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'TWIXT LIFE AND DEATH!

(A dramatic incident from the splendid school yarn inside.)

A GRAND LONG COMPLETE SCHOOL STORY INTRODUCING—

Under False-

by Martin Clifford

CHAPTER 1. The Impostor!

"DON'T!" panted Alan Castleton hoarsely. "Don't point at me like that!"

He sat up in bed, in the Shell dormitory of the School House at St. Jim's. He was shivering, and there was a cold sweat on his brow.

"Don't point at me, Arthur!" he gasped. "I tell you—"

He broke off, staring about him wildly. The Shell dormitory was quiet, except for the breathing of all the other juniors. Some moonbeams were straying through the windows, and all the shadows were black and mysterious.

Alan Castleton took a gulping breath—a breath that expressed exquisite relief.

"He's not here!" he muttered. "I only dreamed it! I only thought— Oh, heavens! And it was so vivid, too! I could have sworn that he was here—that he was beside my bed, pointing an accusing finger at me!"

He sank back on his pillow, quivering from head to foot. A dream!

He could not close his eyes again. Even now, it seemed impossible that he could have dreamed that incident. Arthur had been beside him—Arthur, his twin brother! But his common sense told him that he had only been in a nightmare. For Arthur Castleton, of St. Jim's, was now sleeping in his dormitory at St. Frank's, far away—where Alan had sent him!

Or was he sleeping?

There was a hideous doubt here—a doubt which stabbed Alan to the heart. Wasn't it far more likely that Arthur had been hounded out of St. Frank's—that he had been drummed out by the enraged Removites and Fourth-Formers? And, after all, St. Frank's was in the same county—not such a very great distance off! Even now, Arthur might come—for a reckoning! Even now—

"No, no!" muttered Alan, with a gasping sob. "He won't come! That's not Arthur's way! He's too good-natured for that—too thoroughly decent! That's what makes it so hard to bear—so bitterly hard! Oh, what a cad I've been—what a blackguard!"

Conscience was at work here—acutely at work. As Alan Castleton lay in bed, he was tortured. He was tormented by the recollection of his own despicable doings.

He really belonged to St. Frank's, but he had made things so hot for himself there that he had cleared out—he had gradually run away. In secret, he had met his twin brother, Arthur, and he had suggested a little joke. He had sent Arthur back to St. Frank's to face the music—whilst he, himself, came to St. Jim's, where Arthur was held in the highest possible esteem by everybody in general.

A joke?

Now that it was too late, Alan could see that it was no joke—but a trick of the dirtiest and shabbiest description. Alan had performed many caddish acts in his life, but this last one of his had brought matters to a climax. He had come to realise his own blackguardism.

And nobody at St. Jim's—or at St. Frank's, for that matter—knew that there were two Castletons. The twins had always kept that secret—partly because of their father's desire. He wanted each of his sons to hoe their own row. So he had sent them to different schools. But whilst Arthur was as straight as a die, Alan had always been several kinds of a rotter.

He had come to St. Jim's lightheartedly, gloating over the way in which he had tricked his twin. But when he had

For years now Alan Castleton has trod the downward path and revelled in its demoralising results. But at last comes the voice of conscience, urging him to pull himself up, if only to right the grievous wrong he has done his twin brother whose place he has taken at St. Jim's.

arrived everybody had been so splendid to him—believing him to be Arthur—that he had been brought to a sudden realisation of his true character. And now his conscience was causing him such agony as he had never known.

There was one thing which tortured him more than any other. The uncertainty! The suspense! What had happened to Arthur?

"Everybody at St. Frank's was preparing a hot reception for me," muttered Alan, as he closed his eyes for a moment. "They were going to make things as hot as mustard! And I deserved it all, too—although I didn't realise it at the time. Good heavens, what a beast I was! What a thorough,

out-and-out rotter! And Arthur has gone back to face it all—to take the punishment that is really mine! And now I can't do anything—I'm helpless—helpless!"

He opened his eyes again and stared into the black shadows. In every one of them he could see his twin brother—he could see Arthur, standing in that darkness, pointing that accusing finger at him. With a shudder, he closed his eyes again.

"Perhaps there'll be a letter in the morning," he muttered. "Gad, I hope there is one! I don't care if it's full of condemnation—full of bitter anger. All the better! Don't I deserve it? He is bound to have written last night—before the post went! He got to St. Frank's fairly early, and must have discovered—"

He broke off, his perspiration even worse. Supposing Arthur hadn't had a chance to write a letter? He might have been kicked out of the school—not merely by the fellows, but by the headmaster himself!

Sacked! Expelled!

Was it not a distinct possibility? Alan knew what he had done at St. Frank's—and he knew that Arthur would bear the brunt of it. And in his present condition he exaggerated every one of his own actions—until they assumed unreal proportions.

And here, at St. Jim's, the fellows were simply wonderful! It had been his birthday yesterday—Arthur's birthday, too. And Tom Merry and Blake & Co. and Talbot and Levison and all the others—they had got up a big birthday party in his honour—in Arthur's honour.

But Alan had been the guest—in his brother's shoes.

And at that party Alan had been brought to realise what he actually was. Arthur was practically loved in this school—not in any silly, sentimental sort of way, but everybody was genuinely fond of him. He was such a decent sort—such a straight, honest, open sort of chap. There was something about him which endeared him to everybody.

And every friendly word cut Alan like a knife. He knew that he did not deserve them—he knew that he only deserved scorn and contempt. And yet friendliness was showered upon him in a way that he had never before known. It was a shock to him—and it had brought realisation in its train.

He had come to bed, looking rather unwell—and the sympathy of the Shell fellows had hurt him more than ever. And here he was, lying in bed, while everybody else was asleep. He had dozed once or twice—he had fallen into fitful snatches of slumber. But always to dream! Always to have nightmares of Arthur!

Alan did not exactly know it, but it was his conscience that was hurting him so much now—his guilty conscience that affected his nerves. As a rule, he was confident and cool—insolently cool. But now, all that had gone. The knowledge of what he had done was constantly before him. And the more he thought about it the worse it appeared.

—TOM MERRY & CO., THE CHEERY CHUMS OF ST. JIM'S!

-Colott's!



In his fevered brain he was not merely a cad, but a scoundrel.

He started up again, opening his eyes. What was that? A sound had come from the window—a little scratch!

It was Arthur!

Arthur had come, after all! So great was the conviction in Alan's breast that his twin brother would come for a reckoning that he started up in bed, and stared dazedly at the window. There was nothing there at all—nothing, at least, except a twig of ivy, stirred by the night wind.

"I can't stay in here!" he muttered feverishly. "I want air—I must have some air!"

He got out of bed and went to the window. But just as he was about to open it a sound came from his rear. It was a creak—and then came a voice:

"Who's that?" it asked.

"Eh?" gasped Alan, starting round, and jumping violently. "Who—who spoke? Who is it? Who is it, I say?"

"Steady, Castleton—steady!" came Tom Merry's even voice. "Are you ill?"

"No—no, I'm not ill!" stammered Alan huskily. "I—I—That is—I mean—"

He broke off, confused, unable to frame any words.

He knew that his terror had given him away. It had only been Tom Merry, awakened, probably, by Alan's movements. And Tom was naturally asking what was the matter. The cheery Shell captain sat up in bed and looked closely at Alan in the gloom.

"I say, Castleton, you're not quite yourself!" he said, with concern. "You had a rotten headache when you went to bed, I believe?"

"Yes—a terrible headache!" muttered Alan. "Perhaps it was that party last night. Please—please don't worry about me, Blake. I—I shall be all right!"

"Blake?" repeated Tom Merry, in wonder.

"I—I mean—"

"My dear chap, you're certainly ill!" said Tom. "I'm Merry—Tom Merry!"

"Of course!" said Alan, with a gulp, realising that he had made a bad blunder. "Yes, I'm a bit queer to-night, Merry. But don't worry about me—I shall be all right after I've had a sleep."

Tom Merry was very curious, but he asked no questions. Castleton's stammering utterances had made him wonder. And to be called Blake had surprised him even more. What on earth had made Castleton do that? Was his mind wandering, or what?

Alan got back into bed, and pretended to snuggle down, as though to go to sleep. He was in a fresh fever—hot from head to heel. The fact was, he knew practically nobody at St. Jim's. He had seen them all at that party, and Arthur had told him their names, and had given him their descriptions. But they were all strangers to him—strangers who acted as though they had known him for weeks and weeks! They were friends—and yet they were unknown to him!

The impostor realised more than ever how gravely he had wronged his twin brother. For these fellows were strangers to him, and yet they were friends. And what of Arthur's plight? Arthur had gone to St. Frank's—where everybody would be strange to him, too—but there, to add to the nightmare-like torture of his position, everybody would be hostile to him!

"Oh, heavens!" he breathed. "What have I condemned Arthur to? It's bad enough here—where everybody is so jolly decent to me! But what must it be like for Arthur?"

There was no sleep for him. His nerves were on edge—they were so utterly raw that the slightest sound set them jangling. And his fevered brain allowed him no rest whatever. He had treated Arthur

atrociously, and he was haunted by the fear that Arthur would come back—that Arthur would come to St. Jim's to square things up!

True, Arthur was a good-natured fellow—forgiving and easy-going. But Arthur had a temper, too—a violent, hasty temper. He wouldn't have been of much use to anybody if he had had no temper. And surely, with such provocation as Alan had given him, he would now let that temper of his hold full sway! And what would he do, if he had been booted out of St. Frank's?

Surely he would come here—to Alan?

So greatly did this idea take possession of Alan's mind that it became an obsession with him. He no longer regarded it as a probability, or as a possibility—but as a certainty.

Arthur would come!

But when—when? The suspense of it all was maddening. Why didn't he come now? Why didn't he come at once, and give his twin brother the hiding he deserved? Just at this minute Alan felt so wretched that he would have accepted the hiding without a murmur. He would have felt pleased at the pain of bearing it. Anything to still that conscience of his—anything to know that he was being made to suffer for his caddishness.

Still shivering, he turned over in bed, hot and perspiring. He couldn't understand it. He felt stifling—and yet he was shivering all the time.

He vaguely wondered if he was, indeed, ill. Perhaps he had contracted influenza, or some disease, or fever. Surely these symptoms proved that such was the case?

But Alan knew, in his heart, that his only fever was connected with his brain. It was his thoughts that were causing him this anguish, this torture.

He could not understand it. It was too big for him. On other occasions, if he had thought of any misdeed, he had laughed at it. He had brushed it aside with scarcely any attention. What did he care?

That had always been his policy in life. But now, suddenly brought to a sense of his despicable character, he was appalled. The very suddenness of his realisation had come as a shock. It was like the explosion of a bombshell. For the first time in his life he saw himself as he was—and he was disgusted. He loathed himself.

Truly, Alan Castleton was paying for his shabby behaviour!

CHAPTER 2.

The Figure at the Window!

SCRAPE, scrape!

It was only a faint sound, and it came from the window. Nobody in the Shell dormitory seemed to hear it. Even Tom Merry had gone soundly to sleep again, and knew nothing. Castleton was in a fitful kind of doze—neither asleep nor awake. It seemed to him that figures were round his bed, that scornful fingers were pointing at him. Not one—but many.

Scrape, scrape!

The sound came again, and then a figure appeared at the window, outlined darkly against the sky. First of all the head and shoulders, and then the crouching form of somebody getting cautiously through the opening.

And then Alan Castleton sat up.

He hadn't actually heard anything, but he knew—he sensed—that somebody was at the window. And he gave a gulp—a great convulsive gulp.

He could see the figure glaring now—moving cautiously—creeping into the room! It made no sound, but was slowly advancing.

Arthur!

Who else, indeed? It was Arthur—come here to settle his account! Just as Alan had believed, his brother had come—and here he was, grim and silent.

With a choking cry, Alan staggered out of bed, and the figure came to a halt. It stood just beyond the window, where there was dense blackness. And Alan ran up and clung to it desperately.

"I'll confess—I'll confess!" he panted hoarsely. "Oh, I knew you'd come—I knew—"

"Great gad!" said the figure, utterly startled.

Alan fell back with another cry; and this time it was a cry of consternation, mingled with relief. That hadn't been Arthur's voice. It was a harsh voice—a rasping sort of voice.

"What the deuce is the matter with you?" it came again.

"Racke!" whispered Alan.

"Well, what about it?" asked Aubrey Racke of the Shell. "Don't stare at me like that. I'm not a ghost, you fool!"

Alan fought for his breath.

"I—I thought—"

He paused, knowing that it was useless for him to tell the truth. Indeed, he could not do so—especially to Racke, of

all fellows. Racke was the worst cad in the School House—the black sheep of the Shell.

"Well?" he asked sharply.

"I—I—"

Alan passed a hand over his brow again, and his mind was so confused that he could think of no words to say. He had made a blunder—a terrible mistake! He had mistaken Racke, coming through the window, for Arthur! So obsessed by the conviction that Arthur would come that he had mistaken this figure for his brother without making any inquiry.

Racke, of course, had been out on one of his night jaunts. Occasionally the young rascal would break bounds, risking all the consequences. To-night he had been out with Clampe, of the New House. They had both cycled into Wayland, and had been playing cards with two members of a jazz band there—a couple of sports named Barker and Willis. Alan Castleton knew Willis, for Willis had been a monitor at Alan's old Grammar School. He was a weedy, cowardly sort of youth, and just the type that Racke would associate with.

Alan realised now what had happened. He knew that Racke had just come back from one of his jaunts. But his conscience was like something on fire—something searing his very brain.

And Racke was staring at him curiously—very curiously indeed. Of late, Racke had done everything in his power to discredit Arthur Castleton, for Racke hated Arthur—hated him because of his decency. Aubrey Racke had heard all sorts of rumours about Arthur's bad behaviour; but that behaviour had really been Alan's—and Racke had met with no success.

"What the dickens did you mean just now, Castleton?" asked Racke wonderingly. "What was that you said about confessin' somethin'?"

"Did I?" asked Alan, fighting for time.

"Yes, you did!"

"I—I don't seem to remember."

"Rot!" retorted Racke. "You remember all right. What was the idea of rushin' across the room an' clingin' to me like that? Anybody might think I had come here to stick a knife into you!"

Alan desperately fought for some plausible explanation.

"I—I'm not quite well!" he said tensely. "You know I had a headache last night. You know I was feeling pretty rocky."

"There's no reason why you should—"

"I was dreaming!" interrupted Alan. "It was an awful nightmare—a terrible sort of thing! I—I suppose I ate something that didn't agree with me. Anyhow, I thought you were a policeman, and I had an idea that I had just set fire to a lot of houses, and had been watching them burning with terrific glee. And—and then you came along, and I thought you were a policeman, and I confessed; but it's all confused."

Racke looked at Alan more curiously than ever.

"That wasn't bad, to be invented on the spur of the moment," he said coolly. "But you can't fool me, Castleton!"

"I tell you—"

"Rot!" said Racke again. "What was the real reason for your action? You weren't asleep—and you hadn't been in a nightmare, either. You thought I was somebody else. Come along—out with it!"

"No, I can't explain anything!" panted Alan.

"But you admit that you faked up that yarn of a dream, don't you?"

"I admit nothing!" replied Alan fiercely. "I tell you it was a dream! I tell you—"

"All right—all right!" interrupted Racke hastily.

"There's no need to raise your voice, an' awaken everybody else! Get back to bed, an' keep quiet. Do you think I want all the chaps to know that I've been out on the razzle?"

"I—I won't say anything—"

"I shouldn't think you would!" interrupted Racke calmly. "You don't want me to tell the chaps just what happened, do you?"

"No—no!" panted Alan. "Don't say anything about that!"

His nerves were a mass of rags, and he clutched at Racke's arm desperately. But Racke shook that grip away, and backed a pace or two.

"Keep your paws off me!" he snapped. "By gad, you're in a queer state, Castleton! What on earth's come over you since yesterday?"

It was a question which Alan could not answer. For answering it involved the truth. And how could he explain to Racke that he was an impostor?

He had sworn to himself that he would say nothing to injure Arthur's name at St. Jim's; and he meant to keep that vow. He had acted like a cad in the past, but now, perhaps, he would be able to redeem himself. Not com-

pletely, but to a certain extent. He had treated Arthur shabbily, but he would do nothing at St. Jim's to make things worse.

He stood there, hardly able to keep himself straight. He had never dreamed that he could be so affected—that this mental pain of his could make him such a wreck.

Now that it was too late to recall his twin brother, he regretted what he had done—oh, how he regretted it! And he had done it all so easily—so thoughtlessly. At the time it had struck him as being a particularly cute dodge. But now—

"Well, aren't you goin' back to bed?"

Racke's voice cut in harshly on Alan's thoughts, and he started.

"Yes!" he muttered. "I—I think I'd better!"

"I'd like to know what's the matter with you!" said Racke. "Somethin' must have happened when you went to Abbotsford."

"What?" gasped Alan.

"Ah, that touched you on the raw, eh?" sneered Racke. "Mellish told me that you went to Abbotsford yesterday, an' that you wouldn't tell anybody why you were goin'. What did you do there?"

"I can't tell you!" retorted Alan fiercely. "I won't tell you!"

If he had only known it, he was making things much worse by his obvious fear. He had gone to Abbotsford to meet Arthur; but, of course, he had come from St. Frank's. It was Arthur who had left St. Jim's; but Racke didn't know the difference.

"Yes, I shall have to make some inquiries about Abbotsford," went on Racke coolly. "Something pretty interestin' must have happened there yesterday. You were different as soon as ever you came back, Castleton. I suppose you didn't rob a bank, or anythin'?"

"Don't be a fool!" said Alan fiercely.

"Well, you'd better explain—"

"I—I'll speak to you again to-morrow," said Alan in his weakness. "I—I'll tell you somethin'—"

"After you've had all the rest of the night to think it out, eh?" interrupted Aubrey Racke sneeringly. "Behanged to you, Castleton! Get back to bed, you fool! You're a mass of nerves. All the same, I shall expect you to tell me somethin' else to-morrow. If you don't, I might feel inclined to explain to everybody what has just happened."

"Don't—don't—!" said Alan huskily. "I—I'll speak to you again, Racke."

He went back to bed in a fresh fever. He didn't want Racke to tell the Shell fellows of that little incident. There would only be a lot of inquiries, and Alan desired, above all else, to be left alone.

He was looking forward to the morrow with a kind of dull horror.

He was particularly afraid of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Gussy was so effusive—well-meaning, no doubt, but effusive. He insisted upon thrusting his friendship on Castleton. From the very start, the genial Gussy had proclaimed that Castleton was a "wippah," and he did not see any difference between the twin brothers. At that birthday party he had consistently hung round Alan, and had pressed his attentions upon him.

The other fellows, too, were almost as bad. Or was it good? They all wanted to show him how highly they thought of him. Perhaps things had been exaggerated yesterday—because it had been his birthday—that was a probable explanation. But it was far more likely that Alan was exaggerating the activities of the fellows. They were just ordinarily friendly; but he was so accustomed to being avoided by the crowds that he had received an exaggerated impression. In his present state he was hardly in a fit condition to judge, anyhow.

Racke was soon asleep, and snoring heavily. He had had quite a good evening, for he had won something like two or three pounds from Willis and Barker. And Racke

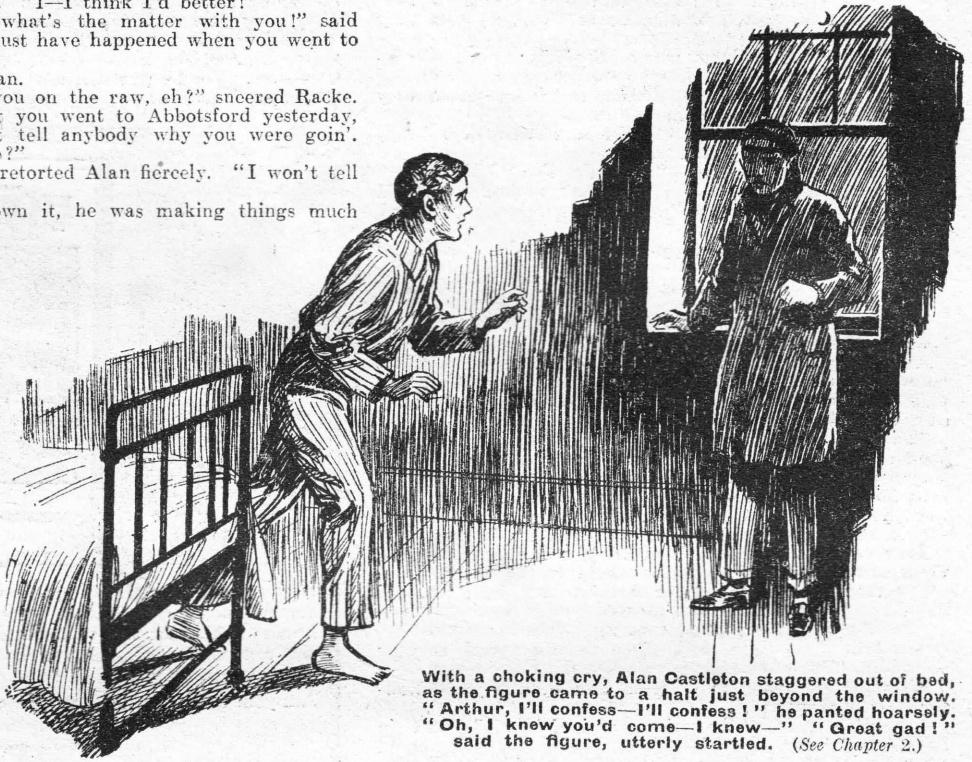
was looking forward to another of those little games. These friends of his wouldn't be in the district for long, and he wanted to make hay while the sun shone.

Alan Castleton, however, found no sleep yet.

He could hear Racke's snoring, and he was relieved.

More than once he looked at the window, wondering if Arthur would really come. No, that was impossible. That was only a fantastic fear. If Arthur came at all, he would come on the morrow—openly. It wasn't like Arthur to creep into a place in the dead of night. He would never act in that way.

Besides, there might be a letter in the morning; and perhaps Alan would leave St. Jim's altogether. That



With a choking cry, Alan Castleton staggered out of bed, as the figure came to a halt just beyond the window. "Arthur, I'll confess—I'll confess!" he panted hoarsely. "Oh, I knew you'd come—I knew—" "Great gad!" said the figure, utterly startled. (See Chapter 2.)

wasn't a bad idea. In the morning he could slip off, and— But where could he go to?

It was impossible for him to return to St. Frank's now. Arthur was there—or he had been there.

The whole position was in a turmoil.

And, at last, Alan managed to get a little sleep.

It only came to him in fitful dozes. Ten times during that night he awoke, shivering; and always he could see Arthur beside him. And, in every case, Arthur was accusing him. All this was an indication that Alan's conscience was hard at work. It was torturing him more and more.

Sheer weariness, in the end, drove him to slumber. His physical strength was unable to stand the strain. And so he slept.

And in his dreams he always saw Arthur at St. Frank's—he saw him drummed out by all these fellows there. They were raving at him, shouting at him, and jeering at his discomfiture. Some of the rotters were even throwing stones at him. He was being cast out of St. Frank's in disgrace, and he was suffering in Alan's place.

These were the dreams which came to Alan Castleton as he lay in bed in the Shell dormitory at St. Jim's.

It wasn't until three o'clock in the morning that he obtained any real sleep. But from that hour onwards his torturing conscience quietened, and he was allowed to obtain some real, restful repose.

Alan needed it, too; for the morrow was to test him to the uttermost.

CHAPTER 3.

The Impostor's Weakness!

CLANG! Clang!
It was the rising bell, and many were the yawns in the Shell dormitory.

"Heigh-ho!" said Monty Lowther, as he sat up, stretching himself. "Another day, ye lubbers! And not a

half-holiday, worse luck. Nothing but work—work, boys, work, and be contented!"

"I don't suppose it will kill us," said Tom Merry cheerily, as he jumped out of bed. "Hallo, Castleton! How goes it this morning? Feeling better?"

Alan was sitting up, dazed and heavy.

"I—I'm all right, Blake!" he muttered.

"Blake!" said Tom Merry, staring. "What the merry dickens—"

"I—I mean, Merry!" said Alan hastily. "Sorry! I'm still half asleep!"

He cursed himself. For some idiotic reason he had mixed up Jack Blake with Tom Merry. Every time he looked at Tom Merry he had the name "Blake" in his mind. He was a stranger to all these fellows—although they didn't know it. And a mistake of this sort was only natural.

But Tom Merry, at least, was particularly struck. Castleton had made the same mistake during the night. What could it mean? Tom found himself looking at Alan very closely; and then he went nearer to Alan's bed.

"You're not well, Castleton," he said earnestly. "In fact, you're decidedly seedy."

"I'm not!" insisted Alan. "Honestly, I'm all right!"

"You can tell that to the marines," replied Tom. "I can see a difference in you."

"A—a difference?"

"Rather!" said Tom, nodding. "You don't look the same chap!"

"But I am!" faltered Alan desperately.

Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, of course you are, if it comes to that," he replied.

"You can't be another being, can you, Castleton?"

Alan gulped inwardly. Little did Tom Merry know that he was, actually, another being! Once again Alan had nearly given himself away, and he yawned prodigiously in order to hide his confusion.

"I've had a pretty rotten night!" he admitted. "I've been dreaming like the deuce, and I'm glad it's morning. I shall be all right directly after breakfast."

"I hope so," said Tom, with a friendly nod. "We don't want you to be seedy, Castleton."

"No fear!" said one or two of the other fellows.

They came round his bed, greeting him cheerily. And every one of those greetings cut Alan to the quick.

For they were intended for Arthur, and he, Alan, did not deserve them. All he deserved was vituperation and scorn. He could have borne that with stoicism; could have laughed in their faces, and given them as good as they gave him. But when they were all so friendly he was helpless. He felt strangely weak in face of this goodfellowship which abounded.

The Shell fellows themselves noticed a difference in Castleton. It was something almost intangible. They could not explain it. Of course, he wasn't well—his drawn face and his puffy eyes proved that. But there was something else wrong with him—something curiously vague.

The truth was they could all tell that Alan Castleton was not exactly the same as Arthur Castleton. The facial resemblance was the same, and the figure was identical; but nothing could hide the fact that these two twins were dissimilar in character.

Alan was feeling a little steadier this morning, and his one desire now was to get dressed quickly and to escape. He wanted to get rid of these fellows who wore so cordial to him. Besides, he had remembered that there would probably be a letter for him.

A letter from Arthur!

It made no difference that that letter would be a bitter one—a letter full of condemnation and anger. Alan would like it all the better; for, in his present mood, he felt that he deserved it.

By getting down before the others, too, he might be able to have a good look round St. Jim's, and familiarise himself with the studies and the passages, and all the other geography of the school. At present he was very vague; for he had only arrived the previous evening, after dusk had set in.

As he got dressed he noticed that Racke was eyeing him rather curiously. But Alan tried not to look in Racke's direction.

Tom Merry and Talbot, and most of the others, sensing that Alan wanted to be left alone, said very little to him. They could see that he was not quite well, and they were rather concerned about him.

By much hurrying, Alan succeeded in being the first down, and when he got into the hall below he eagerly went to the letter-rack and searched it.

"By gad!" he muttered.

Yes, there was a letter in the "C" division. It was for him all right—it couldn't be for anybody else! It

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was from Arthur—and Arthur had written, telling him what had happened at St. Frank's. And that was what Alan wanted to know. More than anything else, he was anxious to learn what had happened to Arthur at St. Frank's.

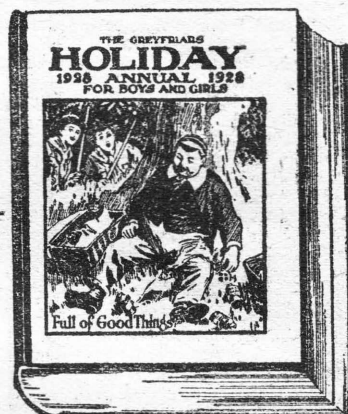
He took the letter out of the rack, and hardly glanced at the superscription on it before he inserted his thumb under the flap. Then he gave a sudden start. The letter was not for him at all! It was addressed to Crooke.

"Oh, my goodness!" muttered Alan, with a guilty start.

He had nearly opened that letter, too—so certain had been that it was for him. With a hasty movement he put the letter back into the rack, and turned aside. His thoughts were in a tumult again.

So there was no letter for him, after all.

Arthur hadn't written! In a way, Alan was tremendously relieved. And yet, at the same time, he felt more tortured than ever. For he was still uncertain. The suspense would continue. There was no news of any kind—no news from



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his twin brother at St. Frank's. What did it mean? How had Arthur fared? How, in the name of goodness, could Alan find out the truth? There seemed no possible way.

He went out into the quad, and he paced up and down in the bitter morning air, without any overcoat, and without even realising that he needed one. His hands were thrust deep into his trousers pockets, and he was blue with cold before many minutes had elapsed.

Truly, he was being bitterly punished for all his sins.

"Bai Jove!"

Alan did not even hear that exclamation from the School House doorway. But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was standing there. And Gussy was considerably perturbed. The wind was very cold that morning, and here was Castleton, walking about in the quad without an overcoat, and without even a cap!

"Castleton, deah boy!"

Alan looked round at that shout, and started.

"Oh, hallo!" he called awkwardly. "Good-morning!"

"Good-mornin', Castleton!" replied D'Arcy. "Weally, deah boy, you are fwightfully unwise in woamin' about the quad without any headgeah! It is fwightfully cold, and it is beginnin' to wain, too!"

Alan started, and suddenly realised that he was feeling cold.

"Yes, I—I had forgotten!" he said. He turned aside, wishing to be alone with his thoughts again. And he forgot Gussy on the instant. He was wondering about Arthur. Not a word from him! And the old uncertainty was continuing. He didn't know what had happened at St. Frank's, and—

"Weally, Castleton, I must stwongly pwotest!" said Arthur Augustus, in a firm voice.

Alan turned. Gussy was beside him now—and he was not only wearing his own overcoat, he had brought Castleton's! Alan stared rather stupidly. It amazed him that anybody should be so concerned for his health.

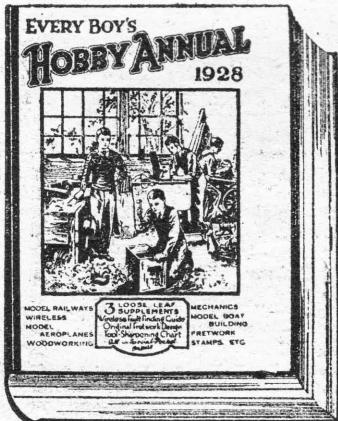
"What—what's this?" he asked, staring.

"Your ovahcoat, deah boy!" said Gussy. "Pway put it on, Castleton!"

Alan struggled into it, and his face had gone red.

"You shouldn't have troubled, Archie," he said in a low voice.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus. "My name isn't Archie, you duffah!"



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"Eh?" said Alan, with a start. "I—I'd forgotten! I—I meant Gussy."

"That's bettah!" said D'Arcy, with a nod. "Weally, Castleton, you are actin' vewy stwongly this mornin'. I twust you have not weceived bad news?"

"No—not at all."

"Ewevythin' all wight at home?"

"Yes, of course."

"Your patah in the pink of condish, I twust?"

"As far as I know," said Alan.

"And the good old matah is also sewene?"

"Yes—yes," said Alan, feeling desperate. "Everybody's all right, I think, thanks."

"I twust you are not wowwyin' ovah financial mattahs?" continued Gussy, with the best intentions in the world. "I know it is fwightfully wowwyin' to be short of cash. If you are in any way embawwassed, Castleton, kindly say the word. I shall have much pleasuah in whackin' out—"

"No, I don't want any money," interrupted Alan. "I'm quite all right, Gussy."

"I wefuse to believe you, deah boy," said Gussy firmly. "You are far fwom bein' all wight. In fact, as far as I see, you are all w'ong! Your bwow is fevahed, and you are lookin' vewy seeday."

"I tell you—"
"Vewy seeday indeed!" continued D'Arcy, giving Alan a searching look. "You have fwightful bags undah your eyes, and your coloh has nearly gone. I weally think you should see a doctah, Castleton."

"He'll need one after you've been at him for ten minutes, Gussy!" said Jack Blake, coming up with Herries and Digby.

"Weally, Blake—"
"Morning, Castleton!" nodded Blake, with a friendly smile at Alan. "I hear you're not feeling quite yourself to-day?"

"You look a bit rocky!" said Herries critically.

"Rather white about the gills!" nodded Digby.

Alan regarded the chums of Study No. 6 with a curiously desperate look.

Why was everybody so friendly? Why were they concerning themselves about his health? Why on earth couldn't they leave him alone?
He almost felt like screaming out aloud, but by a supreme effort he managed to keep himself under control. If they had raved at him, if they had called him the names he deserved, he would not have minded. He could have stood that. But this persistent cordiality was maddening. It was maddening because he did not deserve any of it.

He wanted to be alone—absolutely alone.
"I—I'm not feeling quite up to the mark, I'll admit," he said, ready to adopt any subterfuge. "I said I was all right; but it's no good keeping that up, I suppose. I—I'm a little bit out of sorts. I—I think I'll go along to the study, or something else, where I can be quiet."

"That's a hint, Gussy," said Blake promptly.

"Yaas, wathah!" agreed Arthur Augustus. "Castleton vewy plainly does not want you bothahin' him, Blake. Come along, Castleton. I will go with you to the studay."

"Ass!" said Blake. "Castleton doesn't want you, either!"

"Weally, Blake—"
"He's proved that!" put in Digby. "Look! He's walked off by himself!"

"Then I will wun aftah him," said Arthur Augustus, with concern. "I am vewy much afwaid Castleton is in a wocky condition. Bai Jove! Pway welease me, Blake!"

"Rats!" said Blake. "Castleton showed us as plain as a pikestaff that he wants to be alone. Goodness knows why; but that's his bizney. So you're not going to bother him, Gussy."

"Weally, Blake, I have no intention of bothahin' him—"

"Whether you have any intention of it or not, we won't take the risk," said Blake. "Come along with us, Gussy, and leave Castleton to himself."

And Arthur Augustus gave it up.

CHAPTER 4.

Gussy Means Well!

"JUST a minute, Tom Mewwy!"
The Terrible Three halted as they were about to turn into the Shell passage. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came up, looking concerned and worried.

"Better buck up, Gussy," said Monty Lowther. "We're in a hurry. Can't stop to listen to your feather-headed chatter!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Anything wrong, old man?" asked Tom Merry.

"I wathah think theah is somethin' vewy w'ong," replied Gussy. "Surely you have noticed that Castleton is vewy seeday this mornin'?"

Tom nodded.

"Yes, I've noticed it," he agreed. "There's certainly something the matter with Castleton. But I have an idea that he wants to be left alone, so it'll be a kindness on our part if we say nothing; Perhaps he's had some bad news—"

"I don't think so," interrupted Arthur Augustus. "I questioned Castleton closely on the subject, but he assuahed me that ewevythin' is all sewene. No bad news fwom home wathevah. His people are quite all wight, an' he is not wovvied financially."

"Perhaps he's in love?" suggested Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah, I fail to see what evidence you have to—"

"No conclusive evidence, I'll admit," replied the humorist of the Shell. "At the same time, Castleton went off mysteriously to Abbotsford yesterday. He came back with a moony look on his face. Now he seems to have lost his appetite, and he's going about with a far-away, dreamy expression in his eyes. They're all signs of love, Gussy."

"I utterly wefuse to believe it!"

"My dear chap, I assure you," said Lowther, "I've seen all these signs in you!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"
"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Dozens of times," continued Monty, with a nod. "Now, let me see! How many times have you fallen in love, Gussy? There was that girl at the bunshop, and there was the other girl in the restaurant in Wayland, and two or three in London during the holidays, and then you fell in love with one of the housemaids—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You fwithful wottah!" shrieked Arthur Augustus, turning very pink. "You know vewy well that I have nevah fallen in love with one of the housemaids!"

"Then it must have been the cook!" said Lowther.

"Bai Jove!" shouted Gussy. "Unless you wetwact that atrocious statement, Lowthah, I shall have no option but to administrah a feahful thwashin'!"

"Aren't we drifting somewhat from the subject, old man?" put in Manners gently. "We weren't discussing love, were we? I thought you said that Castleton was feeling seedy?"

Arthur Augustus gulped, and calmed down.

"In the cires, Lowthah, I will postpone that feahful thwashin'," he said. "Castleton's condition is of more importance than—"

"That's all right, Gussy; you needn't postpone it," said Lowther. "I apologise."

"Bai Jove! Weally?"

"In four different positions," agreed Lowther.

"Then, as one gentleman to anothah, I have no alternative but to accept your apology," said Gussy graciously. "Howevah, theah is uttally no need for you to adopt four different positions, Lowthah."

"But about Castleton," said Tom Merry, frowning. "He certainly seems very changed this morning. I noticed it as soon as ever he got up. There's something—something—Blessed if I can explain it!"

"Exactly," said Lowther. "I've felt the same sensation."

"Me, too," agreed Manners. "Something intangible, but it's there! Castleton is different, somehow."

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus. "If theah is any diffevance, it is because he is ill. An' I suggest that we ought to persuade him to see Nurse Wivahs. The poor chap is obviously ill, an' he should go into the sannay. How would it be for us to go to Castleton an' ask him as a favah to weport to Mawie?"

"It might work," said Tom Merry, nodding. "If Castleton is really feeling ill, he'll knuckle under quickly enough, and Marie Rivers will soon put him right."

So they went along the Shell passage, and it so happened that Alan Castleton himself appeared at that very moment. He had been alone in Study No. 2, but Frere had come in, Frere being Castleton's study-mate. And Alan had escaped, for his desire to be alone had almost become a mania.

"Heah we are, deah boy!"

Alan stared with dull misery. Gussy again! Kindly, well-meaning, fatheaded Gussy! And Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther, and one or two others, too! They all surrounded him.

"What—what's this?" asked Alan huskily.

"My dear man, you've got to look after yourself," said Tom Merry firmly. "Or if you won't look after yourself, we've got to look after you. We suggest that you go and see Nurse Rivers."

"Nurse Rivers?" repeated Alan. "Who is she? I—I mean—"

"You ass, she's the nurse in the sannay!" said Manners, staring.

"Oh, yes!"

"Weally, Castleton, I think your memowry must be gwowin' wockay!" said Arthur Augustus. "This mornin', not ten minutes ago, you wewewred to me as Archie—"

"Yes, and he calls me Blake!" said Tom Merry, nodding.

"Bai Jove! Did he weally?" asked Gussy. "Then it is certain that Castleton is ill! His mind must be wandahwin'!"

"You ought to know, Gussy," said Lowther. "Yours has been wandering for years!"

"Weally, Lowthah, this is no time for your wotten jokes!" said Arthur Augustus severely. "Castleton, pway come with us to Mawie Wivahs. I weally think that you should go into the sannay. An' I will win down for the doctah—"

"No, no!" panted Alan, backing away. "I don't want any doctor!"

"Weally, Castleton—"

"I won't have any doctor, either!" insisted Alan fiercely. "And I don't want to go to Nurse Rivers, or anything else! Why can't you leave me alone? I'm nothing to any of you! Why can't you—"

He broke off, biting his lip. Just for a moment his old temper had got possession of him, and he checked himself, realising that the juniors were staring at him in a strange way.

"I—I'm sorry!" he went on huskily. "I—I didn't mean to say that! You're all so friendly to me, all so concerned, just because I'm a bit seedy this morning. But I wish

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you wouldn't be!" he added earnestly. "There's nothing actually the matter with me! Please leave me alone!"

And there was such a world of entreaty in his voice that Tom Merry at once nodded.

"Right you are, Castleton," he said. "We won't bother you any more. If there's something on your mind, you'd better be left to yourself."

"Yaas; but—"

"This way, Gussy!" said Blake.

"I utterly wefuse to go this way—or that way, eithah!" said Arthur Augustus. "I want to wemain with my fwiend Castleton."

"Then you won't!"

"I insist—"

"You can insist all you like, Gussy, but your friend Castleton doesn't want you!" said Blake pointedly. "His one desire is to be alone, so we won't pester him. Haven't you ever felt like that? Something has been worrying you, and all you want is solitude. We're not going to bother Castleton with our questions and prying."

"I twust, Blake, that you do not suspect me of pwyin'?" asked Gussy, scandalised.

"Not intentionally prying, old man," said Blake. "But it amounts to the same thing really. Castleton wants to stew in his own juice—"

"I object to that disgustin' expression, Blake!"

"Well, anyhow, he wants to be by himself," amended Blake. "And your company, Gussy, is sometimes a bit tiresome."

"Bai Jove!"

"I hate to be so blunt about it, but the truth always hurts!" went on Blake, with a grin. "There's no need to worry about Castleton, you ass! Anybody can see that he isn't bodily ill; it's only mental trouble. There's some worry on his mind—and it's private, too. He's told us that as plainly as possible."

"Yaas, wathah!" agreed D'Arcy. "That is why I am so wowwied about him. If only he will confide in me—"

"Rats! This way, old son—"

"Weally, Blake—"

But Arthur Augustus was led away, and the other fellows melted in various directions. Alan Castleton found himself free to go where he pleased. It was another indication of the genuine friendliness of these St. Jim's fellows. They realised that he wanted to be alone, and they were not bothering him with their questions. They were going, so that he could be by himself. It was simply another expression of their regard for him.

He went back to his own study, and was relieved to find that Frere had gone. He closed the door and locked himself in. Then he sank into a chair and sighed deeply.

All these fellows had no regard for him—but for Arthur! It was Arthur they were so concerned about. When they got to know the real truth—if they ever did—they would look upon him with scorn and contempt. And it was scorn and contempt that he deserved. They would despise him for the cur he was.

Wouldn't it be a good idea to tell them? To confess everything?

For a moment Alan struggled with the thought. Why not? That was a way to end it all quickly—to get away from these friendly fellows! It would be so simple, too; half a dozen words—

Simple? Alan wasn't so sure. With a start, he realised that they wouldn't even believe him! They knew that he was mentally worried; and he had already made one or two blunders with regard to the names. They would think that he was wandering in his mind. They had never heard a word about a twin brother. His story would sound too fantastic to be credited. Who would believe that he really belonged to St. Frank's, and that he had changed places with a twin brother?

He groaned.

No, he couldn't even explain the true situation; for the truth sounded too ridiculous to be believed. Another thought came to him. To explain would be cowardly—would be a weakling's move. No; his duty was to remain here, in accordance with his pledge to Arthur. And he would keep his vow, too! He would do nothing at St. Jim's to besmirch Arthur's fair name!

So Alan sat in his study, and he was so enraptured in his own thoughts that he disregarded the breakfast-bell—in fact, he did not even know that it had rung. He wanted no breakfast; food would have choked him. He remained in his study until breakfast was over and until he heard the tramp of feet out in the passage.

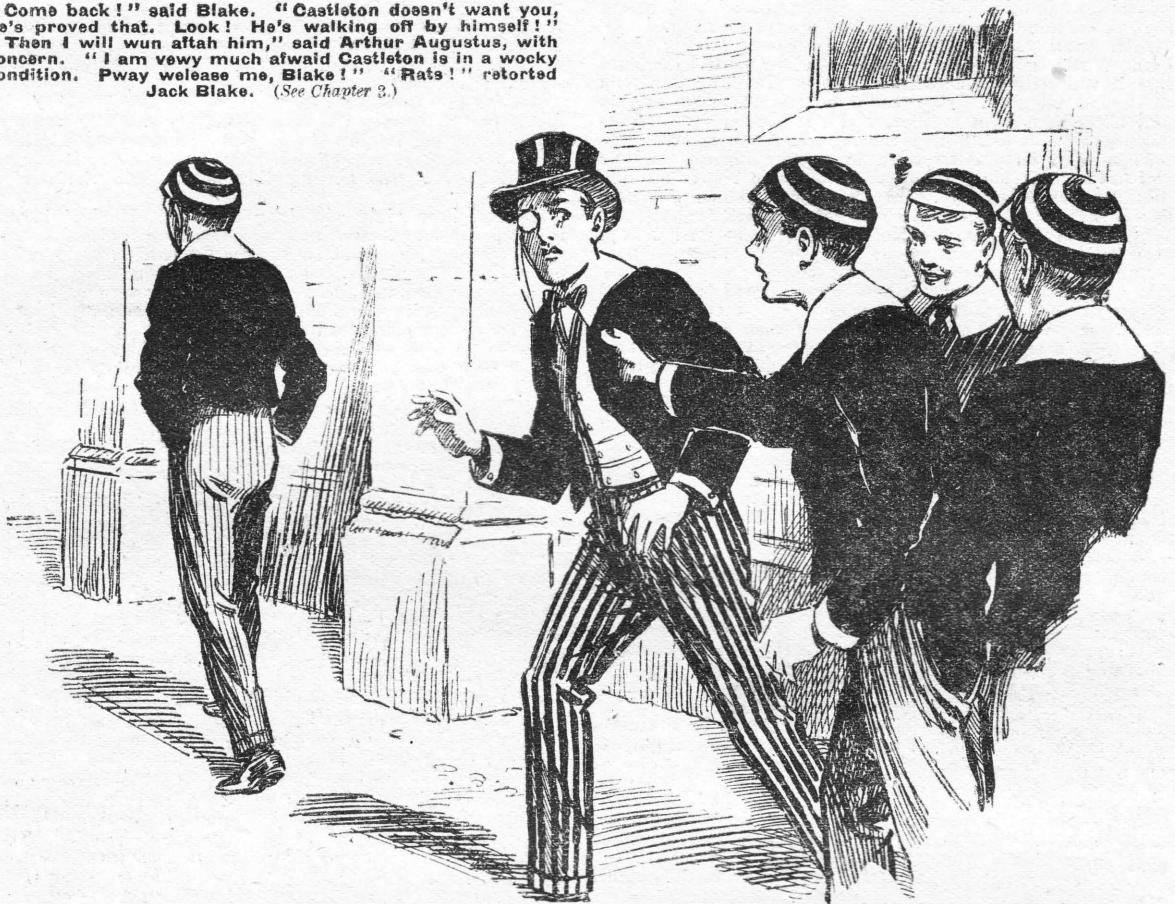
Thump, thump!

Somebody was banging on the door, and Alan got up with a start and unlocked it. Harry Frere was there, and one or two other Shell fellows, too.

"Hallo!" said Frere. "Why didn't you come in to breakfast, Castleton?"

"Breakfast?" said Alan, with a start. "I—I'd forgotten!"

"Come back!" said Blake. "Castleton doesn't want you, he's proved that. Look! He's walking off by himself!"
 "Then I will wun atfah him," said Arthur Augustus, with concern. "I am vevy much afwaid Castleton is in a wocky condition. Pway welaase me, Blake!" "Rats!" retorted Jack Blake. (See Chapter 3.)



"Forgotten breakfast?" said Talbot, staring. "My hat! Then you certainly are ill!"

"I—I wasn't hungry, anyway," said Alan. "Don't bother!"

"Mr. Railton was asking about you," said Bernard Glyn. "You—you didn't say that I was unwell, did you?" asked Alan.

"No," replied Frere. "All the same, Castleton, I think you might tell us what's the matter. We don't want to pry into your affairs, but you've been behaving so curiously that—"

"I—I'm a bit worried," muttered Alan. "It's something—something private. Nothing much, of course; so please don't press me. I shall be all right soon, I expect. By the way, is there any second post this morning?"

"Post?" said Frere. "Yes, there is one some time during the morning, but we don't get the letters until lessons are over; then we generally find them in the rack."

"Thanks!" said Alan absently.

He walked away; and the other Shell fellows looked after him very wonderingly.

Yet not one of them guessed the truth. They accepted Alan without query, and had not the slightest inkling that he was an impostor in their midst—that he was a fraud and a fake!

CHAPTER 5.

Slipping!

"CASTLETON!"

Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, called out the name rather sharply. And everybody else in the Shell Form-room looked on wonderingly. For Castleton had taken no notice of the Form master, and was still seated at his desk, deep in a brown study.

"Castleton!"

Again Mr. Linton called out the name, and Alan still gave no sign. He had not even heard—and he had been paying no attention to the lesson from the very beginning. Now, when he was called upon to construe, he was not only unprepared, but he had no knowledge of the fact that he had been called upon.

"Wake up, Castleton!" said Bernard Glyn, giving Alan a nudge.

"Th?" said Alan, with a start. "Why, what—"

"Castleton!"

"Sir!" said Alan, jumping up with such violence that he upset two or three of his books on the floor.

"Are you ill, Castleton?" asked Mr. Linton sharply. "Surely there was no need for you to give such a violent start?"

"I—I'm sorry, sir!"

"Do you know that I have called you three times, Castleton?"

"No, sir. I—I wasn't attending, sir," admitted Alan. And there was such a tone of hopelessness in his voice that Mr. Linton went across to his desk and bent over him. He looked at Alan closely.

"You are acting very strangely this morning, Castleton," he said, with concern. "If I did not think that you were unwell I would give you a severe imposition for your inattention."

"I—I'm all right in the main, sir," said Alan, with tight lips. "I'm not ill—I'm not ill at all, sir!"

"Not bodily ill, Castleton; but it would appear as if you have something on your mind," said the Form master kindly. "Do not hesitate to seek my advice if you are in any need of help, my boy."

"Thank you, sir!" muttered Alan wretchedly.

Even the masters were friendly towards him—friendly when they should have been bitterly antagonistic!

"If you wish it, Castleton, I will excuse you from lessons," continued Mr. Linton. "Perhaps you had better go to your study and take some rest—"

"No, sir, I don't need it!" put in Alan. "Everybody has been telling me that I'm ill. And—and I'm getting—getting—"

"Getting rather tired of it, eh, Castleton?" smiled Mr. Linton. "I can quite understand. I have been in very much the same position myself. It becomes a nuisance, doesn't it, when everybody tells you that you look pale and haggard? Very well, my boy, we will leave you alone."

"Thank you, sir!"

There was something very kindly in Mr. Linton's attitude. And for the rest of the morning he did not call upon Alan to do any work. But Alan, in order to obtain some distraction from his torturing thoughts, tried to settle himself to the lessons. He failed miserably. He could do nothing, for his thoughts were constantly wandering away. Arthur

was always in his mind—Arthur always stood just before him, in his mind's eye. And he was always accusing.

Alan knew very well that everybody was talking about him. What else could he expect? Yet how could he explain that it was only his conscience that was making him look so ill and haggard? How could he tell anybody that he had tricked his twin brother, and had played such a low-down game that it was now causing him acute agony?

Time after time Alan tried to recover his old coolness and confidence. He tried to throw off this fresh sensation that was affecting him. He had never known anything like it before. Why should he be so concerned for Arthur? Why should he be so worried? Hitherto he had always been callous—indifferent to the sufferings of others.

And he knew the answer all the time.

It was because everybody here was so good to him, and it proved that Arthur was one of the best chaps in the world, or he would never have made such an impression in so short a time. And he—Alan—had sent Arthur to face that storm at St. Frank's. Always it came back to that one thought.

As soon as lessons were over Alan dashed to the letter rack and searched it. He uttered an inward groan when he found that there was no letter for him.

Still no news.

He half expected a telephone message. St. Frank's wasn't such a great distance away, and Arthur could easily phone if he wanted to. Why was it that no sound was heard from him? How was he getting on at St. Frank's?

So often did Alan ask himself this question that it grew upon him like a disease. He turned away from the letter-rack, torn and agonised by this fresh period of suspense. He was beginning to feel that he couldn't bear it much longer. It was simply impossible. How was he to carry on throughout the day? What would happen if the evening came and still there was no information?

"I shan't be able to stand it," he muttered. "I'll run away this evening. I'll go back to St. Frank's. Yes, by gad, I'll go back and face them all! It would be the only decent thing to do—to tell everybody there that I played a filthy trick on Arthur!"

Then he shrank from it.

To go back—to face all those fellows he had harmed! He felt incapable of such a thing, and in his weakness he rather welcomed the advent of Racke and Clampe, who came up just then.

"Oh, here you are, Castleton," said Racke. "Lookin' for a letter?"

"No, not exactly," replied Alan. "There's nothing for me, anyhow."

"Don't forget what happened last night," murmured Racke. "It's all right. I've told Clampe about it. He can be trusted; he's one of my pals. Would you care to come along to the study?"

"I don't mind," said Alan wearily.

He didn't care where he went, so he accompanied Racke and Clampe to Study No. 7 in the Shell passage, and they all went in. Alan felt too wretched to resist these rascals. Besides, unless he went with them, Racke would probably explain what had happened during the night. The thought of that was quite sufficient.

What would all the fellows say if Racke explained that he had acted so strangely in the small hours? They thought queer things about him already. So Alan found himself in Study No. 7, and he watched dully while Racke and Clampe lighted cigarettes. And suddenly an overwhelming temptation came over him. His nerves were raw, and he had always turned to a cigarette to calm his nerves. He believed that a cigarette was soothing.

"Care to have one?" asked Racke carelessly.

Alan hesitated, and in that moment of hesitation he was lost.

An overwhelming desire to smoke had come upon him. Hitherto he had thought nothing of smoking; he had always laughed with contempt at those fellows who didn't smoke. But he remembered that vow of his—to do nothing that could possibly detract against Arthur's character.

Now was the time to prove the strength of his resolve. For Arthur did not smoke, and did not approve of it, either. This was Alan's chance to prove—

"Yes, thanks!" he said eagerly. "I—I'd like one!"

He was slipping!

Eagerly he took the cigarette and lighted it. And the first two or three puffs were gloriously soothing to him. He did not notice that Racke and Clampe were watching him with strange expressions. Racke's eyes, indeed, were glittering. He was getting this fellow into the net at last!

He had been right all along the line. He had known it from the start. But this was the first indication that Castleton had given that he was a reformed "blood." Time after time had Racke tried to trip Arthur Castleton up, and always he had failed. He did not know that he was now dealing with the Castleton who was actually responsible for all the acts of which he had heard.

Racke decided to be diplomatic. Any show of triumph might turn Castleton away from him, and then he would lose him altogether.

"That's the style," he said, nodding. "There's nothing like a cigarette when you're feelin' a bit down in the dumps. You're always welcome to come here, Castleton, if you don't care to smoke in your own study."

"Thanks," said Alan.

"You've fooled the rest of the chaps splendidly," went on Racke, with a grin. "Oh, well, as long as you admit it to us, everythin's all right. Isn't it, Clampe?"

"It's all right with me," agreed Clampe, nodding.

He remembered how they had failed the previous evening—how they had brought that fellow, Willis, to the school, so that Castleton should be shown up. But nothing had come of it, for Blake and Tom Merry and all the rest had definitely refused to hear anything against Castleton. But this was different.

Here was Castleton, smoking in Racke's own study—here was direct evidence! Unfortunately, Racke couldn't use it, for he would have to confess to all and sundry that he had been smoking, too. No, this would do for a start. Later, he would be able to trap this hypocrite.

Alan himself was forgetting his good resolves.

Somehow, he felt drawn towards the two fellows. He knew they were rotters—he knew that they were smokers and card-players. And in all probability, they were in the habit of betting on horses. Well, what of it? Hadn't he always backed his own fancy? Wasn't he a jolly good bridge player? And didn't he consider bridge was a rotten game unless there were fairly heavy stakes?

When all was said and done, these were fellows after his own heart. They were the sort he had always associated with. It was with a feeling of relief that Alan sank back into a chair and continued smoking his cigarette.

For the very first time since he had been at St. Jim's he was feeling more or less at home. He was in his own element here. It was what he had always been accustomed to. And he was away from all those friendly Shell fellows and Fourth-Formers.

"You're a deep one, Castleton," said Racke, with a chuckle.

"Eh?"

"As deep as they make 'em!" continued Racke. "It's takin' you all this time to come out of your shell. What's the matter with you to-day, anyway? An' what was the matter with you durin' the night?"

"Nothing," replied Alan. "How many more times have I got to tell you that there's nothing the matter with me?"

"You can tell me so until you're blue in the face, but I shan't believe it," replied Aubrey Racke coolly. "You may be able to fool the others, Castleton, but you can't fool me. Somethin' happened when you went to Abbotsford yesterday. What was it?"

"It's none of your business!" replied Alan shortly.

"Rats!" said Racke. "If I like to make it my business, I can do so. You went to Abbotsford, an' you came back you were a different chap."

SOLUTION OF LAST WEEK'S "HIDDEN NAMES" PUZZLE!

1. Having raced downstairs, the new "Co." meets every morning to negotiate a jape on the oddering old porter. (Grace, Newcome, Mornington, Dodd.)

2. How ardently the Rookwooders play footer! They shape elegantly in their jerseys and shorts, and are seldom guilty of muffing a goal. (Howard, Peele, Muffin.)

3. "I'll Sing Thee Songs of Araby"—that is my theme to-night. Tenor and alto neatly harmonise. (Raby, Smythe, Dalton.)

4. Wherever we go we relish the scenery; on a smart, racy motor-bike, or in a car, the world seems wonderful. (Gower, Tracy, Carthew.)

5. Of great detectives, surely the monarch is Holmes. We know lesser lights, but none so brilliant as he. Shun evil lest you fall into his hands. (Chisholm, Knowles, Neville.)

6. Tom Anderson tramped wearily till he reached the town's end; then Tom acknowledged he felt "whacked." (Manders, Townsend, Mack.)

"By gad!" muttered Alan, struck by the unconscious truth of Racke's statement. "Was I?"

"Yes, you were," retorted Racke. "You've been worryin' like the dickens ever since. If there's any trouble, why the deuce don't you confide in us? Do you owe some money to a bookie?"

"No, I don't!"

"Is some tradesman dunnin' you for money, then?" asked Clampe. "Or have you got into trouble in some other direction? We'll help you out, old man, if there's any way—"

"I'm not in any trouble, and I don't want any helping out," replied Alan coldly. "Perhaps I was wrong to come here, and to smoke this cigarette with you."

"Wrong be hanged!" retorted Racke. "Why the merry deuce don't you come out into the open with us, Castleton? Why don't you stop all this bluff?"

"What bluff?"

"Ye gods and little fishes!" said Clampe. "He's askin' what bluff? An' ever since he's been at St. Jim's he's pretended to be a goody-goody merchant, an' even refused to acknowledge Banks when he met him in the open street. An' he succeeded in foolin' everybody into takin' him at his face value. It makes me sick the way the fellows crawl round him, an' believe him to be everythin' that's honourable."

"It's true!" burst out Alan. "He is honourable! I—I mean—"

"He is honourable?" repeated Racke, staring. "Who is? We were talking about you!"

"I—I didn't quite realise," muttered Alan, biting his lips.

He would have to be more careful than this! Sooner or later he would give himself a way; he would say something that could not possibly be glossed over. He was already beginning to regret his action in coming into Study No. 7 with these two cads.

But the cigarette had been very soothing, and that was something, at all events. He knew, in his heart, that at any ordinary time he would have associated with this pair quite openly. They were certainly his sort.

Curiously enough, now, however, he began to dislike them. Had he ever been like these two? The thought struck him forcibly. It startled him considerably, too. More than ever before he was resolved to be different—to strike out in a fresh line from this hour onwards.

That old life of his should be cast aside and forgotten!

**CHAPTER 6.
The Temptation!**

AUBREY RACKE was looking victorious. True, Castleton had not slipped very far, but he was well on the road; and nothing would please Racke better than to see this fellow go right back on the downward path. Only Racke didn't regard it as the downward path at all.

If only he could get Castleton into the fold, what a victory it would be! For it wouldn't take long for the other fellows to know the truth—and then they would turn from Castleton, and he would necessarily join Racke's own particular clique. After that Racke would be able to turn him adrift—to achieve the triumph that he had been longing for!

"About Willis," said Racke carelessly. "You know Willis, don't you, Castleton?"

"Willis?" said Alan. "Yes."

"Hallo! I thought you said you didn't know him?"

asked Clampe. "Last night you recognised him, and then you denied—"

"I—I wasn't thinking!" said Alan hastily. "When I say I know him, I mean that I met him last night. Didn't you bring him here?"

"You'll do!" grinned Racke. "Come off it, Castleton! You may be able to pull wool over the eyes of the other fellows, but we're a bit too wide awake. You know jolly well that Willis was a monitor at Barton Grammar School. And you know that you attended Barton Grammar School, too. So why the dickens do you keep up this idiotic pretence?"

Alan was silent.

"But we needn't quarrel," went on Racke genially. "I think I told you that Clampe and I went over to Wayland last night, didn't I? We had a fine little game, and won some cash, too."

"Yes, you told me," said Alan wearily.

"Well, Barker and Willis are goin' to return the compliment to-night," said Racke, lowering his voice. "We've arranged it all, you know. They're comin' here—to St. Jim's."

"Coming here?"

"Yes—on the strict Q.T., naturally," continued Racke. "Clampe and I have arranged everythin', and we're goin' to let the chaps in at half-past eleven. They finish their jazz playing at eleven o'clock, at the dance hall, and then they're comin' straight ou here."

"But where can you play?" asked Alan.

"Up in one of the attics," grinned Racke. "I'm goin' to fix it up this evenin'—without anybody else knowin'. It won't take long to get one of the old attics into shipshape. I've got an oil-stove, and I can smuggle it up there quite easily. How about it?"

"What do you mean—how about it?" asked Alan.

"Won't you join us?" asked Racke. "I'll give you a dig at eleven o'clock, if you like—when I get up."

"No, I won't come, thanks," said Alan, remembering that vow of his.

"Rats! Be a sportsman!"

"No, I won't come!" repeated Alan fiercely. "Besides, there would be five of you—and five's a crowd at bridge."

"My dear ass, we're not going to play bridge!" grinned Racke. "It's too jolly slow for a gamble. We thought about makin' it banker or nap."

"Or even pontoon!" put in Clampe, with a grin.

"And five is all the better for games like that," continued Racke. "You'll come, Castleton, won't you?"

"I—I'll think about it," said Alan, tempted more than he knew.

"Thinkin' about it is no good!" said Racke, with a frown. "Make up your mind now, old son, and give us your promise."


"Oh, all right!" said Alan, nodding.

Clampe and Racke glanced at one another. They had not expected such a triumph as this. Here was Castleton—the paragon—agreeing to a game of banker after lights-out. It was an amazing circumstance.

Truth to tell, Alan was feeling so weary that he was ready to turn to anything. He was forgetting his vow already. He only knew that he was worried almost beyond endurance—that he was tortured until he would have agreed to almost anything. And, in his heart, he felt that a little gamble would do him good. It would take his mind off the worry about Arthur. In the past, he had often turned to cards when he had been worried; and he had believed that cards had helped him. Even now, poor

**ARE YOU GOOD AT PUZZLES?
—TRY THIS ONE!**

HIDDEN NAMES!



This week we are introducing the names of a number of Greyfriars masters and scholars, who figure in our famous companion paper, the "Magnet Library." Each of the following sentences contains a number of names. See how many you can discover. The complete solution will appear next week.

1. Clubs are taking big sums now in gate-money; and players, when inspired, win golden opinions.
2. It is selfish to eat a bun—terribly selfish, when a tramp is tottering hungry beside you.
3. Ever a keen rivalry exists between each "Co." Kerr tells me.
4. Sing heartily another item, please! Your voice is angelic, and we love such ebullitions of melody.
5. We will agree never to run a risk in nerve-racking exploits; there is no operation worth it.
6. We cap persons who are our superiors, as we go squelching or pottering or toddling down the lane.

fool, he did not realise that they had only added to his mental stress. Hectic card-playing of that sort, with large money stakes, was not for a boy of his age.

He knew Willis, too. Willis, of course, was several kinds of a beast—a cowardly sort of rotter, too, who never liked paying up when he lost at cards. Still, he knew Willis well—he was the only fellow among all this crowd whom he did know. The rest of them were strangers to him. Even Racke and Clampe were strangers. It would be a relief to meet somebody again—somebody whom he could greet with some sort of friendliness.

"That's all settled, then," said Racke, with a nod. "Good man, Castleton! We knew that we'd get you into the flock sooner or later!"

"Yes, it's about time you came to your senses," said Clampe. "A leopard can't change his spots, you know!"

Alan started.

Was there any truth in that old saying? If so, what was the use of fighting? Why should he try to change? He had always found life pretty good under the old conditions. It would be a lot better, perhaps, if he dropped all his pretence, and frankly admitted that he was one of Racke's crowd.

Of course, all the other chaps would regard him askance—they would think that he had gone dotty. But what did he care? It would put an end to their embarrassing friendliness. He would know where he stood—he would be able to go about without the risk of somebody tacking himself on, and insisting upon a display of cordiality.

"Yes, Racke, I'll come to that little party of yours," said Alan, taking a deep breath. "By gad, it'll be a relief, too! I'm sick of all this business! Sick to death of it!"

"That's the way to speak!" said Racke, in a gloating voice. "Why don't you go out and tell everybody that you're fed up with them? Doesn't it make you sick, the way they slobber all over you?"

"Yes, it does!" muttered Alan fiercely. "I don't like it—I don't want it! Why should I stand it any longer? You're right, Racke—you're dead right! I've had enough of all this!"

"Good man!" grinned Clampe. "Come along, and we'll take you out—"

"No—let me alone!" interrupted Alan. "I don't want you fellows with me. But you can rely on me for this party of yours, Racke. I'll take my time over the rest."

He went to the door and strode out without another word.

And Racke and Clampe gazed at one another in victorious jubilation. They had succeeded beyond their wildest dreams. They had got this black sheep into the fold! It was only a matter of hours, now, before he revealed himself to the whole Junior School. Perhaps he would go and break with them even now!

Alan had gone straight to Study No. 2 and his brain was in a tumult.

He wanted to think for a minute or two; and then, when his mind was settled, he would go to that confounded nuisance, D'Arcy, and tell him exactly what he thought of him! He would go to Tom Merry, and Blake, and Talbot, too. He didn't want their friendship—he didn't want their confounded advances—

Then Alan brought himself up with a jerk.

But what did it matter what he wanted? He wasn't himself now at all. He was Arthur—living in Arthur's shoes, living a lie! And he had sworn to do nothing at St. Jim's to injure Arthur's name!

"Oh, I think I'm going off my head!" he muttered, as he sat on the edge of the study table and stared dully before him.

"I am Arthur now!" he went on. "What right have I to mix with Racke and his rotten companions? What did I say in that study of his? I don't know—I don't know! I've forgotten already. I let myself go for a minute—I became my old self again! And it won't do! I'm Arthur—and I've got to act like Arthur!"

The dinner-bell sounded, and he was inclined to ignore it. He heard it; but he still had no appetite. Food was distasteful to him. But Frere and one or two others collared him and forced him into the dining-hall.

Once he had started eating, he found that he was really hungry. And the food did him quite a lot of good. It put strength into him—in two ways. It strengthened him bodily, and it made a great difference to his shaky nerves. He noticed that Racke was looking at him almost continuously, and this persistence on Racke's part had just the opposite effect to what Racke desired.

For Alan obstinately made up his mind to let things go on as they were. He was Arthur, and he would act like Arthur. He was even beginning to regret that promise he had made regarding the party in the attic that night. What about his vow?

He went through the rest of the meal in a dreamy sort of

condition; and when the juniors left the dining-hall he found that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had linked an arm into his.

"I have come to the conclusion; Castleton, dear boy, that you need buckin' up," said Gussy genially; "so I think it will be wathah a good ideah for us to come for a stwoll wound the gounds."

"Thanks all the same, Gussy—"

"And pway wemabah that I am takin' no wefusals," went on Arthur Augustus. "We are goin' wound Little Side and Big Side, and then we are finishin' up by a walk by the Wivah Whyh. It will do you a world of good, Castleton."

Alan felt like insulting the innocent Gussy on the spot. He only restrained himself by a great effort.

"I don't want to go for a walk, D'Arcy!" he said fiercely. "So please don't press me! I'm asking you nicely, aren't I?"

"Weally, Castleton—"

"But if you persist like this I might change!" added Alan. "I've told you that I don't want to go for a walk. Isn't that enough? Or must I make it plainer?"

"Good gwacious! What evah is w'ong with you, deah boy?"

"There's nothing wrong—if you'll only leave me alone!" rapped out Castleton, his voice harsh with exasperation.

"Can't you see that I want to be left to myself?"

Arthur Augustus softened.

"I am fwightfully sowway, Castleton," he said penitently. "Deah boy, it will not be necessary for you to wemind me again. Pway accept my humble apologies. I did not quite wealise that you were so wowwied. I'm most fwightfully sowway!"

There was such a world of earnestness in Gussy's voice that Alan felt a stab go through him. He had wounded this genial swell. Some decent impulse in him made him clasp at Gussy's arm.

"Sorry, old chap!" he uttered huskily. "I—I didn't mean to speak so beastly!"

"That's all wight, Castleton," said Gussy quietly.

He walked off; and Alan was ready to kick himself. In spite of all his rebuffs, these chaps were still decent to him. They were ready to pander to his every whim.

"Oh, what's the use?" he muttered, as he went back to his study and closed the door. "I'm a beast—a rotter! I'm only fit to mix with Clampe and Racke and those sort of chaps!"

He locked the door and sat down in front of the fire. His mind went back to Arthur again. Still there was no letter, and he found himself wondering how Arthur was now faring. He was amazed at the persistency of this conscience demon. It was on his shoulder all the time, whispering into his ear. At times he half expected to see the creature when he turned his head.

Never for one moment did he give him any rest.

"I can't understand it!" he muttered to himself. "Arthur hasn't written, he hasn't wired, or he hasn't telephoned. Is he coming to St. Jim's himself? By this time he must have been hounded out of St. Frank's—and perhaps he's gone home! Perhaps the pater himself will come here to fetch me! By gad, that would be pretty awful!"

The uncertainty of the whole position was worse than actual exposure. If only something would happen! It didn't matter what—but something!

So Alan's thoughts went backwards and forwards—to Arthur, to Racke, and then to his own position. He did not quite realise it, but he was gradually changing. His ideas were different. In some subtle kind of way he was altering his mental focus.

Dimly he was beginning to realise that decency paid. He wanted to be decent himself; he badly wanted to live as Arthur lived. For he could not help feeling a warm glow within him as he realised how splendid all these St. Jim's chaps were. Wouldn't it be simply great to earn their good fellowship, as Arthur had earned it?

But he was weak—terribly weak!

He had promised to attend that party of Racke's, and he had said that he would break with all the rest of the juniors.

What was he to do now?

There was Arthur—always there was Arthur!

And so Alan sat in front of his study fire brooding—brooding miserably over the entire position. No matter in which direction he looked, he could see no ray of hope.

CHAPTER 7.

The Friendly Little Party I

TAP, tap!

"Here they are!" murmured Aubrey Racke, with satisfaction.

He and Alan were down at the lower passage window at the School House. It was just after eleven-thirty, and St. Jim's was wrapped in slumber.

It was a wild night outside. A high wind was blustering round the old school buildings, and it moaned and hooted. Rain was in the air, too, and the atmosphere was bitter.

Racke opened the window, and three figures appeared. They belonged to Clampe, of the New House, and the two visitors from Wayland—Barker and Willis, the members of the jazz orchestra. They were all wrapped up in heavy overcoats and mufflers.

"I was waitin' out in the quad," muttered Clampe. "I thought it was better for us all to come in together."

"Good idea!" whispered Racke. "Hallo, Willis! Hallo, Barker! Jolly pleased to see you!"

"And so you ought to be!" said Barker. "It's a rotten night to come out, anyhow—and I don't quite fancy this business! Too much like committing a burglary! Stealing about in the middle of the night, as though we were criminals, is a bit too thick! You ought to be pleased with us, young Racke!"

"We are!" said Racke promptly.

Alan stood looking on, saying nothing. He hardly knew

"Just a minute while I light the lamp!" murmured Racke. "An' don't forget—no noise!"

"This is some party—I don't think!" muttered Willis.

"Give us a chance!" growled Racke.

"Haven't you got any gas in this confounded hole?" demanded Barker, as Racke struck a match.

"Plenty of it; but there's nothin' laid on up in these attics," replied Racke. "Besides, a lamp is more cheerful. It's a good one, so you needn't worry."

"What about the light showin'?" asked Clampe.

"I'm not such an ass as all that!" retorted Racke. "There's a blanket slung right across the window. It's pretty warm in here, too—that oil-stove is a good one."

And when the lamp was lighted the visitors were compelled to admit that Racke had made some very generous preparations.

There was a box as card-table in the middle of the room, and the oil-lamp, in the little fireplace, was giving off a warm, grateful glow.

There were plenty of boxes, and over a couple of them

WEST HAM UNITED can certainly claim a right to be among the "elite" in football. They have a man named Earl who plays at full-back, and another Earle in the attack.

Gordon Hodgson, the Liverpool player who came from South Africa, looks like establishing a claim to be one of the best all-round sportsmen of to-day. During last summer he played cricket, lawn tennis, and baseball, and next summer he will be on the county staff of Lancashire for cricket.

As showing the increasing number of footballer-cricketers, it may be mentioned that Fulham have four county cricketers on their football staff—Gregory, of Surrey; Moseley, of Kent; Hills, of Glamorgan; and Walters, of Oxford. It can't be wondered at that Fulham won the cricket Cup for football teams.

Fred Keenor says that his team, Cardiff City, are long-distance runners rather than sprinters. They started badly last season, but certainly finished well by taking the Cup at the end. Most clubs, though, prefer to get off the mark well.

How's this for a quick change? Harry Storer, of Derby County, played in a cricket match on a Tuesday and in a football game on the following day.

Stoke City have recently bought their ground, but there is a clause in the agreement which will prevent "football for all time" being played there on Good Friday.

The footballers' life is a short one. Not one First Division goalkeeper who started the present season was in the game when it was resumed after the War break.

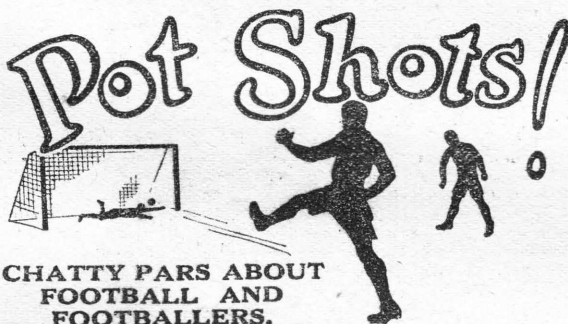
The transfer fee said to have been asked for Keeping, the Southampton back, last season was said to be seven thousand. Some clubs thought that to pay this amount was rather too risky, seeing that Keeping's hobby is aviation.

what was happening. Looking back, everything was rather vague. He was only aware that a great relief had come over him. They were just going to have a little party, and he felt that it would bring him a great measure of satisfaction. It would be like old times.

He could not quite recall afternoon lessons, or what had happened during the evening. Everything was so vague. He only knew that he had not heard from Arthur, and that the whole position was in just the same condition that it had originally been. He had suffered much—he had suffered even more than he could tell.

In his suspense he was ready to join this party and to throw himself wholeheartedly into the games. It was just what he wanted to buck him up—just the very thing to put new life into him.

They all crept up the stairs like shadows, taking care to make no sound. They went past the dormitories, and then up the attic stairs. At last they reached the little room that Racke had prepared, and the door was carefully closed.



CHATTY PARS ABOUT FOOTBALL AND FOOTBALLERS.

Newcastle United have no fewer than twelve players on their books who were born in Scotland, and Preston North End have eleven. These teams don't meet in the League, otherwise we might call the match Scotland United v. Scotland North End.

It is no unusual thing in these days for footballers to possess their own motor-cars, but Pym, the Bolton Wanderers' goalkeeper, has struck a new line. He has a motor-boat of his own.

The Middlesbrough defence should be able to tie up quite a lot of forward lines, seeing that they have Twine in it.

Mr. F. J. Wall, the secretary of the Football Association, has held that post for over thirty years. What a host of football secrets he must have stored up in that time.

On Manchester United's ground an innovation is being tried this season—the provision of a special "pen" for lady spectators. The flaw in the idea, as expressed by one lady, is that when they go in their own pen they have to pay for themselves. If they go with the men, the men pay.

Artificial sunshine treatment for players is another of the latest ideas. At Preston an apparatus has been installed for giving the men ultra-violet ray treatment.

For many years Pearson, of West Bromwich, was one of the leading goalkeepers. Now his son is keeping goal for the "Throstles."

When the Brentford club was first started there was much discussion as to whether Rugger or Soccer should be played. Eventually Soccer won by one vote. Some of the clubs Brentford knocked out of the Cup last season must have wished that the voting had gone the other way.

Blyth and Buchan, of the Arsenal, are about the best pair of golfers in football. Not so long ago Blyth went round the Hendon course in 73, and at the same time Buchan went round in 75. They can both putt as well as they can shoot.

—disguised as a sideboard—there were heaps of sandwiches, a supply of veal-and-ham pies, and such-like, and two bottles that immediately caught the visitors' attention.

"What's that stuff over there—ginger-ale?" asked Willis, a thin, weedy youth.

"Oh, I say!" protested Racke. "Cheese it!"

"Cider?" ventured Barker.

"When I have visitors, I treat them with respect!" replied Racke. "I don't offer them cider, or ginger-ale!"

Willis had gone across to the improvised sideboard and he had picked up one of the bottles.

"Am I dreaming?" he asked. "It's champagne!"

"Never!" said Barker.

"Oh, it's champagne!" grinned Racke. "I popped over to Wayland directly after tea, and brought all this stuff back with me. Didn't I tell you that I was goin' to give a proper party?"

"Racke, old man," said Willis, "you're a giddy hero!"

"That stuff cost me a pretty penny, too!" said Racke. "I happen to know a man in Wayland, an' he let me have it cheap. But even cheap means a lot of money!"

"Well, you needn't worry; it was our money!" said Barker, with a grin. "It was the money you won from us last night!"

Alan suddenly found that Willis was looking at him. Until this minute Alan had been in the background, hardly noticed. He had been looking on as though he were an outsider.

"So you're here, Castleton, are you?" said Willis, with a frown.

"Anything wrong in my being here?" asked Alan.

"Yes, confound it!" retorted Willis. "What the thunder was the idea of you disowning me yesterday? I don't quite like your behaviour, my lad!"

Alan went across to him and took his hand.

"I'm sorry, Willis!" he said quietly. "I—I wasn't quite myself. In fact, I'm a bit seedy even now. But you're a friend of mine—at least, you were at Barton. I think we're old friends!"

Willis thawed.

"Why, yes, of course," he said. "I don't want to keep up the quarrel, old man! We're all here together, so let's be merry!"

"The more we are together, the merrier we'll be," grinned Barker.

"That's the idea!" said Alan, with an answering grin.

He was already feeling much better. The atmosphere of the room was like wine to him. It was familiar—it was like old times! And what a relief it was! What a glorious, unbounded relief!

There was Willis, too—the only fellow he really knew. Racke and Clampe were new to him. Even Barker was a stranger. But Willis—well, Willis had been with him at Barton Grammar School, and they had been together for many terms. He had never thought much of Willis, but at this moment Alan was willing to claim Willis as one of his oldest and most valued friends.

"What about a tot of champagne to start off with, Racke?" he asked.

"Not likely!" retorted Racke. "We'll have a game or two first, an' then sample the champagne when we're beginnin' to get a bit tired. What do you other fellows say?"

"That'll suit us fine!" nodded Barker. "Let's go to the cards!"

Alan shrugged his shoulders.

"Just as you like!" he said.

And so they all sat down at the table. Before many minutes had elapsed a game of nap was in progress.

Alan was rather startled at the stakes. Racke had set them, and they were playing for sixpenny points. That might mean a huge amount of money for the losing parties. But Barker and Willis were evidently after their revenge, and they had made no objection.

Gradually Alan slipped back into his old ways—at least, it was a gradual process during the first five or ten minutes. And then, afterwards, it became a swift plunge.

"Enjoyin' yourself, old man?" asked Racke, while the cards were being dealt.

"Rather!" said Alan, his eyes sparkling. "By gad, I'm glad to be back in the old atmosphere!"

"This is nothin' new to you, eh?" asked Racke.

"I should say it isn't!" replied Alan. "What do you say, Willis?"

"Don't talk about it," replied Willis. "I wish I had all the money I'd lost at cards while we were at Barton! And you were the young beggar who got most of it out of me, Castleton! Gad, you were a hot one!"

"It strikes me he's still pretty warm!" said Barker, eyeing Alan's pile of winnings.

"He's only been luke-warm while he's been at St. Jim's," chuckled Clampe. "He's been hidin' his light under a bushel, the deep bounder! Tryin' to make out he's turnin' a new leaf, an' all that sort of piffle! Even now, the fellows believe that he's a good little Eric."

"Gad, that's rich!" said Willis. "Good little Eric, eh? Why, this man is about the hottest speed merchant that I ever met!"

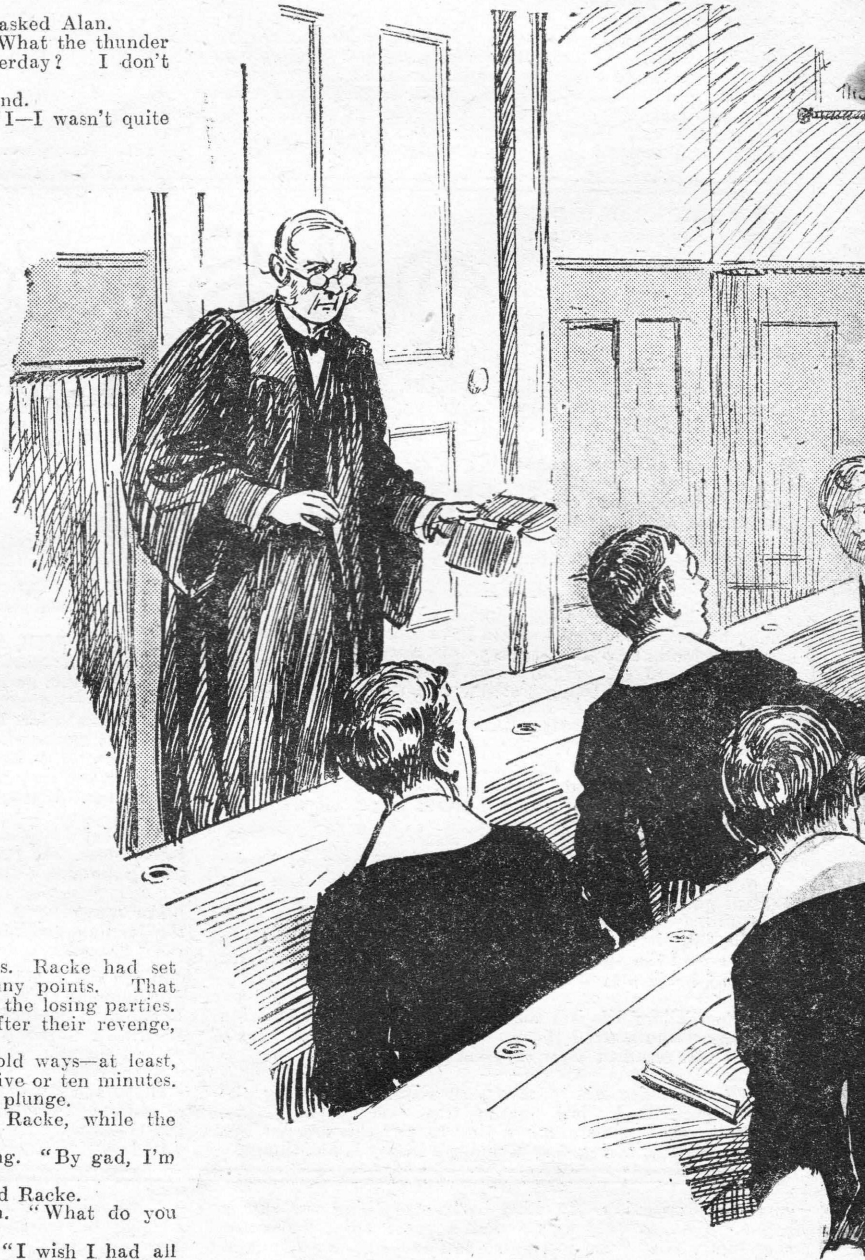
"And I'll be hotter yet!" declared Alan recklessly. "I

don't care a hang what happens after this! I'm going to keep to the old rut! There's nothing like it! I've been a fool to get out of it!"

He went on with the game, and Racke and Clampe were joyous. Not only were they winning, but they had got Castleton firmly into their clutches. The triumph shone in their eyes.

Before long the luck began to change.

Alan's pile of winnings diminished, and he struck a bad patch. Before long every farthing of that money had gone,



and he had dived into his pockets for more. He changed a pound note, and then another, and after that a third.

"I hope you've got plenty of cash on you?" asked Willis rather anxiously.

"Heaps!" replied Alan. "It was my birthday yesterday, and my pater sent me a tenner. I had some other money besides."

"That's good hearing!" said Barker pleasantly. "We'll try and get the whole lot before we've done, Castleton!"

"I don't care!" said Alan, with absolute abandon. "If I lose the lot, it'll be all the better."

"Dry up!" said Racke, with a scowl. "When a chap talks about losin' everythin' he's got he generally wins!"

Alan played on, growing more reckless and more supercilious. He was himself again now—back in his old colour.

Under the influence of the cards he changed rapidly—so rapidly, indeed, that he found Racke and Clampe continually eyeing him in wonder. They had always suspected that this fellow was very much of a blade, but his present behaviour took them by surprise. The change in him was extraordinary.

As for Alan, he had forgotten all about Arthur now. He had forgotten his vow and everything else. He was going wholeheartedly into the game, and nothing else mattered.

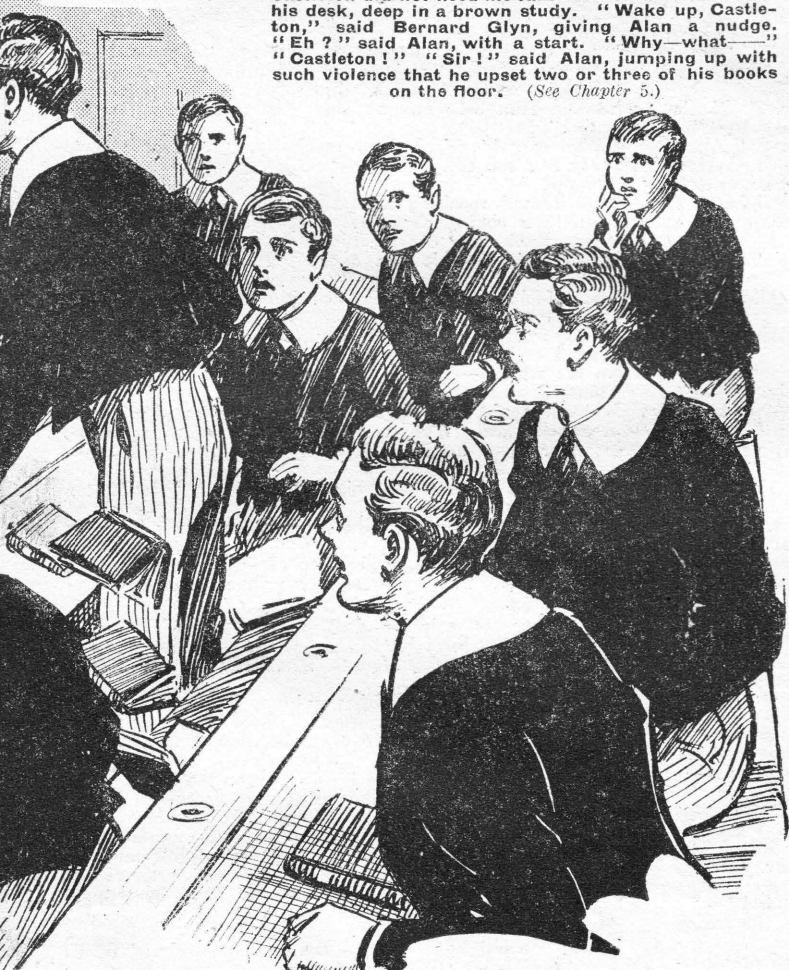
And it was a relief—a blessed relief!

Why should he worry about his fool of a twin brother? What did it matter what happened to Arthur at St. Frank's? Confound Arthur! He went there of his own accord; he agreed to the exchange. Very well, then; he would have to abide by the consequences!

That was the way Alan was stiling his conscience now.

Gone were all his good resolves, gone were his wonderful intentions to emulate Arthur's example! He could have laughed at himself for even thinking of them. How could he ever find any happiness—in living like Arthur? What did he care about football, or running, or jumping, or swimming, or boxing? Those were the sports that he had always despised. Well, he despised them still. Card-playing was ten times better!

"Castleton!" Mr. Linton called out the name. But Castleton did not heed the call. He remained seated at his desk, deep in a brown study. "Wake up, Castleton," said Bernard Glyn, giving Alan a nudge. "Eh?" said Alan, with a start. "Why—what—" "Castleton!" "Sir!" said Alan, jumping up with such violence that he upset two or three of his books on the floor. (See Chapter 5.)



"What about a little champagne?" he asked genially, after another half-hour had elapsed.

"Oh, hang it, let's wait until we've finished this game!" said Racke. "We'll have an interval then, and change to some other game. We shall want a snack, too. Let's carry on for another twenty minutes."

"Just as you like," said the others.

And so the game went on, with Alan becoming more and more boisterous. He was enjoying himself immensely. Many times he had enjoyed a little midnight party, but never, within his recollection, could he remember one he had enjoyed so much as this. It was like a breath of life to him. It was something to remember for always.

Not once since he had slipped into that attic had he

thought of Arthur. Not once had it occurred to him that he was going back on his vow. His conscience troubled him not one whit. At last he had succeeded in silencing that little demon which had hitherto perched itself upon his shoulder. He had turned a deaf ear to the sprite, and was no longer conscious of its presence.

He had abandoned himself to the game—to this return to his old ways.

And if he thought of anything at all, he made a fresh vow—a vow that he would never again depart from this enjoyable life. It was the only way in which he could find any satisfaction. To be a goer, to gain a great reputation for himself as a hot young blood! That was Alan Castleton's desire.

He was back again in his old element. He was with the old, noisy, card-playing crowd. And he was happy!

CHAPTER 8.

The Interruption!

"CHEERIO!"

"Here's the best of luck!"

"Chin-chin!"

Glasses were raised, and the members of the card-party drained them. Alan smacked his lips with appreciation as he set his glass down.

"By gad, Racke, that's pretty good champagne!" he declared. "Let's have another glass!"

"As many as you like—while it lasts," replied Racke. "Who says more?"

They all did, and the glasses were refilled. It certainly was good champagne, and within a few minutes Alan was feeling extraordinarily light-hearted. The wine had gone to his head very quickly, and he soon felt that he had not a single care in all the world.

Aubrey Racke made no secret of his triumph.

"Good man, Castleton!" he said, clapping Alan on the back. "You're one of us now! You're one of the crowd, eh?"

"Rather!" said Alan promptly.

He did not remember his vows. He had thrown aside every vestige of his good intentions. Here he was, smoking, gambling, and drinking champagne! The same old life!

"Let's change the game to pontoon," he suggested. "There's plenty of excitement in that game, and it's a gamble, too!"

"You're a fast one, Castleton," said Willis. "I'm hanged if you're not worse than you used to be!"

"Ten times worse!" nodded Alan. "And in future I'm going to be even hotter! I've done with all this silly rot about turning over a new leaf. There's no sense in it, and I'm sick of it!"

"Are you goin' to tell Tom Merry an' Blake an' that crowd, that you've finished with them?" asked Racke.

"Tell them?" repeated Alan, with scorn. "To-morrow I'll shout it from the house-tops! They're a lot of goody-goody rotters! I can't bear the sight of them, and their friendliness nearly drove me mad! I don't want it! And I won't have it!"

"That's the stuff to give them!" said Clampe, with a nod. "By gad, you'll give them all a shock, particularly Gussy!"

"Yes, I'm reserving something special for that tailor's dummy!" replied Alan. "He's the kind of fellow who ought to have been smothered at birth! He's no use in the world, and he's not even an ornament. No more brains than a piece of coke!"

"Well, we don't want to discuss your little playmates," said Barker. "What about the game?"

"Yes, let's get on with it," said Racke. "I'm jolly pleased about Castleton. He's back in the fold—he's one of us again. Have a cigarette, Castleton, old scout?"

"I was rather hoping that Barker would give me one of his cigars," said Alan coolly.

"Gad!" said Barker. "Do you smoke cigars?"

"Give me one, and watch," retorted Alan.

They all chuckled as Barker passed over a cigar and Alan lit up. Then he went on with the game, becoming more and more excited and talkative.

After another half-hour there was a further pause, and more champagne was consumed. Alan did not quite know why, but he received the lion's share. He was greedy for it. It made him forget things, it gave him a wonderful feeling of exhilaration. Again and again his glass was filled, and when he settled down to the game once more he was feeling rather dizzy, but serenely contented.

"Not so much noise, Castleton," said Racke, while Alan was laughing. "You'd better go easy, you know."

"What do I care?" laughed Alan. "The more noise, the better!"

"You silly idiot!" said Clampe. "Do you want to get us all sacked?"

"If we're sacked, we're sacked, and there's an end of it!" said Alan. "I won't be any different from my brother at St. Frank's. He's sacked by now, I expect."

"Your brother?" said Racke, staring.

"Of course!" grinned Alan, with a leer. "My twin brother."

"You're squiffy!" said Clampe bluntly.

"Am I?" laughed Alan. "That's all you know. But I'll tell you a secret, my sons. I've kept it to myself until now, but why should I keep it any longer? You might as well enjoy it with me. It's one of the richest things that's happened for years. You'll yell when you hear it!"

The champagne was having its deadly effect.

"Come along, then," said Willis impatiently. "Let's yell, and get it done with. I suppose you know you're holding up the game?"

"That doesn't matter for a bit," said Racke. "What's that you were sayin' about a twin brother, Castleton?"

"Why, you ass, haven't you guessed it?" asked Alan.

"It was Arthur Castleton who came to St. Jim's—Arthur who got friendly with Tom Merry and that crowd. Arthur's always been a saintly sort of chap—straight as a string, and all that sort of drivel. He's the chap you've been harbouring under this roof!"

"That's right," said Racke. "Arthur Castleton. But you're Arthur Castleton?"

"No he's not!" put in Willis. "His name is Alan!"

"What?" yelled Racke, in his amazement.

"Alan," nodded Alan. "That's my name. Always has been."

"But—but—"

"It's perfectly easy," interrupted Alan thickly. "Don't you understand? Arthur was here until yesterday, but I sent him a telegram, and we met at Abbotsford."

"Great Scott!" said Clampe. "So that's why you went to Abbotsford?"

"Of course it is!" grinned Alan. "We met there, and I fooled Arthur properly. I sent him back to St. Frank's, where I'd got into very hot water. So Arthur was sent back there to face the music. Pretty rich, what? I came along here and stepped into Arthur's shoes, and nobody knew the difference. Don't you think I worked it pretty cleverly?"

"By gad!" breathed Racke, a great light dawning upon him. "So that's the explanation of the mystery? And I never thought of it. It never occurred to me. No wonder you seemed different, Castleton!"

"Of course I'm different, and thank goodness for it!" said Alan, with a sneer. "I wouldn't be like Arthur for a king's ransom. I kept up the farce to-day, but to-morrow I'll finish with it. Of course, I shan't let on that I'm not Arthur, but I'll give everybody a shock, you can take it from me!"

Aubrey Racke drew a deep breath. The mystery was clear. No wonder Arthur Castleton had gained the confidence of the Shell and the Fourth. He wasn't this fellow at all—he wasn't the one whom Banks knew. When Castleton had denied all knowledge of Banks he had spoken the truth. When Racke had tried to trap Castleton he had failed to do so, because he had got hold of the wrong fellow. It was all explained.

And Racke hardly knew whether to be pleased or otherwise.

He had set his heart on converting Arthur Castleton into a rotter, but it seemed that this particular Castleton in the room—Alan—needed no converting.

On the whole, Aubrey Racke felt that he was pleased. Even if Alan had no intention of saying anything about his twin, Racke would see that the whole school knew the truth. He was under no obligation to keep the secret.

The game continued.

Alan, in his insane folly, brought on, it seemed, by the champagne and the general atmosphere of abandon, had blabbed out everything. He had given the game away—he had let the cat out of the bag.

And he didn't care a rap.

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Why should he care? These fellows were his friends—he could trust them. They were the sort of companions that he had always associated with. And he didn't care who knew it. As for Arthur, well, Arthur could run the gauntlet at St. Frank's and take whatever came to him.

In fact, Alan had completely changed now. He rather hoped that Arthur was going through the mill properly. He wanted to hear that his twin brother had been hounded out of the school, and that he had suffered agonies. In Alan's present mood he was feeling vicious and vindictive.

"I say, Castleton, go easy!" warned Racke, for about the tenth time. "Don't keep shoutin' like that!"

"Go to the deuce!" retorted Castleton. "I shall shout as much as I like!"

"But, you fool, there'll be a master up here—"

"I don't care if the Head himself comes!"

"Steady—steady!" put in Barker. "If you don't keep quiet, Castleton, we'll make you! Don't forget that we're on the premises, and we don't want to be involved in any trouble with your beastly masters! Let's keep this party select! We don't want any rough-house stuff!"

Alan cooled down.

"Oh, all right!" he muttered. "You're the guests, so I'll respect your wishes. But you needn't worry about any masters, your rabbits! It's nearly three o'clock, and nobody's likely to come!"

"Gad, nearly three, eh?" said Racke, with a start. "We shall have to be finishin' up before long! Supposin' we fix half-past three as a time limit?"

"That'll suit us," said Willis, nodding. "We can be in bed by half-past four, and we can lie in until lunch-time."

"Lucky beggars!" said Clampe. "We've got to get up with the risin'-bell—an' we shall be washed out in the mornin'."

"Who cares?" asked Alan recklessly. "We don't have a party like this often, and—"

Thump!

Alan ceased speaking abruptly. And all the others sat still in their chairs, as though they had been turned into statues. Racke and Clampe turned pale. That thump had sounded from outside the door! There was somebody there!

"You fool!" hissed Racke, turning fiercely upon Alan. "This is your fault!"

"I don't care!" retorted Alan viciously.

"But I do!" snarled Racke. "I don't want to be bunked from the school—"

Thump!

It came again, and there was something peculiar about that knock. Even Willis and Barker noticed it. It wasn't like an ordinary knock—a rap. It was a thud—a solemn, impressive thud.

"It can't be a master!" whispered Barker. "Wouldn't a master ask some questions?"

"By gad, yes!" muttered Racke. "I don't quite like—"

Thump!

It came again, and the expressions of alarm were changing to looks of fear. There was something almost uncanny about that knocking.

"What are we goin' to do?" asked Clampe, his voice quivering. "We can't let this go on, or that thumpin' will awaken the whole giddy House! Somebody has got to open the door!"

"I won't!" said Racke, with a gulp.

"Leave it to me!" said Alan, with a sneer. "If you fellows are too frightened to open the door, I'm not!"

Thump!

"Oh, heavens!" murmured Racke, pale to the lips.

Alan rose to his feet, and he was very unsteady. There was a leer on his face. What did he care whether it was a master, or a prefect, or anybody else? He was in such a mood that the matter was one of complete indifference to him. He deliberately took his time and paused, after rising, to brush some crumbs off his waistcoat. Then he strolled leisurely towards the door.

Thump!

"I can't stand this!" panted Racke desperately. "Who's there? Who is it? Why don't you answer?"

Silence.

Beyond that locked door there was complete and absolute silence. And now for the first time even Alan, in spite of his former assurance, began to look uneasy. Perhaps the champagne was losing its effect. Perhaps that insistent thumping had affected him. At all events, he hesitated just before he was about to turn the key in the lock.

"Well?" muttered Barker. "Aren't you going to open the door?"

"Yes," said Alan, between his teeth. "Only—only it seems so rummy! I've got an extraordinary feeling! As though—as though this attic was haunted! It doesn't seem like anybody real—like a genuine knock!"

"Oh, shut up!" muttered Racke, licking his dry lips. "Why don't you open the door, confound you?"

Alan tried to square his shoulders.

"I'll open it," he said curtly. "I'm not afraid!"

With a swift movement he turned the key in the lock, grasped the handle, and then flung the door wide. Then he started back, a hoarse cry in his throat. He stared with dazed, bulging eyes.

For on the threshold stood his twin brother, Arthur Castleton!

CHAPTER 9.
The Reckoning!

ARTHUR CASTLETON!
For a moment there was an utter silence in that attic. It was silence fraught with suspense. Racke and Clampe and the two visitors from Wayland were merely spectators. This affair was between the twin brothers—alone!

The figure in the doorway seemed almost spectral. Slowly it raised a hand and pointed an accusing finger at Alan. And Alan screamed.

The accusing finger!
Just as he had seen in those nightmare dreams of his! Arthur had always pointed at him in that accusing way! And here he was now, in the flesh—silent and dreadfully grim. He was like some avenger—some terrible destiny!

aren't you at St. Frank's, Arthur? You went to St. Frank's in my place——"

"Yes, at your suggestion!" interrupted Arthur. "You lying cur, Alan! You knew what awaited me at St. Frank's, and yet you sent me there! You gave me no word of warning! You sent me to St. Frank's, making me believe that it was only a joke!"

"I—I didn't mean——"
"Silence!" thundered Arthur. "I will tell you what has happened to me. I will go into no details, because the details are too awful, but I have been hounded out of St. Frank's in your place, Alan!"

"Hounded out?" asked Alan, hardly able to form the words.

"Drummed out by the entire school!" continued Arthur, his voice as cold and relentless as steel. "I have been expelled from St. Frank's by the headmaster; bunked from your school! And all in your name, Alan!"

"But—but didn't you explain?" asked Alan desperately. "It is your habit to be treacherous and cowardly, but it is not mine!" retorted Arthur. "I have said nothing! I have faced your troubles, Alan, and I have taken the punishment! Now I have come here to have the reckoning!"

Alan backed away.
"What—what are you going to do?" he panted fearfully. "Need you ask?" said Arthur. "I am going to thrash

Arthur Castleton at St. Frank's!

Tricked by his rascally brother Alan into going to St. Frank's, Arthur Castleton meets with a hot reception when he arrives at the school. The juniors, of course, immediately assume he is Alan: accordingly they punish Arthur for his brother's misdeeds, and he finds himself scorned by St. Frank's. In

"Staggering the School!"

you will read how Arthur determines to fight for his brother's name, to redeem Alan's rascality, and how, after many rebuffs, he finally succeeds in winning his way to popularity. This absorbing long complete yarn of schoolboy fun and adventure is one of the best Edwy Searles Brooks has ever written. Go to your nearest newsagent now and ask for—

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"Arthur!" shouted Alan, his voice rising to a shrill falsetto.

Arthur walked into the room, and slowly and deliberately closed the door behind him. He turned the key in the lock. And still he uttered no word. There was something terrifying in his very attitude.

His appearance in itself was eloquent of what he had been passing through.

He was haggard, his face possessed a hounded look, and it was grimy and mud-spattered. All his clothing, too, was torn and smothered with mud. Alan's brother was in a pitiable condition.

"Arthur!" stammered Alan, awed and sobered by his twin's dramatic appearance. "Arthur, what has happened? Why don't you speak? Why don't you tell me what has happened? Don't look at me like that! Arthur, don't look at me like that!"

"I have found you!" said Arthur Castleton, his voice steady and icily cold. "And I have come here, Alan, to exact a reckoning! You trickster! You cur! You cowardly hound!"

Even if Racke and the others had wanted to interrupt they could not do so. They were held as though in a vice by the very forcefulness of Arthur's fury. They could do nothing except stand back and watch.

Now Aubrey Racke needed no further proof. Here were the two Castletons together! And they were amazingly alike, except for the fact that Arthur was bearing the evident signs of a hard and weary tramp along the highways.

"Wh-why are you here?" stuttered Alan. "I—I mean, why

you as you have never been thrashed in your wretched life! You deserve more, Alan—much more! But I shall be satisfied when I see you stretched out at my feet! Take off your jacket! I, you have an ounce of decency you'll accept your punishment——"

"I won't!" snarled Alan, livid with fear. "I won't fight you, Arthur! We're brothers—we're twins! It's not right that we should fight——"

"Was it right that you should betray me as you did?" asked Arthur relentlessly. "We are brothers, yes—we are twins! Was that any reason for you to treat me worse than you would treat your bitterest enemy? Take off your jacket, I say!"

Arthur, without another word, peeled off his own coat, and then he rolled up his shirt-sleeves. There was something dreadfully significant in his actions. He was as cold as ice—cool and determined. Alan felt weak and helpless in the presence of his avenging brother.

And then, in that same fearsome manner, Arthur entered the fight. He came forward, his fists lashing out. Racke and the others stood looking on, still held tightly by that unseen vice. They could do nothing to intervene; they could only stand there, watching with fascinated interest.

Crash!
Arthur's fist smashed into Alan's face, and Alan staggered back, shouting with pain. There was no doubt that Arthur meant business. There was no getting out of this fight, unless, indeed, Alan wanted to be knocked out like a mere cur without putting up the slightest resistance. Even Alan was not quite such a weakling as all that.

"All right!" he panted. "If you want to fight, I'm ready—I'll take you on! But this is your doing, not mine!"

"Fight!" said Arthur steadily. "I give you your chance to knock me out. But, you hound, if I don't give you the hiding you deserve, I'll never lift my head up again!"

They started then in grim earnest!

It was a terrible affair. Round and round that attic, thumping, thundering, careless of who they woke, or what happened afterwards, Arthur was fighting cleanly, as he always fought. But Alan was like a wild beast in his desperation. He was in the very last throes of fear.

Tramp, tramp, tramp!

Round the attic they went, and Alan knew that he was doomed. There was no getting away from it. This brother of his was like an avenging demon! There was no escaping from his blows!

At last Racke managed to find his voice. Fears for his own safety had brought him to his senses.

"Quick!" he gasped, turning to Clampe. "We'd better go! What with all this noise, there'll be a crowd of masters and prefects here in another couple of minutes. Let's scoot down to the dormitory while we're still safe!"

"It's all right for you, but what about me?" snarled Clampe. "I've got to get across to the New House!"

"And what about us?" demanded Willis shrilly. "How are we going to get out?"

"I can't help your troubles!" snapped Racke.

It was one thing to talk about getting out, and it was another thing to accomplish it. For the two combatants were tramping round and round the attic, and it was practically an impossibility to get anywhere near that locked door.

Alan was feeling dizzy and frantic. His mind was in a terrible whirl. And he seemed to know, subconsciously, that he deserved everything that was coming to him. Just as he had expected, Arthur had been kicked out of St. Frank's—scorned and rejected by everybody there. And now he had come back; he had come to get even!

Never in his life had Alan received such a terrible thrashing.

He was fighting blindly now, for both his eyes were gradually closing. He knew that his mouth was cut, and he was so dizzy that he hardly knew what he was doing. And then he got into a terrible frenzy. He was staggered and amazed by the utter skill of his twin. He could not get anywhere near him! Not one of Alan's wildly aimed blows found the mark. And yet every one of Arthur's thrusts went home.

It was a terrible affair.

"Arthur," sobbed Alan at length, as he backed away shivering with fright, "stop! Can't you stop?"

"I haven't finished yet!" retorted Arthur steadily.

"But I can't go on; I tell you I'm finished!" gasped Alan. "You're not going to smash me up completely, are you?"

"Don't you deserve it?" retorted Arthur.

"You—you fool! This sort of thing is doing you no good—"

"Don't you deserve it?" repeated Arthur, his voice rising terribly. "Good heavens, Alan, try to realise what you have done! I have suffered tortures through you; worse tortures than I can possibly describe! I have been humbled, humiliated, and thrown into the mud! I've been kicked out of St. Frank's; treated with more humiliation than if I were an escaped convict! And that was your fate, Alan—not mine! Do you think I can forgive you for this? Later, perhaps, I might be able to, but now I'm going to have my satisfaction!"

"Aren't you satisfied?" panted Alan, backing to the window and pulling the blanket down that covered it, in his haste. "Aren't you satisfied yet?"

"No!" thundered Arthur.

And once again he came at Alan. He wasn't like any ordinary human being; there was something strange about him. In his fury, he had dropped every atom of his good nature; he had lost his gentleness. He was a grim, determined avenger.

"You shan't knock me out—you shan't!" gasped Alan fearfully. "Oh, you brute! Can't you see that I'm nearly done? Haven't you any mercy?"

"What mercy did you show me?" asked Arthur relentlessly.

And then, with a sudden gulp of breath, Alan thought that he saw a chance. That blanket had come down, and he seized it in one movement as he dodged. The next second he whirled it round. He had no idea of fair fighting now, even if he ever had had. He only wanted to stop this fight. He wanted to escape further punishment.

Swish!

The blanket swung round Arthur's head, and settled over him like a pall. And then, with a yell of triumph, Alan rushed closely in and grabbed his brother round the middle,

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pinning his arms to his side. His head was enveloped in that blanket and he could do nothing.

"Now!" shouted Alan. "I've got you, confound you!"

In his frenzy he swung Arthur round. They reeled from side to side of that little room, the other occupants dodging frantically.

"Look out!" shouted Willis.

"You fools!" panted Racke. "Can't you stop this?"

But they did not even hear him. Alan was in such a towering rage that he would not have cared if the headmaster himself had entered the room. He was fighting—fighting like a demon.

And Arthur, enveloped in that blanket, was momentarily helpless. They swayed again and again, from end to end of that room. Right into the window they went, and then Alan gave a cry of triumph and forced his brother backwards. There was such strength in that thrust of Alan's that Arthur heeled right over, until he crashed against the attic window with a shattering of glass.

The window was a low one, and it was of the lattice type.

"Look out!" shouted Racke in horror.

Arthur, backing against that window with all the force of Alan's thrust, had smashed clean through the lattice, and now for one horrifying second he toppled—hovering over the very sill!

"Arthur!" shrieked Alan.

But it was too late!

Arthur Castleton, groping helplessly within the folds of that blanket, had gone! He had toppled over into the void! The wind howled round the School House, and came blustering across the shattered window. And with it came a flurry of rain. And then—

Thud!

It was a sickening, dreadful, horrible sound, coming up from far below. Dead silence followed it; and this silence was ten times more terrifying than any of the sounds that had gone before.

CHAPTER 10.

The Price of Treachery!

SILENCE!

Alan Castleton stood at the attic window, staring down—staring blindly, wildly. For one awful second it seemed to him that his heart had stopped beating; he could see nothing. The night was as black as pitch, the rain came beating into his face, and the wind sent his hair into disordered wisps.

"Arthur!" he shouted brokenly.

Arthur had fallen—fallen right down from this attic window to the ground below! One clean drop—straight down! And now there was no sound from the ground—nothing but that deadly silence.

"He's gone!" choked Alan, turning and facing the others. "Why did you let me do it? Why did you—"

"Fool!" hissed Racke. "How could we stop you? You've killed him—you've killed your own brother!"

"No!" screamed Alan. "Not that!"

He turned to the window again and stared out.

"What's below here?" he asked. "What is there?"

"Nothing but the hard stone!" replied Racke, his voice so shaky that he could hardly form his words. "There's a path below this window—a paved path! He must have fallen right upon it, and he's been killed!"

He shrank away from Alan, and the others were backing, too, as though he were some vile monster.

"I—I didn't mean to do it!" said Alan hoarsely. "How did I know? I was so excited—I was so desperate! I didn't know we were anywhere near the window! I didn't mean to knock him out like that!"

"Hadn't we better do something?" interrupted Barker harshly. "What's the good of standing here, talking? The poor fellow may be terribly injured! We've got to go and help him!"

"Yes—yes," said Alan, swaying towards the door. "We've got to help him! Arthur—my own brother! Oh, what have I done? What have I done?"

And then, in a frenzy, he turned round upon these companions of his.

"It's your fault!" he went on shrilly. "You cads! You curs! You drew me into this! But for your horrible persuasions I shouldn't have been here—and then this couldn't have happened! What a fool I was not to keep to the straight path! What a mad, insane fool!"

"It's no good raving like that!" snarled Barker. "That won't do any good! You've got to go and see about your brother! Don't forget he's down there—on that hard path! It's no good standing here and raving—"

The door suddenly burst open, and Tom Merry appeared, and behind him were crowds of others—Talbot, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, Blake, Kildare of the Sixth, and even more. They came pouring into the attic like a flood.

"What's happened?" shouted Tom Merry.

"Gweat Scott!" said Gussy. "Look at Castleton!"
 "A card-party!" said Kildare sternly. "You young scoundrels!" he added, turning to Barker and Willis. "I suppose you drew these boys into this affair?"

"Never mind this affair!" said Barker. "There's somebody nearly killed—Castleton's brother!"

"Somebody nearly killed!" went up a shout.
 "It's Arthur—Arthur, my twin brother!" sobbed Alan, clutching at Tom Merry's sleeve. "He went out of the window—he fell—"

"Your twin brother?" said Tom Merry. "But I didn't know—"

"Oh, don't ask questions now—don't waste any time!" urged Alan. "We had a fight—a terrible fight! Can't you see how he's smashed me up? I deserved it all, too!"

"Heavens!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "You what?"

"It was an accident—a sheer accident!" moaned Alan. "Oh, why can't you do something? Why can't you go down—"

"What is all this commotion here?"

Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, came pushing through the crowd. He was looking very stern. And Alan, with a sob of relief, rushed up to Mr. Railton and plucked at him. Here was somebody in authority at last!

"What is it, Castleton?" asked Mr. Railton.

"My brother, sir!" said Alan tensely. "We had a fight. We swayed across the room, and Arthur fell out of the window—down to the paving-stones below!"

"Good heavens!" said Mr. Railton.

He gave one glance round the room, but made no comment. There

was something here that demanded instant attention. All the rest of the affair could wait until afterwards. Mr. Railton was horrified—utterly and absolutely staggered. But there had been a terrible accident, and this was no time for delay. He turned towards the door.

"Quickly, boys!" he said. "Get downstairs as rapidly as you can—yes, all of you! Rush outside, and see if you can find any sign of this poor boy. I will come with you."

Alan found himself rushing downstairs among the others. He hardly knew which way he went, and he had forgotten all about his pains. Arthur had fallen out of that window, and there had not been a single sound of him since! The dreadful significance of it was worse than anything that Alan could ever have imagined. It seemed to him that ages passed before they succeeded in getting outside into the cold, wet night.

Then they fought their way round the School House, the wind beating against them, the rain slashing into their faces. The wildness of the night seemed to be in accord with the wild happenings that had been taking place.

The wind shrieked round the School House and rose to a terrifying roar. It sounded like the shouting of a million fiends in Alan's ears. And these fiends were uttering one word—a word that was contained in the beating of the wind. "Murderer!" The word came at Alan from a thousand different angles at once. He held his hands to his face, and gave a loud scream of horror.

"I didn't mean to do it!" he shouted convulsively. "It was an accident! I swear it was an accident!"

"Steady!" said Tom Merry. "Pull yourself together, Castleton!"

"But I tell you it was a sheer accident!" insisted Alan. "Don't you believe me? Good heavens! You don't think that I threw Arthur out of the window, do you? You don't think—"

"Here he is!"

A great shout went up. And Alan fought his way through the fellows, and then started back, staring.

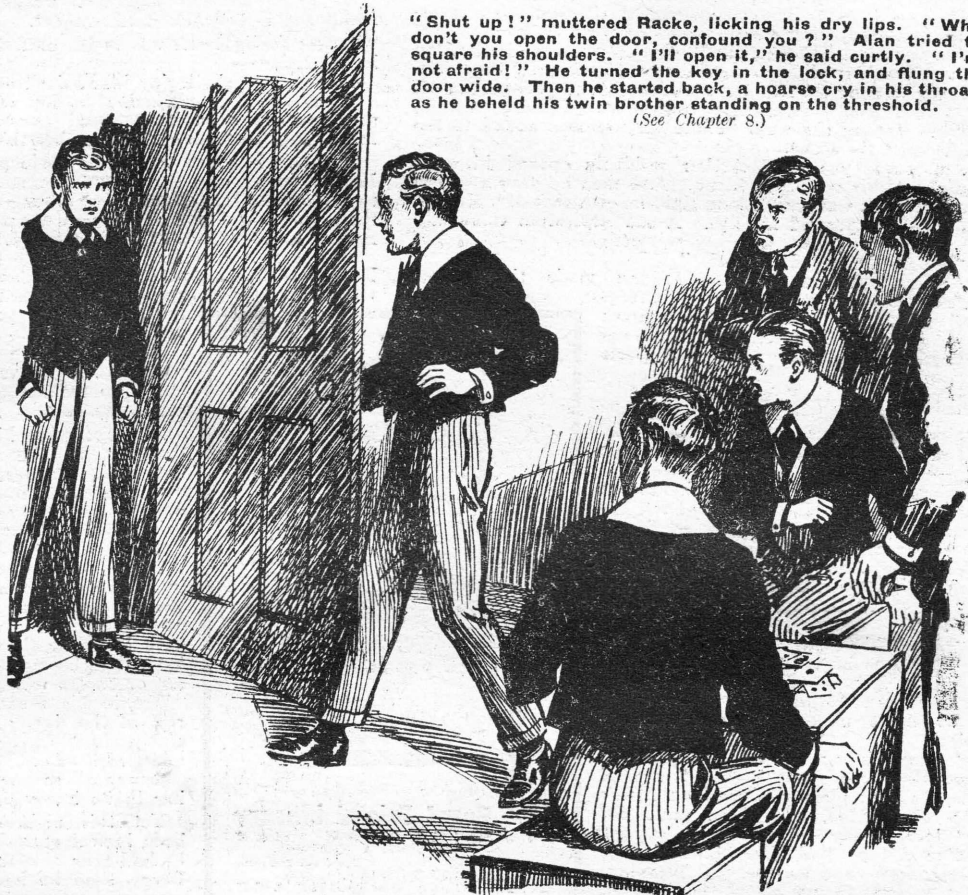
Two of the juniors had found some torches. The glare from them lit up the scene in the most eerie fashion.

And there, on the hard flagged path, lay the figure of Arthur Castleton.

He was very still, and he was in a cramped-up position.

"Shut up!" muttered Raake, licking his dry lips. "Why don't you open the door, confound you?" Alan tried to square his shoulders. "I'll open it," he said curtly. "I'm not afraid!" He turned the key in the lock, and flung the door wide. Then he started back, a hoarse cry in his throat, as he beheld his twin brother standing on the threshold.

(See Chapter 8.)



Mr. Railton was about to bend over him, but Alan dashed up and pushed the Housemaster roughly aside.

"He's my brother!" he said fiercely.

Mr. Railton stood aside without a word, and Alan dropped on one knee and took Arthur's head on the other. There was an expression of quiet repose on Arthur's face—very different to the grim expression that had rested there during the fight.

"Arthur!" sobbed Alan. "Oh, Arthur! Speak to me!"

For a moment Arthur opened his eyes, and Alan gave a great shout of relief.

"He's alive!" he gulped convulsively. "Oh, thank Heaven, he's alive!"

But Arthur said no word. His eyes closed again, and he breathed evenly. Once or twice his face twitched a little.

"Arthur," choked Alan, "why don't you speak to me?"

But still Arthur said nothing.

And Alan, sobbing bitterly, fell across his brother's still form. A cold, dreadful fear was beginning to take possession of him. Why was Arthur so silent? Why did he not speak? He was breathing! Alan could hear him breathing—distinctly!

Mr. Railton came up and gently pulled Alan aside.

"This won't do, my boy!" he said quietly. "We must carry your brother indoors and attend to him. Somebody must fetch the doctor—"

"I'll go, sir!" offered a dozen voices.

"Two of you will be enough," replied Mr. Railton. "Fetch the doctor as quickly as you can. Every minute may be of value."

"All right, sir!"

Two of them sped off; and Mr. Railton turned to the injured boy again.

"Poor youngster, I am afraid he is in a very bad way!" he said softly. "Poor Castleton!"

"But he'll live, sir—won't he?" asked Alan, a cold hand seeming to clutch at his heart. "Tell me he'll live, sir!"

"I cannot tell you, Castleton," replied Mr. Railton very quietly. "I am no doctor; and I have not yet had time to even examine the poor boy. Come, help me to lift him up. We will carry him indoors and place him gently on one of the beds. But be careful—be very, very careful!"

There was a dead silence as Mr. Railton and Alan prepared to lift Arthur up. Nobody had even thought of making any inquiries, or of wondering why there were two Castletons here. The tragedy of this affair had overshadowed everything else.

Alan gently lifted his twin brother's feet, and Mr. Railton took Arthur's shoulders. And then very solemnly they commenced walking towards the main door of the School House. It was a silent, impressive procession, with the flaming torches leading the way. Those very torches added to the wildness of the scene.

And as they walked Arthur suddenly opened his eyes again, and his eyelids flickered. And then he gave a queer, long sigh. It was such a long sigh, indeed, that Mr. Railton suddenly compressed his lips. A sad expression came into his face.

"Wait!" he urged. "Wait!"

And they halted, and Mr. Railton made them place Arthur on the ground again. Everybody wondered what was the matter; and Alan, with a strange shivering attacking him, fell upon his knees again.

"What is it, sir?" he asked.

"Be silent, boy—be silent!" said Mr. Railton, his voice curiously unnatural. "Let me look more closely—let me see—"

He broke off and lowered his head to Arthur's chest. Then he lifted the unfortunate boy's eyelids, and slowly let them drop. And when Mr. Railton looked up there was an expression of consternation in his eyes.

"What is it, sir?" asked a dozen voices.

"What's happened to him, sir?"

"Boys, be brave!" said Mr. Railton. "Castleton, you, too, must be braver than anybody!"

"I don't understand, sir!" sobbed Alan.

"There is no longer any sign of breathing from your brother," replied Mr. Railton, placing a hand on Alan's shoulder. "No, no! You must not act in this way—"

For Arthur had flung himself over Alan's form, and he, too, was listening. But there was no sound—no sign of life! He looked up, and so great was his anguish that he screamed aloud almost without knowing it.

"What has happened?" he shouted.

"Oh, what has happened?"

And he knew what Mr. Railton's words would be even before the House-master spoke.

"I am no doctor, but I can come to only one conclusion," said Mr. Railton in a terribly tragic voice. "There can be only one explanation, Castleton. Your brother is dead!"

Alan leapt to his feet, reaching out his hands to the black and threatening sky.

"Dead!" he shrieked. "Arthur dead!"

And then it seemed to him that everything became black and dim. A thousand flashing lights came across his vision, and he reeled dizzily.

CHAPTER 11. The Truth!

ALAN CASTLETON, shrieking wildly, ran blindly forward into the darkness. He was brought up suddenly by something which struck him in the legs. He halted,

and then those flashing lights faded from his eyes and the darkness cleared.

His voice died away into a sobbing silence.

And he believed that he had become unconscious. For everything was wrong—everything was fantastically impossible. He wasn't outside in the pouring rain and at that scene of death; he was in Study No. 2, staring out of the window at the afternoon sunlight!

Quite near him the fire was crackling in the grate; and from outside in the passage he could hear the tramping of feet and the sounds of laughter. He shook himself dazedly and fell back weakly into his chair again.

"Arthur!" he breathed. "Arthur! Where—where—I don't seem to understand—"

He broke off his muttered words and stared round frantically in bewildered amazement.

It was daylight—he was in his own study. He was sitting in his chair—

Then, like a shattering blow, the truth came to Alan.

"A dream!" he choked, a feeling of overpowering relief sweeping over him. "Oh, thank Heaven! Thank Heaven! It was only a dream—a ghastly, horrible dream!"

That one fact was all that he could grasp at the moment. He was in his own study, and it was afternoon. He tried to piece the thing together—to disentangle the dream from the reality. It was all a maze—a complete and utter tangle. And in his relief he had no wish to think yet.

The one thought which throbbled through his fevered brain was that Arthur was alive! There had been no fight, no struggle in that attic. Arthur had not fallen to the ground, and—

That attic!

Of course, there hadn't even been a party with Barker and Willis and Racke and Clampe—there hadn't been any party at all!

And yet everything was so vivid in that dream that Alan could scarcely believe it for a moment. He hadn't drunk any champagne, or he hadn't played cards, or— But where was he? What was the time?

Clang, clang!

The bell for afternoon lessons! Then in a flash Alan knew the full truth. He was still in his study, where he had come after dinner. He hadn't been here for more than half an hour, and he hadn't been asleep for longer than ten or twelve minutes!

Yet in his dream he had spent the rest of the day, and he had attended that party which Racke had suggested—and which hadn't yet become a reality!

It was all so bewildering, so stupefying in its immensity.

Yet—this nightmare of Alan's had been logical enough. In the dormitory he had been able to get no restful sleep. Every time he had dozed off he had awakened, to see Arthur's accusing finger pointing at him. The fear that Arthur would come to St. Jim's was an obsession with him; and he had fallen asleep in that chair and had dreamed everything so vividly that it seemed a pageant of real events.

"Oh, thank Heaven!" muttered Alan again. "And I thought—I thought—"

He shuddered.

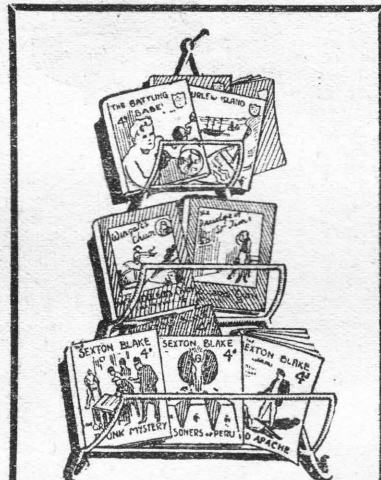
He could see Arthur now—lying on that hard path. He could hear Mr. Railton's voice, saying that Arthur was dead. And it was only a dream—a dream brought on by his torturing conscience! Racke didn't know anything about a twin brother—he hadn't babbled out a word to the black sheep of the Shell. Nobody at St. Jim's knew the truth; but everybody at St. Jim's soon would!

For in that second Alan Castleton made a great resolve.

He was filled with a new purpose—and he had great strength given to him.

That dream was to bear the most amazing fruit.

While the purpose was still strong upon him Alan went to the door, unlocked it, and went outside. His face



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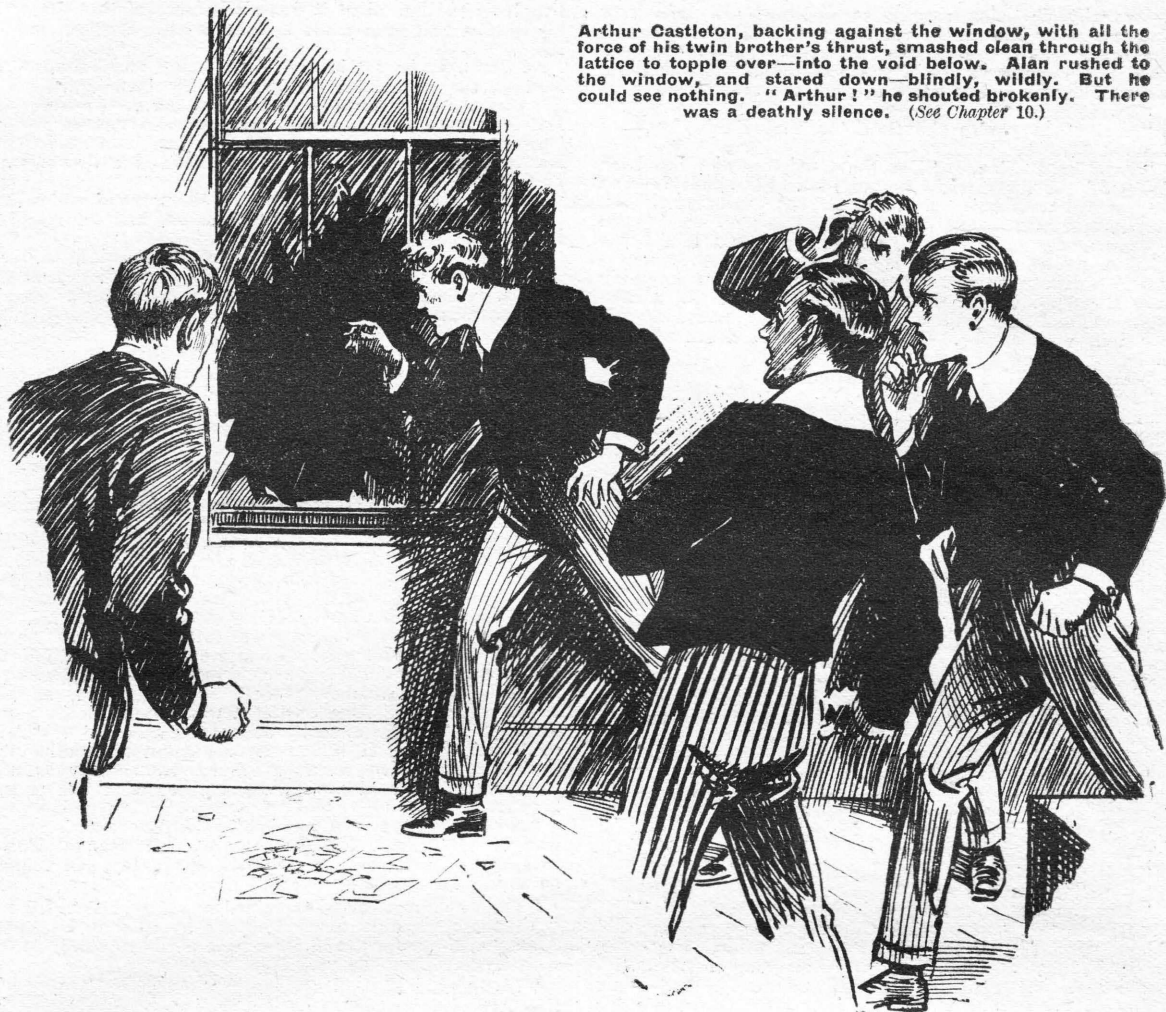
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Arthur Castleton, backing against the window, with all the force of his twin brother's thrust, smashed clean through the lattice to topple over—into the void below. Alan rushed to the window, and stared down—blindly, wildly. But he could see nothing. "Arthur!" he shouted brokenly. There was a deathly silence. (See Chapter 10.)



was set in a curiously determined expression. Even now he could scarcely believe that it was only afternoon—that there had been no evening, or no night! The gambling party through which he had lived in his dream was not due to take place until many hours had elapsed. In all probability it would never take place at all. Perhaps Racke had been just fooling him—for, after all, it was a bit thick to suppose that those two jazz players would come to St. Jim's and play cards in an attic. It had seemed logical enough in a dream, but in real life it was too absurd. As a matter of absolute fact, Aubrey Racke had been leading Alan on when he had made that statement. But it had been sufficient to put the nightmare into Alan's fevered brain.

"Hallo, Castleton!" said Tom Merry as he came out of Study No. 10. "Coming along to the class-room? There's plenty of time yet, but—"

"I want you, Tom Merry!" said Castleton. "I want everybody!"

"Hallo!" said Tom, staring. "What's the matter?"

He was struck by the curious note in Castleton's voice. It was a note of great steadiness—of relentless purpose.

"Come out into the quad, will you?" went on Alan. "And will you please gather everybody else you can? Blake and D'Arcy and all the others. There is something that I want to say—something that I must say! Because, if I don't say it, I shall choke!"

"My dear man, what on earth—"

"Please!" urged Alan. "Please do as I ask!"

He went out into the quad himself, and stood there, waiting—his mind so firmly made up that he felt calm and settled. For the first time since coming to St. Jim's he felt serene. He had made up his mind—he had solved the problem. There was only one thing to be done, and he was determined to do it. Conscience had pointed out the way to him, and he was not fool enough to ignore the command.

Before long the fellows began to stream out—Tom Merry & Co. of the Shell, Blake & Co. of Study No. 6; Levison, Clive, Cardew, and many others. Figgins & Co. came over

from the New House, to say nothing of Redfern and Lawrence, and others.

"What's all the excitement about?" everybody was asking.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "Castleton, deah boy, whatevah is the mattah?"

"Are you all here?" asked Alan, looking round at the curious faces. "There's something I've got to tell you, you fellows. Not ten minutes ago I had a terrible dream in my study—and that dream has pointed out the solution of my troubles. I want to tell you everything; but I want to be brief."

"Bai Jove!" said Gussy. "I wathah think you are still unwell, Castleton—"

"Dry up, Gussy!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Let Castleton speak!"

"First of all, I'm going to tell you something that you won't believe to begin with," said Alan. "I am not the same Castleton that was here yesterday. The Castleton you have always known is Arthur—and I'm Alan. We're twin-brothers."

A number of shouts went up, including quite a few laughs. Alan had not been taken seriously.

"We're twins," continued Alan. "I really belong to St. Frank's, and Arthur is the fellow who should be here. But I made St. Frank's too hot to hold me—mostly because of my caddish actions—because of my despicable conduct."

"Well, I'm jiggered!"

"Weally, Castleton—"

"Yesterday I went to Abbotsford and met Arthur there," continued Alan. "I persuaded him to go back to St. Frank's in my place—a filthy trick, considering what awaited him there. I thought it was very clever at the time, but I've had nothing but torture ever since. It has taught me a lesson that I shall never forget!"

"But this is all rot!" said Herries. "Castleton never had a twin brother! He must be raving!"

"No, he isn't," said Tom Merry. "He's right. Now we

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know why Castleton seemed so different. In fact, now that we know the truth, we can even tell that he's not the same fellow. He looks marvellously like our own Castleton, but there's just a shade of difference, something almost intangible; but it's there, all the same."

"Gweat Scott!"

"Then—then you're the Castleton that Banks knows?" shouted Mellish.

"Yes," said Alan. "I'm the Castleton who has been doing all the dirty tricks in the past. I'll admit it—I've been a cad until now. I was at Barton Grammar School, and Arthur was at Walsing Grammar School. And when I came here, and found how much you liked him I felt what a wretched bounder I had been. I'm sorry now—deeply sorry, genuinely sorry. And if there's anything that I can do to put things right, I'll do it. As a commencement, I have called you all together, and I've confessed in front of you. I've told you what a beast I was, and now I mean to make amends."

"Bai Jove! Well spoken, deah boy!"

"For goodness' sake, D'Arcy, don't say anything in praise of me!" exclaimed Alan bitterly. "I deserve nothing but your contempt—nothing but your scorn. I want to hear you hissing me; and, if you have any sense, you'll boot me out of these grounds. I'm nothing but a cur!"

Many of the expressions round him were softening. Everybody realised that Alan had, indeed, played a very unsavoury part. But they almost felt like forgiving him. Obviously, there was a great deal of good in this chap—although, hitherto, it had always been kept down by his supercilious veneer. Under the surface, no doubt, he had plenty of decency.

"We've heard all this, Castleton, and we believe you," said Tom Merry, speaking for the others. "It is impossible to do otherwise. Lots of things that were very mysterious to us have now become clear. We could never understand about your brother. He's such a decent sort—such a thorough sportsman. And yet we were constantly hearing rumours of his former doings."

"They were my doings," said Alan quietly.

"Yes, we know that—you've explained it," said Tom, nodding. "But, naturally, we all believed that your brother was the fellow. So you really belong to St. Frank's?"

"Yes."

"And you acted like a blackguard there?"

"I did!" muttered Alan.

"And you sent your brother back to face the music?"

"It was the most caddish thing I've ever done," said Alan. "But I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to St. Frank's straight away, and I'm going to tell everybody there just what I have told you now. And I am going to ask Arthur to forgive me. I shan't deserve his forgiveness, but he's such a good-natured fellow that he might find it in his heart to have some pity for me."

"Good man!" said Blake. "That's the open thing to do—the decent thing!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I only hope you mean this, Castleton," said Tom Merry earnestly. "I hope you mean to turn over a new leaf—"

"I do!" interrupted Alan, his voice quivering with emotion. "I swear to you all that I do! From this minute onwards I'm going to lead a new life—I'm going to do everything I can to mould myself upon Arthur! Since I've been at St. Jim's—less than twenty-four hours—I've seen what comes of being decent. I shall never be like Arthur—because he's one in a thousand—but I'll try!"

"No chap can do more than that," said Talbot quietly. "Good luck to you, Castleton!"

"Bunkum!" sneered Racke from the background. "Do you think I believe this tosh? Why, the fellow promised to come to a card party of mine; and not an hour ago he was in my study, smokin'—"

"Dry up, Racke!"

"Be quiet, you rotter!"

Scarcely an hour ago! Alan could hardly believe it. It seemed to him that a tremendous time had elapsed since that fateful cigarette in Racke's study. But nobody believed Racke—or, if they did believe him, they took no notice.

For it was impossible to disbelieve Alan Castleton's words. They had come from the very bottom of his heart—from the depths of his conscience-stricken mind. He had sinned—he had confessed his wrong—and he was determined to do the best he could to make amends.

CHAPTER 12. All Serene!

A GREAT peace had come upon Alan Castleton as he set out for St. Frank's.

And such peace as this was almost beyond his understanding. He had never realised that the simple act of confessing his faults could have brought such

happiness to him. And it was all because of that dream—his resolve had been made because of that dreadful nightmare.

At times, as he sat in the train, being whirled towards Bellton, the station for St. Frank's, he started, and half-felt that the happenings in that dream had been actualities. For they were still so vivid. Alan could remember every tiny incident, almost every word that had been spoken by Racke and the others. Never had he had a dream that had so impressed itself on his mind.

And the peace now within him was the peace of confession. He had done wrong, he had repented, and he acknowledged his sins.

And now he was going back to St. Frank's, to seek Arthur, and to ask for Arthur's forgiveness. And he wanted to find out what had happened, too; he was dreadfully anxious to find out that.

And even if Arthur forgave him—which, in itself, was doubtful—he had little hope that he would be forgiven by the juniors of St. Frank's. For Alan had been a despicable rotter at St. Frank's, and he knew it now. He was staggered when he thought of his own acts. With full realisation upon him, he saw every one of his past actions in their true perspective. And it was impossible to expect that the St. Frank's fellows would give him another chance.

But in spite of this Alan journeyed on. Nothing should turn him from his purpose now.

Whatever happened to him at St. Frank's, he must go there. He must find Arthur, face him, and humble himself.

The decency that had lain latent in Alan Castleton was now coming to the surface, rising through that supercilious outer shell. There were hopes for Alan yet, it seemed.

And at St. Jim's everybody was talking.

When lessons were over that afternoon groups of fellows gathered in the quadrangle and in the Junior quarters. Everybody was wondering what had happened at St. Frank's, and when Alan Castleton would return.

"A jolly rummy affair!" declared Jack Blake. "And the funny part of it is, we never guessed the truth. We could tell Castleton wasn't quite the same, but who the merry dickens would have thought there were two of the beggars?"

"No wondah we were puzzled," said Gussy, with a sage wag of his head. "No wondah Castleton was lookin' so fighthfully bewildered at the birthday partay. Of course, he didn't know where he was."

"The whole mystery is explained now," said Tom Merry. "All those rumours about him are as clear as daylight. Alan was the culprit, and there was never anything wrong with Arthur from the very start."

"Wathah not!" said Gussy. "A fellow with a name like Arthur is bound to be a wippah!"

"Bow-wow!" said Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Of course, I knew it all the time!" said Baggy Trimble. "I didn't say anything to the fellows, but I could tell that Castleton wasn't the same. In fact, I told Mellish that there were two of them."

"Did you?" said Mellish. "This is the first I've heard of it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I mean, I was going to tell you!" said Baggy hastily. "But you can't fool me, you know. As soon as I spotted Castleton last night I knew that he was different."

"Marvellous!" said Monty Lowther. "But considering that we all saw he was different, I don't see there's anything particularly brilliant in your effort, Baggy. Let's hope that the real Castleton comes back soon."

"Yaas, wathah! We'll give him a woyal welcome!" declared Gussy. "In fact, it might be a good ideah to get up that birthday partay again."

"Fathead! We can't hold it twice!"

"Weally, Hewwies, you appeal to forget that our own Castleton was nevah at the feast," said Arthur Augustus. "And, in the circs, wouldn't it be a wippin' scheme to get up a welcome for him this evenin'? He's bound to return, and—"

"It's not at all a bad ideah," said Tom Merry. "And any scheme for a big feed is welcome. Suppose we have a whip round and raise some cash?"

"Topping!" said Monty. "I'll contribute sixpence—my sole wealth at the moment."

Most of the other fellows agreed to the idea, and quite a good collection was made. Then a number of the fellows went off to purchase the supplies. The real Castleton had not been at that birthday party, and so it was felt that something should be done. And he was bound to turn up sooner or later in the evening.

As a matter of fact, Arthur turned up sooner.

The evening was still comparatively young when he walked through the gateway of St. Jim's, looking happy and joyous. He had no appearance of a fellow who had

been hounded out of St. Frank's. In fact, Arthur was radiant.

"Bai Jove, beah he is!"

"Good man!"

"Welcome back, Castleton, deah boy!" said Gussy, clapping Arthur on the back.

"Thanks, Gussy," said Arthur. "I'm jolly glad to get back, I can tell you."

"Yaas, wathah! Your bwothah has told us—"

"Wait a minute!" said Blake, looking at Arthur closely.

"Let's be sure that this is the right one!"

"Yes, this is Arthur all right," said Tom Merry, as he came up. "I can see the difference in a minute—now that I know. It's always easy to be clever after the event, isn't it? But this is our own Castleton!"

"I think so," said Arthur, smiling.

"Your brother was afraid that you were going to be drummed out of St. Frank's," said Tom Merry. "He sent you to St. Frank's to face the music—to enter the hornets' nest. We're all anxious to know what happened."

"Nothing has happened," he replied quietly. "I was tried by the Form—a kind of imitation court, you know. They found me guilty and sentenced me."

"Bai Jove! But you weren't guilty, deah boy!"

"I know that; but I was in Alan's shoes, remember."

"But didn't you explain that to the St. Frank's chaps?"

"How could I?" asked Arthur. "We had each of us agreed that we would not give the secret away. So I took Alan's medicine for him."

"Bai Jove! That's just what you would do, deah boy!"

"But those St. Frank's chaps are fine!" went on Arthur, a soft light entering his eyes. "I played in a football match for them, and before Alan arrived everything was all serene for me."

"You don't need to tell us any more," said Blake, nodding. "That winning way of yours, eh? You cast your giddy spell over the whole assembly, my son. And before Alan turned up they were all friendly with you, I'll guarantee."

"Yes, as a matter of fact, they were," admitted Arthur, flushing. "But, of course, they didn't know the actual truth until Alan turned up and explained."

"Do you mind telling us what Alan said?" asked Tom Merry curiously.

"Yes, I'll tell you," replied Arthur. "He came to St. Frank's, and he admitted, before everybody, that he had been a rotter. And he swore, on his oath, that he'd live cleanly and decently in future, and I believe that he meant every word of it. I believe he'll keep his promise."

"Bai Jove! Then the fellow is a wippah, too!" said Arthur Augustus. "He told us that he was goin' to do abah, Castleton, and we believed him. Your stowy has

cowwobowated it. Bwavo, Castleton! I mean, bwavo, the other Castleton!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And if it comes to that, bwavo this Castleton, too!" continued Gussy. "It stwikes me they are a pair of wippahs! Your bwothah, deah boy, has been several kinds of a wottah in his time, but he is twuly wewpentant, and it is impossible for us to bear any malice. If he visits you at St. Jim's we shall give him a warm welcome."

"Hear, hear!"

"He's your brother, Castleton, and that's good enough for us."

"Thanks, awfully!" said Arthur, with gratitude. "I don't think I've ever been so happy before."

Standing a little apart, Aubrey Racke and Leslie Clampe were looking on.

"Makes me sick!" Racke was saying. "This is the goody-goody Castleton again, and I'm afraid we shall never gather him into the flock now."

"Not one chance in a billion!" said Clampe. "We thought we'd gathered the other Castleton into the flock, but he slipped out again. The breed's evidently no good."

"I'm sick of them!" sneered Racke. "After all the trouble we had, too; all our efforts to prove that this idiot was a reformed blade. And he's never been a goer at all. It's enough to make you fed-up, isn't it?"

Clampe could not help smiling.

"Don't forget that I warned you," he said, with a grin.

"What do you mean—you warned me?"

"Didn't I tell you to leave the chap alone?" asked Clampe. "I told you it would only bring trouble—"

"Oh, dry up!" growled Racke. "Confound the pair of them!"

But the other juniors were not saying the same thing. They were very pleased to see Arthur back; they were more pleased because his twin-brother had done the decent thing, and everything was now all serene.

And later on they celebrated by holding that second party in the Rag, with the real Arthur as the guest of honour. It had been a dramatic day for the two Castletons, but everything was quite O.K. now.

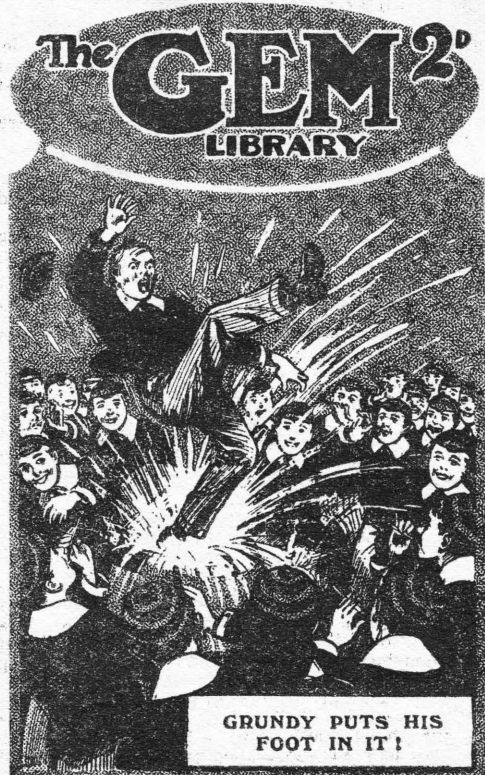
The exchange of schools, apparently so fantastic and unfortunate at first, had been the very best thing of all.

For Arthur had gone to St. Frank's and had succeeded in redeeming his brother's name. And Alan had come to St. Jim's, and he had been brought to a full realisation of his unsavoury behaviour.

From every point of view that exchange of schools had been a great success.

And Alan, the rotter, looked as though he might soon become Alan, the sportsman.

THE END.



SENSATION AT ST. JIM'S!

Grundy of the School House gets moved to the New House!

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THE ROOKWOOD DICTATOR!

By
Owen Conquest.



(Introduction on page 26.)

Jimmy Silver's Alibi!

"HURRY up and get these beards and things off!" snapped Knowles. "And then I think there's a reckoning for Jimmy Silver and the other young ruffians!"

"Come on!" gasped Catesby.

From the connecting corridor to the bath-rooms was fortunately a short distance, and the seniors covered it without encountering anybody. In their remarkable state they were glad of that. Even a royal revenge on the Fourth would not make up the dignity which would be lost if they were glimpsed for a moment in coloured beards and moustachios.

Knowles plunged into the bath-room, and Catesby and Frampton followed suit. In a few seconds hot water and soap and pumice-stone were doing their utmost to remove the hairy appendages which the Fascists had given Knowles & Co.

But that mixture of gum and glue and secotine and rubber solution had not been concocted for nothing. It was, as Arthur Edward Lovell had remarked, guaranteed to stick, and stick it did. Despite the almost ferocious efforts of the three prefects to remove their beards and moustachios, that mixture refused to melt. The beards were on, and it appeared as if they were on for good. Lovell had once stuck a pair of rubbers to his shoes with the rubber solution, and it was not surprising that Knowles & Co. found difficulty in budging it.

"By gad! I don't believe it'll ever shift!" ejaculated Knowles, after a fierce struggle lasting half an hour.

"Oh, dear! I can't get it off!" gasped Catesby dismally.

"Oh, won't I skin those kids—won't I, just!"

"They'll be flogged and expelled!" snarled Frampton. "And that's too good for 'em. By gad! We shall never get these off, Knowles. What about going to Dalton?"

"What, like this?" roared Catesby.

"Cut the beastly things off short!" snapped Frampton.

"It's the only thing we can do," agreed Knowles, with a



Mr. Dalton looked up in amazement as three startling figures dashed into his study. (See Page 25.)

gasp of rage. "Oh, dear! What will Dalton think when we turn up like this?"

"Can't be helped!" snapped Frampton. "They'll get it all the heavier!"

"Something in that," agreed Catesby.

Knowles, his teeth set, gave a furious tug to his flaming and now sodden beard. A moment later he gave a howl of pain, and stopped tugging suddenly. His eyes fairly glittered at the other two.

"Come on!" he rapped. "Dalton's going to see us just as we are! And if he doesn't flay the little villains alive, I'll do it myself!"

With crimson faces, and beards and moustachios wet and trailing from their chins, the three seniors left the bath-room. Knowles scouted ahead and reported that the Sixth Form corridor, at least, was clear.

Knowles and Catesby and Frampton came down the Sixth Form corridor at breakneck speed, fearful that they would be seen. They swept down the staircase like three whirlwinds and made a reckless bolt for the House door.

A terrific yell greeted them there, for, as luck would have it, a crowd of juniors spotted them.

"Oh, my hat!"

"My only summer bonnet! Knowles!"

"And Frampton! And Catesby! What's happened to you, you men? Playing Rip Van Winkle, Knowles, old man?"

Knowles did not pause to reply.

With Catesby and Frampton at his heels, he fairly flew

across the quad. As it was after locking-up time, the juniors should have remained in their House. But a shouting, laughing crowd came dashing in the wake of the prefects.

In the hall of the Classical side there was quite a sensation. Fellows scattered at the flying approach of the seniors, but joined up, roaring with merriment, in the chase.

Knowles was gasping for breath when he burst into Mr. Dalton's study, with Catesby and Frampton just behind him.

He stood, pumping in breath, on Mr. Dalton's carpet, while the Fourth Form master eyed him in undisguised amazement. Carthew's appearance after his interview with the Dictator had been startling enough; Knowles & Co. were like Carthew, only much more so.

"Knowles! Catesby! What—what does this mean?" "It means that we've only just escaped from those young villains—Jimmy Silver and the rest!" gasped Knowles furiously.

"What—what— Pray calm yourself, Knowles. Am I to understand that you have been treated in the same manner as Carthew was recently?"

"We were seized in our study, sir," gasped Knowles, keeping cool only with an effort, "and dragged to a secret chamber! Then they got us up like this! We've been half an hour in the bath-room trying to get these beards and things off, but they won't budge!"

"This is monstrous!" ejaculated Mr. Dalton, his face setting severely.

"I know who it was, sir—Silver!" "Silver?" Mr. Dalton raised his eyebrows. "Are you sure, Knowles? Did you recognise him?"

"One of the young rascals addressed him by name!" snapped the prefect.

Mr. Dalton pursed his lips. He wanted, naturally, to punish the offenders, and to punish them severely; but he did not like to hear accusations against the head boy of his Form.

"You are certain, Knowles? Silver has given me his word that he had nothing to do with the—ahem!—ragging of Carthew."

"He may have had nothing to do with that, sir, though I doubt it; but he was one of the ringleaders in this escapade. I demand that he shall be flogged, sir! Look at me—"

"I am looking at you, Knowles," said Mr. Dalton, with asperity. "You have certainly been very—ahem!—badly treated. I will send for Silver at once."

"Very good, sir," answered Knowles, breathing hard. He waited with ill grace while Toby was dispatched to find "Uncle James" of the Fourth.

There was a knock at the door at last, and Knowles' brow grew grim.

"Come in!" said Mr. Dalton. Jimmy Silver appeared in the doorway. He did not look alarmed.

"Come in, Silver!" said Mr. Dalton seriously. "I am sorry to say that Knowles has made a very serious charge against you. Where have you been this evening?"

"For the last hour, sir?" asked Jimmy calmly.

"Yes."

"With Monsieur Monceau, sir," responded Jimmy Silver, with perfect equanimity.

"You young liar!" burst out Knowles.

"Silence, Knowles! How dare you make use of such an expression! Silver's statement can be verified. What were you doing with Monsieur Monceau, Silver?"

"Lovell and I were studying Victor Hugo, sir," said Jimmy, with the utmost calm.

"Pah!" ejaculated Knowles.

"Kindly request Monsieur Monceau to step here, Toby," said Mr. Dalton quietly.

Jimmy Silver waited quite calmly for the arrival of Monsieur Monceau. Knowles and Catesby and Frampton eyed him as if they could eat him.

"You wanted to see me, Monsieur Dalton?"

"Ah, yes, Monsieur Monceau. I should like you to verify this boy's statement that he has been with you for the last hour studying Victor Hugo."

"Vy, yes," agreed the little French master, nodding his head.

"Ze page called him away to your study, Monsieur Dalton. He and Lovell—zey both very interested in ze work of ze great Victor Hugo."

Knowles' face was a study.

He was a suspicious fellow—a very suspicious fellow. But even he could not suspect Monsieur Monceau of entering into a conspiracy with a junior to escape punishment. He realised, too late, that that "Jimmy" had been let drop intentionally, for him to seize upon and make a fool of himself exactly as he had done. And at that Knowles writhed.

"Thank you, Monsieur. That is all. You may go, Silver."

Jimmy Silver nodded cheerily to Knowles, and left the study.

Mr. Dalton gave Knowles a glance. "The matter will be investigated, Knowles. You had better go and take off that ridiculous beard."

"Oh! Yes, sir!" Without a word, Knowles and Catesby and Frampton went.

In the passage, Knowles gave the others a glance.

"That was set for us! We walked straight into it! But let them wait—that's all!"

And the seniors headed once again for a bath-room.

Punter Gets Impatient!

LATTREY! Stop a minute!" Mark Lattrey of the Fourth stopped in the lane. A tall, distinguished-looking gentleman detached himself from a stile, and strolled elegantly towards him, swinging a malacca cane.

Lattrey did not appear pleased at the sight of Captain Punter. He had, in fact, been hurrying past the stile, hoping that the captain would not spot him.

Captain Punter was smiling genially, evidently pleased at that chance meeting after classes. Lattrey was wishing that he had stayed within gates. But it was too late for wishing now, and the cad of the Fourth endeavoured to smile as the captain came up.

"Hallo! Fancy meetin' you!" ejaculated Lattrey, affecting surprise.

"Hoped I might catch sight of you!" responded the captain, swinging his cane and eyeing the junior keenly.

"You saw the result of the Bartown Race, I suppose?"

"Yes, but you've cleaned me out already!" said Lattrey bluntly. "You'll have to wait, that's all!"

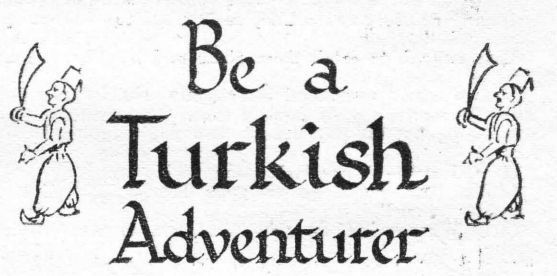
Captain Punter smiled. It was not a nice smile.

Since coming to the Rookwood district Captain Punter had found the "sportive" fellows in the school a lucrative source of income. Seniors and juniors had fallen into his net, and once in it they discovered that the captain was no better than any other kind of sharper. Lattrey figured now among that unhappy number.

But there was quite a friendly note in the sharper's voice as he answered:

"Don't let it worry you, my dear boy. We all find ourselves in a corner now and then—what?"

(Continued overleaf.)



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Lattrey stared.

He was not quite so simple as the majority of the "giddy goats" of Rookwood, and he had sized-up Captain Punter for what he was worth. Only the prospect of a "dead cert" had tempted the Fourth-Former to bet; and he could not affect to understand the captain's friendly overtures at that moment. He had nothing to give away.

"I'll pay you as soon as I can," he answered, after a pause. "Three pounds, isn't it?"

"When will you have three pounds?" asked the captain coolly.

Lattrey bit his lip. He knew better than anybody that he was not likely to have that sum for weeks, at least.

"Now, I want you to listen," continued the captain quietly. "You owe me three pounds, and you can't pay. I don't want to make a fuss, but your headmaster would sit up and take notice if I went and saw him—"

"Don't!" ejaculated Lattrey. "I'll pay somehow—"

"Listen!" snapped Captain Punter. "You can't pay. But I may be willing to forget the debt—in certain circumstances!"

"For-forget it?" gasped Lattrey dazedly.

"In fact, I'll wash it right out!" offered the captain generously. "Always agreed that you do what I suggest." "And what's that?"

Lattrey's eyes were gleaming. He was not an over-scrupulous youth at best, and the prospect of escaping from this rascal's clutches was alluring.

"I dare say you know that I've had some dealings with a kid named Lovell—a fag—"

"I know!" assented Lattrey, grinning.

"His brother and three friends interviewed me," went on the captain calmly. "I'll make no bones about it, though you probably know the facts already. The boy Lovell thrashed me with my own cane—thrashed me like a dog—and the rest helped to give me what you would call a ragging. I looked a sight for some days."

"I heard about it."

"They were crowing—what? Well, Captain Punter isn't the man to take such treatment lying down. I arranged with Carthew to get them into a barn, where I was waiting with some friends—"

"I heard about that, too!" grinned Lattrey. "Dalton and Bulkeley butted in and gave you and your men a thundering licking, didn't they?"

"Somebody gave me a prize jaw," answered the captain, with an evil smile. "It all comes to this—I've been swindled out of young Lovell's money, and I've taken two handlings on account of those four fellows. I'm not the man to forget or forgive! They're going to rue it—you understand?"

"Easy enough to catch them alone and lick them, I suppose?" queried Lattrey.

"Not so easy," responded the captain, shaking his head. "And the matter's gone beyond that. I'm going to make those young hounds pay dearly, and you're going to help me!"

"Here, I say—" began Lattrey, in alarm.

"Either that, or I go to your headmaster with an interesting story!"

"Oh! What—what do you want me to do?" gasped Lattrey.

"Nothing that need alarm you. Carthew owes me some money. I gave him a fortnight to pay. The fortnight's up, and he hasn't paid. I want you to go to him for me and ask for the money—twenty pounds."

"Oh, I'll do that fast enough!" said Lattrey, relieved.

"Wait a minute. That's only the beginning," continued the captain. "He won't be able to pay—though if he can, I'll be glad of the cash. But he won't. And then we put our scheme into operation. It would amuse Carthew if I could tell him. If he can pay he gets clear. If not, he plays a leading part in my scheme to get Lovell and his friends expelled from Rookwood—"

"Wha-a-at?"

"Just that!" said Captain Punter, between his teeth.

"You might remember that you can't swindle me and handle me like a dog with impunity, Lattrey! Now, listen here! If, as I expect, Carthew can't pay, you will come and tell me. I shall be waiting here at the stile. Then you will tell me when Carthew is likely to be out of gates—at the same time that those four fellows are out, too!"

"What do you mean?" asked Lattrey, with deep uneasiness.

"Simply this. Carthew is going to be knocked over the head; nothing serious, but enough to stun him. He will never know that I did it, and there will be an inquiry at the school. That's where you come in, Lattrey!"

"Look here, this is villainy!" ejaculated Lattrey.

"You know the alternative. It's all square. I'm letting Carthew off his twenty pounds in consideration of the part he will play. It's cheap at the price. And when the school is questioned, I want incriminating evidence discovered among the belongings of Lovell and the others—sufficient to get them expelled from the school, branded as dangerous young hooligans—as they are!"

"But—but it's mad and—and rotten!"

"You will be responsible for landing them with the evidence," went on the captain grimly. "The stick I use—with blood on it—that's one thing. You can hide it in their study. It'll be easy enough—and no risk at all for you. That's all you're likely to worry about, if I know you, Lattrey!"

Mark Lattrey licked his dry lips.

Rascal as he was, he shrank from the scheme which the captain had outlined. Punter, of course, was inflexible with the loss of a debt and two thrashings, and his venomous nature was stirred to its depths. Getting four innocent juniors expelled did not seem very terrible to him, but to Lattrey the matter appeared in a different light. Certainly the scheme was workable. And there was a debt of three pounds hanging over Lattrey's head.

"There's no need to get afraid!" sneered the captain contemptuously. "You'll have nothing risky to do, as I said. And if you're too squeamish to come in with me, think of what Dr. Chisholm will say about your little bet on High Hope!"

"I—I say, I suppose Carthew couldn't grumble," muttered Lattrey hesitatingly. "He'll get off twenty pounds. But convicting Silver and the rest—"

"It's either that or else convicting yourself," remarked Captain Punter. "See here! My mind is made up. Get along to the school now and see Carthew. You can get back and let me know the result before the gates close. Then we'll make final arrangements."

"But look here, I can't—" protested Lattrey.

"Then I'll walk up to the school with you," answered the captain coolly.

Lattrey gasped. He shrank from the villainy of Captain Punter's suggestion; but, on the other hand— He was trapped; it was expulsion for the Fistical Four, or for himself. And Lattrey had no doubt that if the captain made known all his dealings with him and the visits after lights-out to the Bird-in-Hand he would have to leave Rookwood.

He gave Punter a hunted look.

"I—I'll go and see Carthew. He may be able to pay."

"Get along, then!" agreed the captain. "And don't forget to drop back and let me know what's to happen."

"All right."

Mark Lattrey's thoughts as he turned towards Rookwood were not pleasant. His mind was a chaos of conflicting emotions—fear of Punter, and shrinking from the task imposed upon him chief among them.

Bitterly now did Lattrey regret that little gamble which had landed him in the rascal's power. But there was no blinking the fact that Punter could at will get Lattrey expelled—and that he would not hesitate to do it.

As the cad of the Fourth came in at the gates he caught a glimpse of Carthew in the quad. And the sight of Tubby Muffin, the fat and fatuous, extending fingers and thumb from the tip of his nose towards Carthew made Lattrey jump.

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE!

Jimmy Silver & Co., the Chums of Rookwood, angered by the persecution of Mark Carthew, a bullying prefect of the Sixth, form a secret organisation called the Fascist Band of Rookwood.

Carthew is one day brought up for trial before the band, all disguised in white robes, and given the ragging of his life. The Fascists are careful to cover up their tracks by electing only a few of their numbers to act on each occasion.

Next on the list of victims are three Modern Side prefects, Knowles, Catesby, and Frampton. A meeting of the band is called to discuss ways and means of dealing with these bullies.

Valentine Mornington formulates a safe plan of action, and that same night Knowles & Co. are gagged and blindfolded and taken before the Grand High Council of the Fascist Band of Rookwood, where they are forced to submit to the indignity of having their hair trimmed and their faces painted and adorned with curly beards and moustachios before being released.

"I know who the rascals are!" cries Knowles, his eyes gleaming. "I heard one of them call the other 'Jimmy'!"

(Now read on.)

Carthew made a stride after Muffin, and a yell floated to Lattrey's ears.

"Yah! Keep off, you rotter! I'll set the Dictator on you!"

Carthew paused, with his hand raised to cuff the fat junior. Then he turned and hastened into the House. Lattrey, viewing it all from a distance, gasped. It was a win for Muffin—with the threat of the Dictator to back him up! Who was the Dictator, Lattrey did not know. If it was not Jimmy Silver—and that had been demonstrated, for the benefit of Knowles and Catesby and Frampton—he could not guess. But there was no doubt that Carthew was taking the lesson to heart.

Lattrey followed the prefect into the House and up the staircase to the Sixth Form corridor.

Carthew entered his study, and Lattrey followed close behind him. The prefect glanced round irritably.

"Hallo! What do you want, you cheeky fag?"

Carthew was usually on quite good terms with Lattrey—they were birds of a feather. But in his present harassed mood Carthew was fed-up with fags of all descriptions. He saw the shadow of the Dictator in every Fourth Form face, and the strain of keeping his temper in hand was telling on his nerves.

"I've just seen Punter—" began Lattrey.

"Hang Punter!" snarled Carthew. He had forgotten the sportive captain completely. The recollection of his debt startled him.

He strode across to his desk and threw his cap inside. Then he started.

"Good gad! What—"

He drew out of the desk a card—a large white card—bearing an inscription. As he read that inscription Carthew's face grew livid.

In big red letters ran the following:

"HANDS OFF THE FOURTH!—THE DICTATOR."

Carthew whirled round, beside himself with rage. His glance almost burnt through Lattrey.

"Lattrey! Did you put this here?"

"Eh? Put what where?"

"This! You did; I can see it in your face, you young whelp!"

Lattrey stared, aghast, at the card which Carthew thrust under his nose. It was a startling communication, and enough to annoy any senior. To Carthew it was the last straw—and something had to go.

"You put it here; I saw you in the corridor before I left the study!"

"I came with some lines for Bulkeley!" ejaculated Lattrey, alarmed by the terrific expression on the prefect's face.

"A likely yarn!" sneered Carthew contemptuously. "I saw you in the passage—that's enough! So you're one of these Fascists, Lattrey! Hold out your hand!"

(Don't miss the continuation of this splendid story in next week's GEM, boys.)

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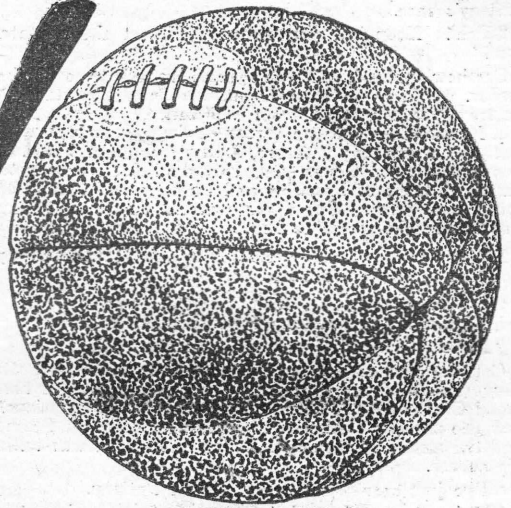
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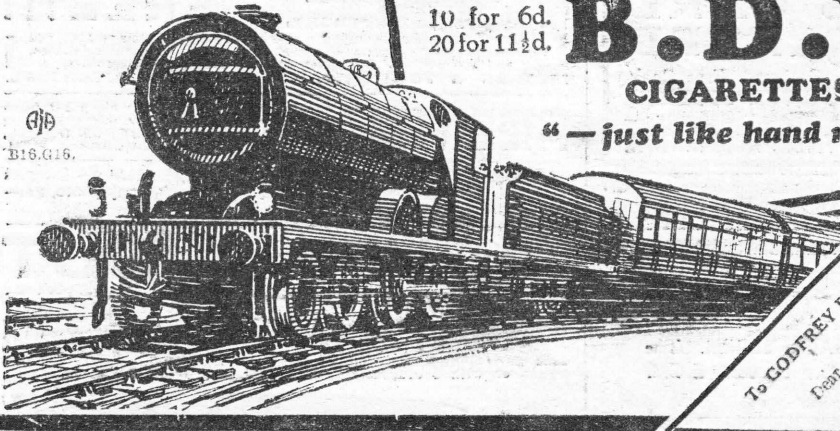
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