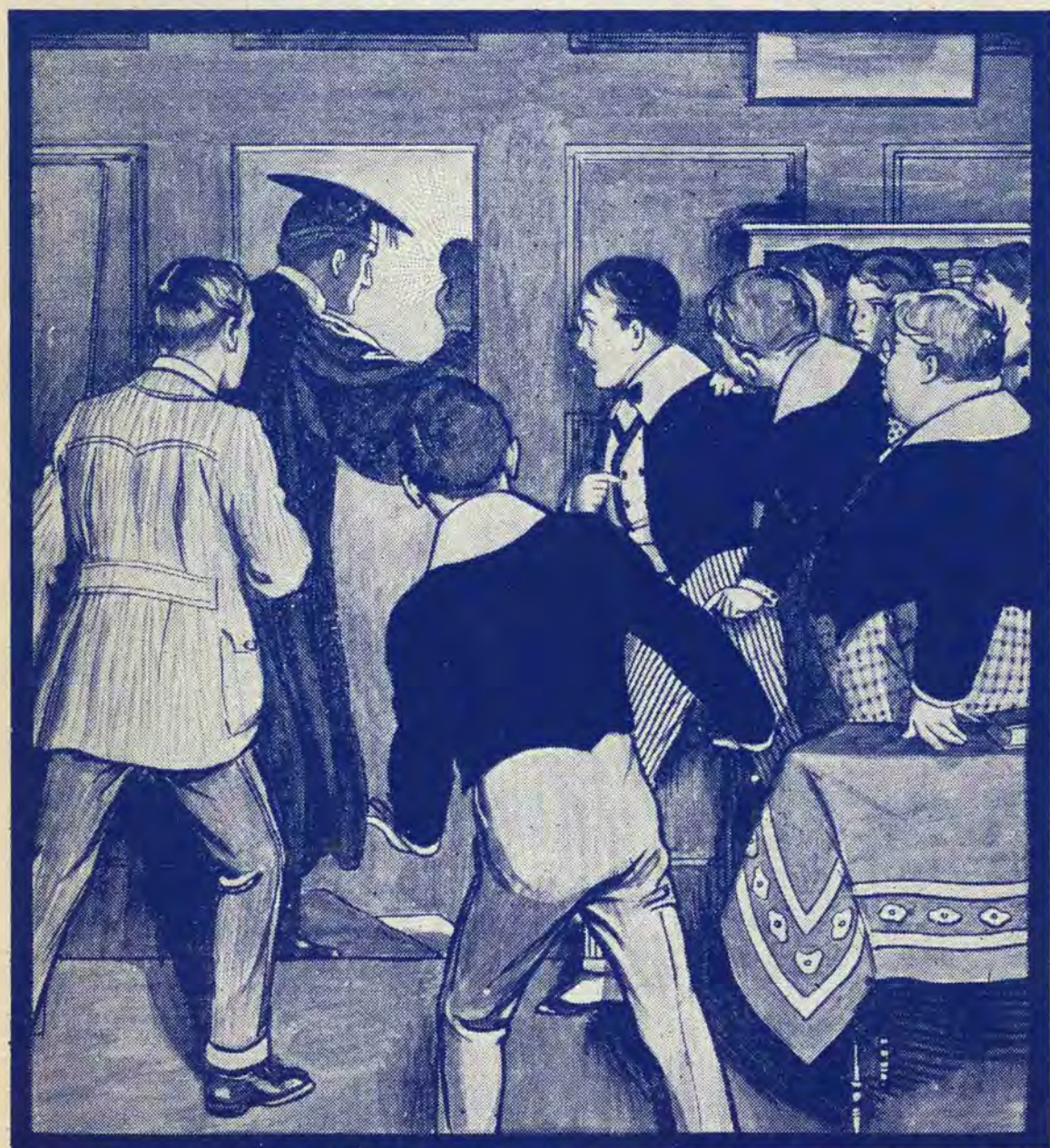




THE HAUNTED SCHOOL!



THE HOUSE-MASTER ADVANCED INTO THE APERTURE OF THE WALL!

(A Thrilling Scene in the Magnificent Long, Complete School Story contained in this Number.)



THE HAUNTED SCHOOL.

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



CHAPTER 1.

Fed Up With Bunter!

"BUNTER!"

"Are you there, Bunter?"
Quite a little crowd of juniors had gathered round the doorway of Study No. 2 in the Fourth Form passage in the School House.

Tom Merry had hurled open the door, and the juniors looked into the study, but all was dark within.

From the darkness came no sound.

If W. G. Bunter, of the Fourth Form, was there, he was following the celebrated example of Brer Fox, and "lying low."

"Bunter!" roared Jack Blake.

Silence.

"Bai Jove! The boundah has sneaked off, you know," remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "You ought to have kept an eye on him, Tom Mewwy."

"Oh, he's there right enough!" answered Tom Merry.

"I can hear a sound like a grampus grunting," said Monty Lowther. "There can't be a grampus in a St. Jim's study, so it must be Bunter."

"Are you there, Bunter?" hooted Manners.

"Nunno!" came a gasp from the dark study.

"What?"

"I—I'm not here, you know—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Light the gas, somebody," said Tom Merry.

"Oh, dear!" came another gasp.

Herries struck a match. There was a sound of movement in the study, and then silence again. George Herries ignited the gas, and the juniors looked round for Bunter.

He was not to be seen, however. Save for the new-comers, Study No. 2 seemed to be untenanted.

"Bai Jove! Where is the fat boundah?" asked D'Arcy. "I pwesume he has not disappaeched up the chimney!"

From under the study table there came a sound of stertorous breathing. The juniors chuckled as they heard it.

"Are you under the table, Bunter?" demanded Monty Lowther.

"Ow! No!"

"Herries, old scout, dig under the table with your foot—you've got the biggest feet at St. Jim's—"

"I haven't got the fattest head, anyway!" grunted Herries, with a glare at the humorous Lowther, apparently implying that Montague Lowther possessed that distinction.

"Ordah, deah boys! We have come here to wag Buntah, not to wag one anoathah," said D'Arcy. "Buntah, you fat, wothah, come out fwom undah the table. I know you are there—I can heah you gwahntin'!"

"I'll try the poker—" began Tom Merry.

There was a hurried movement under the table, and Bunter rolled out into view without waiting for Tom Merry to try the poker.

He scrambled up, pink and breathless, and blinked at the St. Jim's juniors through his big spectacles.

"I—I say, you fellows—" he stammered.

"Lock the door, somebody!" commanded Tom Merry.

"I—I say, you know—"

Digby locked the door. Bunter of the Fourth backed away to the window, blinking at the juniors in great alarm. There was quite a representative gathering of the Lower School present. The Terrible Three of the Shell, Blake & Co. from Study No. 6, Figgins & Co. from the New House, and Levison, Cardew, Clive, and Julian.

Study No. 2 was crowded—not to say swarming—and there certainly seemed enough present to see justice done on the Owl of the Fourth. As he blinked at the crowd of juniors, Billy Bunter wished from the bottom of his heart that he had stayed at Greyfriars, and never tried his luck at St. Jim's.

"I—I say, you fellows—" he murmured.

Tom Merry held up his hand.

"Bunter!"

"Ye-es, old chap?"

"Don't 'old chap' me!" said the captain of the Shell sternly. "I suppose you know what we've come for?"

Bunter grinned feebly.

"Ye-es. You—you called on me because you're all my old pals, of course. I—I'm jolly glad to see you!"

"Eh?"

"W-w-won't you sit down?" gasped Bunter.

"Bai Jove!"

"We've called on you," said Tom Merry sternly, "to make an example of you."

"I—I say, it's n-n-no good making an example of me, you know!" gasped Bunter. "S-s-suppose you make an example of somebody else—D'Arcy, for instance. Then I could benefit by the example, couldn't I?"

"Gwreat Scott!"

"That's not a bad idea," said Monty Lowther thoughtfully. "Does Gussy agree—"

"I certainly do not agree, Lowthah. I wedge the suggestion as uttably ridiculous!"

"You are going to have justice, Bunter," went on Tom Merry.

"Oh dear! I—I'd rather not, if you don't mind!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"To come to business," continued the

captain of the Shell, unheeding: "The School is getting fed up with you, Bunter. When we first met you we thought you were a decent chap, not at all like your precious cousin, Billy Bunter of Greyfriars. We were deceived in you. Why, what are you grinning at, you fat image?"

"I—I—I wasn't!"

"We gave you a welcome to the school," resumed Tom Merry. "You had every chance. And what have you done, Walter Bunter?"

"Everybody!" said Lowther.

"You've turned out a worm of the first water," said Tom. "You're not only exactly like your cousin Billy to look at, but you're exactly like him in every other way. We thought you were quite different; but it turns out that you're the same kind of fat worm over again."

"Oh, really, you know—"

"In fact, if we didn't know you were Walter Bunter, we should think that you were Billy Bunter himself, who'd got here somehow from Greyfriars," said Tom Merry sternly.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Bunter jumped.

He wondered for a moment what the juniors would have thought if they could have guessed how near Tom Merry's remark was to the exact facts.

"Oh, really—" murmured the Owl.

"We've often heard from the Greyfriars fellows about your cousin Billy's little games," went on Tom. "And we've thought to ourselves that if Billy Bunter was at St. Jim's, we'd— What are you grinning at again?"

"N-n-nothing."

"We'd jolly well cure him!" said Tom.

"Well, you've turned out exactly like Billy, and we're going to cure you—see? That's what we've come here for. You have been found guilty on many counts—"

"Don't recite the indictment," remarked Figgins. "We can't stay here all night."

"He's bagged grub," said Fatty Wynn, with a glare at the hapless Bunter. "He's bagged other fellows' grub in both Houses."

"He tells whoppahs!" said Arthur Augustus, with a sad shake of the head.

"His sins are as numberless as the sands on the giddy seashore," said Monty Lowther solemnly.

"I—I say, you fellows—"

"And we're all fed up," said Tom Merry. "No fellow's grub is safe when you are around, Bunter. There's a tin of pickards missing from my study now."

"I—I haven't seen it, old chap. P-p-perhaps Blake had it."

"What?" roared Jack Blake.

"I—I mean Levison. It would be just like Levison—"

"Why, you fat rotter—" began Benoit Levison hotly.

"There's a cake missing from Study No. 6!" said Digby.

"I didn't know you had a cake!" gasped Bunter. "I never touched it. Besides, it was only a measly little cake."

"Enough!" said the captain of the Shell. "You are going to be made an example of, Bunter!"

"Ow!"

"Yaas, wathah! A howwible example."

"I—I say, you fellows, I—I'd prefer the whole matter to drop," said Bunter, blinking at them.

"Bai Jove!"

"The matter isn't going to drop just yet," said Tom. "You're going to drop first—hard! This committee, representing the Lower School, has decided to take drastic measures. First, you are going to be bumped—"

"Ow!"

"Then you are going to have six with the fire-shovel—"

"Yow!"

"And then—"

Tom Merry was interrupted. A sharp, stern voice came from the direction of the locked door.

"What does this mean? Why is this door locked?"

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus. "Waiton!"

CHAPTER 2.

An Unexpected Visit!

"M R. RAILTON!"

"Oh dear!"

There was sudden silence in the study.

Tom Merry & Co. had gathered there to execute long-delayed and richly-deserved justice on the Owl of the Fourth. But they realised that their Housemaster would probably not see eye to eye with them in the matter. The sound of Mr. Railton's voice at the door was rather disconcerting.

Billy Bunter grinned. The interruption had come very fortunately for the fat junior.

The voice went on sternly:

"Merry! Blake! Levison! All of you to follow me to my study at once. I will not allow this persecution of a new boy! At once! Do you hear?"

"Yes, sir!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Oh, owikey!"

Dismay had fallen upon the administrators of justice. They looked at one another.

"Rotten!" mumbled Blake. "How on earth did Railton know we were here?"

"Waiton is undah a misapprehension," said Arthur Augustus. "He appeals to wegard our pwoceedin's as persecution. I shall certainly explain the mattah to Mr. Waiton."

"Well, we'd better go," yawned Cardow. "Housemasters don't like to be kept waitin'. They're an unreasonable lot."

Blake was already unlocking the door.

The juniors had not heard the Housemaster walk away, and they expected to see him in the passage when they emerged. To their surprise, the passage was empty.

"Bai Jove! Waiton must have walked off vewy quietly!" said Arthur Augustus, scanning the passage through his eyeglass. "He is not heah."

"He, he, he!"

"What are you cacklin' at, Buntah?"

"Never mind, Bunter," grunted Blake.

"Let's get along and see Railton. May as well get it over. Oh dear!"

In a disconcerted crowd the juniors made their way to the staircase, leaving William George Bunter—supposed at St.

Jim's to be Walter Gilbert Bunter—grinning in his study. Had they known that the supposed Wally Bunter was in reality the one and only Billy Bunter, they might have remembered that Billy Bunter of Greyfriars was a ventriloquist—but they did not know it, and they did not suspect.

"Hallo! You fellows look jolly cheerful!" Grundy of the Shell was on the landing, talking to Wilkins and Gunn, and he grinned at the downcast faces of the Co. "What's the row?"

"It's a slight misundahstandin' on the part of Mr. Waiton, Gwunday. It will be set wight, howevah. I shall put the mattah to him as one gentleman to anothah—"

"You jolly well won't!" growled Blake. "You'll keep your chin quiet, Gussy, and not get us a licking all round."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Oh, come on!"

"I shall insist upon explainin'—"

"Br-r-r-r!"

"I do not wegard that as an intelligible we-mark, Blake."

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy followed his chums, with his noble nose in the air.

In a disconsolate crowd Tom Merry & Co. arrived at the door of Mr. Railton's study. Tom Merry tapped on the door.

"Come in!"

The juniors marched in.

Mr. Railton was seated by the fire, chatting with Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, who sat in an armchair on the opposite side. Both the masters glanced at the crowd of juniors in surprise, looking more and more surprised as more and more fellows came in. By the time they were all in the study the space between the door and the table was pretty well filled.

The School House master rose to his feet, frowning a little.

"What does this mean?" he demanded.

"We—we've come, sir," said Tom Merry.

"I can see that you have come, Merry," said the Housemaster tartly.

"But why, pray, have you invaded my study in this manner?"

"We—we—" stammered Tom, quite astonished by this reception.

"You told us to come, sir," said Levison.

"I certainly told you nothing of the kind. What do you mean?"

"But—but you—" stammered Levison.

"I certainly have no recollection of telling so many juniors to come here," said Mr. Railton. "What have you come for?"

The juniors looked at one another.

"Pway allow me to explain, Mr. Waiton," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"I am waiting for you to explain," said Mr. Railton sharply.

"The fact is— Yawwooh!"

"D'Arcy!"

"Ow! Pway excuse me, sir. Some silly ass twod on my foot. The fact is, sir—pway stop pokin' me in wibs, Blake—the fact is, sir, you are undah a complete misapprehension."

"What?"

"So fah from persecutin' Buntah, sir—"

"Bunter!"

"Yaas, sir. We certainly were not persecutin' him, but were only goin' to impress upon his mind that it was wotten bad form to bag anothah chap's grub, sir."

"Is this impertinence, D'Arcy?"

"Bai Jove! Not at all, sir! I should wegard it as vewy bad taste to be impertinent to a Housemastah."

"What your dealings with Bunter may have been I do not know, and I do not

see the necessity for mentioning the matter. I have asked you why you have crowded into my study in this manner."

"We could scarcely wefuse your wequest, sir."

"My request?"

"Certainly, sir. We came here because you told us, owin' to your misapprehension of what was happenin' in Buntah's studay."

"I had no knowledge of anything that may have been happening in Bunter's study, and I certainly did not tell you to come here."

"Wha-a-at?"

"I presume," said Mr. Railton sternly, "that this is what the juniors, I believe, call a rag. Your Housemaster, my boys, is not a proper subject for jeeting. I shall—"

"Oh, no, sir!" gasped Tom Merry.

"You told us—"

"When did I tell you?"

"Five minutes ago—"

"That is enough, Merry. I have not been out of this study during the last twenty minutes. Mr. Railton picked up his cane. 'You must not play these foolish pranks on me. Hold out your hand!'"

Tom Merry simply blinked at him.

"But, sir—but—" he stuttered.

"I am waiting, Merry!"

"I pwoest, sir!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus hotly. "You have no wight, sir, to wegard this visit as a wag. You certainly told us to come here."

"D'Arcy!"

"Ewewy fellow heah heard your voice, sir, when we were in Buntah's studay," said the swell of St. Jim's firmly.

"Pewwaps you have forgotten, sir."

Mr. Railton lowered the cane. The astonishment in the juniors' faces was too genuine to be mistaken; and he realised that it was not a "rag."

"Let us have this clear," said the Housemaster. "It appears that you have been deceived. You say you heard me—"

"Vewy distinctly, sir."

"Where were you?"

"In Buntah's studay, sir."

"And you fancy that I spoke to you—"

"We certainly heard your voice from the passage, sir."

"Oh!" exclaimed Mr. Railton. "Was the door closed?"

"Yaas."

"I accept your statement that you supposed you heard my voice. You certainly did not hear it, however, as I was not there. Some one, apparently, has deceived you by imitating my voice."

"Bai Jove!"

"Oh!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"It is very odd," said Mr. Railton, looking sharply at the juniors. "I should not have supposed it was possible for a boy to imitate my voice so exactly as to deceive you. That, apparently, is what has happened—if you are telling the truth."

"I twust, sir, that you do not think of doubtin' our word," said Arthur Augustus, with a great deal of dignity.

"I do not doubt your word, D'Arcy; but it is very odd indeed. However, as you are here you may as well explain what you were doing in Bunter's study."

"Ahem!"

"Well?"

"We—we were goin' to make wathah an example of Buntah, sir, as a warnin' not to bag othah fellows' grub," stammered D'Arcy.

"In what way, D'Arcy?"

"Ahem! Bumpin' him, sir, ahem!—and—"

"What else?"

"And—and whackin' him, sir, with a fire-shovel on his bags, sir."

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"Is that all?"
 "And waggin' him generally, sir—
 Yooop! If you persist in tweedin' on
 my feet, Lowthah—"
 "I think I understand," said Mr.
 Railton. "You will take fifty lines each
 for ragging Bunter, as you call it. And
 I forbid you to enter his study again for
 any such purpose. Now you may go."

"Undah the cires, sir—"
 "You may go, D'Arcy."
 "Yaas, sir; but considewin— Pway
 don't dwag my arm in that way, Blake!
 Weally, Hewwies— Dig, you ass—"

Arthur Augustus was got out of the
 study in rather a flustered state, and Tom
 Merry drew the door shut.

"You uttah asses!" exclaimed the
 swell of St. Jim's. "I was goin' to ex-
 plain to Waitton at length—"

"Life's too short, dear boy," answered
 Blake, "and fifty lines each are enough,
 without having 'em doubled for your
 cheek, Kim on!"

"I think I had better go in again and
 explain to Waitton—"

"I think you had better not, old top,"
 answered Blake cheerfully. "Take his
 other ear, Dig."

And Arthur Augustus was led up the
 staircase loudly expostulating.

CHAPTER 3. A Deep Mystery!

TOM MERRY'S brows were
 wrinkled in thought. In the
 upper passage the juniors
 gathered in a rather excited
 crowd. The incident had puzzled them,
 and it exasperated them, too. Fifty lines
 each had rewarded them for the visit to
 the Housemaster's study, and they
 wanted to know who it was that had sent
 them there.

"There's some beast in the House play-
 ing tricks," said Tom Merry. "This
 isn't the first time it's happened. You
 remember somebody saying 'Rats' to
 Linton in the Form-room, and we never
 could find out where it came from."

"And somethin' of the sort occurred in
 the Fourth," said Arthur Augustus.
 "Some fellow was cheekin' Lathom
 through the keyhole, and he imitated
 othah fellows' voices."

"And then that affair in our study
 the other night," said Manners. "We
 thought Wilkins was behind the book-
 case—"

"And he wasn't," remarked Lowther.

"He certainly wasn't. Now, we want
 to know who's playing these tricks," said
 Tom Merry. "There seems to be a
 fellow about with a gift for imitating
 voices. It's a gift that's going to get
 him into trouble."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Let's ask Grundy," said Blake.
 "Grundy was at the end of the passage
 when we were called out of the study.
 He ought to have seen whoever it was."

"Good!"
 The juniors looked for George Alfred
 Grundy of the Shell, and found him in
 his study with Wilkins and Gunn.

"Licked?" asked George Alfred
 cheerily, as the crowd of faces appeared
 in his doorway.

"Did you want us licked?" demanded
 Clive.

"The fact is, kid, I don't think you
 Fourth Form fags get lickings enough,"
 replied Grundy. "If I were Housemaster
 I should warn you. I think you need it.
 That's my candid opinion."

"Weally, Gwunday—"

"And that's why you imitated Rail-
 ton's toot and sent us to his study!"
 exclaimed Herries hotly.

"Eh? What?"

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"Did you?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Eh? No. Why should I?"

"Well, somebody did," said the cap-
 tain of the Shell. "We thought Railton
 called to us through the door, and it
 turns out he didn't. You were in the
 passage when we came out. Did you see
 who was outside the door of No. 2?"

"Nobody was."

"What?"

"I never noticed specially, of course;
 but I'm certain that nobody was in the
 passage at all till you came out,"
 answered Grundy.

"That's rot, of course."

"What do you fellows say?" asked

Manners, addressing Wilkins and Gunn.

"You were there."

"Didn't see," answered Wilkins. "I
 had my back to the passage. Same with
 Gunn, I think."

And Gunn nodded assent.

"I hadn't," said Grundy, "and I
 know the passage was empty."

"How could it be empty when some-
 body called to us through the door of
 No. 2?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Don't ask me. Perhaps you imagined
 it."

"Fathead!"

"I regard that suggestion as utterly
 asinine, Gwunday."

"Did you notice whether Grundy came
 along to No. 2 a minute or two before
 we came out, Wilkins?" asked Tom.

"No, he didn't."

"Sure of that?"

"Quite."

And Gunn nodded assent again.

Tom Merry was staggered. Unless
 Grundy & Co. were disregarding the
 truth in the most reckless way, the
 trickster could not have been none of
 them. Yet if the passage had been
 empty, as Grundy averred, where had
 the mysterious voice come from?

"Blessed if it doesn't look as if the
 place was haunted!" said Blake soberly.

"Bai Jove, it is weally vewy extra-
 ordinary! I do not undahstand it at
 all."

"There's something going on," said
 Grundy. "Look at what happened in
 this study the other day. I heard
 Wilkins speak. I thought he was under
 the table, and he wasn't! It beats me.
 Unless the blessed place is haunted, I
 can't account for it!"

There was evidently nothing to be
 learned in Grundy's study, and Tom
 Merry & Co. departed, with a lingering
 doubt as to whether George Alfred had
 been sticking to the truth.

"What about Buntah?" asked Arthur
 Augustus. "We were going to wag
 Buntah, and we haven't wagged him."

"Oh, bother Bunter!" answered Tom
 Merry. "Bunter will keep."

And the juniors dispersed, all of them
 puzzled and perplexed and a little
 worried.

That the School House of St. Jim's was
 haunted was really impossible; and yet,
 if it was not haunted, the mysterious
 happenings of late were not to be
 accounted for.

It might be supposed that there was
 some fellow in the House who had the
 trick of imitating voices, though it was
 a rare gift; but it could not be surmised
 how he remained invisible when he was
 playing his tricks.

With that queer problem in their minds
 Tom Merry & Co. had no attention to
 waste upon Bunter of the Fourth.

Figgins & Co. returned in a thoughtful
 mood to the New House. When they
 arrived in their study they found a fat
 junior ensconced in the armchair.

"Bunter!" ejaculated Fatty Wynn
 wrathfully.

The fat junior blinked at them amic-
 ably.

"I say, you fellows, no larks, you
 know! I've come over here to see you
 in a friendly way."

"We'll roll you downstairs in a
 friendly way," remarked Kerr.

"I say, it's jolly suspicious of you to
 keep your cupboard locked up," said
 Bunter. "Just as if you suspected
 fellows were after your grub."

"So you've been at the cupboard?"
 demanded Figgins.

"Numo! I—I never even noticed
 whether it was locked or not," said Bun-
 ter hastily. "I say, you fellows, no
 larks! If you chuck that cushion at me,
 Fatty Wynn, I'll—I'll—"

"Well, what will you do?" asked
 Fatty Wynn grimly.

"I—I'll overlook it if you mean it as a
 joke," Bunter dodged the cushion.

"He, he, he! But, I say, you fellows,
 I've got a suggestion to make. Some
 fellows have been grousing because of a
 few tarts and a cake or two, and so on.
 Mean, I call it. Well, I'm going to
 stand a big spread, and ask all the
 fellows, especially you chaps, to set the
 matter right."

"Oh!" said Fatty Wynn, laying down
 the stump he had picked up. "That's
 rather decent of you, Bunter. It's up to
 you, too."

"Just what I think, old chap. Now, to-
 morrow's a half-holiday. Can you
 fellows make it convenient to come?"

Fatty Wynn glanced at his chums.

"I don't see being down on Bunter if
 he wants to do the decent thing, you
 fellows," he remarked. "We might go."

"It will be rather a decent spread,"
 said Bunter. "I'm giving it in the
 Hobby Club room. A study wouldn't be
 big enough for all the guests."

"What? Are you spending a fortune
 on it?" asked Figgins.

"I think about four quid will cover
 it," answered Bunter carelessly. "My
 idea is to make it a really decent thing,
 you know, so that fellows will feel it's
 worth their while. Cakes and buns and
 tarts, you know—"

"Good!" said Fatty Wynn, his eyes
 glistening.

"Several pots of jam, and meringues
 and—"

"Good!"

"Cold beef and ham to begin with,"
 added Bunter.

"Nothing like laying a solid founda-
 tion," agreed Fatty Wynn. "That's a
 jolly good idea, Bunter."

"I thought you'd like the idea. If I
 have a couple of cold fowls, I suppose
 you could carve, Wynn?"

"Pleased to," said Fatty Wynn, beam-
 ing.

"Then it's a go. We'll discuss the de-
 tails over tea if you like," said Bunter.

"Hold on a minute!" remarked Kerr
 grimly. "Before you bag a tea in this
 study, Bunter, we'll be a bit more pre-
 cise. You've got the tin to stand this
 whacking spread to-morrow?"

"Oh, that's all right!"

"Let's see it," said Fatty Wynn sus-
 piciously.

"Ahem! The—the fact is, I—I
 haven't got it at present," said Bunter
 cautiously, "but I'm expecting a postal-
 order—"

"What?" roared Figgins & Co.

"By the first post in the morning—
 from a titled relation of mine, you
 know," said Bunter, "and—"
 Yaroooooooh!"

Bunter did not finish. Three pairs of
 hands were laid upon him, and he went
 through the doorway like a sack of coal.
 There was a terrific concussion as he
 landed in the passage, and a still more
 terrific yell.

"Gimme the poker, quick!" howled
 Fatty Wynn.

Hurried footsteps rang along the passage. The poker was not needed. William George Bunter was gone.

CHAPTER 4.

A Surprise in Study No. 6!

"I'VE been treated badly since I came to St. Jim's!" Billy Bunter made that statement in Study No. 6. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was there. Blake and Herries and Digby had strolled out when Bunter strolled in. That was one of Bunter's grievances. Fellows seemed to have fallen into a regular habit of strolling away when the Owl came along.

Arthur Augustus lingered, constrained by politeness. Even Bunter was entitled to some politeness, D'Arcy thought. Blake & Co. did not seem to see it.

"Have you, weally, Buntah?" asked Arthur Augustus, with a glance at the doorway.

Bunter nodded impressively. "I haven't been treated as I expected," he said. "I should never have come to St. Jim's at all, only all you fellows were so jolly friendly when I met you at Greyfriars. Now, are you friendly now? I ask you the question."

"Ahem! You see, deah boy—"

"Well?" said Bunter loftily. "You see, you are such a howwid boundah, Buntah!" explained Arthur Augustus. "That accounts for it, you know."

Bunter snorted. "I was offered a chance in the footer team," he said. "How many matches have I played in?"

"You play so wottenly, you know, and you nevah turn up to practice."

"I don't need so much practice as some chaps. Some fellows," said Bunter, "are born footballers. I'm one of them."

"Bai Jove!" "Do I ever get a hearing in the Junior Debating Society?" demanded Bunter warmly.

"You talk such feashful piffle, you know."

"Have I been offered a part in any of the plays?" continued Bunter. "Never once, though I can act better than any other fellow at St. Jim's. That boast Lowther said they'd give me the part of Fat Jack when they played 'Fat Jack of the Bonehouse.' That's all."

"Ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at. I wasn't treated like this at Greyfriars. You should have seen the way Wibley used to chase me about, begging me to play Hamlet or Julius Caesar—"

"Bai Jove! Did you stay a vewy long time at Gweyfwiahs, Buntah?" asked Arthur Augustus, in surprise.

"I—I—I mean—yes—no—exactly—" stammered the Owl of Greyfriars, realising that he had nearly given himself away once more. "What I mean is—Ahem! Um!"

"I weally do not quite see what you mean, Buntah. Your weemarks are not vewy lucid."

"You've really let me down, D'Arcy," said Bunter, changing the subject. "I relied on your friendship when I came here."

"I am vewy sowwy, Buntah. But you must admit that I stood you as long as I weally could, you know."

"I'm afraid I rather despise you, you know," said Bunter, shaking his head solemnly. "This isn't quite up to my standard, D'Arcy."

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus, almost overcome. "Weally, Buntah, I—"

"But I'm going to give you a chance," said Bunter generously. "I don't want to be hard on you."

"Weally—"

"I'm willing to let bygones be bygones, and start afresh," said Bunter. "I'm willing—perfectly willing—to admit you to my friendship, D'Arcy."

"Oh!"

"Same with Blake and Digby," said Bunter, in the same vein of generosity.

"Not Herries; he's got no money to speak of—I—I mean, I don't approve of him—"

"Buntah, do you see that dooah?"

Bunter blinked round at the door.

"Yes. Do you want it closed?" he asked.

"Yaas, with you on the othah side!" said Arthur Augustus warmly. "I regard you as an offensive person, Buntah. I decline to have anythin' whatever to do with you."

"Very well," said Bunter loftily.

the ancient building of St. Jim's before the studies were added.

It was well known in the school that an ancient secret passage existed behind the old wall, and the panel that gave access to it had been screwed up by order of the Head to prevent reckless juniors exploring the dark recesses. Arthur Augustus followed Bunter's gaze, but he could see nothing to attract special attention on the panelled wall.

Bunter blinked at him suddenly.

"Did you hear it?" he breathed.

"What are you alludin' to, Buntah?"

"Listen!"

Arthur Augustus jumped.

From the panelled wall came a faint, expiring voice.

"Let me out! Oh dear! I'm suffocating in here! Let me out!"

"Gweat Scott! Who—who is there?"

gasped Arthur Augustus, staring blankly at the wall.

"I'm Grundy! Help!"



Arthur Augustus jumped. From the panelled wall came a faint, expiring voice. "Let me out! Oh dear! I'm suffocating in here! Let me out!"

"Then I shall make you sit up, and all the rest, too. I'm going to punish you!"

Arthur Augustus smiled.

"Are you goin' to give us a feashful thwashin' all wound, deah boy?" he inquired.

"Worse than that! I'll jolly well turn your hair grey before I'm done with you!" said Bunter darkly. "I'll make you sit up! Wait and see!"

And Bunter rolled to the door.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I weally begin to think that that fat boundah is a little wooky in the crumpet. I weally fail to see how he can make anybody sit up, exceptin' by baggin' his gwib. Bai Jove! What are you stavin' at, Buntah?"

Bunter had paused and turned, and he was blinking in a peculiarly fixed manner at the study wall near the bookcase. That wall was of old oak panels, part of

"Oh deah!"

"Help!"

There was the sound of a faint groan, and then silence. Arthur Augustus, in horror, stared at the wall, rooted to the floor.

CHAPTER 5.

Only a False Alarm!

"GWUNDAY!" gasped Arthur Augustus at last.

Bunter blinked at him.

"How did he get there, D'Arcy?" he asked. "I know there's a secret passage—Trinble told me. But—but—"

"The uthah duffah must have got into it somehow, and lost his way!" said Arthur Augustus, aghast. He ran to the wall, and tapped on it. "Gwunday!"

Groan!

"Are you injahed, Gwunday?"

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"I've fallen, and I think my leg's broken."

"Oh, dear!"

"Help!"

"Beah up, dear boy—beah up! I will get help at once!" gasped D'Arcy.

He ran to the door of the study. Wilkins and Gunn were coming down the passage towards the stairs, and D'Arcy shouted to them.

"Come here—quick!"

"Can't, old top!" answered Wilkins. "We're off to Rylcombe to meet Grundy; we promised to meet him at the bunshop after he's done his shopping."

"Gwunday is not at Wylcombe, Wilkins—"

"He jolly well is!" said Gunn.

"He is heah, Gunn."

"Eh? We saw him start for Rylcombe," said Gunn. "Bunter saw him, too, for that matter—didn't you, tubby?"

"He must have come back, though," said Bunter, blinking at Gunn. "He's been playing tricks."

"My dear porpoise, if Grundy cuffed you, I dare say you deserved it," said Wilkins. "Perhaps he's a bit too free with his cuffs; but you can do with a bit."

"Help!"

Wilkins jumped.

"Hallo! That sounds like Grundy's foot. Where is he?"

"He is in the secret passage, Wilkins, behind the wall of my study! He says he has broken his leg."

"Eh? How could he get there? The panel's screwed up."

"There's another entrance from the vaults," said Gunn. "Has Grundy been down in the vaults? The thumping ass told us to meet him in Rylcombe."

"Help!"

Wilkins and Gunn, in great astonishment, came into the study. Arthur Augustus ran along the passage to call the Terrible Three. They received the startling news with amazement, and hurried to Study No. 6.

Trimble caught the news, and in a few minutes it was spreading through the School House.

Juniors came from near and far to crowd into Study No. 6 and round the doorway; there was quite a cram in the passage. Excited voices were heard on all sides.

"The thumping ass!" Jack Blake exclaimed, with more wrath than sympathy. "What has he been poking into the secret passage for? It's against Head's orders!"

"I wathah think the mystery is explained now, Blake."

"Eh? What mystery?"

"Those mysterious voices, you know—it was Gwunday playin' tricks from behind the walls, you know," said D'Arcy, with conviction. "That is what the boundah is in the secret passage for."

"My hat!"

"Looks like it, and no mistake," said Tom Merry. "That would explain! But he's got to be helped! We can get these screws out, I suppose?"

"Help!" came in faint tones.

"Better smash it in," exclaimed Bunter. "Here, give me room!"

Bunter picked up the poker and swung it back. There was a fiendish yell from Gore of the Shell.

"Yaroo! Keep that maniac away—Yooooo!"

"I wish you wouldn't put your head in the way, Gore. Give me room, you fellows, and I'll soon smash—"

Blake gripped the Owl just in time. "You won't, you fat idiot!" he exclaimed.

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claimed. "You're not going to wreck this study. Get back!"

"Oh, really, Blake—"

"Out of the way, fathead! The screwdriver—quick!"

Tom Merry and Blake started to work with screwdrivers.

But the screws in the oak panel were many, and they were well driven in. There was a long task ahead of the rescuers. Behind the two juniors wielding the screwdrivers the study swarmed with a buzzing throng. The passage outside was crammed.

Kildare of the Sixth came pushing his way through the crowd.

"What's all this about?" exclaimed the St. Jim's captain. "Is the study on fire? Why—what—you young rascals! What are you taking out those screws for?"

"It's all wight, Kildare—"

"Stop it at once!" rapped out Kildare angrily.

"Gwunday is there, Kildare!"

"Nonsense!"

"It's true, Kildare!" gasped Tom Merry. "The silly ass has got into the old passages somehow, and he's calling for help. He says he's broken his leg."

"My hat!" said Kildare. He rapped on the panelled wall. "Are you there, Grundy?"

"Help!" came faintly to his ears.

"Are you hurt?"

"My leg—broken! Ow!"

"Good heavens!" muttered Kildare. "The utter young idiot! Here, give me that screwdriver, Merry! Some of you go and call Mr. Railton here."

Kildare set to work. Levison hurried away for the Housemaster, and soon returned with him. The swarming crowd made way for Mr. Railton, as he arrived at Study No. 6.

Five or six screws were out by this time, but there were many more to come. Mr. Railton's face was very grave, and it was plain that only his concern for the hapless junior behind the wall prevented him from being very angry indeed.

He looked on in silence while Kildare and Blake laboured at the hard screws, Herries soon taking Blake's place, to give him a rest. Bunter touched the Housemaster's sleeve, and Mr. Railton looked down at him.

"Shall I telephone for an ambulance, sir?" asked Bunter.

"Certainly not!"

"Grundy will have to go to the hospital, sir, won't he?"

Mr. Railton made a gesture, and the officious Owl backed away. The School House master tapped on the panels while the screwdrivers were still hard at work.

"Can you hear me, Grundy?" he called out.

"Yes!" came in faint tones.

"Are you really hurt?"

"My neck's broken, sir—"

"What?"

"I mean my arm, sir."

"Levison, did you not tell me that Grundy stated that he had broken his leg?"

"That's what I understood, sir," answered Levison of the Fourth.

"He certainly said so!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

"His statements appear to conflict with one another," said Mr. Railton, knitting his brows. "I doubt whether Grundy is injured at all. He would certainly know whether it was his arm or his leg that was broken. This appears to me to be a foolish prank on Grundy's part. However, proceed with opening the panel."

The screwdrivers proceeded.

The panel was released at last, and

Kildare slid it open. A dark aperture was disclosed, where a huge block of stone was missing from the thick wall. Mr. Railton stared into the opening.

"Grundy!"

There was no reply; neither was any sign to be seen of George Alfred Grundy. Mr. Railton called again, angrily, but only the echo of his voice answered him. The juniors looked at one another blankly. They did not know in the least what to make of it.

"Get me a light!" said Mr. Railton abruptly.

Blake hastily lighted a bike-lantern.

Mr. Railton took it, and advanced into the aperture in the wall. There were steps in the passage within, and the Housemaster disappeared from sight. The juniors waited, breathless.

"Gwunday is gone!" said Arthur Augustus, in a hushed voice. "His leg cannot possibly be broken, affah all. He has been pullin' our leg!"

"It's a lark, I suppose," said George Wilkins dazedly. "Grundy's been spoofing us. But fancy pulling a Housemaster's leg! Why, Railton will boil him in oil for this!"

"Serve him jolly well right!" growled Manners. "He must be off his rocker to play such an idiotic trick!"

"Is he off his rocker?" said Wilkins dubiously. "I've often thought there was something rather queer about Grundy. Look at the way he plays football, for instance."

"He will get a fearful thwashin' for this! I must say that it serves him right!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Here comes Railton!" murmured Blake.

Mr. Railton emerged from the secret passage. His brow was as black as midnight.

"Have you found him, sir?" ventured Wilkins.

"No, Wilkins, I have not found him. Grundy must be deliberately hiding away in the passages," said Mr. Railton. "He cannot, therefore, be injured. The whole affair is an extraordinary prank, for which Grundy will pay the penalty when he is found!"

It was evident that the Housemaster was intensely angry and exasperated, which was not surprising. Kildare was looking very grim. Such a prank was really unpardonable, and it was quite certain that the vials of wrath would be poured out on Grundy when he turned up.

"Blake, you may close up that panel, and refasten it—"

"But, Grundy, sir—"

"He may leave the secret passage, Blake, where he entered it. There is no need for the panel to remain open. Kindly put in all the screws; I will examine it presently."

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Railton left the study. He looked back to speak to Wilkins.

"Tell Grundy to come to my study immediately you see him again, Wilkins."

The Housemaster strode away, followed by Kildare.

The juniors remained, in a buzz of excited discussion. The general opinion, freely expressed, was that George Alfred Grundy was "off his rocker."

Only on that hypothesis could his extraordinary conduct be accounted for. The reckoning that awaited him when he turned up was a heavy one.

Blake and his chums set to work screwing up the panel once more. It was a long and weary task. They offered the other fellows to give them a turn with the screwdrivers, but most of the fellows found that they had other engagements, and the crowd dispersed.

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther kindly did a screw apiece, and then gracefully retired. Talbot did a couple, and Clive did one. The rest remained for Study No. 6 to negotiate.

And as they ground away with the screwdrivers, with aching palms, Blake & Co. made remarks about Grundy that would have made George Alfred's hair rise on his head if he could have heard them.

Bunter grinned into the study when they were nearly finished.

"I say, you fellows, enjoying yourselves?" he asked.

"Pitch something at that fat beast!" said Blake, in a sulphurous voice.

"He, he, he!"

Billy Bunter retreated before anything could be pitched. He rolled cheerfully into his own study, where Mellish and Trimble were having tea.

"Lots of hard work going on in No. 6," he remarked. "He, he, he! They don't seem to be enjoying it! Slackers, you know! He, he, he!"

"I should think they'd scalp Grundy!" remarked Mellish.

"I hope they will!" assented Bunter. "Grundy's a beast; always pitching into a chap! I told him I'd make him sit up! He, he, he!"

"Well, you haven't made him sit up!"

"Eh? Oh no, of course not!" said Bunter hastily.

In Study No. 6 the last screws were replaced, and Blake & Co. sat down, breathing hard, to a well-earned tea—rather late. Their feelings towards George Alfred Grundy were such as could not be expressed in words. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy tenderly rubbed a blister on his palm.

"Genewally speakin'," he remarked, "I am sorry when a chap gets a lickin'. But I shall not sympathise with Grundy if Wailton fairly skins him for this silly trick!"

And Blake & Co. agreed.

CHAPTER 6.

A Little Surprise for Grundy!

"BY gad, it's Grundy!"

Racke and Crooke of the Shell were near the gates, chatting, when a burly figure came striding in. Racke and Crooke stared at him blankly. They had been talking about Grundy, and wondering where he was; but assuredly they had not expected to see him come in at the school gates.

Grundy was frowning; apparently not at all in a good temper. He noted the surprised stare of Racke and his chum, and stopped to return it.

"Well, do you take me for a ghost?" he demanded.

"Jolly nearly, I think!" gasped Racke.

"Where on earth have you come from?"

"From Rylcombe, of course."

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Crooke.

"What—what do you mean?"

"What beats me is how you got out of gates," said Aubrey Racke. "How on earth did you manage it without being seen?"

"Eh? I walked out, of course!" said the astonished Grundy. "Nothing surprising in my being out of gates, is there?"

"Well, a little bit surprising," answered Racke. "Everybody's been looking for you since you played that trick in Study No. 6 an hour ago."

"Dreaming?" asked Grundy pleasantly. "I've been in Rylcombe the last two hours."

"Oh!" ejaculated Racke. "Is that the yarn you're going to spin to Railton?"

"Blessed if I see why Railton should want to know where I've been! I shall tell him if he asks me, of course."

"You'll tell him you've been in the village all the time?"

"Of course."

"Well, I don't want to shove advice at you, Grundy," said Racke. "But I'd try to think of a better one than that if I were you."

"That one won't wash!" said Crooke, shaking his head.

Grundy blinked at them.

"I don't know what you're driving at," he said. "But if you're hinting that I'm not telling you the truth—"

"The truth!" grinned Racke. "Oh, gad!"

"Yes, the truth!" hooted Grundy. "You silly ass, supposing I were a lying worm like you, why should I tell whoppers about where I've been? I suppose you don't think I've been to the Green Man, in your style?"

"No, I don't. I know where you've been—hiding behind the wall in Study No. 6, and pulling Railton's leg!"

"Are you potty?" asked Grundy, in wonder. "I've been waiting at the bunshop in Rylcombe for Wilkins and Gunn, and I'm jolly well going to give them a talking-to for not turning up!"

"Pile it on!" chuckled Crooke.

"Don't you believe me?" roared Grundy.

"Ha, ha! Not likely!"

"Here, hands off!" yelled Aubrey Racke, as the exasperated Grundy made a jump at them.

Grundy did not heed. He collared Racke and Crooke, and brought their heads together with a sounding crack. Then he strode on across the quad, leaving the two black sheep of the Shell roaring.

As he came striding into the School House there was a howl.

"Here's Grundy!"

"Here's the silly ass!"

"You're wanted, Grundy!"

George Alfred stared round at the juniors in amazement. Racke and Crooke had astonished him; but he was still more astonished now. Wilkins and Gunn came quickly towards him.

"How did you get out?" asked Gunn.

"Out!" repeated Grundy.

"Yes; some of the fellows are watching the vaults staircase," said Gunn.

"They haven't seen you pass!"

"The vaults! I've not been in the vaults, you ass!"

"How did you get into the secret passage, then?" asked Wilkins.

"What secret passage?"

"Eh?"

"He doesn't know!" grinned Ker-ruish.

"Ha, ha!"

"Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise!" said Cardew of the Fourth.

"Are you going to keep that up to Railton, Grundy?"

"I say, you fellows, it's rather too thick, isn't it?" chuckled Bunter.

Grundy wondered for a moment or two whether he was dreaming, and would wake up presently in bed.

"Are you all potty?" he gasped.

"I've been at Rylcombe—"

"Oh!"

"I've been waiting at the bunshop for you two slackers!" roared Grundy, with a glare at Wilkins and Gunn. "I want to know why you never came? Keeping a chap hanging about an hour!"

"What was the good of coming when you weren't there?" demanded Wilkins.

"I was there!" howled Grundy.

"You couldn't have been there and here, too, old top. You'd better go to Railton's study now; he wants you."

"What on earth does Railton want me for?"

"You don't know!" grinned Levison.

"No; how should I?"

"Oh, my hat!"

Darrel of the Sixth came along, and tapped Grundy on the shoulder.

"Go to Mr. Railton at once," he said.

"What for, Darrel?"

"I dare say he'll tell you!" answered the prefect drily.

"But—I say—Darrell—"

"Cut off!"

"Well, my hat!" stuttered Grundy, as he started for the Housemaster's study in blank bewilderment. "I believe everybody's gone potty."

He tapped at Mr. Railton's door, and entered, and found the School House master with a stern-brow. Mr. Railton picked up his cane.

"Grundy," he said, fixing his eyes on the dismayed junior, "doubtless you will be punished with the greatest severity—"

"Wha-a-at for, sir?"

"For the unexampled impertinence you have been guilty of!" exclaimed the Housemaster. "I am very strongly inclined to report you to the Head for a flogging!"

Grundy staggered.

"A—fuf-flogging!" he stuttered. "What have I done? Everybody seems to be down on me all of a sudden. I'd like to know what I've done!"

"You know perfectly well what you have done, Grundy. You have caused a disturbance and uproar in the House, and wasted my time—"

"I—I—I have, sir?" babbled Grundy.

"Not at all, sir! How could I, when I've been out of gates?"

"Grundy! Do you dare to tell me that you have been out of gates, when I heard your voice distinctly in a junior study?"

"Mum-mum-my voice, sir!" said Grundy dazedly. "You couldn't have, sir; I had my voice with me, of course. When was it, sir?"

"An hour ago."

"I was in Rylcombe, sir—"

"Grundy!"

"I—I was, sir—I was at the bunshop, waiting for those two asses, Wilkins and Gunn! It's the truth, sir! They saw me start—so did Bunter—they'll tell you so, sir—"

"Then you returned, Grundy, to play this trick—"

"What trick?" howled Grundy. "How could I play any trick when I was at the bunshop in Rylcombe? I don't even know what's happened."

Mr. Railton looked at him fixedly. Grundy's bewilderment was so evidently genuine that it made an impression upon the Housemaster, angry as he was. The Shell fellow was in a perspiration with excitement and dismay.

"Grundy, someone has entered the secret passage which opens out of the vaults— forbidden precincts for juniors—and has played a trick, alarming the whole House. I certainly thought it was your voice that spoke from behind the panel in Study No. 6. Do you deny it?"

"Oh, my hat! Yes, sir, of course. I've been out of gates."

"I could not credit your denial, Grundy; but I recall, from a previous incident, that there is someone in this House who appears to possess the trick of imitating voices," said Mr. Railton. "Whoever it was, gave your name when spoken-to."

"Oh, what a beast!" gasped Grundy.

"If you were at the bunshop, as you declare, you must have been seen there, Grundy?"

"Oh, yes, sir; I was talking to Miss Bunn most of the time!"

"Then you can have no objection to my telephoning to the shop and asking for confirmation of your statement?"

"None at all, sir," said Grundy, at once.

"Ring up Mr. Bunn, and he'll tell you."

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jolly well tell you I've been kicking my heels in his place for an hour or more. I was waiting for Wilkins and Gann, and they never came, and—"

"Wait!" said Mr. Railton.

He turned to the telephone. Grundy watched him, in quite a dazed state, while he was telephoning. A few minutes were enough to satisfy Mr. Railton. From the other end of the wire full confirmation of Grundy's statement came from Mr. Bunn.

Mr. Railton put up the receiver.

"I am very glad to say, Grundy, that Mr. Bunn bears out your statement," he said. "I am very glad indeed that this explanation came before your punishment was administered, my boy. I have been deceived. I am sorry, Grundy."

"Oh, that's all right, sir!" said Grundy, quite cheerful now. "It was some awful card playing a trick, sir."

"Ahem! I shall make further investigation into the matter," said the Housemaster. "You may go, Grundy."

And George Alfred went.

CHAPTER 7.

The Mystery Deepens!

"LICKED?"

That question was asked by about twenty voices at once as Grundy of the Shell came down the passage. The news of Grundy's return had spread, and a crowd had gathered to see him after his interview with the Housemaster.

They expected to see him almost doubled up. But Grundy was looking quite cheery, and he carried his head high.

"Licked!" he answered. "Certainly not! Railton was very civil. He's not a bad sort, only a bit dense at times."

"Civil!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"Certainly. After ringing up the bunshop, and finding that I was there, he was satisfied. Of course, he ought to have taken my word without asking for proof. But Housemasters will be Housemasters, you know. As I said, he's a bit dense sometimes. And now," said Grundy, "I want to know who's been playing tricks, and using my name and imitating my voice?"

One member of the crowd sidled away hastily and vanished; and the name of him was W. G. Bunter. But the other fellows blinked at Grundy.

"Would—would you mind saying that over again, Grundy?" gasped Tom Merry blankly.

Grundy said it over again.

"Bai Jove! Do you weally mean to say that it wasn't you all the time?" shouted Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Of course it wasn't, ass!"

"Too thin!" said Levison.

"If you want a thick ear, Levison—"

"Let's ask Railton," said Blake.

"Any objection to that, Grundy?"

"You can ask Railton if you like; but if you can't take my word, Blake, I'll have the gloves on with you—"

"Never mind the gloves at present," said Jack Blake. "If it was you busting up our study with your silly tricks you're going to get the ragging of your life. I'll ask Railton."

And Blake went to the Housemaster's study, the other fellows waiting very curiously for his return. He came back in a few minutes.

"All serene," he said. "Mr. Railton says it's proved that Grundy was at the bunshop in Rylcombe all the time. It— it wasn't Grundy."

"Bai Jove!"

"Then who was it?" howled Wilkins.

"I can tell you who it was," said Grundy. "It was the same chap who

played a trick before—imitating Railton's voice, and sending you chaps to his study to get lines. You thought it was me then. You're all rather dense. Now, it was that chap, whoever he was—and I want to know who it was. I'm going to scalp him!"

"First catch your hare!" remarked Cardew.

"Bai Jove! This is vewy wemarkable, deah boys! I will not give you a feafuful thwashin' aftah all, Gwunday."

Snort, from George Alfred.

"I'll take all the thrashings you can give me, and stand on my head all the time!" he snapped.

"Weally, Gwunday—"

"Let's go and finish tea," said Blake.

"It wasn't Grundy; but we've got to find out who it was, somehow."

And the juniors dispersed, greatly perplexed.

Bunter of the Fourth met the Terrible Three as they were going to their study. Grundy's return had interrupted tea.

"I say, you fellows," began Bunter, blinking at them. "This is a jolly mysterious thing, isn't it?"

Tom Merry nodded.

"Looks as if the place is haunted, doesn't it?" asked Bunter.

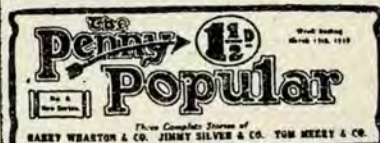
"Well, it isn't."

"Some of the fellows think so," said Bunter. "Trimble says a light ought to be kept on in the dorm to-night."

"Trimble's an ass!"

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"I think Grundy ought to be ragged," went on Bunter, following the chums of the Shell into their study. "You fellows ought to do it. Playing tricks like that, you know. He, he, he! He cuffed me, too—hard!"

"It wasn't Grundy played the trick." "Oh, that's all rot, you know! Who else could it have been? I'll tell you what, Tom Merry. You could lick Grundy. I'll hold your jacket for you, if you like."

"Thanks; I won't trouble you."

"If you're funky of Grundy, Tom Merry—"

The captain of the Shell made a movement towards Bunter, and the Owl of the Fourth jumped into the passage.

"Oh, really, Merry—I was going to say—"

"Cut off!" growled Tom.

"Aren't you going to lick, Grundy?"

"No!" snapped Tom. "For goodness' sake, Bunter, mizzle. You're too numerous, and you've got too much chin. Wriggle away!"

"I'm sorry to see you showing the white feather like this, Tom Merry," said Bunter, shaking his head.

"What!" roared Tom.

"You should get up a little pluck," said Bunter reprovingly. "Be a man, you know, like me!"

"Slay him!" murmured Lowther.

Tom Merry made a stride at the fat junior, and took him by the collar. His patience was exhausted.

"You fat idiot!" he said, shaking Bunter hard. "You silly chump! You porpoise—"

"Yaroooh!"

Shake, shake, shake!

"Yow-ow! Stop it!" howled Bunter.

"If you make my specs fall off—Ow!"

Shake, shake!

"If they get bub-bub-broken—yaroooh!—you'll have to pip-pip-pay for them! Yooop!"

"Sit down!" said Tom.

Bunter sat down—hard, and roared. Tom Merry closed the study door on him. The next minute a howl came through the keyhole.

"Yah! Beasts!"

The Terrible Three grinned, and sat down to tea.

"Beasts! Yah!" continued the dulcet tones at the keyhole. "I've a jolly good mind to come in and lick you, Tom Merry!"

"Do!" said Tom.

"Yah! You come out here!" roared Bunter. "I'll mop up the passage with you!"

"All right!"

Tom Merry stepped to the door and looked out. He was just in time to see a fat figure vanishing round the corner. Billy Bunter had not stayed to mop up the passage with him.

Tom chuckled, and returned to the tea-table. The Terrible Three discussed the mysterious happenings in the School House over tea. The same discussion was going on all through the House. It was interrupted in No. 10, however, by a voice at the keyhole.

"You there, Tom Merry?"

Tom looked round towards the door.

"I'm here, Kangy. Trot in!"

"Confound your cheek, Tom Merry!"

"Wha-a-at!" stuttered Tom, astounded by that address from Kangaroo of the Shell, the cheery Cornstalk, with whom he was on the best of terms.

"You've been bullying Bunter! Don't ask me into your study. I won't come. But next time I see you I'll jolly well pull your nose! And I'm going to ray study now, if you want to find me, you worm!"

Tom Merry sat petrified.

"Is—is—is he mad?" he gasped. "Kangaroo?"

There was no reply. Tom Merry rose to his feet with a glitter in his blue eyes.

"I think Kangaroo must be off his dot," he said. "But off it or on it, he's not going to talk to me like that! I'll go and see him."

And Tom Merry left his tea for the second time, and his chums followed him to Harry Noble's study, up the passage. Kangaroo and his study-mates—Glyn and Dane—were there, discussing the subject that was uppermost in all minds just then. They looked surprised at Tom Merry's frowning face as he strode in.

"Well, I've come!" said Tom.

"Anything up?" asked Bernard Glyn.

"Yes. I want to know what Noble means by insulting me through the key-hole of my study," said Tom Merry hotly. "You can say it over again here, Noble, and then put up your hands!"

Kangaroo looked at him.

"Nobody has to ask me twice to put up my hands, old scout," he answered calmly; "but let's know what the row's about first."

"You know well enough!" exclaimed Manners angrily.

"All I know is that Tom seems to have come here looking for trouble," said Kangaroo. "I'm ready to oblige him."

And he pushed back his cuffs. Clifton Dane interposed, and pushed the Cornstalk back into his chair.

"Don't be an ass, Kangy!" he said. "Tom's made some mistake. Let's hear what he's grouching about."

"I'm not grouching," said Tom. "I shook Bunter because he cheeked me, and if Noble thinks I was bullying him he—"

"My dear man, I don't think anything about it at all, as I didn't even know you'd shaken the fat treasure, and don't care twopence whether you did or not!" said Kangaroo.

"You said—"

"What do you mean?" broke in Lowther. "Only two minutes ago you were howling at Tom through our keyhole."

"You're dreaming, old man. Where was I two minutes ago, Glyn?"

"Sitting here, for the last quarter of an hour," said Glyn. "Is this some new joke of yours, Lowther? It's a bit deeper than the jokes in your Comic Column, then. They want some seeing; but this beats me hollow."

Tom Merry uttered an exclamation.

"Then—then it wasn't you, Kangaroo, old chap? I savvy, and I'm sorry! It was your voice!"

"Did you fellows notice my voice leaving the study for a stroll down the passage on its own?" asked the Cornstalk, appealing to his study-mates.

"Ha, ha! No."

"It was that beast again, of course," said Tom. "It was your voice right enough, Kangy. I thought it was you speaking. Of course, it was that sneaking, tricky cad who put on Grundy's voice this afternoon. We've been taken in again!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Kangaroo. "My dear man, next time you hear my voice at a keyhole, ask me whether I was there with it before you come along breathing fire and slaughter. Are you going to fight me?"

"No," said Tom, laughing.

"Thanks! I'd rather not, if it's all the same to you," said the Cornstalk, laughing, too. "But, I say, this is getting thick. That practical joker has got to be found."

The Terrible Three returned to their study. Tea was finished at last, without further interruption.

In the Common-room that evening

there was only one topic—the unknown practical joker who had so weird a gift of imitating voices. Trimble of the Fourth declared that the House was haunted, Bunter supporting that view.

But the general belief was that it was a practical joker, and everybody wanted to know who it was. And the things that were promised that practical joker when he should be found out were enough to make him tremble in anticipation.

Discussion did not seem to let any light in upon the mysterious matter. As Talbot of the Shell remarked thoughtfully, it looked as if some malicious fellow had set out with the deliberate intention of making everybody thoroughly uncomfortable and disturbed, and was succeeding in his object!

That was, in fact, the exact truth, and the Greyfriars' ventriloquist had not finished yet.

"You are a young ass, Trimble! There are no such things as ghosts," said Arthur Augustus severely.

"Isn't there a ghost of St. Jim's?" asked Bunter. "I've heard of a ghost belonging to the school—an old monk who was murdered—"

"D-d-don't talk of it!" howled Trimble.

"Pooh! You're a funk, Trimble," said Bunter loftily. "I'm not afraid of ghosts. Keep your pecker up, and try to be brave, like me!"

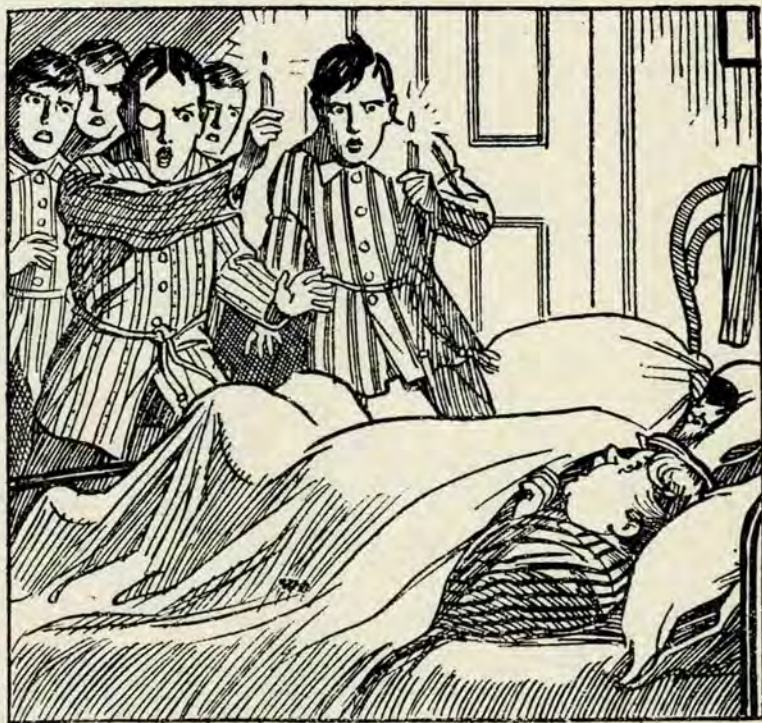
"I shouldn't wonder if there's a ghost," remarked Mellish, with the pleasant idea of playing on Baggy's fears.

"Hark! Was that a sound under your bed, Trimble?"

"Yaroooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Anybody hear a groan?" chuckled Roylance.



Jack Blake spun round. He fancied the weird sound came from behind him. But nothing was to be seen save the dancing shadows from the candle-light. From under Baggy Trimble's bedclothes came a series of ear-splitting yells. "Help! Ghosts! Spooks! Help! Yaroooh! Help!"

CHAPTER 8.

Haunted!

"K-K-K-KILDARE!" stammered Baggy Trimble, in the Fourth Form dormitory that night, as the captain of St. Jim's was about to turn the light out. "I—I say, Kildare!"

Kildare looked at him.

"Well, Trimble?"

"C-can we have the light left on?" pleaded Baggy. "The—the blessed House is haunted, you know. There may be a—a ghost—"

"You young ass!" answered the Sixth-Former. "Good-night, kids!"

"Good-night, Kildare!"

Kildare turned out the light, and left the dormitory. There was a splutter from Baggy Trimble as the door closed after him.

"I—I think we ought to have a light, you know. I—I shall be dreaming of ghosts."

"I—I say, d-d-don't!" gasped Trimble. "I'm not nervous, of course—"

"Ha, ha!"

"But—but d-d-don't!"

"Bai Jove! You weally sound as if you were nervous," chuckled Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Buck up, deah boy; you won't heah any ghosts gwoamin' heah. Besides, suppose a ghost has a taste for gwoamin'—it won't hurt you."

Groan!

"G-g-great Scott! What's that?"

"Yow-ow!" came from Trimble.

Several of the juniors sat up in bed. A deep and horrid groan had come from somewhere in the darkness.

"Don't play tricks like that!" exclaimed Blake. "It sounds creepy."

Groan!

"Who was that?" exclaimed Herries.

Groan!

"I I say, get a light!" roared Baggy Trimble. "It's the g-g-ghost!"

"Shut up, you ass!"

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"Help!"

"You cwass ass, Twimble, dwy up! There are no such things as ghosts. One of the fellows is pullin' your leg!"

Groan!

Silence fell on the Fourth-Formers as they listened to the repetition of the creepy, uncanny sound. The darkness of the dormitory added to its unearthly effect.

"Look here, the chap who's doing that had better stop!" exclaimed Blake angrily. "Enough's as good as a feast."

"I say, you fellows," came from Bunter, "I—I think it's a ghost."

"Fathead!"

Groan!

"That's you, D'Arcy, you howling ass!" exclaimed Cardew.

"Weally, Cardew, it is nothin' of the sort!"

"It came from your direction!"

"Wats!"

Groan!

"Gussy, you ass——" began Blake.

"I have already said, Blake, that I am not playing this widdlewink trick!" said the swell of St. Jim's sternly.

"Then there's somebody close by your bed doing it." Blake jumped up. "We'll jolly well see who's out of bed, and nail him!"

Blake struck a match, and held it up. Arthur Augustus was sitting up in bed, but there was no one near him. As the match flickered there was a dismal groan close at hand.

"Under Gussy's bed!" exclaimed Digby.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We'll give him a lesson!" said Blake. "Get a candle, Dig. I'll keep a watch alight so that I can see if he dodges out."

"Right-ho!"

A candle was soon lighted, and Blake held it up and glanced over the beds. To his surprise, every one of them had an occupant. If there was anyone under D'Arcy's bed it was not a member of the dormitory.

"Some silly ass from another dorm!" exclaimed Levison. "Lowther, very likely—he's funny ass enough."

Groan!

"I'll jolly soon see!" growled Blake. "I'm fed up with this!"

He stooped, and cast the candle-light under D'Arcy's bed. Then he rose rather quickly to his feet, his face startled.

"Who is it, deah boy?"

"There's—there's nobody there!" stammered Blake.

"What!"

Half a dozen juniors were out of bed now, and two or three candles were lighted. Some of the fellows were looking rather scared. Trimble had buried his head under his bedclothes.

"Bai Jove! There is weally no one there!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "But I distinctly heard somebody gwoanin'. What— Oh, cwimbs!"

Groan!

"I say, you fellows, that's under my bed!" exclaimed Bunter.

"Look under all the beds!" exclaimed Blake, in great perspiration. "There's some silly ass here playing tricks! Have him out!"

There was a rapid and angry search. But there was nobody to be found under the beds; and the juniors looked at one another in scared perplexity. And as a hush fell on them a deep groan resounded from somewhere.

"Oh, cwikee!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "This is weally gettin' unnervin'. Of course, it isn't a ghost!"

But Arthur Augustus's tone was not quite so assured now.

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Groan!

Jack Blake spun round with a jump. He fancied the weird sound came from behind him. But nothing was to be seen save the dancing shadows from the candles. From under Baggy Trimble's bedclothes came a series of ear-splitting yells.

"Help! Ghosts! Spooks! Help! Yaroooh! Help!"

"Shut up!" roared Blake. "Do you want to wake the whole House?"

"Yah! Help! Oh! Help!" yelled Trimble, unheeding.

Groan!

"I say, you fellows, isn't it awful!" exclaimed Bunter. "Is that something just behind you, D'Arcy?"

Arthur Augustus spun round like a top.

"Ow! You utter ass, Buntah, there is nothin' heah!"

"There's something just near you, Blake——"

"You thumping ass, be quiet!" gasped Blake. "It's only a shadow!"

"It's a ghost!" howled Trimble.

"Help! Yocooop! Help! Ghosts! Help!"

The dormitory door opened, and a lamp gleamed in. Mr. Railton, with a black brow, strode into the dormitory.

CHAPTER 9.

Under Suspicion!

MR. RAILTON held up the lamp, and looked sternly at the crowd of juniors in pyjamas. And they looked at him. From under Trimble's bedclothes still came the yells of affright.

"Help! Yocooop! Help!"

"What does this mean?" demanded Mr. Railton sternly.

"Yow-ow-woop! Help!"

"Silence!" thundered Mr. Railton.

But Baggy Trimble's head was muffled with blankets, and he was making too much noise himself to hear or heed the Housemaster's voice. He went on yelling.

"What is the matter with Trimble?" exclaimed the Housemaster.

"He—he thinks there's a ghost!" stammered Blake.

"What utter nonsense!"

"Help! Yocooop! Ghosts! Yaroooh!"

Mr. Railton strode to Trimble's bed, and grasped the huddled blankets and jerked them back.

"Trimble!"

"Yaroooh!"

"Trimble! Boy!"

"Keep off!" yelled Trimble. "Yah! D-d-don't touch me! Help!"

"You stupid boy!" thundered Mr. Railton. "Do you not know me—your Housemaster?"

"Oh!" gasped Trimble, blinking at him. "I—I thought you were the ghost, sir! Oh dear! Oh dear! Ow!"

"Be quiet at once, Blake, tell me what this means. Has someone been frightening this foolish boy?"

"I—I wasn't frightened, sir," stammered Trimble, much comforted by the light and the presence of the Housemaster.

"Not at all. I—"

"Silence! Answer me, Blake! What has happened here?"

"We heard groans, sir," said Blake.

"I—I suppose it was somebody playing a trick. There isn't anybody in the dormitory excepting us, but——"

"Groans!" repeated Mr. Railton. "That is very extraordinary! It must have been some boy present playing a trick."

"We couldn't spot him if it was, sir. And—and the sound came from under the

beds, and when we looked there wasn't anybody there."

"Come, come!" said Mr. Railton. "You have allowed your imagination to run away with you. What you state is not possible, Blake."

"Unless it's a ghost, sir," said Billy Bunter.

"Do not be so absurd, Bunter!" Mr. Railton looked round. "Someone here has been playing a foolish trick. I command him to admit the fact at once."

There was no answer.

Mr. Railton's frown deepened.

"It is clearly the same person who has played tricks before," he said. "This occurrence proves that it is a member of the Fourth Form—of the School House portion of the Form. The boy who played the trick downstairs to-day is undoubtedly the same person, and here present, I think."

"Oh!" ejaculated Bunter.

The Greystriars ventriloquist realised that it behoved him to tread warily now. The field of search was being narrowed down.

"Yaas, wathah, sir," said D'Arcy. "I nevalh thought of that—but it's quite cleah. It cannot be Gwunday, as he is in the Shell dorm."

"I give the boy concerned another chance to speak up," said the Housemaster. "If it is left to me to discover him his punishment will be very severe!"

Silence.

"Very well," said Mr. Railton, compressing his lips, "I shall look into the matter. For the present, you may all go back to bed."

"I—I say, sir, can we have a light?" gasped Trimble.

"This is ridiculous, Trimble!" said the Housemaster sternly.

"Ye-a-es, sir, but—but can we have a light?"

"You should display more courage, Trimble."

"Oh, yes, sir, certainly; b-b-but can we have a light?"

Mr. Railton made an impatient gesture.

"I will leave a small light burning," he said. "Really, I am ashamed of you, Trimble. Go to bed at once, all of you!"

The Fourth-Formers turned in, and Mr. Railton, leaving a subdued light burning, quitted the dormitory, with a very dark frown on his face.

"I say, you fellows, shall we turn out the light?" asked Bunter.

"Let it alone!" howled Baggy Trimble. "You fat rotter, if you——"

"Oh, leave it alone!" said Blake.

"I say, you fellows, you're a blessed lot of funks!" went on Bunter cheerily.

"What?"

"Look at me! I'm not frightened," said the fat junior. "I'm the only chap here who wasn't."

"Perhaps it was you playing the trick!" grunted Herries.

"Bai Jove!"

Bunter jumped. He had been looking for a little cheap glory; not for suspicion that he was the mysterious japer. Herries' remark was too near the facts to please Bunter.

"Oh, really you fellows!" he stammered. "I like that! My belief is that it was Herries all the time."

"What!" roared Herries.

"I—I meant it was D'Arcy——"

"Bai Jove! Do you want me to come and give you a fearful thwashin', you fat boundah?" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's indignantly.

"I—I—I mean, it—it was Tom Merry," stammered Bunter. "Now I come to think of it, it was Tom Merry—I'm sure of it. He shook me to-day——"

"You silly ass, what's that got to do with a groaning ghost?" snapped Blake.

"I—I mean, he's rather a beast, you know. I shouldn't wonder if he was

hidden in the dorm all the time, laughing in his sleeve——"

"Fathead!"

"We've looked everywhere," remarked Levison. "But somebody must have been in the dorm——"

"It was one of our crowd," answered Blake. "We've only got to find out which one. And nothing of the kind happened before Bunter came to St. Jim's, either."

Billy Bunter quaked.

"I—I say, you fellows——" he stammered.

"Bai Jove! That is vewy twee, Blake," said D'Arcy. "It weally begins to look——"

"Oh, really, D'Arcy! I—I'm sure it was Tom Merry—now I come to think of it, I recognised his voice——"

"There wasn't any voice, Buntah—only a gwoan."

"I—I mean I recognised his groan——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah ass, Buntah! I weally cannot help suspectin'——"

"Gussy, old man, you're a silly ass!" came a voice from the shadows; and there was a howl from the juniors as Tom Merry's voice was recognised: "Good-night, kids! I'm tired of pulling your leg!"

Blake jumped up in bed.

There was only a dim light in the dormitory, and, such as it was, it did not reveal the presence of any intruder.

"Tom Merry!" howled Blake. "Why, you cheeky rotter——"

"Where are you, you feafful boundh?" shouted Arthur Augustus. "Bai Jove! We will sewag you for this, Tom Mewwy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The laugh seemed to die away in the distance, and there was silence. The juniors stared round them in the shadows in utter amazement. Even Baggy Trimble was reassured now.

"Where is the rotter?" exclaimed Blake. "Tom Merry! You sneaking Shell-fish, where are you?"

"He's gone!" said Bunter. "I—I think I heard a door close—a sort of click. I say, you fellows, do you think there's a secret passage here somewhere—like the one in Study No. 6?"

"I didn't hear it," said Blake.

"Bai Jove! A secret passage would account for it," said D'Arcy. "A secret passage we don't know about——"

"Then how would Tom Merry know about it?" asked Julian.

"Bai Jove! I weally don't know! But I fail to see how Tom Mewwy can have got heah otherwise; the door has not been opened."

Blake settled his head on his pillow again.

"However he did it, he did it," he remarked; "and we'll jolly well talk to him in the morning. We'll teach the Shell bounders not to play giddy pranks in our dorm!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The Fourth Form got to sleep at last; and Tom Merry, in the Shell dorm, slept the sleep of unsuspecting innocence, never even dreaming of the vials of wrath that were to be poured out upon his head in the morning.

CHAPTER 10.

A Little Too Previous!

TOM MERRY came out of the School House in the fresh morning while the rising-bell was still ringing, and Manners and Lowther followed him out. The Terrible Three were down early, as they often were. It was a sharp, clear morning, and the open air was very tempting for a run before breakfast.

The chums of the Shell were trotting cheerily round the quadrangle when Blake & Co. emerged from the House with some more of the Fourth. Jack Blake spotted the Terrible Three at once.

"There they are!" he said. "I dare say Manners and Lowther are in the game; but it's Tommy we've got to deal with. We've got to give him a tip about keeping chaps awake at night playing ghost. Some of you fellows collar Manners and Lowther and nail them, while we give Thomas the time of his life!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Nine or ten juniors started to meet the Terrible Three. The Shell fellows came trotting on unobtrusively, and gave a yell in chorus as they were suddenly collared.

"Hallo! What's this game?" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Our turn!" grinned Blake. "Down him! Here, sit on him, Bunter!"

The Terrible Three, surprised and wrathful, struggled, but the odds were too heavy. Levison, Clive, and Cardew handled Manners—Monty Lowther was collared and held by Julian, Roylance, and Herries. Blake and Digby and D'Arcy levelled Tom Merry with the grass, and held him there—and Billy Bunter rolled up cheerily at Blake's call and sat on him. There was no resistance from the captain of the Shell after that. Bunter's weight was no joke.

"Gerrooh! Gerroff!" gasped Tom.

Bunter grinned, and settled down comfortably on Tom's shoulders, fairly flattening him.

"You shook me yesterday, you beast!" he remarked.

"Ow!" gasped Tom. "Gerroff!"

"Sit on him, Bunter!"

"I'm sitting on him—I'll jolly well squash him!" said the Owl, with a fat chuckle. "Playing tricks in the dorm, and frightening everybody but me—I'll show him!"

"Wow! Draggimoff!" wailed Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry's face was in the grass, and Bunter laid a fat hand on the back of his head and jammed it down hard. There was a gurgle of anguish from the captain of the Shell.

"Here, chuck that, Bunter!" said Blake sharply.

"Groooh! Draggimoff!"

"Not yet, deah boy!" grinned Arthur Augustus. "You are goin' to have a lickin', deah boy. Did you bwing that stump, Blake?"

"Here it is! Steady, Tom! Don't kick, or you may get it in the wrong place!"

"Go it!"

Whack, whack, whack!

Blake laid on the stump—not hard, but sufficiently so to make the Shell captain yell. Manners and Lowther struggled to go to their leader's aid, but they struggled in vain. The Fourth-Formers roared with laughter.

"Stoppit!" howled Tom Merry. "Are you all potty? Stoppit! By Jove, I'll lick the lot of you! Ow!"

Whack, whack!

"Oh, you rotters! I'll—I'll——"

"This is for your own good," explained Blake. "Suppose Railton had caught you in our dorm last night playing ghost. You'd have got worse than this."

Whack!

"Yaroooh! You silly ass, I wasn't in your dorm last night!" howled Tom Merry. "What do you mean, you frabjous chump?"

"Dwaw it mild, Tom Mewwy! You know vewy well you were playin' ghost in our dorm, and frightenin' Twimble."

"I wasn't!" shrieked Tom. "I was in bed last night, you chumps!"

"Bai Jove! Is that honest Injun, Tom Mewwy?"

"Ow! Yes, you ass! Wow!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Blake. He stopped the operations of the stump. "This is jolly queer. If it wasn't you, Tom Merry, who was it?"

"How should I know, you thumping ass?" growled the captain of the Shell.

"How could I know, when I was in bed, asleep?"

"Roll off, Bunter."

"Oh, rot!" said Bunter. "Give him some more. He shook me yesterday——"

"I'll shake you to-day if you don't roll off," said Blake; and he poked the stump at Bunter's podgy ribs. "Now then——"

"Yooop!"

Billy Bunter rolled off, and Tom Merry sat up, draggled and breathless. Blake's followers released Manners and Lowther, who were in a state of towering wrath.

"You silly chumps!" roared Lowther. "Wade in and mop them up!"

"Hold on," said Blake. "There seems to have been a mistake. If Tom Merry wasn't in our dorm last night, he must have lent his voice to somebody who was."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry-gasped for breath.

"You frabjous fabberwocks!" he panted. "Couldn't you ask me the question first?"

"Well, you see, we were sure——"

"We were quite suah, Tom Mewwy. Howeyah, if you deny the circumstance, we accept your statement," said Arthur Augustus gracefully. "You can regard that stumpin' as withdrawn."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! It doesn't feel withdrawn!" gasped Tom Merry. "I've a jolly good mind to knock all your silly heads together!" He scrambled to his feet. "Now, tell me what's happened, you asses, as you ought to have done at first?"

Blake explained.

"Fathead!" said Tom. "You ought to have known it wasn't I. How could I get in and out of the dorm without being seen?"

"Blessed if I know! But it was your voice."

"And it was Grundy's voice in your study, and Kangaroo's voice I heard at my door, and Railton's voice we heard another time!" growled Tom Merry. "That blessed trickster knows how to imitate voices. You ought to have thought of that."

"Perhaps we ought," admitted Blake. "But—but it was so exactly like your toot. The chap must be rather clever to be able to do it."

"Clever enough, I suppose," said Tom.

"Bai Jove! I was thinkin' of suspectin' Buntah, but that wathah knocks it on the head," remarked Arthur Augustus.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hallo! There's brekker-bell."

Billy Bunter was rolling away to the School House; but, for once, it was not only a meal-time that drew him there. The conversation was taking a turn that the Owl of Greyfriars did not like.

"Bunter!" repeated Tom Merry, as the juniors started for the House. "How could Bunter play such a trick? He hasn't brains enough."

"I should certainly not regard him as a bwainy chap," agreed Arthur Augustus. "But he was not frightened last night—and he isn't vewy bwaie, you

know—and nothing of the sort ever happened before Buntah came. And, whether on the matlah, I remember that Buntah has always been somewhat about when these things are happenin'."

"The fat idiot couldn't do it," said Manners.

"Well, no, he certainly couldn't do anything that worried Latham," said Arthur Augustus. "But Walton said last night it must be somebody in our dorm, and I think he was right. But who was it, then? If it was somebody, it must have been somebody, you know."

"Not really!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "Did you work that out in your head, Gusey? This is what comes of belonging to the old nobility!"

"Well, Lowther—"

"Won't he make 'em sit up in the House of Lords some day, with a brain like that?" exclaimed Lowther enthusiastically. "They'll make him Lord High Warden of the Royal Inkipot, at least!"

"I regard you as an ass, Lowther! I do not believe there is such an office in existence as Lord High Warden of the Royal Inkipot."

"Go on!" murmured Lowther.

The juniors went in to breakfast, Tom Merry kindly allowing the affair of the kidnapping to drop. The mystery of the Fourth Form dormitory remained a mystery; but at the breakfast-table many glances were turned upon Bunter.

Billy Bunter did not notice it, however. His attention was devoted wholly and solely to his breakfast.

CHAPTER 11. Sheer Neck!

"TROUBLE for somebody!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Ang.

The Fourth were in their Form-room, and Mr. Lathom was about to take his class, when the School House master entered with a knitted brow. Mr. Railton spoke a few words in a low tone to the Form-master, and then turned to the class and a deep silence.

The juniors all looked as meek and mild as possible. It was plain from the Housemaster's look that there was "trouble" for somebody.

"My boys," said Mr. Railton in his deep voice, "you are all aware that a number of very extraordinary pranks have been played in this House lately. General disturbance has been the result. It is my duty to discover the culprit, and administer adequate punishment."

Billy Bunter kept his eyes fixed on his desk. He was anxious not to meet the Housemaster's glance at that moment.

"From what happened last night," continued Mr. Railton, "it is clear that the perpetrator of these absurd and troublesome practical jokes is a member of this Form, and a School House boy. Which boy it is I cannot say; but he is certainly here present, and hears me speak."

Bunter was sedulously studying an inkstand on his desk. He felt the Housemaster's keen glance on the class, and did not dare to look up.

"I call upon that boy to stand forward!" said Mr. Railton. "He will certainly be caused very severely. But if he does not admit his identity, and it is left to me to discover him, he will be sent to the Head to be flogged. I shall wait one minute for the boy to come forward."

The Housemaster stood silent, and waited; and the Fourth Form were silent, too. The New House members of the Form looked uncomfortable.

enough, but the rest were somewhat excited. The big hand of the Form-room clock travelled round the space of sixty seconds, and there was no reply from the Form.

"Very well," said Mr. Railton, when the minute had elapsed. "I have given the boy an opportunity, and he has chosen to let it pass. The closest investigation will take place, and I have not the slightest doubt that the offender will be discovered. A flogging will follow. That is all."

The School House master quitted the Form-room, and there was a buzz among the juniors. Billy Bunter was looking a little pale now.

Lessons began with Mr. Lathom; but the Fourth were thinking quite as much about Mr. Railton's investigations as about Mr. Lathom's instructions. Billy Bunter was thinking a great deal more about them.

The Owl of Greyfriars was decidedly uneasy.

The matter had been narrowed down, and already suspicion in the Form had turned upon him. It was natural that it should turn upon a new fellow, before whose arrival nothing of the kind had occurred. In fact, it was only Bunter's well-known obtuseness that prevented the juniors from deciding that he was the offender. That such a complete ass as Bunter could worry the whole House, as the unknown trickster had done, did not seem probable to them.

But suspicion was on him, and might grow—in fact, would grow. And if the same suspicion occurred to the Housemaster—

Bunter quaked inwardly. He had been determined to make the School House fellows "sit up," as he expressed it, for their supposed shortcomings towards him; and, as usual, he had overdone it.

And if he was found out—

"Bunter, you are not listening to me!" came Mr. Lathom's severe voice. "I have twice told you to construe, Bunter."

"Oh dear!" gasped Bunter.

He blundered through his construe a little more hopelessly than usual, but he hardly heard the admonitions that followed.

Billy Bunter was very glad when the Fourth Form was dismissed that morning.

His painful reflections in the Form-room had earned him severe reprimands from Mr. Lathom, but they had helped him to make up his mind. He realised that his little game was played out, and his chief object was to escape the punishment he had richly earned.

"I say, you fellows," said Bunter, as he came on the Terrible Three in the corridor. "I—I say, Tom, old chap—"

"Br-r-r!" said Tom Merry.

"You know Railton better than I do," said Bunter. "He's a man of his word, isn't he?"

"Of course he is, fathead!" answered Tom.

"If he made a chap a promise he'd keep it, wouldn't he?" said Bunter, blinking anxiously at the captain of the Shell.

"Yes, ass!"

"That's all right, then," said Bunter. And he rolled away to the Housemaster's study, Tom Merry & Co. looking after him in surprise.

Mr. Railton had just come in from the Sixth Form-room, and he glanced at the fat junior in the doorway.

"If, if you please, sir," began Bunter, venturing gingerly into the study. "I—I want to speak to you, sir."

"Well—"

"I—I want to give you the name of the

fellow who's been playing tricks, sir," said Bunter, blinking at him.

Mr. Railton frowned. Above all things, he detested tale-bearing. But he was in rather a difficult position. After what he had said in the Form-room he could scarcely refuse to listen to Bunter.

"Indeed! You are aware of his identity, Bunter?" he asked curtly.

"Yes, sir. I—I feel it my duty to tell you, sir."

Mr. Railton raised his hand.

"One moment, Bunter. I have not asked any boy to give me information, nor desired any boy to do so."

"I—I think I ought to tell you, sir," said Bunter. "The fact is, sir, the chap would like to own up, and get it over, only he's nervous. I—I knew who it was all along, and I know he'd like you to be told."

"In that case, Bunter, you may proceed."

"I—I suppose I sha'n't be punished, sir, if I tell you the chap's name?"

"There is no reason why you should be punished, Bunter."

"I—I knew about the chap doing it, sir—"

"You were not called upon to betray him, however," said the Housemaster. "I do not blame you for keeping the secret, though your Form-fellow was acting very foolishly and wrongly."

"Then—then I sha'n't be punished, sir, if I tell you?"

"Certainly not!"

"Thank you, sir!" said Bunter meekly. "But—but the other fellows, sir, may—may think I oughtn't to have told you; they—they don't understand how the matter stands. I—I don't want to be ragged, sir."

"Come, come!" said the Housemaster impatiently. "You are wasting my time, Bunter. If you have anything to tell me, tell me at once!"

"Yes, sir, certainly; but—but would you mind speaking to Tom Merry—he's in the corridor, sir—and telling him there's to be no ragging?"

Mr. Railton stepped to the door.

"Merry! Come here, please! You others may come also."

"Yes, sir," said Tom.

The Terrible Three came along to the Housemaster's door, and Study No. 6 and some other fellows came with them. Bunter blinked at them as they crowded round the doorway.

"Merry, and all of you," said Mr. Railton, "Bunter has come here to tell me the name of the reckless boy who has been plunging the House into uproar lately by a series of foolish tricks. He thinks exception may be taken to this by the others—"

"Sneak!" came a voice from somewhere.

"Silence!" exclaimed Mr. Railton.

"Bunter assures me that the offender is anxious for the truth to be told, but shrinks from confessing. He is not, therefore, guilty of tale-bearing, and I forbid you, under any circumstances whatever, to punish Bunter in any way. I require your promise, Merry, as head boy in the Lower School, that there shall be no ragging."

Tom Merry hesitated.

"I say, Merry, it's all right," said Bunter. "The chap doesn't mind my giving him away—he's glad to get it over."

"I promise, sir," said Tom Merry quietly.

"Very good, Merry!" The Housemaster turned to Bunter. "Now, Bunter, you may give me the boy's name."

"You've promised that I sha'n't be punished, sir."

"That is understood. Now, what is the name?"

"Bunter, sir."

"What?"

"Bunter!"

There was a gasp from the juniors in the corridor. Mr. Railton stared blankly at the Owl of the Fourth.

"Bunter!" he repeated. "There is no other boy at this school of that name but yourself."

"Yes, sir! I'm the chap!" said Bunter.

"What?" gasped Mr. Railton.

"I'm the chap, sir," said Bunter. "It—it was really only a joke on the fellows, sir."

"Bai Jove!"

"You see, sir," continued the Owl, blinking cheerfully at the astounded Housemaster. "I'm a jolly clever ventriloquist, like—like my cousin Billy at Greyfriars. That's how I did it. I can make my voice come from anywhere, sir. Shall I make the Head's voice come from the wastepaper-basket, sir, just to show you?"

"Certainly not!" stuttered Mr. Railton.

"I could, sir. I can imitate anybody's voice—especially a grunt like Grundy's, or a silly chirrup like D'Arcy's, or a snort like Herries!"

"Bunter!" thundered the Housemaster. "I have already suspected that there was ventriloquism employed in these foolish tricks, and I had been making inquiries. Bunter! You confess!"

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Railton caught up the cane.

"Very well! I shall now administer a—"

"I—I say, sir, you promised—" howled Bunter.

"What?"

"You promised that I shouldn't be punished, sir, if I told you the name."

Mr. Railton stared speechlessly at the Owl.

"I asked Tom Merry first," said Bunter, in an injured tone. "He told me you were a man of your word, sir."

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Tom Merry, almost overcome.

"Gwreat Scott! Of all the fearful cheek—"

"Bunter! I—I gave you that assurance under a misapprehension!" exclaimed the Housemaster. "You led me to believe you were going to name some other boy in the Fourth Form."

"I never said so, sir."

"You—you certainly did not say so. But—but, Bunter, you impertinent young rascal, do you imagine for one moment that you will escape your just punishment by this trickery?" exclaimed Mr. Railton.

"Certainly, sir! You promised!"

Tom Merry & Co. stood breathless. Mr. Railton's face was a study for some moments. But at last he lowered the cane.

He was fairly caught, and he realised it. He was caught—but a Housemaster's word could not possibly be broken.

"Bunter," said Mr. Railton, at last, breathing hard through his nose, "you may go. If there is any recurrence of these ventriloquial tricks you will be flogged. Go!"

"Thank you, sir!" said Bunter cheerfully.

And he rolled out of the study with a fat grin on his face, leaving Mr. Railton looking, as Cardew expressed it, absolutely stumped.

In the passage Tom Merry & Co. surrounded the Owl. Their looks were grim, but Billy Bunter grinned at them confidently.

"You've spoofed Railton," said Tom Merry. "But you can't spoof us. You're going to have the ragging of your life, Bunter!"

"I hope you're not going to break your word, Merry," said Bunter loftily. "Railton will be down on you, too, if you do!"

"Mum-mum-my word!"

"Certainly! Railton said there was to be no ragging; and you promised for all the fellows. I despise a chap who breaks his word," said Bunter. "I couldn't do it myself. I'm too honourable!"

"Well!" said Tom Merry, with a gasp. "Well! I—I suppose the fat beast has got us! Well! You—you—you can clear off, Bunter!"

Billy Bunter winked at the exasperated juniors, and rolled away, grinning. And as he rolled off an unmelodious cackinnation floated back to the exasperated juniors:

"He, he, he!"

THE END.

(Don't miss next Wednesday's Great Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's—"THE RIVAL ENTERTAINERS!"—by Martin Clifford.)



COKER THE COMICAL! - By Dick Russell.

BLOW Dr. Johnson!" Horace James Coker uttered that disconcerting remark with startling suddenness.

Potter and Greene raised their heads from the impots they were engaged upon, and looked across at each other dimly.

After that they looked up, and found Coker glowering down upon them.

"Do get on with your impot!" implored Potter. "The footer begins in half an hour. We must get these dashed lines in to Prout before then!"

"I said blow Dr. Johnson!" repeated Coker firmly. "And I mean blow Dr. Johnson!"

"Two-thirty, Coker, old man!" hinted Greene, pointing at the clock on the mantelpiece. "The match begins at three, you know!"

Coker glanced absently at the clock, and seemed inclined to resume his seat.

But he straightened up again like a Jack-in-the-box.

"What's Dr. Johnson got to do with it, anyway?" he demanded warmly. "Tell me that!"

That was precisely what Potter and Greene wanted to know. Or, to be a trifle more correct, that was precisely what they didn't

want to know. The venerable Dr. Johnson didn't interest them in the slightest.

Wearily they shook their heads.

"Dry up, old chap?"

"The match, you know!"

"Talk about it after tea, old son!"

All of which soft persuasions had utterly no effect upon the talkative Coker.

Not that they were anxious to escort the lordly one on to the field of leathery battle. Their side would stand a much better chance of winning without him.

But Latin poetry requires a deal of translating with a voice like Coker's booming in the vicinity. The thing was to still it.

"I'll tell you what!" exclaimed Coker, waxing hotter. "It's—it's traitorous, and unfeeling! That's what it is, every bit!"

"Well, what could you expect but linear?" murmured Potter patiently. "Prouty asked you what Dr. Johnson was, and you said a builder in Courtfield. Did you think it was funny, you ass?"

"I was thinking at the time of a building contractor in Courtfield!" grunted Coker.

"How was I to know he meant Johnson out of the—the Stone Age?"

"And we were lined for cackling!" put in Greene dolefully. "As if you weren't made to be cackled at, Coker! But do let us

finish, like a good chap! Save Dr. Johnson till to-morrow!"

"Blow Dr. Johnson! Do you, or don't you, know that there's a serious shortage of houses?"

"That's all very well—"

"Do you, or don't you, know that the streets are swarming with houseless people?" demanded Coker dramatically, but with some exaggeration. "Go into Friardale or Courtfield this afternoon and look at the swarms of people walking through the streets, all without homes to cover them!"

"You thumping ass!" shouted Potter exasperatedly. "Do you think people carry their homes about like umbrellas?"

"Ahem! It's this demobilisation muddle that's holding things back!" said Coker, frowning at Potter. "I suppose they've made such a mess of it that the builders can't get out of the Army. Now, listen to this!"

Coker produced an old and dirty newspaper and laid it on the table.

"Grooh!" gasped Potter, starting back in his seat. "What a whiff!"

Greene fanned himself with his impot. Coker frowned blackly.

"Don't be a pair of asses! I found this

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about the middle. Bloeater been wrapped in it, or something. But that's immaterial, so listen."

"Get it out, quick!" said Potter faintly. "And then throw it on the fire!"

"It's just a few lines from a reader of the paper, printed in the column reserved for letters. 'Sir,—The alarming want of houses, occasioned by the unfortunate ending of the war, must be remedied. Houses must be built. Every square inch of ground in the country must be used for this purpose. Are we pro-Germans? No. Where are our builders? What—?'"

Potter and Greene rose rebelliously. "Look here, Coker!" exclaimed the former. "If you think we're going to listen to that all the afternoon—"

"There's no need to read it all—"

"Good!"

"But it goes on to say that a certain stretch of waste ground in Courtfield could be used for building on," said Coker, wrinkling his brow. "At present it's used as a brickfield, or something like that. I saw it the other day. Bricks are scattered, some in piles. And—would you believe it?"

Coker paused momentarily, then went on: "There's actually a big, wooden advertisement there, saying, 'Johnson, Building Contractor.' When houses are wanted so urgently, you know! My hat!"

Potter and Greene each winked an eye furthest from Coker. For the advertisement practically showed that Johnson was engaged building houses on that identical piece of ground.

"Now, I've looked up a few books on building matters," went on Coker thoughtfully.

"Mind you, I don't say I could rig up a house as well as Johnson and his hirelings—"

"Not really?"

"You know I couldn't," said Coker suspiciously. "Don't try to be funny, Potter! Your face carries you far enough in that direction!"

"Twenty-five to three!" put in Greene irrelevantly.

"Blessed if your eyes ain't glued to the clock, Greeney!" said Coker peevishly. "I was saying, I couldn't do the job like Johnson's men, but I'll tell you what I could do!"

"You could dry up!" suggested Potter.

"I could make a beginning!" said Coker triumphantly.

"Make a whatter!"

"I mean, I could slush the boundaries! Make them see that they're unpatriotic, backing rotters! I could begin erecting a house, and if, of course, it shapes all right, as I rather expect it will, I'll finish it off!"

"Great Scott!"

"Holy Moses!"

"Then I'll bring along Mr. Johnson to see what a raw hand has done, guided purely by the spirit of patriotism. And if that doesn't make him set to work at once, building houses, and getting tenants for them—well, he must have a hide like a crocodile!"

"You—you think you could build a house?" said Potter faintly.

"On a brickfield!" said Greene, with equal faintness.

"No doubt of it!" said Coker promptly.

"With your help this afternoon—"

"Oh!" Potter and Greene became grim in an instant.

"So that's what's behind this tosh about building!" said Potter coldly. "You want us to go selling bricks, do you?"

"Ahem! You may as well, you know, now that it's too late for the fooler."

Potter spun round, and glanced anxiously at the clock.

"Ass!" he said, with a gasp of relief. "Twenty to three. A good twenty minutes yet."

"As a matter of fact," said Coker, rather awkwardly, "that clock's half an hour slow!"

"What! That clock gains!" exclaimed Potter. "It should be fast!"

Coker nodded.

"You're right, Potter; it gains," he said lamely. "So I put it back half an hour."

II.

POTTER and Greene stared at their study-mate speechlessly.

Now that Coker's voice was quiet some of the voices from the playing-fields were faintly audible. Some of them were:

"On the ball, Bland!"

"Shoot, man!"

"Goal! Hurrah!"

The match had begun without Potter and Greene.

"You purposely put back the clock," said Potter deliberately at last, "in order to make us miss the match! You—you imbecile!"

"It's only a practice, you know!" said Coker pleasantly. "Take it good-humouredly, old man!"

"O-g-good-humouredly!"

"Do you know, I guessed you would prefer a measly game of focker to any patriotic idea! I thought so!"

"You thought so?" stuttered Potter.

"Oh, my hat, you thought so!"

"Oh," said Coker airily. "I know human nature, you know! I know a good many things, you know!"

"Yes!" said Greene, breathing hard. "But you don't know how near you are to being thrown out of the window, you frabjous ass!"

"Oh, come!" said Coker easily. "Tain't like you to turn nasty, Greeney! Take a trot with me along to Courtfield, old scouts! When you get into the air you'll admit that it was rather a good idea of mine to turn the clock back. Ha, ha, ha!"

Potter and Greene looked at each other stonily. Coker looked beamingly out of the window, evidently to see how the weather was for building.

Suddenly Potter's grim visage broke into a grin, and he winked. Almost simultaneously Greene did likewise.

They had come to a tacit and mutual understanding.

"Well, Coker," said Potter, "if you really want our help in this potty business—"

"We'll give it," finished Greene.

Coker beamed as he turned from the window.

"I knew you'd take to it!" he said enthusiastically. "It's a jolly good idea of mine, even though I say so."

"Let's finish off these lines," grunted Potter.

And they got to work at last.

Potter and Greene exchanged many glances during the course of it. But Coker saw nothing of them. His face was wreathed in smiles as his pen struggled over the paper.

The two quickly finished, and laid down their pens. It was now a matter of waiting for Coker; and that somewhat lengthy period of waiting they spent gazing ominously at his beaming countenance.

"Finished!" he said cheerily, at length.

"You chaps nearly done!"

"Nearly!" said Potter sarcastically.

"Oh, you have! He getting on your coats, you know; I've one or two things to take with me."

Wherewith Coker opened the table drawer, and drew forth something that looked like a huge sheet of linen, folded.

"Oh, good!" said Potter, with awakening interest. "Rather a good idea of yours, Coker!"

Horace beamed at face.

"Glad you're seeing reason, Potter," he said amiably. "Even though we've never tried our hands at building before—"

"I mean, it's a good idea to have refreshments whilst we're at it."

"Refreshments!" repeated Coker. "Who said anything about refreshments?"

"Well, that tablecloth," said Potter argumentatively. "You're not going to lay bricks on it, I suppose?"

"Tablecloth!" snorted Coker, with great disparagement. "This is the plan."

"Eh? The what?"

"The design of the construction. Do you think you build houses as you pile bricks?"

"You know nothing about the blazes, Potter!"

"What's the bag for?" asked Greene. For Coker had collared a small hand-bag, and, with his two thumbs, was making for the door.

"Measuring instruments," said Coker firmly.

"Accuracy is going to be my motto. And as for the tools, I'm going to borrow them from Johnson."

"The builder whose bricks we're going to use!" exclaimed Potter.

"Just so!" chuckled Coker. "I'll pay him for the loan of them, of course. But it will pile on the agony, by Jove! If he's a patriotic man it—should bring tears to his eyes—tears of repentance for his negligence."

"He'll be affected, no doubt," murmured Potter.

They made for the gates now, and Potter and Greene cast regretful glances at the playing fields, where jerseyed figures were to be seen in miniature, and in rapid movement.

On the road to Courtfield Coker waxed quite voluble on the subject of building.

"And now that we've got the light in the evenings," he finished brilliantly, "we'll be able to put in all our spare time at our 'house'!"

"We'll see about that," said Potter shortly.

"Later."

"In the dim by-and-by!" added Greene, sotto voce.

Coker indicated the spare stretch of ground when they arrived at it. It was indeed quite a decent site for building, and houses would have been erected on it long ago but for the war.

"Lots of bricks lying about, you see," remarked Coker critically. "Some of 'em in piles, too, as I thought."

Potter and Greene saw that, and understood, which Coker did not. Anybody but Coker would have seen that the bricks had been placed carefully in position by the practised hands of builders.

"Johnson's office is quite near here—his address is on the signboard there," said Coker, pointing. "If he doesn't happen to be in his office, we'll bone the tools from the yard at the back. Still, someone's sure to be there, and the sight of a few John Bradburys will do the trick."

A short walk brought them to Johnson's office, which was remarkably dilapidated and ill-directed, bearing no great testimony to his prowess as a builder. But perhaps he hadn't built it himself.

Mr. Johnson was in his office, poring over accounts.

"Good morning!" said Coker affably.

He was met with a discouraging stare.

"Well?"

"You are Mr. Johnson?"

"I'm Johnson, right enough! What do you want?"

For answer Coker drew forth his pocket-book, and displayed its contents. There was a visible softening of Mr. Johnson's expression.

"Ho! You've called to pay an account, my lad!"

"Ahem! Not at all! I want you to do me a favour, Mr. Johnson—a little favour, but I'll pay well for it. All I want is the loan of a few of your building implements."

Mr. Johnson waved him off.

"My dear lad, I can't do that! That's a ridiculous thing to ask me!"

"Not so ridiculous! There's a deal of profit attached to what we've got to do," said Coker impressively, "and a lot—in fact, the whole—of that profit will go to you. We're not out to make money; it's just a little service for the country. Should we damage the tools I'll pay for them willingly. You can have my address—Coker, Greyfriars School. There's a money in this, mind you, and it will go into your pocket. Honour bright!"

Coker was quite serious in saying this. He really believed that he could rig up a really valuable house, and that it would be a good thing for Mr. Johnson, who would have had nothing to pay out of the profits for labour.

Mr. Johnson looked thoughtful. All his implements were lying idle, for the simple reason that all his men were out on strike. But for that fact they would have been working on that piece of waste ground, and Coker would scarcely have made his blunder.

So Mr. Johnson naturally considered that this was a good chance for putting his instruments to a remunerative use, especially as he had securities against damage.

Coker and he quickly came to an understanding, during the course of which paper money changed hands.

Laden with various utensils, not to mention mortar, Coker & Co. returned to the brick-field.

Coker opened the bag he had brought from Greyfriars. And then, his face intent as if by making abstruse calculations, he made a number of mystical measurements.

Potter and Greene yawned repeatedly until these were finished.

"The cellar must go by the board," said Coker thoughtfully. "That can be dug afterwards by old Johnson's labourers. And—er—we'll rig up the scaffolding when we get more advanced, you know, and—er—"

after I've had another look at the book. Ahem!"

His two helpers grinned. Coker was just beginning to realise that he was at a loss.

However, he removed his coat in quite a workmanlike manner.

"Better take off yours, you two!" he urged. "No fear!"

Coker grunted. The three armed themselves with trowels, and looked about for bricks.

"Those piled straight are by far the best," said Coker critically. "They've been put that way purposely, I can see. They haven't been dumped down anyhow from a cart!"

"Wonderful!" murmured Potter.

Coker tugged at one of the bricks, but it refused to budge. The simple reason was that it was mortared down.

"Hallo!" he said suspiciously. "Someone's been monkeying here. Pass me a chisel, Potter, and a heavy hammer!"

Potter obligingly passed the chisel and heavy hammer.

Coker got to work. Bang, bang, bang!

The brick gave way against that onslaught, and toppled off.

Coker looked at his chums dubiously. They were as serious as owls.

"Think the weather fixed them together like this, Potter? Anyway, they're the best bricks of the lot, and I'll loosen the whole dashed pile!"

And Coker set to work with a will, and the bricks were soon being rapidly dislodged.

But to return to Mr. Johnson.

Now, the truth was that Mr. Johnson was a patriotic man. He was also not unduly prejudiced against making a little money when the chance presented itself. And he found that both happy traits of character could be made use of by building houses for the Government.

His men had been engaged on one of these Government contracts before they struck, and the brickfield was the site. So, after finishing with his ledgers, Mr. Johnson thought he would stroll there to see how things had progressed.

When he reached the brickfield, and saw who were engaged there, and, worse than all, saw to what use his implements were being put, he simply stood and gaped.

He couldn't believe his eyes.

Potter and Greene could quite believe their eyes when they observed Mr. Johnson. They had been expecting something like this by way of a climax, and had kept wary eyes upon all four sides of the open field.

The amiable Coker kept eyes upon nothing but his work of destruction.

"Phew! They're stuck faster towards the bottom!" he gasped, without looking up. "Blessed if I'll be beaten, though!"

Bang, bang, bang!

Potter and Greene retreated to a strategic point which placed Coker between themselves and the fast-beating-irate Mr. Johnson.

Coker looked up at last, and started violently. For he found the red face of Mr. Johnson glowering at him.

A torrent of abuse was coming from his lips, but the hammering had up to now deadened the sound.

"You young whelp!" he raved. "Scoundrel! So this is what you wanted the implements for! You—you—you—"

"My dear man," said Coker pacifically, "don't get excited."

"Excited! I—"

"If you'd given me time to finish you'd have been pleased, I can tell you!"

"Pleased!" Mr. Johnson glared, and was speechless.

"Now, let me talk to you straight, man to man," said Coker, laying down the tools.

"Personally, I don't believe you're unpatriotic, Mr. Johnson. I think it's pure negligence on your part. But, I put it to you. Don't you think that when fellows have been four years in the trenches, fighting for you, they're worth at least a decent house to come back to?"

Mr. Johnson made a gurgling noise in his throat. Coker put it down to repentance, and went on:

"Here you are, a builder—a builder, moreover, with a patch of ground at his disposal. Isn't it your duty to get permission from the Government to build respectable houses upon it? Think, man!"

Mr. Johnson found his voice at last.

"You—you interfering fool! I'm already working against a contract from the Government—"

"Oh!"

"And—and that's the beginning of the job that you've just broken down, you—you—"

Mr. Johnson broke down again.

"Oh, my only hat!" gasped Coker, in dismay. "I—I say, I'm awfully sorry, Mr. Johnson—"

"You imbecile!"

"But still, you know, it didn't seem to be much of a beginning—"

"Ow!"

Mr. Johnson's podgy fist had shot forward, and thumped him upon the nose.

"My hat! Go easy, you know! I say—"

Coker fled precipitately, leaving Mr. Johnson roaring like a bull, and dancing like a dervish.

"Queer old file, that chap!" commented Coker, joining Potter and Greene. "Never

known a chap fly into a rage so suddenly! He— Yaroooh!"

A heavy brickbat caught him squarely between the shoulder-blades. Another whizzed over his head. And Potter and Greene had to jump wildly to escape similar missiles.

"Scat!" jerked Potter tersely, digging his elbows into his ribs. "Nothing else for it!"

Coker seemed inclined to favour "peace by negotiation," but a glance at Mr. Johnson changed his mind.

The three Fifth-Formers vanished at top speed, and left Mr. Johnson shying brickbats apparently at nothing.

THE END.

THE ST. JIM'S GALLERY.

No. 39 :

CLIFTON DANE.



of mixed Indian and white blood in North America. Dane was no more ashamed of his mother, a chief's daughter of the great Huron nation, than of his father, an Englishman and an old St. Jim's boy. He was proud of them both—a little homesick at the thought of the many hundreds of miles of sea between him and them in far-off Canada. He was very ready to resent any slight upon his birth. No such slight was likely to come from any decent fellow; and Dane had taken to Tom Merry and the rest, though at first he had the mistaken notion that Arthur Augustus was a mere top.

But there were then, as there are now, fellows at St. Jim's who could not be classed as decent; and in those days George Gore was one of the worst of them. Gore and Mellish, in the shadow of the porter's lodge, had heard the new boy tell Tom Merry that he was not quite English; and as Dane crossed the hall, after his interview with the Head, Gore started in to behave after his own base nature.

Gore had his face covered with a handkerchief, and he held Mellish by the hand. Mellish was in it, though he did not feel quite as safe about it as Gore did. And Gore was soon to find that the half-Indian boy was a dangerous person to meddle with.

Dane had told Tom Merry, touched by the kindness of his greeting, that he liked him, and they had shaken hands on that. Because of this Gore held Mellish by the hand, and sobbed out:

"O-o-oh! I—I like you! O-oh! But—but I'm not quite English, you know. I am a nig-nig!"

Dane leaped at him like a cat, and Gore crashed against the wall. He made no real attempt at fight; he was too frightened for that. When Dane had finished with him Mellish had discreetly disappeared.

It was rather unfortunate that Dane should have been put into the study shared by Gore and Skimpole—at least, both Dane and Gore thought it unfortunate. Skimpie did not mind. He always has hopes that a new boy may be found to take some interest in his own special abstruse subjects; and, though always disappointed, he goes on hoping. Dane was one of his many disappointments; the Canadian junior had never heard of Professor Balmyscrumpet, and did not care a row of pins for what Skimpie called the social questions of the day.

Among Dane's belongings were an album and a pocketful of tame snakes—queer pets, and hardly likely to be approved of by those in authority, but quite harmless. Several people got frights from those reptiles. Taggles was one of the victims. Kerr was another. Kerr has plenty of pluck; but even the pluckiest fellow may be a bit alarmed at finding a wriggling snake in his pocket in class. But Arthur Augustus had the worst fright of all. He fairly jumped on to the table when he found the floor of No. 6 all alive, as it seemed to him, with wriggling, squirming bodies. But he was only frightened, not hurt. Gore had pretended that he wanted to bury

TWO of the trio of chums in Study No. 11 have already been dealt with—Noble some time since, Glyn as lately as last week. Now we come to Clifton Dane, the Canadian member of the firm of Cornstalk & Co.

The Terrible Three were sent to Rylcombe Station to meet Dane. Kildare sent them, having had a hint from the Head that someone should go. But the four chums of Study No. 6 and Figgins & Co. also went. No one sent them. The notion of going was entirely their own. Since the new fellow was booked for the Shell, Tom Merry and his chums regarded the action of the Fourth-Formers as mere butting-in and gross cheek. But the two parties joined forces when they found a crowd of village lads piling in on one fellow.

That fellow turned out to be Dane. He was dusty and dishevelled, and when Tom Merry helped him to his feet he was very angry.

He got over that, though, and his appearance and manner made a favourable impression on Tom and the rest. He was very dark, somewhat after the gipsy fashion. They soon found out the cause of this. He admitted that he was not wholly English; in fact, he was what is called a half-breed, a term which is apt to be used more contemptuously than it should be, for there have been many fine men

the hatchet when Dane came into his study. But that was only in order to wait his chance to get his own back. He took a particularly low way of revenge.

He found in Dane's album a portrait of the new boy's mother. He thought of flinging the book into the fire; but he dared not do that. So he plastered the opening in which the portrait was with paste, and believed that he had ruined it in a way which might be made out as accidental.

Lowther was the photographic enthusiast among the Terrible Three in those days; but he did not stick to the game as Manners did later. At that time, however, he was very keen indeed; and he offered to enlarge some of Dane's photos for him.

But when Dane fetched his album the damage done was revealed. It was a cruel trick—perhaps Gore had hardly realised how cruel it was. The new boy took it hard; but he promised Tom Merry that he would not attempt anything rash by way of revenge.

And he did nothing rash—in fact, his way of getting even was well thought out. First he made sure that Gore was the criminal, though of that there could have been little doubt from the first. Then he trapped Gore, overcame him, partly by main strength, partly by some power in his eyes that his enemy felt without understanding, tied him up, and dealt with him effectively. He had procured a number of tubes of some stuff of the secotone kind. He smeared Gore all over with this, and stuck to him any number of pieces of paper with "Cad!" written upon them. Gore stormed and threatened; but he had to hold up on that when he was told that he would get the stuff in his mouth if he did not. After the business had been properly completed Gore was taken along the passage and thrust into the study of the Terrible Three. Dane said that he just wanted some friends of his to see what sort of rotter Gore really was, and that after that he might go and turn himself into a show, with a twopenny admission fee, if he liked.

Undoubtedly the power which Gore felt when Clifford Dane fastened his dark, gleaming eyes upon him was that of hypnotism. But it was not till some little time later that it was discovered that Dane was a hypnotist. It came out through the influence he wielded

over a curious little animal Manners had—a cavy, which bit. The creature, not unlike a guinea-pig in appearance, and, indeed, really a species of guinea-pig, showed viciousness with others, but was at once subdued by Dane. It ran up his arms and nestled on his shoulder—and did not bite his ear, as Manners had expected it to. Tom Merry said that Dane must be a mesmerist—which is, of course, the same thing as a hypnotist. Tom did not believe in hypnotism. Lowther did, and showed some alarm lest Dane should put the influence on him. Tom said it was all rot; Dane said he was sure it was nothing of the kind. He admitted, when pressed, that he had tried his hand at the game with some success. They wanted him to try it on Mr. Ratcliff; but Dane preferred to start with Arthur Augustus, whose wrath was less to be dreaded than that of the crusty New House master.

But Skimmy was the first victim—a willing victim. What will not Skimmy do in the cause of science? He did not believe that Dane could mesmerise him; he felt sure that his powerful will would offer an effective resistance to any such attempt. But he went off like a lamb, and did strange things before Mr. Lathom. Gussy was as confident as Skimmy that he could not be overcome; but he was overcome just as easily, and that turned out badly for Mellish. D'Arcy had lately lost a ring. Under the hypnotic influence he remembered where he had left it—in the bath-room, where Mellish was at the time. And Mellish, who has rather a loose way with unconsidered trifles upon which he may chance, had to give up the ring, and was tied up in a tablecloth and deposited in the quad by way of some slight punishment for what at best was a mean trick, though he averred that he had no intention of keeping the thing.

Fatty Wynn also came under the influence. Dane's magnetic gaze compelled him to hand down his plate of sausages to Towser. Fatty has no ill-will towards Towser, one feels sure; but his affection for that rather surly old fellow certainly does not extend to self-sacrifice in the matter of anything of such importance as sausages. He made that very clear when he knew what he had done. His plump cheeks quivered with indignation when

he was told of it. But he still would not believe that he had been mesmerised.

Perhaps the influence was still upon Fatty when he went to the bath-room and got into a hot bath and fell asleep there with the tap on, and caused a miniature flood, and missed Gussy's spread. But something—something considerable—was saved for him.

Glyn joined Kangaroo in No. 11 before Dane did, but only just before. The story of how Kangaroo got rid of the dandy Snythers has already been told. Noble suggested to Glyn that two in a study would be better than three; but it was not with Noble that Glyn sided when the tug-of-war came.

Kangaroo said that Mr. Ralston had no objection to the two staying in their old quarters, and he made it plain that he was so very far from having an objection to that course that he would very much prefer it. But they could not see it his way; they were not keen on their old quarters, and they had no notion of giving way to the somewhat autocratic Cornstalk.

He told them that they were asking to be chucked out. They said they were. He did his best to chuck them out. But the pair were much too hefty for him. He found himself lying on the floor with the pair of them on top of him.

And he capitulated. From that time on the three have got on thoroughly well together.

Dane has shown his ability in the scouting line, and he is quite good at games, though not in the very first rank of the St. Jim's juniors either at cricket or football. His batting is of the hit-or-miss type, with more strength than science; but his fielding leaves little to be desired. He is a capable half-back, though possibly better at taking the man than the ball. But it is as a skater and runner that he comes nearest the top. He has had far more skating practice than most of the St. Jim's juniors; and some of you will remember how, when he and Noble and Kumi Rao spent Christmas at Greyfriars, he distinguished himself on the ice of the Priory pool. His Indian ancestry accounts in part for his running form. It is at long distances that he is best; there the tirelessness of the Huron-snow tells.

A good fellow, Dane, and a nice fellow, too!

The Editor's Chat.

For Next Wednesday :

"THE RIVAL ENTERTAINERS!"

By Martin Clifford.

Next Wednesday's grand, long, complete story of St. Jim's is of the humorous order, and chiefly concerns the rival efforts of the Shell and the Fourth to bring off a Grand Victory Concert. Tom Merry & Co. and Jack Blake & Co. are equally determined to run the show; and many amusing scenes—in which Bunter is conspicuous—are enacted before the Victory Concert duly takes place. Whether the Shell eventually succeed in outwitting the Fourth, or vice versa, is a question which must be left unsolved until the story is in my readers' hands. That Martin Clifford's fine yarn will afford them the keenest enjoyment is assured in advance.

A SHORT WAY WITH THE GROUNDERS!

A Manchester Girl Reader Speaks Her Mind.

I am quoting this week a letter which is typical of many I have lately received on the same subject—namely, the grievances of the disgruntled ones.

"Manchester.

"Dear Editor,—I noticed your remarks concerning those amiable mud-slingers who express dissatisfaction with the GEM.

"I, for one, don't sympathise with them. I have been a reader for four years of all the companion papers, and there is scarcely a story which I have not thoroughly enjoyed. My friends are all keen readers, and they would like to get within hitting distance of the grumblers.

"The adventures—and misadventures!—of Bunter particularly amuse us, and waiting for the next issue is—well, torture!

"You can tell the grumblers that they will get short shrift in Manchester, should they disclose their identity—but that, of course, they would refrain from doing, for very sound reasons!

"Wishing your papers the best of luck,—
Yours sincerely,

"A LOYAL GIRL READER."

THE "PENNY POP"!

Letters continue to pour in expressing delight and satisfaction at the reappearance of the "Penny Popular." The stories of that powerful trio of schools, St. Jim's, Greyfriars, and Rookwood, are proving an immense attraction.

Those who have not renewed their acquaintance with the "Penny Pop" in its new form should make a point of placing an order at once with their newsagent for Friday's issue.

Your Editor

NOTICES.

Correspondence, etc., Wanted by—

N. Prideaux, 76, Brynland Avenue, Bishops-ton, Bristol, wants more members for World-Wide Correspondence Club. Foreign and Colonial readers specially invited. Stamped envelope.

W. J. Summers, 201, Worcester Road, Bootle, near Liverpool—with a reader in the district interested in journalism.

H. Bradwell, Valley House, Great Longstone, near Bakewell, Derbyshire—with readers anywhere.

F. Anderson, 34, Henry Street, Woolwich, S.E.18—with readers anywhere, especially those interested in engineering.

Miss G. Cooper, 12, Culmore Road, Balham, S.W.12, wishes for more members for her GEM and "Magnet" Club.

A. E. Williams, 23, Prescott Road, Fairfield, Liverpool, wants members for F. A. Magazine and Correspondence Club. Stamped envelope.

Back numbers wanted by—

J. Arbott, 49, Waterworks Road, Trowbridge, Wilts—"Rival Ventriloquists," "Harry Wharton & Co.'s Pantomime," "Special Constable Coker," "Billy Bunter's Postal-Order," 2d. each and postage.

Frank Sykes, 153, Greig Street, South Reddish, Stockport—"Down on 'His Luck,'" "Ashamed of His Father," "Bolt Cherry in Search of His Father," "The Toif." 5d. each offered.

R. Moseley, Stag's Head, Market Drayton, Salop—"For D'Arcy's Sake," "Under Bunter's Thumb." 2d. each offered.

S. Hodges, 51, Beacon Street, Springfield, Wolverhampton—wants complete set of "Greyfriars Herald." Clean. 2d. a copy offered.

Edward Langdon, the Clarendon Dairy, Clarendon Place, the Hoe, Plymouth—"Magnet" Christmas Numbers 1912, 13, 14; also GEM Christmas Number, 1913. 4d. each offered. Write first.

Miss E. Withers, Cheswedyne, Newbridge Street, Whitmore Reans, Wolverhampton—GEM Christmas Number, 1916. "In the Seats of the Mighty." 3d. offered if clean. Write first.

M. Doyle, 251, Rose Street, Darlington, Sydney, Australia—"For Another's Sake," "A Hero of Wales," and "The Honour of a Jew."

J. O. Cox, 106, Ritchie Street, Invercargill, New Zealand—"Magnets" and GEMS, 1-300, 1½d each offered.