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by
MARTIN
Clifford.



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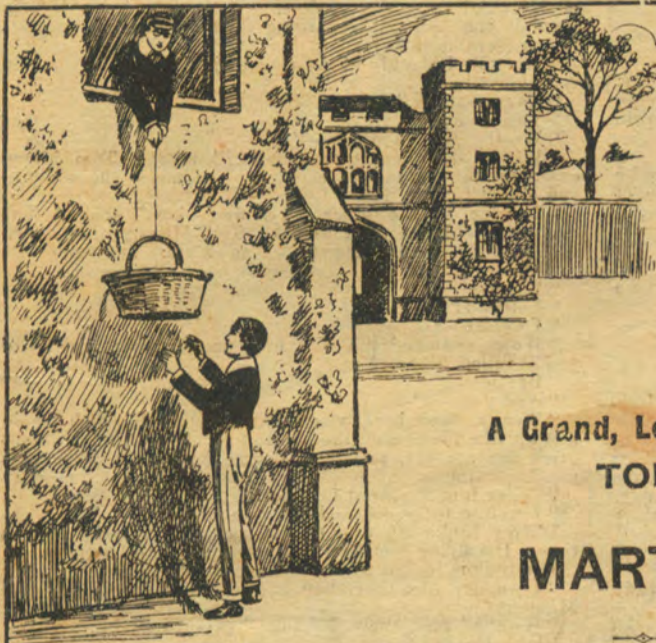
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RAIDING — THE — RAIDERS.

A Grand, Long, Complete School Tale of
TOM MERRY & CO.

BY

MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

Getting Ready for Gussy.

"KEEP that can steady!"
"Look here—"
"And don't make a row!"
"Who's making a row?"
"If you're going to begin arguing now, Blake, we may as well chuck up the whole affair," said Tom Merry, in a tone of patient resignation.
"Who's arguing?"
"Oh, cheese it!" said Monty Lowther. "If Gussy hears a word, he'll dodge us, and—"
"Of course he will, and all our trouble will be wasted," said Tom Merry severely. "That's why I want Blake to shut up for a minute or two."
"Look here—" Blake began again wrathfully.
"Hush!"
Blake broke off.
"Is he coming?"
"Oh, no!"
"Then what did you say hush for, you ass?"
"Well, it's time for you to shut up, anyway."
Jack Blake glared. He began pushing back his cuffs in a suggestive way. Digby gently shoved him back.
"Chuck it, Blake, old man—"
"If you think I'm going to be checked by a Shell duffer in my own study," began Jack Blake warmly.
"Don't spoil the jape, old son."
"That's the worst of these Fourth Form chaps," said Manners. "They never can keep quiet. Now—"
"Oh, ring off!" said Blake. "Who's making a row now?"
"Hush!" said Digby.

"Oh, rats!"

"I can hear footprints—I mean footsteps."

"Oh!"

The juniors gathered in Study No. 6, in the School House at St. Jim's, hushed a little. There were half a dozen of them gathered round the window—Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther of the Shell, and Blake, Herries, and Digby of the Fourth Form.

Blake and Digby were holding a large, shallow tin can balanced on the window-sill. The can was too large to stand on the sill unheld, and it had toppled rather dangerously when Blake let go to push back his cuffs. The can was filled to the brim with a mixture of water and soot—an inky mixture, evidently prepared by the cheerful juniors for the head of someone passing below.

And that someone was their chum, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's.

The juniors were expecting him round the corner, and they were ready for him.

They watched keenly from the window as the sound of footsteps drew nearer. It was necessary to be careful; if the ghastly concoction in the tin can fell upon the wrong head there was likely to be trouble—especially if the head belonged to a master or a prefect.

"Hold on!" muttered Digby.

Kildare of the Sixth, the captain of St. Jim's, swung into view. He strode past the danger spot, without the least idea of what was above, without looking up.

"My hat!" murmured Tom Merry. "Suppose we had let him have it—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There would have been a row," grinned Monty Lowther. "Do be careful, you Fourth Form kids, and don't make a bungle of it."

"Look here, you ass—"

A DOUBLE-LENGTH TALE OF TOM MERRY NEXT THURSDAY.

No. 116 (New Series).

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"Hold that can steady, old chap, and don't jaw," advised Lowther.

Blake breathed hard through his nose.

"Peace, kidlets—peace," said Tom Merry soothingly. "The stuff will get upset soon, and then we shall have had all our trouble for nothing. We must think of Gussy, too. This is all meant in the way of kindness; it's for his own good."

"Yes, rather!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He has been tried and found guilty of being a frabjous ass," said Tom Merry. "We've tried him, and found him guilty ourselves. What could be fairer than that?"

"Nothing!"

"While he was in Paris," resumed Tom Merry, growing warm on the subject. "He picked up a blessed slang saying, and he has worked it off on an unoffending school ever since, in season and out of season. Now, I know it's a common custom to talk French slang to show you've been to Paris, but there comes a time when one gets fed up with it."

"There does," said Lowther emphatically.

"And Gussy over-does it."

"He does."

"We've warned him, but in vain," said Tom solemnly. "We've cautioned him as a first offender, and as a hundredth offender, and he doesn't take any notice. Like the chap in the ballad, still he answers with the cry."

"Quite right!"

"Hence these tears—I mean, hence this little surprise packet," said Tom Merry, with a nod towards the can of soot-and-water. "When Gussy gets that on his napper, it will make him think."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And perhaps we shall be spared, 'Je ne marche pas,' for a time," said Tom Merry, with a chuckle. "It will take him some time to get the soot off."

"Yes, rather—and serve him right."

"It's for his own good."

"What-ho!"

"Steady with that can!"

"Rats!"

Tom Merry looked out of the study window again. The elegant form of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was not yet in sight.

Yet they knew that he was not far away, and that he was coming. A new fellow had arrived at St. Jim's that day, and D'Arcy, with his usual politeness, had gone to show him round the school.

But the swell of St. Jim's was due in the study for tea, and it was time he came.

He could not be long now, and the juniors at the study window waited with all the patience they could muster.

D'Arcy's offence had been great, and fully justified the juniors in taking drastic measures.

Lately Tom Merry & Co. had had a holiday in the South of France, and in France D'Arcy had heard for the first time a slang saying of the boulevards, which struck his fancy.

Fellows who had never been abroad might be satisfied with saying "I don't think!" But a youth who had spent holidays in Paris and Nice and Monte Carlo naturally felt that it was the correct thing to go one better.

"Je ne marche pas" is the Parisian equivalent of that expressive saying; meaning literally, "I don't go," but possessing otherwise a dozen shades of meaning.

And D'Arcy, since his return from his travels, had inflicted that atom of slang upon his long-suffering schoolfellows without mercy.

Fellows might say "I don't think," and be excused; it is not English, but it is expressive, and often hits off one's meaning to a nicety. Since his return from Paris, D'Arcy had never said it. He said "Je ne marche pas."

And he said it often.

Hence, as Tom Merry said, that can of soot-and-water, and the party of watchful juniors at the study window. That was the form their remonstrance was taking.

It was impossible for D'Arcy to doubt their meaning when that flood of ghastly mixture descended upon his head.

Tom Merry made a sudden gesture.

"He's coming!"

Footsteps were approaching once more.

"Look out; he may look up, you know!" said Manners.

"Then we'd better not look out," remarked Lowther, who never could be restrained from making bad puns.

Br-r-r-r!

"Quiet!"

"He's coming!"

"Now then!"

A silk hat, with a junior underneath it, appeared in view, and the can was tilted over.

Swoosh!

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There was a wild yell from below as the concoction swished downward, and swamped upon the silk hat and its wearer.

"Ow! W-w-what— Oh! Ooch! Yaroch!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Got him!"

"My only hat!" roared Tom Merry. "It's the wrong chap!"

"What!"

"It's not Gussy!"

"Phew!"

A face smothered in liquid soot was turned up towards the study window. It was impossible to recognise it, but it certainly was not D'Arcy's. The juniors had been a little too hasty after all.

The soot had descended upon the wrong victim.

"My hat!" gasped Digby. "I wonder who it is!"

"Bai Jove!"

That sudden exclamation at the door made the juniors whirl round from the window. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stood in the doorway, regarding them through his eyeglass in considerable surprise.

They stared blankly at the elegant junior.

"Gussy!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You—you ass!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Where did you spring from?" roared Tom Merry exasperated. "We were expecting you under the window, you duffer."

"I came in the other way, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus. "But I must wemark, Tom Mewwy, that I can't allow you to chawactewise me as an ass. You see—"

"Chump!"

"Weally—"

"Fathead!"

"I wefuse—"

"We've swamped this stuff over another chap instead of you!" yelled Blake.

"Bai Jove!"

"And you—"

"Weally, deah boys, you couldn't expect to catch me in a twap like that," said the swell of St. Jim's. "You might catch one another, pewwaps, but as for me—je ne marche pas."

"Collar him!" roared Lowther.

"I wefuse to be collahed—je ne marche pas—"

D'Arcy broke off, and dodged out of the study just in time. His flying footsteps died away down the passage.

The juniors looked at one another in exasperation.

"I wonder who that chap is that we've swamped," said Manners.

"We shall soon know, I expect," grinned Blake.

Blake was right.

Two minutes later a ghastly figure presented itself in the doorway of the study. It was the figure of a junior, soaked from head to foot in sooty water, with a drenched silk hat in his hand.

He stared at Tom Merry & Co., and they stared at him.

CHAPTER 2.

The New Fellow.

"HALLO!" said the stranger.

"Hallo!"

"Did you fellows chuck this stuff over me?"

"Ahem!"

"I thought it came from the window of this room."

"H'm!"

"I came up here to slay the chap who chucked it," explained the sooty one. "Which of you dangerous maniacs was it?"

"H'm!"

"Perhaps you were all in it?"

"No, you're in it," said Monty Lowther. "We—ahem!—we've chucked it."

"Well, of all the frabjous duffers, I think you take the cake," said the sooty one.

"It was really these Fourth Form kids," explained Tom Merry. "They would chuck the stuff in such a hurry."

"Look here, Tom Merry—"

"You see, it was a mistake, kid," said Tom Merry. "The dose was intended for another chap."

"Oh, I wish you had made sure of him, then!"

"So do we—ha, ha! But who are you?" went on Tom Merry, puzzled. "I can't recognise your chivvy in that state, and your voice doesn't seem familiar."

"I'm a new chap!"

"Oh!"

"My name's Reginald Leslie."

"Oh!"



"Hush! I can hear footsteps," said Digby, holding a can filled to the brim with a mixture of water and soot evidently prepared for the head of someone passing below.

"A chap has been showing me round," said Leslie, through the soot. "He said he'd buzz off and tell his friends that he was bringing me to tea in the study, and I was coming round, when—"

"Is this how you usually receive your guests, Blake?" asked Tom Merry affably.

"Oh, go and eat coke!" growled Blake. "I say, Leslie, I'm awfully sorry! You see, we've been fed up by that chap who was showing you round, and we got up this little surprise for him, and you got it by mistake."

Leslie laughed. He was evidently a decidedly good-tempered fellow. The best of tempers might have been ruffled by the experience he had gone through, but the new boy appeared to be cheerful enough, and quite placable.

"Well, if it was an accident, let's say no more about it," he said. "But as I'm new here, one of you might show me to a bath-room, where I can get this stuff off; and as my box hasn't been sent up from the station yet, I'll be glad of a change of clothes from somebody."

"What-ho!" exclaimed Blake. "We'll see you through. You're about Gussy's size, and I'll get some of his things."

"I'll show you to the bath-room," said Manners. "Bring the duds there, Blake!"

"Right-ho!"

"Thanks!" said Leslie. "I feel awful, and I shall be glad of a clean-up!"

"You're taking this jolly well!" said Tom Merry. "I think you're a decent chap. What Form are you going into?"

"The Fourth!"

"School House, I suppose?"

"Yes, that is my House. There's another here, I believe."

"Yes, the New House—a horrid den!" said Tom Merry. "A sort of home for duffers and chumps, you know. The School House is cock-house at St. Jim's. We'll take you over to the New House some time and show you the freaks."

Leslie laughed, and left the study. He had been only a couple of hours at St. Jim's, but he had already learned that there was a keen rivalry between the two Houses there; and he took Tom Merry's graphic description of the New House for what it was worth.

"Well, that's a jolly nice chap!" exclaimed Digby, as the

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NEXT
THURSDAY:

"TOM MERRY'S MASTER-STROKE."

By
MARTIN CLIFFORD.

new boy went out. "Precious few fellows would take a mistake like that so cheerfully!"

"You're right!"

"I think we owe him some reparation," said Tom Merry. "Gussy has already invited him to tea. Suppose we make a really jolly feed of it, and do him down in the best possible style; I really think he deserves it!"

"Good egg!"

"We haven't had a decent feed for some days," Tom Merry remarked. "Let's club together and get in something decent!"

"Good!"

"Small contributions thankfully received, and larger ones in proportion," said Digby, holding out a coffee-tin. "Walk up!"

Coins clinked cheerily into the tin.

There was quite a collection soon, for, as it happened, the chums of St. Jim's were in funds; a state they were not often in. Money generally burned in their pockets till it was gone. But Tom Merry had lately had a remittance from his old governess, Miss Priscilla Fawcett, and Lowther one from his uncle.

"Sixteen bob!" said Tom Merry, counting up the collection. "Jolly good! I'll go down to the tuckshop and negotiate with Mrs. Taggles, while you chaps get the study ready."

"Right you are!"

"By the way," said Digby suddenly, "I wonder what study that chap is going in? They've tried to shove new chaps into this study several times, but we've always been lucky, and they've left. This chap looks like a stayer."

"By George," said Herries, "that's serious! I like that chap; but there's four in this study already, and we don't want a fifth. It can't be did!"

Jack Blake came in in time to hear the remark. The chief of No. 6 Study was grinning.

"It's all right!" he remarked.

"What's all right—about the study?"

"About the clothes. I've given him Gussy's best Sunday suit, and his fanciest waistcoat, and the giddiest tie I could find in Gussy's box!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"As Gussy was the cause of all the trouble, it's only fair; besides, Gussy is strong on hospitality to strangers!" grinned Blake. "Still, we needn't mention the matter to him; leave him to find it out."

"But what about the study?" said Herries. "Where is the new kid going to be put?"

"That's all right!" said Blake reassuringly. "I've asked him; you can bet your boots I thought of that! He's going into Study No. 8 with Mellish!"

"Sorry for him—or any chap that has to dig with Mellish." "So am I. Mellish is a worm; still, it may improve even Mellish to chum with a decent chap, and this chap is awfully decent!" said Blake. "Where are you going, Tom Merry?"

"We've made a collection for a feed; I'm going to order the grub!"

"Good! Here's my whack!"

And Jack Blake handed out a two-shilling piece. Tom Merry jingled it into his pocket, and walked out of the School House, and made his way towards the little shop on the other side of the quadrangle—the little place kept by Mrs. Taggles within the precincts of St. Jim's, and greatly patronised by the boys when they were in funds.

CHAPTER 3.

Fatty Wynn on the Warpath.

"TOM MERRY!"

A fat youth in Etons was lounging outside the tuckshop. It was Wynn of the New House—generally known as Fatty Wynn. Wynn was generally with Figgins and Kerr, of the Fourth; but just now he was alone. He was looking in at some of Dame Taggles's fresh tarts with a longing eye, but it was evident that Fatty was not in funds.

"Tom Merry! Hallo!" said Fatty Wynn affably.

"Hallo!" said Tom Merry.

"Going in?"

"Looks like it, doesn't it?" said Tom Merry, entering the shop.

Fatty Wynn followed him in, with a still more friendly expression upon his plump face.

"I say, Tom Merry, I suppose you're having a feed?" Fatty Wynn remarked, as Dame Taggles came out of her little parlour and smiled at Tom Merry.

"That's it!"

"I shouldn't mind joining you," said Fatty Wynn. "I'm a bit peckish. I get very hungry, you know, at this time of the year."

Tom Merry laughed.

"It's a study feed," he remarked, "and New House bounders are barred!"

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"A study feed?" said Fatty Wynn, with glistening eyes.

"That's it!"

"Oh, all right!"

Fatty Wynn strolled out of the tuckshop. Tom Merry gave his orders to Dame Taggles, to an extent that broadened the welcoming smile upon that good lady's countenance.

Fatty Wynn kept up a careless air till he was out of the shop. Then he suddenly broke into a desperate run, and pelted away in the direction of the New House.

He ran right up the steps of the New House, and was dashing in, when two juniors crossed their arms in front of him and brought him to a sudden halt.

"Oh!" gasped Fatty Wynn breathlessly.

"What's the row?" said Figgins, the long-legged chief of the New House juniors. "Any of the School House bounders after you?"

"Can't see any of them!" said Kerr, looking out.

"No!" gasped Fatty Wynn. "It's a wheeze—quick! Come on!"

"Where?"

"This way!"

"Why?"

"To the tuckshop, you ass! Come on!"

"Oh, rats!" said Figgins. "I'm not coming to the tuckshop. You've had enough to eat for to-day, for one thing. You've had your tea—"

"I had hardly anything—only some bacon and poached eggs and sausages, and the kidneys and toast, and a few tarts and a pineapple!" said Fatty Wynn indignantly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, come on!"

"My dear Fatty, I'm stony—it's no good!"

"Ass! I don't want you to stand treat!" yelled Fatty Wynn. "It's a wheeze, I tell you—a raid on the School House!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Figgins, on the alert at once. "What is it?"

"Tom Merry's in the tuckshop buying up the whole blessed place!" gasped Fatty Wynn. "He's alone, too, and he may come out any minute. Come on!"

That was enough for Figgins and Kerr. They were as keen as Fatty now. The three juniors dashed away at top speed for the tuckshop. They reached it—but did not enter. Tom Merry's voice could be heard inside.

"And two dozen tarts, I think, Mrs. Taggles!"

Fatty Wynn's mouth watered.

"Two dozen," he murmured. "Oh, I wonder if they are twopenny ones?"

"Quiet!" muttered Figgins. "Get behind this tree. We'll collar him as he comes out, and lift the grub before he can say ginger-pop!"

"Good!"

In a twinkling the three raiders were ambushed behind the big elm that stood in front of the school shop.

Figgins peered round the trunk to watch for Tom Merry.

It was some little time before the hero of the Shell emerged.

When he came out he had a cheerful anticipatory smile upon his handsome face, and a large and well-filled basket in his hand.

"Look out!" murmured Figgins, drawing back his head quickly. "Rush him as he passes the tree; I'll give the word!"

"What-ho!"

Tom Merry came on unsuspectingly.

"Go for him!" yelled Figgins suddenly.

The New House trio rushed to the attack.

Tom Merry was taken by surprise, but he was on his guard in a second. He dropped the basket and put up his fists, and met the rush of the New House juniors with them.

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"Oh!" roared Fatty Wynn, as a set of hard knuckles crashed upon his nose. He staggered back, and sat down violently upon the ground.

But Tom Merry had no time to strike more than one blow. Even as Fatty Wynn rolled over, Figgins and Kerr grasped the hero of the Shell, and whirled him round, and got him down.

Tom Merry bumped on the ground, and Figgins and Kerr sprawled over him. Tom Merry struggled desperately, and shouted for help.

"Rescue, School House!" he yelled.

"Quick, Fatty!" gasped Figgins. "Cut off with the basket!"

Fatty Wynn staggered up. His nose was crimson and swelling; but he never heeded that. He grasped the basket by the handle, and tore off towards the New House. Once within the walls of that building, the loot would be safe.

"Rescue!" roared Tom Merry.

But there was no rescue at hand. Most of the School House fellows were at tea in the House, and the tuckshop was deserted.

Fatty Wynn vanished across the quadrangle.

"All serene!" grinned Figgins. "Let the boulder go!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Figgins and Kerr jumped up, and ran after Fatty Wynn. Tom Merry sat up, gasping for breath. He gazed after the retreating forms of the New House juniors in a dazed and uncertain way.

"The—the boulders!" he gasped. "Oh, the rotters! They've collared the grub!" He jumped up.

Figgins & Co. were too far off for pursuit; Fatty Wynn had already disappeared into the porch of the New House. The basket and what it contained was gone.

Tom Merry hurried back to the School House.

He burst into Study No. 6, looking considerably dishevelled and very excited. The chums were preparing for tea. The fire was blazing and the kettle singing on the hob. Jack Blake was spreading a cloth on the table—a cloth so white that it was pretty certain that it did not belong to Study No. 6.

"Here he is!" exclaimed Digby. "Got the grub?"

"No!" gasped Tom Merry.

"You've been time enough. Why haven't you got it?" said Blake. "Here's Leslie hungry as a hunter."

The new boy laughed. He was washed and combed now, and quite clean, and dressed in the best suit of clothes belonging to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, which fitted him very well. He was a good-looking, well-formed lad, with a pleasant face.

"I'm not so very hungry," he remarked. "Do you want a hand to carry the things in, Tom Merry?"

"It's a raid!" panted Tom. "Figgins & Co. collared the lot outside the tuckshop!"

"What!" roared half a dozen voices.

"The grub's raided!"

"You ass!"

"You duffer!"

"You cheerful idiot!"

"You chump!"

"It wasn't my fault!" exclaimed Tom Merry, rather staggered by the general attack. "I didn't know they were waiting for me behind the tree."

"Ass!" said Blake. "Where's the grub now—what have they done with it?"

"Taken it into the New House."

"They're jolly well not going to keep it there!" said Blake resolutely. "Let's go and get it back."

"Phew!" said Digby. "A raid into the New House! We shall have dozens of them on our necks in a shake of a lamb's tail."

"I don't care—"

"They'll be at tea, most of them," Tom Merry said quickly. "We may be able to get up to Figgins's study quietly and raid them before they can give the alarm. It's a chance, anyway; and we're not going to take this lying down, I suppose?"

"Rather not!"

"Come on, then!"

"Are you coming, Leslie?" asked Blake. "It's a chance for you to show that you're going to stand up for your House." Leslie laughed, and nodded.

"What-ho! I'm on!"

Leaving the preparations for tea just where they were, the juniors hurried out of the study. In the passage they met Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who was approaching the study cautiously, as if not quite certain what sort of a reception he was likely to meet with there.

At the sight of the whole body of juniors bearing down upon him Arthur Augustus stopped, and backed quickly away.

"It's all right, Gussy!" sang out Tom Merry. "We're—"

"Wats!"

"It's all right! We're going—"

"More wats!"

"I tell you—"

"Je ne marche pas," said Arthur Augustus, and he dodged into another passage and was gone.

"The boulder! We'll make him 'marche' presently!" said Tom Merry; "no time now. Come on!"

And the School House juniors hurried out of the house, and dashed across the quad. at the run, to get to close quarters with Figgins & Co.

CHAPTER 4.

A Surprise for Figgins & Co.

"RIPPING!"

"Splendid!"

"First chop!"

Such were the exclamations of Figgins & Co. as they examined their prize in Fatty's study in the New House.

The basket lay upon the study table, and Figgins & Co. were unpacking Tom Merry's recent purchases.

The extent of them delighted the heart of Fatty Wynn, and he gave a sort of purr of delight as he took out each fresh article.

"My hat!" said Figgins. "They were going to have a feed, and no mistake! This little lot must have run them into nearly a pound."

"Awfully thoughtful of them to lay in a feed like this when we're broke!" grinned Kerr.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And to think that I was going to sell my diamond pin to raise the wind, too," said Figgins.

Kerr looked at the diamond pin, which lay on the table, and grinned. The diamond was a very questionable one, and the gold of the pin could not be called first quality. Figgins had bought that pin as a great bargain for ten shillings. Kerr had declared that the chap who sold it had made the bargain, but Figgins had warmly asked him what he knew about diamonds, anyway, and the subject had been dropped. Several times when the chums of the New House had been short of money Figgins had come near selling his pin, but Kerr always thought that Figgins wouldn't be able to raise such an amount as he anticipated upon it.

"We shall save that," he remarked.

"It will do for another time," said Figgins. "Perhaps we'll sell it and stand the School House chaps a feed, if they like to admit that we've done them brown this time—as we jolly well have."

"Yes, rather!"

"Light the fire, someone," said Fatty Wynn. "I'm so hungry that I think I will begin with the cake, but we'd better get the eggs poached, too."

"I wonder how those School House boulders will take this?" Kerr remarked. "No chance of their trying to get even with us, I think?"

Figgins shook his head.

"Well, even Tom Merry wouldn't care to venture right into the house," he said. "He jolly well wouldn't get out again very easily—not with the basket, at any rate."

"We'll see!" said a voice at the door.

"My only hat!"

Tom Merry!

Tom Merry walked quickly into the study, followed as quickly by Lowther and Manners, Digby and Herries, and the new boy, Leslie. Blake was not to be seen. Leslie closed the door quickly, and Lowther put his back against it.

Figgins & Co. stared at the intruders in amazement. Such a daring invasion as this was not according to his calculations. The New House fellows mostly being at tea, either in Hall or in their own studies, the intruders had been able to enter undiscovered—but getting away was another matter.

"Well, of all the cheek!" gasped Figgins.

"The nerve!" said Kerr.

Fatty Wynn grasped the basket.

"You'd better jolly well get out, you School House wasters!" he exclaimed. "If you think you're going to raid our grub—"

"Your grub!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"Yes, ours! Get out!"

"Look here—"

"Nuff said!" interrupted Figgins, with a majestic wave of the hand. "We give you kids one minute to get out of the house. Otherwise—"

"I expect it will be otherwise," remarked Digby.

"Otherwise," said Figgins, frowning, "we shall raise the house, and you will be snatched baldheaded and bumped down every blessed stair before you're let go."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Lock the door, Leslie," he said.

"Right you are!"

Figgins made a rush.

"Rescue, New House!" he roared. "School House boulders! This way!"

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"There was an answering shout from the passage immediately."

"Collar them!" said Tom Merry briefly.

"The School House fellows closed upon their foes. Figgin's & Co. put up a good fight, shouting for rescue all the time. Hammering blows fell upon the door of the study, and voices shouted without, but the door was locked, and would not budge. And Figgin's & Co. had no chance of opening it. The odds were too great.

Figgin's went sprawling on the hearthrug, and Digby and Herries sat on his chest, and Kerr was pinned against the wall in an iron grasp by Mannors and Lowther. Fatty Wynn rushed for the door to unlock it, and was bumped down just inside, and Tom Merry sat on him and kept him down.

"Rescue!" bawled Figgin's.

"Hooryay!" gasped Herries. "They're done!"

Hammer-bammer! came at the door.

"What's the row in there?" yelled Pratt, through the key-hole.

"School House bounders!" yelled back Figgin's.

"Open the door, then!"

"Can't! It's locked!"

"Unlock it!"

"They've got me!"

"Well, make 'em let go!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "That's not so easy, Pratt snorted outside.

"If you expect me to get through the keyhole and rescue you, you're likely to be jolly well disappointed!" he exclaimed.

"I'm not him enough."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bust the door in!" shrieked Kerr.

"Get a key from somewhere!"

"Quick!" exclaimed Tom Merry, who had plenty to do to keep Fatty Wynn down. "Pack the grub into the basket, Leslie, and send it down to Blake."

"You bet!" said the new boy.

He was already busy at the table, packing in the provisions. Then he drew a long and strong cord out of his pocket and fastened the end of it to the handle of the basket. Figgin's gave a whoop as the new boy carried the basket towards the window and opened the latter. He understood the scheme now. Tom Merry & Co. did not intend to attempt to get the lock down the stairs of the New House.

The passage without was crowded with New House juniors, ready to pile themselves upon the School House fellows as soon as the door was unlocked, but the raiders did not mean to unlock it.

"Rescue!" bawled Figgin's. "They're going—O-o-o-o!"

It was necessary to gag Figgin's in time, or a crowd of New House fellows would have cut round to the window outside, where Blake was alone. There was nothing handy but a egg which Fatty Wynn had taken out ready to peack. Digby clutched it and jammed it into Figgy's mouth.

"O-o-o-o-o-o!" gasped Digby.

"Right you are!"

"Buck up, Leslie!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"O-o-o-o-o-o!"

"Shut up!" gasped Digby.

Figgin's gasped and spluttered wildly.

"I'm off!"

"Cut off, then!"

"All right!" he called out.

detached the cord.

was waiting for it, and he grinned as he received it and Leslie lowered the basket out of the window. Jack Blake

If the key had been turned sideways in the lock, the new key could not, of course, have been inserted from the outside. But Leslie had not thought of that in locking the door. The new key from outside sent the inside one from the aperture, and it fell with a clang to the floor.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Leslie.

"I never thought—"

"You duffer!"

"Quick! Feet against the door!" shouted Tom Merry.

He ran to pick up the key, releasing Fatty Wynn. The fat junior jumped up and grasped him promptly. Tom Merry tore himself loose, and tried to insert the key into the lock, but it was too late. The key outside was already falling.

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The key grated as it turned.

"Rush for it!"

"Right up!" shouted Tom Merry. "Rush for it!"

The idea of descending from the window had to be given up now. There was no time for it. The School House juniors had barely time to line up before the enemy were upon them. Pratt unlocked the door and hurried it open, and a swarm of New House fellows rushed in.

"Where are they?"

"Go for 'em!"

"Rush for it you chaps!"

"Hurray for the School House!"

Tom Merry & Co. made a desperate rush. In a moment the rival juniors were mingled in a wild and whirling conflict.

CHAPTER 5.

Tea in Study No. 6.

"Go for 'em!"

"Yah! New House cads!"

"Give 'em socks!"

"School House rotters!"

"Hurray!"

Tom Merry & Co., hitting out furiously on all sides, fought their way out of the study and along the passage to the stairs. But there the New House juniors made a concentrated rush, and the School House phalanx was broken and scattered.

"Run for it!" shouted Tom Merry.

And they ran for it.

Leslie and Digby and Herries went headlong down the stairs and gained the quadrangle. Lowther and Mannors were seized in innumerable hands, frog-marched down, and hurried forth amid shouts of laughter.

Tom Merry was seized by Figgin's & Co., and soon reduced to helplessness. Figgin's & Co. were vengeful.

"Bring him along to the bath-rooms."

"Duck him!"

"Hurray!"

"Here, leggo!" roared Tom Merry, struggling. "Leggo!"

"Yank him along!"

"Boys!"

A thin acid voice broke upon the disturbance. The juniors released Tom Merry as suddenly as if he had become red-hot. Tom reeled against the wall. Mr. Katchiff, the House-master of the New House, came down the passage with a severe look upon his thin face.

"What is all this noise about?" he exclaimed.

"We—we—"

"Merry! Ah, I need not ask who is to blame when I see you here!" said Mr. Katchiff harshly. "You are the cause of endless disturbances. Return to your own House at once, Merry!"

"If you please, sir—" began Figgin's.

"Silence, Figgin's!"

"Yes, sir. But—"

"Go into your own study at once, Figgin's. Merry, leave the house."

"Certainly, sir," said Tom Merry.

He turned to go downstairs, bestowing a wink upon Figgin's & Co. as he did so. He was glad that Mr. Katchiff had chosen to blame him, as it saved Figgin's & Co. from punishment. As a matter of fact, he was glad too that the New House master had appeared on the scene at that moment. He had come very opportunely for Tom Merry.

Tom Merry, very dusty and dishevelled, walked out of the New House. He found his comrades already returning. They had discovered that Tom had not escaped, and were about to make a desperate attempt to rescue him.

"Here he is!" exclaimed Lowther, in great relief.

"Here I am," asserted Tom Merry. "Buzz off."

They hurried back to the School House. Before they reached it Figgin's & Co. and a crowd of New House juniors were in pursuit.

Figgin's & Co. pursued them to the very steps of the School House. But in the doorway was a swarm of School House fellows, and it was impossible to come further. The School House juniors yelled defiance, and hurled catcalls at the enemy, and Figgin's & Co. paused, and hesitated, and finally beat a retreat.

"This is where we smile!" ejaculated Digby. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the School House crowd.

"Who's cock-house at St. Jim's?"

"School House! School House!"

"And Figgin's & Co. drifted away disconsolately.

Tom Merry and his comrades, rumpled and dusty, but triumphant, crowded up to Study No. 6. Blake was already unpacking the basket.

"All serene?" he asked.

"Right as rain!"

"You look a jolly rumbled lot!" said Blake, eyeing them critically.

"So would you if you'd been through the same row that we have!" said Lowther warmly. "Shut up and poach the eggs, while we dust ourselves."

"Yaas, wathah! You do need dustin'," said Arthur Augustus, looking into the study.

"You'll get dusting too, if you don't look out," said Blake.

"None of your marching pah here, you know."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Cheese it, and make the tea," said Blake.

"I wufuse to cheese it. I—"

"If you're going to make a row in the presence of visitors—"

"Bai Jove, I didn't notice you for a moment, Leslie, deah boy!" said D'Arcy, with a graceful bow. "Pway excuse me! I shall be vewy pleased to make the tea, Blake."

"Get on with it then, and don't talk."

"Weally—"

"Poof!"

D'Arcy sniffed, and made the tea. Tom Merry & Co. dusted themselves down, and restored their clothing to some degree of tidiness and order. There was a savoury smell in the study as Blake poached the eggs.

The juniors, still a little breathless, but very cheerful over their victory, sat down round the table to tea. There was a tap at the door, and Mellish of the Fourth put his head in.

He met with a universal stare.

Mellish, the cad of the Fourth, was not popular, and his face was seldom welcome anywhere. But Mellish did not mind that very much. He would seek to ingratiate himself with anybody, in spite of the plainest rebuff, if it suited his purpose. Leslie, of course, knew nothing of the character of the sneak of the School House so far.

Mellish looked in with a smirking grin.

"Hallo, you fellows!" he said very affably, his eye scanning the tea-table with keen appreciation. "I've just looked in—"

"And now you can just look out again," said Blake.

Mellish wriggled.

"Well, you see, I—I was just looking for the new chap, Leslie. He's to share my study, No. 8, and I wanted to get him a bit of a feed to welcome him. I'm in funds to-day. Have you seen Leslie?"

"I'm Leslie," said the new boy.

"Oh, there you are!" exclaimed Mellish, pretending to notice him for the first time. "Good! I'm Mellish, your study-mate."

"Glad to meet you!" said Leslie.

"I hope we shall be chummy," said Mellish. "Will you come and have a bit of a feed in the study?"

Leslie was nonplussed for a moment. He could see that the other fellows did not like Mellish, and that they made no bones about showing their dislike. But Mellish was to be his study-mate, and this welcome was certainly cordial enough on the part of the School House cad.

"Sorry," said Leslie; "I'm having tea in here; but—"

He glanced questioningly at the others. There was only one thing they could do, and they did it.

"Come in, Mellish," said Blake, with an effort. "Have tea with us."

Blake knew very well that that was what Mellish had come there for, and that he had no more intention of standing a feed to the new boy than to the man in the moon. But he could not very well get out of asking the cad of the Fourth to tea, all the same.

"Thanks, awfully, Blake!" said Mellish, with an agreeable wriggle. "If you're sure I sha'n't be in the way—"

"Oh, come in!"

"Certainly. I—"

"Shut the door."

Mellish grinned, and shut the door, and came to the table. Leslie made room for the cad of the Fourth beside him.

"Sit down here," he said.

"Thanks awfully!"

"Blake, deah boy, I will twouble you for anothah cup of tea. The tea has been made vewy well this time."

"That's a wonder, considering who made it!" retorted Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Pass the jam, Gussy," said Monty Lowther.

"I was just speakin'—"

"Pass the jam."

"You are intewwuptin' me—"

"Exactly. Pass the jam."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Pass the jam."

And Arthur Augustus sniffed, and passed the jam.

CHAPTER 6.

A Very Unpleasant Happening.

THE tea in Study No. 6 was a very cheerful and cozy meal. With a bright fire in the grate, a well-spread table, and a jolly set of fellows, it could not fail to be a success. Even Mellish was in a cordial temper, and did not make any of the sneering remarks which generally earned him dislike wherever he went.

"Pass the cake, please, Mannahs," said D'Arcy presently.

"Here you are, Gussy."

"Pway pass the knife also," said the swell of the School House, with dignity. "I twust you do not expect me to bweak it off in chunks with my fingahs, Mannahs."

"Blessed if I can see the knife," said Manners, looking round the table. "Have you eaten the cake-knife, Gussy?"

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"Well, where is it, then?"

"Pway look wound—"

"It was here a minute ago!" said Mellish.

But it was gone.

The juniors looked up and down and round about, but the cake-knife was not to be found. It was a handsome knife with a silver handle, which Miss Fawcett had presented to the study, and was of considerable value—though the juniors valued it chiefly because it would cut. It had cut many things besides cake in its time.

Blake looked on the floor, but the knife was not there. He was considerably puzzled. What could have become of the knife was a mystery.

"Some ass is hiding it for a jape!" said Tom Merry. "I call upon the silly duffer in question to produce it!"

There was no reply.

"It does not mattah," said D'Arcy. "Dig will get up and get me anothah knife from the dwawah!"

"Dig jolly well won't," said the owner of that name, with great promptness.

"Weally, Dig—"

"Here's a knife!" said Blake. "Cut the cake, and be quiet, Gussy!"

"I wufuse—"

"Cheese it! Hallo—who's that?"

The study door opened.

Three familiar faces presented themselves—they belonged to Figgins & Co. The School House juniors were on their feet in a twinkling. The appearance of the New House trio naturally looked like a renewal of the raid.

But Figgins held up his hand in sign of peace.

"Pax!" he exclaimed.

"Oh!" said Tom Merry. "What's the trouble?"

"We had to make it pax, to get into the House," said Fatty Wynn, with a yearning glance at the table. "Otherwise, we'd rush you bald-headed!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Sit down, Fatty, and wire in—eh, Blake?"

"Yes, rather!" grinned Blake. "It would be cruelty to animals to keep Fatty off the feed. Here you are, Fatty!"

He gave his chair to the fat Fourth-Former. Fatty Wynn did not need a second bidding.

He sat down and started.

Figgins frowned a little.

"We didn't come here to cadge a tea!" he exclaimed, with a severe glance at Fatty Wynn. "It's about another matter—a rather important one."

"Go ahead!" said Tom Merry.

He could see by the expression of Figgins's face that something unusual had happened. Figgins was looking curiously grave and quiet. Tom Merry wondered what was the matter.

"We were stony broke this afternoon," said Figgins, with a cough to clear his throat.

"That's no news!" remarked Lowther.

"Pway don't intewwupt Figgins, Lowthah. I wegard it as bad form!"

"Ass!"

"Don't interrupt Figgins, Gussy!" said Blake severely.

"I wufuse to be called an ass! I—"

"Bai Jove!"

"We were stony this afternoon, and I was going to sell my pin," said Figgins. "I dare say you chaps have seen me wearing a diamond pin—"

"I've seen you wearing a pin," said Lowther.

"Was it a diamond?"

"Yes, it was a diamond!" said Figgins emphatically. "I bought it at a big bargain for ten shillings. The chap who sold it to me—chap named Isaacs—said it had cost twenty pounds."

"Well, Isaacs wasn't understudying George Washington at the time, that's certain," said Lowther. "But go on with the harrowing story. Have you lost the pin?"

"Yes."

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus, looking very much

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interested, "and you've come to ask me to discover it for you, Figgay, in my capacity as an amateur detective. I shall be very pleased to take up the case—"

"I haven't," said Figgins.

"Weally, Figgins—"

"The fact is," said Figgins, "I had put the pin out on the table, and then we raided your feed, and I gave up the idea of selling it. Then the grub went—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, then, I thought of selling the pin again, but it was gone."

"Gone!"

"Yes. Before the row it was on the table. After the row it was—gone!"

Tom Merry stared at him.

"I suppose it got knocked down, and it's somewhere on the floor of the study," he said.

Figgins shook his head.

"It was lying there beside the inkpot," he replied. "The inkpot wasn't upset—but the pin was gone. It wasn't knocked down. It was moved!"

"What on earth do you mean?"

"To make sure, we've hunted all over the study," said Figgins, "and I've questioned all the fellows who came in to kick you chaps out. Nobody's seen it!"

"My word—"

"Mind, I'm not hinting anything!" exclaimed Figgins hastily. "Don't think I mean for a second that I think one of you chaps might have boned the pin."

"Bai Jove!"

"But somebody took it off the table," said Figgins. "I suppose it was taken for a lark. I hope it was, anyway. If one of you chaps has hidden it for a joke, I'd like you to tell me where it is!"

The juniors looked at one another.

"I never even saw it," said Tom Merry.

"Nor I," said Blake. "Are you sure it was there, Figgay?"

"Quite sure. I had drawn Kerr's attention to it only a few minutes before you chaps rushed in—hadn't I, Kerr?"

"You did!" said Kerr, with a nod.

"Blessed if I understand it!" said Tom Merry. "Anyway, I haven't seen the pin. Any of you fellows seen it?"

There was a general shaking of heads. Leslie was looking considerably perturbed. It was not a pleasant affair to be involved in on the first day of his coming to St. Jim's.

"You're quite sure, you chaps?" said Figgins, at last.

"Quite sure!"

"You haven't taken it for a lark?"

"Of course not!"

"Well, it's been taken."

Tom Merry's face hardened.

"Look here, Figgins, do you mean to say that you're going to accuse somebody of stealing that blessed pin?" he exclaimed sharply.

Figgins looked decidedly worried. He exchanged a glance with Kerr, and did not reply for a moment or two.

"Well," he said, at length, hesitatingly, "the pin was taken. I wouldn't say a word about it—I don't want a scandal—but half the fellows in the New House know already through my inquiring after the pin."

"Hang it all!" exclaimed Blake. "The fellows will be saying there's a thief in the school!"

"That's what I'm afraid of," said Figgins quietly.

And then there was a grim silence in Study No. 6.

CHAPTER 7.

D'Arcy Approves!

TOM MERRY was the first to break the silence.

"This is rotten!" he said.

Figgins nodded.

It certainly was "rotten," but Figgins did not see quite what was to be done. Reginald Leslie rose from the table and stood looking out of the window into the dusk of the quad. Tom Merry glanced at him, and felt very uncomfortable.

"I'm sorry this has happened your first day here, Leslie," he exclaimed. "It won't give you a very good impression of St. Jim's, I'm afraid!"

"Wathah not," agreed D'Arcy. "Howevah, I assuah you, Leslie, deah boy, that Figgay is makin' a wegulah howlah, as usual, and the pin is probably in his pocket all the time."

"I shouldn't wonder," said Manners.

Figgins grunted.

"I've told you fellows how the facts stand," he said. "I'd like to know your opinion on the matter, as to what's to be done. The pin's gone—it's not the value I'm thinking about, though it was a very valuable one—"

"Ahem!"

"What are you grunting about, Lowther?"

"Oh, nothing!"

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"I got that pin at a bargain!" said Figgins warmly.

"Chap named Isaacs—"

"Never mind that!" said Kerr. "Valuable or not, the thing's gone. That's the point!"

"Exactly!" said Figgins. "That was what I was coming to. Blow the value; but the pin has been taken, and half the fellows in the New House know it. I think something ought to be done about the matter."

"But what?"

"I don't know," Figgins confessed.

The juniors looked at one another in dismay. It was about the most unpleasant thing that could have happened. Where was the diamond pin?

"Well, the thing ought to be looked for!" said Tom Merry at last. "But I don't think it should be hinted in public that it has been taken. Better put it that the pin is lost—that's true enough—and ask the fellows to keep their eyes open for it."

"They'll be saying there's a thief in the school, I'm afraid."

"Well, if the pin's been taken, there must be a thief," said Blake. "But I'm blessed if I know why a thief should take that pin!"

"Why, to sell it, of course!"

"Yes, but how could he possibly hope to find a buyer for it?" argued Blake. "The chap named Isaacs palmed it off on you, but there isn't another fellow at St. Jim's who would be done like that—"

"Why, you ass—"

"Therefore—"

"You frabjous duffer, the list price of that pin was twenty pounds—"

"Twenty rats!"

"Look here—"

"Twenty cents more likely—"

"I'll jolly well—"

"Oh, cheese it!" exclaimed Tom Merry, pushing between the two juniors, who were both growing very excited. "No good rowing now—there's something more serious to think of. The diamond's got to be found—and until it's found, I think the less said about it the better."

"Oh, all right!" said Figgins.

"It's a curious happening, though," remarked Mellish, with a glitter in his light eyes. "Where can it be gone to?"

Tom Merry grunted expressively. He had forgotten for the moment that the cad of the Fourth was in the study. The story was not likely to be kept dark now that Mellish was in possession of it.

"Look here, Mellish, you can keep your mouth shut about this!" he exclaimed abruptly. "Don't spread it through all the Form-rooms!"

Mellish looked injured.

"Of course, you can rely upon me, Tom Merry—"

"Yes, to blab it all up and down St. Jim's!" exclaimed Blake angrily. "It's a rotten bizney altogether, and I don't see what Figgins wanted to have a rotten spoof diamond at all for!"

"Look here—"

"Do shut up, Blake!"

"Yaas, wathah, Blake! You must wemembah, deah boy, that Figgay is a stwangah within the gates, and a guest in the study at this particular moment."

"Oh, rats!"

"If you say wats to me, Blake—"

"More rats!" said Blake.

"Then I shall have no wresource but to administah a fearful thwashin'! I—"

"Order!"

"I wufuse to ordah—I mean—"

"Order, you ass! Blake, ring off! What's the good of a row?" said Tom Merry. "That won't find the blessed pin?"

"We'll buzz off," said Figgins. "I thought we ought to come and tell you, that's all. I thought one of you might have been ass enough to take the pin for a lark. Come on, Fatty; you'll make a famine in the School House at that rate."

"I think I'd better have another tart," said Fatty Wynn.

"I think you hadn't," said Figgins. "Come on."

"Yes, but—"

"This way!"

And Figgins fastened an iron grip upon Fatty Wynn's ear, and led him from the study. Kerr followed, and the door closed behind Figgins & Co.

They left general dismay and discomfort behind them.

"Well, of all the rotten bizney!" said Monty Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"The pin's lost, somehow, of course," said Blake. "Perhaps somebody hasn't been able to resist the impulse to tread on it and make an end of it. I felt like that once when I saw Figgay wearing it."

"Yaas, wathah! It was an outwageous thing, you know."

"Oh, it's lost!" said Digby. "There's a way things have of getting lost. That cake-knife, for instance, that's just disappeared."

"Bai Jove, yaas!"

"That's curious," said Mellish.

"It's a wotten thing, and that's the twuth," said D'Arcy.

"I suggest that we dwop the subject."

Blake looked at his elegant chum in great admiration.

"What a jolly good idea!" he exclaimed. "How do you think of these things, Gussy?"

"Weally, Blake—"

Mellish rose to his feet. The feast was over, and Mellish had no reason for lingering. He had news for the common-room, too.

"I think I'll be getting along," he remarked.

No one said him nay, and Mellish left the study. D'Arcy glanced after him through his eyeglass as he went, and then looked at Leslie.

"I am sowwy you are shawin' a studay with that chap," he remarked. "We should have been vewy pleased to have you in here, only we are full up."

"I'd have been glad to come," said Leslie, with a smile. "Still, five in a study of this size would have been rather a crowd."

"It's a pretty good-sized study," said Blake.

"Oh, yes. But—"

"I wegard you as a chap I could chum with, too," said D'Arcy, looking at Leslie with growing interest. "There are vewy few fellows in St. Jim's who have much taste in dwess. Even in the Sixth most of the fellows leave vewy much to be desiahed. You must permit me to wemark that you are dwessed in a weally elegant way, much above the awewage of the juniars here. I twust you do not considah the wemark as impertinent."

Leslie grinned, and the other fellows chuckled.

"Not at all," said the new boy. "Go on. How do you like the cut of my jacket? I should like your opinion on that."

He stood up to be viewed, and D'Arcy turned his monocle with great attention on the jacket.

"It is a vewy good cut," he said. "It does not fit you exactly, but it is a vewy good cut indeed, and I can see that you have an excellent tailah."

"And the trousers?"

"The twousahs are a twifle long for you, which I suppose is the weason why you turn them up. I do not wholly approve of a chap of your age turnin' up his twousahs," said D'Arcy. "Of course, with a fellow like me—"

"Why, you're not any older than I am!" exclaimed Leslie.

"Pewwaps not in years, but in expewience and so on, you see," explained D'Arcy.

"What about the waistcoat?"

"Wippin'! I weally wegard that waistcoat as a work of art," said D'Arcy, looking at it closely. "I had a waistcoat vewy like that myself—in fact, exactly like. It is the waistcoat I like best of all I have. I designed it myself, and the tailah cawwied out my insturctions in a vewy intelligent mannah. It is wathah wemarkable that you should have a waistcoat so like it in pattern."

"And the necktie?"

"Vewy good taste," said D'Arcy. "Quite in keepin' with the waistcoat, which is a vewy important point. You sometimes see chaps lookin' as if their waistcoat belonged to one person, and their collah and tie to quite anothah."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors.

D'Arcy turned his eyeglass upon them in mild surprise.

"Weally, deah boys, I fail to see any cause for this unseemly mewwiment."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Leslie laughed as loudly as the rest.

"Weally, you know—"

"You see," explained Blake, "as you had spoiled Leslie's duds—"

"I did nothin' of the sort. It was you duffahs—"

"Well, it was your fault—"

"I wufuse to admit anythin' of the kind. How could I help it if all you silly asses determined to play the giddy goat?"

"Oh, come!" said Blake warmly. "If you had passed under the window when we expected you, you would have got that sooty water instead of Leslie."

"Yaas, but—"

"Therefore it's all your fault—"

"Nothin' of the sort. I—"

"And as it was all your fault," resumed Blake, unheeding, "I borrowed a suit of your clothes for Leslie, as his box hasn't come from the station—or hadn't then. See?"

"What!"

"They fit him pretty well, don't they?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blake—"

"Ho, ho, ho!"

"Tom Mewwy—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wegard you as a set of wottahs. I wegard this as nothin' short of sawwilege."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry & Co.

Arthur Augustus surveyed them in great wrath. Gussy was very particular about his clothes, and to have one of his most elegant suits ravished in this manner was too bad.

"Bai Jove! Of all the wascally twicks—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Howevah, as Leslie is a guest in this studay, I shall say no more," said D'Arcy, after a pause. "Otherwise I should give you all a faithful thwashin'."

To which the juniors responded with a fresh roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

CHAPTER 8.

Kangaroo & Co. are a Bit Previous.

THANKS to Mellish, the story of Figgins's missing diamond pin was all over St. Jim's the next day. It was too unpleasant an item of news for Mellish to think of keeping it dark. But, contrary to Mellish's expectation, nobody took the loss of the diamond pin very seriously.

Nobody but Figgins believed in the diamond, and that anybody should go to the trouble of stealing a piece of glaring paste set in a glaring "spoo!" gold pin, seemed unlikely to the St. Jim's fellows.

It was more likely that the pin had been swept down somehow in the tussle in Figgins's study, and trodden under-foot, or destroyed in some way or another. What should anybody want to steal it for? That was what the fellows asked.

Tom Merry & Co. were only too glad to see that view taken of the matter.

The thought that there might be a thief at St. Jim's, especially in the School House, was horribly unpleasant; and they would rather have believed anything else.

And, in fact, the loss of Figgins's wonderful diamond would probably have been forgotten soon by everyone but Figgins, but for a fresh incident which recalled it to the fellows' minds the next afternoon.

Afternoon school was over, and Tom Merry was going up to his study for his cricket bat, when he encountered three Shell fellows in the passage, all of them looking very wrathful.

They were Noble, Dane, and Glyn of the Shell, and Glyn was looking the most excited of the three.

Tom Merry halted.

"Anything wrong?" he asked.

"Wrong!" howled Bernard Glyn. "I should say so! Have you seen Skimpole?"

"Skimpole! Yes; he went into his study to do his article for the 'Weekly,'" said Tom Merry wonderingly.

"What's the matter with Skimpole?"

"I don't know whether anything's the matter with him now," said Glyn, "but there's going to be something the matter with him in a minute or two."

"What-ho!" said Clifton Dane.

"We're going to slay him!" explained Kangaroo.

Tom Merry laughed.

"But what for?"

"He's been in our study," said Kangaroo. "You know the duffer thinks he knows something about mechanics and things. He—"

"He came to me to borrow a dry battery," said Glyn, taking up the tale. "I told the howling ass he couldn't have it. I told him so in plain English—"

"Awfully plain English!" grinned Dane.

"Well, I was using the battery myself, in rigging up a set of chimes to go by electricity," explained Glyn. "It was a really nobby contrivance, and I was going to rig it up in the common-room, to tell the hours. A jolly good idea I thought."

"Jolly good."

"Well, and the villain has taken the battery out, and boned it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's nothing to laugh at!" said Bernard Glyn indignantly. "How would you like a jolly good invention to be mucked up by a silly ass? Skimpole thinks he can invent things, and he's always raiding my study for electric lamps or batteries or wires or something. I'm going to put a full stop to it."

"What-ho!" said Kangaroo. "When Glyn gets one of his inventions upset, he's like a bear with a sore head, and we can't stand him in the study. Therefore Skimpole has got to be taught better."

"That's it," agreed Clifton Dane. "It would be different if Glyn took it quietly. But he doesn't."

"Would you?" roared Glyn.

"So we're going to slay Skimpole quietly," said Kangaroo.

"You can come and lend a hand if you like, Tom Merry."

"Well, I'll look on and see fair play," said Tom Merry.

Kangaroo kicked open the door of the next study to Tom Merry's, which Skimpole of the Shell shared with Gore. Skimpole, the genius of St. Jim's, was sitting at the table, with a pen in one hand, and his huge forehead resting on the other, blinking through his big spectacles at a blank sheet of foolscap. The most voluminous contributor to "Tom Merry's Weekly" had evidently not yet thought his subject out.

Gore was looking out of the window, and tattooing with his knuckles on the panes. Skimpole blinked up at him with an annoyed look.

"Gore, I wish you would either be quiet or leave the study," he said. "How am I to do brain work with that row going on?"

"Blessed if I see how you're to do brain work at all," said Gore. "What are you going to do it with?"

"Really, Gore—"

"Hallo! Here's some visitors," said Gore, as the Shell fellows crowded in. "Is that the way you always come into a room in the bush, Kangaroo?"

The Cornstalk grinned.

"We're looking for Skimpole. We're going to slay him."

"Oh, good! Don't let me interrupt."

Skimpole blinked at the intruders.

"Really, Kangaroo—"

"Collar him!"

Skimpole jumped up.

"Look here— Oh—ow!"

"Bump him!"

"Yaroo!"

Skimpole was jerked away from the table and bumped down on the floor in a sitting posture in next to no time. The dust rose in a cloud from the study carpet. Gore gave a yell of laughter, and Tom Merry looked in, grinning.

"Oh!" gasped Skimpole. "Yah!"

His spectacles slid down his nose, and he gasped for breath.

"Give him another!" said Bernard Glyn, vengefully.

"Go it!"

Bump!

"Yaroo!"

"And another!"

Bump!

"Yah!"

"Now, then," said Bernard Glyn, breathing hard—"now, perhaps, you'll learn to let another chap's dry batteries alone, Skimmy, old son!"

"Ow!"

"Next time I tell you I can't lend you my props, you'll understand that I mean it," said Glyn. "Savvy?"

"Ow!" Skimpole adjusted his spectacles, and blinked up at the Shell fellows. "You are crassly ignorant of the ethics of the subject, Glyn. What right have you to that dry battery any more than I have? Under Socialism, which will shortly be established in this country, all dry batteries will be nationalised."

"Ass!"

"I required that dry battery for repairing my study telephone, which had been thrown into disorder by Herries's bulldog getting at the wet battery," said Skimpole. "I think a dry battery would be more reliable under the circumstances."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I consider it selfish and unreasonable of you to refuse me the dry battery," said Skimpole. "But in any case, as I did not have it, I cannot see the reason for this absurd violence, unless it is the outcome of your heredity and environment, and you cannot help it, as Determinism teaches."

"Where is the battery?"

"Really, Glyn, you should know where your own battery is," said Skimpole, blinking at him. "How should I know?"

"Why, you've taken it!" shouted Glyn.

"Eh? I have not taken it!"

"What?"

"As you declined to lend me a battery, I gave up the idea of repairing the telephone for the present, and devoted myself to thinking out my article for Tom Merry's 'Weekly.' That article will deal with the questions to be settled at the next General Election, and—"

"Blow the next General Election! Do you mean to say that you haven't borrowed the battery?"

"Certainly!"

"Well, it's gone!"

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"I really cannot help that. I have not taken it."

The Shell fellows looked at Skimpole. Duffer as he was, he was incapable of a lie—as he would have explained, a sincere Socialist could not possibly tell one. Skimpole, still sitting on the floor, blinked back at them.

"Well, my hat!" ejaculated Glyn.

Kangaroo chuckled.

"We've been a little bit previous," he remarked.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But where's the battery?"

"I haven't had it," said Skimpole. "I haven't seen it. Really—"

"It's curious," said Gore. "Things seem to be getting into a habit of disappearing lately. I've lost a penknife."

Tom Merry looked at him quickly.

"You've lost a penknife, Gore?"

"Yes. I think I laid it down somewhere, and never saw it again. It's odd."

"Jolly odd!"

"Well, I'm sorry, Skimmy," said Glyn. "You must take that bumping as a punishment for something else, as you didn't do what I supposed. See?"

"Really, Glyn—"

"Let's pick him up and put him back, and it's all right," said Clifton Dane.

"Ha, ha! Good!"

"Hold on— Oh—ow!"

Kangaroo & Co. seized Skimpole, and jerked him up from the carpet, and plumped him into his chair with a heavy bump. Skimpole spluttered and gasped.

"Really, you know—"

The Shell fellows crowded out of the study. In the passage Tom Merry turned to the chums of the end study with a frowning brow.

"You're sure that battery's gone, Glyn?"

"Quite sure."

"You have no idea who's taken it?"

"Not the least in the world."

"It was taken for a lark, I suppose," said Kangaroo. "We naturally suspected Skimmy, as he had been asking for it."

"But it wasn't Skimmy."

"Oh, no."

"Then who was it?"

"Give it up—some funny merchant."

"The merchant is a little too funny," said Tom Merry, with a contracted brow. "You heard about Figgy's pin—and there was a knife lost in Blake's study. Now you've lost a battery, and Gore's lost a penknife. It's curious."

"Phew! But—"

"I don't know what to make of it, that's all."

And Tom Merry's face was very thoughtful as he went downstairs with his bat under his arm.

CHAPTER 9.

Mellish is Wanted.

KILDARE, the captain of St. Jim's, looked out of his study with a very red face, and called "Fag!"

The captain of St. Jim's was generally the most even-tempered fellow in the school. It was very seldom that he was angry, and he seldom allowed himself to be even annoyed. But he looked both angry and annoyed now.

"Fag!"

As a rule there was a scuttling of feet in different directions when that dreaded word was heard ringing along the Sixth-Form passage. Juniors who were quite close at hand would develop a sudden deafness and fail to hear, and would have pressing business in another part of the building.

But there was an exception generally made in favour of Kildare. The big, athletic captain of the school was as popular among the lowest fags as among the high and mighty seniors of the Sixth.

It was an honour to fag for Kildare, and even Shell fellows were quite willing to do it, though, as a rule, the Shell claimed to be exempt from fagging duties.

When Kildare called "Fag!" instead of the usual exodus, there was generally a gathering of willing juniors to obey his commands.

"Fag!"

From up the passage and down the passage came pattering footsteps.

Jack Blake of the Fourth came from one direction, and D'Arcy minor—Wally D'Arcy—from another. The Fourth-Former and the Third-Former raced up, and met just outside Kildare's door, and bumped into one another.

"Oh, you ass!" roared Wally, as he staggered against the wall.

"You young duffer!" growled Jack Blake, catching at Kildare to save himself. "What do you mean by racing about the passages like that?"

"Why, you were doing the same, you ass!"



"My hat!" said Figgins, eyeing the feed they had raided from Tom Merry & Co. "They were going to have a feed and no mistake! This little lot must have cost them nearly a pound."

"I was coming to fag for Kildare."

"So was I."

"Rot! You've got too much cheek, you Third-Form fags," said Blake. "Clear off, and go and get washed!"

"You can jolly well clear off yourself!" retorted Wally.

"My only Aunt Jane! I—"

"Drop that!" said Kildare. "I don't want any fagging done."

"You called fag," said Blake, with an injured look.

"Yes, but I want the junior who was fagging for me to-day—only to speak to him, though. Whose turn was it to make my toast?"

"Mellish's."

"I wasn't here," said Kildare. "I found it all ready when I came in."

"Wasn't it made all right?" asked Blake anxiously. "It's no good trusting that chap Mellish to do anything. You'd better let me take his turn in future."

Kildare smiled.

"The toast was made all right, but there's another matter. Find Mellish, will you, and send him to me."

"Nothing I can do?"

"No; only that."

Kildare went into his study. Blake started towards the

stairs, and Wally went with him. There was a curious expression upon Wally's face.

"Kildare's waxy, Blake," he remarked.

"Yes; he looked it."

"What's Mellish been doing, I wonder?"

"Oh, he's always up to something," said Blake crossly. "If he's playing any of his mean tricks on old Kildare, though, we'll jolly well rag him."

"Blessed if I know how Kildare can stand you Fourth-Form chaps," said Wally. "We're all willing to fag for him in the Third, but—"

Wally scuttled off in time to escape a kick from Blake, and the Fourth-Former went on alone. He looked in the quadrangle for Mellish, but the cad of the Fourth was not there, and Blake went up to the Fourth-Form passage, to Study No. 8.

He knocked at the door and entered.

Mellish was there, with Leslie, the new boy in the Fourth. Leslie was roasting chestnuts at the grate, and Mellish was watching him, with an evident expectation of being asked to help dispose of the roasted chestnuts.

Both the juniors looked round as Blake came in.

"Hallo!" said Leslie. "Have some chestnuts?"

"Certainly."

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By
MARTIN CLIFFORD.

NEXT
THURSDAY:

"TOM MERRY'S MASTER-STROKE."

"They're good!" said Mellish.
 "Kildare wants you, Mellish," said Blake, sitting on a corner of the table, and accepting the chestnuts. "He's just sent me to look for you."

Mellish looked a little uneasy.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"I don't know."

"Well, is anything the matter, I mean?"

"I think so. Kildare looked waxy."

"I made the toast all right, and put the kettle all ready," said Mellish. "The table was laid, and—and there was nothing wrong, unless Herries's beastly bulldog has got into the study and mopped up the toast."

"I don't think it's that. Kildare looked ratty. You'd better buzz off and see what the trouble is," said Blake. "I'll attend to the chestnuts."

Mellish gave him a far from pleasant look, and quitted the study.

Leslie grinned.

"What do you think is the trouble with Kildare?" he asked.

Blake shook his head.

"I haven't a notion. But Kildare never gets ratty for nothing, so I suppose Mellish has been playing the giddy ox in some way. These are prime chestnuts. How do you get on with Mellish in this study?"

"Pretty well."

"Glad to hear it," said Blake. "I dare say you've noticed that nobody likes Mellish. It's because he's not to be trusted. You remember we arranged for nothing to be said about Figgy's diamond; but Mellish spread it all over the place that the diamond had been stolen. That's his way."

Leslie nodded.

Blake went on chatting cheerily, but the new boy was very silent.

CHAPTER 10.

A Terrible Accusation.

MELLISH was looking, and feeling, decidedly uneasy as he made his way towards Kildare's study. He was so often guilty of playing ill-natured pranks, that he was never secure from punishment; and now he was only wondering which of his delinquencies had come to the knowledge of the St. Jim's captain.

He tapped at Kildare's door nervously.

"Come in!" rapped out the senior.

Mellish entered reluctantly.

Kildare was standing up, evidently expecting him. The kettle was singing away by the fire, and the toast on the table was already cold. Kildare had not had his tea.

He fixed his eyes on the eud of the Fourth as he entered.

"Mellish! You were fagging for me at tea?"

"Yes," said Mellish uneasily.

"Then I've a question to ask you," said Kildare grimly.

"Close the door."

The junior obeyed.

"I hope the toast was all right, Kildare," he faltered.

"I—I didn't make the tea, because you told me to leave it till you came. You remember you were going to speak to Darrel before you came in to tea."

Kildare looked at him hard.

"Did you think I was going to complain of the tea or toast?" he asked.

"I—I don't know what's wrong, then," said Mellish. "I haven't done anything that I know of."

"Look here, Mellish," said Kildare, "I don't want to accuse you, if there's a chance of your being innocent—"

"What do you mean?"

"Where is my watch?"

"You—your watch!" stammered Mellish.

"Yes."

The Fourth-Former stared blankly at him.

"I—I don't know, Kildare," he said. "How should I know where your watch is? I haven't seen it."

"I hope you haven't," said Kildare; "but somebody has seen it, and taken it, too; and I want to know who it is."

Mellish turned pale.

"Do you mean to say that your watch has been stolen?" he exclaimed.

"It has been taken away, at all events."

Mellish's jaw dropped.

"And you—you think I took it?"

"I want to know whether you know anything about it or not," said Kildare. "To be quite frank, Mellish, you don't bear a very good reputation in the school. When that fellow Thurnel was here, you were more than suspected of extorting money from him to keep his secret from the Head; and a fellow who would blackmail would steal."

"Oh!"

"My watch is gone. I left it out on the table, to take it to the watchmaker's in Rylcombe to be repaired, and was wearing a gun-metal watch Darrel lent me," went on Kildare. "I left the watch lying there when you came into the study, and it was there while you were making my toast. I couldn't have been out of the study many minutes before you came in, I think."

"Five minutes, I believe," said Mellish. "You went to speak to Darrel. I happened to see you go into his study as I came up to get your tea."

"Then it could only have been a minute or so, or you wouldn't have seen me go into Darrel's study," said Kildare. "The watch was lying there. When I came in here again, it was gone."

"I didn't move it."

"You noticed it lying there, I suppose?"

"Yes," said Mellish, looking very scared. "I—I had to lift it up to lay the cloth."

"And what did you do with it?"

"Laid it down again on the tablecloth."

"And then?"

"Then I made the toast, and cleared out."

"Without touching the watch again?"

"Yes, certainly. I never even looked at it again."

"You see that it has gone."

"I can't help it."

"I have hunted all over the study, in case it might have got shoved away," said Kildare. "It is not to be found."

"I—I—"

"If you have taken it, Mellish, you had better give it me back at once, and I will see what can be done in the matter," said Kildare.

"I—I haven't taken it."

"It was gone when I came in."

"Well," said Mellish, plucking up courage a little, "I left before you came in—I don't know how long—and anybody might have nipped in and taken the watch."

"Nobody was likely to know that it was there."

"Well, a fellow might have come in for anything—to speak to you, for instance—"

"And taken the watch?"

"I suppose so."

Kildare looked at him harder than ever. The fag was evidently frightened, and yet, somehow, it did not seem to be the fright of guilt. But Mellish was so habitually false that Kildare could not believe a word or a look of his. In judging Mellish, it was only possible to judge by the evidence, without considering anything that Mellish himself said on the subject.

"When did you leave the study, Mellish?" the captain of St. Jim's asked, at last.

"I—I don't remember."

"You did not notice the time?"

"I—Yes," said Mellish abruptly. "The clock was striking six—I remember now."

"And I came in here at five minutes past six," said Kildare.

Mellish was silent.

"You ask me to believe that in five minutes, some fellow, who could not have known that the watch was there, came into the study and stole it."

"I—I—"

"Come, you had better confess!"

Mellish burst into tears.

"I—I didn't take it. I swear I didn't. What should I want to take your watch for?"

"Come, don't blub!" said Kildare. "I don't know whether you're acting or not. If you're suspected unjustly, it's your own fault—you are a known liar, and I cannot believe a word you say."

"I didn't take the watch."

"Then where can it be?"

"I—I don't know. I didn't take it."

Kildare's brows contracted.

"I should like to give you the benefit of the doubt, Mellish," he said, "but I cannot afford to lose the watch; and, besides, I could not allow a thief to pass unpunished. If you will not or cannot give me back the watch, I shall have to place the matter in the hands of Mr. Railton, and there will be an inquiry."

"I can't help it. I didn't take the watch."

"You stick to that?"

"Yes."

"Very well. I cannot help thinking that you did take it—any other supposition seems too unlikely. But I will give you a chance. I will say nothing about the matter for one hour. If in that time the watch is returned, I will do my best to save you from being expelled."

"I—"

"That's enough. You can go."

"I tell you—"

"Enough, I say!"

Kildare opened his study door, and Mellish had to go. He went blindly out into the passage, and Kildare closed the door after him.

Mellish almost staggered away. He made his way towards the Fourth Form passage, hardly seeing where he was going. For once in his life the cool, calculating junior was utterly upset and thrown off his balance.

He almost walked into Tom Merry, as the hero of the Shell came in, and Tom nearly dropped his bat. A shower of rain had driven in the cricketers.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Where are you going?"

"Eh?"

Tom looked at him curiously. He did not like Mellish; but the look of the junior made him feel concerned.

"Anything the matter, Mellish? Are you ill?"

"N-n-no."

"Well, you look it. You look jolly seedy."

"I—I'm all right," muttered Mellish. "I—I suppose you believe it, too. You're all against me—every one of you."

Tom Merry stared at him.

"What are you talking about?"

"I—I don't care. I—I didn't do it, and you can all go and be hanged. You've always been against me, and you'll believe it at once, of course."

"You're ill," said Tom Merry quietly. "Let me give you a hand to your room."

He slipped his arm through Mellish's, and led him to his study. The cad of the Fourth went without a word. He seemed too dazed and overcome to think or speak. For once Mellish was utterly terrified. Innocent or guilty, he realised that his long record of deceit and unscrupulousness would tell against him when the inquiry was made—innocent or guilty, there would be few to believe in his innocence.

CHAPTER 11.

A Startling Discovery.

TOM MERRY opened the door of No. 8 Study, and entered the room with Mellish. Blake and Leslie were eating chestnuts, and Blake was chatting cheerily, while the new boy in the Fourth stared at the fire.

"Hallo!" said Blake, looking up, "you're just in time for the last chestnut, Tom Merry. Here you are! Catch!"

"Oh, you ass!" ejaculated Tom Merry, as he caught the chestnut—on his nose.

"Ha, ha! You are clumsy!"

"What's the matter with Mellish?" asked Leslie, glancing at the cad of the Fourth. "Have you turned bear-leader in your old age?"

"He's seedy."

"Oh, sorry!"

"He was all right ten minutes ago," said Blake suspiciously. "What little game are you playing now, Mellish?"

It was curious how nobody, for a moment, believed that anything Mellish said could possibly be true. But he had only himself to blame for that.

He scowled savagely at Blake.

"He's really seedy, I think," said Tom Merry, as Mellish threw himself into a chair and covered his face with his hands. "I don't see why he should be malingering now."

"Why, my hat!" exclaimed Blake, in astonishment. "He's turning on the waterworks!"

Tom Merry looked distressed.

Mellish was crying! His tears, doubtless, were not of as much consequence as those of a more manly lad would have been, yet it was seldom that Mellish cried—and then only when he was licked.

"Kildare's been pitching into him," said Blake. "How many, Mellish?"

"I don't think he's been licked."

"Then what is he blubbing about?"

"I don't know."

"I haven't been licked," said Mellish, looking up, very white. "Kildare says I've stolen his watch—that's all."

"What!" exclaimed Blake and Tom Merry together.

"That's all," said Mellish defiantly. "I suppose you'll believe that I'm a thief. I don't care."

"Then you ought to care," said Tom Merry quietly. "Do you mean to say that Kildare has missed his watch and accused you of stealing it?"

"Yes."

"Then you jolly well did it, or Kildare wouldn't say so," said Blake. "And that explains how things have been vanishing lately, if Mellish has taken to supplementing his income by a little private burgling."

"Shut up, Blake. I suppose you deny it, Mellish?"

"Yes. That's not much good, though. Kildare doesn't believe me."

Tom Merry ran his fingers through his curly hair in the way he had when he was perplexed.

"Well, you're such a blessed prevaricator," he remarked, "I don't see how anybody is to take much stock in what you say."

Mellish gritted his teeth.

"Of course, you're against me—I knew you would be. Kildare left his watch on the table; the study was empty for five minutes after I left it. Anybody might have gone in. But, of course, he thinks I took it."

"Well, if it was taken, you were the most likely person to take it," said Tom Merry bluntly. "But I hope there's some mistake."

"There was a scare about a thief in the School House a few weeks ago," Blake remarked. "That was before you came, Leslie—Where's Leslie?"

"He's gone out," said Tom Merry.

"It's beastly for him," said Blake. "He'll think he's been sent to a blessed den of thieves if this sort of thing goes on. But as I was saying, there was a scare about a thief in the School House, and some of the fellows set their silly ears up at me, as you remember—and then the missing banknote was found in the foolscap that ass Skimpy had borrowed from Gussy's desk. I dare say this will turn out to be a bungle of the same sort."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"This isn't the first thing that's been missed, Blake. Kildare's watch is gone, but so is Glyn's dry battery, and Gore's penknife, and the cake-knife in your study, and Figgins's pin, which was the first thing to go."

Blake whistled.

"You think—"

"I think the lot of them all went in the same direction," said Tom Merry firmly. "I don't see that it's any good trying to believe that there's not a thief in the School House any longer. There is one."

"My hat!"

"The question is, who is it?" said Tom Merry. And his glance was very dark and suspicious as it rested upon Mellish.

"I remember that Mellish was hardest of all on me when some of the fellows suspected me of boning Gussy's banknote," said Blake; "and I've always noticed that a chap is hardest on another chap for doing what he might have done himself."

"That's true."

Mellish looked up with a wet and haggard face.

"I don't know anything about it," he said. "I know you'll all believe that I'm guilty. I can't help it. I'm innocent."

"Honour bright?" said Tom Merry.

"Yes, honour bright. I—I don't deny that I've done some things that weren't quite—quite the thing," stammered Mellish. "You know I have. But I've never stolen—and I don't know what's become of Kildare's watch. Besides, if I were to become a thief, do you think I should be idiot enough to take Kildare's watch? It's a watch everybody in the school knows, and it's got his monogram on it. I couldn't sell it or pawn it without being found out."

Tom Merry nodded.

"Something in that," he remarked, looking at Blake. "I wouldn't answer for Mellish's honesty, but he's too deep to put his foot in it like that, I think."

"Somebody's done it, though."

"Yes; that's the puzzle."

"What's Kildare doing about the matter?" said Blake. "Is he going to lay it before the Head?"

"He's given me an hour to return the watch," said Mellish.

"And then?"

"Then he's going to Mr. Railton."

"Then if you've taken the watch you'd jolly well better take it back at once," said Blake. "It's a good chance for you."

Mellish bit his lip.

"But I haven't taken it."

"Well, if you stick to that you'll have to take your chance," said Blake. "I don't like to suspect any chap of being a thief, but you're more likely to steal than any other fellow in the house, and that's plain English."

"You're jolly glad of a chance to be down on me!" said Mellish venomously. "You'd be glad if I were expelled!"

"I shouldn't be sorry," said Blake frankly. "You're no credit to St. Jim's. But the Head won't expel you unless you're guilty—you can bet on that!"

"You came very near being expelled yourself once—were you guilty?" sneered Mellish.

Blake looked uncomfortable.

"Well, the matter will have to be sifted out," he said.

"Look here, Mellish—"

The door opened, and the eyeglass of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy glinted into the room. Arthur Augustus himself followed it.

"I was told I should find you heah, deah boy," he remarked.

"Leslie told me you were heah. Leslie was lookin' vewy upset. Is anythin' the mattah?"

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By
MARTIN CLIFFORD.

NEXT
THURSDAY:

"TOM MERRY'S MASTER-STROKE."

"Yes, rather! No wonder, when he's found his study-mate is a blessed thief—or suspected of being a thief, anyway," said Blake.

"Bai Jove!"

"I'm not a thief!" said Mellish.

"There is a thief in the School House, howevah," said D'Arcy. "That's what I was lookin' for you for, Blake—to consult with you about it. My sovewegn-purse has disappeared."

"What?" yelled Blake.

"My little gold sovewegn-purse, that I usually weah on my watch-chain," said D'Arcy. "I took it out to fill it with soveweigns when I changed a fivah, and I was called away and left it in the studay. Somebody took it while I was fetchin' a book from the school libwary for Wushden."

"Look here, Gussy, none of your rot!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Do you mean to say that your sovewegn-purse is gone?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"What was in it?"

"Five soveweigns."

"You ass!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"You deserve to lose the money for being so careless with it," said Tom Merry. "But this finishes it, Blake. There's a thief in the School House, and there's no doubt about that."

"Not a bit, I suppose."

"Wathah not!"

Mellish looked haggard.

"I suppose you'll be suspecting me of stealing D'Arcy's sovewegn-purse, as well as Kildare's watch!" he exclaimed.

D'Arcy turned his monocle upon the cad of the Fourth.

"Who's suspectin' you?" he demanded.

Tom Merry explained.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, when he had heard. "Mattahs do look wathah black against Mellish, and no mistake!"

"I have not touched any of the things."

"We have only youah word for that, deah boy, and youah word isn't worth much, you see."

"That's how the matter stands," agreed Tom Merry. "We all know that Mellish's word can't be taken."

"You can believe me or not, as you like," said Mellish, with a livid face. "But I don't know anything about the thefts, that's all."

He rose to his feet as he spoke, and moved away from the armchair. Blake uttered a sudden exclamation.

"My hat!"

"What—"

"Look!"

Blake pointed at the seat of the armchair, which Mellish had left only a few seconds before. There, half-embedded in the deep cushion, where the back joined the seat of the chair, was something that glittered in the gaslight. It was the silver case of a watch.

Tom Merry sprang forward and jerked it out to view. He turned it over in his hand. On the back was the monogram "E. K."

"Eric Kildare!"

It was Kildare's watch!

CHAPTER 12.

Hidden Loot.

TOM MERRY held the watch up to view. The light gleamed upon it. The face of Tom Merry was stern and accusing.

Mellish staggered against the mantelpiece, white as a sheet. He seemed unable to take his terrified eyes off the watch.

"Good Heaven!" he stammered.

"Thief!" said Blake.

Mellish gave a strangled cry.

"I—I don't know anything about it. I didn't know it was there."

"It's a bit too late to tell us that," said Tom Merry contemptuously. "I don't think anything could be clearer than that."

"Wathah not!"

"I—I didn't—"

"The watch was in the armchair. It must have dropped out of your pocket as you sat there," said Tom Merry, in a hard voice. "All the time that you were telling us you knew nothing about it, it was in your pocket."

"It—it wasn't, I—"

"Bai Jove! You must have a fearful nerve if you deny it now, Mellish, deah boy!"

"But I do deny it!" screamed Mellish. "I don't know anything about it. I never saw the watch—it was not in my pocket!"

"Stuff!"

"Nonsense!"

"Rubbish!"

"It's been put there!" panted Mellish. "It's—it's a plot to ruin me—to drive me from the school! You all hate me, and want to get rid of me! This is a plot of you fellows to get me expelled!"

"Oh, shut up, you cad! Do you think anybody at St. Jim's would be fool enough to believe that?"

"I didn't know the watch was there!"

"I don't believe you—I can't."

Mellish stared at the chums, his face perfectly ghastly. He seemed to be almost overcome by the horror of the situation.

Strong disbelief was written in each of the three faces looking at him. How, indeed, could they believe him?

"Kildare gave you an hour, you say, to take the watch back," said Blake, after a pause. "You'd better take it!"

"He'll think I stole it."

"Well, you did steal it."

"I didn't!"

"What's the good of keeping that up now?"

"Oh, hang you!" shrieked Mellish. "I know it's a plot. I'll go to Mr. Railton—I'll go to the Head. I—I—"

"Go, then!" said Tom Merry.

Mellish took a step towards the door, and then stopped. He was trembling in every limb now.

"They wouldn't believe me, any more than you do," he said hoarsely and brokenly.

"What can you expect?"

"Yaas, wathah! You see, Mellish, deah boy, it's so jolly clear!"

"I don't know how the watch came there. I didn't know

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"And two dozen tarts, I think, Mrs. Taggles!" said Tom Merry, from within the shop. Fatty Wynn's mouth watered. "Two dozen," he murmured. "Oh, I wonder if they are twopenny ones!"

it was in the chair when I was sitting there," said Mellish huskily.

The juniors looked at one another in silence. They firmly believed now that Mellish was guilty; yet they could not help feeling a sentiment of something like pity for the wretched boy.

If he had done this, he was paying dearly for what he had done.

"You had better take the watch back to Kildare," said Blake quietly.

"He—he'll think—" Mellish's voice trailed away into silence.

"If he keeps silence, it will be better for you, Mellish," said Tom Merry. "If there's anything in what you say—if it's possible that you are innocent, that will give you time to find out how the watch really came there."

Mellish took the watch in his trembling fingers. "You're right. I'll take it back to Kildare. But, mind—I don't confess anything. As sure as there's a Heaven above us, I don't know how the watch came there!"

And he staggered rather than walked from the study. The chums of the School House stood silent and dismayed when he was gone.

"This is an awful bizney," said Blake, breaking the silence

at last. "Mellish has always played it pretty low down, but I never thought he would come to this."

"Wathah not!"

"I suppose there can be no doubt?" said Tom Merry hesitatingly.

"What doubt can there be? All the evidence was against him, and now we've found the watch—almost in his pocket." Tom Merry nodded.

It really did seem as if there were no room for doubt, and yet something in the white, wretched face of the Fourth-Form sneak had appealed strangely to Tom Merry.

"As a matter of fact, Mellish is entitled to the benefit of the doubt, but I don't see where the doubt comes in," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked. "The watch must have slipped out of his pocket on to the chair."

"Yet that's curious, too," said Tom Merry. "I don't really see how the watch could have slipped out of his pocket."

"But if it had been on the chair, deah boy, we should have seen it."

"It may have been poked into the cushions to hide it."

"Poss.—but not pwob.," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Besides, as this is Mellish's study, who could have hidden it but Mellish?"

"Yes, that's so. But—"

"Let's look, and see if there's room for the watch to be hidden in the chair," said Jack Blake.

They examined the chair. Where the padded back joined the seat there was a rent in the leather covering, in the very place whence the watch had been taken. Tom Merry inserted his fingers into the rent.

"Plenty of room here to hide a watch," he remarked. "The bump Mellish gave when he dropped into the chair may have jolted it half out, you know, and that's how we came to see it when he got up."

"Poss.—but—"

"Hallo!" ejaculated Tom Merry, as his fingers touched something hard. "There's something else in here besides padding!"

"Phew—what is it?"

"It feels like a knife!"

"My hat!"

"I've got it. Look!"

Tom Merry drew out a small penknife with a pearl handle. Jack Blake uttered a sharp exclamation.

"That's Gore's knife!"

"Ah, he said he had lost one!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"See if there's anything else there, Tom Merry. You may fish out the cake-knife, and Figgy's pin—to say nothing of Glyn's dry battery!" exclaimed Blake excitedly.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"There's nothing more here!"

"Let me look!"

Blake examined the rent in the chair, but there was nothing more to be discovered—nothing but padding.

"Bai Jove, it's wathah cleah now!" said D'Arcy. "I shouldn't wondah if we find the west of the things, if we search the studay. I don't pwopose doin' so, of course, as that would be a wathah mean pwocceedin'."

"Mellish is guilty!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The three juniors left the study with frowning brows.

CHAPTER 13.

Unbelieved.

"WELL?"

Kildare uttered that monosyllable grimly as Mellish presented himself in his study. Darrel, of the Sixth, was with Kildare, and he turned to the window. Mellish cast an uneasy glance at Darrel.

"You can speak before Darrel," said Kildare coldly. "I shall consult with him about what I do in the matter, anyway."

"All right!"

"Have you found the watch?"

"Yes."

Kildare smiled grimly.

"I thought you could manage to do so, if you tried. Where is it?"

"Here."

Mellish laid the watch upon the table.

"And now, what have you to say for yourself?" asked Kildare; and Darrel turned round from the window, and fixed his eyes upon the wretched junior.

"Nothing!" said Mellish desperately. "Only—only I didn't take it!"

Kildare stared.

"You didn't take the watch?"

"No."

"Yet you have brought it back?"

"It was found."

"It was found? By whom?"

"Blake saw it—in the armchair—in my study!"

"In your study?" said Kildare, with emphasis.

"Yes. It had been hidden in the lining, I think."

"By you?"

"No."

"By whom, then?"

"I don't know!"

"You are lying, Mellish!"

"I thought you'd say so," said Mellish sullenly. "It's a plot to ruin me, I believe."

"A plot? Nonsense! Who should plot against you?" said Kildare testily.

"Tom Merry, and Blake, and the rest!" said Mellish viciously. "They hate me. They'd like to see me kicked out of St. Jim's!"

"It would be all the better for St. Jim's, I think, if you were kicked out!" said Kildare sternly. "How dare you make such an accusation against Tom Merry and Blake, without a shred of evidence?"

"There is evidence. They were all in the study—they never come to my study other times, but they were all there to find the watch," said Mellish sullenly.

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"Isn't there a new boy in your study?" asked Darrel.

"Yes."

"Tom Merry and his friends are on friendly terms with him?"

"I suppose so."

"Then that is a sufficient reason for their visiting your study, when they have not been in the habit of doing so hitherto," said Darrel sternly.

Mellish was silent.

"Don't think I attach any importance to your accusation against Tom Merry, for a second, Mellish," said Kildare. "It is a foul lie. You know in your heart that Tom Merry is incapable of such a dishonourable action!"

"Somebody put the watch there!"

"Yes, and I have very little doubt as to who it was," said Kildare. "Well, you have restored it, and I told you that if you did so I would do the best I could for you. I will do so—I'll give you another chance. I will say nothing—but mind. This is your last chance. If I hear of anything missing from the School House again I shall know where to look for the thief!"

"I tell you—"

"That's enough. Get out of my study!"

Mellish went out with a spiteful scowl.

"That's the meanest and rottenest waster in the School House, Darrel!" said Kildare. "I don't know whether I've done right in giving him another chance."

"It's a curious business," said the prefect slowly.

"Oh, it's plain enough! He was hard up, and he took the watch with the idea of pawning it, of course."

"It is curious that he should still protest his innocence, in the face of such overwhelming evidence," Darrel said slowly.

"That's his nerve. He would lie for lying's sake, I believe, if he had no other motive."

"I suppose it's not possible that there's some mistake—that some fellow planted this on him for a lark," the prefect suggested.

"Well, it's possible, I suppose."

"But you don't think it's likely?"

"No, I don't! A fellow who would play a trick like that would be a meaner rat than Mellish himself—and such a fellow would be hard to find in St. Jim's!"

"He gave me an impression, somehow, that he was speaking the truth."

Kildare shook his head.

"I've bowled him out in too many lies to trust a word he says now," he replied. "It's pretty certain that he was lying this time!"

Darrel nodded, but as if not quite satisfied, and the subject dropped.

Mellish went away in a more collected mood than when he had last quitted the captain's study. His face was still white, but very spiteful. His eyes were gleaming with malice. There was a curious "catty" expression on his face.

Gore's heavy hand fell upon his shoulder as he came out of the Sixth-Form passage. The burly Shell fellow stopped him.

Mellish stopped, but with a grunt of dissatisfaction. There was no love lost between Mellish and Gore in these days. Gore had been trying for a long time to turn over a new leaf, and Mellish had done his best to prevent him. Mellish had failed, as far as that went; though Gore certainly had many lapses in his career of reform. But he had sense enough to have as little as possible to do with his former crony.

"Well, what do you want?" snapped Mellish.

"Have you seen my penknife?"

"Your penknife? No!"

"I've lost it!"

"Well, I'm not a blessed detective, or an inquiry department," grunted Mellish. "What on earth has it got to do with me?"

"Only that I've just remembered that I was sharpening a pencil in your study, while I was speaking to you there, last time I used it," said Gore. "I thought I might have left it in your study."

"Well, you didn't—at least, I haven't seen it."

"Gore! Hallo! Is this your knife?"

Tom Merry, Blake, and D'Arcy came up, and Tom held out the penknife. Gore took it with an exclamation of satisfaction.

"That's it. Where did you find it?"

"In Mellish's study."

Gore looked at Mellish.

"I told you I might have left it there, Mellish. It was mighty queer that Tom Merry should find it there, and you hadn't seen it."

"Those who hide can find!" said Mellish, with a bitter sneer.

Tom Merry, who was turning away, swung back, with a very red face. He had intended to say nothing of the circumstances of the discovery of the penknife, but Mellish's remark could hardly be allowed to pass unchallenged.

"What did you say, Mellish?" he exclaimed.

"You heard what I said."

"You said that those who hide can find," said Tom Merry, with flashing eyes, "in reference to my finding that knife in your study."

"Yes," said Mellish defiantly.

"Which is as good as saying that I put it there."

"Oh, Gore says he left it there," said Mellish, a little alarmed by Tom Merry's look. "I don't say you put it there."

"It was hidden there, as a matter of fact," said Tom angrily. "It was hidden in the padding of the armchair."

"Phew!" said Gore. "How did you come to find it?"

"I was looking there. Something else had been found there—I needn't say what," replied Tom Merry. "I found the knife."

"Well, as I said before, those who hide can find," said Mellish savagely. "Yes, you can lick me if you like, Tom Merry, and I'll still say it! I'll yell it out before the whole school, if you like."

Tom Merry's fist had clenched, but he unclenched it again. "I won't lick you," he said scornfully. "You're not worth it. If you had the pluck to put up a fight, I'd take you into the gym, this minute."

"I'm not going to fight you," said Mellish sullenly, "and I'm not going to have a charge of stealing fastened on me."

"Stealing!" said Gore.

"Yes, that's what they're accusing me of, stealing your knife, and hiding it in the armchair. If it was hidden there, I didn't hide it."

"Then who did?" demanded Gore.

"Somebody who wanted to fix this thing on me, I suppose," said Mellish, with a savage look at Tom Merry.

"Rats!" said Gore.

"Of course, you're against me, too—"

"You'll find all St. Jim's against you if you talk piffle like that," said Gore. "Don't be a fool. I don't believe you wanted to steal the knife. Why don't you own up that you did it for a silly lark, and have done with it?"

"Because I didn't do it."

"Oh, rats!"

Mellish walked away, his face dark with rage and hatred. Gore slipped the penknife into his pocket.

"Thanks for bringing it to me," he said. "But I say, you don't suppose that Mellish meant to steal it, do you?"

"I hope not," said Tom Merry.

And he said no more on the subject.

CHAPTER 14.

Leslie has nothing to say.

"KERRUISH says so!"

"Rats!"

"Well, he says so!"

"Where's Kerruish?"

"Kerruish!"

"Hallo!" said the Manx lad, rising from the armchair in front of the fire in the junior common-room. "Who wants me?"

"Tom Merry."

"Well, here I am," said Kerruish.

"I don't want you," said Tom Merry. "Hancock has just told me a yarn, that's all, and says he had it from you."

"So I had," said Hancock.

"What's it about?" asked Kerruish.

"The new chap."

"Oh!"

"Tell him what your cousin said in his letter, Kerruish," said Hancock.

"Oh, all right! I've got a cousin at Freshfield School," explained Kerruish. "I knew the new chap here came from Freshfield—"

"I didn't know he had been to a public school before," said Tom Merry.

"Well, he has."

"Did he tell you?"

"No."

"Then how do you know?" demanded Tom Merry sceptically. "It's curious he hasn't mentioned it. How do you know, anyway?"

"Because it was written in a Latin grammar he lent me," said Kerruish. "There was his name and school on the flyleaf."

"Oh, I see."

"I asked him about Freshfield, and whether he knew my cousin," said Kerruish. "He didn't seem to like the subject."

"Why shouldn't he?"

"I don't know. I only know he didn't. That's how I came to mention him to my cousin when I wrote. And in return, my cousin said—"

"Well?"

"I don't want to spread it round the school—"

"You've done that already," said Tom, half laughing. "You may as well out with it now, you young ass."

"Well, I suppose he can explain it, if it's explainable," said Kerruish. "My cousin said there was a chap named Reginald Leslie at Freshfield, for three days, and then he left suddenly."

"Left!"

"That's it."

"Why?"

"Nobody knew."

"Stuff!"

"Well, that's what my cousin says, and he's in the Shell at Freshfield," said Kerruish. "I give it to you as he gave it to me. He says that Freshfield wasn't Leslie's first school, either, and that nobody knew why he had left the previous one."

"There you are!" said Hancock.

Tom Merry sniffed.

"Oh, it's all rot," he said. "I know this much—Leslie's a decent chap, and if he left a school, he had good reasons for it."

"I don't say he hadn't," said Kerruish. "I'm not saying against Leslie. I'm not up against him in any way. I like him. Only that's how the matter stands, that's all."

"I expect your cousin's barking up the wrong tree in some way."

"Look here, my cousin—"

"Oh, blow your cousin!" said Tom Merry.

And he walked away. Kerruish looked a little disconcerted, and Hancock broke into a chuckle.

"Tom Merry has taken a big fancy to Leslie," Hancock remarked. "They all seem to like the new chap. He's got a pleasant way with him that I like myself."

"So do I," said Kerruish. "I was only just mentioning this. I didn't mean it as anything up against Leslie in any way."

"Of course not."

"I don't see why you wanted to go and tell Tom Merry," exclaimed Kerruish.

"Well, you told me," said Hancock.

"Well, anyway, I don't see that it matters. Tom Merry seems to think it's up against Leslie; I never thought about it. You needn't spread it any further."

"Certainly not," said Hancock. "I can keep a secret. I think I've mentioned it to a few fellows—Mellish and Gore, and Digby and Figgins, and—"

"And the rest of the blessed school, I suppose!" said Kerruish. "Well, it can't be helped. And I don't see that it matters, anyway."

And he sat down and opened his book again.

Tom Merry, however, seemed to think that it mattered a great deal, and his brow wore a frown as he left the common-room.

The thoughtless lads who had chattered over the little item of news had not considered it deeply in any way; but as a matter of fact, if Kerruish's information were correct, it certainly told against the new Fourth-Former.

And Leslie was popular in the school already.

He was kind and obliging, good-natured to a fault, and he never bore malice. He was pretty fair at class work—sufficiently so to keep him in the good graces of Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth Form. He was a good bat; and as cricket was beginning at St. Jim's, that was something to his advantage. Tom Merry, the junior cricket captain of the School House, had already put down Leslie's name as a reserve for the House eleven.

All the chums of the School House liked Leslie.

Even his study-mate, Mellish, who liked nobody but himself as a rule, rather liked the new boy in the Fourth.

Leslie did not chum up with him—few fellows could have endured to really chum up with a chap like Mellish—but he was always civil to him, ready to oblige him, and to help him or go with him anywhere.

And Mellish, somewhat to his own surprise, found himself entertaining a friendly feeling for the new boy.

Leslie had now been a few days at St. Jim's, and, as we have said, he had won golden opinions from all sorts of people.

The new boy seemed happy enough in his new school; though sometimes there was a shade upon his brow which seemed to indicate that he had matters for reflection that he did not share with his friends. But no one was inclined to pry into his private concerns.

Tom Merry left the School House with a thoughtful expression upon his face. He did not like the information he had just received from Kerruish.

As it happened, he almost ran into the fellow he was thinking about, as he came out upon the old stone steps. Leslie was standing there watching a foot-race on the gravel

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path between Blake of the School House and Kerr of the New House.

He tapped Tom Merry on the shoulder, and stopped him. "Penny for your thoughts," he remarked, in his cheery way.

Tom Merry laughed.

"You can have them for nothing," he said. "They're about you."

"Good!" said Leslie. "Go ahead! Are you thinking of putting me in the junior eleven, instead of sticking me down as a reserve? I'm willing."

"Not just yet," said Tom Merry, with a smile. "I dare say you'll be in the junior eleven later, though; I like your form, and that late cut of yours is a regular daisy. But I wasn't thinking about cricket. It's another matter, Leslie."

Leslie's face clouded over a little, as if he were in expectation of hearing something unpleasant.

"Go ahead!" he said again, laconically.

"I may as well speak about it," said Tom Merry. "It's none of my business, of course, and I dare say you will tell me so."

"I'm not likely to do that, Tom Merry."

"Well, as most of the fellows will soon have hold of it, I may as well mention it right off," said Tom. "It's about your last school."

Leslie coloured.

"What about my last school?"

"You were at Freshfield, weren't you?"

Leslie hesitated a moment, and looked at Tom Merry hard.

"How do you know?" he asked abruptly.

"A fellow saw it in one of your books."

"Well, I was there—there's no secret about it, that I know of."

"You left suddenly?"

"Rather suddenly."

"Will you say why?"

Leslie laughed.

"Is this a catechism?" he asked. "What are you driving at, anyway?"

"Don't think I'm curious," said Tom Merry, "I'm not. Only the fellows have the story that you left Freshfield suddenly, and some of them will want to know why. If you explained right away it would be all the better, that's all. A chap is supposed to be perfectly frank about his antecedents here."

"I left Freshfield because—well, because the place didn't suit me, and I didn't suit the place," said Leslie.

"I see. That's what you'll say if you're asked?"

"I have nothing to say. I've answered you because you're a friend; but if anybody else asks me, I shall tell him to mind his own business."

"Well, I suppose you know your own affairs best," said Tom Merry. "Perhaps I oughtn't to have mentioned it, but as you're new here, I thought I'd say a word."

"It's all right, old man—thanks!"

And the subject dropped.

CHAPTER 15.

Herries has an Idea.

"PWAY, Blake—"

"Hullo! What's the matter with you?"

"Nothin'."

"Then shut up, and don't interrupt a chap's oiling his cricket bat," said Blake severely. "You ought to be getting into your flannels, Gussy. Haven't you noticed that it's not raining?"

"Yaas, wathah, but—"

"We're going to get in some cricket practice," said Blake.

"Hasn't it dawned upon you that the cricket season is upon us again, and that we shall have to buck up if we're going to lick the New House in the House matches?"

"Yaas, wathah, but—"

"That new chap, Leslie, is coming out strong," said Blake warningly. "If you don't stick to practice, Gussy, you'll find that Tom Merry will give Leslie your cap for the junior House eleven."

"I should uttaly wefuse to have my cap given to Leslie for the juniah House eleven. If Tom Mewwy made such a pwoposition, I should say, 'Je ne marche pas, deah boy.'"

Blake jumped up and gripped his bat by the handle.

"What did I tell you?" he roared.

"Weally, Blake—"

Arthur Augustus dodged round the table, Blake chasing him with brandished bat. The swell of St. Jim's narrowly escaped a swipe.

"Blake—Blake, you ass!"

"Come here and be slain, you duffer!"

"Je ne marche pas—"

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"Why, there you go again! I—"

Blake made a desperate rush. D'Arcy reached the door of the study, and dashed out into the passage. Blake brandished the bat after him from the doorway.

"Come back and be pulverised, you ass!"

"Je ne marche pas," came back from the distance.

And Jack Blake slammed the door.

"Bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy, stopping in the passage to adjust his eyeglass. "I wegard Blake as an excitable wottah. His mannahs certainly have not that wepose which stamps the east of Veah de Veah. Hallo, Dig!"

"Hallo!" said Digby. "Where's Blake?"

"He was playin' the giddy ox in the studay just now. Dig, old son, I want you to lend me some tin. I was about to ask Blake, but he is such an excitable beast."

"How much?" said Digby.

"Oh, anythin'! I am bwoke, you know."

"Where's that fiver?"

"You know I lost my sovereign-purse, with the money in it," said Arthur Augustus. "It has not turned up yet."

Digby looked very serious.

"I say, Gussy, you can't let five quid go like that!" he exclaimed. "Hang it all—it's a small fortune! You ought to make Mellish dub up."

"Mellish says he knows nothin' about it."

"We all know Mellish," said Digby sceptically.

"I don't want to make a scandal, deah boy. It may turn up in the long wun."

"Better see to it."

D'Arcy shook his head.

"Oh, no—je ne marche pas!"

"What!" roared Digby.

"Je ne marche pas—Ow!"

Digby was hitting out. The chams of Study No. 6 had agreed that it was the only way to cure D'Arcy, and they were acting up to the agreement nobly.

"Ow! Dig, you ass! Yow—"

"There you are," said Digby, "and there—and there—"

"Ow! You are ruinin' my waistcoat!"

"And there—"

"Bai Jove! I'll give you a feahful thwashin'. I—"

Digby walked on, grinning, leaving D'Arcy staggering against the wall, and gasping for breath. The swell of St. Jim's gathered himself up, and gasped and gasped.

"The wottah!" he murmured. "The uttah ass! I shall have to seriously considah whethah I can continue to wegard those wottahs as fwiends."

The swell of the Fourth went on his way. He had not borrowed the money from Digby, after all, and he looked round for Herries.

Herries was standing on the steps of the School House, with his hands thrust deep into his trousers pockets, and an exceedingly thoughtful frown upon his face.

He looked up as D'Arcy came out.

"Just the fellow I want to see!" he exclaimed.

"Weally! I was lookin' for you, Hewwies."

"You haven't found that sovereign-purse yet?"

"No, I wanted to bowwow—"

"Well, look here—"

"Some tin—"

"Don't interrupt, Gussy, old man. I've been thinking it out. You know what a terror my dog Towser is at following a trail?"

"I know what a tewwah he is, certainly."

"You remember he tracked down some burglars once, who broke into the chapel at St. Jim's?" urged Herries.

"I wemembah you said he did."

"Look here, Gussy—"

"I am stony bwoke, deah boy. Can you lend me—"

"Now, if Towser can track down a burglar, why can't he track down a purse?" demanded Herries triumphantly.

"Is that a conundrum, deah boy?"

"No, ass! If you show the purse to Towser, and let him sniff it, he'll track it down like anything," said Herries enthusiastically.

"But how can I show him the purse when it's lost, deah boy?"

Herries rubbed his nose thoughtfully.

"H'm! I had overlooked that point. Of course, that would be a difficulty. But we can show him something else—the watch-chain you wear it on, for instance."

"Wats! As a mattah of fact, Hewwies, I don't want to have anythin' to do with Towser. He has no respect what-evah for a fellow's twousahs."

"Do you want to get your purse back, or don't you?"

"Yaas, but—"

"Well, Towser will do it. Come on!"

"If you can lend me ten bob for a few days—"

"Can't, my son; I haven't more than eighteenpence in the world," said Herries cheerfully. "You can have that, if you like. But there's no need for you to go round borrowing money, when you've got five pounds only waiting to be



A ghastly figure presented itself in the doorway of the study. It was the figure of a junior, soaked from head to foot in sooty water. "Hallo!" said the stranger.

found, and Towser can find it for you as easily as rolling down a staircase."

"I am afraid—"

"Oh, you needn't be afraid of Towser. He's a very gentle dog, and never bites you unless you stare at him, or unless he feels annoyed about something. Besides, I shall have him on the chain all the time."

"I did not mean that I was afraid of Towsah, Hewwies. I mean that I am afraid it will be no use."

"Well, give Towsah a trial, anyway," urged Herries.

"Je ne marche pas."

"What!" roared Herries.

"Je ne—Ow!"

"Hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Tom Merry, rushing up and pushing between the two Fourth-Formers. "What's the row? Wherefore this thushness?"

"He's babbling French at me again," said Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Oh, serve him right, then!" said Tom Merry. "I'll help you. You dot him on the nose, and I'll dot him on the eye."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Now then, go for him—"

"Hold on!" exclaimed D'Arcy hastily. "I—I should like to give Towsah a twial at findin' the purse, Hewwies, deah boy."

"Oh, all right!" said Herries, pacified at once. "Come on, Tom Merry! Don't start playing the giddy ox now."

"Why, you ass—"

"Oh, come on! We're going to show Gussy's watch-chain to Towser, and make him track down the missing sovereign-purse."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at?"

"That!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "But I'll come, rather! It ought to be worth seeing."

And the chums of the Shell followed Herries and D'Arcy as they made their way towards the kennels.

CHAPTER 16.

Towser on the Track.

"TOWSER!"

"Gr-r-r-r!" said Towser.

Herries unhooked the chain from the padlock, and Towser came out of his kennel. He blinked sleepily at his master, and looked at the other juniors out of the corner of his eye. There was a rather wicked look in Towser's eye, though Herries always maintained that he had the pleasantest expression it was possible for a dog to have.

"Here we are!" said Herries cheerfully. "Show him your chain, Gussy."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Monty Lowther.

"What's the row about?" he demanded. "If you're going to give cheap imitations of a rotten alarm clock, Lowther, you may as well bunk."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Towser doesn't like cackling," said Herries. "If you worry him, I may not be able to hold him in."

"Bai Jove!"

Monty Lowther became serious all at once.

"Why don't you show him the chain, Gussy?"

D'Arcy was regarding Towser rather doubtfully through his eyeglass. He did not care to approach his head too close to the bulldog's jaws.

"As a mattah of fact, deah boy—"

"Towser won't bite, unless you look at him."

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Oh, give me the chain!"

"Vewy well."

Arthur Augustus unhooked the chain from his famous gold tickler and handed it to Herries. It was a valuable chain, and D'Arcy followed it with his eye with a certain amount of apprehension.

Herries dangled it before Towser.

"Here, Towsy, old boy, sniff!" he exclaimed.

Towser made a snap at the chain. He appeared to be under the impression that Herries was offering him something to eat.

"Look out!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

"It's all right— By George!"

Towser caught the chain in his mouth, and began to crunch it. Apparently he did not like the flavour, for he almost immediately ejected it.

"By George!" said Herries.

"You uttah ass—"

"Of course, I couldn't foresee that he would bite at it," said Herries. "You can't expect a chap to foresee everything."

"You fwabjous duffah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Terrible Three.

"Oh, shut up!" said Herries. "It was your cackling that made Towser bite the chain instead of sniffing it, I think."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Smell it, Towsy, old boy—smell it!"

Herries jammed Towser's head down upon the chain, so that he had to smell it, if there was any smell attached to it.

"Upon the whole, Hewwies, I think I'd wathah wisk losin' the purse for good than have my chain mauled ovah by that feahful beast."

"Oh, rats!"

"I wepeat—"

"There, he's smelt it now; you can pick the thing up."

"Dwag that beast away, then."

Herries pulled Towser aside, and D'Arcy picked up his chain and began to wipe it in a very gingerly manner.

"Now, then, Towser," said Herries persuasively. "Track it out, old boy."

Towser sat on his haunches, blinked at his master, and did not move.

"Towser! Go it!"

"What's he got to do now?" asked Tom Merry curiously.

"Why, you see, Gussy wore that sovereign-purse of his on his watch-chain," explained Herries. "By smelling the chain Towser ought to be able to track down the purse."

"My hat!"

"You remember how he tracked down the burglars that time—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, stop your silly cackling!" said Herries crossly.

"Nobody here ever does Towser justice. If he got his deserts—"

"He would be drowned in the newwest pond," said D'Arcy.

"Oh, ring off!" grunted Herries. "Come on, Towser!"

Towser did not stir.

Either he did not know what was required of him or the scent from the chain was insufficient. Or perhaps he was lazy. Anyway, he did not move. He remained sitting quite still, blinking at his master. Herries tugged at the chain till it seemed likely that he would choke Towser in his collar or jerk his head off. But Towser did not seem to mind very much.

The Terrible Three looked on with great gravity. They were very careful not to laugh again.

But Herries probably detected some traces of suppressed mirth. His ruddy face grew ruddier than usual with exertion and annoyance.

"Towser! Come on, old doggy! You rotten beast, why don't you move? Towsy, old boy, do trail it down, now! Good doggie! Rotten, obstinate brute! Come on, old chap!"

"Bai Jove—"

"Shut up, Gussy, old fellow! Your voice worries Towser."

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"I think you might look the other way, too. Your face worries him."

"I wegard you as an insultin' ass!"

"Look here, you fellows, don't stare at Towser," said

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Herries crossly. "I don't see what you Shell fellows are hanging about here for, anyway."

"Why, you asked me to come!" said Tom Merry indignantly.

"Well, I didn't know you meant to play the giddy ox like this."

"What have I done?"

"Oh, don't begin arguing now," said Herries, who found it rather difficult to reply to that question.

As a matter of fact, Tom Merry had done nothing, and the cause of Herries's exasperation was the fact that Towser had done nothing either.

"I wegard Towser as a wotten fwaud!" said D'Arcy.

"There, now you're speaking again!" exclaimed Herries angrily. "How can you expect a dog to follow a track if you keep on worrying him all the time?"

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Do shut up for a minute or two! You can jabber at tea-time in the study if you like."

"You uttah ass—"

"When is the show going to begin?" asked Monty Lowther innocently. "We're waiting!"

"Dry up!"

"Is it simply an exhibition of how much a dog's neck can stand without being broken?" asked Manners.

Herries glared. As a matter of fact, Towser's neck was standing a good deal. But before Herries could reply Towser made a sudden movement.

He sprang away so suddenly that the chain slipped from Herries's hand, and dangled and clinked after the bulldog as he dashed away.

Herries's face flushed with excitement.

"There he goes!" he shouted. "What do you say now?"

"Bai Jove! I say that he will pwobably do some damage if you don't wecovah that chain, deah boy."

"Come on! He's on the track!"

"Wats!"

"Quick!"

Herries was dashing wildly after Towser. The Terrible Three and D'Arcy dashed after Herries. They were curious to know what was the cause of the sudden bolting of the bulldog. That he was on the track of the missing purse they did not believe for a moment.

Herries, however, had no doubt whatever about it. He firmly believed that Towser, having got going at last, was leading him straight to the hiding-place of the missing purse.

"Come on!" gasped Herries. "Don't lose sight of him!"

"He's going into the wood-shed!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Then the purse is there!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Come on! Quick!"

Towser disappeared into the wood-shed. Immediately there arose a perfect babel of yells and yelps and screams.

"My only hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "What on earth—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Monty Lowther. "It's Pongo!"

"Pongo?"

"Yes—young Wally's dog!"

"Bai Jove! It's my minah's dog, and no mistake!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, stopping in the doorway of the wood-shed to adjust his monocle and look in. "Towser is attackin' him, bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Herries's face was a study.

Even he could hardly doubt that Towser had made that sudden bolt to get to close quarters with his old enemy, Pongo, the ragged mongrel which was the apple of the eye of D'Arcy minor.

Towser had somehow become aware of his proximity—perhaps he had heard some howl which the juniors had not noticed—and he had taken advantage of his freedom to make a desperate attempt to settle his old account with Pongo.

The two dogs were rolling over and over on the floor of the wood-shed in desperate combat.

Pongo was hampered by being on a chain, and he was less than half the size of the bulldog, so he was greatly at a disadvantage.

If the combat continued there wasn't much doubt that it would end disastrously for the unfortunate mongrel.

Gr-r-r-r!

Bow-wow!

Yap—yap—yap!

"By Jove," exclaimed Tom Merry, "they must be separated! Pongo will be torn to ribbons! Stop 'em, Herries!"

"Well, you see—"

"Who's that going for Pongo?" roared D'Arcy minor, coming up at top speed. "What's the row? My only Aunt Jane! Take your blessed bulldog away, Herries!"

"You see—"

"I'll jolly well kick him, then, if you don't!"

D'Arcy minor was fearless when it came to defending his

beloved mongrel. He was rushing upon Towser, when Arthur Augustus caught him by the shoulder and swung him back.

"Hold on, Wally—"

"Leggo!"

"Towsah will bite you—"

"Let him!"

"Weally, Wally—"

"Poof!"

Wally jerked himself loose and rushed at Towser. Herries jumped forward and seized the chain, dragged at it, and jerked away Towser's head, or it is extremely probable that Wally would have felt the teeth of the bulldog.

Gr-r-r-r!

Yap—yap—yap—yap!

"Take that beast away, Herries!"

"Look here—"

"And if you ever let him loose again I'll shoot him!" roared Wally, picking up Pongo and comforting him in his arms.

Pongo was dusty and foamy, and his blood was flowing in two or three places, but Wally didn't mind that. His jacket and waistcoat were reduced to a shocking state, but Wally did not even notice it.

Pongo had had enough of the combat, and he was glad enough to snuggle into his master's arms and escape the powerful jaws of the bulldog. But he poked his little black muzzle out of Wally's jacket and barked defiance at his enemy as Herries dragged him away.

Towser was rather difficult to get away. He wanted to return and finish Pongo. But Herries dragged and dragged, and Towser had to go.

The Terrible Three lent a hand on the chain, and Towser was got back to the kennel at last. Herries's face was crimson as he tied him up. He did not say anything more about tracking down the purse.

But as the juniors left the kennel Herries turned a wrathful look upon the swell of St. Jim's.

"A nice muck you've made of it!" he exclaimed.

Arthur Augustus stared at him.

"Eh? What did you say, Hewwies?"

"A nice muck you've made of it!"

"I?"

"Yes, you! Next time I'm going to get Towser to follow a trail I'll jolly well take care that you're not on the scene!" snorted Herries.

"But—but—weally, you know, I don't see—"

But Herries did not stay to listen. He stalked away wrathfully. Arthur Augustus turned his monocle upon the chums of the Shell, who were roaring with laughter.

"I wegard Hewwies as an uttah ass!" he remarked.

"So he is!" said Monty Lowther. "And so are you! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Ha, ha, ha! I hope that Herries will let us be on the scent next time Towser does any tracking, at all events!" grinned Tom Merry.

And the Terrible Three yelled again.

CHAPTER 17.

A Question of Dignity.

"IT'S howlid to be bwoke!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy made that very true remark. He addressed it to no one in particular. He was in Study No. 6, with his hands in his trousers pockets, in a graceful attitude on the hearthrug, when he delivered himself of the statement.

Blake, Herries, and Digby were doing their prep. They did not look up, and apparently had no idea that the silence had been broken.

D'Arcy carefully adjusted his monocle in his eye, and surveyed their bent heads with a somewhat wrathful look.

"It's howlid!" he said.

Still no reply.

"I say it's howlid!"

"Eh!" said Blake, looking up at last. "What's horrid?"

"To be bwoke!"

"Who's broke?"

"I am!" said D'Arcy. "As Hewwies failed to twack down my missing purse with Towsah—"

"Oh, rats!" said Herries.

"I am stonay bwoke!"

"Well, I'll lend you some tin," said Blake.

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"Thank you, Blake, but—je ne marche pas."

"What?" roared Blake.

"Je ne marche pas!" said D'Arcy coolly.

Jack Blake jumped up.

"I'm sorry to have to interrupt your prep., you fellows," he remarked, "but a chap must stick to his principles. We agreed to bump him whenever he did it. Collar him!"

"Right-ho!" said Herries.

"Pway don't play the giddy goat, deah boys!" said

D'Arcy. He reached down a hand to the grate and drew forth the poker from the bars. It was red hot. "Pway don't be an ass, Blake! Pway don't play the giddy ox, Dig! I shall be sowwy if you get burnt, you know, but when it comes to bein' bumped, I can only say—Je ne marche pas!"

The chums of Study No. 6 simply glared.

Arthur Augustus, with unexpected forethought, had evidently put the poker in the fire ready. He had an old glove on his right hand, with which he held the poker, to protect his fingers from possible soiling, and this showed preparation. He eyed the exasperated juniors, through his monocle, over the red-hot poker serenely.

"You see, I have a stwong objection to any sort of disrespectful usage," he remarked. "I can take a joke with anybody, I twust, but when it comes to weally wude horse-play, je ne marche pas."

"My only hat!" gasped Blake.

"Put that poker down!" roared Herries.

D'Arcy shook his head.

"Sowwy, Hewwies, but—je ne marche pas."

"You utter ass—"

"I decline to be called an ass. I—"

"Chuck that poker down!"

"Je ne marche pas."

"Look here—"

"I am wetainin' this pokah in my hand, at considerable twouble to myself, to prevent you fellows tweatin' me disrespectfully," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "I can stand anythin' but that. When it comes to that, je ne marche pas."

"The—the image—"

"I wefuse to be chawactewised as an image, Blake. I wegard it as a widiculous and oppwobwious expression."

"I know I shall slay him," said Blake. "I've got a feeling that Gussy will be found drowned in a water-butt one of these days."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Put that poker down, you chump!"

"I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort. Pway go on with your wpep, deah boys!"

The chums of the Fourth looked at D'Arcy, and looked at the poker, and sat down at the table again. There was no arguing with the hot end of a poker.

"I was wemarkin' that it is a howlid thing to be bwoke," said Arthur Augustus. "The worst of it is, that after the insultin' mannah of you chaps to-day, I cannot descend to bowwow of you!"

"Go hon!"

"Unless you apologise for the vavious wude wemarks you have made, deah boys, I shall uttably wefuse to bowwow a single shillin' of you."

The juniors chuckled.

"Oh, I say, Gussy, don't be so rough on us!" implored Blake, almost with tears in his eyes. "Don't—don't!"

"I am sowwy to be wuff on you," said D'Arcy firmly. "But under the cires, I cannot considah it consistent with my dig, to bowwow money of you. I shall decline to do anythin' of the sort unless you apologise."

"Oh, Gussy!"

"I am sowwy, as I have wemarked, but it is necessawy to be firm at times."

Blake wept into his handkerchief.

"What is it Shakespeare says on this subject?" he said.

"I forget what it is, but it was very touching, and very much to the point. Boo-hoo!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Something about a thankless child," said Digby sadly.

"We've bumped Gussy again and again for his own good, and as for gratitude—well, you could put all his gratitude into a thimble!"

"Weally, Dig—"

"That's it!" said Blake. "How sharper than a toothless child to have a thankless serpent!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Herries.

"That is not a subject for cackling, Herries! Cannot you respect the grief of an old chum?" demanded Blake.

"Weally, Blake, deah boy—"

"How sharper than a toothless serpent it is—"

"To have a thankless Gussy!" said Digby.

"And he won't even borrow a sov. of us!"

"And we haven't it to lend if he would!"

"Oh, dear!"

"Boo-hoo!"

D'Arcy surveyed the humorous juniors through his monocle with a glance of lofty scorn. It dawned upon him that they were "rotting."

"I wegard you as a set of asses, deah boys!" he said. "I uttably wefuse to bowwow of you, though it is howlid to be bwoke. I want a new necktie—I have worn this one for three consecutive days, and I feel howlidly wagged when I have it on. I was dependin' on that fivah to do a little shoppin', and now I am bwoke. It is howlid!"

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NEXT
THURSDAY:

"TOM MERRY'S MASTER-STROKE."

By
MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 18.

Skimpole Thinks it is an Ungrateful World.

"How sharper than a toothless Gussy it is, to—"

"Pway don't wot, Blake. This is wathah a sewious mattah. I weally want to wecovah my fivah, you know: it is so howwid to be bwoked, and to go awound feelin' wagged and ill-dressed. You always know a chap by his neckties, and a chap who never changes his necktie is—well, I won't give you my opinion of such a chap, as I wemembah that Howwies nevah changes his necktie. What's to be done, deah boys? I am stonay bwoked, and it would not be consistent with my dig, to bowwow of you fellows."

"What a giddy problem!" said Blake thoughtfully.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Better put Towser on the track of the purse again."

"I decline to have anythin' more to do with Towsah undah any cires, whatevah!"

"Ass!" said Herries. "Towser would have had the purse all right, only—"

"I wefuse to discuss Towsah. Whenever that subject is mentioned," said D'Arcy, with a great deal of dignity, "je ne marche pas."

Blake glanced out of the corner of his eye at the poker.

It was quite black, and must have been very nearly cold by this time. It did not occur to D'Arcy that the longer he kept his weapon away from the fire, the less effective it became. In a few minutes, at the most, the poker would be no longer harmful, and then—

Blake chuckled softly at the idea.

"I have been thinkin' of goin' into the subject as a detective," said D'Arcy. "You wemembah the abilities I shoyed as an amateur detective when I took that up."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see any cause for mewwiment."

"I was thinking of you as an amateur detective," explained Blake. "It was enough to make a donkey cackle!"

"Oh, vewy well; in that case I excuse you—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Digby and Herries.

Blake glared at them.

"What are you two silly duffers cackling at?" he demanded.

"Ha, ha, ha! Gussy had you there!"

"Why, I—"

"Yaas, wathah! I wathah think I had you theah, deah boys!"

"You ass—"

"I decline to be called an ass—I mean, je ne marche pas."

Blake bounded out of his chair. He was sure that the poker was cold by this time.

"Pway keep off, deah boy—"

"Collar him!"

"I shall be sowwy to burn you—"

"You won't burn us with that poker!" grinned Blake.

"Collar him!"

"I shall poke you—"

"Poke away!"

"Ha, ha! Collar him!"

"Stand off!"

"Rats!"

The three juniors simply hurled themselves upon the swell of the School House. D'Arcy poked at them desperately with the poker, but there was hardly a faint glow of heat left in the metal, and it did not hurt them in the least.

They collared him, and yanked him over, and the poker crashed down into the fender.

"Ow! Pway welease me, you duffahs!"

"Bump him!"

"Hurray!"

"I wefuse to be bumped! Je ne marche pas."

"Bump him!"

"Je ne mar—ow—je ne—yow! Yaroooh!"

"Bump, bump, bump!"

Blake opened the door, and each bump brought D'Arcy nearer to it, till with a final one he was hurled forth, and went rolling into the corridor. Blake slammed the door after him, and D'Arcy sat up in the passage and gasped.

"Bai Jove!" he ejaculated. "I will give them all a feahful thwashin'—"

He jumped up, and rushed back towards the study. The door was locked on the inside, and he shook and rattled it in vain. His shaking and rattling elicited nothing but a series of chuckles from within.

"I wegard you as wottahs!" yelled Arthur Augustus, through the keyhole.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Open this wotten door, so that I can thwash you!"

"Je ne marche pas!" yelled Blake. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Herries and Digby. "Nous ne marchons pas."

"Bai Jove!"

And Arthur Augustus, with his own weapons thus turned against him as it were, gave up his attack on the door, and walked away in search of a clothes-brush to remove some of the dust from his person.

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Don't Miss

"GORDON CAY'S RAID," in THE EMPIRE LIBRARY.

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MELLISH was sitting on a bench in the alcove in the Fourth Form passage. The cad of the Fourth was staring out of the passage window, which gave a view upon the kitchen garden. The view was not particularly interesting, nor was Mellish interested in it. He had his hands thrust deep into his pockets, and his brows were wrinkled over his staring but unseeing eyes. Mellish was buried in deep and painful reflection, and he did not even see Arthur Augustus D'Arcy as the latter came along.

D'Arcy turned his monocle on the cad of the Fourth. Like most of the fellows in the Form, he disliked Mellish, but the junior was looking so miserable now that his heart was touched. He stopped to speak to him.

"You're lookin' wathah wotten, Mellish, deah boy," he remarked.

Mellish looked round.

"I'm feeling rotten," he growled.

"What's the mattah?"

"You know well enough."

"Weally, Mellish—"

"All the fellows are down on me now," said Mellish savagely, yet with a whine in his voice. "Half the Form have been calling me a thief."

"It's wuff, if you're not one."

"So you think I am one, too?"

"Well, it weally looks like it."

"It's a lie!"

D'Arcy pushed back his cuffs.

"What did you say, deah boy?"

"It's a rotten lie," growled Mellish. "I haven't the faintest idea how Kildare's watch and Gore's knife got into my study."

Arthur Augustus unclenched his fists, and regarded Mellish with a keen and curious glance.

"It's a very odd thing," he remarked, "but I'm wathah inclined to believe you. But if you didn't put the things there, who did?"

"I don't know."

"Then I should advise you to find out as quickly as poss., Mellish."

"I've tried to, but I can't. Unless it's some of you fellows plotting to get me out of the school, I can't catch on to it at all."

"Pway don't be an ass."

"Or unless—" Mellish paused.

"If you have any othah theowwy, I shall be vewy pleased to give you my opinion on it," said D'Arcy kindly.

"Well, there's another fellow in my study," said Mellish sullenly. "It didn't occur to me at first, but—"

"Do you mean Leslie?"

"Yes. If you come to it, why couldn't Leslie have taken the things there just as much as I?"

Arthur Augustus frowned darkly.

"Leslie is a decent chap," he said. "I wefuse to listen to a single word against him. If you say another word against Leslie, Mellish, I shall hit you. If you can't clear yourself without slandewin' an innocent chap, you'd bettah shut up."

"What I think is this—"

"Wats!"

"I tell you—"

"You needn't tell me any more, Mellish. I'm disgusted with you, and I feel that you are probably a wotten thief aftah all."

And Arthur Augustus walked away with his nose very high in the air. The cad of the Fourth looked after him with lowering brows.

Mellish was looking, and feeling, utterly miserable. He did not himself believe that Tom Merry & Co. were in a plot against him; and he could hardly believe that the frank, open-natured new boy was a thief. But any other explanation it was impossible for the cad of the Fourth to furnish to his unbelieving Form-fellows.

Mellish went slowly along the passage, his hands thrust deep into his pockets.

A crowd of Third-Form fags going out of the School House avoided him in the most pointed manner, and Curly Gibson went through the pantomime of buttoning his pockets.

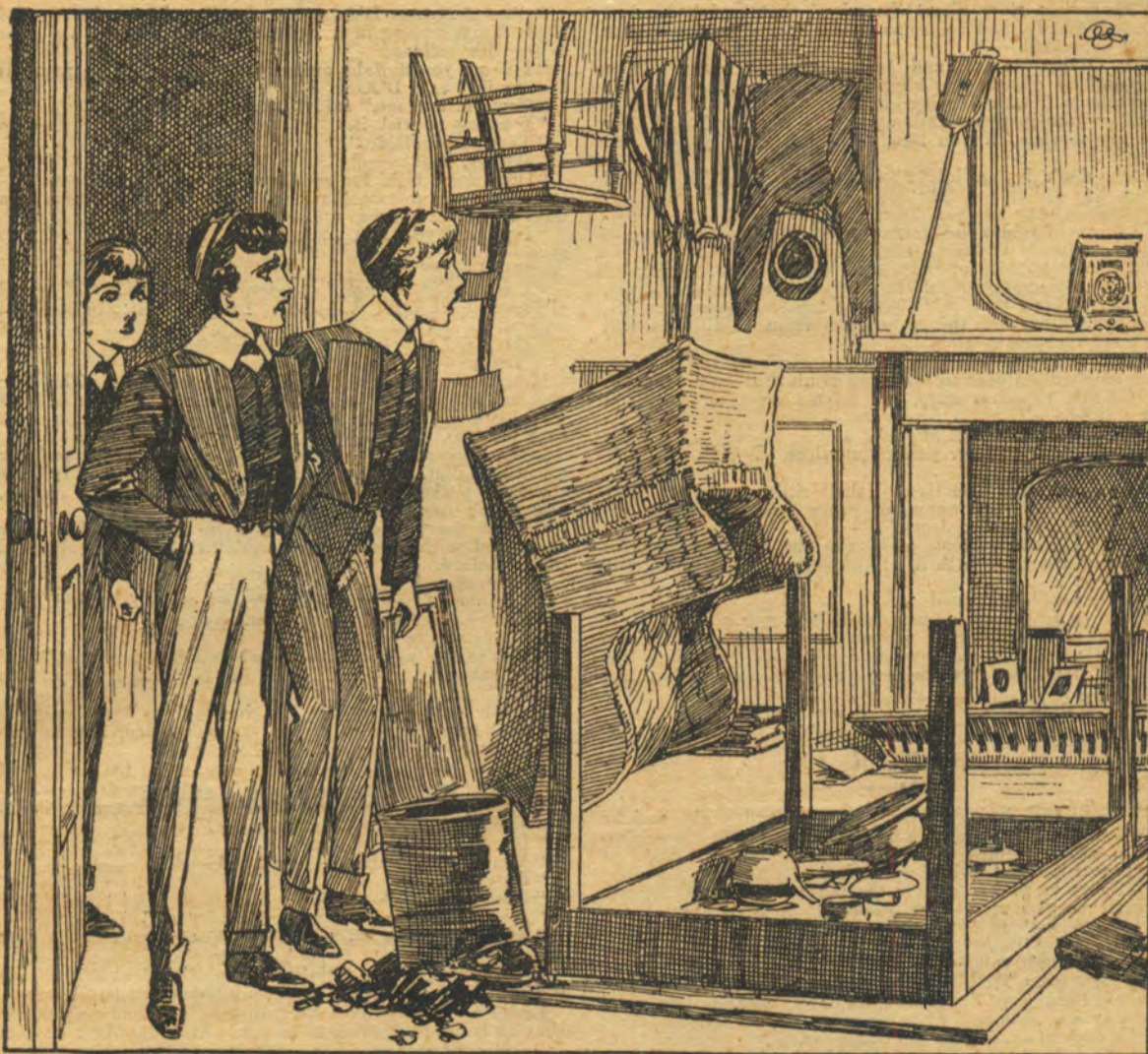
Mellish flushed scarlet, and turned another way.

He looked into the junior common-room. Leslie was standing in the doorway, talking to Tom Merry and Skimpole.

Mellish gave them a savage glance, for no better reason than that they were looking bright and cheerful, while he was feeling miserable.

Tom Merry looked at him.

He knew what was the matter with Mellish, but for the life of him he could not make up his mind whether he thought



Three startled exclamations came together, as Gordon Gay, Jack Wootton, and his minor stared at their study.

(An amusing incident in the grand, long, complete school tale of Gordon Gay & Co., contained in "The Empire Library," now on sale. Price one halfpenny.)

Mellish was innocent or guilty. The chances were that he was guilty; yet—there was a doubt.

"It's a rotten thing to have happen in your study, Leslie," said Tom Merry, with a wrinkle in his brow. "Rotten for you."

Leslie nodded without speaking.

"You've chummed with Mellish some days now," said Tom. "What do you think of him—that he stole the things that were found in the armchair?"

Leslie coloured.

"I'd rather not give an opinion."

"We ought not to judge too hastily," said Skimpole, rubbing his bumpy forehead, "that is unjust. Under Socialism—"

"Oh, ring off, Skimmy!"

"You see, Merry, nothing of this sort can occur under Socialism, as everyone will be well provided for. There will be no poverty, and consequently no crime."

"Cheese it!"

"But as I have once or twice taken up amateur detective work, and as crime will probably continue until Socialism is established, I think I might look into this matter, and do my best to set matters right. You remember my abilities as a detective, Merry?"

"Yes; as wonderful as Gussy's."

"More wonderful," said Skimpole, who never saw a joke. "I have the true detective brain—the true instinct. I should easily rival Sherlock Holmes if I fairly started to work."

"Go hon!"

"It is quite true. I am accustomed to ribald doubts of my statements," said Skimpole, unmoved. "Now, if I looked into this matter—"

"Go and look into it, Skimmy."

"I will tell you how the facts stand," said Skimpole, unheeding. "Stolen articles were found in No. 8 Study—"

"Yes. Ring off."

"Suspicion therefore falls upon the occupants of No. 8"

"Bosh!"

"Upon both Mellish and Leslie—"

"What!"

"As Mellish bears a bad character in the school, suspicion is stronger against him, of course."

"I should think so," said Tom Merry warmly, while Leslie turned very red.

"However, Leslie is not exempt from suspicion—"

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

"He is a new boy here, and we know nothing about his antecedents—"

"Cheese it!"

NEXT
THURSDAY:

"TOM MERRY'S MASTER-STROKE."

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By
MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"There is a story about the school that he left his last school suddenly, and for some reason that does not appear to be explained—"

Tom Merry started, and Leslie turned crimson. The short-sighted Skimpole blinked at them through his spectacles without observing either.

"Therefore suspicion falls upon both of you. I will offer you my services, if you like, Leslie, to clear you of this crime."

"Oh, don't be an idiot!" said Leslie; and he walked away.

"That is very curious, Tom Merry. I—"

"Oh, ass!" said Tom Merry; and he too walked away.

The genius of the Shell blinked after him.

"Dear me! Both of them seem to cut up very rusty at my masterly exposition of the facts," murmured Skimpole. "I really think that perhaps they are in a plot together, and have stolen the things between them. I think I will offer my services to Mellish."

Mellish had thrown himself into a chair by the window. Skimpole trotted over to him, and blinked at him cordially.

"Mellish, my dear chap, the fellows seem to think you are a thief—"

"Shut up!" growled Mellish.

"I am going to offer you my services. I—"

"Get out!"

"As an amateur detective. I shall either prove you innocent, and clear your name, or prove you guilty, and get you expelled from St. Jim's. I—"

Mellish lifted his foot, and gave the amateur Socialist a push on the chest with it. Skimpole staggered away and sat down.

"Dear me!" he gasped.

When he recovered his breath, Mellish was gone.

"Dear me!" Skimpole gasped again. "This is an ungrateful world! I am convinced now that Mellish is the thief. I shall not trouble my head further about the matter."

And he didn't!

CHAPTER 19.

Alone.

MELLISH had gone out into the quadrangle, and he walked about there by himself for some time. Nobody seemed to want to speak to him. Some of the fags called out to him when they saw him; and Mellish writhed as he had to endure the taunts and insults he had himself heaped upon Jack Blake, at a time when Blake was under a cloud of suspicion. It was justice at last for the cad of the Fourth. The evidence against him was convincing enough to most of the fellows; but only because they knew that Mellish was what they termed a "rotter." His word could not be relied upon in any case; so how could one pay any attention when he protested his innocence?

The story of the unpleasant discovery in No. 8 Study might have been kept a secret but for Mellish himself. He had blurted it out recklessly before Gore—and it had, of course, spread—but that very blurring out was a sign of innocence, Tom Merry thought. But the general opinion was that Mellish could account for all the late thefts, if he chose to do so.

As Mellish's study-mate, Leslie was spoken to about it a great deal. But the new boy in the Fourth firmly declined to enter into any discussion of the matter. It seemed very painful to him.

"I'm a new chap here," he said. "I don't want to talk about it. I think that Mellish is innocent, after all."

"But how came the things in his study, then?" demanded Hancock.

"I don't know," said Leslie uncomfortably.

"If he didn't put them there, it looks as if you did, you know," said Kerruish. "There's only you two, fellows in the study."

"Oh, shut up, Kerruish!" said Fisher. "We know Leslie's all right."

"Yes; but if Leslie's all right, Mellish is all wrong."

"And he is all wrong, and that's the beginning and the end of it," said Gore emphatically.

And most of the fellows agreed that it was so.

Mellish came in from the dusky quad, with a scowling brow. A Second-Form fag put his head round a corner and bawled "Thief!" and vanished. Mellish walked on with burning ears, and went slowly upstairs.

Mellish had a quiet, catlike tread—a tread which fellows said he cultivated for the purpose of overhearing things he wasn't expected to hear. It was quite possible, for eavesdropping was one of Mellish's little ways.

He went along the Fourth Form passage without making a sound.

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Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was standing in the doorway of Study No. 6, looking in at Blake and Digby. Herries had gone to feed his bulldog.

"I twust you duffahs are pwepared to keep the peace if I come in," said D'Arcy, a little doubtfully.

"Come in and see," said Blake genially.

"I wefuse to wisk it."

"Then stop outside."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Only don't talk, for goodness' sake! You've been talking ever since we came back from Monte Carlo, with only a flash or two of silence, and we're getting fed up."

"I weward you as a wude beast, Blake. I was goin' to say—"

"No, don't!"

"I was goin' to say that upon second thoughts I would allow you to lend me half-a-sov. I don't want to be too hard on you."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally—"

Mellish passed on, and reached his own study. The door was half-open, and the gas was burning. Mellish entered with his quiet, stealthy step, and a curious expression came over his face.

Leslie was standing in the light of the gas, examining something that glittered and shone. He slipped it into his waistcoat pocket as Mellish came in, and turned a sudden, angry look upon the junior.

"What do you come sneaking in like that for?" he demanded, with a passionateness Mellish had never observed in him before.

Mellish stared.

"I suppose I can come into my own study," he said.

"You've no right to sneak about spying on people."

"Who's spying on people?"

"You're always doing it; the whole school knows it," said Leslie savagely. "You ought to be kicked out of the school!"

Mellish could only stare. The change from Leslie's usually pleasant manner was so sudden, so unexpected, that he was taken utterly by surprise.

Leslie seemed to realise that he was saying too much, and he checked himself suddenly, and turned towards the door.

"But I say!" exclaimed Mellish. "What is it—what have you got there that I mustn't see?"

"I! Nothing."

"You had something in your hand—"

"Rats!"

"But, I say—"

"Mind your own business, confound you!"

And Leslie went out of the study, and banged the door after him.

Mellish was left in a state of absolute astonishment. He did not know in the least what to make of the new boy.

Leslie had always been civil to him, and had maintained that he believed Mellish to be innocent of the dark charges brought against him.

What did this sudden change of manner mean?

Mellish could not make it out; but he had his prep. to do, and he dismissed the matter from his mind at last. He sat down to his work, and did it badly and wretchedly enough. No one came into the study while he was at work.

Mellish was feeling very lonely when he had finished.

He left the study, to go down to the common-room. The chances were that nobody would speak to him there, unless to insult him, or answer him if he spoke. But human companionship was something, even if unfriendly.

Mellish went slowly and heavily downstairs.

As he entered the lower hall there was a sudden exclamation in Darrel's voice, and a rush of feet.

Kildare and Darrel grasped the junior, one by either shoulder.

"Here he is!" said Kildare grimly.

Mellish wriggled, and looked scared.

"Wh-wh-what's the matter?" he panted.

"You know well enough," said Kildare. "I warned you that if it happened again, you'd get no mercy. Come along!"

"Where?" shrieked Mellish, in terror.

"To the Head!"

Mellish's knees knocked together.

"To—the Head!" he stammered.

"Yes."

"W-w-what for?"

ANSWERS

"Come, come!"

"Stop!" shrieked Mellish, as the two prefects walked him along, without giving him a chance to resist. "Stop! What's it for? Tell me; I've a right to know! I—I—" "Very well," said Kildare, without stopping, however. "It's for stealing Darrel's watch."

"What!"

"Darrel's watch has been stolen."

"I—I—"

"It was taken from the drawer in my room," said Darrel.

"I—I didn't take it—"

"That's for you to prove," said Kildare. "I dare say it will be found in your room, as my watch was—and Gore's penknife, as I've heard since. Anyway, it's the Head's business to look into it, and you're coming to Dr. Holmes now."

"I—I—"

"Shut up, and come on!"

"Stop!" cried Mellish. "I—I tell you, I'm innocent, and—and I believe I know who the thief is."

"Nonsense!"

"Kildare! Give me fair play!" gasped the wretched junior. "You're always fair to the other fellows—why can't you be fair to me? For mercy's sake—"

Kildare paused irresolutely. In spite of his strong conviction of Mellish's guilt, there was something in the despairing tones of the junior that went to his heart. He stopped, and Darrel did the same.

"Well, Mellish, what have you to say? Quick?"

"I—I believe I know the thief."

"Who—quick?"

"The new chap, Leslie!" panted Mellish. "Oh, I know it now—I—"

"You young cad!" said Kildare wrathfully. "I haven't seen much of Leslie, but he's a decent-looking chap, and the fellows all like him."

"Listen to me—only listen! Was there anything stolen before he came to St. Jim's?" panted Mellish.

"Oh!"

"The first thing stolen was Figgins's pin," went on Mellish feverishly. "It was stolen during a raid on the New House. I wasn't there—any of the fellows will tell you that I wasn't there. Leslie was."

Kildare and Darrel exchanged glances.

"The things have been found in my study," went on Mellish, with a gasp. "But it's Leslie's study, too. You know that."

Kildare hesitated.

"What has made you start this yarn now?" he exclaimed. "It's all true, as far as it goes, but it was just as true when you were first accused. Why couldn't you suggest then that Leslie did it—if it isn't a yarn you've thought out since to meet the case?"

"Because—because—"

"Well?"

"Because when I went into my study this evening, Leslie was there, and—and he had something in his hand that was—was gold—and glittered in the light. He flew into a fearful temper when he saw me, and I—I wondered. Now I know."

Kildare compressed his lips.

"Where is Leslie?"

"I—I don't know, but—"

"Better see him before we go to the Head," said Darrel.

"Right!" said Kildare shortly. "This will have to be looked into. If Mellish is lying—as usual—he will have to suffer for it. It's his last chance, anyway—if he's a thief he leaves St. Jim's."

"Here, Tom Merry," called out Darrel, sighting the hero of the Shell in the passage, "do you know where Leslie is?"

"Yes; in the common-room."

"Thanks!"

Kildare and Darrel strode away towards the junior common-room with the trembling Mellish. Tom Merry stared at them and followed. It was clear that something was about to happen.

CHAPTER 20.

Accused.

LESLIE was in the common-room. He was playing a game of chess with Monty Lowther, and playing very well. His good-looking face was very calm and cheerful, and he seemed to have no trouble on his mind, excepting that of keeping his king out of check. It seemed impossible, looking at him to imagine that he was the thief of the School House.

"Check!" said Monty Lowther.

"Oh, all right! I—"

"Leslie!"

The new boy looked up. Other fellows in all parts of the room looked round, too. The sight of the white and trembling Mellish between the two prefects was enough to attract general attention.

"Hallo!" said Leslie, in surprise.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "There's goin' to be a wow, deah boys. I wathah think Mellish is bowled out at last."

"Serve him right," said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Kildare looked keenly at the new boy, as he rose to his feet. Leslie was looking surprised and startled, but not at all frightened. His glance passed from Kildare to Darrel, and from Darrel to Mellish.

"Anything wrong?" asked Leslie.

"Yes," said Kildare abruptly; "very wrong. Darrel's watch has been stolen from a drawer in his study."

Leslie turned red.

"What has that to do with me?"

"Mellish suggests—"

"Oh, Mellish!" said Leslie contemptuously. "I suppose no one takes any notice of what Mellish says."

"Rather not!" exclaimed a dozen voices. "Mellish is a thief!"

The cad of the Fourth cast a haggard glance round.

"Give me a chance!" he exclaimed.

"Bah!"

"Booh!"

"Pickpocket!"

"Cad!"

"Silence!" exclaimed Kildare sternly. "Mellish has a right to be heard. He is suspected of being the thief who has been pestering us lately. If he's guilty, he will be expelled from the school."

"And a jolly good thing, too," said Lowther.

"Hear, hear!"

"Silence! Leslie, Mellish suggests that the stolen articles, found in your study, were placed there by you, and not by him. He declares his belief that you stole Darrel's watch from his study. Mind, I'm not saying I believe a word of it. Only I want to hear what you have to say."

Leslie was silent.

"It's all lies," exclaimed Blake warmly. "Leslie's all right."

"Is he?" shrieked Mellish. "Look in his pocket, then—see what you will find there!"

Leslie's hand flew to his waistcoat pocket.

The action was unconscious; but it betrayed him. Monty Lowther had been about to exclaim that, if the watch were in Leslie's pocket, Mellish had slipped it in. But Leslie's action confounded him, and the words died upon his lips.

Silence fell upon the excited juniors.

Leslie's action had been seen by a score of pairs of eyes, and it simply dumfounded all who saw it. If the stolen watch proved to be in that particular pocket, Leslie stood condemned before them all.

Kildare knitted his brows.

"Which pocket, Mellish?" he asked curtly.

Mellish's eyes were blazing now.

"That pocket!" he exclaimed. "The one he has put his hand on."

"Look here—" began Leslie.

"Turn out that pocket," said Kildare.

"There's nothing in it."

"Then turn it out."

"I won't."

Kildare's face set hard.

"He's a thief!" shrieked Mellish. "He's the thief! Why won't he turn out his pocket? He knows the watch is there."

"Dry up!" muttered Manners.

"I won't! I won't! He's the thief!"

"Turn out your pocket, Leslie."

"I—I—"

"Well, I will," said Kildare.

He grasped the junior in his strong hands. Leslie struggled, but his wrists were jerked together, and held in an iron grip in Kildare's right hand. Then the captain of St. Jim's slipped his fingers into the waistcoat pocket, and drew out what it contained—a gold watch!

There was a buzz of surprise and horror from the crowd of juniors. Leslie's face was pale.

"Is that your watch, Darrel?"

"Yes."

The prefect took the watch. Then all eyes were fixed upon Leslie. His own eyes sought the floor, and the colour came and went in his cheeks.

"Search him!" exclaimed Mellish exultantly. "Search him! Very likely he's got the other things on him, too!"

"Have you any other stolen articles on you, Leslie?"

Leslie looked up. He was recovering his coolness now, and there was even a ghost of a grin upon his face.

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"I'll see," he said calmly.

And the juniors gasped.

Was this Leslie—this cool, unblushing thief—was this the fellow they had learned to like and admire in the few days they had known him?

"He's mad," muttered Tom Merry, who was very pale.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Turn out your pockets," said Kildare sternly.

Leslie made no further demur. He turned out his pockets, and Figgins's wonderful diamond pin came into view, and then Arthur Augustus's sovereign-purse. The new boy tossed it over coolly to the swell of the School House.

"You'll find the cash in it all right," he remarked.

"Bai Jove!"

"Glyn's dry battery is up the study chimney, and the cake-knife is in my hatbox," said Leslie calmly. "You'll find a good many other little things about my study, too—in my boxes—tins of blacking, and bits of string and sealing-wax, packets of stationery, and so on—things that haven't been missed."

"What!"

"That's about all."

There was a hush. Kildare fixed his eyes upon the new boy.

"I suppose you know you will be expelled from the school?" he said.

"I know I shall have to leave."

"Have you any explanation to make—any excuse to offer?" said Kildare.

"Lots!"

"What do you mean? Why did you steal these things? You are not poor. You did not need them."

"Exactly."

"Then why did you steal them?"

"Because I couldn't help it."

"What!"

"I couldn't help it," said Leslie coolly.

"What do you mean? Do you mean to say that you couldn't help stealing?"

"Just so."

"Are you mad? Why couldn't you help it?"

"Because I'm a kleptomaniac!"

CHAPTER 21.

Leslie Owns Up.

"A KLEPTOMANIAC!"

"Bai Jove! A kleptomaniac!"

"Great Scott!"

"Rats!" said Mellish. "It's a lie!"

"Hold your tongue, Mellish!" said Kildare sharply. And the cad of the Fourth was silent.

The captain of St. Jim's fixed his eyes keenly upon Leslie. The new boy seemed to be quite undisturbed by the sensation his statement had caused.

"What do you mean by saying that you are a kleptomaniac, Leslie?"

"I mean exactly what I say," replied Leslie coolly. "I'm a kleptomaniac—that's a chap who can't help stealing. It came on me before I could walk. I used to steal the ribbons out of the nurse's cap. I used to steal sticks of wood and bits of coal, and crusts of bread, and hide them away. I used to be jolly well licked; but it was no use. I couldn't stop it, and they couldn't stop me. The physicians assured my pater that it couldn't be helped. I stole the same as other chaps breathed, because it was my nature to. Because I was a kleptomaniac."

The fellows stared at him.

Leslie did not seem to be ashamed of his extraordinary announcement; doubtless because years of life as a kleptomaniac had hardened him, and rendered him insensible to the normal feelings on the subject.

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy. "I have heard of kleptomaniacs, you know, but I have nevah seen one before. It's amazin'."

"Yes, rather!" said Blake. "But I believe him."

"So do I," said Tom Merry.

Kildare was staring hard at the new boy. He could hardly doubt what Leslie said; besides, proof for or against his statement would be so easily forthcoming, that it would have been absurd for Leslie to lie. In any case, he would have to leave St. Jim's. Thief or kleptomaniac, there was no room for him there.

"It's true," said Leslie quietly. "I'm sorry, but I can't help it. It's a kind of insanity, you know; they say everybody's rocky on one point or another. Bless you, I've heard doctors discussing my case, and I know all about it. I picked the pocket of a stout old specialist who came to examine me, and he never knew it till my pater sent his watch back afterwards."

"My hat!"

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"I suppose I shall have to leave St. Jim's," said Leslie. "I'm sorry, I like the place, and I like the chaps. I had to leave my last school, Freshfield, for the same reason. I was bowled out in three days there."

"Bai Jove!"

"You see, my pater is a hopeful sort of person, and he always hopes I shall get cured, by being placed in new surroundings and making a fresh start," said Leslie with a faint grin. "I try awfully hard, but it's no use—it breaks out. It's horrid! I always steal things that are of no use. I've stolen pounds and pounds, but I've never spent a penny of it. I'm not dishonest—I'm a kleptomaniac. My pater has had to make restitution scores of times. All the things I've taken here would have been given back in the long run—they weren't in any danger."

"I suppose I must believe you," said Kildare. "It's a strange story."

"Oh, the head-master of Freshfield would bear it out, if he were asked; and so would three or four other head-masters, in various parts of the country, and half a dozen private tutors I've had," said Leslie. "I'm sorry. It's a horrible thing; but there it is, it's in my blood, and I can't help it."

"You are a most unfortunate lad, if that's true," said Kildare; "but you allowed suspicion to fall on Mellish—"

"Well, it wasn't my fault, and I said all along I believed him innocent," said Leslie. "It's because Mellish was a mean cad, and quite capable of such a thing, that he was suspected; it was his own fault, and I don't see that I was to blame. He couldn't expect me to get myself turned out of the school for him."

"You cad—" began Mellish.

"If he had been called up before the Head, to be punished, I should have owned up," said Leslie; "I meant to, if it came to that."

"I believe you," said Kildare. "It's a curious story, but I believe you. You'd better come to the Head now; he must know all about it."

Leslie nodded.

"I suppose so. Good-bye, you chaps, I suppose I sha'n't see you again. I'm sorry. I've had a jolly time, my few days here. I suppose you won't shake hands with me!"

Tom Merry held out his hand frankly enough.

"I will," he said; "there's my fist."

And many of the juniors—all whom the new boy had become intimate with—followed his example. In spite of Leslie's light manner, they could see that the strange curse which hung over him was a deep tragedy in his life.

"Thanks!" said Leslie, a little huskily. "I hope you'll always believe that I've told you the exact truth. It's a kind of mental disease, and I'm not dishonest. I've never kept anything I've stolen, or made use of it. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye, old chap!"

Leslie followed Kildare and Darrel from the room, and they went away to the Head's study.

The junior common-room was left in a buzz of excited comment.

"It's a stwange stowy," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I'm awfully sorry for the chap."

"So am I," said Tom Merry.

The topic did not soon lose its interest for the juniors of St. Jim's. It was a very strange story, but a true one. They heard more particulars afterwards that bore out the truth of Leslie's curious story.

They did not see the new boy again, save for a glimpse of him as he drove away to the station that evening. He was not expelled; that he did not deserve; but the Head had naturally decided that there was no room for him in a school like St. Jim's. And in spite of his curious failing, the fellows were sorry to see him go—sorry for Leslie, too, and wondering what would become of him in the future.

"He was a decent chap," said D'Arcy the next day. "I'm sorry he's gone. I wathah think that, by the influence of a powerful mind, you know, I might have cured him. By the way, I've got my fivah back now, and I shall be able to get that necktie. What colour would you advise, Tom Mewwy?"

"Pink, with green and yellow spots," said Tom Merry.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Well, then, green, with bars of yellow, and blue, and crimson—"

"I wegard you as an ass. Je ne marche pas."

"What!"

"Je ne marche—"

D'Arcy did not stop to finish. He dodged away as his chums rushed at him, and fled down the passage. Half a dozen wrathful juniors shook wrathful fists after him, and faintly, from the distance, floated back:

"Je ne marche pas!"

THE END.

(Another splendid 26-page story of the Chums of St. Jim's next Thursday, entitled, "Tom Merry's Master-Stroke," by Martin Clifford.)

 **The First Chapters of a Splendid Serial Story.**



By Lieutenant Lefevre.

READ THIS FIRST!

Oswald Yorke, a youth of eighteen, whom peculiar circumstances have forced to become a highwayman, one night holds up the carriage of Admiral Sir Sampson Eastlake. He is overpowered, however; but the good old admiral offers him a chance of serving the King in the Navy instead of handing him over to justice. Oswald, therefore, joins the frigate Catapult as a midshipman, under the name of John Smith.

Owing to the incompetence of her drunken commander, Captain Burgoyne, the Catapult does not distinguish herself against the French ships. The crew become discontented, and at length Oswald overhears a plot to mutiny, and murder the officers. The latter, with a few men they can trust, assemble on the quarter-deck, which they quietly proceed to fortify.

(Now go on with the story.)

How the Quarter-Deck was held Against the Mutineers.

"Who's going to look after my sick while I am kept here?" grumbled Dr. Telford. "I tell you what it is, gentlemen; mutiny or no mutiny, I am not going to desert my patients. I am going down to the cockpit, and there I shall stay."

It was vain to reason with him and point out his danger. The doctor obstinately refused to listen.

"They wouldn't be such blackguards as to kill me while I am tending their messmates," he said. "And if they do—well, I shall die at my duty."

"Shall I come with you, sir? I could help you," said Oswald.

"No, my lad; you stay here, and take your chance of life. I can do all that is to be done below," said Dr. Telford kindly.

He shook hands with them all, and with a calm, collected demeanour, went off to watch over his patients, leaving the only protected part of the frigate apparently without regret and without fear.

"He may have no nerves, but he has a great heart," Oswald thought, as he watched the doctor's figure fade away into the darkness.

Not counting the two helplessly drunken men and the captured spy, there were fifteen or sixteen men gathered together on the quarter-deck, prepared to sell their lives very dearly when the storm broke.

In order that their presence might not be noticed, they all, with the exception of Mr. Pringle and Maxwell, seated themselves on the deck in the shadow of the bulwarks, and waited the signal that was to herald the breaking of the storm.

There was still half an hour to eight bells, and Mr. Pringle, finding himself at leisure for a little while, took observations of the weather.

"I shouldn't be surprised if we have another sort of storm

before morning," he said to Maxwell. "I wonder if those scoundrels will still obey orders?"

He decided to put them to the test. Calling up three or four men by name, he directed them to go aloft and take in sail, and the men went up to their task without demur.

"We are ready for both kinds of storm now!" muttered Mr. Pringle, rubbing his hands. "What did you load those boat-guns with, Maxwell?"

"Grape, sir."

"Good! One dose of that ought to bring them to reason; but we shall see. There is one thing about it; the men won't fight with a good heart. It takes the heart out of them to know that they are fighting in a wrong cause. Depend on it, those two carronades will do more to break them up than a whole broadside from a French line of battleship—at least, that's my opinion."

"I think so, too," said Maxwell. "I wonder who is going to lead them. They will have a leader of some sort, I suppose."

It was not very long before Maxwell received an answer to his question. Suddenly the sharp, clear sound of the bell rang out, and at the very first note there was a suspicious movement forward. Standing on the quarter-deck, Mr. Pringle tried to pierce the gloom with his eyes, but could only see a score or more of shadowy, indistinct forms moving about. There were certainly more hands on deck than properly belonged to the watch.

Silently, like an army of phantoms, the dark shapes came stealing across the main deck, their programme being evidently to rush the quarter-deck; but of a sudden the forward movement stopped, as Mr. Pringle's voice rang out:

"Back! Forward, all of you! What are you doing here?"

The men lurking under the bulwarks on the quarter-deck grasped their loaded muskets ready to defend their position, while the mutineers hung back for a moment while they took counsel among themselves.

Suddenly one figure advanced from their ranks—advanced almost to the foot of the steps leading up to the quarter-deck.

"Mr. Pringle, sir, we don't bear no ill-will agen you; but there are some on board the Catapult as has driven us to do the work we mean to see through this night. Come down, sir, and give yourself up to us as our prisoner, and I promise you no harm won't come to you! Come down, sir; there ain't no use in fighting agen us. Our blood is up. We've stood this dog's life as long as any men on earth could stand it, and now the end's come, and we mean to strike for our rights!"

The speaker was a man named Jacobs, one of the idlest and most worthless characters on board. It was evidently he whom the rest had chosen as their leader, and of all the crew he was certainly the best fitted for the position.

"Do you know what you are saying?" said Mr. Pringle sharply. "If I understand you right, it sounds strangely like mutiny!"

"And mutiny it is!" said Jacobs boldly. "We ain't afraid of the word, sir. We know what the punishment is, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 116"

**NEXT
THURSDAY!**

"TOM MERRY'S MASTER-STROKE."

**By
MARTIN CLIFFORD.**

but we're ready to face that. But we ain't got no time to talk here with you now. Come down and give yourself up to us, and we will treat you honourable and straight. Refuse, and your blood will pay the price!"

Almost at this moment a man hurried on deck. "They've gone!" he said breathlessly. "They ain't in their cabin!"

There was a murmur among the mutineers.

"Where is the captain and Mr. Brabazon?" demanded Jacobs boldly.

"The captain is here, where he should be, on his quarter-deck!" said Mr. Pringle, wisely holding his tongue as to the captain's condition. "Enough of this. I give you one chance. I cannot see your faces in the darkness. I shall not be able to recognise you. Back to your duties, before it is too late—back, I tell you, you fools!"

"It's you who are the fool!" shouted Jacobs boldly. "I've given you your chance, and you don't take it. So—"

As he spoke he sprang up the steps, a naked cutlass in his hands.

"Come on!" he shouted, waving the weapon above his head.

With a yell, the mutineers started forward; and as they did so, Lieutenant Armstrong, Finlay Fid, and the rest sprang out from their places of concealment.

Urging his followers onwards with shouts, Jacobs gained the top step, and already had one foot on the quarter-deck, when Mr. Pringle raised his pistol and fired.

The sound of the report was instantly followed with a ringing clash, as the cutlass fell from Jacobs' hand, and the man fell backwards to the main deck.

But the fall of their leader seemed to awaken the others to a fury of rage and hate. With oaths and curses they pressed forward, struggling to gain the quarter-deck.

"Let them have it!" shouted Mr. Pringle. And the rattle of musketry instantly followed on his words.

Surprised at the unexpected reception, the men reeled back, leaving many of their number lying on the deck.

"To the carronade, quick!" whispered Pringle to Maxwell. "Fire when I order, but not before." Aloud he shouted. "Madmen, if you value your lives, back to the fore-castle, every mother's son of you!"

But the men's blood was up. Without a thought to the consequences of their crime, they made a second dash forward, uttering shouts of rage and vengeance.

"Fire!" said Mr. Pringle in a clear, steady voice.

Maxwell's hand shook as he applied the match. He was firing on his own countrymen, on the men with whom he had thought to fight side by side!

There was a loud report, a blinding flash, that lighted up a scene which impressed itself vividly and for ever on the memory of those who witnessed it.

A horde of half-naked men, mad with rage and the lust of blood, brandishing cutlasses in their brawny hands; a deck already strewn with those who had fallen; and on the quarter-deck a handful of pale-faced men, waiting and willing to sell their lives dearly to uphold the authority of the man who lay in their midst in a drunken sleep.

A Terrible Struggle.

Right into the midst of the crowd of mutineers the carronade emptied its deadly cargo of grape. A dozen men fell, some screaming and writhing in agony, others in a deathly silence, to be maintained for evermore.

The rest sank back dazzled, dismayed, and astounded. They had not looked for this opposition, and it took the courage out of them. Subdued, awakened to the deadly peril they ran, they slunk back into the shadows.

Mr. Pringle saw his opportunity, and seized it.

"Throw down your arms, you fools!" he cried out. "Throw down your arms and surrender!"

For a moment silence followed his demand. It

seemed as if the men, cowed and terrified as they were, would obey.

A feather would have weighed the scale either way at that moment, and the feather was forthcoming in the loud, blatant voice of one of the mutineers.

"Throw down your arms and surrender, you fools!" he shouted. "Surrender, and be strung up to the yardarm, every mother's son of you! Remember who is skipper of this ship. You don't expect much from him, I reckon!"

They expected nothing from Captain Burgoyne. They knew that he would exact the uttermost vengeance on them, one and all. They knew that it meant for many, if not for all, a length of rope and a dangling noose.

"Don't ye feel the rope round your necks now, you fools?" shouted the jeering voice. "There's nothing the cap'n'd like better than to see his ship's company dangling from the yardarm! Throw down your weapons, you fools, and give in!"

"Curse me if I do!" roared a voice.

The next moment the chorus was taken up.

"I warn you!" shouted Mr. Pringle. "Smith, bring that other carronade to bear. These villains mean mischief still!"

With a hoarse yell the mutineers darted out from the shadow. They meant to carry the quarter-deck with a rush.

Bang! A flash of light, a screaming of iron shot, and then a screaming a thousand times more awful. But those who were not struck pressed forward with the fury of maniacs. They were fighting with the rope around their necks. They seemed to feel it press into their flesh, and choke them.

One leaped up the steps and seized Mr. Pringle by the arm with his left hand. His right was upraised with a cutlass clenched in his brawny fist.

Another moment, and Mr. Pringle would have been cleaved to the chin, but, flinging his arms around his assailant, he closed with him, and the pair fell to the deck struggling furiously.

What would have been the upshot no one could tell, for Fid stooped and thrust his pistol against the mutineer's ear and fired. The man rolled over without a groan, his blood splashing hot on to Mr. Pringle's face.

Lieutenant Armstrong, Finlay, and the others, had poured a volley into the oncoming horde, but there was no time to reload. Bleeding, panting, screaming out oaths, the men rushed up the steps, slashing and hewing with their cutlasses. On the quarter-deck they sought to force them back, some using cutlasses, others their muskets clubwise.

It was a bitter and horrible struggle—Britisher against Britisher. Then, little by little the mutineers gave way. Stumbling and scrambling on the deck, slippery with human blood, they fell back step by step, till the stairs to the lower deck were reached. Here, for a moment, they made a last stand; but it was useless. Two stumbled, and fell backwards, crashing down on the lower-deck, where they picked themselves up and crawled away, maimed and bleeding, to hide. A moment later there was a rush. The mutineers fought

amongst themselves as they fled down the steps and across the deck, making for the fore-castle, which scarcely a dozen reached.

Here they barricaded themselves in, hoping against hope that they would yet be able to make terms and save their lives.

It was a horrible scene that the morning sun rose upon—a deck strewn with dead, from whose grisly wounds streams of blood had flown into the scuppers, where it lay rocking sluggishly with every movement of the vessel.

Mr. Pringle stood with his arms folded across his breast, his face pale and stern. Scarcely one of the defenders of the quarter-deck but what was wounded. Only old Fid, grey and gaunt, stood unscathed. He seemed to have borne a charmed life, for he had been where the fight was thickest, his brawny arms dealing death among the men who had been his messmates.

(Another long instalment of this thrilling serial next Thursday.)

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