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TRIMBLE, THE FOOTLING FUNK, CHALLENGES FIGGINS—

CHAPTER 1.

Wynn on the Warpath!

"**W**HO—"
Fatty Wynn began; but he could not continue.

Emotion choked him.

He stood in the doorway of his study, in the New House at St. Jim's, gazing into the room with bulging eyes and dropping jaw, as if he beheld a grisly spectre therein.

Figgins and Kerr, who were coming up the passage, stared at him. They could see that there was something wrong with David Llewellyn Wynn. They hurried on to join him.

"What—" began Figgy.

Fatty Wynn pointed into the study with a trembling finger.

"Look!"

Figgins and Kerr looked.

"Oh my hat!" ejaculated Figgins.

"Phew!" said Kerr.

"Who—" repeated Fatty Wynn, finding his voice again. "Who—who's done it?"

Figgins & Co. stepped into the study. Figgy and Kerr looked wrathful; but Fatty Wynn gazed at the study table more in sorrow than in anger. On that table, not ten minutes ago, a feast had been spread out. Fatty Wynn had spread it out with the loving care natural to Fatty on such an occasion. There had been beautiful ham sandwiches; lovely tomato sandwiches; a pile of toasted muffins; two pots of jam; and—above and beyond all—a huge cake!

All had been ready for a feast of the gods, when Fatty had gone down to call his chums, to hurry them up to the spread. He had not intended to be gone more than a couple of minutes. But Figgy and Kerr were talking football downstairs with some New House men; and a question concerning goal-keeping had arisen—a subject upon which Fatty knew everything that was to be known, if not a little more. So, as it turned out, it was ten minutes before the chums of the New House came up to the study.

Somebody had profited by the delay.

Of the pile of muffins, only one was left. All the sandwiches were gone. Both jampots were empty; a sticky spoon lying near them indicating that their contents had been removed in haste, and disposed of in bulk. And the big cake had vanished—only a few crumbs and a single plum remaining to mark the spot where it had stood.

Who had done it?

"The best spread we've had this term!" There was a break in Fatty Wynn's voice. "The very best!" And—and gone! Gone! S-s-somebody's cut in and scoffed the lot!"

"Must have been more than one!" said Kerr. "One fellow couldn't scoff all that—unless it was Trimble of the School House. I dare say he could. Even you couldn't have scoffed so much, Fatty."

"But who—" said Figgins.

"Some School House cad!" groaned Fatty Wynn. "No New House man would raid our study. Some School House toad—"

He gazed mournfully at the denuded table.

The table was draped with a nice clean white tablecloth. The cloth hung round it on all sides. On the floor, close by the table, lay a chunk of cake, apparently dropped there by the raider. On the cloth, where it hung down one side of the table, were the marks of jammy fingers. These tell-tale signs, however, Figgins & Co. did not notice for the moment. They were gazing at the few remnants of that

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FIGGINS in a FUNK!

By MARTIN CLIFFORD

handsome spread; like the Indian in the poem, who gazed on the scene where the home of his fathers once had been.

"He can't have been gone long!" said Figgins.

"I wonder we didn't run into him in the passage," said Kerr.

Fatty Wynn started.

He had been overwhelmed by this awful catastrophe. But now his faculties were beginning to work again.

"My hat! It's not more than ten minutes since I left the study—and he must have been here a good many minutes to scoff that lot! And we saw nothing of him as we came up. My hat!"

Fatty Wynn made a jump to the fender and grasped the poker.

"I say—what—" began Figgins.

"He's still here!" roared Fatty Wynn.

"Wha-a-t?"

"He can't have got away. He hasn't had time! He's got out of sight somewhere—"

"Oh crumbs!"

"Root him out!" yelled Fatty.

He took a firm grip on the poker. If the raider was still in the study, obviously he was going to have a hectic time when he was rooted out. The feast was gone—gone beyond recall. But vengeance remained. It was probable that the raider would repent him of the raid when David Llewellyn Wynn got busy with the poker.

—THE FIGHTING FURY . . . AND FIGGINS DECLINES—WHY?



"But where—" gasped Figgins. There was only one possible place; under the table, where that nice clean tablecloth screened the space underneath. And now Figgy noticed the chunk of cake on the floor, and the jammy marks on the cloth. He understood. The raider was still there; and he had dodged under the table, out of sight, as he heard footsteps approaching the study.

"Under the table!" gasped Figgy.

"Ow!"

It was a sudden terrified squeak. It proceeded from under the table. There was no doubt now.

Fatty Wynn brandished the poker.

"Shift that table!" he roared.

"What-ho!"

Figgins and Kerr reached out to grasp the table, to lift it aside and reveal the hidden raider.

"Oh jiminy!" came the terrified squeak again.

"That's Trimble!" yelled Fatty Wynn. "Have him out!"

At that moment one end of the table rose suddenly from the floor. A torrent of crockery shot over Figgins and Kerr. Crash! went the table. Smash! went the crocks. And a fat figure leaped into the air and bolted for the door.

Fatty Wynn made a rush with uplifted poker. Unfortunately, Figgins, staggering under a torrent of plates and cups and saucers, staggered in his way. There was a collision, and Fatty stumbled over.

The poker came down. It did not reach Baggy Trimble, who was jumping out of the study with the activity of a kangaroo. But every bullet has its billet.

"Gerrout of the way!" roared Fatty Wynn. "Wharrer you stopping me for, you ass? Gerrout!"

"Ow! My napper!" Kerr was yelling frantically.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Figgins.

Headless of the damage to Kerr's napper, Fatty Wynn rushed out of the study. He rushed into a junior in the passage with a crash.

"Gerrout!" howled Fatty. "Wharrer you getting in the way for, Redfern, you chump? Gerrout!"

"What the thump—" began Redfern.

Fatty Wynn did not answer. He disentangled himself from Redfern and rushed on.

But it was too late!

As he reached the stairs a fat figure bolted out of the New House and scudded into the quad.

Baggy Trimble was gone!

With him went Figgins & Co.'s gorgeous spread—safely packed away inside Trimble. And, heavy laden as he was, Baggy Trimble crossed the quad to the School House in record time.

CHAPTER 2.

A House Row!

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form turned his celebrated eyeglass upon a podgy form that came sprinting across the quad towards the School House.

"Twimble seems to be in wathah a huwvy!" he remarked.

A number of School House men were adorning the steps of the House with their noble selves. Tom Merry and Manner and Lowther, of the Shell, sat in a cheery row on the stone balustrade. Blake and Herries and Digby, of the Fourth, leaned in a row beside them. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stood facing them. Arthur Augustus had been talking on a subject of general interest when the sight of Baggy Trimble streaking homeward drew his attention to that fat and fatuous youth.

All the juniors glanced round and grinned. Baggy was putting on speed; but he was in no condition for a foot-race. He never was! His fat face

was crimson and bedewed with perspiration; his breath came in panting gasps, and he snorted like a grampus. Baggy Trimble never made a pretty picture, and now he looked less prepossessing than ever.

"That fat boundah can't wun for toffee!" remarked Arthur Augustus, with a disapproving eye on the panting, puffing Baggy.

"He's putting it on now, though," observed Tom Merry. "Looks as if he would be good for the hundred yards, at that rate."

"Somebody's after him, I suppose," yawned Blake. "Can't see anybody, though. He's been up to something."

"The guilty flee when no man pursueth!" said Monty Lowther. "Keep an eye on him! I fancy he's going to burst!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The podgy Baggy really looked as if he were in danger of such a catastrophe as he came puffing and blowing up to the School House steps. But he did not stop there. He charged up the steps with undiminished speed. Whether he was pursued or not, it was plain that he feared pursuit. He came

Amazing change in the biggest funk at St. Jim's. Seeks to avenge insult in mortal combat! Read this Priceless New Long, Complete Yarn of Tom Merry and Co. of St. Jim's!

up with a rush.

"Bai Jove! What evah is the mattah, Twimble?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "What are you chargin' about like a pottay elephant for? What— Oh ewikey!"

Arthur Augustus was rather thoughtlessly standing directly in Trimble's path as he addressed him.

Trimble did not hear him, heed him, or even see him. He charged on blindly; and Gussy broke off with a startled yell, as he received the charge.

"Yawwoogh!" spluttered Arthur Augustus as he sat down suddenly on the steps.

"Ow!" gasped Trimble, reeling from the shock. "Ow! Gerraway! They're after me! He's got a poker! Ow!"

Trimble recovered his balance, and darted into the House and disappeared. Arthur Augustus sat gasping.

"Oh crumbs! Oh, bai Jove! Oh deah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! I have been knocked ovah!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "I have a great mind to go aftah that dangewous maniac and give him a feahful thwashin'. Oh cwkey!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry & Co.

"There is nothin' whatevah to cackle at, you asses!" gasped the swell of St. Jim's, as he scrambled to his feet. "I see no occasion whatevah for this wibald laughtah. My twosahs are all dustay—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, wats!"

Arthur Augustus dusted his elegant trousers, with a frowning brow. The other fellows chuckled. The matter was serious especially as regarded those elegant trousers; but the School House juniors seemed to see a comic side to it.

"You were saying, old chap—" said Tom Merry.

"I was sayin' that my twosahs are dustay—"

"Oh, bother your bags!" said Tom. "You were saying, before Trimble happened—"

"About Cousin Ethel," said Manners.

"Yes, get on with it," said Digby. "You were getting quite interesting, old chap; and that's a bit unusual, you know."

"Weally, Dig—"

"You were telling us—" said Herries.

"Yaas, wathah," said Arthur Augustus, the clouds clearing from his noble brow. "My Cousin Ethel is comin' to stay with some fwiends neah Wayland; in fact, she has come, as I undahstand that she awwid this mornin'."

"Good!" said Tom Merry.

"And, of course, she would like to call and see her fwiends heah," said Arthur Augustus. "And I was thinkin' that tea in the studay—a wathah special tea, you know—would be wathah a good ideah."

"Hear, hear!"

"Gussy is the man for good ideas!" said Blake heartily.

"We'll make a partay of it, you know," said Arthur Augustus. "You fellows, and those chaps from No. 9—Levison, Clive, and Cardew—and old Talbot, of course. In fact, as many as Studay No. 6 will hold."

"Good egg!"

"And a few from the New House," suggested Tom Merry.

Arthur Augustus looked doubtful.

"Figgins would like to come," said Manners.

Arthur Augustus looked icy.

"Weally, I see no reason why that New House boundah should be interestid in my cousin!" he remarked.

"There are lots of things you don't see, old top," said Blake affably.

"Weally, Blake—"

"I noticed that Figgins was looking very chirpy to-day," remarked Monty Lowther, with a grin. "I suppose he knows."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Oh, ask old Figgins!" said Tom Merry. "House rows are off on an occasion like this. Ethel would like Figgy to be there."

"I have no reason whatevah to suppose that Ethel would notice whether Figgy was there or not, Tom Mewy!"

Whereat the juniors grinned. If Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was unaware that Ethel Cleveland liked George Figgins very much indeed, he was the only fellow in the Lower School of St. Jim's who was in that state of unawareness.

"Hallo! Talk of angels, and you hear the rustle of their giddy wings!" exclaimed Blake. "Here comes Figgy."

Three New House men were coming across the quad at a run. All three of them looked rather excited.

Fatty Wynn had a fives bat in his hand. He looked as if he intended it for a stern use.

Tom Merry & Co. detached themselves from the balustrade at once. It was evident, from the looks of Figgins & Co., that they were on the warpath; and if that was the case the School House men were cheerfully prepared to give them a warm reception.

A day seldom passed without a "rag" between the juniors of the rival Houses of St. Jim's; though on some occasions, such as a school match, or a visit from Cousin Ethel, they buried the hatchet, and the lion and the lamb were at peace.

"Hallo, you New House wasters!" called out Blake, as Figgins & Co. came up. "What the thump are you doing on the respectable side of the quad?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We're after Trimble!" roared Fatty Wynn. "We want that fat rotter, and we're going to have him, and if you School House cads get in the way you'll get hurt!"

"My dear man, you can have Trimble as a gift, and welcome," said Tom Merry. "We're not proud of Trimble. He ought really to be a New House man."

"Quite New House style!" said Monty Lowther. "Can't imagine how they came to put him in the School House."

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"Oh, don't give us any of your cheek!" snorted Fatty Wynn. "Just stand out of the way and shut up!"

"My or y hat!" exclaimed Blake in amazement and wrath. "Do you really fancy you're going to be allowed to walk into this House to mop up a School House man? My hat!"

"Bai Jove! You feahfully cheeky boundahs—"

"Gerrout!" snorted Fatty Wynn, and he came sturdily on, followed by his comrades.

"Line up! chucked Tom Merry.

As Tom had said, the School House were not proud of Trimble. They would have landed him on the other House with pleasur. had it been possible. But Trimble, with all his faults—and their name was legion—was a School House man. The bare idea of New House men pursuing him into the sacred precincts of the House was more than enough to make the School House juniors warlike.

"Of all the nerve!" gasped Herries.

"Bai Jove! Of all the feahful cheek—"

"Colla! them!" roared Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Chuck it!" shouted Figgins. "I tell you, that fat rotter Trimble has raided our studay—"

"He's scoffed our spread!" yelled Fatty Wynn.

"You ought to be proud of a School House man scoffing a spread in your mouldy old House!" declared Blake.

"Why, you—you—you—" gasped Fatty, in breathless wrath. And he fairly hurried himself at the School House fellows.

Figgins and Kerr backed him up nobly.

But the odds were too great. Really, it was only Fatty Wynn's towering wrath at the scoffing of his spread that had led him to take these reckless measures. Figgins and Kerr backed him up, as in duty bound; but they hardly expected to get away with it. An invasion of the School House was certain to be strenuously resisted, regardless of the rights and wrongs of the matter.

Figgins & Co., grasped by many hands, went rolling down the steps. They landed at the bottom, gasping.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come on again, you New House wasters!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The New House trio picked themselves up. They accepted the invitation, and came on again in a desperate charge.

"Mop them up!" roared Blake.

"Give them bears!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fatty Wynn, struggling wildly in the grasp of Blake and Herries and Dig, was tossed down the steps again. Kerr, resisting manfully, was hurled down by Manners and Lowther. Figgins, who was a mighty man with his hands, engaged Tom Merry and Arthur Augustus, till a fist jammed on his nose, and he went backwards, and joined his friends below.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Have some more?"

"Pile in!"

Whether Figgins & Co. would have asked for any more, cannot be said; for just then Mr. Railton looked out of the House from his study window.

"What is this?" demanded the School House master. "What—"

Before the Housemaster could finish, Tom Merry & Co. had melted away into the House and Figgins & Co. across the quad. And Mr. Railton, finding himself addressing empty space, smiled faintly, and withdrew his head into his study.

CHAPTER 3. Nothing Doing!

"Gussy, old man!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy glanced round. It was the following afternoon, and a half-holiday at St. Jim's. Blake and Herries and Digby were watching a First Eleven match at Big Side; and Arthur Augustus had Study No. 6 to himself. He was busy upon a rather important matter—nothing less than trying on a series of beautiful neckties, one after another, before the study glass.

The fat voice of Baggy Trimble interrupted him. The fat figure of Baggy was framed in the study doorway.

Arthur Augustus lodged his eyeglass in his eye, and surveyed Trimble with a cold and disparaging survey.

"Did you address me, Twimble?" he inquired.

"Yes, old fellow! You see, Gussy—"

"I am Gussy to my fwiends!" said Arthur Augustus, in his most stately manner.

"What a nobby tie!" exclaimed Trimble, in great admiration.

D'Arcy's severe countenance relaxed.

"Yaas, wathah!" he agreed. "I weally think it is wathah nice, Twimble. I have almost decided on this one for



Wynn stumbled, and the poker came down. It did not reach Trimble, however, but there was a fiendish yell from Kerr!

Saturday." On Saturday, it all went wed, Cousin Ethel would be taking tea at St. Jim's, and the question of a necktie for Saturday was, therefore, a rather urgent one.

"Oh, ripping!" said Trimble. "The fact is, Gussy, you know more about ties and things than any other man in the House."

This time "Gussy" was allowed to pass without rebuke. Arthur Augustus nodded cheerily.

"Yaas, I wathah think I know somethin' about such mattahs," he agreed. "I am glad to see you takin' an interest in them, Twimble. You are so fwightfully slovenly as a wule."

"Look here, you know—"

"Your own tie, fow instance," said Arthur Augustus, glancing at it. "It is quite a wag, you know. It weally looks as if you have been twyin' to hang yourself, Twimble. It is quite howdid to see a fellow's tie tied like that."

"I was going to ask you, Gussy—"

"To show you how to tie it?" asked D'Arcy cordially. "With pleasuah, deah boy. It is weally quite an eyesore."

"Nunno! I was going to ask you if—if you'd like to come for a walk this afternoon."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy froze again. He was not likely to walk with Baggy Trimble. It was like Baggy's check to prefer such a request. But Baggy, whatever else he lacked, had never lacked cheek.

"Sowwy!" said D'Arcy briefly.

"It's a lovely afternoon fo. " walk," urged Baggy, "and—and I should so enjoy your company, Gussy."

The swell of St. Jim's unbent again a little.

"In that case I am vewy sowwy I cannot come, Twimble," he answered. "You see, if you do not mind my mentioning it, I cannot stand you at any pwice."

"Look here—!" hooted Trimble.

"Pway shut the door aftah you, Twimble. There is wathah a daught."

Trimble did not retire, and he did not shut the door. Arthur Augustus had turned to the glass, and was busy again with ties. Baggy glared at his back with his little piggy eyes.

"I say, Gussy! I really wish you'd come!" he said. "The fact is, I've got to get across to Wayland this afternoon. I've got a postal order payable at the post office there; and I'm going to the pictures. Look here, you come, and I'll stand you the pictures, too."

"Thank you, Twimble, but I should not care to go to the

pictures with you. You like nasty **American** films, and I cannot stand them."

"Look here, what about tea at the toashop, too?" said Trimble recklessly.

D'Arcy looked round from the glass in surprise. It was extremely unusual for Baggy to offer to stand treat in this reckless manner.

"Bai Jove! You are vewy good, Twimble; but, as a mattah of fact, I am teain' with Tom Mewwy this aftahnoon."

"Well, you can get back in time for tea, if you like," said Trimble. "I want you to walk over with me. Do come, Gussy. I—I find your society so jolly improving, you know."

Arthur Augustus was an unsuspecting fellow. But this was laying it on rather thick; and he surveyed Trimble with a touch of suspicion.

"Weally, Twimble—"

"You'l come, won't you?" asked Trimble. "Lovely walk through the wood—and I'll tell you all about the big affair at Trimble Hall last hols."

"Wats! What do you want me to walk to Wayland with you for, Twimble? What are you up to?" demanded Arthur Augustus.

"Only—only because you're so nice, Gussy."

"Weally, you fat duffah—"

"And—and you can back a fellow up if any of those New House cads are hanging about," said Trimble.

"Oh!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus.

And he grinned. He knew now the reason why his company was so ardently desired that afternoon. Since the raid on Figgins & Co.'s study the previous day, Baggy Trimble had hardly set foot outside the School House. Figgins & Co.—especially Fatty Wynn—were keeping a vengeful eye open for Baggy. But Baggy did not want to pass a half-holiday mewed up in the House. Still less did he want to fall into the hands of a New House avenger. Arthur Augustus, evidently, was to be his bodyguard.

"You—you see, those rotters make out that I bagged their feed yesterday" said Trimble, driven to telling the truth at last. "They're after me. If you'll come along, Gussy, and—and ask your pals to come, too, then, you see—"

"Wubbish!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Of course, I could lick one of them—any one of them," said Baggy. "But the three together, you know—"

"Yaas, I should like to see you lickin' one of them," chuckled Arthur Augustus. "The fact is, Twimble, you deserve a feahful thwasnin' for baggin' a spweed in the New House. You should keep your hands fwom pickin' and stealin', you know."

"Yah!" snorted Baggy.

"I do not wegard that as an intelligible wemark, Twimble! Pway wettre fwom my studay!"

"You silly chump!"

"Weally, Twimble—"

"You fatheaded tailor's dummy!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Fat lot of use you'd be in a scrap!" said Trimble derisively. "I could jolly well lick you with one hand tied behind me!"

Arthur Augustus laid down a tie, and came across towards the door with a warlike gleam behind his eyeglass.

Baggy Trimble backed into the passage and the door slammed. Arthur Augustus grabbed at the handle.

"You cheeky wottah!" he exclaimed. "Bai Jove! Are you holdin' the door, Twimble? Welease the door at once, you fat wottah! I am goin' to thwash you for your feahful cheek!"

Arthur Augustus jerked at the door.

But it did not open.

Baggy's fat hands, evidently, were holding the door-handle on the outer side. On second thoughts—proverbially the best—Baggy had decided not to lick the swell of St. Jim's, even without the handicap of one hand tied behind him.

"Welease that door-handle, you cheeky fat wottah!" roared Arthur Augustus, pulling at the knob.

Trimble held on for dear life.

"Do you heah me, Twimble?"

"Yah!"

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy put both hands to the door-handle. He grasped it in a grasp of iron, and pulled with all his strength. Slim and elegant as he was, there was a great deal of strength in Arthur Augustus—much more than there was in the podgy Baggy.

That terrific drag was too much for Trimble. He let go!

The door flew open—suddenly.

"Oh ewikey!"

Arthur Augustus had not apparently been prepared for that sudden surrender. The door flew open so suddenly that it tapped—hard—on Gussy's noble nose, and he sat down on the study floor with a bump and a yell.

"Ow! My nose! Wow! Bai Jove! You feahful wottah!" roared Arthur Augustus. "Gwooooh! Oh, my nose! Bai Jove, I will—"

"Oh jiminy!" gasped Trimble.

There was a rapid patter of flying feet in the Fourth Form passage. Arthur Augustus scrambled up, with one hand to his aristocratic nose, and plunged into the passage. He was just in time to see Baggy Trimble vanish down the stairs.

"Come back, you wottah!" roared Arthur Augustus. "I am goin' to give you a feahful thwashin'! Come back, you fat fwack!"

Baggy Trimble did not come back. He was not a very bright youth, but he was too bright for that. His fleeting footsteps died away.

Arthur Augustus, breathing hard, went back into his study. He went back to the mirror. But his beautiful assortment of neckties lay unheeded. He gazed in the glass, examining his noble nose with an anxious eye. It had had a knock—a hard knock! If it swelled, what would it look like on Saturday?

Gussy forgot neckties. He almost forgot Baggy Trimble. Lesser matters were banished from Gussy's noble mind as he proceeded, anxiously and carefully, to give first aid to his aristocratic boko.

CHAPTER 4.

Beastly for Baggy!

TOM MERRY smiled. Manners grinned. Monty Lowther chuckled.

The Terrible Three of the Shell seemed entertained.

It was Trimble of the Fourth who provided the entertainment. Trimble of the Fourth had come rather suddenly out of the School House; and, at the same time, Fatty Wynn of the New House appeared in the offing.

Fatty was on the School House side of the quad. There was a frown on his plump brow. David Llewellyn Wynn had let the sun go down on his wrath, and had allowed the sun to rise on it again.

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Time is a great healer; and in the course of time, no doubt, Fatty Wynn would forget that gorgeous feast that had been ravished almost under his nose. But as yet the loss was too recent. Fatty, like Rachel of old, mourned for that which was lost, and could not be comforted. Kicking Trimble was, perhaps, a poor solace; but it was better than nothing. Fatty was prowling round the School House, looking for a chance to kick Trimble.

Baggy gave a gasp of terror as he spotted him. The chums of the Shell were near at hand. Baggy dodged behind them, using them as a screen to bar off Fatty Wynn.

He had fled out of his own House to escape the wrath of Gussy—and the wrath of Fatty Wynn awaited him in the quad. Baggy felt like a hapless mariner of old, between Scylla and Charybdis. He felt like a fish that had flopped out of the frying-pan into the fire. He was between the devil and the deep sea.

"I—I say, d-d-don't move!" he gasped.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The three Shell fellows formed a fairly effective screen. Baggy peered between them at the New House Falstaff. Wynn had not noticed him—yet! He had been looking in another direction when Baggy bolted out of the House. But when he looked round—

"Keep still!" gasped Trimble. "I—I say, I—I don't want a row with that New House cad! D-d-don't let him see me!"

"You fat funk—" began Manners.

"Of—of course, I'm not afraid of him, you know!"

"You look as if you weren't!" chuckled Tom Merry.

"Bursting with pluck, what?" asked Monty Lowther.

"I—I—I— Oh dear! Keep together!" gasped Baggy, in anguish. "He's looking this way! D-d-don't let him see me! Oh jiminy!"

Fatty Wynn was looking towards the Shell fellows now. They grinned, and drew closer together, screening Baggy from view. Behind the three of them Baggy crouched, invisible to David Llewellyn Wynn.

He trembled as he crouched. The Terrible Three had only to separate a little to reveal him to the gaze of the avenger.

But they stood tight, screening him. And they chuckled as Fatty Wynn came towards them.

"Seen Trimble, you men?" asked the New House junior.

Baggy suppressed an agonised gasp.

"Trimble?" repeated Tom Merry thoughtfully.

"We saw him at dinner!" remarked Monty Lowther.

"I think I've seen him since!" observed Manners thoughtfully. "But I don't seem to see him at the present moment."

"The fat rotter's skulking somewhere," said Fatty Wynn. "I'm jolly well going to scrag him as soon as I get hold of him. He bagged our spread, you know—smashed up all our crocks getting away—and I caught Kerr a lick on the head with the poker that I meant for Trimble!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, you may think it funny," growled Wynn; "but Trimble won't think it funny when I begin on him! Know where he is?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Terrible Three.

The situation struck them as comic, though it appeared rather tragic to the fat junior crouching behind them in a state of palpitating funk.

Fatty Wynn glared at them. And he looked puzzled. It was rather odd for the Terrible Three to be standing in a row like soldiers on parade close together.

"What are you School House fatheads up to?" he asked.

"Snuff!" said Monty Lowther blandly.

"Ha, ha, ha!" came a shout of laughter from a little distance.

Levison, Clive, and Cardew of the Fourth were coming along from the rear of the Terrible Three, and they had a full view of the crouching Baggy.

Fatty Wynn looked at them, past the row of Shell fellows.

"You men seen Trimble?" he called out.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at, fatheads?" demanded Fatty Wynn testily. "Look here, I'm after Trimble! Where is he? You ought to be jolly well ashamed of having such a funk in your House!"

"Puzzle, find Trimble!" chuckled Levison.

Baggy blinked round, with an anguished blink, at the three Fourth-Formers. Mutely he begged them not to betray his whereabouts.

They halted, looking on at the peculiar scene with grinning faces.

"Look here! What's the joke?" demanded Fatty Wynn.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cackling School House fatheads—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you know where Trimble is—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the School House fellows.

Fatty Wynn gave an angry snort, and turned away. Evidently there was some joke on, though Fatty could not see what it was.

Fatty tramped away wrathfully, and disappeared.

"Is—is—is he gone?" gasped Baggy.

"Ho's gone!" chuckled Tom Merry. "You flabby, frabjous funk—"

"Look here, you know—" Baggy peered round his screen, and breathed more freely. "Of—of course, I'm not afraid of the fellow, you know. The—the fact is, I—I don't want to hurt him."

"Oh, my hat!"

"As for funking him, of course, that's rot!" said Baggy. "I handled the three of them in their own House yesterday, and I can tell you they had enough! You can cackle—"

"Thanks! We will! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yah!"

Baggy Trimble rolled away now that the coast was clear. There was a shout from Cardow.

"Look out, Trimble! There's Kerr!"

"Wha-a-at?"

Baggy blinked round. The Scottish member of the New House Co. appeared in sight. With a gasp of terror Baggy broke into a gallop, and vanished in the direction of the gates.

"Hallo, is that Trimble?" exclaimed Kerr. "I'm looking for Trimble! I say, Trimble! Stop!"

Baggy vanished out of gates.

Baggy was not, as a rule, much of a sprinter. But he could put on speed on some occasions. This, evidently, was one of the occasions. He departed almost at lightning speed, leaving Kerr of the Fourth staring.

"Oh jiminy!" gasped Baggy, as he rolled breathlessly into the road. "Oh dear! Rotters! Oh crickey!"

Crash!

A New House junior had gone out of gates ahead of Baggy. Baggy, charging out at full speed, got him nicely in the middle of the back.

"Oh!" roared Figgins.

"Ow!" gasped Baggy.

He reeled back from the shock. George Figgins sprawled on his face, completely bowled over by that unexpected charge from behind.

Figgins' features tapped on the hard, cold, unsympathetic road. His mouth collected dust, his nose received a jolt that made it feel, for the moment, as if it had been pushed clean through his head.

"Woouooooogh!" gasped Figgins.

Baggy stared down at him in horror and dismay. There were three fellows at St. Jim's whom Baggy wished particularly to avoid that afternoon, and he had encountered them one after the other. He had floored Figgins—which was so much to the good, as far as it went. But the thought of what would happen when Figgins got up again almost froze the blood in Baggy's fat veins.

"Oh jiminy!" he gasped.

"Ow! Oh! Who—what—" spluttered Figgins.

He half-rose.

Baggy Trimble simply could not afford to let him wholly rise. The results, to Baggy, would have been too awfully painful. Without stopping to think, in sheer desperation Baggy hurled himself on Figgins, and the New House junior was squashed down on the road again.

"Grooooooogh!" came in smothered accents from George Figgins.

Baggy jumped away and fled.

Figgins sat up dazedly. His eyes and mouth were thick with dust, his nose was badly scraped, and he was quite dizzy and dazed. Also, he was furious.

"Who—what—who—" spluttered Figgins.

A fat figure was going at full speed up Rylcombe Lane. Figgins scrambled to his feet.

"Trimble!" he roared.

Baggy flew.

Behind him came the sound of running feet.

Baggy blinked back over his shoulder. Figgins, crimson, dusty, infuriated, was in hot pursuit.

"Oh jiminy!" spluttered Baggy.

He raced on his highest gear. Even Figgins, the best junior sprinter in the New House, had to go all out to keep him in sight. Baggy left the lane and plunged into the footpath through the wood. Behind him, relentless as Fate, came the footsteps of Figgins.

CHAPTER I.

Unfortunate for Figgins!

C OUSIN ETHEL started.

She was surprised.

She was, in fact, more than surprised. She was shocked.

It was difficult, indeed, for Miss Ethel Cleveland to believe her own bright blue eyes for a moment or two.

Miss Cleveland was walking through the woodland footpath. It was a cold but fine afternoon, a very pleasant afternoon for a walk. Miss Cleveland's footsteps had led her, perhaps unconsciously, in the direction of St. Jim's, when she left Wayland, though she was still, at this moment, a half-mile from the school. The possibility of a chance-meeting with some old friend—such as Figgins of the Fourth—might have been at the back of Miss Cleveland's mind.

Now she saw Figgins.

Figgins did not, for the moment, see her. His eyes were fixed on a fat figure ahead of him—a fat, panting figure that he had almost overtaken.

Baggy, like Charley's Aunt, was still running. But he was failing fast. Great gasps proceeded from Baggy. His face was crimson with exertion, bedewed with perspiration; his mouth wide open, his breath like a stream of steam on the cold, clear air. Baggy did not see the graceful, girlish figure ahead of him; he saw nothing, heard nothing, knew nothing, except that Figgins was gaining fast. He gasped and grunted and spluttered as he exerted himself to keep up his flight, and the terror in Baggy's blazing countenance might have softened the heart of a Red Indian.

Figgy had a heart much softer than that of a Red Indian; but he, of course, could not see Baggy's face. He could only see the back of Baggy.

Cousin Ethel saw his face, and was sorry for him. She saw Figgins, and was surprised and shocked at Figgins.

Figgy had always seemed to Cousin Ethel a very quiet and even gentle fellow. So he was—when Miss Cleveland was around.

Now he looked anything but quiet or gentle. Certainly he was not looking his best. His dusty face, his scraped nose, and the hot anger in his looks, did not make for beauty.

Miss Cleveland came to a sudden halt—looking on. Her face became very set and cold. She felt that she never would have believed this of Figgins.

"Grooogh! Ooooooh! Ow! Oooooo!" spluttered Baggy, in breathless anguish and terror.

"You fat rotter!" gasped Figgins.

From Figgy's scraped nose red drops were trickling. Figgy was not what anyone would have called a handsome chap at the best of times. But generally he had a very pleasant face—the sort of face that people liked. Now his face was anything but pleasant. Cousin Ethel had never seen it looking like this before.

Of course, she knew nothing of the many sins of Baggy—of the raided spread of the day before; of the crocks Baggy had smashed in making his escape from Figgy's study; of the severe handling Figgins & Co. had received when they had pursued the fat pilferer to his own House; or of the more recent incident—of Figgy being charged over from behind, and his features being ground in the dust. All she knew was what she saw—a fat and breathless fellow fleeing as if for his life, and George Figgins running him down ruthlessly, with the obvious intention of administering toco with an unsparring hand.

No wonder she was shocked. No wonder she was surprised at Figgins.

"Got you!" roared Figgins.

His outstretched fingers touched Baggy's fat shoulder.

"Yaroooh!"

As if the touch had galvanised Baggy into new efforts, he shot onward again.

But it was the last spurt. Baggy's wind, never good, was wholly expended by that final effort, and he collapsed, and rolled on the grassy footpath within six feet of Ethel Cleveland.

"Now!" panted Figgins.

He would have had Baggy the next second.

"Stop!"

Ethel ran forward

"Yarooogh!" roared Baggy. "Keep off! Lemme alone! Yah, you bully! Keep off, or I'll tell your Housemaster! Brute! Rotter! Help!"

"Ethel!"

Figgins stopped dead

He stared at the pretty vision under the branches of the old trees as if it had been a spectre.

"Oh!" gasped Figgins. "Ethel! Oh!"

"Help!" roared Baggy.

Figgins stared at Ethel, so surprised by the sudden meeting that he actually forgot to raise his cap.

Baggy sat up.

He sat in the grass, gasping for breath, streaming with perspiration. But he had seen Ethel now, and knew that he was safe. Figgins was not the man to punch a fellow in the presence of a girl. He was not, indeed, the man to punch a fellow like Baggy much at all. Figgy's wrath was very likely to evaporate when the moment of execution came. In all probability a spank or two was all that Baggy would have received from the New House junior.

Now he was safe—even from that mild punishment. Being safe, Baggy recovered his courage a little.

Figgins stared across Baggy at Ethel. He had almost forgotten Baggy. He remembered his cap, however, and lifted it.

Scarlet flooded Figgy's honest face. It rushed into his mind that Ethel had seen him under the most unfavourable circumstances. What would she think of him?

What Miss Cleveland thought of him was a matter of the deepest moment to George Figgins. Why he hardly knew himself. But he knew that it was so. The opinion of the rest of the world might have passed him by, like the idle wind which he regarded not. But by Miss Cleveland's opinion Figgy set great store.

"Oh!" he gasped again. "Ethel! I—I—I—"

His voice trailed off.

"I hope you are not going to hurt Trimble!"

Ethel's voice was like ice. It might have come from a refrigerator.

Figgy remembered Baggy's unimportant existence.

"Eh? Oh! No! Certainly not!"

"Yah!" came from Trimble. "You beastly bully! Yah! Hit one your own size, you New House funk! Yah!"

Baggy, feeling safe in Ethel's presence was rubbing it in. Figgins undoubtedly was much bigger than Baggy—that is, he was much taller. In width, Baggy had the advantage.

"Shut up!" hissed Figgins.

"Shan't! Bully! Yah!"

"I—I say, Ethel!" stammered Figgins.

The colour faded from his face, and he looked dismal as he detected that icy look on Miss Cleveland's attractive countenance. She thought he was a bully—she thought he was going for a fat, clumsy fellow smaller than himself—pitching into a fellow who obviously couldn't fight! That was what she was thinking, and it made Figgy's blood run cold.

"Bully!" howled Trimble. Baggy was beginning to enjoy this. He saw and understood the expression on Figgy's face. "Bully! Yah!"

"Will you dry up?" panted Figgins.

"No, I won't! Bully!" howled Trimble. "Beastly bully! Pitch into me if you like! I ain't so big as you, but I'll fight as long as I can stand! I ain't afraid of a hulking bully! Yah!"

It was a safe offer. Trimble knew that he could say what he liked in Cousin Ethel's presence, without Figgy laying a finger on him.

Baggy staggered to his feet. He was still panting like a pair of very old bellows. But he was feeling better now. He had had a hectic time—but he was, after all, taking it out of Figgins. He was making Ethel think him a brute and a bully.

"Don't you mind, Miss Cleveland," he said. "Much obliged to you, but I can stand up to the brute. I know I ain't a match for a fellow a head taller than I am, but I'll do my best."

"You—you worm!" gasped Figgins.

"Bully!"

"I—I wasn't bullying him, Ethel!" gasped Figgins. "I—I'm sure you know that I wouldn't bully."

"Looks like it, doesn't it?" sneered Baggy. "Miss Cleveland knows what to think of you, you brute!"

"If Miss Cleveland wasn't here—" gasped Figgins.

"Yah!"

"Ethel! I—I'd better explain—" gasped Figgy.

"You have nothing to explain to me," said Cousin Ethel coldly. She was so hurt by Figgy lowering himself in her esteem that it came natural to say hurting things to Figgins. "It is, of course, no business of mine. But I hope you will let Trimble go away. I am sure you would be sorry afterwards if you—if you ill-used him."

Figgins gulped.

"I wouldn't touch the fat bounder with a barge-pole! You see—"

"Yah!"

"Go away, Trimble!" said Figgins, between his teeth. "I'm letting you off, you fat rotter! Go away!"

"I'll please myself about that!" sneered Baggy. "In fact, I don't know that I'd better go away and leave Miss Cleveland unprotected."

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"What?" roared Figgins

Baggy jumped away, suddenly doubtful whether Miss Cleveland's presence was the complete protection he had supposed.

"Look here, you keep off!" he gasped.

"Please go away, Trimble!" said Ethel quietly.

"You'd better—" breathed Figgins.

Baggy thought he had better, too. Figgins, at that moment, was a peculiar mixture of the lion and the lamb. To Ethel he desired to appear lamblike—to Trimble, he was yearning to play the part of a devouring lion. Baggy felt uncertain which way the cat would jump, so to speak; and he realised that he would be safer out of Figgy's reach.

So he rolled away up the footpath, and Figgins and Cousin Ethel were left alone.

But Baggy did not go far.

Baggy's chief sin was inquisitiveness; and he was intensely curious to know how this interview would end. So as soon as he was out of sight on the winding footpath, Baggy left the path, and sneaked through the wood, back to the spot where he had left Figgy and Ethel. Keeping a mass of brambles between him and that spot, Baggy Trimble listened with all his fat ears to the voices that reached him quite distinctly.

CHAPTER 6.

Honour Bright!

GEORGE FIGGINS stood silent, dismal, after Baggy had gone. He hardly dared to look at Cousin Ethel.

Ethel looked at him coldly.

Then she made a movement to walk on. But Figgy, of course, could not let it go at that. He had to clear himself—to justify himself—in Ethel's eyes. Figgy was not much of a hand at talking; but he had to explain somehow. He had to remove that icy expression from Miss Cleveland's face.

"Ethel!" he mumbled.

"I think I had better go," said Ethel. However, she paused.

"No, don't go!" gasped Figgins. He was far too young and inexperienced to guess that Ethel did not intend to go just yet. "I—I say, I—I'm afraid you—you think—"

"You do not care what I think, I am sure."

"I jolly well do," said Figgins eagerly. "More than what anybody else thinks—even Kerr and old Fatty Honest Injun."

Ethel's frozen countenance thawed a little. After all, it was impossible not to like simple, honest old Figgins.

"You—you see!" stammered Figgins. "I—I suppose you thought I—I was bullying that fat brute. Nothing of the sort! I—I wasn't going to pitch into him."

"No?" said Ethel. "I thought you were."

"Well, I might have given him a wallop!" confessed Figgins honestly. "You see, he's such a crawling toad!"

Behind a mass of brambles, a fat fist was shaken at Figgins. But Baggy Trimble prudently made no sound.

"I do not like Trimble," said Ethel. "I think he is a very unpleasant boy. But—"

The fat junior behind the brambles breathed hard through a fat nose. It is truly said that listeners hear little good of themselves.

"You see," mumbled Figgins, "I—I— That fat brute is always playing some rotten trick! Of course, I don't want to run the fellow down," added Figgy, "but—but— Well, I was waxy!"

"I thought so!"

"Oh dear!" said Figgins. "I—I mean, he made me wild!"

"You looked it!" assented Ethel.

Figgins cudgelled his brain for suitable words. Everything he said seemed to make matters worse instead of better.

"Of course, I know a fellow shouldn't lose his temper!" he said lamely. "But—but that fat chump charged me over from behind, and rubbed my nose in the dust before I could get up! Look at my nose!"

Ethel looked at it, and smiled involuntarily. It was not a handsome nose at that moment.

Figgins rubbed it ruefully.

"I—I'm awfully sorry for this, Ethel!" he stammered.

"You see, I was—was coming out this afternoon, thinking that I—I might happen to see you, as I knew you were staying at Wayland, and—and— I say, I'm frightfully sorry! Just my beastly luck!" groaned Figgins.

He looked so contrite and so miserable that Cousin Ethel thawed more and more.

"I dare say Trimble was very unpleasant," she said, "but—but it was a great surprise to me to see you looking so angry."

"D-d-did I?"
 "You did—very!"
 "Only a little waxy!" pleaded Figgins. "And—and when a fellow's nose has been ground into the road—"
 "Trimble is a fat and helpless fellow!" said Ethel. "Not the kind of fellow to be able to defend himself against you. He is never in condition, and I think he is rather cowardly."
 The listener, undoubtedly, was not hearing much good of himself! Behind the brambles Baggy glared with fury.
 "That is all the more reason why you should treat him with kindness," said Ethel. "At least, with consideration."
 "I—I know!" stammered Figgins.
 "He was terribly frightened!"
 "He's such a rotten funk!" said Figgins.
 Again a fat fist was shaken, unseen behind the brambles.
 "If I had not come up—" went on Ethel.
 "I—I shouldn't have hurt him!" protested Figgins.
 "Perhaps a thump or two—and considering what he did—"

"I don't think it is nice for boys to fight," said Ethel.
 Figgins almost laughed, distressed as he was.

"Trimble fight! He can't fight! He's been known to scot with a Third Form fag after him. Fight!"

"If he cannot fight," said Ethel severely, "you should not touch him. Were you going to thump him, as you call it, knowing that he could not defend himself?"

"Oh erikey!" said Figgins. "That's an awfully rotten way of putting it."

"I am sorry you think my way of putting it is rotten," said Miss Cleveland, with dignity. "I had better walk on!"

"No, don't! You see," Figgins stammered, "as—as you say, it was—as—I mean, looking at it like that, I—I see—I see what you mean! I—I suppose I was in the wrong, Ethel! I know it was silly to lose my temper with a worm like Trimble. I'm sorry!"
 Ethel looked at him—perhaps thinking it was nearly time she let Figgins off!

"I—I was surprised, because—as I think you know—I have always had such a high opinion of you," she said.

"Oh, I say!" ejaculated the gratified Figgins.
 "I should like to think," went on Ethel, "that you will forget all about the matter, and not touch Trimble."

"I wouldn't touch him with a ten-foot pole!" said Figgins eagerly. "I don't care a rap about the fat duffer. Of course, I'm going to let him off. I'll promise if you like."

"I have no right to ask you to promise—"
 "Yes, you have," interrupted Figgins, "because—because we're such jolly good pals, you know. I'd promise anything you like, Ethel!"

Ethel smiled.
 "I mean it," said Figgins eagerly. "Honest Injun! I'll promise not to lay a finger on Trimble, if you like."

"Will you really?"
 Ethel was once again the Cousin Ethel that Figgy knew—much to his relief.

"Really and truly!" exclaimed Figgins. "I don't care what the fat idiot does. I promise not to lay a finger on him. There, I'll never touch him again, not at any price! Honour bright!"

"I am sure you will not be sorry for having made that promise!" said Ethel brightly. "He is not worth your dislike or your anger—George."

When Cousin Ethel called George Figgins "George" she might have twisted him round her little finger, if she had liked, or used him for a doormat. Figgy's honest face beamed with delight.

"It's a go!" he said. "Bother Trimble! I'll never touch the fat chump—never lay a finger on him, honour bright! I'd promise a jolly lot more than that to please you, Ethel!"

"That is all I ask," said Ethel. "I—I know Trimble was speaking untruthfully when he called you a bully. He is a most unpleasant boy—the most unpleasant boy I have ever seen, I think. Isn't it ever so much better to treat him with the contempt he deserves?"

"Of course it is," said Figgins. "He can do what he jolly well likes, and I'll never touch him! He ain't nice to touch, anyhow. I—I say, Ethel, if—if you're going for



As Fatty Wynn approached, Baggy crouched lower behind the Terrible Three!

a walk, perhaps—perhaps you wouldn't mind if—if I came along?"

"I should like it!" said Ethel.

"I've got such a lot of things to tell you," said Figgins happily, as they moved along the footpath together. "If you'd care to hear about the football—"

They passed out of Baggy's hearing.

When they had disappeared up the leafy path, Baggy Trimble emerged from the wood and stared after them sourly. He had hoped to hear Cousin Ethel turn Figgins down—hoped to discover that Figgy had got the "kybosh" in that direction, anyhow. Instead of which, the little storm in a teacup had blown completely over and Figgy seemed to be on as good a footing as ever with Miss Cleveland.

It was a disappointment to Baggy, and he grunted discontentedly.

But every cloud has a silver lining. Figgy's promise not to lay a finger on him—a promise that he knew Figgins would keep, for Figgy was a slave to his word—was a comfort to Baggy. In that quarter, at least, he was safe from getting what he deserved.

He rolled away from the spot—thinking! Slowly a fat grin dawned on his face. Thinking over that rash promise that George Figgins had given, Baggy Trimble saw possibilities ahead. He grinned—and the grin became a chuckle—the chuckle a loud, unmusical laugh. Great thoughts were working in Baggy's fat brain—thoughts that were to produce unexpected and startling results.

CHAPTER 7.

Baggy Astonishes the Natives!

WHERE did you get it?" Monty Lowther asked that question. It was tea-time; and the Terrible Three of the Shell had arrived in Study No. 6. There was to be a spread in that celebrated apartment, and the chums of the Shell were honoured guests.

Lowther's question was addressed to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Blake and Herries and Digby were gathered round the well-spread tea-table; they had come in hungry from the football ground. D'Arcy was standing before the glass, passing a well-manicured finger over a nose that seemed to have lost its aristocratic shape a little.

"Did you win it in a raffle?" continued Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"What's happened, old bean?" asked Tom Merry.

"I wish I'd brought my camera!" remarked Manners.

"It was that fat brute Twimble!" said Arthur Augustus, breathing hard. "I was goin' to thwash him for his cheek, you know, and he had the feahful nerve to hold the door on the outside, and—and he let go suddenly when I was tuggin' at it, you know, and the beastly door stwuck me wathah forcibly on my nose, and—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It may seem a laughin' mattah to you fellows!" said Arthur Augustus stiffly. "I do not wegard it as a laughin' mattah. It is wathah unpleasant to have a wed nose. I can only hope and twust that it will not look so dweadfully wed on Satahday, when Cousin Ethel comes!"

"A coat of whitewash—" suggested Lowther.

"Weally, you ass—"

"Or a chunk of sticking-plaster—" suggested Manners.

"Wats!"

Arthur Augustus gave his noble nose a final glance, and sat down at the tea-table. There was no doubt that his nose was red—very red. It was a trifle swollen—only a trifle, but sufficient to spoil its beautiful Greek outline. Gussy was distressed, and he had a smouldering eye. His fierce

expression hinted that there was trouble in store for Trimble of the Fourth.

"Aftah tea," he said, "I am goin' to kick Twimble! I am goin' to kick him vevy hard!"

"Good egg!" said Blake. "The harder the better! Let's all go and kick him after tea. Trimble can do with a lot of kicking."

"Hear, hear!" said Herries. "I say, those New House cads are chipping us about Trimble being such a beastly funk. He's a disgrace to the House. We might be able to kick a little pluck into him."

"Not a bad idea," assented Tom. "Figgins & Co. are raging for his gore. Trimble ought to be made to stand up to Wynn, at least. They're about as fat as one another—"

"Fatty would knock him into a cocked hat," said Digby.

"Well, it's better for a man to be knocked into a cocked hat than to go sneaking about, hiding behind fellows," said the captain of the Shell. "If we kick Trimble hard enough, we may kick him into using his hands instead of his legs in a scrap. He lets the House down."

"Yeas, wathah!"

The study door opened, and a podgy face looked in. Seven pairs of eyes were fixed on it in surprise. One pair—the pair belonging to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy—glittered.

"Hallo, Daniel!" said Lowther affably.

Trimble blinked at him.

"Eh? My name's not Daniel!" he said.

"Then it ought to be, as you're butting into the lions' den," said Monty. "Roll in! The lion's just ready to bite."

Trimble cast an uneasy glance at Arthur Augustus. That elegant youth had risen to his feet.

"Here, no larks!" said Trimble. "I haven't come here to row! The fact is, I want a second."

"A—a—a what?"

"A second," said Trimble.

Tom Merry & Co. gazed at Trimble. Had any other fellow wanted a second, they would have understood. But they could not understand what the fat funk of the School House wanted with a second.

"Is that a joke?" asked Tom, puzzled. "If it is, it's too deep for me."

"Look here. You know—I say, keep off, D'Arcy! I'm not going to row with you. I've got one fight on my hands already."

"Bai Jove!"

"You've got a fight on your hands?" yelled Blake.

"That's it. I want a second to back me up."

"Great Christopher Columbus!"

"Wats!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus. "I wefuse to listen to your wotten fibbin', Twimble! I am goin' to kick you till—"

"Honest Injun!" said Baggy. "If you're spoiling for a fight, D'Arcy, I'll accommodate you later! One thing at a time!"

"You're really going to fight somebody?" gasped Manners.

"I've been insulted!" said Trimble loftily.

"That's nothing new!"

"I've been called names—"

"Not so many as you deserve—"

"Well, I'm not standing it," said Trimble. "I'm a peaceable chap, as you know—"

"Ha, ha! We do!"

"But there's a limit," said Trimble. "A man, being peaceable, like I am, is liable to be misunderstood—"

"What-ho!"

"I've even been called a funk—"

"What the thump else do you expect to be called?" demanded Tom Merry. "You are a funk, aren't you?"

"No!" roared Trimble.

"Well, that's news. When did you stop being a funk?" asked Lowther. "This is rather sudden, isn't it?"

"I'm not a fellow for ragging and fighting, as a rule," said Trimble. "But when it comes to being called a funk, it's the limit. I know what I'm going to do. I'm going to pick out the feftiest man that's called me names, and—and fight him. Just to show the fellows!"

"Bai Jove!"

"You're really going to scrap!" ejaculated Blake. "Let's see—who's the smallest man in the Third Form? That's the man, I suppose?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No!" hooted Trimble.

"Well, who's the happy man, then?"

"Figgins of the Fourth!"

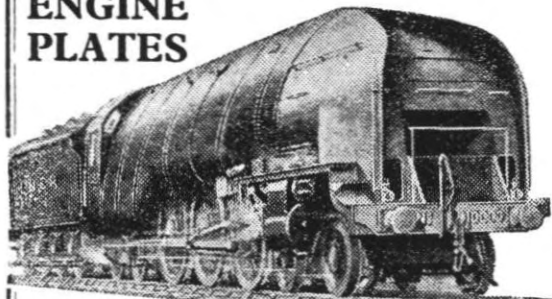
There was a yell in Study No. 6.

"Figgins!"

Had Baggy named Kildare of the Sixth, the captain of the school, the juniors could hardly have been more astonished.

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Figgins of the Fourth was the mightiest junior fighting-man in the New House. It was an open question whether he was not a match for Tom Merry of the Shell. Certainly he was a match for a whole battalion of Trimbles.

Tom Merry & Co. stared at Baggy open mouthed. "You—you—you're going to fight Figgins?" said Tom dazedly.

"Yes!"

"Gammon!"

"He's insulted me!" said Trimble. "Called me names. So have a lot of other fellows. But a man can't fight the whole school. I'm picking out the heftiest of the lot. That's me all over. I thought at first of fighting you, Tom Merry——"

"Me?" gasped Tom.

Trimble nodded cheerfully.

"Yes, you! But, after all, a man doesn't want to lick a man in his own House——"

"Lick!" stuttered Tom. "D-did you say lick?"

"Yes. Besides, you're junior captain of the House, and I don't want to send you crawling about looking like a wreck after I've done with you——"

"Ye gods!" said Tom Merry faintly.

"Taking everything into consideration," said Trimble, blinking at the amazed juniors, "I've decided to make it a New House man. Licking a New House man will be one up for the House. You fellows make out that I never do anything for the House. Well, that will be something."

"You fat idiot!" bawled Blake. "You couldn't lick one side of Figgins! You couldn't lick one of his eyelashes!"

"Well, if I go down, I go down!" said Trimble valiantly. "A fellow can't do more than his best! But I'm going to take it on, and prove that I'm not a funk, anyhow. Figgins is my man!"

"Oh cwumbs!"

"Now, who's going to be my second?" asked Trimble briskly. "I want a man to go over to the New House and see Figgins and fix things up. If Figgins funks it, of course, I can't help that——"

"Figgins funk it! Oh, my hat!"

"Well, I don't think he's so jolly plucky as the New House men make out!" declared Trimble. "Anyhow, I'm challenging him. Which of you men is going to be my second and fix it up with Figgins?"

Tom Merry rose to his feet. The other fellows followed his example. Baggy Trimble had, for the moment, taken their breath away. But they had recovered it now.

"You fat fooler," said Tom, in measured tones, "you're such a howling funk that the smallest kid in the Third could wallop you with one hand! You've disgraced the House by your funking. Now you'd like one of us to go over and challenge Figgins, and as soon as Figgy showed up, what would you do? Hide under a table, or in a box in the box-room!"

"Look here! You know——"

"And make us look a precious set of asses!" said Tom witheringly. "Half a dozen fellows saw you running away from Figgins in Rylcombe Lane this afternoon. You ran away from Kerr, though he wasn't going to touch you. You hid behind us when Fatty Wynn was around——"

"You—you see I'm a peaceable chap——"

"You are—much too jolly peaceable for anybody to believe that you're going to fight Figgins. I don't know what you've come here telling these thumping whoopers for, but I jolly well know that you're pulling our leg."

"Look here, I mean it——"

"Tell us an easier one!" suggested Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah! You fat, fwabjous fwreak!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly. "I weteuse to listen to another word of your bwaggin' and sillay bounce! I am goin' to kick you!"

"We're all going to kick him!" said Blake.

"Yes, rather!"

"Hear hear!"

"I—I say!" roared Trimble. "I mean it! Leggo! I'm going to fight Figgins! Yaroooh! I want a second! Whoooooooh!"

Nobody in Study No. 6 was likely to believe that Baggy Trimble was going to fight Figgins. But everybody in the study was incensed at what seemed to them a palpable attempt to pull their leg.

The general opinion was that Baggy wanted kicking. The general opinion was immediately acted upon.

Tom Merry grasped the fat junior by the collar and slewed him round. A yell of horrid anticipation broke from Trimble.

His anticipations were justified. There was a crash of boot-leather on Trimble's tight trousers, and the fat Fourth Former shot out of the study doorway like a pip from an orange.

"Yarooooooh!"

Baggy sprawled in the passage.

"Dribble him home!" yelled Blake.

"Yow-ow-ow! Whoooooh!"

Baggy leaped to his feet and fled. He disappeared up the passage at record speed, without waiting to be dribbled. A door was heard to slam farther along the passage.

Tom Merry & Co. returned to tea in Study No. 6. They were not interrupted again by the warlike Baggy.

CHAPTER 8.

Figgins Declines!

"I'll pulverise him!" murmured Fatty Wynn. Figgins & Co. were at tea in their study in the New House. It was a rather frugal tea, funds being a little low in the study.

No doubt that was why Fatty was thinking of the feed raided by Trimble the day before. The desire to pulverise Baggy was still strong upon him.

Figgins had come in rather late to tea, and he had a pleased and contented expression on his rugged face. Apparently he had enjoyed his afternoon's walk and talk. Kerr glancing at him smiled. Kerr never asked questions; but he had an idea, from the look on Figgy's simple old chivvy, that Cousin Ethel had been somewhere around.

"I'll smash him!" said Fatty.

"Eh? Who?" asked Figgins.

"That brute Trimble."

"What has he done?"

Fatty Wynn stared at Figgy.

"What?" he repeated. "You've forgotten that the fat villain bagged our spread yesterday?"

"Oh, that!" said Figgins. "Never mind, old bean; it would be gone now, anyhow."

Fatty Wynn snorted. It was true that the feed, certainly, would have been gone. But it seemed to make a great difference to Fatty which way it went—and another sun was going down on his wrath.

"The brute's such a rotten funk, a man can't get near him to wallop him!" grumbled Fatty.

"Well, let him off!" said Figgins. "He's not worth punching really. After all, it was only a spread."

"Only!" gasped Fatty Wynn. "I say, Figgy, you're not going off your rocker, are you? It sounds like it."

There was a tap at the study door before Figgins could answer. The door opened, and Cardew of the School House looked in. Figgins & Co. looked at him in surprise. Ralph Reckness Cardew, the dandy of the Fourth Form, was an extremely infrequent caller in that study.

"Trickle in," said Figgins. "Want anything?"

"Nothin', thanks," answered Cardew.

"Take it and go!" suggested Fatty Wynn. No School House man was "persona grata" with Fatty just then. The loss of his spread was too recent.

Cardew however, did not go. He lunged gracefully into the study, and leaned in a rather elegant attitude on the mantelpiece.

"In me," he explained, "you behold Mercury——"

"Mercury?" repeated Figgins.

"Yes. The god-like messenger, you know."

"If you've got a message, cough it up!" said Figgins. "We'll get on with our tea if you don't mind."

"Not at all! I've paid to see similar sights at the Zoo!" answered Cardew affably. "In this case, I take it, there is no charge."

Figgins & Co. looked expressively at Ralph Reckness Cardew. It required a certain amount of nerve for a School House man to walk into the rival House and talk to the natives like this. But Cardew had never lacked nerve.

"I'm a giddy messenger," drawled Cardew. "Ever heard of a man named Trimble?"

"That fat blighter!" growled Fatty Wynn. "Mean to say he's got the cheek to send a message here? I wish he'd bring it himself!"

"Message for Figgins," explained Cardew.

"Oh, rot!" said Figgins. "I don't want to hear anything from Trimble. Look here, Cardew, what are you getting at? If you've come here to be funny you're liable to go out on your neck!"

"The person of an ambassador," said Cardew gravely, "is sacred, in the most barbarous regions. The New House comes under this description. So——"

"You're asking for it," said Figgins warningly.

"But I'm really an ambassador, old bean—at least, a second. I've brought a challenge from Trimble."

"A—a—a what?"

"Unworthy as I am, that is the high office I fill at the present moment," said Cardew. "It seems that Trimble has been asking a lot of fellows to second him; but they

couldn't somehow believe that he was genuinely on the warpath, and instead of takin' it on, they kicked him. Judgin' by the howlin' that reached my ears, they appear to have kicked him hard."

"Good!" said Fatty Wynn heartily.

"But I, with my well-known perspicacity, perceived that the bold Baggy was in deadly earnest," continued Cardew. "Where he has suddenly dug up this unexpected pluck, I don't profess to understand. That he has never hitherto shone in the heroic line, I believe is common knowledge. But there's a proverb that the worm will turn. Probably you are aware that Trimble is a worm. Well, he's turned." "You'd better make it a bit plainer," said Figgins. "You gas so frightfully, you know, a man never knows what you're driving at."

"As jolly old Dr. Johnson remarked, 'I can provide you with a reason, but not with an understanding,'" remarked Cardew negligently. "However, I'll try to put it in words of one syllable suitable to the New House grade of intellect. Trimble's sent a challenge to Figgins to meet him in deadly strife."

"Rot!" said Figgins.

"Honest Injun!" said Cardew. "He's been rootin' up and down the House for a second; and I took it on, thinkin' it would be rather amusin' to fix up such a strenuous combat."

"Then you're a silly ass!" said Kerr. "Trimble's gammoning."

"Just what Levison and Clive said!" assented Cardew, with a nod. "Tom Merry and the rest think the same. But I noted the gleam of deadly, dogged determination in Baggy's eye, and concluded to take it on. I'm rather curious to see whether he will burst when punched. That's my chief interest in the matter."

"What utter rot!" snapped Figgins uneasily. "Trimble couldn't stand up to a Third Form kid. At least, he wouldn't. I suppose he could if he had any pluck. But he hasn't any."

"You should see him now!" said Cardew. "He's burstin' with it! Ragin' for gore."

"Rubbish!"

"Look here," said Fatty Wynn, with a gleam in his eyes, "you take it on, Figgins. He bagged that spread—"

"Oh, rot! Do you think Trimble would come up to the scratch if I did?" demanded Figgins. "Wild horses wouldn't drag him into the ring!"

"The School House men jolly well would," said Fatty shrewdly. "They simply couldn't let a man of their House back out after actually sending a challenge over here. I don't know what Trimble's doing it for, but if you take him on, he can't slide out. The House wouldn't let him."

"A Daniel come to judgment!" said Cardew. "You may safely bet your best silk socks that Baggy will have to toe the line if his challenge is accepted. If he doesn't walk up, he will be rolled. For one thing, the fellows wouldn't miss the fun of seeing him burst. If necessary, I personally will roll him up, much as I dislike the idea of touchin' him."

Figgins gave an angry snort.

"And how long do you think he would stand up to me?" he demanded.

"Long enough for you to lick him," said Fatty Wynn.

"Rot!" said Figgins.

Cardew raised his eyebrows, looking rather curiously at George Figgins. It was impossible, or nearly impossible,

to suspect Figgins of "funk," especially where Trimble was concerned. But it was plain and obvious that Figgins did not want to accept that challenge from the warlike Baggy.

Figgins coloured under Cardew's gaze.

"I'm not taking it on!" he snapped. "For one thing, I don't believe Trimble would turn up. I'm not going to waste my time on the fat fool. I don't want to hurt him, either. You can go back and tell him to keep where he's safe, and hold his silly tongue."

Cardew's look became mocking.

"Is that your answer?"

"That's all the answer you'll get!" said Figgins gruffly.

"Great gad!" said Cardew. "This is goin' to be the queerest old scrap that ever was at St. Jim's. On our side we've got to drive Trimble up to the mark, and on this side somebody's got to drive Figgins up to the mark. Great gad!"

Kerr and Wynn stared at Figgins. Figgy was looking red and uncomfortable, but quite resolved.

"Look here, Figgy—" began Fatty Wynn.

"Nuff said!" answered Figgins. "I'm not taking any notice of the fat fool. That's that!"

"Then I'll jolly well take him on in your place!" exclaimed Fatty hotly. "You can go back and tell Trimble that it's fixed up with me, Cardew."

Cardew shook his head.

"That won't do!" he explained. "Trimble has picked out Figgins as junior captain of this House and acknowledged chief. Figgins is your champion fighting-man, and Trimble has selected him—for that reason, he says. He says that he won't take any substitute. Fact is, he seemed to think that Figgins mightn't be keen on it; and he wants it to be made quite clear that Figgins is his man. The challenge is definitely for Figgins. No others need apply."

"Rot!" growled Fatty. "He can meet any New House man if he really wants a scrap, which I don't believe. Tell him so."

"I'll tell him," agreed Cardew. "For the credit of St. Jim's I'm glad to see that there's one man here willin' to stand up for his House. Gad, I never dreamed that Baggy would be the man to put the wind up on this side."

"What do you mean?" bawled Figgins.

"Exactly what I say," answered Cardew calmly. "When a man's challenged to a scrap he's expected to stand up to it. I give you my word that if you take it on Trimble shall appear in the ring. What more do you want?"

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

Cardew smiled, a smile that very nearly made George Figgins jump at him. But Figgy restrained himself.

"Am I to take it, then, that you refuse Trimble's challenge, Figgins?" asked the School House junior.

"Yes!" snapped Figgins.

"I suppose you know what the fellows will say?"

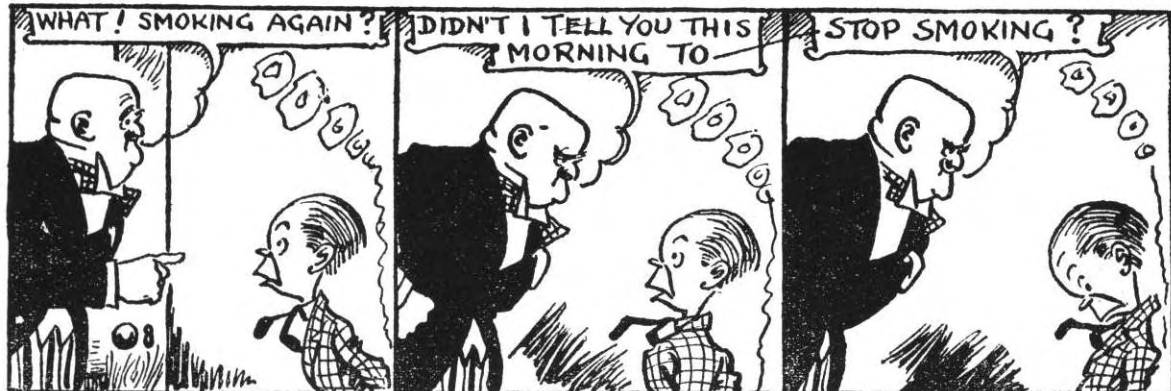
"They can say what they like! And now you'd better get out!" said Figgins. "I'm rather more than fed-up with you."

"A feelin' I fully share!" said Cardew amiably. "Believe me, I'm not enjoyin' your society." He strolled to the door and opened it. There he paused to glance round the study. "If I may make a remark, there's one rather important thing you forgot when you were furnishin' this study," he said.

Nobody inquired what it was, so Cardew continued:

"I don't see any foot-warmer."

Potts, The Office Boy!



"You silly owl!" growled Figgins. "What the thump should we want a foot-warmer in the study for?"

"Cold feet!" explained Cardew.

And he closed the door and walked away down the passage—leaving a dead silence behind him in Figgins' study.

CHAPTER 9.
Baggy the Bold!

THE games-room in the School House—the apartment where juniors most did congregate between tea and prep—was fairly full. Tom Merry & Co. were there, talking football—chiefly interested in a forthcoming fixture with Rylcombe Grammar School. Talbot of the Shell sat at the rather battered old piano, playing softly. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was passing a slim finger slowly and thoughtfully over his noble nose. Racke and Crooke, in whispers, were discussing the chances of their favourite "geegee." Grundy of the Shell was making his loud voice heard in criticism of Kildare in a recent First Eleven match. Other fellows were laughing at Grundy. Levison and Clive of the Fourth had their eyes on the door, waiting for Cardew to come in. Baggy Trimble—generally the most insignificant fellow in the House—was strutting, fairly strutting, and receiving some attention for once. For most of the fellows knew that Cardew had taken his challenge over to the New House; and though nobody believed for a moment that the fatuous Baggy would stand up to Figgins for a single round, his peculiar proceedings rather entertained them. For Baggy had been told quite plainly that if he sent that challenge across the quad the House would see to it that he did not let the House down by dodging the result. And Baggy did not seem to mind.

Baggy loved the limelight, of which as a rule, he had little. Now he was getting some. What he meant by it nobody knew, or could guess; but it was evident that Baggy was landing himself in trouble. Figgins & Co. had been fairly hunting Baggy since the incident of the raided spread; and, of course, Figgins would jump at the chance of giving him the licking he deserved. A single round with Figgins would turn Baggy into a serious hospital case. Yet he was asking for it!

It was rather a puzzle!

"Cardew's a long time!" grunted Baggy.

"You silly ass!" said Levison. "Cardew was an ass to take your silly challenge over. What will you do if Figgins takes it on?"

"Lick him!" said Baggy.

"Fathead!"

"Well, you'll see!" said Trimble cheerfully. "Figgins has called me a funk. He's called me other things, too, lots of times. Well, I'm jolly well going to make him put up his hands."

"And where will you hide when he does?" asked Clive.

"Yah!"

Grundy of the Shell looked round.

"Trimble won't hide!" he said emphatically. "I'll see to that! He's done this of his own accord, and I'll jolly well see that he doesn't let the House down and set those New House wasters cackling at us. Trimble's for it now."

"Think I'm afraid of Figgins?" hooted Trimble.

Grundy snorted.

"I jolly well know you are!" he answered. "But you're for it now; I'll see that you don't sneak out of it."

"I don't want any cheek from you, Grundy!" said Trimble.

"What?" roared Grundy.

"My hat! That jolly old worm is turning!" ejaculated Monty Lowther. "Are you going to fight Grundy next, Baggy?"

"Bai Jove! Whatevah is the mattah with Twimble?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "It surely cannot be possible that he has any pluck aftah all. I am suah I should have noticed it if he had."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, pile it on!" said Trimble bitterly. "There's plenty of chaps here wouldn't care to challenge Figgins of the New House. I'm doing it."

"Challenge in haste, repent at leisure!" grinned Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I can make the fat idiot out!" said Tom Merry, staring at Trimble. "Looks to me as if you're landed this time, Trimble."

"Who's afraid?" demanded Baggy.

"Well, you are, aren't you?"

"Yah!"

"Hallo, here's Cardew!" said Manners. "This is where Baggy changes his mind in a hurry."

"Yaas, wathah!" chuckled Arthur Augustus.

Ralph Reckness Cardew lounged into the games-room. The general attention was turned on him.

"Well," said Baggy Trimble, "you've fixed it up? Where and when? Any time and place will suit me, so long as Figgins is there ready. The sooner the better, that's all."

"Well, my only hat!" said Tom Merry, in amazement.

"Gentlemen, chaps, and fellows," said Cardew, "get ready for the surprise of your lives. Figgins funks it!"

"What?"

"Bosh!"

"Rubbish!"

"Draw it mild!"

"Such," said Cardew, "is the sad, solemn fact! Figgins declines to fix up a meetin' with our respected friend Trimble."

"Oh crumbs!"

"Is that right?" demanded Tom Merry suspiciously. "If this is one of your silly larks, Cardew—"

"Straight as a string," said Cardew. "It's a frightful disappointment to me personally. I was lookin' forward to seeing Trimble burst."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But Figgins declines. He refuses to fight Trimble."

"Bai Jove! Why?" asked D'Arcy.

"He gave no reasons. It was hardly necessary. When a fellow refuses a challenge of this sort, the reason leaps to the eye."

"Rot!" said Tom. "Figgins is no funk!"

Cardew shrugged his shoulders.

"Look here!" roared Trimble. "I'm not having this! Figgins called me a funk! He's called me names right and left! He's got to put up his hands!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"A fellow can't call a fellow names, and then refuse to fight!" exclaimed Trimble indignantly. "I'm not letting him off! Look here! Figgins has got to fight!"

"One Crowded Hour!"



"Hear, hear!"
 "Disgraceful, I call it!" hooted Trimble. "He says I'm a funk! Well, if I'm a funk, what's he afraid of?"
 "Well, Figgins can't possibly be afraid of Trimble," said Blake. "That's not sense!"
 "What's he sneaking out of it for, then?" demanded Trimble.

"Blessed if I know!"
 There was an angry roar from Grundy of the Shell.
 "My hat! A New House man calls a School House man a funk—and then refuses to fight! What's St. Jim's coming to? Why, the rotten coward ought to be drummed out of the school!"

"Dash it all, Figgins can't have refused!" exclaimed Levison. "Look here, Cardew, give us the thing straight."
 "My dear man, I've given it to you straight. Figgins refuses to fight Trimble. Wynn has offered to take his place, if Trimble will accept."

"That I jolly well won't!" exclaimed Trimble. "Figgins isn't sneaking out of it like that! Rotten coward, getting another man to fight his battles!"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Tom. "Figgins isn't a coward!"
 "Why don't he fight, then?" roared the warlike Baggy. "He's bigger than I am! He makes out I'm a funk! Why, only this afternoon I pushed him over outside the gates, and jolly well rubbed his nose in the road. Ain't that enough for him? Look here! If he won't fight, I'll jolly well pull his nose in the Form-room to-morrow."

"Bai Jove!"
 "Sickening, I call it!" said Baggy. "Look here! Figgins has got to be made to toe the line."

"We'll jolly well make him!" roared Grundy. "We'll make the New House fairly cringe if Figgins won't put his hands up."

"We'll jolly well rub it in!" said Wilkins. "Those New House cads have chipped us enough about Trimble funking. Now we'll let them have it about Figgins, hot and strong!"

"Bai Jove! But how could anybody possibly be afraid of Twimble?" asked Arthur Augustus, in amazement. "It doesn't seem possible, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "You shut up, D'Arcy!" hooted Trimble. "I'll jolly well lick you after I've licked Figgins!"

"Bai Jove!" The swell of St. Jim's jumped up. "You needn't wait till you have licked Figgins, Twimble. I should have vewy great pleasure in givin' you a feathin' thwashin'."

"Go it, Baggy!" chuckled Dig.
 "Wade in, Twimble!" chortled Herries.
 Trimble, however, did not wade in.

"One thing at a time," he said. "I've got Figgins on hand now. You can wait your turn, Gussy. Look here, you fellows, if Figgins won't toe the line, I'll jolly well call him a coward up and down the school. I'll give him the coward's blow! I'll make him squirm! I'll—"

"Burstin' with pluck, isn't he?" said Cardew admiringly. "Who'd have thought it of Trimble? We've been entertainin' a paladin unawares."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "You can cackle!" said Trimble disdainfully. "I've challenged Figgins, and he's afraid to fight! Who's the funk now. I'd like to know?"

And Baggy, with his fat little nose high in the air, marched out of the games-room. He left the room in a buzz of amazement and excitement. That Baggy, the funk of the House, had found courage enough to challenge Figgins to combat was amazing enough; but that Figgins had refused to face Baggy in strife was still more amazing. The fellows simply could not understand it. But they had to admit that, so far as a fellow could see, it certainly was not Trimble who was the funk. And there was no doubt that, if George Figgins kept to his resolve to dodge that fight, it was likely to be a long time before the New House heard the last of it.

CHAPTER 10. Cold Feet!

GEORGE FIGGINS crimsoned.
 It was evening, and the Fourth Form of St. Jim's were gathered in the Common-room. Herries and Digby were busily engaged in a game of chess, while the rest of the juniors were discussing footer. It was two or three days before the School House were due to meet the New House, and naturally enough, the School House were of the opinion that they could knock the rival House into a coked hat when it came to footer.

"We'll hem them in their own half for the whole ninetyay minutes," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was saying, when Figgins & Co. came walking into the room in their usual

cheery mood. As Figgins joined up, there was a hiss from several quarters. And from somewhere came a voice:

"Funk!"
 "Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Dwy up, you men! It's not cwicket to wub it in! Let Figgins alone!"

But for D'Arcy's remark, Figgy might not have guessed that the hiss, and the opprobrious epithet, were meant for him. Figgins was a popular fellow in the rival House as well as in his own House. It was rather a new experience for Figgy to be treated like this.

Kerr and Wynn looked savage and uncomfortable. Redfern, Owen, and other New House men turned red. Most of the School House members of the Form grinned. Baggy Trimble cackled.



Figgins, with a face like a full-blown peony, looked round.
 "Somebody said 'Funk'!" said Figgins, in a clear voice.
 "If it was meant for me, I invite the sportsman to step out and say it again!"

Mellish of the Fourth was the "sportsman"; but he did not step out, or say it again. He preferred the background.
 "Gad!" said Cardew. "Are your feelin's hurt, dear boy?"

"Shut up, Cardew!" muttered Levison.
 Cardew shrugged his shoulders.

"Look here, Figgins," said Blake bluntly. "If you don't want fellows to think you a funk, don't act like one. Trimble's asked you to stand up to him. Any kid in the Third would do it. Why don't you?"

"Yaas, wathah! It weally is vewy peculiar, Figgins," remarked Arthur Augustus. "I don't think vewy much of the New House, of course; but I should be vewy sowwy to think it was a funky House."

"You silly owl!" said Figgins.
 "Weally, Figgins—"

"If any man here thinks me a funk, he's only got to put up his hands and put it to the test!" growled Figgins. "I'm

ready to mop up any School House ass that wants a licking!"

"Go it, Trimble!"

Baggy Trimble swaggered forward.

He was garbed in gym costume and wearing boxing-gloves.

"Well, I jolly well call you a funk, if you won't fight!" he declared. "So you can put that in your pipe and smoke it!"

Figgins glared at him.

"You fat toad!" he snapped.

"Call a fellow names!" sneered Trimble. "It's easier to scrap with your mouth than with your fists, I dare say. Yah!"



Figgins tripped and fell. "Got him!" yelled Baggy. Figgins felt his nose seized by a fat finger, and thumb!

"You podgy porpoise!" roared Figgins. "You'd fall down and burst if I hit you!"

"You haven't the pluck to hit me!" retorted Trimble.

There was a breathless hush, and all eyes were on Figgins. If he stood that, he could stand anything.

For a second his eyes flashed fire, and he made a half-stride towards the fat Baggy. And the swaggering air vanished from Baggy on the spot, and his fat face blanched with alarm.

But Figgins, for whatever reason, restrained himself. He burst into a rather forced laugh.

"I'm not going to hit you, anyhow, Trimble. Take your freak of a face away, for goodness' sake!"

"Yah! Take yours away!" jeered Trimble. "Think you can give me orders, you long-legged gorilla? If you don't like my face, smack it!"

And Baggy Trimble, greatly daring, fairly thrust his fat face at Figgins, inviting a smack.

A quiver ran through George Figgins. He seemed to be struggling with himself. But his hand did not rise.

Trimble, triumphant, pressed closer. Figgins had either to push him off forcibly, or to give ground. To the amaze-

ment and mockery of the School House men, and the open disgust of the New House fellows, he gave ground. Figgins backed away from Trimble.

"Well, my only hat!" gasped Blake.

"Funk!" Half a dozen voices called out now.

"Are you potty, Figgins?" yelled Fatty Wynn, in a fury. "What do you mean? Gone off your rocker? If you won't smack that cad's cheeky face, I jolly well will!"

Three or four School House juniors interposed. And the fiery Welshman was shoved back.

"Hands off!" said Blake. "Trimble's challenged Figgins! He's a right to stick to his man."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I'll smash the cheeky toad!" yelled Fatty.

"You jolly well won't!" said Kerruish. "It's up to Figgins, if there's any smashing to be done. If Figgins funks it—"

"Look here, Figgy!" breathed Kerr.

Redfern grabbed Figgins by the shoulder roughly.

"Get on with it!" he snapped. "What's your game, you chump—letting the House down! Are you a fatheaded coward?"

Figgins, with a blaze in his eyes, shook off Reddy's hand. He seemed disposed to follow that up with a drive from his right.

"Keep it for Trimble!" snapped Redfern. "Here's a School House ass asking you to fight him. If you're not afraid, get on with it!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Afraid?" Figgins gave a savage laugh. "Afraid of that fat, flabby, frabjous freak?"

"Well, lick him, then!"

"I'm not going to touch him."

"And why aren't you going to touch him, when he's asking for it?" demanded five or six New House men angrily.

"That's my business!"

"Ho, he, he!" came from Trimble. "Try a hot-water bottle, Figgins. It's good for cold feet!"

"You sneaking toad!" gasped Figgins.

"Shut up!" said Trimble, in a bullying tone.

"Wha-a-t?"

"I don't want to hit you if you're funky," said Trimble. "I'm no bully. But don't let's hear any more from you! When a fellow's afraid to fight, the less that's heard from him, the better!"

"Why, I—I—I'll—" gasped Figgins.

"I've told you to shut up!" said Trimble aggressively. "I'm going to give you the licking of your life. Take that!"

Trimble's right flashed out. Unfortunately for Herries his aim was somewhat off the mark, for that unfortunate individual caught Baggy's gloved fist full on the nose.

"Yoooh!" he howled, as a myriad stars appeared before his vision.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the onlookers. "You've hit the wrong man. Have another go, fatty. One like that on Figgins' boko and the victory's yours. Now then, one—"

Mr. Lathom came along just then. The hubbub died down at the arrival of the Form master.

Little Mr. Lathom glanced over his Form. He could see that some excitement was on.

"Dear me! Is anything the matter?" asked the Fourth Form master.

"Nothin' much, sir," said Cardew. "Only a fellow complainin' of cold feet!"

The juniors gasped. Cardew was about the only fellow in the Form who would have ventured to jest like this with a Form master.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Lathom, peering over his spectacles. "It may be very unhealthy to have the feet cold in winter. Which boy is suffering from cold feet?"

"Figgins, sir!" said Cardew airily.

Figgins gritted his teeth. But for the presence of the Form master, Cardew's handsome features would have been in danger of an alteration for the worse.

"I think the poor chap's feelin' it rather bad, sir!" pursued Cardew. "Trimble was advisin' him to try a hot-water bottle. I suggested a foot-warmer myself."

Little Mr. Lathom, kind-hearted and unsuspecting, peered at Figgins.

"I am afraid you can have neither a hotwater bottle nor a foot-warmer in the Form-room, Figgins," he said kindly. "But I will allow you to change your place and sit nearest the fire."

"Oh ewikey!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

There was suppressed gurgling among the Fourth as Mr. Lathom opened the Common-room door. Mr. Lathom apparently had not heard—or had forgotten—the slangy sense of the term "cold feet."

New House men glared at Figgins. School House men grinned at him. Even his nearest and dearest chums, Kerr and Wynn, were for once ashamed of their comrade. What could be the matter with Figgins they could not imagine. But if he was not the funk Trimble called him, why did he not knock the fat and fatuous Baggy spinning? Certainly he was big enough and strong enough to make mincemeat of Baggy Trimble.

It was a mystery—and a most perplexing and embarrassing mystery to the New House men. It surprised and amused the School House fellows.

As for Baggy, he was enjoying himself.

Fellows had called him a funk. Now he had challenged the champion fighting-man of the rival House—and that man was funking him! Baggy was fairly gloating. Seldom, or rather never, had Baggy Trimble been able to pose as a fierce fighting-man hunting for trouble. That was his pose now. And he enjoyed it thoroughly.

And Baggy had not finished yet. He had only started. He was waiting eagerly for morning break. Baggy on the warpath was quite a new Baggy. He was bursting with ferocity.

When Mr. Lathom finally departed, Figgins walked out of the House by himself. After him went Trimble.

"Stop!" shouted Baggy.

"Run for it, Figgins!" yelled three or four derisive voices. "Trimble's after you!"

Figgins glared round.

"Stop him!" shouted the valorous Baggy. "Hold him for me! Don't let that New House funk get away!"

Figgins clenched his hands hard. He unclenched them again and went quickly into his own House. And the fellows who saw him go fairly gasped.

Figgins of the Fourth had run away—fairly run away—from Baggy Trimble! Kerr and Wynn looked positively sick. School House men shouted with derisive laughter. Figgins, in his study in the New House, heard it—with burning cheeks. But he did not come out.

CHAPTER 11.

Figgys in a Fix!

"O H dear!" groaned Figgins.

He sat on the table in his study, swinging his long legs, in a dismal mood.

Figgins was feeling down.

He had made that promise to Cousin Ethel unthinkingly, little dreaming of what was to follow. It had seemed a safe enough promise. For naturally it had never crossed his mind that Trimble would take the offensive.

How could a fellow have foreseen that? Trimble, the funk of the school, the fellow who had been known to run from a small fog—Trimble, whom Figgy could have knocked out with one hand! Naturally, Figgy had supposed that Trimble would be only too glad to keep his distance.

In fact, this outbreak on Trimble's part was utterly inexplicable, as well as unexpected. It was just as if he knew that Figgy's hands were tied, and that it was safe to "show off."

Of course, Trimble couldn't know that—so far as Figgins could see, at all events. Perhaps the fellow wasn't such a funk as was commonly supposed. Certainly it looked as if he wasn't. Judging by appearances, he was eager for combat, thirsting for gore, as it were. Figgy, in ordinary circumstances, would gladly have given him all he wanted, and a little over. Now his hands were tied.

Figgins turned over in his mind that rash promise. There was no getting out of it, without breaking his word—and to Ethel, of all people. To break his word was impossible to Figgins—to break it to Cousin Ethel, unthinkable. He had promised, honour bright and honest Injun, not to lay a finger on Trimble—whatever Baggy did.

It was just rotten hard luck that Baggy had taken this warlike turn when Figgy was bound by that explicit promise.

What were the fellows thinking of him? The mocking laughter in the quad was a sufficient answer to that question.

Baggy Trimble was strutting in the quad. He was telling fellows that he was waiting for Figgins to come out. Other New House men were willing, and eager, to give him the scrap he demanded. Baggy loftily declined all such offers. Figgins was his man—he wanted Figgins. He was going to lick Figgins for calling him a funk! He absolutely declined to be satisfied with any substitute for Figgins. Undoubtedly Baggy was within his rights; and

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there were plenty of School House men to stand by him and see that he got them.

Figgins writhed.

If only he could have foreseen anything of this kind! But, of course, he couldn't have!

And he couldn't explain! He flushed hotly at the bare thought of telling the fellows that he had made a promise to a girl not to thrash Trimble. Figgins was not the man to make a girl's name the talk of the Lower School—above all, not Cousin Ethel's name. Besides, it would have sounded like a lame excuse. Not one fellow in ten would have believed a word of it.

Cousin Ethel had a great deal of influence over Figgy, and it was all for his good. She liked him. She was proud of him, and Figgy valued her good opinion more than anything else in the wide world. But he did wish that he hadn't met Ethel that Wednesday afternoon. All unknowingly she had placed him in a frightful fix.

That worm, that toad, that unspeakable outsider, Trimble, meant business. What on earth was to come of it?

The bell for third school interrupted Figgins' dismal meditations. He came out of his House—not with his usual cheery swing, but cautiously, looking about for Trimble!

Trimble! He was actually anxious to get across the quad without Trimble seeing him! He was dodging Trimble!

Trimble, however, was waiting at the Form-room door. A crowd of grinning School House men were with him.

"Here he comes, Trimble!" called out Lumley-Lumley, with a chuckle.

Trimble blinked round.

"That New House funk?" he exclaimed. "Watch me while I pull his nose, you men!"

"Go it, Trimble!"

Baggy Trimble rolled up to Figgins. Figgins, with a hunted look, backed away. Baggy followed him up.

"Ba! Jove!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's noble eye gleamed scorn at the unhappy Figgins through his eyeglass. "Weally, Figgins, this is wathah too thick. I wegard you with contempt, Figgins."

"Funk!"

"Cold feet!"

"Anybody got a white feather?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Really, it seemed a case for a white feather, for Figgins was backing and dodging, the fat Baggy waddling after him in vain. Again and again Figgins very nearly hit out. But every time the remembrance of his promise held his hand.

Baggy was grinning with glee.

Promises, to Baggy himself, were like piecrusts—even more fragile than pie-crusts. But he knew that other fellows took a different view—and that Figgins was such a fellow. Baggy regarded a fellow who was bound by his word as "soft." But he was prepared to take relentless advantage of such "softness."

It was sheer joy to Trimble to bully-rag a fellow before whom he had fled in terror.

And Baggy was getting, at last, a little respect in his House. Fellows argued that Baggy couldn't be such a rotten funk if he was ready to fight Figgins. They had been ashamed of Baggy; but Baggy was showing mettle after all. Judging by appearances, there was at least a bigger funk than Baggy at St. Jim's, and he was in the other House.

"Go it, Baggy!" chuckled the School House juniors.

Figgins backed and dodged.

"You rotten funk!" gasped Baggy bra'lessly. "Lemme gerrat you! I can't chase you all over the place! Hold him, somebody!"

A School House foot was put out, and Figgins tripped over it. He stumbled and fell; and Baggy fairly jumped at him. The next moment, Kerr jumped at Baggy; but three or four fellows collared Kerr and dragged him off.

"Fair play's a jewel!" grinned Cardew. "Man to man!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Got him!" roared Baggy, in triumph as he clutched at Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Mellish. "Pull his nose, Baggy!"

"I'm jolly well going to!"

"Grooogh!" gasped Figgins, as his nose was seized by a fat finger and thumb.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins leaped up, his face white, his eyes ablaze. His look was enough for Baggy Trimble, who jumped back in terror. Figgins' hand was lifted, but it fell again. He could not hit Trimble! Slowly his upraised arm fell to his side.

He walked quietly into the Form-room, looking neither to the right nor to the left. Fellows gave one another wondering glances. This was the limit—absolutely the limit!

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "He, he, he!" came from Trimble. "Jevver see such a funk? He, he, he! You saw me pull his nose! He, he, he!"

In the Form-room, during third school, Kerr and Wynn carefully avoided looking at Figgins. If the hapless Figgins glanced round him, he met only mockery and derision in the surrounding faces. After class, Figgins walked away by himself. He was in the lowest possible spirits; and his rugged face fully expressed his feelings.

Figgins was in a fix! There was no doubt about that; and the worst of it was that he could see no way out!

CHAPTER 12.

A Surprise for Cousin Ethel!

TOM MERRY rubbed his nose thoughtfully. It was Saturday, and Saturday was a day to be marked with a white stone, so to speak. For that afternoon. Cousin Ethel was coming to tea at St. Jim's; and in Study No. 6, in the School House, there was to be a very select gathering. Many heads had been put together; funds had been pooled, and the spread, so far as that was concerned, was excellently arranged to the last detail. The study itself had a newly swept and garnished look; and already there were fresh flowers tastefully arranged in the jam-jars on the mantelpiece. And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, glancing in the mirror, smiled the smile of complete satisfaction, noting that no trace, after all, remained of that jolt on his noble nose.

"But what about Figgins?" asked Tom Merry. D'Arcy shook his head. "Nothin' about Figgins, deah boy." "He'd like to come."

"Pwobably." "And I—I rather think Ethel would like to see him." "I hardly think so, Tom Mewwy. In any case, it is quite impos. Twimble—"

"You're not asking Trimble?" ejaculated Tom. "No feah! But Twimble," explained D'Arcy, "is goin' to kick Figgins out if he evah catches him in this House. He has told the whole House so—and the New House as well. As Figgay has turned out such a wotten funk, Twimble will do as he says. You see we don't want a wow with Ethel heah."

"If Trimble kicked up a row with Ethel here, we'd jolly well lynch him!" growled Tom.

"Yaas, wathah! But Figgins can't come, all the same. As a mattah of fact, Tom Mewwy, I dwaw a line at a man who funks a duffah like Twimble. There's a limit, you know."

"It's all rot," said Tom. "Figgins isn't a funk. I can't make out why he doesn't mop up the quad with Trimble. But—"

"It's a standin' joke, Tom Mewwy, the way he dodges Twimble!"

"I know. But—" "Bai Jove, I must be off!" said Arthur Augustus, glancing at his watch. "I'm fetchin' Ethel ovah, you know. See you latah, deah boy!"

And Arthur Augustus walked cheerily out of the House, to meet Miss Cleveland and escort that charming young lady to the school.

Figgins of the Fourth was loafing about near the gates, his hands in his pockets. He glanced at D'Arcy.

Arthur Augustus gave him a distant nod. Figgins coloured. He was not the man to fish for an invitation; but he did want to join the tea-party of which Cousin Ethel was to be a member.

"I—I say, Gussy—" he began lamely. A fat figure appeared in the offing. Arthur Augustus made a sarcastic gesture towards it.

"Look out! There's Twimble!" he said.

"You silly ass!"

"Weally, Figgins—"

"Look here—"

"Twimble's comin' this way! You had bettah cut!" said Arthur Augustus sarcastically; and he walked out of the gates.

Figgins grunted, drove his hands deeper into his pockets, and tramped out of gates also.

Poor Figgins was feeling quite down and out that afternoon. That hapless promise to Cousin Ethel had placed him in an awful fix. He was dodging Trimble—there was no help for it.

He had to keep his word. He kept it. But Baggy, encouraged by impunity, was growing more and more aggressive.

By this time, indeed, Baggy almost believed that he was really a terrific fighting-man, and that Figgins was

afraid of him. And the warlike Baggy gave Figgins little rest.

Baggy was in fact, having the time of his life these days. Figgins, on the other hand, was not.

Dismally, the hapless Figgay loafed about Rylcombe Lane. At least he would be able to raise his cap to Miss Cleveland when she passed with Gussy, going to the school.

It was about an hour later that Arthur Augustus emerged from the footpath into the lane, with a graceful, girlish figure by his side.

Cousin Ethel was looking very cheerful and bright. She looked, perhaps, a little brighter at the sight of a rather long-legged figure in the distance, loafing in the lane with hands driven deep into pockets.

Figgins, leaning against a tree beside the lane, did not, for the moment, observe D'Arcy and his pretty cousin. His glance was turned in the other direction, towards the school. From that direction a fat figure was approaching.

Figgins was breathing hard.

A fat grin dawned on Baggy Trimble's face. He rolled on towards Figgins, his fat grin changing to a threatening, bullying look.

"Now, you New House rotter!" he said. "Keep your distance, you fat fool!" said Figgins, with smouldering eyes.

"Yah! Put up your hands, you funk!"

"Get away!"

"I'll jolly well—"

Figgins hastily detached himself from the tree and walked quickly up the lane. Baggy's fat squeak followed him.

"Yah! Funk! Funk! Yah!" And Baggy rolled away chuckling.

(Continued on next page.)

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Figgins walked on quickly, with burning cheeks, and almost walked into Arthur Augustus and Cousin Ethel. He stopped, his face crimson, and mechanically raised his cap. The glance of contempt from Arthur Augustus he did not even notice; and he hardly dared to look at Cousin Ethel. It was clear that she had seen what had happened.

Ethel looked at Figgins, and then at the fat figure of Baggy, rolling away at a distance. Then she looked at Figgins again.

"Pway come on, Ethel, deah gal!" said Arthur Augustus. "The fellows have got tea all weady in the studay!"

But Ethel had stopped.

"What does this mean?" she asked quietly.

"Oh, nothing!" gasped Figgins.

"Pway come on, Ethel!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

He could not help feeling contemptuous; but he was feeling sorry for Figgins, too, at that moment!

But Ethel did not come on.

"I don't understand," she said.

Arthur Augustus might almost have suspected that she had forgotten he was there, and that all her interest was in this New House chap.

"It—it's all right!" stammered Figgins.

"Why are you letting Trimble bully you?" asked Ethel.

"I—I can't help it."

"Pway don't wub it in, deah gal!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "A fellow can't help bein' a misewable funk, you know!"

"Nonsense!"

"Oh!"

"Tell me what this means. Are you letting Trimble treat you like this because of the promise you made me?" demanded Ethel.

Her quick mind had jumped to the explanation at once.

"You—you see—" mumbled Figgins.

"Pway don't wub it in!" murmured Gussy. "Poor old Figgins can't help bein' a funk, and Twimble has been huntin' him all ovah the school for days! Pway come on, deah girl!"

"Is it because of your promise?" asked Ethel, her eyes on Figgins.

Figgins' face was burning.

"Well, a promise is a promise!" he mumbled. "I—I promised not to touch Trimble, whatever he did. So—so—so there it is! Of course, Trimble doesn't know anything about it!"

"Of course he does!" said Ethel scornfully. "He must have listened when you were speaking to me in the wood."

Figgins jumped.

"Oh, my hat!" he ejaculated.

Figy's simple mind had not even thought for a moment of that explanation of the bold Baggy's amazing outbreak as a fighting-man.

"I am sorry I made you promise," said Ethel. "I release you from the promise. I had no idea—I am very sorry! Trimble is a wretched boy—he must have listened and taken advantage of it! But it was splendid of you to keep your word in such trying circumstances. I'm so sorry."

"Bai Jove! I weally don't undahstand!"

"I shall see you at tea!" said Ethel brightly. "You have asked Figgins and his friends, Arthur?"

"Oh, bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus could not help feeling that his pretty cousin was displaying less than her usual tact. But he played up manfully. "Oh, yaas, Figgins, I—I shall be—be vewy pleased if you will come to tea in No. 6 and bwing your fwinds! Bai Jove!"

"Jolly glad to, old man!" said Figgins brightly.

Ethel gave him a smile, and walked on with Arthur Augustus. And the face of George Figgins—no longer in that disagreeable fix—beamed like unto the summer sun at midday!

I don't say I'm as good at running as Figgins is—he, he, he!"

From the direction of the New House three New House men came in sight. Figgins & Co. were coming to the School House for tea in No. 6.

"Here né comes!" said Mellish of the Shell.

Trimble blinked across the quad at Figgins & Co.

"He's got the cheek to come over this side of the quad!" ejaculated Baggy. "Well, all the better! See me pull his nose again."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go it, Baggy!"

"Watch me!" chuckled Baggy. "I say, you keep the other men from chipping in, you know. Fair play, you know."

"We'll jolly well see fair play!" said Grundy of the Shell. "If Figgins won't put up his hands, pull his nose, and pull it hard."

"What-ho!" chuckled the happy Baggy.

Figgins & Co. came directly towards the House. They had seen Baggy, and for some reason they were smiling. Relations had been strained in the New House Co., owing to Figgy's inexplicable display of funk where Trimble was concerned. But that seemed to be over now, and the Co. on their old cheery and chummy footing. They came along with linked arms, all three looking merry and bright.

Baggy detached himself from the balustrade. He was ready to "show off" again at Figgins' expense, and he had no suspicion in his far mind that there had been a change—and that Figgins had been formally released from his rash promise. Baggy was delighted at this meeting—and, quite unknown to Baggy, his delight was shared by George Figgins.

Figgins, indeed, was almost as pleased to see Baggy, just then, as he was going to be to see Cousin Ethel at tea in Study No. 6!

"Oh, here you are, you New House waster!" exclaimed Baggy, in his most bullying tone, as the three came up.

"Speaking to me?" asked Figgins mildly.

"Yes, you funky rotter!" roared Trimble.

More School House fellows gathered round. There was going to be another entertainment.

"Go it, Baggy!" exclaimed a dozen voices.

Baggy went it! He flourished a fat and rather grubby fist under George Figgins' nose.

"Put up your hands!" he bawled.

Figgins stepped back.

"I'm just going to tea," he said, in the same mild voice. "What about leaving it till after tea, Trimble?"

"Yah! Funk!"

"You see—" said Figgins, in a honeyed voice.

"Yah! Funk! Coward! I've said that if you show your nose in this House, I'll kick you out of it!" said Trimble. "So I jolly well will! Yah! Put up your hands! Mind, I'm going to pull your nose."

"You won't let me off?" asked Figgins.

"That I jolly well won't! Come on, if you've got the pluck of a bunny rabbit!" hooted Trimble, brandishing his fat fists. "Come on, you funk!"

"Right ho!" said Figgins unexpectedly.

He came on.

Baggy's fat and flabby fists were knocked away, and Figgins' knuckles landed on a podgy nose.

"Yarooooh!"

Bump!

Baggy Trimble sat down.

"Man down!" chuckled Cardew. "Up you get, Baggy! Go for him!"

"Pile in, Trimble!" roared Grundy. "He's come up to the scratch at last! Pile in!"

"Yow-ow-ow-ow!" Baggy clasped his nose with both hands and spluttered. "Yow-ow-ow-ow!"

(Continued on page 24.)

CHAPTER 13.

Alas, For Baggy!

BAGGY TRIMBLE grinned gleefully.

Baggy was feeling happy and glorious.

Baggy's podgy figure leaned on the balustrade of the School House steps, and several School House fellows were round him. Baggy, no longer the despised funk of the House, was enjoying life.

"Fairly bolted!" Baggy was saying. "I'd have given him a jolly good licking there and then, but he bolted."

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NEXT WEEK'S—

"The VENGEANCE of the HAWK!"

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Thrilling, long complete yarn of Tom Merry & Co.,
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ALSO Questions answered by the ORACLE and—
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Every week it gets longer! No, not Whiskers' beard, but the list of questions which he answers correctly! Can't you help me to beat him?—Ed.

WHEN I crawled into the sanctum this morning, chums, I found the Editor kneeling against a large cage. I soon saw what was what—the old Ed. had a parrot inside that cage, and he was busy trying to make the parrot say: "Wake up, Whiskers! Wake up, Whiskers!" But the parrot, so far as I could make out, was refusing to say anything so rude.

"Excuse me, sir," I ventured to say, as I approached, "but is that parrot of the Psittaceous species?" At this the Ed. got up and glared fiercely round at me. "I don't want any of your cheek," he snorted, "first thing in the morning. This bird is a parrot, and it was given to me by an aunt of mine in the Navy, see?"

I tried to calm the old Ed. down by telling him that I thought the parrot was a very nice specimen, and obviously well brought up, because he wouldn't say "Wake up, Whiskers!" "I'll make him say it," growled the Ed., "if I have to stay here all day." "I think you'd better get inside the cage as well," I suggested, "then I can teach you both to speak civilly to me while I'm about it."

Well, chums, there might have been a row if that parrot hadn't thought fit at that moment to start squeaking: "Can you catch him napping? Can you catch him napping? Wake up, Whiskers! Wake up, Whiskers!" and a lot more remarks of a similar nature. This sent the old Ed. off into wild paroxysms of mirth. "There you are, my lad," he chortled, "a real talker, and no mistake!"

"Yes, sir," said I, "that parrot is undoubtedly is of the Psittaceous species I mentioned, that being the Latin name for the well-known red-tailed grey parrot of tropical Africa. The African grey parrot is the most famous parrot for talking in existence.

And I see you've got a nice large cage for him. D'you know, sir," I continued, "that in ancient Rome parrots were kept in cages made of ivory and tortoiseshell, with silver wires."

"That's very interesting," said the Ed., sitting on the floor and gazing at me and the parrot with an expression of great respect. "Yes, sir," I replied; "and what's more, the old

Romans used to eat parrots. It was nothing for a Roman Editor to win a parrot in a raffle. Many people make the mistake of supposing that parrots come from the tropics. There are, of course, a great quantity of parrots and macaws and parakeets in the tropics, but they are also met with in much colder parts, in North America, for instance."

I was just getting warmed up to the subject when the old parrot started off again, and the Ed. told me to fetch the pile of readers' queries from his desk and start work.

"Look here," said he, "there's a letter from a reader in Stoke Poges who wants to know whether an Indian chief named Black Sparrow Hawk ever really lived?"

"Sure enough, sir," said I; "he was a real, live guy, and no error. He was known as Black Hawk among the settlers, his tribe name being Makatawimeshokaka, meaning Black Sparrow Hawk. He was the chief of what were known as the Sauk and Fox tribes, and used to organise daring attacks on the Americans living along the banks of the Mississippi. He was captured eventually by a party of Winnebagoes, and sent to Fortress Monroe, in Virginia, where he stayed for a few weeks."

"I suppose he escaped?" said the Ed.

"No, sir, he hadn't any need to escape. After stopping at the fortress for a bit, the Government took him on a tour through the cities, after which he settled down on a reservation in Iowa, where he died."

"Very good. Now, can you inform a Glasgow reader, McPherson by name, why a fortification of earth is called a barricade?"

"Easily, Ed., old boy," said I. "Years ago, in warfare, barrels were often filled with earth and piled up together to make a barricade, and in Spanish a cask is called a barriaca.

From that word soldiers got the term barricado, and hence barricade. What's the next teaser?"

"A letter from Charles Lumley, who lives in Islington. He wants to know what a tally was in the old days?"

"That takes us back a year or two, Ed.," said I. "Tallies used to be used in the English exchequer for the purpose of keeping accounts, but they were done away with in 1826. A tally consisted of a wooden stick, about an inch thick, with notches cut on it at certain intervals. These notches represented the amounts paid, and the tally was split in two parts after a payment was made, one half being given as a receipt. How would you like me to give you a receipt for my wages, sir, on a wooden stick?"

"It wooden do at all!" snapped the Ed., chortling at his own witticism. "Is that all you know about tallies, old 'un?"

"There are one or two other bits of information floating about in the old noddle," I replied. "Let me see now, what else do I know about tallies? Oh, yes! These tally-sticks were all called in and collected in a room, and in the year 1834 they were ordered to be destroyed. They were then used as fuel for the stoves in the Houses of Parliament, and on October 16th the stoves got overheated, and the Houses of Parliament were burnt down."

"Is that so?" said the Ed. "What a good job you weren't Print Minister or something—you might have got burnt as well. Anyway, let's get on with the questions. What kind of dog is a harrier, exactly?"

"Harriers are a smaller breed of foxhounds, sir, and can be distinguished by their pointed ears. Harriers are used in the pursuit of hares, and while capable of fast runs, they haven't the staying power of the foxhound."

"The same reader, his name is Will Stevens, wants to know about otterhounds, beagles, and basset hounds. Perhaps you can tell us a bit about them, my learned lump of laziness."

"Otterhounds," said I, ignoring the insult, "are thick, woolly harriers, with an oily underfur, and are first-rate water dogs, though they are savage and quarrelsome. Beagles are small foxhounds. They have long bodies and short legs, and will track hares and rabbits with great cunning. They move so slowly, though, that it is possible to follow them on foot. Basset hounds are long dogs, with crooked legs and drooping ears. They were originally used as sporting dogs in Normandy."

"Now can you tell Tom Taylor what dum-dum bullets are like?"

"I'll have a shot at it," said I brightly. "Dum-dum bullets are hollow-nosed bullets that expand on striking an object. The wound made by a dum-dum is supposed to be more severe than that made by an ordinary bullet. They get their name from the town where they are manufactured—Duddum, a town in British India."

The old Ed. was about to pick up another letter when the parrot started flapping his wings wildly and screaming out: "Let Whiskers go to lunch! Let Whiskers go to lunch!" I was so delighted at finding how clever the parrot was that I clipped off a bit of my whiskers and pushed it through the bars of the cage. No sooner had I done this than the parrot screamed out: "Buzz off, baldhead!" So I buzzed, leaving the Ed. to quieten his new pet as best he could.

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—GREAT PROGRAMME!

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ROUSING NEW COMPLETE YARN OF THE SEA!



CHAPTER 1. A Strange Story!

BILLY ROSCOE, whose parents had long since been dead, lived with his uncle, Skipper Roscoe, of the steam trawler *Sapphire*, L.T.0055. As a matter of fact, Skipper Roscoe owned two steam trawlers, the *Sapphire* and the *Opal*, both of Lowestoft. The *Sapphire* he commanded himself, but the command of the *Opal* was in the hands of Stephen Sims.

Billy Roscoe, who was a deck-hand aboard the *Opal*, was a chip of the old block. He, like his uncle, had blue eyes, and his skin was tanned from exposure to the elements. One glance sufficed to tell that deck-hand and skipper were related.

It was getting dark, the sun was sinking rapidly, and the shadows on the heaving waters were lengthening and deepening, when Billy Roscoe crossed the little swing-bridge and made his way along the quay. At length he came to where, amongst hundreds of other boats, the *Opal* lay. On the opposite side of the quay was her sister ship, the *Sapphire*.

There was a deal of activity aboard both vessels, especially down below in the stoke-hole and the engine-room, the engineers toiling like demons to get a good head of steam ready for the northward run.

Once alongside the fore-deck of the *Opal* he tossed his bag of duds down on to the deck. The tide was rising, but it would be an hour or more before it reached the flood, and the trawler's deck was some feet lower than the quayside.

The heavy bag sailed through the air, and would have thudded on the deck, but a young fellow came darting up the hatch and stepped right in the path of the missile. It struck him on the shoulder, and felled him neatly.

Billy laughed uproariously. Such a blow might have been serious to a landsman, but fisherfolk are hard and tough and take little notice of such misfortunes.

Billy seemed to let himself drop forward from the edge of the quay. His strong hands gripped the ratlines of the fore'ard rigging, and he swung himself down on to the deck, dropping as lightly as a cat.

But the fellow who had been felled by his kitbag was scrambling to his feet. He was sturdy, red-headed, and fiery of temper. His oily clothes showed that his employment was down below in the engine-room, oiling and greasing the cranks and shafts.

"Clumsy!" he roared. "I'll teach you—"

With clenched fists he rushed at Billy Roscoe, his red hair bristling with rage, his eyes flaming with temper.

Billy dodged the blows nimbly, then rushed in and

grappled with his fiery pal. He knew Frank Parkes' quick temper of old, and he knew the best way of dealing with it. He pinioned Frank's arms to his sides in a bear-like hug, and they struggled together, reeling about the slippery deck until their feet became entangled in a rope and they fell heavily, rolled along, and collided with the hatch—a smack that knocked all the fight out of both of them.

Grunting, they rolled apart, sat up, and glared at one another. Then Billy grinned, and Frank grinned.

"Had enough?" asked Frank.

"Pack it up!" retorted Billy. "It was an accident!"

The two forced a smile, and arm-in-arm made their way below.

"Frank," said Billy, "there's something I want to tell you, but you must promise to keep it mum!"

Frank nodded in agreement, and waited for Billy to continue.

"It's like this," said Billy, talking low, in case anyone should overhear him. "I had a chat with my uncle, Skipper Roscoe, this afternoon, and I learnt something. As you know, uncle owns both this trawler and the *Sapphire*, which he commands himself, and of course it

has always been understood that I shall inherit both of 'em, since uncle has no children of his own.

"Well, it appears that some time ago, when things were very bad in the fishing line, Skipper Roscoe borrowed two hundred pounds from Skipper Sims, of the *Opal*."

"Whew!" Frank whistled, with surprise. "By jiminy, Billy, where on earth did Sims get the money from?"

"Oh, I don't know!" answered Billy. "Had it left him or something. But that's got nothing to do with it. The point is this—things haven't been any too rosy lately, and uncle hasn't been able to do more than pay the interest on the loan."

"And Sims is getting nasty about it?" suggested Frank.

"Well, it's worse than that really, because uncle signed an agreement which means that if he does not repay the money within a year from now Sims gets the *Opal*."

"What!" roared Frank. "The *Opal* for two hundred quid?"

"Yes, I know," answered Billy, "it's all wrong; but uncle's signed the agreement, and that's that! The trouble is this—things are looking better now, and uncle thinks that he will be able to pay Sims half the money if this trip is successful. But Sims doesn't seem to want to get the money back. He knows that neither the *Sapphire* nor the *Opal* are insured, so he may get up to some trick to make sure that uncle does not pay him back, so that he can get the *Opal*. Get me?"

"Sure thing!" said Frank, somewhat excited by this time.

ALL ABOARD THE "OPAL" FOR MYSTERY AND ADVENTURE . . .

But wait for Billy, the Deck-hand,
and Frank, the Engineer: They're
deep and Deep-Sea Pals!

"And the long and short of it is that you want me to help you keep an eye on Skipper Sims?"

"That's the ticket!" cried Billy; and with a final handshake the two chums parted, each going to his own post.

Overhead, the bumps and clattering, at intervals, told how the crew were coming aboard in readiness for the trip.

CHAPTER 2.

Stormswept!

THE sun sank behind the yacht club headquarters, and Lowestoft Harbour became busy, because the tide was at the full. The heaving waters glistened, cold and black, save where the innumerable lights of moving craft were reflected. There were white lights, red lights, and green lights, in what looked like an amazing confusion. The huge sails of the smaller, old-fashioned smacks loomed dark against the dark sky.

Some ketch-rigged vessels warped their way from the docks to the harbour heads, some made use of the fussy tugs; but with a shrilling and hooting of many toned sirens, and the tinkling of engine-room bells, the steam trawlers and drifters churned the harbour waters to foam, going astern, twisting and turning until the outer harbour was reached. Then, with three long farewell blasts on the sirens, they headed for the open sea, the propellers racing to the highest pressure the engines could manage.

The Opal left her berth a good half-hour before the Sapphire, so that Billy was unable to see his uncle again before the trip. Stephen Sims, a burly, clean-shaven man, with a hooked nose, twisted lips, scarred eyebrows, hard, grey eyes, and enormous fists that looked like sheave blocks when they were clenched, was in the wheel-house at the wheel.

The weather was fresh, the air keen, and the breeze was strengthening to a stiff blow, but North Sea fisherfolk care little for such things. They have to go to sea, and they go, and take the weather as they find it. Stephen Sims was undoubtedly a clever seaman. He lolled in the wheel-house, the port window open, one arm draped over the weather-board, one hand on the wheel as if he were steering a pleasure boat up a river without another craft in sight or hearing.

Ahead of the harbour heads the engines were at full speed, and the Opal raced out into deep water as if glad to get away from the shore. It was to be a three weeks' trip, possibly ranging as far to the north as Iceland, according to where the fish swarmed.

Several days went by, and nothing unusual happened. They dropped the trawl on the Dogger, and the hard work began in real earnest. The wind freshened into half a gale, and, straining at the trawl cables, the Opal laboured, rising sluggishly on the creaming waves and swooping down in the troughs in a way that suggested she would never rise again from the watery valleys. Yet she did, and all the time she headed north.

But the catches were poor. The winches rattled, and the fishermen hauled at the tackle. The nets came to the bulwarks, wet and bulging, but the fish were poor in size and quantity, and Skipper Sims held on his way, trawling and steaming at full speed, alternatively, towards the Norwegian Sea and the Arctic Circle.

"Looks like the old man was wrong," said Frank Parkes. He was loitering in the engine-room companion, and Billy was in the gangway clearing a line that had fouled the lee-board. "Rotten catches! We shan't make a profit on this trip, and no one'll be able to say it was his fault."

The wind was howling and whipped the spray from the curling wave crests, flinging it over the tossing trawler in stinging sheets. The jib was set forward to lift her head a bit, and there was a wisp of bulging brown canvas on the mizzen to help bring the trawl along the bed of the ocean; but even then the Opal made heavy weather of it, and her decks were often awash.

Billy toiled in a bath of perspiration, swathed in oil-skins, and with great sea-boots on that reached up to his thighs.

"Things are bad," he admitted. "But the trip isn't over till we get home."

Frank shrugged his shoulders and pursed his lips. He didn't like the look of things, and didn't care who knew it. He eyed the smoke that belched from the tall stack. Billy glanced up and frowned as he saw how it shot down, sharply, almost on top of the wheel-house before it blew away to windward.

The waves increased in violence, and the wind shrieked wildly. The boatman, watching over the trawl ropes astern, yelled at the top of his voice:

"She's bumping!"

Skipper Sims came from his cabin and made his way along the gangway. He looked worried and shook his head

at the mate, who regarded him anxiously from the wheel-house.

"Glass went down like a stone," he said shortly.

And even as he spoke, the wind died away with a weird moan, and a strange silence fell on the heaving sea. Overhead the lowering clouds seemed whirled round and round in a mad dance.

Skipper Sims was galvanised into activity. With a bound he was up in the wheel-house and thrusting the mate out on deck.

"It'll howl on us in a jiffy!" he roared. "Get the trawl up if you can. Lively, now! All hands! Save the nets if you can!"

"All hands!" belowed the mate. "All hands to the nets!"

And aboard a fishing-boat, when it is a case of saving the nets, everybody lends a hand except the man at the wheel and the engineer. The cook, the greaser boy—everybody—flies to the trawl. A man was at the rattling winch. The engine-room bell tinkled, and the ship went astern gently, to ease the strain on the guide-ropes.

Billy was hauling on the ropes, with Frank in front of him. Bit by bit the bulging, dripping net came up from the depths until it flapped in the water alongside, tilting the Opal to starboard until her bulwarks were under water. There were fish in the net, but not a lot. The waves still ran high—an ominous swell—but the crests were no longer foaming because the lower wind had dropped like a stone.

The fishermen, Billy and Frank well to the fore, clawed at the net to haul it aboard. The Opal swooped down in the trough of the waves, and a rope sagged, then she shot up again, and that rope suddenly tautened, struck Frank across the shoulders with surprising violence, and shot him over the bulwarks so that he sprawled on the sodden net and went slithering towards the heaving sea.

But Billy hurled himself after his pal and clutched at his leg, gripped his ankle, and yanked him back a couple of yards. Frank squirmed like an eel, wriggled round, and dropped again on the slippery deck. His red hair bristled, and his eyes flashed as he faced Billy.

"You hurt?" he snapped. Then he grinned and turned to his work. Billy had saved his life, and that was his way of acknowledging the fact. But Billy understood. Such incidents occur frequently in the lives of the toilers of the sea, but Frank was not likely to forget the debt he owed.

The net was on deck, and Skipper Sims was studying the sky anxiously. The engine-room bells jangled, and the propeller churned the water to foam under the ship's counter. She forged ahead, and Skipper Sims steered her in a wide circle, watching the lowering sky all the time, while the deck-hands toiled at the trawl, tossing the fish down the open hatch, clearing away the medley of wet ropes, getting the net into something like order.

Then, to the eastward the sky became as black as pitch, and Skipper Sims made up his mind what to do.

"Batten down!" he bellowed. "All hatches! We'll run slap into it!"

The storm, swooping up with all its furv, struck the ship, and she staggered beneath the onslaught, her decks completely submerged in creamy foam. The mate fought his way to the wheel-house where Skipper Sims struggled with the bucketing-wheel, his face bleeding from splinters of glass, smashed from the screens by the huge waves. Two men were needed to keep the vessel on her course, running full tilt into the heart of the storm.

CHAPTER 3.

Deserted!

THE lightning spluttered venomously, and the thunder crashed. The rain drove in sheets that blotted out everything for a time. But the centre of the storm passed on out towards the wide Atlantic, and the blinding rain eased a trifle. Visibility improved a little, although the wind still howled and assailed the gallant vessel.

But they were able to see and to hear. First came a dull report, then there was a sudden brilliant glare, almost straight ahead, that shot up to the lowering sky, and died out in a faint splutter.

"A ship in distress!"

Every man aboard the Opal knew what it meant. One of the deck-hands clawed his way forward and stood on the bulwarks by the starboard rigging, one arm hooked for support in the trawl irons, peering into the smother ahead. Suddenly his stentorian voice sounded through the roaring of the waves, and above the howling of the tearing wind.

"Ship ahoy!"

Skipper Sims poked his head out of the window of the wheel-house.



Frank shot over the bulwarks and sprawled in the net. As he went, Billy hurled himself forward and seized Frank's ankle!

"Where away?" he bawled.

"On the starboard bow, skipper! Look!"

There was hardly any need to urge anyone to look. Everybody was looking, and one glance proved the stranger to be a steam trawler. Then as the light improved they could make out the letters on her black smoke stack—L. T. She was a Lowestoft boat!

But there was more in it than that. Skipper Sims stared at the scene, his jaw sagging foolishly. It was more than a Lowestoft boat, hailing from the same port as the Opal. She was the sister ship of the Opal. She was the Sapphire! Her masts were gone. Her smoke stack was battered and dented, and her wheel-house shattered. There was no sign of a dinghy or lifeboat, and her broken trawl boom trailed in the troubled water alongside. She canted over, at an alarming angle, and rode the waves sluggishly as if waterlogged. There was not a sign of life on her decks, and as she rolled on the mountainous waves she showed her registration marks on her foreboard—L. T. 0033.

But Skipper Sims made no move. He hung out of the wheel-house, gazing at the scene as if terrified. Everybody expected to hear the engine-room bell jangling, but the skipper seemed rooted to the spot.

Then Billy came pounding along the alleyway, heedless of the waves that were doing their best to wash him overboard.

"The Sapphire!" he yelled. "Uncle's aboard her! He'd never leave her!"

Skipper Sims turned his head and glared at Billy.

"Back to your post!" he snarled.

"But you can't leave her!" cried Billy.

"I'm not risking my ship!" hissed Sims. "What can you do in this weather?"

"There may be somebody aboard her! Uncle would never leave her! You can't leave her!"

Skipper Sims' face was convulsed with fury.

"I'm boss of this hooker!" he bellowed. "Get back—"

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But Billy began to climb up to the wheel-house, frantic with emotion.

"You can heave-to!" he cried hoarsely.

"You can bring her about and see if—"

"Get down!" snarled Sims.

He left the wheel, turned, and struck out with his fist savagely.

The blow caught Billy full in the face and knocked him from his insecure perch on the vertical ladder. With a cry of dismay he fell backwards, struck the bulwarks, then disappeared overboard in the welter of the waves.

Coming from the engine-room hatch, Frank Parkes saw and heard. With a bound, he was beside the wheel-house and claved down the lifeline that hung there.

"Man overboard!"

With the belt in the crook of his arm, Frank leapt to the rescue, conscious of the fact that the life-line trailed behind him, and that the bo'sun was coming with a rush down the alleyway. The burly bo'sun first put his foot on the snaking line, then stooped and gripped it in his great gnarled hands and hung on.

Billy was half stunned, and his heavy sea-boots didn't help matters. He went down like a stone. The cold water revived him, and he fought the pressure of the sea and shot to the surface. Frank, swimming strongly, saw him, and seemed to hurl himself forward. His outflung hand grabbed Billy's shoulder and held him until he could grip the lifeline.

The lifeline became suddenly taut, and the bo'sun began to haul in. Then Skipper Sims touched the spokes of the wheel, while the mate stood by, uncertain what to do. The Opal sheered off to windward a point or two. The lifeline jerked sharply, and the trawler shipped a heavy sea. The bo'sun slipped on the treacherous deck and fell, the line was torn from his grasp, and the end flicked his face as it shot over the bulwarks into the water.

Frank didn't know the truth. The line had slackened, and he guessed that something had gone wrong. Billy was clinging to the belt, white to the lips, but still game. He was doing his utmost to rid himself of his sea-boots, and eventually he succeeded.

"The line's broken away," said Frank curtly.

Billy trod water, and there was a queer look on his face.

"Sims is deserting us!" he snapped.

"He daren't!" cried Frank. "The cur! The—"

But it was true. With volumes of dense smoke belching from her stack the Opal was continuing on her course, almost due east. No signal flew from her mast-head, no cry came across the turbulent waves. She steamed on into the heart of the storm, and the rain, swooping down on the wings of a squall, blotted her cut.

"The rat!" snapped Billy. "To desert any ship, let alone his own crew!"

"We're goners," said Frank, the cold beginning to grip him.

"Unless we can fetch the Sapphire," said Billy. "Swim for it, Frank. We're to windward, and she's drifting slowly. The trawl boom holds her back. It's a dog's chance! Swim for it!"

Frank obeyed, but they were careful to take the lifeline with them. The actual distance was nothing to either of them. Born and bred to the sea, they could swim like fishes. But the waves ran high, and in such northerly altitudes the water was icy cold. Fortunately the wind helped them, and they drifted as fast as they swam, and the waterlogged trawler drew nearer and nearer.

Frantically they fought to reach her, and it seemed for a time as if they would be beaten after all. Then, in the last fifty yards the storm seemed to increase in violence, and the waves roared down on them, lifted them up to the lowering clouds, then swept them forward as if they were surfing.

They released their hold on the lifeline, and it was never seen again. The waves held them poised for a moment over the hapless vessel, then dropped them, and their eager hands clutched at the bulwarks as they were flung alongside, the undertow striving to tear them from their hold.

Billy had a good grip on the trawl-irons, and clambered aboard. Frank was still hanging to the mizzen-chains, or

what was left of them. Billy went to his assistance and clawed him inboard. For a time they crouched under the lee of the caboose to get their breath back; then, having recovered, they went on a tour of inspection.

"A near thing!" spluttered Frank.
 "We're here," said Billy. "You came after me, Frank, old man. I sha'n't forget it."

"You did the same for me, more or less," said Frank. "What does it matter? You yanked me aboard here. Seems as if she's doomed."

The Sapphire canted badly with every roll, and in the troughs of the waves she dipped her scuppers under. Billy clawed his way along the windward alleyway, and his startled cry brought Frank to his side, and they stared at the figure of Skipper Roscoe, unconscious, lying by the winch, a stout rope lashing him to the drum. There was a nasty wound on his forehead, and his face was smothered with congealed blood.

CHAPTER 4.

and the Nick of Time!

"SOMETHING funny about this!" muttered Frank.

"What can we do?"
 "Get him into his bunk," said Billy.

"But if the ship goes down—"
 "We'll all go down with her!" snapped Billy. "The boats have gone. We've got to risk it. But I don't think she'll go down. She's a fine boat, and—well, help to lift him."

It was by no means easy, on the heaving deck, to cut the lashings, carry the unconscious man to his cabin astern, and deposit him in his bunk.

Frank fetched water in a bucket he found rolling about in the scuppers. The water was sea water, but that couldn't be helped. Billy washed the blood from his uncle's face, bathed the wound, and bandaged his head.

Skipper Roscoe stirred, and opened his eyes. He stared at the sight of his nephew.

"Thank Heaven!" he exclaimed. "Is the Opal standing by?"

"No, she isn't!" said Billy. "Sims deserted us!"

"What d'you mean?"
 Billy explained briefly, and a hard light came to Skipper Roscoe's eyes.

"Sounds like conspiracy!" he said huskily. "The storm

hit us suddenly, but the Sapphire was sound—as far as I knew. She took water like a sieve, and the men abandoned her. There was a timber boat to wind'ard, and they took the boats. I wouldn't go. The foremast came down on the wheel-house. That's how I got this cut—the glass—and I must have lost consciousness. Then I came round and crawled to the deck. I got the rockets and fired one. The others were damp. Then I managed to lash myself to the winch, and—and I don't remember any more."

"The rats deserted her!" hissed Billy.

"Yes," said Skipper Roscoe. "Roberts said the holds were full of water. He said she couldn't float another five minutes, and they left her."

"But she's still floating," said Frank. "And we're alive."

"We'll save her yet!" cried the skipper, raising himself on one elbow.

But Bill thrust him back

"You stay where you are. Frank and I will see to this job. You're not fit to walk the deck, let alone do anything. We'll stop the leak if it can be stopped, and before long Sims'll wish he hadn't been so clever. I'm beginning to see daylight in this business. But there's no time to waste. Come on, Frank!"

Their first visit was to the engine-room, where everything was in confusion, but the engines themselves seemed in order.

"Could you manage 'em, Frank?" asked Billy.
 "While they work, I'll manage 'em," said Frank. "But if they go wrong, I don't guarantee anything. Let's see the fires."

In the stokehole they found the fires low but still burning.
 "Get 'em going," said Frank, grabbing a shovel. "We'll get enough steam to work the pumps, anyway."

Frank toiled like a nigger in the engine-room, smothering himself with oil, when Billy climbed up for a breath of air.
 "Get me a lantern," he said. "I'm going down the hatch to have a look."

He opened the main hatch, and, holding his lantern aloft, gazed down at the pile of empty fish-boxes. They were swollen with water and jammed tight. The Sapphire had indeed sprung a leak, and by all the rules she ought to have sunk, as Roberts, the rascally mate, had said she would. But he had bargained without the fish-boxes. They had been packed tight in the first place, but the water had swollen them jammed them, and they were keeping the ship afloat longer than seemed possible. It had happened before, and it was happening again.

In the interstices between the boxes the water swished to and fro in a sinister fashion as the ship rolled. In the light of the lantern Billy saw something floating on the oily water, and a glint came to his eyes. He clambered into the flooded hold, and, half-wading, half-swimming, he reached for the object, seized it, and clambered with it up to the deck, where Frank awaited him.

"What is it?"
 "A wedge!" snapped Billy.

Frank knew what it meant.
 "The skunk—Roberts—bored a hole in her! It washed out, as he meant it to. But I'll bet he didn't expect to hit that storm! No wonder he abandoned the ship first chance he got! He reckoned she'd go down like a stone!"

Billy was stripping off his jersey.



Frank and Billy stood staring at the figure of Skipper Roscoe, unconscious, and lashed to the winch.

"From the way the boxes are stowed and where I found that," he said, "I've got a good idea where the hole is. Keep the pumps working!"

He returned to the hold, and dived again and again into the ooze between the evil-smelling fish-boxes. He kept under as long as he could, pawing the keel-plates of the Sapphire, trying to find the hole from which the wedge had washed. For ten minutes he was unsuccessful, though he dived repeatedly. He kept coming up for air, and he was nearly all in.

Frank came with a hammer from the engine-room.

"Found it?"

"No, not yet. But it's our only chance, Frank."

"Try the other side of that pile."

Billy nodded, and clambered over the pile of boxes until he was up in the bows. With the hammer in his belt he dived, and seemed to be under for a long time. Then he broke surface, and he was grinning.

"I've got it. Once more and I'll wedge it in. Here goes!"

Frank held the lantern aloft as he dived. Pawing along the plate, Billy found the hole through which the water poured. He inserted the wedge and drove it home with the hammer. As he stood uncertainly on his feet, the water was six inches over his head in that part of the hold. It wasn't easy to work blinded, as it were; but somehow he managed it, and shot up to the surface.

Frank had to help him out of the hold. They battened down the hatch again, all except one corner where the pump line went down. The steam pump rattled away, and the water poured out of the scupper. The Sapphire rose to the waves, and Billy grinned with delight, while Frank tossed his sodden cap in the air.

"Saved her!" he cried. "Gosh, but Sims'll be sorry!"

Billy rose to his feet and studied the sea. The storm was whirling away to the westward, and the clouds cleared from the sky. The wind still howled and came gustily, the waves still ran high, but immediate danger was over and the stars began to twinkle overhead.

"Better get way on her, if we can!" said Billy. "Can you manage it?"

"Stoke her well first!" said Frank.

They went to the fires. The floor of the stokehole was dry, so well had the pumps done their work. They piled coal on until the gauges registered sufficient pressure of steam, then Frank went to the engine-room control and Billy rushed to the wrecked wheel-house. Fortunately, the

helm was still intact, but he had to clear the debris of glass and wooden panels away to get at it. The engine-room telegraph had jammed, and they had to be content for the time being with yelling at one another.

"Stand by!" yelled Billy.

"Stand by, it is!" replied Frank.

"Go ahead, then!"

"Ahead!"

The steam hissed and roared; then the engines began to rattle, the propeller churned the water to foam, and the Sapphire forged ahead.

The sound of it brought Skipper Roscoe from his bunk. He came staggering along the alleyway.

"What are you doing?" he cried. "You can't force her with her holds full o' water!"

"Only two inches in the fore'ard hold, skipper!" grinned Billy. "We found the wedge and put it back in the hole Roberts made. We're going to bring the old hooker to port after all!"

"I'm seeing daylight!" said Skipper Roscoe. "Sims was saying everywhere it wouldn't be long before he owned the Opal. He's bribed my seamen and my mates. He's worked this! He meant me to have a bad trip, and maybe lose the Sapphire. I'd be unable to repay him the money I owe him, and he'd keep the Opal, under the terms of the agreement. If we do make port he'll never command a ship of mine again!"

"Hear, hear!" cried Frank, poking his head out of the engine-room hatch. "Don't you worry, skipper! We'll bring her in!"

"Sure we will!" agreed Billy. "But you get back to your bunk, uncle, and if you feel fit I'll call you for the next watch. We'll manage somehow, and we'll bring her to port without paying a halfpenny in salvage. And I'm looking forward to seeing Sims' face when he sees us bringing up to our moorings!"

It seemed as if most of their troubles were over, and all that lay ahead of them was hard work and long watches; but, although they did not know it then, their adventures were only just beginning. Skipper Sims wasn't the sort of rogue to leave anything to chance, and much was to happen before the deep-sea pals brought the Sapphire to harbour.

(Well, chums, what do you think of Billy and Frank? They're great, aren't they? Another fine yarn in this series will appear in next week's GEM!)

FIGGINS IN A FUNK!

(Continued from page 18.)

Figgins chuckled.

"I'm waiting for you," he remarked. "As I'm going to tea, I can't wait long. Get up and get on with it."

"I—I say, I——" Baggy blinked at him in horror. Evidently Figgins, for whatever reason, was no longer bound by that rash promise. The blood ran almost cold in Baggy's fat veins as he realised what he had booked himself for. "I—I say, I—I'll let you off——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But I'm not asking to be let off!" chuckled Figgins.

"You're not letting me off—and I'm not letting you off."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Kerr and Fatty Wynn.

"Yow-ow-ow! I—I—— Keep off, you beast!" gasped Baggy. "I—I—I'll lick you to-morrow—next week——"

"Get up!" roared Grundy.

"Shan't! Ow! I say——"

Grundy of the Shell dragged Trimble to his feet. With a heave of his powerful arms he hurled him at Figgins.

"Now go it!" he snapped.

"Yaroooh!"

Tap, tap, tap! came Figgins' knuckles, all over Baggy's fat countenance. Wild howls burst from Baggy.

"Ow! Wow! Keep off! Ow! Oh erikery! Whooop!"

Baggy fairly turned tail and rushed into the House. A roar of laughter followed him.

Baggy's career as a bold bad bully had been glorious; but it had been brief. It had come to a sudden end. Baggy was once more the despised funk.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You rotten funk!" roared Grundy. "Come back!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A howl died away in the House. Baggy Trimble did not come back. Wild horses would not have dragged him back.

"I suppose you've been gammonin' all this time!" said Cardew, staring at Figgins. "What the deuce did you mean by makin' out that you were afraid of Trimble?"

Figgins laughed, and walked into the House, without replying, with Kerr and Wynn. As they came up to the Fourth Form passage they came on a panting figure.

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Baggy had stopped there to take breath. But at sight of Figgins there was a howl of alarm from Baggy.

"Yaroooh! Keep off, you beast! Oh jiminy!"

Baggy bolted.

The door of Study No. 6 was wide open. It was a case of any port in a storm, and Baggy rushed in. Tom Merry & Co. and Cousin Ethel stared at him in surprise.

"Bai Jove! What——"

"What the thump——" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Yarooooh! Keep him off!" shrieked Baggy. "I say, keep that New House beast off! I say, Figgins is after me! Yarooooh! Help!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins & Co. appeared in the doorway. There was another yell from Baggy. He dodged round the study table.

"Ow! Yow! Help! Keep him off!"

"Oh cwumbs!"

"Oh dear!" exclaimed Ethel.

"Yarooooh! Help!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Keep him off!"

"You silly ass!" roared Figgins. "I'm not after you—I've come here to tea——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake took Trimble by one fat ear and led him from the study. He led him down the passage without a word; and there, silently and solemnly, kicked him. Then he returned to Study No. 6. A dismal howl floated after him.

"So it was all gammon, Figgins," said Tom Merry.

Figgins grinned.

"I thought it was, though I couldn't make it out," said Tom. "Of all the silly asses, old man——"

"You must let me explain," said Cousin Ethel.

And when Ethel had explained, all was clear. It was a very happy tea-party in Study No. 6—and the happiest face of all was that of George Figgins, which fairly glowed. In another study, Baggy Trimble was groaning dismally. But nobody bothered about Baggy.

THE END.

(Poor old Baggy! He always comes a flop in the end—but, then, he deserves it! Don't miss next week's thrilling yarn, "The Vengeance of the Hawk!")

SMASHING SOCCER and ADVENTURE YARN!



By

HEDLEY SCOTT.

(Opening Chapters
Retold on Page 26.)

The RANGERS' RECRUIT!

Buxton Takes Advice!

"YOU impudent hound!" snarled Buxton, and drew back his fist as if he would dash it in Chakenham's face.

"Hear, hear!" said Thomas' twin. "I agree entirely with Thomas. What's more, I venture to say that since you set your heart on winning Irene Marshall you've lost your sense of proportion."

There was a measure of support for the Chakenham twins, judging by the low, angry murmur that escaped the rest of the assembly.

"You mutinous hounds!" swore Buxton. "By gad, I'll—"

Adolph Haverswood, who seemed to exercise controlling influence over Buxton, plucked him by the arm.

"Nor so hasty, dear old bean," he smiled. "The boys are right in a way."

"What!" stormed Buxton. "Are you going to turn like the other jackals?"

Haverswood shook his head.

"None of us is turning,"

he answered smoothly. "We

all know which side our bread

is buttered, Marchant. But

it's a peculiar fact that since

you tried to entice that girl

Irene from Hartley, since

you've got her idiot of a

brother into your power in a

praiseworthy effort to force her to accept your attentions—

now wait a moment—since Hartley, like the big stiff he is,

took the blame for the Oxford affair and butted into the

Rangers' side, you've lost your head."

The veins stood out on Buxton's forehead like bands of

steel as he listened to this frank statement from his chief

henchman. For a moment it looked as though he would

burst into a volcanic tirade of abuse, but a semblance of

MASKED . . .

6 Gentlemen of Leisure meet. But the 6 specimens in question turn out to be 6 Master Criminals when they are

control was left to him, for he passed a hand across his eyes and composed himself

"By heavens, Haverswood, I've killed men for being half as outspoken as that! But perhaps there is a vein of truth in what you say. That big stiff Hartley is an obsession with me, the girl Irene the same. And if weakness there is in me, it whispers again and again that Hartley, the blundering, clumsy stiff, will somehow get his heel upon my neck—upon our necks!"

Dead silence followed Buxton's words. No criminal, no matter how lucky he is, likes such words as these, for his peculiar calling tends to foster superstition. And something like the voice of fate seemed to dwell in Buxton's words.

"Then why don't we put the big chunk of ugliness out of mess?" growled Billenter.

"Hear, hear!"

"Too dangerous, now," said Haverswood.

Buxton banged a savage fist on the table.

"What the devil do you mean—too dangerous?"

"What I say, returned Haverswood coolly. "Everyone knows the bad feeling between you and Hartley. Moreover, our scouts inform us that that meddling blighter Ferrers Locke is friendly with him."

"A private detective," sneered Buxton. "Poof!"

"The detective who has never lost a case," said Haverswood quietly and very deliberately, and at his words a shiver ran through the gathering. "No, Marchant, we'll try another lay. Ferrers Locke must have no suspicion, you understand? You, Marchant, must make amends to ugly, red-headed Bill. You must apologise—"

"What?" roared Buxton furiously. "I'll see him hanged first!"

Haverswood smiled indulgently.

"Brains will win in the end, Marchant. You will apologise like the good sportsman the tooter fans think you are. You will turn a smiling face to big Bill and spoof him."

"Bury the hatchet altogether," said Thomas Chakenham, with a sly grin. "I follow Haverswood."

. . . UNMASKED!

"And while red-headed Bill is telling himself that you're not such a bad sort," went on Haverswood, "Chakenham will fix things up with one or two of the outside boys and a certain bookmaker."

A cunning light glimmered in Buxton's eyes as he swiftly reviewed the possibilities.

"Adolph," he said boisterously, "I always said you were

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the brains of this concern. I'll do as you suggest. Now let's talk it over and weigh up pros and cons from every angle. Money was Hartley's downfall at Oxford. Money must be his accursed downfall with the Rangers. Do I get you?"

"Spoken with sense," said Haverswood. "Gather round, fellow plotters, and let us hope that Hartley's ears do not burn."

And the Buxton gang, once more in harmony, callously discussed plans for the downfall of Bill Hartley, what time a horrified world read in newsprint of the tragic shooting of Inspector McDoughty and the deliberate firing of the house in Rutley Street.

The Man in the Check Suit!

"FIVE more minutes, Bill!"

Tich Freeman, all smiles, pulled out a turnip watch from his pocket—a watch nearly as big as an alarm clock—and tramped up the platform to get a paper.

The train taking the Rangers to their away match with Bidstead Wanderers was almost due. In a cheery crowd the Cashton Rangers whirled away the minutes.

It was five days since Bill's adventurous scene in Rutley Street, and the only evidence of that affair he bore about him was the four-footed pet that now refused to leave his side.

"Scotty," as the late Inspector McDoughty's fox terrier was quickly styled, was determined to show gratitude. Since the day of the fire the smart little fellow had stuck to his big rescuer like a shadow. As Tich Freeman remarked, it was a case of Mary and the little lamb all over again. Bill in his turn had become passionately attached to the sagacious animal, and had quickly offered it a new home in the flat which he shared with Tich.

Down to the ground for training went Scotty with the same punctuality and enthusiasm as his burly master. And even at this early stage Scotty signalled a winning shot at goal from Bill's boot by setting up a shrill bark. The Rangers had taken Scotty on the list as their mascot, hence his presence on Euston Station platform in readiness for the journey to Bidstead.

"Signal's down," volunteered Tich, returning from his purchase of a newspaper. "She'll be in in a minute. Hallo, what do you want?"

He scowled at a fat individual, garbed in a suit of loud material, and surmounted by a bowler hat set at a rakish angle, who had sidled up to the crowd of footballers.

"Keep your hair on," returned the loudly dressed gentleman.

And with a deliberate wink at Bill—a knowing wink which mystified him just as much as it intrigued the rest of the players, he moved on a step.

"What the thump is he winking for?" said Bill hotly. "Blessed if I know," confessed Tich. "Horrible looking specimen, ain't 'e?"

"Bookmaker written all over him," said Howard Taylor, the goalie, "and a low specimen of the variety at that."

"I ken him weel!" Sandy Ferguson's Scotch accent broke in. "He's a bookmaker. A pretty rotten reputation he has, too. I no likes the look of him."

Bill glared at the objectionable fat gentleman with open hostility, and received a second wink in return, accompanied by a greasy smile. If the fat gentleman wished to convey the impression that he and Bill Hartley were known to each other, he had succeeded somewhat in his purpose. If he wished to imply that something was "on" between him and the Rangers' inside-forward, he got very near to the mark. His only utterance, however, left no doubt about it either.

"Don't forget, Bill," he said in a hoarse stage whisper that carried remarkably well.

"What's your game?" snapped Bill. "Are you trying to be funny?"

Another wink was the only form of reply.

Bill's blood boiled within him. His was a sensitive nature, and he read an undercurrent of mischief in what had transpired. So did Scotty, for that matter. With a low growl, he advanced a pace and showed his teeth. The bookmaker took one look at the faithful terrier and decided to depart while the going was good. Unfortunately, he was

not quick enough. Scotty not only disliked his voice, his manner, and his unwelcome attentions, he disliked intensely the peculiar pattern of the fat gentleman's trousers. As the fat gentleman wheeled clumsily, Scotty sprang forward with terrific energy. His teeth met and closed on a generous portion of the check cloth situated in the nether regions of the objectionable gentleman's boots.

There was a terrified shriek from the bookmaker and a rending of cloth.

Simultaneous with it rose a roar of laughter from the Rangers, which echoed again and again as Scotty trotted back to his master, wagging his tail in evident pleasure, with a large portion of check material between his teeth.

"Good old Scotty!"

"Serve the old fool right," said Bill, somewhat peeved. "What the thump did he speak to me like that for?"

"Oh, never mind him," said Tich Freeman cheerily. "He's got plenty to keep him busy now. Look at him—he's scuttling off holding a newspaper round his pants. Ha, ha!"

Bill's clouded face cleared somewhat. Next minute came the shriek of an approaching train, and the Bidstead train drew in and braked to a standstill. The players tumbled in in a light-hearted, cheery group, and the fat bookmaker and his knowing winks were forgotten. Yet the poison of the Buxton gang had been sown. Long before the match with the Wanderers came to a conclusion the Rangers were destined to remember with vividness the peculiar meeting between Bill Hartley and the man in the check suit.

Major Carstairs, in company with the Bidstead management, surveyed the rapidly swelling tiers of humanity that thronged into the Bidstead enclosure, with an appreciative grimace. The home team's tussle with the famous Cashton Rangers was a big draw, which was intensified by reason of the fact that Bidstead, having lost their first thirteen matches, had found their form with a vengeance. Their record now stood at—matches played twenty-one. Won eight; lost thirteen; drawn nil. On the "book" Bidstead were certainly finding their feet, and the sudden change in their fortunes had swelled their following to an enormous extent. That the clash with the Rangers would test them to their uttermost was the opinion of all who styled themselves "fans." Yet, to provide an unpleasant intrigue to the coming match, there had spread the rumour that Cashton Rangers were going to "sell" the game.

The Bidstead directors had quickly denied via the Press such an unsporting arrangement, but like all rumours where celebrities are concerned, its growth persisted. Moreover, investigation had shown that at least three bookmakers had laid odds of three to one against Cashton winning, a state of things that was hardly reconcilable with their form.

Major Carstairs had fumed like a human volcano when these rumours had been brought to his ears. Betting of any nature he disliked with a bitterness that some people described as unreasonable, but betting in connection with football made him see red.

The mere suggestion that the Rangers had already decided the fate of the coming match; that Bidstead would win handsomely, had drawn from him an infuriated denunciation of bookmakers, rumour-mongers, and the like. Yet the major could not get the rumour out of his head. As he listened to the remarks of the crowd his appreciation of its size diminished. It was being stated quite freely that the match was a "cert" for the home side.

"Let me tell you, sir," hoared the major, addressing one voluble gentleman in a bowler hat not very far from the directors' stand, "you're talking nonsense. Sell the match, confound you! Why, I've a mind to sue you for slander."

"Ave yer, cocky?" leered the man in the bowler. "Well, wait until after the match. I'll still be 'ere."

Carstairs' purple face became more inflamed. With a snort of rage he elbowed his way out of the directors' stand and entered the dressing-room.

The Rangers were in the process of changing. Not one but looked forward to the match; not one of them but saw a further two points accumulating to their credit in the League table.

Major Carstairs' face softened somewhat as he eyed each of his "boys" in turn. If a match could be sold it could only be sold by a player or players. Certainly among that cheery contingent of Cashton's hopes there was no traitor—on looks, at any rate. True, the softening influence faded out of the major's face when he saw Marchant Buxton enter

THE FIRST CHAPTERS RE-TOLD.

BILL HARTLEY, a six-foot edition, of brown and muscle, with a head of flaming red hair, is "sent down" from Oxford. Arriving home, he quarrels with his father and then leaves for London to find work. In London, Bill meets an old friend in Major Carstairs, chairman of the Cashton Rangers F.C., who gives him a trial with the eleven. Bill is eventually signed on, only to find that Marchant Buxton, who was behind the plot that brought about his dismissal from the "Varsity," is the club's centre-forward. Buxton, who, incidentally, is the leader of a gang of crooks, does his best to ruin Bill, but thanks to the timely intervention of Ferrers Locke, his plor' fair. Inspector McDoughty gets on the track of the gang, but is shot down in cold blood by unknown assailants, who afterwards set fire to the house in which he lodges, and thereby destroy all clues. Bill, however, heroically rescues the dead inspector's dog. Meanwhile, Buxton calls a meeting of his gang, one of whom rebukes him for trying to down Hartley.

(Now read on.)



Scotty trotted back to Bill, wagging his tail and carrying a large piece of check material!

the dressing-room, for Carstairs was beginning to develop a dislike of the amateur. But there was no fault to find in Buxton's looks any, more than in the others. He advanced with a cheery grin and a greeting, which suggested that his forced "standing down" from the team had in no way soured him.

"Hallo, boys!" he exclaimed boisterously. "I simply had to come along and see you knock spots off the Bidstead boys. Good luck to you—an' don't take any notice of the silly rumours floating about."

"Oh, so you've heard these infernal rumours, have you?" exclaimed Carstairs.

Marchant Buxton smiled easily.

"My dear major, wherever celebrities meet in battle so will there also be found rumours," he observed. "It's a compliment in a way, for Cashton enters the ranks of celebrities, what?"

"Confound you and your nonsense!" snorted the major unreasonably. "Tell me, Buxton, without any frills, just exactly what you've heard."

Marchant Buxton's face assumed a serious expression.

"Well, it was being voiced pretty freely at the station that Bidstead will win hands down," he remarked. "Some hefty louts in the crowd made no secret of their information that the match had been sold—"

"Wha-a-at?"

"Calm yourself, my dear major," said Buxton suavely. "Remember I am merely repeating what I heard. I also heard my talkative friends in the crowd inform the rest of humanity that Bill Jelks, whoever he is, was laying three to one against the Rangers."

"This is monstrous!" fumed the major.

"It certainly isn't playing the game," admitted Buxton. "But why worry, sir? Our boys will win comfortably. I predict—even with—ahem!—yours truly away from the centre."

He made the latter observation with such careless frankness that the players grinned. Certainly Buxton was a sportsman.

Even Bill Hartley found himself wondering whether he had misjudged the fellow—a feeling that almost became a conviction when Buxton, apparently spotting him for the first time, advanced and held out a friendly hand.

"Hallo, Hartley! Sorry we didn't hit off as well as we might have done," he remarked, in a tone that rang true. "My fault, I'm afraid. Was a bit jealous of you."

Bill felt uncomfortable. Like the good sportsman he was he experienced no elation in someone else's apology.

"That's—that's all right, Buxton," he found himself saying. "I don't bear you any ill will."

Instinctively his right hand shot out in a token of buried enmity, and Buxton, flashing a smile at him, gripped the rugged fist and wrung it warily.

Some of the players applauded with a murmur of approval, for most professional footballers are like a happy band of "kids," and prefer peace and good-fellowship to jealousy and ill-feeling.

Major Carstairs viewed the proceedings with an approving eye and a smile of gratification. Now, with Buxton playing his good game as centre, and Bill playing up to him—the major was telling himself, when the referee poked his head round the door.

"Ready, boys?"

"Ready!"

To a storm of cheers the Cashton Rangers doubled out on to the springy turf. It was an ideal day for King Footer, with a fairly dry turf, little wind, and plenty of daylight. Up in the stand Carstairs remarked to Buxton, who was seated next to him, that it was "ideal"—an observation with which the amateur concurred. He was about to make some general remark in addition when his voice was swept up and lost in the terrific ovation that greeted the appearance of the Bidstead Wanderers.

And while the crowd settled down to watch the preliminaries Buxton's monocled eye swept the rows of faces in the stand alongside and settled for one fleeting instant on that of Thomas Chakenham. An almost-imperceptible nod passed between them. Then, a peculiar glitter dwelling in Buxton's eyes he, in company with thousands of other spectators, announced to himself and his neighbours that Cashton Rangers had won the toss.

The home eleven surged forward in anticipation as their centre kicked off. A low pass found the inside-right, and without wasting a second of time he viciously punted the ball to his wing.

Cleverly taking the ball on the run the outside-right feinted past the Rangers' half-back, and then curled the leather to his centre again. But this time the Rangers' centre-half was on the spot. Dunstall's bullet head rose a foot clear of the Bidstead forward, and there echoed through the crisp air a soft thud, which in no way indicated the cleverness with which Dunstall had twisted the ball to his own inside-left.

"Up, the Rangers!"

In an encouraging bellow the Rangers' faction gave tongue, to be utterly eclipsed in the retaliatory roar that the Bidstead crowd returned. But Jute, the Rangers' inside-left, still had the ball at his feet, and as a defender hurled himself recklessly at him he tapped it to Markham at centre.

The Rangers' centre forward, some eight paces in advance of the rest of the line, gathered the ball neatly, shouldered off a burly back who tore at him, and then swung it away to Tich Freeman on the wing.

"Go it, Tich!"

Tich was going it. At full-peg he raced along the touch-line, literally jumped the out-of-control leg of the half-back who went down in a sliding tackle to dispossess him, and returned the ball to the centre of the field.

Markham barely touched it; but the nerve-tensed audience saw the leather trick—away to the foot of Bill Hartley. And in a flash that could almost be felt, the thousands waited for the shot that was certain to come.

Bidstead fans to a man had gathered the accounts of the Rangers' new inside-forward; he was another Alce James and a Dixie Dean rolled into one—a scheming, clever player, and a destructive shot.

Thus it came as a mixture of disillusionment and relief to Bidstead when Bill, with a cannon-ball shot that streaked across the turf inches high, missed the gaping posts by a couple of feet at least.

"Phew!" The Rangers' fans whistled their amazement.

Bill himself could hardly believe it. He had taken time over his shot; he had put his all into it, and the result—

He grunted in disgust as he retreated for the goal kick, his ears burning at some of the out-spoken comments of the crowd. Even Tich Freeman seemed to give him a reproachful glance.

"Sorry, Markham, old scout!" apologised Bill at the first opportunity. "I can't make it out—"

"That's all right, Bill!" smiled Markham. "Accidents will happen!"

Bill told himself that it wouldn't happen again. But, to his consternation, to say nothing of the watching crowd, it did.

After a sweeping attack by the Bidstead forwards that nearly resulted in a goal, the ball, directed by Moulton's life-size in boots, drifted over to Tich Freeman. With amazing speed for a "little 'un," Tich flashed away, tricking the opposition with an ease that elicited roars of laughter and applause, and occasional jeers for the benefit of his victims.

"Pass, Tich!"

There was no need for the over-anxious Rangers' fans to offer advice. Tich knew his business. Drawing the defence in subtle manner, he stuck to the ball until the last possible moment. Then, with a perfect lob, he dispatched it to Bill's right foot.

Some of the Bidstead supporters shut their eyes, so certain seemed a goal with Bill unmarked. But they quickly opened them in startled amazement as a full-throated groan soared skywards.

Bill had missed an open goal!

It seemed incredible, but it was true. Once again Bill had taken the requisite time for his shot, but to his horror, he had seen the ball hurtle past its objective with a yard to spare. As if in a daze he passed his hands over his eyes. As one in a dream he heard the jeers of the multitude; saw

the somewhat reproachful glances his own team mates cast upon him.

Tich Freeman came running over to him, his face a picture of concern.

"What on earth's the matter, old chap?" he panted. "Have you gone blind, or summat?"

Bill shook his head.

"I don't know, old man. That goal was a sitter—"

"Pull yourself together!" said Markham, with a trace of sternness in his voice. "We shan't get any more chances like that, Bill."

As Bill walked back he found himself blinking. Something was wrong with his eyes. What it was he could not for the life of him determine, but the feeling grew rather than diminished as the game proceeded.

But those two initial blunders seemed to be but the beginning of Bill's troubles. For the next eighteen minutes—to half-time exactly—he not only failed to take advantage of what the newspaper scribes declared to be "gift goals," but completely missed the ball on at least a dozen occasions. In the circumstances, it was not to be wondered at that the Rangers, thus disheartened, found the fighting forwards of the Bidstead club swarming down upon them in overwhelming array.

Leston and Moulton at back performed prodigies, but weight of odds told in the end, and barely half a minute from the interval Howard Turner was defeated by a shot that seemed to emerge from a score of feet. He went down full length in a despairing effort to avert the disaster, but his groping fingers touched the ball over the line, and first blood went to the home eleven.

"Come on, Rangers!"

"Buck up, Ginger!"

"Played, the Wanderers!"

It seemed something of a farce to play out the remaining few seconds to the interval, for barely had Markham glanced down his line of forwards preparatory to kicking off when the whistle blew. In a discomfited crowd the Rangers trooped off the pitch, the most unhappy member in their midst being Bill Hartley.

And barely had the dressing-room door closed on them when the rumour that the Rangers were selling the match rolled from tongue to tongue with encouraging strength. It went without saying that Bill Hartley's deplorable exhibition was given a foundation pillar in the building of the rumour, and ugly looks and ugly threats were directed at him.

Boiling with vexation, Major Carstairs had pushed into the dressing-room to demand an explanation. He was not the only one. The players themselves were surrounding Bill in a noisy, angry throng.

"You bound! You're selling the match!"

(What can have happened to Bill Hartley? Why is he constantly missing goals? Surely he has no intention of selling the match? There's some mystery here, chums. See what happens in next week's instalment.)

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