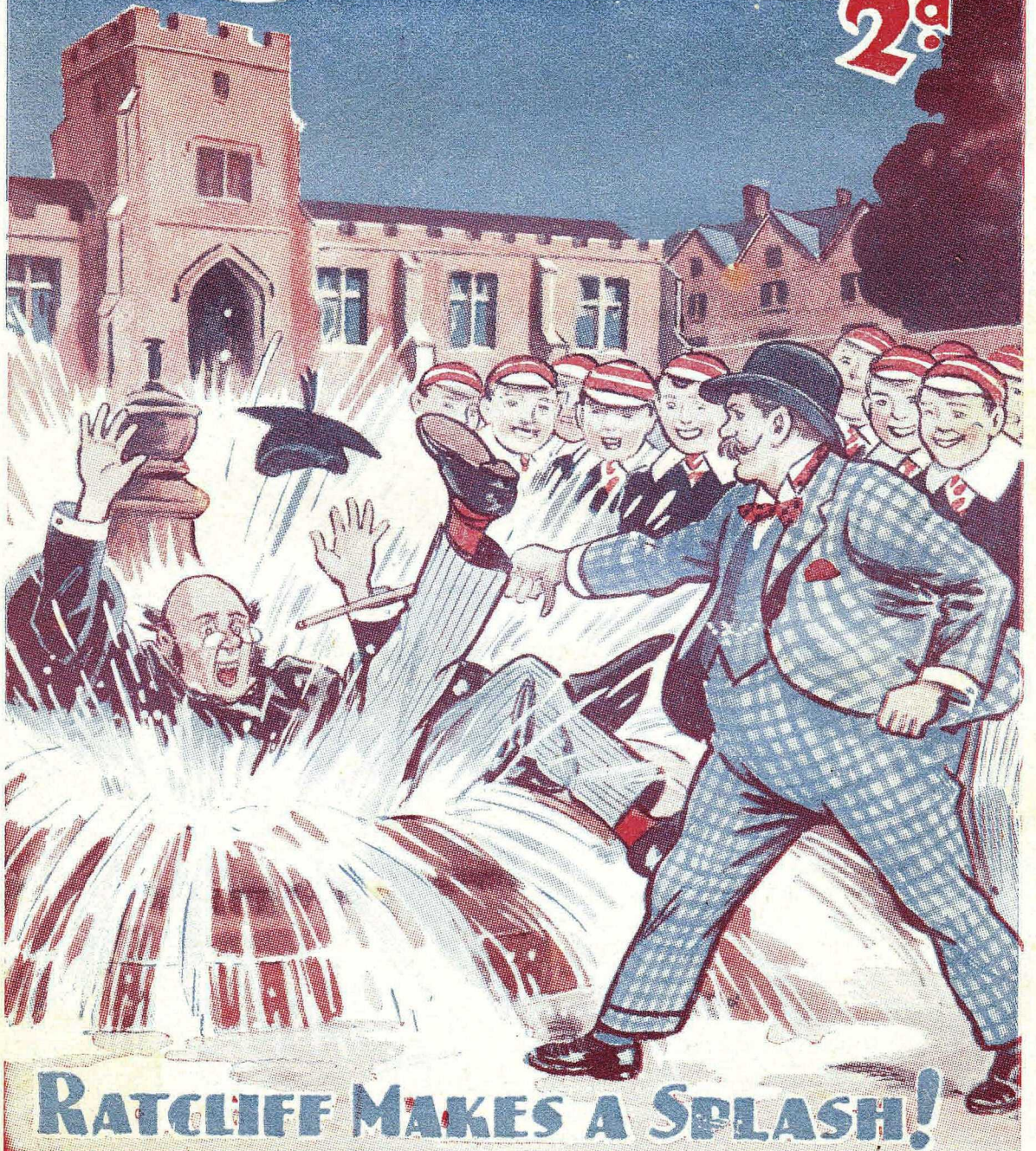


galloway

"THE BOY WHO SPOOFED ST. JIM'S!" —INSIDE.

The GEM 2d



RATCLIFF MAKES A SPLASH!

TO REVEAL HIS DARING MASQUERADE AND BE EXPELLED—OR FACE ARREST FOR A THEFT OF WHICH HE IS INNOCENT? IT IS A BITTER CHOICE KERR HAS TO MAKE!

The BOY who SPOOFED



Kerr stepped aside a little as he reached the gates with P.-c. Crump and forced a scrap of paper into Figgins' hand. "Read it!" hissed the Scottish junior. "Mum's the word!"

CHAPTER 1. On the Watch!

TOM MERRY burst into his study in the Shell passage at St. Jim's with a wrathful expression on his usually sunny face.

Apparently he was quite upset, and he glared at Manners and Monty Lowther, who were in the study, as though they had done him some personal injury.

"I'm fed-up!" Tom Merry exclaimed hotly.

Monty Lowther grinned.

"If that's the case, you won't want any tea, I suppose?" he asked humorously.

"Oh, don't be an ass!" growled Tom Merry. "I'm thundering wild—"

"What's up, old man?" asked Manners curiously. "Come to look at your chivvy closely, you do look fed-up!"

"Who's been disturbing the serene calm of your mental equilibrium, fair youth?" asked Lowther, who couldn't possibly be serious in any circumstance.

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"It's Knox!" replied Tom Merry, between his teeth.

After which nothing more need have been said. The Shell captain's sympathetic chums understood perfectly. Evidently Knox, the bullying prefect, was on the warpath.

"Knox again!" exclaimed Manners. "What's the trouble this time?"

Tom Merry rubbed his hands tenderly.

"Oh, the same as usual!" he replied. "He's in a towering temper about something—lost some money on a gee-gee, I expect—and when I just happened to bump into him in the entrance-hall, he gave me four swipes with his rotten cane!"

"Disgraceful!" said Monty Lowther. "And you only bumped into him?"

"Well, he happened to be carrying some paper and ink at the time," admitted Tom Merry, "and it naturally got upset. But it wasn't my fault. How the dickens could I help the red ink slopping all over his face and getting into his mouth?"

"You were absolutely blameless!" said Lowther.

"And he gave me four swipes—just for bumping into him! What do you think of it?"

"Well, I think Knox ought to be hung, drawn, and quartered!" went on Lowther, with a note of indignation in his voice. "After that it wouldn't be a bad idea to do something really drastic—such as dropping him into a tank of boiling oil!"

"Oh, don't be funny!" growled Tom Merry. "My hands are jolly sore."

Manners opened the door.

"Well, let's buzz down to Little Side," he said cheerfully. "As a matter of fact, we were just going to look for you when you thundered in. Can't stop to think about Knox this afternoon. We've got to practise hard in readiness for the away match next half."

And the Terrible Three, who were in flannels, sallied out of their study, mentally deciding to deal with Knox later on—at least, Tom Merry did so.

Manners and Monty Lowther privately held the opinion that Knox had been somewhat justified in delivering the four swipes. To have red ink

LAUGHS—FUN—EXCITEMENT—DRAMA! ALL IN THIS GREAT YARN OF THE CHUMS OF ST. JIM'S.

ST. JIM'S!



By
Martin
Clifford

stopped all over one's face wasn't exactly pleasant.

"Bai Jove! The uttah wottah!"

The dulcet tones of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form echoed up from the hall as the Terrible Three reached the head of the stairs.

"Hallo, Gussy's been catching it!" grinned Manners. "I wonder who the 'uttah wottah' happens to be?"

"Knox is an uttah beast!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, looking at the Terrible Three as they descended the stairs. "I wepeat, deah boys, that Knox is nothin' bettah than a bullyin' wuffian."

"Hear, hear!"
"Two hear, hears, in fact!" said Lowther. "Your remarks meet with our unanimous approval, Gussy. But have you been splashing red ink over Knoxy, too?"

"Weally, Lowthah, I nevah touch wed ink!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "It is howwid stuff for gettin' on the fingahs. But somehow Knox has managed to smothah himself with the w'etched stuff. He was weally a most disgustin' sight! The uttah beast cut me across the legs with his wotten cane! Did you evah heah if such an outrage?"

"Appalling!" said Monty Lowther solemnly. "I should write to the governors about it, Gussy. In about

six months' time, after holding a dozen meetings, they will send their instructions to the Head, and Knox will be placed under arrest for daring to touch your august person!"

"Pway be sewious, Lowthah," said Arthur Augustus reprovingly. "I admit Knox had good weason to be in a tempah, but that is no excuse for his canin' me. I happened to meet him, you see, and I merely gwinnd—"
"Loudly, I suppose?" asked Monty Lowther.

"It is impossible to gwin loudly, Lowthah. I may have burst into a chuckle—as a mattah of fact, I believe I woared with laughtah. Knox looked extwemely funny."

"And Knox, I suppose, didn't see the joke?" asked Manners.

"No. He is uttahly lackin' in a sense of humah, deah boy!"

Kerr's amazing masquerade is the jape of the term at St. Jim's. But it's no joke for the Scottish junior when he finds himself arrested for theft!

"I think that quality would be rather lacking in me if I swallowed a gallon of red ink," chuckled Lowther.

"I wegard Knox as a howwid bully!" said Arthur Augustus stiffly.

"Shurrup, Gussy!" murmured Tom Merry.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I do not compwehend the meanin' of that widiculous expwession. As I was sayin', Knox is a wottah—"

"Shush, you ass!"

Arthur Augustus had his back to the staircase, and did not see that Knox, having cleaned himself, was descending the stairs. The swell of the School House failed to take the hints that were thrust upon him by the Terrible Three.

"Knox is a frightful wottah!" said D'Arcy, warming to his subject. "He's not only a bully, but a—"

"So you think I'm a frightful rotter, D'Arcy?" said Knox, coming down quietly and grasping D'Arcy's shoulder. There was a hard glint in the prefect's eyes.

"I—I— Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "So you were listenin' to what I said, Knox?"

"Yes, I was!" rapped out Knox furiously.

Arthur Augustus sniffed.

"Then I wegard you, as a gweatah wottah than evah!" he exclaimed defiantly. "It is only a cad who is an eavesdwoopah—"

"Oh, you ass!" murmured Tom Merry.

"I wefuse to be called an ass!"

"Well, you won't refuse to write out five hundred lines for insolence," snapped Knox. "I want them by calling-over to-night. If you haven't got them done I shall double the imposition. And if I had a cane with me now I'd give you a taste of it!"

And Knox walked out into the quadrangle, leaving Arthur Augustus gasping.

"The bwute!" he exclaimed. "Bai Jove, I uttably wefuse to do the wotten lines."

"Better be careful," warned Tom Merry. "It doesn't do to jib against Knox—he's got too much power. I should advise you to do the lines."

"We shan't miss you at cricket," said Monty Lowther consolingly. "We're having a practice match, I know, but your absence won't make any difference, Gussy."

"Weally, you wottah—"

But the Terrible Three walked out, chuckling. They sympathised with Arthur Augustus, but he had undoubtedly brought the punishment upon his own head. If he had only taken their hints all would have been well.

As Tom Merry & Co. crossed the quad they saw that Knox was striding towards the shrubbery. What his object was they didn't know, but in reality Knox was bound for further trouble. He seemed to be looking for trouble that afternoon. And on this occasion the famous Figgins & Co. of the New House were the unconscious culprits.

Figgins & Co. were hidden among the trees, and were waiting impatiently for Clampe to come along, and Knox had spotted them. Clampe was a Shell fellow, and another denizen of the New House.

"We'll teach him a giddy lesson!" said the long-legged Figgins. "I heard him say, quite by accident, that he was going to have a smoke in the woodshed with Diggs. I've suspected that Clampe went in for that rotten game for a long time, and we'll teach him the error of his ways. His kind uncles are going to show him the right path."

"Well, it's past the time now," said Kerr. "Perhaps he isn't coming after all!"

"Of course he isn't!" growled Fatty Wynn. "Let's get back to the study. How am I going to make that giddy toffee if we stop here—"

"Shush, you ass!" muttered Kerr. "He's coming!"

Figgins & Co. had been on the watch for ten minutes, and they relaxed into instant silence now that Clampe was approaching. As it happened, it wasn't Clampe at all—it was Knox. Figgins & Co. didn't seem to consider the possibility of anyone else coming that way, and as soon as they heard footsteps they took it for granted that Clampe was approaching.

It was rather unfortunate for Figgins & Co.—and for Knox!

"Here he comes," murmured Kerr. "Get ready!"

"We'll teach him to smoke, by gum!" The footsteps drew nearer, and a figure suddenly appeared. Figgins & Co. sprang out. Knox, taken utterly by surprise, was bowled over in a twinkling. He went down with a terrific thud and gasped.

"Got him!" roared Figgins. "Now, Clampe, you rotter—"

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Fatty Wynn.

in alarm. "It isn't Clampe at all, Figgy! It's Knox!"

"My—my only hat!" stammered Figgins.

"Get off my chest, you young hounds!" roared Knox furiously. "By George, I'll make you sit up for this!"

"We—we're awfully sorry, Knox!" gasped Figgins. "We thought you were Clampe, you know. Quite an accident, I assure you. I—I say, if we let you get up, you won't—"

Knox struggled furiously.

"I'll skin you!" he raved. "I'll report you to Mr. Ratcliff, and see that he punishes you severely for this outrage. Let me get up, hang you!"

He struggled harder than ever, and Kerr, who was kneeling on his chest, rocked about like a ship in a heavy sea. Suddenly there was a dull crack from somewhere in Knox's waistcoat, and Knox howled in fury.

"That's my watch!" he stuttered. "You—you— By Jove, I'll wallop you for this! You've smashed my watch!"

"Awfully sorry," said Kerr breathlessly. "If you'll only promise not to report us—"

Knox went so red in the face that he seemed on the point of an apoplectic fit. He exerted himself terrifically, and Figgins & Co. were hurled from him. Knox jumped to his feet, breathing hard.

"You young rotters!" he snarled, feeling in his pocket and producing the remnants of his silver watch. "You've smashed it!"

"It was my knee," said Kerr. "If you hadn't struggled, Knox—"

Knox grasped Kerr roughly.

"You've smashed my watch, so I'll wear yours until mine is repaired," he said harshly. And before Figgins and Fatty Wynn could interfere he wrenched Kerr's watch from its chain.

"You'll have this back when mine's repaired, and not before!"

And Knox strode off, leaving Figgins & Co. simply speechless with indignation.

CHAPTER 2.

Kerr Means Business!

"THE—the rotter!"

"The burglar!" gasped Figgins, at last. "He's collared your watch, Kerr!"

"My—my silver watch!" stammered Kerr furiously. "That was a present from my mater, and that rotter will bust it!"

"I wouldn't stand it!" said Fatty Wynn warmly. "My hat! It's coming it a bit thick!"

"Rather!" agreed Figgins.

Kerr hesitated, his face pink with wrath. Then, suddenly making up his mind, he left his chums and raced across the quad towards the School House. Knox had almost reached the entrance when Kerr caught him up.

"I—I say, Knox—"

Knox turned and glared.

"Well?" he asked roughly.

"That—that watch was a present, you know," panted Kerr. "My mater gave it to me, and I've never parted with it for a second. I wouldn't even lend it to Figgy or Wynn!"

Knox grinned unpleasantly.

"Well, you didn't lend it to me," he said. "I took it."

"Yes; but it isn't fair," protested Kerr heatedly. "I didn't smash your ticker on purpose, Knox. We mistook you for Clampe, and it was quite an accident. And if you hadn't struggled—"

"Run away!" snapped Knox impatiently.

"But I want my watch!" roared Kerr. "I'll pay for the repair of yours, and take it down to the watchmaker's if you like."

"I don't like!" rapped out Knox. "Cut off!"

"But—but it's burglary!" shouted the Scottish junior. "I've offered to pay the damage, and you haven't any right to collar my ticker!"

Knox chuckled.

"Perhaps it'll teach you to be more careful in the future," he sneered. "And if this watch doesn't keep right time I shall open the back and stick a pin in the works to make it go properly."

And, with that threat, Knox walked into the School House, leaving Kerr gritting his teeth with helpless fury. He could do nothing—nothing in the way of recovering his watch, at any rate.

If he wanted the watch back he would have to recover it by force, and it was no easy matter to use force against a prefect, especially a prefect of the rival House.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stalked out of the School House at that moment, and he was looking very angry.

"I uttably wefuse," he was saying to himself. "Knox can go to Jewicho for his wotten lines. I considah that the imposition was uttably unwawwanted, and I shall therefore appeal to the Housemastah if Knox cuts up wusty. Bai Jove, Kerr, what are you doin' ovah this side of the quad, you New House wottah?"

Kerr glared.

"It's Knox!" he exclaimed gruffly.

"Of all the howling rotters—"

"Bai Jove! Have you been wunnin' foul of Knox, too?" asked Arthur Augustus. "It isn't pweicely the thing to wun down a membah of my own House, but in the cires, Kerr, I agree with you entirely. Knox is a disgwace to the School House!"

"He's a disgrace to any House!" growled Kerr. "We wouldn't have him for a gift!"

"But you are lookin' wathah watty," said Arthur Augustus. "Pway confide in me if you are in any twouble."

"Oh, you can't help, Gussy!" said Kerr, with a gleam in his eyes. "Knox has collared my ticker just because I happened to kneel on his and smash it. I offered to pay the damage, too. The rotter's actually pinched my watch—a present from the mater!"

"Bai Jove! What uttah cheek!" said D'Arcy indignantly. "Mattahs are comin' to a ewisist. I nevah thought that Knox would descend to pinchin' tickahs!"

"I'll get it back!" said Kerr firmly.

And he meant to think of a scheme, sooner or later, and, as it happened, the idea for it came sooner than Kerr anticipated, and from a totally unexpected quarter.

CHAPTER 3.

Kerr's Great Wheeze!

BURR-BURR! Burr-burr! Burr-burr!

Kerr paused as he walked down the passage in the New House. He was just outside the prefects' room, and within the apartment the telephone-bell was ringing insistently. Apparently there was nobody there to answer it.

There was a telephone in the prefects' room of both Houses at St. Jim's, and juniors were occasionally allowed to use the instrument. Very often they used

it without being allowed when the prefects happened to be absent.

Burr-burr! Burr-burr! Burr-burr!

Kerr looked at the door of the prefects' room, and then turned the handle.

"Anybody in here?" he asked, looking in.

But the room was empty. Kerr crossed over to the telephone and lifted the receiver from its hook.

"Might as well see who it is," he muttered, placing the receiver to his ear. "Hallo!" he said aloud. "Who's that?"

"Hallo! Is that St. James' College?"

"Yes, this is St. Jim's," replied Kerr.

"Good! I want to speak to Knox of the Sixth Form."

"Well, you're on the wrong number, old chap," said Kerr. "This is the New House. Knox adorns that old barn they call the School House. We wouldn't own him over this side of the quad—wouldn't touch him with a barge-pole, in fact!"

"What?" exclaimed the voice angrily. "How dare you speak like that? Who are you? What is your name?"

"You wouldn't know if I told you!"

"From your voice I gather that you are a boy—a very insolent boy!"

Kerr grinned. He had no compunction whatever about cheeking friends of Knox. Anybody who could be on friendly terms with Knox must obviously be a rotter.

"I tell you you've got the wrong number," said Kerr. "Perhaps if you ring up the Green Man, in Rylcombe, to-night you'll find Knox there—or perhaps you are ringing up from the Green Man yourself?"

"You—you impertinent rascal!"

"Bow-wow!"

"How—how dare you?"

"Oh, I dare all sorts of things over the phone!" said Kerr coolly. "But who are you and what do you want? I don't think Knox likes talking to bookmakers over the telephone!"

"Bookmakers!" roared the strange voice. "How dare you imply that I am a bookmaker! My name is John Mason, and I am expected at St. James' this afternoon."

"You're a pal of Knox's?"

"I am a friend of Knox's father," said the stranger. "I have not seen Knox since he was a child—before I went abroad."

"Well, it's no good telling all this to me," said Kerr. "You'd better ring up the School House. Knox might be there."

"Don't you know for certain?"

"How should I know?" asked Kerr. "He may be out on Big Side, or—"

"Dear me, how awkward!" said the unknown Mr. Mason. "And I have only a few moments to spare."

"Better ring up at tea-time—"

"I shall be in the train by then," said Mr. Mason over the wires. "Look here, my boy, you are very impertinent, but I presume it is only owing to your extreme youth!"

"Go hon!"

"I want you to take a message to Knox for me."

"What's the message?" asked Kerr noncommittally.

"Merely a few words," said the stranger, evidently taking it for granted that Kerr would give the message to Knox. "He is expecting me this afternoon, as I wrote and told him that I was coming. Tell him that I am deferring my visit until next week."

"Simply that?"

"Yes; nothing more."

"You're not coming this afternoon at all?" asked Kerr.

His eyes gleamed with an eager light. An idea had just struck him—a great and gorgeous wheeze, if he could only work it.

"No, I am not coming to-day."

"And you won't be here until next week?"

"That is it precisely."

"And you haven't seen Knox since he was a kid?"

"That is so. But—"

"He wouldn't know you if he saw you?"

"I suppose not. I have only just returned from abroad," said the stranger. "But I fail to see how this affects the question. Knox is expecting me, and I want you to tell him that I am not coming until next week."

"I'll go and see Knox at once," said Kerr. "Don't you worry yourself."

Kerr omitted to mention that, although he would see Knox, he had no intention of telling the prefect what had passed over the phone. Kerr made no promise whatever.

"Thank you!" came across the wires. And Mr. Mason rang off.

Kerr replaced the receiver and slipped out of the prefects' room before Monteith or Baker or Sefton came along. His eyes were gleaming.

"By George!" he muttered. "What a wheeze!"

He walked down the passage slowly and emerged into the sunlit quadrangle. An involuntary grin was hovering about his mouth.

"Knox is expecting Mr. Mason, and if I don't give the message—and I didn't promise to—Knox will be waiting for his visitor," he murmured. "It would be rotten to disappoint Knoxy, so I'll work it that Mr. Mason comes, after all. At least, Knoxy will think it's Mr. Mason!"

For Kerr's great wheeze was to impersonate the unknown gentleman and present himself at St. Jim's in his place. As Mr. Mason couldn't turn up there could be no possible hitch in the plan.

"It's all plain sailing!" muttered Kerr gleefully. "Old Mason is a stranger to Knox, and he can't turn up in any circumstances. So when I announce myself as Mr. Mason, Knox won't have a suspicion, and I can give him the time of his life! And I can get my watch back, too, and Knox will be the laughing-stock of the whole giddy school! What a jape, by gum!"

It was certainly a gorgeous idea, and if it worked out according to programme Kerr would have his revenge on Knox and succeed in making the bullying prefect sing extremely small.

Kerr had told the real Mr. Mason that he would go and see Knox, so Kerr felt obliged to keep his promise. As it happened, Knox was standing by the entrance gates, and Kerr strolled up carelessly. Knox was talking to Cutts of the Fifth.

"Yes; the old idiot ought to be here by now," Knox was saying. "He mentioned half-past two in his letter, and it's twenty to three already."

As Knox spoke he pulled out his watch—or, rather, Kerr's watch—and chuckled as he saw the New House junior's wrathful expression. It pleased Knox's peculiar nature to gloat over the helplessness of the younger boy.

But Kerr's turn was coming.

"I shouldn't wait about here for the ass!" said Cutts. "Let him find his own way when he comes! You're not expecting a tip from him, are you?"

"Well, it's possible," said Knox, "but there's no certainty about it. Mason's



"Knox is a frightful wottah!" said D'Arcy, warming to his subject. "He's not only a bully, but a—"

"So you think I'm a frightful rotter, D'Arcy?" said Knox, coming down the stairs and grasping Gussy's shoulder. "I—I—bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

not a relation, you know—merely a pal of my pater's who's got a foolish idea into his head that he'd like to see me. I suppose I shall have to soft-soap over him while he's here, just to keep up appearances, you know!"

And Knox and the Fifth Former strolled off.

"My hat!" grinned Kerr to himself. "It's all serene! Knox hasn't got a suspicion, and it would be a pity to disappoint him. But I'll bet there won't be much of the soft-soap bizney when I get started! Knox is going to have the surprise of his giddy life!"

And Kerr went off to prepare the great jape.

CHAPTER 4.

Knox's Visitor Arrives!

"NO, I shan't tell a giddy soul!" Thus George Kerr of the New House.

He had been thinking the matter out, and had finally decided to keep mum. He would not even tell Figgins and Fatty Wynn of his intended jape. He made up his mind, in fact, to spoof the school.

Kerr had no doubts as to his ability to carry out the wheeze successfully. He was generally acknowledged to be the best actor in the Fourth Form. And, apart from that fact, Kerr was truly a wonder at the art of impersonation. He had proved his skill on many occasions, and he knew that he could disguise himself so that not even his closest friends would recognise him.

Ten minutes after Knox and Cutts had left the vicinity of the entrance gates, Kerr hurried out, carrying a large handbag. He walked down Rylcombe Lane for a little distance, and then suddenly dived into the wood.

From that moment he disappeared completely, but in a comparatively short time a stranger stepped out of the wood and looked cautiously up and down the lane.

"All serene!" he murmured. "Now for the giddy jape!"

The false Mr. John Mason was a

curious-looking individual. Rather short and squat, he was, nevertheless, a little stoutish, and was attired in a somewhat loud check suit. A bowler hat was perched on his head at a rakish angle, and, altogether, Mr. Mason looked somewhat like a prosperous bookmaker on a holiday.

His face was ruddy, and adorned with a reddish-brown moustache. And he looked down the lane from beneath heavy and bushy eyebrows. Mr. Mason did not look at all like a friend of the lordly Knox's, and it was practically certain that Knox would get a terrific shock when he met the stranger.

Which was exactly what Kerr wanted. Mr. Mason strolled leisurely up the lane to the gates of St. Jim's, and found Clampe and Diggs of the New House lounging by Taggles' lodge. Nothing could have suited Mr. Mason better; for, if Clampe and Diggs did not recognise him, he would be perfectly safe.

"Allo, young shavers!" Clampe and Diggs did not look at the stranger. They were engaged in conversation, and it did not seem to strike them at the time that Mr. Mason was speaking to them.

"I'm speaking to you, my pippins!" The two New House juniors condescended to notice Mr. Mason's existence.

The stranger nodded affably. "How do?" he said cheerfully. "Nice afternoon!"

The two juniors stared. "Low bouncer!" muttered Clampe. "Like his cheek to talk to us!" said Diggs audibly. "What do you want? This isn't the tradesmen's entrance, you know—"

"That's all right," said the stranger. "I want the School House."

Clampe grinned. "Take it!" he said, with a chuckle. "You're quite welcome to it! We're New House fellows, you see, and that old barn would be better out of the way!"

"Hear, hear!" said Mr. Mason. "Ahem—I should say—er—the School House looks quite a decent show!" he

added hastily. "This is St. Jim's, I suppose?"

"You suppose right," said Diggs. "But what do you want here? Strangers aren't allowed in the quad, you know! This is a school for gentlemen—"

Mr. Mason nodded. "Then you don't belong to St. Jim's?" he asked blandly.

"Don't belong—" Diggs turned red. "Look here, you low rotter—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled Clampe. "One for you, Diggy!" Diggs glared furiously.

"If you've called for the dust, you'd better go to the tradesmen's entrance!" he said, with a sneer. "Or perhaps you're selling bootlaces?"

Mr. Mason laughed heartily. "You must have your little joke!" he exclaimed. "No; I ain't called for the dust, Piggy—didn't I hear your friend call you 'Piggy'! A most appropriate name, I'm sure!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Clampe. Diggs turned scarlet.

"Look here, Clampe, I'm not standing this!" he shouted. "I'm blowed if I'm going to be insulted by this—this bouncer!"

"Better go easy!" muttered Clampe. "Don't call him names!"

"Well, didn't he call me 'Piggy' just now?" roared Diggs furiously.

"That's your name, ain't it?" asked Mr. Mason. "If you'll tell me your little friend's name—Scamp, is it—"

"Scamp!" muttered Clampe. "My—my name's Clampe, you idiot!"

"Sorry!" said the stranger coolly. "Nothing to get wild about," said Mr. Mason affably. "I'm looking for Knox, the son of my old pal, you know. If you tell me where I can find Knox, I'll give you a halfpenny each!"

Clampe and Diggs gasped. Then, without a word, they turned their backs on the visitor and stalked away. Mr. Mason looked after them, and grinned to himself. He walked aimlessly across the quad, and suddenly spotted Crooke of the Shell talking to Mellish.

"Knox isn't about," he murmured. "May as well amuse myself. And it'll put the giddy disguise to the test—not that it needs any more testing, I fancy."

He approached Crooke and Mellish, and they looked at him curiously.

"Allo, young 'uns!" he said. "I want the School 'Ouse!"

"That's the School House there," said Crooke, nodding.

"Thanks! I'm looking for Knox." Crooke grinned.

"Can I oblige?" he said humorously. "I'll give you some knocks, if you like."

"I reckon you've plenty of cheek for a kid," said Mr. Mason. "I mean Knox, the prefect. Where is he?"

Crooke and Mellish looked the stranger up and down, and sniffed.

"Find him!" said Crooke shortly.

"That ain't perlit," said Mr. Mason severely. "I can see you kids ain't been brought up proper. You look pale. You've been smoking."

Mellish glared. He had just begun smoking, as a matter of fact.

"Mind your own business!" he growled. "Who the deuce are you, anyhow?"

"I don't want no impudence!" interrupted Mr. Mason.

"What!"

"You 'eard what I said. Strikes me you boys ain't looked after quite properly in this 'ere school," said the visitor. "I ain't been 'ere long, but I can tell as you two ain't

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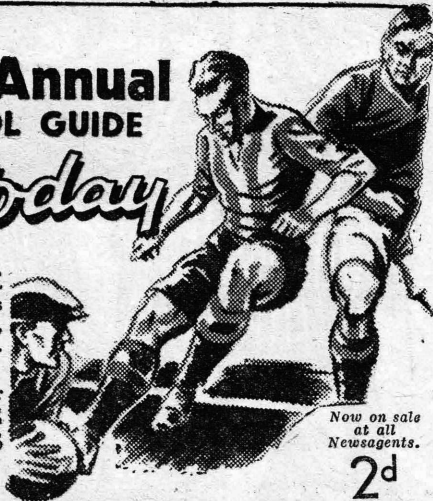
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got the manners of real gentlemen. I'm a gent, I am."

"My hat!" gasped Crooke. "This is the giddy limit! This chap must be off his rocker! Look here, Looney, there's the gate——"

"No need to point to it," said the stranger. "I ain't blind. I've come 'ere to see Knox. Strikes me I've been to a lot of council schools where the boys have better manners. However, I don't suppose the majority of the boys are like you. Mebbe you're what they call the snobs?"

"You—you——"
"My hat! I'll——"

"Well, what'll you do?" asked Mr. Mason grimly. "I'm at St. Jim's to see Knox, an' I've asked you to show me to 'im. Anything wrong in that? Ain't a visitor entitled to respect?"

"You—you entitled to respect?" sneered Mellish.

"Yes. What's wrong with me—hay?"

"Oh, there's nothing wrong with you!" said Mellish unpleasantly. "You're all right for Petticoat Lane, or Whitechapel. But you'd better clear out of St. Jim's pretty quickly! Loafers ain't allowed here."

Mr. Mason looked grimmer than ever.

"I kin stand a lot, and I ain't lost me temper yet," he said slowly. "I want to know if you're going to do as I ask? Are you going to show me to Knox?"

"Yes," said Crooke suddenly.

Mellish stared.

"Look here, Crooke, you ass——"

"Shut up!" said Crooke quickly; and he winked at Mellish with his offside eye—a wink, however, which did not escape the notice of Mr. Mason. Mellish subsided, guessing that Crooke had something on. He was right, for the Shell fellow jerked him aside.

"Buzz off, and fix up a booby-trap of books in my study," he whispered quickly. "We'll teach the boulder something!" Then Crooke changed his voice, and added aloud for Mr. Mason's benefit: "I'll go and see if Knox is in his study."

"Right-ho!" grinned Mellish. And he hurried off.

"Fixing up a jape," thought Mr. Mason, with an inward chuckle. "They'll find I'm not such a giddy fool as I look, by gum!"

In a few minutes Mellish and Crooke returned.

"Yes, Knox is in his study," Crooke announced. "This way, sir!"

Mr. Mason followed the two juniors into the School House. They went up to the Shell passage, and paused before the door of Crooke's study. It stood very slightly ajar, and the visitor suspected a trap at once.

"This is Knox's study, sir," said Mellish. "Walk in!"

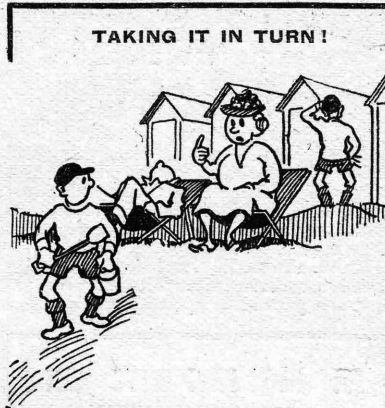
Mr. Mason hesitated. "This is rather curious," he remarked. "I understand that Knox is a prefect and a Sixth Former. How is it that his study is in the junior passage?"

The two cads of the School House were rather taken aback.

"This—this isn't a junior passage, sir," stammered Crooke. "This is the Sixth Form quarters. Walk in. Knox is inside."

Mr. Mason shook his head. "I'm after you," he said. "Show me in, young 'uns."

Crooke gave a sickly smile.



"Now, Angus, give the bucket and spade to Jamie. It's your turn to watch for the deck-chair collector!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to E. Francis, 50, Aldbourne Road, Shepherd's Bush, London, W.12.

"We—we'd rather not, sir," he stuttered. "We're in a hurry, sir. Come on, Mellish!"

The joke on the visitor hadn't panned out quite successfully, and they thought it best to make themselves scarce. But at that moment a crowd of Shell fellows came round the corner and blocked up the passage. Also two strong hands were laid upon the cads' shoulders.

"Hold on!" said Mr. Mason grimly; but his eyes twinkled as he saw the Shell fellows crowding up. There were quite a number—Bernard Glyn, Kangaroo, Dane, Talbot, and several others.

"Let us go, you common boulder!" roared Mellish furiously. "Take your beastly paws off my shoulder!"

"By Jove! What's the matter?" asked Bernard Glyn.

"It's this—this rotter!" panted Crooke. "He's a visitor——"

The Shell fellows frowned.

"A visitor!" repeated Talbot sharply. "And you're insulting him! My hat! We'll deal with you later, Crooke! What's the trouble, sir?"

"Well, these young fellows say that this is Knox's study," said Mr. Mason.

"They may be right——"

"Why, it's Crooke's own study!" exclaimed Kangaroo.

"It isn't!" roared Crooke. "It's Knox's. Walk in, sir!"

The visitor gripped the two cads more firmly.

"If it's Knox's study," he said, "you can go in and announce me!"

And he pushed them forward into the doorway.

Crooke gave a fiendish yell, but it was too late. He and Mellish sprawled in the doorway.

Crash!

A shower of heavy books fell down upon the heads of the unfortunate japers. Mellish had done the thing thoroughly, and had chosen the largest books he could lay hands on, and also added, by way of variety, the fire-irons and one or two chunks of coal.

The cad of the Fourth received the full benefit of his thoughtfulness now, for the poker gave him a frightful crack on the head, and a lump of coal nearly drove his nose into his face. A great deal of the blackness was transferred to Mellish's face, which scarcely improved his appearance.

"Ow!" howled Mellish. "Yaroooh!" "Yow!" roared Crooke. "I'm half-killed! Yoooop! Oh, you ass, Mellish! Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Mr. Mason. "So that's why you wanted me to go in? Well, you must 'ave your joke, I s'pose! Very amusing, young shavers. P'raps this will teach you a lesson to treat visitors with respect!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Shell fellows.

"How do you feel, Mellish?"

"I—I—oh, my nose!" moaned Mellish. "Ha, ha, ha!"

Bernard Glyn & Co. simply roared with laughter. They felt that Crooke and Mellish had thoroughly deserved to be hoist with their own petard.

The hearts of the Shell fellows warmed towards the unknown Mr. Mason, as it were. He had turned the tables upon the cads very neatly, and that fact made him almost popular at once.

He left Crooke and Mellish sitting among the debris, and walked off down the passage. The Shell practice match was evidently at an end, so there were plenty of fellows in the quad.

And the news spread rapidly that the visitor had already had an encounter with Crooke and Mellish, and that he had come off triumphant. Bernard Glyn & Co. had followed the visitor down, and he was soon the centre of an amused throng.

As Kangaroo remarked, it was possible to cut Mr. Mason's accent with a knife, but any man who succeeded in taking Crooke and Mellish down a peg or two, must obviously be the right sort!

CHAPTER 5.

Quite an Entertainment!

"BAI Jove, who is the stwanganh?" The chums of Study No. 6—Jack Blake, Herries, Digby, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy—were strolling from Little Side with the Terrible Three.

As they entered the quad, Arthur Augustus adjusted his famous eyeglass, and looked towards the spot where Mr. Mason was surrounded by many juniors.

"I wondah who he is?" he repeated. "Better go and ask him, Gussy," said Tom Merry.

"That's right; go and shove your rose in!" exclaimed Blake. "You always were inquisitive, Gussy."

"Weally, Blake——"

"He looks a funny merchant," remarked Manners. "I don't admire his taste in clobber, anyway."

"You are quite wight, Mannahs," said Arthur Augustus. "The stwanganh's clobber is feafhully aggressiv. Bai Jove, what a necktie!"

"Don't faint, Gussy!" exclaimed Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah, I wish you would not make such wicidulous wemarks. I had no intention of faintin'. I trust I possess more staminah! But, weally," added Arthur Augustus, "it wequahs pwetty stwong sight to look upon such clobber without flinchin'!"

They gathered round the little crowd.

"I want to see Knox," Mr. Mason remarked affably. "You see, I am on a visit to St. Jim's."

"A visitah, bai Jove!"

"That's it, young shaver. I'm visiting Knox."

"Young shavah!" murmured Arthur Augustus indignantly. "Weally, that is watah too much, deah boys! Howevah,

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I cannot vewy well wemonstwate with a come up to my study, sir? We can talk guest."

"No; it would be awfully bad form," said Lowther gravely.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Will somebody find Knox for me?" went on Mr. Mason. "I've been 'ere a decent while, and I ain't seen 'im yet. P'r'aps, one of you youngsters will oblige?"

"Pway, let me offah my services," said D'Arcy, gracefully stepping forward. "Knox is wathah a wottah, sir, but pewwaps the fact is unknown to you?"

"Well, not exactly," replied the visitor. "But if Knox don't like the looks o' me—I ain't exactly a born dook, you know—I'll soon put him in his place. Give the name of Mr. John Mason—who's always been a great friend of Knox's father. If he's ashamed of an old friend, then I'll teach 'im a lesson."

Arthur Augustus went off to search for Knox, leaving the juniors highly amused. They foresaw quite an entertainment in the near future. The high and mighty Knox would most certainly be startled at the stranger's accent, and would feel ashamed of his visitor—for Knox was a first-class snob.

Arthur Augustus ran the prefect to earth in the pavilion on Big Side, and beckoned to him. Knox came out frowning.

"Done those lines?" he asked.

"No, Knox; I've come on quite another mattah," said Arthur Augustus hastily. "There is a gentleman waitin' for you in the quad—a Mr. Mason. You are expectin' him, I gather."

"Oh, he's come at last, has he?" said Knox, feeling if his tie was straight. "Yes, I am expecting him, D'Arcy."

Arthur Augustus hurried off in advance, fearful lest Knox should again remember the lines. He rejoined the crowd in the quad, and a moment later Knox pushed through them, all smiles, to greet, as he thought, his father's old friend. He had visions of a substantial tip, so he set himself out to be extra polite.

"Delighted to meet you, Mr. Mason!" he exclaimed genially. "You're quite a stranger to me, you know, but I've heard heaps about you from the pater."

The smile faded from his face as he regarded Mr. Mason's appearance. But there was no getting out of things now; he had acknowledged the visitor as an old friend.

"Well, you ain't wot I thought you'd be, Gerald," said Mr. Mason, taking Knox's hand. "I was expecting to see a hupright, hathletic fellow. Strikes me you don't go in for enough hexercise. However, I'll give you a lecture later on."

"Th-thank you," stammered Knox.

He looked at Mr. Mason in dismay, and the latter chuckled inwardly. Revenge is sweet, and George Kerr, hidden beneath the disguise of Mr. Mason, meant to take full advantage of his opportunity.

"Nice place—very nice!" Mr. Mason proceeded. "I s'pose you're 'igh up in the school—mebbe in the seventh standard?"

"S-standard?" stuttered Knox faintly. "They're called Forms here, sir. This isn't a Board school!"

Mr. Mason looked round genially. "Times 'ave changed," he went on. "Of course, you wouldn't remember the time when me and your dad went to the same Council school? Them was times, young 'un! Me and the blacksmith's boy used to—"

"I—I say," gasped Knox, "won't you

come up to my study, sir? We can talk a lot better there, and—and—"

"Rubbish!" said Mr. Mason. "We're all right here! Why, what's it matter about these boys 'earing what I'm saying? You ain't ashamed of your own dad, or your dad's pal, I know!"

Knox looked round helplessly and gritted his teeth. He was conscious of the fact that his face was absolutely crimson. The juniors were looking on with great enjoyment, and every face bore a grin.

Knox, the snob, was being shown up. The unpopular prefect felt that he would like the ground to open up and swallow

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him, Mr. Mason and all. This fearfully low bounder was absolutely the limit, and he was his father's old friend. Knox was quite staggered.

"Buck up, Knoxy!" grinned Blake. "Don't go away now; we're just getting interested."

"As good as a play!" chuckled Manners.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Knox turned on D'Arcy, with a scowling face.

"Go to my study and wait till I come!" he snarled.

"Weally, Knox—"

"Do as I say!" thundered Knox furiously.

"I uttably decline—"

"Ear, 'ear!" chimed in Mr. Mason. "Let the young gent alone. What he says is quite true—things are getting interesting. If you bully the younger boys in my presence, Gerald, I shall take you in 'and myself. I don't believe in bullying in any form. I 'ope you don't bully the kids?"

"Never!" muttered Knox between his teeth. "I always treat them with extreme leniency."

"Weally, Knox, what a wotten fib!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly. "You know vewy well that you are the wottenest bully in the School House. I pwotest against such a wotten fib."

"Hear, hear, Gussy!"

"Don't tell fairy-tales!"

Knox clenched his fists.

"Silence!" he roared savagely.

"Clear off, all of you!"

"Don't go, boys; stop where you har!" said Mr. Mason.

The juniors stopped; they had no intention of going, in any case. There was scarcely a boy there who had not felt the sting of Knox's misused power, and to see him humiliated was a sheer joy.

"No sense in getting ratty," said the visitor soothingly. "You an' me don't want to fall out, Gerald. What would your dad say when I went back to 'is public-house?"

"Public-house!"

"My only aunt!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Well, this is the latest!" grinned Monty Lowther. "Fancy Knox's pater being a giddy publican!"

Knox nearly choked.

"He isn't!" he roared. "What do you mean by saying such a thing?" he went on angrily, turning to Mr. Mason.

"It's a lie!"

"Easy, boy!" said the visitor smoothly. "Mebbe I made a mistake. But it's only natural. Him and me always being in the pubs—leastways, I can say with truth that I never went into a pub without 'im!"

"Won't—won't you come indoors?" asked Knox desperately.

"Not me! I'm staying hout 'ere!" said Mr. Mason. "Yes, it's a very nice school. I suppose your dad would 'ave liked to 'ave gone to a school like this."

"He did!" growled Knox. "He was educated here and at Oxford."

"Hoxford, eh?" said Mr. Mason. "What did 'e go to Hoxford for?"

"To the university, of course!" snarled Knox.

"University?" repeated the visitor. "What's that?"

Knox gritted his teeth.

"Look here, Mr. Mason," he said savagely, "I believe you're pulling my leg. You can't be so ignorant—"

"Hignorant!" repeated Mr. Mason. "Mind what you are saying, young man! I'm a well-hedicated man, I am, and I pride myself on the fact. Me and your dad hoften 'ave an argument on manners. I'm always 'aving to pull 'im hup in conversation. I s'pose you've swanked 'ere that you're the son of a rich man. 'Ow many times 'ave your father 'ad to go to the pawnshop—ow many times, hey?"

"Pawnshop, by gum!"

"Phew!"

"Gweat Scott!"

Knox glared round at the tittering juniors.

"My hat, I'll deal with you juniors later on!" he muttered thickly. "And as for you, Mr. Mason, the sooner you get off these premises the better I shall like it. After what you've been saying the boys will make a laughing-stock of me—"

"Well, it won't do you any 'arm!"
 "Look here—"
 "Now, then, don't get riled!" said Mr. Mason soothingly. "I'm older than you are, you know, Gerald. If you're ashamed of me—well, I'll clear hout. But don't let's part in hanger. Let's 'ave a cigar together, anyhow!"
 "A—a what?" gasped Knox.
 "A cigar—a smoke!" said Mr. Mason.
 "You smoke, don't you?"
 "Of course not!" snapped Knox. "I never smoke!"

There was a general broadening of the juniors' grins.

"Oh, never!" murmured Lowther.
 "Sure, an' it's a howlin' fibber ye are, Knoxy!" said Reilly.
 "Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, you'll 'ave a smoke with me, surely?" asked Mr. Mason, producing a couple of black cigars from his waist-coat pocket.

He stuffed one in his own mouth, and held out the other to Knox. But the prefect shook his head.

"I don't smoke," he repeated, between his teeth.

"Well, you can start now," said Mr. Mason genially. "You don't mean to say you're scared? Fancy a big, strapping feller like you being afraid to smoke a mild cigar. Well, you are a kid!"

Knox breathed hard.
 "Go it, Knoxy!" chuckled Blake.
 "Light up, like a man!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Pile in!"
 "Don't be a funk!"

"Ear that?" chuckled Mr. Mason. "They're laughing at you, Gerald! Don't let 'em see as you're afraid of smoking a cigar. You ain't a little kid, are yer? What's the matter? Afraid of being sick?"

"No, I'm not!" roared Knox desperately. "It's against the rules to smoke at St. Jim's. If—if you'll come for a walk with me I—I'll smoke it—"

"Good!" said Mr. Mason. "Light it hup 'ere, though. Then we'll go for a little walk—mebbe to the station."

Knox brightened up.
 "Are you thinking of going?" he asked eagerly.

"Well, I shall 'ave to go afore long, I suppose," said the visitor. "Arter I've seen the 'eadmaster, and—"

"You—you can't see the Head?" gasped Knox frantically. "The Head's out, I believe—"

"He isn't," interrupted Lumley-Lumley. "I guess he's in his study."

"Well, he—he's very busy," snarled Knox, meaning, at all costs, to prevent this impossible "friend" of his from interviewing the reverend Head. "Come on, Mr. Mason! We'll light these cigars and be off!"

Mr. Mason grinned.

"No 'urry!" he exclaimed. "'Owver, we'll light hup!"

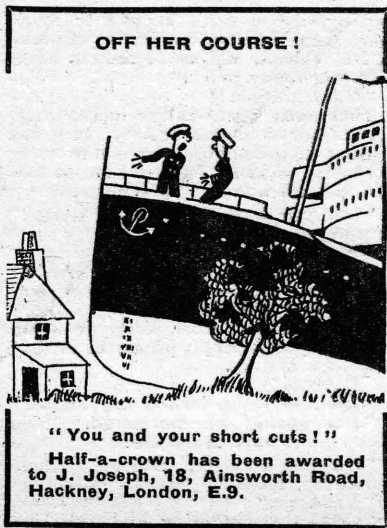
He produced a box of matches and struck one. Knox lighted his cigar, and the puffs of smoke that came from it nearly choked him.

"Like it?" asked Mr. Mason, making a pretence of lighting his own.

Knox was so occupied that he didn't notice that his visitor failed to light the other cigar.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Kangaroo.
 "What a niff!"
 "Yaas, wathah! Gwoogh!"

Knox thought so, too. He gasped and spluttered. He had smoked many cigarettes, and one or two cigars, when he felt extra "doggy," but



never had he smoked a cigar so utterly vile as this precious specimen.

"Like it?" repeated Mr. Mason amiably.

"It—it's a bit strong!" gasped Knox.
 "Let's be going."

"Mind you don't let it go hout."
 "I shan't let it go hout—I mean out," spluttered Knox.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Never, in all his life, had Knox felt so angry. He felt that he would like to throw himself upon Mr. Mason and slaughter him on the spot. He knew that he was humiliated and made a laughing-stock. Hemmed in by grinning and tittering juniors, who usually quailed at his glance, he could not even escape. And he was obliged to be civil to this low, common ruffian, who called himself his father's friend! Knox thought that it must be some horrible nightmare!

But the cigar, at any rate, wasn't a nightmare—that was real enough! The strong smoke drove the juniors back, gasping and choking; and even Mr. Mason seemed to be in desperate straits to prevent himself going off into a coughing fit.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Knox. "This is too much! Let's—let's be going!"

"I'm ready!" said Mr. Mason, waving a puff of smoke away. "Oh, crumbs! What a niff! I—I mean, ain't that cigar got a lovely smell?"

Knox took it from his mouth and held it out at arm's length. A way was cleared for him to get through the crowd, and he walked hastily through the juniors, Mr. Mason following. As a matter of fact, the juniors were glad to get rid of Knox—and the cigar. And Knox and Mr. Mason were in need of fresh air.

But the pair had hardly walked five yards before a thin, begowned figure appeared, and a murmur of consternation arose from the juniors.

Knox stood in full view, with the fearful abomination still smoking in his hand.

"Knox!"
 The prefect stood frozen to the ground. The single word cut through the air in acrid tones, and Knox went pale.

For the begowned figure was that of Mr. Ratcliff, the harsh, ill-tempered Housemaster of the New House!

CHAPTER 6.

Ratty Catches it Hot—and Cold!

MR. RATCLIFF halted.
 "Knox!" he thundered.
 "This is positively outrageous! I—I am at a loss for words, Knox! I cannot believe the evidence of my own eyes. How dare you—how dare you, Knox?"
 "I—I couldn't help it, sir!" said Knox limply, dropping the cigar.
 "Couldn't help it!" roared Mr. Ratcliff. "You have the audacity to say that you couldn't help it! Good gracious! What is the school coming to? You, a prefect, have the utter impertinence to light a cigar in the presence of many junior boys, thereby setting them a shocking example. I—I cannot find words to express myself, Knox! This abominable occurrence shall be reported to Dr. Holmes himself! What have you to say, Knox?"

Knox didn't reply. In fact, he didn't feel up to replying. This shock, coming on top of the effects of that awful cigar, was a little too much. Knox felt that matters couldn't get much worse than they were at the present moment.

"Answer me, Knox!" rapped out Mr. Ratcliff. "I demand—"

Mr. Mason stepped forward. He had been feeling rather nervous at first, but as his disguise had stood the test of even his own schoolfellows, Kerr felt that Ratcliff would not be able to see through it. And the japer, seeing that things had gone a little further than he had first intended, wished to smooth the troubled waters, as it were.

"One moment, sir," he said calmly.
 "If you will allow me—"

Mr. Ratcliff turned a frozen glare upon Mr. Mason—which quite failed to have the desired effect, however.

"No, sir! I will not allow you!" he thundered. "You will please be silent while I am dealing with this wretched boy. I will speak to you later, sir, for I suspect that you are responsible for this outrageous scene."

"I think Knox was hardly to blame—"

"Will you be silent?" roared Mr. Ratcliff, too angry to moderate his tones or his language to the stranger. "I don't know who you might be, sir."
 "Well, I might be the Duke of Shoreditch on holiday."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 The laugh subsided as if by magic as Mr. Ratcliff glared round. He turned to Mr. Mason with a snarl.

"So you are pleased to be flippant!" he exclaimed furiously. "Very well! I shall demand a full explanation from you, sir, later on. At the present moment, I strongly advise you to hold your tongue!"

"But, sir," interrupted Knox, "this gentleman is Mr. John Mason, a friend of my father's."

"Silence, Knox! It is my intention to take you to the headmaster. This—this gentleman will be requested to give an explanation later on."

Mr. Mason's eyes gleamed. Mr. Ratcliff was an old enemy—there was hardly a junior in the New House at St. Jim's who didn't owe Mr. Ratcliff innumerable grudges. For ever nagging and fault-finding, for ever administering lines and lickings, the New House master was heartily disliked at St. Jim's, and the juniors were always glad of an opportunity to get their own back on him.

Such opportunity, however, very rarely came. Several juniors had often threatened to come back to St. Jim's

when they had grown up, for the sole and exclusive pleasure of giving Ratty a thundering good hiding. In point of fact, such an occurrence had actually taken place on one historic occasion.

Kerr, of the New House, was feeling reckless. Here was an opportunity to "go for" Ratty bald-headed. As a stranger he could talk as he liked, without fear of being silenced, for Mr. Ratcliff had not the slightest authority over him. He could give as good, if not better, than he received.

As a New House junior he had to put up with the Housemaster's harsh tongue without daring to reply. Mr. Mason was not forced to put up with anything of the kind.

And he didn't!

Rather wrathful, and certainly reckless, he went the whole hog, so to speak, and entered into the spirit of the thing. He, a supposed visitor at St. Jim's, had been ordered to hold his tongue. Mr. Ratcliff had certainly forgotten himself.

"I wish to say a few words—"

"Allow me to inform you, sir, that your advice is not asked for, and is not wanted!" snapped the New House master icily. "It may interest you to know that I am Mr. Ratcliff!"

Mr. Mason's eyes gleamed.

"Oh!" he ejaculated slowly. "You're Mr. Ratcliff, are you? I've 'eard of you! I've 'eard a whole lot about you! So you're Mr. Ratcliff—eh?"

The words were uttered in a tone of deepest contempt, and Mr. Ratcliff's eyes almost goggled from his head. The juniors, listening with all their ears, grinned at one another and drew closer. Matters were evidently going to be interesting. If Mr. Mason succeeded in humiliating the unpopular Housemaster he would be forthwith proclaimed a hero for all time.

"How—how dare you!" stuttered Mr. Ratcliff.

"Ow dare I?" repeated the visitor deliberately. "Mebbe you think I'm one of your schoolboys who you can bully as you please! I'm going to speak to you plain, Mr. Ratcliff, and tell you a few facts that ought to make you feel 'appy! And I ain't going to be shut up, neither!"

Mr. Ratcliff gasped.

"Good gracious, Knox! Remove this—this person!"

"I refuse to be removed!" went on Mr. Mason. "You're a bully, Ratcliff, and if the boys 'ere 'ad their way I bet they'd kick you out of St. Jim's! Instead of treating 'em like a master should, you bully 'em, stick your great ugly nose in where it ain't wanted, and interfere in things that don't concern you."

"Good—good heavens!"

"Take my advice and make yourself more agreeable—you'll find it pays in the long run, matey! I'm telling you all this for your own good, just as if I was one of your schoolboys. If you don't alter, you'll find yourself reach the limit one of these 'ere days. The fellows will go for you baldheaded, and boil you in oil! Not that you don't deserve it—cause you do!"

Mr. Ratcliff positively quivered with fury. The crowd of juniors were grinning with joy, and even Knox wore a smile. Mr. Mason's words were sweet music to their ears; to hear old Ratty "told off" was a sheer delight.

"You—you insulting scoundrel!" roared the Housemaster. "How—how dare you! I'll have you thrown off the premises!"

"Yes, you would!" sneered Mr. Mason, more reckless than ever. "That's just like you, Ratty! You do a lot o'

torking, but it don't amount to much when you threaten the likes of me! It's only boys, who can't answer back, who you really bully!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

That remark was rather unfortunate, for Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who was getting excited, did not trouble to lower his voice. And his beautiful accent told Mr. Ratcliff who the speaker was.

"Oh, you burbling chump, Gussy!" murmured Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

Mr. Ratcliff glared at Arthur Augustus. He felt that he was out-matched by the plain-speaking visitor; but he could, at least, vent his wrath upon the aristocratic person of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"D'Arcy!"

Arthur Augustus looked surprised. "Bai Jove!" he murmured. "Old Ratty must have heard me!"

"Do you hear me, D'Arcy?" thundered Mr. Ratcliff.

"Yaas, sir."

"Cease that muttering, and come here at once!" rapped out Mr. Ratcliff in a chilly voice. "You made a remark just now, upholding the insulting words of this—this ruffian!"

"Yaas, wathah, sir!"

"Well, boy, what have you to say?"

"Nothin', sir. He spoke the twuth!"

"Oh, you blithering jabberwock!" groaned Blake.

"Very well, D'Arcy!" said Mr. Ratcliff, fairly dancing with fury. "I will teach you that it is not your place to pass criticisms upon me! I intend to cane you here and now! It should be a lesson to you!"

"Weally, sir, you have not the power!" protested Arthur Augustus.

"What! What did you say, D'Arcy?"

"You are not my Housemastah, sir."

"You have insulted me, boy, and I intend to thrash you!" roared Mr. Ratcliff, gripping the cane he carried in a firmer grasp. "Hold out your hand!"

"Weally, sir—"

"Hold out your hand!"

"I wefuse, sir!"

"I will give you one more chance!" snarled the Housemaster, who was now nearly choking. "Again I order you, D'Arcy, to hold out your hand!"

"I utahly decline to do anythin' of the sort, sir!" said Arthur Augustus firmly. "I wefuse to be caned! I have done nothin' to wawwant such treament! I—"

But Mr. Ratcliff was now speechless with anger. He was not angry with D'Arcy particularly, but he felt that he wanted a victim to vent his wrath upon. And Arthur Augustus had interposed at the right moment.

Mr. Ratcliff was so furious that he could not control himself. He grasped the swell of the School House and lashed viciously with the cane.

"Owwwwwwww!" howled Arthur Augustus. "Bai Jove, you uttah wottah! Yowwwwwoop!"

Mr. Ratcliff laid it on heavily.

"My hat, this won't do!" murmured the disguised Kerr, in dismay. "I shall have to stop this! I mustn't let poor old Gussy suffer!"

Mr. Mason, otherwise Kerr, was now extremely wrathful himself. Mr. Ratcliff's unwarrantable attack upon Gussy was the limit.

"Stop—that, you brute!" roared Mr. Mason.

Mr. Ratcliff nearly fell down with amazement. He released Arthur Augustus and turned upon the visitor.

"Did—did you address me?" he panted.

"Leave that boy alone!" thundered

Mr. Mason. "If you touch him with that cane again, I'll snatch it away and give you a taste of it!"

"We'll see—we'll see!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff, white with fury.

And he turned upon Arthur Augustus as the latter was walking away, and brought the cane down with considerable force upon the rear portion of D'Arcy's trousers.

"Yawooh!" howled Arthur Augustus, jumping into the air. "Oh cwumbs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors roared. It was rather unfeeling of them, but they didn't feel the pain, and the expression upon D'Arcy's noble countenance was really funny.

"Now, sir," snarled Mr. Ratcliff, almost foaming at the mouth, "perhaps you'll show us what you'll do?"

Mr. Mason hesitated.

"Yes, by gum, I will!" he roared, throwing caution to the winds.

He made a dive forward, snatched the cane from Mr. Ratcliff's hand, and swished it through the air.

"You—you wouldn't dare touch me with that?" panted the New House master.

"We'll see—we'll see!" hissed Mr. Mason, mimicking Mr. Ratcliff.

He looked truly ferocious, and the unfortunate Ratty turned quite pale. Never for a moment had he suspected that Mr. Mason would be as good as his word. But he had no time to remonstrate. The cane hissed down, and lashed his thin legs with stinging force.

"Ow! Help—help!" bellowed Mr. Ratcliff. "Help!"

He jumped nearly a yard into the air, and looked round wildly for assistance. But none was forthcoming. The juniors, New House and School House alike, stood looking on with joy. They had all suffered from Mr. Ratcliff's vicious temper, and they were not likely to go to his assistance now. On the contrary, they would rather have lost a term's pocket-money than stop this amusing scene.

Not a master was in sight, not a prefect, except Knox. Possibly the prefects were conveniently keeping out of the way. Anyway, they didn't put in an appearance. Even Taggles was not to be seen. Mr. Ratcliff was at the mercy of this ruffian.

There was only one thing to be done—he must make a dash for the New House. No doubt such a proceeding would be undignified in the extreme, but the unfortunate Housemaster was now desperate. He had suffered enough indignity already. To remain there and be thrashed before a crowd of grinning juniors was simply out of the question.

So he ran for it; but, unfortunately, Mr. Mason ran, too. And he not only ran, but he administered a playful slash at every yard or so, which had the effect of making Mr. Ratcliff pop up and down like a monkey on hot bricks. It was impossible to look upon the scene seriously. Across the quad they went, and a roar of laughter followed.

The juniors were simply doubled up with merriment.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

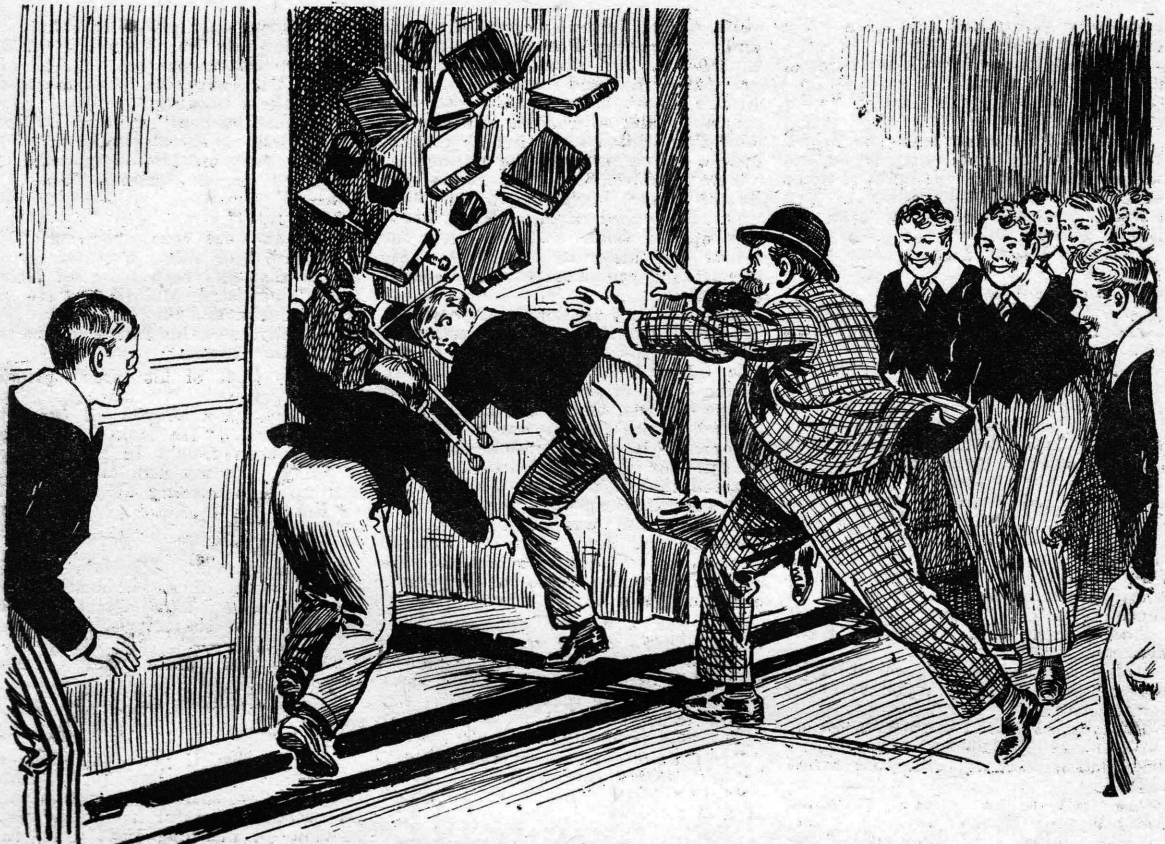
"Run for it, Ratty!"

"Give him another taste!" roared Figgins. "Don't spare him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's wight, deah boy! Thwash the wottah soundly!"

Mr. Ratcliff ran desperately for the New House, but his pursuer headed him off, and the wretched Housemaster swerved aside and ran for the fountain, his gown flying in the breeze. Arriving there, he put his back to it and held up his hand.



"If it's Knox's study," said Mr. Mason, "you can go in and announce me!" And he pushed Crooke and Mellish into the doorway. Crash! The two cads gave a fiendish yell as a shower of heavy books and coal fell down on their heads. The japers had been caught in their own booby trap!

"You—you scoundrel!" he panted. "Don't dare to touch me again!"

Mr. Mason jabbed at him with the cane. Unfortunately, Mr. Ratcliff thought that the blow was going home, and he involuntarily threw himself back, forgetting at the moment that the fountain was just behind him.

He threw himself back, lost his balance against the low rim of the fountain, and failed to recover it.

There was a loud splash and a fiendish yell from Mr. Ratcliff. But the yell was almost drowned by the howl of laughter that went up from the juniors.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! Now the wottah is cooled off!"

"Yes, rather!" grinned Monty Lowther. "Old Ratty's got it hot and cold at the same time. He ought to consider himself lucky. It's as good as a giddy Turkish bath!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Ratcliff scrambled out of the fountain like a limp rag. He was too utterly spent to say a word. Mr. Mason realised it, and threw the cane down. As a matter of fact, he was rather alarmed at the enormity of the offence he had committed. He, Kerr of the Fourth, had thrashed Mr. Ratcliff with his own cane! It would mean the sack—nothing less—if the truth ever came out.

But that wasn't likely to happen, for nobody suspected him. But as Mr. Ratcliff's dripping figure staggered away towards the New House, Mr. Mason made up his mind to clear out and assume his own identity again without any loss of time.

As long as he remained at St. Jim's now he would be in considerable peril.

CHAPTER 7.

A Little Mistake!

TEN minutes later the old quadrangle wore quite a calm appearance.

Little groups of juniors were scattered about, certainly, and they were all grinning, but there was no longer any excitement.

The real cause was that Kildare and Darrell had put in an appearance—with canes—to ascertain the cause of the commotion. Whether by accident or design, they had arrived after everything had happened, and after looking at Mr. Mason rather curiously they went off.

The visitor to St. Jim's was now the centre of a little group of Fourth Formers, and Knox had gone off to the School House.

Knox was feeling rather relieved. The adventure with Mr. Ratcliff had detracted the juniors' attention from himself.

"But I can't believe it!" muttered Knox, as he entered his study. "It seems impossible that that chap is pater's old friend. There must be some mistake somewhere."

Yet that couldn't be, Knox told himself, for the stranger had given the right name.

"Oh, hang!" muttered the prefect. "I'm not going to bother myself about it. Thank goodness old Ratty came along at the moment he did. That cigar would have made me ill if I'd finished it, and I expect old Ratty will be too ashamed of himself to rake the matter up again."

He looked thoughtfully at his table, and his eyes rested upon a little parcel which had apparently come by post.

Toby, the page, must have left it there during his absence. Knox picked it up and unfastened it.

"Wonder what the dooce it is?" he muttered.

He soon discovered, and the discovery gave him a considerable amount of pleasure. For the parcel contained a really first-class gold watch. It was not a cheap article, but a solid gold English lever.

Knox was delighted.

It was a present from a loving relative which had been long promised.

Knox had begun to have doubts about its arrival, but now those doubts were set aside. And the watch couldn't possibly have come at a more opportune time. His own was smashed, and he was wearing Kerr's.

Knox grinned.

"Well, I've got no further use for Kerr's watch now," he muttered. "I'll slip across the quad and return it to him. Kerr ought to consider himself jolly lucky!"

He had no intention of having his old watch repaired, and as he didn't want two watches on him, he decided to get rid of Kerr's. He placed his new one on the side table and left the study.

Knox went out into the quad, but as there was no sign of Figgins & Co., he entered the New House and went up to the Fourth Form passage.

Without troubling to knock at the door of Figgins' study, he entered.

Figgins and Fatty Wynn were there. Figgins was preparing tea, but Fatty Wynn was busily breaking up some substance which was apparently meant to be toffee. It was black and uninviting,

but Fatty Wynn was sucking a great chunk with enjoyment.

They both looked up as Knox entered, and they both frowned.

"Well," said Figgins bluntly, "what do you want?"

"You're not wanted here, you School House bouncer!" said Fatty Wynn, not without difficulty, for the lump of toffee in his mouth impeded his speech. "You haven't got any authority over us, Knox. Clear out!"

"Where's Kerr?" asked Knox.

"Out!"

"But where is he?"

"How the dickens should I know?" asked Figgins. "He went off on his own somewhere, and we haven't seen him for over an hour. What do you want him for, anyhow?"

"I don't want to see Kerr particularly," replied Knox, taking out Kerr's watch and laying it on the table. "Give him this when he comes in."

"Oh, so you've come to your giddy senses?" asked Figgins. "Like your cheek to take it from Kerr!"

Knox grinned.

"Serves him right for ragging a prefect," he replied. "You three fags can consider yourselves lucky you weren't reported."

And, with that remark, Knox departed.

"He's smashed the blessed thing, I expect!" growled Fatty Wynn, reaching for the watch.

But Figgins picked it up first.

"You ass! Do you want to get Kerr's watch all mucked up with your rotten toffee?"

"It isn't rotten toffee!" protested Fatty Wynn indignantly.

"Well, it looks pretty ghastly," replied Figgins, with delightful frankness.

"Taste a bit, you chump!"

"Not me!" grinned Figgins. "The sight of it's enough, old man. I believe you've got some chunks of coal or cinders mixed up with that toffee, Fatty."

"Well, there might be one or two pieces," admitted Fatty Wynn. "But you can easily pick 'em out when you're eating it. I say, where's Kerr got to?"

But Figgins couldn't answer that question, and he laid the watch, which was in perfect order, aside until Kerr should put in an appearance.

Meanwhile, Knox left the New House. Just outside he met Mr. Mason, who was apparently waiting for him.

"You haven't gone, then?" said Knox, frowning.

"I'm going soon, youngster," said Mr. Mason affably. "What's the time?"

Knox's hand went to his waistcoat.

"My watch is in the study," he replied shortly. "But it's time you were going, Mr. Mason, anyhow."

And Knox, seeing Rusden of the Sixth in the distance, left the visitor without ceremony, and crossed the quad.

Mr. Mason watched him until he and Rusden entered the gymnasium.

"In his study—eh?" murmured Kerr. "That's a giddy stroke of luck. I'll slip in and get it, and then grease off. My hat! What a shindy there'd be if old Ratty found out who I was!"

But Mr. Ratcliff had made himself extremely scarce, and was not likely to be seen in public again for several hours. It was doubtful if he would show his face even then; so Kerr felt that he was safe.

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He walked leisurely across the quad and entered the School House. Fortunately he met nobody in the Hall or passages, and arrived outside Knox's study. He opened the door cautiously and slipped in. He left the door ajar behind him; but he did not hear a soft footstep in the passage.

Percy Mellish, the Paul Pry of the School House, crept up to the doorway. He looked in through the partially opened door, and saw that the visitor was alone in the study. He was looking round as though in search of something.

Kerr couldn't see his watch at first; he didn't see it at all, in fact. But he saw Knox's new gold ticker on the side table. The blind was half-down in the study to keep out the sun, and in the dimness, and in his hurry, Kerr did not notice that it was a different timepiece. It was a watch—that was enough for Kerr. He took it for granted that it was his own.

It was rather an unfortunate mistake to make, and was to have serious consequences. And Mellish's inquisitiveness did not improve matters. He saw Kerr put the watch in his pocket, and thought it rather strange.

"My hat, a watch!" muttered Mellish. "That's rather queer!"

He didn't expect Mr. Mason to make his exit quite so quickly, and was still in the passage when the visitor emerged.

Kerr was rather taken aback.

"I—I didn't know you were there," he said, rather confusedly.

"Isn't Knox in there?" asked Mellish.

"No."

And Mr. Mason went hurriedly down the passage, leaving Mellish staring after him. The cad of the Fourth felt no great affection for the visitor, and he was still sore from the effects of the booby-trap incident.

His eyes gleamed suspiciously.

"The bouncer was jolly confused," he muttered. "My hat! I wonder if everything's all right? What was he doing in Knox's study alone? What was he doing with that giddy watch?"

Mellish didn't really think that there was anything really amiss, but he had a curious propensity for making mischief. He decided that it would be rather a good joke to tell the fellows that the stranger had been up to something fishy in Knox's study. It might result in Mr. Mason being subjected to some inconvenience and trouble, and that would be a slight compensation for the booby-trap fiasco, anyhow.

Mellish walked down the passage, and descended to the entrance hall. The Terrible Three were standing by the door, chatting about the scene in which old Ratty had cut such a ridiculous figure.

"I say, you fellows, I've just found something out," began Mellish. "I happened to see—"

Tom Merry sniffed.

"You do happen to see things, you blessed spy!" he exclaimed. "Buzz off! We don't want to hear any of your rotten tales!"

"But it's about—"

"Oh, vamoose!" growled Manners.

"Absquatulate!" said Monty Lowther. "That's what they tell you to do in America, when they would rather have your room than your company. Absquatulate, or levant! You can do which you like, Mellish; only buzz off!"

"You asses!" shouted Mellish.

"I've found out something about that low rotter who whacked old Ratcliff!"

"Low rotter or not," said Tom Merry, "it was worth quids to see old Ratty take a ducking."

"My hat, rather!" grinned Lowther. "He was in Knox's study just now, alone," went on Mellish quickly. "I happened to be passing, and saw him—"

"Oh, rats!"

"Go and eat coke, you rotter!"

"I saw him shove a watch in his pocket that had been lying on Knox's table," persisted Mellish. "He put it in quickly, and then came out. You should have seen his face when he saw me in the passage."

"Well, what of his face?" growled Tom Merry.

"It had guilt written all over it," said Mellish. "He looked as though he had been caught in the act, sort of thing. It's my firm belief that he was up to something fishy."

"Rot!"

"Piffle!"

"Rubbish!"

Mellish glared. His tale had not created much of an impression, and the Terrible Three stated their opinions with characteristic bluntness.

"I tell you—"

"Will you clear off?" roared Manners.

"Well, if that's all you've got to say—"

"It is."

"Except that if you don't clear off in exactly ten seconds," added Lowther, "we shall be under the painful necessity—painful from your point of view—of bumping you! One, two, three—"

"Look here, you burbling asses—"

"Four, five, six. Four seconds left, Mellish!"

"You—you rotter!"

"Seven, eight—"

But Mellish did not wait any longer. He felt that there would have been considerable danger in staying there. He recognised the warlike signs—Manners was already pulling up his sleeves—and walked away.

CHAPTER 8.

In a Tight Fix!

THE Terrible Three chuckled.

"I thought that would do the trick," grinned Lowther, when Mellish had disappeared. "Silly young ass, coming to us with his yarns."

"Sheer invention, I expect," said Tom Merry. "Mellish has got his knife into Mr. Mason, and wants to make mischief."

"That's it," said Manners.

Nevertheless, the Terrible Three were certainly impressed by Mellish's story, although they would not admit it to him or to themselves.

Mr. Mason was certainly a very curious individual. It was not absolutely out of the question to suppose that he had taken a fancy to something in Knox's study. But it was quite probable that everything was all serene. There was only Mellish's word to go upon, and that wasn't usually worth much.

The Terrible Three were silent for a few minutes, and then Manners relieved the doorpost of his weight.

"Well, I suppose we'd better have some tea?" he said. "The kettle's boiling by this time, I expect."

"Impossible!" said Monty Lowther solemnly.

"What do you mean?" demanded

Manners. "I put it over the fire twenty minutes ago. I should like to know how it's impossible?"

"Of course, the water in the kettle might be boiling," went on Lowther thoughtfully. "I don't say anything about that. But to say the kettle's boiling is absurd!"

Manners glared.

"I suppose you call that a joke?" he asked, with biting sarcasm. "Because, if so, I don't! And I think you're a funny fathead!"

"Go it!"

"Oh, cheese it, Manners!" said Tom Merry. "Lowther can't help it; it's a family failing, I believe. Let's go and have tea!"

And the Terrible Three commenced ascending the stairs. But before they reached the top, the thick-set figure of Mr. Mason appeared. He came downstairs quickly, after a moment's hesitation.

"Going, sir?" said Tom Merry.

"Yes, my boys," said Mr. Mason shortly. "Good-bye!"

"Can't you stop and have tea in our study?"

"Impossible! Thanks all the same!"

And Mr. Mason hurried out. Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther looked at one another rather in surprise.

"By gum, he's in a giddy hurry!" said Manners. "I—I wonder—"

"Well?"

"You wonder what?"

"Oh, nothing!" said Manners.

"Well, that's a fat lot to wonder," said Lowther. "Explain yourself, ass!"

"Well, I was thinking of what Mellish said," replied Manners uneasily. "I—I suppose there couldn't have been any truth in it? Only Mason looked a bit taken aback. Let's go and see where he's making for."

They descended the stairs again, and went to the door of the School House. Mr. Mason was crossing to the gates. Except for his figure, the quad was deserted.

Suddenly he paused, looked towards the New House, and then dodged with wonderful agility, considering his evident age, to the cover provided by the old elms. He crouched there, unseen by two figures who emerged from the New House. They were those of Mr. Raitlon, the School House master, and Mr. Linton.

Kerr, in fact, was feeling a little nervous. He had already overstayed his time, and he was anxious to become himself again. Everything was quite all right, and he was congratulating himself, when he heard Mr. Linton's voice across the quad.

Instinctively Kerr concealed himself. The School House master and Mr. Linton had evidently been visiting Mr. Ratcliff. Therefore, Kerr had no wish to meet the two masters now. They might ask awkward questions, which he would have difficulty in answering.

Consequently he took cover behind the elm when the pair had disappeared into the Head's house.

But the Terrible Three looked upon the matter in quite another light. This, in the circumstances, was only natural. The whole thing was suspicious. First Mellish's tale, then the little incident on the stairs, and finally the strange behaviour in the quad.

"Why has he hidden himself?" murmured Tom Merry uneasily. "I say, you chaps, I'm beginning to have doubts, you know. As Mellish said, things look fishy. Suppose the chap really has boned something out of Knox's study, how would he act?"

"Why, just as he's acting now, I should think," said Manners.

"Exactly. The fellow's a stranger, you know," went on Tom Merry. "I think, perhaps, we'd better go and ask him a few questions."

"We shall look pretty sort of asses if everything's all right," said Lowther.

"Well, we can bump Mellish afterwards," said Tom Merry. "That's one consolation, old man."

They left the School House and hurried across the quad to the gates.

Mr. Mason was just about to leave. He heard the footsteps behind him, and quickened his pace. Tom Merry looked at his chums.

"Looks suspicious!" he murmured. "Come on!"

"Hi, Mr. Mason!" called Lowther.

Kerr turned hesitatingly, but before he could decide what to do, the Terrible Three were surrounding him.

"Just a word, Mr. Mason!" said Tom Merry uncomfortably. "We're grateful to you for going for old Ratty as you did, but—but some chap has raised a suspicion against you. We want to clear it up before you go."

"It's about a watch," said Manners. "Mellish says he saw you take a watch out of Knox's study."

Mr. Mason smiled. There was no reason why he should not reveal his identity to the Terrible Three; they'd simply roar at the joke. And, of course, he could easily explain that the watch was really his own.

"You see—" he began.

But at that moment Darrell of the Sixth came up, and Kerr said no more. It was the height of misfortune that Darrell came upon the scene at that moment.

"Oh, so you're the gentleman who played old Harry with Ratcliff?" he said affably. "Well, I'm a prefect, and I'm supposed to keep law and order, but I can't say that I exactly disapprove—unofficially, I mean. Ratcliff requires taking down a peg or two at intervals."

"We were talking to Mr. Mason about a watch, Darrell," said Tom Merry. "Mellish says he saw this gentleman take a watch out of Knox's room. It is all rot, of course, but we want to clear Mr. Mason's name."

"Oh!"

Darrell looked serious, and gave Kerr a keen glance.

Kerr was looking somewhat alarmed

—a fact that did not escape the attention of the Terrible Three. And Kerr had good reason to feel alarmed. He had his own watch in his pocket, as he thought, and if he was forced to produce it in front of Darrell, Tom Merry & Co. would recognise it as Kerr's, and the whole truth of the joke might come out, which would be nothing less than disaster. For Darrell, as a prefect, would be forced to report the matter. And if Dr. Holmes learned that Mr. Ratcliff had been chased round the quad by Kerr—well, Kerr would belong to the Fourth no longer. His career at St. Jim's would come to an abrupt termination.

"We know you can explain it, Mr. Mason," said Tom Merry. "Did you take a watch out of Knox's study?"

"I don't see as 'ow—"

"That's not an answer," interrupted Darrell suspiciously.

"Well, I did take a watch, then!" grunted Kerr. "But it was my own!"

"Let's see it!" said Manners bluntly.

"I—I'm in a hurry to catch my train. I—I mean, I want to go!" exclaimed Kerr confusedly.

Tom Merry looked grim.

"It won't take a moment," he said,

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really convinced by now that all was not as it should be. "If it's your own watch, where's the harm in showing it to us?"

Kerr winked at Tom Merry in an effort to put him wise. Unfortunately, Tom Merry took it quite the wrong way.

"It's no good winking at me," he said. "That game won't work! One of our chaps had better run and fetch Knoxy," he added.

"No, wait—" began Kerr desperately.

But Manners rushed off.

"All this is very suspicious!" said Darrell sternly. "The fact of your not wishing to show the watch practically makes you condemn yourself. You're a stranger here, Mr. Mason, and we don't know anything about you. You'd better let us see the watch before we take it by force!"

Kerr groaned.

His position was really precarious, but the predicament into which he was to be landed later on was to prove twenty times as serious.

Kerr fished in his pocket, took out the watch, and handed it to Tom Merry.

"Don't recognise it," he whispered hurriedly, naturally thinking that the ticker was his own. "For goodness' sake, don't give me away!"

Tom Merry frowned as he took the watch, and Monty Lowther and Darrell drew nearer.

"My hat!" exclaimed Tom. "This is a brand-new ticker!"

"Brand new!" ejaculated Mr. Mason. "Rot!"

"A gold one, too!" said Darrell.

"Gold!"

"Rather! A solid gold English lever, worth twenty quid, at least!"

"Great—great Scott!"

Kerr staggered, and turned pale under his make-up. He had taken the wrong watch! It wasn't his own ticker at all. For a moment he could hardly realise the truth.

Unwittingly he was a thief!

CHAPTER 9.

No Explanation!

KERR breathed hard. "I—I didn't know it!" he exclaimed frantically. "I didn't mean to take that watch! I—I thought—"

"We'd better wait until Knox comes!" said Darrell sharply. "This watch may be his, although I've never seen it before."

Kerr did not reply. His mind was in whirl, but he breathed a little sigh of relief, nevertheless. At that moment he was glad that he had made a mistake, for now there was nothing to prove his true identity. The shadow of the sack, as it were, was momentarily lifted. He was in a very tight fix, but he was still Mr. Mason. There was no likelihood of his identity being discovered.

Tom Merry was looking very grave. Those whispered words of Mr. Mason's, asking him not to give him away, was convincing proof indeed. At least, Tom Merry thought so. It showed quite plainly that the stranger was guilty.

It was absolutely rotten, but if the man was a thief he would have to be punished.

"Here comes Knox!"

Knox and Manners hurried up.

"What's up?" inquired Knox. "My hat, then you're still here, Mr. Mason?"

"Yes; we've detained him," replied Darrell. "He was seen taking a watch out of your study, Knox, and was just

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hurrying out of the gates when these Shell fellows collared him."

Knox started.

"A watch!" he exclaimed quickly.

"Let me see it!"

Darrell handed it over.

"Great Scott! This is my new ticker!" yelled Knox indignantly. "It only came this afternoon, and I haven't worn it yet. It's solid gold, and worth twenty-five quid! Do you mean to say Mr. Mason collared it?"

"Yes."

"By George!"

Knox pocketed the valuable ticker and stared at the dismayed Mr. Mason suspiciously. This was absolutely the limit. Knox had thought his father's friend a low ruffian, but a thief—

A doubt was beginning to creep into Knox's mind. Was it possible that there was a mistake somewhere? It seemed incredible that the man, with all his common ways, could be the real John Mason.

Knox decided to bring the matter to the notice of Mr. Railton, the School House master. He would know what to do.

"You'd better freeze on to this rotter while I go and talk to Railton," he said hurriedly. "Don't let him get away. We shall have to see the Head, I expect."

"I won't escape," growled Kerr.

"That's a fact!" said Lowther grimly. "We'll watch you too closely, my pippin!"

Knox hurried off.

"Don't be long!" called Darrell. "I'll wait here until you come back."

Kerr groaned inwardly. If Darrell would only go he could explain matters. Then, perhaps, he could have a fake struggle with the Terrible Three and make his escape.

Kerr knew that they would be only too anxious to help him out of his predicament once they knew the truth. But, with Darrell present, any idea of revealing his identity was out of the question. And the prefect remained close to Kerr in case he should attempt to make a break for freedom.

Meanwhile, Knox rushed into the School House. In the hall he almost bowled Arthur Augustus D'Arcy over.

"Out of the way!" he snarled.

"Weally, Knox—"

"I'm in a hurry!"

"Bai Jove! What's the excitement?" asked Arthur Augustus. "You look quite wed in the face, Knox. I twust nothin' is w'ong? Pway don't wush away while I'm speakin'. Well, I nevah! The wottah has gone!"

Knox had no time to waste on Arthur Augustus.

He knocked at the door of Mr. Railton's study and entered. The School House master was writing, and he looked up in surprise at Knox's flushed face.

"Is anything the matter, Knox?" he asked.

"Yes, sir; something serious," replied Knox. "You may be aware that I had

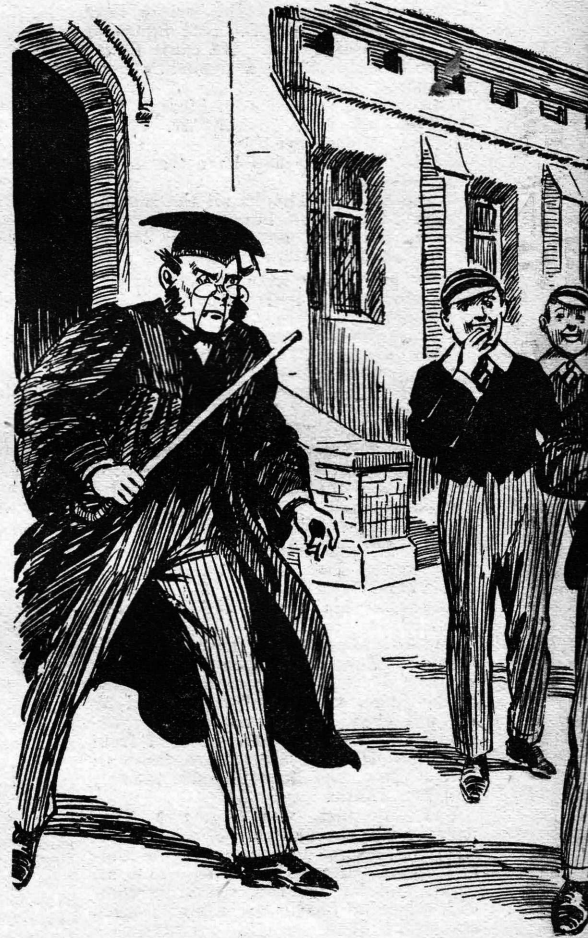
a visitor this afternoon—a Mr. Mason. He had a scene with Mr. Ratcliff in the quad."

"Ahem! I have heard something about it," said Mr. Railton.

Knox rapidly explained what had occurred, and voiced his opinion regarding the stranger.

Mr. Railton listened with a grave face, and when Knox had done he rose to his feet and frowned.

"This is serious, Knox," he said, tapping his desk with his finger-tips. "Really, I hardly know what to do. The headmaster must know of it, of course. But this doubt about Mr.



Knox stood in full view, with the fearful cigar smoking in his hand, as he thundered the New House master. The prefect stood frozen to you, M

Mason's genuineness is rather embarrassing. If the man is really your father's friend the position is awkward. Is there no way of ascertaining the truth?"

Knox considered.

"My pater's on the telephone in the City," he said suddenly. "He never leaves his office before six, and I might catch him. He'd know, perhaps. It'll mean a trunk-call to London, but we should get to know something. The pater would be able to describe his friend. You see, sir, I've never seen Mr. Mason until to-day."

"Very well, Knox; the seriousness of the position warrants a trunk-call to London," said Mr. Railton. "You will phone at once. You may use my telephone."

Knox soon succeeded in getting through to his father's office, for the heavy business of the day was over.

"Hallo, hallo!" he shouted into the transmitter. "Is that you, dad?"

A surprised voice came faintly across the wires.

"Good gracious, it is Gerald! What do you want, my boy?"

"There's a man at St. Jim's who calls himself John Mason," said Knox. "He wrote and said he was coming to-day, you know."

"Yes; but he cancelled that arrangement, Gerald."

"What!" roared Knox.

Knox. "He's dressed like a bookmaker, and has got a moustache. And he speaks like a navy, dropping his 'h's,' and all the rest of it."

A laugh came across the phone. "You've been spoofed, my boy!" chuckled Knox senior. "My friend Mason is a thin man, exceedingly gentlemanly, and is quite clean-shaven."

"By George!" Knox stared at the telephone. He had a few more words with his father, and then hung up the receiver.

"Our suspicions were right, sir!" he said excitedly, staring at Mr. Railton. "That man downstairs isn't Mr. Mason at all!"

"So I gathered from your words, Knox," said Mr. Railton.

"He—he must have got to know that Mr. Mason wasn't coming," said Knox. "He's some burglar who's come just to take anything he could lay hands on, and he's collared my new ticker as the most valuable article. If those Shell kids hadn't captured him he'd have got away!"

"It is exceedingly fortunate that the boys grew suspicious of the man before it was too late," said Mr. Railton. "We had better take the scoundrel to the headmaster's study without delay."

Knox was excited. He had half-suspected that his visitor was an impostor all the time, and now he had undeniable confirmation. It was practically certain that the man had come to St. Jim's for the purpose of robbery.

And certainly all the evidence went to prove that such was the case.

The unfortunate train of circumstances had landed Kerr of the New House into a terrible hole. He had taken the gold watch in the firm belief that it was his own, and this was the result! The disguised junior was to be taken before the Head as a common thief!

And he could not explain. That was the terrible part of it all. It would be the simplest matter in the world for him to reveal his identity and explain how Knox had collared his watch and how he had taken the gold ticker in mistake. The Head, of course, would understand at once, and

would know that everything was all right.

But Kerr couldn't explain; he couldn't reveal himself as Kerr. If he did, the Head would know that it was he who had publicly humiliated Mr. Ratcliff.

And the result of such knowledge would be drastic. Kerr would be expelled. The Head simply couldn't allow him to remain at St. Jim's after such an act. Kerr had recklessly chased Ratty round the quad under the firm impression that he would be leaving St. Jim's, as Mr. Mason, for good within an hour.

Knox and Mr. Railton descended to the quadrangle, and found the Terrible Three and Darrell still mounting guard, as it were, over the prisoner. Mr.

Railton looked at Kerr sternly, and the junior's heart sank.

"Your trick is discovered, my man," he said coldly. "Denial is useless."

"Trick, sir?" asked Tom Merry inquiringly.

"Yes, trick!" exclaimed Knox wrathfully. "This rotter isn't Mr. Mason at all!"

"Not Mr. Mason!" "No. He's an impostor. He came to St. Jim's in Mr. Mason's name, just to see what he could pinch!"

"I didn't!" broke out Kerr desperately. "I—I'm not Mr. Mason, I know, but—"

"That is enough!" snapped Mr. Railton icily. "Knox and Darrell, you can manage him between you. Bring him to Dr. Holmes' study. You Shell boys can go now. I understand that you are responsible for the scoundrel's capture."

"In a way, sir," said Tom Merry. "But it was Mellish who first gave us the tip. Mellish saw the man take Knox's watch, you know, sir."

"Indeed. Mellish's inquisitiveness has come in useful for once," said Mr. Railton dryly. "But come, Knox, we will go to the Head."

And the dismayed and now thoroughly alarmed Kerr was marched off.

Not a soul guessed his real identity, and, indeed, he wished it to remain a secret. Oh, if he hadn't let himself go during that scene in the quad! But the temptation to "go for" Ratcliff had been irresistible. That one incautious act had placed him in an awful predicament.

His mind was in a whirl as he was taken into the Head's study. He listened to the conversation as though he were in a dream. It all seemed unreal. But, even now, he thought that there might be some way out. Knox's watch had been recovered. Surely they would let him go, thought Kerr.

The Head was amazed and shocked as he listened to the story. Kerr became aware that the Head was looking at him sternly.

"Well, my man, what have you to say?" asked Dr. Holmes.

Kerr started. "N-nothing," he muttered, "except that I didn't mean to take Knox's watch."

"That is absurd!" retorted the Head sharply.

"It sounds absurd, I know," replied Kerr. "But it's the truth. I—I can't explain fully. You—you don't know everything. I can't say any more."

The Head smiled grimly.

"There is no necessity," he replied. "You stand self-condemned. You have no explanation to offer, and we know that you are a scoundrelly impostor." Kerr breathed hard.

He wanted to blurt out the truth. He wanted to tear his disguise off, and show himself as Kerr; he wanted to explain the mistake of the watch.

But he daren't! His very safety, in fact, lay in remaining silent. The thought of being sacked from St. Jim's sickened him. And yet he assuredly would be sacked if he told Dr. Holmes that he was Kerr. For expulsion would be the only punishment for his escapade of the afternoon.

So he remained silent, and was nervous lest his disguise should be penetrated.

Knox's voice broke in upon Kerr's thoughts.

"What are you going to do, sir?" asked the prefect.



his hand, as Mr. Ratcliff appeared on the scene. "Knox!" roared Knox! "This is positively outrageous! How dare Knox!"

"He hasn't been there?" "Great Scott!"

"He is going to join me in London to-night," went on Knox senior.

"Then—then this chap here is an impostor?" gasped Knox into the phone.

"Presumably so."

"But—but Mr. Mason may have changed his mind," said Knox quickly. "He may have come to St. Jim's after all."

"That is impossible," came the voice across the wires. "As a matter of fact, Gerald, Mason phoned me to say that he was coming; he's on the train now. If there is a man at St. Jim's who calls himself John Mason he is evidently an impostor. What is he like?"

"A—a small, thick-set man," replied

The Head's eyes were stern, and he rang the bell.

"There's only one thing to do, Knox," he replied. "This man is obviously a burglar, and he must therefore be given in charge. I intend to send for the police at once, and have him arrested."

"As you say, sir, the only thing to be done," commented Mr. Raitton.

Kerr stared, and fell back a pace in consternation.

The police!

He was to be arrested for robbery! It took his breath away. Until this moment he had not realised the true and real extremity of his position. But there was no misunderstanding the Head's decision.

"Arrested!" murmured Kerr, under his breath. "Oh, my hat! What shall I do?"

CHAPTER 10. Under Arrest!

"SPOOFED!"

"The fellow's a giddy fraud!"

"Well, I'm blessed!"

"Yaas, it is a bit surpwisin', deah boys," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "But are you sure of this, Tom Mewwy? It's howwid to think that the chap is an impostah!"

The Terrible Three were in the junior Common-room, and a crowd of Fourth Formers and Shell juniors were gathered round.

The news that Mr. Mason was an impostor took everybody by surprise.

"There's no doubt about it, Gussy," said Tom Merry. "We found Knox's new gold watch on him. He was trying to sneak out when we collared him. And Knox has proved that he isn't the real Mr. Mason at all."

"Oh, he's a proper scoundrel!" said Jack Blake.

"I twust the Head will be lenient," said Arthur Augustus. "The fellow is an awful boundah, I admit, and a wotten thief, but I hope he gets off lightly."

"There's not much hope of that," said Tom Merry. "Levison says the Head has already phoned for the police."

"Bai Jove, then it's all up for the poor chap!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Let's go and see what's happenin', deah boys!"

And Arthur Augustus left the Common-room.

Quite a crowd followed him—his three chums of Study No. 6 and the Terrible Three, and others.

The Hall was deserted, but out in the quad two figures loomed up in the dusk. They were those of Figgins and Fatty Wynn.

"New House rotters!" exclaimed Levison. "Collar 'em!"

"Pax!" said Figgins hastily. "We're looking for Kerr. We've mislaid him!"

"Kerr?"

"Yes," said Figgins. "Have you chaps been up to some fatheaded jape?"

"Weally, Figgy, we haven't seen Kerr for hours," said Arthur Augustus. "I twust nothin' has happened to him. When did you see him last?"

"Some time in the middle of the afternoon."

"He's not here," said Tom Merry. "I expect he's gone out somewhere on his own. He'll be back by locking-up time."

"What's the giddy excitement over here?" asked Fatty Wynn. "Somebody standing a feed?"

Blake grinned.

"That's the way, Fatty—always think of your tummy first!" he chuckled.

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"No, there's no feed on. But you know that chap Mason—Knox's friend?"

Figgins grinned.

"Rather!" he replied. "He deserves a giddy medal!"

"Well, he's a thief!" said Blake.

And he told the New House juniors what had happened.

Figgins and Fatty Wynn were greatly astonished, and rather disappointed. All the juniors, in fact, had looked upon the valiant Mr. Mason as a sort of hero.

And now it was known that he was an impostor—a visitor at St. Jim's under false pretences—a thief. The revelation was certainly an unpleasant one.

"Now, then, young gentlemen, let me pass!"

A gruff voice sounded in the dusk, and a burly figure appeared before the lighted door of the School House. It was the figure of P.-c. Crump, the Rylcombe policeman. Mr. Crump was

Mr. Crump fixed the unfortunate Kerr with a stern glare.

"You'll ave to come with me!" he said, with evident satisfaction.

"I—I won't!" gasped Kerr. "You don't understand."

"We understand quite enough!" said Dr. Holmes curtly. "Take him away, officer. All formalities can be seen to later on. I wish this man to be taken from the school without any loss of time."

"Very good, sir!" said Mr. Crump, jingling something in his hand.

Kerr watched, with heaving breast, and then he instinctively shrank back. He was going to be handcuffed!

"Don't—don't put those things on me!" he gasped.

"Now then, none o' that!" exclaimed P.-c. Crump gruffly. "Old hout your 'ands!"

Kerr clenched his fists and looked round desperately. But there was no hope of escape. He was cornered. He held out his hands. What was the good of resisting?

The wretched New House junior was thankful that he had taken particular care over his make-up. His thoroughness was rewarded now, for nobody guessed the actual truth.

Snap!

The manacles were on his wrists.

Kerr looked at them as though in a mist. Then, all in a flash, it seemed, his mind became clear and acute, and he almost laughed at the utter absurdity of the whole thing. He, Kerr, of the Fourth, arrested and handcuffed! Half a dozen words would be sufficient to gain his freedom again.

But those half dozen words were never spoken; they would have been Kerr's expulsion order, as it were. He set his teeth, and resigned himself to be taken to the police station; but he told himself that he would get out of the terrible hole somehow.

He couldn't do anything himself, but there were Figgins and Wynn; there were Tom Merry & Co. All would help to extricate him from this predicament.

But they didn't know that Mr. Mason was Kerr! How could he tell them?

"Come hon!" exclaimed Mr. Crump roughly.

And Kerr was led away.

As he walked beside the policeman, he managed, with some difficulty, to get a stub of pencil from his pocket. Then he scrawled something on a piece of paper he had had in his hand previous to being handcuffed.

"Come hon, brisk now!" said Mr. Crump. "An' you'd better not play no monkey tricks with me, my man."

In ordinary circumstances, Kerr would have thought it impossible to write a brief note while his hands were manacled. But he was desperate now, and he managed somehow.

He was thankful that he had unconsciously been fiddling with a piece of paper while in the Head's study.

He screwed the paper up in his palm, nervous lest Crump should detect it. For if the policeman saw what was written, "the fat would be in the fire" indeed. But the stolid guardian of the law had noticed nothing.

The Terrible Three, Blake & Co., and many other School House and New House juniors were waiting out in the quad to see the policeman and his captive depart. They could not deny that Mr. Mason deserved punishment, seeing that he had stolen Knox's new watch; but, all the same, they felt a certain amount of compassion for the stranger.

(Continued on page 18.)



looking extremely important, for he knew that he had an arrest to make, and arrests round about Rylcombe were few and far between. Consequently, Mr. Crump felt that this was an occasion on which to show off his importance.

"Old Crump!"

"He's soon on the spot!"

"It's wotten, deah boys, that Mr. Mason is to be awwested!"

The juniors made way for Mr. Crump, and he passed on majestically—at least, he intended to do so. Monty Lowther's boot somehow stuck out in the way, however, and the constable tripped over it, plunged forward, and only just managed to keep his balance.

"My heye!" he gasped.

"You're in a hurry, Crumpy!" said Lowther innocently.

"Young raskils!" muttered Crump, with as much dignity as possible.

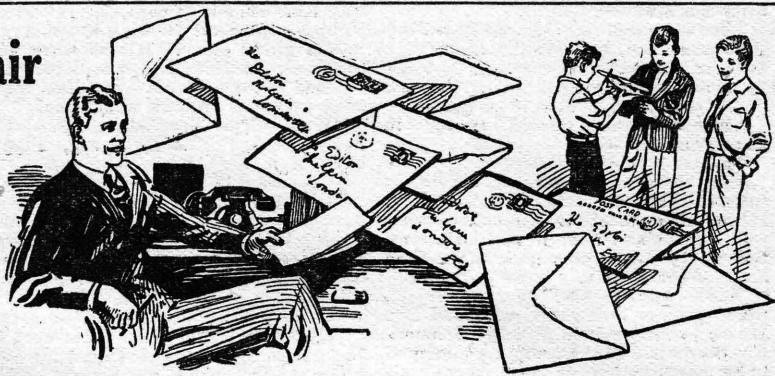
He walked on, leaving the juniors chuckling.

Mr. Crump arrived at the Head's study and entered.

"Ah, you have come, Crump!" said the Head. "I wish to give this man in charge for robbery. He came to the school under false pretences, and was only just prevented from escaping with a valuable gold watch."

The Editor's Chair

Let the Editor be your pal,
Drop him a line to-day,
addressing your letters:
The Editor, The GEM,
Fleetway House, Farring-
don Street, London, E.C.4.



HALLO, Chums! As you have probably seen announced on page 8, that popular old favourite with GEM readers, "The Holiday Annual," makes its welcome reappearance next week, September 1st. Ever since 1920, this grand annual has delighted readers with its variety of school stories, poems, articles, etc., but I think that this year's volume will be regarded as the best ever. I have read it and that's my firm opinion.

Its school yarns of Tom Merry & Co. and the chums of Greyfriars and the leading lights of Rookwood are among the most thrilling, humorous and dramatic ever written by those leading school-story authors, Martin Clifford, Frank Richards, and Owen Conquest. Then there are sparkling poems, humorous articles and a variety show for amateur actors—altogether a bumper book that no boy or girl should be without. If you've got a birthday coming along, or some kind relative wants to buy you a present, don't forget the "H. A." Its entertainment value is worth double the 5s. which the annual costs.

"THE JEW OF ST. JIM'S!"

Another good thing which readers will welcome next week is the St. Jim's story, which bears the above title. It deals with the arrival of Dick Julian, the Jewish newcomer, and a really good sort.

Monty Lowther, ever ready for fun, decides to jape the new boy, but he finds no supporters among his own chums. They regard his jape as being in bad taste, and this gets Lowther's back up. In consequence the obstinate Monty takes Crooke and Mellish into his confidence. The three japers then set out to pull Julian's leg at his own expense, but it's Lowther & Co. who find it expensive—very! It's a case of the biters being badly bitten!

Thereafter Lowther nurses a bitter animosity towards the Jew, and takes every chance of showing it, with the result that there is not a little trouble—especially for Lowther.

Readers will enjoy every word of this thrilling and amusing yarn. Look out for it.

"HARRY WHARTON & CO'S DAY OUT!"

In this issue we leave the chums of the Remove on the station platform at Reading, just as Wharton has spotted his old enemy, Melchior. In next Wednesday's chapters the juniors go on to Aldershot, where they see an exciting Army football match. They also see the gipsy outcast again, and they feel sure that the man is out for revenge on them for having been the cause of his imprisonment. This is brought home

to them very forcibly when, on a lonely road, Harry Wharton & Co. are attacked by Melchior and three other ruffians!

What happens I will leave Frank Richards to describe to you in his most thrilling style next week. See that your GEM is reserved for you, chums.

AN IDEA.

For some time I have been particularly struck by the large number of readers advertising in "Pen Pals" who are interested in stamp collecting. This has given me an idea, and I am getting to work on it soon. For the present I will keep my wheeze a secret, but I shall have some interesting news for readers in a few weeks' time.

REPLIES TO READERS.

Now, a large stack of letters confronts me, and I am eager to see what readers have to say and answer their questions. My first reply is to:

D. Parke-Taylor (St. John, New Brunswick).—I am pleased to hear that you think the St. Jim's stories have been great since you became a reader. Carberry and Herr Rosenblum are no longer at Greyfriars in the present stories in the "Magnet." Yes, the arrival of popular Greyfriars characters now absent will be dealt with in future yarns. Many thanks for your interesting letter and good wishes.

H. Tout (Cooksbridge, Sussex).—Pleased to hear from you again. I will consider your suggestion. Lumley-Lumley is English, but he spent most of his early childhood in U.S.A. There are 30 boys in the Shell. Buck Finn is 15 years 9 months. The Christian names you want are: George Francis Kerr, James Monteith, James Sefton, Gerald Crooke, Eric Kerruish. Your joke again failed to make the Jester smile. Keep trying, and you'll succeed.

Mrs. N. Cook Dart (Deptford, S.E.8).—Many thanks for writing to me again. Yes, I am greatly honoured! I am also pleased to hear that you still find keen enjoyment in the St. Jim's stories. I will think over your suggestion and try to oblige you and your small friend.

A. Porter (Harrow Weald).—It always gives me much pleasure to hear from old readers such as yourself, and I was glad to know that you think the GEM is as good as ever. I will do what I can about those stories you want. Best wishes.

"The Terrible Three" (Canonbury, N.1).—The juniors' Christian names and ages you want are: Jack Blake, 15 years 4 months; Harry Manners, 16 years; George Herries, 15 years 6 months;

Robert Arthur Digby, 15 years 4 months; Eric Kildare, 17 years 8 months; George Darrell, 17 years 6 months; James Monteith, 17 years 5 months. Your joke was a "chestnut." Try again.

Miss D. Hamilton (London, E.1).—No, the St. Jim's stories are not founded on fact, but they are as true-to-life as school stories can be, while at the same time being thrilling, humorous and interesting. The Christian names you require are given in the previous reply. Baker's Christian name is Stanley.

R. Carter (Portsmouth).—Thanks for introducing the GEM to your two chums. There's no need to worry about Martin Clifford. He is in good health, and he is too bound up in the St. Jim's stories to think of retiring. A similar joke to one of those you sent in appeared a short time ago. I'm afraid the other was not quite suitable. Try your luck again.

M. O'Donohoe (Streatham, S.W.).—Sorry, old chap, but none of your jokes hit the bullseye. Wingate is 17 years 11 months; Wally D'Arcy, 13 years 6 months; Sammy Bunter is twelve years. Kildare's age appears above.

Miss G. Philip (East Aberdour, Scotland).—Many thanks for your interesting letter. Harry Wharton & Co. have spent a holiday in Scotland. Maybe they will pay another visit in the future. Yes, send along your autograph album. Your joke was rather an old one.

K. Moore (Reading).—You can be sure that Martin Clifford and Frank Richards will keep up the high standard of their stories. Tom Merry is 16 years; Lowther, 15 years 11 months. The other ages you ask for have already been given. You may have those autographs. Post me your album. Levison reforms later on. I have heard no further news about the Greyfriars film.

J. Smith (Hull).—As you are very keen on art, I should advise you to go to an art school and improve your ability as much as possible. The type of work you take up depends largely on your own skill in any particular line. But draughtsmanship is quite a sound career.

J. Shire (Walton-on-Thames).—You will read in due course how Bunter becomes a ventriloquist. He hasn't yet made the discovery that he is gifted. Yes, I will pass on your congratulations to Martin Clifford and Frank Richards. Thanks for your kind wish.

C. Hall (Leeds, 11).—Thanks for your congratulations. I am very sorry to hear that you have been in hospital for six years, old chap, and that, now you are out, you are still an invalid. I am pleased to know that the GEM is doing much to brighten your life. Your joke was rather difficult to illustrate. Send in another. Best of luck to you!

PEN PALS COUPON
28-8-37

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He had, at least, given them all an afternoon's amusement.

"Bai Jove, here he is, deah boys!"

"Handcuffed, too, by gum!"

"Hard lines!"

"Now, then, young gents, let me pass!" said Mr. Crump severely.

"You ain't going to lock him up, are you, Crumpy?"

"I ham!" declared Crump.

Kerr could hardly restrain a grin, in spite of the seriousness of the situation. It was all so utterly ridiculous. Crump would have had a fit if he had known that the prisoner was none other than Kerr of the Fourth.

"Make way, please!"

The juniors followed Crump and Mr. Mason to the gates in a body, surrounding the pair. Mr. Crump was inclined to be pompous, but, as the juniors didn't take any notice of him, it didn't matter much.

"By Jove!" murmured Kerr suddenly.

He found himself almost alongside Figgins. They had reached the gates, and it was absolutely the last chance of letting his chum know the truth. Kerr stepped aside a little, and forced the scrap of paper into Figgins' hand.

"Now, then, walk quietly!" growled Mr. Crump threateningly.

Figgins stared at his palm.

"What the—" he began.

"Read it!" hissed Kerr. "Mum's the word!"

The constable glared round.

"Wot's 'e saying?" he asked suspiciously.

"Oh, n-nothing!" stammered Figgins.

Mr. Crump and his prisoner passed out of the gates, surveyed with great disfavour by Taggles. Taggles disliked anything out of the usual routine to happen. As a rule it always entailed extra work for him; and Taggles had a great antipathy for work of any kind.

The gates clanged to, and the crowd of juniors listened while the footsteps of the prisoner and his escort faded away.

"Well, deah boys, he's gone!" said Arthur Augustus. "I suppose we have seen the last of the poor fellow. It is wathah a pity, considewin'—"

But D'Arcy was wrong—quite wrong. They hadn't seen the last of Mr. Mason by any means!

CHAPTER 11.

The Rescue Party!

"GREAT Scott!"

Figgins made that ejaculation in a tone of breathless amazement. He and Fatty Wynn had returned to the doorway of the New House. In Figgins' hand was a crumpled scrap of paper.

"What's wrong?" asked Fatty Wynn.

"Read this!" ejaculated Figgins excitedly. "My only hat, it's unbelievable, Fatty! It was Kerr all the time! Kerr! Oh, it's impossible!"

Fatty Wynn glared at Figgins rather in alarm.

"If you're feeling queer, Figgy—"

"You—you ass!" roared Figgins.

"Read this! That Mason chap pushed it into my hand as he was being led out—without Crumpy seeing him. Read it!"

Fatty Wynn held the paper under the light. Upon it were scrawled a few words—horribly scrawled, but just decipherable.

"I'm Kerr. Come and rescue me. If not, it means the sack."

"My hat!" gasped Fatty Wynn.

"That chap isn't a man at all; he's

Kerr!" exclaimed Figgins. "That's why Kerr isn't here with us. He's been having a jape all on his own, and got into a giddy mess! It was Kerr who thrashed old Ratty; it was Kerr who pinched Knox's watch. My hat, there must be some mistake about that!"

"Well, I'm blessed!" ejaculated Fatty Wynn. "And, I say, Figgy, I've got it!"

"Got what?"

"Didn't Kerr say he was going to have his own back on Knoxy?" said Fatty Wynn. "Well, he disguised himself so as to give Knox a high old time. He was doing it, you remember, when Ratty came up and interfered."

"By George, you're right!"

"Of course I am! And Kerr went to Knox's study afterwards to get his own watch back," went on Fatty. "He didn't know that Knox had brought it to us, and he took Knox's by mistake. It was that mistake which landed him in this fix."

"And he's been arrested!" said Figgins seriously. "Well, this is a fine go!"

It was certainly a "go," and Figgins and Fatty Wynn hardly knew what to do. It was evident, however, that Kerr would have to be rescued in some manner. And Figgins instantly realised that Tom Merry & Co. must be informed of the facts, and a meeting held to decide the plan of action.

"Come on!" said Figgins briskly.

"Where to, Figgy?"

"Study No. 6 in the School House, of course!"

And they hurried across the quad. The other juniors had dispersed, and gone their various ways. The two New House heroes entered their rivals' domain, and reached the Shell passage without meeting anybody. They opened the door of Tom Merry's study.

The Terrible Three looked up in surprise.

"Come to Study No. 6," said Figgins hurriedly. "It's vital!"

"What the dickens—"

"Not a second to waste," said Figgins urgently.

And he and Fatty Wynn departed to the famous apartment in the Fourth Form passage. They arrived and walked in without the formality of knocking. Blake & Co. were at home, having just come in.

"Bai Jove, New House wottahs!"

"Pax!" said Fatty Wynn hastily.

"It's a question of life or death!" exclaimed Figgins excitedly. "At least, it's jolly serious. Kerr's got himself into a frightful hole!"

"Bai Jove!"

"That's different!"

Before Figgins started explaining the Terrible Three put in an appearance. They were all looking somewhat puzzled and astonished.

"Now, what's the vitally urgent matter, Figgy?" asked Tom Merry.

Figgins closed the door carefully.

"You're beastly mysterious!" began Blake impatiently.

"Mustn't let anybody overhear," Figgins said. "It's about Kerr. Kerr's been playing the giddy ox, and has landed himself in trouble. He went and played a jape without consulting his kind uncles, and this is the result."

"What is the result?" demanded the curious juniors.

"I'll give you a surprise," went on Figgins. "That chap Mason wasn't Mason at all!"

"We know that, you ass!" roared Blake. "He was a rotten burglar!"

"He wasn't," said Figgins calmly.

"He was Kerr—disguised."

"Kerr!"

"Oh, draw it mild, Figgy!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Look at this, then," said Figgins.

He produced Kerr's scrap of paper and passed it round, and explained the incident when Knox had taken the junior's watch, and also explained that Kerr had sworn to be revenged.

"So, you see, it was old Kerr all the giddy time," he concluded. "He was simply japing your rotten prefect. He took Knox's watch by mistake, thinking it was his own, I expect, and was utterly flabbergasted when he found out the truth. Mellish saw him do it, and put you Shell bounders on the scent. You collared Kerr, made him produce the watch, and things looked jolly black against him. And when Knox found out that he wasn't Mason at all—well, it seemed pretty evident that he must be a deliberate thief!"

For a moment there was a tense silence in Study No. 6.

Tom Merry had been looking thoughtful, but a sudden gleam entered his eye, and he looked round the crowded study.

"Suppose a gang of giddy roughs raided the Rylcombe Police Station?" he said slowly. "The room they call the cell wouldn't take much forcing. A whole crowd of ruffians could easily do it, and then Kerr would be rescued."

The juniors stared.

"And do you imagine that a gang of ruffians are conveniently going to break into the police station to-night?" asked Blake sarcastically.

"Yes," replied Tom Merry, "I do."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, pway be sewious!"

"I was never more serious in my life," replied Tom. "Now, these ruffians—nine, to be exact—will rescue Kerr by force. It's a desperate plan, but it's the only way I can think of."

"You—you ass!" roared Figgins.

"How do you know that nine ruffians are going to break into the police station?"

"Because, my dear chap, the nine ruffians happen to be in this study at this moment," said Tom Merry calmly.

There was a gasp.

"I uttably wefuse to be called a wuffian!"

"Oh, dry up, Gussy!" exclaimed Tom Merry quickly. "There's only one way to get Kerr out of this rotten hole, and that's by using drastic measures. Well, the measures I have suggested are jolly drastic."

"But we should be recognised!" roared Blake.

"What's wrong with bugging on false beards and moustaches, and long coats, and all the rest of it?" said Tom Merry. "We shan't be recognised, even if we're seen; and after we've rescued Kerr we'll strip off the disguises and be respectable St. Jim's juniors once more. The police will think that their prisoner has been rescued by his companions, and will be searching the whole giddy countryside for them, while we're here chuckling. That's my idea, anyhow. I'm blessed if I can see any other way out of the tangle."

There was a moment's breathless silence.

"My only hat!" ejaculated Blake. "What a daring wheeze! But it's certainly the only way."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus excitedly. "Kerr has simply got to be wesqued—there is no doubt

about that. We can take hammahs and chisels in ordah to bwack into the wotten pwison. Bai Jove, we shall feel like howwid burglahs, deah boys!"

"Can't help what we feel like," said Blake briskly. "It's a desperate situation altogether. Kerr's very safety hangs in the balance, so we've got to get a move on. At a time like this, Figgy, we've got to pull together."

"Exactly!" agreed Figgins. "But the longer we jaw here the more time we waste. Let's buzz off and get prepared. We shall have to miss prep for to-night."

"Yaas, watah!"

And Tom Merry & Co. and Figgins and Patty Wynn proceeded to put their desperate plan into execution without a moment's delay.

CHAPTER 12.

No Luck!

IN you go!" P.-c. Crump pushed his prisoner into the little cell at Rylcombe police station, and the heavy door clanged to and the bolts were shot.

The cell was only a small room in reality; but the door was thick, and the window was stoutly barred. There was no means of escape for anyone locked within the little apartment.

Kerr sat down on a hard chair to think over his position. He realised that his only hope of rescue now lay in his chums.

The unfortunate junior had not been in the cell more than five minutes when Mr. Crump came to the cell again. Kerr wondered what his object could be. He was soon to learn.

"Better not take your clothes off!" growled Crump, who was evidently in a bad humour over something. "I've jest phoned up to Wayland, and I've got to take you in a car to Wayland police station. I'll be ready in five minutes."

The door shut again, and Kerr stared at it dumbly.

He was to be taken to Wayland!

"Oh crumbs! That's properly put the kybosh on it!" he muttered, in dismay.

Even if his chums did decide to make an attempt to rescue him, it was hopeless now. Once he was in Wayland police station, nothing could liberate him except his own confession. That would set him free soon enough, but he didn't want to confess.

He had to escape. He was to be taken to Wayland by Crump in a car. Surely an opportunity would present itself for him to make a dash for it!

Kerr set his teeth.

"I'll risk it!" he muttered grimly. "It's the only way. While we're going to Wayland I'll try and give old Crump the slip."

The policeman was not long in returning. He was in a bad temper, apparently owing to the fact that he had to make the trip to the neighbouring town. The cell door was unlocked again, and Crump appeared with a lamp. The policeman was ready for the journey.

"Come hon!" he growled. "An' no larks, mind. But I don't reckon you can do much, seein' as you're 'and-cuffed."

Kerr did not reply; he simply looked sullen. He wanted to give Crump the impression that he was resigned to his fate. The policeman would then be less vigilant than otherwise might be the case.

A police car—an open tourer—was waiting outside, and Kerr was glad to see that only a couple of local rustics

were looking on. He entered the car, and Crump shut the door securely. Then the constable got into the driver's seat.

"Lot o' nonsense!" muttered Crump. "Makin' me take you hover to Wayland this time o' night! Well, perhaps it'll be better to get rid of yer!"

They started, and drove sharply through Rylcombe, and then out on to the lonely road to Wayland. It was a dark night now, for the sky was a little overcast, and there was no moon. Kerr felt extremely glad, for everything was in his favour. If he could only get out of the car he could make a dash for it.

And he knew that he could very soon outdistance the portly constable, once it came to a race.

But he could think of no pretext for getting Crump to stop the car. He instinctively felt that the constable would suspect his intention, and would consequently be on the alert. No; he must take Crump quite by surprise, and be away into the darkness before the constable realised what had happened.

And there was only one way in which that could be accomplished.

"I'll do it!" thought Kerr desperately.

He would jump clean out of the car as it was being driven along.

At first thought it seemed a mad thing to do; but after all, Kerr decided, there would not be much risk. At most he would only sustain a few bruises. There was a steep rise within a few hundred yards, up which the car could not travel so fast.

That would be Kerr's opportunity.

They went on, and the car presently slackened its pace as it climbed the hill. Another minute, and then, just as

Crump was changing down to second gear, he caught a glimpse of his prisoner disappearing over the side of the car.

His prisoner had jumped clean out!

Crump hastily stopped the car, and got out as actively as his portly form would let him. He looked hurriedly down the road towards Rylcombe. He blinked in the darkness, and then saw a dim figure moving ten yards away.

Crump rushed towards it.

The figure was that of Kerr, who was in the act of rising to his feet. He had taken the leap out of the car at the correct moment, but Fate was against him.

As he had landed in the road he had trodden on a loose stone. The next moment he crashed on to the roadway, and almost knocked every ounce of wind out of his body. He knew that he had not a second to lose, but for a few moments it was a sheer physical impossibility for him to rise.

When at last he did scramble up, it was to find Crump's hand upon his shoulder.

"What luck!" groaned Kerr hopelessly. "What ghastly luck!"

"Thought you'd escape, did yer?" roared Crump wrathfully. "Not while I'm about, my man! This'll mean a hextra dose of quod for you, I reckon!"

Kerr was too utterly disappointed to reply. He had lost his chance of escaping. Crump would certainly not give him a second opportunity.

As soon as they were in the car again the constable produced a stout piece of rope and tied it round Kerr's legs.

"That'll put a stop to your little games!" grunted the constable. "With



P.-c. Crump and his prisoner in the car were travelling along the dark lane when a bearded man appeared in the roadway. "Stop!" commanded the man in a threatening voice. Crump was compelled to brake hastily. "Wot does this 'ere mean?" he ejaculated.

your feet tied and your wrists 'and cuffed, I don't reckon you'll try any more of your little tricks."

And captor and captive proceeded towards Wayland.

All hope had faded from Kerr's breast.

CHAPTER 13.

The Hold-up!

A VILLAINOUS bearded face peered round the corner of the hedge close by the little Rylcombe police station, on the outskirts of the village.

A dim figure in a long overcoat appeared after the face.

Altogether the fellow looked a desperate character.

"Bai Jove, it's quite all wight, deah boys!" exclaimed the villainous individual, in tones which strangely resembled those of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Pway follow me. It is my ideah to go up to the police station and wequest to see the pvisonah—"

"Gag him!" hissed a voice. "The silly ass will give us away!"

"Weally, you wottah—"

Many other bearded strangers appeared out of the gloom, and Arthur Augustus was promptly collared.

"Look here!" murmured Blake threateningly. "The best thing you can do, Gussy, is to keep your mouth shut. You've got such a beautiful accent that you'll muck the whole show up, if you aren't careful!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"If you're not quiet, Gussy, we'll bump you!" exclaimed Tom Merry. And Arthur Augustus subsided, realising that there was no time for argument.

"What's the programme now?" whispered Manners.

"Well, we don't want all to be seen at once," replied Tom Merry. "You chaps had better wait behind this hedge here while I buzz round and do a bit of scouting. I may be able to have a few words with Kerr through the bars of his giddy cell!"

"It will be a sell if he isn't there!" murmured Monty Lowther.

But nobody was in the humour for puns, especially the Lowther variety; and Tom Merry disappeared into the darkness.

Outside the gate of Crump's cottage, which was attached to the police station, he suddenly ran into an aged rustic who was standing by, apparently looking at nothing in particular.

"Nice goings hon!" murmured the old fellow. "That's wot they be, mister. Did you see 'em?"

"See whom?" asked Tom Merry gruffly.

"Why, ole Crump an' 'is prisoner!" explained the rustic. "They've just gone off in a car to Wayland—to the lock-up, I suppose. First arrest in this village for some time—"

But Tom Merry was not listening. He had scooted back to his chums.

"They've gone!" he panted, in dismay.

"Who?" demanded Blake. "What do you mean?"

"Crump's taken Kerr to Wayland; some old chap just told me."

"My hat!"

"Bai Jove!"

"What can we do now?" asked Fatty Wynn helplessly.

"Do!" exclaimed Figgins. "Didn't we hear a car start off less than two minutes ago?"

"My hat, so we did!"

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"Well, it was Crump and Kerr in that car, for certain. They've only just started for Wayland. My only hat! What can we do? I've got it. Look!" Figgins pointed excitedly. In the distance he could see the village tuckshop, with its windows dimly illuminated. And outside, quite a collection of bicycles were propped.

"Are you dotty?" asked Arthur Augustus. "Weally, Figgy, I cannot see what you want us to look at?"

"Explain yourself, you New House ass!"

"Bikes!" ejaculated Figgins intently. "They belong to Grammar School chaps, I expect. But that doesn't matter twopence. We'll collar them, and take the short cut to Wayland and overtake the car."

"Gweat Scott!"

"That's an idea!"

"Rather!"

"We can whizz down that little side lane," went on Figgins quickly. "It's not much of a road, I know, but it's a short cut, and if we ride hard we shall be able to get in front of the car, and then hold it up. Things are being made easier for us by Crump taking Kerr to Wayland."

"Yes, if there's no hitch," said Blake doubtfully.

"There'll be a hitch if we don't start; there's not a second to lose."

"Hold on!" said Tom Merry quickly. "Mustn't make a mess of it by being too hurried. Suppose the Grammar School cads spot us taking their bikes? They'll think we're strangers, and will set up a hue-and-cry. One of us must take his disguise off, and explain matters to Gordon Gay & Co., after we have gone."

"Gussy!" exclaimed Lowther. "The very chap!"

"Weally, I uttably wefuse to wemain behind!"

"Yes; you're the very chap, Gussy!" went on Tom Merry briskly. "If you come with us you'd only give the game away by calling Crump a 'feahful wottah,' or something like that."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Besides, there's not one of us who would explain matters so gracefully and delicately to Gordon Gay as you, Gussy," said Monty Lowther diplomatically.

"If you weally think so—"

"Yes, we do."

"Vewy well, I will wemove my disguise and stay behind," said D'Arcy. "I trust you youngstahs will cawwy the thin' through without a hitch, although it is wathah doubtful, considewin' that I shall not be there to diwect pwocceedings."

"We'll manage somehow, Gussy," said Figgins. "Only, for goodness' sake, stop this jawing, and let's start."

The jawing, as a matter of fact, had occupied only a little over a minute, and the eight disguised juniors walked forward in a body, and quickly collared eight bicycles. The rescue-party were extremely thankful that the village street was dimly lighted, and was almost deserted. There was not much fear of detection.

Tom Merry, looking back, had a momentary glimpse of Gordon Gay & Co. rushing out of the tuckshop in wild excitement. But they bumped into Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and the Shell captain saw that the swell of St. Jim's was busily explaining matters, or trying to, at least.

"Speed!" panted Figgins. "Pedal for all you're worth, you chaps!"

They needed no bidding. They were putting all their "beef" into it, and the bicycles simply flew.

The party turned down the side lane that Figgins had referred to, and went along at the same reckless speed. In ordinary circumstances the juniors would not have dreamed of taking such risks on a dark road, but the very safety of their chum depended upon their speed.

They were all good cyclists, and they made the machines fairly hum. But, fast as they went, they knew that it would be touch and go for them to reach the high road before the car had passed.

Fortunately there was no traffic of any description, and so their progress was unimpeded. On they flew, leaving a cloud of dust behind them.

"Nearly there!" panted Tom Merry. "One more spurt will do it!"

As the juniors were spurting all the time, Tom Merry's advice was rather superfluous.

A few minutes later, panting, dusty, and breathless, they arrived at the junction with the main road to Wayland. As they leaped from their bicycles they looked hastily towards Rylcombe, and two spots of light gleamed in the distance.

"The car!" gasped Figgins breathlessly. "We're in time!"

"Thank goodness!"

Their strenuous efforts were rewarded, and they breathed with relief. Except for the oncoming car the dark road was quite deserted, and they would be safe in going to the rescue of their unfortunate chum. And Crump would never see through their disguises in the darkness.

Tom Merry gave his instructions rapidly, and in a few moments the bicycles were hidden, and there was no sign of the juniors.

The car came on.

It was only a few minutes since Kerr had made his attempt to escape, in fact, and Mr. Crump was in an exceedingly bad temper. He wanted to get to Wayland and be relieved of his charge.

There was a slight murmur from the bushes bordering the road. Next moment, when the car was fifteen yards away, a black-bearded form appeared in the roadway.

"Stop!" he commanded, in a threatening voice.

CHAPTER 14.

All Serene!

MR. CRUMP started violently. He braked hastily, otherwise he would have run down the man in front of the car.

"My hey!" he ejaculated. "Wot-wot does this 'ere mean?"

"It means," said the stranger, "that you've got to deliver up the prisoner!"

Kerr, in the car, almost let out a whoop of delight. He guessed instantly that this was the result of the scrawled note he had thrust into Figgins' hand. His chum had come to his rescue, after all. From the depths of despondency Kerr's spirits suddenly leaped to the highest pitch.

"Oh, good!" he murmured joyfully. "They haven't left me in the lurch, after all."

But there was only one rescuer—possibly Figgins. But what could Figgins do alone.

"Sharp now!" went on the stranger. "Deliver the prisoner to me!"

"You—you—" stuttered Crump. "Would you interfere with the law, my man?"

"I am interfering, and I won't wait more than ten seconds longer!"

Mr. Crump had visions of a stormy interview with his superintendent if he allowed his captive to get away, and he suddenly became desperate. He started up the car.

Kerr's heart beat wildly. Was the rescue going to fail, after all?

The individual sprang forward before the car had fairly started.

"To the rescue!" he roared. "To the rescue of our comrade!"

And instantly a swarm of similarly bearded figures sprang forward.

Mr. Crump turned pale beneath his tan.

"Oh lor'!" he exclaimed. "There's a gang of them!"

"Death is the reward of those who resist!" said a solemn voice.

"My heye!"

Mr. Crump evidently took the solemn one at his word, for he didn't resist in the slightest degree. He got out of the car, and for a few minutes the rescue party were busy.

When they had done the captive was freed. The handcuffs, which had been unlocked with the key taken from the constable, were put on Crump's own wrists. Then on his tunic a jagged piece of cardboard was pinned, bearing, in printed characters, the words:

"OUR COMRADE HAS BEEN RESCUED FROM THE LAW'S GRASPING CLUTCHES. WE HAVE NO USE FOR THIS BLOCKHEAD. WE DISAPPEAR FOR EVER. THE SOCIETY OF CROOKS."

"Our trademark is there," said one of the mysterious rescuers. "You'll have to walk to Wayland, blockhead, and report yourself to your superiors. You will see us no more!"

Mr. Crump was too frightened to say anything, and he had no opportunity. He was ordered to get moving, and he was only too glad to get away from his captors. He almost felt ill when he imagined himself walking through Wayland, handcuffed, with the ridiculous notice pinned on him and minus his prisoner.

The rescuers, in fact, almost felt sorry for Mr. Crump.

"It's all right, though," said Tom Merry. "He won't be blamed when he tells how many villains set upon him, and he'll be sure to exaggerate it. I don't think he'll suffer."

"But we've got Kerr!" ejaculated Figgins joyfully. "Kerr, you thundering, thumping ass, what do you mean by getting yourself arrested?"

"Think of the trouble you've put us to!"

Kerr grinned sheepishly.

"It was all a rotten accident!" he explained. "You see, I took the wrong ticker, and so got myself into this fearful scrape. I couldn't say a word because—"

"Yes, we've guessed it all," chuckled Tom Merry. "My hat! I'll give you my word, we had to scorch on our bikes to rescue you in time, Kerr!"

"But we've succeeded!" said Figgins. "Oh, Kerr, you ass, I've a good mind to give you a thick ear!"

"Don't do that, Figgy!" exclaimed Kerr. "I've been through enough to-day, goodness knows! I grazed my wrist in trying to escape from old Crump, and I absolutely gave up hope. I didn't think you'd get up such an elaborate wheeze. It's ripping of you. I'm saved!"



"I really must be going now, my dear. My dinner will be burnt!"
Half-a-crown has been awarded to L. Bowes, 134, Hillside, Moulse-croomb, Brighton, 7.

"Yes, but you won't be saved if you stop here!" said Monty Lowther. "I vote we buzz back to St. Jim's with all speed."

The juniors, Kerr included, removed their disguises, after which they pushed Crump's car into the side of the road out of harm's way. Then the nine juniors started off for Rylcombe, Kerr riding on Figgins' step.

They arrived without mishap, and found Gordon Gay & Co. perfectly satisfied with the explanation which Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had given them, especially as the elegant Fourth Former had been thoughtful enough to stand them all a feed in the tuckshop to compensate for the inconvenience.

Having returned the bicycles, Tom Merry & Co. and the New House trio started briskly for St. Jim's. They did not wish to remain a moment longer than was necessary in Rylcombe.

"It's wippin'!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "I was wathah uncertain as to whethah you would be able to manage without me, deah boys. Kerr, you fat-head, why didn't you tell us you were japin' Knox and Mr. Watchliff?"

"Well, you see, Gussy, I wanted it to come as a surprise."

"Oh, it came as a surprise all right!" said Monty Lowther. "We nearly had fits when Figgins flew in and said that it was you who'd been arrested!"

"Bai Jove, now that it is all ovah I wegard the affair as bein' distinctly funny!" said Arthur Augustus.

"I'll tell you what," suggested Fatty Wynn, "we ought to have a feed to celebrate the occasion."

The juniors chuckled. "Good idea!" agreed Figgins heartily. "And, as you School House chaps have come up to the scratch so jolly well, we'll hold the blow-out in my study this evening."

And the cheerful juniors went on until they arrived at the spot where Kerr had changed his clothes in the wood. The clothes were a bit damp, but Kerr didn't mind, and as the night was mild, he soon slipped into them.

"Thank goodness!" he said. "I'm Kerr again!"

The juniors went on to St. Jim's, and luckily the whole crowd of them managed to reach the quad, via the school wall, without discovery. A few minutes later Tom Merry & Co. strolled inno-

cently into the School House as though nothing had happened.

Figgins, Fatty Wynn, and Kerr went to their study and were soon busily preparing a feed. Kerr was safe now.

But, in spite of his security, he came very close to detection. And it was Knox of the Sixth who almost found out the truth.

Just before supper-time the gates clanged open, and P.-c. Crump and Inspector Skeat came in, Crump looking very crestfallen, and the inspector very important.

They went straight to the Head's study, and reported the hold-up on the Wayland road.

The only clue, Skeat declared, was the fact that the escaped prisoner had grazed his wrist.

And Knox, who had been present in the Head's study during the interview, suddenly came across Kerr in the New House with a slightly bloodstained handkerchief round his wrist. Thinking of the other matter, the coincidence seemed remarkable, to say the least. And it instantly flashed into Knox's mind that Kerr was a clever impersonator.

And the watch! Kerr must have taken his gold watch in mistake for his own. Knox saw it all. The prefect even guessed the identity of the mysterious rescuers.

He frowned darkly, and laid his hand upon Kerr's shoulder.

"I'm going to take you to the Head!" said Knox triumphantly. "I've guessed the truth, you young rascal! I haven't forgotten what you did to me in the quad this afternoon. This'll mean the sack for you to-morrow as sure as anything!"

"Off your rocker?" asked Kerr.

He had been startled for a moment, but he was quite cool now.

"No, I'm not!" growled Knox. "It's no good your denying the truth."

"And suppose you take me to the Head?" asked the Scottish junior coolly. "Where's your proof? Do you think the Head will believe your yarn?"

Knox released his hold, and looked doubtful.

"Do you think old Skeat will believe that a Fourth Former was put into a prison-cell?" proceeded Kerr, with great calmness. "I'm not committing myself to anything, Knoxy. You've got no proof—this graze is nothing—and even if the Head thought it was true, he couldn't punish me on suspicion."

Knox scratched his head.

"Perhaps I'll let you off," he said grudgingly, and he turned on his heel and walked away to the School House.

Kerr, chucking hugely, rushed up to the study, where the School House guests were already present in force.

The juniors were all amused at the manner in which Kerr had silenced Knox's mouth. The feed was a terrific success.

So Kerr managed to get out of his awful predicament just by the skin of his teeth—and the help of his loyal chums.

And the local police were left with a mystery which would certainly require a considerable amount of clearing up, bearing in mind that both the prisoner and his rescuers had utterly vanished for all time.

THE END.

Next Wednesday: "THE JEW OF ST. JIM'S!"—a humorous and thrilling yarn telling of the arrival of Dick Julian, and how he makes a bitter enemy of Monty Lowther. Look out for this great story.

WHEN VENTRILOQUIST BUNTER THREW HIS VOICE UNDER A CARRIAGE SEAT—AND THE REPLY CAME BACK IN "CHINESE"!

HARRY WHARTON & Co.'s DAY OUT!

Bunter's Sympathy!

"W^{HARTON!}"
"Yes, sir."
"Dr. Locke wishes to see you in his study after prayers."
"Ye-es, sir."

Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove at Greyfriars, walked on, and Harry Wharton immediately became the centre of commiserating glances from his comrades. If he had been ordered to execution, Bob Cherry, Frank Nugent, and Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh could hardly have looked more sympathetic.

"Rotten!" said Bob Cherry feelingly. "What can it be this time?"

"The rottenfulness is terrific," murmured Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh, "and the cutfulness on the esteemed hand is more hurtful in the cold weather. I look upon my esteemed chum with great sorrowfulness."

"Same here!" grinned Nugent. "What have you been doing, Harry?"

Harry Wharton laughed. "I can't call to mind anything in particular," he said.

"Curious how these little things slip the memory," Bob Cherry remarked in a thoughtful way. "We never mean any harm, but masters take such a beastly serious view of things. Quelch cuts up rough if you show the least glimpse of a sense of humour in the class-room."

"Curious!" said Wharton, laughing. "Hullo, there's the chapel bell!"

"Hold on a tick! Hadn't you better get some exercise-books?"

"What for?"

"To stuff under your togs, old chap, in case it's serious."

"Oh rats! I'm not afraid of a licking—and perhaps it won't be one, after all."

"Nothing like being on the safe side. An exercise-book between you and the cane makes all the difference."

But Harry Wharton was already walking towards the chapel, and his chums followed him, still debating the probable cause of the unexpected summons to the Head's study.

Harry Wharton was thinking it over, too. He was trying to call to mind some delinquency which might be at the bottom of it, but he could think of nothing. When the morning service was over, Wharton came out with a somewhat clouded brow.

"Anything wrong?" asked Levison, passing him on the way to the class-room.

"Oh, no; only—"

"Only a licking!" grinned Bulstrode, the bully of the Remove. "Wharton has to go into the Head, and Dr. Locke knows how to lay it on. I should recommend exercise-books, Wharton."

"Oh rats!" said Wharton. "Or rub something on your hands."

Wharton walked away without replying. The other Removites went into the class-room, while Harry made his way slowly towards the Head's study.

"I say, your fellows—"

"Hullo, porpoise!"

"I wish you wouldn't call me names, Bulstrode!" said Billy Bunter, blinking at the Remove bully through his big spectacles. "I don't think I'm much

By Frank Richards.

(Author of the grand long yarns of Greyfriars appearing every Saturday in our companion paper, the "Magnet.")

like a porpoise, either, when I'm wasting away to a shadow for want of proper nourishment."

"You look it!" grinned Bulstrode. "I know I never get enough to eat," growled the fat junior. "I've had to have my tea in Hall several times lately, and the school tea, of course, is never enough for me."

"And you contribute a lot to the funds of Study No. 1," said Levison sympathetically.

"I don't contribute anything. Wharton and the others do the contributing, and I do the cooking," explained Billy Bunter. "I suppose a labourer is worthy of his hire, and you know it's wrong to 'muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn.' And I rather think that the little I eat isn't likely to be missed."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't suppose I shall ever get a decent meal again till I get the prize of a pound a week in 'Answers' football

No lessons for a day! Instead, a jolly trip to see an Army cup-tie. The chums of the Remove are in clover in this sparkling story!

competition," said Billy Bunter. "Of course, that will make a difference. I'm thinking of standing a series of extensive feeds, and I should like you two fellows to come to all of them. By the way, could you lend me a couple of bob?"

"I dare say I could," said Bulstrode, "but I'm not going to!"

"Oh, really, Bulstrode—"

"Why don't you ask Wharton?"

"He's made it a rule now never to lend me more than a shilling at a time, and never twice in the same day. Of course, it's horribly mean, but Wharton isn't a fellow you can argue with. I say, you fellows, if you like to advance me a little off 'Answers' prize—"

"Rats!"

"Oh, really, Levison! I've been disappointed about a postal order. By the way, where is Wharton going? Why isn't he coming to the class-room?"

Bulstrode winked at Levison. "Didn't you know, Bunter?"

"Didn't I know what?"

"About Wharton being expelled." Bunter stared. "Wharton expelled!"

"Yes. That's what he's going to the Head's study for—to be expelled," said Bulstrode, with perfect gravity. "Better go and condole with him."

"What has he been doing?"

"Ah, that's it!" said Bulstrode, with

a shake of the head. "What has he been doing?"

"I'm sorry to hear it, but if he's leaving Greyfriars he might stand me a little before he goes," said Bunter. "I know he had a registered letter yesterday, and if he is leaving—"

Bunter did not finish, but raced away after Wharton as fast as his fat little legs could carry him.

Bulstrode burst into a roar. "My hat, there's sympathy! Bunter thinks he's expelled, and he's going to take the opportunity to borrow his last bob! Ha, ha!"

"Little beast!" grunted Levison. Harry Wharton had almost reached the Head's door when he heard the pattering of footsteps behind him. He looked round, and Billy Bunter came panting up.

"I say, Wharton! Stop a minute!" Wharton stopped.

"What is it, Bunter?" he asked good-naturedly. "You'll be late for class."

"I—I say, Wharton—" Bunter gasped, and could not get on. He was very short of breath, and the run had winded him. "I—I say—"

"Oh, take your time!" laughed Harry.

"I—I say, Wharton, as you're going—going—"

"I'm going in to the Head."

"Yes, yes, I know. As you are going to be expelled—"

"Eh?"

"As you're going to be expelled you don't want that remittance you had yesterday, and you might lend me a few bob—"

"What are you talking about, you young ass?" demanded the captain of the Remove impatiently.

Billy Bunter gasped for breath. "I—I say, as you're going to be expelled, you might—"

"You utter ass!" said Wharton, laughing in spite of himself. "Who told you I was going to be expelled?"

"Bulstrode."

"He was pulling your leg, ass!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"You'd better cut off, or you'll be late for class."

"But—but aren't you going to be expelled?"

"No, of course not!"

"Then—then that rotter was only rotting! But I say, Wharton, you—you oughtn't to disappoint me, you know, so—"

"Well, I'm sorry, Bunter, but I'm afraid I can't undertake to be expelled simply to please you," said Wharton gravely.

"I—I don't mean that. But—but if you were expelled I thought you wouldn't have any use for your remittance, and you might have lent me a few bob. I think you might lend me something, all the same."

Harry Wharton looked at his watch. "You're a minute late for class now, Bunter."

"Oh crumbs! Quelch is bound to notice it, and it's all your fault."

"My fault!"

"Yes, for keeping me talking instead of handing over the few shillings you're going to lend me."

"If you wait till I hand them over,

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"Are you there?" asked Bunter. And he was about to squeak, in his ventriloquial voice, a reply, when an answer came from under the seat. "Ere!" The Famous Four stared in amazement. Bunter had succeeded in throwing his voice!

Bunter, you'll be late for afternoon classes as well," said Harry, laughing.

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Cut off, you young ass!"

"But, aren't you going to give me—"

"I'll give you a thick ear if you bother me any more," said Wharton. "I'm glad to know how sympathetic you would feel if I were really expelled. Now you've enlightened me on that point, cut—"

"But, really, Wharton—"

"Oh, cut!"

And Harry turned and walked away himself. Bunter blinked after him with an expression of aggrieved indignation, and then turned and made his way to the Remove class-room.

The clock on the wall indicated nearly twenty minutes past nine as Billy Bunter pushed open the class-room door and entered.

The Lower Fourth were all in their places, and Mr. Quelch, the Form-master, turned round from the black-board and fixed his eyes on Bunter like a pair of gimlets, as Bunter afterwards described it.

"Bunter!" he rapped out, as the fat junior tried to sneak unseen to his place.

"Ye-e-es, sir!" said Bunter, with a jump.

"You are four minutes late."

"I'm sorry, sir."

"I've no doubt you are, Bunter, but that is hardly sufficient. What is the cause of this inexcusable delay in arriving in the class-room?" demanded the Remove master.

"If you please, sir, it wasn't my fault—"

"Then whose fault was it?"

"I—I hardly like to say, sir."

"Answer me at once, Bunter!"

"I mean, Wharton would be waxy, and—"

"Wharton! What do you mean? Did Wharton cause your delay?"

"Well, sir, I—I—"

"Answer me at once!" rapped out Mr. Quelch in a voice that nearly made Bunter jump clear of the floor.

"Well, sir, Wharton kept me talking, and—"

"You will take fifty lines for being late, Bunter, and I shall speak to Wharton on the subject," said Mr. Quelch severely. "We will now proceed."

And the Remove proceeded.

Good News!

HARRY WHARTON tapped at the door of the Head's study, and the voice of Dr. Locke bade him enter. Dr. Locke nodded pleasantly enough to the junior, and Harry Wharton took courage from his expression.

"Ah, it is you, Wharton!" said the Head. He glanced over his desk and took up a letter that had already been opened.

"Yes, sir," said Wharton. "Mr. Quelch told me you wished to see me here."

"I have had a letter from your uncle, Colonel Wharton," said the Head.

Harry Wharton looked interested. He could not help wondering what his uncle had written to Dr. Locke about.

"Yes, sir."

"It appears," resumed the Head, "that the colonel's old regiment is playing in a football match this afternoon—I mean that the regimental team is playing—at Aldershot. The colonel is going down for the match, and he particularly wishes to take you with him, if it can be permitted."

Harry Wharton flushed with pleasure.

"It is kind of him to think of me, sir, and there's nothing I should like better if—if you will be kind enough to give your permission."

Dr. Locke smiled.

"I have spoken to Mr. Quelch about

it, Wharton, and we have agreed that there is no reason why the colonel's wishes should not be complied with."

"Oh, thank you, sir!"

"You have not to thank me, Wharton, but your own good conduct," said the Head. "There is another point the colonel mentions. He thinks that you would like, if possible, to take some of your friends with you—"

Harry Wharton's eyes danced.

"Oh, sir!"

"And he wishes me to give them permission. Now, I do not see any objection if you are careful in selecting your companions. There are some boys in the Remove to whom I should certainly not give permission to leave the school for a whole day, but boys of this kind, I think, are not among your personal friends. At all events, you may send in the names of three or four juniors whom you would like to take, and I will discuss the matter with Mr. Quelch."

"Thank you, sir!"

"If you go you will meet the colonel at Reading, as the nearest point to Aldershot, and you will start early from here. I shall send a wire to Colonel Wharton to inform him that you are coming. You may go, Wharton, and you are excused classes to-day after first lesson."

"Thank you, sir!"

And Harry Wharton left the Head's study, walking on air. A day's holiday was, of course, welcome to any school-boy, but a run down to the great Hampshire camp to witness an exciting football match would be great. And if he obtained permission to take along his chums the day out would be a success in every way.

Harry Wharton entered the Remove class-room, and a good many fellows glanced at him curiously, expecting to see him squeezing his hands—a common result of a visit to the Head's study.

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The genuine pleasure in Harry's face puzzled the Removites, his own chums as much as anybody else.

"The thrashfulness has not come off," murmured Hurree Singh. "The congratulateness is terrific!"

"So it wasn't a licking?" muttered Bob Cherry.

Wharton shook his head.

"No. Don't talk now."

"Why not? Quelch isn't looking."

"Best behaviour to-day."

"Anything on?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Explain, then, fathead!"

"Best behaviour, I tell you; no talking in class."

And Bob Cherry had to control his curiosity. Mr. Quelch glanced in their direction, and it was not safe to say more.

At the end of the first lesson the Form-master signed to Wharton to come out to his desk.

Bulstrode's face lighted up.

"Now he's going to get it!" he muttered. "The Head has let him off, and Quelch is going to lather him instead!"

Mr. Quelch fixed his eyes on Bulstrode.

"Bulstrode, I have cautioned you before about talking in class! You will take fifty lines."

Bulstrode scowled, and was silent.

"Wharton, you are excused further lessons to-day," said Mr. Quelch, "as you will doubtless have some little preparation to make for your journey."

"Yes, sir. Thank you!"

"Let me know whom you wish to take with you at eleven o'clock, and I will speak to the Head about it."

"Yes, sir."

And Wharton left the class-room. The curiosity of the Remove was great, and that of Harry Wharton's own chums was excited to fever heat.

"What the dickens does it mean?" muttered Bob Cherry to Nugent.

"Where is he going?"

"On a journey, Quelch said."

"I know that, ass! I wonder where?"

"I say, you fellows," murmured Billy Bunter, "Wharton must have been cramming when he told me he wasn't going to be expelled. That's where he's going."

"What's that, you young ass?" said Bob Cherry.

"Wharton is expelled, of course, and that—Ow!"

Bunter broke off with a wail of anguish as Nugent pinched him. Mr. Quelch looked round.

"What is the matter with you, Bunter?"

"I—I had a sudden pain, sir."

"You will have another sudden pain if you disturb the class again," said Mr. Quelch, "and a more severe one, Bunter! Take care!"

And Billy Bunter understudied the oyster for the rest of the lesson, and was mum.

A Holiday for Five!

THE moment the Remove were released from the class-room for the morning recess, Harry Wharton's chums rushed off in search of him. They were suffering from a burning curiosity to know what was "up." Wharton was not in the Close, and they looked for him in Study No. 1, and ran him to earth there.

The captain of the Remove was dividing his attention between a heap of articles piled on the table and a bag on the floor, which could have contained about a quarter of them when crammed to its full capacity.

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"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, as he rushed into the study.

"What is the meaning of it, anyway?"

"What's up?" asked Nugent.

"Why the bagfulness and the journeyfulness?" demanded the Nabob of Bhanipur. "What is the honourable upfulness?"

"Hallo, you chaps! Is it eleven o'clock?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Then I ought to have the list ready for Mr. Quelch."

Wharton took a pencil from his pocket and tore a sheet of paper from a notebook.

"I suppose I can put your name down, Bob?"

"What for—a football subscription?"

"Ha, ha! No. For a little run down into Hampshire—"

"Eh?"

"And a football match at Aldershot—"

"What?"

"And a whole holiday."

"What are you talking about?" shrieked Bob Cherry. "If you're trying to pull my leg—"

"Nothing of the sort."

"The pullfulness of the esteemed and august leg would be bad formfulness in the present honourable circumstances!" said the Nabob of Bhanipur. "But I should be glad if our worthy chum would explain what he dickensfully means."

"That's it," said Nugent. "What do you mean?"

"You see, my uncle has written to the Head and asked him to give me a day off," Harry explained. "His old regiment is sending a team to Aldershot to-day for a football match, and Colonel Wharton wants me to go down with him to see it."

"Good idea! And he wants you to take us?"

"That's it."

"Ripping! How fortunate we made such an excellent impression on the colonel!" grinned Bob Cherry. "On the present occasion, chaps, I think it can be passed unanimously that the respected colonel has played up well and deserved well of his country!"

"Yes, rather!"

"The ratherfulness is terrific!"

"I'm to let Mr. Quelch know what fellows I want to take, and he'll see about it," said Wharton. "Your name to go down, Cherry?"

"Well, I should say so!"

"Yours, Frank?"

"I suppose I'd better be there to look after you and the colonel," said Nugent.

"Put my name down."

"And yours, Inky?"

"The gladfulness on my honourable part will be terrific!"

"Good! Now we shall make a pleasant party of four."

"Will you?" said Bunter, coming into the study. "I'm really surprised at you, Wharton!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What's the matter with the Owl?"

"I'm surprised at Wharton! I'm referring now to his meanness!"

"Are you looking for a thick ear, Bunter?"

"Oh, really, Wharton! I mean your meanness in not lending me a few bob when you know the state of health I'm in through not properly feeding my recent cold! I've heard all you fellows have been saying!"

"You generally do hear a lot of what fellows have been saying," Nugent remarked.

"Oh, really, Nugent! As I was saying, I think you might remember me when it comes to planning an excursion.

You will have to take some grub to eat in the train, and you'll want me to get it ready."

"I think we could manage, Bunter."

"I couldn't leave such a thing in your charge," said Bunter loftily. "I have a sense of duty. Besides, I think that a run down to Aldershot would probably do me good after my recent cold."

"It wouldn't do us good to have a fat porpoise to roll about," said Nugent.

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"Well, I'll put Bunter's name down," said Wharton, after a moment's hesitation.

"I don't know whether Mr. Quelch will allow you to come, Bunter."

"Oh, yes, he will, if you beg it as a special favour."

"I'm blessed if I know why I should do anything of the sort," said Wharton—"especially after your sympathy when you thought I was going to be expelled, you young grampus. I'll do my best, though."

And Wharton left the study. He found the master of the Remove in his room, and Mr. Quelch took the list.

"You have four names here, Wharton."

"Yes, sir."

"Cherry, Nugent, Hurree Singh, and Bunter. I do not know about Bunter. He is too backward with his work, I am afraid, to be given an extra holiday."

"I—I should be glad if you could let him come, sir," said Wharton, flushing.

The Form-master looked at him keenly.

"I don't see how your pleasure will be enhanced by having that troublesome boy with you, Wharton. I am afraid you have allowed your good nature to make you put his name down here. However, I will see."

"Yes, sir," said Harry.

He returned to Study No. 1. Bunter was making his preparations for the journey, evidently assured that he was going.

"Well, what's the verdict?" asked Bob Cherry.

"I think it's all right for you three fellows, but about Bunter I'm not so sure," said Harry, beginning to pack the bag. Bunter looked up quickly.

"What's that, Wharton? Of course I'm going!"

"It all depends on Quelch, Bunter. The fact is, you're too lazy and careless with your lessons to be let off."

"I suppose, as a matter of fact, you'd rather leave me behind. I think it's selfish of you, when I'm so much in need of a change after my recent illness," said Bunter, in an injured tone.

"Nobody ever feels any sympathy for me."

"Oh, cheese it, Bunter! I'll do my best."

Harry Wharton packed the little bag, putting in the things the chums would want on a day's run, and not forgetting a big packet of sandwiches he had obtained from the housekeeper.

"What train are we catching?" asked Bob Cherry.

"The twelve o'clock from Friardale. We shall have to walk down to the station."

"Oh, I say, Wharton, it's a jolly long walk! Couldn't we have a cab?" said Bunter. "I get tired of walking."

"Part of the way's down hill, and you could roll it," suggested Bob Cherry.

"Oh, come on!" said Harry Wharton, laughing. "I'm to go to Quelch's study for the answer, and you chaps had better get ready."

"Good!" Harry Wharton went down the passage. A youth came out of Russell's study—a gentle-looking youth, with almond eyes and a pigtail, and a smile that was child-like and bland. It was Wun Lung, the Chinese junior in the Remove.

"Gooe out?" he asked, as he glanced at Wharton's bag and cap.

"Yes," said Wharton. "Going on a little run, Wun Lung."

"Me comee?"

Wharton looked a little uncomfortable. Wun Lung had shown a great attachment to him since coming to Greyfriars, and Wharton was very kind to the little Oriental. He would willingly have taken Wun Lung along, but he felt that he could hardly ask Mr. Quelch for more.

"Can't be did," he replied. "I'm going on leave, you see, and I can't take you. I'd be glad to if it could be fixed."

"No savvy."

"Can't take you."

"No savvy."

"You could jolly well savvy if you liked," murmured Wharton.

"Whalton say me comee?" asked Wun Lung.

"No, I didn't. I'm sorry you can't come. I'm going a long way."

"Chinee likee goee long way."

"It can't be done."

"No savvy."

"Well, I'll ask Mr. Quelch, if you like."

Wun Lung grinned with delight.

"Me savvy."

"Yes, I thought you'd savvy that," said Wharton, laughing in spite of himself. "But, mind, I don't promise you. Wait here a bit."

"Me waitee."

Wharton tapped at Mr. Quelch's door and entered. The Form-master gave him a genial nod.

"You have the Head's permission to take these companions, Wharton," he said. "I hope you will have a pleasant day."

"Thank you very much, sir," Wharton coloured. "I—I— Might I ask you, sir, if I could take one more fellow with me?"

Mr. Quelch shook his head.

"Come, Wharton, you must be reasonable. The Head has stretched a point in your favour by allowing you to take four companions. You don't want to take the whole Remove, I suppose?"

"It's Wun Lung, sir. He—"

"I should not care to take the matter to the Head again."

"Thank you, sir. I—I'm sorry I asked. But I told Wun Lung I would, and—"

"I quite understand; but I do not think it would do."

"Very well, sir."

Wharton quitted the Form-master's study. The Chinese junior was waiting for him in the passage. He looked at the captain of the Remove eagerly.

"Me comee?" he asked.

"Sorry, Wun Lung; I can't get permission."

"No savvy."

"I'm sorry you can't come, old chap. Can't be helped."

And Wharton walked away. He left the Chinese junior with a curious grin on his quaint little face.

Five minutes later the Famous Four were leaving the gates of Greyfriars, with Billy Bunter plodding on behind, and grumbling at every step at having to walk to the station;

In the Train!

"TRAIN'S in!" exclaimed Bob Cherry as the Greyfriars juniors came in sight of the station.

The Removites broke into a run and dashed into the station. Billy Bunter came panting in after them.

"I say, Wharton, you can take my ticket," he gasped. "I'll return you the amount out of my postal order on Saturday."

Harry Wharton did not reply. He took the tickets, and the juniors hurried on to the platform. The train was preparing to start. A carriage door was open, and the juniors bundled into it.

"Hurry up, there!"

Billy Bunter was the last to enter. He was breathless from the run. He sprawled into the carriage over the feet of the Removites, and the guard slammed the door. Bunter sat up gasping.

"My hat!" he panted. "I say, you fellows, you might have helped me in. And all of you stand there grinning like a lot of Cheshire cats, and don't give a fellow a hand up at all."

Harry Wharton jerked the fat junior to his feet. Billy Bunter sat down in his seat and panted.

"No need to yank me about like that, Wharton," he said. "You might have made my spectacles fall off, and if they had got broken I should have expected you to pay for them. Ow!"

"What's the matter now?"

"Somebody stuck a pin into my leg!"

"Stuff! You're dreaming!"

"Well, I felt it jab, anyway," grunted Bunter. "I say, Wharton, is there anything to eat in that bag?"

"Yes, some sandwiches."

"I suppose you're not going to take them all the way to Aldershot?"

"No; but I'm going to take them most of the way to Reading," said Harry Wharton grimly.

"Oh, really, Wharton—considering that I'm practically famishing—"

"Cheese it! You can have some presently. I— What on earth's the matter, Bob?"

Bob Cherry was sitting next to Bunter. He had suddenly leaped to his feet with a fiendish yell, clapping his leg. Then he turned on Bunter and yanked him off the seat.

"Hold on!" yelled Bunter. "I mean let go! What's the matter now? Are you off your rocker?"

"You young bounder, I'll teach you to stick pins into me!"

"I—I didn't!"

"Then who did?"

"How should I know? You're dreaming!" gasped Billy Bunter. "Don't shake me like that, you beast!"

"If you do it again I'll sling you out of the window!" growled Bob Cherry. "So look out, you funny merchant!"

"I tell you I didn't—"

"Oh, cheese it! If you didn't, who did?"

This was unanswerable, and Billy Bunter's protests were unheeded. The Famous Four, by way of passing the time, commenced to sing songs. But Bunter kept his eyes on the bag.

"I say, Wharton," he said at last.

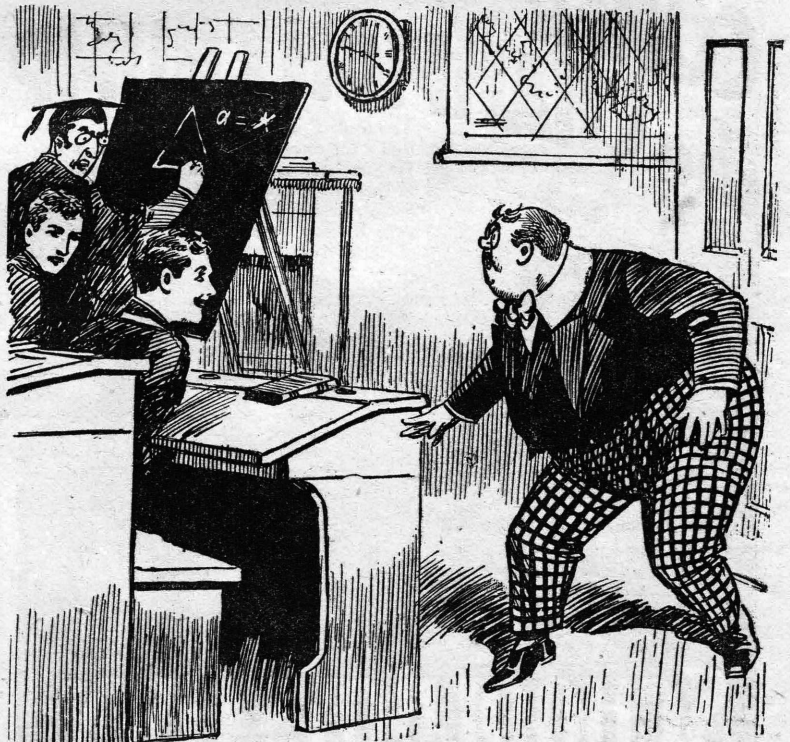
The juniors did not stop singing. Bunter blinked at them indignantly.

"I say, you fellows, I don't mind your making that row, you know, but really I think you might let me have some of the sandwiches—"

"Shut up!"

"But, really, Cherry—"

"Unless the shutupfulness is immediate, the whackfulness will be terrific," said the Nabob of Bhanipur.



Just as Billy Bunter, late for class, was trying to sneak into his place unseen, Mr. Quelch turned round from the blackboard. "Bunter!" he rapped out. "Ye-e-es, sir!" stammered Bunter, with a jump. "You are four minutes late!" said the Remove master.

"Oh, really, Inky—"
 "Ow!" roared Nugent.
 "What the dickens is the matter now, Nugent?"

"It's that fat villain! I'll teach him to play his practical jokes on me!" howled Nugent; and he hurled himself on the astonished Bunter.

Bunter was thrown down on his back on the seat, and Nugent bumped his head on the cushions. Bunter yelled and squirmed.

"Hold on, you beast! Ow! Stop him, you fellows! He's mad!"

"What on earth's the matter?" asked Harry Wharton.

"The young villain stuck a pin in my leg!"

"I—I did—"

"Yes, I know you did!"

"I—I—did—" stammered Bunter.

"Well, if you did you ought to be licked," said Bob Cherry. "I warned you once not to be funny. Bump him!"

"I—I didn't do it!" yelled the unfortunate Bunter.

"Now, don't prevaricate, Bunter," said Bob Cherry reprovingly, while the incensed Nugent still industriously bumped the Owl of the Remove on the cushions. "First you said you did, now you say you didn't. It won't do!"

"I—I—I didn't!"

"Then who did?" asked Nugent.

"B-blessed if I know. Perhaps Bob Cherry did it!"

"What's that?" demanded Bob Cherry. "Give him another bump for his cheek, Frank. We have enough to put up with from Bunt without his starting as a funny merchant."

"I should think so."

"I—I think you might stop them, Wharton," gasped Billy Bunter as

Nugent finished bumping him on the seat. "I—I—"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"You shouldn't start in the funny line, Bunt. Fellows don't like pins stuck in their legs. You're getting off lightly."

"But I didn't do it!"

"Oh, don't cram!" said Nugent. "You've had your medicine, now be quiet. If you are funny again, I shall sling you out at the next station, so I warn you!"

"But I tell you—"

"Shut up!"

And Billy Bunter relapsed into indignant silence, and the Famous Four resumed their sing-song. Four merry voices rang out from the carriage as the train rushed on.

Amazing Ventriloquism!

HARRY WHARTON opened the bag at last, and Billy Bunter's eyes gleamed. The captain of the Remove took out the substantial packet of sandwiches, and the juniors began an early lunch.

Bunter started on the sandwiches at express speed, and the whole supply would quickly have disappeared had not Bob Cherry put the brake on, as he expressed it.

"Hold on," he remarked pleasantly, as the fat junior reached out for his sixth sandwich. "I'm afraid you will damage your works, old chap, if you give them so much to deal with all of a sudden."

"I've been famishing all the morning, Cherry."

"Now, you know after a long famine it's dangerous to eat large quantities of food," said Bob Cherry. "You ought

to know that well enough, Bunter. As you've been famishing for a whole morning, it won't be good for you to eat any more."

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Quite right," said Nugent, grinning. "We must look after Bunter's health. As he's in our charge we must see that he doesn't expire of repletion."

"Look here, Nugent—"

"The repleteness is already terrific," remarked the Nabob of the greedfulness of the honourable Bunter.

"Utter rot!" said Billy Bunter. "You fellows don't understand me. I'm not greedy, but I like a lot. If you've done singing, I'll do a little ventriloquial practice."

"That you won't!" said Bob Cherry emphatically. "If you start the ventriloquial groan here I'll give you something to groan for."

"It isn't the ventriloquial groan; it's the ventriloquial drone."

"I don't care whether it's groan or drone, we've had enough of it in the study at Greyfriars," said Bob Cherry.

"Besides, it's forbidden by the bylaws of the railway company."

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"You mustn't do anything to the detriment of the railway or the discomfort of other passengers."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"As a matter of fact, I wasn't thinking of practising the ventriloquial drone," said Bunter. "Of course, with the time I've spent on ventriloquism, I've got far beyond that now. I can throw my voice—"

"Could you throw it out of the window, so that it wouldn't keep on jawing all this journey?" asked Nugent.

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"Well, we'll give you a chance," said Wharton. "Mind, only one chance, and if you can't throw your voice you're to shut up."

"I'm quite willing to agree to that, Wharton, as there are few who can equal my wonderful ability in voice-throwing on the famous Balmicrumpt principles," said Bunter. "I will first make my voice proceed from under the seat. I will speak to a person supposed to be under the seat, and he will reply 'Ere!' As you know, the aspirate cannot be produced with the ventriloquial voice."

"Go ahead! If you make your voice proceed from under the seat, you shall have another sandwich."

"Very well. I'm just going to begin," said Bunter, clearing his throat. "Now then, you fellows, just watch me."

"We're watching you, Bunt."

"I'm going to ask the supposed person under the seat if he's there, and he's going to reply: 'Ere!'"

"Well, do it, then, and don't jaw so much."

"Are you there?" asked Bunter; and he was just about to squeak, in his ventriloquial voice, a reply, when an answer came from under the seat.

"Ere!"

The Famous Four gazed at one another in amazement.

"My hat!" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

"Well, I must say that's all right," Nugent remarked. "I didn't see his lips move, even."

"He looks pretty well astonished himself," laughed Harry Wharton.

Billy Bunter did indeed look astonished. The voice from under the seat astounded him. He knew he had not made the reply, and yet it seemed that he must, unconsciously have done it. At all events, Bunter was not the

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person to disclaim any credit. He blinked triumphantly at the Removites. "Where's that sandwich?" he demanded.

"Well, you've earned it," said Bob Cherry. "Here you are! Blessed if I ever thought you'd be able to ventriloquise, though!"

"A fellow of my wonderful abilities is often misunderstood by common chaps."

"The modestfulness of the esteemed Bunter is terrific."

"I'll give you another demonstration, if you like," said Bunter, when the sandwich had disappeared—which was in the space of half a minute. "I'll make my voice come from the luggage rack."

"Carry on!"

"Are you there?" rapped Bunter; and then he squeaked: "Ere!"

But the reply did not seem to proceed from the luggage rack; it was only too evident that it proceeded from Bunter himself. The juniors grinned.

"There! What do you think of that?" asked the fat junior.

"Rotten!" came the reply, with singular unanimity.

"Oh, really, you fellows, you oughtn't to allow jealousy of my ability to bias you like that!" expostulated Billy Bunter. "Still, I admit that I'm more successful in throwing my voice down-

wards. I'll hold a short dialogue with a supposed person under the seat. Now then, are you there?"

"Ere!" came from under the seat. Bunter grinned slightly. He knew perfectly well this time that he had not made that ventriloquial reply, but he did not mean to give himself away.

"Go ahead," said Bob Cherry encouragingly. "I'll admit that you're getting on."

"How long have you been under the seat?" went on Bunter.

"Long time."

"My hat!" ejaculated Nugent. "One would almost think that there was somebody under the seat. Go on, Bunter, this is getting interesting."

Harry Wharton looked puzzled, and so did Bob Cherry. They had not seen Bunter's lips move in the slightest when he was ventriloquising, and they did not know what to make of it. The nabob was watching the fat junior intently.

"Don't you find it stuffy under there?" went on Bunter.

"Yes."

"Would you like something to eat?"

"Yes."

"What would you like?"

"A sandwich."

Bob Cherry shook his head. "Ah, that wasn't quite up to the mark," he observed. "The word sandwich gave it away, Bunter. It

didn't sound as if it came from under the seat."

Billy Bunter grinned. "I thought it did," remarked Harry Wharton.

Bob Cherry shook his head. "I admit that it was pretty good, but it wouldn't have deceived me," he said. "Go on, Bunter, let's see if you can keep it up."

"I think I ought to have another sandwich first."

"Here you are."

Bunter devoured the sandwich—and another. Then he resumed the extraordinary ventriloquism.

"Are you getting tired?"

"Yes," came from under the seat. "Why don't you come out?"

"Me allee light."

Bunter gave a gasp of dismay. He knew that there must be somebody under the seat who was entering into the joke on the Removites. But he did not know who it was, nor did he expect to be given away by a reply in "pidgin" English.

The Removites jumped up in amazement.

"Wun Lung!" shouted Harry Wharton.

"He's under the seat."

"It's a little game."

"Bunter, you fat impostor!"

Bob Cherry reached under the seat

(Continued on next page.)

PEN PALS

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and caught hold of a pigtail. He gave it a jerk; and, with a loud howl, the Chinese junior rolled out on the floor of the carriage.

A Startling Encounter!

WUN LUNG!

"You young boulder!"

"Then it was you all the time!"

The Chinese junior grinned. Billy Bunter took advantage of the fact that the general attention was drawn to Wun Lung to make a fresh attack on the sandwiches.

"So you were talking under the seat, and it wasn't Bunter's ventriloquism at all!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"Me talkee for jokee," explained Wun Lung.

"You young duffer! And I suppose it was you that was sticking those pins into us, and not Bunter at all?" said Nugent, laughing.

Wun Lung grinned expansively.

"But did you get leave to come away from Greyfriars, Wun Lung?" asked Harry Wharton.

"No savvy."

"Did you ask Mr. Quelch if you could leave for the day?"

"No savvy."

"You have bolted, then?"

"No savvy."

Harry Wharton gave it up. It was plain enough that the Chinese junior had taken french leave. When Wun Lung had an idea in his head it was not easy to get it out again, and the idea of accompanying the Greyfriars chums to Aldershot had evidently taken possession of his mind.

The Celestial must have left Greyfriars before Harry Wharton & Co. reached the station first, and hidden himself under the seat. By not showing himself until the train was near Reading he made return impossible.

"There will be a row about this when he gets back to Greyfriars," said Nugent, with a shake of the head.

"The rowfulness with the esteemed Quelch sahib will be terrific."

"Well, it can't be helped now," said Harry, half amused. "We shall have to take the young boulder along and look after him for the rest of the day."

Wun Lung beamed.

"Me come! Allee right!"

"It won't be all right when you get back, unless you can manage to soft soap the Quelch-bird," grinned Bob Cherry. "But now you're here you'd better have some sandwiches. You must be peckish."

"Me hungry."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Don't say anything, you fat humbug! Catch me believing in your giddy ventriloquism again! No wonder you couldn't make the voice proceed from the luggage-rack!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But, I say, you fellows—"

"Shut up, and hand over the sandwiches!"

"That's what I was going to say. There aren't any."

"Why, there were a dozen left! Blessed if the young cormorant hasn't scooped the lot!" exclaimed Bob Cherry in disgust.

"After exerting myself to entertain you as I have done, I suppose I'm entitled to a snack to keep up my strength!" said Bunter with dignity.

"Nothing left for you, Wun Lung, unless you take a bite out of Bunter. Do you like pork?"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Hallo! Here we are!" exclaimed Nugent. "This will be Reading."

Billy Bunter sniffed.

"By George, I think I can smell the biscuits already!" he exclaimed. "I suppose you fellows are going to stop here for some lunch?"

"Hungry again?" asked Nugent sarcastically. "I suppose you must be;

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it's nearly five minutes since you scoffed the last sandwich."

"Well, I could do with a snack. But you know Reading is the place where the best biscuits in the world come from, and we ought to sample them while we're here. It would be a good idea, if you fellows like, to give up going to Aldershot to-day, and have a look over the biscuit factories and try some samples of the stuff. It would be much more fun. Anyway, I think we ought to take a few pounds of biscuits to eat in the train."

"Better say a few tons, and they would keep you quiet for an hour or so."

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

The train stopped and the juniors alighted.

A tall, soldierly figure was standing on the platform, and Harry Wharton sighted it at once. Colonel Wharton caught sight of the boys and came towards them with a genial smile on his bronzed face. He shook hands with them, his glance lingering curiously on Wun Lung. He knew the others, but

it was the first time he had seen the cheerful youth from China.

"I'm glad you were able to come, Harry," he said. "I'm glad to see you and your friends. The Head wired me that you were coming by this train. The train we are taking for Aldershot does not leave for half an hour, and I suppose you lads could manage a little lunch."

"Yes, rather, sir!" said Billy Bunter.

"We had some sandwiches in the train," said Harry; "but lunch would be welcome, all the same."

"Come along, then."

The colonel led the way. Twice or three times as they went Hurree Jamset Ram Singh looked back over his shoulder with a curious expression on his dusky face. Harry Wharton noticed it at last.

"What is it, Inky?" he asked.

"I was observing the honourable rotter standing over there with the esteemed scowl on his face," said the nabob. "He seems to be specially interested in you, my worthy chum."

"Where is he?"

"Standing behind the honourable automatic machine."

Wharton looked in that direction and gave a start. The man, whose black, glinting eyes were fixed on him, was no stranger to the captain of the Greyfriars Remove.

He was a powerful fellow with a dusky skin and white teeth, evidently of gipsy blood. A cap was drawn low over his brows, and he had a muffer round his neck, and a shabby cardigan jacket on.

"Melchior!" exclaimed Harry involuntarily.

It was the gipsy who had been the kidnapper of Marjorie Hazeldene shortly after Harry Wharton had come to Greyfriars, and who was now supposed to be in prison.

Colonel Wharton heard the boy's exclamation and looked round.

"What is it, Harry?"

"Melchior, the gipsy."

"Where?"

"There—he's going!"

The gipsy, finding himself observed, had moved away and mingled with the crowd on the platform. Harry Wharton made a movement as though to dash in pursuit, and then paused. There wasn't time now to give chase to the gipsy.

But Harry was left wondering what Melchior was doing there. Had he been following the juniors? If so, what was his motive? Was he looking for a chance of revenge on Harry, who had been responsible for his capture? Harry Wharton determined to be on his guard.

(That the gipsy outcast is seeking revenge is proved in next week's gripping chapters, when the chums of the Remove are attacked by a gang of roughs! Don't forget to order your GEM early.)



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