LIVE STORIES & ARTICLES for the ADVENTURE-LOVING BOY!

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"IS THIS THE STATE IN WHICH YOU KEEP YOUR STUDY?"

The Head's Surprise Visit proves disastrous for the Rookwood Chums.

YOU'LL ALL ENJOY THIS ROUSING TALE OF THE HEROES OF ROOKWOOD!

NO LUCK for the FISTICAL FOUR!

by OWEN CONQUEST

Head's inspection is always regarded by Jimmy Silver & Co. of the Fourth with certain uneasiness, for very seldom are junior studies kept in a presentable state. But on this occasion, when the Head pays his surprise visit, he gets the shock of his life—and so do Jimmy Silver & Co.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
The Head Looks In!

"CLEAR!"

"What?"

"No ingress!" said Bulkeley of the Sixth, with a smile.

Jimmy Silver & Co. stared at the captain of Rookwood.

They were surprised.

George Bulkeley, of the Sixth Form, was stationed at the end of the Classical Fourth passage—the staircase end. He leaned on the wall, with his official ashplant under his arm.

As the Fistical Four came upstairs after classes Bulkeley slipped the ashplant from under his arm and held it across the passage, barring the way of the chums of the Fourth.

Jimmy Silver & Co. halted on the landing. Bulkeley's action was quite mystifying to them. Why they could not walk along their own passage to their own study they simply could not guess.

"Look here, Bulkeley——" began Arthur Edward Lovell warmly.

"Clear!" said the prefect tersely.

"Can't we go along to our own study?" asked Raby.

"No!"

"We've come up for tea!" said Newcome.

"Sorry!" said Bulkeley politely. "But orders are orders. I'm here to keep the passage clear. Cut!"

"But——" said Jimmy Silver.

"Hook it!"

"Well, my hat!"

Argument with a prefect of the Sixth, and a captain of the school, was not feasible. The official ashplant that barred the passage would have furnished the effective and somewhat painful answers to any arguments advanced by fags of the Fourth Form.

Besides, it was fairly plain, after a moment's reflection, that Bulkeley of the Sixth was acting on instructions. It could not have been simply for his own entertainment that he was doing sentry-go at the entrance of the Classical Fourth Passage.

The Fistical Four retired across the landing to the stairs, where they waited. Valentine Mornington came up, passed them, and was about to walk along the passage, when Bulkeley stopped him.

"What on earth's the name of this game, Bulkeley?" asked Morny.

"Cut!" was Bulkeley's reply.

"Can't a chap go to his study?"

"No."

"Oh, gad!"

Mornington shrugged his shoulders and joined the Fistical Four on the staircase.

"Anythin' up?" he asked.

"Looks like it!" said Jimmy Silver. "All the fellows are being kept out of their studies, it seems."

"Is it a Head's inspection, then?"

"Oh! Very likely."

Two or three more of the Classical Fourth came up. Bulkeley stopped them, and the little crowd at the head of the stairs grew and grew. Bulkeley, standing on guard, gave no explanation, and all sorts of surmises were started by the crowd of juniors. Lovell called out to Cyril Peele of the Fourth as that youth came up the staircase:

"Better mind your eye, Peele!"

Peele gave him a rather inimical look. The black sheep of Rookwood was on the worst of terms with the Fistical Four. Only that morning, in fact, Arthur Edward Lovell had held Peele's head under a flowing tap as a punishment for having given a cigarette to Lovell's minor, Teddy. Arthur Edward Lovell had almost forgotten that incident already; but, naturally, it lingered longer in Cyril Peele's memory.

"What do you mean?" grunted Peele.

"Looks like a Head's inspection," grinned Lovell. "If you've got any smokes in your study, look out for squalls!"

Peele sneered.

"Thank you for nothin'!" he answered. "I'm not afraid of a Head's inspection."

More and more fellows came up, and the crowd on the stairs grew and grew. It was agreed now that it was a "Head's inspection" that was toward, and some of the fellows were rather uneasy. Once or twice in the term it was the custom of Dr. Chisholm to make an official and stately round of the junior quarters, and these visits were always paid by surprise. Had notice been given in advance, doubtless the Head would have discovered every study in spick-and-span condition, and plenty of evidence that every fellow in the Form was a model character.

Surprise visits, on the other hand, enabled the Head to see things as they actually were, which meant trouble to untidy fellows who kept their football boots in the bookcase and Latin grammars inside out on the floor. It meant still more trouble to fellows who were foolish enough to transgress the strict rule against smoking at Rookwood, and who had cigarettes in their rooms to meet the awful glance of the Head. Once the Head had actually discovered a pipe in a Shell study, and the owner had had great difficulty in convincing Dr. Chisholm that he used it only to blow bubbles with.

"This is all very well," growled Conroy of the Fourth, "but a fellow wants his tea after footer practice—what?"

"It's too thick!" agreed Lovell. "But we're in luck—our study is all right."

"Right as rain!" said Jimmy Silver, feeling quite relieved as he thought of it.

Undoubtedly there were times when the end study was not right as rain. Sometimes it was untidy. There had been occasions when it had been very untidy.

Fortunately, on this especial day, the Fistical Four had nothing to fear on that score.

They had not been in their study at all that day—or only for a few minutes—and it was still in the state in which the "boys' maid" had left it early in the morning. At least, the chums of the Fourth naturally supposed that it was.

Other fellows had some grounds for uneasiness; few were in the happy state of satisfaction of the Fistical Four, and, apparently, Peele.

"Here he comes!" murmured Oswald at last.

The majestic figure of Dr. Chisholm was sighted on the lower stairs. He was accompanied by Mr. Dalton, the master of the Fourth.

The juniors backed away respectfully for the Head to pass, and Dr. Chisholm and Mr. Dalton moved on into the Fourth Form passage, and the inspection had begun.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.
Awful Luck!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. waited.

With all due respect to the Head of Rookwood, they wished that the stately old gentleman would "buck up," so that they could get to the end study to tea. Footer practice had made them hungry.

But "bucking up" was the last thought that was likely to enter Dr. Chisholm's mind. All his movements were slow and stately.

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From the end of the passage—still barred off by Bulkeley—the juniors watched him enter the first study.

They watched him almost with bated breath, for that study belonged to Peele, Gower, and Lattery, and Peele & Co. were the black sheep of the Form. If any unpleasant discovery was made in the quarters of the Classical Fourth it was almost certain to be in Peele's study. But Peele and Gower and Lattrey seemed quite at ease.

"No smokes there this time—what?" murmured Lovell.

Apparently there were none, for Dr. Chisholm's face was quite unmoved when he came out of the study.

"You fellows are in luck," grinned Raby. "What have you done with your latest copy of 'Racing Tips,' Peele?"

"I haven't left it for the Head to find, anyhow," answered Peele, coolly.

And the juniors grinned.

Study No. 2 belonged to Higgs, Jones minor, Putty of the Fourth, and Tubby Muffin. Mr. Dalton entered with the Head, and looked out again.

"Higgs!"

"Here, sir!" said Alfred Higgs, in dismay.

"Please come here!"

"Yes, sir!"

Higgs passed Bulkeley, and went to Study No. 2. He almost cringed in the doorway as he met the glance of the Head.

Dr. Chisholm pointed to the bookcase.

"Are these your boots, Higgs?"

"Oh! Yes, sir!" gasped Higgs.

"Is it your custom to keep football boots in the bookcase, among your books?"

"Oh, no, sir!"

"Do you generally leave your boots lying about in such an extremely muddy state?"

"Nunno, sir!"

"You will take five hundred lines of Virgil, Higgs."

"Oh! Yes, sir!" stuttered Higgs.

"Perhaps you will kindly make a note of it, Mr. Dalton?"

"Certainly, sir!"

The Head made a stately motion to the doorway, and Alfred Higgs jumped away as if the headmaster had been a steam-roller rolling down on him.

Dr. Chisholm progressed to Study No. 3.

That study belonged to Pons, Van Ryn, and Conroy, the three Colonials. Mr. Dalton glanced out of the doorway.

"Is Van Ryn there?"

"No, sir," answered Jimmy Silver. "I left him in the changing-room."

"Shall I send for Van Ryn, sir?" asked Mr. Dalton, turning back into the study.

"It is not necessary, Mr. Dalton," said the Head. "You will see that he writes out two hundred lines for leaving his dictionary on the floor."

"Certainly, sir!"

Progress proceeded to No. 4, the study of Mornington and Erroll. This study passed muster, and so did Study No. 5, which belonged to Townsend, and Topham, and Rawson. Study No. 6, the quarters of Oswald, Flynn, and Hooker, escaped criticism, but in Study No. 7 the Head halted in the doorway with a frown.

"This is a very untidy room," he said. "To whom does this room belong, Mr. Dalton!"

"Gunner and Dickinson minor, sir."

"I have seldom seen even a junior room in so untidy a state," said the Head. "Perhaps you will cane both Gunner and Dickinson minor, Mr. Dalton?"

"Certainly, sir!" said the Fourth Form master.

"I like that!" murmured Gunner indignantly. "All through that young ass Dickinson minor being cheeky. He said I couldn't play footer for toffee, and, of course, I had to wallop him."

The juniors chuckled.

Peter Cuthbert Gunner's drastic methods with his study-mate were well known, and most of the fellows considered that a caning from Mr. Dalton was exactly what Gunner wanted.

Dr. Chisholm and Mr. Dalton progressed now to the end study. The visit of inspection was almost over.

The Head stopped in the doorway.

To the surprise of the Fistical Four, who were watching him along the passage, thunder gathered on his stately brow.

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated the Head.

"Upon my word!" said Mr. Dalton.

Both masters stared into the study, apparently surprised and shocked by what they saw there.

"What on earth's the matter now?" murmured Raby. "Our study's all right, isn't it?"

"Something's up!" said Newcome.

Dr. Chisholm turned to the Fourth Form master.

"Whose study is this?"

"Silver, Lovell, Raby, and Newcome," said Mr. Dalton."

"Kindly call them here."

Jimmy Silver & Co. passed Bulkeley and walked up the passage in a state of great astonishment. What fault the Head had to find with their study was a mystery to them.

Dr. Chisholm eyed them sternly as they came up.

"This is your study?" he asked, in a deep voice.

"Yes, sir," said Jimmy.

"You are head boy of the Fourth Form, I think, Silver?"

"Yes, sir."

"And this is the state in which you keep your study?"

"Yes, sir," repeated Jimmy, in surprise. "Is—is there anything the matter with it?"

"How dare you ask such a question, Silver? I have never seen a room in such a state! In all my experience as a headmaster I have never seen such untidiness, such slovenliness, such—such——"

Dr. Chisholm paused, apparently at a loss for a word that would express his feelings.

The Fistical Four could only blink.

From where they stood, facing the two masters, they could not see into the study, but they naturally supposed that it was as they had left it. Dr. Chisholm stepped back and pointed into the doorway of the end study.

"That," he said, "that is the state in which you, the head boy of your Form, keep your study?"

Then the chums of the Fourth looked in.

They jumped.

It was really difficult to believe the evidence of their own eyes for a minute or two.

The end study, which they had seen last in an unusually tidy state, was now in a state that almost beggared description.

If half the Form had been engaged in a free fight within its walls it could hardly have looked more wrecked and havocked. Gunner's study had been order itself in comparison.

The table was up-ended in a corner. The chairs were lying about on their backs. Books were scattered over the floor, an upset inkpot had streamed ink over the carpet in a long black stream. Three or four jam tarts were sticking to the carpet or the mantelpiece. The glass pane of the bookcase was broken, and a sooty kettle had been shoved in among the books. There were ginger-beer bottles in the fender, and two or three lying about the room; torn paper was scattered all over the place. In the grate was a Latin grammar, torn in several places, as if for the purpose of lighting a fire. There was more disorder than could be taken in at a single glance.

"Oh!" gasped Jimmy Silver, as he stared dazedly into the wrecked study.

"Oh!" stuttered Lovell.

Raby and Newcome were dumb with amazement and dismay.

What on earth had happened to their study during their absence at football practice, after class? It looked as if an earthquake had struck it.

"Mr. Dalton!"

"Sir?"

"Will you kindly send someone for a cane? I will punish these juniors myself."

"Very good, sir!"

Mr. Dalton went along the passage and returned with Bulkeley's cane. He handed it to Dr. Chisholm.

"Silver, I am shocked at this! I am shocked and surprised," said the Head. "I have no alternative but to punish you severely for keeping your study in such a state—such a revolting state—such a disgusting state! Bend over that chair!"

"But, sir——" gasped Jimmy.

"Not a word!"

"But——"

"Bend over that chair!" exclaimed the Head, in a terrifying voice.

And Jimmy Silver bent over the chair.

The cane rose and fell six times.

"Six" was a punishment at Rookwood of varying severity. It depended on the degree of vigour with which the "six" was laid on.

On this occasion there was no fault to be found with it, so far as the vigour was concerned.

Indeed, the hapless captain of the Fourth might have supposed that the Head had been doing "physical jerks" specially to get his muscle up for the occasion.

Never had any fellow at Rookwood received so severe a "six"!

Jimmy Silver was quite pale and breathless when the last stroke had fallen.

Lovell, and Raby, and Newcome stood in a dismayed group. Their turn was coming.

They realised dimly that some japer must have ragged their study in their absence. At the most unfortunate moment possible—just before a surprise visit from the headmaster.

They realised, too, that it was useless to attempt to make that clear to the Head. Dr. Chisholm judged by what he saw, and he was in no mood to listen to explanations.

"Lovell!"

"We never——" gasped Lovel hopelessly.

"Bend over that chair!"

Arthur Edward Lovell bent over, and received four hefty strokes. Jimmy, as head of the Fourth, had the distinction of receiving the severest punishment. Four each was deemed sufficient for his study-mates.

"Raby!"

"Somebody has——" began Raby.

"Bend over that chair!"

Four more hefty swipes were administered.

"Newcome!"

Arthur Newcome did not attempt to explain. He knew that it was futile, and he bent over the chair without a word.

Four times the cane rose and fell.

Then the Head handed it back to Mr. Dalton, who handed it back to Bulkeley of the Sixth. Justice had been done!

Dr. Chisholm eyed the Fistical Four sternly as they stood wriggling with anguish.

"I am surprised and shocked!" he told them again. "I am disgusted with you! Put this study in order at once. Mr. Dalton, I recommend you to keep an eye upon this study. I should never have dreamed that such slovenly and disorderly boys existed at Rookwood at all. I have been very much surprised and shocked."

And the majestic Head sailed away, followed by Mr. Dalton and Bulkeley. The inspection was over.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.
Lovell Leads!

"OH!"

"Ow!"

"Wow!"

"Mmmmmmmmmmm!"

There were sounds of woe and lamentation in the end study when the Head was gone.

Four voices were raised in anguish.

Classical Fourth fellows came along the passage and looked in. The Classical Fourth had hardly expected the Head's visit to pass off without trouble for somebody. But it was rather a surprise that the trouble had fallen chiefly on the Fistical Four.

Nobody would have been surprised by a flogging for Peele & Co., for having smokes or cards in their study. But Peele's study had been drawn quite blank, and it was upon Jimmy Silver & Co. that the vials of wrath had been poured.

"Well, by gad, you fellows asked for it," said Valentine Mornington as he glanced at the suffering four. "What on earth's been going on here? Dog fight—what?"

"Ow! Wow! Wow!"

"Must be silly asses!" said Putty of the Fourth. "A man never knows when to look for a Head's inspection. But it's asking for trouble to keep your quarters in this state. Any prefect who looked in would have given you lines, at least."

"Isn't this study supposed to set an example to the rest of the passage?" grinned Peele. "Isn't Silver head of the Fourth? Is our shinin' example lettin' us down?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly owls!" said Arthur Edward Lovell, savagely. "We never left the study like this. It's a rag!"

"Well, it looks a bit untidy, even for you, Lovell!" grinned Oswald. "Why didn't you tell the Beak it was a rag?"

Arthur Edward Lovell groaned.

"I tried to, but can a fellow ever tell the Head anything? Does he ever listen to a chap?"

"It's a rotten, sneaking rag!" said Jimmy. "Somebody came in here while we were at footer and mucked up the study. I don't mind a bit of a rag, but this is too thick. Spilling ink and breaking glass is outside the limit."

"I suppose the fellow never knew that a Head's inspection was impendin'," said Putty of the Fourth.

"It was a rotten thing to do, all the same. The silly chump who mucked up this study is going to squirm for it!" said the captain of the Fourth.

"Was it you, Putty?" demanded Arthur Edward Lovell.

"No, fathead! If I ragged a man's study I shouldn't muck it up like this."

"Might have been a Modern raid," suggested Peele.

"Oh, very likely!" said Oswald.

"Likely enough!" groaned Lovell. "My hat, if it was Tommy Dodd and his mob we'll jolly well raid Manders' House in return, and make the cads sorry for themselves."

"Ow!" mumbled Raby.

"Wow!" murmured Newcome.

The Classical fellows went to their studies to tea, some of them sympathetic, some of them grinning. Jimmy Silver & Co. were left to groan till their feelings had been relieved by a sufficiency of groans. It was quite a long time before they ceased to moan and mumble. The Head had not spared the rod.

"Keep smiling," said Jimmy Silver, at last. "Not much good squealing. After all, we can stand a licking."

"It's unjust!" growled Lovell.

"My dear man, if you're going to howl over all the injustices you ever butt up against you'll be busy howling all your life," said Jimmy. "The Head doesn't know any better. How's a headmaster to know anything?"

"Something in that," said Raby, with a faint grin.

"O! Wow!" said Newcome.

"That's all very well," said Lovell hotly, "but a headmaster ought to look into a thing before he hands out the whackings. Ow!"

"Well, he did look in. I wish he hadn't! How was he going to guess that some brute had ragged the study? Never mind grousing about the Head. He's not a bad old scout, according to his lights," said Jimmy Silver tolerantly. "What we want to find out is the merry merchant who ragged the study, and we want to make him tired of life."

"Yes, rather! But who was it?" growled Lovell. "Looks to me like a raid of the Modern cads."

"I hardly think that Tommy Dodd and his pals would muck up a man's study like this," said Jimmy Silver thoughtfully. "You see, this isn't just a little rag; it's thorough-going hooliganism. The Modern fellows are cheeky outsiders, if you like, but——"

There was a sudden whoop from Arthur Edward Lovell.

He pounced on a book that lay on the floor, grabbed it up, and held it aloft in triumph.

"Didn't I say it was the Modern cads?" he exclaimed.

"What's that?"

"Rotten chemistry manual. Some Modern cad had it in his pocket, or under his silly arm, and dropped it here," said Lovell triumphantly. "Nobody in this House studies chemistry. They study 'stinks' over on the Modern side. Why, look here! Here's Dodd's name written in it!"

The chums of the Fourth looked.

There it was, "T. Dodd," written in the hand of Tommy Dodd of the Modern Fourth, on the flyleaf of the chemistry manual.

"That settles it!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Didn't I tell you so?" hooted Lovell.

"You did, old man. Even you are right sometimes," said Jimmy Silver. "Not often. But accidents will happen."

"I'm going to rag those Modern cads, and I'm not going to lose a single minute about it!" bawled Lovell. "You fellows can stick here if you like. I'm going!"

And Arthur Edward Lovell went.

His three chums exchanged glances, and then they followed him. Arthur Edward was hot-headed, but he could not be allowed to venture into the lion's den alone, and the Co. were very keen on vengeance, too, and did not want to wait. Mr. Manders' House was like unto a lions' den for Classicals on the warpath. But it was evident that Arthur Edward Lovell dared to be a Daniel, and there was no stopping him. So his comrades followed on.

They left the House and walked across the quad to the block of buildings which constituted the Modern side of Rookwood, and which went by the name of Manders' House.

"Hallo, Classical cads!" remarked Towle of the Modern Fourth, as the Fistical Four walked into the enemy's quarters.

Towle of the Modern Fourth was up-ended the next moment, and left, roaring indignantly, and Jimmy Silver & Co. hurried on towards Tommy Dodd's study.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.
A Slight Mistake!

THE three Tommies of the Modern Fourth—Dodd, and Cooke, and Doyle—had finished tea in their study, and Tommy Dodd was going through his pockets.

"Anybody seen my blinking chemistry?" he asked.

"Lost it?" asked Tommy Cooke.

"Sure, you're always losing something," remarked Doyle. "You'll be losing your head next. Luckily, there's nothing in it of any value."

"Fathead! Where's the blessed thing? I remember sticking it in my pocket when we were kicking Peele to-day. I want it after tea. You know we've got chemistry with Manders. The dashed thing's gone!"

"Dropped it when you were kicking Peele, perhaps?" suggested Cook.

"Perhaps. I'll kick him again when I see him. I thought at the time that I hadn't kicked him enough."

There was a sound of hurried footsteps outside the study. The door flew open.

The three Moderns stared at the open doorway. Four Classicals, in a rather breathless state, appeared there.

"Hallo! What——" began Tommy Dodd.

"Here they are!" shouted Lovell. "We've found the cads at home!"

"Go for them!"

There was a rush into the study.

Before the Modern trio quite knew what was happening the rush of the Fistical Four overwhelmed them.

Dodd and Cook and Doyle went sprawling about the study, with the Classicals sprawling over them.

Jimmy Silver hastily jumped to the door, slammed it, and turned the key in the lock. The Classical raiders were in the heart of the enemy's territory now, with any amount of reinforcements for the enemy close at hand. Jimmy Silver & Co. did not desire to see those reinforcements, howsoever much the three Tommies might have desired to do so.

"Now rag the cads!" panted Jimmy.

"You bet!"

"What-ho!"

"You potty Classical duffers!" roared Tommy Dodd. "What the thump do you mean? Oh, my hat!"

"Yaroooh!"

"Rescue!"

There was a terrific struggle in Tommy Dodd's study.

The odds were four to three; but the three were first-class fighting-men, and

they put up a hefty resistance. Jimmy Silver & Co. found their hands very nearly full.

Jimmy, in close embrace with Tommy Dodd, crashed on the study table, and the table reeled into the fender. The crockery it bore went in a crashing stream into the grate.

Crash, crash—smash!

"Oh, crumbs! You Classical rotter! You——"

"You Modern cad——"

"Take that!"

"Ow! Take that!"

Crash! Bump!

The combatants rolled over, fighting furiously.

Newcome was down, with Tommy Cook sitting on him; but Raby sprang to the rescue, and Cook was dragged over, and Raby took a seat on his chest. Then Tommy Cook was reduced to impotence.

if two or three cyclones had struck it all at once. The three Tommies looked little better, as Lovell lathered ink and jam and gum over them.

Towle & Co., outside the study, hammered on the door, and hissed ferocious threats through the keyhole.

But the avengers did not heed.

The locked door was between them and the Modern reinforcements, and there was no one to say them nay.

"That will do, Lovell!" said Jimmy Silver at last. "We'd better get clear now."

"You won't get clear in a hurry!" gasped Tommy Dodd. "We'll jolly well scrag you for this! We'll lynch you! What sort of rotten hooligans do you call yourselves?"

"Sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander!" grinned Lovell. "If you don't like your own medicine, that's your look-out."

"Don't be an ass, Lovell," said Jimmy Silver. Tommy wouldn't tell lies about it. If he says he didn't, he didn't."

"Then who did?" hooted Lovell.

"Honour bright, Tommy Dodd?" asked Jimmy Silver. "Didn't you fellows rag our study?"

"No," yelled Dodd. "We've been out since classes, you chump, and only came back in time for tea, you frabjous ass, and we haven't been on the Classical side at all, you born idiot!"

"Oh, dear! Then we're sorry——"

"I'll give you sorry!" gasped Tommy Dodd.

"We found his 'stinks' book there!" howled Lovell. "If they hadn't been there, how did Dodd's 'stinks' book get there?"

"My chemistry book, you ass! I lost it when I was kicking Peele this morning."

THE STUDY RAGGERS! Whilst his three chums held down Tommy Dodd & Co., Arthur Edward Lovell went to work with great thoroughness. He took everything he could find from the cupboard, broke everything he could break, and knocked over anything which was standing up. When he had finished the Tommies' study was indeed a total wreck. (*See Chapter* 4.)

"Rag the cads!" roared Lovell, as he went down struggling with Tommy Doyle. "Here, sit on him, Newcome!"

Newcome sat on Doyle and pinned him down to the floor.

There was a buzz of voices outside the study now. The handle of the door was turned and shaken and the panels thumped.

"It's a Classical raid!" came Towle's voice. "Four of the cads—they're ragging in the study. They've locked the door."

"Let us in, you Classical worms!"

"We'll jolly well scrag them when they come out."

Heedless of the uproar outside, Arthur Edward Lovell proceeded with his task of ragging the study, in retaliation for the ill-usage of the end study on the Classical side.

Lovell's methods were not gentle. Indeed, they might almost have been called methods of barbarism.

Everything he saw he knocked over, everything that was breakable he smashed. Tommy Dodd's study soon presented an aspect compared with which the end study was orderliness itself.

The three Tommies were still struggling furiously; but they were well held, and they could not interrupt Lovell's reprisals.

In five minutes the study looked as

"I fancy we've done a bit more damage than they did on our side," chuckled Raby.

"I jolly well meant to," said Lovell.

"Who's done any damage on your side, you silly idiots?" bawled Cook.

"You have, you cheeky Modern rotters, and got us a Head's licking for the state our study was left in," said Lovell. "But you've got something a bit thicker than a Head's licking."

"We haven't touched your study, you fathead!" hooted Tommy Doyle.

"Gammon!"

"I'll give you gammon when I get loose!" gasped Doyle.

"Oh, cheese it!" snapped Lovell. "Do you want to make out that you didn't rag our study this afternoon?"

"You frabjous ass, no!"

"Rot!"

"We didn't, but we jolly well will, after this!" roared Cook.

"You didn't?" exclaimed Jimmy Silver, in dismay.

"No, you ass!"

"Gammon!" said Lovell. "Of course, they did! I'm surprised at even you Modern cads telling lies about it."

Tommy gasped with fury.

"Lemme get loose!" he spluttered. "Let me get at him! Silver, you blithering idiot, gerroff, and let mo get at him!"

"Peele!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver, and a flash of understanding came to him at once.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.
Not a Lucky Day!

JIMMY SILVER jumped up.

Raby and Newcome followed his example.

The three Tommies, dusty, dishevelled, jammy, inky, breathless, staggered to their feet.

Lovell's destructive hand was stayed. Even Arthur Edward Lovell was doubtful now, and realised dimly that his "bull-at-a-gate" methods were a little liable to lead him on a false scent.

The two parties stared at one another, while Towle & Co. still raged in the corridor outside.

"I—I say, we're sorry!" stammered Jimmy Silver, at last. "What were we to think? We found the study ragged—and bagged a Head's licking for it—and picked up your book there, Dodd."

"You frumptious idiot, I suppose it was put there for you to pick up and make you make fools of yourselves, just as you have done!" snorted Tommy Dodd.

"Oh, my hat! Somebody pulling our leg, you know!" exclaimed Lovell.

"Easy enough to pull a Classical dummy's leg!" said Tommy Cook.

"Look here——"

"Peele!" groaned Raby. "Peele, of course! Lovell held his napper under a tap this afternoon, and Doddy says he's kicked him. And Peele wasn't afraid of a Head's inspection. Of course, he had nosed it out that the Head was coming, and had his own study all ready. I remember Morny thought so."

"And ours ready, too!" mumbled Newcome.

"We've been taken in," said Lovell.

"You silly chumps, you've been taken in, and now you're going to be kicked out!" snorted Tommy Dodd.

"Well, we're sorry for the mistake, but——"

"Will that set our study to rights again?" roared Cook.

"Nunno! I suppose not. But then you——"

"Will that get the jam and ink off me?" shrieked Tommy Doyle.

"N-no. But——"

Doyle made a sudden rush to the door and turned back the key. The door flew open.

"Collar the Classical rotters!" shouted Doyle.

Towle of the Fourth rushed in, with six or seven Modern juniors at his heels.

"Back up!" shouted Lovell.

It had been a ghastly mistake. But it was natural, in the circumstances, that the three Tommies were disinclined to make allowances for that mistake. They had been handled severely, their study had been wrecked, and they were excited and wrathful.

Lovell had not given much thought to a retreat after vengeance on the Modern enemy. The Classicals had hoped to escape by a sudden rush from the study.

But that hope was frustrated now by the inrush of a crowd of vengeful Moderns.

All that the Fistical Four could do was to stand shoulder to shoulder and attempt to fight their way out.

The attempt was quite hopeless.

Great fighting-men as the Fistical Four were, they were of no use against odds of two or three to one.

They resisted gallantly, but they were fairly overwhelmed by the Moderns and strewn on the floor.

Fortunately, there was no jam or ink left—Lovell had used it all on the three Tommies. But the four unhappy Classicals were ragged till they hardly knew what was happening to them.

Then they were booted out of the study.

Arthur Edward Lovell went first, with five or six boots to help him go, and he sprawled, roaring, in the passage.

Jimmy Silver followed, and then Raby, and then Newcome. After them the Moderns swarmed, still booting.

The hapless raiders picked themselves up somehow and fled for the stairs.

Fortunately, the Modern juniors did not follow them down the staircase, where an uproar would have drawn prefects to the spot. But, really, Jimmy Silver & Co. had had enough.

They scudded out of Manders' House breathlessly, and did not stop till they were half-way across Big Quad. Knowles of the Sixth, a Modern prefect, sighted them as they went, and shouted to them, but they did not heed.

The juniors tramped into the House. A sharp voice called to them—the voice of their Form master, Richard Dalton, in much sharper tones than they usually heard from him.

"Silver! Raby! Newcome! Lovell!"

"Oh! Yes, sir!"

"You are in a disgraceful state! Your clothes are dusty—dirty; your collars torn! Upon my word, I have never seen Rookwood juniors in such a state! Only this afternoon the Head punished you for having the most slovenly study in the Fourth Form. And now I see you——"

"We—we——" stammered Jimmy Silver.

The chums of the Fourth realised that it would have been wise to repair damages a little before showing up in the House. But they had hoped to slip in unnoticed. Their luck was out. This was most emphatically not Jimmy Silver & Co.'s lucky day.

Mr. Dalton raised his hand.

"I am greatly surprised at this, Silver! You have, I suppose, been fighting—that is the only explanation."

"We—we——"

"I warn you, Silver, that you must be more careful!" said the master of the Fourth sternly. "Each of you will take five hundred lines of Virgil, and bring them to my study to-morrow."

"Oh, sir!" gasped the hapless four.

Five hundred lines was a very heavy impot.

"If the Head had not already caned you I should do so now," said Mr. Dalton. "Go!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. scudded up the stairs and vanished from the severe gaze of Richard Dalton. They passed Cyril Peele on the landing, but they did not even kick him as they passed. They scudded on to the end study—still in a state of wrecked untidiness.

"We're up against it to-day!" groaned Newcome.

Lovell rubbed his knuckles.

"I fancy I know who did this," he said.

"Peele!" said Jimmy Silver. "I'm fairly certain now that it was Peele. But we're going to make jolly sure!"

"Smythe of the Shell," said Lovell. "He grinned at me as I came in, and I hit him on the nose. Depend on it, it was Smythe. I've tapped his nose; but that's not enough. Let's go and rag his study."

"What?"

"Come on!" said Lovell. "No good slacking about. Let's jolly well go and wreck Smythe's study, and if he's there we'll wreck him, too!"

Lovell started to lead the way.

Jimmy Silver, and Raby, and Newcome jumped up, seized Arthur Edward Lovell, and whirled him back into the study. Lovell sat down with a bump. Jimmy slammed the door. The chums of the Fourth had had enough of Arthur Edward's leadership—a little too much, in fact.

"Now chuck it!" said Jimmy Silver wrathfully. "We'll make a little more certain before we rag any fellow's study, you frabjous chump."

"I'm going——"

"You're not!" said Raby.

"I jolly well am!"

Lovell jumped up and rushed for the door.

Bump!

Arthur Edward Lovell sat down again.

"Have some more?"

Fortunately, Arthur Edward did not want any more. And Jimmy Silver & Co. set to work to put the end study to rights, postponing, for the present, reprisals upon the unknown study-ragger.

THE END.

(But Jimmy Silver & Co. get on the track of the mysterious study-ragger. How, you will discover in next week's rollicking long story of Rookwood, entitled: "GIVING THE GAME AWAY!")

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AN AMAZING STORY OF THE GREYFRIARS CHUMS IN AFRICA!

SCHOOLBOYS to the RESCUE!

By FRANK RICHARDS

(Author of the stories of Greyfriars appearing in the "Magnet" every Saturday.)

Fortune favours the brave, it is said, and certainly fortune is with Harry Wharton & Co. when they set out on the last stages of their amazing desert journey!

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
Forward!

"MY fine gentlemans——"

"Ready?" said Harry Wharton.

Sleep was impossible for the watchers in the Bordj.

In the upper room Billy Bunter slept; in the lower room Harry Wharton & Co., of Greyfriars, watched and waited with sleepless eyes. Ibrahim, the guide, had recommended sleep till he should awaken them at the appointed hour—but sleep was impossible.

Darkness lay on the African desert and the sandy hills—the square brick tower of the Bordj was a black shadow among shadows. Through the loopholes by the door moonlight began to gleam.

Ibrahim rose and shook himself. He was calm and cool, though he had said that he was going to his death with his masters. He had resigned himself to it with Oriental fatalism. For that the Greyfriars party would be successful in rescuing Major Cherry, Ali ben Yusef, and the two girls, Marjorie Hazeldene and Clara, from the hands of Mustapha ben Mohammed, the savage desert sheikh, he did not think possible for one moment. Indeed, in his innermost heart he marvelled at the success which had already attended the rescue party that had set out from Biskra. Still, Ibrahim, with the fatalism of the East, had attached himself to Harry Wharton & Co., and was prepared to serve them to the end.

Already he had learned much from a stealthy visit to the desert sheikh's encampment, although the news that Marjorie and Clara had been kidnapped and were now fast prisoners in the merciless hands of Mustapha ben Mohammed had brought a sickening feeling of dread to the hearts of the Greyfriars juniors.

As they waited for the appointed hour, Harry Wharton & Co.'s thoughts turned to Greyfriars, hundreds of miles away, wondering whether they would ever see the old school again. Their adventure seemed like a strange tale out of a novel—first the kidnapping of Ali ben Yusef; then the capture of Major Cherry and the annihilation of the soldiers that had accompanied him to attempt the rescue of Ali; next the kidnapping of the two Cliff House girls, closely followed by the death of their kidnapper, Bou Saoud, son of the desert sheikh; and finally their little haven, the Bordj, built of stout brick and mortar, from which, shortly, the plucky band was to set out in a do or die attempt at rescue.

"Ready, you fellows!" said Wharton's voice, strangely tense.

The juniors nodded, and examined their rifles

The five juniors were cool and collected. Death lurked in every shadow; every step they were to take, it was only too likely, brought them nearer to doom. But there was no thought of hesitation. They were only glad that the hour of action had arrived; that the long, weary waiting was over at last.

In the corner of the room an Arab prisoner sat leaning on the wall, sleepless as his captors, his fierce eyes glowing at them with unsleeping savage hate. Little did he know that he had rendered his last service to his scoundrelly master, Mustapha ben Mohammed.

"We're ready," said Bob. "We must call Bunter, to bar the door after us."

He ascended the steps to the upper room.

Bunter was sleeping soundly on a pile of rugs. Bob Cherry groped for him, in the dim moonlight that penetrated through the loopholed walls, and shook him by the shoulder.

"Ow! Wharrer marrer?"

"Wake up, Bunter!"

"Tain't rising-bell."

The Owl of the Remove had been dreaming that he was in the old dormitory at Greyfriars.

"Wake up, old man," said Bob gently. "We're going now. Come down and bar the door after us."

"You're going to leave me alone here?"

"Come!" answered Bob.

Bunter scrambled up, mumbling and grumbling. He followed Bob Cherry down to the lower room of the Bordj.

In the dimness he blinked at the juniors.

"Why can't you have a light?" he growled.

"It would not be safe—it might be seen," said Harry Wharton. "Don't put on a light while we are gone, Bunter."

"Look here, I'm not staying here alone!"

"Do you want to come to the sheikh's camp with us?"

Bunter shuddered.

"Ow! No! I say, you fellows——"

"Bar the door after we are gone, and don't open it to anyone, unless you hear our whistle. You understand?"

"Ow! Yes! I—I say, are you leaving that Arab here?" asked Bunter, blinking uneasily at the bound man in the corner.

"He is quite safe, bound hand and foot," said Harry. "You needn't be afraid of him, Bunter."

"Suppose he got loose——"

"Knock him on the head if he tries to get loose!" growled Johny Bull.

"Oh, dear!" mumbled Bunter.

The fat junior was in a hopeless state of funk. It was by his own fault and folly that he was with the rescue party at all. But the chums of the Remove did not lose patience with him. In that hour of terrible peril there was no room for anger. They were loth to leave the hapless Owl to his own devices, surrounded by perils in the heart of the desert. But there was no help for it. He was, at least, safer in the Bordj than they were likely to be among the tents of Mustapha's spearmen.

"I—I say, you fellows——" groaned Bunter.

"Keep your pecker up, kid," said Bob Cherry kindly. "If we get back we've got a chance of getting you safe to Biskra. If not, you must shift for yourself. If we're not back to-morrow take the best camel and go."

"Oh, dear!"

"Bar the door safely after us, Bunter."

"Ow! Yes," mumbled the Owl of the Remove.

The juniors stepped out of the Bordj into the dim moonlight. Ibrahim remained till the last.

There was a peculiar gleam in the eyes of Honest Ibrahim.

"We're waiting for you, Ibrahim," said Harry.

"Ibrahim him come" said the guide. "Him look at the son of a dog to see all safe."

"Right!"

A minute later Ibrahim joined the juniors outside the Bordj. He had apparently examined the Arab prisoner to make sure that his bonds were still secure. It did not occur to the juniors that Ibrahim had any hidden motive in leaving that duty till they were outside the brick tower.

Billy Bunter shut the door after them.

One by one the palm-wood bars dropped into the iron sockets. Wharton counted them as they dropped, to make sure that the Owl of the Remove had secured the door.

Then the Famous Five followed Ibrahim.

With his baggy blue trousers and gold-braided jacket glimmering in the light of the rising moon, Honest Ibrahim led the way among the rugged rocks and sandy ravines.

From the top of the tower the juniors had had a glimpse of the distant Arab encampment. On the ground it was lost to their view. To find their way to the place among the wild, trackless rocks in the dim moon-glimmer, would have perplexed the Greyfriars juniors. To Ibrahim it was easy.

He led the way without a pause.

Harry Wharton looked back after a few minutes. The Bordj had vanished from sight among the folds of the low hills.

A trackless wilderness of rock and sand surrounded the juniors, with here and there, in the openings of the hills, a glimpse of the sandy desert glimmering under the moon.

Wharton spoke at last in a low voice. All his thoughts were with the prisoners of the sheikh; but he had not forgotten the hapless Bunter left alone in the solitary tower with the savage Arab prisoner. If by some wretched chance the ruffian should regain his liberty, the instant death of Bunter and the alarm carried to the Arab encampment would follow.

"Ibrahim!"

"Yes, my noble gentleman."

"You're sure you left the prisoner safe?"

Ibrahim's white teeth gleamed in the moonlight as he grinned.

"Him safe, noble master. Ibrahim him swear it."

"Good! If he should get loose——"

"Him no get loose," said Ibrahim coolly. "Him never stir one hand any more. Ibrahim him make very sure."

Wharton started.

"The way of Inglis-tan is not the way of the desert, my noble master," said Ibrahim coolly. "The son of a dog, him gnaw the cord. Before morning him free, with Ibrahim gone and no watch him more. Now him never gnaw the cord."

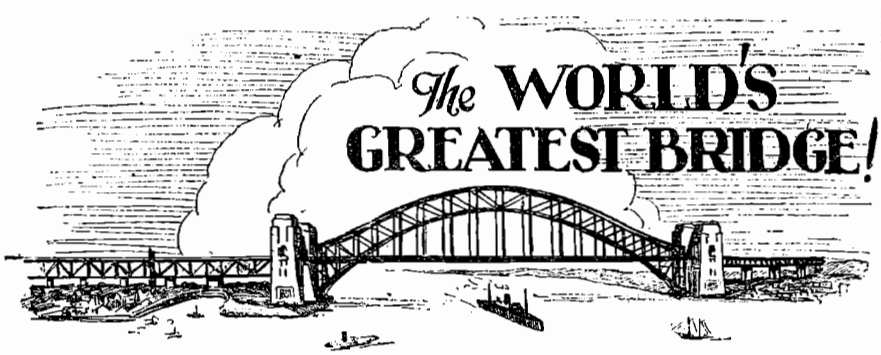
"You — you have——" breathed Harry, with a sickening feeling in his breast.

"My noble master him wish the son of a pig to get free and kill Bunter, and give alarm to the sheikh?" grinned Ibrahim.

"No, no. But——"

"Ibrahim, him take care of that. You trust Honest Ibrahim, him do your business. We lose time, noble master, and it not safe to talk. The desert has ears."

(*Continued on opposite page.*)



The WORLD'S GREATEST BRIDGE!

Another engineering wonder is slowly but surely rearing its giant steelwork to the sky—Sydney Harbour Bridge, the greatest in the world! Our special contributor tells the story of its construction in his usual vivid style!

Australia is far enough away, even in these days of extra swift liners and speeding planes, to cut out any possibility—you might think—of people in Britain or America being interested in a bridge being built there. But as that bridge happens to be the largest arch bridge in all the world, there is no civilised port on earth where news of its wonders is not being eagerly sought.

Four more years it will take before traffic can pass over it—and already two years have been spent in herculean labour in laying its mighty foundations. When that traffic starts it will be a most astonishing stream—of trains, motor cars and other vehicles, and swarms of foot passengers.

They reckon that *every hour* there will pass over it 168 electric trains, 6,000 other vehicles, and something like 40,000 pedestrians. Every hour, mark you!

It will be a colossal bit of engineering, a sheer triumph for the British firm building it, for the bridge to stand steady under that great strain. The bridge will be 150 feet wide, and will cross Sydney Harbour, its ends being 1,650 feet apart. And one great steel arch will span that water.

Roughly £4,000,000 will be the bill for it, and if you could weigh the whole mass of steel and stonework in scales you would get the total of 50,000 tons!

Over it there will pass four lines of electric railway, there will be a 56-feet wide road, and two footpaths each ten feet wide. At its centre the bridge will be 170 feet above the water, which means that only the very largest of ocean liners will be unable to pass beneath it.

Bearings weighing hundreds of tons are being erected on solid concrete pillars sunk in enormous holes dug in sandstone on each shore of the harbour, holes twenty-five feet deep and filled with concrete, and in between there will be no supports at all. That's where one of the marvels of this new bridge comes in.

Of course the building is proceeding at an equal rate from either shore, the two tremendous "arms" of the bridge gradually increasing in length until, many, many months hence they will meet. Those arms are only stumpy as yet. They have a long, long way to go before they touch. And at the extreme end of each—the ends which are slowly approaching each other—is perched a 500-ton crane.

Those cranes are hauling up steel girders in immense numbers, from tugs far beneath, and as the girders are swung into place so hundreds of red-hot rivets will be driven home. The strain on the two "arms" is tremendous, naturally. Something must help them to carry the enormous weight. And that something is cable—steel cables galore.

Each cable, as thick as a man's arm, must do its bit. There are hundreds of them altogether, combining to support the bridge-ends from either shore. The inland ends of the cables go back into great tunnels excavated four hundred feet or more in the solid rock, taking the strain that no man can really visualise.

Some of the masses of steel that the engineers are handling tip the beam at 100 tons apiece. They reckon them to be quite small when the steel masses are only twenty-five tonners! Some of the great bolts being used to secure these portions of the structure together weigh nine tons each and are as much as fourteen feet long.

Rivets? Well, they estimate they will use about 7,000,000 before the last red-hot one is hammered home. The first great steel span was placed in position some time ago. Fancy handling that mass—1,600 tons of it! The four main bearings, too, are being put in place, and the weight of each of those is just short of 300 tons.

All the weight of the tremendous single span will fall upon those four bearings. You can imagine the care that has gone to the making and placing of these, for each has got to stand steady to a thrust equal to 20,000 tons.

At each extreme end of the bridge will be granite towers 285 feet high, made of blocks some of which weigh seven tons each. Much of the material—granite, steel girders, rivets and an incredible quantity of other things—has had to be brought miles to the scene of the herculean labours of hundreds of navvies and mechanics and engineers.

The stone comes from a quarry in the neighbourhood, though, and some of the parts are being made in factories and workshops at one side of the big harbour. The need for this mighty construction has arisen because traffic is swelling to such an extent that some means had to be provided for carrying it swiftly from the city of Sydney, on one side, to the city's suburbs on the other.

It meant either a tube below the harbour, or the world's greatest bridge over it. Choice fell on the bridge, and if all goes well in four years' time we shall see the opening of one of the cleverest engineering feats ever undertaken by man!

THE SECOND CHAPTER.
To the Rescue!

"AND now——" muttered Bob Cherry.

Ibrahim had stopped.

He had led the juniors higher into the sandy hills by paths that wound among rocks and boulders. Now they stood on the bank of a narrow watercourse. The thin stream, glimmering in the moonlight, trickled at their feet.

Ibrahim pointed down the shallow stream.

"That is the way," he said. "My fine gentlemens must walk in the water. Prenez garde! You trust Ibrahim!"

He tucked up his baggy blue trousers and stepped into the stream

Save where it had gathered in deeper pools in the rocky bed, the stream did not rise above three or four inches.

In silence, Harry Wharton & Co. followed

Ibrahim had described to them the situation of the cavern where the major was a prisoner. He had profited by the hours he had spent in the Arab camp, and he had done his scouting well.

The juniors understood that this was the watercourse by which the cavern opened. They were to reach the ravine at its upper end. The lower end was barred by Mustapha's encampment.

In single file the juniors trod down the bed of the torrent after Ibrahim.

In the rainy season the rocky bed would be filled to overflowing, with a thundering, roaring torrent that swept down with resistless force, to join the waters of the Oued Tahar far away.

But in the summer heat the stream was low and thin there was no danger from the descending water.

The danger was from the slippery wet rocks, from the rugged precipices over which the stream cascaded.

More than once, many times, a foot slipped; many times the juniors had to catch at the sharp rock-edges to save themselves.

But they were active and wary, and no danger, no difficulty, could have turned them back.

"Here, my fine gentlemens shall be careful!" murmured Ibrahim.

A sheer drop of six or seven feet was before them.

Over it the water fell in a cascade, with a loud murmuring and clouds of spray.

Below, the water had gathered in a pool several feet deep. A dozen yards farther on there was a further drop, a steep slope into the wider space of the ravine.

Even in the daylight the descent would have been full of peril and difficulty. In the dim, uncertain moonlight the juniors could hardly see the dangers that encompassed them.

But there was no hesitation; only steady care and quiet resolution. Ibrahim was leader now, and the juniors listened in silence to his directions, and obeyed them implicitly.

The guide leaped down the fall, and was lost to view in the spray of the cascade. The juniors stood in the flowing water above, and waited. A few minutes, and Ibrahim scrambled out of the pool, and reappeared to view, standing on a bulging jut of rock over the water.

One by one the rifles were tossed to him, and one by one he caught them with unerring hand, and laid them on the rock.

Then, one by one, the juniors followed him in the leap, plunging into the pool below, and scrambling out drenched and breathless on the jutting rock.

Ibrahim grinned with satisfaction.

"It is done!" he said. "Bismillah! It is done! Now the way is clear!"

Once more the Greyfriars juniors waded on.

In a few minutes more they were out of the rocky watercourse, and able to step on the rocky banks, where the stream flowed through the wider space of the ravine.

There, in the distance, they caught sight of the Arab tents, glimmering in the valley below.

Ibrahim pointed.

"Him cave!" he said.

The black orifice of the cavern showed in the rocky wall of the ravine. Bob Cherry caught his breath.

"My father's there?"

"Him there this morning, my fine gentleman. We find him."

The juniors hurried on into the cave.

DEFENDING THEIR GARRISON! Fierce Arabs beat at the brick walls, and clambered on one another's shoulders in desperate efforts to reach the parapet of the roof. But Harry Wharton & Co. never slackened their defence one moment, and the raiders were driven back. (*See Chapter* 5.)

THE THIRD CHAPTER.
The Rescue!

"FATHER!"

Major Cherry stared through the gloom, with starting eyes, as he heard that familiar voice close at hand.

For the moment it seemed to him that his senses had deceived him. It was his son's voice, and his son was dead, or far away.

"Father!"

"Bob!" The major's voice was hoarse and broken. "Bob! It's not possible! Oh, am I going mad at last?"

"It's Bob, father, and we're all here."

"We're here, sir said Harry Wharton.

"The heefulness is terrific, my esteemed sir!" chuckled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh

There was a cry in the darkness.

"Oh, we are saved—we are saved!"

It was Marjorie's voice

"Marjorie!" panted Bob.

Harry Wharton turned on the light of his electric torch. There was no danger of the gleam being seen outside the cavern.

The sight that met the eyes of the rescuers dumbfounded them.

Major Cherry and Ali ben Yusef, roped to the rocky wall, and two ghastly white faces that looked from the earth—the faces of the two girls buried alive!

Bob gave a cry.

"Marjorie! Clara! Oh, the dastards!"

"We are saved!" whispered Marjorie. "Clara—Clara, dear—we are saved! Our friends have come!"

Clara's eyes opened wildly.

"The demons!" breathed Wharton. "Quick—quick! Get them loose! Quick!"

Ibrahim drew a candle from the folds of his ample garments. Frank Nugent struck a match and lighted it.

The juniors were instantly at work. With their bare hands they tore at the earth and sand that had been stamped hard round the half-buried prisoners.

Bob Cherry left his comrades for a few moments to the task, while he drew his knife across the major's bonds.

Major Cherry stood free at last.

Bob hurried to Ali. The one-time schoolboy of the Remove at Greyfriars smiled at him.

"I being very glad to see you," he whispered, in his odd English.

A heap of sand and earth was growing on the floor of the cavern.

At last Marjorie and Clara were drawn from their terrible prisons. They were chilled to the bone. Clara was scarcely conscious, and Marjorie, though conscious, was utterly exhausted, and unable to make a movement. It was likely to be long before they recovered from their fearful experience.

"The villains!" Bob muttered again and again.

Harry Wharton trod to the mouth of the cavern and looked out. The moonlight showed the encampment of the Arabs, in the valley below the ravine. It was long past midnight now, and no one was stirring in the irregular group of tents. Only here and there a pariah dog wandered, hunting for bones or offal, and occasionally uttering a mournful howl.

Wharton knitted his brows.

Fortune had favoured the rescuers—they had found the prisoners; they had released them. But getting away from the cavern was another matter.

The major and Ali, though weakened by their long imprisonment in the damp cavern, could doubtless have clambered up the steep watercourse with Ibrahim and the Greyfriars juniors. But it was impossible for Marjorie and Clara; and it was equally impossible for them to be carried by such a route. The rescuers could not return to the Bordj by the way they had come.

Major Cherry joined the captain of the Remove at the cavern's mouth. He stepped out into the moonlight, and stood for some minutes surveying the encampment below.

The major was quite himself again now—his bronzed face was stern and resolute as of old.

"You are in command now, sir," said Harry Wharton. "What are the orders?"

The major smiled faintly.

"We have to take our chances of passing the camp," he said. "The dogs will give the alarm—then we shall have to run for it. Bob has told me about the Bordj—if we can get there, we shall have a breathing-space, at least. If we get away without raising an alarm, we shall mount and ride for the desert without a moment's delay—if we are attacked and pursued, we shall defend ourselves in the Bordj, and trust to fortune. More than that we cannot foresee at present. The two girls must be carried—they cannot walk." He gritted his teeth hard under his grizzled moustache. "Mustapha shall pay dearly for it, if fortune is our friend."

He turned back into the cavern.

No time was lost.

The major picked up Marjorie in his strong arms, and at a sign from him Ibrahim lifted Clara from the ground. The two men were to carry them, while the Famous Five and Ali guarded the retreat. Wharton had passed his revolver to the Greyfriars Arab.

In silence they left the cavern.

Down the rocky, rugged bank of the torrent they trod cautiously, ever nearer to the glimmering tents of the kinsmen of Mustapha.

Walls of rock shut them in—it was impossible to turn out of the ravine until they were within thirty yards of the nearest tent.

Then Ibrahim muttered a word and led the way, clambering over rough rocks. The major followed with Marjorie; and the juniors brought up the rear.

They cast backward, watchful glances at the tents as they turned their backs on the encampment of the Arabs.

Loud and long the howls of the pariah dogs rang through the night. The wandering brutes had scented the strangers.

Fierce, loud howls rang among the tents, and there was a sound of stirring, and of hoarse voices calling in Arabic.

"They're alarmed!" muttered Bob Cherry.

"Faster—faster, my fine gentlemens!" called out Ibrahim. "There is death behind now, my noble masters!"

A shot rang out in the tents—apparently a signal. The sound of shouting followed.

Two or three of the Arab dogs were snuffing after the Greyfriars party, as they hurried over the rocks.

They moved swiftly, but the way was rough, and it lay uphill. Dark figures moved among the tents—a shot rang out, and then another.

Pursuing footsteps rang on the rocks behind the fugitives.

The rugged route Ibrahim was following was too steep and broken for the use of horses and camels, fortunately. It was on foot that the savage spearmen of the Tahar poured in pursuit. But they ran swiftly, shouting and brandishing their spears.

The fugitives had a good start. But burdened with the two girls, their pace did not equal that of the pursuing Arabs.

At every yard of ground the running tribesmen drew nearer, and shots rang out from behind, the bullets spattering on the rocks.

Bob Cherry looked back, with a grim brow.

"We shan't get clear," he said. "Let them save the girls, and we can take our chance!"

Wharton nodded.

Ibrahim was going fast ahead, following a rugged path in the midst of jagged boulders on the hillside. The major followed him: the juniors stopped and turned, rifle in hand.

Five or six of the Arabs, outdistancing the rest, came speeding towards them, yelling and brandishing their spears.

"Fire!" said Harry, between his teeth.

The rifles poured a volley upon the advancing Arabs.

Crack! Crack-ack-ack-ack-ack!

The sudden reports filled the hollows of the hills with resounding echoes, like the roll of distant thunder. Three of the pursuers spun over like rabbits under the fire—a fourth staggered away, yelling. The others stopped—and Ali's revolver spat twice, and two of the Arabs dropped on the rocks.

With wild yells, the foremost of the pursuers dropped back, to come on again with a crowd of their comrades. But Harry Wharton & Co. did not wait for them. They had checked the pursuit, and, without losing a second, they hurried on again, only praying that they might have time to reach the shelter of the Bordj with the rescued girls before the enemy closed in on them.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.
Hard Pressed!

KNOCK! Knock! Knock!

Billy Bunter awoke suddenly. He sat up on the rugs, in the upper room of the Bordj, and rubbed his eyes.

Knock! Knock! Knock!

Crashing blows resounded on the hard wood of the door below. The Owl of the Remove quaked with terror.

"The Arabs!"

That was his first thought. But loud and clear came the signal whistle of the Greyfriars juniors. And then Bunter heard the voice of Bob Cherry shouting:

"Bunter! Bunter! Let us in—quick!"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

He stumbled down the dark stairs.

Outside there were panting voices, trampling feet. Farther, but plainly to be heard, sounded the yells of the Arabs.

Bunter's trembling hands fumbled with the bars of the door.

"Bunter!" roared Bob. "Quick—quick—they're almost on us! Hurry—hurry!"

Bar after bar dropped from Bunter's fumbling hands.

The door swung open.

Major Cherry staggered in and placed Marjorie on a bench. Ibrahim followed with Clara.

Bunter blinked at them dazedly.

Round the doorway outside Harry Wharton & Co. were gathered, facing the pursuers.

The savage Arabs were already at the gateway of the courtyard, so close were they on the track of the fugitives.

Four or five savage, yelling spearmen came rushing into the courtyard, and the Greyfriars juniors fired steadily. Two of the Arabs dropped, and the others sprang back into cover of the courtyard wall.

"Quick!" panted Harry.

There was not a second to be lost. In a few minutes at the most the whole crowd of savage spearmen would be pouring into the courtyard, and a few shots would not stop them then.

"The bars—quick!"

Johnny Bull already had a palm-wood bar in hand. He jammed it into the iron sockets.

The door was fast.

Wharton, his heart thumping, placed the rest of the bars in position.

They were safe now—for the moment.

"The camels!" muttered Bob.

"Too late!"

The camels and horses tethered in the courtyard were at the mercy of the Arabs. Already thievish hands were dragging them loose. They were a rich prize for the desert robbers.

But it could not be helped.

The Greyfriars party were fortunate to have escaped with their lives so far, and they realised it. That they would be hemmed in and besieged by the sheikh's spearmen was certain. Every drop of water and ounce of food had to be considered now. Even had the camels been brought into the shelter of the Bordj, they could not have been fed and watered for long.

There was a loud crashing of spear-butts on the hard door as the Arabs crowded savagely round it.

The juniors heard the deep, furious voice of Mustapha ben Mohammed shouting to his men.

The Arabs prowled round the building, seeking an entrance. One reached up and drove his spear through a loophole in the wall. The glistening point was visible to all in the Bordj. Bob Cherry thrust the muzzle of his rifle through the opening, standing on a bench to reach it, and pulled the trigger. A fearful howl outside answered the shot, and the spear dropped away.

Marjorie and Clara were taken into the upper room of the Bordj, and laid down to rest on the rugs. There they were safe, so long as their defenders could hold the little tower against the overwhelming enemy.

Harry Wharton, Bob, and Johnny Bull ascended to the flat roof, rifle in hand. The brick parapet sheltered them there, and through the loopholes in the parapet they could fire on the Arabs below.

The crashing on the door suddenly ceased.

A single imperative knock rang on the door. Then the voice of Mustapha ben Mohammed, the sheikh, was heard.

"Dog of a Roumi, are you here?"

"I am here, son of a pig!" answered the major quietly. "All your prisoners are here, Mustapha ben Mohammed, assassin and thief—never to fall alive into your hands again!"

A savage curse in Arabic answered.

"I will burn the Bordj with every living soul in it!" hissed the sheikh.

"There will be many dead among the kinsmen of Mustapha before the Bordj is burned," answered the major coolly.

"I have seen the dog Ibrahim with you. The traitor shall die by a thousand tortures when he falls into my hands!"

Ibrahim shrugged his shoulders.

"There is always death, O sheikh!" he answered. "When the gates of death have opened for Ibrahim he will be beyond your power."

"Wait—wait a little!" The sheikh's voice was almost inarticulate with rage. "Wait till all my men are here, then you shall see how long these brick walls will save you."

"We shall see!" said the major quietly.

Bob Cherry looked from the parapet above as the enraged chief stepped back from the door.

His eyes blazed down at Mustapha ben Mohammed.

"Coward and villain!" shouted Bob. "Bring your thieves and rascals as soon as you like. They shall follow your son, Bou Saoud."

The sheikh glared up at him.

"By dawn Bou Saoud shall be looking on your tortures as you die by inches!" he snarled.

"Bou Saoud will never look on your crimes again. Bou Saoud lies within a dozen yards of you—dead!" shouted Bob. "Do you see that heap of sand yonder? Under it lies Bou Saoud."

The sheikh gave a violent start.

"Unbelieving dog, you lie!"

Bob Cherry's eyes glittered down on the sheikh without pity or compassion.

"Scoundrel," he said, "Bou Saoud is dead, do you hear? Bou Saoud is dead, and you shall follow!"

And he pulled the trigger.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.
Fighting for Life!

MUSTAPHA BEN MOHAMMED staggered.

Two or three Arabs rushed forward to catch him as he fell.

But the sheikh recovered himself in a moment, and spurned them aside. Deep on his swarthy face showed the mark of the bullet, and blood streamed down on his white burnous.

But the sheikh was not disabled. He turned and strode away, and even at that moment, while in the moonlight he offered a target for the rifles on the roof of the Bordj, he did not hurry his steps. He still retained the savage dignity of the desert sheikh.

"Shoot!" muttered Bob. "Remember the cave! Shoot—shoot the scoundrel dead!"

But the spearmen closed round Mustapha ben Mohammed, and bore him in safety through the gateway of the courtyard.

Mustapha disappeared from sight.

Bob Cherry dropped the butt of his rifle to the flat brick roof.

"The brute was hit at least!" he muttered.

The Arabs were scuttling out of the courtyard, where they were exposed to the fire from the roof and the loopholes. The camels had already been driven away by thievish hands. Outside the low brick walls of the courtyard the savage desert warriors crouched in cover and opened fire on the Bordj. Shot after shot rang out, awakening the deep echoes of the hills. Bullets spattered on the walls of the brick tower and sang over the roof.

But the fire was harmless enough; the Arabs were wasting powder and shot on thick brick walls. Only by the merest chance could a bullet penetrate one of the narrow loopholes.

The moonlight was fading now—faint and dim in the East came the first pale gleam of dawn. A new day was about to break over the wild Sahara.

The garrison of the Bordj gathered on the roof—with the exception of Billy Bunter. He remained in the lower room—though even Billy Bunter was not thinking any longer of sleep.

Major Cherry scanned the courtyard, and the wall that circled it, and the broken country beyond.

"We have a strong position here," he said quietly. "The Arabs will lose heavily before they carry it, if the ammunition holds out."

"We've plenty of cartridges, sir," said Harry. "We got all our baggage inside when we arrived here—it's only the camels that those rascals have taken."

"And food?"

"Enough for a week, at least—longer, if we go on rations."

"And water?"

"The cistern is filled—it's a big cistern. I don't think we shall go short of water in a hurry, now that we need none for the camels."

Major Cherry nodded approval.

"We can hold our own," he said.

The sun leaped above the horizon, and it was day.

Among the rocks of the hills the juniors watched more and more Arabs gathering round the Bordj. Every man in Mustapha's camp had arrived at last—a swarm of savage, fierce-eyed warriors.

The desultory firing was still going on. It was evidently only a preliminary to a fierce attack.

Suddenly through the morning air came the fierce beating of a drum.

It was the signal.

"Look out!"

"Fire!"

Through the gateway of the courtyard came a savage swarm of Arabs, with spears and scimitars, rushing at the Bordj. They circled the building, with furious yells.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

From the roof, the defenders fired, coolly, steadily, incessantly. The Famous Five handled their rifles, the major and Ali and Ibrahim had revolvers. Almost every shot told on the crowded mass below, and wild yelling foes dropped on all sides.

Crash! Crash! Crash!

A heavy axe beat on the door of the Bordj, and the strong, thick wood creaked and groaned under the assault.

Like a scared rabbit, Billy Bunter came bolting up to the roof.

Major Cherry passed him on the stair.

The major hurried down to the lower room, where the loopholes commanded the space outside the door.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

He fired again and again into the mass of the Arabs outside, and yells and groans answered. The burly Arab who wielded the axe dropped dead—the axe was caught in another hand, but ere it could touch the door again, the new wielder staggered and fell, with a bullet in his heart. Major Cherry crammed fresh cartridges into his revolver, and still it spat death from the loophole.

The attack on the door ceased.

Outside, dead and wounded lay in heaps, and the air was filled with groans and cries and hoarse curses in Arabic.

Loud above the tumult, the fierce voice of Mustapha ben Mohammed was heard, urging on his men.

Fierce Arabs beat at the brick walls, and clambered on one another's shoulders in desperate efforts to reach the parapet of the roof.

Had the defence slackened even for a minute the attack would doubtless have carried the day.

But it did not slack.

The sun rose higher and hotter, and blazed down on a fearful scene—on dead and wounded, on yelling savages of the desert, who rushed and rushed again to the furious attack; on the Greyfriars juniors manning the roof of the tower, sweating, fatigued, blackened, ghastly—but still steady and strong, and firing—firing incessantly.

It seemed like some ghastly nightmare to the schoolboys of Greyfriars—as the brown faces and glittering eyes surged round the tower, and savage hands clutched and clambered, and dusky ruffian after ruffian dropped back dead or disabled.

But even their savage hate and recklessness of death, even the infuriated voice of the sheikh, failed at last to drive on the Arabs to destruction. Thirty ghastly figures sprawled under the walls of the Bordj when the attack broke at last, and the Sahara spearmen, with yells of rage and disappointment, surged away. Almost in a moment, at the height of its fury, the attack ceased, and the shattered mob of Arabs went streaming out of the courtyard.

But the fire from the roof did not cease. It was no time for half-measures. So long as an enemy remained for a target the rifles rang and rang again, and many of the retreating tribesmen rolled over as they fled.

Then they were gone—crouched once more in the shelter of the courtyard wall—leaving the defenders of the Bordj worn out, but victorious—and the courtyard below cumbered with dead.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.
The Last Hope!

THE blazing day wore on.

The monotonous silence was broken occasionally as some watching Arab loosed off a gun at the Bordj, and a bullet chipped on the hard, sun-baked bricks.

It was clear that the crushing defeat had sickened the desert tribesmen, and they were not keen to rush on the rifles of the garrison again. But all round the low wall of the courtyard they lay, watching and waiting like wild beasts waiting for their prey.

At a distance a tent had been erected —the tent of the Sheikh Mustapha ben Mohammed.

With deadly, ruthless persistence, the sheikh was prepared to wait for the hour of his vengeance.

In the Bordj the major had taken command; and his instructions were promptly carried out by the Greyfriars party. Coolness and calmness reigned, though there was little hope in any heart.

The provisions were carefully measured, and apportioned into rations; even the water was rationed, though the great cistern of the Bordj was still almost full. Every cartridge was counted. The heavy firing had depleted the stock of ammunition, though the juniors had taken care to be well supplied. And once the cartridges failed all was over—once the rifles were silent the swarming Arabs would sweep resistlessly over the brick walls of the Bordj. Not a shot was fired in reply to the desultory rifle-fire of the enemy.

In the heat of the day the garrison slept—careful watch being kept. But no sign came from the enemy, save the ringing of a futile shot at intervals.

When the sun dipped towards the west Major Cherry stood on the flat roof and looked towards the tent of the sheikh in the distance. His brows were knitted.

The soft voice of Ali ben Yusef spoke beside the major, and he turned his head. The Greyfriars Arab looked up at him with a smile.

"When it being dark, they will come," said Ali.

"It is very likely."

"And if they are being driven off again, they watching and waiting till the end."

"Well?"

"I thinking, my old friend," said Ali ben Yusef softly. "When it is dark, they come—and also it being dark, one may slip away and perhaps escaping through the sons of pigs when there is no light."

"One, perhaps," said the major gruffly.

Ali smiled again.

"If we dying here, we all dying," he said. "You not thinking I would escape and leave you in danger! I thinking of help."

"What help?" The major shook his head. "Even if one could get through them, Ali, there is no help. The nearest French post is a hundred miles away—and even then——"

"I not thinking of the French."

"What then?"

"The tribes of the Oued Tahar," said Ali. "Ecoutez, mon vieux! I, Ali, am the chief of the Tahar, and with the eye of Ahmed in my turban, the tribesmen will recognise me as their sheikh, and follow me. The eye of Ahmed is here."

Major Cherry wrinkled his brows in thought. He understood now of what the son of Yusef was thinking.

"But——" he muttered.

"It being the only hope," said Ali gently. "If there being no help, we hold out for days—weeks—but the end is there all the same. We not being taken alive—we die at our posts. Be it so! But there being a chance of rescue if I, Ali, call on the tribesmen of the Tahar. They will obey the amulet of the sheikhs."

The major was silent for a long minute.

"Listen to me, Ali," he said. "When your father was killed, and I saved you from the assassins of Mustapha, I saved also the Eye of Ahmed. But I took you with me to England for your safety. You were a boy, and until you were a man you could not contend with Mustapha and Bou Saoud. Even the Eye of Ahmed would not have saved you from the assassin's knife or bullet. Mustapha had many followers in the tribe. It was my plan that you should return when you were a man, and call on the tribes to obey you—but——"

"But it is changed now," said Ali. "Bou Saoud is dead—and many of the kinsmen of Mustapha have fallen. The sheikh is wounded, and he is tied here—he thinking of nothing now but to take the Bordj and satisfy his vengeance. He has called his kinsmen to him—of the race of Mustapha there is perhaps hardly a man left among the tents of the Oued Tahar."

"That is true."

"There being danger for me," went on Ali calmly. "When I reach the Oued Tahar I may fall to the knife of some follower of Mustapha. The tribesmen may refuse to follow a boy. I may never get through—I may be slain here in sight of the Bordj. There are many dangers, all of them terrible. But what is here if I remain?"

"That is true," repeated the major.

"There is a chance," said Ali, "and even if the tribesmen refuse to follow a boy, there are my kinsmen of the blood of Yusef—they will follow me. But I do not doubt. If I reach the Oued Tahar, and if there I escaping the spies of Mustapha, the Eye of Ahmed will enforce the obedience of the tribes. I shall return with five hundred horsemen—and yonder sons of dogs will be given to the jackals!"

The major was silent.

"You thinking I am right!" said Ali. "It is danger—but there is no other way; otherwise, we all being lost."

Major Cherry cast a glance towards the encircling enemy.

"You would never get through," he muttered.

"I taking the chance."

"You are a brave lad, Ali," said the major. "If you live to be a man, you will be a great sheikh. Let it be so—it is, as you say, the only hope, slight as it is. Take your chance when the sun sets."

Major Cherry descended the stair into the Bordj.

In a few minutes he returned, with a little leather case in his hand—so long and so carefully guarded by Marjorie Hazeldene.

Harry Wharton & Co. came up with him; they had been told of Ali's intention. That the schoolboy sheikh would succeed in getting through the enemy was unlikely, and they knew it: but they would not have uttered a word to dissuade him from the attempt. It seemed the only chance of saving Marjorie and Clara, and for that no risk was too great.

The major opened the little case.

"Look!" he said. "This is the Eye of Ahmed—the hereditary amulet handed down from generation to generation of the Sheikhs of the Oued Tahar. Look!"

It was a great diamond that blazed in the sun.

Ali's eyes gleamed as he looked at it.

"The amulet!" he said. "The sign of obedience to all the tribes of the Oued Tahar."

"It is yours, Ali!"

The brown fingers of the schoolboy sheikh closed on the diamond. He cast a vaunting look towards the tent of Mustapha ben Mohammed.

"Son of a dog, your hour is coming!" he said.

The red sun sank lower in the west; the long shadow of the Bordj lengthened. Night was at hand.

Ali was calm, and seemed to have no fear.

He bade farewell to his comrades in an even voice, and with a steady hand fastened the camel-rope about his waist.

Bob Cherry stared down into the darkness over the parapet.

Here and there was a glimmer in the gloom—the glimmer of an Arab garment. Closer and closer the stealthy foe were creeping round the tower. There was no time to be lost.

"Good-bye, Ali, old fellow!" whispered the juniors.

And the schoolboy sheikh was gone.

Strong hands lowered the rope.

A jerk from below told that Ali was on the ground, and the rope was pulled up.

With beating hearts the defenders of the Bordj strained their eyes over the parapet.

But they could see nothing.

Faint, stealthy sounds, that was all. But if Ali were seized they would hear. He had a revolver, and would fight to the last. They listened in terrible apprehension for the ring of the Greyfriars Arab's revolver.

But there was no sound.

Minute followed minute, crawling by with leaden feet, and still no sound came from the darkness of the night, save the faint sounds of stealthily creeping Arabs.

"He is through!" whispered the major, at last.

It seemed so. The very fact that the Arabs were creeping stealthily into the wide courtyard, was a help to Ali ben Yusef. Amid the creeping figures in turban and burnous, one more was not likely to be noticed. And the darkness hid his face, even from those who knew the features of the son of Yusef.

Fifteen minutes had elapsed since Ali had gone. Unless he had been seen and seized in silence, he was through the enemy, and the desert was open before him.

And behind him his comrades grasped their weapons, to fight once more for their lives, and for lives that were dearer than their own.

Loud and fierce rang the yells of the Arabs round the Bordj, as if pandemonium had suddenly broken loose in the darkness.

On all sides rang gun and pistol, and bullets whizzed over the roof.

Crash!

The top of a ladder, roughly made of palm-wood bound together with camel-hide thongs, crashed against the parapet of the Bordj. Up the rungs came clambering the fierce enemy.

"Shoot!" roared the major.

Crack, crack, crack!

The rifles flashed and rang. Dusky ruffian after ruffian rolled yelling from the scaling-ladder, but ever the others took their places, clambering up with savage fury.

Crash came another ladder against the opposite wall of the Bordj. Up it the Arabs came swarming.

The defenders divided at once, three or four of them rushing to defend the new point of attack.

Shot after shot rang out. But savage eyes gleamed over the parapet now, savage hands clutched at the brickwork.

(*Continued on page 28.*)

A burly Arab fell on the roof. As he leaped up, Ibrahim sprang forward, and an axe swept through the air. The Arab rolled dead on the roof, and Ibrahim grinned over him. At the other ladder the major was wielding a rifle by the barrel, driving back the assailants with crashing blows.

Fierce as the attack was, it was checked. Dead men and dying lay at the foot of the scaling-ladders, and the air was filled with groans and yells. But the savage tribesmen of the desert poured on, clambering like tigers to the assault.

"We're holding them!" panted Wharton.

It was hand-to-hand now, but the defenders of the roof had the advantage. Arab after Arab rolled from the ladders under fierce blows.

Bob Cherry spun round suddenly. A third ladder had been reared, at the front of the Bordj, lifted against the parapet in silence, and in the heat of the struggle the defenders had not heard it; in the darkness they had not seen it. Bob caught the glimmer of a white burnous as an Arab came clambering over.

"Look out!"

He rushed across the roof.

His rifle was empty, but he drove it at the Arab, driving the butt with savage force into the dusky face. The desert robber staggered back, and disappeared over the parapet. There was a crash below, and a roar of rage.

But there were five or six Arabs on the ladder, coming on fast. Bob swept the foremost away with his rifle-butt, sending him crashing to the ground; and at the same moment a dusky hand clutched at him from the darkness. A moment more, and he was grasped in brawny arms that were like bands of steel.

"Back up, you fellows!" panted Bob.

Wharton and Nugent came tearing to his aid.

Bob Cherry struggled desperately, striving to hurl back the Arab, who was half across the parapet. The dusky ruffian lost his footing on the ladder, and went reeling back; but he did not loosen his grasp on Bob. With him went the Greyfriars junior.

The fall swept the ladder below them clear. Bob Cherry was torn from the Arab's grasp in the fall, and he clutched at a rung of the ladder. For an instant his descent was checked, but only for an instant. Then he rolled to the ground in the midst of a swarm of yelling Arabs.

A knife was at his throat, when the deep voice of the sheikh was heard. He was speaking in Arabic, in savage, grinding tones. The knife was withdrawn; savage hands grasped the Greyfriars junior, and dragged him away. He expected instant death, but it was not a swift death that the Sahara sheikh intended for him.

In the darkness and the wild excitement, the defenders of the roof had not even seen that Bob Cherry was gone. The Arabs were swarming on the ladder again, and every hand was active. Blow on blow rained on the savage assailants.

Major Cherry had hurled back one of the ladders, sending it crashing on the heads of the Arabs below; but the other two swarmed with fierce foes, and for many minutes the struggle was doubtful.

But axe and knife and clubbed rifle drove back the clambering assailants. The attack paused, and in the pause sharp shot poured from the roof of the Bordj into the thick of the enemy swarming below.

"They're done!" panted Johnny Bull.

"They're going!"

Again the sheikh had failed.

The attack had cost him dear—fearfully dear. Dead men and wounded lay heaped below the ladders, and more were falling under the fire from the roof.

Savagely, reluctantly, the sheikh gave the word to retreat. He realised that his men's lives were being spent in vain, and already half his savage band had fallen in the struggle with the defenders of the Bordj.

With howls and curses, the Arabs retreated.

Major Cherry wiped his brow.

"We've beaten them! Thank Heaven for that!"

"Our luck's in!" muttered Johnny Bull. "After this I fancy they won't be in a hurry to come on again, and if they make it a siege that will give Ali a chance."

"Call the roll!" said the major quietly.

There was not a member of the party who had escaped unscathed. Ibrahim was calmly binding up a gash in his arm; the major's bronzed cheek had been furrowed by a bullet. He called over the names quickly; even yet the defenders did not know whether all had survived that fearful struggle.

But Wharton and Nugent, Johnny Bull, and Hurree Singh, and Honest Ibrahim, answered to their names.

"Bob!"

Twice the major repeated the name of his son, but, to the horror of all, there was no answer.

He compressed his lips.

"He's not here, sir," said Harry, in a faltering voice.

From the darkness came a voice—the voice of Mustapha ben Mohammed, the sheikh. In savage, mocking tones he shouted in Arabic, and the major clutched a rifle and fired into the darkness in reply. Then there was silence.

"What did he say?" exclaimed Wharton. "Does he know——"

"Was he speaking of Bob?" panted Nugent.

The major's voice was hoarse and strained as he answered:

"Yes."

"Then what——"

"Bob is in his hands," said the major, with a groan. "That is what he has told me to torture me. My boy!"

"Oh!" muttered Wharton.

"What else did he say, sir?" asked Nugent.

The major set his teeth.

"That to-morrow, in our sight, when the sun is up, my boy is to meet his fate—the cruellest fate that that dastard can contrive for him."

. . . . . .

It was a night of horror on the lonely Bordj in the heart of the Sahara. Through the darkness, and through the dim moonlight, when the moon rose, the Greyfriars party stared hopelessly towards the Arab camp, where their comrade lay a bound prisoner—doomed to a fearful fate. They could not help him. There was no hope. The long, leaden minutes of the night dragged by, while the sands of their comrade's life were running out; and they longed for, and yet dreaded, the rising of the sun on the desert.

THE END.

(*In the merciless clutches of the desert sheikh, what is going to happen to Bob Cherry? See next week's gripping long tale of the Greyfriars Chums in Africa, entitled: "THE VENGEANCE OF THE SHEIKH!"*)

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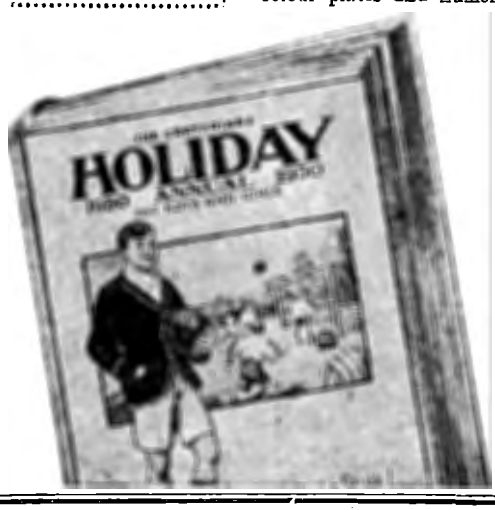

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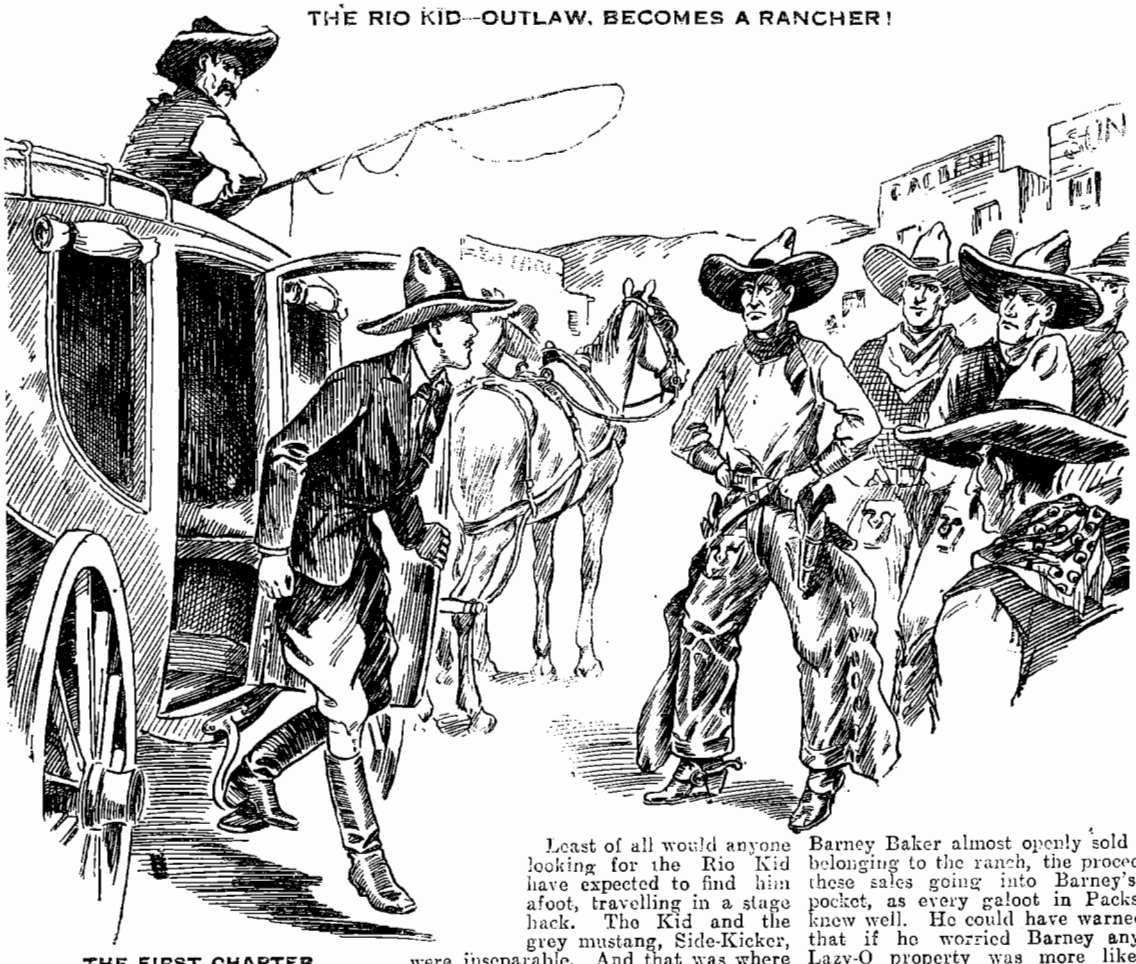

RIO

To own
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THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The New Boss of the Lazy-O!

THE little two-horse hack that ran from Pecos Bend to Packsaddle carried a single passenger. Jimmy Dace, the driver, could have told any galoot who that passenger was—or he figured that he could. He knew him as Mister Fairfax, the guy who had bought the Lazy-O Ranch at Packsaddle, and was going to take possession of his new property. And Jimmy Dace would have been as astonished as anyone to learn that the young man in the hack was more properly named Carfax, and that he had been known all through Texas as the Rio Kid.

Few, if any, would have known the Rio Kid as he lounged lazily in the rickety old hack, bumping along the trail to Packsaddle. Looking at his own face in his pocket mirror, the Kid hardly knew himself. And he reckoned that Texas sheriffs and Texas rangers would hardly get wise to him if they saw him.

The Kid had changed some.

He still wore the Stetson hat, but without the band of silver nuggets that was so widely known. The silver spurs and the goatskin chaparejos were gone. The walnut-butted guns no longer swung in the low-hung holsters. The holsters were gone with the guns. Nobody, looking at "Mister Fairfax," would have guessed that he was "heeled" at all. But anyone who had known the Kid would have figured—correctly—that though his hardware was not on view it was within easy reach.

The Kid looked like a prosperous young rancher—as he was, for the time being, at least.

Least of all would anyone looking for the Rio Kid have expected to find him afoot, travelling in a stage hack. The Kid and the grey mustang, Side-Kicker, were inseparable. And that was where the Kid felt the pinch hardest. He hated parting with his horse, even for a few days; he hated going afoot, and he loathed travelling on wheels. But he had marked out the game he was going to play, and he was going to play it.

Jimmy Dace, who drove the hack, was not a respectful person, as a rule, but he treated his solitary passenger, on this occasion, with marked respect. The man who had bought the Lazy-O was a man deserving of respect, for many reasons. The Lazy-O was the biggest ranch in the Packsaddle section of the Pecos country, and its long-horned herds roamed over scores of miles of rich grasslands. The Lazy-O bunch was the toughest bunch in Texas, and when they rolled into Packsaddle for a jamboree law-abiding citizens closed doors and windows and lay low till the bunch rode out again. And Jimmy Dace wondered, with deep respect, at a guy who looked little more than a boy, and who fancied that he could handle the Lazy-O bunch. Moreover, Jimmy respected wealth, and only a wealthy galoot could have bought the Lazy-O—forty thousand dollars, at the lowest figure, Jimmy reckoned, though the Lazy-O had been in the market for a long time, and, in fact, for years on end had been run by the foreman, Barney Baker, without much interference from distant proprietors. Jimmy wondered how Barney Baker would cotton to this new boss, who looked like a kid; and, privately, he opined that in buying the Lazy-O, Mister Fairfax had bought trouble.

Jimmy could have told Mister Fairfax quite a lot about his new property and its outfit, had he chosen to tell tales. He could have told him that Barney Baker almost openly sold cattle belonging to the ranch, the proceeds of these sales going into Barney's own pocket, as every galoot in Packsaddle knew well. He could have warned him that if he worried Barney any, the Lazy-O property was more likely to interest his heirs than himself. He could have put him wise that in Packsaddle the law was chiefly the law of the man quickest on the draw, and that no sheriff within a hundred miles was likely to seek trouble with the Lazy-O bunch, if he could help it. He could, in fact, have told this handsome young rancher that in going to the Lazy-O he was most likely going to his own funeral.

But Jimmy did not tell Mister Fairfax all those things that he might have told him. It was no business of his, Jimmy reckoned, and a stranger who horned into the Packsaddle country could find things out for himself. Moreover, Jimmy was interested in figuring how long Mister Fairfax was likely to live after horning in. No insurance company would have taken on Mister Fairfax, at any price, on Jimmy Dace's estimation of his probable length of life.

But the young guy in the hack evidently did not know what a thorny trail he had started on. He seemed quite cheery and satisfied.

That certainly was the case. Except for parting with Side-Kicker, the Rio Kid was quite enjoying his new venture.

Rangers and sheriffs had been hot on the Kid's track. The boy outlaw of the Rio Grande had been hunted hard. He had been cornered in the Mal Pais, and the sheriff of Plug Hat had almost cinched him. By llano and sierra they had hunted the Rio Kid, and the Kid reckoned that it was time for him to disappear altogether. In a safe place the Kid had tucked away the fortune he had won in the Arizona gold-mines long ago. Much of it was gone, for the Kid was careless in such matters; but much remained—plenty for the boy

THE) KID—RANCHER!

By RALPH REDWAY

a ranch, and be lord and master over a gang of punchers, has always ecret ambition of the Rio Kid, Boy Outlaw. At last comes the ortunity of realising his dream, and the Kid is not slow in taking it.

outlaw's new venture. And there was something in this stunt that appealed to the Kid's sense of humour. They looked for him in the llano and the sierra, by mountain and plain they hunted him, but they were not likely to look for him bossing the biggest ranch in the Packsaddle country.

He had discarded his distinctive attire, he had parted, for a time, with Side-Kicker, he dressed like a rancher instead of a puncher, and he sported a little moustache, which made him look both older and different; and he did not figure that he was likely to be recognised. And Packsaddle was a far cry from the Rio Frio country, where he was best known. And the fact that it was a district that sheriffs disliked, out of regard for their health, recommended it to the Rio Kid. What was not healthy for sheriffs was likely to be all the healthier for the boy outlaw of the Rio Grande.

So the Kid smiled cheerily as he sat in the two-horse hack, bumping over a trail that was good for horsemen, but had never been made for wheels. He looked out on the Packsaddle country and liked it. It was a rich and well-watered country, abounding in rich grass, good feed for cattle, and little streams, rolling plains, fringed by belts of post-oak and pecan, deep coulees, where the rain gathered. The Kid figured that the Packsaddle herds would not thirst, even if all the rest of Texas was dry. And he was master of hundreds of acres of this rich country, which was a pleasant thought to the boy puncher, who had punched cows on the Double-Bar, in the Frio country, and who, like all punchers, had dreamed of having a ranch of his own some day. Now he had it, and he figured that life was going to be good.

Herds of cattle dotted the rolling prairie, through which the stage-trail ran. Several times the Kid sighted some puncher, riding his broncho knee-deep in grass, and his heart warmed to the sight. This, he told himself with a grin, was better than the Mal Pais and shooting up the rangers.

A slackening of speed, as Jimmy Dace pulled in his horses, caused the Kid to put his head out and glance at the driver.

"Say, we ain't hitting Packsaddle yet?" he asked.

"Nope."

"What are you pulling in for?"

Jimmy Dace gestured with his whip.

"I guess there's two guys ahead who want to chew the rag with somebody," he answered.

The Kid glanced along the trail.

Two horsemen had pulled out from the plains, and sat in their saddles directly in the way of the hack. Punchers, they looked to the Kid, riders in chaps, with hard-bitten, reckless faces—punchers, the Kid figured, of a tough brand. They touched no weapon, but they plainly meant to stop the hack, and the Kid, scenting trouble, slid his hand down to where the walnut-butted gun had once swung in the holster. Then he grinned, as his hand found nothing hanging by the well-fitting cord riding-breeches. And his hand slid round to the back of his belt, to make sure that the gun that was not in sight was safely there, all the same.

"A hold-up?" he asked.

"Not so's you'd notice it," answered Jimmy Dace.

"What's the game, then?" asked the Kid, puzzled.

Jimmy Dace looked down from his box at the handsome, inquiring face looking up at him from the window of the hack. An impulse of compassion stirred Jimmy's somewhat leathery heart. After all, the Kid was only a kid—a mere boy, playing rancher—and it was a shame to let him walk with his eyes shut into what was coming to him.

"Mister Fairfax, sir," said Jimmy, "them guys belong to the Lazy-O."

"My ranch?" said the Kid.

"They're in the Lazy-O outfit, and I guess they're Barney Baker's side-pardners," said Jimmy, sinking his voice to a hoarse whisper, though the hack was not yet close to the waiting horsemen. "The one with the cast in his eye is Panhandle Pete——"

"Looks tough!" commented the Kid.

"Sure! The one with the scar on his jaw is the Coyote. His name's Jenson, but he's called the Coyote."

"Looks mean," said the Kid.

"That's how," said Jimmy Dace. "Mister Fairfax, sir, they're stopping this hearse to see you, sir."

"Sort of welcome home?" drawled the Kid.

"Not on your life," said Jimmy Dace. "Since, I guess them guys is rough. 'Tain't my funeral, nohow, but I hate to see a tenderfoot mishandled."

The Kid smiled.

"I ain't exactly a tenderfoot, feller."

"I guess not," assented Jimmy. "I reckon you was raised among cows. You sure do look it, Mister Fairfax, sir. But——"

"They know at the ranch that I'm coming from Pecon Bend in this hack," remarked the Kid. "Two of the boys have rode out to meet me. I take that kindly."

Jimmy Dace stared at him.

"They've rode out to meet you, sure enough," he said. "Mister Fairfax, I guess they never told you a whole heap about the Lazy-O when they sold it to you."

"I guess I had all the particulars," said the Kid. "You want to say it ain't a good ranch?"

"Best in the Packsaddle country," answered Jimmy. "But did they tell you about the bunch?"

"They did not," said the Kid. "But I guess I'll pull all right with the bunch. And if I do not, feller, I guess a bunch can be fired."

Jimmy gave him a pitying look.

"You figure on firing the Lazy-O bunch?" he asked.

"Sure, if I don't like their ways."

Jimmy opened his mouth again—and closed it. He drove on slowly towards the two waiting horsemen. It was useless, he figured, to put this confident Kid wise, and he had to take what was coming to him.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.
The Kid Means Business!

THE Rio Kid gazed with cool interest from the window of the hack. Jimmy Dace drew it to a halt at a gesture from the horseman with a cast in his eye—Panhandle Pete, as he had called him. Whatever attitude Mister Fairfax might adopt, Jimmy Dace did not aim at trouble with the men of the Lazy-O. Jimmy was by nature not a meek galoot at all; but when he walked in the presence of the Lazy-O men he walked warily.

"Arternoon, fellers!" said Jimmy, very civilly.

"You've got a passenger?" asked Panhandle Pete.

"You've said it."

"Name of Fairfax?"

"Right in once."

"Tell him to hop out."

Jimmy Dace called down to his passenger.

"Mister Fairfax, sir, you want to hop out and speak to these guys."

"Guess again," drawled the Kid. "I ain't hopping out a whole lot."

"For the love of Lucy, Mister Fairfax, sir, don't rile 'em!" murmured Jimmy Dace. "I'll tell the world you're a good little man, and I'd hate to see you quirted or shot up."

"I'd sure hate it myself, just a few," said the Kid cheerfully. "Tell them guys I'm their new boss, and I want to speak to them. They're to ride up to the window."

Jimmy made a hopeless gesture.

"Say, we're waiting to see that guy!" called out the Coyote.

"He's a-coming," called back Jimmy Dace hastily. "Give the galoot a chance, you 'uns." He bent as low as he could, to give the Kid one last warning. "Mister Fairfax, sir, hop out, and talk turkey to them guys. I guess it ain't my funeral, and I sure don't want to rile the Lazy-O bunch, but I jest got to tell you that when they say hop, a guy had better hop. Did they tell you at Pecos Bend who bought the Lazy-O last fall?"

"They did not."

"Did they tell you he was found shot up on the prairie?"

"Gee!" said the Kid. "They did not."

"I guess they was plumb anxious to find a buyer for that ranch," said Jimmy. "I reckon it's been hanging on the market a long time, Mister Fairfax, sir. I guess they didn't tell you all they could, or you sure wouldn't have horned in to buy it. Mister Fairfax, sir, you talk turkey to them guys and get off safe."

The Kid smiled.

"Tell them guys to come up to the hack," he answered. "It's their boss orders them."

Jimmy sighed.

"You 'uns, your boss says you're to ride up to the hack and talk to him," he called out.

The two punchers stared, exchanged a glance, and then grinned. They rode up to the halted vehicle and stopped beside it, staring at the handsome, boyish face that looked out at them.

The Kid gave them an amiable smile,

"You boys belong to the Lazy-O?" he asked.

"Sure!" grunted Panhandle Pete.

"Then I'm pleased to meet up with you," said the Kid. "You want to know that I've bought the ranch—leastways, I've paid down on it, and aim to hand over the rest after I've looked it over. Comes to the same thing. I sure hope we're going to pull together fine at the Lazy-O."

"Step down from that hearse!" said Panhandle Pete curtly.

"Sho!"

"You hear me, yaup?" snapped the puncher.

"I sure ain't deaf," said the Kid pleasantly. "But you seem to have got it wrong, feller. You ain't boss—I'm boss. Chew on that a minute, and then take off your hat and say you're sorry."

Panhandle Pete stared at him.

"Gee whiz!" he said.

"Some greenhorn, I guess," remarked Coyote Jenson.

"Git down outer that hearse, you!" roared Panhandle Pete.

The Kid whistled softly.

"I've sure heard that Packsaddle is a tough country," he remarked. "Is that how a cowman talks to his boss in Packsaddle? I sure reckon that there's going to be a change on the Lazy-O."

"You hopping down?"

"Not a whole lot."

"Then I guess you'll be made," said Panhandle Pete.

The Kid looked at him steadily. His face was still cool and smiling, but there was a glint in his eyes.

"That's your say-so," he said. "You say the same, you Jenson?"

"Sure!" said the Coyote emphatically.

"That does it," said the Kid coolly. "You're both fired. You don't belong to the Lazy-O any more. Go back to the ranch and tell Mr. Baker I've fired you, and ask for your money."

"Loco!" said Panhandle Pete. "Plumb loco!"

He dismounted from his broncho and wrenched open the door of the hack. Jimmy Dace sat tight on his box and chewed tobacco. He felt no call to intervene. He had warned the newcomer, and he left it at that. Not that intervention on Jimmy's part would have been any use.

"Now," said Panhandle Pete, his bearded, bronzed face flushed with anger. "You gitting down, Mister Fairfax, or you want to be handled?"

The Kid gave him a cheery nod. When it came to trouble he wanted room; and trouble was coming swiftly. He assented.

"If you're so particular I'll sure get down," he said.

"Pronto!" snarled Pete.

The Kid stepped out of the hack.

Both the punchers were dismounted now, and they had their quirts in their hands. The Kid realised that he had bought a surprise-packet in the Lazy-O ranch. Lawyer Lucas, in Pecos Bend, had not not told him what to expect in the Packsaddle country. But the Kid had no grouch about it. He figured that he was quite able to take care of himself, and he grinned as he surmised what these guys would have thought had they known that Mister Fairfax was the Rio Kid, the quickest man on the draw in all Texas. The Kid never looked for trouble, but trouble had a way of haunting his footsteps. And he had no objection to it when it came.

"Well, hyer I am, you 'uns," said the Kid cheerily. "If you want to shoot off your mouths, I guess I can give you a few minutes. Don't forget that you're fired from the Lazy-O."

"I guess you ain't the size of man to fire us, dog-gone you," growled Panhandle Pete. "We come hyer to put you wise. The bunch don't want you on Lazy-O. Got that?"

"I got it," assented the Kid.

"If you like to ride back to Pecos Bend while you're safe in one piece I guess I'll rustle you a horse."

"But I guess I've jest come from Pecos Bend," said the Kid, in innocent surprise. "I ain't going back any. I'm going to Packsaddle, and to-morrow I aim to take possession of the Lazy-O."

"You ain't been in Packsaddle afore, I guess."

"Nix!"

"I reckoned not. You don't savvy this country," said Panhandle Pete grimly. "I reckon you fancy that if you hit trouble at the ranch the sheriff will put things through for you."

"Ain't that the sheriff's job?" asked the Kid.

"Sure thing! But you want to find a sheriff who's anxious to get on the job in Packsaddle," answered the puncher. "You ask the sheriff at Pecos Bend to ride out to Lazy-O and see you through, and I guess he'll tell you to call again next year."

"You don't say!" remarked the Kid.

"We don't get a lot of sheriffs here," said Panhandle Pete. "Barney Baker runs the Lazy-O, and Barney's good enough for the bunch. And we ain't honing to see any boss cavorting around. You get me?"

The Kid laughed.

"I guess you'll see me cavorting around," he said. "Why, you gink, I've paid down ten thousand dollars on that ranch—the other thirty thousand to be paid after I've seen it."

"I guess you can call it off and save the thirty thousand," said the puncher.

"And you figure that Lawyer Lucas will hand me back the ten if I call it off?" grinned the Kid.

"Not in your lifetime," chuckled the Coyote.

"Then I guess I go through with the deal," drawled the Kid. "Got any more to say, you guys?"

"You hitting it for Pecos Bend?"

"Not by a jugful."

"Waal, if you want to be quirted before you go, I guess I'd as soon quirt you as not," said Panhandle Pete.

The Kid laughed again. He had heard that the Lazy-O outfit were a tough bunch, but this way of meeting a new boss was, he figured, the limit. It was no wonder that a property like the Lazy-O had hung long in the market.

"You aim to quirt your boss?" he asked.

"Sure—if you don't hit the horizon pronto."

"I guess I've heard they're tough in Packsaddle," said the Kid. "But I never heard the like of this. Still, if you're honing to handle that quirt, I guess you'd better get on with it."

Panhandle Pete waited for no more. He made a rush at the Kid, swinging up the heavy quirt.

With a swift backward jump the Kid eluded the slash of the quirt, and before it could be lifted again he leaped forward as swiftly.

What seemed like a solid lump of lead crashed on the jaw of the puncher. It was the Kid's fist—and all the Kid's weight was behind it.

Panhandle Pete gave a gurgling gasp and flew backwards, and crashed down in the trail with a mighty crash.

"Gee!" gasped the Coyote.

His hand flew to his gun.

Crack!

How the Colt got into the Kid's hand seemed like magic to Jimmy Dace, watching with distended eyes from his box.

But it was there, and it was there in time. And the Kid burned powder before the Coyote could lift his hand with the gun in it.

There was a hoarse yell from Coyote Jenson as the gun flew from his hand and his right arm dropped to his side. He stood staggering and staring stupidly at his arm, which hung helplessly, streaming with blood. And Jimmy Dace ejaculated, in tones of wonder and awe:

"Gee! Carry me home to die!"

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THE THIRD CHAPTER.
The Kid Comes to Town!

THE Rio Kid stood smiling, the smoking Colt in his hand. Panhandle Pete still sprawled dazedly in the trail. Coyote Jenson staggered back to the hack, and stood leaning on it, his face white, his legs sagging under him, his broken arm hanging at his side helplessly.

Panhandle Pete staggered up.

He felt his jaw with his hand, as if to ascertain that it was still there.

"Dog-gone my cats!" he muttered hoarsely.

"You want any more, feller?" asked the Kid amiably.

The puncher grabbed at a gun.

"Don't!" said the Kid quietly.

The walnut-butted Colt was looking at the Lazy-O puncher, the Kid's finger on the trigger.

"Guess again, feller," advised the Kid. "You touch that gun and you're a dead guy. Guess again."

Slowly the puncher's hand came away from his belt. The Kid's voice was cool and drawling, his face smiling, but his eyes glinted like cold steel over the revolver. Panhandle Pete knew that he was looking death in the face.

"You—you durned, dog-goned lobo-wolf!" he muttered, his voice husky with rage.

"I guess you ain't the first guy that's woke me up for a gopher and found he'd woke up a prairie wolf," said the Kid. "Take that gun and drop it in the trail."

Panhandle Pete took the gun from his belt. He was sorely tempted to lift it and attempt a pot-shot. But something in the glinting eyes of the Kid warned him off. He knew that he would be a dead man before he could pull the trigger. The gun crashed to the ground.

"That's better," smiled the Kid. "You jump to orders that-a-way, feller, and I guess I may keep you on at the Lazy-O, after all. I sure ain't anxious to fire any of the bunch. I guess we'll pull together as thick as fleas on a Mexican dog when we know one another better. You jest got to learn to behave and you'll find me as good a boss as a cow-man could want. You get me?"

"You figure on going on to the Lazy-O?"

"Sure!"

"I guess the bunch will be glad to see you," muttered the puncher. "I guess we'll all be powerful glad to see you, Mister Fairfax."

"That's sure good to hear," said the Kid. "You tell them at the Lazy-O that I'm coming along to-morrow, and tell Barney Baker to ride into Packsaddle this evening and see me at the hotel there. Now don't shoot off your mouth any more. You've spilled a hatful already. Get on your cayuse and ride."

Panhandle gave him a look, and gave

a longing glance at the gun lying in the trail."

"Forget it, feller!" said the Kid. "Don't I keep on telling you that you ain't woke up a gopher, but a prairie wolf, all teeth and claws. You want to let that sink into your cabeza. Put that pard of yourn on his bronc and tote him away. I guess he wants tying up some."

STRAIGHT FROM THE SHOULDER! **What seemed like a lump of lead crashed on the jaw of the puncher. It was the Kid's fist, and all the Kid's weight was behind it. Panhandle Pete gave a gurgling gasp, and flew backwards, and crashed down in the trail.** (*See Chapter* 2.)

With a muttered curse, the Lazy-O puncher turned away. In grim silence he helped the wounded man into his saddle, and the two rode away together across the plain.

The Kid restored his gun to its place.

He smiled as he met the wondering stare of Jimmy Dace.

"We ain't wasted a lot of time, feller," remarked the Kid, "and I'm sure glad to have met up with some of my bunch. But I reckon you'd better get on."

"Jumpin' gophers!" murmured the driver. "Mister Fairfax, sir, I guess I hand it to you. I guess you're the first guy that's put it over the Lazy-O bunch and got away with it."

The Kid stepped into the hack, and the driver gathered up his reins, cracked his whip, and drove on towards the distant cow-town, still in a state of wonder and surprise.

The Kid leaned back in his seat, a thoughtful expression on his face.

It was clear, he reflected, how trouble dogged his steps. From those old days on the Double-Bar Ranch in the Frio country, when the Kid, innocent of any wrongdoing, had been driven into outlawry, trouble had followed him like his shadow. He could say, with a clear conscience, that he never hunted it; but it always seemed to come. Still, there was no doubt that the Kid seemed to thrive on it.

He quite realised that he had been, to some extent, played for a sucker when they sold him the Lazy-O. He had no doubt that Lawyer Lucas at Pecos Bend was in cahoots with Barney Baker at the Lazy-O, and that they stood together to keep the Lazy-O on its present footing. No doubt that Barney made a good thing of it, running the ranch as if it were his own. No doubt that they expected him to be scared off, and to lose the big deposit he had paid on the purchase price, leaving Barney Baker king-pin till a new buyer came along—to be played in the same way. This was a game that could be played in a country like Packsaddle, but it could not, the Kid reckoned, be played on him. He had bought the Lazy-O, and he was going to run the Lazy-O. And though the Kid never hunted for trouble he had a certain zest in meeting it when it came. There was something in him that loved a fight.

The hack rolled on, bumping on the uneven trail, and Packsaddle came in sight at last, in the glow of the sunset.

The Kid looked with interest at the cow-town as he approached it. It was like a hundred other cow-towns that he had seen—one irregular street, lined with shacks, shanties, 'doby houses, and frame houses, with a timber hotel and a timber saloon. The hack rolled up to the hotel where a dozen horses were hitched to the well-gnawed rail in front of the building. The usual crowd of loafers and curious citizens had gathered to see the hack come in from Pecos Bend. Packsaddle was far from railways, and the hack from Pecos was its only regular communication with the outside world, and brought mails and newspapers, baggage, and an occasional

passenger, three times a week. The arrival of the stage was always a matter of interest in a cow-town, buried in the vast prairies. On this occasion the interest was greater than usual, for all Packsaddle knew that the new boss of the Lazy-O was arriving that day from Pecos Bend.

Two or three score of punchers and others were lounging in front of the timber building, watching for the hack. There was a general movement as it rolled up and Jimmy Dace brought it to a halt with a flourish. Half-a-dozen voices called out at once:

"You got him, Jimmy?"

Jimmy grinned down from his box.

"Sure!" he answered.

A short, muscular puncher, bow-legged from incessant riding, straddled forward. The Kid, from the hack, noted that the crowd gave way with great care to the bow-legged man. But he did not need that to tell him that the man was a gun-man—a "killer." He knew the type—the hard, cold face, the ice-cold eyes.

"You say you got him?" asked the bow-legged man.

"I sure got him, Lariat," answered Jimmy, very civilly.

"Wasn't you met up on the trail?" demanded Lariat. "I reckoned some of the boys was meeting up with you."

That told the Kid that the bow-legged man was a Lazy-O man. He reckoned that the Lazy-O bunch took in some of the hardest characters even in the lawless Packsaddle country.

"We was sure met up with, Lariat," said Jimmy Dace. "Panhandle Pete and the Coyote."

"Waal, then, what you giving us?" demanded Lariat. "Mean to say they let the guy come on to town?"

"They sure did."

"I guess I don't get you," growled Lariat.

He turned from Jimmy as the Kid stepped from the hack.

Every eye in the crowd fastened on the Kid immediately.

The Kid wondered, for a moment, whether any galoot in Packsaddle happened to know the Rio Kid by sight, and whether the change in his looks would pass muster.

But there was no sign of recognition in any face—only keen interest, tinctured with derision. The buying and selling of the Lazy-O, as the Kid learned later, was a standing joke in Packsaddle.

Every man there was keen to look at the new proprietor of the Lazy-O, keen to size him up, and see what sort of a guy he was. And they wanted to know how he had got so far as the cow-town, as it was an open secret that some of the Lazy-O bunch had aimed to meet the hack and warn him off.

The Kid glanced round casually and started for the hotel entrance. The bow-legged man planted himself promptly in the way.

"Say, you Mister Fairfax?" he asked.

"You've got me," assented the Kid. "I reckon you're a Lazy-O man?"

"Yep!"

"One of my outfit then," said the Kid pleasantly. "Take a look at your boss, if you want, and then step lively. I guess I'm honing for some supper, feller."

The cold eyes of the gun-man watched him curiously. He did not step aside, or make any movement to do so.

"I reckon your supper can wait, Mr. Fairfax," he remarked, in icy tones. "I want to know the bang of this. Wasn't you told on the trail that Packsaddle ain't a healthy place for you?"

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"I kinder guessed it from the way them guys carried on," said the Kid. "But they was quite satisfied, when they went, that I can look after my health."

The gun-man eyed him, evidently puzzled. There was a hush in the crowd. Every man there knew the gun-man's intentions, and the Kid was not blind to them. But he smiled pleasantly.

Barney Baker, he reckoned, was handling this matter in a business-like way. If a quirting on the trail did not frighten off the new boss there was a gun-man waiting for him at Packsaddle, and it was going to be gun-play. There was no doubt that any man who bought the Lazy-O was buying trouble.

"I guess Panhandle Pete put you wise that you wasn't wanted on the Lazy-O," said Lariat, at last.

"He kinder dropped a hint that-a-way," assented the Kid. "From what I figured, it seems that the outfit ain't honing to get a new boss. But they'll sure come to like it when they know me. I'm a good little man when I ain't riled."

There was a laugh, and the gun-man's cold eyes glittered.

"I don't rightly know how you got past the guys," he said. "But——"

"I ain't keeping it a secret," said the Kid cheerily. "They sure was too fresh, and I fired them."

This Week's Tall Story!

William Gosling, porter at Greyfriars School, sternly refuses a handsome tip from Mauleverer!

"Fired them?" gasped Lariat.

"Jest that. Fired them from the bunch," said the Kid innocently. "I guess a ranch boss can fire his hands if he wants to."

"Gee whiz!"

"They was very fresh," said the Kid confidingly, conscious that every ear was hanging on every word. "They sure was fresh. But after I handled Pete and let daylight through Coyote they was like lambs. I guess they know how to behave when they're told."

"You handled Pete and drilled Coyote?" stuttered the gun-man blankly. "What you giving us, you ornery locoed gink?"

"Straight goods," answered the Kid. "Jimmy Dace will tell you, if you hone to know. Me, I'm for supper."

"You ain't for supper yet," said Lariat grimly. "I guess you won't want any supper, Mister Fairfax, when we're through."

"Feller, I'm hungry, after coming all the way from Pecos Bend," said the Kid. "I guess it's me for grub. Stand back!"

"Not on your lifetime," sneered Lariat.

"The Lazy-O bunch sure do want to learn manners," said the Kid pleasantly. "I figure that they've got a boss now to teach them. I don't take lip from any man in my outfit. You're fired, Lariat!"

"Fired! Me?"

"You get me. Don't let me see you on the Lazy-O when I hump along tomorrow or I shall sure have to use boot-leather on you," said the Kid.

There was a breathless hush and a rustle as men crowded back out of the line of fire. For less than that—much less than that—Lariat had shot up more than one man in Packsaddle; and every man knew, too, that he was there to pick trouble with the new boss of the ranch.

Lariat drew a deep, deep breath.

"You figure that you'll use boot-leather on me?" he said at last. "You figure that you'll fire me from the bunch? Carry me home to die!"

"I've told you to stand aside, feller," the Kid pointed out. "I guess I ain't taking the trouble to walk round you. You moving?"

"Not so's you'd notice," drawled the gun-man.

"I guess you'll be moved, pronto!"

"Wade in!" grinned Lariat.

The bow-legged man stood like a rock in the Kid's path, his hands very near his low-slung guns. That he aimed to draw and fire as soon as the Kid made a hostile movement every man knew, and already the Packsaddle men figured that the Lazy-O would be wanting another new boss. But they did not know the Rio Kid.

"I guess I'm giving you a chance," urged the Kid. "I've sure fired you from my outfit, but I ain't honing for trouble with you. Get out of the way, you wall-eyed, slab-sided, pie-faced coyote!"

Like a flash Lariat's hand gripped a gun. But, fast as he was, he was not fast enough. Instantly at the motion the Kid leaped on him, and before the gun could leave the holster the Kid's grasp was on the gun-man. The bow-legged puncher, swung from his feet with that sudden grasp, went crashing to the ground, and the revolver was kicked from his hand. His left hand grasped the other gun as he sprawled, and the Kid's riding-boot stamped gun and hand together to the earth, to the accompaniment of a scream of pain from Lariat.

The Kid was not smiling now.

He grasped the sprawling ruffian by the neck, dragged him up with a swing of his sinewy arms, twirled him round helplessly, and planted a crashing kick on his buckskin trousers.

Lariat flew into the street and rolled over, almost under the feet of Jimmy Dace's horses.

The Kid glanced at him and walked into the timber hotel. He was, as he had said, hungry after his long drive from Pecos Bend, and wanted his supper. Outside the hotel he left a buzzing crowd, wild with excitement. Often enough there was excitement in the cow-town of Packsaddle, but never had it reached such a pitch as now. The arrival of the new boss of the Lazy-O had caused all Packsaddle to sit up and take notice.

THE END.

(The Kid is in for a lively time when he takes over the Lazy-O Ranch—but that does not worry this cheery young outlaw. He's had more worries than most men—and got over them. Don't miss reading: "THE NEW BOSS OF THE LAZY-O!" next week!)

ANOTHER THRILLING TALE OF THE SOUTHERN SEAS!

The DANCE of DEATH!

As King of Crusoe Island, Old Joe has certainly enjoyed a long and successful reign. But there comes a time when the white king and his friends realise that their stay on the island is drawing to a close—that time is when the savages turn against them!

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
Treachery!

ONE day, directly breakfast was served to the chums of Crusoe Island, and before he had given himself time to consume his own portion, Pieface disappeared.

Dick and Frank Polruan and Joe Tremorne paid little heed to this, thinking he had perhaps gone off into the forest to chop wood, of which, with the winter and cold coming on, they were running short.

At lunch-time he had not reappeared.

When Dick went into the galley to see how the midday meal was progressing, instead of finding Pie busily frying fish, or making some tasty sort of native stew, he was confronted with a note pinned to the wall, just above the galley-stove.

The boy was more than a little surprised, and started to read the strange missive:

"Dis chile am what you callums busy—oh, yes! De ole bag o' tricks, mouldy Joe as well, has gotter get dere own lunch for once. Plenty tinned pork in de cubberd.

"Your honest black serbant,
"PIEFACE."

Dick went down to the beach with a yell, and found Joe passing a critical eye over the dinghy, now beginning to look decidedly the worse for wear.

"What's the matter with you, anyway?" asked the sailor, starting round. "London on fire, Queen Anne dead, or the schoolmaster got the measles?"

"Pie's mizzled!" explained Dick. "Done a guy, and left us to get our own rotten dinner! Look at this. A bit thick, I call it!"

And he showed the paper.

Frank laughed as Joe handed it to him to read.

"Better say 'a bit thin'—at least, the lunch will be. Never mind; he'll turn up all right."

But the day dragged on, through the long, hot afternoon, and the golden sun began to cast lengthening spears of light over the sand, and still the black boy failed to put in an appearance.

As Lirikiri was none too safe a place to be in, unless someone with a gun was pretty handy, when tea was over, the chums and Joe went out in quest of the runaway.

They found him at length in a little glade off the main track leading to the native village.

He was sitting on the soft green turf, buried under leaves that still clung to ropes of stout creeping lianas, which he had cut from the surrounding undergrowth.

At his side were two empty tins, one of which had contained cocoa-powder, the other, condensed milk. Both were empty.

But evidence of a mixture of contents was plainly visible on the black boy's smiling countenance, besmeared from ear to ear with the sticky concoction.

Of this little weakness they had never succeeded in breaking him since the day he had run away from his brutal taskmasters in Plymouth, and had found refuge on their yacht in the Barbican.

"What the dickens are you up to?" asked Joe, moving forward, and catching his foot in one of the trailing vines, which nearly sent him sprawling on his face. "Here, I say, we shall all get tied up in knots with these beastly things. Don't you hear? What are you at?"

Pie looked up, and grinned affably.

"Making a slingum, Massa Joe," he explained. "Nice, beautifuls sling, strong enough to liftums house—oh, yes!"

"Sling! What, in the name o' jumping Nelson, do you want with a sling? And who said anything about lifting houses?"

"No, liftum Bunjik," corrected Pie.

"Lift the elephant! Who wants to lift the elephant? He can lift himself."

"Not on to a ship," replied the youth.

"A ship!" Joe was plainly puzzled. "What do you mean?"

"Dis chile thinks we not stay here all de winter, Massa Joe," was the answer. "Sometime I see Massa Frank. He look ober de blue sea, and he tink ob home. And, Massa Dick, he talk about Polruan dis last few weeks. An' you, ole Tinny-whiskers, you growl about not having nets and tackles and a good boat. You are all tinking ob home."

The sailor coughed behind his hand.

"Gone off 'is crumpet, that's what he's done, boy," he said anxiously. "The kid's barmy. I never said anything about going home."

Pie shook his head, but his nimble fingers went on with the work of making a sling.

"It's not what you hab said, but what you habn't said," replied Pie wisely. "I know you all tinkums about getting back to England. You all gettin' tired ob dis yere island."

The chums coloured, and looked from one to the other. Frank was the first to break the silence.

"He's quite right, Joe. We've all shown, one way and another, that we're getting pretty fed-up, and want to stretch our legs a bit. You see, Crusoe Island isn't very large, and we've gone over all the ground hundreds and

hundreds of times. I guess, sooner or later, it will come to a move on."

Joe began to fill his pipe thoughtfully. His stock of tobacco was running perilously short.

"Yes, I suppose that's it," he agreed, smoking deliberately. "I was thinking the same myself, only didn't like to say so. But, there, the cat's out of the bag now, so there's no harm in talking about it. What do you say to making a bee-line for England on the very next boat that comes along?"

"I'm quite willing," said Dick. "After all, one can have too much of a good thing; and, though we've enjoyed the jolly fine time here, there are other stunts to be done. Evidently Pie is quicker-witted than the whole lot of us, and is making plans to take his elephant with us."

"Don't know about taking that great hanimal," grunted Joe, looking at the truly formidable sling. "Hefferlants take up a lot of room."

Frank came to the rescue.

"Now, see here, Joe, you old sinner," he said, "that won't do at all. You promised Pie, in consideration of the fine work that Bunjio did in getting us out of that shed, when Roqueto's gang made us prisoners, that wherever we went the elephant should go, too. That settles it. Pie, you need not worry. Get on with your sling. Everything's fixed."

Joe was wise enough to know when to give in with a good grace.

"All right, please yourselves, only it will cost no end o' money carting that hefferlant about, and all we've raised on the island's been spent buying stores."

"In which case we must raise more."

"How?"

"By having another go at the lagoon."

"Raising pearls, you mean?"

"Yes, raising the wind by raising pearls," laughed Dick. "We must fill in the time somehow, and it may be weeks before a steamer calls. Bully for the pearl-raising expedition!"

"We'll need a bunch o' natives to lend a hand," said Joe. "I'll go down to the village, and pick out a few who've done East Pacific diving. Frank, I want you to fix up a water-glass."

"What's that?" asked the boy.

"Don't you remember," Joe replied, "how we lost a good deal of time, to say nothing of pearls, on the last show, through the wind rippling the surface of the lagoon? Makes the shells look where they aren't, and vice versings."

"How do you make the glass, then?"

"Cut the top and bottom out of a petrol-can, and let in two strips of glass. Weight the edges with lead strips, and there you are."

The idea of a pearl-hunting expedition was eagerly seized on, and for the rest of that day all went to work with a will, making ready.

By nine o'clock the following morning the little party set out, a score of stalwart Lirikiri islanders being detailed off to carry the dinghy across the coral reef to the placid surface of the lagoon.

Arrived at the edge, Joe divided the party into two squads, one for immediate diving while the others were allowed to remain at a distance, where they occupied their time lounging in the shade of the palms and drinking from green coconuts.

Dick took the oars and commenced to row, while Frank busied himself with the water-glass can.

Although the lagoon was shallow in most places, it occupied a considerable area, and a good hour was spent in locating the place of the last "find."

Now they saw the use of Joe's invention, for the burning sun turned the surface of the lagoon into a dazzling mirror which almost blinded them.

The faint rippling of the water gave fantastic, deceptive shapes to everything that lay at the bottom, so that more than once Dick cried out the warning word "Clam."

The converted tin, however, helped them, giving a clear, motionless view of the bottom, and in a little while a pearl-yielding section was found.

By the end of the morning Joe had the "find" laid out on a stretch of sail in the stern, and the natives came in to be rowed landwards.

The sailor was obviously pleased.

"Another two or three days, and we'll have raised a fortune," he remarked, as they neared the circling reef of coral. "We ought to make two or three thousand pounds of them at Apia or Sydney—more than enough to pay for a first-class outfit home."

So the time went on without any shadow of impending trouble falling across the peaceful operations. For three days the pearl-raising proceeded. That afternoon was to be the last trip.

Crude shelters of cut saplings and boughs, roofed with branches and intertwined leaves, had been erected on the higher ground beyond the reef, for Joe soon discovered that the knot of palms gave inadequate protection to the men against the scorching sun.

As usual, a crowd of natives had gathered by ones and twos, coming down from the village to watch the operations.

They formed a line shutting off a view of the shelters, as, the work finally done, the divers swam shorewards, and Dick lightly sculled the dinghy towards the landing-place.

Frank was the first ashore.

"Hi, you fellows, give a hand in bringing the boat higher up!" he called, as Joe busied himself tying the pearls into a red bandana handkerchief.

There was a long silence, during which several of the men turned and regarded him with curious intentness in their slumbrous, dark eyes.

Not one of them made the slightest movement to obey, and a swift pang of fear shot through him when he remembered that the boat did not contain a single weapon.

"Now, then, get a move on you!" he said, laying his hand on one fellow's arm.

The man grunted something unintelligible, and his flat, bison-like face wore a sullen look. The rest circled round the boy, and one of them barged against him.

Subconsciously Frank scented trouble.

"Look out, Joe! These fellows mean mischief!" he yelled.

And barely was the warning uttered when the lithe forms swept round him with a rush, and almost carried him off his feet.

At the same moment the throng on the beach broke, disclosing a stream of savages pouring out of the shelters, armed with bows, arrows, and spears.

In an instant all was confusion. Joe jumped from the dinghy's gunwale into the water, and met the surging mob on the edge of the reef.

One, bolder than the rest, leaned forward, and beat at him with a club.

Joe caught the descending wrist, snapped it like a rotten twig, and seized the weapon, bringing it down with terrific force on his assailant's head.

The man slithered down the slope, and plopped heavily into the lagoon.

Meanwhile, Frank was struggling against terrific odds. He laid out two with a couple of perfectly-delivered upper-cuts, but a jab in the forearm with a spear turned him faint and dizzy, and before he could recover a dozen hands had thrown him down and bound him with thongs.

But Joe and Dick were still in action, the former wielding his club with deadly effect.

Skilfully dodging a flight of spears, aimed from the higher ground, he dashed full among his adversaries, calling upon them to submit to their white king, or take the consequences.

The unequal contest, however, could not last for long. Without rifle or revolver, they were hopelessly at a disadvantage, as Joe realised to his horror.

He fought with the strength of ten, dealing mighty hammering blows; but as fast as one went down another took his place

At last even the sailor's colossal strength began to give out.

Surrounded by a yelling, pushing mob, who more than once, by the sheer weight of numbers, lifted him off his feet, he was forced higher and higher up the rising ground towards the shelters.

Here a fresh detachment came to the islanders' aid.

One clever fellow, quick as lightning, darted down between the twinkling legs, and, getting behind the sailor, hit him heavily on the skull.

The pearls dropped from Joe's hand, and, spinning round, he fell forward on his face.

A sob of angry impotence broke in Dick's throat. He shouted encouragement to Pieface, who was doing wonderful work with the iron bar.

But their efforts proved in vain. A hurtling tomahawk caught the black boy sideways, and laid him flat. Within a few seconds Dick, too, was brought to his knees, and his arms tied behind him.

He glanced helplessly round, and saw that all his companions were similarly situated.

Nor did the awful din abate. Amid shouting and yelling, the whole party dragged their prisoners up the slope, and made off at a rapid rate for the village.

When Joe and Frank came to, they found themselves with Dick and Pie beside them, lying on the mud floor of a closed hut, while the noise outside portended only one thing—death for them all!

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Joe Tremorne's Ruse!

EVEN after they had recovered consciousness, it was a long time before either of the four spoke.

Truth to tell, for one reason and another, they didn't feel much like talking.

If the savages had suffered—and suffered terribly at their hands, they had not escaped unscathed.

Joe had a lump on the back of his head as big as his fist—and that is saying a good deal.

One of Dick's eyes was closed and fast assuming alternate reds, and purples, and green, destined later to settle into a sombre black.

Frank's arm, ripped by the spear, had bled pretty badly, thus making him feel weak, while Pieface, from head to foot, was one mass of bruises.

At last Joe Tremorne ventured with a remark.

"We're going to have trouble before we're out of this," he said.

"Guess we've had a tidy-sized bunch of trouble already," agreed Frank, nursing his arm, which pained horribly. "What do you think they'll do?"

"Think they'll do?" repeated Joe, in disgust. "There ain't much doubt over that. Jest you hark to 'em. Never heerd such goings-on in all my nateral."

The din was certainly dreadful—far exceeding anything of the sort heard since their arrival on the island.

It had been the easiest thing possible to disengage themselves from their bonds.

Apparently the savages didn't trouble overmuch about the efficacy of these, relying for the safety of their captives on the hundreds of people—men, women, and children — grouped about the hut.

Nothing had been taken from them but the pearls—the loss of which Frank particularly regretted.

He had not said so to the rest, but he had nourished hopes that, with plenty of money to hand, once clear of the Antipodes, he would be able to induce Joe to take on an expedition through either South America or the heart of Africa.

And now it looked as though all of them had unexpectedly come to the end of their tether.

Joe voiced his feelings aloud.

"They're all round us like a swarm o' bees," he muttered, glueing one eye to a crack in the wall

Outside, the day was dying in a glory of brilliant colour. The sky, no longer like an immense vault of burnished brass, was turning to purple with slanting ribbons of gold, and here and there a silver star gleamed like diamond points against the deepening blue.

Save for the croaking of the frogs and the occasional scream of a parakeet in a noisy flight, and the moan of the wind, the forest was sleeping.

"No help in that direction," thought Joe. "Oh, my! They're not half going through it."

Dick caught the muttered exclamation and drew himself to the watcher's side.

"What's going on, old bird?" he asked.

"They're going to make a night of it—and an end of us!" was the answer. "The old chief has turned traitor, and is urging them on!"

"What for?"

"He's givin' 'em juice out of a big gourd; stuff to get 'em excited, I suppose. The women are collecting sticks for a fire. And, sink me, if they're not bringing out the old cookin'-pan again!"

The faces of the boys became white and set against the gloom.

"Is there nothing we can do?" asked Dick.

"Nothing—till it gets dark," said Joe. "They're getting awful excited, and soon they'll be stark, raving mad. Some of 'em will dance till they fall down exhausted; others will lose their heads and start fighting. Here, what do you want?"

He swung round as Pie laid a hand on his arm and whispered through the gloom.

"Look here, Joeymans, see what dis chile hab found!"

THE NATIVES BREAK OUT! An immense tripod, formed of the trunks of three huge trees, was dragged out, and a large iron pot hung from it. Then the savages proceeded to dance madly round it, singing and shouting. (*See Chapter* 2.)

Joe went back into the middle of the hut. Here and there thin streaks of illumination were piercing into the darkness of the prison as the fire in the clearing, every moment mounting higher, began to change the evening into the brilliance of day.

Pie stood over a bundle heaped in one corner and stirred it with his foot.

It consisted for the most part of native garments with ornaments of human teeth in strings, and brightly-painted feathers.

And, underneath, were curiously-shaped objects somewhat resembling beehives.

In each of them were two circular-shaped holes an inch or two apart.

Joe gasped.

"The dresses worn by the devil-dancers," he explained. "I've seen 'em used before on big affairs like this. The magic medicine-men wear 'em to disguise themselves with. When the real dancing starts they go in and out of the rest and point to any they don't like—or want to get rid of. That means the poor beggars go into the cooking-pot. Jolly good way of getting rid of your enemies—eh?"

"Then, maybe, we shan't be the only ones to be boiled," suggested Dick.

"Like as not there will be others," agreed the old salt. "Once they start they may keep this gadget up for several days and nights. Ah, now they're going to liven the proceedings with a little music."

He ran to his crack in the wall and made out a strange, but fearsome sight.

The clearing was now vividly bright as the red flames danced higher, and the night sky deepened to sapphire.

The savages—at least, a good hundred of them—had formed in a slowly-revolving circle, every man being armed with a reed from which he produced the most weird sounds.

And, as they walked, they lowered their brutal, painted faces, and raised their knees to a rhythmic chant, which stirred the onlookers to wilder frenzy.

For an hour or more the dance of death went on, the music shrilling up, only to die away in dismal moans, as here and there a player dropped out and fell exhausted on the grass.

And, all the while, the night was rent with screeches, shrieks, and cries, which even the loud thumping of the tom-toms and the wail of the pipes, failed to drown.

More and more wood was heaped on the fire, which now seemed large enough to have the cauldron placed over it.

An immense tripod, formed of the trunks of three huge teak-trees, was dragged around it, and the legs placed so as to be just out of reach of the licking flames.

In turn, the captives put their eyes to the hole in the wall and watched the hideous proceedings.

Pie was inconsolable.

"Dey'll kill my poor dear likklums Bunjik when dey've cooked me," he moaned. "Oh, if only dat Bunjik was here with me!"

"He'd have to die all the same," said Frank consolingly. "It's no good, Grate Polish, our numbers are up, and we can only keep quiet till the end comes."

"Don't know so much about that," interrupted Joe. "If only you kids keep quiet and do exaccerly as I tell you, there may be a chance even now."

A chorus of "Oh's" came out of the gloom behind the sailor.

"Yes, things is getting purty lively about these parts," he went on. "What's happening? Why, the first of the devil-dancers has shown up, that's all. And, my giddy aunt, a queer fellow he is, his body all covered with feathers and rows of teeth, which rattle as he goes, and a mask on his head resembling a pig. There, you can look for yourselves."

With swift, powerful jabs of his clasp-knife, Joe punctured the thin wall in three places, and three pairs of eyes looked out on the clearing.

The din was terrific, and the dancing became madder than ever.

Suddenly into a pathway of radiance came the incongruous and terrifying figure of the devil-dancer.

The long, wooden headgear, shaped with a pig's long snout, with ears attached, moved up and down, and, by an arrangement, a mouth, filled with red-painted teeth, opened and shut as the wearer emitted strange growls and grunts.

Then, from behind the native huts, the magic medicine-men appeared.

All their heads were covered, some with box-like arrangements made out of plaited grass and daubed with brilliant colours, some with headpieces like beehives, similar to those lying at the feet of the watchers, and others with light wooden coverings carved and painted to resemble the animals of the forest.

The men and women continued to dance, and in and out of the revolving figures the devil-dancers hopped, pointing here and there at a cringing man or woman, and as each hand was extended as though in accusation, a fearful wail went up, and the luckless victim, after a feeble struggle, was dragged away.

"When those wretches are through with their own lot, they'll start on us," Joe whispered; adding, in an aside, "that is, if we're mugs enough to give them the chance."

"Don't see what we can do," said Frank, whose head ached horribly.

"I do," said Joe. "Dick, old son, get busy with your knife, and start working out a panel in the back wall of this hut. Where's Pie?"

"Dis chile am heah!" came a melancholy voice out of the darkness.

"Good for you!" snapped Joe. "In the far corner by the door, the pigs who lived in this shanty had a fire not so long ago. Take that gourd, and pour the water into a hole in the floor; then mix mud and ashes with it until you've got a black, sticky mass."

"What's the move, Joe?" Frank asked.

"Start taking your togs off, laddie. Our legs hev got to go bare for a bit. We're goin' to make ourselves up black-brown, like the natives—at least, those parts of us which the clothes in the heap won't cover."

Dick could have yelled with delight.

"I see. You mean, we're to disguise ourselves as devil-dancers?"

"That's it," purred the sailor. "I notice that every now and then, after he's pointed to a victim, the devil-dancer hops off and disappears among the trees. Our gadget is to do likewise, otherwise, ditto. Come here, Frank boy, and learn how they do the dancing."

While the others worked at their task, Frank watched.

"Think you've got it?" asked Joe anxiously.

The boy nodded.

"I believe so. First they raise the right leg, hop once or twice on the left foot, then raise that, touch the backs of those in front with their hands, and repeat."

"Right!" said Joe. "Now you, Dick, come and watch while Frank practises the hopping once or twice up and down the hut!"

It took Dick very few moments to grasp the gist of the performance, and then he and his cousin initiated Pie.

It was the weirdest and most comical sight imaginable to see them dancing up and down in the limited space of their prison.

The boys managed the performance tolerably well, but poor old Joe made a most horrible mess of it, especially when it came to the hopping about on one leg.

He invariably fell over, barking his shins, and putting on his face a good deal more mud and dust and dirt than the disguise warranted.

However, in a little while the boys pronounced him perfect.

"Now, then, get busy with Pie's treacle stuff," said Joe briskly. "Daub it all over your chests, arms, and legs until you look the colour of mud."

For several minutes there was a fearful scramble for the mud-bath.

There was just sufficient water to provide enough of the sticky stuff to take the whiteness out of their flesh.

"Now for the togs, and if we're not slippy they'll be fetching us out for the cooking-pot!" said Joe.

"Ugh! These things do buzz, no end, and they're full of insects!" complained Frank.

Joe laughed.

"You'll be mighty glad you had them before long, my boy, insects or no insects. Come here, an' let me fix your headpiece on! There, can you see all right?"

"Quite," replied Frank, adjusting the beehive-shape arrangement. "Now, Dick, have you got that opening ready? I'm off to join the devil-dancers."

"Make for that opening between the trees," counselled the sailor, pointing through the portion of the wall which Dick had cut away. Hide behind the bushes as soon as you get out of the crowd, and we'll join you one at a time. Then it's all together for home."

By this time the excitement had reached an intense pitch.

Cries and yells mingled with the shrilling of the pipes and the beat of the drums, as men and women pointed out by the devil-dancers were dragged away to a terrible fate.

Joe wiped the moisture from his forehead.

"Crumbs, they're not half going it! This jamboree will result in the deaths of half the folk on the island before it's through! Now, Frank, off you go and join the line, and may the best of luck go with you!"

Dick's eyes were suspiciously moist as he saw his chum slip through the hole in the wall, let himself down flat on his face, and worm his way along the ground until he came to the edge of the fireglow, where the circle of dancers showed continuously.

With a hop, a medicine-man, wagging his grotesque head furiously, cleared the line and vanished amid the bushes.

This was Frank's chance. He stepped into his place, and the next minute they saw him dancing with the rest.

"You next!" said Joe, thrusting an open clasp-knife into the lad's hand. "If anyone looks like giving you trouble, deal him out a dose with that!"

Dick understood that it was a matter of life or death for all of them, and screwed up his nerve to breaking-tension.

"Good-bye, old Joe, and I hope we meet again—this side of sunrise!"

The sailor gripped his hand and turned away.

When he looked again Dick had joined the giddily-revolving throng, but Frank was nowhere to be seen.

"No. 3, Pieface by name!" whispered Joe. "You've seen what the other two did. Go and do likewise."

There was something of the savage about the black boy as he took on himself the dreadful task.

Perhaps he had seen scenes like this before in his native Africa. Anyway, he slipped out with a smiling face.

The sailor adjusted his headpiece, and, gripping a weapon under his native dress, oozed like a shadow through the opening, and with a terrific yell bounded among the dancers.

A man screamed as Joe pointed at him, and ran away into the forest.

In a flash the sailor was after him, but, once in the shelter of the trees, he made a quick detour and came to the spot where the chums were waiting.

There was no time for congratulations. Joe merely pointed to the north.

"We've got about ten minutes, that's all—ten minutes in which to cover a good two miles. At the end of the journey are guns—and safety. Can you do it?"

"Only try us!" replied the three in chorus.

Joe did, and they all won through.

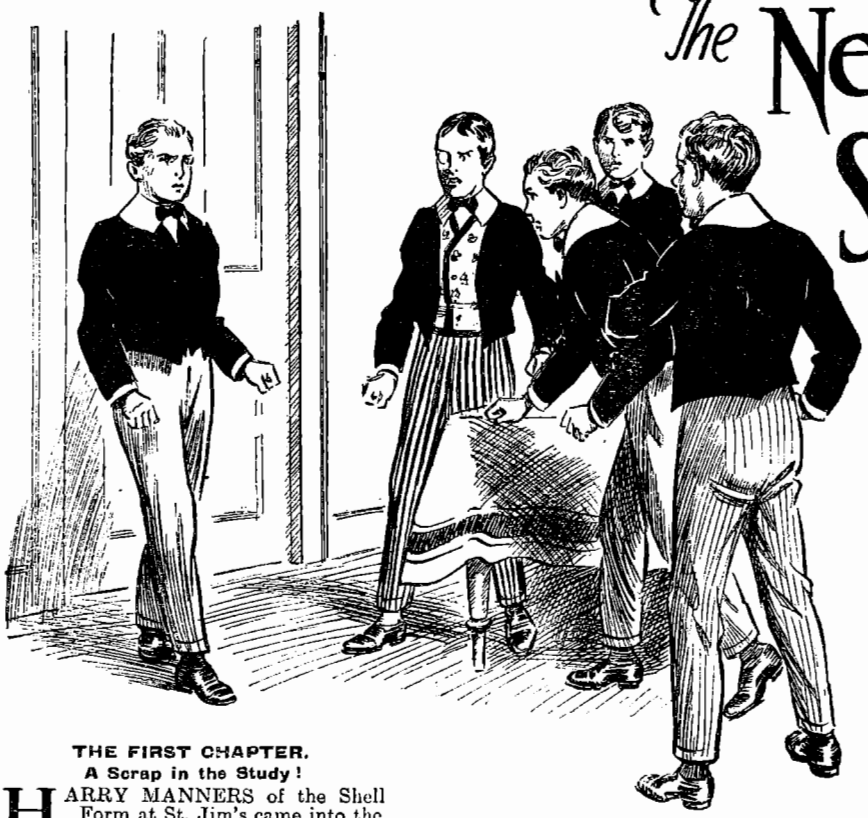
"But," said Joe, as he barred and locked the door of their little block-house, while Dick handed rifles and revolvers all round, "I guess if a ship puts in to-morrow we'll be jolly wise to take it!"

And the tired-out three thought so, too.

THE END.

(So this is to be the last adventure of the Four Chums on Crusoe Island—perhaps their last adventure on this planet. But it's not an easy job to get rid of old campaigners, and our daring band are determined to fight their way to freedom. Will they do it? That question will be answered in next week's rousing long tale of Frank Polruan & Co., entitled: "THE WAY OF THE SOUTH SEAS!")

A SENSATIONAL STORY OF TOM MERRY & CO. OF ST. JIM'S!



The New Boy's Secret!

BY MARTIN CLIFFORD

(Author of the stories of St. Jim's appearing in the "Gem" every Wednesday).

Harry Manners, as a rule, is as good-natured and as sporting a fellow as you'd ever wish to meet. But for some reason, unaccountable to his chums, he displays strange bitterness towards Eric Torrence, the new boy. What is the meaning of it?

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
A Scrap in the Study!

HARRY MANNERS of the Shell Form at St. Jim's came into the School House with a frowning brow.

Manners was angry, and he had good reasons for being so, for that Wednesday afternoon had turned out a complete and painful frost—for him.

To begin with, his troubles had commenced with the discovery that his precious and expensive camera had been badly handled, his films raided, and his money gone on a fresh supply. The culprit had been Baggy Trimble, the fat and fatuous member of the Fourth.

Manners had very nearly caught Trimble only a few yards from the gateway of St. Jim's, and Trimble would have been roughly and justly punished, but for the interference of a stranger. This stranger, who turned out to be a new boy named Torrence, and whom Baggy was escorting to the school, had turned on Manners when the latter had pounced upon his escort to deliver justice. A fight had followed, in which Baggy had made his escape, and in which Manners had received a somewhat severe "prize" nose. The fight had been stopped by Kildare, the skipper of the school, who had turned up at a most unfortunate moment.

Therefore, taking one misfortune with another, Manners was in a state of great irritation, not at all his usual placid and placable self.

"Football over?" he asked Levison of the Fourth, as he met that youth in the hall.

Levison nodded.

"Yes. We drew with Figgins. Where did you pick up that jolly old nose, old chap?"

"Find out!" snapped Manners.

"Keep your wool on," said Levison, with a smile.

Manners grunted, and went on to the stairs. Cardew and Clive were chatting there, and both of them smiled at Manners. The Shell fellow was quite aware that it was his prize nose that provoked the smiles.

"Has Tom Merry come in?" asked Manners.

"He's in the changin'-room," said Cardew, "fightin' his giddy football battles over again. Did it damage the car?"

"Eh?" asked Manners, bewildered. "Did what damage what car?"

"Haven't you butted into a motor-car with your nose?"

"You silly ass!"

Manners tramped up the stairs, leaving Cardew chuckling and Clive grinning.

He came into the Shell passage and walked on morosely to his study. As the football was over, Manners thought that Tom and Lowther might as well have had tea ready in the study. He was in the mood when a fellow is liable to think that some other fellow might have done something that he hadn't done.

But, of course, Tom was going in for "football jaw" in the changing-room, and Lowther, if he had come back from the pictures, was loafing about somewhere. Manners was crosser than ever as he threw open the door of Study No. 10 Study in the Shell.

A junior was sitting in the armchair in the study, and for the moment Manners supposed that it was Lowther.

"Oh, you're here, Monty! Might have started getting tea."

The junior rose from the chair and looked at him. Then Manners recognised him, and stared.

"You!" he exclaimed.

"Little me," said Torrence cheerfully.

"What the thump are you doing here?"

Torrence smiled.

"I might as well ask you that," he said good-humouredly. "What are you doing here?"

"Oh, don't be a silly ass!" said Manners angrily. "You're not wanted in this study, and that's plain."

"You don't say so!" said Torrence, unmoved.

"I do say so!"

"Dear me!"

Torrence sat down in the armchair again. Manners stood and stared at him, puzzled and angry. Why the new fellow was there was a mystery to him; to Manners it seemed sheer, unadulterated cheek.

"Will you get out?" asked Manners, at last.

"Certainly not!"

"You won't get out of this study?" exclaimed Manners, more astonished than angry now.

"No!"

"You cheeky rotter!"

"Oh, draw it mild!" exclaimed Torrence. "What's biting you, anyhow? Where's the harm in my waiting here?"

"You can wait somewhere else, if you want to wait," said Manners. "You can't wait in this study. Travel!"

"Bosh!" said Torrence.

Manners' eyes glittered.

"Can it!" went on Torrence cheerfully. "Do you think you can bully-rag me because I'm a new chap? I'm new here, but I've been to school before, and I know my way about. Can it, old bean!"

Manners placed the door wide open.

"That's your way," he said. "Get going!"

"Cheese it!"

"You won't go?"

"Of course I won't!"

"Then you'll jolly well be put!" roared Manners, quite losing his temper now. And he advanced on the new junior with his hands up.

Torrence jumped up again, and backed off a pace or two.

"Mind what you're about, you ass!"

he exclaimed. "I suppose you don't want the Housemaster to come in and catch us fighting?"

"The Housemaster's not likely to come here," sneered Manners. "I give you one second to get out of this study."

"Rats!"

"Then I'll jolly well kick you out!"

Manners rushed at the new fellow.

They grasped one another, Manners savagely and Torrence with growing anger. Manners endeavoured to swing the new fellow towards the door, and succeeded. But Torrence swung back with Manners, and they crashed into the study table. Manners had laid his camera on the table, and as that article of furniture rocked under the impact the camera slid to the floor with a thud.

"Oh, you rotter!" gasped Manners. "Out you go!"

"We'll jolly well see!" panted Torrence.

The struggle was furious, and the two juniors reeled and staggered about the study. Then they came doorward again, just as Tom Merry and Monty Lowther came along the passage towards No. 10.

"Outside!" gasped Manners; and he made a herculean effort to hurl Torrence forth into the Shell passage.

They parted.

But it was not Torrence who went whirling out, it was Manners—greatly to his surprise.

Manners of the Shell hurtled through the doorway, and crashed on the floor of the Shell passage, and rolled at the feet of his astonished chums as they arrived at No. 10.

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THE SECOND CHAPTER.
Bitter Blood!

"WHAT the dickens——"

"Manners!"

Tom Merry and Monty Lowther stared blankly at Manners as he sprawled breathlessly in the Shell passage. Torrence looked out of the doorway of No. 10, panting.

Manners sat up.

"Oh!" he gasped. "You rotter! You cad! I'll—I'll—— Just wait a tick, and I'll smash you!"

"Come on, then, you outsider!" retorted Torrence. "You haven't got on very well with the smashing so far!"

"What the thump does this mean?" exclaimed Tom Merry, in great amazement. He caught Manners by the arm and helped him up, and kept hold of his arm.

"Let go!"

"But what's the row?" asked Tom. "Who's this kid, and what are you scrapping with him for?"

"I'm going to smash him!" roared Manners. "Will you let go my arm, you dummy?"

"No," said Tom quietly. "Let's know what it's all about first."

"Look here——"

"Come into the study," said Tom.

Manners breathed hard with rage, but he allowed himself to be walked into the study, Torrence stepping back from the door. Half a dozen Shell fellows were looking out of their doorways curiously, wondering what the shindy in No. 10 was about.

Monty Lowther looked a little dismayed.

"Now let's hear about it," said Tom good-humouredly. "I suppose this is a new kid? I've never seen him before."

"A cheeky cad for the New House," said Manners, with a glare of deadly animosity at Torrence.

"Oh, what's the good of slinging names?" exclaimed Tom. "Chuck it! I suppose this chap is the fellow Figgy was talking about, as he's New House. Is your name Torrence?"

"Yes."

"Well, what are you up to in this study, which is ours?"

Torrence stared, and Monty Lowther looked very conscious.

"Yours?" repeated Torrence.

"You see——" began Lowther.

Torrence turned on Lowther.

"Have you been pulling my leg, you silly owl? You told me that this was the New House when I met you in the quad a little while back, and this study Mr. Ratcliff's study, and that I was to wait for him here."

"Oh!" exclaimed Tom; and Manners started.

"Draw it mild," said Monty Lowther warmly. "I never told you anything of the kind. I let you jump to the conclusion that it was so, being a silly new kid, and that's quite a different thing."

"Oh, you ass, Monty!" said Tom, laughing. "Is this one of your rotten practical jokes?"

"The new dummy thought he knew his way about like an old hand, and told me I couldn't stuff him," said Lowther. "I felt that it was up to me to take him down a peg, especially as he's a New House outsider. Blessed if I expected Manners to rag with him here, though!"

Torrence frowned.

"So that excitable duffer was thinking that I meant to stick in his study," he said, looking at Manners. "I thought it was the Housemaster's study."

Tom Merry laughed.

"You must be rather an ass," he said. "Surely you'd know—— But I suppose you haven't been at school before, or only a preparatory school, so you wouldn't know any better."

"I've been to school before, but——" Torrence paused. "It was a rotten joke to play on a new kid. I may get into a row for not seeing my Housemaster sooner than this. I've been waiting here a long time."

"More fool you!" said Manners.

"If you'd told me it was your study, I'd have got out fast enough."

"How was I to know you didn't know?" snapped Manners. "How could I guess you were idiot enough to take a room like this for a Housemaster's study?"

"Oh, draw it mild—it's his first day at St. Jim's!" said Tom. "But you'd better cut off, Torrence. Mr. Ratcliff must have expected you long ago. Look here, I'll take you over to the New House, if you like."

Torrence curled his lip.

"Thanks—I don't want any more help!" he said. "Goodness knows where I might get landed next time! I'll manage it on my own."

He walked out of the study with that, and Tom coloured with anger. But his anger passed quickly enough as he realised that Torrence had a right to be wary, after his experience with Monty Lowther.

Manners made a movement as Torrence went, but Tom caught his arm again.

"Nothing to rag about, old chap," he said. "The kid wasn't to blame for being here. It was all that ass Monty's fault."

"He's a cheeky cad, all the same."

"Well, I don't see——"

"He stood up for Trimble when I was going to lick him for taking my camera," growled Manners.

"Oh! Is that where you got that nose?" asked Lowther.

"Never mind my nose," said Manners savagely. "I'll make that cad's nose match it, and more, before long! Why couldn't you let me finish with him?"

"Oh, let's have tea!" said Tom Merry. "I'm jolly hungry after footer! We drew with the New House."

"Blow the New House, and blow footer!"

"Oh!"

Manners was evidently not in a good temper. As a matter of fact, he was feeling bitterly humiliated by the outcome of his tussle with Torrence; he could not forget that his comrades had seen him ejected from his own study by the new junior. That rankled deeply; and Manners did not mean to let the matter end where it was.

Tea in Tom Merry's study was not the usual bright and cheery meal that evening.

While the Terrible Three were at tea Torrence went out of the School House into the quad, where the autumn dusk was falling. He did not need to inquire his way to his own quarters, however, for three juniors sighted him and rushed down on him.

"This is a new kid," said Kerr. "Never seen him before, at any rate. Are you Torrence, for the New House?"

"Yes," said Torrence.

"Then we're looking for you. Come on!" said Figgins.

"But, I say——"

"Oh, come on!" said Fatty Wynn, "We haven't had tea yet, looking for you, you silly owl! Ratty wants you. Come on, I tell you!"

And Torrence, realising that these must be New House fellows, sent to look for him, walked away with Figgins & Co., and reported himself, at last, in Mr. Ratcliff's study.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.
Manners Makes a Discovery!

"ARE you going to be my second, Tom?"

Manners asked that question after tea.

Tom looked up in surprise.

"Your second?" he repeated.

"Yes," said Manners.

"Fighting somebody?"

"That new cad."

"Oh!" said Tom, wrinkling his brows.

There was a brief silence in Study No. 10 in the Shell. Tom Merry and Monty Lowther looked at one another. Manners stared gloomily at them. There was an ache in Manners' nose; and it was so red and swollen that he could not fail to be conscious of it continually. It was quite unlike Manners to feel bitterness or malice; but there was no doubt that he was exceedingly sore now, and in a very unforgiving mood.

"Look here, Manners," said Tom, after a pause. "What is there to fight that kid about? Give it a miss!"

"I wasn't asking you for advice!" said Manners grimly. "I was asking you to be my second. If you don't like the idea I dare say I can find another fellow. Talbot will do it."

"If you're going scrapping I'll be your second fast enough," said Tom. "You know that. But I think it's rot. It was Monty's fault that the kid butted into this study and you rowed with him."

"Guilty, my lord," said Lowther.

"I'm not worrying about that. I've told you that he stood up for Trimble and pitched into me——"

"Well, I dare say Trimble wanted kicking—he usually does," said Tom. "But it seems that he was showing Torrence the way to the school, and it

was decent of the fellow to stand up for him."

"Oh, was it?" exclaimed Manners.

"Well, yes. He didn't know what the trouble was about, did he?"

"Probably not. But he shouldn't have butted in." Manners crimsoned with anger. "Look at my nose! Do you think I'm going to let a new kid give me a nose like this and say nothing about it?"

Manners' chums were uncomfortably silent. They felt for his humiliation, but their opinion was that the affair ought to go no further, unless Torrence gave fresh offence. Manners had given them an indignant description of the affair of the afternoon; but they did not see eye to eye with Manners on that subject. It seemed to them that Torrence had been bound, in a way, to stand up for Trimble, in the circumstances — which Manners could not see at all, or would not see.

They could not help feeling, too, that Manners' resentment was largely founded upon his ignominious ejection from his own study. But Torrence had not been to blame for the shindy in Study No. 10; Monty Lowther had been to blame for that, if anybody.

"I'm going to lick him!" said Manners savagely. "That's settled. You can act as my second or not, as you choose."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Leave it over for a bit," he said. "It's dashed bad form to scrap with a fellow on his first day in the school, Manners. If you still feel the same in a day or two there will be lots of time."

"Be reasonable, old chap," urged Lowther. "The kid can't be expected to put up a fight his first day here. He's got plenty of other things to think of."

"You can take him my message, and fix it for Saturday afternoon," said Manners stubbornly.

"I'll take him your message to-morrow, if you're still keen on it," said Tom uncomfortably. "Leave it till then, Manners. It's too thick to go over bothering the chap in his House on his first evening."

Manners grunted.

"To-morrow will do then," he said.

With that the subject dropped. Manners sorted out his books for prep, though it was not yet the usual time. Tom Merry left the study to attend a meeting of the junior football committee; and Monty Lowther, after a rather comical glance at Manners' lowering face, quitted Study No. 10 in search of more cheerful company.

Manners was left alone.

He rubbed his nose, and rose from his chair, and moved restlessly about the study. He was feeling upset and irritable, unlike his usual self in every way. The fact was that the struggle with Torrence had shaken Manners up a good deal, and the sense of having had the worst of it was rankling in his mind. And, determined as he was upon a fight with the new fellow, he did not, at the bottom of his heart, feel quite certain of pulling off a win; and that was a bitter misgiving, Torrence being a younger fellow than himself, and a couple of inches shorter.

STRANGE BEHAVIOUR! Torrence crossed to the bookcase and began to go through his books, examining the title pages of each with keen scrutiny. One or two pages bearing a name he tore out and jammed in the fire! (*See Chapter* 5.)

Neither was Manners quite satisfied with himself for feeling so bitter towards the new fellow. He had a consciousness that that bitter feeling was unworthy of him, and that his resentemnt was quite out of proportion to Torrence's offences.

As he moved restlessly about the study, hugging his sulky resentment to himself, as it were, Manners noticed, without specially heeding, a letter that lay on the floor. It was not unusual for odds and ends to lie about the floor of a junior study, till they were swept away by the boys' maid in the morning.

But Manners was naturally a tidy fellow; it was his way to stack up Monty Lowther's scattered papers, and to remove Tom Merry's football boots from the bookcase or the mantelpiece when he found them there. He stooped at last and picked up the letter, and glanced at it to see to whom it belonged. It was not likely to be his own, as he never dropped letters about; he supposed that it must belong to either Tom Merry or Monty Lowther. Being tired of his own dismal company by that time he meant to take the letter along to its owner.

"Dear Parkinson——"

Manners stared at the name.

There was no fellow, so far as he knew, at St. Jim's, of the name of Parkinson.

How a letter belonging to a fellow named Parkinson had been dropped in Study No. 10 in the Shell was a mystery.

"My hat!" ejaculated Manners in astonishment.

He could not help seeing what was on the first page of the letter, which was folded in half.

"Dear Parkinson,—I was jolly glad to get your letter, which shows that you haven't forgotten us here, though I really expected you would, in the circumstances. It was jolly decent of you to send along the tenner, and you can bet there was a celebration when it came. There isn't any news here, except that Smiley has been sacked. I dare say you remember he used to smuggle in smokes for some of the fellows, and they used to go to the boot-room for them. Well, he was found——"

Manners did not turn the page. He realised that he was reading a letter which did not belong to him or to either of his study-mates.

He stood with the letter in his hand, staring at it.

This letter had been written obviously from some school to a fellow named Parkinson, who had left.

That much was clear.

But how, in the name of wonder, had it arrived in Study No. 10 in the School House of St. Jim's?

There was no new fellow there named Parkinson who might have brought it in his pocket.

Manners started.

Torrence!

Only Torrence could have dropped that letter in the study. As soon as he thought of Torrence, Manners knew that he must have dropped it there. Evidently it had fallen from his pocket duing the breathless rough-and-tumble in Study No. 10.

"Oh! It's his!" grunted Manners.

What Torrence was doing with a letter in his pocket which belonged to somebody named Parkinson was a problem. But that was no business of Manners', and he was not inquisitive. Torrence, clearly, had dropped the letter there, and it was for Manners to return it to him. Doubtless he knew Parkinson, whoever Parkinson was, though it was odd enough that he should have Parkinson's letter in his possession.

It was so odd—so extremely odd—that Manners' thoughts moved further. Fellows did not carry about other fellows' letters in their pockets, as a rule.

But the new fellow's name was Torrence—at least, that was the name under which he was entered at St. Jim's. The letter, addressed to Parkinson, could not therefore belong to him, unless——

Manners was not a suspicious fellow. But he was in the mood now to be very suspicious of Torrence.

He was tempted to read the remainder of the letter, which might have lst in some light on the subject. But he resisted that temptation, and placed the missive in his pocket.

It had to be returned to Torrence, at all events; but Manners had no desire to take it over to the New House personally. Tom Merry could take it when he went over as Manners' second after lessons the next day.

That evening Tom Merry and Lowther, when they came in to prep, found Manners very thoughtful and quiet. They supposed that he was still thinking about the trouble with Torrence.

Manners was, in point of fact, thinking about Torrence. And he was thinking about Parkinson, too; and dark and strange suspicions were working in his mind. But of that he did not speak a word to his chums.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.
Torrence or Parkinson?

"LOOKIN' for somethin', deah boy?"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth, asked that question in his most courteous tones.

Torrence looked up quickly.

He was coming up the passage from the stairs in the School House, and D'Arcy, of the Fourth, coming out of Study No. 6 after prep, spotted him. Torrence was glancing to right and left as he came along as if in search of something; hence Gussy's polite question.

"Yes," said Torrence. "I've dropped a letter somewhere——"

"You're the chap who was sewappin' with Mannahs in the Shell passage, aren't you?" asked Arthur Augustus, turning his eyeglass rather curiously on the new junior.

"Yes," said Torrence, with a smile. "I think I must have dropped the letter while I was scrapping with him; but I don't want to butt into his study again if I can help it! I only missed it from my pocket a few minutes ago, and so I came across——"

"All sewene, deah boy! I'll help you look for your lettah," said Arthur Augustus amicably. "It's wathah late for a fellow to be out of his House, you know—or pewwaps you don't know, bein' a new kid. Mr. Watcliff would most likely give you lines if he knew you were ovah heah."

"Oh, would he?" said Torrence.

"Well, I've got to have that letter, and I must have dropped it over here, so I shall have to chance Mr. Ratcliff."

He moved on, and the swell of St. Jim's moved along with him, kindly lending his assistance in the search. But the lost letter was not sighted on the landing or in the Shell passage, and the two juniors arrived at the door of Study No. 10.

There were sounds from the study that showed that it was occupied, and Torrence hesitated to knock. He had had enough trouble with Manners of the Shell that day and did not want any more.

"It's all wight, old scout," smiled Arthur Augustus. "I will explain to Mannahs, if you like."

And Arthur Augustus knocked at the door.

"Come in!" sang out Tom Merry's voice.

D'Arcy opened the door.

"Hallo, Gussy! Trot in!" said the captain of the Shell cheerily. "We've just finished prep."

"Wight-ho, deah boy! This new chap Towwence——"

Manners started up as he saw the new junior in the rear of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. He guessed at once why Torrence had returned to the scene of the scrap. He had discovered the loss of the letter.

A hard look came over Manners' face.

If Torrence intended to claim a letter addressed to somebody named Parkinson, Manners did not intend to make the matter easy for him. A letter addressed to Torrence Manners would have handed over at once without delay. But if Torrence wanted a letter addressed to another fellow—at least, to another name—he could say so, and if he found it an awkward matter, that was his own look-out.

So Manners did not speak, but waited with a grim expression on his face.

"This chap has dwopped a lettah somewhah in the School House while he was sewappin' with Mannahs, he thinks," explained Arthur Augustus. "He's come ovah for it."

"Oh, good!" said Tom Merry, relieved to hear that the new fellow had not come over on the warpath. "I haven't seen it, though."

"Same here," said Lowther.

Torrence stepped into the doorway. He did not care to enter the study with Manners looking at him a good deal like a bulldog. From the doorway he scanned the room with keen eyes.

"None of you seen it?" he asked, with a rather troubled expression on his face. "I simply must have dropped it here. It could only have come out of my pocket while I was scrapping."

"You can look round the study," said Tom good-naturedly. "I'll help you, if you like. But if you'd dropped it, I suppose it would be on the floor somewhere, and I don't see it."

"I picked up a letter here just before prep," said Manners, slowly and deliberately.

Torrence gave him a quick look.

"My letter."

"I don't see how it could be your letter, Torrence," said Manners, in the same deliberate way. "I'm keeping it till I find the owner, as it doesn't belong to this study."

Tom and Lowther glanced at Manners, puzzled. There was a sneer on Manners' face now—though Manners, as a rule, was little given to sneering.

Torrence's face was red now.

"If you will show me the letter, Manners, I can say at once whether it's mine," he said quietly.

"Your name is Torrence. I understand?" said Manners grimly.

"Yes—Eric Torrence."

"You haven't two names by any chance?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that the letter I've picked up belongs to a chap named Parkinson," said Manners coolly. "Unless your name's Parkinson as well as Torrence, I don't see how it can be yours."

Torrence's eyes gleamed.

"You've read my letter!" he exclaimed.

"I'm not in the habit of reading other fellows' letters," said Manners disdainfully. "I looked at it to see who the owner was when I picked it up here, as any fellow would do. I thought it belonged to Tom Merry or Lowther, naturally. I couldn't help seeing the first page. I've seen no more than that, and don't want to. I've got the letter in my pocket now, waiting till I find the owner."

"I'm the owner," said the new junior, setting his lips. "I've told you so."

"You're the owner of a letter addressed to a chap named Parkinson?" asked Manners grimly.

"Yes," said Torrence, with a deep breath.

Tom Merry and Monty Lowther stared at the New House junior. Arthur Augustus jammed his celebrated eyeglass into his noble eye and turned it full upon Torrence.

"Bai Jove, that is wathah wemarkable!" said Arthur Augustus. "How can you possibly be the ownah of a lettah addwessed to anothah chap, Towwence?"

"I'm not called on to explain that, that I know of," said Torrence coolly. "How I came to have the letter is my own business. Hand over my letter!"

"Yaas, wathah! But——"

"Dash it all, Manners, give him his letter!" said Tom Merry in perplexity. "What does it matter about the name?"

"It's jolly queer, at least," said Manners.

"I don't know about that. Parkinson, whoever he is, may have given Torrence the letter to read," said Tom. "Anyhow, it's no business of ours, is it? You don't suppose that Torrence has been bagging a letter belonging to somebody else, do you?"

"No, I don't suppose that," said Manners. "What I suppose is, that if a fellow named Torrence receives letters addressed to Parkinson, there's something very queer about it, and very fishy. He can have his Parkinson letter."

With that Manners threw the letter on the table.

Torrence stepped inside the study, picked up the letter, and slipped it into his pocket.

"Thanks!" he said icily.

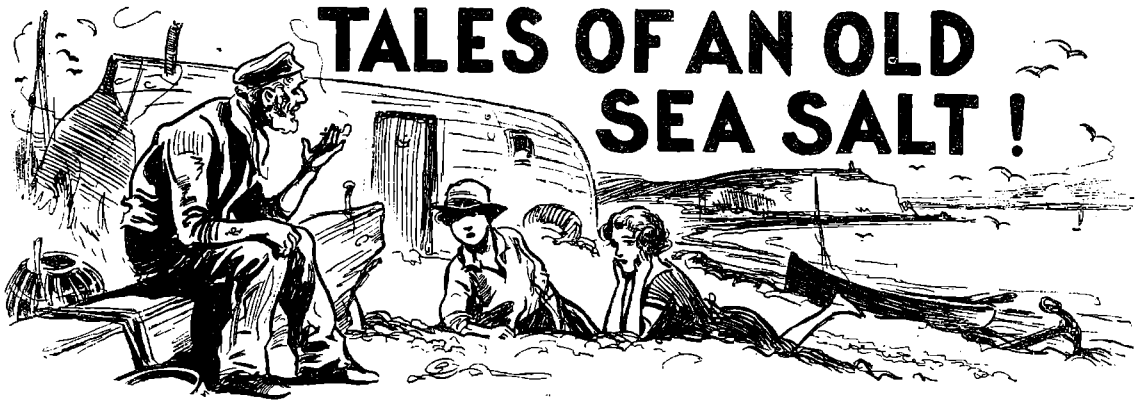
Without a word of explanation, he turned and walked out of the study, leaving the Shell fellows staring.

In a moment he had scudded down the stairs and disappeared, to return to his own House.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy shook his head very seriously. If there was nothing in the incident, and it admitted of a simple explanation, he did not see why the new fellow should not have explained. The inference was that there was "something" in it. However, the swell of St. Jim's reflected that it did not concern him personally, and he dismissed the matter from his noble mind and left the study.

It was not so soon dismissed in Study No. 10, however. Tom Merry and Lowther were perplexed, and Manners grimly cynical. And so they had plenty of food for thought that evening.

(*Continued on page 28.*)



TALES OF AN OLD SEA SALT!

Yes! The old bo'sun has done a bit of smuggling—and not so very long ago. Sit down and listen to his latest yarn!

The Smugglers of Longley Hollow.

"SMUGGLIN'?" said the bo'sun, with unctuous virtue. "No, sir, I never did do anythin' in that line—'cept once!"

The way in which he spoke the last words convinced me that there was another of his yarns in the offing, and I passed my tobacco-pouch, and waited. He blew out a cloud of smoke, and began:

'Twas about a couple o' years ago since a young fellow, just like yourself, came down 'ere from Lunnon. An orther 'e said 'e was, and wanted what 'e called "local colour." 'E was writing a book about smugglers, an' 'e seemed to think that we was all a bit inclined to run cargoes on dark nights. Course we didn't do anythin' o' the sort—we fellows down 'ere likes our beds too much for that—and at first we begins to think that 'e's some sort o' detective, an' 's tryin' to trap us.

Bein'-like, however, 'e worrits us so much about wantin' to go on a smugglin' expeediation, that we 'its on a plan, an' we makes up a party to provide 'im wi' "local colour," as 'e called it. Just to make sure that we wouldn't get into trouble, we sees the local revenoo fellow and tells 'im all about it, and 'e laughs, 'cos this was e plan:

We fixes up wi' a little French boat what runs to the 'arbour, and 'er skipper promises to get together a lot o' old casks and bales, the casks to be full o' water, and the bales just be old canvas. We also gets a lot o' cigar-boxes and fills 'em wi' rubbish. Then we was to run out a boat late at night next time the Frenchman is coming back, an' take the orther bloke out wi' us.

Course, the revenoo blokes, knowin' it was all eyewash, in a manner o' speakin', wouldn't interfere wi' us, and we plans to run the dummy cargo ashore, 'ide it in a cave, and make the orther think we was really smugglin'. 'E was a very generous fellow, an' we knew as 'ow 'e'd pay us for our trouble.

The night for the Frenchman to come back comes along, and we makes a great display o' secrecy. 'Bout two o'clock in the mornin' we starts out in old Zeke Busby's boat, wi' the orther sittin' in the stern and thinkin' 'e was back in the good old days o' smuggling.

We comes across the Frenchman about four miles out, and then we gets all the dummy cargo in the boat and runs for the shore. We acted like we'd seen the smugglers act on the pictures, and we talks a lot about "Yo-'o!" and similar nortical expressions. When we gets the boat back to shore we shoulders the bales and casks—and mighty 'eavy they was, too—and carries them up the cliff path, an' ides them in Longley 'Ollow, on top o' the cliffs an' not far from the main road.

Then we all goes to old Zeke's place and pretends to 'ave a sharin'-out o' the cargo, which we are supposed to move on the next day. The orther was delighted wi' 'is "local colour," and, bein' a generous sort, as I said, 'e puts 'is 'and down, and gives us all a nice little tip for the night's entertainment. Then 'e says as 'ow 'e'll be gettin' back to 'is 'otel, and off 'e goes.

Next day I 'ad promised to take 'im out fishin', so I goes to 'is 'otel an' asks for 'im. They tells me there that 'e'd gone back to Lunnon by motor-car early that there morning. Well, later in the day me an' old Zeke goes along to Longley 'Ollow, where we'd 'idden the dummy cargo, our intention bein' to get the rubbish out o' the way.

"The farmer's lad tells us he had seen the young man loading a car near the beach."

Strike me pink if we could find any of it! It 'ad all vanished, mysteriously like!

Zeke reckons that the others must 'ave taken it, so we doesn't bother any more about it. But later in the day we sees the others an' no one knows anythin' about where the rubbish 'ad gone. Then we begins to make inquiries.

First we finds a farmer's lad what 'ad 'appened to be walkin' along the cliffs that mornin', an' 'e tells us that 'e 'ad seen the orther an' another fellow shifting bales and casks into a big motor-car just about dawn. Well, that o' course, makes us laugh, for we thinks the orther 'as tried to get away wi' a cargo composed o' old rubbish and casks o' water.

'Bout midday the French boat comes into 'arbour, an' I sees the skipper coming along the quay. 'E comes straight up to me and says 'e's sorry 'e wasn't able to meet us that mornin' as arranged, 'im bein' kept late by the tide.

"But you did meet us!" I says. "We took the cargo off of you!"

"You didn't!" 'e says. "I've still got the fake cargo aboard. Look for yourself!"

An' o' 'ad, too!

Well, we couldn't understand it, like, so we calls a conference, but we was just as much in a quandiary when we'd finished. Anyway, we 'ad sense enough to do one thing—an' that was to shut our mouths about it, an' none o' us 'ave ever gone in for smugglin' again!"

"But—but what had happened?" I asked, when the bo'sun had shown no signs of continuing with the yarn. "You don't mean to say you had dreamed it all?"

"Not us," said the bo'sun. "We'd run the cargo all right; and when I think o' that orther laughing at us, I'd like to smash 'is face in! Jim Pemberty, 'oo's got a job on the Customs, told us all about it later. That fellow was no orther—'e was a real live smuggler, an' 'e'd made arrangements wi' another French boat to bring in a cargo what looked like our fake cargo—but what was the real thing! 'E must 'ave made a pile out o' that job, and we——"

He broke off and sucked at his pipe for a while.

"Well, I got a quid out o' it, anyway!" he concluded.

THE NEW BOYS' SECRET.

(Continued from page 26.)

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.
In Black and White!

"PARKINSON!"

Eric Torrence started violently.

He had slipped quietly into the New House after his visit to the other House, and hurried up to the Fourth Form quarters. Torrence had been assigned by Mr. Ratcliff to Study No. 3 in the New House Fourth, an apartment hitherto tenanted by Digges and Pratt.

The door of Study No. 3 stood half open as Torrence reached it, and he could hear the voices of Digges and Pratt within.

"Parkinson—Eric Parkinson!" Pratt was speaking.

"Ridsdale. What does Ridsdale mean?" That was Digges' voice.

"Must be the name of a school."

"There isn't any school of that name."

Torrence pushed open the study door, with a rather set face, and went in. Pratt of the Fourth was sprawling in the armchair with a "Holiday Annual" a year old open on his knees. It was open at the title page, and by sheer chance Pratt had come on the name inscribed there by the owner of the volume:

"Eric Parkinson,
Ridsdale."

Pratt looked up and nodded to Torrence.

"I've borrowed your 'Annual,'" he said. "I hadn't seen this one before. It's last year's. You don't mind?"

"Not at all," said Torrence.

"You picked this up second-hand, I suppose?" said Pratt. "There's another chap's name on the title page."

"Is there?" murmured Torrence.

"Same front name as yours, though—Eric," said Digges. "Did you know Parkinson, Torrence?"

"Is that the name there?" asked Torrence calmly.

"Yes; and Pratt says that Ridsdale is a school. Ever heard of a school called Ridsdale?"

"Yes," said Torrence.

"Well, I haven't," said Digges. "It must be some cheap hole-and-corner show not to be heard of."

"Well, perhaps it is a cheap hole-and-corner show," said Torrence. "We haven't all made money in tallow, you know. There must be cheap places for the people who haven't."

"Cheeky cad!" said Digges sulkily, as he stalked out of the study.

Torrence picked up a book and sat down. But he was not reading. He was waiting for Percival Pratt to go. It was not long before Pratt laid down the "Holiday Annual," and lounged out of the study, going downstairs to join the fellows in the Common-room before dorm.

Torrence rose quickly to his feet and closed the study door, which Pratt had left open.

He picked up the "Holiday Annual" from the armchair and quietly and quickly tore out the title page, and jammed it into the remains of the study fire, stirring up the coals.

Then he crossed to the bookcase and began to go through his books, examining the title page of each with keen scrutiny. One or two title pages he tore out and jammed into the fire.

He was stirring the fire over the last when the door opened again and Pratt looked in.

"Dorm!" said Pratt. "Better get a move on. Monteith don't like to be kept waiting."

"Right-ho!" said Torrence cheerily.

And he followed Pratt.

Perhaps it was because he was a new boy, in strange surroundings, that Eric Torrence did not fall asleep very soon in the Fourth Form dormitory in the New House. Perhaps he was wondering what the other fellows would have said if they had known what he could have told them—what Manners of the Shell suspected.

In the Shell dormitory over in the School House, Manners, too, was slow to close his eyes. He, too, was thinking—of the fellow who, he was convinced, had come to St. Jim's in a false name, and whom it might be a fellow's duty to show up in his true colours.

THE END.

("MANNERS' FEUD!" is the title of next week's full-of-sensations story of Tom Merry & Co., of St. Jim's.)

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