

“OUTLINES” Competition Solution Inside!

CONTINUOUS
VARIETY!
YOUR FAVOURITE
STARS—
TOM MERRY & Co
INSIDE!

The GEM

2^d



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TOM MERRY SENT TO COVENTRY BY BLAKE & CO.! READ ABOUT

BARRED BY HIS CHUMS!



What has Tom Merry done? Why do Blake & Co. cut him? Blake refuses to tell the Hero of the Shell what he has got up against him, but when Cousin Ethel arrives at St. Jim's she takes a hand in the matter.

CHAPTER 1. Not Thrown Out!

"OH!" George Gore of the Shell Form at St. Jim's uttered that exclamation suddenly, and jumped to his feet.

Tom Merry looked in at the door, with an expression of amazement on his face as he caught Gore's startled look. Gore had been seated at the table, pen in hand, when Tom Merry tapped; and he had been too deeply occupied to notice the tap.

But as the door opened and the hero of the Shell looked in, he sprang up, his face going suddenly pale.

He stared blankly at Tom Merry, and Tom Merry stared at him.

"What's the matter, Gore?"

"Oh!"

"I'm not a ghost," said Tom. "What on earth's the matter? I tapped before I opened the door."

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"I didn't hear you."

"Well, I tapped. What's the matter? I didn't mean to startle you."

Gore breathed hard. The colour came back slowly into his pasty face.

"You startled me," he repeated.

"Blessed if I know why you should be so startled at a fellow looking into your room," said Tom Merry. "I came to speak to Skimpole."

"He isn't here."

"I can see he isn't now. What's the matter with you?"

"Nothing."

Gore was recovering his self-possession. He was on the worst of terms with Tom Merry, and he never troubled himself to be polite to persons he disliked.

"This is my study," he said. "I haven't asked you into it. There's the passage, Tom Merry."

Tom Merry sniffed.

Gore watched that proceeding in considerable surprise.

"What the dickens are you sniffing at?" he demanded. Tom Merry sniffed again.

THIS ASTOUNDING AFFAIR IN THE SPLENDID YARN BELOW!

By

Martin Clifford

"Oh, I thought it was cigarettes!" he explained. "I thought that you were smoking, and fancied you were caught by a prefect."

"I wasn't smoking."

"No; there's no smell of tobacco, so I suppose you weren't. I'm afraid I shouldn't take your word, Gore."

"Mind your own business."

Tom Merry looked at him steadily.

"What little game are you up to?" he demanded.

"What do you mean?"

"You weren't startled like that for nothing. What were you writing there?"

"That's my business."

Tom Merry made a step into the study, and Gore hastily turned over the sheet he had been writing upon.

The hero of the Shell laughed scornfully.

"I guessed as much. You've got something there you don't want anybody to see."

Gore scowled fiercely.

"Suppose I have—what is that to do with you, Tom Merry?"

"Nothing, perhaps."

"Then mind your own business, and get out of my study!"

"I'll get out of your study soon enough, Gore. You're not the kind of fellow whose company I like. But before I go—"

"Get out!"

"Before I go," said Tom Merry calmly. "I've got a word to say. I don't know what your little game is. I don't know what trick you're playing—"

"Get out!"

"But before you carry it out, Gore, whatever it is, bear this in mind. You're in bad odour at St. Jim's. You're a cad, and a cur! You're a bully to the small boys, and about the worst-hated fellow among the fags. It's pretty plain to me that the masters have had their eye on you for some time."

Gore started.

"I know the masters are down on me," he snarled, "and I know whom I owe it to, Tom Merry."

"You owe it to yourself," said Tom calmly—"yourself, and your precious Smart Set. You're going the right way to get sacked, Gore—expelled from the school. I say that as a warning."

Gore's lips curled bitterly.

"I don't want your warnings. Let me alone—that's all I want. Mind your own business, and I'll mind mine."

"Good! As head of the Shell, I thought I ought to speak to you, that's all. You're a worm; but I don't want to see any fellow sacked from the school."

"You can't scare me."

"I'm not trying to scare you. I know that Mr. Railton has had his eye on you all this term. He knows very nearly as much about you by this time as you know yourself."

"If you have sneaked about me—"

"You know I haven't."

"I don't know. Anyway, get out of my study, or I'll throw you out!"

Tom Merry's eyes gleamed.

He was a good-tempered fellow—the best-tempered fellow in the School House at St. Jim's, with the possible exception of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy; but Gore's manner would have provoked the temper of a saint.

"You'll throw me out?" he said quietly. "Then you'd better do it, Gore!"

"Get out!"

Tom Merry did not stir.

"Are you going?" yelled Gore.

"No; I'm waiting to be thrown out."

Gore gritted his teeth.

He had said he would throw Tom Merry out, and he was certainly big and burly enough to do it; but the hero of the Shell was a decidedly tough customer to tackle, and Gore knew that.

But he was in such a towering rage that he had lost

some of his usual caution, which, as a rule, led him to bully small boys, and let larger ones alone.

He stepped towards Tom Merry with fists clenched, and his eyes flaming.

"Get out!"

Tom Merry looked at him steadily.

"I'm waiting to be thrown out."

Gore wasted no more time in words.

He dashed straight at Tom Merry with a rush like that of a maddened bull.

Tom Merry did not flinch for a moment. He stood like a rock, and dashed Gore's lashing fists aside with ease, and they met chest to chest, with an impact that did not make Tom Merry stir, but which brought a gasp from the bully of the Shell.

Then Tom Merry's arms closed round the burly Shell fellow and Gore wriggled and panted in a grip of steel.

Tom Merry's smiling face looked into his.

"Going to throw me out?" he said sweetly.

"Ow!"

"What's the matter?"

"Ow!"

"Get on with the throwing out."

"Ow! Wow!"

Monty Lowther and Manners, Tom Merry's study-mates came along the passage. They stared into the study in amazement at their chum.

"What on earth—" began Manners.

"What the dickens—" said Monty Lowther.

Tom Merry laughed.

"It's all right, kids!"

"What are you up to?"

"Gore is throwing me out."

"Ha, ha, ha! Go it, Gore!"

"Ow!" gasped Gore. "Wow! Yow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Lemme go, you beast!" panted Gore, struggling in vain in the grip of the hero of the Shell. "Chuck it! Leggo!"

"Aren't you going to throw me out?"

Gore gasped.

"N-n-no!"

"Oh, throw him out, Gore!" implored Monty Lowther. "He's really got far too much cheek, and he ought to be thrown out. We should so like to see him thrown out. Do throw him out, there's a good chap!"

"Ow!"

"We're waiting for the fun to begin," said Manners. "Go it, Gore! Make an effort!"

"Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Leggo! Chuck it! Ow!"

Tom Merry released Gore so suddenly that the Shell bully, unprepared, collapsed in a heap on the carpet. He sat there gasping for breath, fixing upon the Shell fellows a glare that was almost demoniacal.

"Looks pretty doesn't he?" said Manners. "Come on, Tommy!"

"Hang you!" snarled Gore. "I'll get even with you—all of you—and Jack Blake and his set, too! I'll show all of you what I can do!"

"Gas, I expect," said Monty Lowther. "That's about all you can do. Come on, kids, and we'll leave him to stew in his own juice!"

And the Terrible Three went out and slammed the door.

Gore staggered to his feet.

"Just you wait!" he muttered. "I'll show you! Sack, eh? It's a jolly sight more likely to be Tom Merry that's sacked, not me."

CHAPTER 2.

Something Up!

TOM MERRY laughed as he went down the Shell passage with Lowther and Manners. The "throwing-out" process had been funny; but in a few moments his face became grave.

"What was the row about?" asked Lowther.

"Nothing. I called in to speak to Skimpole, and Gore was as polite as usual. I gave him some home truths on the subject of his personal qualities and his chance of being sacked from the school, and then—"

"Hence these tears," said Lowther.

Tom Merry laughed.

"Yes. I don't like Gore, but I should be sorry to see him expelled. He doesn't understand that he's getting jolly near it. But it's no good talking to him; he never will believe that anybody wants to do him a good turn."

"Hallo! Here's the one and only!"

Monty Lowther, by that expression, could only refer to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the School House. The elegant junior was coming along with his usual airy and graceful walk when the chums of the Shell turned into the Fourth Form passage.

The Terrible Three came to a halt, and gave three nods at precisely the same moment, as if moved by clockwork.

But Arthur Augustus did not smile, neither did he nod in return.

He jammed his eyeglass into his eye, took a long and careful survey of the chums of the Shell, and then walked into Study No. 6 and closed the door.

This proceeding on D'Arcy's part was so astounding that the Shell fellows could only stare at one another in blank amazement. The swell of St. Jim's was usually the cheeriest and politest fellow there; in fact, he carried his personal courtesy to an extent that sometimes moved the merriment of the School House fellows.

This piece of unexampled rudeness was simply staggering, therefore.

The Terrible Three exchanged a blank stare.

Tom Merry rubbed his nose thoughtfully.

"Something wrong with Gussy," he said.

"Looks like it."

"Off his rocker, do you think?" said Lowther tentatively.

"I suppose so. Of course, it may be a new waistcoat that's weighing on his mind—"

"More likely a new hat!"

"Oh, don't be funny! There's something wrong, any way. Blessed if I can make it out! Let's look for Blake. I saw him in the lower passage a few minutes ago."

And the Terrible Three went on their way towards the stairs.

If there was anything wrong with Gussy, if he was "on his dignity" about something, it was useless to question him. But Blake was certain to know about it. Jack Blake, Digby, and Herries, as they shared Study No. 6 with Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, were bound to be in the secret.

"Here's Dig!" exclaimed Manners, as that individual came in with a cricket bat under his arm.

"Hallo, Dig!"

"Been knocking up centuries?"

"What's the matter with Gussy?"

Digby of the Fourth looked at the Terrible Three. He did not put up his eyeglass, because he did not use one. But he fixed a freezing stare upon the chums of the Shell, and stalked past them like the ghost in "Hamlet."

Again the three chums were taken by surprise.

"It's a study rag," said Tom Merry at last. "They've all got it. Blessed if I can make it out, though!"

The Terrible Three went down the stairs considerably perplexed. They had been cut dead by two of the four members of Study No. 6. Why?

It could not be on account of the constant rows and scrimmages they had with Blake & Co. Those little affairs simply cleared the air, as it were. Why had D'Arcy and Digby cut them, then?

They looked round for Blake. That junior was not to be seen; but Reilly volunteered the information that Herries had gone round to feed his bulldog. The chums of the Shell made their way thither at once, and found Herries and Towser together with a bag of biscuits.

Herries looked up at the three, but he did not speak to them.

"Bite it, Towsey!" he said. "Bite it, old chap! You can't expect to have a cold mutton-bone every day, you greedy brute! Dog-biscuits are good enough for you, I think—they make a jolly big hole in my pocket-money, anyway. You're growing dainty!"

Gr-r-r-r!

"Now, come on, old boy! Feed up!"

Gr-r-r-r!

"Herries, old man—"

"Eat your bikkie, you brute, can't you?"

"I say, Herries—"

"You'd better come for a run round the quad and get an appetite," said Herries, in disgust; and he unloosened the end of the chain from the kennel.

"Herries—"

"Come on, Towser!"

And Herries started off with his dog. He had not taken the slightest notice of the presence of the Terrible Three, though, of course, he could not have failed to hear them addressing him.

The chums of the Shell looked wrathful. They weren't accustomed to being treated with contumely, especially by a Fourth Form chap, and their tempers began to rise.

"Collar him!" said Tom Merry, as Herries moved off.

Lowther and Manners grasped the Fourth-Former, one by

each shoulder. Herries tried to wrench himself away, but he failed.

Towser growled ominously.

"Look here, Herries," said Tom Merry, planting himself in front of the big Fourth-Former, "what does all this mean?"

"Get out of the way!"

"I want an explanation."

"You're in my way."

"Look here—"

"Clear out!"

"You're not going till you've explained," said Tom Merry, determinedly. "If we have much more of your rot, we'll roll you in the gutter, too."

"What-ho!" said Lowther emphatically.

"Towser! Towser!"

Towser seemed to bristle all over. Herries grinned.

"You'd better buzz off!" he said. "I've only got to say a word to Towser, and he'll take three samples out of your legs! Get away!"

Manners and Lowther glanced at the bulldog, and released Herries. Towser looked very businesslike.

"What's the matter with you, Herries?" demanded Tom Merry angrily. "It's the same with Gus and Dig. What have you got up against us?"

"You know jolly well!"

"We don't know."

"Think it over, then."

"You ass! You're barking up a wrong tree, somehow!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "I don't understand you fellows at all. If you've got anything up against a chap, why can't you say it out plain?"

"I told Blake I wouldn't."

"Oh, it's Blake, then!"

"It's all of us," said Herries. "We don't want a row with you fellows. It's all right, only—"

"Only what?"

"Only we don't want to speak to you."

"Why not?"

"Find out!"

In spite of the threatening teeth of Towser, the Terrible Three came very near hurling themselves upon Herries at that moment.

But Tom Merry restrained his temper.

"We'll speak to Blake," he said. "Come on, you fellows—"

"Towser, run, old boy!"

And Herries ran off with his bulldog. The Terrible Three, with frowning brows, set out to look for Jack Blake of the Fourth. The interview was likely to be a stormy one when they found him.

CHAPTER 3.

Blake is Obstinate!

JACK BLAKE dropped from the horizontal bar in the gym, with the flush of exercise in his handsome, boyish face.

Half a dozen fellows who had been watching his feats there gave him a cheer.

"Jolly good!" said Harry Noble of the Shell. "You Fourth Form kids aren't all duffers, now—"

"Can't say the same of you Shellfish," said Blake cheerfully. "You are."

"Well, you cheeky fag—"

"Rats!"

"Here he is!"

It was an exclamation from the direction of the door.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther came up, looking very warm and excited. They had been hunting high and low for Jack Blake.

"Here the boulder is!"

"We've found him."

"Blake! Blake!"

Jack Blake deliberately turned his back upon them and began speaking to Kerruish of the Fourth.

"Let's see you on the bar, Kerruish, old boy."

"I say, Blake—"

"Up with you, Kerruish!"

"Tom Merry's talking to you," said Kerruish in astonishment.

"Never mind. Get on the bar."

"But—"

"Here, hands off!" exclaimed Blake, as the Terrible Three, their patience quite exhausted, seized him in their grasp. "Stop that!"

"You ass—"

"Hands off!"

"Keep him tight!" growled Tom Merry, whose blue eyes were glinting now. "If you don't want the frog's-march



The frog's-march was of a very gentle variety, but it was sufficiently painful to Blake, to say nothing of the humiliation. Right round the gymnasium Tom Merry & Co. marched him, wriggling spasmodically and vainly in their grip!

round the gym, Blake, you'll tell us what you are playing the giddy ox for!"

"Let me go!"

"I won't!"

Blake began to struggle fiercely. He was a powerful fellow for a junior, but he had no chance, of course, against three fellows.

They held him fast, and he was twisted over and laid on his back on the floor. Then Monty Lowther stood on his legs, to keep him from lashing out, and Manners held his wrists above his head. Tom Merry gently planted a foot upon his chest.

Spread out in this manner, Jack Blake was quite helpless and at the mercy of his foes; but his spirit was undaunted. His eyes blazed as he looked up at the Terrible Three and gasped for breath.

"I'll take you one at a time, if you like," he exclaimed; "with or without gloves, too! You rotters!"

"Never mind that now," said Tom Merry. "You've got to explain yourself, and we'll fight you afterwards, if you like."

Blake's mouth set obstinately.

"You won't get a word out of me."

"Look here—"

"Lemme get up!"

"You'll jolly well get the frog's-march in a minute."

"Rescue, Fourth!" shouted Blake.

There was a general movement among the Fourth-Formers who were standing round. The scene was attracting attention from all parts of the gym.

"Here, let him alone!" exclaimed Kerruish, the Manx lad, and he pushed forward at the same moment, rolling back his cuffs.

"Stand back!"

"Bosh! Let Blake get up."

"That's the tune!" exclaimed Hancock of the Fourth. "Let him alone!"

And there was a threatening murmur from the juniors.

The Shell fellows in the crowd looked perplexed. They naturally felt like backing their own Form against the Fourth, but Tom Merry's proceedings at the present moment certainly did seem a little bit high-handed.

Tom Merry looked round with his clear, flashing eyes.

"Hold on a minute, chaps!" he exclaimed. "You can all know how the matter stands. This dummy Blake has got something up against us, and he won't explain what it is. That's what we want—an explanation. He won't give it."

"Why the dickens don't you, Blake?" demanded Noble.

"Because I don't choose," said Blake.

"That's no answer. Tom Merry has a right to it."

Blake smiled scornfully.

"Tom Merry knows best whether he has a right to ask

it," he said. "I dare say he could hit on it for himself, if he thought the matter over."

"I have thought the matter over."

"Well, you'll get nothing out of me."

And Blake closed his lips obstinately.

Tom Merry stood looking down at him with blazing eyes.

"Look here, Blake," he said, "I know you're a decent chap, or I'd let the matter drop now and never speak to you again as long as I am at St. Jim's. But I know there must be some mistake."

"Not much chance of a mistake in this matter."

"What is the matter?"

Blake did not answer.

"Did you ever see such an exasperating brute?" exclaimed Lowther. "Give him the frog's-march, and see if you can make him talk!"

"Here, hold on!"

"Right-ho! We're holding on."

And the Terrible Three yanked Jack Blake from the floor. The Fourth-Former struggled in vain in their grasp.

"Rescue, Fourth!" he shouted.

"Oh, hang it!" said Kerruish. "If you've got something up against Tom Merry, why can't you tell the chap what it is in plain English?"

"I'm not going to tell him!"

"Then you can bawl rescue till you're hoarse; I don't stir."

"Nor I," said several voices. "It's caddish, Blake. Tell him what you've got up against him."

"Go and eat coke!"

"Come on!" said Tom Merry.

There was no chance of a rescue.

The juniors were puzzled and by no means pleased by Blake's obstinacy. If he had anything against the Terrible Three, it was only straightforward to tell them so. This idea of cutting a fellow dead, and at the same time refusing to explain what offence he had given, did not appeal at all to the St. Jim's fellows.

Fourth-Formers as well as Shell fellows looked on without interference, while Jack Blake went through the delights of the frog's-march.

Blake struggled desperately in the grip of the Shell fellows, but his struggles only made his punishment worse.

Tom Merry, of course, did not hurt him. The frog's-march was of a very gentle variety; but it was sufficiently painful to Blake, to say nothing of the humiliation.

Right round the great gymnasium they marched him, wriggling spasmodically and vainly in their grip.

Then they came to a halt.

"Now will you explain?"

"No!" roared Blake.

"You'll go round again!"

"I don't care!"

"You'll get bumped next time."

"Go and eat coke!"

"What are you playing the giddy ox for?"

"Find out!"

"Come on!" exclaimed Tom Merry, quite exasperated. "What he wants is some more, and plenty of it! Come on!"

Jack Blake made a tremendous effort to break loose.

He dragged his captors over, and for some minutes the four juniors were mixed up on the floor in a writhing, struggling mass. At the same time, Kildare of the Sixth, the captain of St. Jim's, entered.

CHAPTER 4.

Skimpole Inquires!

KILDARE stared blankly at the scene on the floor. Rows between the Terrible Three and the chums of Study No. 6 were certainly not rare, but this looked something more serious than a study row.

Jack Blake was hitting out furiously, and Monty Lowther had rolled over on the floor with a crimson nose. Tom Merry and Manners were grasping Blake now with no gentle hands.

The captain of St. Jim's strode towards them.

"Stop that!" he rapped out.

At Kildare's voice the struggle ceased.

Tom Merry and Manners let go Blake as if he had suddenly become red-hot, and Blake rolled away, gasping, on the floor. Tom Merry jumped up, and Monty Lowther sat up, his hand to his streaming nose.

Kildare looked at them sternly.

"What does this mean?" he exclaimed.

"N-nothing!" stammered Tom Merry.

"You were fighting."

"Oh, no!"

"What?"

"We weren't fighting," explained Tom Merry. "If we had been fighting we should have been one to one, you know. We were collaring Blake."

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"And what were you collaring Blake for?"

"To—to give him the frog's-march, you see."

"Indeed! And why?"

"Oh, he wants to be put through it, you know! It was a sort of lesson to him not to be cheeky to his elders."

Kildare could not help grinning. Tom Merry was a couple of months older than Blake, but he spoke in quite a grandfatherly manner.

"Well, I don't like to see you kids having a row to this extent," said Kildare. "You were fighting, and in a way I don't like to see. A study row does no great harm, but you were punching one another like hooligans."

"I'm sorry."

"Well, don't do it any more, that's all."

Kildare walked out, leaving the late antagonists looking at one another grimly enough.

Blake caressed a darkened eye.

"Does that look very bad, Kerruish?" he asked, turning to the Manx junior, and ignoring the Terrible Three.

Kerruish grinned.

"It isn't a beauty spot," he said.

"My hat! And Cousin Ethel's coming to-morrow! I shall have to get a beefsteak for it from the House dame."

And Blake turned to hurry away.

Tom Merry called to him:

"Blake!"

The Fourth-Former hurried on without looking round.

Tom Merry's face flushed, and he made a movement to follow, but Monty Lowther caught his sleeve.

"Hold on, Tommy! Remember Kildare!"

Tom Merry nodded.

"All right; but I'll make him speak, all the same, some time. It's a caddish thing to take up a line like that."

"I know it is, and I can't understand it in Blake."

"I suppose there's some mistake," said Manners, caressing his nose. "There's no mistake about the bump on my nose, though. It's there."

"Well, yes, it looks like it," assented Tom Merry, laughing. "My eye seems to be going to close up, too. I think I'll go and bathe it."

And the Terrible Three left the gym.

They attended to their damages, at the same time discussing the strange matter that had risen so suddenly to bother them.

That morning they had been on the best of terms with Study No. 6.

Even as late as afternoon school, when Herr Schneider had taken the Fourth Form and the Shell together in one class for German, there had been no friction.

But since classes had been dismissed this peculiar state of affairs had arisen.

What was the matter with Study No. 6?

Tom Merry was determined to have an explanation, as was only natural. This state of affairs could not be allowed to last. It would lead to endless comment in the School House, and Blake's attitude could not fail to make fellows think that the Terrible Three had failed to "play the game" somehow.

If fellows like Gore or Mellish had made a stand against them no notice would have been taken; but it was different with Blake & Co.

They were the top of the Fourth, and fellows of good standing, and they would not be supposed to get their backs up over nothing.

There was a general prospect of unpleasantness if the matter was not cleared up.

Another point, too, was in Tom Merry's mind.

D'Arcy's Cousin Ethel was visiting the school on the following day, which was a half-holiday, and the Terrible Three were very friendly with Ethel.

They knew that some boating excursion was being planned, and they naturally wanted to take part in it.

But with this trouble between them and the Fourth-Formers that would be out of the question.

"Suppose we put it to them in a friendly way?" suggested Manners, as he tied his necktie in the study after a wash, and at the same time ruefully surveyed the reflection of his swollen nose in the glass. "Perhaps that would have more effect than punching their heads, when you come to think of it."

"Something in that," assented Lowther.

Tom Merry laughed.

"You're right; and if we see Cousin Ethel to-morrow we don't want to show her an assortment of black eyes, swollen noses, and thick ears."

"Exactly."

"But if they refuse to explain—"

"We'll treat them with contempt, then, and find some way of bagging Cousin Ethel to-morrow, and leave 'em in the lurch."

"Jolly good!"

There was a tap at the door of the study, and Skimpole looked in.

Skimpole, the genius of the Shell, blinked at the Terrible Three through his big glasses.

"Ah, I thought I should find you here!" he exclaimed, with much satisfaction.

"Nothing remarkable in that, as it's our study," grunted Lowther.

"I deduced it," said Skimpole, who, when he was not inventing airships or expounding Determinism, was much given to playing the amateur detective. "I heard that you had gone to the dorm for a wash. I discovered traces of wet in the passage, and deduced from that that you were here."

Tom Merry laughed heartily. "You deduced that we came back dripping from the wash, I suppose?" he remarked. "As a matter of fact, there's been about a gallon of water spilt in the passage, through Gore upsetting a chap who was bringing a kettle along."

"Ahem! I suppose that is the fact, as you say so—"

"Of course it's a fact, fathead!"

"Ahem! However, as a careful detective, I must prefer my theories to your facts. I have found you here."

"Good! Now go and find somebody else somewhere else."

"Really, Merry—"

"Go and find a keeper!" said Monty Lowther.

"Really, Lowther, I have come here to do you a service—"

"Ow! We don't want to hear anything about Determinism."

"I was not thinking of that—"

"We don't want the details of the latest thing in airships."

"I have given up airships."

"Well, aeroplanes are just as bad when you begin on 'em. Bunk!"

"I was not going—"

"Buzz off!"

"As you know," said Skimpole, unheeding, "I have in my leisure moments, and entirely as a brain rest after serious work, taken up amateur detective pursuits. I hear that there is a mystery in the School House—"

"Well, we haven't got it here! Look in the passage, or under the Head's desk."

"Pray do not be frivolous, Lowther. I hear that you have some dispute with Blake, and he refuses to explain what is the matter."

Tom Merry gave a groan.

"Oh dear! It's all over the School House already, I suppose!"

"The fellows were talking about it in the Common-room," said Skimpole. "I immediately determined to offer you my services. I will solve the mystery very shortly."

"Skimmy, old man—"

"Pray let me have the details," said Skimpole, in the best manner of a stage Sherlock Holmes, producing a bulky notebook and wetting the end of a pencil.

The Terrible Three looked at one another and grinned.

Skimpole was usually funnier as an amateur detective than as an inventor of airships, which was saying a great deal.

"I am sorry, Skimmy," said Tom Merry, laughing, "but I'm afraid I can't oblige you with any details. You see, it's all right."

"But there is a mystery?"

"Nothing to speak of."

"I understand that Blake and the rest have something up against you."

"Ye-es."

"And decline to explain what it is?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Is that all?"

"That's all."

"Good! Of course, it is plain that Blake suspects you of something. Perhaps he has missed money from his study—"

"What!"

"And suspects you of stealing it—"

"Eh?"

"In that case, the question to be first settled is whether you are guilty. If you are guilty, I should advise the immediate return of the stolen property."

The Terrible Three stared at him blankly. Skimpole was certainly going ahead.

"You unutterable ass!" said Tom Merry at last.

"Ah!" said Skimpole, jotting something down in his notebook. "Abuse of the detective engaged upon the case can only be construed as a sign of guilt."

"You frabjous idiot!"

"I must observe that all you say may be used in evidence against you," said Skimpole. "You see, I proceed in these matters by deduction. Blake suspects you of something. It is not murder. There has been no body discovered in the School House. Moreover, no one is missing."

"My only hat!"

"Therefore it is not murder. It must be robbery. Mind, I do not say you are guilty. Things certainly look rather black against you—"

"What!"

"But I will do my best for you. At all events, I will clear up the mystery," said Skimpole, with a wave of the hand. "I regard that as my duty. You had better be frank with me, my man—I mean, Tom Merry—"

"Your burbling duffer!"

"If you stole the money—"

"Idiot!"

"Or the watch, as the case may be—"

"Dummy!"

"You had better confess, and restore it—"

"Luhatic!"

"Abuse is not argument. As it appears to be impossible to get a clear statement from you, I will interview the fellows in Study No. 6."

And Skimpole left the study, leaving the Terrible Three half laughing and half angry.

CHAPTER 5.

D'Arcy Thinks It's Rotten!

"I WEGARD it as wotten!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy made that pronouncement in Study No. 6.

The chums of the Fourth were at prep—or were supposed to be at prep. They had their books upon the table, and were sitting round it.

But that was as far as they had advanced with prep.

They were looking worried, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had voiced the sentiments of all four of them, when he made his emphatic observation to the effect that he regarded it as rotten.

"Absolutely wotten!" added D'Arcy.

Jack Blake nodded.

"Beastly!" he observed.

"What-ho!" said Dig.

Herries grunted assent.

The chums of the Fourth Form all felt the same about the matter. It might worry the Terrible Three; but it was a greater worry still to the chums of Study No. 6.

"I wegard it as absolutely, feahfully wotten," went on Arthur Augustus. "In the first place, it is wotten to have to lower your opinion of a fellow you like."

"Quite so."

"Then it is wotten to see him cut up wusty about it, without bein' able to explain to him."

"Yes, rather!"

"Moreovah," continued the swell of St. Jim's, "Cousin Ethel's comin' ovah to-morrow aftahnoon."

"I know it."

"She will see that there is somethin' wong."

"Of course she will."

"She'll think we've been quawwellin'."

"She'll know we have."

"She'll wegard it as shockin' bad form."

"Very likely."

"Well, deah boys, I wegard that as the wottenest part of it all."

And Arthur Augustus gave a sigh.

Jack Blake grunted.

"It's rotten all round," he said. "Blessed if I should ever have expected anything of the sort from Tom Merry. It's not like him—as we know him."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You never know a chap till you find him out," Digby remarked oracularly.

"I wegard that as a vowy just we mark, Dig."

"Can't be helped," said Herries. "Better say nothing more to them, that's all."

"If there were any woom for a doubt—"

"But there isn't."

"No; I'm afwaid not."

"When you see a chap's own handwriting—"

"I weally think there is no furthah doubt, then, deah boy. The wotten part of it is that, undah the circo, we can't speak about it. Not that speaking about it would make any difference to the mattah. It wouldn't atlah the facts."

"Not at all. Better keep our heads shut over it."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Ah! You are here!" said a voice at the door, as Skimpole blinked in. "I am very glad to find you fellows at home."

"The gladness is all on your side, then," said Blake crossly. "Don't bother now, Skimmy! We've enough to bother over without any Determinism or airships!"

"I have come to investigate—"

"Clear!"

CHAPTER 6.

In a Friendly Manner!

Skimpole did not clear. He came into the study, closed the door in a mysterious way, and produced his notebook.

"I am going to look into the case," he said.

"What case?"

"The case of Study No. 6."

Blake looked perplexed.

"Do you mean the bookcase?" he asked.

"Certainly not, Blake! Prevarication is useless!"

"Bai Jove!"

"What on earth are you driving at, Skimmy?"

"I am here to investigate. You will find it better to be frank with me. You suspect Tom Merry. Good! What have you missed?"

"Missed!"

"Yes. What has been stolen?"

"Stolen!" gasped Blake helplessly.

"Certainly! What has Tom Merry taken from the study?"

"Taken from the study!"

"Exactly! Come on, you had better speak out!"

"You frabjous ass, he hasn't taken anything! There's nothing been missed. What put such a silly-ass idea into your head?"

"You will find it better to be frank."

"How can I be Frank when I am Jack?" demanded Blake, with an air of seriousness as if he were asking a very important question.

Skimpole looked puzzled. He never did catch on to the most obvious joke.

"I mean you had better be candid," he said.

"I'm sweet enough already without being candied!" said Blake.

"I don't quite understand you, Blake. You appear to me to be quibbling—a certain sign of guilt! Ahem! I forgot. Tom Merry is the guilty party."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is no cause for laughter. I am willing to place my abilities at your disposal in discovering the stolen property, and bringing the crime home to Tom Merry. If he is innocent, I shall prove him——"

"Guilty?"

"Certainly not! I shall lay bare the facts, whatever they are. A detective can be no respecter of persons. I should be sorry to see Tom Merry expelled——"

"What?"

"But I must lay bare the truth. Now, kindly acquaint me with the nature of the missing property."

Blake assumed a solemn expression.

"There's nothing missing at present," he said. "But I have reason to believe that something will be missing from the School House shortly."

"Ah, indeed! Go on! What is it?"

"A frabjous ass named Herbert Skimpole. He is very likely to be found brained in some quiet corner."

"Really, Blake——"

"That's all the information I can give."

"Yaas, wathah! I am wathah inclined, however, to give Skimpole a fearful thwashin'!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy thoughtfully.

"Really, D'Arcy——"

Jack Blake rose and took the amateur detective by the collar.

"There's nothing missing," he said. "There's no crime and no mystery, no dead bodies behind the wainscot, no missing wills hidden inside a bicycle tyre. I am sorry, but that's how the matter stands. Now, travel along!"

"I refuse to go till I have the facts——"

Blake opened the door.

"That's your way, Skimmy!"

A heavy boot clumped behind Skimpole, and he made a hasty exit into the passage. He ran right into three juniors who were just arriving at the door.

"Ow!" gasped Manners, as he reeled against the opposite wall, with Skimpole clutching wildly at him.

"You ass!"

"Dear me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Skimpole slid to the floor, and sat there looking dazed. Blake stood in the doorway, looking askance at the Terrible Three.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther marched into the study, and Blake had no choice but to give ground. Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy rose to their feet, looking very threatening. Tom Merry did not heed their looks.

He closed the door, and the Terrible Three stood with their backs to it.

"Now," said Tom Merry grimly, "we've come to talk this matter over in a friendly manner."

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TOM MERRY'S look was grim, and his tone was businesslike. He had come to talk the matter over in a friendly manner, as he said; but there wasn't much friendliness in the looks of anybody in the study.

The Fourth-Formers glanced at one another in silence.

"Well?" said Tom Merry.

"Well?" said Manners.

"Well?" said Lowther.

Arthur Augustus looked at the ceiling. Digby looked at the floor. Herries looked at the pattern of his trousers. Jack Blake looked out of the window.

Silence followed the three "Wells."

The chums of the Shell breathed hard.

"Look here!" said Tom Merry.

Nobody looked.

"We've come to talk this matter over in a friendly spirit."

D'Arcy coughed, but no other sound broke the silence of the study. Wrath gathered on the brows of the Shell fellows.

"I don't quite know what to think of you chaps," said Tom Merry, his voice rising as his temper rose. "You are acting like a set of cads, and that's the truth!"

"I wefuse to be called a cad!"

"Shut up, Gussy!" said Blake warningly.

"I decline to shut up! I have been called by an opprobrious epithet!"

"Dry up!"

"Undan the circe it is impos for me to dwy up! I——"

"Cad was the word," said Tom Merry. "You can put it in your pipe and smoke it! What do you mean by it?" he went on, his eyes flaming. "We were on good terms enough this morning. Without any cause at all, you suddenly take it into your heads to cut us. We don't want your blessed acquaintance, as far as that goes. You can keep it to yourself if you want to. But you've treated us like pigs in the sight of the whole House. The fellows are already jawing it over. We're entitled to an explanation."

"Yaas, wathah! There is somethin' in what Tom Mowwy says, Blake."

"Shut up!"

"I wefuse to shut up. There is somethin' in what the chap says. Ewery gentleman who considahs himself aggrieved has a wight to an explanation."

"Oh, ring off!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Do shut up!" growled Digby.

"Weally, Dig——"

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" demanded Tom Merry. "If there's any mistake we're willing to hear what you have to say, and to explain it."

Blake shifted uncomfortably.

"We don't want to talk about it," he said.

"What you want isn't the point. It's what we want."

"Well, there's no mistake."

"Wathah not! I quite fail to see how there can be woom for a mistake in the mattah," said D'Arcy, with a shake of the head.

Tom Merry's eyes gleamed.

"Then tell us what it is, and we'll see."

Silence!

"You won't tell us?"

"We can't," said Blake, after a pause.

"Why not?"

"Because—because we can't."

"And do you call that playing the game?" demanded Tom Merry hotly.

Blake sniffed.

"Oh, if you come to playing the game, you can't give us many points," he said. "You're not the chap to preach to anybody."

Tom Merry drew a deep breath.

"Well, I'm jolly well keeping my temper in this matter," he said. "If it were any chap but you, Blake, I'd jolly well land out from the shoulder; but I can't help feeling that there's some ghastly mistake somewhere."

"There isn't."

"If what you say means anything at all, it means that you suspect me of treating you badly in some manner."

"I don't suspect," said Blake abruptly. "I know."

"You know what?"

Blake was silent.

"Are Manners and Lowther in it, or is it up against me only?"

"It stands to reason they're in it, as they chum up with you in everything," said Blake. "I don't say there's any proof. But, anyway, we haven't anything to say against them."



Tom Merry was busily engaged in punching Blake's features, and Blake was pommelling away at Tom's ribs. D'Arcy and Herries laid hold of Tom Merry, one by the neck and one by the heels, and dragged him off.

"Then it's myself only?"
 "Well, yes."
 "What have I done?"
 Blake remained silent again.
 "What have I said?"
 Still silence.
 "You won't tell me! You're going around nursing it up among yourselves, and making fellows think that I've treated you meanly in some way, and you haven't the decency to speak out!" exclaimed Tom Merry fiercely.
 Blake was still silent. His face was very red, and his mouth was set obstinately. He was evidently determined not to speak.
 "Then I've only got one thing to say," said Tom Merry. "You're a cad, Blake, and the rest of you are cads, and I stick to that till you have the decency to say out what you've got in your minds."
 "I wofuse to be called a cad!"
 "I say same as Tom Merry," said Lowther. "And I'm willing to lick any rotter in the Fourth Form who says otherwise."
 "Weally, Lowthah—"
 "And I say the same," said Manners; "and for two pins I'd wade in now and wipe the floor of the study with you!"
 Blake shrugged his shoulders impatiently.
 "Oh, it's no good talking!" he exclaimed. "The less said about the matter the better. Get out, and don't speak to us; that's all we want."
 "Yaas, wathah!"
 Tom Merry's eyes flashed.
 "It's not all we want!" he said. "But if you like to swallow what I've said, you are welcome to it!"

"If it comes to that, I dare say I could chuck you out of this study!" said Blake warmly.
 "You'd better try!"
 "If you put it like that, I jolly well will try!"
 "Come on, then!"
 Jack Blake was losing his temper, too. He was not slow to accept the invitation of Tom Merry.
 He ran straight at the hero of the Shell and grasped him, and in a moment they were rolling round the study in conflict.
 Both were excited, both had their tempers unusually roused. They reeled to and fro in the study, and crashed against the table.
 "Here, keep off!" exclaimed Digby, giving the nearest of the two a push.
 It happened to be Tom Merry.
 "Hands off!" exclaimed Lowther angrily. "Two to one isn't fair play!"
 Dig's ire was quickly roused.
 "Who's two to one?" he demanded.
 "You, you worm!"
 That was enough for Digby.
 The next moment he was waltzing with Monty Lowther; at all events, that was what he appeared to be doing.
 "Pway keep off me!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.
 "Hang it all, deah boys, don't tread on my feet!"
 "Blow your feet!" gasped Lowther.
 "I wofuse to do anythin' of the sort! I—I mean, I wogard you as a wottah! I weally think we cannot allow these disweputable scenes in our study, Hewwies!"
 "Right-ho!" said Herries.

"Shall we chuck the wottahs out?"

"You'd better not try!" said Manners.

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"Oh, ring off, ass!"

"I wefuse to wing off, and I uttahly decline to be called an ass! Hewwies, pway back me up, and we will put an end to this unseemly disturbance!"

"What-ho!"

"Here, one at a time!" exclaimed Manners, as the two Fourth-Formers advanced upon him.

D'Arcy shook his head.

"This is not a fight, Mannahs; it's a thwow-out!"

"Rats!"

"Collar him, Hewwies!"

"Come on, then!"

They collared Manners. Manners went out of the study with a rush, and bumped in the passage.

"Bai Jove, that's a beginnin'!"

"Collar the other rotters!" gasped Herries.

"Wight-ho!"

Tom Merry and Blake had come down with a bump on the hearthrug. Tom Merry was busily engaged punching Blake's features, and Blake was pommelling away at Tom Merry's ribs for all he was worth.

D'Arcy and Herries laid hold of the hero of the Shell, one at his neck and one at his heels, and dragged him off Blake.

Tom Merry struggled furiously.

"Leggo! Fair play!"

"Wats! You're goin' out!"

"Leggo!"

The Fourth-Formers yanked him to the door, and then they obeyed his order to "Leggo!" Tom Merry rolled out

on Manners, knocking him down again as he was getting up.

"Now for the othah wottah!"

Digby and Lowther had bumped against the armchair and fallen into it. The juniors had dragged them out, detached them from one another, and hurled Lowther forth.

The three Shell fellows were sprawling in the corridor. The door of Study No. 6 was packed with the Fourth-Formers, glaring and gasping at their ejected enemies.

"Pway go away quietly, deah boys!" said D'Arcy, with a wave of the hand. "We have no desiah to hurt you in any way. But if you wowwy us again we shall have no wresource but to give you a feahful thwashin'!"

Tom Merry & Co. did not look like going away quietly, as they struggled up with red wrath in their faces.

But just as they were about to hurl themselves upon the Fourth-Formers there came a note of warning from Harry Noble, who was coming upstairs.

"Cave!"

Tom Merry glanced quickly towards him.

"Coo-ey!" sang out the Australian. "Cave! Railton!"

The chums of Study No. 6 bolted back into the study, and closed the door. The Terrible Three did a foot-race along the passage.

Twenty seconds later Mr. Railton came along, and found nothing to account for the noise he had heard.

The Housemaster of the School House looked about him with a puzzled expression. But there was nothing amiss, apparently, and so he shook his head and went his way.

CHAPTER 7.

The Peacemakers!

THE outbreak of ill-feeling between the Terrible Three and the chums of Study No. 6 caused much comment in the School House, especially among the juniors.

Which was the chief of the School House juniors, Tom Merry or Jack Blake, was a point that had never been satisfactorily settled.

But both were looked up to by the juniors, and the row between them was certain to cause excitement in the House.

Even Figgins & Co. of the New House were interested in it. Figgins & Co. were "up against" the School House all the time, but endless rows and rags did not diminish the esteem they felt for Tom Merry & Co.

When the news of the rupture spread to the New House, Figgins was greatly concerned. He was having tea in his study in the New House, with his chums Kerr and Fatty Wynn, when Pratt looked in and told him.

Pratt of the Fourth was full of it. He gave Figgins ample details of terrific combats alleged to have taken place between the Terrible Three and Study No. 6, and left the New House chums in a state of wonder.

"Blessed if I can make it out," Figgins remarked, when Pratt was gone. "Pratty has piled it on a bit, I suppose; but I suppose it's true in the main."

"Some row about a feed, perhaps," hazarded Fatty Wynn. "I have always thought that it's carrying a joke too far to interfere with a fellow's grub."

"You would!" grunted Figgins.

"Look here, Figgy—"

"I can't make it out, either," said Kerr, screwing up his forehead to think. Kerr was a canny Scot, and it was freely admitted in Figgins' study that when there was any hard thinking to be done Kerr was the chap to do it.

"It looks to me as if somebody has been making mischief."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, you remember the time when Mellish set us all by the ears by telling us tales about one another?" said Kerr. "It might be something of the kind again."

"By George, I shouldn't wonder!"

"I don't see why we shouldn't look into it," said Kerr thoughtfully. "Of course, they're only School House worms, but as Cock House at St. Jim's we really ought to look after them a little."

This was a view of the case that fully appealed to Figgins.

"Right you are!" he exclaimed. "We're the heads of the juniors of St. Jim's, and these quarrelling bouncers ought to be made to listen to the voice of authority."

"We'll go over and see them about it."

"Here, we haven't finished tea!" said Fatty Wynn, in alarm.

"Blow tea!"

"You must be off your rocker, Figgins!"

"Never mind tea," said Figgins, taking his fat chum by the collar and jerking him out of his chair. "That's all right. You can miss the rest."

"But—"

"Come on!"

"I'm hungry!"



DOWN with the bullies! That is the motto of the Secret Society formed by the Fourth-Formers at Rookwood! And Carthew, the leader of the bullies, is their greatest enemy. But the Society is very secret, and even Carthew is not sure who is at the back of the frequent mysterious attacks upon him. He thinks it's Jimmy Silver & Co., but when he accuses them he finds that they have all got perfect alibis! Get yourself a copy of this great yarn to-day and start reading it right away—it's far too good to miss!

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"You'll enjoy your supper all the more."
 "I've hardly tasted a mouthful—"
 "Well, I don't know the exact size of your mouth, Fatty, but if you could get six sausages, nine potatoes, and half a loaf, and a quarter-pound of butter into it at once it must be a tidy size."
 "There were only eight potatoes—"
 "Well, that's enough to go on with. Give your internal regions a five-bar rest, and come on."
 Fatty Wynn cast a lingering glance at the table as he followed Figgins and Kerr from the study. He had eaten only enough for two, and he naturally felt a little empty.
 As the New House chums crossed the quadrangle towards the School House, a burly junior nearly bumped into them, walking along quickly, with his hands thrust deep into his trousers pockets, and a gloomy look on his face.

It was George Gore.
 Figgins called to him, and Gore stopped.
 "Hold on!" said Figgins. "I hear you've got alarms and excursions going on in the School House."
 Gore grinned.
 "Yes, Tom Merry and Blake have been going for one another," he said.
 "What's it all about?"
 "Study No. 6 have something up against Tom Merry, that's all. They make out that he's been playing them a mean trick of some sort."
 "Rot!" said Figgins.
 "You can call it rot if you like. Some of the chaps say that Tom Merry has stolen something from Study No. 6."
 Figgins looked at him keenly.
 "I think I can guess who started that," he remarked.
 "Who?" asked Gore, very innocently.
 "You, or Mellish."
 Gore shrugged his shoulders.
 "You're welcome to your opinion," he said.
 He walked away. Figgins & Co., looking considerably puzzled, went on to the School House. They met Reilly in the Hall, and the Belfast boy looked inclined to attempt the ejection of the New House intruders all by himself, but Figgins made the sign of peace.
 "Pax!" he exclaimed. "Where's Blake?"
 "Faith, and he's in his study!"
 "Good! It's all right, Paddy; we're on a friendly visit."

"Sure, and Tom Merry's just paid him a friendly visit, and left the study on his neck," grinned Reilly.
 That did not sound very promising for Figgins & Co. However, strong in the knowledge of the natural superiority of New House over School House—in their own opinion—they ascended the stairs and knocked at the door of Study No. 6.
 It was opened from within so suddenly that they jumped.
 "Look here!" roared the voice of Blake. "We've had enough of you! We're not going to have any more! If you don't keep out—Hallo, Figgy!"
 Figgins grinned.
 "That a new dodge for greeting visitors?" he asked.
 Blake turned to pink.
 "I didn't know it was you, Figgins. But what do you want, anyway? This is a respectable House, and New House bounders are not allowed in it off their chains."
 "Oh, choosie it! We've come to see what the row's about."
 "What row?"
 "Between you and Tom Merry."
 "Ask Tom Merry."
 "But—"
 "Yaas, wathah, deah boys! We wufer you to Tom Mowwy as the pwopah source of information."
 "Yes, but—"
 "Good-bye!" said Blake.
 And he shut the door, leaving the peacemakers looking rather blankly at one another.

CHAPTER 8.
No Clue!

FIGGINS was first to break the silence.
 "Well," he said, with a deep breath, "if this is the latest thing in School House manners, I can only say that they've a lot to learn."
 "What-ho!" said Kerr emphatically.
 "Worth leaving our tea unfinished for, this is," Fatty Wynn remarked sarcastically.
 "Oh, blow your tea!"
 "Well, what I say about it is—"
 "Never mind what you say. Listen to what I say," said Figgins. "I suppose Blake is worried. He has a beautiful art shade round his eye, and I suppose he's thinking of
 (Continued on next page.)



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 5, Carmelite Street,
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SPRING TIME!

Tim: "My father does spring cleaning all the year round."
 Bob: "Why?"
 Tim: "He's a watchmaker!"
 J. K. WHITE, Bethany School, Goudhurst, Kent.

HE DID AS SHE SAID!

Policeman: "I believe you stole that carpet."
 Man: "No, I didn't. A lady gave it to me and told me to beat it—and I did!"
 FRANK GREEN, 4, Church Road, Warringham, Surrey.

HOW DID HE KNOW?

Pat: "If ye can guess how many eggs Oi've got in me hand, ye can have them both."
 Mike: "Two."
 Pat: "Begorra, ye can have them, but Oi'd loike to know who told ye!"
 J. GEAL, 19, The Parade, Claygate, Surrey.

NOT GUILTY!

Small Boy (who is fishing and has lost some of his bait, to old lady watching him): "Ere, 'ave you been playing with my worms?"
 M. ST. JOSEPH, P.O., Scottburgh, S. Coast, Natal, S. Africa.

NOT QUITE!

Waiter: "Did you ring the bell, sir?"
 Diner (who had been waiting a long time): "No, I was telling it; I thought you were dead!"
 M. J. LOUGHEAD, 22, Sunbeam Road, Old Swan, Liverpool.

A SHORT MEMORY.

Mother: "How is it, Tommy, that you can never tell me what you have learned at school? Willy Smith can always tell his mother!"
 Tommy: "Well, he hasn't got so far to go home!"
 D. BARRINGTON, 47, Brookdale, Catford, S.E.6.

A DIFFERENT REASON.

Golfer (to caddie): "Yes, my lad, fresh air is a wonderful thing. I always advise people to sleep with their windows open."
 Caddie: "I suppose you're a doctor, sir."
 Golfer: "No, my lad, I'm a burglar!"
 J. CIVIN, 28, 8th Avenue, Northmead, Benoni, Transvaal, S.A.

SOME JOB!

Customer: "Do you make life-size enlargements from photographs?"
 Assistant: "Yes, sir."
 Customer: "Then here's one of an elephant!"
 F. KINDER, 108, High Street, Godalming, Surrey.
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Miss Cleveland comin' to-morrow. Just like those asses to begin fighting at such a time. Let's go and see Tom Merry."

And the New House juniors went on to Tom Merry's study. On reaching it, Figgins knocked at the door and looked in. The room was empty. Figgins grunted.

"I expect he's in the Common-room."

Figgins & Co. proceeded downstairs. Sure enough the Terrible Three, who had finished their prep, were in the Common-room. Manners and Lowther were playing chess, and Tom Merry stood leaning up against the wall watching the game. His eyes were on the board, but his thoughts were far away. Tom Merry was more worried than he cared to say about the peculiar line taken up by Study No. 6.

"Hallo!" said Figgins. "We're looking for you chaps!"

"Look a little farther, please!" growled Lowther.

"Check!"

"We want to speak to you!"

"Speak to one another, then, if you must speak."

"Look here, Lowther—"

"Rats!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"It's all right, Figgy," he said. "It's no good speaking to Lowther when he's playing chess, or Manners either, for that matter. What is it?"

"We're looking into this trouble of yours with Study No. 6."

Tom Merry's face darkened.

"Oh, never mind that!"

"We thought we'd try to sift it out for you," said Figgins.

"I hear that Study No. 6 have gone for you baldheaded, and won't explain their reason."

"Well, something like that."

"And you can't make it out?"

"No."

"Well," said Figgins, with an air of great wisdom, "suppose it's something like that trouble we had once before? You remember the time when Mellish set us all by the ears with his yarns?"

Tom Merry started. Figgins propounded that theory with an impressive air, apparently quite forgetful that it was Kerr who had thought of it. But Kerr only smiled.

"My hat!" said Tom. "There might be something in that."

"You see, Blake seems to be thinking badly of you, and won't explain. And that's a great deal like what happened before over Mellish."

"You're right, Figgins."

"Worth looking into—ch?"

"Yes; but"—Tom Merry's face hardened—"Blake ought not to take in any yarn Mellish might have told him, after what happened that time."

"It might be some other cad—Gore, for instance."

"That's no excuse for Blake believing the yarn without giving me a chance to explain," said Tom Merry, knitting his brows.

"You don't know how it would work. You might look into it."

"I will. I'll give Blake a chance to speak—the last chance, too. If he wants to remain on these terms, I shan't try to bridge it over again."

"We'll come with you," said Figgins, more and more satisfied with his new role of peacemaker. "Come on!"

Tom Merry assented, and they proceeded to Study No. 6. Blake & Co. simply stared at them when they entered.

"So you're back again!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," said Figgins. "We think we've hit on the mystery."

"What do you mean?"

"Yaas, pway explain yourself, deah boy."

"Go it, Merry!" said Kerr encouragingly.

Tom Merry looked steadily at the angry Fourth-Formers.

"Figgins has made a suggestion," he said. "He thinks it is possible that Mellish has been causing trouble again with his tale-bearing. I want you to tell me whether that is it?"

Blake's lip curved.

"Well, it isn't," he said.

"Mellish isn't mixed up with the matter?"

"No."

"Nor Gore?"

"No; nor Gore, either."

"And you won't tell me what the matter is?"

"No."

"Very well," said Tom Merry, between his teeth.

"That's the finish. You won't speak, and you won't give me a chance to explain. Let it go at that. I shan't trouble you again."

And the hero of the Shell, with his head held high, walked out of the study.

Figgins & Co. looked blank.

"Blessed if I can make it out," said Figgins. "Can't you chaps tell us what's the matter, and perhaps we can set it right?"

Jack Blake shook his head, with a worried expression.

"It can't be done," he said. "It's—it's a sort of secret. Don't bother your head about it, old chap; you can't do any good."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Blessed if I didn't think you're off your giddy rockers!" said Figgins. And he left the study with the Co.

"Worth missing our tea for, this was!" Fatty Wynn remarked for the second time, as they crossed the quad to their own quarters.

Figgins grunted.

CHAPTER 9.

Awkward for D'Arcy!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY stood before the glass in Study No. 6, with an anxious expression upon his aristocratic features.

Morning lessons were over, and the chums of Study No. 6 were thinking of the promised visit of Cousin Ethel, and the boating excursion that had been arranged for the afternoon. The afternoon was turning out sunny and fine, and there was every prospect of a pleasant time on the river.

But there was anxiety in the heart of Gussy. In the scrimmage of the previous day, when Tom Merry & Co. had come to Study No. 6 to talk matters over in a friendly spirit, D'Arcy had caught somebody's elbow with his nose. Whether it was Tom Merry's elbow, or Blake's elbow, or his own elbow, he did not know, but it was somebody's elbow. And though the ownership was uncertain, there was no doubt about the damage it had done.

There was a decidedly red swelling on the nose of the swell of St. Jim's which gave that organ a peculiar slanting appearance, which did not add to its beauty.

Potts, the Office Boy!



D'Arcy looked at it in the glass with dismay. He wouldn't have minded so much, if Cousin Ethel hadn't been coming that afternoon, but it was too bad that upon that important occasion his nose should be out of "goah," as he expressed it.

"It's wotten!" said D'Arcy aloud, as he dabbed his nasal organ with powder. "Weally wotten!"

"You're right, old son," said Blake, as he came into the study with Dig and Herries. "Mind it doesn't crack the glass."

"Mind what doesn't cwick the glass, deah boy?"

"Your face."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Weren't you alluding to that?"

"I was alludin' to this swellin' on my nose," said D'Arcy stiffly.

"Oh, I see!"

"It looks wotten!"

"Oh, it doesn't show much!" said Blake. "Look at my eye."

And Arthur Augustus, still in doubt whether he could possibly meet a lady in that state, was hustled from the study.

He carefully rubbed the patch of powder he had put on his nose. After all, that concealed the redness, and there was only the swelling to be seen. And perhaps Cousin Ethel might imagine that he had knocked it against a door in the dark, or something of that sort.

The Fourth-Formers were in high spirits, and looking very fit and handsome in their flannels. As they went downstairs Skimpole joined them. Skimpole blinked at them in a most friendly way through his big spectacles.

"I say, it's very decent of you!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, isn't it?" said Blake cheerfully. "I don't know what you are talking about, but I'm quite prepared to admit that it was very decent of us. Good-bye!"

"Held on!"

"In a hurry."

"Yes, but I'm coming with you."

"Bai Jove!"

"Your mistake," said Blake blandly; "you're not."

"But you invited me."

"Which?"

"You sent me a most kind and pressing invitation to join your party on the river this afternoon."

"Oh, don't be funny, Skimmy!"

"But you did, and—"

"Then I must have been asleep and having a nightmare," said Blake. "I am awake now. Good-bye!"

"Really, Blake—"

"You are undah a slight misapprehension, Skimmy, deah boy!" said D'Arcy. "Blake really couldn't have done anythin' of the sort, deah boy."

"Really, D'Arcy, the message was very explicit, and Gore said—"

"Gore!"

"Yes. He said Blake had impressed it upon him that I simply must come, or Miss Cleveland would be greatly disappointed, as she wanted me to explain the true meaning of Determinism."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake made a grimace. He understood at once that it was the cad of the Shell who had been at work again; and though he didn't want to be bothered by the genius of the

School House that pleasant afternoon, at the same time he didn't like to hurt Skimpole's feelings.

"Well, come on!" he said

"If you really want me, Blake, I shall be happy to come. Otherwise—"

Blake chuckled.

"Can you imagine anybody not wanting you?" he demanded.

"Well, no, if you put it like that. My improving conversation will naturally open and broaden your narrow and uninformed minds, and I am always pleased to place my stores of knowledge at the service of the ignorant."

"Bai Jove!"

"You have such a nice way of putting things that we couldn't possibly leave you out," said Blake. "Come along. If you talk you will probably get brained with a boathook. You might bear that in mind."

"Really, Blake—"

"Shut up and come on," said Blake, in his charming, direct way.

The Fourth-Formers, with the latest addition to the party, passed out of the School House. Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther were standing in a group outside, and they glanced at the Fourth-Formers.

Had matters been other than as they were, the Terrible Three would have been in the party to take Cousin Ethel on the river; and all—to use a poetic expression—would have been calm and bright.

As it was, Blake & Co. passed them with averted looks.

"Better get down to the boathouse and have the punt all ready," said Blake abruptly. "Cousin Ethel is sure to be here by that time, and we'll call at the Head's house for her."

"Yaas, wathah! But, I say, Blake—"

"Well, what?"

"Do you think she will notice my nose?"

"I don't suppose she will notice you at all, old chap."

"Weally, Blake—"

CHAPTER 10.

On the River!

TOM MERRY looked after the Fourth-Formers with a frown on his brow. Manners and Lowther were looking dark, too.

"They're keeping it up," Monty Lowther remarked.

"They can keep it up for good," said Tom Merry. "I shan't speak to them again, for one. That's settled, as far as I am concerned."

"Same here!"

"I wish I could understand it, though," said Manners thoughtfully. "They're acting in a rather caddish way, I know, but it's no good saying they are cads. We know jolly well they're not. They've got hold of some idiotic mistake, somehow."

"That's their business."

"Yes, I suppose so. We're not going to follow them any more, anyway," agreed Manners. "They can go and eat coke!"

Gore came out of the School House, and he grinned as he passed the Terrible Three. Tom Merry met his eyes.

"Well, what's the joke?" he asked sharply.

Gore chuckled.

SOLD AGAIN!



"You're not going on the river?" he asked.

"No."

"Study No. 6 left you out?"

"Mind your own business."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And if you don't want a prize thick ear, you can go and cackle somewhere else!" said Tom Merry, with rising wrath.

Gore retreated a step or two, still cackling.

"Ha, ha, ha! There's a rife in the lute, it seems. What will Cousin Ethel say? Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry made a step towards him, and he walked quickly away.

"Cad!" said Lowther.

Tom Merry looked perplexed.

"I wonder if that worm can have had anything to do with it?" said Manners.

"He's quite capable of it," said Tom Merry. "But I asked Blake if Gore had been doing or saying anything, and he said that he hadn't."

"That settles it, I suppose."

"Hallo! There's Cousin Ethel."

A car stopped at the Head's house, and the Terrible Three ran forward just in time for Tom Merry to assist Cousin Ethel to alight.

Miss Cleveland shook hands with the chums of the Shell, with a bright smile for each.

The girl looked very charming, with her sweet face shaded under a big summer hat.

"Quite an age since you've been here," said Tom Merry, a little reproachfully. "We were beginning to think you had forgotten St. Jim's."

"I shall never do that," said Ethel brightly; "and I am always glad to come. I have a message for you from Miss Fawcett."

Tom Merry coloured a little.

His old governess, Miss Priscilla Fawcett, sent him messages at every opportunity, and they generally related to his health and the anxiety she felt about his delicate constitution; the said constitution being in reality about as delicate as that of a rhinoceros.

"Yes," he said. "What is the message?"

"If you go on the river this afternoon you are to be very careful not to get your feet wet," said Ethel demurely.

"Oh, thank you!"

Lowther grinned at the ivied wall. Manners chuckled silently. Tom Merry turned a little pinker.

"Is that all?" asked Lowther.

"Yes."

"Her exact words?"

"Well, perhaps not exact."

"Oh, come, let's have the lot!" said Tom Merry resignedly.

"Well, Miss Fawcett really said 'his dear little feet.'"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lowther. "His dear little feet!"

"Oh, shut up, Lowther!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Cousin Ethel's face remained perfectly grave.

"But there's no danger," said Tom Merry. "We're not coming on the river this afternoon, Cousin Ethel."

The girl looked at him quickly.

"You are not coming!"

"No; we should like to come with you, of course, but—it's turned out that we can't come," said Tom Merry, turning very red.

Miss Cleveland looked at them, and noted a swollen nose, a darkened eye, and a cut lip distributed among the chums of the Shell.

Then she understood.

But if the juniors of St. Jim's chose to fight among themselves, that was no business of hers, and she passed no remark upon it.

"I am sorry you are not coming," she said simply.

"So are we; jolly sorry," said Tom Merry.

And the girl went into the Head's house.

The Terrible Three walked away with gloomy faces.

"It's rotten!" said Tom Merry, breaking a long silence.

"She thinks we've been quarrelling and fighting like a parcel of kids—"

"Ahem!" said Lowther.

"Well, we haven't. We went to Blake's study in a friendly spirit, and if they hadn't been such a set of idiots—"

"Exactly!"

"It wasn't our fault they cut up rough; but it makes you feel such a rotten hooligan if a girl sees you with a bashed chivvy!" growled Tom Merry.

"Here come the Fourth Form worms!"

Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy were seen coming in the mud, and Digby and Skimpole had been left in the punt.

The Fourth-Formers did not glance at the Shell fellows. They went directly towards the Head's house.

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Ten minutes later they passed again, and this time Cousin Ethel was with them.

Ethel was looking very thoughtful. Once or twice she had glanced at D'Arcy's face, and the swell of St. Jim's was in an unhappy frame of mind, feeling that she had noticed that his nose was a trifle out of gear.

"I say, Blake—" he whispered, as they came down to the landing-stage opposite the boathouse.

Blake looked at him.

"Anything wrong?"

"Is my nose vewy noticeable?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Blake—"



Blake had dipped the end of his finger in the mud and he had of D'Arcy's nose with it. Arthur Augustus' nose now gave him a peculiar appearance, but happily the swell of St. Jim's was quite a change!

"Let me give it a rub," said Blake; "the powder has come off."

"If you think you could improve it—"

"I'm sure I could."

"Pway go ahead, then, dear boy."

Blake had dipped the end of his finger in the mud, and he now dabbed the side of his chum's nose with it.

Arthur Augustus' nasal organ was now ornamented with a dab of black mud which gave his face a most peculiar appearance. But he was nappily ignorant of the change.

"Do you think it looks diffevent, Blake?"

"Immensely!"

"Thank you vewy much!"

"Not at all. It's a pleasure to me."
 "Ha, ha, ha!" suddenly roared Herricks.
 D'Arcy put up his eyeglass and stared at him frigidly.
 "Weally, Hewwies—"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "What is the mattah?"
 "Nothing!"
 "Then pway cease that absurd cacklin'. Weally, Dig, now you are beginnin'. What is the beastlay joke, deah boy?"
 "Ha, ha, ha! Nothing!"
 "Dear me!" said Skimpole, blinking at D'Arcy's nose.
 "Dear me! This is most extraordinary!"



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"Oh, pway wing off, Skimmay!"
 Cousin Ethel was smiling, too, as she sank into her comfortable seat amid the cushions in the punt. Blake took the pole and shoved off.
 D'Arcy rubbed his nose. The effect was to distribute the patch of mud over his nose and increase the curious effect of it.
 Skimpole blinked at him with great interest.
 "I regard this as extraordinary," he said, looking round.
 "The whole of D'Arcy's nose has turned a black colour—"
 "Bai Jove!"
 "This discolouration is evidently due to a conglomeration of the minute animalculæ—"

D'Arcy jerked out his handkerchief and rubbed his nose hard.
 The mud came off on the handkerchief, and the junior's nose was left in its natural state, save for the slight swelling.
 "Dear me!" exclaimed Skimpole, who was nothing if not scientific. "This is indeed a most extraordinary case. The friction applied to the nose has evidently dispersed the conglomeration of animalculæ—"
 "You uttah ass—"
 "Really, D'Arcy—"
 "Some ass put some mud on my nose! It was you, Blake!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "I wegard the action as lackin' in pwopah respect."
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "I am weally in doubt as to whethah I ought to dwop your acquaintance," said Arthur Augustus. "But for the pwesence of Miss Cleveland, I should give you a fealful thwashin'."
 "I shan't lose sight of Miss Cleveland in a hurry, then," grinned Blake. "But don't you make me feel nervous, Gussy, or I might splash you."
 "Oh, on second thoughts, I will ovahlook your absurd joke!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

The punt went gliding on, down the river towards the bridge over the Rhyl. There was a figure crossing the bridge. It was that of George Gore. He stopped and looked down, as the punt with its happy load came gliding by.
 There was a scowl on Gore's face. He never made himself agreeable to anybody, yet he felt a sense of injury when he was left alone on a half-holiday. But his eyes gleamed with malicious satisfaction as he looked down into the punt and saw that Tom Merry and his friends were not there.
 He chuckled aloud as he noted it.

"I've put a spoke in their wheel, at all events," he murmured; "and there's another coming along jolly soon, too— as soon as there's a chance."
 The punt glided on towards the bridge.
 Skimpole extracted a big volume from under his jacket and opened it at page 444.

"It is a pleasant and peaceful afternoon," he remarked. "Just the time for the improvement of the mind. I have a volume here—Professor Loosetop's great book on Determinism, or the theory that every being is the creature of his heredity and his environment—in other words, that all existing things are governed by the condition under which they exist. It is a wonderful theory."

"Blessed if I can see anything wonderful in it," said Blake. "I should say that much was taken for granted before anybody started arguing. It seems to me that Determinism is only a longer word for saying that whatever is, is. And we know that already."

"You do not understand, Blake. The true Determinist cannot blame anybody for anything. Man being governed by the conditions under which he exists, cannot be blamed for what he does. The blame, if any, falls on his conditions of life—his heredity and environment. If you, for instance, were to knock this book out of my hand into the water, you would not be to blame, for you would act upon an impulse, and the impulse would be caused by the state you are in through the combined influence of heredity and environment—"

Clump!
 The pole clumped on the book, and the valuable volume of the precious lucubrations of Professor Loosetop splashed into the river and disappeared.

Skimpole clutched after it in vain.
 The volume was gone!
 He blinked at Blake indignantly.
 "Really, Blake, that was a beastly thing to do!"
 "Rot! You said yourself that I shouldn't be to blame for doing it."
 "It was rotten!"
 "Not at all. It was my heredity—"
 "Really—"
 "Or my environment. You can take your choice, as a Determinist."

Skimpole rubbed his nose thoughtfully. It occurred to him at that moment that there was something "rocky" with his favourite theory—a theory much beloved of cranks.

"But it was really kindness to animals that was my motive," said Jack Blake blandly. "A chap who brings a volume of scientific bosh out with him on the river ought to have it chucked into the water, and himself chucked in after it. I'm leaving you in the boat, Skimmy."

"Really, Blake—"
 "But if you begin to talk Determinism, I expect my
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heredity or my environment will make me shove you into the water, too!"

And Skimpole took the hint, and the wonderful theory of Determinism was heard no more in the punt.

CHAPTER 11.

Cousin Ethel Thinks It Out!

COUSIN ETHEL had been very silent for some time. The girl was usually cheery and chatty, and her silence did not pass unnoticed. She was evidently thinking something out.

To Arthur Augustus D'Arcy it was only too clear that she was thinking of that swelling upon his aristocratic nose. After considerable reflection, he resolved to grasp the nettle, as it were, and broach the painful subject.

"I say, Ethel—" he ventured.

The girl looked up.

"I wathah think I know what you're turnin' ovah in your mind, Ethel."

"Really?"

"Yaas, wathah! I want to explain that it wasn't my fault."

"I didn't think it was, Arthur."

"You see—"

"I suppose it's a misunderstanding?"

D'Arcy looked a little puzzled. He didn't see how his swollen nose could be classed as a misunderstanding.

"You see, it was an elbow—"

"What?"

"It was vewy likely Blake's elbow; he is a wathah clumsy ass!"

"I don't understand."

"I am wefewwin' to the state of my nose. It was an elbow. I should not like you to think that—"

"Oh, I see! I was speaking of something else."

"Eh?"

Cousin Ethel laughed.

"You had not guessed my thoughts, after all, Arthur."

"I thought you were noticin' the fact that my beastly nose is a little bit out of geah, Ethel."

"Not at all."

"Oh!"

"I have been thinking, though. I hope you boys won't think me impertinent," said Cousin Ethel, with a deepening of colour in her fair cheeks.

"Oh, Ethel!"

It was a general chorus of remonstrance at the idea.

Cousin Ethel laughed.

"Very well; but I am going to speak about your personal affairs, that really are no concern of mine at all."

"Go ahead!" said Jack Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It's about your dispute with Tom Merry."

The chums of the Fourth looked uncomfortable at once. Miss Cleveland observed it, but she did not appear to do so.

"I am very sorry to see you on bad terms," she said.

"We—we're not exactly on bad terms," stammered Blake.

"We—we've had a row, and we don't speak to one another, but we're not exactly what you'd call on bad terms."

The girl smiled.

"Now, if you don't want to tell me anything about it, I'll say no more," she said. "I'll ring off, as I think you would put it."

"Pway don't wing off, Ethel. Bai Jove, I shouldn't wondah if Ethel could give us some advice on the subject, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, struck by a sudden idea. "Ethel's an awfully intelligent gal, you know. Suppose we tell Ethel all about it, and see what she says?"

"Good egg!"

Blake hesitated.

"It's like giving Tom Merry away," he said.

"Of course, Ethel will keep it dark."

"I should not repeat anything you told me, without your permission, of course," said Cousin Ethel. "Now, understand me. I don't want to ask for any of your secrets, but I am certain that this quarrel is due to some misunderstanding, and I should like to see you good friends again before I leave St. Jim's. I am convinced of it, or I should not speak on the subject. It can't be anything serious."

Blake looked gloomy.

"But it is," he said; "it's jolly serious, Ethel."

"We'll tell Ethel all about it, deah boys."

"Right, I've no objection."

"You see, Tom Mewwy has acted in this mattah in what we can only possibly chawactewise as an extremely caddish mannah—"

Cousin Ethel held up her finger.

"Stop!"

"Yaas, but—"

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"I am certain Tom Merry has done nothing of the sort! He is not that kind of boy. There is some mistake."

"Weally, Ethel—"

"And I am surprised at you, Arthur."

"Surprised at me, deah gal!"

"Certainly! You are not usually suspicious."

"Bai Jove, I have nevah been called suspicious before!"

"You think Tom Merry has treated you badly?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Has he refused to explain?"

"We haven't given him the chance."

"You told him what you have against him, surely?"

"We couldn't, you see."

Cousin Ethel shook her head.

"That is not playing the game, Arthur."

"Bai Jove!"

"You don't know the circumstances yet," said Blake,

"I'll give you the whole story—"

"Pewwaps I had bettah explain to Ethel, Blake."

"Perhaps you had better dry up! You see, Ethel—"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Gag him, somebody! You see—"

"I wufuse to be gagged!"

"You see, Ethel, when you see a chap's own handwriting, it's proof enough, isn't it?" said Blake.

"Yes, I should say so."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, we've got it in Tom Merry's handwriting."

"You've got what?"

"I'll show you the letter."

Blake felt in his pocket, and brought out an envelope. He handed it to the girl, who drew out the letter that was folded and enclosed in it.

"Am I to read this?" she asked.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Certainly!" said Blake. "You see, we picked up that letter in our study. It wasn't in an envelope then. It was just scribbled to slip under a prefect's door; but Tom Merry must have dropped it in our room. He came in to speak to us after morning lessons yesterday, when I went up to the study for my cricket bat, and he was showing Dig some ju-jutsu trick. It was then that he dropped it, I imagine. Anyway, we found it lying on the carpet where he had been standing when we went up after afternoon school."

"Yaas, wathah! He had dwopped it without noticing it, of course."

Cousin Ethel nodded, without speaking.

She unfolded the single sheet of paper, which was written on in Tom Merry's well-known hand.

Her face changed in colour as she read:

"I have reason to believe that some juniors intend to break bounds to-night. I advise you—to keep an eye on Study No. 6.

"A FRIEND."

"Good gracious!" murmured Cousin Ethel.

Blake looked very glum.

"Nice sort of thing for Tom Merry to write, wasn't it?" he said. "I had told him only that morning that we were going to get in some grub for a dormitory feed that night, and he wrote this to give us away to a prefect."

"But—"

"Of course, he was going to slip it under a prefect's door. There was a chap used to play those tricks here before," said Blake. "Tom Merry was down on him fast enough. We put off that little excursion last night, but to make sure, we looked out a bit, and we found that a prefect was watching the Fourth Form dormitory. He had given us away, all the same. If we hadn't happened to find that note where he lost it, we should have run right into the trap."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"The letter is not signed," Cousin Ethel remarked.

"Of course, he wouldn't sign it. He wouldn't give himself quite away, even to the prefect he was sneaking to."

"Are you sure Tom Merry wrote this note?"

"Of course! It's in his hand."

"It looks like it."

"I knew it at a glance."

"But—"

Blake shook his head.

"I'm afraid there's no getting out of it, Miss Cleveland. It's simply awful to think that a chap we always believed to be decent could play such a cad's trick. But how can we doubt his own handwriting?"

"Bai Jove, I don't see how we can! But I've had a lingewin' feelin' all the time that pewwaps there might possibly be some explanation."

"This is the first time you've spoken about it, then."

"Weally, Dig—"

"There can't be any explanation," said Herries despondently. "You never know what a fellow's like till you find him out. That's all there is about it."

"That's it," said Blake.
 "You haven't shown this to Tom Merry?" asked Ethel.
 "No."
 "Nor mentioned the matter to him?"
 "Oh, no! We couldn't," said Blake. "There's no doubt about it. He couldn't deny his own hand, could he?"
 "I suppose not."
 "And we didn't want him telling us a host of lies—as he could only have done if he had tried to squirm out of it. We thought we'd better let the matter drop at once. I was going to burn the letter."
 "You see, deah gal, the mattah was weally too disgustin' to be argued about. You can't argue with a sneak."
 "All the same, I think you should have given Tom a chance to defend himself," said Cousin Ethel firmly.
 "But—"
 "You see—"
 "It was no good arguing on the subject when there was clear proof—"
 "The proof may not be clear."
 "How do you make that out?"
 "If you know a boy to be honest and decent, any amount of evidence ought not to be allowed to tell against him," said Cousin Ethel. "I am quite certain that Tom Merry is incapable of acting in a mean or caddish way."
 "But—"
 "There's the letter—"
 "In his own hand!"
 "Tom Merry never wrote this letter!" said Cousin Ethel quietly.

CHAPTER 12.

Ethel Gives Advice!


Cousin Ethel's words were followed by a prolonged silence in the punt.
 The juniors looked at her, and then at one another, with blank faces.
 "Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy at last.
 Cousin Ethel nodded her head.
 "Tom Merry never wrote that!" she repeated, and she tossed the letter down with a scornful gesture.
 "Weally, Ethel!"
 "It is impossible!"
 Jack Blake looked deeply wounded.

"Well, if you don't believe us, there's nothing more to be said," he replied. "But I thought—"
 The girl laid her hand gently on his arm.
 "Blake, you don't think I would doubt your word? It isn't that. But you have been deceived."
 "The letter is in the chap's own hand."
 "It appears so."
 Blake jumped.
 "You don't think—"
 "I do! I think somebody else wrote that letter!"
 "But—but—but it's in Tom Merry's hand," said Blake feebly.
 "It has been imitated."
 "My hat!"
 "Bai Jove, I nevah thought of that, you know!"
 "But—but it's impossible!" said Digby. "A chap couldn't imitate Tom Merry's hand as near as that."
 And Herries shook his head.
 "Wathah not! I weally think you are wide of the mark this time, Ethel."
 Cousin Ethel set her pretty lips firmly.
 "I am quite sure I am right," she said. "Tom Merry never wrote that letter. If he did not write it, somebody else must have copied his hand."
 "But why?"
 "To make trouble between you, of course."
 "Bai Jove! But if Tom Mewwy did not wite that lettah, how did he come to dwop it in our study?"
 "He did not!"
 "But we found it—"
 "Where the writer had dropped it."
 "Oh!"
 "But Tom Merry knew about our intention of breaking bounds, and this letter gives it away," said Blake.
 "Did no one else know?"
 "Not that I am aware of."
 "Could no one else have known?"
 Jack Blake hesitated a moment.
 "Well, I suppose anybody could have learned by listening at our door," he said.
 "The boy who would imitate another's hand in a letter would listen at a door," said Cousin Ethel.
 "I—I suppose so."
 "Taking it as admitted, then, that another boy could have learned of your plans, and that he wanted to cause trouble between you and Tom Merry, he might have written that letter, and then, of course, he would leave it somewhere where you would be certain to find it, or it would be of no use writing it."
 "M-my hat!"
 "Bai Jove!"
 "Blessed if I don't think there's something in it!" said Herries.
 Cousin Ethel smiled.
 "At all events, I am certain Tom Merry never wrote this," she said.
 "But—but who—" said Blake.
 She shook her head.
 "That is for you to find out."
 "But, I say, that's a jolly serious thing!" said Blake. "It isn't a mere trick; it's a forgery."
 "I don't suppose the boy who wrote this stopped to think of that. I should say he was as silly as he was wicked."
 "Then it wasn't Mellish," said Dig.
 Blake shook his head decidedly.
 "Not much! He'd never do a thing he might be sacked from the school for."
 "Then who?"
 "Blessed if I know!"

"What do you think we'd better do about it, Cousin Ethel?" asked Jack Blake, quite humbly. It was borne in upon his mind that Cousin Ethel was far more capable of giving good advice than any masculine person there.
 "What you should really have done at first, Jack—"
 "And that is?"
 "Go straight to Tom Merry and show him the letter."
 Blake drew a deep breath.
 "I'll do it!"
 "Then let us get back to the school," said Cousin Ethel.
 "But we haven't gone as far as we were going."
 "This is a more important matter than boating. Think what Tom must be feeling like, if he doesn't know what you have against him, and I am sure he doesn't."
 "H'm! I suppose so."
 "Yaas, wathah! It appears vewy pwob to me that Tom Mewwy is in a decidedly wotten fwame of mind about it. I have tweated him with great contempt."
 "We'd better be getting back," said Cousin Ethel.
 "Well, right you are!"
 "Dear me!" said Skimpole, waking up from a reverie,

(Continued on page 19.)

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NOTES AND NEWS FROM—



Address all letters: The Editor, The GEM, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London. E.C.4

HALLO, chums! Have you had a look at page 25 yet? If not, take a look straight away, for you will find the solution of our "Outlines" competition on it. If you have less than 6 errors, you must make a claim, full particulars of which appear with the solution.

And now about next week's issue of the old paper. First and foremost, it will contain a ripping long complete yarn of St. Jim's, entitled:

"THE SECRET OF THE TOWER!"

in which Blake & Co. are amazed at the mysterious behaviour of the one and only Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. This splendid story is packed with thrills and fun, and I can assure you that it is definitely one of Mr. Martin Clifford's brightest efforts. Then there will be further chapters of our gripping Western adventure yarn,

"RED STAR RANGER!"

in which Jerry Garrison and his pal Fusty are up to smash the crooked mayor, Jasper Privett, of Red Rock. And if that doesn't satisfy the thrill brigade, well, I don't know what will! Potts, the irrepressible, will be on parade again, and I shall also publish a column of jokes sent in by readers, for each of which I pay half-a-crown. In addition, there will, of course, be another page from my notebook.

BITING THE HAND THAT FED!

Here is a story of ingratitude—as base ingratitude as you could think of. Seventeen years ago Joshua Jones, of Hingham, Mass., found a starving fox pup. He took pity on the unfortunate animal and took it home with him. He fed it and cared for it, and put a leather collar round its neck. For six months he kept it, and then one day it ran away. Joshua Jones was sorry, for he liked that fox, but he did not expect to see it again.

Now Joshua Jones had some chickens; he has kept chickens for many years, and for nearly seventeen years he has been losing a few every week, but he has been unable to catch the marauder. At last he succeeded—the marauder was a fox. Joshua shot the fox—and round its neck was a leather collar! So Joshua and his fox met again.

HARD LUCK—BUT GOOD LUCK!

There is an old saying that it is an ill wind that blows nobody any good, and it was very well illustrated the other day in Merced, California. Quarryman Grant was at work when he suddenly received a terrific blow on the head. Somewhat dazed he looked round to see just what it was that had hit him, and discovered

that a twenty-pound nugget of quartz had done the deed. Now Quarryman Grant felt really peeved with that nugget, and he showed it just what he thought of it by giving it a good hard crack with his hammer and breaking it in pieces. Inside it he found a nugget of pure gold worth £700!

THE WEEK'S BEST STORY.

A man who lived near London had a car. It was quite a good car, and ran very well, but when the time came that he wanted to sell it, he was unable to find a buyer. Thinking that if he had to give it away he would like to give it in a good cause, he asked a clergyman if he could suggest a suitable recipient. The clergyman told the owner of the car that it would be very greatly appreciated by a near-by convent, and he decided to take this advice. The car was not licensed, but as the convent was close the man decided to drive it up without worrying about that. Right outside the convent he had an accident, and the car was smashed to smithereens. Needless to say, the fact that it was not licensed came out, and the man was prosecuted, but when the full facts came out he was let off. What of the car? A firm bought the wreckage for a pound, and the pound was given to the convent!

SHOCKS FOR FLIES!

John William Oatway, a North London inventor, has recently designed a very nice lampshade. I say it is very nice, but I doubt if flies and insects agree with me! This lampshade displaces the old and rather unsightly fly-paper, and works in this way. Concealed in the columns of the shade is a pot containing rum and sugar, while on top there is a small blue light to attract insects. When the flies and insects touch the shade they are immediately electrocuted—and that's that!

AN AMAZING COINCIDENCE!

Tom Morgan is a coalman in the engine sheds at Ystalyfera, near Swansea. During the War he fought in France and like other soldiers he had a tin hat, but he did not keep it after the War. The other day Tom was unloading a truck full of scrap metal when he came across an old tin hat. He looked at it, and it seemed familiar, so he went over it to see if it had any distinguishing marks. It had; it was the very hat that Tom used to wear in France!

"HOW'S THAT?"

Mr. F. M. Parncutt claims to be the unluckiest batsman in the world. He says that he is wrongly given out by umpires more times

than any other man. Of course, we all know that type of fellow who is never really out, but Mr. Parncutt isn't a bit like that, for there is a really good reason for his saying this. During the War he was wounded and lost an arm, and now he has an artificial one, and very often when he makes a stroke it makes quite an audible click. "How's that?" shouts the wicket-keeper. "Out!" says the umpire, raising his hand, for he thinks that he heard the click of the ball just "flicking" the bat. But despite his handicap in this way a few years ago Mr. Parncutt headed the batting averages of the South London League with an average of 40.2 runs for the season!

THE UNCLAIMED HIGH STREET!

Sherston, Wilts, has a High Street. It is a very wide street, in fact it is the widest High Street in all Wiltshire, and when they have a Fair in Sherston, the roundabouts and side-shows and all are put up in the street. Now the High Street is developing pot-holes, and really nasty ones at that, and the time has come for it to be repaired. That would seem quite a simple matter, assuredly, but in this case it is not so—for no one knows to whom the street belongs! The Parish Council have written to all the local authorities, and even a Government department has been approached—but none of them admit liability. So the pot-holes remain.

ODDS AND ENDS.

Goldfish farms in America have a stock of twenty-two million rare goldfish, worth a quarter of a million pounds. Near-by farms have given up breeding ducks and use their ponds for breeding water-fleas as food for the goldfish!

An aeroplane recently carried a cargo of 22,000 ladybirds from California to Florida to fight an insect pest in the orange and grape-fruit groves!

THE BLUE BIRD AGAIN?

Captain Sir Malcolm Campbell has now found a new place to run his famous Blue Bird car which holds the world's land speed record. In his opinion the plains he has found in Hungary will make a far better speedway than Daytona beach, and he hopes to put the record up by a large margin. Sir Malcolm's great ambition is to be the first man to attain a speed of three hundred miles an hour on land, and it is quite likely that his giant car will be taken over to Hungary in the near future.

THE FALL OF THE TYRANT!

Here's a thrilling school story, starring the popular chums of St. Frank's, that no Gemite ought to miss. It tells of the desperate attempt of a treacherous traitor to blow the school to smithereens! For such is the mad revenge Mr. Kennedy Hunter, the tyrant House-master, would bring upon St. Frank's in the hour of his downfall. Having secured the Head to his study chair, the tyrant places a time bomb on the table and takes his departure. Slowly the fatal seconds tick away—until there is only two minutes to go before the bomb explodes and reduces St. Frank's to ruins! What happens? Get this magnificent yarn to-day and read all about it. Ask for the "Nelson Lee Library."

YOUR EDITOR.

BARRED BY HIS CHUMS!

(Continued from page 17.)

during which he had not heard a single word that was said in the punt. "Are you returning?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Very good. Upon second thoughts, I had better not waste the afternoon on the river. You see, there is the case of Study No. 6 in hand."

"Ass!"

"Really, Blake, I must solve that mystery! Perhaps it would interest Miss Cleveland to hear about it. You must know, Miss Cleveland, that a considerable sum of money has been stolen from Study No. 6—"

"Ass!" said Blake. "It hasn't—"

"Well, a valuable watch, then—"

"Nothing has been stolen, duffer!"

"And Tom Merry is suspected—"

"He isn't."

"This prevarication will do you no good, Blake. It is becoming pretty clear to me that you are acting in collusion with Tom Merry in the matter."

"My hat!"

"You'd better speak out."

"Don't mind him, Cousin Ethel," said Digby. "When Skimmy takes up the amateur detective business he's always taken like that."

"Really, Digby—"

"Things look very black against Skimpole," said Blake seriously. "He implies that there was some money in Study No. 6, and I'm jolly certain there isn't any now. Skimpole lately visited the study under suspicious circumstances. The natural inference is that Skimpole is the guilty party. We had better report this to the Head."

"Really—"

"You must admit that things look very black against you, Skimmy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Really, you chaps—"

"Oh, ring off, Skimmy! Get back to the Determinism, if you must talk rot."

And Blake punted home.

CHAPTER 13. Bitter Blood!

TOM MERRY was standing under the big elm outside the School House, talking to Manners and Lowther, when the chums of the Fourth came in.

Tom Merry had been knocking about the school with his chums. He was more worried than he cared to admit by the strange attitude taken up by Study No. 6, and he could not give his mind to cricket, or swimming, or boating, or any of the usual occupations of a half-holiday.

The Terrible Three saw Blake & Co. escort Cousin Ethel to the Head's house, and then come back towards the School House. Blake was looking round him, as if in search of someone, and suddenly he spotted the Shell fellows under the elm. His face brightened, and he spoke to his companions and hurried towards them.

Tom Merry's face hardened.

"They're coming here?" said Manners, in surprise.

"Yes. Perhaps they've found out their mistake," said Tom. "It's too late as far as I'm concerned. I'm done with them."

"Same here!" said Lowther.

Blake and his friends came up. The Terrible Three stared straight past them, taking no notice of their presence at all.

There was a long and awkward pause.

Tom Merry and his chums, leaning against the big trunk of the elm, did not care to move, and they contented themselves with appearing to be quite ignorant of the arrival of the Fourth-Formers.

"I say—" began Blake.

There was no answer.

"Weally, you chaps—" said D'Arcy.

Blank stares greeted his attempt to open a conversation. The Terrible Three were getting a little of their own back, and the Fourth-Formers found it a little disagreeable.

"Oh, come off!" said Digby. "Have you lost your ears?"

"Manners hasn't," said Herries. "They're as big as ever."

This "drew" Manners at last.

"You let my ears alone!" he snapped.

"Certainly! When I want a pair of fans, or something of that sort, I'll get something smaller," said Herries.

Manners turned red and was about to make a warm retort, but Tom Merry broke in.

"Look here, you chaps," he said, "cut off! You've been playing the giddy goat a long time to please yourselves, now you can play it a little longer to please us. We've had enough of your jaw. Is that plain enough?"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Shut up!"

"I wufuse to shut up! I—"

Jack Blake drew the crumpled letter from his pocket.

"Look at that, Tom Merry," he said.

"I don't want to."

"I want you to."

"I don't care what you want."

"It's important."

"Rats!"

"Look here—"

"Go and eat coke!"

Blake grew very red. Tom Merry refused to take the letter. His temper, usually so quiet and kind, had been exasperated too much, and he was firm.

"Looks to me as if he knows all about it, after all," said Digby. "I dare say that's only his bluff."

Tom Merry looked at him quickly.

"What do you mean? What should I know about that letter?"

"You should know whether you wrote it or not."

"I?"

"Yes, you. Did you write it?"

"How should I know, when I haven't seen it?"

"Look at it, then!" said Blake.

He held the letter out again, and this time the hero of the Shell took it. He opened it and read it, and uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

"What does this mean?"

"That's what we want to know," said Blake grimly. "What does it mean? That's for you to explain."

Tom Merry looked at him fiercely.

"Do you think I wrote this letter?"

"It's in your hand."

"It looks like my hand."

"Did you write it?"

"No."

Tom Merry passed the letter to his chums, who read it. Then he tossed it back to Jack Blake.

"So that's what you've got up against us?" he said scornfully.

Blake felt uncomfortable. In the flashing indignation in Tom Merry's eyes he read that his suspicions had been unworthy of him.

Tom Merry was innocent. But who, then, was guilty?

"Yes," said Blake slowly.

"You thought I wrote that?"

"Ye-es."

"How did you get hold of it?"

"I found it in my study, where you had been showing us that ju-jutsu. I—I thought you had dropped it there."

"You thought I wrote that—I?" Tom Merry's eyes blazed. "For what purpose? To give you away to a prefect."

"Well, you see—"

"You didn't know me better than that, you—you worm!"

"Here, draw it mild!" said Blake. "How was I to know you didn't write a letter that was written in your own handwriting?"

"And why have you shown it to me now, when you refused to tell me yesterday what was the matter?"

"Cousin Ethel advised us to come to you."

"And you were going to keep it dark?"

"Well, it isn't a pleasant matter to jaw about."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry clenched his hand.

"I'll keep that letter," he said. "I'll find out who wrote it—who's been imitating my handwriting. Whoever did it left it in your study to make trouble between us. And you fell into the trap like a set of silly gulls, instead of coming to me about it in a straightforward way."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"You ought to have known I couldn't do such a thing. You've known me long enough to know that I'm not a sneak."

"Well, you see—"

"Oh, don't try to excuse yourself! I'll never speak to you again. Give me that letter, and I'll find out who wrote it."

"I know it's rough on you, if you didn't write it," began Blake uncomfortably.

"If!" broke out Tom. "So you still have doubts on the subject?"

"Well, not exactly; but—but the writing—"

"You see, it's your own hand, deah boy."

"It's a forgery!"

Tom Merry was too excited to moderate his voice, nor did he see that Mr. Railton had just come out of the School House, and was passing by the big elm.

His words rang out loudly, and the Housemaster could not fail to hear them. He stopped short.

"Cave!" whispered Blake. "For goodness' sake, don't get the masters into this, or the rotter will be sacked, whoever he is."

"Bai Jove, I wathah think it's too late!" muttered D'Arcy.

The swell of St. Jim's was right. The Housemaster of the School House came directly towards them, and the juniors touched their caps and faced him in grim silence.

CHAPTER 14.

Mr. Railton Takes the Matter Up!

MR. RAILTON looked directly at Tom Merry. Tom's eyes were on the ground.

The unbroken rule of the juniors—to keep their disputes and trouble among themselves, without letting masters or prefects into them—bound him to silence; and but for the passing of Mr. Railton at that moment, the question of the forged letter would have been thrashed out without interference from above.

But it was clear that the matter could not be kept secret now.

"Merry!"

"Ye-es, sir?"

"I could not help hearing what you said. As a rule, as you know, I should take no notice of words heard by chance. But what you said was too serious. You said that something was a forgery."

Tom Merry was silent.

"You are not the kind of boy to say such a thing recklessly," said Mr. Railton, in his quiet, kind manner. "What did you mean, Merry?"

The junior did not speak.

"Were you referring to this letter?" asked the Housemaster, with a nod towards the fatal letter which Blake, in his dismay, was holding conspicuously in his hand, as if with the idea of making it as prominent as possible.

Blake started, and tried to slip the letter into his pocket. The Housemaster smiled slightly.

"Give me that letter, Blake."

There was no help for it. Blake handed over the letter. "Once more, Merry, is this what you were referring to?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then I must read it. Have you any objection?"

"N-no, sir."

Mr. Railton read the letter. An expression of astonishment came over his face.

"This is a letter warning some master or prefect of an intended infraction of the rules," he said. "It is in your hand, Merry."

"Yes, sir."

"Did you write it?"

"No, sir."

"Then you declare it to be a forgery?"

"I—I suppose so, sir."

Mr. Railton's lips set tightly.

"That is a serious matter. Tell me how the letter came into your possession, Blake!"

Jack Blake reluctantly related the circumstances. It was plain that the matter was out of the hands of the juniors now. Mr. Railton had taken it up, and he would be backed by the authority of the Head.

The way of the transgressor was likely to be hard.

The Housemaster listened to Blake's explanation with the closest attention. He nodded when the boy had finished.

"I will say at once," he said, "that I believe Merry. I am sure he would not tell an untruth. And I am sure he would not write a letter like this."

"Thank you, sir!" said Tom Merry.

"You have been with me long enough for me to know your character, Merry. I am glad to be able to say that you have never been guilty of untruthfulness or deceit of any kind. I hope you did not think that Merry wrote this letter, Blake?"

Blake turned crimson.

"Well, sir, you—you see, it was in his hand, and—and——"

"Then you did think so?"

"Ye-es, sir."

"I am sorry for it."

"But—but we never dreamed there could be a chap at St. Jim's who could forge a letter, sir," stammered Blake.

"No, I suppose not. Perhaps you are not so much to blame. This is a dreadfully serious matter. The boy who wrote this letter must have intended a wicked and cowardly

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deception, but doubtless he never thought of the fact that forgery is a crime punished by imprisonment."

Imprisonment! The words struck a chill to the juniors.

True enough, that was what it meant, if the matter were taken seriously. Imitation of handwriting was a little too serious a matter for a joke.

"The writer of this letter must be found," said Mr. Railton. "If you have any suspicion, it is your duty to state it to me."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"I shouldn't like to suspect any chap of such a thing, sir," he said. "It seems to me impossible that any St. Jim's chap would do it."

"Yet someone must have done it."

"I suppose so, sir!"

"I will keep this letter," said Mr. Railton. "The matter will be laid before the Head and fully investigated."

"If you please, sir——"

"What is it, Merry?"

"I—I would rather it were left alone, sir, if you don't mind. I—I am the injured party, sir, and I don't mind——"

"I understand what you mean, but it is impossible for the matter to be passed over. The boy who wrote this letter is not fit for anyone to associate with. He will have to leave the school!"

And the Housemaster walked away towards the Head's house.

The juniors exchanged looks of dismay.

"Bai Jove, we're in for it now!" said D'Arcy. "When Waiton looks like that he means business. He'll have the whole truth out."

"It will serve the fellow right to be sacked," said Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But whom could it be?" said Manners, puzzled. "Mollish is worm enough, but he's too jolly cautious!"

Tom Merry gave a start.

Back to his mind, as Manners spoke, came that scene in Gore's study of the previous day; when the bully of the Shell had been so deeply engrossed in something he was writing, and had been so startled by Tom Merry opening the door.

He had covered up what he had been writing, with a guilty look—half guilty, half scared—that Tom Merry remembered only too clearly.

Was it Gore?

Gore's enjoyment of the situation, too; the keen interest he took in the progress of the trouble caused by the forged letter; the triumph he had shown. All pointed to one conclusion.

"My hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

They all looked at him.

"Have you thought of the wottah, Tom Merry?"

"I think so."

"Who?" asked three or four voices.

"Gore!"

"Phew! Well, he's rotter enough, and fool enough!" said Jack Blake. "But what have you got to go upon?"

Tom Merry explained the scene of the previous day.

"Bai Jove! It looks like it!" said D'Arcy. "I have always regarded Gore as a wottah. He deliberately sat on a silk hat of mine once, and completely ruined it; and a chap who would do that would do anything!"

"Hold on!" said Blake. "What time was it you saw Gore?"

"It was just before you asses started playing the giddy goat. We met Gussy as we came down the passage."

"Then it was a good couple of hours after we found the letter in the study," said Blake. "Gore couldn't have been writing it after we found it."

"Bai Jove!"

"I'm! Perhaps he was writing another, though," said Tom Merry. "If the first was successful he'd naturally go on. He may have written another one, to work off on somebody else. Anyway, he was writing something he didn't want seen; he was frightened out of his wits when I looked in."

"Well, it was more likely to be Gore than anybody else," said Lowther. "But what can we do in the matter?"

"We can't give him away."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Certainly not!"

"It won't be needed," said Blake grimly. "Railton won't let the matter rest now till he's got at the truth, you can lay your socks on that! Gore's number is up!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"The best thing he can do is to own up!" remarked Tom Merry. "It would be only a decent thing to give him a hint. Anybody know where he is?"

"He was on the bridge over the Rhyl a time back."

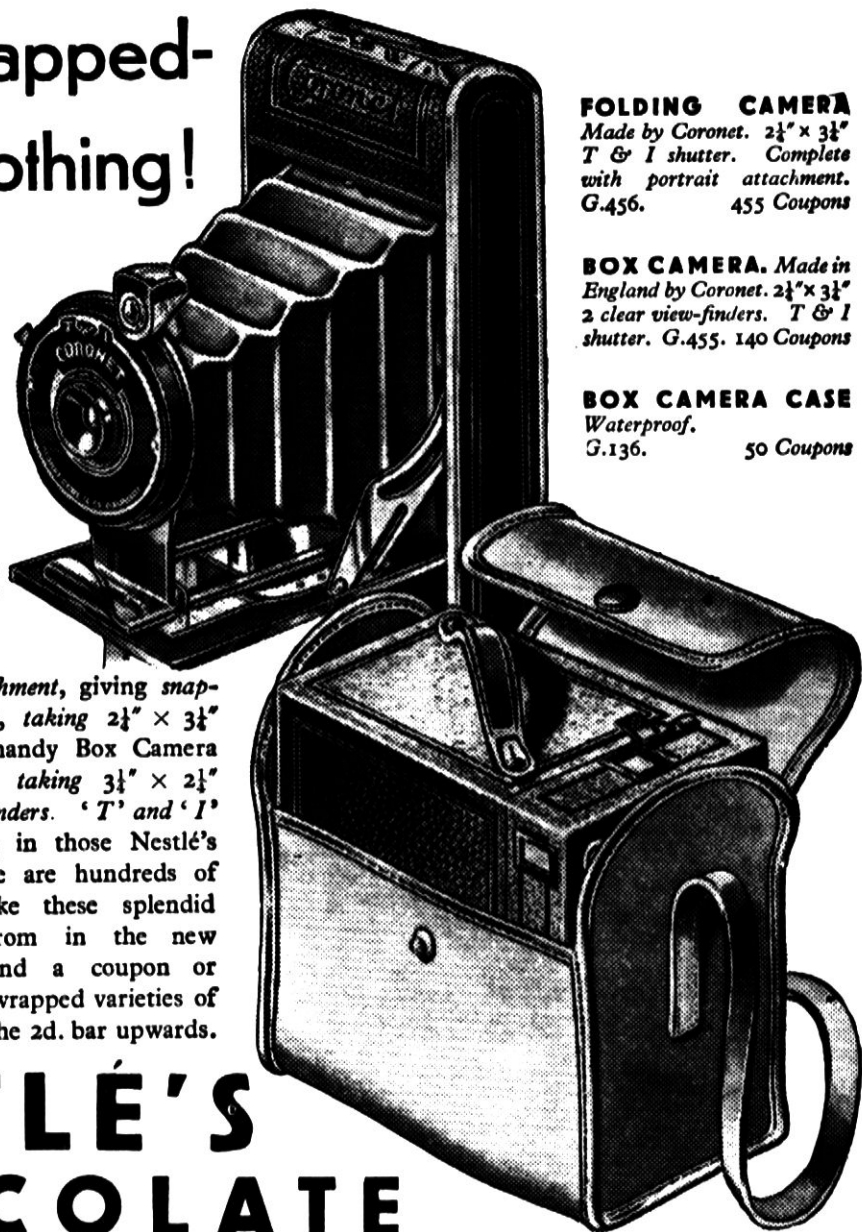
"I think I'll go and look for him."

And Tom Merry strolled away.

(Continued on page 22.)

To be snapped-
up for nothing!

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Jack Blake shook his head. "Not much good trying to do Gore a good turn," he remarked. "He's a chap you can't be decent to. If it's Gore—and I think it is—he's booked for the sack. I'm sorry for the rotter, but there's no getting out of the fact that St. Jim's will be better off without him."

To which Arthur Augustus D'Arcy rejoined emphatically: "Yaas, wathah!"

CHAPTER 15.

Gore is Defiant!

"**W**HAT do you want, Tom Merry?" Gore uttered the words in a startled tone. He was sitting on a grassy bank near the Rhyll, keenly examining a paper held in his hand—a sheet of notepaper covered with writing.

Tom Merry had come along the river, and he caught sight of Gore and hurried towards him; but Gore was too preoccupied to see his approach till Tom's shadow fell across him.

Then he started, and hastily thrust the letter into his pocket.

Tom Merry looked at him steadily. It was the scene of the study over again—the same furtive hiding of the paper, the same half-guilty, half-furious look upon Gore's face.

If Tom Merry had had any doubts they would have been dispelled then. Gore was guilty. It was another letter of the same kind that he was conning over now.

Tom looked steadily at the bully of the Shell. Gore met his glance angrily and defiantly.

"What do you want?" he snapped.

"I want to speak to you."

"The want's all on your side, then. Leave me alone!"

"It's for your own sake, Gore!"

Gore sneered.

"I've been comparing notes with Blake," said Tom Merry abruptly. "I know all about the letter he found in his study."

Gore looked blank.

"Blessed if I know what you're talking about!" he said.

"You know very well, I think. Blake found a letter in his study, just where I might have dropped it—a letter in my hand, but not written by me, all the same."

Gore yawned.

"I really don't know anything about the matter. What are you confiding all this to me for?"

"Because I think you wrote the letter."

Gore turned pale.

"I—I wrote the letter!"

"I think so."

"Liar!"

Tom Merry's eyes blazed for a moment. But he kept his temper. He had not come there to quarrel with Gore.

"I want to speak to you quietly about it, Gore," he said. "I'm not your friend, and you're not mine. But you're in danger."

"I don't see it."

"Mr. Railton has taken up the matter."

"What!"

"He accidentally found out that there had been a forgery—"

"A—a—a what?"

"You don't like that word," said Tom Merry bitterly.

"I don't know what else you would call it. Anyway, Mr. Railton heard me use the word, and then he insisted upon knowing all about it."

Gore sprang to his feet.

"You—you cad! You've told him; you've sneaked about me!"

"I haven't said a word about you."

"Then—then what do you mean?"

"If you didn't write the letter you've nothing to fear."

Mr. Railton is taking the matter before the Head, and it will be sifted out now. It's no good trying to stop it.

Nobody has anything to fear except the chap who wrote that letter. That fellow will be found out."

"How?"

Tom Merry shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know how. But when there's a general inquiry, things do come out; and I haven't the slightest doubt that Railton will get to the bottom of the matter. If he once suspects you he will turn you inside out before you know it. Now that he's on the track the guilty party is done for. There's only one chance for him."

"And what's that?" asked Gore, with white lips.

"To own up."

"Own up!"

"Yes. Go straight to Mr. Railton and own up, and throw yourself on his mercy. Say you're sorry; goodness knows you ought to be. Then there may be a chance for you."

"You've taken it for granted that I wrote the letter."

"Yes. If you didn't, you're all right. If you did, take my advice—the advice of a friend—though I don't feel very friendly towards you about it."

"Why are you interfering in the matter at all?"

"Because I don't want to see you sacked from the school."

"Why not?"

"Oh, I suppose you don't understand?" said Tom Merry scornfully.

Gore sneered savagely.

"No, I don't! You see, I've injured you by imitating your hand; got you into a row with your friends. Then you come to me with friendly advice, how to avoid being punished for it. It's a little too thick, Tom Merry!"

Tom was silent.

He had hardly expected Gore to understand his motives; but he had hoped that the cad of the Shell would be sensible enough to see where his true interests lay.

"It won't wash," said Gore sneeringly. "You can't pull the wool over my eyes, Tom Merry. I don't know what little game you're playing; I suppose your idea is to bounce me into admitting that I wrote the letter. It won't wash."

"I'm pretty sure about that already."

"Well, you can keep your advice till I ask for it," said Gore. "I'm not going to Mf. Railton. I'm not going to own up."

"It would be better for you."

"And for you, perhaps."

"How—for me?"

"It would get you off. You say a letter has been found in your handwriting. If so, I imagine you wrote it. I dare say you'd like to frighten another fellow into owning up that he did it."

Tom Merry compressed his lips hard. It was not easy to be patient with Gore. Tom Merry's hand was itching to strike him full upon the evil, sneering face. But he knew that there was black trouble ahead for Gore, and he refrained.

"You can't work that with me," said Gore, shrugging his shoulders. "As for the letter, I suppose you wrote it. I dare say you'd be as likely to sneak about the kids as anybody else."

"How do you know that the letter was 'sneaking' about the kids, if you never wrote it?" asked Tom Merry, quick as a flash.

Gore started.

"You—you said something of the sort!" he stammered.

"I said nothing of the sort."

"Well, I—I—"

"You've given yourself away," said Tom scornfully. "If you never wrote the letter, you couldn't have heard of its existence till this moment, and yet you show that you know what was in it."

Gore bit his lips.

"Never mind what I know!" he snarled. "I'm not going to Railton! You can't bounce me into getting you out of a difficulty with your lies! I think it's very likely that Railton doesn't know anything about the matter at all."

Tom Merry's hand clenched hard.

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"Very well," he said quietly. "We'll say no more about it. I've tried to do my best for you, though goodness knows you deserved precious little at my hands. Let the matter drop?"

"Certainly!" sneered Gore. "Try the same game on somebody who's likely to be taken in!"

And he swung away, and strolled towards the school. The bully of the Shell was in a triumphant mood. He felt that he had scored off Tom Merry, and he grinned as he entered the quadrangle.

"I'll make them sit up—and more than that!" he murmured, as he ascended the stairs of the School House. "I'll make them——"

"Gore!"
The cad of the Shell started and looked round.
"Yes, sir?"

It was Mr. Railton. The Housemaster's face was grave and cold, with an expression on it that struck a sudden terror to Gore's heart.

"Follow me, Gore!"
"Yes, sir. I—I——"
"That is enough! Follow me!"

And Gore, trembling, followed the Housemaster to the Head's study and into the presence of Dr. Holmes!

CHAPTER 16.

Sacked!

GORE stood before the Head like a culprit—like a culprit already, although he had not yet been accused.

Dr. Holmes was looking severe, and Mr. Railton's face was like iron. What did it mean—what could they know? A score of fears and unquiet thoughts whirled through the mind of the wretched junior as he stood in the presence of his judges.

"Gore!"
Dr. Holmes spoke slowly, quietly, in ominous tones. Gore's breath almost failed him. In that tone he read his doom. Yet what could they know—what proof could they have?

"Ye-es, sir?" he gasped.
"Gore, look at that letter!"
The Head held out the letter that Blake had found in his study. Gore looked at it. Well he knew every line of it, though, when he had written it, he had been far from expecting to have it produced against him in the Head's study.

"Read it, Gore."
"I have read it, sir."
"Have you ever seen it before?"
"No, sir."
"You did not write it?"
"Certainly not, sir."
"I hope you will be able to prove that!" said Dr. Holmes grimly.

"I—I—I——"
"Listen to me! That letter was found by Blake in his study. It is in a handwriting strongly resembling that of Merry of the Shell. Blake naturally concluded that Merry had written the letter."

"I suppose he did, sir. It's Tom Merry's hand."
"Ah, you suppose he did!"
"Certainly, sir!"
"It does not occur to you that Merry's hand might have been imitated by anyone who wished to do him an injury?"
"Oh, no, sir! I think that's very unlikely!"

"Very good! Now listen to me, Gore. You stand in a very procacious position, and it will be well for you to tell the truth."

"I am telling the truth, sir."
"Listen! When Mr. Railton placed that letter in my hands measures were at once taken to detect the culprit. Neither he nor I can credit for a moment that Merry wrote that letter. He denies it, and his word is quite good enough. It is perfectly clear that his hand has been imitated. It occurred to me that the imitator would not be able to reproduce another boy's hands so faithfully unless he had done a considerable amount of practice. Of this practice traces were likely to be found in the culprit's study. That was my first thought, Gore."

Gore turned deadly pale.
"Therefore, I immediately had a search made. Inquiry was made of the School House prefects as to which boys were on the worst terms with Merry, and might be supposed to be more likely than the others to make this attempt to injure him. Among other names, yours was given in. Your study was the second one searched. This was the result."

The Head opened an envelope, and turned out several fragments of paper upon his writing-table.

Some of them were half-burnt, but still retained clear traces of handwriting, while others were crumpled, and had evidently been screwed up and thrown into the waste-paper-basket.

On most of them the wording of the letter was partially repeated, and on several the handwriting was more like Gore's than Tom Merry's.

The cad of the Shell stared at them with starting eyes. Like most dabblers in rascality, he was as great a fool as a rogue, and he had never foreseen—never dreamed—of anything of this sort. The chance that the matter might come before the masters had never even occurred to him.

"What have you to say, Gore?"
The cad of the Shell was dumb.
"I am waiting, Gore!"
"Oh, sir, I—I—— This is a plot to ruin me!" burst out Gore desperately. "Tom Merry must have written those papers and put them in my study."

"I am quite aware that Merry is incapable of doing anything of the sort," said Dr. Holmes; "nor had he any motive for doing so. A wild accusation like that cannot have any weight. I think, however, that there may be further proof. Turn out your pockets!"

"Wh-wh-what?"
"Turn out your pockets immediately!"
"Wh-why, sir?"

"Some of these fragments have a different wording," said Dr. Holmes. "That looks to me as if you have been practising for another letter. I think, too, that the success of your first attempt would probably encourage you to further evil-doing. I think it quite possible that you may have something of this sort about you."

Gore was dumb.
"Turn out your pockets!"
"I—I—I——"

"Will you obey me, or shall I call in Binks to search you?"
"Oh, sir! I——"
"Please call in Binks, Mr. Railton!"
The Housemaster stepped to the door.
"I'll turn out my pockets, sir," said Gore huskily.
"Very well. Wait a moment, Mr. Railton."

Gore turned his pockets out. Mr. Railton watched him closely, and caught him by the wrist as he tried to slip a paper up his sleeve.

"We will see that, please, Gore!"
Gore made a choking sound in his throat. He despaired now. Mr. Railton unfolded the letter, and laid it before the Head.

Dr. Holmes adjusted his glasses and read it.
It ran as follows:

"You had better keep an eye on Figgins & Co. this evening.—A FRIEND TO ORDER."

The Head's brow grew stern. The note was in Tom Merry's hand, or rather, a close and clever imitation of it, and was evidently written by the same hand as the note picked up in Study No. 6 in the School House.

"What did you intend to do with this note, Gore?" said the Head quietly.

The wretched boy stared at him dumbly.
"I think I can guess," went on Dr. Holmes. "You meant to drop it somewhere in the New House, where it would be found by Figgins. Figgins would naturally imagine that Tom Merry had sent it to a New House prefect, and bitter blood would be the result. Was not that your plan, Gore?"

But Gore did not speak.
"I think we may take your guilt as established now," said Dr. Holmes. "So astounding an instance of wickedness in a boy of your age I have never encountered before. It is, of course, impossible for you to remain at the school."

"Oh, sir!"
"You will be expelled! For the sake of your parents, and also because of the disgrace it would cause to the school, I shall spare you a public expulsion. You will go now and pack up your things. I shall write to your father and acquaint him with the cause of your leaving. You will leave St. Jim's to-morrow morning by the first train. You may go!"

"Oh, sir!"
"Go!"
And Gore went.
It had come at last—the Fate he had so often tempted, and had more than once narrowly escaped!
He was sacked!

CHAPTER 17.

Alone!

GORE sat in his study. He had finished his packing, and now, tired and despondent, he sat down to think. His thoughts were not pleasant.

He threw himself into the chair, his legs stretched out, his hands thrust deep into his trousers pockets, his head bent forward, his brow sullen.

It had come to this!

Sacked!

On the morrow morning he was to leave the school for ever.

Gore had never had any great affection for the school. It had never come into his mind that he liked the place.

But now he was to leave it he realised that even his hard heart was not proof against association.

The old quad, the green old elms, the cricket field, and the bathing-pool on the Rhyl—he knew how he would miss them all.

But that was not all. He was leaving the school in disgrace.

He had always done badly there. At Clavering, his previous school, where he had first met Tom Merry, he had done badly. He had kept up the same course at St. Jim's. Laziness and slacking kept him in the Shell when he was more than old enough for the Fifth.

He had not cared for that. The fact that he was bigger and older than most of the Shell fellows had only made him into a bully.

More than once he had tempted Fate—more than one serious infraction of the college rules, more than one act of meanness or brutality had been brought home to him, and still the last and heaviest of punishments had passed him by.

Now the blow had fallen. He was expelled! And as he realised it, realised that it was all over with him—that St. Jim's was to be left behind, and that all he had to face now was an angry father, a home where he was not welcome, he groaned aloud.

Sacked! That was the only word that was clear to his brain.

The wretched junior let his face fall into his hands, and a sob shook him from head to foot. The tears—strange enough to the eyes of George Gore—came through his fingers.

He felt a touch on his shoulder, and started.

It was Tom Merry.

Tom Merry looked down at the cad of the Shell. Gore looked up, his face still wet. There was silence for some moments. Gore broke it.

"I hope you're satisfied now," he said.

Tom was silent.

"I'm sacked," said Gore. "It's knocked me right over—you can see that. I'm done for. You've got your triumph. I hope you'll enjoy it."

"I—"

"You've come here to triumph over me. Well, make the most of it. I hate you. I hate the place, and everybody in it."

"I haven't come here to triumph over you, Gore," said Tom Merry. "I'm sorry for this. You know I warned you."

"I know you did."

"If you had owned up you might have got off. As it is, I suppose Railton has found out somehow."

"Yes."

"And you're expelled?"

"Yes."

"I'm sorry."

Tom Merry's look and tone were so sincere that even Gore could not but believe him. The bully's face softened a little. It was curious that the sympathy his own friends had never dreamed of showing him should come from the boy he had injured.

"Well, I believe you," said Gore slowly. "Blessed if I know why you should care about it. I wrote that letter, and they found it out."

"Why did you write it?"

"Because I was a silly ass, I suppose. Because you and Blake and your friends have always been against me, and I wanted to pay you out."

"It was a rotten mean trick; but I won't say anything about that now. I'm sorry for you, and sorry for your

people. It's rough on them, anyway. Look here, can't anything be done?"

Gore looked at him quickly.

"What can be done? I'm sacked!"

"Yes, but an appeal to the Head—"

"You wouldn't think of appealing to him if you had seen his face when he told me I was expelled. It was like iron. I believe he's glad to be rid of me. I believe they both had their eyes on me for some time, and want to get me out of the school."

Tom Merry thought it very probable. Gore was not the kind of boy to do any school good.

"But I say," went on Gore eagerly, "there's a chance—it's just possible—if you went to the Head. You're the injured party, and you might be able to get me off."

It was curious to ask the boy he had done his best to damage and discredit, to save him from the punishment of an act committed against Tom Merry himself. Gore would have clutched at a straw then to save himself.

Tom Merry looked thoughtful.

"Will you try, Merry?"

"I don't know that it would do any good," said Tom slowly, "but I'll try, if you get a public flogging—"

Gore shivered.

"That's bad enough, but anything's better than getting expelled."

"Yes, that's so!"

"If you can get me off that I'll always be your friend. You shall see that I can be grateful."

Tom Merry knew Gore well enough to be aware that his gratitude would last as long as his danger. But he did not think about that then.

"I'll try," he said.

And the hero of the Shell walked towards the school. He met Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in the gateway. D'Arcy was looking very serious.

"Tom Mewwy, I've been lookin' for you—"

"Well, here I am, kid."

"I twust that all misundahstandin' is now ovah, and that the formah welahs are now westored, deah boy!"

Tom Merry did not reply.

"We were uttably taken in, you know," said Arthur Augustus. "How were we to dweam that there was a chap at the coll wotten enough to imitate a fellow's hand? We couldn't be supposed to guess it, you know!"

"You might have thought better of me."

"It was weally a vevy painful shock to think badly of you, deah boy!"

"Well, I suppose I ought to overlook it," said Tom Merry. "But I shouldn't have suspected you of acting like a low cad if I had seen a dozen forged letters."

"Pway don't pile it on, deah boy! We feel bad enough about it already!" said Arthur Augustus, with a look of genuine distress that Tom Merry could not resist.

He held out his hand impulsively.

"It's all right, Gussy! Give me your fin, old son, and forget all about it!"

"I wegard that as the weally wight and pwopah thing to do!" said D'Arcy, shaking hands with Tom Merry. "It's all wight now! I apologise most sincerely in the name of Study No. 6 for our unjust suspish!"

"That's all right!"

"And now there's anothah mattah," said D'Arcy seriously. "I have just seen Cousin Ethel off, you know, and she had heard that Gore was sacked. She was vevy sowwy for the wottah."

"I'm sorry myself."

"Yaas, wathah! The chap is an absolute blightah, but weally one can't help feelin' sowwy for a fellow who's down," said Arthur Augustus. "Ethel suggested that an appeal to the Head might get him off."

"I'm just going to the Head to make one."

"Bai Jove! I'll come with you as a wepresentsative of Study No. 6 in the mattah, deah boy!"

"Right you are—come on!"

"Pewwaps you had bettah leave the talkin' to me, as the most sensible chap of the two," D'Arcy remarked, as they entered the School House. "What is required in this case is a fellow of tact and judgment."

"Rats!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

Tom Merry knocked at the Head's door. The deep voice of Dr. Holmes bade him enter. The Head looked surprised when he saw the two juniors.

"What can I do for you?" he said.

"If you please, sir—"

"Weally, sir—"

"Shut up, Gussy!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"It's about Gore, sir," said Tom Merry respectfully. "I hear that he's been expelled from the school, sir—"

Dr. Holmes nodded.

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"That is correct, Merry."
 "I—I know he acted like a rotten cad, sir," said Tom Merry, "but—but as I was the party he was trying to injure, I—I thought perhaps—"
 "Go on, Merry!"
 "Perhaps you would let me intercede for him, sir."
 "Do you want to intercede for a boy of that nature, Merry?" asked the Head very quietly.
 Tom Merry coloured.
 "It's rough on him, sir, and on his people. I—I think perhaps the fright would be a lesson to him, sir, if—if you would let him stay."
 "Yaas, wathah, sir! That is what I was goin' to say; and, though I should p'robably have expressed it a little more neatly, it is weally how I look at it, sir."
 "I am sorry, Merry—"
 "I hope you will be as easy as possible with him, sir. It was through me—though accidentally—that the matter came out, and I feel—"
 "I understand, Merry. But it is impossible for me to pardon Gore, or to overlook his fault."
 "But, sir—"
 "It is too serious. He intended it for an ill-natured, cruel trick, but another step in the same direction might lead him to crime. Forgery is a serious thing, Merry. The wretched boy had no intention of committing forgery, but that is what his act amounted to. It would not be consistent with my duty to the other boys to overlook it."
 "I thought perhaps a—a flogging, sir—"
 "That would not be sufficient, and I cannot allow such a corrupting influence to remain in the School House."
 "Bai Jove, I nevah thought of that!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.
 And Tom Merry was silent. He felt that the Head was right—that in such a case mercy was out of place.
 "Later, perhaps, when Gore has learned by experience to alter his ways, I might allow him to return," said Dr. Holmes. "That is a matter to be considered later. For the present, at all events, he must go. He leaves the school to-morrow morning. It is good of you—very good and proper—to speak up for him, Merry; especially as he has tried to injure you. But I cannot alter my decision."
 "Very well, sir."
 "I am sorry, but the matter is closed."
 And the two juniors left the study.
 "Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus, turning his eyeglass upon Tom Merry when they were in the passage. "I have

nevah seen the old boy with his back up like that before, Tom Mewwy!"
 Tom Merry nodded.
 "It's no use," he said. "He won't change his mind, that's certain."
 "Yaas, wathah!"
 "I shall have to tell Gore."
 "I suppose so—there's nothing else to be done," said D'Arcy. "Pewwaps if you had left it to me to explain to the Head the mattah might have turned out bettah. Do you think that's likely, Tom Mewwy?"
 "No, I don't."
 Gore was waiting for them in the School House passage. He was standing by himself. The other juniors of the House glanced at him from a distance, but carefully avoided approaching him or speaking to him.
 Gore started eagerly as Tom Merry came up, and he turned a quick, hopeful look upon the hero of the Shell.
 But Tom's expression was enough for him. The hope died out of his face as quickly as it had arisen there.
 "No good?" he asked in a low voice.
 Tom Merry shook his head.
 "No. I'm sorry."
 "He wouldn't listen?"
 "He listened, but he wouldn't change his decision. I'm sorry, Gore. I hope you believe I've done my best?"
 Gore nodded dully.
 "Yes, that's all right; I know you have. Thank you. It was decent; more decent than I've ever been to you."
 And Gore turned slowly away. They heard him shut the door of his study. There was a deep shade upon the brow of Tom Merry. He had done all he could; he could do no more.
 The next morning the expelled junior, in the midst of a silent crowd, stepped into a car, and his boxes were placed in after him, and, with a white face, he was driven out of the gates of St. Jim's.
 Gore was gone!
 And, bitter enemy as he had been to the Terrible Three and the chums of Study No. 6, it was a long time before they ceased to think of the pale, heavy face of the junior who had been "Sacked!"

THE END.

(Look out for thrills in next week's ripping yarn of Tom Merry & Co.—"THE SECRET OF THE TOWER!" Order your copy now and make sure of it!)

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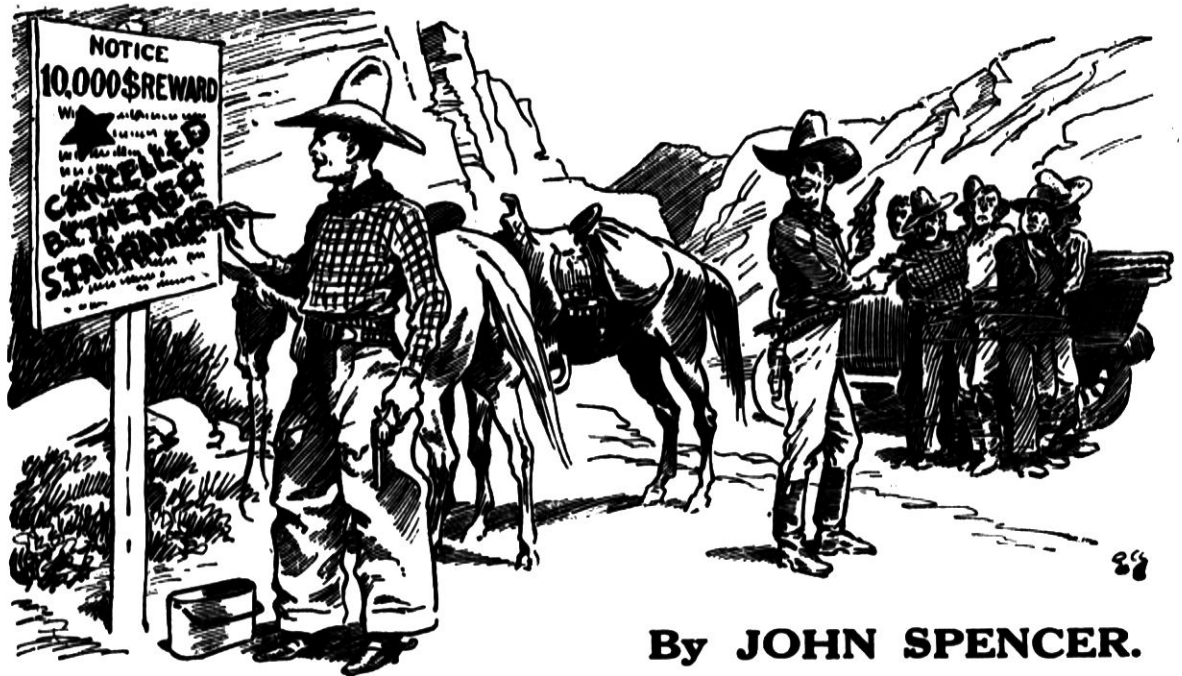
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MORE THRILLS IN OUR GREAT WESTERN ADVENTURE YARN!

RED STAR RANGER!



By JOHN SPENCER.

JERRY GARRISON and FUSTY, his pal, are "framed" and then outlived by the rascally Mayor of Red Rock, JASPER PRIVETT. The two pals know that Privett is in league with a band of bandits in the hills, and they are determined to locate the bandits' hide-out, and settle up with Privett. Privett sends his gunmen after Jerry and Fusty, but the pals catch the gunmen and leave them tied up until Privett finds them!

A Big Catch!

THE gunmen built a fire on a plateau, letting the glare be seen, and rested there. At sun-up they started up the mountains. A messenger, detaching himself from the main body, took a lone trail, speeding for further help.

The rest of the party opened out and combed every trail which led from the lower plateaux past Bird Rock to the Misfire Canyon.

Trails they found a-plenty, but no sign of Jerry or Fusty. "But they're here, ahead of us," snarled Privett, as the party, closing in, approached the mouth of Misfire Canyon. "They can't get away. The moment you see them, fire! I don't care who hits them, or when or where; I want 'em brought to me dead, preferably; too much trouble to deal with 'em alive!"

A double trail of hoof-prints led into the sombre canyon. But then they had followed other double tracks before, and drawn blank.

This new trail might have been left behind by Jerry Garrison and Joe McKraw; but then, again, it might not.

Privett drew rein at the entrance to the gorge, and waited until a shrill and sustained bugle-call rang from far up the mountain, where clouds streaked across the wall of a hidden peak. As he heard the bugle-call the mayor's face lit up.

"Gosh!" he cried. "That's done it, boys! We've got another party riding down to the canyon. They'll enter it on t'other side. We'll go in this side. Somewhere in between us we'll find Jerry Garrison and Joe McKraw. They can't escape the pincers. We've got 'em stone cold. Get yore guns ready, and use 'em first chance you get."

The men unsling their Winchester, and with Privett still leading, his gun aslant across the saddle, they passed into the gloomy canyon.

To the right a great chasm yawned. Its rim was black, in shadow. The opposite side of the gorge flamed red in the blazing sunlight.

At points where the trail wound in and out they were able to look down to where the waters tumbled, thousands of feet below. On the right, rocks rose up in jagged points, or dome-shaped tops. Sometimes the rocks were smooth,

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but mostly they were rough and frowning. High above towered the sheer wall of the mountain peak.

It was dark up there, but not so dark, presently, for Jasper Privett to miss the Stetson topped face of a man who, propped on his hands, hung on a brink peering down. Privett could not swear to it, but he believed he saw a paint-horse show itself for a second and then disappear behind a boulder.

Jasper Privett's heart raced, but he said nothing. If he could himself shoot down or capture the two outlaws, what a boast he would be able to broadcast through the state. He saw grand publicity in this idea. So, with eyes glued upon the trail, he rode on until he saw unmistakably a trail of horses' shoe-prints turning up a narrow stone-strewn trail, which ran zigzagging up from the main trail through Misfire Canyon.

Privett glanced upward. The sheer wall of rock prevented him from seeing up there. Neither could the men up there any longer see his troop of gunmen on the trail below.

"Boys," said Privett, "some of you ride back west, the rest ride on east. Dismount and take up your positions. Garrison and Fusty are up there. I saw Garrison. I'm going to climb. I'll drive 'em out of cover and you shoot the moment they show."

The gang didn't mind. If the boss liked to run the risk, that was his funeral. As Jasper Privett, dismounting, began to climb, Winchester in hand, they rode off left and right until they were in a position to command the mountain-side. There they dismounted and waited with guns ready.

Up went Privett, creeping from the shelter of one boulder into the shadow of another, trailing his rifle.

His plan was set. Garrison did not know he had been seen. He would be expecting nobody. But soon he, Privett, would come within sight of him, and then—braung!—he would riddle the smart-looking youngster and then squat on the trail and wait for Fusty to show himself, and get Fusty, too.

Privett must have climbed over 1,000 feet with the utmost caution without catching a glimpse of Garrison or Fusty, and he was pausing for breath when—whiz—a coil of dried and tested hide rope dropped over his head, tightened round his body as a deft hand jerked it up under the armpits, and bit deep through the clothes into Privett's flesh.

The Mayor of Red Rock howled.

"Got him, Fusty," chuckled a boyish voice from above. "Didn't I tell you I'd fool Privett into a boob trap if I showed myself. Lay hold of that line, and help haul the fish to land."

Behind a boulder above, Fusty laid hold of the end of the lariat and helped Jerry Garrison to pull, and the astonished gunmen waiting on the brink of the gorge below saw the bulky body of their boss swing into sight and dangle, swaying back and forth like a pendulum, over the deadly drop.

Privett let go the Winchester, which bounced and spun from rock to rock, until it took a final plunge down to the racing torrent below the canyon.

"Hey, you guys down there!" cried Jerry Garrison, coming into view, one foot planted firmly on the smooth shoulder of the rock behind which he had been hiding. "Can you hear what I say?"

His voice rang clearly below, despite the distance. Their answering cries alike were heard.

Jerry Garrison bared a Bowie.

"You'll all troop back to Red Rock instanter," he said, "or, if you refuse, I'll cut the lariat through and let the mayor take a dive. Any choice, mayor?"

Jasper Privett's teeth clashed together like castanets as he hung swaying in the breeze.

"Do what he says, boys!" he howled. "He's got me stone cold!"

"And send a messenger telling the guys up above to draw off, too!" shouted Garrison. "Show a white flag when you get an answer. Then draw off to the entrance of the canyon and wait thar, and I'll send the mayor to you. Attempt to come up here, and the mayor'll take his dive."

"You win, Jerry!" shouted a man down below. "But make it easy for the boss, wontcher?"

"Easy nothing!" Jerry shouted back. "He hangs in the wind till you've all cleared out!"

And so Mayor Jasper Privett swung on that biting lariat, groaning and cursing, until the last of the fifty horsemen had ridden from view. Then Jerry and Fusty hauled him up.

"Mayor," said Fusty, striding bow-legged up to the man who had outlawed him, "yore the crookedest, dirtiest cuss that ever disgraced the rank of mayor. Reckon you had my pal Sim Ross, sheriff, shot up. But you palmed off the job on me and Jerry Garrison and outlawed us. If I did right I'd shoot the hide off'n yer. But a promise is a promise, and as Jerry and me wanta get out of these yar mountains without being shot up, I suppose we'll have to keep our promise and let you go."

Privett, by this time, was scared into a quivering human jelly.

"Please, Fusty," he whined. "Please!"

"All right," growled Fusty. "We'll set you free when that white flag shows."

Two hours later a white flag fluttered on the end of a rifle down in the gorge below. Then the gunmen withdrew to the entrance of Misfire Canyon.

And an hour and a half after that the mayor joined them—on foot.

But he did not come as they had expected. Jerry and Fusty had stripped him to his pants and gummed on to him a big red star.

"Reckon that'll knock a bit of a hole in the mayor's reputation, Jerry," said Fusty, as he led Jerry up the steep and crumbling trail. "Now let me show you that bolt hole I spoke about. I found it when I was lost up in the canyon as a kid. We can camp there, and nobody the wiser. It's safer than trying to leave by the other end of the canyon right now."

"O.K.," Jerry Garrison agreed, as he gave the reins a yank and hauled Paintbox after him. "I'm aching to get my tongue roots round some of that tinned salmon. Lead on, old-timer, lead on."

The Way In!

THE Red Star Ranger eased his position on the cool, dry ground, and lying propped upon his elbows, watched with interest Fusty, his pal, preparing the "eats."

They had camped under the lee of a rock-face, and Joe had loosed a Primus stove from his pack and blown air into it to fry bacon and heat a can of pork and beans. There would be coffee to follow, with canned milk and sugar, pots and pans and mugs littered the ground beside the bow-legged cook.

"Can I help you anyways, Fusty?" Jerry asked.

"Yep, by keepin' yore trap shut until it's time to fill it with the grub," Fusty answered as he turned the sizzling bacon. "Ef you wuz to chef the eats we shore would both die of in-di-gestion."

"Suit yourself, pard," Jerry answered lazily, taking a

cigarette out of a packet and lighting it. "I wouldn't disturb the peace of this here paradise for worlds."

Above them swept a sun-drenched, blue sky, seen through high, precipitous rocks. And as Jerry Garrison cocked an eye that way a golden eagle swung from one sharp crag to another with a mighty spread of wing.

Bringing his eyes down presently from watching the bird, Jerry cast a glance at two ponies who were contentedly cropping short fine mountain grass, rooted in shallow earth blown by the winds from anywhere.

Their packs and slickers were set out in a hole in the rock-face. Their Winchesters and gun-belts hung from or were propped against their saddles. And Jerry grinned as he thought of Jasper Privett's gunmen combing the mountains with intent to kill and never a chance of them finding this sanctuary of whose existence Fusty alone knew.

"Speed up the fodder, old timer," said Jerry, drawing hard at his cigarette, "and then you can tell me some about how you found this place."

Soon the food was ready, and eaten with rare appetite. Over the strong coffee, sweetened with much sugar, and a cigarette, Jerry lingered contentedly.

"I'll wash up, pard," he drawled. "Now, supposin' you shoot the works about this place."

Fusty packed a wad in his pipe and lit the tobacco, perching himself upon a boulder, and leaning forward, his bow legs looking more bowed than ever, his shock of grizzled hair, and his lined and weatherbeaten face as sober as the giant rocks about him.

"It wuz when I wuz eighteen years old, Jerry," he said. "Red Rock in them days wuz just a few shacks. Injuns lived around, and it was dangerous for a white to stray. The only law known was gun-law, and wild-eyed, long-haired prospectors kem into the town reg'lar."

Fusty puffed at his pipe until the tobacco glowed.

"My pop was alive in them days. Kep' a general store. I wuz a wild, harum-scarum, alwus roamin'—"

"Were you as bow-legged then as you are now, you old weasel?" Jerry asked.

"Nope! That kem afterwards thru' hard ridin'. Where wuz I? Oh, I remember. I uster like to kem up the mountains and I wuz alwus lookin' for a new trail. I knew every foot of Misfire Canyon, when grown men were scared to enter it. An' one day, when I was up along Misfire, ridin' slow, I kem on somethin' unusual, a rounded bit of rock lyin' on the trail. It had just bin dislodged."

That bit of rock was clean on one side, where it had been broke off. Rocks don't break off of themselves. Storms and tempests don't break 'em off, neither, an' besides, there hadn't bin a storm in months. So I looks up, and I see the place where that rock had kem away, about a hunner feet up a stiff climb. I got me up there and found a trail. No, they was two trails, of nail-studded boots, each a different pattern, and the hoof-prints of a hoss.

"That was funny, I thought, an' so I went down, took the reins, and pulled the old cayuse up where it didn't seem possible for a goat to climb, and that's how I found the way into this place."

"It shore is a cute way in," said Jerry. "When you told me we could take the hosses up, I wouldn't believe it. But we did it. Clever, too, the way you went back and rubbed out the trail. I'll bet Jasper Privett and his posse of gunmen from Red Rock have rid by more'n once and never dreamed we'd gone up that cliff-face, Fusty."

"Nobody never would dream it," Fusty said. "And if they did find the trail they'd turn back when they kem to that rock face which stands right up flat like a wall and seems to dam the path."

"Couldn't believe me when you said we could ride round it, Fusty. Didn't believe it even when I saw. And then the ride through that sort of tunnel with the cliffs risin' sheer hundreds of feet up and in places so close together that the ponies' flanks brushed the walls."

"Well, I rid in thataway when I was eighteen years old," said Fusty, "and I found me in this place. It was just the same then as it is now. But from that day to this I never set foot hyar again till I brought you."

"You wasn't an outlaw then with a price on yore head, old-timer, and a neck to save from stretchin', like me."

"Nope," Fusty conceded, looking round the place as if scared. "But there was another reason why I never kem again, Jerry. I found a dead man hyar."

"You found a what?" Jerry Garrison tossed away his cigarette in alarm.

"I found a dead man hyar. He was lying over thar, near that jutting out pint," said Fusty, indicating a spot across the grass grown space. "He couldn't have been dead long, and yet his clothes were ribboned to rags, there wuz hardly any flesh on his bones, and the buzzards flew in flocks as my hoss shied. He wuz just a skeleton."

"Crikey, old-timer! What did you do?" Jerry asked in an awed voice.

"Bolted. But it was dusk. Soon night came. So I had to out-span an' sleep 'longside my pony till the day broke."

"An' then?" "I took me over to where the skeleton lay and looked for marks of identification. But wouldja believe me, he hadn't a thing on him to show who he was or from whence he kem—didn't even carry a visitin'-card. There wuz nothing in his pockets. There wuz holsters to his belt, but no guns in 'em. Couldn't account for how he kem there, and not knowin' what better to do, I dug a shallow hole and buried him, pilin' rocks on top. Kem over, Jerry, an' let me show you where he lies."

Fusty stumped in a bow-legged waddle across the arena, and Jerry Garrison, following on his heels, made out, as he drew nearer to the cliff face, an elongated mould of moss-grown rocks that measured, perhaps, ten feet long by four feet wide, the centre piled high.

Fusty whipped off his Stetson, and regarded the grave with a solemn stare.

"Here's where I planted him, Jerry," he said. "I cud do no more. Didn't know who he was. Couldn't tell how he got himself dead. And as soon's I cud I turned me back along the trail and rode back to Red Rock. I was that scared of the place I never kem back again till I brought you hyar. And I didn't say nothing about it to nobody, for, when you consider pints, what'd have bin the good?"

"It o'ud have been no good, old-timer," said Jerry, dangling his hat from lax fingers and staring reverentially at the mound. "I hope the guy has slept peaceful like under there. And, whether or no, I'm glad you found this place all them years ago, 'cos else how would we have fooled the army that's roamin' the mountains tryin' to get us?"

Fusty turned away, pressing his broad-brimmed hat down on his long grey hair once more, and starting off in another duck waddle across the stunted mountain grass.

"Somehow, Jerry, the place don't scare me now as it did when I first kem hyar," he said. "Reckon that's becous I'm with you."

"Sure!" laughed Jerry Garrison. "You'd be surprised the good effect I have on my pals. Now it's me for the wash-up. Then we'll go to sleep!"

The Way Out!

THE two outlaws were in no hurry to leave their sanctuary and face the gunmen who were waiting for them down the mountain trails.

They loved the peace and quiet of the place, and they needed rest.

But the next morning after breakfast, as Jerry Garrison turned the tale of Joe McKraw had told about the skeleton over and over in his mind, he reached a point in the story which made him leap to his feet with a started yelp.

"Fusty, you dumb-legged old wart!" he shouted. "When you kem up here aged eighteen didn't it strike you to look around for the other guy who made the trail?"

"Which other guy?" asked Fusty, munching at a wedge of stale cheese. "There warn't no other guy."

"But you said you found two tracks made by nailed boots in that narrow footway from which that bit of broken rock fell."

Fusty lowered his hand and gave Jerry a startled look, a hunk of cheese gripped between his two rows of sound, white teeth. His eyes blinked.

"D'you know, kid," he said, speaking slowly and solemnly, "I never give that other guy a thought till now."

"Why should you? You'd need to have brains in your empty pan," said Jerry Garrison, with a grim, but affectionate smile. "All the same, accordin' to the way you read the tracks, there was another guy. And that makes me think."

"Don't let the effort exhaust you," retorted Fusty, powdering up the cheese with jaws that rose and fell with a shutter-like motion.

"I'm thinkin', Fusty, since you saw nothing of Number Two while you wuz up here, and didn't notice any fresh tracks on the way back, that that other guy must have left this place by another way."

"There ain't another way," said Fusty, shaking his grizzled head emphatically.

"You don't know. On your own showin' you were too scared to look. You were so scared you hadn't given Number Two a thought in all of sixty years."

"What do you mean?" asked Fusty indignantly.

"Said you wuz eighteen when you kem up hyar, didn't you? Eighteen and sixty makes seventy-eight; an' that's takin' years off'n your age, as the bride does when she signs the marriage register."

"Me seventy-eight! I'm not seventy-eight!" Fusty protested angrily.

"Eighty-eight, then, or ninety-eight!" said Jerry teasingly. "What's it matter? You look all a hundred and eight. But, to get back to that other guy, pard; my opinion is there's another way out, and he must have found it. That's why you didn't see him."

"Well," growled Fusty sulkily, "what wuz he doin' hyar?"

"Dunno! Can't ask him. But the one thing we can do, old-timer, is look for that other way out."

Fusty was willing, and, accordingly, they searched the irregularly shaped arena, which kept narrowing and then breaking out into fresh pockets among the rocky cliffs; whereupon, deciding that it would be easier to ride, they went back for their ponies, saddled-up, and continued the search on horseback.

And as they went, Jerry Garrison grew more and more excited.

The way led downward. At times they had to rub against rock to get along. Then the trail would open out. And at last, without any other warning than a growing airiness and intensification of light, they came out upon a narrow plateau, from which the trail broadened and dipped downward.

(Jerry and Fusty make an amazing discovery in next week's thrilling instalment of our great Western adventure yarn!)



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