


SPOOFING THE SHELL!

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.

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THE TWO MR. LATHOMS!

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SPOOFING THE SHELL!

A Magnificent, New, Long,
Complete School Story
of Tom Merry & Co.
at St. Jim's.

By
MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

Fatty Thinks it Out.

FATTY WYNN of the Fourth Form had a deep wrinkle of thought in his brow. He was standing with his hands in his pockets, and a far-away expression on his plump face, evidently thinking deeply. His chums, Figgins and Kerr, watched him, grinning.

Figgins & Co. had been talking cricket. Fatty Wynn had fallen silent, his thoughts wandering from the topic. Something was engrossing Fatty's reflections, and his chums could guess what it was. The food problem was the great problem of Fatty's existence; and it cast into the shade the toughest thing in mathematics.

Figgins, with great humour, took out his watch to time him. Kerr chuckled. But Fatty Wynn did not even observe Figg's little joke.

"Five minutes!" said Figgins.

No word from Fatty. His wrinkle was growing deeper, and that was all.

"Six minutes!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Kerr.

Fatty Wynn started, and looked at his chums.

"Six minutes fifteen seconds!" said Figgins, putting away his watch. "Have you solved it, Fatty?"

"Eh? Solved what?"

"How to get extra grub over and above your allowance?" chuckled Figgins. "I suppose that's what you were browsing over, wasn't it?"

The fat Fourth-Former looked indignant.

"No, it wasn't!" he said warmly. "Do you think I am always thinking about grub, Figgins?"

"Well, jolly near it!" said George Figgins. "Do you mean to say you weren't thinking about grub just then?"

"N-no!"

"My hat! Hold me while I faint!" ejaculated Figgins.

"Don't pile it on, Fatty!" murmured Kerr.

"Oh, rats!" said Fatty Wynn. "I was thinking— And I've got it!"

"Grub!"

"No!" roared Fatty Wynn. "Not grub! I was thinking of a wheeze. Ain't we up against the Shell now? Ain't we trying to score points over them, and put them in the shade?"

"We are—we are!" agreed Figgins. "You don't mean to say you were thinking over our job of downing the Shell?"

"Yes, I was!" snapped Fatty.

"My word!"

"And I've got the idea!" continued Fatty. "Look here! In this contest every kind of victory counts—running and jumping and games, and other things. We scored over the Shell by a dormitory raid. Well, I've got a still better idea."

"Not connected with grub?" asked Kerr sceptically.

Fatty Wynn coughed.

"Well," he said cautiously, "it may be connected with grub."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I thought so!" grinned Figgins.

"Oh, don't cackle!" said Fatty. "Just listen to my idea."

"You've got a scheme for raiding Tom Merry's dinner, or bagging Lowther's tea, or Manners' breakfast?" roared Figgins. "Or boning Grundy's toffee?"

"No, you ass! Better than that. It's just as much to us if we score over Racke or Crooke as over Tom Merry, as they're all in the Shell."

"That's so, if the umpires allow it as a win," assented Figgins. "We can rely on Lefevre of the Fifth to do the square thing. But it will have to be a real win—not bagging a chap's butter-scotch, you fat boulder!"

"You know Racke's a food-hog!"

"Passed unanimously!"

"Well, suppose a chap found out his hoard—I'm sure he's got a hoard—and bagged it?" said Fatty, his eyes glistening. "That would be a patriotic service, and it would be a score over the Shell, wouldn't it?"

"Well, it might count, or it might not!"

"Oh, it would count all right! Clearing out a food-hog would be a first-class stunt!" said Fatty Wynn confidently. "My idea is to sneak into Racke's study over in the School House and hunt out his hoard."

"I don't suppose he keeps it in his study, if he's got a hoard."

"Bound to keep some of it there, anyway. And I'll collar the lot, and leave him a message of thanks."

"And hand the grub over to the house-keeper?" asked Kerr.

"Ahem!"

"It ought really to be handed to the Food Committee at Rylcombe," said Figgins.

"Ahem!"

"What are you 'ahemming' about, Fatty?"

"Well, we can't risk giving Racke away," said Wynn cautiously. "Mustn't sneak, even about a food-hog. There's a limit, you know!"

"Well, you ass, what's the use of taking his grub if you're thinking of giving it back to him again?"

"I'm not, ass!"

"You're thinking of wolfing it?" demanded Figgins.

"Well, the—labourer's worthy of his hire, you know," answered Fatty Wynn defensively. "If I scoff a hog's hoard I'm entitled—ahem—Of course, we three will whack it out together!"

"We three won't whack out a quarter of an ounce beyond our rations!" replied Figgins.

"I'm surprised at you, Fatty!" said Kerr solemnly.

Fatty crimsoned.

"This would be a special occasion," he pleaded.

"There are no special occasions in war-time! Why, you fat boulder," exclaimed Figgins wrathfully, "you're calling Racke a food-hog, and you're proposing to be one yourself!"

"Nothing of the kind! I was thinking—"

"You think too much, Fatty, on that subject. Food-hogs are barred in the

New House. I think we had better bump you as a warning!"

"You silly ass—"

"It's a duty," said Figgins firmly. "You're a good little man, Fatty; but when you let your mind run on grub you're liable to fall away from your principles. Nothing like a bumping to bring you back to the straight and narrow path. Lend a hand, Kerr!"

Fatty Wynn dodged, but he dodged too late.

His two chums, actuated by a sense of chummy duty which Fatty did not appreciate at all, collared him and bumped him. And there was a dismal yelling from Fatty Wynn.

"Yoooop!"

"Hallo! Trouble in the family?" exclaimed Tom Merry, coming along with Manners and Lowther. "Mind you don't burst him!"

"Yaroooo!" yelled Fatty. "You cheeky rotters—"

"You Shell bouncers clear off!" said Figgins. "What are you cackling at?"

"We've got a new score over you," said Monty Lowther. "I suppose you know there's a serious fat shortage just now?"

"What about it, fathead?"

"Well, our idea is to take Wynn and melt him down—"

"What?"

"He would make tons and tons of pork dripping—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Tom Merry and Manners, delighted by the expression that came over Fatty Wynn's face at that suggestion.

"That would be a national service," continued Monty Lowther. "I think it ought to count twenty points in our favour in the contest. What do you think, Wynn?"

"I'll tell you what I think!" gasped Fatty, scrambling furiously to his feet. "I'll show you what I think, you Shell idiot! Back me up, you duffers!"

And Fatty Wynn charged at the humorist of the Shell, apparently exasperated by the playful suggestion that he should be melted down into pork-dripping. Kerr and Figgins cheerfully followed him up, charging Tom Merry and Manners.

"Yaroor!" yelled Lowther, as Fatty Wynn's weight sent him fairly spinning. "Oh, my hat! You dangerous hippopotamus! Yooop!"

"Here! Hold on!" shouted Manners. "Oh, crumbs!"

But the sudden charge of Figgins & Co. had fairly bowled over the Terrible Three of the Shell. Manners went sprawling across Lowther, and Tom Merry was pitched across Manners. Figgins & Co. sauntered away to the New House, leaving the Shell fellows to sort themselves out. Tom Merry sat up dazedly, and there came a muffled howl from Manners. The captain of the Shell was inadvertently, and unfortunately, sitting on his chum's face.

"Groogh! Gerroff!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" There was a yell of laughter from Racke of the Shell, who was looking on. "What game do you call that?"

"Ow! Groogh! Yow!"

"Gerroff!"

"Oh, my hat!"

The Terrible Three scrambled up, but Figgins & Co. were gone. Nobody was at hand but Aubrey Racke, who howled with laughter. To the three dusty juniors Racke's merriment seemed misplaced. They collared the cheery Aubrey on the spot, and bumped him. As they walked away they left Racke of the Shell still yelling—but not with laughter.

CHAPTER 2.

In the Enemy's Quarters.

"A LL clear!" murmured Fatty Wynn. The plump Fourth-Former grinned.

Fatty had not given up his great scheme, in spite of the discouragement of his chums. Whether lifting Racke's hoard would count as a point or two in the Form contest or not, it seemed to Fatty a ripping idea to lift it. It would be a score, in one way, at least. And, with great caution, the Falstaff of the New House had stolen into the rival House and had, with great luck, succeeded in making his way to the Shell passage unobserved.

He came quietly up the stairs, and glanced quickly along the passage. There was no one in sight, and with great speed Fatty scudded along the passage and dodged into Racke's study. He knew that Racke and Crooke were not there, having seen them a few minutes before in the quad. He closed the study door behind him, breathing hard.

Racke might come in any moment, certainly. The New House raider was taking some risk. But risk did not matter to Fatty Wynn, especially if there was a feed at the end of it. Besides, he was quite prepared to deal with either Racke or Crooke, or both together, if it came to fistcuffs.

Without losing time, Fatty Wynn scudded round the study, searching for tuck. His fat face fell as all his searching brought nothing to light. If Aubrey Racke kept any forbidden supplies in his study, he was careful to keep them in a very secret place.

"Sneaking rotter!" muttered Fatty Wynn. "Suspicious beast! I suppose he thinks his grub's not safe, the rotter! Br-r-r-r!"

Fatty searched the cupboard, and looked under the table, and even glanced up the chimney. He was at the chimney when the study door opened, and Aubrey Racke strode in, with Crooke, Scrope, and Mellish at his heels. The four juniors stared blankly at Fatty Wynn, who spun round with a very red face, and blinked at them.

"My hat!" exclaimed Crooke.

"What are you doing here, you New House cad?" demanded Racke.

"I—I—"

"It's a House raid!" said Scrope. "Let's make an example of him!"

Fatty Wynn backed round behind the table, and pushed back his cuffs. He was discovered now, and there was going to be trouble. But Fatty was a great fighting-man, though a very plump one, and he was coolly calculating what chances he had against four.

"What were you up to here?" asked Racke, suspiciously. "Looking for a chap's money—what?"

David Llewellyn Wynn flushed crimson. "You sneaking cad!" he roared. "You know that's a lie! I was looking for your food hoard, if you want to know, you prize hog!"

"Pshaw!" murmured Crooke.

"I'll give you a lesson not to rummage in my study!" said Racke, gritting his teeth.

"I say, let's collar the cad and keep him a prisoner!" said Scrope. "We'll fasten him to the leg of the table, and keep him till call-over. That will count in the Form contest, if we make him beg off."

Racke scowled.

"We're not taking any part in their dashed Form contest!" he said savagely. "I've said so often enough."

"Still, it's a chance—"

"Oh, rats! We'll collar him, right enough, and give him a thundering good hiding with a fives bat," said Racke.

"Oh, all right!"

"Mind he doesn't get out," said Racke.

"I'll lock the door to start with."

He turned to the door.

Fatty Wynn's eyes gleamed.

He had to fight the four, as soon as they attacked, and that within locked doors. It appeared to Fatty that it would be better to attack than to wait to be attacked—while the door was still unlocked. And he acted upon that idea at once, without hesitation.

With his hands clenched, Fatty Wynn came pounding round the table, and charged at Racke & Co. like a Tank in full career.

"Here, look out!" howled Mellish.

"Oh, crumbs! Gerroff!"

Crooke went staggering from Fatty's left, and sat down. Fatty's right hit Scrope fairly in the eye, and he spun across the study. Mellish, who was not a hero, backed away with a jump like a kangaroo. All passed with almost the speed of lightning, and Racke turned from the door, to find Fatty fairly upon him.

The New House junior grasped him, and they struggled.

"Help!" yelled Racke fiercely. "Back up, you funks!"

"Yow-ow! My eye!"

"Groogh!"

"Help me, you fools!"

Crash!

Racke went down on the carpet with a roar. Fatty Wynn tore the door open, dodged into the passage, and slammed the door behind him.

In Racke's study there was a chorus of groans and howls.

Racke staggered to his feet.

"Come on!" he panted. "We'll smash him! Follow me, I tell you!"

"Ow! Ow!"

Racke dragged the door open again, and dashed into the passage.

But Fatty Wynn had made good use of the minute he had had in advance. The passage was empty.

Racke glared savagely round him, and ran to the stairs. But there was no one on the staircase.

It seemed incredible that the fat Fourth-Former could have escaped so promptly; but he was not to be seen.

With a muttered oath, Aubrey Racke returned to his study. He found Crooke and Scrope caressing their injuries, and Mellish grinning.

The black sheep of the School House had not followed him out. They had had enough of Fatty Wynn's plump fists.

"Caught him!" mumbled Crooke.

Racke snarled.

"He's gone, hang him!"

"My hat! He was quick!"

"He knew what I'd give him!" growled Racke. "Stop that howling, for goodness' sake! If you'd backed me up, we'd have made mincemeat of the cad."

"Oh, rats!"

Racke kicked the door shut, and locked it. But it was some time before the precious quartette settled down to the game of banker for which they had come to the study. They were feeling hurt.

After Racke's door was closed, a door further up the passage opened quietly,

and a fat, grinning face looked out. The study was the study of Tom Merry, but the face was the face of David Llewellyn Wynn. The fat junior was not gone—he had realised that there was no time to escape, and he had dodged into a study for refuge. Being aware that the Terrible Three were out of doors, he had chosen Tom Merry's study.

Fatty Wynn chuckled as he looked along the deserted passage. The coast was clear once more.

"Silly chumps!" murmured Fatty Wynn complacently. "Anybody could fool those silly Shell bouncers! Yah!"

But just as Fatty was leaving the study on tiptoe there came a sound of voices from the stairs, and he popped back hastily.

To be caught in the enemy's quarters meant a ragging for the New House raider; and Fatty Wynn was not out for a ragging.

He waited for the footsteps to pass before emerging. But to his dismay he heard Tom Merry's voice outside.

"We'll hear it, Monty. I don't suppose it's any good, but we'll hear it, old scout!"

"Fathead! It's the jape of the season."

"Bow-wow!"

Fatty Wynn looked wildly round the study. The Terrible Three were evidently coming in, and they were not to be handled like the slackers in Racke's study. And if they captured Fatty in their quarters, there was not the slightest doubt that they would use that capture in a way to score points in the great Form contest. What Figgins and Kerr would say to that was something Fatty Wynn did not care to think about. His only thought was to take cover; and almost instinctively he squeezed himself behind the tattered screen in the corner. He was squeezed there, trying to subdue his hurried breathing, when the Terrible Three entered.

Fatty Wynn remained as still as a mouse. Through a slit in the screen—which had seen considerable service—he saw Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther; but the three Shell fellows did not glance towards the corner.

It was evident that they did not suspect for a moment that there was anyone else in the study, and Fatty Wynn breathed more freely as he noted that fact.

"Now, Monty—" said Tom Merry.

"Shut the door!"

"What for?"

"It's important, you ass! Do you want the Fourth to get on to the wheeze, when it's up against them?"

"Oh, all right!" Tom Merry closed the door. "Now—"

The door opened, and the eyeglass of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth glimmered in.

CHAPTER 3.

The Plot.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY smiled benignantly at the three Shell fellows, who stared at him. Lowther, who had been about to speak, checked himself abruptly.

"Bai Jove! Anythin' on, you chaps?" asked D'Arcy.

"Nunno!"

"You are lookin' vewy startled."

"Well, what do you expect when you bung a face like that on us, all of a sudden?" demanded Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthaw—"

"The question arises," remarked Manners, "whether it is a face!"

"Pwavy, don't make wotten personal remarks, deat boys. I do not regard them as funny!" said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "I have looked in to

speak to you fellows. I have a pproposal to make—

"No good making it here," said Lowther, with a stare. "Take it along to the girl in the bun-shop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah ass!" shouted Arthur Augustus. "I wufuse to listen to your fivoolous wemark. I have a pproposal to make wegardin' the Form contest. I have mentioned it to Blake and Hewwies and Dig, and they only made a wude wepy. But I weally think that it is up to the School House Fourth to beat you boundahs! I do not believe in lettin' the New House Fourth do all the hickin'. So I have thought of this challenge—"

"Oh, a challenge, is it?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Go ahead!"

"We are goin' to whop the Shell in pwetty neably ewerythin', such as wickstin' an' wunnin' an' jumpin' an' w'estlin' an' japin' an' so on," explained Arthur Augustus. "But there are othah things. I challenge the Shell to pwoduce a weally well-dwessed fellow—"

"What!" yelled the Terrible Three. "I am quite sewious, deah boys. I challenge you to put up a man to dwess, an' the umpiahs shall decide whethah he beats the champion of the Fourth in that line. I shall wewesent the Fourth. And I weally cinsidah that I shall beat you, and I expect the committee to award me twenty points, at least."

The Terrible Three stared at the Honourable Arthur Augustus.

"A—a competition in wearing clothes!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Some fellows can weah clothes, an' some cannot," said Arthur Augustus. "I flastah myself that I am wathah well dwessed. Put up your man, and I will dwess against him, and we will both appeah before the committee, who shall judge which does most cwedit to the school."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I weally fail to see anythin' to laugh at, deah boys. Blake an' Hewwies an' Dig cackled just the same when I suggested it—"

"Ha, ha!"

"Oh, wats! If you wufuse the challenge, I shall claim twenty points fwom the committee in default."

"My dear ass, there's a limit!" grinned Tom Merry. "Can't have a competition of tailor's dummies."

"If you chawactewise me as a tailah's dummy, Tom Mewwy, I shall feel called upon to give you a feahful thwashin'!"

"Go hon!"

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard you as a cacklin' ass! I wegard you, Lowthah, as anothah cacklin' ass, and you, Mannahs—"

"Gussy, old man, you want looking after," said Monty Lowther seriously. "These great ideas coming into your brain show that there's something loose just under your roof."

"You checkay ass—"

"I think we ought to see Gussy home, you chaps," said Lowther.

"Hear, hear!"

"Gweat Scott! You eillay ass! Hands off! Yawoooooh!" yelled Arthur Augustus, as the chuckling trio collared him and swept him off the floor.

With his arms and legs wildly flying, Arthur Augustus was carried out of the study, and down the passage.

"Yawoooh! Jeggo! I will thwash you all wound!" he roared. "Gweat Scott! Wescue!"

"Bless my soul! What—what is this!"

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"Oh!"

Mr. Latham, the master of the Fourth, was coming up the staircase, and he fairly jumped as he met that procession almost in full career.

The little Form-master stopped, blinking at the abashed juniors over his spectacles.

"What—what—" he exclaimed.

The Terrible Three allowed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy to slide down to his feet. The swell of St. Jim's stood red and gasping.

"Gwoogh! Oh, deah! I am all wuffed! Gwoogh!"

"Merry! Lowther! Manners! What does this mean?" exclaimed the master of the Fourth severely.

"Ahem! We—w—"

"Gwoogh!"

"We—we were taking D'Arcy home, sir," said Tom Merry, stammering.

"We—we were taking him to Study No. 6! Ahem!"

"I am afraid, Merry, that D'Arcy was being the victim of somewhat rough horseplay!" said Mr. Latham sternly.

"Ahem!"

"Not at all, sir," said Arthur Augustus cheerfully. The great Gussy could always be depended on to play the game. "These fellows, sir, vewy kindly volunteered to cawwy me to my studay."

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Latham.

"Only a little game, sir," said Arthur Augustus diplomatically. "They were goin' to cawwy me into the studay an' surprise Blake an' Hewwies an' Dig, sir."

"Oh! said Mr. Latham. "Very well! But do not be quite—quite so noisy in your games indoors, please!"

"Vewy well, sir!"

Mr. Latham, with another blink at the juniors, passed on. Arthur Augustus stood smoothing down his ruffled jacket.

"Gussy, old man," said Monty Lowther affectionately, "you're worth a guinea a box, you are really!"

"Bai Jove!"

"And now you can walk home, as a reward," said Tom Merry, laughing. And the Terrible Three went back to their study, leaving Arthur Augustus to finish dusting himself—a long process.

Fatty Wynn, behind the tattered screen in the corner of No. 10, suppressed a groan as the three Shell fellows came back. He had hoped to find an opportunity of escape but there had been no chance. The fat Fourth-Former settled down to wait, with a dismal feeling that it was tea-time, and a still more dismal doubt as to whether there would be anything for him in Figgins' study when he got back to the New House.

Monty Lowther closed the door carefully. Tom Merry and Manners watched him, with a grin. They were about to hear Lowther expound his great scheme for taking a rise out of the Fourth; but they did not seem to think it was going to be such a corker as Monty Lowther supposed.

"Mind, this has got to be kept awfully dark," Lowther began. "Better not even tell many in the Shell. And not a whisper to the Fourth."

Fatty Wynn, behind the screen, winked into space. Lowther, quite unconsciously, was telling the Fourth himself!

"Oh, we'll keep it dark," yawned Manners. "What is it, anyway?"

"The biggest spoof ever thought of," said Lowther impressively. "You know that Scottish boulder, Kerr, is great on impersonations and things—he makes himself up as all sorts of characters, to amuse those duffers over in the New House—"

"Yes. He's jolly clever at it," said Tom Merry. "But what about it? You

haven't brought me up here to jaw about Kerr, I suppose?"

"My idea is that the Shell can beat the Fourth in that, as in everything else," explained Lowther. "Kerr's clever. I don't deny that. He's a born actor, and he seems to be able to twist his features into any shape he likes. But I'm pretty good at acting, too. You fellows know that. Well, you know how Kerr got himself up once as a new kid, and came here and took us in—"

"Yes, the cheeky ass!"

"Well, if our Form contest had been going on then that would have counted as a big win. Suppose we worked off a spoof like that on the Fourth?"

"Ahem! Could we? There's no Kerr in the Shell."

"There's Lowther!"

"Oh!"

"Ahem!"

"Look here, you asses, can't I act?" demanded Lowther, with some warmth. "You've seen me. Can't I make up, as well as Kerr? Perhaps not quite so well as Kerr, if you come to that; but very well, all the same."

"Ye-es. But—but you couldn't spoof them as Kerr did us. They wouldn't take you for a new boy in the New House."

"I'm not thinking of that. I wouldn't use a second-hand New House wheeze," said Monty Lowther disdainfully. "What price Latham?"

Latham! ejaculated Tom Merry and Manners together.

"Yes."

"What about Latham?" asked the captain of the Shell, not quite understanding.

"Oh, you're a duffer! Why shouldn't I make myself up as Latham?"

"Great pip!"

"He's not taller than I am—hardly as tall, in fact. He's a good deal wider; but padding will do that," said Monty Lowther eagerly. "It's easy enough to make up, with lines on the face and bushy eyebrows. But it's rather a pity the old bird hasn't any face-fungus."

"Oh, Christopher Columbus!" said Manners blankly. "You ass, you couldn't do it! And—and if you were found out, the Head would be waxy!"

"I shan't call on the Head, duffer! I think I could do it. I'll have some practice, of course—you fellows helping me. And—and if I passed as Latham, think of the game we could have with the Fourth! I'd order 'em into the Form-room on a half-holiday—"

"Oh!"

"Can't 'em all round—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Make Blake and Figgins stand in the corner!"

Tom and Manners yelled.

"You see," grinned Lowther, "there's simply no limit to the way I could make 'em sit up, if they take me for Latham. It would count as the biggest thing in the whole contest."

"But—but you couldn't—"

"I think I could. Think of me caning Figgins; and making that fat boulder, Wynn, turn out his pockets, and give me his toffee!"

"Ha, ha!"

"Isn't it the jape of the season?" demanded Lowther.

"Ye-es. But—"

"Mr. Latham is going off on Wednesday afternoon, with Linton, you know. Mr. Linton's nephew is home on leave, and old Linton's going to see him," said Monty Lowther. "Our respected Form-master is taking Latham with him—I know that."

"Yes, I've heard so. But—"

"Well, on Wednesday afternoon Mr. Latham will be fifty miles away, and our own Form-master will be fifty miles away

with him. Nothing could be better. When the fags see Lathom, they'll simply suppose he's come home, instead of going on with Linton. He might, you know."

"But—" "You're as full of butts as billygoat!" said Lowther impatiently. "What are you butting about now?" "Could you do it?" said Tom dubiously.

"Rats—yes! I'm going to try, anyway."

"Ahem!" "And I'm going down to Mr. Wiggs' in Rylcombe now, to get some things I shall need for the part," said Monty Lowther determinedly. "You fellows can come, and bring all the tin you've got. I suppose you're backing me up?"

"Oh, yes, we'll back you up!" said Manners. "But—"

"Can't you back me up without so many butts?" asked Lowther. "I tell you it's the jape of the season, and it's going to do the Fourth fairly in the eye. Now, come on, and stop butting!"

The Terrible Three left the study—Lowther smiling and confident, Tom Merry and Manners considerably doubtful, but prepared to back up their chum in that astounding scheme for spoofing the Fourth. After their footsteps had died away down the passage, Fatty Wynn emerged from behind the screen in the study, grinning. He peered out into the passage, and then tiptoed away by the back stairs, and scuttled out of the School House.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Fatty Wynn. "The chumps, the asses, the duffers! Ha, ha!"

And Fatty Wynn scudded away to the New House. He had news—interesting news—for Figgins and Kerr.

CHAPTER 4.

And the Counter-Plot.

FIGGINS' study—six-thirty. Important.

Jack Blake of the Fourth looked at that laconic note and grunted. It had been pitched into Study No. 6 after tea by a New House fag—Jameson of the Third.

Jameson, evidently acting as Mercury for Figgins & Co., had chucked the note in, jerked out "From Figgins," and departed, whistling shrilly. Blake picked up the note, intending to ram it down Jameson's neck, but the New House fag vanished too promptly. So Jack Blake read the note.

"Cheek!" said Herries.

"Nerve!" remarked Digby.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus warmly. "Figgins has no right to call a meetin'. He is actin' as if he were leadah of the Fourth, which is—"

"Idiotic!" said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I suppose it means that they've got a wheeze up against the Shell," said Blake thoughtfully. "Some rot, of course! You know what New House wheezes are. It means giving away points to the Shell. No good going."

"None at all," agreed Herries.

"Well, deah boys, we have agreed that School House and New House stand togethah in beatin' the Shell," remarked Arthur Augustus. "Pewwaps we had bettah go; and we will insist upon puttin' it to the vote, if it is a wheeze. As we are fough to thwee, that will put the boards in their place."

"My hat! You do have ideas sometimes, Gussy!" said Herries admiringly. "That's not a bad notion."

"Good!" said Blake. "Let's go. Mind, we're in the scheme, and outvote them. It's bound to be some rot."

And with that intention firmly fixed in



Crooke Scores for the Shell!
(See Chapter 5.)

their minds, the chums of Study No. 6 strolled over to the New House. In the great contest it was the Fourth against the Shell; but, somehow, the juniors never forgot the old House rivalry, and Study No. 6 and Figgins & Co. seldom failed to criticise one another's ideas with severity, though they could all pull together when the tug-of-war came.

The four School House juniors arrived at Figgins' study, and as Blake kicked at the door there was a sound of chuckling within. It ceased, and Figgins' voice called out:

"Trot in!"

Blake & Co. entered.

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn were in the study, and also in high good-humour. Their faces were wreathed in smiles.

"Sit down, dear boys!" said Figgins.

"We've got some news for you."

"I vote against it," said Herries.

"Same here!" remarked Digby.

"Against!" said Blake laconically.

"Yaas, wathah; an' I do the same! It follows, deah boys, that you are outvoted, and you are bound to drop it," grinned Arthur Augustus.

"Eh? Drop what?" ejaculated George Figgins, in surprise.

"The wheeze."

"What wheeze?"

"Oh, didn't you ask us here to tell us about some wheeze you've got against the Shell?" demanded Blake, somewhat taken aback.

"Not at all."

"Oh! I—I thought—"

"You did?" asked Kerr. "I'd like to know what you did it with, then?"

"Why, you cheeky New House ass—" began Blake wrathfully.

"Order!" said Figgins. "It's not a wheeze against the Shell, fatheads. It's a Shell wheeze against us, and we've spotted it."

"Oh, good!" said Blake, interested at once. "What's the game?"

Figgins roared.

"You'd never guess. It's a spoof—a

kind of spoof that couldn't come off in ten thousand years and a little over. You know how jolly clever Kerr is at making up."

"Not bad for the New House," admitted Blake.

"Oh, rats! Well, that's put the idea into their silly heads. They think that Monty Lowther can do it as well as Kerr. What do you think of Lowther making up as Mr. Lathom?"

"What?"

"Bai Jove!"

"And palming himself off on us, while our giddy Form-master is gone away with Linton on Wednesday afternoon?" chortled Figgins.

"They can't be such asses!" exclaimed Digby.

"That's the scheme!" roared Figgins.

"Ha, ha! Fatty was scouting in the School House, and he got on to the whole bizney."

"The thundering asses!" exclaimed Blake. "Lowther couldn't do it. Why, he's taller than old Lathom, for one thing. Lathom's as small as Kerr or Digby."

"You mean, I'm as big as Lathom," said Kerr sharply.

"Yes, that's the way to put it," agreed Digby.

"Well, you're much of a muchness, anyway," said Blake, with a grin. "As for Lowther, fancy his trying to palm off his long shanks as Lathom's little fat legs, for instance."

"Well, that's their fatheaded scheme," said Fatty Wynn. "They're going to order the Fourth about—Lowther is, I mean—came us, and give us lines, and make us stand in the corner, and all that—if we take Lowther for old Lathom."

"The chumps!"

"If it came off, it would be no end of a wheeze," grinned Figgins. "Of course, it couldn't come off!"

"I don't know," said Blake slowly. "Lowther's rather clever at acting, and

there was about a chance in a million. Lathom was specially built by Nature to be caricatured—with his wig, and his barnacles, and all that. I think it's rather lucky we've got on to the game."

"Yass, wathah!"

"Well, that's what we're calling a pow-wow about," said Figgins, grinning. "They're going to try it and I think we ought to let them go ahead. Let the howling ass think he's taking us in, you know, and order us into the Form-room. When we're there, we'll collar him, and tie him to Lathom's desk, and put a ticket on him. 'In this style, 5/9!' or something like that, and leave him for the fellows to stare at!"

"Good wheeze!" agreed Blake.

"'Bai Jove! I've got a better idea than that, deah boys!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus excitedly.

"Rats!" said Figgins.

"Weally, Figgins—"

"Let Gussy go ahead," said Blake, at once. "His ideas don't amount to much, as a rule; but they're bound to beat New House wheezes every time."

"I quite agree with you, Blake. Look heah, deah boys! Instead of tying Lowther up, we'll spwign Lathom on him!"

"Lathom will be out all the afternoon," said Kerr.

"Besides, it wouldn't be the game," said Figgins severely. "Lowther would get jolly well ragged by the Head if he was found caricaturing a Form-master. That's how the Head would look at it."

"You misapprehend, Figgins! I was not weerrin' to the weal Lathom. But if a Shell boundah can make up as Lathom, so can a Fourth Form chap. You know that I am wathah a dab at actin'—"

"Acting the goat, you mean?"

"I mean nothin' of the sort, Figgins! I mean that I am a wathah wippin' actin', and I could make up as Mr. Lathom a treat—"

There was an hysterical yell in Figgins' study. The idea of the noble Gussy making up as Mr. Lathom took the juniors by storm. Six juniors roared, and roared again, and Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass upon them in surprise.

"I fail to see any reason for this wibald laughah," he said idly. "Pew-waps you will tell me where the joke comes in?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you duffahs—"

"Fancy Gussy as Lathom!" sobbed Kerr.

"Fancy Lathom speaking with Gussy's accent!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wats! I could imitate Lathom's voice very well! Think of the surprise of those cheeky boundahs if a chap they supposed to be Lathom walked in when Lowther was actin' the goat—"

"But they wouldn't suppose you were Lathom!" roared Blake. "You couldn't do it!"

"Wats!"

"I say, though!" exclaimed Figgins. "It's a jolly good idea, though Gussy couldn't carry it out. What price Kerr?"

"Kerr?" repeated Blake.

"Yes. Kerr's the only chap in the school who could do it. We've got all the stuff, too. Kerr's made himself up to imitate Lathom before, in one of our plays," said Figgins. "Kerr could do it on his head. My hat! Fancy the feelings of those chumps, with Lowther goin' as Lathom, if Lathom walked in—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My hat! I believe Kerr could do it!" said Blake. "Better than Lowther, anyway. Feel inclined to try it, Kerr?"

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"You bet!" said Kerr tersely.

"Then it's a go."

"'Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus was almost crimson with wrath. "I wufuse to have my wippin' ideah collared in this barefaced mannah! I wufuse—"

"Ass!" said Blake. "Kerr can do it, and you can't!"

"I wufuse to admit anythin' of the sort, I considah—"

Figgins closed one eye at Blake.

"I move that a vote of thanks be passed to Gussy for his nobby idea," he said.

"It's suggested by the School House, and carried out by the New House—that's an equal division of labour. Gentlemen, vote of thanks—"

"Hear, hear!"

The vote of thanks was passed unanimously, and Arthur Augustus was a little mollified.

"Howevah—" he said.

"That's settled, then!" said Jack Blake. "Mind, not a word! You can't tell Reddy and his pals into it, and we'll tell Julian and one or two others; but it had better be kept dark generally."

"Right ho!" said Figgins.

"Yass, but—"

"Come on, Gussy! Prep, you know!"

"Yass; but I weally considah—"

Arthur Augustus was dragged away without being able to state what he considered. The wheeze was too good to be left in Gussy's hands.

In the Common-room that evening Monty Lowther smiled at Study No. 6, thinking of the great spoof he was planning for their benefit. Study No. 6 thought of the great spoof they were planning for Lowther's benefit, and smiled, too. So both parties were happy and satisfied.

CHAPTER 5.

A Very Peculiar Contest.

TOM MERRY frowned.

The Terrible. Three were sunning themselves on the School House steps the next day, when Tom Merry's glance fell upon Crooke of the Shell and Mellish of the Fourth. The two black sheep were walking away together, and their direction was that of the old ruined tower at a distance from the school buildings. The captain of the Shell could guess what their object was. The two seedy black sheep were going off for a quiet smoke.

"It's too bad!" said Tom Merry.

"That silly worm, Crooke, could take a hand in the Form contest if he liked, and the shady ass prefers to slack about, and smoke in corners. Poof!"

"He ought to be made to!" said Manners.

"Racke won't allow any of his merry followers to join in the contest," remarked Monty Lowther. "He has given them his orders. But I think it could be wangled about Crooke. What price Crooke against Mellish?"

"Not a fight," said Tom, laughing.

"They both funk it."

"No. A contest. They're going off to smoke now."

"I suppose so."

"Well, what price a smoking-match?"

"Wha-a-at?"

"It would be a contest," urged Lowther, "and it would be a valuable lesson to the silly chumps. By the time they'd finished, I don't think they'd care for any more smoking for a long time to come."

Tom Merry laughed.

"I agree with you there. But how could we put that on the notice-board, ass? Smoking Contest, Crooke v. Mellish."

"Ha, ha! That wouldn't do. We can

put it as a Form score, same as was done with the points for Piggy's dorm raid."

"It's too thick," said Manners, shaking his head.

"Rot!" said Lowther warmly. "It's a jolly good idea! Those two silly chumps ought to be taught a lesson about smoking!"

"Yes; but—"

"We'll call in some of the Fourth to see fair play, and follow them," said Lowther, evidently much taken with his idea. "There's Figgys and Blake and Levison yonder, they'll do."

"But—but—"

"Rot! I'll call them!"

Monty Lowther hailed the Fourth-Formers, and explained his scheme, which made them stare. But Lowther had his way, and the six juniors followed Crooke and Mellish to the old tower. There were voices in the shadowy old ruin as they approached.

"I say, Crooke, these cigs are rippin'! Nothin' like a smoke after dinner, is there?"

"Nothin', Percy, my boy. Like one of the cheroots?"

"H'm! I think I'll stick to the cigs."

"Oh, try a cheroot! They're toppin'!"

Tom Merry & Co. exchanged glances of disgust, mingled with amusement. George Gerald Crooke was indulging in cheroots, by way of swank. It was quite certain that he would never have ventured to smoke one to the end.

An atmosphere of smoke greeted the juniors as they entered the shattered building.

Crooke and Mellish were seated on chunks of fallen masonry, each with a cigarette between his lips.

They started at the sight of the Co.

"Only fags!" said Crooke, seating himself again contemptuously.

"Did you think it was a prefect?" grinned Blake.

"Oh, rats! Hallo, Levison, goin' to join us?" asked Crooke insolently.

"Your old game, you know. Have a fag?"

Levison of the Fourth coloured a little. The black sheep of St. Jim's never allowed him to forget that he had once been a member of their shady circle.

"Thanks, no!" he said. "I'll watch you!"

"Oh, you can watch!" sneered Crooke.

"Have another, Mellish?"

"Certainly!"

"Here's a match, old scout!"

Mellish of the Fourth, with a defiant look at Tom Merry & Co., lighted his second cigarette.

"You've got plenty of that muck, Crooke, I suppose?" asked Tom Merry.

"Oh, lots!"

"Good! It's wanted."

"Eh? You want a smoke?" exclaimed Crooke, in surprise.

"Not exactly. Put out all your smokes on this stone."

"Rats!"

"Better!" said Tom cheerfully.

"You'll be bumped if you don't!"

"Look here! If you've come to bully, Tom Merry—"

"Not at all! I've come here to watch you enter into the Form contest in the only way you can or will," said the captain of the Shell. "Shove out your smokes, now, chapp!"

Gerald Crooke hesitated. But he had to obey, and he did it. Several packets of cigarettes and a case of black-looking cheroots were laid on the stone.

They had cost Crooke a good deal of money, which he did not miss, however. Crooke had plenty of tin.

"My hat! There's enough there to cause an earthquake, if those chumps smoked them," said Figgins.

"They're going to," said Tom. "Light

up, you rotters! Take a cheroot each, and light up!"

"Who-a-a?"

"The chap who gets that mid-channel attack first is the loser," explained Monty Lowther. "A contest quits in your line—what? Go it!"

Crooke and Mellish gazed at the half-dozen grinning juniors blankly. Not for the wealth of Golconda would they have smoked those terrible cheroots if they could have helped it. It began to look as if they would not be able to help it.

"You're terrific smokers!" grinned Figgins. "You ought to enjoy this. You're not starting, Mellish! Play up for your Form!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I'm not going to!" gasped Mellish. "I—I—you can't make me!"

"I wouldn't think of it. I shall simply stick this pin into you if you don't smoke—every time you don't! Dash it all, you came here to smoke, didn't you? Get a move on, then!"

"We're a committee of Fourth and Shell, to watch the contest," explained Manners. "It's agreed that it counts a point for the winner. Pile in!"

Gerald Crooke made a sudden rush for the doorway. He was collared and spun back promptly.

"You—you—you dare not make me smoke those—those things!" yelled Crooke. "I—I won't! I—I—I—Yaroooooh!"

"My dear man, that was only a touch!" said Monty Lowther. "I shall really stick this pin in next time!"

"Yarooooh!"

"You starting, Mellish?" chortled Figgins. "I've got a pin ready for you."

"I—I say—"

"Get a move on!"

The two hapless black sheep picked up a cheroot each. They had come there to smoke, and they had assumed a lofty contempt for fellows who did not smoke. So really they ought to have welcomed that peculiar contest. But they didn't!

They had to enter into it, however. They were very well aware that the affair was intended as a lesson to them, rather than as an event in the Form contest. Still, it counted. That was agreed upon. If they wouldn't, or couldn't, play up for their Forms in any other way, this was their chance—and their punishment.

Two gleaming pins in ready hands were arguments that could not be resisted. The black cheroots were lighted, Crooke inwardly anathematising himself for having bought them at all.

Crooke had swanked among his smoky associates with those cheroots. That swank had to be paid for now—dearly!

The room filled with smoke as the two cheroots burned away, Crooke and Mellish blinking at one another hopelessly over them. Tom Merry & Co. began to cough a little, but they stood it out. Slowly, slowly, the cheroots were consumed, and when they threw the stumps away the merry smokers were looking a little queer in the visages. But neither had yielded yet to the earthquake that threatened from within.

"Go it!" said Tom.

"I—I can't smoke any more!" moaned Mellish. "I—I'm feeling very uncomfortable inside! Ow!"

"Got that pin handy, Figg?"

"Yaroorh!"

"Give you another, Mellish? Don't mind me!"

"Keep off, you beast!" howled Mellish.

He despairingly took a second cheroot. Crooke followed his example. The Shell fellow was more hardened to smoking than the Fourth-Former, and it looked like a win for the Shell. But Crooke

was feeling very queer. Slowly, very slowly, the cheroots burned away, watched with great interest by the committee of the Fourth and the Shell.

Mellish mopped his perspiring brow.

"I—I say—" he murmured.

"Go it!"

"Grooh!"

"You're not smoking, Crooke!"

"I—I am! Keep off!"

"Go it, then!"

Crooke smoked on desperately. He repented his sincerely that he had ever taken up that habit, one of the unhealthiest for a growing boy. As for Mellish, he was in the depths of misery, and Tom Merry & Co. would have let him off if it had been only the Form contest they had thought of. But this was a valuable lesson for the black sheep, and they felt, like Hamlet, that it was their duty to be "cruel, only to be kind."

"Yurrrrrrrgh!"

"Hallo! Shell wins!" shouted Lowther.

Mellish of the Fourth fairly rolled on the floor. Crooke staggered to his feet, white and woeful.

"You've won for your Form, Crooke!"

said Tom Merry, with a chuckle. "Now, I suggest that you should stamp on all those smokes."

"Grooh!"

"Or else we'll watch you smoke them."

Crooke, with a gasp of terror, swept the smokes to the stone floor, and trampled them under his feet. Tom Merry & Co., chortling, quitted the old tower. They left two merry blades behind them who were feeling far from merry.

"One point up for the Shell!" grinned Monty Lowther. "And a most valuable lesson taught free, gratis, and for nothing! I rather fancy Mellish will decline next time Crooke asks him round to the old tower for a smoke."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the juniors agreed that it was very probable. For a long time to come Mellish of the Fourth will be fed up with smoking.

CHAPTER 8.

Racke Causes Trouble.

"WHAT on earth's the matter with you?"

Aubrey Racke asked that question in amazement as Crooke came into the study. Crooke tottered in, pale and feeble, and sank into a chair.

"Been overdoing the smoking?" asked Racke, eyeing him.

"Grooh! Yes."

"Tackling those cheroots you showed me this morning?" grinned Racke.

"More fool you! I told you you couldn't smoke 'em!"

"Grooh! Those rotters made me!"

"What?"

Crooke faltered out his tale of woe, Racke listening in amazement. He burst into a chuckle when Crooke had finished.

"Ha, ha, ha! You must be feeling primo!"

"I wish it had been you instead of me!" moaned Crooke. "Anyway, they've made me enter their dashed contest. I outlasted Mellish, and it counts as a point for the Shell."

Racke scowled.

"We won't recognise it! We won't allow it!"

"What do they care whether you recognise it or not?" sneered Crooke.

"They got you in against your will, making out that you were running a race when you were running away from Tower!"

"Now they've got me in! They'll manage the rest, too, in spite of you! You're no good!"

Racke's eyes glittered.

"Look here, we can make them sit up for this!" he exclaimed.

"I wish we could!" groaned Crooke. "I'm feeling awful! I wish I'd never bought those cheroots! I—I didn't know they were so strong!"

"They made you smoke," said Racke. "Smoking is against the rules. You can complain to the Housemaster."

"Fathead! They found me smoking. They'll tell Railton that if I complain about them. And Railton's just beast enough to approve of it, as a lesson to me!" mumbled Crooke.

"Come with me to Railton, and chance it!"

"Go and eat coke!" answered Crooke.

Aubrey Racke scowled, and left the study, leaving Crooke groaning in the armchair. Racke would have been glad enough to induce his comrade to lay a complaint; but Crooke was too careful to keep the knowledge of his habits from the Housemaster. As Racke came downstairs he found a number of fellows gathered about the notice-board in the Hall. A new notice was on it, announcing one more point to the Shell.

No names were mentioned. The Terrible Three were there, and smiling. Several fellows wanted to know how the new point had been gained.

"But who scored?" asked Kangaroo of the Shell.

"Crooke," answered Lowther.

"Great Scott! What did Crooke do?" exclaimed the Cornstalk, in astonishment.

"Out-smoked Mellish of the Fourth."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Racke gave the group of juniors a scowl, and hurried away to the Fifth-Form passage. Lefevre of the Fifth was the chairman of the committee of umpires, and Racke shrewdly guessed that the senior had not been told the nature of the contest. The cad of the Shell intended to enlighten him.

Lefevre was in his study reading, the other members of the study having left after Levison minor, the secretary, had made the necessary entry in the record. The Fifth-Former glanced round at Racke.

"You've had the sports committee here?" asked Racke.

Lefevre smiled. The big Fifth-Former took the proceedings of the juniors more or less humorously, though he was quite keen on the more serious contests between the Shell and Fourth, such as the athletic events.

"Oh, yes!" he said. "Your Form has scored again, Racke. Are you doing anything in the contest?"

"No fear!" said Racke disdainfully.

"You might do worse," said Lefevre, with a glance of strong disfavour at the weedy heir of the war-profits of Messrs. Racke and Huckle.

"You've entered a point for the Shell for the last event?" asked Racke.

"The sec. has."

"Did they tell you what the event was?"

"No. They agreed that it counted a point to the Shell," yawned Lefevre.

"You can ask them for details if you want to know, Racke. I'm reading."

"It was a smoking-match," said Racke.

The captain of the Fifth jumped.

"A what?" he shouted.

"Crooke and Mellish smoked cheroots to see who could hold out longest."

"That can't be true!" exclaimed Lefevre. "Tom Merry would not have a hand in shady things of that sort, or the fellows either. I don't believe you, Racke."

"Ask Merry!" sneered Racke.

were aware of the great spoof of which they were to be the victims.

"Well," said Jack Blake at last, "twenty-five points is a lot, but the Shell couldn't spoof us in a month of Sundays. I'm rather inclined to agree."

"Oh, let 'em rip!" said Figgins. "Fifty, if they like, as far as I'm concerned."

"Make it twenty-five," said Monty Lowther.

"Well, this is how I look at it," said Blake. "We agree willingly, but on condition, of course, that it works both ways. If we spoof the Shell, in a way they have to own up to, in the same space of time, it counts twenty-five points to the Fourth."

"Agreed!" said the Terrible Three at once.

"That's fair," remarked Wally. "Settled!" said Lefevre. "Make a written note of it, Levison minor. Can't be too careful."

"Right-ho!" answered Frank. Lefevre, with a nod to the juniors, left the study. The Terrible Three strolled out after him, and Wally and Frank left together. Blake and Redfern and Figgins were left alone in No. 6.

They smiled at one another. "Did you ever see such a set of innocent old birds?" murmured Jack Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!" "They're going to pull our leg this afternoon, or they think so, the howling asses!"

"Well, as a matter of fact, it might have worked out twenty-five points for the Shell if Fatty Wynn hadn't got on to the wheeze," remarked Redfern.

"But as the matter stands—"

"It's twenty-five for the Fourth, I reckon," chuckled Figgins.

"You bet!" The three Fourth-Formers left the study in high good-humour. They became very serious when they met the Terrible Three downstairs, however. "You chaps coming along to the nets?" asked Blake. "It's about time we got some cricket practice."

"Certainly," said Tom Merry. "I'll come." "Oh, then you're not spoofing this afternoon!" exclaimed Blake, as if that had been what he wanted to discover.

Tom laughed. "Ask no questions, my son," he replied. "Let's get along, and I'll make a mess of your stumps, if you like."

"In about ten years!" snorted Blake.

Tom Merry went down to Little Side with the Fourth-Formers. They passed a group of the Third, in which voices were raised in excitement.

"Hallo! What's the trouble in fag-dom?" asked Figgins, stopping.

D'Arcy minor gave a snort.

"Reggie's got his back up!" he exclaimed. "Reggie's back is a very special back, and has to be specially considered, or Reggie thinks so."

"Oh, don't be an ass!" retorted Manners minor. "I say you're taking too much on yourself, and I repeat it. We don't want any amateur tears in the Third."

"If you call me an amateur tsar, I'll give you a face like an amateur kaiser!" growled Wally.

"Oh, rats!"

"Hold on!" exclaimed Levison minor, as Wally made a stride towards Reggie. "No more scrapping, for goodness sake! Don't be such an ass, Reggie!"

"Ass yourself!" answered Reggie. "You're too cheeky, too, if you come to that."

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Joe Frayne.

"Well, I agree with Reggie for once," said Jameson. "What I think is—"

"Piffle!" remarked Wally. "You're only a New House worm, anyway!"



Only Kerr After All!
(See Chapter 11.)

"Why, you cheeky chump—"

"Bow-wow!"

The juniors walked on, leaving the fags in a state of high excitement. They were not surprised to hear a sound ofuffling a few minutes later. Apparently the position of Wally and Levison minor on the sports committee with a Fifth-Former, caused some heart-burning among their old friends. Manners minor was seen later mopping his nose, and Jameson retired to the fountain to bathe his eye, from which it appeared that Wally, as usual, had had the best of the argument.

CHAPTER 8.

Going Strong.

MONTY LOWTHER and Manners were busy while Tom Merry was on the cricket-ground with the Fourth-Formers. Tom was sagely keeping the Fourth from suspecting that anything special was on that afternoon, so he supposed. And certainly Blake & Co. would have had no suspicion had not Fatty Wynn learned the enemy's plans in advance. Lowther remained in Study No. 10 in the Shell with Manners, the latter helping him in his transformation scene. Most of the accessories were found in the property-box of the junior dramatic society, but Lowther had made some special purchases at Mr. Wigg's in Rylcombe. He was well provided with all he needed, it only remained to be seen whether he could play the part. On that point Lowther had plenty of confidence in himself.

His chums had some slight doubts, though Monty had succeeded in talking them round. They agreed that Kerr could have worked the oracle, and only coughed when Lowther demanded warmly whether he couldn't act quite as well as a Fourth-Former, and a New House bouncer at that.

However, Lowther was given his head, and Manners helped him loyally in

making up. Kangaroo of the Shell was keeping watch downstairs, to report when Mr. Lathom left the school. The Fourth-Form master was to be away the whole afternoon with Mr. Linton, and it was not safe for the new Mr. Lathom to appear on the scene till the genuine article was at a good distance from St. Jim's.

Most of the Shell fellows were in the secret now, but unreliable members, such as Racke & Co., were carefully excluded from the secret. Racke & Co. had engagements out of doors that afternoon, which was all the better.

Kangaroo tapped at the locked door of No. 10 at last.

"Open sesame!" he said through the keyhole.

Manners opened the door a foot or so, and the Cornstalk squeezed in, and the door was locked again at once.

"They're gone," said Noble. "I watched them trotting down the road to the station together. They're catching the two-thirty from Rylcombe."

"Lathom and Linton?"

"Yes, both the cheery old boys. They're clear off the scene," said Kangaroo. "My hat! You look rather a mixture. Lowther! I suppose it's you?"

Lowther grinned complacently. His appearance was already greatly altered.

He was dressed in clothes that bore a close resemblance to Mr. Lathom's ordinary grab. His face was made up to look over fifty, and it really was made up remarkably well.

"You look like old Lathom's twin already," said Kangaroo, staring at him. "Not quite fat enough, though."

"I haven't finished padding yet."

"Cut down to Lathom's quarters, Kangy, and pinch his cap and gown," said Manners. "I'm sure he won't mind us borrowing them. They'll be returned before he comes back, anyway."

"Good business!" said Kangaroo.

He left the study, and came back in a

few minutes with the Form-master's cap and gown in a bundle. He remained in the study to lend aid in making-up. It was quite a long task. Monty Lowther was an artist, and he did not leave anything to chance.

"My hat!" said Manners at last. "Blessed if I shouldn't take you for Lathom, Monty! It's turned out better than I thought."

"Better than I expected, too!" said Kangaroo frankly.

"What did I tell you, asses?" answered Lowther.

"What are the Fourth kids doing, Kangy?"

"Playing cricket," answered Kangaroo. "They're nearly all on Little Side. Tommy is with them—good wheeze! They don't suspect anything."

"Not even Kerr, and he's pretty keen!" grinned Manners.

"I didn't see Kerr there, or Wynn," said Kangaroo, reflecting. "All the better, really. When you're working off a spoof, it's just as well for that canny Scotsman to be off the scene."

"Just as well!" agreed Manners.

"Kerr wouldn't spot me!" said Lowther loftily.

"Well, I hope he'll keep off the scene, all the same."

"I think I'm about finished," said Lowther, with a last look at the glass.

"What do you fellows think?"

"It's ripping!" said Manners. "I never thought you could do it. You're a trifle tall for Lathom, but that's the only thing."

"I shall stoop a bit. That will be all right!"

"It's a corker!" said Kangaroo heartily.

And certainly that praise was deserved. Lowther was not such a past-master as George Francis Kerr in that peculiar line; but undoubtedly he was very clever and very skilful. In clothes like Mr. Lathom's—in the master's cap and gown, and with spectacles to match the Form-master's—he was the living image of Mr. Lathom. And in minor details, too, he had done his work well; almost every line on Mr. Lathom's face seemed to be reproduced on Lowther's.

Indeed, Manners and Kangaroo would certainly have taken him for Mr. Lathom, if they had not been watching the process of transformation.

Lowther grinned into the glass.

"I fancy I shall pass!" he said.

"What about the voice, though?" asked Kangaroo doubtfully. "Your voice isn't much like old Lathom's tiny squeak."

"Any chap could imitate that squeak," answered Lowther. "I could do it on my head. My dear boys," continued Lowther, adopting Mr. Lathom's somewhat squeaky voice, "pray, do not indulge in this—er—exceedingly rough horse-play on the stairs. I—er—object strongly to the staircase being turned into a bear-garden! Ahem!"

"Bravo!" chorled Kangaroo. "It's Lathom to a T!"

"Ripping!" said Manners.

"Seeing that the coast's clear before I get out of the study," said Lowther. "Mr. Lathom mustn't be seen coming out of No. 10 Shell."

"Ha, ha! No!"

Manners escorted in the passage. It was quite deserted. Everybody was out of doors at that fine afternoon. Monty Lowther, adopting Mr. Lathom's slow and rather jerky walk, left the study and proceeded to the staircase. Manners and Kangaroo giving him a wide berth now. The sharp Form-master was fairly lunched, so to speak.

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Lowther, with all his confidence in himself, felt an inward tremor as Contarini of the Fourth came upstairs. The Italian junior glanced at him, and Lowther drew a quick breath.

"Contarini!" he rapped out, in Mr. Lathom's tones.

"Yes, sir!" said Contarini.

He stared at Mr. Lathom, but not with suspicion. He was only surprised to see him indoors after he had heard that the Form-master was going away for the afternoon with the master of the Shell.

"I—er—Have you seen Blake, Contarini?"

"He's on the cricket-ground, sir!"

"Kindly tell him to come to my study at once."

"Certainly, sir!"

Contarini went downstairs again. Monty Lowther's eyes glistened over his spectacles. His disguise had passed muster. Contarini did his lessons every day with Mr. Lathom, and he had seen nothing suspicious.

With a feeling of great elation, Lowther descended to Mr. Lathom's study. In Mr. Lathom's own quarters suspicion was less likely than ever to be roused. It needed some nerve certainly to take possession of a Form-master's study for the purpose of carrying out a jape; but the humorist of the Shell had plenty of nerve—possibly too much!

Monty Lowther calmly walked into Mr. Lathom's study, and ensconced himself in Mr. Lathom's armchair, with his back to the light. Good as his make-up was, he was not taking more chances than he could help. He sat there in state, waiting for Jack Blake of the Fourth to arrive. That was to be the final test; and if Blake was taken in the jape was going ahead, with the handsome result of twenty-five points for the Shell in the Form contest!

CHAPTER 9.

A Sudden Surprise.

"BLAKE!"

"Hallo!" said Jack Blake. He was in the nets when Contarini called to him. He looked round inquiringly.

"Mr. Lathom wants you in his study," called out Contarini.

"Oh, don't be funny!" answered Blake. "Lathom's gone out for the afternoon. I saw him start with Linton."

"He must, then, have returned. He told me to tell you."

Blake gave a grunt.

"What does he want me for?"

"I don't know."

"Oh, rats!"

Blake handed his bat to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"I sha'n't be more than a minute or two, you fellows!" he said.

And he left the cricket-field. Tom Merry's eyes twinkled. Several Shell fellows grinned, and exchanged glances.

Some of the Fourth were smiling, too. The secret was known to Study No. 6, to Figgins & Co., Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence, and to Julian and Roylance. It had been considered judicious not to let it go any further at present. An incautious word would have spoiled everything.

Jack Blake repaired at once to Mr. Lathom's study. As he entered it he gave a start. Unless it was Mr. Lathom himself sitting in the armchair it was his double. Blake looked at him hard. Was it possible, after all, that Mr. Lathom had lost his train and returned to the school?

"You sent for me, sir?" said Blake respectfully.

He felt that he had to be wary.

"Yes, Blake!" The junior started again as he heard the well-known squeaky tones of his Form-master. "You have been a long time coming."

"I was on the cricket-ground, sir."

"Very well! Blake, I am sorry to say that I have been greatly shocked and pained by your conduct and that of your Form-fellows!"

"Oh, sir!"

"Youthful high spirits, Blake, I can quite understand and allow for, but anything in the nature of horseplay I disapprove of strongly. I am sorry to say that I have observed this kind of thing very much on the increase in my Form."

"Oh, sir!" murmured Blake.

"There seem to be endless disputes with the Shell," continued the master severely. "There have been disturbances in the passages. I have heard of a boy's head being held under a tap!"

"Ahem!"

"I have decided, Blake, to impress upon my Form that an end must be put to such unruliness. The Fourth Form will be detained in the Form-room this afternoon. Kindly inform the whole Form, Blake, that I expect them in the Form-room, and any boy who is not there in ten minutes will be caned!" said Mr. Lathom sternly.

"I—I say, sir—"

"That is enough! Go!"

Jack Blake left the study. He was perplexed.

Quite certain as he was that the spectacled gentleman in the study was Monty Lowther, got up for the occasion, he felt uneasy, so excellent was that get-up.

He returned to the cricket-ground in a dubious state of mind.

"Hallo, what's the trouble?" asked Figgins.

"Fourth Form detained for the afternoon," answered Blake gloomily.

"Every chap's got to get in or be caned. Get a move on!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"What a rotten shame!"

"Rotten!"

"Lathom off his merry old rocker?" exclaimed Cardew.

"Bless his cheek!" said Levison warmly.

"Can't be helped," said Blake.

"Better get a move on!"

"Yaas, wathah!" smiled Arthur Augustus. "Bettah get a move on, dear boys! Sowwy to have to leave you, Tom Mewwy!"

"Not at all!" said Tom, smiling too.

"Form-masters have to be humoured in their little way."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But I thought Lathom had gone out!" exclaimed Sidney Clive.

"Seems to have come in."

The Fourth-Formers, many of them with glum and angry faces, started for the School House. They grumbled as they went—the fellows in the secret grumbling the loudest. Jack Blake ran down to the gates, where Lawrence was leaning against the stone pillar with his hands in his pockets.

"Get into the Form-room," said Blake. "Lathom's orders."

Lawrence winked.

"I say, you've been here all the time?"

"You bet!"

"Sure Lathom hasn't come in?"

"What do you think?" answered Lawrence. "Wasn't I put on the watch to make sure?"

"And he hasn't come back?"

"No."

Blake breathed with relief.

"That settles it!" he said. "Come on! Keep your face straight!"

CHAPTER 10.

Two of Them.

MR. LATHOM!

"Am I dreamin'?" murmured Cardew, in utter amazement.

"Bai Jove!"

"Oh, crumbs! What—what—?"

The Fourth Form fairly gasped. Their glances wandered from the master standing at the desk to the master standing in the doorway.

They were the image of one another. But on careful survey it could be observed that the master at the desk was a little taller than the other master, a little taller, in fact, than the genuine Mr. Lathom.

The two masters stared at one another blankly. The Fourth Form stared at them alternately, most of the fellows wondering whether it was a dream.

"What does this mean?" It was the new-comer who spoke, in Mr. Lathom's squeaky voice, very sharp and angry now. "What does it mean, I say? Who are you, sir?"

"Oh!" gasped the unfortunate Lowther.

He stood helpless.

Of all the unfortunate occurrences that could have happened to spoil that great spoof, this was the most unexpected. Mr. Lathom had been watched going to the station; even if he had lost his train, he should have returned before this. Yet here he was.

Monty Lowther stood rooted to the floor. Behind Mr. Lathom, in the passage, he caught sight of the dismayed faces of Tom Merry and Manners. They had spotted Mr. Lathom entering the School House. The sight of him had been like an electric shock to the unhappy plotters. And just as if he knew there was something on, Mr. Lathom had gone directly to the Fourth Form room, so there was no time to cut ahead and warn their chum.

"Who are you, sir?" thundered the new-comer. "Can I believe my eyes? Blake!"

"Yes, sir!" gasped Blake.

"What are you doing here in class on a half-holiday?"

"We—were told, sir—2—"

"By whom?"

"Mr. Lathom, sir—I—I mean, that gentleman, sir."

"Is it possible," thundered Mr. Lathom, "that this man has palmed himself off on my Form as myself? Sir, speak! Who are you?"

"Yow-ow!" gasped Monty Lowther.

"Oh, dear! Ow!"

The unhappy humorist of the Shell would have given a term's pocket-money for the floor to open and swallow him up.

The jape was a great one—a regular corker, in fact; but how was that to be explained to a testy Form-master? The twenty-five points for the Shell vanished into thin air, and a flogging loomed ahead.

"Sir, you are a vile impostor!" exclaimed Mr. Lathom, pointing an accusing forefinger at his miserable double. "You have dared to call yourself by my name! It is astounding—incredible! Blake, do you mean to say that you took this ill-dressed, stupid-looking man for me? There is not the remotest resemblance!"

"He—he's just like you, sir!" gasped Pratt.

"Nonsense, Pratt!"

"We—we took him for you, bedad, sir!" stuttered Mulvaney minor.

"Nonsense! Once more," said Mr. Lathom, turning to the unhappy spoofers. "Will you explain who you are, and what you are doing here, before I send for the police?"

"Oh!" stuttered Lowther.

"In fact, I will send for the police in any case," said Mr. Lathom. "My boys, see that that man does not escape, while I go and telephone to the police-station. Such an imposture as this could only have been carried out with some criminal intention."

"Hold on, sir!" yelled Lowther, as the Form-master made a movement to go. "It—it was only a joke, sir."

Mr. Lathom spun back.

"What! I know that voice! That is a boy's voice!"

"Lowther!" gasped Cardew.

"Monty Lowther!" shrieked Pratt.

"Lowther! Is it possible? Is this some fresh example of your absurd play-acting, Lowther?" thundered the Form-master.

Monty Lowther groaned.

"Oh, only a joke, sir—j-j-just a joke on the Fourth!" he stuttered. "I—I thought you were out for the afternoon, sir."

"And thinking I was out, you have borrowed my gown, and made up your face into an absurd caricature of mine!" exclaimed the Form-master.

"Ow!"

"Take that gown off at once!"

Monty Lowther obeyed meekly. The Fourth were staring at him blankly. To those not in the secret, it came as a staggering surprise.

"Now take off those glasses, Lowther!"

The spectacles came off, and were laid on the desk. There was a buzz from the juniors. Even now Monty Lowther was scarcely recognisable; but it could be seen that he was a boy, not a man.

"Is that paint on your face, Lowther?"

"It—it's make-up, sir."

"Wipe it off!"

Monty Lowther dismally wiped at his face with his handkerchief. He could not possibly wipe off the make-up like that; but he succeeded in wiping it into a blotched mass, which gave him a queer mottled look. He did not look like a middle-aged man now, but like Monty Lowther, with an exceedingly dirty face.

"By gad!" murmured Cardew.

"What a spoof! What cruel luck for old Lathom to hop in just then!"

"Wasn't it?" grinned Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!" chuckled Arthur Augustus.

"Silence in the class!" snapped Mr. Lathom.

"Oh!"

"Lowther!"

"Ye-es, sir?"

"You were not, I presume, alone in planning this outrageous and disrespectful practical joke?"

"It—it was not meant to be disrespectful, sir."

"Answer my question, Lowther! Were you alone in this, or had you any confederates—I might say, accomplices?"

Monty Lowther was silent. But Tom Merry and Manners came in from the passage. The little Form-master blinked at them over his spectacles.

"We were in it, sir," said Tom Merry quietly.

"Only a joke, sir!" murmured Manners.

"Ha! I thought as much! I am convinced, however, that others were also parties to this. Do you deny that such is the case, Merry?"

"Ahem!"

"You need not reply. I presume, Merry, that this childish performance was a part of the contest, as you term it, between the Shell and the Fourth Form?"

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry, wondering a little at Mr. Lathom guessing that.

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"Ha, ha! All right!"

They hurried to the School House after the rest. In the Fourth Form room nearly the whole Form had gathered. The members who had been out of gates when the summons was issued were still absent; but they were few.

Most had been on the cricket-ground. Fatty Wynn came in last.

There was a buzz of angry voices in the Form-room.

"What does this thumping rot mean?" exclaimed Pratt hotly. "I think old Lathom must be off his chump!"

"Detained for the afternoon, by gad!" said Cardew. "Why?"

"Nobody seems to know," growled Kerruish.

"Shush! Here he comes!"

There was a hush as the Form-master rustled into the room.

All eyes were upon Mr. Lathom.

He blinked at the assembled Form over his glasses.

"All are not present!" he rapped out. "Blake!"

"Yes, sir."

"Where are Chowle, Mellish, Trimble, Kerr, Robinson minor, and Lorne?"

"I—I don't know, sir. I suppose they were out of gates."

"I told you to send in all the Fourth, Blake!"

"Ye-es, sir. But—"

"You will take a hundred lines, Blake!"

"Oh! Yes, sir!"

"I am very dissatisfied with this Form," continued the master. "This Form is not a credit to the school."

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"D'Arcy!" rapped out the master.

"Oh, yaas, sir!"

"What is that in your eye?"

"M-m-my monocle, sir."

"Remove it at once!"

"Bai Jove!"

"There is no reason, D'Arcy, why you should attempt to make yourself look more absurd than you appear naturally!" snapped the master.

"Oh, cwumbs!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy allowed his celebrated monocle to drop to the end of its cord. He was beginning to wonder whether this really was Mr. Lathom after all.

"Now," said Mr. Lathom, "you will take out your Latin grammars, and I shall set you a task. The afternoon shall be improved. Figgins!"

"Ye-es, sir!"

"You were laughing."

"W-w-was I, sir?" stammered George Figgins.

"You were! Stand in the corner, Figgins!"

"Oh!"

George Figgins marched into the corner indicated by Mr. Lathom's outstretched finger. His face was rather red. Some of the Fourth were grinning at the sight of the great Figgins standing in the corner like a naughty infant.

"What?" thundered the master. "You are laughing—you, Wynn; you, Redfern; you, Blake; you, Kerruish! Stand out here! I shall see whether I cannot reduce this Form to a proper state of seriousness."

He took up the cane from the desk.

Jack Blake drew a deep breath. Just as the master took up the cane there was a step without. The Form-room door opened.

The master, cane in hand, looked round to the door. The cane dropped from his hand to the floor, and he stood petrified. The juniors stared blankly. For the figure that stood in the open doorway was Mr. Lathom!

Mr. Lathom had looked on the Form contest hitherto with a benevolent eye, but had not taken any special note of it. "I thought so. I hold the whole Shell Form responsible!"

"Most of the fellows did not know, sir," said Tom.

"They can answer for themselves, Merry. Kindly summon the whole of the Shell, who are now within gates, into this Form-room."

Tom Merry hesitated. "It is true that I am not your Form-master, Merry. If you prefer to have this matter dealt with by the Head, you may say so!"

"Oh, no, sir!" gasped Tom. Merry hurriedly. He hardly dared to think what might be the result if the Head was brought into the matter.

"Then do as I tell you, at once, Merry!"

"Very well, sir."

The captain of the Shell left the Form-room. Monty Lowther and Manners looked at one another eloquently. They were in the deepest depths of dismay. Their only comfort was that Mr. Lathom apparently intended to keep the Head out of the affair. Fortunately their own Form-master was away. And though Mr. Lathom seemed very rattly, he was generally a mild man, and not likely to be quite so severe as either the Head or Mr. Linton.

There was silence in the Form-room while Tom Merry was gone. Diggs asked Mr. Lathom if they might go, and received a snappy answer in the negative. Then there was silence till many footsteps were heard without.

With Tom Merry at their head, the Shell fellows came in—Talbot, Gore, Kangaroo, Noble, Dane, Thompson, Glya, Jinson, Grundy, Wilkins, Gunn, Gibbons, and a crowd more. Only those who had luckily been out of gates escaped the summons.

Some of the Shell fellows looked angry, and some dismayed and apprehensive. All the parties to Monty Lowther's great spoof were among the apprehensive ones. But they could hardly help grinning as they looked at Lowther, with his blotched face and dismal expression. Never had a humorist looked so lacking in humour as Montague Lowther at that moment.

"What the thump is this silly game?" growled George Alfred Grundy, very audibly.

"Grundy! Silence!" snapped the Form-master.

Grundy suppressed a snort. The Shell fellows stood in line, waiting for Mr. Lathom to speak. He blinked at them over his spectacles.

"Disgraceful!" he snapped. "Any of you who assure me that you have nothing to do with this disrespectful practical joke may stand out."

None moved. The Shell fellows knew now what the trouble was. Tom Merry had explained to those who were not already in the secret. But they were all game. Even Grundy only grunted, keeping his opinion to be forcibly stated to the Terrible Three later. Racke & Co. would not have hesitated to stand out—but they were not present. Even Skimpole only gave Mr. Lathom a solemn blink, and stood where he was.

"Then I must conclude that you were all concerned in it?" said Mr. Lathom sharply.

Silence!

"I understand that in this—this Form contest, the umpires are Lefevre of the Fifth and two Third-Formers," said Mr. Lathom.

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry, again wondering at finding the Fourth Form-master so well informed on the subject.

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"Very well! Call them here, Merry!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"Under the circumstances, I require them to see you dealt with. Tell D'Arcy minor and Levison minor to come here, and request Lefevre to do so."

"Oh! Very well, sir."

Tom left the Form-room again. The Shell fellows shifted uneasily from one leg to another, and looked at one another. The matter was taking a turn that they liked less than ever. The Fourth looked serious, too—though there were some smiling faces.

Tom Merry came back with Wally and Frank Levison, both of whom looked startled. Lefevre of the Fifth followed them in.

"Ah! Thank you for coming, Lefevre," said Mr. Lathom. "You are, I understand, head of the judging committee, or something of the kind, in a contest between these two junior Forms."

"Yes, sir," said the Fifth Former.

"Very well. The boys of the Shell have planned a most unheard-of practical joke, nothing less than Lowther making himself up in a ridiculous manner, and passing himself off as a Form-master."

"Oh, my hat!" said Lefevre.

"Silly chump!" murmured Wally.

"Ass!" said Frank Levison, sotto voce.

Monty Lowther heard those remarks, but he gave no sign. Like Cæsar of old, he was fallen low, and none so poor to do him reverence!

"I desire you to be a witness to my dealing with these boys, Lefevre," said Mr. Lathom. Kindly remain."

"Just as you like, sir," said Lefevre.

"Merry!"

"Yes, sir?"

"I leave you the choice whether you are caned by me or taken before Dr. Holmes. You may all speak."

Tom Merry glanced at his followers. There was the same desire in every face. It was better to bear the ills they had than to fly to others that they knew not of.

"If—if you please, sir, we—we'd rather you dealt with the matter," murmured Tom Merry meekly.

"Very good! Fetch me a cane from the desk."

There was a buzz of deep-drawn breath as Tom Merry fetched the cane and handed it to Mr. Lathom. Some of the Shell fellows rubbed their hands softly.

CHAPTER 11.

Only Kerr!

"YOU first, Merry!" said Mr. Lathom grimly.

Tom Merry advanced, and held out his hand.

Swish!

It was a smart cut, but it did not hurt much. Angry as Mr. Lathom seemed, he was apparently as mild as his old self when it came to punishment. Tom Merry had been expecting at least two severe cuts; and he was surprised and relieved at being dismissed with one that did not hurt.

"Lowther!"

Swish!

"Manners!"

Swish!

So it went on; but before Mr. Lathom had worked his way through the Shell, the fellows were grinning. The punishment was only a matter of form to those hardy youths. Even Skimpole did not mind much. Grundy even gave a contemptuous sniff, as if he felt that it was an indignity to be caned as gently as a Second-Form fag.

The march past was over at last,

Lefevre and Wally and Frank and the Fourth Form looking on in silence.

"M-m-may we go now, sir?" mumbled Monty Lowther.

"Certainly not! I have not finished with you yet!"

"Oh!"

"The old bird's fairly on the war-path!" murmured Manners.

"Lefevre!"

"Yes, sir?" said the Fifth-Former, who was wondering why he was there at all. He could not refuse the Form-master's request; but he did not see what it all had to do with him.

"I understand that if this absurd practical joke had been a success, the Shell would have scored twenty-five points in the Form contest?"

"Quite so, sir!" answered the senior. "That was the agreement, though I was not aware of the nature of this event."

Tom Merry simply blinked at the Form-master. Mr. Lathom's knowledge of the affairs of the junior Forms was really remarkable.

As the matter stands, Lefevre, the Shell will not score those points?"

"Oh, no!" said Lefevre, with a smile. "The spoof hasn't come off, owing to your return, sir, I suppose. I don't think the juniors meant any harm, sir. It was only a practical joke."

"Yaas, wathah!" murmured Arthur Augustus, closing one eye at Blake.

"On the other hand," said Mr. Lathom, "I understand that, in the event of the Fourth Form succeeding in spoofing, as they appear to call it, the rival Form, the twenty-five points would count in favour of the Fourth."

"That's the arrangement, sir."

"How the thunder does he know all that?" muttered Tom Merry helplessly. "Is old Latham a blessed magician?"

"Under the circumstances," said Mr. Lathom, "I congratulate the Fourth Form!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"I fancy that the Fourth have spoofed the Shell pretty thoroughly, so you can put down the points to the Fourth, cocky!"

Lefevre almost fell down.

The Shell fellows stuttered with amazement.

For a Form-master of St. Jim's to address a fellow as "cocky" was so utterly unheard of that they could only suppose that Mr. Lathom had become suddenly insane.

"Wha-a-at?" gasped Lefevre. "I—I beg your pardon, sir! Wha-a-at did you say?"

"I said the Fourth Form score points, fathead!"

"Eh?"

Lefevre leaned helplessly against a desk. He was overcome. He blinked at Mr. Lathom with his mouth open, like a newly-landed fish.

His eyes almost bulged from his head as Mr. Lathom put up his hand to his wig, and calmly detached it. His spectacles followed.

A pin might have been heard to drop in the Fourth Form-room.

All eyes were upon Mr. Lathom, the juniors gazing at the amazing phenomenon, as if fascinated. If he had taken off an arm or a leg, it could scarcely have astounded them more.

"Rather a complete spoof, I take it!" remarked Mr. Lathom. But his voice was no longer the voice of Mr. Lathom—it was the voice of George Francis Kerr of the Fourth Form. "Tommy, old chap, you look as if you were going to faint! Lowther, what's the matter with you?"

"Kerr!" shrieked Lowther.

There was a roar from Figgins:

"Ha, ha, ha! Spoofed!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Fatty Wynn. "What price the Fourth now?" "Kerr!" said Tom Merry dazedly. "Kerr! You-you spoofing beast!" "Mr. Lathom!" chorled.

"Have I surprised you, dear boys?" he said. "Wathah a surprise, I considah!" chuckled Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Ha, ha!" You will have to get up vewy early in the mornin' to pull the leg of the Fourth, Tom Mewwy."

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Then—then you rotters knew it was Kerr all the time!" yelled Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Yaas, wathah!" "Most of us knew," sobbed Blake. "Tommy, my son, your face was worth a guinea a box just now! See if you can do it again!"

The Shell fellows stared at Kerr. He was recognisable now. Monty Lowther gave him the glare of an infuriated basisk.

"You—you—you!" stuttered Lowther. Words failed him.

"Bai Jove! I wathah think we score those twenty-five points for the Fourth!" "It was my chorled Arthur Augustus. "It was my ideah, deah boys; and I must say that Kerr has cawied it out as well as I could have done, or vewy neahly!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Oh, my hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "You—you spoofing rotters!" Then you knew the game all the time?"

"All the time!" chuckled Blake. "All the time, dear boy. And when you were so solemn with the committee we knew what you were up to, and we let our claim twenty-five points if you spoofed the Fourth, and we claimed twenty-five if we spoofed the Shell!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Well, my only sainted aunt!" ejaculated Lefevre, finding his voice at last.

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## \* CADET NOTES. \*

IT would be of considerable assistance to the Central Association of Volunteer Regiments by endeavouring to make arrangements for readers of the "Gem" who desire to join Cadet Corps, if those who apply for information and advice would state their age in the letters. In some cases boys have applied who are too young to join Cadet Corps, while in other cases the applicants are above the military age, and unless exempted, will be called to the Army in so short a time that it would be scarcely worth their while joining a Cadet Corps at such a late moment. Perhaps readers will bear this in mind, and when communicating with the Central Association of Volunteer Regiments, send Judges' Orders, Royal Courts of Justice, Strand, London, W.C. 2, make a note to include a statement of their age in the application.

Speaking generally, it may be said that Cadet Corps restrict their membership to lads over thirteen. Boys under that age would be more suitable for membership of the Boy Scouts, which will take them in from ten years of age or thereabouts. Lads over seventeen years of age are eligible for the Section "C" of the Volunteer Force, and so could join that organisation. This way it will be seen that a kind of ladder exists for lads, beginning at nine or eleven in the Boy Scouts, going on to the Cadets at fourteen or fifteen, and the Volunteers after they reach the age of seventeen years. Of course, the lines of division are not fixed so definitely as this, and there is a certain amount of overlapping. But in principle this is the general idea to which the various movements work.

So many inquiries are received from readers about the Flying Corps that we may perhaps repeat that recruiting for the Boy Sections of the Air Service has been temporarily suspended. We have referred before

"You cheeky young villain, Kerr! You took me in!"

"Sorry, old top!" said Kerr, laughing. "I had to. The picture wouldn't have been complete without the merry referee present. Besides, I want you to put down twenty-five points for my Form!"

"Yaas, wathah!" "Then—then where's Mr. Lathom?" exclaimed Lefevre.

"Fifty miles away by this time!" roared Figgins. "He never came back at all!"

Monty Lowther looked at his chums. Tom Merry and Manners grinned feebly. The spoof had come off, but it was not the Fourth who had been the victims. And when they thought of the way "Mr. Lathom" had ordered them about, and caned them, the Shell fellows felt like kicking themselves.

The Fourth were in a roar. But the Shell looked quite sickly. They could not quite see the humour of the situation yet.

"Enter up the points, Mr. Secretary," grinned Kerr. "I've got to get all this off before Mr. Lathom comes home."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And the next time you plan a terrific spoof on the Fourth," added Kerr, "make sure that Fatty Wynn isn't behind the screen in your study!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh!" gasped Tom Merry. He understood at last.

Lefevre grinned. "I suppose the Shell admits the claim of the Fourth to the points?" he inquired.

"Ye-c-es," mumbled Tom Merry, "I—I suppose so."

"It's a clear case," said Talbot, laughing. "We'll get nearly level on the cricket-match, though!"

"Not in your lifetime!" said Redfern.

"Clear case!" said Wally. "I'm sur-

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* CADET NOTES. *

to the fact that the 7th Battalion of the London Regiment Cadet Corps has started a special Air Service Section, and we learn that the Liverpool Cadet Corps has now started a similar section for the instruction of youths who intend, on attaining military age, to join the Air Service. They will be taught all about engines and aeroplanes, and it is hoped to obtain the use of an aeroplane for flight practice eventually. This ought to prove a strong inducement, we should think, to Liverpool boys to join up.

Many other inquirers who write to us desire to embark upon training, with a view to taking up a commission in the Army when they reach military age. Several of the London Cadet Corps act as feeders in this way to the O.T.C., and applicants can be referred to them when they appear to be suitable. Such lads should not be less than sixteen years of age, and in good physical health, and should possess educational qualifications equal to the standard of the London Matriculation Examination. The Scottish Engineer Cadet Corps, which has its headquarters in Islington, has started a series of classes on Wednesday and Thursday evenings for lads who are desirous of going in for commissions. Further particulars would be sent in reply to enquiries.

A big recruiting effort, recently made in Bradford by the West Riding Volunteers in that city to organise and equip a new Cadet Battalion, proved to be very successful. The battalion will consist of youths between the ages of fifteen and seventeen years, and one of the advantages held forth on joining it is that on attaining military age a youth will be able to get a commission more easily if he has been trained among Cadets than if he is new to the business. It is anticipated that as a result of the efforts made the number of lads required will be enrolled, and a considerable amount of money subscribed

prised at you, Tommy. They wouldn't have fooled the Third like that!"

"No fear!" grinned Frank Levison. "Points for the Fourth, and that takes the Fourth well ahead. The Shell will have to look out."

"Poor old Shell!" grinned Blake. "Aren't you sorry we didn't make it fifty points, Tommy?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry did not answer. The Shell fellows marched out, feeling quite sickly. The Terrible Three went to their study to escape the criticisms, but Grundy followed them there, and stood in the doorway, stating his opinion of them at great length, and in a voice that could be heard at the end of the passage. And he did not cease till the Terrible Three rose in their wrath and smote him hip and thigh, and hurled him into his own study in a breathless heap.

Then they locked their door against further intruders. And then Tom Merry and Manners expressed their opinion to their too-humorous study-mate.

"Ass!" said Manners.

"Fathead!" said Tom Merry.

And Lowther only said:

"Oh, crumbs! What a sell!"

But in the Fourth Form that afternoon there was great rejoicing. The Fourth-Formers fairly executed a waltz of triumph round Kerr. The Fourth were going great guns in the Form contest; and Blake and Figgins, who did not always agree, agreed heartily that the unhappy Shell would have to hide its diminished head. But the last word had not yet been spoken.

THE END.

(Don't miss next Wednesday's Great Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's—"THE SHELL SCORES!" by Martin Clifford.)

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## \* CADET NOTES. \*

towards the £3,000 required for the equipment of the battalion. Any of our readers in Bradford should note this, and support the effort now being made in that city.

The Exeter Cadet Battalion, which is attached to the Devonshire Regiment, recently held a concert in the Victoria Hall. Special interest was attached to the gathering by the fact that the newly-formed brass and reed band of the battalion made its first public appearance, and Captain Plummer presented the new instruments, of which he was the generous donor.

The First Annual Prize Distribution to the Conington Cadet Corps took place recently. In the presence of a large gathering the corps paraded at the Hall under the command of Captain Solly, and their smart appearance was highly commended by those present, including the Mayor and Mayoress and other well-known citizens. Prizes were given for special service, rifle-shooting, and drill attendance, and at the conclusion of the distribution the visitors and the corps were entertained to tea by Captain Solly. A most successful evening was spent, and it is hoped that one result of it will be to increase the strength of the corps.

Major-General McEneaney, C.B., M.V.O., inspected the St. George's College Cadets in the College grounds at Guildford recently. On arrival he was received with a general salute, and the Cadets afterwards marched past, and performed various exercises and drills. The general, addressing the cadets, gave them some useful and practical hints in regard to their training, and expressed his satisfaction at the admirable state of efficiency to which the corps had been brought by its officers, and through the interest taken in it by the lads themselves.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 533.

# THE TWINS FROM TASMANIA.

FOR NEW READERS.

The twins are Philip Derwent, of Highcliffe, and his sister Philippa, of Cliff House. They have a cockatoo, named Cocky, which has been until recently with Flip (Philip) at Highcliffe, but is now at Cliff House. Flip has made an enemy of Gadsby, who is plotting against him in a fight with Ponsonby. His best chums, Merton and Tunstall, are away from the school for a time, owing to a serious accident to one of Merion's eyes at the outset, thanks to gambling. He goes with the nuts to a gambling den at Courtfield, quarrels with Pon, and is knocked senseless just as the warning "Police!" is heard. Flip comes, as returning to Highcliffe means certain expulsion. Then he meets Peter Hazeldene, who has run away from Greyfriars. He goes to Highcliffe in the night, and sees the Caterpillar. He and Hazel sleep under a haystack, and, after buying caps—the school caps being unsafe—get breakfast at an eating-house. Goggs, of Frankingham, comes to Highcliffe.

## Goggs takes stock.

"M" Y name," said Smithson solemnly, "is Nebuchadnezzar Jehoram Willis."

"Quite Scriptural!" said Goggs brightly. "I can remember it by that."

"And mine," said Yates, "is Benjamin Boanerges Blinkhooley."

"Alliterative, with a touch of the Scriptural. Yes, I think I can also impress that upon the tablets of my memory."

"And mine," said Benson, "is Johnny Walker."

"Dear me! Another Johnny! How very pleasant! We ought to great chum! I do not know in the least why, Walker, but your name has a suggestion of something not quite—or teetotal to me."

"Well, I'm a teetotaler all serene!" shouted Benson in his ear. "We're all teetotalers here, I suppose, except Pon and his crew once in a while."

"And they? But do not tell me, I beg! Dear me, dear me! My grandmother—"

"Isn't she a teetotaler?" inquired Smithson.

"Oh, yes! Oh, quite so, I assure you, Nebuchadnezzar! Let me see. The extremely mud-nosed boy with the nice brown eyes is Nebuchadnezzar Jehoram Willis."

"Here, I say!" protested Smithson, hardly fancying the description.

"And the youth with the rather large nose and the pink-and-white cheeks," went on Goggs, unheeding him, "is Benjamin Boanerges Blinkhooley. That is correct, I think."

"It's jolly well not!" howled Yates. "No one ever said before that my nose is too big, and if I ain't pasty-faced, I suppose that's not anything against me, is it?"

"Not at all—not in the very least," replied Goggs. "Pardon me if I have in any way hurt your feelings. My silly mistake; I'm always making them. And you are—"

"Johnny Walker? I will shake hands with you first, as you are my namesake."

"He don't mean any harm," whispered Smithson to Yates. "He's only too soft to live. Never left his granny till now, I should fancy."

Goggs shook hands with them in turn. He was as solemn as if in church. But there was something about the grip of his hand that hardly seemed to fit in with his extreme softness. It was a manly grip. All three felt that.

Just then Ponsonby, Gadsby, and Vavasour lounged up.

"Oh, by gad!" yawned Pon. "What's blown in now?"

Gadsby stood as if rooted to the ground. He could hardly believe his eyes.

From behind the big, blue spectacles the bright blue eyes of Johnny Goggs took very careful stock of Gadsby. But there was nothing but foolish simplicity in the face of Goggs.

"It is—no, by gad, it can't be!" muttered Gadsby.

"How do you do, Gadsby?" said Goggs demurely. "There is no need for us to shake hands, I think, as we are not upon at all friendly terms. But we need not quarrel. We can pass each other by as strangers in future. At this first meeting, however, I feel it incumbent upon me to address you in terms of civility."

"Dash it all, Gaddy, you surely never quarrelled with that, did you?" said Cecil Ponsonby, with high scorn. "I'd as soon think of havin' a row with a dashed worn. by gad! Why, if it's human, it's only just human!"

"I know the chap," replied Gadsby

sullenly. "You can't help knowin' chaps when you're chucked into a house-party with them, by gad! He ain't half the fool he looks. But I've no use for him, and I don't see what he wants hangin' round here for. Unless it's to see Derwent, an' he'll hardly do that."

And Reginald Gadsby grinned maliciously. Smithson spoke, and there was a note of something like triumph in Smithson's voice.

"He's not hanging round. He's a new-boy, Gadsby. But you needn't worry. He says he bars you."

"Does he know Derwent?" asked Pon sharply.

"Yes," answered Gadsby. "But I don't know much about him—no use askin' me. Come along, you fellows!"

"If he's a new chap—" began Vavasour.

"Can't be, for he's Frankingham. He's been pullin' these boudiers' silly legs, that's all. Come along, Pon!"

"Wait a tick. This is interestin'. Bit of a mystery about you and this codfish-faced son of a sea-cook, I suspect, Gaddy!"

"That's like him. He knows Gadsby, and don't like him. That sounds as if he knows Gadsby pretty well."

"I don't know about Derwent; but I know I shouldn't think any the worse of him if he turned out to be a chum of Derwent's. I'm not the only fellow who thinks Derwent didn't get fair play from you and your gang, Ponsonby, and that if he's had to bolt it's only because you've managed to fasten some of your dirty tricks on his shoulders!"

Which was very straight speaking from Yates, whom Pon had always despised as a mere nonentity. But Smithson & Co. were not the nobodies at Highcliffe that they had been before the days of Frank Courtenay's coming. They did not fear to stand up to Pon & Co. now, and there was among them a strong feeling of sympathy with Flip.

"Well, by gad, you've a nerve, Yates!" said Pon furiously. "But what's the odds to us that crawlin' outsiders like you think?"

"That's the tone, Pon, absolutely! We despise them," said the high-minded Vavasour.

"I see no reason why you should despise Nebuchadnezzar and Benjamin and Johnny Walker," said Goggs mildly. "No doubt, they have their faults; but I am inclined to think that they are very much better fellows than any of you. As I only know Gadsby, however, I cannot as yet speak with certainty except as regards him. He is very much their inferior, I am sure, although he may patronise a more expensive taste."

Smithson, Yates, and Benson hardly knew whether to grin or to scowl. Gadsby scowled most unmistakably. Vavasour looked puzzled and stupid. Pon grinned.

"What did you call those chaps?" he asked.

"Eh?" asked Goggs, with hand to ear.

"I asked what you called them?" bawled Pon.

"The cad ain't really deaf, Pon," said Gadsby sulkily.

"What did I understand now. That is Nebuchadnezzar Jehoram Willis, that Benjamin Boanerges Blinkhooley, and this one Johnny Walker!"

"Well, I wish you joy of them as chums!" said Pon, in his nastiest manner. "I may tell you that they've been pullin' your silly leg already, seein' at a glance what a cheap ass you are."

Goggs shook his head reproachfully.

"I fear that you are both untruthful and spiteful," he said. "It is plain to me that you do not like Nebuchadnezzar, Benjamin,

and my namesake. I do not think they would pull my leg—in fact, I am quite sure they have done nothing of the sort."

Smithson & Co. began to wonder whether Goggs was as soft as he looked. Had they really succeeded in pulling his leg after all? He seemed to be giving them a hint that they must not make too sure of that.

The nuts passed on.

"Wonder what that chap wants here, by gad?" said Gadsby.

"What's the dashed odds?" returned Pon. "Wants nothin', probably—didn't want to come, very likely—is dashed, certain not to want to stop, I should say."

"Think you're going to rag him, Pon?" sneered Gadsby.

"I don't think—I know it."

"Better go easy, I warn you, old top!"

"What, with that dashed half-pound of inferior butter?"

"With Goggs. Call him what you like, but don't be in too dashed a hurry to think he'll eat out of your hand if you're kind to him, or knuckle under to you if you're not."

There seems to be some mystery about the image, said Pon.

"Oh, absolutely! What are you drivin' at, Gaddy?" chimed in Vav.

"Never mind. I believe there is a mystery, come to that. For one thing, he wasn't deaf when I met him, an' I don't believe he is now."

"Think he's puttin' it on, Gaddy?"

"Yaas, then, I do."

"But what on earth for?"

"That's more than I can tell you, old sport."

## Two In Peril!

"WAKE up, Hazel!"

Hazel awoke from a pleasant dream, in which everything was going all right, as it had a way of not doing in his waking hours, to the dull and depressing reality of his close quarters in the goods wagon, and to Flip shaking him by the shoulder.

Impatient words rose to his lips. But he checked them, feeling suddenly ashamed of himself.

"What is it?" was all he said.

"Time for us to do a bunk, old chap! Had enough of this?"

"Yes. But I've been asleep most of the time. You haven't, I know."

"Well, I was watching out for a chance to make a change in our way of travelling," replied Flip. "I think it's come. They're going to do some shunting here. It's a pretty big station, but the town, whatever it is, isn't very close, and there are fields on one side of the line. If we can dodge out without being seen, and get into the fields, we can walk into the town safely enough, I reckon."

Hazel lifted a corner of the tarpaulin, and took a careful glance around.

He saw that he must have slept some time. It was dusk now. Already signal lamps gleamed like jewels down the line, and a haze lay over the fields to the left.

The long goods train halted, with clang of buffers.

"Come on!" said Flip.

Next moment he was down in the six-foot way.

He had dropped lightly and easily; but Hazel, cramped and stiff from long lying in one position, came down clumsily, staggered, and would have fallen had not Flip caught him.

"Hold up!" said the Highcliffe junior lightly.



Hazel groaned.  
"I feel completely knocked out!" he said.  
"There isn't a scrap of strength left in my legs."

"Oh, you'll be all serene when you've walked a little way," Flip answered. "Come along; there's a train signalled on the line we've to cross."

They moved towards the fields, Hazel limping behind his comrade.

Then there came a sharp cry of pain and fear, and Flip, turning, saw a face as pale as death looming through the gloom.

"What's the matter?" he asked.  
But almost before he had finished speaking he saw, and was down on his knees by Hazel's side, tugging hard at his left foot.

It had caught somehow in the points, and the train was thundering down upon them—very near now—horribly near!

"You can't! It's no good! Best get out and save yourself! Oh!"

How he had done it Flip did not know till afterwards; but Hazel's foot was free, and Hazel fell forward on to his shoulder, and the engine was close upon them.

Had Flip hesitated a single second both might have perished.

But there was no hesitation. He gripped Hazel; he gave a sudden spring forward with all the strength that was in him. He cleared the rails with his helpless shoulder, and together they rolled down the embankment, while the train roared and clattered past.

Flip, looking up, saw a vision of dimly-lighted windows that had a strange, unreal look, and, looking down, saw what sent a thrill of fear to his heart.

Hazel lay there white and motionless. He looked like one dead. Had the fright killed him?

"Hazel! Hazel, old man!"

No answer!

Flip did not call again. He felt that he could not bear to call again and to get no response.

He stretched out his hand, and it fell into water. A narrow stream trickled along by the hedge at the foot of the embankment. He dipped his hand into it, and dashed some of it to Hazel's face.

With a long, low, shuddering sigh, the unhappy Greyfriars junior came to his senses.

"Oh, I'm glad!" said Flip, his voice shaking. "I thought you'd gone, old chap!"

"Thought the fright had done me in?" said Hazel, with a little sneer at himself.

"Well, it did nearly. Be quiet a moment, Flip; I don't feel like talking yet."

For fully five minutes they lay at the foot of the embankment, and Flip was glad to be silent, for he had been horribly shaken. But it was not his own danger that had shaken him.

Then Hazel spoke.

"Better for you if I had gone under, Flip," he said gravely.

"It would have been both of us," murmured Flip.

"Yes, I know. I shall never forget this, not as long as I live. I won't promise that I'll always be decent and cheery, like you are, Flip; I know myself too well. But however rotten I may be, I want you to remember that I haven't forgotten—that I know you have done for me all that a fellow could do for his best chum!"

"I don't want to remember it at all," said Flip. "It was like a beastly nightmare when I found you'd gone off. But I shan't forget that you called to me to save myself and leave you to it!"

"Did I? couldn't have meant it," returned Hazel bitterly. "Must have been dreaming that I was Wharton or Bob Cherry! It wasn't Peter Hazeldene that spoke."

It was, old chap," said Flip soberly, and conviction rang in his voice. Hazel had meant it; in the moment of trial he had thought of his comrade before himself. And if Hazel would not forget, neither would Flip Derwent.

Hazel struggled to his feet.

"We'd better be going on, I suppose," he said.

"Hullo!"

"What's wrong?" asked Flip.

"Do you know how you got me out of that?"

"No, I don't. Something gave. I was afraid of rickling your ankle; but there wasn't much time to be thinking about that."

"You pulled the sole clean off my boot," answered Hazel.

"Sorry, old chap! Couldn't help it, you know."

"Why don't you apologise for saving my life?" said Hazel bitterly. "Of course you

couldn't help it. But I must get the thing, and find a cobbler who will stick it on again. I don't feel much like going up over those lines again, either."

"I'll go," said Flip at once.  
"No, you won't! I'm not funkng everything. Here, come back!"

But Flip had already gone.  
He returned with only part of the sole.

"I don't reckon any cobbler in the world could do anything with that," he said. "We shall have to get a new pair."

He sat down as he spoke.  
"What are you doing?" asked Hazel. It was too dark now to see.

"See if you can wear these," Flip said. "I fancy your feet are pretty much of a size."

"What, and let you go barefoot? What do you take me for?"

"Well, I hope you're a chap with a little common-sense," replied Flip coolly. "You can say if you're not. You are completely fagged out now, if you have boots half a mile to go, and you can't be crocked to the wide to-morrow. I can stand it all right."

"It can't be done, Flip! I'm not such a miserable, selfish brute as all that."

"No selfishness about it, Hazel. We can't afford to have you crocked. Besides, you've got to go in and buy new boots if we can't find a shop, and you can't do that with one sole off. Come along now!"

Hazel almost sobbed as he obeyed. But Flip was right: the thing had to be done.

The spoiled pair of boots was thrown over the hedge. It was of no use burning them selves with rubbish like that. They started across the fields, Hazel, though the boots fitted well enough, could hardly drag himself along. But Flip, with only socks to protect his feet, as hungry as Hazel, and perhaps really almost as worn out, trudged cheerily, and before they reached the town was leaving his comrade.

"Here you are!" said Flip, stopping in front of a boot-shop.

"I've no money," answered Hazel faintly.

"But I have. Here's a note. Don't give more than a quid, you know. We must make it last out."

"But—"

"That's what the goat did. I suppose we're among the goats, after doing a bunk like—"

"I can't take your money, old man!" protested Hazel feebly.

"Then you'll have to keep my boots, that's all."

Hazel staggered into the shop. Flip's look was too much for him.

He came out in about ten minutes, with a new pair of boots on and the pair in which he had entered in a parcel.

"I let the chap wrap them up," he said. "He looked at me in a queer sort of way. I wonder why?"

"It occurred to me while I was waiting that we must both be pretty grubby—kind of half-baked Christy Minstrels, I should say."

"Oh! We must get a wash somehow."

"We must get a bath," said Flip. "And some grub. And a bed. But the first thing to get is a portmanteau."

"A what?"

"Well, it needn't be a portmanteau. Something cheaper might do—carpet-bag, perhaps."

"But what for? We've nothing to put

"If we don't have a really good rest to-morrow, you won't be fit for anything to-morrow, old son. If we go to a hotel of any sort without a bag, suspicions will be aroused at once. See? With a bag and something done to get the worst of the worst of our faces, I think we may pass muster if no one happens to look at us too hard."

"You think of everything," muttered Hazel.

"This didn't want much thinking out. Now to find somewhere to put on my boots without spectators, then for a horse-trough and the best we can do with our handkerchiefs, and after that for a quiet hotel, a bath, a feed, and bed!"

The programme sounded attractive in Hazel's ears—all except the first part. Washing at a horse-trough on a cold evening was a quite jam. But something had to be done to make themselves look a little more presentable.

They found what they wanted in a quiet street where the lamps burned but dimly and no one seemed to be stirring. But even then Flip was not satisfied. They must get handkerchiefs, he said, and he must have

a new pair of socks; and it would not be a bad thing if they got an extra pair or two, and a spare shirt each.

"To-night?" asked Hazel faintly.

"Yes. No good waiting. Collars, too—ours must be pretty dingy. Oh, and a coat each; these Eton things give us away horribly."

"Can't we get something to eat first?"

"You can. Look here, let's find a place you can go into and get some grub while I do the shopping. You need only take the edge of your appetite off; but it certainly is time you had something."

Hazel had no longer the spirit even to protest. A wretched faintness was stealing over him. But for that he would not have consented to be left alone with the bag in the tea-shop which Flip found.

He could not eat much, but two cups of strong tea made him feel better. Then he had to wait, feeling terribly nervous. He conjured up visions of Flip's being run down by Highcliffe searchers and hanged on to anything about him; or of Flip's being seized by a policeman and walked off to the cells—Hazel was not at all sure that the police could not do that; or—oh, almost anything might have happened!

But nothing at all had happened. Flip came in, faced by a cheery staff, pitched a couple of parcels into the bag, and handed a smaller one to Hazel.

"Clean collar," he said. "Put it on now. But we won't change our jackets till we're in our bed-room; we can keep our overcoats on till then. I'll screen you while you change the collar."

He picked up a piece of rather unappetising-looking cake to eat while he waited. It was not first-class, by any means, but it tasted good enough to the famished Flip.

"I won't eat any more, though," he said. "We'll have something better than this stuff in a few minutes. You cash up, Hazel, and then we'll get along. I know of a place to go to. It was quite a nice, unsuspicious sort of merchant where I bought the coats. I asked him about getting munition work here, and we had quite a yarn. He recommended me to the Chequers, which I spotted about a hundred yards away from here. Kept by a friend of his—clean, decent, and reasonable. Sounds all right, eh?"

"I feel as if it was rather walking into a trap," Hazel answered.

"Oh, I don't think so! That chap didn't smell a rat; and when I say that he sent me to the Chequers, the people there will naturally think he knows all about us, and won't trouble."

Hazel hoped it would be so. Anyway, there was nothing to do but to follow Flip's lead—and Flip led boldly and confidently enough.

No one could have thought that it was the first time in his life he had ever gone to an inn on his own for lodging. He gave his orders like a man, it seemed to Hazel.

Within a quarter of an hour, as they were squabbling in the bar, there came a good and satisfying meal. And after that came bed. Hazel fell asleep almost before his head was fairly down on the pillow, and Flip was not long after him.

Flip had locked the door, and when he awoke to consciousness of light in the room and voices talking, he was so surprised that he only just managed to check himself in an ejaculation.

But he did just manage it.

"They had another key, of course," he thought; "or they stuck something in and twisted this one in the lock. I can say it would be easy to do something like remove."

"But I suppose the only thing to do is to let the folks at their schools know."

"Of course it is, Maria!" answered the

#### Another Escape.

FLIP lay quite still. It seemed the only thing to do. He hoped that Hazel would not wake, for he had no confidence at all in Hazel's nerve in the face of such an emergency.

The woman came up to the side of his bed.

"He doesn't look a bad sort, Joe," she said with a touch of something like remorse.

"But I suppose the only thing to do is to let the folks at their schools know."

"Of course it is, Maria!" answered the

man. "Best for them in the long run, you know. Boys can't be allowed to go running away like this."

"No, no; they can't, Joe. It wouldn't ever do, that's a sure thing. But I'm thinking about our boy—if he'd lived. He would have been just the same age as this lad, I should say, and a bit like him. And—"

"Don't you get thinking of young Joe, my dear. It makes you too soft. And if the lad had lived, and had run away from school, shouldn't we have been thankful enough to anyone who had got him sent back? I've nothing in the world against these two, and I don't care a scrap about the reward."

"We can't take that, Joe!"

"Not for ourselves, Maria. But there's plenty of funds it would help. We'll pass it on. Don't know that we'll get the chance, though. Redwick has first claim, I reckon."

"I don't think I could have done what he did, sending them here. It was too like a trap," said the woman.

"Redwick's man, and has sense. You're a woman, my dear," said the innkeeper gruffly. "Come along, now! Those Eton jackets settle any doubt there was. We needn't disturb them. Let the lads have their sleep out. I dare say they're tired enough."

The woman stooped, and her lips touched Flip's forehead. He kept his eyes shut, and never stirred. But if he had felt any resentment for the proposed giving up of himself and Hazel, it would have passed after that motherly kiss. She was thinking of the boy who had died, he knew.

The door closed softly, and Flip opened his eyes again.

He waited a minute or two, then looked at his watch. It was midnight.

No need to disturb Hazel yet. Hours would pass before they need go. But Flip meant to go before anyone at the Chequers was stirring.

It might be true enough that it would be best for them to go back. As far as Hazel was concerned Flip had very little doubt as to that. But they were not going till they were caught—and they were not caught yet!

To Flip the whole business had become something like a game, with himself and Hazel, and perhaps half a dozen other people, on one side, and all the world, so to speak, on the other. He had anticipated the game terribly, because he would take such a gloomy view of things. But he was in it, for good or ill, and the best must be made of him.

Flip did not sleep again; that would not have been safe. It was not too easy to keep awake all those hours, but there was plenty to think of. None of it was too cheerful; but it might have been worse, and he comforted himself with that thought.

People at a place like the Chequers would be early risers, he knew. It was between five and six o'clock, and still dark, of course, when he got out and dressed. Not until he was fully dressed did he wake Hazel.

"Wrrrrrr!" mumbled Hazel. "Tain't rising-bell yet!"

"But it is!" replied Flip, shaking him gently.

Hazel sat up in bed, looking very wide-begone and wearied.

He remembered now where he was, and as that had happened in the last thirty-six hours or so crowded in upon his mind.

Unlike Flip, he found no bright side to it. But it was not Hazel's way to look for the bright side of anything when he was down on his luck.

"What's wrong?" he muttered.

"Nothing much," answered Flip. "Only we've been twinged here, and if we stay till the folks are up we shall be collar'd safe as houses."

"How d'ye know? I don't see how you can know that."

Flip told him briefly. Hazel was at once in something like a panic.

"They may come any minute," he said.

"We ought to have bolted at once."

"They said they were going to let us have our sleep out, and you looked as if you could go on snoozing for ever."

"And you could go to sleep again after hearing that?" growled Hazel. "Suppose you hadn't woke up?"

"As a matter of fact, I didn't go to sleep again at all."

Hazel was repentant at once.

"You lay awake all that time and let me sleep, Flip."

"All you needed it, old chap."

"I suppose you didn't?"

"I don't know that I did, much."

Hazel shivered.

"I should have gone mad, lying there all those hours thinking," he said, "knowing all the time that at any minute they might come back, too. It must have been awful!"

"Not a bit of it. It was all serene. And I knew they wouldn't come back. They said they wouldn't do anything till the morning."

"You can't trust people like that!"

"Wrong, Hazel! I could trust those two all right. Decent sorts, both of them."

"Treacherous beasts, I call them!"

Flip frowned.

"If I were you," he said, "I should shin out of bed and dress, not sit there talking such rot. They're not treacherous beasts, any more than Quetch and Wingate were rotters for chusing us. Don't you see, old scout, that other people are bound to look at this bizney in a different way from us?"

"Brrrr!" growled Hazel, getting out of bed.

He said no more till he had finished a rather hurried and decidedly chilly wash. Then he noticed that Flip was writing.

"What's that for?" he asked.

"We can't scot owing our bill," Flip replied.

"I know I jolly well should, after that treachery!"

"Well, I shouldn't. How much should you think it would be, Hazel?"

"I don't know. And if I did I wouldn't tell you!"

"Well, I'm going to put half-a-soy in. That can't be far wrong. I should say. Think it's enough."

"I shall let it be ten bob too much for people who would serve us such a dirty trick!"

Hazel's temper was distinctly unpleasant. But Flip could make allowances for him.

"Seems to me the thing is not what sort of folks they are, but what sort we are," he said. "I think myself they're all right-ho. But I know jolly well I should feel mean and small afterwards if I cut without paying up."

"Well, it's your cash. You can do as you like with it!" replied Hazel ungraciously.

Flip did not answer that. He was adding another line or two to what he had written. He did not show Hazel the note. In his present temper Hazel would not have understood it. Thus it ran:

"I am leaving a ten-shilling note. I think this will pay the bill. I heard you talking last night, but I did not let on. I do not blame you a bit. I dare say it seems the right thing to you that we should be forced to go back to school; but we don't see it quite like that, and we are not caught this time. —P. D."

"P.S.—I am sorry your boy died. I could not help hearing you talk about him. He had a good mother, anyway; and a pretty decent father, too."

There were envelopes in a drawer of the toilet-table. Flip put his communication and a ten-shilling note inside one of them, and fastened up the flap. As he laid it on the table Hazel said:

"I'm ready if you are."

Flip put out the light, and went to the window.

"Best not to go out by the stairs, I think," he said. "We're on the first floor, and at the back. There's a stableyard below. Easy enough to lower ourselves with a blanket."

Everything seems easy to you! Hazel growled. "But I suppose you're right. You generally are!"

In less than five minutes they were in the yard below. A blanket dangled from the window they had left. But that did not matter. They would be clear away before anyone was likely to notice it.

It was raw and dark and cold. Hazel shivered and shrank up his shoulders.

From a stable hard by a horse stamped on the cobbles; but no other sound broke the stillness.

"We shall have to get over the gate," said Flip. "It's locked, and there's broken glass on the top of the wall."

"More trouble," said Hazel bitterly.

"Well, getting over a gate ain't much I'll give you a bunk up."

"And what about yourself?"

"Oh, I shan't need one."

"Here goes, then! I say, Flip, don't mind me if I'm rattled. I can't help it, you know."

"Oh, I don't mind," replied Flip lightly.

But he could not help thinking now and then that he knew plenty of fellows—Merton and Tun, for instance, or the Caterpillar, or Bob Cherry, or Squiff—who would have been more cheerful comrades than Peter Hazeldene.

Once over the gate, they found themselves in a back street of mean houses. Here and there a dull light glimmered in a window, but no one stirred in the street.

They turned to the left, and soon found the back street led into the main thoroughfare of the town.

(To be continued.)

## The Editor's Chat.

For Next Wednesday:

### "THE SHELL SCORES!"

By Martin Clifford.

And about time the Shell did, who you are such admirers of Tom Merry that you don't like seeing his side lose may say:

Well, it was time, too. Lowther's very ingenious scheme let down his Form badly, but that was only through an accident. No one could have expected Patty Wynn to be in hiding where he could hear all about it. The Fourth deserved the points gained, not for knowing of the scheme and being armed against it, but for Kerr's counter-attack.

Lowther is not to be beaten, however. It may make pretty jokes, but he is plenty of brains, and if he is not quite so consummate an actor as Kerr, he has real talent in that direction. Next week you will read how he spoofed the Fourth, and how the First Eleven cricket-match went. And after that there will be more to tell of Racker's man, of the squabble in the Third, and of the other contests.

### A NEW SERIAL IN THE "MAGNET."

In the next number but one of the "Magnet" will begin a great new serial by

MR. SIDNEY DREW,

the famous author, who has written so many fine stories about Ferraers Lord, the millionaire, Ching-Lung, the Chinese prince, and Wang-Waga, the comic Eskimo. All of these popular characters reappear in

### "THE BROWN TORRENT."

which is the title of the new "Magnet" serial.

### LIST OF TOM MERRY STORIES IN THE "GEM"—continued.

- 53.—"D'Arcy's Minor's Charm."
- 54.—"The Son of a Sailor."
- 55.—"The Terrible Three's Revolt."
- 56.—"The Cad of St. Jim's."
- 57.—"The Feud of the Fourth."
- 58.—"Skimpole's Scholarship."
- 59.—"The Rival Editors."
- 60.—"Tom Merry in Liverpool."
- 61.—"Smuggled to School."

- 62.—"Tom Merry's Scoutmaster."
- 63.—"The St. Jim's Masters."
- 64.—"The St. Jim's Inventor."
- 65.—"The Hypnotist of St. Jim's."
- 66.—"The Form-master's Secret."
- 67.—"Tom Merry's Week-end."
- 68.—"Hip-Hip, Hooley."
- 69.—"A Ship of the Empire."
- 70.—"Tom Merry's Sub-Editor."
- 71.—"Sent to Coventry."
- 72.—"Tom Merry's Triumph."
- 73.—"Played Out."
- 74.—"The Territorials at St. Jim's."
- 75.—"Gussy's Guest."
- 76.—"Skimpole's Discovery."
- 77.—"The Terrible Three's Air-Cruise."
- 78.—"The Boy Scouts' Rivals."

Your Editor