

INSIDE! A SCHOOL STOKY BY FRANK RICHARDS.

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HOW

TOM and JERRY

COME TO LIFE ON THE SCREEN!

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THIS IS AUSTRALIA'S FAMOUS MAGAZINE FOR BOYS!

Done in the Dark!

By
FRANK RICHARDS



"You men have got to back me up!" said Dudley Vane-Carter.

Upon which, there was silence in the corner study at Carcroft.

Harry Compton, Bob Drake, and Dick Lee looked at one another, and they looked at Vane-Carter. But they did not speak.

"Backing up" the scapegrace of Carcroft did not seem to appeal to them very much. V. C. was a reckless fellow; and when his temper was roused, he was not given to thinking of consequences. But wiser fellows thought of them. And this was a serious matter—awfully serious.

V. C. was, evidently, in one of his worst tempers now. The Carcroft Co. sympathised: they had no doubt that that little beast, Packe of the Sixth, had given V. C. hard measure. But—

"I could handle him myself, if you come to that," said Vane-Carter, "I'm nearly as big as Packe—Sixth-Form man as he is—undersized rat! I came jolly near doing it, too."

"You utter ass!" said Bob. "If you punch a prefect, you go straight to the Head to be bunked."

"That's why I didn't! But he's got it coming to him, all the same. And you fellows have got to help."

"You've got your own pals—Levett and Leath!" Lee pointed out. V. C. gave an angry grunt.

"Lot of use asking them to back up against a pre.!" he snapped.

"You're asking us!" grunted Harry Compton.

"Look here, V. C., fellows have

had six before, without doing a song and a dance about it!" said Bob.

"I tell you it was for nothing! I happened to tread on his foot! He gave me six—and laid them on too!" Vane-Carter wriggled. "Twice as hard as Roger ever does—and Roger can whop! Malicious little beast! It's time he had a lesson."

"Something in that!" agreed Bob. "Everybody's fed up with Packe and his slimy ways. He listens to fellows talking—yah! But—"

"But he's a pre.," said Compton.

Packe of the Sixth was not a popular prefect. He was the smallest man in the Sixth, and sensitive about it—he was never at his ease: he was anxious that the Lower School should respect him—so anxious about it, that nobody ever did. And he mistook an itch to meddle for a sense of duty. Everybody, as Bob said, was fed up with Packe; and everybody would have liked to let him know where he got off. Only, with a pre. you just couldn't.

"What do you want to do?" demanded Compton, restively. "We can't punch a prefect, any more than you can, V. C."

"And you can't rag a pre.," said Bob. "Report to the Head—and the morning train home! Not good enough."

"Even Packe can't report a man to the Head, if he doesn't see him, and doesn't know who he was," snapped Vane-Carter.

The three stared at V. C.

"Is Packe going blind just before

we rag him, to make it safe for us?" asked Bob. "It would be nice of him—but it doesn't seem probable."

"Stop talking rot, if you know how!" growled Vane-Carter. "I've thought this out. It's dark soon after tea."

"So we're to nobble Packe in the dark?"

"And bag him, with a potato-sack over his head!" breathed Vane-Carter, his eyes glistening. "We can get the sack from the gardener's shed—easy."

"And the sack from the Head, afterwards!" said Lee.

"Will you let a fellow speak? Packe's going to be nobbled on the Oak Walk—across the quad. Nobody will be there after dark: safe as houses."

"Nobody!" agreed Bob. "Not even Packe. So how—"

"That's easy! If Packe hears that fellows are out of the House after lock-up, gone for a smoke in a certain spot, what will he do?"

"Hike along to investigate, I suppose. Any pre. would."

"Well, I can fix it for him to get the glad news," said V. C. "That's an easy one. It will be black as a hat under the oaks. Packe mooches along—a sack comes down over his head—a rope's knotted round it—before you can say knife. There will be some soot inside the sack—"

"Oh, crumbs."

"Lots of time for the fellows to get clear, and cut back to the

House, while he's snuffing soot in the sack. He won't have the remotest idea who did it."

"No?" grinned Bob. "As he's just given you the biggest licking of the term, he won't need to be fearfully bright to guess that you were on the spot."

"That's why I shan't be there," said Vane-Carter, coolly. "About that time I shall be taking a Latin paper to Roger's study, for a little help with deponent verbs. What price that for an alibi?"

"So we're to do the trick, while you fix up an alibi!" exclaimed Lee.

"Exactly! Where's the risk? Think Packe is a cat, to see in the dark?"

"By gum!" said Bob. "It sounds good, you men. Think of the little beast meandering back to the House tied up in the sack—and when they get the sack off him, the soot—!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a chuckle in the corner study. Nobody liked Packe—but all seemed to like the idea of the sack and the soot.

"After all, we owe him a few," said Bob. "He's greasy. He will pick on a fellow for something he's heard by accident. He's nosey! He likes nosing into everything—jolly good idea to let him nose into soot."

"Might do him good!" said Lee, with a nod.

"But—!" said Harry Compton, slowly.

"Wash out the butts, and be a sport!" said Vane-Carter. "It's a fool-proof stunt—I only wish I could be on the spot to handle the sack—but it wouldn't do—the poisonous little beast will think of me at once. But if you fellows have got the nerve—"

"We've got the nerve. But—"

"You wouldn't be butting, if the little blighter had given you six for stepping on his precious toe—and all of them swipes!—worse than Roger at his worst," growled Vane-Carter. "I tell you, I shan't be able to sit down at prep. to-night."

"Oh, all right," said the captain of the Fourth, at last. "Packe is poisonous, anyway. It's a go."

And a "go" it was!

DUDLEY VANE-CARTER smiled genially.

He was feeling better.

True, he was still feeling the severe effects of that "six" in Packe's study. Packe had laid on that six not wisely, but too well.

But revenge is sweet: and V. C. was consoled by the knowledge of what was coming to Packe.

V. C. was a good planner. He had it all cut and dried. Already, before lock-up, a sack had been abstracted from the gardener's shed—and a bag of soot, collected from study chimneys, emptied into it. That sack, with a cord looped round it, had been hidden behind an oak in readiness.

It was deeply dark out in the quad, beyond the radius of lighted windows. There was ample time between tea and prep. Some of the Fourth were in their studies at tea, some in the Burrow, when four fellows slipped quietly into the form-room passage—deserted after class. At the end of that passage was a window—which Vane-Carter quietly opened.

Harry Compton, Bob Drake, and Dick Lee dropped, one after another, with hardly a sound, into the darkness at the back of the House. Vane-Carter shut the window, leaving it unfastened for them to push up on their return. He strolled away, gave Levett a nod as

**Nex^t Month's
school story
by
FRANK RICHARDS
will be
"THE CARCROFT CAD"**

he passed him, and went upstairs. The next item in the programme, was to despatch Packe of the Sixth to the spot where his fate awaited him. That, as V. C. had said, was easy—with a man like Packe; always nosing about, always with eyes and ears open for thoughtless acts or careless words. That was where Levett and Leath, V. C.'s pals, came in.

Levett would have thought twice, and thrice, and many times again, before he had a hand in "nobbling" a prefect. Levett was not the man for such deeds. But if anything stealthy or cunning was required, Levett was the man. So it came to pass that Packe of the Sixth, coming along to the senior day-room after tea, overheard whispered talk between Levett and Leath.

They did not seem to know that he was in the offing. They had their faces glued to a window, as if trying to peer into the dark of the quad. Packe, as he glanced at their backs in passing, heard a whisper.

"Did you see them get out, Leath?"

Packe paused.

"No! But V. C. said he was going, with two or three fellows—I fancy they had the smokes parked in the hollow oak—you know the hollow tree in the Oak Walk—"

"If they're missed from the House—"

"Not likely, before prep."

Levett and Leath peering through glass into the dark, did not see Packe as he turned and departed. They only saw a glimmer of his reflection in the glass!

Packe disappeared.

A few minutes later Levett, hanging about the Sixth-Form passage, spotted Packe in the lobby there, putting on coat and hat. It was cold and damp, as well as dark, out of the House—and Packe, evidently, was going out. Levett grinned, and hurried up the staircase to the study landing—where V. C. was waiting.

"O.K.?" asked V. C. eagerly.

"He took it down like a gudgeon. Now he's in the Sixth Form lobby, getting into his coat."

"Good man!"

Levett laughed, and went downstairs again, to rejoin Leath in the Burrow. V. C. went to the landing window, and opened one of the casements a few inches. From there, in the glimmer of many lighted windows, he could watch anyone leaving the House by the door of the Sixth Form lobby. In a few minutes he beheld a hatted and coated figure—very small for a Sixth Form man—moving away. He chuckled softly. All he had to do, now that he was sure, was to take his Latin paper to Mr. Ducas's study, and establish his watertight alibi.

He was about to close the case-ment, when he heard a sharp cry from below, and, staring down, saw Packe stagger and fall.

"Ooogh!" floated up to his listening ears. "Ow! Oh! What idiot has been chucking orange peel about? Oooooh!"

V. C. grinned. Turkey Tuck had had oranges, that afternoon: and the fat Turkey was very careless with his peel. Packe had slipped on orange-peel, and he seemed hurt. That was merely amusing to V. C.—but suddenly he ceased to be amused.

To his utter dismay Packe, after rubbing his knee for a minute or two, turned back, limping, to the House. Faintly, V. C. heard a door below open and shut. Packe had gone in again.

Vane-Carter breathed fury. After all his careful planning—and with three fellows waiting out there in the dark—this! Had Packe “chucked” it, or was he going out again, after attending to his precious knee?

V. C. crossed the study landing to the stairs. Levett would be able to pry out for him what Packe was doing. But as he descended the stairs, he came to a sudden halt, at the sound of familiar voices below. One was the squeaky voice of Packe—the other, his form-master's deep bass.

“You are sure, Packe?” Mr. Ducas was asking.

“I think so, sir! I have reason to believe that some boys of your form are out of the House, smoking in the Oak Walk. I was going, but I slipped and hurt my knee—I must go to my study for some embrocation—ow!”

“Very well, Packe: I will see to it,” said Mr. Ducas.

Vane-Carter stood on the staircase petrified. That scug, Packe, wasn't going—Roger was going! Packe limped away to his study for Elliman's: Mr. Ducas went for his coat and hat.

“Oh, holy smoke!” groaned Vane-Carter.

His brain almost reeled, at the idea of Roger going into the Oak Walk in the dark—and getting the sooty sack.

It was a time for action—swift action. The scheme, so elaborately planned, had gone phut: but there was still time to avert the last awful catastrophe, if V. C. did not lose a second. He did not lose half a one.

In less than a minute, V. C. was clambering out of a box-room window, dropping from the leads, and racing away in the dark as if he were on the cinderpath.

Breathless, he reached the Oak Walk, and plunged into the blackness under the heavy old branches. A word would be enough: and the four would race back to the House: Roger, when he came, would find nobody. He stopped, paused to get his breath for a call, and then—

He hardly knew what happened next.

“GOT him!” breathed Bob Drake, inaudibly.

He was careful not to speak aloud. Packe was not a cat to see in the dark—but he had ears—very sharp ears—and he might have recognised a voice. Silence was the cue.

The Carcroft Co. were ready—prompt—efficient. They had the sack, with the cord round it, ready—they heard the footsteps that came—and their eyes being used to the dark by this time, they glimpsed faintly a shadowy figure, much the same size as the one they expected—and the sack went over the head of that figure, descending to the knees. It was swiftly done, but well done. Swift hands dragged tight the cord, and knotted it behind the victim's back.

From the interior of the sack came frightful splutterings. The Carcroft Co. did not linger to listen! Their work well and truly done, they shot away: in a minute they were under the window by which they had left the House—in another minute, they had climbed in, and the window was shut and fastened.

When they strolled into the Burrow, there was nothing in their innocent aspect to hint that they had been out after lock-up. Levett gave them an inquiring grin—Bob closed one eye at Levett—that was all.

“I say, you chaps, seen V. C.?” called out Turkey Tuck.

“V.C.!” said Bob, “I think he's gone to Roger for a spot of Latin, fatty.”

“I hope he's got over that whopping!” said Turkey, morosely. “He's been a beast ever since Packe whopped him. And what did he expect, I'd like to know? Think Packe was going to believe he trod on his foot by accident—why, he fairly stamped on it!”

“Oh! Did he?” gasped Bob.

“He jolly well did!” said Turkey. “Packe may be a goat, but he wasn't goat enough to believe that was an accident! Lots of fellows laughed—but I bet you V. C. didn't laugh when he got the six! He, he.”

Harry Compton and Co. exchanged glances.

“So that was why—!” murmured Bob. “It wasn't for ‘nothing’—V. C. was pulling our legs, my beloved ‘earers.’”

“And diddling us into bagging Packe, who gave him six for cheek, as he jolly well deserved!” Harry Compton breathed hard. “If we'd known—!”

V. C. had been rather too astute for the unsuspecting corner study. But it was done now—and what was done, could not be undone.

“After all, Packe will look fearfully funny, when he totters in, in the sack!” said Bob. Bob was always a fellow for looking on the bright side of things.

“WHAT'S up?”

“What the dickens—?”

“Oh, haddock!” gasped Turkey Tuck. “Look!”

Everybody was looking. The big door on the quad was wide open: light streamed out into the night. Half Carcroft seemed to be packed round the doorway. There was a buzz of astonished voices. Coming up the steps of the House was Roger Ducas, with a face of amazement and wrath—and he was leading in a strange, swaying figure—a figure enveloped in a sack that descended below the knees, roped round the middle. Who it was, could not be seen or guessed.

“Has anyone a knife?” asked Roger, as he led his prize in. “This rope is knotted—”

“Here, sir!” came a squeaky voice, that made Harry Compton, Bob Drake and Dick Lee jump, as if the floor under their feet had suddenly become red-hot.

Their heads almost swam, as they saw Packe of the Sixth bustle officially forward, with a pocket-knife. They almost fancied, for a moment, that it must be Packe's ghost. But it was Packe—here, in the House—and in the name of all that was unthinkable, who was in the sack?

Packe sawed at the cord—Roger jerked off the sack. Its occupant was revealed—but not easily recognised. The face was black with soot . . . the hair full of soot. . . .

“Vane-Carter!” stuttered Mr. Ducas. “What does this mean?”

“Gurrrrrgh! Oogh! Gurrrgh!”

“Packe! Take this boy to a bath-room—let him clean himself, and then send him to my study.”

Vane-Carter, still gurgling, was led away.

THERE were sounds of laughter in the corner study, a little later, when Dudley Vane-Carter hurled open the door, and stamped in, red and furious.

“You howling idiots!” he roared.

“Ha, ha, ha!” yelled Compton, Drake and Lee.

“You never got Packe—you got me—”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“I've got a detention for going out after lock-up—”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

Dudley Vane-Carter glared at the hilarious three. They roared. He brandished clenched fists at them. They roared the more. Finally, he stamped out. And he left the corner study still yelling with laughter.

THE END.