

A SURPRISE FOR ST. JIM'S!

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



IS IT A GOAL?

(An Exciting Scene in the Grand Long Complete Story in this issue.)



THIS WEEK'S CHAT



Whom to Write to — — —
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For Next Wednesday :

"D'ARCY IN DISGRACE !"

By Martin Clifford.

One would not expect Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the Fourth—probably the most fastidious fellow at St. Jim's, and always extraordinarily keen on any point of honour—to have dealings with Banks, the bookie. His chums are enraged when Levison, backed by Crooke, Racke, and Mellish, whose company he has shunned of late, accuses Gussy of this, and brings forward what looks like evidence. They will not believe other than that the evidence is faked, and there is a very big row. Talbot comes into collision with his best chums because he protects Levison, who has already had more than enough, from the fury of Blake; and the matter gets into Mr. Railton's hands. But the queerest thing of all is that Gussy does not deny his guilt! He appears to be taking the line that what he chooses to do must be right because he chooses to do it! This is just a little too much for the rest to swallow, and D'Arcy gets the cold shoulder. Still he refuses to explain, and it is only when the affair gets to the ears of the Head that the truth comes out. What the truth was, and why it should have been concealed, my readers will find out next week in that fine yarn

"D'ARCY IN DISGRACE !"

QUESTIONS OF CONDUCT.

This reminds me of some correspondence I have had concerning two other stories in which the one and only Gussy played a prominent part—"Every Inch a Hero," and "For D'Arcy's Sake." The latter story appeared in the "Magnet"; but I think most "Gem" readers read it—it was not my fault if they did not, for I specially asked them to. The question of conduct referred to in this case was connected with Greyfriars characters, too; but I think it will be as well dealt with here as in the "Magnet."

A Yorkshire reader writes complaining bitterly of the manner in which D'Arcy behaved to Dick Brooke in the story mentioned. "Was it our Gussy," he asks, "the one who was the soul of honour, the one who was as open and honest as the day, and who would not have hurt another's feelings for whole worlds, was it he who, when he had beaten Brooke in the ring, refused to shake hands with him?"

The correct answer is that it wasn't, for D'Arcy did not beat Brooke—Brooke beat D'Arcy. But that is a point of minor importance. "I loved the 'Gem' once, my dear Editor—that is the only word for it—but now it seems as if my best chum had suddenly gone away, for Gussy must have gone, and an impostor come in his place before such a thing could have happened. So for you and me, dear Editor, there is only Tom left!" adds this reader.

No, thank you, my friend! There is more than Tom Merry left for me, if not for you! What has happened to Manners and Lowther and Talbot, to Blake and Digby and Herries, to Figgins and Kerr and Wynn, that I should give them up? And there are others besides them. I do not even give up Gussy. True, he fell very far below his own high standard in the story referred to; but does one throw over an old and tried friend because in a world where no one is perfect he proves that he can err and go astray like the rest? The green-eyed demon of jealousy got hold of poor Gussy, and made him to do what he took shame for afterwards. But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy is far too good a fellow not to be forgiven one fault.

It is a London reader who waxes bitter about the weakness of Bob Cherry, Frank Nugent, and Hurree Singh in gambling with the sharper in the train. It would appear that he can forgive Nugent, on the score of his being always weak and easily influenced, and also Inky, on the ground—a highly debateable one, I think—that he hardly knew he was wrong. But he cannot forgive Bob Cherry, or, rather, he cannot forgive Mr. Richards for making Bob the third victim of the gambler's wiles.

If it had been Johnny Bull, now—then it would have been

excusable in his eyes. Here, I think, he is quite wrong. He guessed Bull in advance; but he made a bad guess. Bob Cherry, blithely good-natured, would be a far readier victim than sturdy, independent Johnny Bull, who really does not mind hurting people's feelings a bit if he sees occasion.

"Sickening! Disgusting! Almost incredible!"

These are some of the epithets my correspondent uses. Had Wharton been one of the gambling trio, he says, he would never have read another "Magnet" yarn. Well, that would have been his loss—no light one, I think, for his keenness is evident.

His attitude strikes me as silly—there is no other word for it. Neither Mr. Richards nor Mr. Clifford holds up his heroes as faultless. The best of men—and boys—go wrong sometimes. What the three Greyfriars fellows did was wrong—admitted! But it was foolish, not wicked. They were betrayed by good nature, and not by love of gambling. That makes a great deal of difference in one's judgment.

I will leave it there. I do not believe, however, that any boy who read the story with intelligence failed to derive the right moral—and that a good one—from it.

NOTICES.

Football.

[In order to get in as many notices as possible, those included have been cut down to the shortest possible limits. It should be understood that the figures in brackets always refer to age, and that "r." means "radius." Where these particulars are omitted they were not supplied by sender of notice. All applications may be taken for home and away matches.]

Matches Wanted by:

EMMANUEL JUNIORS F.C. (16-17)—5-mile r. of Leicester. Ground, Western Park.—H. Miller, 24, Tudor Rd., Leicester.

HALE END UNITED F.C. (17)—4-mile r.—A. E. Smet, 68, Victoria Rd., Wood St., Walthamstow.

CARLETON SECOND (14½) want to arrange matches within reasonable distance of Tufnell Park.—H. Capel, 84, Tyther-ton Rd., Tufnell Park, N.

SPEN LANE WESLEYAN F.C. (14-15); newly formed.—W. Hooper, 35, Mallin St., West Smethwick, near Birmingham.

THE 18TH COY. BOYS' BRIGADE (15) want home and away matches in the Sheffield area.—F. H. Appleby, 32, Hawksley Avenue, Hillsborough, Sheffield.

TOWN UNITED F.C. (15-16)—4-mile r. of Bolton.—R. G. Parkinson, 20, Allsopp St., Bolton.

WHITTINGTON MOOR UNITED F.C. (15-16)—6-mile r. They are also anxious to form a medal competition. Those wishing to join should write at once.—Hon. Sec., 66, Shaw St., Whittington Moor, near Chesterfield.

KELFIELD JUNIORS F.C. (16-17)—6-mile r. of Kensington.—J. Henry, 36, Wallingford Avenue, North Kensington, W.

DONCASTER TOWN RANGERS F.C. (16-17½)—20-mile r. of Doncaster.—E. Brogan, 64, Queen's Rd., Doncaster.

C.H.W.F.C. (14-15)—8-mile r.—W. M. Barker, 260, Ramsay Rd., Forest Gate, E.

Other Footer Notices:

P. Duck (71, Fonthill Rd., Finsbury Park, N.) and friend would like to join a footer team (15-16½) in or near Finsbury Park district.

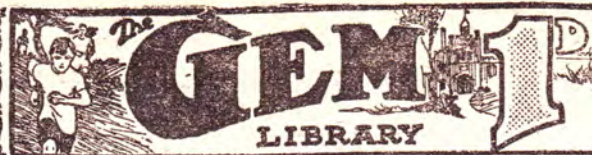
R. Phillips, 4, Plevna Rd., Hampton, Middlesex, wishes to join a footer club (17-18) within 5 miles. Plays left-back.

F. E. Harvey (17) and F. H. Reynolds (16) would like to join good footer club in or near Clapham. Both play forward. Please reply to former, at 29, Deauville Rd., Clapham Park, S.W.

Frank Coles, 27, Ringcroft St., Holloway, N., would be glad to hear from anyone in his district who cares to join a footer club (15) which he is forming. Stamped and addressed envelope, please.

Your Editor

PUBLISHED IN TOWN
AND COUNTRY EVERY
WEDNESDAY MORNING



COMPLETE STORIES
FOR ALL, AND EVERY
STORY A GEM!

A SURPRISE FOR ST. JIM'S!

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's.
By **MARTIN CLIFFORD.**



Levison was in the Rylcombe colours, and it was evident that he was going to play with the village team.
No wonder the St. Jim's juniors stared. (See Chapter 10.)

CHAPTER 1.

Levison Astonishes the Natives.

"LEVISON!"
"Great Scott!"

"Wherefore this thussness?"

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther uttered those exclamations in a sort of chorus.

The Terrible Three were surprised.

And the other fellows on the junior football ground at St. Jim's chuckled. They were surprised, too, and amused. There was cause for surprise.

Tom Merry & Co. had gone down to footer practice. The match with the Grammar School was due shortly, and Tom

Merry was keeping his men hard at work. It was no slacker's job to be a member of the St. Jim's junior eleven. All the members of Tom Merry's team were there, and a score of other fellows, all keen on the game, when Levison of the Fourth arrived.

Levison of the Fourth never honoured the football ground with his presence if he could help it. There was a certain amount of compulsory practice he could not escape, but he was very fertile in excuses for getting out of it. Sometimes he suffered from an imaginary sprain, sometimes he was seedy, sometimes he coolly cut the practice and risked it. It was rare to see him in footer rig, and when he couldn't avoid it, he generally looked sullen and impatient, and cleared off at the earliest possible moment.

Next Wednesday:

"D'ARCY IN DISGRACE!" AND "CORNSTALK BOB!"

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And now he had turned up of his own accord to footer practice!

He was in footer shirt and shorts, with a coat on, when he came down from the School House, evidently ready for business.

There was a slight flush in Levison's sallow face. He knew that his unusual proceeding would excite remark.

And it did!

"Wherefore, oh, wherefore this thusness?" said Monty Lowther. "What on earth are you doing in those bags, Levison?"

"Not going to play footer?" ejaculated Manners.

"Is it a joke?" asked Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove! It must be some feahfully deep joke of Levison's," chimed in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth. "Pway explain, deah boy. The joke is weally wathah too deep for me!"

Levison's face set in a sullen scowl.

"I've come down to practice," he said angrily.

"Not footer practice!" exclaimed Blake of the Fourth.

"Yes."

"Hold me, somebody!" murmured Blake. "I feel that I'm going to faint."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Has Kildare been after you?" asked Tom Merry.

"No," said Levison, scowling.

"Railton dropped on you at last?"

"No."

"Then what the deuce are you here for?" asked the captain of the Shell in surprise. "Is this some weird joke?"

"Pulling our leg somehow," said Manners, puzzled. "You might explain where the joke comes in, Levison."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It's too deep for us," said Figgins of the New House. "Now, what is the merry joke, Levison?"

Levison's brow grew darker and darker as he looked at the grinning faces of the footballers.

"It's not a joke!" he said savagely. "I'm going to take up footer this season."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at, you silly asses?" demanded Levison angrily.

"Ha, ha, ha! Your little joke!" roared Monty Lowther.

"Don't be so funny, you know," urged Manners. "Wild horses wouldn't drag you on the footer field if you could sneak out of it. You'll tell us next that you've given up smoking."

"I have given up smoking," said Levison.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now tell us another!"

"If you don't want me here, I can clear off!" exclaimed Levison angrily.

"Don't!" implored Monty Lowther. "It will be a pleasure to see you playing footer, without a prefect watching you. But you must excuse us for being surprised. It's the first time you've turned up without a prefect leading you along by the collar, isn't it?"

"If you mean business, you're welcome, Levison," said Tom Merry, smiling. "But really, it is rather surprising, you know. You can't expect us to get used to it all at once."

"Wathah not, deah boy!"

"Pile in, Levison!" grinned Figgins. "I want to see you play footer. I suppose you know the difference between a goal and a goal-post—what?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If Levison's taking up the game, it's up to us to help him," said Monty Lowther gravely. "I think we ought to coach Levison a bit."

"Keep your coaching till I ask for it!" growled Levison. "I could play your head off any day, if I chose to take the trouble!"

"My dear chap, I'm a ripping coach, and I'm going to help you. Now, in the first place, footer is a game. Got that?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is a game played with a ball," continued Monty Lowther, with the air of an instructor. "The ball is kicked by means of the pedal extremities, otherwise known as the feet."

"Bai Jove! Ha, ha!"

"The wooden erection at each end of the field is called a goal. The person who mucks about in goal is called the goal-keeper."

"You silly ass!" roared Levison.

"Football is played by a team. The teams consist of eleven persons."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Eleven, mind—not ten, or thirteen," said Lowther. "First of all, fix that number on your memory. Eleven. Got that?"

"You silly cuckoo!"

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"The game is started by means of a kick-off. The ball is kicked-off by being projected from a boot—a football boot."

"Look here—"

"If the ball is kicked over the touch-line, it is in touch. Got that?"

Levison's face was a study. His neglect of the great winter game had not left him in such a state of hopeless ignorance as the humorist of the Shell chose to assume. As a matter of fact, Levison, when he chose, could play both footer and cricket in a very creditable way, and a little sticking to practice would have turned him into a first-class player, for a junior. But Monty Lowther never let slip an opportunity for exercising his peculiar gift of humour.

"The players in the front line are called forwards. They are called forwards because they play forward," explained Lowther. "On the other hand, the players in the back line are called backs, because they play back. Got that?"

"You burbling idiot!"

"But the players in the half-way line are called half-backs, because they play half-backs. Perhaps you will ask why they are not called half-forwards. That is one of the mysteries of the game. But at present, you must take your coach's word. The goalkeeper's business is to keep goal—he is therefore called the goalkeeper. Got that?"

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

The expression on Levison's sulky, savage face made them yell, even more than Monty Lowther's extraordinary coaching.

Levison drove his hands deep into his coat pockets.

"I might have expected this kind of thing!" he said, between his teeth. "There isn't a chap here who hasn't been down on me for slacking and leaving footer alone, and when I come down to practice, I get this. Go and eat coke, the lot of you! Hang footer, and hang you!"

And Levison turned round, and strode savagely off the field.

"Hold on, Levison!" called out Tom Merry. "Don't be an ass! You're more than welcome here."

Levison strode straight on, without turning his head.

"Gentlemen, the little comedy is now over," said Monty Lowther. "Let's get on with the washing."

"I suppose Levison was only pullin' our leg," remarked Arthur Augustus. "He couldn't weally mean to take up footer."

"More likely wanted a chance to give somebody a kick on the cly," growled Herries. "That's more in his line. I know him. He kicked me once in practice, and called it an accident, after I had hammered him for worrying Towser."

"Yaas, wathah, I wemembah that!"

"Give a chap his due," said Talbot of the Shell. "Levison has been a good bit different in many ways since his minor came to St. Jim's. I think he was in earnest myself."

"Oh, rats!" said Herries gruffly.

"He took up ewicket once, I wemembah," remarked D'Arcy thoughtfully.

Herries snorted.

"Because he had a relation coming, and wanted to make the old fellow believe he was a cricketer. He chucked it up at once."

"Yaas, that's so."

"It was only a rotten trick—same as this," said Herries. "My dog Towser can't stand Levison. He knows him."

"Well, if Towser's given his verdict, there's nothing more to be said," remarked Monty Lowther gravely. "Still, I must say I agree with Towser in this case. Levison can go and eat coke. Let's get on with the practice."

"Still, he ought to be encouraged if he's in earnest," observed Talbot.

"Rats! He was only spoofing!"

And the juniors piled into footer practice, and forgot all about Levison of the Fourth. The black sheep's new and surprising departure had been nipped in the bud, with a vengeance.

CHAPTER 2.

Grimes is Surprised.

"C HEEKY cad!" grunted Mellish of the Fourth.

"Confounded cheek!" agreed Croke, the ornament of the Shell.

"Well, it does take the cake!" remarked Racke.

The three indignant youths were lounging on the football-ground, looking on idly at the practice, without thinking of taking part in it, however. Croke & Co. did not care for footer, and they were only lounging there to kill time. Like most incurable slackers they had a good deal of time to kill. And their indignation was moved at the sight of Grimes, the grocer's boy, from Rylcombe.

Grimes had evidently been delivering goods at the back



"Yawoooo!" yelled Arthur Augustus, as the bun crashed on the back of his elegant jacket, "Wha-a-at was that?" (See Chapter 6.)

door, for he had an empty basket on his arm. But the sight of the footballers in the distance had drawn Grimes to the spot. Grimes was a keen footballer, and he was skipper of the village team—which sometimes played St. Jim's.

Lofty minds like Crooke's and Mellish's never could understand why Tom Merry chose to play the grocer's boy's eleven. They sneered when Grimes brought his team to St. Jim's, and sneered when Tom Merry led his men down to the village green to play Grimes & Co. But Grimes was serenely regardless of their lofty sneers, and Tom Merry equally so. Indeed, Tom Merry had on one occasion rubbed Crooke's nose in the turf for making disparaging remarks about old Grimes. After that, Crooke was a little more careful to confine his lofty remarks to his own select circle.

The sight of Grimes, with his basket, looking on at the footer, was really too much for Crooke & Co.

They bristled with indignation.

"It's too thick!" said Racke. "The low brute ought to be kicked out!"

"Let's kick him out!" suggested Mellish. "We can handle him—three of us!"

"Some of those rotters would chip in!" growled Crooke.

"They're pretty busy."

"Come on!" said Racke. "We'll chivvy the cad, anyway."

And the three black sheep of St. Jim's bore down on the unconscious Grimes. Tom Merry & Co. were making a rush up the field, with a crowd of New House fellows trying to stop them, and Grimes had set down his basket, in his keenness as he watched.

"Bray-vo!" sang out Grimes. "Bray-vo!"

"What are you cackling for, you cad?" asked Crooke.

Grimes turned round and touched his cap.

"What the dooce are you doing here?" asked Racke.

"No 'arm, I 'ope!" said Grimes.

"Oh, get out!"

Two or three fags of the Third were looking on at the footer, and they looked round as Crooke & Co. started on Grimes. They were Wally D'Arcy, Joe Frayne, and Levison minor—the new boy in the Third.

"Let Grimes alone, you rotters!" called out Wally. "Why shouldn't he be here if he likes?"

"Thank you, Master D'Arcy," said Grimes. "I'm doin' no 'arm. Only lookin' on."

"Well, you're going to clear off, and take your blessed basket with you!" sneered Crooke. "Now then, sharp's the word, unless you want a thick ear!"

Grimes looked warlike for a moment. He could have knocked Crooke flying, and Racke after him, without much difficulty. But a row with St. Jim's fellows on the St. Jim's ground would have caused Grimes trouble with his employer, as the cads of the School House were well aware. Grimes picked up his basket quietly.

"Don't go, Grimes!" exclaimed Levison minor. "Let him alone, Crooke, you cad!"

"You shut up!" growled Crooke.

"Dot him in the eye, Grimey!" advised Wally. "I'll hold your basket, old son."

Grimes grinned.

"Mr. Sands wouldn't like me to dot 'im in the eye, Master Wally," he said. "I'll go. I'm going, young gentlemen."

"More duffer you," said Wally. "Give him the basket on the napper! Crooke's a funk, and he'll bolt if you mop him."

Grimes only grinned, and turned away. But his meekness did not disarm Crooke & Co., it encouraged them. They

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY;

"D'ARCY IN DISGRACE!"

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followed Grimes as he made his way slowly back to the side gate, past the School House.

"Now then, quicker!" said Crooke, in a bullying tone. "We're going to see you off the premises. Your sort aren't wanted here!"

"Shove his basket over his head!" grinned Mellish.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grimes jumped away.

"Ands off, young gents!" he said. "I'm going!"

"Collar him!" grinned Crooke, feeling quite safe in ragging Grimes now that they were a good distance from the footer-ground, and out of sight of Tom Merry & Co.

Crooke and Racke collared Grimes, and Mellish seized his empty basket and wrenched it away from him.

Grimes resisted, but he did not hit out. He had Mr. Sands' wrath to think of if he knocked down a St. Jim's fellow.

"Do let a chap alone!" urged Grimes. "I'm going as fast as I can!"

There was a patter of feet, and Frank Levison came running up. The little fag's face was flushed, and his eyes were gleaming. He grabbed at the basket, snatched it from Mellish, and smote the Fourth-Former with it, knocking him backwards.

"Yow-ow!" roared Mellish, as he went down in a heap.

"Now let Grimes alone!" exclaimed Levison minor, advancing upon Crooke and Racke, flourishing the basket.

"Why, you cheeky whelp, I'll smash you!" shouted Crooke.

The two raggers released Grimes, and rushed at the fag.

"Hold on!"

Levison major came up quickly.

Crooke and Racke paused.

"You'd better take that young cad away if you don't want him smashed!" growled Racke.

Levison laughed.

"If there's going to be any smashing, I'm going to have a hand in it," he remarked. "Why can't you let Grimes alone?"

"Because we don't choose!"

"Why, you rotter," panted Mellish, "you were chivvying Grimes yourself only the other day!"

"Oh, let him alone!" said Levison.

"Well, we won't let him alone!" howled Crooke. "We'll smash his blessed basket over his head!"

Levison stepped quickly to Grimes' side. He put up his hands coolly. Grimes blinked at him in blank astonishment.

"Come on!" said Levison cheerfully. "Don't you take a hand, Grimey! Those cads would get a complaint sent to your governor if you hit them. Franky, you can look after Mellish."

"What-ho!" chuckled the fag.

"I'm going to look after Crooke and Racke," said Levison. "Come on! You don't seem to be in a hurry."

"What are you chippin' in for, you cad?" growled Racke.

"Sheer cussedness," grinned Levison. "I'm spoiling for a fight. Come on!"

"Oh, hang you!"

Racke thrust his hands into his pockets, and strode away, followed by Crooke.

Mellish picked himself up, and followed. It was not a fight the cads of the School House were looking for.

Levison grinned sarcastically.

"Come on, Grimey," he said. "I'll see you out!"

"Thank you, Master Levison!" said the astounded Grimes. He took his basket from Frank, and followed Levison.

They went down to the side gate, and Levison passed out with the grocer's boy.

"Going back to Rylcombe?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Do you mind if I walk part of the way with you?"

"Not at all, Master Levison," gasped Grimes, wondering whether he was dreaming. If Tom Merry, or Figgins, or D'Arcy had interfered between him and the raggers, Grimes would not have been surprised. But Levison!

"Then I'll come," said Levison cheerfully.

He sauntered down the road with the grocer's boy.

"You're playing St. Jim's soon at footer, I believe?" he remarked.

"Yes; week after next, Master Levison."

"Getting lots of practice?"

"Well, all we can," said Grimes. "Of course, we don't 'ave so much time for it as you young gents. Now the evenings are drawing in, too, it makes a difference. But we generally get an hour on the green after work."

"I suppose you're in great form?"

Grimes grinned.

"Pretty good form for us," he said. "Pilcher's a terror, and Ned Wilson is ripping in goal. Of course, we're not up to St. Jim's, but we're going to give Master Merry a tussle."

"You practice in the evening?" said Levison.

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"Yes; and Thursday afternoons, after the shops are closed."

"Football under difficulties," grinned Levison.

"Well, we does our best," said Grimes.

"You play a jolly good game, considering. Would you mind if I came down this evening and joined you?"

Grimes almost dropped his basket in his astonishment.

"Joined us?" he repeated.

"Yes; for a bit of practice."

"My eye!" said Grimes.

"Well, would you mind?" asked Levison impatiently.

"I—I suppose you're jokin'?" said Grimes, in wonder.

"You can get all the practice you want at St. Jim's, I suppose?"

"I don't choose to practise there," said Levison, his brows darkening. "But I want to get some footer. Of course, I don't want to force myself on you."

"Not at all, Master Levison. You'd be welcome!" said Grimes. "I didn't know as you played footer much."

"I'm taking it up."

"Oh, I see! You come if you want to," said Grimes; "but—but—" He hesitated.

"But you don't want me?" said Levison grimly.

"Tain't that," said Grimes hastily; "only we're rough-and-ready chaps, but—but we don't 'ave no nonsense. 'Skuse me, but if you played with us, you—you—"

Levison chuckled.

"I should have to play like the rest, and not expect any kow-towing because I am a public-school chap?" he said. "Not put on any side, or anything of that kind."

"Well, you—you see—"

"Of course I see. I sha'n't put on any side."

Grimes coloured, but he grinned.

"You'll 'skuse me mentioning it, sir—"

"That's all right. Can I come?"

"Oh, yes; rather! I'll tell the fellows."

"Right-ho!" said Levison. "What time do you begin?"

"About seven."

"I'll be there."

To Grimes' astonishment, Levison shook hands with him on parting. Grimes went on towards Rylcombe in a dazed frame of mind. He had suffered a good deal of petty persecution from some of the St. Jim's fellows of Crooke's kind, and Ernest Levison had been among them. A change seemed to have come over Levison, and Grimes could not understand it. But he was a good-natured fellow, and did not bear malice; and if Levison had a fancy for taking footer practice with the village team, Grimes would not say him nay.

CHAPTER 3.

Arthur Augustus Means Well!

"LEVISON!"
No reply.

"Levison!"

Mr. Railton repeated the name more loudly.

The School House master was taking the roll-call.

Levison of the Fourth did not answer to his name.

Levison minor, from the ranks of the Third, looked round anxiously.

"Levison!" said Mr. Railton for the third time.

There was no answer, and the Housemaster marked down Levison major as absent.

"Bai Jove!" remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as the Fourth streamed out of Hall. "Levison will get into a wow! Wailton looked quite waxy!"

"Serve him right!" said Herries, with a grunt. "Why can't he tear himself away from the Green Man in time for roll-call?"

"Gweat Scott! Is Levison at the Gween Man, Hewwies?"

"I dare say he is."

"Shouldn't wonder," remarked Jack Blake. "Silly ass to be late for call-over, anyway! Railton has an eye on him."

"Pewwaps he is not at the Gween Man at all," suggested Arthur Augustus gently. "As a mattah of fact, deah boy, I have remarked that Levison has been a vewy great deal more decent this term. He has quawwelled with that awful boundah Wacke—"

"Wouldn't Racke lend him any more money?" growled Herries.

"Bai Jove! That might have been the weason, of course."

"Vewy likely," grinned Digby.

"I think he doesn't go to Cwooke's study for playin' nap in the evenin', as he used to."

"Well, Crooke is Racke's study-mate."

"And he seems to be on wathah bad terms with Mellish."

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"Rogues fall out sometimes," remarked Blake.
 "Yaas; that is twue. But, weally, I have thought sevewal times that Levison is growin' a bit more decent. He was goin' to play footah to-day—"

"Gammon!"

"I have been thinkin' it ovah, deah boys, and on weflection I wathah think that Levison meant business."

"Bow-wow!"

"I do not wegard that as intelligent wemak, Hewwies! Aftah all, Levison always had his good points."

"Blessed if I ever saw anything of them!"

"Talbot wathah likes him—"

"Talbot's an ass!"

"Weally, Blake, I wathah think you are an ass, too! Suppose Levison has seen the ewwah of his ways, and is goin' to turn ovah a new leaf?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see any weason for wibald laughtah. If Levison is turnin' ovah a new leaf, he ought to be encouraged."

"Well, encourage him!" yawned Blake. "Bestow some of the delights of your merry conversation on him, Gussy."

"I was thinkin' of doin' so," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity.

"Jolly good idea!" said Blake heartily.

Arthur Augustus looked pleased.

"You think it is wathah a good ideah to talk to Levison a bit, deah boy, and show him that we are willin' to encourage him?"

"Certainly! It will give us a rest in-the study," explained Blake.

"You uttah ass!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus wrathfully.

Arthur Augustus walked away with his noble nose in the air, and Blake & Co. went chuckling to their study.

The swell of St. Jim's did not follow them. He posted himself in the doorway of the School House, looking out into the dusky quadrangle.

A sudden slap on the shoulder made him jump, and he turned round to see the Terrible Three smiling at him.

"You wuff ass, Tom Mewwy!" said Arthur Augustus, rubbing his shoulder. "You have wumpled my jacket!"

"What are you hanging about for, instead of doing your prep?" demanded the captain of the Shell severely. "Can't have this slacking in the Fourth Form."

"I am not slackin'!" said Arthur Augustus warmly. "I'm waitin' for Levison to come in."

"Pal of yours?" grinned Monty Lowther.

"Certainly not!"

"You're waiting for him because he isn't your pal?" asked Manners.

"Not exactly, Mannahs. I am goin' to speak to Levison, howevah, in a friently way."

"What on earth for?"

"I don't mind tellin' you chaps. In fact, I hope you will follow my example," said Arthur Augustus benignly. "I have been wathah intewested in Levison lately. It may be wathah wemakable, but I have an impression that Levison is turnin' ovah a new leaf."

"Whattin' a new which?" ejaculated Lowther.

"Turnin' ovah a new leaf," said Arthur Augustus firmly.

"Now, we all know that Levison is a feahful wottah—"

"Hear, hear!"

"And a wegulah wogue—"

"Passed unanimously."

"And a vewy shady wascal—"

"Is that what you're waiting to tell him?"

"Certainly not, you ass! I am goin' to speak to him in a vewy friently way. He is a wottah and a wogue and a wascal, I am sowwy to say. But that only makes it all the more to his cwedit if he tries to turn ovah a new leaf. Suppose he has made up his mind to be decent—"

"My hat! He would have a lot of leeway to make up."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Howevah, he ought to be encouraged. I am goin' to encourage him."

The Terrible Three chuckled. Arthur Augustus was quite serious, but the Shell fellows were not serious at all. They deemed it extremely unlikely that the most hardened young rascal in the school was turning over a new leaf, and they doubted greatly whether Gussy's noble encouragement would be any use to Levison.

"I do not see any weason for mewwiment," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "I wegard this as a dutay—wathah a painful dutay, as I weally cannot stand Levison at any pwice. But if he is dwoppin' his wotten ways, an' turnin' ovah a new leaf, I have wesolved to encourage him!"

"By sheddin' upon him the light of your countenance?" asked Lowther.

"That is a wiculous way of puttin' it, Lowthah! I am goin' to speak to him in a friently way!"

"And join him in a little smoke?"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"And trot down to the Green Man with him for a game of billiards with his cheery old pal Lodgey?"

"You wiculous ass!"

"I don't know whether we can allow this," said Tom Merry gravely. "Suppose, instead of reforming Levison, you fall into his naughty ways?"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"The experiment might work out the wrong way, you know," said Tom, with a shake of the head. "What would Study No. 6 say if its ornament came home with the milk in the morning?"

"You ass!"

"Squiffy," said Lowther solemnly.

"Smellin' of spirits," said Manners, with equal solemnity.

"If you wegard me as capable of smellin' of spiwits, you feahful asses—"

"We can't let you run the risk. I feel that we've got a duty to do, too—a painful duty," said Tom Merry. "Take one of his ears, Lowther, and I'll take the other, and we'll lead him out of the way of temptation!"

"You uttah asses!" shouted Arthur Augustus wrathfully.

"If you are lookin' for a feahful thwashin'—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! Heah's Levison! Pway don't give me any more of your wot, you duffahs!"

And Arthur Augustus turned to meet Ernest Levison, who was coming up the steps of the School House, looking tired and breathless.

CHAPTER 4.

Discouraging!

TOM MERRY & CO. looked rather curiously at Levison.

They had little enough to do with the black sheep of the Fourth; they were in a different Form, and their ways were very different from his. They had hardly a single taste in common with Levison, and their occupations were quite dissimilar. But now that D'Arcy mentioned it, they realised that during the past few weeks Levison of the Fourth had not been quite the same as of old.

They could not help noticing his attachment to his minor, and they had noticed that Frank Levison, of the Third, was a thoroughly decent little chap. It was possible that he had a good influence over his brother, and that might have made a difference to Levison.

Certainly he was no longer on speaking terms with Racke of the Shell, the wealthy youth who rolled in money, derived from his father's bloated war-profits, and who spent it—so far as the restrictions of school life allowed—in the way war-profits are generally spent.

It was common knowledge among the juniors that Levison won a good deal of money from Racke at cards, and that horn of plenty had certainly run dry since their quarrel. They knew, too, that Levison spent a good deal of time helping his minor with his lessons, to keep him in the good graces of his very exacting Form-master.

But Levison turning over a new leaf was a trifle too steep; and it was rather remarkable that he should begin by missing call-over—a serious matter.

Levison caught their eyes fixed on him, and scowled. He had not forgotten the chipping on the footer-ground that afternoon.

He was passing on, when Arthur Augustus joined him, with a very genial smile.

"In a huwwy, Levison, deah boy?" he asked.

Levison stared at him.

"I've got to report to Railton," he said. "I missed call-over!"

"That was wathah weckless, Levison."

"Go hon!"

"Howevah, I twust you were not at the Gween Man?"

"You silly ass!"

"Eh?"

"You frabjous dummy!"

Levison walked on, going to Mr. Railton's study, leaving the swell of the School House rooted to the floor.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus.

There was a chuckle from the Terrible Three.

"Well, how is it pannin' out?" asked Lowther. "How does Levison take his encouragement?"

"He seems wathah to misundahstand," said Arthur Augustus slowly. "Howevah, I shall not allow myself to be webuffed. I wegard this as a dutay—a wathah disagweeable dutay, pewwaps, but still a dutay!"

And Arthur Augustus went down the passage, and leaned gracefully against the wall near the Housemaster's study to

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wait for Levison once more. The Terrible Three chuckled, and went out into the quad for their evening trot.

Mr. Railton's door opened in a few minutes, and Levison of the Fourth came out. Arthur Augustus detached himself from the wall.

"Licked, deah boy?" he asked sympathetically.

Levison grinned sarcastically.

"Sorry to disappoint you—no!"

"I am not disappointed, Levison," said Arthur Augustus gently. "I am vewy pleased. Lines, I suppose?"

"No, not lines either."

"Bai Jove! Has Wailton let you off aftah missin' woll-call?"

"He has," said Levison.

"I am vewy glad to heah it, deah boy!"

Levison stared at him.

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

"The—the mattah?"

"Yes. Have you gone potty?"

"Pottay?"

"Yes; or are you trying to pull my leg?"

"Weally, Levison—"

"In either case, you can go and eat coke!" said Levison; and he went down the passage.

Arthur Augustus seemed to swallow something with difficulty. Levison was certainly not an easy fellow to encourage on the path of virtue, even if he was following it, which was still doubtful. But Arthur Augustus was a stickler. He followed Levison down the passage, nobly choking down his feelings, and assuming a genial and friendly smile.

"Don't buwvy, deah boy!"

"What do you want?" asked Levison, stopping and looking at him.

"Nothin'."

"Then what are you stopping me for?"

"Weally, Levison—"

"I've not had my tea yet, and I've got my prep to do when you've done playing the giddy ox!"

"Haven't you had your tea?"

"I think I've just said so."

"Bai Jove! Howevah—"

"I'm going to have it now," said Levison.

"I'll come with you, deah boy."

"Eh? I haven't asked you to tea, that I know of. I know I'm jolly well not going to!"

Again Arthur Augustus seemed to be swallowing something he felt it difficult to get down; but he stuck to his guns.

Levison's manner was decidedly uncompromising; but as he was quite in ignorance of Gussy's benevolent intentions towards him, he could be excused for supposing that Arthur Augustus was pulling his leg. Probably he would not have felt very grateful for those benevolent intentions if he had known of them.

"I have had my tea, Levison."

"Then you don't want any of mine?"

"Certainly not. I was thinkin' of sittin' with you while you have tea, you know, as your study-mates are not there now."

"Thanks! I'm afraid it would take my appetite away!" said Levison.

"Bai Jove! You uttah wottah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, quite forgetting for the moment his benevolent intentions.

Levison grinned, and went upstairs. Arthur Augustus breathed hard for some moments.

He was tempted to follow Levison, and bestow upon him a record licking, and leave the encouragement over for another time. But he calmed down, and mounted the stairs after the junior, his intentions still benevolent.

Levison was getting his tea in his study, when Arthur Augustus' eyeglass gleamed in at the doorway.

Lumley-Lumley and Trimble and Mellish, who shared the study with Levison, had long since had their tea and gone down. Levison was very late.

He stared at the swell of St. Jim's as D'Arcy's eyeglass and genial smile dawned upon him from the doorway.

"Hallo! You again!" snapped Levison, puzzled and angry.

"Yaas, deah boy. Can I help you?"

"Eh?"

"Can I fwy the washahs for you, Levison?"

"Let that bacon alone!" growled Levison. "That fat beast Trimble has scoffed nearly the lot, and you're not going to spoil the rest!"

"I am wathah a dab at cookin' washahs—"

"Oh, dry up!"

Levison scoured out the frying-pan with a page of Trimble's

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Latin grammar, tossed in the sole remaining rasher, and stuck the pan on the half-dead fire. Arthur Augustus, determined not to accept a rebuff, sat on the corner of the table and watched him. His elegant jacket draped over the butter, but the swell of St. Jim's did not notice that for the moment. There was a strong scent of frying bacon in the study, and Levison mumbled and grumbled as he raked the dying embers under the pan.

"You seem wathah tired, Levison," remarked D'Arcy.

"I am tired," said Levison tartly.

"What have you been doin', deah boy?"

"Find out!"

Arthur Augustus coughed.

"Takin' a long walk in the countwy, pewwaps?" he suggested.

"Perhaps," said Levison sourly.

"Wippin' countwy wound St. Jim's, isn't it?"

"Oh, rats!"

"Ahem! Weally, Levison, this is one of the pwettiest parts of Sussex. I twust you enjoyed your walk?"

"Hang this fire!"

"Are you vewy hungwy?"

"Oh, don't worry!"

"Ahem!"

Levison turned round from the fire, scowling.

"What the thunder do you want here?" he exclaimed.

"Have you gone off your silly rocker?"

"N-n-no!"

"Then what are you talking such howling rot for?"

"Do you chawactewise my wemarks as wot, Levison?" said Arthur Augustus indignantly.

"Blinkin' rot!" said Levison.

"Ahem! You seem to have come home in wathah a wuffed tempah, Levison. Pewwaps exahcise does not agwee with you, owin' to your slackin' wound and smokin' and so on."

"Go and eat coke!"

"The fact is, Levison, I am vewy glad to see you takin' up healthy exahcise, instead of slackin' wound like a smokay wottah," said Arthur Augustus affably.

"No business of yours that I can see."

"Yaas, wathah! I am goin' to encouage you."

Levison almost dropped the frying-pan.

"You're going to what?" he ejaculated.

"Encouage you, old chap," said Arthur Augustus benevolently. "It appeahs to me, Levison, that you are turnin' ovah a new leaf. Are you turnin' ovah a new leaf?"

"You silly ass—"

"Ahem! I have remarked, Levison, that for some time—in fact, evah since your minah came—you have not been such a weally unspeakable wottah as usual. Pway do not gwit your teeth like that, deah boy; it wathah sets my nerves on edge. My ideah is that you ought to be encouaged, and I want you to undahstand that if you are goin' to be decent, I am goin' to back you up. I know what a feahfully uphill stwuggle it will be for a fellah of your sort, you know," explained Arthur Augustus.

Arthur Augustus did not expect gratitude from Levison. But certainly he did not expect the Hunnish glare that Levison turned on him. Somehow or other—much to his surprise—his remarks seemed to be making Levison angry.

"I twust you will stick to it!" rattled on Arthur Augustus, determined not to notice Levison's unaccountable ill-humour. "It will come wathah hard at first, but in time it will be easiah. It weally cannot be a pleasuah to you to be a disgwace to your House, as you have always been, and to have fellows ashamed of the fact that you belong to St. Jim's. I twust all that is goin' to be thwown behind, Levison."

"Are you going out of this study, or are you waiting to be pitched out?" roared Levison.

"Bai Jove!"

Levison advanced on Arthur Augustus with the frying-pan held out, evidently intending to smite him with it, reckless of what happened to his last rasher. The swell of St. Jim's slipped nimbly from the table.

"Weally, Levison, there is nothin' to be watty about; my intentions are quite fwiendly, in fact, encouwagin'. Gweat Scott, I am smothahed with buttah! Oh, cwumbs!"

"You silly idiot!" shrieked Levison. "You've been sitting in my butter, and it's all I had!"

"Confound your buttah!" yelled Arthur Augustus, losing his noble temper at last. "I am smothahed with gwease! Gwoogh! Look at my jacket! Keep that fwyin'-pan away, you howlid beast! Yawwooh!"

Arthur Augustus fairly fled from the study, with the frying-pan only an inch behind him.

He did not halt in the passage. Arthur Augustus feared no foe personally. But he feared bacon-fat on his elegant clobber, with a deadly fear. The butter was bad enough.

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Frank Levison came running up, his face flushed, and his eyes gleaming. He grabbed at the basket, snatched it from Mellish, and smote the Fourth-former with it, knocking him backwards. (See Chapter 2.)

But he stopped as he reached the head of the stairs, for there he met the Terrible Three, coming in, and they threw their arms round him and caught him.

"Hallo! Looking for Levison to encourage him?" grinned Tom Merry.

Arthur Augustus gasped.

"Oh, deah! The howwid beast had a fwyin-pan—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is nothin' to cackle at, you asses!"

"Have you been encouraging Levison?" chortled Lowther.

"I wegard Levison as a wascal, and I wefuse to speak a single word to him undah any circs whatevah!" snapped Arthur Augustus.

And he stalked away to Study No. 6, very wrathful.

"Doesn't seem to have been a success," said Manners; and the Terrible Three chortled on their way to their study.

Arthur Augustus entered No. 6 with a heightened colour. Blake and Herries and Digby were at their prep, but they suspended their prep to look at their noble chum with grinning inquiry.

"How have you been getting on with Levison?" asked Blake.

"Wats!"

"Have you been encouraging him in turning over a new leaf?"

"I do not believe the uttah wottah is capable of turnin' ovah a new leaf. I wegard him as a wank outsiders! The disgustin wottah was goin' to put bacon-gwease ovah my clobber. I think it is vewy pwob that he has been to the Gween Man this evenin' aftah all!"

"Because of the bacon-grease?" asked Blake. "I don't see the connection."

"Oh, wats!"

"Are you going on encouraging Levison?"

"If you persist in discussin' that uttah wottah, Blake, I shall wefire ffrom the studay!"

Blake chuckled, and resumed his prep. Arthur Augustus, after a struggle with the butter on his jacket and trousers, sat down to work in a less equable temper than usual. The result of his attempt to encourage Levison in turning over a new leaf had severely ruffled the repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere.

CHAPTER 5.

Suspected!

TOM MERRY looked for Levison of the Fourth the next day after lessons.

Tom had been thinking over the incident on the footer ground, and he wondered whether there was anything in Arthur Augustus' theory that the rotter of the School House was turning over a new leaf.

It was unlikely, but it was possible, and if Levison really had thought of playing the game, Tom felt that his reception at footer practice had been a little hard on him.

And, as the good-natured captain of the Shell did not want to be hard on anybody, he looked for Levison, to set the matter right. He found Levison in the quad, with his coat on, going down to the gates.

"Going out?" asked Tom.

"Yes!" snapped Levison.

"Not coming down to footer practice?"

"Have you some more brilliant humour to work off on me?" asked Levison sarcastically. "Thanks, I'm fed up!"

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"No," said Tom, "you mustn't mind a joke or two, Levison—you took us rather by surprise, you know. It was a bit of a new departure for you. But if you're really serious about taking up footer, I'm glad to see it, and I'd help you any way I could."

"Thanks. I'll ask for your help when I want it."

"Oh, don't be a ratty ass!" said Tom. "You're welcome on Little Side—you've as much right there as anybody else, come to that!"

"Has that just occurred to you?"

"Well, if you're determined to keep your back up, I'm done!" said Tom. "I don't see any sense in being sulky, myself."

"Well, I can't come, even if I wanted to," said Levison. "I've got an engagement."

"Outside the school?"

"Yes."

"Well, it's not my business," said Tom; and he shrugged his shoulders and turned away. Levison laughed.

But Tom Merry turned back and joined Levison again as he went on to the gates.

"It isn't my business, as I said," began Tom, "and I don't want to preach at you. But wouldn't it be a bit more sensible, Levison, to come down to the footer, and chuck up your engagement out of gates? You've got the makings of a first-rate player in you if you chose to keep yourself fit. You'd have got into the House team in the long run if you'd stuck to cricket. Why not give footer a chance?"

Levison looked at him curiously.

"You'd put me in the House team?" he asked.

"Yes, if you were good enough to be included, you know. It might come to that later in the season."

"A smoky blackguard in the House team!" grinned Levison. "What would all the good little Georgies say?"

"Well," said Tom, after a pause, "if I played you I should expect you to chuck smoking, of course. It's a player's duty to keep himself fit."

"Well, I shouldn't."

"H'm! But that's far off, anyway," said Tom good-naturedly. "At present it's only a question of practice. Why not take it up?"

"And give Lowther another chance of being funny? He can be funny without my assistance!" sneered Levison. "And you'd never put me in the team, either. The fellows wouldn't let you. There's a set against me."

"Oh, that's all rot!"

"As for footer, I could play the heads off half your team if I chose," said Levison coolly. "Talbot's a better man than I am, and perhaps yourself, and Figgins. I could make rings round the rest."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, come down now and play up!" he said.

"I've got an engagement."

Tom hesitated.

"Look here, Levison! If it's that man Lodgey, in Rylcombe, you'd better be careful. The prefects have got on to it that a St. Jim's chap has been to see him—more than once. Kildare spoke to me about it. I fancy he was thinking of Racke."

"And you told him to look in the Fourth?" suggested Levison.

"I told him nothing," said Tom Merry quietly. "I shouldn't be likely to tell him anything. I'm giving you the tip that it's dangerous just now—I won't say anything about it's being rotten."

"No, don't!" said Levison. "Talbot's the only chap whose sermons I ever listen to. He doesn't rub it in too often. Well, I'm going down to Rylcombe, and if you see Kildare or Darrell smelling round, you can tell them!"

And with a grin Levison walked out of the gates.

Tom Merry looked after him for a moment with a clouded brow; then, dismissing the matter from his mind, he went down to the football-ground. He had done all he could, and there was nothing more to do.

Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, took roll-call that evening, and when he called Levison's name there was no reply, as on the evening before.

"My hat!" murmured Blake. "Levison's rather over-doing it!"

Mr. Lathom blinked over his glasses at the Fourth.

"Is not Levison present?" he asked.

No answer.

"Do you know where Levison is, Blake? I understand that he was absent from calling-over yesterday."

"No, sir," said Blake; "I haven't seen him."

The big door opened, and a breathless junior came in. It was Levison, and his red cheeks and panting breath told that he had been running. He hurried to his place in the Fourth.

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"My name called?" he whispered to Mellish.

"Yes. You're marked down," grinned Mellish. But Mr. Lathom's eye was on the new-comer.

"You are late, Levison!" he said.

"I am sorry, sir!"

"Did you miss calling-over yesterday?"

"Yes, sir. I explained to Mr. Railton."

"Very good. Why are you late this evening?"

"I've been out, sir."

"No doubt. But where have you been?"

There was a hush among the juniors. Most of them took it as a matter of course that Levison had been somewhere that he could not explain to the Form-master. They wondered whether the time had come for the black sheep to be lagged at last.

"In Rylcombe, sir," said Levison calmly.

"Indeed! What were you doing in Rylcombe?"

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus. He felt a little concerned for Levison, little as he liked him.

Mr. Lathom was the reverse of an inquisitive master—indeed, generally he did not see what was going on under his nose. It was pretty plain that he had some motive for questioning Levison of the Fourth.

There could be only one motive—that Levison was under suspicion. Possibly some clue had transpired to the identity of the St. Jim's junior who was on pally terms with Mr. Lodgey at the Green Man.

The juniors could not help, however, feeling some admiration for Levison's nerve. He faced the questioning Form-master without flinching.

"I happened to stop on the village green, sir," he said calmly.

"Indeed! Was there some unusual attraction on the green, Levison, to cause you to forget calling-over?"

"The village chaps were playing footer, sir."

"Was that why you stayed?"

"Yes, sir."

"Oh, my only summer bonnet!" murmured Blake, quite overcome. He had expected Levison to lie, but this seemed to him a real corker.

"You are very keenly interested in football, then, Levison?" asked Mr. Lathom, his spectacles gleaming at the junior.

"Yes, sir," said Levison, an answer that made the Fourth gasp.

"I have never observed, Levison, that you were fond of games. More than once authority has had to be exerted to compel you to attend practice on the playing-fields."

"I'm going to take up footer this season, sir."

"I am glad to hear it, Levison! I am somewhat surprised, however, that you should find a game among the village boys so very interesting."

"They've got a new player in the village team, sir," explained Levison. "Quite a ripping forward—a chap who plays centre-forward better than any fellow of his age at this school."

"Oh!" gasped Blake.

"Bai Jove!"

"You will kindly remain, Levison, after I have called the roll," said Mr. Lathom.

"Certainly, sir!" said Levison cheerfully.

The master of the Fourth finished the roll, and the St. Jim's fellows left the hall, Levison remaining behind with the Form-master. Mr. Lathom beckoned to the black sheep to approach.

"Levison, I hope you have told me the truth," said the little Form-master, not unkindly.

"I hope so, sir," said Levison, with a touch of impertinence.

Mr. Lathom frowned.

"I have not infrequently found you out in prevarication, Levison. Otherwise, I should not think of doubting the word of a boy in my Form. But the story you have told me is very odd."

"Indeed, sir!"

"You made the same explanation to Mr. Railton last evening. Mr. Railton told me so."

"Yes, sir."

"On both occasions, Levison, you were delayed by the fact that you stayed on the village green because the village team was at practice?"

"Yes, sir."

"Yet you have never shown any keenness for outdoor games, to my knowledge."

"I told you, sir, that I'm taking up footer this season."

"Quite so—quite so! If your unpunctuality was caused by so very harmless a reason, Levison, I should be sorry to misjudge you. I am sorry to say, however, that your reputation is not good, and that you are under a somewhat serious suspicion."

"I hope not, sir."

"It appears to be established that some boy belonging to this school has been seen at a low haunt in this neighbourhood," said Mr. Lathom. "It is a matter that affects the good name of the school, and is very serious."

"I hope the fellow will be found out, sir, for the sake of the school," said Levison calmly. "He ought to be expelled, in my opinion."

"I have little doubt that he will be expelled if discovered," said the Form-master drily.

"That will be all the better for the school, sir."

Mr. Lathom coughed. Whether Levison was innocent, or whether he was the coolest and most impertinent young rascal at St. Jim's, was a question to which the Form-master was unable to find an answer.

"Your interest in football is rather sudden, Levison. May I inquire what caused you to take up the game so—ahem!—abruptly, and to display this sudden interest in village football?"

"It's because my minor's come to St. Jim's, sir," said Levison meekly. "I feel that, as his elder brother, it's up to me to set him a good example, sir, and help to bring him up in the way he should go."

Mr. Lathom coughed again, quite violently. He could hardly doubt that Levison's reply was intended for impertinence; yet Levison spoke so meekly and seriously that it was difficult to find fault with him.

"You may go, Levison," said the Form-master abruptly.

"Thank, you, sir. Is there nothing else you would like to ask me, sir?" said Levison demurely.

"Nothing! You may go."

Levison went.

Mr. Lathom shook his head very seriously. He was not satisfied with Levison, and he had an uncomfortable feeling that the young rascal had been pulling his leg all through the interview. Which was not at all gratifying to so extremely dignified a person as a Form-master!

CHAPTER 6.

Arthur Augustus Takes the Bun!

MANY eyes were turned upon Levison of the Fourth when he came into the Common-room. The black sheep had succeeded in making himself an object of general interest and discussion, which was not at all disagreeable to him. Levison loved the limelight, and he would rather have been noted for rascally qualities than not noted at all.

Monty Lowther came towards him, feeling in his pocket as he did so.

"Got off with Lathom, dear boy?" he asked.

"Yes, thanks."

"Not licked, or lined, or jawed?"

"Yes, jawed," said Levison calmly. "Still, I pulled the old fossil's leg, so that made up for the jawing!"

"Bai Jove! It is wathah diswespectful to allude to your Form-mastah as an old fossil, Levison," said Arthur Augustus severely.

"Go hon!"

"You got out of it all right, then?" said Blake.

"Quite all right—thanks for your kind inquiry!"

"But surely Lathom didn't swallow your yarn?" ejaculated Herries.

"I'm not sure," said Levison. "But he had to give me the benefit of the doubt."

"I suppose he couldn't prove it was lies," remarked Herries thoughtfully. "He doesn't know what a Prussian you are, so well as we do."

"Exactly. That was where his difficulty came in."

"But that cock won't fight twice," chuckled Crooke of the Shell. "You'll have to think of a better whopper next time, Levison."

"When I'm hard up for a lie, I'll ask you, Crooke. You'll never be hard up for one."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gentlemen," said Monty Lowther, "the presentation is about to take place. Levison, your schoolfellows feel that it is up to them to bestow upon you some mark of distinction as a token of their admiration for your very unusual power of Hunning, otherwise rolling out whoppers, and for your remarkable neck. There isn't a fellow at St. Jim's with so much neck—that's admitted on all hands!"

"Hear, hear!"

Lowther's hand came out of his pocket. It held a bun. It was a somewhat old bun, considerably stale, and for that reason cost only the moderate sum of one halfpenny at the school shop. The humorist of the Shell considered that his little joke was fully worth that moderate sum.

"Take it, dear boy!" he said, placing it in the astonished Levison's hand amid a roar of laughter from the juniors.

"What in thunder—" began Levison.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you giving me this rubbish for, you silly ass?"

"It's a bun," explained Lowther. "You've earned it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You frabjous idiot—"

"Gentlemen, I put it to the meeting whether Levison doesn't take the bun?" said Monty Lowther.

"Hear, hear!"

"He does—he do!" chuckled Julian of the Fourth. "Stick to it, Levison!"

"He takes the whole bun-shop, when it comes to lying," grinned Reilly. "Sure, you've fairly earned it, Levison, me boy!"

Levison's face was dark with anger. He was far from appreciating Monty Lowther's exquisite humour. The stale bun crackled in his fingers as he clenched them upon it. Monty Lowther stepped back with a smile of satisfaction, quite satisfied with the effect of his little presentation.

"You cheeky rotter!" said Levison, between his teeth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove, don't be watty, deah boy!" chortled Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I wegard it as vewy funnay!"

"Take the joke, you know," said Gore, with a chuckle. "You've taken the bun."

Levison strode to the door, his thin lips set. Near the door he turned suddenly, and his hand came up, with the bun in it.

Whizz!

"Look out, Lowther!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

But Monty Lowther was looking out. He had quite expected that. Lowther's humour was not exhausted yet. He was standing close to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and as the hard bun whizzed through the air he caught hold of the swell of St. Jim's, and drew the surprised and unresisting Gussy in front of him.

Crack!

There was a fiendish yell from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy as the stale bun cracked on his aristocratic nose.

"Yawwooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Levison, grinning now, walked out of the Common-room.

Arthur Augustus put his hand to his nose.

"Gweat Scott! Oh, cwumbs! My nose!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the juniors. "Gussy takes the bun!"

"Gwoogh! Lowthah, you feahful wottah—"

"Hallo!" said Lowther, in surprise. "What's the matter?"

"You feahful beast, you deliberately drew me in the way of that wotten bun, and my nose is feahfully hurt!"

"Well, isn't it a D'Arcy's place to be in the front in time of danger?" demanded Lowther. "I suppose you're not afraid to face the fire? You don't expect a common mortal to shove himself in front of a D'Arcy, do you?"

"You uttah ass—"

"I'm only going by what you've said yourself," said Lowther. "A D'Arcy's place is at the front. Well, I yanked you in front. What are you grumbling about?"

"I wegard you as a pwactical jokin' beast, Lowthah, and I am goin' to give you a feahful thwashin', unless you immediately apologise!" roared Arthur Augustus.

Monty Lowther reflected.

"Will an apology set the matter right?" he asked.

"Yaas."

"Good! I apologise," said Monty Lowther cheerfully. "Any old thing! I beg you to let the serene light of your countenance shine once more, with its accustomed effulgence, upon your devoted slave!"

"You uttah ass, I do not wegard that as a pwopah apology! However, as you have expressed wegwet, I will ovahlook the occuurence."

"I breathe again!" said Lowther.

Arthur Augustus sniffed, and turned away, and Monty Lowther stooped and picked up the bun.

Whizz!

"Yow-oooo!" yelped Arthur Augustus, as the bun crashed on the back of his elegant jacket. "Wha-a-at was that?"

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"D'ARCY IN DISGRACE!"

"The bun," said Lowther.
 "You uttah wuffian!" shrieked Arthur Augustus. "I am goin' to thwash you this time! I wefuse to be the victim of your wotten twicks!"

And the swell of St. Jim's pushed back his spotless cuffs and advanced upon Lowther.

The humorist of the Shell backed away.

"Hold on!" he ejaculated. "I apologise!"

"What!"

"I apologise!" said Lowther. "From one gentleman to another, an apology sets anything right. I've heard you say so."

Arthur Augustus paused.

"Vewy well, if you apologise, the mattah is dwopped," he said.

"Hear, hear!"

Arthur Augustus walked away. The cheerful Lowther fielded the bun—which was showing signs of wear-and-tear by this time—and it whizzed through the air again. This time it caught Arthur Augustus on his noble ear, and he spun round with a yell of wrath.

"You feahful wottah, are you playin' your wotten twicks again?" he shouted. "Bai Jove, I will wipe up the floor with you, Monty Lowthah!"

Lowther held up his hand.

"Stop—"

"I wefuse to stop—"

"But I apologise—"

"What?"

"I apologise!" said Lowther calmly, while the juniors yelled with laughter. "From one gentleman to another—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Do you think you are goin' to make a cock-shy of me all the evenin' with that wotten bun?" shrieked Arthur Augustus.

"Certainly!"

"Wha-a-a-at?"

"But I'm going to apologise every time!" explained Monty Lowther. "That sets the matter right!"

Arthur Augustus' face was a study.

"If you thwow that bun at me again, Lowthah—"

"Yes, I'm going to," said Lowther, with a nod.

"I shall give you a feahful thwashin'!"

"Not if I apologise, surely?" exclaimed Lowther, in surprise.

"Yaas, you wottah!"

Lowthah shook his head sadly.

"Blake, I should advise you to keep your eye on Gussy," he said. "His manners are failing. If this goes on, Gussy will no longer be the glass of fashion and the mould of form in the House. Gussy, I'm shocked at you! Under the circumstances, I decline to throw the bun at you any more, as your manners are not to be depended on. You shock me, Gussy!"

And Lowther, with a sad shake of the head, walked away to do his prep.

Arthur Augustus turned a very pink face upon the yelling juniors.

"I fail to see anythin' whatevah to laugh at," he said.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wepeat that I see nothin' whatevah to cackle at, you uttah asses!"

But the other fellows evidently did, for they persisted in cackling.

CHAPTER 7.

Looking for Levison.

KILDARE of the Sixth was frowning.

The frown of Kildare, the captain of the school, head of the games, and great Panjandrum generally, was a matter of serious import. Fellows wondered what was the matter, and compassionated the unfortunate individual who had called that frown to Kildare's usually placid brow.

It was Wednesday afternoon, a cool, clear autumn day, and ideal weather for footer. Most of the St. Jim's fellows did not need urging to the footer ground. They were only too glad to be there.

But the task fell to the prefects of seeing that the slackers and shirkers did their bit. Compulsory

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practice at St. Jim's only amounted to four hours in the week, so there was really no excuse for a fellow shirking it, however slack he might be. But the more a fellow slacks, the more he feels inclined to slack; and Kildare and Darrel and another prefect or two had been routing shirkers out of odd corners, and cuffing them off to Little Side.

Crooke and Racke of the Shell had been routed out of their study; Mellish had been rounded up as he was seeking to scuttle out of gates; Clampe had been brought along by the ear; Trimble had been helped out of the tuckshop by a vigorous application of a football boot; Piggott of the Third had been cornered in a box-room with a cigarette, and Piggott was looking like a particularly Hunnish Hun in consequence. Other fellows who were inclined to slack about scudded down to Little Side of their own accord, lest worse should befall them. But one slacker could not be found, and that was Levison of the Fourth. Hence the frown on Kildare's brow.

Kildare was a dutiful prefect, and was prepared to do his duty at any amount of inconvenience to himself. But naturally he did not like wasting a ripping afternoon on the thankless task of hunting out slackers. So Kildare's wrath rose as he failed to find Levison of the Fourth, and had to leave his own footer over till he found him.

Levison wasn't in the School House, and he wasn't in the New House. He wasn't in the tuckshop or the gym or the quad. He wasn't to be seen anywhere.

"The lazy little beast has sneaked out!" Kildare told Darrel wrathfully. "And I've been told to keep a special eye on him. He's dodged us."

Kildare strode away to the juniors' ground, where Tom Merry & Co. were busy with practice. The Grammar School match was coming off on Saturday, and the junior footballers were improving the shining hour.

Kildare called Blake off the field.

"Have you seen Levison?" he asked.

"Saw him at dinner."

"Not since?"

"No."

"Do you know where he is?"

Jack Blake was silent.

He thought he could guess where Ernest Levison was, but he had no intention of confiding his guess to the head prefect of the School House.

"Well?" snapped Kildare.

"I don't know anything about him," said Blake. "I dare say he's gone out."

"I warned him that there would be a row if he missed practice again," said Kildare. "Levison is going a bit too far. Do you know where he's gone?"

"Levison never tells me anything about where he goes."

Kildare gave him a sharp look.

But he was not the kind of fellow to induce a junior to sneak about another junior, and he asked no more questions. He strode away with knitted brows.

Blake whistled softly as he went back to the game. He did not join in it at once, however. He went over to where a crowd of the Third were busy with a ball, apparently trying to transfer as much of the mud from it as possible to their own persons. He called to Levison minor.

Frank Levison did not answer. He was busy.

"Levison minor!" yelled Blake angrily.

"Oh, go and eat coke!" called out the fag.

"Come here, you young ass!"

"Bow-wow!"

"Shut up, you Fourth Form duffer!" called out Wally. "Don't worry!"

"It's about your brother, Levison minor!" called out Blake.

Frank detached himself from the muddy scramble at once, and ran towards Blake.

"Come back!" shouted Wally wrathfully. "Where are you going to, young Levison? Going to slack like your major—eh?"

Levison minor did not reply. He joined Blake, with an anxious look.

"What's the row?" he asked.

"Is Ernest in trouble?"

"Do you know where your brother is?" asked Blake.

The fag hesitated.

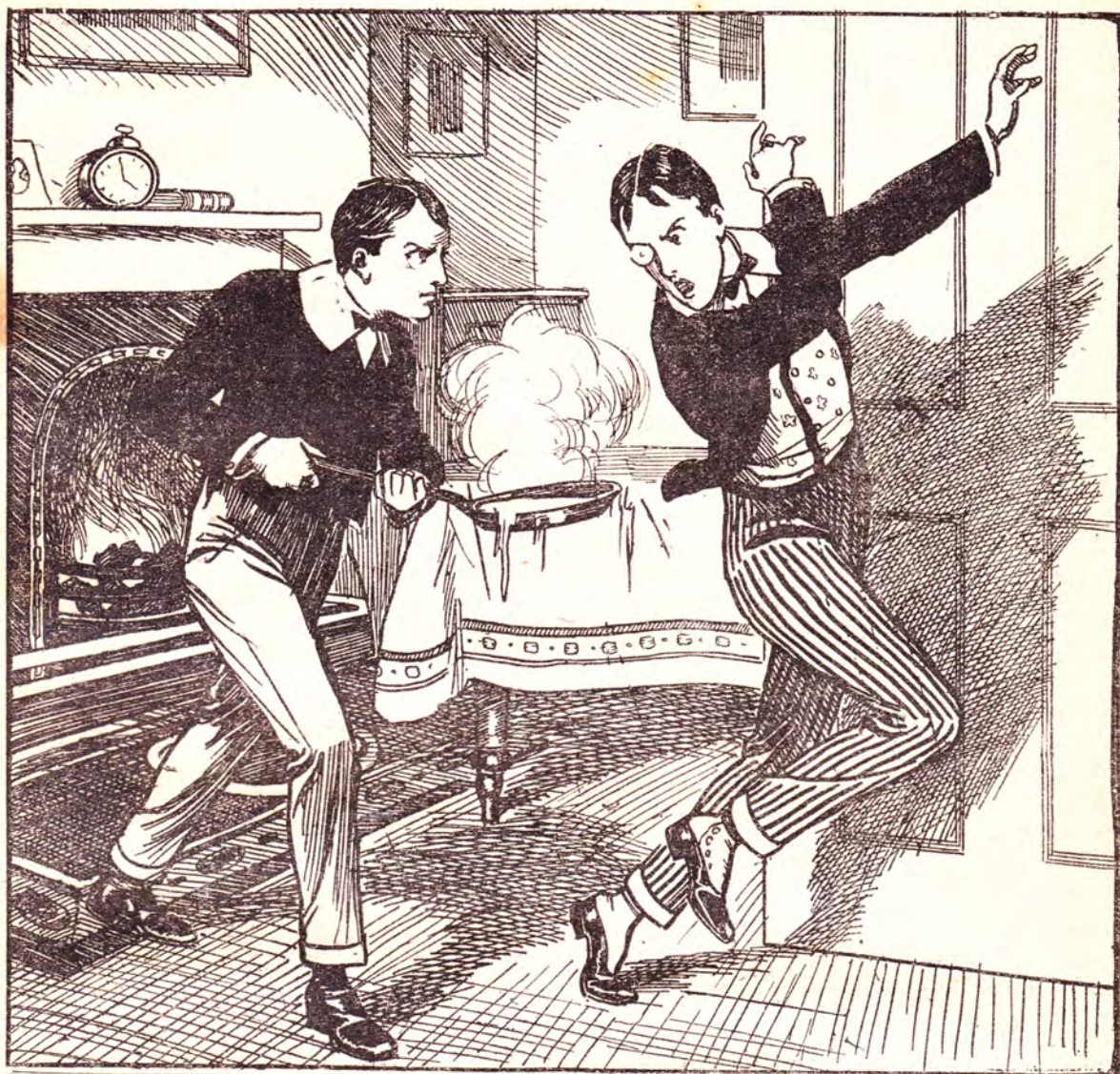
TUCK HAMPERS

FOR READERS OF

THE
BOYS' FRIEND

OUT TO-DAY!

ONE PENNY.



"Keep that fwyn'-pan away, you howwid beast—yawoooh!" Arthur Augustus fairly fled from the study, with the frying-pan only an inch behind him. (See Chapter 4.)

"I don't want to know anything about him!" said Blake gruffly. "I don't care a tuppenny rap where he is or what he's doing. But he's missed footer practice again, and Kildare is on the war-path. If you could find him and bring him back, it would be all the better for him."

"He wouldn't come," said the fag.

"You know where he is, then?"

"I—I think so."

"Well, most likely a prefect will go and look for him," said Blake. "It's no business of mine, but I don't want to see a fellow sacked—even your major. If you know where he is, you'd better give him a tip he may be looked for. Railton may take it in hand himself."

"My brother's doing nothing to be sacked for!" said Frank indignantly.

Blake snorted.

"You don't understand," said the fag.

"No, I don't, and I don't want to! Let him take his chance, and be hanged to him! I don't know that I ought to have given you the tip, anyway!" said Blake savagely.

"You don't understand. He's cut practice, but—but—it isn't as you think," said Frank.

"Rats! You say you know where he is?"

"I think I know."

"Then you know what he's up to, I suppose?"

"I—I think so. But—but there's no harm in it. Ernie told me about it. I—I was anxious when he missed call-

over the other night, and I asked him," faltered the fag. "But I'm to keep it secret."

"So you're keeping Levison's secrets, are you?" said Blake grimly. "Precious lot of good that will do you! He might keep his rotten secrets to himself!"

"It isn't a rotten secret. You don't understand."

"Br-r-r! Well, let him take his chance. It will be better for you if he's booted out of the school, as well as better for the school, from what I can see!" growled Blake. "Blessed if I thought even Levison would tell his shady secrets to a kid in the Third!"

"It's not shady!" retorted Frank. "You never do Ernie justice, any of you! He's as good as anybody else in the Fourth, or better!"

Blake grinned.

"That's rather rough on the Fourth," he said. "Never mind. If he's up to no harm, it won't hurt him if Kildare finds him out. No business of mine, anyway."

Blake walked back to the junior ground. An impulse of good nature had led him to give Levison minor that warning. To his surprise, Frank went back to his game at once. He did not seem alarmed about his brother.

Meanwhile Kildare had gone into the School House. He went to Mr. Railton's study. The Housemaster looked inquiringly at his frowning face.

"About Levison, sir," said Kildare. "You asked me to keep an eye on him. He has cleared off for the afternoon."

Mr. Railton compressed his lips.

"You spoke to him on the subject, Kildare?"

"Yes, sir."

"Yet he has gone out, disregarding your warning?"

"So it appears, sir."

"I am afraid it is necessary to look into the matter," said the Housemaster quietly. "As you know, I have been very far from satisfied with Levison for some time. It appears beyond doubt that some St. Jim's junior has been seen at a low haunt in Rylcombe—you know the place I mean. For the good name of the school, the matter must be cleared up."

"You want me to look for him, sir?"

"I will not take you away from your game, Kildare. I will go down to Rylcombe myself."

"I am quite ready, if you wish."

"No! I will take the matter in hand myself. Levison's very mysterious excursions must be explained, once and for all. His explanation on two occasions was very extraordinary, and I can scarcely credit it. If he is in Rylcombe this afternoon, I shall find him," said Mr. Railton.

"Very good, sir."

Kildare went down to Big Side, leaving the matter to the Housemaster. A little later, some of the juniors caught sight of Mr. Railton going down to the gates, with a very grave expression on his face.

"Levison's booked, I think," Jack Blake remarked. "There goes Railton—and I fancy I know where he is going!"

"Aftah Levison, deah boy?"

"You bet."

"Bai Jove! Unless the wottah is weally turnin' ovah a new leaf, Blake, he will be in feahful twouble!"

Blake grunted.

"Precious little new leaf about Levison. I'll bet you nine-pence to fourpence Railton's going to the Green Man, and he'll find Levison there!"

"Bai Jove! Pewwaps they won't let him in if Levison's there," suggested Arthur Augustus.

"I fancy they wouldn't be able to stop him. I hope he'll give Joliffe and Lodgey a hiding while he's there. He could do it, though he's only got one arm to use."

Arthur Augustus looked thoughtful.

"If there's goin' to be a wow, Blake, pewwaps we ought

to go aftah old Wailton and back him up. What do you think, deah boy?"

"I think Railton would pull your ears if he found you hanging about after him, that's what I think," said Blake gruffly.

"I should wefuse to have my eahs pulled, Blake," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity.

But on consideration Arthur Augustus decided not to follow Mr. Railton, to back him up in a possible row with the rascally gang at the Green Man. It was barely possible that a Housemaster might not appreciate such support from a member of the Fourth Form.

CHAPTER 8.

Very Mysterious!

THAT Levison of the Fourth had gone out without leave, and that his Housemaster was after him was soon known far and wide.

After footer was over the juniors discussed the matter with keen interest.

Crooke & Co. congratulated themselves that they had not been on what they called the ran-dan that afternoon.

If there was a storm brewing, the black sheep were quite satisfied that it should burst upon Levison's devoted head alone. They were not in the least anxious to share their associate's scrape.

"The silly ass was simply askin' for trouble," Crooke remarked to his cronies. "He was pilin' it on too thick. Missin' call-over—cuttin' footer after he'd been warned—it was simply asking for it!"

"Well, it won't be much loss if he's sacked," said Racke. "He's been a rotten cad ever since his minor came to the school. I wish they'd boot him out, and his minor after him."

"If he's had up before the beaks he may talk," said Mellish uneasily. "It would be like him to give the whole game away."

Crooke shook his head.

"It wouldn't be like him," he said, "I'll say that for him. He wouldn't round on us unless we had a hand in givin' him away. Anyway, if he does, we all stick together an' deny it."

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"Oh, yes, rather!"

But the black sheep felt a little uneasy, all the same. If one member of their honourable company was taken "before the beaks" it was only too possible that he might tell secrets about the rest; and a considerable amount of hard lying would be required to escape sharing his fate. Lying did not cost Crooke & Co. very much; but lying under the penetrating eyes of the Head was not an easy or agreeable task. So, upon the whole, they hoped that Levison would get clear on this occasion, as he had on so many other occasions.

But the general opinion was that Levison would not get clear. His luck had always been good; but the juniors opined that the luckiest rascal must be lagged at last, and it looked as if Levison's time had come.

Few cared much whether Levison was expelled or not, but all were interested to know whether it would come to pass, or whether the young rascal's phenomenal luck would hold good once more.

There was a buzz of suppressed excitement when Mr. Railton was seen to enter at the gates.

Levison of the Fourth walked at his side.

All eyes were turned on Levison.

He did not have the hangdog air the juniors expected to see. He seemed quite calm and unruffled.

"So Railton found him!" murmured Blake.

"I wonder where?" grinned Digby. "He doesn't look as if the chopper was coming down."

"I must say the boundah's got plenty of nerve," remarked Arthur Augustus. "If he is goin' to be sacked, he's takin' it remarkably well."

"Oh, that's only his neck!" growled Herries.

"Pewwaps he has turned ovah a new leaf aftah all," suggested Arthur Augustus. "Waiton may have found him at Mrs. Murphy's, havin' a gingah-pop, you know!"

"Bow-wow!"

"He wouldn't cut footer practice for a ginger-pop at Mrs. Murphy's," said Tom Merry. "Kildare warned him specially that he was keeping an eye on him. He must have had a motive for disobeying orders, unless he was just asking for trouble."

The Housemaster and the junior came on to the School House. Mr. Railton appeared unconscious of the general interest taken in the arrival. But Levison noted the curious glances from all sides, and he smiled his sneering smile.

They entered the School House, and Levison followed the Housemaster into his study. The door closed, much to the disappointment of Baggy Trimble, who had posted himself on the banisters to watch what went on in the room.

The juniors waited for Levison to come out.

It was tea-time, but few went up to tea. Levison of the Fourth absorbed all their interest. Was he going to be sacked? Had Railton caught him at the Green Man?

The questions were of really thrilling interest, and even fellows who did not care a button about Levison personally were anxious to have them answered.

The study door opened at last, and Levison came out rubbing his hands.

"Caned!" said Trimble.

"Licked!" said Blake. "That means it isn't the sack, I suppose!"

Levison came down the passage, and a crowd of anxious inquirers surrounded him. He looked at them coolly.

"Hallo! Anything on?" he asked.

"Put us out of our misery!" said Monty Lowther. "Have you been sacked, or haven't you been sacked?"

"Sacked?" repeated Levison, raising his eyebrows.

"Why?"

"Well, you ought to know why!" grinned Manners. "Didn't Railton catch you in Rylcombe?"

"Yes."

"At the Green Man?" asked half a dozen voices.

"Well, I wasn't a hundred miles from the Green Man," said Levison calmly.

"But were you there?"

"I'm afraid I can't satisfy your curiosity," said Levison. "Still, you can put it down that I was at the Green Man, if you like. Where should I be likely to be?"

"Railton brought you back, anyway. What in the wide world have you told him this time?" asked Herries.

"Better ask him!" suggested Levison.

"But you've been licked," said Blake. "What were you licked for?"

"Disobeying orders. Kildare told me not to go out till after the footer practice this afternoon, and I went."

"And nother else?"

"Nothing else."

"Do you mean to say that you've spent a whole afternoon out of school without doing anything blackguardly?" asked Herries incredulously. And there was a laugh.

Levison grinned.

"It's amazing, I suppose, but I have!" he said.

"I say, what were you doing when Railton found you?" asked Trimble.

"Sitting on the grass."

"In the garden of the Green Man?"

"No! On the village green."

"Well, my hat!" said Trimble in amazement.

"What the thunder were you sitting on the grass for?" asked Tom Merry.

"Resting."

"After a game of nap?" grinned Lowther.

"Not this time. After exerting myself rather hard."

"Can't you tell us what you've been doing?" demanded Crooke.

Levison shook his head.

"No!"

"Why not?" exclaimed half a dozen juniors.

"Because I don't choose to!" said Levison cheerfully. And he walked on, leaving the School House fellows staring.

Blake rubbed his nose thoughtfully.

"Well, that beats it!" he said. "Levison didn't ask for a licking simply for the sake of sitting on the grass on the village green. He's been up to something. But how the merry thunder has he spoofed Railton?"

It was a deep mystery, and the juniors gave it up. But Levison was more an object of interest than ever. Nobody believed that he had been innocently occupied at Rylcombe that afternoon. And the Housemaster had run him down at Rylcombe. How had he spoofed the Housemaster—for nobody doubted he had done so. It was a mystery.

And Levison, as if he delighted in keeping the curious fellows on tenterhooks of curiosity, refused to utter a word of explanation.

But one thing was assured. Levison had not been sacked; he had not even been reported to the Head for a flogging. Somehow or other he had satisfied Mr. Railton, and, apart from being caned for disregarding a prefect's orders, he had not been called to account at all. Either there was nothing shady, after all, in his mysterious business at Rylcombe or else his luck had held good once more.

CHAPTER 9.

The Grammarian Match!

"THAT cad here again!" growled Crooke.

It was Saturday afternoon, and Gordon Gay & Co. had arrived from the Grammar School. The match had started, and there was a good crowd round Little Side to watch it. Crooke & Co. came lounging down, in the charitable hope of seeing Tom Merry's team beaten by the Grammarians.

And among the fellows who stood watching the kick-off was Grimes. Hence Crooke's remark.

Grimes had been delivering goods at the school, and here he was. But he was not alone. Levison of the Fourth and Lumley-Lumley had joined him. And Crooke & Co. had to content themselves with sneering from a distance.

Levison had joined Grimes at the kitchen door, and walked with him to the football-ground, and Lumley-Lumley joined them there. Lumley-Lumley was surprised, and he showed it. He had been very friendly at one time with Grimes, and had had a scrap with Levison for chivvying him. He was astounded to see the two on such good terms.

Levison noted his astonishment, and grinned.

"Hallo! You two getting pally?" asked Lumley-Lumley.

"Why not?" said Levison.

Grimes grinned.

"No reason why not, I guess," said Lumley-Lumley. "Glad to see it, in fact. Got time to see the match, Grimey?"

"Mr. Sands said I could stay, if there was no objection, sir," said Grimes. "I don't often get a chance of watchin' a match."

"Good old Sands! I'll never say anything more to him for putting sand in his sugar, I guess!" said Lumley-Lumley. "And you come over here to play next Saturday, Grimey. How's your team getting on?"

"Fast-rate!" said Grimes.

"Going to beat us next Saturday?"

"I 'ope so, Master Lumley."

"Good for you!" said Lumley-Lumley, chuckling.

"Grimes has got a new player," said Levison. "He thinks a lot of him—don't you, Grimey?"

"I do, Master Levison," grinned Grimes.

"Yes, I guess I heard you tell Lathom so!" said Lumley-Lumley, looking curiously at Levison. "The new forward you were interested in when you missed call-over the other night."

"That's the chap," said Levison.

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"Then you were telling Lathom the truth?" ejaculated Lumley-Lumley, in astonishment.

"As near as I ever get, you know," said Levison, shrugging his shoulders. "It's true that Grimes has a new forward in the village team, and I'm rather interested in his play. I'm generally there when that chap plays."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Grimes.

Lumley-Lumley looked puzzled.

"I guess I don't quite see the joke," he remarked. "And I don't quite catch on, either, Levison. If you want to see some good footer, you can see it here, without watching Grimey's new forward. I guess he's not above St. Jim's form!"

"I think he is," said Levison calmly.

"Bow-wow!"

"Well, that's my opinion. I believe Grimey's new forward could beat any player in our junior eleven, excepting Talbot or Figgins or Tom Merry."

"I guess you're off-side," said Lumley-Lumley. "Shall we see the wonderful new man next Saturday, Grimey?"

"I 'ope so, Master Lumley."

"He's going to play against our team?"

"Yes," grinned Grimes.

For the life of him Lumley-Lumley could not see why Grimes was grinning.

"That looks like a goal," Levison remarked, as there was a hot attack on the Grammarian citadel. "Pass, you fat-head, Blake—pass, you duffer! There it goes! Now, Talbot! Hurrah!"

The ball went in.

"Goal!" roared the St. Jim's crowd.

"Goal!" yelled Levison. "Hurrah!"

Lumley-Lumley simply blinked at him.

"I guess you're mighty keen on footer all of a sudden," he remarked.

"Not so jolly sudden," said Levison. "I told you a couple of weeks ago I was going to take up footer."

"You're a long time setting about it, then. You haven't been near the footer-ground from that day to this."

"Oh, everything takes time," said Levison carelessly, while Grimes chuckled. "Perhaps I shall open some of your eyes one of these days."

"Perhaps you will," said Lumley-Lumley drily. "But I guess you won't!"

The game was going hot and strong now. The Grammarians were fighting hard to equalise, but it was not till close on time that Gordon Gay succeeded in putting the ball in.

The Grammarian goal was followed by a sharp attack from Tom Merry & Co., and the St. Jim's forwards—Talbot, Figgins, Tom Merry, Blake, and D'Arcy—seemed to swarm round the visitors' goal. But the attack did not materialise, and the whistle went for half-time.

"Fumblers!" said Levison, in a voice loud enough for the St. Jim's footballers to hear as they came away.

Tom Merry looked round.

"Hallo, you here, Levison? What the dickens are you doing on a football-ground?"

"Passin' impertinent remarks, bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus indignantly. "You are not the person to pass remarks on a fellow's play, Levison. I wedged it as wotten cheek!"

Levison laughed.

"Of course, I don't know anything about the game," he remarked. "It's even necessary for Lowther to tell me that there's eleven players in a team, and that the game's played with a ball. But I know enough to know that that goal was fumbled, and that it ought to have come off!"

"You cheeky ass!" said Blake.

"You awfully cheeky wottah!"

"And you fumbled it, Blake," said Levison deliberately.

"What?" yelled Blake.

Criticism of his play from a fellow who played the game would not have exasperated Jack Blake so much. But hostile criticism from a slacker and shirker like Levison of the Fourth was rather too thick.

"Oh, shut up!" said Tom Merry angrily. "You don't know whether a chap fumbles or not, at any rate!"

"You agree with me," said Levison coolly. "You know

Blake fumbled. You know he ought to have passed out to D'Arcy, instead of centreing, and D'Arcy was ready, hanging up for the shot, only it didn't come."

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy, taken aback.

It was true enough; but the incident had been so quick, passing like a flash, that only a keen eye would have noted it, and seen what the chances actually were—only the keen eye of a fellow who knew the game inside out.

Tom Merry looked at Levison in astonishment. He had noted it, of course, though he had not intended to mention it to Blake, who was only too keenly conscious of his mistake the instant it had been made.

"If you know so much about footer, it's a pity you don't play the game!" said Tom tartly.

"I know enough to know when a silly ass fumbles and misses a certain goal with his muddling," grinned Levison.

Jack Blake's face was scarlet.

"You cheeky cad!" he said between his teeth.

"And you know I'm right, Blake," said Levison.

Blake nodded at once.

"Yes, you're right, I know that; I ought to have let D'Arcy have the ball, and I knew it a second too late. But you don't know anything about it, you cheeky gasbag! I suppose Lumley or Grimes pointed it out to you."

"I guess not," said Lumley-Lumley. "I didn't see it—it was a bit too quick for me."

"Same 'ere!" said Grimes at once. "I thought Master Merry would get the ball when Blake sent it in."

"And Figgins got it, as a cow with half an eye could have seen, if a cow with half an eye had been in Blake's place," said Levison mockingly. "If D'Arcy had got the ball, he had a clear field for a run in, with the Grammarians backs tumbling over Tom Merry and Blake and one another, and Carboy out of goal!"

"Bai Jove, that's wight enough! Don't mind that uttiah wottah, Blake. I wedged his remarks as uttially impertinent, though he happens to be wight!"

"Oh, I don't mind him!" said Blake, though his lips were set. "He knows what he's talking about. Blessed if I know how he picked up so much knowledge of the game at the Green Man!"

"Oh, that isn't all I know!" said Levison coolly. "I could give Tom Merry a tip or two, as well as Blake."

"Oh, could you?" said Tom, nettled.

"Yes. You let Gay pass out the ball to Wootton major on the wing, a few minutes before. You thought he was going to pass to Mont Blong; but I could see he wasn't," said Levison. "Gay was fooling you, and you fell into the trap. I shouldn't have fallen into it."

"You bragging rotter!" began Lowther.

"He's right," said Tom. "Gay did take me in, and then they got up the field with the ball. But how Levison spotted it beats me!"

"You mean to say he's right?" ejaculated Lowther.

"Yes, he's right enough."

"Well, my hat!"

"As a matter of fact, you've all fumbled, excepting Kangaroo and Talbot," said Levison, with insolent coolness. "Gay wouldn't have got a goal at all if you hadn't. And Talbot lost three distinct chances in about ten minutes. Once through Figgins failing to pass out; once through Lowther sending the ball wide; and once through Redfern letting the ball go into touch."

"Oh, my hat!" said Talbot.

The voices of Redfern, Lowther, and Figgins were heard in chorus:

"Is that so, Talbot?"

Talbot of the Shell looked rather uncomfortable.

"Well, I—I thought so," he said. "Only my opinion, of course. Levison must have been watching like a hawk."

"As for you, Reilly—"

"Sure, is it a thick ear ye want?" asked Reilly of the Fourth gruffly. "Because if ye don't, ye needn't give me any tips, Levison."

The footballers moved on, having had quite enough of Levison and his criticism—well-founded as it was, as they had to acknowledge. They would not have minded the criticism much from anybody else; but from the slacker, shirker, and black sheep it came rather a bitter pill.

Lumley-Lumley stared at Levison in blank astonishment.

"I guess you know a bit of the game, after all," he remarked. "Where did you pick it up? Not on this footer-ground."

Levison laughed, and did not reply.

In the second half, the struggle was keen, but a goal came to Talbot near the finish, and St. Jim's ended two to one. When the footballers came off the field, Tom Merry paused to speak to Levison of the Fourth.

"Any more criticisms?" he asked.

"Oh, a few!" said Levison carelessly. "That goal was a



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corker, I admit that. Talbot can play. But if your front line hadn't run to seed in the middle of the game, you could have had another."

"Two or three, perhaps, if you'd been in the front line?" suggested Tom, with heavy sarcasm.

"One, at least," said Levison coolly. "Perhaps two."

Tom Merry snorted. Just as Levison's remarks were, Tom Merry felt a strong inclination to pull his nose. It pleased Levison's peculiar nature to put the junior skipper's back up in this way. Tom turned to Grimes.

"We shall see you here next Saturday, Grimey," he remarked.

"Yes, Master Tom."

"And you want to look out, too," chimed in Lumley-Lumley. "Grimes has got a new forward, who is going to stagger humanity."

"Good!" said Tom, laughing. "Is that so, Grimey?"

"Jolly good man, anyway, and chance it," said Grimes. "You'll be surprised when you see him, Master Tom."

"Well, we'll be glad to see him, anyway," said Tom; "and we'll give a wriggle or two before he puts the extinguisher on us, I hope. Ta-ta, Grimey!"

When Grimes left, Levison of the Fourth went with him. And that evening, Levison was back just in time for calling-over, darting into Hall barely in time to answer "adsum" to his name when Mr. Railton called it. Mr. Railton gave him a glance, but made no remark. But as to where he had been, and what he had been doing, Levison made no explanation to anyone.

CHAPTER 10.

Grimes' New Man!

LEVISON of the Fourth came out of the School House, after dinner on the following Saturday, with his coat on. The Terrible Three were chatting in the doorway, killing time till the footer-match was due.

That afternoon, Tom Merry's team was playing the village eleven—a match which did not loom very large in the eyes of the St. Jim's junior footballers. In the nature of things Grimes' eleven could not be up to the form of the fellows who had so much more time to give to the game, and the juniors were accustomed to beating them.

There had been some talk about Grimes' statement that he had a new forward in his team, who was a wonderful player. The St. Jim's juniors grinned over it rather indulgently. Grimes' wonderful new man was perhaps a great player in the eyes of the village footballers; but they thought he would probably prove very small beer on the St. Jim's ground.

Monty Lowther hailed Levison as he passed. The humorist of the Shell could not avoid being humorous, in season and out of season.

"Aren't you going to honour us with your presence this afternoon, Levison?" he asked reproachfully. "We were looking forward to having some more tips on the game, you know."

"I dare say I could give you some," said Levison.

"You could give us some more wotten cheek, you mean!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who was adorning the stone balustrade with his elegant person. "I wegard all your remarks on the subject as impertinent, Levison."

"I suppose you're going to mop up the villagers as usual this afternoon?" said Levison sarcastically.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I suppose so," said Tom Merry. "They play a good game, but they're not quite up to St. Jim's form. You know that."

"Their new man is."

"I shall be glad to see him," said Tom, with a smile. "Grimey seems to think a lot of him. You've seen him play?"

Levison nodded.

"Well, you do know something about the game," said Tom. "You can't play it, but you seem to be able to judge play pretty well. What do you really think of Grimes' new man?"

"First class!"

"Better than the rest?"

"Heaps!"

"Quite dangerous for us to tackle—what?" grinned Monty Lowther.

"Well, I think he will open your eyes a bit," said Levison. "If you fumble as you did last Saturday, Lowther, you won't be much use against him."

"You cheeky ass!"

"Well, you asked me. By the way, Tom Merry, you generally give your wangy players a chance in the village match."

Tom Merry laughed.

"I don't know about wangy players," he said. "But every chap is entitled to a chance sooner or later, and second-rate men are good enough for that match. No need to spring Talbot or Kangaroo or Figgins on them."

"Would you like a tip from me?"

"Not particularly; but you can go ahead."

"Well, don't take too many risks with your team. That new villager has been helping Grimes coach his eleven, and he knows the game inside out. If you put in a weak team, you'll be licked hands down."

And Levison went down the steps without waiting for a reply. Tom Merry looked rather thoughtful.

"Cheeky ass!" growled Lowther.

"Well, I don't know," said Tom. "Levison is an unpleasant beast, and he puts everything as unpleasantly as he can; but there's no denying that he can judge a fellow's play. If Grimes has got a surprise packet in store for us, we don't want to be taken off our guard."

"It wouldn't be like Levison to give you a tip if it was any use to you," said Manners.

"I don't know; he seemed sincere enough. After all, he may care whether his school's beaten or not."

"Lot he cares!" sniffed Manners.

"Yaas, wathah! I had an impression that Levison was turnin' ovah a new leaf, but I feah that there is nothin' in it," remarked Arthur Augustus. "He has been goin' it more than evah, the last week, in fact—he disappears every day aftah lessons, and wushes in just in time for call-ovah."

"Blessed if I know why the prefects don't nail him!" grunted Lowther. "He seems to have pulled the wool fairly over Railton's eyes, anyway."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I think I'll take his tip, all the same," said Tom Merry, after some thought. "Talbot is going over to Abbotsford, but I'll tell Figgins and Kangaroo they'd better play, after all."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, it's hardly worth the twouble. I shall be there, you know," observed Arthur Augustus reassuringly.

"That's why I've got to be jolly careful," said Tom Merry. And he walked away before Gussy could digest the true inwardness of that remark.

Levison had gone down to the gates. Crooke and Mellish met him in the quad, and stopped him.

"Going out?" Crooke asked.

"Yes."

"Racke's got a little party on this afternoon—"

"Hang Racke!"

"Well, I know you had some trouble with him over your minor," said Crooke. "But Racke's willing to look over it, if you are."

"I'm not!" said Levison grimly.

"Dash it all, you did jolly well out of Racke when you were friendly with him!" said Mellish. "Don't be an ass, Levison! Have you got anything special on for this afternoon?"

"I have!"

"Lodgey and billiards?" sneered Crooke.

"No," said Levison quietly; "not Lodgey and billiards this afternoon."

"What is it, then?"

"I'm going to be here for the match."

"Eh? What match?"

"They play Grimes' team this afternoon, you know."

"You're going to waste the afternoon on that, when Racke asks you to a jolly party?" ejaculated Crooke.

"Exactly!"

Levison walked out of the gates, leaving Mellish and Crooke staring.

"What in thunder is the game he is playing?" exclaimed Crooke, puzzled and angry. "He don't care twopence for footer, and as for watching the village duffers play—I suppose he's gone potty!"

"There's something on," said Mellish—"something he wants to keep us out of! He's cleared off nearly every day regularly for weeks now, but he doesn't go to the Green Man. I've asked Lodgey, and he hasn't seen him for a fortnight. He's rusty about it, too. He's got something on that he's keeping us out of, the rotter! I should have thought he'd have jumped at the chance of making it up with Racke."

Racke's merry little party set out that afternoon without Levison of the Fourth. Levison had disappeared—as he had fallen into the habit of disappearing of late. But his tip to Tom Merry had borne fruit, and the junior captain was more careful in the selection of his team than he usually was for the Rycombe match. Talbot of the Shell was absent, and Tom put Julian of the Fourth in his place, otherwise, the eleven remained the same that had played the Grammarians a week before.

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"D'ARCY IN DISGRACE!"

CHAPTER 11.
Levison's Game.

The kick-off was timed for three o'clock, and before three Tom Merry & Co. were on the ground punting a ball about while they waited for Grimes & Co.

The Rylcombe footballers could not afford the luxury of a brake, and they walked to St. Jim's. As three o'clock drew near, Tom Merry sighted them coming in at the gates—Grimes and Pilcher and Craggs and Wilson and the rest.

"Here they are!" called out Tom.

He went to meet the Rylcombe team as they came down to the ground.

He stared a little as he saw Levison of the Fourth with Grimes.

"Here you are, Grimey!" said Tom cheerily. "We're quite keen to see that tremendous new man of yours!"

Grimes chuckled.

"He's 'ere, Master Merry!"

"So you're going to see the match, after all, Levison?"

"Oh, yes; I'm not going to miss it!" said Levison carelessly. "I promised Grimes I'd be present; didn't I, Grimey?"

"You did!" grinned Grimes.

"In fact, I wouldn't miss it for worlds!" said Levison, while some of the Rylcombe footballers grinned. Tom Merry could not quite see why.

He led the visitors to their dressing-room. Several friends had come along with the village eleven, and Tom wondered which was the wonderful new forward. Grimes did not point him out, however, and the whole party went into the dressing-room. Tom Merry rejoined his men in the field.

Some fellows were gathering round the ropes—not much of a crowd for the village match. Among them was Levison minor of the Third, and Wally bore down on him while the team were waiting for the Rylcombe men to come out.

"Oh, here you are!" said D'Arcy minor. "I've been looking for you, young Levison. Slacking about like your major—what!—instead of coming down to practice?"

"No practice for me this afternoon," said Frank.

"You blessed slacker—"

"I'm going to see the match."

"Blow the match!" said Wally. "Nothing in that. Only the village kids, and they haven't an earthly!"

Levison minor smiled.

"I think they've got an earthly," he said. "Grimes has got a new forward—a jolly good man!"

"Oh, rot! You come with me!"

"You stay with me," said Frank. "You'll be surprised when you see the chap, and he'll be worth watching, too. I tell you he's a corker."

"You know him?" asked Wally, a little impressed at last.

"As well as I know my own brother!"

"That's jolly queer! I didn't know you had pals in the village!" said Wally, in surprise. "Well, I'll stay and have a look at him, and if you've been rotting, I'll jolly well punch your nose, young Levison!"

"Here they come!" chirruped Frank.

Tom Merry & Co. looked at the Rylcombe footballers as they came marching into the field, Grimes at their head.

"Now we shall see that remarkable new forward!" smiled Arthur Augustus.

Grimes, Craggs, Pilcher, Wilson, and the rest came on. Eight—nine—ten—and then— The St. Jim's juniors rubbed their eyes.

They wondered for a moment whether they were dreaming. For the eleventh man was Levison of the Fourth!

He was in football rig, in the Rylcombe colours. It was evident that he was going to play with the village team. There was a mocking grin on his face as he met the astounded stares of the St. Jim's fellows.

"Levison!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove!"

"Is Levison playing for you, Grimey?" asked Blake, in wonder.

Grimes nodded.

"Yes," he said. "No objection, Master Merry?"

"None at all," said Tom, with a smile. "But if you're short of a player, we could have lent you a better man."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Has your new man failed you, after all?" asked Tom, glancing over the village team, and recognising ten familiar faces there.

"No," chuckled Grimes; "not at all!"

"But I don't see him here," said Tom, puzzled.

"Yes, you do, Master Merry. Master Levison!"

"Eh?"

Grimes chuckled again, and his team chuckled, and Levison of the Fourth grinned. The truth was dawning upon Tom Merry & Co. now.

"Levison!" ejaculated Tom. "He—he—"

Grimes nodded.

"He's our new man!"

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"LEVISON!"

"My only hat!"

"Gwreat Scott!"

"Levison a footballer! Levison your new man!"

Gammon!"

Tom Merry & Co. were utterly astounded. They had wondered a little about the new man in whom Grimes placed so much confidence. But that the new man was a St. Jim's fellow they had naturally never dreamed.

And Levison of the Fourth! Why Grimes should have confidence in him as a player passed their understanding.

Certainly Levison had lately revealed that he had a good knowledge of the game, so far as judging a player went. But as a player himself!

The black sheep of the Fourth grinned, evidently gratified by the sensation he had caused.

"Well, this beats the band!" said Tom Merry at last. "So you've really taken up footer, Levison?"

"Looks like it, doesn't it?" said Levison coolly.

"And you're beginning by playing against your own school!" said Blake.

Levison shrugged his shoulders.

"Did you want me to play for St. Jim's?" he asked sarcastically.

"No jolly fear!"

"Well, if you didn't want me here, you can't complain if I join a team outside the school."

"They're welcome to you!" said Blake tartly. "Grimes is an ass to play a slacker who hasn't touched a football since the season started!"

"Oh, I've been steadily at practice, you know!" said Levison airily. "Grinding at it, you know!"

"Bai Jove! I have nevah seen you at pwactice, Levison!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

"You can't see a mile and a quarter, even with the aid of your eyeglass," said Levison. "I've been at practice nearly every day with Grimes' men!"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"So that's where you were!" exclaimed Blake.

"Exactly."

"I see now," said Tom Merry slowly. "That's why Railton didn't rag you when he found you in Rylcombe last week. He found you playing footer?"

"That's it!" chuckled Levison. "Rather a surprise for Railton, too! But he wasn't waxy—rather pleased, in fact. I explained to him that I had been chivvied off the footer-ground here, and had to take up practice outside the school!"

"Well, that wasn't quite the case," said Tom.

"Bai Jove! You fellahs see that I was wight all along!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus.

"Eh? You didn't know what Levison was up to!"

"I pointed out that he was turnin' ovah a new leaf," said Arthur Augustus triumphantly. "I was quite suah about it, and I am glad now that I encouaged him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Suppose we get on with the game?" suggested Levison.

"Ready!" said Tom.

"You don't mind me playin' Master Levison?" Grimes asked, as the footballers went into the middle of the field.

"He said you wouldn't mind!"

"Not at all," said Tom cheerily. "But I don't quite see your object. Levison isn't much of a player!"

"Toppin', Master Merry!"

"A fortnight's practice must have worked wonders, then!" said Tom, laughing. "Topping or not, you're welcome to him!"

The teams lined up, the kick-off falling to Grimes. Levison was playing inside-right for the Rylcombe team, and the St. Jim's fellows noticed that he looked very fit and very alert as he lined up with the rest. In football colours, with alert eyes and springy limbs, he looked very little like the slacking, smoking, shady cad of the Fourth they knew so well.

A change, indeed, had come over Ernest Levison. It was not likely to last, but it was a change very much for good.

Frank Levison was watching the new player with great delight. Wally was lost in astonishment. He understood now the fag's keen interest in Grimes' new forward.

"You knew that all along, you young beggar?" grunted Wally.

Frank nodded and grinned.

"Yes; Ernie told me, but I had to keep it dark. They're going to see now that Ernie can play footer!"

"More likely to let his side down," said Wally. "He can't play!"

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"You'll see," said Frank, with serene confidence.

The Rylcombers had followed up the kick-off with a rush; but they were soon stopped, and the home forwards got away in great style. But they did not go through the villagers like a knife through cheese, as they had expected. Grimes & Co. were playing up remarkably well.

The village team seemed to have been pulled together and improved generally, as if it had had the benefit of coaching from someone who knew good-class footer inside out. Was it Levison? The mere idea of a team being pulled together like that by the slacker of St. Jim's was astounding. Evidently there was more in Levison than met the eye.

The St. Jim's attack was stopped, and the game swayed in midfield, neither side getting a chance for some time. There was a buzz round the field when a Rylcombe player was seen to get away suddenly with the ball, and speed down on goal. It was Levison of the Fourth.

"Go it, Ernie!" shrieked Levison minor ecstatically.

Ernie was going it!

Of the Rylcombe forwards, only Grimes kept the pace. Levison seemed to wind through the school halves, and as Herries and Reilly, the backs, rushed him down, he sent the ball to Grimes in the nick of time. Grimes drove it in, and Fatty Wynn, in goal, was beaten to the wide. Perhaps Wynn's amazement at seeing such an attack from Levison had something to do with it, and certainly Fatty never looked for so swift and clean a pass to centre from Levison. Anyway, the ball was in the net, and the crowd gasped:

"Goal!"

"Goal!" shrieked Frank, clapping his hands. "What do you say now, Wally, you fathead?"

Wally whistled.

"My only Aunt Jane! Your major can play footer! That was his goal right enough; he made Grimey a present of it. It beats me!"

Tom Merry looked rather queerly at Levison as Fatty Wynn pitched the ball out. Levison was surprising him.

The sides lined up again, and the Saints—considerably to their own surprise—made it a point to mark Levison very carefully after that. It was only too clear that he was the most dangerous man in the village team.

The news that a St. Jim's fellow was playing against St. Jim's had spread, and that it was Levison of the Fourth. Fellows chuckled at the news, and wondered why Grimes was such an ass as to play him. But Levison's play altered their opinion very considerably.

Levison of the Fourth was playing against St. Jim's, and Levison of the Fourth was playing a great game; and at that news the juniors thronged down to the ground in great numbers, and with keen interest. The village match was seldom honoured by a crowd, but by the time the first half was over the numbers on the ground were as great as on the occasion of the Greyfriars or Rookwood match. And all eyes were on Levison.

The village goal was the only one taken in the first half. The interval found Grimes & Co. one up, much to their satisfaction.

A big crowd looked on keenly when Tom Merry kicked off for the second half.

"I guess this takes the cake!" Lumley-Lumley remarked. "Levison's been bragging about Grimes' new man, and it was himself all the time! Just like Levison! But the queer thing is that he is a good man—one of the best! Who'd have thought that Levison could play footer like that?"

"Who'd have thought he'd take the trouble?" sneered Crooke. "I thought he was havin' a good time, sneakin' away from the school every day as he did, and he was only playin' football with village kids! Silly ass!"

"You wouldn't, would you?" grinned Lumley-Lumley.

"Not in your line! There he goes again! Bravo!"

"Play up, St. Jim's!"

Levison looked like getting through again; but Kangaroo, at centre-half, robbed him of the ball, and sent it up the field. The St. Jim's forwards rushed on, and there was a hot attack on the village goal.

Wilson fisted out the ball as it came in from Tom Merry's foot; but Figgins' head met it and drove it right back, and

the goalkeeper was beaten. There was a yell from the St. Jim's crowd as the leather went into the net.

"Goal!"

Tom Merry & Co. were relieved as well as pleased; for there was only a quarter of an hour of the second half still to go, and they had only just succeeded in equalising.

Both sides looked a little breathless as they lined up after the goal. The game had been a gruelling one.

Freshest of the village team was the inside-right. The St. Jim's juniors had fully expected Levison to crack up, with bellows to mend; but Levison made no sign of bellows to mend.

It was pretty clear that he must have given his smokes a wide berth during his practice in Rylcombe. His wind was sound, and he seemed as fresh as paint; and, what was still more surprising, he played a clean game—no sly kicking or hacking, no dubious tricks, no foul charging—nothing of the kind that fellows who knew him expected of Ernest Levison. The healthy influence of the great game had had a wholesome effect upon him, that was clear.

The struggle went on, hard and fast. Time was getting close. The referee glanced up at the clock-tower once or twice. And the score was still equal, and Tom Merry & Co. were fully held.

The Saints made a final tremendous effort, determined that the game should not end in a draw. They came up the field in serried array. With quick, short passing, they brought the ball fairly up to goal, and Wilson was called upon to defend again. He saved twice, and then Pilcher drove the ball out to the eager forwards, and Grimes captured it and rattled it away.

The Saints were after him like wolves as he went down the field; but Grimes was swift. He rushed on till Kangaroo met him, and hurled him off the ball. Monty Lowther kicked to clear, but the Rylcombe inside-right stopped the ball, and drove it on. Reilly ran forward to clear it, but Levison wound round Lowther, and was first on the spot. He shouldered Reilly back, and had the ball.

Herries was speeding down on him, and the halves were almost swarming upon him. Levison had less than a second to deal with the leather, but less than a second, as it happened, was enough for Grimes' new man. The ball shot from his foot like a pip from an orange, right at goal, and Fatty Wynn, between the sticks, jumped at it a fraction of a second too late. The leather grazed his outstretched finger-tips as it shot into the net.

There was a gasp from the crowd. If ever a goal had been touch-and-go, it was that goal. But there it was; and Levison, the slacker of the Fourth, had kicked it! From Levison minor came a yell of delight!

"Goal!"

"Well kicked, sir! Goal! Goal!"

Goal it was, and the village were two to one; and two minutes later the whistle went, and the match was over.

Rylcombe village had won by two goals to one, and they grinned with breathless satisfaction as they walked off.

"Your game, Levison!" said Grimes, clapping his new recruit on the shoulder; and Levison chuckled.

"Bai Jove, yaas, it was Levison's game!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Wathah luckay for Gwines that Levison had turned ovah a new leaf."

When Grimes & Co. departed after the match, Grimes' new man remained behind. He was the object of much curiosity. Even Herries had to admit that Levison of the Fourth was a footballer, astounded as he was by the discovery. Tom Merry clapped Levison on the shoulder as they walked back after seeing Grimes & Co. off at the gate.

"You'll go down as a reserve for the House team, Levison," he said; "and I don't see why you shouldn't play for St. Jim's!"

Levison smiled in his sarcastic way.

"You think I'm good enough?"

"You've proved that you're good enough," said Tom. "And if you'll take a tip from me, you'll stick to the game, and drop playing the giddy ox! You know by this time that footer's better!"

Levison nodded, his look much more cordial than usual.

"I'm going to," he said. "And if you mean to give me a chance in the footer, you won't have anything to complain of!"

"Done!" said Tom Merry.

Grimes & Co. had scored an unaccustomed victory; but it was not wholly a defeat for St. Jim's; for, as a certain junior of the Third was never tired of pointing out, it had been Levison's Game.

THE END.

(Don't miss next Wednesday's Great Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's—"D'ARCY IN DISGRACE!" by MARTIN CLIFFORD.)

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CORNSTALK BOB**The Previous Instalments Told How**

Old TOM HILDER, a cattle-farmer of Katfarit, Australia, is faced with ruin for the want of £1,000. He goes to a friend in Sydney, HENRY NORMAN, from whom he obtains the money, but is afterwards robbed, and, in recovering the notes, becomes mixed up, in the eyes of the police, with a gang of scoundrels.

His son BOB receives the money from his father, and takes it to SUMMERS, the bank manager, who is in league with BOARDMAN, a scoundrel who has plotted to ruin old Hilder.

Bob is afterwards arrested, and charged with passing false notes at the bank, but is liberated from his prison-cell by CAPTAIN DASHWOOD, a notorious outlaw.

Bob learns from him that his father was robbed by a man named SUTHERLAND, the leader of another gang of outlaws, and he sets out in pursuit of him. He traces the villain to an hotel, where he also sees his father. A fight ensues, and the place is burnt down. Bob narrowly escapes with his life, believing his father to be dead.

Later, old Hilder appears upon the scene again, and he and Bob and Dashwood succeed in capturing Sutherland, who had been in league with Boardman, and they all retire to Dashwood's hiding-place. Finding that Boardman has played him false, Sutherland tells them where GELL, another accomplice of Boardman's, is in hiding.

Bob sets off alone to find him, after arranging with the rest of the party where they are to meet again. Bob arrives at Katfarit, and with the help of KERR, an old bullock-driver of his father's, succeeds in finding the half-insane Gell, who has been shut up by Boardman because the latter is afraid he will give him away.

*(Now read on.)***Gell Reforms.**

"It would, if you can get him to consent."

"I believe he would be willing. He's full of remorse; it's preying on his mind. He would feel happier if he owned up."

"Then, try it on! I'll fetch the paper and pen and ink along, and you can write it all down. And if you have to scoot, I'll do all I know to keep Gell out of Boardman's clutches."

So it was arranged, and Kerr went home. Gell had been sitting listlessly in the shanty whilst Bob and the bullock-driver had conversed outside, and Bob, on his return, suggested that they should turn in. Gell did not need any persuasion, and they both slept soundly till morning.

Kerr came early with the writing utensils, and had to hurry off to his day's work. Bob waited an opportunity to speak to Gell; but the latter's mood had changed. He had become very nervous again, and very restless. He wandered in and out of the shanty and by the side of the stream, much to the lad's anxiety. He ate little, would not smoke, and muttered continually; sometimes listening intently, a frightened look in his eyes, as if fearing the approach of an enemy.

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TUCK HAMPERS ARE GIVEN AWAY TO READERS OF THE "BOYS' FRIEND," 1st.

During the heat of the day he remained thus, but when a cool breeze sprang up in the evening he became quieter, and Bob determined to put his plan to the test. To his delight Gell jumped at the suggestion.

"I'll do it!" he cried. "Perhaps, after that, these horrible thoughts will leave me!"

Finding him in this humour Bob did not delay. He at once began to write, taking down Gell's eager words as quickly as he could. Much as he knew already, yet he was horrified by the depth and malignity of Boardman's wickedness. He covered page after page, every burning sentence having the impress of truth in it. At last Gell stopped, and Bob read the statement aloud.

Gell nodded from time to time.

"It's all true, every word of it," the unhappy man said, in tones of deep earnestness. "And already I feel better for telling you."

"And you will sign this when Kerr comes?" Bob asked. "He will be here very soon."

"I'll sign it before as many witnesses as you like," Gell answered.

"Then you have made full reparation, and now my troubles are at an end, whatever happens," the lad said, his heart at last at ease. "And here is Kerr. I hear his footsteps."

A shadow fell across the doorway. With a smile on his face, Bob looked across the shanty, then, with a start, he scrambled to his feet.

Boardman had crept to the door. The villain's face was twitching, his eyes glinting. A revolver was in his hand.

"Your life is forfeit, according to the law!" he hissed. "I have a right to shoot, and rid you from my path! Ah, you young cub, I've got here just in the nick of time to save myself!"

Swiftly he raised his arm and fired. Bob reeled and fell. Next instant Boardman seized the papers and vanished into the darkness again.

The smoke from the revolver had not cleared before the scoundrel, Boardman, had vanished from the shanty, taking with him the papers on which Gell had told the tale of villainy. And Bob lay unconscious where he had fallen.

A full minute passed, and Gell stood without moving. He could have run away. His poor brain, so near to madness, urged him to take the step. But something held him back, some new force was acting on his mind; gradually the vacant look passed from his eyes.

His full reason was coming back. The shock he had sustained on hearing the loud report of the revolver-shot had shaken up his thoughts. Once again he was beginning to think consecutively; of a sudden, a clear light broke forth. With a gasp he realised everything. He crossed the shanty swiftly and knelt down by Bob.

The lad's eyes were closed and his face was white. Gell raised his head and rested it on his knee, and as he did so he heard soft footsteps coming round by the side of the shanty.

Was Boardman returning, to make sure of his evil work? Gell's face flushed purple, his mouth became hard, his powerful figure grew taut. Laying Bob down again, he stood

up, and, with his big fists clenched, he strode to the door. If Boardman meant further mischief he was up against more than he reckoned.

And then Gell jumped back as if bitten. For something small and black was on the ground, within a few inches of his leg, and a pair of round, white orbs were blinking up at him. He made to kick, and the object wriggled out of his reach. Then he stood erect.

"Golly!" it said. "But me mean no harm!"

Gell stared down, his hands now on his hips, and his tall body nearly bent double.

"Sakes! It's a black chap!" he muttered. "Say, mister Weazel, what do you want here?"

"Me all right! My name Bogong! Me vera good fellow!" the other replied. "Me looking for Bob Hilder!"

"Oh!"

The last words recalled Bob's terrible predicament.

Gell wheeled round and returned to him, and Bogong, following, seeing the lad lying unconscious, rushed forward, and was the first at his side.

Mumbling in a choked voice he began a hurried investigation. Once he shot a look of fury at Gell.

"He's shot," he cried; "but not much hurt! The shot is here," and he touched his own shoulder. "He soon all right. What bad man did this?"

"A precious scoundrel, sure enough, but I had no hand in it," Gell replied, drawing a deep breath. "Can you get him round, though? I half-feared he was done for."

"You hold him. I run for water," Bogong said, and he made for the door.

Gell waited, watching for the first signs of returning consciousness. Very soon Bogong returned, and sprinkled water over Bob's face. At last the lad opened his eyes.

"Bogong with you," the black tracker said encouragingly. "You quite safe with Bogong ever. You—"

Bob struggled to rise further.

"Bogong," he said, in a weak voice, "where am I? What happened to me? There was something, and I can't remember! Where's that cur Boardman? Has he got away? He fired, and my shoulder is burning. And the papers—are they safe? If we have them still—"

He was struggling now in his excitement, and Bogong, as he took in the reason of his agitation, kept gazing from him to Gell, and back again.

"You're not badly hurt," Gell cut in. "Just lie still, and we'll soon fix you up. And it don't so much matter if the papers are lost. We can write the tale out again, can't we?"

Bob gazed at him with increasing thought and keenness.

"What's come over you?" he asked. "You're not the same as you were."

Gell passed his big hand across his forehead.

"Seems as if a brick has been taken out of my head," he replied. "There's a lot that's past, like a bad dream; I remember it all, in a fashion, and nothing seems real. I was sort of turned into another man, and my brain-box was blotchy, though all the time I was fighting hard to worry out something straight. Then something went bang, and I woke up."

"And you're game still to round on Boardman?"

Gell growled. "Not half!" he said fiercely. "If I got him by the throat I'd shake the life out of him! I owe all I've gone through to him, and there's one thing I remember without any fog, he fair scared me when he had me off the mark."

Bob held out his hand.

"Help me to my feet; I'll be better sitting down," he said. "All this is quite extraordinary. How long have I been knocked silly?"

"Only a matter of a few minutes," Gell explained.

"And all this has happened in that time? Bogong, how did you turn up?"

The black tracker grinned.

"Me coming from massa," he replied. "Me go to the bullock-driver, Kerr, and he send me here."

"And my father and your master?"

"They all right! Massa too sharp for the police! And the old man; he full of clever tricks, too!"

"What message did they send?"

The black tracker looked at Gell and shook his head.

"No talkee-talkee now," he replied. "We play possum, and don't speak. Bad man everywhere, and Bogong no fool!"

"If you think I'd split on you, you make a big mistake!" Gell said, with a ring of conviction in his voice. "I'm quite on the other lay, as I'll show, first chance I get! I'm fair itching to go after that cur, Boardman, and set about him! But if you want to talk on the quiet, I make no objection; I'll clear out, and come back when you've had your say."

"No; you had better stay here," Bob suggested. "I feel I can trust you, absolutely."

Bogong took a letter from his pocket, and the lad recognised his father's writing. The letter was rather long.

Old Tom told him that he and Dashwood had got safely away from the lair, taking Sutherland with them. They were being hard pressed by the police, but hoped to keep ahead of them. They were making for a place called hoped Bob would join them there, and that he would have Gell in his company.

All now depended on swift action, old Tom continued. He could not hope to evade the troops much longer. But if Gell and Sutherland were in their hands, they would be able to clear up much in a few days. Bogong was to deliver the letter and return with Bob.

Bob read the letter aloud, and turned to Bogong.

"You'll come along with us, then," he said. "And I vote we clear out quick!"

"But do you feel strong enough for the journey?" Gell asked.

"I'll get along all right," Bob replied. "And the sooner we get away from Boardman, the better; most likely he is on his way to fetch the police."

"He has sauce enough for anything," Gell growled.

"And he has the papers, and he doesn't know you have come all right again, so he thinks he is quite safe," the lad explained. "I should have liked to have seen Kerr, but there's hardly time for that."

"Tell you what," Gell remarked. "Let this black chap stop on here. He can take any message you wish to Kerr, and, also, he can track down Boardman. It will pay you to know where he goes, and what he's up to."

"Good idea!" Bob agreed. "Bogong, you go back to Kerr, and tell him what has happened here, and where I'm going. Then follow on after Boardman, if he has left the house. And when you get news, meet us at Monomoo. Now, Gell, are you ready?"

"I haven't got a horse," Gell said.

"Bogong will lend you his."

"And I get one from Boardman's paddock," Bogong grinned.

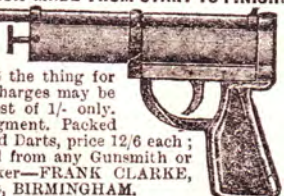
"The paddock, and all in it, belongs to my father by right," Bob said. "Take one, if you can, Bogong. You won't be doing anything wrong."

So it was arranged, and the lad and Gell mounted and rode away. They had a journey of a hundred miles before them, and, in ordinary circumstances, would have thought nothing of it; but Bob was feeling ill, and his shoulder was hurting him much; still, he held on for five hours without complaining. Then he was forced to pull up, and admit that he could go no farther.

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Gell helped him out of the saddle. The lad's face was flushed, his eyes were feverishly bright, and his mouth was set hard to stifle a groan. Gell gathered a pile of leaves for a bed, and lay down. They did not dare to light a fire, for fear of attracting attention.

Bob sank into an uneasy slumber, tossing and turning, and muttering in his sleep. He awoke at dawn, white-faced and shivering, and it was clear to Gell that he was in a high fever. His mind seemed out of the usual, too; he spoke in broken sentences. Neither had he any appetite for food; but he eagerly drank the tea Gell brewed.

It was clear that he was quite unfit to travel, so they stayed in this spot all the day, and as the heat increased the lad became worse. Now, thoroughly alarmed, Gell began debating in his mind what he should do. And, before long, he found himself marvelling that he should be so anxious about Bob. Once, on Boardman's incentive and because he hated the lad, he had not hesitated to leave him to perish, after knocking him senseless. Now his whole thought was how he could save him. But Gell had suffered much from remorse since then; he was, in many respects, an altered man. A great desire had grown in his heart to make what reparation he could.

Here was the opportunity, and he could have wished it had come in a less perplexing way. To ride to Monomoo and fetch the lad's father seemed the easiest course. But to leave him thus was fraught with danger. Bob might wander away if his delirium grew worse, and he might be caught by the police.

Still, a risk had to be taken, and Gell calculated that, with hard riding, he could get from this point to Monomoo within six hours. If all went well, he would be back in another six. He laid his views before Bob.

The lad listened, without taking much interest. But he approved of the suggestion. So Gell made more tea, placed it near him for use during his absence, and saddled Bogong's horse. He gave one look at the lad when he mounted. Bob's eyes were closed.

Again Gell hesitated. A very uneasy feeling crept over him. But he had thought over everything, and came to a decision.

Shaking up the reins, he cantered away.

Dashwood Meets Gell.

When Boardman had shot Bob and had dashed away, the papers in his hand, his first instinct was to escape from the scene of his evil deed. He hurried back to the house, and, lighting a lamp in the kitchen, sank into a chair.

He fully believed that Bob was dead. He had fired to kill him, and he was a splendid shot. The scoundrel, far from feeling any regret, was filled with exultation. No harm could come to himself—of that he felt certain. The lad was regarded by everyone as a desperate outlaw; the police for months now had been hunting him down; the worst would be credited about him.

It would be easy, therefore, to say that Bob had put up a desperate fight, and had been shot in self-defence. No one would be able to prove the contrary. Gell was the only one present at the tragedy, and Gell was not in his right mind. The villain was convinced that all the world would applaud his action.

What then was the next step to take? And here he looked at the paper in his hand, and he began to read it. His tanned face became slate coloured as he continued. Gell had turned against him, and Gell was not so feeble-minded as he thought. If this paper had fallen into other hands! He jumped up and began to pace the room.

He must go back and make sure of Gell. Clearly Bob and his father had been meditating some clever move, and the lad, by some means or other, had discovered where Gell had been hidden. Yes, he must catch Gell again, put him under lock and key, and then go to the police and tell them that Bob was dead.

He burnt the paper, the evidence of his guilt, and slipped quietly out of the house. Across the scrub he went, back to the shanty, and as he drew near he advanced on tiptoe. To his startled surprise he heard voices. Were the police there already?

Creeping to the back, he looked in through a chink in the uneven boards. With difficulty he suppressed a gasp. For Bob was not dead; he was sitting on a bunk, ghastly pale, it is true, but very much alive. And Gell was there, talking quite rationally, and a black boy, whom Boardman soon identified as Dashwood's companion. With every sense now strained to the utmost, he listened.

Often he heard his name. Soon he realised that his danger was even greater than he had thought. But when Bob read

the letter sent to him by his father, a gleam of triumph came into his eyes again. Tugging at his big black beard, he nodded his head from time to time.

They were all to meet at Monomoo. Good! He would let these go there, call out the police, and round-up the lot. At one stroke he would get rid of all his enemies. Without waiting a moment longer he crept away. Twenty minutes later he was in the saddle, galloping as fast as a swift horse could take him, to the nearest police-station.

Meantime, Dashwood and Bob's father were approaching Monomoo from the far side of the Blue Mountains. With them was Sutherland, a prisoner old Tom could not afford to let slip, no matter how great the risk to himself.

They were very exhausted. For some days now they had pressed on, only resting when their horses were completely jaded, knowing that a police cordon was gradually closing in around them, often without food, and always full of anxiety.

But a dogged determination kept them from yielding. They could have struck across the continent, and thus have shaken off their pursuers had they wished. They had chosen to come this way to meet Bob.

"There are the Blue Mountains at last," Dashwood remarked, as they rode out of a thick wood; and he pointed to what looked like a faint cloud far away in the distance.

Old Tom raised his drooping head. His eyes were heavy, weariness had deepened the wrinkles on his face; he gazed, his forehead contracted, across the vast space.

"Ay, so it is!" he replied. "And there were times I thought I'd never get even as far as this. I'm not as strong as I used to be; I found that out in the last few days and nights."

"There's plenty of fight in you still," Dashwood replied cheerily. "Don't lose heart, now that you are so near the goal. We ought to get there a couple of hours before midnight, and then, if we meet Bob, and he has good news—"

"Ay, if he has, I will be well repaid," the old man interjected, shaking off his lethargy and settling himself more firmly in the saddle. "If I didn't believe, all my life, that honesty triumphs in the long run over evil, I wouldn't have had the heart to stick out this journey. There have been times I've wanted to drop to the ground and lie there. But it's just a case of sticking out misfortune. Still, if the luck is against me this time, as it has been so often, I don't know as I won't feel compelled to throw up the sponge."

"You'll find the luck has turned," Dashwood replied. "Bob will have done his job all right; he's as good as any man."

Old Tom turned his eyes, shining with pride.

"That's true, though I am his father as says it," he answered. "He has the grit, and that's what counts. And he's clever, too, beyond his years. It's of him I've been thinking all these weary months. I want to see him back in the old homestead, with his life fair and straight before him. Then I reckon my work is done, and I don't care if my number goes up."

"Bob would soon round on you if he heard you talking like that," Dashwood said. "You will have many years of happiness and comfort with him. Heigho! I wish I could look forward to that, but as a man makes his bed, so he must lie."

Old Tom turned in the saddle.

"Look here, there's something I want to say," he began. "You've got every chance of a fresh start if you leave me now. I'll manage to get to the mountains all right, with Sutherland. And you must know that every mile you come this way you're running your neck farther into the noose."

"Oh, there's no fear!" Dashwood replied offhand.

"There's every cause for fear, and don't think I'm blind to that," old Tom insisted. "You meant to make for Queensland when Bogong came to the lair and told us how Bob had tricked the police, and that we had just time to clear out. You sent Bogong to fetch Bob to the Blue Mountains, and you said you would come a bit of the way with me. You've been coming all my way all the time, and I'm very grateful. But you had better veer off now to the east. I'm sorry to part with you, as you know, but that is nothing to what I would feel if you were nabbed."

"I'll get through all right," Dashwood said.

"If I didn't think you would, I'd stop here and not go a step farther," old Tom began. "But one can't be certain."

"I must pick up Bogong," Dashwood explained.

"Bogong can follow you anywhere; you couldn't lose him, even if you wanted to. And no harm can come to Bogong; the police will never get hold of him. It's you they're after, and—"

"I'm going on, and that's enough said," Dashwood cut in. "I want to see Bob once more. Like as not we'll never meet again."

"You've come all this way on my account," old Tom

(Continued on page iii of cover.)

CORNSTALK BOB!

(Continued from page 20.)

replied. "There's no need to tell me—I know it. You didn't think I could get along alone. It's jolly good of you, and Bob will be grateful, too, all his life. So now we'll part, and—"

Dashwood laughed.

"If you go on, I'll just follow," he said. "I mean to see this through!"

"You want to make sure that Bob and I don't miss one another?"

"What if I do? Anyhow, I'm going to have my own way. I'm an obstinate chap, as you know," Dashwood answered. "And if I'm rounded up, there'll be no one but myself to blame. So we'll say no more, old man. And let us off-saddle for a spell, and have a bit of grub. The horses will be the better for a rest, too, and we'll make Monomoo before midnight. That will be time enough."

He jumped to the ground, and old Tom had perforce to do the same. Sutherland was not bound; he knew that Dashwood's revolver would send a bullet after him if he tried to escape. Besides, he did not want to do so. He had received a promise of pardon if, at the proper time, he admitted the guilty part he had played in the conspiracy. They off-saddled, turned the horses out to graze, and sat down to a meal.

The food and rest did the old man good. His spirits rose, and when they were in the saddle again, his tone became cheery. But the ride before them was still long, and often he dozed in the saddle, only to awake with a start, and clutch at the reins.

Dashwood rode close beside him, eyeing him keenly from time to time. It was because he feared a breakdown that he had accompanied him all the way. No one could have known better the terrible risk he was running, though he had made so light of it. Deep down in his heart he fully believed that this journey would end in his death.

Yet he was not depressed. He was tired of life, tired of the life a false step had led him into, and he saw no opening to another one. And he had taken a great liking for Bob, and for the old man too. Fate had thrown them together; they had suffered together, helped one another, and had come to understand each other. He believed he could do much to restate these two friends in the honourable position which was their due. He felt he would be content if that could be done before the hand of the law closed on him.

And old Tom would never have got to the Blue Mountains alone. Often Dashwood had encouraged him on the way; even now he would be beaten without someone to watch over him. So he rode by the old man's side during those last twenty miles, and had the satisfaction of bringing him safely to the end.

Old Tom was dog-tired when Dashwood helped him to the ground. He lay down, and was soon fast asleep. The others had supper, and after it Dashwood sauntered up and down. At every moment he expected Bob and Bogong to arrive. Besides, he had to keep awake and alert for fear of the police.

A couple of hours passed thus, and then he heard the thump of horse-hoofs coming over a hill far away. The sound died away as the horse descended into a valley. It came to him again as the animal mounted the next incline. He had been listening keenly, and now he frowned.

"There's only one coming, and I expected two," he murmured. "Something has gone amiss!"

He drew out his revolver, and made sure it was loaded. Then he walked in the direction of the approaching horseman. The man was riding hard. He shot out from a clump of trees only fifty yards away.

On he came and Dashwood, in the shadow, waited. Suddenly he sprang forward, his arm raised, and the barrel of his revolver shining in the moonlight.

"Halt!" he cried.

The man pulled up. Dashwood walked nearer.

"Great Scott!" he gasped. "It's that scoundrel Gell!"

A Tight Corner.

As Dashwood spoke, he caught the horse's bridle and seized Gell's arm.

"You get down!" he commanded. "I'm going to have some words with you before you go!"

"And that's what I want," Gell replied, swinging his leg over the saddle. "That's what I came here for."

He jumped lightly to the ground.

"Where's old man Hilder?" he inquired.

"Why do you ask?"

"Because I have a message from his son."

"And what is the message?" Dashwood inquired.

"Young Bob can't come along. He's knocked up bad.

He started after Bogong called, but Boardman had given him a dose of lead in the shoulder, and half-way here, or less, he turned queer."

Dashwood shoved his revolver back into his belt, but his fingers were still playing around the handle.

"You're speaking the truth?" he demanded.

"Of course I am!"

"Then tell me a bit more."

"Anything you like," Gell agreed. "Young Bob came to fetch me. I was funny in the head. He got me along to a shanty, and I had written out a statement owning up a lot. I'm ashamed of, when Boardman turned up, hired, and knocked Bob out, got the papers, and cleared off. That shot sorter pulled me round. Just then Bogong turned up, and told Bob he was to meet you and the old man here. We rode together till he could go no farther. Then I left him, as comfortable as I could, and came on. He's six hours' ride from here, and he's in a high fever, and getting worse, I'm afraid, so I didn't spare the horse, as you can see."

Dashwood rubbed his chin.

"That's bad news, if it's true," he remarked.

"It is bad, and it is true," Gell affirmed. "Is it likely I'd walk into a trap and spin a false yarn? Why should I have come this way at all if I didn't want to—"

"All right! I believe you! So I take it that you have turned against Boardman?"

The scowl that swept at once over Gell's face convinced Dashwood at once of the former's sincerity.

"If I could get a grip on Boardman—" Gell began. "But there's no use talking about that. I warn you, though, that he's up to mischief. Young Bob thinks that too, and therefore he told Bogong to follow him up and keep an eye on him."

They had walked back to the camp together, and Dashwood looked at the old man, still in a heavy sleep.

"He's altogether beat!" he said. "Poor old chap, this last news about Bob will upset him completely. He's not fit for a long ride; in fact, it's a big rest he wants before he'll be much good for anything. And he's fairly safe here for some hours—as safe as anywhere else, at least. If I wake him up now—"

"You needn't wake him," Gell cut in. "Just scribble a few lines on a bit of paper, and leave it with me. I'll look after him, and when he rouses himself I'll show him the paper and tell him what has happened. Do you cut along and get hold of young Bob. And you'll want to ride fast. He's not safe alone."

"That's the ticket," Dashwood agreed. "I'll own up that you've given me a bit of surprise. I didn't expect this—from you! You're playing the white man, and that puts the lid on everything that is against you. You'll start again with a clean sheet, as far as the Hilders are concerned, when all comes right. There's grub yonder. I guess you'd like a tuck in. And I'll be off in two shakes from now."

In a few minutes more he was riding hard through the bush. Gell had fully explained where he had left Bob, and Dashwood, with his great bush-lore, was bound to find him. But before long his horse began to tire. The effect of the long journey, for many days and nights, had not been worn off by the short rest it had just had. Dashwood knew it would be folly to press on; he must ride slowly or perhaps the animal would go dead lame.

So he jogged along, chafing at the delay, and the day was well advanced before at last he came near the spot where Gell had left the lad. He saw Brave Bess grazing peacefully, and a sense of relief came to him. He rode on another hundred yards, and, jumping down, he began to search around. But he could not find Bob.

Up and down he tramped, and at last he stopped, his face growing grim. He had come upon a pile of leaves on which evidently someone had lain. Bob must have got up. But he could not have gone far. Had he intended to continue the journey he would, of course, have saddled the mare.

Dashwood whistled, but no answer came. He began a thorough search, and for an hour he paced the scrub within a radius of half a mile in every direction. Then he came back to the bed of leaves again.

And now something bright caught his eye, and, bending down, he picked up the stem of a pipe with a silver band in the centre. Bob had not a pipe; that he knew well. And he had seen Gell's stuck in the band of his sombrero. Then someone else had been here.

At once he began a closer search. And, forty yards away, he came upon some footprints, the toes pointing towards where Bob had lain. He went farther, and found the impress of horse-hoofs. They were not those of Brave Bess. They were bigger.

It was clear to him now that someone riding that way had seen the lad, had dismounted and gone over to him, and, finding him ill, had taken him away. Whither had he gone? Dashwood kept on searching, and found the same horse-hoofs further down along a path. At once he hurried back, put his saddle on Brave Bess, and began to follow them.

(Another grand instalment next week.)

A Cash Prize for Every Contributor to this Page.



Our Weekly Prize Page.

LOOK OUT FOR YOUR WINNING STORYETTE.

HIS EARLY TRAIN.

On retiring in the evening, as the clock chimed out eleven, He remarked in languid accents: "Call me, please, at half-past seven."

I've been late for several mornings, but to-morrow, mind, I mean—

To catch that early City train—you know—the eight-fifteen."

They called him in the morning, when the sun was rising high.

He murmured: "What d'you want? Shut up! Oh, half-past seven? All right!"

I'll be down in half a jiffy." Then he rubbed his drowsy pate.

Gave a growl and thumped his pillow, and slept on till half-past eight.

When the clock was pointing grimly, with the hands to five to nine.

He bounded madly down the stairs with boots devoid of shine;

His collar-stud was missing, and his tie was round his ear. While his wild demands for breakfast made the household quake with fear.

His coffee was at boiling-point—he looked for milk in vain: He couldn't find his hat—his gloves; and who had bagged his cane?

A muttered curse beneath his breath, a frantic rush, and then—

He just got into the guard's van of the twenty-five to ten!

—Sent in by J. H. Coulson, Glasgow.

MOTHER WAS RIGHT.

"That's what I call a good dinner!" remarked Bobby, as he leaned back in his chair, with an air of repletion.

"Bobby," said his mother, "I'm ashamed of you for saying such a thing!"

The visitor, who was dining with the family, laughed heartily.

"Bobby appreciates the good things of life," he said, "like all the rest of us."

"Don't you think it was a good dinner?" Bobby inquired of the visitor.

"Yes, indeed!" the latter replied, with a smile. "I enjoyed it thoroughly."

"Mother said she thought you would, because she didn't suppose you got very much at home!"—Sent in by A. Williams, Manchester.

GOOD RECOMMENDATION!

The wife of a wealthy manufacturer had occasion to call in the help of a new floor-polisher.

"Do you understand your business thoroughly?" she asked.

"All I ask, ma'am, is that you shall inquire for yourself at my last situation." On the floor of the large drawing-room alone five persons broke their limbs last winter, and a lady slipped down the grand staircase."—Sent in by T. Johns, Victoria, Australia.

N

THE CHARGE.

At a certain church the verger had a habit of beckoning to the visitors as they entered, and then pointing to a seat.

This little peculiarity was taken advantage of by the small boys of the neighbourhood, who would stand at the church door and mock the old man. One day he made as though to run at them, and one boy, in his haste to escape, ran into the arms of a policeman, who asked what was the matter. The untruthful urchin replied that there was a row in the church. So the policeman went to investigate. The verger beckoned him, pointing to a vacant seat beside an old gentleman. The policeman sat for a minute or two, then he tapped the old chap on the arm and said:

"Are you coming quietly?"

The gentleman asked what was the matter, and, not wishing to cause a disturbance, got up, and went with the policeman to the verger, who was standing at the door.

"Now, what is the charge?" said the P.c.

"Charge? Charge? There ain't no charge! The seats are free!" he replied.—Sent in by E. Hopkin, Nottingham.

TWELVE-KNOT OUT.

Jack: "Once more, Molly, will you marry me?"

Molly: "For the twelfth time this hour, I tell you I will not!"

Jack (of the Navy): "Well, twelve knots an hour for a little craft like you is not bad going."—Sent in by A. Tiscornia, Lancashire.

STOPPING THE LEAK.

Observing that the gutter round the house had become clogged by autumn leaves, Mr. Figgins, valiant head of the family, climbed a tree by the side of the house, from a branch of which he imagined he could reach the edge of the roof.

Just as he reached the top of the tree, however, the branch which was bearing his weight gave way, and he started to fall.

Half-way down, his feet became entangled in some of the other boughs, and he hung head downwards.

"Sophie—quick!" he gasped.

"Oh, Arthur!" she yelled.

"Quick—a chair!"

In a flash it was there.

"Now stand up on it!" he spluttered.

"But, Arthur!" she expostulated. "I'm not strong enough to help you down!"

"I'll get down all right as soon as I can get right end upwards!" he panted. "But what I want you to do is to take this fountain-pen out of my waistcoat-pocket. It's leaking like the dickens!"—Sent in by T. A. Corris, Bootle.

PULLING HIS LEG.

The father was endeavouring to administer to his struggling small boy a dose of castor-oil. The task was proving rather a difficult one, and a visitor volunteered the following helpful suggestion:

"Pinch his nose, and he'll drink it without knowing it!"

"Pull his leg!" was the tart retort. "He'll think it's golden syrup!"—Sent in by Boy E. Pye, Brentwood.

23-10-13

As the "GEM" Storyette Competition has proved so popular, it has been decided to run this novel feature in conjunction with our new Companion Paper,

THE BOYS' FRIEND, 1d.,

Published every Monday,

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