

"TOM MERRY'S ENEMY!" A Magnificent 30,000-words School Story
of the Chums of St. Jim's inside.

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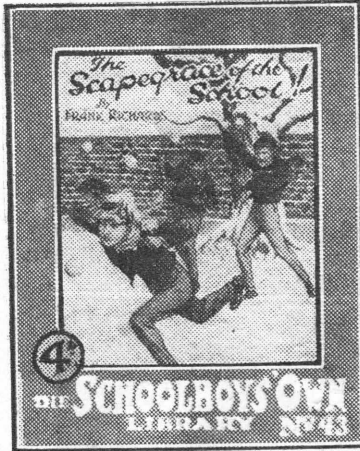


No. 986. Vol. XXXI.—January 5th, 1927.

TOM MERRY IS LEFT STANDING!

In his plot to depose Tom Merry from the junior captaincy at St. Jim's, Percy Knox, the new boy, sees the value of making Tom Merry look a fool on the footer field! (Read this week's grand extra-long school yarn inside)

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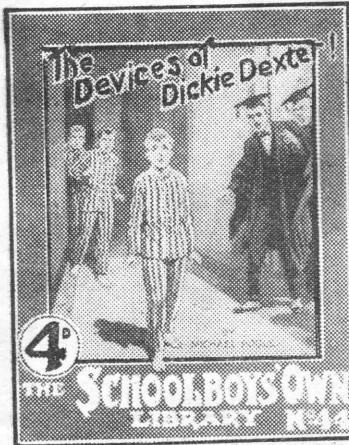
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THE GIFT OF PROPHECY IS NOT MINE!

A READER from Manchester writes and asks me if it is going to rain on St. Swithin's Day this year. Gee! That's looking ahead some, as our American cousins would say. My correspondent flatters me by saying that as I seem to know most things I might be able to help him out over this. No; he's not pulling my leg—at least, he assures me that he isn't, but his query leaves me guessing. It might snow, it might hail, it might be sunny. So variable is our climate that anything might happen. But I never was a weather prophet. Just to show you how bad I am in this direction, I'll recount a little experience in which a very dear friend of ours figured.

THE OPTIMIST!

Mr. Martin Clifford had given me a look in at the office to talk over a new series of St. Jim's yarns, and we were so engrossed in our subject that we didn't notice the fleet passage of time until an ache in the region of my waistcoat told me that lunch-time had come round. I suggested to Mr. Clifford, therefore, that we should continue our discussion over a square meal. He thought the notion a good one. We were about to sally forth from the office, when I noticed that your favourite author was carrying a raincoat. I remarked that as the said raincoat was not partaking of lunch, would it not be better to leave it in my room. Mr. Clifford took a calculating view of the sky through the office window, and said that he thought it would rain. "Not a bit of it!" I replied, also looking up at the sky wisely. "Leave the thing here." And so, courteous as ever, Martin Clifford bowed to my opinion and left the "thing" there.

BAD LUCK!

Well, the lunch was good, likewise the theme of the new series of St. Jim's yarns. We came out of the restaurant and commenced our return journey to the office. Then it rained! Rained—well, it seemed to me that the Clerk of the Weather had collected all the oceans he could and dropped them down on my particular part of London. Mr. Clifford said nothing as we took shelter in a porch, but his look spoke volumes. Half an hour we waited, and then, during a lull in the storm, I ventured to suggest that we should try our luck. Our luck was out. It came on to rain again, and, to cut a long story short, two drowned rats arrived back at the editorial office. A brand new suit was spoiled—No, no; it wasn't mine! But the foregoing will show my Manchester correspondent what a bad weather prophet I am. So whether it will rain on St. Swithin's Day I really can't say. But what odds if it does? The GEM will be on sale that week just the same!

NEXT WEDNESDAY'S PROGRAMME:

"CAPTAIN AND CAD!"

By Martin Clifford.

From this title readers who have been following the career of Percy Knox at St. Jim's will gather that he plays a prominent part. He does indeed! The story is well told, and shows your favourite author in good form. Don't miss it, whatever you do!

"WHITE EAGLE!"

Keep an eye open for another instalment of this grand adventure serial, chums! Tom Holt, championing the Apache Nation, finds that he's up against a whole heap of trouble. But he likes trouble.

VISITING THE DENTIST!

Grooooooh! None of us like the ordeal of bearding a dentist in his den—or his torture-chamber, as some people regard it. But the St. Jim's Rhymester wades in regardless, and his jolly poem on this subject will amuse you, take it from me. Order next week's GEM early, boys!

Your Editor.

THE NEW BOY'S AMBITION! For some reason Percy Knox, the new boy, has set himself up against Tom Merry! That the newcomer to the Shell is a good footballer, and a handy chap with his fists, soon becomes apparent! Popularity comes his way, and on the tide of that popularity he hopes to depose Tom Merry from the junior captaincy and take his place!



TOM MERRY'S

ENEMY!

A Powerful and Dramatic Long Complete Story of the Chums of St. Jim's, dealing with the bitter rivalry between Percy Knox, a new, boy, and Tom Merry, junior captain.

By
MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1. Rubbing It In!

TOM MERRY, of the Shell Form at St. Jim's, came into Study No. 10, and quietly closed the door. Then he walked, a trifle unsteadily, to the study armchair and dropped into it heavily.

His chums, Monty Lowther and Manners, were seated at the table busy with their prep; but they ceased work abruptly and fixed their eyes on their study-leader.

"Tom!" said Monty Lowther, almost gently.

Tom Merry did not look up—he gave no indication that he had heard. His usually sunny face was dark and bitter in expression; it also bore signs of recent rough usage; Tom's nose was red and swollen, his lips were puffed, and a dark bruise showed on his white forehead, while one of his eyes was all but closed, and circled with a dark hue.

"Tom!"

Monty Lowther got up from the table, and crossing to his chum, he placed a sympathetic hand on his shoulder.

"Feeling better, old chap?" he muttered awkwardly.

Tom Merry nodded, without speaking.

"We're dashed sorry about this, old man," said Lowther. "But—but—but—"

"You shouldn't have tackled the brute just now," put in Manners quietly. "You were feeling seedy and not up to the job."

"He's a rough handful at any time," said Lowther. "You ought to have waited until you were better, old man!"

Tom Merry spoke then.

"Go on," he said bitterly. "Rub it in! Tell me you told me so, and all the rest of it."

"Tom—"

"Think I don't know it without you rubbing the fact in?" said Tom Merry, his voice and face bitterly angry.

"I was a fool to be drawn into a fight with the cad to-night; but he knew I was seedy, and he saw his chance! I was a fool! He licked me—he's chosen his time and licked me! But—"

"Your time will come, old chap!" said Manners loyally. "You'll wipe up the earth with the cad when you're fit again."

"I mean to," declared Tom, his eyes glinting. "He played a dirty trick on me this afternoon—kept me away from the match."

"He says he had no hand in it, of course!" said Lowther.

"He's a liar!"

"Well, I believe that, too," said Lowther, nodding grimly. "He's the only chap who had a motive for keeping you away. He asked you for a place in the team, and you refused him. He was determined to play—determined to show the fellows what a wonderful player he is. So he got you out of the way and played in your place."

"That's pretty clear," agreed Manners frowning, "but the trouble is the fellows won't swallow it—the story seems a bit too steep to them."

"Best to let the whole thing drop, I think," grunted Monty. "We can prove nothing—if we could it would be different! Let Knox go hang, Tom, and let the blessed affair drop!"

Tom Merry raised his head then—the look on his bruised face quite startled his chums. It was a rare thing indeed to see the sunny-tempered Tom Merry enraged; but he was certainly enraged now.

"Let it drop?" he hissed through his teeth. "I'll be hanged if I will! Think I'm going to allow that new cad, Knox, to score over me with his crooked tricks?"

"But—"

"That's enough!" snapped Tom. "I'm going to show Knox that he can't play such games on the junior skipper of St. Jim's. He may be able to use his fists, and he may be a good footer player; but he'll find he can't come along and rule the roost either because of that or because his cousin is a prefect in the Sixth here."

"Looks as if he means to be cock-of-the-walk if he can!" admitted Manners. "Cheeky cad!"

"He's worse than a cheeky cad! He's proved the sort he is by chumming up with rotters like Racke and Crooke. He's a smoky rotter, and an unscrupulous outsider," said Tom, his lip curling.

"Blessed if I know why he hates you so, Tom," said Manners. "I suppose he's taking his cue from his cousin Gerald."

Tom nodded, his brow dark.

"That's one reason, no doubt," he said. "Another—and what started the trouble between us—was because I refused to chip in and save him when Grimes and his pals from

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the village chucked him in the duckpond the day he arrived."

"It served him right—the bullying cad asked for it!" "I know that. But it's made him hate me like poison. That isn't it all, though," said Tom, setting his lips. "It's pretty clear the bragging cad's been used to ruling the roost wherever he's come from; and he wants to rule it here."

"Looks like it!" "But I'm in the way," resumed Tom, his eyes flashing. "And that's the whole trouble, really. He means to boost me out of my job if he can."

"He'll never do that," said Lowther, half-grinning. "He'll try, anyway, and he'll cause no end of trouble—unless I stop his games. This is a start, you fellows. When we heard a cousin of Knox of the Sixth was coming into the Shell we knew there'd be trouble. But we never expected this."

"I expected he'd be a sneaking little worm," admitted Manners.

"But we never expected him to be a swanking cad who can back up his swank and brag with his fists," said Tom. "He's a hefty brute, and that's the trouble."

"And he can play footer—no denying that!" said Manners.

"I haven't seen him play yet," said Tom. "But if he thinks he's going to push himself into the team, by such methods he used this afternoon, he's making a thundering mistake."

"He'll expect a place in the team after the way he played to-day," murmured Lowther, shaking his head. "He plays the selfish game; but there's no denying it—he can play!"

"He won't get it if he does expect it," said Tom, his eyes glinting again. "I'll thundering well see to that."

"You—you won't play him?" asked Monty uneasily.

"Certainly not!"

"The fellows will expect it," said Lowther, still more uneasily. "They carried him off the field to-day, Tom. The fellows forgot he's a smoky bounder, and a bragging cad, and that he's Knox's cousin. He played a brilliant game, and the chaps just howled over him."

"They'll expect him to play on Saturday against the Grammarians for a cert," agreed Manners.

"Knox will play if I say he can play," was Tom Merry's curt reminder. "He'll have his chance in the practice to-morrow. If he plays well he may get his chance in a match."

Tom's chums eyed him somewhat uneasily. They were still eyeing him when the door was suddenly kicked open from outside, and a junior lounged into the study, with his hands in his pockets.

He was a tall, well-built youth, with heavy features, and rather a blustering, domineering look about him. Like Tom Merry, he sported a "black" eye, a swollen lip, and other signs of recent combat.

It was Percy Knox—the cousin of Gerald Knox, in the Sixth Form, and the new fellow who had already in the few days he had been at St. Jim's caused more trouble than an ordinary new boy causes in a whole term or more.

"Knox!" breathed Manners, his face growing grim.

Percy Knox grinned as he sighted Tom Merry in the chair. It was not a pleasant grin, and it made Lowther clench his fists.

"You—you cheeky cad!" he snapped, glaring at the new fellow. "Didn't they teach you to knock at doors where you came from?"

"Possibly," yawned Percy Knox. "I certainly learned quite a lot at my last school. One thing I learned was to knock down any footling nobody who dared to cheek me. Got that, Lowther?"

"So it was at your last school they taught you to be such a blustering bully?" remarked Lowther, undisturbed by the threat.

Knox flushed red, and his eyes glittered.

"That's enough, Lowther!" he said threateningly. "I've already licked your precious captain to-night!"

"Took him at a disadvantage, you mean!" said Manners hotly. "You knew he was seedy—"

"Hold on!"

Tom Merry got out of his chair. His face was white save for the bruises on it, and his eyes gleamed as he eyed Percy Knox.

"Hold on!" repeated Tom Merry. "I fancy Knox has come to see me?"

"Quite right!" grinned Percy Knox. "It's all right, though, Merry—I haven't come to give you another licking."

Tom Merry did not turn a hair, but his chums did.

"You howling cad!" shouted Monty Lowther, his eyes blazing. "You may have licked Merry by a rotten fluke; but you're not coming here rubbing it in, you cheeky sweep! I'm ready to face you—"

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"Kick the rotter out of the study!" snapped Manners. "Come on, Monty!"

"Here, hold on!" shouted Percy Knox, jumping back with his big fists raised. "I've already had one bit of a scrap to-night, and I'm not taking on the two of you. I've come here to see the junior captain about the footer, not to scrap, hang you!"

"Drop it, you chaps!" said Tom Merry quietly. "Let Knox say what he's got to say."

Lowther and Manners drew back with obvious reluctance, glowering at the new fellow. Knox turned to Tom, a mocking sneer on his heavy features.

"That's right, Merry—you've already learned to be careful how you handle me," he grinned.

"I've learned you're a treacherous, unscrupulous cad!" answered Tom steadily. "You're quite mistaken if you think I fear you, Knox. You licked me to-day; but there are other days. All you've done is to put me on my guard. What have you come to see me about?"

Knox minor laughed.

"About the footer!" he said. "You heard how I shaped to-day against Greyfriars, Merry?"

"I heard!"

"I won the game for St. Jim's practically off my own bat," remarked Knox coolly. "I made things move, I can tell you. The fellows think I ought to be a permanent member of the St. Jim's junior team."

"Do they?"

"Yes. They even think," went on Knox, with a sneer, "that I'd make a better centre-forward and a better skipper than you, Merry."

"Do they?" said Tom calmly. "Anything else?"

"Nothing particularly," said Knox, "excepting that I demand my place in the Grammar School match on Saturday on the form I've shown to-day."

"You demand it?" said Tom, raising his eyebrows.

"Yes; that's what I've come to see you about!"

Tom Merry pointed to the door.

"Get out!" he snapped. "Get out, you impudent sweep!"

"You refuse, then?" asked Percy Knox, his eyes glinting.

"Of course I do, you cheeky cad! I've never seen you even play yet."

"But haven't others?" shouted Knox, losing some of his coolness. "I've proved what I can do."

"But not to my satisfaction," said Tom. "I wasn't there—why, nobody knows better than you, Knox!"

"If you think I had a hand in that—"

"I do," said Tom steadily. "It was planned and worked by you, aided by Racke and his pals. What you did to-day, however, at footer makes no difference to me. Before I play a man I want to know, not only if he can play, but if he can also play the game—if he can be relied on to play for the good of the team, and to do what he's told to do."

"I've proved that to-day," said Knox savagely. "I was the best man on the field—the men carried me off shoulder-high after the game. The fellows think—"

"I care nothing what they think in this case," said Tom. "I'm footer skipper, and it's for me to say who shall play. You'll get your chance to-morrow afternoon. It's compulsory games practice. Be on Little Side at three, and then I'll see how you shape. If you satisfy me that you are worth a place in the team I'll think it over."

"Oh, will you?" snarled Knox. "Think I'm going to attend games practice like a footling duffer at the game?"

"I'll jolly well not!"

"I think I mentioned that it's compulsory to-morrow," said Tom calmly. "You'll have to turn up, Knox."

"I'll jolly well not!"

"Too good for practice, I suppose?" snorted Manners.

"Just that!" snapped Knox minor. "I'll play in matches; but I've left practice behind long ago."

"You swanking cad—" began Lowther.

"Chuck it, Lowther!" said Tom Merry, his swollen lip curling disdainfully. "What Knox says does not influence me in the slightest. Unless he attends practice games he most certainly will never play in a match while I'm skipper."

"Won't I?" shouted Percy Knox. "We'll soon see about that! You forget I've got a cousin in the Sixth—a prefect."

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Lowther.

Tom Merry laughed—he could not help it.

"If you think he can help you you are mistaken," he said. "I am junior footer captain, and Knox has no power to interfere with my duties as skipper. I am answerable only to Kildare, who is senior skipper of games. Your cousin can go and eat coke, Knox!"

The new fellow's eyes glittered spitefully.

"What about the fellows, then?" he snarled. "They'll know what to think if you try to keep me from playing, Merry; they'll know it's personal spite and personal jealousy. You know I can beat you, as I've beaten you with my fists, and you fear me!"

Tom Merry got out of his chair again. His eyes were blazing.

"Get out!" he said, pointing to the door. Get out, before I have another go at you, you cad! I'll show you if I fear you!"

"Pleased, I'm sure," said Percy Knox, with a nasty grin. "You've not had enough, then!"

And, raising his hand, he smacked Tom Merry across the face, sending him staggering back.

It was quite enough for Manners and Lowther.

"You—you sweep!" shouted Monty Lowther.

And he went for the new fellow like a whirlwind. He was not alone. Manners gave a growl and followed Lowther with a rush.

"Out with him!" he yelled. "Chuck the cad out, Monty!"

The next moment a furious struggle was raging in Study No. 10. Tom Merry stood away, taking no part in it. He knew that, big and strong as he was, Knox stood no chance against Monty and Manners. Their intention was not to fight Knox, but to throw him out of the study.

But they soon found they had to fight for all that. Percy Knox had not been called a "rough handful" for nothing.

And he certainly lacked neither pluck nor power.

Backwards and forwards across the study the three staggered, struggling furiously together. The table crashed away, and a couple of chairs went crashing over.

"Chuck it, you fellows!" called Tom, in alarm.

But his call went unheeded. Monty and Manners were warming up to the task now. They were enraged at the way the new fellow had treated their chum, and they were not disposed to deal gently with him.

Crash!

The burly fellow was down now, with both Lowther and Manners swarming over him on the floor. Manners suddenly tore himself free, and, jumping for the door, he tore it open.

"Now!" he panted. "Out with the cad!"

The struggle was resumed with redoubled fury, but Percy's bolt was shot. He had already suffered severely at the hands of Tom Merry, though he certainly had won, but now his strength and powers of resistance were gone.

He seemed to collapse all at once, and the next moment the two incensed juniors had him at the door.

He went flying through, all arms and legs, and crashed down into the passage.

"There, you rotten cad!" shouted Lowther breathlessly. "You came asking for trouble, and you've got it! If you want any more, come back for it!"

But Percy Knox, apparently, did not want any more just then, fond as he seemed to be of trouble. He scrambled dazedly to his feet, and glared at Manners and Lowther in the doorway with glittering eyes of fury. Then he tottered away, raging, while Lowther and Manners returned to their study and closed the door.

CHAPTER 2.
More Trouble!

"WOTTEN!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy closed his book with a slam on the table in Study No. 6 as he made that announcement. Then he adjusted his eye-glass and regarded his chums through it rather severely.

Blake, Herries, and Digby did not lift their heads from the table, nor did they answer at all.

Arthur Augustus frowned.

As a matter of fact, he had already made the remark that it was "wotten" several times to no purpose. None of his chums looked up from their prep or took the slightest notice. Hence the frown on the face of Arthur Augustus.

"Weally, you fellows," he said in some exasperation, "are you all deaf, bai Jove? I have already addresssed you several times."

"Give your silly chin a rest!" added Digby, without looking up.

"Bai Jove! I wefuse to dwy up!" said Arthur Augustus. "I have finished my pwep—"

"But we haven't!" snorted Blake. "Dry up!"

"Weally, Blake, why should I dwy up when I have something to wemark? It is somethin' wathah important!"

"Will you shut up and let us get on with our prep?" yelled Blake. "Dry up, blow you!"

"There is no weason to wear at me, Blake!" said Arthur Augustus warmly. "I detest bein' woreed at, as you are well aware, deah boy. Howevah, I have been thinkin' about this w'etched Knox bisnay, you know."

"Well, that's hopeful news, you chaps," remarked Digby. "If Gussy's really started thinking, there's no knowing what he may come to next; he may even start talking sense, and cease acting like a burbling chump!"

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus, ignoring the chuckles of Study No. 6. "The fact is, deah boys, I am feelin' wathah wowed about this feahful wuffian Knox. Now the wottah has licked Tom Mewwy—"

"You needn't worry about that, anyway, old scout!" grunted Herries. "Old Tommy was off colour. When he's fit again he'll jolly soon make giddy mincecoat of that swanking cad!"

Arthur Augustus shook his noble head very gravely.

"I am not so vewy sure of that, deah boy. Have you forgotten that the wuffian actually licked me?"

"Well, you're not Tom Merry, you silly duffer!" snorted Blake. "Couldn't any footlin' ass lick you?"

"You know perfectly well that any footlin' ass could not lick me, Jack Blake," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "You yourself, for instance, would not find it easy to lick me, bai Jove!"

"Good for you, Gussy!" chuckled Herries.

"I do not desiah to boast at all," said Arthur Augustus seriously, "but I wathah fancy I can hold my own with any fellow in the Fourth. Yet this outsidah, Knox, has licked me!"

"Miracles happen even in these days," said Digby solemnly.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus innocently. "It is weally amazin', you know; but the fellow did actually lick me! And now he's licked Tom Mewwy, the best boxah in the Lowah School!"

"It was a fluke!" grunted Herries. "Next time—"

"I am vewy much afwaid that the same thing will happen the next time," said Arthur Augustus. "This Knox person is weally a coughdwop, you know! But what I am about to wemark is this—"

"Oh dear!" groaned Blake. "We may just as well chuck prep, you chaps! Now Gussy's chin's really started wagging—"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Well, I'm fed-up with prep, anyhow," grinned Digby, closing his books. "Even Gussy's chin-wag is better than prep. Go ahead, Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus frowned at his chum's levity, but he went ahead. As a matter of fact, Blake & Co. were only too glad to "chuck" prep, and certainly eager to discuss the strange feud that had arisen between Tom Merry, the junior captain of St.

Jim's, and Percy Knox, the new fellow. It was the chief topic of conversation in the School House that evening.

Tom Merry's strange absence from the Greyfriars match had been surprising enough. But when the new fellow had coolly taken his place, and when he had shown such startling football, there had been something approaching a sensation.

But sensation had followed sensation. In the Common-room that evening Tom Merry had suddenly turned up, dishevelled and shivering with cold, and he had charged Percy Knox with having caused his absence from the match by tricking him and causing him to be trapped in the vaults, where he had been kept a prisoner until after the match.

Percy Knox had coolly and insolently denied the charge, and the fight had followed—a fight that had ended in a sound "licking" for the hitherto champion boxer of the Lower School.


No wonder the House was in a turmoil of excitement.

Few imagined for one moment that the matter would end there. Tom Merry was not the fellow to give in so easily. The question on every fellow's tongue now was as to what Tom Merry's next move would be.

Up to that afternoon Percy Knox had been looked upon with disfavour by the fellows—or the decent element, at

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with disfavour by the fellows—or the decent element, at

least. His boasting and his swank were scarcely likely to make the juniors like him. Cheeky new fellows were not popular at St. Jim's. Moreover, the very fact that Percy was a relative of Gerald Knox, the hated and unpopular prefect, was enough to make the fellows fight shy of him.

The events of that afternoon and evening had changed the attitude of most of the fellows, however. His brilliant play against the Greyfriars team had made all the difference. A fellow who could play footer as he did could be permitted to "swank" a little. And a fellow who could use his fists as Percy Knox undoubtedly could was a fellow to be respected. Percy Knox's swank and brag were not just hot air—far from it.

Indeed, public opinion had veered completely in regard to the new fellow. Nothing succeeds like success, and by winning the Greyfriars match for St. Jim's—he had been undoubtedly chiefly responsible for the win—Knox had succeeded in gaining swift and unexpected popularity.

But in doing so he had come "up against" the junior captain of St. Jim's—Tom Merry—who was still more popular and a power in the school. And the general opinion was that there was trouble ahead.

Apparently Arthur Augustus D'Arcy shared that latter view.

"As I wemarked," he resumed, shaking his head sagely, "it is weally too wotten for words! Now Tom Mewwy has been licked that Knox person will be absolutely unbeawable! He will considah himself cock-of-the-walk, and he will want to wule the woot."

"Will he?" said Blake grimly. "He'd better not play any games with the Fourth, anyway!"

"We'll give him Knox," grinned Digby; "a few jolly good knocks, in fact!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I do not mean so much with his fists," said Arthur Augustus. "I am thinkin' of his attitude in general. He will demand a place in the school team, and now he has licked Tom—"

"My dear fathead," said Blake scornfully, "what the thump does it matter if he has licked old Tommy. There are ways and means of dealing with a chap like him—even if he can use his dashed fists!"

"That is all vewy well, deah boy. But if the fellows back him up it will make things vewy awkward for Tom Mewwy."

"Phew! That's so, Gussy!" said Blake, frowning.

"Tom Mewwy will nevah be bullied into playin' the cad," said Gussy. "And you noticed how the fellows wawed over Knox's play."

"He did play well," admitted Blake. "But—but I fancy his sort of play won't suit old Tommy—it wouldn't suit me, in fact. Too jolly selfish, for one thing, and for another he won't obey the skipper; I noticed he deliberately ignored Talbot's orders more than once in the match. That sort of thing won't do whether a man can play or not."

"That is just my point, deah boy!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, shaking his head again. "That fellow is out for twouble—I saw that fwom the first. He is out to give Tom Mewwy—"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's flow of eloquence was rudely interrupted at that point. There came hurried footsteps outside, and the next instant a fat junior dashed into the room, a gleeful grin on his face. It was Baggy Trimble of the Fourth.

"Quick, you fellows!" he shouted excitedly. "They're at it again. He, he, he!"

"Bai Jove! What—"

"Tom Merry and that new chap!" yelled Trimble. "They're scrapping like billy-oh—I heard 'em when I was passing their study, you know."

And Trimble—the biggest busybody in St. Jim's—rushed away to spread the glad tidings that Knox and Tom Merry were "at it again!"

"Phew!" muttered Blake, staring at his chums. "I thought it wasn't finished with yet. Come on!"

He hurried away towards the Shell passage, and his chums followed hot-foot. If Tom Merry and Percy Knox were fighting again, then they had no intention of missing the affair.

They soon discovered, however, that Trimble—as usual—had made a little mistake.

The Fourth Form juniors arrived in the Shell passage just in time to see Percy Knox thrown out of Study No. 10 by Monty Lowther and Manners.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "That fellow is weally the limit! He's been lookin' for twouble again!"

"And found it this time!" grinned Herries. "Look at him!"

Percy Knox was certainly worth looking at. His jacket was torn up the back, and his collar and tie were adrift from their moorings, so to speak. His bruised features,

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coupled with his towled hair and dishevelled attire, made him look a sight.

As he staggered past the chums of the Fourth he gave them a deadly glare.

"What's happened, Knox?" called Gore, from the doorway of his study. "Been scrapping with Merry again?"

The new fellow vanished into Study No. 7 without answering.

Apparently the entertainment—whatever it was—had ended, and the fellows who had come out into the passage to see what the rumpus was about went in again.

"Let's see what's happened, anyhow," said Blake.

Blake's chums followed him into Study No. 10. As they entered Lowther and Manners wheeled round with their hands up, evidently expecting trouble.

"Only little us," said Blake, with a curious glance at Tom Merry. "Feeling better now, old scout?"

Tom nodded without speaking.

"What's the rumpus about?" asked Herries. "That swanky cad at his games again?"

"He came asking for trouble and we gave him some," said Manners breathlessly.

And between them Lowther and Manners explained what had taken place.

"Phew!" breathed Blake, frowning. "The chap's a cool customer, anyway. He means business, Tommy!"

"So do I!" said Tom Merry, his voice harsh. "The matter isn't ended yet, Blake!"

"You mean about what happened this afternoon?"

"Yes. You believe my story about being kept away from the match, Blake?"

"Yes, I think we do," said Blake grimly. "That chap is capable of any trickery, anyway. But—but—"

"It's rather thick," said Herries. "A good many of the chaps don't believe it, though. That's the trouble. They—they seem to think—"

"I know what they think!" snapped Tom Merry fiercely. "They think it's a yarn I've got up, to excuse my absence, and to get Knox into trouble. But I don't care a rap what they think. I'm going to get to the bottom of the trick, and I'm going to bowl the howling cad out!"

"Well, I should do the same myself," said Blake grimly. "We'll back you up quickly enough, too. If that cad is responsible—"

"He is, I tell you—I know he worked it!"

"Well, then, he ought to be shown up and punished," said Blake. "Only—"

"Only what?" snapped Tom.

"Only it won't be easy, Tom. He's a crafty cad, and he's covered up his tracks well, you bet. You've no proof whatever now those notes are destroyed."

"Better let the matter drop, Tom," said Manners uneasily. "If it could be proved, well and good. But as it can't—"

"It'll only do more harm than good, I'm afraid," agreed Digby. "Some of the fellows think it's a stunt of yours—"

"Yaas, watah! But I do not agree with you fellows," said Arthur Augustus sagely. "If Tom allows this mattah to dwop Knox will be doin' anythin' he likes, you know. If I were Tom Mewwy I should make a feahful wow ovah the mattah!"

"Gussy's right!" said Blake. "Don't let it drop, Tommy!"

Tom Merry's eyes glittered.

"Do you think for one moment that I'm going to?" he said through his teeth. "Do you think I'm such a fool as to allow a new chap to come along and treat me in that manner? Not likely!"

"I should tackle him about it again to-morrow!"

"To-morrow?" echoed Tom angrily. "I'm not waiting for to-morrow, Blake! The thing can't wait, I tell you! I'm going to get to the bottom of it now—this very night!"

And with that Tom Merry set his lips and walked out of the room. His chums looked at each other, and then they hurried after him. It was plain that the day's troubles were not over yet.

CHAPTER 3.

No Proof!

TO the surprise of Blake and the rest, Tom Merry did not lead the way to Knox's study. He went direct to Study No. 2 on the Fourth Form passage.

"He's after Mellish!" said Lowther grimly. "It was Mellish who told Tom he'd find Kildare round by the chapel—led him into the trap."

"Bai Jove!"

The juniors followed Tom into the study. Mellish was there with Wildrake. As the juniors entered, Baggy Trimble, who shared the study with Mellish and Wildrake, followed them in. Trimble seemed to have a perfect genius for scenting rows of any sort.

Mellish looked very uneasy indeed at Tom Merry's dark face. He got up from the table slowly.

"Yes, you are the fellow I want to speak with!" snapped Tom Merry. "This afternoon I met you outside Kildare's study. I asked you where Kildare was, and you said you'd seen Kildare round by the chapel."

Mellish licked his lips.

"It's true enough," he muttered. "I did see Kildare there; he was chatting with another senior."

"I don't believe it!" said Tom curtly. "You were put up to tell me that by Knox and Racke!"

"I—I wasn't!" said Mellish.

"You were; it was part of the plot!" said Tom, his lip curling. "You were hanging round Kildare's room, knowing I should come along looking for him."

"It's not true!" said Mellish, eyeing Tom shiftily. "Why don't you tackle Knox about it yourself—not me?"

"I'm tackling you!" snapped Tom Merry, grasping the shoulder of the sneak of the Fourth. "And I'm going to get the truth out of you, you little sweep!"

"And if you touch me I'll tell Knox!" said Mellish, with just a suspicion of a sneer.

Tom Merry shook him angrily. Mellish yelled desperately to Trimble. He apparently did not intend to face Tom alone. "Fetch Knox here, Trimble!" he yelled. "Tell him Merry's bullying me! Leggo, Merry, you cad! I know nothing about it, I tell you!"

Tom Merry released the sneak abruptly, his face flushing red. Trimble giggled and turned to bolt out, only too willing to fetch Percy Knox.

"No; let him go!" cried Tom Merry, as Blake and Herries moved as if to stop the fat junior. "Let Knox come if he wants to. We'll have this matter out to-night, or not at all!"

"Tom!" muttered Lowther.

The chums looked at each other and then at the grim, determined face of Tom Merry in dismay. Tom Merry had met Percy Knox in bitter combat once that evening, and only the intervention of Manners and Lowther had prevented another fight. But now it looked as if nothing could prevent another fight.

And Tom Merry was certainly in no condition for fighting—whether Percy Knox was or not. Knox had beaten him the first time, and it was more certain he would succeed a second time.

"Tom!" repeated Lowther desperately. "Chuck it for to-night, old man! You're not fit, and there's been trouble enough! Leave it until to-morrow."

"Shut up, Monty!" snapped Tom roughly.

"But weally, deah boy—"



The Fourth-Form juniors arrived in the Shell passage just in time to see Percy Knox thrown out of Study No. 10 by Monty Lowther and Manners. "Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Knox is weally the limit! He's been lookin' for twouble again!" "And found it this time!" grinned Herries. (See Chapter 2.)

"Shut up!" snapped Tom.

Arthur Augustus relapsed into silence as Lowther had done—knowing it was useless to say more. Several fellows, attracted to the spot by Mellish's yell, had looked in, and it was clear nothing could prevent the thing going on now.

Tom Merry remained silent—he was clearly waiting for Knox minor to turn up.

"What's going on in here?" demanded Cardew, looking in with Levison and Clive behind him.

"Only Merry waiting for Knox to come and lick him again!" called Racke. And there was a laugh.

"You don't say?" remarked Cardew. "Never knew old Thomas was so greedy!"

There was another laugh, and Tom Merry went scarier, while his eyes glittered dangerously. It was abundantly clear to the junior captain that his prestige had already suffered severely at the hands of Percy Knox; he knew that unless he dealt with the matter promptly and decisively his prestige would suffer still more.

"Here he comes!" yelled Trimble suddenly.

The crowd round the doorway parted as the burly Percy Knox roughly elbowed his way through. There was a nasty look on the new fellow's bruised features.

"What's this?" he said, in his blustering voice. "Here, just let Mellish alone, Merry!"

Tom Merry faced him calmly—only his eyes showing the rage that consumed him.

"I am not touching Mellish," he answered, with dangerous calm.

"Trimble said you were bullying him!" snapped Knox, his face ugly and threatening. "I suppose, because you think Mellish is a pal of mine you can take it out of him—what?"

"Not at all!"

"I evidently didn't give you enough this evening," said Percy Knox, showing his teeth in a grin. "It seems you're anxious for another licking, Merry. If you're not—there's the door! Get out of this study!"

"What?"

"Get out!"

And Percy Knox pointed to the doorway, his eyes glittering.

There was a murmur; for a new fellow—even a fellow like Knox—to order the junior captain of St. Jim's about was something new, and something that was likely to lead to explosions.

"You—order me out of another fellow's study?" said Tom Merry, his voice trembling with passion.

"Just that!"

"And if I refuse to go?"

"I shall lick you again!" said Knox, baring his teeth.

"Then that is my answer!" hissed Tom.

Smack!

It was Tom's fist connecting with Percy Knox's square chin. The blow had all Tom's weight behind it, and the new fellow spun round and dropped crashing into the fireplace.

Crash!

"Bai Jove!"

It was a terrific drive, and for a moment the big fellow lay where he had fallen, panting and gasping.

Tom Merry stood back a yard, his fists clenched, his eyes blazing.

"Now get up and get on with your licking, you puffed-up, cheeky cad!" he panted.

"Tom—"

"Stand back, Lowther!" shouted Tom Merry.

Percy Knox was on his feet again, his heavy face convulsed with fury. He came on with a rush, his big fists up. Tom Merry stood like a rock, his own fists ready. The next moment they were at it hammer and tongs.

"Oh, bai Jove!" muttered Arthur Augustus, in dismay. "This is weally wretched! We ought to stop it, Blake! Tom Mewwy is seedy, and—"

"We're going to stop it!" snapped Jack Blake, his eyes on the combatants who were fighting furiously now. "Lend a hand here, Lowther and Manners—all of you!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Let 'em alone!" roared Aubrey Racke. "Go for the cad, Percy. Knock the stuffing out of him!"

"Oh, good man, Percy!" howled Crooke.

Tom Merry was down—sent to the carpet with a crashing left on the temple. But he was up again almost at once, though he reeled dizzily as he stood awaiting Knox's onslaught.

But it never came. As the new fellow darted in Blake stepped swiftly between the two, with his own fists up. Knox snarled, and punched at him viciously.

It was his last blow. Blake dodged neatly, and the next instant the new fellow was struggling furiously in the grasp of half a dozen fellows.

"That's enough for one night," snapped Jack Blake. "You're a little too ferocious for St. Jim's, Knox. You can fight Tom Merry again, but not to-night."

"Yaas, wathah! Hold him, deah boys!"

In the grasp of Blake, D'Arcy, Levison, Manners, and Lowther, Knox struggled savagely, but in vain. Tom Merry stood back, panting.

"Let me get at him, you cads!" shouted Percy Knox. "You're only doing this because you know I'll lick him!"

"Yah! Fair play!" howled Racke. "Let 'em fight!"

"Let him come on, hang you!" said Tom Merry through his teeth. "What are you chaps chipping in for?"

"You've had enough for one night, old chap," said Levison. "You can meet this giddy fire-eater another time."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Let them fight!" shouted Aubrey Racke furiously. "Fair play, you cads!"

"Racke's hungering for a fight," remarked Lowther, releasing his grasp of Knox, "so I'll oblige him with a few minutes' scrapping."

And the humorous Lowther tapped Aubrey Racke lightly on his prominent nose. Racke howled and retired, rubbing his nasal organ, and scowling. Racke wanted a fight, but not with himself as one of the principals.

But there were other fellows in the crowd who did not see any reason why the fight should be stopped.

"Dash it all, why should you chaps chip in?" snorted Gore. "Give the new fellow fair play."

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"Hear, hear!"

There was a murmur of agreement from the doorway, it was instantly followed by a sudden startled gasp from someone on the fringe of the crowd.

"Look out! Kildare!"

The next moment the crowd parted hurriedly as the tall form of Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, pushed his way through.

He glanced round grimly at the fellows in the room. Then his eyes fell on Tom Merry and Knox minor, and he compressed his lips.

"What does this mean, Merry?" he demanded.

Tom Merry was silent, though really it was a superfluous question to ask. That Merry and his enemy had been fighting was only too plain for all to see. Kildare seemed to realise the fact.

"What are you and Knox minor fighting about, Merry?" he asked sternly. "This is neither the place nor time for this sort of thing; as the junior captain, you ought to know that."

"Perhaps Knox will tell you that, Kildare," said Tom Merry, his eyes glinting at the new fellow.

"I'll do that quickly enough," exclaimed Percy Knox quickly. "Merry went for me because I chipped in to stop him bullying young Mellish here."

"Bullying Mellish?" ejaculated Kildare. "Rubbish, you young idiot! Merry is not a bully!"

"It's true, anyway!"

"It is a silly lie!" snorted Lowther. "Knox—"

"Shut up, Lowther!" snapped Kildare. "Merry, I've heard there's already been trouble between you and this new chap this evening. Those marks on your faces were not made in the last few minutes. What is the trouble?"

"Knox seems to want to evade that question," said Tom, his lip curling. "But it's the sort of trouble you ought to know about, Kildare. I'll tell you. You know I was absent from the match this afternoon, I suppose?"

"Yes," assented Kildare grimly. "I was going to speak to you in regard to that. A skipper can't clear off and leave his team in the lurch like that, Merry. I happen to know you were not detained—"

"I was not detained," said Tom, speaking calmly now. "I was imprisoned in the vaults—tricked and kidnapped by that unscrupulous cad there!"

"What?"

"That is the truth," said Tom. "Just before the match I received a note supposed to come from you, and asking me to go to see you."

"I sent no note!" ejaculated Kildare.

"I know that now. It was a forgery. I went to your study, but you were out. In the passage outside Mellish was mouching, and he told me you were round by the chapel. I went there, and was attacked there by some fellows; they threw a sack over my head, and imprisoned me in the vaults. I was there until after dusk."

Kildare blinked at him unbelievably.

"You seriously tell me that, Merry?"

"Yes. It sounds wild, but it is quite true."

And Tom went on to tell the story as he knew it.

"If it is true, this is a serious matter, Merry," said Kildare, though his face showed he himself could scarcely credit it. "Have you the note on you now—the note you say you got from me?"

"No. I naturally pitched it away after reading it."

"Anyone else see it?"

"No."

"Is Talbot here?" asked Kildare, looking round.

Talbot of the Shell stood out. He looked very uncomfortable.

"You had a note that was supposed to come from Merry just before the kick-off, I believe?" said Kildare. "It ordered you to play Knox. Have you got it still, Talbot?"

Talbot shook his head.

"I wish I had," he said grimly. "I threw it away after reading it."

"H'm! You believed it came from Tom Merry?"

"I did," said Talbot. "But I believe now that it was a forgery. Knox brought it, and I carried out the order in it, and played Knox."

"So Knox brought it, did he?" said Kildare, looking hard at the new fellow. "Who gave you the note, Knox?"

"I found it on the table in my study, it was enclosed in another one, and it came from Merry. It said I was to play in Merry's place, as he was detained," said Knox calmly.

"Have you that note now?"

"No," said Knox smiling. "Like Merry and Talbot, I destroyed the note, naturally."

"Didn't it strike you as queer that you, a new fellow, should be asked suddenly to play in an important match?"

"Not at all," said Knox. "My cousin in the Sixth knows I'm a first-class player, and I imagined that my form had become known through him."

Kildare looked curiously at Percy Knox. A fellow who referred to himself as a "first-class" player was something new to St. Jim's. But Kildare had also heard from Darrell that Knox could play, and he just grunted.

"Well," he said, "I don't quite catch on to why you say Knox had a hand in it, Merry—if it ever happened!"

Tom Merry flushed angrily at the doubt in Kildare's voice and words.

"But I do!" he snapped angrily. "Knox came to me and demanded a place in the team. I naturally refused, having nothing to go on excepting his own brag and swank. He was determined to play, and he got me out of the way so that he could play. The cad's been up against me since the day he came here."

"Have you any proof that he had a hand in it?"

Tom was silent. Now those notes were gone he certainly had not, though it was more than likely he could have proved nothing had they been retained.

"I have no proof," he said quietly. "But I know he was at the bottom of it. He put Mellish up to hanging about your study door, knowing I should come along."

"This won't do at all, Merry," said Kildare quietly. "I'm saying nothing about the kidnapping business. I'll leave that to Mr. Railton. But I want to say this. You're the junior skipper, and you're responsible to some extent for law and order in the House. If you can't keep the fellows in order without fighting in the Common-room and in studies, it's a pity. It's also a pity that you can't get along with this new chap, Knox. He seems a very useful fellow in many ways, and should be an acquisition to the House."

"He's caused nothing but trouble since he came here!"

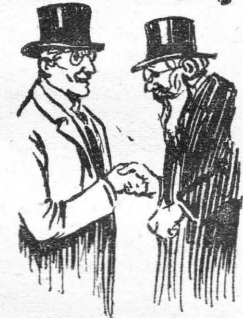
"He seems a chap who can hold his own," said Kildare dryly. "But I am speaking in regard to games, Merry. I've heard from Darrell that he's a rattling fine footballer—has a wonderful command of the ball."

"He sticks to it pretty well, from all accounts," said Tom, unable to restrain a sneer. "Nobody else can get a look in at the ball. He plays for himself, and not for the team."

"That can very easily be remedied," said Kildare. "As skipper, you can cure him of that fault. The point is that we want all the good men we can get, and I believe he's a

CAMEOS OF SCHOOL LIFE!

"OLD BOYS' DAY!"



A VERY special day is this,
When bygone generations
Meet to renew their boyhood's bliss,
And old associations.
When grizzled generals, tall and gaunt,
Delighted to have met you all,
Survey each old familiar haunt,
And wish their youth perpetual!

Statesmen and lawyers, side by side,
Stroll in the quad so sunny;
And millionaires, with all the pride,
That springs from mints of money,
Revisit every pleasant scene
Of youthful joy and jollity;
While smiling masters walk between
These gentlemen of quality!

Poets, professors, famous men
In every branch of learning,
Point out the place that was their
"den,"
And with a wistful yearning,
Recall the dear old days of yore,
The triumphs and disasters,
The japes they practised by the score
On monitors and masters!

Together, at a princely spread,
The Past and Present mingle;
And many a merry speech is said,
While forks and teaspoons jingle.
Dragged from the limbo of the past
Are many stirring stories
Of feuds and fights, games hard and
fast,
And gallantries and glories!

We sit and listen, eager-eyed,
To numerous narrations;
And we shall ever think with pride,
Of bygone generations.
For truly they were giants all,
True to our best traditions;
And with what rapture they recall
Their youthful expeditions!

Maybe, in twenty years to come,
WE shall be of this party;
Shall meet, and hail each old-time
chum,
With greetings glad and hearty!
Maybe, the big brown hand we'll
shake
Of General Sir Tom Merry;
Professor Glyn, Commander Blake—
A pleasing prospect, very!

"Did Mellish volunteer the information that I was round by the chapel, or did you have to ask him?"

"I asked him," said Tom, flushing.

Kildare compressed his lips.

"Then you've made your charge without the slightest proof at all!" he said angrily. "As a matter of fact, I was round by the chapel this afternoon with Darrell. I strolled there, and doubtless Mellish did see me."

"I did," stammered Mellish, gaining courage suddenly. "It's all rot what Merry says."

"Seems to me that it's worse than rot!" exclaimed Kildare. "But if you still stick to your story, Merry—"

"I do!" said Tom doggedly, his eyes flashing.

"Very well," said Kildare. "It is scarcely a matter for me to deal with, though. I will report it to Mr. Railton, and leave the matter in his hands."

"Oh!"

"Now, clear out of this—all of you!" snapped the skipper of St. Jim's. "Merry, just come with me for a minute."

He strode from the study, and Tom Merry followed him, leaving the room in a buzz.

A minute later Tom was standing before Kildare in the latter's study.

very good man. He practically won the match to-day. You'll play him in the Grammar School match on Saturday, of course, Merry?"

"I'll decide that when I've seen him play myself," said Tom.

"I hope you will not allow personal feelings to sway your judgment!" said Kildare tartly.

"You know I shall not do that, Kildare," said Tom Merry, keeping his temper with an effort. "I've told him I shall judge him on his form in the practice match to-morrow afternoon. If he satisfies me I shall play him in the match. But if you order me to play him, Kildare—"

"I don't wish to interfere unnecessarily," said Kildare coldly. "What you propose is good enough for me. Anyway, I hope there will be no more trouble, Merry. That's all!"

And, with a curt nod, Kildare dismissed the Shell junior. The junior skipper of St. Jim's walked out of the room. His face was white, and he was inwardly fuming with rage and chagrin. Plainly enough, Kildare doubted his story of what had happened that afternoon, and, plainly enough, the

genial skipper of St. Jim's was gravely displeased with him. Tom Merry went to bed that night bitter and utterly east down. He felt ill, and he felt wretched in other ways than physical. Already Percy Knox's trickery and underhanded methods were bearing fruit. Even Kildare's attitude had changed towards him. Tom saw a stiff tussle ahead between him and the crafty, scheming new fellow, and he realised more than ever that Percy Knox was a force to be reckoned with.

CHAPTER 4.

The Practice Game!

MR. RAILTON, the Housemaster of the School House, duly went into the matter of the kidnapping of Tom Merry the next morning. But, as even Tom himself anticipated, it all came to nothing.

Unlike Kildare, Mr. Railton seemed to believe Tom Merry's story—indeed, Kildare himself had to admit there was something in it. For that evening Taggles, the school porter, had reported that the keys of the vaults—which were in his charge—had disappeared. And on the morning of Mr. Railton's investigations they were found in the door of the vaults.

Someone unknown had evidently taken them, and had been in the vaults recently. It lent colour to Tom Merry's story, and Mr. Railton went into the matter thoroughly. He had Tom Merry, Talbot, Mellish, Knox minor, Kildare, and Darrell before him, and he thoroughly sifted the evidence—or what evidence there was. But it came to nothing. Save for the missing keys, there wasn't an atom of proof to support Tom's charge—either against Percy Knox or anyone else.

Mr. Railton wisely decided to let the matter drop there, and Tom Merry was obliged to accept his statement that it was closed.

It was hard lines on Tom Merry, and it made the junior captain more bitter and angry than ever. He knew perfectly well what the majority of the fellows thought about it, and he knew that the investigations had done him far more harm than good—as his chums had warned him.

As Tom feared, his cold was much worse when he got up that morning, and he went into classes feeling wretchedly ill. Mr. Linton soon noted the signs, and he suggested a visit to the matron. But Tom made light of it, determined to stick to the day's work. A whispered aside he happened to overhear from Aubrey Racke that it was "cold feet" and not a cold he had, stiffened his resolve in that direction.

Moreover, Tom was determined to be on Little Side at three o'clock that afternoon. It was compulsory games practice, and Percy Knox had stated that he had no intention of attending; Tom was determined that he should attend—willingly or unwillingly.

Tom knew perfectly well that all the fellows knew of Percy's determination not to obey Tom's order, and he was resolved not to show weakness at the beginning of what he saw was going to be a bitter struggle between himself and this domineering, ambitious new fellow.

So, despite the pleading of his chums, Tom turned up promptly at three on Little Side. A glance told him that Percy Knox was absent.

"Knox not here, I see!" he said grimly. "Any fellow know whether he means to turn up or not?"

"Not!" called Crooke, and there was a laugh. "Right!" said Tom calmly. "Blake, Levison, Clive, D'Arcy, Herries, and Lowther, come with me!"

"Let the rotter rip!" murmured Lowther uneasily. Tom walked on without answering. Blake grimaced and led the others after Tom. They found nobody in at Study No. 7, but from Cardew—who had been excused practice—they learned that Knox of the Sixth had "yanked" him off to his study.

It was a poser for Tom, but he did not hesitate long. He set his lips hard, and led his men along to the Sixth Form quarters.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Jack Blake, as Tom knocked on the prefect's door. "Now for it!"

"Come in!"

It was Gerald Knox's voice, after a long pause, and, pushing open the door, Tom entered, his chums remaining in the doorway.

There was a haze of cigarette-smoke in the room, and, on seeing who the visitors were, Percy Knox brought a cigarette from behind him and stuck it between his lips again. Knox senior had evidently pitched his hurriedly into the fire.

He fairly glowered at the juniors. "Hallo! What the deuce do you kids want?" he said angrily. "Clear out!"

"We've come for Knox minor," said Tom quietly. "It's

compulsory games practice to-day, Knox. As junior captain, it's my job to see Knox minor turns up."

"I've given him permission to cut practice this afternoon," said Knox senior. "Now get out, you cheeky young sweeps!"

"Knox must come," said Tom steadily. "Only Kildare and myself have the right to let a chap off games practice."

"Do you know whom you are talking to?" hooted Gerald Knox. "Are you forgetting that I am a prefect, you impudent little worm!"

"Not at all! But I've my duty to do, Knox. Your cousin must come or I shall be obliged to report him to Kildare."

Knox fairly fumed. He jumped to the bookshelves and snatched up his ashplant.

"Hold out your hand, Merry!"

"I shall do nothing of the sort!" said Tom. "I refuse to be caned for carrying out my duties, Knox. If you touch me I shall report the matter to Kildare."

"And we'll jolly well chip in, too!" came from Blake in the doorway.

Knox's eyes glittered, but he flung down the cane. He had no more desire for the matter to be reported to Kildare than he had to have half a dozen hefty juniors swarming over him. He knew only too well that Blake and the rest would chip in if necessary.

"Get out!" he hissed, giving Tom Merry a deadly look. "As a prefect I excuse—"

"Hold on!"

The interruption came from Percy Knox. That junior slid from the table and threw his cigarette into the fire.

"Hold on, Gerald!" he repeated coolly. "I think I will attend practice, after all!"

"You silly young fool! Don't I tell you that you needn't?" blared Knox senior.

"But I want to do so," said Percy calmly. "I'll explain my reasons afterwards. Cheerio, old top!"

He nodded and winked at his cousin, and then he nodded insolently to Tom Merry.

"I'm ready!" he said. "I'll run along to the changing-room and be with you on the footer field in two ties!"

"You'd better!" said Tom Merry.

Knox minor left the room, and Tom and the others followed. Tom was looking perplexed, but he decided to trust the new fellow to turn up as he had stated he would.

"He's diddling you, Tom!" grunted Lowther as they walked back to the ground.

"We'll see!" said Tom grimly. "Kildare is in charge this afternoon. Perhaps he's unaware of that!"

They found Kildare already in charge.

"Knox minor coming?" he snapped, as Tom came up.

"He says he's coming?" said Tom.

"He'd better!"

All doubts were set at rest a minute later as Percy Knox came running on the field. He looked perfectly fit—in striking contrast to Tom Merry.

"Funked it, after all?" whispered Aubrey Racke as Knox joined him. "You ass!"

"Not at all!" murmured Percy Knox. "When I spotted Merry's giddy chivvy I saw he was thundering seedy. It struck me it's a good chance to make him look a fool! If I can only get playing against him I'll make the sweep look small, you see!"

Little dreaming why Percy Knox had changed his mind so abruptly, Tom Merry dropped the new fellow from his mind—for the time being. Sides were picked swiftly—Tom Merry captaining one side and Talbot captaining the other. Tom Merry ignored Percy Knox, and it was at Kildare's suggestion that Talbot picked the new fellow and placed him at centre-forward. From Darrell and also from Knox senior Kildare had heard a lot about the new fellow's abilities, and he was anxious to try him out.

More than one fellow grinned in anticipation on noting that Tom Merry was opposed to his enemy. Tom himself did not like it at all; had he been fitter he would have relished the trial of strength and skill.

It could not be helped, however, and Tom resolved grimly to do all he could, despite his aching head and streaming eyes and nose.

From the very start he spotted Knox minor's game.

At the kick-off Tom got the ball and started off with it. But he lacked his usual dash and spirit—a fact he was only too well aware of himself. Before he had gone a dozen yards he stumbled over the ball, and as he did so a figure nipped along and lifted the ball off his toes almost.

It was Percy Knox, and he went away like greased lightning, the ball like a living thing at his toes.

Tom Merry stood staring after him, and a laugh of derision went up. Tom flushed to the roots of his hair.

"Wake up, Merry!" called Kildare.

But it was easier said than done to Tom Merry that afternoon.



"Who's done this, Skimmy?" asked Levison, cutting the hapless scientist's hands and legs free. "Groooough!" gasped Skimpole. "Tell us who it was, and we'll smash him!" hooted Blake. "Groooough! Oh, dear!" panted Skimpole. "It was a great hulking brute, who used very bad language—" "Ginger Burke!" shouted Herryes. "I believe that is the unpleasant youth's name," gasped Skimpole. "Oh dear!" (See Chapter 5.)

Lowther should have gone off after Knox, but he stopped to speak to Tom.

"Tom, you awful ass!" he said earnestly. "Can't you see you're playing right into that cad's hands? He's out to show you up—to make you look silly if he can. Chuck the game and get off the field—you're not fit to be out, never mind playing!"

"I'm playing!" said Tom through his teeth. "I'll be better presently."

"But, you ass—"

"I'm playing!" said Tom stubbornly.

Lowther shrugged his shoulders and ran off. There was a strain of obstinacy in Tom's nature, and he knew it was useless to argue. But Lowther's face was glum as he went after the speeding new fellow. He saw plainly now why Knox minor had changed his mind and decided to play.

He had abundant reason to think so as the game progressed.

Tom Merry was hopeless—he fumbled the ball, and he missed chance after chance. Kildare came across to him presently.

"What on earth is the matter with you, Merry?" he snapped. "Great Scott! You might never have seen a ball before."

"I'm not up to the mark—got a bit of a cold, Kildare," said Tom.

"Then get off the field, you young ass!"

"I'll be all right presently. I'd rather stick it out!"

"Oh, all right! You know best how you feel, kid! But—"

Kildare shrugged and turned away. He could not understand Tom Merry of late. He saw the signs of the cold on Tom's face, but he did not dream how the junior was actually feeling, and what an effort it was for him to play at all. He could not help suspecting—as many others did—that Tom's curious behaviour was entirely owing to the fact that he was opposed to Knox.

From the beginning Talbot's team had it all their own way. And Percy Knox had his own way with Tom Merry. He seemed to go out of his way to seek a tussle with the junior skipper, and he bested him practically every time.

By half-time Percy Knox had scored the only two goals, and by half-time also Tom Merry was feeling more shamed and humiliated than he had ever done in his life before, while his own chums were seething with wrath and chagrin. They could see as plainly as could Tom himself that Percy Knox was out to make him a laughing stock.

The new fellow's play was brilliant. He left the hapless Tom Merry standing still again and again, and he went speeding through the opposing defence like a knife through cheese.

To the few spectators the game was more comical than anything else. Tom Merry's face was burning as he came off the ground when the whistle went for half-time. He knew only too well what a pitiable figure he had cut, and he also knew that had not the redoubtable Fatty Wynn been in goal for them the slaughter would have been appalling.

"For goodness' sake chuck it, Tom, old man!" pleaded Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah! Pway wetiah ffrom the game, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus, shaking his head gravely. "That beastly outsiders is takin' advantage of your wotten seediness! The fellows seem to think you're only pwetendin' to be wocky because you feah that cad's play will be better than yours."

"That's it, right enough!" said Blake gloomily. "For goodness' sake chuck it, Tommy!"

"And won't they think so all the more if I do retire?" said Tom bitterly, his face scarlet. "I'm sticking it right through to the end! Hang the fellows, and hang Knox!"

But Tom was counting without Kildare.

"There's been enough of this, Merry!" he snapped, coming up behind the juniors. "It's pretty clear you're

not yourself to-day. Dress and get back to school at once!"

"Is that an order, Kildare?" asked Tom, his voice thick.

"Yes. I order you to retire from the game and get indoors! You're making a perfect fool of yourself!"

"Very well, Kildare!"

There was nothing else for it—the captain's orders had to be obeyed. Tom Merry went back to school, biting his lips in his effort to keep back the tears of mortification. Once again the ruthless and crafty new fellow had scored.

Tom went back to the study and flung himself into the armchair, his thoughts black and bitter. The luck seemed against him all along the line. He was still crouching there when Kildare looked in after the practice game.

"You are here, then, Merry?" he said grimly.

"Yes; I'm here!"

"I looked in to tell you that the game ended with the score at five to one for Talbot's side," he said.

"To rub it in, you mean," said Tom, his eyes glinting.

"Not at all!" said Kildare quietly, ignoring the "cheek" of the reply. "Knox was responsible for four out of the five goals. You must have seen," he added dryly, "that the new fellow is a rattling good man."

"He certainly did show up well against me," said Tom bitterly.

"You were not yourself," said Kildare. "You should



**A
SHEFFIELD
READER
WINS
DELICIOUS
TUCK
HAMPER!**

**THIS
WEEK!**

NOT A DOG'S CHANCE!

The man had been summoned for keeping a dog without a licence, and had repeatedly tried to interrupt the proceedings. Every time he stood up, however, he was called to order by the usher. But as he still continued to jump about excitedly, the clerk turned to him and said sternly: "Do you wish the Court to understand that you refuse to renew the dog licence?" "Yes, but—" "No buts. Do you wish us to understand that or do you not?" "Quite, but I—" "Well, then, you must renew your licence or be fined. You know it expired on January 1st?" "Yes," said the miserable man, able to get a word in at last. "and so did the dog!"—A Tuck Hamper, filled with delicious Tuck, has been awarded to: Miss Marjorie Yelland, 69, Broadfield Road, Sheffield.

not have been playing at all. But the fact remains that Knox played a jolly good game."

Tom was silent.

"I admit," said Kildare, "that he plays a selfish game, and that won't do. But that can be altered; he must be taught to play for the good of the team, Merry. That's up to you."

"Me?"

"Yes; after this I suppose you won't hesitate to play this new kid in the Grammar School match?" said Kildare, his voice rising a little. "We want all the good men we can get—and Knox is undoubtedly a good man!"

"I haven't decided on the team yet."

"Well, when you do decide you'll include Knox's name," snapped Kildare.

"Is that an order, Kildare?"

"Yes; I don't often interfere with you, Merry," said Kildare, his tone kinder. "But I really must in this instance. It seems to me that you have taken an unreasonable dislike to this new chap, Knox. It has influenced you in your attitude to him as a footballer, though I am sure you do not realise it yourself, Merry!"

"Very well!" said Tom Merry, though his face was flushed with anger. "I am bound to do as you order me, Kildare. I'll put Knox's name down."

"Right!" said Kildare. "I don't think you'll have reason to regret it as far as footer is concerned, Merry."

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And with that Kildare went out. Knox had indeed scored.

CHAPTER 5.

Ginger Burke!

"HALLO! What the thump's this coming?"

Lumley-Lumley of the Shell asked the question in startled tones.

It was the following day just after afternoon lessons. In the old gateway of St. Jim's quite a number of fellows were standing chatting together in various groups, for though there was a nip in the air, it was fine and sunny even in the late afternoon.

Then Lumley-Lumley asked that question and his startled exclamation drew everyone's attention to the lane outside the gates.

"Great Scott!" gasped Levison. "What the dickens is it?"

Approaching the school gates from the direction of Rylcombe was a quaint and grotesque form. At least, in the distance, and from the strange manner of its approach, it certainly did look quaint and even grotesque.

It was a boy, undoubtedly; and he was staggering along in a curious series of twists and turns and short hops. As the juniors' glances fell upon him he suddenly stumbled and fell full length in the roadway.

"Looks like a giddy escaped monkey," grinned Aubrey Racke.

"Or a giddy frog!" chuckled Core. "Hallo, he's up again!"

"And down again!" roared Racke. "Great pip! Look at him! Ha, ha, ha! I believe it's old Skimmy!"

But few of the fellows joined in Racke's laughter.

"It is Skimmy!" said Levison, frowning. "The poor kid's got himself in a mess or something. Come on!"

He started off at a run for the distant figure, who had sprawled once again in the roadway. After him went Cardew and Clive, and several more of the decent fellows in a rush. Racke and his companions followed at a more leisurely pace.

They arrived on the scene to find Levison and Clive just dragging the hapless Herbert Skimpole to his feet.

Skimpole was the scientific genius of the Shell—or, at least, he fancied himself a scientific genius. He had a very weedy body; but a large head crammed with queer knowledge and cranky notions surmounted it. But though his frail body was of little use, and his big head of less—according to his fellow juniors—he possessed a good, generous heart, and he was popular enough at St. Jim's. Few fellows—if any—had reason to dislike "Old Skimmy!"

The faces of Levison and the rest were dark as they lifted Skimpole up now; for he certainly was in a "mess." He was plastered from head to foot in icy, slimy mud, and his thin hands were tied behind him. His feet were tied together loosely, leaving him just room to move them a few inches at a time. His spectacles—without which Skimpole was lost—were missing from his face altogether.

"Skimmy!" snapped Levison. "Who's done this?"

"Ow! Ow-yow! Groooogh!" groaned Skimpole. "Oh, dear me! I am exceedingly hurt—I have suffered the most acute distress and—groooogh—pain! And I have been deprived of my spectacles, without which I am completely—groooogh—helpless and inconvenienced! Ow! Yow!"

"Who's done this, Skimmy?" repeated Levison angrily, cutting the hapless scientist's hands and legs free. "What brute's treated you like this, kid?"

"Not the Grammarians?" demanded Clive.

"Groooogh! No!"

"Then who? Tell us and we'll smash 'em!" snorted Blake, who had just run up with his chums.

"Yaas, watah!" chimed in Arthur Augustus. "Pway who has committed this wotten outrage, Skimmay, deah boy?"

"Groooogh! Oh dear, dear! I can scarcely stand, my dear fellows. It was a great hulking individual who used very bad language, and who had very red hair. He—"

"Ginger Burke!" shouted Herries. "Oh, the cad!"

"I believe that is the unpleasant youth's name," groaned Herbert Skimpole, rubbing his thin hands together to restore the circulation. "I was rash enough to return from the village alone by the path through the woods. The rude fellow was seated on the stile with a couple of his companions. They refused to allow me to pass, and when I remonstrated with them they rolled me in the ditch, and tied me up. They were also exceedingly rude in their expressions to me, and they kicked and cuffed me. Ow! Ow! They have—groooogh—hurt me exceedingly!"

"Bai Jove!"

"The cads!"

The juniors looked at each other very grimly. Ginger Burke was not unknown to them by any means. He was a

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great, hulking youth, with fists like legs of mutton, and he had a far from enviable reputation. His home seemed to be in Wayland, but he had recently obtained employment in Rylcombe.

The St. Jim's juniors had very good reason to know him. He had come "up against" George Alfred Grundy to begin with, and he had soundly trounced even that mighty fighter. Since then he declared war in no light measure on the St. Jim's juniors.

Unfortunately, he seemed to prefer to bestow his unwelcome attentions on the weaker element—fags and fellows like Trimble and Mellish and suchlike. Now, seemingly, it was the luckless Skimpole's turn. For more than a week now nothing had been heard of him; but apparently his reign of terror was not ended in the district.

Racke & Co. were looking on, with grins; but Percy Knox, who was with them, was looking perplexed.

"What's the rumpus?" he demanded, in his domineering manner. "This queer object's in the Shell, isn't he?"

"Yes; it's old Skimpole," chuckled Racke. "Doesn't he look a sight?"

"Who's this chap Ginger Burke you're talking about?" snapped Knox, his eyes glimmering. "I think I've heard something about him before. Sort of bully of the village, ain't he?"

"Something like that," agreed Clive. "Looks as if he's been bullying Skimmy, doesn't it?"

"And he's done this sort of thing before?"

"Several times," said Gore. "Skimmy isn't the only one."

"And nobody's stopped him?"

"Yes—at least, they've tried to stop his games. Grundy happened to meet him once, but he fairly put Grundy to sleep in no time."

"That clumsy fool!" sneered Percy Knox. "What good is he? I licked him myself in next to no time; I could have licked him with one hand if I'd wanted."

"Why didn't you, then?" said Cardew, yawning. "I noticed you were very careful to use both of them, anyway. You needed them, too."

"I shouldn't need them both to lick you, anyway, you sneering cad!" said Knox, looking Cardew's slim and elegant form up and down. "If you want a scrap—"

"I don't!" said Cardew cheerfully. "Not before tea, anyway. But I tell you what, old sport—why not trot off an' tackle this ginger-headed merchant? You're just about his weight and—ahem!—disposition!"

"You cheeky cad—"

"Hallo! Here's old Thomas!" interrupted Cardew cheerily. "Seen anythin' of our old friend Ginger Burke, Thomas?"

Tom Merry, with Manners and Lowther, came along the lane from the direction of the village, and they stopped and stared at the scene. Tom Merry had his overcoat collar buttoned over a thick muffler. His nostrils and lips showed red against his white face.

"Seen that brute? No!" said Tom, staring at the hapless Skimpole. "Why—what— Has that ruffian done this to Skimmy?"

"Yes; and sent the poor kid home with his hands and feet tied!" said Levison. "It's getting a bit too thick, Merry! Something will have to be done about this!"

"If I were junior skipper," said Percy Knox, with a sneer, "something would be done—and jolly quickly, too! Perhaps Merry has done something, though—perhaps he's already licked the chap?"

"Not likely!" chipped in Crooke scoffingly. "This looks like it, doesn't it? Merry gives Ginger a wide berth—what?"

"That's enough, Crooke!" snapped Lowther, his eyes gleaming dangerously. "Merry's already been out looking for the brute more than once. You know that!"

"But he's never found him," murmured Racke, winking at the sky. "I wonder why?"

There was a laugh, and Tom Merry's face flushed. He could already see what this was leading up to.

"Dry up, Racke! As the biggest funk at St. Jim's, it's scarcely for you to criticise anyone," said Levison. "I know for a fact that Merry's hunted for that brute; I've been out on the trail with him myself. The cad only goes for duffers, and he keeps clear of trouble."

"It's queer that he's kept clear for so long," said Percy Knox, his lip curling. "I like the idea of Merry as champion of the oppressed—what? Look here, the chap can't be far away. Why doesn't Merry go after him now?"

He looked straight at Tom Merry as he spoke, and it was clear to all that this was a challenge.

"I don't choose to go after him now," said Tom quietly.

"Why not?" asked Knox, lifting his eyebrows. "Dear me! Has our highly respected skipper got cold feet?"

"You would not understand if I explained," said Tom, steeling his voice to calmness. "But I'm not seeking a fight with anyone to-night."

"Tell us why," said Knox blandly. "It would be interesting, I'm sure!"

All eyes were on Tom Merry now. Actually even Levison was a trifle surprised at Tom's attitude.

"I challenge you to go out and fight that chap," said Percy Knox coolly. "I think I've heard you say that, as skipper of the Lower School, you had certain duties and responsibilities, Merry. Isn't it your job as skipper to stop bullying either inside or outside the school?"

"It's my job to try," answered Tom.

"Then here's your chance, being such a dutiful chap," said Knox. "Show the fellows that you're up to your job."

"I'm not risking a fight to-night," said Tom. "There are two fights I am very keen on, though—I'm keen to fight Ginger Burke, and I'm keen to fight you again, Knox, you cheeky cad! But not yet!"

Knox laughed.

"Why?"

"I'll tell you one reason; the other reason I won't explain," said Tom, flushing. "It's the Grammar School match to-morrow. We'll need all our fitness and energy to win. I'd advise you to steer clear of scraps also to-night, Knox, as you're in the team."

"Bunkum!"

"Yah! Cold feet!" called Crooke, from the fringe of the crowd.

Tom Merry turned away abruptly.

"Come along, Skimmy!" he said, taking Skimpole's arm. "I'll report this affair to Kildare. That brute shall pay for this!"

With that Tom Merry led Skimpole away towards the gates.

"Yah!" someone shouted after him. "Funk!"

Tom Merry did not turn round, or halt. He had already made a fool of himself on two occasions—when he had fought Knox the night before, and when he had played footer that afternoon. Tom realised that now, and he was not going to make a mistake again. He had fought when he was not fit to fight, and he had been beaten. He had played footer when he was not fit to play, and he had made a fool of himself in consequence. In both instances he had played into his enemy's hands. Even in the hope of a swift revenge on Skimmy, Tom did not intend to risk that again. And his decision—especially in view of the coming match—was a wise one. Unfortunately, he did not know Percy Knox's real intention, and he was fated to learn that Percy Knox meant to score another way.

CHAPTER 6:

Knox Minor's Challenge!

MONTY LOWTHER and Manners followed Tom Merry towards the school; but none of the others did, for as the crowd was about to disperse Percy Knox held up his hand.

"Hold on, you fellows!" he said grimly. "I've got something to say before you go. Just a minute!"

"More hot air?" asked Levison curtly.

"Or more slander and back-biting?" said Blake.

"Not at all!" said Percy Knox regardless. "I mean real business. For the good of the school this sort of thing can't go on!"

"A lot you care for the good of the school," grunted George Herries. "Dry up!"

"It's the duty of the junior captain to put down bullying," said Knox coolly. "As our respected junior captain refuses then someone else must do the job for him."

"Who's going to do it, then?"

"I am!" was the cool reply. "Merry seems to funk the job; but I'm going to show him that there's one fellow in the Lower School who isn't afraid to stand up for the weaker chaps."

"Good man, Knox!" called Raeke.

"It's rather thick, though, that a new fellow has to do Merry's dirty work for him," said Crooke.

"Not at all!" said Knox, planting his feet apart and glancing round very much as the mighty Grundy was wont to do. "I suppose he just funks it, knowing his dashed limitations. He's a poor sort of skipper I must say; and I wonder you chaps put up with him. But now a better man's come along—"

"Bow-wow-wow!" said Blake.

"D'you want your dashed head punched, Blake?"

"Not by you, old chap!" said Blake cheerily. "I'm rather particular, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Cheese it, Blake!" said Gore angrily. "If Knox thinks he can lick Ginger Burke, then I'm backing him up for one. Somebody ought to lick the brute and teach him to leave St. Jim's fellows alone."

"Why don't you, then?"

"I'm not up to him, and you jolly well know that; you aren't yourself!" snapped Gore. "Tom Merry's the only fellow barring Knox who has the ghost of a chance against that brute. And if Merry funks it, then the more credit to Knox if he doesn't."

"Hear, hear!"

"Tom Mewwy does not funk him!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy warmly. "He has to-morrow's match to think of!"

"Aren't I down to play, too?" remarked Knox. "I'm not afraid of playing with a black eye if needs be."

"Tom Mewwy is also vewy seedy—"

"I've noticed he's been seedy of late!" grinned Raeke. "Ever since Knox came on the scene in fact! He goes wobbly at the knees whenever he faces Knox. Notice him this afternoon at footer? He wants us to think he's seedy!"

"Bunkum!" said Scrope.

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"Allow me to point out that we're wastin' time gassin'," remarked Cardew casually. "If dear old Knox means to administer a few hard knocks to the Burke merchant, I suggest he gets a giddy move on. Possibly he'd rather give Ginger time to wander away, though?"

Percy Knox took a step towards Cardew, his eyes gleaming pugnaciously. He shook his clenched fist under Cardew's nose.

"I've already warned you, you stuck-up tailor's dummy!" he said threateningly. "Any more cheek from you and you're for it!"

Cardew neither retreated nor turned a hair. With his hands still in his overcoat pockets he bent his head and scrutinised Knox's fist curiously.

"H'm! Quite a useful article!" he remarked. "Have you ever tried soap on it?"

"You—you—cheeky—"

"A death in the family accounts for your nails bein' in mourning. I presume?" inquired Cardew, looking up blandly. "Try constant work with a nail-brush!"



"You've got to be taught to leave St. Jim's fellows alone," said Levison who's going to do the trick," said Knox. "Oh!" ejaculated Burke by the announcement. But after eyeing the St. Jim's junior

There was a chuckle; but Levison dragged his chum away.

"Chuck it, Cardew, you ass!" he said uneasily. "Stand back, Knox! No need to want to fight every chap who tries to rag you a bit! If you mean to have a go at Burke—"

"I'll fight this chap first if he likes," snapped Knox, glaring at the smiling Cardew. "I'm not standing—"

"Why not tackle Burke first? You'll need all you've got in you for him!" said Clive grimly. "And Burke might clear off!"

"He'll be hanging on that stile yet, I fancy!" said Glyn.

"It's a favourite resting-place of the lazy wastrel. This way—if you mean it, Knox?"

"I do mean it!" growled Knox.

"Then come along!"

Glyn led the way smiling. Knox stalked after him quickly enough, his square jaw set hard. The rest swarmed after the two in eager anticipation. A scrap between such a "coughdrop" as Percy Knox and a terror like Ginger Burke was more than likely to be worth watching.

That Knox was in earnest none of them doubted—even the cynical, humorous Cardew did not doubt that. The new fellow's swank and blustering vain-glory amused him; but he did not doubt that Knox would come "up to scratch" when the time came. The main body of the juniors, however, were not amused—they had come to know that Knox could back up his bragging with deeds, and they overlooked it; indeed, the new fellow was already something of a hero in the eyes of the more easily influenced element at St. Jim's.

It was not a far cry to the stile in Rylcombe Woods, and when near the spot Levison called a halt.

"Hold on, chaps!" he said. "No good rushing in and giving the chap time to bolt—and he'll certainly bolt if he sees a crowd! I suggest Knox and two chaps go straight to the stile while the rest of us scout round and surround the spot."

"Good wheeze!"
"Yaas, wathah!"

This was promptly decided upon, and with Levison and



"Oh, 'ave I!" growled Ginger Burke. "And I'm the man who's going to do the trick!" said Levison. "Oh, are you, by crickey!" He seemed not a little taken aback at a moment he swiftly threw off his jacket. (See Chapter 6).

Blake—who volunteered—to back him up, Percy Knox strode on through the trees towards the stile.

The stile came into view suddenly, through the bare trees, and Levison gave a grunt of satisfaction. Seated on the stile was a big, burly youth in rough clothes, and wearing a scarf round his thick throat. His hair was a fiery ginger in colour and like rope almost in texture.

"That's the chap!" said Levison grimly. "Like the look of him, Knox?"

"I'll make mince-meat of him!" said Knox, his eyes glinting.

He stalked on towards the stile—whatever else could be said of him, he did not lack pluck. Two other youths were lounging round the stile and all three were smoking "fags."

They jumped up as the three St. Jim's fellows swung into their view. Ginger Burke's companions seemed to hesitate; but Burke spoke to them and they stopped.

"'Ere's some blokes from the skool out for a ta-ta!" he grinned. "Shall we let 'em pass if they arsk us nicely?"

The three juniors stopped.

"We don't want to pass, Burke!" said Levison calmly. "We've come specially to see you."

"Ho, 'ave you!"

"Yes. You've just been ill-treating a St. Jim's kid, you cad—a fellow not half your size!" said Levison. "We've come to see you about that. There's a chap here who intends to knock the stuffing out of you, you cowardly brute! You've got to be taught to leave St. Jim's fellows alone."

"And I'm the man who's going to do the trick!" said Knox, stepping up to Ginger Burke.

"Oh!" ejaculated Ginger Burke. "Oh! Are you, by crickey!"

He seemed not a little taken aback by the announcement. But after eyeing Knox for a moment his small eyes glittered and he swiftly threw off his jacket and spat on his hands.

Knox took off his own jacket and cap and handed them to Levison.

"Hold on!" said Jack Blake. "Not here—no good asking for trouble, Knox; there's a nice quiet little clearing a few yards in the woods. If a master or prefect comes along—"

"This 'ere spot's good enough for me," said Ginger Burke, showing his teeth. "It won't take me more'n two tics to knock that swank-pot inter the middle of next week!"

"But it's not good enough for us," said Levison. "This way, chaps!"

He started off, and Knox started after him. Burke did not follow. As a matter of fact, Ginger Burke did not like the look of things at all. He was used to terrorising, and to be faced so coolly like this rather frightened him. There was not a little of the coward in his nature.

He gave his companions a swift look.

"Run for it!" he hissed.

He started off with a rush.

"Look out!" howled Blake.

He made a clutch at the fleeing Burke, but one of Burke's companions tripped Blake up, and he went crashing down. Burke and his friends went crashing amid the trees.

They did not get far. There came a shout, and suddenly the woods seemed alive with fellows wearing St. Jim's caps. Burke went crashing down in the grasp of Cardew, Clive, and Herries. His companions met with a similar fate at the hands of a swarm of St. Jim's juniors.

"Bring the cads along!" called Levison, hurrying up. "I might have expected something like this, the sweeps!"

The three roughs were dragged up and forced towards the clearing. Burke's face was savage and frightened now.

"I knowed it!" he yelled furiously. "I knowed it were a trap! Fair play, blow you!"

"You'll get fair play all right!" snapped Blake. "These fellows have only come to see the fun, Burke! This chap here wants to fight you, and we're going to see you fight him, my pippin!"

"Look 'ere—" yelled Burke.

"You needn't fear that we shall chip in!" snapped Levison, his lip curling. "It's going to be a fair fight, as far as we're concerned. We sha'n't interfere, and your men mustn't, either!"

"Oh!"

Burke looked relieved. He eyed the juniors suspiciously, and then, as if he decided to accept the challenge, he grinned—a nasty grin.

"All right!" he snarled, looking Knox's figure up and down. "I reckon as I can make mince-meat of that bloke! 'Ow do I know as you won't chip in if I licks 'im, though!"

"You've got our word for that," snapped Levison. "If Knox fails to lick you, then someone else will have a go at you, until you learn to leave our fellows alone."

"By crimes!"

The burly rough looked still a bit suspicious; he evidently could not understand why the juniors did not "go for" him and thrash him—as he and his friends would doubtless have done had the position been reversed.

But he threw his jacket—which he had snatched up on bolting—down again, and spat on his hands and rolled up his shirtsleeves.

Knox rolled up his. His face was hard and very determined as he stepped back, ready for the business.

"One of these chaps can be your second, and we'll have the usual rounds," said Levison, who seemed to have constituted himself master of ceremonies.

He took out his watch, and Racke stepped forward, apparently anxious to be his pal's second.

"You shove that there watch back!" snarled Ginger Burke, his big jaw protruding. "I wants no rounds, and I wants no seconds for this job. I'm going to fight, not dance round like a bloom-in' cat!"

"As you like!" said Knox. "A rough and tumble will suit me. I fancy I'm going to show you—"

"Look out!" yelled Blake. Just in time Knox stepped back and put his hands up, for Ginger Burke came at him with a mad rush, his big arms waving like the arms of a windmill. He had apparently got tired of waiting.

Crash! Knox staggered back, his guard raised too late for Ginger's left jolted on his chin, sending him reeling, and then Ginger's right smashed to the side of his jaw with sickening force.

The new fellow slewed round, pitched sideways, and went crashing down.

He picked himself up, dazed, hurt, and enraged. "Less gassing, Knox!" exclaimed Gore. "Fight, you idiot!"

CHAPTER 7.

Victory!

FROM his savage expression Percy Knox was determined, too. The sudden onslaught had taken him unawares. He had intended to make a bit of a speech before starting, being a fellow who loved dramatics. But he dropped that idea now.

As he picked himself up Burke came at him again, in a bull-like rush, and his massive, bunched knuckles swung round in a mighty punch.

The punch never connected—luckily for Knox. That youth slipped neatly under the arm, and drove his own right with a smashing thud into the bully's unprotected solar plexus.

Ginger Burke choked, doubled up, and Knox followed his first blow with a tearing, jabbing upper-cut.

"Bravo!"
"Good man, Knox!"

Ginger Burke tottered, and then Knox went at him like a tornado, slamming, jabbing, and punching mercilessly. Ginger Burke obviously had little idea of boxing, and his defence was pathetically inadequate.

Crash!
"Bravo! He's down!"
"Go it, Percy!"

Percy Knox stood back, breathing hard, his face still hard. He knew only too well that the hulking Ginger Burke could stand any amount of such punishment, and that he would be up again quickly enough.

He was right. Ginger leaped to his feet, snarling, his eyes glittering at his younger adversary. The rough realised now that, though he was bigger and stronger, he would have his work cut out to win the battle.

Knox had strength, too; his hefty blows had "rattled" the bigger fellow, and he was more active, and he certainly had more knowledge of boxing—far more.

"Knox's fight!" murmured Ralph Reckness Cardew, "unless the ass is silly enough to run right into 'old Ginger's fist too many times—like that."

Smack!
Ginger Burke had caught the over-eager Knox napping with a mighty slam in the region of the heart that all but doubled up the St. Jim's fellow. He followed it up with a volley of furious blows that Knox parried desperately, backing, ducking, and twisting, as he did so.

"Is this 'ere a runnin' match?" sneered Ginger Burke savagely. "Stand up to me, you bloomin' snake!"

It was Burke's turn to be over-eager now. He followed up recklessly, slamming blow after blow, most of which Knox, rattled and dazed as he was, easily guarded.

Suddenly Knox stood firm under the fusillade of blows and landed a swift, jolting right full on the bridge of Burke's nose.

It was a nasty smack, and Ginger yelped, a thin stream of crimson spurting from his nasal organ.

"You little rat!" hissed Ginger. "I'll smash you for that!"

The blow had stung furiously, as a blow on the nose always does, and Ginger lost his temper badly.

"Look out now, Knoxy!"

There was need for the warning. The hulking Ginger came on raging, his small, beady eyes glittering menacingly.

The next moment the two were at it hammer and tongs, Ginger following up furiously as Knox gave ground steadily, countering, guarding, and jabbing when he could.

It was an onslaught that could not last, as Knox well knew. But it was an onslaught that few could have stood up against.

Crash!
Knox tripped suddenly and crashed down. Ginger bent as if to hammer him as he lay, but a howl of wrath from the crowd made him jump back again.

"You'd better not!" said Levison. "Stand back!"
Knox minor was on his feet again now, swaying unsteadily, his eyes blinking rapidly. That last blow—a smashing hook,

that sent his head jerking back—had shaken him-up considerably. But he was up again.

"He's game, anyway!" said Jack Blake, with reluctant admiration. "I can't stand the conceited blighter, but, by Jove, he's game!"

"Yaas, wathah!"
"Good old Knoxy!"

The new fellow's strong personality had undoubtedly taken a firm hold on the minds of the more easily influenced fellows. That shout proved that Percy Knox was already well on the way to popularity with the crowd. As he heard that shout his lips met and he faced Ginger Burke again with a twisted grin on his bruised face.

He was determined, come what may, to increase that measure of popularity. That shout of encouragement gave him new courage, courage which in that stage of the fight he was sadly lacking. That last furious attack had bemused and staggered him, shaking his nerve and grit.

But he seemed a different fellow as he faced the crouching bully. Ginger came on again, a little over-confident now. Percy Knox stalled off the rush, and then, with a clever feint, he drove his way through his opponent's defence with a terrific upper-cut.

Ginger Burke crashed to the frosty grass.

"Good man, Knox!"
Knox grinned again, and waited for his opponent to rise, ready to knock him down again—for he was not the fellow to grant an enemy the slightest advantage.

Ginger Burke clawed himself to his knees, and was getting up when Knox floored him again with a swinging hook. Burke swore, his beady eyes glimmering with hatred. He started up again, and then swiftly and unexpectedly he flung himself bodily at his adversary's legs.

Knox minor crashed down on his back as the rough's powerful arms dragged his legs from under him.

There was a howl, and once again Burke drew back when about to jump on the prostrate junior. He was evidently not used to modern methods of warfare.

But his drawing back gave the dazed and half-stunned junior a chance to rise. He staggered to his feet, and as Burke drove in again Percy Knox stepped swiftly back, and, quick as thought, shot out his foot.

Crash!
The burly rough tripped over the foot and went crashing down full on hands and face.

"Oh!"
It was a gasp of surprise—amazement and dismay from the St. Jim's fellows looking on. Burke had played a cowardly and unfair trick—but that was no reason why Percy Knox should do likewise. Two blacks never made a white to St. Jim's fellows where sportsmanship was concerned. It was a thing none present could have imagined a fellow like Tom Merry doing.

But Knox had done it; and he seemed proud of the trick.

"Tit for tat, you cad!" he panted. "Two can play at those games! Come on, you hound!"

"That's the game, Percy!" roared Racke. "Give it him back!"

"Bai Jove! That was wathah wotten!" murmured Arthur Augustus, in dismay.

The crowd was silent—but not for long! They very soon forgot Knox's lapse in the excitement of the next few whirling moments.

"Now the band will play!" murmured Levison. "They've both lost their giddy tempers this time!"

"Knox has it!" remarked Cardew. "Get your giddy shoulders ready to chair the giddy conquerin' hero home again!"

There was deep sarcasm in Cardew's remark; but scarcely anyone heard him, so engrossed were they in what followed.

As Levison opined, the band did play, so to speak. And as Cardew had added, Knox certainly "had it."

With both their tempers gone, and with science and skill—what little had been used in the fight—thrown to the winds, it was just a case of pluck and wind and endurance.

Percy Knox certainly had the pluck; and in regard to wind and endurance he certainly had the advantage of the burly wastrel. Ginger Burke was strong undoubtedly; but—as the juniors had already suspected—there was a yellow streak in his make-up.

The big fellow couldn't stand much punishment—and Knox gave him plenty during the hurricane attacks made just then. Scarcely giving him time to get to his knees Knox darted in and fairly rained down blows on the bigger fellow, who, turned sideways, defending himself dazedly, his face evil in its fear and hatred.

"Give it him, Percy!" howled Racke in a fever of excitement.

"Yes; give it him!" shouted Clive. "Let the brute taste a bit of pain—give him some for old Skimmy!"

Knox gave him plenty—not to revenge Skimmy or any one else; Knox would never have lifted a hand to save or

revenge Skimpole, for he was not that sort. But he was revenging his own hurts, and—his one burning desire—he was fighting for popularity, and to “show up” Tom Merry, the fellow he hated.

The end came swiftly. Ducking desperately before a merciless shower of punches, Ginger Burke suddenly darted in and clinched. Percy Knox grinned an ugly grin, and, knocking one arm swiftly upwards, he shot out his right with all the force he had left behind it.

The smack took the big bully full in the throat, and as he fell back, gasping, Knox's left hit him neatly under the chin.

Crash!

Once again Ginger Burke was down, and this time he made not the slightest effort to rise. He lay, panting, his eyes burning as he glared up at the triumphant new fellow.

“Had enough?” panted Knox.

“Yes, hang you!” came in a gasping croak. “I—I'm done!”

“Going to leave St. Jim's chaps alone after this, what?” demanded Knox, his chest heaving as he stood over his fallen enemy.

“Yes, hang you!”

“If you don't,” said Percy Knox threateningly, “I shall come and seek you again, my pippin! And next time I'll make a hospital case of you! You've terrorised this district long enough, but it's going to stop now I've come. See?”

“Cheers!” murmured Cardew.

The whimsical Fourth-Former was speaking sarcastically, as usual, but he was not taken sarcastically by the crowd.

“Good old Knox!” bawled Racke.

“Hurrah!”

There was a roar that could have been heard at St. Jim's. Racke & Co., and a dozen other fellows, swarmed round Knox and shook his hand with admiring enthusiasm.

Blake, Clive, Levison, and several others turned away, smiling.

“Hold on!” drawled Cardew. “Aren't you fellows goin' to stay to do honour to the conquering hero? Herries, run back for your cornet! What about a tenor solo, Gussy?”

“Ass!”

“I don't think I'll stay to do homage, either,” remarked Cardew, yawning. “I must say I admire you fellows' good taste in the matter.”

“He showed pluck,” said Blake. “But then—”

“Tom Merry would have licked the chap in four minutes,” said Levison quietly. “I would have tackled him myself if I'd known just what he was made of. He's a fighter, is Ginger Burke, but only when he's up against someone he knows he can lick. He can't stand punishment, and he soon crumples up.”

“He might easily have been knocked out in the first minute,” grunted Herries. “And that's the chap who had the reputation of being a bruiser—the giddy terror of the neighbourhood! B-r-r-r!”

“The other chaps seem to think Knox's done something great, anyway!” growled Jack Blake, looking back. “Just hark to them!”

Behind the juniors, through the trees, came a roar. Knox, his bruised face flashed with pleasure, came through the trees, with an admiring crowd swarming round him.

“Rotten!” said Digby. “I'm glad that brute Burke's been laid by the heels at last, but—but—”

“It means unpleasantness for old Tommy,” said Clive, shaking his head. “This new chap's done what Tommy didn't do—and what the fellows seem to think he ought to have done.”

“It'll do Merry a lot of harm, I'm afraid,” said Levison. “I believe Knox's sole reason in fighting Burke was to belittle Tom, and gain popularity for himself.”

“Of course it was!” said Herries. “It—it's rotten, really!”

And that, indeed, was the opinion of Tom's friends. In his ruthless campaign of hatred against Tom Merry, and in his burning ambition to become “cock-of-the-walk,” Percy Knox had undoubtedly scored yet again. He had done what Tom Merry had refused to do, and what most of the fellows had felt Tom Merry ought to have done.

CHAPTER 8.

Crossed Off!

“HALLO! What's on now?”
Monty Lowther asked the question as the Terrible Three came out of the tuckshop. It was long past tea-time, but the chums had been discussing footer matters with Talbot of the Shell, and even tea had had to take a “back seat” to footer matters. The discussion had ended, however, and now Tom Merry and his chums were making a belated raid on the tuckshop for cakes for tea.

Then Lowther made the exclamation as he sighted a crowd of fellows coming through the gates.

“Something happened!” remarked Manners. He called to Blake & Co. and Cardew & Co. as they came along at that moment. “What's the matter, Blake?”

“You mean that gang?” said Blake, jerking his head back towards the gates. “You'll know that soon enough, I fancy!”

“Alas! Poor Thomas!” sighed Cardew.

“You've fairly given dear old Knoxy an openin' for a jab at your giddy solar plexus this time.”

Tom Merry gave a start, his eyes fixed on the approaching swarm of excited fellows.

It was some time since he had escorted the hapless Skimpole indoors, and the matter had left his mind since then. He felt instinctively that there was more trouble here for him, however.

“Has Knox—” he began.

“You've guessed it, Thomas!” murmured Cardew, though he knew Tom was far from guessing “it.” “Our friend Percy has been distinguishin' himself again. His giddy star is again in the ascendant!”

“What do you mean, you silly ass?”

“Look at Knox's chivvy, an' take two guesses, dear man,” suggested Cardew. “Ginger Burke's chivvy, I may add, is much worse than that. It was resemblin' if you remember, a turnip before; it now resembles a badly squashed tomato!”

Tom Merry went a trifle paler. In a flash he grasped the position.

“You—you mean Knox has been fighting Ginger Burke?” he said thickly.

“Just that! Knox knocked him into the middle of next week, as our friend Grimes would term it.”

“Phew!” breathed Manners. “So that was his game!”

“Yes, that was his game!” said Tom Merry, setting his lips. “He tried to taunt me into fighting Burke, knowing that, as matters stood, I should refuse. Then he goes and tackles the brute himself.”

“Just to show you up!” said Lowther savagely.

“I never even guessed that was his game,” said Tom. “And—and you say he actually licked that lot?”

“Licked him hollow!” assented Blake. “But it's nothing really to make a big song about, though the fellows think it is!”

more than an inflated bladder. You could have licked him, Tom!”

“I meant to lick him,” said Tom, “but—”

“Here they come!” murmured Lowther. “Oh crumbs! Look at the swanking cad!”

Swanking was scarcely the word to describe Percy Knox's entry into the quad at St. Jim's. He fairly strutted, the crowd almost trotting at his heels. George Alfred Grundy was known to have an amazingly good opinion of himself, and he often strutted whether there was cause or no. Percy Knox—as Lowther remarked—could have licked Grundy into a cocked hat at the same game.

There was some excuse for it now, perhaps, but to sober, ordinary fellows like Tom Merry & Co., his behaviour seemed ludicrous in the extreme.

“His blushin' honours thick upon him!” murmured Cardew.

Cardew stood out and held up his hand.

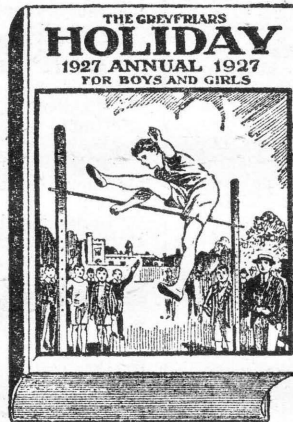
“Halt!” he cried dramatically. “We must celebrate this victory in a suitable manner, dear men! Manners, fetch your camera out! There isn't much sun left, but Knox is such a shinin' light he'll make up for it.”

“Out of the way, Cardew!” roared Racke. “You cheeky ass!”

“What about a brass band?” drawled Cardew. “Percy, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 986.

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why not make a speech while the school band's raked together?"

"Dry up, Cardew!"

"Out of the way, you mad ass!"

Knox gritted his teeth and glared at the smiling Cardew. For the affair to be made light of and turned into a joke was the last thing he desired—as Cardew well knew.

"You rotter, Cardew!" he gritted. "If Merry's put you up to making fun of me—"

"Perish the thought!" drawled Cardew. "You're naturally funny, old bean, without that!"

"Oh, come away, Cardew, you ass!" snapped Levison, and he dragged his chum by the arm.

"I'll talk to you later, Cardew!" said Knox meaningly.

"I've had enough of your cheek!"

He looked at Tom Merry, who was just turning away.

"Hold on, Merry!"

"Well?" snapped Tom.

"You've been looking for Ginger Burke, I understand—

aching to lick him, what?"

"I have looked for him!"

"Well, you've no need to look for him again," said Knox, with a sneer. "I found him at once—he didn't need much looking for as far as I was concerned."

"Merry's only looked in the Head's study!" called Crooke, and there was a laugh.

"Well, I soon found him, anyway," grinned Knox, mopping a streaming nose. "And I licked him—licked him to the wide! I could have licked him with one hand tied, I believe."

"Go hon!" said Clive.

"It's no joking matter!" said Knox, turning abruptly on Clive in sudden fury. "It's a dashed disgrace to St. Jim's that a funk like Tom Merry should be junior skipper!"

"Hear, hear!" roared Mellish.

"We want a new skipper!" shouted Racke.

"Well, it's time there was a change, anyway," said Gore, and there was a murmur. "Whether Merry farked or not, he's left another fellow to tackle the job he should have tackled. If Tom Merry's got any excuse to make, he—"

"I haven't!" said Tom Merry.

And he went indoors, his face white. Lowther and Manners followed him up to Study No. 10. A cheerful fire was burning there, and almost in silence the three chums prepared tea.

"I'm afraid you'll have to do something to stop this business, Tom," said Manners quietly as they started on hot buttered toast. "Knox is gaining ground—there's no denying it! It's the rottenest luck imaginable that you should be so seedy just now!"

"I'll be all right soon!" said Tom, trying to speak cheerfully. "All the decent fellows know me—they know I never farked Burke. I just had the bad luck to miss him each time."

"I don't know," grunted Manners. "It's queer how easily the chaps turn, the silly asses! It isn't only Racke and his pals now, remember! I don't like the look of things at all, Tommy!"

"I hope to goodness you'll be fit for the match to-morrow at all events!"

"I wish I could feel I should be!" muttered Tom. "This thumping cold will take its course, I suppose!"

"You ought to see the matron and get something, Tom," said Lowther. "Your chivy looks a sight—anybody should see you're not fit to be up, never mind anything else."

"Rot! You know what the fellows will think if I do?"

"I know what they'll think if you don't," said Lowther, shrugging. "Don't forget the match to-morrow!"

"Knox will pull the game through if I let them down!" said Tom bitterly.

"You still think of playing him, then?"

"Yes; in any case, Kildare has ordered me to do so," said Tom. "I shall put the list up after tea!"

Lowther and Manners looked relieved. They had feared Tom would refuse to include the new fellow in the team, and they knew what dissatisfaction that would cause.

It was a cheery meal in Study No. 10 that afternoon. When it was over Tom Merry swiftly made his team out and pinned it on the notice-board in Hall. Several fellows were in Hall at the time, and a rush was made for the list.

"Knox is down!" exclaimed Lumley-Lumley. "So you've shoved him in, after all, Merry!"

Tom Merry nodded.

"Good!" said Lumley-Lumley.

There was a chorus of approval on all sides. Tom Merry set his lips as he heard it. It did not come pleasantly to his ears at all.

"It's a cert for St. Jim's then!" said Gunn, with satisfaction. "That new kid can play, and no mistake."

"Grammar School won't have an earthly!" said Bates

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oracularly. "Knox says he means to score at least four goals, and he's a chap who does what he says, you know."

"He's offering ten to one on St. Jim's," grinned Trimble. "He, he, he! Who wants to take him on and lose a quid or two?"

Tom Merry was just turning away; but he halted at that.

"What's that you say, Trimble?" he snapped.

"Eh? He, he, he!" grinned Trimble, entertained by the expression on Tom Merry's face. "It's a fact! That swanky cad's offering anyone ten to one on St. Jim's for to-morrow's match. The beast kicked me just because I offered to take him on—if he'd lend me the money, you know. Beastly bully!"

And Trimble rubbed himself.

"Is that a fact, Trimble?" said Tom, in a grim tone.

"Yes; ask anybody," said Baggy Trimble, his eyes glimmering at the chance to "pay Knox back" for that kick. "I say, it's a cert we shall win, though. If you'll lend me—"

Trimble ceased speaking, for Tom Merry was walking away. In the ordinary way Tom would have ignored any statement from Trimble; but he had good reason to believe there was truth in it this time. He had known that Knox was addicted to betting on school matches with Racke & Co. But he was not a member of the school team then.

He was a member now, and that made all the difference.

As he walked away, Lumley-Lumley whistled.

"That's done it!" he said. "Trimble, you fat little mischief-maker—"

"Well, Knox kicked me!" grinned Trimble.

"And I'll kick you, too!" said Lumley-Lumley.

"And I!" added Clifton Dane.

Thud!

"Yoooooop!"

Trimble yelled and bolted, just missing Dane's kick as he went.

"That's about done it!" said Dane, shrugging. "Now for more trouble! I bet he's gone to play Hamlet with Knox!"

"Serve the bounder right!" said Gunn. "But let's go and see what happens, chaps!"

There was a rush to follow Tom Merry. As they expected, Tom, with his chums at his heels, had gone straight to Study No. 7 in the Shell passage. It was the study occupied by Racke & Co.

Tom Merry reached it, and rapped on the door. Then he turned the knob. The door was locked.

"Who's that?" called Aubrey Racke from inside.

"Tom Merry!" answered Tom. "I wish to speak with Knox, Racke!"

"Go and eat coke!"

"Oh, let the dear little fellow in!" came Knox's voice in a drawl. "I'm getting bored and require a bit of entertainment. Open the door, Mellish!"

The key turned in the lock, and the door was dragged open. Tom Merry stepped into the study. His lip curled as he noted the heavy atmosphere of cigarette-smoke. On the table was a feast—or the remains of a feast, rather—and it was fairly clear that Percy Knox had been celebrating his victory. Of late, Knox had taken to inviting fellows to his study for feeds—and smokes for those who wanted smokes. It did not need a very keen fellow to see why. Knox was after popularity, and he cared nothing how he got it.

Knox regarded the captain of the Shell with a cool grin on his battered features. Racke hurriedly closed the door, but not before Lowther and Manners had slipped inside and joined Tom.

"We are highly honoured, chaps!" exclaimed Knox, blowing out a cloud of tobacco smoke. "Our respected skipper has looked in to join the merry party!"

"Looking for trouble, I bet!" grunted Crooke.

Tom's eyes went round the assembly. In addition to Racke & Co., there were several other fellows whom he scarcely expected to see there—Gore, Buck Finn, Gibbons, French of the New House, and Reilly of the Fourth.

There was a silence.

"I've come for a word with you, Knox!" said Tom Merry, determined to go through with it. "You know you're down to play for the school to-morrow at Rycombe?"

"I know it!" assented Knox. "And the Grammarians will know it to-morrow, I might tell you!"

"I don't think so!" said Tom Merry grimly. "Your name happens to be on the list at present; but it won't remain there long!"

Knox stood up, an ugly look on his face, his careless manner gone.

"What do you mean?" he blared.

"Just this," said Tom Merry calmly. "In the first place, you knew you were booked to play, and yet you're here

smoking beastly fags the night before the match. That's not the way to win matches!"

"You puttin' yourself up to teach me the game?" said Knox. "The fellow who made himself a laughing-stock this afternoon?"

"Never mind that!" said Tom. "A man who smokes just before a match is no good to me. But that's not all, Knox. I've heard you're offering bets on the match. Is that true?"

"Quite true!" snapped Knox. "Is it any business of yours, you cheeky cad?"

"Yes, it is! A fellow who bets on school fixtures is a rotter! A player who either backs his team to win or lose, is a worse rotter! There's no room for him in the junior team, anyway. I'm going to cross your name off the list right now, Knox!"

Knox stood gritting his teeth. It was clear enough that Tom's decision had taken all the wind out of his sails. His eyes glittered spitefully.

"You dare cross my name out!" he said thickly. "If you do, you'll have the fellows to deal with!"

"Hear, hear!" put in Racke savagely. Racke had managed to get a Grammar School man to take him on in quids, and he almost fainted at the thought of his idol being out of the team, after all. "You jolly well daren't do it, Merry! Kildare ordered you to put him in, I've heard!"

"Shut up, Racke!" snapped Tom. "You hear what I say, Knox? You're not playing in the match to-morrow. That's final!"

And Tom left the room.

He went straight back to the notice-board, and, to the surprise of the fellows there, he calmly crossed Knox's name off the list, putting in Redfern's in its place.

Then, leaving the room in a buzz, he went off to Kildare's study. Kildare was there alone.

"Well, Merry," he said, "what's the trouble now?"

"I've just crossed Knox's name off the list for to-morrow's match, Kildare," he said quietly. "As you ordered me to play him I thought I'd better report to you what I've done."

"I should think so!" said Kildare, staring. "Why have you done this, Merry?"

"I'd rather not say, Kildare," said Tom steadily. "It is not a personal matter, however. I think you know me well enough to believe me when I say I am perfectly justified in refusing to play Knox. If you insist upon him playing—"

"I do!" said Kildare grimly.

"Then I resign the captaincy!" said Tom.

"What?"

Kildare jumped.

"You mean that, Merry?"

"Yes; in my view Knox is not fit to play for St. Jim's. I should be wanting in my sense of duty and right if I played him. You would be the first to refuse to play him if you knew the facts, Kildare!"

Kildare regarded the junior captain grimly. He spoke after a few moments reflection.

"Very well, Merry!" he said gruffly, at last. "I will accept what you say, kid, and I'll withdraw my order to play the chap. I'm sorry you've taken up this attitude, for I believe Knox will prove a very good man indeed. However, I don't want you to resign from the captaincy—far from it! You're the best man for the job, in my opinion. I leave it to you."

"Thanks, Kildare!"

Tom left the captain's study. He had gained his point, but he knew Kildare was far from approving. He also knew that Kildare was far from being the only fellow who would not approve. Tom knew that his decision not to play Knox minor would raise a storm of protest from all quarters. And Tom knew it would not add to his popularity, either—quite the reverse!

But Tom Merry knew what he ought to do—his conscience told him he was doing the right thing, and he meant to do that whatever the cost.

CHAPTER 9.

In the Soup.

"MERRY, just a minute!"

"Yes, Knox?"

Tom Merry's face clouded.

It was noon on the following day—Saturday, the day of the Grammar School match. Tom Merry was just leaving Study No. 10 when Gerald Knox of the Sixth called to him.

Tom had a fair idea what Knox of the Sixth wanted to see him about; hence his clouded brow.

"Come to my study, Merry!" ordered Knox.

Tom Merry nodded, and followed Gerald Knox to his study on the Sixth Form passage. He guessed Knox wanted to see him in connection with the match—and his Cousin Percy's exclusion from the team.

His guess was a right one.

"Now, Merry!" snapped Gerald Knox, as the junior stood before him. "I think I told you before my cousin came to St. Jim's that I would stand no nonsense in regard to him. I foresaw that you little sweeps would try to get a bit of your own back out of him, and I warned you what to expect."

"You did," assented Tom. "It made no difference to us, Knox; we intended to treat your cousin just the same as any other new chap; and we've done so, I think. If your cousin's struck a lot of trouble it's been entirely his own fault!"

Gerald Knox laughed.

"My dear kid," he said, with a sneer. "It's other people who've struck the trouble—people who have tried to
(Continued overleaf.)

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take a rise out of my cousin. I think you happen to be one of them—what?"

"Is this what you want me for—to tell me this, Knox?"

"No. As regards things in general, I fancy my cousin can take care of himself," grinned Knox. "But there's one little matter where his ability to take care of himself doesn't help him much. I refer to the footer, Merry."

"Oh?" said Tom.

"You've got your knife in him," said Knox pleasantly, "and you seem determined to keep him out of the team, though he's well earned a place in it. Even Kildare, I understand, has ordered you to play him."

"That's true," said Tom.

"But you managed to persuade Kildare to leave the matter in your exceedingly capable hands," said Knox, with a sneer. "The consequence is you've allowed your dashed personal enmity to override your duty as footer captain—which is to get hold of the best men."

"I have my reasons for refusing to have him in the team," said Tom. "As you are his cousin it won't be sneaking to tell you them. Knox has been betting on the match, and he was smoking cigarettes yesterday. I also know that he did not intend to obey me during the match—he's been openly bragging about it."

"I don't believe it, you lying little sweep!"

"Very well, then! If you are not satisfied, Knox, I will report my reasons to Kildare, and leave him to decide."

Knox bit his lip. He knew what Kildare's decision would be in that case. It would be serious trouble for Percy Knox in addition to being barred from the team altogether.

"There's no need for the matter to be brought before Kildare again," he said. "I'm asking you, as junior skipper, Merry, to put my cousin back in the team again."

"I'm sorry, but it can't be done!" said Tom.

"You refuse!"

"Yes."

"And if I promise to make things deuced hot for you, Merry, if you don't—"

"I should still refuse," said Tom calmly. "Whatever you threaten or say will make no difference to my decision, Knox. If there is trouble I shall be obliged to exercise my privilege of appealing to Kildare."

"You little rotter!" hissed Knox, knowing he was beaten.

"I—I've a dashed good mind to slam you over that chair and lick the hide off you, Merry!"

"Try it!" said Tom, his eyes glinting dangerously. "I'm not the chap to submit to a thrashing I haven't earned, Knox!"

"Get out!" snapped Knox, pointing to the door. "I'll make you sit up for this, Merry! Hold on," he added swiftly, his eyes fixed on Tom's face. "I see you're suffering from a cold, Merry?"

Tom Merry's brow clouded suddenly. He was suffering from a cold still—indeed, it was worse this morning. Tom had hoped from the bottom of his heart that the cold would have vanished by the day of the match; but that hope had not been fulfilled. He had awakened that morning heavy-eyed, and with aching head, and feeling as weak as ditch-water. But he was still determined not to give in—a determination he himself could not help suspecting was a foolish one.

Mr. Linton had again mentioned the matter; but Tom had again managed to assure him that it was of no consequence. Now Knox had noticed it, and Tom had a sudden feeling that Knox had some object in mentioning it.

"Yes," he answered. "I have a cold, Knox!"

"Not much good denying it!" said Knox. "And so you mean to play in the match suffering from a cold, Merry?"

"I hope to play!"

"It doesn't trouble your sense of duty that you will be jeopardising the team's chance, being seedy?" sneered Knox. "I heard how you played Thursday, Merry. I suppose today will be just such another fiasco!"

Tom was silent. He knew there was—he realised it for the first time now—something in Knox's sneering remarks.

"We'll see!" said Knox, as Tom did not answer. "As a prefect, you forget I have a certain amount of responsibility and duty, my lad! You still refuse to play my Cousin Percy?"

"Yes!"

"Right! Now get out!" snapped Knox.

Tom Merry left the room slowly. He felt very uneasy and disturbed indeed—not at the thought of any injury Knox might do him, but at the thought Knox had mentioned that he was, by playing in the match when seedy, jeopardising the team's chance of victory.

Was he doing that? Counting Knox minor out, wasn't he risking a lot when there were several good players who would make a better show than he would in his present state?

Tom Merry went back to his study, and paced the carpet, thinking the problem out as best he could with his aching head. He hated the thought of giving in, but—

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The problem was soon settled for him, however. There came a step in the passage, and Knox of the Sixth looked in, a grin on his face.

"Railton wants you, Merry," he said.

"Right, Knox."

With a sinking heart Tom went to the Housemaster's room. Mr. Railton looked at him very keenly, and then he frowned.

"Knox of the Sixth informs me that you have a bad cold, Merry," said Mr. Railton. "I see you are certainly looking very far from well, my boy. You had better go to the matron without delay. It may be a mild form of influenza, and in that case—"

"But—but it's the Grammar School match to-day, sir!" said Tom Merry dully. "I'm not really so very bad at all. I—"

"Knox mentioned the match to me," said Mr. Railton. "It is utterly absurd for you to think of playing football in your present state, Merry. I forbid you even to go near the ground to-day!"

"Oh, sir!"

"I am sorry, Merry, but I could not allow you to take part in such strenuous exercise as football when you are suffering from a cold," said the Housemaster acidly. "In any case, you would certainly never do yourself justice on the football field, my boy. You will go at once to the matron and report to her for treatment. You may go!"

The Housemaster nodded a dismissal, and Tom Merry fairly tottered out of the room. It was bad luck upon bad luck. He had refused to allow Knox to play in the match, and now he himself was debarred from playing. What would the fellows say? Perhaps they would be glad, thought the junior bitterly.

Instead of going straight to the matron, Tom went to Talbot's room. He found Talbot seated on a chair. On the floor was a bowl of water. Talbot had one foot up on the edge of another chair. The foot was bare, and Talbot was busy winding a bandage round his ankle.

Tom Merry fairly blinked at him, his feelings too deep for words.

"Just sent Trimble looking for you, Tommy," said Talbot, his voice showing clearly his disgust. "I'm crooked, old chap. Sorry, but it was a rotten accident. That gammy three-legged chair there let me down. I was reaching up—"

"Has it just happened, Talbot?" said Tom, smothering the impulse to call Talbot a "careless ass."

"Five minutes ago," said Talbot, groaning. "What dashed rotten luck. You'll have to play Cardew, Tommy."

"Oh, crumbs, what a mess!" groaned Tom. "And Railton's just forbidden me to play, Talbot!"

"Oh, great pip!"

"But that's not making much difference, really," said Tom grimly. "I was just wondering if it would be better if I kept out of it when Railton sent for me. Anyway, I'd better trot over and see old Figgins, and fix it up with him."

"You're still determined not to play Knox, Tom?"

"Absolutely!"

"I think you're quite right," said Talbot quietly. "Never mind the fellows, Tom—they don't think. And keep a stiff upper lip, old chap. Knox will over-reach himself yet."

"I'm trying to," said Tom, smiling. "Well, I'll run in and see you again when I've fixed things up with Figgy. It can't be helped, and we must make the best of things."

Tom Merry hurried out and made his way towards the New House. He had assured Talbot that he was trying to keep a stiff upper lip, but he found it very hard to do so in the circumstances. Tom had no false modesty, and he knew that Talbot and he were the best men in the team, and he saw a slashing defeat before St. Jim's from Gordon Gay and his men from the Grammar School. And he knew it would mean yet another score for his enemy if that did happen. The fellows would blame him entirely for the defeat, having refused to play the fellow whose brilliant play was the talk of the school. But he did not even think of changing his mind—that was not Tom Merry's way.

CHAPTER 10.

The White Feather!

"HALLO! Herries and old Towser!"

And Tom Merry smiled as he hastened his steps to catch up Herries and his beloved bulldog, Towser.

Tom Merry had been to the matron, and in addition to plenty of good advice—which Tom Merry, being a normal schoolboy, was unlikely to take—the matron had given Tom a dose of medicine. His temperature had proved to be little above the normal, and being satisfied that it was a cold which Tom would soon shake off, the matron had allowed Tom to go for his walk.

So, after spending most of the afternoon with Talbot, Tom had started out. Tom had been forbidden to go near the ground—the match was being played on the Grammar School ground—but Tom saw no reason why he should not go to meet the players as it was nearing time for the match to end.

He took the short cut by the towing-path, and he took it easy. The fresh air seemed to clear his head wonderfully, and he soon began to feel better. He sauntered on, his gloomy forebodings and depression slipping from him with every step he took. It was just as he reached the outskirts of Rylcombe that he sighted George Herries and Towser.

Tom Merry smiled at sight of the two. Herries cared more for his beloved dog than he did for his bosom chums—he certainly looked after his pet better than he looked after himself. The way Herries walked along, his eyes ever on his pet, amused Tom. He remembered hearing Herries saying that Towser was "off his feed," and he guessed that Herries had been with Towser to the vet at Wayland on that account.

"Cheerio, Herries!" called Tom as he came up to him. "Towser any better?"

He stooped and patted the big, ugly head of the bulldog. Towser sniffed at Tom's hand and buried his nose in Tom's palm. The junior captain and he were old friends.

"The vet seems to think he's right as rain," grunted Herries, eyeing Towser anxiously. "But I'm not so sure myself. I think I'll try to persuade the fellows to let me have him in the study for a few nights, so that I can keep my eye on him this damp weather."

Tom chuckled. He wondered what Arthur Augustus D'Arcy would say to that.

"I should," he murmured. "There's one big risk, though."

"What's that?" demanded Herries eagerly.

"He might get indigestion after chewing up Gussy's topper and bags," grinned Tom. "You know old Towser can't resist Gussy's clobber. I suppose it's the aristocratic scent of them that appeals to him."

"Don't talk rot!" snorted Herries. "It's hardly a thing to joke about, Tom. Oh, my hat!"

Just in time, Herries took a firmer grip of the strong chain that held Towser, for at that moment a cat emerged leisurely from a garden gate scarcely a couple of yards away.

The cat vanished back into the garden like greased lightning, and but for the combined efforts of Tom and Herries, Towser would have followed like a thunderbolt.

"Hold him!" gasped Herries, throwing his weight on the leash. "Oh, my hat! Towser, you old fathead! Good dog! Lie down, you silly ass!"

Herries often boasted of his pet's remarkable obedience, but just now it was conspicuous by its absence. Herries might have spoken to the garden gate.

"Great Scott!" panted Tom Merry. "I thought old Towser was delicate, Herries?"

"So he is. He's just screwed up with excitement now; it's bad for him, though. Hold him!"

"Sling the chain round that post, you ass!" snorted Tom.

Towser was still tearing and tugging at the chain. As Herries dragged on it Tom slung the end of the chain round the post and clipped the spring catch at the end through a link.

"That's fixed him!" he chuckled. "Now let him cool down a bit."

"I'm not sure that we ought to let him strain like that," said Herries, wrinkling his brows. "He might easily strain his heart or some—"

"Look out, Herries!" said Tom abruptly. "Back up!"

At Tom's startled cry Herries wheeled, and then he looked alarmed as he saw that from the narrow opening along the towing-path four hulking youths had lounged, and were coming towards them.

All the four were hefty chaps; but one was bigger than the rest and he had red hair.

"Ginger Burke!" said Herries. "Oh, my hat!"

Herries was terrified at sight of them—not on his own account, but on account of Towser! Had Towser not been there, tied to the post, Tom would have given the word to bolt, strategy being much wiser than a bold front with such odds to face.

But there was no time to free Towser, and in any case Towser always made a point of wanting to do the exact opposite to what his master wished him to do—despite Herries' fond delusion to the contrary.

"They may leave us alone—after what happened yesterday," whispered Tom. "Ignore them!"

But Burke & Co. were not to be ignored; apparently the thrashing had by no means cured Ginger Burke. His beady eyes glimmered with spite and malice as he sighted the St. Jim's juniors.

"By crimes!" he ejaculated. "Here's two of the hounds now, lads! Go for 'em! Smash 'em!"

"Old on, Ginger!" exclaimed one of the others. "They got a dorg—mind your eye!"

"Can't you see 'e's chained up?" growled Ginger Burke.

"Ere, I'll soon settle 'is 'ash!"

And he took a running kick at the chained Towser, who was growling ferociously as he tugged and strained to get at the unwelcome newcomers.

At least, he intended to take a running kick at Towser; but Herries had other ideas about that. His eyes blazed and he jumped in front of his beloved dog.

Thud!

Herries' fist lashed out, and Ginger Burke staggered back under a jolt beneath his rough chin that must have rattled every tooth in his head.

"Come on!" hissed Herries. "Come on, you brutes!"

"Yes, come on!" said Tom Merry through his teeth.

He jumped to the side of Herries, fists ready.

"Rush 'em!" howled Ginger Burke, hugging his jaw. "Never mind that there dorg; he's an old 'un, and he's chained up. Rush 'em!"

The wavering youths plucked up courage and followed Ginger in a savage rush.

What happened next came as the biggest surprise George Herries had ever had in his life.

As the rush came, Tom Merry suddenly turned, and, easily dodging the outstretched arm of Ginger Burke, bolted for his life.

He vanished up the narrow entry some yards away, and what happened to him after that the astounded Herries had no chance to see. He went crashing down under the rush of the four, too startled even to offer any resistance for the moment.

When he did start to struggle it was too late. He was pinned down by cruel, grinding knees, flat on his back on the cinders. A yard away, poor Towser was frothing at the mouth, and all but frantic in his raging desire to come to his master's aid.

But the chain was strong, and though the post shook and jerked under the dog's desperate tugging and tearing, it held. Ginger Burke snatched up a big stone and flung it savagely at the dog.

"Old your row!" he shouted. "Put your boot inter the tyke, 'Erb!"

But 'Erb wasn't keen to get within reach of Towser who, never a gentle-looking animal, looked positively fendish now as he gave tongue in his rage through bared fangs.

Ginger Burke snorted, and snatching up another stone, he sent it whizzing—this time, unfortunately, with better aim—into the hapless Towser's ribs.

Herries gave a gulp as he heard a strangled yelp, and he renewed his struggles, fighting like a wild cat, Tom Merry and his cowardly retreat—if it was that—forgotten for the moment.

There came a sudden rush of feet, however, and Herries yelled with delight as he heard a shout.

"Rescue!" he yelled gaspingly. "Rescue, St. Jim's! Oh, good man, Knox!"

Crash!

Ginger Burke went crashing down and rolled over and over. Over him stood Percy Knox, his fists clenched, his eyes glinting. Ginger's three cronies were flying along the towing-path.

"Good man!" gasped Herries again.

He staggered to his feet, and falling on his knees, he started to fondle and quieten Towser. That excited animal licked Herries' flushed face in a whirl of canine delight.

Racke, Crooke, Mellish, and Scrope, who had been with Knox, had held back at first; but now as they saw the three louts fleeing, they became remarkably courageous, and they joined Knox.

"Into the dashed river with this lout!" snapped Percy Knox. "That lesson I gave— Ah! Would you?"

Ginger Burke kicked savagely at the junior's ankle, and as Percy Knox staggered back, he leaped to his feet, and made a bold bid to escape.

Percy Knox was too quick for him. He sprang forward, sending Racke staggering out of his way, and his foot just caught Ginger's flying heel.

Ginger lurched forward, and as he did so, Knox's fist shot out. It was a clean blow, and it sent the burly rascal

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spinning. Madly the fellow tried to recover himself, and then he slithered down the sloping bank with a savage yell.

Splash!

Unable to stop himself, Burke slid down the bank, tripped at the bottom, and overbalanced into the river.

"Good egg!" chortled Racke. "Good for you, Percy! Look at the cad!"

Ginger Burke soon reappeared; but he made no attempt to climb ashore. He was already swimming, and turning, he swam across the river, slowly and laboriously, his face—or what could be seen of it—fiendish in expression.

He reached the farther side after a desperate struggle, and clambering out with difficulty, he shook a furious fist at the St. Jim's fellows and took to his heels.

It was just at that moment that Blake, followed by a dozen or more fellows, came hurrying along the towing-path. They had sighted the trouble some distance away as Knox & Co. had done. And, like Knox & Co., they were just returning from the match.

"What the thump's been happening here?" panted Jack Blake. "Herries—Great Scott! And Towser! Have those louts been at you?"

Herries nodded—his face growing grim as he suddenly remembered Tom Merry.

"There was another chap here when we spotted you," said Knox, wiping his knuckles. "He bolted just before we came up. Who was it, Herries?"

Herries was silent for just a moment, and then his eyes glistened as he looked at Towser.

"It was Tom Merry!" he said.

"What?"

"It was Tom Merry!" repeated the junior deliberately. "The cowardly sweep left me in the lurch—at the mercy of those brutes! He thought only of his own skin!"

"Herries!" gasped Jack Blake.

"Bai Jove! Weally, Hewwies, deah boy——"

"It's true! I wish it wasn't!" said Herries through his teeth. "But the fellow you saw was Tom Merry. We were talking together when Burke and his pals came along. Merry knew I couldn't bolt myself—he knew Towser was chained to the post—he chained him up himself, the cad!"

"And he ran away and left you to it?" demanded Blake in sheer unbelief. "Dash it all——"

"I've told you it's the truth!" said Herries, almost angrily. "Tom Merry showed the white feather—not the first time lately, it strikes me, after this!"

"Phew!"

"Gweat Scott!"

"What about Merry now?" bawled Racke. "Yah! Wait until we see the funk. Nice chap to have for skipper—I don't think!"

"I don't think I shall ever acknowledge him as skipper after this," remarked Percy Knox. "I wonder what would have happened to Herries and his dog if I hadn't come along?"

"Let's get back and tell the fellows!" yelled Mellish. "We'll make him sit up after this!"

"Oh, dry up!" snorted Blake. "This is sickening, you chaps!"

"Wotten, bai Jove!" groaned Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I can scarcely believe it of Tom Mewwy!"

"Let's get back!" said Herries irritably.

He had already unfastened Towser, and the chums of the Fourth started off along the towing-path. They had been gloomy enough before they had come upon Herries and heard his story—for the Grammar School had beaten St. Jim's by five goals to one, a really slashing defeat. With Tom Merry and Talbot absent from the team they had expected nothing else but defeat. But five to one was worse than they had anticipated.

And the general feeling was one of anger against Tom Merry—bitter disappointment and anger. They considered Tom Merry had let them down very badly. They did not look at the matter through the eyes of Tom Merry. If he was seedy, then well and good. But Knox wasn't seedy, and it was personal jealousy and dislike that made the junior captain keep Knox out of the team. Had Knox been playing it would have been five to one in the other direction.

That was the general view, and Blake & Co. knew it only too well. And now this had happened—a far worse thing for Tom Merry to face. The fellows might forgive stubbornness and personal antipathy in their junior captain; they would certainly not forgive cowardice. Blake & Co. returned to St. Jim's in a very miserable frame of mind. And when they saw Manners and Lowther in Rylcombe Lane and told them the amazing news those youths were thunderstruck. They simply refused to believe it, and there was trouble between Herries and them in consequence. But it did not affect the issue.

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CHAPTER I

The Reason!

TOM MERRY ran hard—harder than he had ever run in his life before—he went like the wind.

But it was not to get away from the bullying Ginger Burke & Co. Tom Merry had never "funked" that unpleasant personage. He had taken his measure long ago, and only opportunity had prevented him dealing with the ruffian—or attempting to deal with him. And, though the odds were four to two against them, Tom Merry was far from funkng a scrap, though he realised it would be no light affair.

As he faced the oncoming roughs, fists ready, his head well back, Tom Merry certainly did not look as if he funkng the fight—indeed, he looked as if he intended to enjoy it.

But in that critical, dramatic moment Fate stepped in to deal the junior captain of St. Jim's yet another blow.

Both juniors were guarding Towser—Herries facing one way, and Tom the other, and this explains why Herries failed to see what Tom Merry suddenly saw.

The garden fence against which they had been standing ended a few yards farther on at a stretch of waste ground. Beyond this, at something approaching right angles, was a row of cottages, their fronts facing the river as it twisted at that spot. The cottages had long gardens with low fences, and Tom could see into them from where he stood.

In that moment as he awaited the onslaught of the roughs Tom glimpsed something happening in the first garden. Like a scene flashed swiftly across a cinema screen Tom glimpsed it out of the corner of his eye.

From an opened cottage door a child came dashing, screaming in fright, the white smock he wore just bursting into flames.

Tom Merry simply didn't stop to make a decision, or to do anything else. Something had to be done mighty quickly, and the junior did it instinctively.

The next instant, swiftly dodging Ginger Burke's outflung arm, he was tearing across the waste ground with every ounce of speed and energy he could muster.

He was at the low fence almost before he knew it, and he fairly flung himself over it. His feet scarcely touched the rough ground, and then he was racing up the garden, the screaming of the youngster—drowned until then by Towser's outcries—ringing shrilly in his ears.

Tom was tearing off his overcoat now, and with a bound he reached the shrieking youngster and whirled his coat round him. Then he flung the child down and rolled him over and over, pressing, thumping, and smothering out the flames as best he could with his bare hands.

Luckily, only the smock had had time to get firmly alight, and in a very few seconds Tom had torn it away, and was ripping off the rest of the youngster's clothes, pressing out the burning cloth.

He had just put the last smouldering spark out, and the youngster was fairly bellowing in his arms, when a woman came running from the house next door. She reeled and almost fainted at sight of Tom with the youngster in his arms.

She covered her face with her hands, and then she snatched the bellowing child from Tom.

"I think he's all right, ma'am!" panted Tom, rubbing his scorched and blackened hands and wincing as he did so. "I'll see if all's well inside, shall I?"

Without waiting a reply Tom ran into the cottage and glanced swiftly about him. The fireguard that should have been before the kitchen fire was lying on the hearthrug, leaving the fire unguarded. Apparently the youngster had dragged it away and managed to get his loose smock to the flames.

Tom went out again, nodding his head reassuringly.

"He must have stumbled against the fire, or something like that!" he gasped. "The fireguard was dragged away."

"It was my fault; I shouldn't have left the child!" gasped the woman, hugging the howling youngster. "It's all my fault!"

"He doesn't seem to be much burned," said Tom. "I should take him along to a doctor, ma'am, though, for all that."

"Oh! Yes, yes——"

The woman seemed to have lost her head in her agitation and distress. Tom took the youngster from her again, though she let him go unwillingly.

"I'll take him along. Luckily, Dr. Short's house is near, ma'am. Leave him to me."

Tom hurried through the cottage into the lane beyond. Whether the child was burned badly or not he could not tell; he certainly was if the noise he was making was anything to go by. With the woman and a neighbour following, talking volubly, Tom hurried along with his yelling, wriggling burden. It was a task few at St. Jim's—if any—would have tackled.

But Tom Merry had a heart of gold, and he cared nothing whether anyone saw him or not. He reached the doctor's house at last—glad enough to do so—and glad he was to hand back his charge to the mother.

She took the child, and, too agitated to thank the junior, she hurried up the steps of the house and rang the bell. A moment later both woman and the child vanished indoors, and the door closed.

Tom put on his coat again—it was badly scorched, but not burned—and then he looked at his hands ruefully. They were blackened and coarse, and they felt as if a thousand red-hot needles had been driven in the flesh.

"Oh crumbs!" groaned Tom. "I shall not be able to hold a dashed pen for— Oh, my hat! Herries!"

It was just then that the junior suddenly remembered the plight in which he had left Herries and Towser.

Anxious as he was to know if the youngster was all right, Tom realised he was in safe hands now, and without hesitating longer the junior started back at a run for the river. He crossed the waste ground with a rush, and then he stared.

Ginger Burke & Co. had gone, as had Herries and Towser. In the distance along the towing-path he glimpsed several figures that he guessed were St. Jim's fellows.

They were too far away for him to distinguish them, but Tom sighed with deep relief as he saw them.

"Oh, good!" he muttered. "Some of our chaps must have come along—coming from the match, I expect! Wonder how it went?"

Tom was soon to learn that. As he came out into Rylcombe Lane he saw three familiar forms just ahead of him. They were Grundy, Wilkins, and Gunn, and Grundy was speaking—or rather bellowing.

"I tell you Merry wants kicking out of his job!" he was roaring angrily. "No good you telling me he knows best, George Wilkins."

"But, look here, if that chap Knox—"

"Dry up! I tell you Knox may be a swanky cad—I'm not denying it; he is—but he knows a good footballer when he sees one!"

"Referring to yourself, I suppose!" grunted Gunn.

"Exactly! Knox says that if he were footer captain he'd see I got the place I'm entitled to on my form."

"Pulling your leg!" sniffed Wilkins. "He's out to get on the right side of everybody—born idiots included!"

"If that's cheek—"

"Not at all! Plain facts, old chap!"

"Look here," said Grundy, not quite grasping Wilkins' meaning. "Tom Merry's no good! I'll admit, mind you, that I can't stand this chap Knox—my opinion is that he's a smoky sweep! But he can play footer after a fashion, and he knows a good man when he sees one. Now Tom Merry's let the school down—he's a back-number and he'll have to go."

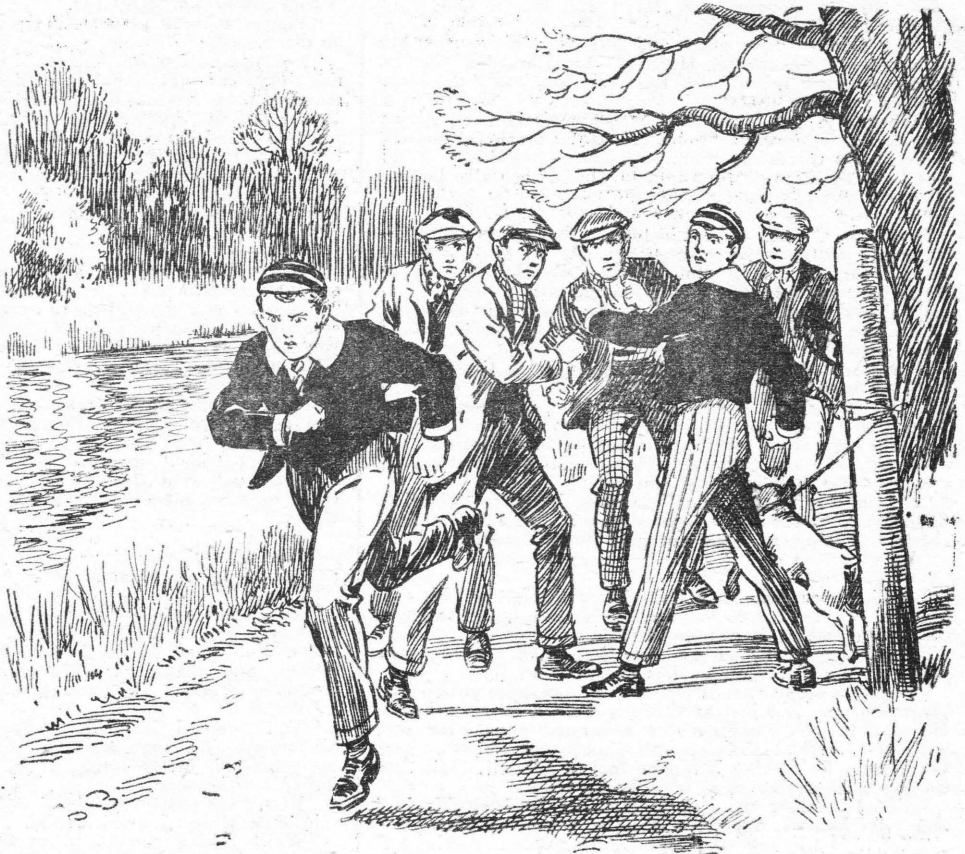
"Thanks, old chap!" called Tom Merry cheerfully.

Grundy wheeled round.

"Oh, here he is!" he snapped. "Now, my pippin, what about it?"

"How did the match go, Wilkins?" asked Tom.

Wilkins growled, and avoided Tom's look.



"Rush 'em!" howled Ginger Burke. "Never mind that there dog!" The wavering youths plucked up courage and followed Ginger in a savagish rush. What happened next came as the biggest surprise George Herries had ever experienced in his life, for Tom Merry suddenly turned and bolted for his life! (See Chapter 10.)

"We got licked by five to one," he said.

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Tom.

"You ought to have shoved in Knox minor!" said Gunn bluntly. "The fellows blame you for the licking—a licking we shall never hear the last of, Merry. After all the school record is the main thing, and you ought to have played that new chap."

"I don't think so even now," said Tom Merry.

"You wouldn't," said Grundy bitterly. "Lot you care whether school wins matches or not! You'd have had me in the team long ago if you had!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Hallo! Look at the crowd at the gates," said Wilkins. "Waiting to welcome you, Tom Merry—I don't think!"

"It doesn't worry me," said Tom, setting his lips.

But it was to worry him—as he soon found out.

As he walked up to the gates there rose a yell.

"Yah! Funk! You rotten coward, Merry!"

"Who'd leave a pal in the lurch and save himself?"

"What about old Towser, you funky cad?"

Tom Merry jumped.

He understood now, in a blinding flash, what the crowd meant.

It was not merely that they were angry over him in regard to the match! Herries had obviously told how he had bolted at the critical moment.

He was being called a funk—a coward who had left a chum in the lurch.

Tom went white.

He could clear himself easily enough; but the charge made him furiously angry for all that. He opened his mouth to speak, and then he closed it again tightly and started to walk past the crowd.

"Hold on!" called Percy Knox, barring his path. "I think Herries wants to speak to you—wants to tell you what he thinks of you!"

"I don't wish to speak to Merry!" said Herries angrily. "Quite the reverse!"

"Weally, Hewwies—" D'Arcy's voice was quite distressed.

Tom Merry stopped and faced Herries, a dangerous glint in his blue eyes.

"You think I ran away and left you to have it out with those brutes alone, Herries?" he demanded thickly. "You've known me all this time and you can't put more trust in me than that?"

"What else am I to think?" snapped Herries, giving Tom a look of scorn. "I don't mind so much for myself, Merry. But there was poor old Tower—practically at the mercy of those brutes. And you bolted—actually bolted! How can you explain it, Merry?"

"I—I—"

It was on the tip of Tom's tongue to explain matters—he would certainly have been sensible to have done so without further delay. But he did not. He was already angry—bitterly mortified—and the thought that all the fellows blamed him for the defeat. And now this on top of it—all the fellows, even Blake—oh, believing him capable of an act of miserable cowardice.

It was too much. He seethed inwardly at the thought. Had he been in a different mood he would, doubtless enough, have stated the plain facts—facts that could easily have been proved correct. But he was far from being his real self—the looks of scorn increased his bitterness and obstinacy. If the fellows believed him a hopeless funk then let them, and be hanged to them!

"I'll just say this, Herries!" he said, his voice trembling. "I left you in the lurch right enough. But I had a good reason for doing so. I did not funk those brutes!"

"Rot!"

"What?"

"Liar if you like that better!" said Herries, his eyes blazing. "You know you funk'd it—you bolted, showed the white feather if anyone did!"

Tom Merry clenched his fists hard—his swollen, raw palms giving him agonies of pain as he did so.

He took a step towards Herries, and Herries swiftly put his hands up. But just as abruptly Tom drew back again. He was in less condition for scrapping than ever now with his scorched and burning palms and fingers. He would only be making a bigger fool of himself. His time would come—as in the case of Percy Knox.

Without another word Tom Merry turned on his heel and went indoors, a howl of derision following him.

"Yah! White feather again! And that's our skipper!"

"Let's kick him out!" bawled Racke.

"Hear, hear!"

Lowther and Manners said nothing at all. They were too dazed and bewildered and horrified. They had heard the story and on reflection they had smiled, knowing Tom Merry would have some good reason to give.

But he had had his chance to give a reason, and he had failed to give it. Lowther and Manners walked slowly indoors after their chum feeling as if the world had come to an end.

CHAPTER 12.

Knox's Triumph!

"TOM!"

"Tom, old fellow—"

Lowther and Manners almost crept into Study No. 10. They were both looking exceedingly distressed, and it was plain they felt their chum's disgrace keenly.

Tom Merry was standing by the window looking out into the frosty quadrangle. He did not look round.

"Tom!" went on Lowther. "What does it all mean? Why don't you speak and throw the lie that you funk'd in the dashed teeth of those cads? We know you didn't funk—you couldn't!"

"The fellows seem to think so," said Tom bitterly, leaving the window. "How did the match go, you fellows? I hear it was worse than I had expected—five to one!"

Lowther nodded.

"It was a frost for us from beginning to end," he said. "Our chaps missed you and old Talbot, and they seemed to have no heart for the game. Even poor Fatty Wynn was completely off!"

"The fellows seem to think I should have played Knox," said Tom.

Lowther and Manners were silent for a moment.

"You did right, Tommy," said Manners at length. "But the fellows won't see it. They blame you for the defeat, and they're dashed sore about it. They can't forget how Knox won the Greyfriars match."

"That was his dirty trickery again!"

"We know, but the fellows don't, or won't, believe it. Tom, it's no good. That chap is a genius at getting round the chaps. You'll have to start the same sort of game somehow if you're going to keep your job," said Lowther soberly.

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Tom Merry stared at him.

"You—you mean play the sort of dirty tricks he plays?" he ejaculated.

"Not at all. I mean that you'll have to begin to humour the silly fools—get round them a bit. Knox is doing it—standing them feeds and making all sorts of lying promises. You won't do that sort of thing, I know. But you can wheedle round the chaps a bit."

"I'll be hanged if I will!" snapped Tom.

"I don't think you realise how far matters have gone, Tommy," said Manners. "They're shouting for a new election for the captaincy now."

"Let them!"

"Tom—"

"If the fellows are not satisfied with me as skipper, they can get someone else!" snapped Tom, his eyes gleaming. "I've stood as much as I mean to stand from them! In any case, it's too late to think of electioneering if that's what you mean. They're shrieking for my blood now."

"If you'd only speak, Tom—"

Crash!

Manners was rudely interrupted. The door crashed back, and a crowd of fellows—Fourth and Shell—crowded into the room.

"Here, outside!" snapped Tom, his eyes glinting.

"Not yet," said Gore, who was in the forefront with Knox minor at his elbow. "We've come to talk to you first, Merry."

"Go on!"

"The fact is," said Gore bluntly, "we're fed-up with you as House captain, Tom Merry!"

"Indeed?"

"Yes. And we're fed-up with you as junior captain, too, both here and in the New House!" said Gore deliberately. "You're mucking up the footer. You've lost us the match to-day, and made us a laughing-stock for the dashed Grammar School. That sort of thing won't do!"

"Won't it?"

"No!" shouted Gore, his temper rising. "But that isn't all, Merry. We don't want for our skipper a fellow who'll leave his pals in the lurch, who'll play the coward as you did this afternoon."

"You seem pretty certain that I did play the coward," said Tom Merry, his voice calm. "Can you prove it?"

"We're asking you to prove that you didn't play the funk," said Lumley-Lumley in a more reasonable tone. "Look here, Merry, it seems piffle to think that you did funk it. But the matter can't be allowed to remain as it is. If you can explain I'd advise you to do so now."

"And if I don't?"

"We shall demand your resignation, Merry," said Gore grimly.

"And if I refuse to resign?"

"We'll find some other method of shifting you!" snapped Racke from the fringe of the crowd. "We've already got a better man to take your place."

"Better at smoking and betting?" said Lowther, his lip curling.

"No; just better at playing footer and using his fists, and standing up for chaps weaker than himself," said Gore deliberately.

Tom Merry winced. His face went white, and he seemed to control himself with a mighty effort.

"Are you going to give an excuse or not, Merry?" snapped Gore.

"Not!" said Tom Merry savagely. "I'm hanged if I'm going to be brow-beaten like this! You fellows know my reputation; you know I've never shown the white feather. I've asked you to take my word that I did not funk. If you can't, then there's an end of it."

"You won't explain?"

"Not to you—no!"

"And you won't resign?"

"Not to please you—no!" said Tom Merry.

"That's good enough, then!" said Gore, who had evidently made himself the spokesman of the deputation. "Come on, you fellows! We'll show his lordship that he can't rule the roost just as he likes!"

"Hear, hear!"

The deputation withdrew amid a buzz of excitement. Monty Lowther pulled a wry face as he looked at Tom's grim, determined face.

"You're an ass, Tommy!" he said.

"A double-barrelled one!" added Manners in disgust. "You've done it now!"

"You fellows still back me up, then?" said Tom Merry, his voice bitter again. "I haven't given you my reason yet, but you don't give me the cold shoulder. Why?"

"We know you have a good reason, Tom."

"You'll still believe in me if I refuse to tell you my reason for bolting from Herries this afternoon?"

There was just a moment's hesitation. Then Lowther nodded, and at the same instant Manners nodded.

"I'm quite ready to take your word that you did not

funk, Tom," said Lowther seriously, "and I don't wish to hear your reason at all."

"Same here!" said Manners promptly.

"Right!" said Tom, his eyes shining. "Then I don't mind telling you it!"

"Oh!"

"It's not a thing a chap wants to gas about," said Tom, flushing a little. "That's the main reason why I did not tell those raging idiots. A fellow can't talk about it."

"Go on!" said Manners curiously.

Tom Merry hesitated. Even to his chums he found it difficult to explain. He had probably saved that youngster's life—undoubtedly he had, in fact. It was not a thing a decent chap would want to make a song about. But he felt he owed it to his bosom chums to explain—if only for their loyalty.

"It was just as we were waiting Ginger Burke's rush," said Tom. "I happened to see a kid rush out of a cottage with his clothes on fire—one of those cottages standing back from the towing-path. Herries did not see it, but I did. And the kid's shrieks were smothered by Towser's snarling and growling."

"Oh!" gasped Manners. He was beginning to guess.

"Well, I just did what any other fellow would do," said Tom quietly. "I left Herries to it—there was nothing else for it—and I rushed to the cottage and managed to put the flames out. The kiddie did not seem to be much harmed, but I took him to the doctor's house in the lane there. When I got back Herries and the rest had gone. I suppose it was Knox who saved him?"

"Yes," stammered Lowther. "Knox knocked Burke into the river, and his pals bolted."

"Phew!"

"You—you old ass!" breathed Lowther. "And you'd let the fellows believe you a coward before you'd speak?"

"Yes; they should take my word."

"And you'd risk losing the friendship of Blake and his lot rather than speak?"

"Yes. Herries should have taken my word, and he should not have called me a liar."

"You'll explain to them, though? You'll want all your friends now, Tommy."

"No! I don't want friends who don't trust me!"

"You old ass!"

"Perhaps I am. But I'm sticking to my guns over this."

Manners and Lowther exchanged hopeless glances. They had never known the sunny-tempered, level-headed Tom Merry in such an unreasonable mood as this—and they could not help seeing that it was unreasonable. There was a glum silence, and just then came another knock at the door. Wally D'Arcy of the Third put his head round the door.

"Merry wanted in Kildare's study," he said cheerily. "Hope it's a licking for him! Yah!"

With that the cheery Wally departed—just missing a whizzing Liddell and Scott as he went.

"That's done it!" said Lowther as he retrieved his book.

"You know what that means, Tommy?"

"I can guess."

"It means that those cads have been to Kildare. Be prepared, old son!"

Tom Merry nodded grimly, and went to Kildare's room. Kildare was seated at the table, looking over a list of names on a sheet of paper. He looked up and eyed Tom curiously as the junior captain entered.

"I want to speak to you, Merry," he said gravely. "You're still looking seedy, kid."

"I feel seedy," said Tom. "It will pass, though."

"But the trouble in the Lower School doesn't seem to pass, Merry," said Kildare grimly. "I've noticed things have not been going well for some days. What is the matter? I cannot understand why you seem to have become so dashed unpopular all at once."

Tom said nothing.

"I can only think this new fellow has something to do with it," said Kildare. "At the same time I've heard rather curious stories about you, Merry."

Tom Merry flushed to the roots of his hair.

"I don't propose to repeat them or mention them," said Kildare. "I do not believe them myself."

"Thanks, Kildare!"

"At the same time," said the captain dryly, "you've got yourself entirely to thank for a lot of it. Against my express wishes you declined to play Knox, who would have saved the match no doubt this afternoon."

"I suppose he would!" said Tom.

"It won't do," said Kildare. "No use putting the fellows' backs up like that, Merry. Anyway, it appears to have come to a head. The fellows want a new captain for the House and for the School, Merry. I'm sorry, but there it is!"

"I understand."

"You refused to resign, I believe," said Kildare. "But you know the rule—if a third of the fellows demand an election for a new captain, I'm obliged to arrange a new election?"

"Yes, I know the rule."

"Very well. Here is the list. It seems that Knox is the man selected to stand against you, Merry," said Kildare, pursing his lips. "Have you any objection to raise, Merry?"

"None!"

"Then it will go through," said Kildare grimly. "I shall be sorry if you lose the captaincy, kid. You've backed me up well—you've proved yourself a sound man, and I've no complaints personally to make whatever. I don't think we have a man to better you."

"Thanks, Kildare!"

The skipper of St. Jim's nodded, and Tom Merry went out. He knew he would hear further about it very soon. He walked away to Study No. 10, feeling curiously careless about it all. But the feeling did not last long.

When Lowther and Manners came in the study a little later they found him slumped in the easy-chair, glum and moody. He knew only too well that—unless a miracle happened—the result of the election would be a foregone conclusion. Pery Knox's bitter enmity and hatred had borne its fruit. His underhanded scheming had succeeded—the Greyfriars match, the Grammar School match, the affair of Ginger Burke, and this last affair of Herries and Towser had all been big nails in "Tom Merry's coffin," as Knox himself put it.

And so it proved.

The following Wednesday, when the election was held, Tom Merry was hopelessly beaten by the new fellow. Tom had fully expected to be beaten—he had been just determined not to resign of his own accord. As he still refused to defend himself against charges, and as he refused to do any electioneering of any kind, or to allow his chums to do any, the result was just what might have been expected.

Blake & Co. did not vote at all—they were not on speaking terms with the Terrible Three, and they kept out of it altogether. Figgins & Co., over in the New House, did not feel the matter so strongly as did Blake & Co., and they voted en masse for Tom Merry.

But their votes and the votes of the few fellows who still stuck to Tom counted for little against the votes Pery Knox polled.

Pery Knox had attained his ambition—he was captain of the Lower School at St. Jim's, and captain of footer, and "cock-of-the-walk" in general.

It had to be seen how long he would remain in that elevated position.

THE END.

(Will Tom Merry re-instate himself in the good opinions of his chums? Will he make another bid for the junior captaincy? See next week's grand story—**"CAPTAIN AND CAD!"**—You'll enjoy it no end, chums.)

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The Warning!

"**C**HIEF," Tom said, making direct appeal, "White Cat is my friend. If he has offended you, I ask that he receive forgiveness."

Badger Head flashed a swift glance at Tom's face. This youth was beginning to interest him. He understood now why old Black Hawk had pressed his election upon the council. He weighed up the situation coolly and rapidly.

"It is true," he said, after a moment's silence. "White Cat disobey me a short while back. Punishment for that by our law is burning by slow fire."

Sadie gave a little exclamation of horror and indignation. Badger Head raised his hand.

"Stay! White Eagle has asked my mercy. What will he give?"

Tom's face hardened, and he took time to answer. White Cat had crept forward. He did not speak, but there was an appeal in his eyes which nearly made Sadie cry out.

"What is it that the chief wishes to receive?" Tom said formally.

Badger Head grunted, and his face, long and narrow, with the big, straight nose and overhanging upper lip which had given him his name, became cold and cunning. "Huh! I wish for my brother's service for the nation. Nothing for myself."

He paused, and Sadie, now on tiptoe with excitement and hot sympathy for White Cat, cried impulsively:

"Oh, give him anything he asks! Tom—you will?"

But Tom was very grave now. He began to divine what was in Badger Head's mind, and that it meant the sacrifice he had determined not to make. On the other hand, he knew Indian law. If he refused, White Cat might become a cripple for life.

"Your price!" he said.

Badger Head crossed his hands upon his breast as he had done when he first met Sadie.

"Give yourself," he said slowly. "Come with us to the Reservations for this winter and see with your eyes what justice men of the White race grant to the Red when they are in their power."

A short silence followed these words, broken by a shudder.

WHO'S WHO IN THE STORY.

TOM HOLT, a sturdy young Britisher of seventeen, who has lived for a time amongst a tribe of Apache Indians in New Mexico.

BLACK HAWK, chief of the tribe.

WHITE CAT, his son.

COLONEL CHAPIN, a wealthy rancher.

SADIE, his daughter.

HUNKS and **MALINKA**, Tom's dog and horse respectively.

Tom soon endears himself to the Chapins and Calumet Ranch becomes his new home. But Tom doesn't forget his friends the Indians. On the contrary, he does much to pull down the barriers of racial hatred that exist between the Whites and the Reds. Unknowingly, however, Tom is being used by Black Hawk to collect information about the

ing sigh from Sadie, as she saw that her words had recoiled upon herself.

Tom looked at the girl, and waited for a moment for her to speak. But her face was hidden in her hands and she made no sound. He turned back to Badger Head.

"I give myself," he said simply, "for the sake of my friend."

Badger Head slightly nodded.

"It is a good price," he said in Indian. "White Cat is forgiven."

Hunks had never been so puzzled in his life. He understood why White Cat intervened to protect Badger Head, and having complete confidence in White Cat, as well as love for him, he had yielded up his prize.

When Sadie had appeared Hunks had appreciated quickly the significance of her invitation to the house of this newcomer. But when the man went so offensively close to her, Hunks prepared once more for an immediate attack, and this time promised himself that no man—not even Tom—should tear him from that Indian beast while he were alive. But nobody did anything! His master's appearance, he thought, would be the signal for the onset, but, though he obviously did not like Badger Head, they had shaken hands.

Sadie did not seem to understand the nature of this enemy at all. White Cat, the dog perceived, was in great fear of him. It was a queer world!

The mystery became deeper and deeper as time went on. Hunks never took his eyes off Badger Head at the breakfast table; never left him alone in a room for a moment while he was at Calumet, and found his first conclusions—that the man was a spy—more than confirmed. Yet he was treated by the colonel as an honoured guest, and later, when the whole of the Calumet party went to the Indian camp, he became their host himself.

There were hundreds of Indians in this camp—Hunks was greatly impressed by their numbers—and all owned Badger Head as master. Most extraordinary of all, the man went out of his way to be civil and friendly to Hunks! In front of everyone he laid a hand upon his head; pulled his ears familiarly, and called him by pleasant-sounding Indian names.

The feel of the man's hand was detestable, and Hunks with great joy could have bitten it to pieces; but something warned him that, so far from contemplating such an action, he must try as far as possible to be civil, too. He even felt that the man's caress, unpleasant as it was, had been honestly given, and that he now bore no malice for the attack made upon him a few hours before. This fairly turned the pup's world upside down. But some days later, when he found that he was to leave Calumet with his

white settlements, which the Indians plan to raid next spring. The colonel, like most of the cowboys in Servita, has good cause to hate the Redskins, but his views change when his daughter is caught in a forest fire, for the Redskins are the first to offer their services. Sadie is saved, thanks mainly to Tom, White Cat, and his Indians. The colonel, eager to show his gratitude, throws open the doors of Calumet Ranch to Black Hawk's tribe. Later, Badger Head, the supreme chief of the Nation, is caught trespassing at Calumet by Hunks, who attacks him. The Indian is about to shoot Hunks when White Cat intervenes. For daring to come between the chief and his victim, White Cat is sentenced to the "fire." Sadie and Tom arrive, and as the party walks back to the house Tom realises something is amiss with White Cat.

(Now read on.)

master, and Malinka, and that they were to form part of the body of Indians controlled by Badger Head, he began to settle down and understand. He saw that Tom was treated with marked consideration by the chief; that White Cat and Black Hawk were in the best of spirits, and that Indians of all sorts welcomed him wherever he met them.

Tom had much to think of as he made his preparations to go south with the Apaches. Apart from consultation with the colonel concerning his undertaking, there was the problem of Sadie. The child was broken-hearted at his departure, and was now inclined to be very resentful over the whole matter.

When, however, she realised that Tom was going solely out of a sense of duty, she became suddenly fired with a determination to be equally self-sacrificing, and knowing that her father had a great desire for her to take a course at college—a proposition she had hitherto refused to entertain—she offered, to the colonel's infinite surprise, to spend the winter in the east, and study hard.

This decision pleased Tom in more than one way. There was no real need for the colonel to be at the ranch in winter-time. It would do him great good to get a change, and the college chosen by Sadie was not far from Chicago, where Chapin had friends and large business interests. He now consented to go there until the spring, by which time Tom would be free, and they could all be reunited at Calumet.

The council of the Apache nation, with certain sub-chiefs which Badger had brought to Servita, numbered two hundred. They came ostensibly to give fitting welcome to Tom upon his chieftainship and to make elaborate and touching protestations of fraternal friendship with the settlers in that district.

In reality, their purpose, as we know, was a very sinister one. Being persons of consideration, they wore, while in camp, official dress; held long meetings, and made interminable speeches, to which Tom had to listen, and, in many cases, reply in suitable terms. He was bored to desperation by it all, but he had some reward in Sadie's delight in the costume presented to him—buckskin shirt, heavily beaded, fringed breeches and moccasins, and an Indian headdress of modest dimensions, bearing three white feathers taken from the eagle Tom had shot the last night in hunting-camp.

Of course, he had to be photographed in the costume, and Sadie, whose spirits had recovered, made him sign a copy with his new name, and declared she should hang it up in

the most conspicuous place she could find in her rooms at college.

Then came the departure, and at once the whole scene changed. The official dresses were cast aside, and with them all official decorum and behaviour, and Tom began to find the journey to the Reservations not at all unlike the hunting-party adventure upon a large scale. The band split up into sections, and though by some mysterious means Tom could not fathom all the parties kept in touch with one another, for the greater part of the time he found himself once again travelling with his old friends.

Yet things were not the same as of old. To begin with, Tom, like Hunks, had grown up, and, having fully regained strength and condition after his wound, was now accepted by the warriors as a leader in any undertaking which required cool daring and initiative. Then, as they drew nearer to the end of the journey, he began to feel a difference in the whole atmosphere and in the attitude of Black Hawk and White Cat towards him.

It began one evening when White Cat, in front of his father, told Tom in detail the cause of his disobedience to Badger Head. Tom, knowing the sensitiveness of Indians over any matter affecting tribal discipline, had never asked his friend what he had done, and his surprise was very great indeed when he learnt the truth.

"Why did you not tell me before?" He asked the question bluntly, though he dropped his hand upon the young Indian's knee with a grip that was not to be mistaken.

"I wish old Hunks could know." "Huh!" grunted Black Hawk, who had not yet spoken. "He know! Look!"

The dog, as usual, had been lying close by his master, but now he moved and laid his head upon White Cat's knee. Tom laughed grimly.

"Yes. If Badger Head wants trouble, he has only to touch the kitten with a finger-nail!" Then he took White Cat's hand and wrung it. "I shall never forget, nor will the pup."

"It was nothing," muttered White Cat, burying his face in the dog's neck, while Hunks licked his face all over. "You and he save my life twice over."

"Huh!" grunted Black Hawk again. "Hunks no dog. There is a devil in him, as we say long ago. Badger Head find it out one day. But that not our business. Tom, in a very short time we reach Reservations. To-morrow Badger

(Continued on the next page.)



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WHITE EAGLE!

(Continued from
previous page.)

Head joins our party, and we shall be alone no more. This is why I tell you about White Cat."

Black Hawk had lit his pipe and was puffing it slowly, with a dark, inscrutable expression on his face.

"When I asked you to come hunting with me many moons ago, I had the purpose in my mind that we could turn you as men turn cattle on the run. It was my thought when I said you should be a chief in the nation that we could pull you as a doll on wires."

He paused, and smoked in silence for some minutes.

"My mind has changed." He paused again, but not for long. "We called you White Eagle, and laughed in our throats. But it was a true name. You soared into the sky out of our sight; then—huh!—you swooped down straight as the arrow of our fathers, on your prey, Mick Mander. But you are young, and you trust too many. The time is coming, my son; when you must trust no one—not one!"

He stopped, and Tom saw that he had finished.

The lad's face became very grave. The meaning behind Black Hawk's words was clear enough. The council of the nation, with Badger Head leading, were making a catspaw of him. Black Hawk was putting him on his guard. So far, so good. But, after all, Black Hawk was a member of that council. He was second in rank only to Badger Head, and he had intended to play the same game. Where did he stand now, really?

"It is well," Tom answered in Apache, his tone as quiet as the chief's, for he was learning Indian manners fast. "But you leave me without eyes. I have come to serve the nation for love. If it has no love for me, I return to my friends—to-night."

His voice quickened towards the end, and the last word came with a jerk. White Cat made a sudden gesture of

appeal, and looked anxiously at his father. But Black Hawk did not move an inch. His face was set hard.

"White Eagle speaks true," he said, as if addressing his son, though his eyes were upon Tom's face. "I will speak now. Then, White Cat—then shall our friend give his mind to us who love him. Tom, it is this way." He relapsed into English again, with a shake of the head; his small eyes darting suspiciously left and right. "The nation is in two pieces." He jerked his hands apart. "One piece want war—blood and scalps. They would put white men over slow fire, and make white girls their squaws."

Tom drew a sharp breath, and clenched his hands, at which Hunks stiffened all over and growled. Black Hawk turned towards the dog and nodded.

"Hunks know," he said. "But there is another piece. This piece of the nation quiet. Want no war. Wish to hunt in summer; trade skins in fall; lie quiet in Reservations winter-time. This piece love White Eagle. It go out and save Yellow Flower from fire, and make friends with cowboys, and sit happy on their horses. Huh!"

"But this piece very small. It only counts twenty warriors. The other piece has five thousand. The head of the little piece"—he laid a finger upon his breast—"is only a little man, who, but a moon ago, would have scalped and slain with all the rest. The head of the big piece is cunning as fox, fierce as panther, strong as bear. I give no names. Ask Hunks!"

Then his tone changed.

"Friend Tom, you have made the little piece. It is your baby. If you go now, that baby die. See? I tell you this. Both pieces want you. The Government have said, Apache bad men, and this coming winter shall have little food. The council is in fear. Badger Head is in fear. All look to you. If not much food squaws and babies starve. If they starve, the nation will become one piece only; thirsting for blood of white men. You have power. Stay with us, and tell plain truth to the Great White Agent, who holds the Reservations in his hands. Then no one will starve, and your baby, the little piece, may grow so big that it will become the nation.

"Those who want blood will hate you, but the rest will give their lives into your hands. That is the thought which holds my mind. White Cat, my son, tell Tom all that is in yours."

(What will be the outcome of this confession of Black Hawk? Read next week's topping instalment for the answer, boys.)

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