

SCHOOL & DETECTIVE STORIES IN THIS ISSUE.

# PLUCK

THE MYSTERY OF SPORTS DAY.  
A Splendid School Tale. By Jack North.  
SAVING A THRONE.  
A Story of John Smith, Detective.

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TAFFY HAD LOWERED HIMSELF FROM THE BATTLEMENTED EDGE OF THE ROOF TO THE COPING BELOW IT. "CANNA YE DRAW YOURSEL' UP AGAIN, TAFFY?" ASKED MAC, STRETCHING OUT HIS HAND AS HE LEANED FROM THE WINDOW



A GRAND SCHOOL TALE.

THE RIVALS  
—OF—  
ST. KIT'S.

Eldred Lacy Speaks Out.

There was a buzz of excitement in the hall. The Forms of St. Kit's were assembled there to hear what the Head had to say; but already the news had spread like wildfire through the school. There had been a theft in the doctor's study, and Arthur Talbot was suspected of being the thief.

The boys were amazed at the accusation, even Talbot's enemies; but few of either his friends or his foes waited to hear any evidence before making up their minds on the matter.

His friends, to a boy, believed him innocent; while his enemies—and they were numerous at St. Kit's—shrugged their shoulders and sneered.

The Fourth Form was more excited about the matter than any other. Mr. Slaney had returned to his Form only just in time to stop what threatened to be a riot, and the juniors were still breathing wrath.

Pat Nugent was the most excited of all. His hot Irish blood was on fire at the cruel accusation made against the boy who was his idol, and his ideal of what a young Britisher should be.

Talbot a thief! It was impossible, and Pat was ready to fight anybody, whether in the Fourth Form or the Fifth or Sixth, who should maintain an opposite opinion.

And as Trimble and his set had already plumped against Talbot, it was probable that Pat and the chums of the end study had a large number of combats in prospect.

The Fourth was buzzing with suppressed indignation when the doctor entered and took his place.

All eyes were on the Head at once. All noticed how pale and worn he looked, years older than he had looked the previous day. The matter was telling heavily on Dr. Kent.

Talbot stood in his place in the Sixth, pale and calm. After the first stunning shock of the surprise at finding himself suspected, the young fellow had taken it calmly. He was deeply hurt, and deeply indignant, but he knew that there must be an inquiry, and he was ready to face it quietly.

The doctor cleared his throat. The buzz in the hall died away. Everyone was anxious to catch every word uttered by the doctor—rather a rare state of things on the occasion of a speech by the Head.

"My boys," said the doctor, and his voice, though very quiet, reached to every corner of the big lecture-hall—"my boys, there has been a terrible happening in this school. Some of you know what it is, others are still in ignorance. Last evening, while I was absent from my study, a sum of money in gold and notes was taken from my desk."

Dead silence!  
"I was forced to the unpleasant conclusion that there is a thief in the school," went on the Head. "I have made some inquiries, and I have learned that during my absence three boys went to my study with the intention of speaking to me. These three boys are above suspicion."

There was a buzz. The doctor waved his hand for silence.  
"I had hoped that they might have furnished me with some clue to the thief, but I was disappointed. I have no clue at present. But unless the truth is immediately made known, I shall have no alternative but to call in the police, when I have little doubt that the thief will speedily be brought to light."

The police! A sort of shudder went through the hall at the word. The police at St. Kit's!

Even fellows who did not, as a rule, think much about the good fame of the old school could feel what a disgrace was about to fall upon St. Kit's, and every face was dark and serious.

The Head paused for a moment. There was a dead silence while the boys waited for him to continue.

"Before such a serious step is taken, however," resumed Dr. Kent, "I wish to give the unhappy boy who has done this wretched deed a chance. If he will come to me and confess his guilt, and restore the stolen money, I will do my best for him."

Still silence.  
"I may add," said the Head, "that, so far, suspicion does not rest upon anyone whatever, and that any hint to that effect is a malicious slander upon the boy concerned."

Lacy and some of his friends turned red.  
"Hear, hear!" shouted Pat, forgetting himself in the exuberance of his feelings.  
The doctor took no notice of the interruption. As a matter of fact, he was glad at that moment to hear the loud shout which told that Arthur Talbot was not without friends in the hour of trial.

"I think that is all," said the doctor slowly. "There will be no lessons this morning. I shall be in my study until twelve o'clock. I hope—I sincerely hope—that the boy who has done this wicked thing will come to me there. If the truth is not made known by that time I shall send for a detective."

There was a dead silence, and then Eldred Lacy stepped a little forward.

"May I speak, sir?" he exclaimed.

The doctor looked fixedly at him.  
"Certainly, Lacy! I shall be glad to hear anything which you, or anyone else, may be able to say that will throw the least light upon this matter."

"Thank you, sir! As a matter of fact, it is the duty of the captain of the school to speak for the boys, as you are aware, but Brooke does not seem inclined to do so."

Brooke turned red.  
"I have nothing to say," he blurted out, "except that I don't for a moment put any belief in the slander which Rake invented this morning."

"Very well," said Lacy; "you have nothing to say, so I will speak, with the doctor's permission. We have a strong feeling, sir, that the school ought not to be disgraced by the police being brought into the matter, if it can possibly be helped."

"I quite agree with you, Lacy," said the doctor, cordially enough. "I am glad to see that my feeling on the subject is general. But unless the thief confesses I am unable to do what else can be done."

"There is one person in the school, sir, upon whom suspicion centres."

"I think I have already said, Lacy, that there is no such person in the school."

"Pardon me, sir, for disagreeing with you. Many of us, at all events, think that there is ground for suspecting a certain party, and we think that his guilt or innocence could be proved by an investigation, before the police are called in."

"To whom do you refer, Lacy?"  
The Head knew well enough, as a matter of fact.

"Shall I mention his name, sir?"  
"Decidedly! As I suppose the whole school knows to whom you allude, it can do no harm to mention his name," said the doctor, with a ring of scorn in his voice.

"The person I mean is Arthur Talbot, sir."

"Very well. Now, Lacy, this has been hinted at before, and I am not sorry to have the matter threshed out before the school. It was only for the purpose of sparing an innocent lad's feelings that I refrained from referring to it myself."

"If Talbot is innocent, sir, I suppose he can prove it. There's a strong feeling in the Form that he ought to do so."

"What do you wish him to prove? He told me frankly that he had gone to my study last evening, and that was all there was to tell. Haywood and Dunn went also."

"They went together, sir; and each is a witness for the other."

"Ah! Then I am to conclude, Lacy, that if they had gone separately, you would have suspected one of them of having committed the theft?"

Lacy shifted uncomfortably. This was rather turning the tables on him, and in the silence of the hall an audible chuckle proceeded from the ranks of the Fourth Form. But the prefect was not long at a loss.

"Certainly not, sir!" he exclaimed. "I should never suspect any fellow of being a thief unless there were reasons for it besides the fact that they were on the spot at the time the theft was committed."

"Indeed! Then you really attach no weight at all to the fact that Talbot visited my study, although you seem to have made so much of it?"

The doctor's voice was cutting.  
Lacy turned red, but he stuck to his guns.

"Not to that alone, sir."

"Then you have other reasons?"  
"I have sir."

"Name them!"  
"I don't like speaking against a fellow, sir—"

"It's too late to think of that now. You have already spoken against Talbot. It is now your duty to substantiate your charge, and my duty to hear you. If you cannot substantiate it, you stand exposed to the whole school as a slanderer!"

(To be continued in next Saturday's PLUCK)