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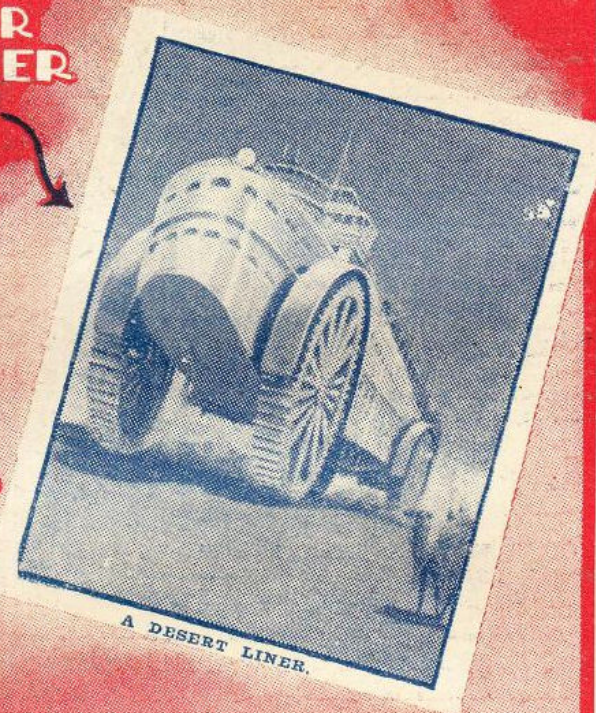
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A GRIPPING LONG COMPLETE STORY OF TOM MERRY & CO.,—

Friendship



Right from the outset of his job as captain of St. Jim's, Tom Merry of the Shell knew that he would be faced by problems more difficult than he had ever experienced before. But for all that he never dreamt of the terrible duty he would be called upon to perform!

CHAPTER 1. Trouble Brewing!

"HERE we are!"

Monty Lowther of the Shell at St. Jim's made that remark as he turned the corner of the corridor that led into the Sixth Form passage in the School House.

Monty Lowther was not alone in this visit to the lofty regions of the Sixth. Manners was with him, and so were Blake & Co. of the Fourth. There were determined looks upon the faces of all of them as they tramped along the passage towards the end study.

One of the study doors opened, and the scowling face of Knox, of the Sixth, glared out at them. It was tea-time, and Knox was hoping that the footsteps in the passage had been those of some fags. But at sight of the party of Shell and Fourth fellows Knox scowled.

"What are you young bounders doing up here?" he snapped.

"That's not your business, is it?" grinned Jack Blake cheerfully. "And curiosity killed the cat, you know."

"No check!" roared Knox.

"As a matter of fact," chuckled Monty Lowther, "we are on a visit to the captain of St. Jim's."

Knox looked taken aback for the moment. Then he growled something under his breath, and slammed the door. It was a sore point with Gerald Knox that visits to the Sixth Form passage on the part of juniors were fairly frequent now that Tom Merry had been elected captain of St. Jim's.

That election was a sore point with several of the Sixth, in fact. But they had only themselves to blame for it. When Kildare, the old captain, had resigned, after some warm words between himself and the Head of St. Jim's—the result of Kildare having wrongly punished an innocent junior—the rest of the Sixth had felt that since anyone may make a mistake at times, Kildare had been hardly used. They had accordingly decided between them

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that none of the Sixth should stand for the vacant captaincy. In this way they had hoped to force the Head to ask Kildare to reconsider his resignation. But the Head had beaten them by a startling move.

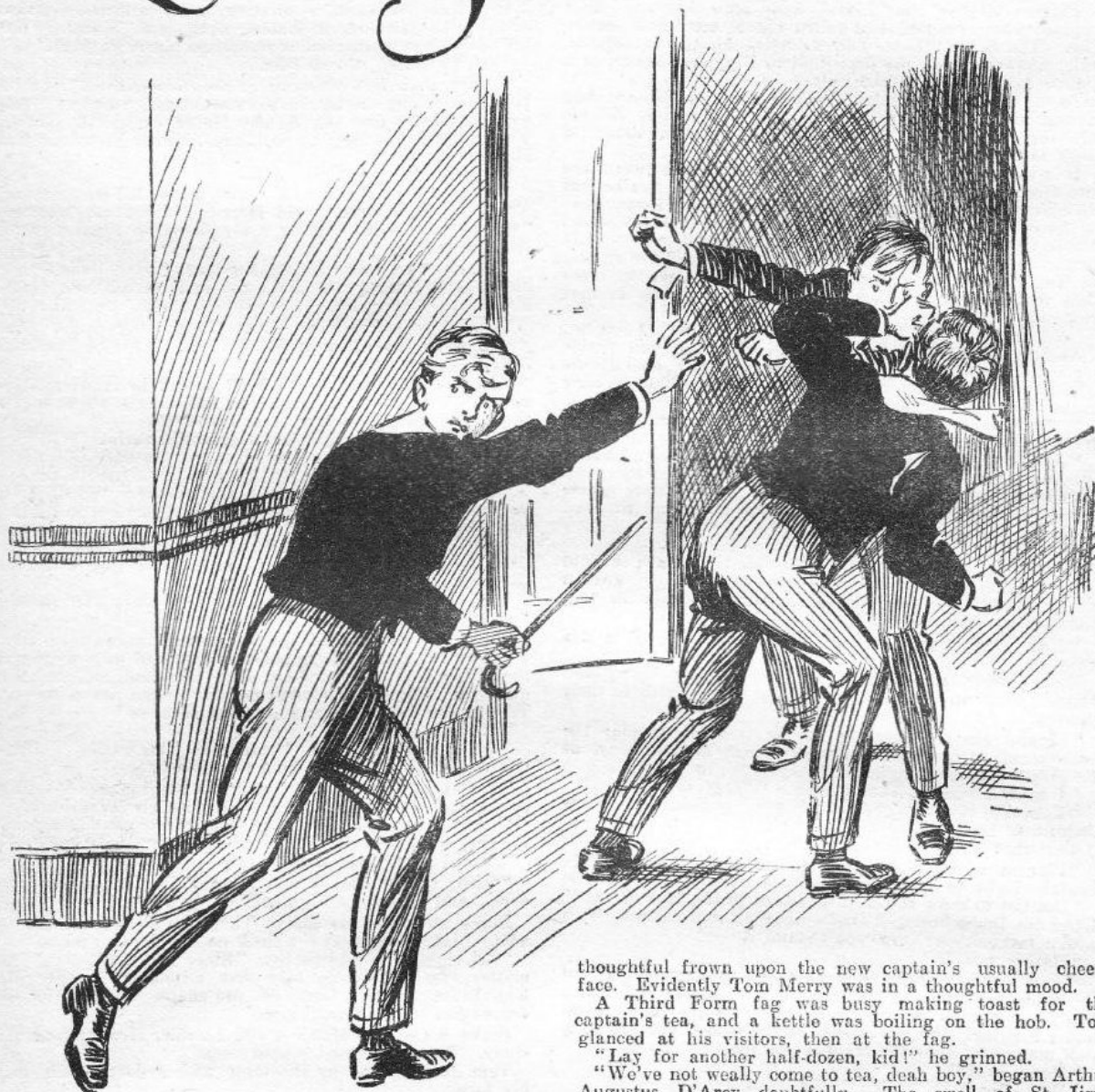
Dr. Holmes had replied to the Sixth-Former's ultimatum by leaving the post of captain open to anyone in the school! The result had been staggering enough. A junior in the Shell had won the election! Tom Merry, previously junior captain, had been elevated to the lofty rank of captain of St. Jim's.

It had taken the school a little while to get used to that state of affairs. But Tom had soon shown that he had to be taken seriously.

He ruled with as firm a hand as Kildare had done. Those fellows who had been unwise enough to imagine that they would be able to do as they liked now that a fellow-junior was in the seat of power, had soon found out their error! Even Tom's own chums had suffered from Tom's ashplant on occasion!

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—THE FAMOUS CHUMS OF ST. JIM'S!
OR Duty? By **MARTIN CLIFFORD**



But though he had proved himself a good skipper, Tom Merry had soon found out that being captain of St. Jim's was not all honey.

It was pleasant enough to have a study in the Sixth Form passage, to have fags at one's beck and call, to be above the usual school rules, such as locking-up time and bounds-breaking, and to have command over the very prefects who in the past had handed out punishments to him for many junior escapades. But on the other hand Tom was beginning to find that the responsibilities of his new post weighed a little heavily at times on his young shoulders.

And, strangely enough, it was his own chums who had proved the worst thorn in the side of the new captain of St. Jim's.

Bang!

Jack Blake knocked on the door of Tom Merry's study, and opened it with a crash as Tom's voice from within bade him enter. Blake & Co. and Manners and Lowther marched in.

Tom was seated by the window, with a book on his lap. But he had not been reading the book. There was a

thoughtful frown upon the new captain's usually cheery face. Evidently Tom Merry was in a thoughtful mood.

A Third Form fag was busy making toast for the captain's tea, and a kettle was boiling on the hob. Tom glanced at his visitors, then at the fag.

"Lay for another half-dozen, kid!" he grinned.

"We've not weally come to tea, deah boy," began Arthur Augustus D'Arcy doubtfully. The swell of St. Jim's adjusted his celebrated eyeglass to survey the crisp slices of toast that the fag was buttering. "Howevah, if you insist—"

"I do insist," said Tom, with a smile. "Shut the door, Herries, will you?"

A change had come over the faces of Tom Merry's unexpected visitors.

They had marched into the study looking very determined—almost grim in fact. This cheery invitation to stay to tea seemed rather to have taken the wind out of their sails!

"Well, it's jolly nice of you, Tommy," said Manners, rather awkwardly. "But, as a matter of fact, we're here on bizney, so to speak—"

"We wanted a word with the jolly old skipper of St. Jim's," explained Monty Lowther.

"I see. Never mind—stay to tea, and gas at the same time, if you've come to gas," answered Tom. "What's the trouble, anyway?"

"Tell you later on," said Blake briefly, glancing at the fag, who was busily rattling out more plates and cups on to

the big table. But a few minutes later the fag had gone, his job finished. Tom Merry pulled up chairs to the table for his guests.

"Now," said Tom, as they all sat down, "what's in the wind, you chaps?"

Blake helped himself to a slice of toast, and coughed.

"Ahem! It's about Figgins!"

"Oh! I see."

Tom Merry frowned.

Figgins, of the New House, had been elected junior captain when the post had fallen vacant on Tom's promotion. The School House had strongly objected to Figgins' rule, however, from the first—and to Figgy's selection of a junior footer team in particular!

As a result the rivalry between the two Houses had flamed out with dangerous bitterness. There was trouble brewing—lots of it! No one knew this better than did Tom Merry himself.

It was unlucky for Tom that the trouble between the two Houses had happened under his captaincy. But he was determined to do the right thing, and show no favouritism to the School House, simply because he himself was a School House fellow. As captain of St. Jim's, he had to be strictly impartial. The School House juniors had hoped for an ally in Tom; but already Tom was making it clear to them that they were very much out of their reckoning in that respect!

"Yaas; it's about Figgins!" nodded Arthur Augustus. "As you know, deah boy, since Figgins has been junior captain, he has been dwoppin' nearly all the School House men from the footah team, and puttin' in a lot of New House boundahs in their place!"

"Why," snorted Herries, "in the last match against Greyfriars there were only four School House chaps playing!"

"And, of course, we got licked!" broke in Digby hotly, spreading jam fiercely on his toast.

"Licked?" echoed Monty Lowther. "We were worse than licked. Greyfriars picked up our team and dropped it in the mud and trod on it!"

"Well?" said Tom, a trifle impatiently.

"After that," went on Blake, "wouldn't you have thought even Figgins would have had the common or garden decency—and sense—to make a few alterations in his rag-time team? But has he?"

"No!" hooted Manners and Herries and Digby in one voice.

Blake leaned across the table towards Tom Merry and banged a fist on the cloth, so that the cups rattled in their saucers.

"Figgins has the cheek to say he is going to play the same team against the Grammar School on Saturday, as he played against Greyfriars!" roared Blake breathlessly.

"I know," nodded Tom quietly. "Figgy told me so."

"You take it vewy coolly, deah boy," complained Arthur Augustus.

Tom shrugged his shoulders.

"Figgins is junior skipper," he answered shortly. "He has the right to select any team he likes."

"But not to show rotten favouritism to the New House!" burst out Blake hotly. "That's what we won't stand! This rotten favouritism! We won't stand it—"

"Rather not!"

"And that's why we've come to see you, Tommy," cut in Manners. "You're captain of the school, and above Figgins although you still play footer in the junior team under Figgins! But, as captain of the school, you can jolly well make him alter the team if you like!"

"Heah, heah!"

"What about it?" cried Blake.

Tom Merry put down his tea-cup. There was a dark frown on his face. For a moment he did not speak. Then he said slowly:

"Rats!"

"Bai Jove! Weally, deah boy—"

"When I was junior skipper, Kildare never interfered with me," said Tom quietly. "So I don't intend to start interfering with the present junior skipper, now I'm in Kildare's shoes. I've toid you that before, as a matter of fact. And it's flat!"

"Oh!" There was a look of dismay on Blake's face.

"But—"

"There are no 'buts' about it!" snapped Tom sharply. "I'm backing up Figgins! Don't forget, too, that I'm skipper, and it's my duty to look after law and order. If you fellows want trouble, you'd better look out. I shan't stand any nonsense—New House fights, and so on. See?"

"Ahem! Yes, but—"

Tom rapped the table with a determined fist.

"And listen to me, you silly asses!" he exclaimed. "You're all right off the rails about Figgy! I tell

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you it isn't favouritism that has made Figgins put a lot more New House men in the team. You may not believe that, but I'm dead certain it's true. Figgins isn't that kind. He's sure that the team he has chosen is the best possible, and the fact that Greyfriars licked them proves nothing, in his opinion. They might have licked any team we'd put up, for all we know—that's what Figgins says!"

"Sort of fat-headed thing he would say!" grunted Blake.

"I'm hanged if I agree with you, Tommy!" cut in Manners. "We had a meeting, after afternoon classes to-day; all the School House, Shell, and Fourth. And we've come to a unanimous resolution about Figgins!"

"What's that?" asked Tom.

"Why, that he's showing rotten favouritism!" hooted Blake, breaking in before Manners could answer. "And we've decided that no School House chap will play in Figgins' team as long as he shows favouritism to the New House!"

"My hat!"

Tom stared at Blake with rather a startled expression.

"And what's more," said Herries, with great grimness, "this evening we're sending a deputation to Figgins to tell him so!"

"That is," corrected Monty Lowther, "if you won't make him alter the team and chuck out some of the New House duds!"

There was a breathless silence in the big study. Tom stared round the grim circle of faces. Then he shook his head.

"I've already told you I don't intend to interfere!" he said, in a curt tone. "And you fellows are all wrong in thinking Figgins is acting from favouritism—"

"Tell that to the marines!" suggested Herries.

Tom flushed.

"It's true enough!"

"We don't agree with you," said Blake. "Well, since you refuse to interfere, we'll send our ultimatum to Figgins to-night! As long as he plays New House duds in place of School House footballers, he won't get a single School House boot kicking in the match against Gordon Gay & Co. on Saturday!"

"That's where you are wrong, anyway," said Tom shortly.

"I shall play if Figgy wants me!"

"Well, we don't count you, of course," said Blake, after a pause. "I s'pose you're not exactly one of us now—you're the giddy captain and Lord High Panjandrum, which is different. But Figgins won't get any of the rest of us—not Talbot, nor Levison, nor old Gussy here—"

"Wathah not!"

"What about St. Jim's?" broke in Tom curtly. "Don't you think you're letting down the school?"

"No," said Manners quietly. "It's Figgins who is letting down St. Jim's, by filling the team with his favourites!"

"I suppose it's no use trying to convince you fellows that Figgins is honest enough?" exclaimed Tom impatiently.

"Fraid not!" said Digby dryly.

"Well, that's what I think," said Tom, with gleaming eyes, "and I back up Figgins!"

Blake rose from his chair. They had all finished tea by now. Blake glanced at the clock on the chimney-piece.

"All right," he said coolly. "Since you won't act in the matter, we'll have to take our ultimatum to Figgins! Thanks for the tea. Come on, you chaps. It's time for the deputation to the New House."

Blake & Co. and Manners and Lowther trooped from the study. The door closed behind them.

Tom Merry stood by the table with a deep frown upon his face.

"The idiots!" he exclaimed bitterly. "They're all wrong about Figgy, too! Why can't the chaps be sensible?"

Then he smiled rather wryly, as he remembered that in the past he himself had not infrequently been well to the fore in inter-House troubles! Now that he was senior captain, however, and responsible for law and order at St. Jim's, he was seeing some things in rather a different light!

Tom Merry was convinced that Figgins was not influenced by favouritism in his selection of the team; but Tom knew he would never be able to persuade his chums of that fact. And they were now the leaders of the School House junior Forms—and leading their followers in search of trouble!

Tom Merry, unlike his rebellious chums, was on the side of law and order! He was determined to prevent open trouble, at least, between the two Houses, and to punish any trouble-makers with an iron hand.

It was not surprising, therefore that there was a very worried frown on Tom's face as he crossed towards the door to yell for a fag to clear away the tea-things.

Already during his reign as captain of St. Jim's, Tom Merry was finding to his cost the truth of the saying, "Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown!"

CHAPTER 2.
Visitors for Figgins:

HERE they are!" An excited yell greeted the appearance of Blake & Co. as they entered the junior Common-room some minutes later.

Nearly all the Shell and the Fourth were assembled there, and they had been waiting for their leaders with increasing impatience. The fellows crowded round them as they came into the room, till Blake & Co. were breathless.

"Well," called out Kangaroo of the Shell, "what did Tom Merry say?"

"What news from the seat of jolly old power?" inquired Cardew of the Fourth, in his drawing voice.

Blake jumped on to a chair, the better to make his voice heard.

"Tom Merry won't do anything!" he announced, and there was a groan. "He's backing up Figgins!"

"Shame!"

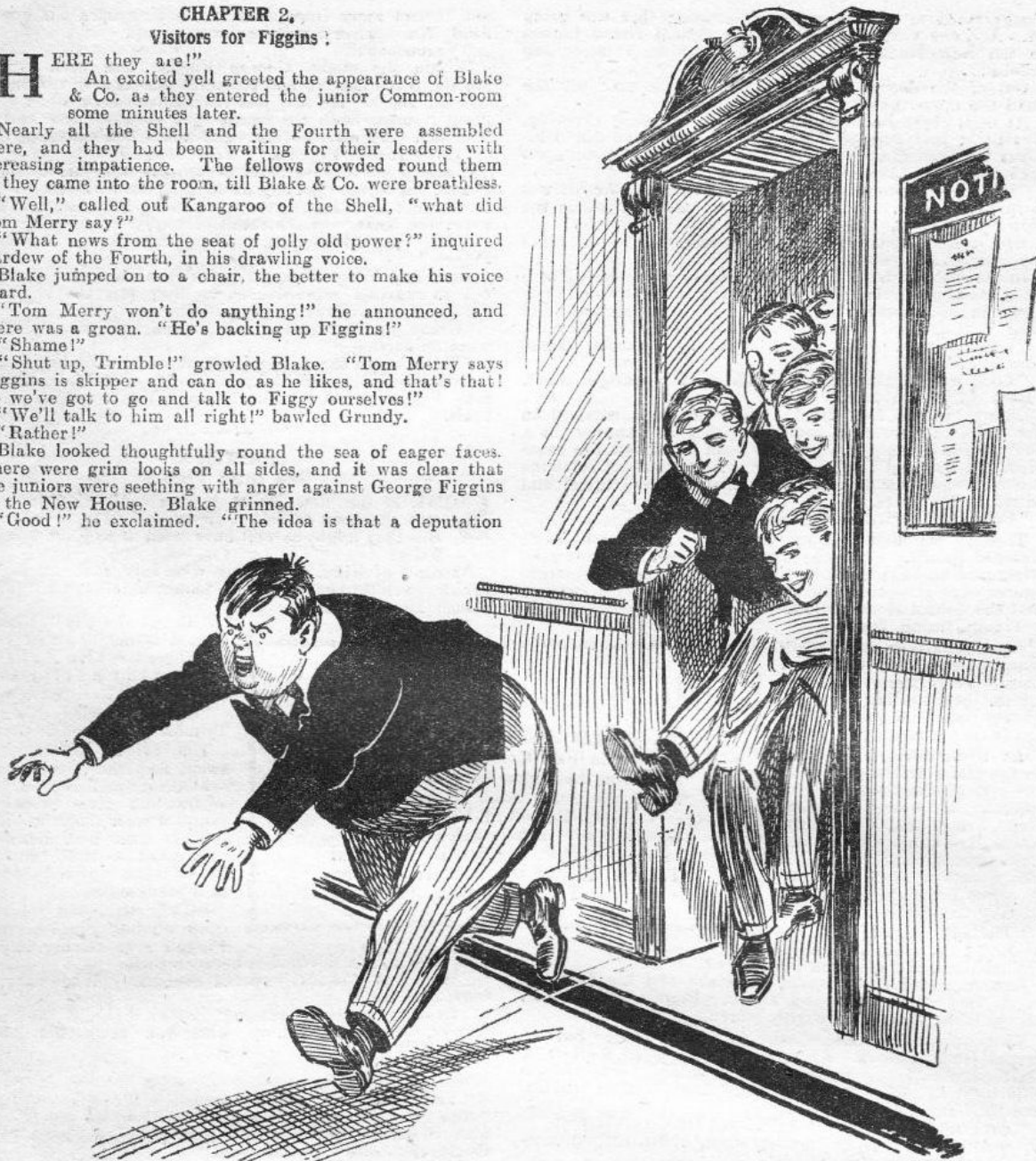
"Shut up, Trimble!" growled Blake. "Tom Merry says Figgins is skipper and can do as he likes, and that's that! So we've got to go and talk to Figgys ourselves!"

"We'll talk to him all right!" bawled Grundy.

"Rather!"

Blake looked thoughtfully round the sea of eager faces. There were grim looks on all sides, and it was clear that the juniors were seething with anger against George Figgins of the New House. Blake grinned.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "The idea is that a deputation



There was a yell from Baggy Trimble as, in the rush for the door of the Common-room, he became wedged between Grundy and Gore. "Grooch!" howled Baggy. "I'm squashed!" Next moment a hefty boot from the rear sent the fat Fourth-Former flying out into the passage. (See Chapter 2.)

tells the cap Figgins that so long as he persists in showing this rotten favouritism none of us will play for his team—"

"I won't for one!" sniffed Baggy Trimble, the fattest fellow in the Fourth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Since Baggy Trimble was a hopeless duffer at football, as at everything else—except eating and sleeping!—his warm refusal to play for Figgins' footer team struck the rest of the juniors as being funny. They roared. Baggy blinked round at them indignantly.

"Oh, really, you chaps—"

"Shut up, Trimble!" snapped Blake. "As I say, the wheeze is for a deputation to tell Figgins what we've decided. But I don't fancy it would be exactly safe for a small deputation to venture into the New House just now! So all of us had better go, in case of trouble!"

"Hurrah!"

"That's the ticket!"

"Then come on!" yelled Blake. "Follow me!"

He jumped off his chair and pushed his way towards the door of the Common-room, with Herries and Digby and D'Arcy clustering round him, and Manners and Lowther at his heels. The rest surged after their leaders, and a

solid flood of fellows, pushing and struggling, poured out through the doorway into the passage. There was a yell from Trimble as he became wedged between Gore and Grundy in the doorway.

"Ow! Yarooooop!"

"Move along there!" yelled Bernard Glyn, behind.

"Grooooooh! I can't!" wailed Baggy. "I'm squashed!"

He struggled wildly, his fat little arms and legs kicking out and waving madly. Then Glyn planted a hefty boot in the seat of Baggy's tight trousers, and the fat Fourth-Former shot out into the passage with another yell.

The rest of the fellows poured out over him, and away along the passage in a surging stream. When the last of them had passed by, it was a very breathless and dishevelled Baggy that crawled painfully to his feet.

"Ow! Beasts! You've nearly killed me, you rotters!" roared Baggy, shaking a fat fist after the departing crowd.

But no one had any time to waste over Baggy's troubles. And the fat junior forgot them as he scuttled after the crowd.

Baggy did not care two pins about the football team that Figgins chose to select—he would not have cared had the junior captain chosen not to select one at all! But

Baggy liked to be in anything interesting that was going on. And the visit, en masse, of the School House juniors to the New House was likely to prove very interesting indeed!

Out of the doorway of the School House and into the quad the crowd poured.

At first, there had been a good deal of noisy shouting. But Blake had stopped that. It would not have suited his plans for Tom Merry or one of the prefects to come upon them and forbid their visit to the New House!

"Quietly does it, you chaps!" Blake warned. And it was a fairly orderly crowd that tramped across towards the New House steps.

Up the New House steps Blake marched with his followers crowding at his heels.

In the entrance-hall, French and Digges of the New House were standing looking at the board. They turned their heads in astonishment at the sound of tramping feet, and their jaws dropped when they saw who the visitors were.

"Great Scott!" ejaculated French. "School House bouncers!"

"Look out!" gasped Digges. He gave a startled shout. "Back up, New House!"

Chowle, of the New House, appeared for a moment on the stairs in answer to that shout—but he vanished in a hurry, with a frightened gasp, as soon as he saw the cause of it. French and Digges did not wait to find out what the School House battalion wanted, either. They turned and bolted up the stairs.

"Come on!" cried Blake, hurrying his pace.

Through the hall and up the stairs the School House tramped noisily. From the direction of the fags' quarters, frightened squeaks could be heard, and scared, scampering figures were glimpsed. But it was the Fourth-Form passage that the School House fellows wanted—and Figgins' study.

Tramp, tramp, tramp!

Up the stairs to the Fourth Form passage they went in a body. There were no seniors within hearing, apparently; at any rate, no prefect had put in an appearance as yet.

As Blake turned the twist in the stairs and appeared at the end of the Fourth Form passage, he heard hurrying feet. French and Digges had found Redfern & Co. in the passage, and Redfern and his two chums were now racing in astonishment to the stairs, to view the visitors.

"Hallo!" gasped Redfern, as Blake marched into view.

"What the dickens do you want here?"

Lawrence and Owen stared at Blake and his followers in startled wonderment and alarm. French and Digges, behind them, looked thoroughly scared.

Visits to the New House were infrequent on the part of School House fellows. And never before could Redfern & Co. remember having seen their rivals from the other House visit them in such large numbers! They scented trouble, and their faces went grim.

"Back up, New House!" called out Redfern sharply.

Instantly doors began to swing open, and surprised faces stared out into the passage.

There were gasps and exclamations at the sight of the School House battalion pouring into the passage solidly from the stairs.

Redfern & Co. fell back before Blake & Co.'s advance. They had to—otherwise, sheer weight of numbers would have swept them over and trampled them underfoot!

On towards Study No. 4—Figgins' study—the School House "deputation" tramped.

Shouts of alarm were ringing out on all sides now. Doors were crashing open, and more and more New House fellows were pouring out into the passage. And it was clear from the looks on their faces that they did not for a moment believe that their rivals from the School House had visited them with any peaceful intentions.

"Look out!"

"School House cads!"

"Back up, New House!"

"Shut up, you New House idiots!" growled Blake.

"We've come to see Figgins!"

"Rats!" snorted Redfern. "Clear out of here before we throw you out!"

Blake had halted outside the door of Study No. 4. Redfern faced him with gleaming eyes and clenched fists.

"You talking to me?" asked Blake.

"I jolly well am!"

"Well, I'd like to see you chuck me out!" grinned Blake,

and turned away from Redfern, flinging open the door of Study No. 4, after a very perfunctory tap.

"Yarooooop!"

Within the study, George Figgins had been crossing hastily to the door to find out what the noise in the passage was all about. He had just reached the door when Blake flung it open—with the result that Figgins' nose and the door met with what novelists call a dull and sickening thud.

"Oh!" roared Figgins. "Yarooooogh!"

Clasping his injured nasal organ, the new junior skipper glared out of the doorway at Jack Blake with tearful eyes. It was not that Figgy was touched by Blake's visit, however; the tears were the result of madly watering eyes.

"Ow!" panted Figgins. "By doze! You silly ludatic! Pff—"

Kerr and Fatty Wynn, Figgins' two study-mates, stared out in startled astonishment as they saw the swarm of School House fellows in the passage.

"Great pip!" gasped David Llewellyn Wynn. "Wh-wh-what on earth—"

"We've come to see Figgins!" announced Blake.

And with a very warlike gleam in his eyes, Blake marched into Figgins' study, with his followers swarming at his heels.

CHAPTER 3. The Great Fight!

SOME of the New House fellows made an attempt to stop the flood of School House fellows into the study. But they might as well have tried to stop the Niagara Falls!

At sight of Figgins, dancing with fury and clasping his rapidly-swelling nose with both hands, a yell arose from the School House battalion.

"There he is!" hooted Clifton Dane.

"There's the rag-time footer skipper!" snorted Gunn.

"Yah!" bawled Baggy Trimble, as excited as anyone.

The School House crowd swept into the study like an avalanche, and Figgins and Wynn and Kerr were surrounded in a moment. They put up their fists—but there was about as much room to scarp in the crowded study as in a sardine-tin.

Blake, squashed chest-to-chest against Figgins, found Figgy's eyes glaring into his

own with only a few inches between them.

"Well, you cuckoos?" roared Figgins. "What have you come here for?"

"To tell you a thing or two!" hooted Blake. "We School House chaps are fed-up with you and your rotten favouritism!"

"Hurrah!"

"Rather!"

"You and your rotten favouritism!" repeated Blake. "And we've come to tell you that so long as you continue with it—filling the team with New House duds—no School House chap will play for you!"

"Bai Jove, no!"

There were angry yells from the swiftly-gathering New House crowd. But as yet the School House chaps were in the majority by a long way, and the New House protests were lost in the deafening cheers and shouts of agreement that followed Blake's words.

"You—you—you—" stuttered Figgins.

"Well," demanded Blake, still jammed tightly against Figgins, "what have you got to say?"

"Will you alter the team and put more of our chaps in it?" howled Herries.

"Will you stop the rotten favouring of New House idiots?" roared Kerruish.

"Because, if not, none of us'll play for you," said Talbot, in a voice that was surprisingly quiet compared with the others.

Figgins glanced at Talbot. Talbot was one of the few School House fellows he wanted to play next Saturday.

"Those are our terms," agreed Levison—another of Figgins' choices from the School House. "Take 'em or leave 'em!"

"Well?" roared Grundy.

"You—you bouncers!" panted Figgins.

"Bouncer yourself!" growled Blake savagely. "What do you say?"

"You want my answer?" Figgins was breathing hard.

"Yes!"

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"Then here you are!" said Figgins, and planted a hefty fist under Blake's jaw.

Blake did not fall over backwards for the simple reason that he was too tightly hemmed in to fall at all. But he crashed into the fellows immediately behind him, and gave a yell. The next moment his own fist landed squarely on Figgins' already painful nasal organ.

"Ow!" panted Figgins.

Fatty Wynn hurled himself at Blake. Herries landed a clenched fist on the New House Falstaff's ear, and Kerr returned the compliment to Herries.

The next moment pandemonium had broken loose.

Throughout the brief and stormy conversation in the study more and more New House fellows had come hurrying to the scene, summoned by urgent messages for reinforcements. The passage was crowded with juniors now, School House and New House in almost equal numbers.

As if they had all been waiting for a signal, the rival bands of juniors fell upon one another tooth and nail.

Like a match put to gunpowder, that first blow in Figgins' study had started a row that was going to be remembered at St. Jim's for a long, long time.

Surging and battling, punching and pommeling, yelling and gasping, the packed crowds in the passage broke loose. In a few moments a deafening riot was in progress.

Blake's temper was at boiling-point. He wanted to get at Figgins, and Figgins wanted to get at him. But it was impossible. The surging crowds swept them apart as fellows poured out of the study to join the main struggle in the passage. Blake was swept out on the floor, so to speak. He found himself at grips with someone who was energetically trying to bang his head against the door, and he found that it was Redfern. Blake punched Redfern heartily in the ribs, and Redfern vanished into the crowd with a yell.

Biff! Thud! Biff!

Tramp! Tramp! Tramp!

Bang! Crash! Thump!

"Take that!"

Herries was fighting fiercely with Owen, and Herries was not getting the best of things. Owen's blood was up! But, as was happening everywhere, as soon as Herries got properly to grips with his adversary he was swept away from him in the seething throng.

"Oh! Ow! Yawwooooh!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, his eyeglass flying on the end of its cord, was battling valiantly with Kerr, the Scottish junior. Kerr blacked Gussy's eye at about the same moment that Arthur Augustus supplied Kerr with a glorious thick ear.

"Back up, New House!"

"Down with the School House cads!"

"School House for ever!"

The battle raged and surged.

It was spreading out now. Study doors had crashed open beneath the strain of fighting swarms, and most of the studies now contained a free fight of their own.

Talbot of the Shell had gone sprawling into Study No. 6, with his arms clasped lovingly round Fatty Wynn. Fatty had been fortunate in landing on top, and the weight of Fatty Wynn was more than a Samson could have withstood. Talbot, breathless and winded, lay helpless on the floor, gasping for air, while the junior from Wales sprawled across his chest.

"Geroooff!" gasped Talbot faintly.

"Where are you, you silly ass?" roared Wynn, sitting up and brandishing his fists. He had not yet realised that he was sitting on the unfortunate Talbot. "Where are you? Come and have your face pushed in!"

Then Grundy and French came flying into the study in a struggling embrace and knocked Fatty Wynn flying. Grundy and French and Talbot and Fatty Wynn began a whirling four-cornered tussle under the table, and the table went over with a crash.

In the other studies similar private scraps were in progress. Half-a-dozen New House fellows were battling with half-a-dozen School House fellows in Figgy's study, and the study was rapidly assuming the appearance of a second-hand shop after an earthquake. Figgins, picking himself up in the passage after a punch on the jaw from Hammond that had sent him flying, happened to glance in through the open door of his study, and his eyes almost popped out of his head at what he saw.

The table was overturned, as were most of the chairs: pictures were broken, and the coals from the coal-scuttle were strewn over the carpet. The ornaments and clock from the chimney-piece were now in the grate, accidentally sent flying by the sweeping blow from Clive's fist that had really been intended for Koumi Rao, the New House junior who hailed from India's sunny clime. The ink-stand had been upset over some of Figgy's most cherished books, and altogether it was with difficulty that the leader of the New House recognised his own study.

"M-m-nny hat!" stammered Figgins, as he stared in dazedly.

He made a feeble attempt to raise his own voice above the din to stop the struggle that was going on amid the ruins of his furniture. But the next moment he was collared by Blake, who had been looking for him quite a while.

Figgins and Blake rolled on the floor of the passage, pommeling each other, and for the moment at any rate Figgy forgot his horror over his wrecked sanctum.

Of all the juniors on the scene, only one was not busy with his fists.

The solitary exception was Baggy Trimble.

Baggy was very busy in a totally different manner, however, and he was enjoying himself hugely.

As soon as the trouble had started Baggy had nipped into an empty study. There he had found what he had hoped to find—a cupboard full of tuck.

And while the battle raged to and fro in the passage and in many of the other studies, Baggy Trimble stood by the open cupboard and stuffed.

It was certainly his lucky day. Though Baggy did not know it, he had happened to hit upon the study belonging to Koumi Rao—a fellow wealthy beyond the dreams of avarice. The Indian junior's cupboard was always well supplied with tuck of the tasty kind that Trimble liked best.

Jam-tarts and cakes, biscuits and meringues, macarons and chocolate eclairs—Baggy was filling himself with everything that his greedy heart could desire. He was beginning to breathe a little heavily, perhaps, but otherwise he was showing no signs of flagging in his exertions.

Baggy was not a fighting-man, but that certainly did not debar him from doing his bit for the School House.

"I'll teach those New House rotters!" panted Baggy, as he stuffed another jam-tart into his jammy mouth. "I'll eat the beasts' grub for 'em. That'll show 'em!"

And Baggy was busily carrying out his brilliant plan when suddenly the door crashed open and a couple of fighting figures came staggering into the study.

Your Editor Says—

EVERY ONE A WINNER!

With Nos. 1, 2, and 3 of our magnificent series of FREE GIFTS in your hands, chums, you can get a better idea of the wonderful achievement to the credit of the good old GEM than I could give you in pages of description. This trio of splendid picture cards is only the beginning of a grand collection, that you can add to week by week until you possess a really worth-while gallery of Mechanical Marvels of the Future. Every one of them represents the best work of a skilled and imaginative artist, produced in co-operation with expert designers and inventors. Not the least amazing of these peeps into the future is depicted in this week's picture, which shows a gigantic "liner" of the desert, capable of transporting its hundreds of passengers across the sandy wastes in which may be seen fantastic ease and comfort to-day, but which, in the years to come, may well be commonplace. Following it up in top-notch style comes "A Submarine Battleship"—the picture you'll find in your copy of the GEM next Wednesday, and which fully lives up to the reputation set by its predecessors. Need I say more?

By the way, are any of your pals missing our record-breaking series of FREE GIFTS? If so, just show them your cards and they won't need to be told what a great chance they're letting slip! And while you're about it, pass on to them that oft-repeated but sound piece of advice:—

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Baggy jerked his head round with a gasp. That gasp was unfortunate. A piece of pastry went the wrong way, and the next moment Baggy's face had gone purple as he choked and spluttered for breath.

"Grooooooh!"

Pratt and Wildrake, the fighting pair who had interrupted Baggy's glorious spread, were far too busy to notice the fat Fourth-Former, however. Wildrake staggered back against the table, and Pratt hurled himself at his adversary. Wildrake dodged and cannoned full into Baggy Trimble just as that purple-faced youth seemed about to expire from suffocation.

"Yoocooop!" yelled Baggy, as Wildrake struck him in the tenderest spot of his podgy waistcoat. He found his breath with a gasp and skipped aside, as Pratt and Wildrake again got to grips. "Ow! Look out!"

But Wildrake and Pratt were too busy to look out. They whirled into Baggy and sent him flying into the grate, where he collapsed feebly like a punctured balloon. On the floor Wildrake got Pratt down, and, grabbing a bottle of ink from the table, began to pour the contents over the New House fellow's head.

"Oh lor!" groaned Baggy. "I'm ill!"

That sharp blow in the waistcoat on top of his coloured feed had been fatal. Baggy's face was assuming the colour of a lettuce.

Pratt, escaping from Wildrake, rushed from the study. Wildrake stood gasping in the centre of the room. His eyes fell on Baggy.

"Grooooh!" panted Baggy feebly. "I—I feel sick!"

Wildrake stared at him.

"So do I!" he said, with a shudder.

"Have—have you been raiding their grub, too?" gasped Baggy.

"No!" roared Wildrake.

"Then why do you feel—grooooh—sick?" inquired Baggy in gulping tones.

"At sight of your face!" explained Wildrake politely, and marched to the door, to hurl himself into the battle and the din.

In the passage the tremendous struggle was raging as fiercely as ever.

All the bad blood between the two Houses had come to a head and was finding vent. The School House fellows' one desire was to punch New House noses. New House chaps wanted nothing else but to black School House eyes. And both sides were indulging in their desires to their hearts' content!

It was known that Mr. Ratcliff, the Housemaster, was out that evening—very fortunately. But how much longer that tremendous battle could continue before the prefects came upon the scene was doubtful.

Not only in the passage and in the studies was the fight being waged. On the stairs more than one pair of fighting couples had struggled together. And Monty Lowther and Tate of the New House had even found themselves in the entrance-hall at the foot of the stairs in the middle of a long protracted duel. So, making the most of it, they peeled off their coats and fought to a finish. Only when Tate was on the floor and did not look like rising again did Monty rush up the stairs to find a fresh victim.

It was a fight on such a scale as the juniors could not remember having occurred between the rival Houses before. It was glorious, the best scrap they had ever had—that was their opinion as they trampled and struggled together.

Had they only known it, Monteith, the captain of the New House, was out that evening as well as Mr. Ratcliff. And Monteith had taken a number of fellow-prefects with him into Wayland. Since the remaining two New House prefects had gone for a stroll down by the river in the warm evening sunshine, there was not a prefect in the House.

Otherwise, the great fight could never have been waged for so long. But the scrappers themselves were far too busy and excited to think or care of prefects.

The great battle raged on.

CHAPTER 4. Up Against It!

"COME in!"

Tom Merry, seated in his study, had just started his prep, when there was a tap on the door. It opened, to reveal a scared small boy, whose face was only faintly familiar to Tom.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed. "Who on earth are you?"

"P-please, my name's Timms," bleated the fag. "I'm in the New House—"

"Oh, I see!" Tom smiled. "Come in, kid! You want to see me?"

"Yes, please! I—I don't want to sneak, or anything, but—but—"

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The New House fag faltered. He was a new boy that term, and he was apparently scared to death of Tom Merry.

"Well?" grinned Tom encouragingly. "Cough it up, kid! What's the matter? Someone been bullying you?"

"Nunno! But—but there's an awful, tremendous fight going on in the New House!" panted Timms. "The School House have attacked the New House, and they're breaking furniture—and all sorts of things! I thought somebody ought to stop it and—"

"Great Scott!"

Tom had jumped to his feet; his brow had gone dark.

"Perhaps I ought not to have said anything!" gasped Timms.

"I'm jolly glad you have!" snapped Tom. He knew that Mr. Ratcliff was out, and that Monteith was out with most of the other New House prefects, for he had seen them go.

A minute later Tom Merry was hurrying across the quad towards the New House.

He ran up the steps, and as he entered the hall the din from above came to his ears.

"Great pip!" muttered Tom. "They sound as if they mean business!"

His eyes were gleaming, his lips set in a grim line.

He had expected trouble between the two Houses, but he had not expected it so soon as this—or so openly. From the sounds that filtered down from above, something like a volcanic upheaval was in progress in the New House.

Tom strode towards the stairs. And as he did so he heard a curious sound on the staircase.

Bump, bump, bump!

The next moment two rolling figures came into view, rolling rapidly down into the hall, clutching at one another and pommelling one another, with their legs and arms waving wildly as they rolled.

Bumping swiftly from stair to stair, the human ball came whirling down towards Tom Merry. Then, with a final crash, it landed at his feet, to sort itself out a moment later into the figures of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and Fatty Wynn.

"Take that!" roared Fatty Wynn, planting a fat fist on Arthur Augustus' nose.

"Yawoooooop!"

Fatty Wynn and the swell of St. Jim's, both looking terribly battered and dishevelled, had come to rest in sitting postures side by side at the foot of the stairs. As yet they had not realised Tom Merry was there. And Fatty Wynn had been the first to recover his breath and resume hostilities.

But the swell of St. Jim's was not far behind.

With one hand he clasped his outraged nose. The other he clenched and planted with excellent aim in Fatty Wynn's eye.

"Bai Jove! Take that, you fat wottah!"

"You howling duffers!" snorted Tom Merry. "Chuck it!"

"Gweat Scott!" panted Arthur Augustus.

"M-my hat!" gasped David Llewellyn Wynn.

Both sitting where they were, the battered pair gazed up at Tom Merry, with consternation on their damaged countenances.

"Tom Mewwy!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

"Oh lor!" groaned Fatty.

From above the sounds of battle swelled louder. Again there was a mysterious, bumping sound on the stairs, and again a struggling human ball came rolling swiftly into sight.

This time it was Grundy and Redfern. They continued their struggle at the foot of the stairs until Tom had dragged them apart; and then their jaws dropped.

"Tom Merry!" exclaimed Redfern, in consternation.

"Oh crumbs!"

"What's going on here?" snapped Tom angrily.

"We've been walloping the New House!" boomed George Alfred Grundy.

"Rats!" hooted Redfern. "We've been walloping you idiots!"

"Well, you'll all four of you take a couple of hundred lines!" said Tom grimly, and turned to the stairs.

As he hurried up them, followed by four dismayed glances, the noise of the struggle in the Fourth Form passage swelled to deafening proportions. And as he turned into the passage itself the tumult was almost thunderous.

"Great Scott!"

The youthful captain of St. Jim's stared at the scene in utter amazement.

He had not realised the terrific proportions that the inter-House battle had assumed.

Not only was the passage filled with struggling figures; it was littered with shreds of torn clothing, with collars and ties and buttons galore, and here and there a shoe! Books from the studies had somehow found their way into the passage, too, and so had coals, and even one or two broken bits of furniture.

Tom Merry staggered back at sight of the amazing scene.

He had seen a good many fights in his time, but he had never seen anything on such a gigantic scale as this!

He clutched at the top of the banisters. He had to stop the fight, if it were possible to stop it!

With a great shout he tried to make himself heard above the din.

"Stop this!" he yelled.

No one heard him. The fight raged on.

Herries and Figgins, locked in a ferocious grip, were sent reeling by Tom, and carried on their struggle half-way down the stairs. Kerruish, sent flying by a powerful punch from Lancelot French, staggered against Tom, and almost knocked the captain of the school reeling down the stairs. Tom caught hold of Kerruish's shoulder, but the Manx junior wrenched himself free, without realising for a moment who Tom was, and hurled himself at French. The two vanished into the fighting tumult together.

"Stop it, you fools!" roared Tom, in hot anger.

His voice was lost in the din. And still the battle raged!

The struggling figures of Julian and Tate reeled into him. Tom grasped them and dragged them apart.

alone he was powerless to stop the riot—for a riot it was. Blood was up! Like two fighting dogs the two bands of angry juniors would take a great deal of separating!

"What the dickens ought I to do?" Tom asked himself helplessly. "I can't stop 'em—"

He broke off, and glanced quickly round.

A step on the stairs had come to his ears, despite the din, and it was not the step of another junior this time.

A startled exclamation leapt to Tom Merry's lips.

For ascending the stairs, with rustling gown and thunderous brow, was none other than Dr. Holmes, the headmaster of St. Jim's!

CHAPTER 5.

The End of the Riot!

"Oh, my hat!"

There was utter consternation in Tom Merry's face as he saw the hurrying, dignified figure of the Head coming up the stairs.

Tom was not worrying about himself, though doubtless



Bump, bump, bump! Fatty Wynn and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, both looking terribly battered and dishevelled, rolled down the stairs in a fierce embrace and, with a final crash, landed at Tom Merry's feet. "You howling duffers!" snorted Tom. "Chuck it!" "Gweat Scott!" "Ni-my hat!" (See Chapter 4.)

"Chuck it!" he shouted savagely.

Julian and Tate stared at him in dismay as they realised suddenly who he was. Then their expressions changed to dogged defiance. They did not mean to chuck it! They wrenched themselves free from Tom's grip and hurried themselves again into the fray.

Tom's face went dark. This open defiance of his authority was the last straw. But what could he do? It was like trying to stop a thunderstorm, he told himself helplessly.

Even as he stood there, wondering what to do, there were quick steps on the stairs. Redfern and Fatty Wynn, followed hot-foot by Grundy and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, came rushing by him, and plunged into the swarm of fighting figures. Evidently they thought that they might as well be hung for a sheep as for a lamb! At any rate, they were not going to miss all the rest of the fun, even for Tom Merry!

Figgins and Herries finished their little argument on the stairs, and came pounding past Tom without noticing him, intent on joining the main struggle. Tom shouted to them as they passed, but in vain.

He realised, with a feeling of utter helplessness, that

the Head would want to know why he had not stopped the riot. It was of the fellows themselves that Tom was thinking. They were in for it now!

"Stop it, you asses!" pleaded Tom hoarsely, in a last vain attempt to quell the tumult before the Head actually arrived in the passage.

But his voice was lost in the din. And the next moment Dr. Holmes had come to a horrified standstill at the top of the stairs beside Tom Merry.

"Bless my soul!" gasped the Head.

From the sounds that had reached his ears from below, Dr. Holmes had realised that there was a fair-sized row in progress! But he had not realised what a tremendous battle was actually taking place, and the sight shocked the old Head. He stared at the seething mass of fighting figures in horror.

There must have been nearly a hundred fellows scrapping in the passage and in the studies. The Head clutched the banister rail, and his usually genial old face took on a glare

that would have sunk a battleship, as Tom Merry remarked later.

"Good heavens!" cried the Head in horror. "What is the meaning of this terrible behaviour?"

"It—it looks like a bit of trouble, sir," mumbled Tom, wishing heartily that he was not there.

"A—a bit of trouble?" echoed the Head dazedly. "A bit of trouble? Bless my soul—it is a riot! Hooliganism! Why have you not stopped it, Merry? How dare you stand here and do nothing?"

"I did try to stop it, sir," ventured Tom feebly. "But—well, it didn't come off!"

The Head turned from the young skipper and surveyed the trampling swarm of fighters with glittering eyes. One or two of the juniors had caught sight of him now, and broke away from their antagonists with utter dismay on their battered faces. But as yet the majority of the fellows were still scrapping away furiously. And the din remained terrific!

"Boys! How dare you?"

The Head's voice was truly awful. It echoed along the passage like thunder, clearly heard above even that deafening tumult. And its effect was magical!

In a moment dozens of perspiring faces were turned towards the head of the stairs. Horror was writ large upon them, at sight of that tall, gowned figure standing at Tom Merry's side. But for a few gasps of consternation a deathly silence fell.

The great fight was over—finished as abruptly as it had begun! The panting combatants stood as if frozen into stone, their eyes fixed in incredible dismay upon the furious features of the Head.

"Oh, my hat!" breathed Blake.

"Cwums! The—the Head!" mumbled Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Oh deah!"

"The Head!" echoed Figgins hollowly, wiping the crimson stream from his almost shapeless nasal organ. "Now we're for it!"

In the terrible silence Dr. Holmes surveyed the crowd of dishevelled juniors, with a jaw as stern and grim as the Rock of Gibraltar.

"I am shocked!" thundered Dr. Holmes, in a voice that caused Baggy Trimble, peeping wide-eyed from one of the studies, to tremble in his shoes and drop a bag of bananas that he had raided from the cupboard. "I have never known such a disgraceful affair! You School House boys—what are you doing in this House? How dare you come here and indulge in this disgraceful rioting?"

No one took it upon himself to explain how they had dared! No one would have opened his mouth for worlds just then. The Head breathed hard.

"Who are the ringleaders?" he demanded in awful tones. Jack Blake, looking anything but happy, stepped forward. He was followed by Manners and Lowther and Arthur Augustus, Digby, and Herries. Then Talbot stepped forward, too. Talbot was not quite sure whether he was a ringleader or not, but he meant to be on the safe side—or the unsafe side!—like the sportsman he was.

"You boys will follow me now," said the Head sternly. "Merry, you will take the names of the rest, and give me a list of them. I will decide their punishment later."

The Head turned and strode down the stairs, with the group of ringleaders trailing after him in a dishevelled line. As they passed the top of the stairs Blake glanced at Tom Merry and made a wry grimace.

"Hard luck!" muttered Tom. "But you silly asses asked for it—"

"Oh, wats!" snapped Arthur Augustus, massaging an already darkening eye, and passed on with the others down the stairs behind the wrathful headmaster of St. Jim's.

As soon as the Head was out of earshot, a babble of angry talk began.

It was clear that, although the Head had successfully stopped the great riot, feelings were still high between the rival parties. The New House bitterly blamed the School House for the whole affair, naturally enough, and the School House retorts were not exactly polite. But Tom stopped further argument promptly, lest it should develop into something more warlike once again, and began his big task of taking down the names of the culprits.

It was not a job that he relished. Though he would have had time to punish the fellows himself, had the Head not arrived on the scene, Tom could not help but feel sorry for them now that they had incurred the wrath of Dr. Holmes. That the Head would not let the juniors off lightly was very certain.

When Tom had at last completed his list it contained the names of nearly all the Fourth and Shell of both Houses. Except for a few fellows such as Skimpole, the Shell naturalist, and one or two others who had missed the big fight for various reasons, nearly the entire Forms had taken part in that momentous affray.

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"Now get back to the School House, you chaps," said Tom shortly; and the School House fellows went off, muttering and disconsolate, and casting many dark glances at their New House rivals.

When the crowd had broken up the wreckage left by the struggle was more easily seen! Tom whistled at the sight of wrecked studies and broken furniture. It would be a long time before the New House forgot their visit from the School House fellows!

After this it would be war to the knife between the rival Houses of St. Jim's!

CHAPTER 6.

On the Carpet I

TOM MERRY was not looking very happy as he knocked at the door of the Head's study some time later that evening. He knew that he was not going to find the Head in a good temper by any means.

He had met Blake & Co. returning from that dreaded sanctum, and Blake & Co. had been twisting themselves into knots after the worst flogging they could remember. Hoisted on the back of Taggies, the porter, they had one and all been most unpleasantly surprised at the strength of the Head's biceps. It would be quite a long time before Blake & Co. were able to sit down again.

In answer to Tom's knock, the Head's deep voice was heard from within. Tom entered the study.

Dr. Holmes was pacing to and fro on the carpet, with a dark frown on his usually kind old face.

"I've brought you the list you asked for, sir."

"Pray lay it on my desk," said the Head grimly. He paced to and fro with rustling gown. "Merry, this shameful affair is a disgrace to the school!"

"Ye-e-es, sir!"

"How was it you failed to stop it?" demanded the Head sternly. "You were on the scene—your duty was to stop this disgraceful hooliganism immediately it began!"

"I did my best to stop it, sir."

"Then you mean to say you cannot control the juniors?" exclaimed the Head sharply.

"I generally can, sir," said Tom awkwardly. "But—well, they got out of hand this time, and—"

"They were certainly out of hand!" snapped the Head.

"Does that mean that under your captaincy the discipline of the school is going to pieces? And why was the New House left entirely without prefects this evening? It is your duty to see that such things do not happen in either House, Merry. I look to you to keep the prefects under you up to the mark, to use the term. Monteith, as captain of the New House, is largely responsible, of course; but you are captain of the school, and responsible in a large measure for the spirit displayed by your prefects."

Tom was silent.

"Of course," continued Dr. Holmes in a more kindly tone, "I realise that, as a junior, you have many difficulties to contend with in your position as captain. I had grave doubts from the first as to a junior's ability to control the school satisfactorily; but since you were elected to the post, I consented to your—er—assuming the reins of office. But I shall expect you to enforce discipline better than this. You must do better, Merry."

Tom shifted from one foot to the other, and went very red. He felt that it was rather rough luck on him that he should be getting the blame in this way. But then he realised that the Head did not understand that it was only owing to the exceptionally bitter feeling that had flamed out between the two Houses that the riot in the New House had come about.

"I will do my best to look after the discipline, sir," said Tom quietly. "I am sorry that this has happened."

Dr. Holmes dropped a kindly hand on Tom's shoulder.

"Yes, you must try to do better." He turned to his desk. "I want you to post this notice on the school board for me, together with your list of the names of the culprits."

"Very good, sir."

"As you will see by this notice, I have confined the culprits within gates for the next two half-holidays," said the Head, handing Tom the sheet of paper on which was written the stern decree. "Also, each of them will write me out five hundred lines. When you have posted the notice, if Monteith has returned to the school please tell him in future to make sure that his House is not left without a prefect to see to law and order."

"Yes, sir," answered Tom. But his heart had fallen.

The gating of the juniors for the next two half-holidays would mean that the coming match against the Grammar School, which was to have been played away, would have

(Continued on page 12.)

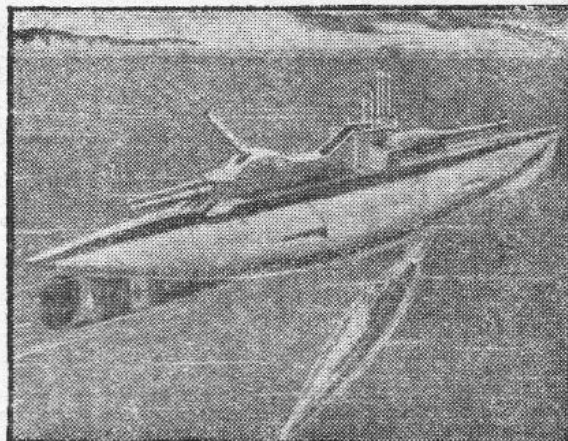
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MARVELS of the FUTURE!



No. 4.—A SUBMARINE BATTLESHIP.

AS Mistress of the Seas it is fitting that Britain should lead in the further "besting" of Father Neptune. When the first men went below the surface of the sea down into the deeps, about one hundred and thirty years ago, in the first submarine that ever was, and blew a merchant ship sky-high, people thought the last word in ocean wonders had been spoken.

Actually the last word hasn't been spoken yet, and since that original tiny undersea craft carried out its perilous undertaking there has scarcely a year gone by without improvements in submarines having been achieved. Now a Leviathan of the Deep, such as no man dreamed of until recently, is in sight.

Enormous bomb-dropping planes threaten to drive the huge warships from the seas. These tremendous vessels make almost unmissable targets from the sky, and their movements, compared with the swift turnings and dodgings of fighting aeroplanes, are sluggish in the extreme. An ironclad that is practically a floating fortress cannot dodge explosive bombs rained down from overhead. And so it seems that they will have to take to the deeps, where they can still fight but where the peril from enemy aircraft is very greatly lessened.

They will become submarine battleships, with great guns that can belch tons of destructive metal the moment the ship rises to the surface, and with fighting aeroplanes stowed away in the vessel's interior for use as emergency requires! Scaplanes and aeroplanes carried in this way to-day inside submarines are only small two-seaters, with wings that fold back so that the aircraft can easily be lowered, in a lift, into a hangar in the parent submarine's interior.

These first experiments, being conducted to-day, in providing submarines with additional 'stings' are amazing enough. Yet

they only touch the fringe, as it were, of stupendous developments that must inevitably come. Then we shall see submarine battleships that carry submarines like those of the

present day—the submarines themselves carrying aeroplanes in their interiors, and not little ones, like those now being experimented with, either!

But it needs only time for the planes to grow, as they will, to keep pace with the increasing size of the submarines—or, rather, undersea cruisers, as these monsters of the future will be. Bomb-dropping aeroplanes will not be the only stings these deep-sea terrors will carry. Torpedoes can be fired whilst the vessel is submerged at great depth, and then be controlled on their course by electrical apparatus, which will be among the "stores."

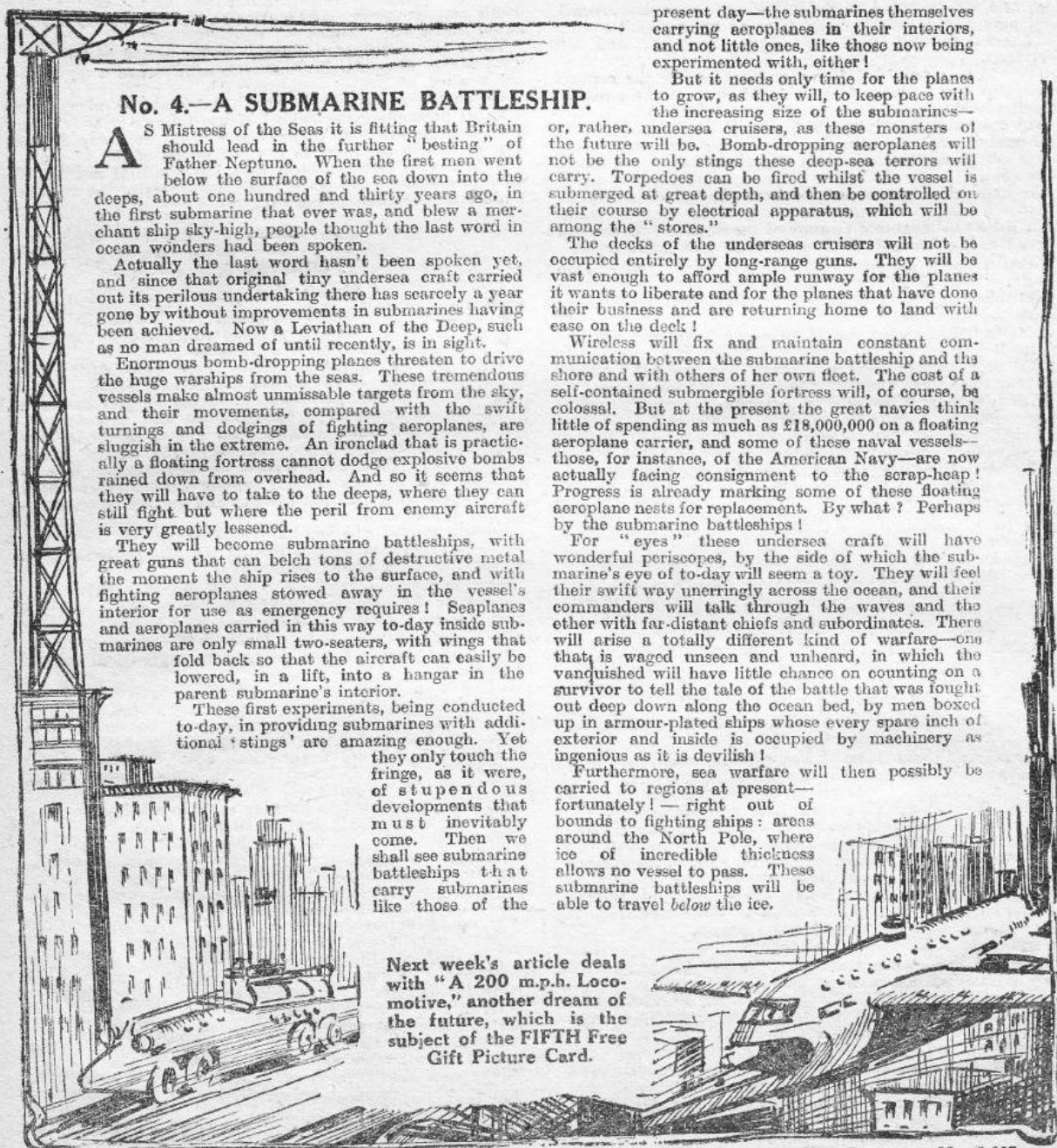
The decks of the undersea cruisers will not be occupied entirely by long-range guns. They will be vast enough to afford ample runway for the planes it wants to liberate and for the planes that have done their business and are returning home to land with ease on the deck!

Wireless will fix and maintain constant communication between the submarine battleship and the shore and with others of her own fleet. The cost of a self-contained submergible fortress will, of course, be colossal. But at the present the great navies think little of spending as much as £18,000,000 on a floating aeroplane carrier, and some of these naval vessels—those, for instance, of the American Navy—are now actually facing consignment to the scrap-heap! Progress is already marking some of these floating aeroplane nests for replacement. By what? Perhaps by the submarine battleships!

For "eyes" these undersea craft will have wonderful periscopes, by the side of which the submarine's eye of to-day will seem a toy. They will feel their swift way unerringly across the ocean, and their commanders will talk through the waves and the ether with far-distant chiefs and subordinates. There will arise a totally different kind of warfare—one that is waged unseen and unheard, in which the vanquished will have little chance on counting on a survivor to tell the tale of the battle that was fought out deep down along the ocean bed, by men boxed up in armour-plated ships whose every spare inch of exterior and inside is occupied by machinery as ingenious as it is devilish!

Furthermore, sea warfare will then possibly be carried to regions at present—fortunately!—right out of bounds to fighting ships: areas around the North Pole, where ice of incredible thickness allows no vessel to pass. These submarine battleships will be able to travel *below* the ice.

Next week's article deals with "A 200 m.p.h. Locomotive," another dream of the future, which is the subject of the FIFTH Free Gift Picture Card.



Friendship or Duty?

(Continued from page 10.)

to be abandoned. And Gordon Gay would scarcely be likely to agree to playing the match at St. Jim's, since the last Grammar School match had been played there. It was the turn of the Grammarians to play at home.

"Well?" said the Head, rather sharply, as Tom stood hesitating.

"There's a match on, on Saturday, against the Grammar School, sir," blurted out Tom. "If the fellows are gated it'll knock it on the head. I mean," he added hastily, "it will have to be scratched. And it's the last match of the season, sir—"

"Well—" The Head hesitated; but he was a sportsman, and he realised that the last match of the season was an important event. "Very well. The team against the Grammar School will be exempt from the order on Saturday, and will be gated on the following Wednesday instead. You may add a note to that effect on my notice."

"Thanks awfully, sir!" said Tom gratefully, and left the study.

There was a troubled frown on the face of the captain of St. Jim's as he went down to the hall to post the notice, together with the list of culprits whom it affected.

Not only did Tom sympathise with the fellows over their stiff punishment; the Head's somewhat acid remarks about the school discipline under his captaincy had upset him a good deal.

He had taken great care to keep the school discipline up to the mark. His conscience was clear on that point.

On the stairs Tom met Grundy of the Shell. Tom stopped him. Grundy blinked at him through two black eyes.

"You needn't do me those lines, Grundy," said Tom shortly. "The Head's punishing everybody!"

"Thanks!" growled Grundy. "What's the Head doing about it? Lickings all round?"

Tom explained what the Head's edict was, and Grundy groaned.

"I'd much sooner have a licking!" he grunted. "Five hundred lines! Oh crumbs! And gated for two halves!"

Grundy's rugged features looked even more disconsolate than before as Tom went on down into the Hall. And Grundy's was not the only gloomy face in the School House when Tom had pinned up the Head's notice. A gating was the punishment that the juniors loathed more than any other.

Five minutes later Tom was back in the New House, where he made for James Monteith's study in the Sixth Form passage.

Monteith had returned, and it was with a very bad grace that he received the Head's message.

"Seems to me," said the New House skipper sullenly, "that you could have stopped the row yourself, if you'd tried, instead of waiting for the Head to turn up."

"Rats!" snapped Tom Merry. "Anyway, you ought to look after your own House!" He grinned to himself. "Please do better in future, Monteith!" he added severely, using the words that the Head had used to him.

"Well, I'm hanged!" gasped Monteith, very red in the face. "You cheeky little—"

"That'll do!" said Tom. "I'm captain, and I'm telling you to look after discipline in this House better. See?"

Monteith looked as though he would explode. But he controlled his feelings with difficulty.

"Very well," he said, almost dazedly. Tom chuckled and departed, feeling better.

As he went down the stairs he met Figgins. Tom grinned at sight of Figgins' battered features.

"Great pip!" exclaimed Tom. "You look as though you've been having an argument with a giddy steam-roller!"

Figgins felt his nose tenderly, and dabbed at a cut lip and massaged a thickening ear ruefully.

"It was a good scrap, wasn't it?" he said gloomily. "A pity the Head barged in on it, though. I—I say, as I don't think it would be exactly safe for me to go into the School House just now so would you mind sticking up this notice for me? It's the team for next Saturday."

"Certainly," said Tom.

He took the sheet of paper that Figgins held out and glanced at it. He smiled rather grimly.

"I see you are putting up the same team as played Greyfriars."

"Yes!" snapped Figgins.

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"The School House fellows said they wouldn't play—you know that, of course?" said Tom slowly.

"I do!" Figgins' voice was grim. "They came over to tell me—hence the trouble. But I'm giving them one last chance. They can play, if they want to. Talbot and Levison and Gussy I want, and, of course, you."

"Do you think they will play?" asked Tom curiously. "Dunno!" growled Figgins savagely. "But they've got their chance."

It was with a very doubtful face that Tom returned to the School House. A big crowd was gathered round the board, discussing the Head's notice. As Tom pinned Figgins' notice up there was a surge forward to read it. Something very like a howl of indignation arose.

"The same team!" roared Blake.

"Only four School House men down to play!" snorted Glyn.

"He's not learnt his lesson, evidently," said Levison, with a growl, and took a pencil from his pocket. "This'll show him I meant what I said, for one!"

And he crossed out his name with a heavy line. Talbot stepped forward and did the same. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy pushed his way through the crowd.

"Pway lend me a pencil, somebody!"

A dozen pencils were thrust out towards the swell of St. Jim's very promptly. D'Arcy took one, and crossed out his name with great care.

There was a delighted cheer from the crowd in the Hall. Tom Merry shrugged his shoulders and turned away without a word.

He knew that nothing he could say would be of any use towards persuading the School House fellows to alter their drastic decision. He himself would be the only School House chap in the team in the last match of the season!

It was with clouded brow that the youthful captain of St. Jim's went up the stairs, with the cheers of the warlike juniors still echoing in his ears.

CHAPTER 7.

Blake's Great Idea!

THE next day was Wednesday, the first of the gated half-holidays. Even at breakfast there was a glum atmosphere in the School House.

During morning lessons there were dark looks cast between New House fellows and School House.

On his way to Mr. Lathom's class-room Figgins had seen the scored-out names on his footer notice, and, without turning a hair, had coolly written New House names in over those of the three rebels. The watching School House juniors had given a derisive cheer as they watched him do so; and, with feelings at their present height, there might have been a scene had not masters and prefects been crossing the Hall.

Though they would not have admitted it for the world, it was beginning to look as though the School House were getting the worst of the argument.

They had failed to force Figgins' hand. Figgy had declined to be intimidated, and had kept to his original team, despite School House threats. And he did not seem to mind now that the School House had carried out their threats, and the three who might have played had refused to do so.

It looked as though the only result of it all would be that the School House footballers would miss the last match of the season! There were thoughtful looks on the faces of Talbot, Levison, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy that morning.

"I wonder if I did wight, deah boys?" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's, in Study No. 10, after dinner, as the four chums of the Fourth were sitting disconsolately in their room, wondering what to do with their half-holiday.

"Of course you did!" snorted Blake.

"But the thweat not to play was weally only made to force Figgay to atah his wotten team!" complained Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "Since it failed, by withdwawin' f'rom the team it is weally wathah like cuttin' off one's nose to spite one's face, so to speak."

"It would improve your face," said Herries gloomily.

"Bai Jove! Weally, Hewwies—"

"You've shown Figgins who's who, anyway," said Digby reasonably. "We should all have looked awful asses if we'd threatened to withdraw from the team and then hadn't!"

"Hear, hear!" cried Blake.

Arthur Augustus sniffed.

"But then you two were not down to play in Figgay's team, so it's all vevy well to talk!" he said stiffly.

Blake and Digby coloured. It was a sore point that Figgins had not recognised their sterling worth on the footer field.

"Oh, rats!" grunted Blake. "You talk too much, Gussy! You don't mean to say you are worm enough to be thinking of backing out now and offering to play for Figgins?"

"Oh, wathah not!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus hastily. "I was only thinkin' it is wotten, missing the last match of the season, don't you know—"

"Rats!"
"And if Gordon Gay and the Gwammawians walk over us, I shall feel it is weally partly my fault, deah boys," continued Arthur Augustus.

"That's all rot!" hooted Herries. "If Figgins' blessed team is licked—as it's sure to be—it's all Figgins' fault, of course!"

But, though he relapsed into silence, Arthur Augustus did not look by any means convinced.

"Of course," said Blake suddenly, "the pity of it all is that Tom Merry is playing! It spoils the School House rebellion, having one School House chap in Figgins' team. Of course, Tommy's different, in a way, now—"

"He couldn't refuse to play," agreed Digby. "As captain, he's got to be impartial between the two Houses, whatever he really thinks."

"But it's a pity he's playing," persisted Blake thoughtfully—"a great pity!"

"It would teach Figgins that he can't afford to treat

the School House in this rotten way, if we could keep Tom Merry from playing!" exclaimed Herries, with gleaming eyes. "My hat, yes! If Tommy wasn't playing, it would make Figgins' team look too potty for words! He'd have to ask some School House chaps to play, then!"

"Of course he would!" cried Blake eagerly. "Tommy makes all the difference. With him in it, Figgins' team is just possible. Without Tom Merry it would be a joke! Figgins couldn't manage without some School House support somewhere."

"What about locking Tommy in the box-room on Saturday?" suggested Herries enthusiastically. "Then, when he can't be found to go off to the Grammar School, Figgins will be forced to strengthen his team by begging some School House chaps to play, after all. When he's promised some of our crowd places in the eleven, we'll release Tommy, and he can play with the rest!"

"Wippin' ideah!" ejaculated the swell of St. Jim's.

But Blake shook his head.

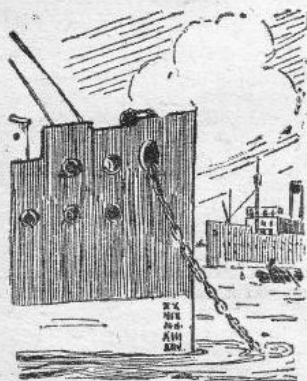
"Rats! It's an old stunt, to lock a chap in the box-room! Figgins would guess, and he'd go straight to the

(Continued on the next page.)



Q. What is a ship's draught?

A. You need not fear, "Timid Timothy," when you make your trip across to Norway with your uncle. The ship's draught about which you have heard won't give you one of the colds you dread may spoil your holiday. This term means the depth of water a vessel draws—that is, the vertical depth of the immersed portion of her hull. Or, in other words again, the draught is the distance from the keel of a floating ship to the surface of the water, reckoned vertically. The draught varies, as you will understand, with the amount of cargo in a vessel, and to tell what water she is "drawing" there are Roman numerals on the stern and stern posts. Also, there is what is



To tell what water a ship is "drawing," numbers representing feet are painted on her bow—as shown.

called the Plimsoll Line marked on her hull and below which she must not sit by law. I am sure, "Timid Timothy," that all reader-chums will join with me in hearty congrats on your great chance to visit Norway for a holiday. Jolly good luck!

Q. What is a snail's pace?

A. Reggie Tupman complains in a letter to me that a boy in his Form told him that he was too slow to catch snails. This set him thinking and, after turning the matter over in his mind for three days, he decided to write and inquire exactly how fast a well-conditioned snail can travel when in training. For your sake, Reggie, I timed one of my garden snails the other night over a course nine inches long on a gravel path and it accomplished the distance in three hours, fifteen minutes, and two and three-fifths seconds. I shall not, however, be surprised if I have a few hundred letters from readers stating that snails from their own cabbage patches have beaten this remarkably fast effort. But here is a question for you in return, Reggie, and other readers who like a problem to grapple with: A snail starts to climb up a six-foot pole. It crawls up two feet per day and slips back one foot each night. How long before that snail gets up the pole? I will print the answer lower down on this page.

Q. What was the Iron Maiden?

A. One of the many means used in England and elsewhere in olden times for the torture of criminals or alleged criminals. In shape it resembled a cupboard made of iron and with a hinged door. The inside was full of spikes. The unfortunate victim was simply put in and the door slowly shut on him. Of the two evils I would sooner get in a jam on one of London's underground trains. One does have a dog's chance of coming out alive.

Q. Where does London get its gas?

A. A good deal, George St. J., is manufactured in the Houses of Parliament, which have been described as the Gas Works of the whole British nation. But I presume you mean the variety that mother uses when she wants to cook you the sizzly old rasher for brekker. This gas is obtained from the Gas Light and Coke Company which has supplied the metropolis for over a hundred years.

Q. What is the difference between a mandoline and bandoline?

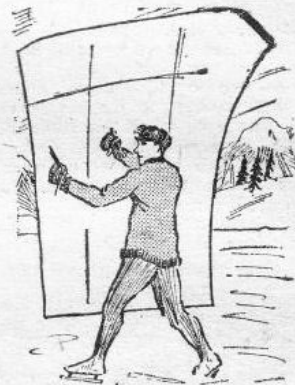
A. A mandoline is a stringed instrument, musical or otherwise, according to who plays it. Bandoline is a sticky preparation for fixing the hair. A young musician who used to be an acquaintance of mine, did not appear to know this difference, for one night in an argument, he parted a pal's hair with a mandoline. He comes out of gaol next Thursday!

Q. Where may you see human "sailing boats"?

A. In Norway. Expert skaters often may be seen on the ice in this frigid land, using a sail to waft them along as shown in the accompanying picture.

Q. What is the Franchise?

A. Don Scattersthaite writes from the Midlands to tell me he has heard this term used in connection with the election. Quite probably, my chum! In this sense it means the qualification or right to the



In Norway expert skaters may often be seen carrying large sails—to help them on their way, of course.

vote. With regard to your other query: Your former pal who has told you that you are to distribute a thousand leaflets voluntarily for one of the candidates or get a thick ear, is hardly within his legal right. But do not write to the respective leaders of the Conservative, Liberal, and Labour parties about it; they may be busy.

(The answer to that snail problem set earlier on the page is five days. The snail gets to the top of the pole at the end of the fifth day, after which it doesn't matter a hoot whether it slips and dislocates its neck!)

box-room to look for Tom Merry! That wouldn't work. But I've got a wheeze that might!"

"Well?" demanded Digby eagerly.

"Listen!" Blake jumped from his chair and faced his three chums, with a quick chuckle. "You know Miss Fawcett?"

"Of course, dear boy!"

Miss Priscilla Fawcett was Tom Merry's old governess—a dear old lady, who visited Tom at the school not infrequently.

"What about her?" inquired Digby, very perplexed.

"Tom Merry would do anything for her, wouldn't he?" muttered Blake. "Well, s'pose Miss Fawcett was to turn up on Saturday, and insist that Tom spent the afternoon looking after her; however keen Tom was to play, he couldn't refuse the old lady, could he—not if she cried when he refused to stay with her—"

"Wathah not! But how can we get Miss Fawcett to do that?" asked Arthur Augustus, with an impatient sniff.

"Oh, we could!" grinned Blake. "It might not be Miss Fawcett, you see, but as long as Tom Merry thought it was it would be just as good!"

"You mean, somebody could impersonate the old lady?" breathed Digby.

"That's it!" nodded Blake excitedly. "Some chap could impersonate her, and arrive at the school on Saturday, and insist that Tom Merry looks after her instead of going off to play footer! Tom couldn't refuse, out of politeness to a lady—besides, he'd do anything for Miss Fawcett. He'd have to tell Figgy he couldn't go, after all, to play in the match! And without Tom Merry the team would be so weak that Figgins would jolly well have to ask for School House men to make it a team that could be called a team; otherwise, his eleven would be the laughing-stock of the Grammar School when it arrived!"

"And when he'd given places to our chaps—we'd insist on at least five or six School House men playing—we'd admit who Miss Fawcett really was, and Tom could come too?" chortled Herries.

"Exactly, old hoss!"

Arthur Augustus drew a deep breath. He adjusted his monocle, and surveyed Blake with an approving glance.

"Blake, dear boy, I congratulate you on a weally wippin' ideah!" said the swell of St. Jim's delightedly. "You weally must have a few bwains somewhere, aftah all—"

"Why, you cheeky rotter!" roared Blake.

"But who could do the impersonation without Tom Merry spotting it at once?" asked Digby doubtfully.

Blake wrinkled his brow in thought for a moment. Then he grinned with satisfaction.

"Cardew!" he said. "Cardew's the man! He's pretty hot at that sort of thing."

"But you're not going to tell me he could fool Tom Merry into thinking he was really Miss Fawcett!" exclaimed Digby, still doubtful.

"Why not? He could pretend he has a bad cold, so the voice wouldn't give him away. He's a dab at making up with grease-paints and things, I know. He knows Miss Fawcett well enough, and could imitate her face rippingly, I'll bet. The eyes are a bit difficult, p'raps; but he can wear some slightly darkened glasses, and say the doctor has ordered them to be worn to ease the eyes. As for the clothes, we could get most of them from the dramatic society property-box."

"Good!" grinned Herries. "That's the ticket! Cardew could fool Tom Merry cleverly enough, I'm jolly sure!"

"Let's go and ask him if he'll take the job on!" said Blake eagerly.

And the four chums of Study No. 6 hurried from the room and along the passage towards Study No. 9.

Cardew was at home, alone. He grinned as Blake explained the object of their visit. A flickering gleam came into the eyes of the slacker of the Fourth.

"It would be rather an amusin' rag, dear man!" he murmured thoughtfully, his eyes on Blake's eager face. "It ought to work, too; and even if it didn't, there's no harm done! As you say, if we could persuade Thomas to stand down from the team it would force Figgins' hand, right enough!"

"Then you'll do it?" exclaimed Herries.

"Gad! Yes!"

Blake gripped the languid hand of the slacker of the Fourth and sealed the bargain.

CHAPTER 8.

"Miss Priscilla Fawcett!"

"**B**LOW it! Rain!"

It was Tom Merry who made that exclamation in a tone of great exasperation as he tumbled out of bed and went to the window to look out at the weather. For this was the day of the match against the

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Grammarians—the last match of the season. And it was raining.

"Blow!" repeated Tom.

It was not raining hard, just a nasty warm drizzle that looked as though it meant to keep on all day. It kept on while Tom dressed, and during breakfast and during classes, at any rate! There seemed very little prospect of it clearing up before the match.

As Tom came out of the Shell class-room after last lesson that morning, Grundy planted his big figure in his path. Tom halted.

"Look here," said Grundy, "what about the match this afternoon? You still mean to play?"

"Certainly!" nodded Tom Merry.

There was quite a large crowd of School House fellows gathered round him, and from the looks on their faces it was clear that they were in ill-humour. Evidently there was a very strong resentment against Tom Merry on the part of a very large number of the fellows. Though Tom was captain of the school, they still regarded him as something of a blackleg for consenting to play in Figgins' team that afternoon.

"Don't you think you ought to back up your House—even though you are captain?" sneered Gore.

Tom's eyes gleamed.

"No, I don't!" he said steadily. "I'm backing up Figgins, as I've told you often enough. And if you don't like it, you can lump it!"

He swung on his heel and pushed his way towards the stairs. There were growls and murmurs from the crowd of School House fellows.

Manners, who had passed by the crowd, turned on them angrily.

"Shut up, you asses!" he snapped.

"It's all very well for the rest of us to refuse to play under Figgins, but Tom Merry is different! He can't go against the junior captain, on principle—"

"Rats!" growled Kerruish. "He's a blackleg!"

Manners clenched his fists. Like many others of the Shell and Fourth Manners was thoroughly "up against" Figgins for what he considered the New House leader's unfair favouritism of New House men. But he had the sense to see that Tom was in an awkward position, even had his feelings been strongly against Figgins; as captain, Tom had to stand up for law and order.

"Say that again, and I'll knock you down, Kerruish!"

Kerruish did not say it again. He went red and turned abruptly away. At heart Kerruish was a decent chap; but, like many others, he felt a good deal of resentment against Tom Merry at the moment.

"If Tom Merry plays this afternoon, I think we ought to make it hot for him!" grinned Racke maliciously.

Racke was not a footballer, and cared little for footer matters. But he welcomed an opportunity of angering Manners and of stirring up ill-feeling against Tom Merry.

"Oh, shut up!" snapped Manners contemptuously. "What



"I've brought some of your Sixth-Form friends a Fawcett brightly. They say they all love a game were looking dazed as they entered the room," gasped North. "I did!" beamed Miss Priscilla

does footer matter to you, anyway, Rakee? You wouldn't know a football from a goalpost!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a laugh, and the laugh was against Rakee. He growled something and stamped away. Monty Lowther took Manners by the arm. He did not want to see his chum mixed up in a row with the rebels. The malcontents were many and Manners might have got a rough handling.

"Come upstairs old boss!" murmured Monty, and the two chums went up to their study.

On the stairs they met Cardew.

"What's the row in the hall?" inquired Cardew lazily.

"A lot of silly asses are saying Tom ought to be stopped from playing this afternoon!" snapped Manners.

Cardew raised his eyebrows.

"Really?" he murmured. "How interesting! Do you know, I shouldn't be surprised if Thomas doesn't play this afternoon, either."

He grinned and passed on. Manners and Lowther looked at one another puzzled.

"Now, what on earth did he mean by that?" queried Monty Lowther.

But that was a question that neither of Tom Merry's chums could answer. Manners and Lowther knew nothing of Blake's little scheme.

It had been considered wisest not to tell them. Though Manners and Lowther were "up against" Figgins like the rest of the School House juniors, and would have refused to play under Figgins' leadership had they been asked, their friendship with Tom Merry might have induced them to warn him of Blake's plan. So they had been kept in safe ignorance of Cardew's coming impersonation.

It was still raining after dinner. Tom was the only junior in the School House who minded. Nearly all the rest were gated that afternoon as the result of the Head's decree, so were not affected very much by the weather.

But Tom Merry, in his study after dinner, looked out at the rain rather gloomily. The match was going to be a wet and muddy one, without a doubt.

He glanced at his watch. There was still nearly an hour before he need leave for the Grammar School.

"Just time to go over the minutes of the prefects' meeting," Tom told himself, and sat down at the table to do so.

As captain of St. Jim's Tom was a busy man these days—the busiest fellow at St. Jim's! There was generally some job in connection with the captaincy to be done during his spare moments.

He was interrupted in his task by a tap on the door. It opened to reveal the grinning face of Blake.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Tom.

"Hallo!" answered Blake cheerily. "Busy? Here's a visitor for you, old scout!"

"A visitor?" echoed Tom, in bewilderment. "Who?"

There was a rustle of skirts in the passage. The next moment a figure in black, with a smiling old face peeping

out from beneath an old-fashioned bonnet, was framed in the doorway.

"Miss Priscilla Fawcett," announced Blake politely.

The figure of the little old lady—as it at any rate appeared to be—stepped into the room, beaming upon Tom Merry. In the passage, Levison and Clive could be seen, and Herries, Digby, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Tommy darling!" exclaimed the pseudo Miss Priscilla fondly.

For a moment Tom Merry stood staring at his visitor in astonishment. It was so unusual for Miss Fawcett to visit him without writing to let him know of her intended visit that he felt quite taken aback for the moment. Then a grin of delight came over Tom's face. He was very fond of his old guardian, and was always glad to see her at St. Jim's.

He stepped quickly forward.

"Why," he exclaimed, "I didn't know you were coming down, dear! I never got a letter—"

"Perhaps it got lost in the post, Tommy darling," suggested Miss Priscilla. "Oh, how careless of the postman! I shall write to the Postmaster-General—indeed I shall!"

Her voice sounded unlike her usual clear, high tones. They were high-pitched, but were faint and husky.

"You have got a rotten cold!" said Tom in concern.

He was about to kiss the old lady, as he knew that she always expected him to do so, when Miss Fawcett drew back with astonishing quickness.

"You mustn't kiss me!" she said hastily. "My cold is so bad, and you might get it!"

Tom smiled. Then a look of concern came into his face. His eyes were on the dark glasses perched on her nose.

"You are wearing different glasses?" he said questioningly.

"Yes," nodded Miss Fawcett. "My eyes are a little weak, you know, and—the doctor has told me to wear dark glasses for a little while. I find them very comforting."

Tom glanced at the fellows in the passage.

"Come in, you chaps!" he exclaimed. "Thanks for showing Miss Fawcett up to my study!"

"Oh, not at all!" said Blake.

Miss Fawcett beamed round the room.

"These dear little boys have been telling me all about your being captain of the school now, Tom darling! I think it's wonderful! I always said they would make you captain of the school one of these days!"

"Oh—ah—yes!" Tom went a little pink. "It was really more of a fluke than anything, but—"

"Nonsense! I'm sure the headmaster has realised your true worth!" exclaimed Miss Fawcett earnestly. "He sees how noble and good you are!"

There was a muffled sound from Herries that sounded suspiciously like a suppressed chuckle. Tom, red as a beetroot, glared at Herries. Miss Fawcett beamed at Tom Merry.

"Dear boy!" she murmured. "Dear, wonderful boy!"

"Th-thanks!" stammered Tom. "But, really—"

"Now," interrupted Miss Fawcett briskly, in the same rather faint, husky voice, "I've brought you a little present, Tommy darling!" She took from under her coat a flat parcel and handed it beamingly to the surprised captain of St. Jim's. "I want you and your little friends to play with it this afternoon."

Wonderingly, Tom unwrapped the brown paper. Then he gave a gasp.

Miss Fawcett's present was a "snakes-and-ladders" board, together with dice and counters.

"M-m-my hat! Snakes-and-ladders!" gasped Tom. "I—I say, this is awfully kind of you—"

"Oh, not at all, darling! I knew you would like a nice exciting game of snakes-and-ladders on a nasty wet afternoon like this!"

Tom stared at her blankly, and at the grinning faces of his chums from the Fourth.

"I'm awfully sorry, dear!" he exclaimed hastily. "I—I should love a game, of course, but not this afternoon. You see, I've got to play football this afternoon—"

"Football?" echoed Miss Fawcett shrilly, in evident horror. "Oh, but I can't allow you to play football on a nasty wet afternoon like this!"

Tom jumped. A look of dismay sprang into his face.

"But—"

"No football!" said the old lady firmly. "It would mean your death of cold!"

"Heah, heah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gravely.

"Rather!" agreed Blake solemnly.

Tom glared at the Fourth-Formers. Then he turned patiently to the old lady.

"I'm ever so sorry," he said, with a troubled look, "but I have to play in a school match, and so I can't really get out of it!"

Miss Fawcett—or her understudy—gazed at him tearfully.



ing, Tommy darling!" announced Miss Priscilla of snakes-and-ladders! The three prefects "Did you say snakes-and-ladders, ma'am!" "I know all little boys play it." (See Chapter 9.)

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "Oh! Tommy, do you really mean that you will defy my wishes?"

"My hat! Nunno! At least," he went on desperately. "I am awfully sorry, but I must! You see, it's a school match—"

"You mean you care nothing for my wishes?" cried Miss Fawcett, apparently very near to tears. "And you want to go away this afternoon and leave me, when I have come down specially to see you? Oh, Tommy, how could you?"

And Miss Fawcett sank down in a chair and produced a little white handkerchief, with which she began to dab at her cheeks.

Tom Merry watched her in consternation.

"Oh crumbs!" he muttered.

Not for the world would Tom have caused one moment's unhappiness to Miss Priscilla Fawcett. But how could he stand down from the match now, even for her sake?

"But if you come and watch the match—" he exclaimed eagerly.

"In this rain!" sobbed Miss Fawcett. "Do you want me to catch my death of cold?"

"Oh, dear!" Tom shuffled his feet unhappily. "No, I suppose not! But—"

"Oh, how can you be so cruel?" wailed Miss Fawcett.

Blake moved across to Tom's side.

"Don't be a cad!" muttered Blake, shaking his head solemnly at Tom. "Hang it all, even footer isn't so important as keeping the old lady happy, surely?"

"I—I suppose not," gasped Tom miserably.

By now Miss Fawcett seemed to be sobbing almost as though her heart would break. Tom could stand it no longer. He glanced at the clock. Yes, there was just time to tell Figgins, and for the junior skipper to get hold of a substitute.

He crossed quickly to the old lady's side, and laid a hand on her shoulder.

"Don't cry, dear!" he begged. "I—I won't play footer this afternoon!"

Miss Fawcett's tears stopped with rather astonishing suddenness. She grasped Tom's hand with trembling fingers.

"My dear little Tommy!" she cried warmly. "How sweet of you! How good you are—how kind! You promise?"

"Ye-es!" mumbled Tom Merry wretchedly.

"You'll stay at the school and play snakes-and-ladders with me?" beamed Miss Fawcett. "I know little boys love snakes-and-ladders so!"

"Y-yes!" Tom glanced at the group of Fourth-Formers. "I say," he muttered, "one of you chaps go and tell Figgins, will you? Tell him I'm frightfully sorry, but explain—"

"Vewy good, deah boy!"

Arthur Augustus turned briskly to the door, and vanished, followed by the rest in a body. They evidently felt that it would be too risky for one of them to venture alone into the New House! There was safety in numbers when putting their heads into the lions' den!

CHAPTER 9.

Snakes-and-Ladders!

TOM'S face was a picture of worried feelings as he closed the door behind them. He glanced across at the figure of the old lady in the chair. She was smiling happily again, he noticed with relief.

But there was something puzzling about her. Tom could not quite decide what it was, but undoubtedly Miss Fawcett seemed a little different this afternoon from her usual self. He told himself that it must be those darkened glasses—and, of course, her cold had altered her voice.

"Oh dear!" he muttered miserably. Glad though he usually was to see his old guardian, Tom was by no means glad of her visit this afternoon!

To have to stand down from the match at the last moment like this was a terrific sacrifice. But it had to be made. Even footer was not so important that he must make the dear old lady unhappy because of it. Had she merely seemed disappointed, Tom would have played. But he could not stand seeing her in tears. Any sacrifice was better than that!

But in these circumstances particularly, it was really very awkward—more than awkward! What would Figgins

say? Tom hoped to goodness that Figgins would understand! It would be rotten if Figgins thought it a trick of his to avoid going against School House public opinion!

And whom would Figgins get to play in his stead?

There was nobody else in the New House who was fit to play in a school match! The ten best New House men were already down to play. Figgins could not possibly find an eleventh without going to the School House. But what would the School House do?

Then Tom's heart leapt. Perhaps this was a blessing in disguise, after all! Figgins might come to terms with the School House at the last moment, and agree to play half a dozen School House men, if only to meet them half-way in the matter of forming a team. If so, such a team would be better than the team with ten New House men in it that was to have met the Grammarians that afternoon!

"My hat! P'raps Figgyl'll do it!" breathed Tom eagerly.

It was with a much happier countenance that he crossed to the table and opened the snakes-and-ladders board. He did not mean to let Miss Fawcett dream that snakes-and-ladders was not a pastime that he enjoyed as much as footer and cricket.

"Now," said Miss Fawcett briskly, "you must find some nice friends, and we'll have a nice game! I am very fond of snakes-and-ladders myself."

"Are you?" ejaculated Tom, in astonishment. "I—I never knew that!"

"Oh, but I am!" she assured him.

"Now, find some nice friends, and we can begin!" She patted the grey curls that protruded from beneath her bonnet. It was an old-fashioned bonnet, with a large brim, and if left most of her face in deep shadow. "I will wait here."

"Right you are!" smiled Tom, and left the study.

The moment the door had closed, Miss Fawcett drew a deep breath, and murmured something that would have startled Tom Merry considerably to hear from her lips:

"Gad! What a scream! But it's workin' like a charm!"

And the chuckle that followed that remark was strangely deep in tone for an elderly lady!

After a few minutes, Tom returned. Since all the juniors but those playing in the match against the Grammarians were gated that afternoon, Tom had had little difficulty in finding some friends to join in a game of snakes-and-ladders. Snakes-and-ladders did not, perhaps, sound a very exciting way of spending an afternoon! But Manners and Lowther, and Talbot and Kangaroo, had agreed to come along.

Tom was wondering very much how Blake & Co. had fared over at the New House, in their interview with Figgins. But there was still a quarter of an hour or so before the team need leave for the Grammar School, and if some arrangement had been come to between the New House and School House at last, there was plenty of time for Figgins to collect Talbot and Lowther, for example, if he wanted them.

Tom had confided his expectations to his friends, and they were wondering as eagerly as he what decision Figgins would come to. They would certainly be willing to play if Figgins agreed, in the circumstances of the loss of Tom Merry from the team, to include a large number of School House fellows in the eleven.

But in the meantime they were willing to give pleasure to Miss Fawcett by starting off at snakes-and-ladders!

Miss Fawcett welcomed them with a very bright smile.

"Dear boys!" she exclaimed. "You will love a nice game, won't you?"

"Rather!" said Talbot politely. "Oh, rather, ma'am!"

"But," continued Miss Fawcett, "I expected Tommy darling, that now you are a prefect and the captain of the school, that you would have some of your Sixth Form friends along to join you in your nice games!"

"The—the Sixth?" echoed Tom blankly.

Miss Fawcett nodded in a very determined way.

"Yes, the Sixth! Surely you have many friends in the Sixth, now you are captain?"

"Well," said Tom, "you see—"

"I will invite some of them myself!" exclaimed Miss Fawcett.

She jumped from her chair and crossed briskly towards the door. Tom gave an exclamation of alarm.

"Oh! I say, dear, please don't! You see—"

But he was too late to stop her. Miss Fawcett had sailed

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from the study, and along the passage. The five juniors stared at her in dismay. Kangaroo was grinning.

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Talbot. "The Sixth—to play snakes-and-ladders!"

"Stop her!" gasped Manners.

"Oh crumbs!" groaned Tom. "It's too late! Listen!"

They could hear Miss Fawcett rapping on one of the neighbouring study doors. A moment later the voice of Kildare could be heard.

"K-K-Kildare!" stammered Kangaroo. "Oh, my hat! I say, Tom, old chap, excuse me, but I've just remembered I've got an important letter to write!"

And the Australian junior hastily vanished from the study, and could be heard speeding away down the stairs. Tom gripped Monty Lowther's arm as the humorist of the Shell made a panic-stricken movement as if to follow Kangaroo.

"You stand by me, old chap!" pleaded Tom.

"Oh, all right!" said Monty Lowther. "But—"

He broke off, listening, as Miss Fawcett was again heard to be knocking on a study door. This time it was the voice of North that came to their ears a moment or two later.

"This is awful!" mumbled Tom.

With feelings too deep for words, the juniors waited. It was not long before footsteps in the passage could be heard. Miss Fawcett appeared beaming in the doorway.

"I've brought some of your Sixth Form friends along, Tommy darling!" she announced brightly. "They say they all love a game of snakes-and-ladders!"

She entered the room, followed by Kildare, North, and Darrell.

The three prefects were looking dazed, as if they did not quite know whether they were standing on their heads or their heels. They had all been too polite to refuse an invitation from a lady; but there were extraordinary looks on their faces as they came into the study.

"S-s-snakes-and-ladders!" gasped North. "Did you say snakes-and-ladders, ma'am?"

"I did!" beamed Miss Priscilla. "I know all little boys love it."

"L-little boys?" echoed Darrell feebly.

The three Sixth-Formers towered above Miss Fawcett. But apparently she regarded them as little boys, and had not the faintest idea that it was unusual for Sixth-Formers to spend their time over snakes-and-ladders. It was a game that was popular enough in the Third, but scarcely a craze among the prefects at St. Jim's.

"Awfully good of you to come!" mumbled Tom to the three bewildered Sixth-Formers. "Miss Fawcett has just been kind enough to present me with a snakes-and-ladders set," he went on desperately; "and—and she thought it would be a good idea to play with it on a wet afternoon like this."

"Oh, rather!" said Kildare weakly. He caught Miss Fawcett's eye and tried to pull himself together. "There's nothing like a game of snakes-and-ladders, to my mind!" He passed a hand across his brow. Apparently the ex-captain of St. Jim's was greatly perturbed.

"But how do you play the confounded game?" muttered North wildly.

"Dunno!" whispered Kildare. "I—I say, old man, is this true, or am I just dreaming?"

And the ex-captain of St. Jim's sat down dazedly in a chair in front of the snakes-and-ladders board and stared in horror at the contorted snakes that ornamented its squared surface.

"I don't think I will play, after all, dear boys," beamed Miss Fawcett. "I would just like to watch you!"

This was, perhaps, a good deal more true than her listeners realised. There was no doubt that the bogus Miss Priscilla Fawcett was going to enjoy herself immensely in watching the three Sixth-Formers solemnly playing snakes-and-ladders with Tom Merry & Co.

"Sit down, you chaps," said Tom, breathing with difficulty.

They sat down round the highly-coloured board. The three Sixth-Formers were still looking as though they thought they really must be dreaming. Tom mopped his brow with a handkerchief and picked up the dice.

"You start, Monty, old chap!"

"No; you start!" mumbled Monty Lowther. "I don't know how to."

"Neither do I," said Manners hastily.

"Oh, all right!" Tom threw the dice and moved a counter along the bottom row of squares. "Will you go next, Kildare?" he suggested in hollow tones.

Kildare threw. And, with dazed faces, the snakes-and-ladders party began their enforced game.

Miss Fawcett chuckled softly.

CHAPTER 10.

The Plot that Failed!

"SEEN Figgins?"

Blake asked that question of the solitary occupant of Dame Taggles' little tuckshop under the elms; it was Baggy Trimble.

Baggy paused before replying, to stuff a jam-tart into his already jammy mouth. He nodded.

"Mmmmm!"

"Where?" roared Blake.

Blake & Co. had failed to find Figgins in the New House and they had so far searched for him unavailingly elsewhere. They clustered eagerly round Baggy Trimble to hear his answer.

"He's gone!" said Baggy carelessly, picking up another tart.

"Gone?" echoed Herries. "Where to, you dummy?"

"Grammar School, of course!" grunted Baggy.

"Bai Jove!"

"Wha-a-a-at?" gasped Levison.

Blake grasped the fat Fourth-Former by the shoulder and shook him.

"What do you mean?" demanded Blake. "He can't have gone yet! It's too early—"

"Ow! Leggo!" Baggy rubbed his shoulder. Blake's grip had been painful. "I tell you he has gone! Him an' all the team!" Baggy sniggered. "I think they went early in case the School House chaps tried to stop 'em, or something! So Figgins nipped off with the other nine New House asses!"

"Great pip!" gasped Digby blankly.

"We're done!" groaned Clive.

The juniors stared at one another in dismay. They had never dreamt that Figgins would leave the school so early to go to the Grammar School. And his doing so had upset their little plan entirely. It was no good hoping that Tom Merry's dropping out of the team would now induce Figgins to put in a big percentage of School House players. It was too late!

"But Figgins wouldn't sneak off and leave Tom Merry behind," suggested Levison, with sudden hope. "Maybe the fat dummy's fibbing!"

"Oh, really, Levison!" Trimble blinked at Levison indignantly. "I tell you Figgins has gone—and his one-eyed team! As a matter of fact, I happen to know, 'cos Figgins gave me a bob to take a message to Tom Merry, saying the rest had gone on, and would he meet em at the Grammar School."

And Baggy, stuffing the last tart into his mouth, slipped heavily from his chair by the counter and rolled towards the door. Figgins' bob was evidently now spent!

"I'll go and tell Merry," said Baggy, and rolled from the shop, leaving Blake & Co. to stare at one another in utter consternation.

"Dished, diddled, and done!" breathed Blake.

"Oh deah! I am afraid Cardew's impersonation has not been any use, aftah all!" sighed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Well, it's kept Tom Merry from playing, anyway!" snapped Clive. "And that's something! Figgins will only have his New House wasters to play for him now. He'll be a man short. And serve him right!"

But it was with gloomy faces that the group of juniors tramped out of the tuckshop.

Their high hopes of bringing about Figgins' surrender had been dashed to the ground in a moment. Compared with that, the fact that the School House had succeeded in keeping even Tom Merry from playing in Figgins' team was not much consolation. And it was impossible to save the situation by going after Figgins to tell him of Tom

(Continued on next page.)



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Merry's standing out of the team—for they were gated, by the order of the Head himself.

As Blake had said, they were, without a doubt, dished, diddled, and done!

In the end study of the Sixth Form passage a heavy silence reigned, broken only by the rattle of the dice on the table.

The game of snakes-and-ladders was in full swing.

The most uncomfortable-looking fellow of the lot was Tom Merry. Manners and Monty Lowther had begun to see the humorous side of things, and so had Talbot. The three Sixth-Formers were feeling uncomfortable. There were very curious expressions on the faces of Kildare and Darrell, though they were bearing up bravely. But North looked as though the strain was beginning to tell upon him.

North was awarding Miss Fawcett with some glances that were anything but grateful. It almost looked as though North of the Sixth was not so delighted as might have been expected at this chance of a happy afternoon at snakes-and-ladders.

"Your turn, Talbot!" grinned Monty Lowther.

Talbot took his turn, and was rewarded by a long slide down the longest snake on the board. He handed the dice-box to North, who clutched it reluctantly and made his throw. He moved his counter mechanically.

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Darrell. "You've won!"

"Have I?" gasped North. "I didn't know!"

"Of course you have!" cried Kildare eagerly. "You've got to the last square, old man! That means you've won!"

"Does it?" North stared at the board and then at Kildare. A beaming smile spread over his face. "Then the game's over?" he exclaimed. He was on his feet in a moment. "You—you mean we've finished?"

In another instant North was striding towards the door with the air of a reprieved prisoner. At the door he turned.

"Th-thanks for the game, ma'am," he stammered; then North had vanished, and his footsteps could be heard hurrying rapidly down the stairs.

The others had risen, too. Darrell and Kildare made a smart move for the door; but Miss Fawcett hurriedly intercepted them.

"Oh, but you must have another game!" she beamed.

"I—I think not, if you don't mind, ma'am!" said Kildare hastily. "You—you see, I think two games of snakes-and-ladders in one afternoon is a little too much. It's so exciting; it upsets the nerves if you overdo it!"

"Exactly!" agreed Darrell. "Thank you so much! G'-bye!"

He groped for the door-handle and swung the door open. With a hasty bow to Miss Fawcett, Darrell and Kildare left the study with almost feverish haste. And at that moment a fat figure rolled into their path.

"Yarooooop!"

In his haste Kildare had knocked into Baggy Trimble and sent him flying. Baggy collapsed in a gasping heap on the linoleum, and the two tall Sixth-Formers stepped hurriedly over him and vanished before Miss Fawcett had time to urge them to stay for a second thrilling game at the snakes-and-ladders board.

"Ow!" gasped Baggy Trimble, scrambling up painfully. "Yow! I'm hurt! Kildare's a rough beast!"

"Well, what do you want, Baggy?" demanded Tom Merry.

Baggy rubbed a bruised elbow.

"Yow! Figgins asked me to give you a message," he grumbled.

"Figgins?" exclaimed Tom eagerly.

"He's gone off to the Grammar School, with the rest of the team, and wants you to join him there," growled Baggy.

"Great pip!"

Tom's face was a picture of dismay. He stepped into the passage and grasped Baggy by the arm.

"Ow! Leggo!"

"When did Figgins go?"

"A long time ago."

"Then why didn't you tell me this before?" roared Tom.

"Well," said Baggy cautiously, "I didn't think there was any blessed hurry. I—I had to have a snack first."

"You fat porpoise! I s'pose Figgins gave you a bob to take the message, and instead of bringing the message you blued the bob first in the tuckshop!" snorted Tom Merry grimly.

Baggy wriggled free, and with a sniff he put his fat little nose in the air.

"Well, what if I did?" he snorted. "Serve you right for being a rotten blackleg! Yah!"

And he scuttled away down the stairs hastily. Tom Merry, with clouded brow, returned to the study.

"Oh crumbs!" he muttered.

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He had never dreamt that by standing down from the team for the sake of Miss Fawcett he would be letting Figgins go off with a man short. It had not occurred to him, any more than it had to Blake & Co., that Figgins might go off early to prevent any trouble from the rebellious School House fellows.

But it was too late now. He had given Miss Fawcett his promise to stay with her that afternoon. He could not break his word—not even for football.

And it was impossible to send a deputy post-haste to the Grammar School. By the Head's strict order, all fellows other than those chosen by Figgins for the football team were gated. There was no going against that command.

"What's up?" exclaimed Manners quickly at sight of Tom's troubled face.

"Figgins and the rest of the team have already gone to the Grammar School," said Tom quietly.

"Great Scott!"

That involuntary exclamation caused Tom to jump almost out of his skin.

For it had been Miss Priscilla Fawcett who had given that startled exclamation at Tom's words. And it was a voice that Tom recognised instantly.

"Cardew!" he gasped, scarcely able to believe his ears.

He stared dazedly at the figure in the chair by the fireplace.

Cardew caught his breath.

He had given himself away. In his startled consternation at the news of Figgins' departure, which, as he instantly realised, had brought all the plotters' plans tumbling to the ground, so far as forcing a surrender from Figgins was concerned, the masquerading slacker of the Fourth had forgotten for a moment that he was supposed to be an elderly lady who did not use such expressions as "Great Scott!" The exclamation had escaped him without his thinking, and his masquerade was revealed.

"Cardew!" yelled Tom, and with a quick stride he was at the side of the figure in the chair. Another moment and he had snatched both bonnet and wig from Cardew's head.

"Cardew!" panted Monty Lowther in amazement.

Tom stared at Cardew in utter bewilderment. As yet he had scarcely time to wonder why Cardew had done it. Another thought was occupying his mind to the exclusion of all else.

That promise he had given, as he had thought, to Miss Priscilla Fawcett was no longer valid.

Without waiting another instant, Tom Merry turned and rushed to the cupboard where his footer kit was kept. Tucking it under his arm in a wild bundle, the captain of St. Jim's rushed without a word from the study and pelted down the stairs.

Three minutes later Tom Merry, after a hasty change, wheeled his cycle from the shed and pedalled furiously out through the gates and along the lane towards Rylcombe Grammar School.

The match would have been started by the time he reached the Grammarians' playing-fields, he knew. But he would be in time for most of the game even now.

Head down, Tom Merry fairly flashed the pedals round as he flew along the wet road through the drizzling rain towards Rylcombe.

CHAPTER 11.

Tom Merry to the Rescue!

IN Tom Merry's study Talbot had seized Ralph Reckness Cardew in a vice-like grip.

"You—you spoofer!" roared Talbot.

Cardew grinned coolly.

"Pretty good, eh, dear man?" he drawled.

"But what was the giddy idea?" yelled Monty Lowther.

"Why, to keep dear Thomas from playing this afternoon," grinned Cardew. "Some of us thought that if we could do that it might force Figgins to surrender. With Thomas in the team it wasn't quite hopeless; but with Thomas out of the r.n.nin', even Figgins couldn't have had the cheek to field his New House bunch of crocks against Gordon Gay & Co. He would have had to ask the School House to back him up, and we should have made our own terms."

He chuckled, but rather ruefully.

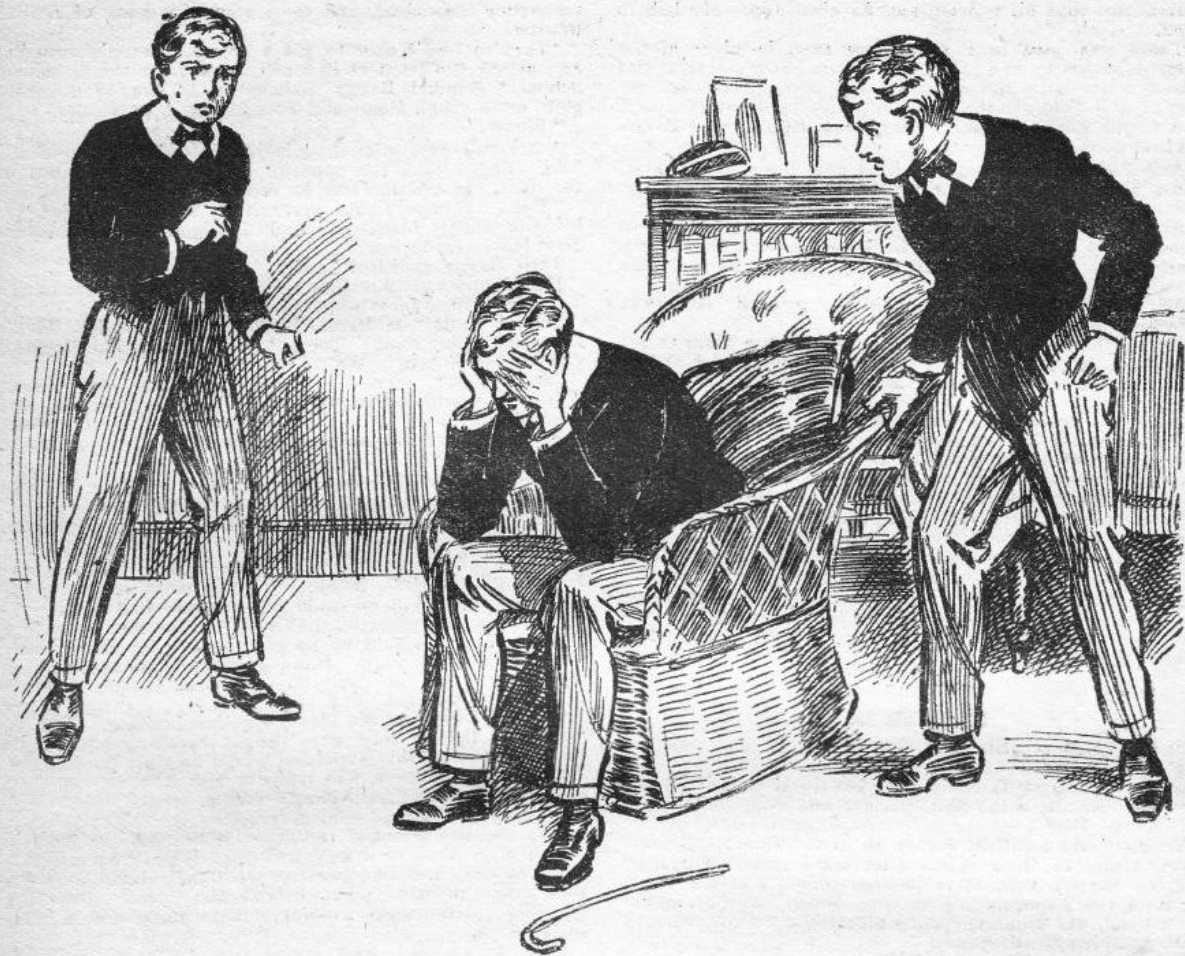
"You see, we never guessed Figgins would go sneekin' off like he did. That upset the apple-cart for us."

Talbot released the slacker of the Fourth.

"I see," he said slowly. "Well, perhaps it wasn't a bad idea."

"In any case," drawled Cardew, "it would have stopped the virtuous Thomas from being a blackleg. But apparently we haven't even succeeded in doin' that. He's gone off to play—"

"And good luck to him!" said Manners vehemently. "I'm beginning to think that Tom was right all along, and that we were asses to boycott Figgins. Tom was sure



Tom Merry's head sank wretchedly on to his hands, while Manners and Lowther watched him in silence. "What on earth am I to do?" muttered Tom hoarsely. "I'm captain of the school; I've promised the Head to do my duty. But—but I can't do it if it means that you two are to be expelled!" (See Chapter 12.)

Figgins was honest enough in thinking his team was the best possible, even if he was all wrong in thinking so. Well, what if Tom was right?"

"Rats!" said Cardew. "Figgins was just showing favouritism, and he needed boycotting till he chucked it."

"Not so sure," repeated Manners thoughtfully. He glanced at the others and closed the door. "Anyway, apart from that I fancy we have a little score to settle with Cardew for making us play snakes-and-ladders."

"Rather!" grinned Monty Lowther.

A look of alarm flashed into Cardew's face. He tried to dart for the door, but his skirts hampered him, and the next moment he had been seized and swung on high.

"Bump him!"

"Yaroooooogh!"

There was a bump and a yell. "Miss Priscilla Fawcett" was finding that neither her age nor sex was saving her from the consequences of her glorious spoof!

"Goal!"

The Grammarians had scored.

Gordon Gay had put the ball past Fatty Wynn with a lightning shot to the top left-hand corner of the net that had left the St. Jim's goalkeeper helpless.

The match had only been in progress for fifteen minutes. Figgins' face was gloomy as the ball was returned to the centre of the field.

With only ten men playing, and at least three of those hopeless "duds," things were not looking too bright for the visiting team.

"What on earth's happened to Tom Merry?" snorted Kerr.

"Goodness knows!" muttered Figgins savagely. "Looks to me like some more dirty work from the School House chaps. They've kept him away somehow. It's not like Tom Merry to let us down otherwise."

He tapped the ball across to Redfern for the fresh kick-off, and again the match was waxing hot and furious.

Gordon Gay & Co. were very strong that afternoon. They had a splendid team in the field, and they were all over

the ten St. Jim's men, despite the heroic efforts of Figgins and Redfern and Kerr, the pick of the visiting forward line, to force the attack.

The St. Jim's half-back line was hopeless. The backs—Owen and French—were not very much better, for Owen seemed to be off form. But for Fatty Wynn, in goal, the Grammarians would have scored several times already, instead of only once. The Falstaff of the New House, leaping about between the posts with amazing agility despite his bulk, was a tower of strength. But even he found it hard to keep the ball from investigating the interior of the net time after time!

And at last the Grammarian attack could be kept at bay no longer. From a corner-kick Frank Monk, of the Grammar School, got his head to the ball and jerked it into the net. There was a deafening, delighted yell from the watching Grammarians on the touchline.

Only twenty minutes of play, and already the score was two-nil in favour of the home team!

It was not surprising that the Grammar School fellows felt that life was worth living.

Again the ball was returned to the centre. As Figgins was placing it, he heard a sudden shout from Redfern.

"Look!"

Figgins glanced quickly towards the touchline, in the direction of Redfern's outflung hand.

A muddy figure in footer kit was racing on to the footer-field.

"Tom Merry!" gasped Figgins.

Tom came panting up. He was covered with mud from head to foot. His face was so mud-spattered as to be hardly recognisable.

"Sorry I'm late!" he panted. "I got held up. I'll explain later! And on the way here my bike skidded in the mud and buckled a wheel—I've had to foot it most of the way—"

"Play inside-right, will you?" jerked Figgins. "Kerr, drop back to fill up the half-back line! Go centre-half."

"Right!" nodded Kerr, and hurried back to fill up the vacant position. The referee, who had paused at Tom's

arrival, sounded his whistle, and Figgins tapped the ball to Tom.

There was hope in Figgins' face now, in place of the utter dejection he had previously shown. Tom's arrival was late enough—with the score already two—nil against St. Jim's! But Tom was the finest junior footballer at St. Jim's, and might work wonders. There was hope for the Saints yet!

And Figgins' hopes were realised only ten minutes later, when Tom Merry, after a wonderful solo run down the centre, planted the ball squarely in the net.

At half-time the score was still two—one. But almost immediately after the opening of the second half Tom Merry planted the ball in the net again, from a perfect pass from Figgins.

All square! And George Figgins' rugged face was wreathed in smiles.

He had had difficulties enough in bringing a team to the Grammar School that afternoon! And hopeless defeat had seemed to be his lot at first. But now things were looking very different!

Without a doubt it was a case of Tom Merry to the rescue.

And when the hero of the Shell, playing as he had rarely played before, scored a third goal with his magic foot—a goal to be followed a few minutes later by the final whistle—and St. Jim's trooped off the muddy field with victory theirs, a mud-stained figure was high on the shoulders of ten rapturous New House fellows.

Tom Merry, the captain of St. Jim's, had won the match for his school off his own boot!

And though there was no one on the touchline to cheer his amazing feat, the other footballers made up for the absence of the gated St. Jim's juniors by yelling themselves hoarse in Tom Merry's honour!

CHAPTER 12.

Breaking Bounds!

"H E, he, he!"

Baggy Trimble put his head in at Study No. 10 in the Shell passage and sniggered.

Baggy seemed to be amused about something!

Manners and Lowther were both in the study. Manners was making the best of his afternoon's imprisonment by busying himself with some photographic materials, ready for the spring's snapshot campaign! Monty Lowther, on the other hand, was standing staring gloomily out of the window at the puddles in the quad.

It had stopped raining, and the sun had come out. It was not at all a bad afternoon now. Monty Lowther would have liked nothing better than a tramp over the moors to Wayland, to visit the girls of Spalding Hall. But the depressing fact that he and his chums were all gated made anything of that nature impossible.

Hence Monty's gloomy brow!

But there was another reason, too. Since Tom Merry's election to the captaincy of St. Jim's, Study No. 10 had been far less cheery than in the old days. Manners and Lowther missed Tom badly.

Baggy's arrival caused Monty to turn from his gloomy reflections, and survey the fat Fourth-Former critically.

"If you've come here just to make those beastly noises, you can scat!" he growled.

"He, he, he!" Baggy, undaunted, sniggered again. "Tom Merry's in for it!"

"What do you mean, you fat clam?" demanded Manners.

"He, he, he! Some of the chaps mean to pay him out for being a blackleg, and playing in Figgins' team this afternoon."

With quick strides Monty Lowther crossed to the doorway and jerked Baggy, squealing, into the study.

"What's that?" he roared. "What do you mean?"

"I shan't tell you if you don't leggo!" squealed Baggy.

Monty Lowther released him, but put his back to the door.

"Now, then, out with it!"

"You know most of the chaps are mad with Tom Merry for being a rotten blackleg?" sniggered Baggy. "I call it pretty rotten myself, the way he's gone against the House! Just because he's captain he thinks he can do as he likes, I suppose—Ow! Leggo my ear, Lowther, you beast!"

"What are the chaps going to do about it, anyway?" demanded Lowther savagely.

Baggy rubbed his injured ear.

"Ow! Oh, really, Lowther! I'm telling you! It was Racke's idea, I think. But a lot of 'em agreed to it. They've telephoned to that chap Roker, in Rylcombe—you know!"

"Great Scott!" muttered Manners. "Well?"

Manners and Lowther glanced at one another. They knew Roker only too well! He was a young hooligan who spent most of his time hanging about the Green Man—a thoroughly

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unsavoury individual, and the leader of a gang of similar beauties.

"They've told Roker to get a crowd of roughs together and attack the team as it comes home from the Grammar School!" grinned Baggy maliciously. "They're going to give 'em a rough time—and Tom Merry in particular!"

"Whew!"

A startled expression had leaped into Monty Lowther's face. Baggy took the opportunity to skip quickly out of the door. In the doorway he turned.

"Yah! I hope Roker gives it to Tom Merry hot for being a beastly blackleg! And to Figgins and his rotten New House favourites!"

Then Baggy vanished hastily.

But Manners and Lowther were not worrying about Baggy Trimble. Their faces were startled.

"Great Scott!" muttered Manners. "The cads! That's about the giddy limit! The sort of thing cads like Racke & Co. would think of! We've got to stop it!"

"But how?" cried Monty Lowther desperately. "Trimble wouldn't have told us if it hadn't been too late! Look at the time! The team will have left the Grammar School by now! So we can't telephone to Gordon Gay to warn them—"

"We must go and meet the team, and put them on their guard—we might be in time!" breathed Manners.

"But—we're gated! It would mean getting expelled if we were caught—"

"Rats!" Manners gripped Lowther's arm. "I'm willing to take all the risks, if you are! We can't go out of the gates, of course, but we could slip over the wall! We can't let Tom be set upon by Roker & Co. without moving a finger! And it would be no good telling the Head; he'd never believe the yarn. Besides, he would be sneaking on our chaps. And we can't do that, even though they are cads who've planned this."

Only for a moment did Monty Lowther hesitate. He knew very well that if they were caught breaking out despite the gating order that expulsion would be their punishment. But he, like Manners, was ready to risk it!

"Come on, then," said Monty quietly.

They hurried out of the study.

Bicycles were essential if they were to meet the team in time to warn them of Roker's ambush. It was with difficulty that Manners and Lowther smuggled their bikes over the wall, at a deserted point behind the chapel. But they succeeded in doing so without being seen, so far as they were aware.

Could they hope to be in time?

They flew along the lane at a breakneck pace, the mud flying from beneath their racing wheels. They saw no sign of Racke's hired hooligans on the road; but, for all they knew, Roker & Co. were already lying in wait at some lonely spot in Rylcombe Lane, waiting to carry out their part of the rascally bargain—a part for which Racke & Co. and their supporters had no doubt promised liberal payment. Roker & Co. would never dream that two speeding St. Jim's cyclists were off to warn their intended victims of the trap, and would let them pass without hindrance.

And luck was with Manners and Lowther!

There was no sign of the returning St. Jim's team on the road. Not till they came in sight of the Grammar School did they find them.

St. Jim's caps could be seen among the crowd at the gates of the Grammar School. The St. Jim's team were only just leaving.

Breathlessly Manners and Lowther dismounted among the crowd. There was a startled exclamation from Tom Merry.

"My hat!" He grasped Manners by the wrist, staring at his two chums in wondering consternation. "You idiots! You've broken bounds, in spite of the Head's order—"

Rapidly Manners explained. When they had finished, both Saints and Grammarians looked at one another, with grim faces. Then Gordon Gay stepped forward.

"I fancy we can knock this little scheme on the head," he announced cheerfully. "If you fellows bike along the road and run into the ambush, Roker and his pals will never guess that we Grammar School chaps are coming along a little way behind. I fancy they'll get the shock of their lives!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Grammarians.

Figgins gripped Gordon Gay's hand. His eyes were sparkling.

"That's ripping of you!" he exclaimed. "We'll make Roker & Co. wish they'd never interfered in St. Jim's affairs, I fancy!"

"Hear, hear!" chuckled Tom Merry grimly.

Accordingly, there were grins on the faces of the St. Jim's footballers as, with Manners and Lowther, they returned along the lane towards their own school. And not till then did Manners and Lowther learn of the result of the match.

Manners held out a hand to Figgins, who gripped it as he cycled along.

"Good man, Figgy," said Manners quietly. "Monty and I, at any rate, are beginning to feel we've made rather asses of ourselves over this inter-House row. We jumped to the conclusion that because you'd put a lot of New House men in your team it was through favouritism. Well, I think now that Tom was right, on considering it, and that we've misjudged you. I expect the other chaps will come to see sense, too, before long."

"Oh, that's all right!" said Figgins awkwardly. "I can promise you I didn't mean to show any favouritism, you know. But, naturally, my back went up a bit when I was accused of it, and I was a bit too ready, p'raps, to fill up up the team with New House chaps when the School House men crossed out their names. Well, luckily, there's been no harm done. Thanks to Tom Merry, we licked the Grammar School—"

Figgins broke off.

A number of figures had burst into sight from the hedges on either side of the road. It was Roker, with a gang of other roughs at his heels, and they closed in on the St. Jim's party in a businesslike way.

"Back up!" yelled Tom Merry.

A moment later the footballers had closed up, back to back, hitting out fiercely against the overwhelming odds.

Roker & Co. were in numbers. Without doubt, despite their plucky defence, things would have gone badly with the St. Jim's party had they been alone. But the fight had scarcely started before there was a yell from down the lane, and round the bend swept Gordon Gay and a host of Grammarians. They pedalled swiftly up, leapt from their bicycles, and hurled themselves at the hooligans.

The conflict was short and sharp. Roker & Co. were not of the stuff of which heroes are made, and at this unexpected turn of the tide they became panic-stricken. They

broke and fled, but not before most of them had been more roughly handled than they had ever been in their lives before. Saints and Grammarians were left victorious.

It was with warm handshakes that the St. Jim's fellows parted from their old rivals from the Grammar School, and each school gave a cheer for the other. Then the St. Jim's party remounted their cycles and pedalled off cheerily towards home.

Some distance from the school Manners and Lowther left the footballers, to gain entrance over the wall at the back.

They were feeling very pleased with themselves. The news of St. Jim's unexpected victory over the Grammarians had put them in high spirits, as well as the success of their daring dash to warn Tom Merry of the cowardly attack that had been planned to be made on him.

But a shock was waiting for Manners and Lowther.

They succeeded in gaining the school premises safely enough without being seen, and hurried off to Tom Merry's study. But the youthful captain of St. Jim's was not there when they arrived. They sat down to wait for him, but the minutes passed, and still he failed to put in an appearance.

"Where the dickens has he got to?" exclaimed Manners impatiently, after a quarter of an hour had gone by.

"P'raps he's gone off to report us for breaking bounds!" chuckled Monty Lowther humorously.

It had already occurred to the two chums that, as captain of the school, Tom ought to report fellows who had defied the Head's gating order. But obviously, under the circumstances, even a conscientious fellow like Tom Merry would not consider it his duty to do so.

The door opened and Tom Merry stepped into the study. At sight of his face Manners and Lowther jumped up in vague alarm.

"What's up?" exclaimed Manners.

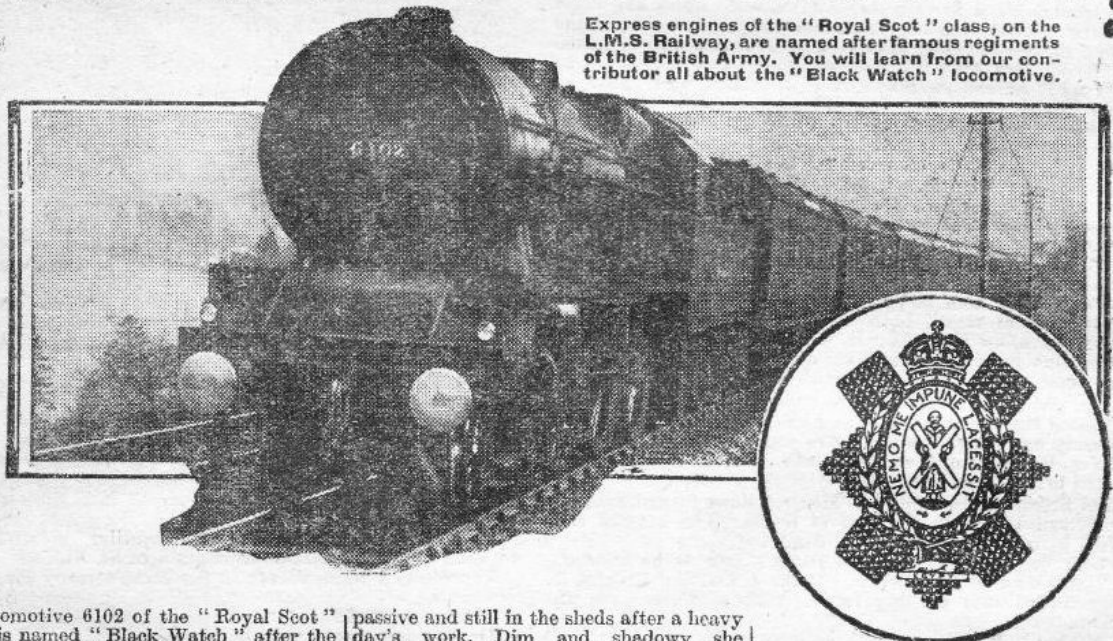
Tom's face was dark and troubled. He smiled wryly.

(Continued on next page.)

Here are a Few Interesting Facts about one of Britain's Great Locomotives.

REGIMENTAL "ROYAL SCOTS"

Express engines of the "Royal Scot" class, on the L.M.S. Railway, are named after famous regiments of the British Army. You will learn from our contributor all about the "Black Watch" locomotive.



Locomotive 6102 of the "Royal Scot" class is named "Black Watch" after the famous Scottish regiment which was raised in 1730 for the protection of Edinburgh. Its title was derived from the fact that all the bright colours in its tartan were extracted, leaving only the dark green ground.

In olden days we can imagine soldiers of the Black Watch patrolling the turreted walls of Edinburgh Castle, and guarding the city from the attacks of rebels and bands of outlaws; dark, shadowy figures ever wakeful, watchful, while the city slept safe in the knowledge that the soldiers of the King kept constant vigil.

And it is such a picture that is conjured up in the minds of those who may chance to see the locomotive "Black Watch,"

passive and still in the sheds after a heavy day's work. Dim and shadowy she seems in the gloom of midnight; silent and still after the thundering throb of her mighty mechanism during the day.

She is the very embodiment of those silent watchers who kept constant vigil while Edinburgh slept in days gone by. No wonder she is called "Black Watch."

The famous regiment has ever been noted for its deeds of valour. In 1794 to commemorate its gallantry in Holland it was privileged to add the "red hackle," to its feather bonnets. In like manner locomotive 6102 has been painted red above the blackness of its wheels and lower members.

The Black Watch fought at Fontenoy, Corunna, and Alexandria. At Waterloo

it was with Picton's division, and those of you who would care to read of its magnificent exploits at the Battle of Alma will find an exciting account in a book called "Eothen," by Kingslake. It also achieved greatness at Bangalore, Seringapatam, Quatre Bras, and Waterloo.

Locomotive 6102 of the "Royal Scot" class takes its name from a very great regiment. And the mighty red and black engine has achieved fame not only by its own magnificent efforts but because of the historic traditions and poignant memories of honour, valour, and glory which the name "Black Watch" calls to mind.

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"I've just been seeing the Head," he said slowly. "He sent for me as soon as I got in. He tells me that Knox has reported seeing two juniors cycling along Rylcombe Lane this afternoon."

"Whew!" breathed Monty Lowther.

"The Head tells me that I must find out who the two chaps are who went out despite his orders," continued Tom heavily. "They are to be expelled!"

He sat down in a chair, staring at his two chums miserably.

"I—I didn't tell him I knew who they were," he said in a strained voice. "But, of course, you are the two chaps!"

Tom's head sank wretchedly on to his hands.

"What on earth am I to do?" he muttered hoarsely. "I'm captain of the school. I've promised the Head to do my duty, and all that. But—but I can't do it if it means that you two are to be expelled!"

CHAPTER 13.

A Boy's Cross-roads!

"Hullo! Figgins!"

"Figgay, deah boy!"

George Figgins turned. He had been crossing the quad from the tuckshop towards the New House when he heard his name called. He halted, as did Kerr and Fatty Wynn, who were on either side of him.

"School House cads!" growled David Llewellyn Wynn.

Blake, Herries, Digby, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy were hurrying across towards the New House trio. Figgins & Co. eyed them grimly.

In the present state of warfare between the two Houses they were not disposed to greet Blake & Co. in a friendly spirit. But it was soon clear that Blake & Co. were out to be friendly, to the amazement of Figgins.

Blake came up with a grin on his face and held out his hand.

"Shake!" he said. "Congrattors on licking the Grammar School, Figgy!"

Rather dazedly, Figgins shook hands.

"Is it pax, then?" he exclaimed doubtfully.

"You bet it is!" chuckled Blake. "We've realised we've been a lot of jealous asses in the School House—and I can't say fairer than that! We're sorry we gave you all the trouble we did. We thought we were doing the right thing, you know, but we realise now that we were doing the wrong thing—and jolly nearly caused St. Jim's to be licked by Gordon Gay & Co!"

"Yaas!" agreed Arthur Augustus. "But we're goin' to wally wound you now, Figgay!"

"Hear, hear!" nodded Digby.

Figgins grinned.

"That's fine!" he chuckled. "It's jolly decent of you chaps to bury the hatchet, 'cause I fancy I was a bit of a pigheaded ass myself! Anyway, it was due to a School House bouncer that we beat the Grammar School, as you know!"

"Huwwah for Tom Mewwy!" grinned Arthur Augustus.

"And the chaps that tried to get Roker & Co. to beat up the team—and Tom in particular—are feeling rather sorry for themselves now," remarked Blake blandly. "We've beaten them up instead! It was only rotters like Racke & Co. who tried to work that, of course. The rest of us have come to see things a bit more sensibly now, Figgy."

"Oh, good!" grinned Figgins. "By the way, Tom Merry suggested that we three went and had a late tea with him to celebrate our giddy victory! Are you chaps coming, too?"

"Yes, he asked us," nodded Blake. "A feast to heal the blessed breach, too, eh?"

And School House and New House fellows turned towards the School House on the best of terms. The hatchet was buried between the rivals of St. Jim's!

There was a cheery grin on Blake's face as he knocked on Tom's door and opened it. Blake & Co. and Figgins & Co. crowded into the big room. Then Blake gave an exclamation.

"My hat! What's wrong?" he burst out.

Tom Merry was alone. He was standing by the window, his face the picture of misery.

Figgins closed the door quickly and crossed towards the captain of St. Jim's.

"What on earth's the matter?" he asked, with concern on his rugged face.

The others crowded round with startled faces. Tom smiled wanly.

"I—I'm in a bit of a hole," he said. "You know how Manners and Lowther came out over the wall to warn us? Knox saw them. He didn't recognise them, though. He's told the Head. And the Head has told me I must find out who the chaps were who went out, although they had been gated. It—it would mean expulsion—"

He broke off. The other fellows stared at him in utter dismay.

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"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "How—how feahfully wotten!"

Tom glanced miserably from face to face.

It was a terrible decision that Tom Merry had been called upon to make. To many fellows, without Tom's keen sense of duty, it would have been simple enough to deny all knowledge of the two culprits, and carry on as if he had never discovered their identity. But Tom was too honest for that.

He had promised to do his duty when assuming the post of captain of St. Jim's. His duty was clear. He ought to tell the Head who the culprits were, since he knew them. But to give in the names of his own chums—

Tom sank down in a chair.

"I've got to do it, I suppose," he said thickly. "It's a question of honour, isn't it? You see, if it had been Racke, or someone like that, I suppose I should have given in the name, as a matter of duty. I—I can't favour them because they are my own chums!"

The other juniors stared at him in silence. It was a problem that Tom had to solve for himself. They could not help him to decide.

"I must do my duty," said Tom. His face was haggard. "I'll tell the whole affair to the Head, and perhaps he'll let them off expulsion!"

But Blake shook his head.

"No, the Head wouldn't think that was sufficient excuse for them to defy him like that," he said unsteadily.

Tom rose slowly to his feet.

"What can I do?" he muttered hopelessly. "I've got to tell the Head, haven't I? There's no way out of it?"

"It's a question of duty, of course," said Kerr quietly. "But, on the other hand, there is the question of friendship. You've got to choose—duty or friendship?"

"Friendship," muttered Tom. "That's all very well. But in this case friendship would stand for favouritism! Don't you see?"

"I've got it!" said Figgins, jumping up suddenly.

"What do you mean?" breathed Tom Merry.

"Why, what you've got to do!" panted Figgins excitedly. "You can't give your own chums' names to the Head! And you've got to do your duty—while you're captain. Don't you see—"

"No," said Tom. "I—I don't understand—"

"You old ass!" grinned Figgins. "It's clear enough! Go to the Head and hand in your resignation as captain of St. Jim's! Then you aren't captain any longer, and so it's no longer up to you to tell the Head who the two chaps were!"

CHAPTER 14.

Tom Merry's Resignation!

"COME in!"

Dr. Holmes was seated at his desk. He turned his head at the sound of a tap on the door. Tom Merry entered.

"Ah!" The old Head's face was stern. "You have come to tell me the names of those two boys who broke bounds this afternoon, I hope. Such insolent defiance must be punished heavily—"

"No, sir," broke in Tom steadily. "I wasn't coming to tell you that, sir."

"You have not succeeded in finding out who the two culprits were?" inquired the Head, staring at Tom keenly. There was something in the face of the youthful captain of St. Jim's that was puzzling the headmaster.

Tom did not reply to the question. A faint flush mounted to his cheeks.

"I came to see you, sir," he said steadily. "because I wish to hand in my resignation as captain of St. Jim's."

There was a tense silence in the Head's study for several moments.

"Bless my soul!"

Dr. Holmes rose slowly to his feet. He eyed Tom curiously, then removed his spectacles and wiped them. He turned to Tom again.

"You really think you would prefer to resume your old position in the junior school, instead of carrying on as at present?" he inquired curiously.

"Yes, sir; I should."

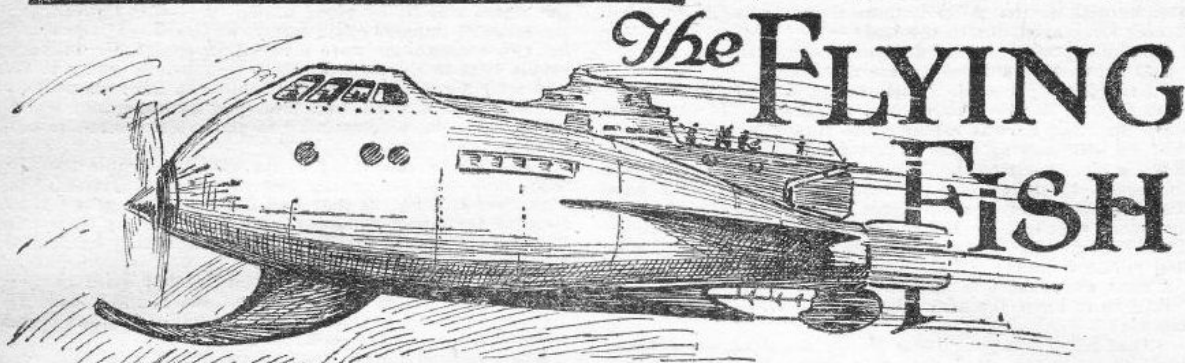
"You surprise me!" said the Head at last. "You wish to give up the privileges connected with the captaincy?" He smiled. "You have done extremely well in the position, I must say, although I have had to—ah—speak to you concerning the school discipline on occasion. Considering that you are a junior, I was pleasantly surprised at your handling of the responsible duties connected with your position."

"Thank you, sir. But I really mean it—I want to resign."

(Continued on page 27.)

A REMARKABLE NEW SERIAL OF ADVENTURE!

By Leslie Beresford.



THE WORLD MENACE!

Whilst the statesmen of the world are working for peace and good will, on the Island of No Escape there is being built at desperate speed a new menace to the whole of mankind—a fleet of Flying Fish!

The Man Who was Dead!

FOR a moment Rodney was half inclined to take the papers from the envelope and read them. That was natural enough. Here, possibly, was the last letter his father had written before he was murdered. It seemed only right that his son should be entitled to read the contents. But the letter was not addressed to him, and, in spite of his natural inclination, Rodney hesitated to commit a breach of trust.

To escape from temptation, he thrust the envelope back into his pocket, joining Dan in peering through the porthole, and watching the final act in the drama of piracy on the high seas which they both vainly attempted to prevent. Aboard the "Yolande" they could see Von Roden and the Greek, with their men, busying themselves excitedly. The former was directing the dismantling of the ship's wireless—a precaution which might have been expected.

Presently Lord Braxton was escorted down the companion-way with his baggage, and then the others finally followed as well as some wearing the neater uniform of the yacht—the mutineers, no doubt.

A few minutes later, with the faintest pulsing of her motors, the Flying Fish began to edge away from the yacht, which, still veiled by the mist, remained riding the water, her engines stopped, with no one on her decks, though faces could be dimly discerned at one or two of the portholes.

"These people are a pretty blackguardly lot, Dan!" murmured Rodney. "They've left the ship to run herself, with those poor beggars on board all battered down. Of course, they'll find a way of getting out in the long run, but by then it won't matter. Lord Braxton will be as lost as ourselves. It's hard lines on him. But he's got one advantage over us, Dan. They have let him bring his luggage with him. You and I have only got what we stand up in. I've been wondering what we were going to do about that. Jolly old Kraft's made an awful mess of my shirt, and you look as if you could do with a change."

"That be worrying me, too," said Dan. "Leastways, it were last night, everything being so sudden. But while you were sleeping this morning I was looking round, and I came on this—"

He had risen from the berth on which he had been sitting, and opened a locker below it, disclosing a drawer full of male underclothing. They were examining these when the door was unlocked and Prince Karagenski came in. He shut the door behind him.

"Ah!" he murmured. "So you have been spying out the land. Looking for a change of clothing?"

"We've nothing but what we're wearing," explained Rodney.

"Quite," nodded the Prince. "I had meant to say a word to you about that matter, and those things. They belong to my son Sacha. He is about your age and build. You are welcome to make what use you can of them. He—you will meet Sacha when we come to our journey's end. He was to have made this trip with us, but was ill, and we left him behind."

There was a softness in his face as he stated these facts which made Rodney look at him a second time, for he seemed like a new person. But before the boy could speak the prince laid a hand on his shoulder.

"You know," he said, "you two fellows haven't done yourselves, or anyone else a fraction of good by seeing red and running amok to-day."

"We just didn't have any luck!" shrugged Rodney. "And we couldn't look on and do nothing at all."

"Possibly not. I can quite understand your feelings, young fellow, even though you may not even try to understand mine. And, while on that subject, let me tell you this. Rude remarks about Russians are neither wise nor English!"

"That's quite true sir!" agreed Rodney, feeling the colour rise in his face. "I knew that after I had said what I did. But I couldn't make head or tail of things."

"Of what?"

"Of you having anything to do with that piracy business—with the whole show, for that matter—"

"You know what—as you call it—the whole show is?"

"A good idea, sir. A fleet of vessels like this one—to wipe out Britain and conquer the world."

"In a word—yes. That is the idea!"

"And you, a prince, mixed up in it! That's what I can't understand."

"But, then, as I hinted to you when you mentioned Holm-hurst in connection with myself—you don't happen to know the circumstances. Nor do you know my real feelings in the matter. You are like my son Sacha. He has had thoughts of me sometimes. And yet I am doing it for him—to give back to him the wealth and greatness to which he should have been born. For under Tsardom the Karagenskis were among the wealthiest and the highest. Their riches and power were torn from them under the revolution. And now, as these things were snatched from us, so shall they be restored—swiftly, inexorably, on demand! Over London—over New York—over Paris we shall appear. 'Pay!' we say to the people of these cities. 'Pay—and agree to our demands, for we rule the world! Submit, or we lay you in ruins and turn you into a shambles!'"

In that moment the inborn savagery of the Slav seemed laid bare in his burning eyes and hard, bitter mouth, the thin mask of civilisation torn asunder. He was magnificent,

but horrible with his air of dominating power, and the sight of him made Rodney shiver.

"That's brute force—a sort of blackmail!" said the latter. "And it isn't cricket!"

"Admitted, my young friend!"

Swiftly the face of the prince had undergone a change. Once again the mask of civilisation was back in its place, cold and cynical, the monocle gleaming derisively.

"It is not cricket. I will merely say that my cricketing days are over. And the game I am playing now is one

THE OPENING CHAPTERS.

RODNEY BLAKE, a stocky youngster of seventeen, whose one ambition is to follow in the footsteps of his father, Adrian Blake—a special news correspondent now out of England on business for his paper—is spending a few days with

DR. FRASER, prior to joining the staff of the "Sun."

Together with his chum,

DAN LEA, a stalwart son of Devon, Rodney is strolling along Littleworth Cove when he sees a strange-looking craft in the cove, manned by foreigners, which resembles an airship and a boat combined.

PRINCE ALEXIS KARAGENSKI, the ship's commander, informs Rodney that there is a serious case of illness on board and asks for the services of Dr. Fraser. The doctor goes aboard and some time later Rodney and Dan are captured by Prince Karagenski's men and taken on to the ship as prisoners. The strange craft, to the amazement of the two chums, then rises after the fashion of an airship and speeds them away. During an attempt to prevent piracy on the high seas speeds them away. Rodney Blake comes face to face with Lord Braxton, who owns the "Sun." Thrusting a hand into his inner coat pocket the English peer withdraws a thickish packet which he thrusts into Rodney's hand. Glancing at the address on the envelope, the youngster gives an exclamation of surprise as he recognises the handwriting of his father whom he had been led to believe to be dead.

(Now Read On.)

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which, once begun cannot be left unfinished! I am not alone in it—I cannot turn back if I value my life. It is a game with death. Already more than one has died so that it may be played out to the end—"

"Including my father!" nodded Rodney, in hot anger.

The other laid a hand on his shoulder. "I regret it!" he said. "Believe me, I regret it. I knew your father—I met him on the Continent. I wanted to warn him that he was probing into things best left alone—that he was playing with certain death. But I dared not. You do not understand. The people in this business have too much at stake even to trust each other. Two have died for being merely mistrusted! I did go so far as to try and warn your father. But next day—it was in the Austrian Tyrol—they found his hat floating on the river. Someone had silenced him!"

"That was what Von Roden told me!" muttered Rodney. "I'd like to know the man who did it. Was it Von Roden himself?"

"That I don't know. These things are done secretly, and none of us knows what the other does. However, that is not what I came to talk about altogether, my young friend. But because you are Adria Blake's son, and because I have been partly responsible that you are here, I do not want harm to come to you. I have spoken for you with Von Roden, who is in a dreadful temper about you, and was inclined to take desperate measures with you in a few hours' time, as was done with your father six months ago.

"To cut a long story short my young friend," added the prince, in a less serious tone of voice, "I've stood sponsor for your future good behaviour so I hope you won't let me down. It's no good trying to imitate David, and going out with slings and stones to slay Goliath! It's too big a job for you altogether. Be wise and accept the inevitable, and I shall leave the door open for you to move about as freely as ever."

Rodney accepted the friendly hand which the prince held out to him and the latter seemed to take this as acquiescence in his ultimatum, patting Rodney on the shoulder and leaving the cabin. But the latter was not nearly so interested in this kindly intervention, as he was in something else which was puzzling him greatly, causing him—as soon as the cabin door was closed again—to take another glance at the envelope in his pocket. He showed it eagerly to Dan as soon as they were alone.

"Look at that Dan!" he said. "See the date? Only three weeks ago. And the writing on this envelope is my father's. You heard what the prince said just now? He said that dad was killed six months ago. How could that possibly be, if he addressed that envelope only three weeks since?"

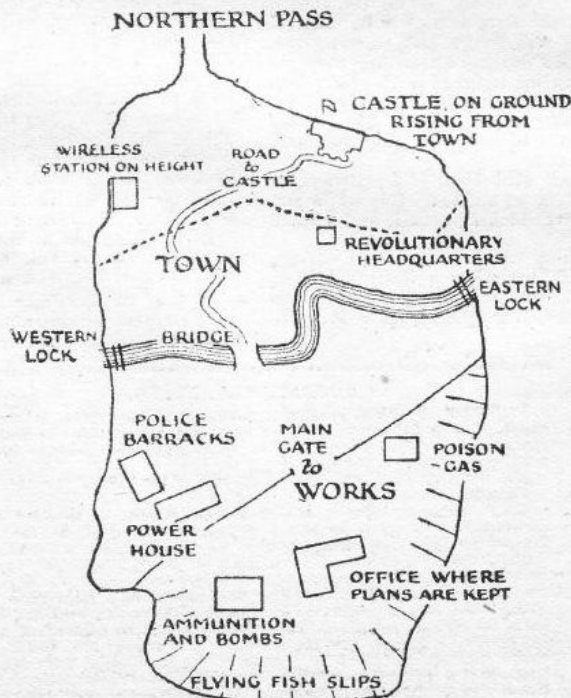
The Valley of No Escape!

RODNEY'S first determination was to get a word with Lord Braxton and ask for the answer to that question which the latter must be able to give. Short of reading the contents of the envelope, which he could not do without permission, it was his only way of learning the truth. And, of course, as so often happens in this life, a word with Lord Braxton was the last thing he seemed likely to get.

The newspaper millionaire was, as Dan and he discovered, in one of the larger cabins between that of Von Roden and the one occupied by Mirapoulis. An armed sailor lounged to and fro outside the door, as a sign that these people were taking no risks with this valuable prisoner. Nor was the freedom promised the two lads by the prince quite as unwatched as it had been at first. Kraft, his face twisted vindictively, seemed always to be hovering wherever they might be, keeping an eye on them.

The Flying Fish, they discovered, had risen from the

MAP OF THE VALLEY OF NO ESCAPE



It is on this island, the stronghold of the world conspirators, that Rodney and his pal, Dan Lea, meet with many strange and perilous adventures.

sea and was rushing through the clouds at great speed. A violent storm was in progress, it seemed, for at intervals the vessel was lit by vivid flashes of forked lightning, and the noise of thunder could faintly be heard. The prince and his two companions were closeted in conference in a large saloon next to the control cabin, occasionally going in there and studying the chart on the table. In the next cabin, the wireless was at work, and messages were continually being taken from the wireless man to the cabin where the others were in conference.

"It must be something to do with the people that Irish chap said we were taking aboard off some Greek island," suggested Rodney, as they had disconsolately grown a little tired of their own company, and had made up their minds to see if they could find Dr. Fraser, whom they had not seen since first they came on board.

"Just as well we didn't reckon on that Irish chap getting us away, since we've reached the island!" said Dan. "There wouldn't be much hope of that with that German fellow keeping an eye on us as he be."

Kraft loomed up on them in the corridor as Dan spoke, glowering at them angrily, with his marked face and swollen lip, and asking them what they wanted.

"A word with the doctor," replied Rodney.

"The Herr Doctor cannot be seen. He is with his patient. You can come and have your meal, which is now ready for you. Afterwards, if the Herr Doctor is free to be seen by you, I will let you know."

"One of these days, Dan," said Rodney under his breath, as they went towards the dining-saloon, "I shall really hurt that fellow. I've never known anyone in my life before whose face I disliked so much. Of course, the doc isn't too busy to see us. I'll bet he's wondering why we haven't been near him since last night."

They sat down in the dining-saloon and ate the meal which was laid ready for them, waited on by the foreign steward in a white jacket. They ate silently, Rodney hinting to his friend that it was wisest to keep their own counsel in front of this man. It was a good meal, and their appetites were healthy, so they helped themselves freely.

Afterwards, when they had finished and—for lack of anything better to do—had strolled along back to their own cabin, Dan remarked that he felt drowsy, and suggested that they should lie down for a while in their berths. The storm, making the place as black as ink, was still raging round them, and they switched on the electric light, settling down to talk.

First they discussed the days spent together at Tidewell, wondering how things were going there, and the disturbance their disappearance must be causing. Then, of this strange adventure into which they had so unexpectedly been

plunged, and what was likely to come of it. This brought back to Rodney's mind again the mysterious envelope addressed in his father's handwriting, and the contents which he so much wished to read, and only refrained from reading through a sense of honour.

He was wondering to himself whether it was not mistaken honour after all, when he heard Dan snore, and stared at him in surprise, though he had to confess that he, too, felt stupidly sleepy. Indeed, whether it was the force of Dan's example, or whether—as was quite reasonable—the excitement and activities of the last twenty-four hours with very little real sleep during the night were having an effect on him, he suddenly found himself unable to keep awake.

Before giving way and making himself comfortable, he took the precaution of tucking Kraft's revolver and the letter to Lord Braxton under his pillow, and, satisfied with that, let himself drift into oblivion.

How long he had been asleep he did not know. He came back to a sense of consciousness with a heavy feeling in his head. He did not come back at once, either. He seemed to

be battling his way back. He had the impression that he was engaged in a hand-to-hand tussle with the German, Kraft, who was leaning over him and trying to overpower him. It seemed to him that, in the darkness, Kraft dealt him a terrible blow, which sent him down into the depths.

Against this he struggled, fighting violently for breath and freedom, staggering to his feet from his berth with his eyes suddenly wide open to meet—not the yellow glow of the electric bulb, but the vivid hues of a blood-red dawn. Struggling and fighting, he certainly was. But not—as he had imagined—with Kraft. He was writhing in the powerful grip of young Dan, who was holding him down and talking to him reassuringly.

"What be wrong with you?" he was saying. "'Tis Dan—not yon German. And what be wrong with things, anyhow? It be morning, for sure! We must have slept nigh twelve hours on end!"

Rodney, pulling himself together, began to look around and out of the porthole. The Flying Fish, he could see, was moving gently over a mountainous stretch of country, rugged and serrated, a vast panorama of peaks coloured pink and blue in the lights of the dawning sun.

"It isn't that Greek island!" he said. "Where can we be, Dan? And how can we have come to sleep like that? My head's splitting. I've been having the most shocking dreams. I thought Kraft was bending over me. I never felt anything so certain in my life."

"That's what you wakened saying!" nodded Dan. "I'd just wakened myself, and was wondering how it could be day so soon—"

"Why, it's day all right!" laughed Rodney uneasily, with a glance at his wrist-watch. "It's near half-past four, though the time would be different here, of course. We must have been shockingly tired, both of us. And yet—it doesn't seem to me, somehow, to have been a natural sleep. You don't think, by any chance, there was anything in the food they gave us—"

On a sudden inspiration Rodney stepped back to the berth on which he had been lying and thrust his hand beneath the pillow, groping vainly for an instant. Then he flung the pillow aside. His suspicion had proved right.

"Perhaps I wasn't so wrong in my dream after all, Dan!" he said under his breath. "The last thing I did before I dropped off to sleep was to put Kraft's revolver and Lord Braxton's letter under my pillow. And—they're gone! They haven't taken legs Dan. What a fool I was! Don't you see what's happened? We've been drugged. Kraft, or somebody, has been in here looking round. Perhaps someone saw Lord Braxton give me that packet."

"Dan!" he added. "Lord Braxton said these people were not to get hold of that packet at any cost. He trusted it to me. And—and I've let him down! What am I to do?"

"Can't do anything!" Dan shook his head. "It must be that Kraft, the low-down skunk! We've been drugged, sure enough. When I woke I was that dizzy I didn't somehow think it was natural."

"And I've let Lord Braxton down. Perhaps my father as well. Heaven knows what was in that packet!"

At which moment, as Rodney made a sudden impulsive movement towards the cabin door and opened it, Kraft himself loomed outside, his white, moonlike face stretched in a leer.

"Ah! You vas awake at last, mein young friends!" he said. "You vas schleep so heavy I vas afraid you vas never get up again. I come to tell you that ve vas now landing. The journey vas over. Kindly get ready to come where you are to go."

He passed on, leaving Rodney staring after him with anger and self-accusation burning in him. There was no doubt at all now as to who had taken that revolver and packet. Kraft himself had practically admitted as much.

Meantime, a glance through the porthole indicated that the Flying Fish was making a swift vertical descent to earth. Passing out into the corridor, with Dan behind him, Rodney saw that they were descending straight into the deep pit of an immense valley, surrounded by precipitous cliffs and high peaks.

It was not by any means an empty valley, they were quick to realise. It was inhabited, and it seemed as if a largish town occupied almost one-half of it. Near to this, on a height, a big castellated building stood on the edge of a pine forest. A river cut the valley in half. With every moment of descent the view became clearer.

On one side of the river, which was bridged once, rows upon rows of houses were crowded together. On the opposite side stretched what looked like immense works, from which steam was issuing and the lights of big furnaces shone. It was at one end of these works that Rodney noticed something which caused him to grip Dan by the arm and point downwards. Giant skeletons of airships in various degrees of construction could be seen. Around these, and streaming across the grounds of the works, like little flies, were hundreds upon hundreds of people. Nineteen of

those giant airship shapes there were, as the Irishman had told them. The rest of the fleet of Flying Fish.

From behind the two the voice of Prince Karagenski addressed them.

"The end of our journey, my young friends!" he said. "A Russian valley in the Caucasus, with a name, by the way, which is very appropriate. They call it the 'Valley Of No Escape.'"

The Vulture's Lair.

EXAMINATION of the place to which they had been brought, the bustle of arrival in the lights and shadows of the dawn, and the knowledge that now at last they had reached the actual headquarters of this amazing menace to the world's peace, so occupied Rodney and his friend, Dan, that other matters drifted for the moment into the background.

It was clear that, during their night of drugged sleep, the Flying Fish had called in somewhere and taken fresh people on board.

With Von Roden, the prince, and the Greek, were now two other people of apparent importance—one biggish-made man in an Egyptian taboosh, and a small, hunchback man wrapped in furs, to whom all the others showed a tremendous deference. It was Lord Braxton, whom these people now, of course, found it unnecessary any longer to keep under guard, who gave Rodney some information as to these last two people.

"Now we have all the vultures gathered together!" he was murmuring cynically, standing just behind Rodney in the chill dawn. "The man in the red hat is Abbas Fazil, who hopes to reign over the Mohammedan East. The other is Boronov, the biggest scoundrel in Soviet Russia to-day. A pretty collection of human fiends—though what Karagenski is doing among them I don't quite understand. However, young friend, here we all are, and our chances of doing anything effective against people like these look very remote! The best we can hope is that they won't cut our throats. It's the strangest thing to me to find myself here with you—Adrian Blake's son, of all people! Your father—"

Whatever Lord Braxton was going to say remained unsaid. Between them the bullying figure of Kraft had stepped, pushing Rodney roughly by the shoulder towards a large automobile which was waiting near by. It had just come into Rodney's mind to confess to the loss of the packet entrusted to him by the newspaper millionaire, but he was robbed of the chance. Kraft had been joined by a burly man of obvious Teuton type, dressed in a kind of grey uniform. Apparently he had already received some information regarding Rodney and Dan. He looked them cynically up and down, and chuckled, speaking in good English with a guttural accent.

"So you are the two young trouble-merchants? Well, I am Colonel Stangerfeld. I am in military command of this valley. When I meet trouble here, I send my men out to shoot it. You see? You are being taken up to the castle for the time being. Presently we shall no doubt find something useful for you to do. Get in this automobile!"

Bundled into the dark interior of the car, which was loaded with baggage so heavily that they had little room in which to make themselves comfortable, the driver started them off with a jerk. By now the sun was rising higher in the east over the peaks by which the deep valley was surrounded, and through the windows they could see something of their surroundings. It was rather an astonishing sight on which they looked as the car made its way through the valley. On one side, near where the Flying Fish shone magnificently in the sun, there stretched the immense high-walled area of works, from which noise and flame came continually.

The gates of this, Rodney noticed, were guarded by men dressed—like Colonel Stangerfeld—in grey uniforms, and armed to the teeth. From the gates and towards them there moved two streams of people, fur-clad and grimy, hurrying as if fear hunted at their heels—people whose grey faces were sullen and miserable, their steps speeded up occasionally by threats and derisive laughter from the uniformed guards. And then, over a bridge across the river, the car began to mount through a large town of poor hovels, with an occasional brick building here and there.

Ahead of their car, when the road twisted, the lads could see four other large cars moving. The people on doorsteps, watching the procession of cars whizz by, stared after them with anger in their eyes. Presently, the car gave way to a long and winding road, climbing steeply through a dense forest of pines. This road, after a while, gave them a wonderful glimpse of the valley below bathed by now in the rising sun—a scene of ceaseless bustle, the nineteen sinister skeletons of the Flying Fishes under construction looming side by side in a long row, each in a sort of dock.

Swinging round into an immense gateway, the car drove into some wooded grounds, and presently drew up with a

jerk at a heavy portal. Getting out, Rodney and Dan realised that they had arrived at the big castellated building they had seen from the porthole of the airship. They were hurried inside by Kraft, and kept waiting for a long while in a great mediæval old hall, its walls hung with tapestries, hunting-trophies, and armour. Then Kraft, returning and beckoning them, they mounted a wide staircase and were taken into a huge room, handsomely furnished and with two beds in it.

"You vas lucky, let me say to you!" growled Kraft, as he turned to leave them alone. "If I vas have mine own way vid you, I vas put you away in the dungeons where you vas safe underground."

"Thanks for the compliment, Fritz!" laughed Rodney. "It shows you've got a wholesome respect for us—"

"Was it?" Kraft's face was livid, his swollen lip and blackened eye being visible proofs of why he felt so vindictive. "It vas lucky for you that you haf a goot friend in der Prince Karagenski, and that—there are other reasons vhy you vas not put under the ground for good. But—you make vone enemy of me. And don't forget—when der time comes—"

"When it comes," laughed Rodney, "either my friend or I will be quite ready for you, so don't you worry. We're not likely to funk you, Fritz!"

Kraft's face went more livid than ever, and he was about to splutter something in further warning, when a slim, fair-haired lad, dressed in furs, appeared in the doorway. Kraft, interrupted, raised his hand in salute, and fell back in surly anger. The lad came towards Rodney and his friend with a shy smile.

"I am Sacha Karagenski," he explained haltingly, as Kraft disappeared and the door closed. "My father has been telling me about you. One of you is the son of Mr. Adrian Blake—"

"I am," said Rodney. "And this is my friend, Dan Lea."

"I don't suppose you're at all glad to be here," proceeded the other awkwardly. "Father's been telling me how it happened. I expect you're feeling pretty badly towards him and the others—and towards me. But I hope you won't blame me. It's not my fault; and when I heard you were here I was glad. There's no one here anywhere near my age. I'd hoped we might be friends."

"Why not?" asked Rodney, with a laugh, holding out his hand impulsively. "Neither Dan nor I would dream of blaming you for our being here. You didn't know anything about it. Besides, I don't know that Dan and I are worried over being here, either. We know pretty well what's going on, and—one never knows—it might be possible for us yet to upset some of the arrangements these people seem to be making—"

"Hush!" The Russian lad glanced round him apprehensively at the huge room with its oak-panelled walls and shadowed corners. "Whatever you think, don't say too much. You don't know this place and these people. There is always a spy somewhere, listening to what is said. And then—if there isn't actually a spy hidden near—there may be tucked away where you'd not think of looking a little machine taking down all that's said—"

"A dictaphone!" nodded Rodney, understanding, and looking around him cautiously.

The other laid a hand on his arm. "They wouldn't have put one in here yet," he said, "because it has only just been settled which room you were to have. I asked them to put you next to me—that door over there leads into my room. They were going to put

you in charge of Kraft, but they changed their mind when I spoke. Boronov—he's the head of them all—said I could look after you—"

"Spy on us?" laughed Rodney.

"Not exactly. Boronov doesn't think you can do any harm. I don't see, either, how anyone could, especially chaps like us."

"You're not really in with these people, then?" questioned Rodney. "Your father told us something like that about you."

"I'm only here because I can't help it. And, really"—again the Russian lad looked searchingly into the dark corners of the big room before he went on in low undertones—"father himself hates the whole business. He got mixed up in it, and—he can't get out of it. They'd kill him—or me—if he tried. That's why I'm here—as a sort of hostage. And it's the same with you—"

"With me?" Rodney stared in some surprise, as the Russian touched him on the arm.

"Yes," nodded the latter; "because of your father."

"I can't quite make out the truth about my father!" frowned Rodney. "Of course, he was on the trail of this business for an English newspaper—"

"Belonging to Lord Braxton," said Sacha Karagenski.

"On the Flying Fish Von Roden told me my father had been killed."

"So he thought—and so did the others. But that wasn't so. Your father seems to have been too clever for them."

"Then that accounts, Dan, for the packet Lord Braxton asked me to look after. It had been posted by my father only a few weeks since—"

"From Angora!" nodded the Russian, causing Rodney to turn on him in surprise.

"How do you know that?" he asked.

"Just now I told you that—with these people—one had to be careful what one said. In that cabin of yours on the Flying Fish they had a kind of broadcast arrangement. You and your friend were talking about that packet and your father, and Von Roden was listening in another cabin. So they took steps to get hold of the packet—"

"By drugging us!" exclaimed Rodney, beginning to see daylight, and colouring hotly as he realised how Dan and he had been caught napping. "I ought to have been more careful, of course. Lord Braxton warned me that these people must never get hold of that packet. And now I've let him down, and perhaps my father as well. If they've got that packet—"

"They haven't!" intervened the Russian lad, after another cautious glance around. "I heard them talking about it before I came here to you. Kraft took it away from your cabin, with the idea of handing it to Von Roden. But before he could do that they stopped at a Greek island to take up Boronov. Somehow—Kraft doesn't understand at all how—he fell in the sea from the deck. Someone picked him out safely. But—afterwards—he could not find that packet."

"There's been no end of a fuss about it. You see, they'd discovered that your father was at Angora some weeks ago. Their spies had been after him, but he slipped away from them. No doubt, in that packet, he'd been telling Lord Braxton where he was and what he was doing."

"Ten to one on my gov'nor doing something worth while!" laughed Rodney. "Still, if Kraft was ass enough to fall in the sea—and I suppose the packet got loose somehow and floated away in the dark—well, at least they can't know where he is."

"But they're busy trying to find out. And that's one reason why Boronov's chuckling at having picked you up. They believe your father is trying to make his way back to England with certain papers he's got hold of. They're counting on getting in touch with him and letting him know they have his son here, and threatening that, if he doesn't give in, you'll be shot."

"Kind of them!" said Rodney. "But I don't think that would frighten my gov'nor. However, we needn't worry. They haven't found him yet, I'll bet. And meantime—"

"We're going to be friends!" smiled Sacha Karagenski, holding out his hand again; and the three lads shook on the bargain.

So, in this lair of human vultures, a comradeship was struck which made the two captives from England feel happier and more at home than they otherwise might have done in such sinister quarters.

(Rodney and Dan are to meet with many strange and perilous adventures in the Valley of No Escape so make sure you read the next instalment of this gripping new serial.)

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FRIENDSHIP OR DUTY?

(Continued from page 22.)

"Very well. I must accept your resignation, of course," murmured the Head thoughtfully. "Perhaps it is as well. I never imagined, I admit, that a junior would be elected captain when I opened the post to the whole school. However, it is far better, in my opinion, for a senior to be captain of St. Jim's."

"As a matter of fact, sir," said Tom, "I spoke to Kildare myself a few minutes ago. I told him I intended to resign, and told him I hoped he would carry on again. He told me that he would see you, and discuss the matter. He is quite willing to do so, he tells me, if you will have him as captain again, and if the school elects him."

A plain look of relief came into the Head's face.

His disagreement with Kildare had been small enough, really, although it had led to big results! It was good news for Dr. Holmes that Kildare was not bearing resentment, and would be willing to take on the captaincy again. For without doubt Kildare was the best captain St. Jim's could hope to have. And no one realised that better than the headmaster of St. Jim's himself.

"That is excellent news, Merry!" said the Head, with satisfaction. "Please tell Kildare I would like to see him shortly."

"Very good, sir."

Evidently the Head had quite forgotten for the moment his anger over the news that two of the gated juniors had broken out that afternoon! It was a relief to Tom to leave the study without further reference to that matter!

And one thing was certain. Even if the Head pursued his investigations he would never, without Tom's help, be able to discover the identity of the two culprits!

Tom returned to the Sixth Form passage with a light tread, and entered the end study with grinning face.

"Well?" exclaimed Figgins and Blake together.

"All O.K.!" chuckled Tom. "I've resigned. The Head's going to see Kildare! My hat, it's a relief, really, not to be a blessed prefect any longer! Lend me a hand, you chaps, to shift my gear back to Study No. 10."

The election took place on the following Tuesday, and Kildare was elected captain by an overwhelming majority.

No one was more relieved when Kildare resumed office than was Tom Merry.

It had been pleasant enough for a while, being captain of the school. But enough is as good as a feast!

At Figgins' own request, Tom resumed his position as junior captain.

And Tom Merry, back in Study No. 10, felt that it was far, far pleasanter to be among his friends of the junior school again than to be in the lofty position of skipper—a position which would have meant the sacrifice of Friendship or Duty!

THE END.

(There will be another grand long story of Tom Merry & Co. in next week's GEM, entitled: "A TRAITOR IN THE SCHOOL!" together with another FREE "Marvels of the Future" picture card. Order your copy WELL IN ADVANCE.)

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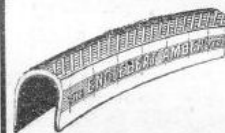
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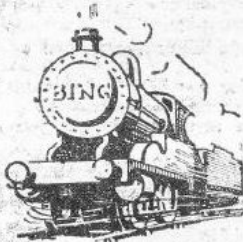
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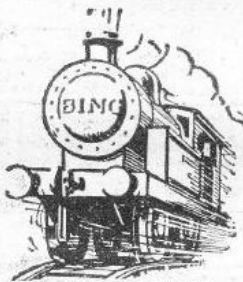
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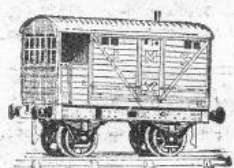
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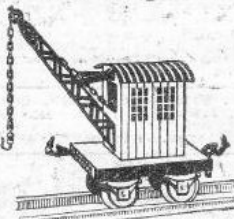
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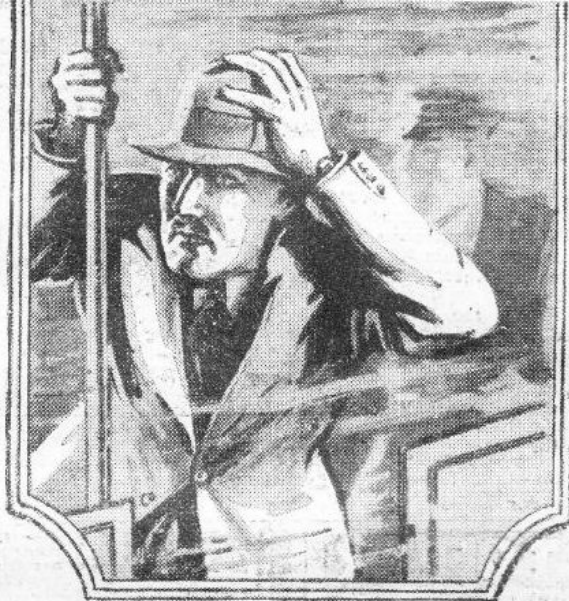
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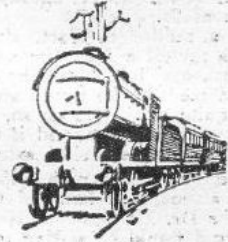
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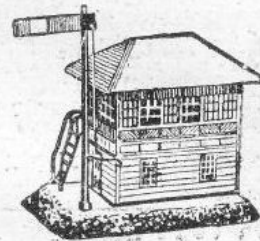
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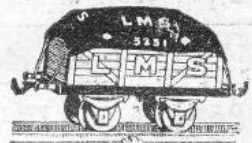
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Realistic signal box. With steps, one-arm signal, and candle-holder. Height 5 in.

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