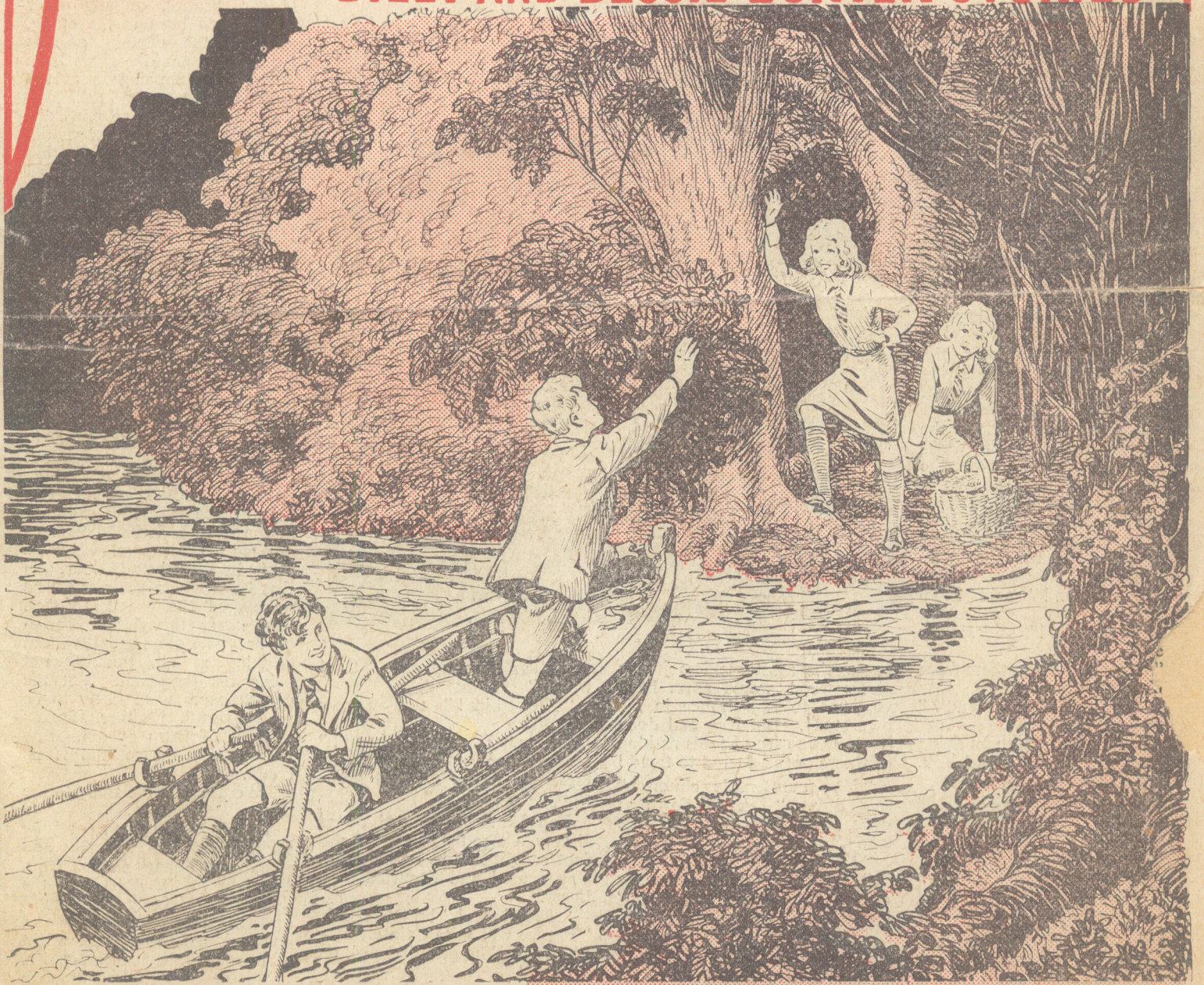


CHUMS OF LYNWOOD

by FRANK
RICHARDS

3^d

AUTHOR OF
THE FAMOUS
BILLY AND BESSIE BUNTER STORIES



EXCITING BOY & GIRL STORIES

A Grand Complete Story, Featuring the Boys of
Lynwood School and the Girls of High Lynn School

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(Author of the Billy and Bessie Bunter stories)

CHAPTER I

EXTRA FOR TWO!

"RAG!" exclaimed Bob Rawlings and Jimmy Carroll, simultaneously.

They stared.

In fact, their eyes almost popped.

It was morning break at Lynwood School. The chums of Study Five were strolling in the quadrangle, thinking of anything but Rag Hankey of the Fourth. They were, in fact, cheerfully discussing a picnic on the island up the river, scheduled for that afternoon, which was a half-holiday. Two girls from High Lynne School were coming, and it was going to be quite a great occasion.

But they forgot all about picnics as they suddenly saw the chubby, ruddy face of Christopher Cuthbert Hankey looking from a window.

For that window was the window of the study belonging to Mr. Prance, the master of the Fourth Form at Lynwood.

Prance was somewhere in the quad: they had seen him walking and talking with Towle, the master of the Third.

Rag, of course, had no business in Mr. Prance's study. And the cheery grin on Rag's face told that he had been "up" to something.

"That clown!" said Bob Rawlings.

"That fathead!" said Jimmy Carroll.

Rag was beckoning them from the window. They ran up.

"I say, is Prance about?" asked Rag.

"What on earth are you doing in Prance's study?" asked Bob.

Rag Hankey chuckled.

"You'd never guess!" he said.

"If you've been ragging Prance—" breathed Bob.

"Have I not?" chuckled Hankey.

"I say, I've propped his Latin dictionary on top of his door—"

"What?"

"Wait till he comes in—cosh!" grinned Rag.

"But I say, I can't get out at the door—I've got to nip out at the window. Is Prance about?"

"Oh, you goat!"

"Oh, you clown!"

Bob Rawlings and his chum

gazed at the happy Rag, quite aghast. Booby-traps were not unknown in the Fourth Form at Lynwood. But a booby-trap fixed up in a master's study was something out of the common—very much so.

Only Rag was capable of such things. Rag was every known kind of an ass. Even Wilmot

see you any minute at the window—"

"Then I'll chance it."

And Rag Hankey, losing no more time, clambered out of the open study window and dropped to the ground. It was like Rag to stumble as he dropped and land with a bump.

"Oh!" gasped Rag as he sat

Prance boiling over, with a bump on his nut! He would skin Rag, and bite every other man in the form."

"It's risky getting in at a beak's window—"

"I'll chance it."

They looked round cautiously. If Mr. Prance, or any other master, had been in the offing, certainly the captain of the Fourth could not have "chanced" climbing in at the study window.

But no "beak," and no Sixth-form prefect, was at hand. Brimble of the Fifth was strolling by, and Coote of the Third was staring at them; but Brimble and Coote did not matter.

"All clear," muttered Bob.

"Prance may blow along any minute—"

"We don't want that clown Hankey flogged. I'll chance it."

Bob Rawlings clambered actively over the wide stone window-sill. Jimmy Carroll watched him as he dropped inside the study.

The chums of the Fourth had kicked Rag as a warning not to "rag" in a beak's study; but they were concerned about him, all the same. It was certain that Prance would go right off at the deep end if a dictionary crashed on his head when he pushed open his study door, and that he would never rest till he discovered the practical joker. Rag never thought of consequences; he just ragged without thinking at all, thinking not being his long suit. But the consequences were likely to be very painful, whether Hankey thought of them or not. Bob was going to save him if he could.

He cut across the study to the door.

The door had been carefully set ajar, and an enormous and weighty dictionary lodged from the door to the lintel over the doorway. Nobody could push open the door from outside and enter without getting that weight of learning fairly on the crown. It was easy to imagine Prance's feelings when he got it!

"The clown!" breathed Bob.

He jumped on a chair and lifted down the big dictionary. He laid it on the table and put the chair back in its place. It



Jones, the most reckless junior at Lynwood, would never have ventured to rag Prance in his own study. But Rag had done it—it was a case of fools rushing in where angels feared to tread!

"You unutterable chump!" said Bob. "Take it down at once, and clear out of the study."

"I'll watch it!" grinned Rag.

"If Prance gets a dictionary on his nut, he will see red!" hissed Jimmy Carroll.

"Let him!" said Rag, cheerfully. "Wait till he comes in! Cosh! But I say, I've got to get out—can't you tell a fellow whether Prance is about?"

"Take that dick down and go out by the door," hissed Bob.

"Rats!"

"Prance may come along and

down on the quad. "Ow! wow!"

"Kick him!" said Jimmy Carroll.

"Here, I say—whoop!" roared Rag. "Wharrer you kicking a fellow for? I say—stoppit—whoop!"

Rag Hankey bounded up as Jimmy Carroll kicked. Bob's foot caught him as he bounded. Rag roared and departed in a hurry.

"The clown!" breathed Bob. "Prance will raise Cain all over Lynwood if he gets that dick on his nut."

"Let's go after Rag and kick him all round the quad," suggested Jimmy.

"Let's get that dick down," answered Bob. "I'll nip in at the window. We don't want

was the work of hardly a minute.

Then he cut back to the window.

"O.K.," said Jimmy Carroll. "But get out quick—Prance may—oh, my only hat! Oh, crumbs!"

Jimmy spun round, in dismay, from the window as he felt a tap on his shoulder. He stared at the tall, lean figure of Mr. Prance, his form-master. Bob, inside the study, stared at him, too, through the open window.

Mr. Prance had come along at a very unlucky moment for the chums of the Fourth. His face, always severe, was grim. He fixed his pin-point eye on Jimmy Carroll, then on Bob Rawlings.

"Well?" he rapped.

"Oh!" gasped Bob. "We—I—Oh!"

"What are you doing in my study, Rawlings?"

"Oh! Nothing, sir," stammered Bob.

"Are you aware, Rawlings, that Lynwood boys are not permitted to enter a master's study unless sent for—especially by the window?"

"Oh! Yes, sir!"

"Are you aware of it, Carroll?"

"Oh!" stammered Jimmy. "Yes, sir!"

"Very good!" said Mr. Prance. "I find you both breaking a rule of which you are well aware. Have you played some foolish prank in my study?"

"Oh! No, sir."

"No doubt I interrupted you in time," said Mr. Prance drily. "You did not, I presume, enter my study without any reason at all, Rawlings?"

Bob made no reply to that. He certainly could not explain to Prance that that ass, that clown, that fathead, Rag Hankey, had fixed up a booby-trap there.

"Had I found that any disrespectful prank had been played in my study I should have reported you both to Dr. Walpole for a flogging!" said Mr. Prance. "As it is, I shall only give you a detention."

"Oh!" murmured Bob and Jimmy together.

"Both of you will go into Extra School this afternoon," said Mr. Prance. "I trust that it will be a warning to you. Now leave my study—by the door, Rawlings."

Mr. Prance stalked away. Bob gave his chum an eloquent look, and turned to the door. Jimmy Carroll's face, generally merry and bright, was as long as a fiddle when Bob rejoined him in the quad.

"Sold!" said Jimmy, dismally.

"That washes out the picnic on Eel Island this afternoon," said Bob. "That ass Hankey—"

"Let's go and kick him again!"

"Yes, let's!"

There was no other solace. It was Extra for two; and no picnic with Kate Wilton and Gwen Hatch on the island up the river. So they looked round the quad for Rag Hankey and found him, and duly kicked him, much to his wrath and indignation—and, finding solace in it, kicked him again, and yet again, till Rag dodged into the House and escaped to his study.

CHAPTER II

STUMPED!

VALENTINE WILMOT-JONES jumped suddenly.

"Oh!" he exclaimed.

Wilmot-Jones was in his study, No. 7 in the Fourth, which he shared with Rag Hankey. He

felt sure, was going to win the three o'clock, and he was going to be at Lynford Races to see him do it! He was going with a sporting friend he knew outside the school, and he was going to have a great time.

Certainly, if his great time that afternoon came to the knowledge of his headmaster, there was no doubt that Dr. Walpole would administer as severe a flogging as had ever been administered at Lynwood—if he did not expel him! But W.J. was going to be very cautious about it.

He had told Rag Hankey—which was as good as telling everybody at Lynwood—that he was going up to Eel Island that afternoon in his boat, to explore

remained was to decide whether he was going to lose his too-ample pocket-money on Pink Daisy or on Smoke Stack!

Deep in that knotty problem, W.J. neither heard nor heeded a rapid patter of footsteps in the passage; and even had he heard and heeded it, he would not have expected the study door to hurtle open as if struck by a bomb and Rag Hankey to career into the study at top speed like a runaway horse.

But that was what happened.

The study door flew open with a crash. Rag Hankey bolted in so frantically that he crashed into the study table without being able to stop himself in time.

Naturally it startled Wilmot-Jones and made him jump. He jumped so suddenly that the half-smoked cigarette slipped into his mouth. And then he yelled, "Oh!"

The burning end of that cigarette was hot! One end of it, W.J. found, or fancied he found, quite agreeable. But the hot end was most disagreeable. W.J.'s yell woke almost all the echoes in the Fourth-form passage.

"Oh!" gasped Rag, as he grasped the rocking table to save himself from falling, while books and papers shot off and fluttered over the floor.

"Oh!" yelled Wilmot-Jones. "Ow! Ooooh! Wooooh!"

He spat out the cigarette in frantic haste as he leaped up from the rocker. He rubbed his mouth with his handkerchief. He glared at Christopher Cuthbert Hankey as if he could have eaten him.

"Oh!" repeated Rag, breathlessly. "D-d-d-did I make you jump, W.J.?"

"Urrrrrrgh!"

"Anything the matter?" asked Rag.

"Wurrrrgh! You nearly made me swallow a cigarette!" shrieked W.J.

"Oh! Ha, ha! I say, you shouldn't be smoking in the study, W.J. Prance would give you six if he caught you at it."

"Wurrrrgh!" W.J. rubbed his mouth, and mumbled, and gurgled, giving Rag deadly looks the while. "Oh! ow! Oooogh."

"Ha, ha!" chortled Rag. He seemed to think it funny! "Did you burn your mouth, old chap? Well, if a fellow smokes in the study—"

"You mad ass!" yelled Wilmot-Jones. "What do you mean by charging into the study like a mad bull?"

"Rawlings and Carroll are after me," said Rag. "I dodged in to get clear of them. I say, you stand by a chap if they come up here, won't you."

"You potty clown!"

Rag peered out of the doorway. To his great relief, there was no one to be seen in the Fourth-form passage. Rawlings



had the study to himself in break that morning, Rag being busily engaged in his campaign in Mr. Prance's quarters.

Fellows seldom went up to the studies in morning break, and the dandy of the Fourth was not expecting any interruption. He was leaning back in a rocker, with one elegant leg crossed over the other, and a cigarette in his mouth, from which he was ejecting little streams of smoke. That was one of W.J.'s manners and customs, W.J. rather priding himself upon being a "bad hat" who honoured the rules of the school rather in the breach than the observance.

Open on his knees was a newspaper—open at the racing page. While he blew out streams of smoke, Wilmot-Jones was conning over the valuable information in the "Tipster's Tips" column, not quite sure whether he was going to back Pink Daisy or Smoke Stack for the three o'clock that afternoon.

One of those "gees," W.J.

the ruin of the ancient monastery on the island. He was going to pull away from the school raft, as if bound on a perfectly innocent excursion up the river.

But he was not going to stop at Eel Island. He was going to pull on as far as Lynford Bridge, where his sporting friend was going to pick him up in a car.

That made all safe, in W.J.'s opinion.

He had to be wary—for he was aware that his form-master, Mr. Prance, had a somewhat doubtful eye on him. Only a few days ago, a Lynwood cap had been seen over the fence of the Blue Bell, a disreputable inn strictly out of bounds for Lynwooders, by Champion of the Sixth, head-prefect. Both Champion and Mr. Prance had a suspicion that that cap had adorned the head of Valentine Wilmot-Jones of the Fourth Form, and W.J. was aware of it.

So W.J. was going to be very wary indeed. All his plans were cut and dried for covering his trail that afternoon, and all that

and Carroll had not followed him up to his lair.

"Oh! They ain't coming," said Rag. "Fancy fellows getting shirty because a fellow fixed up a booby-trap for old Prance! I thought they'd be amused, you know—and instead of that, they started kicking a fellow. I—I think I'll stick in the study till the bell goes for third school—I don't want to run into them again. Look here, don't you start any more of your filthy smoking! You jolly well know that I can't stand it in the study."

"You blithering idiot——"

"Oh, draw it mild," said Rag. "Tain't my fault you've burnt your mouth—I never knew you were smoking here, did I? Besides, you jolly well know that you shouldn't have been smoking."

"You footling freak——"

"I'll tell you what," said Rag, pacifically. "If you like, I'll come up to Eel Island with you this afternoon. Blessed if I know what you want to root about the old ruin for, but I'll come. You don't want to go up to the island all on your own, I suppose?"

"I don't want a mad ass for company."

"Oh, yah!" said Rag. "I expect you mean you're going to take your filthy smokes—is that it? Well, I don't want any of your smokes, and I'm not keen on rooting over a silly ruin, either! Go on your own, and be blowed."

"I'm going on my own, you dithering dummy! Shut the door."

"Not if you're going to smoke," said Rag. "I'd rather have some air, see?"

"I'm not going to smoke now! I've got something else to do."

"Oh, all right."

Rag shut the study door.

Wilmot-Jones finished rubbing his painful mouth. He still had a pain in it, but he had a worse pain in his temper! As Rag shut the door, Wilmot-Jones stepped to a corner of the study, where a cricket-stump stood. He picked up the stump.

"I say, what are you going to do with that stump, W.J.?" asked Rag in surprise. Rag was not quick on the uptake.

"You're just going to find out," answered W.J. He stepped between Rag and the door, with the stump gripped in his hand, and a gleam in his eyes. "I'm going to swipe a blithering, blethering, burbling fathead who's made me burn my mouth with a cigarette! Got it now?"

"I—I say——!" stammered Rag. "I say, you keep off! I—I say—yaroooooh!"

Swipe!

"Yoo-hoop!" roared Rag, dodging round the table. "Why, you cheeky rotter, do you think you can swipe me with a cricket stump?"

Swipe!

Wilmot-Jones evidently thought that he could; for he did. He pursued Rag round the table, swiping. Swipe! swipe! swipe!

"Oh, crumbs! Oh, crikey! Stoppit!" yelled Rag. "I'll jolly well punch your head! Keep that stump away! Yaroooo!"

Swipe! swipe!

The hapless Rag yelled, and roared, and dodged. He had fled to his study to escape a booting; but he seemed to have fallen out of the frying-pan into the fire. Any amount of booting from Rawlings and Carroll did not amount to so much as a single swipe from the cricket-stump in the vigorous and vengeful hand of W.J. And Rag was not getting a single swipe! He was getting them as fast as W.J. could lay them on!

Swipe! swipe! swipe!

In sheer desperation, Rag rushed at the dandy of the Fourth. But the plump Rag had no chance whatever in combat with W.J. He landed one punch, which did not even make W.J. wink. Then Wilmot-Jones's left landed on his chest with a thump, and Rag sat down suddenly.

The next moment W.J. had him by the collar and had twisted him over. Swipe! swipe! swipe!

"Oh! ow! wow! yarooooh! Whooop!" roared Rag.

Swipe! swipe! swipe!

There was a clang of a bell. It was the bell for third school. Then, at last, the cricket stump ceased to swipe.

"There, you fathead!" panted Wilmot-Jones. "There, you ass! There, you footling frump!" And he pitched the cricket stump into a corner and hurried out of the study.

"Wooh! Oooooh! Wooh! Moooooh!" mumbled Rag Hankey as he crawled to his feet. "Oh! Oh! wow! Ooooooh!"

It was full five minutes before Rag felt equal to following Wilmot-Jones down. And he was still wriggling when he left Study Seven at last.

All the rest of the Lynwood Fourth were in their places, and the lesson had begun, when Rag wriggled into the form-room.

Mr. Prance fixed a baleful eye on him.

"Hankey!" he rapped.

"Oh! Yes, sir," moaned Rag.

"You are six minutes and a quarter late." Prance was always exact!

"Oh! Yes, sir! I—I——"

"You will take a hundred lines of Virgil, Hankey."

"You see, sir, I—I——"

"And go to your place."

"But, sir, I—I——"

"If you say another word, Hankey, I shall cane you."

Christopher Cuthbert Hankey did not say another word; but

he went to his place with deep feelings. As he passed Wilmot-Jones, he whispered:

"You wait, you smudge!"

"Want some more stump?" asked W.J.

"You smeary smudge, you just wait!" hissed Rag. "I'll jolly well make you sit up! I'll jolly well——"

"Are you talking in class, Hankey?" rapped Mr. Prance.

"Oh! No! Yes! I——"

"Take another hundred lines, Hankey."

"Oh, crumbs!"

Rag almost collapsed into his place.

CHAPTER III

ROUGH ON RAG!

"THAT will do, Rawlings!" rapped Mr. Prance.

Bob Rawlings had stumbled a little in his "con." Bob was a good deal handier with a cricket-bat than with the immortal works of Virgil. And just then Bob was thinking more of the half-holiday, which was hopelessly "mucked up," than of Latin verse. Mr. Prance gave him a frown as he sat down.

"Did you prepare this lesson, Rawlings?" he rapped.

"Oh, yes, sir," answered Bob.

"Then the result does you no credit," said Mr. Prance. "But perhaps you are thinking more of playing insensate pranks in your form-master's study than of work in form?"

"Oh! No, sir!" stammered Bob. "I—I—never——"

"That will do! You will go on, Carroll."

Jimmy Carroll stood up to construe. Jimmy was clever in class, as he was in most things, and he proceeded to hand out a translation which not only satisfied Mr. Prance, but even caused a smile to dawn upon his severe features. Prance was undoubtedly a little of a Tartar: but a good "con" would always put him into a good humour. But he interrupted Jimmy to rap at Rag.

"Hankey!"

"Oh, yes, sir?"

"Sit still!"

"Oh! Certainly, sir," moaned Rag.

"You may go on, Carroll."

Jimmy went on, while Rag strove to control his wriggles. It was all very well for Prance to tell him to sit still, but Prance hadn't had a dozen from a cricket stump. Rag had! It was not easy for Rag to sit still, after that stumping in Study Seven.

However, Rag sat as still as he could, unwilling to draw the pin-point eyes upon him again. His own eyes were fixed, inimically, on Valentine Wilmot-Jones.

Often and often there was a spot of trouble in Study Seven. Rag was a fellow who sometimes exasperated even his friends—and W.J. had very little

patience with him. W.J. certainly did not think himself a bully or intend to be one, but he had an impatient temper and an overbearing disposition, and Rag had most of the benefit of both. But that stumping was, in Rag's opinion, the limit. Rag had heaps of pluck, and more than once he had tried his luck in a "scrap" with W.J.—but he never had the ghost of a chance. That stumping, however, was going to be avenged, if Rag could contrive it. He was going to make Valentine Wilmot-Jones "sit up."

Pondering on ways and means of making W.J. go through the sitting-up process, Rag naturally had little attention to bestow on the lesson. He gave quite a jump when Prance suddenly rapped out:

"You will go on, Hankey."

"Oh!" stammered Rag.

He had not even been listening, and he wondered dizzily where he was to go on.

"Did you hear me, Hankey?"

"Oh! Yes, sir! I—I'm finding the place," stammered Rag. "I—I've lost the place just for a minute, sir."

"Lucus in urbe fuit media——" whispered Baker.

"Did you speak to Hankey, Baker?" rapped Mr. Prance. Prance's ears were as sharp as his eyes.

"Oh, sir! I—I——"

"Take fifty lines, Baker! Go on at once, Hankey."

"Yes, sir! Lucus in urbe fuit media——" Rag had the place, at any rate, even if he could make little or nothing of the Latin. "Lucus—lucus——"

"Construe!" rapped Prance.

"There was a light in the city——!" stammered Rag.

"There was a what?" almost roared Prance, while some of the Fourth chuckled. It was like Rag to confuse lucus, a grove, with lucus, lux.

"I—I—I mean——!" mumbled Rag.

"Indeed!" said Mr. Prance, "I am glad to hear that you have a meaning, Hankey." This was sarcasm. "Perhaps you will be kind enough to make your meaning a little clearer."

"I—I—I mean——"

"There was a grove in the midst of the city, fathead!" whispered Jimmy Carroll, taking the risk of Prance's sharp ears.

"Oh!" Rag went on happily.

"I—I've got it, sir! There was a grove in the midst of the city, fathead!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled all the Fourth. It was rather unfortunate that Jimmy had added the word "fathead." Rag had taken it as part of the translation!

"Upon my word!" ejaculated Mr. Prance. "Silence in the class! Hankey, you may take another hundred lines, and sit down."

"Oh, crikey!" groaned Rag.

"You will bring me the lines before you go out this after-

noon," added Mr. Prance. "Wilmot-Jones, you will go on."

Rag sat crushed. He had now a total of three hundred lines, all to be delivered in his form-master's study before he could get out for the half-holiday that day! Rag was beginning to feel like the Raven's unhappy master, whom unmerciful disaster followed fast and followed faster!

Valentine Wilmot-Jones stood up to construe. W.J. could be very good in class when he liked. On this occasion he chose to be very good indeed, for Prance was evidently in a tart temper, and he did not want to risk a detention. After long cogitation, W.J. had decided to back Smoke Stack for the three o'clock at Lynford, and a detention would have interfered very seriously with his sporting speculations. W.J. proceeded to ladle out Virgil as if Latin were his mother-tongue, and Prance's frowning face cleared once more.

"Rotten smudge!" breathed Rag.

A gleam came into Rag's eyes. There was Wilmot-Jones, rolling out his construe without a fault, under Prance's approving eyes—and it came into Rag's mind that with Prance's attention wholly concentrated on W.J., this was a chance for him. He was going to interrupt that impeccable construe with an ink-ball! Prance would not see who projected it, and it was safe as houses.

To knead a fragment of blotting-paper, with ink, into an ink-ball, was quick work. Rag very soon had it ready. He lodged it on his thumb-nail, to project with the tip of his forefinger.

W.J. was only a couple of yards away, and any fellow but Rag could have landed that ink-ball on the target, catching him nicely in the ear. But Rag was cack-handed. There always seemed to be a screw loose somewhere in everything that Rag handled—even in so simple a matter as whizzing an ink-ball.

The ink-ball whizzed! Unluckily, it missed Wilmot-Jones' ear by six or seven inches. But every bullet has its billet!

Whizzing on past Wilmot-Jones, that ink-ball landed on the next object in the line of fire, which happened to be Mr. Prance's face.

Plop!.. "Oooh!" gasped Mr. Prance.

He jumped almost clear of the form-room floor as the ink-ball impinged upon his majestic countenance and streaked it with ink.

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Bob Rawlings.

"Oh, that awful ass!" murmured Jimmy Carroll.

Wilmot-Jones stopped in his construe, staring at the inky countenance of his form-master. Every fellow in the Fourth

stared. Rag stared hardest of all, overcome with dismay at this unexpected outcome of his shot at W.J.

"Oh, lor!" breathed Rag.

Mr. Prance stood in a transfixed state for some moments. The expression on his face was simply terrific.

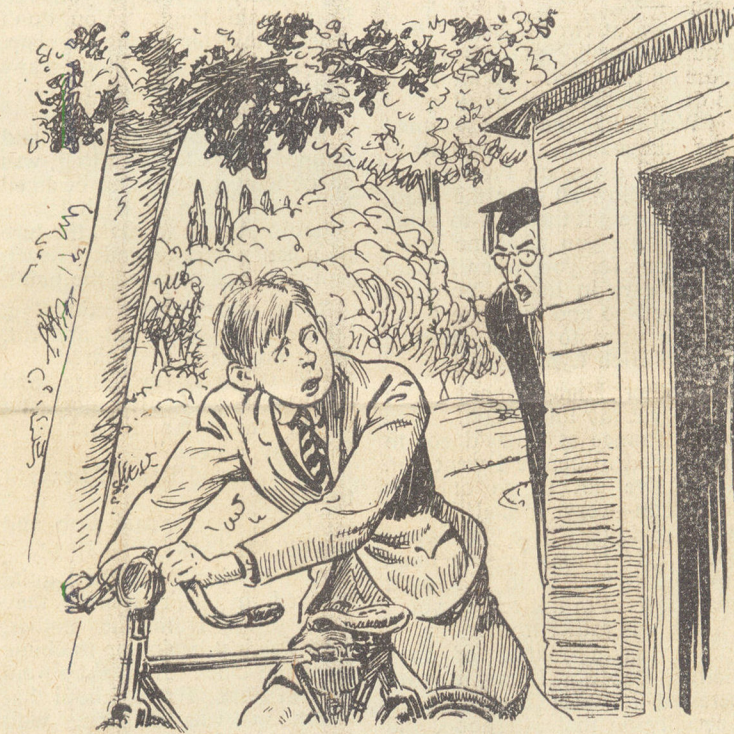
Then he took out a handkerchief and wiped away the ink. Then he eyed his form with a basilisk glare.

"Who threw that ink-ball?" he asked in a deep, deep voice.

There was a dead silence.

Six or seven fellows had seen Rag's action. Nobody was disposed to tell Mr. Prance so. Rag sat dumb with horror.

"The boy who threw that ink-ball will step out before the form immediately," boomed Mr. Prance.



Nobody stirred. Rag was not likely to step out!

"Very well!" said Mr. Prance. "Unless the boy who threw that ink-ball steps out at once, the whole form will be detained for the half-holiday."

"Oh, crikey!" groaned Rag.

Expressive glances were cast at Rag from all sides. Nobody was going to give him away, but when the whole form was threatened with detention, a fellow was expected to own up. Rag knew what was expected of him, and what he had to do; but it cost him an effort to drag himself to his feet.

"If—if—if you please, sir—!" bleated Rag.

"Was it you, Hankey?"

"I—I chucked it at Wilmot-Jones, sir, only—only it missed—!" groaned Rag.

"Stand out before the form, Hankey."

Mr. Prance picked up his cane from his desk. Rag almost

crawled out before the form.

"Poor old Rag!" murmured Bob Rawlings.

"Rag's the man to ask for it!" murmured Jimmy Carroll.

Mr. Prance pointed to a desk with his cane.

"Bend over that desk, Hankey."

Prance did not know that Rag had been stumped that morning. Perhaps he might have laid it on a little more lightly, had he known. As it was, he laid it on as if he fancied that he was beating carpet.

It was six of the best! The hapless Rag was yelling long before the sixth shot landed. When it was over, he crawled back to his place. After which it was quite useless for Mr. Prance to tell him to sit still. Rag wriggled, and wriggled, and

wiggled; and he was still wriggling like an eel when third school ended.

CHAPTER IV

RAG TO THE RESCUE!

BOB RAWLINGS rubbed his nose. Jimmy Carroll wrinkled his brows. They performed this Combined Operation as they came out after the school dinner.

"We've got to let them know!" said Bob.

"We have," agreed Jimmy.

"I don't know whether they'd care to go on their own," said Bob. "Anyhow, it was arranged for us to go with them, and we've just got to let them know before they start for Eel Island."

Jimmy nodded.

High Lynne School was lower down the river than Lynwood, on the other side of the village of Lynn. Kate Wilton and Gwen Hatch were coming up

in their boat from High Lynne, and the arrangement was that both parties should meet at Eel Island, a mile up the river from Lynwood. Probably they would sight one another on the river, on the way up. But the detention handed out by Mr. Prance made it impossible for Bob and Jimmy to keep to that arrangement. They had to go into Extra School for the afternoon, and excursions up the river were completely washed out for them.

All that remained was to let Kate and Gwen know that they couldn't come and leave it up to them to decide whether to carry on on their own or wash out the excursion altogether. But to let Kate and Gwen know, word had to be taken to High Lynne somehow. That was the problem.

Extra school began at two. Bob and Jimmy had to solve that problem before two o'clock chimed out from the clock-tower. There would not be a minute, or even a second, of grace. Prance was too exact for that.

"What about W.J.?" asked Jimmy Carroll, as the dandy of the Fourth came sauntering out of the House. "He might give them the tip."

"Eh! I've heard that he's going to the island this afternoon," answered Bob. "He's going up the river, not down."

"Might run down to High Lynne first—it's not a long run on the water," suggested Jimmy Carroll. "W.J. just walks the water in that skiff of his."

"Might ask him!" agreed Bob.

And he hailed Wilmot-Jones, who glanced round.

"Can't stop," said W.J. "I'm rather in a hurry! What is it?"

"Well, look here, you know we're detained owing to that mad ass Hankey and his monkey-tricks," said Bob. "We want to get a message down to Kate Wilton at High Lynne. She and Gwen were coming on a picnic, see?"

"Sorry—!" said Wilmot-Jones politely. "Look here," said Jimmy Carroll. "You can't be in a thumping hurry to get to that old ruin on Eel Island. Bless if I thought you'd care a bean about such a thing at all."

Wilmot-Jones laughed. "I'm developin' a taste for archaeology," he said. "It's frightfully interestin', archaeology."

"Rot!" said Jimmy. "Bosh!" said Bob.

The dandy of the Fourth laughed again.

"Well, I've got to push off, rot and bosh or not," he said.

"It wouldn't take you long to run down to Kate's school with the current, and drop a message there," said Jimmy Carroll. "If it made you half an hour late

at Eel Island, that wouldn't hurt you."

"Sorry——!"

"Look here, will you do it or not?" said Bob gruffly.

"Sorry—not!" Wilmot-Jones walked on. But he turned back for a moment. "Look here, you chaps, I'd do it like a shot, but I'm really in a hurry—I've got a date. Somebody else will go. Try Rag—he will do anything for anybody."

And W.J. walked away.

Bob glanced after him with a frowning brow and Jimmy Carroll shrugged his shoulders. That Valentine Wilmot-Jones had developed a taste for archaeological pursuits they did not believe for a moment. They were not interested in his proceedings, but now that they thought about it, they guessed something like the truth.

"Bet you he's not going to the island at all," said Jimmy Carroll. "More likely meeting some sporting outsider somewhere. It makes it safer, to get it about that he's gone up to the island, if he's inquired after."

Bob Rawlings nodded.

"That's about it," he agreed. "Oh, bother him and his racing stunts! What about asking Rag—he would do it."

"We booted him this morning for his own good," grinned Jimmy. "Perhaps he's grateful! Let's see."

"Know where the fathead is?"

"Anywhere except where he's wanted," grunted Jimmy Carroll. "Must be spotted about somewhere. Let's look for him."

The chums of the Fourth looked up and down round the quad, but Rag was not to be seen. They looked in the gym, and into the school shop, and on the cricket ground, without any luck. Then they went into the House, and looked into the lounge, but Rag was not there. Finally they decided to draw the studies, and went up to the Fourth-form passage.

As they came along to Number Seven they heard a voice from that study, apprising them that Christopher Cuthbert Hankey was there.

"Oh, scissors! Oh, holy smoke! Blow Virgil! Blow Prance! Blow W.J. Blow these rotten lines! Blow everything."

Evidently Rag was at home!

Bob and Jimmy looked into the study. Rag, with a far from happy expression on his chubby face, was seated at the study table, with Virgil propped open against the inkstand, a sheaf of impot paper before him, a pen in his fingers, and a smear of ink on his nose. Apparently Rag had retired to his study to get through the lines given him by Prance. Rag was seldom prompt with lines, but no doubt the fact that he was forbidden to go out until he had delivered them made a difference. Anyhow, there was Rag, inky and dolorous, doing lines.

He looked up dismally at the two juniors in the doorway. His face brightened just a little. They had put "paid" to his wonderful scheme for ragging Prance in break that morning, and they had booted him for it, still, he was glad to see them now.

"I say, trickle in," said Rag, eagerly. "Have you come to help me with these putrid lines?"

"Not exactly," said Bob.

"We've got to go into Extra at two, owing to your fatheaded stunt in Prance's study, you ass——"

"You shouldn't have barged in," said Rag, "I'd have got Prance a treat with that dick, if you hadn't! Serve you right!"

"Well, look here——"

"I've done a hundred," groaned Rag. "I've been stick-here ever since tiffin grinding at it. I've got two hundred more to do. If you chaps did fifty each——"

"Extra at two, fathead," said Jimmy Carroll, "and it's a jolly close on two now. We want you to do something for us, Rag."

"Well, I like that!" exclaimed Rag, indignantly. "You butt in and spoil a rag on Prance, you boot a fellow all over the quad, and you've got the neck to come and tell me you want me to do something for you, when I'm up to the ears in lines. You can jolly well go and eat coke."

"We want to get a message over to High Lynne——"

"Bother High Lynne! I've got to get my lines done! You heard Prance say they'd got to be handed in before I went out. Well, I've got to go out this afternoon—very special!" said Rag, darkly. "I've got something on! It may be something up against that swob W.J. or it may not! I'm not telling you."

Rag was rather mysterious.

But, as a matter of fact, neither Bob nor Jimmy was interested in what Rag had got specially on that afternoon, and did not care a hoot whether it was up against the dandy of the Fourth or not. What they were interested in was getting a message across to High Lynne before Kate and Gwen started out in their boat.

So they did not, as Rag perhaps expected, ask him any questions. They kept to the matter in hand.

"Two of the girls were going on a picnic with us this afternoon, Rag," said Bob Rawlings. "Now we can't go."

"Were they?" said Rag, dipping his pen in the ink. "Well, I'm rather busy——"

"Cut across and tell them we're detained, old chap," said Jimmy Carroll.

"My lines——"

"Kate Wilton and Gwen Hatch—you know them! You wouldn't like them to be hung up this afternoon not knowing whether we're coming or not."

"Um!" said Rag. "No! But Prance said I was to take in

my lines before I went out. You heard him."

"It's not twenty minutes on a bike there and back! Prance won't know anything about it. You can dodge out easily enough, and get back for your lines."

"Um!" said Rag, again.

"And look here, we shall have some of the picnic stuff left on our hands—we'll stand tea in Number Five afterwards," said Bob. "We've got a cake and a bag of jam-tarts, Rag."

"Oh!" Rag Hankey sat up and took notice, as it were. "I say, now you're talking. After all, if I get my lines in pretty early, Prance won't know I've cut out for a quarter of an hour, so that's all right. What sort of a cake?"

"Sultana," said Bob, laughing. "Good! I'll cut across on my jigger, to oblige you fellows," said Rag. "You don't deserve it, after booting a chap, but I will. I say, how many jam-tarts have you got?"

"A dozen!"

Rag laid down his pen, and jumped up. Really, Rag was an obliging fellow, and he liked Kate and Gwen of High Lynne School. Added to that, the lure of a sultana cake and a dozen jam-tarts easily settled the point.

"I'm your man," said Rag. "I'll run the jigger out, and cut. What am I to tell them?"

"That we're in Extra and can't get out this afternoon, and would they like to make it Saturday instead."

"O.K.," said Rag. "Leave it to me."

"Good man," said Bob and Jimmy together.

And leaving it to Rag, quite relieved in their minds, they went down from the studies. Two was just beginning to chime from the clock-tower, they were only in time. Extra School that afternoon was French, with Monsieur Bon. Nine or ten hapless offenders were booked for Extra, and Bob Rawlings and Jimmy Carroll joined them, going to the French master's class-room.

It was not joyful in Extra with the sun shining in a blue sky, and cheery voices of luckier fellows floating in at the class-room windows. French irregular verbs had little charm at the best of times, and least of all on a sunny half-holiday. But the chums of the Fourth had at least one consolation—they had got off a messenger to High Lynne, and Kate and Gwen would be put wise before they started out in their boat.

On that point, they were easy in their minds. They would not have been quite so easy, if they had been able to follow the movements of Christopher Cuthbert Hankey while they were sitting in Extra with Monsieur Bon. Luckily for their ease of mind, they couldn't.

CHAPTER V

NO GO!

MR. PRANCE stared.

Mr. Towle glanced round.

Prance and Towle were walking and talking in the quad. Towle, who was a camera enthusiast, was telling Prance about some successful shots with his camera, and promising to show him a set of really good prints when he had printed them out. Prance was listening with as much interest as he could muster, manfully concealing his yawns, and thinking of a pile of Form papers, waiting for him in his study, which he had to correct before tea.

Had Prance been interested in Towle's conversation, and giving the Third-form master his attention, probably he would not have noticed a plump figure with a ruddy plump face that cut across to the bike-shed.

But as Prance's attention was wandering, it was natural that his eyes should wander also, and so it happened that Prance did spot that plump figure—at which he stared, frowning.

"Upon my word!" said Mr. Prance.

"What—?" queried Mr. Towle.

"Did you see that junior—Hankey of my form——"

"I did not notice him," said Mr. Towle. "As I was remarking, Prance, I have what I consider a most successful picture of the chapel. I really think——"

"Hankey," said Mr. Prance, "has instructions to bring an imposition to my study before going out."

"Indeed!" said Towle. "Quite so! The old grey wall comes out specially well in my picture of the chapel, as I think you will agree——"

"Oh, quite, quite!" said Mr. Prance. "But I must speak to Hankey! You will excuse me, Towle."

Not sorry to escape from Towle and his hobby, Mr. Prance cut across to the bike-shed, into which Rag Hankey had disappeared. Mr. Towle was left full of unuttered photographic talk. Luckily, he spotted Mr. Rand, master of the Second Form, in the quad, and bore down upon him, to let him have it instead of Prance.

Mr. Prance stopped outside the door of the bike shed.

Prance was a severe gentleman, but a just one. Judging by appearance, Hankey was going out before delivering his lines. Still, it was just possible that he had cut down to the bike-shed to speak to some fellow there who was going out, not intending the same himself. In that case Prance had no kick coming, as it were. So he waited to see whether Hankey wheeled out a bike.

He had only a minute to wait.

Then the front wheel of a bicycle emerged from the door-

way of the shed, followed by the rest of the bike and Rag Hankey.

Without even noticing the lean figure in the offing, Rag started running his bike down to the gate. That settled the point. Obviously, Hankey was going out, with his lines still undelivered.

"Hankey!" Mr. Prance rapped out the name like a pistol-shot.

"Oh!" gasped Rag.

He stared round. His eyes popped at his form-master. Why and wherefore his beak was hovering round the bike-shed, Rag did not know. But there he was!

"Hankey! Did I direct you to bring your lines to my study before going out this afternoon?" inquired Mr. Prance.

"Oh! Yes, sir!" mumbled Rag.

"Have you done so?"

"Oh! No, sir!"

"Yet you are going out on your bicycle!" said Mr. Prance, grimly.

"I—I—I—," stammered Rag.

There was little to say. He hadn't delivered his lines. He was going out! Prance had him!

"You will replace your bicycle immediately," said Mr. Prance.

"If—if you please, sir, a chap asked me to take a message for him, and—and—"

"Did I just tell you to replace your bicycle immediately, Hankey?"

"Oh! Yes, sir."

"Then do so!"

Rag wheeled his bike back into the shed, and replaced it on the stand. Mr. Prance watched him with a grim eye as he did so.

"Now follow me, Hankey!"

"Oh, dear! Yes, sir!" moaned Rag.

He followed his form-master back to the House. He followed him in, Mr. Prance pointed to the stairs.

"Go to your study, Hankey, and write your lines. You will write an additional fifty lines for having disregarded your form-master's orders."

"Oh, scissors!" groaned Rag.

There was no help for it. Christopher Cuthbert Hankey tramped up the staircase, back to Study Seven. Prance, frowning, went to his own study.

"Putrid!" groaned Rag, as he sat down to lines again.

He dipped pen in ink, and re-started after the interval. Rag, certainly, intended to carry out the mission he had undertaken. But it had to be postponed. He had an additional fifty lines added to the three hundred. More than ever, Rag wished that that "dick" had landed on Prance's "nut" in morning break, as it certainly would have done but for the intervention of Bob Rawlings and his chum. Still, even a Latin dictionary on Prance's nut would not have

helped him now. He had to plough through those lines before he could get out, and he could only hope that he would still be in time to "tip" Kate and Gwen, when he did ultimately get across to High Lynne.

It was a tiresome business, sitting in the study at lines—no more enjoyable than French verbs in Extra. It seemed to poor Rag that his task would never end.

But everything comes to an end at last, even the weariest river winds somewhere safe to sea! Rag, at long last, wrote the last line, threw down his pen, and chucked Virgil across the study.

"Blow!" said Rag. "Blow lines! Blow Prance! Oh, blow!"

Having thus expressed his feelings, Rag gathered up his lines, to take them down to Prance.

He tapped at the door of Mr. Prance's study.

"Come in!" came Prance's rap.

Rag marched in. "My lines, sir!" he mumbled.

Mr. Prance took them, glanced at them, and grunted.

"Carelessly written," he said.

"Very slovenly! Extremely slovenly! You must do better than this, Hankey."

Rag fairly trembled. It was true that he had lost no time over those lines, and that signs of haste were plentiful—not to mention an assortment of smears and blots. It would be like Prance to tell him to write them over again! In which case, not only could he carry no message to High Lynne that afternoon, but the mysterious very special "something" of which he had hinted to Bob Rawlings and his chum would have to be abandoned.

But Prance could be merciful. Perhaps the dismay in Rag's plump face disarmed him. He smacked the lines down on the table.

"You may go, Hankey!"

"Oh! Thank you, sir!" gasped Rag.

He shot out of the study almost like a bullet!

Two or three minutes later, Rag was on his bike, grinding away at the pedals as if for dear life. In Lynn Lane he missed a farmer's cart by an inch, in the village street of Lynn he caused several of the inhabitants to jump for their lives; in the road beyond, only a motorist's skill saved him from a head-on crash. With remarkable luck, Rag was still alive and in one piece when he arrived at High Lynne School.

A plump High Lynne junior was looking out of the gateway. Rag knew Betty Bunn of the High Lynne Fourth, and as he tumbled off rather than dismounted from his machine, he called to her:

"I say, Betty! I've got a



message for your pals, Kate and Gwen. I hope they ain't gone out yet."

Betty laughed.

"Just like you to come with a message an hour late," she remarked.

"Oh, crumbs!" said Rag.

"Are they gone?"

"Gone an hour ago."

"Oh, scissors! That tears it!" said Rag. "I say, I couldn't help being late—my beak bottled me. Look here, tell them when they come in that I came, won't you, to tell them that Bob and Jimmy are in Extra and couldn't come out."

"Fat lot of good telling them when they come in," said Betty. "But I'll tell them, if you like."

Rag had done his best. His best hadn't been of much use—but then, nothing that Rag did ever was of much use! Anyhow, he could do no more, and he remounted his jigger, and rode back to Lynwood, at a rather more leisurely pace.

Bob Rawlings and Jimmy Carroll were still in Extra, with an hour and a half of it still before them. But Rag was not thinking of Bob and Jimmy. It would have been no use to report to them that he had missed Kate and Gwen, even if it had been possible to speak to fellows in Extra, which it was not. Rag was thinking now of his own plans for that afternoon—or what remained of it.

He put up his bike, and went down to the school raft on the Liss. There was a grin on his fat face as he pushed a boat out. He was still feeling the twinges of the stumping in Study Seven, accentuated by the six in the form-room! That swob, that smear, that smudge, Wilmot-Jones, was going to pay scot and lot for all his painful twinges,

and Rag knew how—or, at all events, he fancied that he did!

CHAPTER VI

ON THEIR OWN!

"NOT here!" said Gwen Hatch. "Not yet," agreed Kate Wilton.

The High Lynne boat floated under the shadowy branches of the trees on Eel Island. Kate ducked a fair head, Gwen a dark one as they pushed the boat in from the bright sunlight on the river under the shade of the island trees.

The Liss broadened almost into a lake where Eel Island lay, in the middle of the stream. It was quite a distance from either shore. Deep woods shut in the river on either side. It was a beautiful spot, but considerably solitary. Eel Island was part of the Craye estate, and Sir Peter Craye, who was a governor of both schools, gave leave for Lynwood boys and High Lynne girls to land on his island. But it was a fairly stiff pull up the river as far as the island, and it did not have many visitors. It was thickly wooded, with a little open glade in the centre, where the remains of the ruined monastery lay, which was an ideal spot for a picnic in the summer.

But for Rag Hankey's clowning in Prance's study that morning, and its consequences to the chums of the Fourth, Bob Rawlings and Jimmy Carroll would have been at the island ready to greet the two High Lynne girls when they landed. Owing to Rag's ill-luck as a messenger, Kate and Gwen had no idea that they were not coming at all. But that they had not yet arrived was plain from the fact that no boat was tied up at the

little landing-place under the beeches.

"Late!" said Gwen.

"Well, you never know exactly when you can get away at school," said Kate. "We had to stop and speak to Miss Prim just before we started."

Gwen Hatch looked back along the river, holding on to a low branch of a spreading beech.

"No sign of them," she said.

"Well, let's get ashore," said Kate. "If they're late, we'll have the picnic ready for them when they come."

"We've got only half the stuff in our basket," said Gwen. "They were going to bring the rest."

Kate smiled.

"Then we'll get our half ready," she said.

"O.K.," said Gwen. "Come on."

Gwen Hatch jumped ashore, and pulled the boat closer in. Kate followed her and tied the painter to a low bough. Then the picnic-basket was taken out.

"This way!" said Kate.

The little landing-place was shut in by the trees that grew thickly on the island. But there was a narrow and rather winding path through the trees and thickets, leading to the glade in the middle of the island, and both girls had been there before, and knew the way.

Kate pushed on ahead, pushing boughs and brambles out of the way, and Gwen followed her with the picnic basket.

In a few minutes they emerged into the glade—and a pool of sunshine in the midst of the shady trees.

In one spot were almost shapeless masses of old masonry, overgrown with grass and ivy, where an ancient monastery had once stood. A good many hundreds of years had passed since the old days when the monks had dwelt there, and only fragments of walls and heaps of fallen masonry remained to show where they had dwelt.

The picnic basket was set down and unpacked. The spirit-stove was prepared for boiling water and making tea. Gwen carried the little kettle down to the landing-place and filled it with water, and brought it back, and it was soon singing merrily on the spirit-stove.

By that time, both the girls quite expected to hear the sound of a boat pulling in to the island. But no such sound came to their ears. There was no sound of a boat, and no sign of Bob Rawlings or Jimmy Carroll.

"I suppose they're coming!" said Gwen, with a sniff.

"Of course they're coming, dear," said Kate Wilton. "If anything happened to stop them, they'd have sent word."

"Perhaps they've started playing cricket and forgotten all about us!" suggested Gwen.

Kate laughed.

"That's not likely, Gwen. Chris Hankey might, perhaps, but not Bob or Jimmy Carroll. They've been delayed."

"Well, after all, we don't specially want them," remarked Gwen. "We're quite capable of picnicking on our own."

Kate made no rejoinder to that. Gwen seemed to be getting just a little "stuffy" on the subject. But Kate had unlimited good temper and patience, and she took it for granted that something unexpected had turned up to delay the two schoolboys.

"Kettle's boiling," remarked Gwen.

"Better wait a little, I think," said Kate, gently.

"Then I'll put out the stove. May wait for hours," said Gwen. "Might as well wait till

doubtless forgotten all about it. Kate could not think so, but she was very much perplexed, when an hour had passed, and there was still no sign of the Lynwood fellows.

"I can't understand it," she said, as they came out of the ruin, into the sunny glade again.

"I can!" said Gwen. "Isn't there a proverb that boys will be boys? Can't expect them to have too much sense."

"Bob wouldn't forget—"

"Looks as if he has! Anyhow, what does it matter?" asked Gwen. "Look here, I'll go down to the landing-place and have another look, and if they're not in sight, we'll have tea; and after tea we'll pull back to the school."

"I'm sure they're coming!" said Kate.



tea-time, if you come to that. But wild horses won't make me wait later than tea-time, Kate."

"They'll be here long before tea-time," said Kate, soothingly. Sniff, from Gwen.

"Perhaps!" she said. "Well, what about exploring that old ruin? We were going to explore it together, but as they are staying at Lynwood to play cricket or something, let's get on with it."

"Oh, all right," assented Kate.

The two schoolgirls rambled over the ruins of the old monastery, finding interest for a time in exploring shadowy old recesses, and choked-up cellar stairs, and roofless old cells where once the monks had lived.

Every minute they expected to hear the voices of the Lynwood juniors hailing them from the glade. But no call came, and Gwen Hatch was quite decided in her own mind that they were not coming, had

"Bow-wow!" said Gwen.

They pushed through the trees and thickets, back to the landing-place. There they had an extensive view of the river, rolling bright in the summer sunshine, for a considerable distance towards Lynwood.

There were several boats to be seen at a distance. But none was pulling towards the island, neither were Bob Rawlings and Jimmy Carroll visible in any of them. Gwen sniffed, and even Kate began to wonder whether it was possible, after all, that their friends at Lynwood had forgotten. Her fair face was just a little clouded.

"Sister Anne, Sister Anne, do you see anyone coming?" asked Gwen, sarcastically.

"They're not in sight," said Kate.

"And they won't be," said Gwen, "and it doesn't matter a boiled bean so far as I can see. We're going to have tea now."

"Might wait a little longer—"

"Rubbish!" said Gwen.

"Something must have happened to stop them—"

"Cricket, I expect. Come on, Kate—you've been admiring the view long enough; now let's go and have tea."

"Oh, all right," assented Kate.

They returned to the glade in the centre of the island. Gwen set the kettle boiling again on the spirit-stove and made tea. Gwen, at all events, was resolved to wait no longer. She sorted out sandwiches and scones.

"Here you are, Kate. They were going to contribute a cake and tarts, but of course they've forgotten that as well as us! We've got plenty."

"They'll arrive while we're having tea," said Kate.

"I don't think!"

It was very pleasant, picnicking in the leafy glade on the island. Kate was a little worried, but Gwen had dismissed the Lynwood fellows from mind, and she chatted cheerfully about High Lynne affairs, while tea and sandwiches and scones were disposed of.

Kate gave a sudden start, interrupting her.

"Is that a boat?" she exclaimed.

"I can't hear it."

"Well, I thought I heard—"

"Bosh!" said Gwen. She listened for a moment. "Nothing! Anyhow, if they've come, they know where to find us! They don't need us to lift them ashore, do they?"

Kate laughed.

"No, but—"

"Have another scone," said Gwen. "If they've come, they'll be here in a minute. But they haven't!"

And it seemed that Gwen was right. Kate was almost certain that she had heard a sound of a boat at the landing-place, hidden from their sight by the intervening trees and thickets. But as no one came through the trees to the glade, it was evident that the Lynwood fellows had not arrived. Whatever might be the reason, Bob Rawlings and Jimmy Carroll were not coming, and the girl chums of High Lynne had the picnic on their own.

CHAPTER VII

RAG KNOWS HOW!

CHRISTOPHER CUTHBERT HANKEY grinned.

He was feeling pleased with himself.

The grin on his chubby face was so wide, that it seemed almost to extend from one of Rag's ears to the other.

Sitting in his boat, Rag was pulling up the Liss. Rag was about as good at rowing as at anything else, and he caught crabs innumerable as he rowed up the river for Eel Island. But that did not diminish his happy cheerfulness, or reduce the expansiveness of his happy grin.

Near Lynwood, there were a good many craft on the water, and Rag nearly ran down a punt manned by Coote and Jenkins and other heroes of the Third Form; and then, barging across the bows of a Fifth-form boat, was nearly run down in his turn by Brimble and Rance of the Fifth Form. But little misadventures like that did not disturb Rag's cheery equanimity.

And at a distance from the school, he had the river to himself, and as there was no other craft to collide with, Rag did not collide with any other craft. He very nearly capsized, as he looked round over his shoulder at Eel Island, but again he had a hair's-breadth escape.

Grinning all over his fat face, Rag pulled in to the island.

Rag's plans were cut and dried.

That smudge, that smear, Valentine Wilmot-Jones, had gone up to Eel Island that afternoon. Rag, at all events, had no doubt that he had. That W.J.'s declared intention of exploring the old ruin on the island, was merely camouflage to cover up a much more extensive excursion, for which he might be sacked if it came out, Rag was wholly unaware. Rag was not a suspicious fellow, and what Wilmot-Jones had said on the subject, Rag took at face value.

Wilmot-Jones was on that island! At that very moment, Rag had no doubt he was exploring that silly old ruin. His boat would be tied up at the landing-place. What would he feel like, when he came back for it, and found it gone?

Rag grinned and chuckled at that thought.

W.J. was a smudge, a smear, a blot, and all sorts of similar things. He had stumped Rag in the study—for nothing at all, except that he was in a bad temper because he had burnt his mouth with one of his own silly cigarettes! Rag would have liked to give him a hiding. But that was not practical politics. Even the ink-ball in form had been a failure, and had landed Rag with "six" from Prance's cane—all of which he put down to W.J.'s account. Dearly Rag would have liked to stand up to W.J. with the gloves on, and give him the hiding of his life. But he just couldn't!

But there were other ways! Rag had thought it out, and made his plans. Rag was, in his own belief at least, the fellow to make plans!

He was going up to Eel Island, to leave Wilmot-Jones stranded there. Probably he intended to be back for tea, Rag thought. He would miss his tea! He had to be back for calling-over in hall; well, he jolly well wouldn't be back for calling-over in hall! He wouldn't be back till he got off that island somehow. "How"

was a matter for W.J. to puzzle out—Rag wasn't going to bother about that. Rag couldn't stump W.J., as W.J. had stumped him; but this, in Rag's opinion, would be as good as a stumping, and a little over.

Wherefore did Rag grin with enjoyment at the happy prospect, till his grin almost seemed to meet round his fat head!

As he drew nearer to the island, Rag was very cautious. He made as little sound as possible. If W.J. heard him, he might have a chance of intervening. Rag did not want that. If W.J. guessed his intention, he certainly would cut up rusty; indeed, he might collar Rag and strand him on the island, the smudge was capable of anything. Rag was taking no risks.

Certainly it never occurred to Rag that Valentine Wilmot-Jones was not on the island at all, but that two High Lynne girls were! He was aware that Bob Rawlings and Jimmy Carroll had arranged to picnic somewhere that afternoon with Kate Wilton and Gwen Hatch; but he did not know where that picnic had been scheduled to take place, and he did not think for a moment of Eel Island in connection with the High Lynne girls. He was thinking of it only in connection with Valentine Wilmot-Jones.

Not for a moment did Rag dream that, about half-an-hour before his arrival, two High Lynne girls had been standing on that very landing-place, scanning the river for their Lynwood friends.

The landing-place was quite deserted now. The thick wood hid the interior of the island from his eyes—and hid him from eyes in the interior of the island.

Rag's only doubt was, that having been so considerably delayed that afternoon, first by lines, and then by biking over to High Lynne, he might be too late, and that W.J. might already be gone.

But the sight of a boat tied up under the shady beeches relieved Rag's mind of that doubt!

W.J. was still there—for there was the boat! Rag's grin grew even more expansive as he saw it.

With great caution, he pulled in under the shady branches.

He lost no time! If W.J. caught him at it, the game was up, and the consequences were certain to be painful.

He reached over, and cut the painter of the tied-up boat with his pocket-knife. There was no time to untie it! Rag was in too much of a hurry to get through and be off.

The boat floated loose.

Rag suppressed a chuckle. He gave the boat a push and it floated out on the current.

Then he pushed off in his own boat.

The deed was done! W.J., when he discovered what had happened, would be quite helpless. No doubt he would be in a fearful temper; but he could rage as much as he liked, on his own, on Eel Island. Rag did not mind!

Rag pulled away cheerfully, going down the current to Lynwood. The High Lynne boat drifted out into the middle of the river and rolled down the current in the same direction. Rag gave it no heed. The boat would not be lost—someone would see it, and take it in, when it had drifted as far as the school raft. W.J. would find it all right in the boat-house, when he got back. There was no doubt about that. The doubt was, when W.J. would get back—and that made Rag chuckle explosively as he pulled down the Liss.

He lost sight of the drifting boat and did not give it another thought. In great spirits, Rag arrived at the Lynwood raft. His chubby face was merry and bright as he walked up to the school, in time to meet the detention class coming out of Extra. Having carried out his masterly plan of vengeance on Wilmot-Jones, Rag was thinking of tea and of the cake and jam-tarts which were to be his reward for his services as messenger that afternoon.

With a very cheery plump visage, Rag Hankey waited in the corridor for Extra School to be dismissed; thoughts of Wilmot-Jones stranded on the island in the river, and of cake and jam-tarts in Study Five, mingling happily in his fat mind.

CHAPTER VIII

RAG'S REWARD!

BOB RAWLINGS came out of the French master's class-room with Jimmy Carroll and the rest of the detention class, glad to get out at last. But they were not looking their merriest and brightest. "Extra" on a half-holiday was neither grateful nor comforting, they had missed a happy excursion up the river, and they were fed up to the back teeth with the beautiful language of France. Rag, in the corridor, waved a plump hand, with a cheery grin, as they came out, but they did not smile. They were half-disposed to renew the booting of the morning on the plump person of the fatuous youth who had been the cause of "Extra" for them.

However, they restrained that natural impulse as the cheery Rag joined them. After all, he had taken that message for them to High Lynne, and so atoned for his sins to some extent. They did not yet know how he had taken it!

"Oh, here you are, chaps!" greeted Rag. "I say, ready for tea?"

"You went over to High

Lynne?" asked Jimmy Carroll.

"Of course I did! Didn't I say I would?" demanded Rag, warmly.

"O.K. then. Come up to the study."

Rag cheerfully trotted after the chums of the Fourth. They were ready for tea after an afternoon in Extra, and Rag was more than ready after a bike ride and a pull up the river.

In Number Five, Bob sorted out the cake and tarts that had been intended to grace the picnic on the island, had it come off. Jimmy Carroll eyed Christopher Cuthbert Hankey rather curiously. Rag seemed to be bubbling over with satisfaction, for some reason best known to himself.

"What have you been up to, Rag?" asked Jimmy.

Rag grinned.

"That's telling!" he said.

"Playing some more mad japes on somebody?" growled Bob. "Asking Prance for a whopping again, you footling fathead?"

"Never mind Prance," said Rag. "Prance will keep! I can jolly well tell you that somebody will be sorry for stumping a fellow, presently."

"If you mean W.J.—"

"I'm not going to say anything about it," said Rag, sagely. "The fact is, I don't want W.J. to know that I did it. You know what a rotten temper he's got—I'm not going to have him laying into me with a stump again."

"You silly ass, you'd better not jape W.J.," said Jimmy Carroll. "He's not much safer than Prance."

Rag chuckled.

"I fancy I know how," he said. "But I'm not saying anything! I say, if W.J.'s late for roll, don't you say I know anything about it."

The chums of the Fourth stared at him.

"You've done something to make W.J. late for roll!" exclaimed Bob.

"That's telling!" chuckled Rag.

Jimmy Carroll laughed.

"I expect W.J. is all right," he said. "Rag's japes always work out the wrong way round. Tuck into that cake, fathead!"

"What-ho!" said Rag; and he tucked into the cake, with an eye on the jam tarts. Even the blissful reflection that Valentine Wilmot-Jones was hopelessly stranded on Eel Island, faded into the back of Rag's mind, in the presence of cake and jam-tarts!

"You got that message to Kate Wilton all right?" asked Bob Rawlings.

"I didn't see Kate," Rag explained, through a mouthful of cake. "I saw her pal, that plump one, Betty Bunn. I told her."

"Well, that's all right, if she told Kate and Gwen in time,"

said Bob, with a nod. "I suppose she did."

Rag shook his head.

"She couldn't have told them in time very well," he answered. "You see, they were gone out before I got across to High Lynne."

Bob and Jimmy jumped. Indeed, they bounded. They glared at Rag across the table as if they could have bitten him.

In Extra that afternoon, their only consolation had been that Rag had warned the High Lynne girls in time that they could not come. And now—!

"You born idiot!" yelled Jimmy Carroll. "Mean to say you got there after Kate and Gwen had started?"

"I couldn't help it," protested Rag.

"Why couldn't you?" roared Bob. "You had bags of time, if you went when we went into Extra. Oceans of time."

"Yes, but you see, Prance copped me as I was going for my bike—"

"Why did you let him cop you?" howled Jimmy.

"Well, I didn't ask him to cop me, did I?" demanded Rag, indignantly. "I was just hooking the jigger out when he rapped at me and made me wheel it back. Who'd have thought of running into Prance at the bike-shed?"

"Why, you—you—you—" gasped Bob. "Then you never got the message to Kate and Gwen at all, and they never knew—"

"Well, Prance marched me back into the House, and I had to do my lines first. I cut across after I'd done them, all right."

"What was the good of that, when it was too late?" roared Bob.

Rag looked indignant.

"Well, I said I'd go, and I went," he answered. "I'm a fellow of my word, I hope! Betty will tell them when they come in, so it's all right, ain't it?"

"All right!" hooted Bob. "Yes, they'll know that we couldn't help it, when Betty tells them; but they expected us to join them in the picnic, and they'll think we let them down—"

"But they'll know you didn't, when Betty tells them—"

"You howling ass!"

"Look here, if that's how you thank a chap for taking a lot of trouble for you on a half-holiday—!" said Rag, warmly.

"Oh, you ass!"

"Oh, you clown!"

The feelings of the chums of the Fourth were almost too deep for words. Kate and Gwen, no doubt, would know that they couldn't have helped what had happened when they received the message at last via Betty Bunn. But in the meantime they must have gone on the trip, expecting to meet the Lynwooders at the island. Anybody but Rag

could have cut out, without catching Prance's eyes, keen as they were. Rag, of course, had had to bungle it.

While they glared at him across the table, Rag ate cake. Jimmy Carroll, breathing hard and deep, reached for the jam-tarts.

"Well," he said. "We promised you cake and tarts if you took that message across to High Lynne—"

"I took it all right!" said Rag.

"And it doesn't matter about it having been too late to be of any use, does it?" hissed Jimmy. "Well, you've had the cake—here's a tart!"

Smack!

"Yurrooogh!" spluttered Rag, as a fat and juicy jam-tart landed in the middle of his plump countenance, "Wurrooogh! Wharrer you at? I say—groooooogh."

Rag bounded up from his chair. He liked jam-tarts; in fact, he liked them very much—taken internally. Taken externally, they were horrid. He dabbed and clawed at sticky jam on his fat face.

"Urrrrgh! I'm all sticky! Why you smudge—urrrrrgh!"

"Have another!!" yelled Jimmy.

He grabbed up a second jam-tart.

Rag did not stop for another! One jam-tart plastered over his fat face seemed enough for Rag. He made a wild bound for the door.

Jimmy Carroll made a bound after him. Rag gave a fearful howl, as the second jam-tart was plastered on the back of his plump neck. He plunged out of the study yelling.

"Hold on!" shouted Jimmy. "There's some more."

Rag did not want any more! He tore away down the Fourth-form passage and vanished into space. Jimmy turned back into the study.

"The howling fathead!" he said. "The blithering idiot! What on earth could the girls have thought, getting to the island and not seeing us there?"

"It's rotten," said Bob.

"I've a good mind to go after that born idiot and boot him all over Lynwood!" breathed Jimmy. "The ass! The fat-head! The chump!"

"Nothing we can do now," said Bob, with a knitted brow. "Anyhow, they'll know when Betty tells them! I expect they're back at High Lynne by this time."

"Sure to be," agreed Jimmy. "But it's rotten! That idiot Rag—"

"Bother him!"

"Blow him!"

The chums of the Fourth sat down to finish their tea—minus Rag! The only comfort was that Kate and Gwen would understand how the matter stood when they got back to High

Lynne, and the message was passed on by Betty Bunn. They little dreamed of Rag's other activities that afternoon, and that the two girls on Eel Island could not get back to High Lynne!

CHAPTER IX

STRANDED!

GWEN HATCH sniffed.

It was quite an emphatic sniff.

Kate looked rather thoughtful and worried. They had finished their tea; sandwiches and scones had been duly disposed of. For some time afterwards they sat talking under the shade of the branches at the edge of the glade on Eel Island; Kate expecting every minute to hear a boat at the landing-place, Gwen no longer expecting anything of the kind. Hence Gwen's emphatic sniff.

"About time we cut, I think," said Gwen. "Not thinking of waiting here for those two donkeys till lock-ups at High Lynne, are you, Kate?"

"No! No!" said Kate, "But—"

"Well, let's get off, then," said Gwen. "And next time our dear friends at Lynwood ask us to join them in a picnic, we'd better have another engagement."

"I can't think that they are to blame," said Kate. "Something must have happened to prevent them coming—"

"You don't think they've got intelligence enough to send a message across in that case?" inquired Gwen.

"Well, they may have and we never got it in time."

Gwen laughed scornfully. Kate seemed to be catching at straws in her desire to find excuses for the Lynwooders.

"Might as well not send it at all as send it too late," she remarked. "I expect they forgot all about us and the picnic. Anyhow, it doesn't matter. If we're not going to miss roll at the school, Kate, we'd better get off this silly old island."

"Well, I suppose it's no use waiting any longer," said Kate.

"It was no use waiting at all, as I could have told you all along," answered Gwen. "Come on! We've got just about time to pull down to High Lynne before the gates are shut, and we shall have to get a move on, too. Hop it."

Gwen was already packing kettle and tea-cups in the basket. Having done so, she picked up the basket and started.

Kate followed her, with a clouded face. She was perplexed and Gwen was annoyed, neither of them feeling very happy about that afternoon's trip.

But both of them forgot perplexity and annoyance as they arrived at the landing-place. Gwen gave quite a howl:

"The boat!"

"Oh!" gasped Kate.

Gwen dropped the basket. They stared at the place where their boat had floated, tied up under the beeches.

That spot was vacant.

The boat was gone!

"Oh!" breathed Kate. Her face was quite pale. "Gwen, the—the—the boat—it—it's gone!"

"You little ass!" gasped Gwen. "You never tied it safely."

"I'm sure I did!"

"Think it gnawed the cord and got loose like a dog?" asked Gwen, sarcastically.

"I know I tied it safely," panted Kate. "Look! Here's part of the cord—it never came undone! It's been cut."

"Cut! Oh, scissors!" gasped Gwen. She looked at the fragment of cord dangling from the low bough. It had not been untied, it could not have slipped loose. There was the clean cut of a knife!

"Somebody came along and—and took away the boat!" said Kate, faintly. "The painter was cut! You—you remember—I thought I heard somebody here while we were having tea—"

"The boat's been stolen," said Gwen.

"What—what are we going to do?"

"Ask me another."

The two girls looked at one another in dismay, almost in horror. The boat was gone and there was no other means of getting off the island. They had left themselves only time to get back to High Lynne before the gates were closed for the night. And they were stranded on Eel Island, a mile and a half from High Lynne School.

"Oh!" gasped Gwen.

"Oh!" repeated Kate.

"We—we may pick up a lift!" said Gwen, hopefully. "Some—some boat may pass and give us a lift across to the bank, at least."

They stared over the river, glimmering in the setting sun. Not a boat was to be seen. Earlier in the afternoon, Lynwood boats had been seen at a distance, but none was to be seen now. It was close on lock-ups at Lynwood, as well as at High Lynne.

"We're stranded," breathed Kate.

"We—we—we've got to get off!" exclaimed Gwen, almost wildly. "Oh, what can we do?"

Kate was silent. There was nothing that could be done.

"What will they think at the school?" panted Gwen. "They'll think we've had an accident and got drowned or something."

"Oh!" breathed Kate.

"We—we—we can't stay here, Kate—"

"Somebody will look for us—"

"Not till dorm," said Gwen.

"Miss Prim will mark us absent from roll. That's all till dorm. Lucky we told Betty where we were going. She will tell Miss Prim, when we don't turn up for dorm. If they have to send a boat up the river there'll be an awful row—"

"That's better than being left here," said Kate. "Oh, dear! If only a boat would pass—we could call out—"

"We can't see anything for these beastly trees. A boat might come down from Lynford Bridge and shoot past before we could make them hear—"

"We must watch," said Kate. "Anybody who passed would take us off."

The two girls watched with eager eyes. The minutes passed slowly. Gwen looked at her wrist-watch.

"They're taking roll at High Lynne now," she said. "Primers is marking us absent."

"Betty may tell her—"

"Oh, dear!"

The landing-place on the island faced down the river. The thick trees and bushes cut off the view in every other direction. A boat coming down from Lynford would not be seen till it passed through the channel between the island and the distant wooded bank. It was only too likely that, if it was going fast it might shoot past the island before the stranded schoolgirls could make their voices heard. But they watched and waited, hoping to see a boat.

"Oh! Look!" exclaimed Kate, suddenly.

"A boat!"

From the channel a light skiff suddenly shot, going down the river at racing speed. Whoever was in that skiff was evidently in a hurry. The girls had a momentary glimpse of him, and knew that it was a Lynwood junior, Valentine Wilmot-Jones, of the Lynwood Fourth. But it was only an instant's glimpse. The skiff went by like an arrow.

"Help!" screamed Gwen.

"Help!" echoed Kate.

But it was plain that the schoolboy in the boat did not hear as he whizzed past the island and he could not see the girls under the shadow of the low branches of the beeches. Wilmot-Jones was late and he was going all out to get back to Lynwood before lock-ups. He was past the island almost in a flash.

"Oh!" gasped Gwen. "He never heard us—"

"He was going too fast," said Kate. "I suppose he's late—it must be nearly roll at Lynwood. He could not see us here."

The skiff vanished down the river in a few seconds. Late as he was, with barely time to get in before lock-ups, Wilmot-Jones certainly would have stopped to take the stranded schoolgirls off the island had he

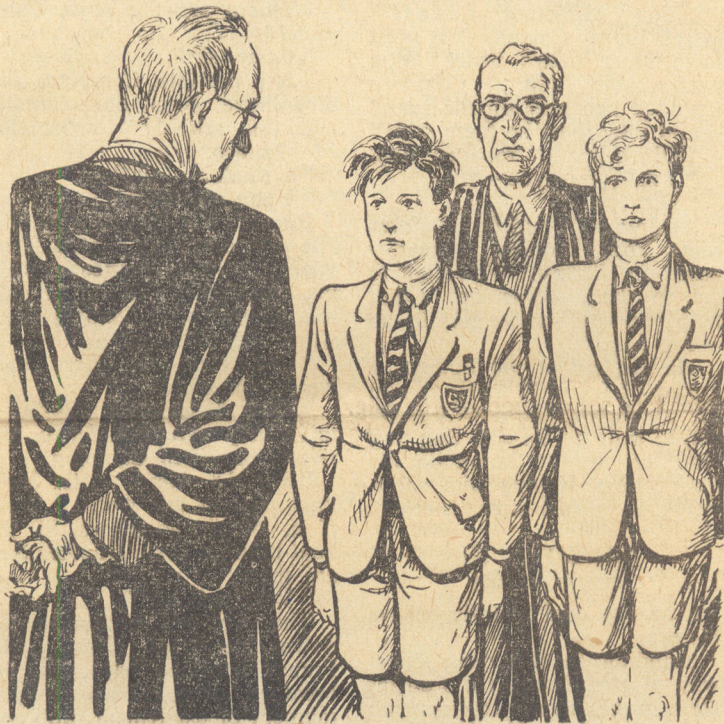
known that they were there. But he had not the remotest idea that anyone was under the shadowy branches, and he had flashed by before their calling voices could reach his ears. He was gone—and with him the last hope of the chums of the High Lynne Fourth. They could only wait in the hope that they would be searched for from High Lynne—and how long they might have to wait, they hardly dared to think, as the sun sank lower and lower, and the dusk deepened on the river and the wooded banks.

CHAPTER X

STARTLING!

"WILMOT-JONES!"

Mr. Prance was calling the roll at Lynwood.



Rag grinned.

"Adsum!"

Rag jumped.

If Rag Hankey had felt that anything was quite certain in an uncertain world, it was that Wilmot-Jones would not answer when his name was called at Lynwood. Rag was quite assured of that. Wilmot-Jones, in the ineffable Rag's belief, was stranded on Eel Island—had not Rag taken away the boat and stranded him there? And W.J. certainly had not marched into hall with the Fourth when the bell went. Rag was unaware that at the very last moment an elegant figure had slipped in at the door, just before Campion of the Sixth closed it, and joined the ranks of the Fourth.

W.J. was a little breathless. He had lingered rather too long with his sporting friend at the races and had cut it very fine in getting back. From Lynford Bridge to the school raft he had

rowed as if in a race, shooting down the river like an arrow: the bell for call-over had ceased to ring when he got in and he had just squeezed into hall at the last moment. He was a little breathless and a little flushed, but quite cool; and when Mr. Prance came to "Wilmot-Jones" in the Form list and called his name, the dandy of the Fourth answered "Adsum" at once—to the utter astonishment of Christopher Cuthbert Hankey.

"Oh, scissors!" ejaculated Rag.

He stared round and nudged Bob Rawlings.

"I—I—I say, is that W.J.?" he gasped.

"Didn't you hear him answer, fathead?" asked Bob.

"But—but he can't have got in!" gasped Rag.

Wilmot-Jones—for there was the dandy of the Lynwood Fourth—not stranded on Eel Island at all and not even late for roll.

Rag was almost in a dither when the school was dismissed after roll. He went out of hall still blinking.

Valentine Wilmot-Jones strolled into the Lounge, the junior day-room. Rag followed him in, still blinking at him as if he could not quite believe his eyes.

W.J. gave him no heed. He had forgotten that stumping in the morning, and it had never occurred to him that the fatuous Rag had been plotting vengeance.

He strolled over to Bob Rawlings and Jimmy Carroll in the Lounge.

"Did you get that message across to High Lynne all right?" he asked.

"No!" grunted Bob. "Rag took it, but he was too late with it. The girls had gone before he got there."

"Rag all over!" said W.J., shrugging his shoulders. "Born idiot!"

"You couldn't have cut across with it, of course," said Jimmy Carroll, sarcastically. "In too dashed a hurry to get out of bounds."

Wilmot-Jones laughed.

"Well, I was pressed for time, as I told you," he answered. "You shouldn't get into Extra when you've got a date, dear boys."

"Oh, rats!"

"Look here, W.J." Rag came up. "How did you get off?"

Wilmot-Jones stared round at him.

"Is that a riddle?" he asked.

"I can't make it out," said Rag. "Look here, how did you do it?"

Rag had not intended to let W.J. know anything of his performances that afternoon. The stump was still in Number Seven and Rag did not want any more samples of W.J.'s swiping. But his master-plan had evidently gone hopelessly wrong and Rag was puzzled and mystified. He wanted to know.

"How did I do what?" asked Wilmot-Jones. "What are you driving at, you ass?"

"How did you get off the island?"

Wilmot-Jones stared for a moment and then laughed. He remembered that he had told Rag that he was going to Eel Island that afternoon.

"You ass, Hankey," snapped Jimmy Carroll. "That was all gammon—W.J. never went to the island at all."

"What?" gasped Rag.

"Don't yell it out all over Lynwood," said Wilmot-Jones. "I don't want Prance to get inquisitive about it."

"But—but—but he did go there!" gasped Rag. "His boat was tied up on the island, I tell you."

"Was it?" grinned Wilmot-Jones.

"Oh, crikey!" ejaculated Rag. "I—I thought it was your boat, of course, as you said you were going up to the island. Didn't you go after all?"

"Find out!"

With that, Valentine Wilmot-Jones walked away. He certainly had no intention of confiding his afternoon's activities to Christopher Cuthbert Hankey.

Rag blinked after him, and then blinked at Rawlings and Carroll.

"I—I say, think he never went to the island?" he stammered.

"Not likely," answered Bob.

"But—but—but somebody did!" gasped Rag. Rag's face was a picture of dismay. It was dawning on him that he had made a little mistake.

"Well, people do go to the island," said Jimmy Carroll, "if you saw a boat there, it wasn't W.J.'s."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Most likely the High Lynne boat," said Bob.

Rag almost fell down.

"The—the—the High Lynne boat!" he gurgled. "Oh, holy smoke! What would a High Lynne boat be doing at Eel Island?"

"Kate and Gwen—!"

"But—but—but they weren't going to Eel Island, were they?" gasped Rag. "You said a picnic—"

"The picnic was on Eel Island."

"Oh, lor'!"

Bob Rawlings and Jimmy Carroll could only stare. Rag looked almost as if he would faint. Indeed, he felt like it, as he realised what he must have done. Often and often had Rag's schemes gone wrong. But never had a scheme of Rag's gone so disastrously wrong as this!

"What on earth's the matter?" asked Bob, in wonder. "As the girls never got our message in time, I suppose they pulled up to Eel Island. Have you been up to the island this afternoon?"

"Oh, crumbs! Yes."

"You saw a boat there and thought it was W.J.'s?" asked Jimmy.

"Oh crikey! Yes!"

"Well, it wasn't—it must have been Kate's. But what the thump's the matter with you, fathead?"

"Oh dear! Oh lor! You—you see, I—I thought W.J. was on the island," groaned Rag. "Of—of course I thought so, as he said he was going there, and—and I thought it was his boat, of course—"

"Well, what about it?"

"He—he—he pitched into me with a stump this morning—"

"What's that got to do with it, you clown?"

"Oh! Lots! You see, I was going to strand him on the island, to get even—"

"What?" exclaimed Bob.

"And—and thinking it was his boat, I cut it adrift—"

"What?" yelled Jimmy.

"And—and—and it wasn't his boat after all!" groaned Rag. "I—I say, it must have been the High Lynne boat! I—I—I say, do—do—do you think that I—I—I've gone and stranded Kate and Gwen on the island?"

For a moment the chums of the Fourth stared at him, quite aghast. Rag was the picture of utter dismay. He knew now what he had done.

"Good heavens!" breathed Bob. He grabbed Rag by a fat shoulder and shook him. "You ass! You dummy! You chump! You found a boat tied up at the island and cut it adrift—?"

"Oh, jiminy! Yes!" gasped Rag.

"You blithering idiot!" hissed Jimmy Carroll. "It must have been Kate's boat! You unspeakable idiot, you've stranded two girls on the island—and they must be there still!"

"Oh, crikey!" moaned Rag.

"You—you—you—!"

"Oh, lor'!"

"Come on," said Bob, "never mind that footling fathead—come on, Jimmy. We've got to get to them—come on! Can't help lock-ups—we've got to go—come on."

He ran out of the Lounge, a crowd of fellows staring at him as he went. Jimmy Carroll stayed only to up-end Rag and land him with a bump on the floor; then, leaving him spluttering, he rushed after his chum.

CHAPTER XI

QUICK WORK!

MR. PRANCE could hardly believe his eyes.

Standing in the open doorway of the House, the Fourth-form master was in conversation with Campion of the Sixth, captain of Lynwood.

If Mr. Prance expected anything to happen just then, he certainly did not expect two boys of his Form to rush past him, taking no more heed of him than if he had been a fag in the Second Form, and dart out into the dusky quadrangle.

But that was what did happen!

Blind to Prance, blind to Campion, Bob Rawlings and Jimmy Carroll tore out of the House.

The news that Kate Wilton and Gwen Hatch had been stranded on the island in the river by the ineffable Rag, washed out every other consideration. It was past lock-ups; they were almost due for prep; even to go to the gym required leave from a master. And they rushed headlong out of the House as if no laws or rules existed at Lynwood at all. It was no wonder that Prance could hardly believe his eyes! Neither could Campion of the Sixth quite believe his. They

stared blankly after the two fleeting figures.

Then Prance roared.

"Rawlings! Carroll! Come back at once."

They dashed on unheeding. For the first time since he had been master of the Fourth Form at Lynwood School, Prance's sharp voice was disregarded by boys of his form!

"Rawlings!" roared Prance, "Carroll!"

They vanished in the dusk.

"Upon my word!" gasped Mr. Prance. "Campion! Please fetch those boys in—I will take them to the Head immediately!"

Campion ran down the steps into the quad. He dashed after the disappearing juniors.

But they were gone.

The Lynwood captain came back, breathing hard. Prance looked at him.

"Where are the boys, Campion?"

"Gone, sir."

"Is it possible, Campion, that they have gone out—actually left the school?" articulated Mr. Prance.

"I think so, sir."

"Upon my word!"

Prance's lips set in a tight line. His pin-point eyes glinted. They were gone—but Prance's speaking countenance indicated only too plainly what awaited them when they returned.

"Did you see where they went, Campion?"

"They dodged me, sir—but I think they were heading for the river," answered Campion.

"For the river! After lock-ups! Upon my word! Campion, please go down to the boat-house and see whether they are there."

"Very well, sir."

The Lynwood captain hurried down the steps again. Mr. Prance breathed hard, and he breathed deep. Even in that moment of excitement, Bob and Jimmy might have been alarmed by the expression on his face, if they could have seen it. Luckily, they couldn't!

They were not losing a moment.

And they were not thinking of Prance's wrath, or of the consequences of this sudden breaking-out after lock-ups. They could think of nothing but the outcome of Rag's mad prank, of the two girls stranded on the lonely island in the river, with the dusk falling, dreading to be stranded there for the night. There was only one thought in the minds of the chums of the Fourth—they had to get a boat out, and go to the rescue with all speed, whatever the result to themselves they had to get Kate and Gwen off the island and safe back to High Lynne School, and they had to do it without losing a second.

"We've dodged him," muttered Bob, as they ran. "We've got to get a boat, Jimmy—"

"The boat-house will be

locked up now—"

"Can't be helped—we've got to."

"O.K."

They came down with a breathless rush to the school raft on the Liss. There was no doubt that Gibbons, the boat-keeper, would have locked up the boat-house by that time. But they had to get a boat out—there was no question about that.

But as they arrived on the raft they discerned the red glow of a pipe in the dusk. Gibbons, the boat-keeper, was standing by a boat tied up to the raft, smoking his pipe. He stared round at the sound of running feet.

Bob Rawlings panted.

"There's a boat, Jimmy—!"

"Good egg!"

They ran across the raft. Gibbons stared at them, blankly, taking the pipe from his mouth. The sight of two breathless juniors racing down to the river after lock-ups at the school was rather startling.

"'Ere, what's this game?" he asked. "You ain't allowed out now! What do you want?"

"We want that boat—" panted Bob.

"Don't you touch that boat," exclaimed Gibbons. "That's a High Lynne boat."

"A High Lynne boat!" exclaimed Jimmy.

"Jest that," said the boat-keeper. "I found it adrift and fetched it in. I'm going to pull it down to High Lynne if they don't send up for it. Look 'ere, you let that boat alone."

"Kate's boat!" breathed Bob.

"The one that idiot Rag cut adrift!" muttered Jimmy.

"I tell you—!" exclaimed Gibbons. He placed himself between the juniors and the boat. "I tell you straight—"

"Shift, you ass!"

"Look 'ere—"

There was not a moment to waste. Bob Rawlings grabbed the boat-keeper by one arm, Jimmy Carroll grabbed him by the other. Gibbons, in great astonishment and wrath, found himself twirled out of the way, and he sat down on the raft with a bump.

"Oh!" he gasped. "Look 'ere—ooooh!"

"Quick!" panted Bob.

The two juniors jumped into the tied-up boat. Jimmy Carroll picked up the oars while Bob grabbed at the painter to untie it. There was a patter of running feet from the direction of the school.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Jimmy. "That will be Campion! Quick, Bob—for goodness sake, quick!"

Bob tore at the painter with hurried fingers. They heard Campion run out on the raft, panting. Then his voice came: "Gibbons! Have you seen two juniors here—?"

"They're 'ere all right, sir!"

gasped Gibbons. "Taking out that there 'Igh Lynne boat that I took in—there they are, sir—"

Campion came running across the raft.

"Stop!" he shouted. "Get out of that boat, you two young sweeps! Mr. Prance's orders! Get out this minute."

"Oh, quick!" b r e a t h e d Jimmy.

Bob wrenched at the painter. The cord came loose, just as Campion reached the boat. With a shove at the raft with his hand, Bob Rawlings pushed off. As the boat floated off the Lynwood captain gasped at it, and caught the gunwale. He dragged it back.

"Now, then—!" he panted.

Jimmy had an oar in his grasp. He planted the end against the raft and shoved with all his strength.

The boat shot out. Campion held on and was almost dragged off the raft into the water. But the pull on the boat as Jimmy shoved desperately with the oar was too much for him. The gunwale slipped through his fingers and he tottered back on the raft and sat down.

"We're clear," breathed Bob.

"Out with the oars!"

"Good luck!"

Campion staggered to his feet. He stared after the two juniors in the boat, each of them pulling at an oar. He fairly roared after them.

"Come back! Do you hear? Come back! You'll be flogged for this! Come back at once, you young rascals!"

But the captain of Lynwood shouted in vain. The boat glided fast away from the raft, leaving him red with anger and still shouting.

"Pull, old chap!" panted Bob.

Jimmy Carroll did not answer, he saved his breath for pulling. Both Bob and Jimmy were good oarsmen, but never had they rowed before as they rowed now. The current on the Liss was fairly strong, but the boat seemed to fly as they put all their beef into it.

The boat-house, the boat-keeper, the raft, and Campion waving and shouting, disappeared astern. It was a mile up the Liss to Eel Island, against the current, but the boat almost whizzed. That mile was covered in record time, and at length the boat floated in under the spreading branches of the beeches on the island.

CHAPTER XII

RESCUE!

"GWEN!"

"What—?"

"Look!" panted Kate.

Under the shadowy branches, looking out over the river in the falling dusk, Kate was watching. No boat had passed since Valentine Wilmot-Jones's skiff had shot by and they had called to him in vain. And as the dusk deepened, the two stranded

schoolgirls almost lost hope of getting taken off the island in the river. No doubt, sooner or later, a boat would come up from High Lynne—when Betty told the mistress of the Fourth where the two girls had gone that afternoon. But neither could guess how long that might be.

Gwen, seated on a log in the dark shadows, was almost in tears. Kate still watched the river, hoping against hope. And suddenly a boat shot into sight from the direction of Lynwood.

"Look! Gwen! A boat—"

Gwen Hatch jumped up from the log.

"Where—who—?"

"I—I think it's a Lynwood boat, I—I'm almost sure it's Bob and Jimmy—" panted Kate.

"Oh!" said Gwen. She stared hard at the approaching boat. As it came nearer both the oarsmen looked round at the island and even in the deepening dusk she knew them. She sniffed. "So they're coming!"

"Oh, thank goodness!" gasped Kate.

"Better late than never, I suppose they think!" said Gwen, her lip curling. "Anyway, we shall get off this wretched island now—that's something. Catch me making a date with Lynwood again!"

"They're coming as fast as they can," said Kate. "Look how the boat's flying. Most likely it wasn't their fault—"

"Bosh!" said Gwen.

"If they couldn't help it—"

"I said bosh!"

"Well, they'll be here in a minute," said Kate, "and they'll tell us—"

"I don't want them to tell me anything! I just want to get off this foul island! We shall get into a precious row at High Lynne."

"No, no, not when we explain to Miss Prim that our boat was lost—Why," exclaimed Kate, in astonishment, as the boat glided under the branches, "I believe that's our boat—they've found it—"

Bob Rawlings stood up and grasped a low branch, guiding the boat in to the landing-place.

"Hallo!" he shouted. His voice echoed over the island, "Kate! Gwen! Are you here?"

"We're here," called back Kate.

"And we've been here long enough," added Gwen, "and we're tired of it."

The boat bumped on the grassy bank. Bob jumped ashore, peering at the two girls in the shadows under the trees.

"So sorry," he gasped. "I say, we've been going all out to get here, as soon as we knew. I say, we sent you a message—at your school—"

"We never got it!" said Gwen, dryly.

"No! I know! You see, Prance came down on us, and put us in Extra, so we couldn't

get out," panted Bob. "We got Rag Hankey to come across and tell you, but he was late, and told Betty Bunn to tell you when you got in, like the silly ass he is, you know—"

"We've not got in," said Gwen.

"I—I know! But—but of course we never knew you'd lost your boat," stammered Bob. "Never dreamed you were stranded here, till that idiot Rag let it out—"

"How did Rag know?" asked Kate.

"Oh, that ass! That fat-head! That chump!" said Bob. "He took away the boat thinking it was Wilmot-Jones's, for a rag on W.J.—never knowing that you were on the island. And we should never have known, only W.J. came in, of course, and then that idiot Rag let out what he'd done—"

"And then we came as fast as we could," said Jimmy, from the boat. "Just cut out of the House and come—"

"Oh!" exclaimed Kate. "So you see, Gwen—I knew they couldn't have helped it—"

"Um!" said Gwen.

"We couldn't really," said Bob. "We thought Rag had put you wise when we went into Extra—and when he told us afterwards that he'd been late, of course we never dreamed that your boat was gone—"

"Let's get off," said Gwen.

"Come on," said Jimmy Carroll.

Bob helped the two girls into the boat and followed them in. They sat in the stern with the picnic basket, while the Lynwood junior took the oars. Jimmy pushed off.

"Thank goodness we found it out and came," said Bob Rawlings. "I—I say, you ain't stuffy about it, are you, Kate?"

Kate smiled.

"No, Bob! You couldn't help it—it was dreadful being stranded on the island, but that was Rag's fault—the silly fellow—"

"We'll boot him when we get in," said Jimmy Carroll.

"Hear, hear!" said Gwen.

"Oh! No! No!" exclaimed Kate. "He never knew we were there! Thank goodness he told you what he had done; goodness only knows how long we might have stayed there."

"Won't be long getting in now," said Jimmy.

"You got leave to come out after lock-ups to fetch us?" asked Kate.

Bob shook his head and Jimmy grinned.

"No time!" said Bob. "We just rushed off the minute we knew."

"Prance looked like having a fit when we bolted past him," grinned Jimmy. "He will have his hair off! Can't be helped."

"Oh!" exclaimed Kate. "Oh, Bob, you will explain to Mr. Prance and tell him—"

"That's all right!" said Bob. "We had to chance it with Prance and with Campion too—but it will be all right."

"Right as rain!" said Jimmy, reassuringly.

Neither of them felt very confident about that. But they did not want the High Lynne girls to know that trouble awaited them at Lynwood. They pulled on rapidly and the Lynwood boat-house and raft came in sight.

"There's Gibbons," grinned Jimmy, "Campion's gone in." He released one hand from his oar to wave at the staring boat-keeper as they passed, and shouted, "O.K. Gibbons—we're taking the boat back to High Lynne for you."

The boat swept on, leaving the boat-keeper on the raft staring.

Ten minutes later it arrived at the High Lynne boat-house. Five minutes more and Bob and Jimmy said good-bye to Kate and Gwen at the door of High Lynne, leaving them to explain to Miss Prim, the mistress of the Fourth, who met them at the door with a severe and almost awful countenance—which, however, melted and became quite kind and concerned when she learned that the two girls had been stranded on the island in the Liss.

"They won't get into a row, anyhow," said Bob, as the High Lynne porter let them out and clanged the gate after them. "That's one comfort."

"We shall!" said Jimmy.

"Well, we can stand it! Trot!" said Bob. "The sooner we get back to Lynwood, after this, the better!"

They trotted all the way back to Lynwood by the shortest cuts. Now that they had time to think of it, they realised that something like a storm awaited them at their school.

"We had to go—!" said Bob.

"We had to," agreed Jimmy.

"We couldn't lose a minute, could we?"

"We jolly well couldn't!"

"But Prance—"

"And Campion—!"

"Well, we've got to face it," said Bob. "That idiot Rag—"

"That blithering dummy, Rag—!"

They clambered in over a wall and found the House door wide open, and Mr. Prance standing in the doorway. The expression on Prance's face as his eyes fell on them was like unto that of the fabled gorgon, only somewhat more so.

"So you have returned!" said Mr. Prance, in a voice that sounded like the filing of a saw.

"Yes, sir," said Bob. "We—"

"Follow me!"

"Yes, sir," said Jimmy. "But we—"

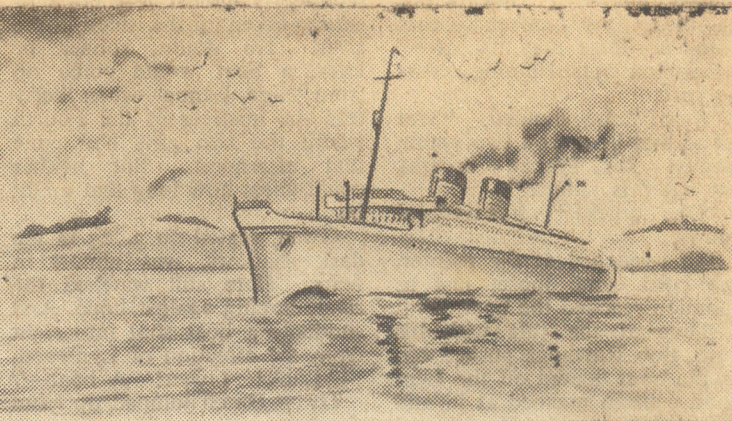
"You need say nothing! I am taking you to your head-master for a flogging. Follow me and be silent."

"But, sir—"

(Continued on page 16)

The BOX OF TURKISH DELIGHTS

by Margaret Ruthin



SOMEWHERE DOWN at the sea front a steamer's siren hooted . . . once, twice, three times. Peg Silver looked anxiously at her wrist watch, while the French shopkeeper leisurely wrapped up the little brooch she had just bought.

"M'sieur," Peg said anxiously, speaking in her very best French, "what is the time? My watch is stopped."

A big silver pocket watch was produced, and after a long, long look, the shopkeeper nodded his head and, smiling, turned the watch so that the young English girl could see for herself.

Peg's heart almost dropped to her white shoes: five minutes to twelve, and the liner sailed at twelve.

Dumping a handful of francs on the counter, she grabbed the little parcel and rushed out.

"Biddy," she screamed, calling to her Irish friend, who was deep in conversation with a most disreputable-looking Arab a few yards away: "Come on . . . my watch has been stopped. We're going to miss the boat."

"Oh, bejabers," Biddy Callagan turned like a flash and followed her friend like a dog chasing a rabbit. The old Arab, though his face was adorned by a patriarchal white beard, gave a yelp and chased Biddy with a turn of speed which was amazing.

"The ring," he wailed, "you have forgotten the ring."

Biddy slowed down for a moment, snatched something from the Arab, then shot out of the Rue de la Republique and into the Quai du Port as if every Banshee in Ireland was at her heels.

Like international sprint champions the two girls tore through the crowds of French dockers and on to the quay of the South Outer Harbour, where a great white liner was just blowing a last warning through her shining brass siren.

Only one narrow gangway still connected the ship to the shore, and workmen were even then starting to haul that clear.

"Stop, stop, stop!" Peg gasped, and at the same moment two men on the ship also began to shout. They were Peg's uncle, a retired sea captain,

George Silver by name, and his servant, a grumbling old fellow by the name of Zachariah Bumble.

The narrow gangway was hastily pushed back into position. The two girls shot up like corks from a couple of popguns, and almost at once the last thick hawser at the stern of the ship was cast off. The gangway was hastily dragged ashore, and the liner began to edge slowly forward.

"You couple of little idiots," Uncle George Silver roared, while the crowd who had watched the last-minute arrival gave a cheer.

"Didn't ought to have let 'em go ashore," Zachariah Bumble announced as he followed Uncle George and the two breathless girls. "I've said it before, an' I'll say it again. . . . Boys is the devil, but I'd rather have a cart-load o' boys any day than two gals . . . and Peg an' Biddy is wuss than any gals I've ever known."

"All right, all right," Uncle George growled. "I let them go ashore alone . . . and very foolish it was, too. But they got back . . . they've got to learn, and they can only learn by seeing and doing things for themselves. Now be quiet."

Peg and Biddy were glad to get down to their cabin. They hastily washed, changed their dresses, and looked through the two portholes as the big liner slowly made her way out into the Bay of Marseilles.

They looked back at the greatest of all French seaports, with the hills behind it. They could see the big transporter bridge high in the air at the entrance to the old harbour. They could see the twin forts of St. Jean and St. Nicholas which had guarded the port from attack by Barbary pirates.

Then Biddy gave a yelp.

"Come on . . . let's go up on deck, or we'll miss that little island . . . y'know the one I mean, where the Count of Monte Cristo was kept prisoner for so many years. It's not so far out from Marseilles."

"Oh, yes," Peg was turning to follow her friend when she saw something on Biddy's pillow. It was a large and very

beautifully-made box. It looked like an outsize in chocolate boxes. "What's this, Biddy?" she demanded.

"That . . . oh, er . . ." Biddy hesitated, looked uncomfortable, and then went on hurriedly, "look . . . if we don't hurry we'll not see that island place . . ."

"All right," Peg said quietly, "we'll go and look at the Chateau D'Iffe, where the Count of Monte Cristo was imprisoned . . . but . . ."

"Oh, all right," Biddy groaned. "Don't tell me. Let me guess. I've to tell you all about that box when we come back. A girl can't have even a little bit of privacy."

As they hurried up the companionway to the promenade deck Biddy laid a confiding hand on Peg's arm and said solemnly:

"You know that darling old man I was talking to . . . when you nearly gave me a heart attack by saying we were going to miss the ship?"

"If you mean that dirty old Arab," Peg replied, "I did see him . . . and wondered what he got out of you. A typical beggar, if ever there was one."

"There you go," Biddy retorted, shaking her head sadly, "an' it's the English every time that can't see wood for trees. He wasn't a beggar."

"No." There was a world of scepticism in Peg's voice. "Well, he looked like a beggar, but I daresay he was just one of the kings of Ould Oireland, down on his luck. What did he get out of you?"

For answer, Biddy, her head held high, and a scornful look on her face, dipped her hand into the pocket of the very neat white drill shorts she was wearing, and a moment later smiled triumphantly at the look of utter amazement on Peg's face.

"I didn't give him anything, Peg darlint," she murmured, "but he gave me this. How'd you like it, eh? Isn't it a beauty?"

Peg forgot that the ship was at that moment steaming past the famous islet on which stood the rock-girt Chateau D'Iffe, for winking at her from Biddy's

palm was a ring, and set in it was what looked like a wonderful pigeon's blood ruby.

"It's real," Biddy said triumphantly. "Take hold of it . . . and all I have to do is deliver that box of Turkish Delights to his son in Port Said."

"What?" Peg felt a cold shiver run down her spine, despite the hot sun shining down from the cloudless Mediterranean sky.

"I said, 'All I have to do for the ring is to deliver a box of Turkish Delights to the old gentleman's son when we reach Port Said,'" Biddy declared, and after a moment, when Peg still seemed speechless, the Irish girl went on blithely, "Ah, and the poor old gentleman, it was nearly in tears he had me. Him more or less an exile in Marseilles, an' never seen his son since he was a baby."

"Fiddlesticks," Peg burst out. "Of all the goofs, you are the biggest and the goofiest. Do you mean to try and tell me that you believe an old Arab would give you a ring . . . and ask only that you'd deliver a box of Turkish Delights to his son? Oh, Biddy . . . of all the Irish . . ."

"Now, it's misjudgin' the man you are," Biddy protested. "Sure, and didn't he swear by the Beard of the Prophet that there was only Turkish Delights in the box. It seems it's an old Arab custom to send sweetmeats at this time of the year, and . . ."

"We're going right down to the cabin," Peg said grimly, "and we're either chucking that box out of the porthole or taking it to the Captain."

There was genuine horror in Biddy's eyes as she heard that.

"We just can't do that, Acushla," she protested, "sure an' the old man made me promise . . . an' a solemn promise it was, too, that I'd deliver the box."

Peg stalked on, hurried down to the cabin, and with Biddy at her heels, picked up the box. It looked like a box of Turkish Delights. It had the name of a famous firm of French sweetmeat makers on the front, and it felt too light in weight to contain anything but Turkish Delights.

"I won't let you do it," Biddy said doggedly. "I gave the old man my word of honour. I swore on the name of Saint Patrick, and I just can't break my word. What harm is there?"

"It's probably just a trick to get you to deliver something he couldn't send through the post, you Irish gossoon," Peg said tartly. Then her eyes softened, and she said quietly: "Oh, Biddy Callaghan, you've a heart so soft and big that any sort of ill-luck story melts you. I ought to be angry . . . but I can't."

"Sure and you make me feel like an idiot," Biddy muttered. "Look, I'll tell you what we'll do. We'll open the box . . . an' see what's inside."

They examined the box. It was well fastened with gummed paper. Peg, however, took the box into the bathroom and, turning the hot water tap, held the box close enough for the steam which rose from the well-nigh boiling water to dampen the sticky paper. Within half an hour they peeled off the last little strip of paper, laying it carefully alongside the others, so that they would be able to seal the box again afterwards.

Then, in a breathless silence, Peg slowly lifted the lid.

There was a sheet of crinkly brown paper, such as usually covers chocolates. When this was removed there was a thinner sheet of white paper, with the French maker's name on it. Then, beneath that, were a compact array of cubes, pink and white, of Turkish Delight.

"There, now, it's the suspicious mind you have," Biddy said. "It's vindicated I am, an' the ould gentleman as well. Just Turkish Delight, and nothin' else."

"I'll see what's underneath," Peg muttered and, carefully washing her hands, she lifted the soft cubes out, laying them neatly on the white paper which had covered them.

There was another layer of cubes of Turkish Delight underneath, and below them . . . cardboard: the bottom of the box!

"I think we ought to tell Uncle George," Peg said, and at that Biddy's eyes swam with tears.

"No . . . Peg darlint, don't. I promised I wouldn't tell a soul," she pleaded.

"But you've told me," Peg replied.

"Ah, sure now, and you're different," Biddy said promptly. "I'd have to tell you everything . . . even what my boy friend said . . . if I ever had a boy friend. Sure, an' you are closer to me than a sister; but I can't tell anybody else. I gave my word of honour. Promise you'll not tell, Peg. Promise!"

Biddy was in such deadly earnest that Peg promised, but for the remainder of the day she was very worried. There was something wrong with that

box of Turkish Delights, she was certain. No one was going to go to all that trouble to get an ordinary box of sweetmeats from Marseilles to Port Said. She wanted to confide in her uncle, but her promise to Biddy kept her silent.

Towards evening she had a brainwave. Going to the ship's shop, she asked if they had any Turkish Delight, and to her joy was shown a small box, the cubes of Turkish Delight it enclosed being exactly the same size as those in Biddy's box.

Peg bought three boxes, then, making sure that Biddy was engrossed in a game of shove-ha'penny with Uncle George, Bumble and a tea planter on his way back to Ceylon, Peg hurried down to their cabin.



. . . Biddy felt very important . . .

The mysterious box was duly opened again, the cubes of Turkish Delight were transferred, and she had just finished packing the big box when there came a knock on the door and a moment later the stewardess came in.

"Having a secret binge?" she asked, smiling, and looking at the pile of Turkish Delight which Peg had meant to throw out of the porthole.

"Well . . . er . . . n-no!" Peg stammered, and began hastily putting the Turkish Delight which had been in the big box into the three smaller boxes.

"Your uncle, Captain George, wants you to go up on to 'A' deck," the stewardess said, "and he wants you to hurry. There's a school of porpoise swimming alongside the ship . . . and they look very beautiful with the phosphorescence all over them. I'll pack these for you."

Peg would have liked to have refused, but she did not want to

appear awkward, so, her face red, she nodded.

"All right . . . put the three small boxes under my pillow, will you? The big box goes on Biddy's bed."

"Yes, miss," the stewardess replied, and at that Peg went up on deck.

Ten minutes later, having lost her handkerchief, Biddy Callaghan came down to the cabin. The first thing she saw was three small boxes of Turkish Delight lying on her pillow . . . while the mysterious big box of Delights was on Peg's pillow.

The Irish girl stared at them for a moment. Then she had a bright idea.

"Bejabers, an' I'll just make sure there's nothin' goes wrong on account of the old fellow's

sticky paper which sealed the big box, it was once more exactly as it had been when the old Arab had first given it to Biddy.

Two days later they reached Port Said.

* * *

There was the usual rush of bum-boats out to the ship, and a horde of small craft anxious to take sightseers ashore. Uncle George Silver had sailed the world for many years as captain of a liner, and he knew Port Said very well. He would have preferred to stay aboard, but at the very mention that Peg and Biddy should go sightseeing alone, his face went purple and his eyebrows lifted so high they almost vanished into his hair.

"No, by hooky, if you go ashore alone you'll be in trouble before you have time to say 'Jack Robinson' half a dozen times. I'll come with you."

"And I suppose I'd better come too," Zachariah Bumble growled, "for I've spent more than half my life keeping your uncle out of trouble," he said, winking at Peg and Biddy.

A yelling boatman was signalled, and a minute or so later, complete with sun hats, the party scrambled down the accommodation ladder and were helped into the boat by a grinning Egyptian.

"What's that you've got?" Uncle George asked, pointing to the big box of Turkish Delights Biddy was holding tightly under her right arm. "That's what I call taking coals to Newcastle; you can buy Turkish Delight here by the ton. That's a real Irish trick," he ended, and chuckled.

A few minutes later they scrambled ashore. Uncle George paid the boatman, and Zachariah Bumble shoo-ed away a horde of would-be guides and shoe-blacks.

They started to walk towards the town, but within a minute were accosted by a man in Arab dress who had been staring thoughtfully at the two girls. Biddy, acting on the instructions given to her by the old man at Marseilles, was wearing the rather flashy ruby ring. By this ring, the old man had said, she would be recognised.

The Arab bowed, lifted his hat, and with a smile said:

"I would like to buy the box of Turkish Delight, Mees. I theenk you met my father in Marseilles?"

"Oh, yes," Biddy felt very important as she held out the gaily coloured box. "Your father said that . . ."

Uncle George, having got back his breath, was beginning to ask what this meant, but he stopped, just as Biddy stopped, for, apparently from nowhere, a dozen uniformed policemen surrounded them.

"Here, what's this?" Uncle

George was bristling with indignation. "Have you gone mad? I'll see..."

"Your pardon, sir," was the curt retort, "but we think we have got on to a smuggling trick, and you will all have to come to police headquarters. We have been waiting for your arrival."

Uncle George almost exploded. Bidy looked at Peg and grinned.

"Don't worry," she said, "I took the precaution of exchanging those 'Delights' for some I found on your pillow."

"What?" There was horror in Peg's voice. "But... oh, you... Bidy... I'd already exchanged them."

There was no chance of further conversation. They were hurried out to where two big cars were waiting and, together with the grimly silent Arab, were whisked off to the central Police Office.

In a room filled with officials, several newspaper reporters, and a cameraman, the box was opened. One by one the cubes of Turkish Delight were carefully slit, and each one was found to contain a little aluminium phial, filled to the brim with a cocaine.

Uncle George and Zachariah Bumble were speechless with amazement. Neither of them had any idea how Bidy had got the box, but the Irish girl soon began to talk.

"Look now," she began, and in her agitation she lapsed into a rich Irish brogue. "If there's anybody at fault, sure an' it's nobody else but me. Y'see..."

The man who seemed to be in charge of the whole business held up a hand for silence, and there was a twinkle in his eyes as he said:

"Don't worry. We knew you had the cocaine... from the moment you got it. We've been watching that dealer in Marseilles... or, at least, the French police have, for some time. All we were afraid was that you might open the box... discover what it contained, and throw it away."

"But we did... both of us," Peg burst out, and she and Bidy both told their story of how they thought they had got rid of the cubes of Turkish Delight, without knowing what they contained.

There was laughter from all... save the man who had been about to take the box from Bidy when the police came. There were innumerable photographs, innumerable questions, and later on iced drinks to mark the arrest of one of a gang of cocaine smugglers.

"It's more Irish you are than Ireland itself," Uncle George said when he led his niece and Bidy back to the ship some hours later.

"Ochone, an' but for me

doin' a double swap, Uncle George, they wouldn't have been able to arrest that man, would they? Those policemen couldn't have clapped the chap in jail if we had managed to substitute harmless Turkish Delights for those containing the cocaine. Shure, now, an' I think you've a lot to thank the Irish for."

CHUMS OF LYNWOOD

"Silence!" rapped Mr. Prance.

And in silence they followed him to the Head's study.

CHAPTER XIII

LUCK!

DR. WALPOLE frowned.

Bob Rawlings and Jimmy Carroll stood silent in the headmaster's study, while Mr. Prance spoke.

The Headmaster spoke in a deep, deep voice.

"Rawlings! Carroll!"

"Yes, sir," mumbled Bob. "We—"

"We—!" began Jimmy.

Dr. Walpole raised his hand for silence.

"You need not speak, except to answer my questions," he said. "You have heard what your form-master has told me. You left the House after lock-ups without leave and without even asking leave?"

"Yes, sir! But we—"

"You rushed past your form-master in the doorway and refused to stop when he called to you?"

"Yes, sir, because—"

"You disobeyed Campion of the Sixth Form, head-prefect of Lynwood, on the school raft and took away a boat against his direct orders?"

"You see, sir—"

"Yes or no?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Very good!" said Dr. Walpole. "What your motives may have been for this wild escapade I am not interested to know. Disrespect and disobedience are not permitted in this school. You will be severely flogged."

"But, sir—"

"That will do! Mr. Prance, the school will be assembled in hall after third lesson to-morrow for a flogging to be administered to these two boys of your form."

"Very good, sir," said Mr. Prance.

"But, sir—!" gasped Bob.

"You may take these boys from my study, Mr. Prance, and—"

BUZZZZZZZ!

The sudden buzz of the telephone-bell interrupted the stately Head. He turned, and lifted the receiver.

"Come!" rapped Mr. Prance, going to the door. The two hapless juniors turned to follow him from the study.

"Dr. Walpole speaking!"

They heard the Head on the telephone. "Miss Prim—yes—what

Old Zachariah Bumble shook his head dolefully as he followed them up the ladder to the deck of the liner.

"O-oh, an' this is only the beginning of our cruise," he muttered. "Boys is the devil... but what those two gals will do before we're back home I just shudder to think. We'll be hung, drawn, quartered, and

imprisoned for life."

Up on "A" deck, however, walking towards the lounge for an ice sundae, Bidy was slipping an arm round Peg's waist and murmuring:

"Hasn't it been lovely? Oh, I'm looking forward to some real adventures soon."

THE END

(Continued from page 13)

—what—what? One moment, please."

The Head glanced round from the telephone.

"One moment, Mr. Prance. Let the boys remain for the present."

"Very good, sir."

Mr. Prance stopped at the door. Bob Rawlings and Jimmy Carroll stopped. Dr. Walpole had the receiver to his majestic ear again. The clear, sharp voice of Miss Prim, form-mistress of the Fourth at High Lynne, came through and was audible to the others in the study as well as to Dr. Walpole.

"The two boys, Rawlings and Carroll, are now on their way back to Lynwood, Dr. Walpole—"

"They are here now, Miss Prim."

"May I ask you, sir, to express my thanks to them—"

"Your thanks, Miss Prim?"

"Yes, sir! But for them, two girls of my form who were stranded on the island in the river would still be there at this late hour. It appears that someone took away their boat—"

"Bless my soul!"

"The boat appears, from what they tell me, to have been taken by someone by mistake, leaving them stranded on the island. No one, of course, knew what had occurred or they would have been fetched away. These two boys seem to have found out what had happened and they went in a boat to take them off. It was a very kind and thoughtful act, and I desire to express my thanks to them."

"Oh! Quite so, Miss Prim. I—I will certainly convey your thanks to the two boys in question."

"Thank you, sir!"

"Not at all, Miss Prim."

Dr. Walpole put up the receiver and looked round at the two juniors. There was quite an extraordinary expression on his face.

"Mr. Prance—"

"I heard what Miss Prim said, sir."

"It appears that these two juniors of your form learned that two girls of High Lynne School were stranded on the island and that that is why—"

"So it appears, sir."

"In these circumstances, Mr. Prance—"

The Head coughed.

Bob Rawlings and Jimmy Carroll exchanged a glance. That telephone-call from Miss

Prim at High Lynne had come fortunately for them. Their luck was in!

Mr. Prance gave them rather a grim look. He could not quite forget how those two juniors of his form had bolted past him, and turned a deaf ear to the voice of authority. But he nodded, slowly.

"I was, of course, not aware—!" he said.

"Quite so, Mr. Prance. But the haste with which these two juniors acted may, perhaps, be excused, in the circumstances—"

"I agree, sir."

"Very good!" said Dr. Walpole. "There will be—ahem—no flogging. The boys may be excused for leaving the school after lock-ups, in the—the circumstances. Some undue haste in such circumstances is—hem—pardonable! If you agree, Mr. Prance, the boys may be dismissed."

"Quite so, sir," said Mr. Prance.

"Rawlings! Carroll! You may leave my study!"

Rawlings and Carroll did not wait to be told twice!

"I SAY!"

Rag Hankey met the chums of the Fourth as they came up to the studies, rather late for prep.

He eyed them anxiously.

"I say, is it all right?" he asked.

"Yes, ass!"

"Yes, fathead!"

"O.K. then," said Rag, in great relief. "I say, fancy me making a bloomer like that—me, you know! I thought it was W.J.'s boat tied up there—of course I did! You could have knocked me down with a feather when he turned up for roll in hall!"

"You burbling ass!"

"You blithering chump!"

"Well, I never knew it was the girls I stranded on that dashed island, you know," said Rag. "You got them off all right?"

"Yes, blitherer!"

"Yes, cuckoo!"

"That's all right, then," said Rag. "I say, when I found that it was the girls I'd stranded on that island, I could jolly well have kicked myself, you know! Honest Injun—I could have kicked myself, hard!"

"We'll save you the trouble," said Jimmy Carroll.

"We will!" said Bob.

And they did!

THE END