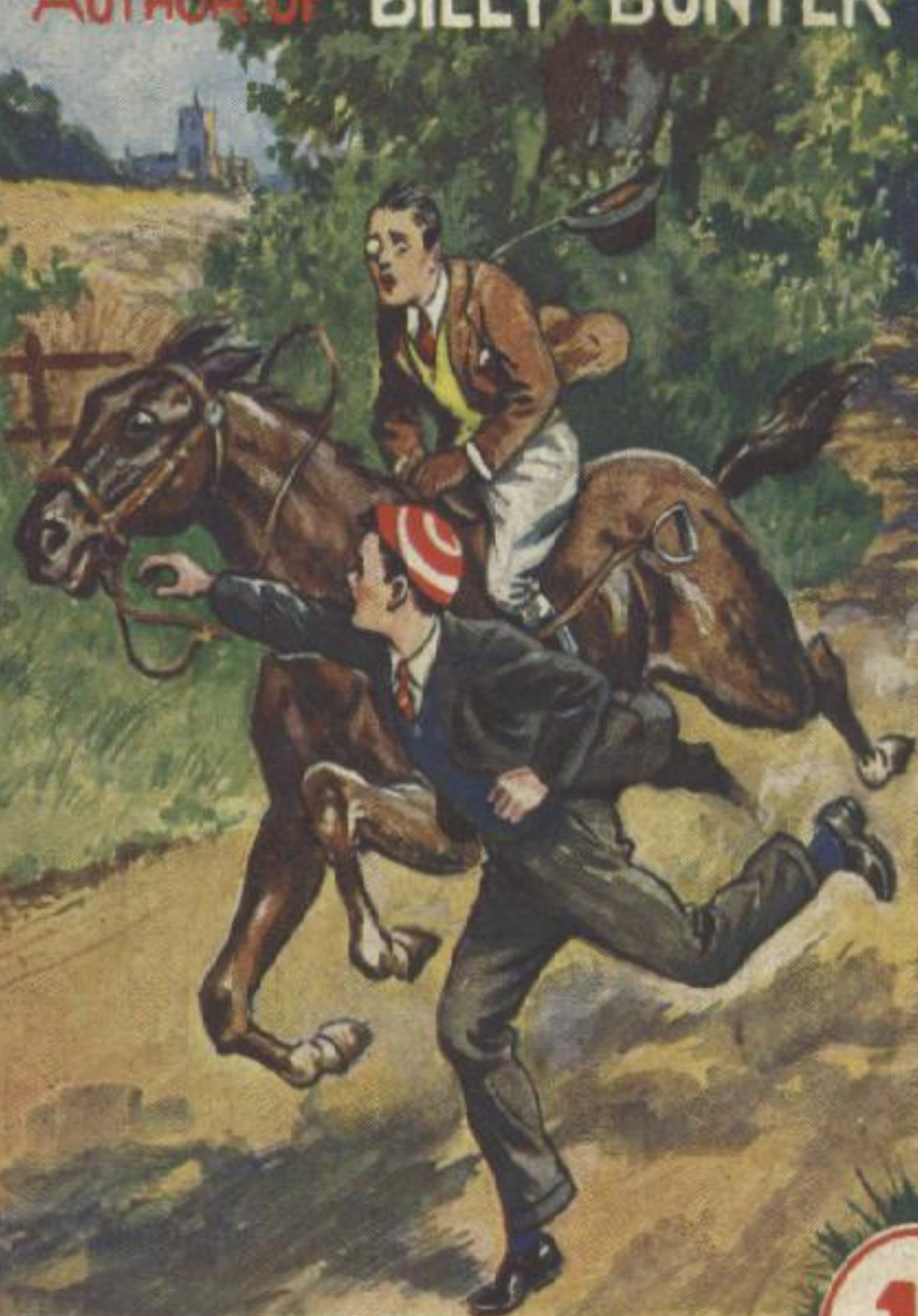


SPARSHOTT SERIES No 5

The HERO of SPARSHOTT

by FRANK RICHARDS
AUTHOR OF BILLY BUNTER



1/-

NECK OR NOTHING!

Hero of Sparshott

CHAPTER I.

THE BIG IDEA!

“**B**ARNEY’S in a tantrum!” grinned Plum.

Tom Rake grinned too.

Harry Vernon, captain of the Sparshott Fourth, frowned.

Carboy and Root, lounging in the doorway of No. 5 Study, exchanged a wink.

That Valentine Barnes-Paget, the “Buccaneer” of Sparshott, was in a “tantrum,” was plain for all to see. It leaped to the eye! When Barney was in a bad temper, nobody in the offing was left in any doubt about it.

Sparshott fellows weren’t always good-tempered. But it was an understood thing at Sparshott that fellows did not fly off the handle in public. A fellow might be “stuffy” or “shirty”; he might even be in a rage—but he was expected to keep within the limit. But in that, as in most matters, Barney was a law unto himself—and did that which was right in his own eyes.

At the present moment Barney was, as Plum dumpton expressed it, in a “tantrum.” He came up to the Fourth Form studies stamping rather than walking. There was a scowl on his face. He shoved past Sir Algernon Lovelace on the landing so roughly that that elegant youth staggered. He glared at the grinning faces of Plum and Rake, and catching Vernon’s frown, gave the captain of the Fourth a defiant stare. If Barney chose to blow off steam, nobody was going to frown Barney into a sense of greater propriety.

Barnes-Paget had been sent for to his form-master’s study. It looked as if he had not found his interview with Mr. Lamb an enjoyable one.

“Did the Little Lamb give you four or six, Barney?” asked Plum.

“Oh, don’t be a fool!” snapped Barnes-Paget.

“If it’s not a licking, why are you scowling like a demon in a pantomime?” asked Tom Rake.

“Find out!”

“There’s such a thing as decent manners, Barnes-Paget!” remarked Harry Vernon, “Not in your line, I suppose?”

“Oh, shut up!”

Barnes-Paget walked, or rather stamped, past the chums of No. 3 study. They looked—and felt—very much inclined to collar him as he passed, and bump him on the passage floor.

“Oh, jiminy-whiskers! Has Lamb found out that you were out of bounds last night, Barney?” exclaimed Plum, “that means going up to the Head, I told you you were a fool to go—now, who was right?”

Barnes-Paget was stamping on to his study, No 5, but at that remark from Plum, he swung round, his face flaming. Before Plum could guess what he was going to do, he grabbed Plum’s little fat nose, between finger and thumb.

“Gurrrggh!” spluttered Plum.

The next instant, Rake and Vernon had grasped Barney, and whirled him away from Plum. Plum clasped his tweaked nose with both hands, in anguish. Vernon and Rake whirled the Buccaneer off his feet, rushed him on to his study, and pitched him into the doorway—Carboy and Root jumping out of the way just in time. Barney went headlong into No. 5, sprawling full-length on the most expensive carpet in the Sparshott Fourth.

"There, you ruffian!" exclaimed Harry Vernon.

"Stick there till you're in a better temper, old bean," advised Tom Rake. And they left the Buccaneer to sort himself out, and returned to Plum. Carboy gave Barney a hand up, while Root hastily closed the study door.

"By gum, I—I—I'll——" panted the Buccaneer.

He made a stride to the door—but stopped. He had asked for it, as he was well aware: and it was not much use to ask to be pitched headlong into his study a second time. He stood where he was, panting for breath.

"What on earth's the trouble?" asked Carboy, blankly, "has Lamb got on to your breaking out last night?"

"No, you fool."

"Whopped?" asked Root.

"No, idiot."

"Not a row with Lamb?"

"No, I tell you."

"Then what the thump are you doing a song and dance about?" demanded Carboy.

The Buccaneer gave him a scowl, threw himself into the armchair, and sorted out a cigarette. He was calmer now, but still evidently in an extremely bad temper. Carboy and Root watched him rather uneasily—and not very pleasantly. They had their own reasons for keeping on pally terms with the millionaire's son; but there were times when they were strongly inclined to give Barney what he asked for so often.

"Well, are we going out or not?" asked Carboy, at last, impatiently.

"Not!" snapped the Buccaneer. "At any rate, not to the Feathers, as we'd arranged. This half-holiday is mucked up."

Carboy and Root looked sullen.

"Not my fault!" snarled Barnes-Paget. "Lamb has knocked it on the head!"

"He never found out ——?" exclaimed Carboy, in alarm.

"Of course not, idiot. He doesn't know a thing. But he's knocked it on the head all the same," snarled the Buccaneer. "And that's not all. We're going to have a new man bunged into this study."

"Oh, rotten!" said Carboy and Root together.

"We've always had the study to ourselves—and now that goat Lamb is goin' to stick a new man in it—some fathead coming here in the middle of the term. And as if that wasn't putrid enough, he's asked me—or rather, told me—to meet the new scug at the station, and bring him here." The Buccaneer almost howled with wrath. "That's my jolly half-holiday to-day—fetching a moon-faced new kid from the station, and then we've got to have him planted on us in this study!"

"Oh!" said Carboy, with a whistle. He understood now the Buccaneer's "tantrum." "We jolly well don't want a new man in this study."

"We jolly well don't," agreed Root.

"Who is he, Barney?"

"Some wild Mick from Tipperary or Connemara!" snarled the Buccaneer. "Doesn't know a soul in the place—if he did, he might be planted on some fellow he knows. But he's been sent over from Kilkenny or Killamagoo or somewhere—and some lawyers in London put him up there, Lamb says, and are sticking him in the train to-day—and Lamb thinks it would be nice—that very word!—nice!" hooted the Buccaneer. "He thinks it would be nice for some Sparshott fellows to meet him at Rodwood, and convoy him to the school—and I'm specially picked because he's going to be in this study—blow him! That washes out our run this afternoon—Lamb asked me if I had anything special on—I couldn't tell him we were going to play billiards with a man at the Feathers ——."

Carboy chuckled.

"Hardly!" he agreed.

The Buccaneer smoked his cigarette savagely. His afternoon was "mucked up," as he expressed it. But that was not the worst. He did not want the new junior "planted" in No. 5. Three were enough for a study—four were a crowd. And there were many little manners and customs in No. 5 which the black sheep of Sparshott preferred to keep to himself and his pals. Barnes-Paget, Carboy and Root were three of a kind. It was unlikely that the new junior would be of the same kind.

"Might be some stuck-up prig like Vernon, or some clumsy rhinoceros like Rake, or some born idiot like Tumpton, or some lackadaisical ass like Lovelace!" grunted the Buccaneer. "Not likely to be our sort, anyway. We don't want him here."

"Might rag him, and make him glad to change out, if anybody else would take him in!" suggested Root.

"I've got a better one than that!" said Carboy slowly. "You say that he knows nobody here, Barney?"

"Never been in England before, Lamb says!" grunted Barney.

"What's his name?"

"Egan—Michael Egan."

"Well, look here, suppose he made friends with some Sparshott men before he got here, and asked to be put into their study?" said Carboy. "Lamb's a good-natured little beast, and he would fall for it, ten to one."

"Talk sense!" snapped the Buccaneer. "Think any Sparshott man's going to make friends with him, just to get him put into his study? Who'd want a new smug landed on him?"

"Let a fellow finish," said Carboy. "We go to meet this wild Irishman at Rodwood. We've got to do that anyhow. Well, he won't know it from Adam. We make friends with him——!"

"Do we?" snarled Barnes-Paget. "I'm more likely to punch his head at sight."

"We make friends with him, and tell him our names—Vernon, Rake, and Tumpton——"

The Buccaneer jumped.

"What?" he yelled.

"And we take such a fancy to him that we'd like him put in our study—No. 3. We get him to ask Lamb."

"Oh, crumbs!" ejaculated Root, while Barnes-Paget stared blankly.

"See the point?" pursued Carboy. "This wild man from Connemara arrives at the school, thinking what nice chaps Vernon and Rake, and Tumpton, are—how jolly friendly they are—how nice it would be to be in the same study—and he tells Lamb about his new friends, and asks to be put in with them. Lamb would agree at once—benevolent old goat. See."

"But——!" gasped Barnes-Paget.

"He would find out that his leg had been pulled, as soon as he made the acquaintance of that gang in No. 3. But that would be too late. Once a fellow's landed in a study, he's landed in it. How could he go back to Lamb and say he'd made a mistake, and could he be put into another study? He couldn't. Besides, he wouldn't want to. No. 3 Study's a jolly decent study—quite as good as this. It will be all right for this chap Egan. We land him there, if it works—and we keep our own study to ourselves. How's that?"

The scowling face of the Buccaneer of Sparshott broke into a grin.

"We get rid of the new smug, and we pull a fast one over that gang!" said Carboy, complacently. "Looks to me like the goods, what?"

Barnes-Paget chuckled.

"It's the goods!" he said, jumping up from the armchair. "By gum, what a jest on that crew! They're welcome to him—and he's welcome to them. By gum, a jape like that is better than a run down to the Feathers. Why, we can work it as easy as falling off a form. Mind, I'm Vernon, you're Rake, and Root's Tumpton, when we meet this wild man from Connaught at Rodwood. He can't have a suspish. By gum, this is a winner!"

Ten minutes later, the Buccaneer and Co. sallied forth in company. Harry Vernon and Co., in the quad, gave the Buccaneer rather a grim look—in reply to which he bestowed on them, to their surprise, a nod and a cheery grin. Evidently Barney's tantrums were over.

CHAPTER II.

TAKING THE STRANGER IN.

“**R**ODWOOD!” shouted a porter. “Change here for Oke and Parsley!” Mick Egan gathered a bag from the rack, and stepped from the train. He stood looking about him on the long platform of the country station, with its banks of flower-beds, beyond which there was a glimpse of the blue sea.

Three fellows lounging on the platform glanced at him curiously.

“That can't be Paddy!” said Carboy.

“Must be,” said Barnes-Paget. “Why not?”

“You said the new man was a wild Irishman,” said Root.

“You silly ass, do you think every Irishman carries a shillelagh under his arm?” snorted the Buccaneer. “Don't be an ass.”

A dozen or more passengers had alighted from the train at Rodwood. But there was only one boy among them, and if Michael Egan was coming by that train, this obviously must be Michael Egan.

“Ask him, anyway,” said Carboy.

Barnes-Paget, assuming his politest manner, approached the boy, who was glancing about him, and raised his hat.

“You're Egan?” he asked. “New chap for Sparshott. If so, we're here to meet you and take you to the school.”

Carboy and Root, still a little doubtful, eyed the newcomer. He was a rather sturdy lad, evidently strong and active, with a pleasant, good-looking face, and very handsome dark-blue eyes with dark lashes. Exactly what they had expected Egan to be like was rather vague in their minds: but they had not expected a handsome fellow like this.

The newcomer's face broke into a pleasant smile.

“Yes, I'm Egan,” he said. “It's good of you to meet me here.”

“Not at all,” answered Barney. “Jolly glad to make your acquaintance. I'm Vernon—this chap is Rake—and that Tumpton! We're all in the Fourth—the form you're going into. We thought you might like to know some of us before you got to the school, so here we are, see?”

Carboy and Root nodded and grinned, as they were presented to the new junior under those inaccurate names.

“There's ten minutes to wait for the local train,” continued Barnes-Paget. “Come along to the buffet. I daresay you could do with a spot of something after your journey down.”

“Sure and I could. But——.”

“Come along, then,” said Barnes-Paget, slipping his arm through the new junior's. “You carry the bag, Rake.”

“My dear chap, I can carry my own bag,” protested Egan.

“We're looking after you, your first day here. Take the bag, Rake.”

Carboy took the bag, grinning.

“You see,” went on Barnes affably, as he walked the new junior along to the refreshment room, “you're the very first chap that's come over from Ireland straight to Sparshott, so it's rather an event with us.”

“Is it entirely?” asked Egan, in surprise.

“Oh, quite. Here we are,” said Barney as they went into the station buffet. “You mustn't expect the fat of the land here—grub's short in this country, and you'll find it a bit of a change after Ireland.”

“We call it Eire,” said Egan.

"Airy?" asked Carboy, deliberately misunderstanding. "Is it very airy in Ireland? Do you mean it's windy?"

"No, no," said Egan, laughing. "Not airy—Eire! It's our own name for our own country. The old name."

"Sit down here kid," said Barnes-Paget. He gave Carboy a warning look over his shoulder. "We can get cakes and coffee here. Our treat, you know. The grub's pretty measly, but you'll have to get used to that on this side of the Irish Sea."

Mick Egan's pleasant face was very bright as he discussed coffee and cakes with the three polite fellows from Sparshott.

The new fellow was no fool, as they could see at a glance; he had all his wits about him. But he was quite without suspicion; he was a stranger, and he was being taken in; and it was impossible for him to suspect that these three fellows had a purpose of their own to serve in showing him all this politeness, or that the names they had given were not their own. Naturally enough, he took Barney and Co, at face value; and could hardly help feeling pleased by this kind and courteous reception at the hands of fellows belonging to his new school.

"I suppose you don't know much about Sparshott," remarked Barnes-Paget.

"Very little, so far," answered Egan, "I know nobody there yet—."

"You know three fellows already—us three."

"Yes, and sure I'm very glad to know you, too," said the new junior. "I wondered a bit what it would be like; but I'm bound to say that I never expected so kind a welcome as this."

"Oh, you'll find us pretty decent," said Barnes-Paget. "I suppose you know that we Fourth-form men have studies—."

"Men?" repeated Egan.

The Buccaneer laughed.

"We're all 'men' at Sparshott," he said. "Boys are quite unknown. Even in the Second Form they're 'men.' Just a way of speaking. Well, we all have studies, as I daresay you know—."

"No, I'm afraid I don't know a lot about it yet—."

"Well, that's how it is. We three have the best study in the Fourth—No. 3 Study," explained Barnes-Paget airily, "and though there's three of us in it, there's lots of room for a fourth, if you'd like to dig in with us."

"We'd be glad," said Carboy.

"Jolly pleased," said Root.

"Can a fellow choose his own study?" asked Egan.

"Well, not exactly. A new fellow who blows in in the middle of the term is assigned to a study where there's room for him. But if you ask the beak it will be all right. Lamb's a good little man, and he would agree like a shot if you asked to be put in a study where you have friends."

Egan looked pleased, but he could not help feeling a little surprised. It was complimentary, certainly, but he had never anticipated that his new schoolfellows would take to him, at sight, in this agreeable way. He could not help thinking that Sparshott School must be a very happy place if all the fellows were as kind and pleasant as these three!

"If you'd really like me——!" he said.

"Bank on that," said Barnes-Paget. "I told Rake that I liked your looks as soon as we saw you getting out of the train—didn't I, Rake?"

"You did," agreed Carboy, "and Tumpton said the same."

"Just ask Lamb, when you see him," pursued Barnes-Paget. "You see, you know us already, and by the time we get to the school you'll know us better. We'd really like you in No. 3 Study—honest Injun."

"Honest Injun!" repeated Carboy.

"You can tell Lamb you know us, and that we've said we'd be glad to have you," explained Barnes-Paget. "That will work the oracle. You might be stuck into a study with some ass like Lovelace—you wouldn't like that."

"I shall certainly ask Mr. Lamb, as you're so kind," said Egan. "I must say that this is jolly friendly of you."

"My dear fellow, we know a good chap when we see one," said Barnes-Paget. "We'll be jolly glad to have you in—No. 3 Study. I'm awfully glad we came over to Rodwood instead of—of Barnes-Paget."

"Who's Barnes-Paget?" asked Egan.

"A chap in the Fourth," said the Buccaneer, calmly. "Lamb was sending him over to meet you at the station, but we came instead. You needn't mention it to Lamb, as it might get Barnes-Paget into a row for not coming. No need to mention that he didn't meet you at the station—all you've got to say is that you met up with us in Rodwood and we became friends—we're friends, aren't we?"

"I hope so," assented Egan, surprised but pleased.

"Lamb will stick you in our—in No. 3 Study—like a shot—he's a kind-hearted little ass. Hallo, there's the train. Pick up that bag Rake."

Carboy picked up the bag, and they went out to the train.

In the local train to Oke there was half-an-hour's run—and during that half-hour nothing could have exceeded the kind politeness of Barney and Co. It was the first time on record that they had ever taken the trouble to make themselves agreeable to a new boy; but Egan had no idea of that. He was feeling very happy and contented in such pleasant company.

From Oke the four walked up the shady lane together towards Sparshott. At the stile in the lane Barnes-Paget came to a halt.

"By gum, we've forgotten those books for Lamb!" he exclaimed. "Dash it all, you might have thought of it, Rake—or you, Tumpton. We shall have to cut back to Oke. Mind waiting here ten minutes or so, Egan? Lamb told us to bring some books from the shop—look here, sit on the stile, and just wait a few minutes—we'll be back in a brace of jiffies."

Egan would have been quite willing to walk back to the village with his new friends for those forgotten books; but Barnes-Paget did not suggest it, and he did not want to be in the way. So he assented cheerfully, and sat on the stile, under the shady branches, to wait for them to rejoin him. The three young rascals disappeared down the lane at a rapid trot.

Out of sight of Egan, however, they did not keep on to Oke. They squeezed through a gap in the hedge, and cut across the fields to the Feathers Inn, grinning.

Barney had no doubt that the new boy would remain where he had been left till they rejoined him—and he intended to leave him waiting for at least an hour—he was not going to be deprived of his game of billiards at the Feathers. And Mick Egan, little dreaming how kind and friendly his new friends really were, waited patiently and cheerfully for their return.

CHAPTER III.

NECK OR NOTHING!

HONK! HONK!

"Look out, Lazy!" shouted Harry Vernon.

"Look out, fathead!" shrieked Tom Rake.

"Oh, jiminy-whiskers!" ejaculated Plum.

And Sir Algernon Lovelace, generally called Lazy Lovelace in the Sparshott Fourth, jumped, and nearly fell out of his saddle.

Algy was ambling gently along the lane near the cross-roads, when Harry Vernon and Co., out for a saunter before tea, came in sight of him. Algy, always elegant, was more elegant than ever in riding-clothes; he was, in fact, a thing of beauty and a joy for ever. The eyeglass that usually adorned his right eye had fallen from its place, dangling at the end of its silken cord. Algy naturally gathered it in, and wiped it on the edge of a spotless handkerchief

before replacing it in his eye. To do so he let his reins fall on the horse's neck. Which would not have mattered if his mount had continued to amble gently. Unfortunately, his mount did not.

Algy was oblivious of a car that was speeding along the road from Parsley, approaching the corner. He was wholly intent on wiping a speck or two from his monocle. But the chums of No. 3 Study saw it, and shouted to him from a distance.

But it was too late.

▼ The car, driven at high speed, came roaring round the corner, rushing down on Algy and his horse as if deliberately charging them.

It was going at a high and reckless speed. For a terrible moment, Harry Vernon and Co. dreaded that it would rush Algy down, horse and rider in a terrific crash. But the driver saw him just in time to swerve, and the car roared by, grazing the horse and just missing him. It roared on its way, regardless—leaving the startled and frightened horse rearing and plunging frantically.

"Oh, gad!" gasped Algy.

He was almost tossed from the saddle—but he held on, luckily, with his knees, as he dropped the eyeglass, and clutched at his reins. But the reins dangled over the tossing head, and were far beyond his reach. He had to grasp at the pommel of his saddle to save himself from being tossed off; and the horse, uncontrolled, broke into a frantic gallop.

"Oh, jiminy-whiskers, he's running away with him!" gasped Plum. "I say, come on! After him!"

It was not much use for fellows on foot to chase a runaway horse—but they tried it on. The horse, in a perfectly frantic state, tore away down the lane at a furious gallop, the rider utterly unable to get it under any kind of control, and in danger every moment of being flung from his precarious seat. Harry Vernon and Tom Rake ran hard—Plum doing his best behind, but very speedily falling out of the race. Plum's weight was against him in a foot-race.

But his chums, though not handicapped like Plum with an extensive circumference, had no better luck. They were able to keep the runaway in sight for about a minute—but that was all. Then horse and rider disappeared from their eyes down the winding leafy lane, and the crash of hoof-beats died away in the distance. Whatever was going to happen to Sir Algernon Lovelace, the chums of No. 3 Study were not able to help him.

"Oh, gad!" breathed Algy, as the horse thundered on, the reins dangling about the tossing head, "what a go!"

He could do nothing but hold on—if he could do that. Every moment he might have been tossed with a crash to the earth. Algy was not in the least frightened—Lazy Lovelace never was frightened—but he knew well enough that he would be lucky if he got out of this without broken limbs, or, indeed, without a broken neck. And if a car appeared ahead in the narrow lane, as was likely any moment—Algy tried not to think of that, as he clung desperately on.

Clatter! clatter! clatter!

Algy Lovelace did not see the boy sitting on the stile by the roadside—he saw nothing but the tossing head and a whirl of dust. But Mick Egan looked round quickly as he heard that frantic clatter of wild hoofs.

For a single moment, Egan stared blankly at the frantic horse, coming down the lane at a mad gallop, and the swaying figure that clung somehow to the heaving back. But it was only for a single moment; he was quick on the uptake. If he realised the terrible danger of getting in the way of the thundering hooves he did not stop to think of it. Neither had he time to think—for, unless he acted instantly, the runaway would be past him, careering on towards the village. It was a moment for action, not for thinking, if he was going to attempt to save the rider—and he was.

As the maddened animal came careering by, the sturdy figure by the roadside leaped at his head. If Mick had not caught the dangling reins he would have gone down under the crashing hooves; but he did catch them.

The wildly tossing head was dragged down by his weight. The horse thundered on, dragging the brave lad with him; for a dozen yards his feet dragged in the dust, and he felt as if his arms were being wrenched out of their sockets. Then the runaway slowed down, and Mick was able to bring him to a halt.

He stood panting crimson, breathless, holding the horse's head. Once at a halt, the animal calmed, and stood trembling after his late excitement. Algy Lovelace, still in the saddle, not quite sure that he was still alive, blinked at him.

"Oh, gad!" he said.

"All right now?" gasped Mick.

"Right as rain, old boy," said Lovelace, "thanks to you! I say, it was jolly decent of you!" He grinned. "Did it occur to you, kid, that you ran about a hundred chances to one of getting yourself killed?"

"No time to think about that," said Mick. "Sure you're all right? Hadn't you getter get down?"

"O.K. now, if you'll hold him a minute longer, while I get my eyeglass," said Algy. "I've had a knock on my leg—banged on somethin'—but it doesn't amount to anythin'—only a bit of a bruise."

Algy's eyeglass had curled round the back of his neck on the end of its cord. He groped after it, Mick holding the horse with a steady hand. Having recaptured the furtive monocle, Lovelace stuck it in his eye, and immediately felt more comfortable. A bruise on his ankle was a much less important matter.

"Fellow feels lost without it," he explained to the wondering Mick. "If it hadn't dropped out of my eye, this would never have happened. There was a road-hog in a car and the poor old gee was startled. I say, I'm awfully obliged to you."

"Not at all," said Mick.

"Yaas, but I am, you know! Might have had to be picked up and taken home on a gate, what? I say, you're not hurt?"

"Only a bit of a shake."

"That's good! Give me the reins, will you? He's all right now—I can manage him. He's a good old gee—only scared by that beastly car."

Algy took his reins, and settled himself comfortably in the saddle. Micky eyed him rather anxiously; but the horse was quiet enough now, and the rider had him under control. Algy wheeled him to ride back towards Sparshott, remembering the juniors in the lane, who were quite certain to be very anxious about him.

"You've got plenty of pluck, kid," he said. "Give me your fist before I go, will you?"

Mick, smiling, gave him his "fist"; and Algy rode away towards the school as cool and cheerful as if nothing uncommon had happened. Mick returned rather breathlessly, to his seat on the stile, to wait there for his kind friends. Lazy Lovelace cantered on out of sight.

It was about half a mile on that he came on two juniors, running. But they stopped running at the sight of Lovelace riding towards them.

"Oh," gasped Harry Vernon, "you're all right, then."

"Not killed?" exclaimed Tom.

"Not so's you'd notice it," assented Algy. "Came back to tell you so. But I jolly well might have been if a chap hadn't jumped at the horse and stopped him for me. Plucky kid."

"Must have been," said Harry. "Who was it?"

"Dashed if I know! Never saw him before," said Algernon. "Tons of pluck, whoever he is. I was expecting to be killed every tick, and then he happened! Hallo, here's old Plum, just on burstin'."

Plum came panting up.

"Oh, you're not killed!" he gasped.

"I've just told these fellows so," assented Algy. "Do I look killed? I

think I'll ride this gee back to Parsley—feel a bit shaken up—unless you'd like to lead him back for me, Plum! It's only two miles or so."

"Yah!" was Plum's rejoinder to that; and Algy chuckled, and set his steed in motion again, and cantered away for Parsley.

Harry Vernon and Co., much relieved in their minds, went in to tea—wondering a little who the "plucky kid" was who had saved Algy from a bad accident. They little guessed that that plucky kid was on his way to Sparshott School; and that, owing to Barnes-Paget's peculiar proceedings, they were booked to have him as a study-mate in No. 3 Study!

CHAPTER IV.

O.K.

"YOU haven't got the books!" said Egan.

"The books?" replied Barnes-Paget. He had forgotten, for the moment, the pretext on which he had left the new boy at the stile.

"The books for Mr. Lamb, that you went back for —."

"Oh! Yes! Quite! They—they hadn't arrived, and we—we waited." The Buccaneer stammered a little. Barney did not often feel ashamed of himself; but Egan's utter want of doubt and suspicion did make him feel a little ashamed, for once.

"That's why we've kept you so long, Egan," said Carboy blandly. "We waited for those books, till we felt we couldn't keep you waiting longer."

"So here we are!" said Root. "Get tired of waiting?"

"No, that's all right," said Egan cheerfully. "I wondered what kept you so long, but I didn't mind waiting."

"Come on then," said Barnes-Paget, rather abruptly. He had left the new boy to wait over an hour, while he was playing billiards at the Feathers. Now they walked on to Sparshott together.

At the school gates Carboy and Root disappeared; leaving the rest of the proceedings to Barney alone. The Buccaneer walked Egan in, as cool as a cucumber—but he made all the haste he could, for now that he was in the school, a chance remark from any fellow might have revealed the trick he had played on the new junior. In fact, as they crossed the quad, Ridd of the Fourth called out, "I say, Barney"—and Barney almost looked round at the name, but checked himself in time, and pushed on with Egan—leaving Reggie Ridd staring.

They passed near Mr. Lamb's study window, where, the window being open, the master of the Fourth could be seen within, at his table. Barney spotted Plum Tumpton coming towards them, and steered Egan out of the way. But Plum was not to be denied—he came up.

"You're jolly late, old scout!" he said. "Is that the new kid?"

"Yes—come on, Egan—we're late."

"You jolly well are!" said Plum. "Lamb called me half-an-hour ago and asked whether you'd got in. That was the first I'd heard of a new kid coming to-day. Is his name Egan?"

"Yes—don't stop us now —!" The Buccaneer caught Egan's arm, to march him past Plum, in dread of what Plum might say next. But Plum marched on with them to the door of the House. Plum was a kindly fellow, and had a cheery word for the new "kid."

"So your name's Egan, kid?" he said. "Welsh, what? Or Scotch? I know Egan's a Welsh or Scotch name—I forget which."

"Irish," said Egan, smiling. He rather liked that plump, red-cheeked junior, who looked so good-natured, but he was not vastly impressed by Plum's brains.

"Oh, Irish, is it?" said Plum. "I knew it was something or other, and if it wasn't What's-its-name, it would be Thingummy. Live in England—."

"No; in Eire."

"Then you're Scotch," said Plum. "Ayr's in Scotland."

"I mean——"

"My dear chap, we've had it in geography with Lamb," said Plum. "Ayr's in Scotland all right. Take my word for it."

"I mean, my country is Eire ——"

"Oh, not at all," said Plum politely, "I shouldn't call it eerie. Bit uncanny up in the Highlands perhaps, among the seers, and seventh sons of seventh sons, and bards and so on; but not eerie—oh, no."

"Ireland is called Eire, these days, you goat," grunted Barnes-Paget.

"Is it?" said Plum. "I don't see why—I've heard that it's a jolly country—green isle with lots of grub, and all that. Why do they call it eerie? Nothing eerie about having plenty of grub I should say. Anyhow, this chap is a Scotchman if he comes from Ayr. I positively know that Ayr is in Scotland, because we's had it with Lamb in class. I say, Bar——"

Barnes-Paget interrupted him before "Bar" could be completed into "Barney."

"Like some bullseyes, Plum?" he asked.

"Would I!" said Plum eloquently.

"I've got a bag of them for you—only I left it on my study table—if you wouldn't mind going up to the studies ——"

Plum shot away for the staircase.

Relieved of Plum Tumpton, Barnes-Paget led the new boy to Lamb's study.

"Is that chap's name really Plum?" asked Egan, as they went up the corridor.

"Oh! Yes! Biggest ass at Sparshott," said Barnes-Paget.

"Well, he seemed very good-natured ——"

"Oh, so he is—everybody likes Plum—I like him myself, though I pulled his nose this afternoon," said Barnes-Paget. "He got an extra dose of good-nature instead of any brains—he wasn't on the spot when brains were served out. Here we are, Egan—this is Lamb's study. I won't come in with you—I'll wait at the end of the passage till you come out. Mind you ask Lamb to put you into No. 3, with Vernon ——"

"With you and your friends?"

"Oh! Yes! I mean, with Vernon, Rake, and Tumpton—that's how you put it to Lamb. He's sure to say yes if you tell him they—we're friends already. Here you are—walk in."

Barnes-Paget tapped at the door, and in response to Lamb's "Come in," opened it for Egan, and shut it again when the new junior went in.

With a grin on his face, he walked down the passage to the corner, to wait there for the new junior to rejoin him after his interview with Lamb.

Everything was going well from the Buccaneer's peeculiar point of view. He waited cheerfully at the corner for Egan. Banks of the Fourth came up to him there.

"That a new kid I saw you with?" he asked.

"Yes; just over from Tipperary, or Tralee, or Tonypandy, or somewhere."

"I say, what study do you think they'll jam him in? We've no room for new kids in No. 6."

"Number Three, I think," smiled the Buccaneer.

"Oh, good; that's all right. Looks a decent kid, but a fellow doesn't want to be crowded out. But I say, that'll make four in No. 3. I wonder how they'll like it."

"I wonder!" agreed the Buccaneer.

"Heard about old Lazy?" asked Banks.

"Anything happened to Lovelace?" yawned Barnes-Paget. "Too lazy to breathe, and expired to save the trouble of livin'?"

Banks chuckled.

"No! He was out riding this afternoon—you know he's always riding when he can get hold of a gee—and he had an accident."

"Went to sleep and fell off?"

"Horse bolted from a car. The silly ass rode him back to Parsley afterwards, and walked back with a bandy leg. Must have got a bang on his ankle while the horse was bolting. Lamb saw him limping in, and he's sent him into sanny to lie up. Ankle fearfully swollen. He will get out of class to-morrow—perhaps next day, too. Some chaps have all the luck."

"Well, I'd rather be in class, than in sanny with a swollen ankle," said Barnes-Paget. "The fathead might have broken his neck."

"I hear that he would have, only somebody stopped the horse," said Banks. "Some village kid, from what I can make out—it happened in Oke Lane. Vernon and Rake have gone to see him."

"They'll find a new kid in their study when they come back," said Barnes-Paget. "Happy surprise for them."

"Oh, rather," said Banks, laughing. "Hallo, here he comes."

The door of Mr. Lamb's study opened, and Egan came out. He came down the passage with a very pleased expression on his cheery face. Apparently he was satisfied with his interview with his form-master.

"O.K." he said cheerily. "Lamb seems a very nice man. I asked him about putting me in your study, and he agreed at once—after what I told him —."

Banks stared.

"I say," he began, addressing Barnes-Paget, "didn't you say the new kid was going into No. 3?"

The Buccaneer did not seem to hear the question. He slipped his arm through Egan's.

"Come on," he said, "you'll have to see the matron. She'll give you some tea—it's over in hall. This way."

He marched Egan off, leaving Banks of the Fourth staring.

CHAPTER V.

WHOSE STUDY?

"HALLO!" said Plum.

"Hallo!" said Egan.

"Want anything in this study?" asked Plum.

"I was just going to ask you that."

Plum stared—as well he might.

He had come into his study—No. 3 in the Fourth. He was rather surprised to see there the fellow he had seen with Barnes-Paget in the quad.

Michael Egan was there—and he seemed to be making himself at home. Plum was a good-natured fellow, and very tolerant with new kinds. But he was surprised—and not quite pleased.

"Is that a joke?" he inquired.

"Not at all."

"Well, what are you doing here?" Plum demanded restively.

"Sitting in the armchair."

"I can see that!" roared Plum. "What I want to know is, what the thump are you doing here, sitting in Vernon's armchair, see?"

"I don't see that it matters a lot to you," said Egan, in surprise. He had not the remotest idea that Plum belonged to that study. So far as he knew, his study-mates were Vernon, Rake, and Tumpton—the three agreeable fellows who had met him at Rodwood. That Plum was Tumpton was not likely to occur to him.

"It doesn't matter a lot to me?" repeated Plum.

"No; why should it?"

"Well, it does happen to matter," snorted Plum. "It matters a lot see?"

You seem to be rather a fool, Egan. I've always heard that Scotchmen are canny—but you don't seem very bright."

"But I'm not a Scotchman," urged Egan. "I come from Cork."

"You said you came from Ayr."

"No, no—Eire! Quite a different place," said Egan patiently. "I dare say you've heard of Cork."

"Of course I have, fathead," answered Plum, disdainfully. "I'm pretty good at geography. Cork's in Ulster."

"It jolly well isn't."

"I mean, Ulster's in Cork," said Plum hastily. "I knew it was one or the other. I've a pretty good memory for geography. But never mind about that. I find you squatting in this study just as if it belonged to you —."

"So it does."

Plum jumped.

Oh! Jiminy-whiskers!" he exclaimed. "Mean to say that Lamb's jammed you in here."

"Just that!"

"Well, if that isn't a first-class swizzle!" exclaimed Plum. "Three to a study already—and now a new man jammed in. Sure Lamb told you Number Three?"

"Quite sure!" said Egan, smiling.

"It's not fair!" snorted Plum. "Barney's study is bigger than this—more room for four in Number Five than in Number Three. Lamb knows that. I say, you'd have more room in Number Five with Barney."

"I think I shall be all right here, thanks."

"Well, you may think so, but there's other fellows to be considered," said Plum warmly. "I don't want to be uncivil to a new chap, especially when he comes from thousands of miles away —."

"Not quite so far as that!" grinned Egan. "Make it hundreds."

"I don't care whether it's thousands or hundreds, or millions if you come to that!" snorted Plum. "I don't see being crowded out by a new smug. Lovelace has a study to himself—he could easily take in another man. I believe his people fixed it up—but that's rot—you ought to go into Number Seven. Look here, old Lazy's got himself landed in sanny, and you could just walk into his study, if you liked."

"But I don't like."

"I've a jolly good mind to go to Lamb about it," said Plum indignantly. "Perhaps he couldn't land you on old Lazy—but he could have stuck you in Barney's study. I tell you there's more room there."

"What the dickens does it matter to you?" asked Egan, puzzled. "Aren't you getting rather excited about nothing, Plum?"

"Like your cheek to call me Plum!" said Plum, with a snort. Plum was called Plum by everybody in the Lower School at Sparshott; but it seemed to him very familiar from a newcomer he had never seen an hour ago.

But Egan, who supposed from Barney that his name was Plum, could only stare.

"What else am I to call you, if I call you anything?" he asked.

"No need to call me anything," snorted Plum. "But I'll tell you what I call you—I call you a cheeky smudge, so yah."

"Thanks," said Egan. "I've never been called a smudge before—is it something awful? Why not travel along before we have a row?"

"Me—travel along!" said Plum, almost dazedly. "Well, I like that!"

"Glad you like it!" said Egan, politely. "Shut the door after you Plum."

"If you call me Plum, when I don't know you from Adam, I'll jolly well punch your head!" roared Plum.

"Oh, all right! What shall I call you—Raisin, or Currant, or Sultana, instead of Plum?" asked the new junior. "Or Apricot—or Greengage? Anything you like."

Plum breathed wrath.

"You've a lot of lip for a new kid," he said. "I can't make out why Lamb jammed you in here. He knows jolly well there's less room here than in Number Five."

"It's simple enough—I asked him," explained Egan.

"You asked to be put into this study?"

"Yes; why not?"

"Well, of all the nerve—and what the thump did you ask to be put in here for, when you don't know a fellow here?"

"But I do know a fellow here," said Egan, cheerfully. "To be exact, I know three fellows here—Vernon, Rake, and Tumpton."

Plum blinked with astonishment.

"You know Vernon, Rake, and Tumpton!" he spluttered.

"Yes! Only very recently, but we're all quite friendly," said Egan. "I'm jolly glad to be in their study; and why you're interested in the matter at all, is just a mystery to me. What on earth does it matter to you?"

"Mad, I suppose!" gasped Plum. "Look here, I'm Tumpton."

Egan stared at him.

"You're Tumpton?" he repeated.

"Yes; Eustace Percival Tumpton, if you want the lot."

"Are there two Tumptons at Sparshott?"

"No; only one, and that's me."

"Then you're not Tumpton," said Egan. "I've met Tumpton, and you're not the least bit like him. You're twice as wide, to begin with."

"You've met Tumpton!" yelled Plum.

"Yes, and made friends with him. He belongs to this study."

"I'm Tumpton!" shrieked Plum, "and I belong to this study! Now what about that, you young lunatic?"

"Gammon!" said Egan cheerfully. "I'm a new kid here, and I daresay I don't know the ropes, but you can't pull my leg to that extent. Not quite!"

"I tell you I'm Tumpton of the Fourth!" shrieked Plum.

"You can tell me till you're black in the face, but I shan't believe it, when I know you're not."

"I tell you I am—and if you say I'm not, I'll chuck you out of this study on your neck!" roared Plum.

"You're not!" said Egan at once.

"That does it!"

Plum rushed at him. Egan jumped up from the armchair, and then went crashing back into it, with Plum sprawling over him. Then Plum grasped him, and he came out of the armchair in a heap. Plum whirled the heap towards the door.

Then suddenly something surprising happened to Plum. A grasp stronger than his own was laid on him, and he was suddenly whipped off his feet, weighty as he was. The next he knew he was sitting in the passage outside No. 3 Study, dizzily wondering how he had got there.

"Oooogh!" gasped Plum. "Oh, jiminy-whiskers! Wooogh!"

Egan, standing a little breathless inside the study, watched him. Plum staggered to his feet, with the help of the passage wall. He stood gurgling for breath, his face crimson, and his eyes bulging at the new junior.

"You—you—you've chucked me out!" he gasped. "I—I was going to chick-chick-chuck you out, and you've chick-chack-chucked me out—chucked me out of my own study."

"My study!" said Egan.

"Mine too, ain't it?" roared Plum.

"Not that I know of."

"Well, I'll jolly well show you whose study it is!" spluttered Plum, and he came back into the doorway with a charge like a runaway lorry.

Egan was a sturdy fellow; but Plum Tumpton's weight was in that charge, and it swept him across the study to the window. But at the window he rallied, grabbed Plum, and whirled him round doorward. Again Plum felt

his feet leave the floor—again he found himself sitting in the passage in a dazed, giddy, breathless state.

The Irish junior smiled at him from the doorway.

"Why not call it a day?" he suggested.

But Plum could not call it a day, or anything else—he could not speak, he was so utterly winded. He sat and gasped, and gasped, and spluttered, and spluttered, as if he never would leave off gasping and spluttering; and Michael Egan closed the door on him and left him to it.

CHAPTER VI.

WHO'S WHO?

"**HOO-OOCH—ooooooooogh!**"

That weird sound greeted Vernon and Rake as they came across the study landing into the Fourth-form passage. Then they saw Plum.

They were coming up to the study expecting to find Plum there. They were not expecting to find him sitting outside the study door, on the floor of the passage, with his hair standing almost on end, his collar hanging down, the back of his neck, his face crimson and perspiring, and pumping in breath with a series of suffocated gasps and gurgles. —But that was how they found him.

"Hoo—ooogh—grrrrggh!" gurgled Plum, "Jiminy-whiskers—ooogh! Wait till I get my—gurrghh—breath! I'll scalp him! Urrgh!"

"Is that a new game?" asked Harry Vernon.

"Eh! Urrrrggh! Wharrer you mean? Urrggh."

They gazed at him. They had just come away from Sir Algernon Lovelace, who was a hospital case with a damaged ankle. Plum looked like a still more serious hospital case at the moment.

"Nice and comfortable on the floor?" asked Tom Rake. "I prefer a chair myself—but every man to his taste."

"Urrgh! Gimme a hand up, instead of standing there talking rot!" gurgled Plum. "Can't you see I'm winded?"

"Yes, I think I sort of noticed it," agreed Tom. "What's winded you?" Rake and Vernon heaved Plum up between them, and he leaned a hand on each, as he continued to splutter for breath.

"That smug!" gasped Plum.

"What smug?"

"New smug! Chucked me out of my own study."

"A new fellow chucked you out of your own study!" exclaimed Harry, staring. "What rot! I never knew there was a new fellow in the Fourth —."

"Well, there is, a blighter named Hogan—no, Logan—or was it Egan?" said Plum, "it was something, I know. A bit off his chump, I think. He made out that he was a Scotchman, and then an Irishman, and doesn't seem to know what he is, so far as I can make out. And he says I'm not me."

"Eh!"

"What?"

"Me—not me, you know!" breathed Plum, "I told him I was me, and he said I wasn't. What do you fellows think of that?"

Vernon and Rake did not say what they thought of that. They just gazed at Plum. He had said that the new fellow was a bit off his chump: and they really could not help wondering a little whether Plum was!

"Had the cheek to stand there, and look a fellow in the face and say that he wasn't himself!" said Plum, "I told him I was, and he said I wasn't! Then I started chucking him out of the study—and somehow—I don't quite know how—he chucked me out instead."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Funny, ain't it?" roared Plum, indignantly, "jolly funny for a new smug to chuck a fellow out of his own study. Well, funny or not, I'm going to smash him up into so many little pieces, that he will want glueing together again, see? And if I had some real pals instead of a pair of sniggering hyenas, they'd back me up."

"We'll back you up all right, old fat man," said Tom soothingly, "Tell us where he is now, and we'll strew the hungry churchyard with his bones."

"He's in the study."

"In the study—our study!" exclaimed Vernon, in astonishment. "He's in our study, and he's chucked you out of it! By gum!" The captain of the Fourth turned to the door of No. 3 study. "We'll soon see about that."

"And he said I wasn't me," said Plum. "Made out that he'd met a chap named Tumpton, and that I was somebody else. Mad, you know."

"Sounds a bit mad," said Tom, "He can't have met anybody he mistook for you—unless it was a barrel of lard wandering about—"

"Look here—!" roared Plum.

Harry Vernon threw open the door of No. 3 Study.

Mick Egan glanced around. He was putting his collar and tie straight after the shindy with Plum, and his good-looking face was still a little flushed. Vernon gave him a grim glance. He would rather have liked the fellow, on his looks—but he was not prepared to like a new kid who had chucked Plum out of Plum's own study. Such a new kid required to learn where he got off: and to learn without delay.

"Well, who are you?" demanded the captain of the Fourth.

"I'm Egan! Who are you?"

"I'm Vernon—and this is my study—"

Egan stared at him blankly for a moment, and then burst into a laugh.

"Oh, you're Vernon, are you?" he said, banteringly, "and that chap with you is Rake, I daresay, as much as that fat fellow is Tumpton."

"I'm Rake," said Tom, staring at him.

"Pile it on!" said Egan, "If it's some sort of a joke, don't mind me. Or have I dropped into a lunatic asylum in mistake for a school?"

"Hear him," gasped Plum, "First he makes out that I'm not me, now he's making out that you fellows are not you. He's either mad or cheeky."

"Not mad, by any chance, I hope?" asked Harry Vernon, politely. "If not, perhaps you'll explain why you don't believe my name's Vernon."

"How many Vernon's here?" asked Egan.

"Only one."

"Then you're not Vernon! That chap isn't Rake! That fat fathead isn't Tumpton! When I tell you that I know all three fellows you may as well chuck up trying to pull my leg about your names. Where's the point of it, anyhow? If it's a joke, I can't see it—and we generally can see a joke in my country."

"It's not a joke," said Harry, "I'm Vernon—"

"Oh, chuck it."

"I'm Rake!" roared Tom.

"Rats!"

"And I'm Tumpton," bawled Plum.

"Give us a rest."

"Well," said Harry, with a deep breath, "you may be potty, or you may not be potty—and you can believe what you like about our names—but you can't barge into this study and chuck out a fellow who belongs here. There's the door—walk out!"

"I'll watch it!"

"You won't walk out?"

"Why should I?"

"Well, I thought you might rather go out on your feet than on your neck. It's a much more comfortable way of going!" explained the captain of the Fourth, "but suit yourself! Collar him."

"Here, I say—Oh, howly saints!" yelled Mick, as he was suddenly

grasped by Vernon and Rake, and whirled to the door, "I tell you—leggo! I say—Whoop!"

Bump!

Egan landed in the passage, with a bump and a roar. He sat there for about the tenth part of a second; then he was up like an indiarubber ball, and charging back into No. 3. But three fellows lined up to receive him, and he was hurled forth again, rolling headlong on the passage floor.

"Will that do?" asked Harry Vernon, laughing, "My advice to you is to chuck it, and get along to your own study, wherever that is."

"Oh, I forgot," said Plum, "he says Lamb put him in this study."

"What?" yelled Vernon.

"Lamb put him in this study—"

"You unutterable idiot!" yelled Vernon, "why didn't you say so before? We can't chuck him out if Lamb put him in."

"Not if it's his own study, you blithering ass!" hooted Rake.

"Well, he chucked me out," said Plum, "Look here, he ought to have been put into Barney's study, where there's more room. Let's keep on chucking him out till he goes back to Lamb and asks to be put into Barney's study."

Mick staggered to his feet and stood panting in the passage. Evidently, he did not mean to give up the contest: at the same time, he realised that the odds were too heavy, if the garrison of No. 3 chose to keep him out.

"Look here, Egan, if that's your name, did Lamb put you into this study?" demanded the captain of the Fourth.

"Yes," gasped Mick.

"Well, it's pretty rotten, as there's three already."

"Nothing to do with you—it's not your study."

"It is my study—I'm Vernon—"

"You're not!"

"You fathead, every fellow here knows I'm Vernon, captain of the form. What's put it into your silly head that I'm not Vernon?"

"Oh, don't be a goat!" exclaimed Egan, "I've met Vernon and Rake and Tumpton—three jolly decent chaps who were very civil to me. I asked specially to be put into their study because I'd met them and they were very friendly. So now don't give me any more of your blather."

"You haven't met us before—"

"I've met Vernon and Rake and Tumpton, I tell you. Vernon asked me specially to ask Lamb to put me into No. 3, if you want to know. And I did ask him, and Mr. Lamb did as I asked—and I'm coming in."

And with that, Mick Egan did come in—with a rush.

But Harry Vernon and Co. did not collar him, as he came, and hurl him forth once more. They let him come in, only gazing at him in bewilderment.

Plum had said that the new fellow was a "bit off his chump," and really it did begin to look like it. It was clear that he did earnestly believe that he had met Vernon, Rake and Tumpton—and Vernon, Rake and Tumpton of course, knew that he had not. So, unless he was a little "off his chump," there really seemed no accounting for it.

Egan looked at them, rather surprised by the sudden cessation of hostilities.

"I'm sticking here," he said, "it's my study."

"I suppose it's your study, if Lamb sent you here," said Harry, slowly, "But—"

"And as it's not yours, the sooner you get out, the better."

"But it is ours," said Harry.

"Oh, don't talk rot! I don't know who you are—but this study belongs to Vernon, Rake and Tumpton—and me! So get out of it."

Three or four Fourth-form fellows had come along the passage, drawn by the shindy, and they were looking in at the door. They exchanged very curious glances, as they heard Egan's words. Cook tapped his forehead significantly. Scaife and Banks and Lane and Ridd grinned.

"Are you going?" snapped Egan, impatiently.

"Better clear, you chaps," whispered Plum, "I thought it was cheek—but you see now he's mad. He thinks he's met us, and that we ain't ourselves—mad as a hatter! Might get hold of a poker, or a knife or something—you never know, with lunatics."

It was then that Barnes-Paget, Carboy, and Root came up the passage from the landing. They were going to their study: but at the sight of the little crowd round the door of No. 3, they stopped, with grinning faces. They could guess that there was a spot of trouble in No. 3 Study by this time.

"Oh, here you fellows are!" exclaimed Egan, much relieved, as he saw the three, "I say—Vernon—Rake—Tumpton come in here—these fellows—I don't know who they are—make out that this is their study—"

If Harry Vernon and Co. had felt bewildered before this doubly bewildered them. They could scarcely believe their ears, as the new junior addressed Barnes-Paget, Carboy, and Root as Vernon, Rake, and Tumpton.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Barnes-Paget.

"Nothing to laugh at, Barney, when the poor chap's off his onion," said Plum, "t'aint a laughing matter, Barney."

The Buccaneer seemed to think it was. He roared.

"Aren't you coming in, Vernon?" asked Egan, puzzled.

"Ha, ha, ha!" No—I'm goin' to my own study," chuckled Barnes-Paget, "I'm not Vernon now—I'm Barnes-Paget—I was pullin' your leg at Rodwood, you silly ass! Come on, Carboy—come on, Root! Ha, ha, ha!"

The three young rascals went laughing up the passage: leaving Mick Egan rooted to the floor of No. 3 Study with astonishment.

CHAPTER VII.

PLUM'S ULTIMATUM!

MICK EGAN, the next morning, took his place in the Sparshott Fourth—and was the object of a good deal of attention on the part of the rest of that form.

New boys, as a rule, did not get much attention—new boys were nobodies. But Mick was an exception—owing to the peculiar circumstances of his arrival.

All the Fourth knew by that time the trick that had been played by the astute Buccaneer to dodge having the "new smug" landed in his study—also, undoubtedly, to score off the Sparshott Co.

Barney had been quite successful—he and his friends still had Number Five to themselves; the new boy was landed in Number Three; Barney and Co. were satisfied; Harry Vernon and Co. quite the reverse.

Certainly, a word to Mr. Lamb about the trick Barney had played would have put paid to the Buccaneer's astuteness. But no one was likely to speak that word. Mr. Lamb had already dismissed the matter from his mind—Egan was in No. 3 Study, and that was that.

Harry Vernon and Co. were feeling sore—but they did not want intervention from a "beak."

They could hardly blame Egan for having been taken in—it was Barney who was to blame; the new fellow could not possibly have been on his guard against such trickery. Barney seemed to regard the affair as a tremendous joke—and so, indeed, did most of the Fourth Form. It was called "Barney's latest" in the Lair, and laughed over loud and long.

"But we're not standing it, you chaps," said Plum, after school that day. "We're not going to be crowded out in No. 3, just to please Barney."

"Better make the best of it," said Tom Rake. "Egan doesn't seem a bad chap, and we shall get on all right."

"Rot!" said Plum emphatically. "I daresay he isn't a bad chap,

though he seems a bit fatheaded, and doesn't know whether he's a Scotchman or an Irishman. I can't stand fatheads."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Plum's chums.

"Eh! What is there to cackle at in that?" demanded Plum crossly. "Queer that a chap can't open his mouth without fellows yelling at him like a lot of hyenas. I never could stand fatheads—present company excepted, of course —."

"What!" ejaculated Vernon and Rake together.

"I mean to say, you fellows are rather duffers," said Plum. "I don't mind that. I've got brains enough for the study. We're told to suffer fools gladly, and so far as my own pals are concerned I don't mind —."

"Oh, holy smoke!" murmured Rake.

"But this is too thick," went on Plum. "Besides, we're not going to have that smudge Barney gloating over us. We're not going to let No. 5 score over No. 3."

"Something in that," agreed Tom.

"Lamb would jolly soon set it right if we put it to him," said Plum. "Of course, we can't do that, as Barney jolly well knows. He can call it a joke if he likes—but he told the new chap a pack of lies, and I don't call telling lies a joke."

"Hear, hear!" said Tom.

"Barney's way!" said Vernon, with a shrug of the shoulders. "Barney doesn't look at these things as we do."

"Well, we're not standing it," said Plum, "and as Lamb intended Egan to go into No. 5, he ought to go. Barney couldn't stop him. He wouldn't dare make a row about it, in case Lamb got wise to it all. So what Egan had better do is just to go and stick himself in Barney's study, as Lamb intended—and it will be all right."

Vernon shook his head.

"That gang would chuck him out, and chance it with Lamb," he said.

"Well, that won't matter, so long as he doesn't come back to No. 3. Look here, let's go and tell him what we've decided."

"Oh, let it drop, old chap," said Tom. "After all, there's such a thing as hospitality to a stranger from afar. I think —."

"Don't you start thinking," said Plum. "You can leave the thinking to me. It's in my line—not in yours."

"Oh, scissors!"

"Well, I think too —!" began Vernon.

"It's no more in your line than in Tom's, old chap," said Plum. "You'll give yourself a pain if you start thinking. Leave it to me."

"Leave the thinking to you?" asked Tom.

"Yes!" said Plum emphatically. "I'll do that."

"And what will you do it with?" inquired Tom.

Eustace Percival Tumpton disdained to answer that question. He gave a sniff, and walked off to the House, leaving his chums grinning.

Eustace Percival Tumpton was not grinning; he was extremely serious as he went up to the studies to interview the new junior. Plum was a good-natured fellow—he had a heart of gold—but he wasn't going to be scored off by Barney, and he wasn't going to be crowded out in No. 3 when there was plenty of room for the new fellow in No. 5. That was fixed in Plum's fat mind: as immutable as the laws of the Medes and Persians.

He found Egan in No. 3, arranging books on the bookshelf. Plum eyed that proceeding morosely. Only too plainly, the junior from Cork was making himself very much at home.

"You can pack up those books, Hogan," said Plum. "I mean Logan, that is, Egan."

"But I've only just unpacked them, Rum—I mean Gum—that is, Plum!" answered Egan.

"I've told you not to call me Plum."

"Sorry, Chumman—I mean Lumpton—that is, Tumpton," said Egan gravely.

Plum breathed hard.

"I haven't come up here for a row," he said. "I've come to tell you what you're to do."

"That's awfully kind of you," said Egan. "Lamb has been telling me things, and the Head gave me a word or two; but they don't count for much, in comparison."

Plum gave him a suspicious look. He was almost sure that this was meant for cheek!

"Well, you can't stick in this study," he said. "You were ass enough to be taken in by Barney; but you know now that you were booked for Barney's study. So the sooner you hike along there the better. I'll help you carry your things in the passage, if you like," added Plum generously.

"Thanks: I don't see I'd rather stick here," said Egan, cheerfully. "To tell the truth—a thing we often do in Eire—I'm rather particular about the company I keep, and I don't want to consort with three born liars like Barnes-Paget, Carboy, and Boot. They may think it funny to tell a new fellow a string of lies. I ain't! And I don't want to have anything to do with them."

"Well, there's something in that," admitted Plum. "But you see, Logan —"

"I don't see, Lumpton —"

"I mean Hogan —"

"Oh! I mean Chumman: "

"That is, Egan," said Plum, breathing very hard. "You see, there's no room for you here, and we ain't want you, anyhow."

"That doesn't apply any to me. Suppose I say that there's no room for you, and I don't want you anyhow."

"It's my study!" roared Plum. "And I won't have a silly fathead landed on me, see? I can't stand fatheads. If you don't know whether you're a Scotchman or an Irishman, you know you're not wanted in this study, so get out. And I'll see you out, now! Sharp's the word."

Egan laughed. He was a placable fellow, and might perhaps have acceded to Plum's request had it been put a little more tactfully—little as he liked the idea of Barney's study. As it was, he laughed, and went on arranging his books.

"Do you hear?" roared Plum.

"I'm not deaf."

"I've told you to get!" said Plum. "I may as well tell you that if you stick where you're not wanted, I shall wallop you."

"Help!" gasped Egan.

"Mind, I don't want you," said Plum, relenting a little, "I don't want to thrash a new kid on his second day here."

"That's all right—you won't!" said Egan, reassuringly.

"Won't I?" roared Plum. "You'll see! Now, hear this—we shall be in the Lair after roll this evening—and if you tell me you're changing into Barney's study, all right. If you don't, I shall wallop you. I warn you that I'm a pretty good hitter, and you'll get the hiding of your life. I give you till after roll. You've got till then to think it over."

"Thanks! I'll make my will!" said Egan.

That reply very nearly precipitated the combat on the spot. However, Plum restrained his just wrath and stalked out of the study.

Egan, smiling, went on arranging his books. Plum, breathing wrath, went out to rejoin his comrades in the quad.

"I may want a second, after roll, in the Lair," he said.

"You'll get more than a second—a good many minutes," answered Tom Rake.

"I don't mean that, you ass! When I say a second, I mean a second, not a second," snapped Plum crossly.

"That makes it quite clear!" assented Tom.

"I mean to say, I may be thrashing that new smug—I've told him so, unless he changes into Barney's study. One of you fellows will be my second. May as well have the gloves ready—that Scotchman, or Irishman, or whatever he is, looks a cheeky ass, and mayn't give in till I've walloped him. I'm going to do it."

"But ——!" said Vernon and Rake, in dismay.

"That's settled," said Plum. "I'm sorry, but it can't be helped—this evening, in the Lair, you're going to see a silly ass get a jolly good hiding. That's that."

And Plum stalked away.

"Oh, ye gods and little fishes!" said Tom. "Plum's got tons of pluck, but he boxes like a windmill—if a silly ass gets a jolly good hiding in the Lair this evening, I'm afraid that silly ass is going to be poor old Plum."

And Harry Vernon fully shared his misgivings.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FIGHT!

MOST of the Sparshott Fourth, in the Lair after roll-call that evening, were smiling. Everybody knew of Plum's warlike intentions; but those warlike intentions were taken seriously only by Eustace Percival Tumpton himself. To Plum that matter was very serious indeed—but to the rest of the Fourth there seemed to be in it an element of the comic.

Plum, as everyone knew, had heaps of pluck—tons of it. Plum feared no foe. Pluck was a great asset for a fighting man, undoubtedly. Still, something more was needed in a scrap—such as keeping one's head, and keeping one's wind, and having some slight faint knowledge of boxing.

And Plum, though a very Paladin for pluck, was rather liable to lose his head, and absolutely certain to lose his wind, while his boxing was of a most fearful and wonderful kind, calculated to excite hilarity rather than alarm in his opponent.

What Mick Egan was like in the scrapping line nobody knew—but he looked sturdy and well-set-up, and cool and self-possessed. He couldn't possibly know less about boxing than Plum did. So unless he was frightened out of his wits by Plum's truculence to begin with he was not likely to go down under the fat fists that were going to thrash the air. And assuredly he did not look like a fellow who was easily frightened.

So most of the Fourth expected an entertainment when Plum started: and his loyal pals could only hope that he wouldn't be hurt too much. Gladly they would have stopped Plum and persuaded him into the paths of peace. But Plum was not to be stopped and not to be persuaded. What Plum had said he had said—and that he was going to do—if he could! Plum was the only fellow in the form who didn't know that he couldn't.

Every member of the Fourth gathered in the Lair, with the solitary exception of Sir Algernon Lovelace, who was still in "sanny." Only the schoolboy baronet was going to miss the show, which all the form agreed would be worth watching. Plum looked grim—and the gloves were ready on the table; and when Egan came in, Barnes-Paget carefully shut the door, to keep prefects off the scene. Egan, who had a pleasant way with him, was already on friendly terms with several fellows, and Banks and Cook came into the Lair with him.

At the sight of Plum's grim glare, Banks and Cook grinned, but Egan looked a little worried. As Plum came over towards him, he moved away to avoid Plum, getting on the other side of the long table. Plum going round one end after him, Egan went round the other end, so that the big table was still between them. Which caused a good many curious glances to be cast at

the junior from Cork, and caused Eustace Percival Tumpton to emit a snort of scorn.

Plum stopped, and glared at Egan across the table.

"Look here," he roared, "stop, see? This isn't a game of going round the mulberry-bush! Think you're going to dodge me?"

"I'm trying," answered Egan, with a nod.

"Well, you jolly well can't do it, see? Are you going to change into Barney's study, where you really belong?"

"Oh, no."

"Wise man!" grinned Barnes-Paget. "You wouldn't find it healthy there."

Egan looked at him with a glint in his dark eyes.

"I'd change into your study, if I wanted to, Barnes-Paget," he said.

"But I've no use for fellows who tell a string of lies to a stranger, and I'd rather keep my distance."

The Buccaneer flushed crimson.

"Straight from the shoulder," grinned Tom Rake. "I don't know why that chap is dodging Plum—but he's no funk, Harry. He's ready for Barney."

Vernon nodded.

"You silly smug," snarled Barnes-Paget, "I pulled your leg yesterday because I didn't want you in my study; and if I ever find you in it, you'll go out on your neck. And —"

"You shut up, Barney!" hooted Plum. "Don't you butt in here. I'm talking to that chap. Now then, Hogan —"

"Now then, Plumpton —!"

"Are you going to get out of my study or not?" roared Plum.

"Not!" said Egan.

"Then I'm jolly well going to thrash you, to begin with. Take off your jacket, and put on those gloves."

"I'll back you up, Egan," said Cook.

"But I'd rather not fight Tumpton!" objected Egan. "Daah it all, this is only my second day here, and I didn't come here to scrap."

"You'll have to fight, or give me best!" roared Plum.

"O.K. I'll give you best."

"What!" ejaculated Plum.

"Best! All right now?" asked Egan.

"I'll jolly well show you whether it's all right," gasped Plum. "Perhaps you'll get a bit keener when I've punched your nose. I'm coming for you."

Plum rushed round the table after the Irish junior.

He reached him, and drove a fat fist at a rather handsome nose—which would have looked much less handsome if Plum's punch had landed, with Plum's extensive weight behind it. But—how Plum never knew—his punch went up into the air, and his rush brought him against Egan, chest to chest; and as the junior from Cork stood like a rock, Plum staggered back from the shock, and sat down with a resounding bump on the floor of the Lair.

"Oh!" gasped Plum, "Oh, jiminy-whiskers!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Plum sat and gasped, hardly knowing what had happened. The Fourth-formers roared with merriment.

Vernon and Rake picked Plum up, still gasping.

"Now chuck it, old fat chump," said Tom.

"I'll watch it!" gasped Plum. "I haven't thrashed him yet, have I? Get these gloves on, Egan; you've got it coming, you smear."

"Oh, all right!"

Egan did not remove his jacket, but he put the gloves on. Plum whipped off his jacket, rolled up his sleeves, and donned the gloves. Plum meant business—serious business—if the new junior did not.

"You keep time, Vernon. Now, I'm ready!" spluttered Plum.

"You ready, Egan?"

"Yes, if you like."

"Time!" said the captain of the Fourth.

Plum barely waited for the word to be uttered before he rushed. The sails of a windmill in a high wind had nothing on Plum's fat fists, as they threshed and sawed the air. Plum, apparently, expected Egan to go down under that hefty charge. But Egan did not go down. He side-stepped, and as Plum wheeled on him, side-stepped again—and yet again, so that Plum had to revolve on his axis to keep facing him. Meanwhile, Plum's fat fists were hitting the air at a great rate. Finally, with a desperate charge, Plum hemmed in the new junior against the table, and then Mick Egan had to hit out. His glove tapped on a fat little nose, much to Plum's surprise. It was not a hard tap—all the fellows could see that he put no force into it—it was just hard enough to up-end Plum. For the second time Eustace Percival Tumpton sat down with a bump that almost shook the Lair.

"Ooooooh!" gasped Plum.

"Man down!" chuckled Carboy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Time!" said Harry Vernon.

Tom Rake helped Plum up, and sat him in a chair. Plum was fairly winded with his terrific exertions—he never had too much wind. He sat and panted.

"Now what about calling it a day?" asked Egan.

"Urrrrgh!"

"I give you best! A fellow can't do more," urged Egan.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's good enough, Plum!" urged Tom Rake.

"Taint!" gasped Plum. "Why, he thinks he can lick me—I can see that—he thinks I can't lick him! I'll jolly well show him! Urrrrgh! Wait till I get my wind."

"Time!" called Harry Vernon.

Plum plunged into the fray. His fat forehead was bedewed with perspiration, and his breath came in gasps. But he was full of determination, if not of breath. He forced the fighting from the word go.

Why his frantic punches never reached Egan's good-humoured face Plum did not know. Not one of them did. They seemed to be brushed away like flies. This time he had no chance of pinning Egan against the table—which was perhaps fortunate for him, as it saved his opponent the necessity of punching him. Egan contented himself with brushing off Plum's punches, every now and then giving ground, but taking care to keep plenty of sea-room. Plum attacked hard and fast—all the harder and faster as he felt his wind failing, and realised that he could not keep up these strenuous tactics long. But at length his wind did fail, so utterly, that Plum had to stop sawing the air with fat fists, and stand gasping, while Egan dropped his hands and smiled at him.

"Oooooogh!" gasped Plum. "You toad!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You smudge!" gurgled Plum. "You tick! Urrrrgh!"

"Time!" chuckled Vernon.

It was clear to Plum's chums by this time that Plum was not going to get hurt. He was only going to get winded. Except for that one tap on Plum's plump little nose, there had been no casualties on either side. Clearly there wasn't going to be any. The Lair was in a roar of merriment, which had an exasperating effect on Plum. As he pumped in breath after the second round he resolved with a deep and deadly resolve to knock that grinning smudge out in the third.

But, as Vernon called "Time" the door of the Lair opened. Wilmot of the sixth looked in—doubtless drawn to the spot by the roars of laughter.

"Cave!" called out Carboy—rather too late.

The Sixth-form prefect stepped in, his eyes on the two combatants.

"Fighting here!" he said. "Stop that at once! Tumpton—and you,

what's your name?—any more of this, and I'll have you up in my study for eight up."

With that, the great man walked out of the Lair.

"Oh, rotten!" gasped Plum, "just like a pre, to butt in when I'd as good as got him licked."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Plum peeled off the gloves in disgust. The word of the head-prefect of Sparshott was law, and the fight had to stop. It was very exasperating to Plum. But Mick Egan seemed quite satisfied.

Plum was still panting when the juniors went to the studies for prep. Egan—not having had that terrific thrashing as planned—was there, in No. 3 Study, and Plum eyed him morosely.

"You're sticking here?" he demanded.

"Like glue!" assented Mick.

"You jolly well know that I can't thrash you, after what Wilmot said."

"I jolly well know you can't thrash me," agreed Egan.

"Well, I shan't speak to you, if you stick here."

"You won't talk to me at all?"

"No, I won't."

"Let's have this clear," said Egan gravely. "If I stick in this study, you won't talk to me—but if I change out, you will. Is that it?"

"That's it!" said Plum, sternly.

"That settles it—I stick here!" said Egan.

Plum really could think of no suitable rejoinder to that; and he could only relapse into a dignified and scornful silence.

CHAPTER IX.

A ROW IN No. 3 STUDY!

"**P**OOOR old Lazy!" said Tom.

It was the following day, at tea-time. Three fellows were in No. 3 Study when Tom Rake came in—Vernon, Plum, and Egan. Plum's masterly scheme of thrashing the new junior out of the study having proved a failure, he was still there. True, Plum was fully persuaded that, but for Wilmot's intervention, it would have been O.K.—a persuasion that he had entirely to himself.

But there it was—Egan was a fixture in No. 3 Study; and Vernon and Rake were disposed to settle down to it and make the best of it. As a matter of fact they were rather grateful to the new junior for letting their plump chum off so lightly and, except that they were rather crowded in the study, and did not like Barney scoring over them, they had no real objection to the addition to No. 3. Plum, certainly, wasn't going to speak to him—but Plum forgot this every minute or so; and Mick probably had as much as he wanted of Plum's conversation, perhaps a little more.

Tom Rake had paid a visit to "sanny" to see Sir Algernon Lovelace, hence his remark as he came into the study.

"Not up yet?" asked Harry.

"No—ankle still dicky," answered Tom. "Must have banged it on something when the horse was bolting—never noticed it at the time, but he jolly well did when he started walking back from Parsley, the ass! Just like old Lazy! Matron says he may come out to-morrow."

"Who's Lazy?" asked Egan, rather struck by that peculiar name. Several times in the last day or two he had heard fellows mention "old Lazy"; but so far he had not seen anyone who answered to that name.

"Chap named Lovelace," answered Tom, "Sir Algernon Lovelace, of that ilk—jolly good chap, and nearly as big an ass as Plum."

"Look here —!" roared Plum.

"On the sick list?" asked Egan.

"Not exactly—horse bolted with him last half-holiday—let's see, that was ~~was~~ day you came," answered Rake. "He got a knock on his silly ankle—banged it on a tree or a gate or something, I expect, in Oke Lane."

"In Oke Lane!" repeated Egan.

He remembered a half-forgotten episode in Oke Lane on Wednesday afternoon.

Of that episode he had, naturally, said nothing; he did not even know that the rider he had saved from a bad accident was a Sparshott fellow; and anyhow, it was not a matter to talk about. Now it occurred to him that the elegant youth with the eyeglass, whose horse had run away in Oke Lane, was the "Lazy" he had heard fellows speak of as being in "sanny."

"Yes. You might have seen him, if you came that way," said Tom. "You'd know him by his eyeglass—the only one here. No end of a nut, old Lazy. We call him Lazy Lovelace because he's too lazy to live; but he's a jolly old baronet really. By gum, I'd like to know the chap who stopped his horse and saved his jolly old neck."

"Somebody stopped the horse?"

"Yes, jolly plucky chap, whoever he was," said Tom. "Lazy's told every fellow who's been to see him in sanny. Some kid in these parts, I suppose—Lovelace had never seen him before, though—jumped at the gee's head, and might have been killed—splendid chap, whoever he was."

"Well, I suppose he couldn't very well look on and see a fellow get a bad accident," said Egan. "Any fellow would have done the same."

"Think so?" said Tom sarcastically. "Well, I can jolly well tell you that any fellow wouldn't have done the same—lots of fellows wouldn't. I can tell you that jumping at the head of a runaway horse, and taking the risk of being crushed to death, isn't such a jolly easy thing as you seem to think it is."

"Perhaps Egan would have done it, if he'd been there!" said Plum, with overwhelming sarcasm. "Perhaps!"

Egan laughed.

"Why not?" he said lightly.

Snort from Plum.

"Well, I hope you would have, and I hope I would have," said Tom drily. "But it's not much use to brag about what one might have done, when one hasn't done it. And any decent chap admires a chap for being real plucky, and I tell you that the chap who saved old Lazy's neck was one in a hundred, and if you don't think so, the sooner you shut up the better."

"I only said that any fellow would have done the same!" said Mick mildly.

"And I've said that any fellow wouldn't, unless he was uncommon plucky, and had uncommon presence of mind, and was a thoroughly decent chap," said Tom warmly, "and if you don't think much of what he did —"

"Well, I don't."

"You don't, don't you?" hooted Tom.

"Not specially. Nothing to do a song and dance about, that I can see."

"Oh, chuck it, Egan," exclaimed Harry Vernon. "I was beginning to think you a decent chap—but that's rotten."

"I don't see it."

"Well, if you don't, others do!" snapped Tom. "Rotten—and putrid, if you ask me."

"I didn't ask you."

Tom Rake breathed hard.

"You're asking for trouble," he said. "For two pins, I'd chuck you out of this study, neck and crop. You've never met old Lazy—but I can tell you he's one of the best, and if anything had happened to him, every man in the Lower School would have been down in the mouth about it—and that chap who saved him from a bad accident, whoever he was, was out of the top

drawer—a splendid fellow. And if you think that what he did was nothing, or next to nothing —”

“Well, it wasn't much, that I can see.”

“Look here —!” bawled Tom.

“Let's drop the subject—not worth arguing about,” said Egan.

“Never mind about dropping the subject. I say that that chap who saved old Lazy's neck was a hero—a real hero. And if you don't say the same, we'll jolly well bump you till you do,” roared Tom.

“Yes, rather,” said Plum hotly. “Now then —.”

“Oh, rot,” said Mick uneasily.

“That does it,” said Tom. “Bump him!”

Egan jumped up from the table. Vernon, Rake, and Plum jumped up at the same moment. All three were angry now. The unknown hero, whoever he was, who had saved old Lazy's neck was a fellow the Sparshott Fourth were delighted to honour. They didn't know who he was, any more than Algy Lovelace did; but they admired him, and any fellow who didn't admire such a splendid chap was, in their opinion, a smear, a smudge, and a blot. Egan, it seemed, didn't. He had planted himself in their study—and now he was making out that the fellow who had saved old Lazy's neck had done nothing much—and that did it! Three pairs of hands grasped the junior from Cork, and swept him off his feet.

Bump!

Mick Egan smote the floor of No. 3 Study hard. He roared as he smote it.

“Now,” roared Tom “do you call that chap a hero, or don't you?”

“No, I don't!” gasped Mick. Really, he hardly could, as he was himself the “chap.” “Nothing of the kind.”

“Give him another!”

Bump!

“Oh, howly Mother av Moses!” roared Mick. “Stoppit, will you, you spalpeens. Will you chuck it?”

“Do you call that chap a hero or not?” roared Tom.

“Not!” gasped Egan.

Bump!

“Oh, bedad! Oh—ow—oooh!” spluttered the unfortunate junior from Cork, “look here —.”

“We'll keep this up as long as you do!” said Harry Vernon. “Say when! We say that that chap who saved old Lazy was a hero—what do you say?”

“Leggo!”

“Give him another!”

Bump!

“Yarooooooop!” roared Egan, struggling frantically. “Will you chuck it? I tell you it was nothing, and I know more about it than you do.”

“You know nothing about it! You're a worm,” said Tom. “You're a smudge! You're a toad! You want a lesson. Now, then, do you say that that chap who saved old Lovelace was one of the finest fellows that ever walked the earth, or don't you?”

“No, I don't!” gasped Egan.

Bump!

“Yoo-hoop!”

“Last time of asking!” hooted Tom. “Then you go out of this study, and you don't come back. We'll take you to Barney's study, where you really belong, and dump you there, and bump you bald-headed if you ever walk in here again. Got that?”

“Hear, hear!” said Plum.

“That's that!” agreed Harry Vernon. “We're fed up with you sneering at a chap whose boots you're not fit to clean. Now then —.”

“Do you call that chap, whoever he was, a giddy hero, and the finest fellow going?” demanded Tom.

“No!”

"Then that does it! Hike him along!" said Tom Rake.

And Mick, with his arms and legs wildly flying, was carried bodily out of No. 3 Study, rushed along the passage, and borne headlong into No. 5. He was landed, with a heavy bump, into Valentine Barnes-Paget's armchair. There he sprawled and spluttered, completely winded.

"That's for you!" said Tom. "If you want some more, come back to No. 3 and ask for it. Lots on tap; and you'll get all you want, and some over."

With which the three went back to their study, to their interrupted tea. Mick Egan was left in Barney's armchair, spluttering for breath.

CHAPTER X.

BARNEY MEETS HIS MATCH!

"WHAT——!"
"Why ——!"
"Cheek!"

Valentine Barnes-Paget, Carboy and Root all exclaimed together as they came in at the door of No. 5 Study in the Sparshott Fourth.

They stared at an unexpected occupant of that study.

It was ten minutes since Harry Vernon and Co. had landed Mick Egan there. By that time Mick had recovered his breath, and he was sitting up in the armchair, putting his collar and tie straight, and debating in his mind what his next step was going to be.

He was rather amused by the absurd misunderstanding in No. 3 Study—and could not help grinning at the thought of what Harry Vernon and Co. would have said had they known that it actually was he, Mick Egan, who had jumped at the bolting horse and saved old Lazy's neck. Of that, of course, the chums of No. 3 Study had not the remotest idea.

Mick looked round as Barney and Co. appeared in the doorway of No. 5. They had come up to tea; but they forgot tea at the sight of the new junior sitting there in the armchair as if the study belonged to him.

Carboy and Roots gave him dark looks: the Buccaneer's brow grew as black as thunder. All three jumped to the same conclusion at once—the new fellow had been turned out of No. 3 and had installed himself in No. 5; which, according to Mr. Lamb's orders in the first place, he had a right to do. Carboy and Root, perhaps, would have contented themselves with scowling: but the Buccaneer was made of sterner stuff.

"Oh! You're here, young Tipperary!" he snapped.

"Here I am," assented Mick.

"Fed up with you in Number Three, what?" sneered the Buccaneer.

Mick grinned.

"Sure they did seem a bit tired of my elegant society," he admitted.

"And you fancy you can stick yourself in here?" sneered Barney.

"Well, we didn't take the trouble to pull your leg the other day, and land you on that study, because we wanted you here, see? Didn't I tell you yesterday that if I found you in this study you'd go out on your neck?"

"Did you?" yawned Mick. "Yes, I believe you talked some cheeky rot of that sort. What about it?"

"This about it—I happened to mean every word. If they don't want you in No. 3, you can sneak into any study you like that'll have you—this study won't! Now get out before you're chucked out. Sharp!"

The Buccaneer came across the study, and stood in front of the junior in the armchair with knitted brows, and spoke in his most bullying tone.

Mick looked at him coolly. If Barney expected that his black looks would produce any effect, he was disappointed. The cheery junior in the armchair seemed quite unmoved.

"Do you hear?" snapped Barnes-Paget savagely. "I've told you to get out."

"And who may you be, to tell me to get out?" asked Mick, his eyes sparkling. "I'll please myself about that entirely."

"Will you?" said Barnes-Paget. "We'll see, my Tipperary pippin. I told you you'd go out on your neck if you came here—and now you're going."

With that, the Buccaneer grasped the new junior and dragged him headlong out of the armchair.

Had the Buccaneer been a little less headstrong, and a little less high-handed, there need have been no trouble. But Barney was not a fellow to check his temper—he was a fellow to let it rip. But neither was Mick a fellow to be handled just as the Buccaneer chose—as Barney speedily discovered.

He exerted his strength, and whirled the new junior round the table towards the open doorway. But there Mick exerted his strength also, and at the doorway there was a fierce struggle.

Carboy and Root looked on grinning, expecting to see the new fellow shoot out of the doorway like a pip from an orange.

But that was not what happened. For a long minute the two struggled fiercely—then they separated, one of them flying headlong through the doorway, and landing outside with a crash. But it was not Mick—it was Barney—who crashed in the passage and rolled over there.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Carboy.

Root whistled.

Mick stood panting for breath. Outside, in the passage, the Buccaneer sat up, in quite a dizzy state.

He staggered to his feet, his face flaming. He had started to "chuck out" the new junior—and he had been "chucked out" himself! He came back into the study like a tiger, with flaming face, flashing eyes, and lashing fists.

Mick's hands went up promptly to meet him. It was going to be a fight now—and very different from the fight with Plum in the Lair!

Carboy hastily pulled the table to one side. In a moment Barnes-Paget had leaped at the new junior, and they were fighting fiercely—the Buccaneer flaming with fury, Egan cool and determined.

Hammer and tongs they went, hard and fast. Carboy and Root watched in blank amazement. There were not more than two or three fellows in the Sparshott Fourth who could stand up to Valentine Barnes-Paget, and Barney's pals expected to see him knock the new fellow all round the room, and finally out of the open doorway. Instead of which, Mick held his own with perfect coolness, stalling off Barney's furious attack without giving an inch of ground. And as Barney, in his fury, thought only of attack and nothing of defence, the advantage was with the fellow who kept his head. Carboy and Root fairly gasped as the Buccaneer suddenly went over backward from a terrific jolt on the jaw, and landed on his back on his expensive study carpet.

"Ye gods!" breathed Carboy.

Mick stood panting, but still cool. The Buccaneer sprawled on his back, unable, for the moment, to get on his feet. He put his hand to his jaw, which ached horribly. The junior from Cork packed an unsuspected punch; Barney was feeling almost as if a mule had kicked him. He sat up at last dizzily, his hand still to his jaw.

There were footsteps and voices in the passage. The din in No. 5 brought other fellows out of their studies. Among them were Harry Vernon and Co.

A crowd of faces stared in at the doorway. The Buccaneer, crimson with rage, dragged himself to his feet.

"Man down!" said Plum. "Did you let that chap knock you down, Barney? He didn't handle me like that in the Lair, what?"

At which Vernon and Rake chuckled. Plum stared at them.

"Well, what's the cackle about?" he demanded. "He didn't handle me like that, did he? You saw the scrap."

"Fathead!" said Harry.

"Ass!" said Tom.

"If Wilmot hadn't stopped us ——."

"Lucky for you he did," said Tom, laughing.

"Look here ——!" roared Plum.

"Oh, my hat! That chap can scrap!" said Harry Vernon. "Look here, Barney, you'd better have the gloves on."

Barnes-Paget did not heed, if he heard. He had pulled himself together after the crash on the carpet, and was attacking fiercely, desperately; and the crowd of juniors watched breathlessly.

Barney was the man for rows; but it was but seldom that such a scrap as this was seen at Sparshott. Mick was holding his own—a little more than his own—and though a good many of the Buccaneer's blows came home, he did not flinch for a second. He gave back more than he received; and, for the second time, Barnes-Paget went over, and landed on his back on the carpet.

Carboy and Root picked him up, and he held on to them, panting. His rage was as fierce as ever; but for the moment, he could not go on. But he was going on—he was going to beat his enemy—whether he could or not! The Buccaneer was the only one there who did not realise that he had met his match, and perhaps a little more than his match.

CHAPTER XI.

A FIGHT TO A FINISH.

HARRY VERNON stepped into the study: and stepped between Barnes-Paget and the new junior, as Barney made a move to renew the conflict.

"Hold on," he said quietly.

"Get out of the way, you fool!" snarled the Buccaneer.

"If you're going on, put the gloves on ——!"

"I won't!"

"You will!" said the captain of the Fourth, "and you'll have regular rounds, and I'll keep time. We don't want a dog-fight here."

"I'm going to smash that rat ——!" yelled Barnes-Paget.

"You silly ass!" exclaimed Tom Rake, "you'll be glad of the gloves before you get to the finish."

"Yes, rather," said Plum. "You can't handle that wild Irishman like I did, Barney."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Will you get out of the way, Vernon?" yelled the Buccaneer.

"Not till you've got the gloves on," said Harry. "Get them from the study, Tom."

"Right-ho!" said Tom. He ran down the passage to No. 3.

"I tell you ——!" shouted Barnes-Paget.

"Keep cool, old chap!" advised Plum. "You won't have a chance if you don't keep your temper. You're more than half licked already, you know."

Smack!

Why the Buccaneer suddenly turned on him, and landed a back-handed smack on his plump face, Plum Tumpton did not know. But he knew that the Buccaneer did! Plum gave a startled roar and staggered back into the doorway.

"Ooogh!" he spluttered. "Wharrer you up to? Gone mad? My gum, I'll mop up the study with you—I'll wallop you worse than I did Egan ——."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Three or four fellows dragged Plum back, as he was about to rush at Barney. The plump Plum spluttered with wrath.

"Chuck it," grinned Banks. "Barney's got enough on hand, without a terrific warrior like you piling on him, Plum."

"He smacked my face!" roared Plum.

"Well, you asked him to —."

"Eh! I only said he was half licked already —."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Rake came back with the gloves. Barney seemed more than half disposed to punch the captain of the Fourth out of his way; but even in his fury he realised that one fight on his hands was enough at a time. Carboy helped him off with his jacket, and Tom Rake did the same for Egan; and the gloves were donned. Vernon took out his watch to keep time.

"Now, you rotter!" breathed Barnes-Paget, his eyes gleaming at the new junior.

"Same to you, and many of them!" answered Egan cheerily.

"Time!" rapped Vernon.

The Buccaneer, in his rage, had wanted bare knuckles; but, as Tom had warned him, he was soon glad of the gloves. For the new junior's punches came home, hard and fast, on his flushed and heated face, and would certainly have left a good many marks there had the knuckles been bare. Even with the gloves on they told severely. Unwillingly, but perforce the Buccaneer gave ground till his back was to the wall, and he could go no further. Only the call of time saved him from going down again, but Vernon's voice came sharply:

"Time!"

Egan dropped his hands and stepped back. The Buccaneer was staggering, as Carboy helped him to a chair.

"Keep cool, ol' chap," whispered Carboy, as he fanned Barney's blazing face with an atlas. "You're chucking it away with your temper."

"Oh, shut up!" snarled Barney.

"I tell you —."

"Will you shut up, you fool?"

Carboy shrugged his shoulders, and shut up. Barney, evidently, had no use for sage advice.

The consciousness of coming defeat had dawned on Barnes-Paget's mind, and it enraged him beyond measure. Somehow, whether it was possible or not, he was going to beat his enemy. His head was reeling, his jaw stiff and aching, his strength ebbing; yet he could hardly wait for the call of time. When it came he leaped back into the fray.

This time fortune seemed to smile on Barney: it seemed as if, by sheer will-power, he would carry all before him. His attack was fierce and savage, and so hot and fast, that Egan in his turn had to give ground. Barney followed him up, with all his strength and energy packed into a last effort to knock him out; and again and again his fierce blows rained on the new junior's face; and then, with a sudden crash, Mick Egan went down. He hit the floor with a heavy crash, and lay there panting.

Vernon began to count. The Buccaneer, almost gurgling for breath, but watchful and ready, stood with clenched fists, his eyes on his fallen enemy. There was a breathless silence as Vernon counted.

"One, two, three, four, five, six —"

Egan was seen to make an effort, but he slipped back again.

"—seven, eight, nine —!"

But "ten" was not counted, for Egan was on his feet again, desperately stalling off the Buccaneer as he attacked. That was all he could do till the call of time gave him a much-needed rest.

Tom Rake led him to a chair. Tom had quite forgotten that he was not on friendly terms with the new junior.

"Stick to him, kid," he said. "You're all right—Barney's at the end of his tether. You'll get it on a plate in the next round."

Egan nodded: he did not speak; he wanted all the breath he had. Vernon's eyes were on his watch.

"Time!"

Egan came up to time a little slowly, but readily. Barnes-Paget almost staggered forward. His last effort had exhausted him, and his strength was spent—he knew it as well as the onlookers did, but he refused to know it—he was still going to beat his enemy! But he could hardly see by this time, and his blows went wild; and in a few moments he was on his back, not knowing how he had got there.

“Man down!” said Banks. “All over.”

Vernon counted once more.

“One two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight nine” a fraction of a second’s pause—“TEN!”

Egan very near the end of his tether, peeled off the gloves and threw them on the table. Barnes-Paget, who had been struggling to rise, got on his feet at last.

“I’m going on!” he breathed. “Egan, you rotter ——!”

“You’re counted out!” snapped the captain of the Fourth. “The fight’s over! Take those gloves off him, Carboy.”

“I tell you I’m going on!” yelled the Buccaneer. “I’m not licked—that rotter couldn’t lick me. I tell you ——.” He made a lurch forward, stumbled, and fell on his knees.

Carboy and Root picked him up and put him in the armchair. Even the obstinate Buccaneer realised that it was the finish. So far from carrying on, he was so utterly spent that he could not get out of the armchair.

“Better come and bathe your face, old son,” said Tom Rake, taking Egan’s arm; and he led him from the study. Plum followed with Egan’s jacket on his arm. The crowd of juniors broke up, and the door of No. 5 Study closed on the defeated and enraged Buccaneer.

Carboy and Root remained with him—but they did not remain long; Barney’s savage temper drove them out and the study door opened and shut again. Then the Buccaneer was left alone with his savage temper to keep him company—propably not very cheery or exhilarating company.

CHAPTER XII.

JUST LIKE PLUM!

PLUM TUMPTON grinned.

Plum was pleased with himself.

He stood in No. 3 Study his fat face wreathed with a grin of satisfaction. He was expecting Egan. And Plum had laid a deep, dark plot for the discomfiture of the superfluous new junior in No. 3.

It was the following day—Saturday. Harry Vernon and Tom Rake had gone to see Lazy Lovelace, who was expected out of sanny that afternoon. Plum had not gone with them, having something else on hand. He was glad that his chums were off the scene—he did not want them to come butting in at the wrong moment. The fellow he wanted to come up to No. 3 that afternoon was Michael Egan—he had a happy surprise prepared for him.

Plum had placed the study door a couple of inches open. On the top of it he had placed a Latin dictionary, leaning against the lintel of the door. But that was only a beginning. On top of the dictionary he piled six or seven school books, the weightiest in the study. Even that was not all—as the great poet of Stratford has put it, “thus bad begins, but worse remains behind.” On top of the pile of school books Plum planted an inkpot, full of ink.

Then even Plum was satisfied that he had done enough. Whoever pushed open that door from outside and stepped in was certain to meet with a startling surprise—and Plum was prepared to enjoy the spectacle, if the other fellow didn’t.

Wherefore did Eustace Percival Tumpton grin—a wide and happy anticipative grin that crinkled all the layers of fat on his plump visage.

“Ha, ha!” chortled Plum.

Egan would be coming up before long. For the astute Plum had made sure of that by asking Cook, of the Fourth, to tell him that he (Plum) wanted to see him in the study. So he did want to see him—he wanted to see him in the middle of a shower of school books and an inkpot.

Having completed that booby-trap, Plum stepped down from a chair, put it back in its place, and surveyed his handiwork, grinning.

However, Egan might not come up immediately; and Plum was a prisoner in the study while he had to wait for the booby-trap to do its fell work; so at length he ceased to grin, and sat down at the study table facing the door.

There he was well placed to witness the catastrophe when it occurred; and in the meanwhile could get on with lines for Lamb. Lamb had given Plum fifty lines on Monday; and as they had not been written, he had doubled them on Thursday. But Plum was a fellow with many occupations, and the lines yet remained unwritten. Had the Little Lamb gone on doubling them, Plum would not have minded if the number had run into thousands, or indeed millions. But Lamb never redoubled—the next item in the programme was Lamb’s cane, if the lines were not handed in. Plum did not like lines, but he liked lickings less; and as Lamb had expected that impot on Friday, and it was now Saturday, Plum realised that it behoved him to get on with it. He had time on his fat hands while he waited for Mick Egan to come up and walk into the booby-trap, so he got on with it.

He propped up Virgil against the inkstand, dipped his pen in the ink, and started. For ten or fifteen minutes Plum transcribed Latin with his usual allowance of blots and smears.

Then, at the sound of a footstep in the passage, coming from the direction of the stairs, he ceased to scrawl, and sat up and took notice.

If this was Egan, Plum’s plot was near fruition.

He listened, grinning, as the footsteps came up the passage from the landing. His grin was so broad that it extended almost from one of Plum’s fat ears to the other. He barely suppressed a chuckle.

A few moments now and the junior from Cork would be pushing open the door and receiving the books and the inkpot, with a shower of ink therefrom. Plum was quite ruthless. Hadn’t the fellow asked for it? Only yesterday the Co. had taken the trouble to hike him along to No. 5 and dump him down there; yet he had turned up to prep. in No. 3 like a bad penny. Plum couldn’t wallop him—after what Wilmot had said! And he was a genuine toad—for he made out that he didn’t think much of that splendid chap—that real hero—who had saved old Lazy’s neck when his horse bolted! If Plum could have stood the rest, he couldn’t stand that! The fellow was going to be shown where he got off—and Eustace Percival Tumpton was the fellow to show him!

The footsteps stopped at the door of No. 3 Study! Plum watched the door with a fascinated gaze. Somebody was coming in—and it couldn’t be either Vernon or Rake, who were with old Lazy. Plum very nearly roared with laughter in anticipation. But he suppressed it; it would never do to put his victim on his guard. Grinning from ear to ear, he watched and waited.

Tap!

Plum had no time to wonder why Egan tapped at the door of his own study! For the door was pushed open immediately after the tap, and the newcomer stepped in.

Crash!

“Ooooooooh!”

“Ha, ha, ha!” roared Plum. He could restrain it no longer.

“Oh! Ooogh! Goodness gracious! Upon my word! Bless my soul! Ooooh!”

The laugh suddenly died on Plum's lips. He sat transfixed, staring across the table at the figure in the doorway—a figure in cap and gown, with a face streaming with ink!

"Lamb!" breathed Plum dizzily. "L-l-l-lamb! Oh, jiminy-whiskers!"

Plum had intended whoever entered the study to be surprised. And there was no doubt that Mr. Lamb was surprised.

His mortar-board had taken the knock from the dictionary, and was cocked rakishly over one of his ears. School books had banged on him right and left. The inkpot had landed—upside down—on the bridge of his nose, shedding its contents over Mr. Lamb's countenance. Ink streamed and streaked, giving Mr. Lamb quite a zebra-like look as he tottered and staggered in the doorway.

"Ooooooh!" spluttered Mr. Lamb. "Wooooogh!"

"Oh, jiminy-whiskers!" groaned Plum.

He did not need telling why Lamb had come up to the study. He had come for those lines, so long overdue. Plum hadn't expected him—but it was the unexpected that had happened, as the unexpected so often does.

Plum sat frozen with horror.

Mr. Lamb dabbed at ink on his face. For some moments he was utterly bewildered. It had seemed to him, for a fearful second, that the great pile of Sparshott School was tumbling down on his head.

He realised that it was not as bad as that. But it was bad enough. Amazement in his face gave place to towering wrath.

"Who—who did this!" He glared round the study. "Tumpton! Upon my word! Wretched boy, you did this!"

"I—I—I—I—I—I!" babbled Plum.

"You did this!" roared Lamb. "No doubt you guessed that I should come here for your lines—I see it all! This deliberate outrage——"

"Oh, jiminy-whiskers! Oh, crikey! No, sir!" gasped Plum. "I—I—I—I—I—I——"

"I see it all! Tumpton, I shall punish you most severely for this—this deliberate and ruffianly act——"

"I—I didn't—I—I mean I wasn't—I—I never!" babbled Plum. "I—I—I—I—I meant it for somebody else, sir ——"

"Wretched boy!" Mr. Lamb had brought up a cane under his arm, doubtless for use if he did not find the lines finished. He slipped it into his hand, and pointed with it to a chair. "Bend over that chair, Tumpton."

"I—I say, sir—I—I—I—I—I——!"

"Bend over!" roared Mr. Lamb, flourishing the cane.

"Oh, lor!" groaned Plum.

He bent over the chair in quite low spirits. As he did so, there was another step in the passage, and Mick Egan looked in.

"Cook said you wanted to see me here——!" he began. "Oh! I didn't see you, sir—why—what—what——?"

Mick broke off, staring in surprise at scattered school books, spilt ink, and a form-master with ink-streaked face. Then he understood—and guessed why he had had that message from Cook. Luckily—for Mick—Mr. Lamb had arrived first!

Mr. Lamb took no heed of the junior at the doorway. The cane swished in the air and descended.

Whack!

"Yarooooop!" roared Plum, as the dust rose from his trousers.

Whack! whack! whack! whack! whack! whack! WHACK! It was what the Sparshott fellows called "eight up"; and the last was the most emphatic. With every whack came a loud yell from poor Plum, and at the eighth he gave a roar that might have excited the envy of the celebrated Bull of Bashan.

"There!" gasped Mr. Lamb, "let that be a warning to you, Tumpton."

"Yow-ow-ow-ow-ow!"

Mr. Lamb tucked his cane under his arm again, and left the study. Probably he went to get a wash—he needed one! Plum leaned on the study table and wriggled.

“Hard luck, old man,” grinned Mick. “Did you mean that for me?”

“Ow! Wow! Yow—ow!” groaned Plum. “Why didn’t you come up five minutes sooner, you tick! That would have been all right.”

“Lamb was quite welcome,” said Egan, laughing.

“Yow-ow-ow! You smeary smudge, I’ll jolly well wallop you, and chance it with Wilmot!” roared Plum.

“Help!” gasped Egan. And he cut away, laughing, down the passage.

Plum made a movement to pursue, but stopped, and leaned on the study table again. After “eight up” he was in no state for war. He leaned on the table and wriggled and mumbled, and grunted, and twisted; and for the next hour wondered whether life really was worth living—till at last he felt better.

CHAPTER XIII.

UNEXPECTED!

SIR ALGERNON LOVELACE walked across the quad, between Harry Vernon and Tom Rake, with a cheery face, his eyeglass gleaming in his eye. He exchanged nods and smiles with dozens of fellows who called out a cheery word. Algy was glad to be about again—and every fellow was glad to see him about. Every now and then he gave a little limp—his aristocratic ankle still had a twinge in it occasionally—but he was very merry and bright.

“Toppin’ to be out again,” he remarked. “Simply sickenin’ stickin’ in sanny restin’ a game leg.”

“Might have been worse,” grinned Tom. “But for that giddy hero who stopped your horse, you might have been resting a game neck!”

“Yaas!” Algy nodded. “Wish I knew who that chap was! I’d like to see him again, and tell him what I think of him. Might have asked him his name if I’d thought of it. But a chap can’t think of everything, can he? What with the horse boltin’, and a bang on the leg, and nearly losing my eyeglass, I had enough to think of.”

“We’d all like to see him, whoever he was,” said Harry. “Like a hand up the stairs?”

“No, that’s all right! Just catch me if I fall!” said Algy cheerfully. However, Algy did not fall, and he successfully negotiated the staircase, and the three arrived at No. 3 Study in the Fourth. There was going to be tea in that study—a spread to celebrate Algy’s recovery and his happy restoration to the arms of his friends.

Plum was in the study. Plum wriggled, and turned a rather lugubrious look on his chums as they came in.

“Lazy, old chap! Jolly glad to see you up!” said Plum. “Ow! Wow! I say, that little beast Lamb can lay it on, can’t he? Wow!”

“Whopped?” asked Algy sympathetically.

“Ow! Yes! It’s getting better,” said Plum. “Rotten luck—I fixed up a pile of books and an inkpot on the door for that worm Egan, and Lamb came up for my lines, and walked into it, and ———.”

“Ha, ha, ha!” roared Plum’s chums.

“Well you can cackle,” said Plum warmly, “but it wasn’t funny for me! Eight up, and every one a swipe! Wow! All that tick Egan’s fault! Ow!”

“Who’s Egan?” asked Lazy Lovelace.

“New smug,” said Plum. “They’ve landed him in our study—wow! Awful tick—he makes out that that chap who stopped your gee never did anything in particular—makes out that it was nothing—any fellow would have done it—frightful smudge.”

"Does he?" said Algy. "Then I'll jolly well kick him when I see him. That chap saved my life, very likely, and might have been killed. Splendid chap! What's this fellow's name—Egan? Mind if I kick Egan in your study, you men?"

"Not with your game foot!" said Tom, laughing.

"Oh, gad! I forgot that! I'll be careful to kick him with the other foot," said Algy. "Must kick him if he runs down that chap who saved my life. Is he comin' up to tea?"

"Well, I suppose he will, as it's his study, more or less," said Harry.

"You don't mind if I kick him out?"

"Not in the least."

"Good!" said Algy. "Must remember which leg to use though."

And he sat down. Plum, in spite of his woes, had prepared the spread, and tea was almost ready. Barnes-Paget looked in at the door with a nod and a grin to Sir Algernon.

"Glad to see you up, old bean," he said.

"Thanks! You've been scrappin' while I've been in sanny," said Algy, turning his eyeglass on the Buccaneer. "What a man you are for rows, Barney."

Barnes-Paget's brow darkened. His defeat at the hands of the new junior still rankled.

Before he could answer there was a step in the passage, and Mick Egan came up to the study door. Barney gave him a black look, and stepped aside. Mick, quite unimpressed by the Buccaneer's blackest looks, stepped into the doorway—and paused at the sight of the elegant junior with the eyeglass seated at the study table. He knew that elegant youth again at once.

"Oh! Here's the new smug!" grunted Plum.

Sir Algernon Lovelace looked at the junior in the doorway. Then he stared. Then he jammed his eyeglass a little more firmly into his eye, to stare more steadily, with blank amazement in his face.

Egan smiled and coloured.

"You!" he ejaculated.

"Yes," he said, "little me."

"Oh, gad!" said Algy. "You—you're a Sparshott man, then! I never knew! Never dreamed of it! You!"

"Get out, you smug!" roared Plum. "Outside, see? You're not wanted here! This is Lovelace, if you want to know—the fellow whose life was saved by the splendid chap you've a fancy for running down! Now get out."

Algy rose from the table, and rushed across the study to the junior in the doorway, unheeding a twinge in his ankle.

"Go it!" roared Plum. "Kick him out, Lazy!"

"Give us your fist, old man!" said Algy.

Harry Vernon and Tom Rake stared in astonishment, and Plum's round eyes almost popped from his round face, as Sir Algernon Lovelace grasped the new junior's hand, and shook it again, and again, and yet again.

"What the thump——!" exclaimed Tom.

"What the dickens——!" ejaculated Vernon.

"Oh, jiminy-whiskers!" stuttered Plum. "I say, Algy, gone mad. That's the new smug—the tick—the smudge——."

"You silly ass!" said Algy, "this is the splendid chap who jumped at my gee and saved my life, or at least my jolly old limbs, the other day. So your name's Egan, is it—and you're a Sparshott man! What jolly old luck!"

"What!" gasped Harry Vernon and Co. all together.

"What!" exclaimed Barnes-Paget.

"The very identical chap!" said Algy. "Fancy him bein' a new man at Sparshott, and I never knew! I needn't tell you I'm awfully obliged to you, Egan—I've only got one neck, and you saved it for me. Didn't you chaps know that Egan was the man?" asked Algy, looking round.

"How could we know?" stuttered Tom. "He never said anything about it! Why, he said it was nothing, when we told him—made out it was nothing—."

"Said any fellow would have done it!" said Plum. "Sure it's the same chap, Lazy?"

Sir Algernon chuckled.

"Sort of," he answered. "Oh, gad, and I was goin' to kick you, old chap—"

"What on earth for?" asked Mick.

"For makin' out that the chap who risked his life for me hadn't done anythin' special" chuckled Sir Algernon. "And it was you all the time!"

Egan chuckled too.

"Well, this beats it!" said Tom Rake. "I—I—I suppose he couldn't say anything else, as he was the man. If we'd knowt—"

"If we'd known, we'd have been jolly glad to have you in this study, Egan," said Harry Vernon. "And you're more than welcome, old fellow, now we do know."

"Oh, jiminy-whiskers!" said Plum. "I—I'm glad I never got you with that inkpot, Egan—even if I did get eight up from Lamb. I say, we'll be jolly glad to have you in the study."

"So it was you!" said Barnes-Paget, staring at the Irish junior. "I might have guessed, as it happened near the stile where I left you—but I never did! I—I say, Egan, I'm sorry—I was rather a rotter—and, look here, if you want to dig in No. 5 Study I'll be jolly glad to have you there."

"No fear!" said Plum. "We've got him and we're keeping him."

"You're jolly well not!" said Sir Algernon Lovelace. "Egan's going to dig in my study ain't you, old fellow? Jolly nice study, No. 6, and the best of company in it—mine, you know! If you don't say yes, I shall jolly well kick you after all—and I've got only one sound leg—no end of trouble standin' on my game leg and kicking you with the other, so be a good chap—!"

Mick Egan laughed.

"That does it!" he said. "I'll be glad!"

It was quite a happy party in No. 3 Study—Harry Vernon and Co., and Algy, and Mick, and Barney, all—for once at least—in the best of tempers and on the best of terms. And afterwards, Sir Algernon led his new chum off in triumph to his study—limping a little, and leaning on the strong arm of the Hero of Sparshott.

THE END.