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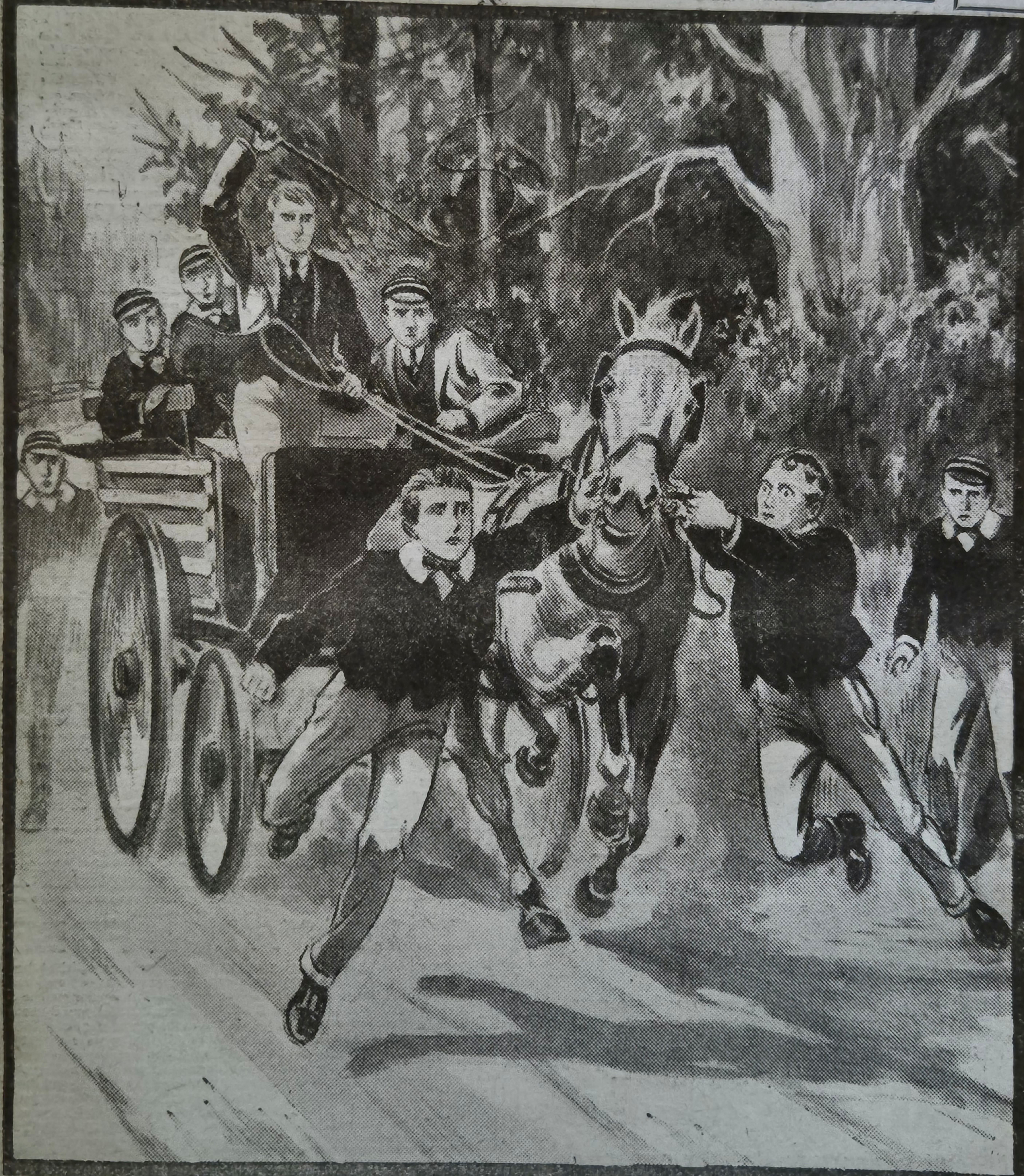
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By **MARTIN CLIFFORD.**



Lowther tore himself loose from his chum's grasp, his face flushed crimson, his eyes gleaming with anger. "Let me alone! You've no right to interfere with me!" he said, "Mind your own business; I'm fed up with you!"
(See Chapter 6.)

CHAPTER 1.

A Good Turn That Did Not Deserve Another.

TOM MERRY stared.

He was surprised.

He was in his study, in the Shell passage in the School House at St. Jim's, when Levison of the Fourth came in.

Tom was busy grinding out lines for Herr Schneider, and he was in a hurry to get them done. He wanted to join his chums, Manners and Lowther, who had gone down to the footer practice. Therefore, he was not pleased to see Levison of the Fourth. Besides, he was not on good terms with Levison.

And Levison's manner was very mysterious.

He came quickly into the study, and closed the door carefully behind him. Then he came towards Tom Merry, with an expression of suppressed excitement upon his face.

He did not speak for a moment, and Tom, naturally, stared at him.

"Well?" said Tom at last.

"Busy?" asked Levison, with a glance at the sheet of

impot paper, which Tom Merry was covering with weird-looking German characters—characters that grew weirder and weirder as he hurried over them.

"Yes," said Tom.

"What are you doing—drawing a map?" asked Levison.

Tom Merry frowned. His German handwriting never quite satisfied Herr Schneider, but really it was too bad to have his German imposition mistaken for a map.

"I'm writing German," he said shortly.

"Oh!" said Levison. "Well, that can wait for a few minutes—"

"Sorry!" said Tom politely. "But it can't wait. You see, I've got to get down to the footer. Good-bye!"

But Levison did not go.

"I've been waiting for a chance to see you—" he began.

"I'm on view all day, no charge," said Tom. "Still, you can look at me if you like. You don't mind if I get on with this, do you? Werd ich zum Augenblicke sagen—"

"Look here," said Levison; "this is important!"

"Verweile doch, du bist so schön," murmured Tom Merry. Levison made an angry gesture.

Next Wednesday:

"A BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION!" AND "SECRET SERVICE!"

Copyright in the United States of America.

"Will you listen to me? I've come in here to do you a good turn."

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Tom Merry, in astonishment, and he laid down his pen. "Fire away! Rather a change for you, isn't it, to be doing anybody a good turn?"

"How would you like thirty quid?" asked Levison.

Tom Merry grinned, and held out his hand.

"Rippingly! Hand it over!"

"I haven't got it, fathead! But I can show you where to get it."

"Whose is it?" asked Tom humorously.

"Yours, if you like to take it."

Tom Merry looked puzzled.

"I don't quite see how I'm to get thirty quid for nothing," he remarked. "Still, it would come in very useful, certainly. I'd stand a new outfit for the junior cricket club to begin the season in tiptop style. What is it—a competition?"

"A sort of competition," said Levison.

"With a certainty of winning the prize?" asked Tom, laughing.

"Yes."

"Well, that's the kind of competition a fellow would like to go in for," Tom Merry admitted. "But it sounds a little too good to be true. Go on!"

"You have to risk a quid," explained Levison.

"Sort of entrance-fee?"

"Yes, in a way."

"Well, it's worth that—if the thirty quid are quite certain," said Tom, still grinning. "I'm on! I can raise the quid."

"You get the quid back too," said Levison.

"Better and better! What paper is the competition in?"

"It isn't in a paper."

"No!" said Tom, in surprise. "Where is it, then?"

"Wait a minute. If I put you on to it, I want you to lend me a quid, so that I can go in for it, too," explained Levison. "I'll let you have the quid back out of my prize."

"Then there are two prizes of thirty pounds?"

"Dozens."

"My hat!" said Tom, in astonishment. "I suppose you're not trying to pull my leg—or gone off your rocker, by any chance?"

"I'm quite serious. Anybody who likes to put a quid down can be absolutely certain of thirty quid in return. You see, it happens that I've got inside information from a fellow in the know, and it's a dead cert."

"But it wouldn't be quite cricket to enter if you know the thing in advance, would it?" asked Tom.

"Yes; in this case it would. You'll understand when I explain."

"Explain away, then," said Tom Merry. He was quite interested now.

Certainly it sounded a little too good to be true, but he knew that Levison was a very clever fellow, and awfully deep. If there was anything in this, it was certainly worth hearing about—even if he had to miss his footer practice. Thirty pounds was a large sum, and if it could be won honourably and fairly, there was no reason why he shouldn't go in and win.

"First of all, it's understood that, if you take my tip and enter, you'll lend me a quid, so that I can enter, too?" said Levison eagerly.

"Done!"

"Good! Well"—Levison lowered his voice—"have you ever heard of the Muggleton Handicap?"

"The what?"

"The Muggleton Handicap."

"What is it—a race?"

"Yes."

Tom Merry frowned. A glimmering of Levison's real meaning began to dawn upon him. But Levison, in his eagerness, did not notice the Shell fellow's change of expression.

"It's a chance of a lifetime!" he said. "I dare say you know that an uncle of mine is a professional trainer—and I know a lot about racing stables."

"You won't get much good from that kind of knowledge," said Tom, with a curl of the lip.

"Knowledge is always useful. My uncle is trainer to Lord Luscombe, the owner of Four-in-Hand—that's a horse, you know."

"Oh, that's a horse, is it?" said Tom Merry.

"Yes. Four-in-Hand is entered for the Muggleton race—and all the bookies regard him as a rank outsider, without an earthly!"

"Do they?"

"You see, he's a dark horse," said Levison, quivering with eagerness by this time. "They don't know it, but he's a dark horse."

"What difference does that make?" asked Tom. "I suppose a dark horse doesn't run any differently from a light horse, does he?"

Levison gave him a pitying glance.

"It doesn't mean his colour, ass! It means that he's been kept dark—his form has been kept a secret, to surprise everybody on the day of the race. The bookies are offering thirty to one against him and several other outsiders. But, as a matter of fact, he isn't an outsider at all—he's being kept dark on purpose, but he's certain to romp home, and leave the whole field standing."

Tom Merry was silent.

"I've got the tip straight from Tom Tuttle, the jockey who's going to ride him," went on Levison. "I made friends with him when I was staying with my uncle last vac. He's let me into this—it's a dead cert. Just think of it. You lay your quid on Four-in-Hand, and when he gets home you rope in thirty quid. The bookies will be tearing their hair after the race, of course—you can bet your socks on that. Everybody who lays money on Four-in-Hand will net thirty to one."

"But if he's supposed to be an outsider, nobody will lay money on him, I suppose?"

"Only those in the know," explained Levison. "It's being kept awfully dark; but Tuttle has let me in, and I'm willing to let you in. You needn't have anything to do with the bookie. I'll get the money laid on for you. I know a man in Wayland—"

"You rotten cad!"

Levison jumped.

"Eh? What?"

"You rotten cad!" repeated Tom Merry, rising to his feet, his eyes gleaming scorn at the Fourth-Former. "So your competition is a race, and you want me to bet on a beastly horse; that's how I'm to make thirty quid?"

"Look here—"

"Suppose the Head heard of it?" said Tom Merry. "What would happen to you then, you silly fathead? You'd be sacked from the school."

"Oh, you needn't be afraid! It will be done under the rose, of course—"

"I'm not afraid," said Tom Merry disdainfully. "But I'm not a blackguard, either. And I'm not putting any money on horse-races. There's the door. Get out!"

Levison's face was almost convulsed with rage. He had fancied that he was getting along quite nicely, and Tom Merry's attitude came as a shock to him. His eyes scintillated as he glared at the captain of the Shell.

"You—you fool!" he muttered. "Can't you see that it's the chance of a lifetime? You could make a small fortune by risking a few pounds. I should think that at a time like this you could give up your humbug for once."

Right conduct always appeared to Levison of the Fourth as humbug. There were few things that Levison believed in.

"I suppose I can't expect you to understand that it isn't humbug, but principle," said Tom Merry quietly. "But I don't want to argue it with you. I've a jolly good mind to pitch you out on your neck for coming here and asking me to bet! Clear off!"

"You—you fool! You hypocrite!" hissed Levison, too enraged to care what he was saying.

But that was too much for Tom Merry. He was indignant and angry already, and the words were scarcely out of Levison's mouth when the Shell fellow was upon him.

"Hands off, you rotter!" shrieked Levison, and he struck out furiously.

His fist crashed into Tom Merry's face, but he had no time for a second blow. The Shell fellow's powerful grasp was upon him, and he was whirled off his feet. Tom Merry tore the door open, whirled Levison through the doorway, and sent him flying into the passage.

Then there was a terrific roar from two fellows who were just about to enter the study.

"Oh—crumbs!"

G

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See column 2, page 26 of this issue.

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OUR COMPANION PAPERS: "THE MAGNET" LIBRARY, Every Monday. "THE PENNY POPULAR," Every Friday. "CHUCKLES," 10, Every Saturday, 2.



Tom Merry tore the door open, whirled Levison through the doorway, and sent him flying into the passage. Manners and Lowther were just about to enter, and Levison crashed into them. "Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "Sorry! Ha, ha, ha!" (See Chapter 1.)

"Great Scott!"

Bump!

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "Sorry! Ha, ha, ha!"

Manners and Lowther of the Shell, and Levison of the Fourth, were mixed up on the floor of the passage in a wild array of arms and legs.

CHAPTER 2.

Herr Schneider is Pleased.

TOM MERRY grinned as he looked out from his study doorway. He could not help it.

It was a most unfortunate accident, but it had its comic side—to an onlooker, at least. The comic side, however, was quite imperceptible to Manners and Lowther.

They sat up—when they had sorted themselves out from Levison and from one another—and gasped, and glared at their chum.

"You howling ass!" roared Lowther.

"You frabjous jay!" shrieked Manners.

Levison scrambled up and limped away. He had been considerably hurt, and, from the looks of Manners and

Lowther, he guessed that he might be still more hurt if he stayed.

Tom Merry tried to look contrite.

"I'm awfully sorry, you chaps!" he gasped. "I was just chucking Levison out. I thought you chaps were down at the footer—"

"Ow! We came in for you, you silly ass—"

"We came for you, you blithering chump—"

Manners and Lowther picked themselves up and came into the study. Tom Merry retreated round the table. His chums looked as if they were meditating assault and battery.

"Pax!" said Tom Merry, holding up his hand. "It was really an accident. And I had to chuck Levison out."

"What's he been doing?" growled Lowther, dusting down his clothes.

"He wants me to put some money on a horse, and we had a little argument."

"The rotter! He ought to know better than to bring that kind of thing to this study," said Manners. "He'll get the push one of these days."

"It's a wonderful thirty to one chance," said Tom Merry, laughing. "He's got a tip straight from the stables, and he wanted to put me on to a good thing."

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY—

"A BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION!"

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of
Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"And you were showing your gratitude when we came along?"

"Just so."

"Well, you might have been civil to him if he was trying to do you a good turn, even if it was some of his blackguardly racing," said Lowther. Lowther had a bump on the back of his head where it had come into contact with the floor, and it had had a little effect upon his temper.

"Well, he jawed me, too," said Tom mildly.

"I dare say you jawed him first."

"Admitted."

"I expect it's all rot," said Manners pacifically. "I've heard of those precious dead certs before. The only certain thing about them is that the bookmakers get your cash."

"I don't know. Levison won some money once," said Lowther. "What sort of a thing was this, Tom? Let's hear about it."

"Oh, it was all rot!" said Tom. "Help me do my lines instead."

"Rats! Tell us about Levison's dead cert," said Lowther obstinately.

"Well, it's the Muggleton race, and he knows a jockey who's going to ride the winning horse, that's been kept dark," said Tom. "It seems that it's a dark horse, and that means a horse that's been kept dark—not a dark horse—"

"Teach your grandmother!" said Lowther. "I know that!"

"Do you?" said Tom, a little nettled. "Well, if you know more about jockeys and races than I do, I don't know that I envy you."

Lowther sniffed.

"What's the name of the horse?" he asked.

"Better ask Levison."

"What's the odds?"

"Blow the odds!"

"Look here—"

"Oh, ask Levison if you want to know about it," said Tom Merry. "I'm fed up with his blessed certs, and I've got to do my lines."

"Well, I will ask Levison, then," exclaimed Lowther; and he walked out of the study and slammed the door behind him.

Tom Merry glanced at Manners.

"What's the matter with Monty?" he asked.

"Seems ratty," said Manners. "Never mind. Let's do the lines. He was rather ratty this morning. He forgot his letter home last week, and his uncle had stopped his pocket-money for a week—the giddy Roman parent, you know."

"Poor old Monty! I hope he won't be idiot enough to listen to any of Levison's rot. This study keeps clear of that sort of thing," said Tom Merry anxiously. "We don't want to follow in the footsteps of Cutts of the Fifth."

"Oh, Monty's not such an ass as that," said Manners. "Give me the next sheet, and we'll get the lines done, and you can take them to old Schneider before tea."

"Good egg!"

And Tom Merry and Manners settled down to do the lines. When they were finished, Tom Merry conveyed them to Herr Schneider's study. The German master was seated in the armchair in his study, smoking a big meerschaum pipe, and reading over a letter with a very pleased expression on his fat face.

He glanced up at Tom Merry over his spectacles, and nodded kindly.

"Ah! It is tat you have done te lines?" he said.

"Yes, sir," said Tom, wondering what was the cause of the German master's unusual good humour.

Herr Schneider was not celebrated for good temper. Indeed, those very lines had been imposed upon the hero of the Shell because he had dropped a German dictionary upon the Herr's favourite corn. All the Shell had thought it very funny when Herr Schneider let out a terrific shriek and jumped clear of the floor. But the Herr had not agreed with them, and Tom Merry had found himself the richer by a hundred lines of Goethe. But Herr Schneider had evidently recovered now, and he was simply beaming over the letter in his hand.

Instead of scanning the imposition as usual, to detect whether more than one hand had been at work upon it, Herr Schneider waved to Tom Merry to lay the sheets upon the table.

"Tat is all right, mein poy."

"Thank you, sir!"

"I have received a nice letter, ain't it?" said Herr Schneider, evidently so full of satisfaction that he felt compelled to tell somebody about it. "Dere are pupils who remember deir old master, mein poy, as perhaps you will some day afterwards, when it is tat you shall need to speak Cherman, and you will tink of te old Cherman master who try very hard to teach you."

"Oh, yes, sir," said Tom. "I'm sure we shall always remember you, sir."

"I hope tat tat shall be so, Merry," said the Herr kindly. "If I giff you lines now, it is for your own good. If I shall rap you on der knuckles mit pointer, tat also is for your own good."

"I'm sure you're very kind, sir," said Tom demurely. Really, he was not anxious to have the German master so keen on doing him good in that way.

"I have here a letter from an old pupil," said Herr Schneider. "I have te honour vunce before to teach Cherman to a great Herr—to Lord Luscombe."

"Did you really, sir?" said Tom. He remembered that name. Levison had mentioned it as the owner of Four-in-Hand, the dark horse that was to romp away with so much of the bookmaker's money on the day of the Muggleton race.

"You have heard tat name, hein?"

"Yes, sir. A racehorse owner, isn't he?"

"Tat is right. A ferry great Herr," said Herr Schneider, with satisfaction. "He ask me to come and see him."

"That is very nice, sir."

"He does not forget his old Cherman master. I go to visit him, and see te races mit mein lord in te grand stand, ain't it?"

"How ripping, sir!" said Tom.

"Ach! It is ferry kind ob te lord, I tink."

"Very kind indeed, sir!" murmured Tom Merry, wondering how long he was to stand there and hear about it. "If—if I ever become a lord, sir, I shall ask you to come and see the races with me."

The German master looked at him suspiciously.

"You may go, Merry," he said quite shortly.

"Thank you, sir!"

And Tom Merry left the study, leaving Herr Schneider re-reading his letter, with a fat smile of complete satisfaction on his face.

Two juniors were standing by the window at the end of the passage, talking in low tones. It gave Tom Merry a slight shock as he saw that they were Lowther and Levison.

They were so earnest in their discussion that they did not observe Tom Merry till he clapped Monty Lowther on the shoulder.

Then Lowther looked round quickly, a slight flush stealing into his face.

"Hallo, it's you!"

"Still light enough for some footer, Monty," said Tom.

"Run on with Manners, then," said Lowther. "I'm just having a jaw with Levison."

Tom hesitated.

"Can't that wait?" he said.

"Oh, rot!" said Lowther. "Why shouldn't I talk to Levison?"

"Look here," said Tom Merry bluntly, "are you talking about horses and races, and that blessed thirty-to-one chance?"

"Suppose we are?" said Lowther defiantly.

"Well, if you are, I think you're a silly ass, and Levison's a rotten rascal!" said Tom Merry wrathfully.

Levison's lip curled in a sneer.

"You're welcome to your opinion," he said. "I don't see that you are Lowther's master, Tom Merry, to order him about."

"Blessed if I do, either!" said Lowther. "Dash it all, Tom, you're not my grandfather! Let me alone!"

Tom Merry checked the hot retort that rose to his lips, and turned on his heel. He did not want to quarrel with his old chum; and he knew, too, that that was what Levison wanted. He walked away without replying, though he was feeling very angry. But Monty Lowther did not notice his clouded face as he went. He was deep in discussion with Levison a few moments later, and he did not even glance after his chum.

CHAPTER 3.

Levison's Tip.

© UTTS of the Fifth lighted a cigarette, as he lay back in his comfortable armchair and stretched his long legs.

"We'll have a drag," he said.

Knox of the Sixth was sitting on the edge of the table.

ANSWERS

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FERRERS LOCKE, DETECTIVE,

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He had a cigarette between his fingers, but he had not lighted it. He was looking surprised and uneasy.

"A drag!" he repeated.

"Yes, if we can get three or four more fellows to come."

"I think you're off your rocker, Cutts," said the Sixth-Former. "Suppose we were seen?"

"Oh, we shouldn't be seen!" said Cutts carelessly. "Muggleton is a good distance from here, and nobody from St. Jim's will be at the races. The risk is nil. And it will be ripping fun."

Knox shook his head.

"Too funny for me altogether," he said. "You forget I'm a prefect. If anything should leak out!"

"Why should it?"

"Well, things do sometimes. I rather like the idea of going to the races, but, for goodness' sake, let's go as quietly as we can, and not attract attention."

"We want to do the thing in comfort," said Cutts. "I don't suggest taking front seats in the grand stand."

"I should hope not."

"A drag is the thing. We'll make up a party," said Cutts.

Knox shook his head again. He was quite as big a "plunger" as Cutts, but he lacked Cutts's nerve. Any St. Jim's fellow who went to the races on a half-holiday could be sure of being expelled from the school if his escapade were discovered. Cutts had run that risk more than once; but then he had a wonderful gift for getting himself out of scrapes. Knox was not quite so sure of his luck.

"We must go, anyway," said Cutts. "I've got a good bit of money, and I'm going to see whether Bully Boy wins without waiting for a telegram."

"Yes, I agree to that. But let's go quietly," said Knox uneasily. "We might get a trap and drive over, perhaps; but not a crowd of us."

Cutts shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, if you're suffering from nerves, have your way!" he said. "Anyway, a trap will cost money, and we'll get a couple more to share the exes. I think—"

Cutts broke off suddenly, and threw his cigarette into the fire, as a knock came at the door of the study.

"Come in!" he rapped out.

Levison of the Fourth entered.

He grinned as he scented the odour of tobacco-smoke. Cutts frowned at him as he closed the door behind him. Levison's manner was much more familiar and easy than a junior's manner should have been in a senior study. But Levison and Cutts were not on the usual terms of junior and senior. The blackguard of the Fifth and the cad of the Fourth had very much in common.

"Well, what is it?" asked Cutts sharply, and he extracted a fresh cigarette from his case.

"Thanks—I'll have one," said Levison.

Cutts extended his case.

Levison lighted a cigarette, Knox of the Sixth looking at him rather grimly. It was Knox's duty as a prefect to come down very heavily on a junior for anything of that kind; but Knox could not "come the prefect" with Levison. Levison knew too many of his little secrets.

"I saw you with Weekes the bookie in Wayland yesterday," Cutts, Levison remarked, as he blew out a cloud of smoke. Cutts scowled.

"You see too much sometimes, Levison," he remarked. "It will get you a hiding one of these days."

Levison laughed.

"I've come to talk business," he said. "I want to go to Muggleton on Wednesday."

"What for?"

"Guess!" said Levison sarcastically.

"If you're thinking of going to the races," said Knox, attempting to assume the manner of a prefect, "you'd better give it up. I couldn't allow anything of the sort."

"Couldn't you?" said Levison. "But you're going."

"Of course I'm not thinking of anything of the kind."

"Then you've changed your mind suddenly. You were thinking of it five minutes ago," said the junior coolly.

Knox made an angry gesture.

"You young cad! You've been listening at the door!" he exclaimed furiously.

"I heard a few words," said Levison cheerfully. "But I guessed that you were going, anyway—you and Cutts. Well, I'm coming."

"You're not coming with us!" growled Cutts.

"Yes, I am," said Levison calmly. "I'm coming in the trap with you, and you're going to stand treat."

"You cheeky young hound!" exclaimed Cutts, jumping up.

"Hold on!" said Levison. "I'll explain. I think I can get another fellow to share the exes, if I don't hand out anything myself. Besides, I can put you on to a good thing in the principal race."

"I'm on to a good thing already."

"Bully Boy, I suppose?" said Levison disdainfully.

"Yes."

"Well, that's not a good thing—that's a rotten thing. Bully Boy hasn't an earthly."

"He's the favourite," said Knox.

"So he may be, but there's a dark horse, being kept quiet by the owner, and that horse is going to beat Bully Boy by whole lengths. They both belong to the same man, and the other geegee is miles ahead of Bully Boy. They've had trials together, and the other horse has beaten Bully Boy hollow."

"I don't believe it," said Cutts.

"It's a fact, all the same."

"What's the other horse?"

"Four-in-Hand."

Cutts burst into a laugh. He extracted a pink paper from his pocket and opened it.

"Listen to this!" he said. And he read out:

"It is not likely that Four-in-Hand, who is in the same stable as the favourite, will run. He has no chance whatever in this race."

Levison nodded.

"The stable is spreading that yarn," he said. "Four-in-Hand is being kept dark. You needn't take my tip if you don't want to, but it's a dead cert."

Cutts bit his lip uneasily.

"Look here, I've got quite a big sum on the favourite," he said. "If there's anything in what you say, I'm in a hole. How do you know?"

"Straight from the stable."

"But how?"

"I know the jockey who's going to ride Four-in-Hand, and who has ridden him in his trials with Bully Boy."

"Tom Tuttle?" asked Knox.

"Yes."

"You know him?"

"Yes. He's employed by my uncle, and I made friends with him last vacation."

The two seniors looked very grave.

"I say, that's pretty rotten," began Knox. "I took your tip about Bully Boy, Cutts, and I've going in pretty deep—on tick, too."

"Same here!" growled Cutts. "How was I to know anything about a dark horse?"

Levison chuckled.

"Everybody who isn't in the know will be astonished when Four-in-Hand gets home," he said. "I'm going to have a quid on him with Weekes, and that means thirty quid for me next Wednesday. If I could raise the money, I'd put twenty on him."

"That's the rub," said Cutts. "It's rather hard to raise the ready. But I could hedge on Four-in-Hand, if it's certain."

"I'll show you Tuttle's letter, if you like."

"Tuttle ought to know," Knox remarked.

"Yes, that would settle it," said Cutts, with a nod. "I'll see the letter. And—and if this is really a good tip, Levison, you can come with us, and we'll stand Sam. Why, if this is genuine, we can simply skin the bookies! I'd pop my watch and Sunday socks on a chance like that."

"It's settled, then," said Levison. "Besides, I can get a chap to stand his whack in paying the exes."

"Who is it?"

"Lowther of the Shell."

Cutts started.

"What rot! One of that crowd! They never have anything to do with this kind of thing."

"You never can tell!" grinned Levison. "Lowther's as keen after a chance like this as anybody else, if he's worked the right way, of course. As a matter of fact, it's from him I'm getting my quid. I'm stony myself. And I specially want to get him into it."

"Why?"

"For reasons of my own," said Levison coolly. "I'm up against that study, and it will be one in the eye for Tom Merry when his beloved chum takes to ways that are dark and tricks that are vain. Savvy?"

The two seniors laughed.

"Well, get me Tuttle's letter, and it's a go," said Cutts.

"Done!"

And Levison left the study in a state of great satisfaction. A drive to the races free of expense, and a loan to stake on the horse that was certain to win—Levison had reason to feel satisfied. It is true that there is many a slip 'twixt cup and lip; but Levison was too satisfied to think about that.

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY—

"A BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION!"

CHAPTER 4.

Shut Up!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY of the Fourth Form polished his eyeglass, and jammed it into his eye with an air of unusual determination.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was in a determined mood.

He was standing on the steps of the School House at St. Jim's, sunning himself, when Monty Lowther of the Shell came along.

Lowther did not observe him as he came up the steps. He seemed to be plunged in deep thought.

Arthur Augustus stepped into his path.

"Lowthah, deah boy!" he said, gently.

The Shell fellow stopped.

"Hallo! What is it, Gussy?" he asked, rather brusquely.

"I want to speak to you, Lowthah."

"Any other time do?" asked Monty Lowther. "I'm rather pressed—"

"I am quite aware of that, deah boy, and I am goin' to speak to you simply because you are wathah pwessed."

Lowther stared at him.

"Do you generally pick on a time when a chap's pressed to recite to him?" he asked.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Would you mind letting me pass, and doing your solo here by yourself?" the Shell fellow inquired sarcastically.

"I must weally speak to you, Lowthah."

"Well, pile in, and get it over," said Lowther resignedly.

Arthur Augustus looked round.

"I should pwefer more pwivate place, Lowthah. Heah we may be overheard."

"My hat! What is it all about?" exclaimed Lowther, in astonishment. "Are you going to tell me a deadly secret? If you are, go and tell Blake or Herries or Dig instead."

"It does not concern Blake or Hewwies or Dig, and it is not a secwet; it is a mattah of the gweatest importance, howevah. Pway come with me, where I can speak to you without bein' ovahheard."

"Can't be did!"

"I must weally insist, Lowthah."

"Rats!" said Lowther.

"If you prefer to speak heah, Lowthah—"

"I give you one minute," said Monty Lowther. "Life's short, Gussy; no time to listen to all your remarks."

"It's about what you are pwessed for time for, and if you want to speak heah about the wotten ideah you have in your silly head, you will do so at your own wisk."

Lowther started.

"Do you mean that you are putting a finger in my pie, in your usual way?" he asked, a flush coming into his cheeks.

"Haven't you ever heard that it's a good scheme to mind one's own business, Gussy?"

"I wegard this as my bizney."

"How do you make that out?" demanded Monty Lowther warmly.

"I wegard it as my dutay to look aftah you youngstahs to a certain extent. A fellow of my tact and judgment—"

"Ass!"

Arthur Augustus frowned.

"At any othah time, Lowthah, I should pwobably give you a thwashin' for applyin' that extwemely oppwobwious epithet to me. Howevah, I will look ovah it."

"Duffer!"

"I will also look ovah that!"

"Fathead!"

"And that also," said Arthur Augustus patiently, evidently determined not to lose his noble temper. "Will you come with me where I can speak to you, Lowthah, or do you pwefer it where evewyboday can heah?"

"If you must jaw, you may as well jaw in private," said Lowther ungraciously. "Let's trot round to the tower."

"It is hardly nesses to go so fah as that."

Lowther grinned.

"May as well make quite sure of it," he said. "Come on, Gussy. It's really kind of you to interest yourself in me in this way. You don't know how grateful I feel."

And Monty Lowther took the arm of the swell of St. Jim's, and led him away. Arthur Augustus was all smiles now. He felt it his duty to give Monty Lowther some fatherly advice, and he was glad to see Lowther taking the matter so sensibly.

They walked round the School House, and Lowther led the way into the old ruined tower. There Arthur Augustus halted.

"This will do vewy well, Lowthah."

"Better make sure," said Lowther. "Walls have ears, you know. Come up the steps."

"Weally, it is a good thing to be captious, but that is wathah ovahdoin' it, you know," said Arthur Augustus, in surprise.

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"You can't have too much of a good thing," said Monty Lowther solemnly. "When you're being cautious, Gussy, you should be really cautious."

"Yaas, but—"

"Come on!"

Lowther drew the swell of the Fourth up the old stone steps, and into a room. He made Arthur Augustus enter first, and then stood in the doorway himself, with his hand upon the heavy old oaken door.

"Now, pile in," he said.

"I have been observin' you, as a fwiend, Lowthah," said Arthur Augustus. "You have been talkin' a lot with Levison, of my Form. Now, I know Levison has a wotten dodge on—he had the awful cheek to pwopose to me to put some money on a horse—some beastly horse that is goin' to win thirty to one next Wednesday."

"And what did you say?" asked Lowther.

"I said some vewy plain things, and Levison turned quite wed," said Arthur Augustus cheerfully. "Now, as you have suddenly become thick with that awful outsidah, I cannot help suspectin' that he has been pwoposing the same wascality to you."

Lowther flushed a little.

"Yaas, I see it is so," added Arthur Augustus, whose eyes were keenly on Lowther's face, "I am weally surprised, Lowthah, that you should take any intewest in such wascally things. I wondah Tom Mewwy doesn't stop you."

"Oh, rats!" said Lowther grimly.

"Wathah not! Fellows get the sack for that kind of thing. Cutts and Levison will both come to gwief one of these days. I wegard you as a fwiend, Lowthah, and I cannot possible allow you to go on the woad to wuin in this way."

"Fathead!"

"I have wesolved to keep my tempah, and I shall wefuse to be pwovoked into thwashin' you, Lowthah. I am goin' to speak seriously—"

"No objection to that," said Lowther. "How long do you think it will take?"

"Pewawps ten minutes."

"Make it as long as you like," said Lowther generously. "I don't mind in the least as I sha'n't be here. Good-bye!"

Lowther stepped back suddenly out of the room, and drew the door shut after him.

Slam!

"Lowthah, you wottah—"

Arthur Augustus made a spring at the door. There was a grinding sound as the ponderous iron key turned in the lock. D'Arcy dragged at the door.

But the door remained fast. Monty Lowther's footsteps could be heard dying away on the steps, and a chuckle could be heard also. Then there was silence.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stood transfixed with rage.

He understood now why the humorist of the Shell had brought him to the room in the tower. It had been with malice aforethought, so to speak, with the intention of shutting him up there possibly as the only method of shutting him up.

"Bai Jove!" breathed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "The awful wottah! The fwightful beast! I'll give him a feahful thwashin' when I get out. But how the dooce am I to get out?"

That was a question that required answering. Arthur Augustus hammered furiously on the door for a few minutes, and shouted to Monty Lowther, but there was no sound of Lowther returning. Evidently he had departed, to keep the engagement Arthur Augustus had interrupted with his well-meant interference.

The swell of St. Jim's was a prisoner.

He crossed the room towards the old loophole that gave admittance to light. The opening was a yard across inside, but outside it was only six inches, narrowing through the thickness of the massive wall. There was certainly no possibility of putting even his head out.

Through the slit Arthur Augustus could catch a glimpse of the quadrangle, and of a corner of the School House. In the distance he spotted Blake of the Fourth strolling with Digby. But they were too far off to hear the sound of his voice.

"Oh, that awful wottah Lowthah!" murmured Arthur Augustus sulphurously. "I've a gweat mind to let the wottah go to the beastly bow-wows in his own beastly way, bai Jove! I wondah how long I am goin' to be shut up heah?"

And the unfortunate good adviser stretched his arm through the loophole, with a handkerchief in his hand, and waved it, in the hope of attracting attention from somebody.

CHUCKLES, 1^D. 2

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CHAPTER 5.

Drastic Measures.

TOM MERRY and Manners and Blake and two or three other fellows were punting a footer about the quad, about a quarter of an hour later, when the elusive footer led them in the direction of the old tower. Then Tom Merry caught sight of a handkerchief fluttering from the slit high up in the old wall.

He stopped, and regarded it with astonishment.

"What on earth's that?" he asked.

"Somebody in the tower," said Blake, cocking his eye up at the handkerchief. "Like a giddy, imprisoned damozel making signals to her giddy knight!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Some silly ass playing the giddy goat!" remarked Manners. "Where's that ball got to?"

"Help!"

The voices of the juniors close by the tower had reached Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in his prison. And he shouted from the loophole for help.

"Gussy!" roared Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha! He's got himself shut up there somehow!" roared Manners.

"Help, deah boys! Pway come up and welease me!"

"Like a bird!" said Tom Merry, laughing.

And the juniors hurried into the tower, and ascended the old stone steps.

"Where are you?" called out Tom Merry.

There was a thump on the inside of the locked door.

"Heah I am, deah boy!"

"Well, why don't you come out?" demanded Blake.

"The door's locked, ass!"

"Unlock it, then."

"The key is on the outside, you fwabjous chump!"

"That it jolly well isn't!" chuckled Jack Blake.

"There's no sign of a key here, Gussy. Didn't you lock yourself in?"

"You uttah ass!" shrieked Arthur Augustus, whose temper had suffered a little. "Why should I lock myself in?"

"Blessed if I know! I never do know why you do things," said Blake. "But if the door's locked on the outside, where's the key?"

"I suppose that beast Lowthah has taken it away with him!"

"Lowther!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Yaas. The uttah wottah shut me up in heah, and locked the beastly door!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is nothin' to laugh at, you silly asses! It is not funnay at all! I am goin' to give Lowthah a feahful thwashin'!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Will you unlock the door, you cacklin' asses, and let me out?" shouted Arthur Augustus.

"How are we to unlock the door without a key?" chuckled Tom Merry. "Do you know where Monty is gone, Gussy? We'll go after him."

"I believe he is with Cutts of the Fifth."

"Oh, rats!"

"If you say wats to me, Tom Mewwy—"

"Rats, and many of them!" said Tom warmly. "Monty hasn't anything to do with Cutts of the Fifth, and I know it! Don't be an ass!"

"If there were not a door between us, Tom Mewwy, I should give you a lickin' for that wemark! Will you find that beast Lowthah, and let me out?"

"Well, we'll look for him," said Tom. "What did he shut you up for?"

"The wottah bwrought me heah, because I was goin' to give him some good advice. Then instead of listenin' to my advice, the awful outsidah locked me in!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is not a laughin' mattah at all! Lowthah is goin' to the dogs, and I was goin' to look aftah him. Now I wefuse to do anythin' of the kind! The sooner such a wottah gets the sack the bettah!"

"You're talking out of the back of your silly neck, Gussy!" said Manners. "What has old Monty been doing?"

"He has been makin' bets and things, and waces and things, with that wottah Levison!"

"Bosh!"

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"Bosh!" repeated Manners with emphasis.

"And if you look for him now, I'm pretty certain that you'll find him with Cutts of the Fifth. He said he had a pwessin' engagement."

"Oh, rot!"

"Well, we'll look for him," said Tom Merry. "Wait till we come back, Gussy!"

"Pway huwwy up! It's wathah cold in heah!"

"Ha, ha! I suppose it is. Keep your fatherly advice next time till it is specially requested, Gussy!"

"Wats!"

The juniors descended the stairs again. Tom Merry was looking very grave. He had noticed, as well as D'Arcy, that Monty Lowther had been unusually "thick" lately with Levison of the Fourth, and he had not liked it. But he had not spoken to his chum more than once on the subject, as Lowther had developed an unaccustomed touchiness. That Levison would have been glad to make trouble among the Terrible Three, Tom knew; and he did not intend to play into the hands of the cad of the Fourth if he could help it. But if Lowther was really getting led into bad company, it was time for his chum to chip in, emphatically.

Cutts of the Fifth was a blackguard of the first water, and the less Lowther had to do with him the better.

"It's all rot!" said Manners, with an uneasy glance at Tom's serious face. "Monty hasn't anything to do with Cutts."

"We'll look for him there!" said Tom shortly.

Tom Merry and Manners and Blake proceeded at once to the School House, and made their way to Cutts's study. Tom knocked at the door, and opened it.

Cutts of the Fifth was there, with Monty Lowther.

They were engaged in an animated conversation, but they ceased immediately the three juniors presented themselves in the doorway.

Lowther turned red.

Gerald Cutts stared at the juniors calmly.

"What do you want?" he asked.

"We want Lowther," said Tom Merry curtly. "Come on, Lowther, old man!"

"I'm rather engaged just now," said Lowther. "I'm having a jaw with Cutts."

"The less you jaw with Cutts the better, I should think!"

"Oh, rats!"

"Monty, old man——" said Manners.

"Look here," exclaimed Lowther hotly, "I'm not a little kid to be looked after and watched! That silly ass D'Arcy has been trying it, and I've shut him up. Leave me alone!"

The juniors exchanged glances.

It was a curious thing how easily Cutts of the Fifth could get a younger fellow under his influence, if he chose to exert his powers. He could be a very agreeable fellow when he liked. But the Terrible Three knew him so well, and had had so much experience of his blackguardly ways, that it was surprising that a member of that famous Co. should be taken in by him. Tom Merry and Manners looked at their chum in mingled surprise and anger.

"Look here, Monty, you'd better come!" said Tom Merry at last.

"I won't!"

"What have you got to jaw about with Cutts?"

"Never mind that!"

"But I do mind that!" exclaimed Tom Merry hotly.

"You know very well that Cutts tried to get me into his rotten ways once, and you fellows helped me out. Now he's trying the same game with you, I suppose. You ought to know better, after my experience!"

"Thank you!" said Cutts, with sarcastic politeness. "May I mention that I am not used to being slanged by fags in my own study?"

"You'll get used to it, if you don't leave my chum alone!" said Tom Merry. "You know what we think of you!"

Cutts yawned.

"There's the door!" he remarked.

"Will you come, Monty?"

"No!" snapped Lowther.

"Then we'll jolly well make you!" exclaimed Tom Merry, whose temper was rising. "You've no business here, and you know it! Collar him!"

"You silly ass!" shouted Lowther. "Let me alone! Hands off!"

But Lowther's expostulations were not heeded. Tom Merry and Manners and Blake collared him, and whirled him out of the study. Cutts burst into a laugh. The juniors were angry, and had not stopped to reflect; but, as a matter of fact, they were playing into the hands of the blackguard of the Fifth. That course of treatment was only likely to arouse the obstinacy in Monty Lowther's nature.

Cutts did not offer to interfere. He stood with his hands in his pockets, looking on and laughing.

Lowther gave a roar of wrath as he was whirled out of the study. He struggled in the passage, but the three juniors rushed him along, and his resistance was of no avail.

They arrived somewhat dishevelled and panting at the end of the passage. Lowther struggled furiously there. A heavy iron key fell from his pocket and clinked on the floor. Blake picked it up.

"Let me go, you fools!" shouted Lowther.

"Come on, Monty!"

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NEXT
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"A BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION!"

"I won't!"
Lowther tore himself loose, and stood panting, his face flushed crimson, his eyes gleaming with anger.
"Let me alone! You've no right to interfere with me. Mind your own business!"

"Look here, Monty—"
"Oh, cheese it; I'm fed-up with you!"
And Lowther, with an angry snort, strode away towards Cutts's study. Tom Merry and Manners and Blake exchanged hopeless glances. Their drastic interference had evidently done no good.

Blake whistled softly.
"Well, this is a pretty kettle of fish," he said. "I'll go back with you for him, if you like."

Tom Merry shook his head.
"Let him have his way," he said, compressing his lips. "We'll mind our own business, as he said."

And Tom Merry walked away, his face darkly clouded. Blake whistled again, and then walked off, making his way to the old tower with the key. A few minutes later Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was free once more. He came out of the room in the tower in a state of great wrath.

"You found that wottah?" he asked.
"Yes," growled Blake.
"Where was he?"
"In Cutts's study."
"Yaas, I thought so!" said Arthur Augustus. "Now you can come with me, and hold my jacket and monocle while I give him a thwashin' for playin' me such a wotten twick!"
"Cheese it!" said Blake. "There's going to be trouble enough, I think, without you chipping in. I think Lowther's going off his silly dot. Come on!"
And Arthur Augustus, on second thoughts, decided to let Monty Lowther off that fearful thrashing.

CHAPTER 6.

A Rift in the Lute.

THAT afternoon there was trouble in the Co.
Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther were always on such excellent terms with one another that any rift in the lute was sure to be seen at once. So before afternoon lessons were over, all the Shell knew that Monty Lowther was not speaking to his old chums.

Curious inquirers wanted to know the reason; but they received only the shortest of replies, and had to retire with their curiosity unsatisfied.

After lessons, Tom Merry and Manners came out of the Form-room together, but Lowther did not join them in the passage.

Lowther did not go down to footer practice.

After the practice Tom and Manners came in to tea, both of them looking somewhat clouded. They were both worried by the fact that they were on bad terms with their hitherto inseparable chum; and still more by the knowledge that Lowther needed them more than ever just now. For a fellow who came under the influence of Gerald Cutts was undoubtedly in need of firm friends to stand by him and see him through. What Cutts wanted with Lowther they did not know, but they knew it was no good that was in the mind of the Fifth-Former. And if Lowther was led into any recklessness, and trouble followed, it was pretty certain that Cutts would get clear, and that all the trouble would fall upon the junior.

The two Shell fellows wondered whether Lowther would come into the study to tea as usual. At the slightest sign of the olive-branch from their chum they were anxious to make it up.

They were both relieved to find Lowther in the study when they came in. He had the fire going, and the table ready for tea.

It was evidently a sign of peace, and their faces lighted up. Tom Merry determined to act just as if there had been no dispute as the easiest way of passing it over.

"Tea ready?" he exclaimed heartily. "That's good! I'm as hungry as a hunter."

"Same here!" said Manners.

"Just on!" said Lowther, a little awkwardly. "I thought I'd get it ready when you came in. The kettle's on the boil, and I've poached the eggs."

"Good!"

And the three chums sat down to tea with something of their old hearty cordiality.

Monty Lowther was unusually silent and thoughtful; but Tom and Manners were determined to notice nothing, and they chatted in the same strain as usual.

"We shall have a pretty tough match with the Grammar School next Wednesday," Tom Merry remarked. "I hear that Gordon Gay & Co. are in great form."

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Lowther started a little.
"Next Wednesday!"
"Yes; you haven't forgotten that we're playing the Gram-
marians?"
"No-no," said Lowther. "But—" He paused.
"It will be a good match," said Tom Merry. "We want to keep the practice up, too, Monty; we shall have to be in form."

"I don't think I want to play next Wednesday," said Lowther, colouring.

"You're feeling fit surely?"

"Oh, yes; I'm fit enough!"

"Then why not play? You would be missed from the team—we haven't another fellow up to your form to put in your place," said Tom anxiously.

"Oh, that will be all right!" said Lowther. "You could play young Hammond of the Fourth—he's a good man."

"But we want you!"

"I'm sorry, but—after all, it's only fair to give some of the others a chance," said Lowther. "Besides, I—I think I shall have an engagement."

There was a silence in the study. Lowther did not offer to explain what the engagement was. But both Tom Merry and Manners guessed that it had something to do with Cutts of the Fifth.

The silence lasted a long time, and Lowther's face grew redder and redder. He broke the silence at last.

"Look here, you chaps, I may as well speak out!"

"Perhaps it would be better," said Tom Merry drily.

"I've been talking to Levison—"

"Well?"

"He's told me about Four-in-Hand, you know, the dark horse for the Muggleton Race—"

"The cad!"

"I don't see that he's such a cad in that. Of course, I know that the Head's down on anything of that sort!"

"Do you think that he's down on it without reason?"

Lowther gave an impatient shrug of the shoulders.

"Well, lots of people bet on horse-races," he said.

"Yes—running horses in races, but not making bets on the races," said Tom. "Racing would be a real sport if there were no betting. When the money comes in the sport goes out."

"Lots of people play bridge for money."

"That doesn't make it right."

"People go to Monte Carlo and play roulette—"

"But they know they ought not to."

"Well, perhaps they oughtn't," admitted Lowther. "But nobody's perfect in this world, you know. Why shouldn't a chap have a bit of fun sometimes?"

"Fun's all right," said Tom. "But blackguardism isn't."

"That's too strong. This horse Levison speaks of is going to win at thirty to one against. It seems simply a sin to let such a chance go by. Just fancy getting thirty quid by putting on one quid!"

"Whose thirty quid?" asked Manners drily.

"The bookmakers' quids, of course."

"And where do they get it from?"

"From people who lose their money, I suppose."

"Exactly. It isn't their money; it's money won by gambling. And if you talk for a month of Sundays, Monty, you can't make it out that gambling is right."

"Well, if you put it like that, of course," said Lowther uneasily, "gambling is a horrid word, I know. But if you call it sport—"

"Better call a spade a spade!"

"Well, look here, it isn't as if I were going to haunt pubs and pal with bookies, as Cutts and Knox do," said Lowther. "It's just once—and once only. Here's the chance of a lifetime—why shouldn't I make something just for once?"

"For one thing, if you begin, you go on," said Tom Merry.

"If you win, you'll want to win again. It would be better for you to lose. Not that you've got much chance of winning, either."

"This is a dead cert."

"I've heard of dead certs before. The only thing certain in racing is that the bookmakers make money out of it. And they don't make money out of their losses."

"I—I suppose they don't," said Monty. "But—but this is a special chance. Levison knows the very jockey—he's got information straight from the horse's mouth."

"Even so, it's a rotten thing to do. You call it sport, or anything you like—but it's practically swindling to keep a horse dark like that, and take in the public."

"Well, I don't look at it like that."

"You used to—before Cutts got at you," said Tom bitterly.

"It isn't as if I were going to make a regular thing of it. Why shouldn't a chap have a bit of fun sometimes? Wouldn't you like a drive to the races?"



Cutts was rolled over in the grasp of the juniors, and then the lash rose and fell. Cutts roared with pain, and ground his teeth in helpless rage. "I'll make you sorry for this!" he panted. (See Chapter 11.)

"I should like that all right."

"Well, then, let's make a break for once," said Lowther eagerly. "I'm just going to put a single quid on Four-in-Hand, that's all. We'll go to Muggleton together on Wednesday, and have a good time. I'll stand Sam. It will be a ripping excursion!"

Tom Merry and Manners stared blankly at their chum. It seemed to them that Monty Lowther was taking leave of his senses.

"Go to the races!" repeated Manners.

"Yes."

"Why, it means the sack if the Head knew."

"He won't know."

"A thousand people might see us."

"We sha'n't take front seats in the grand stand. Cutts will make all the arrangements, and you know how clever he is."

"Clever enough to keep out of trouble, and to let his friends in for it; I know that," said Tom Merry.

"Oh, he isn't such a bad sort."

"You've always thought before that he was a rotten bad sort."

"I mean, he has his good points. I suppose he's a bad hat, but nobody's quite bad, through and through. He's been very decent to me lately."

"It seems to me that you're going off your rocker," said Tom. "You can't go to the races. It would mean ruin if you were found out."

"I've arranged to go," said Lowther sulkily.

"With Cutts?"

"Yes, with Cutts," said Lowther defiantly. "What have you got to say against it?"

"Lots! You can't do it."

"I can do it—and I'm going to."

"For goodness' sake have a little sense, Monty. You can't! Besides, there's the Grammar School match—"

"Blow the Grammar School match!"

Monty Lowther rose to his feet.

"I think you're a pair of narrow-minded duffers," he said deliberately. "I never liked Eric, or Good Little Georgey—never could stand them. I'm not a blackguard, I suppose—and I don't see why you should be down on me because I want a bit of excitement for once in a way. I call it narrow-minded."

"You can call it what you like," said Tom Merry angrily.

"I call it being commonly decent."

"Which means, I suppose, that I'm not commonly decent?"

"Not if you go to the races and bet on horses," said Tom.

"Whatever you choose to say about it, you can't make black white, and wrong right."

"Well, if I'm not a decent chap, you don't want to have anything more to do with me," said Lowther savagely. "You can go on playing Eric, and I'll go my own way. I'm fed up!"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 315.

NEXT
WEDNESDAY—

"A BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION!"

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of
Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

He strode to the door.
 "Monty!" exclaimed Tom, jumping up.
 Lowther did not reply. He strode from the study, and closed the door behind him with a resounding slam.
 There was a rift in the lute, now, with a vengeance.

CHAPTER 7.

The Only Way.

TOM MERRY and Manners stared at one another blankly. Monty Lowther's quick footsteps died away along the passage.

He was gone! And he left dismay in the study behind him.

"Well," said Manners, at last, with a deep breath, "this beats it, Tommy! I should never have thought that Monty could be such a silly ass."

Tom Merry compressed his lips.

"I've a jolly good mind to let him go his own way, and have nothing more to do with him!" he exclaimed angrily.

But Manners shook his head.

"That won't do, Tommy. He's our old pal—and all this is due to Cutts. We've got to see Monty through this, somehow."

"But how—if he won't let us?"

"We can't let him go his own way. Dash it all, it means the sack! I——" Manners broke off as a tap came at the door.

The door opened, and Blake of the Fourth came in. Blake looked from one to the other of the Shell fellows with a puzzled expression.

"Anything up?" he asked.

"Yes," said Tom Merry shortly.

"Lowther's just passed me with a giddy thundercloud on his noble brow," said Blake. "You chaps haven't been having a row, surely!"

"I'm afraid we have," said Tom ruefully. "Shut the door, and give us some advice, Blake. Monty's determined to play the giddy ox, and we're determined that he sha'n't."

Blake closed the door.

"Tell your uncle about it!" he said. "You can rely on your Uncle Blake for good advice in case of family troubles. Pile in!"

"Keep it dark, of course——"

"That's understood; go on."

"Lowther's arranged with Cutts to go to the races next Wednesday."

Blake whistled.

"My hat! That takes the cake, and no mistake!"

"If he does, it's asking for the sack," said Tom Merry.

"It's very likely to come out, and you know the line the Head would take."

"A flogging, at least."

"Well, a flogging would serve the silly ass right—but more likely he would be expelled from the school. We don't want that."

"Rather not," agreed Blake. "He's got to be stopped. He seems to be rather an obstinate ass, though."

Blake reflected, wrinkling his brows in thought.

"You've argued with him about it?" he asked.

"Yes."

"And it was no good?"

"Not a bit."

"Then there's only one thing to be done," said Blake judiciously. "Unluckily, it's the same day as the Grammar School match. Would you be ready to chuck that up for the sake of looking after Lowther?"

Tom Merry looked worried.

"Well, I'm junior skipper, and the Grammar School match is going to be tough," he said. "The fellows will expect me to play. Still——"

"Oh, that's all right," said Blake reassuringly. "I'd be willing to captain the team in your place, if you like. It would come to the same thing."

"Would it?" growled Tom Merry, quite unconvinced.

"Yes—or better," said Blake calmly. "I'm willing to volunteer as skipper, so you needn't worry about that. If it's no good talking to Lowther, you'll have to take action—actions speak louder than words, you know. You'll have to watch him on Wednesday afternoon—and you can't do that while you're playing footer. When he goes out with Cutts you'll have to collar him!"

"Collar him!" said Manners.

Blake nodded coolly.

"Exactly! Collar him, and simply yank him in, and keep him in. If he objects, knock him down and sit on his head."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, that's one way," he remarked.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 315.

"It's the only way," said Blake.

"He cut up rather rusty when we rushed him out of Cutts's study, you know," Manners remarked.

"Let him cut up rusty," said Blake. "It's for his own good, isn't it? If Cutts & Co. are bowled out and brought up before the Head, Lowther will be jolly glad he isn't in the party, I should think. He's off his dot just now—he'll be glad afterwards that you chipped in. It's like appealing from Philip drunk to Philip sober, you know."

"Well, there's something in that," Tom Merry agreed. "Only—if we collar Lowther, Cutts & Co. may chip in, and then——"

"Then there will be a rumpus," said Blake. "And if Cutts takes a thick ear to the races with him, all the better. You'd better have a few fellows with you in case of trouble."

Tom Merry nodded thoughtfully.

"It's rotten to have cut the match, especially with the Grammarians in such great form," he said. "But I suppose we ought to do it for Monty's sake—confound him! Let me see." He drew a slip of paper from his pocket. "This is how the team stands: Fatty Wynn in goal, Herries and Reilly, backs; Redfern, Kangaroo, and Lowther, halves; Kerr, Figgins, myself, Blake, D'Arcy, forwards. I might put you in as centre-forward in my place, Blake, and young Hammond as inside-left in your place."

"Good egg!" said Blake.

"And Owen of the New House can take Lowther's place at half. Manners wasn't going to play this time, anyway. But—— I'm blessed if I know what will become of the match, if I stand out of it."

"Much the same as if you stood in," said Blake comfortably. "I'll skipper the team."

"I think we'll leave that to Kangaroo," said Tom Merry, laughing. "You can play centre-forward, and Kangy can captain from the second line."

"But I really consider——"

"It's rotten to cut the match," said Tom discontentedly. "Lowther ought to be boiled in oil for worrying us like this on the day of the match. I've a jolly good mind to let the silly ass go his own way."

"Can't let a pal go to the giddy bow-wows!" said Blake.

"No, I suppose not. I shall have to have some fellows with me, in case Cutts gives trouble on Wednesday afternoon," Tom Merry said thoughtfully. "You can speak to Digby about it, Blake—and there's Lumley-Lumley and Glyn and Clifton Dane. They'll all be willing to help, and they can be trusted."

"Right-ho!" said Blake. "No charge for good advice. But are you sure you wouldn't like me to captain the team?"

"I think we'll leave that to Kangy."

"Under the circumstances——"

"Oh, never mind the circumstances!" said Tom Merry.

"Have some of these chestnuts, Blake. They're good." And Blake grinned and consumed chestnuts.

CHAPTER 8.

Lowther Wants to Know.

WHEN Tom Merry posted up the list of players for the Grammar School match there was a good deal of surprise among the St. Jim's juniors.

Tom Merry's own name was missing from the list, as well as the names of his two chums.

It was a very unusual thing for the junior captain to miss an important match, and the fellows were very curious about it.

Quite a number of them made inquiries of Tom Merry on the subject.

But the captain of the Shell had only to say that he thought it better to stand out on that occasion, and that Kangaroo—otherwise Noble of the Shell—would captain the team in first-class style.

The news came as a surprise to Monty Lowther, as well as to the other fellows. Nothing had been said to him on the subject in the study. The three Shell fellows still did their preparation in the same study together, but they spoke little, and Monty Lowther had been having his tea in hall or in some other study lately. When they met for preparation they exchanged few remarks.

The rift in the lute was widening.

Lowther spent a good amount of time with Levison of the Fourth now, and was sometimes in Gerald Cutts's study.

Perhaps he was feeling a little lonely being estranged from his old friends, or perhaps it was sheer obstinacy, and he was bent upon showing them that he could do as he liked.

Lowther seemed quite changed from his old self these last few days.

Tom Merry and Manners knew that it was due to the influence of Cutts of the Fifth, and their feelings towards that individual were not pleasant.

They rather hoped that on Wednesday afternoon Gerald Cutts would cut up rusty, and give them an excuse for handling him. If it came to that, they were determined that he should have signs of their vengeance to carry to Muggleton Races with him.

When Lowther read the footer list on the notice-board on Tuesday he frowned a little over it, and after some thought he looked for his old friends. He found Tom Merry and Manners playing chess in the common-room.

Lowther approached the table, and stood looking on for some minutes, with his hands in his pockets, without speaking.

Tom Merry looked up genially. He was only too willing to make friends again at the first sign from Lowther.

"Give us a tip," he said. "Would you move the rook?"

"Oh, blow the rook!" said Lowther. "What about that match to-morrow? It seems that you are not playing."

"No; I'm standing out."

"What for?"

"Well, I've some reasons for standing out."

"Because I'm out of it?" asked Lowther.

Tom Merry did not reply. He seemed to be intently studying the game, and debating in his mind whether he should move his rook.

Monty Lowther bit his lip, and the line in his forehead deepened. He was evidently growing angry.

"Look here!" he exclaimed abruptly. "Have you chucked up the match on Wednesday with any idea of interfering with me?"

"I think I'll shove it on bishop's fourth," murmured Tom Merry, still apparently devoting his whole attention to the chess.

Lowther's eyes gleamed.

"Did you hear me?" he said.

"Don't speak to the man at the wheel!" chided Manners.

"You really shouldn't talk to a chap who's going to be mated in three, Lowther!"

"Mated in three thousand years!" grunted Tom Merry.

"Why, I've got you fixed! I don't care where you put your queen; I've got it!"

"If you intend to interfere with me to-morrow afternoon," said Lowther, in a low, concentrated voice, "I can warn you that it won't do! I sha'n't stand it."

"Check!" said Tom Merry.

"Will you answer me, Tom Merry?"

Tom looked up at last impatiently.

"I've got nothing to say," he said.

"Are you planning to interfere with my excursion to-morrow afternoon? That's what I want to know!"

"Wait till to-morrow afternoon, and then you will know," said Tom.

"That means yes, I suppose. Well, now I know what to expect!"

And Monty Lowther stalked away with compressed lips and angry brow.

"He's spotted it, you see," Manners remarked.

"Can't be helped!"

"It won't make any difference?"

"Not at all!"

Monty Lowther made his way directly to Cutts's study in the Fifth Form passage. He found that young gentleman smoking a cigarette and studying a pink paper.

Gerald Cutts nodded genially to him as he came in. It was a great pleasure to Gerald Cutts to have detached Lowther from his chums. He had never forgotten his old grudge against Tom Merry. And Lowther was very useful to Cutts of the Fifth just then. Cutts, with all his prospects of untold wealth when Four-in-Hand romped home, was short of money, and he had been short of money for some time, with the result that his credit was not good. Monty Lowther's contribution to the expenses of the trap on the day of the races was very welcome.

"Hallo!" said Cutts cheerfully. "You're not looking very chirpy! Not worried about your quid on Four-in-Hand, are you?"

Lowther shook his head.

"That's as safe as houses," said Cutts. "It's beginning to leak out now that there's a dark horse—a giddy Polonius behind the curtain, you know. The odds against Four-in-Hand have gone down to fifteen to one already. It will be down to evens to-morrow. The bookies are smelling a rat."

"Then it's really a cert?" Lowther asked.

"A dead cert! Levison's information was quite correct."

"And it means thirty quid to-morrow?"

"Thirty quid!" assented Cutts.

"It's a lot of money!"

"A lot of money to get for nothing," agreed Cutts. "You don't often get a tip like that. Levison is a useful beast."

Lowther seemed to hesitate.

"And you don't feel any scruples about taking the money, Cutts?" he asked.

The Fifth-Former stared.

"No. Why should I?" he asked.

"Well, money got by gambling isn't—isn't—isn't exactly like other money, is it?"

The senior laughed.

"Your pals have been talking to you, I see," he remarked. "My dear chap, all life's a gamble. What's the Stock Exchange but a big gamble? Monte Carlo under another name. What's business but a gamble? You take your chance in everything, and if you're lucky you score. And if you've got sense you freeze on to everything that comes into your hands. That's business."

"But—"

"Why shouldn't you take the bookies' money? Do you think they have any scruples about accepting their winnings?" said Cutts, laughing.

Lowther laughed too.

"No, I suppose not. It's all right, I suppose. I—I haven't done anything of this kind before, that's all. But I say, Cutts, I'm afraid Tom Merry and Manners have some idea of chipping in when we start to-morrow. Tom is standing out of the Grammar School match on purpose, I think."

Cutts frowned.

"They'd better not chip in and bother me!" he growled.

"Do we start from here?" asked Lowther.

"No; we go down to Rylcombe and meet there, and the trap will be waiting for us on the Muggleton road," said Cutts. "We'd better leave the school separately, and that won't excite any attention."

"Those silly asses may collar me—"

"Oh, come! I suppose they wouldn't have the cheek to collar you and keep you in by main force?" Cutts exclaimed in astonishment.

"I shouldn't wonder if they did."

"Then you'll have to dodge them," Cutts reflected. "Leave half an hour before the rest of us, and wait for us on the road. You'll know where to find the trap. It will be waiting on the Muggleton road, and you'll only have to walk on till you come to it. There will be a man in charge, and you can ask him if he's waiting for Cutts."

"Yes, that will be all right. I'll clear off immediately after dinner, then."

"Yes. And don't go out by the gates. Drop over the wall. You can do that behind the trees, where you won't be noticed. They won't even know you're outside the school then," said Cutts.

Monty Lowther grinned.

"Right-ho!" he said.

And he left Cutts's study feeling more easy in his mind. The excitement of getting away from his watchful friends added a zest to the adventure. There was, it was true, a lurking uneasiness in Lowther's breast—a haunting consciousness that he was doing wrong. He had argued it out that there was no harm in what he was doing, and his arguments had seemed reasonable and convincing enough; but he knew in his heart that it is always easy to find arguments in favour of doing what one wants to do.

A still, small voice within warned him that all argument on the subject was fallacious, and that it was simply a "dodge" to stifle the promptings of conscience. But the boy, in his obstinacy, refused to listen to the still, small voice.

When the next day came, Monty Lowther was still determined to throw in his lot with Cutts and Knox and Levison. And Tom Merry was equally determined that he should not. It remained to be seen what the outcome would be.

CHAPTER 9.

Tricked!

MONTY LOWTHER sat very silent and thoughtful at dinner that day.

He was thinking of the difficulty before him of escaping the keen eyes of his chums.

The thought that they should take it upon themselves to prevent him by force from carrying out his design made him very angry; but he knew that it was useless to mount the "high horse" on the subject. Tom Merry and Manners had made up their minds, and they would not have listened to him, and would have taken no notice if he had even quarrelled with them about it. They were simply determined that he should not go, and that was an end of it.

After dinner, Monty Lowther walked out by himself, and strolled in the quadrangle.

Tom Merry and Manners strolled in the quadrangle, too. Lowther knew that they were keeping an eye on him, and he gritted his teeth.

But he did not give way to his temper. He called out to Levison of the Fourth, who was talking to Mellish.

"Levison, old man!"

Levison looked round.

"Hallo, Lowther!"

"When you see Cutts, will you ask him when he's starting, and tell me?"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 315.

NEXT
WEDNESDAY—

"A BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION!"

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"Right-ho!" said Levison.

Lowther walked away. Levison grinned at Tom Merry and Manners, and went into the house. He grinned still more when he was out of their sight. He knew the arrangement Lowther had made with Cutts. Lowther's request to him now was simply for the purpose of throwing dust in the eyes of the two Shell fellows. Tom Merry and Manners naturally had the impression that Lowther would be starting with Cutts, and that there was no need to be specially vigilant until they saw Cutts leave the School House.

It was a trick—the kind of trick Lowther had never seemed likely to be guilty of. He was learning fast in the company of his precious new friends!

"We may as well get down to the gates presently," Tom Merry remarked to his chum. "We can see when Cutts goes, and if the Grammarians come first, we can meet them there. I'll whistle to the other chaps if I want them. I've arranged that."

"Good egg!" said Manners.

There was no sign of Cutts yet. He was not starting just then. Tom Merry discussed the coming match with Blake and Kangaroo, a little anxious about the result as he himself was standing out, as was only natural.

A little later, Tom Merry and Manners sauntered down to the school gates, there to keep watch and ward for Cutts & Co.

Kangaroo and the junior eleven were preparing for the match.

"Here they come," said Manners at last, as two seniors came down towards the gates.

Cutts and Knox were talking cheerfully together as they came out. They glanced carelessly at the two Shell fellows in the gateway.

"Hallo, not playing footer this afternoon, you kids?" said Cutts.

"No!" said Tom shortly.

"Slacking—eh?" said Knox.

"We've got something else to do!" said Tom Merry deliberately. "A chum of ours has some scheme for going out with a rotten blackguard, and we're going to persuade him not to."

Cutts flushed a little, and Knox scowled.

"I wish you luck," said Cutts carelessly.

And the two seniors walked out.

Tom Merry was a little puzzled. Had he been mistaken, after all? Lowther had certainly said that he was going to the races with Cutts that afternoon; but had he changed his mind?

Tom Merry hoped that he had.

At all events, there was no sign of Lowther coming down to the gates. A few minutes later Levison came along, but he was alone.

Levison glanced curiously at the two Shell fellows.

Tom Merry made a stride towards him.

"Isn't Lowther going with you?" he exclaimed.

"Lowther!"

"Yes. Where is he?"

"How should I know?" said Levison, with an air of surprise. "He's your chum, ain't he? You ought to know where he is."

"I understood he was going out with you," said Tom Merry, biting his lip.

"Would you like to search me?" asked Levison insolently. "You're welcome to look in my hat and in my waistcoat-pocket, if you like."

Tom Merry clenched his hand; and Levison walked on rather hastily, and disappeared down the road. Still there was no sign of Lowther coming.

"Perhaps he's changed his mind, and he's not going, after all?" Manners suggested hopefully.

"But you heard what he said to Levison half an hour ago about asking Cutts when he would be starting?"

"Yes; but he hasn't started with him, all the same."

"I don't quite catch on," said Tom, wrinkling his brows. "I should be jolly glad if he had changed his mind. We should be able to play in the Grammarian match, after all. Hallo, here come the Grammarians!"

A brake was rolling up the road, crowded with fellows in Grammar School caps.

The brake stopped at the gates of St. Jim's, and Gordon Gay & Co. of the Grammar School swarmed down, and were warmly greeted by Tom Merry.

"Here we are again!" said Gordon Gay heartily. "Ready to give you the licking of your lives, my infants."

"And we're ready to take it!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "Come in!"

"We'd better look for Lowther," he said in a low voice to his chum, as they walked to the footer ground with the Grammar School crowd. "No good waiting about any

longer. If he's not going, there's no need to miss the Grammar match. Kangy won't mind if I take my place, after all. He's a good sport."

"Right-ho!" said Manners.

Monty Lowther was not to be seen among the crowd who were gathering on the junior football-ground.

Leaving the Grammarians in their dressing-room, Tom Merry and Manners hurried into the School House to look for Monty Lowther there.

But he was not to be seen there; and no one knew where he was, or could give any information in reply to their anxious inquiries.

Lowther seemed to have vanished, as if the earth had opened and swallowed him up.

Several of Tom Merry's friends, who had willingly agreed to help him in this delicate matter, joined in the search for Lowther. But Glyn and Dane, and Digby and Lumley-Lumley, searched in vain.

Monty Lowther, it was soon pretty clear, was not within the walls of St. Jim's.

Tom Merry's brow was darkly clouded, as this truth forced itself home upon his mind. He understood now that he had been fooled by Lowther—fooled by his old chum.

"Lowther must have gone out first," he said moodily to Manners. "The others must have arranged to join him outside."

"I suppose there's no doubt he's with them?" said Manners.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"None at all, I think. But he must have sneaked out first before Cutts started."

"But what he said to Levison?"

"That was a trick."

"A trick!" said Manners, with a stare.

"Yes. He said it purposely for us to hear, so that we shouldn't keep an eye on him for a bit!" said Tom bitterly.

"Oh, my hat!" said Manners.

"Didn't you keep an eye on the gates?" asked Digby.

"Yes; he didn't go out by the gates," said Tom. "He must have dropped over the wall. I sha'n't be able to play in the match, after all. Wait a minute for me while I go and speak to Blake. Look here, you fellows, you're going to stand by me in this, aren't you?"

"Yes, rather."

"Then get out the bikes while I go and speak to Blake."

"The bikes!" exclaimed Digby.

"Yes; buck up!"

Tom Merry hurried away to the junior football-ground. The Grammarians had changed now, and were ready for play. Blake and Kangaroo met Tom Merry eagerly.

"Well, are you playing?" asked Kangaroo. "If you are, I don't mind a bit, you know. I'm willing to step down."

"No. I can't play. It's all right. I've just come to tell you, that's all. Pile in, and lick the Grammarians, if you can."

"Oh, we'll lick them!" said Blake confidently.

"Yaas, wathahl!" chimed in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I am weally in gweat form to-day. It will be all wight, Tom Mewwy. I assuah you that you will not be missed fwom the wanks at all."

"I hope not," said Tom.

And leaving the two teams on the footer-ground, preparing for the tussle, Tom Merry hurried back and joined Manners and the rest. They had brought the bicycle out of the bike-shed ready, and were waiting for him.

"What's the order now?" asked Digby.

"We're going after Cutts," said Tom Merry decisively. "Lowther's gone with him, and we're going to bring him back."

"Good egg!" said Manners.

"They have a trap, and there's only one road they can have taken to Muggleton," said Tom Merry. "We can beat them on the bikes, if we put on speed. That's the idea. You're game to back me up?"

"Yes, rather."

"I guess we'll back you up," said Lumley-Lumley. "But they've got a prefect with them, you know—Knox of the Sixth!"

"I don't care if they had a dozen prefects—I'm going to fetch Monty back, if I have to go after them alone!"

"You won't have to do that," said Clifton Dane. "We're all in it. After all, Knox won't dare to say a word about it afterwards, in case it should come out that he was going to the races. He wouldn't remain a prefect long if the Head got to know about that."

"Come on, then!" said Tom Merry.

And the half-dozen juniors wheeled their machines down to the gates, and out into the road, and mounted and pedalled away in hot haste—in pursuit of Cutts & Co.

CHAPTER 10.

Run Down.

LEVISON was the last to reach the rendezvous. Monty Lowther had arrived first, and was seated in the trap, when Cutts and Knox arrived. Levison came up ten minutes later.

"Jump in!" said Cutts.

Levison jumped in. Cutts had already dismissed the groom who had been in charge of the trap. He took the reins himself.

Knox sat beside him, and Monty Lowther was behind with Levison of the Fourth.

Knox and Cutts and Levison were looking very cheerful as the trap bowled away down the road. But Lowther's face was somewhat overcast.

He was thinking.

He had been determined to have his way—he had quarrelled with his best friends, and had given them the slip; but somehow he did not feel comfortable in his new surroundings.

The talk of the other three ran upon subjects congenial to them—races, bets, tips, billiards, and so forth—and Lowther felt himself out of it.

And he did not want to feel himself "in it" either.

He had a vague feeling that he was in an atmosphere of dingy blackguardism, and the talk of the three "sportsmen" jarred upon his nerves.

He tried to be cheerful; but in spite of himself his brow became gloomier and gloomier.

It was a bright, fresh afternoon, and very pleasant driving along the green lanes in the trap. With his old chums, Lowther would have enjoyed it well enough. But it was no use trying to think that he enjoyed it with Cutts & Co. He couldn't!

Cutts & Co. considered themselves sportsmen of the first water; but as Lowther listened to their talk he realised clearly enough that "sport" with them meant one thing only—money!

All their thoughts were for the amount they might win—for the cash they would have in their pockets when they had succeeded in "skinning the bookies," owing to Levison's valuable tip.

It was money, money, money, all the time.

A gang of moneylenders could not have been keener after hard cash than those three precious sportsmen seemed to be.

Not a single thought for the race as a race—as a trial of strength and speed between the horses engaged—the only point of view from which it could really be looked upon as a sport.

Cutts & Co. had not the slightest desire for the best horse to win, or for a fair race to be run—they wanted the horse they had backed to win, and they wanted to pocket substantial stakes as a result.

If that was "sport," Lowther reflected, then money-lending and card-sharping might also be considered as "sports."

Monty Lowther had expected to enjoy that excursion, but the enjoyment seemed to be very far off now that he was fairly embarked upon it.

And at home, at St. Jim's, the Grammar School match was going on, and he might have been playing for his school in a healthy, wholesome game, instead of hurrying away up a risky expedition after somebody else's money.

Levison looked at him occasionally with a cynical grin. He thought that Lowther was thinking of the risks of the expedition and the possibility of the "sack" if the sportsmen were found out. But to do Lowther justice, he was not thinking of that aspect of the case at all.

It was a wretched feeling that he was an outsider among outsiders that was worrying him and clouding his brow.

"My hat!" Levison exclaimed suddenly.

He was looking back along the road. Six cyclists, scorching at a great rate along the white, dusty road, had come into sight.

They were too far off to be recognised; but Levison knew that they were St. Jim's fellows.

Cutts glanced round.

"What's the row?" he asked.

"Some more chaps going to the races, I fancy," said Levison, with a grin. "Look at them!"

Cutts glanced back and grinned. But Lowther gave a start. The cyclists were drawing rapidly nearer, and Lowther had recognised the one who led.

"That's Tom Merry!" he exclaimed.

"Tom Merry!" ejaculated Cutts.

"Yes."

"Isn't he playing this afternoon?"

"No; he stood out of the match."

Cutts sneered.

"So that giddy paragon is going to the races, too!" he

exclaimed. "Well, we live and learn. I shouldn't have thought it of him."

"Digby's with him," said Levison, scanning the rapid riders. "And Dane and Glyn—and Lumley-Lumley—and Manners. Lumley-Lumley's dropping into his old ways again, I suppose, and he's taking the others along with him."

"They're not going to the races!" said Lowther curtly.

"Where else can they be going, on this road?"

"They're after us!"

"What!" exclaimed Cutts.

"They're after me, I mean," said Lowther, biting his lip. "I know they had some scheme of stopping me from going. They've followed!"

"They'd better not meddle with us!" growled Knox. "I'm a prefect, and—"

"What do you think they care for that, now?" said Lowther, with a bitter laugh. "You can't report them to the Head, I suppose?"

"Why can't I?" demanded Knox angrily.

"It might come out where you were going at the time."

Knox was silent. Certainly, under the present circumstances, the fact that he was a prefect was not likely to make much difference.

Cutts set his teeth.

"I'll lay the whip round them if they come near," he said, and he urged on the horse. "They sha'n't interfere with you, Lowther!"

The trap dashed on at top speed.

But the cyclists drew steadily nearer. They were scorching now at terrific speed, and it was fortunate that the road was a lonely one. Tom Merry was well ahead, and next to him came Clifton Dane, the Canadian junior. The rest were strung out behind, all riding hard.

They had evidently seen the trap, and the trap was equally evidently the object of their pursuit.

Lowther sat in silence gazing at them as the trap bowled on.

He did not know whether to feel angry or relieved.

It was like their cheek, certainly, to think of stopping him by force from going where he had chosen to go; but—

But there was a certain amount of relief in the reflection that, if they collared him, as they evidently intended, he would not be committed to the company of Cutts & Co. for the afternoon.

Nearer and nearer came the racing cyclists.

Tom Merry was close up behind the trap at last, and he waved one hand to Monty Lowther. Lowther did not respond.

"Monty!" shouted Tom.

No reply.

"Cutts, stop!"

Cutts flourished his whip as he glanced round.

"If you come near me, I'll lay this round you!" he called out.

"Will you?" said Tom Merry, between his teeth. "We'll see about that, you blackguard! There are enough of us to handle you, I think."

Tom Merry waved his hand in signal to his followers, and skirted the trap, passing it on the right. He shot past the vehicle, and forged ahead. Cutts made an angry lash at him with the whip as he passed, but he was gone like lightning. One after another, the rest of the cyclists shot past the trap, and rode on ahead.

Cutts gritted his teeth savagely.

He understood the object of the juniors. They were going to get ahead of the trap, and stop in the road—and Cutts would not be able to pass them. Six juniors would be quite able to stop the horse, however hard he drove on. And when once the trap was halted, there were enough of them, as Tom Merry had said, to handle the party, even if Lowther took a hand against his old friends.

For half a mile the cyclists ran on, and then Tom Merry gave the word to stop. The juniors, panting for breath, and crimson with their exertions, jumped off their machines.

The trap was coming on furiously.

There was no turning, so far, by which Cutts could turn from the high-road, and to turn back, of course, would have been to give up the trip. Just before the first turning Tom Merry & Co. halted. Cutts had no choice but to try conclusions with the half dozen juniors.

"What are you going to do?" muttered Knox uneasily. Tom Merry & Co. were standing in the road ahead of the trap.

"Drive on!" said Cutts, between his teeth.

"They're going to stop us!"

"Let them risk it!"

"I—I say, Cutts, if you drive over one of them—"

"It's their bizney if they get in the way."

"You—you idiot!" gasped Knox. "It might be fatal!"

"Let them clear out of the way, then!"

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A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD

NEXT
WEDNESDAY—

"A BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION!"

"Cutts—stop—for goodness' sake! Are you mad?" Knox laid a restraining hand on the arm of the Fifth-Former.

Cutts shook it off savagely.

"They can take their chance. It's their risk!"

And he drove on furiously, straight at the little group of juniors standing in the middle of the road.

CHAPTER 11.

Cutts for Cutts!

TOM MERRY & CO. stood their ground, facing the oncoming trap.

Three faces in the vehicle were white now.

But Cutts did not move a muscle. He had a nerve of iron. He believed that the juniors would jump aside rather than be run down. If they did not—

If they did not it was their own business.

The trap rushed on.

Tom Merry's eyes were gleaming.

"Cutts means to scare us off the road to make us let him pass," he said. "You fellows stand aside!"

"Rats!" said Digby promptly.

"I'm going to make a jump for the horse," said Tom grimly. "You chaps get aside, and be ready to help me. Some of you get on ahead. The horse will drag me a bit before I can stop him, I think."

"I guess it's risky!" said Lumley-Lumley anxiously.

"I know it is; but Cutts isn't going to beat us!"

"Let me do it," said Clifton Dane. "I'm used to horses. I've ridden them barebacked out in Canada."

"You can take the other side if you like," said Tom.

"For goodness' sake be careful, though! It would be easy to get trampled over if that brute really drives down on us."

"I guess he's going to," said Lumley-Lumley.

"Tom—" began Manners.

"I'm going to do it," said Tom quietly. "We haven't come as far as this to be beaten by Cutts at the finish."

The trap was close on them now.

Tom Merry and Clifton Dane stood ready to spring. The other four were further down the road.

Clatter, clatter, clatter!

"Cutts," muttered Knox,

"don't be a mad idiot! Suppose you injure them—"

"Hold your tongue!"

"Cutts! Stop!" shouted

Monty Lowther; and he

caught Cutts by the shoulder

from behind. "They're going

to jump at the horse! You

may kill them!"

"Let go my shoulder!" said

Cutts savagely.

"I won't! You're going to

stop!" said Lowther fiercely.

"You brute! Pull in the

horse! Do you hear?"

Cutts released one hand

from the ribbons for a

moment, and struck back-

wards at Monty Lowther.

The Shell fellow dropped back

in the trap, felled by the un-

expected blow. The trap

swept on.

All the savage hardihood

in Cutts's nature was roused

now. Whatever happened, he

was going to drive on and let

the fellows ahead take their

chance if they did not get out

of the way.

Clatter, clatter, clatter!

The trap swept down on

the juniors, and Clifton Dane

and Tom Merry sprang at the

same moment at the horse's

head, and caught the reins

and hung on grimly.

Their weight dragged down

the horse's head, but he thun-

dered on at a scarcely re-

duced speed, dragging the

juniors along, their boots

scraping on the dusty road,

their arms feeling as if they

were being wrenched from

their sockets.

But they held on.

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The speed of the horse slackened, and the other four juniors closed in and obtained a hold upon him.

Cutts rose in his seat, lashing savagely at the juniors with his whip.

The hard and heavy lash fell upon them cruelly, and they gasped with pain as they felt it; but they did not let go.

The horse was dragged to a halt.

Cutts was still standing up, lashing away savagely.

"Hold the horse, Dig!" muttered Tom Merry.

The horse, trembling in every limb, was easy enough to hold now. Digby kept a grip on the bit. Tom Merry turned towards the trap with the others.

Cutts lashed and lashed at him as he clambered into the trap, but he did not heed. He reached Cutts and grasped him.

"Now, you cad!" muttered Tom Merry between his teeth.

They struggled fiercely, and rolled back into the trap. Monty Lowther and Levison had jumped out. Levison had no intention of putting up a fight. It did not matter to him whether Tom Merry & Co. collared Lowther or not. Monty Lowther stood undecided. Knox came to Cutts's help, but two or three of the juniors seized the prefect, and dragged him out with a bump into the road.

Knox sprawled in the road, and Bernard Glyn promptly sat upon him, pinning him down.

Tom Merry and Cutts were still struggling, and the powerful Fifth-Former would undoubtedly have had the better of it, but Manners came to his chum's assistance. Cutts of the Fifth was dragged out of the trap into the road.

"Hold him!" panted Tom Merry. "He's been using his whip on us, and now he's going to have some of his own medicine!"

"Good egg!" said Lumley-Lumley.

Tom Merry picked up the whip.

Cutts was rolled over in the grasp of three sturdy juniors, and then the lash rose and fell upon him.

Cutts roared and struggled, but he could not get loose, and he had to take his punishment.

To be horsewhipped by a junior was a new experience for the dandy of the Fifth, and he almost foamed with rage as he writhed under the infliction.

Tom Merry panted as he threw down the whip at last.

"There! I think that will do!" he exclaimed.

"Had enough, Cutts?" asked Digby.

Cutts ground his teeth with helpless rage.

"I'll make you sorry for this!" he gasped.

He staggered to his feet as the juniors released him.

He was looking very dusty and very dishevelled and wild with rage. For a moment it seemed that he would rush upon the juniors. But he thought better of it. The odds were too much against him, and he did not want another horsewhipping. He gritted his teeth and clambered back into the trap.

"Let me get up, you young hounds!" said Knox, who had not struggled since he was floored. He had kept a nervous eye on the whip instead.

"Let the brute get up!" said Tom. "He doesn't matter to us—or Levison. The cads can go where they like. We want you to come with us, Lowther."

Monty Lowther looked sullen.

After what had happened he had not the slightest desire to go with Cutts, as a matter of fact. But the thought of yielding to force roused all his obstinacy.

"I'm going with Cutts!" he said.

"You're not going with Cutts!" said Tom Merry sharply.

"I am!"

NEXT WEDNESDAY:

A BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION!

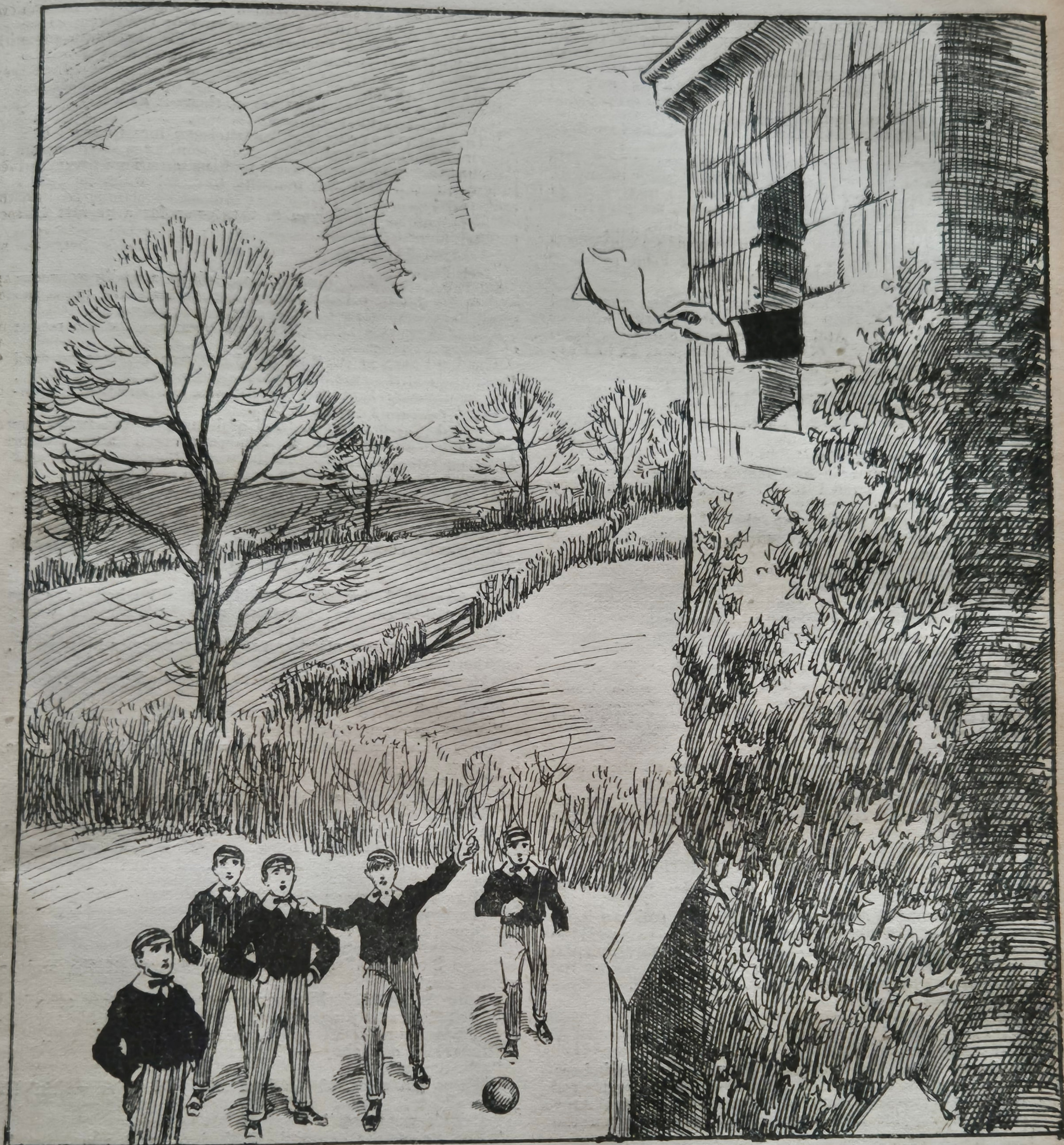
A Magnificent Long, Complete Tale of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's.

BY MARTIN CLIFFORD.

PLEASE ORDER EARLY!



Gran



Tom Merry caught sight of the fluttering handkerchief high up in the old wall. "What on earth's that?" he asked. "Somebody in the tower!" said Blake. "Like a giddy, imprisoned damozel making a signal to her giddy knight!" (See Chapter 5.)

"Drive on, Cutts!" said Tom Merry quietly. "You and your precious friends can get off. If you're not gone in one minute we'll cut the traces."

That was enough for Cutts. He cracked his whip, and the trap moved on, with Levison and Knox seated in it.

Lowther made a stride towards it, but the juniors gathered in his way. Lowther had to stop, and he clenched his hands.

"Look here! I won't come back with you!" he said between his teeth.

"You can please yourself about that!" said Tom Merry.

"But you're not going with Cutts!"

"What right have you to interfere with me?" exclaimed Lowther passionately.

"The right of a friend to save you from making a fool of yourself—"

"I don't look on you as a friend!"

"You can look on me as you please; but you're not going with Cutts. That's settled."

"Settled now, at all events. I guess," Lumley-Lumley remarked, with a gesture after the trap.

Cutts was driving hard, wreaking some of his fury on the horse, and the vehicle was disappearing in a cloud of dust in the distance. There was no chance of Monty Lowther overtaking it, even if his friends had allowed him to attempt it.

"Now, are you coming, Monty, old man?" asked Manners. "You can have a lift behind my bike, you know."

"I won't!"

"It's a long way to walk to St. Jim's," said Clifton Dane.

"I'm not going to St. Jim's!"

"Where are you going, then?"

"To Muggleton," said Lowther defiantly.

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Tom Merry smiled grimly.

"You're a good two miles from any railway-station, and it's twelve miles to walk to Muggleton," he remarked. "You couldn't possibly get there till the races are over. You're welcome to try. Come on, you fellows; let's get off."

The juniors returned to their bicycles.

Monty Lowther remained alone in the road, his face dark and angry.

He knew that what Tom Merry had said was correct. He had no chance of getting to Muggleton in time for the races. He stood undecided, hesitating. Not that he wanted to go to the races, so far as that went, but he would not give in.

Tom Merry & Co. came riding back.

"Won't you have a lift to the school, Monty?" Manners called out persuasively.

"No, I won't!" growled Lowther.

There was no more to be said.

Tom Merry & Co. rode back the way they had come, and after they were out of sight. Monty Lowther started walking in the same direction. And as he tramped along the long, white road, he had plenty of time to repent that he had not accepted Manners' offer of a lift.

CHAPTER 12.

Very Rusty.

"GOAL!"

"Bwavo, Figgins."

The Grammar School match was not over when Tom Merry & Co. arrived at St. Jim's, tired and dusty after their long ride.

Immediately after putting up their bikes, the juniors hurried down to the footer-ground to see how the game was progressing.

The second half was nearing the end.

"How's the score?" Tom Merry asked eagerly, tapping Kerruish of the Fourth on the shoulder. Kerruish was clapping his hand and cheering the latest goal.

"One to one now!" said Kerruish. "Gordon Gay scored in the first half; now Figgins has equalised."

"How long to go?" Tom Merry looked at his watch.

"Only five minutes. Looks like a draw. Well, that's better than a licking."

"Good old Figgins!"

"Hurray!"

The teams lined up again.

Neither side wanted a draw, and they put all their beef into the last five minutes of the match.

The Grammarian forwards came down in a rush upon the St. Jim's goal, and broke through the defence, and the ball whizzed in.

But Fatty Wynn was ready for it.

A fat fist smote the ball out again, and Herries cleared away to midfield, and the game went back with a rush towards the enemy's territory.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy captured the ball, and ran it up the field; and at the psychological moment, so to speak, he passed to Figgins, and Figgins slammed it home, in spite of the wild clutch of the Grammarian goalie.

There was a wild yell from the St. Jim's crowd.

"Goal! Goal! Goal!"

"Hurray!"

"Good old Figgins!"

Phip! went the whistle.

The match was over, and the Grammarians had been beaten by two goals to one. All the players looked pretty red and breathless when they came off. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy rushed up to Figgins and clapped him ecstatically on the back.

"Bwavo, Figgay, deah boy!" he exclaimed. "That was weally wippin', you know. I could not have done that bettah myself."

"Go hon!" grinned Figgins.

"Wonderful shot!" commented Blake. "Considering that Figgy did it from a pass from Gussy, it was what you'd really call miraculous."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Blake, you ass—"

"Well, we've beaten them, Tommy," said Kangaroo as he greeted Tom Merry. "How did you get on with Lowther?"

"We've stopped him" said Tom.

"Brought him back with you?"

Tom shook his head.

"He wouldn't come; he's walking it."

The cornstalk whistled.

"My hat, what an obstinate ass! He will be pretty fagged by the time he gets in, I should say."

"Serve him right," growled Tom crossly. He was almost as exasperated with his old chum as he was concerned about him.

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OUR COMPANION PAPERS: "THE MAGNET" LIBRARY,

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"CHUCKLES," 10.

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"We're goin' to have wathah a feed, and the Gwammah chaps are stayin' to it," Arthur Augustus remarked, as he joined them. "Where's Lowthah? We'll make him come to the feed, and let bygones be bygones, and then it will be all wight."

"He's not in yet."

"Look for him when he comes in, then—is he watty?"

"A little, I think," grinned Manners.

"Then pewwaps you had bettah leave him to me," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "If he is in a watty tempah, it is bettah for him to be dealt with by a fellow of tact and judgment. I'll take the boundah in hand when he comes in."

"Don't let him take you to the tower for a private talk again," chuckled Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, wats!"

Gordon Gay & Co. joined their rivals in a really gorgeous feed in the junior common-room, the studies being much too small to accommodate so numerous a tea-party.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy kept an open eye for the return of Monty Lowther.

The kind-hearted swell of St. Jim's was really concerned about the dispute that had arisen among the Terrible Three, and he thought that the present was an excellent opportunity for making peace.

Lowther would come in tired and hungry, and under the beneficent influence of a handsome feed and Arthur Augustus's tact and judgment he would "come round," and all would be calm and bright once more.

So while Tom Merry & Co. were entertaining the Grammarians Arthur Augustus slipped out of the common-room every now and then, to look for the returning wanderer.

But the feed was over, and the Grammarians had departed in their brake by the time Monty Lowther arrived at St. Jim's.

He was tired, hungry, and ill-tempered when he came dragging into the school at last, after his long and weary walk.

Arthur Augustus spotted him in the doorway as he came in, and bore down upon him at once.

"Heah you are, deah boy!" he exclaimed genially.

Lowther grunted.

"Tiahed?" asked D'Arcy sympathetically.

"Yes," growled Lowther.

"You should weally have had a lift back on one of the bikes—"

"Oh, rats!"

"You were weally a sillay ass, you know—"

"What!"

"I don't want to wub it in," said D'Arcy gently, "but you were undoubtedly a sillay ass. Howevah, let bygones be bygones. We have been havin' a feed with the Gwammah chaps—"

"Blow the Grammar chaps!"

"We beat them in the match—"

"Blow the match!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"And blow you!" added Lowther disrespectfully, and he walked on.

Arthur Augustus, feeling perhaps that he had not exercised so much tact and judgment as were called for by the circumstances, hurried after him, to make another effort.

"Lowthah, deah boy—"

"Oh, dry up!"

"We've got some of the feed left, and we're waitin' for you—"

"I don't want any."

"But its weally wippin', deah boy, and you must be hungry after walkin' all that fwightful distance. And we have agweed to let bygones be bygones, and not say a word about your being a sillay chump. I am not goin' to mention it to you, for one."

"Ass!"

"Pway come along, deah boy; we're goin' to tweek you as if nothin' had happened, without makin' a single reference to the fact that you have played the giddy goat—"

"Fathead!"

"Weally, Lowthah, if you persist in applyin' these oppwibwious epithets to me—"

"Dummy!"

And Lowther tramped upstairs.

Arthur Augustus jammed his monocle into his eye, and gazed after him, debating in his mind whether he should make another effort or not. He finally decided not. Monty Lowther was in too difficult a temper to be managed just then, and as D'Arcy confided to Blake afterwards, he didn't want to finish the matter by giving the Shell fellow a fearful thrashing. That would have shown neither tact nor judgment.

Arthur Augustus returned to the common-room.

"Lowthah's come in," he remarked.

"Where is he?" asked Tom Merry.

"Gone to his study."

"Oh, all right!"

"I twied my best with him, deah boys, but he seems vewy watty," said Arthur Augustus. "I weally came vewy neah gettin' watty myself, so I've left him alone."

Some time later Tom Merry and Manners went up to the study to do their preparation. They found Monty Lowther there at work, with a sullen expression on his face. He gave them a very bitter look as they came in.

Tom Merry bit his lip, and spoke out at once.

"Look here, Lowther, it's no good keeping this up!" he exclaimed. "You know very well that you oughtn't to have started for the races this afternoon, and that we did quite right to stop you. Now it's all over, let bygones be bygones and let's say no more about it."

"You had no right to interfere with me, whatever I chose to do," said Lowther.

"Do you mean that you are going to keep this up?" Tom asked bluntly.

"I don't want to have anything to say to you."

"Very well, you can have the study to yourself, then, to sulk in," growled Tom Merry. "I'm fed up with it. I'll do my prep in the Form-room. Come on, Manners."

Manners hesitated a moment, glancing towards Lowther, but Lowther kept his eyes sullenly fixed on the fire.

Then Manners followed Tom Merry out of the study, and Monty Lowther was left alone, with thoughts that were far from happy ones.

CHAPTER 13.

Danger Ahead.

"GREAT Scott!"

Knox of the Sixth dragged a handkerchief from his pocket all of a sudden, and held it to his nose, almost covering his face.

Cutts and Levison stared at him.

Knox wasn't blowing his nose; he was evidently pretending to do so, for the sake of covering up his features.

"What's the matter with you?" asked Cutts.

"Schneider!" muttered Knox.

"What!"

"Old Schneider's in the grand stand, and he's got field-glasses fixed on us."

"Oh crumbs!"

The trap was drawn up amid a host of other vehicles, where the occupants could obtain a view of the racecourse.

Amid so many spectators the three young rascals from St. Jim's had not supposed that they were likely to be seen or noticed.

That anybody belonging to the school would be there witnessing the races was not at all probable, and least likely of all was Herr Schneider, the German-master of St. Jim's.

But there he was.

Of the fact that Herr Schneider had once taught German to Lord Luscombe, and of the fact that his lordship had kindly asked the old fellow to join his party on the day of the races, Cutts & Co. naturally knew nothing.

They would as soon have expected to see the Head himself there as Herr Schneider.

But there Herr Schneider was.

It was a new and interesting kind of scene for the German-master, and he was greatly interested, and when there was nothing going on he swept the place with his field-glasses, studying the crowd and the animated faces.

Quite by chance his glasses had lighted upon the vehicle in which sat three St. Jim's fellows.

Then the glasses had become glued, as it were, to the spectacles of the German-master.

The sun glinting on the field-glasses had caught Knox's eye, and he had recognised the German-master in the distance.

Hence his attempt to conceal his face.

But he felt that it was too late. The field-glasses had been fixed upon him a full minute before that.

Cutts and Levison looked in the direction in which Knox was staring.

They, too, made out the German-master with his glasses fixed upon them.

Levison went quite pale.

Cutts set his teeth. It was a thing he had never looked for, and it took even the cool and iron-nerved cad of the Fifth a little aback.

"Old Schneider, of all people!" he muttered.

"What's the old fool doing here?" said Levison, between his teeth. "He's recognised us."

"Hang him!"

"Confound him!" said Knox, putting away his handkerchief. "It's no good. I can see he knows me. The Head will get it now."

"It means rotten trouble."

"Let's get out," said Levison uneasily.

"The principal race isn't run yet," growled Cutts. "We've got to wait till Four-in-Hand has run before we clear off, if there were fifty German-masters goggling at us through field-glasses."

"But, I say—"

"Clear off, if you like; I'm staying," said Cutts. "Besides, we can't get the trap out now, and we can't leave it here."

"Well, I'm not staying, with that old boulder watching me," said Levison. "I jolly well wish I had gone back with Lowther now. He was a lucky bargee to get out of it as he did."

"I—I think I shall clear, too," said Knox uneasily. "It's a good distance, and the old duffer mayn't have recognised us after all. But as soon as he can he'll come round to make sure of us. He'll be here after the race, Cutts."

"Let him!"

"Well, Four-in-Hand can win without our watching him," said Knox. "I'm off!"

"Funk!" said Cutts disdainfully.

"Funk or not, I'm not going to be sacked if I can help it."

And Knox slipped out of the trap, followed by Levison, and they scuttled away through the crowd, careless of the fact that the race was about to start—almost careless, in their fear of the consequences, whether Four-in-Hand won or lost.

Had the German-master recognised them?

They felt that he must have done so, with the aid of the field-glasses. Yet there was a hope that he had not.

At all events, the sooner they got back to St. Jim's the better chance they had of establishing an alibi and escaping detection.

"We can't drive back now," Knox said, looking at his watch. "We can get a train to Wayland, I think. Good! There's ten minutes. I know the train."

"You've been here before," grinned Levison.

"Mind your own business! Not a word about this at the school, Levison, and you'd better get some pal to swear that you haven't been out of St. Jim's all the afternoon. Old Schneider has bad sight, and he may not be able to swear to us."

"There's a chance," said Levison.

They hurried to the railway-station.

Ten minutes later the train was bearing them away, and they arrived at Wayland after dark and caught the local train at Rylcombe.

What had become of Cutts, what had happened in the race he had stayed to watch, they did not know and hardly cared.

Their own safety was what they had to think of now, and that was quite enough to occupy all their thoughts.

They passed a crowded brake in Rylcombe Lane. It was bearing the Grammarians footballers back to their school.

The merry fellows crowded in the brake contrasted very much with the two uneasy, sullen, worried rascals tramping home to St. Jim's.

They reached the school at last, and Knox went into the New House, to see Sefton of the Sixth, with whom he hoped to be able to arrange an alibi.

Levison hurried into the School House in search of Monty Lowther.

He found Lowther alone in his study.

The Shell fellow was doing his preparation, with a sulky brow. He glanced up as Levison came in, and did not look very pleased.

"Hallo! Back already?" he asked.

Levison sank breathlessly into a chair.

"Yes," he said.

"How did it go?" asked Lowther, with some eagerness.

"Did Four-in-Hand get it?"

"I don't know."

Lowther stared.

"You don't know! Didn't you stay for the race?"

"No."

"Oh!" said Lowther, in surprise. "Anything happened?"

"Old Schneider was there, in the grand stand, and he spotted us."

"Great Scott!"

"Knox and I cleared off at once, but Cutts is sticking it out. There's a chance that old Schneider didn't recognise us," Levison explained. "If we can prove an alibi he may think he was mistaken about us."

"You mean if you can make up a set of lies," said Lowther bluntly.

Levison sneered disagreeably.

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"Yes," he said; "it amounts to that. I'm not going to get a flogging or the sack, if I can help it."

"Looks to me as if you will, all the same."
"Not if I prove I wasn't there. You know what a blind old bat Schneider is; he can't be quite certain of us. If a fellow bears witness that I haven't been out of his sight all the afternoon—"

"Better ask Mellish; he'll tell lies for you, if he's got the nerve."

"That's just the difficulty. Mellish wouldn't have the nerve, I'm afraid, and he hasn't much of a reputation for truthfulness. I want you as a witness."

Lowther jumped.

"I," he exclaimed.

"Yes."

"What do you mean? How can I bear witness that you didn't go to the races, when I know jolly well that you did?" exclaimed Lowther.

"You can do it quite easily. Did you ride home with the others after they collared you, or did you return alone?"

"I walked—by myself."

"Then you came in rather late?"

"Yes."

"Good!" said Levison, rubbing his hands. "Now, that's ripping. You and I have been taking a long country walk together this afternoon. See? If Herr Schneider imagines he saw me at Muggleton, there's your evidence to prove that I was with you all the time, strolling on Wayland Moor, and so forth."

Lowther glared at the cad of the Fourth.

"You rotten cad!" he exclaimed. "Do you think I'm going to tell a pack of lies like that?"

"I think you'd better," said Levison, compressing his thin lips. "You're as deep in the mud as I am in the mire. If I get into trouble, you share it."

"I wasn't there," said Lowther. "I owe that to Tom Merry, anyway. I wasn't at Muggleton, though I was idiot enough to start."

"But you started," said Levison, "and if I'm bowled out over this, Lowther, because you won't help me, I'll take jolly good care that you're bowled out too. This isn't a time for being particular about a whopper or two; this is a time for sticking together and facing it out. Suppose Tom Merry hadn't stopped you, and you'd gone after all? Old Schneider would have recognised you as well as us. Then you'd have had to lie yourself out of it somehow."

"I shouldn't," said Lowther.

Levison shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, you could do as you like; but I'm not asking for the sack," he said. "I want a witness to prove that I never went near Muggleton this afternoon, and you're my witness."

"Better ask Mellish or Crooke. I won't lie for you."

Levison rose to his feet, a cold, greenish glitter in his eyes.

"You mean that?" he asked in a concentrated voice.

"Yes, I do."

"Very well. I'll do the best I can, but if I'm bowled out, mind, you're bowled out too. If the Head is down on me, he shall know that you started for the races with us, and that you've got money on Four-in-Hand with Weekes, the bookie."

"You cad! You mean that you'll sneak?"

Levison gritted his teeth.

"I won't suffer alone, because you're putting on the goody-goody bizney at this time of day!" he snarled. "If you wanted to play Good Little Georgie, who couldn't tell a lie, you should have remembered that Good Little Georgie didn't go to the races, either, or bet on horses at thirty to one against. In for a penny, in for a pound. Were in the same boat now, and we ought to stick together. But if you let me sink, I'll take jolly good care that you go down with me."

And Levison quitted the study and slammed the door.

CHAPTER 14.

Facing the Music!

TOM MERRY and Manners were at work in the Form-room, when the door opened, and Lowther came in.

The breach in the Co. had grown so wide now that Tom Merry had begun to think that it never would be healed.

And that thought brought a deep shade of gloom to his brow.

The Terrible Three had always been inseparable; there had been little tiffs sometimes, but they had always blown over. Was it possible that that firm friendship had come to an end at last, and owing to the miserable rascality of fellows like Levison and Gerald Cutts?

Tom Merry looked up, and his face grew eager as Lowther came in.

He was only too willing to meet his old chum half-way, if

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Lowther showed the slightest sign of extending the olive-branch.

"Done your prep?" asked Lowther.

"No," said Tom. "Lots of time, though. Is anything wrong?" He scanned Lowther's face, which was unusually pale. "Monty, old man, what's the matter?"

Lowther sank down upon a form.

"It's all up, that's what's the matter," he said.

Tom Merry and Manners looked very anxious. Lowther's tone was desperate; and in that moment, when their old friend was in evident trouble, all thought of quarrel and dispute melted away like snow in the sunshine.

"What is it, Monty?"

"I've just seen Levison."

"He's got back, then?"

"Yes. Old Schneider was in the grand stand at Muggleton, and he spotted the party."

"Oh crumbs!" ejaculated Manners.

"Schneider!" said Tom Merry. "My hat—I remember now—the old chap told me the other day he used to be Lord Luscombe's German master, and Lord Luscombe is the owner of Four-in-Hand. He said Lord Luscombe had sent him an invitation. So he was at Muggleton to-day?"

"Yes."

"And he recognised Cutts and the rest?"

"So Levison thinks."

"Jolly lucky for you you weren't with them, Monty," said Manners. "Surely by this time you're glad we yanked you out of Cutts's trap?"

Lowther groaned.

"It wasn't any good," he said. "I'm in it just the same."

"How are you?" said Tom Merry. "You didn't go to the races."

"But I started."

"Schneider can't know that."

"He will know it—the Head will know it—when Levison gives it away."

"Levison! But why should he give you away? He's cad enough, but it won't do him any good to get you into trouble."

"You don't understand. Levison hopes to bamboozle old Schneider—you know he's very short-sighted—by making believe that he wasn't at Muggleton at all to-day. If he could prove an alibi, old Schneider might think he was mistaken about him."

"How can he prove an alibi when he was there?"

"By lying, and getting a witness to lie too."

"Oh," said Tom, "there's a job for Mellish or Crooke! It will suit them."

Lowther shook his head.

"They're his pals, and they're known to be lying cads, and their word wouldn't be taken. He wants a decent chap to speak up for him."

"He won't get one to do it."

"He won't," agreed Lowther. "Not that I've got much right to call myself a decent chap, I suppose, after what I've been doing lately. But if I don't speak up for Levison, and tell a bundle of lies to screen him, he's going to give me away to the Head."

Tom Merry and Manners sat in silence and consternation.

Although they had not thought about the possibility of Herr Schneider being at Muggleton, they had known that the excursion to the races was dangerous, and they had striven to save Lowther from the danger against his will.

And they had believed that they had saved him. But the matter was not so simple as they had supposed.

Even the first step on the downward path is not easy to retrace. Lowther's recklessness had placed him in Levison's power, and Levison intended to use his power. Unless Monty Lowther saved him, he would take care that Lowther shared his disgrace and punishment.

"Well, that is rotten!" said Manners at last.

"What does Levison want you to do, exactly?" asked Tom Merry slowly.

"I'm to be ready with a yarn that we were out for a walk this afternoon together, and that he never went near Muggleton."

"The rotter!"

"Old Schneider is short-sighted, and there must have been a big crowd there, and so such a yarn as that may make him doubtful whether he really saw Levison, or whether he mistook another chap for him. It's a chance."

"You can't do it, Monty."

"I don't mean to. I've been a silly fool, but I'm not going to be a silly rascal too. If I'm bowled out, I'll face it the best I can without telling lies."

"But it may be the sack!" muttered Manners.

"Or a flogging," said Lowther. "It can't be helped. I've got to stand it. Besides, if I told lies as Levison wants, they mightn't be believed. Old Schneider may be quite certain that it was Levison. He had field-glasses."

"Whether it would be believed or not, you can't tell a lie to the Head about it," said Tom Merry decidedly. "Oh, Monty, old man, this is a rotten hole for you to be in, and we can't help you."

"I know you can't. I mayn't be here to-morrow," said Lowther moodily. "I—I say, I've been playing the giddy ox, I know. I've been a silly ass! I—I want to tell you chaps I'm sorry, before—before it happens, whatever it's going to be. If it's the sack—" He broke off, with a quiver in his voice.

"It can't—it sha'n't be!" exclaimed Tom Merry, starting up. "After all, you didn't go to the races."

"But I started, and there's the bet with Weekes the bookie. I can't deny that."

"Oh, Monty, old man, what an awful ass you've been!" groaned Tom Merry. "Why didn't you kick that cad out, the same as I did?"

"I wish I had; but it's a bit too late to wish that now," said Lowther. "It serves me right. I knew all the time I was doing wrong, only I wouldn't admit it. Even if that beastly horse wins, I've no right to the money, and I sha'n't take it. I've made up my mind about that."

"Good!" said Tom Merry.

The Form-room door opened, and Jack Blake looked in.

"There's something on, you fellows. Come out!"

"What is it?" asked Tom Merry.

"Old Schneider's just come in, looking like a giddy thundercloud, and he's got Cutts of the Fifth with him."

Lowther smiled grimly.

"He's sure of Cutts, at all events," he remarked. "There won't be any chance of Cutts to get out of it by lying."

"Do you think he's been spotted at Muggleton?" asked Blake.

"I know he has."

"Great Scott, he will get it in the neck, and no mistake!"

The crowd of fellows were left in a buzz, as the German-master and the dandy of the Fifth disappeared into the Head's study.

The excitement was intense.

Three fellows—one of them a prefect—had been spotted on the racecourse, and were to be taken before the Head!

There was only one opinion among the fellows as to what the result would be.

"It's the sack!" said Clifton Dane.

And the other fellows agreed with him.

"Here comes Knox!" said Lefevre of the Fifth.

Knox, the prefect, came in, looking pale and troubled. He had been expending a great deal of eloquence on Sefton of the New House, trying to persuade that youth to help him bolster up an alibi. But Sefton, though not particular about a crammer or two, as a rule, firmly declined to oblige on this occasion. As he bluntly said, it was no use telling crammers that were certain to be found out. So Knox was left to rely solely upon his own powers as an Ananias.

Knox walked quickly to the Head's study, without glancing to right or left. Some pitying looks followed him. Knox was not liked, especially by the juniors, but they could feel sorry for him now. He was in the same boat with Cutts of the Fifth, but he had none of Gerald Cutts's iron nerve.

Last came Levison. He was looking pale and bitter, with a crafty expression on his face. He paused to speak to Lowther.

"Are you coming in with me?" he asked, in a low voice.

The Shell fellow shook his head.

"You won't help me?"

"I won't lie for you!"

"Then get ready to be called in yourself, that's all!" said Levison bitterly.

And he passed into the Head's study.

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said Blake, with a whistle. "Jolly lucky for you you didn't go, Lowther."

Lowther was silent.

The Shell fellows left the Form-room. There was a crowd gathering in the passage. Herr Schneider, looking very grave and imposing, was making his way to the Head's study, and Gerald Cutts of the Fifth was with him. They had returned to the school together.

Cutts had an air of reckless hardihood, and he nodded coolly to his friends among the crowd of fellows looking on.

If he was going to get it "in the neck," at last, the black-guard of the Fifth at least was facing the music with unshaken nerve and coolness.

"You vill come mit me to te Head, Cutts," said Herr Schneider, glancing round.

"Certainly," said Cutts composedly.

"I also vant te ozzar two," said Herr Schneider. "Kildare, please—"

Kildare of the Sixth, the captain of St. Jim's, had just come out of his study.

"What's the matter, sir?" he asked.

"I take Cutts to te Head. He has been to te races this afternoon," said Herr Schneider. "I find him dere, and pring him pack."

"My hat," exclaimed Kildare, "you must be an awful ass, Cutts!"

Cutts shrugged his shoulders.

"Bal Jove, he's takin' it coolly!" murmured Arthur Augustus in some admiration. "The wottah has a splendid nerve, at any rate."

"Dere were two ozzers," said Herr Schneider—"Knox, of te Sixth, and Levison, of te Fourth. Vill you send dem to te Head after me, Kildare?"

"Yes, sir."

"Gum mit me, Cutts!"

And Herr Schneider marched off, with Cutts at his heels.

CHAPTER 15.

Paying the Piper.

DR. HOLMES was listening, with a grave face, to what Herr Schneider had to tell him.

The three delinquents stood silent and dismayed.

Of the three, only Gerald Cutts showed anything like courage.

Cutts was icily cool, but he knew that it was wiser to make some show of repentance and regret in the presence of the Head, and he had assumed an expression accordingly.

Knox and Levison were openly dismayed and apprehensive.

Herr Schneider explained with great gusto. The German-master evidently thought that he had deserved well of St. Jim's in bowling out the three young rascals.

"I see dem trough te glasses, quite plain, sir," he explained. "Two of dem clear off, but Cutts remain. I make my way to te trap, and he say—he was very cool—all right, but let him stay till te race was run. I refuse."

"Quite right!" said the Head, in a deep voice.

"So I pring him back mit me to te school, sir."

"Thank you, Herr Schneider! You have done the school a great service!" said Dr. Holmes. He turned his severe glance upon the trio. "Now, what have you to say for yourselves?"

"I am very sorry, sir," said Cutts smoothly. "It was done thoughtlessly for a little excitement, and I'm afraid I did not reflect how wrong it was until afterwards."

"You are quite old enough to know how wrong it was, Cutts, and as a senior it is your duty to set an example to the juniors, and not to lead them into temptation!" said the Head sternly. "And you, Knox—you are a prefect—you have done this, while I have been reposing faith in you."

"I'm sorry, sir!" stammered Knox, all his intended lies fading out of his mind under the stern gaze of the Head. "I know it was wrong. I—I—I'm sorry! It was just done for a bit of fun, sir; we never meant any harm!"

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"And you, Levison?"
 "I—I went because the others did, sir!" said Levison.
 "Lowther pressed me to go with him, and I—I didn't like to refuse!"
 The doctor raised his eyebrows.
 "Lowther!" he exclaimed.
 "Yes, sir; Lowther of the Shell."
 "Do you mean to say that he was with you?"
 "Yes, sir."
 "Did you see Lowther, Herr Schneider?"
 "Certainly not, Herr Doctor!" said the German-master.
 "Dere were tree of dem, and dese tree are dose tree!"
 "Lowther left us half-way to Muggleton, sir!" explained Levison. "Some friends came after him and made him go back."
 "Then he has some good and wise friends," said the Head.
 "But you state that he started with you for the races, in the same party?"
 "He did."
 "Then he should join you here!" said the Head, frowning.
 "Herr Schneider, will you have the goodness to call Lowther in?"
 "Ja wohl, Herr Doctor."
 Herr Schneider stepped out of the study, and returned in a couple of minutes, followed by Monty Lowther.
 Lowther was very pale, but he looked composed. The punishment of his folly and obstinacy had come, and he knew that he deserved it, and he had made up his mind to go through it with courage.
 "Lowther," said the Head, "I hear that you left the school with this reckless party, to visit the racecourse at Muggleton?"
 "It is true, sir," said Lowther quietly.
 "But you do not go the whole way?"
 "No, sir."
 "Did you change your mind, and turn back of your own accord?" asked the Head, in a more gentle tone.
 "I am sorry to say I did not, sir. My friends had more sense than I had, and they came after me, and made me leave the party."
 "It was your intention, then, to go to the races with these others?"
 "Yes, sir."
 "But for the inference of your friends, you would have carried out that intention?"
 "Yes, sir," said Lowther bravely.
 "You are speaking very frankly, Lowther; but your admission places you in exactly the same position as these boys."
 "I know it, sir!" said Lowther bitterly. "I'm not pretending to be any better than they are. We're a precious set of blackguards, and we ought to be kicked out of the school!"
 "I must inquire a little further before I decide on your punishment," said the Head. "If you visited the racecourse merely to watch the races, that is much less serious than if you indulged in any betting or gambling of any kind. Cutts, I ask you whether you have staked money on a horse?"
 Cutts looked astonished.
 "I, sir? Certainly not!"
 "You did not go there to bet?"
 "To bet, sir!" said Cutts, in a tone more of sorrow than of anger. "Oh, sir, I hope you do not really think that of me!"
 "We never thought of anything of that kind, sir," said Knox. "We just went off in the trap for a bit of excitement. Really, it was as much by chance as anything else that we got to Muggleton at all."
 "Yes, sir," said Levison; "we didn't think there was any great harm, sir, as we were out driving, in passing through Muggleton, and taking a look at the racecourse."
 "Certainly, the harm would not be very great, if that were all," said the Head. "I am not sure it is all, however. You have not spoken, Lowther. Have you made any bets on any horse running to-day at Muggleton?"
 Lowther was silent.
 "I must ask you for a reply, Lowther!"
 Knox and Cutts and Levison fixed their eyes upon Lowther, with a strange mingling of threats and beseeching in their expression. If Lowther joined in the general lying, there was a good chance of lying themselves right out of the scrape. But would he?
 Levison, at least, had his doubts about that. And Levison soon found that his doubts were justified. Monty Lowther did not intend to lie.
 "Yes, sir; I made a bet on Four-in-Hand!" said Lowther at last.
 Cutts gave him an almost murderous look.
 "For what sum?" asked the Head.
 "One pound, sir, to win thirty if Four-in-Hand got in,"

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said Lowther. "I—I was an ass, but—but it seemed such a lot to win!"
 "You made this bet with a bookmaker on the course?"
 "Oh, no, sir!"
 "With whom, then?"
 "With a man who lives in Wayland, and runs a betting business, sir."
 "His name?"
 "Weekes, sir."
 "How did you happen to meet him in the first place?"
 "I—I've never met him, sir!"
 "Then how did you contrive to make a bet with him without meeting him?"
 Lowther faltered. Levison had given him away without scruple, but he felt some hesitation in returning tit for tat, and giving Levison away. But he had to reply.
 "Another fellow arranged it with him for me, sir."
 "Indeed! And who was it?"
 Lowther did not answer.
 "Was it one of the boys here present?" asked the Head.
 "Yes; I see by your face that it was so. Cutts, I cannot accept your statement that there has been no betting! Lowther, who is undoubtedly the least guilty of the whole party, admits having made bets. There is not the slightest doubt in my mind that you others have done the same!"
 "Indeed, sir—"
 "I have now to consider," went on the Head, in a deep voice, "the question of your punishment. If I believed that this kind of conduct was a habit with you, I should expel you all from the school immediately. But I prefer to think that you have told the truth in stating that you were led away thoughtlessly by a desire for excitement, and did not consider the consequences. The two junior boys I regard as having acted under the influence of their elders, and I shall therefore dismiss them with a caning. But for you, Knox and Cutts, the matter is decidedly more serious, especially for Knox, who is a prefect, and in whom I have reposed my confidence."
 Knox's lip trembled.
 "I—I hope you'll give me a chance, sir," he faltered. "I—I acted thoughtlessly, I know, and—and I—I'm sorry, and—"
 "Lowther and Levison will be caned. You others I give of choice between a flogging and expulsion from the school."
 "Oh, sir!"
 "You may take your choice," said the Head coldly.
 The two seniors stood silent.
 "I am quite aware that senior boys are never flogged at St. Jim's, and it will be an unprecedented occurrence," said the Head. "But the circumstances are unprecedented. It is either that or expulsion, and for the sake of your people, and in the hope that you will be more careful in the future, I am willing to spare you expulsion."
 Cutts ground his teeth hard.
 To be flogged, in public, with all the school looking on—he, Gerald Cutts, the dandy of the Fifth, the "blade" and the leader of fashion in the school—it was a bitter humiliation! But it was better than the disgrace and ruin of being expelled.
 His mind was made up at once.
 "Very well, sir," he said, "I choose the flogging."
 "And I, sir," faltered Knox.
 "Very good!"
 The Head rose to his feet, and picked up a cane.
 "Come here, Lowther and Levison."
 The two juniors advanced, and took their caning. Levison writhed under it, but Monty Lowther stood it with fortitude. He knew that he was lucky to escape so easily.
 "You may go!" said the Head, as he laid down his cane, and the two juniors, squeezing their hands, left the study.
 "Herr Schneider, will you kindly ask Taggles to come here?"
 "Certainly, Herr Doctor!"
 Herr Schneider followed the juniors out.
 "I shall spare you the disgrace of being flogged in public, considering the high Forms you belong to," said the Head.
 "The punishment will take place here."
 "Thank you, sir!" said Cutts.
 They waited for the arrival of Taggles.
 Meanwhile, Lowther had joined his chums outside. Tom Merry and Manners had been waiting for him anxiously.
 "Sacked?" asked both of them together, as Lowther came down the passage.
 Lowther grinned ruefully, and shook his head.
 "No; the Head's a brick. I've been caned, so has Levison!"
 "Serve him right!" growled Manners.
 "Knox and Cutts are going to be flogged," said Lowther.
 "Flogged! My hat!"
 "A Fifth Former and a Sixth Former flogged!" exclaimed Blake. "Great Scott! That's something new! They won't



"Gents," exclaimed Mr. Huggins, "I rise to propose the 'ealth of my nevvv, Sidney Snoop." (An incident from "The Snob's Lesson!" the grand long, complete tale of Harry Wharton & Co. of Greyfriars, which is contained in this week's issue of "THE MAGNET" Library. Now on sale. Price One Penny.)

be able to look the fellows in the face afterwards, I should imagine."

"Wathah not!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "But I must say I considah that it serves them wight. They ought to have been sacked."

"Flogged!" echoed a dozen voices, in astonishment. "Knox flogged—a giddy prefect!"

"And Cutts—the Admirable Cutts!" exclaimed Kangaroo. "By George! Well, after all, he was really asking for it."

"Here comes Taggles!"

Taggles, the porter, passed them on his way to the Head's study. The door of the study closed behind the porter. The passage was crowded with excited fellows.

For a Sixth-Former and a Fifth-Former to be flogged was so unusual that the news spread like wildfire over the school, and half St. Jim's had gathered there.

There was a ceaseless buzz of voices.

From the Head's study there came a sound of swishing. The juniors listened for yells, but there were no yells, somewhat to the disappointment of the fags. As Wally D'Arcy of the Third remarked, it would have been fun to hear old Knox roaring. He had made Wally roar often enough.

But, severe as their punishment was, the two seniors had a sufficient sense of dignity to take it in silence.

Only the swishing was heard from the study, and that ominous sound ceased at last.

The door opened.

Knox and Cutts came out together.

There was a great change in the two seniors. Both of them were deadly pale, and Knox was shaking. Cutts still strove to carry his head high, and he returned the glances of the crowd with savage defiance.

The blackguard of the Fifth was game to the last.

He strode away, his head high, and disappeared, but Knox looked as if he were cringing as he walked unsteadily after him.

There was a deep breath when they had gone.

"Well, this beats it!" said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I fancy they won't be quite so doggish after this," Lumley-Lumley remarked. "Nothing like a real good flogging to take the doggishness out of a bounder."

"I was jolly lucky not to get the same," said Lowther, in a low voice, as he walked away with his chums. "I

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say, you chaps, I've been a fool—a crass idiot. But there won't be anything of the kind again, as far as I'm concerned."

"Of course there won't," said Tom Merry cheerfully.

"And—and if you fellows will overlook my playing the giddy ox," faltered Lowther.

"Not another word, you old duffer," said Manners. "It's all forgotten and done with. Let bygones be bygones."

"Not another giddy syllable!" said Tom Merry. "Don't think anything more about it. Only, Monty, old man—"

He paused.

"Well?" said Lowther.

"About your bet. If it comes off—if Four-in-Hand has won?"

"I sha'n't touch the money."

"Good!"

"As for the quid I put up, I sha'n't ask for that, either. It can go. I'm only too jolly glad to be out of the whole bizney," said Lowther. "And if Levison ever comes to me again with the chance of a lifetime, I'll give him such a hiding he won't know his face in the looking-glass."

"Hear, hear!"

And so the Terrible Three were on their old terms once more. Monty Lowther had had his lesson, and, severe as it had been, it had done him good. He was not likely to listen to the voice of the tempter again.

He did not even take the trouble to inquire whether Four-in-Hand had won that race or not; but there were others at St. Jim's who were quite keen on that point. Cutts and Knox and Levison were looking forward to their big winnings as some consolation for the punishment they had received. Levison, when the pain of his caning had worn off a little, made his way rather hesitatingly to Gerald Cutts's study. He entered it with some misgivings, not exactly knowing the kind of reception he would receive. Knox was there with Cutts, and both the seniors bestowed angry glares upon the cad of the Fourth.

"Have you heard about the race yet?" Levison asked.

"Not yet!" growled Cutts.

"You didn't see it run, of course?"

"No; that old fool dragged me away too soon."

"How are we going to know?"

"I shall get a telegram giving the winner," said Cutts. "I arranged that before Schneider collared me, in case he came down on me. It may be here any minute now. Of course, that will be all right. We shall make a small fortune over the race, and if it were not for that, Levison, I'd skin you. What did you want to drag Lowther into it for? If Lowther hadn't been there we could have stuffed up the Head that there had been no betting."

"I don't see why he should keep clear of it, when we were getting it in the neck," said Levison sullenly.

"Not for his sake, idiot, but for ours," growled Knox. "I'm not a prefect any longer—all through you, you young fool. We might have been sacked."

"We've been flogged, as it is," said Cutts, through his set teeth. "We shall never hear the end of that. But there will be a pot of money over the race—that's one comfort."

Tap! It was a knock at the door.

"The telegram very likely," said Knox eagerly.

"Come in!" called out Cutts.

Toby, the page, came in with a telegram in his hand.

Cutts snatched it from him, and signed to him to clear. The door had scarcely closed behind Toby when the Fifth-Former tore open the telegram.

He looked over it with avid haste.

Then a change came over his face. His features became fixed, and he stared at the telegram with starting eyes. Knox was watching him anxiously.

"What's the news?" he exclaimed breathlessly.

Cutts gave a yell.

"Sold!"

"What!" shouted Levison.

"Look at it!" shouted Cutts, holding up the telegram, in a frenzy of rage. "Look at it—Two Kisses, Bully Boy, The Hermit. No mention of Four-in-Hand. He hasn't even been placed! We've lost!"

"Lost!" stuttered Levison.

"Lost!" yelled Cutts, turning upon him furiously. "Lost! That's the end of it—that's the result of your precious tip—that's your splendid information straight from the horse's mouth. Not even placed, by gad. Nowhere! All our money gone!"

"And I've been betting on tick!" muttered Knox, white to the lips. "Where am I going to get the tin from to settle?"

"Where am I going to get it from?" howled Cutts.

Levison almost staggered to the door. Cutts was upon him with the spring of a tiger. All his disappointment, all his rage, were wreaked in the blows he rained upon the unfortunate junior. Levison howled with pain and fury; and when he was hurled headlong out of the study at last, he went sobbing down the passage.

It was likely to be a long time before the sports of St. Jim's indulged in another plunge—even upon the chance of a lifetime!

(Another grand, long, complete tale of Tom Merry & Co. next Wednesday, entitled "A BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION," by Martin Clifford. Please order your GEM Library in advance. Price One Penny.)

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SECRET SERVICE!



The Opening Chapters of a Grand New Serial Story. By AGENT "No. 55."

NOTE!

The author has, for obvious reasons, to conceal his real identity under the pen-name of Agent "No. 55." Concerning his position, I am allowed to say no more than this: that if his real name were revealed it would cause something like consternation in Diplomatic and Secret Service circles.

THE EDITOR.

THE FIRST INSTALMENTS.

Jerry Osborne, a young Britisher who is employed as a clerk in London by a German named Muller, goes to Berlin on a holiday, and there meets with an adventure which alters the course of his whole life. Chance throws him into the company of Max Elton, a famous British airman and inventor, who has established himself on the German coast in order to keep an eye on the secret preparations for war with Britain, which Germany is carrying on on a huge scale. Osborne joins Elton in his work, and learns that the airman is in danger of his life from German Secret Service agents, of whom Jerry's own employer, Muller, is the chief.

The two become fast friends, and go through many adventures together, finally coming back to England, where Elton becomes one of the advisers of the Cabinet. Various disasters happen to English arsenals and dockyards, but still no suspicion is breathed against Germany.

One night the motor-car of the Foreign Secretary, Sir Edmund Black, with Elton at the wheel, is waylaid on a lonely coast-road by Muller's emissaries, but after a sharp fight the Germans are beaten off. Meanwhile, Jerry, lurking in the neighbourhood, has seen Muller arrive by aeroplane, which he abandons on the marshes. Jerry disables the plane, and then, with Elton, goes in chase of Muller.

They stumble across Muller's discarded airman's outfit, which Elton dons. Then a whistle warns them that someone else is approaching. Elton, impersonating Muller in the darkness, goes to meet the new-comer, who is none other than the German ambassador. Elton receives a packet of secret papers, and when the ambassador at length becomes suspicious, bolts off into the darkness with Jerry. He falls on the slippery grass, however, and drops the packet, and to recover it Jerry has to use his electric torch. The two crouch in a hollow, while the line of lanterns which indicates the hostile searchers, draws steadily nearer.

(Now go on with the story.)

On the Track!

"The sea and those two Germans are behind us. D'you think we can slip between the lanterns unseen if we go forward?" asked Jerry, in a whisper.

And Elton replied:

"Used to be a decent shot one time—second for the King's Prize. Did you chuck away your gun, Jerry?"

Jerry hadn't; he had hung the sling over his shoulder, and a confounded nuisance it had been while he was running. Silently he passed the weapon to Elton.

And within a dozen seconds happened a series of surprising incidents. All at once the right-hand end lantern, now no more than thirty yards distant, went out. Before a man could count three another of the flickering lights disappeared. And then another. An angry cry reached the ears of Jerry. And then a fourth lantern came to grief. Elton and his noiseless rifle were doing some wonderful shooting together. The remaining lights were shot out, and Jerry could not restrain a whispered "Bravo!" of admiration for such marksmanship under trying conditions.

Keeping quite still, crouched near the ground, Jerry and Elton waited until the amazed searchers had actually walked or run past them. And then they rose without noise and made for the inn.

They missed a comic tragedy of which the marsh was the scene. But they were better employed. In their bed-room they were poring over the three sheets of paper that the oiled silk envelope had contained.

For Max Elton and Jerry Osborne the night had held anxiety and excitement enough. Another person had found it no less stimulating, and his troubles lasted the longer.

Scared by the mysterious destruction of his aeroplane, Muller, his flying-dress discarded, had made all haste to gain the road. He had heard the shooting as Sir Edmund Black's car was attacked, and the following hastening away of the car told him that the attempt had failed. His agents had fled. But he had other business than the kidnapping of the English Foreign Secretary. For several weeks he had been employed in the conveyance of secret communications from the German Embassy in England to Berlin. This night he had been warned such a message would be given him. Previous messages had been brought him by an attache who had travelled from London by car.

To give information that his plane had been ruined and

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY—

"A BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION!"

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flight to Berlin was impossible at once became Muller's first thought, for, spy though he was, he was a true patriot.

Crossing the marsh, he hit the road half a mile lower than where Black's car had been stopped. Here he fell in with a motor-waggon, one of those that convey deliveries of fresh Brightlingsea oysters to some of the great London hotels. He had begged a lift, and it was given. A mile run not bringing a meeting with the car of the expected embassy messenger, Muller had got down and hurried back to the marsh, fearing the man he expected must have arrived unknown to him.

And this actually had happened. It was while Muller was hastening back that Max Elton made up his mind to impersonate Muller himself.

Reaching the marsh, Muller fell in with his men who had attacked Sir Edmund's car. Lanterns were procured, and Muller intended having a thorough search for those who had rendered his flying-machine useless. And these, he was convinced, must be Max Elton and Jerry Osborne.

When, ten minutes after the marvellous shooting out of the lanterns, Muller and his angry followers, assisted by the now risen moon, captured two individuals hurrying frantically about the marsh, the leader was delighted. But the prisoners proving to be Baron von Krantstein and his attendant, a burly young under-secretary, instead of the two Englishmen, disappointment and rage choked Muller. Words failed him.

But they did not fail Von Krantstein.

"Blitzen! Ach, you dog, you traitor! So you would play false to those who employ you, to your Kaiser, your Fatherland!" shouted the enraged ambassador, as his eyes fell upon Muller's pallid face.

He whipped an automatic repeating pistol from the pocket of his great-coat as he spoke, and levelled it full between the secret agent's eyes.

"Give me back the packet for Berlin, and before I have counted three, or, by Heaven, I shoot you dead!" he cried, his voice trembling with excitement.

"Gnadiger Herr!" cried Muller, astonishment struggling with fear.

"Ein!"

Muller's mouth opened, but he did not speak; his eyes were wild.

"Zwei!"

There was no hesitation about Von Krantstein. He fully believed that it was to Muller he had given the packet, and betrayal of its contents was too serious for a man's life to stand in the way. He meant to shoot.

And Muller's men realised as much. Before the ambassador could pronounce the fatal "Three!" a shout broke from them, and they made a threatening advance. But a check was waiting.

"Keep back!" came the abrupt command from Von Krantstein's companion, and he produced a weapon similar to his principal's. "Keep away!"

And then, in a lower tone, he said to Von Krantstein:

"Sir, are you certain this is the man to whom you gave the packet? He is not dressed the same."

The "Three!" was not uttered, though certainly not because of the threatening movement of the men about Muller. Von Krantstein looked at the man, and saw him to be dressed in an ordinary lounge suit. The man to whom he had given the precious communication was clad in an airman's garb.

"Where are the clothes you were wearing?" he demanded of Muller, for still he doubted.

"My flying-clothes? I took them off an hour ago," Muller answered. "And I tell you, sir, that I have received no packet from you this night."

"How? Did you not meet with me? Did I hand to you the letter for the War Minister in Berlin? Did you not say to me that it was to London and not to Berlin you would take it? And then you did run away, and we have been searching for you since."

"Gnadiger Herr, this is the first time to-night I have seen you," cried Muller earnestly. "I have tried to find you, to warn you that my plane is destroyed, that for it to fly is impossible, that—"

"Himmel! Then to whom was it that I gave the letter?" interrupted Von Krantstein, in a strangled voice. He lowered his pistol.

Followed a quick-spoken explanation by Muller—though he said nothing about the attempted kidnapping of Sir Edmund Black—and Baron von Krantstein listened aghast. He had been tricked. Into the hands of someone, one who was no friend of Germany, he had given material of an importance not to be measured. And that person had vanished.

Baron von Krantstein, trusted ambassador, a diplomat of twenty years' standing, a shrewd, clever man of the world, THE GEM LIBRARY,—No. 315.

could not wholly conceal the fear that was growing within him. He saw himself ruined irrevocably. Worse, he saw the German Empire, his own beloved Fatherland, disgraced, tricked, offered to the hand of her great enemy, England, discredited among nations, her policy revealed.

He thought of the Kaiser, hard, stern, an enemy of those who failed. He pictured his wrath, and he trembled.

"Who can have done this?" he cried.

And Muller answered quickly:

"There is only one man—two men: Max Elton and Jerry Osborne."

There was dead silence. And then:

"And unless they have already gone, which Heaven forbid, I know where they may be found," cried Muller triumphantly.

The words aroused Van Krantstein from the semi-stupor into which he had fallen.

"Then, in the name of our Kaiser and our Fatherland, show me where these men may be found!" he exclaimed.

"Follow me!" said Muller dramatically.

And on the way to the inn, where sat Max Elton and Jerry Osborne deep in the deciphering of the secret communication, ignorant of the knowledge that Muller had of them, Baron von Krantstein, ambassador and high-born German, a nobleman, one "born," actually apologised to the person whom he had unjustly suspected and misjudged. That is to say, he expressed his regrets.

At a brisk pace the party took the road to the inn.

The Secret Message.

"What a higgledy-piggledy-looking lot of nonsense!" said Jerry, looking over his friend's shoulder.

"It does look as though it would take some figuring out," Elton admitted.

They were in their bed-room at the inn, the sheets of paper taken from the oiled silk wrapper lying on the table in front of them.

"Take!" repeated Jerry. "Why, to get at the meaning of that awful jumble would take a man years—if his friends didn't have to carry him into a lunatic asylum first!"

Max laughed.

"Perhaps it would—if one weren't used to such things, or hadn't the key. Any use at cryptograms, Jerry?"

"Not a bit."

"I've done something of the kind, but I admit this one is rather stiff."

Stiff! Glancing at the meaningless jumble of letters and figures upon the papers, written without any attempt to form coherent words, although breaks and divisions existed. But, as Elton informed Jerry, it by no means follows that in cipher-writing the divisions occurring in the cryptogram coincide with the divisions between the words of the actual message.

"Almost gives one a headache even to look at it!" declared Jerry. "There's no telling where to begin!"

"That's one of the beauties of a really good cryptogram," said Elton. "The less assistance given to any unauthorised solver, the better the cipher. Once make a good beginning, and a solver has gone a long way towards finding out the secret. But, as you say, this one doesn't give any kind of hint. It isn't the usual German Foreign or War Office cipher—I can tell you that much!"

"How d'you know that?" asked Jerry, still staring.

"Because I've handled both, and know them, though our Teutonic friends don't know that!"

"Whatever it is, this looks hopeless."

"Wrong there, old man. I don't believe there's any cipher ever invented, or can be invented, that a trained man, given time, wouldn't be able to worry out sooner or later. Haven't you heard of the cryptographic message that fell into the hands of the French Government some years ago? That came from Germany, by the way. Well, the experts got to work, and, after six months of sticking to it, they read it all right."

"Six months! But we haven't got that!" Jerry objected.

"No, my lad, and sha'n't want it either. I don't think this is going to give us much trouble—an hour or so, perhaps!"

"Then you mean to say that you have the code, or the key, or whatever it is, that'll help you to read this?"

"No. But I think I'll be able to make the key. They've given me a suggestion, whoever wrote this, and I take it this message has come from the German Embassy in London. The man who handed it to me was the German Ambassador." Jerry whistled. "Yes, that was Count Von Krantstein. I have met him once or twice. Lucky he didn't recognise me."

"Then I reckon this message is important!"

And Jerry stared at the sheets of paper with newly-awakened interest, striving to read into or invent some mean-

ing to words that were not really words, but only bunches of letters.

What he saw certainly wasn't promising. The characters were English all right, but the words they made were neither English nor sense. They didn't look as though they could have had a meaning in any language. Jerry might well have been puzzled, for this is what he saw:

1280224570334680482458052578061
4680724680817093570X146806:+513680
X+23680X+3147020-63580XV157050-
342580X+737018357020-14.

These figures were upon the first of the three sheets containing the message, and Jerry stared at them without the faintest comprehension. The only feature that might have some significance appeared to him to be the constant recurring of the noughts.

But the writing on the two other sheets seemed infinitely worse—a weird jumble that suggested brain-fever for the unhappy individual set to work to extract a meaning.

Max Elton, however, did not look particularly worried. He had glanced through the sheets while talking, and was now intently scanning the rows of figures. The others were the harder proposition, Jerry thought, and he wondered why Max did not tackle the most difficult first.

The message they contained seemed effectually hidden in the annexed jumble:

ALEC PLUTISO ONE
MERV MOUSI UNDLA
ME TIATH HIR OTY
THOU ISANDO NUTR
GNOOL UPPS ALEAV
EEMO IMANTYS SEC
LEON ADW MEELEKF



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AYSSA HOTH BENJE
TOWI MJOLL LARBE
ARRATIO GLASME I
LIN TOMOST ORILA
KNJOB KEMSTO AJA

Hearing Jerry groan, Elton looked up at him with a smile.

"Does look pretty awful, old man, doesn't it?" he said. "But, like lots of other things, its looks are the worst part of it. So I'm thinking, anyway, for I believe I'm acquainted with the principle of the thing."

"That's a comfort."

"Yes, save a lot of time. It's a jolly good cipher, although it isn't exactly novel. The French know it—call it La Grille. In Germany it goes by the name of Netz, or Gitten."

"But, however simple these things are, one can't do much without the key. And what does that line of figures mean, Elton?"

"They are the key, old man—at least, that's my belief. We'll test it shortly. You notice the 'noughts' that keep recurring at irregular intervals? Well, if my notion's correct, those noughts indicate the end of each line of the Grille."

"But what of the plus and minus signs dotted about, and the X's and V's?"

"Oh, they're simple enough! After each nought comes a figure representing the number of the line—first, second, etc.; and those signs are introduced simply to render these indications less obvious. It's a bit clumsy. For instance: X—2 just stands for 12, line twelve, that is; and 20—q—right at the end, you see; that means line nineteen. I'm just going to set out those numbers as I think they ought to go. Now, see here—Hullo! What's that?"

The cause of Elton's sudden exclamation was a gentle tapping upon the door of the bed-room, and after a quiet glance at Jerry, who understood, and walked noiselessly towards the door, Elton replied:

"Come in."

The door opened quietly, and Jerry and Elton saw the round, fresh-coloured face of the young man who assisted in the stables of the inn.

"What is it you want?" demanded Jerry sharply.

"I beg your pardon, sir"—and the fellow turned a pair of guileless blue eyes upon him—"but I was only sent up here to inquire if everything is all right, sir. Master noticed that a light was burning here, and, as it's late, he feared that one of you gentlemen might have been taken ill, or something gone wrong, so he sent me, sir. Very sorry, gentlemen."

"Well, you can tell the landlord nothing is the matter," Elton answered. "Don't let him worry because we are burning the lamp rather later than usual. You can go."

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir. I'll tell him." And the young man went off, softly closing the door behind him.

"I don't altogether like that young fellow," said Jerry.

"Neither do I," Elton agreed. "Much too quiet spoken and polite. Doesn't fit in, somehow. He's too well-educated for his job."

"Same here."

And then Jerry crossed to the table where lay the results of Elton's handiwork, a foolscap sheet, divided by neat lines in a large number of squares.

But they would not have been so easy of mind had either felt the slightest suspicion of the truth—that the soft-spoken young man they agreed in disliking was in Muller's pay; that Muller was well aware the inn was their headquarters; and that Count von Krantstein, at last made aware how he had been outwitted and by whom, was at that moment not thirty yards from the inn, alternating between spasms of hot anger and fits of the coldest horror and fear of the consequences, and vehemently swearing that no matter what might

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intervene, by fair means or foul, by force or craft, by murder, if necessary, he must get back the all-important communication to his Government.

But Elton and Jerry did not know.

"If you look at the figures," said Max, "you'll see that—excluding the ones that number the lines—none is higher than 8. That means there can be no more than eight spaces to each line of the Grille. Now, look at this ruled sheet of paper."

The paper was divided into eight spaces across the width, and by the length into as many rows as there were rows in the cipher message. But how this was going to help Jerry could not see, not even when he saw Elton begin to transcribe the message to the ruled sheet, observing exactly the same order, placing two letters in each square, except in those instances where a space, or division between the nonsense words, preceded or followed a letter.

When he had finished, Jerry saw the square all filled, the majority with two letters each.

Then Elton took a second sheet of foolscap ruled similarly to the first, but with some of the squares in each row neatly removed by his penknife. This he proceeded to lay over the sheet bearing the message, with the result that the greater part of the message was obliterated.

"Now have a look, Jerry, and I think you'll agree that it is a real smart cipher the German Ambassador has made use of for the purpose of sending the Kaiser a communication too important to be sent in the ordinary code. He chuckled, continuing: "See the dodge, Jerry? Those figures give the key. You'll see that the squares I've cut out correspond with the figures given."

And Jerry could see that. For instance, the first four figures being 1 2 8 0, and Elton having shown that "1" indicated the line, and the "0" the end of the line, the squares removed from the second sheet Elton had prepared were the second and the eighth. In the line 2, the squares cut away were the second, fourth, fifth, and seventh. The same principle had been followed all through.

"Now, old man, you can see we are left with so many letters visible in each line," said Elton. "I'll call these out, line for line, and you write them down. Put a big dash between separate lines. Yes, that's the way I mean. I'm just anxious as the dickens to see the result."

So was Jerry. His doubt and perplexity were giving place to a certain subdued excitement, which grew the greater as Elton neared the end of his dictating.

This is what Jerry found he had put down:

ECNE — RVOUSIND — IATHIRTY
— THOUSANDTR — OOPSLEAV
— EEMAYSEC —
ONDWEEKF — LEET — INMSMA
— YTHIRDAS — SISTFRAN —
CEAUST — IANOTG — IVINGW
— AYTHEN — WILLBE — TIME —
TOSTRI — KE.

Elton completed his dictation, and Jerry, looking up from the paper, his eyes snapping with excitement, met his friend's gaze. For many seconds the two stared at one another.

"Well?" asked Elton, and a faint smile crept about his lips. "Well?"

"It's marvellous," breathed Jerry.

"Let us rearrange the letters."

This was an easy matter, and in a few moments Jerry had the message written out. It was worth reading. He read it aloud.

"E C nervous India. Thirty thousand troops leave E. May, second week. Fleet in M S. May third, to assist France. Austria (by some error the R had been omitted from the word) not giving way. Then will be the time to strike."

"Jerry, I'd give something to know from whom Count von Krantstein obtains his information," said Max Elton quietly. "Plain enough, isn't it? Not much doubt of the meaning—eh? 'E C' certainly stands for English Cabinet, and there can't be much doubt but that 'M S' means Mediterranean Sea. My lad, we've made a find."

"You have, you mean. By George, Elton, I wonder if our countrymen will ever understand how much they owe to you! You're wonderful!"

(Another exciting instalment of this splendid serial next Wednesday.)

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is the principal character in one of the complete stories contained in

CHUCKLES, 1d.

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Enthusiastic Lady Artist (who is rather short-sighted): "My good farmer, what are those beautiful, waving objects near those trees, rivalling the latter themselves in grace and beauty of outline, making such a beautiful variety in the landscape, and seeming to hang 'twixt earth and heaven?" Old Farmer (gruffly): "My shirts, mum!"—Sent in by A. Waters, Western Australia.

WOUND HIMSELF UP!

Tommy's uncle took him one day through his farm. On coming out of the meadow, he saw a dog turning round and round, trying to bite its tail. "What kind of dog is that, uncle?" asked Tommy. "That's a watchdog," replied uncle. "Oh! I suppose he's winding himself up now?"—Sent in by G. Dobie, Scotland.

CANDID!

"Madam," said the shopman, "I have here a can-opener that can't be beaten. Candidly, it can open any can that can be opened by a can-opener, and if you show me a can, I can—". The lady had heard too much already, so she called out the canine, and the canvasser cancelled all further attempts to sell his can-opener and cantered away.—Sent in by T. Cooney, Oldham.

CLEARING HIMSELF BEFOREHAND.

Murphy was assistant cook on board a trooper bound for India. The first morning he forgot to wash the boiler out after breakfast, consequently there were tea-leaves on the surface of the soup when dinner was served. To clear himself of blame, he went to the respective messes, and said: "If yez foind any tay-leaves in the soup ye'll know it's mint!"—Sent in by Miss Bessie Henshaw, King's Heath, Birmingham.

HEARD IT ALL BEFORE.

One day a country-farmer, after going into a church and hearing a singularly powerful sermon, asked to be introduced to the preacher in the vestry. He complimented the bishop on his oratory and skill, expressed a very high opinion of the sermon, but added that he had heard every word of it before. The bishop looked pained and surprised. "Yes," replied the humorist, "and I will send you a book containing every word of the discourse." Next morning a bulky volume reached the place. It was a dictionary.—Sent in by Miss E. Butler, Hove.

ECONOMICAL.

"But, my dear," said the young husband, as he inspected the gorgeous smoking-jacket his wife had given him for his birthday present, "I am afraid you spent too much on this. Something cheaper would have done just as well." "Now," she pouted, "there you go! Grumbling over my gift, as usual! But this time you are in the wrong. I didn't spend any money on it." "You didn't? Then how on earth did you get it?" "I just had it put down to your account."—Sent in by David Dickinson, Blackpool.

COMBINATION.

"What do you want?" demanded Mr. Newlywed, as he confronted the tramp at the door of his little week-end cottage in the country. "Breakfast or work?" "Both, sir," the wayfarer timidly ventured in reply. "H'm!" said Mr. Newlywed, and disappeared momentarily into the house. Presently he returned, carrying a large slice of cake. "Then eat that!" he exclaimed savagely, "and you'll have both. My wife made it."—Sent in by A. Mathieson, Aberdeenshire.

PADDY AND THE HOTEL LIFT.

The Irishman who went up in the hotel lift without knowing what it was did not easily recover from the surprise. He relates the story in this way: "I went to the hotel, and, says I, 'Is Mистер Smith in?' 'Yes,' says the man with the sojer cap. 'Will yez step in?' So I steps into the room, and all of a sudden he pulls a rope, and—it's the truth Oi'm telling yez—the walls of the building began running down to the cellar!"—Sent in by E. Cole, New Kent Road, S.E.

WHY HE COULDN'T GO!

Little Bobby heard his father say one evening: "Pshaw! I wish young Sparks would go. It's nearly midnight, and I'd like to lock up the house and get to bed. What on earth can Sparks and Mabel talk about all these hours?" Bobby tiptoed to the parlour door, and peeped through the keyhole, then he tiptoed back to his father. "It ain't Mr. Sparks's fault, pa. He can't go, 'cos Mabel's sitting on him!"—Sent in by Miss E. Lewis, Gloucester.

SOLD!

Collector: "H'm! Fairly good specimen. I'll give you fifty pounds for it." Curio Dealer: "No, sir. I've just sold that for a hundred guineas." Collector: "A hundred! Good heavens, you've been swindled! It's worth twice as much!"—Sent in by T. Portman, Erdington.

JUST HABIT.

Traveller: "Guard, why didn't you wake me up when I asked you? I am miles beyond my station!" Guard: "I did, sir, but all I got out of you was, 'All right, Maria, get the children their breakfast, and I'll be down in a minute.'"—Sent in by S. Schofield, Manchester.

THE REASON WHY.

On alighting from a train at Euston Station, old Farmer Giles was accosted by one of his customers, who estimated himself as rather a wag.

He therefore inquired whether the farmer carried chalk in the box which was held tightly under his arm.

"It might be chowk right enough," the farmer answered.

"Oh!" said the dandy. "That's what you mix with the milk, isn't it?"

"Not exactly," said the farmer. "I've used so much chowk for the marking up of your milk on tick that I really had to buy another box."—Sent in by E. Watson, Stoke-on-Trent.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 315.
Long, Complete School Tale of
By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

MONEY PRIZES OFFERED!

Readers are invited to send **ON A POSTCARD** Storyettes or Short, Interesting Paragraphs for this page. For every contribution used the senders will receive a Money Prize.

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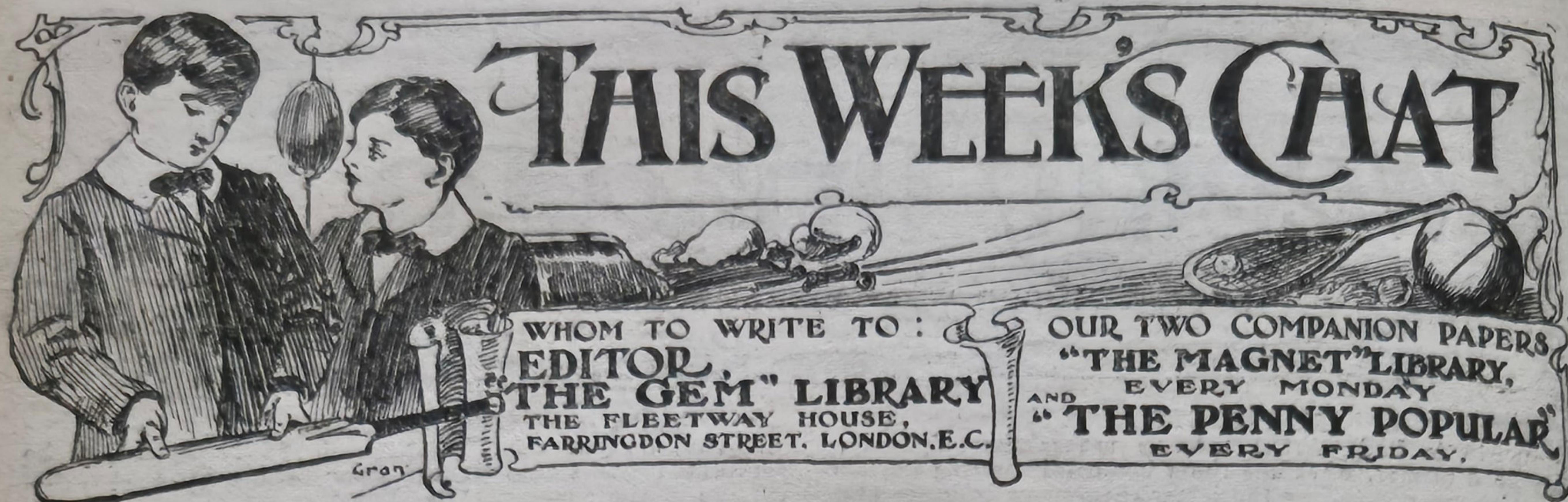
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No correspondence can be entered into with regard to this Competition, and all contributions enclosed in letters, or sent in otherwise than on postcards, will be disregarded.

NEXT
WEDNESDAY—

"A BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION!"

A Magnificent New,
Tom Merry & Co.

OUR SPECIAL WEEKLY FEATURE



For Next Wednesday.

"A BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION!"

By Martin Clifford.

In this splendid long, complete school story, Tom Merry & Co. concoct a scheme for celebrating the birthday of one of their respected masters. It is some time before the scheme makes any progress amongst the School House juniors, while the New House fellows declare definitely against it. Tom Merry persists with his idea, however, and the School House chums finally decide to carry it through, in spite of the opposition of Figgins & Co. Thereafter it becomes a matter of School House versus New House, and the contest is waged between them with the usual vigour. Figgins & Co. all but succeed in carrying through a first-class jape on their chums of the other House, but Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, by a fortunate accident, stumbles upon the whole plot in time to prevent a complete "mess up" of

"A BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION!"

ITEMS OF INTEREST.

Master G. Deeley, of 60, Duncan Terrace, Islington, would like to hear from fellow-readers with a view to forming a "Gem" Football Club.

Miss Mary Twomey, 276, Canning Street, North Carlton, Victoria, Australia, would like to hear again from the Mr. Twomey who previously communicated with her, but whose address she has unfortunately lost.

Master G. Coulbeck, of 21, Clyde Street, Grimsby, would like to join a "Gem" League in Grimsby, or would be willing to assist any other reader to form one.

A FULL RANGE OF GOOD READING.

The arrival on the scene of our latest halfpenny companion paper, "Chuckles," now provides readers of our famous series of companion papers with a full range of good reading-matter for the week-end. The "Gem" and "Magnet" Libraries admittedly fulfil all the requirements of the early and middle parts of the week in a manner which it would, I think, be hard to surpass. Then comes, on Friday, "The Penny Popular," a paper devoted entirely to complete stories, and packed full of the cream of popular fiction. There is more solid, first-class reading-matter in "The Penny Popular" every week than in any other paper of its size and price in the world. In regard to this paper, it has always been my policy to cater for all ages and classes of fiction-lovers, and the manner in which the good old "Penny Pop." has steadily, from its inception, climbed the rungs of the ladder of popularity shows that its sterling worth is being more and more generally appreciated. Just lately "The Penny Popular" has enjoyed quite a boom, and has bounded ahead with more than usual rapidity, and in view of this very considerable increase in the number of regular "Penny Pop." readers I have decided to incorporate in it

A NEW FEATURE.

which will, I think, meet with general approval. This will consist of an

EDITOR'S CHAT COLUMN.

so that I can communicate with "Penny Pop." chums direct—nothing strikingly original, I grant, but a new departure for this paper, which I am convinced, from the number of readers who have written to me on the subject, will fulfil a long-felt want. So look out for Your Editor's Special Chat to his "Penny Pop." chums in next Friday's issue of "The Penny Popular."

Then on Saturday comes "Chuckles"—the bright and cheery halfpenny coloured paper which provides you with amusing jokes and pictures and first-class stories, just when you have most leisure to enjoy them. What more cheerful companion than the latest copy of "Chuckles" could you wish for on a Saturday afternoon or restful Sunday morning? In "Chuckles" my chums get more fun and brightness for one halfpenny than can be had anywhere else for double that sum; and if you want to enjoy a succession of cheery and happy week-ends this year I cannot give you any better advice than to order your newsagent to keep "Chuckles" for you regularly every week.

RABBIT KEEPING.—No. 4,

By Meredith Fradd.

The Tans.

I have left until last mention of the two breeds that have been, as it were, manufactured. The oldest, and to my mind by far the prettiest, are the tans—blue-and-tan or black-and-tan—and one cannot do better than liken them in colour to the tan terriers that all readers will know by sight. The chest, forefeet, and belly, together with a triangular piece immediately behind the ears, must be of a rich tan colour, all the rest of the body must be deep black or blue, as the case may be, without a sign of brindling; the ears are short and erect, and the weight must be the same as the Dutch—about 5lbs. Quite a few years back the forefathers of this most beautiful breed of fancy rabbits were engaged in destroying the English farmers' crops, and to this day there is a shyness about the little creatures not to be found in the older established breeds. It is gratifying to be able to say that the originators of this breed can now claim that their addition to the ranks of exhibition rabbits is, nowadays, quite one of the most popular, a popularity that carries with it a large monetary value.

The credit of bringing out the very latest breed of fancy rabbit belongs to a lady who showed Imperials, as she has named them, for the first time at the Crystal Palace Show. A large breed, weighing about seven pounds when full grown, coloured a deep blue from nose to tail, with large, though erect ears, it is a pretty-looking animal, and has already found many admirers; but its monetary value has not yet been fixed, as its show career is of such recent occurrence.

Such, then, is a brief summary of the points and the values of the different breeds of fancy rabbits that are bred and shown in their thousands every year in the United Kingdom.

(Next week: a special article on "How To Train Dogs To Do Tricks.")

The Editor

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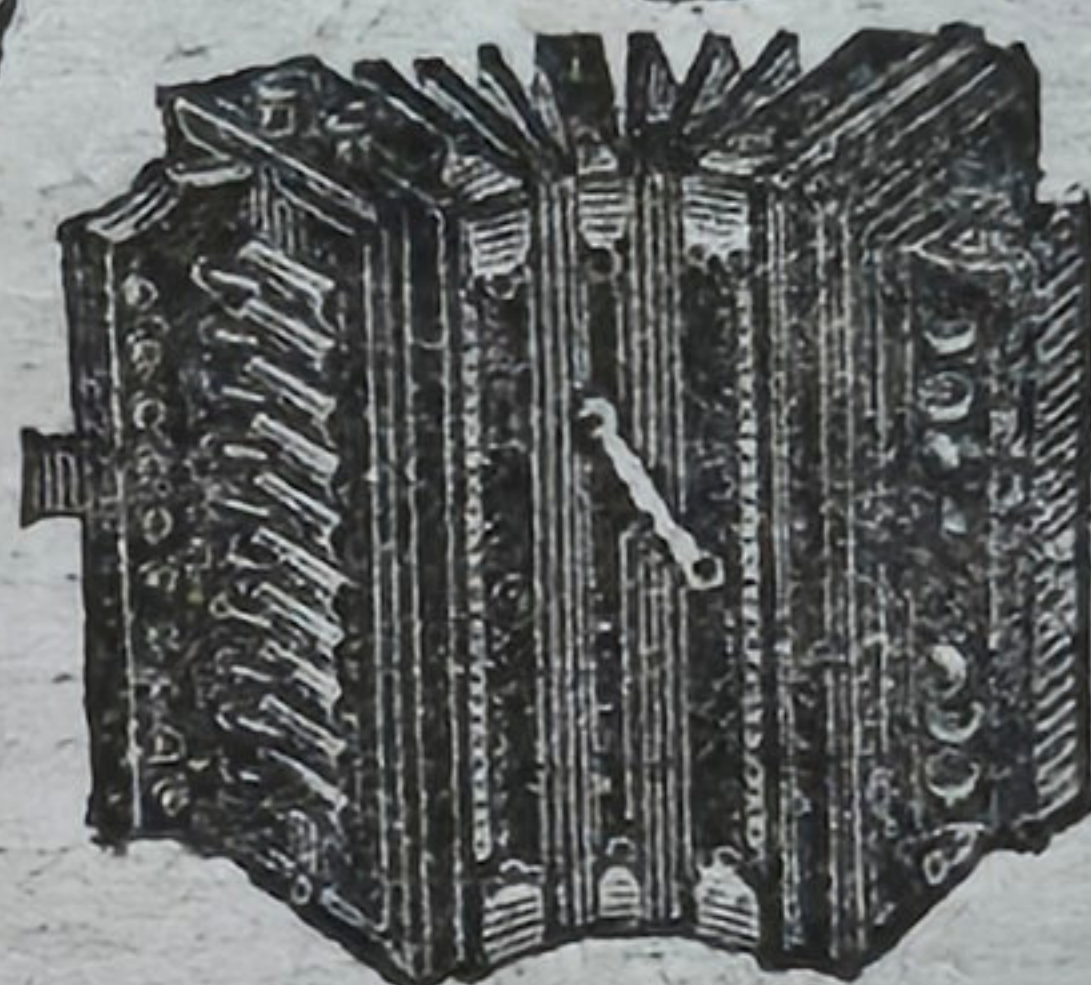
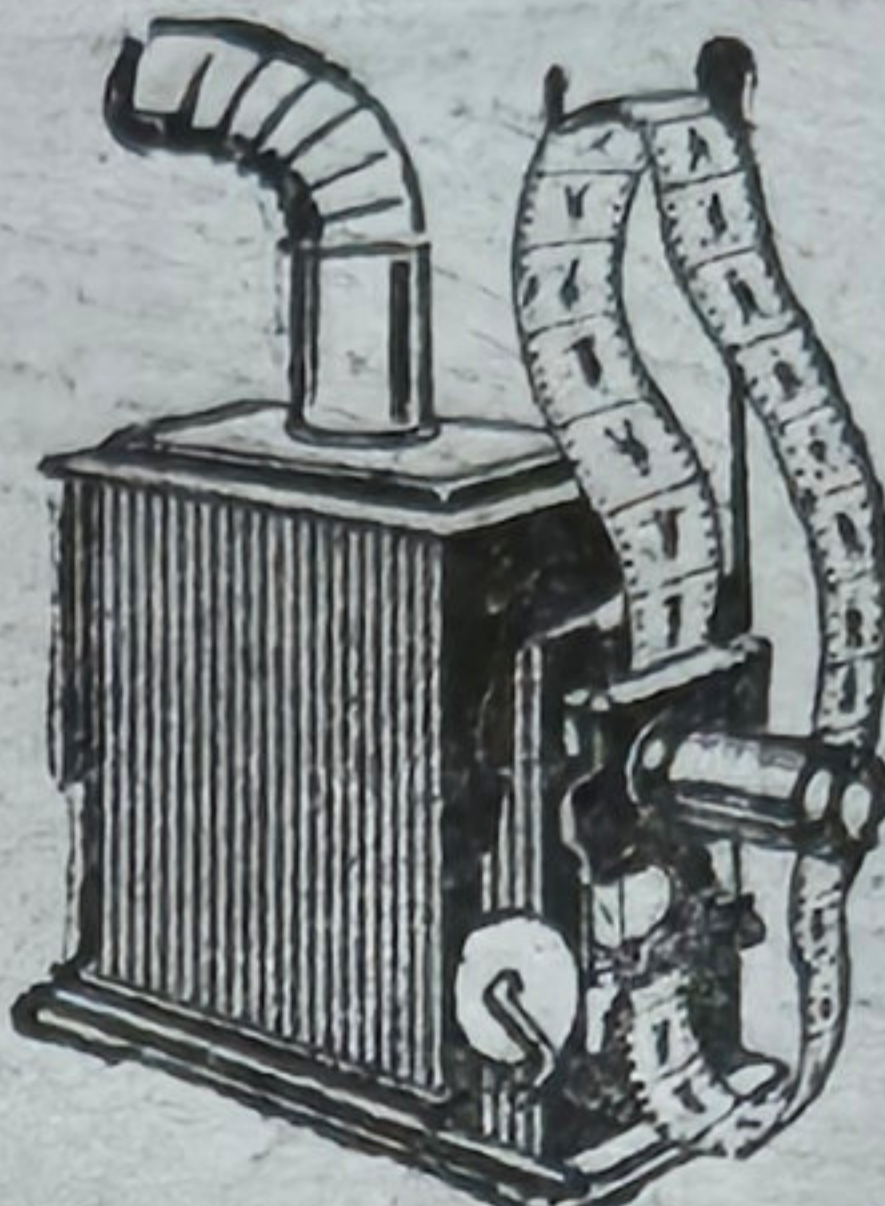


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