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No. 1,349. Vol. XLIV.

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The Ramblers' Recruit!



When the St. Jim's First Eleven are beaten by the Wayland Ramblers in an exciting football match, the hero of the hour is the Ramblers' new recruit—Tom Merry!

CHAPTER 1. Dusting D'Arcy!

"WILL it wain?" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's asked that question as he looked out of the doorway of the School House.

There was a drift of clouds in the winter sky, but the air was clear and dry. It was a half-holiday at St. Jim's, the first of the new term, and most of the fellows were streaming down to the football ground.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with his monocle jammed into his eye, was regarding the sky anxiously.

"Star-gazing, old chap?" asked Jack Blake, coming out of the House, and giving Arthur Augustus a mighty slap on the shoulder as he asked the question.

D'Arcy gave a howl as he staggered forward and went flying down the steps of the School House.

He just saved himself from falling by hopping from one step to another, but by the time he had reached the ground he had overbalanced, and there he sat down.

"Ow!"

Blake looked down at him in astonishment.

"My hat! What did you do that for, Gussy?" he asked.

"Yow!"

"Let's see you do it again!" exclaimed Monty Lowther of the Shell, as he came out. "Blessed if I knew you were so clever at gymnastics!"

"Weally, Lowtah—"

"Go it!" said Blake heartily. "Stand on the top step and look at the sky, and I'll give you another smack, and—"

"You uttah ass—"

"Eh?"

"I wufuse to do anythin' of the sort."

Arthur Augustus scrambled to his feet and dusted his trousers. His aristocratic face was very wrathful.

"I weward you as a wuffianly ass, Blake! I have half a mind to give you a feahful thwashin'!"

"But—"

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"You have thwown me into a fluttah, and made my clothes all dustay."

And the swell of St. Jim's flicked a few specks of dust from his almost immaculate "bags."

Jack Blake grinned.

"Well, if that's your gratitude for a chap greeting you in a friendly way, I can only say you don't understand friendship," he said. "I'm ashamed of you, Gussy!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"No, don't apologise. It's too late now!" said Blake in a very lofty way.

"You uttah ass!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "I wasn't goin' to apologise. I should wufuse to do anythin' of the sort! I considah—"

Blake waved his hand.

"Now that matter's settled," he went on in his cheerful way, "I'll dust your jacket if you like, Gussy."

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Is my jacket dustay, too?"

"There are some specks on it."

"Pway dust them off, deah boy."

"Certainly! Here goes!"

Blake started.

Smack!

Blake's hand came down on D'Arcy's shoulder violently. If there was a speck of dust there, it must have been demolished.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy felt almost demolished, too. He gave a wild yell and tottered forward.

"Don't run away!" exclaimed Blake. "That's only one speck. There's another speck on the other shoulder."

"Ow!"

"Come a bit nearer."

"You feahful ass! You did that on purpose!"

Blake nodded.

"Of course I did," he said. "You wanted me to knock that speck of dust off, didn't you?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Manners and Lowther.

"Pway stop cacklin', you Shell boundahs—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

By Martin Clifford.

"There's another speck on the other shoulder," said Blake. "Do you want me to knock it off? I can't wait here all the afternoon, you know. It's the first half in the new term, and I can't waste it wholly dusting your jacket."

"You uttah ass!"

"Let's get it over—"

Arthur Augustus backed away.

"If you lay hands on me again, Blake, I shall stwike you! I should be sowwy to have to do so, but if you play any more of your wotten twicks I shall have no wesource but to administah a feahful thwashin'!"

"But I'm going to dust your jacket."

"You're not!" shouted D'Arcy, still backing away. "I warn you— Ow!"

"You!" said another voice, as D'Arcy backed into somebody and trod upon his foot. "You silly ass!"

"Weally, Figgins—"

"You!" said Figgins of the New House, dancing on one foot. "You duffer! What do you mean by walking backwards like a blessed crab?"

"I wefuse to be compared to a cwab—"

"Oh, don't mind Gussy, Figgy!" said Blake. "He's always a bother. He's worrying me to dust his jacket for him now, and he won't keep still."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Coming down to the footer, Blake?" asked Figgins. "As it's turning out fine we might get up a scratch match."

"Good egg!"

"Speakin' of footah," said Arthur Augustus, "I was wondewin' if it would wain, when that silly ass came and stwuck me on the shouldah! I—"

"Doesn't look like rain," said Figgins.

D'Arcy refixed his monocle and gazed at the sky. Certainly, in spite of the drift of cloud, the heavens gave promise of fine weather.

"Yaas, wathah! Upon the whole, I wathah think it will be fine," said Arthur Augustus. "Undah the circs, I have decided to take you fellows for a little wun."

"Eh?"

"You are prowbably awah," said D'Arcy, "that St. Jim's seniahs are playin' Wayland Wambblers on Saturday."

"What about it? It's only a senior match!" said Blake.

"Yaas, but I suppose we take some intewest in it, although it is not, of course, of so much importance as a juniah match," said Arthur Augustus. "I know it will mean a feahfully tough match—I heard Kildare say so."

"Well, if they'd play a few chaps out of the Fourth we'd help them out," said Blake, with a yawn. "If Kildare knew his bisney as a footer captain—"

"Well?" said a quiet, pleasant voice.

Jack Blake swung round in dismay. Kildare of the Sixth, the captain of St. Jim's, had just swung out of the School House, and he had paused as he heard the words of the Fourth Former.

CHAPTER 2.

The Wayland Recruit!

KILDARE—the big, handsome Sixth Former—was football captain of St. Jim's. He was the most popular fellow in the Sixth, and the idol of the juniors.

In spite of Blake's cheeky remark he was one of Kildare's

most devoted worshippers, and everything that Kildare did was right in his eyes. According to the St. Jim's juniors there never was a fellow who was such a fine footballer as Kildare—there never was such a swimmer, never such a walker or runner, never such a cricketer. And, indeed, Kildare deserved most, if not all, of the admiration with which the youngsters regarded him.

Blake coloured as he met the captain's eyes.

Kildare smiled grimly.

"Well?" he repeated.

"Ahem!" said Blake.

"Let me see," remarked Kildare. "You were saying that if I knew my business as a footer captain—"

"Oh, it's all right!" said Blake resignedly. "How many? I can stand it!"

"How many what?"

"Lines."

Kildare laughed.

"None," he said. "But you should be a little more careful, Blake. That is all."

And Kildare walked away.

Blake ran after him impulsively.

"I say, Kildare, I'm sorry. I was only joking, you know. We all know you're the best footer captain St. Jim's ever had or could have."

"Thanks!" said Kildare. "If you're satisfied, Blake, I needn't have any doubts about it, I'm sure."

Blake grunted as the St. Jim's captain walked away. Arthur Augustus regarded his chum disapprovingly through his monocle.

"Well, I must say that I wegard you as an ass, Blake," he said.

"It was all your fault, you chump!" exclaimed Blake, exasperated. "What on earth did you want to bring up the subject of the Wayland match just then for?"

"Weally, Blake—"

"You're always putting your blessed foot in it!"

"I wefuse to wegard it in that light. You were wankly impertinent, and had I been Kildare I should have thwashed you!"

"Br-r-r-r-r-r!"

"That is a silly cjaulation, Blake, and not an argument. Howevah, to return to the point, the St. Jim's seniahs are playin' Wayland Wamblahs on Saturday, and it's goin' to be a vewy tough match. Now, I know that the Wamblahs are at pwactice to-day, on Wayland Common, and I think it would be a good ideah to go ova to see them. I've nevah seen Wayland Wamblahs play, and I am cuwious to see how they shape, you know."

Jack Blake nodded.

"It's not a bad idea!" he exclaimed. "I'll come over with you, Gussy. You Shell bounders coming?"

"I'll come," said Monty Lowther. "I don't feel like beginning footer practice to-day. Do you, Manners?"

Manners shook his head.

"No," he said, "and for the same reason, I think."

Blake looked at them.

"Still thinking about Tom Merry?" he said.

Lowther nodded.

"Can't help it," he said. "It seems so rotten to be beginning footer this term without Tom here. The team won't be the same without him."

"Yaas, wathah!" assented Arthur Augustus. "I am sure we miss Tom Mewwy as much as you fellows do, and I wish he could have come back to St. Jim's. I wondah when we shall see him again?"

"I wonder."

"I'll come over to Wayland, too," Figgins remarked. "It's fine enough for the bikes. Shall we go on wheels?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then the sooner we start the better," Figgins remarked. "They'll be doing their practice early, as it gets dark so soon."

"Let's get off, then."

The juniors walked round to the bicycle shed for their

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coachmen. Kangaroo, the Cornstalk junior, joined them, and six juniors went pedalling out of the gates of St. Jim's.

The road was hard and frosty, the air cold and dry. It was an ideal afternoon for a cycle run, and the St. Jim's juniors put on speed and fairly whizzed along the lanes. They were in sight of Wayland Moor in a very short time.

In the keen, sharp winter air several football games were in progress on Wayland Common. But the size of the watching crowd showed the juniors where to look for the Wayland Ramblers. The Ramblers were an amateur team, and they had made quite a name lately in the locality.

"Here they are!" exclaimed Blake, as he saw a thick crowd round the Ramblers' ground. "They're at it already, and there are a lot to see them. I suppose there's no charge for admission to the practice, though."

This was the case. The gates were open, and the people came in and out as they chose. Only on match days the Ramblers made a charge to cover expenses. The juniors ran their bikes into the ground, leaned them against the wall, and then made their way to the front to see the teams.

The Ramblers were in full force for the practice, and they were playing a scratch team in blue shirts. The Ramblers themselves were in red.

There was a pretty good crowd round the pitch, but the juniors secured front places close to the scratch team's goal. They watched the players with great interest. Although they might affect to take little notice of senior matches, the juniors, as a matter of fact, had St. Jim's football fame very near to their hearts. They knew that Wayland Ramblers were the hardest team Kildare and his men ever had to meet, and they were anxious to see the men who might lower the St. Jim's colours, and to "size" them up and calculate what chance they had against St. Jim's First Eleven.

"They look a good lot," Monty Lowther remarked.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Some of them only lads, too," said Blake. "I suppose the average age is a year or two older than the St. Jim's seniors."

"Looks like it," said Figgins. "But there's one chap there who isn't a day over fifteen, if he's that! My only summer hat!"

"What's the matter?"

"Look at that chap!"

"What chap?"

"Inside-right!"

The juniors looked more closely at the player in the red shirt, the fellow whom Figgins had judged at a distance not to be more than fifteen. He was closer now, and they could see his face clearly.

A simultaneous exclamation of amazement burst from all the juniors.

"Tom Merry!"

"Bai Jove!"

CHAPTER 3. Football Foes!

TOM MERRY did not hear the exclamation of the St. Jim's juniors.

He did not even know they were on the ground—he was too intent upon the game.

The scratch team was composed mainly of Wayland reserves, but they were giving the First Team a hard game. It was the first half of the match, and the Ramblers had scored only one goal.

Tom Merry was playing inside-right, with Blane at outside-right, Carter at centre-forward, and Yorke at inside-left. The Ramblers were attacking hotly, and the scratch team were doing their best to hold them. But it was in vain.

Tom Merry had the ball, and he brought it close in before passing to the centre-forward.

The centre, tackled by a back, sent it on to Yorke, who rushed it forward and slammed it in.

"Good old Ramblers!" shouted the crowd. "Goal!"

Then the whistle rang out. The two sides trooped off for the interval.

Tom Merry's face was flushed and happy as he went off the field with the Ramblers. He had done very well in the first half of the scratch match. He knew that himself, and, besides, Yorke had told him so.

Mr. Philpot, the manager of the Wayland Club, was waiting at the gate, and he clapped Tom Merry on the shoulder as the junior came off with the rest.

"Very good, Merry!" he exclaimed. "I wish you were playing with us for good."

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Tom Merry smiled brightly.

"I wish I were, sir," he said.

In the handsome dressing-room of the Ramblers it was noticeable that the other players were very kind to Tom Merry. There was only one exception. That exception was Blane, who played outside-right. He said nothing to the boy, and when his eyes dwelt upon Tom Merry they gleamed with dislike. There was bad blood between the winger and the latest recruit to the Ramblers.

It dated from the day when Tom Merry had offered to play for the Ramblers at Rimdale, taking the place of a fellow who was injured before the match.

Tom Merry had accepted Mr. Philpot's offer to stay with him as a guest for a week or two, and to play for the Ramblers in the meantime.

There was no reason why he should not accept it, and to play once more on the footer field did him good, especially after the trials and anxiety he had been through since the loss of his fortune compelled him to leave St. Jim's.

"You have been putting up a good game, Merry," Yorke said in the dressing-room. "You 'made' that last goal, you know."

"It's very kind of you to say so," said Tom Merry.

"It's true! I wish you were permanently in the team," said Yorke. "Perhaps if Mr. Philpot finds you a post in Wayland somewhere you may play regularly for the Ramblers."

Tom Merry nodded.

"I should like to," he said.

"Oh, he won't go; you needn't be afraid of that," said Blane, with a sneer. "He knows when he's dropped into a soft corner."

"Shut up, Blane," said Yorke angrily.

Tom Merry turned towards the outside-right with flashing eyes.

"What do you mean by that, Mr. Blane?" he exclaimed.

"I mean what I say," replied the winger coolly. "You've wormed yourself into Mr. Philpot's good graces, and you're not likely to get out of your own accord."

Tom Merry's cheeks burned.

"I have no intention of playing for the Ramblers after the match next Saturday," he said. "That is what I am staying for."

Blane shrugged his shoulders.

"We shall see!" he sneered.

"Hold your tongue, Blane," said Yorke angrily; "and look here, I warn you to be more civil to Tom Merry. He's a more valuable member of the team than you are, and if I had to leave one of you out to keep the peace, you're not the one I should keep in the team."

Blane bit his lip savagely. But he said no more. He did not care to enter into a wordy conflict with Yorke.

The brief interval over, the Ramblers and the scratch team lined up once more in the clear, frosty air.

"Good old Merry!"

"Back up, Tommy!"

"Play up!"

Tom Merry started.

Yorke laughed.

"Some friends of yours in the crowd, I expect," he remarked.

"Fellows over from St. Jim's, I expect," said Tom Merry, with a flush of pleasure in his cheeks. "They haven't forgotten me there."

He looked round quickly for his old friends. The whistle had not sounded yet for the beginning of the play.

The sight of a silk hat in the crowd indicated where Arthur Augustus stood. Tom Merry waved his hand, and the chums of St. Jim's waved back.

There was no time for more. The whistle rang out, and the play restarted.

The Ramblers were having things more their own way now, the scratch team beginning to tire after the strenuous first half. The chums of St. Jim's watched keenly.

"Fancy seeing Tom Merry here!" Monty Lowther remarked, still in great wonder. "I thought he had started for Southampton when he left Gussy's place."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And here he is at Wayland," said Manners. "He's changed his mind, that's clear. But the surprising thing is, his playing for the Ramblers."

"I wonder—" began Blake, and then he paused.

His chums looked at him.

"You wondah what, deah boy?"

"Why, Wayland are playing Kildare and his lot on Saturday. Will Tom Merry be playing for them then?"

"Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that!"

Monty Lowther gave a whistle.

"Not likely!" he remarked.

"I don't know," said Kangaroo. "He's a member of the



With a hoarse cry of fury, Blane threw himself upon Tom Merry before the junior could climb over the stile. "Let me go!" cried Tom, struggling fiercely in the man's grasp. "You young cub!" snarled Blane. "I'll smash you!"

team now, anyway. This is a practice match, the last before they play St. Jim's, I believe. It looks to me as if Tom Merry will be playing against St. Jim's on Saturday afternoon."

"Phew!"

"Bai Jove!"

It was a curious question. It could not be decided with certainty till after the practice match was over, when the juniors meant to see Tom Merry.

"Let's get round towards the gate," said Blake. "We can see Tommy as he comes off after the match, and they may let us into the dressing-room."

"Yaas, watah!"

The chums made their way round towards the exit from the field. The match was nearly at its finish now. Tom Merry had kicked a goal, and Yorke had scored another, and the reserves were well beaten when the whistle went.

"Hallo, Tommy!"

Tom Merry paused as he was going off the field with the other players. From the crowd his chums were grinning at him.

"Hallo, old sons!" said Tom Merry.

"We want to speak to you, you know," Blake remarked.

"Wait a minute; I'll join you."

"Right-ho!"

The juniors waited while the crowd cleared off, and five minutes later Tom Merry came out of the dressing-room and joined them. He shook hands with the juniors with great pleasure.

"I'm jolly glad to see you again!" he exclaimed. "I did not know any of you fellows would be on the ground here."

"It's jollay wippin' to meet you once more, Tom Mewwy!"

"Yes, rather!"

"You're playing for the Ramblers now?"

"Only for a time," said Tom Merry.

"Are you playing against St. Jim's?" asked Monty Lowther. "I suppose you know that the Ramblers are playing our First Eleven on Saturday?"

"My hat!"

CHAPTER 4.

A Warm Welcome!

TOM MERRY looked at the juniors in astonishment. It was evident that the announcement was news to him.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Didn't you know, deah boy?"

"Certainly not!"

"But are you playing for the Ramblers on Saturday?" asked Lowther.

"Yes."

"Then you're playing against St. Jim's."

"Oh!"

Tom Merry was looking dismayed. He had been glad to oblige Mr. Philpot by playing for the Wayland Ramblers, but he did not know that a match against his old school was included in the programme. If he had known that, his acceptance of the manager's offer, kind as it was, would have been much more doubtful.

"How do you get to be playing for the Ramblers?" asked Manners.

Tom Merry explained:

"It was after I left you fellows at Gussy's place in the vacation. You see, the Ramblers were playing Rindale when I stopped there, and one of their men was hurt before the match, and I offered to take his place just for a chance to play a bit of footer again. Mr. Philpot—he's the Ramblers' manager—liked my play, and as he found that I was looking for work, he asked me to stay with him for a week or two. He said the Ramblers had another match on before his injured man would be well enough to play, and asked me to take his place for the time. He also said he might be able to find me a post of some sort in Wayland."

"I see."

"I mentioned to Mr. Philpot that I had been at St. Jim's, and left owing to losing all my tin." Tom Merry explained. "I didn't know that he thought much about it, and he mayn't have any idea that I should object to playing against the old school."

"But you would?"

"Yes, rather. Here's Mr. Philpot now; I'll speak to him."

The handsome, stout gentleman, in the silk hat and frock coat, who was coming from the clubhouse, paused as he passed the juniors. Tom Merry presented the chums of St. Jim's to him.

Mr. Philpot greeted them very kindly.

"I hear the match next Saturday is against St. Jim's, sir?" Tom Merry said.

Mr. Philpot nodded.

"Yes. Did you not know that?"

"It wasn't mentioned to me, sir."

"No?"

Tom Merry coloured. His chums drew away and stared at the road, to give Tom an opportunity of speaking alone with the manager.

Mr. Philpot looked at him.

"I did not know you were not aware of it, but I did not suppose it made any difference, Merry," he said. "Have you any objection to playing?"

"Well, sir, you see, St. Jim's is my old school."

"Does that make any difference?"

Tom Merry hesitated.

"I don't know that it does," he said at last.

"Why, you might play in an Old Boys' match against the school, and you might meet your old schoolfellows anywhere in any team you play!" said Mr. Philpot, with a smile.

"Yes, I suppose so, sir."

"But if you have any real objection to playing, of course, I should ask Yorke to leave you out," said Mr. Philpot quickly. "I hope you will think it over before deciding, however. As you know, Grey will not recover from his injury for some time, and, in the meantime, I have depended upon you instead of looking out for another player."

"Then I shall play, sir. After your kindness to me, I should not be likely to leave you in the lurch, Mr. Philpot."

The manager shook hands with him.

"That is settled, then, Merry?"

"Yes, sir."

And Mr. Philpot, with a nod to the group of juniors, walked on.

Tom Merry rejoined his chums.

"I'm playing on Saturday," he announced abruptly.

"Against St. Jim's?"

"Yes."

"Bai Jove!"

"Well, I don't see that it matters," said Blake thoughtfully. "It was a bit of a surprise at first, that's all."

A "CATCH" TO COME!



"Where yer bin, Billy?"

"Fishin' in the canal."

"Catch anything?"

"No—but I ain't bin

ome yet!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to A. Worwood, 95, Springcroft Road, Hall Green, Birmingham, 11.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Are you free for the rest of the afternoon, Tom?" Monty Lowther asked.

"Yes; I was thinking of coming back with you fellows and seeing Kildare, to explain the matter to him," said Tom Merry.

"That's what I was going to suggest."

"Good! Then I'll come!"

"Have you got a bike here, deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Tom Merry laughed.

"Bikes are things of the past with me, Gussy," he said.

"If you're all riding, I'll stand on behind a machine, as we used to do."

The juniors of St. Jim's took their machines out into the road, and Tom Merry mounted behind Lowther on his machine, standing on the footstep, and keeping a hand on Lowther's shoulder. He had often had a lift in the same way when he was a St. Jim's junior himself. They pedalled off down the frosty road, chatting cheerfully, and soon came in sight of St. Jim's.

"Bai Jove," Arthur Augustus remarked, "the fellows will be glad to see Tom Mewy again!"

"Yes, rather!" said Kangaroo. "We'll have a bit of a celebration this afternoon in honour of the occasion."

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"Good idea," said Figgins. "I can tell you the New House will play up!"

"Here we are at St. Jim's!" said Jack Blake, jumping off his machine in the old gateway.

"Hallo!" roared Figgins, in his stentorian tones. "Hallo, people! Here's Tom Merry come to visit you!"

There was a shout from the quadrangle, and a crowd of fellows rushed up at once, and in a moment Tom Merry was having both hands shaken.

CHAPTER 5.

Like Old Times!

"HURRAH! It's Tom Merry!"

"Good old Tommy!"

"Here we are again!"

There was no doubt about the warmth of Tom Merry's welcome. Fellows of the Shell, the Fourth, and the Third came up and shook hands with him, and thumped him on the back till he was sore. Even Fifth Formers forgot for the moment that they were great and dignified in comparison with Shell fellows, and greeted Tom Merry heartily.

"Jolly glad to see you again!" said Lefevre of the Fifth.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hip-pip!" shouted Wally D'Arcy of the Third Form.

"Bravo!"

"Yaas, wathah! Bwavo!"

And Tom Merry was marched to the School House amid a joyous crowd. Fatty Wynn dug Figgins in the ribs.

"Figg, old man, we shall have to stand a jolly good feed to celebrate this."

Figgins chuckled.

"Trust you to think of a feed!" he remarked.

"Well, have you got a better idea? We stood a feed the last time Tom Merry came to St. Jim's, and I don't see why we couldn't do better than stand another now."

"Oh, all right, my son, go ahead!"

Tom Merry stopped when he entered the School House.

"I've got to speak to Kildare," he said.

"This way, old son," said Monty Lowther.

And a crowd of juniors marched Tom Merry to Kildare's study.

Blake, D'Arcy, and Manners tapped at the door at once, and the captain of St. Jim's called out to them to come in.

Blake opened the door.

"Here's Tom Merry, Kildare."

Kildare, who was having his tea, and chatting to Darrell of the Sixth, rose to his feet at once, and held out his hand to the hero of the Shell.

"Glad to see you, Tom Merry!" he exclaimed.

"Same here," said Darrell, shaking hands with Tom Merry in his turn.

"I want to speak to you, Kildare, if I may."

"Certainly. Sit down. You youngsters cut off."

The "youngsters" cut off, and Kildare turned to Tom Merry with a smile.

"It's very pleasant to see you here again," he remarked. "Does this mean that you are coming back to St. Jim's for good, Tom Merry?"

The junior shook his head.

"I'm sorry, no, Kildare."

"Well, I wish you were. Your friends miss you a great deal; and the junior footer team won't be the same this year without you. But it can't be helped, I suppose. How have you been getting on? I've heard that you spent the Christmas vac with D'Arcy, after all."

"Yes. I'm staying with Mr. Philpot, in Wayland, now."

Kildare looked a little surprised.

"Mr. Philpot, the banker?" he asked.

"Yes."

"He's manager of the Wayland Ramblers," said Kildare. "Our First Eleven are playing them on Saturday."

"That's what I want to speak to you about, Kildare."

"Yes."

"I shall be playing for the Ramblers."

Kildare started.

"What?"

"That's news," said Darrell. "How does it happen?"

Tom Merry explained the circumstances. The two Sixth Formers listened attentively. Kildare nodded when Tom Merry had concluded.

"I don't see how you can do anything else," he remarked. "You don't object to my playing against St. Jim's, then?"

asked Tom Merry eagerly.

Kildare laughed.

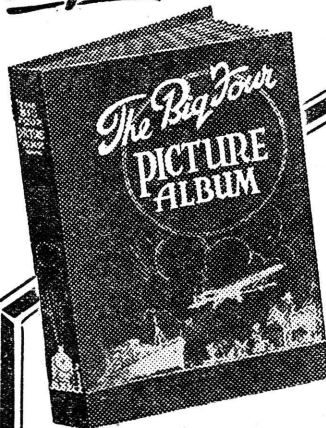
"Why should I object? You don't belong to the school now."

"I still look upon myself as a St. Jim's chap."

"Quite right, so you are. But when a team visits you, you know, we've sometimes lent substitutes, one of our own

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fellows to play against us. It will be all right, Tom. You are playing for the Ramblers now, and all you've got to do is to play your hardest on Saturday, and help to beat us if you can."

Tom Merry gave the St. Jim's captain a grateful look. "I'm glad you've put it like that," he said. "It would have seemed ungrateful to Mr. Philpot to draw out."

"That's all right," said Kildare. "We shall see you on Saturday, then. I'd make you stop to tea now, but I know your friends in the Lower Forms have some celebration on for you, and it would be too bad to disappoint them. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye, Kildare!"

Tom Merry left the study with a light heart. Blake and D'Arcy were waiting for him at the end of the passage. The swell of St. Jim's was looking a little excited.

"Here you are, deah boy!" D'Arcy exclaimed. "Is it all right?"

"Yes; Kildare's a brick!"

"Manners and Lowther are getting tea in the study," said Blake. "We're all coming. Figgins & Co. are bringing in some of the grub. This way!"

"Yaas, wathah; it will be a wippin' celebration, Tom Mewwy, deah boy!"

"It's awfully kind of you chaps—"

"Wats!"

"And many of 'em," said Blake. "It does us good to see your cheerful-chivvy again. It won't look so cheerful, by the way, on Saturday, when you get a licking from our First Eleven."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, this is the first occasion when I can't say that I hope St. Jim's will win," he said.

"Bai Jove, yaas!"

There was a scent of cooking in the Shell study as Blake and D'Arcy piloted Tom Merry in. Manners and Lowther were looking very warm and busy, and Fatty Wynn was lending a helping hand.

"Nearly ready," said Monty Lowther cheerfully. "You fellows amuse our guest while we're finishing."

"I'll help," said Tom Merry. "I suppose you still keep the things in the same old places, eh? The bread in the bookcase, and the jamptot in the desk?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Yes."

Tom Merry helped cheerfully; and as he moved about the study, which was so crowded that everybody got in everybody else's way—just like old times—Tom Merry could scarcely believe that the late events were not all a dream, and that he was not a Shell fellow in the St. Jim's as of old.

CHAPTER 6. A Cry for Help!

TOM MERRY enjoyed that tea-party in the crowded study, and stayed as long as he could with his old chums, and when the time came to depart they easily obtained a pass from Kildare to walk with him half the way to Wayland.

Tom Merry could not leave his departure too late, as he wanted to get to Mr. Philpot's house before the usual bed-time. The whole party of juniors tramped down the lane from St. Jim's, turned into the footpath by the stile, and then along under the frozen branches of the trees in Rylcombe Wood.

It was a bitterly cold night, with a clear moon shining through the frosty branches. In sight of the Wayland road, the juniors bade farewell to Tom Merry, and Tom tramped on alone. The other fellows turned for the walk back to St. Jim's.

"Jolly cold!" exclaimed Blake. "Walk sharp!"

"Hold on, deah boys!"

"Oh, buck up, Gussy!"

"Pway stop a minute—"

"What's the matter?"

"I've drowped my eyeglass!"

"Oh, rats!"

"If you say wats to me, Lowthah—"

"Rats—I mean wats!"

"You uttah ass—"

"Now, come on, Gussy!" exclaimed Herries. "We can't stay here all night while you slang that Shell boulder, you know."

"I've drowped my eyeglass."

"We don't mind," said Digby. "I suppose you can leave it there, can't you?"

"I wufuse to do anythin' of the sort."

"Now look here, Gussy—"

"I'm looking for my beastlay monocle, don't you know!"

The juniors glared at the swell of the Fourth. He was stooping in the pathway under the trees, trying to discover

the fallen monocle by the aid of the moonlight—a somewhat hopeless task.

The night was very cold indeed, and a chill wind blew through the leafless trees, and it was not pleasant to stand about watching the elegant junior groping for his eyeglass.

"Can't you strike a match, you ass?" exclaimed Manners.

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"Well, why don't you light one?" asked Figgins.

"Because I haven't one. I find that cawwyrin' a matchbox has an effect of bulgin' out a fellow's pocket."

"You—you chump!"

"Weally, Figgay—"

"Here's a box of matches," said Kerr. "Catch!"

Whiz!

"Yawwoh!"

"What's the matter?"

"Yowp! That howwid wottah has hurled that wotten matchbox at my nose! Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, I told you to catch," said Kerr. "I didn't say catch it with your nose. You should look out."

"You feahful ass—"

"Rats!"

"I wegard you as a dangewous chump, Kerr!"

"Go hon!"

"I am sowwy to detain you in this cold night, deah boys, but undah the circs, I have no wesource but to give Kerr a feahful thwashin'."

"Ass!"

"Weally, deah boys—"

"Go it!" said Kerr cheerfully.
 "Unless you instantly apologise——"
 "Rats!"
 "Then I have no other wresource——"
 "More rats!"
 "That was enough for Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. He rushed at the Scots junior, brandishing his fists in the air.
 "Stop him!" howled Blake. "We shan't be home till morning at this rate."
 "Collar him!"
 "I uttably wefuse to be collahed!"
 "It's all right," said Kerr, with a grin. "I'll collar him."
 "Weally, Kerr—— Ow!"
 Kerr had dodged the elegant junior's furious attack, and closed with D'Arcy. He had a strong grip round Arthur Augustus, and held him fast.
 "Wefuse me, you uttah wottah!" gasped Arthur Augustus.
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "You feahful outsiders——"
 "Will you make it pax?"
 "Certainly not! Wefuse me! You are wumplin' my clothes!"
 "My hat!" suddenly exclaimed Kerr, as he felt his hand come in contact with something that dangled behind D'Arcy as he embraced him. "The giddy monocle!"
 "Bai Jove! What!"
 "The eyeglass, you chump!"
 "Gweat, Scott!"
 Kerr released the swell of St. Jim's. It was the monocle, right enough. The cord it was attached to had swung behind D'Arcy, and the eyeglass had been dangling down his back. That was all.
 "Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy.
 "You—you fatheaded ass!" said Jack Blake, in measured tones. "You ought to be frog's-marched all the way back from here to St. Jim's!"
 "Weally, Blake——"
 "Oh, bump him!" exclaimed Kangaroo.
 "I wefuse to be bumped! I——"
 "Collar him!"
 The juniors made a threatening movement towards D'Arcy. In a few seconds more Arthur Augustus would have been seized and bumped on the muddy ground. But just at that moment a sound came ringing through the wood. It was a cry, and it came from the direction Tom Merry had taken towards the Wayland road. The cry echoed eerily among the frozen trees.
 "Help!"
 "Bai Jove!"
 "My hat!" exclaimed Blake. "Did you hear?"
 "Yes. It was Tom Merry!"
 "Come on!" shouted Lowther.
 He dashed away at top speed up the footpath, and the rest of the juniors followed pell-mell.

CHAPTER 7. Attacked!

TOM MERRY, leaving the St. Jim's juniors in the woodland path, had tramped on cheerfully towards the Wayland road.

He was feeling very cheered by his visit to St. Jim's and the kindness and friendship he had met with there. He whistled as he went, to keep himself company. As he reached the stile which gave access from the footpath to the Wayland road, he saw that someone was leaning upon it. It was the figure of a man, and as Tom Merry drew near he recognised the man, in spite of the uncertainty of the moonlight. It was Blane, the outside-right of the Wayland Ramblers' team.

Tom Merry was far from pleased at the meeting. There was no love lost between him and Blane, and many times the outside-right had shown him deep and unreasonable hatred. And a smell of strong liquor showed that the man had been drinking.

He straightened up a little as Tom Merry came up, but he did not offer to move so that the junior could get over the stile into the road.

"So it's you!" he said, in a husky voice, with a leer.
 "Yes, Mr. Blane, it's I," said Tom Merry civilly. "Would you mind letting me get over the stile?"

The winger did not move.
 "It's very late," said Tom Merry.
 "Late, is it?"
 "Yes. Please let me pass."

Blane laughed. His laugh sent a breath of spirituous fumes into Tom Merry's face, and the lad receded a step, with an involuntary expression of disgust.

Tom Merry had not suspected Blane of being a drinker

before. But he was hardly surprised. This was the cause, probably, of the fellow's bad temper and unreasonable nature. The strong drink acted upon his system in that way, making him savage and quarrelsome while he was so intoxicated, and irritable and peevish when he was sober.

Tom Merry realised that Blane was in a humour now for a dangerous quarrel. And he meant to do the best he could to keep the peace. He was not afraid of Blane, but he did not want any open quarrel with a member of the Ramblers' team. It would not be long before he left the Ramblers, and he wanted to go without any open enmity.

Blane was watching him with drunken seriousness.

"Well?" he stuttered.

"Please let me pass," said Tom Merry.

"You don't pass while I'm here!"

"But I want to get home," said Tom Merry persuasively.
 "I shall be shut out at Mr. Philpot's if I don't get in soon!"

Blane chuckled.

"I don't care, do I?"

Tom Merry made no answer. He could not move Blane from the step of the stile without a struggle, and he moved along to step over the top bar as far from the intoxicated winger as possible.

Blane saw his object, and sprawled along the stile to stop him.

"No, you don't!" he snarled.

Tom Merry drew a deep breath.

"Will you let me pass, Mr. Blane?"

"No, I won't!"

"I cannot remain here!"

The winger sneered.

"We'll see about that!" he replied.

Tom Merry clenched his hands.

"If you stop me I shall have to shift you!" he said.

"I don't want a row, Mr. Blane. Will you let me pass?"

"No!"

Tom Merry wasted no more time in words. He had either to remove the winger from his path by force, or spend as long a time in the frozen wood as Blane chose to keep him there—an alternative that was not to be thought of, in spite of his desire for peace.

He grasped the outside-right by the shoulders and dragged him away from the stile.

Blane seemed surprised by the attack, so much so that he made no resistance for the moment, and Tom Merry dragged him away without a struggle. Then he stood unsteadily, swaying from side to side, while Tom Merry moved quickly towards the stile. But before he could reach it Blane had recovered himself. With a hoarse cry of fury he threw himself upon Tom Merry, grasping him round the body, and endeavouring to throw him to the ground.

Tom Merry returned grasp for grasp, and struggled fiercely.

"Let me go!" he cried.

"I'll smash you, you young cub!"

Boy as he was, Tom Merry might not have had the worst of the tussle, but as he struggled in Blane's grip his foot caught in a root, and he went heavily to the ground.

The fall dazed him, and Blane, falling upon him, knocked almost all the breath out of his body.

A dark, savage face loomed over Tom Merry in the moonlight.

"I've got you now!"

And a heavy fist crashed down upon him.

It was a cowardly blow; perhaps Blane would not have struck it if he had been sober.

Tom Merry's head reeled, and lights danced before his eyes. He clenched his fists and struck out fiercely, blindly.

Blane gave a yelping cry.

Tom Merry's knuckles had crashed upon his mouth, and there was a spurt of red from cut lips.

"Oh! I'll choke you for that!"

The man's hands grasped at Tom Merry's throat.

The boy looked up in startled horror.

It was the face of a madman that looked down at him—a man mad with rage and drink, and no longer responsible for what he did.

"You mad fool!" gasped Tom Merry. "Let go!"

"I'll choke you!"

"Help!"

Tom Merry shouted out the cry desperately as he felt the hands grasping at his throat. He had no time for more.

Tom Merry's brain reeled.

He strove fiercely, but in vain, to throw off that terrible grip. The savage face above him seemed to dilate, to grow larger in size, and swim before his startled eyes.

A mist swam before him.

Then suddenly, in the midst of the gathering darkness, there was a sound of rushing feet, and the grasp upon his throat was relaxed, and he gulped in air—gasp after gasp, as if he would never cease.



"That person," said Gussy, pointing to Blane, "had his hand in Tom Mewwy's jacket when I looked into the dwassin'-woom! Pewwaps he will explain what he was doin'!" Blane's face went white with guilt. "It's a lie!" he blustered.

CHAPTER 8 Late Hours!

"**B**BETTER, old chap?"

It was Monty Lowther's voice.

He had Tom Merry's head on his knee, and Manners was fanning him with his cap.

Blake and Figgins and Kerr were holding Blane down. The drunken ruffian was not struggling. He had already discovered that that was futile.

Tom Merry passed his hand across his brow, and looked round wildly.

"You—you here!" he stammered.

"We heard you call!"

"Thank Heaven! I believe that drunken fool would have murdered me!" gasped Tom Merry.

Lowther caught his breath.

"I—I almost thought you were gone when we ran up," he said. "We yanked the cad off in no time. Better, old chap?"

"Yes; I'm all right now."

"Bettah have a bit of a west, old chap," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sagely. "You look wathah wotten, you know."

Tom Merry breathed deeply. The colour was coming slowly back to his cheeks. His heart was beating more evenly.

He rose with the assistance of his chum.

"I'm all right," he repeated. "As for that rascal——"

"We'll take him to the police station."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"No, no!" he exclaimed quickly.

"Why not?"

"I don't want him locked up."

"But he's a dangerous character!" exclaimed Figgins.

"I suppose he was going to rob you?"

"Oh, no!"

"What did he want then?"

"It was spite—and he was drunk."

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, catching sight

of the prisoner's face in the moonlight. "I've seen that chap; he was playin' for Wayland this aftahnoon."

"Not one of the Ramblers?" exclaimed Digby.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"My hat!"

"Yes; he's Blane, the outside-right," said Tom Merry.

"We're on pretty bad terms, though goodness knows it's not my fault. I can't bring any disgrace upon the Ramblers by showing him up. If I mention the matter to Mr. Philpot, that will be enough, and he can act about it as he thinks fit."

"Yaas, wathah; I weally think that is the wight and pwopah way to look at it, Tom Mewwy. Pewwaps we ought to wag the wascal a little."

"He's too drunk to understand now," said Tom Merry.

"Let him go."

"He may go for you again."

"Oh, I'll keep clear of him!"

Monty Lowther shook his head decidedly.

"We'll let him go, if you like!" he exclaimed. "But we'll see you home as far as Mr. Philpot's house before we leave you. You're not safe with that scoundrel around."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry looked dubious.

"It will make you very late back," he said.

"That's all right; we can explain to the Housemaster."

"All serene, then."

"You can go, you scoundrel," said Monty Lowther, shaking Blane by the shoulder. "If I had my way, you'd be sent to prison, you brute!"

The outside-right gave him a stupid glare, and staggered away.

Tom Merry & Co. clambered over the stile, and, with the bodyguard of juniors, Tom made his way to Mr. Philpot's house.

At the door the chums left him.

"Good-night!" said Tom Merry. "I'm pretty late—"

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everybody seems to have gone to bed. You'll be jolly late in yourselves."

"That's all wight, deah boy!"

And the juniors took their leave.

The door closed, and the comrades of St. Jim's tramped on towards the wood. They clambered over the stile one more, and as they entered the footpath a dark figure lurched by them. It was Blane.

The winger gave the juniors a stare, and muttered something, and then went lurching on into the shadows and disappeared.

"Bai Jove! That chap's making a night of it!" remarked D'Arcy, as the party took their way through the wood.

"Looks like it," said Kangaroo. "Jolly lucky we saw Tom Merry home, I think—and lucky we heard him when he yelled."

The juniors tramped on to St. Jim's, and when they reached the school Blake had to peal three times upon the bell before there was a glimmer of light. Taggles, the porter, came down to the gates.

He held up his lantern and blinked at the juniors through the bars.

"So it's you!" he said grimly.

"Looks like it, old son!" said Blake cheerfully. "Open the door, Taggy. You're awfully nice to look at, I know; but it's too cold to stand here long."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Open the gate, Taggy," said Kerr. "I suppose you don't want us to report you for disrespect to your elders?" Taggles snorted.

"Which these is nice goings hon," he remarked. "Do you know that it's past midnight?"

"Good-night, sir!"

And within five minutes the juniors were in bed; and in one minute after that fast asleep.

CHAPTER 9.

The Quality of Mercy!

"MR. BLANE wishes to see you, Master Merry." Tom Merry looked sleepily out of bed at Mr. Philpot's valet.

The grey winter dawn was creeping in at the windows of his room in the banker's house in Wayland.

Tom Merry was sleeping later than usual, after staying up the previous night; but it was now only eight o'clock, an early hour for a call.

"Mr. Blane?" he repeated.

"Yes, sir."

"Ask him to come up, please."

"Very good, sir."

Tom Merry jumped out of bed as soon as the door had closed, and threw a coat about himself. He was not the possessor of a dressing-gown in these days. The door reopened, and Blane came in.

Tom Merry had gone to bed the previous night without considering fully what he was to do in the matter of Blane. It seemed inevitable that he must mention to Mr. Philpot the attack the Wayland winger had made upon him.

He had slept soundly until awakened by the announcement that the winger had come to see him, and so he had had no time to think over the matter.

It was easy enough to guess Blane's motive in calling.

He was sober in the morning, and he realised that he

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"Time you were in bed, Taggles," said Kangaroo. "Naughty boy! Open the gates, will you?"

Taggles slowly unlocked the gates.

"Come hin!" he said. "Nice goings hon, I must say. You're to report yourselves to your Housemaster as soon as you get in."

"Thanks, Taggy. I know how sympathetic you feel."

Taggles gave another snort.

"Which I saw Mr. Railton take out a cane—a nice thick one," he said. "Which I consider—"

"Shall we stay to listen to what Taggles considers, or shall we buzz?" said Monty Lowther, in his blandest tone.

"Buzz!" said the juniors, with one voice.

And they buzzed.

There was a light in Mr. Railton's study, and a shadow on the blind. The juniors knew that shadow. The Head was there.

"My hat!" said Blake. "I'm jolly glad we've got a good excuse this time. There's Dr. Holmes in Railton's den."

"Bai Jove! Yaas."

The juniors entered, and Blake tapped at Mr. Railton's door.

Good as their excuse was, they trembled a little as they entered and found the stern gaze of the Head and the School House master fixed upon them.

"So you have returned?" said Dr. Holmes severely.

"Yes, sir."

"Yaas, wathah, Doctah Holmes."

"And what is the meaning of this conduct?"

Blake explained.

The Head's face changed as he listened, and so did Mr. Railton's.

"Ah, that alters the case!" said the Head.

"Entirely so," said Mr. Railton, pushing away his cane in an absent sort of way.

"We thought we'd better see Tom Merry home, under the circumstances, sir," said Blake, encouraged.

The Head nodded.

"Quite so," he said. "You are excused, I will give you a note to your Housemaster, Figgins, and Mr. Ratcliff will overlook the matter. There, you may go. Good-night!"

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had ruined himself by his drunken folly, if Tom Merry chose to speak.

The man was looking very white and worn now. Reckless indulgence in strong liquor over night had turned him into a ruffian then; it had turned him into a limp rag now.

Tom Merry looked at him, but did not bid him good-morning. He could not bring himself to extend a friendly greeting to a man whom he both disliked and despised.

Blane tried to meet his eyes, but failed.

"I dare say you're surprised to see me," he muttered.

"I'm surprised at your cheek in coming here, after what happened last night!" said Tom coldly.

"That's why I've come!"

"Why?"

"Because—because I want you to look over it!"

"In what way? I don't mean to bring any charge against you, if that's what you mean?"

Blane shook his head.

"No, I didn't think you would do that, Merry!"

"What do you want, then?"

"I—I was mad last night," said Blane hoarsely. "I was with some fellows, and they made me drink."

Tom Merry's lip curled. He had heard that sort of excuse before. It was no excuse.

"I should think a man of your age would know what was good for him," he said.

"Well, I took too much, and some of them chipped me about your playing better than I. Then I met you in a lonely place—"

"And tried to strangle me!"

"I didn't mean that—I don't know what I meant—I was too drunk to think," said Blane. "I'm sorry enough for it now!"

"You'd be sorrier still if you'd woke up in a prison this morning!"

Blane bit his lip.

"Look here," he said. "Will you look over it, and say nothing about the matter if I promise you that nothing of the kind shall ever occur again?"

"What do you want me to do?"

"Say nothing!"

"To Mr. Philpot, you mean?"

"Yes. It would ruin me if he knew," said the winger hoarsely. "He wouldn't let me stay in the team for one thing, and I'm hoping to work my way on and get taken on by a big club as a professional."

Tom Merry was silent.

He did not want to be hard upon Blane. But the man had proved himself to be an unscrupulous ruffian, and Tom Merry felt instinctively that he was not to be trusted.

"Don't say anything to Mr. Philpot," said Blane. "It would injure me in my prospects in every way if he dropped me. I suppose you know I'm in his employ at the bank?"

Tom Merry nodded.

"You don't want to ruin me, Merry?"

"No," said Tom slowly, "I don't. But it seems to me that Mr. Philpot is entitled to know the kind of man you are!"

"I tell you I was drunk!"

"You may get into the same state again."

"I promise—"

Tom Merry made a gesture.

"Don't promise me anything. I don't for a moment believe you'd keep your word!"

"Look here—" began Blane fiercely. Then he broke off. He realised that he was not in a position to bluster, but his eyes gleamed with malice as he dropped into a quiet tone. "Sorry, I know I'm in your hands, and you can say what you like."

The lad felt decidedly uncomfortable. Blane had contrived to place him in the position of hectoring one who was at his mercy, a thing Tom Merry would have been the last fellow in the world to do.

Blane saw his advantage, and pressed it.

"You're not the kind of chap to be hard on a man when he's down," he said.

"I hope not!"

"Let it pass this time. Nothing of the sort shall ever occur again, I assure you of that. I'm as glad as you are that those lads came along last night before any harm was done!"

"Well, perhaps—"

"Promise not to say anything to Mr. Philpot!"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"I won't promise," he said. "But I won't say anything to Mr. Philpot so long as you let me alone!"

"You might give me some assurance—"

"That's enough assurance. I won't bind myself to keep it secret. But if you let me alone, you've nothing to be afraid of as far as I am concerned. That's all I can say."

"Thank you for that," said Blane. And he quitted the room. But when the door was closed upon him, his face became dark with rage and spite, and he gritted his teeth.

"The young prig!" he muttered fiercely, as he went downstairs. "So he's going to hold me at his mercy! If I don't get rid of him—"

Blane pursued that train of thought as he walked away from Mr. Philpot's house, and a deadly determination grew in his soured mind.

Meanwhile, Tom Merry, only half satisfied with his concession to the winger, dressed and came down to breakfast. Mr. and Mrs. Philpot greeted him with their usual cordiality.

"You were in late last night, Tom," Mr. Philpot observed.

"Yes, I stayed a little too long at the school, sir," said Tom Merry.

Mr. Philpot smiled.

"It's all right, Tom. You feel fit this morning?"

"Fit as a fiddle!"

"Very good. I shall come down to see you practise. You told your old captain about your playing against St. Jim's on Saturday?"

"Yes, sir! Kildare is a splendid sportsman. He told me to go ahead."

Mr. Philpot laughed.

"Very good, then!"

"It will be a tough match for the Ramblers, sir," Tom Merry observed. "Kildare and his men are splendid players!"

"I know it, Tom, but I think the Ramblers have a very good chance," said Mr. Philpot. "By the way, I think Blane came to see you this morning?"

"Yes," said Tom Merry.

"I hope that means that you are getting on better terms. You two ought to be as friendly as possible, as you are together on the right wing."

"I shall try my best, sir!"

And Tom Merry was glad that he had not, after all, mentioned the incident of the previous night to Mr. Philpot. Not that he trusted Blane. But he was agreeably surprised

(Continued on next page.)



Do you know a good joke? If so, send it to "THE GEM JESTER," 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4 (Comp.). Fine footballs are awarded every week for the two best jokes received, and a half-a-crown is paid for every other joke that appears in this column.

OBEYING ORDERS!

Manager (to new boot-boy): "You are taking a very long time over those boots I told you to clean."

Boot-boy: "I can't help it, sir—some of them were brown when I started!"

A football has been awarded to K. Westcott, 2, Summerseat, Farwell Road, Rawdon, Yorks.

* * *

NOT CHEAP.

Tom: "Policemen's helmets are being sold for a shilling."

Ted: "That's not cheap considering every one was made for a 'copper'!"

A football has been awarded to R. Hamilton, 73, Lindisfarne Road, Dagenham, Essex.

* * *

DEFICIT.

Teacher: "What do you understand by the word 'deficit,' Smith?"

Smith: "It's what you've got when you haven't as much as you had when you had nothing!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to A. Goslett, 36, William Street, Woodstock, South Africa.

* * *

OBVIOUSLY.

Sandy: "Is it right that McTavish has bought the garage?"

Jock: "I don't know; but I see the notice 'Free Air' has been taken down!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to P. Shapland, 143, East Reach, Taunton, Somerset.

* * *

MUSIC HATH CHARMS.

Black: "You like music, do you? Which instrument do you prefer to hear?"

White: "The dinner gong!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to A. Parker, 13, Beckenham Place, Hanson Lane, Halifax, Yorkshire.

* * *

NO COMPLIMENT.

Barber (to assistant): "Why are you so late this morning?"

Assistant: "I had to get my hair cut, sir!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to G. McAuliffe, 8, Dinorwic Road, Anfield, Liverpool, 4.

* * *

SURE THING!

Jack Blake: "I'll never get over what I saw last night."

Gussy: "Why, what was it?"

Blake: "The moon!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to W. Jeffrey, 94, Eastbourne Road, Darlington, Durham.

* * *

QUESTION AND QUERY.

Englishman: "Why is it that all you Americans answer a question with another question?"

American: "Do we?"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to W. Legon, 196, Browning Road, Manor Park, London, E.12.

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when he came down to practise on the Ramblers' ground that morning to find that Gerald Blane was in the best of tempers, apparently, and inclined to be very cordial.

Friendship it was impossible for Tom Merry to feel for such a fellow, but he was glad enough to accept outwardly the olive branch for the sake of the team. And during that morning's practice, the two footballers pulled very well together.

CHAPTER 10.

A Misunderstanding!

WHAT about a bwass band?" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy propounded the query in Study No. 6 in the School House at St. Jim's on Friday evening.

Blake, Herries, and Digby were discussing the morrow's match. Blake had said that in honour of the unique occasion, the juniors ought to cut their own play that afternoon and watch the senior match.

Digby fully agreed. Herries would doubtless have agreed, but Herries was thinking very deeply about a most important subject to him—a new collar for his bulldog, Towser. So Herries' replies were a little absent-minded.

"I think we'd better cut junior play," said Blake. "After all, Tom Merry is a St. Jim's junior, really, and it's not often we get a chance of seeing a St. Jim's junior play against St. Jim's seniors!"

"Quite right," agreed Digby.

"What do you think, Herries?"

"I was thinking of a brass one."

"What?"

"You see, the old one is leather—"

"Eh?"

"Weally, deah boys—"

"Now there's Gussy beginning—"

"Weally, Blake—"

"One ass at a time," said Digby.

"Weally, Dig—"

"My idea is that we get good places to see the senior match," said Blake. "Under the peculiar circumstances of the case—"

"Exactly," said Digby.

"But what about the bwass band?"

"Hay?"

Herries looked at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy with much cordiality. He imagined that the swell of St. Jim's was referring to Towser's new collar.

"You think a brass one would be all right?" he asked.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, I was thinking so, too, but the expense—"

"Oh, that's all wight, deah boy."

"I don't know," said Herries, with a shake of his head.

"We're not rolling in money like you, Gussy." "I wepeat that it's all wight. I've had a fivah fwom my governah this mornin', deah boy, and I shall stand the exes."

Herries stared. As a rule, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was dead set against Towser. He accused Towser of having no respect for a fellow's trousers, and he was certainly right. Towser had accounted for a great deal of damaged clothing at St. Jim's.

"You'll stand the exes?" he exclaimed.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"That's awfully decent of you, Gussy."

"Not at all, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus, with a princely air. "Not in the least, Hewwies. I shall be delighted if you fellows are agweeable."

"Well, I don't see that it matters to Blake or Dig," said Herries. "I'm agreeable, as far as that goes, but it will be expensive."

"That is weally all wight."

"It may run into fifteen bob."

"It couldn't be done at the pwice, Hewwies."

Blake and Digby listened, grinning. They fully understood that D'Arcy and Herries were driving at different things, but it had not yet dawned upon Herries or D'Arcy.

"I say it could," said Herries. "I know."

"Wats, deah boy!"

"I'll come with you to buy it, then," said Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"I don't want you to be done."

"I weally do not undahstand what you mean about buyin'

the bwass band, Hewwies. I am thinkin' of havin' it for to-mowwow, that's all."

"What? Only for to-morrow?"

"Yaas, wathah! I suppose we don't want such a thing permanently," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, in a very sarcastic tone.

"I jolly well do want it permanently. I'm blessed if I understand you at all, D'Arcy!" said Herries irritably.

"I twust I make myself plain," said D'Arcy. "As for your desiah to have a bwass band permanently, Hewwies, I wegard it as idiotic. I suppose you wouldn't pwopose to keep it in the study?"

"Of course not. I should keep it in Towser's kennel."

"What?"

"On Towser, of course."

"Bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Blake and Digby.

"Pway don't cackle, deah boys! I wegard Hewwies as an ass. I was talkin' about a bwass band—"

"Yes, for Towser!"

"Towsah!"

"Yes, Towser, fathead! What on earth is the use of a brass collar unless it's for Towser?" demanded Herries, getting somewhat excited. "I suppose you're not thinking of wearing one yourself?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Hewwies, I wegard you as a chump. I was talkin' about a bwass band, and I was not talkin' about a bwass collah."

"Same thing. I don't mind your calling it a band so long as it fits Towser and looks all right—that's the chief thing!"

"You uttah ass!"

"You frabjous chump!"

"I wefuse to be called a fwabjous chump! I was talkin' about a bwass band."

"I know that!"

"I mean a musical band!" shouted Arthur Augustus.

Herries glared at him.

"Well, you utter ass!" he exclaimed. "What would be the good of a musical band to Towser?"

Blake and Digby shrieked. It was difficult for Herries to get his mind off Towser.

"I wasn't speakin' of Towsah!" shrieked D'Arcy. "I was thinkin' of a bwass band to play a triumphal march when Tom Mewwy comes to-mowwow."

Herries snorted.

"Well, fancy wasting a fellow's time talking that rot!" he exclaimed. "I was talking about Towser!"

"I was talking about Tom Mewwy, you see!"

"The question is whether I get Towser a brass collar—"

"Wats!"

"Look here, D'Arcy—"

"The question is whether we shall get a bwass band for Tom Mewwy—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway don't cackle, deah boys! I was quite willin' to spwing the cash to stand a bwass band for the occasion."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wish you fellows would be sewious! I don't care if the band comes to a couple of pounds, I can stand it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wegard it as a good ideah!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Bury it!"

"I put it to the vote," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "Those who are in favah of a bwass band to gweet Tom Mewwy kindlay signify the same in the usual mannah!"

And the juniors did—they shouted:

"Rats!"

"I wegard you as a set of asses," said Arthur Augustus.

"I shall go along and pwopose 'it to Mannahs and Lowthah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus quitted the study with his nose very high in the air, to propose his ripping idea to the Shell fellows. It was about five minutes later that he came back.

There was dust on his jacket and a smudge on his face.

"Well?" said Blake. "What did the Shellfish think of the wheeze?"

"I wefuse to discuss the uttahly wude and ungentlemanly conduct of those wude boundahs," said D'Arcy, with dignity.

And the chums of the Fourth yelled again. Nothing more was heard on the subject of the brass band.

CHAPTER 11.

Blane's Revenge!

SATURDAY morning was bright and clear, and the Wayland Ramblers turned out for an hour's practice—such of them, at all events, as could leave their occupations.

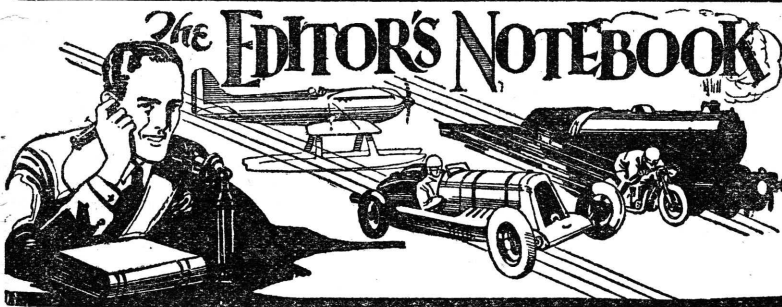
(Continued on page 14.)

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GATHER ROUND FOR MORE NOTES AND NEWS FROM—



Let the Editor be your pal! Write to him to-day, addressing your letters: The Editor, The GEM, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

HALLO, Chums! Christmas Day is drawing near now and I expect that many of you are being asked by parents, aunts and uncles what you would like for Christmas presents. Most of you have your own ideas about what you want; but the present that is always very popular and gives the maximum of amusement for the minimum of outlay is a good book—and what better book than "THE HOLIDAY ANNUAL"? In its 250 odd pages you can read more about the cheery Chums of St. Jim's, and there are also grand stories of the Chums of Greyfriars and Rookwood Schools. In addition there are numerous yarns of thrilling adventure—adventure staged in the South Seas, the African Jungle, the Wild West, etc. And other ripping tales feature motor-cycle racing, flying, old-time adventure, and whaling, and there are a host of other fascinating features.

The "H.A." is a bumper book at a bargain price—now reduced to 5s.—and when asked by a kind relative what Christmas present you want, take it from me, chums, you cannot do better than suggest this splendid Annual.

Another grand gift book is "THE POPULAR BOOK OF BOYS' STORIES," priced at 2s. 6d. This all-story Annual has now been enlarged to 192 pages, and its many thrilling stories include sea and flying adventure, a stirring story of the French Foreign Legion, and powerful tales of olden day and present day pirates. In fact, its varied contents cannot fail to appeal to every boy—and it also makes a magnificent Christmas present.

"THE FAGS' FORM-MASTER!"

Now let's take a look at next week's GEM programme. There will, of course, be another sheet of Free Gift Pictures in colour, and ten more pictures will be added to the collections in your albums.

The St. Jim's story—and it's a scorcher, too!—features the further adventures of popular Tom Merry, who, as you know, lost his money recently. He is given a job at St. Jim's—and what do you think it is? He is made Form-master of the Third Form! Mr. Selby is ill, and in his temporary absence, the Head thinks that Tom can manage the fags. But can he? Tom thinks that he's in clover, but he soon finds out that his new job is no sinecure. Don't the fags lead him a dance! You will simply delight in reading all about it next week.

There is not the slightest doubt that

"THE WHITE GIANTS OF EL DORADO"

is the most popular serial we have ever had, for almost every letter that I get from readers sings the praises of this thrilling story. In next Wednesday's chapters, the primitive Ciri-ok-Baks

attack the city of Az, where the St. Frank's adventurers have taken refuge, and with characteristic impulsiveness Handy attacks the giant leader of these wild men! What happens then? Don't miss this nerve-tingling instalment, whatever you do!

This tip-top programme will not be complete without another adventure of "Mick o' the Mounted!"—while the Jester awards more footballs and half-a-crowns for readers' prize jokes of the week, and lastly, yours truly will be in the chair again.

THE PRIVATE TAXI.

William J. Hamilton, a New York banker, unlike most people from the land of hustle, prefers comfort to speed. One

**Xmas
Greetings
to All
My Chums.**

FROM
YOUR EDITOR.

of the things which annoyed him most in America was that he could not get into an American taxicab and keep his hat on! He always had to take it off, and that upset him. Mr. Hamilton came to London. He looked at the old type taxis in the great city and saw that here at last was what he wanted. He tried one and found that he could enter without removing his hat. That was good enough for him. He bought the oldest cab he could find for £8, and it has been a great source of joy to him back at his home in America. For not only can he keep his hat on, but he also enjoys watching his friends looking at the clock reading 10s., and then getting out and paying nothing!

THE LONGEST GOLF MATCH!

Fred Mullins, of Camberwell, has written to ask which is the longest golf match on record. I set about finding the answer for him, for I knew that there had been at least one match which had been played

over many miles, and then quite suddenly I came upon the answer. At least, if anyone knows of a longer match I shall be glad to know—because this one hasn't finished yet, and it has been going on for eleven years!

The match started in August, 1922. It is between Mr. Chamberlain of Ramsbury and Mr. New, the postmaster of Chilton Foliat. They play on a private course which the owner allows them to use, and they play every Saturday. There is a silver jug, which the two players purchased between them, and it is held by the winner each year; but a record is kept, and the score is added up from year to year. So far Mr. Chamberlain, who is seventy-one, has won the trophy six times, and Mr. New, who is ten years younger, has been successful four times. This year's winner has not yet been decided. The scores to date are:

| | |
|--------------------|--------|
| Mr. Chamberlain .. | 30,821 |
| Mr. New .. | 29,962 |

so Mr. New leads by 859 strokes. But there are years to go yet!

By the way, there's one special little rule in this match. After each Saturday's play the winner pays for the loser's tea!

A MIRACULOUS ESCAPE.

Signor Furio Niclot, the Italian airman, went up recently on an attempt to beat his own record for altitude in a tourist seaplane. On such attempts, of course, the airman wears an artificial breathing apparatus for use at great heights. Signor Niclot had reached a height of nearly six miles when his apparatus broke down, and the airman lost consciousness. Immediately the plane got out of control and began to drop to earth. It seemed a million to one against Signor Niclot getting down alive, but at 1,000 feet he recovered consciousness and brilliantly gained control of his machine. He made a safe landing, and, after medical treatment, rapidly recovered.

A YOUTHFUL HERO.

This is the story of Peter Doolan, an eleven-year-old Liverpool boy, who, although badly injured, saved two little girls from serious injury. Peter was on his way to school with some other children, when a lorry crashed into a gate and knocked it on top of Peter and the two girls. Peter took the full force of the shock, and despite his injuries he managed to kneel in such a position that he supported most of the weight of the gate, which weighed three hundredweight, and kept it off the girls, who were only very slightly hurt. Peter, however, had to go to hospital.

THE ONE MAN PARK.

Is that name familiar to you? No, I don't suppose it is, because that is not the real name of the little park in Leicester Square, London, but it well might be. The keeper of this park has the following jobs to perform: Open the park in the morning, and ring the bell to turn people out at night before he locks up. Keep order in the park, keep the place tidy, plant all the flowers, mow the lawns and trim the hedges and trees. Well, that's enough for one man isn't it? But that's not the lot; the worst job is still to come, for this man has to answer all the questions that people ask him, or, at least, he has to try to, but he says himself that sometimes people ask him posers which really do stump him.

THE EDITOR.

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The Ramblers' Recruit!

(Continued from page 12.)

Half the team were employed in Mr. Philpot's bank, and the genial manager always arranged for them to have the time necessary for practice. There were eight of the team on the Ramblers' ground, and half a dozen other members, who were playing to give the first team practice. A match of seven aside had been arranged.

Tom Merry looked very fit as he came down to the ground with Mr. Philpot. He was feeling very well indeed, and his eyes were sparkling at the prospect of a good hard match in the afternoon.

It was an honour to be wanted to play against fellows like Kildare and Darrell of the Sixth Form at St. Jim's.

Mr. Philpot glanced at him with a smile.

"You are feeling quite in form?" he said.

"Quite, sir! I'm looking forward to the match."

"That's right, my lad—that's the proper spirit. I'm glad to see, too, that you are on so much better terms with Blane lately. Cut in and change."

Tom Merry went into the dressing-room.

He was on the ground a little later than the rest of them, and he had the room to himself while he changed. It did not take him many minutes.

He ran out into the field in the red shirt and white knickers of the Ramblers, looking very fit and very handsome. He glanced over the players. Blane had not yet arrived. Tom Merry did not know whether he was expected.

There was a few dozen people in the field who had come to see the practice, and many more intended to follow the Ramblers over to St. Jim's in the afternoon to see the match there. The Ramblers were very popular in Wayland.

Among the crowd were several faces Tom Merry knew, and one extremely aristocratic visage decorated with an eyeglass met his eyes first.

"Gussy! By George!"

Tom Merry ran across to see his chum.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy raised his silk hat cheerfully.

"Jolly glad to see you," said Tom Merry, as he shook hands with the swell of St. Jim's. "But how did you get here?"

"Come by twain, deah boy."

Tom Merry laughed.

"I mean, have you got leave? Lessons aren't over yet at St. Jim's."

"Mr. Lathom gave me leave, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus cheerfully. "Wathah decent little chap, old Lathom. I explained to him that I wanted to see you on a most important mattah, and he let me come."

"Good!" said Tom Merry. "But what's the most important matter?"

"I've a lettah fwom Cousin Ethel!"

"Good!"

"She'll be down to see the match this aftahnoon."

"Jolly good!" said Tom Merry heartily.

"I thought you'd be glad to see her," said D'Arcy. "She'll be glad to see you, too. Cousin Ethel is a wippin' gal."

"You're right, she is."

"What is that chap waggin' his fingah at you for, deah boy?"

Tom Merry glanced round. Yorke, the Wayland captain, was signing to him that he was wanted. Tom Merry grinned.

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In front of a fire Mick sat with Jim Bates, whose guardian had been arrested. "Dad made Plug Kelly my guardian when he went up north in a gold strike," Jim said. "I haven't heard from dad since."

Mick and Jim were then called to the superintendent's office. "I want you to take Kelly down to Regina," said the superintendent. "And Jim will go with you to give evidence." "O.K., sir," replied Mick.



The short winter's day waned; dusk began to fall, and it was time to make camp for the night. "Kelly, you pitch the tent," commanded Mick, "and don't try any funny tricks. I'm keeping my gun handy!"



During the night two of the dogs started to fight, and Mick, satisfied that Kelly was asleep, went over to quieten them. Little did he suspect that Plug had been awaiting such a chance as this!



When Mick partially recovered it was to see his prisoner racing away over the snow in the sledge. Crack! Mick fired hastily, missed—and then Kelly was vanishing into the darkness.



"We've got to recapture Kelly—how?" said Mick to Jim, next morning. How, indeed, when they were left without dogs? Fortunately, another Mountie, who was passing, let Mick have his sledge.

(What's going to happen now?)

HE MOUNTED!

of the Wild West!



that Plug Kelly was brought in, and at sight of Mick his eyes gleamed with hatred. "You per, little rat!" he cried, and attempted to bring his handcuffs crashing down on the Mountie's head.



With Jim sitting in the sledge, Mick took the long trail to Regina. "Guess this isn't going to be a picnic," muttered the Mountie, taking care to keep an alert watch on his dangerous prisoner.



ried towards the Mountie. A sudden leap, then up came the prisoner's arms, and the handcuffs thudded down upon Mick's head with stunning force.



With a low moan, Mick collapsed to the ground and lay still. In a moment Kelly had taken a key from the Mountie's tunic and was unlocking the handcuffs. "Now to escape!" he muttered triumphantly.



All that morning Mick and Jim pursued Kelly, but a fall of snow had completely obliterated the escaped prisoner's tracks, and it was a hopeless job. "Look out—a bear!" cried Jim suddenly, and pointed.



A huge grizzly was lumbering over the snow towards them. Mick took hasty aim with his gun, pulled the trigger—and the weapon jammed! Next moment the snarling brute reared on hind legs to attack!

See next week's thrilling pictures.)

"That's my skipper," he said. "They're ready for me. I must be off!"

"Vewy well, deah boy. I'll stay and watch you."

"Come round to the dressing-room presently and wait for me to come off," said Tom Merry. "You can come in there. We're not playing full time, you know—this is only a short practice, with seven a side."

"Vewy good!"

Tom Merry ran off to join the players. Yorke was frowning a little, and Tom Merry thought at first that the frown was for him. But he was mistaken.

"Blane hasn't come yet," said Yorke. "He has leave from the bank, too—he ought to be here. We shall play without him."

And the sides lined up.

They were soon playing away merrily. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy watched them from the ropes. The grass was cold to his feet, and he soon remembered Tom Merry's invitation for him to wait in the dressing-room. He strolled away in the direction of the building.

Gerald Blane came in at the gates and looked round the field. He knew he was late, and he expected some strong remarks from Yorke. As he glanced at the players he saw the ball fly into the net, in spite of the utmost effort of the goalie to save, and Yorke clapped Tom Merry on the shoulders.

"Bravo, my lad!" he exclaimed. "That was a ripping goal!"

Blane scowled darkly.

It was his fate, the jealous winger thought, to arrive on the scene just in time to see Tom Merry score, and to hear him praised by his captain.

He swung into the dressing-room with a scowl upon his face.

He was alone there. The other players had not even seen him arrive. Blane took off his coat and looked round for a nail to hang it upon. Then a sudden gleam shot into his eyes.

Tom Merry's coat was hanging close to him, and next to it was Yorke's. From the latter came a clink as Blane touched it.

"My hat!" muttered Blane.

His eyes were burning.

The opportunity he had longed for had come at last and thrust itself into his hands, as it were, without his seeking it.

He gave a quick glance towards the door—he was alone. The voices of the players could be heard in the field, that was all. No one was likely to come to the dressing-room.

Blane ran his hands through Yorke's coat pockets. From an inner pocket he drew the money he had heard clink. Yorke, in changing his clothes, had slipped his money and his watch and chain into the inside breast-pocket of his coat, and then hung the latter up.

He had not expected the coat to be disturbed, of course.

Blane drew the watch and chain and the loose silver from the pocket. He thrust them into the inside pocket of Tom Merry's jacket.

His face was white, and his hand trembled as he did so.

A footstep at the door startled him.

His heart leaped to his mouth, his brain almost swam with terror. If one of the fellows had seen him—

It was a youth in an elegant coat, a silk hat, and an eyeglass who presented himself to Blane's view.

Blane drew a deep, quick breath. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was a stranger to him, and he only thought that some impertinent investigator had penetrated into the place without leave.

D'Arcy had seen Blane draw his hand from Tom Merry's pocket. He would have thought nothing of the action, but for Blane's quick, guilty look, and the spasm of terror that flashed across his face.

Then, in spite of himself—for D'Arcy's was the most unsuspecting nature in the world—a gleam of suspicion shone in his eyes.

But he had no time to speak.

Blane sprang towards him angrily.

"How dare you come in here?" he exclaimed.

"Weally——"

"Get out!"

"That is not the way to address me," said the swell of St. Jim's, with dignity. "I will thank you to be more civil."

"Strangers are not allowed here," said Blane, a little more quietly. "You must go outside."

"But——"

"Come now, outside. I tell you you can't stay in here."

"I should wefuse to stay with a person of such extremely wude mannahs, in any case," said the swell of St. Jim's, with a great deal of dignity.

And he turned on his heels and walked away.

Blane pressed his hands to his temples, which were throbbing wildly.

"Thank my good luck it was a stranger," he muttered. "If it had been Yorke, or one of the fellows——"

He dared not follow out that reflection. But he felt that all was safe now. He changed his clothes, and ran out to join the players.

CHAPTER 12.

Black Suspicion.

YORKE slipped his arm through Tom Merry's as they came back towards the stand.

The Wayland captain was looking very gratified and cordial. He liked Tom Merry—there were few persons Tom Merry met who did not like him—but that was not all. Tom Merry had been playing up splendidly, and, in spite of his youth, Yorke knew that he was one of the most valuable members of the team. What he lacked in weight, in playing against older opponents, he made up by his fast speed, and his great agility and quickness.

"My hat!" said Yorke. "I wish you were staying with us for good, Merry!"

Tom Merry coloured with pleasure.

"You're very good to say so," he replied.

"It's the truth!"

They entered the dressing-room.

Tom Merry changed his clothes, after a good rub down. He was rather surprised at not finding D'Arcy waiting for him in the dressing-room. He expected the swell of St. Jim's to come in at any moment, however.

He put on his coat, naturally enough, without noticing that anything had been placed in his pockets. He would never have dreamed of such an occurrence, unless he had seen it with his own eyes.

Yorke felt for his watch and chain to put them in the usual place, after he had donned his waistcoat.

He looked surprised.

There was nothing in the pocket into which he had slipped the watch and several coins.

Thinking that he might have made a mistake, the captain of the Ramblers felt in the other pockets.

But neither watch nor money was to be found.

The expression upon Yorke's face had attracted attention by this time, and several of the fellows were looking at him.

"Anything wrong, Yorke?" asked Carter.

"It's a joke, I suppose," said the Wayland skipper brusquely. "I must say I don't see any fun in such jokes, myself."

"Anything wrong with your togs?" grinned Carter. "Some practical joking rotter pinned up the sleeves of my jacket one day in the dressing-room."

"Well, that was idiotic, but this is worse."

"What's happened?"

"Who's got my watch?"

"Your watch?"

"Yes."

"You don't mean to say you've lost your watch?" said Williams, the goalie.

"No, I haven't lost it—somebody's taken it out of my pocket," said Yorke. "I'll thank him to hand it over."

There was general silence.

Yorke looked round at the grave faces. Some of the footballers were looking very uncomfortable.

"Hang it!" said Carter uneasily. "I don't like that sort of joke, any more than you do, Yorke. It's silly to meddle with other people's valuables."

"Rotten!" said Blane.

"Well, whoever's got it, hand it over, and we'll say no more about it," said Yorke.

No one replied.

Yorke grew red in the face.

"Will you own up?" he asked, addressing no one in particular.

"Nobody seems to know anything about it," said Williams, after a long and uncomfortable pause.

"That's rot! Whoever took it out of my pocket must know."

"Who was it?" asked Carter, looking round.

Silence again.

"Sure you haven't got it in the wrong pocket?" asked Brown, the centre-half of the Ramblers, after another pause.

"I know I haven't!"

"Have you searched?"

"Yes."

"Sure you brought it here this morning?"

"Quite sure."

"Sure, I saw Yorke take it off before we went out to play," said Maguire, the outside-left, an Irishman. "I remember asking him the time."

"I remember," said Yorke. "I had it drop out of my waistcoat pocket once, and it broke the glass, and now I always shove it into my coat pocket for safety."

"Not very safe this time, it seems," said Blane.

"Well, I suppose somebody's taken it for a joke."

"Rotten kind of joke, I think."

"So do I, rather," said Carter.

"Come, don't let's be jawing about it when Mr. Philpot



BUNTER, the Benevolent!

What's happened to William George Bunter? It is well known that the only concern of the fat boy of Greyfriars is for the well-being of W.G.B. But in this magnificent Yuletide yarn, a remarkable change comes over him. He becomes philanthropic, kind and considerate towards others. He is a new Bunter—Bunter at his best! Read all about his amazing and amusing Christmas adventures.

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comes in," said Yorke. "Hand it over, the chap who's got it!"

No reply.

"Well, if the chap won't own up, I think he's a troublesome fool!" said Yorke. "I suppose it's hidden about the room, somewhere. Will you fellows help me look for it?"

"Yes, rather!" said Tom Merry.

And the footballers, half-dressed as they were, searched for the missing watch high and low, but no trace of it was to be discovered.

Yorke stopped at last, with a very red and angry face.

"Look here, this has gone far enough," he said. "We shall look a set of fools if Mr. Philpot finds us at this, like a set of larking schoolboys. Where's my watch?"

"Goodness knows!"

"Now," said Yorke with deliberation, "when a chap takes a watch out of another chap's pocket, I think he's several sorts of a silly fool, if he does it for a joke. But if he doesn't own up and give it back, there's only one conclusion to be drawn—that he means to keep it!"

"Oh!"

"We've no room for a thief in Wayland Ramblers," said Yorke, in cutting tones. "I give the idiot one minute to hand me back my watch, or tell me where it is."

Grim silence in the dressing-room.

More than a minute elapsed. But no one had spoken.

"Very well," said Yorke, compressing his lips. "I take it that whoever has taken my watch, means to keep it."

"Oh!"

"There's nothing else to think." Yorke stood near the door. "There's only one thing to be done."

"What's that?"

"Everybody here to turn out his pockets."

"Oh, hang!" said Carter, growing very red. "That's rotten, Yorke!"

"Better do it," said Blane. "Unless the watch is found there will be a rotten suspicion attaching to every one of us."

"Faith, and ye're right!"

"There was some silver with the watch and chain," said Yorke. "They're all gone together. Now, then."

After a momentary hesitation, Williams started by turning out his pockets. He drew every pocket inside out.

The other fellows followed his example slowly.

"Sure, and ye needn't trouble, lad," said Maguire to Tom Merry, with an Irishman's natural courtesy to a guest, for that was what Tom Merry really was in the Ramblers' dressing-room, not being a regular member of the team.

"I'd better do the same as the others do," said Tom Merry.

"Hang it all, what's right for one is right for another!" said Blane. "Let Merry turn out his pockets like the rest."

"I'm doing it!" said Tom Merry quietly.

Then he suddenly paled.

His hand had gone into his breast pocket inside, and it had felt something there which he knew had not been there when he took the jacket off before play.

It was a watch.

The touch seemed to freeze him. He stood almost petrified, his face white and startled. Blane was watching him like a cat.

"All the pockets, Merry!" he cried.

"Let him alone, Blane!" exclaimed Yorke angrily. "Of course he will turn out all his pockets. Why should he object?"

Blane shrugged his shoulders.

"This—this is a trick!" said Tom Merry, in a forced unnatural voice. "There—there is a watch and chain in my pocket!"

"What!"

Tom Merry, with a trembling hand, drew out the watch and chain and laid them down. Then he groped in the pocket again, and laid the silver beside the watch. There was a breathless silence. A pin might have been heard to drop in the dressing-room.

CHAPTER 13.

The Shadow of Guilt!

TOM MERRY was white as death.

None of the footballers spoke, but Tom Merry knew what their expressions meant.

He stood white and silent.

Yorke broke the deadly stillness at last. The Wayland skipper's voice was a little shaken as he spoke.

"What does this mean, Merry?"

"I don't know."

"You—you don't know!"

"No!"

Gerald Blane sneered. The other footballers exchanged significant glances. Yorke scanned Tom Merry's face hard.

"Tom Merry! That is my watch!"

"I know it is."

"That money is mine."

"I know."

"How did it come to be in your pocket?"

"I don't know."

"Merry!"

"I say I don't know. I didn't put it there."

Yorke compressed his lips.

"Look here, Merry, if you own up that you did it for a joke—"

"I did not do it for a joke!" Tom Merry was recovering a little, though the discovery of the watch in his pocket had seemed to freeze his blood for a moment. "I did not do it at all. I had no idea the watch was in my pocket."

"Then how did it come there?"

"It must have been placed there."

"My dear lad—"

"Don't you believe me?"

Yorke was silent.

Tom Merry looked round wildly at the accusing faces.

It was easy to see what conclusion the footballers had drawn. Indeed, was it possible for them to draw any other conclusion?

If the junior had taken the watch for a foolish joke he would have owned up. That anyone in the Ramblers' team could have been wicked enough to put it into his pocket to incriminate him seemed beyond belief.

They all knew Tom Merry's circumstances; that he had been rich, and that he had become poor; and that he had left his old school to face the world, with little, if any, money to stand between him and want.

"You don't believe me?" said Tom Merry huskily.

Silence.

"Bai Jove, that's vewy kind of you, sir," said a voice outside. "I weally want to see Tom Mewvy, you know. He's an old friend of mine."

It was D'Arcy's voice. He was coming in with Mr. Philpot.

Tom Merry recognised the tones, and he shivered. He did not want D'Arcy to come in and see him accused of theft. But he could not stop it now.

"I say," said Blane, looking round. "We all know how hard-up Merry is, and I think Yorke might look over this. Merry can get away, and nothing more need be said about the matter. After all, Yorke's got his money back, and we don't want to disgrace the Ramblers in public."

"Right!" said Carter.

And Yorke nodded.

"Goodness knows, I don't want to be hard on the kid!" he said. "I'll own up I'm horribly disappointed in him."

"I'm not a thief!" said Tom Merry, in a hard, clear voice. "That watch was put into my pocket by somebody."

"What's that?" exclaimed Mr. Philpot, looking in at the door. "What's that, Merry? What is the matter here?"

And Mr. Philpot came in, looking very anxious and alarmed.

He had heard Tom Merry's words, and they were enough to alarm him. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had heard them, too. He crossed over quickly to Tom Merry.

"What's the mattah, deah boy?" he asked.

Tom Merry was silent.

"Sowwy I wasn't here before," went on Arthur Augustus. "I came in, but a chap turned me out, so I waited till I could see Mr. Philpot."

Blane drew back behind some of the other fellows.

A deadly fear had gripped at his heart at the sight of D'Arcy. He had not known before that the elegant junior was a friend of Tom Merry's, or that he had visited the dressing-room to see him.

He remembered the suspicious attitude he had been in when D'Arcy saw him on that occasion, and he feared to meet the junior's glance.

(Continued on the next page.)

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Mr. Philpot was looking from one to another of the players.

"What has happened?" he asked. "Please explain, Yorke."

"It's rotten enough, sir," said the Wayland captain reluctantly. "Somebody took my watch from my pocket, and it was found in Tom Merry's pocket."

"Bai Jove!"

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Mr. Philpot. "Can you explain, Tom Merry? It would be very hard for me to believe that you were a thief."

"Thank you, sir!" said Tom Merry, with a grateful look at the manager. "But I can't explain. I can only say that the watch must have been put in my pocket."

"Good heavens!" said the manager again.

"Bai Jove!"

"I hung my jacket near Yorke's coat," said Tom Merry. "I didn't even know Yorke had his watch in his pocket. I am not a thief. Somebody has changed the watch into my pocket for a horrible joke, I suppose."

"Can you suggest anybody?"

Tom Merry hesitated.

"I'm on good terms with everybody here excepting Blane," he said. "And I don't like to suggest that Blane would do such a villainous thing."

The manager looked round for Blane.

"Is Blane here?"

"Yes, sir," said Blane, coming forward unwillingly enough; and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's eyes glinted behind his monocle.

"Do you know anything about this, Blane?"

"Nothing more than the others."

"I believe you have been on better terms with Tom Merry lately?"

"Yes, sir," said Blane, with an appearance of great frankness. "Merry did me an act of kindness the other day, and I told him then that I was grateful, and that I should prove it."

"Blane said that, Merry?"

"Yes; or something like it," Tom Merry confessed.

"Of course, someone may have slipped into the dressing-room and played this trick," said Mr. Philpot slowly.

The suggestion was received in silence. No one regarded such a theory as being in the smallest degree probable.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jammed his eyeglass very tightly into his eye, and gave Blane a look that made the winger simply shrink.

D'Arcy might have a simplicity of character in many ways; but he was no fool, and he knew how to put two and two together and make a total of four.

"May I be allowed to speak, sir?" he said.

"Certainly," said Mr. Philpot. "I do not see what you can know about the matter, however."

"I came in here while the men were playing, sir."

The manager started.

"You played the trick?" he exclaimed.

"No, sir! I was ordahed out by a chap here, who wufused to listen to me," said Arthur Augustus. "I believe I have already mentioned that circumstance to you, my deah sir."

"Yes."

"The chap who ordahed me out was this chap," said Arthur Augustus, taking off his eyeglass, and indicating Gerald Blane with it. "He was alone. I wegarded his mannah as wude and caddish."

Blane moved his lips, but did not speak.

"When I looked in," went on D'Arcy, replacing his monocle, and speaking with a leisurely ease which was somewhat exasperating under the circumstances, "that chap—I must call him a chap, as it would be a misuse of words to refer to him as a gentleman—that chap was fumbling among the coats—"

"Ah!"

"He had his hand in the inside pocket of a jacket," said D'Arcy. "I wegarded it as wathah cuwious at the time. But as it was not my biznay, I took no notice of it. But now that I see Tom Mewwy dwessed, I recognise it as his jacket. That person"—he went on, pointing to Blane again—"had his hand in the pocket of Tom Merry's jacket. Pewwaps he will be kind enough to explain what he was doin'."

Blane was white as death.

"It's a lie!" he blustered.

Mr. Philpot looked round.

"Blane was alone here for a time, I believe," he said.

"Yes," said Yorke. "He came late."

"Then he had time and opportunity to do as stated?"

"Certainly!"

"What have you to say, Blane?"

Blane felt his tongue cleaving to the roof of his mouth. Bold, brazen effrontery might have afforded him a chance even then, but he had not nerve enough to meet the eyes

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of the footballers. D'Arcy's statement carried truth on the face of it. What use was a wretched lie against the truth?

"It's—it's false, sir," he muttered thickly. "It's—it's a tale got up between the two of them."

"That is nonsense!" said Mr. Philpot coldly. "Tom Merry and D'Arcy have not seen each other, excepting here and now, since the game. You should think of a better story than that, Blane."

"I—I—"

"Keep that man here," said Mr. Philpot, "while I telephone to the police station."

He moved towards the door.

But at the threat, what little courage Blane possessed, deserted him, and he broke down.

"Stop, sir!" he gasped, in a strangled voice. "I—I—I did it! Don't be hard on me! It was a—a joke!"

Mr. Philpot regarded him sternly.

"You confess, Blane?"

"Yes," muttered the miserable plotter.

"Tell me the truth! You did this for revenge upon Tom Merry—you wanted to brand him as a thief?"

A lie trembled upon Blane's lips, but he did not venture to utter it. His head dropped low under the scornful looks that were cast upon him from all sides.

"Yes," he muttered.

"You hound!" said Yorke.

Mr. Philpot stepped aside from the door.

"Get out!" he said. "Don't show yourself here again, or at the bank, either. We don't want a coward and a scheming scoundrel in Wayland Ramblers. Get out!"

Blane staggered to the door, and went without a word. Words could not have been of much use to him now. His cowardly plot had recoiled upon his own head.

Mr. Philpot turned to Tom Merry and held out his hand.

"I ask your pardon," he said. "If I doubted you for a moment it was because that scoundrel had laid his plans so carefully. I was shocked and very much pained that you should have been treated like this in the Ramblers' quarters, Merry. I hope you'll do your best to look over it."

"Bai Jove! I wegard that as vewy handsome, Tom Mewwy—quite the wight and pwopah thing to do, you know."

Tom Merry smiled a little tremulously.

"It's all right, sir," he said.

"We're all sorry," said Yorke.

"It's all right."

"Yaas, wathah! Jolly lucky for you, deah boy, that I happened to be awound, though," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I believe I genewally turn up in the wight place at the wight moment, you know."

"So you do, Gussy, old son. You're a brick!"

Arthur Augustus nodded.

"Yaas, Tom Mewwy, undah the circs, I weally considah that you are wight in wegardin' me as a bwick!" he agreed.

CHAPTER 14.

The Ramblers at St. Jim's!

TOM MERRY had been cleared, and the Wayland footballers were only too anxious to do anything they could to remove the impression of the unpleasant incident from his mind.

He had never been so popular with them; and Arthur Augustus came in for a share of the attention, too.

Gerald Blane had gone at once. He would never be seen at the Ramblers' ground again, and he was not likely to remain in Wayland at all. He was ruined there, and the punishment of the rascal had certainly been very heavy, though no heavier than he richly deserved.

But the Wayland captain had to find a new outside-right at a few hours' notice. He selected a winger with care from the reserves, and although the new man was not quite up to Blane's form, there was no doubt that he would get on better with the inside-right, and that was a gain.

Upon the whole, Yorke was not dissatisfied with the change. Blane had been a good player when he chose, but always uncertain, especially as regards temper.

And Tom Merry having shown his quality as a forward, the Wayland captain realised that what was chiefly wanted was an outside who would co-operate heartily with the young forward, which Blane never would have done.

Mr. Philpot asked D'Arcy home to lunch with him, an invitation which the swell of St. Jim's readily accepted, and the elegant junior made a very favourable impression upon Mrs. Philpot.

"I'll come ovah to St. Jim's with you, in the chawabanc, deah boy," D'Arcy remarked at lunch. "I wathah like your men, Mr. Philpot."

"They would be very flattered," said the banker, with a smile.

"Yaas, wathah, sir! I am wathah good as a judge of chawactah," replied D'Arcy innocently. "I fail to see

why you are gwinnin', Tom Mewwy. By the way, I had an ideah of a bwass band to greet you when you came to St. Jim's, but the fellows wufused to back me up."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wats, deah boy! Howevah, the ideah has been dwopped for the pnesent, but I shall pewwaps wevive it when you pay us anothah visit."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy walked with Tom Merry to the ground to meet the charabanc which was to take the footballers over to St. Jim's.

There was room for him in the vehicle, and he took a seat beside Tom Merry, the Wayland footballers receiving him among them with great good-humour.

D'Arcy was kind enough to give Yorke a good many points about playing the game during the drive over to the school, all of which the Wayland captain received with smiling good-humour, and the swell of St. Jim's was in the middle of an exposition of the offside rule when they reached their journey's end.

A crowd of juniors met the charabanc at the gates, and

"As a mattah of fact," went on Arthur Augustus seriously. "I wegard this as a match between juniuahs and seniahs—Kildare's team on one side, and Tom Merry's on the othah. The Wayland chaps can be wegard as backin' up Tom Mewwy against the seniahs. That is weally the pwopah way to look at it."

"Yorke would be flattered," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Well, that's how I wegard it."

Cousin Ethel and the juniors walked with Tom Merry to the pavilion, where the hero of the Shell went into the dressing-room assigned to the Waylanders. Kildare met him as he went in, and greeted him with a smile.

The kick-off was timed early, and St. Jim's fellows were already crowding round the ground.

Blake's advice to throw up junior play for the occasion and watch the senior match instead had been taken by all the lower school of both Houses.

Both Houses were represented in the senior team, six School House and five New House fellows wearing the colours of St. Jim's.



"Watch him!" went up an excited shout from the spectators. "He's through!" Tom Merry had beaten the St. Jim's backs, and only Baker in goal stood between the Ramblers' young recruit and a score!

among them was a graceful figure which Tom Merry knew at once.

He raised his cap to Cousin Ethel.

"Bai Jove! There's Cousin Ethel wavin' her hand to me," exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Let's jump down here, deah boys."

Tom Merry glanced at Mr. Philpot. The manager smiled and nodded.

"Jump down by all means, Tom," he said.

The two juniors jumped off the vehicle.

Tom Merry shook hands with Cousin Ethel warmly. Figgins was looking after her, a duty that Figgins performed with a great deal of pleasure.

"So jolly glad to see you," Tom Merry exclaimed. "It's a pleasure to have you watching a match again, Cousin Ethel."

"And a pleasure to see you play," said Ethel, with a smile, "though it is against St. Jim's."

"Only against St. Jim's seniors," said Blake cheerfully.

"That really doesn't count, when you come to think of it. Now, if it had been against St. Jim's juniors—"

"Yaas, wathah, that would have made a great deal of difference."

Cousin Ethel laughed.

They looked a very fine team, too, especially Kildare and Darrell of the School House, and Monteith, the head prefect of the New House.

The St. Jim's fellows were on the ground first, and the growing crowd greeted them with a cheer.

They looked very fit indeed.

Younger than the Ramblers, as a team, they had the advantage of more continual practice, and they were certainly quite as fast, if not so heavy.

Blake & Co. were standing in a group close up to the ropes, having won the position by the free use of knees and elbows.

A crowd of New House fellows had been there, but they had been ousted, and Blake and Digby and D'Arcy, and Lowther and Manners and Kangaroo, and half a dozen other School House juniors stood in a compact group.

"Stick here," said Blake. "A lot of people are coming over from Wayland, and there will be a crush."

"What-ho!" said Kangaroo.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"These New House chaps are growling," observed Herries. "They seem to think they have some sort of right to be here."

"They were first," D'Arcy remarked. The other fellows glared at him. "What's that got to do with it?" "Weally, deah boy——"

"Isn't the School House Cock-House of St. Jim's?" "Yaas, wathah!"

"Isn't it our bounden duty to put the New House fellows in their place on every possible and impossible occasion?" "Yaas, certainly!"

"But we've put them out of their place," suggested Lowther.

"Oh, don't be funny."

"Yaas, weally, Lowthah, I don't think you ought to be funny at a time like this. You see, deah boy——"

"Oh, rats!" said Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"Here, out of it, you School House kids!"

It was the great Figgins.

The deposed New House fellows had called in the aid of their chief. Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn came up, looking very businesslike, with a crowd of New House fellows at their heels.

"Out of it!"

"Clear!"

"Buzz off!"

"Shoulder to shoulder!" said Blake. "If these New House bounders are going to kick up a row on the ground at any moment on an occasion like this, it is our duty to put it down."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Look here——" roared Figgins.

"Weally, Figgins, I am surprised at you. The Wamblers

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may come on the gground at any moment, and surely you do not wish them to see us wovin'?"

"Clear out, then."

"I decline to clear out."

"All the other front places are taken," said Kerr. "Half the blessed country seems to have come to see this match. Pratt was keeping open a place for us."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now, then, are you going?"

"Rather not."

"Wats, deah boy!"

"Rush them!" said Figgins.

"Hurrah!"

The New House juniors made a rush all together. Jack Blake and his chums met it sturdily, but the force of the rush sent them against the ropes, and some of them rolled underneath into the playing field.

"Order, there!" shouted the prefects.

"Bai Jove!"

A linesman ran up, and began booting all the juniors within reach in a really broad and impartial way.

They scrambled out again, under or over the rope, in a remarkably rapid manner. New House and School House were mixed up now indiscriminately. The linesman, who was a New House prefect, eyed them with a glare.

"Any more row here, and I'll have you all turned off the field!" he exclaimed. "Bear that in mind now!"

"Weally, Evans——"

"Shut up!"

And the linesman walked away.

"Keep quiet, you chaps," said Figgins, who had secured a front place; and he grinned at Blake, who was beside him. "It's all right. Order!"

"I can't see anything," said Pratt.

"It's all right," said Lowther, who was also in the front.

"You keep your eyes on me, Pratt, and cheer when I do."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly ass!" roared Pratt. "I—— Here, come on, French! There's a place lower down!"

And Pratt and French ran off.

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Well placed or not, the juniors had to keep order, and there was little more disputing in the ranks. The St. Jim's seniors were punting the ball about, keeping themselves warm. And now the Wayland Ramblers appeared in sight. They were in red shirts, and the Saints wore blue and white stripes.

There was a shout as Tom Merry ran out into the ground with the rest.

"Tom Merry!"

"Here he is!"

"Give him a cheer!"

"Bwavo!"

"Hurrah! Hip-hip-hurrah!"

The cheer rang out over the ground, and it brought a flush of pleasure to Tom Merry's cheeks. There was no doubt that the Saints were glad to see him, and that they liked him none the less, though on this occasion he had appeared on the college ground to play against St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 15. The Match!

KILDARE won the toss, and gave his opponents the wind to play against.

"Good for the start," commented Blake. "There's plenty of wind."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Wayland Ramblers kicked off against the wind. The kick-off was followed immediately by some fast play.

Wayland Ramblers tried their usual tactics of heavy rushes and short passing, but they found the Saints defence hard to beat.

Baker of the New House in goal was in splendid form, and he saved several times in the first ten minutes of the game.

Jack Blake gave Arthur Augustus a slap on the shoulder to express his satisfaction.

"Jolly good game!" he exclaimed.

"Ow!"

"What's the matter now?"

"I weally wish you would not thump me in that bwotal way. You thwow me into a fluttah, and there is dangah of wumplin' my coat."

"Oh, rats!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"There goes Tom Merry!"

"Bai Jove!"

All eyes were turned upon the St. Jim's junior who was playing in the ranks of the visiting team.

Tom Merry had received the ball from the outside-right, and as Carter, the centre-forward, was marked, he was going on with it. The St. Jim's seniors made the mistake of paying less attention to Tom Merry. The junior dribbled past the centre-half, and made a dash between the backs.

"Watch him; he's through!" went up a shout from the spectators.

And he was through!

The backs were beaten, and only Baker in goal stood between the junior and a score. Baker was watching him closely, and shaping for the shot. Tom Merry feinted to shoot with his left, and suddenly changed his foot, and sent the ball into the far corner of the net.

Baker clutched wildly after it a second too late.

There was a deafening roar.

"Goal!"

"My hat! Goal!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Hurrah!"

The cheers were deafening.

The Ramblers' backers, of whom there were some hundreds on the ground, were stentorian in their efforts. St. Jim's juniors joined in heartily. Tom Merry's score was a score for them—they all felt that—and School House and New House united to give him an ovation.

"Bravo, Tom Merry!"

"Hurrah!"

"Goal! Goal! Hurrah!"

Baker looked a little sheepish as he tossed the ball out. He did not wholly like being beaten by a Shell fellow.

Yorke's eyes gleamed as he walked back to the centre of the field.

He slapped Tom Merry on the shoulder.

"Good for you, kid!" he exclaimed. "I knew you would do well, but I never expected the first goal of the game from you! Good!"

Tom Merry's face flushed with pleasure as the teams lined up again.

Kildare did not look much disturbed. His men were in good form, and he reflected that one swallow did not make a summer.

(Continued on page 22.)

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22 EVERY BOY'S COLLECTING THE "GEM" PICTURES! TEN MORE NEXT WEEK.

The Saints played up again well.

They fully held their own now, and the play was more in the Wayland half than in the St. Jim's territory.

But St. Jim's did not score.

The minutes ticked off, and the time for the interval drew nearer and nearer, and the score remained unchanged, one to nil.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus. "They want wakin' up, you know, deah boys. I say, you know, play up there!"

"Go it, Saints!"

"Put your beef into it!"

The Saints were hotly attacking the Ramblers' goal now, and it looked as if they would score any minute.

A fast drive was sent in, and Williams had all his work cut out to save. He punched the ball out, and it fell at Kildare's feet. The St. Jim's captain kicked it first time and the leather shot past Williams, and lodged in the net.

Then the Saints roared.

"Goal! Goal!"

"G-O-A-L!"

"Hurrah! Hurrah!"

"Bravo!"

The score was level, but it did not remain so. Almost on the point of time Darrell slammed the ball in. Then the whistle rang out for half-time, amid a storm of cheering, and St. Jim's closed the first half with a score of two to one.

The change of ends brought the wind in the faces of Kildare and his men.

St. Jim's kicked off after the interval.

Interest among the spectators was very keen now. St. Jim's lead gave them an advantage, and if they kept it through the second half the game was theirs.

The Ramblers were determined to equalise, and the Saints were resolute that they shouldn't, and so the play was hard and keen.

Twenty minutes remained to play, however, before the score was changed, and then it was changed in favour of St. Jim's, Monteith sending in a long shot that beat Williams in goal.

Three to one!

St. Jim's felt that the game was all over bar shouting. But that third goal seemed to wake the Ramblers up. They threw themselves almost fiercely into the game, and, passing splendidly, came up the field for goal.

Tom Merry received the ball from the centre-forward, and he took it on without an instant's pause, and passed it to his outside-right just in time, and received it back from him well up in front of goal. Two Saints were close on Tom Merry, but he tricked them both, and ran on and passed across to centre just before he was charged over by a back. Carter sent it to Yorke, and the Ramblers' captain rushed in and scored with a hard drive.

Then the Wayland folk roared.

"Goal!"

"Never mind," said Blake, "we're still ahead, and only a quarter of an hour to play. Kildare will pull it off."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I don't know," remarked Kangaroo. "The Ramblers are going strong now, and they're hot stuff!"

"Bai Jove! Look there!"

Yorke was on the ball again, and in spite of all the efforts of the St. Jim's defence, he sent it whizzing in again five minutes later.

Three all!

Wayland Ramblers had equalised!

Ten minutes more to play. It was anybody's game. As the teams lined up after the goal Yorke gave his men the word.

"Buck up! One more for Wayland!"

And the Ramblers went into it.

But the Saints were in a grim fighting mood. The play was hard and fast, sweeping up to one goal and then down to the other, and good play was seen on both sides.

But the score did not change.

Five minutes more! Fellows were looking at their watches. They had seen Mr. Railton, the referee, look at his.

"Looks like a draw," said Figgins.

"Play up, St. Jim's!" roared Blake.

"Hurrah! On the ball, Ramblers!"

"Bai Jove! Look at Tom Mewwy!"

"Bravo, Merry!"

Tom Merry had trapped the ball, taking it away from the mighty Kildare himself. He was off with it like a shot.

The play had been up at the Wayland goal, but as Tom Merry ran, dribbling the ball with unflinching skill and wonderful swiftness, the press broke up and the field streamed after him.

A roar arose.

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"Go it, Merry!"

"Stop him, Saints!"

"Oh, well passed—well passed!"

Only one Wayland forward was placed for a pass as Tom Merry was tackled, and that was Yorke at inside-left. Tom Merry sent the ball across to him, spreadeagling the Saints' defence, and Yorke rushed on for goal. Tom Merry rushed on, keeping pace with the Wayland captain.

Yorke dashed on. Two backs were closing on him. All depended upon Tom Merry, and whether the young forward would understand what was wanted. Yorke made a feint of kicking for goal which deceived the enemy, and suddenly passed across to Tom Merry.

As if by intuition, Tom Merry knew what was working in his skipper's mind. He was ready for the pass. It found him with nobody to beat but the goalkeeper.

Tom Merry trapped the ball neatly, ran two or three paces with it, and then let drive.

Whiz!

Right into the bottom left-hand corner of the net went the ball, the goalie standing no chance of saving.

"My hat!" ejaculated Baker.

There was a roar.

"Goal!"

"Tom Merry!"

"Bravo!"

Yorke was clapping the lad on the back. High above the clamour rose the shrill peep of the whistle.

The game was over, and Wayland Ramblers had won a hard match by four goals to three. And the Ramblers could not make enough of Tom Merry as they chaired him off the field.

Tom Merry came out of the dressing-room in his ordinary clothes, with a flush from the exercise in his cheeks, and a sparkle in his eyes. His chums were waiting for him outside. As soon as he appeared they rushed upon him.

"Here he is!"

"Bravo, Tommy!"

"Good old Tom!"

"Congratulations, old chap! You've beaten the seniors."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Thanks!" he said. "It's been a ripping match, anyway: but it's the last time I shall play against St. Jim's—the first and the last."

"Mr. Railton wants to speak to you, Tom Merry," said Gore, coming through the crowd. "He wants you to go to his study."

"I'll come."

"I fancy it means something for you," said Gore. "Mr. Railton was talking to the Head, and it looks to me as if something's on."

Tom Merry nodded.

"We'll have tea in the study," said Lowther. "Cousin Ethel's coming to tea."

"I'll join you in the study, then," said Tom Merry.

He walked away towards the School House.

Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, who had refereed the Ramblers' match, was in his normal attire again now, and waiting in his study. He nodded kindly to the junior as he came in.

"Sit down, Merry!" he said. "I want to speak to you."

"Yes, sir."

"I understand that you are staying with Mr. Philpot temporarily, and that you are leaving him after this match to seek some employment?"

"Yes."

"You have not decided upon any post yet?"

"I have not been able to do so, sir."

"The Head and I have consulted about it, Merry, and we think that some post might be found for you at St. Jim's, if you would care for that."

Tom Merry started.

"A post at St. Jim's!" he exclaimed.

"Exactly! What do you say?"

The lad's eyes danced. A post at St. Jim's—where he could earn his living without leaving the old school, without breaking off all his old associations, and plunging alone into the wide world! It seemed too good to be true.

"What can I say, sir," said Tom, "except that I'm glad—that I accept, and that I thank you from my heart?"

Mr. Railton smiled and held out his hand.

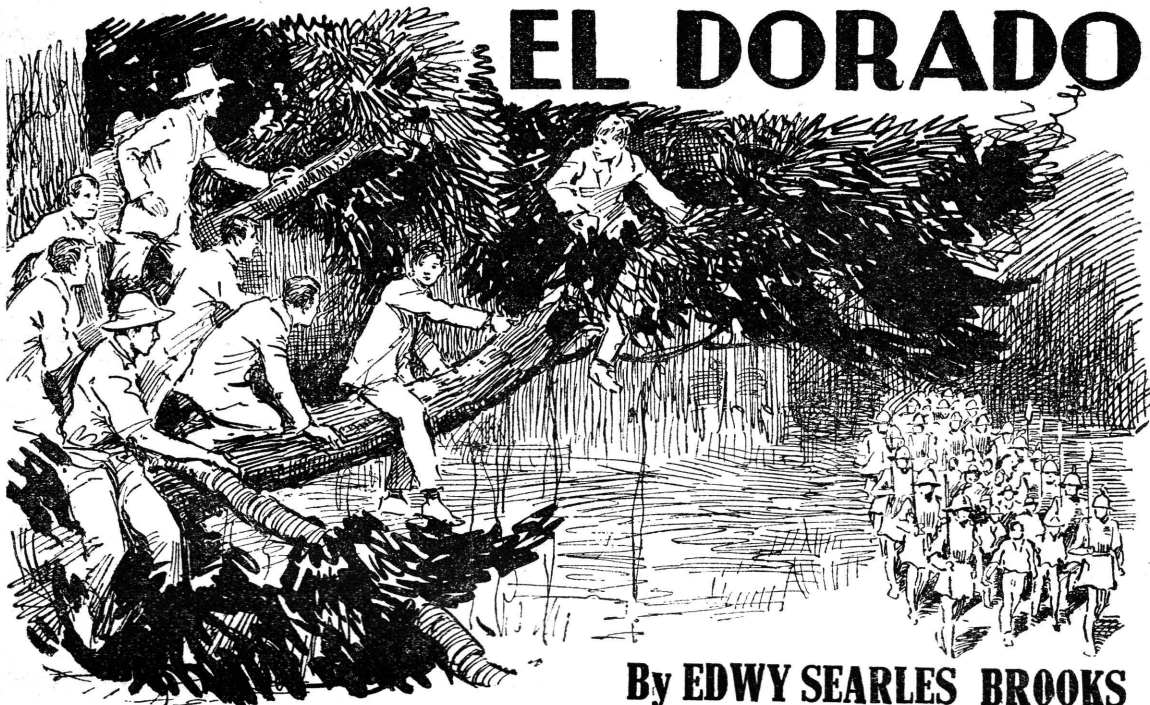
And so it was that when the Wayland Ramblers left St. Jim's, Tom Merry, their young recruit, stayed behind at the old school.

THE END.

(Tom Merry—master of the Third Form! Such is the position Tom Merry takes on next week's great story, "THE FAGS' FORM-MASTER!" Read all about it—it's a wov of a yarn from start to finish!)

FLOCK OF FLYING MONSTERS ATTACK THE ST. FRANK'S AIRSHIP!

THE WHITE GIANTS OF EL DORADO!



By **EDWY SEARLES BROOKS**

THE OPENING CHAPTERS.

In a super airship, the Sky Wanderer, a big party of St. Frank's fellows, under Nelson Lee and three other masters, set off on an educational tour of the world. With the party also are Lord Dorrimore and his black friend, Umlosi. The airship is following a course over the wilds of Brazil when it is brought down by a powerful sunray, and everyone aboard is made prisoner by the Araecs, a race of White Giants ruled over by Professor Cyrus Zingrave, a dangerous criminal. The St. Frank's boys escape, however, in the Sky Wanderer. The airship is heading for safety when suddenly a huge flock of pteradactyls—monster prehistoric birds—flies straight at it!

Touch-and-go!

IT was a time of dreadful anxiety for the boys and Nelson Lee. The latter was responsible for the safety of the St. Frank's juniors and seniors, and this unexpected peril filled the great detective with horror.

Maimed as she was already, and manned only by mere amateurs, and mostly schoolboys at that, the airship was in no condition to withstand further structural shocks.

Thud! Thud! Thud!

Even in the control-room Nelson Lee felt rather than heard the many dull thuds as the pteradactyls crashed against the fabric-covered girders.

In vain Lee sought to gain greater height. He telegraphed to the engine-rooms for every ounce of speed, he pulled at the levers which operated the immense controlling-vanes, but they answered not at all. Sluggish, lazy, the crippled monster was at the mercy of this ugly host of the Arzaeland sky.

On the promenade deck the St. Frank's fellows were watching breathlessly, fascinated by the scene. The vile flying horrors were crashing themselves against the hull in increasing numbers, their croaking, screaming cries filled the air. Many of them, maimed, fell hurtling past the decks, and all the while the Sky Wanderer shuddered and rocked under the force of the innumerable collisions.

"We're done!" muttered Church, in a strained voice.

"It's all up, Handy—we're going to crash!"

"Rats!" said Handforth, gripping the chromium rail.

"Mr. Lee's in control."

"But he's no magician—he can't do the impossible," put

in McClure, white to the lips. "Churchy's right! The poor old bus is doomed."

They were nearly flung off their feet as the airship suddenly rocked with a sickening, shuddering lurch. A little farther along the rail three or four fellows escaped in the nick of time as a pteradactyl flew down close to the deck, one of its wings sweeping into the juniors almost. There was a terrible claw projecting from the leathery wing, and only by a miracle did one of them escape being dragged down to death. The claw caught on the rail, twisting it and leaving a great shattered gap.

From stem to stern the unhappy vessel was being battered, her fabric was being torn, her girders strained under the constant bombardment.

"She's diving!" yelled Boots of the Fourth.

The sensation was ghastly. The Sky Wanderer's nose had gone down, and, apparently out of control, she was diving towards the tree-tops, which were so perilously close.

Down she went, swaying, juddering and with a screeching and croaking like a million demons the pteradactyls flew on. The airship's altered position had changed the sun glint, and the flying monsters were now going clear. But the damage was done. Many of the boys on the promenade decks closed their eyes in expectation of the death crash which seemed inevitable.

Then, as though by a miracle, her nose began to rise again, and she succeeded in reaching an even keel. At the last second, Nelson Lee had regained control. She was obeying her pilot!

But it was touch-and-go. Not ten feet beneath her keel were the tree-tops, and she seemed to be even scraping them. Then suddenly there was a grinding, shrieking sound of tearing metal—a sound which made scores of hearts beat faster.

Nelson Lee, believing that the worse was over, went cold as he heard the unexpected sound. And in a flash he knew what had happened. He knew, too, that he could do nothing in the matter.

The crippled grappling claw, hanging grotesquely and drunkenly from the hull, aft!

This claw, being lower than the rest of the airship, had fouled the tree-tops. But for that one mischance the Sky Wanderer would have floated clear, and Lee did not doubt

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that he could have taken her to safety. But the dragging claw proved fatal. Catching at the trees, it seemed to be tearing the airship asunder. She slewed wildly, her nose swinging to starboard and dropping.

But just when disaster seemed imminent her nose broke clear of the trees, and Nelson Lee saw open ground immediately below. There was a break in the forest, a great expanse of open countryside.

The schoolboys on the decks, with the tree-tops almost brushing them, were silent—for death seemed near. But never for a moment did Nelson Lee lose his head. Making an instant decision, he telegraphed to every engine gondola, giving the order "full speed astern!"

As the Sky Wanderer broke completely clear of the trees Lee operated other levers, and the telescopic grappling-claws forward shot out. They clutched at the ground, cutting great furrows. There were sounds like the reports of cannon as parts of the metalwork snapped. But, in spite of the terrific strain, the grapplings held, and with a last sickening lurch the airship settled down on an even keel, her three good grapplings holding her fast. Her stern was not fifty yards from the edge of the forest belt, and in the forest itself there was a giant furrow marking the vessel's progress.

But there she stood, battered and torn it is true, but on the whole intact. Her girders were strained, her fabric was torn in a thousand places, and the propellers of her port engines amidships and aft were smashed.

But she was no mass of wreckage, sprawling over the land, littered with dead. Nelson Lee leaned back as white as a sheet, for now that the tension was over even his nerve of steel was affected. But he was himself again within a few moments, and with a firm step he strode out of the control-room and hurried to the main lounge. From here he could hear the excited shouts of the boys.

"We're safe!"

"Mr. Lee has done it—he's brought us down without crashing!"

"Hurrah!"

"A miracle—nothing less than a miracle!" came the voice of Mr. Wilkes. "Good heavens! Even now I cannot understand it! We ought to be all dead!"

"Let's give three cheers for Mr. Lee!"

"Hear, hear!"

In their great excitement the boys gave no thought to the grim danger of the situation. They had escaped from El Dorado, it was true—they were out of Professor Zingrave's clutches, but they were still in the Land of the White Giants. And the Sky Wanderer was now so cruelly crippled that she could not again take the air until extensive repairs had been made.

Nelson Lee was aware of the truth, and so was Lord Dorrimore. So were Mr. Wilkes and Mr. Stokes and Professor Tucker. They knew that the venture had failed. By a cruel trick of fate the pterodactyl host had brought Nelson Lee's efforts to nought.

"Here's Mr. Lee!"

"Well done, sir!"

"Hurrah!"

Nelson Lee had appeared on deck, but his face was grave, and he held up a hand. His very appearance stilled the excited, enthusiastic voices. Lee caught a glimpse of Dorrie, oily and grubby, in the background.

"Take it calmly, all of you!" said Lee. "We are safe for the moment, but I am afraid that we have nothing to cheer about!"

"Come off it, sir!" shouted Handforth. "You saved our lives, didn't you?"

"But the unfortunate fact remains that the airship is hopelessly crippled," said Nelson Lee. "Mercifully, we are far from the inhabited regions of Arzacland, and perhaps our enemies will never know that we have been forced down—"

Lee broke off abruptly. For he had strode out farther upon the deck, and he had seen something which had hitherto been hidden.

"Look!" said the detective.

Everyone turned and stared, and then many shouts of consternation went up. For the countryside was clear of

trees for miles, and in full sight there was a town, or city, of stone. It stood in a valley, not two miles distant, and from it came streaming a great column of White Giants.

"Good gad!" came an ejaculation from Archie Glen-thorne. "How frightfully frightful! I mean to say, isn't it a bit too thick?"

"Out of the fryin'-pan into the fire—eh?" said Lord Dorrimore, pushing through the boys and reaching Nelson Lee's side. "Old man, this is ugly!"

He fingered his automatic suggestively, and Nelson Lee nodded.

"I'm afraid you're right, Dorrie," he said grimly. "We've got the weapons, and we shall have to use them. We're not going to be taken again."

"Good man!" said the sporting peer heartily. "I was hoping you would say that. What do you think we'd better do?"

Lee was a man of quick decisions.

"You men will fetch machine-guns, and take up your positions below on the entrance deck," he said crisply. "From that position you will be able to send a raking fire into the enemy if they decide upon an attack."

"We'll stick to the airship, then?" asked Old Wilkey, his eyes shining.

"Yes—for here we are in a little world of our own," replied Nelson Lee. "Furthermore, we are some distance from the ground, and the only way in which the enemy can reach us is by climbing the ladders."

"An' there won't be any ladders," said Dorrie, nodding, "because they won't be lowered. We can defend ourselves from every angle. How many of you boys can use rifles?"

There was a general shout, eager and excited.

"Dorrie, you had better take Fenton and some of the other seniors and give them enough rifles to go round," said Lee briskly. "Supply them with plenty of ammunition, too. We're down, but we're not going to surrender."

"Hurrah!"

"We'll turn the Sky Wanderer into a temporary fortress and defy the enemy," continued Lee. "But, remember, boys, there must be no firing unless the Arzacs made a determined attack."

"Wau! I like it not, Umtagati," grumbled Umlosi, his great fingers twitching on the shaft of his spear. "Is this a fight? Would it not be better to go down upon solid ground and meet the enemy warriors face to face?"

"I do not doubt that you would prefer it, Umlosi, but it would be madness," replied Lee. "We must stick to the airship."

In a moment there was a great bustle of activity. Lord Dorrimore went hurrying off with the St. Frank's masters and some of the seniors. Nipper took it upon himself to organise the junior forces. From one end of the airship to the other active preparations were being made.

Meanwhile, the White Giants were advancing—hundreds of them. And Nelson Lee, at least, saw that the Arzacs were not peaceful peasants, but soldiers, and the detective guessed that this city, far beyond the great protective wall, was one of Arzacland's outer fortresses.

Lee was not far wrong in this assumption; for this place was the city of Az, and it was the stronghold of an Arzac leader known as Surnum Mentius. He was, indeed, one of the mightiest overlords of Arzacland, and he commanded some thousands of highly trained warriors.

The situation looked desperate indeed!

"Captain Hurricane!"

IT was just one breathless situation after another. The boys scarcely had time to think, or to realise how hungry and tired they were. No sooner was one peril overcome than another cropped up hard on its heels. And it said much for the endurance and pluck of the schoolboys that they were instantly ready to cope with the fresh danger.

Nelson Lee's calmness, his supreme quality of leadership, prevented any possible panic. He believed that the coming encounter would be an easy victory for the defenders. The White Giants were not familiar with firearms, and they would inevitably retreat in disorder after the first rush. Moreover, there was no way in which they could climb up to the airship.

Nelson Lee was glad now that Lord Dorrimore had had the foresight to bring machine-guns, rifles, and automatic pistols. Yet Lee did not doubt that a courier was already speeding towards El Dorado, carrying the news to Professor Zingrave—or King Yoga, as he preferred to call himself—that the airship had come down, and was hopelessly crippled. It might be some time before Zingrave's main forces would appear on the scene. But they would inevitably come in their thousands.

The danger, at the moment, was trivial, and Nelson Lee

St.
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WHO



Mr. B. Stokes. W. Church. "Buster" Boots.
(Three more portraits next week.)



As the hideous pteradactyls flew blindly at the Sky Wanderer, one swept down very close to the deck, and only by a miracle did three or four fellows escape the claw that projected from the leathery wing!

was glad of it. He knew how badly he and his companions needed rest.

The preparations were completed. Rifles were passed round among the boys, and they stationed themselves all along the promenade decks. Seniors such as Fenton and Morrow and Biggleswade were given temporary commands; each senior had a number of juniors under him, and the juniors were ordered to obey instructions without hesitation.

Nelson Lee himself went down to the entrance deck, where Dorrie and Old Wilkey and Barry Stokes were already setting up the wicked-looking machine-guns. Meanwhile, the White Giants were comparatively close at hand. They were approaching openly, without any attempt at formation or order.

"We must not be squeamish, Dorrie; neither must we be needlessly brutal," said Lee quietly.

"What do you mean, old man?"

"I mean that they are coming on fearlessly," replied Lee. "unconscious of the lethal weapons we are prepared to use against them. To fire on them in such circumstances would result in a hideous massacre."

"Then what do you suggest?"

"We must give them a chance to retreat—with their lives," replied Lee. "Before they get within range we shall fire an opening round, and if they still come on we shall fire harmlessly over their heads."

"You're right, Mr. Lee," said Barry Stokes, nodding. "It would be horrible to mow them down without giving them a chance. Besides, they might appreciate our motive."

Orders were quickly sent round; the seniors were told to hold their fire. But it was Nelson Lee himself who operated the first machine-gun. It suddenly burst into life, sending a stream of bullets harmlessly into the ground.

But the effect was immediate.

The foremost White Giants paused, then they halted. They stood in crowds, several hundred yards away from the stationary airship. Other Arzaacs came up behind them until a great multitude stood there, hesitant. They had sensed danger in the sinister put-put-put! of the machine-gun.

"By James!" exclaimed Lee suddenly.

"What is it?" asked Dorrie.

"Do you not see anything remarkable about the White Giants?" asked the detective. "Look at them, Dorrie."

"I'm lookin'. They're just the same as the El Dorado blighters."

"In stature and dress, yes," agreed Lee. "But they are unarmed."

"Ye gods and little fishes! So they are!" exclaimed Dorrie. "That's queer, isn't it? Didn't they come up here to attack us?"

It was significant, indeed, that the Arzac hosts should be weaponless. Not a man carried even a stick. Some of them had apparently been holding a conference; for now, before Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore could exchange further talk, a group of four Arzaacs came forward well clear of the others. They were officers, apparently, for their dress was richer, and many golden ornaments gleamed and shimmered on their great tunics. They came forward with their right hands upraised, as though in surrender, or in token of peace.

"Better look out for treachery," muttered Dorrie, crouching in readiness behind his own machine-gun.

Everybody aboard the Sky Wanderer watched breathlessly and with tense curiosity. The four Arzac officers came straight on, apparently confident that their isolation rendered them safe. At last they stood right beneath the giant hull, and one of them stepped forward, looking up at Lee, who was leaning over the rail of the entrance deck.

"Welcome, good strangers, and enemies of King Yoga!" came the White Giant's deep voice. "Welcome to the rebel city of Az!"

Lee cast a quick glance at Dorrie.

"You are wise to leave your men behind!" he called down. "We have weapons of death, and if they approach too closely we shall spread death amongst them."

"But we would welcome you as friends," said the Arzac officer earnestly. "I am commanded by my Lord Surnum Mentius, to greet you with all honour, and to bid you welcome to the city of Az."

"Forgive me if I appear overcautious," replied Nelson Lee. "But we met with such treacherous treatment at the hands of your countrymen in El Dorado that we must decline to take your word that you are our friends—"

"Forgive me for interruptin', old man, but do you see what I see?" asked Lord Dorrimore abruptly. "By the Lord Harry! Look over there!"

Nelson Lee had been closely watching the Arzac officers below; but now he altered the direction of his gaze, and looked where Dorrie was pointing. In the distance, the Arzac multitude had parted, and many of the White Giants were shouting in obvious excitement. A smaller figure was

running between them—running from the direction of the city, dashing headlong towards the airship.

Lee caught his breath in, for at the first glance he saw that the newcomer was smaller in stature—in fact, a European. He was dressed in stained breeches, and a ragged old coloured sweater, with the collar open at the neck. He was a bronzed, clean-shaven man, and his abundant hair, of a fiery red, was waving untidily as he ran.

"Hi! Wait for me!" yelled the newcomer, his voice cracking with a delirious joy. "Ahoj, there! Are you English?"

"Yes!" went up a roar from the breathless schoolboys.

The Arzac officers had turned, and, after a few muttered comments amongst themselves, were waiting. Clearly they were relieved and pleased. The newcomer was almost immediately up to the airship now, his flushed, sunburnt face staring upwards. Dorrie clutched suddenly at Nelson Lee's arm.

"By all that's amazin'!" he ejaculated. "That man is Captain Harry Cane, or I'm Julius Caesar's granduncle!"

"By James, you're right!" said Lee, his eyes glowing. "It is! Captain Hurricane himself!"

It was a joyful surprise; for Lee and Dorrie, like all the world, had believed that the famous, intrepid Captain Harry Cane was dead. It was two years since the celebrated world-flyer had set off on an ambitious solo trip to cross the Southern Atlantic. He had never been heard of again, and, after weeks of waiting the world had believed that Captain Cane had come down in the sea. Never a trace of him had since been found.

Yet here he was—very much alive!

So daring was he, so whirlwind-like were his air adventures, that the British newspapers had dubbed him "Captain Hurricane," making a play of his own name. And a human hurricane he was. Still on the right side of forty this

staunch adventurer was as wiry as nails, and a man, indeed, after Nelson Lee's own heart.

"Hey, you men up there!" he sang out. "What's the matter? Aren't you going to invite me aboard? It's two years since— By Christopher!" he yelled. "You're Dorrie, aren't you? You're Lord Dorrimore?"

"Glad to see that you're alive, Harry," grinned Dorrie, leaning over the rail. "Just as mad as ever, I suppose?"

He turned to Nelson Lee.

"Better let the ladder down," he said. "Harry Cane is an old pal of mine. He wouldn't admit us into a trap. These White Giants are friends."

Leaning over the rails of the wide deck above, the boys were watching with breathless excitement. The name "Captain Hurricane" was passing from group to group. For all the St. Frank's fellows remembered the famous airman; he was one of their heroes.

Soon one of the ladders was lowered and not only Captain Harry Cane came running up, but the Arzac officers, too. Meanwhile, the main body of White Giants remained motionless in the distance.

"This is the most glorious thing that ever happened!" exclaimed Captain Cane, as he gripped Dorrie's hand. "I can't help thinking that I'm still dreaming. Yes, I was fast asleep when the excitement began. It's infernally early in the morning, even now, remember. Somebody woke me up and told me that a great 'ship of the sky' had come down near by; I saw hundreds of Arzacs running out of the town. Well, I've never leapt out of bed so quickly in all my life. I can't quite believe it, even now. What a ship!"

"Didn't you see us in the sky when we crossed over Arzacland yesterday?" asked Dorrie. "Or was it the day before? So much has happened that I'm losin' count of the days."

"We saw nothing—heard nothing," replied Captain Hurricane, with a shrug. "We're pretty isolated down in this part of the country. El Dorado is nearly a hundred miles



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John Robinson, 5, Weymouth Street, Birkenhead, Auckland, New Zealand, wants to hear from match-box collectors.

Peter Rogers, Pictou, Nova Scotia, Canada, wants to hear from stamp collectors.

Miss Florence Mathisen, Portsea Road, Sorrento, Victoria, Australia, wants girl correspondents: America, New Zealand, Tasmania.

Daniel Sefton, 49, Clifford Avenue, East Sheen, London, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,349.

S.W.14, wants to hear from stamp collectors (ages 13—15), Australia and Canada especially.

Dennis Pearson, 381, Lincoln Road, Peterborough, Northants, wants correspondents interested in the Companion Papers and in motor-racing.

Miss Ann Williams, 10, Oriol Road, Bootle, Liverpool, wants girl correspondents, to exchange snaps and magazines; India and Africa especially.

The Secretary, K. Costello, of the Henry Edwards Film Club, 32, Amesbury Avenue, Streatham Hill, London, S.W.2, would welcome new members. The club has centres all over the world: India, Stamboul, Iraq, etc. It runs a quarterly magazine, and includes among its members some of the best-known stars of Filmiland.

Miss Barbara Touner, 9, Grange Road, Lewes, Sussex, wants girl correspondents interested in sports and flying; ages 14—16.

A. Bowman, 51, Lothian Street, Norwich, wants to hear from "Nelson Lee" enthusiasts.

Miss Joan Coltham, 18, Barmouth Road, Wandsworth, London, S.W.18, wants girl correspondents; ages 13—15; swimming, drawing, amateur theatricals.

Harry Green, 93, Neill Road, Hunters' Bar, Sheffield, 11, wants correspondents keen on football and speedway racing; ages 16—18.

Miss Doris Baker, Glen View, Pomphlett Road, Plymstock, Devon, wants girl correspondents interested in clogs; ages 14—18.

Miss Alice Smith, 34, Mountfield Road, Lewes, Sussex, wants girl correspondents interested in sports; ages 15—16.

D. Lacey, 8, Lansdown Road, Luton, Bedfordshire, wants a correspondent in France.

P. Fielding, 19, Kingsford Street, Weaste, Salford, Lancs, wants correspondents interested in football at home and overseas.

Miss Barbara Hawkins, 3, Whitehall Park, Highgate, London, N.19, wants a girl correspondent in Australia (age 14—15), interested in reading and sport.

Miss Elvita, Delle Piane Iglesias, 60, Potosi Carraseo, Montevideo, Uruguay, South America, wants girl correspondents; ages 13—16.

Miss A. Custerson, 11, Parr Street, New North Road, London, N.1, wants girl correspondents, especially in America, interested in reading, drawing, and cricket; ages 13 upwards.

W. Jones, Ridge Farm, Rowhook, Horsham, Sussex, wants correspondents; ages 16—18.

Vincent Baxendale, 1, Vincent Street, Openshaw, Manchester, wants a pen pal in Australia or South Africa, interested in stamps and reading.

Trevor Bennett, 18, Centennial Street, Marrackville, Sydney, N.S.W., Australia, wants correspondents.

B. Morgan, 47, Garden Street, Lower Broughton, Salford, Manchester, wants a pen pal overseas: Canada, Malta, etc. Hobbies: stamp collecting and film star portraits.

L. Luke, 8, Paradise Place, Plymouth, wants a pen pal, interested in sport, old "Nelson Lee" yarns, etc.; age 17—22.

away. You must have flown in from the northward. We're south here. What happened?"

"There will be plenty of time to tell you what happened later," said Nelson Lee. "Dorrie, you have not introduced me."

"By St. Peter! So you are really Mr. Nelson Lee, the detective?" asked Captain Cane, when the formality had been attended to. "And all these youngsters are the boys of St. Frank's? Well, I'm hanged!"

"We want to know why you are here—and apparently on the best of terms with the White Giants," said Dorrie. "Who is this man Surnum Mentius?"

"He is white—right through," replied the other, becoming serious. "He's the greatest overlord in the south of Arzacland. The city of Az is practically an armed fortress, with thousands of soldiers garrisoned there. Round and about, too, there are other towns and villages, and all of them are staunch to Surnum Mentius. For many months past I've been amusing myself by teaching him English—his officers, too."

"And what about King Yoga?" put in Nipper eagerly.

"King Fiddlesticks!" retorted the other. "Didn't you know? He's that blighter, Zingrave!"

"Yes, I knew," said Lee quietly. "Zingrave and I are old-enemies. Did you not see the scars on the hull of this vessel? Zingrave brought us down, imprisoned us, and we escaped. Unfortunately, we could not rescue the officers and crew of the airship, and that is one reason why we have now met with disaster."

"Don't you believe it," put in Dorrie quickly. "Mr. Lee has handled the old ship in a masterly way. It was those rotten flyin' monsters which brought us down. Well, we seem to have been lucky in this spot, anyhow. We thought we had fallen into the hands of the enemy again—but things are not quite so bad, apparently."

"Surnum Mentius is your friend—if only because you are the enemy of Zingrave," replied Captain Cane. "I urge you to accept the invitation which has been extended you by Surnum Mentius' officers. Go into the city of Az, and you will be honoured as distinguished guests. These Arzacs are a fine race—although I know, to my own cost, how the people of El Dorado and other parts have been forced to swear allegiance to the new king. Oh, yes, there have been troublous times in Arzacland during the past few years!"

Nelson Lee required no further evidence. Captain Hurricane was a man of unimpeachable integrity, and his invitation, in itself, was good enough. Lee was immensely relieved to know that there would be no fighting. It was good, indeed, to know that they were amongst friends.

The boys, now that the tension was over, were suddenly aware of their hunger—which was even more apparent than their exhaustion. The prospect of a sound, solid meal did much to revive them.

Indeed, there was some talk of raiding the airship's food supplies; but Nelson Lee forbade any such thing. Far better to go into the city of Az and accept the hospitality of the great overlord, Surnum Mentius.

So, presently the entire company of the Sky Wanderer trooped down the ladders, and reached the ground. It was good to feel the solid earth underfoot. What a vast difference from their previous encounter with the White Giants! For now a guard of honour was formed, and the soldiers gathered in two great columns. At a suggestion from Lee, Captain Cane instructed an Arzac officer to remain behind with a hundred men—so that the airship would be well guarded.

Then the march commenced, and as the adventurers neared the city, they found that half the population had come out to greet them. Men, women, and children in their hundreds were lining the rough road, and, with mighty shouts of acclamation, they welcomed the visitors. It was, in all truth, a triumphal entry.

Signals in the Night!

CAPTAIN HURRICANE was bubbling with enthusiasm.

"I gathered, from something you said, Mr. Lee, that you are pretty well supplied with arms?" he asked. "I see you're carrying a gun, but I can assure you you won't need it in Az."

"We have a number of machine-guns, many rifles, and a big supply of ammunition," replied Lee. "Why are you interested?"

"Because those weapons of yours might come in useful," replied the other, with a touch of grimness in his voice.

"Things are working in this part of the country. Surnum Mentius is an outlaw, and Zingrave, the so-called king, is preparing to crush him and his supporters."

"More trouble!" put in Dorrie. "We always seem to find it!"

"I fancy we've had enough," said Lee, frowning. "If only I could get the boys safely away! How is it, Captain

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Cane, that you are here with this outlaw? Were you not brought down by Zingrave's destruction ray?"

"Yes; I was flying over the country, marvelling at the greatness of my discovery, when that ray struck my plane," replied the famous airman. "I had to make a forced landing, and I was captured. Zingrave was very frank with me, and it's only fair to say that he treated me well. He sent me to what he called an experimental factory, to take charge of a workshop, where a large number of Arzacs were making metal chariots of a special design. Zingrave has big ideas, you know. Well, I found that some of the Arzacs were secretly in sympathy with Surnum Mentius, and when they made a bolt for it through the forest I went with them. That's why I'm here."

There was no time for further conversation. They were well within the city now, and although it had nothing of the grandeur of El Dorado, the houses were, nevertheless, impressive. There was very little gold to be seen, and the buildings were mostly of white stone.

There was a halt, at length, in front of a great square structure with a huge door. The soldiers lined themselves up on either hand, and the Arzac officers went through the great doorway accompanied by Lee, Dorrie, Captain Cane, and all the others. The boys were agog with interest.

They found themselves in a great stone chamber of simple dignity. All round the walls stood scores of giant soldiers, rigid and impassive. On a raised platform sat Surnum Mentius himself, the powerful overlord. He was dressed in flowing white, with a few simple golden ornamentations on his clothing.

"Greetings, strangers from the outer world!" he said, in excellent English.

He was a man of even greater height and girth than the other White Giants. His face was finely chiselled, and there was a humorous curve to his mouth, and his eyes were kindly.

"In the city of Az you shall be honoured," he said quietly. "You are of the same blood as my great friend Captain Cane, therefore you are my friends. You are also the enemies of King Yoga, who is my enemy."

"You do not accept this King Yoga—who is also of my blood—as your ruler?" asked Lee.

"I take orders from no man!" replied Surnum Mentius, his mouth going firm. "This man, whom Captain Cane calls Zingrave, is wicked. For many months he has threatened to make war on me, but I shall be ready when the time comes!"

It appeared that Surnum Mentius was in a strong position; he had some thousands of supporters about him—men who were staunch and true. Then, too, there were the inhabitants of the scattered towns in this region; they were all loyal to their overlord. Great forests separated them

from the central zone, where stood El Dorado. They were isolated, and the things which went on in the capital were hardly known in Az. King Yoga might be supreme in El Dorado, but in this country round about the city of Az he was looked upon as an enemy of the people.

Then, too, there were the primitive inhabitants of the swampy valleys—the tribe known as the Ciri-ok-Baks. They were giants, just like the Arzacs, but they were aborigines—darker-skinned, brawnier, living mostly in houses of mud. "The Ciri-ok-Baks swarm in their thousands beyond the forest belt," said Surnum Mentius quietly. "Their villages are everywhere between here and the great wall which cuts off King Yoga's land."

"And are these people hostile to you?" asked Nelson Lee. "In the past, the Ciri-ok-Baks were hostile to all the Arzacs," replied the great overlord. "But it has been my policy to treat them well, and all these primitive people in the south are ready to fight for me against King Yoga. He knows this, and it is because of such knowledge that he has left me in peace. For when King Yoga makes war against me he will stir up what Captain Cane calls a hornets' nest."

It was good to know that there was such security here in Az. Surnum Mentius saw, after a keen glance at his guests, that they were haggard from lack of sleep, and he wasted no time on formalities. A great feast had been prepared, and without delay the guests were taken into another great chamber, where tables were laid with excellent foodstuffs.

When the meal was over, the juniors were taken to well-appointed sleeping-chambers, and here they flung themselves upon soft beds, and slept soundly, contentedly.

But not until they were all slumbering did Nelson Lee consent to seek a couch of his own. No sooner was his head on the pillow than he slept.

Yet he was awake again by nightfall, and he had no compunction in arousing Lord Dorrimore.

"But, my dear man, this is potty!" protested Dorrie, yawning. "We've only had about seven hours' sleep—"

"Nearly twelve," corrected Lee. "That's enough for any healthy man, Dorrie. The day was young when we went to bed. Now it is nightfall. Have you got a cigarette?"

They both lit up, and Lee paced up and down, smoking in silence for some moments. They were in a smallish chamber of stone, with a doorway which led out upon a wide balcony. The stars were twinkling brilliantly, and over the forest lands there was impenetrable blackness.

Lee suddenly strode out upon the balcony, and stared into the darkness of the night.

"Here, Dorrie," he said tensely. "What do you make of that over there?"

His lordship came out. Ruddily glowing, a light was shimmering up to the night sky. The source of it was apparently many miles distant; and even as the two men stood there watching, another glare broke out to the west, miles away, across the dense forest lands. Then, almost on its heels came a third, and from a totally different direction.

"Signals!" muttered Lee. "Great fires are being lit, and— See! That one over to the left was shielded for a moment. Did you see it flicker and die out—only to spring up more brightly the next moment?"

"What do you think it means?" "Trouble, I imagine," replied Lee grimly.

He heard a voice behind him, and turning, he saw Captain Harry Cane, his face flushed with an emotion which could only be excitement.

"You're awake, then, Mr. Lee?" he asked, striding up. "Have you seen the signals?"

"What do they mean?" "They can mean only one thing," said Captain Harry Cane. "The Ciri-ok-Baks are rising."

"What?" "Those fire signals are always used by the aborigines as a means of communication," continued the other. "And they only use them in times of war—when scattered tribes are called together."

"What are you getting at?" demanded Lee. "Out with it, man!" "Captain Harry Cane shrugged. "Well, the Arzacs are afraid it means big trouble—and you are the unconscious cause of it," he replied. "The Ciri-ok-Baks must have seen the airship flying over the forest, and their primitive minds received a jolt. They took the airship as an omen. They saw it come down in this territory, and for some reason known only to themselves they have gone back to their savagery. Before the night is out they will be attacking the city!"

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