Wynn!" said Arthur Augustus. "I have heard quite enough about him, and a little ovah. I am not detwactin' from his good work in goal; but we owe the victowy to a School House man."

"Hear, hear," said Blake. "Now what about prep?"

"Nevah mind pwep for the moment, Blake. That cheeky ass Figgins actually said that Wynn had pulled the game through—"

"Well, in a way—" began Blake.

"Pway do not argue, Blake. I twust you are not goin' to back up those New House wottahs against your own House!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, warmly.

"Perish the thought!" said Blake. "Now what about prep?"

"Will you kindly stop chattewin' about pwep while I am talkin'?" demanded Arthur Augustus.

"Well, prep's prep, and if you're going on talking till the bell for dorm—"

"Wats! My ideah is that we are goin' to make it perfectly cleah to those New House ticks that it was a School House win and that is what I am coming to."

"Oh! You're coming to something?" asked Blake, as if he had not, so far, guessed that one!"

"Weally, you ass—"

"Come to it quick, then," urged Blake. "There's to be a row with Lathom in the morning, if we leave prep over while you do a chin solo."

"Tom Mewwy, a School House man, put up that goal, and won the match," said Arthur Augustus. "It is the last soccah match befoah Chwistmas, and a School House man won it for St. Jim's. The New House ticks can talk all the wubbish they like but that is how the mattah stands. We are goin' to wub it in—because—"

"Because Figgins hooked your leg?" asked Dig.

"Nothin' of the sort—"

"Because he ducked your napper in the changing-room?" asked Herries.

"No!" roared Arthur Augustus. "We are goin' to wub it in because it is twue, and will put those cheekay New House wottahs in their place."

At which Blake and Co. grinned. Arthur Augustus was very much in earnest. But they could not help surmising that the hooking of his aristocratic

leg, and the ducking of his noble head, had a sub-conscious influence. Anyhow it was clear that Gussy was determined to regard the Greyfriars game as wholly, or almost wholly, a School House victory, and quite, quite determined to rub that fact into the New House.

"But how are we going to rub it in?" asked Blake. "Do you want us to go and shout it under the windows of the New House?"

"Pway do not be widiculous, Blake. "

"Or whisper it in their ears in the form-room, when Lathom isn't looking?" asked Dig.

"If you are goin' to talk like a silly ass, Dig—"

"Well, what's the big idea, then?" asked Herries.

"We are goin' to make a public wecognition of the fact that a School House man beat Gweyfwiahs, by makin' a pwesentation to Tom Mewwy, as the winnah of the game," explained Arthur Augustus. "That will make the fact quite cleah, as well as makin' the New House ticks vewy wild. As it is Chwistmas time, the pwesentation will take the form of a Chwistmas pwesent."

"Oh!" said Blake.

"A vewy suitable Chwistmas pwesent, in my opinion, would be one of those big Chwistmas cakes you can get at the Wayland stores," continued Arthur Augustus. "It will be inscribed to the man who won the Gweyfwiahs match, with best wishes for a Mewwy Chwistmas, and all that."

"But—" said Blake and Herries and Digby, together.

"Weally, you fellows, if you are goin' to begin buttin' like a lot of billy-goats—" said Arthur Augustus crossly.

"Those Christmas cakes are jolly expensive," remarked Herries.

"That is all wight, Hewwies. We will have a subscription to buy the cake, and it won't come to a lot among a lot of fellows—a bob or two all wound. The fellows will play up, just to make it cleah, you know, that the New House smudges are merely also wans in football mattahs. We make a Chwistmas pwesent to the School House man who won the game, passin' by the New House ticks like the idle wind which we wegard not, see?"

That was the big idea, which had been exercising the noble intellect of the swell of St. Jim's. Having propounded it, Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass from face to face, inquiringly, to ascertain what his comrades thought of it.

Perhaps he expected them to enthuse. But there was no sign of any exuberant enthusiasm in study No. 6. Big as the idea was, it did not seem to have made a big impression.

"It would make the New House men wild," remarked Digby. "But—"

"There's that!" agreed Herries. "But—"

"Those Christmas cakes are scrumptious," remarked Jack Blake, thoughtfully. "If Tommy had one given him, he would whack it out in a feed, and we should all come in on it. But—"



"Bai Jove! I was certainly not wegardin' it from that point of view, Blake," exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

"You wouldn't," agreed Blake. "They don't hand out much in the way of sense to the tenth possessor of a foolish face—"

"You cheeky ass—"

"You want to know what we think of the idea?" asked Blake.

"Yaas, wathah."

"Well, I think it's rather rot! What do you think, Dig?"

"Piffle!" said Dig. "What do you think, Herries?"

"Tosh!" said Herries.

"And now that's settled, let's get on to prep," said Blake, briskly. "Nobody wants to be shoved into Extra-to-morrow."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stood with his eyeglass gleaming in his eye, surveying his friends with a withering stare. He did not seem interested in getting on to prep. Prep was a trifle light as air at the moment. Blake seemed to think the matter settled, over and done with. But it was far from settled, over, or done with, so far as Arthur Augustus was concerned. Kind and mild and placid as Gussy was, there was a streak of obstinacy in him, which was rather reinforced than otherwise by opposition.

"So that is what you fellows think?" he asked, with calm dignity.

"Yes! Anybody seen my Virgil?" asked Blake.

"If you fellows are not goin' to back me up—"

"Oh, we'll back you up, all right, old chap," assured Blake. "If that cake comes along, we'll all pile in and scoff our whack. Can't say fairer than that."

"If you are going to talk like a silly ass, Blake—"

"Leave that to you, partner," said Blake affably.

"I shall certainly cawwy on with the ideah," said Arthur Augustus. "I think it is the wight and pwopah thing to do, and that is that!"

"But, my dear old ass—"

"I wefuse to be called an ass, Blake."

"Well, dear old donkey, then, if you like that better—"

"Wats!"

"But look here—"

"I wepeat, wats! Pway dwop the subject," said Arthur Augustus, loftily. "And we had bettah get on with pwep, if you fellahs don't want a wow with Lathom in the mornin'."

And the subject was dropped, and study No. 6 got on with prep—not before it was time so to do. But if Blake and Co. supposed that Arthur Augustus was likely to forget his big idea, it only showed that even after a quite long acquaintance, they did not quite know their Gussy. That big idea was as fixed and immutable in Gussy's noble mind as the laws of the Medes and Persians.

## CHAPTER III

## SHELL OUT!

"TOM MEWWY heah?"

"Yes!" said Tom.

"Oh!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus.

He seemed a little taken aback.

It was the following day, after class. The "Terrible Three" were in their study, No. 10 in the Shell, when an elegant figure and a gleaming eyeglass appeared in the doorway.

All three were busy. Manners was polishing his camera, on which, possibly, there was a speck of dust. No speck of dust was permitted to obtain permanent lodgment on Manners' camera. Monty Lowther was giving the finishing touches to a limerick, and grinning over it as if he considered it extremely funny, as doubtless he did. Tom was scribbling the last line of fifty for Mr Linton, his form master, which had to be taken in before tea. However, he delayed the completion of that last line to answer the question asked from the doorway.

"Oh!" repeated Arthur Augustus. "You—you are heah, deah boy?"

"Sort of," agreed Tom. "Want anything?"

"Not pwecisely."

"Something to say to me?"

"Oh no! Not at all."

Tom stared at him.

"You've come here to see me, and you don't want anything, and you've got nothing to say?" he inquired.

"I—I did not exactly come heah to see you, deah boy. I was goin' to speak to Mannahs and Lowthah, as a mattah of fact. I was not awah that you were in the study—Blake said he was seein' you in the gym—"

"After I've handed these lines to Linton," said Tom. "I'm nearly through." He stared harder at the swell of St. Jim's. Arthur Augustus's question had been asked, apparently, not because he wanted to see Tom, but because he didn't! He was obviously a little disconcerted by finding him in the study with his friends. "You young ass—!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Do you mean you want to speak to my pals without me here?" asked Tom.

"If that's it, I'm going down in a minute. But what the thump do you mean?"

"Oh! Nothin', deah boy."

"What's the jolly old secret?" asked Tom, glancing in turn at Harry Manners and Montague Lowther.

"Ask me another!" said Manners, with a shrug of the shoulders. "Gussy's wandering in his mind, I expect."

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"Off-side!" said Monty Lowther, shaking his head. "He hasn't one to wander in."

"Weally, Lothah—"

"Well, here goes," said Tom. He finished his last line, blotted it, and rose from the table. "I'm going down! You can whisper your jolly old mysterious secrets in another minute, Gussy."

"Bai Jove, you know, weally——"

"Don't go for a minute," said Monty Lowther. "Listen to this limerick Lucky Gussy's barged in—it will interest him too. Listen, my beloved 'earers." And the funny man of the Shell read it out.

There was a young fellow named Gussy,  
Whose manners were fearfully fussy,  
One day a chap sat  
On his best Sunday hat.  
Ere he fainted, he moaned "Lor-a-mussy!"

Manners smiled, and Tom Merry laughed. They were Monty's pals, and that was the least they could do, when Monty was facetious. But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy neither smiled nor laughed. He jammed his eyeglass a little tighter into his noble eye, and gave Monty Lowther a withering look.

"You uttah ass, Lowthah!" he exclaimed. "Do you wegard that as funnay? You are vewy well awah that I should not uttah so wicudulous a wemark as 'Lor-a-mussy! I wegard you as a silly ass, Lowthah."

Tom Merry, laughing, left the study, to take his lines down to Mr. Linton. Arthur Augustus seemed disposed to follow him out of No. 10, regardless of the matter, whatever it was, upon which he had come there to speak to Manners and Lowther.

"Like to hear another?" asked Lowther, affably.

"Certainly not, Lowthah."

"I've one about a guy with a pane in his eye—!"

"Pway do not wead out any more of your wubbish, Lowthah. Now that Tom Mewwy has gone down, I can bwoach the subject I came to speak to you fellows about. I could hardly bwoach it in his pwesence, you know."

"Why not?" asked Manners.

"You see, Tom is to be the wecipient of the Cwistmas present," explained Arthur Augustus. "That is why, Mannahs."

"The Christmas present?" repeated Manners. "Anybody making Tom a Christmas present ahead of Christmas?"

"We shall not be heah on Cwistmas Day, so it could hardly be left ovah till that date, Mannahs. Besides it is intended as a public wecognition of the fact that a School House man won the Gweyfwuars match, and that the New House were simply nowhere. The ideah is that we all wally wound and pwesent

Tom Mewwy with a whackin' Chwistmas cake—as the man who kicked the winnin' goal, and beat Gweyfwiachs at Soccah, see?"

"Oh, my hat!" said Lowther.

"It will demonstwatw to the New House smudges that we wegard them with uttah indiffewence and disdain," said Arthur Augustus. "It will wub in the fact that School House is cock-house of St. Jim's, and the New House simply somethin' that the cat might have bwrought in. Tom Mewwy will weceive the Chwistmas pwesent in wecognition of his gweat feat!"

"Think he'd like that?" asked Monty Lowther.

"I twust so, Lowthah!"

"Fellows don't generally like allusions to their great feet," said Lowther, shaking his head. "Besides, I've never noticed that Tom's feet are bigger than any other fellow's. Have you, Manners?"

Manners chuckled.

"You uttah ass, Lowthah—!" yapped Arthur Augustus.

"Thanks! Same to you, and many of them!"

"I was not alludin' to his feet, as you know vewy well, Lowthah! I was alludin' to his feat in beatin' Gweyfwiachs at Soccah. It was a vewy gweat feat, in my opinion, and by makin' this pwesentation we put the New House wottahs wight in their place. It will make them vewy watty."

"Not much doubt about that," remarked Manners. "Since the argument started, they've been making out that Fatty Wynn did more than all the School House men in the team combined.

"That is uttah wot, Mannahs, and feahful cheek! It was a School House victowy, and we are goin' to celebwatw it by givin' honah where honah is due. Tom Mewwy is the man."

Manners shook his head.

"Tom wouldn't stand for it," he said. "Fact is, he was saying to-day that Wynn of the New House had as much to do with beating Greyfriars as any man in the team, and more than most."

"Tom all over!" remarked Lowther.

"That is vewy wight and pwopah of Tom Mewwy, and his modesty does him cwedit," said Arthur Augustus. "But facts are facts all the same, and we are goin' to make that cleah to the New House. Those boundahs have got to learn where they get off."

"A consummation devoutly to be wished—Shakespeare!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah! It will make Figgins and Co. vewy wild, and Figgins will have to wealize that he cannot althah facts by hookin' a fellow's leg, or splashin' his head in a basin of watah."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is nothin' whatevah to cackle at, in Figgins's wuffianly antics," said Arthur Augustus. "Pway be sewious on a sewious subject. We talked it

ovah in my study, but Blake and Hewwies and Dig did not seem to think vevy much of the ideah—”

“Same here,” remarked Manners.

“And then some,” agreed Lowther.

“I have called heah to see you, as Tom Mewwy’s pals,” said Arthur Augustus. “I twust you will back up. Blake and Hewwies and Dig have agweed to contwibute to buyin’ the cake: but unfortunately money is short, and their whole contwibution comes only to fourpence-halfpenny, which won’t go vevy fah. But I am startin’ the subscription with a ten-shillin’ note. How much are you subswibin’, Mannahs?”

“Wash it out, old man—”

“I wefuse to wash it out, Mannahs.”

“Then wash me out,” said Manners.

“Wats! I twust, Lowthah, that you are goin’ to play up,” said Arthur Augustus. “I do not want to dwaw this study blank.”

“My dear chap, in a cause like this I’d hand over my last farthing,” said Monty Lowther, heartily.

Arthur Augustus smiled cheerily.

“That’s the wight spiwit, old chap,” he said, approvingly. “Shell out deah boy.”

Monty Lowther went through his pockets carefully. He seemed to be in search of some particular coin.

“Here you are, Gussy,” he said at last.

Arthur Augustus held out an open palm for the contribution. Monty Lowther placed an extremely small coin in it.

“Spend the whole lot, and blow the expense,” he said.

“Bai Jove!”

Arthur Augustus gazed at the coin in his noble palm. Having gazed at it he gazed at Lowther.

“What is this, Lowthah?”

“My last farthing!” said Lowther, affably. “I’ve had it quite a long time and now it’s come in useful at last. I said I’d contribute my last farthing, and there it is! I don’t want any change.”

“You uttah ass!” roared Arthur Augustus.

“What?”

“You funnary fathead—!”

“Is that how you’re going to thank fellows for their contributions to the fund?” inquired Lowther. “You won’t get a lot of subscriptions at that rate.”

“I wegard you as a howlin’ ass, Lowthah! Wats!”

There was a clink, as Arthur Augustus hurled Monty Lowther’s last farthing into the fender. Then there was a bang, as he stalked out of No. 10 study and shut the door after him with a slam. The swell of St. Jim’s departed in wrath, leaving two fellows laughing in No. 10 in the Shell.

## CHAPTER IV

## ARTHUR AUGUSTUS MEANS BUSINESS

"THAT ass?" said Figgins.

"That goat!" remarked Keer.

"That chump!" said Fatty Wynn.

The chums of the New House seemed quite unanimous in their opinion. It was a case of three souls with but a single thought: three hearts that beat as one!

They were glancing at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the School House, as they made those approbrious remarks to one another.

It was morning break at St. Jim's and Figgins and Co. were strolling in the quad in the cold and frosty morning. They sighted the swell of the School House sitting on one of the old benches under a leafless tree with an open notebook on his knee, a pencil in his hand, and a frown of concentrated thought on his noble brow.

Arthur Augustus did not observe Figgins and Co. He was too deep in his engrossing calculations, whatever they were. He looked like a fellow "bottled" by some particularly thorny mathematical problem. Even his eyeglass had dropped from his eye, and hung unheeded at the end of its cord.

"That fathead!" went on Figgins. "Making out that the School House beat Greyfriars the other day—"

"Cheek!" agreed Kerr.

"If any man won that match, it was a New House man," said Figgins. "Time and again they nearly got through. 'Member how that chap Wharton jolly nearly potted the pill, and Fatty saved it fairly with his finger-tips."

"That was a narrow shave," remarked Fatty Wynn.

"And that dark chap, Inky they call him, fairly bunged it in," said Kerr. "Nobody could have saved that goal but Fatty here. How he managed to head it out I don't know now."

"It came rather a crack," said Fatty.

"Over and over again," said Figgins, rather excitedly. "Why, it was anybody's game, except for the goalie. The Greyfriars men had a good man between the sticks, but we had a better."

"We had!" agreed Kerr.

"I ain't saying that it wasn't a good goal from Tom Merry," continued Figgins. "It was! And it just won! But, but for Fatty, Greyfriars would have had three or four, and where should we have been then?"

"Echo answers where!" said Kerr.

"It's just School House swank!" said Figgins, "and I've a jolly good mind to walk over and bang Gussy's silly head on that tree. I'd give him School House wins and Christmas cakes, the silly ass!"

The fact was, that argument had run high on the subject of the Greyfriars match. As both Houses played for the School, argument after a game was not exactly uncommon. School House, as the more numerous House, always had a majority of men in the team: but many School House men took the view that there were too many of the New House in it all the same. While if things went amiss, New House men inevitably and infallibly attributed it to lack of New House recruits: and expressed a fixed belief that things would have gone better with more New House players in the field. Tom Merry, as junior captain, was as impartial as a fellow could be: he held the balance with an even hand, which was admitted on both sides: nevertheless arguments survived. And on this special occasion there seemed to be more argument than ever. It had started on the soccer ground almost the minute the game was over: it had continued in the changing-room: and it had gone on ever since. St. Jim's had beaten Greyfriars, and that was satisfactory all round: but whether the victory was due more to the School House than to the New House, or more to the New House than to the School House, was a moot point—and the rivals of St. Jim's argued the point, and indeed worried it like a dog worrying a bone. Tom Merry had declared that it did not matter two hoots one way or the other: but it was said of old that wisdom cries out and no man regards it! Whether mattered or not, the argument went on: and was kept all the more alive by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's big idea of Tom Merry's Christmas present, which was to emphasize the School House view in the most unmistakable manner.

Naturally, Figgins and Co. were wrathful: and at the moment, Arthur Augustus's noble head was in peril of being banged against the old elm under which he sat with his note-book, pencil, and calculations.

"Let's!" said Kerr, in reply to Figgy's suggestion. "Might do him good to bang his silly nut."

"Couldn't bang any sense into it," said Fatty Wynn.

"Try!" said Figgins.

"Oh, all right."

And the New House trio started towards Arthur Augustus. But they stopped as three Shell fellows of the School House came along the path, and halted under the elm to speak to D'Arcy. Banging a School House head with three other School House men on the spot was not practical politics: so Figgins and Co. waited for Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther to pass on their way. However, they did not pass on immediately.

"Looking for you, Gussy," said Tom Merry.

Arthur Augustus glanced up from his notebook.

"Heah I am, deah boy," he said cheerily. "I am wathah in a jam with these figures."

"Maths?" asked Manners, with interest. Manners was quite a whale on maths, and always ready to lend a less gifted fellow a helping hand.

"Oh! No! It's the subscription list," explained Arthur Augustus. "Waisin'

the wind for the presentation, you know: Tom Mewwy's Chwistmas pwsent."

"That's what I want to speak to you about, Gussy," said Tom. "Chuck it, see? It's all rot, old chap."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Tripe," said Tom. "I've heard all about it, and it's rot. Any man might have kicked that goal the other day—Talbot or Blake or Figgins— And Wynn in goal saved the game all through."

"That is not my opinion, Tom Mewwy," said Arthur Augustus, calmly. "I wegard it as a School House victowy, and I am certainly goin' to dwaw attention to the fact that the New House simply did not come into the picture. Figgins could not have kicked that winnin' goal to save his life. He is bettah at hookin' a fellow's leg or duckin' his head, than at kickin' goals!" added Arthur Augustus, with sarcasm. "Pway say no more about it. You are goin' to be pwsented with a special Chwistmas pwsent for winnin' the match—"

"Cut it out, I tell you."

"Wats!"

"I won't have it, I tell you."

"Wats again!"

Tom Merry looked very expressively at the swell of St. Jim's. Indeed, just then Gussy's noble head was in peril of again being banged against the tree, though not by New House hands. Manners and Lowther grinned. Apparently Tom Merry was to be presented with a Christmas present whether he liked it or not! He was, in fact, only a pawn in the game: Gussy's big idea was to put the New House in its place, and that idea was now so firmly fixed in Gussy's noble head that nothing short of a surgical operation would have removed it.

"Pway say no more, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus. "It is all cut and dwied. I am goin' ovah to Wayland aftah class for the cake: and while I quite approve of your modesty in the mattah, I must weally wequest you not to argue about it. Now wun away or I shall nevah get this wight befoah the bell goes for class. Pewwaps you would like to add it up for me, Mannahs—you are wathah bettah at awithmetic than I am."

"Slightly, I think," agreed Manners, with a grin: and he took the notebook and the Terrible Three glanced at the subscription list. Then Tom Merry's brow cleared, and he smiled.

That list did not indicate that much of a harvest had been gathered in, in the way of hard cash, or that the Christmas cake was very likely to materialize.

	£	s.	d.
A. A. D'Arcy	10	0	
W. A. D'Arcy, minor			1
H. Skimple			1
B. Glyn			6
H. Noble			3



R. R. Cardew	1
S. Clive	1
E. Levison	1
R. Talbot	6
G. Gore	2
J. Blake	2
G. Herries	1
R. A. Digby	1½
G. Wilkins	3
H. Hammond	4
	<hr/>
Total	<hr/>

Arthur Augustus had not yet entered the total. Having cast up the column of pence several times, he seemed a little doubtful about the result. Perhaps his aristocratic brain did not deal easily with figures.

"Of course, it's quite easy, Mannahs," he remarked.

"Quite," grinned Manners.

"Well, does that column come to two and sevenpence halfpenny or to two and tenpence halfpenny, old chap?"

Manners chuckled.

"Neither!" he answered.

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"Two and ninepence ha'penny," said Manners. "Total, twelve and ninepence ha'penny."

Arthur Augustus looked very thoughtful.

"Those Chwistmas cakes wun to twenty-five shillin's," he said. "Twelve and ninepence halfpenny from twenty-five shillin's leaves—let's see—leaves eleven and elevenpence halfpenny—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you fellows—"

"That wouldn't do for Lathom," grinned Monty Lowther.

"I—I mean, it leaves eleven and ninepence halfpenny," said Arthur Augustus, hastily. "So I still have that amount to waise."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see any weason for cacklin'—"

"Your jolly old arithmetic would make a stone image cackle, old man. It leaves twelve and twopence ha'penny," said Manners.

"That is not a lot of diffewence, Mannahs. All I wequiah is twelve and twopence halfpenny, then. I wondah where it is comin' fwom!" added Arthur Augustus, thoughtfully. "I'm gettin' the cake to-day, you know."

Tom Merry and Co. chuckling, walked on, and left him to wonder. As

the subscription list had been open for some days, and had produced only two shillings and ninepence halfpenny so far, it seemed improbable that Arthur Augustus would ever arrive at the required sum, and unlikely that that Christmas cake would ever materialize at St. Jim's: which would put "paid" to Gussy's big idea. Certainly it seemed rather a problem, as Arthur Augustus's own resources were limited to the 10s. note that already figured in the list.

Arthur Augustus sat with a wrinkled brow over that problem: unconscious of Figgins and Co. eyeing him, under the elms. Having given the "Terrible Three" time to get to a safe distance, the New House trio bore down on Arthur Augustus. The time had arrived for action.

"Bag him!" said Figgins.

Arthur Augustus jumped.

"Bai Jove! You New House wuffians—let go my collah, Figgins—wow! Let go my arm, Kerr—bai Jove! I will give you a feahful thwashin' all wound—wow—yawooh!"

Tap!

The most aristocratic head at St. Jim's tapped on the trunk of the elm. A most unaristocratic yell pealed from Arthur Augustus.

"Yawoooooh!"

"Give him another!"

Tap!

"Oh, cwumbs! Oh, cwikey! Wow!" roared Arthur Augustus, struggling frantically in three pairs of hands. "Ow! Wow! You uttah wottahs—wow!"

"Now, which House won the Greyfriars match?" demanded Figgins.

"School House," gasped Arthur Augustus.

"Give him another!"

"Whoooooh!" spluttered Arthur Augustus, as the New House trio, grinning gave him another. "Oh, scissahs! Wow!"

"Now which House won the Greyfriars match?" grinned Figgins.

"Wooh! School House!" gurgled Arthur Augustus. Gussy would have made that reply, if it had been with his last breath. "School House, you wottah!"

"Give him another!"

"Yawoooooh! Oh, cwumbs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins and Co. having administered that final tap, trotted away, laughing. The bell for third school was beginning to ring. Arthur Augustus, for the moment, did not heed the bell. He sprawled on the old bench, gasping for breath, and rubbing the back of his head. He had not finished either process when the bell ceased to ring, and Arthur Augustus realized that it behoved him to head for the form-room. He was still gasping when he arrived there: and he gave George Figgins, already in his place, a withering, indeed

devastating glare: to which, to Gussy's speechless indignation, Figgins responded only with a wink.

But if the heroes of the New House fancied that tapping Gussy's noble head would knock a fixed idea out of it, they had another guess coming. After class that day, Arthur Augustus walked out of gates and headed for Wayland—his financial problem, apparently quite disregarded. Figgins and Co. watched him go, and exchanged expressive glances. After which, three heads were put together in consultation: and a little later, Figgins and Co. also walked out of gates.

## CHAPTER V

### UNEXPECTED!

WHOOOOOSH!  
"Gwoooogh!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy hardly knew what was happening.

Up to that moment all had gone well. And how and why something unseen and unknown dropped over his noble head, blotting out the frosty trees, the frosty bushes, and the wintry landscape generally, he simply did not know. He was taken quite by surprise.

He had walked over to Wayland. He had dealt successfully with the matter of the Christmas cake in Mr. Tucker's shop in the High Street. He had selected a very handsome cake, at the handsome price of twenty-five shillings: and the plump and genial Mr. Tucker, genially obliging a good customer, had genially and willingly agreed to take twelve-and-six on account and leave the other twelve-and-six to be settled later. Thus simply had Arthur Augustus solved his financial problem.

The handsome cake was handsomely packed, in a nice strong cardboard box, neatly tied with string. It was quite a large parcel, and its weight was considerable: but Arthur Augustus walked out of the confectioner's shop quite cheerily with it under his arm. On the white iced top of that cake, in red letters, was the ancient and familiar inscription: MERRY CHRISTMAS. Really it was quite a magnificent cake, and perhaps worth the twenty-five shillings that Mr. Tucker had charged for it. Certainly it was the largest cake that had ever graced a junior study in either House at St. Jim's. Any fellow who was not pleased with such a Christmas present must really have been very hard to please.

All that Arthur Augustus now had to do was to walk back to St. Jim's with that handsome Christmas present, and bestow it safely in study No. 6: later to be presented to the junior captain of the House. Tom himself, it was true, had not seemed to welcome the idea—rather the reverse. Arthur Augustus

disregarded that, as a trifle light as air. That Christmas present was going to be presented to Tom, in the junior day-room, amid a cheering crowd of School House fellows: and the more exasperated the New House men were about it, the better. In fact the exasperation of the New House was the primary object. It would rub in, well and truly, the undoubted fact—undoubted in Gussy's opinion at least, which was shared by most School House fellows, that the School House had beaten Greyfriars, and that the New House were nowhere, and not worth mentioning in connection with soccer.

Cheerily, Arthur Augustus walked out of Wayland and took the footpath through the wood for Rylcombe Lane and St. Jim's. It was a little misty in the wood, and a cold December wind blew through the leafless trees and bushes, and a few light snowflakes floated on the wind. But the weather did not worry Arthur Augustus. With his coat-collar turned up, and the rather heavy parcel under his arm, he tramped cheerily along the footpath, under over-arched branches glimmering with frost.



And then it happened.

What happened he hardly knew. At one moment, he was walking along briskly, with the misty wintry wood round him: the next, the wintry wood vanished suddenly from sight, and he was in darkness, with something musty and clinging over his head.

Naturally it had not occurred to Arthur Augustus, as he tramped, to look up at the branches that arched over the narrow footpath. Certainly it could never have occurred to him that any persons were ensconced in those branches, waiting and watching for him to walk back from Wayland. Still less could he have surmised that those persons had provided themselves with a roomy old sack, which had once contained potatoes, but was now scheduled to contain the noble napper of the swell of St. Jim's. No such surmises were in Arthur Augustus's mind: and it was a complete surprise to him, when that sack dropped neatly on his head, enclosing it, and flapped down round his elegant person.

He staggered and gurgled.

He did not even hear the sound as three fellows dropped actively from the tree. His parcel slipped from under his arm to the ground, and rolled in damp grass. He did not heed it—he was grappling wildly with the enveloping sack, and spluttering for breath in its interior.

“Bai Jove! What—who—how—oh, cwumbs! What is it? Oh, cwikey! It—it—it's a sack—oh, scissahs—gwoooogh—”

Probably it would not have taken Arthur Augustus long to struggle out of the sack, had he been permitted so to do. But he was not permitted. Unseen hands grasped him on all sides, and he was pinned.

He struggled wildly. His noble brain was in a whirl with the suddenness of the happening. He could see nothing, and hear nothing—who had collared him was a blank mystery to him. Whoever they were, they had him—on that point, at least, there was not a shadow of doubt. The swell of St. Jim's enveloped in the sack, was a helpless prisoner in unknown hands. He had simply no chance: but he struggled all the same. Arthur Augustus was not the fellow to give in, if he could help it.

“Urrgh! Welease me, you wottahs, whoevah you are!” he spluttered from the interior of the potato-sack. “You fwightful wuffians, welease me at once.”

There was no reply.

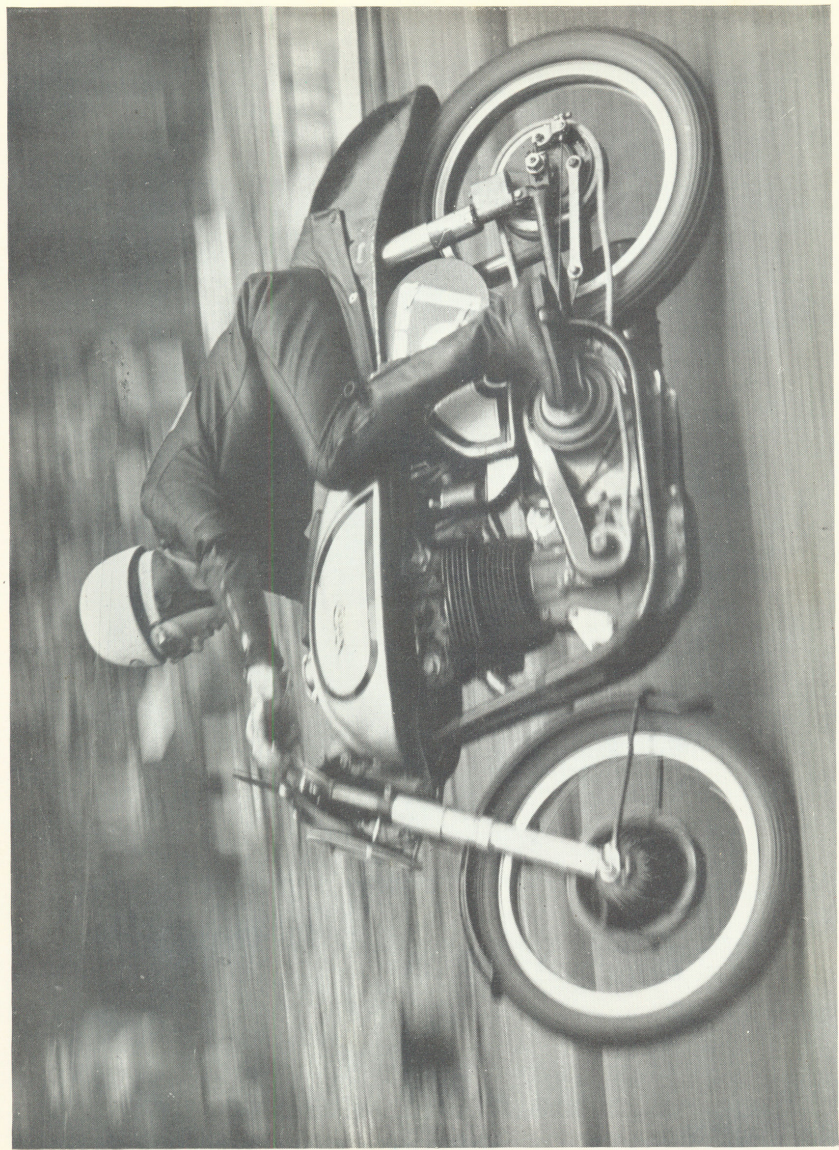
Action, not words, seemed to be the cue of his assailants. Heedless of Gussy's manful resistance, they pinned him, up-ended him, and sat him down in the grassy footpath. He sat down rather hard, with a bump and a gasp.

Then he was suddenly released.

The hands that had grasped him in a vice-like grip relinquished their hold. Vaguely, through the sack, he heard the sound of running feet. He realized



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that his assailants, whoever they were, had gone—leaving him sitting in the musty old sack!

He grappled with the sack. He succeeded, at length, in peeling it off, over his head. He stared about him dizzily.

He was alone on the footpath. The wintry wood reappeared to his vision: but it was quite uninhabited. His mysterious assailants had vanished—in what direction he could not begin to guess. But they were gone—there was not a sign of them—Arthur Augustus sat gasping in the grass, as solitary as Robinson Crusoe on his island.

“Oh, cwumbs!” gurgled Arthur Augustus, and he staggered to his feet, gasping for breath, and still considerably bewildered. “Oh, cwikey! I wondah who they were—some of those wuffs fwom Wayland, I suppose—oh, cwikey! Bai Jove—where is that box?”

He had not had much time to think of the box, containing the Christmas cake, which had fallen from under his arm when the sack descended. But he thought of it now. He stared round for that box—but he stared in vain. He jammed his eyeglass into his eye, and continued to stare—but even with the aid of his celebrated monocle he could not discern an object that was not there! The cake-box had disappeared.

“Oh!” gasped Arthur Augustus.

The swell of St. Jim’s was not, perhaps, remarkably quick on the uptake. But he could guess that the parcel, and the unknown assailants, had disappeared together! He comprehended the meaning of that unexpected onslaught at last. They had been after his parcel!

“Oh!” repeated Arthur Augustus, blankly.

They were gone. The box was gone. They—whoever “they” were—had bolted with it and vanished.

Who they were, and where they had gone, Arthur Augustus could not begin to guess. He knew that there were some rough characters in the region of the Black Bull at Wayland, and surmised that some of them might have spotted him on a lonely footpath with a parcel, and followed on to snatch it. If that was not the explanation, Arthur Augustus could not think of one.

Anyhow, the cake was gone—and there was not a clue, not the ghost of a clue, to the identity of the lawless persons who had lifted it.

“Oh!” breathed Arthur Augustus, for the third time.

Slowly and sadly he walked on to St. Jim’s: cake-less.

He was not looking his usual sunny self as he came in at the gates, just before Taggles came out to close them. Three New House fellows, lounging near the gateway, glanced at him as he came in, and smiled.

But Arthur Augustus did not heed Figgins and Co. or their smiles. With a corrugated brow, he walked on to the School House: leaving the New House triro grinning almost from ear to ear.



## CHAPTER VI

## BY WHOSE HAND?

“OH! HERE you are!” said Blake.  
 “Heah I am, deah boy.”  
 “Anything up?” asked Tom Merry.  
 “Yaas, wathah.”

Half a dozen fellows were seated round the table in study No. 6. Tea was going on—a little later than usual. Blake and Co. had waited a while for their noble chum: but as Arthur Augustus did not arrive, they sat down to tea with three guests from the Shell. It was now past lockups, and they rather wondered what had become of Arthur Augustus, and whether he would bag lines from Railton for getting in late. However, here he was at last: but not, apparently in his usual cheery mood. His face was frowning, and it was clear that something had happened to perturb his aristocratic calm.

“Lines from Railton?” asked Herries.

“No! I was not in late, Hewwies.”

“Then why didn’t you come up to tea before this?” asked Digby.

“I had to get a wash and a bwushup, Dig! I was in a vevy wumpled and dusty state when I came in.”

“Who’s been rumpling and dusting the one and only?” asked Monty Lowther.

“Weally, Lowthah—”

“New House rag?” asked Manners.

“No! I think it was some wuffs fwom Wayland, but I weally do not know. I did not see them. I think there were three of them.”

Six fellows gazed at Arthur Augustus.

“Three of them?” repeated Blake.

“Yaas! They gwabbed me wight and left, and I wathah think there were three pairs of hands. But I couldn’t be quite suah, as I did not see them.”

“Three fellows collared you and rumped you, and you didn’t see them!” exclaimed Blake.

“Yaas.”

“Walking about with your eyes shut?”

“Weally, Blake—”

“Then how the jolly old thump didn’t you see them, if there were three of them and they collared you?” demanded Blake.

“I could not see them with my head inside a sack, Blake. It was quite imposs.”

“Inside a sack!” gasped Blake.

“Yaas—a vevy dusty wotten old sack. It made my clobbah fwightfully

dusty, and wumpled my hair, and actually made my face dirty," said Arthur Augustus, in a tone of deep feeling.

"You didn't walk home from Wayland with your head in a sack, did you?" asked Herries, staring blankly at Arthur Augustus.

"I wegard that as a widiculous question, Hewwies. Certainly I did nothin' of the kind. The sack was dwopped ovah my head fwom a twee ovah the foot-path, and they collahed me befoah I could stwuggle out of it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! Does it stwike you fellows as funnay?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, indignantly. "I fail to see anythin' funnay in a bunch of wuffians dwoppin' a sack ovah a fellow's head, and wumplin' him wight and left. You fellows seem to have a vevy peculiah sense of humah, if you think it funnay."

"Too bad, old man," said Tom Merry, laughing. "So you don't know who perpetrated the fell deed?"

"Haven't a clue, deah boy. They were gone when I got the sack off—they left me sittin' in the gwass with my head in it—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I am vevy glad that you are amused," said Arthur Augustus, sarcastically. "It did not seem amusin' to me. My clobbah was in a fwightfully wumpled and gwubby state, and my collah howwibly soiled—"

"But why the dickens should they have picked on you?" said Dig.

"I suppose they were aftah the cake, Dig."

"The cake?" repeated the whole tea-party in study No. 6.

"You see, they snooped it," explained Arthur Augustus. "The box was gone when I got out of the sack. They must have taken it with them when they bolted. I looked evewywhah, but the box was gone."

"Well, you ass!" said Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"You fathead!" said Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"You let them walk off with a twenty-five bob cake?" exclaimed Digby.

"Well, you're the limit."

"They did not walk off with it, Dig."

"You've just said they did!"

"I have said nothin' of the sort, Dig. I said they wan off with it. If they had walked, I should have caught them, and I should certainly have given them a feahful thwashin' all wound, and wecaptured the cake."

"I can sort of see you thrashing three roughs in a bunch!" grinned Blake.

"Lucky for you they were gone."

"So you did get the cake after all?" said Monty Lowther. "Have the subs. rolled in since break this morning?"

"As a mattah of fact, Lowthah, the subs did not woll in, but I awwanged the mattah by owin' Mr. Tuckah twelve-and-six on the cake."

"Oh, my hat!" said Manners. "You paid twelve-and-six, and you owe Tucker twelve-and-six, and somebody else has walked off with the cake."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I have already said, Mannahs, that they did not walk off with it. They was off with it."

"Comes to the same thing, so far as the cake is concerned," said Monty Lowther. "Tommy, you won't be presented with that Christmas present after all."

"Good!" said Tom.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Wash it all out, and forget all about it, Gussy," said Tom. "We'll have a whip round to raise that twelve-and-six for Tucker, and there's an end."

"I wefuse to wash it out, and I wefuse to forget all about it," answered Arthur Augustus, calmly. "I wegwet, Tom Mewwy, that you take up so vewy ungwacious an attitude towards a Chwistmas pwesent pwesented to you by admiwin' fwiends, but I shall certainly cawwy on, and make it cleah to all St. Jim's what we think in this House of the New House ticks and their widiculous claim to have won the Gweyfwiahs match."

"Look here, you ass—"

"Wats!"

"No good arguing with Gussy, Tom," sighed Blake. "Gussy's as obstinate as a mule, and then some."

"You pwobably mean as firm as a wock, Blake," said Arthur Augustus. "I am certainly as firm as a wock in this mattah. I shall begin again to-mowwow, and I twust the fellows will wally wound. And now," added Arthur Augustus, with dignity, "I will have my tea, if you fellows have finished cacklin'."

Arthur Augustus sat down to tea. The rest of the party had finished, and Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther left him to it. They were smiling in the passage. They could not help seeing a comic side to Arthur Augustus's adventure with the Christmas cake: which perhaps it was natural that Gussy himself could not see. But Tom Merry had rather a thoughtful look as they went down to the dayroom.

"Gussy thinks there were three fellows who collared him," he remarked. "He didn't see who they were—"

"They shoved the sack over his head so that he couldn't, of course," said Manners. "Just like Gussy to walk into it."

"If he had seen them—!" said Tom.

"If he had he could send a bobby to inquire after the cake!" grinned Monty Lowther. "I wonder who they were."

"I fancy I could make a guess," said Tom.

"Eh? How?"

"There were three of them," said Tom. "Gussy thinks they followed him

from Wayland. I rather think they may have followed him from St. Jim's—laid in wait for him coming back—"

"What?" exclaimed Manners.

Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, it looks to me more like a jape than anything else," he said, "and I don't think that jolly old cake is very far away."

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Monty Lowther. "Figgins and Co.—"

"Looks like it, to me."

"Figgins and Co." repeated Manners. "Why, of course! They knew Gussy's game, and had an eye on him—they bagged him and lifted the cake! Might have guessed that one!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lowther. "If that's it, they walked in with the cake before Gussy got in, and it's in the New House now."

"Or in Fatty Wynn!" said Tom, with a chuckle. "Fatty may have scoffed it by this time!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Terrible Three chuckled, as they went down the stairs. They had little doubt that Tom had put his finger on the explanation of Gussy's wild adventure in Wayland Wood—and that the Christmas cake, which Arthur Augustus supposed had disappeared into parts unknown, was all the while no further off than the New House at St. Jim's.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE JOKE OF THE TERM?

RALPH RECKNESS CARDEW looked into No. 10 study at the hour of prep, and three Shell fellows who were sorting out their books glanced round at him in the doorway.

"Prep!" said Manners, rather pointedly.

"Quite!" agreed Cardew. "Sorry to interrupt—"

"No need to," remarked Monty Lowther.

"None at all," Cardew agreed again. "I rather like prep bein' interrupted in my study, mais chacun à son goût—which bein' interpreted, my beloved 'earers, means everyone to his taste."

"Thanks," said Manners, drily. "Have you looked in to teach your elders and betters elementary French?"

"Not at all! I've looked in as Mercury."

"Mercury!" repeated Tom Merry, staring at the Fourth-former. "What do you mean, you ass?"

"Messenger from Olympus," explained Cardew. "Olympus in this case bein' the New House. To cut it short—"

"The shorter the better," said Manners, who had no use for Cardew's airy persiflage. "We've got to do our prep, if you haven't."

"Message from the New House?" said Tom Merry. "Who the dickens is sending us a message from the New House?"

"Young fellow of the name of Figgins. I believe you've met him."

"Oh, don't be an ass. If you've got a message from Figgins, cough it up, and travel."

"Here it is."

Cardew slipped his hand into his pocket, and drew therefrom an envelope. He tossed it on the study table.

But he did not "travel". He remained standing in the doorway while Tom Merry, considerably puzzled, picked up the envelope and opened it.

"Figgins nobbled me just before lock-ups, and asked me to hand it to you," drawled Cardew. "He said there was somethin' in it that would interest all the House. From the expression on his speakin' countenance, I deduced that there was somethin' on in the nature of a jape."

Tom, without replying, unfolded the sheet of notepaper he drew from the envelope. He could not guess why Figgins, who could see him at any time up to lock-ups, had taken the trouble to write him a note, and dispatch it to him by Cardew. He was quite puzzled.

"Oh!" he ejaculated, as he looked at the missive from the New House.

Manners and Lowther and Cardew all looked at him.

"What—?" began Manners and Lowther together.

"Look!" said Tom.

He held up the letter. Manners and Lowther and Cardew all looked at it. They stared at it, in fact. It was quite an unexpected communication from the great chief of the New House juniors. It ran:

To-morrow

at 5 p.m.

A Christmas Cake will be presented  
as a Christmas Present.

to

DAVID LLEWELLYN WYNN

(The New House man who won the Greyfriars match for  
St. Jim's)

The cake, kindly provided by the School House, will be presented to D. L. Wynn in the New House at a distinguished gathering of New House men, in recognition of his Great Exploit in winning the Greyfriar's match.

Signed,

G. FIGGINS.

PS. School House men will be permitted to the ceremony if they make it pax and promise to behave themselves.

PPS. School House men will be expected to wash before coming to the New House.

There was a long moment of silence in No. 10 study while three fellows stared at that missive. It was broken by a yell of laughter from Cardew.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Cardew, at least, was amused.

"A Christmas cake!" said Manners.

"Kindly provided by the School House," breathed Monty Lowther. "That means Gussy's cake!"

"Oh, my hat!" said Tom Merry.

Evidently, Tom's surmise had been well-founded. There could be no doubt now about the identity of the three mysterious raiders who had relieved Arthur Augustus of the Christmas cake in Wayland Wood. The cake "kindly provided by the School House" was obviously that cake!

"Cheek!" said Manners, warmly. "Making out that a New House man won the Greyfriars match—"

"Well, that ass Gussy made out that a School House man did!" said Tom.

"So a School House man did—you did—"

"No more than Fatty did!"

"Who kicked the winning goal?" demanded Lowther.

"Who kept Greyfriars from kicking two or three!" answered Tom.

"Oh, you're an ass!" said Lowther. "Look here, this is a score over School House, and we're not letting those ticks get by with it."

"Looks as if they've got by with it," said Tom. "They've got that cake safe in Figgins's study in the New House. Gussy got the cake—and Figgy's going to give it to Fatty Wynn to-morrow—and that's that."

"Ha, ha, ha!" trilled Cardew. "I fancied there was a jape on, from Figgy's look—ha, ha, ha! So they were the sportsmen who nobbled Gussy in the wood! And he never guessed! Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's not so jolly funny as all that," grunted Lowther. "It's one up for the New House if they get away with it."

Cardew chuckled.

"No 'if' about it," he said. "As Thomas has already remarked, they've got away with it. I must go and tell the fellows this—it's the joke of the term. Gussy must hear this—it will amuse him no end! Ha, ha, ha!"

Cardew, laughing, went down the passage. Tom Merry threw the message from the New House on the table. He was smiling.

"That's that," he remarked. "Gussy's idea has worked out—in reverse! I don't think he'll be frightfully amused when Cardew tells him."

"Look here, it's a score over the House, and we're not standing for it," declared Monty Lowther. "What about turning up in force to-morrow, at 5 p.m., and scragging that gang and collaring the cake?"

Tom Merry shooed his head.

"Forget it, old chap! If we kick up a shindy in the New House it will bring beaks and pre's into it! That's not in the game."

"Well, no," admitted Lowther. "But—"

"Prep!" said Tom.

"Oh, blow prep," said Lowther, crossly. "I tell you, they're not getting by with this! Look here, that cake's parked in Figgins's study over the way. It's a School House cake, and it's coming back to the School House. I suppose we can't march across and kick up a shindy—"

"Hardly," said Manners.

"But there are other ways," Monty Lowther wrinkled his brows. "Suppose a fellow got out after dorm—"

"What?"

"The New House ticks will all be asleep in their little bunks, never dreaming of anything of the kind," said Monty.

"You ass!" exclaimed Tom. "It might mean a Head's whopping for getting out of the House after lights out—at least six from Railton."

"Well, I shouldn't wake Railton up and tell him I was going," said Monty, sarcastically. "I should hate to spoil his beauty sleep."

"Fathead! How would you get in, over the way?"

"That would want thinking out," admitted Monty.

"It would!" remarked Manners. "Better chuck it, and get on with prep."

"Br-r-r-r!" said Lowther.

However, he "chucked" it, and the chums of the Shell got on with prep.

But Monty Lowther's prep was done in a very desultory manner that evening. Every now and then he went off into deep thought—not on the subject of the deathless verse of Virgil. And after prep was over, and Tom Merry and Manners had joined the crowd in the junior dayroom, Monty Lowther disappeared for a time. When he was seen again there was a cheery grin on his face, which seemed to indicate that things were going well from his point of view.

## CHAPTER VIII

### AFTER LIGHTS OUT!

"WHO's that?" Jack Blake asked the question sleepily, in the Fourth-form dormitory in the School House, as the last stroke of eleven died away in the silence of the December night.

It was not the distant boom from the clock-tower that had awakened him.

It was the sound of a thud nearer at hand. It was not a very heavy thud, nor a very loud thud; but it was very distinct in the silence, and it was close beside his bed. He opened his eyes, peered in the gloom, and murmured a drowsy inquiry.

"Pway be quiet, Blake! Don't make a wow, old chap."

That answering voice made Blake sit up and take notice!

"Gussy, you ass—"

"Weally, Blake—"

"What are you waking us up for, at this time of night?"

"I did not wake you up intentionally, Blake! The shoe dwopped fwom my hand—"

"Are you putting on your shoes?" ejaculated Blake. "You're going to sleep with your shoes on?"

"I wegard that as wathah widiculous, Blake! I am not goin' to sleep at pwesent. I have othah fish to fwy."

"What are you up to?" hissed Blake. "Not going out on the tiles after lights out like Cardew, I suppose?"

"Pway don't be an ass, Blake! I am goin' to get that Chwistmas cake, if you weally want to know. You wemembah what Cardew told us in the study—"

"Oh, my only hat and umbrella!" gasped Blake. "You howling ass—!"

"I wefuse to be called a howlin' ass, Blake. It turns out that the thwee wuffians who bagged that cake were fwom the New House, and they have it there now—"

"Do you think you can burgle the New House in the middle of the night?" breathed Blake.

"I twust so, Blake! I am certainly goin' to twy. I uttahly wefuse to allow Figgins to pwesent my cake to Fatty Wynn to-mowwow. That cake is goin' to be pwesented to Tom Mewwy for winnin' the Gweyfwiahs match—"

"Go back to bed, you ass."

"Wats!"

"You'll get into a fearful row if you're caught out of dorm—"

"I shall not be caught out of dorm, Blake. I am goin' to be vewy cautious. That is why I am goin' alone. I am afwaid I could not wely on you and Hewwies and Dig to get thwough without givin' an alarm—you know what asses you are, if you don't mind my sayin' so."

"Oh, you image!" breathed Blake. "You'd wake up everybody in the New House if you got that far. But you won't—you'll wake up everybody in this House first."

"Wats!"

"Who's that jawing?" came a sleepy voice from Herries' bed.

"That ass Gussy—that idiot Gussy—that dangerous maniac Gussy—Look here, Gussy, you go back to bed, or I'll turn out and take my bolster to you." exclaimed Blake.



"There was no reply.

"Do you hear, you goat?" hissed Blake.

Still no reply. But in the silence, there came the faint sound of a door softly shutting. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was gone.

Blake put one leg out of bed. But he withdrew it again. It was too late to make any attempt to stop Arthur Augustus. Blake could only hope that he would not return with a master or prefect's hand on his shoulder. Arthur Augustus, in the opinion of his friends, was about the last fellow in the world to carry out such a perilous enterprise successfully.

That was not Arthur Augustus's own opinion, as he trod away in the gloom. He was cautious—very cautious! But he was very determined, and quite confident. He placed full reliance upon his own tact and judgment.

The discovery that his mysterious assailants in Wayland Wood had been Figgins and Co. of the New House, and that the Christmas cake—Tom Merry's Christmas present—was parked in Figgins's study over the way—had stirred Arthur Augustus's deepest ire. He had been strongly tempted to march across to the New House after prep, and make a valiant attempt to recapture that cake by the strong hand. Arthur Augustus feared no foe, and was not wont to count odds: but even Arthur Augustus realized that an attack in force on the New House was not practical politics. Stratagem was needed: and Gussy had no doubt that he was the man for stratagem. He had set his noble wits to work: and he had been thinking it over ever since Kildare of the Sixth had turned out the lights in the Fourth-form dormitory. And he had made up his noble mind what he was going to do—and now he was doing it. He was going to get out of the House quietly, while everybody was asleep: get into the New House equally quietly, lift that cake from Figgins's study, and return with it in triumph. That was the programme: quiet and caution all along the line, and he had started by dropping a shoe and waking Jack Blake, to begin with!

However, he made no sound as he crept across the landing to the stairs. The House was sleeping. All was still. If a master was still up, in his study, Masters Studies' were far enough away for safety. Softly and silently, the swell of St. Jim's trod down the stairs.

Fortunately, he knew every inch of his way, for the night was almost as black as a hat. He groped in the dark to the junior lobby, groped into it, and groped across to the door on the quad.

That door was locked and bolted at night. It was easy enough to turn back the key, draw the bolts, and leave it unlocked and unbolted for his return. All that was plane sailing: his difficulties were likely to begin over the way. But as he groped over that door for the bolts, he met with a sudden surprise.

"Bai Jove!" he ejaculated.

The bolts on the door were already withdrawn. It looked as if the house-porter had neglected to bolt that door at the usual hour. And, to his further

surprise, Arthur Augustus, when he groped for the key, found that the door was already unlocked!

"Bai Jove!" breathed Arthur Augustus. "The house-portah must have been vevy careless—anybody could get into the House! Or pewwaps some wat like Cardew, or Wacke of the Shell, has gone out of bounds, and left the door unfastened—I shouldn't be surprised."

That, really, was a more probable explanation than carelessness on the part of the house-porter. Anyhow, the door was unbolted and unlocked: and Arthur Augustus opened it, and the chill December air blew on him. Heedless of a cold wind, and a few feathery flakes of snow that floated on it, he stepped out, and shut the door softly behind him.

Dark and gloomy looked the old quad, as he peered round him in the night. But dark and gloom had no more effect on Arthur Augustus than winter wind and feathery flakes. He stepped briskly into the night, trailing through the darkness for the New House.

Like a black shadow against a dark sky, Mr. Ratcliffe's House loomed up before him. He followed the path that led him round to the rear of the building. The blackness was bewildering, and he was now on less familiar ground. He groped along with his hands extended before him: and suddenly he gave a jump almost clear of the earth, and his heart leaped fairly into his mouth, as his outstretched hands came in contact with another form—unseen—in the blackness.

Not for an instant had it crossed D'Arcy's mind that someone else might be there in the dark.

But someone was!

It was unexpected—it was startling—it was really unnerving—but his hands in the darkness were touching some unseen person, and he heard a startled panting gasp as they touched.

It was only for a moment. The next, the unseen figure was leaping away, and bolting into the night. Hitherto, there had been no sound—the unseen one had been creeping softly and silently as Gussy himself—till that sudden contact. But now there was a sound of footfalls, fleeing.

"Oh, cwumbs!" breathed Arthur Augustus.

He stood with his heart thumping. Such an unexpected contact in the dark was enough to make any fellow's heart thump. Gussy's thumped like a hammer, as he stood peering in the direction in which the unseen one had fled.

He could see nothing. And in a moment or two the fleeing footfalls had died away.

"Oh, cwumbs!" repeated Arthur Augustus. "Who the dooce—what the dooce—oh, cwumbs!"

For a long minute he stood there, peering and listening. But there was nothing to be seen, and nothing to be heard. The unseen person, whoever he was, had vanished into the dark night. Who he was, why he was out of his

House creeping about at night, Arthur Augustus could not begin to imagine. But at all events, it was obvious that it could not have been a master or a prefect: and he was gone, anyway. Arthur Augustus was, undoubtedly, a little shaken by that strange encounter. But he was as determined as ever to carry on. And at length he resumed his way, and arrived at the back of the House, stopping at a little window that gave on a dark passage within.

His plan was cut and dried. Kneeling on the sill, he was going to push back the catch by inserting a blade of his penknife between the sashes. Then the little window would open to his hand: he would climb in, and all would be, so to speak, calm and bright, It was as simple as that.

Quietly, he drew himself up on the little stone sill. Kneeling there, with for once a complete disregard for the knees of his trousers, he groped in his pocket for his penknife.

His hand came out empty.

He groped in other pockets. But the result was equally empty-handed. The penknife was not there: He had used that penknife in study No. 6 after prep. No doubt he had left it there!

It was an utterly unexpected and dismaying setback.

"Oh, cwikey!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus, forgetting for the moment the need of silence and caution. "Oh, cwumbs! That dashed penknife—I must have left it on the table in the study! Oh, scissahs!"

Following that exclamation, there came to his ears, from the darkness "D'Arcy! So it was you, you blithering idiot! What are you doing here, you gibbering chucklehead?"

Arthur Augustus nearly fell off the window-sill in his astonishment, as he heard the voice of Monty Lowther of the Shell.

## CHAPTER IX

### IN THE ENEMY'S QUARTERS

"LOWTHAH!"

"Fathead!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Quiet, ass!"

Arthur Augustus stepped down from the window-sill. He peered in amazement at a shadowy form in the gloom. He could barely make it out, but the voice revealed that it was Monty Lowther. That voice went on:

"You champion chucklehead, was it you barging into me a few minutes ago, coming round the House?"

"Bai Jove! Was that you, Lowthah?"

"Yes, ass! Was it you?"

"Yaas, wathah! But—"

"But what?"

"But I wefuse to be called an ass, Lowthah."

"Blitherer!"

"You startled me fearfully when I wan into you, Lowthah—"

"Do you think you didn't startle me, you image?"

"Weally, Lowthah, I fail to see what you are doin' heah. Howevah, now you are heah, pewwaps you can lend me a pocket-knife."

"I've a jolly good mind to lend you a thick ear," growled Lowther. "What the thump are you playing the giddy ox for, in the middle of the night—walking into a fellow's back and giving him a turn? I thought it was a New House pre. for a minute—or old Ratty himself!"

Arthur Augustus chuckled. He realized that it was only Monty Lowther into whom he had barged in the dark, startling the Shell fellow more than he had been startled himself.

"Think it's funny?" hissed Monty. "If it wasn't for waking up the New House, I'd bang your silly head on the wall, see?"

"I should wefuse to have my silly head banged on the wall—I mean I should wefuse to have my head banged on the wall, Lowthah! And I should like to know what you are doin' heah at all."

"I'm going in at that window," grunted Lowther. "I cut off after you barged me, thinking it might be a beak or a pre.—are you sniggering, you silly ass?—but I wasn't going to chuck it. And then I heard you fumbling here, you fathead, and if you hadn't spoken I shouldn't have known that it was you—why aren't you in bed and asleep, ass?"

"You are awah, Lowthah, that Figgins and Co. bagged the Chwistmas cake I am goin' to prewent to Tom Mewwy—"

"Oh, my hat! You're after the cake too?"

"Are you aftah it, Lowthah?"

"Think I'm taking a walk for pleasure in the middle of a December night. with a cold wind blowing, and the risk of a Head's whopping?" snorted Lowther. "I'm after that cake. It's in Figgins's study in that mouldy old House, and I'm going to give him a surprise about it."

"You had bettah leave it to me, Lowthah! This mattah wequiah's gweat caution, and it will be safah in my hands."

"Fathead! As you're here, you can keep cave while I nip in and get it. see? Safer with a fellow keeping cave."

"Yaas, wathah! Only—"

"Only what?" yapped Lowther.

"Only you had bettah stay here and keep cave, while I nip in and get the cake," explained Arthur Augustus.

"Pack it up, fathead! You stay here—"

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus, emphatically.

"Now, look here—"

"I wufuse to look there, Lowthah! You can come in with me, if you like, and we will twy it on togethah. But mind you don't make a wov and wake Watty. If you wake Watty there will be twouble, you know."

Monty Lowther breathed hard and deep. It was a relief to discover that it was only Arthur Augustus D'Arcy who was abroad in the darkness of the December night: but he was strongly tempted to bang his aristocratic head on the wall of the New House. However, he restrained that natural impulse. Banging Arthur Augustus's head would certainly not have preserved the silence that was so necessary in that nocturnal enterprise.

"Keep vevy quiet!" went on Arthur Augustus. "I need hardly impwess on you, Lowthah, that it is essential to keep vevy quiet, and not wisk givin' the alarm. There would be a feahful wov if we were caught heah. Pway don't speak at all—if it is necessawy to give any instnwctions, I will whispah—and you need not weply—mum's the word, you know. Now, have you got a pocket-knife?"

"No!" hissed Lowther.

"Oh, cwumbs! I left mine in the study—"

"You would!"

"Wats! It was feahfully thoughtless of you, Lowthah, not to bwing a pocket-knife to open the catch—"

"You couldn't open that catch with a pocket-knife, fathead. And it doesn't need opening, either. It's unfastened."

"Bai Jove! I uttahly fail to compwehend how you can possibly know that the window-catch is unfastened, Lowthah. How do you know?"

"Because I trickled over here after prep, ass, and hung about in the dark till the coast was clear, fathead, and then nipped in for a minute, idiot, and unfastened the catch, image, all ready to get in when I came across to-night, chuckle-head."

"Bai Jove!"

"Now if you'll get out of the way, I'll open the window."

Monty Lowther put up his hands to the lower sash of the little window, and pushed. The sash slid up under his hands.

"Bai Jove! That's wippin'!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, forgetting caution once more on seeing the way open before him.

"Shout!" said Lowther, sarcastically. "Now the window's open it'll be quite easy to wake the whole House."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Yell!" said Lowther.

"Wats! Pway stand aside and let me get in first, Lowthah! I had bettah lead the way. Do you heah me, Lowthah?" added Arthur Augustus, warmly, as the Shell fellow, unheeding, clambered in.

Monty Lowther, without reply, disappeared into the blackness within.

Arthur Augustus breathed hard as he followed. He dropped inside the window, and bumped into Lowther, unseen in the dark.

"Oh, cwumbs!"

"Bellow!" came a sarcastic hiss from Monty. "Roar!"

"Pway do not talk, Lowthah, now that we are inside. I have already warned you not to speak—"

"Bawl!" hissed Lowther.

"Oh, wats! It is fwightfully dark heah—we shall have to gwope our way—Oh, cwikey, what's that?" added Arthur Augustus, startled, as a sudden beam of light bit into the darkness. "Oh! Is that a flash-lamp? I nevah thought of bwingin' a flash-lamp—"

"You wouldn't!"

"You had bettah hand it to me, Lowthah—"

"If you don't keep quiet," said Monty Lowther, in concentrated tones. "I'll bang your silly head and chance it. Now shut up and follow me without yelling."

The flicker of light danced away in the gloom. Arthur Augustus, suppressing his indignation, followed the gleam of the flashlamp. All was dark, silent, and still: the New House was sleeping. As he glimpsed a staircase, Monty Lowther shut off the light. Arthur Augustus blinked.

"Bai Jove! Where are you, Lowthah? Where—?"

"Quiet!" hissed Lowther. "Here's the stairs! Keep your hand on the banister, and don't stumble—"

"I should not be likely to stumble, Lowthah! I am not a clumsy ass— Oh! Ah! Ooogh! Bai Jove!"

Bump!

Arthur Augustus sat on the stairs. Really, it was not easy work, groping about in pitch darkness.

"Oh, you chump!" breathed Lowther.

"Pway be quiet, Lowthah—"

"What?"

"Pway be quiet! You will wake the House, at this wate."

Perhaps it was just as well that Lowther could not see Arthur Augustus in the dark. Had he been visible, his noble head would have been in extreme peril of a punch, at that moment.

He scrambled up, rubbing a knee that had banged on a stair.

"Ow! wow! ow!"

"What are you yelling about now?" hissed Lowther.

"I am not yellin', Lowthah, and I have banged my knee—"

"Hurt it?"

"Yaas, wathah."

"Good!"

"Why, you wottah—"

"Now shut up!"

Monty Lowther pushed on up the staircase. Arthur Augustus gave his noble knee a final rub, and groped after him.

On the landing above, Lowther turned on the flashlamp again for a moment or two. That was sufficient to give him his bearings. A minute more, and they had reached Figgins's study. Another moment, and they were inside the study, with the door shut: immensely to Monty Lowther's relief. All, after all, had gone well: and Figgins and Co. if they were dreaming in their dormitory, certainly did not dream that the School House enemy were within the walls of the New House, the captured cake at their mercy.

## CHAPTER X

### SOMETHING FOR FIGGINS AND CO.

"**E**UWEKAH!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus. Lowther had turned on the flashlamp, as soon as the door was closed, illumining the darkness in Figgins's study. The light revealed a rather bulky cardboard box, carefully tied with string, that lay on the study table. Arthur Augustus pointed to it, repeating the celebrated exclamation of Archimedes, though with his own inimitable accent.

"Eureka!" echoed Monty Lowther.

"That's the cake all wight!" grinned Arthur Augustus. "There's Tuckah's name on the box. They haven't even unpacked it—"

"Bet they did, to make sure the cake was in it, and that Fatty Wynn sampled it, unless Figgins and Kerr held on to his neck."

"Oh, bai Jove! If that fat New House boundah has been scoffin the cake—"

"Let's see, anyhow."

Monty Lowther put down the flashlamp on the table, and untied the string that secured the cardboard box. There was plenty of string, and it was tied with a good many knots, and the task was not rapid.

"Bettah cut it, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus. "We can find a knife or scissahs somewhah."

Lowther shook his head, and went on disentangling knots.

"Weally, Lowthah, you are wastin' time," urged Arthur Augustus. "We weally do not want to pass the west of the night in the New House. If somebody should hear somethin' and wake up—"

"Pretty sure to, if you keep on exercising your chin."

"Wats! Pwobably there is a knife in the table dwawah—"

"Leave it there, ass! We shall want this string again."

"I weally do not see why, Lowthah."

"Lots of things you don't see, fathead."

"I am bound to point out to you, Lowthah, that this mattah is in my hands," said Arthur Augustus, firmly. "I stwongly object to wastin' time, when we are in the enemy's quartahs like this. I will look for a knife."

"Keep quiet, ass—"

"I wecommend you to keep quiet, Lowthah! I am keepin' as quiet as a mouse. Here is the dwawah."

Arthur Augustus pulled at the table drawer, in search of a knife. The drawer was a little stiff in opening, and he jerked at it. Perhaps he put a little too much energy into the jerk. Unexpectedly, the drawer came entirely out, and Arthur Augustus, in his surprise, let go.

Crash!

"Oh, cwikey!"

The drawer, and Figgins and Co.'s supply of cutlery which it contained, fell to the floor. In the silence of the night it sounded almost like thunder, to the startled ears of the two juniors in the study.

"Oh, you chump!" breathed Lowther.

"The wotten thing came out quite suddenly—"

"Quiet!" hissed Lowther.

He listened with almost painful intentness. The junior studies were a good distance from the sleeping quarters. It was probable that the crash, loud as it had sounded in Lowther's and D'Arcy's startled ears, had not reached other ears. But there was a long minute of tense anxiety.

"It's all wight," said Arthur Augustus, at last. "Nobody's heard! But pway do be more careful, Lowthah—"

"What?" hissed Lowther. "Who dropped that drawer, you maniac?"

"I wefuse to be called a maniac, Lowthah—"

"Pick up those things, idiot, and keep quiet."

"I wefuse to be called an idiot, Lowther. There are two or three knives heah, and now we can cut the stwing—"

"If you come near this parcel," said Lowther, in concentrated tones. "I'll brain you with it."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Shut up!" Lowther loosened the last knot. "It's done now."

He removed the lid of the cardboard box. Tissue paper packing was revealed. The tissue paper removed, the cake itself came in sight—the extensive and magnificent Christmas cake which Arthur Augustus had carried off that afternoon from Tucker's in Wayland, with the inscription "Merry Christmas" on the icing. But the final "s" was missing from the word "Christmas": a triangular segment having been cut out of the big cake. Evidently Figgins and Kerr had not been quite able to restrain their plump chum from sampling the prize.

"Bai Jove! That fat boundah Wynn has been at it!" breathed Arthur



Augustus. "There is quite a large piece missin'. What are you liftin' it out of the box for, Lowthah. It is much more convenient to cawwy it in the box."

Unheeding, Monty Lowther carefully lifted out the cake, and wrapped it in the tissue wrapping paper. Arthur Augustus surveyed that proceeding with surprise and impatience.

"Weally, Lowthah, I quite fail to undahstand what you are at!" he exclaimed.

"Could you expect to understand anything, with a brain like yours?" asked Lowther.

"You cheekay ass—"

"We're going to leave something else in that box for Figgins and Co." said Monty Lowther. "They'll find it tied up here the same as before, and are they going to guess that there's been a change inside?"

"Oh! Bai Jove!"

Monty Lowther glanced round the study. He picked up a shovel from the fender, and shovelled ashes from the grate into the cardboard box.

Arthur Augustus stared at him blankly for a moment or two: and then chuckled, as the idea dawned on his powerful brain.

"Bai Jove! If they don't look into that box before they pwesent it to Fatty Wynn to-mowwow—"

"Why should they?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" trilled Arthur Augustus.

There was a scuttle of coal in the study. Monty Lowther tipped its contents into the box. If Figgins and Co. on the morrow, missed that supply of coal, they were likely to surmise that some fellow from another study had borrowed it—certainly they were not likely to guess that it was in the cake-box.

A mixture of coal, ashes, and cinders almost filled the box. The lid fitted on nicely. With great care, Monty Lowther replaced the string, re-tying the knots as he had found them.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "Will that be wathah a surpwise for the New House boundahs to-mowwow? What?"

"Just a few!" grinned Lowther.

"Weally, it is quite a bwight ideah, deah boy. I wathah wondah that I did not think of it myself."

"Your brain wasn't planned for thinking, you know."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Now pick up those knives and forks and things—and don't make a row."

The table drawer was replaced, and the cutlery replaced in it. Monty Lowther glanced round the room. There was nothing to indicate that it had received a nocturnal visit from the School House. Arthur Augustus picked up the cake from the table.

"Leave that to me," said Lowther.

"Safah in my hands, deah boy. You might dwop it."

"You howling ass—"

"Wats!"

"I'd better carry it, fathead."

"Wubbish!"

Arthur Augustus settled that point by opening the study door, and walking out with the cake under his noble arm.

Monty Lowther suppressed his feelings, and followed. With a glimmer from the flashlamp, they trod cautiously down the stairs, and arrived at last at the little window at the back where they had entered. Arthur Augustus landed the cake on the sill, and clambered out. But the cake was under his arm again by the time Lowther had clambered out after him. Arthur Augustus was not trusting the prize into any hands but his own.

Lowther shut down the sash silently, and they trod away in the gloom.

"Bai Jove! It's fwightfully dark," murmured Arthur Augustus. "Bettah keep close to the wall for a guide—yow-ow-ow!"

"What the thump—?"

"Wow! I've banged my nose on a buttweess or somethin'. Wow! Bettah not keep too neah the wall, Lowthah, and for goodness sake keep quiet! We're not out of the wood yet, you know."

Monty Lowther did not reply: they were still too near the New House for him to tell Arthur Augustus what he thought of him. Like dark shadows in the dark, they groped across the quad towards their own House.

Bump!

Thud!

"Woooooooh!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "What is that? I've wun into somethin'. I have dwopped the cake! Mind you don't twead on the cake, Lowthah. I wan into a twee and dwopped it."

Monty Lowther stopped, groped, and found the parcel in the darkness. He grabbed it up, and put it under his arm.

"Oh, cwumbs! Where are you, Lowthah?" gasped Arthur Augustus. "I dwopped the cake when I wan into that beastly twee—wow! Pway turn on the flashlamp and help me look for that cake."

Monty Lowther chuckled. Really, it would have been injudicious to flash a light about in the quad, at that hour. Nor was it necessary, as the cake was under Monty's arm.

Arthur Augustus groped wildly in blackness for the cake that was not there. There was another bang, and a sharp ejaculation, as his noble nut established contact with a tree-trunk.

"Ow! wow! Oh, cwikey! Wow!"

"Yell!" said Monty Lowther, encouragingly. "Now we're in the middle of the quad, you can wake both Houses at once."

"I wegard you as an uttah ass, Lowthah! Will you turn on that flashlamp or will you not turn on that flashlamp?" hissed Arthur Augustus.

"No fear!"

"Bai Jove! You fwightful wottah—"

"What's the good?" asked Lowther.

"So that we can look for the cake, you uttah ass."

"Why look for the cake, when I've got it under my arm?"

"Oh!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Have you picked it up, you fwightful ass! Hand it to me at once—you may dwop it—"

Monty Lowther chuckled as he receded towards the School House. Arthur Augustus groped after him. He was breathing hard as he groped into the lobby in the School House.

"Fasten the door after you, fathead!" came a whispering voice in the gloom. Then Monty Lowther was gone, still in possession of the cake!

Breathing harder, Arthur Augustus closed and fastened the lobby door. Then he made his way to the Fourth-form dormitory. The cake, at all events, was safe in the School House: the nocturnal raid on the rival House had been a success. All were sleeping as Arthur Augustus tiptoed into his dormitory: and about a minute later, Arthur Augustus was sleeping too, and his eyes did not open till the rising bell rang out in the cold and frosty morning.

## CHAPTER XI

### NOT AS PER PROGRAMME

"PAX!" SAID Figgins, suspiciously.

Tom Merry laughed.

"Certainly," he answered.

"Yaas, wathah!" chuckled Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Pax all round," agreed Jack Blake. "We're here for the jolly old ceremony, not for a row."

"As that Indian chap at Greyfriars would say, the paxfulness is terrific," assured Monty Lowther.

"Peace, my infants, peace!" said Manners. And Herries and Digby grinned and nodded.

Figgins eyed them. Kerr and Wynn eyed them. They really could not quite understand this peaceful visit from the School House—in the circumstances. It was five p.m.—the time set for the presentation, in the New House, of the Christmas cake, "kindly provided by the School House", to Fatty Wynn, as the man who had won the Greyfriars match for St. Jim's. Figgins had cheerily invited the School House men to be present at the ceremony, on condition

that they made it "pax". But that really was only intended to "rub it in". Certainly he did not expect the heroes of the rival House either to make it "pax", or to attend the ceremony peacefully. He would rather have expected some attempt to recapture the cake—indeed, an attack in force would not have surprised him. If Tom Merry and Co. had come over on the warpath, it would not have been surprising. But it was very surprising indeed to see them arrive in this peaceful and indeed hilarious mood.

They were peaceful. They were polite. They willingly made it "pax"—evidently they were not on the warpath. And they were all grinning as if they regarded the affair as a tremendous joke. A joke, indeed it was: but the laugh was on the side of the New House—so far as Figgins and Co. could see, at all events.

"Well, if it's pax, you can come in!" said Figgins, at last. "Are you owning up that it was the New House that beat Greyfriars?"

"Wathah not!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, warmly. "The New House were merely also wans, Figgins—"

"You School House fathead—"

"You cheekay New House wottah—!"

"Order!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Dry up, Gussy!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Order!" said Blake. "No rows or rags! If Figgie thinks that a New House man beat Greyfriars—"

"I don't think—I know!" hooted Figgins.

"Well, then, get on with the jolly old ceremony, and let's see the great man duly honoured," said Blake.

"Yes, rather," said Herries.

Arthur Augustus's frowning brow cleared, and he chuckled.

"Yaas, wathah!" he assented. "Pway let us have no arguin', deah boys—get on with the cewemony! Fatty Wynn weally does deserve what they are goin' to give him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, you can cackle," snorted Figgins. "If you enjoy seeing your mouldy old House scored over, you're welcome to enjoy it all you like. Mind, its pax—no rags here, and no snatching when you see the cake."

"No snatching," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Wathah not!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, come in!" grunted Figgins, and the New House Co. stepped out of the doorway of their dayroom, and Tom Merry and Co. came in from the quad.

There was quite a crowd of New House juniors in the junior dayroom in the New House. Besides Figgins and Co. Redfern and Owen and Lawrence and Pratt of the Fourth, and French and Thompson of the Shell, were there: and more fellows of both forms were coming in. All of them seemed to be in

cheery spirits, evidently bucked by the score over the rival House. They seemed surprised to see the School House party: and still more surprised by their grinning hilarity. What School House men had to grin about, on such an occasion, no New House man could guess—yet!

Certainly the School House men had no chance, if they had been thinking of war. Apart from "pax", which precluded hostilities, there were only seven School House fellows present, and more than two dozen of the New House. Tom Merry and Co. were there simply as witnesses of the triumphant function: and why they had come to swell a New House triumph was a mystery to Figgins and Co. However, there they were, with smiling faces, plainly enjoying the occasion quite as much as any New House man.

On the table stood a large cardboard box, tied with string, bearing on the lid the style and title of Tucker and Co. of Wayland. The time had arrived now for that box to be opened.

That anything had happened to the contents during the previous night, naturally did not occur to Figgins and Co. How could anything have happened to the cake, over-night, in a New House study? Not for a moment did any such suspicion occur to any New House fellow. The box had been brought down from Figgins's study to the dayroom, and there it was—looking just the same as ever—on the outside! It was the inside that was scheduled to cause surprise, when the box was opened.

Fatty Wynn eyed that box almost lovingly. Whether, as his friends declared, Fatty had won the Greyfriars match for St. Jim's, or not, undoubtedly he was looking forward to that cake. The sample he had taken the previous day had whetted his appetite for that magnificent Christmas cake. Fatty would willingly have cut out the ceremony, and started at once on the cake—he could not help feeling that old Figgy was rather wasting time.

Figgins stood at the table, a penknife in his hand, ready to cut the string. All eyes were upon him.

"Gentlemen, chaps, and sportsmen!" began Figgins.

"Hear, hear!"

"As you all know, we recently played a match with Greyfriars, who are pretty good men at Soccer, and only one goal was scored. The match was saved for St. Jim's by the magnificent work of a New House man in goal."

"Hear, hear!"

"Good old Fatty!"

"New House for ever!"

"Wats!" came from the School House group.

"Shut up, you School House tick!" came a roar.

"Order, Gussy!" said Tom Merry.

"Yaas: but—"

"Dry up!" said Blake.

"Oh, all wight."

"By the magnificent work of a New House man in goal!" repeated Figgins, with a glare at the School House group, "and we are met together on this auspicious occasion—"

"Hear, hear!"

"—to present the winner of the Greyfriars match with a Christmas cake, kindly provided by the School House—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hear, hear!"

"And—and—and—" Figgy's eloquence seemed to run short. "And—here it is!" he concluded.

He cut the string with the penknife. He lifted the lid of the box. Fatty Wynn's eyes glistened. The removal of the lid revealed a sheet of tissue paper. Figgins swept it aside. And then—!

He stared into the box.

He was about to lift out the magnificent Christmas cake. But he did not lift out a Christmas cake. Instead, he stared into the box, with his eyes almost popping out of his face.

"Oh!" he gasped. "What-what—oh!"

"Get on with it, Figgy," breathed Fatty Wynn.

"What—?" began Kerr. Then he, too, stared into the box, and jumped. "What-what—where's the cake?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came in a yell from the School House party. "Get on with it, Figgins!"

"Yaas, wathah!" chortled Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Do get on with the presentation, Figgins."

"We want to see Fatty scoff what's in that box!" grinned Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What—what-what—who—how—!" stuttered Figgins. "The—the cake ain't here! How the dickens—who the thump—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Not there!" gasped Fatty Wynn.

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Kerr. He stared at a collection of ashes, cinders, and chunks of coal, in the cake box. "What—what—somebody's got at it—those School House rotters—"

"Oh!" gasped Figgins. "But how—when—how—oh, crumbs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the School House party.

"Go to it, Figgy."

"Hand it over to Fatty!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The New House fellows crowded round, staring into the cake box. Fatty Wynn gazed into it in anguish. There was no Christmas cake for Fatty. There was a stack of ashes, cinders, and coal: which even the Falstaff of the New House did not feel disposed to "scoff".

"Collar those School House ticks!" roared Figgins. "They've done this somehow—collar them—"

"What about pax, Figgy?" chuckled Tom Merry.

"Oh!" Figgins had forgotten "pax" for the moment. "Oh! Look here, you rotters—look here, you School House smudges—you jolly well did this somehow—"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Guilty, my lord!" chuckled Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come on, you chaps," said Tom Merry. "Thanks for letting us in to witness the ceremony, Figgins! We've really enjoyed it! Cheerio!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry and Co. crowded out into the quad, laughing as they went. Figgins and Co. were not laughing. Figgins and Co. were left gazing at that box of ashes and cinders and chunks of coal, with feelings that they could hardly have expressed in words.

## CHAPTER XII

### JUST LIKE GUSSY!

"CHRISTMAS IS comin'," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, thoughtfully.

"Go hon!" murmured Jack Blake.

And there was a general smile in Tom Merry's study.

They had returned from the New House in merry mood. Figgins and Co. had been well and truly diddled, dished, and done. The moot point, which House, if either, had really beaten Greyfriars, was still moot. But at all events the Christmas cake was safe in the School House, and the New House enemy had been left with only the box and its quite inedible contents.

So it was a very cheery party at tea in Tom Merry's study. Only one member of the party had an extremely thoughtful expression.

Arthur Augustus, for quite a while, had been deep in thought: his noble intellect apparently working at full pressure. He came suddenly out of that state of deep cogitation, with the remark that Christmas was coming!

Which really was not news to the other fellows in the study. As St. Jim's was about to break up for the Christmas holidays, they were not likely to have forgotten that Christmas was coming!

"Is that what you've been thinking out?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah," assented Arthur Augustus, with a nod. "Christmas is comin', deah boys—"

"It often does, towards the end of December," remarked Blake, thoughtfully.

"Weally, Blake—"

"I've noticed that," agreed Manners.

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"Thanks for telling us, all the same, Gussy," said Tom Merry.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, what I mean is—"

"Oh! You mean something?" asked Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Go it, Gussy," said Tom Merry, laughing. "What about Christmas? We sort of knew it was coming: but what about it?"

"I've been thinkin'—"

"Did it hurt?" inquired Monty Lowther, sympathetically.

"Weally, you ass—"

"Shut up, Monty," said Tom. "Cough it up, Gussy."

"I will pwoceed to do so, of Lowthah will let a fellow speak," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "Chwistmas is comin', as I have already wemarked, and Chwistmas is a time of peace and goodwill and so on—"

"Hear, hear!"

"It is a time to wash out wows, even House wows!" went on Arthur Augustus. "We have given the New House the kybosh—"

"We have!" agreed Blake. "We have!"

"And I have been thinkin' that, as we have kyboshed them, we might stwetch a point, and wefwain fwom wubbin' it in," explained Arthur Augustus. "Of course, Figgins and Co. have been fwightfully cheekay, makin' out that a New House man won the Gweyfwiachs match—"

"Sheer cheek!" said Herries.

"—when it was weally won by a School House man—"

"Rot!" said Tom Merry.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Bosh!" said Tom. "The match was won by St. Jim's, both Houses combined, and every man played up. That's that!"

"My ideah was to pwesent you with a Chwistmas cake as a Chwistmas pwesent, as the man who won the match, Tom Mewwy—"

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

"Pway do not intewwupt me with widiculous ejaculations. As I was sayin', we have given those ticks ovah the way the kybosh, and it would be wathah sportin' to wefwain fwom wubbin' it in. I am goin' to pwopose—"

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "Who's the happy lady?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah ass!" hooted Arthur Augustus. "You know vewy well that when I say I am goin' to pwopose, I do not mean that I am goin' to pwopose—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"



"I am goin' to pwopose a change in the pwogwamme, if you fellows will leave off cacklin' for a minute and let a fellow speak. Instead of pwesentin' the Chwistmas cake to Tom Mewwy as the winnah of the Gweyfwiahs match, and makin' the New House gween with wage, which is weally not a pwopah state of affaihs just on Chwistmas, I pwopose to stand a study suppah to celebuate the victowy, askin' Figgins and Co. to join up—"

"Oh!" exclaimed all the tea party, together.

"The fact is," went on Arthur Augustus, "that all this waggin' and wowin' ova a Soccah match is not quite the thing."

"Not?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Not!" said Arthur Augustus, firmly.

"Who's been doing most of it?" asked Monty.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway wing off the cackle and let a fellow speak. While it is quite twue that School House is cockhouse at St. Jim's, and the New House pwactically nowhah in compawison, yet we are bound to wemembah that we are all St. Jim's men, and that weally and twuly it does not mattah a wap which House contwibutes most to a Soccah victory—"

"Oh, my hat!" said Blake.

"So I twust," added Arthur Augustus, "that we shall heah no more of it."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Hear, hear!" chuckled Tom Merry.

"But it was Gussy—" began Herries.

"Don't interrupt Gussy when he's talking sense for once," said Manners.

"He doesn't do it often," agreed Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Carry on, Gussy!" said Tom Merry, encouragingly.

"So I pwopose," said Arthur Augustus, "that we wash out all this arguin' and waggin' and wowin', and that as Chwistmas is comin', we extend the wight hand of fwiendship to the New House boundahs, stand a study suppah in celebuation of winnin' the Gweyfwiahs match, and weceive Figgins and Co. as honahed guests, and whack out the Chwistmas cake all wound!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Arthur Augustus's proposition was passed unanimously, with cheers and chuckles—especially chuckles.

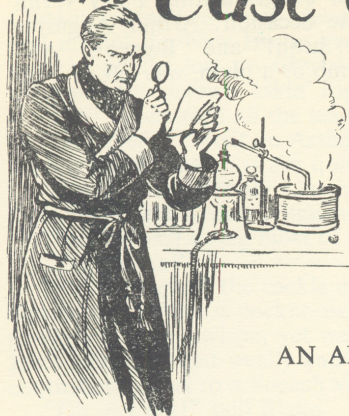
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It was a very handsome study supper when it came off. There were many good things, most imposing of all the long disputed Christmas cake. Figgins and Co. came over very amicably, Fatty Wynn not only amicably but eagerly: and all was calm and bright. Figgins even made a little speech

congratulating Tom Merry on having kicked the winning goal in that famous match, to which Tom responded with another congratulating Fatty Wynn on his monumental goalkeeping on the same occasion: Arthur Augustus D'Arcy punctuating each speech with "Heah! heah!" and "Bwavo!" And not a crumb or a plum, not the ghost of a crumb or a plum, was left of Tom Merry's Christmas Present.

THE END

# The Case of the Perplexed Painter.



by  
**PETER TODD**

AN ADVENTURE OF HERLOCK SHOLMES

THE CASE of the Perplexed Painter was one in which were displayed most brilliantly the remarkable mental aberrations of my amazing friend, Mr. Herlock Sholmes. We were at lunch in our rooms at Shaker Street when the telephone bell rang, and Sholmes, slipping his fish-sandwich into his pocket, removed his feet from the mantelpiece, and answered the call. His face was very grave when he turned from the instrument.

"A client, Sholmes?" I asked.

"A distinguished one, Jotson," he answered. "No less a person than Mr. Scrooluce, the celebrated painter. You have heard of him, of course. His rise to fame has been recent, but his system of painting his pictures with a blacking-brush, and the mystery surrounding their meaning, if any, have made him a great figure in Art circles. No doubt you have heard how he achieved sudden and dazzling success with his picture 'October Moon'."

I shook my head.

"As a medical man, Sholmes, I have to give my attention to more practical matters than Art," I replied.

"True, my dear doctor. But the story is an interesting one," said Sholmes. "Scrooluce, as a young painter, had no success. He painted ships that looked like ships, cornfields that looked like cornfields, clouds that looked like clouds: and but for a happy accident, might have gone on doing so till this day. But it chanced that, having painted one of his usual landscapes, he inadvertently leaned against the canvas while the paint was still wet: after which it resembled nothing in the earth or in the waters under the earth. A

great Art critic came into the studio, while he was cleaning his coat: and, seeing the picture, was overcome with admiration. He hailed it as a work of undoubted genius: and Scrooluce, who had thought of cleaning the canvas for future use, wisely decided to leave it as it was. He was undecided whether to call it 'Venus Rising from the Waves' or 'The Battle of Lepanto', but finally decided on 'October Moon'. From that time, he never looked back. However," added Sholmes, briskly, "we must not waste time. Mr. Scrooluce is in great trouble, and requires my professional assistance."

"What is the nature of the trouble, Sholmes?"

"It seems that some disaster has occurred, while he was away on a holiday, in connection with a portrait he has painted of Lord Popcorn, and another picture called 'Sunset on the Apennines'. He tells me that his lordship was painted with his favourite collie dog, Rover, at his feet, and that he is calling this very afternoon to see the finished picture. He was so very agitated that it is not easy to deduce what has really happened: but he is very anxious for me to go round at once, before Lord Popcorn arrives. So come, my dear Jotson: we must not lose a moment."

"But, my dear Sholmes—"

"This is no time for butting, Jotson," said Herlock Sholmes, severely.

"But," I persisted. "I have several patients to see this afternoon— I really must call upon my patients, Sholmes—"

"Not at all," answered Sholmes. "Let them live, my dear fellow. Come!"

And without waiting for a reply, my amazing friend hurried me out into Shaker Street and into a taxi.

We found Mr. Scrooluce pacing his studio in a state of wild agitation when we were shown in. Two large canvases stood leaning against the wall: and from moment to moment, the painter paused, and stared at one or the other of them, and shook his head despairingly. What was the matter was not clear: but it was evident that something was very much the matter.

"Which?" the painter was exclaiming. "His lordship will be here in a quarter of an hour—he must see the picture. But which—which—which?"

The painter was obviously in a state of utter perplexity: from what cause I could not fathom. Indeed I doubt whether Herlock Sholmes himself was much wiser than I for the moment. Both of us, however, were deeply moved by the agitation and distress of the artist.

As our names were announced, Mr. Scrooluce turned from the pictures, and rushed across to meet us, in his excitement catching my amazing friend by the arm.

"Mr. Sholmes! Can you help me?" he panted.

"Quite!" said Herlock Sholmes, calmly. "If you will give me a few details—you may speak quite freely before my friend Dr. Jotson—"

"But this is no ordinary case," said Mr. Scrooluce, hoarsely. "I am aware of your great reputation, Mr. Sholmes—I know how successfully you in-

vestigated the case of the missing marksman at Bisley—how you traced Lord Stoney de Broke's watch when it mysteriously disappeared after a visit to his uncle—how you, and you alone, tracked down the Lost Chord. But this case, I fear, must be beyond even your powers. Help me if you can—before Lord Popcorn arrives.”

He led us towards the two pictures leaning on the wall. He pointed to them with a trembling finger.

We looked at them. What either was intended to represent, if indeed anything, was a secret known only to the painter. They were, I gathered, painted in his later, or blacking-brush, style: but beyond that I could guess nothing.

“I will tell you the dreadful disaster that has occurred. Mr. Sholmes,” went on Mr. Scrooluce, huskily. “I painted these two pictures before going on a week-end trip. One of them is the portrait of Lord Popcorn with his dog at his feet. The other is ‘Sunset on the Apennines’. Before leaving, I gave strict instructions that nothing in the studio was to be meddled with. Nevertheless, an unthinking housemaid tidied up during my absence. On my return to-day, I found that the pictures had been moved, and, worse than that, that the labels attached to them had disappeared. Lord Popcorn is calling this afternoon for his portrait, Mr. Sholmes, to take it away with him in his car. He will be here in a matter of minutes now. His portrait is here—it is one of these two pictures. But which is it, Mr. Sholmes?”

Mr. Scrooluce paused, and wiped the perspiration from his brow.

Herlock Sholmes nodded, slowly. We now had an inkling of the cause of the painter's perplexity and distress.

“Which?” said Mr. Scrooluce, despairingly. “Which is which? One of these two pictures is the portrait of his lordship—the other is ‘Sunset on the Apennines’. But which, Mr. Sholmes, is which? Is that a problem beyond even your powers, Mr. Sholmes?”

Gazing at the two pictures, I could well understand the painter's perplexity. There was absolutely nothing in either to give a clue. Either might have been the portrait of Lord Popcorn, or a sunset scene in the Italian mountains: or, indeed, anything else. There was not the ghost of a clue.

“His lordship may be here any moment,” muttered Mr. Scrooluce. “Every moment I expect to hear his car. He must take away his picture, Mr. Sholmes. But which is his portrait? Which? Can you help me?”

“I can!” said Herlock Sholmes.

“Bless you for those words,” said Mr. Scrooluce, brokenly.

“Lord Popcorn was painted with his dog Rover?” asked Herlock Sholmes.

“He was! He and his dog are inseparable.”

“Then Rover will be with him when he calls this afternoon?”

“Undoubtedly.”

“Then all is simple,” drawled Herlock Sholmes. “You may rely upon the sagacity of the faithful hound, Mr. Scrooluce, to pick out his master's portrait.”

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure of it. Hark! I hear a cry!" said Sholmes. "Go down and meet his lordship, please, and make sure that his dog accompanies him into the studio. I answer for the rest."

"If you are right—!" gasped Mr. Scrooluce.

"There is no 'if' about it," said Herlock Sholmes, coldly. "My friend Jotson could tell you that. Please go down—"

"You assure me—?"

"I do!"

"I will trust you!" breathed Mr. Scrooluce, and he hurried out of the studio. Alone with Sholmes, I gazed at him. To my surprise, he drew from his pocket the unfinished fish-sandwich which was a part of his interrupted lunch.

"Sholmes!" I exclaimed, "this no time for finishing your lunch—"

"I am not thinking of finishing my lunch, Jotson."

"Then what—"

I broke off, in astonishment, as Herlock Sholmes stepped up to the nearest of the two canvases, and proceeded to rub the fish-sandwich on it. I gazed at him almost open-mouthed. Well as I knew my amazing friend's remarkable methods, I could understand nothing of this.

He stepped back, and replaced the remains of the fish-sandwich in his pocket. There was an inscrutable smile on his face.

"My dear Sholmes—!" I gasped. "What—?"

"Wait and see, my dear Jotson," he replied.

I had not long to wait. The door opened, and Mr. Scrooluce ushered Lord Popcorn into the studio. A collie dog was prancing round their legs.

But the next moment, the dog ceased to prance, made a rush at the canvas on which Sholmes had rubbed the fish-sandwich, and began to lick it with every sign of pleasure.

Mr. Scrooluce stared, evidently amazed by this prompt verification of the assurance Herlock Sholmes had given him. Lord Popcorn smiled genially.

"Rover knows his master!" he remarked. "What?"

"Oh! Yes! He—he—he does!" stammered Mr. Scrooluce. "Undoubtedly! Good dog—good dog!"

. . . . .

"But—!" I remarked later, when we were back in our rooms at Shaker Street.

"But what, Jotson?" drawled Herlock Sholmes. "My client is satisfied. His client is satisfied. So what?"

"But Lord Popcorn's portrait, which his lordship took away in his car, may after all the 'Sunset on the Apennines', Sholmes."

"Quite possibly, Jotson. But as no one could ever know, that is quite irrelevant. You may add to your memoirs, as one more of my astounding successes—The Case of the Perplexed Painter."

# A LODGING *for the* NIGHT



by

FRANK

RICHARDS

## CHAPTER I

### TWO IN THE RAIN

“**B**OTHAH THE wain!”  
Jack Free looked round.

It was raining hard on the road over the Sussex cliffs. It had been a fine autumn afternoon, but the rain had come on suddenly and hard.

“Jack of All Trades”, with his coat-collar turned up, and his head bent to the wind and the rain, tramped on as cheerfully as he could. He was wet, and every moment getting wetter. But there was not a building in sight, and the wayside trees, dripping with rain, did not look inviting; and as there was no shelter to be had, he made up his mind to it. With his head bent, he did not observe that he was overtaking another wet pedestrian on the road, till that exclamation caused him to look up and glance round.

“Bothah this howwid weathah! Bai Jove, this is weally wotten!”

Jack smiled, as he peered through the falling rain, at a youth a little younger

than himself, who was pushing a bike wearily along the muddy road. Why he was pushing it was clear at the second glance—one of the tyres was flat. The unlucky cyclist was afflicted with a puncture at a very unfortunate time.

It was a very elegant youth in a school cap at whom Jack was looking. But it was his accent that drew the boy's attention. Jack of All Trades had knocked about in many places, and heard all sorts of voices, but never one quite like this before. The schoolboy with the bike was evidently speaking to himself, or to space, not being aware of the boy coming up behind him. And as Jack regarded him with interest, he went on, still addressing himself or space:

"Bai Jove! Tom Mewwy was wight—he said it was goin' to wain! Bothah it! It would have been all wight but for that wotten puncture! I weally think my legs will dwop off, if I have to push this jiggah much furthah. It must be anothah mile at least to the Wock. Blow!"

Jack accelerated, and overtook the weary pusher of the bike.

"Can I help?" he asked.

The schoolboy gave a start, at the unexpected voice at his elbow, and looked round. An eyeglass, wet with rain, glimmered at Jack of All Trades.

"Bai Jove! I did not know there was anybody else on the woad! Where did you spwing fwom?"

"Tramping," said Jack, with a smile. "I'm heading for Ridgate—"

"Widgate? That's near Carcwoft—miles fwom heah. You are goin' to get vewy wet befoah you awwive at Widgate."

"I'm fairly wet already! But can I give you a hand pushing the bike? We seem to be going the same way."

"Yaas, wathah! But I am goin' only as fah as the Wock—about anothah mile. It is vewy decent of you to offah to push the bike—I have been pushin' it for miles and miles since that wotten tyre petahed out. If you weally don't mind lendin' a hand—"

"O.K." said Jack, cheerily, and he took the bicycle from the elegant youth's hands, and pushed. The road was rough and muddy, and pushing a bike with a flat tyre was not easy work: but it was Jack's way to be good-natured and obliging, and the schoolboy was evidently fatigued, and immensely relieved to get rid of the task of pushing that troublesome "jigger".

"That's weally fwightfully decent of you," he said. He extracted the wet eyeglass from his eye, rubbed it with his handkerchief, and restored it to its place gleaming, and this also seemed a relief to him. "I wouldn't land it on you only I weally am feahfully tired of pushin' it. I will take it again soon."

"That's all right," said Jack. "It won't hurt me to push it a mile."

They walked on through the rain, Jack pushing the bike, the elegant schoolboy walking by his side, both of them thoroughly wet, and getting wetter.

"This beastly wain took me wathah by surprise, you know," said the



schoolboy. "Tom Mewwy said it looked like wain, but it did not look like wain to me. But of course you don't know Tom Mewwy."

"No," said Jack, smiling.

"A man in the Shell, you know."

"A-a-a-a what?" ejaculated Jack, with a stare. He had heard of eggs in the shell, but not of men in the shell.

"I mean, a chap at my school. I'm in the Fourth form, and Tom Mewwy is in the Shell—the next form up, you know."

"Oh! I—I see."

"But it would have been all wight but for that beastly puncture. I should have weached the Wock befoah the wain came on."

"The Wock?" repeated Jack, puzzled.

"Yaas, that's the name of my bwothah's seaside bungalow. It is called the Wock because it looks out ovah the wocks."

"Oh! The Rock?"

"Yaas—I said the Wock!"

"Oh! Yes! I see."

"It's only ten miles fwom St. Jim's—quite an easy wun on a bike on a half-holiday—but for the wain and the puncture, you know."

"St. Jim's?"

"Yaas, my school, you know. Pwobably you have heard of it."

"I—I—I don't think—I don't remember—"

"Bai Jove! That is vevy wemarkable! I thought ewevybody had heard of St. Jim's."

"Well, I've heard of it now," said Jack, with a smile. "Are you allowed so far from your school on a half-holiday?"

"No feah—this is miles out of bounds. But of course I asked leave fwom Wailton."

"Railton?"

"My housemastah, you know. I'm in the School House. That's cock-house at St. Jim's. The New House is simply nowhah. Wailton is the House beak in the School House. He gave me leave to wun acwoss to the Wock on my bike. I say, shall I take it now?"

"No, that's all right."

"It is wathah a welief to get wid of it for a while, if you weally don't mind pushin' it—"

"Not a bit."

"Vevy many thanks, deah boy. My name's D'Arcy," went on the elegant youth, "Arthur Augustus D'Arcy."

"Mine's Free—Jack Free."

"I am vevy pleased to make your acquaintance, Fwee. It was vevy lucky you turned up on this woad—vevy lucky for me, I mean. You are pushin' that jiggah evah so much quickah than I was."

"I'm more used to hard work, you know," said Jack, smiling.

"I don't know—we work pwetty hard at St. Jim's," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Form evvey day, you know, and pwep aftah tea, and then the games. It's wathah a stwenuous life, weally."

Jack chuckled. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy did not look, to him, a youth who led a very strenuous life—not, at all events, in comparison with his own. But his own way of life was evidently far out of the experience of the schoolboy.

"But what are you doin'—hikin'?" asked D'Arcy.

"Well, sort of," said Jack. "Hoofing it, at any rate. I'm in hope of picking up a job at Ridgate, on a coasting vessel."

"Bai Jove! Weally!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "It must be wippin' to go to sea. I wathah think I should like it—a life on the ocean wave, a home on the wollin' deep, you know, where the scattahed watahs wave, and the winds their wevels keep, what?"

"I can't quite see you in the foc's'le of a coasting tramp," said Jack, laughing. "A fellow has to rough it."

"Oh, I can wuff it all wight! Nothin' soft about us at St. Jim's," said Arthur Augustus. "The fact is, deah boy, that fellows have to wuff it at school—it's vevy diffewent fwom home. Fwinstance, I bwush my own hat—"

"Do you, really?" gasped Jack.

"Yaas, wathah! And I help Blake and Hewwies and Dig to wash up the cwocks in the study aftah tea. Nothin' soft about us, I can tell you. We can work!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! Have I said somethin' funnay?" asked Arthur Augustus. "I weally did not know that I was makin' a joke."

"Oh! No! Not at all. Is that the Rock?" asked Jack, with a nod towards a handsome bungalow that stood back from the road, towards the cliffs.

Arthur Augustus glanced round.

"Yaas, wathah! We have weached it much more quickly than if I had wheeled that w'etched bike! Bai Jove! I shall be jollay glad to get out of this wotten wain. So will you, deah boy. You're comin' in out of the wain."

Jack Free stopped at the gate, with the bicycle. He looked at the elegant swell of St. Jim's. Then he looked at the bungalow—an extensive and expensive-looking building in its own grounds: and then he looked down at his own well-worn clothes. Then he shook his head.

"I think I'll push on to Ridgate," he said.

"Not in this wain, deah boy."

"Well, I can't get much wetter, and—"

"But you can get vevy much dwyah, befoah a fiah," said Arthur Augustus. "Come in with me, and get yourself dwy, Fwee."

"But—" Jack hesitated.

"I shall have to scwounge some tea heah, too. Owin' to that wotten

puncture, I shall not be back at St. Jim's for tea. We'll scwounge tea togetah, what?"

"But your friends here—"

"Nobody there, deah boy."

"Nobody?" asked Jack, in surprise.

"Wathah not! You see, my bwathah Conway doesn't come down till the week-end," explained the St. Jim's junior. "I've wun ovah this aftahnoon to open up the bung weady for him—openin' the windows, you know and airin' the place— I've a latch-key in my pocket—"

"Oh!" said Jack.

"I should have been on my way back now, but for that wotten puncture. I shall have to mend it, befoah I can get goin' again, though. Pway come in out of the wain, Fwee."

"Oh, all right! And thanks," said Jack.

Arthur Augustus opened the gate, and Jack pushed the bike up a gravelled drive, into a roomy wooden porch before the front door. Both of them were glad to get into the porch out of the falling rain.

"Bai Jove! This is wathah bettah," remarked Arthur Augustus. "Now we'll be inside in a jiffy, and get a fiah goin' to dwy our clobbah."

Arthur Augustus groped in his pockets for the latch-key. Having found it, he inserted it in the lock of the door, and in a moment more, the swell of St. Jim's and the waif of the roads were in the bungalow.

## CHAPTER II

### JACK FINDS A LODGING FOR THE NIGHT

"**T**OPPIN'!" SAID Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Fine!" agreed Jack Free, with a cheery smile.

It was quite a pleasant picture in the bungalow. Jack Free, accustomed to turning his hand to any kind of work, soon found all that was wanted, and had a fire going in a big wide fireplace in the lounge hall. Half a dozen rooms opened from the hall: and from one of them, a bedroom, Arthur Augustus sorted out a couple of dressing gowns, and slippers. With a big log fire blazing and crackling, wet clothes were hung up before it to dry, and the two boys donned the dressing gowns—rather large for them, but an agreeable change after wet clothes. Then Jack, with the assistance of Arthur Augustus, sorted out various things from the larder, jammed a kettle on the fire and made tea: and they sat down to a cheery meal. Outside, the rain was still coming down hard and fast, dashing on the windows, and rattling on the roof. But within, all was cosy and comfortable. Arthur Augustus was serenely content: and Jack's face was very bright.

To the swell of St. Jim's, scrounging a tea in this picnic fashion, while his clothes dried at the fire, came under the head of "roughing" it. To the waif who had known the seamy side of life under many aspects, it was the last word in comfort, if not luxury.

Jack Free had been on the road for a good many days, picking up a job here and there, always cheerful, and looking on the bright side of things, making the best of good luck when it came, and keeping a stiff upper lip when the luck was bad—and roughing it in a way that the younger son of Lord Eastwood had never known or envisaged. To Arthur Augustus, the "Rock" was a seaside bungalow where his brother, Lord Conway, came occasionally, with a party of friends. To Jack of All Trades, it seemed a mansion. Pleasantest of all to him, was the cheery friendly manner of the St. Jim's junior, who seemed wholly unaware of any distinction between himself and his new acquaintance, and treated him exactly as he would have treated Blake or Herries or Digby at St. Jim's. Arthur Augustus was quite unconscious of the impression he had made on the waif of the roads, and would have been surprised to learn that Jack Free, after a couple of hours' acquaintance, would willingly have gone through fire and water for him.

"Yaas, toppin'," went on Arthur Augustus. "I was more than weady for my tea, you know. You seem wathah a handy chap at scwoungin' a meal, Fwee."

"I've scrounged a good many," said Jack, with a smile.

"It's wathah like tea in the study, weally," remarked Arthur Augustus. "Wathah lucky that old Conway had laid in the gwub for his week-end party, what? It's wathah a lark fellows waitin' on themselves at meals, isn't it?"

"Oh, quite!" grinned Jack.

"The fact is, it's wathah a good thing for a fellow to learn to look aftah himself, Fwee," said Arthur Augustus, wisely. "It pwevents him fwom gwowin' soft, and all that. We scwounge tea in the study at St. Jim's, and fw the sosses on the study fiah, and wash up the cwocks ourselves. We nevah tea in hall unless we are stony bwoke."

"Oh!" said Jack. Looking at Arthur Augustus, he could not imagine that magnificent youth ever being "stony broke".

"That wotten wain is still comin' down," said Arthur Augustus, with a glance at the window. "Looks like lastin' till dark. I shall have to plough through it to get back—mustn't miss woll."

"Woll?" repeated Jack.

"Callin', ovah, you know: Wailton would give a man lines for cuttin' woll," said Arthur Augustus, shaking his head. "Howevah, old Conway has left a waincoat heah, and I shall bowwow it, so that will be all wight. Bai Jove, though, I must get on to that puncture, or I shall be late."

"Leave that to me," said Jack, getting up out of a comfortable armchair. "I'll set that right for you."

"Not at all, deah boy—couldn't impose on you like that," said Arthur Augustus. "Those clothes look dwy now. Bettah change, and get goin'."

Jack Free was changed in a few minutes. But it was a long process with the swell of St. Jim's: and he was still busy when Jack opened the door, up-ended the bike in the porch, unpacked the puncture outfit, and got to work. Arthur Augustus's voice reached him from within.

"Bai Jove! The clobbah's dwy all wight but it looks feahfully wumpled. It's wathah wuff on a fellow to have his clobbah wumpled. Howevah, it won't show undah a waincoat—that's wathah a comfort. What are you doin' with the bike, Fwee?"

"Getting it ready."

"Thank you vewy much, deah boy. If you get the tyre off, weady for me, it will save time."

Jack Free grinned. The puncture was already in process of repair. It was likely to be finished a long while before Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was ready to begin.

Having, at length, encased himself in his elegant though rumpled clobber, Arthur Augustus had a great deal of brushing to do, and a good many final touches to give: and when, at length, he emerged into the porch, the puncture was finished, and the bike right way up again.

"Bai Jove! Have you done it?" asked Arthur Augustus, in surprise.

"O.K. now," said Jack, with a smile.

"That's vewy good of you, Fwee. It would have taken me much longah. You are a handy chap, and no mistake. I am vewy much obliged. Bai Jove, that beastly wain is still comin' down." Arthur Augustus gazed into the falling rain, and shook his noble head. "I shall have to chance it."

"You must get back for roll?" asked Jack.

"Yaas, wathah."

"I've noticed that there's a telephone here—couldn't you ring them up and say you're waiting for the rain to stop?"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy chuckled.

"We're not quite so fwee and easy at school as you are on the woad, deah boy," he answered. "I can see Wailton's face if I wang him up to tell him that! No, if the bike's weady, I'll wush off."

**BZZZZZZZZZZ!**

It was the ring of the telephone bell, from the cabinet that opened off the lounge hall. Arthur Augustus gave a little jump, as he looked round.

"Bai Jove! that's wathah queeah," he remarked.

"The telephone," said Jack.

"But who can be wingin' up? Conway's fwiends know that he won't be heah till the week-end," said Arthur Augustus, puzzled. "If I hadn't wun ovah this aftahnoon, there would be nobody heah to take the call. It is weally vewy peculiah for the telephone to wing in an unoccupied bung, isn't it?"

Buzzzzzzzz!

"Vewy cuwious indeed," said Arthur Augustus, shaking his head. "I weally don't undahstand it."

Jack grinned.

"Why not take the call, and see who it is?" he suggested. That did not seem, so far, to have occurred to Arthur Augustus.

"Yaas, wathah," he assented, and he crossed the hall, opened the door of the telephone cabinet, and took up the receiver. "Hallo!"

"Is that the Rock bungalow?" came a voice over the wires.

"Yaas."

"Lord Conway there?"

"No, my bwothah does not come down till Saturday."

"Your brother?"

"Yaas: I am Conway's bwothah."

"Oh!" The voice sounded startled. "Are you staying at the bungalow, then?"

"Oh, no! I came ovah fwom St. Jim's this aftahnoon to open it up and look wound. I am just off back to school," answered Arthur Augustus. "What is wanted, please? I can take a message for Lord Conway."

"Never mind, if you are going back to your school. No friends of Lord Conway's have arrived yet?"

"No! They're all comin' togethah on Saturday. Who is speakin'?"

"Then I'll ring up again on Saturday. Thanks."

The unknown interlocutor rang off.

Arthur Augustus rejoined Jack Free in the hall.

"Only somebody wantin' to speak to old Conway," he said. "He wouldn't have got an answah if I hadn't happened to be heah. Now I shall have to push off. What are you goin' to do, deah boy?"

"Push off too," said Jack, smiling.

Arthur Augustus wrinkled his noble brow in thought. Then he shook his head.

"Not in this wain," he said. "I shall covah the ground like anythin' on the bike, and I shall have old Conway's waincoat, too. Are you in a special huwwy to get to Widgate-to-night?"

"Oh, no! But—"

"It's comin' down vewy heavy, deah boy."

"Yes, but—"

"Somebody expectin' you at Widgate?"

Jack laughed.

"No! I know nobody there. But I shall have to find a lodging before dark if I can, and—"

"A lodgin'—aftah miles in the wain! Wubbish!"

"But, you see—"

"If you want a lodgin' for the night, deah boy, stay heah till mornin'," said Arthur Augustus. "The beds are vewy comfortable, and there is plenty of gwub for suppah and bweakfast—"

Jack stared at him blankly.

"But—my dear chap—" he stammered.

"Don't you like the ideah?"

"Oh! Yes! But—"

"Of course, it's wathah wuffin' it, campin' out in a bungalow for the night. But bettah than miles in the wain, and gettin' dwenched, and huntin' for a lodgin' in a stwange town. Don't you think so?"

"Yes," gasped Jack, "But—"

"I wish I could stay on and keep you company: but there would be a feahful wow at St. Jim's if I didn't turn up," said Arthur Augustus. "You're not nervous about campin' in a place on your own?"

Jack laughed.

"I've done that too often to care about it," he said. "But—my dear fellow—what would your brother say, if you let a perfect stranger stay in the bungalow—"

"That's all wight: Conway would say the same. He's a vewy good-natured chap."

"But—!" stammered Jack.

"Bai Jove, you keep on buttin'. What is it now?"

"But I'm a stranger to you, D'Arcy. How do you know you can trust a stranger in the place—all sorts of expensive things about—"

"Wats!"

"Eh?"

"I wepeat, wats! My fwriends at St. Jim's know that I am a fellow of tact and judgment, deah boy. Think I don't know when a chap's all wight?"

"You're very kind," stammered Jack, "But—"

"Pway don't be an ass, Fwee," said Arthur Augustus. "You wathah offend me by suggestin' that I couldn't twust you. I wegard you as wathah an ass, if you don't mind my sayin' so."

"But—"

"You are certainly not goin' through this howwid wain, Fwee. Camp heah for the night, deah boy, and mind you lock the fwont door safely when you go in the mornin'. That will be all wight."

Jack gazed at him. He felt something like a lump in his throat for a moment. He nodded at last.

"I'll be jolly glad to lodge here for the night, D'Arcy," he said. "I'll be jolly careful to lock up when I go in the morning. I don't know how to thank you—"

"Wubbish, deah boy. Now I'll be pushin' off," said Arthur Augustus. "Pway make yourself at home, and don't spare the gwub."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy shook hands with his new acquaintance. Enveloped in a raincoat several sizes too large for him, he pushed out his "jigger", mounted, and pushed off in the falling rain.

Jack Free stood watching him, as he went down the rainy road. He had known the St. Jim's junior only a couple of hours or so, and it was not likely that he would ever see him again: but he had taken a tremendous liking to him. In his rough and tumble wandering life, he had met and known all sorts of men and boys: and had made both friends and foes: but seldom had he met a fellow whom he liked so much as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of St. Jim's.

Not till the cyclist had long vanished in the rain, did Jack turn, and re-enter the bungalow. Then, with a thoughtful face, he went in, and shut the door, and made his preparations for "camping". The rain was still falling in the falling dusk: but the waif of the roads had found his lodging for the night.

### CHAPTER III

#### FALLEN AMONG THIEVES!

**J**ACK FREE AWOKE SUDDENLY.

He had been fast asleep, and dreaming, curled up in a deep, wide, soft-cushioned settee in the lounge hall of Rock Bungalow.

Although the St. Jim's junior had told him to make himself at home in the bungalow, Jack had decided not to take that too literally. He did not feel that he could venture to disturb any of the beds, or occupy any of the rooms that were to be occupied by Lord Conway and his guests at the week-end. All he wanted was shelter from the weather, and a night's sleep: and he intended to be on the road at the first glimmer of dawn. So not very long after Arthur Augustus had departed, he turned in on the settee in his clothes, covered himself with a rug, pillowed his head on a cushion, and went to sleep.

It was yet early—far earlier than bedtime for Arthur Augustus at St. Jim's. There was still a glimmer of watery sunshine through the rain on the Channel when Jack turned in. But he had had a long day on the road, and he intended to turn out at dawn: and he wanted all the sleep he could get before he went on the road again. About a minute after his head lay on the cushion, he was asleep. Dreams came in his slumber, of old days with a caravan on the road, of riding in the circus ring, of a windjammer rocking to a gale—the kind pleasant face of the St. Jim's junior mingling with many other faces from the past. And then, suddenly, he awoke, without quite knowing what had awakened him.



It had still been raining heavily when he turned in. But the rain had ceased now: there was no longer the dashing of raindrops on the windows, nor the rattling on the roof. It was early evening—but silence as of the tomb lay on the lonely road over the Sussex cliffs: yet he knew that there must have been some sound that had awakened him from slumber.

In a lonely building, at least a quarter of a mile from any other, some fellows might have been nervous in the dark hours. But the boy who had tramped solitary roads, and camped in strange places, had nothing in the way of nerves. He sat up on the settee, to listen: and from the silence came sounds from outside the bungalow.

There were footsteps on the gravel drive from the gate to the door. Jack's first thought was that D'Arcy might have come back for something. It was densely dark in the hall: the last glimmer of the fire had died out. He could not see the clock, and did not know what time it was: but he knew that it was yet early in the evening. Someone, certainly, was coming up from the road to the bungalow, and he could not imagine who it could be, unless it was the St. Jim's junior.

He pushed off the rug, and stepped off the settee. If D'Arcy, for some inexplicable reason, had come back, he was going to let him in without delay. But he had to know first. On that lonely road, there were probably tramps about; he did not intend to open the door, after dark, till he was sure that he would not be letting in some lawless character who might have nefarious designs on articles of value in the bungalow.

He crossed to the window beside the porch, drew the blind a little aside, and looked out.

The rain had entirely ceased, and it was a fine autumn evening. Over the cliffs gleamed a silver crescent of moon, the light falling clearly into the garden surrounding the bungalow.

"Oh," murmured Jack, as he looked.

On the gravel drive a large van stood. The lights were out, but he made it out quite clearly in the moonlight. He knew now that it was the sound of the car grinding up the gravel to the porch that had awakened him. It was a long motor-van, and the moonlight glimmered on lettering painted on the side: SMITH'S REMOVALS.

Jack stared at it.

It was a furniture-van: and why it was there was rather a puzzle. The bungalow was fully furnished, and it could hardly be a consignment of furniture that had arrived at the Rock.

But it seemed less likely still that it was there to take furniture away, as D'Arcy had told him that the week-end party were coming down on Saturday.

The arrival of the van was quite a puzzle to Jack, and he could only stare at it and wonder.

He caught sight of the driver, who had got down from the driving-seat, and

was standing by the van smoking a cigarette. There was a sound of footsteps, from someone else whom he could not see.

But a moment or two later, another figure came into sight. It was that of a man in a dark coat and a bowler hat, with sharp features, and extremely sharp eyes, that seemed to glint as the moonlight fell on his face.

His voice came to Jack's ear, as he spoke to the driver.

"O.K., Sam! I've looked round. Not a sign of a soul."

"There wouldn't be, boss, if the party ain't coming along till the end of the week."

"No! But the 'phone was answered. Can't be too careful."

"There ain't nobody now. There'd be a light."

"It's all right! Get the van open, ready for loading. Safe as houses, but the sooner we're through, the better."

"You got your keys?"

"Do I ever forget them?"

"O.K., boss."

The driver went to the rear of the van, and began to open the double-doors. The man in the bowler hat disappeared into the porch, and there was a sound of a key at the lock.

Jack Free stepped back from the window.

His heart was beating a little fast.

Every word uttered by the men outside, only a few feet from him, had come distinctly to his ears.

The van was there to remove a load. A furniture-van, with SMITH'S REMOVALS painted on it, certainly seemed commonplace and reassuring enough. But what he had heard was far from reassuring.

It was possible—though it seemed unlikely after what D'Arcy had said—that a removal firm had instructions to remove furniture from the bungalow. But there was something stealthy in the look of these two men, and if all was above board, why had the man in the bowler hat scouted round the building, and referred to the 'phone call?

Jack breathed rather hard.

He had heard of residences being cleared out, during the absence of their owners, by crooks coolly arriving with a furniture-van, sometimes carrying out such raids in broad daylight under the eyes of unsuspecting passers-by. And the Rock bungalow was a solitary building: there were no passers-by to see what was going on. If this was a robbery, it was, as the man in the bowler hat had said, "safe as houses".

But was it?

It looked like it, to the boy standing there, breathing hard in the dark. But he could not be sure.

If the man had a key to the door, surely he was entitled to enter! Jack listened to the sound at the lock.

The man was trying one key after another. That did not look as if he had been given a latch-key to carry out a job of removal. On the other hand, he might have put it on a key-ring, with others

Key after key was tried. Then suddenly there was a click, and a cold breath of air told Jack that the door had opened.

"O.K., Sam," came the sharp voice. "It's open."

"Put on a light, George."

"Sure! But we don't want a lot of light on this job."

"Nobody on the road."

"You never know."

"We got to 'ave a light for moving the stuff, George."

"I know that! One light'll be enough. I'll find the switch in a tick."

Jack's heart thumped.

Every word he heard confirmed his suspicion that this was a planned robbery. The 'phone call that D'Arcy had answered was another confirmation. He knew the old trick of thieves in ringing up on the telephone, to make sure that a house was unoccupied before carrying out a raid.

He could not be sure, but he was almost sure. And as he heard the man fumbling in the dark for the lighting-switch, he realized, suddenly and very clearly, that he would be revealed immediately the light came on—and if these men were thieves—

Swiftly, he backed to the settee, and ducked down behind its high back.

He was only just in time. A moment after he had ducked, the light came on. The driver came in, and joined the sharp-faced man. Jack, out of sight, could not see them now. But he could hear.

"Nobody at home, George," said the driver, with a husky chuckle.

"No! But it gave me a start when that schoolboy answered the 'phone this afternoon. I never expected an answer."

"He's gone all right."

"He said he was just off! If he came from the school he names, that's ten miles off, and he's safe enough now. All clear."

"A bit of a surprise for his lordship on Saturday," said Sam, with another husky chuckle.

"Get going. Begin with the big things—"

"That settee—"

Jack's heart throbbed, behind the settee.

"No: the piano first. Run in the trolley."

"O.K."

The driver tramped out again.

Jack heard the scratch of a match. "George" was lighting a cigarette, while he waited for the driver to run in the trolley—some sort of hand-vehicle on which the piano was to be run out to the van. If they were not genuine removal-men, they evidently had the outfit for the business.

Hidden behind the settee, the boy tried to think it out. He was certain—almost certain—that this was a bare-faced robbery—a couple of thieves clearing out an untenanted house. Yet it was possible—

But if they were thieves, what was going to happen to him, when they found him on the spot? As soon as they moved the settee, they would see him. Jack Free had plenty of pluck: but he knew that he had no chance in the hands of a pair of crooks—and there was no help at hand: no one to hear the loudest shout.

He was not, however, thinking much of his own danger. He could have dodged out and escaped while the thieves were ransacking the house. But he did not think for a moment of doing so.

If this was a robbery, he was going to prevent it, somehow. It was a chance to repay that kind-hearted schoolboy, and at any risk to himself, he was glad of the chance.

But he had to keep out of their sight.

There was a sound of wheels in the hall. Sam was wheeling in the trolley for the conveyance of the piano. Probably the settee would be next on the list. The piano was in a room that opened off the hall. Jack heard a door open and, Sam wheeled the trolley in, followed by the sharp-faced man.

This was Jack's opportunity. He had to remain undiscovered, while he thought out what he could do. He lifted his head cautiously, and peered over the settee. The two men were in the adjoining room, and he heard a grunt as of exertion: they were getting the piano on the trolley. For the moment—probably for some minutes—they were busy, and out of sight.

He rose silently to his feet, moved out from behind the settee, and darted into the telephone cabinet.

That was a secure spot: there was nothing in it but the telephone and a chair: the thieves—if thieves they were—would probably not look into it at all. It was, at all events, a safe spot for the present.

He closed the half-glass door behind him, his heart beating. Obviously they had not the slightest suspicion that anyone was in the house: but they were wary and alert, and a sound would have betrayed him. But he made no sound.

The telephone was under his hand. That was a means of giving the alarm—but he could not telephone without being heard, while the two men were in the house. But if they both went out to the van—

They were fairly certain to do so. One man could hardly have handled the piano by himself, even with the trolley to wheel it to the van. Once they were both outside, he could chance it.

A ring to the police station at Ridgate—!

It looked like robbery. Yet there was a chance, at least a chance, that it was not so. He could not be certain—hardly certain enough to call up the police. But another idea came into his head, as he thought it over. D'Arcy would know—and it was possible to get D'Arcy's school on the 'phone.

As soon as that thought came into his mind, Jack picked up the directory that lay beside the instrument. He remembered the name D'Arcy had mentioned—Railton, his housemaster. There was an electric lamp in the cabinet—but he could not venture to switch it on. But sufficient light came through the glass of the door from the hall, to enable him to look through the telephone directory.

He opened it at the R's, and ran his finger down till he came to Railton. There were several Railtons: but he soon found the one he wanted: Railton, V. St. James's School, near Rylcombe. That was, and must be, the housemaster D'Arcy had mentioned. As soon as he was safe from being overheard, he could ring up Mr. Railton, and ask to speak to D'Arcy. Then he would know!

He noted the number, and then waited, with beating heart. There was a sound of wheels again.

Peering from the cabinet, through the glass of the door, he saw the trolley emerge into the hall, with the piano on it. Both men were handling the trolley. They rolled it to the front door, and rolled it out, and Jack heard it grinding on the gravel of the drive.

Now was his chance. They would be five minutes, at least, getting the piano into the van: probably longer. It was his chance—and probably the only chance he would have of telephoning unheard.

Swiftly, he dialled Mr. Railton's number at St. Jim's, and waited, almost trembling with eagerness, for an answer from the school.

#### CHAPTER IV

### ARTHUR AUGUSTUS KNOWS BEST!

“WUBBISH!”  
“My dear ass—”

“Wats!”

“Now, look here, Gussy—”

“Wot!”

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the St. Jim's Fourth, was not often emphatic. But he was most emphatically emphatic now.

Prep was over in No. 6 study in the School House at St. Jim's. An argument was proceeding in that study. Jack Blake, Herries, and Digby were all arguing with their noble chum, and finding that their arguments rolled off him like water off a duck.

“Wubbish, wats, and wot!” repeated Arthur Augustus, firmly. “I should

have thought that you fellows had wealized, by this time, that I have some tact and judgment. I twust that I am not likely to be mistaken in a chap."

"Fathead!" said Blake.

"Ass!" said Herries.

"Chump!" said Digby.

"Weally, you fellows—"

"Hallo, what's the row in this study?" The door of No. 6 was pushed open, and Tom Merry looked in, with Manners and Lowther, on their way down after prep.

"We could hear you down the passage," said Manners.

"Little birds in their nest should agree," said Monty Lowther, solemnly.

"Otherwise they fall out."

"Bai Jove! Is that one of your wotten jokes, Lowthah?"

"No: one of my good ones."

"That ass—!" said Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"That image—"

"I wefuse to be called an image, Blake."

"That chucklehead," continued Blake. "What do you think he's done this time?"

"It will surprise you, even in Gussy," said Dig.

"My dear chap," said Tom Merry. "Could anything Gussy does surprise anybody? But what is it—give it a name—"

"It's nothin' weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Well, hear what it is," said Blake. "Gussy cut over on his bike this afternoon to open up that bung on the coast—naturally he would choose a rainy afternoon for opening up a bung—"

"It was not wainin' when I started, Blake. The wain came on vewy unexpectedly."

"Then he goes and gets a puncture," continued Blake. "Sort of thing he would get. If there's any punctures lying around, Gussy's the man to collect them."

"Weally, Blake—"

"So he wheels his bike in the rain," said Blake, "and a tramp—"

"He was not a twamp, Blake."

"My mistake—a gentleman of the open road. Is that right?"

"Wats!"

"A gentleman of the open road lends him a hand pushing the bike. So Gussy takes him in and stands him tea in the bung. So far, so good. Then, instead of seeing the gentleman safe off the premises before he left, and locking up after him, he offers him a lodging for the night in the bung—"

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"And leaves him there in possession," said Blake. "He'd never seen the man before—"

"He was not a man, Blake—he was only a little oldah than myself, and a vewy nice chap indeed—"

"He'd never seen him before, and didn't know him from Adam," said Blake. "All he knew about him was that he offered to push the bike."

"That was vewy kind and considerate of him, Blake, as I was very fatigued pushin' that beastly jigger—"

"And he lets him camp in old Conway's bung!" said Blake. "He's there now, it seems—unless he's walked off already with the piano in his trouser's pocket."

"You uttah ass—!"

"You know what that bung's like," went on Blake. "Not a common or garden bung, like ordinary mortals have. Bung full of expensive things. Gold and silver plate studded with diamonds—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Nothin' of the kind," exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

"Chairs and tables encrusted with pearls—"

"You feahful ass—"

"Anyhow, jolly expensive," said Blake. "And Gussy's left a tramp—"

"I wepeat that he was not a twamp."

"I mean a young gentleman of the road—Gussy's left a young gentleman of the road in that bung, to carry on just as he likes. Is that the limit?"

"And some over," said Herries.

"Ten to one he's gone by this time, with everything he can cram into his pockets," said Dig.

"Wats!"

Tom Merry whistled.

"Wasn't it a bit reckless, Gussy?" he asked.

"Not at all, deah boy."

"You'd never seen the chap before?"

"Not till he offahed me a hand with the bike."

"You don't know anything about him?"

"Oh, yaas. He told me some things."

"Hem! Nothing but what he told you?"

"No!"

"And he's camped in Conway's bung?"

"Yaas, wathah."

"Um!" said Tom Merry.

"Oh, he went on as soon as the rain stopped," said Blake. "Let's hope he locked the door after him, so that other young gentlemen of the road won't be able to barge in and take a cut."

"He did nothin' of the sort, Blake! I invited him to lodge there for the

night, and he is doin' so. He will lock up safely when he goes in the mornin'."

"Dear old Gussy!" said Blake, affectionately.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Anybody could pull Gussy's leg, of course—"

"Wats."

"Sort of gold mine, that bung, for any tramp who could get in," remarked Herries. "And Gussy's let him in, and left him there."

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Can you beat it?" asked Dig.

"I wepeat, you duffahs, that my fwiend Fwee is a vevy decent chap," said Arthur Augustus. "I twust I know a decent chap when I see one."

"But—if you've made a mistake—!" said Tom.

"That is all wight, Tom Mewwy—I haven't."





"Do you ever make anything else, old bean?" inquired Monty Lowther.

"Wats!"

"By gum," said Manners. "Gussy may be right—the chap may be straight. But—"

"But—!" said Blake.

"Jolly risky," said Tom.

"I do not see any wisk in it whatevah, Tom Mewwy. The chap is stwaight as a stwing."

Six juniors looked at Arthur Augustus, and looked at one another. What his "friend Free" might be like, they had not the faintest idea. It was possible that Arthur Augustus had judged him correctly, and that it was all right. But—to six fellows it seemed that there was a very considerable "but". To leave an absolute stranger, of whom he knew nothing except that he was on the roads, in sole occupation of a lonely building full of expensive things, undoubtedly seemed to Tom Merry and Co. rather the limit. If Free, whoever Free was, was straight, it was all right. But if he wasn't—! And the only fellow study who had real faith in Gussy's tact and judgment was Gussy in the himself!

"Well, it's done now," said Tom Merry, at last. "Let's hope for the best."

"That's all very well," said Blake. "But something ought to be done, before Gussy's tramp gets clear with everything he can lay his hands on. Railton would let him use his 'phone for a telephone call to the police station at Ridgate—and the bobby on the beat would give the place a look-in."

"That's not a bad idea, Gussy," said Tom.

"I wegard it as an uttahly wotten ideah, Tom Mewwy. It would imply distwust of that vevy decent chap Fwee."

"But as you don't know the chap, he might be anything—"

"He is all wight."

"Well, how do you know he's all right?" demanded Herries.

"I can twust my own judgment, Hewwies."

"Now, look here, Gussy—" said Dig.

"Wats!"

"You can't leave it as it is," said Blake.

"Wubbish!"

"Ten to one, he's got all the spoons in his pocket at this very minute."

"Wot!"

"Suppose you go and ask Railton!" suggested Manners.

"I hardly think that Wailton's opinion would be worth more than mine, Mannahs, as he has nevah seen the chap."

"But look here—!" roared Blake.

"Pway don't woar at a fellow, Blake! I have told you several times that it throws me into a fluttah to be woared at."

"You howling ass—"

There was a tap at the study door. Blake broke off, and seven juniors looked round, and Toby, the House page, appeared in the doorway.

"Master D'Arcy here?" said Toby.

"Yaas, wathah! Heah I am, Toby."

"Mr. Railton wants you in his study, sir."

"Bai Jove! What the dooce can Wailton want, aftah pwep!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Is anythin' up, Toby?"

"Mr. Railton had the receiver off the telephone, sir! I think he has taken a call for you," said Toby.

"Oh! Pewwaps I had bettah go," said Arthur Augustus, and he left the study, and followed the page down the stairs.

Tom Merry and Co. exchanged rather startled glances. A telephone call for a junior was an extremely uncommon occurrence, more especially after prep. It was a sufficient indication that something uncommon had occurred.

"By gum!" said Blake, with a deep breath. "I—I wonder if it's from Ridgate—something happened at the bung—!"

"Copped that tramp walking off with the spoons, perhaps," said Herries.

"That's it, very likely," said Dig, with a nod.

"Poor old Gussy!" said Tom Merry. "If it's something like that—!"

"The ass!" said Blake.

"The fathead!" said Herries.

"The chump!" said Dig.

Six fellows waited rather anxiously for Arthur Augustus D'Arcy to return to the study. They had no doubt that something had happened—and they were very anxious to learn what! And as the minutes passed, and Arthur Augustus did not return, they went down to look for him.

## CHAPTER V

### A TIP ON THE TELEPHONE

JACK FREE listened. He could hear sounds from the drive outside the bungalow. The two men were getting the piano into the van, and there was a certain amount of noise in the proceeding. But if they were speaking—as doubtless they were—he could not hear their voices. So he knew that they would not hear him, in the telephone cabinet, if he could get through before they came back into the building. How long they would be, he could not tell—surely five minutes at least. But he was feverishly anxious to get through.

A deep voice came over the wires.

"Hallo!"

"Is that St. Jim's?" asked Jack, breathlessly.

"Yes! Mr. Railton speaking," came the deep, pleasant voice. "What is it?"

"I'm speaking from Rock Bungalow, on the coast—Lord Conway's sea-side bungalow—the brother of Master D'Arcy of the school—"

"Well?"

"Can I speak to Master D'Arcy? At once! It's very urgent—"

"Who are you?"

"My name's Jack Free."

"You belong to the place?"

"Oh! No! Master D'Arcy let me stay here to lodge for the night—"

"What?"

"Do let me speak to Master D'Arcy! Some men are removing furniture from the house, and I—I think it's robbery! I want to ask Master D'Arcy whether it's all right."

"Bless my soul!"

"If they catch me at the telephone they'll stop me—if it's thieves, as I think! Just a word to Master D'Arcy—"

"I will send for him at once! Hold the line."

"Yes, yes."

There was silence on the telephone. Jack waited feverishly. He understood that some time must be taken in sending for D'Arcy: but the house-master, surely, would understand that it was urgent. Every minute was precious. If the thieves came back into the house—and he was practically certain that they were thieves—!

A long, long minute passed, and another. They seemed almost like hours to the excited boy in the telephone cabinet at Rock Bungalow. He could still hear faint noises from the drive outside. The piano was heavy and cumbersome: and the two men had plenty to do to park it in the van. They were still busy with it—but for how long?

An age seemed to have elapsed, when a voice he had heard before that day came through from the school ten miles away.

"Is that young Fwee?"

"Yes, yes," panted Jack.

"Mr. Wailton has told me what you said to him—what—"

"Yes, yes! Two men are here removing furniture from the bungalow—"

"Bai Jove!"

"Just at this minute they're getting the piano into the van—"

"Gweat Scott!"

"—so I'm able to speak: but when I hear them coming back, I shall have to cut off at once—if they're thieves. Are they?" panted Jack. "You must

know whether any orders have been given for the furniture to be removed this evening."

"Nothin' of the kind, deah boy! It is vewy astonishin'! My bwotah Conway is comin' down on Saturday, as I told you—"

"No removal has been ordered?"

"Not at all."

"Then these two men are thieves, as I thought."

"Yaas, wathah! If they are takin' anythin' whatevah away fwom the Wock, they are burglahs."

"I was sure of it—but I had to ask you. Look here, D'Arcy, I may have to cut off any second. I think they intend to clear everything out of the house, from what I have heard them say—"

"The wottahs!"

"—It will take them some time—an hour at least! Lots of time to get through to the police at Ridgate, and ask them to send constables here to stop them—"

"Bai Jove! That's a vewy bwight ideah."

"They've got the piano out so far! There are two of them—they call one another Sam and George. I was sure they were thieves, from what I heard—but I had to make quite certain. Will you 'phone Ridgate police, D'Arcy? I may be interrupted any moment here."

"Yaas, wathah."

"Lose no time, will you?"

"Wathah not! But haven't they spotted you about the bung—?"

"No:—I dodged into the telephone cabinet. They've no idea that anyone is in the house—so far, at any rate."

"Pway keep doggo, deah boy. You might be in dangah if they see you." There was an anxious note in D'Arcy's voice. "Pway be vewy careful!"

"That's all right." Jack caught a sound of footsteps. "No more now—they're coming back."

"Wight-ho—mind you take care, deah boy."

Jack did not venture to speak again. Feet were grinding on the gravel: the two men were coming in from the van. Jack ducked his head below the level of the glass in the door, and listened, his heart beating wildly.

He knew now—for certain! And now D'Arcy, at St. Jim's, knew: and a call would go to Ridgate Police Station. The thieves would be interrupted before they could finish that "removal". The police, once they got word, would lose no time.

That he was in danger, if the rascals discovered him there, Jack was well aware. But he was glad he was there, all the same. He knew that he was saving a loss of hundreds of pounds—if the police were in time, as he was sure they would be. In giving the waif a lodging for the night, Arthur Augustus had little dreamed what the outcome would be!

## CHAPTER VI

## GUSSY WAS RIGHT!

"Gussy!"

"What's up?"

"Anything happened at the bung?"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Somethin' wathah excitin', deah boys—a wobbewy!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was standing in the doorway of the School House, in coat and cap, when Tom Merry and Co. came down to look for him—and found him. Apparently he was prepared to go out—which was evidence in itself that something had happened—hours after lock-ups. There was a trace of excitement on the aristocratic visage of the swell of St. Jim's. Twice his eyeglass fell from his noble eye and he had to replace it.

"A robbery!" repeated Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah."

"What did I tell you?" said Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Just what you might have expected, old chap," said Herries.

"Letting tramps into the place—!" said Dig, shaking his head.

"Weally, you fellows—"

"But where are you going?" asked Manners.

"Wailton is goin' to wun ovah in the car, and he is goin' to take me with him," explained Arthur Augustus. "Vewy decent of old Wailton, what? Of course I am feahfully anxious about what is happenin' at the Wock, with my bwothah comin' down on Saturday, you know."

"But who sent the news?" asked Lowther. "Was it a telephone call from the bung, or what?"

"Yaas! It's weally extwaordinawy, you fellows—fancy a gang takin' a furniture van to cleah out old Conway's bungalow, you know."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Such things happen," said Tom Merry. "I've read of them in the newspapers, at any rate."

"Quite a post war industry," said Monty Lowther.

"And the tramp let them in?" asked Blake.

"Eh! What? Weally, Blake, I should be vewy much obliged to you if you would twy not to be such an ass—"

"Well, didn't he?" demanded Blake.

"I have already told you that my fwiend Fwee is not a twamp, Blake."

"Well, did the young gentleman of the road let them in?"

"I wegard you as a fathead, Blake!"

"Well, who sent the news?" asked Tom.

"Fwee, of course."

"Eh?"

"Jack Fwee wang up on the telepone to Wailton, to tell him."

"To tell him that he was walking off with the goods?" gasped Blake.

"You uttah ass!" hooted Arthur Augustus. "If Fwee hadn't been on the spot, and taken the wisk of bein' caught at the telephone, they would have got away with the wobbewy all wight. I am feahfully anxious about what may happen to him if the wogues spot him there. It was feahfully wisky to wing up on the 'phone with two wascally cwooks on the spot."

"Oh, my hat!"

"They may knock him on the head or somethin'. I wondah how long Wailton is goin' to be with that cah!"

"But—but—" stuttered Blake. "Mean to say that the tramp—"

"I wepeat—"

"I mean Free—mean to say that Free 'phoned to give the alarm, while a couple of thieves were about the place—?"

"Yaas, wathah."

"By gum!" said Blake. "He could have hooked it by a back window. Must be a plucky tramp—I mean—"

"Wailton has 'phoned the police at Widgate," said Arthur Augustus. "We shall be there almost as soon as the bobbies, cuttin' acwoss county in the cah. It is vewy decent of Wailton—he's a fwiend of old Conway's, you know. I am feahfully anxious to see Fwee—"

"Here comes the car!" said Blake.

There was the purr of an engine from the shadows, and a gleam of lights. Mr. Railton's voice called.

"D'Arcy!"

"Weady, sir!" Arthur Augustus ran down the steps, and vanished into the car. The lights gleamed away to the school gates, already opened by Taggles. Tom Merry and Co. stared after the red rear-light as it winked away.

"Well!" said Jack Blake, with a deep breath.

"Well!" said Tom Merry.

"Who'd have thought it?" said Blake. "We've been ragging Gussy for being such an ass as to let that tramp into the bung—"

"Spot of luck that he did, as it turns out," said Tom.

"Yes, rather. But—"

"Gussy was right all the time!" said Tom, with a smile.

"Yes—that's what beats me!"

"Wonders will never cease!" remarked Monty Lowther.

"But—what may be happening to that chap at the bung!" said Tom Merry. "I shall be jolly glad to get news that he's safe."

"Same here!"

The red light winked away into the night, and disappeared. With Victor

Railton at the wheel, the car ate up the miles, under the moonlight. Tom Merry and Co. were eager for news of what might have happened at the bungalow—Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, in the car, was deeply anxious.

He watched the trees and shadowy hedge-rows as they flashed by. What had happened—what might have happened—to Jack Free, since his voice had been heard on the telephone? Swift as the car was, it seemed slow to Gussy's anxious impatience.

## CHAPTER VI

### JUST IN TIME!

"THAT SETTEE next."

"'Ere goes!"

Jack Free was thankful that he was no longer behind the settee, as the two men rolled it away on its castors to the door.

He wondered whether they would think of looking into the telephone cabinet at all. Until they did so, at all events, he was safe.

He peered from the glass door. If he had a chance of dodging out of the bungalow unseen—

He ducked his head again, as the two men came tramping in at the front door. There was no chance yet.

He heard them moving about the hall, taking away one article after another: chairs, tables, cushions, rugs, carpet. It was apparent that the thieves intended to make a complete clearance.

That was all to the good in a way, as it was taking time, and time was required for the police to arrive from Ridgate. That the alarm had been given promptly from St. Jim's, Jack had no doubt. But when would they come?

He listened to incessant tramping to and fro. They were losing no time—but they had plenty to do: and time was passing. Bedsteads and bedding were following the other things to the van.

Then Jack heard a sound of clattering and clashing of crockery and cutlery as Sam got busy in the kitchen.

And then, suddenly, the boy's heart almost missed a beat, as he heard the sharp tones of the man in the bowler hat.

"I'll get through to Isaacs now, Sam! Another half-hour will see us through here."

"You said it, boss."

"I'll tip him that all's clear, and to expect us about ten."

"Oh!" breathed Jack.

Every word came clearly to his ears, and his heart thumped.

So far the thieves had proceeded with their work without the slightest

suspicion that anyone else was in the bungalow. Certainly they never dreamed that warning had been given, and that the police were already on their way from Ridgate. But the moment the door of the telephone cabinet was opened—and the man was about to use the telephone—!

Jack peered from the glass in the door.

The man in the bowler hat was standing with his back turned, speaking to Sam in the kitchen, and smoking a cigarette. Was there a chance—a remote chance—of darting across to the open front door before he turned?

Chance or not, Jack had no other resource—for discovery would be immediate as soon as the glass door was opened. Jack had to take the chance.

The man still had his back to him. He was going to use the telephone: but he was in no way hurried. A few seconds—

Jack quietly and softly opened the door of the telephone cabinet. He stepped out on tiptoe.

Almost suppressing his breathing, he tiptoed across the hall towards the open doorway.

The man did not turn.

Jack's heart was beating in great throbs. But his head was cool. Swiftly, but silently, he trod across the hall. The man was speaking again.

He turned.

The next moment he gave a sudden jump and uttered almost a roar of mingled rage and astonishment at the sight of the boy, half-way across the hall to the open doorway.

Jack was on tiptoe. But he was seen and further caution was useless. He made a desperate rush for the doorway.

At the same moment the man in the bowler hat, yelling to his associate, rushed across to intercept him.

"Gosh!" came a startled exclamation from Sam, and he came running out of the kitchen. "What—"

Jack tore desperately to the doorway. He reached it—and at the same moment, the man in the bowler hat reached him, and grasped him. Another second and he would have leaped out, but that savage grasp dragged him back.

"Sam—here—quick—"

"'Old him, boss."

Jack Free turned fiercely on the man who was grasping him. Sam was running across the hall, his hand uplifted, with something in it. Desperately Jack crashed both his clenched fists in the face of the man whose savage grasp was on him. That grasp relaxed, as the man staggered.

He wrenched himself loose.

Sam was almost upon him, the "cosh" in his hand lifted to strike. But the blow missed by a foot as Jack Free bounded into the doorway.

The next moment he was dodging round the van, and running down the drive, as fleetly as a deer. He heard panting voices from the bungalow.



"After him—"

"If he gets away—"

Jack reached the gate. Footsteps were pounding on the gravel behind him. There was no time to open the gate. He placed his hands on the top bar and vaulted over, even as a hand grasped at him from behind.

He landed on the road on his feet. In another moment he would have darted away: but a grasp was laid on his shoulder, and he was stopped. In the dim moonlight the man in the bowler hat loomed over him across the gate.

"Oh!" gasped Jack. He wrenched desperately. He heard the man's savage snarling voice.

"Sam! The cosh—quick!"

In that wild moment, the boy was conscious of lights gleaming on the road, of two or three burly forms shadowy in the moonlight. There was someone on that lonely road—two or three—was it the police?

"Help!" shouted Jack.

"Who's that?" came a deep voice. "Is that the boy—?"

"Help! help!"

He glimpsed a helmeted head. The grasp on him relaxed—and he heard a howl of rage and alarm.

"The police!"

He was released. He stood panting, hardly knowing what was happening. He heard running feet—but they were receding: the two crooks were in flight, cutting across the bungalow gardens, with the constables in pursuit. Jack Free leaned on the gate, panting and panting for breath.

#### CHAPTER VIII

### ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL!

"F<sup>WEE!</sup>"

"D'Arcy!"

The car stopped, the head-lights gleaming on the boy standing at the gate. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy fairly hurled the door open, and leaped out.

"Fwee!" he gasped, "All wight?"

"Right as rain."

"Toppin'! I was feahfully alarmed for you, deah boy—feahfully afwaid that those wottahs might get hold of you—"

Jack laughed breathlessly.

"They did! But the police came just in time! They're in the bungalow now—they've got both of them—I saw them taken in handcuffed—"

"Stunnin'! And you're not hurt?"

"Not in the least!"

"Wippin', deah boy. All's well that ends well, what?"

Mr. Railton stepped down from the driving-seat, his eyes curiously on Jack Free. Arthur Augustus turned to him.

"Is this the boy, D'Arcy?"

"Yaas, wathah—my fwiend Fwee," said Arthur Augustus, and the St. Jim's housemaster, with a smile, shook hands with the waif of the roads. "Vewy lucky he had a lodgin' for the night at the bung, sir."

"Very!" said Mr. Railton.

"I'm glad I was there," said Jack. "I suppose the police will be there for the night. I'd better get on the road—"

"Wats!"

"But—"

"You certainly will not get on the woad," said Arthur Augustus. "I certainly should not dweam of allowin' you to do anything of the kind, deah boy."

"But—"

"I don't think you can go on the road just yet, my boy," said Mr. Railton, "The police will want you when those men are charged at Ridgate. It will be necessary for you to remain for some time, at least."

"Oh!" said Jack. "But—"

"But we shall find you a lodging—not in a lonely bungalow," said the housemaster, smiling. "I will speak to the inspector—and then take you back with me in the car. You would like to stay at D'Arcy's school for a few days?"

"Oh!" gasped Jack.

"Like the ideah, old boy?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"What-ho!" said Jack, his eyes dancing.

It seemed rather like a dream to "Jack of All Trades", when he was sitting in the car with Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, speeding through the moonlight for St. Jim's. And the next few days seemed to him almost a happy day-dream, at the old school, with Tom Merry and Co., and the cheery Arthur Augustus—the happiest possible sequel to his adventure at the lonely bungalow where he had had a Lodging for the Night!

THE END

# A RAG AT CARCROFT!

by  
FRANK  
RICHARDS



## CHAPTER I

### A RAG IN THE SIXTH

**B**ANG! Packe, of the Carcroft Sixth, jumped. Or rather, he bounded.

A Sixth-form man, swotting Greek in his study, might expect a tap at his door if some fellow came along to speak to him. But no man could have expected a terrific bang that sounded as if it had been delivered by a coke-hammer—a bang that made the stout oak door creak and quiver.

That terrific bang fairly thundered in Packe's study. It woke all the echoes. It made Packe jump almost out of his skin, and caused him to drop his volume of Thucydides—and there was another bang as that famous historian landed on the study floor.

“Oh!” gasped Packe.

He stared blankly at the door.

Following the terrific bang, the sound of swiftly-scudding feet was heard for a moment. The rest was silence!

Packe sat blinking. Suddenly dragged out of the Peloponnesian War, with Cleon just starting for Sphacteria to deal with the Spartans, Packe was

rather confused in mind—rather like an owl suddenly dragged into the daylight. It took him a full minute to realize that that resounding bang on his door had been a runaway knock!

When he did realize it, the bemused bewilderment in Packe's face gave place to deadly wrath.

He rose to his feet, clutched up his official ashplant, and started for the door. Packe was a Sixth-form man and a prefect: he was not to be treated so disrespectfully with impunity—if he could help it. Packe often erred on the side of whopping offenders a little too severely: which was probably the reason why some playful junior had given him that runaway knock. This time the whopping was going to be a record—if he could lay hands on the runaway knocker.

But he was much too late. When he opened his study door and stared into the corridor, there was no sign of the fellow who had banged.

Packe made a step out, thinking of asking at the other studies whether anything had been seen of the offender. But he remembered that there was nobody but himself in the Sixth-form studies that afternoon. There was a senior cricket match on, on Big Side at Carcroft: and all the senior men who were not playing would be watching. Packe was the only man swotting in his study on a half-holiday, a glorious summer's afternoon. Packe preferred Greek to cricket—a taste quite unique at Carcroft.

He breathed hard as he turned back into his study and shut the door. He had to let this pass. There was no hope of discovering the runaway knocker now. He wondered savagely who the fellow was. Some junior he had whopped, no doubt, who knew that he was swotting in his study, and that everyone else was out of the House and the coast clear. Vane-Carter of the Fourth, most likely, whom he had caned only that morning. Or perhaps Turkey Tuck, whom he had cuffed for running into him in the quad. Or perhaps one of Compton's gang in the Fourth. Packe was conscious of being the most unpopular prefect at Carcroft School: and he could not have counted up the fellows who disliked him without going into high figures.

He looked out of the study window.

In the distance he saw a group of three—Compton and Drake and Lee of the Fourth form. Nearer at hand he saw a fat figure, that of Turkey Tuck, rolling out of the House. James Smyth Tuck rolled away in the direction of the cricket field, doubtless to give Carcroft's First Eleven the honour of his attention. Packe stared after him sourly. Was it Turkey who had banged at his door? It might have been Turkey—or almost anybody.

Packe returned to his armchair at last, and picked up Thucydides from the floor. He was in a very acid temper. Nobody in the Lower School would have ventured to give any other prefect runaway knocks—Langley, or Lowndes, or Crewe, or Gates. Packe was not respected. He had stealthy ways. He would listen to what fellows said when they did not know that a prefect was in the offing.

He was fussy, and mistook his fussiness for a sense of duty. He whopped more than any other prefect at Carcroft: but never could get himself respected in the Lower School. It was all very annoying and disgruntling to Packe.

However, he dismissed the incident from his mind, at length, and once more immersed himself in Thucydides. By the time Cleon had arrived at Sphacteria, in the seventh year of the Peloponnesian War, Packe had forgotten the runaway knock. Then he was reminded of it.

BANG!

For the second time that afternoon, Packe bounded, and dropped Thucydides on the floor.

It was another runaway knock at his door—as terrific as the first.

This time Packe was a little quicker on the uptake.

He leaped from his chair, and charged across the study to the door. He tore the door open, and jumped into the passage.

But it booted not! The young rascal, whoever he was, had lost no time. He had vanished before Packe had the door open, round a near corner.

Packe stood in the doorway, breathing fury.

Twice had his door been banged: and it dawned upon him that the second bang was not to be the last. It was going on. When he settled down to Greek again, and became once more lost to the world in the delights of Thucydides, there was more to come! He had no doubt of it.

Packe wanted to get on with Greek. Still more he wanted to get on with exercising his ash on the runaway knocker. A "rag" like this—a rag on a Sixth-form prefect—was beyond all limits. He simply had to get hold of that young rascal and whop him.

And, after a little thought, Packe decided that he knew how. Almost opposite his study door was an alcove in the passage. He drew the door shut, and, with his cane gripped in his hand, stepped across the passage to that alcove.

There he was out of sight of anyone coming to his study, either up or down the passage. There he was going to lie in wait!

When the ragger came back—as Packe had no doubt that he would—he would fancy the coast clear as before. The moment he reached the spot, Packe, from the alcove, would be upon him, with the spring of a tiger. There was no margin for error—for no junior had any business in the Sixth-form passage, especially at a time when everybody was out of doors. The runaway knocker was, of course, a junior: some Lower boy whom Packe had whopped not wisely but too well. As soon as a junior came along to Packe's door, Packe had his man!

He waited!

In his intense desire to get hold of the ragger, Packe forgot even Thucydides: and did not care a boiled bean what happened to the Spartans besieged on Sphacteria, or what Nicias thought of Cleon, or what Cleon thought of Nicias. He dismissed the whole bag of tricks from his mind—if the great works of

Thucydides may be described as a bag of tricks—and concentrated on the matter in hand.

Minutes elapsed. Five—ten—but Packe was patient. Then, at last, came a sound of footsteps entering the passage.

Packe waited, his eyes gleaming. Backed in the alcove, he could not see who was coming, until the comer reached his study door opposite. Packe waited for him to reach it. Then he would be in view.

A fat figure rolled in sight. Packe's eyes glinted at Turkey Tuck, the fattest member of the Fourth form at Carcroft. He had rather suspected that the ragger might be Tuck of the Fourth. Apparently it was! For the fat Turkey, turning to Packe's study door, lifted a fat hand!

He had no time for more!

Forth from the alcove across the passage, like a tiger from its lair, leaped Packe of the Sixth. His left hand grasped Turkey's collar, to make sure of him. His right wielded the ash.

There was a startled howl from Turkey Tuck, as his collar was grasped. It was followed by a fearful yell, as the ashplant landed. Then yell on yell, on Turkey's topnote, resounded far and wide, as Packe whacked, and whacked, and whacked, putting all his beef into it.

"Oh! Ow! Wow! Yooop! Woogh! Oooh!" Turkey spluttered and yelled, as Packe laid it on. "I say—yooo-hoooh! Leago! Help! Stoppit! Yaroooooh!"

Whack! Whack! Whack! Whack!

"Ow! Wow! Gone mad? Help! Oh, haddocks! Woooooh!"

Whack! whack! whack!

Immemorial custom prescribed six as the limit in a whopping. Packe forgot all about limits. More than a dozen of the very best landed on Turkey, as he wriggled, and hopped, and struggled, and roared, and yelled.

Then Packe, rather out of breath—he was no athlete—let him go. The moment he was released, Turkey Tuck shot down the passage like an arrow from a bow, and vanished howling. Packe, feeling better, went into his study and shut the door, and settled down once more with Thucydides, satisfied that there would be no more runaway knocks at his study door that afternoon.

## CHAPTER II

### CRACKERS?

"WHAT THE dickens—!" ejaculated Harry Compton.

The Carcroft Co. stared.

Compton, Drake, and Lee, whom Packe had seen from his study window

chatting in the quad, were coming towards the House, when Turkey Tuck happened. From the open doorway of the House, a fat figure shot, like a scared fat rabbit. Dozens of fellows stared at it.

Turkey of the Fourth looked wildly excited. He looked terrified. Had he encountered a grisly spectre he could hardly have looked more so. His mouth was open, and he panted and gasped for breath as he charged out into the quadrangle. His fat cheeks, always red, were crimson: his eyes seemed to be popping from his face. Harry Compton and Co. regarded him in wonder. Never had they beheld the fat Turkey in so wild a state.

In so tremendous a hurry was Turkey, that he did not even see where he was going. Dudley Vane-Carter of the Fourth was standing near the House steps: and as his back was partly turned towards Turkey, he did not see him coming. He knew he was coming the next moment, however, as Turkey crashed into him, ramming him on the port quarter, so to speak.

A charge with Turkey Tuck's weight behind it, taking a fellow by surprise, was irresistible. Dudley Vane-Carter fairly flew.

He gave a startled howl, as he pitched over headlong, landing suddenly and hard on the cold, unsympathetic earth.

Turkey staggered from the shock: but only for a moment. The next, he was careering on again, leaving Vane-Carter for dead, as it were.

"Here, hold on, you mad chump!" shouted Bob Drake. "What's the matter with you?"

"What's up?" called out Compton.

If Turkey heard, he did not heed. He charged wildly onward, and Lord Talboys, who was in his way, had to jump like a kangaroo to avoid being strewn in the quad like Vane-Carter.

"Better stop him!" grinned Dick Lee.

Bob Drake rushed in, and grabbed Turkey by the collar. It was really time that Turkey was checked, charging across the quad like Death on a Pale Horse. But he was going too fast for Bob to stop him. The grip on Turkey's collar checked his flight, but he went spinning round Bob Drake, held by his collar, and almost circled round that sturdy youth before he was finally halted.

Then he struggled.

"Leago! Oh, leago! He's after me. He's crackers! Leago!"

Bob tightened his grip.

"Who's after you?" he demanded.

"Packed! He's crackers! He's dangerous! Leago!" yelled Turkey.

"Packed's not after you, you fat chump," said Bob. "Nobody's after you! What the thump makes you think he's after you?"

"Oh!" gasped Turkey. "He's crackers, you know."

"Packed is?" exclaimed Harry Compton, blankly.

"Yes—bats in the belfry—quite batchy—hay-wire—had as a matter—I

mean mad as a hatter!" spluttered Turkey. "I—I say, look here, don't you let him get near me. He's dangerous."

Turkey squinted back at the House from which he had shot so suddenly. To his immense relief, there was no sign of pursuit. Packe was still in the House. But the fat junior was still terrified. His eyes rolled as if they would roll out.

"But what's happened?" exclaimed Dick Lee.

A dozen fellows gathered round Turkey. His excitement, his evident terror, and his extraordinary statement that Packe of the Sixth was "crackers", excited general interest. Lord Talboys, Levett and Leath, Barrick major, and several more of the Fourth form surrounded the frantic Turkey, all wanting to know what had happened. Nobody liked Packe of the Sixth: but nobody, so far, had suspected that he had bats in the belfry. They were quite eager to know.

"I—I say, sure he ain't coming?" gasped Turkey. "I say, if he comes out, you fellows keep round me."

"But what has Packe done?" roared Bob Drake.

"He pitched into me—!" gasped Turkey. "Whopped me like mad—"

"Well, that's nothing new," said Harry Compton. "Packe's always whopping somebody or other."

"But it was for nothing—" howled Turkey.

"It's generally for nothing, when a fellow gets whopped!" grinned Bob.

"Surprising what an innocent lot of ducks we are at Carcroft, really."

"I tell you it was really for nothing," shrieked Turkey. "I tell you, he was hiding—"

"Hiding?"

"Yes, hiding in that alcove in the Sixth-form passage—I didn't know he was there, of course—how could a fellow guess that a prefect was hiding, ready to pounce out like a tiger—" spluttered Turkey. "And when I was just going to tap at his study door, thinking he was in the study of course, he suddenly sprang on me from behind—"

"Packe did!" gasped Bob.

"Yes, he did! Seized me," gurgled Turkey. "Grabbed me from behind, and pitched into me right and left—oh, crikey! Oh, haddocks! I—I can tell you I was frightened—clutched by a madman, you know—"

"Well, my only summer hat and sunshade!" said Bob. "Sure he wasn't in his study? Wasn't swotting in his study as usual?"

"I tell you he was hiding in the passage, and suddenly jumped out on me from behind and pitched into me!" shrieked Turkey. "Oh, dear! I was scared out of my wits!"

"If any!" murmured Lord Talboys.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You'd have been scared, Lizard," hooted Turkey, indignantly. "I



wouldn't have gone to his study if I'd known that he was mad. Oh, dear!"

"Well, what did you go to his study for?" asked Levett.

"Lowndes sent me," explained Turkey. "Lowndes of the Sixth, on the cricket ground. I think he was going out with Packe after the cricket, if the match was over in time, and it ain't. So he called to me and said go and tell Packe that I shan't be able to come after all, and of course I had to—Lowndes is a pre. Well, I went to Packe's study to tell him, and then—" Turkey shuddered at the recollection—"instead of finding him in his study, as I expected, I never even had time to tap at the door—he sprang on me from behind like a wild beast—oh, lor'!"

"Great pip!" said Bob Drake.

"You didn't do anything?" asked Vane-Carter. V.C. had come up, probably with the intention of booting Turkey for up-ending him. Instead of which, he listened to Turkey's strange tale.

"Nothing at all," gasped Turkey. "I tell you I never knew he was there—never even saw him, till he grabbed me from behind and started in with his cane—looking awfully furious—madmen do, you know."

"Look here, Packe can't be crackers," said Harry Compton. "He's poisonous, but he isn't crackers."

"I tell you he glared at me like a maniac," yelled Turkey. "Simply furious—and I hadn't done anything—only just come to his study to bring him a message from Lowndes. I jolly well shan't take the message now. I daren't go near Packe. I say, V.C. will you go?"

Vane-Carter, laughing, strolled away to the House. Apparently he was not going to take any message to Packe. But the other fellows remained collected round the spluttering Turkey, in surprise and considerable excitement. It was hard to believe that a Sixth-form prefect of Carcroft had suddenly taken leave of his senses: but from Turkey's strange narrative it certainly looked like it. A fellow who hid himself in an alcove, and jumped out suddenly on a junior who was coming to his study with a message, could hardly be quite sane. A fag in the Third form, like Braye or Dinkin, might have played such a trick—but not a prefect of the Sixth, like Packe, if he was in his right mind.

"Sure he was hiding?" asked Dick Lee.

"Yes, in that alcove opposite his study door, you know—lying in wait like a tiger in the jungle," groaned Turkey, "and he sprang out—Oh, crikey! Fancy Packe going mad, you fellows! It's all that Greek, very likely. He's a swot, you know."

"Well, this beats Banagher," said Bob Drake, rubbing his nose. "If Packe played a trick like that, he's off his rocker—must be."

"I say, Compton, think you'd better go to the Head?" asked Turkey.

"Eh! What am I to go to the Head for?" asked the captain of the Fourth.

"I mean, to tell him that Packe's gone mad—"

"Oh, my hat! I can sort of see myself calling on Dr. Whaddon to tell him that one of his prefects has gone mad!"

"Well, something ought to be done about it," urged Turkey, "our lives ain't safe with a maniac in the House. He had a cane when he pitched into me—but he might have a poker next time—or a hammer—or a bread-knife or something. Springing on fellows from behind, you know—"

"Blessed if I make it out," said Harry, "but—"

"Well, look here, go and tell Roger," said Turkey. "Roger will know what to do with him! It ain't safe to leave him loose. He will have to be taken away to an asylum, of course."

"You go and tell Roger," chuckled Bob Drake. "There he is, in his study, looking out! Cut off and warn him there's a lunatic loose at Carcroft."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Turkey Tuck squinted in the direction of Roger Ducas's study window. There stood Mr. Ducas, master of the Carcroft Fourth, looking out of the open window: perhaps wondering what was causing that spot of excitement in the quad. Roger's eagle eye was on the group surrounding James Smyth Tuck.

Turkey hesitated.

He had not the slightest doubt that Lucius Packe, of the Sixth, had gone mad. There was no other imaginable way of accounting for Packe's actions, which, to Turkey at least, were clearly maniacal. A senior man who hid himself in an alcove, jumped out from behind on a junior, and pitched into him without rhyme or reason, could only be as mad as a hatter, and requiring care. Still, Turkey did not quite like the idea of reporting Packe's sudden and alarming insanity to his form-master. He realized that it was an unusually startling story for a beak's ears.

"I—I say, think he'd believe me, Compton?" asked Turkey. "I—I mean to say, Roger doesn't always believe what I say, and—and this is a bit unusual—"

"More than a bit, I think," chuckled Bob.

"But I tell you he's crackers—"

"Better make sure before you spin a yarn like that to Roger," chuckled Dick Lee. "Look here, we'll come with you, if you like, while you go and give him Lowndes' message, and see."

Turkey shivered.

"I wouldn't dare go near him," he stuttered. "I—I say, it's nearly tea time, and—and I daren't go into the House again while Packe's loose—"

Harry Compton laughed.

"Come to tea in our study, old fat chump," he said, "we'll keep Packe off if he does any more springing."

"You'll keep round me?" asked Turkey, anxiously. "You won't bolt and leave me to it if that maniac shows up?"

"Ha, ha! No: come on."

Turkey—still in a state of great trepidation, his gooseberry eyes popping as he squinted round him uneasily—went into the House with the Co. He did not feel safe till he was in the corner study in the Fourth, in company with the three juniors—and even there he did not feel quite safe. There were sausage-rolls and cake for tea, from which Turkey drew comfort—but even while he travelled, rapidly, through sausage-rolls and cake, his eyes kept wandering to the door, and he gave an uneasy jump at every sound of a footstep in the passage. Even sausage-rolls and cake could not wholly fill Turkey's thoughts, while he was haunted by the dread of a lunatic loose in the House.

## CHAPTER III

## A SPOT OF TROUBLE IN THE CORNER STUDY

**B**ANG! BANG!  
Packe could hardly believe his ears—though the deafest ears must have been startled by those two terrific bangs at his study door.

He had dismissed the runaway knocker from his mind. He had no doubt that it was Turkey, whom he had, as he supposed, caught in the very act. After that tremendous whopping, Turkey was not likely to carry on. So Packe was deep in Thucydides, getting on quite nicely with Cleon and the besieged Spartans in Sphacteria, when again came the bang, twice repeated—and he stared at his study door almost gibbering with rage.

Once more Thucydides was thrown aside. Once more Packe grasped his official ash, and flew to the door. Once more he glared into the passage like a lion seeking what he might devour.

Nobody was there. But that did not matter, now that Packe knew for whom to look. He quitted the study, and went in search of Turkey Tuck. Cricket was still keeping the seniors on Big Side, but a good many juniors were about, and Packe called to Vane-Carter of the Fourth, who was lounging in the big doorway with his hands in his pockets, looking out idly into the sunny quad.

"Vane-Carter!"

V.C. glanced round. His eyes glimmered as he looked at the prefect.

"Yes, Packe," he said, meekly.

"Where is Tuck, of your form?"

"I saw him in the quad about half an hour ago."

"He was in the House a minute or two ago," snapped Packe. "Has he passed you going out?"

"No!"

"Levett! Do you know where Tuck is?" called out Packe, as Levett of the Fourth came in with Leath.

Levett gave him a rather startled glance. Like the other fellows, he had been hardly able to make head or tail of Turkey's startling tale of Packe's sudden outbreak of insanity. Turkey had the fattest head, as well as the fattest waist, at Carcroft: and if there was a mistake to be made, Turkey was the man to make it. But now, as he looked at Packe, Levett wondered uneasily whether Turkey had had it right. Packe looked very excited, his eyes were gleaming, and his cane was clutched in his hand. And he was after Turkey!

"Do you hear me, Levett?" snapped Packe, angrily. "Where is Tuck of your form?" He came nearer to Levett as he spoke, and to his surprise and annoyance, both Levett and Leath backed hastily away, almost as if they thought he might bite!

"Oh! Yes!" stammered Levett. "I—I—I think he went up to the studies,



Packe—"He backed further off, watching Packe uneasily. If the fellow was crackers, he wasn't going to spring on Levett as he had on Turkey!

"Go and tell him I want him, and he is to come at once."

"Oh! All right, Packe," stammered Levett.

Leath was already heading for the staircase. Levett was glad to follow him. He did not like Packe's looks at all.

Packe waited impatiently at the foot of the staircase. Levett and Leath went up two steps at a time, and on the study landing above, they gave each other startled glances.

"Think he's madders, as Turkey said?" whispered Leath.

"Blessed if I know what to think," muttered Levett. "We'd better go and tell Turkey—he's teeing in the corner study with Compton's gang."

They hurried to the corner study, which was Number Five in the Fourth-form passage. As Levett opened the door, there was a scared squeal in the study.

"Oh, haddocks! If that's Packe—!"

Levett and Leath looked in.

"Turkey here?" asked Levett. "Oh, here you are! You're wanted, Turkey."

Turkey had a chunk of cake in a plump hand. He had been about to transfer it to the widest mouth at Carcroft. But the plump hand stopped half-way: and the chunk of cake remained suspended, like Mahomet's coffin, in mid-air. The fat junior's gooseberry eyes popped at Levett, while Compton, Drake, and Lee exchanged glances.

"Who—who—who wants me?" gasped Turkey.

"Packe does—"

"Oh, haddocks! I won't go!" yelled Turkey. "I say, Compton—you stand by a chap! I ain't going to be sprung at by a lunatic! Drake, old man, you stick to me if he comes here! Get hold of the poker, Lee! I—I say, that lunatic's after me again—oh, haddocks!"

"Look here, what does Packe want Turkey for?" asked Harry Compton.

"Licking, I suppose," answered Levett. "He's got his cane in his paw, and looks as fierce as a Red Indian."

"But Turkey hasn't done anything," exclaimed Bob. "He can't have—he's been with us ever since Packe licked him half an hour ago."

"Well, Packe wants him," said Levett. "That's his message."

"I won't go!" shrieked Turkey. "You fellows stick to me, and keep him off if he comes here. Oh, lor'! I wish I'd gone to Roger now. I—I say, Levett, you go and tell Packe I ain't here—tell him I've gone home—tell him anything you like, only don't let him know I'm here—"

"This is jolly queer," said Dick Lee. "I suppose it can't be possible that Packe's really gone off his nut?"

"Blessed if it doesn't look like it," said Bob. "What on earth is he after Turkey again for, when he's done nothing?"

"You'll have to go, Turkey," said Leath.

"I won't go!" yelled Turkey.

"Better not," said Harry Compton. "Pre. or not, Packe's got no right to lick a fellow a second time for nothing. Stick here, Turkey. We all know you've done nothing, and if Packe comes after you, we'll stop him."

"Hear, hear!" said Bob.

"Bet you he'll come up, if Turkey doesn't go down," said Levett.

"Well, let him!" said Dick Lee. "If he's gone crackers, there's enough of us to hold him, if he begins on Turkey again."

Lord Talboys came up the passage from the landing. There was a startled look on the Lizard's usually placid countenance.

"Turkey here?" he asked, looking into the corner study.

"Oh! No!" yelled Turkey. "I ain't here, Lizard, if Packe's sent you for me—"

"Well, he has," said Lord Talboys. "He's waiting at the foot of the staircase, and he told me—"

"Oh, haddocks! I say, won't some of you fellows go to Roger and tell him that Packe is nuts!" wailed Turkey. "I—I say, did he look mad, Lizard?"

"Well, he looked jolly shirty, and he's got his ash," said Lord Talboys. "I fancy he's comin' up after you, old fat top."

"Help!" squealed Turkey.

"Look out—here he comes!" called out Leath from the passage.

Levett and Leath faded out of the picture. Lord Talboys stepped into the study. There was a heavy and hurried tread in the passage: and the juniors in the corner study all rose to their feet, breathing rather quickly. A moment more, and Packe's enraged face glared in.

"Oh! You're here!" Packe fairly roared, as his eye fell on the terrified Turkey. He rushed in, and round the table.

Turkey bounded off his chair. He shot round the other side of the table, yelling.

"Ow! Help! Keep him off! Help!"

"Look here, Packe—!" exclaimed Harry Compton.

Packe did not heed him. He had come up after Turkey, boiling. Now he was boiling over. He rushed round the study table in pursuit of the fat junior.

Turkey flew.

He barged into a chair, and sent it spinning. He banged on the table, and set the crockery clattering. But he barged on frantically, in terror of the clutching hand behind.

Harry Compton and Co. looked on, almost stupefied. Lord Talboys stared blankly. Five or six fellows gathered round the doorway, staring in. Round the study table flew Turkey—after him flew Packe. For a minute it was like a game of going round the mulberry bush. But Packe's long legs covered the ground faster than Turkey's short fat ones, and the clutching hand closed on Turkey's collar.

"Yaroooh!" roared Turkey, as he was clutched. "Help! Rescue! Save me!"

"Packe!" shouted Compton.

"Stop that, Packe!" roared Bob Drake.

"Let him go!" exclaimed Dick Lee.

Unheeding, Packe gripped Turkey's collar with his left, and the ash rose in his right. Turkey yelled frantically. And the Carcroft Co. as one man, rushed at Packe, and grasped him. Lord Talboys rushed to their aid: Scott and Drummond ran in from the passage, to lend a hand.

Handling a Sixth-form prefect was an awfully serious matter. No one would have dreamed of it, in ordinary circumstances. But the circumstances were not ordinary. They were extraordinary—very extraordinary. If Packe had gone "crackers", Packe had to be restrained. And it certainly looked as if he had. Everyone knew that Turkey, teeing in the corner study, could not have done anything to Packe.

"Stop him!" exclaimed Harry Compton.

"What-ho!" gasped Bob.

"Ow! Help! Draggimoff!" shrieked Turkey. "You can see he's batchy—he's nuts—he's gone crackers—help!"

Packe was dragged away from Turkey by main force. In the midst of half a dozen breathless juniors, all grabbing him, he went reeling across the study. Turkey did not join in the fray. The moment Packe's grasp was off him, Turkey shot to the door. In the corner study there was wild uproar, as Packe, spluttering with fury, struggled in the grasp of Harry Compton and Co. Leaving them to it, Turkey Tuck fled for his fat life, and his fleeing footsteps died away down the passage.

#### CHAPTER IV

### ROGER TAKES A HAND

ROGER DUCAS, master of the Fourth form, laid down his pen, lifted his head from a pile of form papers, and glanced at his open window, frowning.

From the quadrangle, voices, on the balmy summer breeze, floated in at that open window. The voices sounded excited. And the words that came to Roger's ears were quite startling.

Roger had an idea that something unusual was going on in his form that afternoon. He had seen a crowd of Fourth-form juniors in the quad earlier, and wondered what the excitement was about. But he had returned to his labours on form papers and dismissed the matter from mind. Now he was reminded of it, as the voices floated in on the summer breeze.

"He's crackers!"

"No doubt about that! Mad as a hatter!"

"Dangerous!"

"Better keep clear of him."

"He won't get near me, if I can help it."

"We had to drag him off Turkey—goodness knows what he might have done."

"I say, there'll be a row about handling a pre."

"Not if he's mad—we had to stop him."

"Where is Packe now?"

"In his study. He said he'd report us to the Head for collaring him. Of course the Head will see at once that he's crackers."

"He ought to see a doctor."

"I expect the Head will send for one, when he sees Packe."

"Oh, haddocks! I say, suppose he sprang at the Head like he did at me!"

"Phew!"

"Well, I suppose he might, as he's off his rocker."

"I expect he's been swotting too hard, and just gone off his onion. But he was always rather queer, Packe was."

"Yes, I always thought he had a queer look in his eye."

"So did I!"

"But I say, it's jolly serious, a fellow off his onion, going about the school. The beaks ought to be told."

"They'll hear soon enough—it's all over the shop—"

"He might spring at anybody any minute, like he did at me when I went to take Lowndes' message—"

All this, and more, floated in at the open window. Roger Ducas sat motionless at his study table, his frown intensifying. Finally he rose to his feet, and looked out. At a little distance there was quite a crowd of the Fourth, and some fellows of other forms, drinking it all in. Every face was excited, and some were uneasy. Roger's keen, penetrating eyes fixed grimly on the group.

He knew now what the spot of excitement in his form was. For some strange and inexplicable reason, the juniors believed that Packe, a prefect of the Sixth form, had gone "crackers". Roger did not like Packe: and had he been head-master of Carcroft, Packe would never have been a prefect. But he did not suppose for a moment that Packe was "crackers". He only wondered how so extraordinary an idea could have got into so many heads. Turkey was obtuse enough to fancy anything: but sensible fellows like Compton, Drake, Lee, Talboys, Drummond, Scott, were in the excited crowd, and they evidently were of the same opinion. It was quite a puzzle to Roger, and evidently a matter to be looked into without delay.

He thought it over for a minute or two, and then crossed his study to the door. Clearly the best thing was to see Packe at once, and get to the bottom



of this. Packe was a fussy, nervy fellow: but certainly he wasn't "crackers". One of the juniors in the crowd had said that he was in his study: so Roger Ducas bent his steps in the direction of the Sixth-form passage, to see Packe without delay.

As he turned into that passage, he was surprised to see a junior of his form at Packe's door.

It was Dudley Vane-Carter, the scapegrace of the Fourth.

Roger's eyes fixed on him.

Vane-Carter's actions were quite peculiar. He was on tiptoe, apparently having crept down the passage to Packe's study without making a sound. He had come, it seemed, from an adjoining corridor, further up the passage, as Roger, at his end, had seen nothing of him till this moment. Vane-Carter was in the act of taking a small mallet from under his jacket, where it had been concealed. As Roger watched him he lifted the mallet, and banged on Packe's study door.

Bang! Bang!

The instant the double knock had been delivered, Vane-Carter shot up the passage like an arrow, turned the corner, and vanished.

He had not seen Roger—never glancing round in his direction. But Roger had seen him—and Roger smiled, the grim smile that the Carcroft Fourth knew.

A moment more, and Packe's door flew open, and Packe of the Sixth rushed out, with fury in his face.

Packe had been in his study for some time, Thucydides was no longer the order of the day. He was rumped, dishevelled, breathless, after the spot of trouble with Harry Compton and Co. Those reckless young rascals were going to be reported to the headmaster, and flogged for laying hands on a prefect—sacked, Packe hoped! Quite unaware that he was regarded in the Fourth as a perilous lunatic, Packe was almost more astonished than enraged by what had happened in the corner study in the Fourth.

It was unheard-of at Carcroft for juniors to lay hands on a prefect of the Sixth. Packe really could hardly believe that it had happened. But it had—and he was going to see that condign punishment was the result.

Having recovered his breath, and put himself to rights, Packe was considering whether to go in search of the elusive Turkey again, or whether to seek his headmaster with a report of the outrageous happenings in the corner study, when the bang resounded at his door.

It was the runaway knocker again—Turkey once more, Packe had no doubt. It had not occurred to him for a moment to doubt that the runaway knocker was Turkey.

His look, as he rushed into the passage, really gave some colour to the juniors' belief that he had gone "crackers". Never had any man at Carcroft had so wild and whirling an aspect.

Roger, from the lower end of the passage, stared at him with grim dis-

approval. Roger was always calm and self-contained. He had no use whatever for enraged glares or spluttering fury.

Packe glared round quite like a tiger.

It was amazing that so fat and unwieldy a fellow as Turkey Tuck could have vanished so promptly. But there was no sign of the runaway knocker.

Packe easily guessed that the young rascal had cut up the passage and whizzed round the corner. But he glanced in the other direction—and saw Roger.

He caught his breath, as he caught Roger's grim stare. He was angry; and he felt, like the prophet of old, that he did well to be angry. But he realized that his aspect did not display the decorum that was expected of Sixth-form prefects. He flushed crimson under Mr. Ducas's grim eyes, and strove to suppress his boiling wrath, and clear his too expressive countenance.

"Packe!" Roger's voice was deep.

"Oh! Yes, sir!" stammered Packe. "Someone has been knocking—I mean banging—at my study door, and—and—"

"I am aware of it."

"A boy of your form, sir," added Packe, "an impudent young rascal—"

"I am aware of that also, Packe. That is no reason why you should give an exhibition of uncontrolled temper, and cause alarm among the Lower boys," said Roger, sternly. "It has reached my ears, Packe, that there has been a scene—actually of violence—between you and some boys of my form—"

Packe panted.

"I'm going to report them to the Head, sir—Compton, Drake, Lee, Talboys, and some others—they laid hands on me—"

"I shall inquire into the matter as their form-master, Packe. Kindly accompany me to my study, and I will send for them."

Roger Ducas turned: and Packe, having pitched his ashplant back into his study, followed the portly figure of the master of the Fourth. Roger, in his study, rang for the House porter, and dispatched Ruggles to collect quite a numerous party of his form.

## CHAPTER V

### MERELY A MISUNDERSTANDING!

"**B**UT WHY me?" said Dudley Vane-Carter.

V.C. was puzzled.

Ruggles had delivered his message. Compton, Drake, Lee, Talboys, Turkey Tuck, and Vane-Carter, were all wanted in Roger's study. Why the Carcroft Co. were wanted was clear enough—it was the affair of the corner

study. But Vane-Carter had had no hand in that. V.C. had been nowhere near the corner study when Packe was dragged away from Turkey.

"Me, too!" said Turkey. "I say, I never did anything. You fellows collared Packe, but I didn't, did I?"

"No, you fat villain, you bolted," said Bob Drake. "Come to think of it, I was going to boot you—"

"Here, you keep off! I say, you tell Roger that I never had anything to do with it, and—and I needn't go. Just say to Roger—yaroooh! Keep your hoof away from my trousers will you, you swob?" yelled Turkey.

"Blessed if I know why Roger wants me," said Vane-Carter. "He can't know anything about—" V.C. broke off. "Well, we may as well go—Roger doesn't like to be kept waiting."

"Come on," said Harry Compton, "it's all right, you fellows—Roger will understand that we had to collar Packe, if that's what he wants to see us about. And the sooner he knows, the better. If the chap's crackers, he's got to be looked after."

And the half-dozen juniors proceeded to their form-master's study.

"Come in!" came Roger's deep voice, as Compton tapped. And the captain of the Fourth opened the door, and walked in, followed by his friends: Turkey reluctantly bringing up the rear.

Roger was seated at his writing-table. Packe of the Sixth stood by the window. The juniors glanced at him a little uneasily. But Packe was quite calm now, though his expression was dark and bitter.

Turkey Tuck, last into the room, did not notice Packe for the moment. But when his gooseberry eyes fell on the Sixth-former, Turkey jumped almost clear of the floor, and let out a startled howl:

"Oh, haddocks! He's here! Help!"

"Tuck!" thundered Roger.

"Ow! Keep him off!" yelled Turkey, too terrified to heed even the voice of his form-master. "Help! Oh, haddocks!"

Turkey bounded back to the door. Roger rose to his feet, in wrath.

"Stop! Tuck, stop at once!" he roared.

Turkey, unheeding, tore the door open. But Bob Drake grasped him by a fat shoulder, and jerked him back.

"You fat chump, don't you hear Roger?" he hissed.

"Yaroooh! Leago!" shrieked Turkey. "He's mad—you know he's mad! I ain't going to be sprunged at—I mean sprung at—by a maniac! You know he sprang on me from behind like a tiger. Leago! He may have a knife about him! Leago!"

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Mr. Ducas. "Drake, close the door, and keep that foolish boy here."

"Yes, sir," gasped Bob.

"Yaroooh! Leago! Help!"

"Tuck! Be silent at once! Packe, what have you done to terrify that obtuse boy in such a manner?" exclaimed Mr. Ducas.

Packe was staring blankly at the fat Turkey. He was quite amazed. Certainly he had whopped Turkey, and was going to whop him again, but that did not account for the fat junior's frantic terror.

"Nothing, sir!" gasped Packe. "He seems to be to me out of his senses."

"Oh, haddocks! He's crackers, sir—!" howled Turkey. "Maniacs always think other people are mad, sir, that's why he said that. I know he can't help being mad, sir, but he ain't safe."

"You utterly stupid boy, what has put this absurd fancy into your head?" exclaimed Roger.

"Tain't a fancy, sir—he's mad—all the fellows know! They all know what he did!" yelled Turkey. "He ain't safe. Hiding and jumping out on people—you look out, sir—he might spring at you—"

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Ducas. "Is the boy wandering in his mind? Packe, you did not play any such trick as he describes—surely—"

"Oh!" gasped Packe. "I—I—"

"He did!" yelled Turkey. "He was hiding in the alcove in the Sixth-form passage, sir, and he sprang on me from behind when I went to his study—"

"Impossible!" exclaimed Roger.

"He did!" shrieked Turkey. "Like a tiger! Sprang on me from behind and— and clutched me—I was awfully frightened, sir. Then afterwards he came up to Compton's study, and sprang at me again—these fellows saw him, sir. He's mad, sir—he springs at people! He may spring at you any minute, sir."

Roger gazed at Turkey, and then at Packe. Then he gazed at Harry Compton and Co.

"Compton! Can you explain this?" he exclaimed.

"We only know what Turkey—I mean Tuck—told us, about what happened in the Sixth-form passage, sir," answered Harry, "but Packe did come up to our study, while Tuck was teeing with us, and jumped at him. Turkey couldn't have done anything, as he had been with us all the time, and it looked to us as if Packe had gone batchy, and we dragged him away from Turkey—"

"We had to, sir," said Dick Lee. "When a chap's gone nuts—"

"He looks calm now, sir," said Bob, "but you should have seen him in our study—mad as a hatter—"

"Perfectly potty, sir," said Lord Talboys.

Vane-Carter said nothing. His eyes were glimmering, as if he found the whole affair amusing, but he remained silent.

"I fail to understand this," said Mr. Ducas. "Can you explain it, Packe? You did not, I presume, conceal yourself in the alcove in the passage, and seize this foolish boy suddenly—"

"He did, sir!" yelled Turkey. "Sprang on me from behind like a tut—tut—tiger—"

"Silence! Answer me, Packe."

"I—I—I—," Packe stammered, "I can certainly explain, sir. Tuck had been playing tricks at my study—giving runaway knocks at the door, and getting away before I could get out of the study after him—"

"I didn't!" howled Turkey. "I never—"

"Silence! Proceed, Packe."

"Well, sir, as it happened twice, and I could not catch him or even discover who it was, I—I stepped into that alcove, to catch him if he came back a third time," explained Packe.

"Oh!" ejaculated Roger.

"Oh!" murmured Harry Compton. The juniors exchanged glances.

"He came back, sir, not knowing that I was on the watch there, and was just about to bang at the door, when I took him by the collar, and—and caned him," said Packe. "And later, when the runaway knocking happened again, I knew of course that it was Tuck, and went to look for him, and found him in Compton's study—"

"Tuck! Had you been playing tricks at Packe's study door—"

"I didn't!" gasped Turkey. "I never! I—I wasn't—"

"It happened twice, sir," said Packe, "the third time I caught him—"

"I never—I didn't—I hadn't—"

Roger gave Packe a grim stare.

"You did not see him on the first two occasions, Packe?"

"No, sir—I can't see through a door," said Packe, sullenly. "I saw him the third time, being outside the study in the alcove opposite—"

"Tuck! Why did you go to Packe's study?"

"Lowndes sent me, sir."

"Lowndes?" repeated Roger.

"Yes, sir, he sent me with a message for Packe, and I was just going to tap at his door, when Packe sprang on me from behind—," gasped Turkey. "Of course I thought he was in the study, and then—oh, haddocks! Wouldn't you be scared, sir, with a lunatic jumping at you from behind—"

"Silence, you foolish boy. You have heard Packe's explanation," snapped Roger. "He supposed that you had been giving runaway knocks at his door."

"But I hadn't, sir," gasped Turkey. "I hadn't been anywhere near his study, till I went there with Lowndes' message—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Bob Drake, suddenly. Roger's study was no place for a sudden roar of laughter: but Bob really could not help it, as he realized the idiotic mistake Packe had made. Obviously, somebody else had been delivering those runaway knocks, and Packe had jumped on the wrong man—giving the hapless Turkey the alarming impression that he had taken leave of his senses.

"Drake! You seem to be amused!" Roger's glare froze Bob's merriment on the spot.

"Oh! No—yes—no—yes, sir!" stammered Bob.

"Kindly be silent!"

"Oh! Yes, sir!"

Roger's glare turned on Packe. Packe's face was a study. It was dawning on him, too, that he had made a mistake—that some other fellow had been banging at his door, and that he had jumped on Turkey, who was only there to deliver a harmless message from a man in the Sixth.

"Well, Packe!" snapped Roger. "Probably you realize now that it was not Tuck who gave the runaway knocks at your study door."

"Oh!" gasped Packe. "I—I—I certainly thought—"

"You gave that foolish boy the impression that you were out of your senses," snorted Roger. "And no wonder!" he added.

"Oh! I—I—I caught him at my door, just about to knock—," stammered Packe. "I—I took it for granted—I—I—I certainly thought—and—and—who was it if it was not Tuck, sir?"

"As it happens, I know who it was," snapped Roger, "and it certainly was not Tuck."

Vane-Carter gave a jump.

He understood now why Roger had sent for him along with the others. Roger knew!

"The whole matter is now explained," said Mr. Ducas. "You acted hastily, thoughtlessly, and foolishly, Packe, in a manner quite unworthy of a Sixth-form prefect. Your action, in suddenly seizing upon a boy who had given no offence, was quite enough to give him the impression that you were utterly irresponsible; and these other boys were certainly not to blame for restraining you from punishing him again for absolutely no cause. Is that clear to you, Packe?"

"Oh! Ah! Er—," stammered Packe.

"Is that clear to you or not?" snapped Roger.

"Oh! Er—yes, sir!" gasped Packe.

"I—I—I say, sir, do you mean that he ain't mad, sir?" mumbled Turkey with an uneasy eye on Packe.

"Certainly not, you stupid boy."

"But springing on a chap from behind, sir—!"

"Bless my soul! Cannot you understand that that was a mistake, Tuck, now that the matter has been explained?"

"Oh! Yes, sir! But he did spring on me from behind, and a fellow who springs on a chap from behind for nothing must be crackers, sir. I mean to say, hiding in a dark corner and springing on a chap—"

"Be silent, Tuck!" gasped Roger.

"Yes, sir! But oughtn't he to see a doctor, sir—?"

"That will do, Tuck."

"Oh, very well, sir, still if a fellow's mad, and loose about the school, a chap doesn't feel safe, sir—"

"You fat ass, shut up!" gasped Bob.

"That's all very well, Drake, but with a lunatic about the place—"

"If you say another word, Tuck, I shall cane you!" roared Roger.

"Oh!" gasped Turkey. And he did not say another word. But he kept a very uneasy eye on Packe. Turkey's fat brain was slow on the uptake: and he was far from satisfied that Packe was not, after all, "crackers".

"The matter closes here," said Roger, "excepting for the reckless young rascal who delivered the runaway knocks at Packe's door." Roger picked up the cane from his table. "Vane-Carter, you will bend over that chair!"

Dudley Vane-Carter said nothing. Roger knew, and that was that! The scapegrace of Carcroft bent over the chair, and six whops sounded in the study like six pistol-shots. Then Roger dismissed everybody with a wave of the hand, and was left once more to his pile of form papers. V.C. wriggled like an eel as he departed from the study. The other fellows were grinning—only Turkey Tuck's fat face remaining uneasy. And for days and days afterwards, a mere glimpse of Packe of the Sixth in the offing was enough to send Turkey hurriedly scuttling round corners, with a lingering dread that Packe, after all, really was "crackers".

THE END