

TRAILING THE PHANTOM!

By
OWEN CONQUEST



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The weird and wonderful stunts of TEXAS LICK, from the Wild West, cause a sensation at Rookwood School, and consternation for the Christmas ghost at JIMMY SILVER'S home.

CHAPTER I.

News for the End Study!

SNOOKS of the Second came along the Fourth Form passage at Rookwood, and bumped open the door of the end study.

"Silver here!" he called out.

Jimmy Silver was there.

Jimmy was stretched at ease in the study armchair, with an expression of great satisfaction on his face. Arthur Edward Lovell was reclining with more or less grace on the study sofa. Baby and Newcome adorned the study table with their persons.

The Fictical Four of Rookwood were back at school, after a long trip abroad, and they were feeling pleased. They had enjoyed their trip to Canada, but they were more than glad to be back among old scenes and familiar faces. A week had passed away quite happily. There had been a football match, a rag on the Moderns, a fight between Jimmy Silver and Poole, and other harmless and necessary reformisms, and

after their long absence even school work in the Form-room was almost welcome. Snooks of the Second stared in at four cheery and satisfied faces in the end study in the Fourth.

"Here I am, kid," answered Jimmy cheerily.

Arthur Edward Lovell frowned at the lag.

"Don't they knock at doors in the slum you came from, young Snooks?" he inquired.

"Come off!" retorted young Snooks. "None of your swank, Lovell, because you've been on a lupperous holiday."

"What?"

"Have you really been to Canada?" asked Snooks.

"Of course we have, you cheeky young ass!" exclaimed Baby. "Haven't you heard us saying so?"

"Lots of times," assented Snooks, "but Poole says that you've not really been further off than Southern."

"Southend!" yelled the Fictical Four.

"Peele says he knows a chap who saw you there!" grinned Snooks.

"I'll jolly well give Peele another punch when I see him again!" growled Jimmy Silver; while Arthur Edward Lovell gazed at the sag in great wrath, meditating assault and battery.

"Gower says he doesn't think it was Southend, though," said Snooks.

"Doesn't he?" granted Newcome.

"No; Gower says he believes you were at Margate."

Whiz!

A cushion crossed the end study at great speed, hurled by the hand of Arthur Edward Lovell. It caught Snooks of the Second on the chest, and bowled him over quite neatly. There was a bump and a roar as Snooks of the Second Form sat down in the passage.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Goal!" chortled Raby.

"Yow-ow-ow!" yelled Snooks, repenting, perhaps, that he had ventured to chip the Fictical Four in their own domain. It was, indeed, a rather venturesome proceeding, like boarding the lion in his den, or the Douglas in his hall.

Lovell felled the cushion, and brandished it over Snooks as the latter sat and roared.

"Have some more!" he asked.

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"Anything more to say about Southend and Margate?" inquired Lovell.

"Wow! No! Oh, no!" gasped Snooks.

"Good!"

The sag scrambled up and backed away from the cushion.

"Head's message," he grunted. "Silver's wanted in the Head's study at once. I hope it's a licking. Ow!"

Lovell made a motion with the cushion, and Snooks of the Second scudded away down the passage.

"I wonder what the Head wants," remarked Raby.

"About punching Peele, I suppose," yawned Jimmy Silver. "Peele was walking a prize nose about this morning."

"The Head wouldn't notice Peele's boko," said Lovell. "Perhaps he wants to hear about what we did in Canada."

"Perhaps!" grinned Newcome. "Lot of perhaps about that, I think."

"As that Indian chap at Greyfriars would say, the perhapsfulness is terrific," said

Jimmy Silver, laughing. "More likely Peele's nose! Anyhow, I'd better go. The old boy doesn't like to be kept waiting."

And Jimmy Silver left the end study and strolled down the passage to the stairs.

He tapped discreetly at the Head's door. Dr. Chisholm's deep voice bade him enter.

Mr. Dalton, the master of the Fourth, was with the Head when the captain of the Fourth came in. Both the masters were looking rather serious, and Jimmy did not doubt that Mr. Dalton had acquainted the Head with some delinquency of Jimmy's. The striking state of Peele's nose, apparently, was to be avenged.

Dr. Chisholm blinked at Jimmy over his glasses.

"Ah! I sent for you, Silver," he said.

"Yes, sir."

"Mr. Dalton tells me——"

"Yes, sir," groaned Jimmy.

"That while you were in Canada you——" Jimmy brightened.

Apparently it was not Peele's nose, after all, that was to figure in the interview. Was it possible that the Head wanted to hear a yarn about the Windy River Ranch?

"You made the acquaintance of an American boy——"

"Oh!"

"Named Kick——"

"Lick, sir!" murmured Mr. Dalton.

"Ah! Yes! Exactly! Lick!" said the Head. "Quite so! The boy's name certainly is Lick!"

Jimmy Silver was quite cheerful again now.

"Yes, sir," he said. "I remember him, sir."

"This boy Lick—I should say Lick—is coming to Rookwood," resumed the Head. "It appears that he belongs to—to Mexico——"

"Texas, sir!" said Mr. Dalton.

"Exactly—Texas! Texas is a State in the United States of America, Silver."

"Yes, sir," said Jimmy gravely. The information was quite superfluous; Jimmy Silver was well aware that Texas was a State in the United States of America. But it was not his business to tell the Head so. All information imparted by so great a man as the Head of Rookwood School was to be received with thankfulness.

"Arrangements have been made," went on the Head; "for Lick to be placed in the

Fourth Form at this school—your Form, Silver."

"Yes, sir," said Jimmy.

He wondered a little why the Head had sent for him to tell him all this. Dr. Chisholm proceeded to enlighten him.

"I was glad to hear from Mr. Dalton, Silver, that you were acquainted with this boy Kick—Lick. I understand that he has lived entirely on a—a—"

"Ranch," said Mr. Dalton."

"A ranch," said the Head. "A ranch in—in—"

"Texas."

"Texas," resumed the Head. "He will, therefore, be very new to our ways here. I understand, indeed, that he has no knowledge at all of public school life or of English manners and customs generally. You will be able to assist him very materially, Silver, in settling down here."

"Oh!" murmured Jimmy.

Remembering what he did of Texas Lick, Jimmy was not overjoyed at the prospect of acting as bear-leader to the youth from Texas. But it was no use telling the Head that.

"It is, therefore, arranged," continued the Head, "for this American boy Kick to be placed in your study, Silver."

"Oh!"

"I believe there are four—or is it five—boys in your study already?"

"Four, sir."

"Quite so! I believe, however, that it is the largest study in the Fourth Form passage."

"Yes, sir."

"If, however, you find your room crowded with the addition of this boy Lick, one of the others will be taken out and placed in another study."

Jimmy looked at his headmaster almost compassionately. The Head was a mine of learning and knowledge. What he did not know of the classic tongues was not worth knowing. He knew nearly as much about *Æschylus* as *Æschylus* himself could have known. But he did not know that the Fictical Four of Rookwood would not have agreed to be separated, even if four or five Licks had been handed on them in the end study.

"Oh, we shall manage all right, sir," said Jimmy.

"Very good, Silver! Now, this boy Kick—Lick—is at present in charge of his

father's agent in London. He arrives at Rookwood to-morrow."

"Yes, sir."

"A gentleman will bring him here," continued the Head. "I think, however, that if a boy belonging to his Form were to meet him at the station it would be as well. Mr. Dalton will, therefore, excuse you from the Form-room to-morrow afternoon, Silver, in order that you may meet Lick at Coombe, and conduct him to the school."

Jimmy looked quite cheerful now.

Meeting Texas Lick was no great treat, but an exeat from the Form-room was always welcome.

"Shall I take anyone with me, sir?" asked Jimmy Silver diffidently.

"It scarcely seems necessary, Silver."

"My friends, sir—Lovell and Raby and Newcome—met Lick in Canada," said Jimmy. "It would be a sort of—of welcome for him if they could come with me, sir."

Mr. Dalton smiled, and the Head looked rather hard at Jimmy Silver.

"I will leave that matter to your Form-master, Silver," said Dr. Chisholm.

"I see no objection, sir," said Mr. Dalton.

"Very well. Then to-morrow afternoon, Silver, you will meet the three o'clock train at Coombe, and I trust you will do your best to make Lick feel quite at home."

"Oh, certainly, sir!"

"Very good! You may go, Silver."

And Silver went.

CHAPTER 2.

LICK!

"WELL!" Lovell and Raby and Newcome jerked that monosyllable at Jimmy Silver all together as he came back to the end study in the Fourth.

"All serene," answered Jimmy Silver.

"Not licked?"

"No."

"Then what did the old scout want?" Jimmy Silver explained.

"Well, you ask!" exclaimed Lovell indignantly. "You say it's all serene, and it turns out that we're to have that wild and

woolly animal, Lick, planted on us in this study."

"Well, that's rotten!" agreed Jimmy. "It will be a bit of a crowd. The Head says one of us may change out if it's too crowded."

"The Head's as set!"

Jimmy Silver laughed.

"That chap Lick is a cheeky chump," went on Lovell. "He's too jolly concerted and too bossy. If he puts on any airs in this study I shall jolly well thump him!"

"Oh, he's got his good points!" said Jimmy Silver tolerantly. "I dare say he will shake down in time. Anyhow, we get an extra to-morrow, and we owe that to Lick."

"That's something," agreed Lovell. "I'd meet half a dozen Licks to get away from Latin prose. All the same, I shall probably punch his nose before we're out of the station."

"The Head might have shoved him in some other study," grunted Newcombe.

"You see, we're expected to keep a fatherly eye on him, as we met him out West," said Jimmy.

"Catch me!" growled Lovell.

"Well, we'll see him through if we can," said Jimmy Silver. "Blest if I know how he will get on at a place like Rookwood, after a ranch in Texas! I fancy he's got plenty of troubles before him before he shakes down. Now, what about prep?"

"Oh, blow prep!" said Lovell. "Prep makes me wish we were back at the Windy River Ranch."

"But we're not," said Jimmy. "So we'd better pile in."

And the Physical Four sat down round the study table to work. After prep they strolled down to the junior Common-room, to gather round the fire for a chat before going to bed. They found most of the Fourth already in possession of the news that Texas Lick, of Texas, was coming to Rookwood. There was some curiosity among the juniors on the subject of the new boy from Texas.

"You fellows have seen this kid?" asked Valentine Mornington.

"With our own eyes," answered Jimmy gravely.

"Is his name really Lick?"

"Really and truly."

"Oh, gammon!" said Townsend. "How could Lick be a name?"

"There are more things in the heavens

and the earth than are dreamed of in your philosophy, dear man, and more weird names in the United States than were ever heard of in England," answered Jimmy Silver. "His name is Lick—just Lick! And as if that wasn't enough to go on with, his front name is Texas, after his native State."

"Texas Lick," said Mornington. "Ye gods! What a name!"

"I say, I've heard that name before," said Tubby Muffin. "I've seen it in the papers. There's an American millionaire named Lick."

"That's his popper," said Jimmy.

"His what?" yelled Townsend.

"His popper."

"What on earth's a popper?" asked Topham.

"His father. Where we say pater they say popper," explained Jimmy. "The major would be popper."

"Oh, my hat!"

"We learned a lot of the American language while we were out there," said Lovell. "I guess we could put you galoots wise, some."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You guess you could put us galoots wise!" said Townsend, in quite a dazed way. "Does that mean anything? Mean to say that Texas Lick talks in that language?"

"Just that," said Jimmy Silver, laughing.

"Oh, gad!"

"We'll stand round him and hear him talk!" chuckled Mornington.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The name and fame of Texas Lick had preceded him at Rookwood School. Every fellow in the Fourth was keen to see him when he arrived. Tubby Muffin was specially interested.

"You fellows sure that he's the son of the millionaire Lick?" he asked.

"Quite sure."

"Then he'll have lots of money?"

"Very likely."

"I say, I wouldn't be down on a clump because he comes from California—I mean Texas," said Tubby Muffin. "He can't help his name being Lick. I believe in giving a fellow a fair show."

"Because he's got lots of money!" chuckled Baby.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yes—I mean, no, of course not! After all, what's in a name!" said Tubby,

"Every chap can't have an aristocratic name—like mine, for instance."

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

"I dare say he's quite a nice chap," insisted Tubby Muffin. "I'm going to be decent to him. I'll tell you what, Jimmy, I'll meet him at the station instead of you, if you like, if you can fix it with Dalton."

"Nothing doing," answered Jimmy, laughing.

"I mean it, old chap."

"So do I. You can wait till Lick gets to Rookwood before you borrow any dollars from him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

CHAPTER 3.

The Boy from the West!

"YOU may go, Silver!"

"Yes, sir."

Jimmy Silver & Co. rose from their places in the Fourth Form-room. It was half-past two.

Quite cheerily the Fistical Four left the Form-room, followed by some envious glances, especially from Tubby Muffin. They strolled out of the School House into the keen wind and the wintry sunshine.

"Jolly glad to get out, anyhow," remarked Arthur Edward Lovell, as they walked down to the gates.

"Hear, hear!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. sauntered cheerily down the lane to Coombe. They had plenty of time to meet the train, which was booked to arrive at three from Latham Junction, and was generally a few minutes late.

They arrived at the station, and went on to the platform. The train was signalled, but was not yet in.

"I suppose we shall know the chap when we see him!" remarked Raby. "I remember his face was something like a hatchet."

"He'll be in different clothes, though," said Lovell. "I suppose he'll come to Rookwood in Etons."

"I suppose so," said Jimmy Silver. "He will look a good deal different in Etons and a topper. Keep your eyes open; the train's coming in."

The train from Latham rattled into the station and stopped. A dozen or so passengers turned out.

"There he is!" exclaimed Newcome.

"My hat!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. recognised Texas Lick at once.

There was no change in him. They knew his bronzed face, his long nose, his keen, penetrating eyes. And they knew his Dickson hat and buckskin breeches and riding-boots. He was not, after all, in Etons and a topper. Texas Lick, on his way to Rookwood, was the Texas Lick they had met on the Windy River Ranch.

He seemed to be alone. The chums of Rookwood saw nothing of the legal gentleman the Head had referred to.

Texas Lick stood on the platform and stared about him coolly. He was a stranger in a strange land, but it was evident that he was perfectly self-possessed.

The juniors crossed the platform towards him.

"Hallo, Lick!" greeted Jimmy Silver.

Lick glanced at him.

"Hallo, you guys?"

Having bestowed that greeting, Lick turned to a porter.

"I guess I want my truck!" he said.

"Eh?"

"There's a little grip in the car," said Lick. "The rest is in the baggage-car. Savvy?"

The Coombe porter blinked at him helplessly. Few strangers came to Coombe and fewer Americans. The language of the youth from Texas was a deep mystery to old William.

"Oh, I reckon you're asleep!" said Lick. "You see my truck put out and I'll look after the grip!"

He reached into the carriage and lifted out a bag. This was the "grip" referred to.

"Oh!" gasped the porter. "Them trunks is yours, sir?"

Three trunks had been labeled on the platform. Lick walked along and looked at them, leaving Jimmy Silver & Co. standing.

"Yep, I guess this is my truck!" said Lick.

"You want a truck, sir?" stuttered the porter.

"Yey."

"You mean a trolley, sir?"

"I guess you don't savvy. This is my truck," said Lick, pointing to the trunks.

"Oh!"

"Don't you know what truck is?" demanded Texas Lick derisively. "Gee-what! Have I come over to this little island to

teach folks their own language? Look here, you galoot, you got that truck expressed to Rookwood School instanter. Savvy?"

"Yes, sir!" gasped the Coombe porter, comprehending at last that "truck" was a word meaning baggage.

Texas Lick, with his "grip" in his hand, walked away towards the exit, stared after by everyone in the station. The Stetson hat was not a common kind of headgear in Coombe.

Jimmy Silver & Co. followed him. After the first laconic greeting, Texas Lick had not even looked at them. Apparently he had "no use" for the Rookwooders as he would have expressed it.

They overtook him as he walked briskly out of the station. He stood looking about him there.

"I say, Lick——"

"Yes."

Lick rapped out the word. "Yoy" was a purely transatlantic monosyllable, and meant neither yes nor no—neither yep nor nope—but apparently something between the two.

"We've come to see you safe to Rookwood," said Jimmy.

Lick laughed.

"I guess I don't want seeing safe anywhere," he replied. "As soon as I can't look after myself I reckon it will be time for me to go up the flame. Yes, sir."

"I fancy you want looking after a bit, all the same," said Jimmy Silver. "What the thump do you mean by coming to Rookwood in those clothes?"

Texas Lick looked down at his clothes with a glance of pride.

"I guess these are my glad rags," he answered. "What's the matter with them?"

"We wear Etons at Rookwood."

"Etons!" Lick surveyed the four Rookwood juniors with a derisive grin. "Them Etons?"

"Yes."

"I guess I wouldn't be found dead in them. I reckon the old galoot in London wanted me to change. I guessed not, and told him so. I told him in go and chop chips."

"Well, you can't tell the Head to go and chop chips," said Lovell, "and he'll jolly soon make you change into Etons."

"Oh, guff!" said Lick.

"Where's the gentlemen who was to come down with you?" asked Ruby.

"That old guy? I guess I slipped him half-way—fed-up with him!" explained Lick. "He sure made me tired! I got him into a wrong train at a junction, and I dare say he's at Southampton by this time."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Is there a car to be had here?"

"A taxi? No."

"How do you 'uns get to your school, then?"

"We generally walk," smiled Jimmy Silver. "When there's luggage we take the hack!"

"That thing?" asked Lick, with a stare at the ancient hack outside the station.

"That very thing!"

"Oh, gee-whizz!" groaned Lick. "What the thunder did the popper mean by landing a live American in a backwards shebang like this pesky little ten-cent island? If you ever find Texas Lick in a go-cart like that, you can let him know!"

"Well, your luggage——"

"Do you mean my truck?"

"Yes," said Jimmy, laughing. "Your truck can be sent on to the school. They'll send it on from the station all right. We'd better walk."

"I'm not gone on walking!" snorted Texas Lick. "I've rode a boss ever since I was raised, and if there ain't a car to be had, I guess I'm looking for a critter. Can you hire a boss in these parts?"

"Oh, yes," said Jimmy, "but——"

"Where?"

"Look here, Lick, you see, you can't arrive at Rookwood on horseback!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver impatiently.

"Why not?" demanded Lick.

"Well, you can't."

"Something new, eh?" sneered Lick. "You galoots in England are terrible afraid of anything new. You want to follow in your grandfather's footsteps, what? Well, I don't! Not little me! I guess I'm going to rouse out a boss in this township."

"Look here——"

"Can it!" said Lick.

And he strode away.

The Fiskal Four looked after him, and then looked at one another rather helplessly. They had been sent to Coombe to meet the Teyan and see him safe to Rookwood under their wing. Obviously Texas Lick did not want the shelter of anybody's wing.

"Oh, leave him to it!" said Lovell. "Let's get off without him."

"The ass," said Jimmy Silver. "We can't very well leave him. We're bound to land him at the school."

"Then let's take him by the ears and march him off!"

"Good egg!" said Newcome.

Jimmy Silver hesitated. Lick had walked into the Bird-in-Hand—a public-house that was strictly forbidden to Rookwooders. Apparently he hoped to be able to lure a horse there. Being well provided with dollars, he was successful. While the Rookwooders still stood undecided Mr. Stiggins, the landlord of the Bird-in-Hand, came in person out of the inn-yard, leading a saddled horse, and followed by the Texan.

"He's a bit fresh, sir," said Mr. Stiggins. "If you don't mind that I—"

"I guess I've ridden buckjumpers that would make your hair curl to look at them," answered Texas Lick. "You can send for this horse later."

Jimmy Silver ran forward as the Texan mounted.

"Look here, Lick—"

"Stand clear!"

Lick gave the horse a cut of the whip. It was a good horse, and undoubtedly "fresh." There was a clatter of hoofs as the horse leaped to a gallop, and the Rookwood juniors jumped out of the way. Texas Lick waved his riding-whip.

"So long, you galoots! Walk home!"

He disappeared at a tearing gallop. Jimmy Silver & Co. stared after him.

"Well, say hat!" said Jimmy.

And the Fistical Four started to walk back to the school. Evidently there was no prospect of taking the stranger from afar under their wing.

CHAPTER 4.

The Texan Arrives

LESSONS were over when Jimmy Silver & Co. arrived at Rookwood. They had not hurried back, not being specially anxious to share in last lesson in the Form-room. When they came in, they fully expected to hear that Texas Lick had already arrived. But old Mack, the porter, had seen nothing of him, as Jimmy learned on inquiring.

"Ain't seen him!" said old Mack.

"But he must have come," said Lovell.

"He started before us, and he was on a horse going at top speed."

"Missed the way, perhaps," remarked Baby. "He's a giddy stranger in these parts."

The Fistical Four walked in. Jimmy Silver was expected to hand over Texas Lick to Mr. Dalton, but as the Texan was not with him he could not very well do what was expected of him. He hesitated whether to go to the Form-master's study to report, and while he was hesitating in the hall, Mr. Dalton called to him.

"Where is Lick, Silver?"

"I think he hasn't come in yet, sir."

"Did he not come from Coombe with you?"

"He hired a horse to ride here, sir," said Jimmy reluctantly. He did not know what view Mr. Dalton might take of that proceeding on Master Lick's part.

Mr. Dalton stared.

"Hired a horse?" he repeated.

"Yes, sir."

"Very odd!" said Mr. Dalton. "Tell him to report himself in my study as soon as he arrives, Silver."

"Yes, sir."

So it was left to Jimmy to wait till Master Lick came in, and he waited. A number of juniors gathered round him in the quadrangle to ask after Texas Lick.

"Hired a horse at the Bird-in-Hand?" said Tubby Muffin. "I say, they'd make him pay a pretty penny there! He must have tons of money."

"More money than sense, I should say," remarked Mornington. "I wonder what the Head will think if he sees him trot in."

"Hallo! What's up?"

"There he is!"

"Lick!" exclaimed Lovell.

"My hat!"

The voice of old Mack was heard shouting at the gates. There was a clatter of horse's hoofs.

A horseman came riding in at a gallop. It was Texas Lick, with his rather long hair blowing out in the wind under the Stetson hat.

Old Mack stood and stared after him. He had never seen a new boy at Rookwood arrive in this style before.

Texas Lick came up the drive at a gallop, the gravel flying under the horse's prancing hoofs. There was shouting on all sides. Bulkeley of the Sixth snarled at him.

"Hallo, there! Stop that!"

"Pull in that horse!" yelled Heaven of

the Fifth, jumping out of the way in great haste.

"Look out, you fellows!"

Texas Lick did not heed. He waved his whip and gave a cowboy yell, as if he fancied himself back on the plains of Texas. He came up to the School House with a wild rush, the Rookwooders scattering on all sides. Almost at the steps of the house he dragged in his horse, so suddenly that the animal roared and nearly came down on its haunches.

"Gee-whiz!" roared Texas Lick. "Hyar I am—me from Texas!"

"You are!" roared Jimmy Silver.

"Whooop!"

Texas Lick dragged round the horse, and started off at a wild gallop round the quadrangle. Evidently he was enjoying himself, and delighted with the sensation he was making at Rookwood. The fellows watched him in amazement, almost in consternation.

Lick did not keep to the drives or to the paths. He galloped right across the Sixth Farm green—a spot where no junior was allowed to walk, let alone ride. He whirled past the school shop, and Sergeant Kettle, who was standing outside, took a backward jump into his little shop to escape the flying hoofs—so sudden a jump that the sergeant sat down in a box of eggs, with what a novelist would describe as a sickening thud.

"Great Scott!" gasped Erroll. "Is the fellow mad?"

"Mad as a hatter!" stammered Smythe of the Shell. "Oh gad! Does he take Rookwood for a lunatic asylum?"

"Look out, here he comes!"

The wild rider came tearing up to the house again, the horse almost foaming. Adolphus Smythe of the Shell leaped out of the way, stumbled, and fell right in the path of the galloping horse.

There was a cry of horror on all sides.

For a second it seemed certain that Smythe would be crushed under the thundering hoofs.

Texas Lick grinned.

A touch of his skilled hand was enough—the horse rose to the leap, and cleared Adolphus Smythe—the Shell fellow's dazed and horrified eyes staring up at the horse passing over him.

"Good gad!" gasped Mornington.

"Lick! Stop, you dunny!" yelled Jimmy Silver.

Lick did not stop. He waved his whip and galloped on, lost to all consideration

but the excitement of the wild ride, and enjoyment of the alarm and consternation he was causing. Bulkeley of the Sixth, with a grim brow, rushed at the horse's head. Lick avoided him with a swerve, and at the same time flicked off the Sixth-Formers' hat with his whip. The hat rolled away, and the horseman dashed on, and Bulkeley was left staring after it at his hat.

Mr. Dalton stood on the School House steps, his brow black as thunder. The Head joined him there. Both masters stared at the careering Texan.

"Is—is—is that Kick?" gasped Dr. Chisholm.

"It is Lick, sir," said Mr. Dalton. "I think that is the new boy, Lick, Silver?"

"Yes, sir."

"Boy!" thundered the Head.

Texas Lick looked round. The Head, in his gown, was a strange figure to the eyes of the young cow-puncher of Texas, but Lick recognised that he must be someone in authority. With a final whoop he dashed up to the steps, and dragged in his horse. A second more, and he had alighted, and raised his Stetson hat to the Head.

"Yep!" he said.

"Boy!" gasped Dr. Chisholm. "Are you—are you Lick?"

"Sure!"

"What—what? Answer me yes or no—boy!"

"Yep!"

"What do you mean by yes? Do you mean yes?"

"Sure!"

"Bless my soul! Lick, how dare you arrive in this manner? How dare you create such a disturbance in the quadrangle?" thundered the Head.

"Disturbance!" repeated Lick.

"Yes, sir!" rapped the Head.

"Oh, gee-whiz and gee-whilikins!" ejaculated Lick. "You call that a disturbance, sir? My only hat! You should see the punchers on our ranch on a bender!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence, boys! Lick, this—this extraordinary conduct—"

"I guess I don't savvy, sir! I had to get hyer on horseback, as there wasn't a pecky car to be scared up. And I was jest showing these greenhorns some riding, sir!"

Dr. Chisholm breathed hard.

"You must do nothing of the kind again, Lick! Have you come to Rookwood in these clothes?"

"Sure!"

"Surely your father told you— Bless my soul! This is—is—is really unnerving. Mr. Dalton. Boy, I suppose you have clothes in your box suitable for this school."

"I guess there's a stack of duds, sir, but I rather reckon I'd like to keep to these."

"You will be allowed to do nothing of the sort!" thundered the Head. "Mr. Dalton, you will see that this—this extraordinary boy changes his attire as soon as his box arrives. Then you will bring him to me."

Dr. Chisholm stalked away, in wrath. Texas Lick stared after him.

"I kinder guess that that old guy has got his dander up!" he remarked, to Rookwood generally.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Lick, you must not speak of your headmaster in that manner," said Mr. Dalton severely.

"Gee-whis! Is that guy the headmaster—the head crotch-and-bottle-washer of this hyer shebang?" exclaimed Lick.

"Upon my word!" gasped Mr. Dalton.

"And who may you be, when you're at home?" asked Lick.

"I—I am Mr. Dalton—your Form-master."

"Glad to see you, sir," said Texas Lick cordially. "Shake!" He held out a brown, hard hand to the Fourth Form master.

Like a man in a dream, Richard Dalton shook hands with the new junior, hardly knowing what he was doing.

"Where—where is the gentleman who was to conduct you here, Lick?" he articulated.

"Hanging around Southampton crossing, I guess," chuckled Lick. "You see, I shook him!"

"Shook him?"

"Yep!"

"You—you—you shook him—you mean you laid hands on him—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lick. "Nopa! I guess not! I mean I shook him—Don't you understand English, sir?"

"English?" stuttered the Fourth Form master.

"It's American, sir," murmured Jimmy Silver. "To shake anybody means to get rid of them."

"Oh! Ah! Yes! I see! Lick, come into my study at once. That—that junior must be taken away! Silver, ask the porter to secure the animal! Lick, come with me."

And Texas Lick, not in the least perturbed, to judge by his looks—wung along after the Form master, the floor creaking to the heavy tread of his boots.

"Well!" said Mornington, with a deep breath. "So that's Lick! He lives up to his name—I guess he licks creation."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Something new for Rookwood!" grinned Arthur Edward Lovell. "Wild and woolly, what?"

Texas Lick left a crowd of Rookwood fellows in an excited buzz behind him. There was no doubt that the boy from the ranch was something new at Rookwood—something very new indeed! In ten minutes all Rookwood from the Sixth to the Second, was talking of Texas Lick.

CHAPTER 3.

Tubby Tries It On!

THERE was a heavy tramp of feet, and a buzz of voices and laughter, in the Fourth Form passage.

Jimmy Silver & Co. had gone to the end study for tea; and the heavy tramp in the passage warned them that their new study-mate was coming—and apparently a crowd with him. The door crashed open, and Texas Lick stood in the doorway, grinning cheerily.

"I guess this hyer is Silver's study!" he said. "I'm told I'm to camp here with you guys."

"That's right," said Jimmy Silver. "Trot in!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came a howl from the passage.

Texas Lick chuckled.

"These jays seems amused somehow," he said. "I guess they've never seen a real live American before. Say, that paloot you call Dalton isn't a bad sort. But the old guy is a caution."

"The old guy?" ejaculated Lovell. "Do you mean the headmaster?"

"Sure! Some guy," said Lick.

"You'd better let him hear you call him one!" chuckled Raby.

"I say, Jimmy Silver!" shouted Peele, from the passage. "Are you goin' to charge for admission, now you've got the Wild Man from Borneo in your study?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, come off!" said Texas Lick. "You guys make me tired!" He closed the door

of the end study with a slam, in a crowd of grinning faces. Then he threw himself into the armchair, and put his feet on another chair. "So this hyer is Rookwood, pardners?"

"Yes, this is Rookwood," said Jimmy Silver.

"I guess I don't think much of it!"

"Nothing to what you've got out in Texas, I suppose?" said Arthur Edward Lovell, with sarcasm.

"You've got it!" assented Lick. "I guess this old shebang was put up in the early days of creation, and it's got a bit mouldy since. In the States we'd have it all down and rebuild it, with good square blocks of brick and central heating, and all that. But I reckon you guys don't know enough to go in when it rains. But I reckon I can put up with it a bit before I go back to civilisation."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Anyhow, I'm learning the manners and customs," said Lick. "I put in three months once among the Injuns, and I guess I can do the same hyer studying the natives—what?"

"Not unless you improve your manners, I think," said Lovell grimly. "You won't last three months at this rate. You're more likely to be kicked out under three days."

"Oh, come off!" said Lick derisively.

The door opened, and Tubby Muffin's fat face looked in. He gave the Fiskical Four a rather hostile look, and bestowed his evetex smile upon Texas Lick.

Lick stared at him.

"Great snakes! Who's that guy?" he asked.

"Oh, I say!" ejaculated Tubby. "I— I'm Muffin. I'm jolly glad to make your acquaintance, Lick. I was coming to the station to meet you, only these chaps butted in. You got here late, old chap."

"I guess I had a ride round," said Lick. "I wasn't in a hurry. Say, but how do you get into them clothes?"

"Eh?"

"How do you wedge into them, and how the thunder do you get them off again?" demanded Lick, staring at the fat junior.

Tubby Muffin reddened and the Fiskical Four grinned. Tubby did not seem to be making much progress so far on the path of friendship with the new and jerk of the ranch millionaire.

"The fact is," gasped Tubby. "I—I've

come here to welcome you to Rookwood, Lick. Have you had your tea?"

"Yep. I guess I grubbed with your Mr. Dalton!"

"I've got a cake in my study," said Tubby.

"Keep it there!"

"H'm! I—I say, Lick, you'd like to be shown round the school a bit, wouldn't you? Come along! Take my arm," said Tubby effusively.

Texas Lick roared.

"I guess I should have to fold down like a pocket-knife to take your arm, old scout. Ha, ha, ha! Roll away!"

"I—I say, Lick, I mean it!" urged Tubby. "I—I want to be friendly, you know. I'm not down on you because you're a wild savage from a barbarous country, you know."

"What!" ejaculated Lick.

"I know you can't help it," said Tubby fatuously. "The fact is, I'm willing to take you in hand and civilise you a bit."

"Great gophers!"

"I mean it," said Tubby. "Really, you know. Come along, and I'll introduce you to some fellows. They'll make allowances for you if I put in a word for you. I've got a bit of influence."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jimmy Silver & Co., quite entertained by the expression on Lick's face.

Texas Lick jumped out of the armchair. He strode towards Tubby Muffin, and that fat youth, under the impression that Texas Lick was accepting his offer of friendship, beamed upon him. Already, in his mind's eye, Reginald Muffin saw himself borrowing unlimited dollars from the wild Westerner, in return for his kindly offices in helping to civilise him.

Tubby was undecieved the next moment.

Instead of taking Tubby's fat arm, Texas Lick took his podgy neck. He took it in an iron grip that made Reginald Muffin squirm and yell.

"Yaroooooh!"

"You're a funny galoot, I guess," said Texas Lick. "But I guess your funny business don't go a Continental red cent with me. I reckon you're asking for my back."

"Yow-ow-ow! Leggo!" howled Tubby.

"Git!"

Texas Lick swung the fat junior round by his neck in the open doorway, and planted a heavy boot behind him.

Muffin fairly flew out of the end study.

Bump!

The fat Classical landed on his hands and knees and rolled over. He rolled and roared.

"Now come back and have another!" roared Texas Lick.

Reginald Muffin did not accept that invitation. He scrambled to his feet and fled down the Fourth Form passage, yelling.

Texas Lick turned back into the study with a grin.

"I guess that fat guy won't chew the rag at me again!" he remarked.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Texas Lick was right. Tubby Muffin's friendship did not survive the shock of Lick's heavy boot upon his tight trousers. His brief vision of borrowing unlimited dollars was over, gone from his gaze like a beautiful dream.

CHAPTER 6.

The Licking of Lick!

"YAW-AW-AW-AW-AW!"

That yawn was loud and deep and prolonged.

Mr. Dalton started.

The Fourth Form stared.

English history was being dealt with in the Fourth Form-room at Rookwood. They had arrived at Henry the Eighth, and Mr. Dalton was imparting quite valuable information to his class respecting the times of that much-married old gentleman.

The yawn interrupted him.

It proceeded from Texas Lick.

Probably more than one fellow in the Fourth felt disposed to yawn. Their interests were mostly concerned with the reign of George the Fifth, naturally, and they could have given Henry the Eighth a miss with pleasure.

But fellow in the Form-rooms did not always do what they were disposed to do. Only Texas Lick allowed himself that freedom.

Mr. Dalton ceased to speak, and fixed his eyes upon the junior from Texas.

"Yaw-aw-aw-aw-aw!"

Quite deliberately Texas Lick yawned again, with his somewhat extensive mouth well open, and his sharp eyes almost shut.

There was an irrepressible chuckle in the Fourth.

Evidently the boy from the Wild West was bored; equally evidently he did not hesitate to make the fact known.

"Lick!" exclaimed Mr. Dalton.

The young Texan looked at him.

"Yep," he answered.

"I have told you several times, Lick, not to use the word 'yep,'" said Mr. Dalton sharply. "Do you hear?"

"Yep."

"Cannot you say yes?" exclaimed the Form-master.

"Yep."

"Then say yes when you mean yes."

"Sure!"

The Fourth-Formers grinned, and Mr. Dalton compressed his lips.

"What do you mean by yawning in class, Lick?"

"Nothin' in particular, sir, only I'm bored," said Lick.

"Bored!" ejaculated Mr. Dalton.

"Bored stiff, boss!" said Lick.

"You must not call me boss!" snapped Mr. Dalton. "Boys here address their Form-master as 'sir.'"

"I guess I don't mind."

"You must not yawn in class, Lick. It is very—very ill-bred. You must contrive somehow to learn better manners."

Texas Lick made a grimace.

"I guess all this guff makes me tired, sir," he answered.

"This—this what?"

"Guff, boss."

"Sir!" snapped Mr. Dalton.

"All serene, sir!" said Lick obligingly.

"What do you mean by guff, Lick?"

"Oh, jest guff, sir! All this old stuff about that galoot Tudor."

"That what?" gasped Mr. Dalton.

"That ornery old galoot Tudor!" said Lick. "The pilgrim you call Henry the Eighth. I guess if we'd had him out in Texas he would have been lynched on the nearest tree!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Fourth.

"Silence!" exclaimed Mr. Dalton. "Lick, are you aware that you are speaking insolently?"

"I guess not, sir—jest giving you what I think," said Texas Lick. "All this hyer guff is a waste of a galoot's time. Who cares a Continental red cent about old Henry? If there ever was such a disreputable old mug-wump, the sooner he's forgotten the better, I calculate."

Mr. Dalton stared at him, at a loss for words. His class grinned joyously.

"Doesn't that Texas merchant take the giddy cake?" murmured Mornington.

"Dicky will skin him."

"I guess so!" grinned Lovell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence! Lick, I shall cane you for impertinence, and for interrupting the lesson," said Mr. Dalton.

"Will you, by gum!" said Texas Lick.

"Stand out before the class."

"I guess I'm comfortable hyer, sir. I don't mind going to sleep while you go on chawing the rag."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Lick, you are!" whispered Jimmy Silver, really concerned for the boy from Texas.

"Stand out at once, Lick!" exclaimed Mr. Dalton.

Texas Lick eyed him, but did not stir.

"You want to wallop me?" he demanded.

"I am going to cane you."

"I guess I've never been walloped," said Texas Lick. "I reckon that when I'm hit I hit back, boss."

"Wha-a-at?"

"I'm not looking for any old trouble," went on Lick. "The popper's sent me to this hyer school, and hyer I am. I guess I'm going to stand it as long as I can, jest to please the popper. It hores me stiff, and, as far as I can see, you don't touch a galoot anything that's worth knowing. But carry on, boss, and don't mind me."

"Stand out here, Lick."

Texas Lick did not stir.

Mr. Dalton picked up a cane from his desk, and came among the forms, his face hard and set. During the days that Texas Lick had been at Rookwood School his Form-master had been very tolerant and patient with him. He realized that a rough life on a Texas ranch had hardly fitted Lick for Rookwood and its ways, and he was very considerate.

But there was a limit, and Texas Lick had reached the limit now.

Mr. Dalton dropped his left hand on Lick's collar, to jerk him out of his place.

Lick grasped the desk before him, and held on.

"Let up!" he shouted.

"Boy!"

"Hands off! Don't I keep on telling you that you can't wallop a galoot from Texas!" roared Lick.

Mr. Dalton was a young master and an athlete, one. He wrenched Lick away from his hold with a swing of his powerful arm. Texas Lick came out before the class in a bundle, with his arms and legs flying. Mr. Dalton crashed him down on his feet.

"Oh, Jerusalem!" gasped Lick.

Evidently this was a surprise to him.

"Now hold me your hand!" thundered the Fourth Form-master.

"I'm sure not going to do anything of the sort!"

"For the last time, Lick."

"Oh, guff!"

"Then I shall cane you more severely for your disobedience," said Mr. Dalton.

"Let up, I tell you!" said Lick. "I ain't a galoot to be walloped! You can't do it!"

Mr. Dalton very promptly proved that he could do it—by doing it. The youth from Texas was grasped in his powerful hands and laid across the desk.

Texas Lick struggled. He struggled and wriggled and kicked. One of his kicks landed on Mr. Dalton's knee, and the Form-master gave a gasp of pain.

Then Lick was held down on the desk with a hand of iron, and Mr. Dalton's other hand, grasping the cane, rose and fell.

Whack! Whack! Whack!

Mr. Dalton did not run any risk of spoiling the Texan by sparing the rod. He laid on the strokes of the cane with a hefty hand.

Whack! Whack! Whack!

The dust rose from Texas Lick's trousers. Wild yells rose from Texas Lick.

Whack! Whack! Whack!

"Yarooooop! Let up!" roared Lick. "I guess I ain't standing this— Oh, Jerusalem! Oh, gum! Let up!"

Whack! Whack! Whack!

"Dickie Dalton's in a wax!" murmured Mernington. "I kinder guess and calculate that Lick is sorry he spoke."

Whack! Whack! Whack!

"Yooooop! Whooooop! Woorooooop!"

"Now, Lick—"

"Yow-ow-woooooop!"

"You will apologise at once for your impertinence!" rapped out Mr. Dalton.

"I guess not—"

Whack! Whack! Whack!

"Ow! Ow! Wow! Whoop!" snared Texas Lick. "Oh, great snakes! I guess I apologise, sir!"

"Very good."

Mr. Dalton allowed Texas Lick to slide off the desk and stand upon his feet again. The Texan stood wriggling with anguish.

"Now go back to your place, Lick, and remember that while you are at Rookwood

you must treat your Form-master with respect."

"Texas Lick groaned.

"Ow! I guess I'll remember that, boss! I reckon you've given me aughting to remember it by! Ow!"

"I am sorry to punish you, Lick. But you compelled me to do so."

"Ow! Ow! I guess I never reckoned you was such a hefty galoot, boss! I ain't arguing with you any more! Ow!"

"Go back to your place."

"Ow! Wow!"

Texas Lick limped back to his place amid a grinning class. He sat down, and jumped up again immediately. Mr. Dalton frowned at him.

"Sit down at once, Lick!"

"If you don't mind, boss—I mean, sir—I'd rather stand for a bit!" groaned Texas Lick.

"Oh! Ah! Yes! Very well, you may stand."

And Texas Lick stood. And he was still standing when the Fourth Form were dismissed. It was quite a long time before Texas Lick wanted to sit down.

CHAPTER 7.

Suspicious!

"I GUESS I ain't standing it!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. grinned.

They had come up to the end study after dinner, and they found Texas Lick there.

He was leaning against the window, apparently still disinclined to sit down.

There was a deep frown on his rugged brow.

"I ain't standing it," he repeated. "You can't wallop a free American. I guess I'm going to make that galoot sit up somehow!"

"What galoot?" asked Jimmy Silver, with a smile.

"That guy Dalton!"

"You're going to make Mr. Dalton sit up?" grinned Arthur Edward Lovell.

"How?"

"I guess I've been thinking that out," said Lick. "He ain't going to wallop a galoot from Texas, and don't you forget it. He's too hefty for me, but—"

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Rabby. "You shouldn't come to Rookwood if you don't want to toe the line!"

"And you've got to toe the line, anyhow," said Newcome.

"And the sooner you settle down to it the better for you," said Jimmy Silver.

Texas Lick shook his head.

"I guess I ain't taking a cow-hiding from any son of Johnny Bull," he answered. "Why, on our ranch in Texas—"

"You're not on your ranch in Texas now," interrupted Jimmy Silver. "You asked for a licking in the Form-room this morning, and you got it! Are you coming out with us this afternoon?"

"Yep! All the same—"

"Oh, chuck it!" said Lovell. "Dick Dalton is a good sort, and he wouldn't have licked you if you hadn't made him. Give it a rest!"

Texas Lick grunted and followed the Fistical Four from the study.

As a matter of fact, Jimmy Silver & Co. did not reject in the company of the youth from the wild and woolly West. But as he had been placed in their study, they felt that it was up to them to take him in hand a little. Lick caught up his Stetson hat as he followed the juniors, and donned that headgear as he went out. The school cap or the school topper did not seem to agree with Lick. It was much against the grain that he had changed into Elton.

"For goodness' sake, chuck that thing away, Lick!" exclaimed Arthur Edward Lovell impatiently. "You can't go round Rookwood wearing a Texas hat. Where's your cap?"

"Oh, guff!" answered Lick.

"You'll get called to order if a prefect spots you," said Rabby.

"I guess your prefects don't cut any ice with me."

"You guessed the Form-masters didn't, and you found out that they do," grinned Newcome.

Bulkeley of the Sixth was in the quad. He glanced at the Fistical Four and their companion, and came over to them.

"Take that hat off, Lick."

"What's the matter with it?" demanded Lick.

"Nothing. But we don't wear Stetson hats here. You must dress like the other fellows."

"Why?"

"Never mind why," said Bulkeley impatiently. "You are here to do as you're told."

"I guess not," answered Lick indus-

pendently. "That ain't good enough for a galoot from Texas."

"Are you taking that hat off?" asked the captain of Rookwood grimly.

"Nope!"

Bulkeley reached out for the hat. Texas Lick jumped back. The captain of Rookwood, head prefect of the school, stared at him in astonishment. He had already observed Lick of the Fourth, and observed that he was something new for Rookwood. But it had certainly not occurred to him that Lick did not understand the respect due to a Sixth Form prefect.

"Give me that hat at once!" he exclaimed angrily.

"Oh, come off!" said Lick derisively.

Bulkeley made a stride forward. Jimmy Silver hastily jerked off Lick's Stetson.

"It's all right, Bulkeley, here it is!"

"Gimme that hat!" roared Lick.

"This hat will be returned to you at the keep it for you. And I must warn fat Tubby to put on speed, and it was you, Lick, that you'd better not check a prefect again."

Bulkeley walked into the House with the Stetson, leaving Texas Lick staring after him angrily.

"Now get your cap and come along, you ass!" growled Lovell.

"I guess this mouldy old school makes me tired," grunted Texas Lick, but he fetched his cap and came along.

The chums of Rookwood walked out at the gates, and Lick sauntered along with them. He showed little interest in the surroundings. When he observed them, it was only to make a remark pointing out their infinite inferiority to things in Texas. The green hedges, above all, moved Lick's scorn.

"I guess we'd root all that up, and put in barbed wire," he remarked. "You galoots don't know how to make anything even of this little old ten-cent island you've got!"

"Oh, come on!" said Lovell.

"Don't you walk so posky, fast!" said Lick. "I don't want to risk falling off this little island!"

Thud, thud, thud!

"Hallo! There comes Tubby in a hurry!" said Baby.

Reginald Muffin of the Fourth was coming down the lane towards the Rookwood juniors, going at great speed. His cap was off, his face was crimson with exertion, and the perspiration poured down

his fat cheeks. It was quite unusual for the fat Tubby to put on speed, and it was clear that something had happened to alarm him.

He came up panting, and was rushing past the juniors, when Lovell caught him by the collar to stop him.

Tubby spun right round Lovell under the impetus of his rush, and curled up and set down in the lane with a bump.

"Ow!" he gasped.

"What's the row?" demanded Lovell. "What are you bolting for, you fat duffer?"

"Ow! The bull!"

"What bull?"

Tubby Muffin scrambled up.

"Former Outram's bull!" he spluttered. "He's loose!"

"Oh, rot!" said Jimmy Silver. "They're always careful with that black bull."

"I tell you he's loose!" howled Tubby.

"Don't stop me! Ow! Run for your lives!"

"Have you seen him?" asked Baby.

"No; a man told me he was loose, and told me to clear! I'm jolly well clearing, too!"

And Tubby Muffin rushed on, perspiring and panting, towards Rookwood.

Jimmy Silver looked up and down the lane and across the fields. There was no sign to be seen of Former Outram's black bull. That prize bull was well known in the locality, and known to be a dangerous animal; and the Rookwood juniors paused.

"If he's loose we'd better get back," said Newcome. "He gored a farmer's man once in a field."

"I suppose we'd better," said Jimmy.

Texas Lick burst into a laugh.

"Ha, ha, ha! You guys afraid of a bull?"

"No, we're not, you cheeky ass!" exclaimed Lovell angrily. "But it's no good running into a dangerous bull if he's loose. If the gate was left open he's in this lane somewhere."

"I guess I'm not skeered of a bull," grinned Texas Lick. "Your old bulls in this country ain't a circumstance to our bulls in Texas."

"Oh, blow Texas! We're hearing a lot too much of Texas!" snapped Newcome. "Let's get back, you fellows!"

"Come on, Lick!"

Lick laughed derisively.

"Get back if you like," he said. "I'm not going back. I reckon I'm not skeered."

"We're not scared, you dummy!" roared Arthur Edward Lovell.

"I guess you sure look scared!" chuckled Lick. "If I had my lasso with me—and I've got it in my box—I guess I'd rope that bull in, and show you 'uns how it's done."

"You've not got it with you!" snapped Jimmy Silver. "So come back with us, and don't play the goat!"

"Oh, run off and hide somewhere!" said Lick contemptuously, and he walked on up the lane towards Coombe.

The Fistical Four exchanged glances. They were very well aware that it was the height of folly to risk meeting a savage bull in that narrow lane. But they did not turn back to Rookwood now. The bumptious youth from Texas was not to be allowed to say that he had gone where Rookwood fellows dared not follow. With grim faces Jimmy Silver & Co hurried after Texas Lick.

CHAPTER II.

Some Riders.

"LOOK out!"

The five juniors were half-way to Coombe when a cyclist came tearing by them at top speed. It was Peele of the Fourth Form.

His face was white as he bent over the handle-bars and pedalled as if his life depended on it.

The juniors had just time to jump aside as Peele came rushing them down.

"Peele!" shouted Lovell angrily. "What

"The bull!"

Cyril Peele flung back that word as he rushed on, and the bike and its rider vanished towards Rookwood.

"Oh, my hat!" said Newcome. "Then

Newcome was interrupted. From a turning of the lane came a deep, heavy roar. It was the black bull—and he was close at hand. A second more and the bull was in sight. He came round the turning at a run, and was within ten feet of the juniors when they saw him—a huge, muscular, magnificent beast, as huge and powerful as any fighting bull in the arenas of Spain.

"Good heavens!" stuttered Lovell.

"Hook it!" panted Jimmy Silver.

But there was no time to "hook" it. The bull had seen them, and was evidently in a furious temper. Probably it had already

been hunted and harried since escaping from the field, and its temper—never good—had been exasperated to a pitch of fury. There was a rumbling roar, and the bull rushed at the group of juniors.

Jimmy Silver & Co. bolted through the hedge into the adjoining field, and a second later the bull was charging the hedge. In the field stood a large tree with low-hanging branches, swept clear of foliage by the winter wind. The juniors scrambled into the low boughs with frantic haste.

The Fistical Four were in the tree almost in the twinkling of an eye. But Texas Lick was late.

The Texan was good at many things—he could ride the wildest horses barebacked, he could flick a asp from a fellow's head with a stockwhip at six yards, he could handle a lasso in a masterly manner. But he was not good at climbing in a hurry. He caught a branch, lost his hold, and dropped back in the damp grass, as the bull came bursting through the hedge.

Texas Lick was on his feet in an instant, dodging round the thick trunk of the tree.

"Oh, gum!" he ejaculated. "If I had a gun!"

He made a spring for the branches, keeping the trunk between him and the bull. The savage animal came careering round as Lick strove to clamber up.

Jimmy Silver reached down and grasped the Texan by his collar.

Texas Lick was a good weight, but Jimmy put all his strength into the tug, and the Texan was dragged bodily off the ground.

"Catch hold!" panted Jimmy.

Lick-grasped the branch, and the bull's massive head struck his boots as he swung.

A moment more and Lick was on the branch, safe, out of danger.

"Gee-whie!" he ejaculated. "That was a close call, I guess!"

The bull paced under the tree, roaring.

"My hat!" said Ruby. "Lucky we got into this tree! You thumping idiot, Lick

"You howling ass, Lick!" shouted Lovell. "A pretty scrape you've got us into with your silly gas!"

"Oh, can it!" gasped Lick.

"We might be safe in Rookwood now!" exclaimed Newcome. "And with all your gas, you'd have been gored if Jimmy hadn't dragged you into the tree, you silly chump!"

"If I had my lasso here——"

"What's the good of flogging!" snorted Lovell. "You haven't got your silly lasso—only your silly self!"

"How long are we going to be treed, I wonder?" grunted Jimmy Silver.

"I guess I'm not going to be treed long," said Texas Lick coolly. "This hyer perch don't agree with me."

"Going to walk away with the bull there?" snorted Lovell.

"Nope, I'm going to ride."

"Ride!" yelled Lovell. "On what?"

"On the bull, I guess."

"On the bull?" gasped Lovell. "Mad?"

"I guess I've rode bulls before, on the plains in Texas," answered Lick. "This hyer bull may skaze you, but he ain't a circumstance to the bulls I've handled in Texas. You watch out."

"Look here, Lick—" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

"Can it!"

Lick lunged to the branch with his hands, while the bull roared below. The juniors watched him blankly. They had heard of Texas cowpunchers riding on the backs of bulls—indeed, they had seen such things on the films. Now, apparently, they were going to see it in reality.

"Stop!" shouted Jimmy.

"Oh, guff!"

Texas Lick chose the right moment, and dropped fairly on the back of the bull. Afraid of the animal, he held on with his knees, as when riding a barebacked horse.

"Now, you gee, you critter!" he shouted.

The bull, for a second, seemed too dazed to move. Then, with a roar, it leaped away and careered across the field, with the Texan schoolboy sticking like a limpet to its back.

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Lovell.

Texas Lick rode away on the almost frantic bull. How he maintained his strange seat was a mystery to the Rookwood juniors; but he did maintain it. Well they knew that if he fell he would be gored to death by the savage animal in a matter of moments. But, amazing as it was, he seemed in no danger of falling.

"Well, this beats Banagher!" said Now-come.

"It do, it does!" gasped Jimmy Silver. "I only hope the silly ass won't be killed."

"He seems to be sticking on!"

There was a shout in the distance, and a stout, gaunt farmer appeared in the field, with a labourer armed with a pitchfork. Evidently they were hunting the bull,

But the animal, maddened by the rider sticking to his back, was not to be caught. The black bull charged down on the farmer and his man with such savage determination that they jumped aside and let him pass.

They had entered by a gate, which was left open, and the bull rushed out into the road. Texas Lick still sitting on his back.

The Texan waved his cap to the Rookwooders as he was carried away. Bull and rider vanished from sight.

Jimmy Silver & Co. descended from the tree. They went back into the lane and stood irresolute. Texas Lick was out of sight, hidden by high hedges, and the juniors naturally wanted to get back to Rookwood and safety while the coast was clear. But they did not want to go back without the Texan.

"Bother the fellow!" growled Lovell. "All his silly fault that we're in this scrape at all!"

"He may be hurt," said Jimmy Silver anxiously. "I think we'd better look for him."

The juniors proceeded up the lane, with their eyes well about them, prepared to dodge if they sighted the bull again. But they did not sight the bull—they sighted Texas Lick. They found that youth sitting on a fence by the roadside, whistling. He nodded and grinned to the Fistical Four.

"Where's the bull?" demanded Lovell.

"Miles off by this time, I reckon," said Lick. "He was going real slick-like when I dropped off his back and nipped over this fence before he could turn on me."

"We thought you'd be killed—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lick. "Not this infant! That bull ain't a circumstance, I tell you, to the bulls I've handled in Texas."

"Oh, rot!" said Jimmy Silver. "I'm glad you're safe, anyhow. Now come back to the school."

"I guess I'm in no hurry."

"Well, we are," snapped Lovell. "You've got us into danger once, and we're fed up. Come on!"

"Nope!"

"You've got to come!" roared Lovell. Lick laughed.

"You galsots ramons if you're afraid of bulls. You leave me hyer."

"We're not going to leave you hyer," said Jimmy Silver. "Are you coming?"

"I'm sure not coming."

"Then you'll be taken. Collar him, you chaps!"

"Hyer, let up!" roared Texas Lick, as the Fistical Four grasped him, and dragged him off the fence. "You let up, you uns! You hear me yaup."

But the Fistical Four did not "let up," as the Texan expressed it. They grasped Texas Lick by his arms and his ears, and walked him off to the school. All the way to Hookwood, Texas Lick told them what he thought of them, loudly and with emphasis; but they did not heed. Lick was not released till they were inside the gates of Hookwood, and then he was lugged down in the quadrangle.

"Now you can go and eat coke, or anything else you like!" growled Jimmy Silver, and the Fistical Four walked on, leaving Texas Lick sitting on the ground, and still telling them what he thought of them.

CHAPTER 3.

A Surprise for Mr. Dalton.

"WHAT on earth's that?" Valentine Mornington asked the question. It was near tea-time, and Mornington had come upon Lick in the Fourth Form passage. Lick had a coiled rope on his arm, and Morny looked at him curiously.

"That!" said Lick. "I guess it's a rope."
"I can see it's a rope," said Mornington. "Somebody asked you to put up a clothes-line?"

"Oh, can it?" said Lick. "It's my lasso, that I brought with me from Texas."

"Can you handle it?" asked Morny, with interest.

Lick gave a snort.
"Can it?" he said. "I guess I could rope in a steer before I was six years old."

"Well, there are no steers here to be roped in," said Mornington, with a laugh. "I suppose you're not thinking of going out to hunt for Mr. Outram's black bull. Tubby Muffin says it is loose."

"I guess I'd rope in that bull for them if they asked me," answered Lick. "But I ain't stalkin' bulls now. I guess I'm after that galoot Dalton!"

"What?" yelled Mornington.
"If that galoot thinks he can wallop a free American citizen, he's missin' his guess," said Lick darkly. "Why, if I had him out on the ranch in Texas, I'd have pulled a gun on him!"
"Oh, gad!"

"I guess I'm goin' to rope him in, and make him sit up and take notice," said Lick. "You can come along and see the fun, if you like."

"You read duffer," exclaimed Mornington. "You'll be bogged and bunked from the school if you do anything of the kind."

Texas Lick shrugged his shoulders.

"I guess I'm carryin' on, all the same," he answered; and he walked down the passage with the coiled rope on his arm.

Mornington stared after him for a moment or two, and then, with a chuckle, strolled alone to the end study. The Fistical Four were there, making preparations for tea.

"Hallo! Trot in, Morny," said Jimmy Silver cordially. "Just in time for tea."

"I haven't come to tea," said Morny, laughing. "I understand that you fellows are the keepers of that potty Westerner, Lick."

"Well, he's in our study," said Jimmy. "We're trying to keep an eye on him. What's he up to now?"

"He's going to lasso Dicky Dalton for tickling him in the Form-room this morning."

"Who-a-s-ah!"

"So he says, at least," grinned Mornington. "If you think it's worth while to keep him from being sacked, you can go and stop him. I'd rather watch the fun myself. Dalton's in the quad now."

Jimmy Silver jumped up.

"The potty chump!" he exclaimed. "Come on, you chaps, we must stop him! We don't want him sacked."

"Let him be sacked, and blow him!" granted Lovell. "I want my tea."

"Oh, come on!"

Jimmy Silver ran out of the study, followed by his chums. Mornington followed on, laughing.

"Where is he, Meroy?" shouted Jimmy.

"I think he went downstairs."

Jimmy Silver & Co. ran down the staircase. Texas Lick was not to be seen indoors, and they ran out into the quadrangle. Mr. Dalton was standing by the beeches, talking with Mr. Greeley, the master of the Fifth Form. They were discussing the rumoured escape of Farmer Outram's black bull.

"If that dangerous animal is indeed loose, the school gates should be kept closed," Mr. Dalton was saying as the Fistical Four came along the path.

"Undoubtedly," agreed Mr. Greeley.

"It's all serene," whispered Lovell. "Only that duffer's gasp—or guff, as he would call it. There's Dicky Dalton safe and sound."

Jimmy Silver nodded, greatly relieved. The Texan was not to be seen in the quad, and they came to the conclusion that he had been pulling Mornington's leg. But Jimmy noticed the next moment that Mr. Greely was staring up curiously at the big beech tree close to which the two masters were standing.

"Upon my word, there is a boy in the tree!" exclaimed the Fifth Form master.

Jimmy Silver & Co. looked up, startled. There was Texas Lick. He was standing in a fork of the branches, and his lasso was in his hand. His eyes were fixed on Mr. Dalton, who looked up at the same moment. The Fourth Form-master frowned.

"Lick!" he shouted.

"Yoy!"

"You are not allowed to climb the beeches. Descend at once!"

Texas Lick did not answer. His right arm made a sudden swing, and the lasso flew.

Mr. Dalton was utterly unprepared for the lasso-cast, but had he been prepared he could scarcely have eluded it. The loop was over his head in a twinkling, and it dropped round his body, and instantly the rope was dragged taut.

The astonished Form-master lost his footing with the drag of the rope and rolled on the ground. Mr. Greely looked on, his eyes almost starting from his head with amazement.

"Oh, crumbs!" stuttered Lovell. "He's done it!"

"Rescue!" gasped Jimmy.

The chums of the Fourth rushed to the Form-master's aid. But there was no time to help him. Lick had taken a turn of the rope over a higher branch, and he was dragging on the end. The result was that Mr. Dalton was dragged from the ground, leaning back against the trunk, with his feet firmly planted in the fork of the branches. Lick dragged on the rope with all his weight and strength. With the gripping rope tight round his chest, the young master was lifted and swung clear of the ground, his brain in a whirl.

"Lick!" yelled Jimmy Silver.

"I guess this is where I come in," chuckled Texas Lick breathlessly. "I reckon that galoot won't wallow me again!"

"Boy!" shrieked Mr. Greely. "How

dare you! Release Mr. Dalton at once! Do you hear?"

"Oh! Ah! Help!" gasped Mr. Dalton.

He clutched at the rope with his hands, but with his weight on it he could not loosen the gripping noose. He swung helplessly.

There was a roar of laughter from Texas Lick in the tree. It was echoed by a crowd of Rookwood fellows who rushed to the spot.

"Roped in!" chuckled Mornington.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He's lassoed Dicky Dalton," shrieked Peele.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The boy must be mad!" gasped Mr. Greely. "Lick, I command you! Bulkeley, Neville!"

Bulkeley ran towards the beech, to climb up and deal with Lick. At the same moment there was a wild shout from the direction of the gates.

"The bull! Look out!"

The shout was followed by a rush of footsteps. Fellows on all sides were running for the houses. Old Mack had leaped into his lodge and banged the door and bolted it. In the wide gateway of Rookwood stood the escaped bull, huge, magnificent, its red eyes glaring with rage. From the road behind came a sound of shouting; from two or three directions the hunters were closing in on the bull.

But the school gates, unfortunately, stood open, as they generally did on half-holidays, and there was nothing to prevent the entrance of the bull. Certainly old Mack, the porter, had no intention of trying to prevent it. Old Mack palpitated behind a bolted door.

In a twinkling the crowd round the beech broke up as the bull charged in at the gateway. Mr. Greely, portly and dignified as he was, headed a rush for the School House, and he put on a speed that was remarkable and creditable in a gentleman of his years and circumference. In a moment or two the spot was clear save for Mr. Dalton, swinging on the rope, with his toes touching the ground.

He could make no movement to escape. The bull, bellowing, with lowered head, charged after the fleeing crowd. Jimmy Silver took a hurried glance back, thinking of the helpless Form-master. But what he saw was a lowered head only six yards behind him, and he put on a desperate

burst of speech. He could not help Dicky Dalton by staying to be gored, and he went up the steps of the School House almost as if he were flying.

In a jamming crowd, the Hookwooders poured into the House, and Mr. Greeley and several fellows fumbled in wild haste with the big door. But the door was not needed. The bull stopped at the steps, and stood there roaring, with a roar that rang like thunder through the quadrangle of Hookwood.

CHAPTER 15.

Lick in the Limelight

"GEE-WHIZ!"

Texas Lick uttered that exclamation as the crowd below scattered before the rush of the bull. Bulkeley of the Sixth was the only one that remained. He was already climbing the tree when the bull appeared, and for him the path of safety lay upward. He clambered into the branches breathlessly.

"Some scare, what!" grinned Lick.

He stared after the bull. The animal was roaring at the School House steps. The quadrangle was clear now. From doors and windows in the School House and in Mr. Mander's House scared eyes stared at the terrible animal.

From the steps the bull swung round, its red and furious eyes seeking a victim. Five or six men appeared in the distant gateway the gaitered farmer and his men armed with pitchforks, one of them with a gun. The bull did not heed them. He had sighted Mr. Dalton suspended from the beech, and he was careering back towards the spot whence the crowd had scattered.

"Gee-whiz!" said Texas Lick again, and for a moment his sunburnt face paled.

Then he shouted to Bulkeley.

"Bear a hand here, pard! Help me with the rope!"

Bulkeley did not answer—there was no time for speech. He grasped the lasso with his powerful hands, and put all his force into the pull. With Bulkeley and Lick pulling together with all their strength, the lassoed Form-master was swung high above the ground. The rope was over a high branch, and the pull brought Mr. Dalton up into the lower branches, where Texas Lick and Bulkeley stood.

It was none too soon. Less than a minute after Mr. Dalton had been dragged up into the big beech the bull was careering below.

"I guess that was a close call!" gasped Texas Lick.

Bulkeley helped the dazed Form-master to a secure fork in the branches, and Mr. Dalton was released from the lasso. He was too sobbing and breathless to speak, but the look he gave the cheerful youth from Texas was a very expressive one.

Texas Lick, astride of a branch, drew in his lasso and coiled it. As he did so he watched the bull.

The farmer and his men were in the quadrangle now, closing in on the bull. But as the infuriated animal turned upon them with flaming eyes and lowered head they broke away and scattered. One of the men had a narrow escape of being gored, leaping into the fountain just in time, and rolling, drenched, in the great granite basin.

"I guess that animal's going to give some trouble," chuckled Texas Lick. "I reckon his dander is riz, and he won't be skered home by a guy with a pitchfork!"

He looped the lasso on his arm, and swung to the lowest branch of the beech.

"Lick!" exclaimed Mr. Dalton.

"Yey!"

"Where are you going?"

"After the bull, I reckon."

"Are you mad, boy? Stay where you are! You are safe in the tree," snapped the Form-master.

"I guess I've got my rope byre, sir. I'm going to rope him in, same as I did yon, boss," chuckled Lick.

"You will do nothing of the kind!" gasped Mr. Dalton. "I forbid you to leave this tree, Lick."

"Oh, can it, boss!" said Lick coolly.

"You don't know what you're talking about."

"What! What!"

"Lick, yin cheeky young rascal!" explained Bulkeley.

"Give it a rest," said Lick. "Chin-mag cuts no ice with me when there's a job to be done, I can tell you! On our ranch in Texas that bull would have been roped in in two shakes of a beaver's tail. I guess I'm going to show you 'uns how to handle a bull."

"I forbid you, Lick! Bulkeley, seize him!" exclaimed the master of the Fourth.

Bulkeley made a grasp at the Texas, but

he was too late. Lick dropped from the low branch to the ground.

"Good heavens! He will be killed!" exclaimed Mr. Dalton as the Texan schoolboy, with his lariat in his hand, ran lightly towards the careering bull.

"He's got pluck, sir," said Berkeley. "It's possible he can do as he says."

"If the bull attacks him I must go to his aid," said Mr. Dalton, and he prepared to drop from the tree.

The bull, careering round in search of a victim, watched on all sides by anxious eyes, speedily sighted the Texan schoolboy running towards him. He turned on the Texan at once.

Lick stopped, and watched him coolly.

Every eye was on the Texan now with breathless interest. Texas Lick was enjoying himself. To be the cynosure of all eyes, to shew off in all the school what he could do, just "jumped," as he would have expressed it, with his inclinations.

Even when the bull, with red, savage eyes, charged down on him, the Texan found time to wave his hand airily at the crowd of faces at the School House windows.

"Swank!" growled Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Pluck, too!" said Jimmy Silver. "Yes, rather! If he can handle that bull, he's the real goods," said Mornington. "Oh, and!"

For a moment it looked as if the charge of the maddened bull would sweep the Texan helplessly away. But a quick, active leap aside saved Lick, and the bull, with lowered head, went thundering past him. Texas Lick spun round on him, and the lasso flew with an unerring aim.

Right over the massive head and horns the loop circled, and slid round the great muscular neck of the bull.

The rope flew out taut as the bull thundered on. Against that powerful pull the Texan could not have held it for a moment. But he knew what he was about. He was standing close by a tree, and as the rope flew out Texas Lick took a turn of it round the trunk, and then another rapid turn.

The double turn of the rope, with Lick holding the end, held it as fast as a knot. The rope loosened, and sang almost like a harp-string as it stretched. The wild career of the bull was suddenly stopped. With the immense strain on it looked as if the rope must snap, but it did not. That same

lasso had held many a struggling steer on the plains of Texas, and it was more than equal to the strain.

Crash!

Over went the black bull, sprawling helplessly on the ground, and roaring with rage.

"Ges-whis! I guess that's done the trick!" exclaimed the Texan.

He coolly knotted the end of the rope round the tree-trunk. By the time he had finished, the maddened animal had struggled to its feet. It came whirling back towards the Texan at furious speed. Texas Lick walked away with his back to the bull.

He did not run.

With the eyes of all Hookwood upon him, that was a magnificent moment for the bumptious Westerner.

He just walked.

Behind him the bull came thundering, while Texas Lick strolled, with his hands in his pockets, towards the School House.

Texas Lick knew the length of the rope, he knew its strength, and he knew that he was out of reach of the bull's charge if the rope held. And he was quite certain that it would hold. Had it snapped, the horns of the savage brute would have been in his back in a second more. Sure as he was of the rope, it required an iron nerve to walk calmly away with his back to the savage bull behind him. He did not even glance round.

Twang!

The rope sang as the charging bull drew it to full length from the tree, his horns only a few yards behind the Texan.

But the rope held, and the sudden wrench threw the bull off his feet again, and he went down with a crash and a roar.

As if unconscious of his proximity, Texan Lick strolled on towards the School House, not giving the bull a look.

He came up the steps and grinned cheerily at the swarm of fellows in the doorway.

"I guess it's all O.K., now!" he remarked airily. "You 'uns needn't worry about that pesky bull. He's roped."

CHAPTER 11.

Called to Account!

JIMMY SILVER & Co. watched the roped bull as if fascinated. The animal had struggled up again, puzzled and enraged by the strange hold that held him to the tree. Again and again the bull

sought to rush away, and again and again he was hurled to the ground by the tautening of the lasso. And the tightening of the noose about his neck was almost choking him now.

The great brute's strength and fury were a terrible sight to behold. The juniors almost held their breath as they watched. There was little doubt that the bull might have done fearful damage before he was captured had he not been roped in by the Texan schoolboy.

Farmer Outram and his men were gathering round the bull now, keeping out of the radius of the rope. They waited for the great animal to exhaust his strength in his futile efforts to escape.

"They've got him!" said Lovell at last.

The bull, exhausted, half throttled, was seized at last by the farmer and his men. Several ropes were tied to him, and the farmer held on to the lasso. In the midst of his captors, the subdued brute was led away, and disappeared out of the gates.

Glad enough were the Rookwooders to see him go. Old Mack rushed out of his lodge and slammed and locked the gates, on the principle, apparently, of bolting the stable door after the horse had been stolen. The quadrangle was soon swarming with Rookwood fellows again, excitedly discussing the startling happening.

Texas Lick seemed, like the celebrated young lady at the tea party, to "swell visibly." There was no doubt that Lick had acted well and bravely, and there was still less doubt that Lick felt that he was entitled to "swank."

"That was plucky, kid," said Bulkeley of the Sixth as he passed the Texan.

"It sure was!" agreed Lick.

And Bulkeley grinned as he walked on.

But a few minutes later a message reached Lick that he was wanted in the Head's study. Lick nodded complacently.

"I guess the old guy figures it out that he's bound to put in a few words," he remarked. "I reckon he's never seen a bull handled like that before in all his natural."

"You awful ass!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "The Head wants to see you about handling Dicky Dalton, of course."

Texas Lick shrugged his shoulders.

"I guess I'm going to handle any galoot that lays his paws on me!" he answered.

And he walked away to the Head's study.

He found Mr. Dalton in the presence of Dr. Chisholm. There was a deep frown

on the doctor's face, and Mr. Dalton looked troubled.

"Lick," exclaimed Dr. Chisholm sternly, "from the window of my study I saw your action—"

"Yep," said Lick. "I guess I handled the animal all right, sir."

The Head coughed.

"I am referring to your attack on your Form-master, Mr. Dalton. I was about to come out and deal with you when the bull appeared."

"And then you reckoned you'd wait a bit, sir!" chuckled Lick. "I guess you was wise. The bull would have made shavings of you before you could have said, 'No sugar in mine.'"

"You have dared to raise your hand against your Form-master, Lick!"

"Not my hand, sir, only a rope," said Lick.

"Have you any excuse to offer?"

"Heaps! That guy—"

"What!"

"Mr. Dalton, sir, he walloped me this morning. I figured it out that I would get level. And I guess I did, just a few!"

"Blow my soul!"

Dr. Chisholm stared at Texas Lick over his glasses. He was already aware that Lick was a new and strange inhabitant for a school like Rookwood. But this reply almost took his breath away.

"You—you justify your conduct on the grounds that Mr. Dalton punished you?" he articulated at last.

"Yep."

"Very well," said the Head. "It is evident, Lick, that you are not suited to Rookwood, and that Rookwood is not suited to you. I shall communicate by telephone with your father's agent in London, and you will leave the school to-morrow morning."

"Gee-whizz!" ejaculated Lick.

"That is all. You may go, Lick!" said the doctor, with a wave of the hand.

Lick hesitated. Somehow he did not seem to have anticipated that his retaliation upon his Form-master would lead to his dismissal from the school. He looked dismayed.

Mr. Dalton broke in.

"I should certainly have expected you, sir, to expel this boy from the school for his outrageous conduct," he said.

"But—"

"I could do no less, Mr. Dalton."

"Quite so, sir. But as it happens the boy acted very bravely in securing the bull. I am afraid that lives might have been lost but for his action. I think he has, to some extent, atoned for his lawless conduct. So far as I am concerned, sir, I should be willing to overlook his conduct towards myself for this once, if you thought fit to give him another chance here."

Dr. Cushman hesitated.

"The boy certainly acted bravely, and doubtless prevented serious damage from being done," he agreed. "But—but—"

"I guess you're a real white man, Mr. Dalton!" said Texas Lick cheerfully. "I don't mind saying, sir, that I'm sorry I handled you. I reckon I ain't used to Rookwood ways yet. It's a pesky big change from Texas."

"That is certainly true," said the Head. "At Mr. Dalton's request, Lick, I will give you another chance."

"Thank you, sir!"

"But any repetition of such conduct——" added the Head, in a terrific voice. He did not finish, leaving the rest to Lick's imagination.

"Sacked!" asked Jimmy Silver as the Texan strolled into the end study for tea.

Lick shook his head.

"Not this time. I guess I went a bit over the limit. That guy Dalton is a real white man. I guess I'm going to be real nice to him after this. He put in a word for me with the old guy."

"More than you deserved," said Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Oh, guff!" said Texas Lick.

And he sat down, cheerfully to tea.

CHAPTER 12.

Lick Settles the Point!

"WHAT about Lick?"

Jimmy Silver asked that question in the end study.

The Fistical Four of Rookwood were discussing the Christmas holidays, close at hand now.

Texas Lick, their new study-mate, was not in the end study just then. The chums of the Fourth were not sorry for it. When Lick was in the study most of the talking was done by Texas Lick.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome did not answer Jimmy Silver's question. But they looked at Jimmy rather expressively.

They did not dislike Texas Lick. But they felt that it was possible to have too much of a good thing; even if Texas Lick was a good thing, which was by no means certain.

"Well, what about him?" asked Lovell rather gruffly, after a long pause.

Jimmy Silver coughed.

"You fellows are coming home with me for the hols," he said.

"That's settled," said Raby.

"Lick can't go back to Texas for the Christmas vacation," Jimmy Silver remarked in a casual sort of way.

"I dare say his people knew that when they sent him over here," observed Arthur Edward Lovell, also in a casual sort of way.

Jimmy coughed again.

"A bit rotten for a fellow, sticking at the school through the hols, with nobody to talk to excepting the housekeeper and the porter," he ventured.

"Oh, that won't matter to Lick!" said Newcome. "So long as he can talk he doesn't care who the victim is."

Jimmy laughed.

"Yes; but——"

"Oh, get it off your chest!" said Lovell with a grin. "You want to plant that wild and woolly merchant on us for the hols."

"Nunno! But——"

"Well, it's your place, and you can ask anybody you like," said Lovell. "It's not for us to say."

"Don't get your back up, old chap!" said Jimmy Silver. "If you don't want Lick, I won't ask him. But——"

"Oh, bother the fellow!" said Lovell restively. "Don't we have enough of him at Rookwood? Have we heard anything for weeks excepting his voice, talking through his blessed Western nose? Do you want him at the Priory, telling your pater how much better they would manage the place in America?"

"Well, he's sort of planted on us, being in our study," said Jimmy. "And he's not a bad chap in his way."

"His way isn't our way."

Jimmy Silver looked rather uncomfortable. He felt that it was up to him, in a way, to ask the Texan schoolboy home for the Christmas holidays. But it was quite clear that his chums had enough of Texas

Lick at Rockwood, and wanted a rest from him during the vacation—which was really not to be wondered at, as Jimmy admitted. Texas Lick had plenty of good qualities. But there was, as Lovell expressed it, much too much of him.

"Well, I won't ask him, then," said Jimmy Silver at last. "I didn't like to think of the chap sticking at Rockwood through the hole, that's all."

"You're too jolly tender-hearted, Jimmy," said Lovell chidingly. "You've got a way of taking other people's troubles on your shoulders. A fellow's own troubles are heavy enough to carry, as a rule."

"I must say I agree with Lovell for once," remarked Raby.

And Arthur Newcome nodded assent.

"Hallo! Here he comes!" said Jimmy hastily.

There was a heavy tread in the Fourth Form passage, and Texas Lick, of Texas, came into the study. The cowpuncher schoolboy always seemed to make the study shake when he came into it.

He gave the Pictorial Four a cheery nod.

"Hallo, you guys!" he greeted. "I guess I want to speak to you, Jimmy Silver."

"No charge," said Jimmy. "Go ahead."

"We're just on breaking up for Christmas."

"Tell us something we don't know," suggested Lovell.

"I guess I've been thinking about it some, went on Texas Lick, unheeding. "I'm a stranger in this little island, and, of course, I've never seen an English Christmas. I reckon I shan't be long in this country—couldn't stand it for long, you know. Sort of suffocates a real live American—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"That's the how of it," said Texas Lick.

"But I guess I want to take the chance of seeing a British Christmas before I leave. Savvy? Now you go in for that sort of thing when you're at home, Silver?"

"Oh, yes! Oh, yes!"

"Father Christmas, and dances, and Christmas-tree, and holly and mistletoe, and, in fact, the whole bag of tricks!" asked the Texan.

"Something of the sort."

"Like me to come with you?"

"Oh?"

"I guess it would be all O.K. for me. Say the word, and I'll come home with you for the holidays."

"Oh!"

Texas Lick sat on the edge of the table, which creaked ominously under his weight, and regarded the captain of the Fourth inquisitively.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome exchanged rather queer glances.

It could not be said that Texas Lick was fishing for invitations. He came straight to the point; there was no mistake about that.

"Waal, is it a cinch?" asked Lick, as Jimmy Silver did not seem in a hurry to reply. "I guess it will wake up your folks some to have a real live American in the shebang. What?"

"Oh!" gasped Jimmy.

"Well, my hat!" said Lovell.

That was all he could say. It was evident that Texas Lick considered that his company at Christmas would be something in the nature of a treat for the captains of the Rockwood Fourth.

Jimmy hesitated and cast an appealing look at his chums. Raby and Newcome grinned and nodded, implying that they left it to Jimmy. Arthur Edward Lovell grunted.

"Anybody else going with you, Silver?" asked Lick.

"Yes, these fellows."

"I guess I'll be glad of their company," said Texas Lick graciously. "They're jays; but everybody in this ten-cent island is a jay, more or less. Is it a cinch?"

Jimmy looked at Lovell. That youth had an inward struggle. He did not want Texas Lick's company during the Christmas holidays. But he was well aware that if the tender-hearted Jimmy did not ask him, nobody else would; and he felt a little impunctation at the idea of Lick being stranded at the deserted school for a dismal vacation.

"Do as you like, Jimmy," said Lovell at last.

"Right-ho!"

Jimmy turned to Lick.

"I'll be glad if you'll come home with me for Christmas, Lick," he said politely.

Lick nodded.

"It's a cinch," he said. "I guess I've told the popper that I'm studying the customs of this queer little country while I'm over here. I reckon I shall make them laugh no end in Texas when I get back. It's settled."

Lick slid off the table, and strolled out of the study. Raby and Newcome chuckled. Lovell frowned, and Jimmy Silver burst into a laugh.

"Well, we're lauded with him now!" growled Lovell. "I must say you're an ass, Jimmy! In fact, you're a silly ass! A lurching ass, if you don't mind my saying so! There never was such a howling ass at Rookwood as you are, Jimmy!"

And Jimmy Silver rather wondered whether Arthur Edward Lovell, for once, was right!

CHAPTER 12.

ON for the Holidays!

"THAT'S the Fifth Form brake."

"Is it?" said Texas Lick.

"Yes, it is."

"I guess that cuts no ice with you."

Texas Lick tossed a bag—a "grip," as he called it—into the waiting brake. There was a cheery buzz of voices all about Rookwood School—a hurrying of feet, a dumping of bags. Rookwood was breaking up for Christmas, and the fellows were scattering to the four corners of the three kingdoms. There was frost in the air, and a keen wind, but everybody looked merry and bright.

Texas Lick looked as merry and bright as anyone. He came out with the Fiscal Four in great spirits. There were several brakes—one had already started, loaded over the Plimsol line, as Arthur Edward Lovell expressed it. Some of the fellows were going by the local train from Coombe—others were going in the brakes direct to Latcham Junction—but there were not enough brakes to go round.

"Take that bag out, you cheeky young ass!" called out Hanson, of the Fifth wrathfully and indignantly, as he observed Lick's action.

"Oh, guff!" said Lick.

"By gad!" said Hanson.

He came at Lick, intending in a stew that cool youth in the quadrangle.

But Jimmy Silver & Co. intervened. They were in great spirits, and quite ready for a little rag with the Fifth on break-up day. They collared Hanson, and sat him down hard.

"Now rope in that brake," said Lick.

"But it's booked for the Fifth," said Conroy.

"What does that matter?"

"Oh, my hat! The Fifth think it matters!"

"Now the Fifth!"

Lick had brought a good many rather lawless ideas along with him from the plains of Texas. As a rule, Jimmy Silver & Co. were busily engaged in checking the lawless propensities of their wild and woolly study-mate. But for once his suggestion "jumped" with their own inclinations. It was quite in accordance with the traditions of the end study to wind up the term with a glorious rag.

"Good egg!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "After all, who are the Fifth?"

"Who indeed?" grinned Mornington.

"Men seniors!" chuckled Puffy Grace.

"Collar the brake!" shouted Lovell, catching on at once.

"Hurrah!"

Texas Lick's "stunt" spread like wildfire among the merry Fourth-Formers. There was a rush for the brake.

Jimmy Silver & Co. and Texas Lick were the first on board. Mornington and Errol came next, and Conroy, Puffy Grace, Rawson, Townsend and Topham, Peels and Gower, Tommy Dodd and Cook and Boyle, and then a whole swarm of the Fourth, Classical and Modern.

They fairly swamped the brake.

Hanson of the Fifth staggered to his feet and shouted to them in tones of fury:

"Get out! Get out of that brake! That's the Fifth Form brake! Get out, you young scoundrels!"

But the voice of Edward Hanson was as the voice of one crying in the wilderness. It was drowned by the cheers of the Fourth.

"Here, I say, young gentlemen!" exclaimed the brake-driver, who was standing by his horses.

"Jump on and drive!" shouted Lovell.

"Don't do anything of the kind!" shrieked Hanson.

"I guess that guy isn't wanted," exclaimed Texas Lick. "I've drove wagons behind a team of Mexican burros on the prairie. I guess I can handle this lyer old horse."

He grasped the whip and the reins.

"Go it, Lick!" yelled the juniors.

"Hurrah!"

"Look 'ere—" shouted the driver.

"Stand clear!"

Texas Lick cracked the whip, and the horses moved. The driver jumped back in alarm.

"Stop!" roared Hanson.

"Halt!"

"Go it, Lick!"

"Boys! Boys!" shouted Mr. Dalton, appearing in the doorway of the School House.

But for once the Fourth were deaf to the voice of their Form-master. The brake slowed down the drive towards the gates.

"Merry Christmas, sir!" roared Lovell. "Good-bye!"

"Drive on, Lick!"

"Stop!" yelled Hanson. "Here, Lumsden, Talboys! Come out! Stop those young villains! They've got our brake!"

Half a dozen of the Fifth rushed after the brake. The big vehicle was in rapid motion now, and Texas Lick was handling the two rather powerful horses like one born to the task. There were shouts and cheers from all sides as the brake rolled down the drive to the gates.

"Put it on, Lick!" shouted Lovell.

"Mind the gates!"

"Look host, you!" shouted old Mack, the porter, at the gates. "Don't you have a clinking hackintosh! You—"

"Get aside!"

Old Mack jumped out of the way. At a thundering speed, but with mastery skill, Texas Lick took the brake out of the gates into the road, with Hanson & Co. of the Fifth panting behind.

"Stop!" yelled Hanson.

"Yah!"

"Go and eat coke!"

"We're off!" yelled Lovell in high delight. "Good-bye, the Fifth!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Hanson of the Fifth put on a desperate spurt. He reached the brake, and held on behind, his feet dragging on the road.

"Stop!" he panted.

"Sheer off!" shouted Lovell.

"Stop! I—I—"

"Let me get at him!" said Petty Grace.

Grace extended an orange from his pocket and leaned over the panting Fifth-Former as he hung on behind. Gaily and cheerfully he squeezed the orange over Hanson's face and down his neck.

"Ow!" gasped Hanson. "Groogh! You—ooh—you young villain! I—I—I'll gag-gug-gug-gug—"

Hanson fairly choked, as Petty of the Fourth rammed what was left of the orange into his open mouth. Lovell leaned over and flattened the hat on his head.

"Groogh! Ow! Gug-gug!"

Hanson let go, and sat down in the road. The brake rolled on and left him

there, the crowd of juniors sending back catcalls and yells.

"What larks!" chuckled Lovell. "I say, Lick, don't land us in the ditch!"

"I guess we're getting a move on," answered Lick. "We ain't letting the brake ahead beat us to the station."

"That's the Sixth—"

"Who cares for the Sixth?"

"Nobody, on the last day of term," said Jimmy Silver, laughing. "Beat 'em if you can."

"I reckon I'm going to beat 'em to a frazzel!"

The horses were fairly galloping now, with the brake rocking behind. Ahead in the frosty road appeared the brake that had started first—a brake that belonged to the seniors, and had many members of that most important of Forms, the Sixth, on board. Some of the Sixth stared back at the juniors' brake, surprised to see a junior driving, and probably still more surprised by the speed he was putting on.

Texas Lick waved his whip.

"Clear the road, there!" he shouted.

Knowles of the Sixth stood up in the front brake.

"Pull in, you juniors!" he shouted back.

"Rats!" roared the Fourth.

"What?" yelled Knowles.

"Go and eat coke, Knowlesy! Who cares for prefects now!" howled Lovell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The pursuing brake drew closer. Coombe Lane was not planned for a rush of traffic; there was room for two vehicles to pass one another, but only just room. Two big brakes taxed the road's capacity to its utmost. For one brake to pass another at the gallop was asking for trouble. But Texas Lick always was asking for trouble.

He cracked his whip, and the brake rushed on.

"Stop, there!" roared Knowles.

"Stop, you young asses!" shouted Neville of the Sixth.

"Go it, Lick! Beat the Sixth!"

The whole crew of the Fourth Farm brake—once the Fifth Farm brake—were reckless. Even Townsend and Topham, elegant knuts as they were, waved their hats and yelled. With a roar of voices and a clattering of hanks, the brake swept down the frosty road, to the wild, incessant cracking of Texas Lick's whip.

The driver of the brake ahead pulled in as close as he could to the roadside. He left the pursuer just room.

"Keep on, driver!" shouted some of the seniors. "Don't let that brake pass!"

But the driver was not a reckless junior of Rockwood; he did not mean to gallop at breakneck speed. He was going fast—and he slowed instead of putting on more speed.

The Fourth Form brake came abreast.

"You cheeky young rascals!" shouted Knowles.

"Rats!"

Texas Lick flicked with his whip. Knowles' hat was plucked off, and landed in the ditch. There was a yell of laughter from the Fourth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"1-1-1—" gasped Knowles.

"Go it, Lick!"

The brake thundered on. Some of the seniors shook their fists. A dozen of the juniors groped in their pockets for nuts and oranges and other missiles. A volley whizzed among the great man of the Sixth, answered by shouts of wrath and dire threats of what should happen next term. Then the Fourth Form brake was past.

Knowles, hatless, furious, stood up and shook his fist after the victors in the race. A bump of the brake made him sit down suddenly, and he disappeared among a jungle of feet. A roar of laughter floated back from the heroes of the Fourth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good-bye, Knowles!"

"Merry Christmas!"

And the brake rushed on, and Knowles' voice was lost in the distance behind; which was perhaps just as well, for the remarks that Knowles hurled after the juniors were certainly not wishes for a merry Christmas.

CHAPTER 14.

The Ghost of the Priory!

"HOSTS!"

"Yes."

"Oh, guff!"

Apparently Texas Lick did not believe in ghosts. Neither did Jimmy Silver & Co., of course. Yet there was something in Texas Lick's derisive chuckle that irritated them.

Lick was installed at the Priory, Jimmy Silver's home, for Christmas. Mr. Silver sometimes regarded the Texas junior rather curiously—Mrs. Silver did not know quite what to make of him. Cousin Phyllis seemed interested in him, somewhat as if he were a new and curious kind of zoological specimen.

But Lick was enjoying himself.

Christmas festivities were quite enjoyable at Jimmy Silver's home, and Lick was having a good time, as he freely admitted. Also he was studying the manners and customs of the amusing little island in which he found himself, which was so inferior to anything on the other side of the "pond."

There had been a heavy fall of snow, and the woods and fields round the Priory were banked with white. The keen December wind howled round the rambling old building, and shrieked among the chimney-pots and whined in the wide old-fashioned chimney under which a fire of great logs crackled and roared. Outside was snow, and cold, and deep December darkness—within all was bright and cheery. The hour was growing late, and ghost stories had been told; and then came up the topic of the ghost of the Priory. Texas Lick was interested—and derisive. The story of the phantom Prior who haunted at Christmascide, the scene of his earthly sojourn, made him grin.

"Guff!" said Lick. "I guess you 'uns must be pretty soft if you swallow that guff. Come off!"

"Lots of people say they've seen it," granted Lovell.

"Lots of jays, you mean!"

Lovell closed one eye at Jimmy Silver.

"What price Lick going out and walking along the terrace, where the giddy ghost walks?" he asked. "As he doesn't believe in the jolly old phantom—"

"Good egg!" grinned Jimmy Silver.

"I guess it's a bit too cold and windy—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look hyer, if you guys figure it out I'm skinned—"

"Oh, and! Not at all!" grinned Raby.

"Certainly not!" said cousin Phyllis, but she smiled.

"The hour is getting late," observed Mr. Silver. "I think you young people had better be off to bed!"

And the young people obeyed the hint, and with cheery good-nights, cleared off to their sleeping-quarters.

Lovell and Baby and Newcome came into Jimmy Silver's room for a chat before going to bed. There was a cheery fire in the room, and the Fustical Four of Rookwood drew their chairs round it. Texas Lick looked in, and Jimmy politely pulled up a chair to the fire for him.

"Ghosts!" grinned Lick. "Still talking ghosts?"

"What about that trot on the terrace?" grinned Lovell.

"I ain't scared to do it."

"Well, do it, then," suggested Lovell. "You don't believe in ghosts, you know. And you've got more pluck in your fingertips than anybody in this little island in his whole body. Isn't that so?"

"Sure!"

"Only it's too cold and windy!" grinned Lovell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Texas Lick reddened.

"I guess I'm going," he exclaimed, jumping up.

"Bow-wow!"

"Real business," said Lick. "Your popper's locked up the house, though, Silver—how's a galoot to get out?"

"I'll show you a window on the terrace," said Jimmy. "But—"

"I'm on."

Jimmy Silver shook his head.

"Better chuck it," he said. "There might be a ghost, you know—"

"Oh, can it," said Texas Lick. "I guess I'll walk from one end of the pesky terrace to the other. You can't steer a galoot from Texas with your pesky ghosts."

"Better put a thick coat on," said Lovell.

"I guess I'll do that."

Texas Lick went to his room. After he was gone there was some whispering and chuckling among the juniors in Jimmy Silver's room. When Lick came out of his room he found Jimmy Silver waiting for him in the corridor, with an electric torch in his hand.

"Ready?" whispered Jimmy.

"Sure!"

"Come on, then!"

Jimmy Silver led the way downstairs. All lights were out, all doors and windows

shadows there came a creak, and a low, groaning sound.

Texas Lick started.

"What's that?"

"Was it anything?" murmured Jimmy.

"I guess it was something like a groan."

"Oh, come on!"

Jimmy led the way in the gloom to the window on the terrace. Carefully and quietly he unfastened it, and opened the casement. Texas Lick, muffled up to the ears in a thick overcoat, looked out and shivered a little. The haunted terrace ran the whole length of the house, dim and dark in the December night, thick with snow, swept by the keen wind. It was not an inviting prospect.

"You drop out here!" said Jimmy.

"I guess I'm ready."

"Go it!"

Texas Lick climbed out of the window—slowly, perhaps incommoded by his big overcoat. He dropped into the snow under the window.

"It'll take you ten minutes to walk to the end and back," whispered Jimmy Silver, from above. "If you see the ghost—"

"Oh, guff!"

"If you get scared, run back to this window and I'll help you in."

"I guess no pesky ghost could scare me."

The window closed.

Texas Lick was left alone in the snow and the darkness. He blinked round him, and started along the dark terrace, his footfalls making scarcely a sound in the carpet of snow.

From the December darkness came the howl of the wind and the groaning of the trees. Mingled with these sounds there came another sound—a groan deeper than that of a tormented branch.

Groan!

Texas Lick started convulsively.

But he set his teeth and strode on firmly, farther and farther away from the inhabited portion of the rambling old building, nearer and nearer to the ruined whig, the haunt of bats and owls.

Suddenly from the darkness there came a strange gleam of light.

A dim, phosphorescent glow made itself seen, and Texas Lick came to a dead halt as he beheld it before him.

By that dim glow he made out a dark figure of which he could barely discern the

oullions—a figure draped in a long, dark, flowing robe.

A ghastly face, white as the face of the dead, glimmered in the midst of the phosphorescent glow—a face dim, shadowy, deathlike.

Lick stood motionless.

Round him the wind howled, and the flakes of snow dropped on him unheeded.

As if rooted to the terrace he stood, while the spectre figure advanced on him, with the right arm stretched out under the dark robe, a finger pointing at the motionless junior.

Still Texas Lick did not move—he seemed frozen. Only his right hand slid under his coat and seemed to grasp something there, as, with a low, wailing groan the phantom figure bore down upon him.

CHAPTER 15.

Laying the Ghost!

"H E'S seen it!"

Raby repeated the words.

Three Rookwooders were clustered at a window looking over the haunted terrace. Jimmy Silver, Raby and Newcome pressed their faces to the panes and watched, thrilling with excitement. Arthur Edward Lovell was not with them.

In the darkness without, broken by the gleaming of the snow, the three juniors could see little. But they discerned the phosphorescent glimmer, and they followed breathlessly the gliding motion of the phantom. And faintly in the shadows they made out the figure of Texas Lick, standing motionless as if frozen with terror, his eyes fixed on the dread form that was gliding towards him.

"Lick doesn't seem quite so bursting with awank just now," murmured Newcome. Raby chuckled softly.

Jimmy Silver's brow clouded.

"I—I wish we hadn't done it!" he murmured. "I say, it's really a fool's trick, you know, playing ghosts. A fellow with nerves might be really crooked by a fright!"

"Lick doesn't believe in ghosts," grinned Raby.

"It serves him right," said Jimmy. "But—but—I say, I think we'd better chip in. I'll call out to him."

Jimmy reached from the window.

At the same moment there came a sudden movement outside, a swishing sound, and a fearful yell.

Crash!

Yell followed yell in the darkness. The phosphorescent glow had vanished; Lick had disappeared into the darkness. What was happening the three Rookwooders could not guess, but they thrilled to the very heart as the wild yells rang from the night.

"Good heavens!" panted Raby. "What—"

"Get the window open—quick!" gasped Newcome.

Jimmy Silver, his face pale with alarm, dragged the casement open. He plunged out headlong into the wind and snow.

"Oh! Ah! Help!" came in a frantic yell from the darkness along the haunted terrace.

Wild howls and yells followed.

A light flashed in the house. Mr. Silver, in dressing-gown and slippers, came hurrying down the stairs. He switched on the electric lights as he came.

"What is it?" he shouted.

Newcome had tumbled out of the window after Jimmy Silver. Raby was following, when the old gentleman caught him by the shoulder.

"You—Raby! What does this mean? Who is calling for help?" exclaimed Mr. Silver breathlessly.

"Lick, I suppose," groaned Raby.

"Lick! Is he not in bad?"

"He—he—he went out to walk on the haunted terrace—"

"The foolish boy. Then he has fancied he has seen something!" exclaimed Mr. Silver.

"He—he hasn't fancied it!" gasped Raby. "What?"

"We got Lovell up as the ghost of the Priory!" groaned Raby. "It—it was a jape on Lick, to take him down a peg or two."

"Good heavens! What folly!"

Mr. Silver rushed away to a door that opened on the terrace. Two or three half-dressed servants had turned out now. Lights gleamed all over the house, and voices were raised in alarm. From the terrace there came the sound of wild, incessant yells.

"Oh, help! Grough! Oh! Ouch!"

There was a scuffling and scraping sound, a sound of rolling and bumping, mingled with the frantic yelling.

Mr. Silver threw open the door and rushed out. Raby followed him fast. They rushed bareheaded into the wind and snowflakes.

Crash!

"Oh! What——"

"Great Scott!"

"Jimmy!" gasped Mr. Silver.

Jimmy Silver sat up on the snowy terrace and spluttered. Newcome staggered and clutched hold of Raby. In the darkness the two, rushing out of the doorway, had collided with the two rushing along the terrace.

"Oh! You, dad!" spluttered Jimmy.

"Where is Lick?"

"Ow! Oh!"

"What has happened to the boy?" shouted Mr. Silver. In his anxiety and excitement he seized Jimmy by the collar and jerked him to his feet and shook him. "What has happened?"

"I—I don't know!" gasped Jimmy. "I just got out to see—by the window. They seem to have gone along the terrace. Then you bumped into me——"

Wild yells rang farther along the terrace, but the darkness hid everything from sight. Windows above opened, and lights flashed down and voices called. The butler, half-clad, came running out with a lighted hurricane-lamp.

"This way, Jenks!" exclaimed Mr. Silver.

"Here, sir——"

"Show the light this way!"

Mr. Silver caught the hurricane-lamp from Jenks' hands, and hurried along the terrace, his slippers almost buried in snow. After him hurried Jimmy Silver and Raby and Newcome. Loud yells, muffled, but wild and loud, guided them along the shadowed terrace.

What was happening they had no idea—unless Lick had gone mad with fright. From the bottom of their hearts the juniors repented of the practical joke played on the Texan. They realised—rather late—that playing ghosts was a dangerous game.

"What—what—what is that?" gasped Mr. Silver.

A struggling form lay in the snow on

the terrace—writhing, wriggling, struggling, gasping, yelling. It was smothered by the snow thrown up in its own struggles.

Mr. Silver held the hurricane-lamp over it.

"Who—what——"

"He's in a fit!" gasped Raby, his face white. "It—it's Lick, of course, and he's been frightened into a fit."

"You-ow-ow! Help!" yelled the struggling figure in the snow. "Leggo! Yoo-ooop!"

"That's not Lick!" panted Jimmy Silver.

"Lovell!"

"My hat! What——"

The struggling figure suddenly glided away under the eyes of the astonished on-lookers. It did not go of its own volition. It was as if a giant's hand had suddenly plucked it away. Behind it trailed the dark cloak that had been used to disguise the junior as the phantom prior. Struggling and yelling, the hapless Lovell glided away through thick snow.

"What—what—what——" gasped Mr. Silver, dumbfounded.

"There's a rope!" yelled Raby.

"A—a—a rope?"

"Yes. Oh, my hat! It's Lovell, and that beast Lick has lassoed him!"

"Great pip!"

The writhing rope could be seen wriggling in the snow. It was the rope that was dragging Lovell away.

Jimmy Silver & Co. sprang on the rope and grasped it. They put on a strong pull all together, and there was a shout from the darker end of the terrace.

"Gee-whit! Let up on that rope, you guys!"

"Lick!" yelled Jimmy.

"I guess I'm byed!" chuckled the Texan.

"Lick!" shouted Mr. Silver. "Lick, come here at once! What—what does this mean?"

Texas Lick came tramping up through the snow. His grinning face appeared in the radius of light from the hurricane-lamp.

He coiled up the lasso as he came, and, stooping, released Lovell's struggling form from the noose.

"Lick!" panted Jimmy.

"I guess it's all O. K." drawled Texas

Lick. "That guy played ghost on me, and I reckon he figured it out that he had me fixed with fright. And then I roped him in."

"Roped him in?" gasped Mr. Silver.

"Sure!"

"You—you had your lasso with you?" ejaculated Jimmy.

Texas Lick chuckled.

"Yep—some! When I went to put my coat on I put the lasso under it. You see, I froze on to the little game. I reckoned one of you guys was going to play ghost on me, and I was ready to give him socks!"

"You—you—" gasped Baby.

Arthur Edward Lovell sat up in the snow. He was smothered, he was breathless, he was wild with rage. He spluttered snow from his mouth, and gouged it from his eyes. He gasped snow.

"Ow! Ow! Oh! Ow! Grough!"

"I evensn I roped him in and gave him a dance along the terrace," explained Texas Lick. "You see, he couldn't help himself, with me dragging on the rope and him roped up. Catch on? I guess I'd have yanked him right along to the end and then round the gardens if you galoots hadn't chipped in. Sort of hint that it don't pay to take a rise out of a real live American! What? Ha, ha, ha!"

Texas Lick roared with laughter.

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Silver.

"This—this—this—Get indoors at once! Bless my soul! We shall all catch cold! I—I supposed that it was you crying out with fright, Lick—"

"Catch me!" grinned Lick. "I guess a real ghost wouldn't scare me any. Say, you galoots playing ghost any more to-night?"

"Let me get at him!" gasped Lovell, scrambling up.

Jimmy Silver & Co. collared Lovell just in time to prevent a serious case of assault and battery. Mr. Silver lighted the party indoors, and bade them to go to bed in a rather stern voice. Jimmy Silver & Co. went rather sheepishly upstairs—Texas Lick grinned from ear to ear.

"Good night, you 'uns!" grinned Lick at his door. "Let me know next time you're going to take a rise out of me and sneer no more my boots! Ha, ha, ha!"

And Lick went in to bed. Jimmy Silver & Co. after an eloquent look at one another, followed his example.

CHAPTER 10.

Texas Lick Admires!

"A THOUSAND pounds!" said Arthur Edward Lovell impressively.

Texas Lick did not seem very much impressed.

It was a leading characteristic of Master Lick that he never was impressed by anything that he saw or heard in the Old Country. In the little old island in which he now sojourned, he had, so far, discovered nothing to equal what he had left behind in Texas.

"A thousand pounds!" he repeated.

"How much might that be in real money?"

Arthur Edward Lovell snorted.

Jimmy Silver laughed. Master Lick's cheek amused him as much as it irritated Lovell.

"About five thousand dollars," he said. "Gee-whiz! That's a heap of money."

The Rookwood juniors were standing in the picture-gallery at the Priory House, looking at a little picture, which Mr. Silver had told them was a genuine Tintoretto.

Texas Lick thought Tintoretto no great shakes, and opined that there were better painters in the great United States. He guessed, in fact, that down in Texas there were painters who could "lay over" any old Tintoretto.

He stared at the painting when Jimmy Silver had told him its value in "real money."

"Five thousand dollars! You let on that a galoot would squeeze out five thousand dollars for that amudge!" he asked incredulously.

"Just that!" said Jimmy.

"I guess it shows that fools and their money are soon parted," said Texas Lick. "But I don't quite swallow it. You can't pull the leg of a galoot that was raised in Texas."

"The pater's sold it for that sum," said Jimmy.

"I guess he's a whoo man if he has, but the other 'uns in the deal wants a strait-jacket," said Texas Lick derisively. He stared at the picture again.

Jimmy's father was a collector of pictures, and his collection was worth a good many thousand pounds. Occasionally he sold one of his collection; the hard times being felt at Jimmy's home, as at most

others. It cost Mr. Silver a pang to part with any of his treasures of art; but he found a little consolation, perhaps, in the high prices they fetched.

"What would you think it worth, Lick?" asked Baby.

Lick cocked his eye thoughtfully at the genuine Tintoretto.

"Ten dollars!" he answered.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And not cheap at that," said Lick. "Look hyer, Jimmy Silver, do you mean to tell me, honest Injun, that your popper has roped in five thousand dollars for that picture?"

"Honest Injun!" answered Jimmy, laughing. "The man is coming down to-day to take it away."

"Then I guess I respect your popper more than I thought," said Texas Lick. "He's a galoot to respect. The man who can bring off a deal like that might have been raised in New York, by gum!"

"But it's worth the money!" said Newcome.

"Come off!"

"The dealer will sell it again for a good deal more," said Jimmy.

"He will have to catch a wall-eyed mug to do it, I guess. By gum, your popper is the goods," said Lick, with genuine admiration. "I never reckoned that this mouldy old island produced any galoot with his eye-teeth cut to that extent. I respect him."

Jimmy looked rather grimly at the transatlantic junior.

Lick's admiration was evidently based upon the fact that he believed Mr. Silver to have brought off successfully a piece of very cunning sharp practice.

"You——" began Jimmy.

Then he stopped.

He remembered in time that Texas Lick was his guest, which made it impossible for him to tell the Texan what he thought of him.

"Let's get out!" amended Jimmy.

Lowell and Baby and Newcome were chuckling, as they went out into the snow. Jimmy Silver's brow was knitted. But Texas Lick was evidently unconscious of having given offence in any way; and Jimmy, remembering once more that the transatlantic junior was his guest, cleared his knitted brow.

CHAPTER 17.

The Man from London!

SNOW lay thick among the trees, and ridged the branches, under the clear, cold winter sky. Jimmy Silver & Co. followed the lane that led to Hadley Priory, for some distance. In the clear frosty distance they could see the white roofs of the village and the railway station. It was a keen, bright afternoon, and the chimes of Rookwood enjoyed the walk—with the exception of Texas Lick. That youth was so accustomed to a horse at home in Texas that he had no liking for using his own legs as a means of locomotion.

Texas Lick was talking at the juniors tramped along by the snowy lane—it was quite uncommon with Texas Lick not to be talking. But for once the topic was not Texas, and the superiority of the United States in general, and Texas in particular, to all the rest of the wide universe. For once, Lick had found something to admire in the Old Country—and that was the supposed sharpness of Jimmy's father, which he declared was worthy of a galoot raised in New York, or of a horse dealer in San Antonio.

That the "genuine Tintoretto" was worth the money that was to be paid for it, Lick did not believe for a moment; he regarded that statement in the light of a jest.

The topic, naturally, was not agreeable to Jimmy Silver, and he did not speak; but Lick did not mind that. He enjoyed a one-sided conversation in which he had all the talking to himself. All that Lick required to make him happy was a listener.

The fact that Mr. Silver's affairs were no business of his did not worry Lick in the least. He took a keen transatlantic interest in matters that did not concern him.

"I guess that galoot's late, Silver," he remarked presently.

"What galoot?" asked Jimmy rather gruffly.

Jimmy was feeling rather fed up with Lick's conversation, and with Lick himself, as a matter of fact.

"The pilgrim that's coming for the picture," chuckled Lick. "The messenger from the mug that's buying it."

"Look here, Lick, drop the subject!" exclaimed Jimmy impatiently. "Give us a rest, there's a good chap."

"Catch Lick giving anybody a rest when his chin once gets going," granted Lovell.

"He's wound up, Jimmy," observed Italy. "You'll have to wait till he's run down, old chap."

Texas Lick laughed.

"But he's late," he said, glancing at his watch. "Perhaps the buyer has changed his mind after all. Mayn't be such a guy as your popper took him for."

"Look here—" roared Jimmy.

"Oh, keep your wool on, old scout. The man's late."

"How do you know he's late?" demanded Newcome.

"Jimmy's popper said that he was expecting him now," answered Texas Lick.

"Waal, I guess I know the time the trains get in at that one-horse shakedown you call a railroad station yonder. I believe you call them stations in this country; depot is the real name. But never mind that. The train from Winchester gets in at two-thirty. Now it's three. The next train isn't till three-thirty."

"Well," granted Jimmy, not at all interested.

"Waal," said Lick, "if your popper's expecting the man now, he must have expected him to come by the two-thirty."

"I suppose so."

"And it isn't half an hour from the depot to your house."

"That's so."

"And this is the road, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Then the man ought to be at the house by this time, or at least in sight on the road. And he ain't!"

Jimmy Silver gave a yawn. He was not interested at all, though he acknowledged the accuracy of Lick's observations.

"Perhaps he lost his train," said Lovell.

"Likely enough; that's the way you gamblers do business in this island," asserted Lick. "Anyhow, he's late. If he came by the two-thirty he's had lot of time to get to the house by now, even if he walked the whole way. See?"

"Oh, yes," yawned Jimmy.

"I guess you'll find that he ain't coming, and that the deal's off," grinned Lick. "Your popper will have to hunt for another nag, Silver."

"You cheeky ass!"

"Hallo, here comes a giddy stranger," said Newcome. "Perhaps this is the man."

A man in an overcoat and bowler hat came in sight, striding up the lane from the direction of the village.

The Rockwood juniors glanced at him carelessly.

It was probable that he was the messenger from Mr. Cave, the picture-dealer in London, who had purchased the Tin-torotto from Mr. Silver. Certainly he was a stranger in the locality, and looked like a townsman.

He was a rather powerfully-built fellow, with a hard face and very keen eyes.

"That ain't the galoot," said Lick.

"How the thump do you know it isn't?" demanded Lovell. Lick had a way of making positive assertions, which Arthur Edward Lovell found irritating.

Lick grinned.

"Waal, if he's the man, he's made a long way round," he said. "He ain't come straight from the depot."

"How do you know?" demanded Lovell again.

"I guess I learned to use my eyes out in Texas," answered Lick. "I've trailed deer on the plains, and b'ar in the chaparral, and I ain't done that without having my peepers opened. I guess. That man's been in the woods, where it was pretty thick, too, I guess. Look at his coat and the legs of his trousers!"

The juniors looked, and they admitted that Lick was right. The man's clothes certainly looked as if he had been tramping through thick, wet woodland.

"All the same, I think he's most likely the man," said Lovell obstinately. "I'll jolly well ask him."

"I guess you'll find he ain't."

"Oh, rats!"

The hard-faced man in the bowler hat had almost reached the juniors by this time. Lovell stopped, and his comrades followed suit. Arthur Edward politely raised his cap to the stranger.

"Excuse me," he said. "Are you going in the Priory House—Mr. Silver's house?"

The man stared.

"I don't see that my destination has anything to do with you," he answered curtly.

"It's my father's house," said Jimmy Silver, "and he's expecting a man from London to-day."

"Oh! I—I see."

"I thought you might be the man from Mr. Cave's," said Lovell. "That's all."



Texas Lick quickly took a turn in the rope over a higher branch, and began to haul Mr. Dalton clear of the ground. The Hookwood juniors gasped with amazement!

"Quite content," said the stranger. "I am John Brown, the messenger from Mr. Cave, the picture-dealer. I am going to see Mr. Silver now."

Lovell gave Texas Lick a triumphant look.

"I thought so," he said.

Texas Lick looked a little disconcerted. He had a strong objection to finding himself in the wrong.

"I guess you're late," he said.

"Indeed."

"Yes! The train was in more'n half an hour ago."

Mr. Brown gave Lick a curiously sharp look.

"I am a stranger in this district," he said. "I lost my way taking a short cut through the wood. Luckily I found it again."

Lovell grinned.

"Well, you're right for the Priory House now," he said. "Keep straight on by this road, and you'll come to the gates."

"Thank you."

The hard-faced man walked on, and the juniors resumed their way. The Fistful Four were grinning, and Texas Lick looked very thoughtful.

"I guess that guy was giving us some guff," he said, after a long silence.

"How's that?" grinned Lovell.

"He never lost his way. It's a straight road from the station, and, anyhow, being a stranger, he would ask the way. No reason why he should go-cavorting in the woods looking for a short cut."

"He says he did," remarked Newcome.

"Guff!" said Texas Lick. "He didn't do it. I dare say he took a ramble around, just as we're doing, that's all. I guess."

"Oh, never mind what you guess!" said Lovell. "Here we are! This is the giddy Wilderness!"

And the juniors turned from the road.

CHAPTER 15.

"Sign!"

THE Wilderness was a stretch of woodland bordering the lane between the Priory House and the village of Hadley Priory. It extended for a good distance along the road, and up the rugged hillside beside the road. In the

summer it was the haunt of picnickers; but in the winter, thick with snow, it was lonely enough. The footpaths were caked with snow, and the leafless branches swayed and creaked under their burden of white. The juniors turned into the open footpath that led from the road, and Texas Lick glanced round him and shivered.

"I guess this hyer don't look inviting," he remarked.

"Oh, it's a jolly old place!" said Jimmy Silver. "Ripping in the summer!"

"I reckon it ain't summer now!"

"There's a jolly old highwayman's cave, back in the woods," said Jimmy. "It's said that Dick Turpin hid there once, with the Bow Street runners hunting for him."

"Blow Dick Turpin, whoever he was!" grunted Lick.

"Oh, come on," said Lovell impatiently.

The juniors tramped up the snowy footpath. A ramble in the woods and a peep at the so-called highwayman's cave entertained Jimmy Silver & Co., but apparently Texas Lick was not so easily satisfied. Moreover, he was still annoyed by his mistake regarding the messenger from London.

"Somebody's been in the woods already," remarked Lovell, with a gesture at a series of footprints in the thick snow.

"Some bodies, you mean," said Lick.

"More than one?" asked Jimmy. Bumptious as Texas Lick was, Jimmy knew that the Texan knew all there was to be known on the subject of tracking.

"Sure."

"How do you make that out?" snapped Lovell.

"I guess I've got some eyesight, if you haven't!" answered Texas Lick. "Two men turned out of the road into this footpath less than two hours ago."

"Got the time exact?" said Lovell sarcastically.

"Sure! It left off snowing two hours ago. If these tracks had been made earlier than that they'd have been covered again."

"Oh!" said Lovell.

"But I guess they ain't so old as that, neither," said Lick. "Anyhow, they ain't older. If you look at them you'll see they're made by two different pairs of boots—one a couple of sizes smaller than the other, I guess."

Lovell had to admit the fact.

"Then there's two chaps in the wood

now, ahead of us," remarked Lovell, airing his own scouting knowledge a little.

"How do you figure that out?"

"Because there's no return track," answered Lovell triumphantly.

"I guess there are other ways out of the wood, though," answered Lick.

"Might have left by a different path."

Lovell granted.

"Let's go on," he said. "We want to have a look at the highwayman's cave, and get back to tea. We didn't come here for a scouting lesson, that I know of."

Jimmy Silver & Co. tramped on, taking no further heed of the tracks in the snow.

But Texas Lick declined to hurry.

He lingered, and slowed down and watched the tracks, and seemed strangely interested in them. At last, about a hundred yards from the road, he stopped, and ejaculated.

"Gee-whizz!"

Lovell looked back impatiently.

"For goodness' sake get a move on, Lick!" he exclaimed. "It gets dark jolly early, and we want to get back before dark."

"Hold on a minute, you galoots!"

"Oh, rot!"

"Waal, get ahead of you like, and leave me byer," said Texas Lick composedly.

"I guess I ain't missing this."

"Missing what?" bawled Lovell.

"I don't rightly figure it out yet," answered Lick. "Might be only a robbery, or it might be murder!"

"What?" roared the Rookwood juniors, in chorus.

"Interested you, have I?" grinned Lick.

Jimmy Silver & Co. came back to him. Lick was standing at a spot where a narrow path left the main footpath, winding away into deep, snowy woods.

The tracks the juniors had observed left the main path at this point. Not being in the least interested in the tracks of perfect strangers, the Flatfoot Four had not thought for a moment of following them farther, as their own way lay no longer in the same direction. But it was evident that Texas Lick was deeply interested. His keen grey eyes were gleaming, and his brows drawn into a thoughtful frown, his thin lips set in a tight line.

"Now, what are you gammøning about?" demanded Arthur Edward Lovell.

"I guess I'm giving you the straight goods," answered Lick. "Use your eyes."

Two men came along the footpath to this point, and from this point only one went on."

"Eh?"

"Look for yourselves."

"What does it matter?" snorted Lovell.

"Heaps! Where's the second man?" asked Lick.

"Blessed if I know, or care!"

"Well, I don't know, but I care," said Lick. "I guess I'm getting to the bottom of this. Two galoots came up this footpath together a while back, one with number ten boots, and the other with number seven. You can see the size of the tracks, if you pick them out. Number ten boots' turned off byer—you can see his big tracks leading away up the wood. Where's 'Number seven'?"

"Oh, rot!"

"Hold on, though, Lovell," said Jimmy Silver, beginning to be interested. "It's a bit odd. Only the big tracks go forward—the small ones stop here; and there's no track leading away, excepting the big-footed one. It's rather a problem for a scout."

"I don't see that it matters to us. We don't know the shape, and don't want to!"

"No. But——"

"Oh, I dare say Lick can tell us just what happened," said Lovell, with deep sarcasm. "He's only got to squint at the tracks and tell us the whole story."

"Go it, Lick!" chuckled Newcome. And Rely laughed.

"Sure!" said Lick really. "I guess I can give you the office, if you're interested. Big Foot and Little Foot came along from the village together——"

"Not from any other direction?" jeered Lovell.

"Nope; the tracks turned into the footpath from the direction of Hadley Priors."

"Oh! I didn't notice that."

"I guess I did. Then Big Foot and Little Foot came along the footpath to this spot," continued Lick. "Just about here Big Foot stopped behind Little Foot and gave him a sockdolager on the calbera——"

"A—a what?"

"A knock on the head."

"What?"

"Not caring to leave him lying on the footpath where anybody might pass, he

picked him up and carried him on his back into the woods," went on Lick. "I guess that looks like robbery, at least, if not murder. How do you galsots figure it out?"

Jimmy Silver & Co. did not attempt to figure it out. They stared blankly at Texas Lick.

"Are you trying to pull our legs?" demanded Baby.

"Nope."

"How do you know the big man knocked the little man down?" roared Lovell.

"You can see where he fell. Hyer's the little track, and the big track just behind. He fell forward, with his face in the snow, and his arms thrown out—look where he grabbed up the snow. Mind where you tread, you guy—you'll tread it out!" Lick pointed with his stick. "That's where the little man's face landed in the snow—and you see that spot?"

It was a tiny spot.

But the Rookwood juniors shivered as they looked at it.

Tiny as it was, it glimmered crimson from the whiteness of the snow. It was the stain of blood!

CHAPTER 19.

A Tragical Discovery!

"**BLOOD!**"

Arthur Edward Lovell whispered the word.

There was no doubt about it. It was a stain of blood on the snow—a crimson clue to what happened only a short time before the Rookwood juniors had arrived on the scene.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were grave enough now.

Two sets of tracks had led to that lonely spot, and only one set left the spot. And where they parted there was a stain of blood on the snow!

"I guess the little man was stunned, if he wasn't killed," went on Texas Lick. "Anyhow, the big man picked him up and carried him away on his back."

"I don't see that," argued Lovell. "Might have hidden him in some of these thickets—"

"Look at the tracks."

"Well?"

"Don't you see anything?"

"Oh, yes," growled Lovell. "They're the

same big tracks that lead here from the road, that's all."

"Not quite all," grinned Lick. "They're deeper."

"Deeper?" repeated Lovell.

"Just use your eyes, and you'll see that they're deeper in the snow, and that the toes are driven deeper than the heels," said Lick. "That means that the big man was carrying a weight, and that he was leaning forward a little. He had a burden on his back when he left this spot."

"That's so," said Jimmy Silver.

Jimmy's scouting knowledge was quite sufficient to verify Lick's observations, as soon as he examined the trail.

"That's as far as I've figured it out," said Lick. "But I reckon if we follow Big Foot's trail we'll find some more, what?"

"Follow it," repeated Lovell.

"I guess I'm following it to the finish. I reckon the big man has gone, and the little man is lying around in the wood here somewhere," said Lick. "This ain't the weather for an injured man to lie around out of doors. If he's still alive, I calculate we're going to save his life."

"Come on!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver breathlessly.

"Easy does it. I'm gain' ahead to pick up sign."

Texas Lick had coolly assumed command. But there was no one to say him nay.

But for Lick's acute observation, the Rookwooders knew that they would have passed unnoticed the sign of what had been, perhaps, a tragedy. With all his bumptious self-assertion, the Texan had seen and noted what had escaped them, and the result might be the saving of a human life. All the Fistical Four were willing now for Lick to take the lead.

Scanning the single trail before him as he went, Texas Lick led the way.

Several times he paused to point out "sign" with his stick.

"Look at that spot—and that! You catch on?"

"Drops of blood!" muttered Jimmy, with a sick feeling.

"Sure!"

The track was easy enough to follow. Here and there the bushes had been torn away by a man pushing through. Texas Lick passed suddenly, and with the crook of his stick hooked a Homburg hat out of the frozen bushes.

He held it up for the juniors to see.

"I guess that fell off the little man just here," he remarked. "Big Foot wouldn't have left it on the footpath, where it might be seen; but I guess he didn't mind leaving it byer. Look at it."

The juniors looked and shuddered. The top of the hat was crushed, evidently by a heavy blow given from behind, and the inside was thickly stained with blood.

"Big Foot stopped to rest byer, and leaned up against this tree," remarked Lick.

"How——" began Lovell.

"You can see the tracks, heels to the tree, and the heels driven in deeper than the toes, just byer," said Lick. "I guess he found the little man fairly heavy. The little man's hat rolled off, and he didn't care. He didn't lay him down, though—I guess he was in a hurry to get through, and only stopped a minute or two to get his breath. It was warm work, I guess, carrying a man on his back while he was wearing a thick brown overcoat."

"A—a what?" stuttered Lovell.

"Thick rough brown overcoat," said Lick.

"How the thump——"

"Look at the bark on the tree-trunk, you jay. You can see where the rough coat rubbed hard on the bark—there's little threads of the stuff there."

"My hat!" said Newcome.

"Come on."

"If that's correct, we can tell the police to look for a man with big feet and a thick, rough, brown overcoat," said Lovell. Texas Lick gave him a curious look.

"I guess we needn't tell the police," he said. "I guess I'm going to rope in the galoot on my lonesome. But never mind that now—let's look for the little man."

The juniors pressed on.

Deeper into the wood they went, several times losing the track, where thick, wild bushes and brambles kept the ground almost clear of snow. But the breaking of the bushes, where the big man had forced a way through, formed an infallible guide to Texas Lick.

"I guess we're there," said Lick suddenly.

He stopped in a deep recess, where thickly arched trees almost shut out the winter light. The Texan pulled aside a

mass of thick, scattering snow, and pointed. In that deep, dark recess lay the body of a man.

In a moment the juniors had lifted it out, and were examining it. The man was not dead; but he was quite unconscious, and both hands and feet were tied together with thick cord, evidently to secure him if he should come to his senses.

His face was white and set.

"Good heavens!" breathed Lovell. "The brute must have meant him to die here."

Lick shook his head.

"I guess he would have got help, shouting, when he came to," he answered. "No need for him to have pegged out. Big Foot wanted to keep him safe for a time, that's why he tied his hands and trotters. He could have worked these cords loose in an hour, too, once he came to his senses. Big Foot only wanted to gain time enough to get clear. I guess if we hadn't come along this galoot would have been wandering into the village soon after dark, all on his own—unless he froze byer."

"I guess Big Foot took the risk of that, for such a sum as five thousand dollars," said Lick.

"He's robbed him," said Lovell, pointing to the inseam man's turned-out pockets. "But I don't see how you can guess the amount, Lick. And this poor chap doesn't look as if he ever had such a sum as a thousand pounds in his hands. Five pounds, more likely."

Lick shrugged his shoulders.

"You don't catch on yet," he said.

"Oh, don't gas!" said Lovell gruffly. "Let's get this poor chap where he can be helped; no time for jaw."

"That's so; got going."

The Rookwooders raised the man from the ground. The cut on his head, where the blow had taken effect that had deprived him of his senses, had ceased to bleed. But there was no sign of returning consciousness. Carrying the man among them, Jimmy Silver & Co. started, as fast as they could go. They did not return by the way they had come. Jimmy Silver, of course, knew the countryside well round his home, and he led the way through the woods towards a cottage in the lane, the nearest habitation.

It was a long and heavy tramp. Through

the snowy woods, but the Hankwood juniors pushed on without a pause.

They came out into the Priory Lane at last, close by a cottage.

"I guess we'll land him byer, and get back to the home," said Texas Lick.

"Got to the police-station, you mean," said Lovell.

"I don't mean anything of the sort."

Jimmy knocked at the cottage door, and it was opened by a plump dame. Jimmy explained briefly, and the injured man was taken in and laid upon a bed.

"Now——" said Texas Lick.

"Now I am going for a doctor," said Arthur Edward Lovell. "You fellows had better come, to tell this to the police."

"I guess I'm going back to the Priory."

"Go, and be blowed, then," said Lovell gruffly.

Lick smiled.

"You'd better come with me, Jimmy," he said.

"Why?" asked Jimmy.

"I guess I may need help in handling the galoot."

"What galoot, you ass?"

"Big Foot."

"Oh, don't talk rot," snapped Lovell, and he started off for the village without further words. It was evidently necessary to get a doctor to the injured man as quickly as possible, and Arthur Edward devoted himself to that necessary task.

Texas Lick did not heed him. He turned to the woman of the cottage.

"Can you lend me a rope, ma'am?" he inquired.

She looked at him in surprise.

"A rope?"

"Yep. I guess I want a rope bad; I'll lay it if you like, and pay handsome for it," smiled Texas Lick.

"I can lend you a rope, sir," answered the good dame, and she fetched one from the shed at the back of the cottage.

Texas Lick examined it, and grunted.

"I guess it will fill the bill," he remarked. "Thanks. Are you coming with me, Jimmy?"

"But what——"

"Well, I'm going. I guess there's no time to lose."

"But what——" yelled Raby.

Texas Lick started off at a rapid pace towards Mr. Silver's house. As he went

he knotted the end of the rope into a slip-knot, evidently for the purpose of turning it into a lasso—a weapon that Texas Lick was well accustomed to handle.

Jimmy Silver & Co. looked at one another. Lovell, by this time, was out of sight on his way to the village.

"What has that Wild West duffer got into his silly head now?" asked Newcome.

"Goodness knows!" said Raby.

"Blessed if I can make it out," said Jimmy Silver, in perplexity. "But he seems to have something on his brain. We're not wanted here, and Lovell has gone for the doctor. Let's get after Lick."

"All right!"

The three juniors hurried after the Texan. Lick did not speak a word when they joined him—very contrary to his usual custom. His thin, sharp face was gleaming with suppressed excitement. He broke into a run, and Jimmy Silver & Co. trotted with him—and at a good pace they hurried towards the Priory; though what was the reason of this haste was a mystery to Jimmy Silver & Co.

Texas Lick was breathless when they turned in at the gates, but he hurried on up the drive. Cousin Phyllis and Algy Silver were walking there, and Lick called to them breathlessly.

"Miss Phyllis—has that galoot gone?"

"Wha-a-t?" ejaculated cousin Phyllis.

"Hasn't a galoot called to see Mr. Silver about a picture——"

The girl nodded.

"Mr. Cave's messenger from London?" she asked.

"Yep."

"Yes, he has called," said Phyllis. "He is with Mr. Silver, I think."

"Good!"

Texas Lick fairly sprinted up the path to the house. Jimmy Silver & Co., catching his excitement somehow, raced after him. The door was open, and Mr. Silver could be seen there, apparently seeing off the man who had called for the "genuine Tintoretto." The juniors recognised the hard-faced man whom they had passed in the lane, and who had told them that he was Mr. Cave's messenger.

"I guess we're in time!" panted Texas Lick.

And he ran on, gasping.

CHAPTER 25.

Texas Lick's Capture!

MR. SILVER glanced at the juniors as they came sprinting up to the house. He seemed surprised by their hurry. However, he did not give them more than a glance. Mr. Brown, the messenger from London, was taking his leave, with a little case under his arm which, as Jimmy Silver guessed, held the Tintoretto, purchased by Mr. Cave for one thousand pounds. Texas Lick was the first to reach the house, and he came panting up the wide steps, ruddy and breathless.

"Hold on!" he gasped.

Mr. Silver gave him a look.

"Good-bye, Mr. Brown," he said, "If you care to change your mind, I will order the trap to drive you to the station."

"Not at all, sir," said the messenger; "I prefer to walk."

"Very good."

"I guess Mr. Brown wouldn't walk very far," grinned Texas Lick. "I opine he's got a car waiting for him somewhere."

The hard-faced man started violently.

"What do you mean, Lick?" exclaimed Mr. Silver sharply. Texas Lick's weird manners had more than once severely tried the patience of Jimmy Silver's father.

"Why, sir, I guess Mr. Brown isn't going back to the depot at all," answered Lick cheerfully. "It's too peaky easy to telegraph along the railroad to suit his book."

A strange, startled look was on Mr. Brown's face. He backed away a pace or two, his eyes fastened on Lick's thin, sharp face.

"Are you out of your senses, Lick?" asked Mr. Silver. "I cannot account for your words otherwise."

"I guess not, sir! The galoon's got the picture, I reckon," said Lick, with a gesture towards the case under the man's arm. "That picture's fetching a thousand pounds, ain't it? Waal, I figure it out that he wants to keep it—and he couldn't, not if he went by railroad. What do you think yourself, Mr. Brown?" And Texas Lick grinned knowingly at the messenger from London.

Mr. Brown was breathing hard.

"I understand nothing of this, Mr. Silver," he said. "I must go as I shall

lose my train. Good-afternoon to you, sir."

He went down the steps.

Jimmy Silver & Co. stood silent. Lick's words amazed them, but they had noticed a circumstance that let in a glimmer of light. Mr. Brown was wearing a rough brown overcoat, and he had large feet. They dimly guessed what was in Lick's mind, and they wondered.

Mr. Silver was frowning. Unheeding him, Texas Lick fixed his eyes upon the retreating figure of Mr. Brown.

His new-made lasso slipped into his hand.

To the utter amazement of Mr. Silver, Lick swung the lasso round his head, and the coiled rope went flying, uncoiling as it went.

The loop settled on the broad shoulders of Mr. Brown, and Texas Lick dragged on it.

The unexpected drag jerked Mr. Brown over on his back, and he landed in the snowy drive with a crash.

"Roped, by thunder!" ejaculated Texas Lick.

"Boy!" shouted Mr. Silver.

"I guess I've got him."

Texas Lick ran down the steps, and reached the sprawling man.

Brown had sat up, dazed and dizzy. One of his arms was pinned to his side by the grip of the lasso; the other was free. With his free hand he tore from his coat-pocket a short, heavy life-preserver.

He staggered to his feet, with that deadly weapon gripped in his hand, and a murderous blaze in his eyes.

Lick jerked on the rope sharply, and the lassoed man reeled over again and fell. The next minute the Texan was upon him with a life spring, and the life-preserver was wrenched from his hand.

Texas Lick tossed the weapon to Jimmy Silver.

"Get hold of that! I guess that'll be wanted—that's what he caved in the little man's head with."

"Oh!" gasped Jimmy.

Mr. Brown was struggling violently. Texas Lick knelt on his chest, pinning him down, and still gripping the lasso.

But he could not have held the powerful man for long.

"Helo' here!" he shouted. "Raly,

"Nonsense, Jimmy, bear a hand, you pesky jays!"

"But—but what——" gaped Baby.

"Can't you see he's the man?" roared Lick. "He's the man that knocked out the galoot in the wood."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Bear a hand, blow you!"

In utter amazement, the juniors went to Lick's help. Mr. Brown was fighting savagely now—certainly not acting like a baroness messenger from a picture-dealer in London.

The four juniors grasped him, and secured him, but the man still struggled and resisted.

"I guess we've got the fire-eater now!" panted Texas Lick. And he took another turn of the rope round Mr. Brown, and knotted it.

The man lay on the ground his eyes blazing up at the Texan. Mr. Silver hurried to the spot.

"Lick!" he thundered. "How dare you molest this man? How dare you!"

"I guess you'll be glad of it, sir, when you catch on to the reason," answered Texas Lick coolly. "There's your picture, sir! You'd better get hold of it if you want to touch your thousand pounds for it. This hyer galoot ain't the man from the dealer's at all."

"Wh-a-at?"

"I guess his name ain't Brown, any more than mine is Dennis," chuckled Texas Lick.

"You must be insane!" stammered the amazed old gentleman. "Release that man at once, Jimmy, I am surprised at you—and you others—though nothing Lick should do would surprise me, I think. Release that man at once."

"I guess not," said Texas Lick coolly. "He ain't getting out of this rope till the police put the bracelets on him. Don't I keep on telling you that he ain't the man from the dealer's?"

"Nonsense!"

"I—I think perhaps Lick is right, father!" stammered Jimmy Silver.

"Nonsense! If this is not the man, where is the man?" exclaimed Mr. Silver.

"What can you possibly mean?"

"The man you want is lying in a pesky cottage half a mile away, with a cracked caber," said Texas Lick. "This galoot cracked it for him, and came on to rope up the picture. Savvy?"

"Absurd!"

"I guess he did it with that little club," said Lick, with a gesture towards the life-preserver. "Not a usual thing for a peaceable citizen to carry about him, I reckon." He grinned down at the enraged man bound in the rope. "You may as well own up, Johnny. We've got you this time."

The man panted.

"Mr. Silver! I appeal to you! I—I must catch my train! I—I——"

"Oh, can it!" said Texas Lick contemptuously. "You know we've got you tight. Own up to it. You got on to it that Mr. Brown was coming down from London to fetch the picture, priced at five thousand dollars. I guess you got on the same train, and got out at the same depot—what! You walked with him from the village. I guess you made out that you know Mr. Silver, or something of the kind, and got him into the footpath of the wood by spinning him some yarn about a short cut—what!"

The man stared up blankly at the Texan, evidently astonished by his knowledge.

"I reckon the man would have been on his guard if he'd already fetched the picture and had it with him," grinned Lick. "But as he was only coming to fetch it, he never smelled a rat. He didn't figure out that you were going to knock him on the head, rob him of his credentials, and come on here in his name and tag the Tintoretto. What? But that's just what you did, galoot!"

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Silver.

The so-called Mr. Brown wriggled in the rope. He did not utter a word of denial, apparently realising that it was useless. Mr. Silver seemed almost dazed.

"Can you prove any of this, Lick?" he exclaimed.

"Heaps, sir!" answered Texas Lick cheerfully. "I guess ya passed this pilgrim coming this way when we were going to the Wilderness. He told us who he was—or, rather, who he wasn't. He left the marks of a big size in boots in the snow."

"What can that possibly have to do with the matter?"

Lick chuckled.

He proceeded to explain how the tracks had been found in the wood, and what had followed.

Mr. Silver listened in astonished silence.

the bound man listened, too, gritting his teeth with rage.

"You catch on, sir?" wound up Texas Lick. "I'm nuts on a trail. Why, sir, this is as easy as eating candy, to a galoot about my size. Nothing to what I've done in Texas."

"But—but—" stammered Mr. Silver.

"Ain't it clear yet?" exclaimed Texas Lick. "For a man who can make such an all-fired good bargain in pictures, sir, you're a bit slow at catching on, I guess. The man who was knocked out in the wood had been knocked out by a hefty man in a brown overcoat and with big feet. The sign told me that. We'd just passed a hefty man in a brown overcoat, with big feet, coming away from the wood. This lyer galoot—"Texas Lick stirred the bound man playfully with the toe of his boot—"he never reckoned there was a galoot in this country who could read a sign like that, I guess. And I calculate there was only one—little me."

"But—" gasped the astonished old gentleman.

"It's plain enough now," said Jimmy Silver, with a nod. "I didn't catch on at first. It looks to me, father, as if the man in the wood is the man who was sent from London to fetch the picture, and this man knocked him out and came here to steal it."

"And I guess he came near pulling it off!" grinned Texas Lick. "And now you know, sir, why I figured it out that he wasn't going back to the station. I reckon he wouldn't carry off the stolen goods by railroad. Too pesky easy to telegraph after him. I reckon he's got a motor-car waiting somewhere handy."

"I—I can scarcely believe all this," said Mr. Silver slowly. "If it is correct, you have done me a great service, Lick. The picture would never have been paid for, had it not reached Mr. Cave. I should have been the loser of a thousand pounds. But—"

"I guess you'll find it all O. K.," said Lick. "Wait till the galoot at the cottage can speak, and he'll tell you, I guess, that his name's Brown, and that he came from the London dealer, and that this pilgrim knocked him out in the wood."

"That shall soon be ascertained," said the old gentleman. "I will order the car, and we will proceed to the cottage at once. In the meantime, the picture shall be

placed in safety. Mr. Brown—if you are Mr. Brown—you must submit to restraint for the present, while this boy's story is put to the test."

"Mr. Brown" answered only with a savage exclamation. It was clear that he had nothing to hope from Lick's story being put to the test. Mr. Silver carried the precious *Tintoretto* into the house; and a few minutes later the car was bearing him, with the prisoner and the Brookwood juniors, to the cottage in Priory Lane.

By the time they arrived there they found the doctor in attendance, and Arthur Edward Lovell, and the village policeman from Hadley Priory. The injured man had recovered consciousness, and had given his name—John Brown, employed by Mr. Cave, picture-dealer of London. That information dispelled all doubts.

The "spoof" Mr. Brown was released from Texas Lick's lazo, to be handcuffed by the village constable, and driven away in Mr. Silver's car to the lock-up.

Jimmy Silver & Co. walked back to the Priory—or, rather, the Fistical Four walked, and Texas Lick strutted.

It was a triumph for Texas Lick, and the Brookwooders acknowledged it freely; and Lick was not a fellow to bear his blushing honours thick upon him without a little swank. As a matter of fact, it was a great deal of swank that Lick displayed.

"Well, it heats me," said Arthur Edward Lovell. "Lick seems to have worked it out all right. Of course, the real Brown would have been found, or would have got away, in time—"

"After the other galoot had got away safely with the pesky picture," chuckled Texas Lick.

"Well, yes," admitted Arthur Edward. "Lucky we went for a ramble in the Wilderness this afternoon, Jimmy."

"Yes, rather!"

Texas Lick snorted. He felt that this was a deduction from his remarkable merits.

"I guess you 'uns might have rambled in the Wilderness till you grew grey and bald, and you'd never have read the sign!" he exclaimed. "You mean it was lucky that I was there."

"Hem!"

"Where would that pesky picture be now, if I hadn't been on the spot!" demanded Lick.

"Right enough!" assented Jimmy Silver.
 "You've done jolly well, Lick."

"I guess I have," said Lick.

"But there's no need for us to sing your praises—you can do that yourself all right," grunted Lovell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Waal, I guess I never was a galoot to hide my lights under a bushel," said Texas Lick.

And the chums of Rookwood agreed that he wasn't!

CHAPTER 21.

Lick Looks for Trouble!

HERE'S that ass Lick!"

It was Arthur Edward Lovell who asked, or rather growled, that question.

The Rookwood party, who were staying with Jimmy Silver for the vacation, had been tramping that morning, and they had turned into a country inn for lunch.

After lunch Texas Lick had strolled away, leaving the Fistical Four of Rookwood to themselves; for which relief they were duly thankful. A rest from Master Lick's incessant "chinwag" was very welcome.

But now Jimmy Silver, Lovell, Raby, and Newcome were ready to start for home, and Lick was not to be seen.

"Where is the ass?" said Lovell. "Nothing into something that doesn't concern him, I suppose—that's his way!"

"Let's look round for him," suggested Jimmy Silver mildly.

"I've looked round!" grunted Lovell.

"Well, let's look round again, old chap."

And the Fistical Four proceeded to look through the inn for Texas Lick. There was a click of balls from the billiards-room, and Jimmy Silver glanced in at the half-open door of that department, though without expecting to see Texas Lick there.

But there he was!

Two visitors to the Golden Apple Inn were at the table, and Texas Lick was looking on.

"Come out of that, Lick!" howled Arthur Edward Lovell.

Lick glanced round.

"I guess I'm watching this hyer game," he answered.

"Rather the game! We're ready to go."

"Waal, I guess I ain't stopping you!"

"Look here, Lick—"

"Oh, guff!"

Lick turned his attention to the table again. Apparently he was interested in the game that was going on.

"My hat!" murmured Raby, with a nod towards the player who was handling the cue. "That's Carthew."

"Carthew, by Jove!" said Jimmy Silver.

It was Carthew, of the Sixth Form at Rookwood—a prefect at the school, with whom Jimmy Silver & Co. were scarcely on good terms. However, it was vacation now, and a prefect of the Rookwood Sixth was nobody in particular. Having failed to make a cannon, Carthew dropped the butt of his cue to the floor, and glanced round as he heard his name mentioned. He smiled at the Fistical Four.

"What do you fags want here?" he grunted. "Get out of it!"

"Go and eat coke!" retorted Arthur Edward Lovell promptly.

"What?" roared Carthew.

"Coke!"

And Lovell marched in, and his comrades marched in after him. At Rookwood School, Carthew wielded the power of the asphalt, and was a fellow to be avoided. In vacation he had no terrors for the Fourth-Formers; and Lovell was quite keen on making that fact clear to him.

"If you don't get out—" began Carthew.

"Put us out!" suggested Lovell cheerfully.

Carthew made a step towards the juniors, and stopped. The Fistical Four grinned at him cheerfully. They were quite prepared to use Carthew as a duster for dusting the floor of the room, and there was no doubt that they could have done it quite easily, his Six-Former as Mark Carthew was.

So the bully of the Sixth thought better of it, and turned his back on the chums of the Fourth.

"Get on with it, Panter!" he grunted.

Carthew's companion was chalking his cue. He was a rather slight man, with a black moustache and shifty, sharp eyes, and a thin-lipped mouth like a gash. He looked like a speedy sporting man; as no doubt he was.

He proceeded to run out in a single break, and Carthew, muttering something under his breath, threw a pound note on the table.

"Another game?" asked Panter.

"No."

"Then we may as well be getting along."

"You get along," said Carthew. "I'll join you later, Captain Punter."

"Just as you like."

Captain Punter buttoned his coat, and with a careless nod to Carthew, strolled out of the inn.

"The Head of Rookwood would like to see this," murmured Lovell. "Precious sort of a pal for a Rookwood prefect to be going about with, what!"

Carthew looked at the juniors.

"Will you kids clear off?" he snapped.

"Not until we choose!" answered Lovell independently. "We're not at Rookwood now, Carthew! Go and chop chips!"

"Come on, Lick," said Jimmy Silver.

But Lick did not stir from the billiard-table. Carthew, taking no further heed of Jimmy Silver & Co., turned his attention to Texas Lick. Evidently there had been talk between the two before the entrance of Jimmy and his chums. As Lick was the cheekiest junior at Rookwood, and had no respect whatever for the high and mighty Sixth, it was probable that Carthew's feelings towards him were not cordial. But the bully of the Sixth was aware that Lick was the son of a Western millionaire, and had an allowance of pocket-money that caused other fellows at Rookwood to stare. At Rookwood the prefect could hardly have taken Lick up in any way; but he was many a long mile from Rookwood now.

"I guess I don't mind," Jimmy Silver & Co. heard Texas Lick's drawling voice. Carthew had been speaking to him in a low tone, unheard by the chums of the Fourth.

"Oh, just fifty up," said Carthew.

"I guess it's a kindness of you—you being a prefect and a Sixth-Former and all that," said Lick.

Carthew gave a cough.

"Well, it's vacation now," he said. "I shan't have to rejoin my friend for half an hour or so, so I've got time."

"I guess I'm on."

Texas Lick selected a cue. Arthur Edward Lovell strode towards him in great wrath.

"Look here, Lick," he bawled, "do you think we're going to hang about while you play billiards in here?"

"Oh, guff!"

"Better come along, kid," urged Jimmy Silver.

"I guess I'm giving Carthew fifty up."

"Look here," howled Lovell. "Carthew is an old hand at this game, and he'll clean

you out just as easily at his precious friend Punter did him."

"You cheeky young cub!" roared Carthew. "Get outside!"

"Rats!"

Carthew took a savage grip on his cue.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen!" exclaimed the marker.

"You guys can ramoose the ranch, if you like," said Texas Lick. "I guess I can walk home to your shobang on my lonesome, Jimmy. You roady, Carthew!"

"Yes."

"Quid on the game?"

"Yes."

"Here goes, then."

"Look here, Lick—"

"Give a galoot a rest."

And Carthew having given a miss in baulk, Texas Lick played.

CHAPTER 22.

A Precious Pairt

JIMMY SILVER & CO. stood and looked on, in an uncertain frame of mind, and deep annoyance and exasperation.

Texas Lick was Jimmy's guest for the vacation—an exceedingly trying guest—but the fact made it difficult for Jimmy to speak plainly to him.

Jimmy was not disposed to depart and leave the American junior in the billiards-room with Carthew, the blackguard of the Rookwood Sixth; neither was he disposed to stand idly and look on while the young rascal gambled.

Carthew, as the juniors were quite aware, had a habit of haunting billiards-rooms at a safe distance from the school in term time; and in the holidays, doubtless, he "let himself go" to a still greater extent. The fact that he was going about with a friend like Captain Punter was proof of that. A good many mispent hours had given Carthew considerable skill with the cue, and the Fictical Four knew perfectly well that he was setting out to fleece the Texan.

Lick had plenty of money, and seemed prepared to lose it; and that was good enough for the black sheep of Rookwood.

It was easy to guess that Carthew's precious friend, the captain, had relieved him of a good deal of his pocket-money; and for that reason Carthew had let him

depart alone, intending to indemnify himself at Lick's expense.

Whether Lick lost his ample dollars or not did not worry Jimmy Silver very much, but he had a very strong objection to the present rather shady proceedings. A harmless game on the billiards-table at the Priory House was very different from playing for money in an inn. Jimmy felt responsible for his guest, in a way; yet it was scarcely possible to take him by the scruff of the neck and run him forcibly out of the Golden Apple.

"Well, are we going?" granted Lovell angrily.

"Let's wait a bit for Lick," answered Jimmy. "Carthew will run him out in ten minutes, most likely."

"And bag his money," snapped Lovell.

"Serve him right, so far as that goes."

"Well, that's so," agreed Lovell. "I don't suppose he's ever handled a cue before."

Texas Lick, certainly, was not playing very well. He made a few clumsy cannons, and potted the white once or twice. The Fiskal Four and the greasy marker fully expected to see Carthew run him out quickly; but, for some reason, Carthew was playing badly.

The marker grinned. Carthew had been beaten by the captain, but the marker had seen him put up a better game than this. What the marker saw at once dawned on Jimmy Silver a little later. Carthew was letting the transatlantic youth win—a sprat to catch a whale. It was not a salutory pound note that he designed to capture from the Texan.

Lick's score went up by twos and threes, slowly; Carthew's score barely kept pace with it. Carthew, at 48, was left with an easy cannon, which he missed. Lick gave a chuckle.

"I guess it's my game now," he said.

And so it was. He went in off Carthew's ball, and it was game. Lick gave a chirrup of glee.

"I guess I can play billiards!" he chuckled. "Like to have another game, Carthw?"

"Oh, yes, if you like."

"You humphious ast!" roared Lovell scornfully. "Can't you see that Carthew let you run him out?"

"Oh, come off!" said Lick.

"You can't play billiards for toffee."

"Oh, guff."

"Look here, Lick, check it and come along," said Baly.

"I guess I'm just getting my hand in. I'll play Carthew all the afternoon if he likes—a pound a time."

"You precious totter!"

"Oh, cheese it."

Carthew looked at his watch.

"Well, I can't spare much more time," he said; "I've got to rejoin my friend—we're going on to Winchester this evening. But I'll play you fifty up for a five-pound note if you like."

"Done!"

"Look here, Lick—"

"Oh, give a galoot a rest."

Jimmy Silver & Co. could do nothing but look on when the new game started. They were perfectly well aware of Carthew's game—he had allowed Lick to win a pound to encourage him, and he was going to run him out quickly enough with a five for the stake. It served Lick right, there was no doubt about that; and with all his transatlantic sharpness he seemed quite unaware of it.

Lick gave a mia in baulk this time, and then Carthew started scoring.

As he intended to capture the Texan's five without waste of time, he did not delay matters by pretended poor play. He went in to win, and did his best.

A series of cannons was followed by the potting of the red three times in succession, and then Carthew went in twice off the white, and finally potted Lick's ball. By the time he finished he had made thirty-five out of the required total of fifty.

Texas Lick whistled.

"I guess you are some player," he remarked. "You've put up a better show this time, Carthew."

"Try to do the same," suggested Carthew with a grin.

"Sure!"

Texas Lick started.

As he proceeded, the clume of the Fourth opened their eyes, and Carthew's expression grew quite startled.

There was no more clumsy play on Lick's part.

He began with a cannon, and left the balls easy for another cannon. Cannon followed cannon, with an incessant clicking of the ivory, and each time the balls were left in a favourable position. Ten cannons in succession made the marker stare.

"Oh, god!" murmured Carthew.

Jimmy Silver burst into an involuntary laugh. He was very far from approving of Lick's proceedings, but he could not help laughing. It was not, after all, Carthaw who was the deceiver; it was Texas Lick. He was at least twice as good a player as the Sixth-Former. Evidently he had played billiards a good deal in his native state of Texas.

The cue went in, and the marker spotted it again, and Lick sent it in again. Five times he sent it in.

"Oh gad!" said Carthaw again.

"My hat!" said Lovell. "The fathend can play billiards, unless this is a series of giddy flukes."

Texas Lick glanced round with a grin as he chalked his cue.

"Flukes be blowed," he said. "We've got a billiard-table in the ranch-house in Texas, and I guess I've played on it since I was high enough to reach it. I guess I've made breaks that would make you open your eyes to see 'em. I'm going out in this."

"You—you spoofing young rotter!" muttered Carthaw. "You were puttin' on that you couldn't play for toffee."

"So were you!" grinned Lick.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Carthaw gritted his teeth. He realised now that while he had been leading on the Texas, Lick had been leading him on, and that he had fallen blindly into the trap.

Lick continued to score.

Jimmy Silver & Co. watched him with interest. Every shot was made with cool precision, and every shot told. Without an effort Texas Lick ran out in a single break of fifty.

He grounded his cue, and chuckled.

"I guess you owe me a five-pound note, Carthaw," he remarked. "I'll play you double or quits if you like."

Mark Carthaw was not likely to accept that offer. He had no chance against Lick, and he knew it. He turned away with a black and scowling brow, and Texas Lick picked up the five-pound note, and fluttered it boastfully before the eyes of Jimmy Silver & Co.

"You galoots care for a game?" he chuckled. "I guess I'll give you sixty in a hundred."

"Oh, come out of this, you sturdy wastrel!" growled Lovell. "Look here, I'm not hanging on here any longer!"

And Lovell strode out.

"I guess I'm coming!"

Texas Lick followed the chums of Rockwood, chuckling. Evidently he was exceedingly well pleased with the result of his contest with Carthaw of the Sixth.

CHAPTER 23.

Generous!

"THIS way!" said Lovell.

Texas Lick halted.

"I guess that isn't the way home," he said. "That's the way to Hadley village, you gay!"

"That's right."

"But we're going home."

"Not just yet."

Texas Lick gave the Flatical Four a sharp and suspicious look. He realised that something was "on," though he did not quite guess what it was.

"I guess I ain't great on walking," he said. "Gimme a horse and I'll ride you a hundred miles. But Sharps' pony isn't good enough for me. Let's get home."

"We've got to go to the village first."

"What for?" demanded Lick.

"You'll see when you get there. Come on!"

Arthur Edward Lovell took Lick's right arm, and Baby took his left. They started off towards the village with him, and Texas Lick had no choice about going. Newcome followed on behind, but Jimmy Silver took the road to his father's house.

"Look here, what's this game?" demanded Texas Lick, wriggling as he was marched away. "Where's Jimmy gone?"

"Home," answered Lovell. "You see, you're Jimmy's guest, so he doesn't think he can treat you as you deserve. But you're not my guest, nor Baby's, nor Newcome's; so we're free to deal with you. As you've grown so jolly sharp on the other side of the Atlantic I dare say you can understand that if you try hard."

"If this is a rag—"

"Not at all! Come on!"

Texas Lick walked on between the two juniors, feeling and looking very uneasy. Once or twice when he lagged Newcome let out a foot and dribbled him onward, and Texas Lick gave up lagging.

In a short time they reached the village, and, to Lick's amazement, stopped outside the Cottage Hospital.

"What does this mean?" howled Lick.

"What the thump have you brought me here for, you guys?"

Lovell tapped the collecting-box affixed to the wall of the building.

"Contributions urgently required," he explained.

"I guess you won't catch me contributing to any god-darned old hospital!" snorted Texas Lick. "I sure reckon I know better how to look after my dust!"

"Aren't you putting in five pounds?" asked Lovell.

"Five pounds!" yelled Lick.

"Just that!"

"Nopa! I guess I ain't putting in a Continental red cent!" roared Lick, in great indignation. "Let go my arms, you guys, or I sure guess I'll mop up the burg with you!"

"Never mind about putting in a Continental red cent—whateter that may happen to be!" grinned Lovell. "You've got a fiver about you that you won from Carthew."

"I guess I'm freezing on to it."

"You see, we're down on gambling at Rookwood," explained Lovell. "It's one of the things that are not done."

"Oh, guff!"

"If you want to play the shady goat, you must do it in some other company," further explained Lovell blandly. "When you're with nice boys like us you have to keep decent—or as decent as possible. Catch on to that?"

"Leggo!"

"Now, having played the ox and the blackguard, the only decent thing you can do is to shove that fiver into the box for the Cottage Hospital. That's what you've come here for, I think."

"I haven't come here; I was brung by you guys, I guess! And I ain't putting in a single dime!"

"You're not contributing?"

"Nopa!"

"Well, it's a free country," said Lovell. "You can do exactly as you like, of course."

"Sure!"

"And so can we, of course!"

"Eh?"

"And at present we are going to bump you!" said Lovell.

"Look hyer— Yarooooop!"

Bump!

Texas Lick sat down in the snow—hard! He roared as he sat. He was jerked on

again and bumped again, and he roared still louder.

"Oh, Jerusalem crickets! Oh-yooooop! Carry me home to die! Ow! Yow!"

"Give him another!"

"Help!" yelled Texas Lick.

Bump!

"Oh great snakes! Ow!"

Bump!

"Yarooooop! Let up!" shrieked Texas Lick. "Oh, you guys! Oh, you jays! Oh, you pesky mugwumps! Yooooooooooooop!"

"My dear chap, we're not finished yet!" said Huby. "We're going on bumping you as long as you have Carthew's fiver about you!"

"Oh, you pesky galoots! I guess I'll mop up the burg with you!" groaned Texas Lick.

Bump!

"Ow! Wow! Wow! Will you let up?" shrieked Lick. "Didn't I win that fiver fair and square?"

"Well, no, you didn't!" said Lovell. "Carthew was trying to diddle you, and you diddled him instead. But the fiver's yours to do as you like with, of course. As I said, it's a free country. You're free to keep the loot, and we're free to bump you as long as you keep it. Go it, you fellows!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bump!

"Ow-wow-w-w-w!"

Bump!

"Stop it!" howled Texas Lick, quite desperate now. "I—I—I guess I'll pony up the fiver! I—I guess I mean to all along! Ow! Wow! Yow!"

"Of course, suit yourself," grinned Lovell. "If you contribute that fiver to the hospital you'll do it entirely of your own accord and your own free will."

"You-ow-ow!"

The five-pound note rustled in at the slit in the lid of the collecting-box—probably the only one it had ever received. Texas Lick gave a groan as it vanished. It seemed to affect him a good deal like having a tooth out.

"Now, that's what I call generous!" said Lovell admiringly. "You are free with money, Lick, and no mistake!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, you mugwumps!" groaned Lick.

And he turned and tramped away towards Jimmy Silver's house, followed by three chuckling huns.

Not a word did Texas Lick speak on the way back to Priory House.

The juniors came in rather late for tea, and Jimmy Silver met them with a smiling face.

"You are a little late," Mrs. Silver remarked at the tea-table.

"Well, it was really Lick made us late," said Lovell blandly. "He would walk down to Hadley to put five pounds into the box for the Cottage Hospital."

"Dear me!" said Mrs. Silver in surprise. "That is a very large contribution!"

"A very generous one!" said cousin Phyllis with quite a kind glance at Texas Lick.

"Lick's a generous fellow," said Lovell. Texas Lick said nothing; he could not trust himself to speak just then.

The following day Arthur Edward Lovell and Texas Lick both turned up for lunch with damaged noses. Each explained that he had run his nose against something hard—as undoubtedly they had.

CHAPTER 24.

The Limit.

"O UR train!" said Jimmy Silver.

The vacation was over.

Lovell and Baby and Newcome had gone to their own homes a few days before the beginning of term; Jimmy was to meet them again in the classic shades of Rookwood. Texas Lick stayed on at the Priory till the new term started—his home being in the far-off State of Texas, and nobody but Jimmy Silver being anxious or willing to enjoy his company.

So Jimmy and Texas Lick started for school together, in the frosty winter morning. There were several changes of trains, but at last they arrived at the express for Latcham Junction.

"Come on, Lick!" called out Jimmy Silver.

Lick was busy with an automatic chocolate machine on the platform. He was finding scope for his keen transatlantic genius in an attempt to extract several packets in succession with the same coin. Jimmy caught him by the shoulder and huddled him to the train. He had no sympathy whatever in such efforts of transatlantic genius.

The two juniors entered a first-class

carriage, which they had to themselves. The train was almost starting when a slim man in a bowler hat, with a black moustache, entered the carriage.

The guard slammed the door, and the train started. At the same moment Jimmy recognised the man in the bowler hat and black moustache. It was Captain Punter, the shady sporting man whom he had seen with Carlow of the Sixth in the billiard-room at the inn—in whose delectable company the Rookwood prefect had apparently spent a good part of his holidays.

Captain Punter looked at the two juniors, and seemed to recognise them. He gave them an agreeable nod.

"I've seen you young gentlemen before," he remarked.

Jimmy Silver nodded without speaking; he was very undesirous of entering into talk with a character like Captain Punter. But Texas Lick was quite affable.

"I guess so," he said. "You were with Carlow, who belongs to our school. Know him well, what?"

"Quite an old friend of mine," said the captain. "You young fellows going back to school?"

"You've got it," said Lick.

"So you belong to Rookwood?" said the captain affably. "It's a pleasure to meet you. I'm an old Rookwood man myself."

Jimmy Silver frowned. He did not believe that statement; and certainly he did not want to believe it. Captain Punter was not a gentleman who would have redressed credit on any school. Jimmy had brought a "Holiday Annual" with him to help pass the journey, and to rescue him from the conversation of Texas Lick. He now retired behind it, leaving Lick to talk to the racing sharper if he chose. Lick evidently did choose.

He was soon chatting away quite freely with the captain, telling him about Rookwood School, and his impressions of the Old Country, and the immense superiority of the United States, especially the unequalled State of Texas. Captain Punter "drew" him cheerfully, letting the Western youth's irrepressible chin wag incessantly. In an absent-minded sort of way, the captain took a little case from his pocket and produced a pack of cards. He glanced at his watch as the express whirled through a station.

"Another half hour to Latcham," he

remarked, "This is a non-stop run. What about a round game to pass the time."

"I guess I'm your antelope," said Lick. "You, Jimmy—"

Jimmy Silver gave him a stern look. "You're going back to Rookwood now, Lick," he said. "I warn you that you'd better not do anything of the kind."

"Pooh, where's the harm in a little game for penny points?" said the captain.

"You know as well as I do," said Jimmy Silver.

The captain shrugged his shoulders. "Well, what do you say, Master Lick?" he asked. "Did you ever play cards in Texas?"

"I guess I've played poker with the cowpunchers on the ranch," said Lick. "Of course, I ain't what you'd call a player. But I jest know how to handle the cards."

"Well, just to pass the half hour before—"

"Sure!"

"Look here, Lick—" began Jimmy. "Oh, give us a rest," said Lick. "We ain't at Rookwood yet, and we're only going to play for shillings."

The captain's eyes glinted. With the keen eyes of his profession, which was that of a human bird of prey, he had discerned that the Western youth was well provided with money. In a game like poker, shillings were likely to mount up rapidly into a good many pounds.

Jimmy Silver frowned behind his "Holiday Annual," but he said no more. If Lick insisted upon asking for trouble with a sharper, it was his own look out.

The captain's bowler hat was used for the "pot," and the captain having dealt, the game began. Texas Lick "drew" three cards, the captain drew only one. Shillings dropped into the hat, and then half-crowns, and then ten-shilling notes. In a very short time there were several pounds in the pot, and then Lick called for a show of cards.

He showed a full hand, and the captain showed four of a kind; and the latter being the stronger hand, Captain Panter raked in the stakes.

"I guess you've got me beat," remarked Texas Lick. "Cut!"

He shuffled the cards, and the captain cut them, and Lick dealt. Then the stakes rained into the hat again.

Lick was playing recklessly, or at least seemed to be doing so. Captain Panter covered every stake as he put it up.

Then Lick dealt four of a kind again,

and they were four aces. On a hand like that the captain was prepared to take risks.

Lick glanced at his cards several times, and appeared doubtful. Each time however, after hesitating, he put up a new stake, which the captain promptly covered.

As no "limit" had been fixed, and as Lick raised the stake every time, there was soon a large sum in the hat.

"I guess I'll go you a quid!" said Lick, at last, and he threw a pound note into the hat.

The captain covered it.

"Five!" said Lick, and a crisp five-pound note rattled into the pot.

Captain Panter hesitated at that. But he covered the stake, and called for a show-up.

"Four of a kind and a king," he remarked, turning up his cards.

"A straight flush!" said Lick nonchalantly, showing a sequence of five cards of the same suit, from queen down to eight.

The captain's jaw dropped. With almost lightning swiftness, Lick reached for the stakes and annexed them.

"Your deal!" he said blandly.

Captain Panter took the cards, shoved them back into the case, and put the case into his pocket. Then he fixed a deadly look on Texas Lick.

"You young scoundrel!" he said.

"Gee-whiz! What's bitin' you now?" asked Lick innocently.

"You planted that hand on me," roared the captain.

Lick chuckled.

"I guess we get our eye-teeth cut out in Texas," he remarked. "Why, you galoot, I've played cards with cowpunchers and Mexican growers ever since I was two feet high. Do you reckon I didn't see you dealing from the bottom of the pack?"

"What?" gasped the captain.

"I guess you was sharp, but I kinder reckon we're sharper in the States," said Texas Lick complacently. "I guess I've played you at your own game, captain, and played you for a sucker."

The captain rose to his feet. He was almost trembling with rage.

Texas Lick eyed him coolly.

"Keep your temper, old scout," he advised. "I guess if you cut up rusty I'll call a constable at Latham. Do you want a magistrate to hear all about the way you make money when you meet a schoolboy in a train?"

Captain Panter sunk back into his seat,

Until the express drew up at Litcham he sat and glared at Texas Lick. If Licks could have slain, the youth from Texas certainly would not have survived to reach Litcham Junction. Fortunately, Licks could not. As soon as the train stopped Captain Punter jumped out, and disappeared at once from sight. Texas Lick and Jimmy Silver followed. They found themselves amid a crowd of fellows gathering from all quarters for the new term at Rookwood.

CHAPTER 25.

Barred!

"SHIFT!"

"Eh?"

"Shift!" repeated Jimmy Silver.

Texas Lick blinked at him.

"What's biting you?" he asked.

"I'm fed-up with you," said Jimmy Silver quietly and deliberately. "It may seem all right to you, Lick, to gamble in a train with a shady blackguard, and to cheat a sharper. It's not Rookwood style. I'm fed-up with you, and I want you to keep your distance this term. Is that plain enough?"

Texas Lick grinned.

"I guess you put it plain," he assented.

"But what are you getting mad about? That galoot started out to skin me, giving me a fake deal from the bottom of the pack. I let him run on, and skinned him. I call that fair and square."

"It may be called fair and square in Texas, but it won't do for Rookwood," grunted Jimmy Silver. "So shift, and leave me alone."

"Oh, come off!" urged Texas Lick.

"Hallo, Jimmy!" bawled the powerful voice of Arthur Edward Lovell from the other end of the platform. And Jimmy nodded along to meet his chums, leaving Texas Lick to himself.

"Geo-whiz!" murmured Lick.

He shrugged his shoulders and moved away in the crowd. Jimmy Silver joined Lovell and Baby and Newcome, and they moved off for the local train for Coombe, the station for Rookwood.

"Where's your giddy pal?" asked Lovell.

"Do you mean Lick?" grunted Jimmy Silver. "He's about somewhere. It's rather awkward about his being in our study at Rookwood. I want to keep him at arm's length this term."

Lovell chuckled.

"After having him home for Christmas!" he said. "Well, I told you at the time that you were a thumping ass, Jimmy: you can't deny it."

"Oh, rats!" said Jimmy.

Texas Lick was not seen again before the Fistical Four arrived at Rookwood School. For some time after that they were too busy to think about him at all. There were plenty of things to attend to on the first day of term. Among other things was a meeting with Carthew of the Sixth. At Rookwood, Mark Carthew was once more a powerful personage, invested with the power of the asphalt, and he proceeded to make the Fistical Four realise it. They were putting things to rights in the end study when Carthew of the Sixth looked in, with his cane under his arm and an extremely unpleasant expression on his face.

"Oh! So you're back, what?" greeted Carthew. "I think I remember coming across you kids in the vacation, and you checked me."

"Well, we're at Rookwood now, Carthew," said Jimmy Silver mildly. "Let it rest."

"Quite so, we're at Rookwood now," agreed the bully of the Sixth. "Of course, I'm not going to take any notice of anything that happened in the holidays. But you kids have been ragging with the Modern fellows already, since you got back, and we can't have fags kicking up a shindy on the first day of term. Bend over!"

Carthew swished his cane.

The Fistical Four drew together and eyed Carthew warily. They did not intend to "bend over" and take a licking from the Sixth Form bully. But it certainly was the case that they had been "ragging" with the Moderns, and that Carthew was a prefect and entitled to take official note of such lawless proceedings.

"You hear me?" rapped out Carthew.

Texas Lick strolled into the end study as he was speaking. Carthew gave him a black look. He had not forgotten his unfortunate encounter with the sharp American at billiards.

"You get in' on the war-path already, old man!" grinned Lick. "Look hyer, you get out of this study!"

"What!" roared Carthew, gripping his cane.

"Don't I speak plain? Abusquatulate—vamosos the (and—git!)"

"Why, I—I—I'll—" gasped Carthew.

"You git!" said Lick. "I don't want an have to explain to my Form-master about a billiards sharper butting into a respectable study."

"What about?"

"But if you don't yamooos, you know what to expect."

Carthew eyed the Texan, and Lick eyed Carthew. The bully of the Sixth lowered his cane and gritted his teeth. He understood that it was, as a matter of fact, hold the whip-hand. That incident of the holidays required to be buried in oblivion.

"You catch on?" asked Lick cheerfully. "I guess you ain't bulldozing in this hyer study, Carthew. Not while this infant is hyer. You jest git! Don't jaw, but git!"

The Fistical Four burst into a laugh. The expression on Mark Carthew's face was quite entertaining at that moment.

The bully of the Sixth was evidently yearning to jump at Texas Lick, and lay the case about him right and left. But he did not venture to do so.

With a black brow he strode out of the study. The next moment there was a wild yell in the passage. Carthew had come upon Tubby Muffin there. Tubby had given no offence, but he was within reach, and that was enough for Carthew. The Sixth Form bully strode away to the stairs, leaving the hapless Muffin wriggling from a hefty lash of the cane, and spluttering with surprise and indignation.

Texas Lick gave a chuckle.

"I guess I made that bulldozer climb down," he remarked. "Why, he wouldn't dare to let the Head guess how he passes his time in the vacation."

The Fistical Four did not answer Lick. It would never have occurred to them to hold that incident over Carthew's head, and certainly they would not have dreamed of giving him away, much as they disliked him.

Lick stared at them.

"Lost your voices?" he asked sarcastically.

"Yes, as far as you're concerned," said Jimmy Silver bluntly. "Look here, Lick, I spoke to you plainly enough at Latham. Would take it as a favour if you'd change out into some other study this term."

"I guess this study suits me."

"You don't surr—net!" said Lovell.

"That suits me fine with me," said Texas

Lick coolly. "But what's the matter with you galoots? What's biting you?"

"You know jolly well!" said Ruby angrily. "Peele's study would suit you—you can play cards there, and the lot of you can weld one another as much as you like. It's not good enough for this study."

"Oh, that's it, is it?" said Lick. "You kinder object to the way I skinned that fresh galoot in the train, Jimmy?"

"Yes."

"I reckon you're a lay. I've played poker ever since I was big enough to sit up and hold the cards."

"Well, we don't play poker in this study," said Lovell. "That sort of thing is a bit too fishy for us. Peele would let you into his study if you asked him. You've got lots of money."

"I guess I ain't asking him."

"If you stay in this study you'll be sent to Coventry!" bawled Lovell.

"That means that you won't talk to me, what?"

"Yes, it does."

"Then I guess I'll freeze on to this study," said Lick cordially. "If you won't talk while I'm here, I guess this study will be a bit more comfortable than it was last term."

And Texas Lick strolled out of the end study with that remark, leaving Arthur Edward Lovell speechless with wrath, and his chums grinning.

CHAPTER 25.

Sent to Coventry!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. were in earnest.

In the opinion of the Fistical Four, Texas Lick had passed the limit, and they were done with him.

They had been very patient with the youth from the wild and woolly West—even Arthur Edward Lovell had been patient. They had stood his incessant "chin-wag"—they had tolerated his derogatory descriptions of everything and everybody in the Old Country. They had made every allowance for his "wild and woolly" ways. But there was a limit, and it had been reached. The incident of Captain Punter and the game of poker was the finishing touch.

Texas Lick was sent to Coventry by the end study.

There was no reason, so far as the Fistical Four could see, why he should not change into another study where he would have

been welcome. Peole & Co. would gladly have taken the millionaire's son into their shady fold. If he did not choose to go, that was his own look-out. In the end study he was ignored.

For the first two or three days Lick treated the matter as a joke. He prided himself upon his exceeding sharpness. He seemed, indeed, incapable of understanding that there was anything wrong in his conduct. "Skinning," a sharper who had set out to "skin" him seemed to Lick an exploit of which he was entitled to boast. He did not take the Fistical Four's attitude seriously at first.

But after a day or two he became restive. Talking was to Texas Lick, one of the prime necessities of life. As eating was to Tubby Muffin, so was "chin-wag" to the loquacious youth from the West. Certainly, Lick preferred to do most of the talking himself. He seldom listened to what was said to him. The pauses in his conversation were chiefly for the purpose of taking breath. But even Lick could not find a lasting pleasure in talking to fellows who never opened their lips in reply, and whose faces remained as expressionless as wooden images.

Outside the study Lick's society was not sought after. He was regarded as a bore. His one topic—the immense superiority of the United States to the mouldy old island in which he now sojourned—was not particularly interesting to inhabitants of the mouldy old island. Nobody was anxious for the benefits of Lick's enlightening conversation. And so the sentence of "Conventry" in his own study began to bear heavily upon him.

"I guess you galoots are trying to freeze me out of this study!" he exclaimed indignantly, on the third day at tea-time. "You reckon you'll make me git! Is that the game?"

No answer.

"Can't you speak?" bawled Lick.

Dead silence.

"Look here, Jimmy Silver——"

Jimmy Silver peered out his tea seditately, as if unconscious of Lick's presence in the study. Lick glared at him, and then glared at Arthur Edward Lovell. Lovell stared at his plate.

"Look here, Lovell——"

"Pass the jam, Rabby," said Lovell.

"I spoke to you!" howled Lick. Lovell seemed deaf.

"I say, Rabby, old chap——"

"About the match with the Moderns on Saturday, Jimmy?" said Rabby.

"Look here, I ain't standing this!" howled Texas Lick. "Why, you fellows are making me feel as if I were in a deaf-and-dumb asylum. I'm fed-up with it, I can tell you!"

"Kick-off at two-thirty, Rabby," said Jimmy Silver, ignoring Lick. "I fancy we shall beat the Moderns all right."

Texas Lick sat and glared at the Fistical Four. They continued their conversation on the subject of the Modern football match, and the interrupting voice of Texas Lick passed them by like the idle wind which they regarded not.

Texas Lick rose from the table at last.

"You ain't freezing me out of this study," he declared. "I'm hanging on! Got that?"

The end study might indeed have been a deaf-and-dumb asylum for all the acknowledgment Lick's remark received. He stamped angrily out of the study, and slammed the door with a slam that rang the whole length of the Fourth Form passage.

Then the Fistical Four broke into a cackle.

"The dear old gasbag is getting fed," remarked Arthur Lovell. "He will burst soon!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Indeed, Texas Lick was getting a feeling that he was in danger of bursting with pent-up loquacity. The next day he returned to the charge. He came into the end study for prep, having had tea in Hall, where the silence was not so oppressive.

During prep Lick made incessant observations, not one of which was answered, or apparently heard. Wooden faces met his gaze, whenever he looked at any member of the Co. He grew more and more restive.

"Look hyer, this joke has gone far enough," he said at last. "It's time to chuck it."

No reply.

"Jimmy Silver!" bawled Lick.

Jimmy did not speak.

"I'll jolly well punch your head if you don't answer me!" roared Lick, in great excitement.

A faint grin glided over Jimmy's face, but otherwise he appeared to be stone deaf.

Texas Lick jumped up.

"I mean it!" he howled.

Stony silence.

Texas Lick whipped round the table and rushed at Jimmy Silver. Jimmy jumped to his feet; so did his chums, as if moved by the same spring.

Four pairs of hands were laid on Texas Lick.

He was swept from the floor, struggling and yelling, and bumped on the study carpet—hard!

Then he was carried bodily out of the study and bumped on the floor of the Fourth Form passage, still in deep silence.

Leaving him sitting in the passage, in a rather dishevelled and breathless condition, the Fistical Four returned into their study and closed the door. Then they grinned at one another, while the voice of Texas Lick was heard outside.

"Ow, ow, ow, wow! You jays! You ungrumps! Wow!"

The door reopened and Texas Lick glared in.

"Look hyer, you guys——" he roared.

The Fistical Four jumped up again. Lick was collared in the doorway and bumped in silence—silence on the part of Jimmy Silver & Co., though by no means on the part of Texas Lick. The voice of Lick could be heard in every study in the Classical Fourth. Fellows looked out of their study doorways and chuckled.

With closed lips the Fistical Four bore Texas Lick along the passage, bumping him at every few paces, till they reached the staircase. He was finally bumped down on the landing and left there, and the juniors walked back to their study.

This time Lick did not return, and the end study saw no more of him till bedtime. In the Fourth Form dormitory he gave them a glare which they did not seem to see.

The "cutting" of Texas Lick was a standing joke in the Classical Fourth by this time. But the hapless Lick found it no joke. He stood it for one day more, and then, after a silent tea in the end study, he opened negotiations as it were.

"You galoots have got me properly," he said, almost plaintively. "I guess I'm ready to call it off, if you are."

Deep silence.

"What do you want?" demanded Lick desperately. "Look hyer you don't want to keep up this game. Can't you answer a galoot?"

Apparently the Fistical Four couldn't. At all events, they didn't. The "galoot" remained unanswered.

Texas Lick breathed hard.

"I'll do anything you god-darned well like, if you'll call off this game," he said.

Jimmy Silver looked at his chums. Then he took a stump of chalk from the table-drawer. Still without speaking, he chalked on the looking-glass:

"Will you promise?"

"I'll promise anything you like!" said Texas Lick, in desperation. "Give it a name."

The Fistical Four grinned. Jimmy Silver proceeded to chalk the conditions of peace on the glass.

"Never touch a card so long as you stay at Rockwood."

There was a pause.

"Is that all?" asked Lick at last.

Jimmy Silver chalked again.

"Own up that you're a disgrace to the study."

"Nope!" roared Lick.

Jimmy took a duster and rubbed the chalk from the glass. He resumed his seat in a dead silence.

"Look hyer——" said Lick.

The Fistical Four did not "look there." The sentence of Coventry was still in full force.

Texas Lick glared at them.

"I guess I'll promise not to touch a card," he said. "I don't see the point, but if you make a point of it, there you are. I promise, you ornery galoots!"

Silence.

"That all?" said Lick persuasively.

Jimmy Silver shook his head without speaking.

There was an inward struggle in Texas Lick. But he realised that he could stand "Coventry" no longer; he had to talk or burst.

"I—I—I guess I own up," he stammered.

The Fistical Four waited silently.

"That—that——"

Pause.

"That—that—that I'm a disgrace to the study!" gasped Texas Lick.

The Fistical Four chuckled.

"All serene," said Jimmy Silver.

"Oh, you can talk now, can you?" growled Texas Lick. "I guess I've a jolly good mind to wade in and mop up the lot of you. Of all the god-darned galoots that I've ever struck I guess you jays are god-darned. You make me tired."

"And now we let you talk again, I guess

"you'll make us tired," chuckled Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Texas Lick did.

CHAPTER 27.

Lick Takes the Lead

"YOU galoots game?"

Jimmy Silver & Co. were discussing matters in the end study at Rookwood when Texas Lick butted in with that question.

It was a half-holiday at Rookwood, and the subject under discussion was—what was to be done with the afternoon.

The weather was bad—in fact, "rotten." It was rather too rotten for football. A "rag" on the Moderns was the next best resource, but as it happened, Tommy Dodd & Co. of the Modern side, had gone out of gates for the afternoon, so they were not available for a rag. "Passage football" was another resource, but that was strictly forbidden by the powers, and involved considerable risk of fines, lickings, and gatings.

So, for some time the chums of the end study were prepared to listen to a suggestion from Texas Lick. Usually, they frowned upon the bright ideas of the junior from Texas. Now they gave him his head, so to speak.

"Game for what?" asked Lovell.

"I guess you don't want to sit roasting in this old study all the pesky afternoon—what?"

"No fear!" said Baby.

"There's the cinema at Latcham," suggested Newcome.

"Or we might get through some of our lines," remarked Jimmy Silver. "We've all got lines on hand."

There was a general grunt of dissent. Lines had to be done sooner or later, but the juniors preferred later to sooner.

"Give a galoot a chance to speak," said Texas Lick. "I guess I can fill the bill, if you 'uns are game."

"Well, what's the programme?" asked Jimmy.

"Brighton!" said Lick.

"Brighton!" yelled Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Yep!"

"You're thinking of going to Brighton?" stuttered Baby.

"Why not?"

"Oh, about a thousand reasons why not.

Brighton is about fifty miles out of bounds."

"I guess school bounds eat no lee with me," said Texas Lick disdainfully. "I was raised on a ranch as big as the whole of this mouldy old island—"

"Bor-r-r-r!" interjected Lovell.

"I guess I've looked out the timetable," continued Texas Lick. "We can get to Brighton in time for an afternoon show at the theatre—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Then we can roll round the town a bit, and get home by the evening train—"

"Phew!"

"Waaf, are you game?"

"You silly ass!" roared Lovell. "It would mean a licking all round—a Head's flogging, very likely."

"Oh, guff!"

"Then there's call over at five o'clock—"

"I guess we'd give it a miss."

"We shouldn't get back in time for evening call-over—"

"What's the odds if we don't?"

"Mightn't get back before bed-time, even—"

said Newcome.

"Waaf, suppose we didn't?"

"Oh, you're an ass!"

"A howling ass!" said Lovell. "Take your wonderful wheezes along to some other study, Lick!"

Texas Lick gave a scornful sniff.

"You ain't game?" he asked.

"We're game enough, if it comes to that," snapped Lovell. "But we're not assenough. What's the good of asking for trouble?"

"Rot!" said Lick. "I'm going, anyhow."

"Gas!"

"I guess you'll see. And if you fellows ain't suffering from cold feet, you'll hustle along with me," said Texas Lick. "Why, it would be only a step from Rookwood to Brighton, if you had real railroads in this country. Even on your mouldy old prehistoric lines you can do the trip in fifty minutes."

"It's out of bounds!" howled Lovell.

"Oh, guff!"

"We're not allowed to go to theatres without special permission."

"I guess you make me tired."

"Oh, get out!" grunted Lovell.

Texas Lick shrugged his thin shoulders. He banged to the door of the end study,

and stopped there to bestow a glance of scorn on the Fistical Fear.

"I guess you guys were born with cold feet," he said. "Jawver hear of such a set of funks?"

"Funks!" howled Lovell.

"Jest that!" said Texas Lick. "Funks—that's what you galoots are. I'm goin', and you're afraid to come! I guess you haven't as much sand as a god-darned greaser!"

Arthur Edward Lovell jumped up with a crimson face.

"If you're going, you bragging ass, I'll come. I'll show you whether I'm funk-ing."

"Good!" said Texas Lick. "I hate going on a trip alone. You other galoots got as much sand as Lovell?"

Jimmy Silver frowned.

"Chuck it, Lovell!" he said. "No good playing the ox. We should be missed at five roll-call, and there would be no end of a row."

"I'm going if Lick goes," said Lovell obstinately.

"Come on," said Lick. "Leave them galoots at home to know-how to the prefects, and say 'Yes, sir,' and 'No, sir,' to the masters! If they've got cold feet let 'em sit at home and nurse 'em!"

"You cheeky ass—" began Jimmy wrathfully.

"I guess it's time we were off, Lovell."

"Look here, Lovell—" said Jimmy.

"I'm going."

"There'll be a row—"

"I'm going!"

"It means trouble with Mr. Dalton, and—"

"I'm going!"

"And very likely with the Head, as—"

"I'm going!"

"You're a silly ass!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver angrily. "But if you go, you chump, you're not going without me."

"That's better," said Texas Lick approvingly. "You've got some sand, after all. What about the other galoots?"

"Oh, we're coming," said Raby. "It's a mug's game, and there'll be a row. But sink or swim together!"

Newcome nodded assent; and the Fistical Four went for their coats and caps. Five minutes later Jimmy Silver & Co. emerged from the School House, and started for the gates. Texas Lick was in high spirits—as he generally was when he was setting the

rules and regulations of Rookwood at defiance.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome began to think that the expedition was rather a "lark." Only Jimmy Silver's face was serious. "Uncle James" of Rookwood was a little more thoughtful than his comrades, and he could not help reflecting that after the least came the reckoning. But he was in for it now, and "Uncle James" put as cheerful a face on it as he could.

CHAPTER 25.

A Bad Start.

BULKELEY of the Sixth was standing in the old gateway of Rookwood, in conversation with Knowles, the Modern prefect. Knowles was in hat and overcoat, and had a bag in his hand. Apparently Knowles, of the Modern Sixth, was starting on a journey. His glance fell on the Fistical Four as they came along with Lick, and his eyes gleamed a little. There was no love lost between the Classical chums and the captain of the Modern side of Rookwood. Bulkeley did not notice them for the moment; he was speaking to Knowles in quiet, earnest tones.

"I'm sorry, Knowles, I hoped we should start the new term without all this bickering beginning again. No reason that I can see why the two sides at Rookwood shouldn't pull together."

"If you encourage fags on your side to cheek prefects on the Modern side—" said Knowles.

"That's all rot, Knowles, and you know it," said Bulkeley. "You're in the Modern Sixth, and you've no right to fag Classical juniors. That's a rule as old as the Modern side itself at Rookwood."

"All very well," answered Knowles. "You backed up that young ass Lovell the other day—"

"Lovell was right in refusing to be caned by a Modern prefect. You had only to report him to me."

"Well, we shan't improve matters at this rate, and I've got a train to catch," said Knowles sourly. "Here, one of you kids, carry this bag for me!"

The Fistical Four stopped.

They did not like Knowles; and it was a matter of principle with them to refuse to fag for Modern seniors.

"That was an immemorial right of fellows on the Classical side.

Bulkeley frowned.

"Do you hear me?" demanded Knowles.

"We're not deaf," answered Jimmy Silver politely. "But we're not looking for porters' jobs, thanks."

"No fear!" said Lovell emphatically.

"I guess not!" said Texas Lick.

"That's the way you teach your fags to talk in a Sixth Form prefect, Bulkeley!" sneered Knowles.

"Well, they're within their rights," said Bulkeley. "You should call on a fag of your own House. Still, it seems that you are going down to Coombe, Silver."

"Yes, Bulkeley."

"Well, then, take Knowles' bag for him!"

"Certainly, if you say so," answered Jimmy Silver at once.

"Well, I do say so."

"Right-ho!"

Jimmy Silver took the bag cheerfully enough. Bulkeley was head of the Classical side, and captain of the school, and his word was law; but, besides that, he was the most popular senior at Rookwood, and any junior in either House was ready to please him. Knowles gave Bulkeley a short nod and started down the road, with Jimmy Silver shouldering his bag.

Knowles did not speak to the juniors on the way to Coombe. He gave them one or two sour looks, but otherwise did not deign to take note of their existence.

The Fistical Four were feeling a little worried as Coombe station came in sight.

The trip to Brighton was not in itself harmful, but it was against all rules, and it was, of course, necessary to keep it strictly dark. The juniors did not want to be seen even entering the station by any Rookwood fellow.

And now Knowles was planted on them, and evidently he was going by the local train to Latcham—the train the juniors had to take if they were to catch the express to the seaside town.

That Knowles would "catch them out" if he could was a certainty; he would be delighted at the chance. Latcham Junction was out of the school bounds, and Knowles was going there! It was the worst of ill-luck for the bounds-breakers.

Texas Lick did not seem disturbed; but the Fistical Four were decidedly worried. At

this point they realised that it would only be common wisdom to give up the reckless expedition; but that evidently was not in Texas Lick's mind at all.

At the station Knowles took his ticket, and took the bag from Jimmy Silver.

"You can eat!" he snapped, which was Cecil Knowles' way of acknowledging a service.

Knowles went on to the platform with his bag. Lick went to the booking-office and took five tickets.

"I guess the train's signalled," he said. "Hurry, you galsots!"

"Hold on," said Jimmy.

"Oh, get a move on."

"Knowles is going by that train, and—"

"Room for us, too, I suppose!"

"Even Latcham's out of bounds—lo, alone Brighton—"

"Getting cold feet again?" asked Texas Lick agreeably.

Jimmy Silver breathed hard.

"It's not good enough, you see? Knowles is bound to spot us in the train, and he will report us at Rookwood."

"Let him!"

"Look here, Lick, you thumping ass—"

"There's the train."

Lick started for the platform, and the Fistical Four exchanged looks of exasperation. But they followed Lick. Knowles, fortunately, was already in the train when they reached it, and they bundled into a third-class carriage. Knowles, as they knew, travelled first-class, so they were safe so far.

"All O.K., I guess," said Texas Lick cheerfully, as the train moved out of the station. "Keep a stiff upper lip! We're all right!"

"Knowles will spot us at Latcham," growled Lovell.

"Let him!"

"Oh, you're a silly ass!"

The juniors could not help feeling anxious as the local ran on to Latcham. There was rather a crowd at the junction when the train came in, and the Fistical Four hoped to escape the keen eyes of Cecil Knowles by mingling with the crowd. They cut across the bridge for the express platform; the express was already in the station. As they scudded along the train a voice shouted:

"Silver! Lovell! Stop there!"

It was the voice of Cecil Knowles.

CHAPTER 25.

Knowles Asks for It!

JIMMY SILVER stopped in dismay. Knowles of the Sixth was coming along the train, bag in hand. Evidently he, too, was going to Brighton.

It was cruel luck!

Knowles came up to the group of dismayed juniors, with a grin on his face.

"Out of bounds, what!" he said.

The Classics did not reply. It was obvious enough that they were out of bounds; and that their intention was to go much farther out of bounds.

"Catching the Brighton express, by Jove!" said Knowles, with a whistle. "My hat! I never heard of such cheek. I shall report this to the Head, of course."

"Report and be blowed," growled Lovell.

Knowles looked at his watch.

"Five minutes before the train goes," he said. "I've got time to see you off in the return local to Coombe. Come on!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. looked at one another. It was true that Knowles, a Modern prefect, had not authority to order them about at Rookwood. But they were already caught out of bounds, and it was quite certain that the Head would have expected any prefect, Classical or Modern, to prevent them from going farther.

"Come on!" snapped Knowles.

"I guess I ain't coming!" drawled Texas Lick.

"What!"

"I guess I'm taking this train."

"It's my duty to see you back to the school," said Knowles. "I warn you that you'd better come quietly. You young rascals—this is the way Bulkeley keeps you in order, is it!"

"Bulkeley knows nothing about it," growled Jimmy Silver.

"It's his duty to know," said Knowles.

"I fancy the Head will have something to say to him when I report this. But get a move on! I'm seeing you off before I take my train."

Jimmy Silver breathed hard and deep. It went severely against the grain to be ordered about by the bully of the Modern side. But he felt that there was no help for it.

"Come on, you fellows!" he said.

"I guess I ain't coming!" remarked Texas Lick. "This ~~train~~ is my train, and I'm sure taking it!"

"Look here, Lick——"

"Oh, guff!"

Texas Lick had opened the door of an empty carriage, and now he jumped in. Knowles looked astonished and the Fistical Four blinked at Lick, not knowing what to do.

"Hop in, you galoots!" called out Lick.

"Get out of that carriage!" roared Knowles.

"Can it!" retorted Texas Lick.

"Do you want me to yank you out, you cheeky young sweep!"

"Go and chop chips!"

Knowles' eyes glittered. He dropped his bag to the platform and jumped into the carriage.

"Now, you young rascal——"

He grasped Texas Lick and swung him bodily to the door. There was a yell from the Texan.

"Lend a hand, you galoots!"

Bump!

Knowles of the Sixth and the Texan came bundling out of the carriage together, and they sprawled on the platform. Lick tore himself loose and leaped for the train again.

Knowles bounded after him, red with rage, and seized him by the collar. Lick clung to the handle of the carriage door, and yelled.

"Play up, you galoots! Ow!"

Porters and passengers were gathering round. The scene attracted attention on all sides. Knowles, in his fury, boxed Lick's ears right and left, and Lick yelled louder than ever. Jimmy Silver caught the Modern senior by the arm.

"Stop that, Knowles——"

Smack!

Jimmy gave a roar, and reeled back from Knowles' smiting hand.

That was too much for the Classical juniors.

They forgot for the moment that they were breakers of bounds, and looked for a report to the Head, and remembered only that they were Classics, and up against the Modern Sixth bully.

Lovell and Ruby and Newcome grasped Knowles and dragged him away from Lick. The next moment Jimmy Silver's grasp was on him, too.

Knowles roared and struggled.

"Let go! I—I— Help! Ow! Oh! Who-o-o-o-o!"

Bump!

Knowles of the Sixth rolled on the plat-

form. Texas Lick, breathless and dishevelled, bolted into the carriage again.

"Come on, you galoots!" he panted.

Jimmy Silver & Co. followed him in. Knowles sat up on the platform, his hat gone, his tie streaming out, gasping for breath.

"Ow! Gough! You—you—you—I——" He staggered to his feet. "Come out! I—I'll——"

"Go and eat coke!" panted Lovell.

"Stand back there!" shouted a porter.

Knowles made a savage spring for the carriage. He got half in, and then three or four boots met him, and he went back to the platform—in a heap!

Slam!

The guard slammed the carriage door; there was a shrill whistle from the engine. Knowles of the Sixth scrambled up, seeing red. But a porter caught his arm and jerked him back as the train began to move.

"Let go, you fool!" yelled Knowles. "That's my train!"

"You're lost, is now!"

"I—I—I——"

Jimmy Silver & Co. stared out of the carriage window as the express glided out of Latham. Knowles was almost dancing with rage on the platform, hatless, crimson, and dusty. Texas Lick burst into a chuckle.

"I guess that guy wishes he hadn't butted in!" he remarked.

Jimmy sank into a seat.

"Oh, my hat! We're in for it now!" he gasped.

"Knowles has lost his train, anyhow!" panted Lovell. "He won't be able to worry us at Brighton!"

"Brighton!" groaned Raby. "Lot of good going on to Brighton now! Best thing we can do is to get out at the next station and take the first train back to Rockwood!"

Texas Lick chuckled.

"What are you cackling at, you silly mugger?" roared Raby.

"I guess this is a non-stop!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Then we're booked for Brighton!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

"Sure!"

"That does it!" said Newcome.

"I guess it's all O.K.," said Texas Lick. "We'll have our day out, and bother Knowles! Then we'll unsay back to Rockwood and face the music."

"You silly ass!" said Lovell. "The whole thing's out now, and it will mean a flogging all round!"

"I guess they won't flog me!" said Texas Lick disdainfully. "I guess a free American citizen——"

"Oh, shut up!"

"I guess——"

"Shut up!" roared the Fistical Four, in great wrath.

And Texas Lick for once gave his untiring chin a rest.

CHAPTER 30.

Bagged!

"BRIGHTON!"

"Well, here we are!" said Jimmy Silver grimly.

There they were—there was no doubt about that. They had arrived in London-by-the-Sea, though whether they were going to enjoy the delights of that popular resort was another question.

Jimmy Silver & Co. had felt—and looked—glam enough during the run in the express.

The expedition out of bounds—reckless enough in the first place, and full of risk for juniors of the Lower School—had become simply disastrous since the intervention of Knowles.

Not only were the juniors going out of bounds—many a long mile out of bounds—but they had handled a Sixth Form prefect who had sought to turn them back!

After that they could scarcely expect less than a Head's flogging—indeed, Raby darkly hinted at possibilities of the "boot."

A certain flogging, and the possible "sack," seemed rather a heavy bill to pay for a harebrained excursion about which they did not really care twopence. It was Texas Lick's boastful challenge that had landed the Fistical Four in this scrape, and they were strongly inclined to rag Lick all the way to Brighton.

But Lick was cheerful enough.

"There's going to be a shindy when we get back, since that mug-wump Knowles butted in," he said. "Waal, we may as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb! We'll have our day out, I guess, and face the music afterwards. What!"

"Something in that!" said Jimmy Silver with a faint grin. "We're booked for trouble, so we may as well make the best of it!"

"Better take the first train back!" granted Lovell.

"Oh, guff!" said Lick.

"Look here——"

"You should have stayed at home if you had cold feet," said Texas Lick coolly. "Now we're in for it. Come on, you galsots!"

Lick jumped from the carriage as the train stopped. The Fiscal Four followed him, and they mingled with a crowd heading for the exit.

A constable was standing by the ticket-collector, eyeing the crowd as they came out.

A grin came over his face at the sight of the five Rookwood juniors. He stopped towards them.

"You young genta from Rookwood School!" he asked, civilly enough.

"Yes," said Jimmy Silver.

"Five of you?" said the constable. "That's right! Please come into the station-master's office!"

"Wh-a-a-t!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"I say, what's this pecky game?" demanded Texas Lick indignantly.

"You know your game better than I do," said the constable stolidly. "Running away from school, eh?"

"Running away from school!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver.

"Well, your headmaster's telephoned along the line, asking the stationmaster to detain you till a master can be sent to take you back to school. That's all I know."

"Oh crumbs!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. blinked at the constable. Texas Lick's jaw dropped.

With all his wonderful cuteness, the American junior certainly had not thought of that. And yet it was only what might have been expected, after Knowles had made his report to Dr. Chisholm at Rookwood.

"This way!" added the constable.

In deep and dismal silence the juniors followed the man in uniform. They were utterly dismayed.

They were led into the stationmaster's office. There they looked at one another dumbly.

The stationmaster was not present, but the constable remained, apparently to see that the runaways did not bolt.

"Well, this is a go," murmured Newcomb.

"We're going to enjoy this day out, I

don't think!" groaned Arthur Edward Lovell.

"You ass, Lick!"

"Lick, you crass ass!"

Texas Lick snorted.

"Look here, you guys," he said in a low voice, "we ain't beat yet! There's five of us——"

"What?"

"What price collarin' that bobby?"

"Collarin' the bobby?" repeated Jimmy Silver almost dazedly.

"Yep, and up-endin' him——"

"Up-endin' him!" gasped Lovell.

"Sers! And levanin'! We can do it!" said Texas Lick confidently. "I guess he isn't expecting anything of the sort, and we shall sure take him by surprise!"

"You—you—duunny!" gasped Lovell.

"I guess—— Oh, Jerusalem!" yelled Lick as the exasperated four collared him.

The Fiscal Four did not think of "up-endin'" the representative of law and order. But they had no scruples about up-endin' Texas Lick—and they did so.

Bump!

The Texan smote the floor of the stationmaster's office and roared.

"Oh! You galsots! Whooop!"

Bump!

"There!" gasped Lovell. "Now, if you open your silly mouth any more we'll give you another!"

"I guess——"

Bump!

"Oh, Jerusalem crickets! Let up!" yelled Texas Lick.

"Keep your silly mouth shut, then!" snapped Lovell. "We're fed up with you and your silly wheezes, Lick—right up to the chin!"

Texas Lick groaned, and did not propose any more wheezes. The juniors waited for the next train to come in from Latham Junction.

At last the stationmaster entered the office, and with him came a stalwart young man whom the juniors knew well. It was Mr. Richard Dalton, the master of the Fourth Form at Rookwood.

Mr. Dalton gave the juniors a stern look.

"There are the boys," he said.

A few minutes later the Fourth Form master led his flock to the platform for Latham. He had spoken hardly a word to them, but his face was very grim.

There was a quarter of an hour to wait

for the train back to Latcham Junction. The juniors sat in a dismal row on a seat and waited. Mr. Dalton stood like a statue at the end of the seat.

The train came in at last.

The Fourth Form master shepherded the five juniors into a carriage and followed them in.

He sat in a corner seat by the door. Texas Lick sat in the corner opposite.

Several more passengers entered the carriage.

Texas Lick rose, as if to give his seat to one of them. A second more, and he had jumped from the carriage.

"Lick!" gasped Mr. Dalton.

He sprang to his feet and collided with a stout gentleman who was climbing into the carriage.

"Oh!" gasped the stout gentleman, clinging to the doorway. "Oh! Ah! Young men, you are—ah—oh—clumsy! What do you mean, sir by crashing into me like that?"

"I beg your pardon. Pray allow me to pass!"

"Pray allow me to pass!" retorted the stout gentleman. "I do not want to lose this train!"

Mr. Dalton impatiently allowed the stout gentleman to climb in, and then jumped out. Lick had vanished in the crowd on the platform, and the guard was waving his flag.

Slam! Slam! Slam! ran along the train.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Lovell. "That was—that dummy—that duffer—he's bolted!"

Mr. Dalton stood outside the carriage, his face pale with anger. Texas Lick had vanished from under his very eyes, and the train was about to move.

"Lick!" shouted Mr. Dalton.

There was no answer from Lick. He had disappeared, and was probably off the platform by that time. Mr. Dalton hesitated, but he had not much time to think. To delay, looking for Lick, was to lose his train and the four breakers of bounds who were already in his hands.

"Now, then, sir, hurry up there!"

Mr. Dalton turned hurriedly back to the carriage.

"Silver, I cannot go back without the foolish boy. Can I trust you to go back directly to Rockwood?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"I rely upon you to do so."

Mr. Dalton stepped away, and the guard slammed the door. The express rolled away, leaving Mr. Dalton and the elusive Lick in Brighton.

Jimmy Silver & Co. looked at one another.

"Well, my hat!" said Jimmy.

That was all he could say.

CHAPTER 31.

After the Feast, the Reckoning!

"HERE they are!
"Here are the giddy runaways!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Where's Lick?"
"Where's Dicky Dalton?"

A crowd of fellows surrounded Jimmy Silver & Co. as they came into the School House at Rockwood in the falling dusk of the winter afternoon.

The Fistical Four were not looking happy. But the crowd of fellows seemed to look on the affair as a great joke.

"Where have you been?" asked Smythe of the Shell. "No racers on at Brighton now—what?"

"You cheeky ass!" hooted Lovell.

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"They were going to run away and be pirates!" chorled Tubby Muffin. "Isn't that it, Jimmy?"

"Pathetic!"

"What was the game, anyhow?" asked Mornington. "You seem to be up against it, you fellows."

"It was that dummy Lick!" grunted Jimmy Silver. "We've played the goat and had a rotten time, and now we're going to get a licking. I wish that born idiot had stayed at home in Texas!"

"Yes, rather!" said Raby, with deep feeling.

"You weren't running away from school?" asked Ganner of the Fourth.

"No, you silly owl!" hooted Newcome.

"I've heard that Knowles bagged you in the express for Brighton," said Townsend.

"Blow Knowles!"

"Hallo here's Bulkeley!"

Bulkeley of the Sixth came through the grinning crowd. His rugged face was very stern.

"You're to come to the Head at once!" he said curtly. "Where is Lick?"

"In Brighton, as far as we know."

"Didn't he come back with you?"

"No."

"Or Mr. Dalton?" asked Bulkeley.

"No; he packed us into the train and sent us back. And here we are!" said Lovell dismally.

"Well, get along to the Head; he's waiting to see you."

Bulkeley saw the four juniors along the corridor to the Head's study. They entered that dread presence with dismal forebodings.

Dr. Chisholm fixed his eyes on the four.

"So you have returned!" he said, in an awful voice.

"Yes, sir!" murmured Jimmy.

"Where have you been?"

"To—to Brighton!"

"Bless my soul! How dare you go to Brighton?"

The Fistical Four did not answer that question. Indeed, now they stood under the grim eyes of their headmaster they wondered themselves how they had dared. Dr. Chisholm eyed them over his gold-rimmed glasses, with the eye of a basilisk.

"You had a companion, I think," said the Head—"the new boy, Lick—that is to say Lick? You, Silver are head of your Form. Are you not ashamed of leading a low boy, unacquainted with our customs, into an escapade like this?"

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver involuntarily.

"Do not utter ridiculous ejaculations in my presence, Silver."

"Oh! No, sir."

"Has not Lick returned to Rockwood with you?"

"No, sir. I—I think Mr. Dalton is— is still looking for him!" stammered Jimmy.

"Bless my soul! Lick, as a new boy here, is certainly less to blame than you four, who certainly knew what you were doing! I shall punish you most severely!"

"We—we—" stammered Lovell.

"Well, if you have anything to say, after this reckless defiance of the rules and laws of your school, I will give you a hearing!" said the Head, with majestic wrath.

"It—it was only a lark!" stammered Arthur Edward.

"A—a what?"

"A lark—I mean, a joke—I—I mean—"

"You do not appear to be quite clear as to what you actually mean, Lovell. Did you suppose that a distant town like Brighton was within school bounds?"

"Oh, no, sir!"

"Did you imagine that school bounds could be disregarded by Lower boys, and the authority of your headmaster set at naught?"

"Oh! Co-certainly not, sir."

"This lawless escapade," went on the Head, "might never have come to my knowledge but for the circumstance that Knowles of the Sixth Form was visiting Brighton to-day, to pass the week-end with his relatives there. But for this very fortunate chance, you might have escaped discovery."

Jimmy Silver & Co. did not answer that. Certainly they could not regard the chance as a fortunate one.

"Fortunately—very fortunately, it has come to my knowledge," went on the Head. "I shall now deal with you in such a manner that—I hope—such an escapade will never be repeated!"

He touched a bell, and the shock head of Tupper, the page, was inserted into the doorway.

"Kindly ask the sergeant to stop here, Tupper!" said the Head.

"Yes, sir!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. waited, in the lowest possible spirits, till the heavy tread of Sergeant Kettle was heard in the corri-

dor. The sergeant strode into the study and saluted.

Dr. Chisholm selected his stoniest birch. What followed was painful—very painful.

The Fistical Four were well aware that they had asked for it, and that, after asking for it, they must naturally expect to get it.

Nevertheless, it was painful.

One after another the hapless four were hoisted by the sergeant, and the Head laid on the strokes with the deftness that comes of long practice.

He did not spare the rod—indeed, he was a little tired when he had finished. He was not, however, so tired as Jimmy Silver & Co.

He breathed hard as he laid down the birch at last.

"I trust," he said, "that this will be a warning to you! You may go."

And the Fistical Four went—wriggling! They wriggled their way down the passage—they wriggled, almost like snakes, their way up the staircase to the end study! In the study they continued to wriggle and writha.

Fellows looked in occasionally during the evening, some of them to sympathise, some of them to chortle. To their remarks and inquiries, the replies generally were:

"Ow! Wow! Ow!"

Other fellows were curious to know what had become of Texas Lick and when he would turn up at Rookwood. Jimmy Silver & Co. did not worry about that. They had nearer things to worry about; and they did not care twopence when Texas Lick would turn up, or whether he should turn up at all.

CHAPTER 22.

Fed Up with Rookwood!

"BED-TIME!" said Mornington.
"And Lick hasn't come in!" chuckled Topham.

"He's stickin' it out!" grinned Townsend. "By gad, that fellow's got a neck!"

"And where's Dicky Dalton, I wonder?"

The Fistical Four were keeping in the end study. They were still feeling the effects of their visit to Dr. Chisholm. But in the junior Common-room most of the

Classical Fourth and Sixth were gathered, when the clock indicated half-past nine. And all of them were interested in Texas Lick and his amazing absence.

It was bed-time, and the Texas had not turned up at Rookwood. Apparently he had lost his train back from Brighton; possibly while occupied in dodging Mr. Richard Dalton, his Form-master. The juniors discussed his escapade almost breathlessly.

Bulkeley of the Sixth looked into the room with a frowning brow.

"Dorm!" he said briefly.

"I say, hasn't Lick come in, Bulkeley?" squeaked Tubby Muffin.

"No!" snapped the captain of Rookwood.

"Can't we stay up till he does?" asked Tubby peremptorily.

"Get a move on, you young ass."

Jimmy Silver & Co. joined the Classical Fourth on their way to the dormitory. They learned that Texas Lick was still absent without interest. They were still deeply interested in themselves and their personal reminiscences of the Head's birch.

The Classical Fourth turned in, and Bulkeley put out the light in the dormitory. Then there was a buzz of talk.

There was only one topic—the amazing conduct of Texas Lick.

"Askin' for the sack, you know," said Townsend. "I fancy he'll get it, too!"

The talk was dying away, and the juniors dropping off to sleep, when the dormitory door opened, and the light was turned on. Most of the juniors sat up in bed, blinking. In the doorway appeared Texas Lick, looking a little tired, but quite well-poisoned and cheery.

"Hallo! You've turned up!" exclaimed Oswald.

"Sure!"

Bulkeley of the Sixth followed Lick into the dormitory. He waited for the Western junior to turn in, and then extinguished the light and departed.

A rain of questions poured on Lick from all sides:

"Did Dicky Dalton catch you?"

"Where have you been?"

"Have you seen the Head?"

"Are you guin' to be bunked?"

"Flogged?"

"I guess I'm all O.K.," drawled Texas Lick. "I couldn't get an early train back.

"I've had a top-hole time. Say, has that guy Dalton turned up yet?"

"I think not," said Jimmy Silver. "He didn't bag you, then?"

"Nope! Oh, my!" chuckled Texas Lick. "I guess he's still in Brighton looking for me. Ha, ha, ha!"

And Lick roared with laughter at the idea.

"Haven't you been licked?" exclaimed Lovell. "Haven't you seen the Head?"

"I guess I've seen his nibo," assented Lick. "He told me it was late—I guess I knew that—and he would deal with me in the morning. What's he given you galoots?"

"Flogging all round," granted Raby.

"I guess he won't flog me!"

"He will, you ass, unless he decides to sack you instead!" growled Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Oh, guff!" said Texas Lick. "I guess he can't expect to tie me up with rules same as he does you greenhorns. Why, on the ranch in Texas—"

"Oh, blow the ranch in Texas!"

"In Texas, I've often ridden with the cowpunchers on a bender, and not turned up for bed till three in the morning, after shooting up the town," said Lick. "This little run to-day is nothing! I should smile! I guess if the Head cuts up rusty I shall tell him straight that I'm fed-up with Rookwood and this mouldy old island, and he'd better send me back to Texas."

"Perhaps he'll do that without your telling him," granted Lovell.

"All the better," said Lick cheerfully. "Say, I feel sort of suffocated in this poky little country. Don't you fellows?"

"Bees!"

From the point of view of the Fourth there was an alarming prospect before Texas Lick in the morning. But Lick did not seem to be alarmed. He slept peacefully, and his resonant snore was heard through the night by any fellow who happened to wake.

In the morning he turned out merry and bright. Jimmy Silver & Co. were feeling better—the effect even of a Head's flogging did not last for ever—and they were feeling a little concerned for Texas Lick. It was true that the whole affair and its misfortunes had to be laid at his door; still, he was up against it now, and they sympathized.

As that day was Sunday there was no flogging to be expected; and that gave Lick twenty-four hours more in which to anticipate his punishment. It was like a sword of Damocles hanging over his head; and certainly any other fellow's spirits would have been affected by it. But it did not seem to worry Lick.

At breakfast Mr. Dalton spoke to him with a stern brow. The juniors had learned that Mr. Dalton had returned to Rookwood by the last train the night before.

"Lick!" said the Fourth Form-master.

"Yop!"

"As to-day is Sunday the Head will not deal with you. You will be taken before him after prayers to-morrow morning."

"I guess I don't mind, sir," said Texas Lick affably.

"It is quite immaterial, Lick, whether you mind or not," said the Form-master severely. "You will receive a very severe flogging for your outrageous conduct yesterday."

"I guess not, sir."

"What-a-at?"

"I calculate I ain't taking any, sir," said Texas Lick cheerfully. "I kinder reckon I'd prefer the long jump, sir."

"Silence!" exclaimed Mr. Dalton angrily.

That day Jimmy Silver & Co. were very kind to their somewhat trying study-mate. But Texas Lick certainly did not seem to be in need of sympathy.

Indeed, he was particularly cheerful.

The sword of Damocles impending over his transatlantic head had no effect on his spirits whatever.

"Blessed if I can make the fellow out!" Arthur Edward Lovell remarked. "I shouldn't be so jolly bright with a flogging waiting for me in the morning."

"He guesses he isn't going to be flogged," grinned Raby.

"I fancy if he gives the Head any of his cheek it will be the sack instead of a licking," said Newcome.

Jimmy Silver wrinkled his brows thoughtfully.

"I wonder if that's it!" he said.

"If what's what?" asked Lovell.

"Lick says he's fed-up with Rookwood—he doesn't find the Old Country equal to what he left behind in Texas," grinned Jimmy Silver. "He only came over here to please his father. Perhaps he's rather

been to be sacked, to get back to jolly old Texas."

"But it's a disgrace to be sacked——"
"They mightn't think anything of it in Texas," said Jimmy. "Goodness knows what they think of anything in Texas."

CHAPTER 22.

The Long Jump!

TEXAS LICK was the object of considerable attention the following morning.

His open and oft-repeated statement that he wasn't going to be flogged excited great interest. Most of the fellows termed it "gas," and expected to see the Westerner climb down at the last moment. Others wondered what would happen when Lick found himself in the awe-inspiring presence of the Head.

While the fellows discussed the matter, it was suddenly observed that Texas Lick was absent. He was not seen at early prayers; and after that, when Mr. Dalton looked for him to take him before the Head, he was not to be found.

Up and down and round about Rookwood went the Form-master and the prefects, looking for Texas Lick.

But they did not find him.

Mr. Dalton went to the Head's study at last with a frowning brow, to acquaint him with the fact that Lick could not be found, and was not apparently any longer within the walls of Rookwood.

Buzzzzzz!

The telephone bell interrupted the discussion. Dr. Chisholm turned angrily to the instrument and jerked off the receiver.

"Hallo!" It was a nasal voice that came through the telephone. "Is that Dr. Chisholm?"

"Yes. Bless my soul, I know that voice! Is that Lick?"

"Yep!"

"Where are you?" gasped the Head.

"I guess that doesn't matter," came Texas Lick's cool voice. "I ain't inside Rookwood, that's a cinch. You figured it out that you was going to flog me this morning, old sport!"

"What? What?"

"Is it a fixture?"

"A—a what?" stammered the Head. "Oh,

yes. Certainly I am going to flog you very severely—most severely."

"I guess not! You see, this is the how of it," said Texas Lick. "I promised the popper to stand Rookwood as long as I could! I reckon I've played up to that. But I ain't being flogged—not if this hyer infant knows anything on the subject. Got that?"

"Bless my soul!"

"Call off the flogging, and I'm your antelope—I'll stand it as long as I can, just as I told the popper. Is it a trade?"

"You—you insolent young rascal!" gasped the Head. "If you do not immediately return to the school and submit to the most exemplary punishment, I shall expel you!"

"Is that straight?"

"What? What?"

"Do you mean it, honest Injun?"

"What? Certainly I mean it!"

"Then it's me for the long jump. Good-bye, old scout!"

"Boy!"

"I guess the Popper will let you know where to send my truck. I'm hitting the trail from now on. It's me for Texas!"

"Boy! I command you——"

"Ease off!"

"I—I—I——"

The Head of Rookwood put up the receiver with a dazed look. Texas Lick, at the other end of the wire, had rung off.

"I—I—I——" the Head stammered. "Mr. Dalton: that—that boy must be found, and—and brought back to the school, and—and then expelled—expelled from Rookwood. Bless my soul!"

"Certainly he ~~seems~~ ^{seems} out of place here, sir," said Mr. Dalton. "I think he will be more at home in Texas."

"Bless my soul!"

.....

Rookwood was in a buzz that day on the topic of Texas Lick.

That he had bolted was widely known—and that he was being sought far far and wide the fellows also knew.

But Rookwood School never saw him again.

The promised flogging never was administered. Texas Lick was never there to receive it. He had taken the "long jump"—and Rookwood knew him no more.

Christmas Travellers' Thrills.

IF you are thinking of going on a railway journey this Christmas, let's hope you don't run into the same adventures as those people a year or two back who were marooned aboard a Christmas Special during a snow blizzard near Ayr, Scotland.

Marooned!

Snow had been falling for some days before they started off on their adventurous journey, but snow-ploughs had been able to keep the track clear. Suddenly, however, a terrific storm blew up and the wind-driven snow piled so high on the line that the Christmas Special was brought to a standstill.

Frantic telegraph messages were rushed along the line asking for ploughs to come out and clear the way, but even the ploughs could not punch their way through.

Marooned in a lonely spot, not a single motor-car or relief-party of any kind could get near the train. Meanwhile the snow still fell, piling up so thickly against the sides of the carriages that the doors could not be opened.

To make matters worse, melting snow washed out the fire under the engine's boiler and thus put the steam-heating apparatus out of action.

Half-frozen passengers in the train huddled together under travelling rugs seeking warmth. Thus they remained for two whole days and nights. Then relief came. When the carriage doors were opened, it was found that in some cases the snow had even worked its way inside the compartments and lay on the floor.

During this same storm another train failed to reach its destination, too. Telegraph wires along the line had been broken down by the weight of snow, so there was no way of finding out where the train was stranded. However, a search party set off and managed to locate the straggler. They found it hidden under a twenty-foot bank of snow, and only the funnel was showing!

A Forced Landing.

Turning to aeroplanes, Christmas flying travellers have also had their thrills. On one

occasion, two British Imperial Airways airliners were held up in France by terrific storms while their pilots and passengers fretted to be back in the Home Country for Christmas.

In the end, the pilots decided to take a chance, arranging that whatever the weather they would start back on Christmas Eve. Before starting on the homeward journey, they decided to keep close company in the air so that if one 'plane was forced to land the other pilot could also descend and pick up the stranded travellers.

Leaving Le Bourget, the biggest French air-port, in terrible weather, the two 'planes had not got far before the engine of one machine jammed up working and the 'plane had to make an emergency landing.

Just as the second pilot was going to bring his 'plane down alongside the first, he saw a terrific gust of wind blow over the machine on the ground as easily as if it had been a fallen leaf. He could see nobody was hurt, but he wasn't going to risk his own machine by landing, so he flew on, eventually landing safely at Croydon. Pilot and passengers from the other 'plane finally got to England by air. You'll be glad to know they were in time to eat Christmas dinner in their own country!

The Car That Disappeared!

In case the account of those Christmas adventures makes you think motoring is safer for travelling when there's snow about, hear what happened to a Canadian motorist on his way to spend Christmas Day at his old home.

He was going quite slowly along a road running beside a river when he suddenly got stuck in a deep snow-drift. Leaving the car, he went back along the way he had come in order to get helpers to dig out the vehicle.

When he returned with a couple of labourers, armed with shovels, the car was nowhere to be seen! The mystery was finally solved by the discovery that a heavy fall of snow sliding off a neighbouring building had knocked the car on to its side so that it had slipped down the snow-covered river bank into the water!

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S.S.