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TALE.

By
MARTIN CLIFFORD



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(See page 12.)

NO 12.

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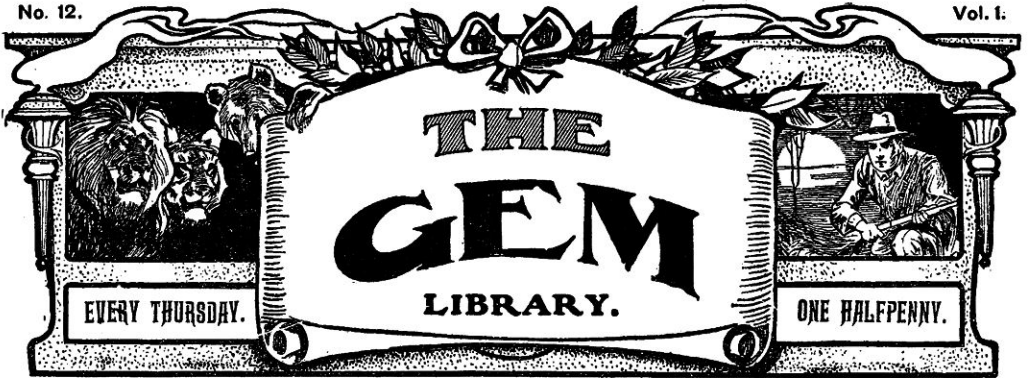
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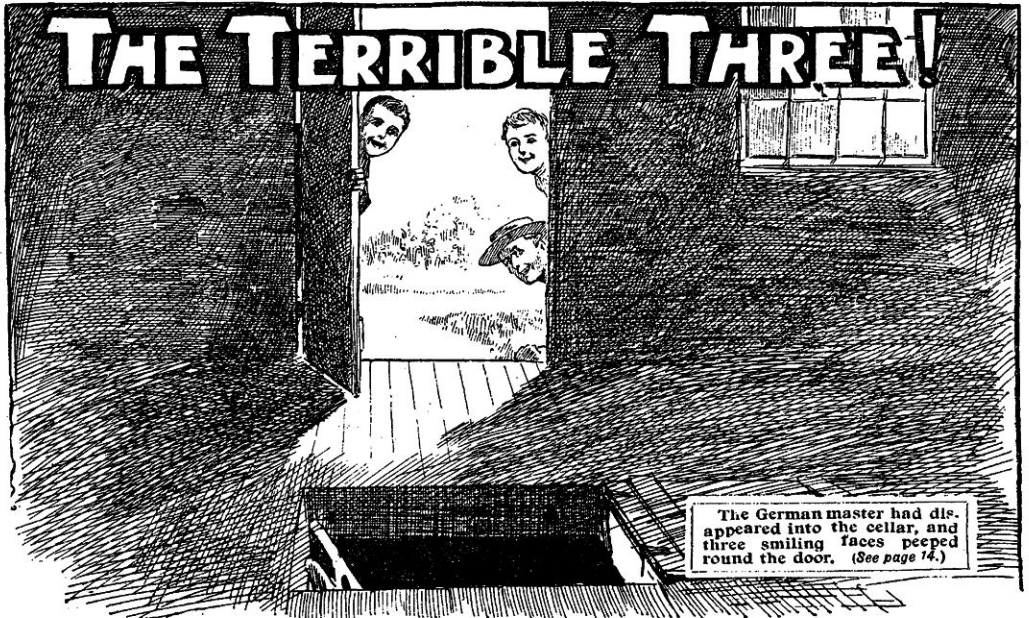
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CHAPTER 1.
New Rivals.

JACK BLAKE of St. Jim's brought his fist down upon the study table with a sudden, emphatic thump. It was rather a thoughtless thing to do, because Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy were hard at work at that table, their heads bent, and their pens scorching away at express speed. And the result, as might have been expected, was disastrous. The concussion made the table jump, and Herries gave a fiendish whoop as the ink spurted into his face, while D'Arcy's eyeglass dropped and smashed on the table, and Digby's pen went zigzagging across an exercise intended for Mr. Lathom's critical inspection on the morrow morning.

"What the—why the— howled Herries. "You dangerous lunatic, what the dickens are you up to?"

"You silly cuckoo!" wailed Dig. "Look what you've

done to my exercise! What will old Lathom say when I show him that?"

"You wuff duffah!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "You've bwoken my monocle—the third that has been bwoken this term."

Jack Blake looked at them serenely, apparently quite reckless of the damage he had done.

"I've got an idea!" he said.

"That's no reason why you should splash beastly ink all over my beastly face!" exclaimed Herries, jerking away Blake's handkerchief to wipe his countenance with.

"That's no reason why you should spoil my exercise!" growled Dig.

"That's no reason why you should bweak my monocle," said D'Arcy mournfully.

"Oh, bother your face, your exercise, and your monocle!"

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said Jack Blake. "Shut up, all of you, and listen to your uncle."

The chief of Study No. 6 in the School House at St. Jim's was an autocrat, and his dutiful followers obeyed, and gave him their attention.

"Look here," said Blake seriously, "things have come to a pretty rotten pass at St. Jim's, and I tell you that, for one, I'm not going to stand it any longer!"

"Hear, hear!" said Herries, wiping the ink from his face, and finding some small comfort in the reflection that he was spoiling Blake's handkerchief, and not his own. "Go hon!"

"I say, I'm not going to stand it," said Blake. "Are you?"

"No, certainly not," said Herries. "I'm going to sit down."

"Don't you be funny, Herries. Nature made you funny enough. I say, I'm not going to stand it, and I should think you would all say the same."

"Right-ho!" said Digby. "Only what is it you're not going to stand? You haven't told us that yet. I'm willing to buck against anything you like, but I should like to know what it is first."

"I'm thinking of that new chap in the Shell."

"Tom Merry?"

"Yes."

"Well, what's the matter with him?" said Herries.

Blake frowned darkly.

"You know as well as I do!" he exclaimed. "The bouncer thinks he ought to be at the head of the School House juniors in the rows with the New House. He has the cheek to say that he can manage the business better than the old firm—that's Study No. 6—because he's in the Shell! Forsooth!"

"For what?" asked Digby innocently.

"Forsooth!" said Blake. "That's old English for rats. This chap Merry is exactly four months and three days older than I am—"

"Did you work all that out in your head?"

"Shut up, and don't interrupt. Now, I suppose you agree with me that Study No. 6 is going to remain at the head of the School House juniors, and that Tom Merry and his lot have got to be kept in their places?"

"Rather!" said the three juniors, together—or, to be perfectly exact, Herries and Digby said "Rather," and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy said "Wathah!"

This was in fact, rather a sore point with the Fourth-Formers of the School House at St. Jim's.

The rivalry between the two houses at St. Jim's, which dated from the foundation of the New House, was as keen as ever, especially among the juniors.

The seniors of both houses affected to take no interest in the struggle for supremacy between the rival juniors, but, as a matter of fact, the rivalry was just as keen among the elders, though it was not quite so exuberant.

Study No. 6 had always been at the head of the School House juniors in their many alarms and excursions against the New House, but now the high estate of Blake and his chums was threatened.

Since Tom Merry had come to St. Jim's, there had been rivalry inside the School House. It was perfectly good-natured and good-tempered, but very keen for all that, and the worst of it was that Tom Merry had shown a genius for leading, and Blake seriously found that his laurels were in danger. Hence a spell of hard thinking for the School House chief, which had brought him an idea, which had proved so disastrous to the face of Herries, the exercise of Digby, and the eyeglass of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"It's all very well," continued Blake, "for Tom Merry to say that we're all in the same boat against Figgins & Co.—that's all very well, but there's such a thing as a new-comer keeping his place, and obeying his elders—no, not exactly his elders—I mean his superiors. And that's just what Tom Merry doesn't do. He doesn't respect us!"

And Blake looked adequately solemn as he made this announcement.

"Awful!" said Digby, with a shake of the head. "What shall we do to him—something with boiling oil in it?"

"Don't be an ass, if you can help it," said Blake. "As I said before, we've got to put these new-comers into their place. My idea is to go to them and put the thing plainly, in a straightforward, play-the-game sort of way, and if they won't listen to reason, why, then, we'll let Figgins & Co. slide for a bit, and give Tom Merry and his pals a taste of our quality, till they ask us to make it pax. How's that for high?"

"Jolly good idea," said Herries thoughtfully. "Only—"

"Only what?" demanded Blake.

"Why, you've gone for Tom Merry before, and you can't deny that it wasn't—well, it wasn't exactly what you would call a howling success."

"No good raking up ancient history, that I can see," replied Blake. "If you're funky of going for the new chaps, say so, and have done with it."

"Oh, rats! You know I'm not!"

"Then get up on your hind legs, and follow your leader!"

"We're going to see the bouncers now in their study?"

"Yes," said Blake. "No time like the present, and I know they're there. Do you know what those three chaps, Lowther, Manners, and Merry have been called? The Terrible Three! We'll Terrible-Three them if they don't mind their p's and q's!"

And Blake, with an extremely determined look upon his face, marched along the passage, into the new wing of the School House, where the studies of the boys of the Shell who boarded in the house were situated.

Arrived at Tom Merry's door, Blake gave a sounding thump.

"Come in!" called out a merry voice; and Blake threw open the door, and marched in. Herries was by his side, still somewhat inky, and Digby and D'Arcy brought up the rear. D'Arcy, as befitted an occasion of such state, was sporting a new eyeglass.

Three youngsters were seated in the study.

Our old acquaintance, Tom Merry, rose to his feet as the juniors entered, and surveyed them with a smile upon his cheerful, sunny face. Manners and Monty Lowther retained their seats, but Manners slid his hand slyly towards a ruler, and Monty Lowther carelessly dropped his upon a heavy lexicon.

The Terrible Three were ready for war.

Blake marched up to the table, and rapped upon it with his knuckles.

"Shut the door, kids. Now, Master Tom Awfully Clever Merry, I want a few words!"

"Right-ho!" said Tom Merry cheerfully, and he pushed a dictionary across the table. "There you are, Blake!"

Blake looked at the book with a puzzled expression.

"What are you getting at?" he demanded.

"You said you wanted a few words. Well, there's lots in that, and you can take your choice."

Lowther and Manners giggled, and a chuckle came from behind Blake. He cast a severe glance over his shoulder, and Study No. 6 became preternaturally grave again.

"Look here, Merry—" began Blake wrathfully.

"No, no, now do be reasonable, Blake. If you want me to do that, you should wear a mask, or a fire-screen, or something—"

Again Manners and Lowther giggled, and Herries and Dig could not restrain a chuckle.

Blake went on hastily.

"Oh, cut the cackle, Merry, and listen to what I've got to say. You new chaps have come to St. Jim's, and you're putting on too many airs. You've got to be taught your place. You know that Study No. 6 is at the head of the Lower School on this side, and so I warn you plainly, keep off the grass."

"I don't think you look at it in exactly the right light, Blake," said Tom Merry, with a sweet smile. "You see, you youngsters—"

He got no further.

The boys of the Shell were certainly older than Study No. 6, but as their difference in age could be counted in months, in some cases in weeks, their assumption of seniority was simply unendurable to the Fourth Form.

The word youngster to a Fourth-Former from a fellow in the next Form above was like a red rag to a bull, and put an end to all peaceful argument.

Blake brought down his fist with a thump on the table.

"Look here!" he bawled. "I'm not going to argue with you new-comers! You ain't St. Jim's fellows at all, as a matter of fact, and we don't own you! Are you going to follow your proper leaders, or are you not?"

"My dear, excitable little fellow—"

Blake wriggled with rage. He was quite as big as Tom Merry, and his wrath was overflowing.

"Nuff said!" he exclaimed. "It's war, then, and we'll teach you bouncers a lesson you won't forget for a donkey's age! Mind your eye, that's all!"

"If you'll allow me—"

"Oh, blow, pah, pooh!"

Blake turned and marched to the door, with his faithful followers at his heels. In the doorway they halted and turned, and at a sign from Blake, Study No. 6 produced peashooters from their pockets. The Terrible Three were laughing; but their laughter came to a sudden stop.

"Fire!"

"Yow, ow, ow!" howled Manners, as a well-aimed pea stung him upon his somewhat prominent nose, and he jumped up, knocking his chair backwards.

"Oh, ow, oh!" yelped Lowther, catching one with his chin and another with his ear.

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Tom Merry, who came off worst of all. A regular volley pinked his face all over, and another came whizzing into his mouth as he opened it to gasp.

With a yell of laughter Blake and his chums slammed the door after them.

Tom Merry was across the study like a streak of lightning. He snatched at the handle of the door, but it would not open; the chums of Study No. 6 were holding it tight from the outside.

"Lend a hand here!" panted Tom.

Manners and Lowther were behind him in a twinkling. Tom grasped the handle of the door with both hands, and Manners caught him round the waist, and Lowther grasped Manners by the shoulders. Then all three tugged hard.

It was a terrible strain, but it was hardly needed. For Blake suddenly let the door go on the outside, and it flew open like lightning. The sudden yielding of the door brought disaster to the Terrible Three. They staggered back blindly as the door flew open, and Lowther fell backwards, Manners sprawled across him, and Tom Merry sat on top of Manners.

"Oh, oh, oh!" gasped the unfortunate Lowther, crushed like a pancake at the bottom of the heap.

"Get off my neck!" roared Manners.

"My only Panama hat!" gasped Tom Merry.

Blake looked into the study with a grin.

"Hallo! Why don't you sort yourselves out?" he asked, and then he slammed the door again, and was gone before any of the trio could think of pursuit.

The famous four gathered again in Study No. 6.

"I think we've had rather the best of the first round," said Blake, with a satisfied grin, "and I've got an idea in my head that will make the three of them look sick, and no mistake. Listen, and I will a tale unfold."

And the four chums listened, and many a chuckle punctuated the unfolding of Blake's plan.

CHAPTER 2.

The Hospitality of Study No. 6.

FIGGINS & CO. were coming in from cricket practice when Blake strolled out of the School House and encountered them.

The New House juniors looked very suspiciously at Blake as he came up with sweet and amiable smile upon his face. Like the ancient gentleman who feared the Greeks when they came with gifts in their hands, Figgins & Co. always had their doubts about Blake when he looked especially bland. But this time Blake was on friendly greeting bent.

"Hallo, old Figgy!" he said genially. "I see you've been at practice. Trying to get into form for the house match?"

"Oh, we're always in form enough to lick the School House!" replied Figgins carelessly.

"I should say so," chimed in Kerr and Wynn and Marmaduke Smythe as one man.

Blake nodded agreeably.

"Well, we shall see that when the match comes off," he said. "No need to get our rags out about it now. What I want to know just now is, would any of you chaps like a feed?"

"Not half!" said Figgins suspiciously. "No gammon?" "Honour bright!"

When Blake said that, Figgins & Co. knew that they could rely upon him, and they beamed on the chief of the School House juniors in the most cordial way.

"Right-ho!" said Figgy. "Where is it? In the School House?"

"Yes, that's it."

"Just wait a jiffy while we change, and we'll hop up to Study No. 6, and—"

"Half a mo'! It's not in Study No. 6, but in one of the new studies in the new wing—Study No. 10"

Figgins looked suspicious again.

"That's Tom Merry's study, isn't it?"

"Yes. He's standing the feed."

"And he sent you to ask us?"

"Not exactly. He doesn't know you're coming, and he doesn't know I'm coming. The fact is, Merry and his pals have been laying in a heap of good things for a feed to the Shell, and we're going to scoff it," said Blake frankly.

"We're on the warpath against Merry and his lot, and as there's a heap of grub, more than four could wolf in a dog's age, we thought we'd take you four into the joke."

"Ha, ha, ha!" giggled Figgins. "Oh, hear me smile! We'll be there, rather!"

"The Terrible Three are going into the gym. for their

rotten squad practice with the Shed," explained Blake. "We're going to get into their study while they're gone, and barricade it. They won't dare to tackle the door, because there's a master's room just across the passage, and if they made a row they would have Schneider on their track. We can sit in there and eat their tommy and giggle at 'em."

"Ha, ha, ha! We're on this!"

"Then come into the School House in ten minutes," said Blake, looking at his big silver watch. "We'll be all ready then."

"Right-ho!"

Figgins & Co. went into the New House, to change out of their cricketing flannels, in high good-humour. Tom Merry, on first coming to St. Jim's, had had a brief sojourn in the New House, and had had his little rubs with Figgins & Co. The joke that was to be played on Study No. 10 was just in Figgy's line.

Blake strolled into the School House again. There was a seraphic smile upon his face. He rejoined his chums in the hall, and the four of them were lounging there when Tom Merry and his friends came downstairs. Blake grinned at Tom in a genial way, but though the Terrible Three looked wrathful, they walked straight on without taking any other notice of the Fourth-Formers.

"There they go," muttered Blake; "off to their silly squad practice! They'll be surprised to see the change in their quarters when they come back."

A little later Figgins & Co. arrived.

"Come on!" grinned Blake. "This way to the banquet."

And he led the way up the stairs and along the passage into the new wing of the School House, and they stopped at Study No. 10.

Blake tried the door.

"Hallo!" said Figgins. "It's locked!"

"Yes. Rotten suspicious bouncers, I call them!" said Blake. "But a locked door won't stop us long, I think."

He took out his pocket-knife. It was a combination knife, containing all kinds of weird instruments, and Blake was not long in picking that lock. The door was thrown open, and Blake stepped in.

"Gentlemen!" he said, with a polite bow, "welcome to the feast. Enter!"

They entered, and Blake closed the door. He had damaged the lock too much for it to fasten again, but he tilted back a chair, and put it under the handle, jamming it tight, fastening the door hermetically against any attempt from without.

"There!" he said, with a look of satisfaction. "I think that will keep out Messrs. Merry and Company. What do you think?"

"I should say so," agreed Figgins. "They won't be able to shift that without busting the door, and with a master just across the passage, they won't dare to do that. What?"

"But where's the grub?" asked Fatty Wynn, looking anxiously round the study.

"That's just like you," said Figgins; "always thinking of the grub."

"Well, we've come here to feed, haven't we?" demanded Fatty Wynn. "If this is a sell, and these School House rotters haven't got any grub—"

"Peace, my children," said Blake soothingly. "The grub is here right enough, I know that for a fact, and we've only got to find it."

"And the sooner the quicker!" exclaimed Herries. "Make a start!"

"Hallo! Here's a locker locked," said Fatty Wynn.

"And here's a poker that will jolly soon open it," said Blake.

He suited the action to the word. The locker burst open under a mighty smite, and an old newspaper was revealed, which screened from view—only for a second—the collection of good things with which the Terrible Three had intended to regale their friends of the Shell.

"My Aunt Mary Ann!" exclaimed Figgins. "Here's a feast! Hand 'em out! Rabbit-pies, by George, and done to a turn!"

"How do you like 'em done?" grinned Blake.

"Ha, ha! Currant-wine—guzzling bouncers! It will be a lesson to them not to look upon the wine when it is red, if they find only the empty bottles waiting for them here. Cake—my hat!—and biscuits! Oranges and apples and nuts! I suppose Tom Merry's maiden aunt has been sending him a giddy hamper."

The good things were hauled out and spread in enticing array on the study table, the Terrible Three's books and papers being deposited in the grate to make room. Fatty Wynn already had his teeth in a pie. Figgins discovered a cocoanut, and he opened it by the simple expedient of bringing down a cricket-bat on it, on the table, with a terrific smash.

"Oh, you clumsy bwute!" wailed D'Arcy, as the fluid from within splashed over his fancy waistcoat, completely spoiling that beautiful article of attire. "Oh, my waistcoat! You sully diffah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Never mind your waistcoat, Adolphus," said Blake; "you've dozens more. You'd hardly believe from this chap's looks, would you, kids, that his father was a dealer in waistcoats?"

"It isn't true!" exclaimed D'Arcy indignantly. "Blake, you'll twy my patience too fah, and I must say that—"

"Rats to you!" said Blake. "Wire in—"
"I pwoteh that—"
"Don't interrupt the feast! Dry up, Aubrey—dry up, my boy!"

And D'Arcy dried up, though his waistcoat did not. The eight juniors set to work to travel through the feast, and they made pretty good headway. Figgins beamed round the table.

"Well," he said, "I don't think much of you School House chaps as a rule—"

"Well, that's jolly polite to start with," said Blake, with a bow.

"Let me finish, can't you? You ain't much to brag of as a rule, but I will say that this is a jolly good feast, and does you credit. I'm doing myself down well, and here's to you, Blake, old dear!"

"Same to you, and many of 'em!" said Blake.
And the two deadly rivals pledged each other in currant-wine.

"This isn't bad wine," said D'Arcy, filling his glass. Tom Merry's cupboard was well provided with glass and crockeryware, and the raiders were making free use of it. "My deah fwends, I dwink—"

He had raised his glass, when a sudden thump came at the study door. It startled D'Arcy, and the wine splashed out of his glass over his shirt-front. He gave a howl of anguish at this second disaster.

"Hallo!" said Figgins, in surprise. "I should like to see you do that trick again, Aubrey."

"Does he always drink like that?" asked Kerr.
Thump! thump!

"Hallo! Who's there?" said Blake.
A fierce voice came hissing through the keyhole.

"What are you doing in our study, you beasts?"

"Feasting," replied Blake cheerfully.

"They're wolving our grub!" exclaimed a horrified voice in the passage. "They know we can't make a row, because of old Schneider. The beasts! Blake, you ruffian, come out of that study!"

"Are you in a hurry, Merry?"

"Yes, I am!"

"I'm sorry for that, because I'm not finished yet, and don't expect to be for some time."

"You howling rotter, when we get at you—"

"Oh, go away and play!"

Thump! thump! thump! The sound of an angry voice with a German accent followed the thumping.

"Vat is all tat noise after? Go away mit yourselves before I gome mit a cane, ain't it!"

It was the voice of Herr Schneider, the new German master at St. Jim's.

There was a sound of retreating footsteps in the passage. The Terrible Three were gone!

Jack Blake chokked gleefully.

"I think we score this time," he remarked complacently.

"Wire in, my pippins, and don't spare the tommy. It isn't ours, so there's no need to be economical with it. Wire in!"

And the juniors wired in with a good will.

CHAPTER 3.

Tom Merry Has Bad Luck.

TOM MERRY and his comrades had been compelled to clear out of the passage suddenly when the thumping on the door aroused the German master, and brought him angrily upon the scene.

Herr Schneider was always "down" on Tom Merry. He had been so when Tom was at Clavering School; and Tom had been far from pleased when, after his transference to St. Jim's, the German master had also obtained a post at the school. And, as ill-luck would have it, Herr Schneider was still located near to Tom Merry's quarters.

The three scuttled away quickly enough before the German could spot them, and the attack on the study door perforce ended. Burning with wrath, the three heroes of the Shell gathered in the quadrangle to take counsel.

"The horrid bounders!" said Monty Lowther. "They've fastened themselves in the study, and they won't open the

door till they've wolfed all the grub. I heard Figgy's voice there, so Blake has invited the New House wasters to the feast."

"Eight of the hungry bounders," said Manners, with a sigh. "My hat, why they won't leave a single crumb for us!"

Tom Merry nodded.

"The worst of it is, that we can't get at them," he said.

"We'd soon have that door busted in if it wasn't for old Schneider across the passage."

"Yes; but now there's no way of doing it."

"There's the window."

Manners gave an expressive whistle.

"The window—on the second story? Are you thinking of walking up a brick-wall like a fly, Thomas Merry?"

"No; I'm thinking of borrowing a ladder from Taggles."

"Will he lend you one?"

"He'd lend me his Sunday clothes if I gave him half-a-crown."

"Oh, I see, bribery and corruption!" grinned Manners.

"But, mind you, only one chap could go up a ladder at a time, and there are eight fellows at the top to receive him."

"I shan't sound a trumpet and say I'm coming," retorted Tom.

"We'll take them by surprise. We left the window open, and I don't suppose they've closed it, as it is so warm. Come, and let's get the ladder, that's the first thing to be done."

They hurried away to the porter's lodge. Taggles was not on the best of terms with the juniors, especially with the heroes of the Shell. But the sight of a half-crown held between Tom Merry's finger and thumb, made him unwontedly civil. He had an idea that that half-crown might be transferred to his own waistcoat-pocket.

"I say, Taggles, it's a nice day, isn't it?" said Tom Merry cheerily. "Warm for the time of year, don't you think so, and a little cold for the season?"

Taggles gave a grunt, but did not commit himself to a reply.

"I want to ask a favour of you, Taggles," said Tom.

"You've got charge of the things the workmen leave here—you know, at that place they're putting up behind the principal's house. By the way, are they building a little wooden hut for you?"

Another grunt from Taggles. It was only a view of the half-crown that kept him from getting up and chasing the trio forth from his lodge.

"But to come to the point," resumed Tom. "There's a long ladder, and that's what I want. There's something up with the door of my study, and I can't get in. I want to get in at the window, and unfasten it from inside."

This was all strictly true.

"You'll lend us the ladder, like an old sport, won't you?" said Tom coaxingly. "And if half-a-crown would be of any use to you, Taggy, old son—"

"I don't know that I ain't got any objection," said Taggles, with a covetous eye on the half-crown. "I don't see why you shouldn't have the ladder."

"Catch!"

Taggles caught the coin as it spun in the air, and came out to hand over the ladder. He watched the juniors with some misgivings as they seized it and ran it off towards the School House. He noticed that they whisked it away quickly, so that it would not be observed from any of the masters' windows, and he guessed that something was "on."

The window of Tom Merry's study looked out upon a corner of the quad, with a big tree close at hand, screening it from general view. Once the ladder was safely there it would be secure from general observation.

"Hallo, there's Kildare!" muttered Manners suddenly, in dismay.

The captain of St. Jim's looked in amazement at the ladder, and signed to the juniors to stop.

"What on earth are you going to do with that, youngsters?" he asked.

"My study door's got fixed" said Tom glibly. "Taggles lent us the ladder to get at the window and unfasten it."

His look was so innocent that Kildare's suspicions were disarmed.

"Oh, all right!" he said. "Mind you don't break your necks!"

"Right-ho!" said Tom, in great relief.

Kildare walked on, and the juniors rushed the ladder round a corner, and stopped with it in the secluded spot under the study window.

"Narrow squeak that!" gasped Tom.

"A miss is as good as a mile. Good luck! The window's still open! Hark! You can hear the corks popping in there! The brutes are scoffing our currant wine!"

"We'll scoff them soon!" said Tom. "Quiet now; we don't want to give the alarm! I'll go up first, and I shall just go into the study head-first, and go for 'em, and keep 'em engaged while you chaps get in at the window. See!"

"Good wheeze! But, I say, there's a lot of those chaps. Hadn't we better have some help?" Manners suggested.

"Right! If you like! Buzz off and get some of the Shell to back us up, while Monty and I put up the ladder."

Manners buzzed "off, and Tom Merry and Lowther handled the ladder. They reared it carefully on end, and allowed the top to rest lightly against the wall under the window. This had been done almost without a sound, and there was no sign of alarm from within the study. It seemed certain that the invaders would be taken by surprise; though, even then, it was a risky enterprise.

But Tom Merry did not care for risks. Manners came back with three fellows belonging to the Shell, ready to back up Tom in the attack on the study.

"Wait till I'm in," said Tom, in a whisper. "I'll keep their hands full while you come to the rescue. Here goes!"

And he ascended the ladder silently. Up he went, anxiously watched by his chums from below. He reached the window-sill, and could go no further without revealing himself to the juniors within. He drew a deep breath, and placed his hands on the sill. The next moment he was looking into the study.

Eight juniors were seated or lounging round the table, and the havoc they had made already in the provisions was astonishing.

Tom Merry vaulted over the sill and plunged into the room. The Fourth-Formers jumped in amazement, but Jack Blake and Figgins tumbled to the situation in a twinkling. In a flash Blake had hurled himself upon Tom Merry, while Figgins sprang to the window and closed it down.

"Lend a hand here!" yelled Blake.

His chums sprang to his aid.

Alas! for Tom Merry's plan of keeping the juniors engaged while his friends followed him in at the window. He was down on the floor of the study in a moment, with Blake and Herries sitting on his chest, D'Arcy clinging lovingly to his hair, and Digby treading on his squirming legs.

The window was closed, and Figgins & Co. were grinning through the glass at the wrathful countenance of Manners outside.

"My hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "Lemme gerrup!"

Blake chuckled.

"Thought you'd attack us in the rear—hey—my pippin?" he exclaimed. "This is where we teach you a lesson not to interrupt your superiors at meal-times. Give us that box-robe, Gussy!"

D'Arcy brought the robe, and Tom Merry's wrists were tied together. Then he was allowed to stand upon his feet.

He was looking very dusty and rumped, and rather blue. There was mischief in the looks of the juniors who surrounded him, and his friends outside the closed window were helpless to come to his aid.

Manners tapped on the glass.

"Open this window, you young brutes!"

"Right-ho!" said Blake, picking up an unorked bottle of currant wine, and stepping to the window. He threw up the sash. "Here you are!"

The bottle was inverted over the head of the unfortunate Manners. Poor Manners gave a yell, and went sliding down that ladder much more quickly than he had climbed up.

Tom distributed the rest of the contents of the bottle with a liberal hand over the boys of the Shell below, and with many muttered words they retreated to a safer distance.

"Your chaps are gone, Merry," Blake remarked. "You'd better follow them. But you came here for the grub, didn't you? You shall have some of it."

Tom Merry had some of it. The "grub" was meant to be taken internally, and Tom Merry took it externally, that was the only difference.

Each of the grinning juniors brought his contribution, and plastered it somewhere upon the person of the unfortunate chief of the Shell. Tom Merry bore the ordeal well.

A fellow of the Shell wasn't going to show the white feather to chaps in the Fourth, and so Tom faced the music like a Spartan.

But the ordeal was severe. It was difficult to look heroic and dignified with a jam tart clinging to his nose, a pat of butter to his chin, and a string of saveloys hung round his neck. Then there was black currant jam smeared on his right cheek, and red currant jam on his left, giving his countenance a really unique appearance.

"Had enough?" asked Blake. "If you haven't, don't mind saying so. We want to meet your wishes in every possible way, you know."

Tom Merry grinned in rather a sickly way.

"I'm satisfied, if you are," he replied.

"Then this is where you make your exit," said Blake.

Tom Merry was led to the window, and lifted out on to the sill. Then Blake untied his hands.

Figgins held a bottle of lemonade ready, and as Tom slithered down the ladder, he emptied it over him. Tom was gasping, smothered with sticky liquid, when he

reached the bottom, and he lost no time in getting out of range.

He met with scant sympathy when he rejoined his Form-fellows. His appearance was so absurd that he was greeted with a shout of laughter, in which Manners and Monty Lowther joined as loudly as any.

"Well, you look a nice object!" exclaimed Manners, wiping his eyes. "Jammy, ain't you? Is that how you like 'em done?"

"Oh, don't rot!" said Tom crossly. "Let's go and get some of this beastly stuff cleaned off, for goodness' sake!"

"Ha, ha! Call yourself a giddy chief?"

"Nice sort of chief, to let those youngsters have the grip of us!"

"Look at 'em cackling! Look here, Tom Merry, if you can't put those kids in their place, we shall depose you and elect another leader."

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Tom, as he made off to get to the nearest bath-room.

The study window was crowded with the juniors, laughing hysterically, and kissing their hands to the wrathful boys of the Shell.

"Ha, ha, ha!" shouted Blake. "Hear me smile! Smile, chaps!"

And Study No. 6 and Figgins & Co. smiled in unison, with a roar that could be heard on the other side of the grassy quadrangle.

The Shell boys marched off in silent wrath, leaving the Fourth-Formers masters of the situation, and gleefully jubilant.

The enemy vanquished and gone, the juniors turned to the interrupted feast. Fatty Wynn had already resumed operations, and they joined him and proceeded to clear the board.

"It's a giddy victory!" grinned Blake. "I fancy those chaps in the Shell will sing a bit smaller after this. I told you I'd put Tom Merry in his place, kids, and haven't I done the trick? What?"

"You have," said his chums together. "They will have to sing smaller. What a ripping feed! How do you like it, Figg?"

"Prime!" said Figgins, beaming over his last tart.

"We'll return the compliment soon, you chaps, and ask you to a jolly good tea over in the New House!"

"That's all right. Another tart, Fatty?"

Fatty Wynn rubbed his bulging waistcoat rather ruefully.

"Er—no; I don't think so," he said. "I haven't room. But"—he brightened up—"I'll shove some of them in my pockets, Blake, if you don't mind. I shall be hungry again soon."

"Right-ho!" said Blake hospitably. "Don't spare the provender. Eat what you can, and pocket what you can't. We don't want to leave a crumb."

And indeed the juniors did not leave much on the table when they rose from the feast.

Blake took a sheet of paper, and daubed on it in big, black letters:

"THANKS!"

This polite acknowledgement of the feast he pinned in the centre of the table, so that it could not escape the notice of the Terrible Three when they returned.

"There!" said Blake. "It's only decent to thank them for a ripping feed like that, and I think Tom Merry will be pleased when he sees it. And now we may as well clear."

He unfastened the door, and took a cautious peep into the passage. No one was in sight.

"Come on, kiddies!"

He led the way from the study, on the alert for an ambush. The juniors followed him, Fatty Wynn bringing up the rear, his pockets were bulging with good things, and a smile of seraphic happiness upon his fat, chubby face.

There was no ambush. Herr Schneider was in his study, and it was not safe to start a row in the corridor. The juniors went downstairs unmolested, and in the hall Figgins & Co. took quite an affectionate leave of Study No. 6, Figg repeating his promise that a return feast should be given at no distant date.

Tom Merry came into the hall while Figgins was speaking. He heard the words. The juniors looked at him. He was cleaned now, and looked his usual self. Blake came towards him.

"Thanks, old chap!" he said effusively. "It was jolly good of you to stand a feed like that, and I've left a little note for you in your study."

Mr. Kidd, the housemaster, was in sight, so any demonstration was impossible. Tom Merry looked unutterable things.

Figgins & Co. left the School House, to return to their own quarters. Blake and his chums went up to Study No. 6, and executed a war-dance round the table, in the exuberance of their glorious triumph over their rivals of the Shell.

In Tom Merry's study the Terrible Three met a little later, and they were looking a doleful trio.

The feast was gone; only crumbs, savoy-skins, and empty bottles remained of it, with Blake's friendly note of thanks for the treat. Manners and Lowther breathed hard as they read it. Then they turned to Tom Merry, whose brow was wrinkled in thought.

"Look here, Merry," exclaimed Manners, "you're the leader of this blooming study! Are you going to take it out of Blake, or must we elect a new captain?"

"Peace, my children!" said Tom, waving his hand. "Don't disturb me when I'm thinking."

"Oh, rats to your thinking! A fat lot of good it's done so far!"

"My babes, I have an idea!"

Manners and Lowther looked scornful.

"Well, we'll wait till we see how it pans out before we start the cheering," said Monty.

"What's the idea?" asked Manners.

"It's working in my brain," said Tom, with a gleam of mischief in his eyes. "I think we shall be able to do 'em down nicely. Figgins was saying that he would invite them to a return feed, and that put the idea into my head."

"Well, I don't see what's going to come of that," said Manners. "Suppose Figgins does stand them a feed; it will be over in the New House, and we sha'n't have a chance of raiding it."

"I wasn't thinking of raiding it. That's a stale joke. I'm not going to work off any of his own second-hand wheezes on Blake," replied Tom Merry serenely. "Go away and play, like good little boys, while I think it out."

Manners and Lowther looked rebellious. The late triumph of Study No. 6 had shaken their faith in their leader. In their old school Tom Merry had been easily first when it came to a contest of wits, but since coming to St. Jim's he had encountered rivals of a different quality. And it looked to Manners and Lowther as if Tom Merry had met more than his match in Jack Blake of St. Jim's. Yet the twinkle in their leader's eye was reassuring. When they saw that twinkle, which they knew of old, they knew that something good was coming.

And so they remained quiet, while Tom Merry thought out the plan that had come into his active brain, till he saw fit to take them into the secret. And when he detailed the scheme, the shout of laughter that rang from Study No. 10 would have warned Blake that mischief was brewing if he had heard it; but he did not.

CHAPTER 4.

The Invitations.

TOM MERRY had devised a plan for "getting his own back" on Jack Blake, but what it was remained a secret, locked up in the breasts of the Terrible Three. They said no word of it to anyone, and when they met Blake about the school they adopted an attitude of lofty unconsciousness of his presence, and appeared to have quite forgotten the circumstances of that raided feed in the study.

The juniors were not disposed to let them forget it easily, and the Terrible Three had to endure a great deal of chaffing and chipping.

"They're going to take it lying down," Blake announced, with much satisfaction, in Study No. 6. "You see, Tom Merry has realised that he bit off more than he could chew in tackling this study, and he has to admit that we've done him in. Talk about making him leader against the New House! Why, the juniors wouldn't have him at any price now. I heard a chap in the Shell saying that Manners and Lowther were thinking of throwing him over, even."

"Yes, we've done 'em," said Dig thoughtfully. "We've done 'em brown, and we've taken our proper place in the Lower School."

The chums had just come into the study from the cricket-field. Two days had elapsed since the affair with the Terrible Three, and nothing had come from them in the way of reprisals, so Blake seemed justified in concluding that Tom Merry meant to take it "lying down." If he had only known it, that was just the impression Tom wished to give him, for it was necessary to the success of Tom's design that Study No. 6 should be off their guard.

"Good!" said Herries. "There won't be any more talk, I fancy, of making Tom Merry captain of the junior eleven. Like his cheek, such a howling new-comer as he is! If he pops up again, we'll sit on him again, and keep him in his place."

And the four chums agreed that Tom Merry should be sat upon promptly if he showed a sign of popping up after his defeat.

The next day was Saturday—a half-holiday. As soon as

school was dismissed, Tom Merry mounted his bicycle and scorched off to Rylcombe. He called at the printer's, coming out ten minutes later with a little neatly-tied packet in his hand. Then he scroched back to St. Jim's. There was a gleeful grin upon his face as he rode. Something was evidently in the wind. As he wheeled his bike to the shed he saw Study No. 6 at practice on the cricket-ground. Monty Lowther and Manners were waiting for him at the door of the School House.

"Got 'em?" asked Manners eagerly.

Tom Merry nodded.

"Yes. Come up into the study."

The Terrible Three hurried upstairs. Behind a closed door Tom produced his little packet and unfastened it. A dozen printed invitation-cards were disclosed, which would have caused stares if they had been seen in the New House at St. Jim's. For this is how they were worded:

"G. Figgins, Esquire, would be glad of the company of — at a feed to be held in Taggles's room, by the kind permission of Henry Taggles, Esquire. Space strictly limited, so don't breathe a word to a soul. Strict Q.T. A high old time guaranteed. Guest on arriving to give the password, 'How do you like 'em done?' to Taggles, who will then admit him. Time, — exactly. —"

Manners and Lowther screamed as they read this very peculiar invitation-card.

"I say, they'll think old Figgins is putting on a lot of style getting his cards printed," giggled Manners.

"Yes, rather; but that will impress 'em," said Tom Merry. "Now, we've only got to fill in the names of the kids invited, and we must take care to disguise our fist. Have you got a kid out of the New House, as I told you?"

"Yes; young Benson, of the Third. He's offered to do it for a bob. Of course, I haven't told him anything about the game, but he knows it's something up against Study No. 6, so of course, he's on it like a bird!"

"Good! Give me a pen."

Tom Merry took the first of the cards, and filled in the name "Jack Blake," and the hour five o'clock. The second card was filled in to "G. Herries," and the time 5.15. Then a third card was made out to "A. Digby," with the time 5.30. The fourth was addressed to "D'Arcy," whose company was requested at 5.45.

"There," said Tom, laying down his pen, "I think that's about right. Blake will come in at five, Herries at a quarter-past, Digby at half-past, and D'Arcy at a quarter to six. I think that's lovely. Now, to get 'em delivered. I've bought some of that scented notepaper old Figgins uses. Nothing like being thorough."

He began to seal up the cards in envelopes. There came a tap at the door, and a mop-headed, inky-fingered youngster of the Third Form came in. He belonged to the New House, and he was evidently on his guard as he came among the School House boys. But Tom Merry's genial manner reassured him in a moment.

"Hallo, young Benson! Do you want that bob?"

"Yes," said young Benson. "No larks, you know."

"No larks, honour bright! It's a game up against Study No. 6. We're going to take a rise out of them, you see."

Benson grinned.

"I'm on!" he declared emphatically.

"You're to take this note and to give it to Blake—"

"Hallo! Where did you get Figgins's nifty notepaper from?"

"Don't you worry about that. You do as you're told. Take this note to Blake, and mind no one sees you give it to him, especially those rotten bouncers of Study No. 6! Savvy?"

"Rather! Give us the note."

"He's not to know you come from us. He's to think you came straight from the New House—from Figgins, in fact."

"Right-ho!" said Benson, winking.

And off he went with the note. The Terrible Three went to their window, from which, through the openings of the trees, they could see part of the cricket-ground. Blake had come off, and was standing with his bat in his hand, looking at the players, when little Benson joined him.

"Hallo!" said Blake. "What do you want, you New House bouncer?"

"Letter for you," said Benson, holding it out.

"Hallo! I know that niff. It's from old Figgy!"

Blake leaned his bat against the railing, and took the note and opened it.

"Well, my Aunt Maria!" he exclaimed, when he had read it. "Figgy is doing the thing in style this time, and no mistake. He must have blued three or four bob on this printing. In Taggles's lodge—that's a good idea. A No beastly prefects nosing in there. Must have squared old Taggles. Cut along, youngster, and say it's all right-ho!"

And young Benson cut off.

Blake put the card into his pocket. He was sorry that he

couldn't take his chums to the feed; but the invitation was from Figgins, who, of course, had to please himself about the number of guests he invited. And as Figgins asked for secrecy, Blake did not say a word about the invitation to his chums. As they were not asked, it would be just as well not to mention the matter till afterwards. Uninvited guests might turn up at the feed, which was probably what Figgy was afraid of.

Young Benson was soon in Study No. 10 again. "He says it's all right," he announced. Tom Merry and his comrades chuckled. "So it is," declared Tom, "all right; more all right than he thinks, the bouncer! Now, take this note, and give it to Herries. Mind Blake doesn't see you."

"Trust me!"

The chums waited for Benson to return. He came in in ten minutes, grinning.

"He's got it," he said, in answer to the inquiring looks fixed upon him. "I gave it to him in the pavilion, where he was changing."

"Did he say it was all right?"

"Well, he said it was all serene, which amounts to the same thing, doesn't it?"

"Right, my son! Now, buzz off with this note to Digby, and, mind, caution."

Benson was a quarter of an hour gone this time; but he came in at last, with satisfaction on his face.

"I found him in the fives court," he explained. "He's got it, and he says 'All right.'"

"Ha, ha, ha! The plot thickens, my infants!"

"Any more giddy messages?" inquired young Benson.

"I haven't seen the colour of that bob yet, Tom Merry."

"Only one more, Benny, my boy! Give this note to D'Arcy, and that's the lot."

"That won't take long. I passed Study No. 6 just now, and he was trying on some new waistcoats there."

Benson was not gone five minutes.

"Well, what did he say?" demanded Tom, as the bright youngster returned.

"He said that Figgy hadn't mentioned whether evening-dress was required."

"Ha, ha, ha! We'll give him evening-dress! That's all, young Benson, and here's a bob for you; and mind, mum's the word."

"Rather!"

And Benson pocketed the bob, and marched off well satisfied with himself.

"Oh, I say, I must smile!" gasped Tom Merry, and he went off into a roar. "This is too funny for words. Blake and his set will meet with a surprise when they go to tea. But look here, time's getting close—it's time we started on Taggles."

"But I say," said Manners suddenly, "suppose Blake should meet Figgins before five, and—"

"Suppose he should meet Figgins's grandmother!" said Tom Merry.

"Well, I don't see why he mightn't meet Figgins any moment in the quad."

"Do you think a chap like I am would forget such a point as that? Figgins & Co. are gone off for the afternoon to picnic in the ruined castle."

"Then it's all serene. Let's go on the warpath now. We've got to get Taggles in a raging temper by the time Study No. 6 begins to arrive."

And the Terrible Three sallied out arm in arm.

It did not take them long to arrive at the porter's lodge. Taggles was sitting on a bench outside his door, smoking his pipe, when Tom Merry presented himself before him. There was no half-crown visible this time, so Taggles's look was not amiable.

"Whatcher want?" he asked, as Tom stopped and looked at him.

Tom Merry did not reply.

He stood before Taggles, with his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat, looking at the crusty porter with a solemn and steadfast gaze. Taggles stared at him, and went on smoking his pipe.

Tom Merry did not move. His fixed gaze was still fastened upon the school-porter's face, which was ruddy, and began to grow ruddier under Tom Merry's earnest inspection.

"Whatcher want?" exclaimed Taggles again, getting restive.

Nothing is more irritating to the nerves than a steady, unmeaning stare, and Tom Merry's strange action was fast rousing the ire of Taggles. At last he could stand it no longer, and as the junior did not move, Taggles jumped up.

"Now, if you want anything, say so, or—"

"I only wanted to ask you a question, Taggles, old dear," said Tom Merry, breaking his mysterious silence at last.

"Well, ask if, then, you confounded young himp, and be huff with you!"

"You don't mind my asking?"

"No!" roared Taggles.

"Well, then—you're sure you don't mind?—very well, then— I say, Taggles, old dear, how do you like 'em done?"

Taggles gave a yelp at this ridiculous question, which was so solemnly propounded, and he made a rush at Tom Merry.

Tom skipped off in a twinkling as Taggles rushed at him, and the irate porter, who knew he might as well attempt to catch a weasel as Tom, gave it up, and returned to his bench to smoke his pipe. A few minutes later Manners came round the corner of the lodge, with an agreeable smile upon his face. Taggles glared at him.

"Hallo, Taggs!" said Manners genially. "It's a dry, thirsty day, isn't it? Could you do with a drop of something to drink?"

Taggles's eyes glistened.

"Well, I could, Master Manners," he said—"I could really."

"Then why don't you get some?" said Manners pleasantly.

"There's a pump over there by the Head's garden, you know."

Taggles glared at him in speechless wrath.

"But I didn't come to say that, really," said Manners.

"I wanted to ask you a question, Taggles, if you don't mind."

"You young himp, I'll—"

"May I ask you? Right! How do you like 'em done?"

Taggles made a spring at him, and Manners dodged. Away he went, as if sprinting for a championship, and Taggles stopped, puffing and blowing, and scarlet with wrath.

"I'll report 'em," he muttered—"I'll report 'em! I'll get 'em licked. They says that boys will be boys. Rot! All boys ought to be taken to some quiet place and suffocated."

That was the opinion of Taggles. He was always at daggers drawn with the juniors, either of the New House or the School House. Taggles reported the youngsters whenever he got a chance, and rejoiced whenever he saw a fellow coming out of the Head's study wriggling in a painful way. The juniors, on their side, were not slow to retaliate.

Taggles settled down to his pipe again. He thought the youngsters had done with him for that afternoon, but he was mistaken. Five or six minutes had elapsed, when Monty Lowther bove in sight.

"Hallo, Taggy!" said Monty pleasantly. "Nice wet weather after the rain, isn't it? How do you like 'em done? How do you like— Great Columbus!"

Lowther went off like a shot, just escaping the clutch of Taggles. At a safe distance he stopped and turned round, and placed his extended fingers to his nose in an extremely provoking way.

"How do you like 'em done?" he called out.

Taggles stamped into his lodge, and sat himself down in the doorway this time, out of sight of the ribald juniors. He was simmering with rage, and he let his pipe go out. He placed a nice little dog-whip ready to his hand, in case any further visitors should arrive and ask how he liked them done.

Meanwhile the Terrible Three gathered at a safe distance, chuckling gleefully.

"The old bouncer's red-hot," said Monty Lowther. "He nearly had me. I pity Blake when he goes to the lodge and gives that password."

"Ha, ha, ha!" gasped Tom. "And then Herries, and Digby, and D'Arcy! Oh, my Aunt Selina!"

And the Terrible Three hugged themselves with mirth.

CHAPTER 5.

The Password.

BLAKE looked at his watch. The famous four had come back to Study No. 6 after cricket practice, but they were a little more silent than usual. Each of them, as a matter of fact, had the burden of a secret on his mind.

Each one had been invited by Figgins—or thought he had—to that mythical feast in the porter's room, and each had been enjoined to keep the fact a dead secret, and was loyally obeying instructions.

But, as the chums very seldom had any secrets from each other, and usually went about in a body, the situation was a little awkward.

Each was inwardly worried a little as to how he was to slip away without exciting suspicion. Blake at five o'clock. Herries at a quarter past, Digby at half-past, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy at a quarter to six.

"Hallo, ten to five!" said Blake. "Any of you fellows going to take a spin on the jiggers before tea?"

"No, not this infant," said Herries, inwardly congratulating himself that here was a chance of getting rid of the three. "You chaps can go. I don't want to bike after the cricket."

"Nor I," said Digby hastily.
"I have a little engagement, dear boy," said D'Arcy. "I'm sorry. Another time."
"Oh, all serene," said Blake inwardly delighted. "See you later."

And he left the study.
"I think I'll stroll round the quad and get an appetite for tea," said Herries yawning. "Don't you fellows trouble to come."

And Digby and D'Arcy were left alone in the study, each wondering how he was to get rid of the other.
"Think I'll go and speak to Mellish," said Dig, at last. And he went down the passage to Percy Mellish's study, where he did not stay long.

Left alone, Arthur Augustus smiled to himself, and sauntered away from the study, to pass the time in the common-room till a quarter to six.
Five o'clock!

Blake sauntered down to the porter's lodge, little dreaming of the reception in store for him. He had the password all ready, and he looked in at Taggles's door with a genial nod, and quite unsuspectingly.

"Hallo, Taggles!"
The school-porter looked at him grimly.
"What do you want?" he snapped, putting his hand behind him to take a firm grip on the dog-whip.
"Oh, don't be snappy, Taggy! I've come to tea, you know. How do you like 'em done?"

Blake pronounced the password with a confident smile, in the innocence of his heart. He was startled by its effect upon the porter.

Taggles jumped up in a white heat, and the lash of the dog-whip curled round Blake's shoulders in a twinkling.
"Hallo, what's up?" howled the astounded junior. "What are you up to, you blithering lunatic?"

He wriggled and dodged, but Taggles got in a couple more before he could get out of reach.

"I'll teach you!" panted Taggles. "I'll teach you to come 'ere a-cheeking me, you young himp, you! Be hoff!"

"Look here, you silly cuckoo," shouted Blake, "I've come to take tea here with Figgins, and that's the giddy password! Don't you understand?"

Apparently Taggles did not understand, for he made a rush at Blake with the whip whirling, and the junior did not stop to explain matters further. He bolted, getting a cut round his legs as he went, and he did not stop till he was at a safe distance from the porter's lodge.

"Well, my hat!" exclaimed Blake, in amazement. "My only Panama hat! Has the old bouncer gone right off his silly rocker, or what—or has Figgy been playing a little game on me?"

The thought made Blake jump. Would Figgy have been mean enough to ask him to a feed there, simply to get him ragged by the angry porter? There was no other explanation. Blake, full of righteous wrath, marched off to the New House to interview Figgins and demand an explanation. The quarter rang from the clock-tower of St. Jim's.

Herries came smilingly round the corner. He looked in at Taggles, and nodded, and made as if to pass him and enter the room.

Taggles rose to his feet, bristling all over with anger.

"What do you want 'ere?"
"It's all right," said Herries confidentially. "I'm the guest, you know—Figgy's guest."

"What are you talking about?"
"Oh, of course, I forgot, there's the password. How do you like 'em done?"

Poor Herries thought that that would clear away the little difficulty that had arisen. He was quite mistaken; it made matters worse.

Taggles went for him like a bull, and in a second Herries found himself lying on his back outside the lodge, and Taggles was knocking his head against the ground.

"You cheeky young himp!" roared Taggles, "You're the fifth one, and I'll—"
Herries wrenched himself away, and jumped up.

"What the dickens— You old lunatic!"
Taggles snatched at him again, and Herries bolted. He

went sprinting away at top speed, utterly amazed, and thinking that Taggles had gone raving mad.

The punishment he had inflicted upon Herries rather contented Taggles, and he was in a better humour as he sauntered down again. But there was more to come!

Promptly as the clock struck half-past five, Digby came up to the lodge with a smile of anticipation on his face. Digby was hungry.

"How do you like 'em done, Taggles?" he said genially.

The next moment he was getting his ears boxed right and left. He had no chance to escape, for Taggles was on him like a shot, and hitting out as though he mistook Digby's head for a punching ball.

"Ow, ow, ow!" roared Digby. "What are you doing? Help! Murder! Fire!"

"Take that, and that, and that!" gasped Taggles.

"Help! He's gone mad! Hellup!"

"And that—and that!"

"Help!"

Digby at last succeeded in breaking away from the infuriated school-porter, and darted off, with his ears singing and ringing, and in a state of unbounded amazement. He almost ran into the Terrible Three.

"Hallo!" said Tom Merry sweetly. "In a hurry, Digby?"

"No, no!" gasped Digby. "Taggles has gone mad, that's all. He's just gone for me like a maniac. Don't go near him; he's dangerous!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Digby rubbed his ears ruefully as he went on. The Terrible Three hugged each other in a paroxysm of mirth. They had seen all that had passed from under the elm-trees, and their enjoyment of the joke had been keen.

"Oh, my word!" gasped Tom Merry. "This beats everything, I think. How unsuspectingly the dear kids come, like lambs to the slaughter!"

"And there's still Adolphus to come," giggled Manners. "We must see that."

"We must—rather!" said Tom, wiping the tears from his eyes.

They waited cheerfully for the coming of the last of the victims. As the clock chimed the quarter to six the elegant Arthur Augustus appeared in sight. He wore a charming waistcoat, with as many hues in it as Joseph's famous coat, a silk hat was tilted upon his head, and an eyeglass screwed into his eye.

"My Aunt Ann Matilda!" murmured Tom Merry. "He looks more killing than ever. Spot that waistcoat! And that hat! Juniors are not allowed to wear toppers, except on state occasions, but he has sported one to impress Figgy. Well, let's hope that Taggles won't damage it."

"Ha, ha, ha! I am afraid he will."

D'Arcy sauntered through an aristocratic lounge to his doom. Taggles was boiling over, at the sight of another junior, whom he had no doubt had come to rag him like the others.

"Aw—my dear fellah," said Arthur Augustus, surveying Taggles through his eyeglass. "Aw—I am here. I believe there is—aw—a password."

Taggles breathed hard.

"How do you—aw—like them done?" drawled D'Arcy.
"How do I like 'em done?" repeated Taggles, coming a little closer. "Why, like that!"

Down came his fist on top of the beautiful silk topper, and it was crushed over the eyes of Arthur Augustus in a twinkling.

D'Arcy gave a yell. The hat had closed up like a concertina under the blow, and it was ruined. As D'Arcy staggered under the shock, Taggles made rapid play with the whip round his legs. D'Arcy yelled again, and danced like a bear, and bolted, to escape the slashes of the whip. He stumbled over a chair and fell, and Taggles fell over him.

"Take that," roared Taggles—"and that!"

"Help! The bwute is hurting me! Help!"

Tom Merry looked in at the door.

"Hallo! Anything wrong?"

"Help! This stwange person is assaulting me bwutally! Help!"

Tom Merry darted in, and seized the infuriated Taggles

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"Had enough?" asked Jack Blake. Tom Merry grinned in rather a sickly way. "I'm satisfied if you are," he replied. (See page 5.)

by the collar. With a skilful twist he tore the porter off his victim, and turned him over on his back on the floor.

"Cut!" he exclaimed. And D'Arcy "cut" as quickly as he could. Tom pushed the table over on Taggles to keep him engaged for a minute or two, and then shot away after D'Arcy. The swell of the School House was standing outside, with his ruined topper in his hands, surveying it with an expression of boundless woe.

"Better hook it!" gasped Tom. "Taggy will be after you in a tick."

And Arthur Augustus took the hint and hooked it. The Terrible Three linked arms and marched off, almost doubled up with laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!" They marched right round the quadrangle in celebration of their triumph. As they came opposite the New House Tom Merry called a halt. The chums of Study No. 6 had gathered there, all of them looking exceedingly wrathful. Blake came towards the Terrible Three.

"I say, have you seen Figgins & Co. anywhere?" he asked.

Tom winked at his comrades.

"What do you want with them?" he asked.

"We want to settle a little account," said Blake darkly. "The horrid bounders invited us to a feed in the porter's lodge—"

"Didn't it come off?"

"No, it didn't. They invited us at different times, do you see, and told us to keep it secret from each other—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And we went, without suspecting anything, and Taggles went for us like a howling lunatic!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It was a joke of that horrid New House fellow, Figgins, see?"

"Yes, I see. Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's all very well for you to laugh," said Blake crossly; "but I don't see the fun, and we're looking for Figgins, to

scalp him. We've just compared notes, and found out how we've all been done."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Have you seen Figgins & Co., hang you?"

"Yes. They're picnicking in the ruined castle."

"Right-ho! Thanks for the information. Come on, kids!"

"Where are you going?" asked Tom Merry.

"We're going on the warpath."

And Study No. 6 marched off, looking decidedly warlike. Tom Merry staggered against the wall of the New House, weak with laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha! This is the joke of the season! They're going for Figg because—because—ha, ha, ha!—because Figg invited them. Ha, ha, ha!"

The Terrible Three were doubled up with mirth. Blake and his chums disappeared out of the gate on the trail of vengeance. Tom Merry tried to recover himself.

"I say, we mustn't miss this!" he exclaimed. "Let's get some of the fellows, and go and see the fun. When Blake meets Figgins there ought to be something worth seeing."

"My hat—rather!" said Lowther. "Come on!"

And a few minutes later the three, with half a dozen boys of the Shell, were following Blake on the path to the ruined castle, eager to see the fun.

CHAPTER 6.

A Plan that Did Not Quite Work.

FIGGINS laid down his pocket-knife, and leaned back lazily against a mass of broken masonry in the ruined castle on the hill. Kerr was leaning on his elbow, deep in the latest number of "Pluck." Marmaduke Smythe and Fatty Wynn were still eating. The picnic in the ruins of the old castle had been a success. The chums of the New House had brought a well-filled lunch-basket, and they had very nearly demolished the contents. Marmaduke and Fatty Wynn were finishing up the last of the jam-tarts.

"Well, this is all right," said Figgins lazily. "I could lie here for weeks! But I suppose it's time we made a move to get back to St. Jim's."

Kerr looked up from his book.

"Right-ho!" he said. "The sun's going down. 'Let's get a move on."

"Wait a minute," said Fatty Wynn. "There's one more tart!"

They waited while he finished the last morsel.

"We'll have a bigger feed here next Saturday," said Figgins, "and ask Blake and his lot to it, in return for the ripping feed that they gave us the other day in the School House. Ha, ha, ha! That was a good joke on Tom Merry. Are you ready?"

"Yes, I suppose you're going to carry the basket, Figgy?"

"I suppose I'm not," said Figgy.

And he led the way from the ruins. The path down the hill, through the beech-woods, seemed quite solitary and deserted, and Figgins & Co. descended it without a tremor of uneasiness. But just as they entered the wood a sudden change came over the scene.

Four figures darted out of the thickets, and each of them seized a New House junior, and had him pinned to the ground in a twinkling. The attack had been so sudden that Figgins & Co. had not the slightest chance of guarding against it. Before they fairly knew what was happening, Figgins was down in the grass on his back, with Blake sitting on his chest, and the other three quickly followed.

"Got 'em!" shouted Blake gleefully.

"Got the bouncers!" echoed Herries, Dig, and D'Arcy.

"Don't let the brutes get up!"

"Trust us!"

"What is the game?" gasped Figgins. "What do you mean by jumping on a chap like this without warning, Blake? Do you call this playing the game?"

"Yes—rather," said Blake; "as much as asking a chap to a feed that wasn't coming off."

"What are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about that feed in Taggles's room."

Figgins stared at him in amazement. He began to suspect that Blake was not quite steady in the head.

"Feed! Taggles's room! Are you dotty?"

"It's no good playing the innocent, Figgy. You sent us all notes of invitation, and made us keep it a secret from each other, and go at different times; and then Taggles—"

"You're dreaming! I never sent you anything of the kind!"

"Figgy, old man, I never thought you would become a story-teller!" said Blake, wagging his finger at Figgins. "It's wrong, my kid, and not much good, as I'm not going to believe you. Now, the time's come for me to pay the piper."

"I tell you—"

"Rats! Now, chappies, we're going to give them beans, and they'll think twice before they play a trick like that on us again. We'll tie them back to back—"

"Look here," exclaimed Figgins, "I give you my word, honour bright, that I don't know what you are talking about."

Blake hesitated. He knew that when he gave his word Figgins was to be relied upon, yet—the junior took the precious note of invitation from his pocket, and flourished it over Figgins's nose.

"Look at that! Do you mean to say you haven't seen it before?"

"Never in my natural!" said Figgins, promptly and emphatically. "Think I'd waste tin in getting invitation-cards printed? Why, you ass, the chap who sent them got them printed so that you wouldn't see it was his hand-writing and know it was a hoax!"

Blake looked rather foolish. As Figgy spoke, it rushed upon his mind that he had been taken in, and that he had judged Figgins & Co. too hastily.

"I say, kids, we've been made fools of!" he exclaimed.

"It wasn't Figgins at all. Pax, you chaps! Are you willing to make it pax?"

"Rather!" said Figgins & Co. with one voice.

And the School House juniors allowed them to rise.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was a sudden shout of laughter from the trees. The eight juniors turned round in amazement, to see nearly a dozen boys of the Shell looking at them from the beeches, and laughing themselves hysterical.

"Ha, ha, ha!" shouted Tom Merry. "Found out your little mistake, Blake?"

Blake's face assumed a sickly expression. He felt that he ought to have guessed it at once—that it was Tom Merry to whom he owed that little joke.

"Ha, ha, ha!" howled the boys of the Shell. "How do you like 'em done, Blake?"

Blake had nothing to reply.

The famous four looked at each other sheepishly.

"Who's leader of the School House now?" demanded the Terrible Three with one voice. "Who's head of the cock-house at St. Jim's?"

"Tom Merry!" exclaimed the boys of the Shell. "Blake is a back number! He can go and feed with Taggles! Hear us smile! Ha, ha, ha!"

And the boys of the Shell marched off, laughing. Figgins & Co. were grinning hugely.

"You've been done in, and no mistake, Blake!" exclaimed Figgins. "If I had that chap in our house I'd jolly soon bring him to his place!"

"Oh, I know you're awfully clever!" said Blake glumly.

"I wish you had him over on your side, that's all!"

"Oh, I'd handle him all right! He's too cocky for anything!" said Figgins. "It seems to me that we both owe him one, Blake. What do you say to a truce for a bit, while we give him the lesson he's asking for?"

"Right-ho!" exclaimed Blake instantly. "He's played it low down on both of us. He wants a lesson awfully badly, and no mistake, Figgy. What's your idea?"

Figgins pointed to the invitation-cards.

"He's taken our giddy name in vain, sticking it on those cards," he said. "We'll make him eat them. He used my name to invite you to a feed that didn't come off, and we'll invite him to one that will come off, and make him eat that. He won't be able to go around grinning over the joke after that."

"Ha, ha! But how are we going to do it?"

"Get him into the Fourth Form-room, that's all, when we're all there together, and fasten the door against all comers. We'll put him through it."

"It's a go, Figgy!"

And the rival juniors shook hands over the compact.

When the juniors came in later, they found the joke all over the school. The seniors were chuckling over the way the famous four had been taken in, and some of them stopped Blake to ask him if he had been having feeds lately with Taggles, and whether he had received any more invitation-cards from the New House.

Blake was furious, and more determined than ever that Tom Merry should be put in his place, and his league with Figgins seemed to promise him the vengeance he desired.

The question was, how to entrap the chief of the Shell into the Fourth Form-room at some time when the masters were not there.

Tom Merry was too wary a bird to be caught by chaff, and Blake and his chums discussed a dozen devices without being able to select one that promised success. It was really Figgins who cut the Gordian knot.

"It's no good trying to take him in," said Figgins practically. "He'd smell a rat, however artful we were. We've got to take the bull by the horns."

"Good enough," said Blake. "But how?"

"The Shell come out of their room five minutes after us in the morning. When Tom Merry comes out, he has to pass the Fourth Form-room. We can wait for him there."

"But the rest of the beastly Form will be with him. We don't want to make a battle royal, with the masters and prefects close on the spot," objected Blake.

"No; not at all. My idea is to make a sudden swoop, and collar him before he knows what's happening, and yank him into the Form-room," said Figgins. "I think we could work it."

Blake nodded.

"Well, it seems the only chance," he agreed. "We'll try. It ought to work out all right."

On Wednesday morning the chums put the plan into practice.

When the Fourth Form came out of their class-room, they did not disperse in different ways as usual, but remained near the Form-room door till the master was gone. When Mr. Latham had departed they went in again, nobody saying them nay, and remained in unmolested possession of the class-room. Study No. 6 and Figgins & Co. remained in the doorway. They waited for the Shell to be dismissed.

A few minutes later a door was thrown open, and with a buzz of eager voices the Shell poured out of their room. They came down the passage past the Fourth Form-room.

Figgins suddenly nudged Blake.

"Look out!"

"Right-ho!" whispered Blake. "Ready!"

The Terrible Three were coming down the passage together, chatting cricket, and unsuspecting of the ambush. The Fourth-Formers had withdrawn inside their door. Tom Merry, as it happened, was walking on the side nearest that door. As he came abreast of it Blake and Figgins suddenly hurtled out and grabbed him.

Before he had time to struggle, Tom was dragged headlong into the Form-room, and as the astonished Manners and

Lowther dashed to the rescue the door was slammed in their faces.

"Help!" yelled Tom Merry. "Rescue!"

"Quiet, you bouncer!" gasped Blake.

He jammed Tom down on the floor, and sat astride of him. Figgins left him to take care of the captive, and ran to the door. The juniors were holding it against the frantic assaults of Manners and Lowther from outside.

Manners, Lowther, and two or three more of the Shell had hurled themselves against the door, and were striving to push it open.

Twenty juniors inside had their combined weight against it, and Figgins had his foot to it, jamming it. The door gave an inch or so under the strong pressure from without, but the juniors, with a great effort, slammed it to again.

"Hold it tight!" gasped Figgins. "I'll have the bolt shot in a jiffy!"

Again the door came in about an inch, and Manners tried to put his foot into the opening. But the juniors, exerting themselves, jammed it tight, and Figgins managed to shoot the bolt. The youngsters reeled panting away from the door. It was safe now. Nothing short of a battering-ram would open it from outside.

"Done them!" gasped Figgins. "Hallo, lend a hand here!"

Tom Merry was fighting hard for his liberty. He had succeeded in rolling Blake over; but Jack would not let go, and now they were rolling over on the floor in a tight embrace, gasping and dusty.

Figgins soon put an end to the struggle. Tom Merry was seized by half a dozen pairs of hands, dragged up, and plumped upon a desk. There he was held by the grinning juniors.

"Well, what's the game, you silly bouncers?" he said, panting. "What the dickens are you up to, anyway?"

His coolness had not deserted him.

Thump, thump, thump!

The door shook under the assaults of Manners and Lowther from without. But it was impossible for them to get in, and the juniors took not the slightest notice of the clamour from without.

"We've got you, you new bouncer!" Blake exclaimed. "Now we're going to put you through it! If those bouncers outside don't stop that row, they'll soon have a master down on their necks. Hallo, they're gone!"

A sharp voice was heard calling up the passage, and it was followed by a scuttling of feet. The Shell were gone!

Quiet reigned in the passage, and Tom Merry was at the mercy of his captors.

"Now," said Blake, "the question to be put to the prisoner is, did he, or did he not, on a certain occasion, send a message to the young gentlemen of Study No. 6, purporting to be an invitation to a feed from the respected and esteemed Figgins of the New House?"

"My hab," said Figgins, "you ought to be in Parliament, Blake!"

Blake bowed to the compliment.

"Did the prisoner commit this crime, or did he not?" he demanded. "Tom Merry, do you plead guilty, or not guilty?"

"Not guilty," said Tom.

"Do you mean to say that you didn't do it?"

"Yes."

"Why, you frightful fibber—" began half a dozen voices.

"Let me explain—"

Blake waved his hand for silence.

"The prisoner is entitled to explain," he said. "Silence for the chair—I mean, silence in court. Tom Merry, go ahead!"

"I am accused of sending a message to certain young gentlemen in Study No. 6—"

"That's the accusation."

"From the respected and esteemed Figgins of the New House?"

"Exactly!"

"Well, I didn't! What I did was this—I sent a message to certain funny animals dwelling in Study No. 6—"

"Look here, none of your cheek!"

"Purporting," continued Tom Merry calmly, "to be from a certain horrid and funny-faced waster named Figgins. You see, there's a difference."

Figgins was crimson with wrath. The Fourth Form were howling with laughter.

"Oh, don't question him any more!" he said. "What's the use, when we know he did it? Let's get on with the punishment!"

Blake frowned severely.

"Who's bossing this show, George Figgins?"

"Why, I am!" replied Figgins instantly. "Whom do you think?"

"Well, I was under the impression," said Blake, with

elaborate politeness, "that I myself was the head cook and bottlerasher on this occasion!"

"Were you?" said Figgins. "I don't quite know how you got under that impression, then; for it isn't anywhere near the truth. I'm at the top of this little concern."

"Oh, rats!" exclaimed Blake warmly. "Now you're talking rot, Figgy, and you know it!"

"Who's talking rot?"

"You, are, you New House rotter—silly, howling rot, and—"

"Do you want a thick ear, Blake?"

"Yes; if you can give me one!"

Figgins' wrath overflowed. He certainly thought he could give Blake one; anyway, he meant to try! He rushed at the School House chief like a bull. Blake, nothing loth, closed with him, and they went staggering to and fro in deadly strife.

"Here, chuck that, you silly owls!" exclaimed Herries. "We didn't come here to slog one another! Have some sense! Figgins, stop it, can't you, you howling idiot?"

"Who are you calling an idiot?" said Kerr. "It was Blake started it!"

"Not a bit; it was Figgins!"

"It wasn't; it was Blake!"

"You're as big a silly cuckoo as Figgins!"

"And I can give you what he's giving Blake!"

A moment more, and Herries and Kerr were at it hammer and tongs.

"Just what might have been expected from these New House mongrels!" exclaimed Digby.

"Who are you calling mongrels?" howled twenty voices.

"You New House pigs!" replied Dig undauntedly. "Why can't you learn to behave yourselves? If you can't, we'll teach you manners!"

"Teach us, then!" said Marmaduke, giving Dig a tap on the nose. And the next moment Digby was sitting upon him. It was the signal for a general melee.

New House and School House had joined against the Shell by order of their leaders, but now that the leaders were fighting, it was not to be expected that the rank and file would keep the peace.

In the heated excitement the prisoner was forgotten. Tom Merry sat on the desk, left alone in the excitement, surveying the scene of conflict with a grin.

The juniors had not had a pitched battle for a long time, and now they fairly let themselves go.

Desks and forms were pitched about and overturned, ink and papers scattered on all sides, and the din was terrific.

"Buck up, School House!"

"Bravo! Buck up, New House!"

With many a war-cry the juniors closed in strife. The Form-room seemed likely to become a wreck.

Tom Merry slid off the desk.

"By Jupiter, this is too good for the fellows to miss!" he murmured; and he ran to the door and unbolted it, and threw it open.

The passage was deserted. Without even noticing the escape of the prisoner, the juniors continued their strife.

"Hurrah!"

"Buck up!"

"Good old Figgy!"

"Go for 'em!"

Pandemonium seemed to be reigning in the Fourth Form-room. Tom Merry darted along the passage in search of his chums. He heard a puffing of quick breath, and Herr Schneider, the German master, tore past him. Tom stopped in dismay.

"Scott! Old Schneider will catch them at it!"

In a flash the German master reached the open door of the Fourth Form-room. He looked in with a grim brow.

The sight was certainly an unusual one. School House and New House were at it hammer and tongs, amid overturned desks, scattered papers, fallen easels, and spilt ink.

"Stop that!" shouted Herr Schneider. "Der teufel! It is as bad as never was after! Stop that fighting, you vicked poyls! Hear me mit yourselves!"

But in the wild excitement even the master's voice had no effect.

Herr Schneider rushed into the Form-room, dealing slaps right and left among the juniors. Blake got one on the side of the head, and, thinking it came from a foe, he hit out, and caught the fat German just under his fifth button.

Herr Schneider gave a gasp, and collapsed. The next moment Blake saw what he had done.

"Oh, sir! I'm sorry, sir! I didn't see you!" he exclaimed. "Chuck it, you chaps! Cave!"

The fighting ceased. Looking considerably ruffled, and rumped, and bruised, the juniors ceased their strife, and stood looking somewhat sheepishly at the master.

Blake gave Herr Schneider a hand to rise. The German master did not seem grateful. He staggered to his feet, and stood leaning on a desk, gasping for breath.

"You—you vicked poys! You dare to fight in te class-room!"

"We're awfully sorry, sir," said Blake penitently; and, indeed, he spoke truthfully. After the feast comes the reckoning, and it was time to be sorry.

"Sorry!" spluttered the German master. "I'll make you mosh sorrer! Pad poys, vicked poys, tat nefer vas! You will stay in—te whole Form will stay in—dis afternoon, and write out German exercises!"

Blake gave a groan, which was echoed by the whole Form.

A whole afternoon's detention, with glorious weather for cricket!

"Oh, Herr Schneider!" he exclaimed. "We are so sorry! Won't you—"

"Not a vord more," said Herr Schneider, majestically waving his hand as he turned to the door. "You are ver luck tat I do not cane you all into te bargain after!"

"We will—"

The German master did not wait to hear him. He stalked out of the Form-room, leaving the Fourth Form utterly dismayed.

"All the fault of those New House wasters!" exclaimed Herries wrathfully.

"All your fault, you mean," said Kerr. "Silly duffers, you ought to have known better!"

It looked as if hostilities would recommence, but Figgins poured oil on the troubled waters.

"It's no good ragging each other!" he exclaimed. "We were both to blame, as a matter of fact, and anyway, it can't be helped now. We've got to stick it out."

"But the cricket!" groaned Blake.

"Can't be helped."

"I say, what about the prisoner?" ejaculated Digby, suddenly remembering Tom Merry. "He's hooked it."

"The—beast! It's a sell all round!"

The juniors did not look happy. Tom Merry was gone, and the Fourth Form were detained for the afternoon, and certainly the laugh was not on the side of the Fourth-Formers. Tom Merry, if anybody, had scored!

And Blake voiced the sentiments of all concerned when he remarked, in tones of the deepest disgust:

"Well, this is absolutely rotten!"

"It is!" agreed Figgins. "Somebody ought to be kicked, and, in my opinion, you're the party, Blake!"

And Blake had no reply to make.

CHAPTER 7.

Tom Merry Proves a Friend in Need.

THE Fourth Form were furious.

Down upon the green quadrangle the sun was shining with summer brightness, and from the cricket-ground came the cheery, familiar sound of wood meeting leather. The Shell were at cricket practice, the Fifth and Sixth were on the cricket-ground or up the river, the youngsters of the Third were chasing each other among the elm-trees of the old quad. But the Fourth Form were detained in their class-room. The fiat had gone forth, and there was no gainsaying it.

While the rest of St. Jim's bowled or batted, cycled or rowed, the heroes of the Fourth remained pent up in their class-room in a state of mind bordering on distraction.

Many of the juniors bore big signs of the combat they had been through—eyes were black, noses were swollen, and ears were thick. Some of them were still dabbing the "claret" away from reddened noses, or furtively rubbing bruises where heavy blows had fallen in the fight.

But of their personal injuries they thought little. It was the being detained—kept in on an afternoon that was made for cricket or the river, that drove them into a state of mind bordering on mutiny.

Herr Schneider had no intention of sharing their imprisonment in the warm, stuffy class-room. He set them their exercises, sufficient to keep them going until four o'clock, and having announced what pains and penalties would be the result if the exercises were not done neatly and completed, he withdrew.

The moment the door had closed behind the German's portly form, every pen instantly left the paper.

The juniors had no intention of writing out those exercises. As Figgins said, you could take a horse to the water, but you couldn't make him write German. Which was rather a mixed metaphor, but expressed what Figgins meant well enough.

"Well, this is too rotten," said Jack Blake, flinging his pen across the room, and his German grammar after it—too absolutely rotten for words! I'm not going to do any beastly exercise. The old bounder can only give us some

more impots, and we're up to the neck in them already. I've a good mind to cut it."

"What's the good?" said Figgins gloomily. "Old Schneider's watching the door from the end of the passage, and we'd be brought back again. I shall scalp that German master if he stays much longer at St. Jim's, and that's flat."

"It's really Tom Merry's fault," growled Fatty Wynn.

"The brute ought to be scalped."

"Well, it isn't really his fault," said Blake. "Let us be just, if we burst a button over it! He couldn't help it, and we started on him! But it isn't a question who's to blame, but how we're to get out of sticking in here for the afternoon."

"There's no way that I can see," growled Figgins. "I'm not going to do any work, though. I'm going to look out of the window. You can see the fellows playing cricket from there."

"Well, that's better than nothing."

The Fourth-Formers were not long in leaving their desks, and opening the big window at the end of the class-room. It was pleasant to look out into the sunny quadrangle, with the wind shaking the foliage of the elms, and the birds chirping in the boughs. The window was soon packed with Fourth-Formers, and the exercises lay neglected on the desks.

Clack! Clack!

The sounds of the good old game came from the field where the Sixth were playing. A shout followed faintly from afar "Bravo, Kildare! Well hit!"

The St. Jim's First were practising, with a scratch team picked out of the Upper Forms, getting into trim for an important fixture soon to come off. Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, was batting. The juniors at the window caught a distant glimpse of two figures in white running, crossing the pitch like lightning. Another shout!

"Well run, Kildare! Well run, Monteith!"

Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, was in the innings with Kildare. The rivals of St. Jim's had been on better terms lately than for a long time past, and they were pulling together pretty well in the First Eleven.

"Bravo!" shouted Blake. "Good old Kildare!"

Glances were turned from the cricket-ground towards the big window crammed with juniors. Blake began to grumble forcibly.

"I say, I can't stick this at any price! It's too rotten! Fancy being shut up here on such an afternoon!"

The faces of the Fourth were grim and grumpy. Some of the New House and School House juniors behind Blake were beginning to shove one another, and it looked as if the monotony would be broken by a repetition of the morning's battle royal.

"Hallo, there's that bounder Merry!" exclaimed Figgins suddenly.

A voice had come from below the crowded window.

"How do you like 'em done?"

The Fourth-Formers looked glumly down at the hero of the Shell. Tom Merry looked up at the sea of grim countenances with his cheerful smile.

"Hallo, hallo!" he exclaimed. "How do you like 'em done, kids?"

"Oh, go away and play!" said Blake, exasperated.

"Can't you see we're busy?"

"Ha, ha, ha! But I'm really sorry, Blake, I am indeed. I'm sorry all your little plans work out like that. Why don't you give up the game, and admit yourself second fiddle?"

"I'll second fiddle you when I get you within hitting distance," said Blake wrathfully. "I'd come out to you now if the old Schneider-bird wasn't on the watch."

Tom Merry wrinkled his brow in thought.

"Is Schneider on the watch?" he asked.

Blake grunted.

"Yes, of course he is. Do you think he'd give us a chance to cut? He's sitting out on the balcony at the end of the passage, reading his beastly Deutch newspaper, smoking his beastly German meerschaum, and enjoying his beastly self, while we're stewing in here hard at work like a lot of beastly niggers."

"Yes, you look as if you're hard at work."

"Well, it's just as bad, shut up here when we ought to be out on the river," growled Blake. "We've got you to thank for it, you rotter! You've got us into this fix. Can't you think of some way of getting us out of it?"

Tom Merry looked thoughtful.

The twinkle in his eyes warned Manners and Monty Lowther that he was thinking out some plan for the benefit of the imprisoned Fourth, and Manners gave him a warning nudge.

"Look here, Tom, we don't want to lose our afternoon, too. These kids have only got what they deserve for being naughty infants—"

"Oh, shut up!" exclaimed Blake. "I'd give you naughty infants if I were near you!"

"Yes, shut up," agreed Tom Merry. "I'm thinking."
 "Look here, Tom, you'd better let old Schneider alone," said Lowther. "He's down on you enough as it is."

"My dear kid, we must always be willing to suffer for the good of the cause," said Tom, with a wave of the hand. "Who's the leader of us three, hey?"

"You are; but—"
 "Well, you two obey orders, and don't worry your poor little brains with trying to do any thinking. Now be quiet while I fix it up."

And Tom Merry wrinkled his brows again in a really portentous way, and Manners and Monty Lowther watched him in silence.

The Fourth-Formers from the window were looking at him curiously, too. The rivalry between the Terrible Three and Study No. 6 was all in a friendly and frank spirit, without a trace of ill-feeling on either side. Either party would have been glad and willing to help the other out of a fix. Tom Merry gave a sudden whoop. It made his comrades jump.

"What's the matter?" exclaimed Manners. "Something bitten you, Tom?"

"No; I've only got an idea."

"Is that all?" said Manners, in a tone of deep disgust. "Nice sort of thing to make such a thundering row about. I must say!"

"I've got an idea, I tell you," said Tom serenely. "Dry up while I talk, Manners; Blake, old dear, did you say old Schneider was sitting out on the balcony at the end of the passage?"

"Yes; there he is, as large as life. I looked out of the Form-room a while ago and saw him. But what is the good of knowing that?"

"Suppose I could shift him, would you hook it?"

"Yes, rather, if you gave us time," said Blake promptly.

"How long are you detained for?"

"All the beastly afternoon, right up till four! It's no good shifting him if he's coming back before then; and I'll bet you couldn't think of a way of keeping him off the grass for an hour and a half, Tom Merry."

"Who knows? I'm going to try, anyway."

"What are you going to do?" asked Blake, with deep interest.

"Never mind that; that's my business. I'm going to return good for evil," said Tom Merry magnanimously.

"That's all you want to know, Blake, my kid."

"Rats! You can't do it."

"Of course he can't!" exclaimed Figgins grumpily. "He's only gassing, and he can't do it for toffee."

Tom Merry grinned.

"Well, I must say you're a grateful lot," he replied. "I'm going to do my best for you kids, although you have really been naughty, and—"

"Oh, shut it! You'll make us tired."

"All right; I'm off! I'll come and tell you when the coast is clear."

"I'll expect you when I see you," said Blake sceptically.

Blake, you could give Doubting Thomas points, and beat him hollow. But I'll do my best for you. Wait till I come back."

And Tom Merry linked arms with Manners and Lowther, and the Terrible Three marched off in their usual way, as if the whole quadrangle belonged to them.

"What the dickens are they going to do?" said Figgins. "I don't see how they're going to shift that obstinate bouncer of a Schneider, for one."

"And I don't either," said Blake. "Still, Merry is an artful card, and I think he may have something up his sleeve. Anyway, he can't do any harm. If he makes Schneider sit up in any way I'd be grateful."

Blake crossed to the door of the class-room and looked out into the passage. At the end of the passage was a high window, reaching from the floor, and outside this was a little balcony adorned with flower-boxes and shaded by a sunblind. It was a very pleasant spot to sit in and read, but it was not only for that reason that Herr Schneider had chosen it.

As he sat in the garden-chair under the sunblind, leaning back on a cushion and reading his paper from the Vaterland while he smoked his long pipe, he looked a picture of fat comfort, and he was also able to keep his eye on the passage

and see that none of the detained juniors left the class-room.

As Blake looked out of the door along the passage to see whether the German was still there, Herr Schneider, as if by instinct, raised his eyes from his newspaper, and their glances met. Blake turned red, and popped back into the class-room.

"Is he still there?" asked Figgins?"

"Yes, the brute! He caught my eye," said Blake. "There's no chance of his even dozing off and having a nap, from the look of him. Oh, he wants boiling!"

He closed the door again with a grunt.

There was clearly no escaping the vigilance of the German master, and the Fourth-Formers were doomed to stay in for the whole term of their detention, unless Tom Merry proved to be a friend in need. Would Tom turn up a trump, after all? That was the

question the juniors asked themselves anxiously, as they went back to the window.

Meanwhile, Tom Merry had walked his companions off, both of them in rather a puzzled mood. They knew from Tom's look that some plan was working in his brain, but what it was they had not the slightest inkling.

"Where are you going?" asked Manners, as Tom turned the corner of the principal's house. "Have you got a bee in your silly bonnet, Tom?"

"This way," said Tom, marching his chums on without deigning to reply to the question. "Here we are. Halt!"

The three came to a stop. In this spot a group of old elms hid them completely from the school buildings. Around them were the signs of building operations. In this secluded corner of the precincts of St. Jim's a new building was in the course of construction, for what purpose destined the youngsters did not yet know. Some curiosity had been shown on the subject, but it was not for the purpose of investigating it that Tom Merry had brought his comrades to the spot.

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NOW.

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"You see that?" asked Tom, pointing to the half-finished building.

"Yes, we see it," said Lowther. "We've seen it before, when we come to think of it. About a hundred times, I suppose. What about it? Are you off your rocker?"

"Do you know the use that little wooden hut is going to be put to?"

"No; nobody at St. Jim's does, so far as I know."

"Well, I do. I don't say the Head intended it for the purpose, mind. It's my own idea. I can't help thinking that it is just the place to accommodate Herr Schneider, if we could only get him there."

Lowther and Manners stared.

"But how on earth—"

"Follow your leader," said Tom.

He led the way in at the open doorway. The floor, which was of stone flags, was completed, and in the centre was a flag with a ring attached. Tom pulled it up, and disclosed a short staircase leading into a clean, whitewashed cellar.

"Have you ever been down there?" he asked.

"I went down once while the workmen were here," said Manners. "It's only a cellar, and there's no way out. Blessed if I know what it's for!"

"I expect the Head will tell us all in good time; but that's not the point now. Doesn't it strike you that that would be a fine place for three naughty boys who wanted to smoke cigarettes on the quiet?"

"You don't mean to propose—" began Manners, in amazement.

"Tom!" ejaculated Lowther, equally surprised. "You surely don't intend to go in for that sort of thing? It's a silly game, anyway."

"If you'd hear me out before jumping to conclusions, you wouldn't make such silly howlers," said Tom, with some heat. "Of course, I'm not thinking of doing anything of the kind."

"Well, what are you driving at, then? I'm in the dark."

"We're not going to smoke in that cellar, though it would be a nobby place; but there's no reason why Herr Schneider shouldn't think that we are going to—"

"My maiden-aunt Selina!"

"And come and investigate—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And go down into the cellar—"

"He, he, he!"

"And get shut in there by accident—"

"Ha, ha, ha! Ho, ho, ho! Oh, I shall faint!" giggled Manners. "Tom, you're a giddy genius, and if it comes off—"

"Oh, rats! It's got to come off if we work it carefully. You know how Schneider watches people about and listens and that kind of thing. If he got a hint of anything unlawful going on in that cellar, he'd come sneaking round to see what it was, hoping to catch somebody on the hop."

"Right-ho! Let's go and snare the innocent bird," chuckled Lowther.

And, discussing the details of their plan as they went, the Terrible Three left the spot. It was a good idea, but would Otto Friedrich Schneider swallow the bait?

CHAPTER 8. In Cellar Cool.

HERR SCHNEIDER raised his eyes from his paper. The sound of voices floated to his ears as he sat on the little balcony, completely screened by the sunblind from the view of anyone below in the quadrangle. The German master's little round eyes glistened as he recognised Tom Merry's voice.

"Ach! It is tat Merry again," he murmured. "But vat —vat is he saying? Te young rascal! Mein gootness, vat a young rascal!"

Tom Merry was talking to his comrades under the balcony.

"Did you put the cigarettes there all right, kid?"

"The cigarettes!" murmured the German.

"Yes," replied Manners. "There are four big packets of them; enough for us to have a jolly good smoke when we get into the cellar."

"It was a jolly good idea to think of the cellar under the new building," said Tom. "You see, nobody will think of looking for chaps smoking there."

"Will tey not!" murmured Herr Schneider, sotto voce.

"Of course they won't," said Lowther to Tom. "It will be a jolly good smoke, and no one the wiser."

"I hope you didn't forget the matches, Manners."

"No; I've got them in my pocket."

"It wouldn't do to carry the cigarettes about, of course," assented Tom. "Some beastly prefect might get wind of the thing and nose them out. I don't like taking risks. There's old Schneider; he would be glad to get on our track, and if he had the least suspicion he would come spying into the cellar in no time."

The German master clicked his teeth.

"Tat hoy is more right tan he was tink," he murmured. "Old Schneider will come aud see tat tey smoke mit temselves. Ach!"

"Well, when are we going for the smoke?" asked Manners. "There's no time like the present, in my opinion."

"No; it won't be quite safe yet. We'd better show ourselves on the cricket-field for a bit. I'm in no hurry," said Lowther.

"Well, if you're not, I am," said Tom Merry. "I'm off!"

"Oh, if you're going, we'll come!"

"Come on, then. I'm simply dying for a fag."

And the juniors strolled away.

Herr Schneider rose quickly, and looked round the corner of the sunblind to see which way they went. He saw the three chums of the Shell disappear round the corner of the principal's house arm in arm. His little eyes gleamed spitefully.

There was no doubt that they were going to the new building to enjoy (?) the delights of a surreptitious smoke in the cellar there. The German master was always on the track of Tom Merry, but he did not often succeed in catching him napping. But this time it really seemed that he held the hero of the Shell in the hollow of his hand.

Secret cigarette-smoking was very severely looked after by the masters at St. Jim's, and any juniors caught indulging in the weed were certain of a caning, if not a flogging.

If Tom Merry were actually caught in the act of smoking cigarettes in the cellar under the new building, he would be taken before the Head of St. Jim's, and there would certainly be a warm time in store for him.

Herr Schneider laid down his paper, and quietly stepped into the house from the balcony. He stopped only a minute to get his hat, and then went out into the quadrangle. He turned the corner of the principal's house only five minutes after the Terrible Three had done so, and followed in their track towards the new building.

He passed the group of elms, and looked round for them. The juniors were not in sight. Herr Schneider grinned a grin. Undoubtedly the three young rascals were in the cellar, with their cheap cigarettes going at full blast.

The German master stole across to the new building. He entered it as cautiously as a cat looking for mice, which, indeed, he really resembled at that moment.

Within the doorway he paused to listen. There was no sound to be heard. But he saw that the trap leading into the cellar was raised, and his little piggy eyes glittered. He stole towards the opening, and listened again. Still no sound from below.

Had they heard him coming, and had they taken the alarm? Probably, for there was no smell of tobacco-smoke about the place. They had not had time yet to light the obnoxious fags. But if they were found in such a secluded spot with cigarettes in their possession that would be quite evidence enough against them.

The German stepped into the opening, and descended the stairs to the cellar. Three grinning faces looked in at the door.

Hidden in the leafy branches of an elm, the Terrible Three had watched the movements of the German master, whose bulky form was visible to them all the time that he had believed himself to be so extremely cautious.

Tom Merry saw that the German had disappeared below, and he stole in on tiptoe. There was a sound of footsteps and an angry voice below.

"Ach, I have caught you—I have caught you in te act, you pad, vicked boys! Vere are you? Show, yourselves dis instant, I command you! Ach, vere are they?"

The German gazed round the cellar in amazement. There were two divisions to the cellar, and Herr Schneider looked in each with equally futile result. There were no boys, and no cigarettes.

A dark frown came over his face. But before he could work it out in his brain, and divine that he had been fooled, there came a sudden snap from above. In a moment he was in darkness.

While the trap was open the cellar had been in twilight. But the blackness was only relieved by a glimmer from a little grating for ventilating purposes.

Herr Schneider started violently at the sound of the closing trap. As fast as he could move his portly person, he ascended

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the stairs, and tried to open it. It was in vain. It ought to have gone up easily at his touch, but it did not move.

A cold sweat broke out over the fat German. He realised that he had been trapped, and he realised, too, that if he were discovered in such a ridiculous position he would be the laughing-stock of St. Jim's.

He hammered on the trap with his fist. He hurt his fingers considerably, and barked his knuckles, but there was no other result. The trap did not budge! It was evidently fastened above.

"Poys!" called out Herr Schneider, in a choking voice, beside himself with rage and the apprehension of ridicule—"poys, let me out of tat door after!"

There was no reply. The Terrible Three were gone.

Herr Schneider hammered on the trap till he was tired, and he realised that it was useless.

Meanwhile, the Terrible Three, grinning with glee, marched off arm-in-arm to the window of the Fourth Form class-room.

As the three came sauntering into sight fifty pairs of eyes were fixed upon them from the window.

"Hallo!" called out Blake. "What's the verdict?"

"He's gone!"

Blake made two bounds to the door. He tore it open, and looked along the passage. The window was still open, and there was an empty chair on the balcony under the sun-blind. Herr Schneider was gone!

"Hurrah!" shouted Blake. "Come on, kidlets!"

The good news soon spread. The whole Fourth Form flocked to the door, and crowded out into the passage, careless of consequences afterwards so long as they escaped now from irksome confinement.

But if Tom Merry had really succeeded in his object, and the German master was to be kept away until the time of detention was up, there was no punishment to come.

In the quadrangle the juniors surrounded Tom Merry. Figgins shook hands with him, while Blake thumped him on the back.

"How did you work it?" demanded a dozen voices.

Tom Merry smiled modestly.

"Never mind that, my infants. But if any of you want a little stroll after four o'clock, you can go to the new building and look in the cellar, and you'll find him there. If you want to know how he got there, you'd better ask him."

"You don't mean to say—"

"I don't mean to say anything. Ta-ta!"

And the Terrible Three strutted off with linked arms, leaving the Fourth Form amazed.

"Well, I don't know how the image worked it," said Blake.

"But here we are, free as air. As we're supposed to be detained, we'd better not make ourselves too numerous round the school. Who's for a row up the river till four o'clock?"

"I am, for one!" said Figgins.

Most of the Fourth Form were there. They streamed out of the gates of St. Jim's in the golden sunlight. It was hardly prudent to linger within the walls, so cricket was barred, but there were plenty of other things to be done.

When the clock in the tower of St. Jim's was striking four Blake turned his boat into the bank. He remembered what Tom Merry had said.

"We'll go and look in the cellar, anyway," he said. "If the German's there, he'll be too grateful to us for releasing him to inquire at exactly what time we left the class-room. Come along, ye cripples!"

And with Study No. 6 and Figgins & Co. at his heels, Blake headed for the new building at the back of the principal's house. It seemed silent enough as they approached it, but when they entered they could hear a numbing voice below the trap.

"Ach! Mein Gott! Tat Merry! I vill punish tat poys some time, au't it?"

Blake grinned at his companions. "It's old Schneider, and no mistake," he said. "Look, the trap's fastened on top! He's been having a giddy time, and no mistake." He unfastened the trap. "Come on, Figgy," he said, in a loud voice; "let's go and explore this cellar. I wonder what they're going to keep here?"

"Right-ho!" said Figgins, in the same tone. "Why, there's somebody in there!"

As Blake threw open the trap the German's red and furious face appeared below.

"We're disturbing him," said Figgins. "We beg your pardon, sir; but we did not know you were spending the afternoon here. Shall we close the trap again?"

"No, no!" howled Herr Schneider. "Hold it while I gets out mit meinsell!"

He scrambled out of the cellar. Without a word of explanation to the juniors, but with a face scarlet with wrath and annoyance, the fat German stalked away.

Blake gasped for breath as the German disappeared from view. He was weak with laughing.

"Well, my hat," he exclaimed, "this is about the best wheeze I've seen for a dog's age. But Tom Merry is in for a high old time, I imagine."

But Blake was mistaken.

Herr Schneider was too keenly sensitive to ridicule to say a word to anyone about his absurd adventure, and the Terrible Three were never called to account for that little joke. The German master certainly was down on Tom Merry; but as he was always so, that didn't make much difference. And the frowns of Herr Schneider did not make much difference to the merry spirits of Tom Merry, as we shall see.

THE END.

(Next Thursday's grand, complete school tale, "Tom Merry's Mistake." Order your copy of THE GEM LIBRARY in advance. Price One Halfpenny.)



Stormpoint

A School Tale. By MAURICE MERRIMAN.

Rex Allingham, Jim Fisher, and Bob Bouncer are three well-known chums at Stormpoint College. Hal Trehearn, the captain of the school, favours them; but they are bullied by Jardon and Symes, two Fifth-Formers. One day the three chums borrow cooking utensils from Jardon's study, and have a good "feed" in the school stove-hole. They are surprised by the two Fifth-Formers and Parker, the school porter, and a general fight ensues. Dr. Andale, the read, stops it, and has Rex put into the school hospital because of a very bad cut on the head. However, he soon recovers, and with Jardon, Symes, Jim, and Bob he goes across to the Head's house one evening to celebrate Lily Andale's birthday. During the evening Rex manages to get his face all inkly through a spiteful trick performed by the two bullies. (No go on with the story.)

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Then one of the ladies present inquired how Rex met with the accident.

"Well, ma'am!" exclaimed Bob. "Jardon will be able to tell you more about it than I can, and he is an excellent speaker, as you will notice directly, when he proposes the health of our hostess. Of course, he will perform that pleasing duty, seeing that he is the eldest boy here. In fact, I shouldn't wonder if he considers himself quite a young man now!"

Dr. Andale began to think he had made a mistake in inviting the two bullies, especially as Bob's words made Lily laugh; but there was no help for it now, and the unfortunate Jardon had to give the best account of the affair that he could. He did not actually lie, because he dared not do so in the doctor's presence, but he made it appear that the matter was quite an accident, and Bob made a mental vow to take it out of him.

When the dessert was placed on the table, Bob kept making signs to Jardon to rise and propose the health of

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their hostess. His signs were perfectly visible to everyone at the table, and it prevented Jardon from framing a speech worthy of his college. But at last he rose.

"Miss Andale, ladies and gentleman. I—er—I—"

Bob had got both his elbows on the table, his eyes were fixed on Jardon with a steadfast stare, and he had a broad-sized grin on his face. It nearly made Jardon mad, and it made the ladies look far from serious, while Lily was shaking with suppressed laughter.

"I—er—"

"You have said that before, Jardon," observed Bob, in a voice that was meant for a whisper, but which, in the painful silence, was perfectly audible to everyone in the room. Dr. Andale glanced sternly at Bob, but that worthy did not see the glance. Not for one second were his eyes taken off Jardon's anxious-looking face.

"On this occasion, I—er have the great pleasure—"

"Looks pleased, doesn't he?" growled Bob, in another hoarse whisper. It almost made Lily hysterical, and it made the doctor feel very uncomfortable, because he expected better things than this from Jardon.

"In proposing the health and many happy returns of the day—and—er—this exceedingly pleasant evening, which—er—I should say that we have had a most enjoyable day," Jardon sat down. He knew he had made an utter ass of himself.

"You shouldn't have said you wanted many happy returns of this evening," murmured Symes, who was now next to him.

No one heard what Jardon said, and perhaps that was quite as well. Bob was looking at Lily now. Her first intention was to get Rex to return thanks for her, but she changed her mind because of his black face, and landed Bob with the task.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" growled Bob, rising. "The pleasant duty of returning thanks on behalf of Lily has been deputed to me by that young lady. It would be quite impossible for me to express those thanks in such eloquent and fluent words as we have just listened to, but seeing that the orator is one of the head fellows in Stormpoint College, of course, this would not be expected from a boy in the Fourth Form. Lily wishes to thank you for the toast, and I am sure we must all feel that the brilliant speech that accompanied it was such as could seldom be heard outside the walls of Stormpoint. On behalf of Miss Andale, I thank you for the kind and eloquent manner in which her health has been proposed."

Then Bob sat down, and looked at his plate, while there was a perfect silence in the room for nearly a minute. The doctor was the first one to look at the ladies. He knew now that he had made a fearful mistake in inviting the three chums to meet the bullies. Jardon never uttered another word for the rest of the evening, except when he was spoken to, and if ever a lad spent a wretched evening it was Jardon.

Lily sang several songs, and she accompanied Rex, who had a charming voice, and was very musical. His black face did not appear to trouble him in the slightest, and they enjoyed the evening immensely.

"I'll get level with him!" growled Bob, as they walked across the close. "You mark my words, I will. He wanted to make you look ridiculous, Rex, but I don't think he came off first best."

"Wasn't his speech superb?" laughed Rex. "You did take him down, Bob. I didn't think you could do it."

"Well, I was savage, you see. I should have made a mess of it on an ordinary occasion. I expect, but I wanted to beat the lout. He didn't want much beating, either, did he? I wouldn't advise that chap to put up as a

Member of Parliament. I believe they get some pretty big dufters there, but he would take the cake if he spoke anything like that. But you wait a bit. Our turn will come next."

Bob's first idea, as a means of getting level with the bullies Jardon and Symes, was to enter their study that night; and he made a thorough search for an empty ink-bottle. He wanted to convince himself first of all that it was they who had blackened Rex's face. But as Bob found no evidence there, he went to the room where they slept together, and here in the cupboard he found a medicine-bottle which had been filled with ink. That was all the evidence Bob cared for. He was convinced; so he broke bounds, and went down town.

"What have you been up to, old chap?" inquired Rex, when Bob crept into the dormitory.

"Been to the dyer's. Got a harmless little due that I'm going to shove into his water-jug. It turns from a pleasing grey to a dense black, and it won't show in the water. There are several advantages about it, and the dyer said he could strongly recommend it for my purpose, because it is absolutely harmless to the skin. He can't guarantee it to remain permanently black for more than three days."

"Ha, ha, ha! I should say they will find that quite long enough!"

"Yes. It goes from grey to a purplish black, and then stays there till it gradually fades away. The dyer says we shall find the result highly satisfactory; and, when you come to think of it, it is better than dyeing him permanently black."

"Quite so. But how are you going to get into his room?"

"That's easy enough. He won't be up yet, so I will just creep in now. Was I missed in any way?"

"I don't think so. No one said anything about it."

"Well, that's all right, 'cos I dodged Porker beautifully. Gently does it!"

"Ha, ha, ha! You will vex those bullies, Bob!"

"Well, that's what I want to do," answered Bob, making his way to the bullies' room. He had just poured the stuff into their water-jug when the sound of footsteps outside startled him considerably, and he had only time to crawl under the bed when Jardon and Symes entered the room. The former appeared to be in a very bad temper.

"I never had such a rotten evening in all my life!" he growled.

"Well, we made that little demon Rex look an utter idiot," answered Symes. "It is a pity he put you on to that speech—"

"Oh, hang the speech! What do I care for the beastly thing?"

"Well, you know, Jardon, you couldn't possibly care for a speech like that. What made you so nervous?"

"I thought the doctor knew we had inked the little brute's face, and was going to make it hot for us. I'm going to get to bed."

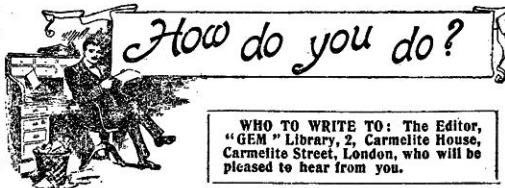
Bob had to wait, but they did not keep him very long, and he ventured to creep out directly he imagined by their breathing that they were asleep.

He got out of the room unchallenged, and in a very few minutes he was in bed.

The following morning Bob waited till the bullies had left their room; then he stole in, noiselessly opened the window, and emptied the water-jug out of it.

The next moment an awful yell burst forth. The fact is, Porker had been watering the flowers below, and he received the contents of that water-jug on the top of his head. It made him yell, and he would have yelled worse had he known what would be the result.

(Another long instalment of this splendid school story next Thursday. Order your GEM in advance.)



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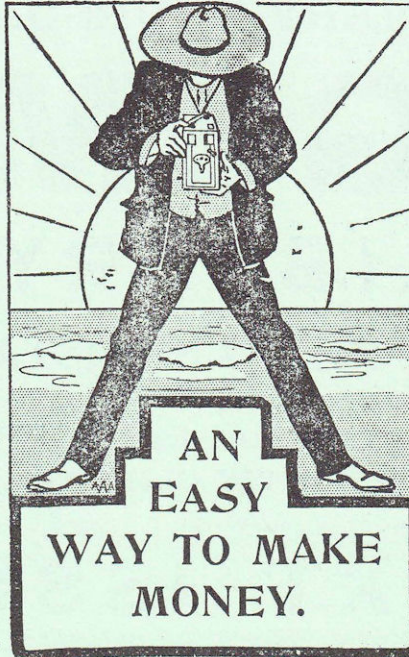
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