

THIS WEEK. JACK BLAKE, AUGUSTUS, FIGGINS & CO.

# PLUCK

THE SHADOW OF A SECRET. **1D**  
A Grand Complete School Tale. By CHAS. HAMILTON.  
UNITED WE STAND.  
An Adventure Story. By OWEN LEACH.



'MY WORD!' SAID PERCY FAINTLY. 'WHAT CAN IT MEAN? SOMEBODY'S STOLEN IT, I SUPPOSE. HOW DID IT COME IN FIGGY'S BAG? OH, CRUMBS! WHAT'S THAT?' HE GAVE ANOTHER JUMP AS THE CHOPPER CRASHED THROUGH THE DOOR. (See page 14.)

NO. 32 VOL. 5. NEW SERIES.



ONE PENNY.

EVERY SATURDAY.

[VOL. 5, No. 132, NEW SERIES.]

The First Long (School) Story.

Complete in this Issue.

# THE SHADOW of a SECRET

A Tale of Figgins & Co.

By CHAS. HAMILTON



St. Jim's to read the letter. But he suddenly broke off in astonishment.

A sharp exclamation had come from Kildare.

"Micky! Good heavens!"

Blake stared at the captain, amazed. Kildare had gone white as a sheet, and the hand that held the letter trembled visibly. Kildare seemed to have forgotten the presence of the junior.

"Micky! Poor old Micky! Oh, the fools—the brutes!"

CHAPTER I.  
Terrible News.

"LETTER for you, Kildare!" Jack Blake walked into the study of the captain of St. Jim's, with the letter in his hand. Eric Kildare looked up with rather a worried expression upon his handsome face. He had a pencil and paper in hand, and was conning over the list of St. Jim's First Eleven when the junior came in.

"Thank you, Blake!" said Kildare, with a nod. "Put it on the table, please!"

Blake laid the letter on the table. Kildare's eyes dropped again on the list in his hand. Football was gone with the winter days, and King Cricket was reigning, and the captain of St. Jim's was much exercised in his mind as to the constitution of the First Eleven.

"Was James Monteith's name to be included in it?" Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, was certainly one of the school's finest cricketers. But after his conduct during the football season, Kildare had resolved that he should never play in the college First Eleven again. Monteith had certainly been upon his very best behaviour lately, but Kildare knew him too well to be very much impressed by that.

"No, it won't do!" he exclaimed aloud. "If I give in again, it would only make him think we could not do without him, and he would begin making mischief again. We can't have the experiences of the football season repeated. He—why—Blake!"

A loud cough had interrupted Kildare's audible meditations. He looked up with a start, to find that the junior was still standing there, rather red in the face.

"Blake! I thought you were gone!" exclaimed Kildare, with a look of vexation, as he realised that the junior must have heard his muttered words, and had, in fact, coughed purposely, to make him aware of the fact. "Blake! What do you mean—?"

"Sorry, Kildare, but the chap's waiting for an answer."

"The chap! Whom do you mean?"

"The chap who sent you this," and Blake pointed to the letter on the table. Kildare picked it up.

"Oh, I thought it had come by post." He slit the envelope. "Wait a minute, Blake!"

"With pleasure, old kid—I mean, Kildare!" Blake hummed a tune as he waited for the captain of

Blake coughed loudly, for the second time, to recall Kildare to himself. He had no desire to hear the captain's secrets in this way.

"Blake!" Kildare made an effort to control his agitation. "Blake, who gave you this note?"

"A country fellow," said the junior, "I met him at the gates, and he asked me to take it in to Mr. Kildare, so I hopped along with it. Any answer?"

"Yes, yes. Wait a minute."

Kildare scribbled hastily on a sheet of notepaper, enclosed it in an envelope, and handed it to Blake.

"Take that to the man, and tell him to give it to the person who sent him. Give him this half-crown, too. And—*and*—Blake—"

"Yes, Kildare? Anything I can do?"

"Yes, you needn't speak of this to anybody, if you don't mind. It's—it's a private matter, and I don't want it to get chattered about."

Blake drew himself up with a great deal of dignity. "Now, Kildare, you ought to know me better than to think I could chatter," he said in a tone of remonstrance.

"You know I'm the soul of discretion, and—"

"You know I'm the soul of discretion, and—"

Kildare smiled faintly. "Then I rely upon you, Blake. Take the letter now."

"Certainly!" And the junior picked up his cap and left the captain's study, and strolled cheerfully out of the School House, and across the quadrangle, to the gates of St. Jim's.

Kildare, left alone, read through the letter again. The sheet of notepaper upon which he had been making the cricket-list, lay unheeded on the table. A more serious matter had chased that worry from his mind.

He read the short tear-stained epistle through, from beginning to end, and then laid it on the table, and rising from his chair, began to pace the study with irregular strides.

The usually calm and cheerful captain of St. Jim's was in a mood new to him, which would have surprised his

EVERY ISSUE CONTAINS TWO EXTRA LONG, COMPLETE STORIES

friends if they had seen him then. His pale face and restless eyes showed how deep was the agitation the letter had caused him.

"Poor old Micky!" He muttered the words aloud. "Poor old Micky! Of course he's innocent. Of course he is. The fools! The brutes! What can I do?"

He broke off sharply. "I'll go to him, at all events, and see what can be done!" He put on his straw hat, and turned towards the table to pick up the letter. At the same moment there came a knock at the door of the study, and it opened.

Monteith, of the New House at St. Jim's, stood in the doorway, looking in wonder at the captain's white, harassed face.

"I want to speak to you, Kildare, if you can spare me a minute."

"Well, I was just going out, really," said Kildare, haltingly.

"In a great hurry? Anything important?"

"N—not exactly," said Kildare, somewhat hurriedly. Monteith was the very last person at St. Jim's whom he would have liked to suspect that all was not as it should have been with him. "What did you want to say?"

"It's about the cricket."

"What about it?" asked Kildare, crushing down his impatience, and striving to appear quite at his ease.

"You are making up the First Eleven. I hear that you are going to overlook my claim to appear in it. Is that the case?"

"You know the cause, Monteith. You know what happened in the football season. More than once I made concessions that my better judgment warned me were too great, and each time you took advantage of them to do me injury."

"That isn't exactly how I look at it, Kildare."

"Perhaps not, but I can't help seeing the facts. You deliberately failed your side in a match! I resolved that so long as I was captain, you should never play for the school again. I didn't come to that decision hastily, and I haven't adhered to it without reflecting deeply on the subject. But I'm afraid I can't alter my decision."

"You think I am not a sufficiently good player?"

"Not at all. It isn't that. You are one of our best players, either at football or cricket. I never denied that."

"You are complimentary, at all events," said the prefect, with a grim smile.

"It's the truth, and I've never said anything else. It's your nature that's at fault, if you'll excuse my saying so."

"Oh, go on; don't mind me."

"We never did pull together, and our experience over the football proves that if I'm to be captain, there's no room in the eleven for you, Monteith. I'm sorry, because if you had chosen, you could have done very well for St. Jim's. But it's best to look facts in the face, however disagreeable they are."

"The long and short of it is, that you mean to leave me out of the cricket for the season," said the prefect, drawing a deep breath.

"You have left me no choice."

"I warn you that there will be trouble."

"I don't know. You mean, I suppose, that the New House will stand by you, and that the New House members of the team will give trouble. I don't think so. You tried to make your house cut the football, but they wouldn't stand it. I fancy it will be the same with the cricket. In any case I've made up my mind. If the New House fellows choose to stand out of the team, they must."

"Then nothing will change your decision?" said Monteith, slowly.

"I'm afraid not."

Monteith gritted his teeth.

Boom!

It was the sound of the school-clock beginning to strike the hour. Kildare gave a start. "You must excuse me, Monteith: I shall be late." He caught up the paper from the table—for he did not wish Micky's letter to run the risk of falling into other hands—and thrust it into his pocket. He passed Monteith hastily, leaving the prefect standing inside the study.

Monteith stood in astonishment. The captain's rapid strides died away down the passage, and he was gone.

"Where on earth is he going in such a tearing hurry?" muttered Monteith. "What was the matter with him when I came in? What was he looking as white as a ghost for?"

The prefect's curiosity was aroused. There was certainly something unusual the matter with Eric Kildare. Monteith glanced around the study, and his eyes fell upon a sheet of paper lying on the table. The prefect stepped towards it and glanced at it. James Monteith was not deeply troubled by scruples of honour, and it was not the first time he had descended to the meanness of reading another fellow's letter.

He gave a low whistle of astonishment. Quickly crossing on tiptoe to the door, he gave a glance either way, up and down the corridor. No one was in sight. Kildare had evidently not missed the letter. Monteith had seen him hastily catch up the paper from the table. It was doubtless in mistake for this letter, the prefect thought, for Kildare would certainly never have left this lying about if he could have helped it. Satisfied that there was no immediate risk of interruption, Monteith returned to the table, and picked up the letter. Hastily, but carefully, he read it through, from the beginning to the end.

No wonder the prefect's eyes gleamed with a spiteful light. The letter was calculated to give gratification to an enemy of Eric Kildare, for it ran as follows:

"Dear Eric,—You will be surprised to hear from me, especially at what I am going to tell you. I am in fearful trouble. I hardly know how to tell you, but you'll soon hear, anyway.

"Eric, I'm running away from the police. I am innocent; I'm sure I don't need to tell you that. But the diamond—the Glyndon diamond—is missing, and they say I have taken it. I didn't, but they won't believe me.

"Ralph Monteith is the hardest on me. He was sure of my guilt from the first, and it is he I owe all this misery to. He believed the worst at once. The police have a warrant for my arrest. I ran away to escape them. I have no money and I don't know what to do. I have been tramping the country for two days. You are the only one who can help me. I don't know if you can, either, but I want to see you. I am hiding now in the ruins of the castle, near St. Jim's. I am going to venture out to try and get this letter sent to you. Will you come to the ruins and see me there? It's a lonely place, and there's not much fear of discovery. Come, do come!

Your unhappy brother,  
"MICKY."

The prefect drew a deep, deep breath! So Kildare's brother was hunted by the police, and Kildare had gone to help him!

Fate had delivered the captain of St. Jim's into his hands.

"By Jove!" muttered Monteith, with glittering eyes, "by Jove! we'll see if he'll keep me out of the First Eleven after all! I wonder what St. Jim's would say if the story got round—Kildare's brother a hunted thief! I must look into it—I can get information at first-hand from Ralph. I've no doubt the fellow's guilty."

He laid the letter on the table where he had found it. Then he quietly left the study, and strolled away with a careless air from the School House, back to his own quarters in the New House. A mean exultation was beating in his heart. Exactly what use he could make of this discovery, he had not yet determined, but he knew that it placed the captain of St. Jim's in his power, and Monteith was not the kind of fellow to show mercy to a powerless enemy.

He sat down in his study, and wrote a letter, addressing it to Ralph Monteith, at Messrs. Stein & Stein, Hatton Garden, London. It was a letter to his cousin, Messrs. Stein & Stein's manager, asking for the full story of Micky Kildare's transgression. Monteith whistled a cheerful tune as he walked out and posted the letter in the school pillar-box. Things were going well for the head prefect of the New House.

CHAPTER 2,  
The Fugitive.

KILDARE left St. Jim's hurriedly, the thought never crossing his mind that in his haste he had thrust the wrong paper into his pocket. He went down the lane with a swinging stride, and turned into the path through the wood leading to the ruined castle.

Well he knew the way. It was not so very long since a junior belonging to St. Jim's had been kidnapped by a gipsy, and imprisoned in the old castle and held to ransom there. The captain of St. Jim's had been one of the keenest searchers for him, though it was due to Blake and the chums of Study No. 6 that D'Arcy was finally rescued from the clutches of Barenegro, the gipsy. Micky Kildare had evidently chosen the ruined castle as a hiding-place, for the same reason that others had chosen it before him—because it was lonely and deserted, and avoided by the country-people owing to its reputation of being haunted.

Kildare strode rapidly up the steep path to the ruined castle. Even in the sunshine of the early summer evening the ruins looked gloomy and forbidding. There was no sight of a human being near, little to be seen but the dark woods on every side, with here and there the smoke from some farmhouse curling over them in the distance.

Kildare entered the main portion of the ruins through

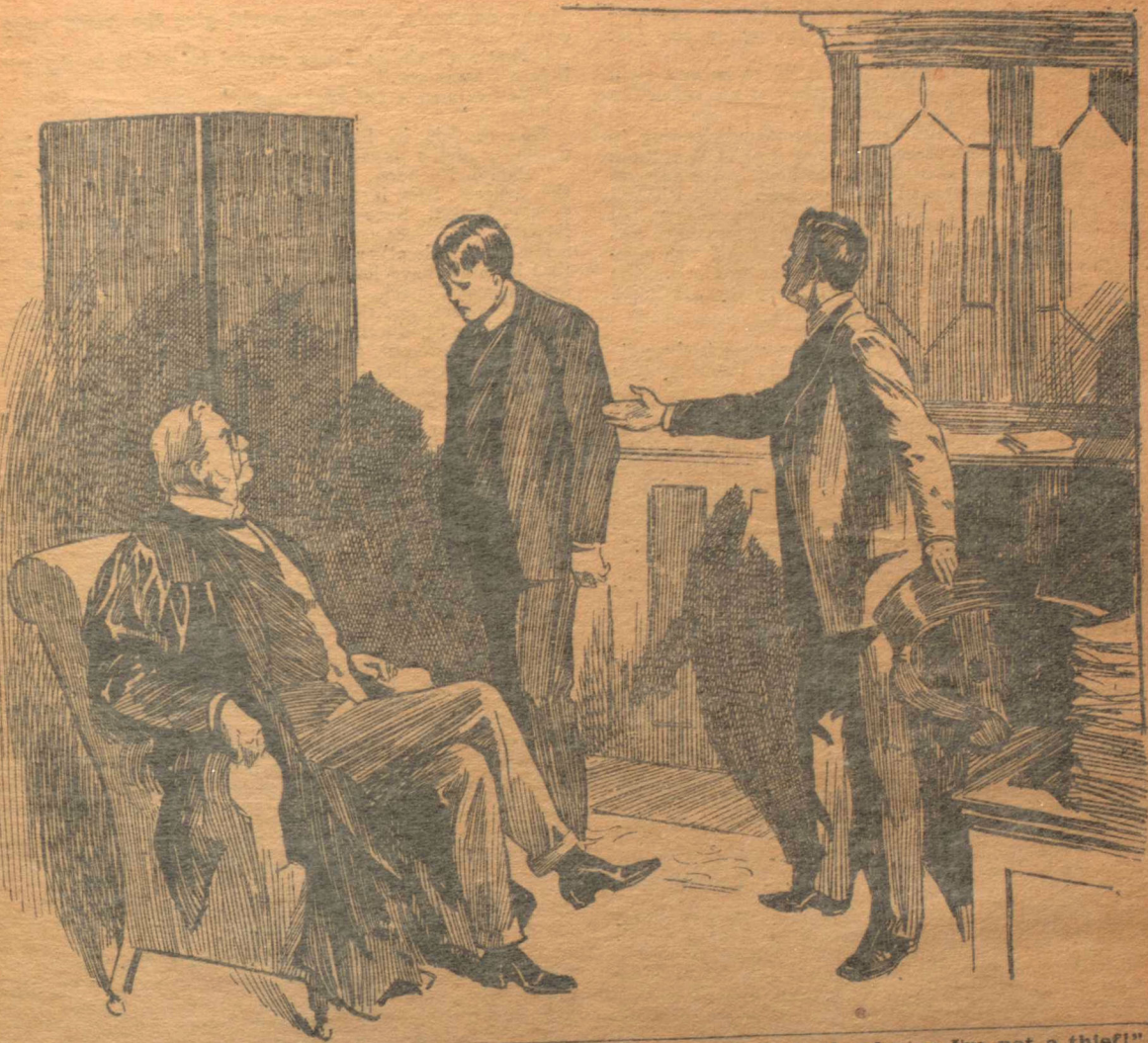
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The British



"Kildare! I've been a cad to you—but—but stand by me now! Tell the doctor I'm not a thief!" faltered Monteith. (See page 16.)

the old, shattered portal, and looked quickly and eagerly around him.

"Micky!"

His voice echoed eerily among the massive fragments of masonry, overgrown with moss and straggling creepers.

"Micky!"

There was no reply to the low, cautious call.

Was the fugitive hiding in the vaults, then? Kildare shuddered at the thought. He called out more loudly the name of his brother:

"Micky!"

There was a rattle of loose stones under a foot, and a boyish figure came into sight from amid a pile of ruins where an ancient roof had fallen in masses round the remains of a wall. Kildare started forward.

"Micky!"

In a moment his brother's hand was firmly clasped in his own. And then the captain of St. Jim's looked anxiously into the white, haggard face before him.

Micky Kildare was six years older than his brother, the captain of St. Jim's, and yet, looking at them, an observer would have said at once that Eric was, if not the older, much more the man of the two. Kildare's happy, Irish good-nature was shared by his brother, but the strength of character which the captain of St. Jim's possessed was unknown to Micky.

The difference between them was striking as they stood face to face. Kildare, erect, determined, though anxious; Micky, pale and scared, almost whimpering with emotion, and the relief at seeing his brother.

"Eric, I'm in awful trouble."

"I know you are, Mick, old chap, from your letter," said Kildare quietly. "Sit down and tell me all about it."

"Let's get somewhere where we shall be safe, then. Any body coming to the ruins might see us here."

"Just as you like, Micky."

Micky scrambled back into the place he had emerged from at Kildare's call. The captain of St. Jim's followed him.

It was a hollow amid huge piles of shattered masonry, left by chance when the roof had fallen in perhaps a century or two before. Micky had cleared it a little, piling bricks and stones higher round it, and made of it a really secure hiding-place. He sank down upon a huge stone. Kildare remained standing.

"It's good of you to come, Eric," said the young man gratefully. "I knew you would help me if you could." Then he groaned: "But you can't do anything!"

"Tell me all about it, Micky."

The unfortunate lad had really little to tell; little beside what Kildare had already learned from his letter. The Glyndon diamond had been stolen, and he was suspected of stealing it.

Micky had always been more or less of a ne'er-do-well. He had been in continual hot water when he was a boy at St. Jim's. He had been asked to leave his college at Oxford for a wild escapade. He had drifted from one thing to another. His parents had been glad when at last he settled down into regular employment, in the service of Messrs. Stein & Stein, diamond merchants, of Hatton Garden.

It was not what they had once hoped for for their elder son, but it was a relief to see him leading a regular life at all. Now that the catastrophe had come, and suspicion had fallen upon him, his former way of life, his known unsteadiness, had, of course, told heavily against him.

"But I'm innocent, Eric!" he almost wailed. "I've been

NEXT SATURDAY:

"RUN OUT!"  
A Tale "shout of Speck, the Twins & Co. AND  
By H. Clarke Book.

"RED MULLET."  
A Story of Kit and Cora, the  
Brother and Sister Detectives.

IN "P" "P".

working steadily for over a year now, and haven't anything to blame myself for. Now they're raking up the past because this has happened."

"That's only to be expected," said Kildare, with a sigh. "It's easier to sow wild oats, Micky, than to get rid of the crop afterwards. But about the robbery?"

Micky told his tale. The famous diamond belonging to Lord Glyndon had been placed in the care of Messrs. Stein while his lordship was abroad. It was kept in the safe, to which only the manager had the key. Mr. Monteith had missed the key from his chain, and everyone was started looking for it. It could not be found, and a locksmith was sent for to open the safe. The Glyndon diamond was missing. Then every employee in the place was searched. The diamond was not discovered, but the missing key was found in Micky's coat-pocket.

And at this Kildare started violently.

"The key in your pocket, Micky? How came it there?"

"I don't know, Eric. For Heaven's sake don't say you doubt me!"

"I don't, Micky. It's plain enough to me. The thief found the key, stole the diamond, and shoved the key in your pocket to throw suspicion upon you and off himself."

"Yes; so I said at once, but no one believed me. Mr. Monteith was certain of my guilt from the start, but I fancy he was sorry for me. He said in my hearing that there was a warrant out for my arrest, and I thought afterwards that he meant to give me a chance to cut and run."

Kildare's brows wrinkled.

"I can't understand that, Micky. Is he a very soft-hearted man?"

"Not as a rule."

"Did he like you very much?"

"Nothing out of the common. He was always agreeable."

"I can't understand it. He ought to have had you arrested as soon as the key was found in your pocket, if he believed you guilty."

"I suppose he was sorry for me."

"He had no right to let that interfere with his duty, and his duty was to use every means of recovering the diamond. I cannot help thinking, Micky, that you did the worst possible thing for yourself in taking advantage of Mr. Monteith's negligence, and running away."

"You wouldn't have had me stay to be arrested, Eric? It looked so black—they all believed me guilty. I should have been convicted to a certainty."

Kildare pressed his hand to his forehead. He was thinking deeply. There was certainly something in what Micky said; yet, if he had stayed to "face the music," it was quite possible that the suspicion against him might have crumbled away. Now he had condemned himself by his own action. He had fled from the fear of arrest, and the natural inference was that he had a guilty conscience, or that he wished to place his booty in safety before he could be taken.

"Micky," said Kildare suddenly, "is there any proof that Monteith lost the key, besides his bare word?"

"I don't know—I suppose so. Why should he lie?"

"Is it possible that—that—" Kildare hesitated.

"Micky, old boy, I can't understand his allowing you a chance to escape, unless—unless it suited his purpose to allow suspicion to fall upon you as much as possible."

Micky stared.

"Oh, Eric! You don't mean to say that—that Mr. Monteith himself—It's impossible!"

"I don't know much of the facts," said Kildare, compressing his lips; "but that looks to me as if it might be true. If Mr. Monteith is anything like his cousin, James Monteith, at St. Jim's, his honour is probably not equal to a very big strain. But this is all conjecture, anyway. Let's talk about yourself. I think you were wrong to run away, but now you've done it the damage is done, and it can't be helped. You must keep out of the hands of the police now."

"Yes, yes, I must."

"Have you been home?"

"No," Micky shivered. "I couldn't face them, Eric."

"Right! This is the best place you could have come to. Nobody will suspect you of coming here, and you can lie low here a long time. In case of anybody coming you can easily dodge into the vaults and hide there. The weather's warm, and you can camp out for a bit, if I get you some things you'll want."

"You're a good chap, Eric; but I don't want to get you into trouble. If—if it all came out, what would the Head say?"

"He couldn't blame me for standing by my own flesh and blood," said Kildare. "Anyway, I'm not going to think about that now. You must lie low now, and the truth may come out—must come out."

"Mr. Monteith—lose that letter I sent you, Eric," said

Micky nervously. "That would give the game away at once."

"That's all right; I was careful to put it in my pocket before I came out."

"Better burn it and make sure."

"Good!"

Kildare felt in his pocket for the letter. He looked curiously at the paper he brought out in his hand.

"Darrel, Rushden, Drake, Baker, Webb, White—What the deuce? This is the cricket list! I"—Kildare turned pale—"I must have picked this up in mistake for the letter."

He felt in his other pockets hastily, though he knew now that he must have left Micky's letter lying on the table in his study at the school. Nothing came to light. The letter was, of course, not there. Micky looked extremely uneasy, and Kildare bit his lip with vexation.

"Have you lost it, Eric?"

"I must have left it in my study."

"I suppose nobody would be likely to go there?"

Kildare started as he remembered that he had left the head prefect of the New House standing in his doorway when he hurried away from the study.

"I—I don't know. I'll hurry back, anyway!" he exclaimed. "I'll come and see you again this evening, Micky, and bring you some things. I'll buzz off now."

And Kildare, with a deep disquietude preying at his heart, hurried out of the recess amid the piled masonry, and out of the ruined castle. He knew that Monteith's honour could not be relied upon. If the prefect saw the letter lying there, and had any curiosity about it, he was quite capable of reading it. And then—Kildare did not care to think of that. He knew how helplessly he would be in his enemy's power, and how little Monteith would scruple to use that power.

As he passed the ruined arch of the old castle, Kildare broke into a run. He went down the rugged path, and all of a sudden there was a yell, as, sprinting round a turn in the path, he ran right into four juniors who were coming up towards the castle. Kildare staggered back, breathless, and there was a crash of smashing glass, as a well-filled lunch-basket went to the ground.

"You silly ass!" roared Jack Blake, of St. Jim's. "What the—why the—Hallo! It's Kildare!"

### CHAPTER 3.

#### A Surprise for Figgins & Co.

BLAKE stared in amazement at the captain of St. Jim's. All four of the chums of Study No. 6 were there—Blake, Herries, Digby, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Blake had been carrying the lunch-basket, when Kildare, coming round the corner at full speed, had run right into him, and sent it flying. Blake had saved his footing, but he had knocked violently against Herries, and Herries was sitting down now. Arthur Augustus was on his hands and knees, looking for his eyeglass, which had taken leave of his eye in the sudden shock.

"Hallo!" said Kildare breathlessly.

"Excuse me for calling you names, Kildare," said Blake, "I didn't recognise you for the moment, old son. But what in the name of Julius Caesar did you want to come bolting round the giddy corner like that for?"

"I was in a hurry!"

"Well, I should say you were," agreed Blake, "a thunder-deuced-Dickens of a hurry, Kildare. Look at that lunch-basket!"

A reddish liquid was oozing from the basket. It came from a smashed bottle of currant-wine.

"What do you think the sandwiches and the cake are like now?" demanded Blake. "Nice sort of a lunch we shall have in the ruins!"

Kildare started. "Where are you going?"

"We're going to picnic in the ruins," explained Blake.

"Now, don't look like a giddy executioner, because the ruins are within bounds on a half-holiday, or else nice orderly chaps like us would never dream of going to them. Herries, if you giggle at my remarks I shall punch your head!"

"You mustn't go to the ruins," said Kildare, flushing uncomfortably. "You had better cut back to St. Jim's, my boys!"

Blake stared at him. "Off your rocker?" he inquired, with a pleasant smile.

Kildare's heart was beating fast. If the juniors went to the ruins now they were almost certain to discover Micky, yet how could he stop them without exciting surprise and suspicion? That was not easy. The juniors were already looking at him curiously, wondering what was the meaning of his pale and harassed look.

"Come on," said Blake, picking up the basket, "the sooner

we get in there, the better, and get this basket unpacked. Currant-wine is all very well in its place, but spilt over sandwiches and seed-cake, it can't be said to make any marked improvement in them. Come along, you kippers!"

"I've lost my eyeglass!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "Wait a minute, doah boys!"

"Rats!" said Blake. "It's a bit of luck if you've lost it. You won't want to go around always looking like a guy, do you? Give it a rest!"

"My dear fellah—"

"Come on, kids, and let him hunt for his giddy monocle all on his lonesome," said Blake, "I'm getting fed up with that eyeglass!"

But Kildare was standing in the path.

"Blake! I think you had better not go to the ruins," he said haltingly.

"Oh, I say, Kildare!" exclaimed Blake. "We're all right. That beast of a gipsy is in prison, and the place is as safe as a bank. And there's four of us, even if any bounder of a tramp should be knocking about here. Don't be a brute, old kid!"

His words suggested an idea to the worried captain of St. Jim's.

"I have just come from there," he said, "as a matter of fact; there's a character yonder you had better not meet. Now, boys, you know I wouldn't spoil your picnic for nothing, and I know you'll do as I wish."

"Oh, all right!" said Blake instantly, "anything for a quiet life. We're always willing to oblige. But I don't see what four of us want to be afraid of a tramp for."

"Besides, we've got lots of grub, and Kildare might as well join us," said Herries. "It's a ripping feed, Kildare, and you might do worse!"

"My hat, yes," said Blake. "You're not at the cricket now, so you have lots of time. Come and take us under your wing, Kildare, and join the picnic!"

"Thanks, awfully!" said poor Kildare, who was on tenterhooks all this time, thinking of the letter left on the table in his study, "but I can't stop. I must get back to St. Jim's. Now, you won't go to the ruins, will you? I know I can take your word."

"Right-ho!" said Blake, turning round. "We'll find a camp somewhere else. After all, it will be very nice by the river, kids. Sorry you can't join us, Kildare!"

"So am I, Blake. Good-bye!"

The four juniors began to descend the path again, and Kildare, passing on with a hurried stride, disappeared from their sight, ahead. He turned into the wood, and out of sight of the juniors, he broke into a run again. The thought of that dangerous letter on his table haunted his anxious mind.

Blake gave a low whistle expressive of amazement as the captain vanished into the wood. "Well, this is a queer business!" he exclaimed. "I left Kildare in his study just before we came out, and lo and behold! here he was at the ruins before us!"

"And in a mighty hurry to get back," said Herries.

"Then what the dickens has he been here for?" demanded Digby. "What does he mean by that tale about a tramp in the ruins, whom we mustn't see? Has the bounder been meeting anybody there—some giddy girl, for instance?"

"Oh gwacious!" exclaimed D'Arcy, "what larks!"

"No, I don't think so," said Blake thoughtfully. "It seems a bit funny, and Kildare seems in a blue funk about our going to the ruins. I don't quite get on to the thing, somehow. But it ain't our business. Come along!"

The chums of Study No. 6 were decidedly curious. But Kildare had acted quite judiciously in relying on their sense of honour. After passing their word not to go to the ruins, none of them was capable of breaking it. They went down the path, and turned off towards the river, and there, by the rippling waters they unpacked the hamper and started the feed. The rugged path up to the ruined castle was left deserted and lonely.

Only for a time, however!

Ten minutes after the chums of Study No. 6 had disappeared, four boyish figures came cautiously out of the wood, looking round them, a good deal like Red Indians on the war-path. And, as a matter of fact Figgins & Co. were on the war-path! For the four were the famous "Co." of the New House at St. Jim's—the deadly rivals of the School House juniors.

Figgins, long-limbed and lank, Fatty Wynn, short and stout, and Kerr, the canny Scotsman, were the original Figgins & Co., and with them was a new recruit, lately admitted to the "Co." for his distinguished services against the School House. His name was Marmaduke Smythe, and he had come to St. Jim's some time before, the most out-and-out bounder that St. Jim's had ever seen. But the boys had reformed him. The process had not been a gentle one, nor very pleasant to Marmaduke, but it had been successful, and that was the main point.

The cautious looks of the four as they came up the rugged path showed that they were upon a hostile expedition.

"No sign of 'em here!" chuckled the great Figgins. "They must be in the ruins. That was where they were going, for certain. The path doesn't lead anywhere else, except by going a long way round, and they wouldn't do that for nothing."

His three followers murmured assent.

"They're in the ruins," went on Figgins, with a grin of satisfaction, "enjoying their dear little selves in a giddy picnic. This is where we chip in."

"Rather!" said three voices in unison.

"Mind, it won't be a walk-over for us," said Figgins. "We are four to four, but we shall have the advantage of taking them by surprise. That counts for a lot, you know. If we can collar the lunch-basket, and most of the grub, we needn't stay to fight it out to a finish."

"Rather not," said Fatty Wynn. "Let's get hold of the grub, that's the main point. I declare the walk has made me quite hungry."

"Oh, you're always hungry," said Figgins. "Blessed if I know where you put all the tommy you cram away. Now, quiet!"

They were drawing near to the ruins. Now they advanced on tiptoe, cautiously, and passed almost as silently as spectres through the ruined arch of the ancient entrance.

Figgins looked round him with a disappointed expression. No one was in sight! The sunshine fell brightly upon ancient wall and mossy stone. But there was no sign of a human being in the place.

"Hallo!" murmured Figgins. "Where are they? Don't see them."

"Perhaps they saw us coming," suggested Fatty Wynn.

"Yes, and they may have scuttled into the vaults," said Kerr.

Figgins shook his head. "No, that's not likely. Blake would rather stay and face us, I fancy. But they may be among the ruins here, somewhere. There's cover enough for an army."

"Well, let's search," said Marmaduke. "Hallo! I heard something then."

"So did I. There's somebody behind that pile of rubbish," Figgins held up his hand for caution. "Now, all together," he whispered, "jump in suddenly, and yell like a lot of lunatics, and startle 'em out of their wits to begin with."

The four New House juniors advanced towards the piles of masonry, which shut in the little recess, by the old wall. At Figgins's signal they leaped up simultaneously upon the rough masses of brickwork, letting out a yell that would have done credit to Colney Hatch.

"At 'em!" roared Figgins. And he leaped into the hollow amid the ruins, and a man started up with a gasp of wild affright.

"Who—who are you?"

It was Micky Kildare, but Figgins, of course, did not know him. But the chief of the New House juniors could see that he had come upon the wrong party, of course, and he jumped back in surprise. For a moment he stared at the fugitive, and the fugitive at him.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Figgins. "Who are you, my giddy kipper?"

"I—I—I—" Micky was stammering with fear. He made a sudden spring, and was gone over the pile of masonry in a moment.

Figgins & Co. stared at each other in astonishment. "Didn't know we should find an escaped lunatic round here," said Figgins. "He gave me quite a start."

There was a dying clatter of hasty footsteps. The stranger had gone down the ancient stairway into the vaults below the ruined castle. None of the juniors was inclined to follow him.

"Well, this is a sell," said Figgins glumly. "Blake and those bounders are not here, and we have found the wrong passenger."

"Where can they be?" growled Fatty Wynn, dreadfully disappointed. "Now we sha'n't get anything to eat till we get back to St. Jim's."

"Oh, blow your eternal eating! It's the frost that worries me," said Figgins, in disgust. "Here's us, left the cricket practice for the special purpose of taking a rise out of the School House bounders, and they've slipped through our fingers like cels. I'll swear they were making for the castle. Perhaps they saw the lunatic and were scared off. Oh! it's too rotten for anything. Come along, Figgins & Co. left the ruined castle. The raid had been a ghastly failure, and they returned to the school in a far from happy mood. Naturally they did not keep silent about their adventure, and before the evening Kildare knew that his brother had been seen in the ruins.

CHAPTER 4.  
Figgy's Mission.

JAMES MONTEITH came into his study in the New House and picked up a letter that was lying on the table there.

"Ralph's writing!" he murmured, with a glitter in his eyes. "Now we shall see!" And he eagerly tore open the letter.

It was the day following that upon which Kildare had met his brother in the ruined castle near the school. Monteith had waited eagerly for the reply to come to the letter he had written to his cousin in London.

As yet the New House prefect had not allowed a word to escape him of his discovery concerning Kildare. He had left Micky's letter lying on Kildare's table, just as he had found it, and there the captain of St. Jim's had seen it on his return to the school, much to his relief. He had immediately secured it, and Monteith's unconscious look when next they met had assured him that the prefect had not read it.

Monteith did not mean to show his hand till he was sure that he held the trumps. Now his eyes quickly scanned the letter written by his cousin Ralph in reply to his inquiry.

"Dear James," it ran,—"I don't know how the news got to you so soon, but it is quite true. Michael Kildare has stolen a very valuable diamond belonging to Lord Glyndon, and has succeeded in getting clear away with it. There is a warrant out for his arrest, and he is certain of a long term of imprisonment when he is captured.

"It is an unfortunate business, and, but for the young man's prompt flight on finding his guilt discovered, suspicion might have fallen on others. It is to be hoped that he will soon be laid by the heels and given his deserts.

"By the way, I want you to do me a little favour. When I saw you on your last vacation, you may remember a little matter we discussed. As I know I can trust to your discretion to burn this letter, I may as well speak plainly. I have been working for some time to get Messrs. Stein & Stein's business in my hands, for my own purposes, and this unlucky affair has created a furore that may be very disadvantageous to me. I am afraid of something coming to light that may show my guileless employers that their manager is intending to take their business away for himself as soon as all is prepared for that final step. Of course, this is only business, and you understand it perfectly; but if Stein & Stein got wind of anything, it would be all U P with me. So, until the unusual excitement here has blown over, I want to get a certain bundle of documents in a safe place.

"Will you take charge of them for me? The documents are purely business ones, and I could not destroy them without great inconvenience afterwards, and I do not know a safe place for them, under the circumstances. I am taking your consent for granted, and am sending the package down soon after you get this letter. As I do not care to trust them to the post, a special messenger will bring them down, and in order to avoid exciting remark, I have arranged for him to deliver the package to you at Rylcombe railway-station. He will be down by the seven p.m., and you will meet him. Show him the enclosed card.

"You don't mind doing this for me, do you? I enclose a five-pound note, as I know you boys are always short of money.—Your affectionate cousin,

"RALPH MONTEITH."

The prefect laid down the letter. There was a crisp five-pound note in the envelope, and James Monteith took it out with a good deal of satisfaction. It was not very like his cousin to be so generous, and the tip was extremely acceptable.

"Of course I'll do it for him!" Monteith muttered. "He's playing a pretty dangerous game at Stein & Stein's, and risking a good berth, but I suppose he knows his own business best. It won't hurt me to take charge of a bundle of papers. I can shove them in my desk till he wants them."

Monteith struck a match and ignited the letter. He held it in his finger and thumb till only a fragment remained unconsumed, and this he dropped into the grate.

"That's done. Now about the package. At seven o'clock I can't go, but I can send Figgy. The messenger won't know him; but he wouldn't know me either for that matter, if he shows him Ralph's card, that's all that's required."

Monteith picked up the slip of pasteboard that had fallen from the letter when he opened it. He glanced at it with a frown. It did not bear his cousin's name.

"Mr. Horace J. Harris."

That was the name on the card.

"I don't quite understand this!" murmured the prefect. "What Ralph shouldn't use his own card. I suppose the messenger his real name, as he wants to

keep the whole matter dark. I don't think I half like it. However, I'm in for it now."

He glanced at his watch, and opened the study door.

"Fag! F-a-a-g!" There was no reply to his call. Monteith stamped his foot. "F-a-a-a-g!"

Figgins came along the passage.

"Hallo, Monteith, were you calling?"

"Yes; confound you!" said the prefect angrily. "You'd better come a little more quickly next time, or you'll hear from me!"

"Just having a little talk with Fatty Wynn," said Figgins cheerfully. "We were arguing—"

"I don't want to know all that. I want you—"

"Yes," said Figgins; "but we were arguing—"

"I tell you—"

"We were arguing whether you'd give me a pass to go down to—"

Monteith was about to reach for a cane, but he suddenly paused.

"Eh? What? You want a pass to go out?"

"Yes," said Figgins, emboldened by the prefect's change of manner; "I want to go down to Rylcombe, please, Monteith. That's what we were arguing about. Fatty said you wouldn't give me one. I said that such a kind-hearted, generous chap as you are would be sure—"

"Shut up all that!" said the prefect tersely. "I'll give you the pass if you like!"

"Thanks!" said the delighted Figgins. "Anything I can do for you in the town, Monteith? I'm going to the tuck-shop—I mean the post-office," said Figgins, correcting himself hastily. "Can I bring you some—some stamps?"

The tuck-shop and the post-office were the same establishment in Rylcombe, but it was easy for Monteith to guess which branch of the business Figgins intended to patronise.

"No," said the prefect, apparently not observing Figgins's little slip of the tongue; "I don't want any stamps. I want you to go to the railway-station."

"Certainly! What for?"

"I've got a packet of—of photographic films coming down," said Monteith. "They're very delicate, and I'm getting them down by special messenger."

Figgins whistled.

"My hat, they'll cost you something—"

"Never mind that. All you've got to do is to take the packet from the messenger at the railway-station. He will be there at exactly seven, so you've got no time to lose."

"How will he know me?"

"You'll show him this card. That's the name of the dealer who is sending them."

"Right-ho! Can I take Kerr with me?"

"To help you carry the stamps?" asked Monteith sarcastically.

Figgins coloured.

"No; but it's a lonely road, and—"

"Oh, take him if you like!" said Monteith. "Mind, the photographic films are awfully valuable, and if you lose them I'll skin you alive!"

"I'll take care of them!" said Figgins cheerfully. "They shall be as the apple of my eye, the care of my giddy heart. Gimme the pass, and I'll scuttle."

Monteith, as a prefect, was empowered to grant leave of absence to the juniors. He wrote out the pass and signed it, and Figgins, hugely pleased, hurried off to his study.

"Well, have you got the pass?" demanded Fatty Wynn when he entered. "I'll bet you Marmaduke's gold watch that you haven't!"

Figgins flourished it before his nose.

"Look at it, then!"

"Well, I'm blessed!" exclaimed Kerr. "I never thought you'd get it, Figgy! Cad Monteith isn't over-fond of this study."

"Well, I don't think I should have got it," said Figgy frankly, "only Monteith wants me to go to the village for him."

"Oh, I see! That accounts for the milk in the cocoanut. What does Monteith want you to do in Rylcombe?"

"He's got some photographic films coming down by special messenger from London—"

"Some what—from where?"

Figgins repeated his statement.

"He must have a lot of money to chuck away," said Kerr. "You don't want better films than you can get in Rylcombe. He's been stuffing you, Figgy."

"Well, I thought it was funny; but I suppose he knows what's in the giddy packet," said Figgins. "Anyway, it doesn't matter to us. I've got to meet the messenger at the station and get the package, and that's all I know, or want to know. It happens mighty luckily for us, doesn't it?"

"What-ho!" agreed Kerr. "We're in luck! We shall get that feed, after all!"

And Fatty Wynn smiled a smile of joyousness.

The previous day's disappointment had been a heavy one to Fatty. He had looked forward to looting the School House picnic, and he had had to return hungry home. Figgins said that he would never be happy till he had had a feed, and Marmaduke's father happening to send him a couple of sovereigns the following morning, it had been decided that the greater part of that munificent tip should be expended in a study brew.

New regulations were in force at the school shop, and it was not so easy as of yore to lay in supplies there for surreptitious feeds. Therefore Figgins had intended to get a pass from some prefect to go down to the village. Monteith's errand had, consequently, come as a boon and a blessing to the chief of the New House juniors.

"Take care of that grub, Figgy," said Wynn anxiously, as Figgins took his cap. "Mind none of those horrid School House bounders get on your track. They're quite capable of waylaying you and pinching the feed."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Figgins. "Just what we were trying to do to them yesterday. I know it would break your heart to lose this feed, Fatty; but let's be fair. If Study No. 6 could get it away from us, it would be all in the game."

"But mind they don't," said Fatty Wynn, almost tearfully.

"Rather!" said Figgins. "I've got permission for Kerr to come with me. If those bounders should be on the track we'll baffle 'em between us. But I don't see how even Blake can have scented this. We haven't said a word to a soul."

"No; but he's as sharp as a needle; and he's looking out for a chance to pay us back for busting up his concert last week."

"Oh, we'll be all right, and the grub will be safe!" said Figgy. "Don't you worry, or you'll grow thin, and that would be an awful blow. Come on, Kerr!"

And Figgins and Kerr left the study, the former carrying a big baize cricket-bag, which he intended to be filled when he returned to St. Jim's with the various good things for the study "feed."

The two juniors having departed in high spirits, Fatty Wynn went to Monteith's study to do the fagging Figgins should have done. He found the prefect putting on his coat.

"Won't you want your tea, Monteith?" asked Wynn.

"No," said Monteith. "You can get my supper ready for when I come in. By the way, Wynn, I hear that you had an adventure yesterday."

"You mean at the old castle?" asked Fatty, who had related that thrilling experience to half the Lower Form boys at the college, and was mightily pleased to get a prefect to listen to the tale. "You mean about the lunatic?"

"Yes," said Monteith, with a slight smile. "Is it all gas, or did you meet some funny merchant at the ruined castle?"

"We did, really!" exclaimed Fatty. "We went there to surprise Blake and the School House cads. We thought they were picnicking in the ruins. They weren't there, but there was a funny bounder hiding among the ruins."

"You saw him?"

"Yes, as plain as I see you. You see, we jumped in on him suddenly, thinking the School House cads were there. He was frightened out of his wits, and he scuttled away like a giddy rabbit."

And Fatty grinned at the recollection.

"Where did he go?" asked Monteith, with interest.

"He ran down into the vaults."

"What was he like to look at?"

"Oh, a young man, I think, as white as a sheet; and his clothes were awfully dirty, as if he had been sleeping in the ruins," said Fatty, taxing his memory.

"Was he like anybody you know?"

Fatty Wynn looked at him wonderingly.

"No, not that I know of, Monteith. I didn't notice."

"All right, Wynn, you can cut. If Sefton wants me, tell him I'm gone over to Wayland about my new bicycle."

"Yes, Monteith."

And Fatty Wynn left the study. Monteith's questioning had aroused no suspicion in his mind, as it might have in the mind of the more sagacious Figgins. He did not trouble to ask himself what was the cause of the prefect's interest in the mysterious lurker in the old castle.

Monteith smiled sourly to himself as he put on his hat.

"It's plain enough," he murmured. "It was Micky Kildare, our respected captain's brother, whom they met at the old castle. The school would be a bit surprised to know the true facts, I think. And I fancy they will soon know them—unless Kildare comes to terms."

And the prefect's eyes glittered. That unpleasant smile was still lingering on his face when he left the New House, passed out of the gates of St. Jim's, and strode away in the summer dusk. And the route he followed was the one leading to the ruined castle, the haunt of the unhappy fugitive.

## CHAPTER 5.

## A Startling Meeting!

"MICKY!" Kildare called the name softly as he stepped into the shadowy ruins of the old castle. The golden sunset was on the woods and the fields, but in the ruined castle the shadows were deepening.

The captain of St. Jim's carried a big bundle under his arm, as he strode into the ruins, and made for the recess where he had left his brother.

"Micky!"

A pale face looked out from among the piled masonry.

"Eric! I'm glad it's you. Come on!"

Kildare clambered over the stones and debris, and joined his brother in the shadowy recess, safe from prying eyes. Micky was trembling. He had caught the sound of Kildare's footsteps before he heard his voice, and that sound was sufficient to rouse all his terrors and send the blood pulsing wildly to his heart.

Kildare could see how the poor fellow's heart was thumping, and his own ached with pity for the unfortunate fugitive. Micky had never been a strong character, and the last few days had told terribly upon him. He seemed to be in the state of a frightened hare fearing the teeth of the hounds close behind him, snapping, at every other moment.

"Poor old Mick!" said Kildare. "This is a hard time for you."

"It would be harder but for you, Eric, old man," said the other. "God bless you! I—I know I'm an awful coward, Eric. But—but you don't know what it is to have the police after you; to feel that every man's hand is against you; to feel that the whole country regards you as an outsider, and is ready to lay you by the heels. It's—it's simply awful, Eric!"

"I know it must be, old chap. I am sure of that."

"Those youngsters yesterday—they startled me out of my wits. Oh, Eric, what if they chatter about what they saw, and people get curious—"

"That's all right," said Kildare reassuringly. "They'll soon forget all about it. Nobody is likely to come here to look for you."

"I suppose not; yet—"

"Keep your pecker up. You will be all right. I've brought you some more things. How did you get on last night?"

"Pretty well. It's so horribly lonely, and the least sound disturbs me. I can't help feeling that the police will soon know where I am."

"That's not likely, or they'd have been here by this. They can't know the direction you have cut in."

"No; yet if they knew I had a brother at St. Jim's they might guess—and they may learn that fact at any moment."

"Don't be frightened at shadows, Micky. Here, get outside some of this grub, and you'll feel a lot better."

Kildare forced his brother to sit down and eat. Between each mouthful Micky cast uneasy glances to right and left. Suddenly he started up.

"Did you hear that?"

"What was it, Micky?"

"A stone falling—a footstep. Somebody was coming into the ruins."

Kildare smiled pityingly.

"It's only your nerves, Micky. There's nothing in a stone falling."

"I'm sure it's someone. Look, Eric! Look, just to satisfy me!"

Kildare patiently rose, and clambering upon a mass of old wall, he surveyed the ruins so far as he could see them. There was no sign of a human being near. After a glance round, Kildare rejoined Micky, who was waiting and watching him with wild, restless eyes.

"There was no one?"

"Nobody at all," said Kildare, as cheerfully as he could. "This place is awfully lonely, Mick. There's no chance of anybody coming here. Those juniors came quite by chance yesterday, because it was a half-holiday, and they won't come again."

"I suppose not. But next Saturday is another half-holiday."

"Yes," said Kildare, with a sigh, thinking of a cricket fixture arranged for that day, and feeling a pang of remorse at the thought that he had given less attention to the college cricket lately than his duty required. His anxiety for his brother had overmastered everything else for the time being. "But you can be easy, Mick. Nobody will come near the ruins on Saturday. There's a match with Headland at the school, and every boy at St. Jim's will make a point of seeing it."

"I was thinking of camping down in the vaults," said

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Micky: "but—but it's so horribly dark and eerie there. I—I couldn't stand it."

"You'll be all right here, Mick, so long as nobody comes; and I tell you there's no chance of that," said Kildare. "You don't find it cold?"

"No; the weather's warm enough for camping out, and the blankets you brought me last night were comfy enough. How did you get them? Won't they be missed?"

"No; I managed that all right. I've brought you some clothes to-day, so that you can get a change in case it's necessary to hurry off at any time. If the scent does come near, you will have to run for it. I've put into this purse all the tin I could raise, too. I've borrowed some off some of the fellows, and there's nearly six pounds there, Micky."

"Thanks, Eric—thanks, old chap! It may mean the saving of me, if I have to run."

"It might. To-morrow I'm going to the costumier's, in Rylcombe, to get you a false moustache and some paint," said Kildare. "That will give you a better chance if you have to cut and run. Though where you'd run to, Heaven knows."

"If I could get out of the country—"

"Yes, if you have to run, you'd better make for Liverpool or Southampton, and send me word from there, so that I can send you money. It's no good letting the people at home know where you are. The police are sure to question them, and it's best for them to be able to say truthfully that they don't know anything about your movements."

"Suppose they visited you, and asked you whether you knew anything, Eric?"

"Well, don't worry about that till it happens," said the captain of St. Jim's. "And in my opinion, it's not at all likely to happen."

"Is anything known at the school yet about this?"

"Nothing, Micky. Not a word."

"It must be in the papers."

"Well, we don't see much of the papers there, you know. Some of the masters may have seen it, but they wouldn't say anything, even to me. The fellows haven't a suspicion."

"It would be horrible for you if it came out."

"I could stand it, I suppose. I know you're innocent."

"But the others don't know it," said Micky wistfully; "and they mightn't believe it. Have you any enemies who could make capital out of it against you?"

Kildare thought of Monteith, and smiled grimly.

"Oh, I'm not going to bother my head about that, Micky," he replied, without directly answering the question.

"Let's talk about yourself. What I should like to get at is who really committed that theft."

Micky made a hopeless gesture.

"I can't think, Eric. It was somebody in the place who found Mr. Monteith's key, and used it, and then shoved it into my pocket."

"Had you an enemy there?"

"No; I was on the best of terms with everybody."

Kildare sighed. Micky had always been on the best of terms with everybody everywhere; and that was one of the causes of his unsatisfactory career. He was nobody's enemy but his own.

"Then the thief, whoever he was, could only have had for his motive the desire to shift suspicion off himself and upon another?" said Kildare thoughtfully.

"Yes, I suppose so."

"I wish I knew more about the matter, or were upon the spot. I can't help thinking it was strange for Mr. Monteith to give you a chance of escaping. That was as bad for you as the key being found in your pocket. But you're not eating, Micky. Try this pigeon-pie."

Kildare unfastened the rest of the things he had brought for his brother. An additional blanket, a tin kettle, and a small spirit-stove, and a dozen other necessaries, showed how careful Kildare had been in thinking of the fugitive's comfort. There was, besides, a considerable quantity of food, with tea, cocoa, and some cooking utensils and crockery-ware.

Micky smiled faintly as he saw the collection.

"You must have pretty well stripped your study, old fellow."

Kildare laughed, glad enough to see even a momentary brightness in the fugitive's despondent face.

"Yes; but the things will be easily replaced," he said.

"Your fag may miss them."

"He's pretty sure to do so," smiled Kildare. "But, fortunately, I have an invaluable fag, who has the rare faculty of minding his own business. Jack Blake is a treasure in that line, and I can rely upon him not to chatter, however curious he may be."

"That's fortunate. Are you coming again to-morrow evening?"

"Yes, to bring you the things I spoke of. I shall get

away on Saturday, too, if I can; but that may be impossible, as there's certain to be something of a time after the Headland match, especially if we beat them. Of course, I must be careful not to let anyone know that I am visiting the ruins."

"Yes, yes, for goodness' sake!" exclaimed Micky, shivering. "Some inquisitive fellow might even follow you to see what you were up to. If there's the slightest danger, don't come. It's horribly lonely for me here, but better that than arrest."

"Right. I'm keeping on the look-out for news, and if the truth comes out, Micky, I shall come to you like a shot, to let you know the danger's over."

Kildare spoke cheerfully, far more cheerfully than he felt. He could not help realising that the case was very black against Micky, and that the truth might never come to light. This stigma would probably cling to the unhappy scapegoat all the rest of his life, even if he evaded arrest. But such thoughts as these Kildare did not utter. His desire was to cheer Micky up as much as possible, and truly the poor fellow needed it.

Micky shook his head despondently. "I'm afraid that won't happen, Eric. My only chance is to lie low till the hue-and-cry is over a bit, and then scuttle out of the country. It's horrible, but I believe that's the best I can do. I don't care much for myself. I was always a rolling stone, but how will the old folks bear the disgrace? That's what cuts deep." And Micky covered his face with his hands.

Kildare sighed. He was thinking of that all the time. His parents would believe, would know, that Micky was innocent. But the verdict of all the world would be against him, and the disgrace of the crime would fall upon a name that had never been disgraced before.

"We must hope for the best, Mick," said the captain of St. Jim's quietly. "I am sure you are safe from the police here, and that's the principal thing, after all." He looked at his watch. "Now I think I had better go, or I shall be missed. I have to take the calling-over at the school." He rose to his feet.

"I'm sorry you're going, Eric. You seem to have been here only a minute," said Micky. "Come again as soon as you can."

"I've brought you some books, Mick, in that parcel, so you won't be so bored to-morrow," said Kildare. "Well, good-bye, old chap." He took his brother's shaking hand in his firm, strong clasp.

Micky gave a sudden start. "Listen, Eric! There's that sound again! There's somebody in the ruins! I tell you there is!" he cried, in a shrill whisper.

Kildare himself had given a slight start this time. It was the sound of stones clinking under a foot, quite close at hand, that had come clearly through the still, evening air.

Was there someone lurking in the ruined castle, after all? A tremor of uneasiness passed through the captain of St. Jim's, but he would not allow his brother to see that he was disquieted.

"It's all right, Mick. Only a falling stone. I'll look carefully round as I go, though, and make sure that there was nobody there. There's always some fragment of mortar or something rattling down in these shaky old ruins."

Micky was only half-satisfied, but Kildare's manner quite deceived him as to the real thoughts of the captain of St. Jim's.

In his heart Kildare knew that there was somebody in the ruins, and he was inwardly determined to know whom it was before he left the spot.

"Well, good-bye, Eric," said Micky, in a low voice, wringing his brother's hand. "You've been an awfully good chap to me, and I'll never forget it, however this wretched affair turns out. God bless you!"

And Kildare, with a last reassuring look, clambered over the piled masonry and left the recess; left Micky feeling more assured than he felt himself. As he disappeared from his brother's sight a grim and hard expression came over Kildare's handsome face. There was someone in the ruins, and from the closeness of the sound he had heard, he was almost certain that that someone had been spying upon him, perhaps listening to the talk between Micky and himself.

The ruins seemed to be quite deserted as the captain of

**ANSWERS**  
ONE PENNY.

Every Tuesday.

**DON'T MISS**

the Long, Complete, School Tale in

"THE GEM" LIBRARY PRIZE 14

The British

St. Jim's glanced keenly and quickly round. He went with a quiet but rapid step towards the ruined arch, beyond which lay the path down the hill. If anyone had just left the ruined castle, he could not possibly be out of sight yet, unless he hid in the bushes.

Kildare came quickly out upon the path, and then uttered a low, suppressed exclamation. There had been someone in the castle, truly, someone he knew! James Monteith was just striding down the path. He turned his head at Kildare's exclamation, and their eyes met. For a moment they looked at each other in silence, and a sudden paleness came into the prefect's face at Kildare's look.

The captain of St. Jim's set his teeth hard. With a rapid step he reached Monteith, and his hand fell in a grip of iron on the prefect's shoulder.

"Monteith, what are you doing here?"

### CHAPTER 6.

#### Blake has an idea—and so has Percy Mellish.

"HA, ha, ha!"

Jack Blake's chums looked at him as he burst into that laugh, wondering if the chief of Study No. 6 had suddenly taken leave of his wits.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What's the matter with the image?" said Digby. "What are you giggling at, ass?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Herries seized Jack Blake by the shoulders, and jammed him against the wall of the gymnasium. "Now, what are you cackling about?" he demanded.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Digby came to the aid of Herries, and Blake's head was solemnly knocked against the wall, while Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stood by surveying the proceeding with approval through his famous eyeglass.

"Here, chuck that!" gasped Blake. "Can't I laugh without starting you acting like a lot of giddy lunatics? It's the joke of the season."

"Will you explain if we let you go?"

"Yes, honour bright."

They released him, and Blake rubbed the back of his head. "Now, what's the giddy joke?" demanded three voices at once.

"You know that the chaps have been talking about old Figgy's adventure at the ruins yesterday? They startled some escaped lunatic, or something, who was hiding there."

"Yes, we know that; what about it?"

"Why, what do you think Figgins & Co. were there for?"

"Blessed if I know," said Herries. "They went there, I suppose."

"Herries, old man, if you keep on making brilliant deductions like that, you'll make Sherlock Holmes and Sexton Blake green with envy," said Blake. "As they were there, we naturally infer that they went there."

"Oh, don't rot. Get on with the washing."

"Well, they didn't take that long walk for nothing, or for the fun of the thing. My idea is that they knew we were going to picnic there, and went there on the war-path, to go for us and scoff the provisions."

"My hat! Then we had a narrow escape of having a slogging match instead of a picnic."

"Exactly. It wouldn't have hurt us much, for, of course, we'd soon have knocked the New House chads into the middle of next week, or right along into the football season," said Blake, with a superior smile. "But what I was going to say is, that I believe Figgy has made up his mind to have that feed after all, although he couldn't collar ours."

"How do you know anything about it?"

"By keeping my eyes open, my son," said Blake. "If you had done the same, you would have seen the cause of that sweet smile of mine which made you so curious. I just spotted Figgins and Kerr going out at the gates, that's all."

"Well, chaps have been out at the gates before now, and nothing very special has come of it," Herries remarked.

Blake gave him a pitying smile. "Yes, but that isn't all. Figgins had a cricket-bag folded up under his arm, and they turned to the left. Now, that means that they are going to Rylcombe, and what do they want an empty bag for?"

"To buy some cricketing things, perhaps."

"Yes, and perhaps not. I could tell by the look on Figgy's face that it wasn't anything so innocent as that. Take my word for it, kids, that they're gone to the tuck-shop. I may mention," went on Blake, in an airy way, "that Marmaduke Smythe had a registered letter this morning."

"Oh, he did, did he? And how do you know, when it must have been delivered to him in the New House?" asked Digby.

"I know, because Percy Mellish told me. Mellish knows everything that goes on. He isn't particular about looking over people's shoulders, and peeping through keyholes, and his information is usually reliable, though you want to kick him for the way he gets hold of it. Now, my belief is that Figgins and Kerr have gone to blow some of that tip from Marmy's pater."

"Shouldn't wonder," said Herries thoughtfully. "It begins to look probable. And if those two New House bouncers have gone to Rylcombe for tuck, why, that's where we come in."

Blake slapped him on the back. "You're getting brighter every day, Herries. You'll be absolutely sensible, some time, if you live long enough: say about as old as Methuselah. Yes, my pippins, Figgins wanted to bag our feed yesterday, and he made a ghastly frost of it. We're going to bag his to-day; but there won't be any frost this time."

The chums were looking eager now. Blake had reasoned it out pretty clearly, and it looked pretty certain that things were just as he said.

The chums of the School House were still feeling somewhat sore about the way the New House had wrecked their concert of the previous week, and this chance of getting their own back on Figgins & Co. was a stroke of luck. Besides, there was the "feed" to be considered; besides the triumph over Figgins & Co., there would be a feast in Study No. 6, and a satirical letter of thanks to be written to Figgins & Co. afterwards.

"But I say," said Digby, "Figgy must have a pass, you know, to go out at this time. It's close on locking-up, and we can't—"

"My dear kid, if it were necessary, we'd risk being absent from calling-over, for the sake of getting one better than Figgins & Co.," said Blake, "but I don't think it will be necessary. You know I'm buying a new bat at Jones's, don't you?"

"Yes, what about it?"

"If I ask Kildare for a pass to go and see about it, he'll give me one. Of course, as a truthful person, I shall go and see about it. Then we can scuttle back and waylay Figgins & Co. between here and the village."

"But will Kildare give us more than one pass?" asked Herries doubtfully. "He may guess that there's something in the wind."

"Herries, old man, you're not born for a diplomat. All we need is a little diplomacy. Leave it to your uncle Blake."

"Well, I for one don't see how you are going to fix it," said Herries obstinately. "If only one goes, he can't touch Figgy, and two would be no good. We want four of us at least to make sure of looting the tommy."

"That's what I think I can fix," said Blake. "We shall all have to go, to make sure of the loot. Leave it to me. I'm going to Kildare now." And Blake marched off to the captain's study.

He met with a disappointment there; there was no answer to his knock, and when he opened the door, he saw that the room was empty. He looked in the gym, and the Sixth Form-room, but there was no Kildare to be seen, and presently he came upon Darrel, the captain's chum, and asked him if he had seen the object of his quest.

"He went out some time ago," said Darrel. "I expect he will be back for calling-over, if you want to see him."

"That won't do," said Blake. "Fact is, Darrel, I want a pass to go out. I've got a new cricket-bat coming to Jones's. They hadn't one I liked in stock, and—"

"You can go down for it Saturday afternoon."

"We're playing Headland," said Blake, with an injured look. "You don't think any of us would out a First Eleven cricket-match, do you, Darrel?"

"I suppose you want to get a pass from me?" laughed Darrel. "All right, Blake, I'll give you one if you'll promise not to go to the tuck-shop in Rylcombe."

"Honour bright!" exclaimed Blake joyfully. "And, I say, Darrel, could you give me a pass for old Herries to come with me? It's rotten going alone, you know!"

"Oh, very well!" said Darrel good-humouredly.

And the School House prefect wrote out the double pass. Blake pocketed it joyfully.

"Many thanks, Darrel!" he exclaimed. "I'll do something for you some day. If you want to be put up to any little wrinkles in cricket before we meet the Headland fellows, I'll give you an hour at the nets—"

"Be off, you cheeky young rascal!" exclaimed Darrel, laughing. And Blake scuttled away, extremely well satisfied with himself.

He did not immediately rejoin his chums, but made his way to Rushden's study, where that School House senior was wrestling with a problem in trigonometry. He tapped and went in, and Rushden looked up with a worried expression.

"RED MULLET"

A Story of Kit and Cora, the Brother and Sister Detectives.

IN "PLUCK," ID.

"RUN OUT!"

A Tale of School Days, the Twins & Co. AND  
By H. Clarke Book.

NEKT SATURDAY:

"Hallo-hallo, what do you want, Blake?"

"I say, Rushden, I'm awfully sorry to bother you now, as I can see you're busy—"

"Cut the cackle! What do you want—quick?"

"Darrel gave me a pass to go down to Rylcombe about my new bat—"

"Well, go, and be hanged to you!" said Rushden. "I'm busy!"

"I don't want to go alone—"

"Well, don't go alone, then! Cut—"

"Now, that's awfully good of you, Rushden!" exclaimed Blake. "You'll give me a pass for old Dig. to go with me, won't you?"

"Yes; I suppose I sha'n't get rid of you unless I do," said Rushden. And he wrote out the pass for Digby and threw it to Blake. "Now cut!"

"You're a good sort, Rushden, and I don't mind telling you so," said Blake. "If I can help you with that problem you're doing—"

"Get out!"

Blake got out.

A few minutes later he tapped at Mr. Kidd's door. Mr. Kidd was the master of the School House at St. Jim's, and a kind and genial master. The youngsters were never afraid to ask him a favour.

"Come in, my lad! What can I do for you, Blake?" he asked, with a smile. Mr. Kidd liked the scapegrace of the School House, as did nearly everybody at St. Jim's.

"If you please, sir, you don't mind my asking you—"

Blake began demurely.

"Certainly not! Go on!"

"I've got a pass to go down to the village, sir, about my new cricket-bat," said Blake, in his most ingenuous manner.

"Would you mind giving me a pass for D'Arcy to come with me? I want to take him for a run."

"Who gave you your pass, Blake?"

"Darrel, sir."

"Very good! I suppose that's all right, then. There's no reason why you should go alone, so D'Arcy may certainly go with you."

Mr. Kidd took pen and paper. Jack Blake had turned very red.

"Here it is, Blake." The housemaster looked curiously at Blake's reddened face. "What is the matter with you, Blake? You have surely told me the truth?"

"Yes, sir," said Blake hesitatingly. "But—but, I don't want to take you in—I mean deceive you, sir. I wasn't going alone, and you said—"

Mr. Kidd laughed heartily.

"I see, you wanted another companion. I am glad to see you so truthful, Blake. It is very right of you to speak out when you saw me making a false assumption. You do not, as a matter of fact, really need the pass for D'Arcy."

Blake's face fell.

"No, no, sir; but I should awfully like him to come."

"Well, I will not make you suffer for being veracious," said the housemaster. "Here is the pass. It is understood that the tuck-shop is barred?"

"Certainly, sir! Thank you very much!"

And Blake hurried away with the coveted pass.

Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy were still waiting for him where he had left them, under the window of the gym. They looked at him inquiringly as he came up. Blake flourished the passes before their amazed eyes.

"Well, what do you say now, you doubling Thomases?" he exclaimed. "Here you are, passes all round! And this is where we go on the giddy war-path!"

"How did you get them?"

"Diplomacy, my dear kid—diplomacy!" said Blake.

"But there's no time to waste! Come along, and let's get over the ground! We want to get ahead of Figgy, and so we shall have to cut across the fields, and do some sprinting, to finish at Jones's and then get ahead of the New House bouncers coming back, to ambush them. Come on!"

The famous four hurried away. They passed out of the gates of St. Jim's, and took the shortest cut to Rylcombe. Little did they dream that, after they were gone, a grinning face looked out of the window of the gym, just above where they had been standing.

The face belonged to Percy Mellish, the Peeping-Tom of the School House, who, from within the building, had overheard every word uttered by the four chums. And Percy was grinning hugely.

There was a rivalry between Blake and Percy—or, rather, there was a rivalry on Percy's side, for Blake never deigned to rival him. But Percy Mellish, though his abilities were not particularly conspicuous, had a great ambition to shine, and he deemed himself a far better leader for the School House juniors than Blake could ever be. He had had one or two tries at the giddy eminence, but had come a cropper each time, as Blake put it, and he had rather given up the

idea lately. But he was always on the look-out for chance to score over Blake.

"My only Aunt Matilda Sempronica," ejaculated Percy Mellish, as he stared after the chums of Study No. 6. "Blake I fancy I shall get my own back this time! I know for a fact that Figgins has gone for grub—there is no doubt on that point at all—and now Blake is pretty certain to collar it. Perhaps Blake won't be the chap who eats it, though!"

And Percy Mellish, chuckling, left the gym. He sought out Walsh, who was his study-mate, and imparted to him the information he had gained. Walsh's eyes glistened.

"That's all right!" he said. "It will be one up for the School House; and now we know about it, I dare say we can make Blake shell out a share to us."

Percy Mellish grinned.

"I've got a better idea than that," he answered. "We'll let Blake collar the loot. It will be one up against the New House, and, of course, we want that as much as Blake does. But when he's got the loot away from Figgins & Co., that's where we come in."

"What are you driving at?"

"Why, Blake's awfully cocky, and it would do him good to take him down a peg, you know. He's going to loot the Tommy from Figgins. Why shouldn't we loot it from him?"

"Ha, ha, ha! That would be a sell for Study No. 6!"

"They put on too many airs in Study No. 6," said Mellish. "My idea is to take a lot of the fellows into the secret, and loot the grub out of Blake's study. Trust me to get a chance! Then we'll have all the fellows to the feed, and snap our fingers at Blake & Co."

"It's a go!" said Walsh. "But how shall we get the Tommy?"

"Trust me for that. Now, let's go and tell the chaps. This will be the joke of the season against Study No. 6."

And so the plot was plotted; to be followed by strange and startling consequences that the juniors little dreamed of at that moment.

## CHAPTER 7.

### A Successful Ambush.

F IGGINS halted outside the tuck-shop in the village. The church clock was booming out the hour of seven.

"Now," said the New House chief, "you can get the grub, Kerr, while I go on to the station, and get Monteith's packet of films. Here's the list we made of the things. Shove 'em into the bag, and I'll be with you by the time you're ready."

"Right-ho!" said Kerr.

Figgins hurried on towards the little railway-station of Rylcombe, the card in his hand which he was to show to the messenger bringing the packet from London. Kerr entered the tuck-shop.

The list was a long one, as nearly a couple of sovereigns were to be expended on the feed, and Kerr was soon busy with the selection of the articles. They were packed into the bag, which was pretty well filled out when they were stowed away. By the time Kerr was ready to start for the school Figgins came in.

The chief of the New House juniors carried a package in his hand. It was a package of good size, wrapped in thick brown paper and sealed, and felt like a cardboard box inside. Kerr glanced at it.

"Is that Monteith's package, Figgy?"

"Yes. Got it all right. The messenger was waiting, and he gave it to me like a shot when I showed him the card," said Figgins cheerfully. "It's all right, you see! Blessed if I know what Monteith wanted to have his films down by special messenger for!"

"Rats!" said Kerr. "That package doesn't contain films!"

"Why should Monteith yarn about it, then?"

"I don't know. Perhaps it's something he oughtn't to have—cigars or something. Well, it's nothing to do with us. The grub's all ready. Shove that in, Figgy, and I'll fasten up the bag."

"Right you are!"

Monteith's package was put in along with the provisions, and Kerr secured the bag. The latter was of considerable weight, and the juniors took it in turns to carry it. They were in a gleeful mood, however, as they left Rylcombe, and started along the dusky lane to St. Jim's.

"What strikes me as funny," said Figgins, "is how Blake will tear his hair when he learns what a chance he's missed. If he had the faintest suspicion of this, he'd be on the war-path like a shot."

"Lucky for us he doesn't smell a mouse," said Kerr.

"Where should we be if the four of them pounced on us, Figgy?"

"Well, we'd give them a tussle," said Figgins. "There'd

be some thick ears strowed around before we let them collar our grub."

"Hallo, did you hear that?"

"Hear what?"

"It was a whistle behind the hedge there."

"Some bird, I suppose. What did you think it was?"

"Well, you were speaking of Blake," said Kerr. "I fancied for a moment it might be a signal. It would be an awful sell if—"

"Oh, rot!" said Figgins uneasily. "You seem to have got Blake on the brain! Let's hurry a bit, though; the sooner we get to the school the better."

They quickened their pace. In spite of Figgins's words of assurance, he cast glances to right and left. The lane here was bordered with high hedges, with frequent gaps, and it occurred to Figgins that it was just the place for an ambush.

If Blake had known anything about that expedition, Figgins would certainly have thought that the whistle was a signal from a scout, to announce that the New House juniors were coming; but then, it was quite impossible that Blake knew anything at all about it, he thought. Still, he was uneasy.

There was a sudden shout on the evening air:

"Go for them!"

Three figures came with a bound into the lane from a gap in the hedge. Figgins halted, his nostrils dilated, his eyes gleaming. His worst fears were realised!

Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy were rushing upon the New House juniors. And from behind them came a pattering of feet. Digby was following the New House pair, after having given the signal to the ambush that they were approaching. Kerr had been right; the whistle had been a signal to foes in ambush.

The bag dropped to the ground between Figgins and Kerr, and the two juniors of the New House stood with clenched fists to repel an attack. The odds were against them, but they did not mean to abandon their precious possession without a desperate struggle.

Right at them came the School House chums, and in a few seconds a wild and whirling conflict was raging in the dusky lane. Figgins and Jack Blake closed in deadly strife, and went reeling and staggering to and fro, trampling up the dust and gasping excitedly. Kerr sent D'Arcy reeling into the ditch with a blow under the chin, which made the unfortunate swell of the School House see stars, but the next moment Kerr was down with Herries on top of him, sitting on his chest.

Digby came running up, and instantly collared the well-filled bag.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed. "Here's a giddy prize! Figgy, old man, it's simply too awfully good of you to lay in a feed like this for us."

"Let our grub alone, you measly School House cad!" roared Figgins.

"Yes, not half, Figgy."

Figgins made a furious effort, and Blake went down. The lanky Figgins sprawled over him, and Jack Blake gasped.

"Here, lend a hand!" shouted Blake. "Somebody collar this brute!"

D'Arcy had extracted himself from the ditch, which was fortunately not more than half full of water. The swell of St. Jim's looked a shocking sight, and he was in a mood for vengeance, hot and strong. He rushed at Figgy and dragged him off Blake. Figgins went down on his back in the dust, and D'Arcy sat on his face. As D'Arcy had just been sitting in a slimy ditch, that wasn't nice for Figgins. He gasped and choked and squirmed, and—bit!

Arthur Augustus gave a fiendish yell and leaped into the air.

"Hallo! What's the matter?" demanded Blake.

"The howwid boundah bit my leg!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "What a howling cad!"

"Ha, ha!" Blake pinned Figgins down before he could rise. "Figgy, old man, we've got you. Don't lose your tickle temper; it's all in the game."

Figgins was struggling furiously.

"Here, give me that rope!" gasped Blake. "This chap is more trouble than he's worth."

D'Arcy, rubbing himself tenderly with one hand, handed Blake a looped cord with the other, and Figgins found his wrists lassoed and tied together in a jiffy. Kerr, between Digby and Herries, found it advisable to surrender. He called for quarter, and was released on parole. Fearfully dusty and rumpled, he sat in the road panting for breath when the School House juniors let him go. Blake picked up the bag.

"Lend us a hand, Dig!" he exclaimed. "It's heavy, but I like it all the better for that. Figgy, old boy, many thanks! Come along, chaps!"

Dig and Blake carried off the bag between them at a run towards the school. Figgins staggered to his feet. He

wrenched furiously at the cord round his wrists, but in vain.

"Stop 'em, Kerr!" he howled. "Go for 'em, you silly duffer!"

Kerr shook his head.

"Can't," he said; "I've made it pax."

"Oh, Christopher Columbus!" gasped Figgins. "Fancy our grab being collared like that, under our very eyes! Oh, my only hat!"

Herries and D'Arcy followed Blake and Dig. Arthur Augustus was still twisting rather painfully. The New House juniors were left rueful in the road. The victors in the brief but exciting conflict vanished in the direction of St. Jim's.

"Here, get this beastly cord off my hands!" said Figgins crossly.

Kerr unfastened him. They were both looking decidedly glum.

"It's rotten," said Figgins. "Oh, let's get along! Life isn't worth living. How they'll be crowing in the School House to-night. We'll get even with the horrid bouncer Blake somehow! The beast!"

They started to walk—or, rather, limp—towards St. Jim's. The fight against odds had left them feeling considerably used-up and fagged. Kerr gave a sudden start, as a thought flashed into his mind.

"I say, Figgy!"

"Well, what's biting you?" growled his chief.

"Monteith's packet—it was in the bag along with the grub."

Figgins gave quite a jump. In the excitement of the conflict he had completely forgotten the existence of Monteith's package, and the recollection of it came back with a shock. The School House juniors, finding it in the bag, would certainly open it, as it bore no superscription, thinking it contained some of the provisions. If any damage were done to the contents there would be a row about it, for Monteith was certain to take it badly.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Figgins. "I'd forgotten all about that. We must get it back, somehow. If we can get a chance to speak to Blake before he opens it, he'll hand it over. Come on; let's get back as quick as we can."

And the New House juniors hurried on to the school.

## CHAPTER 8.

### Monteith Makes Terms.

"M ONTEITH, what are you doing here?" Captain and prefect looked each other in the eyes. For a moment Kildare's expression had chased the colour from James Monteith's cheeks.

But it was only for a moment. He quickly recovered himself. A sneer crossed his sour face.

"Kindly take your hand off my shoulder, Kildare," he said coldly. "I am not used to being handled so unceremoniously."

Kildare's grasp relaxed; his hand dropped to his side.

"You have been watching me?"

"If you particularly want to know—yes."

"You know all?"

Monteith nodded.

"Yes," he said coolly; "all—I know all!"

Kildare drew a deep breath.

"Come," he said, in a low voice, motioning to the prefect to follow him.

"I don't—"

"Follow me! There is one who must not be alarmed. Come!"

Monteith nodded, and then quietly followed Kildare. The captain of St. Jim's, with a moody brow, strode on, and did not stop till they were some distance from the ruined castle. Then he halted and faced Monteith.

"Now, Monteith, we'd better have this out now."

"Certainly," said the prefect insolently. "I suppose we had better talk it over, Kildare, and I'm ready if you are."

"You have watched me? You know all my business yonder?"

"I know that your brother is a hunted thief—"

Kildare's clenched fist went up, and his eyes blazed; and the New House prefect started back. But the captain's arm fell again to his side. It had cost him a terrible effort, but he controlled himself.

"Don't dare to say that again," he said thickly. "My brother is innocent."

Monteith shrugged his shoulders. "You may believe that, Kildare, but to the world he is guilty. However, I don't want to hurt your feelings. To put it more gently, I know that your brother is accused of

"RUN OUT!"

A Tale (School of Speech, The Twins & Co. BY H. CLARKE BOOK.

AND

"RED MULLET." A Story of Kit and Cora, the Brother and Sister Detectives.

IN "PLUCK," 1<sup>o</sup>.

NEXT SATURDAY:

stealing the Glyndon diamond, and that he is hiding in the ruins of the old castle."

"Why did you spy on me? I suppose you read that letter?"

A faint flush came into the prefect's face. Kildare's tone of quiet scorn cut like a whip.

"I don't know what you're talking about, Kildare," said Monteith. "I have the news of the robbery from my cousin, who is manager to Messrs. Stein & Stein. As for watching you—well, I don't see that that's worse than helping a felon to escape justice."

Kildare quivered from head to foot. But he still controlled himself. It was being borne in upon his mind now that, for Micky's sake, he could not afford to quarrel with James Monteith.

"You had an object in doing this?" he said. "You have not done it idly. Even you would not act the spy for nothing."

Monteith bit his lip.

"Yes, I had an object," he replied. "I devoted this evening to the purpose of ascertaining exactly how the land lay, and I have done it. Not for nothing, certainly."

"What is your object? Let us have it out."  
"It might be to aid justice by delivering up a fugitive to the police," said Monteith coolly. "You see, my cousin is Messrs. Steins's manager, and it would be for his benefit for the fellow to be arrested. Why shouldn't I do it?"

"I don't know why you shouldn't, Monteith. I can't expect you to believe in Micky's innocence as I do—"

"Hardly!" interjected the prefect sneeringly.  
"And there's no love lost between us; you would not keep silent for my sake," went on the captain of St. Jim's. "But, as I have said, you have some purpose to serve in thus getting a hold over me. I know that. What is it?"

"You are very keen. As a matter of fact, you are quite right."

"Well, I am waiting for you to speak."

Monteith drew a deep breath.

"You're right, Kildare," he said slowly. "I wanted to get a hold on you, and that's the truth. You have always been against me, and now we're in the cricket season you mean to leave me out of the First Eleven. You have told me so."

Kildare started.

"Yes, I have told you so, and I meant it, Monteith."

"I think you will reconsider that decision now, Kildare."

The captain of St. Jim's looked him straight in the eyes.

He was not slow to grasp the prefect's meaning.

"You mean that I must play you in the First Eleven, or else you will betray my brother to his enemies?"

"That's not exactly how I should put it. Suppose we say, unless you concede me my rightful place in the college team I shall hand a criminal over to justice?"

"Put it how you like; it comes to the same thing. Do you know what this is, Monteith?"

"Business, I call it," said the prefect tersely.

"I call it blackmail."

"You can call it what you like," said Monteith, reddening.

"Anyway, that's my ultimatum. I don't care a rap what becomes of your brother, and whether he's arrested or not. I want my proper place in the team. I'm going to have it. You will concede that to me, or Michael Kildare will suffer."

Kildare's face was pale and hard. He was at the mercy of the prefect, and mercy was an unknown quantity to James Monteith in dealing with a defenceless foe.

It was not without careful thought that Kildare had decided to leave the prefect out of the college First Eleven.

He had turned the matter over anxiously in his mind many times, for he wished to be perfectly fair, and to give the New House prefect every chance. But he had felt that it would not do.

Every concession made to Monteith led to fresh encroachments, and during the football season it had been made perfectly plain that if Kildare was to remain captain of St. Jim's first, there was no room in the team for James Monteith. To let Monteith into the cricket eleven was to reopen the old question; to recommence the old rivalry and unpleasant friction. And Kildare had decided not to do so.

Now what was he to decide? There was a new factor in the problem now; his brother's liberty hung trembling in the balance!

There was a bitter struggle in the captain's breast. His impulse was strong to dash his clenched fist into the insolent, sneering face before him, and to defy his enemy to do his worst. But before his mental vision rose the pale, frightened face of Micky.

A word from Monteith, and Micky would be in the hands of the police; to be sent, innocent as he was, to prison, as innocent men had been sent before him.

Could Kildare face that?

Monteith watched him curiously, noting the signs of struggle in his white, tense face, and wondering what the decision would be. It seemed impossible that the captain of St. Jim's would dare to defy him, and sacrifice his brother; yet he knew well Kildare's sense of rectitude.

The silence was a long one. Monteith broke it.

"What are you going to do, Kildare?"

The captain of St. Jim's drew a deep, quivering breath.

"I—I don't know."

The prefect smiled sardonically. Kildare, always so alert, decided, strong, and steady—how strangely changed he was at this moment!

Monteith had never expected to see him harassed, hesitating, undecided, and the sight afforded him much mean satisfaction.

"You don't know?" Almost unconsciously a bullying tone crept into the prefect's voice. "You had better make up your mind, then!"

"I suppose it's no use making an appeal to you, Monteith," said Kildare slowly—"to your sense of honour as a sportsman? It's no good saying that you haven't any right to make use of this secret you have discovered."

"No good at all," said Monteith promptly. "I am not troubled much with sentimentality. You want to keep me out of the eleven, and, as captain of St. Jim's, you have the power in your hands to do so. I want to get into it, and, as the sharer of your secret, I have the power to force you to let me come in. I have no more scruples than you have."

"But I—"

"Oh, yes, I know what you are going to say!" interrupted the prefect rudely. "It's the old talk about the good of the school—all gas and wind. Besides, how do you know I'm not thinking of the good of the school? As a matter of fact, I think of it more than you do, and I'm certain that we shall be all the better for having me in the team. It isn't as if I were not up to First Eleven form. If that were the case I wouldn't ask anything of the kind. But you have admitted yourself that my form is all right."

"I have already said that I have no fault to find with you as a cricketer, if you choose to play the game," said Kildare.

"Well, then, that's the point. I dare say you imagine you're keeping me out of the eleven from a sense of duty. I attribute it to jealousy. Anyway, I'm coming in. I'm going to play for St. Jim's this season, or know the reason why?"

Kildare was miserably silent. He could not sacrifice his brother. From the first that had been apparent to him. But the only way to save Micky was by yielding to Monteith's demand, and that was hard—very hard!

He had decided, after reflection, that it would be bad for St. Jim's to put Monteith into his old position, and place the power of making mischief in his hands. How, then, could he reconcile it with his sense of duty to yield to the prefect's demand? That was impossible!

He realised that if he did as Monteith exacted, he would be knowingly failing in his duty as captain of the school for the sake of his brother.

"Come, make up your mind!" said Monteith, looking at his watch. "We shall be late for calling-over. Am I going into the First Eleven, or shall I call in at Rycombe police-station on my way back to the school?"

"You—you coward—you—"

"You can cut all that! Give me an answer!"

"I can't!" cried Kildare desperately. "You've got me in a corner, but—but I can't do as you want—I can't!"

An extremely ugly look came over the prefect's face. He half turned to go.

"Very well," he said, between his teeth—"very well, you know what the consequences will be!"

Kildare started forward.

"Stop! I can't give you my answer now. I must have time to think. There's no hurry. I sha'n't finally make up the team till to-morrow to meet Headland on Saturday."

Monteith laughed.

"What's the good of fooling about like that? But I don't mind. If you want time to think it over, take till to-night. I'll come over to the School House and see you before bed. Then you can give me your answer, and put my name in the list on the notice-board."

"Very well, we will leave it at that!" said Kildare heavily. Monteith nodded, and strode away. He was in a gleeful mood. He felt that he had gained his point. Kildare's asking for time to think was a certain sign of surrender. Reflection could only show the captain of St. Jim's how helplessly he was in the prefect's power.

Kildare, a prey to wretched thoughts, followed the path slowly, and Monteith soon vanished with his quick strides. The prefect reached the gates of St. Jim's just as the porter was opening them to admit Figgins and Kerr. Blake and the chums of Study No. 6 had gone in long ago.

Figgins looked rather nervous at the sight of Monteith.

and hurried towards the New House. But the prefect called to him and he had to stop.

"Have you got that packet from Rylecombe, Figgins?"  
"Yes," said Figgins uneasily; "I'll bring it to your study, Monteith."

"You can give it to me now."  
"I—I— The fact is, I haven't it with me just now, Monteith," stammered Figgins.

"What do you mean? Haven't you just come in from Rylecombe?"

"Yes—that's so. But, you see—"  
The prefect shook him roughly by the shoulder.

"Where is the packet? Have you lost it?"  
"Not exactly lost it. No; certainly not lost it."

"Where is it?" shouted the enraged prefect. "Answer me, you fool!"

There was no help for it; the truth had to come out.

"I put it into a bag along with some grub," said Figgins reluctantly, "and the—School House chaps raided it. I was just going to ask Blake to give it back to me. He will, like a bird, when he knows the packet belongs to you, if he—"

"What?" said Monteith, between his set teeth.  
"If he hasn't opened it yet it will be all right. But if the films are damaged, I'll—"

Monteith hurled the junior away from him with such savage force that he went with a crash to the ground, and lay there dazed. Kerr ran to him, and helped him up.

Monteith was running towards the School House, his face white and alarmed.

"My hat," gasped Figgins, "has he gone mad? Oh, my bones! He must be stark, staring, right off his confounded onion! Oh, my bones!"

"It's the packet," said Kerr. "I told you it didn't have any giddy films in it. It's something more important than that, and Monteith is afraid that Blake has got hold of it. I wonder what it was? Anyway, it's out of our hands now."

The two juniors, puzzled and mystified, wondering at Monteith's strange behaviour, went on to the New House. They felt that there was some mystery here, though they could not imagine what it was. Monteith, filled with nervous apprehension, ran swiftly towards the School House.

## CHAPTER 9.

### An Amazing Discovery.

JACK BLAKE dumped down the crammed bag in Study No. 6 with a sigh of relief.

"By Jupiter, that weighs something!" he remarked. "Never mind, all the more for the feed. Lay the cloth, Dig; there's no earthly use in wasting time about it! We're late for tea, and the sooner I sample some of what's in that bag, the better I shall like it."

"Right-ho!" said Dig. "I'm hungry, too. I wonder exactly what Figgy feels like at this moment!"

"Like kicking himself, I fancy," said Blake cheerfully.

"It's one to us, and no mistake!"  
"Buck up with the grub!" said Herries.

The door of the study opened.

"Hallo, what do you want?" exclaimed Blake, as Percy Mellish put his head into the room.

"Sorry, Blake; but I'm afraid there's trouble ahead," said Mellish, with an expression of profound sympathy.

"Oh, rats!" said Blake carelessly, shoving the bag under the table. "What's up now?"

"Mr. Kidd wants to see all of you in his study at once. He's looking awfully serious about something. I fancy it's a row."

And Percy Mellish vanished.

"Oh, this is rotten," exclaimed Blake, in disgust, "just when we were going to enjoy ourselves! What can be the matter with Kiddlets? He gave us the pass."

"It isn't possible that Figgy has said anything about our looting the tummy, is it?" suggested Herries.

"No; it isn't!" said Blake promptly. "Figgy isn't that sort! He plays the game!"

"So he does," said Digby. "Besides, he's not in yet. What can Kiddlets want?"

"Suppose we go and see, deah boys?" suggested D'Arcy.

Blake slapped him on the back with a force that dislodged his eyeglass.

"Jolly good idea of yours, Gussy!" he said. "Come along!"

"Don't be so dweadfully wuff, Blake!"  
"Oh, get a move on you!"

Leaving the captured bag hidden under the table, the four juniors left the study, and descended the stairs to go to the housemaster's quarters. Barely had they gone when Percy Mellish and Walsh ran into the room.

"Where is it?" asked Walsh, looking round.

Mellish darted towards the table,

"I saw Blake shove it in here. Yes; here it is!"  
He dragged out the bag of loot.

"My word, there's plenty of it!" exclaimed Walsh, eyeing it greedily.

"Rather! Lend me a hand! They'll be back in a minute!"

"Right-ho! Buck up!"  
They seized the bag between them, and darted out of the study with it. Right along the passage they went at a run, and reached Percy Mellish's study. Five or six of the Fourth Form School House boys of course, were there, eagerly awaiting them. They gave a chirrup of joy at the sight of the bag.

"Got it!" cried Wilson. "In with it! I'll lock the door!"

Mellish and Walsh bundled the bag in. Wilson slammed the door and turned the key in the lock. Cook shoved the study table against it, and the rest of the juniors piled whatever furniture they could lay their hands on against the table. They knew that Blake would not be long in getting on the scent, and that he would leave no stone unturned to recover the looted loot.

Blake was already on his way back to Study No. 6. The four chums had reached Mr. Kidd's room, to find the door locked and the housemaster absent.

"My hat," said Blake, "this is a little joke of Percy Mellish! I'll give him a thick ear for being so awfully funny when I see him again!"

Still, it was a relief to find that they were not to be hauled over the coals, after all. They went back to the stairs. But a dreadful suspicion suddenly occurred to Dig.

"I say, this may be a game to get at the grub!"  
Blake started.

"Nonsense! Mellish didn't know anything about that!"  
"Well, Figgins thought we didn't know anything about it, but—"

Blake did not wait to argue. He went up the stairs three at a time, and burst into Study No. 6. He looked under the table and gave a yell. The bag, of course, was gone.

"Gone!" yelled Blake.  
"Mellish has collared it! The boulder! The cad! Looting a chap's grub! Where is he?"

The four chums were decidedly wrathful. Blake turned to the door again.

"He must have taken it to his study!" he exclaimed.  
"Come on, before he has time to wolf it! I'll make him sit up for this!"

And the chums, on vengeance bent, crowded out of the study, and raced along the passage to the door of Percy Mellish's study.

Blake thumped on it with his fist as the lock refused to budge.

"Open this beastly door, Mellish!"  
A bowl of defiance came from within.

"Open it yourself, Blake!" called out Percy Mellish.  
"We're busy. Sorry we can't invite you to the feed."

Blake kicked savagely at the door. He heard a tumbling sound inside the study, which he knew was caused by the various packages rolling out on the floor as the raiders emptied the bag. Then followed a sound of snapping string and tearing paper.

Thump, thump, thump! went Blake's fist on the panels.  
"Open this door, you beast!"

The juniors within yelled defiance. Blake set his teeth.  
"It's awful!" gasped Digby. "They're scoffing our grub!"

I just heard a cork pop. We must get at the pigs somehow!"

Blake drew back from the door.  
"All together!" he exclaimed desperately. "I'll have the whole confounded house down before they shall have the grin of us like this! All together!"

The four chums flung themselves at the door, and crashed their shoulders against it; but, strengthened by the heavy barricade within, it stood firm, and resisted even that desperate attack. Blake looked round him wildly.

"We want a giddy battering-ram!" he exclaimed.  
"We want a giddy fetch the chopper out of—"

"What's to be done? I say, Dig, fetch the chopper out of No. 6, and I'll smash the lock!"

"Hallo, care!"  
Monteith, the New House prefect, had just come up the stairs, at the sight of a prefect the chums assumed their most sedate and innocent expression. They were wild against Mellish, but the laws of schoolboy honour forbade bringing a senior into the matter. But Monteith, seeing them in the passage, came straight towards them. His face was pale and anxious.

"Blake—Blake!"  
"Here I am, Monty!" said Blake. "Anything wanted?"

"Yes— You took a bag of things from Figgins in the lane—"

Blake gave a gasp.  
"You don't mean to say that old Figgy has sneaked? I won't believe it!"

"RUN-OUT!"

A Tale (School) of Spies, the Twins & Co. AND  
By H. Clarke Book.

"RED MULLET."  
A Story of Kit and Cors, the  
Brother and Sister Detectives.

IN "PLUCK," 1<sup>D</sup>.

NEXT SATURDAY:

Library

Monteith caught him savagely by the shoulder.

"Don't be a fool, Blake! You are welcome to whatever you took from Figgins; but there was a packet belonging to me in the bag, which is most important. Figgins put it in there to carry along with his own things."

"I tumble!" said Blake, in relief. "I thought Figgy wouldn't sneak."

"Where is the packet? Have you opened it?"

"I haven't opened the bag at all yet. I haven't had a chance."

Monteith breathed more freely.

"Quick! Where is it?"

"Is it very important? I—"

"Quick!" cried the prefect, shaking him fiercely. "Where is it, you young fool?"

"Oh, keep your wool on!" exclaimed Blake. "As a matter of fact, some bounders have looted it from us, and they've got it in this study, scoffing it!"

Monteith understood at once, and he tried the door; and as it would not open, knocked fiercely.

"Oa, you can go on knocking!" said Mellish from within. "You can knock till Doomsday, but you won't get the door open!"

"Open the door!" shouted Monteith. "Don't you know who I am?"

Some of the juniors in the study looked dismayed; but Percy Mellish, though not particularly brave at close quarters with anybody, could be obstinate enough when it was safe to be so.

"Oh, go away and play!" he exclaimed. "You're not our prefect, and you've no right to give orders in our house. I'll complain to Mr. Kidd if you bother us. Go off!" And he went coolly on unfastening the parcels.

"That's the way to talk!" said Walsh admiringly. "Fancy a New House cad coming over here and giving us orders!"

Thump, thump, thump! The door rattled and shook.

"Can't imagine what he wants," said Mellish; "but it's safe enough that if we let him in it will mean a licking for somebody here. Let him go and eat coke! We'll eat these things. Hallo! I wonder what's in this giddy package? It's awfully carefully wrapped up!"

"Sealed, too!" said Walsh. "There must be something especially tasty in that."

"We'll jolly soon see what. Oh, you can leave off knocking, Monteith! It isn't any good, and you make me tired."

Mellish cut through the paper round the packet with his knife. He gave a whistle as still further layers of thick brown paper were disclosed, and then a folded newspaper.

"Well, this is a funny bundle!" he ejaculated. "I wonder what on earth Figgins has got in the middle of all this?" He tore open the newspaper.

Thump, thump, thump!

"Mellish"—it was Monteith's voice, hoarse and agitated, through the keyhole—"Mellish, there is something belonging to me in that bag, and—"

"Oh, rats!" said Percy. "You can't come in!"

He threw aside the newspaper. A small Morocco case was revealed, and the juniors stared at it with wide-open eyes.

"What on earth's that?" exclaimed Walsh. "Figgins must have put the wrong parcel in his bag. That looks like a jewellery-case of some sort."

"Mellish, let me in! There's something of mine in that bag, and it's important. I won't touch you if you let me in at once."

Percy Mellish grinned. He knew the head prefect of the New House far too well to dream of trusting him to such an extent as that.

Monteith was desperate. He ran quickly into Study No. 6 to find something to break in the lock with, and picked up a chopper.

"I say, Monty—" began Blake.

The prefect did not hear him. He ran back to Mellish's door, and brought the chopper into play. The chums of Study No. 6 watched him curiously.

Crash, crash!

But the mischief was already done. The Morocco case was open in Percy Mellish's hand, and he was quivering with curiosity. The other juniors were also excited at the unexpected find, and looking eagerly on as Percy unwrapped the cotton-wool which was placed thickly round the small article contained in the case.

"What is it?" exclaimed Walsh. "Oh, my aunt!"

A sudden blaze of light seemed to dart from Mellish's hand. Percy gave a jump, and the juniors uttered exclamations of utter amazement; for in Mellish's palm lay a large diamond, glinting and flashing in the light.

Little as the juniors knew about precious stones or their value, they could see that this was a diamond, and that it must be a stone of fabulous worth. How it had come into Figgins's bag was a mystery. But it was undoubtedly a stone of priceless value.

"My word!" said Percy. "It's—it's a diamond! What can it mean? Somebody's stolen it, I suppose. How did it come in Figgy's bag? Oh crumbs!" He gave another jump as the chopper crashed on the panel of the door.

Crash, crash!

"Goodness gracious! What is the matter here?" It was Mr. Kidd's voice in the corridor. The din at the door of Percy's study had reached the housemaster, who was chatting with Mr. Lathom in the latter's room. He came upstairs to see what on earth was the matter, with the master of the Fourth at his heels.

The door had given way under Monteith's vigorous attack, but the barricade within prevented the door from opening. The prefect was just shoving at it when the voice of the housemaster broke upon his ears.

"Monteith, what, in goodness' name, are you doing? Did you break that door?"

Monteith calmed himself with an effort.

"Yes, Mr. Kidd. I am sorry—perhaps I have been too hasty—but Mellish has some property of mine in his study, and he refuses either to give it up or let me in."

"That is very strange. What is the property?"

"A packet of important papers, sir, which I am taking care of for someone, and which have fallen by accident into Mellish's hands."

Mr. Kidd's brow grew stern.

"If this is the truth, Monteith, Mellish shall suffer severely for his conduct; but you should have come to me. You have no right to act in this outrageous manner."

"I believe he is looking into the papers, and—"

Mr. Kidd pushed at the door.

"Mellish, admit me instantly!"

Percy Mellish started at the sound of the housemaster's peremptory tones, and hastened to drag away the barricade.

Mr. Kidd stepped into the study, and Monteith followed him, white and eager.

The housemaster's eye caught the blaze of the great diamond in Mellish's hand. He started forward in amazement.

"What is that you have there, Mellish?"

Percy held it out towards him.

"It's a diamond, sir. I found it in the bag."

The housemaster, wondering whether he was dreaming, took the diamond, at the same time putting back Monteith's outstretched hand.

"What do you mean, Monteith? How dare you!"

The prefect's face was grey and drawn. At the sight of the diamond the whole horrible truth had rushed upon his mind. His only thought now was to save appearances, if possible.

"It—it is mine!" he cried excitedly. "It was taken out of the packet belonging to me."

"You said that your packet contained papers," said Mr. Kidd coldly. "You said nothing at all about a diamond."

"There weren't any papers in the packet, except a lot of wrapping paper," said Percy Mellish. "We thought it had got in it, and that's why we opened it!"

"How did the bag come into your possession? Tell me the whole story."

Mr. Kidd held the diamond between his finger and thumb. Monteith, realising that he was powerless, was silent. He leaned against the wall, breathing hard. There was an utter sickness of misery at his heart.

Mellish explained frankly how the bag had been looted from Blake's study. Mr. Kidd turned to Blake, and put the same question to him, and Blake explained in his turn how the bag had been looted from Figgins in the lane. Mr. Kidd knitted his brows thoughtfully.

"This is a very strange affair," he said. "Blake, you will go and tell Figgins I want him. Tell him to come to Dr. Holmes's study. I am going there. Monteith, please come with me."

The prefect, with hanging head and slack gait, followed the housemaster. The passage was pretty well crowded by this time by boys who had had a hint of the strange affair that was going forward. They looked curiously at Monteith's face as he passed. Never had any fellow at St. Jim's seen the head prefect of the New House look like that before.

As they descended the stairs, Kildare entered the house. Monteith passed him without a word, and the captain of St. Jim's gave him a look of amazement.

"What has happened?" he asked, looking round.

There was a buzz of vague explanation, but Percy Mellish was soon to the fore with the facts. At the mention of a great diamond discovered in a packet belonging to Monteith, Kildare felt a thrill go right through him. He walked away straight to the study of the Head of St. Jim's.

Blake had delivered his message to Figgins, and the New House junior had just reached the doctor's door, and he went in with the captain of St. Jim's.

The odds were against them, but Figgins and Kerr did not mean to abandon the precious possession without a desperate struggle. (See page 11.)



**CHAPTER 10  
Light at Last.**

**T**HE Head of St. Jim's was looking worried and ill at ease. Mr. Kidd had already explained to him about the finding of the diamond, and the great stone itself lay upon the doctor's desk before him.

Monteith stood with white face and bowed head, looking utterly crushed. The Head looked up as Kildare entered with Figgins. He looked inquiringly at the captain of St. Jim's, as if wondering what he wanted there.

"Please excuse me, sir," said Kildare quietly. "This matter concerns me very deeply, as I will explain to you if you wish. I should like to know what is discovered. You will not think that I am simply curious."

"Remain if you wish, Kildare. I am afraid it will be impossible to prevent a scandal now. Figgins, I sent for you so that you can tell me exactly what happened to-day in Rylecombe. Tell me everything frankly: you have nothing to fear."

Figgins looked unasily at Monteith. The prefect made him a sign to speak.

"I went there with a pass from Monteith, sir," said Figgins. "He wanted me to fetch him a parcel of photographic films, which were being sent down by special messenger from London, and—"

"What?"

Figgins repeated his statement.

"Go on," said the Head, very quietly.

"I got the package, sir, by showing the card Monteith gave me to the messenger—"

"Have you the card now?"

"Yes sir, I haven't had a chance to give it back to Monteith."

"Place it on my desk. Now go on."

"I got the package," said Figgins, "and put it into a cricket-bag along with some grub—I mean some things we got at the tuck-shop. The School House bounders—I mean Blake—looted it from us in the lane. I'm not complaining, sir, went on the loyal Figgy eagerly. "It's only our fun, you know, and all in the game, and—"

"I understand. Go on."

That's all, sir. Blake collared the loot and Monteith's packet with the rest. I had forgotten about it being in the bag, till afterwards, but I had no time to get it back, or try to, for Monteith—"

"Thank you, Figgins, that will do. You may go."

Figgins left the study.

The Head fixed his eyes upon Monteith. "Now, Monteith, kindly explain how this immensely valuable diamond comes to be in a package sent to you. That it cannot be your property is certain. It is worth thousands of pounds, and I have no doubt it is a famous stone. Explain."

Monteith's lips moved, but he said nothing.

"Let me speak, sir," said Kildare. "I believe that diamond is the famous Glyndon diamond, which was stolen a few days ago from Messrs. Stein & Stein."

The doctor gave a great start. He had read of that robbery in the newspaper. He did not generally know much about news of that kind, but his attention had been specially directed to this by the fact that the brother of the captain of St. Jim's had been accused of the theft. He had noted, too, that Monteith's relation was the diamond merchant's manager.

"The Glyndon diamond?" exclaimed the doctor.

"Yes sir," said Kildare firmly. "I have never seen the stone, but I know it is one like this, at all events. It was stolen from Messrs. Stein & Stein. Monteith's cousin is manager there, and he has accused my brother of the crime. My brother is innocent, of that I am assured. Now, who sent this great stone secretly to Monteith?"

"Answer that question, Monteith."

The prefect licked his dry lips, but no audible sound came from them. What could he say?

"Under the circumstances," said the Head, "I have no alternative but to telephone for the police, and place the diamond, and the facts of the case, in their hands."

Monteith gave a groan of terror. He covered his face with his hands and burst into tears. "For Heaven's sake, sir, have mercy! I swear I know nothing—absolutely nothing—of this horrible thing!" he cried. "Oh, you believe me! You do not think that I am a thief, or the accomplice of a thief!"

**NEXT SATURDAY:**

"**RUN OUT!**"  
A Tale (School) of Specs, the Twins & Co.  
By H. Clarke Hook.

AND

"**RED MULLET**"  
A Story of Kit and Coza, the  
Brother and Sister Detectives.

IN "PLUCK," 19



The doctor shook his head.

"I should be sorry to believe it, Monteith, but can you explain—"

"Kildare, I have been a cad to you!—I admit it—but—but stand by me now! Tell him I'm not a thief!"

The unhappy lad was half-hysterical now. The tears were rolling down his cheeks—cheeks that had never been so wetted since he was a child.

The generous, impulsive Irish lad made a step forward.

"On my word, Monteith, I believe you!" he cried. "I am sure you are telling the truth. I am sure he knew nothing about this, sir."

"Let him explain then," said the Head quietly.

"I will, I will!" cried Monteith. "I had a letter from my cousin. He asked me to take charge of a packet of important papers for him. He said that owing to the disturbance and excitement caused at the office by the robbery, he wanted to keep them in a safe place; as he didn't want his employers to see them. He was working something behind their backs. He sent the papers down by messenger. I never dreamed that the tale was all a lie, and that the packet contained the stolen diamond."

The doctor's face was sombre.

"It's true!" cried Kildare. "It's true, sir, I'll answer for it. He sent his bag to take the packet from the messenger. Would he have done so if he had known that a diamond worth thousands of pounds was in it?"

The point was well taken. Dr. Holmes and Mr. Kidd exchanged a look of relief, and Monteith gave Kildare a grateful glance.

"That is true," said the Head. "I believe you, Monteith. I believe that you did not know the diamond was in the packet."

"Oh, thank you, sir, thank you!"

"Ralph Monteith is undoubtedly the thief of the diamond," went on the Head. "He has contrived to throw suspicion upon Michael Kildare. Doubtless he went in fear of its being turned upon himself, and dared not keep the diamond in his own quarters. It was a cunning device to send it here in a pretended package of papers. But for the merest chance the truth could never possibly have come to light. The packet would have lain concealed here until the villain was ready to reclaim his plunder. A great crime has been prevented; an innocent man's name is cleared owing to the rivalry between the juniors of our two houses. That is a very satisfactory reflection. Mr. Kidd, you will kindly telephone to the police-station. This valuable stone must be given up to them at once, to be returned to its rightful owner, and the scoundrel in London must be arrested."

Mr. Kidd went to the telephone.

"You may go, Monteith," said Dr. Holmes. "I have no doubts; I am certain you were innocent in this matter, and I am sure others will believe so. Kildare, I congratulate you on the name of your brother being cleared."

The two Sixth-Formers left the study.

Monteith, who was shaken to the very depths of his soul by an emotion such as he had never before experienced, went away unsteadily to the New House.

Kildare, in a happy and settled mood, though he was sorry for Monteith, hurried off to the ruined castle to see his brother. It was already dark, but the captain of St. Jim's was eager to lose not a single instant in acquainting Micky with what had happened at the school. He had told his brother that, if there should be good news to bring, he would bring it without delay, but he had never dreamed of its coming so soon. He went down the lane and through the wood like a champion sprinter. Up the rugged path to the castle, careless of stumbles and tumbles in the darkness, he ran, and on into the gloomy ruins.

"Micky! Micky!" His voice rang joyously through the echoing old castle. "Micky! Micky!"

"Is that you, Eric?"

The captain of St. Jim's was clambering over the piles of masonry. In the dim glimmer of the stars he met his brother, and gripped his hand.

"Yes, it's I, Mick, with good news—good news!"

Micky trembled.

"What do you mean, Eric?" he gasped. "What do you mean? Not—not—"

"Yes, yes! The truth is out!" Kildare shouted the words in his joy. "The truth is out! Hurrah! Hurrah!"

The ruins and the dark woods round rang with his hurrah. Micky sank shaking and trembling upon a fragment of stone.

"Is it true, Eric? Can it be true?"

"It's true—true! The truth is discovered. Ralph Monteith is the thief, and they're already wiring to London to have him arrested! The diamond is found."

"Thank Heaven!"

"Come along, Micky, come along. You're not going to

stay a minute longer in this place!" cried Kildare. "Come on, old chap!"

"Where? They will arrest me—"

"You will have to give yourself up, old chap, but it's only a matter of form, now that the thief's discovered. You must give yourself up before you can be discharged, you know. I tell you it's all right." "Come on!"

"You're—you're sure, Eric?"

"Sure? Of course, I am. I've seen the diamond with my own eyes, kid. Ralph Monteith is probably arrested by now. Come on."

The tears were running down Micky's cheeks. He had been through a terrible ordeal, and the relief and reaction were almost too much. He leaned heavily on his brother's arm as he left the ruins. But Kildare's happy spirits soon infected him, and he grew more calm and cheerful. As they followed the path to Rylcombe, Kildare explained how the truth had come to light.

Micky was received with kindness and courtesy at the police-station: It was evident that his arrest was only a matter of form. Kildare wrung his brother's hand before he went back to St. Jim's.

"Keep up your pecker, Micky. You'll soon be free," he said. And Kildare was happier than he had been for some time as he hurried home to St. Jim's.

It was late when he arrived. When he went to his study, he found Monteith standing outside the door, leaning against the wall. He started a little at the sight of him. Monteith's face was very pale and worn.

"I want to speak to you, Kildare," he said in a low voice.

"Certainly," said Kildare, who felt at peace with all the world just then, and overflowing with good-nature. "Come in, old chap."

Monteith followed him into the study. He stood shifting somewhat uneasily, his hand resting on the table.

"Won't you sit down?"

The prefect shook his head.

"I've only a few words to say. I've been a cad—a rotten cad—I can see it now as I never saw it before. You spoke up for me to the doctor. If I had been in your place I should have spoken against you."

"No, no!"

"I should. I found out your secret and I used it like a cad. I was going to drive you into putting me into the First Eleven. That's all over now, of course. Will you believe me, Kildare, when I say I'm glad of it?"

Kildare listened in wonder. Truly a change had come over the head prefect of the New House at St. Jim's.

"Of course I believe you, Monteith," said the captain, cordially.

"Thank you. I—I want to ask your pardon, that's all. I know you didn't expect it of me, but I felt that I must," said Monteith, with his eyes on the floor.

"Of course, it's granted," said Kildare, "and I've been thinking about it, too, Monteith. I'm very glad you've spoken like this. Don't you think that in the future we might manage to get on a little better together? I'm willing to try it if you are. And to show that I'm in earnest, your name goes down first in the list for the Headland match on Saturday."

"You—you mean it, Kildare?"

"Every word."

Monteith held out his hand. "If you choose to take my hand, Kildare, I'm your friend from this hour forth."

And Kildare took it and clasped it firmly.

"It's a compact!" he cried.

The shadow of a secret was gone from Kildare's life, and the face of the captain of St. Jim's wore its old sunny look. Other shadows were gone, too; Monteith was keeping his word. Micky was restored to liberty in a very short time, and Ralph Monteith went to prison, as he richly deserved. Even the New House prefect could feel no pity for the man who had nearly got him into a fearful position.

On the Saturday the First Eleven of St. Jim's met Headland College, and Monteith played for St. Jim's.

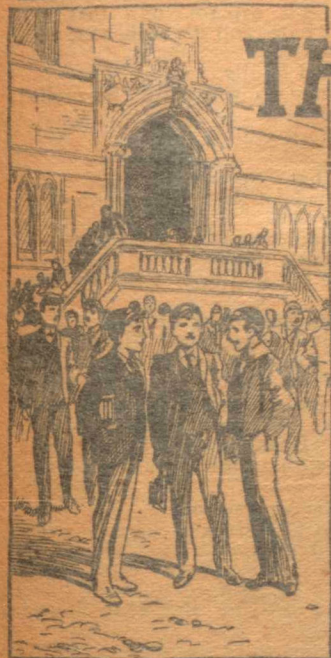
Amazed indeed were the Saints to see his name in the list on the notice-board, and the School House fellows were indignant too. Kildare's action was freely criticised, but the cricket captain did not seem to mind. And the most energetic grumblers had to admit that the result justified the captain's action. For Monteith played the game of his life, and his brilliant scoring very materially helped St. Jim's to the great victory won that day.

THE END.

(Next Saturday: "Run Out!" a School Tale of Specs, the Twins, & Co., by H. Clarke Hook, and "Red Mullet," a Story of Kit and Cora, the Brother and Sister Detectives. Order your copy of PLUCK in advance. Meanwhile, get "The Gem" Library. Price One Half-penny. Now on sale.)

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# THE RIVALS OF ST KIT'S

By Charles Hamilton

## BRIEF ACCOUNT OF THE FIRST CHAPTERS.

When Pat Nugent arrives at St. Kit's an election is taking place for the captaincy of the school between Arthur Talbot and Eldred Lacy. Talbot gains the victory. Pat is thrown into a cupboard by some juniors, and falls asleep. On waking up he hears voices—the voices of Eldred Lacy and his brother, Rupert Lacy, the squire of Lynwood: "You must ruin and disgrace Arthur Talbot, and drive him from the school. He is a menace to me—to both of us. But ruined and disgraced, driven forth into poverty and obscurity, I shall no longer fear him!"

Pat becomes great chums with Blagden and Greene.

One day a tramp, named Black, stops Arthur Talbot and tells him he is his father. The latter believes him, as he has never known his parents. He gives him some money.

Pat, remembering what he had heard when locked in the cupboard, decides to shadow Lacy, and overhears the bully and Black hatching a terrible plot against Arthur Talbot. The next day Black comes to the school while a cricket match is on, and claims Talbot as his son before them all. However, Black is warned off the place by one of the masters, and Talbot goes to his study. Later in the day Arthur puts up a notice on the notice-board saying that he has resigned the captaincy of the school. A crowd of boys gather round, and Pat Nugent punishes Hooper for making a libellous remark against his favourite. (Now go on with the story.)

### A Division.

That there would be a set made against Arthur Talbot, after Seth Black's disclosure, was certain, but it was likely to be chiefly in the upper Forms, where the spirit of snobbery had a footing. Among the youngsters, a fellow who was brave and frank, and kept a straight bat, was sure of popularity.

And so, at the idea of persuading Talbot to withdraw his resignation, nearly the whole of the Lower Fourth, and a goodly number of the Upper, ranked themselves behind Pat.

The execution of the project swiftly followed its conception. Ten minutes after the chums had read the notice in the hall a swarm of juniors were assembled in the Fourth Form-room, listening to Pat's impassioned speeches. There was some opposition, headed by Trimble, Cobb, and Hooper, but it did not amount to much. It was easy to see that the general feeling of the juniors was with Pat.

"Gentlemen of the Lower Fourth, I have called you together upon a most important occasion," said Pat Nugent, standing on a form the better to address the assembly.

"Like your cheek!" called out Trimble.

"Shut up!" roared Blagden and Greene. "If you interrupt the meeting you'll be fired out, Trimble!"

"Yah!" was Trimble's witty and elegant retort.

"We are in danger—the school is in danger—St. Kit's is in danger—"

"There's a lot of danger about," said Trimble.

"Shut up, Trimble!"

"Yah!"

"St. Kit's is in danger of losing the best, the bravest, the finest chap who ever acted as captain of the school in the memory of the oldest inhabitant!" cried Pat. "If we lose him—"

"You can advertise for him in the 'Lost' column of the papers," said Trimble.

"Shut up, Trimble!"

"Yah!"

Pat was rather disconcerted by the general giggle that followed Trimble's interruption, but he went on.

"If we lose our present captain, there's to be another election, and, sure, we'll have that howling snob Lacy in as captain. It will be a blow St. Kit's will never recover from."

"If Lacy could hear you," said Trimble, "he'd give you a blow you'd never recover from."

"Shut up, Trimble!"

"Yah!"

"We can't allow it," resumed Pat. "As members of the honourable Form we belong to, we can't let St. Kit's go to the dogs in this manner. We can't, really. Talbot's going to withdraw his resignation, and save the situation."

"Oh, what rot!" said Trimble.

"Are you going to shut up, Trimble?"

"Yah!"

"Eject that obstreperous person!" exclaimed Pat, pointing to the captain of the Upper Fourth.

"Chuck him-out!" roared the juniors.

Blagden and Greene hurled themselves upon the interrupter. Trimble, with his collar torn out and his head looking like a mop, was hurled forth from the class-room and landed in a heap in the passage. Blagden and Greene returned, panting, but satisfied.

"Go on, Paddy," said Blaggy. "There won't be any more interruptions."

Pat looked round on the assembly.

"Who's coming to remonstrate with Talbot?"

"I!" "And I!" "And I!" "All of us!" "We're on this!" "Now you're talking!"

Trimble put his head in at the door.

"Yah, silly asses! You ought—"

Blagden and Greene made a rush for him. Trimble went pelting down the passage with the two wrathful juniors on his track. Unfortunately for Trimble, he thought more of what was behind than of what was before him. There was a sudden, excited yell, and Lacy, coming round a corner, was hurled across the passage by Trimble, who himself went reeling backwards from the impact.

"Hold on, Blaggy!" gasped Greene. "Better leave 'em to themselves."

"Right-ho, Greene!"

And the two juniors turned back. They cast a glance over their shoulders, and saw Trimble in the clutch of the wrathful prefect, who was thumping away as if he mistook the Upper Fourth-former for a punching-ball.

The Fourth Form were marching out of the class-room now. Pat had made the juniors fall in three abreast, with himself at their head, and the column seemed almost an endless one as it wound out of the class-room.

Blagden and Greene rejoined them in the passage, and placed themselves one on either side of Pat Nugent.

"I say, we ought to have some music on," said Blagden anxiously. "Got your tin whistle, Greene?"

"Yes," said Greene. "But Lacy promised me a licking if ever I played it inside the school any more. He doesn't like music."

"Never mind Lacy now. There's enough of us to snatch him bald-headed if he made himself objectionable. Besides, he won't feel up to much after Trimble butting him over like that. Turn on the music."

"If you think it's a good idea," said Greene modestly, at the same time producing the tin whistle from an inner pocket.

"Of course it's a good idea—isn't it, Pat?"

"Sure, and it is," agreed Pat. "Talbot's fond of music. He goes to hear classical concerts, so he's sure to like it."

"Right-ho!" said Greene. "What shall I play?"

Pat reflected for a moment.

"RUN OUT!"

A Tale (School) of Press, the Terms & Co. By H. Clarke Hook.

AND

"RED MULLET."

A Story of Kid and Cops, the Brother and Sister Detectives.

IN "PLUCK," P.

NEXT SATURDAY:

h library

"Won't You Come Home, Bill Bailey?" he replied. "That's a bit stale, I know; but it has a bearing on the subject, you see. It will show that we want Talbot to come back—see? Besides, you know it. I've heard you murdering it—I mean, playing it—before."

"Jolly good idea," said Blagden. "I should never have thought of that. Strike up, Greene!"

"Here goes," said Greene.

He put the tin whistle to his lips. An ear-splitting shriek came from it, and then another and another, and to this musical accompaniment the Fourth Form advanced upon Talbot's study. Fellows came out of their rooms to look on and see what was the matter.

"Hallo!" said Brooke. "Young Nugent up to his tricks again. What the dickens is the game now, you wild Irishman?"

"Don't block the way," said Pat loftily; "and you're interrupting the music."

"The what?" asked the Sixth-Former.

"The music. Get on, chaps."

"Oh, is that music? My mistake," said Brooke, retreating into his study.

The Fourth Form marched on. Haywood came bolting out of his door, right into the column, considerably upsetting its order.

"What's the matter?" he gasped. "Who's that being murdered?"

"What are you talking about?" demanded Blagden indignantly. "Nobody's being murdered, that I know of."

"But those dreadful screams—"

"If you're talking about my whistle," said Greene, taking the instrument from his mouth, and turning as red as a turkey-cock, "you're a silly ass, Haywood!"

"Oh, is that it? I made sure something dreadful was happening."

"Listen to me, you silly—"

"No, no, no! Take all I have, but spare me!" cried Haywood, in mock terror; and he rushed into his study again and slammed the door.

"Seems to me the Sixth have gone off their silly chumps," said Greene.

"So they have," agreed Blagden. "But never mind. Get to the chorus, and then they'll know you're playing a tune, and—"

"Do you mean to say—"

"No, I don't mean to say anything of the sort," denied Blagden hastily. "Get on with the washing. March along, chaps!"

Greene was only half pacified, but he struck up again, and the Fourth-Formers marched up to Talbot's door, upon which Pat Nugent smote.

"Come in!"

Pat opened the door, and Talbot started up in amazement at the sight of the crowd behind the Irish lad.

"What on earth's the matter? What has happened?"

"Nothing. That's enough, Greene."

"Oh, he'd better finish the chorus," said Blagden.

Greene apparently thought so, too, for he halted just inside the study, and blew off the remainder of that touching appeal to William Bailey, Esquire.

Talbot stood in amazement.

"For goodness' sake stop that fearful noise!" he exclaimed. "You are tearing my nerves to pieces!"

Greene spluttered with wrath.

"I thought you liked music, Talbot."

"So I do; but— There, there; it's all right. What do you want?"

"I don't want anything," bellowed Greene, jamming the unappreciated musical instrument into his pocket. "I don't want a captain who doesn't understand good music when he hears it, so there!"

"Shut up, Greene!" exclaimed Pat hastily.

"I tell you, Pat Nugent—"

"Dry up! Sit on his head, somebody. Talbot, we've come to tell you—"

"I haven't," said Greene obstinately.

"Aren't you going to dry up?" shouted Pat. "It won't take much to get your head punched, young Greene."

"Who's going to punch it?" Greene demanded, looking warlike.

"My dear boys," said Talbot, "you really must not come and make a row in my study; and I am very much engaged just now, too. I don't know what you've come for, but the sooner you go the better I shall like it."

"There, you see!" exclaimed Pat. "Just like you to go and spoil everything, young Greene. Why some chaps can't shut up sometimes is a puzzle to me."

Blagden, as Greene was about to make some warm rejoinder, took him by the shoulders, and with a skilful twist sent him out into the passage.

"Now get on, Nugent!" he exclaimed. "If Greene interrupts again, I'll slay him. Go on!"

"Really—" began Talbot.

"Don't get ratty, Talbot. I'll explain, now that silly bounder's quiet," said Pat. "Sure, and it's an honour we're doing you, if you could only see it."

The captain of St. Kit's smiled faintly.

"I dare say that is the intention you have," he replied,

"and I thank you. But, really—"

"Won't you let me explain?"

Talbot looked resigned.

"Yes, if you like, Nugent; but please make haste."

"We've come to you, the whole of the Fourth Form of St. Kit's," said Pat—"that is, practically the whole of the Fourth. A few rotters like Trimble and Cob and Cleeve—"

"Yes, yes; never mind all that. Go on!"

"All right; I'm going on as fast as I can. Can't say it all at once, you know."

"Are you ever coming to the point, Nugent?"

"Of course. I'm nearly there now. Don't be impatient. As I was saying, the Fourth Form at St. Kit's have read your notice on the board—"

"Hear, hear!" shouted the juniors excitedly.

Pat turned upon his followers with a wrathful look.

"This isn't where you say 'Hear, hear!'" he exclaimed.

"Don't be idiotic! I'll hold up my right hand when you're to cheer."

Silence being restored, the leader went on:

"We've read your notice on the board, and have decided that it won't do. You can't resign. We can't do without you. St. Kit's can't do without you. We've come to tell you so. We're all here to tell you, but as the room isn't very large, most of us are out in the corridor. But we're all here. Now you can cheer."

"Hear, hear!" shouted the juniors.

"Well, and now you are here—" began Talbot.

"Exactly," said Pat, with a wave of the hand. "As I said, it won't do. We can't do without you. We want you to withdraw your resignation. We appeal to you in the name of the whole school to withdraw it. Won't you, Talbot?"

"Hear, hear!"

Talbot, in spite of the trouble that was weighing so heavily upon his mind and his heart, smiled, and the smile was slightly a tremulous one.

Although the way they had of expressing themselves was a little unusual and startling, he could see that there was a sincere attachment at the bottom of this demonstration of the Fourth Form at St. Kit's.

And it touched him deeply, especially at the present moment when his fortunes seemed to be at their lowest ebb, and he knew that many who had been friendly would probably fall away from his side.

There was something in the frank, eager faces of the youngsters—something even in their "cheek" in thus coming to his study, that went straight to his heart.

"Thank you very much, boys," said the captain of St. Kit's, in a low voice. "But—"

"You'll do it, Talbot?"

"No; I cannot."

"But—"

"My dear lads, I have not taken such a serious step without full reflection. I have the best of reasons for acting as I have done, and I have not acted hastily. I thank you for the good opinion you seem to have of me—"

"Oh, sure we know you're the right sort, Talbot!"

"Thank you. I am sorry it is impossible to do as you wish."

And Talbot sat down, as a strong hint that the interview was over.

But Pat Nugent was not beaten yet.

"I say, Talbot," he ventured, "there's one thing you've forgotten, you know."

"Indeed. What is that, Nugent?"

"If you keep it up, and resign, there'll be a new election for captain, and very likely Eldred Lacy will get in."

A shade came over Talbot's face.

"Well, Nugent, if St. Kit's chooses to elect Eldred Lacy captain of the school, I have nothing to say against it."

"But such a howling rotter as Lacy—"

"Come, come, Nugent, you must know that I cannot listen to you speaking against a prefect in this manner!" exclaimed Talbot.

"No, I suppose not; but you know he is," said Pat.

"Sure, and all the school knows it for that matter. How will St. Kit's get on if he's captain? What about the cricket?"

"I'm afraid I can't enter into a discussion on the subject," said Talbot. "My resignation stands, and that's all I can say. Please go now, boys."

The Fourth-Formers, looking rather crestfallen, turned to the door.

The remonstrance had been a failure.

But Pat Nugent did not go with the rest.

When the last of the juniors had gone, Pat came back towards the table, and took the paper out of his pocket and laid it before the captain.

"What is that?" said Talbot, in surprise.

"Something that came into our hands by accident," said Pat. "You can do as you like about it. It's a jolly good reason for keeping that rotter Lacy from ever becoming captain of St. Kit's."

And before Talbot could reply, Pat turned quickly and left the study. Talbot looked after him in surprise for a moment, and then picked up the paper.

"Lacy's writing! Why— The hound! The cowardly cur!"

#### Talbot Loses His Temper.

Brooke was in his study, staring gloomily out of the window in the quadrangle. He was in a miserable mood, thinking of the trouble that had come so blackly upon his friend. He would have been glad to be with Talbot then, but he felt that it was better to leave the captain of St. Kit's to himself just then.

Captain, indeed, Arthur Talbot no longer was.

Brooke had read the notice in the hall, and though he said little, he felt it deeply.

He felt, too, that Talbot had done the only possible thing under the circumstances, and that he had, upon the whole, acted wisely in immediately relinquishing the captaincy of the school.

Yet the loss to St. Kit's was certain to be great.

There would be a new election, and it was already known that Eldred Lacy meant to put up as a candidate.

At the last election Talbot had beaten him by a narrow margin, and if he tried his luck a second time, it was extremely probable that he would get in.

With Eldred Lacy as captain of the school, things were not likely to go as smoothly as of old, especially in the matter of sports, a matter of the greatest consequence at St. Kit's, where athletics were the order of the day.

That Lacy did not approve of Talbot's selections for the first eleven was no secret, and if Lacy became captain, there would be radical alterations.

If the result was a better team to represent the college on the cricket-field, no one at St. Kit's, least of all Brooke, would care to grumble.

But that result was not likely to be attained by Lacy's methods. Brooke felt quite certain about that.

The look-out was a bad one all round, in his opinion, for he could not think of any fellow in the school who would have a real chance against Eldred Lacy at the poll.

In the midst of his gloomy meditations, there was a tap at his door, and Talbot came in.

Brooke turned towards him quickly.

The late captain of St. Kit's was somewhat pale, but his habitual calmness had returned to him, and he was quite himself again now.

He held a paper in his hand, and Brooke glanced at it curiously.

"I want to consult a bit with you, Brooke," said Talbot quietly. "Not about myself, but about that."

He tossed the paper across the table.

Brooke picked it up and read it. It was Eldred Lacy's promissory note to Seth Black.

The Sixth-Former's eyes blazed with indignation.

"Did Lacy write this?"

"You know his writing. He wrote it, sure enough."

"But how did you get hold of it?"

"It got by some chance in the hands of Pat Nugent, who brought it to me."

"The hound! Then he was at the bottom of the whole business."

"It looks like it."

"But this shows that it's all lies, Talbot," said Brooke eagerly. "If Lacy's at the bottom of it, it shows it's all a put-up affair."

Talbot shook his head sadly.

"I wish I could think so, Brooke, but I can't. Lacy has made use of the ruffian's claim upon me to degrade me before all the school, but that doesn't alter the fact that Black has a claim."

"But—but you don't believe that he really has, Talbot?"

"I don't know what to believe. It looks as if he had. But that isn't the point. While this horrible shadow hangs over me, I cannot act as captain of St. Kit's. The fellows are mostly sorry for me now, but there would soon be trouble. And, anyway, I shouldn't care to hold a position

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on sufferance. I've resigned. You wouldn't have advised me to hold on, Brooke?"

"Perhaps not, under the circumstances, but it will be a blow for the college, Talbot. Lacy is almost certain to take your place, and you know what kind of a captain he is likely to make for the school."

Talbot compressed his lips.

"You are right. That's what I feel the most about it; that that scoundrel—for a scoundrel he is, in plain English—should become captain of a good old school like St. Kit's, and drag it down, very likely, to his own level."

"It would be easy enough to put a spoke in his wheel," said Brooke quickly. "We have only to make this letter public to show him up in his true colours to all St. Kit's."

The other shook his head.

"It wouldn't do, Brooke. We have no right to the paper, in the first place; and besides, a fellow who would write that, would denounce his own writing as a forgery if need arose. That's almost certainly the game he would play."

"Phew! I never thought of that."

"He would think of it. Besides, I don't know whether it would be exactly playing the game to show that about. Anyway, it wouldn't do, would it?"

"I suppose not?"

"I shall take it back to Lacy. I dare say he'll be glad to get his note of hand back again," said Talbot, with a grim smile. "But even that won't shame him into withdrawing himself as a candidate. He will stick it out."

"Yes; and the worst of it is, that he's almost certain to get in," said Brooke ruefully.

"That's what we've got to stop if we can."

"I should be glad to hear of a way."

"Mind, I don't want to be understood as wanting to act against Lacy personally," said Talbot. "I admit I dislike him, and he has done me a great injury; but I declare that I haven't the least thought of revenge in my mind. I'm thinking of the school in this matter."

"I know that, old fellow. But what do you propose?"

"Lacy has already put up for the post I have vacated. He

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has lost no time about it. Now, so far no rival candidate has appeared."

"And my private opinion is, Talbot, that one won't appear," Brooke replied, shaking his head. "The fellows know they have no chance against Lacy, and there's a feeling, too, that he ought to be allowed to get in, as he was so close to winning the last election."

"I'm aware of that. But a candidate can be found."

"Whom do you suggest?"

"Yourself," said Talbot quietly.

Brooke gave a start.

"You don't mean that, Talbot?"

"Yes, I do. You are the man; the only one who has a chance of defeating Eldred Lacy at the poll."

"But—well, I've never thought of becoming captain of St. Kit's."

"Think of it now, old man. You ought to come forward."

Brooke hesitated.

"If you really think so, Talbot, I'll certainly put up my name. I think as much as you do that Lacy ought to be kept out of it if possible. He will do the school harm if he is elected, there's no doubt on that point. But I don't feel up to the post myself, Arthur, and that's a fact."

"There's no reason why you shouldn't make as good a captain as myself, any day," said Arthur Talbot. "And it's absolutely certain that you will make a better one than Lacy."

Brooke laughed.

"Yes, you're right there; I can't let even my modesty blind me to the fact."

"Then you will put up?"

"Yes, I will."

"Good! Mind, I don't say it will be an easy task. You'll have a fight to get in. But there's a sporting chance of beating Lacy at the poll, and you may score."

"I'll do my best," said Brooke. "Rather! It won't be a walk-over for Lacy, anyhow, as he and his friends seem to anticipate."

"I shall back you all I can," Talbot observed, "and, of course, vote for you. I fancy my influence in the Upper Forms isn't what it was before this affair, but most of the juniors are still ready to stand by me. I have just had a deputation." He smiled. "They came to ask me to withdraw my resignation, in the name of the Fourth Form."

"Ah, was that the game?" laughed Brooke. "I saw them passing. They were making an unearthly noise, but I forgive them now."

"I believe the Lower Fourth and most of the Upper will plump for you," said Talbot.

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