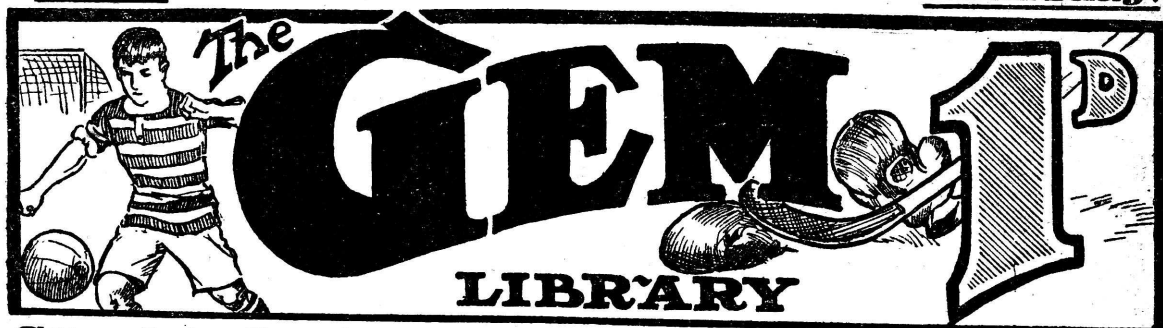


**"By Request of the Head."**

A Grand, Long, Complete Tale of Tom Merry & Co.  
at St. Jim's, in next week's GEM Library.

**Every**

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**The  
Faithful  
Fags.**

A  
Splendid,  
Long,  
Complete  
Tale of  
**TOM  
MERRY  
and Co.**

**By MARTIN CLIFFORD.**

### CHAPTER 1.

#### The Third-Formers Sympathise with Tom Merry.

**T**OM MERRY walked slowly towards the School House at St. Jim's.

His hands were thrust deep into his pockets, his head was sunk. His whole attitude told of a gloomy despondency. The crowd of juniors had dispersed from behind the chapel. Some of them passed Tom Merry, but they did not look at him. No one spoke to him.

It was a strange alteration since a few days, when Tom Merry of the Shell had been the hero of the Lower School, the most popular fellow in his Form, and the idol of the fags.

It was that unlucky football match, in which he had insisted upon playing Jerrold Lumley-Lumley, in spite of the general opposition, that had begun it. The foul play by Lumley-Lumley and the crushing defeat of the School House had resulted, and all blamed Tom Merry. Then had come general strife and disagreement, hot temper on both sides—estrangement. Then the discovery of the marked cards in Tom Merry's drawer, and the rumours that had arisen from it. Lumley-Lumley's habits were well known. What more natural than for the juniors to conclude, from Tom Merry's championship of him, that Tom Merry had taken to his ways.

It seemed only too likely.

Even Lowther and Manners were dubious, or seemed so; and Study No. 6 had turned against him. Blake had stood up to him in angry strife, and had been beaten. But the victory brought only unpopularity with it: all the sympathy was for the defeated Fourth-Former.

Tom Merry left the scene of the combat alone. He was much alone now.

He entered the School House with a throbbing brow. His

face was cut and bruised, his arms aching, his head had a dull pain in it. The fight had been hard. He had won, but he had taken almost as much punishment as Jack Blake. He hardly felt it consciously; he was thinking of other things. It was new to Tom Merry to see eyes averted when he passed and lips curling scornfully. It was new and it was terrible to him.

In the passage he met Lumley-Lumley. The Outsider of St. Jim's came up to him with a friendly manner.

"Bravo, Merry!" he said. "You have licked him. I congratulate you."

Tom Merry paused and looked at him. There were a dozen fellows within hearing, and they were already exchanging significant glances. In his deserted and lonely state now Tom Merry might easily have fallen into the trap and accepted the friendship of the Outsider—the treacherous friendship that was intended to drag him deeper down. But he did not. Every instinct in him revolted against Lumley-Lumley, the cause of all his troubles, though he did not yet even suspect the real depth of the Outsider's baseness.

He stood back, his eyes flashing.

"Don't talk to me, Lumley," he exclaimed.

"But—"

"I don't want a word from you. Is that plain enough?"

Lumley-Lumley shrugged his shoulders.

"Come, come, Tom Merry! I guess you haven't too many friends now."

"I would rather have none than have you, Lumley. You cad! Get out of my path!"

Lumley moved aside with an unpleasant look. It was his scheme to give the fellows the impression that Tom Merry was, openly or covertly, his chum, and this scene was not likely to further the impression.

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"I'll see you again, Tom Merry," he exclaimed, aloud.  
 "You had better not."

Tom Merry went slowly up the stairs. He sought out the nearest bathroom, where he bathed his face and head, and felt better. But a dull pain was still there, and his limbs were aching with the reaction. He went up to his study, passing several Shell fellows, who did not speak to him.

In the study he was alone. The fire was out and the room was cold, and it was growing dark. He walked to and fro ill, fatigued, he threw himself into a chair.

No one came to the study. The fellow who had had troops of friends, who could have chummed with anybody he pleased, was being left severely alone now.

The door of the study opened at last, and Manners looked in. He coloured at the sight of Tom Merry, and closed the door and went away again.

Tom Merry's lips curled bitterly.

Manners had come and gone. Lowther, he knew, would not come. Monty Lowther had taken to spending his time and doing his work in the end study with Kangaroo and the rest. They had deserted him! That was the bitter thought in Tom Merry's mind.

It was scarcely fair to his old chums. Deep as the gulf had become between them, they would have been willing to bridge it if they had seen a way. But in Tom Merry's mood they did not know how. They did not know how he would take any advances, or whether he wanted them to make any.

But Tom Merry was not new in a mood to be reasonable. Never had he wanted a chum's friendship more than at that moment; never had he missed it so bitterly; and it was not to be his now!

He sat alone, and bitter.

Presently there was a sound of footsteps in the passage. The study had grown quite dark by now, and Tom Merry was sitting in the gloom, hardly noticing that it was no longer light.

Footsteps as of many fellows came along the passage, and a buzz of low, excited voices.

Tom Merry started from the gloomy reverie he had fallen into. Was it to be a ragging? He would not have been surprised if a crowd of Blake's friends had burst into the study; and his own friends, he well knew, would not have stood by him now. But he did not care.

He waited for the door to open.

There was a tap, and he was vaguely relieved. The raggars would not knock at the door before entering, that was certain. It was not a ragging.

Tom Merry did not reply to the knock, but the door opened immediately. A dim face looked in.

"Hallo, it's all dark here!" said the voice of D'Arcy minor.

It was Wally!

"Well, he's here," said Jameson, behind his chum. "I know that."

"Then he's in the dark." This came from Curly Gibson.

"Tom Merry! Are you there?"

"Yes," said Tom Merry quietly.

"Here he is, kids."

"Get a light."

A match flared out. It was put to the gas, and the study was lighted.

Tom Merry rose to his feet. Wally, and Curly Gibson, and Jameson, and Cook, and several more of the Third Form had come into the study, and there were others behind them in the passage.

Tom Merry regarded them in surprise.

"What do you kids want?" he asked.

"We want you, old son," said Wally.

"Yes, rather!" chimed in the fags.

"I don't understand."

"My only Aunt Jane!" said Wally, looking at him closely.

"You've been through it! I'm glad I was your second, Tommy. But you look as if you'd been under a railway train. But you should see Blake!"

"Is Blake very bad?" asked Tom Merry hastily.

"Simply squashed."

"Quite done in," said Jameson.

"A wreck!" said Curly Gibson, with much satisfaction.

"I'm sorry for that," said Tom Merry.

The fags stared at him.

"Well, I must say you're a queer beast," said Wally. "But never mind that. Let's come to bizney. You've got no fire here, and no tea. Just as I expected! All those raggars have gone back on you."

Tom Merry coloured.

"Now, don't get your rag out," said Wally. "We're standing by you—the Third! We know Tom Merry is all right, don't we, chaps?"

"Yes, rather!" chorussed the fags, with honest enthusiasm in their somewhat soiled faces. "Yes! What-ho!"

Wally waved an inky hand.

"That's it," he said. "We know Tom Merry's true blue,

and we're backing him up. You've got lots of friends in the Third, Tom Merry."

Tom Merry could not help smiling. The friendship of inky fags in the Third Form might not be a great honour to the captain of the Shell, the head of the middle school, but there was something very touching in the devotion of these youngsters who stood by him faithfully when his own friends had turned away.

He had felt lonely and deserted, wronged by all; but there were evidently fellows yet at St. Jim's who believed in him, and were willing to take up his cause.

"We want you to come to tea in the Third Form-room, Tom Merry," said Wally, a little anxiously. "We've got a rather decent spread, you know. You'll come, won't you?"

Under ordinary circumstances it would have been a great honour for the captain of the Shell to have tea with the fags in their Form-room. And Wally, with a delicacy that was hardly to be expected in the rough-and-ready young scamp of St. Jim's, was careful to imply by tone and manner that he still considered it as great an honour as ever. The fact that Tom Merry was on bad terms with his own Form was not allowed to make any difference at all.

Tom Merry hesitated. He was not much inclined for any kind of society at that moment, though he knew it would do him good. But he did not refuse. He knew that the fags would be bitterly disappointed if he did, and that they had doubtless made great preparations in the Form-room for his entertainment. And Tom Merry's kind heart would never allow him to hurt anybody if he could help it.

"You're very kind, kid," he said. "I'll come with pleasure."

The Third gave a shout.

"Hurrah!"

And they closed round Tom Merry in a body and marched him in triumph from the study.

## CHAPTER 2.

### Kippers for Tea!

"D'ARCY minor! Stop! So I've got you!" Gore's eyes gleamed as he spoke.

Wally eyed him coolly.

"Your mistake, Gore!"

"You young sweep!"

"Oh, buzz off, Gore! Your face worries me."

D'Arcy minor was leading the chums of the Third to the spread in the Form-room. Doubling a corner he had suddenly come upon Gore and Mellish. Gore had evidently not forgotten the trouble of the afternoon. He made a spring towards the fag. Wally made a dart to get past him, but the Shell bully was too quick for him. Gore's heavy hand fell upon his collar.

"Now then," grinned Gore, "You're going through it."

"Chuck it, Gore!"

The cad of the Shell started. He had not known that Tom Merry was with the Third-Formers.

Wally took advantage of his hesitation and wrenched himself free.

"Mind your own business, Tom Merry," growled Gore.

"I'm doing so. Would you like to back up Gore as you did Blake this afternoon, Mellish?"

Mellish jumped.

"I wasn't there, Merry. You're mistaken——"

"It's true, Tom Merry," broke in Wally. "It was Lumley-Lumley. He recommended the good hiding, and you ought to give him one for himself. That cad is the cause of all the trouble."

"Come on!" said Tom Merry abruptly. "Come on, kids! Gore won't touch you now, Wally. Let's get on."

Gore's eyes blazed furiously.

"I'll find a time, D'Arcy minor——" he began.

"Bosh, Gore! I thought you'd chuckled all that sort of thing," said Tom Merry. "Get on, you kids!"

Gore bit his lip.

"From what I hear, there are a few things you ought to chuck, Tom Merry!" he said.

Tom Merry felt the blood tingle in his veins. It was hard to bear. Gore had been on his best behaviour of late. At least, he had seemed to have turned over a new leaf, and Tom Merry had hardly expected this. But he did not reply. What was the use?

"Bah!" he thought. "He wouldn't put up a fight in any case. Why should I trouble about him?" And he followed the Third-Formers without replying.

Gore was relieved. He had seen the fight that afternoon.

"Here you are! Welcome home, Tom Merry!" said D'Arcy minor, as they clattered into the Third Form-room.

"Buzz about, Curly! My Aunt Jane, look at those giddy kippers!"

There was a smell in the Form-room as of burning oilcloth,

and Tom Merry for the moment wondered what it was. He soon discovered.

While Wally & Co. had been up to the Shell quarters to fetch Tom Merry, some of the fags had been preparing the feed.

The Third Form ideas of a feed were not on the same scale as in the Shell. Feeds in the Third Form-room were fearful and wonderful affairs. Fags had been known to stand a feed of sparrows, cooked on pens over the Form-room fire.

It was not quite so bad as that this time. Kippers were the great article in the Third Form menu on this occasion.

Two shiny and greasy fags were roasting the kippers and themselves at the Form-room fire, which was blazing high.

There was a smell that hinted that the cooks were overdoing the work a little, but they were sticking to it all the same.

Wally sniffed, or rather snorted, as he entered the Form-room. "My only Aunt Jane! What are you doing with those kippers?"

"Cooking 'em," said Thrale.

"Burning 'em to death, you mean!" howled Wally. "I told you they were to be done slowly, and not to be burnt!"

"Well, the tails are a bit singed, that's all."

Wally glared down upon the cooks, and jerked the kipper away from Thrale.

"You take the other one, Jimmy!" he exclaimed.

"Right-ho!"

"Give it to Jimmy, Baker you ass! You're burning it!"

Baker retired grumbling and perspiring.

"Well, I'm jolly glad to get rid of it!" he exclaimed. "I was doing it to a turn, as a matter of fact, but if you think you can do it better——"

"Oh, scat!"

"Can I lend a hand?" asked Tom Merry, smiling, the smile that made him look very like his old self.

Wally shook his head.

"No. You're our guest, ain't you? Give Tom Merry a chair, Curly."

"Here you are, Tom Merry!"

"Not that one!" roared Wally. "That's the one with the game leg!"

Tom Merry had nearly sat down, but he stopped himself. Curly Gibson grinned, and changed the chair for another. It was barely possible that Curly was quite aware of the unreliable character of that chair leg all the time.

Wally gave him a fierce look.

"If you don't know how to treat a distinguished guest, Curly, you'd better get out of the Form-room!" he exclaimed.

"Sorry, you know——"

"Shut up, then! Get that cloth laid!"

"Oh, all right! Keep your wool on!"

"Shut up, Curly Gibson! Jameson, you ass, you're burning that kipper!" shouted Wally, turning his head again as a strong smell of burning spread through the room.

"I'm not!" shouted Jameson in reply, with equal heat.

"Why, you ass, I can smell it; it's simply suffocating!"

"It's your kipper!"

"What!"

"You're burning your own kipper, you ass! You've got the end of the thing sticking in the bars! Ha, ha, ha!" Wally jerked his kipper away. His face was a study for a moment.

The fags roared with laughter, and Wally got up for a moment, laid the kipper down, and pushed back his cuffs.

"Are you fellows going to be decent?" he asked.

They stopped laughing.

"I should think you might behave yourselves a little when we've got a guest in the Form-room," said Wally.

"Oh, get on with the kipper!" said Cook.

Wally glared, but he took up the kipper again, and resumed cooking. Tom Merry waited. The intentions of the fags were friendly enough, whatever the feed turned out to be like; and Tom Merry did not care much about that. As a matter of fact, he was getting hungry. The weight on his mind did not interfere with his appetite.

Stronger grew the scent of the kippers, Jameson and Wally accusing each other alternately of burning them.

Wally pronounced at last that they were done.

"No good keeping on any longer," he remarked. "They'll be burnt to cinders if we do. Better serve 'em up as they are."

"Good!"

"Where's that blessed dish?"

"What blessed dish?"

"I told you to get a dish, young Cook!"

"I couldn't!"

"Why couldn't you?"

Kildare came into his study, and I had to dodge out."

Tom Merry laughed. The fags had evidently intended to raid Kildare for a dish, and had failed to secure it.

"Get one out of my study," he said.

"Right!" said Curly Gibson, and he dashed away.

He came back in a minute or less with the dish, and the kippers were landed. They smoked on the hospitable board—and smoked rather blackly, as a matter of fact.

But the fags were not particular. Besides, there were boiled eggs and bread-and-butter to eke out the kippers. Tom Merry was served with a whole kipper in the most generous manner, and Wally bade him start.

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## CHAPTER 3.

### A Third-Form Feed.

TOM MERRY looked at the kipper. Wally had told him not to stand upon ceremony, but to start; and he was quite willing to do so, but he was a little doubtful how to start about it.

"My only Aunt Jane, you haven't given him a fork, you asses!" exclaimed Wally.

"Fingers were made before forks," suggested Cook.

"Shut up, Cook! Do you think a Shell fellow is going to eat kippers with his fingers, like a low down fag?"

"Look here, Wally——"

"Oh, dry up! Get Tom Merry a fork!"

"And a knife!"

"Fish-knives are off," said Curly Gibson, with a solemn shake of the head. "Besides, they aren't really fashionable, you know. People have fish-knives, but I've heard my Aunt Selina say that a fork and a piece of bread are still the proper thing. Better stick to the old original rules of the game."

Tom Merry laughed, and accepted the fork. Armed with this, he started operations upon the kipper.

To disentangle it from the parts that were burnt, and to avoid making a meal of cinders, required some dexterity. Tom Merry did his best.

Wally watched his progress anxiously.

"How do you like it?" he asked.

"Oh, ripping!"

"A little too much done?"

"No; it's jolly good. I like 'em well done."

"No burnt flavour, I hope?"

If Wally really hoped that, it showed that he had a very sanguine disposition. But Tom Merry only replied that the kipper was really ripping.

After all, he was hungry, and there were parts of the kipper that were yet eatable. Like the celebrated egg in the old story, it was good in parts. And good intentions and eager hospitality counted for something.

"Bread, or bread-and-butter?" asked Wally.

Tom Merry had already noted that there was no butter visible.

"Bread, please," he said, unmoved.

"Here you are!"

"Pepper, Tom Merry?"

"Salt?"

"Vinegar?"

"Sauce?"

The fags were very hospitable. Some of them even forgot to eat themselves in their eagerness to press things upon Tom Merry.

The hero of the Shell made a meal, and if it was not wholly palatable, he did not allow his features to betray the fact. Not for worlds would he have hurt the feelings of the heroes of the Third. They were giving him their best, and he took it in the spirit in which it was given.

The solid part of the meal was demolished, and then came cakes and lemonade—home-made lemonade, which Wally had brewed with his own fair hands, as a novelist would say.

Glasses, cups, mugs, tin cans, and washed inkpots were the drinking utensils, the one and only tumbler that was not cracked being presented to Tom Merry. Wally filled it with a warm, pale liquid, and Tom Merry wondered what it was. He tasted it, and it tasted like warm water with a slight flavour of ink.

"You like lemonade?" asked Wally.

"Lemonade!" said Tom Merry, glancing round the table to see if any was there.

"Yes. I made this myself," said Wally, with some pride.

"Oh, this!"

"Yes. Do you like it?"

"Yes, rather!" said Tom Merry. "It's ripping!"

"A little weak, do you think?"

"Oh, no!"

The lemonade was certainly not a "little" weak. It was so weak that Tom Merry had been unable to recognise it at first.

Wally rose, with a cracked mug charged to the brim.

"Gentlemen——"

"Hear, hear!" shouted the fags.

"I give the health of our distinguished guest, Thomas Merry, Esquire——"

"Hear, hear!"

"Things have been said against Tom Merry——"

"No, no!"

"Yes, you asses, they have! But they're all untrue."

"Hear, hear!"

"Lies!"

"Lies!" said Wally, in the plain language of the Third Form. "That's what they are—lies! They say a lot of marked cards

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were found in Tom Merry's study by old Skimpole. Now, you all know what a duffer Skimpole is."

"Yes, rather!"

"He's a howling chump!"

"What-ho!"

"Why, he's a Determinist," said Wally. "Need I say more?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wally, having demonstrated that he need not say more, immediately proceeded to say more, in the manner of public speakers.

"Skimpole imagined it, of course," he said. "He was thinking about some of his rot—Determinism or evolution, or something—and fancied things. If the cards really were found there, somebody put them there to be found. As for the whisky and the cigars, I believe they originated with Lumley and Mellish, and were never found at all. Tom Merry is true blue. I'd no more believe that Tom Merry was a blackguard than I'd believe that—Jameson knew how to cook a kipper."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Look here——" began Jameson wrathfully.

"Order!"

"Silence!"

"Tom Merry's a good chap, and grit all through," went on Wally. "He's licked Blake. Blake is an ass. I hope he'll lick everybody that plays the giddy goat on this business, and the Third Form will back him up all the time."

Deafening applause!

"I've been thinking of taking on Lumley myself——"

Laughter and cheers.

"Gentlemen, I put it to you that Tom Merry is all right, and that we stand by him, and he that will this toast deny, down among the dead men let him lie!" said Wally, breaking into melody.

"Hear, hear!"

"Tom Merry—with musical honours!"

Musical honours in the Third consisted of a paper and comb buzzed through. Wally did the buzzing, and the whole crowd of fags broke into a ringing chorus:

"For he's a jolly good fellow, he's a jolly good fellow, he's a jolly good fellow, and so say all of us."

Tom Merry was silent. There was a moisture in his eyes that was new there. A lump was rising in his throat.

The toast was drunk in lemonade, and Tom Merry found himself the centre of all eyes, and evidently expected to reply.

He rose to his feet.

"Gentlemen of the Third Form——"

"Hear, hear!"

"I thank you all for this ripping entertainment, and beg to state that in many respects it is the feed of my life."

Loud applause.

"I don't know how to thank you for your good opinion of me. Fellows are saying things about me, and some are believing them; but I am glad you chaps know me better, and stick to me. I hope it will come out all right. Anyway, I'm very grateful to you, and—I think——"

Tom Merry's voice faltered.

The fags listened intensely.

"I think the Third Form is a credit to the school, and I should be proud to belong to it," said Tom Merry.

He sat down, to deafening applause.

The fags shouted, and yelled, and rattled their feet on the floor, and their glasses on the table—with dire results to the glasses in many instances.

Kildare put his head in at the door.

"Less noise here, you young sweeps!"

He grinned as he saw Tom Merry at the table, and stepped out. The feed was over. Tom Merry rose to go. But the fags would not let him depart alone. They marched out with him in a body, and conducted him with great honour to his own quarters. There they finally left him, with the assurance that he had jolly good friends left at St. Jim's, and that, come what might, the Third Form were going to back him up!

## CHAPTER 4.

### The School House Do Not Like It.

"HALLO, Blake!"

The captain of the Fourth looked glumly at Figgins & Co. He looked as if he were under sentence of death.

"Hallo!" he said.

"Someone's been leaving him a fortune," said Kerr drily.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, you laughing hyenas. I'm not in the humour for rotting of any sort, so you can hook it!"

"Well, you needn't take the footer licking so badly, Blake," said Fatty Wynn.

Blake brightened perceptibly. It had crossed his mind that they had sought him to see how he took his defeat at the hands of Tom Merry.

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"I didn't take it badly, you porpoise. Why, the School House——"

"Oh, yes," grinned Fatty, "I know what you are going to say. The School House can whack the New House any time they like, except this time. Ha, ha!"

"Rats!" said Blake. "If they feed you up until you filled the goal-mouth, Fatty, I'll get it past you next time."

"Not so easy, Blake," said Figgins. "You fellows had all your work cut out the other day to save it being a bigger licking."

"You cheeky bounders!"

"Not at all!" said Figgins blandly. "You're off colour just now. And you being a Fourth chap, of course, you have our sympathy, whereas Tom Merry——"

"Take your rotten sympathy where it is wanted!" growled Blake.

"Don't tear your hair! I could soon bring you up to snuff," said Fatty Wynn. "You'd shoot splendidly after a few snacks at Dame Taggles——"

"Why don't you get her to open a shop in the back of the net?" said Blake sarcastically.

Fatty Wynn went red. Figgins stopped laughing.

"Of course, we're quite willing to give the School House a few lessons in the grand game——" began Figgins, in an airy way.

"You're what!" shouted Blake. "My hat!"

"Those School House chaps are all like this," said Kerr.

"Cheeky!"

"Let's bump him," said Fatty Wynn.

Jack Blake's eyes glinted dangerously.

"You begin," he said, fixing the fat junior. "I like a lot to hit at."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Figgins & Co., despite themselves. "But you'll have to be bumped, you know. You mastn't cheek the New House."

"You'll be sorry!"

"Rats!"

And the three New House fellows advanced on Blake. Fatty Wynn came on very bravely. He was rather angry at Blake's words, and he wished to prove his prowess in the fistic art.

Blake was more than ready. Fatty was all right in goal, but he didn't know as much about boxing as he did about defending goal.

Blake knocked up his arms. With a powerful punt he sent him flying. Fatty reeled into the arms of Figgins, and both sat down in the quadrangle.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake.

But three to one were too many for Blake. Figgins & Co. made no mistake about the next charge, and the School House junior was collared. Even then he got his right free, and Figgins got it straight on the nose.

"Ow!" he yelled.

"Hold him!" panted Fatty Wynn.

"Yah! New House cads!"

"Well, we offered you the lessons in footer," said Figgins, rubbing his nose with one hand. "Why didn't you take them and save all this bother?"

"Rats! New House cads! It'll be our turn soon, and——"

"It will indeed," grinned Kerr. "As a matter of fact, Blake, it is now."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You rotters!" gasped Blake.

But there was no help for it. Figgins and Kerr were strong, to say nothing of Fatty Wynn.

Bump!

"Heave, O!" crooned Kerr, in imitation of seamen shipping an anchor.

Bump!

Blake winced. He did his best to hide it. But Kerr saw him.

"That'll do, chaps," he said quickly.

"Rats!" said Figgins and Wynn together. "The bounder must be taught to respect the New House!"

And Blake was bumped on the hard quadrangle again. He could not repress a little gasp.

"Ah!" said Fatty. "Not punctured, I hope."

Blake looked daggers at the fat youth.

"One more!" grinned Figgins.

The others laughed as they lifted Blake into the air again. But he had had enough. With a lunge of his leg Blake sent Fatty Wynn head over heels on his back.

With a tremendous effort he got free from Figgins and Kerr. But in doing so he overbalanced. The Co. laughed as he bumped on the quadrangle after all his efforts.

"That'll do!" said Fatty Wynn. "Come on!"

The fat junior had suddenly recollected that he was hungry. Without a word he turned and cut for the tuckshop. Figgins and Kerr followed suit.

"Of all the conceited asses!" said Blake. "To think of that precious lot trying to teach me footer! What next!"

And with a final shake of his fist in the direction of Figgins & Co., he got up, and walked towards the School House.



"Shut the door, Mellish!" said Lumley-Lumley, removing the cigarette hastily from his mouth, and holding it behind him. (See page 12.)

"Bai Jove, Blake, deah boy!" exclaimed an anxious voice, as Blake came up to the steps of the School House. "Bai Jove! Have you had a feahful accident?"

"No!" grunted Blake.

"You have not been wun ovah?"

"No, ass!"

"But something dweadful has happened?"

"No, chump!"

"But it has, deah boy! Your twousahs are all dustay."

"Ass!"

"I wefuse to be called an ass. I appeal to Digby. Dig, old man, aren't Blake's twousahs decidedly 'dustay'?"

Digby chuckled.

"Well, they look a little that way," he agreed. "Sorry, Blake. I saw it from the study window, but I couldn't get out in time. What were you arguing with Figgins & Co. about?"

Blake snorted with indignation.

"They offered to teach me to play footer," he said.

"What!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Teach you to play footer!" exclaimed Monty Lowther, stopping as he passed the chums of the Fourth. "The New House bounders did?"

"Yes."

"Well—the cheek!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It's because of that rotten licking the other day," growled Blake. "The New House have been cock-a-hoop about it ever since. Figgins & Co. aren't so bad as the others, but they can't help showing how full of it they are. It's not often that the New House beats us."

"Wathah not!"

"We shall never hear the end of it till we've beaten them again," said Digby.

"Offering to teach me play footer, though!" said Blake. "The nerve of it! I played footer before they were born—in—in—a sense, I mean. Look here, something will have to be done to bring them down off their perch."

"Play them again," said Lowther.

"Bai Jove, that's a good ideah. The wegulah House match does not come off for some time, you know, but there's no reason why we shouldn't get up an extwah match," said Arthur Augustus. "Suppose we say next Saturday aftahnoon. The match with G. eyfwiahs has fallen through, owin' to some of their chaps being seeday."

Jack Blake nodded thoughtfully.

"But what about the team?"

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chum about the X.



"Bai Jove! I should think we could put up a team easily enough," said D'Arcy.

"Well, I don't see how we could play Tom Merry, and—and as he's junior captain, I don't see how we could play without him."

Monty Lowther flushed and then paled. He did not speak. The Fourth-Formers looked very uncomfortable.

"I don't want to say a word against Tom Merry," said Blake colouring. "I know he licked me, in a stand-up fight—though it mayn't end like that next time, perhaps. I don't want to think I'm chipping at him because he got the better of me behind the chapel the other day. But an accusation was made against him, and he's done nothing towards disproving it excepting to punch the heads of fellows who made the slightest allusion to the matter. Everybody says he's the special chum of the Outsider, and is only keeping it dark in public because he's afraid of getting the prefects down on him. We know he threw away a footer match, and disgraced the School House, from his determination to play Lumley-Lumley, against the wish of every member of the team. What I say is, I don't see how we could let Tom Merry captain us again, under the circumstances."

"Same here," said Digby.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"What do you say, Lowther?" asked Blake. "You're Tom Merry's chum, and—"

"Who says so?"

"Well, it's generally understood."

"Rats! I've got nothing to say on the matter. Tom Merry's made no more explanation to me than to the rest of you, and I never go into his study. I don't want to express an opinion on the matter."

"Look here, if we get up a team without Tom Merry in it, will you play?"

Lowther hesitated.

"I want an answer, you know. We shall have to fix things up for Saturday."

"I'll play if Manners does," said Monty Lowther at last.

"All right," said Blake, "I'll speak to Manners—hallo, Manners, here you are! Want to speak to you?"

Manners hesitated a little at the sight of Lowther, but came up, without nodding to his old chum. Lowther seemed deeply interested in studying the pigeons under the old elms.

"We're thinking of playing the New House again on Saturday, to stop their crowing," Jack Blake began.

Manners nodded approval.

"Jolly good idea," he said.

"Under the cires, we don't think we could have Tom Merry to captain us."

Manners was silent.

"Will you play for us, under another skipper?" asked Blake. "I'm not jumping at the job myself. We'll let it go by vote in the team."

"I should have no objection to volunteewin', deah boys."

"Shut up, Gussy. What do you say, Manners?"

"I'll play," said Manners. "Only it ought to be put plainly to Tom Merry. I don't see how he can captain the School House side after what's happened. But he's junior football skipper, there's no getting out of that. If you're going to form a team without him, he ought to be asked first."

Jack Blake's brow darkened.

"I don't feel like asking him anything," he said.

"Well, I think it ought to be done."

"Yaas, wathah! I regard it as the cowweet and pwopah thing to do, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus, in a very firm tone.

"Oh, all right," said Blake. "I'll do it. Hullo, who's that whiffing off smoke?"

He glanced round. Somebody passing him had left a trail of tobacco odour behind him; it was not smoke, but the smell of tobacco lately smoked. Blake's glance fell upon Lumley-Lumley. The Outsider had just come out of the house.

Jack Blake's lip curled as he glanced after him.

"He's been smoking again," he said. "The cad! Nice chum for a decent fellow to have, I think—and that's the chap Tom Merry put into the junior eleven against the wish of every fellow concerned! Pah!"

"All the same, I think it ought to be put to Tom Merry, whether he's willing to leave the captaincy to somebody else on Saturday," said Digby.

"Oh, good! I'll ask him," said Blake.

D'Arcy looked quickly at his chum.

"I'll come with you," he said.

Blake laughed.

"It's all right," he exclaimed, "I'm not going looking for trouble. I sha'n't have another row with Tom Merry."

"All the same, I'll come with you, deah boy."

"And I," said Digby.

And the three Fourth-Formers together went off in quest of Tom Merry. Lowther and Manners looked at one another queerly for a moment, and then separated without speaking.

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## CHAPTER 5.

### Caught in the Act!

KNOX, the prefect, stopped outside Tom Merry's study and sniffed. Knox, the prefect, was the most unpopular fellow in the School House. There was no other senior so disliked by the juniors—or by the other seniors for that matter. Knox was always finding somebody out in something, and he stretched his privileges as a prefect to their fullest extent in watching, and fault-finding, and reporting, and making himself a general nuisance. And Knox, the prefect, was "nosing," as the juniors called it, round the Shell passage that afternoon. Some cigarettes had been dropped in one of the passages, and there had been some comment upon the matter. Knox suspected juvenile smoking at once. It was hinted in the Form-rooms that Knox himself was not unknown to indulge in the delights of a surreptitious cigarette. But if he did, he evidently did not intend to grant a similar indulgence to the youngsters. No one was keener on the scent of a cheap cigarette than Knox was, and no one more certain to visit the offender with condign punishment.

Knox stopped and sniffed.

As a matter of fact, he had suspected Gore, Gore being known to have been addicted to habits of that sort. Gore's study was next to Tom Merry's. But as he passed Tom Merry's door Knox scented tobacco.

So he paused, sniffing like a dog picking up a scent.

Sniff! sniff!

"My hat!" ejaculated Knox.

And his eyes gleamed.

He wanted to catch Gore, if Gore was guilty, but he would rather have caught any member of the Terrible Three than a dozen Gores. Tom Merry especially he would have been glad to find in a fault—Tom Merry, the junior whose clear, honest eyes seemed to look right through his little mean heart.

Knox threw open the study door.

He started back.

A thick haze of tobacco smoke was in the study. Not only cigarettes, but cigars, must have been smoked there to give the room that thick, blue haze.

It was so dense that Knox coughed.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed.

There was another cough in the study. Knox made out the form and face of Tom Merry through the tobacco smoke.

"Merry!"

"Well?" said Tom Merry.

"I rather think I've caught you this time," said Knox, with a grin. He did not look so displeased as a dutiful prefect ought to have looked. Indeed, one might have imagined from his expression that he was quite pleased.

Tom Merry flushed.

"What do you mean?" he exclaimed hotly.

"I hardly think I need explain," said Knox caustically. "I think the atmosphere of this study answers for itself. You've been smoking, I imagine—or is this simply the scent of eau-de-Cologne?"

This was intended for heavy sarcasm.

"I haven't been smoking," exclaimed Tom Merry angrily.

"I've only just come in, and I found my room in this state—"

Knox laughed.

"Don't tell lies," he said.

Tom Merry gritted his teeth.

"Lies! I'm not telling lies. Don't think you can bully me, Knox, because you're a Sixth Form prefect. I wouldn't be called a liar by the Head himself."

"Do you dare to deny that you've been smoking, when I find your study as thick with tobacco smoke as a tap-room?" exclaimed the prefect, in amazement.

To do him justice, he did not doubt for a moment that he had caught the Shell captain in the act. He might have known Tom Merry better; but he did not. The Shell fellow flushed crimson again.

"I have not been smoking! I hadn't been in here a minute when you came in," he exclaimed. "I was so surprised at finding my study in this state that I hardly knew what to do. I was going to open the window—"

"It would have been wiser to do that when you started smoking," grinned Knox. "Why, hang it all, you young liar, here are the cigars!"

On the table, on an old exercise book, lay three cigar stumps, one of them still quite warm as Knox touched it.

Tom Merry looked at them dazedly.

That somebody had been smoking heavily in his study hardly admitted of doubt, and though the explanation he had given Knox was perfectly true, yet he saw at a glance that it was not likely to be believed by the prefect.

Knox gathered up the cigar stumps.

"You say you haven't been smoking," he remarked. "You can come and tell Mr. Raiton so. This matter will have to go to the House-master."

"I'm ready to go to Mr. Raiton," said Tom Merry, but with a sinking heart.

"Good! The sooner the better," said the prefect.

Tom Merry stood ready to follow Knox. But the Sixth-Former was not yet satisfied. Whistling softly he made a further survey of the study.

"That'll do," he said at length. "I thought you might have a pipe or two hidden about. My duty, you know."

Tom Merry could hardly repress a look of scorn. Did the prefect really believe him guilty? They left the study and descended the stairs.

"Oh, hang!"

Kildare was the cause of Knox's impatient utterance. He was just leaving his study as they neared the House-master's room. Tom Merry felt his position keenly. Kildare was the last person he wished to meet at that moment.

"Hallo! What's the matter?" asked Kildare.

"Smoking in his study," replied Knox. "Railton in?"

Kildare looked grave.

"Mr. Railton is in, I think," he replied, laying a slight emphasis on the prefix. "But wait a minute, Knox. I should like to know about this."

This was exactly what Knox did not want. The caustic tone of Kildare's "Mr. Railton" had not sweetened his temper. But Kildare was head-prefect. Knox had to comply.

"Oh, I can manage all right, thanks. It's only a case of smoking in study—"

"That is not true," said Tom Merry stoutly. "I found the study full of smoke—"

"You know, Kildare," interrupted Knox sneeringly. "The old tale. Room like a kiln. Don't know anything about it. Mr. Railton in, you say?"

"I believe so," said Kildare. "But you haven't told me about it yet."

Knox bit his lip. But Kildare was determined, and he had to explain.

"And it's as plain as anything," he concluded, "that he was smoking—"

"That's not true," said Tom Merry. "I had only just come into the study, Kildare, and I found the room exactly as Knox found it. I don't know anything about it."

Kildare looked anxiously at Tom Merry. He remembered that the captain of the Shell had denied all knowledge of the cards in the same way.

"I'm sorry, Merry. But we shall have to take you to Mr. Railton," he said.

"I've already asked to be taken there," answered the hero of the Shell.

Kildare led the way without a word.

"Well, you stick to the same tale all through, anyway, Merry," said Knox.

Knox's tone was malicious. Kildare looked coldly at him. The captain of St. Jim's had never known Tom Merry to lie. He was very reluctant to entertain any idea of it.

"Come in," said Mr. Railton in answer to their knock.

The House-master put down his pen as they entered.

"I'm busy just now," he began.

The House-master broke off as he caught sight of Knox and Tom Merry.

"What! You, Merry?"

A shade of annoyance passed over Knox's face. Mr. Railton had not mentioned him. In his mind he saw the matter slipping out of his hands.

"Well, Kildare," went on the House-master, "what is the matter?"

Kildare briefly explained how he had met Tom Merry and Knox.

"And you concluded it was best to bring him to me at once. I see," said Mr. Railton. "Well, Knox, let me have your story, please."

"I caught him smoking in his study, sir."

"That is untrue, sir!" said Tom Merry.

"Silence, Merry!" said the House-master. "Go on, Knox."

The bully made a concise statement of his discovery, producing the handful of cigar stumps at the end of it for greater effect.

"But did you actually find him smoking, Knox?" said the master.

"Well, no, sir. Not exactly. But one of these stumps was quite warm when I picked it up."

Kildare looked up. Things were black indeed against Tom Merry. He could hardly believe it.

Knox's last piece of evidence had made a great impression on Mr. Railton. He looked very severely at Tom Merry.

"I am pained to see you here in answer to a charge like this, Merry," he began.

"I found my study exactly as Knox found it, sir!" said Tom Merry. "It was full of smoke, as he says. But I know nothing about the cause. That cigar stump may have been warm, but I did not smoke it!"

Mr. Railton did not reply to Tom Merry, however.

"Have you anything more to say, Knox?" he asked quietly.

"No, sir."

"Or you, Kildare, upon this subject?" asked the House-master.

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chum about the X.

The captain of St. Jim's hesitated. Since the discovery of the cards in Tom Merry's study he had been communing with himself whether he ought to report it or wait for further evidence.

This affair that Knox had discovered had set him thinking more than ever, and he forgot that he was under the House-master's eye. He had withheld the matter for what he considered satisfactory reasons. But it did not take him long to make up his mind now. The path of duty lay before him very clearly.

"I think you have something to say, Kildare?"

The captain of St. Jim's coloured.

"What have you to tell me?" asked Mr. Railton, quietly.

The captain of the school found it not so easy as Knox. The things he had to say were not a pleasure to him, especially when they concerned such a lad as the hero of the Lower School.

Slowly and reluctantly he unfolded the story of the cards. Mr. Railton listened in silence. But Tom Merry held his head erect through it all.

He stood quite firmly, his lips hard set, and his brows a little drawn, but with courage and resolve in every feature.

Was he guilty?

It seemed hard to think so, looking at him now; but Mr. Railton, with his long experience, knew that courage and mere hardihood may have the same outward aspect.

He had to judge by the facts.

The House-master's brow grew sterner and sterner as he listened to Kildare.

"This is very, very serious," he said, at last.

"I fear so, sir," said Kildare.

"Why did you not report this before, Kildare?"

The captain coloured again.

"I hoped that something would turn up to show that there was a mistake about it, or that it was a practical joke on Merry, or something of that sort, sir," he said. "I had a high opinion of Tom Merry. I thought it was within my authority as head prefect of the School House to keep the matter in abeyance."

"Quite right, quite right, Kildare. But it was quite right, too, to tell me now, in view of what Knox has stated."

Mr. Railton pursed his lips a little.

"I think I need not detain you any longer, Knox," he said. "You have stated all that is connected with the matter?"

"Yes, sir," said the prefect, biting his lip.

"Then you may go."

"Very well, sir."

Knox hesitated a second, but he had to go. He knew why Mr. Railton did not want to detain him. In plain English, he was dismissed from the study. Mr. Railton did not feel so confident with him as with Kildare. He had done his duty as a prefect; but in discussing the matter, Mr. Railton wished to have present only the sturdy captain of St. Jim's, whom he had long learned to trust quite frankly. Knox gritted his teeth as he went down the passage. His only consolation was that the junior he hated was probably ruined.

The door closed, and Mr. Railton turned to Tom Merry.

## CHAPTER 6.

### Guilty or Innocent!

TOM MERRY met the School House-master's gaze quite calmly. It was not bravado; it was the courage of innocence in his face. He was not afraid, though his heart was sinking. How would this end? If he was guilty, he would have to leave St. Jim's. And how was he to prove his innocence?

The House-master's face showed that the scene pained him as much as anybody. If Tom Merry turned out to be the black-guard the evidence seemed to prove, he would have to admit that for once he had been utterly mistaken in a boy's character. He had thought very differently of the hero of the Shell.

"Now, Merry," he said, "it appears that you deny all knowledge of the marked cards that were found in your study?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you suggest that either of your study-mates knows anything about them?"

Tom Merry flushed.

"Certainly not, sir."

"Then you think they were placed there by someone else?"

"I suppose so."

"For what purpose?"

"A joke, I suppose, unless it was someone who wanted to injure me."

"That is a very dreadful suspicion, Merry," said Mr. Railton, in an altered voice. "Do you suspect that someone dislikes you so much in the School House that he would go to this criminal length to injure you?"

Tom Merry was silent.

Put like that, the thing did seem too terrible to be believed. Yet what other explanation could be suggested?

What enemy had he who would so injure him if he could?

Surely none.

The thought of Lumley-Lumley crossed his mind. If it was anyone, doubtless it was the Outsider of St. Jim's.

But the Outsider had assumed friendly looks of late, and had shown a keen desire to be on friendly terms with the hero of the Shell, even after the football match and what had followed it.

Mr. Railton broke the silence.

"Well, Merry? Can you give me the name of a boy who might have done this thing, so that I can question him?"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"I could not go so far as that, sir, certainly."

"About this smoking," went on the House-master. "You say the study was thick with tobacco smoke when you went there?"

"Yes, sir."

"How long had you been there when Knox arrived?"

"Two or three minutes, perhaps. I was so surprised by the smoke that I hardly knew what to do. I was going to open the window when Knox came in."

"You had closed the door?"

"Yes, to keep the smoke from getting into the passage. I knew what the fellows would say, after that affair of the cards."

"It seems, then, that the other lads have entertained a bad opinion of you over the affair of the cards?"

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry, flushing.

"It is a painful affair. If you did not smoke the cigars, someone else must have smoked them in your study."

"I suppose so, sir."

"Where were you before you went to the study? If not there, you must have been somewhere else, and if you were seen somewhere else—"

"I had been on the chapel green, sir."

"The chapel green—at this time in the evening?"

Tom Merry flushed again.

"I've been a lot alone just lately, sir, since—since the cards. I was taking a quiet stroll by myself, thinking things over."

"It is very unfortunate that you should happen to be alone, Merry, at the very moment it was most necessary that you should prove you were not in your study," Mr. Railton said, somewhat drily.

"Yes, sir."

"Your study is shared by Manners and Lowther. Either of them might have come in, and found it smoky."

"I suppose so."

"Then, if someone else smoked those cigars there, knowing you were strolling on the chapel green and not likely to come in, he might have been interrupted at any moment by either Manners or Lowther."

"Well, no, sir, I—I'm not on very good terms with Manners and Lowther now," said Tom Merry, awkwardly. "Monty—I mean Lowther—generally digs in the end study, with Noble and the rest, and Manners doesn't come to my study very often."

"You are on bad terms with them?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why?"

"Partly because of those cards."

"Did they believe you guilty?"

"I don't know, sir—I think not—but—but—well, there was the football match, too. Everybody was down on me for playing Lumley-Lumley. Manners and Lowther along with the rest. It all began with that. Lumley asked me to give him a chance, and I gave it him. That was how it was."

Mr. Railton looked at Tom Merry with penetrating eyes.

"I suppose you know, Merry, that your name has been coupled very much with Jerrold Lumley-Lumley's of late?" he asked.

"Yes, I think so."

"That boy has a certain character," said Mr. Railton. "He is not the boy you would naturally take to, if you were the boy I had always believed you to be."

"I dislike him, sir."

"Then it is not true that you have made a friend of him?"

"Not true at all, sir."

"Then appearances are very much against you all along, Tom Merry," said Kildare. "Why did you play him in the House match?"

"He asked me to give him a chance; and I thought some of us had been rather rough on him. I was sorry for it afterwards. He fouled Kerr; and that was the beginning of the trouble. I suppose I was too good-natured."

"I should not like to see troublesome consequences fall upon a lad for being good-natured," said Mr. Railton, "but it has been proved in public the sort of character this boy Lumley possesses. The Head, for reasons which do not concern you, did not expel him from St. Jim's. But you should have known better, Merry, than to allow him to influence you. If you have indeed taken to his ways, as the evidence seems to prove—"

"I have not, sir."

"I hope that is the case. But plainly, Merry, if you did not smoke in your study, one of your study-mates must have done so. Will you call Manners and Lowther, Kildare?"

"Certainly, sir."

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Kildare left the study.

The House-master turned to his writing again, and Tom Merry stood waiting. He was feeling horribly uncomfortable. For a moment or two it seemed to him that he would be glad if this did end in his being compelled to leave St. Jim's. He thought of his quiet home, of the kind old face of Miss Priscilla Fawcett, his old guardian, and how she, at least, would never believe a word against him. Laurel Villa seemed to loom in the distance like a haven of refuge, far away from the trouble of accusations, and questionings, and unfriendly looks.

But then he held his head erect again.

When he left St. Jim's, it should not be with a stain on his name. He would fight this out, and prove his innocence, at least.

The door re-opened, and Kildare returned, followed into the study by Manners and Lowther.

The two Shell fellows stopped in amazement at the sight of Tom Merry. Kildare had simply told them to come to Mr. Railton's study, and they had come. They had not expected to find Tom Merry there.

Tom Merry did not look at them.

## CHAPTER 7.

### Not Proven!

MR. RAILTON laid down his pen, and turned his eyes upon the chums of the Shell. Manners and Lowther stood silent, wondering what was coming.

"You share Tom Merry's study in the Shell passage, I believe, Lowther?"

"Yes, sir," said Monty, in wonder.

"That was the last question he had expected. What on earth had Tom Merry's study to do with Mr. Railton now?"

"Have you used that study lately?"

Lowther flushed a little.

"I've been using the end study a lot, sir," he said, "with Kangaroo—I mean Noble, and Dane and Glyn."

"Have you been in Merry's study to-day?"

"Yes, sir. I went in to get some books."

"At what time?"

"Just after lessons."

"Not since then?"

"No, sir."

Mr. Railton turned his glance upon Manners, who had been listening in a state of considerable astonishment.

"Have you been in the study lately, Manners?"

"Not just lately, sir."

"When was the last time?"

"Just after dinner, sir."

"Oh! Then you were not aware that someone has been smoking in the study?"

"Smoking, sir? No!"

"Nor you, Lowther?"

"Certainly not, sir!" said Monty Lowther, in amazement.

"You hear that, Merry? Do you suggest that either Manners or Lowther is stating what is not correct?"

"No, sir. They're speaking the exact truth, of course," said Tom Merry. "I was quite sure before you asked them that they wouldn't know anything about the smoke."

"Very well. You may go, Manners and Lowther."

The chums of the Shell left the study in wonder. But they did not go far. They waited for Tom Merry to come out of the House-master's presence. They had been on cold terms lately with one another, as well as with Tom Merry, but they forgot that just now.

In the House-master's study there was grim silence for some moments. Kildare was looking distressed, but a hard, proud look was coming over Tom Merry's face. He was determined that no one should see how deeply he was cut by the shadow that had fallen upon his name.

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Mr. Railton spoke at last.

"I don't know what to say to you," he exclaimed. "On each occasion when the evidence seems conclusive against you, Merry, you have a reply to make which hardly seems to deserve any sort of credence. Anybody accused of anything is able to say that it is an enemy's plot against him. That discounts all evidence—yet it is only upon evidence that any matter can be settled."

"I am innocent, sir!"

"I hope you are, Merry."

Tom Merry's eyes flashed.

"I think you should believe it, sir."

"Merry!"

"Yes, sir, I think so," exclaimed Tom Merry passionately. "I've always had a good name—I've always played the game, and any of the fellows would have said so till just lately!"

"Their opinion seems to have changed lately," said the School House master drily.

"That is not my fault!"

Mr. Railton drummed upon the table with his fingers.

"Frankly, Merry, I do not know what to say. It is because you have had such an extremely good reputation that I hesitate. The evidence is more than enough to condemn any boy. If it had been Gore or Mellish, I should not have had a doubt upon the subject. Your good record makes me doubt. I shall not report this to the Head at present."

"I do not care!"

"What?"

"If I am to be suspected and watched and sneered at, sir, the sooner it goes before the Head the better!" said Tom Merry hotly. "I'm sick of this!"

"You are not respectful, Merry!" said Mr. Railton quietly.

Tom Merry reddened.

"I'm sorry, sir! But—but—"

"That is enough now. You may go, Merry."

Tom Merry left the study without another word. Mr. Railton fastened his eyes upon the captain of St. Jim's as the door closed.

"Kildare! What do you think of this?"

Kildare made a helpless gesture.

"I don't know what to think, sir."

"Speak quite frankly to me, Kildare. It is your duty. This is a matter that concerns that lad's whole future life."

"I know it, sir."

"If this is true—if he has become a blackguard in conduct—he will have to leave St. Jim's. But I have always had so high an opinion of that boy that I am very sorry to think such a thing."

"I can't quite think it, sir. Only—only if there were as much evidence against any other junior, I should think the case settled. That's all."

Mr. Railton nodded.

"I agree with you, Kildare. That is exactly how the case presents itself to me. This friendship between Merry and Lumley—do you think it is a real one?"

"The other juniors seem to think so, sir. His own friends seem to have dropped off on account of it, and Lumley certainly speaks of Merry in public as if he were a good friend. I have noticed that. The impression seems to be that they are close friends, but that Merry wishes to keep it dark."

"And that is possibly the case?"

"Just so, sir."

Mr. Railton looked worried.

"Well, the case must be left where it is at present," he said. "I must think over it further. Meanwhile, Kildare, you will keep an eye on Tom Merry."

"Certainly, sir."

And the captain of St. Jim's left the study. Mr. Railton turned to his desk again, and picked up his pen, but he did not write. He sat with a wrinkled brow, thinking.

Meanwhile, Tom Merry, as he left the study, had met Manners and Lowther at the end of the passage. The Shell fellows stopped him. Tom Merry paused, with a hard, uncompromising face and very bright eyes.

"Well?" he asked shortly.

"What's the matter, Tom?"

"Nothing fresh."

"You were being called over the coals?"

"It's nothing—nothing fresh," repeated Tom Merry.

"They've added cigar-smoking to card-sharpening in the list of my sins—that's all. I dare say I shall be accused of picking pockets next. But I don't see that it need interest you. You haven't shown much interest in my affairs lately."

And he strode on before either of them could reply.

He ascended the stairs to the Shell quarters. A crowd of fellows were gathered round the doorway of his study. A haze of smoke was slowly rolling out of the open doorway, and the whole passage was scented with tobacco.

"Ripping goings-on, I don't think!" said Gore, with a sneer. "This is Tom Merry's study—the chap who was down on the smart set here, you know—and held up his hands in horror at a fellow smoking a cigarette behind the woodshed."

"Humbug!" said Mellish.

"Looks like it," said Hancock. "Why, the study's fairly reeking. I suppose that's what Knox and Kildare were marching him into Railton's study for. I saw them."

"Serve him right if he's expelled!" said Jones minor. "It's disgusting! He must have been smoking cigars to make the study like that."

"Yes, rather."

Tom Merry smiled bitterly. He had been found guilty, as usual, by fellows who were ignorant of all the facts, and his enemies were not slow to make use of it against him.

"Hallo, here he is!" exclaimed Digby. "I say, Tom Merry, how did you get your study into this state?"

"Mind your own business!" said Tom Merry shortly.

And he went into the study and slammed the door. The juniors looked at one another, and slowly moved away. In ten minutes the matter was buzzing throughout the length and breadth of the Lower School.

## CHAPTER 8.

### An Awkward Interview.

"COME in!" Tom Merry stared as Blake, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, Digby, Herries, and Kangaroo entered his study. Would he never be let alone?

"I hope you'll pardon this intrusion, dear boy, but we have wathah an important mattah to discuss," said Arthur Augustus, with a graceful bow.

Tom Merry took not the slightest notice of D'Arcy.

"I'm perfectly willin' to allow that certain circumstances may altah cases," said Arthur Augustus. "But pway have the goodness to attend, Tom Mewwy."

Tom Merry continued to stare through the window. Blake & Co. might have been at the Equator for all he seemed to see of them.

Herries coughed.

"I'm speakin' to you, Tom Mewwy!" said D'Arcy.

The swell of St. Jim's was a little nettled at his cold reception.

"Are you?" said Tom Merry. "Well, don't!"

And thrusting his hands in his pockets, he stretched out his legs, and continued to stare out of the window.

"It's rather an important matter, though, Tom Merry," said Kangaroo.

Tom Merry turned a somewhat more genial look on the Cornstalk.

"Well, get on with it, then, Kangaroo," he said.

Arthur Augustus jumped.

"Pway do nothin' of the kind, Kangawoo! I have taken this mattah up, Tom Mewwy. Pway have the goodness to listen!"

Tom Merry shrugged his shoulders. Arthur Augustus jammed his monocle into his eye in an impressive manner.

"It's about the footah, dear boy," he said, at length.

Tom Merry looked impatient.

"Is it?" he said. "Well, you can go and talk your rot to someone else. I've had enough of that talk from you fellows."

"You are undah a delusion, dear boy," returned D'Arcy.

"The footah match you allude to is finished with, I hope. We are discussin' anothah one."

D'Arcy paused.

But Tom Merry made no sign. He was not to be drawn. The chums looked at one another. It was very evident that they did not admire D'Arcy's opening. They thought he was making a mess of things.

"Yaas, dear boy," he went on, "we think the lickin' we sustained when you would play that wottah, Lumley, ought to be wewenged."

Another slight pause. Still Tom Merry said nothing. This was not what they had come for. Herries gave D'Arcy a dig in the back. Arthur Augustus knew what it was intended for, and he did not like it.

"What a beastly wuffian you are, Hewwies," he said. "I should have thought Towsah had done enough damage to my twousahs, without you beginnin'—"

"Oh, ring off, ass!" said Blake. "You would insist on taking this thing on. I could have explained in half the time. It's like this, Tom Merry—"

"You are a biggah wuffian than Hewwies, Blake," said Arthur Augustus. "Pway shut up while I explain."

"Buzz off, Gussy! You've had your innings. We think, Tom Merry—"

"I shall uttally wufuse to buzz off—"

"Look here, Gussy—"

"Wats!"

Tom Merry with great difficulty repressed a grin. This was too much like old times. Blake and D'Arcy had not altered, whatever else might have happened.

"You see, it's this way, dear boy," began D'Arcy again.

"You are captain of the junior School House team, of course, but we thought—"

Arthur Augustus paused. He new

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looked round to Blake for support. Blake was looking the other way. "And we thought, Tom Mewwy, that you would pwefer—" Again a pause by the speaker. Blake was still occupied with staring at the wall. The other fellows were busy staring at the floor. Tom Merry was the only fellow who looked perfectly composed. He almost smiled as he waited for D'Arcy to go on. "I was about to say, Tom Mewwy, you see the posish, deah boy, of course. Oh, dash! Pway explain t yourself then, Blake!"

And Arthur Augustus jammed his monocle into his eye, and joined Tom Merry in his stare into space.

Blake opened in a very different manner from his chum. He bore Tom Merry no grudge for his late defeat. It was no disgrace to be beaten by an athlete like Tom Merry.

"Look here, Tom Merry," he said. "It's about the skippering in this new match."

Tom Merry looked at Blake: neither flinched.

"Well; what of it, Blake?"

"Pway let me assist, Blake. I see my way now—"

"You'll see stars, ass, if you don't ring off. Keep that duffer quiet."

The others closed round D'Arcy.

"Weally, deah boys—"

"Well, what of it, Blake?" asked Tom Merry, when order was restored. "I jolly well wish you'd come to the point. You don't want me to be captain?"

"Well, to begin with, Tom Merry, you've no need to put it like that," said Blake. "We thought after what has happened, you would prefer to stay down for this match, and let somebody else captain the team against the New House."

"I see," said Tom Merry. "You've very likely chosen him already."

Blake coloured.

"You're quite wrong, Tom Merry; we haven't! We think it ought to be put before you first."

"That is kind of you!"

Blake took no notice of the sarcastic tone. Tom Merry's manner rather puzzled him. He could not quite tell how the Shell captain was taking it.

"Look here," he began, "you know as well as we do that it's the right thing—"

"You must see it's perfectlay pwopah, Tom Mewwy—"

"Shut up, Gussy," said Blake. "Are you agreeable, Tom Merry?"

The captain of the Shell laughed—it was a harsh laugh, not much like Tom Merry's old laugh.

"I don't mind," he said. "Get any one you like to captain you. It's all one to me."

The juniors looked awkward enough.

"That all?" went on Tom Merry. "I'm in the wars lately. You might as well pile all you can on while you're about it."

"We're not doing this thing because we're down on you, Tom Merry," said Kangaroo.

"Certainlay not, deah boy. As a mattah of fact, I may say that Blake has forgotten the fact that—" He paused.

"What's that?" asked Tom Merry.

The swell of St. Jim's hesitated.

"Well, you see, deah boy, if I may use the expression, you are undah a cloud—"

Tom Merry leaped to his feet.

"I want no more reminders of that, D'Arcy," he said hotly.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

Tom Merry's eyes were flashing now.

"Keep off that subject."

"Weally—"

"I've had enough of it—more than enough. You have all chosen to believe accusations against me—accusations that can't be proved—"

"I haven't said that I believe them," said Kangaroo quietly.

Tom Merry turned on him.

"Will you say plainly that you don't believe them?" he demanded.

The Cornstalk junior was silent.

Tom Merry broke into a laugh; again that hard and bitter laugh that was so unlike his own.

"I think I was right, then," he said. "You don't care to stand by a chap you all know to be decent. That's what it is!"

"You've got othah fwiends now, Tom Mewwy."

"What do you mean, D'Arcy?"

"You know verry well what I mean, Tom Mewwy."

"Shut up, Gussy—"

"I wufuse to shut up, Blake—"

"We didn't come here to argue," said Blake hastily. "Let that alone."

"I decline to let it alone. Tom Mewwy has a right to an explanation. He has othah fwiends now—Lumley and Mellish."

"That is not true," said Tom Merry quietly.

"Tom Mewwy!"

"I detest Lumley-Lumley more than any other fellow at St. Jim's—"

"Is that why you played him in the House match?" asked Digby sarcastically.

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"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

Tom Merry made a weary gesture.

"Oh, that's enough!" he exclaimed. "You're all against me, and that's enough. You don't want me to captain the House team in this match. Well, it's all right—find another captain. I sha'n't be sorry to cut it. I don't know that I shall ever play for the School House again."

There was a pause for a moment.

"It's wotten talkin' to a chap like this, I know," said D'Arcy at last; "but while you are undah a cloud, Tom Mewwy, you cannot expect to captain the School House juniors, you know. It's askin' wathah too much."

"Haven't you said enough, D'Arcy? I've said that I don't want to captain the team, and I don't want to play in it, either, for that matter. Isn't that enough to satisfy you?"

Tom Merry threw himself into his chair again. The juniors stood uneasy. The interview was not what they could call a satisfactory one, although they had gained their point quite easily. They felt themselves in the right, yet Tom Merry had, somehow, impressed upon them a feeling of being in the wrong.

"Well, that's all right, then," said Blake at last. "We thought we'd put it straight to you, Tom Merry, before we formed up a team for Saturday."

"All right!"

"If you want to play—"

Blake's manner was, for once, half-hearted. If Tom Merry wanted to play he felt that he could not refuse him a place in the team in spite of all that had happened.

But Tom Merry cut him short quickly enough.

"I don't want to play," he said shortly.

Blake could not help looking relieved.

"You are willing to stand down altogether next Saturday?" he asked.

"Quite willing!"

"Then it's settled."

"Yes—for next Saturday, and perhaps for the rest of the term, too," said Tom Merry bitterly. "If you miss me when you meet Greyfriars juniors, you can thank yourselves. But no doubt there are plenty of budding captains in the eleven quite ready and willing to take my place."

"That's not fair, Tom Merry. We don't want to be down on you, but after what's happened we feel that we couldn't play under your lead as usual—"

"Oh, I know," said Tom Merry impatiently. "A fellow's down, so you all crowd in to give him a kick!"

"Look here!" roared Blake. "I don't like that, and blessed if I'm going to stand it! If a chap goes in for blackguardly amusements he must expect decent fellows to be down on him. You were ready enough to be down on Jerrold Lumley when he first came to St. Jim's, only because the same charges were made against him."

"They were proved in his case, and he owned up."

"Well, a chap who owns up may be more decent than a chap who doesn't."

Tom Merry was on his feet in a moment.

"Then you mean to say—"

"Here, enough of that!" exclaimed Kangaroo, in alarm, dragging Blake back. "You two chaps have had it out once, and that's enough. We didn't come here for a scrap. Get away, Blake."

"Look here—"

"Rats! Come away!"

And the sturdy Cornstalk fairly dragged Jack Blake, half resisting, from the study. The other juniors followed in silence. Tom Merry stood with gleaming eyes and contracted brows, and watched them go. D'Arcy was the last, and he paused for a moment with the handle of the door in his grasp to look back at Tom Merry. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was bound to be polite to the last.

"Pway excuse this intwusion into your quartahs, deah boy," he said; and without waiting for a reply, he went out and closed the door.

Tom Merry was left alone. The footsteps died away down the passage. Alone—in the silent study, still haunted by a scent of tobacco-smoke. With a grim, heavy face Tom Merry fell into a deep reverie.

He was suddenly startled from his reflections. There was a sound of a crash in the study next to him—crash on crash. Tom Merry sprang to his feet, and ran to the door of the study.

## CHAPTER 9.

### Gore is Shut Up!

"HALLO! Get out! Hook it!" Gore was reading in his study when the door opened softly, and D'Arcy minor's head appeared. "Gerrouit!" repeated Gore, whizzing a heavy book at the Third-Former. Wally popped his head back in time.

"My hat!" he grinned. "He is in a wax. That would have hurt, too. But never mind, he's in; that's all we want." And Wally scuttled down the passage to the corner, where his chums were waiting for him.

"Ripping, Curly!" he said, addressing Curly Gibson. "Gore's at home. Come on!"

The chums of the Third chuckled. In a few seconds they were outside Gore's study.

"Hope old Skimmy doesn't come along," said Wally. "He'd spoil everything. Cave!" He muttered the word as he heard Gore rise from his chair in the study.

The heroes of the third disappeared more quickly than the imps in "Faust." Wally darted into the opposite study. Jameson was half-way down the stairs in a moment, Curly Gibson sought refuge in the end study—Kangaroo's.

But Gore did not come out. They waited a few minutes: then they had the satisfaction of hearing him unmistakably draw up a chair to the table as they crept back to the door. Silently and swiftly they got to work again.

"Got the cord, Curly?" asked Wally.

"Here you are, kid."

D'Arcy minor took the cord and bound it securely round the handle of Gore's door.

"Now hang on!" he whispered; "and don't breathe while I get the other things!"

Curly Gibson, Jameson, and Cook seized the ends of the cord firmly. Wally vanished in the gloom of the Shell passage. In a few minutes he returned.

"I couldn't have brought these before. It was no use risking being caught by Gore with this heavy thing to lug about."

And the chums saw that he had a tool-box with him. Quietly he put it on the floor; but not too quietly for Gore to hear.

"Quick!" said Curly Gibson. "Hang on like anything, kids! Go on, Wally! Begin! We'll manage somehow!"

The chums hung on to the cord for all they were worth as they heard Gore approaching the door from the inside. Wally, as he had already been heard, did not care how he rattled the tools. Down on his knees he went.

"Where's that gimlet?" he said.

"Look out!" said Jameson.

There was a tug at the door.

"Is that you, D'Arcy minor?" came Gore's voice through the door.

No answer. Jameson and Curly chuckled. Wally was boring screw-holes with the gimlet in the door-check. An angle-iron lay on the floor in the dimness.

"You needn't pretend you're not here, young D'Arcy!" roared Gore. "I heard you a minute ago! Open the door, or I'll skin you!"

He gave another tug at the door to accompany his words. But the chums of the Third had got a good grip.

"Hurry up, Wally!" Curly whispered. "The giddy cord's thin, and it's nearly cutting our paws in two!"

"Who the dickens is it?" muttered Gore, on the other side, trying to catch the inflection of the voices.

"D'Y'hear, young D'Arcy?" he shouted. "I know it's you. Let go that door!"

"Hurry up, kid! Get that angle-iron on, for goodness' sake!" Gore, hearing the low, chuckling whispers, began to rave.

He tugged at the door furiously. The heroes of the Third winced. It was no joke holding the cord against such tugs.

"All right in a moment!" said Wally. "I've got the holes bored! We'll have him screwed up in a jiffy now!"

Gore raved and stormed. Savagely he tore at the door handle. And once, just as Wally was putting the second screw in position, it was a very near thing. He managed to get the door open about two inches. Curly Gibson, Jameson and Cook saw the danger.

"Wally to the rescue!" yelled Curly.

The cock of the Third was on his feet in an instant. He added his weight. Slowly the door came to again. Gore stamped his feet with rage. He had heard Curly Gibson's voice, and recognised it. He was being screwed up in his study by the Third-Formers.

He could hardly believe it for a moment. He had himself taken a hand once or twice in screwing up an unpopular prefect in his study. But to be screwed up himself by the fags of the Third was unspeakable. He dragged furiously at the door again. But the cord on the handle held it fast now in the strong grasp of Jameson and Curly and Cook. And Wally was beginning to drive the screws in. Gore dragged and dragged, and kicked the door at intervals, but the chums of the Third held on like grim death.

And now the first screw was home. Deep in it was driven, and even without Curly & Co. holding on to the door-handle Gore would have found it difficult to get it open.

"Buck up, Wally!" gasped Curly. "I believe Tom Merry's at home next door. He had a visit from Blake and his lot not ten minutes back, I know. We don't want him to come out on us."

"I'm bucking up."

"Skimmy may be along any minute, too. You know this is his study, and he's just the chap to buzz in at the wrong moment."

"Oh, cheese it! There's the second screw!"

"Dear me!"

"Hallo! There's Skimmy!"

Skimpole, of the Shell, came along the passage. He stopped outside his study door, and blinked at the chums of the Third through his big spectacles. He had a great volume under his arm. Skimpole was seldom seen without one.

"Dear me! What are you doing?"

Wally was driving in the third screw with feverish haste. Gore, for the moment, had ceased his raving inside. Wally gave Skimpole a flushed grin.

"It's a scientific experiment," he said.

"Is it, really?" said Skimpole, with great interest. "Of what nature? I am very interested in scientific experiments, D'Arcy minor."

"We want to judge the exact powers of resistance of six screws opposed to the energy of two arms," explained Wally.

"These are the screws, and the arms are inside the study. They belong to Gore."

"Very interesting indeed," said Skimpole.

Another screw went in. There was a rap at the door inside. Gore shouted through the keyhole. He had heard Skimpole's voice.

"Skimmy, are you there?"

"Yes, indeed, Gore, I am here."

"Open this door!"

"Impossible. I would not interrupt a scientific experiment for anything, Gore. I am only too glad to see the youthful enthusiasm for science," said the genius of the Shell. "I trust in time to lead these young persons to a proper understanding of Socialism and Determinism, and to a sense of the importance of evolution."

"You chump!"

"Really, Gore, that is almost rude. You see, it is a very important question whether evolution is a grand scientific theory, or the babble of a weak brain. You will see at once that there is a very great distinction between the two, although some persons profess to see none."

"Open this door! Kick those young cads away!"

"Nonsense, Gore! Whether evolution is the correct theory of the origin of the human race, and whether the development of the species took six thousand or six million years, is very important."

"Will you stop those young villains?"

"It is objected," said Skimpole, now fairly mounted upon his hobby-horse and careering wildly around, so to speak—"it is objected that the time taken for the work of evolution would occupy so great a time, that it would carry the human race back into the glacial period, when life was impossible upon this planet. My dear friends, it is only a surface difficulty. For although evolution goes on very slowly where we can see it, how do we know that in some remote period of time it did not proceed much more quickly? Therefore, the limitation of time is nothing to a truly scientific mind. He can speed up evolution, or slacken it down, to suit his theory exactly, just as he likes. And as nothing is known about those distinct periods, how are you going to contradict him? My dear friends, to a truly scientific mind, facts are only made to fit in with theories. If a fact doesn't agree with your theory, chop some of it off, or twist it round a little. It is surprising how a fact can be moulded into shape by a truly scientific mind."

Wally rose, with a grunt of relief, and bumped into Skimpole and knocked him against the wall, and Skimpole gasped and broke off.

"There, that's finished!" said Wally.

"Skimpole!" roared Gore. "Will you get those screws out?"

"Impossible, Gore. I would not interfere with a scientific experiment for anything. If you fags would like to pursue your investigations into the wonders of science further, I shall be very pleased to give you any instruction you please; and I will prove to you that the human race is descended from a speck of jelly floating in a primeval sea, and not, as Professor Loosetop asserts, from a fragment of rotten orange that turned into life in the sun."

And Skimpole walked away with his big book. Gore hampered at the door.

"Hammer away, old son!" said Wally, through the keyhole. "Hammer away! You won't get out! We've screwed you up!"

"You young hound!" roared Gore.

Wally chuckled.

"You said in the quad, this afternoon that Tom Merry was a blackguard, and ought to be shut up somewhere," he said, through the keyhole. "Well, if that's the cure for blackguards, here you are, nicely shut up! There never was a bigger blackguard than you are, Gore, unless it's Lumley-Lumley. And you're shut up. Now you ain't satisfied, I suppose?"

"You—you—"

Gore seized a chair and crashed it on his door. Tom Merry's door opened, and the hero of the Shell came out in amazement.

"What on earth's the matter?" he exclaimed.

Wally grinned.

"Gore's been saying that blackguards ought to be shut up!"

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he said. "We've taken him at his word, and shut him up! Come on, kids!"

And the fags scuttled away down the passage and disappeared. "You young thieves!" yelled Gore, through the keyhole. "I did say Tom Merry was a blackguard, and ought to be shut up; and so he ought! And I'll skin you for this! Get those screws out! Do you hear?"

Tom Merry's lips set. He understood.

Wally & Co. had screwed Gore up in his study, and Gore's own words told him their reason. His heart warmed towards the fags of the Third. Gore hammered at the door again.

"Will you open this door?"

"I won't!" said Tom Merry. "And the fags are gone!"

Gore started at the voice.

"Is that you, Tom Merry?"

"Yes," said Tom Merry scornfully.

"Look here, I—I——"

"Don't talk to me, you cad!"

Tom Merry went back into his study and closed the door. Gore shouted and hammered, and the noise brought fellows along the passage from far and near. But the screws were well driven in, and no one was inclined to go to the great trouble of finding a screw-driver and extracting them. Juniors chuckled and passed on, and Gore raved till he was tired, and the door still remained screwed up.

## CHAPTER 10. Lumley's Plot.

**J**ERROLD LUMLEY-LUMLEY sat by the window in his study, his feet on a chair within, and a cigarette between his lips. He was smoking, with a thoughtful shade upon his brow and a curious glitter in his eyes. His expression showed that the Outsider of St. Jim's was very satisfied with something. Mellish came into the study, and as the door opened the sound of a hammering and shouting along the passage was plainer.

"Shut the door!" said Lumley-Lumley, removing the cigarette hastily from his mouth, and holding it behind him while Mellish obeyed. The cad of the Fourth sat down.

"What's that row up the passage?" asked the Outsider.

Mellish grinned.

"The fags have screwed Gore up in his study!"

"What for?"

"For saying something against Tom Merry, I understand. Wally and those other inky young scoundrels are sticking to Tom Merry, for some reason. I suppose they think it'll pay them to have the captain of the Shell for a friend."

That was very like Mellish. That Wally & Co. might have a disinterested motive for their action never even occurred to him. Lumley-Lumley nodded.

"Everybody else seems to be pretty well against Tom Merry," he remarked.

"Yes, in the Fourth and the Shell, certainly. You've managed it jolly well, I must say, Lumley."

"What do you mean?"

Mellish closed one eye.

"Oh, it's all right!" he said. "Mum's the word! But I think there are two fellows in this study at the present moment who could explain how those marked cards came to be in the drawer of Tom Merry's table, and how his study came to be reeking with tobacco smoke. But mum's the word!"

"I guess it's safer not to talk too much," said Lumley-Lumley, with a glowering look. "Why don't you go and let Gore out? I thought he was a friend of yours."

Mellish gave a shrug.

"We used to chum a little," he said. "Then Gore took up the reforming business, and dropped me. He seems to have dropped that too, now, but he can't pick me up again just as he likes."

"You mean you don't want the trouble of unscrewing the door, I guess?"

"Well, there are six jolly big screws, driven in over their heads," said Mellish. "It would take a quarter of an hour's hard work. Do you feel inclined for it?"

Lumley-Lumley laughed.

"I guess not," he said.

"Neither do I. Let Gore look after himself. If he doesn't come down for calling over in time, he'll get marked absent. But that's his look out."

"I guess so!" said Lumley, dismissing the subject. "Look here, Tom Merry's in pretty low water just now."

"Serve him right!" said Mellish vindictively. "I've had enough of his carrying his head so high. Let him come down a little—and the more it's brought down the more I shall be pleased, for one."

"They seem to be giving him the benefit of the doubt, somehow—the masters, I mean."

"That's so! Most of the fellows have made up their minds on the subject."

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"The masters have got to make up their minds."

"You mean you're not finished yet?"

"I guess not. Didn't I say I would drive Tom Merry in disgrace from St. Jim's?" said the Outsider, in a low, hard voice.

Mellish shivered a little. He admired the cunning and the nerve of the Outsider. But there was something about Lumley-Lumley that scared him at times.

"You did," he replied.

"And I guess I'm going to do it. When Tom Merry's gone, I'll bring the others to heel fast enough," said the Outsider. "When my time comes to pass into the Shell, I'll be captain of the Form, I reckon."

"I believe you could do it if you tried."

"I shall. But at present we've got to deal with Tom Merry." Mellish eyed him questioningly.

"We!" he said.

The Outsider nodded.

"Exactly," he said coolly. "We. You're going to help me."

"Well, I'm ready—if it's not too risky."

"It's not risky, if you take care. Look here, it has been pretty well established that Tom Merry gambles, and cheats, and smokes. The matter's only being held over because of his previous good reputation. But there's a general impression—put about by ourselves—that in secret he's a great chum of mine, and that he does all I was flogged for doing."

"That's so," assented Mellish.

"Well, it's time for something decisive to happen—something so decisive that even old Railton and Kildare can't have any further doubt, but will have to report the matter to the Head."

"Good! But what?"

"Tom Merry will be found in a state of intoxication——"

Mellish jumped.

"What!"

"In a state of intoxication," said Lumley-Lumley coolly; "so plain and open, that no one can have any doubt about it. Do you think they'll let him stay at St. Jim's after that, Mellish?"

"Of course not. But——" Mellish hesitated. "How on earth—— Look here, you'll never get Tom Merry to taste anything intoxicating, let alone drink it. It can't be done."

"But he can taste a drug that will give the same appearance as intoxication when it overcomes him."

Mellish turned white.

"You—you——" he muttered, and broke off.

Lumley-Lumley laughed lightly.

"Suppose he is overcome in that way," he remarked. "I am near at hand—I rush up to help him—and spill a small phial of brandy over him in doing so—and keep the bottle out of sight, of course. There you are—Tom Merry reeling, and a smell of brandy about him. How's that for high?"

Mellish grasped the edge of the table, as if he felt inclined to reel himself. Bad as he was, he was staggered by the unscrupulous wickedness of the Outsider of St. Jim's.

"I—I can't have a hand in it," he stammered. "I—I can't."

The Outsider's eyes glittered dangerously.

"Why not?"

"It's—it's too rotten! I—I can't! It's beastly! Hang it, Lumley, old man, why can't you let him alone now? You've ruined him with his friends, anyway."

"I'm going to ruin him in every way."

"But—but——"

"I am going to drive him from the school in disgrace."

Mellish licked his dry lips.

"I—I can't have a hand in it," he stammered.

"You can—and will—and must!"

Mellish turned a glare of defiance upon the other. Under Lumley-Lumley's steady gaze his glare died down, his glance dropped. The iron will of the Outsider could overcome greater obstacles than Mellish's terrified obstinacy.

"You'd better help me, Mellish."

"I—I—— All right, hang you!"

The Outsider laughed.

"Time for call-over," he remarked. "Come on! Pull yourself together, you fool. You look as if you'd seen a ghost."

"I've seen something worse," Mellish muttered, thickly.

The Outsider laughed again, and quitted the study. Mellish followed him more slowly. There was a hammering sound from the direction of Gore's study. The bully of the Shell was still screwed in. Mellish was still looking white and disturbed when he took his place with the Fourth Form for calling-over, but Lumley-Lumley was perfectly cool, and he hummed an opera tune as he walked into hall.

# ANSWERS

## CHAPTER 11.

## A Chance for Blake.

"MERRY!"  
"Adsum!"  
"Lowther!"

"Adsum!"

"Gore!"

No reply.

"Gore!"

Still no answer. The Shell fellows looked at one another. But George Gore was not there to answer for himself.

Mr. Railton, who was calling over the names, looked at the Shell ranks. He could see that Gore was absent.

He marked the name down as absent from calling-over, but as he did so, Wally with a very red face, came from among the Third.

"If you please, sir—" he began.

Mr. Railton looked at him with a glance that would have disconcerted anyone but the scamp of the Third Form at St. Jim's.

"Go back to your place, D'Arcy minor," he said.

"But, sir—"

"Do you hear me?"

"It's about Gore, sir."

"Wally, you young wascal, get back!" came in a stage whisper from among the Fourth Form fellows, and then there was an audible muttering of "Shut up, Gussy!"

"Do you mean to say that you know why Gore is absent, D'Arcy minor?" asked the School House-master.

"Yes, sir."

"Very well; explain, and lose no time."

"Something's happened to his study door, sir, and he can't get out," said Wally glibly.

Wally, much as he disliked the cad of the Shell, did not want him to get into trouble for missing call-over, when it was due to that screwing-up joke. He felt that he was bound to explain. But he did not mean to mention the hand he had taken himself in the matter.

Mr. Railton looked surprised.

"Something has happened to the door of his study!" he repeated.

"Yes, sir."

"What is it?"

"It's jammed, sir."

"Jammed?"

"I mean it won't open, sir."

"How do you know, D'Arcy minor? Has your business taken you into the Shell passage?" asked Mr. Railton.

"I passed the door some time ago, sir. Gore was hammering on it."

Mr. Railton looked very intently at the hero of the Third.

"Have you any idea, D'Arcy minor, why Gore's study door should be fastened in this curious way?" he asked.

"I fancy it has been caused by the screws, sir," said Wally cheerfully.

"Screws!"

"Yes, sir. Some screws have got into a place they weren't intended for, or something of the sort. Anyway, sir, the door's jammed, and I know Gore can't open it from inside, and I thought I ought to mention it, sir, before you marked him absent."

And Wally discreetly went back to his place.

"Thank you, D'Arcy minor," said Mr. Railton quietly.

The calling-over proceeded. When it was over, Mr. Railton made Kildare a sign to remain after the rest. The St. Jim's captain lingered.

"You might see what is wrong with Gore's door, Kildare," said the House-master. "If it has been screwed up, as I suspect, you will deal with the matter as you think fit. But don't be hard on D'Arcy minor; it was very manly of him to speak up."

Kildare nodded and smiled.

"Quite so, sir."

The St. Jim's captain was in the Shell passage in a few minutes. There was a sound of thumping on the door from Gore's study, and a voice was shouting through the keyhole.

"Open this door, hang you! I shall miss call-over, and old Railton will be down on me. Hang you all!"

Kildare tapped on the door.

"So you're there, Gore?"

"Oh! Yes, Kildare," said Gore, more quietly.

"Is the door screwed up?"

"Yes; those Third-Form young scoundrels—"

"Why did they do it?"

"Their idea of fun, I suppose."

"Have you been bullying them, Gore?" asked Kildare quietly. "I know your little ways, you see! It is very unusual for fags to screw up a Shell door. You had better tell me the truth, Gore."

"They didn't like something I said about Tom Merry," said Gore sullenly.

"Oh, I see!"

Kildare walked along to Blake's study. The chums of the Fourth were there, and they all rose as Kildare looked in.

"I understand that you're a great deal of an amateur carpenter, Blake?" the St. Jim's captain remarked, with a nod to the juniors.

Jack Blake nodded assent.

"Yes, rather," he said. "Want something mended in your study? I don't mind bringing my tool-chest and doing it."

"Yaas, wathah," said D'Arcy. "I'll come and help, Kildare. I should like to do any sewewin' or hammewin', but I would give diwections."

Kildare laughed.

"Can you handle a screwdriver well, Blake?"

"Just where I'm at home," said Blake, confidently. "Give me a screwdriver, and I'll do anything, from making a bookcase out of an old time-table, to making a cosy corner from the remains of an egg-box."

"Well, I don't think I'll pile labours like that on you," said Kildare, with a grin. "But you might take your screwdriver along and unscrew Gore's door, will you? He's been screwed in by some young rascals."

And Kildare was gone before the junior could reply.

Blake looked round with a rather sickly smile. Herries, Digby, and Arthur Augustus joined in a grin.

"I suppose that's Kildare's idea of a joke!" remarked Blake.

"Blessed if I can see where the humour comes in. Where's the rotten screwdriver?"

And Blake went out of the study, screwdriver in hand, and was soon hard at work upon Gore's door, to an accompaniment of uncomplimentary remarks from the Shell fellow within.

Meanwhile, Kildare had descended into the quarters of the Third. There was a roar in the Form-room as he approached it, but it ceased as he entered. Wally and Co. were laughing over their scientific experiment with Gore's door.

"My hat! Kildare!" exclaimed Wally, as the captain of the school came in. "Here's trouble!"

"I hear that you've been screwing a Shell fellow up in his study, D'Arcy minor!" said Kildare severely.

"I don't see how you could hear that, Kildare," said Wally meekly.

"Didn't you?"

"Well, I thought I ought to oblige Gore."

Kildare stared.

"Oblige Gore!" he exclaimed.

"Yes. He asked for it, you know."

"Oh, he asked for it, did he?"

"Yes. He said that all rotten blackguards ought to be shut up somewhere," explained Wally. "So as soon as we found him in his study we shut him up!"

Kildare tried not to laugh, but he could not help it. He roared.

"You cheeky young rascal!" he exclaimed. "That wasn't what Gore meant!"

"Well, I didn't know any blackguard personally, besides Gore, excepting that rotten outsider Lumley!" said Wally. "I'll screw up Lumley if you like, Kildare."

"You'll get a licking if you do any more screwing up, you young sweep!"

And Kildare walked out of the Form-room, still laughing. Wally gave a grunt of relief.

"Well, that's all right!" he exclaimed. "I thought there was going to be trouble. Old Kildare is a brick!"

"So he is," agreed Curly Gibson. "We're well out of that. But—but we haven't done with Gore yet!"

"Oh, hang Gore!" said Wally, carelessly.

## CHAPTER 12.

## What Wally Discovered!

"STOP!"

It was Gore who shouted out the word; and as it was D'Arcy minor who was addressed, the order was not likely to be obeyed.

For twenty-four hours Wally had succeeded in keeping out of the way of the Shell bully. For a whole day he had dodged Gore. But Gore had not forgotten. He had rewarded Blake's efforts in releasing him with an ungrateful growl. Then he had looked for Wally. But into the crowded Form-room, where the fags mustered in force, the Shell bully dared not venture. He had been compelled to defer his vengeance till the following day. But all that day Wally had dodged him with great skill. In fact, some sporting fellows in the School House offered to lay three to one in oranges that Gore never would catch the elusive scamp of the Third.

But now Gore was very near it. He had cornered Wally on the staircase, and Wally could not come down to the Form-room, and if he went upstairs, there were only the studies and the dormitories.

But Wally did not hesitate.

He dashed upstairs at top speed, with Gore panting after him.

Most of the fellows were below in the common-room, or out

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in the gym., and the passages and stairs were deserted. Probably Tom Merry was in his study, but with that exception the Shell passage was solitary.

Wally dashed into it.

He gained the box-room stairs, with the burly Shell fellow close behind, and getting closer.

Up the stairs went Wally. He was slackening now, and Gore made a grab at his leg, and just missed it.

The bully's eyes were glistening with a cruel triumph. In that deserted corner he would be able to pommel Wally to his heart's content, when once he had hold of him. And there seemed no escape now. If Wally went on to the box-rooms, Gore would corner him there.

But Wally knew that as well as Gore.

Suddenly, without the slightest warning, he stopped, whirled round, and charged down the narrow stairs at Gore.

Gore had only time to let out one wild blow, which missed, and then Wally's weight was upon him, and he went spinning.

He caught at the banisters, missed his hold, and rolled half-way down the stairs, where he at last succeeded in stopping himself by a desperate clutch.

Wally was past him in a second.

In a second more he was speeding down the Shell passage towards the stairs.

But he heard the furious voice of the bully, and he knew he would have no time to escape to the Third-Form quarters. The only chance was to hide; and Wally tore open a door in the Shell passage and popped in. He was pretty certain the study was empty, as there was no light under the door; but he had to take the risk. He was right; it was empty, and in a twinkling Wally had closed the door noiselessly, and stooped under the table, the long cover of which almost reached the floor and quite concealed him.

There the fag crouched and listened with beating heart, a

Wally trembled. There was something so cold and sardonic in the Outsider's voice that it struck a chill to him. He did not move. He could not.

What infamous plot were the Outsider and the ead of the Fourth contriving? What was it that was to hurt Tom Merry? He would have given anything to have peeped from under the tablecloth. But it was too risky. One thing was certain. He could not help listening.

"D'you mean to say the little drop of stuff in the bottom of this bottle will do it?" asked Mellish, in a hoarse whisper.

"Yes."

Wally felt his flesh creep.

"But I don't see how I am to use it, Lumley."

"You've got to watch for him going in to tea."

"Well?"

"Then you'll pop in and tip this stuff into the milk——"

"Oh, I can't, Lumley! I can't! I won't!"

"You can! And will!"

"But——"

"It's no use, Mellish. I'm going to settle Tom Merry, and I said you should help me. This is where you come in. I shall be ready to spill the brandy on him afterwards."

"But I shall be expelled——"

"Oh, you'll be all right," said Lumley-Lumley contemptuously.

Mellish was a coward. But Lumley's coolness seemed to have a bracing effect upon him.

"You're sure it isn't poison?" he muttered.

The Outsider laughed. It was a cruel laugh.

Wally shuddered. He felt that he could not stand it much longer. He clenched his teeth hard, lest he should cry out.

"Here you are, Mellish, it's just enough to do the trick. Come on! Don't be a fool! Take it! I have the more difficult part to play in proving Tom Merry drunk!"

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great deal like a rat in a corner with a mastiff snuffing round for it.

The heavy footsteps of Gore came pounding along the passage. Had the Shell bully been close enough to see him whip into the study? If he had, all was up. Wally believed that he was in the study before Gore was off the box-room stairs; but the next few seconds would prove.

Down the passage came the heavy footsteps. They reached the door, they passed, and died away towards the stairs.

Wally gave a gasp of relief.

Gore had passed the door. He was safe! But he did not stir. He knew that Gore might guess the trick, and come back to look for him.

He intended to wait until Gore had had time to get tired of his search. Then he would venture out. He waited in silence, listening. There was a sudden sound of footsteps.

"Oh, rats!" grunted Wally. "And bringing someone with him, too, the ead!"

He did not stir. The footsteps came nearer and nearer.

"The rotters are going to look in here! I wonder who he's got to help him?" muttered Wally.

The door opened, and two fellows came in. Wally's position was desperate. He scarcely breathed as the footsteps came near the table.

"Got a match?"

It was Lumley's voice! Then it was the Outsider who had joined Gore!

"Yes. Shall I light up?" answered the other.

Wally started. Lumley and Mellish—and not Gore! He realised now what it meant; he was in Lumley's study, and neither of the searchers looking for him or indeed thinking of him at all.

"Yes. I guess we'll have a light. I've got the stuff here for Tom Merry. Don't look so scared, you idiot! It won't do him any real harm, and it's only a small dose!"

Mellish lighted the gas.

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Wally heard a sound as something fell on the table. Mellish, in his anxiety, had let the phial fall.

"You fool!" exclaimed Jerrold Lumley. "Mind, you'll break it!"

"Give it me! It's all right!"

"Take care of it, then."

"I tell you I'm all right now," muttered Mellish.

He thrust the phial into his pocket. Lumley watched him with lowering brows. He could not understand the uneasiness of Mellish; he felt nothing of the kind himself. Base as his action was, he had the courage for it.

"Come on," said Lumley. "I guess it's about time to look for Tom Merry."

"All right!"

The two quitted the study, turning out the gas. The room was plunged into darkness. Lumley did not trouble to close the door.

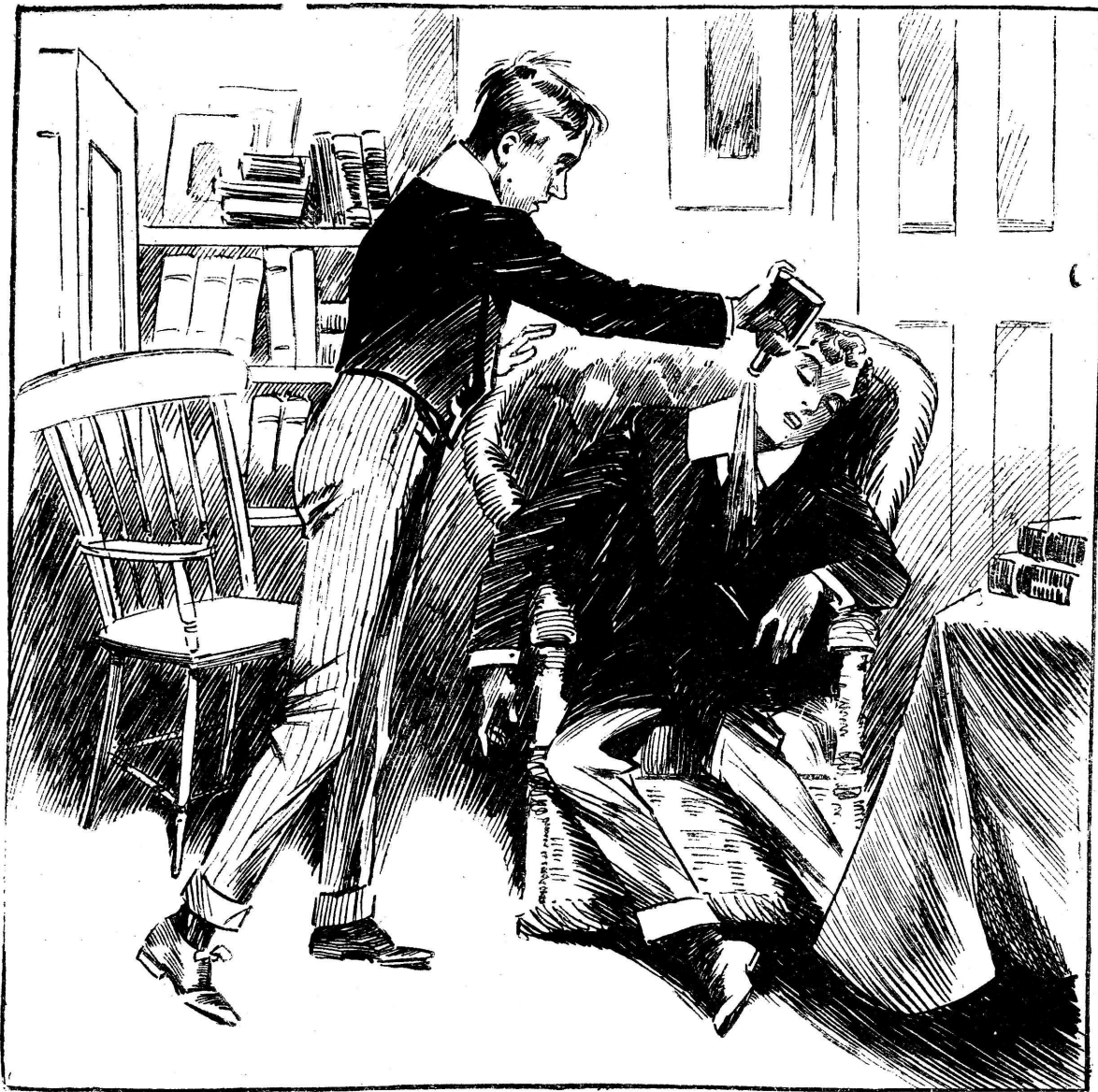
Wally heard their footsteps along the passage.

He crept from under the table, and peeped out from the open doorway into the passage. It was dimly lighted, but he could see Lumley-Lumley and Mellish halted outside Tom Merry's study, listening. They had gone there to ascertain if the hero of the Shell was in his quarters.

They had their backs turned towards Wally. The fag did not hesitate. He darted out of the study, and slipped down the stairs. He made no sound till he was half way down the stairs, and there was no danger of being seen.

Then, with a white face, and a strange trembling in his limbs which was new to him, and which he could not quite control, he ran for Blake's study. His chums in the Third could be of no help to him now. He wanted older heads to think of this, and he thought of Kildare for a moment. But he decided upon Blake.

Lumley-Lumley was coming down the passage as Wally turned back up the stairs again. He passed the fag without even a glance; there was nothing for him to suspect, in Wally



With a firm hand Lumley-Lumley removed the cork from the bottle, and poured the spirits over Tom Merry's arms and coat. (See page 19.)

coming upstairs, and he little dreamed where the scamp of the Third had been five minutes before.

Wally could not repress a shudder as he passed Lumley-Lumley. But the cad of the Fourth, the Outsider of St. Jim's, had no eyes for him.

Wally ran along to Study No. 6 in the Fourth Form passage. A light under the door showed that the chums of the Fourth were at home. Without stopping to knock, Wally threw open the door and dashed into the study.

## CHAPTER 13.

### A Surprise!

**A**RTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY was speaking as his minor burst into the study. From his tone it was evident that he was arguing.

"How you fellows can doubt for a moment that I am the pwopah person to captain the team against the New House, I simply cannot compwehend," he said. "Undah the cires.—Weally, Wally, what do you mean by wushin' into a studay, in that disordahly mannah?"

Wally slammed the door behind him, and stood gasping for breath, with a face so white that the juniors jumped up in alarm. His major ran towards him.

"Wally, deah boy! What is the matter?"

"Have you seen a ghost?" exclaimed Blake.

"I—I've seen an awful villain!" panted Wally.

"What do you mean?"

"Lumley!"

"What has he done?" asked Blake, in amazement.

"He's plotting with Mellish to drug Tom Merry, and make out that he's drunk!" gasped Wally incoherently.

"What!" shouted the four juniors, together.

"I—I heard him."

Jack Blake dropped his hand on Wally's shoulder.

"Pull yourself together, kid, and tell us what you mean!" he exclaimed. "Now, how do you know anything about it, in the first place?"

Wally gasped out the story.

The chums of the Fourth listened in grim silence.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated D'Arcy, when his minor had finished.

Jack Blake looked keenly at the fag.

"I suppose you didn't go to sleep in the study, and dream all this?" he asked.

Wally snorted. He was recovering now from the shock he had experienced, and he was the old Wally again.

"Oh, come off!" he exclaimed. "I've told you because

"we've got to trip up those scoundrels somehow. Come to bizney."

"I twust, Blake, that you do not doubt my minah's statement?" said Arthur Augustus, with a great deal of dignity.

"A D'Arcy is incapable of—"

"Sense," suggested Digby.

"Weally, Dig—"

"Shut up, Gussy!" said Blake. "Look here, Wally, let's have this plain. If Tom Merry's being done in by the Outsider, we're going to stand by him, and never mind what's passed. Look here, you say Lumley gave Mellish a bottle of stuff to put in Tom Merry's milk-jug when he's having tea?"

"Yes," said Wally.

"It's a drug to make him unconscious?"

"That's it. And Lumley said he had some brandy to spill over him, so that he would appear to be drunk."

Blake gave a low whistle.

"My only hat!" he said. "I knew that Lumley was a pretty low-down scoundrel, but I never dreamed of anything like this."

"Bai Jove! No."

"Lumley's been making out that he and Tom Merry are great friends in secret, and this doesn't look as if there was much in it," Herries remarked.

"Wathah not."

"Lumley's lies," said Digby. "And in the light of this it looks to me as if Lumley might know more about that smoke in Tom Merry's study than Tom Merry knew himself."

"Bai Jove! And the marked cards!"

Blake's face was very serious.

"I hope we haven't all been down on Tom Merry for nothing," he said. "or—rather, I hope we have. I should like to see him cleared. This plot looks as if Lumley and Mellish were at the bottom of the whole bizney all along."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We're jolly well going to look into it. I say, we'd better have Kildare in it," said Blake rapidly. "We need a prefect at least—our word mightn't be taken when it came to having it out with Lumley. It would be one junior against another if it came before the Head. Kildare's the man."

"Wathah! I'll run along at once. I think you will all agree I'm the pwopah person—"

Several hands gripped Arthur Augustus as he was making for the door. The swell of St. Jim's gasped. Blake's grip on his collar nearly choked him.

"You uttah wuffian, Blake! Have the goodness to wesease me!"

"We're all going. That's all," said Blake.

"Weally—"

"Come on, kids," said Blake.

"You uttah ass!"

Arthur Augustus got no farther. Blake was in a hurry. Pushing D'Arcy on one side he led the way to Kildare's study.

With the exodus from Study No. 6, speech returned to Arthur Augustus. He was determined to explain the matter to Kildare, and he dashed along the passage behind Blake.

"Pway let me pass, deah boy!"

"Ring off, you ass!"

"I wesease—"

"All right. Refuse away," answered Blake. "Here we are, my sons."

They knocked at Kildare's door, and received a summons to enter. Kildare did not look exactly pleased. He stared in amazement at the eager faces that crowded into his room. They grew excited. They all began to speak at once.

"I'm sorry to trouble you, Kildare—" began Blake.

"Pway wing off, Blake. I insist—"

"If you please, Kildare, let me explain—" began Herries.

"You ses—" began Digby.

"Dig!" exclaimed Blake. "Do dry up."

"I insist on Blake shuttin' up, Kildare, deah boy."

"Tell 'em to leave it to me, Kildare," said Wally.

Kildare was too surprised to do anything but listen for a moment or two. But he got angry at last. He put up his hand quickly.

"Stop!"

The conflicting voices ceased at once. Kildare was frowning. "Now," he said, "perhaps you'll be good enough to explain this nonsense. And be quick about it. I was just beginning my tea. What is it, Blake?"

"Weally, Kildare! If you don't mind, deah boy, I'll explain."

"I've asked Blake, D'Arcy," said Kildare.

"Yes, I know, Kildare. But if you will allow me to use the expression, they are twyin' to do me out of my pwewog. I am the spokesman of Studay numbah six."

"Rats!"

D'Arcy's monocle turned on Blake. The glance might have burned up lesser people. But it had no perceptible effect upon Blake.

"You will perceive my reason for insistin', Kildare—"

"Well, get along with your story, or I shall be compelled to chuck you all out."

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After that Blake gave it up, and D'Arcy related precisely what had occurred.

"Thank you, D'Arcy," said Kildare. "You fellows have done the right thing. D'Arcy minor, tell me what you heard in that study."

Wally blurted out his story for the second time.

Kildare's face grew hard and stern as he listened. He sat in silence until Wally had finished. He seemed to have forgotten his tea altogether. He rose from the table.

"Wait here until I return," he said shortly. He quitted the study without another word.

The chums looked at one another. Arthur Augustus held himself rather aloof. He was on his dignity. But his minor was soon to upset that.

After two minutes of wondering as to what Kildare was about, he suddenly remembered the prefect's untouched tea.

"My hat!" he exclaimed. "A good tea spoiling. It is a shame to interrupt a fellow at tea-time."

"I'm glad to see you gettin' a little sense, Wally—"

"Oh, don't you begin, Gus. I'm going to have tea."

"Wally! You—"

"It's no use letting Kildare's tea go cold. So I'm going to eat it."

"Weally, Wally—"

But before Arthur Augustus could finish the scamp of the Third had seated himself at the table, and Kildare's repast began to disappear rapidly.

"He'll skin you, Wally," said Blake, grinning nevertheless.

"I'll risk that. I'm going when I've finished it. It would be rotten to waste it." And Wally went on eating with great zest.

"Wally! You awfully impertinent young wascal—"

"Oh, ring off, Gussy! You're interrupting the feed," said Wally, cheerfully. "Curious thing how you will go on talking."

"You uttah young wascal! I shall wemah here to wendah an apology to Kildare."

"Thanks, Gus. You're a brick. One member of the family's as good as another, and Kildare can slay you when he comes back."

To which Arthur Augustus vouchsafed no response but a lofty sniff. D'Arcy sat down to wait for Kildare's return with the rest. But he was apparently restless.

"Do you think Kildare will be able to manage, deah boys?" he asked.

The juniors grinned, and D'Arcy frowned a little.

"Pway don't be a set of asses, deah boys," he said. "I feel wathah uneasy—"

"You'll get a thick ear, if you go on like that," said Jack Blake.

"I should uttably wesease to have a thick ear."

"Then ring off!" said Blake.

"I wesease to wing off!"

"Cheese it, then!"

"I also wesease to cheese it, as you call it. But before I go, I think it onlay pwopah to explain that if I go to assise Kildare, it is, of course, for the good of the cause."

And Arthur Augustus walked towards the door. But Herries and Digby were on him in an instant. Blake ran to the door, and put his back against it.

"Pway what is the meanin' of this?" asked D'Arcy angrily.

"It means that you're going to stop here, old kid."

"I wesease. Pway open the door, Blake."

"Go and sit down," said Blake.

And the chums of the Fourth mounted guard on the door. There was no passage for Gussy. Arthur Augustus was inclined to argue it out for a moment. But he saw that the odds were against him, and with as good a grace as possible he gave it up. In silence the chums waited for Kildare. They were anxious, but all excepting Arthur Augustus felt that the matter was in the best hands possible.

## CHAPTER 14.

### Tricked!

TOM MERRY was in his study.

The face of the hero of the Shell was not cheerful.

He was preparing his tea alone in the study. Lowther, he knew, was having tea with Noble & Co. in the end study. Manners had accepted an invitation from Figgins & Co. to tea in the New House. Tom Merry had the study to himself.

Tom Merry could, of course, have had his tea in Hall, where half the Form generally turned up at tea-time. But he did not care to. He was sensitive, too sensitive to wish to draw public attention to the fact that his nearest chums had passed him by.

Besides, he would have had little more companionship at the public table in Hall than in his own solitary study. For during the past week a barrier had grown up between him and the other juniors. Excepting the hateful familiarity of the Outsider, there was little friendship for him in the School House.

The old saying, that if enough mud is thrown, some of it is

sure to stick, was proving itself true in Tom Merry's case. A fellow who used marked cards, and whose study reeked of tobacco-smoke, a fellow who chummed up with a rank outsider like Lumley-Lumley, and played him in the junior eleven against all opposition, that wasn't the kind of fellow the School House had always believed Tom Merry to be, and now that he had been found out—

That was how the fellows were putting the matter to themselves.

Tom Merry tried to think that he did not care—but, as a matter of fact, he did care very much.

This solitary meal in his study was very different from the jolly old tea-party, and perhaps Manners and Lowther felt the difference as much as he did.

The kettle had boiled, and Tom Merry had made the tea, and placed the pot on the tray in silence. He had cut bread-and-butter. There was no smell of cooking in the study. He had not the heart to make any preparations beyond what was necessary.

There was a knock at the door, and Jerrold Lumley-Lumley looked in.

Tom Merry flushed angrily as he looked at him.

"What do you want?" he rapped out.

The Outsider smiled.

"You are not pleased to see me?" he said.

"You know I'm not!"

Lumley-Lumley laughed.

"Well, I haven't come on a friendly visit," he said, "but there's an old lady downstairs asking for you—a Miss Fawcett, and—"

Tom Merry sprang up.

His old governess and guardian, Miss Priscilla Fawcett! How utterly unfortunate that she should have come to the school just now—when she could scarcely fail to see that Tom was in trouble!

"I'm coming!" said Tom Merry, curtly.

Lumley-Lumley nodded and walked down the passage, Tom Merry following him at once. In his heart he was glad, very glad, to see again the one who always loved and trusted him, whatever might betide, yet he wished that Miss Fawcett had not come just then. He would so much rather have borne his trouble alone.

He descended the stairs with Lumley-Lumley.

"Thank you for coming and telling me," he said.

The Outsider laughed.

"That's nothing," he said.

"It was kind of you," said Tom Merry.

He felt that it was kind of the Outsider. No one else—no one who had been his friend—had taken the trouble to come and tell him. The School House page should have informed him—was it possible that the odium that had fallen upon him lately had even had the effect of making the page disrespectful?

They descended to the hall of the School House, and several fellows exchanged significant glances at seeing Tom Merry with the Outsider, apparently on the friendliest terms.

"What did I always say?" muttered Gore. "They're as thick as thieves."

"Jolly well looks like it!" admitted Kerraish.

"Faith, and Tom Merry might be more careful, if he doesn't want us to think that he's chumming up with Lumley," said Reilly.

"Pooh—they're thick as thieves, I tell you!"

Tom Merry paused in the hall, and looked about him.

Jerrold Lumley-Lumley walked away somewhat quickly in the direction of the junior common-room.

Tom Merry looked round with a perplexed expression.

"Lumley—!"

But Lumley was gone.

"Can any of you fellows tell me where Miss Fawcett is?" Tom Merry asked.

"Miss Fawcett?" repeated Gore.

"Yes."

"Blessed if I know."

"Lumley said she had come to St. Jim's to see me, and was here!" exclaimed Tom Merry, in surprise.

Gore laughed.

"I haven't seen her: I expect he was pulling your leg. Little joke between close chums, you know."

Tom Merry flushed angrily.

"Lumley is no chum of mine!" he exclaimed.

Gore shrugged his shoulders.

"Looks like it, anyway. Similar tastes often bring about friendship, you know," said Gore, and there was a chuckle from the other fellows.

Tom Merry's eyes glinted.

"Enough of that, Gore. I don't want to quarrel with you, if Miss Fawcett is here. Have none of you seen her?"

"Not a bit!" said Kerraish.

"There's Toby," said Hancock. "Ask him."

Tom Merry called to the School House page as he passed.

Toby came at once. As a matter of fact, Toby was devoted to Tom Merry.

"Has Miss Fawcett come, Toby?" asked Tom Merry.

"No, Master Merry."

"You're sure, Toby?"

"Quite sure, sir."

Tom Merry's brows knitted.

"Thanks, Toby!" he said. And he walked into the junior common-room, to look for Jerrold Lumley-Lumley.

Some of the fellows standing about followed him, anticipating excitement from his looks. Lumley was in the common-room, sitting in an arm-chair, with his feet on a smaller one. He did not look up at Tom Merry.

Tom Merry halted in front of him.

"Were you lying to me just now, Lumley?" he asked, quietly.

The Outsider laughed: a slightly uneasy laugh.

"I guess not," he said.

"You told me Miss Fawcett was here."

The Outsider yawned.

"Did I?"

"You know you did."

"I guess it was a little joke," said Lumley-Lumley. "No harm done."

Tom Merry compressed his lips.

"It was not a joke," he said. "It was a lie—a rotten, mean lie! You are a cad and a rotter, Jerrold Lumley, and if you've got as much pluck as you have caddishness, you'll come into the gym, and put on the gloves with me."

Jerrold Lumley shrugged his shoulders.

"I guess not," he said.

"Cad!"

"I guess that hard words don't break any bones—especially hard words from a chap like you!" said Lumley, coolly.

Tom Merry clenched his hands hard. Lumley-Lumley rose to his feet.

"Oh, keep your wool on," he said. "It was a joke—that's all."

Tom Merry's lip curled.

"You're not worth licking," he said, and he turned on his heel and strode from the room. But he was puzzled as he went. Why had Lumley-Lumley played that childish and absurd trick—a jape without humour, without anything but a lie in it? Lumley was not the kind of fellow to waste his time thus, as a rule! What did it mean?

## CHAPTER 15.

### Kildare Looks In.

MELLISH was waiting at the corner of the Shell passage when Tom Merry descended the stairs with Jerrold Lumley. He was waiting and watching. The cad of the Fourth was looking somewhat pale, but he was resolute now. He had his work to do, and Jerrold Lumley's trick had made it easy for him, and he no longer faltered.

The moment the two juniors were gone, Mellish slipped along the Shell passage. There was no one to see him, but in case he should be observed near Tom Merry's study, he turned out the gas in the passage as he passed it. It was not an uncommon trick of mischievous juniors to turn out the gas in the passage, and it was not likely to cause any particular notice to be taken.

Mellish reached Tom Merry's study, and ran in quickly. The gas was burning, and it showed the tea-table—with the tea-pot steaming on it, the cup and saucer and milk-jug, and the bread-and-butter already cut.

Mellish's hand trembled as he drew the little phial from his pocket.

He had no time to waste.

Tom Merry was not likely to be detained many minutes by Lumley's falsehood, and, before he returned, Mellish had to get clear.

He dropped the contents of the phial into the milk.

Then he swung back to the door of the study.

There was a quick step in the passage.

Mellish caught his breath.

His heart beat like a hammer. Tom Merry was returning sooner than he had expected. But it could not be Tom Merry! It was someone else.

Whoever it was would probably pass the study—Tom Merry had no visitors in these days. Mellish had closed the door. He waited in fear and trembling for the footsteps to pass the door. They did not pass.

They came up to the study, and stopped—and the door was opened.

Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, strode in.

Mellish stood transfixed.

But, remembering that Kildare could not possibly know anything of the matter, as he believed, he assumed an air of carelessness, as well as he could.

"I—I'm waiting for Tom Merry!" he explained.

The next moment he could have bitten his tongue. If he

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had been there with an innocent intention, there would have been no need to explain his presence to Kildare, who naturally didn't want to know why he was there. Mellish realised that.

Kildare looked at him grimly.

"Oh, you're here to wait for Tom Merry, are you?" he asked.

"Ye-es."

"You want to see him?"

"Ye-es."

"What for?"

Mellish tried to collect his thoughts and answer calmly, but a secret terror was tugging at his heart. Why was Kildare questioning him like this? What was Kildare doing in Tom Merry's study at all? Was it possible that he suspected—that he knew—anything?

"I—I wanted to borrow some money of him," said Mellish desperately.

"Why did you turn out the gas in the passage?"

"The—the gas!"

"Yes—why did you turn it out?"

It was on Mellish's lips to say that he had not done so, but he realised that Kildare must have seen him do it. He held back the useless lie.

"I—I didn't want fellows to see me coming here," he stammered. "You—you see, Tom Merry isn't much spoken to since he took to gambling and drinking, and——"

"You wretched liar!"

Mellish's knees knocked together. Kildare's hard, stern voice drove terror to the very soul of him.

"Kildare! I—I say——"

"Give me the bottle!"

Mellish jumped.

"The bottle?"

"Yes."

"W-w-w-what bottle?" stuttered Mellish.

"The bottle Lumley-Lumley gave you."

Mellish staggered against the wall.

The last remnant of his courage was gone now. Kildare knew all—the captain's words, and his cold, accusing glance, showed that. How he knew mattered little—he knew—and all was lost! The plotters against Tom Merry had somehow overreached themselves at the finish.

"You—you know about that!" stammered Mellish.

"Yes—as you see."

"I—I——"

"Give me the bottle!" said Kildare, coldly.

Mellish, with trembling fingers, drew the empty phial from his pocket. He handed it to the captain of St. Jim's without a word.

Kildare looked at it.

"It is empty," he said. "You have already placed the drug in the milk?"

Mellish gasped.

"Answer me, you horrible little cad!"

"Yes!" said Mellish, in an expiring voice.

Kildare glanced at the little milk-jug. The milk was the same colour as before the drug had been added, there was nothing to show now that anyone drinking it would be reduced to a state of semi-insensibility. The plot of the Outsider had been almost fendish in its cunning, and but for Wally it would probably have succeeded. Would Tom Merry ever have succeeded in clearing himself of that last and most fatal charge? It did not seem likely. Kildare's heart smote him as he thought how he had himself lent credence to the accusations already made against the hero of the Shell—accusations which he now felt must be false, and the work of the same plotting mind as this!

There was a step at the door, and Tom Merry came in.

He looked in surprise at Kildare and Mellish.

"What——" he began.

"Close the door, Merry."

Tom Merry, in wonder, closed the door. Kildare made a gesture to Mellish.

"Tell Tom Merry what you have done," he said.

"Oh! I—I can't!"

"Do as I tell you!"

Tom Merry looked mystified.

"Blessed if I know what's on," he exclaimed. "Will you have a cup of tea, Kildare? I've just milk enough for two cups, and——"

"Don't touch that milk, Tom Merry!"

"Why not?"

"Mellish will tell you," said Kildare, with a merciless glance at the cad of the Fourth. "Go on, Mellish!"

Mellish trembled.

"It's drugged," he said, in a scarcely audible voice.

Tom Merry gave a start.

"Drugged!"

"Yes."

"Who's done that?"

"I—I did."

"Good heavens!"

"It was all Lumley's doing," whined Mellish dismally. "I—I—"

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owe him money, you know, and—and I'm afraid of him. He made me do this."

"Nobody could have made you do it, if you had not been a crawling, rotten cad," said Kildare. "But go on—tell Tom Merry what you had arranged with Lumley."

Mellish's voice faltered as he went on. Under the stern eye of the St. Jim's captain he dared not refuse.

"It's—it's a harmless drug, Merry—it would just have made you sleepy and—and look as if you were intoxicated, you know—after you drank it. I—I swear it wouldn't do you any harm."

Tom Merry stared at him, more in surprise than in horror. He could not make out yet what the object of this rascality was.

"But what's your little game, then?" he exclaimed.

"You see, it would make you look as if you were drunk, and—and then Lumley comes in and spills some brandy over you," whined Mellish. "You—you see—the prefects would have found you insensible, smelling of brandy, and—and——"

"Oh!"

"It was Lumley's idea from first to last, and—and he had a hold on me," exclaimed Mellish, terrified by Tom Merry's expression. "Besides, I—I shouldn't have let it go far—I wouldn't have stood by while you were expelled——"

"Don't lie!" said Kildare sharply.

"Well, I—I——"

"Good heavens!" said Tom Merry slowly. "So that is why Lumley came to me just now with a lie about Miss Fawcett having arrived—to get me out of the study while you played this rotten trick on me."

"Ye-e-es. It was all Lumley from beginning to——"

"That's enough," said Kildare sharply. "Lumley is coming here to play the rest of the business, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"When will he come?"

"I suppose he'll leave it for half an hour or so."

"Very good. Come with me."

Mellish shrank back in terror.

"Not—not to the Head!" he exclaimed.

"Not at present. I am going to lock you up in a box-room, so that you cannot give Lumley any warning that he is discovered."

"I—I won't tell—I swear——"

"Silence! I will think afterwards what to do with you. I shall try to prevent this disgraceful story from getting out if I can—but you will be punished—you can rely on that. Meanwhile, I shall lock you in the box-room. You will remain there quietly. If you make a sound until I come to release you, I will take you straight to the Head; and you know what that will mean for you."

Mellish cowered.

"I'll do exactly as you say, Kildare."

"You'd better. Stay here, Tom Merry."

Tom Merry stood silent in his study while Mellish was taken away, with Kildare's firm grasp upon his shoulder. In a couple of minutes the St. Jim's captain returned, with a key in his hand. Tom Merry had not moved.

Kildare looked at him kindly.

"This is a terrible discovery, Tom Merry," he said slowly.

"I can hardly grasp it yet, Kildare."

"Mellish is a coward and a rascal—only a tool in the hands of Lumley," said Kildare. "You have been their victim. It was clearly Lumley's intention to blacken your character until you were expelled from the school."

Tom Merry shivered a little.

"He told me he would ruin me," he said in a low voice. "After the House match, when he fouled Kerr and disgraced us, I had done with him—and he said that he would ruin me and drive me from the school."

"And he has very nearly succeeded. I know now what the source of the marked cards and the tobacco in the study must have been—all parts of Lumley's plot. You are now cleared from those charges, at all events, Merry. Mellish will tell the whole truth, if Lumley does not."

Tom Merry's face lighted up.

"Thank Heaven!" he said.

"You have cause to be thankful, Merry; that scoundrel's scheme very nearly succeeded. But listen—Lumley is not caught yet."

"We know the whole story now——"

"But if Lumley denies Mellish's tale, how are we to prove it?" said Kildare quietly. "He has the nerve of an old criminal—he will deny everything in the coolest manner—and then even Mellish may back out, and say he was frightened into admitting what he has admitted, and that he was not confessing the truth."

"I didn't think of that."

"You see, what we know, we know—but the Head will be the judge of this matter, and he will require indisputable evidence."

"I suppose so."

"The only way to catch a scoundrel like Lumley is to catch him in the act."

Tom Merry nodded slowly.

"But how?" he asked.

"I have thought of that. Mellish cannot warn him—he is locked up, and I have the key of the room. Lumley will come here, expecting to find you insensible, to carry out his part of the plot."

"But I shall not be so."

"You can affect to be. Pour out your tea, and then throw it into the ashes, leaving a little in the bottom of the cup. When you hear Lumley coming, lie in the arm-chair, as if overcome. I have seen you perform harder roles than that in the amateur dramatic performances."

"It will be easy."

"Lumley will spill the brandy upon you, and then we have him! I shall be on the watch."

"I suppose it is the only way."

"The only way—yes. Do as I tell you."

"Very well!"

And Kildare quitted Tom Merry's study.

## CHAPTER 16.

### Fairly Caught!

"BAI JOVE! Here's Kildare at last!"

The chums of the Fourth were getting tired of waiting in Kildare's study. Wally had cleared the tea-table, and the Fourth-Formers had lent a hand, the fag having broken the ice, so to speak.

Kildare seemed a very long time gone. But at last the study-door opened, and he came in. His face was pale and set.

Blake looked at him questioningly.

"Well?" he asked.

"Well," said Kildare, "I have found proof that the story is true—I have caught Mellish in the act of drugging Tom Merry's milk."

"Bai Jove!"

"Has he confessed?"

"Yes."

"Where is he now?"

"Locked up in the box-room."

"But—but—"

"I am waiting now for Lumley to come and play his part," explained Kildare. "Till then, not a word is to be said. You understand?"

"I think I do," said Blake slowly.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You juniors will return to your study, and remain there quietly—"

"Oh!" said Digby.

"You will wait there, until you hear from me," said Kildare.

"Mind you don't say a word."

"Righto," said Blake, rather half-heartedly.

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy."

The Fourth-Formers would have preferred to take some action. They wanted to fall upon Lumley-Lumley in a body and rag him. But Kildare was evidently right; and in any case there was no gainsaying the captain of the school.

They left the study, and Wally followed them, Blake linking arms with the scamp of the Third.

"You'd better stay with us, kid," he remarked. "You'll be telling the story all over the Third Form-room else."

"Oh, rats!" said Wally.

"Weally, Wally—"

"Now, don't you begin, Gus—"

"Stay with Blake till I tell you, D'Arcy minor," said Kildare.

"If you haven't had your tea, I daresay Blake can give you some."

"Oh, I've had my tea, thanks," said Wally, with a grin.

That grin rather puzzled Kildare, till he turned to his own table after the juniors were gone. Then he saw what it meant. But the captain of St. Jim's only smiled. Nothing that Wally could do would make him angry that evening.

The footsteps of the juniors died away, and Kildare stepped into the next study, which belonged to Darrel, the prefect. The quiet grave senior who was almost as much liked and respected at St. Jim's as Kildare himself, nodded to him, looking somewhat surprised at his grave expression.

"Nothing wrong, Kildare?" he asked.

"Yes—something very wrong," said Kildare grimly.

Darrel laid down his book.

"Go ahead, old man," he said.

Kildare explained. Darrel compressed his lips as he listened.

"I remember you stood up for Tom Merry all the time, Darrel," Kildare concluded. "And you were right. It's a rotten plot against him, and got up by that utter cad, Lumley, who ought to be in a reformatory if anybody ought."

"By George! I should say so!"

Kildare nodded towards the door, which he had left ajar.

"I'm keeping an eye open for Lumley," he said. "He must

pass in sight of this door. Darrel, to go upstairs. When he goes, we go after him. I want you to go with me."

"Right you are," said Darrel.

And the two seniors waited. They did not discuss the matter. Darrel resumed his book, and Kildare began a Latin exercise at Darrel's table. But the St. Jim's captain did not put his mind very deeply into Latin just then. He was listening for Lumley-Lumley. When the door was ajar it gave a view of part of the staircase, which the Outsider of St. Jim's must pass to go up to the Shell passage. As soon as he had passed, Kildare would know that it was time for action. Whenever there was a sound of a footstep, Kildare's eyes left his paper, and at last he saw the Outsider pass.

Jerrold Lumley-Lumley had stayed in the common-room for a good half-hour. He had expected Mellish to come and tell him that his part of the work was done; but the cad of the Fourth did not appear.

Lumley decided that he was keeping out of sight, scared by what he had done. But a suspicion crossed his mind that Mellish had failed him, and at that thought a very ugly expression came over the Outsider's face.

He could only ascertain whether it was so by going to Tom Merry's study, as Mellish did not appear.

The Outsider's face wore its usual careless expression as he went upstairs, but there was anxiety and anger in his heart.

He reached Tom Merry's study. The door was closed, and the light gleamed from beneath it, showing that the hero of the Shell was at home.

Lumley hesitated for a few moments.

If Mellish had failed him—if Tom Merry's eyes met him as he went in, questioningly—after all, he could tell some lie to account for his visit. And if Tom Merry had taken the drug—if he were lying insensible in the study at that moment—the sooner Lumley got to work the better. If he delayed, there was always the possibility of Tom Merry being found by someone else.

He opened the study door at last, boldly.

In spite of his nerve, his heart thumped as he took his first glance into the study. But that first glance satisfied him. Tom Merry was leaning back in the arm-chair, without motion. His head rested on his arm, and his face was almost wholly concealed. He lay like a log.

Lumley stepped further into the study and closed the door.

He glanced at the tea-tray. There was the milk-jug nearly empty. Tom Merry's teacup had a small residue of tea in it. The rest, it was evident to Lumley-Lumley, had been drunk by the junior. The result was visible—he was lying insensible in his chair, a helpless victim waiting for the last move in the cunning game to be played. Lumley's eyes gleamed with triumph.

He had succeeded.

His hand came out of his pocket with the little bottle of brandy in it. He had only to spill that over Tom Merry's clothes, so that the smell of spirits would be strong upon the junior. Then he would call for help. He would affect to have come to the study to speak to Tom Merry—to be frightened at having found him insensible—never suspecting, of course, that he was intoxicated—the smell of the brandy would make that accusation, as soon as a crowd gathered in the study.

How easy it had been!

A smile of pitying contempt passed over the Outsider's face as he stood looking down at Tom Merry.

This fellow had flouted him, refused his friendship, defied him—and had suffered the consequences—fool that he had been to pit his petty strength against the cunning of the Outsider—against the keen wits which had been sharpened by the experience of every kind of rascality in London and Paris and New York!

It was the triumph of the Outsider.

With a firm hand he removed the cork from the bottle, and poured the spirits over Tom Merry's arms and coat, and upon the chair beside him.

The smell of brandy was then thick and sickening.

The Outsider chuckled softly.

The chuckle died away, and the Outsider of St. Jim's turned to the door. He opened it, and was about to call along the passage, in pursuance of his scheme, when he saw two stalwart forms standing directly before him. Kildare and Darrel were there, waiting for the door to open, and they met the Outsider face to face.

Lumley-Lumley started back.

The sudden appearance of the two prefects struck him with consternation, and a terror that something was known seemed to strike into his heart; but with wonderful nerve he concealed the emotion.

"Kildare!" he exclaimed. "Come in, will you? There's something wrong with Tom Merry! I was just going to call for help! Come in, for heaven's sake!"

The rascal's acting was perfect. Kildare drew a quick, deep breath. He realised, with an aching conscience, how completely he would have been taken in, had he not been forewarned of the Outsider's villainy.

He strode into the study with Darrel.

"I found him like that," said Lumley-Lumley, pointing to Tom Merry. "I—I think he must be ill, you know."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, I was going to call for help——"

"You thought Merry was insensible, did you not?" asked Kildare.

"Yes; he is insensible."

"And there is a smell of brandy, too."

Lumley-Lumley sniffed.

"My hat! So there is!" he exclaimed. "I noticed a smell—but I was too startled to think about it! Surely Tom Merry can't have been drinking! I'll never believe it of him."

"You infernal young scoundrel!" roared Kildare, unable to contain his rage.

Lumley started back.

"Kildare——"

"Stand up, Tom Merry, and tell this young villain that he's found out!" exclaimed the captain of St. Jim's.

Lumley-Lumley's face went grey and old as Tom Merry quietly rose to his feet.

## CHAPTER 17.

### The Defeat of the Outsider.

TOM MERRY rose quietly, without a trace of the influence of the drug about him. He was calm and cool—a little pale, from the sickening effect of the strong smell of brandy, but otherwise quite himself.

The Outsider of St. Jim's had a nerve of iron. But his nerve was not equal to this strain.

He backed away, with faltering footsteps, his face grey, worn, as if age had suddenly descended upon it, his lips white and muttering.

Tom Merry looked at him with scornful eyes.

"Mellish!" muttered Lumley-Lumley. "Mellish has given me away."

"You are quite right," said Kildare. "Mellish has given you away—but not till the plot was discovered, and it was impossible for Mellish to do anything else."

Lumley licked his dry lips.

He was making terrible efforts to recover his usual coolness, but his composure would not come back. His hands shook as if with cold.

"The whole rascally scheme is known," said Kildare. "I have been waiting for the last half-hour to see you come up here, and I knew you had a bottle of brandy to spill over Tom Merry."

"Oh!"

"Tom Merry has not taken the drug—but he assumed insensibility, by my orders, so as to make you completely betray your own villainy."

The Outsider laughed.

It was not a pleasant laugh to hear.

"I guess I've slipped up on it this time," he remarked. "Well, I suppose everybody plays a wrong card at times. I don't know how the game got known if Mellish didn't give me away in the first place. But now the jig is up, I can face the music."

"It was D'Arcy minor who discovered it," said Kildare. "Tom Merry owes this to D'Arcy minor."

"Wally!" cried Tom Merry.

"Yes. Wally discovered it, and told Blake, and Blake came to me."

"Blake stood by me, then?" said Tom Merry.

"Yes—and small blame to him, and to the others, for being misled by this young villain," said Kildare. "I should have been taken in if he had reached this point in his rotten game without discovery."

Lumley-Lumley laughed again.

"I guess you would," he assented.

"And you can laugh now," said Kildare, with a glance of mingled wonder and horror at the Outsider.

Jerrold Lumley-Lumley shrugged his shoulders.

"I guess so," he said. "I've slipped up on this and run against a snag. Well, I can face the music. The Head can't expel me. I can stand the rest."

"One word," said Kildare. "It is useless for you to conceal anything now—especially as Mellish will tell the whole truth. You placed the marked cards in Tom Merry's drawer?"

Lumley nodded coolly.

"I guess so," he said.

"And you smoked the cigars in this study?"

"Certainly."

"And your intention?"

"Tom Merry knows my reason. I told him I would ruin him—and drive him from St. Jim's. But for that meddling young cad in the Third"—Lumley's eyes burned for a moment—"but for him—I should have succeeded. As it is, I can stand the racket. You are going to take me before the Head. Take me, and have done with it."

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"Come," said Kildare.

He laid his hand on the Outsider's shoulder. He handed the key of the box-room to Darrel.

"Bring Mellish!" he said.

The prefect nodded, and they left the study. Lumley-Lumley walked with his head erect, and a sneering smile upon his face.

Tom Merry was left alone.

As Kildare and Darrel, with Lumley and Mellish, passed the door of Study No. 6 on their way to the stairs, five eager faces were looking out.

Kildare nodded to the juniors.

"It's all right," he said.

"Hurray!" said Blake.

"Bai Jove! You've caught the wotten boundah, then?"

"Yes, I'm taking him to the Head."

"Wippin', deah boy."

"Hurray!" roared Wally.

And the scamp of the Third rushed off to tell the news in the Third Form-room. The seniors went on their way, and the Fourth-Formers raced along the passage to Tom Merry's study.

Tom Merry was changing his jacket for one that did not smell of brandy. He had opened the window to let that scent out.

The four Fourth-Formers rushed in as he was half in the jacket, and seized him. Blake collared one hand, and Herries another, shaking them frantically. Digby slapped him on the back, and Arthur Augustus dug him in the ribs in the most enthusiastic way.

"Hold on!" gasped Tom Merry. "Stop it! Ow! Hang you! Stop it, you silly asses! Yow!"

"Congratulations, deah boy."

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hurray!"

"Huwway!"

"Leggo!" roared Tom Merry. "Chuck it! Stop! Oh!"

They released him at last. They were brimming over with excitement and satisfaction, and their wild shouts had brought a crowd along the passage, first among whom were the chums of the end study.

A crowd of astonished faces glared in at the door. They saw a most remarkable sight. Tom Merry was standing panting and gasping, half in a jacket, and four excited Fourth-Formers were executing a sort of triumphal dance round him.

"My only hat!" ejaculated Kangaroo. "What's the matter?"

"All off their rockers!" said Clifton Dane.

"Faith, and they're all mad, begorra!"

Tom Merry gasped, and eyed his congratulators very dubiously. He was a kind and generous lad, but it was not so easy to forget the slights and injuries of the past few days.

"Look here, what are you duffers capering in my study for?" he demanded.

"Joy, deah boy."

"That's it," said Blake, pausing and panting. "Joy—pure, unadulterated joy!"

"Hurray!" roared Digby and Herries.

"Look here——"

"This is how it is," said Blake. "Partly through Wally and partly through us the whole thing has been cleared up."

"What has?" demanded Noble quickly.

"About Tom Merry. I said all along that somebody must have put those cards in his drawer."

"What?"

"And I declared from the first that it must have been Lumley who smoked those cigars in the study."

"That you jolly well didn't," said Kangaroo.

"Look here, you Cornstalk ass——"

"Rats! You never said anything of the sort."

"Well, I thought it, then, or at all events I think so now," amended Blake. "And every chap who isn't a silly duffer is bound to agree with me. It's all cleared up, and Lumley's bowled out, and Kildare's taken him before the Head."

"Great Scott!"

"Tom Merry's cleared."

"My hat!"

"As for the chaps who have been saying things against him, I only hope they're properly ashamed of themselves, that's all," said Blake.

"Bai Jove, Blake——"

"I know I ought to have come out stronger on the subject myself," said Blake. "Tom Merry and I had a row, and I was licked—and it served me right. I'm ready to fight Tom Merry again any time he pleases; but at present all I've got to say is, I'm sorry for what's happened."

"Same here," said Digby.

"And here," added Herries.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I considah that we all owe Tom Mewwy a vewy handsome apology,

and it's up to us to make the amende honorable, you know. Undah the circus.—"

"Exactly!"

"Pwaw don't intewwupt me, Blake."

"My dear Gussy, you can't have all the limelight."

"Weally, Blake—"

"We're all sorry, and we don't mind saying so," said Blake.

"That's how the matter stands, Tom Merry."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry's face melted.

"Well, I should be a rotter if I bore malice after that," he said. "I'll only say that I think you might have known me better, that's all."

"Yaas, wathah! Blake was an awful ass!"

"Why, you chump—"

"Digby was a feafuhl duffah!"

"Look here, Gussy."

"And Hewwies was a champion chump! I myself should have seen exactly how mattahs stood long ago, only—only—"

"Only you didn't," suggested Kangaroo.

"Yaas, wathah! I mean—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, it's all over now," said Blake. "I'll go and tell the fellows. I hope Monty Lowther will say he's sorry. I must say that he hasn't stood by Tom Merry in the way I should have expected of him."

"Quite wight, deah boy."

The Fourth-Formers left the study. Monty Lowther came in and closed the door, and the crowd in the passage dispeised to tell and to discuss the startling news, and to make surmises as to what was happening within the closed doors of the Head's study, whither Mr. Railton had followed Kildare, and where the Head's study was now answering for his sins before the Head of St. Jim's.

## CHAPTER 18.

### All Serene.

LOWTHER looked at Tom Merry and Tom Merry looked at Lowther. There was a very awkward pause. These two, who had been old friends and staunch chums for so long and had been estranged, hardly knew how to speak. Tom Merry remained silent. It was Lowther who spoke first.

"I'm jolly glad of this," he said.

"Thank you," said Tom Merry.

"It—it seems that it was a caddish scheme of Lumley-Lumley's all along to get you into trouble—Tom."

"So it seems."

Lowther was silent.

"Look here," he said abruptly, "I never believed it. I didn't know what to think. The beginning of it was your playing Lumley-Lumley in the House team. You were to blame in that, Tom, and that started it. But—but I know I ought to have stood by you, whatever you'd done, when the trouble came. I don't know how it was that we got on the terms we did get on. I never intended it."

"Nor I," said Tom Merry.

"When a bit of unpleasantness starts there's no telling how it's going to end," said Lowther. "I've meant to speak to you about it, but—"

"But you didn't."

"No, I didn't; and perhaps you don't believe me now," said Monty Lowther, flushing very red.

"Don't be an ass, Monty. Do you think I should doubt your word?" said Tom Merry very quietly.

Lowther held out his hand. Tom Merry grasped it, and let it go. Both looked red and uncomfortable. Like most healthy British boys, anything approaching to sentiment made them feel awkward; they were not the sort to wear their hearts upon their sleeves.

"Manners'll be jolly glad to hear this," said Lowther, changing the subject.

Tom Merry's face brightened.

"Yes, I think he will. Hallo! Who's that?"

There was a sound of rapid footsteps in the passage. The door of the study was flung open, and Manners bounded in, breathless. He paused and panted.

"I've—I've just heard!" he gasped.

Tom Merry laughed, his old, happy laugh.

"Have you come to say you're sorry, too?" he asked.

"Sorry?" said Manners reflectively. "I don't know what I've got to be sorry for. I never believed anything against you all along. I don't know how we came to be on bad terms. But I'm sorry, if you like; only I'm jolly glad it's all cleared up, Tommy, my son." And Manners fairly hugged Tom Merry in his glee.

Manners was a quiet fellow, very little given to displaying emotion of any sort, and this was a very surprising exhibition from him. Tom Merry felt a lump rise in his throat, and his eyes were dim for a moment.

"It's all right, old chap," he said huskily.

There was a whoop from the passage. Wally, and Jameson, and Curly Gibson, and Cook, and a crowd of other Third Form fags came crowding in.

Wally gave Tom Merry a smack on the back—an unheard-of liberty for a fag of the Third to take with a Shell fellow. But Tom Merry only laughed.

"Thanks, Wally," he said: "I know all about it. Thank you, old boy—and I jolly well sha'n't forget this. You stood by me like a brick."

"Of course he did," said Jameson. "Wally is a brick—all wool and a yard wide. Didn't we all stand by you?"

"You did, kid."

"We knew Tom Merry was all right," said Wally, with a patronising glance at Manners and Lowther. "Bless you, they couldn't pull the wool over our eyes! Tommy, old son, you've got to come down; the fellows are hungry to see you. Come on!"

Tom Merry hesitated; he had no mind to face an ovation. But there was no denying the fags, and Tom Merry would have done a great deal for Wally. He submitted to his fate, and was marched downstairs in the midst of a horde of fags, followed by Manners and Lowther.

In the junior common-room the fellows received him with a ringing cheer. Figgins & Co. had come over from the New House, and they bestowed congratulatory slaps on Tom Merry's already aching shoulders.

"Of course, I never believed a word against you," said Figgins.

"Nor I," said Kerr. "I said it was all utter rot from the first."

"Exactly what I said," remarked Fatty Wynn. "And I jolly well think that the Lower School ought to stand Tom Merry a big feed as a sort of compensation."

"Hear, hear!"

"Hurrah for Tom Merry!"

"Hip, pip, hurrah!"

It was surprising the number of fellows who had never believed a word against Tom Merry, and had said from the first that it was all rot. There was hardly a fellow in the School House who did not believe by this time that he had believed in Tom Merry all along and backed him up against everybody else.

But Tom Merry was only too glad to see the clouds roll by and to get on his old footing with his friends. If they had allowed themselves to doubt once they were not likely to doubt again, and that was enough for the hero of the Shell.

It was a merry and excited evening in the junior room. The fellows could not make enough of Tom Merry. It was probably the happiest evening of Tom Merry's life. He felt the tears rise to his eyes more than once, but they were tears of happiness.

As for Mellish and Lumley-Lumley, they were almost forgotten. They were remembered, however, when Mr. Railton came into the junior common-room to speak to Tom Merry.

The School House-master shook hands with the junior in sight of all the crowd of fellows.

"I congratulate you, Merry," he said for all to hear. "There is not a shadow of any sort left upon your character. Mellish and Lumley have fully confessed to the dastardly plot against you, and their punishment will be exemplary. Both of them will be flogged in public to-morrow morning before the whole school, and will be confined in the punishment room for a week. Probably their Form fellows will let them see, too, how their conduct has disgusted the whole school. Merry, I congratulate you."

And the juniors cheered Mr. Railton as he left.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Mr. Wailton is a bwick, and Tom Mewwy is anothah bwick, and—and, in fact, we are all bwicks, you know. And, of course, Tom Mewwy will have to captain the team on Saturday against the New House. I weign all claims in favah of Tom Mewwy!"

"Well, I like that!" said Kangaroo. "Blessed if I knew you had any claims!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Kangawoo—"

"Tom Merry's captain, of course," said Blake.

"Hurrah!"

"Well, if you mean that—" said Tom Merry.

"Of course we mean it!" exclaimed Blake. "If anybody suggests that I should captain the team, I'll punch his head! If anybody suggests captaining it himself, I'll dot him on the nose! You're captain—and, look here, you shall play whom you like, and if anybody says a word against it, I'll—I'll squash him! There's going to be proper discipline in this eleven, and no backing against the captain, or anything of that sort, or I'll know the reason why! You can play whom you like—even Lumley-Lumley!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"I sha'n't be likely to suggest playing Lumley-Lumley again," he said. "But there's one chap I shall play if I'm captain."

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NEXT THURSDAY!

"BY REQUEST OF THE HEAD."

"Who's that?"

"Wally!"

"Bai Jove!"

"A blessed fag!" ejaculated Blake.

"The chap I owe most to in the school!" said Tom Merry firmly. "Wally can play, and if he isn't quite up to House form, we shall have to make up for it."

"Well, all right," said Blake. "Blessed if we wouldn't let you play Toby or Dame Taggles if you liked!"

"Yaas, wathah! And weally, young Wally is my minah, ou know, so he is bound to be a credit to any team."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What do you say, Wally?" asked Tom Merry.

Wally's eyes were dancing.

"Do you mean it?" he exclaimed breathlessly.

"Of course, I do, kid!"

"Then hurray!" said Wally. "That's all—hurray!"

And the fags yelled "Hurra!" till they were hoarse. Never had such an honour fallen to the Third Form before. And the fags felt more than repaid for having stood by Tom Merry in the time of trouble.

## CHAPTER 19.

### The Winning Goal.

"HURRAY! Hurra! Three cheers for Tom Merry! Hurra!"

It was Saturday. A huge crowd had assembled on the junior football ground to witness the return match between the School House and the New House.

Both teams had just sprinted on. The players swelled the chorus of cheers that greeted Tom Merry. The Third Form cheered louder than any. Was not Wally, their hero, in the School House team?

"Now, kids," said Curly Gibson, "go it!"

And he led the chums of the Third off in another round of cheering. The whole field followed suit.

Everyone knew the story of the plot against Tom Merry. Everyone was glad it had been discovered. Everyone cheered.

Tom Merry was pleased. But he was embarrassed, nevertheless. Who would not have been with such an ovation!

"Chair him!" cried Curly Gibson. "Wally, what are you going to sleep for?"

"Good egg!" roared Figgins. "Chair him!"

The New House were cheering second to none. In less time than it takes to tell, both teams had closed round Tom Merry. He protested. But the fellows would not be denied. Laughingly he gave way, and he was borne round the field shoulder high.

Kildare had consented to referee the match, and he stood in mid-field the while, clapping his hands as heartily as anyone. Many a senior followed his lead.

There could be no doubt that Tom Merry was the idol of the Lower School. There could be no doubt that the seniors were quite ready to endorse the sentiment.

At last the cheering subsided. Tom Merry and Figgins came forward to toss the coin. Tom Merry won. There was nothing extraordinary in that. But the Third Form started another round of cheering that lasted two minutes.

Kildare put up his hand. But it was no use. Curly Gibson, as deputy leader of the Third, meant to have the full worth of it, and they shouted it out.

Then the whistle went, and Figgins kicked off.

None expected a very good exposition of the game. But the play was good, nevertheless. Figgins & Co. meant the New House to win again if possible. The New House meant to give nothing away.

In a way, the School House team was a weaker one than the last. But Wally thought otherwise. He certainly lacked weight when opposed to Fourth Form players. But he could play football—a fact which the Third Form spectators emphasised to their hearts' content a few minutes later, when he robbed Figgins of the ball.

Arthur Augustus, too, was a source of considerable amusement. His exhortations to his minor to buck up were usually unnecessary, but they seldom ceased.

Wally and his major were inside left and right to Tom Merry's centre, Manners and Lowther completing the complement on the left and right wings.

For some minutes the play on both sides was fairly even. It was a little while before they fairly settled down to business.

One thing the spectators were already agreed upon. The School House forward line was working much better than expected. In a quarter of an hour it was agreed upon as the best vanguard the School House had ever put in the field. But there grew a desire for a score, especially on the part of the School House crowd.

"Pretty play's all right," said Hancock, "but a team plays to win!"

"Go hon!" said Curly Gibson sarcastically.

Every kick of Wally's was cheered to the echo by the Third.

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But the little Third-Former was playing well. He took passes from Tom Merry like a master. More than one movement had nearly led to a score, thanks to Wally.

Arthur Augustus began to talk less to his minor at last. He saw that he could be safely let alone. Figgins & Co. saw also that they had under-rated D'Arcy minor. The Third Form saw with pride that he was "looked after" just like anyone else. Wally was a power in the game. Then Curly Gibson and his friends began to dream dreams. If only Wally could score first!

"Now, Wally," they shouted, "show the old fageys how to do it! Bung it in for them, old kid!"

Everyone laughed. No one would have grudged a Third-Former the honour. But it was expecting a little too much. It was not to be. Wally was fired with the idea as he heard Curly & Co. shouting. Yes, he'd bung it in for them. He watched for a chance.

Tom Merry & Co. had beaten the whole New House defence. The ball had travelled out to Manners in the process. Manners' centre was rather short, but not too short for Wally to try and head it into goal.

Into the air he leapt.

"Goal!" yelled Curly Gibson, as he saw it fly towards the net.

Wally had never played against a goalie of Fatty Wynn's calibre. The fat Fourth-Former could almost read opposing forwards' minds. Wally's shot gave him no trouble. He gathered it as easily as if it were a present of a nice bag of tarts.

Then Wally did a reckless thing—he charged at Fatty.

"Go on, Wally!" shouted the Third enthusiastically. "You'll do it, old kid, yet!"

But Fatty Wynn seemed to pass over the Third-Former like a steam-roller. Even the School House roared as he leisurely cleared, and the game went on.

Wally looked rather "rolled out" as he got up. But he was game. The Third-Form matches were not all lavender, and he could stand knocking about.

Figgins & Co. had to look out. The runs down to the New House goal had been just a little too frequent during the last five minutes.

On such an auspicious occasion a draw would have been acceptable, but—

Figgins & Co. played up. The lanky skipper of the New House could be tricky when he liked. The School House were visited in their turn. And so Dane had a nasty two minutes almost immediately. But Tom Merry & Co. cleared, and the play went to mid-field again.

Then Monty Lowther put in a grand run. He seemed to fly down the right wing. Pratt tried to hold him, but in vain. His centre was a little wild, going right beyond Tom Merry. But Wally was watching. He did the right thing in the right place. He had had one try at Fatty. It was enough! Near enough to goal to make Fatty think he was about to shoot, he passed back to Tom Merry. Fatty Wynn threw himself at full length to save, but he was too late.

Goal!

The School House were one up. Thanks to Tom Merry's sure foot! But the goal was really D'Arcy minor's, and the Third Form let everyone know it.

"Hurra!" cheered the crowd. "Three cheers for Tom Merry!"

"Three cheers for D'Arcy minor!" shouted the Third. "It was his goal. Hurra!"

Tom Merry waved his hand to them. Kildare could not resist for laughing. Wally had certainly turned Lowther's centre to account, though it was a little too much to call it Wally's goal.

Figgins & Co. pinned their opponents in their own half for the remaining time, and the whistle went for the interval with no addition to the score.

Tom Merry came in for another round of cheering. In addition to other things, he had scored the only goal of the match. It was fitting. A fellow like Tom Merry ought to score every time! That was the general opinion.

D'Arcy's manner towards Wally had completely changed. Wally had been decidedly conspicuous. Arthur Augustus manifested a desire to be near his brother when the crowd cheered. He was feeling very proud of Wally just then.

"Now, Gussy!" shouted the Fourth. "Follow Wally's example! Pop one in for us next half!"

"Keep your eye on me, Gus!" grinned Wally. "I'll send you some good things!"

"Weally, Wally—"

"You sent me a jolly good one, Wally," said Tom Merry.

Curly Gibson & Co. heard it, and they cheered the Shell fellow. Tom Merry himself had acknowledged his debt to Wally. The whistle went, and D'Arcy made up his mind to watch for the good things Wally said he'd send him.

The New House opened well. Things looked very serious for Tom Merry & Co. for some time. But it was only a flash in the

pan. The ball was soon up-field. The School House forward line had been changed. Manners was not quite up to wing work to-day. Jack Blake had gone forward. Wally was delighted. If there was a man he would have liked always to be on the wing with him, it was Blake.

But the New House halves took some negotiating notwithstanding. They were not easy to pass. Even then Kerr and his colleague were splendid backs. The New House forwards might be tottering but their defence was sound.

Jack Blake had tremendous dash, and he proved a worry to the New House. But suddenly Figgins & Co. came with a spurt, and before the School House could well realise it, they were right on Dane, and there was a yell from New House spectators as the game became one all.

Figgins's shot was a real gem. Dane had no chance with it. The field went into cheers again, starting with Figgins, and ending as it only could to-day, with Tom Merry.

Then the School House came in a body. They must show that they were the better team to-day. Blake believed that Wally would score before the game was up. He was determined to furnish the youngster with a chance if he could. It came.

Tom Merry was playing with his usual skill. More than one fellow reflected what a team it would have been without him. Starting a movement himself, he simply dazzled Figgins. Out went the ball to D'Arcy as the New House halves came for him. Back it came from Arthur Augustus. The right half had closed in, however, and Tom Merry was rather pressed again. But he knew what to do with it better than anyone. Lowther knew that it was coming to him, too. He then received it with his usual grace. But the New House right back was on him. Quick as thought he saw his game. The spectators were thrilled as he put in the loveliest of long passes right across to Blake on the other wing.

After Tom Merry, Jack Blake was the most popular man on the field. Blake took the pass splendidly. Here was the chance. The New House defence had concentrated itself on the other wing. They might get back in time, but Wally was simply waiting for his pass. But Jack Blake was an old hand. He ran in a little. It was enough to do what he wanted—to draw the defence on him. He beat two halves and the left back single-handed. Then to roars of cheering from the Third Form he passed to Wally. Blake could have got no further with it single-handed. Wally made for goal. Figgins had got up in the meantime. Then Wally risked it. He dribbled round the New House captain. The spectators held their breath.

"Now, Wally!" yelled Curly, as he saw Wally had only to beat Fatty Wynn.

Steadying himself an instant, Wally shot. It was a beauty.

It rose like a rocket into the far corner. Fatty had simply no chance.

"Goal! Goal! Goal!"

The Third Form were nearly frantic with joy. Tom Merry himself led the cheering on the field. Then the next thing that happened was Wally being carried on Tom Merry and Blake's shoulders to the middle of the field, Figgins cheering the new School House recruit with the best.

The best of it was that Wally had kicked the winning goal! For the game was close on the finish now, and it ended at last, to Kildare's ringing whistle, with the score two for the School House and one for the New House. The School House had retrieved their late defeat—and Tom Merry and Wally were the heroes of the hour!

And as the teams came off the field, the crowd closed in on them, and there was a roar of cheering as Tom Merry was hoisted high by Figgins and Kerr, and Wally soared aloft on the shoulders of Jack Blake and Kangaroo.

They were borne breathless and blushing from the field, amid thunderous cheers, and so closed that historic contest; and Figgins, keen footballer as he was, was overheard to say that he was only half-sorry the New House had been licked!

And with that victory, and the clearing of his name, we close this story of Tom Merry. Needless to dwell upon the punishment of the two plotters. Both Lumley-Lumley and Mellish suffered for their rascality, as they well deserved; and few were found to pity them. Indeed, most of the fellows were of opinion that if they had received their just deserts they would have been expelled from St. Jim's. They were punished, and more severe than the punishment meted out by the Head was the contempt with which they were regarded by their schoolfellows.

And Tom Merry remained, as he had long been, the hero of St. Jim's. The clouds that had arisen between him and his chums had rolled away. All was clear again, and for some time Arthur Augustus D'Arcy offered a fresh apology every day for ever having doubted for a moment the honour of the Shell captain till Tom Merry threatened to punch his head if he apologised any more.

And for some time it was noticeable, too, that Wally of the Third displayed a sort of proprietorship over Tom Merry, to which Tom Merry laughingly submitted. But, as Blake candidly owned, it was Wally who had stuck to Tom Merry all along, and he had a right to swank a little about it. To which Arthur Augustus heartily replied:

"Yaas, wathah!"

THE END.

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"Shut the door, Mellish!" said Lumley-Lumley, removing the cigarette hastily from his mouth, and holding it behind him. (See page 12.)

"Bai Jove, Blake, deah boy!" exclaimed an anxious voice, as Blake came up to the steps of the School House. "Bai Jove! Have you had a feahful accident?"

"No!" grunted Blake.

"You have not been wun ovah?"

"No, ass!"

"But something dweadful has happened?"

"No, chump!"

"But it has, deah boy! Your twousahs are all dustay."

"Ass!"

"I wefuse to be called an ass. I appeal to Digby. Dig, old man, aren't Blake's twousahs decidedly dustay?"

Digby chuckled.

"Well, they look a little that way," he agreed. "Sorry, Blake. I saw it from the study window, but I couldn't get out in time. What were you arguing with Figgins & Co. about?"

Blake snorted with indignation.

"They offered to teach me to play footer," he said.

"What!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Teach you to play footer!" exclaimed Monty Lowther, stopping as he passed the chums of the Fourth. "The New House bounders did?"

"Yes."

"Well—the cheek!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It's because of that rotten licking the other day," growled Blake. "The New House have been cock-a-hoop about it ever since. Figgins & Co. aren't so bad as the others, but they can't help showing how full of it they are. It's not often that the New House beats us."

"Wathah not!"

"We shall never hear the end of it till we've beaten them again," said Digby.

"Offering to teach me play footer, though!" said Blake. "The nerve of it! I played footer before they were born—in—a sense, I mean. Look here, something will have to be done to bring them down off their perch."

"Play them again," said Lowther.

"Bai Jove, that's a good ideah. The wegulah House match does not come off for some time, you know, but there's no reason why we shouldn't get up an extwah match," said Arthur Augustus. "Suppose we say next Saturday aftahnoon. The match with G. eyfwahs has fallen through, owin' to some of their chaps being seeday."

Jack Blake nodded thoughtfully.

"But what about the team?"

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NEXT  
THURSDAY:

"BY REQUEST OF THE HEAD."

Kingston was silent. Undoubtedly Professor Polgrave was an extraordinary man. He had completely recovered now, and sat rearranging his clothing.

"Perhaps I appear inquisitive," he continued, "so I will cease talking about you. It is very strange how the accident happened to-day; very strange indeed. As I lay on the ground the solution of a problem came to me—the solution which has evaded me for over eighteen months. As I was endeavouring to rise, I thought with terrible bitterness that the world would lose my greatest discovery of all. But no, you came to my aid; some Providential light guided you to Piccadilly Circus this afternoon. And now I go to work out my discovery. It will take days of patient striving, but I have got the solution; thank Heaven, I have got the solution!"

He paused for a moment and tugged at his white beard. Suddenly he bent forward, and placed his face to within a foot of Kingston's. The latter did not move an eyelid.

"And it was you who saved me," whispered Polgrave. "I can see by your eyes that you are an honest man, that you are an honourable man. The eyes tell a person's whole character; they disclose every weakness, every fault. And you, Mr. Kingston, have no faults; your eyes tell me that you are everything that is good."

"By Jove, professor," smiled Kingston, "you are too flattering!"

"That is where you are mistaken. I mean no flattery by my words. There are very few persons who can read another's eyes. I am one of those few. I can see your whole character; see the strength of it. And to prove how much I believe in you, I am going to show you what no other man has seen; I am going to take you to my laboratory, and disclose secrets which I meant no other man to see until I was dead. Since you have saved my life, however, I think it only right that you, at least, should share my secrets!"

### The Underground Laboratory.

Frank Kingston hardly knew what to make of this very strange old man. At first it seemed as though he were a harmless crank. Yet he spoke sanely and convincingly. Kingston realised, too, that his own character had been read with startling accuracy.

Not that he admitted he had no faults, but as regards strength, will-power, eyesight, etc., the professor had stated the exact truth. Kingston knew this, and it made him curious to know more of his strange companion. The professor was going to trust him, was going to disclose things to him which no one else had ever seen. Should he trust Polgrave in return? Kingston decided to wait and see how events turned out.

"The old chap is a marvel," he told himself. "The manner in which he read my character proves beyond dispute that he is no ordinary man. This leads me to suppose there is a great amount of truth in his statements. Yet I have never heard of him—never seen his name anywhere. If he is the great scientist he tells me he is, surely his name would be a household word. There is something strange about him, something intangible, which makes me curious to know more, which fascinates me. By Jove, I'll see the thing through, and Gray will have to do without my visit!"

He sank back, surveying his companion. The professor was bending forward, twisting the point of his beard rapidly, muttering to himself the while.

"Evidently reckoning something out," thought Kingston. "I wonder what this great discovery is? It is quite possible he thought of the solution as he lay on the ground expecting to be run over and killed every second. But who is he? He can't be absolutely unknown."

He looked at the professor again, and saw that the latter had settled the point which had evidently been worrying him, and now sat quietly rubbing his hands together—hands which were stained and discoloured by years of scientific research.

"Excuse the question," said Kingston, "but I don't remember ever having seen your name in connection with matters scientific?"

The professor chuckled.

"Did I not tell you that I was going to show you things which no other man has ever seen? I do not work publicly—I do not want to be known, to be pestered and worried to death by people wanting me to lecture, to write books, and do other similar annoying things. I work at one thing for perhaps months, make hundreds of experiments, and perfect it. Then I lay it aside and start on another."

"You work, then, for the mere pleasure of it?"

"Exactly, Mr. Kingston—for the mere pleasure of it. Science is my sole object in life. I do not want to become famous. To be talked of by everybody, to be stared at like a monstrosity whenever in public, would divert my thoughts. When I am dead, however, the world shall know all I have done; the benefit of my labour will be reaped by thousands."

Polgrave spoke so earnestly, so enthusiastically, that it seemed impossible to suppose he was a crank. No, Kingston decided, the professor was a clever man, and the words he spoke were the perfect truth.

Suddenly the taxi came to a standstill against the kerb, and Kingston opened the door nearest the pavement.

"Shall I assist you out?" he began.

"Assist me out?" cried Polgrave. "My good sir, I am quite recovered now. In Piccadilly Circus I was overcome by shock, but now I am as active as yourself."

He pushed forward and stepped lightly on to the pavement, his face a mass of creases as he smiled. He was as pleased and genial as a man could well be.

"How much, driver?" he said, in his deep voice.

The taxicab looked at the dial and mentioned the amount due, the professor paying up without question, adding a liberal tip to the fare.

The road they were in was quiet, the houses being large, old-fashioned ones, with big gardens in front. Some of them were empty, others used as boarding-houses. The one into which the professor turned was a little smaller than the rest, and certainly more untidy. The garden was simply a mass of waste ground, the rotten leaves of years lying on the ground beneath the trees. Weeds and grass covered the gravel-drive, and the gate was nearly off its hinges with age.

At first glance the house appeared empty, for all the shutters were up, and some of the window-panes were cracked and broken. The professor chuckled deep down in his throat as he saw Kingston eyeing the building.

"Not very imposing—eh, my life-preserver?" he exclaimed.

"I do not suppose my residence has impressed you to a vast extent. But it shows you how much I care for everyday customs and conventions. I do not think about appearances at all, but you will be surprised when you enter the house; the first person other than myself to have entered it for twenty years!"

"But your servants!" asked Kingston. "Surely they are excepted?"

"Servants!" chuckled Polgrave, as he pushed open the gate. "I never have such nuisances about me. My meagre wants are attended to by the best servants I could wish for—myself. How could a man work with servants bothering him? The idea is ridiculous!"

Kingston could not help smiling at the other's tone. Plainly he was an extremely eccentric old fellow, and Kingston was more curious than ever. They walked up the drive slowly, the professor looking a peculiar figure with the mud spattered all over him. There was no hollowness about his gratitude towards Kingston. When he died the world was to know his secrets, and as Kingston had saved him from an untimely end it was only right that he should know them in advance.

For Polgrave was absolutely convinced of Kingston's straightforwardness. He had seen at a glance that his rescuer was a man of honour, a man to whom he could confide with perfect safety.

Instead of leading the way up to the front door he turned aside and descended several rather steep steps to a dark and dingy area. A moment's fumbling with a key, and the door opened. All was dark inside.

"Come in!" said the professor. "It does not look very inviting, I know, but that can soon be remedied."

As he spoke a click sounded, and the passage inside became flooded with light. Several electric bulbs were dotted along the ceiling.

"By jingo, professor, but you are up-to-date with regard to light, at all events!"

"Yes, it is so much cleaner, and requires much less attention than oil or gas."

Kingston stepped inside, and closed the door after him. The floor was of stone, and the wall distempered a light green.

"Follow me," said the professor, "and I will lead you to my living, sleeping, and working quarters. The house itself is allowed to go to rack and ruin. It is my own, so I can do as I like with it; the furniture in the rooms upstairs has never been used since my parents died and left me the property twenty-two years ago; so you can reckon in what condition it is in!"

"But why have you left it to go to ruin? Why did you not occupy the house?"

"Because I wished to be alone; because I wanted to get absolutely away from everyday life, to be quiet, out of sight of everything and everybody; to be where I could work without fear of a single interruption!"

"Would not a country house have suited you?"

"No, my dear friend," replied the professor. "Where should I have got my supplies from? I am repeatedly going up to the City to obtain fresh chemicals for use in my work."

At the end of the passage was another door, and this the professor opened by means of another key. There were two switches on the wall, and he pressed them both down. One

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THURSDAY.

"BY REQUEST OF THE HEAD."

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chum about the X.

extinguished the lights in the passage, and the other illuminated the space at the other side of the door.

"We adjourn downstairs now," said the old man, who was clearly enjoying his talk with Kingston. "You see, I am quite shut off from the outer world once this door is secured."

"I can believe you, professor."

Kingston examined the door curiously. It was a huge, solid affair, while the edges of the doorway were padded with thick, resilient rubber. This caused the door to shut off practically everything—sound, draughts, and dust.

Polgrave led the way down a flight of firm stairs, and at the foot of these was still another door. This one was not locked, but opened smoothly, as the professor touched the handle.

"You see," he explained, "these cellars extend under the foundations of the whole house. I have got them nearly all in use, but this one is my living-room."

He switched on the electric light here and walked inside, Kingston following, quite interested. The room he entered was certainly unlike an underground cellar. It was small, but neatly furnished. A fire was low in the grate. On the far side a little bed was neatly made, and in the middle stood a table—a small mahogany affair.

"When I first occupied these rooms to live in," said the professor, "I had an elderly man to look after me. He was deaf and dumb, so could be no disturbance. Unfortunately he died ten years ago. Since then I have had to look after myself, and find that I am not so very much trouble."

"But it must be lonely for you here," said Kingston, who wished to lead the old man to tell him more about himself and his work.

"Lonely? No, friend, I am never lonely. My great work lifts me out of myself; it makes me forget who I am, what I am, and where I am. Sometimes, when engaged upon a particularly interesting and absorbing research, I have gone for days without food or sleep. Then, when I have worked for as long as a man can, I rest myself. Were I above ground, within sight of the street, within hearing of the many street-voices, I should be constantly interrupted. Here I am alone, quiet, and able to carry out experiments to my heart's content."

"It is very good of you to bring me here," exclaimed the visitor, "for I am vastly interested in scientific research myself. Why did you give me this privilege?"

Polgrave laid a hand on Kingston's shoulder.

"Because," he said gravely, "you are the only man who has done me a great service. You have saved my life, therefore it is yours; you have a right to know everything concerning me. In showing you my home I have no fear of being talked about—not that I am a criminal; I am only here for quiet—but you are an honourable young man, and will respect my wishes. Therefore, I do not hesitate to let you share my secret."

"I will show you, professor, that your confidence is not misplaced," said Frank Kingston. "Whatever I see and hear in this place shall be kept perfectly guarded."

"I believe you. Now, come, I will show you my laboratory. I am sure you are wishing to see it."

Polgrave led the way into another apartment. The electric lighting seemed perfect. But where did the current come from? Surely the company did not supply it? Kingston was mightily curious and interested.

The laboratory was a much larger apartment than the living-room, though equally as cheerful. This room, too, was heated by means of an open coal-fire. Several large ventilators supplied the place with fresh air, and carried off the foul.

The lights, however, puzzled Kingston a great deal. There were two of them, but they were utterly unlike any others Kingston had ever seen. They were enclosed in large, opaque globes, and suffused the apartment with a brilliant illumination identical with sunlight.

Indeed, it seemed for a moment as though Kingston had stepped into the open air. Yet, in spite of the brilliance, there was no glare. Professor Polgrave's face screwed up in a smile as he saw his visitor gazing at the lights.

"You are puzzled—eh?" he chuckled. "You do not know what they are?"

"I have certainly never seen any like them before."

"For a good reason: there are none. It is my own invention, and though the lamps are supplied with an ordinary electric current, the light is precisely the same as daylight. You may not believe me, Mr. Kingston, but this light is less harmful to the eye than that given by the sun. It is steady, unvarying, and noiseless. Without it I could not have worked down here. With it I forget I am not in the open air."

"It is most remarkable!" exclaimed Kingston, realising for the first time that the professor must be a very clever man.

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"I must really congratulate you on your achievement. It makes the place precisely like the open air. But where do you obtain your current?"

"I will show you that in a moment. For the present I want you to examine the laboratory. This is where I do my work. At present I am engaged upon nothing important, but, thanks to your bravery, I am allowed to live to carry out exhaustive experiments on a most interesting subject. The solution to the problem came to me as I lay on the roadway before the oncoming omnibus."

"Rather a peculiar time to arrive at the solution to a scientific problem, professor!" laughed Kingston.

"Yes, and I thought for a moment I should never live to give the greatest discovery of all to the world. But I am to live, and you are the man I have to thank."

"You have already done that," said Kingston, crossing over to a large bench and examining the articles which were standing upon it. There were dozens of glass instruments, test-tubes, retorts, etc. On the other side of the room the whole wall was covered with shelves and these were filled with hundreds of glass-stoppered bottles, all containing chemicals.

Kingston was greatly impressed; but before long he was to receive the greatest surprise of all. So far he did not know the nature of the discoveries Polgrave had made.

"You have a regular laboratory here, professor," he said. "It is hardly possible to realise it is right underground."

For a considerable time Polgrave kept his visitor entertained, showing him the numerous articles with which he worked. The old fellow had a particularly engaging style, and Kingston found himself growing to like the professor. He seemed so simple, yet so clever.

"But you wished to see the source of my electricity," he said at last. "I will show you."

There were two doors in the laboratory, and the old hermit opened the further one. This cellar proved to be as large as the laboratory, and illumined in the same manner, but it was bare in comparison. One side was occupied by a stack of dull coloured metal. In the end the door of a powerful furnace could be seen. And on the other side of the room some machinery was in motion, but machinery practically noiseless. It was slow moving and exceedingly simple.

"You see," explained the professor, "this engine drives a dynamo. The latter is enclosed in a compartment below ground, for were it in this room the hum would be distinctly disturbing."

"But the engine?" questioned Kingston. "I cannot quite recognise it."

"For a sufficiently good reason," smiled the professor. "It is the only one of its kind in the world. It is driven by a small stream of water, which I obtain from the usual channels. But the engine itself is so constructed that it will keep going and maintain a certain power just as long as the water is driving it."

"In a way, a variation of perpetual motion."

"Exactly! Only this has power behind it. The engine was one of the most difficult pieces of work I ever undertook, but when it proved satisfactory I was well satisfied for my trouble."

"But you did not make it yourself?"

The hermit smiled.

"I constructed every particle of it," he said, with satisfaction. "That was fifteen years ago, and it is as reliable to-day as it was the first week. The lathe I used to make it with has been removed, for now I devote myself to chemical matters only. When I am dead and gone the detective force of Scotland Yard will bless me as they have done no other man."

"Really?" said Kingston, bending over the peculiarly constructed engine. "Why?"

"Because," replied Polgrave, a trace of pride creeping into his remarkably powerful voice—"because I shall leave behind me certain drugs and solutions which will be absolutely invaluable to a detective. All my life I have devoted myself to solving the most amazing problems, and some of the drugs have taken years—yes, years—of experimental work to perfect. But I have stuck at it for the pure pleasure of the work, and you would be surprised were I to tell you everything I have discovered."

Kingston's interest was awakened more than ever now. His companion claimed to have made discoveries which would benefit Scotland Yard to an amazing degree. If this really was the case Kingston could see that Polgrave might prove of the utmost service to him. Kingston took care, however, to show no eagerness.

"You surprise me," he remarked. "May I be so inquisitive as to inquire the nature of these drugs?"

"They are numerous. But wait, and I will give you a practical demonstration. Remain here."

The professor turned and hurried out of the room, leaving

Kingston standing there rather curious as to what was coming.

"By Jove," he thought, "if what the old fellow says is true I shall be in luck's way! I can't quite see, however, what these drugs he talks about are."

He transferred his gaze to the lights above him.

"These lamps are wonderful things. How on earth he constructed them is a standing marvel. The room appears to be flooded with the light of a brilliant summer's day. Gad, but there are stranger things to be seen in London than one ever dreams about. Who, passing along the road outside, would imagine these marvels below here, under this dingy-looking building?"

He stood there lost in thought for a moment.

"Although he has given me no inkling, something must have happened years ago which caused him to live this solitary existence. Down here, alone, there is no telling

### Kingston Confides in the Professor.

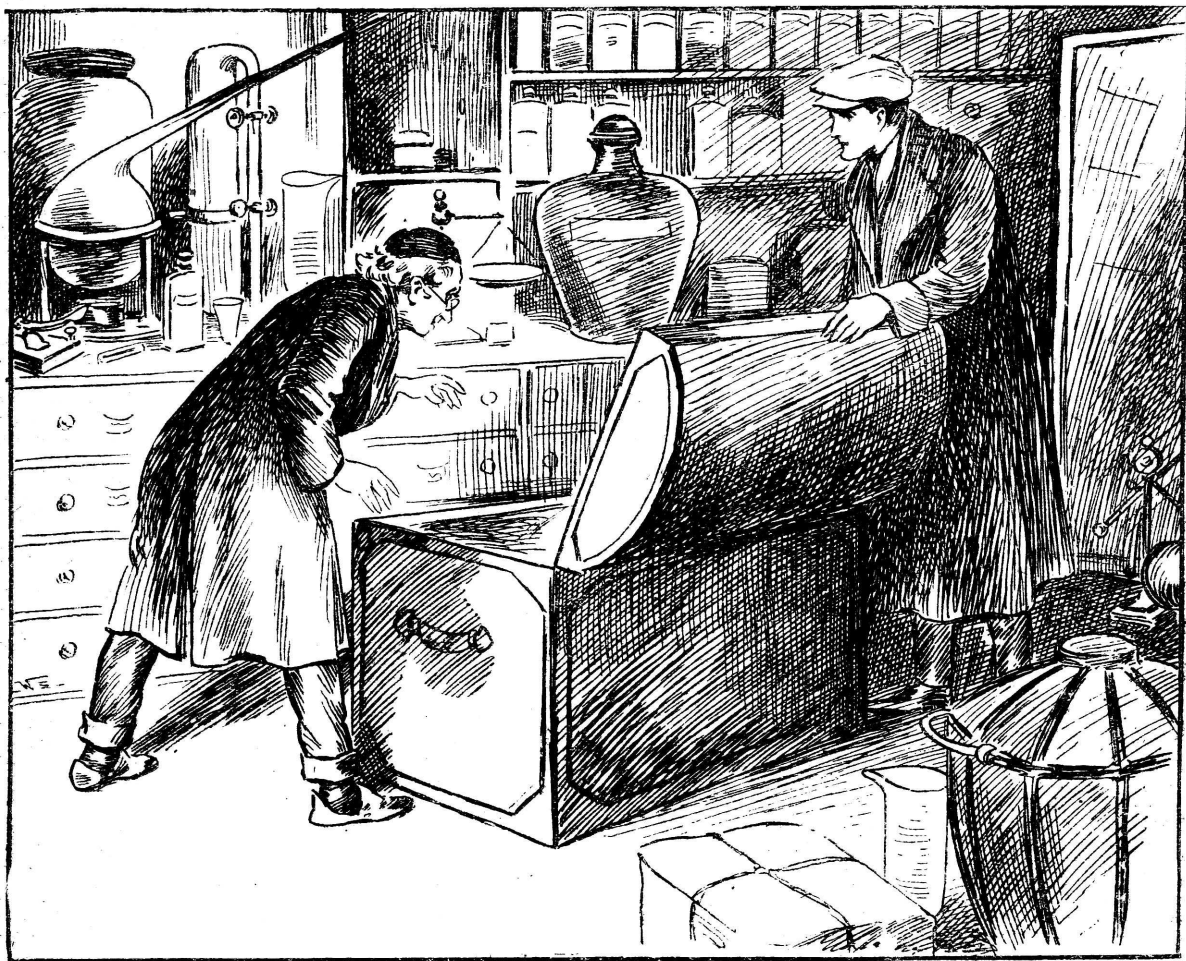
"I thought you would be surprised," chuckled the old man. "You do not recognise me—ch? Ha, ha! How much would Scotland Yard give me for my secret? They can't disguise themselves like this!"

"Good heavens!" cried Frank Kingston. "You told me you would surprise me, professor, and you have done it."

"Come closer," said Polgrave. "Examine my face thoroughly."

Kingston stepped forward and did as requested. Even his marvellous self-control could not hide the astonishment which had taken possession of him.

The professor was apparently another man—a nigger. His skin was a dark chocolate colour, his once white whiskers perfectly black. But the most amazing thing of all was the shape of his features. All the wrinkles had vanished, and



As Frank Kingston threw open the lid of the large trunk he had brought with him, Professor Polgrave uttered an exclamation of astonishment at sight of what it contained! (What did the trunk contain? Look out for this dramatic incident in a subsequent instalment of this thrilling story.)

what marvels he has discovered. A man who devotes his whole life to scientific research must have many successes. It is only in the nature of things. And I am the first outsider to have been below here! Really, I had no notion of such a reward as this when I jumped from that 'bus in Piccadilly Circus."

For Kingston did consider it a reward; he was enjoying himself immensely. It was all so unusual, so bizarre, and out of the ordinary. Here he was in the background—a most unusual position for him to occupy—and the professor in the front. It was a change, and Kingston waited eagerly for Polgrave's return.

He had not to remain long, for the next moment the hermit returned. But the sight of him caused Kingston to utter a cry of amazement. The change in Polgrave was so startling that for a moment Kingston thought it was another man. It was only the voice which revealed to him the truth.

he looked no more than thirty. His nose was broad and flat, while his lips had become thick and heavy.

"I can't understand it," said Kingston at last. "Your powers seem to be superhuman, professor."

"Yet it is merely a matter of chemicals. As you have seen, I have put nothing on my skin—there is no paint there whatever. The colour is obtained by a certain fluid. See, I will become myself in a moment."

The professor produced a tiny hypodermic syringe—an instrument which injects fluid beneath the skin—and applied it to his face. Then, before Kingston's eyes, the dark colour vanished and the old man's face became white and wrinkled again. Another injection from a second syringe made his features return to their original shape.

"The beard and hair," he explained, with a smile, "will require a rub over with another chemical before resuming their natural colour. By this little demonstration, however,

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you will understand that I have done as I told you—that I have made discoveries which will be invaluable to Scotland Yard."

"Although I have seen it with my own eyes, professor," exclaimed Kingston, "I cannot realise the extent of the marvel! Had I been told that such a thing were possible I should have laughed in derision. For truly the discovery is a stupendous one. It is stranger than fiction."

"Truth generally is," replied the professor. "Yet, although this seems so remarkable to you, it is nothing very marvellous. Look at the hundreds of well-known drugs and their capabilities. Nothing is thought of them, because everybody knows them. You are only amazed because this is new to you. Were I to tell you how I made it you would see that it is quite simple. It is the same with everything. When the first telegraph instrument was invented it was thought the greatest wonder in the world—now it is merely an article of every day use."

"There is a great deal in what you say, professor," replied Kingston. "Your discoveries seem wonderful because they have never been heard of. People would not pause to think that you had spent all your life—dozens of years—making experiments whereby to obtain the wished-for result."

"That is just it. When the stuff is completed, and its ingredients explained, it is thought simple after a while. So it is simple. It is the finding of the correct proportions and the correct drugs which is so difficult."

They left the room in which the silent running engine was working and returned to the laboratory. The old man washed his hair and beard in some milky-coloured solution, and almost instantly they became their usual snowy-white-ness.

"Now," he said, "I suggest we have a little tea. This visit of yours is giving me great pleasure, and I am honoured by your presence. Having company to see me is a very strange experience."

"I am sure," said Kingston, "that I am enjoying myself as I never did before. You have interested me to a very great degree, and I feel disposed to take you into my confidence with regard to a certain matter. You have disclosed these things to me, so it is only right that I should return the compliment."

Polgrave's face wrinkled itself into a smile.

"I knew," he said, "the moment I read your eyes, that you were not the man you appear to be. It is plain—Good gracious me, the truth has just entered my head! You are a detective—a private detective perhaps?"

He looked at Kingston eagerly. Evidently he was much interested in detectives.

Kingston decided it possible to discover the reason for this. He shook his head.

"No, professor, I am not a detective—at least, I am not a detective in the sense you infer. I am far from an idle man, however. I will explain it to you over a cup of tea."

"Good!" exclaimed the professor. "Good! I knew that you, with all your strength and will-power, were using your powers to good advantage."

The old hermit hurried into the other room—the living-room—and very soon a kettle was on the fire, singing away merrily. A little clock on the mantelpiece showed the time to be nearly four. Kingston's visit to Carson Gray was entirely forgotten.

He was engrossed with the strange experience, for he saw that Polgrave could be of stupendous assistance to him. It had been simply providential, his encountering the old gentleman. Kingston could read character as well as the professor, and he saw by now that anything he liked to say would be kept a strict secret. Polgrave was genuinely grateful, and somehow the two thoroughly understood one another.

"I said just now that I was not a detective," began Kingston. "That is the truth, in a sense, for my services are not at the disposal of anybody who wants them. I am, however, engaged in

bringing to justice the biggest criminal organisation in the world."

"I knew it!" chuckled Polgrave. "I read it in your eyes!"

"I am doing this work for myself and for the good of the world at large. I am rich, and the work is to my liking. At first it was a matter of revenge—revenge for a terrible wrong—but now that element has almost disappeared, and I am conducting the campaign because this organisation is preying upon every class of humanity—because it is a blot on the earth."

"Tell me about it," urged the professor, giving the fire a poke—"tell me everything."

So Kingston related the whole history of himself and the Iron Island. As briefly as possible he told the facts, misrepresenting nothing.

He began by telling the story of how he, when Philip Graydon, had fallen into the trap Lord Mount-Fannell had laid for him; how he had become a member of the Brotherhood of Iron without properly knowing the nature of the organisation, and how, when finding it out, he had declared his intention of informing the police. Then, because he was a traitor, the Inner Council had decided to land him on the Iron Island and leave him there until it was found necessary to kill him.

The manner in which Kingston told the story was highly interesting, and very soon the professor was engrossed. Kingston left nothing out, but related his life on the Iron Island, the coming of Dolores de las Mercedes, the escape, and the punishment of Don Sebastian. Then followed the long account of how the other members had been dealt with, seven in all.

At the end of the long story the professor sat for a full two minutes without speaking. He was thinking hard, and suddenly, as if by impulse, he held out his hand.

"Mr. Kingston," he said gravely, "the story you have just related to me has absolutely engrossed me—it has left me wondering at our providential meeting. If any man is more worthy of sharing my secrets to use to such good advantage as you can he is yet to be found. Although I have only your unsupported word to go on, I believe every sentence you have uttered. I know it to be true."

"I would not fabricate over such a matter, professor."

"Of course not; there would be no object in doing so. But you said some time ago you were not a detective. Come, good friend, that at least was misrepresented. To perform such work, and to have done what you have done, you need to be a very clever detective indeed. You are too modest. I know what marvellous powers you have, for you gave me a practical demonstration of that at Piccadilly Circus earlier to-day."

"That is nothing," he said. "But to continue. In my work against the Brotherhood I find it continually necessary to don various disguises. No matter how well it is executed

with grease-paint and powder, the result cannot compare with your method."

"You are right," replied Polgrave—"you are right. And I will lend you every assistance I can. But the art of disguising is but a tithe of my discoveries. You will be amazed afresh when I show you some of the preparations I have succeeded in making."

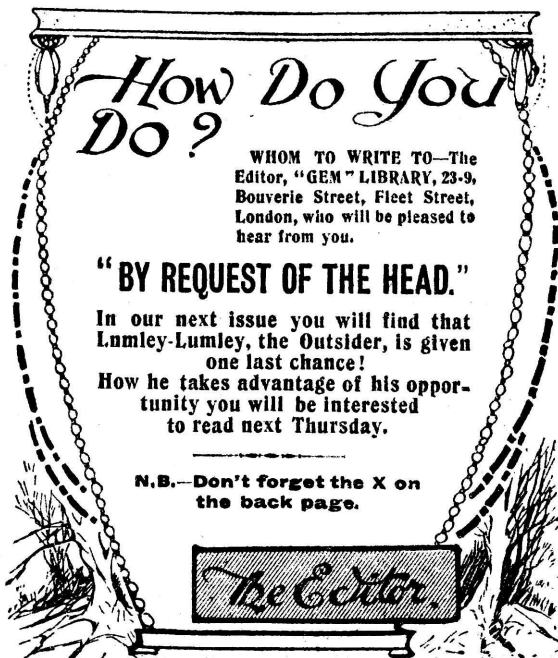
"You make me curious."

"Ha, ha! My good preserver!" chuckled the professor. "You shall know everything in time. You have only to come to me and state your needs. I'll warrant I will supply them to good advantage."

"I have no doubt on that point, professor. But you will probably not care for me bothering you all day—"

"You will be welcome at any time!" cried the old man. "Have no fear on that score. Any work I have on hand will be set aside to welcome you, to assist you in your good work. But see, the time has flown rapidly—it is half-past five, and we have forgotten all about tea."

(Another instalment of this grand serial next Thursday.)



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WHOM TO WRITE TO—The Editor, "GEM" LIBRARY, 23-9, Bouverie Street, Fleet Street, London, who will be pleased to hear from you.

**"BY REQUEST OF THE HEAD."**

In our next issue you will find that Lumley-Lumley, the Outsider, is given one last chance! How he takes advantage of his opportunity you will be interested to read next Thursday.

N.B.—Don't forget the X on the back page.

*The Editor*