

"CHUMS AT LOGGERHEADS!" A STIRRING INCIDENT!

The GEM 2^d

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

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LIBRARY OF
SCHOOL AND SPORTING STORIES



A RIFT IN THE LUTE !

Smack ! " Take that ! " said Jack Blake furiously. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy reeled back with a cry, his hand to his chin. So this was the end of the long-standing friendship between the two juniors ! (A dramatic incident from the grand tale of St. Jim's inside.)



Address all letters: The Editor, The "Gem" Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Write me, you can be sure of an answer in return.

MY DEAR CHUMS.—Extra-long stories are always appreciated by readers of the GRM. There is another of these special yarns appearing in our next issue. I should much like to know what you think of it, also of the plan I carry out whenever possible of getting in more about St. Jim's.

"THE SPY OF THE FOURTH FORM!"

By Martin Clifford.

Of course, the theme of this new tale called for extension of the usual length. The plot is just splendid. An author must have room to move, and in the case of Mr. Martin Clifford, the longer the yarn, the better it is. The writer who is carefully working out a cleverly concocted plot is frightfully handicapped if he has to think about how much space he is filling all the time. Next Wednesday's tale is just one of the stories calling for length. It concerns that urbane, amazingly courteous gentleman, Mr. Horace Ratcliff, and "Ratty's" doings are so many that it takes pages to deal with them.

RATCLIFF, THE IRASCIBLE!

Ratcliff's high way leads him to more trouble. The unpopular master has often been in hot water ere now, but in the grand, new, and highly humorous story in next week's issue he oversteps all limits. He has been left in charge of St. Jim's owing to a most unfortunate concatenation of unlooked-for circumstances. Dr. Holmes is absent, and has left as vice the wise and prudent Mr. Ralston. But Mr. Ralston is likewise called away from duty, and it follows that Mr. Ratcliff succeeds pro tem. to the vacant position. Things might have rubbed along for a spell without unseemly ructions but for the unlucky detail that Mr. Ratcliff has a minor, his tale-bearing nephew at St. Jim's. With the assistance of the reports brought to him by this sneaking, little toad-like creature the narrow-minded master makes things utterly unbearable for the rest of the school, more especially for Tom Merry & Co.

A BANNER OF REVOLT!

Matters rush tornado fashion to a dramatic climax. "Ratty" is not content with mild chastisements. He loves well who chastises well. But, judging from all appearance, Mr. Ratcliff never brought himself to love anybody or anything except his own miserable personality. The tyrant rides the high horse. He adopts the most exasperating measures to enforce his authority, with the result that authority—always an extremely shy bird—fades away, growing beautifully less with each hour. The temporary Head's rules and regulations are disregarded, and the revolution starts. It is a bombshell for "Ratty." Little did he realise the result of his interference. The grand tale carries us to the beginning of a rising calculated to send a thrill of excitement through St. Jim's, leave alone all Gemites. Don't miss this ultra-exciting yarn.

THE "ERRORS" COMPETITION!

Good luck to all readers who have carried off prizes in this great competition. Those who have failed this time can take heart. Perhaps they will be smiled upon by Dame Fortune on the next occasion. There will be another splendid competition in due course. Look out for it!

AN INVENTORS' ISSUE!

At last space permits of the inclusion of a capital number of the "St. Jim's News" next week. Bernard Glyn is not the only inventor we hear of in the coming number of the GEM. One way and another, St. Jim's shines at thinking out new stunts. On several occasions Mr. Ratcliff has been scared out of his wits. The "St. Jim's News" handles the whole subject with skill and delicacy. The number will please all those many readers who have written in asking why the popular Supplement was sometimes crowded out. I know it is a very trying thing to find that one of the popular features of the GRM has gone missing when you pick up the paper Wednesday morning. But the new Supplement is so downright good and all there that it will help to make up for the times when it did not turn up as expected.

"FOOTBALL CHUMS!"

By Arthur S. Hardy.

There is a good deal that I might say concerning the new instalment of this absorbing serial, but, maybe, it is not necessary to do more than refer to the fact that there will be further details of the career of Hal Chester; for his is a real career, say what you may. I don't know quite how you look at it, but to me it is a tolerably fascinating thing to study a real-life sort of yarn, and see how the author deals with the bumps and buffetings which come to any fellow who is worth his salt. Mr. Hardy's hero is not a soft dummy of a fellow who rushes ahead without any difficulty. He acts, thinks, and talks like a genuine youngster who meets his troubles like a Briton. It is a pleasure to meet a character of this kind, and no end encouraging, to boot.

THE TUCK HAMPER!

Last, but decidedly not least! Another Tuck Hamper is on offer next week, also a nice little company of active half-crowns. More entries wanted! I am glad to see my tip about postcards has been adopted by many of my chums.

Your Editor.

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GET BUSY NOW!

Tuck Hampers and Money Prizes Awarded for Interesting Paragraphs.

(If You Do Not Win a Prize This Week--You May Next!)

All Efforts in this Competition should be Addressed to: The GEM LIBRARY, "My Readers' Own Corner," Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C.4.

GOOD OLD BLACKPOOL!

RAILWAY ARITHMETIC!

"Where's your ticket?" demanded the collector. The sleepy yokel opened an eye, looked at the collector, and closed it again. "Now, then, where is your ticket? Haven't you got one?" exclaimed the collector. The sleepy traveller shifted and opened his other eye, then shook his head and went to sleep again. "All right," said the collector, consulting his book; "you'll have to pay five-and-six, please." The sleeper took no notice. "Don't you hear me?" cried the collector angrily. "Five-and-six, please!" For a moment the weary eyes opened again, then a slight dawning of intelligence broke upon the yokel's countenance, and he answered: "Eleven!"—A Tuck Hamper, filled with delicious Tuck, has been awarded to H. E. Parton, 123, Central Drive, Blackpool.

SOME MUD!

An Englishman was complaining to his American friend of the muddy thoroughfares of some American towns, and the American declared that he had seen far muddier places in England. The Englishman replied that he did not think it possible, as he had gone over to his boot tops in mud while walking down Fifth Avenue. "Over your boot tops? That's nothing!" answered his friend. "Once when I was in England I happened to be walking down the Strand, when I noticed a large silk hat floating on the mud. I reached into the road with my stick and gave the hat a poke, intending to draw it towards me, and, believe me or not, an old gentleman's face looked up from under the hat and asked me what the devil I was doing. 'Hallo!' I said. 'You're in pretty deep!' 'Deeper than you think!' came the answer to my surprise. 'I'm riding on top of a bus. Oh, yes, some mud!'"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to M. F. Loeliger, 8, Meadow Road, South Lambeth Road, S.W. 8.

READY WIT!

A countryman, up in London for the first time, was charged with stealing a bicycle. "Do you know," said the magistrate, "I've a good mind to send you to prison for a month?" "Oh, but you can't!" answered the man. "Oh, and why?" asked the magistrate, in surprise. "Because I'm only here for a fortnight!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to F. Cook, 24, Greenfield Road, Harborne, Birmingham.

CATASTROPHE!

"There!" said father, as he surveyed the clothes-post, which had taken him the best part of the afternoon to fix up. "Even the combined forces of the elements cannot bring it down!" Later in the afternoon he saw the pole lying on the ground. "Did you do this?" he demanded of his small son. "No, father," was the reply. "A sparrow perched on it; I saw it myself!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to C. Browning, 19, Edward Street, Bignall End, Stoke-on-Trent.

TUCK HAMPER COUPON.

The GEM LIBRARY.

No attempt will be considered unless accompanied by one of these Coupons.

An outrage at St. Jim's is followed by a series of misunderstandings, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and Jack Blake—long the staunchest of chums—find themselves at loggerheads!



CHUMS AT LOGGERHEADS!

A Magnificent Long Complete School
Story of Tom Merry & Co., the Chums
of St. Jim's.

By Famous
Martin Clifford.

CHAPTER 1.

Gussy Remonstrates!

"**H**E, he, he!"
"Bai Jove!"
"He, he, he!"
"Weally, Twimble—"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, stopped in the passage and regarded Baggy Trimble in some surprise through his gleaming monocle.

"Weally, Twimble," he exclaimed, eyeing the fat Fourth-Former curiously. "Why are you makin' that extwa-ordinawny noise, deah boy?"

"He, he, he!"

Baggy Trimble stopped short and gave vent to another unmusical cabinnation.

Arthur Augustus looked at him still more curiously.

"I pwesume it is your mannah of expwessin' hilawity, Twimble?" he went on tolerantly. "Pway, what is the joke, deah boy?"

Baggy Trimble gave vent to yet another of his remarkable vocal expressions of glee.

"That ass, Blake!" he chortled. "He's being licked by Railton, you know!"

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus frowned.

"Weally, Twimble," he said frigidly. "You are an uttably gwaceless and ill-natured boundah, you know. I might have guessed that your hilawity was occasioned by some other fellow's misfortune, bai Jove!"

"Bow-wow!"

"If you say 'bow-wow' to me, Twimble—"

"You needn't get ratty," grinned Trimble, keeping a wary eye on the swell of the Fourth. "I say, isn't Blake an ass, though? He fairly asked for it, you know."

"Well, and pway what did Blake do, Twimble?" inquired D'Arcy, his curiosity overcoming his indignation. "I twust it was nothin' vewy sewious—"

"He, he, he! The silly chump knocked old Taggles' hat off in the quad, and old Taggy's reported him to Railton. Serves him jolly well right, I think. The awful ass might have known the crusty old idiot would report him," grinned Trimble.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus, shaking his noble head seriously. "That was wathah too bad of Blake. I weally must wemonstwat. Bai Jove, heah he is!"

At that moment a junior came staggering along the passage towards them, his hands clasped beneath his armpits in a suggestive manner. It was Jack Blake, and on his face was an expression of deep anguish.

Undoubtedly Jack Blake had been "licked."

Arthur Augustus turned a sympathetic eyeglass upon his chum.

"Have you been caned, deah boy?" he inquired.

Blake stared at him gloweringly.

"Oh, no; not at all!" he exclaimed, with bitter sarcasm.

"I've been playing at tickling hands with Railton, that's all. We had a nice quiet game, and he won!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Can't you see I've been caned?" hooted Blake wittingly. "Groogh! What's the good of asking idiotic questions, Gussy? Caned, eh? Two on each hand—scorchers! And all because I knocked old Taggy's topper off—the mean old hunks!"

"Pway do not shout at me, Blake!" said Arthur Augustus with dignity. "I am sowwy, of course, that you have been licked. But I must remark that it is your own fault, Blake."

"Go and eat coke!"

"I must also remark that I am surprised to learn that you have tweated Taggles with such gwoss diswpect, Blake," said Arthur Augustus severely. "Taggles is wathah a cwusty old chap, and is wathah twyin' at times. But I must point out that Taggy is entitled to be tweated with wespert and considewation, bai Jove!"

"Will you dry up, you burbling dummy?" snarled Jack Blake in deep wrath. "Isn't it bad enough to be licked by Railton without hearing dashed sermons from you. Give your dashed chin a rest for goodness' sake."

"Bai Jove!"

"Blow old Taggy!" went on Blake wrathfully. "The mean old hunks needn't have reported me just for that. Can't he stand a blessed joke? B-r-r-r! I'll make him sit up for this, you see if I don't! Next time I'll bash his topper in altogether!"

"Weally, Blake, I twust—"

"He, he, he!"

It was Baggy Trimble who interrupted the conversation. The fat junior had stepped to the passage window, which was a yard from them, and was blinking down into the quad below. But now he withdrew his head with a grin.

"I say, you fellows," he cackled. "Old Taggles is just below here. Come and have a look!"

Arthur Augustus declined the invitation loftily, but Blake did not. He had been aware for some moments of a curious sound coming through the open window—a sound like the harsh scraping of a trowel on stone—and he was curious.

He stepped to Trimble's side at the open window, and looked down into the quad. Then he grinned faintly.

It was Taggles right enough. Besides being the gate-keeper at St. Jim's Taggles was also something of a handy man about the school, doing any odd job that was required of him.

He was now kneeling on the School House steps, which were directly below the passage window, and he was carrying out repairs to the stone steps. Armed with a trowel and a supply of cement, he was filling in the hollows in the stone steps—hollows worn by the feet of generations of schoolboys.

Blake's wrath vanished at sight of the old gentleman.

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He was far too high-spirited a junior to remain grumpy for long.

He gave a chuckle and withdrew his head.

"My hat! Trimble's right, Gussy," he grinned. "Old Taggy's repairing the steps down below. I say, wouldn't it be a lark to drop something on his napper?"

"Bai Jove! Blake, deah boy—"

"It wouldn't be a bad idea to roll Baggy through the window on top of old hunks," said Blake thoughtfully.

"Weally, Blake—"

"It might make an awful mess on the steps, though," added the leader of Study No. 6, shaking his head. "If Baggy happened to bust it would be worse than humpty-dumpty. No, we won't do that. I'll tell you what. Let's empty one of those fire-buckets out over the old josser!"

Arthur Augustus stared at his chum in great alarm.

"Weally, Blake, I trust you will neva attempt to do anythin' of the sort, bai Jove!" he gasped. "You suahly do not mean—"

"Your giddy trust is often misplaced, Gussy," said Blake gravely. "Hand me one of those fire-buckets, old chap."

"I shall do nothin' of the sort, deah boy," said D'Arcy firmly. "I must say that I am amazed that you should suggest such a wedic and dangerous—"

"Rats! I suppose I shall have to get one myself, then," said Blake.

He stepped to the row of fire buckets hooked on the wall, and lifted one down. Blake's face was full of resolve, but he was inwardly chuckling. He had not the slightest intention of carrying out his humorous threat; he was merely pulling Gussy's leg.

But Gussy did not know that, and as Blake lifted the bucket down he jumped forward with a cry.

"Bai Jove, Blake, I cannot allow you to play such a weckless and wotten trick!" he exclaimed in some agitation.

"Are you potty, you frightful ass?"

"Leggo!" roared Blake as D'Arcy grabbed at the bucket.

"Leggo! Why shouldn't Taggy have a shower-bath? Here— There, that serves you right, Gussy!"

"Gwooh! Ow! Oh, bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus gave a yelp of dismay as the water splashed from the swaying bucket over his natty spats and over the bottoms of his trousers, drenching them through.

He released the bucket with a gasp of horror.

"Oh, bai Jove! You—you feahful wottah, Blake! Yew-wow! I am dwenched through!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He, he, he!"

Both Jack Blake and Baggy Trimble appeared to find cause for laughter in the plight of Arthur Augustus.

"You cacklin' wottahs!" almost shrieked the swell of the Fourth. "Look at my twousers, and my spats; and my shoes are swimmin' in water, bai Jove! Blake, you awful wottah—"

"Sorry!" laughed Blake. "It was your own fault, Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus almost danced with rage.

"You—you feahful wottah, Blake! I shall have to wash away and change now, or I shall be late for aftahnoon classes. Othahwise, I would stay to administah a feahful thwashin' to you, Blake!"

"Go hon!"

Arthur Augustus did not deign to reply to Blake's brief expression. He stooped and squeezed some of the water from his trouser-bottoms, and then he hastened away along the passage, en route for the dormitory, his aristocratic features crimson with wrath.

"He, he, he! What a scream!" cackled Baggy Trimble, grinning after him. "The awful ass! I say, Blake, go on with the job. Gussy's gone now!"

"Eh?" inquired Blake. "What job, Baggy?"

"Chuckling the water over old Taggles, of course!" grinned Baggy gleefully. "Go on, Blake, it will serve the old rotter right for getting you licked!"

"You want me to do it?" asked Blake.

"He, he, he! Yes, do, old chap!"

Blake shook his head gravely.

"Sorry, Baggy, but it can't be done; can't waste water like that, you know. I'll tell you what, though," went on Blake thoughtfully. "Taggles does wash sometimes, I believe. But you never do, Baggy. It won't be wasting water in your case, old chap. I'll let you have the benefit of it, instead."

With that Blake grabbed the fat junior, and after a brief struggle turned him upside-down over the fire-bucket.

"Yaroooooh!" roared Baggy frantically. "Wharrer you up to, you rotter? Wharrer— Grooooh! Oh, help! Yoop! Grooooh!"

Twice Blake dipped the top of Baggy's fat head into the fire-bucket, and Baggy Trimble roared with wrath and dismay.

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"There you are!" said Blake pleasantly, lowering the yelling fat junior to his feet again. "That's to teach you not to try to persuade others to do what you funk doing yourself. And that," added Blake, planting a hefty boot behind Baggy, "is to help you on your way!"

"Yaroooooh!"

"And here's another help—"

But Baggy Trimble evidently needed no further help. As Blake lifted his boot again he leaped away and bolted along the passage, with water streaming down his fat, greasy features.

Feeling considerably better now, Jack Blake followed him, chuckling, and quite forgetting to replace the half-emptied fire-bucket—and also little dreaming that the incident was to have a startling and unpleasant sequel.

CHAPTER 2.

Who Did It!

"THERE'S Gussy—"

The one and only!" remarked Monty Lowther.

"He seems to be in a hurry, too!"

"And in a wax!" added Manners, grinning. "Now, what daring and disrespectful wottah has been treading on Gussy's corns?"

The Terrible Three were just leaving their study on the Shell passage when they sighted Arthur Augustus D'Arcy coming along towards them. It was something rather unusual to see Arthur Augustus in a hurry. He was usually somewhat sedate and dignified in his movements. It was also rather unusual to see the good-natured and serene Arthur Augustus in a "wax." Both sights were so unusual that the Terrible Three stopped and stared.

"Hallo, Gussy!" exclaimed Tom Merry, as Arthur Augustus reached them. "What's the matter? Suddenly remembered you hadn't changed your socks since morning?"

"Wubbish! Pway allow me to pass, Tom Mewwy! If you do not allow me to pass without delay I shall have no othah wresource but to handle you woughly!"

"Oh, my hat!"

Undoubtedly Arthur Augustus was in a wax!

Not having any desire to be handled "woughly," Tom Merry stepped aside to allow the obviously wrathful swell of St. Jim's to pass.

"Thank you, Tom Mewwy!"

Arthur Augustus sailed past the three Shell fellows with his noble head in the air.

Tom Merry & Co. gazed after him blankly.

"What's bitten the ass?" murmured Tom Merry, with a chuckle. "It isn't like Gussy to give us the marble eye like that."

"Didn't you notice?" put in Manners quickly. "The bottoms of his trousers were wet, and so were his shoes."

"Had both feet in trouble of some sort, then!" grinned Monty Lowther. "Dear old Gussy—he's always getting into hot water!"

"That explains it, then!" said Tom, laughing. "Someone's played a trick on him, and he's rushing up to the dorm to change. No wonder he looked waxy. Anyway, let's get across to the New House. We've none too much time before classes."

Feeling no longer curious concerning the grumpy behaviour of Arthur Augustus, Tom Merry & Co. hurried downstairs, with the intention of visiting the New House to discuss footer matters with Figgins, the leader of the New House juniors.

But they were not fated to reach the New House, for as they reached the Hall they all three stopped short in startled wonder.

"Hallo!" gasped Tom Merry. "What's wrong?"

Something was wrong undoubtedly—seriously wrong.

Round the Hall doorway was a crowd of juniors and seniors, all of them with scared faces. They were staring through at something happening on the School House steps without.

Above the heads of the juniors they glimpsed the heads and shoulders of Taggles, the school porter, and of Kildare and Rushden of the Sixth.

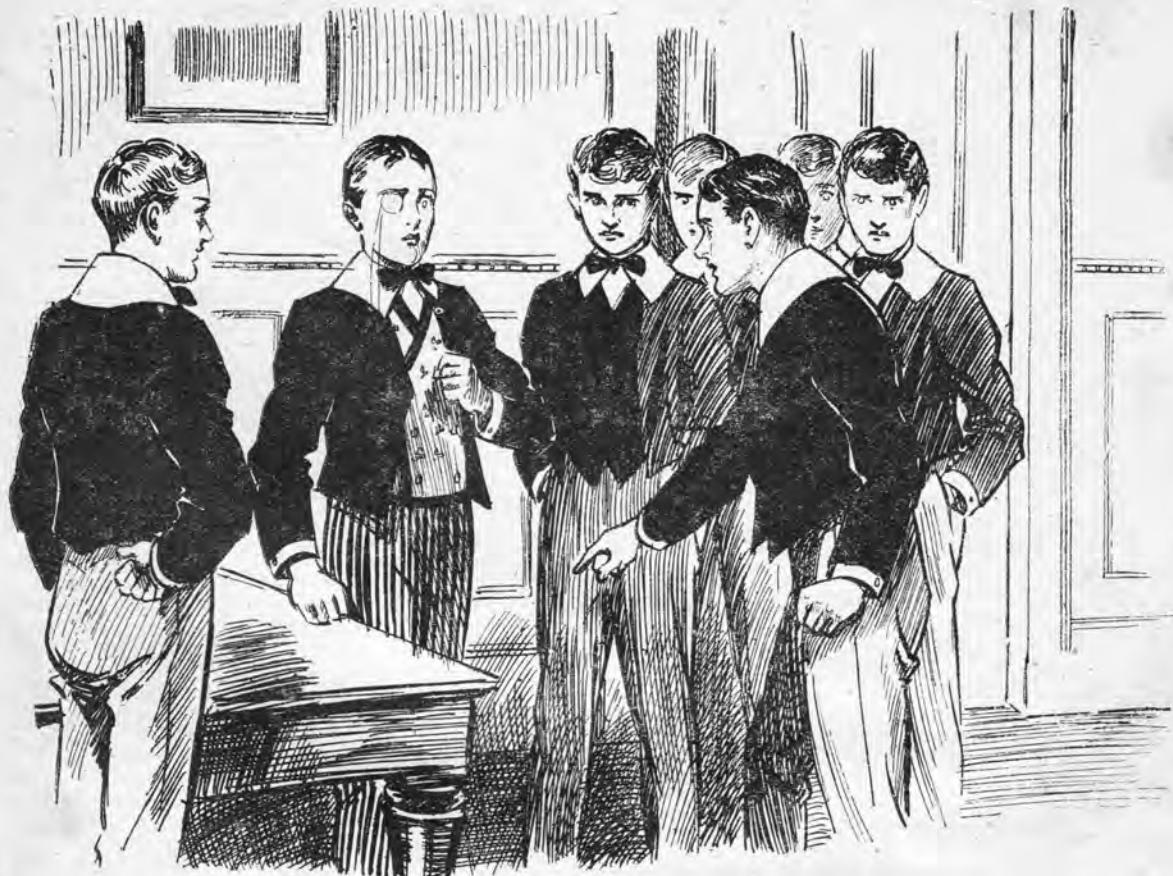
At that moment there sounded hurrying feet behind the juniors, and Mr. Railton rushed past them, his gown flying behind him.

The group round the doorway opened out to let him through, and as they did so the Terrible Three glimpsed what was happening on the steps.

Kildare and Rushden, aided by Taggles, the school porter, was helping someone to his feet—someone in cap and gown.

"Great Scott!" breathed Tom Merry, in great alarm. "It's the Head! Something's happened to the Head!"

"Phew! How rotten! Slipped on the steps, I suppose!" Alarmed and distressed to think that some accident had



"Now, D'Arcy," said Grundy, "I want you to tell me if you were in the second floor passage when that water was thrown over the Head yesterday?" "Weally, Gwunday!" answered the swell of St. Jim's, with a disdainful sniff. "Very well," snapped Grundy, "how do you account for being seen hurrying up to the dorm with your shoes and the bottoms of your trousers wet, D'Arcy?" Arthur Augustus caught his breath. (See page 12.)

befallen the kindly old Head of St. Jim's, the three juniors hurried forward towards the scene.

Before they could reach the spot, however, the crowd parted again and Dr. Holmes became visible. He was leaning on the arm of Mr. Railton, and he was limping. But that was not all. From his head and shoulders water was dripping, and as he limped along he wiped his face with a handkerchief clutched in a hand that trembled.

His usually kindly face was white—white with passion, it seemed to the scared juniors. Never had they seen the Head look quite like that before.

Mr. Railton's face was also white and angry, and his eyes were like steel as he spoke over his shoulder to Kildare.

"Kildare," he said in a voice that trembled with angry indignation, "will you race up to the next floor and see if anyone is there without delay? The cowardly person responsible for this cruel outrage must not be allowed to escape!"

"Certainly, sir!"

Kildare fairly flew away towards the stairs, his handsome features hard and grim.

There was a deep murmur of voices as the Head and Mr. Railton moved on slowly towards the former's study.

"What on earth can have happened?" ejaculated Tom Merry, aghast. "Levison, what's happened to the Head?"

"I'm blessed if I know quite!" said Levison, his face grave. "But some rotter's played a beastly trick on the Head—dropped water on him, or something, from the passage window above."

"What a rotten trick!"

Anxious to hear details, Tom Merry hurried out to where Rushden was talking to Taggles.

"Which I don't rightly know what 'appened meself, Master Rushden," Taggles was saying, his rugged features scared and agitated. "I was jest a-workin' away 'ere on these 'ere steps when the 'ead steps out to speak to me. And afore he'd got 'Taggles' fair outer 'is mouth it 'appened. I jest 'ears a swish, and next thing I knowed the 'ead was lyin' on the steps with water streaming off him."

Rushden nodded and glanced up to the opened passage window above their heads.

"It was chucked out of that window, I suppose, Taggles?" he said grimly. "Did you see anything?"

"Which I was too startled to see anythin', Master Rushden," grunted Taggles. "And what I sez is this 'ere—that there water weren't meant for the 'ead; it were meant for me!"

"Phew!" exclaimed the Sixth-Former. "So that's it, is it, Taggy?"

"It were one of them young humps as did it—meanin' it for me!" went on Taggles, glaring at the juniors present. "And I 'opes as 'ow they catches the young raskel!"

"I hope so, too, Taggy!" said Rushden, his eyes gleaming. "A cad who would play a dangerous and dirty trick like that oughtn't to be allowed to stay at St. Jim's."

"Hear, hear!"

There was a murmur of approval. There was scarcely a junior or senior in St. Jim's who did not feel a deep regard for the kindly Dr. Holmes, and those present felt a burning anger and indignation at the trick that had been played upon him—whether by accident or design.

"Well, what a rotten business!" muttered Tom Merry, his face clouded. "My hat! There'll be the dickens to pay over this! Let's go and see if Kildare's discovered anything."

Rushden had already hurried away upstairs, and most of those present followed, anxious to know if the culprit had been caught. They found Kildare and Darrell and Rushden standing by the row of fire-buckets, their faces grave.

As the juniors reached the spot Mr. Railton came hurrying up to the group of seniors.

"Well, Kildare," demanded the Housemaster sharply, "have you discovered anything?"

"Nothing—beyond the fact that one of the fire-buckets was empty, sir," said Kildare, pointing to the empty bucket on the rack. "There's water on the floor there, and on the window-sill. The chap who did it must have bolted at once!"

"Very well, Kildare," said the master, setting his lips.

hard. "He will doubtless be discovered—he must be discovered!"

"Perhaps someone saw it done from the quad, sir?" suggested Kildare quietly. "If we make the facts known—"

"I'm afraid there is little hope of that, Kildare. The scoundrel would have made quite sure that nobody was in sight when he perpetrated the outrage. However, the Head wishes a general assembly to be summoned at once, Kildare. Will you kindly make this known to all?"

"Very good, sir!"

Ordering the juniors present to disperse, Mr. Railton rustled away, his brow dark.

"Help me round the fellows up, you chaps?" said Kildare grimly, addressing Darrell and Rushden. "Now, kids, you heard what Railton said—general assembly at once! Get a move on!"

Tom Merry & Co. and the rest of the juniors hurried away towards Big Hall immediately, excited and scared. They found a number already there, and very soon the Hall began to fill rapidly. The majority of the fellows, especially the New House fellows, knew nothing as yet of the affair, and there was much excitement and speculation as to what the general assembly was about.

But they soon did know. The story went from mouth to mouth, and long before the last boy had taken his place it was known by all.

Big Hall was in a buzz from end to end until the ringing of the bell for silence put an end to the excited murmuring. And as a deep hush fell upon the great hall Kildare began to call the roll.

He finished at last, and a moment later Dr. Holmes entered. He was limping slightly, and his face was white and hard. Only the rustling of his gown broke the dead silence as he took his place on the dais.

"Is the whole school assembled here, Mr. Ratcliff?" he asked, in a voice unlike its usual kindly tone.

"All are here, with the exception of the four boys in the sanatorium, sir," replied the Housemaster.

"Very good, Mr. Ratcliff."

The Head swept the Hall with glittering eyes.

"Boys," he began, his voice trembling with emotion, "many of you have doubtless already learned of the outrage that occurred a short while ago, and in connection with which I have called you together. For the benefit of those in ignorance, however, I will briefly relate what has happened."

The Head paused, and his voice took on a harsher note.

"Within the last half-hour," he went on, "I had occasion to speak to a member of the outdoor staff who was carrying out repairs to the School House steps. I had scarcely stepped through the hall doorway, however, when a quantity of dirty water was emptied upon me from the passage window immediately above the steps. It caused me to fall heavily upon the steps, and though I escaped serious injury, it has been a severe shock to me."

The Head paused again impressively, and there was a deep, angry murmur, a murmur instantly suppressed as Dr. Holmes proceeded to speak.

"I can scarcely conceive," he went on sternly, "that there is a boy here foolish and wicked enough to commit such an unparalleled outrage upon his headmaster. I can only think that it was intended to be a thoughtless practical joke upon the school porter. Nevertheless, whatever the culprit's intentions were, it was a cruel and wicked outrage, and I am determined to discover and punish the guilty party. I call upon the boy responsible to step forward here and now."

There was not a movement in the assembly. The Head waited for a full minute, and then he pursed his lips.

"I will ask again," said the Head grimly. "And I warn the culprit, whoever he may be, that if I discover his identity by other means, I shall deal with him with the utmost severity. If he will step out and admit his fault here and now, I shall take the view that it was a foolish, thoughtless practical joke, and will deal with him as leniently as is possible in the circumstances. Again I call upon the culprit to come forward."

There was an uneasy stirring and much craning of necks, but the culprit did not step forward.

"I will give the culprit another minute to confess," said the Head, his voice rising harshly. "If he has not confessed by the end of the minute I shall be reluctantly compelled to punish the whole school for his fault. If the boy has a spark of manliness or of fair play in him I believe that such a course will force him to own up to the crime rather than that his schoolfellows should suffer. I am waiting."

A stunned silence followed the Head's ominous words, a silence that was only broken by the snapping of the Head's watch-case as he closed it at the end of the minute.

"Very well!" snapped the Head, his face grim. "The time is up. I have given the culprit ample opportunity to confess, and he has not done so. Until he does so the whole school must suffer. I regret very much the necessity for such a step, but law and order must be maintained. Until the

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matter is cleared up all half-holidays will be stopped, and the whole school will be gated for a fortnight. If at the end of that time the guilty boy still refuses to confess, I shall consider the question of the punishment continuing."

"Oh!"

It was a deep, seething murmur of utter amazement.

No "halfs," and gated for a fortnight! It was a terrific punishment, and the whole school was amazed at its severity. No footer, no cycle runs, no country jaunts and walks for a whole fortnight! The school could scarcely believe their ears. Even the masters looked dumbfounded.

Yet it was only too true. Dr. Holmes nodded to Mr. Ratcliff and limped from Big Hall, the private door at the back of Hall slamming to after him. It was only too clear that the Head was in a terrific rage over the matter, and that the fiat having gone forth, it would be adhered to.

As the school was dismissed the juniors and seniors streamed out of Big Hall in an excited buzz of consternation and dismay.

"It's too awful for words!" groaned Tom Merry. "Oh, my only hat! Gated for a whole giddy fortnight. And what about the blessed Greyfriars match on Wednesday?"

"Rotten!"

"Beastly!"

"A howling shame!"

"Whoever the howling cad is," said Tom Merry through his teeth, "he ought to be boiled in oil for this!"

"Great Scott! Yes, by jingo!"

All agreed with Tom Merry there. But the ringing of the bell for afternoon class stopped the juniors from giving free vent to their feelings just then, and they went into their Form-rooms like fellows in a dream.

CHAPTER 3.

Suspicion I.

WHO did it?

That was the question on every tongue that afternoon.

It was generally supposed—in the senior Forms, at all events—that a junior was responsible, and the Fifth and Sixth waxed exceedingly wrathful at their inclusion in the common punishment. But while the Lower School refused to credit this theory, they had to admit that it was a trick more likely to have been played by a junior than a senior.

There was little work done in the Form-rooms that afternoon. Juniors and seniors were seething with discontent and burning with a deep sense of what they believed to be an unjust punishment. They were sorry for the Head and bitterly indignant at the crime. They realised that the old gentleman had suffered acute discomfort and bodily injury, and still worse injury to his pride and dignity. But they felt, one and all, that the punishment did not fit the crime, and was certainly a grave injustice to them.

It was a relief to both masters and boys when lessons ended that afternoon.

Tom Merry's face was grave and concerned when the Shell came out of the Form-room. During lessons a startling suspicion had entered his mind, a suspicion that would not be allayed.

He drew his chums, Lowther and Manners, to one side as they streamed out into the passage.

"Look here, you fellows!" he said, in a low voice. "I've been thinking about this beastly business, and—well, a rotten suspicion came to me while in class. I thought I'd ask what you chaps think about it."

Both Manners and Lowther nodded, and looked rather uncomfortable.

"I fancy I know what it is," said Manners.

"Same here," said Lowther. "I suppose you mean about meeting old Gussy in the passage?"

It was Tom's turn to nod.

"I do," he said grimly. "It seems a rotten thing to think about a pal, but—but it was queer meeting him like that—in a hurry, and with trousers and shoes wet."

"That's just what I thought, Tommy."

"Of course, it may be all serene—in fact, I simply can't believe otherwise," said Tom quietly. "Blake or some of the others may have been playing a joke on him, and it may have happened in some other way. But—but—"

"It's rather a queer coincidence," finished Manners grimly.

"Just at that very time," added Lowther.

"That's just it," said Tom, frowning. "Anyway, I don't feel we ought to let it pass, you chaps. We'll see Gussy privately, and if he's got an explanation it'll settle our minds to hear it."

"That's so."

"Come on, then!" said Tom, setting his lips.

The Shell captain led the way without further ado to the Fourth Form passage, hoping to find Arthur Augustus in Study No. 6. That the good-hearted Arthur Augustus could possibly have played such a trick seemed to Tom almost absurd, and yet he felt it was his duty to question him about

2. He felt also that others might have noticed Gussy's condition at noon, and he felt it wise to point out what this might lead to Arthur Augustus.

On entering the passage the Terrible Three found a group of Fourth Form juniors congregated round the door of Study No. 6. Blake, Herries, and Digby were among them, but D'Arcy was absent. It was obvious from the gloomy faces of the group what the subject of the discussion was.

"Gussy about anywhere, Blake?" asked Tom Merry.

Blake, whose face looked rather pale, shook his head.

"Blest if I know where the dummy is!" he grunted. "He seems to have got the hump about something. Haven't spoken to the ass since noon."

"Oh!"

"He, he, he!" cackled Baggy Trimble, who figured among the group. "I say, Blake, old chap, perhaps Gussy knows who did it—what?"

Talbot stared at Baggy Trimble curiously.

"The fat toad usually does know something," he said. "I heard the fat ass bragging that he did know just now."

"He, he, he! I know what I do know," grinned Baggy, eyeing Jack Blake and giggling. "Perhaps Gussy does, too."

"You fat ass—"

"Oh, kick the fat frog, someone!" snorted Blake.

"Certainly!" said Herries obligingly.

"Yaroooooh!"

Herries' boot missed Baggy by an inch or more, but the fat junior yelled for all that, and fled along the passage.

"Come on!" said Tom Merry to his chums.

Not feeling like joining in the discussion, the junior captain led his chums away quickly, and the search for Arthur Augustus was renewed.

They ran him down at last round by the cloisters. Arthur Augustus was strolling about alone, and he seemed none too pleased at being disturbed.

"Hallo, here you are at last, Gussy!" said Tom Merry, eyeing the rather agitated features of D'Arcy closely. "We've been hunting everywhere for you, old top."

Arthur Augustus frowned as he blinked through his eyeglass at the Shell juniors.

"Pway wun away, deah boys!" he exclaimed. "I am vewy wowwied, and I desiah to be left alone!"

"Oh, do you?" said Tom Merry grimly. "Well, we'll leave you alone when you've answered a question I'm going to put before you, Gussy."

Arthur Augustus eyed the leader of Study No. 10 fixedly. "Pway, what do you mean, Tom Mewwy?" he demanded, a trace of alarm in his tone.

"I mean this," said Tom bluntly. "At noon to-day, just after the outrage on the Head must have been done, we met you hurrying up to the dorm. Your shoes and trousers were wet, and you wouldn't stop, and you seemed jolly upset about something."

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "That—that is quite wight, Tom Mewwy."

"Very well. We'd like to hear how you got your things wet like that, Gussy?" asked Tom quietly.

"Cwumba!"

Arthur Augustus stared at the Terrible Three, and then he jumped.

"Gweat Scott!" he ejaculated. "You—you cannot sewiously suspect me of havin' played that wotten twick, Tom Mewwy? Oh, bai Jove!"

"We're just asking the question—that's all, Gussy," said Tom calmly. "We know quite well that you're the last fellow at St. Jim's who would play such a trick—knowingly, at all events. You must admit it looks rather queer, under the circumstances, though."

"Wubbish—uttah wubbish!"

"Rubbish or not," said Tom, "if you're sensible, Gussy, you'll explain how you got in that mess. Did anyone else see you just then?"

"I do not remember meetin' anyone, with the exception of you fellows," said D'Arcy coldly.

"You didn't meet that fat robber, Trimble, I suppose?" suggested Tom. "The fat idiot's going about saying he knows something about it, I believe. For your own sake, Gussy, you'd better explain—"

"I shall explain nothin', Tom Mewwy!" said Arthur Augustus disdainfully.

"You—you won't explain?"

"Wathah not! As you appeal to suspect me, howevah," went on Gussy, with a great deal of dignity. "I will give you my solemn word that I did not commit the wretched act. You fellows have known me for a long time, and you ought to be awaah that I would nevah dream of cawwyin' out such a wotten twick!"

"Yes, but—"

"If you cannot accept my word, Tom Mewwy, then there is nothing more to be said!" interrupted Arthur Augustus

haughtily. "I wegard the vewy fact that you have questioned my movements as an insult, bai Jove! I uttably wufuse to discuss the mattah furthah!"

And Arthur Augustus walked away from the Terrible Three.

"Well, my hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "The—the burbling-idiot!"

"Shall we go after the idiot and bump him until he does explain?" suggested Lowther.

"What's the good?" grunted Tom. "You know what a stubborn ass he is. He's got on his high horse, and nothing on earth will get him off until he wants to get off."

"But—"

"We'll tackle him again when he's in a better mood. It's all rot, of course, to think he had a hand in this business of the Head's. But, for all that, I'd feel more comfortable if the dummy would explain matters."

"What about speaking to Blake about it?"

Tom shook his head thoughtfully.

"Better not mention it to anyone," he said grimly. "Less said about it the better—until we've given Gussy a chance to explain, anyway. My only fear is that Trimble, or someone like that, spotted him at noon. If they did, old Gussy's going to be in an awkward position. Anyway, I vote we say nothing for the present."

"Right-ho!" said Manners. "Only, if Trimble did see him, I fancy—Hallo, here's the fat ass!"

"You fellows found old Gussy yet?"

Baggy Trimble came rolling across from the School House with a fat grin on his face. Apparently, he did not see Arthur Augustus in the offing, as it were.

"D'Arcy's over there, owl!" exclaimed Tom Merry, eyeing the fat junior curiously. "But I shouldn't advise bothering him now, Baggy; he's likely to give you his boot if you go worrying him!"

It was a friendly warning, but Baggy Trimble chuckled at it.

"Old Gussy knows better than to give me his boot!" he grinned. "In fact, he'll be no end glad to see me. You watch! Gussy and I are great pals."

Baggy Trimble chuckled again, and rolled across to where the dignified Arthur Augustus was pacing up and down on the gravel path.

"Cheerio, Gussy!" he remarked genially. "I've been hunting everywhere for you, old chap!"

Arthur Augustus turned a frigid eyeglass on the fat junior. "Wun away, Twimble!" he snapped. "I have no desiah to— Bai Jove! One moment, though, Twimble! There is something I want to speak to you about."

"Sure there is!" grinned Trimble.

"Yaas! It is something vewy important, Twimble."

Arthur Augustus fixed a rather hesitating look on the fat, grinning face of Baggy Trimble. There was something rather disconcerting about Trimble's smug, knowing manner.

"I undahstand, Twimble," began Arthur Augustus slowly. "that you are pwetendin' to know who played that wotten twick on Dr. Holmes at noon?"

"There's no pretence about it, Gussy!" grinned Baggy.

"I know, and you know, too, old top!"

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus groaned in deep dismay.

"Weally, Twimble," he said, "I feah you are labowin' undah a misappwehension! I do not actually know—certainly not!"

"But you've got a jolly good idea!" suggested Trimble, with a fat chuckle. "Well, as it happens, I do know, Gussy."

"I wufuse to believe that, Twimble," said Arthur Augustus. "I believe you merely suspect a certain fellow, and that is what I wish to discuss with you."

"Go ahead, Gussy!" grinned Trimble.

"At noon to-day you were pwesent when Blake made a weckless and foolish attempt to empty watah fwom a fire-bucket on to Taggles' head, Twimble?"

"That's so, Gussy!"

"I pwvented him fwom cawwyin' out his intention, Twimble."

"That's so, Gussy," grinned Trimble. "But it doesn't say he didn't do it afterwards."

"I am quite aware of that, Twimble," said Gussy coldly. "I stwongly suspect, howevah, that your claim to know who the fellow is, Twimble, is merely founded on that incident."

"Well, isn't that good enough?"

"Ahem! Weally, Twimble"—Arthur Augustus seemed to hesitate—"weally, Twimble, I admit that it is wathah stwange. But it is not pwoof; some othah fellow might easily have come along atfahwards and done it, you know."

"You think so, don't you, Gussy?" grinned Trimble sarcastically. "Well, as it happens, Gussy, I know it was Blake. You can't pull the wool over my eyes, old chap!"

"Did—did you see Blake do it, Twimble?"

"That's telling, Gussy! I know what I know!"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus gave vent to a deep groan of utter dismay. He had obviously had his doubts before, but he seemed to lose them now. Trimble knew—Trimble, the Paul Pry of the School House, and the biggest purveyor of gossip and slander in the school.

It was worse than he had supposed, then. Trimble did not merely suspect; he knew. Soon it would be all over the school; and soon the authorities would hear. And Blake—what would happen to his chum, then?

Arthur Augustus eyed Baggy Trimble in great distress and fear.

"Twimble," he exclaimed at last, "I twust—I weally twust that you have not mentioned Blake's name to anyone in connection with this wretched affair?"

"Not yet," grinned Trimble significantly.

"I twust, Twimble, deah boy, that you will twy to keep the mattah a secret—at least until I have discussed the mattah with Blake?" said Arthur Augustus hopefully.

"I might—it all depends," said Trimble, shaking his head. "I've not quite decided what to do in the matter yet, Gussy. I feel it's my duty, of course to show Blake up, for—the sake of the school, you know. But if you care to be pally, Gussy, I might think about it."

"Bai Jove! Pway what do you mean, Twimble?"

"It—it's like this, Gussy," explained Baggy, winking at the sky. "I happen to be short of a pal just now—a pal to tide me over my financial difficulties, you know. If you'd like to be that pal, Gussy, I should have to be a pal to your pal, Blake, too, shouldn't I? I couldn't give him away then, could I?"

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus understood then.

"You—you young wascal!"

"Please yourself," grinned Baggy. "I'm not asking you for anything, mind! Not at all! I say, Gussy, wouldn't it be a pity if poor old Blake rot the hoot? You'd miss him in Study No. 6, wouldn't you?"

"You—you little worm, Twimble!" gasped Arthur Augustus, taking a stride towards the fat junior. "I have a vewy good mind to kick you across the quad, bai Jove! You blackmailin' little wottah!"

"Oh, all right!" said Trimble, turning away. "I think, after all, it's my duty to show Blake up. I think I'll ask Kildare's advice about it, anyway. Cheerio, Gussy!"

"Oh, bai Jove! Twimble—"

Trimble came back, grinning.

"Well?" he chuckled.

"You—you said you wanted money, Twimble. How—how much do you require, Twimble?" asked Gussy, his voice trembling.

"Just a loan—between pals, of course," grinned Trimble. "Mind you, I'm not asking you for it. If you care to loan a pal ten bob, Gussy—to be going on with—"

In silence Arthur Augustus took out his pocket-wallet and extracted a ten-shilling note. Baggy Trimble took it with a smirk.

"Thanks, Gussy! I'll let you have it back out of my next remittance, of course. Don't worry about Blake, old chap. A pal of yours is a pal of mine. Cheerio!"

With that Baggy Trimble rolled away en route for the tuckshop under the elms. He passed the Terrible Three on his way, and they stared at him, and he grinned back at them.

"Well, my hat!" gasped Monty Lowther.

The Terrible Three were astonished. They had watched the little scene, at Lowther's grinning suggestion, expecting to see the egregious Baggy sent about his business with D'Arcy's elegant shoe behind him. But instead of that they had seen the two chatting together, and they had seen D'Arcy hand over a Treasury note to the fat junior.

What did it mean? Though Tom Merry & Co. had not heard a word that had passed between the two, they could not help feeling that the incident was significant in the circumstances. Was it possible that Baggy, also, had seen D'Arcy racing up to the dormitory at noon with wet shoes and trousers? He had been bragging that he "knew what he knew." It certainly looked as if he did know something—something regarding Arthur Augustus D'Arcy! Arthur Augustus, certainly, was generous with his cash. But he was not in the habit of handing ten-shilling notes to Baggy Trimble—far from it. And in his present mood it was not likely he would be generous at all.

"That looks queer, Tommy!" muttered Manners at length.

Tom nodded, and his brow clouded.

"Let's get in!" he snapped shortly.

And the Terrible Three were in, their minds not a little disturbed.

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CHAPTER 4. D'Arcy Speaks Out!

"BLAKE, deah boy!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy spoke in low tones, and he eyed his study-mate steadily through his monocle.

Ten was over in Study No. 6, and Blake and D'Arcy were alone. Herries had gone to see to his bulldog, Towser, and Digby was spending a little time in the music-room.

It happened to be the first chance of speaking alone to Jack Blake that had presented itself, and Arthur Augustus was resolved to make the most of it.

That afternoon had been one of the most miserable the swell of the Fourth had ever spent. The news of the outrage on the Head had come as a great shock to him. On hearing it, D'Arcy's mind had, naturally enough, instantly reverted to that incident in the corridor when Blake had—so he believed—attempted to carry out that very same trick; and he had prevented him.

In his innocence, the noble Arthur Augustus had never suspected that Blake was merely "pulling his leg," and that he had not the slightest intention of playing such a foolish and thoughtless practical joke. And therefore, when he heard the grave news, Arthur Augustus felt sick with dread and dismay.

That Jack Blake had played that trick on the Head knowingly—knowing that the Head was below—D'Arcy did not dream of imagining for one moment. If Blake had done it, he had obviously meant it for Taggles—a foolish, thoughtless, practical joke; but merely a joke, nevertheless.

And this was the outcome of it. Blake had not owned up—obviously did not intend to own up—and the whole school was to suffer. The very fact that Blake had not owned up had caused doubts to arise in the mind of Arthur Augustus. Had Blake done it, after all? Blake was straight as a die—the soul of honour. He sometimes made mistakes just as others did. But it seemed incredible that Jack Blake would stand by and see the whole school suffer for his fault.

So, in this state of doubt and uncertainty, Arthur Augustus had hesitated before mentioning the matter to Blake—until he had had that interview with Baggy Trimble in the quadrangle! And that interview had settled the matter in Gussy's mind. Trimble had convinced him that his fears were only too truly founded. In the ordinary way, even the innocent Arthur Augustus was wary of accepting Trimble's word on any matter. But he accepted it now without question. He had left Trimble with Blake, and he had obviously seen Blake do it. That was the view of Arthur Augustus.

And that view had brought a grave problem to the swell of the Fourth. He was torn between loyalty to his chum, and his duty to his fellows in the school. It was his duty either to tell what he believed, or to urge his chum to play the game and own up, whatever the cost.

Arthur Augustus was resolved to do the latter now.

"Blake, deah boy," he went on quietly, "there is a gwave mattah that I desiah to discuss with you."

Blake looked up quickly and coloured. His jaw was set hard, but his eyes showed uneasiness. It seemed as if he anticipated what was coming.

"Go ahead, Gussy," he said grimly. "I fancy I can guess what it is, though."

"Bai Jove! You—you can guess—"

"You silly ass!" snapped Jack Blake, his face still red. "Do you think a chap's blind? You've been like a dumb oyster since noon, and you've been glowering at me as if I'd just murdered your blessed grandmother. It—it's about this affair of the Head, isn't it?"

"Yaas, it is, Blake," said Arthur Augustus, staring fixedly at Blake. "I am vewy much surprised that you have not mentioned the mattah to me yet, nor to Hewwies or Dig. You have discussed the outrage with Hewwies and Dig in the ordinary way, but you have not mentioned what took place between you and Twimble and myself in the passage just before the outrage."

Blake nodded slowly, and his colour deepened.

"I know, Gussy," he said awkwardly. "But I funk'd telling anybody. Since I heard about the Head I've felt rotten about it. I know it looks jolly queer after what I'd said and pretended to do just before. I felt it was best not to mention a word to Herries or Dig or anyone. I've been waiting a chance to speak to you about it, though."

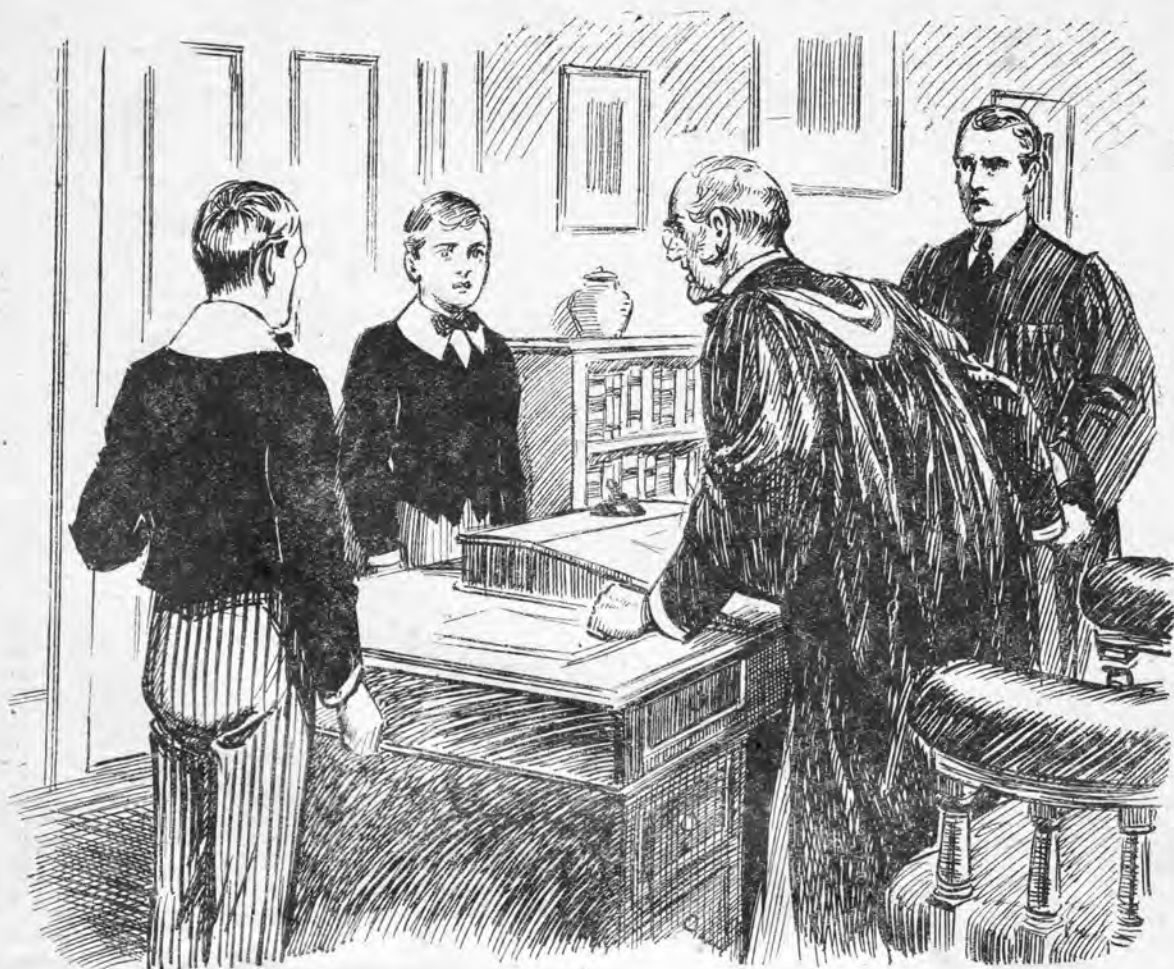
"Bai Jove!"

"I'm no end worried about Trimble, too," said Blake, frowning. "The fatness is certain to think I did it after that. In fact, I know he does; I can tell by the way he looks at me. I'm blessed if I can understand why the fat toad doesn't make a song about it as it is! Look here, Gussy, we've got to shut Trimble's trap somehow. If he gets gassing about it the fellows might easily think I did it. Goodness knows what it might lead to!"

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus fairly blinked at his chum.

"Bai Jove!" he ejaculated, eyeing his chum aghast. "I—"



"Silence, Levison!" thundered Dr. Holmes angrily. "How dare you come here on such an errand—how dare you, sir? Are you aware that D'Arcy has just confessed to having committed the crime which you are now admitting?"

"Oh, my hat!" Levison groaned. (See page 17.)

weally do twust, Blake, that you are not twyin' to bluff the mattah out with me, as well as the west of the school. Weally, I am shocked and gwieved, deah boy."

It was Blake's turn to blink at his chum. His rugged features went a dull red, and his eyes gleamed.

"Eh? What's that?" he snapped. "Great Scott! You thundering well don't actually think I did do it, Gussy, you fool?"

D'Arcy stared coldly through his eyeglass at Blake.

"What is the good of taking up that attitude, Blake?" he said calmly. "Cannot you realise that it is imposs. for me to take any othah view, under the cires? And I have had Twimble's evidence also to support my view."

Blake drew a deep breath.

"Look here, Gussy!" he said in a strained tone. "I could see from the way you looked at me this afternoon that you were upset and uneasy about me. But I never dreamed that you actually thought I had done it—that I could have played a trick like that on the Head."

"I am not chargin' you with havin' played the twick on the Head, Blake," was the calm reply. "I know that you would nevah dream of attemptin' such a wotten outrage on Dr. Holmes. That Dr. Holmes received the watah was the meahest accident. That, howevah, does not altah the facts. I fully realise that you did it fwom a misguided sense of humour—as a thoughtless pwactical joke on old Taggles."

"But, you silly, burbling chump—"

"Pway allow me to finish, Blake," said Arthur Augustus firmly. "I wish to assuah you, Blake, that I fully realise that it was your ideah of a joke, and that I undahstand and sympathise with you in your wotten posish. I can forgive you havin' played the twick, but what I cannot undahstand and forgive is your wefusal to own up—"

"But I didn't do it, you ass!" almost yelled Blake in great exasperation. "I didn't do it. Someone else must have come along afterwards and done it."

Arthur Augustus shook his head slowly; his brow clouded.

"I wegwet that I cannot accept that, Blake," he said in some distress. "I do not think I have evah had weason to doubt your word before; but I have no othah wesource than to doubt it now, in the cires. Blake, deah boy, why don't you play the game? I am suah that if you point out to Dr. Holmes that it was meant for a pwactical joke, and that you meant it for Taggles, he will deal leniently with you."

Blake bit his lip hard, controlling his temper with a strong effort.

"Look here, Gussy," he breathed through his teeth, "I'm telling you that it was not I who played that trick. I know I gassed about doing it; I pretended to you that I was going to do it—"

"Pwetended? That is wot, Blake!"

"It isn't rot, I tell you! You silly idiot, I never meant it; I was just pulling your silly leg. I never dreamed seriously of chucking that dashed water through the window!" shouted Blake earnestly.

"That is wathah feeble, Blake," said D'Arcy disdainfully. "I am surprised that you expect me to believe that. I am afwaid that I cannot believe it, deah boy. I wish that I could."

"Then you can go to pot!" snapped Blake furiously. "If you can't take my word, D'Arcy, I'm finished with you. So now you can get out!"

"I shall not get out, Blake," said Arthur Augustus steadily, "until I have said what I mean to say, and what I believe it to be my duty to say. I feel it my duty, Blake, to point out what is your only honourable course of action in this wretched mattah. It is your duty, as a decent fellow, Blake, to own up without further delay, bai Jove! You suably cannot intend to allow the whole school to suffah for your fault?"

"D'Arcy!" hissed Blake in a tone of concentrated rage.

"If you don't mind what you're saying I'll punch your dashed head, pal or no pal!"

Arthur Augustus drew himself up stiffly.

"I am not afraid of your wretched threats, Jack Blake," he said calmly. "I am sowwy—vey sowwy indeed—to have to speak to you like this. And I must point out that unless you agree to play the game in this maffah it will be utterly imposs. for me to remain fwienly with you any longer."

"You—you rotten, howling cad—"

"Threats or hard names will not altah my attitude, Blake," said D'Arcy freezingly. "I have told you that though I do not approve of such pwactical jokes I am quite weady to back you up, pwovidin' you own up like a man."

"But I didn't do it!" almost shrieked Blake frantically. "How can I own up if I didn't do it, you fool?"

"Wubbish!"

"You won't take my word, then?"

Arthur Augustus shook his head firmly.

"You—you think I'm lying?"

"I cannot possibly accept your statement, Blake."

"Then take that, you cad!" shouted Blake furiously.

Smack!

Arthur Augustus reeled back with a cry, a white mark showing up on his cheek.

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus stared at Jack Blake in utter horror and dismay, his hand stroking his burning cheek. Though Blake had warned him he had never dreamed his chum would carry his threat into effect.

"There, you rotter!" said Blake doggedly. "You've got what you've been asking for, D'Arcy. You've called me a liar and you've called me a cad. If you want satisfaction for that blow you can put up your hands and we'll fight it out."

With his hand to his cheek D'Arcy gazed at his old chum with burning eyes. His agitation and distress was ebbing away, giving place to indignation and growing anger. But he made no effort to return the blow.

"Blake," he said, his voice trembling with emotion, "you will wogwet that hasty blow before long. For the sake of our long fwienship I wefuse to weturn it. But our fwienship ends heah. I cannot possibly remain on fwienly terms with a fellow who is ignowant & the vewy meanin' of duty and fair play, bai Jove!"

With that Arthur Augustus turned with haughty disdain to the door. But he did not reach it. A hand gripped his shoulder and whirled him round with a force that sent his eyeglass flying to the end of its cord.

"No, you don't!" shouted Blake passionately. "You've said more than I'll allow any fellow to say to me, D'Arcy. You're not going to sneak away like that. Put your hands up!"

"I absolutely wefuse to put my hands up, Blake!"

"Then perhaps this will make you."

It was not a hard blow, but it took D'Arcy full on the nose; it also drew blood, and it hurt more than a little. And it proved to be too much for Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Few fellows can remain calm after a blow on the nose, and Arthur Augustus was not one of the few.

It brought the tears rushing to his eyes, and he lost complete control, quite forgetting his determination not to "put his hands up."

"Bai Jove! You—you wottah!" he shouted.

He made a rush at Blake, who had backed expectantly away, and the next moment they were fighting furiously.

CHAPTER 5.

A Rift in the Lute!

"GREAT Scott! Here, what the thump—" Scarcely had the two exchanged a dozen blows when George Herries opened the door and stood gazing blankly upon the scene. Though Herries had noticed the strange coolness between D'Arcy and Blake that afternoon he would have been less surprised to see the Head and Mr. Railton fighting than Blake and D'Arcy—at least, that was what Herries said afterwards.

"Well, I'm hanged!" he ejaculated, as he realised without possibility of doubt that the two chums really were fighting. "Here, stop that, you burbling asses. Stop!"

He rushed forward and flung himself in between the two combatants.

"Get out!" yelled Blake furiously. "Leave us alone, Herries! Grouch!"

Blake had taken his attention off D'Arcy to shout the words, and a hefty punch under the chin was the result.

"You mad idiots—are you potty?" snapped Herries in horrified alarm. "Stop this rot—d'you hear? Blake—D'Arcy—stop!"

Headless of stray blows from both sides, Herries strove

manfully to stop the fight, ignoring also the yells of D'Arcy and Blake to leave them to it. Both juniors had "tasted blood" by this time, and they were fighting tooth and nail, giving no quarter and asking none.

Three Shell fellows who came along the passage just then stopped and blinked into the room in blank amazement. They were the Terrible Three, and the sight of Blake and D'Arcy actually fighting almost took their breath away.

"Great pip!" gasped Tom Merry, hurrying into the room. "What on earth's the matter here? For goodness' sake chuck it, you idiots! You'll have—"

"Help me, Tommy!" gasped Herries. "Help me stop the mad fools!"

"Come on, you fellows!"

Tom Merry called to Lowther and Manners, and the three rushed to Herries' aid. Roughly they wrenched the combatants apart, Merry and Herries holding Blake, while Lowther and Manners held the warlike Arthur Augustus.

"Enough of this, you fellows!" snapped Tom Merry, gazing curiously from D'Arcy's bruised and heated face to Blake's, which was equally as bad. "Do you want every master and prefect along here? Are you both potty?"

"Let me go!" panted Blake. "Who asked you to interfere? I'm going to give that lying cad the hiding of his life!"

D'Arcy said nothing. His looks were enough as he glowered at Blake, however, to show what would happen if he were released.

"Well, this beats the band!" gasped Tom Merry. "What's all this about, Herries?"

"Blessed if I know," grunted Herries, looking from one to the other of his chums in deep dismay. "I came in a moment ago and found these two idiots scrapping like that. Blake, you howling chump, what are you and Gussy quarrelling about?"

"Ask D'Arcy!" muttered Blake bitterly. "He'll tell you." D'Arcy wouldn't, however. He remained silent, his bruised features hard and resentful.

"Look here," said Tom Merry, after a pause, "this won't do, you know. I don't like to see this."

"Then why not clear out and mind your own business!" snapped Jack Blake, glaring at D'Arcy. "Let's settle our own troubles."

"Rot!" said Tom Merry quietly. "Nobody likes to see a good friendship broken, Blake. Let's hear what the trouble is. It may just be a little misunderstanding—that some outsider can put right."

"Let us loose!" snapped Blake furiously. "We can settle it ourselves—with our fists!"

"We'll let you go when you've given your word not to go on with this senseless scrapping," said Tom promptly.

"Very well," said Blake through his teeth. "D'Arcy and I can settle the matter again. It can wait. If D'Arcy agrees to postpone it, I will."

"Well, Gussy?" said the Shell captain.

Arthur Augustus was still breathing heavily, but his face had lost its look of passion. It was quiet and composed.

"I do not pwopose to continue the fight, Tom Mewwy," he replied steadily. "I wogwet vewy much that I was obliged to fight at all with Blake, and I wefuse to continue it heah or anywhere else."

"You—you call me a cad, a liar, and a funk, and you refuse to fight it out?" hissed Blake.

"I wefuse uthahly to have anythin' furthah to do with you, Jack Blake. All is ovah between us! If you will kindly wesease me, you fellows, I will wetiash twom this study."

Tom Merry nodded after a moment's hesitation, and on Lowther and Manners releasing him, Arthur Augustus marched from the study, mopping his face with a handkerchief.

There was a silence after he had gone. Blake found himself free now, and he started to tidy his dishevelled attire.

"Blake," said Tom Merry at length, "I'm dashed sorry about this."

"Keep your sorrow!"

Tom flushed.

"No need to be rotten about it, Blake," he said quietly. "You know why we're chipping in. We want to put matters right, old chap—if we can."

"You can't."

"Tell us what's wrong, Jack," said Tom Merry abruptly.

Blake opened his lips to make an angry retort, but he closed them again. Even in his present bitter mood he could not bring himself to be unpleasant to Tom Merry after that. Just at that moment it was on the tip of his tongue to tell everything.

But he did not—though he felt an almost irresistible impulse to seek the sympathy of Tom Merry & Co. by telling the story of what he believed was D'Arcy's injustice to him. In a flash it came to him that, after all, D'Arcy had good reason to suspect him under the circumstances; he could not blind himself to that fact. He ought to have accepted his word, of course, for all that. But—would Herries, Digby,

and the Terrible Three accept his word? Supposing they also disbelieved? He knew now that Arthur Augustus did not intend to tell.

D'Arcy would keep his suspicions to himself, and what was the use of raising suspicions in others? At the thought the Yorkshire junior set his lips stubbornly.

"I shall tell you nothing!" he snapped. "If that cad, D'Arcy, chooses to tell you, he can. You'll get nothing out of me!"

"Blake, old man—" began Herries uneasily.

"I'm telling nothing!" snapped Blake.

And he walked out of the room.

"Well, my hat!" breathed Tom Merry. "Herries, haven't you any idea why those silly chumps have fallen out?"

"Not the ghost of one," groaned Herries miserably. "Oh, great Scott! This is too rotten for words! I noticed there was something wrong between them this afternoon, though. They scarcely spoke over tea at all."

"It's queer," muttered Tom Merry, giving his own chums a strange look. "Anyway, perhaps the silly asses will come round soon."

The Terrible Three went out then. It was nearly prep time, and they went to their own study. But when they reached it Tom turned to his chums.

"Well, what do you fellows make of that?" he asked gravely.

"It almost looks as if it's something to do with this other affair," said Manners slowly.

Tom nodded, his brow clouded.

"That's just what I think," he said. "I may be wrong, but—it looks as though Blake suspects D'Arcy just as we do, and that he's tackled Gussy about it, and this scrap's the result."

"Phew! That's it!" said Lowther. "Oh, my hat!" That seemed the only possible view to take of the matter, of course; but it seemed to them only too plain in view of what they knew and suspected.

"It's simply amazing!" muttered Tom Merry. "What can we do, you fellows? It's the duty of any fellow to clear this matter up if he can—for the sake of the school as a whole. But what can we do? We've nothing to go on really. We saw Gussy at noon with shoes and trousers wet, but that doesn't say he did it. And because we suspect he's paying that fat toad Trimble cash to keep something quiet, and because he's fallen out with Blake, isn't proof, either."

"That's so!"

"In any case," said Tom Merry frankly. "I'm blessed if I can make myself believe Gussy guilty. He might have done it—he might have done it as a joke on Taggles. But he's the last fellow at St. Jim's to sit tight afterwards and allow the school to suffer."

"I think that, too!"

"Yes, rather!"

"I vote we sit tight ourselves over this, you chaps," went on Tom soberly. "I mean to tackle Gussy about it, though, to-morrow. He'll have got over this scrap by then. So till then mums the word!"

Lowther and Manners agreed with Tom there, and the Terrible Three settled down to prep—though in a very worried mood. And they were not the only fellows at St. Jim's who were worried that night. In Study No. 6 there was dismay and consternation. Neither Blake nor D'Arcy visited the study that evening, and Herries and Digby were at their wits' end to know what to make of matters.



ERIC KILDARE.

The captain of St. Jim's and head-prefect. A splendid athlete, and a general all-round good sort. Captains both the footer and cricket elevens. Kildare is respected by all, with the exception of the rotters, on whom he lays a heavy hand. Will pit himself against anyone and in any undertaking. Fearless and upright is this splendid fellow and a worthy son of the Emerald Isle—the very ideal of a school captain.

They sought out their chums separately, and they demanded an explanation, but in vain.

And outside Study No. 6 and Study No. 10 matters were little better. The Head's stern sentence had cast a deep gloom over the whole school and filled most fellows' minds with suspicion and speculation. And St. Jim's, in general, went to bed that night seething with discontent and discord.

CHAPTER 6.

Grundy Butts In!

"IS D'Arcy here?" George Alfred Grundy, of the Shell, asked the question as he came into the junior Common-room just after dinner the following day. Since the Head's fiat had gone forth, normal life seemed at a standstill at St. Jim's—in the lower School, at all events. The juniors writhed and chafed under Dr. Holmes' stern sentence. They spent their spare time standing about in groups, gloomily discussing the serious state of affairs—serious, that is, from their point of view.

One such group was standing in the Common-room when Grundy came in and asked the question. They were discussing the matter of the gatings and cancelling of "halls" from the point of view of footer, however. On the following day—Wednesday—the junior team were "down" to play Greyfriars at home, and Tom Merry and his fellow footballers were holding an unofficial meeting to discuss the problem that had arisen.

Should the junior captain cancel the match while there was still plenty of time, or should he risk matters—hold on in the hope that the culprit would have been discovered before the match?

It was into this problem that George Alfred Grundy butted with his question. In the ordinary way Tom Merry and the rest of his chums would have ignored both Grundy and his question. Great man as he undoubtedly was—in his own estimation—Grundy did not loom largely before the eyes of his fellows—far from it!

But on this occasion all the juniors present turned at the question and looked at Grundy. For Grundy did not only ask the question; he fairly shouted it.

"No; D'Arcy isn't here, Grundy," said Tom Merry, eyeing the Shell junior rather curiously. "What on earth are you yelling about?"

"Who's yelling?" snorted Grundy. "I want that rotter, D'Arcy, that's all! Any of you kids know where he is?"

"You'll wonder where you are if you come here calling us kids," said Tom grimly. "Buzz off, you silly ass! We're busy!"

"Run away and chop chips!" advised Levison.

"Trot off and play marbles with the fags!" suggested Lowther.

Such a deadly insult would usually have provoked assault and battery from George Alfred; but he scarcely appeared to have heard it. He turned to the door, his rugged features wrinkled into a thoughtful frown, and then he turned back again.

"Look here, you fellows!" he said, his eyes gleaming. "I wasn't going to speak about the matter until after I'd seen D'Arcy. But—"

"I think I've mentioned that we're busy, Grundy," said Tom Merry. "Buzz off, there's a good chap!"

"I suppose you chaps are gassing about this business of the Head's?" asked Grundy grimly.

"That's so!"

"In connection, though, with something that you know absolutely nothing about, Grundy," mentioned Lowther.

"Eh? And what's that?"

"Football," said Lowther pleasantly.

There was a chuckle; but Grundy did not appear to see anything of a humorous nature in Lowther's answer. In fact, he ignored it.

"I suppose you fellows are worrying about the match to-morrow?" he said, more grimly still.

"Just a bit," agreed Tom Merry, smiling.

"Then you've no need to worry much longer," said Grundy quietly. "I fancy you won't need to have to cancel the match. I think I can put my finger on the chap who did it!"

"You-can?"

"Yes, I fancy so."

"My hat! Was it yourself, then?" demanded Lowther.

"You burling chump!"

"And we never dreamed of suspecting Grundy!" went on Lowther gravely. "We might have known it, though. We knew it must have been either a born rotter or a born idiot. Well, Grundy isn't the former—I will say that. But even his best friends admit he's a born idiot!"

"Look here, Lowther!"

"Well, I am surprised!" murmured Lowther. "Have you owned up yet to the Head, Grundy?"

"Will you shut up, you funny ass!" howled Grundy. "I'll jolly well smash you!"

"What an awful ass! But why don't you play the game and own up, Grundy?" said Lowther warmly. "You ought to be ashamed of—Ow! Yow-wow! Groooh! You rotter!"

Lowther yelled furiously as a set of extremely useful knuckles clumped on his nose. Grundy was never a fellow with much patience, and he lost what he had very quickly.

"Take that, you funny idiot!" he snorted, as Lowther reeled back gasping. "You cheeky clown! Bringing your potty jokes into a serious matter like this! Why—here, don't—"

Grundy broke off with a gasp as Lowther made a furious rush at him.

"Here, you idiots!" cried Tom Merry, laughing. "Stop that in here! Chuck it, Lowther! Here, you fellows, help me to chuck this born idiot out. He's as much right in the Common-room as we have; but if he can't keep the peace he goes out."

"What-ho!"

Several pairs of hands closed on the struggling George Alfred, and he was rushed, yelling furiously, to the door and cast out into the passage.

Unfortunately, he went spinning into another junior who happened to be passing just then, and the two went down with a crash and a yell.

"Bai Jove!"

It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy with whom Grundy had collided, and he scrambled to his feet wrathfully. Taking a gleaming eyeglass from his waistcoat-pocket, he jammed it into his eye and gazed at Grundy witheringly.

"Gwundy, you wuffian!" he gasped. "What—"

"Oh, it's you, is it?" gasped Grundy, jumping swiftly to his feet. "Here, you're just the chap I want, D'Arcy!"

Before Arthur Augustus was aware of his intention, Grundy had grabbed him by the scruff of the neck and had hauled him into the Common-room.

Tom Merry and the rest of the juniors had returned to their places round the fireplace, and they looked up in surprise at sight of Grundy again.

"Look here, you fellows!" roared Grundy. "There's been enough foolery; you've got to listen to me. I've brought D'Arcy here, and I'm going to ask the rotter a question before the lot of you."

Having recovered from the surprise of Grundy's attack, Arthur Augustus wrenched himself free, his aristocratic features crimson with wrath.

"Gwunday, you feahful wuffian!" he gasped, "put up your hands! I am goin' to administrah a feahful thwashin' for this unwawanted assault, bai Jove!"

"Not yet!" snapped Grundy. "You've got to answer my question first, D'Arcy. I'll take all the thrashings you can give me afterwards."

"Wubbish! You will put your hands up now, Gwunday!" snorted Arthur Augustus.

He was squaring up to Grundy when Tom Merry interposed.

"Chuck it, Gussy!" he snapped. "There's going to be no scrapping here, old top. Now, Grundy, you idiot, what's the matter? What's the bee you've got in your bonnet?"

Tom Merry asked the question a trifle uneasily. He could see from Grundy's manner that it was something unusually serious. He wondered if Grundy had any reason to suspect D'Arcy of complicity in the affair of which all their minds were full.

He soon knew.

"I'll jolly soon tell you that!" rapped out Grundy, staring accusingly at D'Arcy. "Now, D'Arcy, I want you to tell us if you were in the second floor passage when that water was chucked over the Head yesterday?"

Arthur Augustus paled slightly.

"Weally Gwunday," he answered, with a disdainful sniff, "I see no weason why I should answer that question to you, bai Jove! Go and eat coke!"

Grundy set his jaws hard.

"Very well!" he snapped. "We'll know what to think, D'Arcy. I'll ask you another question, though. Yesterday, at noon, within a few minutes after the outrage was done, you were seen hurrying up to the dorm with your shoes and the bottoms of your trousers wet, D'Arcy. Can you tell these fellows how you happened to get 'em wet just at that time?"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy caught his breath sharply, whilst the other juniors, with the exception of Tom Merry & Co., whistled. Tom Merry himself went grim.

"Great Scott! Is that true, D'Arcy?" demanded Clifton Dane.

Arthur Augustus flushed, and his eyes gleamed obstinately.

"I uttably wufuse to answer that question, Gwunday!" he exclaimed haughtily. "As I have already told you, you can go and eat coke!"

"Here, but that's all very well, Gussy," said Levison, eyeing the swell of the Fourth curiously. "Who told you this yarn, Grundy?"

"It was Gunny," said Grundy grimly. "He met D'Arcy on the stairs at the time, and he spotted what a state he was in. The silly dummy only mentioned it just now, though; it never struck the idiot as being significant until now."

"Phew!"

Arthur Augustus flushed again beneath the sharp scrutiny of the juniors' astonished eyes.

"Bai Jove, Gwunday!" he stammered heatedly. "Am I to suppose that you weally suspect me of havin' cawwied out that wascally twick?"

Grundy looked round at the curious onlookers.

"I'm asking you fellows what it looks like," he said, ignoring D'Arcy's direct question. "Mind you, I'm not sayin' it's D'Arcy; I've always taken him for a decent chap, and I should be dashed sorry if it proved to be him. A chap's got his duty to do, though. All the school's got to suffer for what one chap did. It ain't right. The chap's got to be found out, and bowled out!"

"Get on with the washing!" grunted Clive.

"Well, you fellows know old Gunn isn't the sort to spin a yarn that wasn't true. He spotted D'Arcy right enough, racing up for the dormitory. He's just told me about it, thinking it looked a bit fishy. Well, you chaps must admit it does look fishy. I'm asking D'Arcy now what's his explanation. If he hasn't got one, then we'll know what to think."

"I'm explainin' nothin', Gwunday," said Arthur Augustus calmly. "It does not twouble me what duffahs like you think, bai Jove!"

"You cheeky rotter!" howled Grundy angrily. "Can't you see how it looks to us?"

"Wot!"

"That isn't all, either," said Grundy, calming himself with an effort. "Everyone knows that that fat toad, Trimble, is getting cash out of you to keep his mouth shut about something."

"Bai Jove!"

"Does everybody know that, Grundy?" inquired Cardew. "I don't, so I suppose I'm nobody."

"Well, I heard Racke say he saw D'Arcy handing the fat rotter some money, anyway," amended Grundy. "And Trimble's been flush since yesterday—I do know that."

"Go hon!"

"Anyway," snorted Grundy, "that isn't the only thing, either. What about D'Arcy falling out with his chum—everybody knows they were scrapping last night. Looks to me jolly queer, under the cires."

There was a silence. It looked more than a little queer to the rest of the juniors, also: Grundy's bombshell was, of course, old news to Tom Merry & Co. They had feared

ANSWERS

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that others might have seen Arthur Augustus, in addition to themselves.

But to the others it was news that dumbfounded them. They could understand Arthur Augustus having done the deed in a moment of thoughtlessness. Everyone agreed that "Gussy" was an ass at times. But they could scarcely believe him capable of allowing others to suffer for his own fault.

Yet, what could they think otherwise? D'Arcy had refused to explain, to say whether he had been in the passage at the time or not. If he could clear himself, then why didn't he answer Grundy's questions?

CHAPTER 7.

Trouble!

TOM MERRY broke the silence. He felt that things couldn't go on as they were. Now, Grundy had made the matter public it was time someone brought the obstinate Arthur Augustus to reason.

"Look here, Gussy old man," he exclaimed earnestly, "can't you see that the fellows won't allow you to take up that attitude? For goodness' sake get off the high horse and stop this fooling!"

"I am not fooling, Tom Mewwy."

"Then why the thump don't you speak out and explain matters, you owl?" snapped Tom angrily. "We saw you yesterday, as well as Gunn. It's a matter that needs explaining, D'Arcy, in fairness to the school."

"Bai Jove, Tom Mewwy—"

"I'm blest if I can make this out!" went on the junior captain. "I've always known you to be a chap who played the game, Gussy. If you didn't do it, you've nothing to fear; all you need do is to explain how you got wet."

"I do not intend to explain anythin'," Tom Mewwy, said Arthur Augustus calmly. "Last evenin' I gave you my word that I had not done this thing. I am amazed that you should dream for one moment that I had. I am still more amazed and grieved to know that you refuse to accept my word."

"But, look here, Gussy," said Tom, flushing a trifle uneasily. "Whether I personally accept your word or not doesn't say everyone else will. Listen, there's a good chap. Water was emptied from a bucket on the Head yesterday, and about the time it was done you were seen hurrying away from the spot with soaking wet clothes. Can you blame the fellows for wanting to know what it means?"

"Wubbish!"

"It isn't rubbish," said Tom quietly. "Then there's Trimble. That fat ass has been gassing that he knows who did it. And it's known you've been handing the fat rascal cash. In addition, it's known that you and Blake have quarrelled and fought. You can't blame the fellows for being suspicious, Gussy."

"I have already remarked that the situation does not wowwy me, Tom Mewwy," said D'Arcy frigidly.

"But it may worry you before long," said Tom grimly. "If you know anything about the business, Gussy, it's up to you to speak out—for our sakes and for your own."

"I wewwet that I cannot explain anythin'," Tom Mewwy."

"You won't!" snorted Grundy, pushing himself forward again. "Here, let me deal with the cad. It's as plain as a blessed pikestaff. He won't fight because he can't, of course. I must say I'm astounded, simply astounded at a chap like D'Arcy being such a howling funk and cad."

"Bai Jove! Gwunday, you wottah—"

"Well, what else are you?" hooted Grundy. "By refusing to defend yourself you're admitting you did it, aren't you? And aren't you a howling funk to sit tight and let the school suffer?"

"If you call me a funk and a cad, Gwunday—" began Arthur Augustus hotly, stung from his attitude of lofty indifference at last.

"That's just what I do call you!" snorted Grundy, shoving a red, indignant face forward. "I suppose that's why you scrapped with your pal Blake last night, because he'd bowled you out, and tried to make you play the man and own up. Bah! I'm disgusted—Yaroooh! Ow! Oh, you—you rotter!"

Grundy ended his speech with a yelping mumble as the swell of St. Jim's knuckles clumped on his nose. It was Grundy's turn now, and, like Lowther, he yelled, and rushed to avenge the blow.

In a flash the two juniors were punching away at each other as if their very lives depended upon the result. It was the second fight within two days that Arthur Augustus had been engaged in, and his face still showed signs of the first. To Tom Merry there seemed every prospect of many more fights for Arthur Augustus, unless he chose to explain things.

He decided to put an end to this one, however.

"Pile in, you chaps!" he called. "Pitch that silly ass Grundy out again!"

The juniors made a rush for the combatants and dragged them apart by main force. It took four or five to hold the raging George Alfred back.

"You silly, howling idiots!" he roared. "Lemme get at him. I'll make him own up before I've finished with him!"

"We don't want any death-bed confessions here, Grundy," grinned Monty Lowther. "Out with him, chaps!"

"What-ho!"

"Leggo!" yelled Grundy, struggling furiously. "Why, you cheeky cads, I'll smash you all for this!"

But the juniors did not heed Grundy's voice. For the second time that noon Grundy was thrown out of the Common-room. He charged back at the grinning crowd twice, but as he was simply thrown out again, he gave it up then, and wandered away, dismally nursing his nose.

"Now, what about Gussy?" asked Lowther. "What about banging his napper on the floor to knock a bit of sense into it?"

"Bai Jove! Weally, Lowther—"

"Oh, let the ass go!" snorted Tom Merry, in deep exasperation. "If he chooses to go on acting the goat like this, let him, and let him put up with the consequences, too!"

"Weally, Mewwy—"

"Are you still determined not to speak, Gussy?" demanded Tom.

Arthur Augustus mopped a streaming nose, and blinked round him with as much dignity as he could summon in the circumstances.

"Yaas, bai Jove—yaas!" he mumbled. "I have already said all I propose to say, Tom Mewwy."

"Oh, all right!" said the leader of the Terrible Three. "If you're prepared to have this yarn spread about, and to end up by being yanked before the Head, that's your own lookout."

"I am vewy glad that you have at last realised that it is my look-out and not yours, Tom Mewwy," said D'Arcy.

And with that cutting reply Arthur Augustus sailed for the door. But before he reached it a fat junior rolled into the Common-room. He sighted Arthur Augustus, and his fat face brightened up.

"Oh, here you are, Gus!" he grinned. "I say, I've been hunting everywhere for you, old chap."

"Weally, Twimble—"

"I suppose you're not coming along to the tuckshop, Gus?" inquired Baggy, blissfully unaware of the curious glances of the spectators. "No? Well, it doesn't matter, old top. I only wanted the loan of five bob or so, until my next remittance comes, you know."

"Weally, Twimble!" snapped Arthur Augustus heatedly. "I have already loaned you ten shillin's this mornin', you unscupulous young wascal!"

"Look here, Gussy—"

"And I have already told you, Twimble, that I stwongly object to bein' addressed as Gus by you, Twimble."

"Never mind that, Gussy," grinned Trimble. "What about the five bob?"

"You—you little wascal, Twimble! I uttably wufuse to lend you anothah penny!" said Arthur Augustus, flushing crimson under the curious glances.

Baggy Trimble's little eyes gleamed nastily.

"Oh, all right!" he snapped meaningly. "If you won't, D'Arcy, I suppose I shall have to try someone else. I think I'll go along and see Kildare."

The fat Fourth-Former moved towards the door, and passed out. D'Arcy stared after him a moment in nervous hesitation, and then, his aristocratic face covered with blushes, he hurried out after him.

It almost seemed as if Trimble had anticipated such a move on D'Arcy's part, for he was waiting in the passage when Arthur Augustus came hurrying out.

"Changed your mind, Gussy?" grinned Baggy.

Arthur Augustus fumbled in his pockets and extracted two half-crowns.

"Now I come to think of it," remarked Trimble, "it was really ten bob I wanted, old chap. Couldn't you make it ten bob, Gussy?"

Arthur Augustus almost flung the coins at Baggy Trimble.

"That is all you will get from me to-day, Twimble!" he said through his aristocratic teeth. "You are a wascally young wottah!"

"He, he, he!"

Arthur Augustus turned abruptly on his heel and marched away towards the bath-rooms. He felt that if he stayed in the presence of Baggy Trimble another moment he would be obliged to give the fat junior the hiding he so richly deserved.

"Oh deah!" groaned the hapless swell of the Fourth. "This is weally too awful, bai Jove! I nevah dreamed the silly dummies would suspect me. Gweat Scott!"

That Baggy Trimble was likely to relieve him of every penny he had troubled D'Arcy very little. He strongly objected to such "loans," not on account of the loss of cash, but, because he hated to be a party to such dealing.

But what troubled him was the almost certain possibility that the egregious Baggy would, sooner or later, give the "show" away with his idiotic blundering.

That, however, was by no means the only thing that was worrying Arthur Augustus. Serene in the consciousness of his own innocence, the swell of the Fourth troubled little whether his schoolfellows thought him guilty or not.

What did trouble him was the fact that all St. Jim's was suffering through the fault of one fellow—his own chum, or former chum. What ought he to do? What should he do to "play the game"? Was it right to shield Blake, and let the whole school suffer? He had fallen out bitterly with his old chum, but he could not forget that Blake was his old chum for all that. In fact, all D'Arcy's imagination and anger with his old chum had gone now. He only felt sorry, deeply grieved that his own chum had dishonoured himself and Study No. 6.

That was how Arthur Augustus looked at things. It was the fact that Study No. 6 was, as he believed, disgracing itself that hurt Arthur Augustus far more than his chum's blows, his schoolfellows' suspicions, and Trimble's "attentions."

But what could be done about it? That was the problem which had been occupying D'Arcy's mind all the previous evening and all that morning. And it was only as he was removing all removable traces of his fight that a solution dawned in upon the mind of Arthur Augustus.

"Eai Jove!" murmured the swell of the Fourth to his reflection in the bath-room mirror. "The vewy thing. It won't be pleasant. In fact, it will be frightfully wotten, bai Jove! But Study No. 6 isn't goin' to let down the whole school. Wathah not, bai Jove! If that wottah Blake doesn't realise what his duty is, then I must show him. It seems to be the only way, bai Jove! And I fancy I can stand a floggin' bettah than Blake, in any case. Yaas, wathah!"

Having arrived at that decision, Arthur Augustus did not stop to weigh the pros and cons. Had he done so he might have faltered, good-hearted and stout-hearted as he was. He finished his toilet at top speed, and then he left the bath-room and proceeded, serene and calm, to the Head's study.

CHAPTER 8.

Levison's Resolve!

"PHEW!"

"Great Scott!"

"That shows which way the wind blows, anyway."

There was a buzz of amazed voices as the door of the Common-room closed behind Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

It was clear to all that Arthur Augustus had hurried out to stop the egregious Baggy from going to Kildare, just as clear as it was to all that Baggy's visit to Kildare would not be for soliciting a little loan.

That much was very clear.

Grundy's claim that Arthur Augustus was paying Baggy Trimble "hush money" appeared to be founded on fact.

To Tom Merry & Co. the whole business seemed incredible. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was the last fellow in St. Jim's that Tom Merry himself would have expected to be the culprit—the fellow who was allowing others to suffer for his own reckless fault. Even now Tom simply could not bring himself to believe D'Arcy guilty.

But others could, and did. Fellows who had not dared to charge Arthur Augustus before his face did not hesitate to say what they thought now he was gone.

"It's a howling shame!" exclaimed Aubrey Racke, scowling at Tom Merry. "It's clear that D'Arcy did it. He ought to be made to own up, Merry!"

"Hear, hear!" agreed Crooke.

"It's up to you, Tom Merry, to make him, or to report the cad."

"When it's proved he did it perhaps I will—not before," snapped Tom Merry. "I admit the evidence is pretty fishy—"

"Pretty fishy, eh?" sneered Racke bitterly. "You know jolly well it's clear enough. What more proof do you want?"

"It's not proof enough for me, anyway," said Tom flatly. "Would it have been proof enough if it had been me?" sneered Racke.

Tom nodded emphatically.

"Speaking personally, it certainly would, Racke," he said frankly. "There's a big difference between the two cases, you see. D'Arcy's got the reputation of being a decent chap, and a fellow of his word, while you've got the reputation of being a rotter and a liar!"

There was a chuckle, but Racke & Co. did not join in it. Racke's face crimsoned with rage.

"You—you rotter, Merry!" he hissed. "You know well enough what I mean. I mean that because D'Arcy's a pal you're trying to shield him."

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"You think that, do you?"

"Of course I do," snarled Racke, not noticing the gleam in Tom Merry's eyes. "If it had been me you'd have me before Railton by this."

"Would I?"

"Yes. You've just called me a rotter. Well, what about you? Rather than give a pal away you'll let the whole school down. Call that playing the dashed game? D'Arcy did this, and you've got to show him up. If you don't, then I'm jolly well going—"

"You are going, Racke!" said Tom Merry grimly.

And gripping the dissatisfied Racke by the scruff of the neck, he rushed him to the door. In the doorway he held him a moment or two while he planted half a dozen kicks behind him. Then with a final lunge he lifted the cad of the Shell far out into the passage.

Tom Merry left him to his own devices then, and returned into the room.

"Any more chaps got me marked like Racke?" he asked, looking at Crooke and Mellish.

Evidently Crooke and Mellish hadn't, however. They scowled and slung out after their leader. Tom Merry closed the door and returned to the rest of the grinning juniors.

"Now the air is cleared a bit," he remarked grimly, "we can get down to business, chaps. Something's got to be done, and it's got to be done jolly quickly. The question is, are we to cancel the match to-morrow or not?"

"Not!" said Talbot emphatically. "Whilst there's life there's hope! Plenty of time for all sorts of things to happen before to-morrow afternoon."

"That's so, but it's risking a lot," said the junior captain gloomily. "It's hardly the thing to risk bringing the Greyfriars lot here all for nothing. It isn't fair to them to leave the cancelling to the last minute. We ought to wire them at once, to give them plenty of chance to make fresh arrangements."

"I think that, too," said Levison nodding. "No good waiting for miracles to happen. I suppose it's no use tackling the Head, Tommy?"

The Junior Captain of St. Jim's shook his head dismally. "I've spoken to Kildare, and I've spoken to Railton," he said. "Railton thinks it's hopeless to expect the Head to alter his decision. He seems to have been hit badly by this affair. And Kildare is in the same boat as I am; the Sixth were playing Abbotsford to-morrow. They're as sick about it as we are. If the Head won't climb down to them he jolly well won't to us, that's pretty obvious."

"Rotten!"

"The whole business is rotten!" agreed Tom grimly.

"What about D'Arcy?" granted Gore. "Some of you chaps seem to think he's innocent, but I'm not so sure. I think Racke was right; we ought to bring pressure on the rotter and make him either own up or explain."

"Hear, hear!"

Tom's face clouded; he saw that Racke & Co. were not the only ones to believe D'Arcy guilty.

"I don't see the good of trying to bring pressure to bear on Gussy, or anyone else, for that matter," he said quietly. "If D'Arcy had intended to own up he would have done so before this, you can be sure of that. I know him too well to hope that force will make him do what he doesn't want to do. It's no good hoping for the chap who did it to own up, you fellows. We can't afford to rely on that."

"What the thump are we to do, then?" growled Gore.

"Cancel the blessed match—nothing else for it," said Tom gloomily. "That's if you fellows can't think of a better way. I'm blessed if I can!"

"I've got a suggestion to make," said Ernest Levison quietly.

"Good man!" said Tom heartily. "Cough it up, old scout."

"I'm afraid you'll think it a mad wheeze," said Levison slowly, looking round him. "But it seems to me the only way. Now, what punishment would you think the chap who owned up to having committed the outrage on the Head would get?"

"Goodness knows!" said Tom Merry wonderingly. "I scarcely think he'll get the sack, though. Even the Head must see it was only meant for a joke on Taggles—a silly, thoughtless joke. He'll get a flogging, I expect—a public flogging, most likely."

Levison nodded.

"That's what I think," he said coolly. "Well, you chaps, who's game to take the risk of a flogging for the sake of the school and the footer?"

"Eh? What?" chorused the other juniors.

"What d'you mean?" demanded Tom.

"What I say. Who's game to own up he did it, so that the rest of the school would escape punishment, and so that both senior and junior matches could take place to-morrow?"



Tom Merry & Co. stared at the doubled-up forms of Levison and D'Arcy. "Got it hot?" asked Lowther sympathetically. "M-my hat! You, too, Gussy?" "Gwooooo!" That was the reply of Arthur Augustus. He glowered at the staring crowd, and then staggered away, dismal and dejected beyond words. Not only had his great plan failed, but he had received a record caning—all for nothing. (See page 17.)

"Great pip!"

"Think of the giddy honour of being the martyr—of being the one to sacrifice himself for the common good!" grinned Levison. "Isn't it worth a flogging to have the honour of offering himself as a burnt offering on the giddy altar of the Head's wrath?"

"Well, you burbling chump!" breathed Tom Merry.

The rest of the juniors stared blankly at the author of the astounding suggestion.

"We could draw lots," urged Levison, becoming serious again. "It's simple enough. The chap who's unlucky and draws blank goes to the Head and takes the blame. He'll get a flogging, and the harsh restrictions on the school would consequently be removed. There you are! It's a sporting offer, and everyone has a sporting chance of fame and glory. I'm game, anyway, to take my chance. Who else is?"

"Don't all speak at once," murmured Monty Lowther.

The juniors did not all speak at once. They fairly blinked at Levison. Cardew seemed to grasp the idea first, and he gave a soft chuckle.

"Good man, Ernest!" he grinned. "Why not? You can put me own on your list, for one. I'm simply dying to win the giddy honour."

"I'm game to take my chance, too," said Clive, though he seemed none too keen. "I don't quite see how it's going to be worked, but—"

"I'm game, too!" said Clifton Dane and Bernard Glyn, both together.

"And I!" grinned Monty Lowther.

"Same here!" said Manners, rather slowly.

As the meaning of Levison's amazing suggestion dawned in upon the minds of the juniors more than half of them agreed promptly enough. The sporting nature of it strongly appealed to them, despite the risk of being the unlucky one.

Tom Merry, however, was not among them. His face was thoughtful when he spoke, at last.

"Half a minute, Levison," he said grimly. "In a way it's a great wheeze, and I like the sporting nature of it, but it won't do!"

"Why not?"

"I don't think you fellows have seen what it means," said Tom. "It means lying to the old Head—deceiving him, too! I don't like it. I don't think the end justifies the means."

There was a silence. Evidently the majority had not considered that point.

"It could be worked without telling a downright lie," said Levison, a trifle uneasily now, however. "And, in any case, I think it does justify the means."

"Same here," agreed Cardew. "Thomas, my dear man, you're just a trifle too moral, y'know. Straight-laced, an' all that! Do be a sport, Thomas!"

Tom Merry frowned and coloured. He was sorely tempted to agree. It seemed an easy way out of the difficulty. And it would be doing a fine thing for St. Jim's—in one way. He, himself, would gladly have been the first to offer himself for a flogging if by doing so he could get the harsh restrictions removed.

But this was different. For a junior to go to the Head and say he had done it—tell a lie which would more than possibly lead to still further lies, to deceive him even for such a purpose, did not seem above board to Tom. Two blacks did not make a white. That was his view.

"No; I'd rather not agree to it, Levison, old man," he said steadily. "You fellows know me; you know I'm not the chap to funk a flogging, especially for such a purpose as this. If it could be wangled in a straightforward manner I'd jump at the chance myself without waiting to have lots drawn. But it can't!"

"I believe it can, Merry," said Levison quietly.

"It can't," said Tom, "without telling downright lies. I don't like it, Levison; and I'd rather have nothing to do with it."

"I think Tom's quite right," said Talbot slowly. "It can't be done without lying, Levison. I'm afraid it won't do."

"I'd rather be out of it, too," added Manners.

"Same here!"

There was a chorus. Now the juniors began to think what it meant, the suggestion did not seem quite so sporting or easy. The Head would be certain to insist upon all the

facts, and the first lie would be practically certain to lead to a perfect morass of lies and deceptions.

Levison gave a reckless laugh as he saw that his suggestion was doomed to be dropped.

"Right-ho, then!" he grinned, his eyes gleaming brightly and excitedly. "We'll call the gamble off; and I'll make it a cert for me. I've made the suggestion, and I'm going to stick to it. As you chaps won't tackle it, I will myself."

"What?"

Levison nodded and laughed.

"I admit a lie's rarely justified—if ever—and I know just what I'm doing," he said grimly. "But I believe the end justifies the means in this case. The Head's sentence is an injustice to begin with. I'm going to the Head, and I'm going to take the blame; I shan't tell lies unless I'm forced to. Anyway, I'm going."

"But look here—" began Tom Merry in alarm.

"I'm going," said Levison doggedly. "All you fellows need to do is to sit tight and say nothing."

"Levison, old man," said Sidney Clive uneasily. "It can't succeed. Chuck it!"

"I'm going—and I'm going now," said Levison, grinning faintly. "You've no need to wire to Greyfriars, Tommy; it'll be all serene, you see."

With that Ernest Levison walked to the door.

"Stop the silly ass!" said Tom Merry. "It's madness!"

He started after Levison, as did Clive and Manners, but they were too late. Like lightning Levison slipped the key of the door from the inside to the outside, and the door slammed in the juniors' faces.

Then the key turned with a click, and the imprisoned juniors heard Levison marching away—apparently en route for the Head's study.

"Well, my hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "The—the burbling dummy!"

That was all Tom could say just then. Levison's cool action had taken his breath away.

CHAPTER 9.

Nothing Doing!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY rapped on the Head's door with quiet confidence and calm serenity in his mind. He was quite comfortable—indeed, happy, would express his feelings better. All martyrs are happy, and Arthur Augustus was no exception. Before he had been anxious and worried—worried on Blake's behalf and on behalf of the school as a whole. But now he had arrived at his decision he felt curiously relieved and cheery; he felt a warm glow at the thought of the fine, unselfish act he was about to perform.

Not that Arthur Augustus actually thought about it as fine and unselfish—far from it. To him it was simply an act of necessary duty. Study No. 6 had to retrieve its honour; that was the way Arthur Augustus looked upon his proposed action.

He fully realised what he was doing, however; at least, he realised that the punishment would be severe indeed. He did not believe it would be the sack, but he knew it must be a public flogging.

The thought of the latter made the aristocratic Arthur Augustus shudder. But it did not shake his resolution for all that.

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Arthur Augustus pressed his eyeglass more firmly into his eye and coughed.

"Ahem!"

Arthur Augustus had carefully rehearsed what he had intended to say beforehand. He had realised that he would need to tread very warily if he was to persuade the Head that he was the culprit, without telling lies and without raising suspicion.

But now he found himself before the august Head of St. Jim's, D'Arcy's carefully rehearsed speech took unto itself wings. He forgot it all.

"Well, D'Arcy," said Dr. Holmes sharply, "what is it you wish to see me about? If it is nothing of great importance you should go to your Form master, D'Arcy."

"Ahem!" coughed D'Arcy. "You—you see, sir—"

This was scarcely lucid, and the Head's frown deepened. "I do not see, D'Arcy!" he rapped. "If you do not explain the reason—Ah!" The Head's voice took on a sharper note. "Can it be, D'Arcy, that you have come to see me with regard to the outrage perpetrated upon me yesterday?"

"Oh, yaas, sir!" gasped Arthur Augustus, blinking from Mr. Railton to the Head. "That's it, sir! I—I—I've come, sir—"

"Dear me!" ejaculated the Head, somewhat taken aback. "You have come, you say. But am I to understand that you— Bless my soul! Is it—can it possible that you are the culprit—the rascally person who played that exceedingly dangerous and wicked trick upon me, your headmaster?"

Arthur Augustus pulled himself together with an effort. He realised that now was his chance.

"I deeply wegwet, sir," he exclaimed calmly and quite truthfully, "that you unfortunately weceived what was intended for Taggles, the portah. It was a wegwetable accident, and you will wealise, I twust, sir, that it was meant for a pwactical joke—"

"D'Arcy!" gasped the Head.

"You will also, I twust, sir, wemembah that fact when decidin' upon the punishment, Dr. Holmes," went on Arthur Augustus earnestly. "At the same time, I am quite weady to take any punishment you may think fit to administah."

It was quite an ingenious way of putting things, and the Head glared at the noble martyr with a brow growing more and more thunderous.

"Then—then you were the guilty party, D'Arcy?" he thundered. "Bless my soul! I am amazed beyond measure to learn that you, D'Arcy, a boy in whom I have hitherto had the greatest trust, should be guilty of such thoughtless and wicked work!"

"I am vewy sowwy, sir," said Arthur Augustus humbly, though from the gleam in his eyes he looked far from being sorry; "but I can only twust that you will wealise that the watah was not intended for you. All the fellows at St. Jim's—includin' myself, sir—wespsect you too much to dycam of twentin' you with such gwoss diswespsect, bai Jove!"

If Arthur Augustus expected his soft words to turn away the Head's wrath he was sadly mistaken.

The Head half-rose from his chair, and fairly glowered at the junior.

"D'Arcy," he gasped. "How dare you add insult to injury in this— Oh, come in!"

A sharp rapping at the door had interrupted the Head's remarks, and in response to his testy invitation, a junior entered the study.

It was Levison of the Fourth, and both the Head and Mr. Railton eyed him curiously.

"Well, Levison," said the Head. "What is it? I am busy at present—"

"It's rather important, sir!" said Levison calmly. "It—it's about this outrage upon you yesterday."

"Oh, indeed!" said Dr. Holmes grimly. "Pray proceed, Levison."

Levison proceeded, though he felt not a little puzzled by the Head's manner. He was also not a little puzzled and uneasy regarding the presence of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in the study.

"I—I've come to give myself up, sir," he said, colouring a little.

"Bai Jove!"

"G-good gracious!"

"Bless my soul!"

The Head, Mr. Railton, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gave vent to expressions of unqualified amazement. They stared transfixed at Ernest Levison. The junior became more uneasy still.

"You—you have come to give yourself up?" ejaculated the Head. "Have you taken leave of your senses, Levison?"

"Eh? Oh no, sir!" stammered Levison. "I—I've also come to say how deeply I regret that—that you got it instead of Taggles, sir. It—it was meant for old—I mean,

Taggles, of course, sir. Just a lark! No St. Jim's fellow would dream of playing a trick like that on you, sir. But—but—

"Levison!"

Ernest Levison jumped as Dr. Holmes rapped out his name. He blinked at the Head more uneasily than ever now.

"Y-e-es, sir!"

"Levison," thundered Dr. Holmes. "Do you mean to say that you have come here to admit guilt for that dastardly outrage upon me yesterday?"

"I—I've come to—to give myself up, sir," stammered Levison, flushing as he felt Mr. Railton's eyes fixed upon him. "And—and to express regret. I'm ready to take the punishment, sir. I hope—"

"Weally, Levison—"

"Silence!" cried Dr. Holmes angrily. "Levison, how dare you come here on such an errand—how dare you, sir? Are you aware that D'Arcy has just confessed to having committed the crime which you are now admitting to have carried out?"

"Oh, my hat!"

Levison groaned.

"Either you are making a false claim, Levison," snapped Dr. Holmes, his eyes gleaming at the thought, "or you are both guilty—the act was carried through by the two of you. I demand to know at once which is correct?"

"Weally, Levison, deah boy—"

"Silence, D'Arcy!"

Once again the Head silenced Arthur Augustus. But before the Head could proceed again, Mr. Railton, who had been eyeing the two juniors searchingly, now "buted in," as Levison afterwards expressed it.

"May I attend to this matter, sir?" he exclaimed grimly. "I believe I can very easily settle it."

"Very good, Mr. Railton!"

The Head sank back into his chair.

"Now, D'Arcy," began the Housemaster grimly. "Did you throw that water over Dr. Holmes yesterday? I demand a straightforward answer."

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"I am waiting, D'Arcy?" snapped the Housemaster.

"Ahem!"

"If you do not answer the question I shall conclude that you did not, D'Arcy!" snapped Mr. Railton.

"Ahem!"

Arthur Augustus, covered with blushes and confusion, and dismay, coughed, but that was all. A straightforward answer that consisted of a direct lie did not come easy to the Honourable Arthur Augustus D'Arcy—in fact, it did not come at all.

The Housemaster waited another moment, and then he nodded grimly as if quite satisfied. He turned abruptly to Ernest Levison, who was staring rather curiously at D'Arcy.

"Levison," he said quietly, "I will ask you the same question. Did you throw that water over Dr. Holmes yesterday?"

"I—I've come to give myself up, sir!" stammered Levison, repeating himself like a parrot.

"That is not answering my question, Levison. I demand a straightforward answer."

"Ahem! You—you see, sir—"

"Well?"

"Ahem!"

That was all Levison of the Fourth could get out. Mr. Railton turned to the Head, his face very grim, though his mouth twitched curiously.

"Dr. Holmes," he exclaimed, "it is perfectly obvious to me that neither of these boys committed the outrage at all!"

"But—bless my soul— Really, Mr. Railton—" gasped the bewildered Head.

"It is perfectly plain, sir, that these boys have come here from a quixotic and absurd desire to sacrifice themselves," said Mr. Railton. "Whether it is a plot, or whether it is an individual act, I do not know. D'Arcy!"

"Oh deah!"

"Is it not the fact that you have come before Dr. Holmes for the purpose of taking the blame of this matter on your own shoulders?"

"Ahem!"

"Answer Mr. Railton, D'Arcy!" thundered Dr. Holmes.

"Bless my soul! This—this is too much! D'Arcy, if you do not at once confess to the truth, I shall deal very severely indeed with you. Now, sir!"

"Oh deah! Oh, yaas, sir!"

"You were willing to take the blame in order that the restrictions regarding the holidays and bounds would be cancelled?" went on Mr. Railton.

"Oh—oh, yaas, sir!"

There was no help for it—both Levison and D'Arcy saw that.

"And in your case, Levison—was your motive the same?" Levison hung his head.

"Y-e-es, sir!" he stammered.

"This—this is amazing!" ejaculated Dr. Holmes, staring as if transfixed at the two would-be martyrs. "Boys, did you realise that the punishment for such an outrage would be very severe—that a flogging would be the mildest form of punishment for such a crime?"

"Oh, yaas, sir!"

"Certainly, sir!"

"You—you see, sir—"

"Weally, it was like this, sir—"

The Head raised his hand.

"That is enough," he said, in an ominous tone. "I understand the position fully now. You have dared to attempt an impudent and rascally deception upon your headmaster."

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"I am amazed—scandalised!" gasped Dr. Holmes. "At the same time I cannot help but realise that your motives were unselfish, and—in some measure—praiseworthy. I shall take that into account when punishing you."

"Thank you vevy much, sir!"

"You need not thank me, D'Arcy," said Dr. Holmes grimly. "Mr. Railton, will you kindly hand me the cane from the top of the bookshelf behind you?"

"Certainly, sir!"

Mr. Railton reached for the cane and handed it to the Head. The juniors watched proceedings in a far from happy state of mind.

"Weally, sir—"

"Hold out your hand, D'Arcy!"

"But, sir. I must point out—"

"Hold out your hand!" thundered the Head.

Arthur Augustus gasped and held out his hand.

Swish, swish!

"Now the other, boy!"

Swish, swish!

Even then the Head did not stop. Three on each hand was the punishment, and when the Head had finished the two martyrs were almost doubled up like pocket-knives.

"There!" exclaimed Dr. Holmes, his voice trembling with indignation. "I trust that will be a lasting lesson to you not to attempt again to carry out such a daring and impudent imposture. You may go!"

The two hapless juniors went. To their surprise they found the passage outside almost full of juniors—juniors who eyed them in scared dismay. Tom Merry & Co., and the fellows who had been in the Common-room, had evidently been released by someone. They stared at the two hapless, doubled-up forms.

"Get it hot?" asked Lowther sympathetically. "M-my hat! You, too, Gussy?"

"Gwooh!"

That was the reply of Arthur Augustus. He glowered at the staring crowd, and then he staggered away, dismal and dejected beyond words. Not only had his great plan failed, but he had received a record caning—all for nothing.

"What on earth happened, Levison?" demanded Tom Merry. "Did it fall through?"

"Ow-wow! Groooh!"

"Buck up, Ernest, old chap!" said Clive. "I suppose you weren't a big enough liar for that job?"

"Groooh! That's just it!" groaned Levison, straightening himself with a feeble grin. "Though it wasn't really that that bowled me out. It was that born idiot, Gussy; he'd only just owned up to the giddy crime a minute before I did."

"Wha-at?"

Levison grinned and nodded.

"I think the Head had swallowed his 'confession,' too," said Levison. "Then my butting-in seemed to muck the business up. Anyway, old Railton spotted the spoof, and bowled us both out. We got three on each hand apiece—scorchers, too! Groooh!"

"Well, my only hat!"

"Great pip!"

The juniors felt like laughing, but they forbore out of sympathy for Levison.

"So—so Gussy went and owned up, too!" gasped Gore in astonishment. "But—but didn't D'Arcy do it, then?"

"Of course not!" snapped Levison. "Railton asked him the direct question, but he couldn't answer it—couldn't tell a direct lie no more than I dashed well could. I'm thundering well certain now that D'Arcy didn't do it. It's my view the dummy's shielding someone else."

"Phew!"

"Well, my hat!" said Tom Merry. "Anyway, your wheeze has failed, then, Levison?"

"Yes; but don't rub it in, Tommy."

"I won't," laughed Tom. "In fact, though I didn't approve, and didn't think it could come off, I think you deserve praise for your giddy nerve and pluck, old chap. Not many chaps would have taken such a sporting chance as that."

"Hear, hear!"

"Good man, Levison!"

"Up with him!" said Tom Merry. "Show him what we think of a chap who'll sacrifice himself for his pals. Up, chaps!"

"Here, don't be asses——"

But Levison's protests were unavailing. He was lifted shoulder high, and as the bell for afternoon classes rang just then, they marched him along in triumph to the Fourth Form-room. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was in his place when they crowded into the Form-room; but they scarcely looked at him. He had shown, if anything, more pluck and self-sacrificing spirit even than Levison, but they scarcely realised as yet what Levison's words meant; and so Arthur Augustus remained under suspicion. But as it happened it was not to be for long. The vindication of Arthur Augustus was coming quickly.

CHAPTER 10.

Blake Explains!

"**B**LAKE, old man——"
George Herries spoke softly. There was only Blake, Herries, and Digby in Study No. 6—Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had not come in yet, though it was some minutes since afternoon class had ended. As a matter of fact, Arthur Augustus had been keeping out of the study as much as he could since the fight with Blake, and he was scarcely expected in the study until prep time. Family affairs in Study No. 6 were strained all round—which accounted for the soft tone in which Herries addressed Blake.

Blake, who had only just come in and was getting a book from the bookshelves, looked round, with a grunt.

"Well?" he demanded gruffly.

"Look here, Blake," said Herries bluntly, "this silly ass game's gone on long enough. You scrapped with our tame ass last night——"

"I did; what about it?"

"That's what we want to know," said Herries. "And as we're pals, I think we've got a thundering right to know what the trouble is between you and Gussy."

"You'd better ask D'Arcy that!" snapped Blake.

"We've asked him. He won't say a word. He's as pig-headed as a mule," said Herries pointedly, forgetting his intention to "go gently" in his wrath. "But we know now that it must be something to do with this affair of the Head."

"Oh!" said Blake. "You—you think that?"

"Yes, we do, Blake. I suppose you know that nearly every fellow in the House suspects Gussy of having played that trick on the Head?"

Jack Blake jumped.

"What-at?" he almost yelled.

"It's a fact," said Herries grimly. "I heard a whisper or two this morning, but I couldn't get Gussy to say a word. I've been trying to get a word with you since, too."

"I—I haven't heard a whisper," stammered Blake. "Great Scott! I went straight into the library after dinner, and I've scarcely spoken to a chap since. But how—why——"

"We've only just heard ourselves," said Digby. "I suppose as we're D'Arcy's pals the fellows don't care to mention it to us. Anyway, it's true enough. Gussy was spotted by Gunny, and I believe Tom Merry and his pals, rushing up to the dorm just after the water was chucked over the Head——"

"But, look here——"

"Wait a bit. They say the bottoms of his trousers were wet through, and his shoes, too. And he won't explain why or how he got wet."

"Well, I'm hanged!" gasped Blake, thunderstruck. "And—and is that why the burbling asses suspect him?"

"Yes—that's one reason. Another is that Baggy Trimble's touching him for cash—seems to have him fairly under his thumb. You've heard the fat toad saying he knows the fellow who did it—well, the chaps say Trimble knows it's D'Arcy, and is holding it over him. What do you think about that, Blake?"

Blake said nothing—he was flabbergasted.

"I'm blessed if I know what to make of it," went on Herries, staring curiously at Blake. "I'm thundering sure that you know something about it, though."

Blake nodded, his lips set hard.

"Yes, I do," he snapped. "Well, of all the born idiots! I—I suppose the ass was shielding me—or thought he was?"

"Eh? What d'you mean?"

"I mean this," said Blake grimly. "It was I who wet the idiot's trousers and his shoes. I wasn't going to breathe a word of it to anyone. I didn't see the fun of raising suspicions unnecessarily. It's different now, though. I'm not going to let that silly ass suffer for what was my fault."

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"But—but——"

"I'll explain," said Blake.

And he did. To his wondering and alarmed chums he explained what had taken place in the passage by the window, and how Arthur Augustus had marched away in great wrath and wet things.

"So you see now why we quarrelled and fought," said Blake, his brow dark. "D'Arcy wouldn't accept my word—he jumped to the conclusion that I'd played the trick. I'll admit it looked queer; but D'Arcy should have accepted my word."

There was a silence. Herries and Digby were eyeing their chum in undisguised dismay.

"Go on!" said Blake bitterly. "Say you suspect me, like D'Arcy did—and does!"

"We don't admit anything of the sort, Jack," said Herries warmly. "We can understand poor old Gussy doing so, though. He wouldn't dream you were pulling his leg all the time. But—but, I say, Blake, if this gets out it's going to put you in an awkward hole."

"Let it!" snapped Blake. "I'd rather be sacked than let D'Arcy be suspected—even for a time. Anyway, I didn't do it—I swear to you chaps here and now that I didn't do it."

"More likely to be a trick of Trimble's," said Digby uneasily. "Only—only he'd scarcely have the nerve, would he? Anyway, that's not all, Blake. I suppose you haven't heard about Levison and D'Arcy going to the Head?"

Blake shook his head wonderingly. And Digby proceeded to relate how Arthur Augustus, and then Levison had "confessed" to the crime.

"Well, I'm hanged!" breathed Blake, his voice husky. "Oh, the burbling jabberwork! But—but it was just like old Gussy to do that, the awful ass! Fancy going and asking for a public flogging like that!"

"It was to save you!" said Herries bluntly.

"Partly that and partly for the school's sake," said Digby quietly. "Anyway, after this, Blake, I think you and Gussy ought to make it up. If this business gets out, old man, I'm afraid you'll want all the chums you have."

Blake nodded, his face grim.

"I—I wish I hadn't struck him!" he muttered. "He—he's a good ass! But I'm afraid it's no good; he won't forget that blow in a hurry, and he won't believe me that I didn't do it," he added bitterly. "How am I going to prove I didn't do it?"

Herries and Digby were wondering that.

"Perhaps better leave things where they are," said Digby hesitatingly. "After all, Gussy's about cleared himself—scarcely any of the decent chaps believe he did it, anyway."

Blake gave a growl.

"What? You think I'm going to let this go on?" he snorted. "Not likely! Come on, you chaps, we're going to clear Gussy before the fellows whether it means trouble for me or not. Come on!"

And with that Jack Blake started from the room, his face set and hard. Herries and Digby followed him with uneasy faces and troubled minds. They realised, if Blake did not, what Arthur Augustus had already realised, that if Blake did clear Arthur Augustus he could only do so by putting himself "in the soup." Digby and Herries might believe Blake's denial that he had actually "done it." But they knew that after hearing of what had taken place in the passage, of the struggle between Blake and Arthur Augustus for possession of the fire-bucket, scarcely another fellow in the House was likely to believe it.

But Blake did not trouble to think the matter out. All he wanted at that moment was to clear Arthur Augustus—the fellow he had been fighting with the night before.

CHAPTER 11.

Baggy Lets It Out!

"**M**AKE it five bob, Gus?"

"Wats!"

"You can surely manage half-a-dollar, then, Gus?" urged Baggy Trimble.

"I have already told you, Twimble," said Arthur Augustus, fixing the fat junior with a gleaming eyeglass, "that I am stony broke! You are an utterly dishonourable young wascal, Twimble!"

And having given his opinion of Baggy Trimble, the swell of the Fourth marched into the Common-room. In one way Arthur Augustus entered that apartment to escape from the attentions of Baggy Trimble, and in another way he entered because there was scarcely anywhere else where he could go. He was carefully avoiding Study No. 6, and he felt that, under the circumstances, he could scarcely "shove himself" on other studies.

But if he expected to escape from the attentions of Baggy Trimble that way he was doomed to disappointment.



"Look here, Blake," snorted Grundy, "if you're not going to own up, you rotter, I'm going to take you along to Mr. Railton by the scruff of your neck! Come—Yaroooooh!" Crash! Blake's patience had given out. As Grundy's hand closed on his shoulder, Blake's fist shot out like lightning. It took the great George Alfred clean under his massive chin, and he was floored like a falling tree. (See page 21.)

As he marched into the room Baggy Trimble rolled in at his heels.

There was an unusually large crowd of fellows in the Common-room, and there was a chuckle as the two came in together.

"D'Arcy and his shadow," remarked Racke.

"A jolly substantial shadow," said Crooke, grinning. "He gets bigger as D'Arcy gets smaller."

Baggy Trimble ignored the remarks; he seemed oblivious of the curious looks. It did not seem to occur to his obtuse mind that his actions were perfectly understood by everyone.

"Look here, Gussy," he grunted peevishly, "I'm not going to run about like this after you any longer! Are you going to lend me that five bob, or not?"

Trimble spoke in a whisper, but it was a whisper that was heard all over the Common-room. Arthur Augustus went pink, and his eyes glittered.

"Twimble," he exclaimed, his voice trembling with wrath, "if you do not stop pestewin' me I will thrash you soundly! I have already told you that I have no monay. I uttably wefuse—"

"Look here, Gussy—"

"Be careful, Baggy!" cried Racke warningly. "Be careful you don't kill the goose, you know! Don't overdo it!"

"Oh, really, Racke, I don't know what you're talking about!" snorted Trimble. "D'Arcy and I— here, what—"

Baggy Trimble gave a yelp of surprise as he felt his arm gripped.

It was Tom Merry, and that junior's face was set determinedly.

"There's been enough of this!" snapped the leader of Study No. 10, eyeing the blushing swell of the Fourth steadily. "We can't let this young rascal go on with this rotten game, D'Arcy. What's he doing it for? Why is he screwing cash out of you, Gussy?"

Arthur Augustus jammed his eyeglass farther into his eye and gazed frigidly through it at Tom Merry.

"Weally, you know, Tom Mewwy," he said icily, "I fail to undahstand what business this is of yours, bai Jove!"

"It's the business of anyone to put a stop to rascality of this sort," said Tom, taking Baggy Trimble by the scruff of the neck. "Now, you fat clam," he went on grimly, "what's this game mean?"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"You silly owl!" snorted Tom Merry. "Can't you see that it's plain to everybody that this game's something to do with this affair of the Head? And I'm jolly well going to get to the bottom of it. The school's not going to be let down if I can help it!"

"Bai Jove! Weally—"

"Shut up a minute! I believe Trimble knows who did that rotten trick; and I believe you know, D'Arcy!"

"He ought to! Who better?" called Racke sneeringly.

"Levison told us," said Tom, ignoring Racke, "that you went to the Head and tried to get him to believe that you yourself did it, D'Arcy. He's told us, too, how you could not say you had done it when Railton tackled you. You couldn't tell a downright lie, Gussy. We know now that it wasn't you, despite the evidence. I believe you are shielding someone else."

"Looks like it, anyway," said Levison, nodding. "It can't be Trimble, though—"

"It's just the sort of rotten, idiotic thing the fat rotter would do!" said Tom, shaking the fat junior. "But—"

"Leggo!" howled Trimble, blinking about him in great alarm. "Of course it wasn't me! D'Arcy knows as well as I do it wasn't me. Ask him!"

"You fat idiot—"

"It wasn't!" yelled Trimble. "Ask D'Arcy! He knows who did it! Ask him! Of course it wasn't me!"

"You fat ass!" said Tom, his eyes gleaming. "We know it couldn't have been you—at least, it doesn't look like it. But you've admitted now that you do know—"

"I haven't!" gasped Baggy. "I—I know nothing about it. Honour bright!"

"I'm not so sure that it wasn't Baggy who did it!" chimed in Cardew, winking at the juniors. "I vote you take him before Railton and make him own up, Thomas."

"That's it!" grinned Lowther, grabbing the fat youth. "Good wheeze! Lend a hand, you chaps!"

Baggy Trimble howled with terror. As Cardew had expected, he quite lost his wits at that.

"Yaroooooh! Leggo!" he yelled. "It wasn't me! You can ask D'Arcy and Blake—"

"Blake?" echoed Tom Merry abruptly.

"Yes. Leggo!" gasped Trimble, quite forgetting Racke's warning not to "kill the goose that laid the golden eggs." "I know nothing at all about it. I wasn't even there when Blake did it."

"What?"

"I mean I wasn't there when Blake didn't do it," corrected Trimble hastily. "In fact, I know nothing at all about the matter. Don't I keep telling you that? If you think— Yaroooooh!"

Baggy yelled as Tom Merry shook him impatiently.

"You fat ass!" he snapped. "You've said quite enough! I've a jolly good mind to yank you before Railton. In fact—"

"Yow! It's all right, Merry!" gasped Baggy. "I'll tell you; no need to go to Railton! Oh dear! It was Blake who did it!"

"Blake?"

"Yes—ask D'Arcy! No good glowering at me like that, D'Arcy!" groaned Baggy, blinking up at D'Arcy. "Can't you see these beasts are making me speak?"

"Bai Jove!"

"You—you mean to say Blake did that trick?" gasped Tom Merry.

"Yes, he must have done. He said he was going to pay Taggles out for reporting him. D'Arcy tried to stop him chucking the water out, and that was how he got his shoes and things wet."

"Great Scott!"

There was a gasp of amazement. Arthur Augustus looked the picture of dismayed wrath.

"Is—is this true, D'Arcy?" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"I utterly refuse to answer that question, Tom Merry."

"That means yes, I fancy!" snapped Tom. "Well, I'm hanged! So—so that's it!"

The juniors were astonished. They felt they saw it all now, however. D'Arcy had been shielding someone, after all—he had been shielding his chum Blake. Tom Merry thought he understood everything now—the reason for D'Arcy's fight with Blake, and the chivalrous impulse that had made Arthur Augustus go to the Head and attempt to take the blame upon his own shoulders.

"Gussy, old man—" began Tom, a new note in his tone. "So that's why you wouldn't explain, you old ass! You were willing to be suspected, and you were willing to take the flogging rather than give Blake away. I'm blest if you don't beat old Levison—"

"Wubbish—uttah wubbish! I—I—"

Arthur Augustus stammered and stopped in great distress. He was at a loss for words. But at that moment the door opened and Blake entered, followed by his chums, Herries and Digby.

"Here he is," whispered Baggy Trimble. "I say, you chaps, don't tell him I told you."

There was a dead silence as Blake walked into the room. His face was set and determined, and he saw at once that something was "up." Unfortunately, he did not get the chance to speak first. He had come down with the intention of clearing Arthur Augustus at all costs, but he found that this had been done already.

"You're just the fellow we want to see, Blake," said Tom Merry quickly. "This fat idiot, Trimble, is making a serious charge against you."

"Is he?" said Blake coolly.

"Yes; he says that you were the chap who chucked that water over the Head—the fellow who's caused all this trouble."

"He's lying, as usual, then!"

"I—I suppose he is," said Tom. "But—but look here, Blake, you've heard, of course, about D'Arcy—that he's suspected by the fellows of having done it?"

"I've just heard about it," said Blake grimly. "That's why I'm here now."

"D'Arcy was spotted rushing up to the dorm with wet things just after it happened, Blake," said Tom. "That's the main reason why the fellows have suspected him. Now Trimble claims that he got wet trying to stop you from chucking the water out of that window."

"That's so!" said Blake. "At least he got wet struggling with me for the bucket."

"Then—then it's true?" gasped Tom.

"Quite true!" said Blake coolly.

The juniors were astounded, to say the least of it.

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CHAPTER 12.

Condemned by the Head!

THERE was a buzz of excitement in the Common-room. Scarcely a fellow there had actually taken Trimble's story for truth, and now they were dumbfounded at hearing Blake admit it.

Jack Blake seemed to be the calmest fellow there.

"Well, my hat!" breathed Tom Merry again. "I don't quite catch on to this. You actually mean to admit that you were the chap who chucked the water over the Head—who caused all this rumpus?"

"Not at all!" said Blake. "I didn't do it."

"You—you didn't?"

"Certainly not!"

"But—but—"

"Someone else did it—not me," said Blake quietly. "I admit I said I'd pay old Taggles out, and I admit I suggested tipping the water from the fire-bucket on to Taggles down below. But I was only pulling Gussy's leg—"

"Bai Jove!"

"I never meant to do it; and I didn't do it." Both D'Arcy and Trimble thought I was serious, I suppose; but I wasn't. I hadn't the faintest intention of doing such a silly ass trick. After D'Arcy had gone I just booted Trimble away, and followed him along the passage."

"Ahem!"

There was a cough from somewhere at the back of the room—a cough of sarcastic derision. Blake flushed as he heard it, and his eyes gleamed.

"Look here," he snapped, glaring angrily around him. "I told D'Arcy the truth; he didn't believe me, and we fought. I suppose you chaps won't believe me, either?"

"D'Arcy knows you better than we do," called Racke. "Is it likely?"

"Weally, Wacke, you wottah—" Arthur Augustus stared round him, greatly agitated. He was not enjoying the situation at all. "Weally, Wacke," he went on, "I have been vellectin' upon the mattah, and I am not at all sure that I was wight. I wufused to believe Blake because I did not think he was pullin' my leg, and because I had imagined that Twimble actually saw Blake do it. If Blake is wight in sayin' he kicked Twimble away—"

"Of course I did," snapped Blake, painfully conscious of the accusing faces around him. "Why, does that fat rotter say he saw me do it?" he almost shouted, taking a step towards the alarmed Baggy.

"Ow! I say, you fellows, keep him off!" gasped Baggy. "I—I didn't say I saw him, you know. But I left him there—he must have done it, you know."

"You fat fibber—"

"Here, hold on, Blake!"

Tom Merry stepped forward, and gripped Blake's arm.

"No good losing your temper, Blake," went on Tom grimly. "Pitching into Trimble won't help you. It's a thundering pity it didn't all come out before this. I don't wonder Gussy scrapped with you—"

"Weally, Tom Merry—"

"Shut up, Gussy!" snapped Tom. "If Blake says he's innocent, then perhaps he'll explain why we've heard nothing about this before. And," added Tom, in a tone of disgust, "perhaps he'll explain why he's allowed us to suspect poor old Gussy."

Blake flushed to the roots of his hair.

"I tell you," he hissed savagely, "that I didn't know D'Arcy was suspected—I swear I didn't. Since we fought I've kept out of his way, and nobody's mentioned anything about him to me."

"That's so," said Herries loyally. "We didn't know about it ourselves until this evening."

"That's right!" said Digby, glaring about him. "Blake knew no more than we did."

"Why did he mention nothing to anyone about the matter at all?" insisted Tom.

"Would you have done?" demanded Blake hoarsely.

"What was the good of raising suspicion? I thought that the least said about it the better. I could see that if it was known I'd said what I had and done what I had, things would look thundering black against me."

"Oh, you admit that?" sneered Gore. "You admit the evidence is black against you?"

"I know it looks rummy," said Blake doggedly. "But I'm telling you here and now that I did not do it. You fellows ought to know me, and if you can't take my word for it you can go to pot!"

"Rot!"

"Rubbish!"

"Bunkum!"

"Own up, you cad!" yelled Percy Mellish. "Why should the blessed school suffer for you? Yah!"

"Make the cad own up to the Head!" snapped Crooke. "It's plain enough."

There was a roar of acclamation. It was only too plain that the general opinion was that Blake had "done it." Even Tom Merry & Co., close chums as they had been, could not help feeling as Arthur Augustus had done, that Blake had gone "off the rails" for once. Tom Merry himself scarcely knew what to say or do. But others were not so squeamish.

Up till now Grundy of the Shell had remained silent, listening to affairs with a look of amazed wrath on his rugged features. But now he pushed his way to the front and pressed a huge fist underneath Blake's nose.

"You—you howling cad!" he hooted. "I'm ashamed—disgusted with you, Blake! Not only would you let your own pals down, but you think you're going to let the school down, too. But you're thundering well not, my pippin!"

"Look here, Grundy, you fool!"

"Oh, shut up!" snorted Grundy furiously. "Bah! You make me sick! Why couldn't you play the game and own up, you rotter? Well, you're going to now. I'm going to take you along to Railton by the scruff of the neck! You cad! Come—Yarcooh!"

Crash!

Blake's patience had given out. As Grundy's hand closed on his shoulder Blake's fist shot out like lightning. It took the great George Alfred clean under his massive chin, and he was felled like a falling tree.

"The next chap who lays a hand on me will get the same," said Blake, his voice trembling with passion. "I've told you I'm innocent, and you're a lot of cads to— Would you?"

Again Blake's fist went out, clumping home again on Grundy's chin as that junior sprang to his feet with a wild yell and rushed at him.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "Stop the idiots!"

He rushed forward in a frantic effort to stop the fight. But both Blake and Grundy had gone too far to be stopped easily.

A blow intended for Blake caught Tom on the temple, sending him spinning away. Levison, who had also jumped forward to interfere, took a nasty clump on the nose that brought the tears to his eyes.

There was no stopping either Grundy or Blake. Their respective "blood" was up, and they went for each other hammer and tongs.

But the Common-room was not the place for a fight of such a nature, and all there realised it. Tom Merry, D'Arcy, Levison, Talbot, and half a dozen other juniors made a combined rush together.

"Keep out, you asses!" yelled Grundy furiously. "Lemme deal with the cad!"

He struggled furiously, and for a few seconds a wild and whirling scrimmage resulted amidst a terrific uproar. And then the inevitable happened.

The door flew open suddenly, and Kildare appeared, followed instantly by an awe-inspiring figure in a rustling gown.

It was Mr. Railton, and the Housemaster gazed in consternation at the amazing scene. Then his voice boomed out:

"Boys! Good heavens! Stop this at once! Do you hear me?"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Railton!"

The tumult ceased as if by magic, and the juniors sorted themselves out with expressions of dismay.

"Merry!" snapped the Housemaster icily, "what does this disgraceful exhibition of hooliganism mean?"

The junior captain was silent. Mr. Railton's keen eyes roved round the faces of the juniors. He could not fail to see the obvious marks of combat on the faces of Grundy and Blake.

"Ah! You two have been fighting, I suppose?" he rapped out. "Why?"

There was a dead silence. Grundy scowled at Blake, but remained silent. Then suddenly a voice came from the end of the room.

"Own up, Blake, you cad!" it said.

Mr. Railton wheeled round.

"Stand out the boy who called that!" he snapped.

There was a moment's hesitation, and then Racke stepped out, his features hard.

"I did, sir," he said respectfully. "I don't want to sneak, but—but I think that Blake ought to be made to own up that it was him who drenched the Head with water. Everybody else thinks so, too. If he won't, Trimble or D'Arcy ought to explain—for the sake of the rest of the school."

Mr. Railton looked from Baggy Trimble to Arthur Augustus.

"I shall say nothin', sir," said D'Arcy firmly.

"Oh dear!"

Baggy Trimble groaned. He had very good reason not to wish to say anything, either. But as it happened there was no need for Trimble to speak.

"Trimble's no need to say anything, sir," said Blake disdainfully. "I'm not afraid of saying all there is to say myself. I was fighting with Grundy because he charged me with having played that trick on the Head."

"Oh, indeed!" said Mr. Railton, much taken aback. "Bless my soul! And—and why should he charge you, Blake?"

The Fourth-Former hesitated, his face a trifle white, and then his mouth set doggedly. He realised that it would have to become known now, that his best course was to be perfectly frank and straightforward.

"Because I—I played the goat, sir," he said, through his teeth. "Just before the affair happened D'Arcy and Trimble heard me say I'd pay Taggles out for reporting me. And also because I took a fire-bucket from the rack and pretended to empty it on to Taggles. D'Arcy thought I meant it, and tried to stop me."

Mr. Railton gazed at the junior as if thunderstruck.

"You—you admit all this, Blake?" he gasped.

"Yes, sir," said Blake, almost as if he found bitter satisfaction in making matters clear. "I was a fool. I was only larking, though, sir. I didn't intend to do it. And I didn't do it. Someone else must have come along just afterwards and done it."

Mr. Railton's brow grew very grim.

"Very good, Blake," he said, in a hard voice. "I am very glad for your own sake that you have now made this story known to me. Racke, you did quite right in bringing the matter to my notice."

The Housemaster gazed steadily into Blake's flushing face, and then he spoke abruptly.

"You will follow me to Dr. Holmes, Blake," he said curtly. "Trimble and D'Arcy will also accompany me. Come!"

Amid dead silence the master and the three juniors left the study. Three minutes later the Head of St. Jim's was listening in amazement to Mr. Railton as that master grimly related the facts known. And ten minutes later Arthur Augustus emerged from the Head's study alone.

There was quite a crowd of fellows waiting in the passage, and immediately Arthur Augustus was surrounded by excited and questioning juniors.

D'Arcy's face was pale and full of dismay and distress.

"Well?" breathed Herries anxiously. "How did Blake get on?"

"Wotten!" groaned the swell of the Fourth dismally. "Feahfully wotten! The Head's convinced he did it. He won't accept Blake's word, and he's condemned him."

"Oh, great Scott!" groaned Digby.

"He's to be publicly flogged at nine o'clock to-morrow morning," said Arthur Augustus. "Oh! dear! I feel it's all my fault, you fellows. I—I wish I'd accepted poor old Blake's word now. I realise I was quite wrong from the very beginnin'."

"Rubbish!"

"Blake did it, and he deserves all he's going to get!" snorted Grundy.

"Well, it certainly looks like that," muttered Tom Merry uneasily. "I—I wish I could think otherwise, Gussy. But you've nothing to reproach yourself with, you ass!"

"Rather not!" said Manners.

Arthur Augustus shook his head and groaned.

"If only I hadn't listened to that little beast Twimble!" he groaned. "But I undahstood that the little fat wottah had actually seen Blake do it; and that's why I weally wufused to accept Blake's word. Oh, bai Jove!"

At that moment a series of wild yells floated out from the Head's study.

"What on earth's that?" ejaculated Tom Merry. "It sounds like Trimble."

"It is Twimble," said Arthur Augustus grimly. "The Head bowled him out, bai Jove! He asked Twimble why he hadn't spoken before, and the fat wottah let out that he has been touching me for cash. You know what an ass he is. Anyway, the Head's thrashin' him for it now, I suppose. I am vewy, vewy glad."

"Hear, hear!"

There was no sympathy whatever for Baggy Trimble, and when he emerged from the Head's study the next moment he was greeted with general grins. He rolled away, doubled up with anguish, and a moment later the door opened again and Jack Blake appeared.

His face was white and his eyes were burning. Escorted by Mr. Railton, he walked along the passage, and vanished inside the punishment-room. A moment later Mr. Railton came back alone and vanished into the Head's study.

"You fellows," muttered Arthur Augustus firmly. "I am goin' along to speak to Blake. I am goin' to tell him that I no longer doubt his word, and that I wegwet evah havin' doubted it."

"You silly ass—"

But Arthur Augustus did not heed. A moment later he was rapping on the door of the punishment-room.

"Who's there?" called Blake huskily from inside.

"It is I—D'Arcy," called Arthur Augustus firmly. "Blake, deah boy, I have come to say how deeply I wegwet evah havin' doubted your word, deah boy. I am vewy, vewy sowwy that we quawwelled, and I am vewy sowwy that the Head has wufused to take your word."

"Oh!" gasped Blake.

"Had I known that that little wascal Twimble had not seen you do the twick, as I had imagined, it would nevah have come to this," said D'Arcy. "I should have accepted your word without question. I trust you will accept this apology, deah boy, and will let us wesunie our fwiendship."

There was a silence beyond the door. It did not last long. Blake's voice was low when he answered at last.

"All serene, Gussy," he called. "I'm jolly glad you've come along to tell me this. I'm sorry, too, that I was so dashed hasty. Anyway, it's all serene now, old man."

"If I can do anythin', deah boy—"

"I'm afraid you can't, old chap. Don't worry about me. I'm not afraid of the flogging, and the truth will come out some time. Now run away, Gussy. No good you getting collared here and getting into trouble."

"Vewy well, deah boy. Good-bye!"

With that Arthur Augustus walked away, feeling much better in his noble mind. And inside the punishment-room Blake also was feeling much better. In fact, he felt he scarcely cared about the coming flogging at all. The split in Study No. 6 was healed, and Blake and D'Arcy were chums once again.

CHAPTER 13.

In the Nick of Time!

WHEN Blake appeared on the dais in Big Hall at nine before the assembled school, he looked strangely calm and composed. Much as he was upset at the thought of the public ordeal before him, he could not help feeling secretly elated at the thought that he was to be a martyr to a good cause.

None the less, it was not pleasant to stand before the whole school condemned for such an act. He knew that almost the whole school believed him guilty. And he felt he could scarcely blame them. He realised how black the evidence was against him.

A hush fell upon the school as Taggles stumped on to the dais. And a moment later, Dr. Holmes rustled to his table and picked up the birch.

Every face went a trifle white. A public flogging was not a pleasant sight to witness, and there were few fellows who did not feel a certain amount of sympathy for Blake.

"Boys," began the Head in deep, serious tones, "you are assembled here to witness the punishment of a boy who has committed an outrageous and reckless assault upon your headmaster. At noon on Monday, as I was emerging from the School House doorway, this boy emptied a quantity of water from a fire-bucket on to me from a window above. It was a dangerous and thoughtless trick, and might have had more serious consequences than it did."

The Head paused, and his voice took on a deeper note.

"I am well aware," he went on grimly, "that the water was not intended to fall on me, and I am also aware that it was intended as an act of revenge upon Taggles, the school porter, who had had occasion to report Blake. Nevertheless, it was a mean and dastardly trick, and one which I cannot too severely condemn. The fact that this boy did not confess of his own accord in the first place makes the crime worse in my eyes, and the public flogging I propose to administer is the least punishment I can inflict under the circumstances. This should be a lasting lesson to him, and should prove a warning to others not to attempt such acts of reckless meanness. Have you anything to say, Blake, before your punishment is carried into effect?"

"Only that I am innocent, sir," said Blake quietly.

The Head pursed his lips.

"Taggles," he said grimly, "I am ready!"

A thrill ran through the ranks of the school as Taggles hoisted Blake on his back. Blake made no effort to resist. A moment later the Head lifted the birch aloft.

But it never fell. At that dramatic moment there was a commotion at the rear of the hall, and a moment later three figures appeared down the centre aisle.

As the school recognised them, a buzz of amazement swept the hall from end to end. Dr. Holmes remained as he was, a look of amazed anger on his face.

And no wonder! For the three persons were a strangely-assorted trio. First came little Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth; after him came Mrs. Mimms, the School House matron, and behind her was Toby Marsh, the School House pageboy. Mr. Lathom looked excited and pleased.

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Mrs. Mimms looked flushed and nervous. While Toby Marsh was openly blubbing.

"Great Scott!"

"Well, my hat!"

A ripple of excited whispering went through the rows of juniors.

"Silence!" thundered the Head. "Mr. Lathom—Mrs. Mimms—this extraordinary intrusion! Really, this is too much!"

The Head advanced to the edge of the dais, and fairly glared at the approaching procession.

"Mr. Lathom!" he ejaculated, as the three came up to him. "What does this mean, pray? Really—"

"Dr. Holmes," said Mr. Lathom in a somewhat agitated voice. "The matter is of too urgent a nature to be delayed if an act of injustice is to be prevented. It was not Blake of my Form who committed that outrage. It was this wretched boy, Marsh, the pageboy."

"Good gracious, Mr. Lathom!"

"The matron brought the boy to me a few moments ago," explained the Fourth Form master, "and I brought him here at once. He has confessed to having committed the outrage in a spirit of revenge upon Taggles, the porter, who, I understand, found it necessary to—ahem!—inflict corporal punishment on the lad."

"Bless my soul!" gasped the Head faintly. "Is this true, Mrs. Mimms?"

"Which it is, sir!" said Mrs. Mimms nervously. "The young hump came to me at noon, and he asks me what he's to do. He said as he'd done it, and that a boy named Blake was to be punished for it. He said he couldn't let it go on, and he wanted to own up. I advised him to come to you at once, sir. And I hope you'll deal gentle with the boy, considering as he's owned up himself."

The Head turned and regarded the shivering Toby.

"Marsh!" he gasped. "So—so it was you who committed that—that wretched act, boy?"

"Ow, ow! Yessir!" groaned the hapless Toby. "I never meant it for you, sir—I swear I didn't, sir! I won't never do it agen, sir! Ow! Oh dear! Mr. Taggles, he clouted me Monday morning, and I thought I'd pay him out."

"Bless my soul!"

"Ow! I seed the fire-bucket on the floor, sir, and I did it without thinking much what I was doin', sir!" groaned Toby. "I won't never do nothing like that agen, sir!"

"I—I trust, Marsh, that you will not!" gasped the Head faintly. "Really— However, you may take the boy away now, Mrs. Mimms. I—I will see him later."

"Very good, sir!"

The procession started back down the centre of the Hall, the hapless Toby leading the way this time, with little Mr. Lathom bringing up the rear. They vanished from sight, and a buzz of voices swept over the assembly.

"Silence!" called Dr. Holmes in quite a subdued voice. "This—this is amazing! Blake—"

"Yes, sir," said Blake, who was now on his feet again.

"I—I am exceedingly glad to discover, my boy, that you did not commit the crime after all," said the Head, with a cough. "It—it was most fortunate that the boy was brought in time to prevent an act of injustice. It is a great relief to me to know that it was no St. Jim's scholar who was guilty of the outrage. Your sentence, of course, is rescinded. You may go, Blake!"

"Thank you, sir," said Blake calmly.

And Blake went. He paused, grinning cheerfully, between the rows of astonished faces, to where the Fourth were standing, and there—as Lowther afterwards put it—he was "swallowed up in the bosom of his family!"

In his hour of triumph, Jack Blake proved to be modest and forgiving. He had already forgiven Arthur Augustus, and now he forgave Tom Merry, Lowther, Manners, and the rest of the doubters; he even forgave the hot-headed George Alfred Grundy. The clouds had rolled away, and Blake felt he could afford to be generous and forgiving.

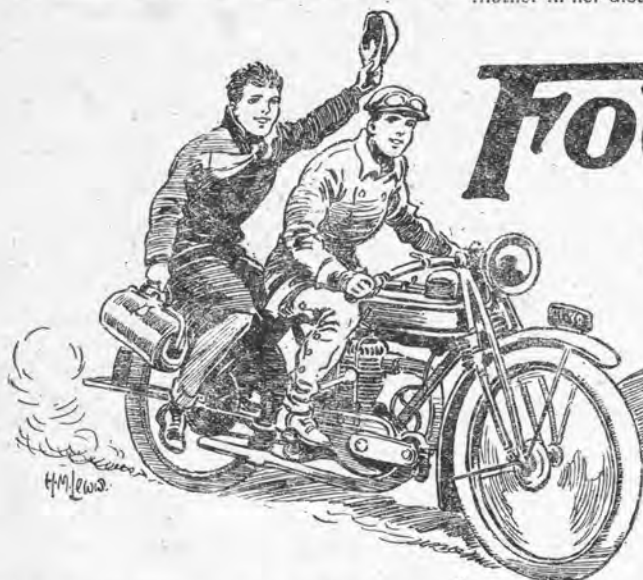
And, fortunately for the hapless Toby Marsh, the Head also proved to be forgiving. After all, the pageboy had shown no little courage in owning up to save Blake, and the Head did not overlook that fact. He gave the pageboy a severe "wiggling," and after the "wiggling" Toby resumed his usual position in the School House.

Fortunately, Tom Merry had not sent the wire to Greyfriars, and that afternoon the match duly came off—a stirring tussle, in which Blake covered himself with glory. After the match, on arrival at the School House, Arthur Augustus found a registered letter waiting for him from his noble pater, and the contents of this was duly "blued" on an extra-special feed to celebrate the passing of the clouds and the healing of the rift in Study No. 6.

THE END.

(There will be another splendid story of Tom Merry & Co. next week, chums, entitled: "THE SPY OF THE FOURTH FORM!" Don't miss the extra exciting story by the world's famous author, Martin Clifford.)

Hal Chester has fought the good fight, and no mistake. And the big reward he gets gives him the chance to stand by his mother in her distress!



FOOTBALL CHUMS!

By
ARTHUR S. HARDY.

(The Most Popular Football Writer
of the Day.)

A thrilling yarn, telling of the trials and tribulations of young Hal Chester, in his bid for fame on the footer field.

WHAT HAS HAPPENED.

HAROLD CHESTER, a well-knit youngster in his teens, and a member of the Kingsdown Football Club. His love for football earns for him the disapproval of

JAMES HENSON, his stepfather, a Nottingham grocer, in whose employ Hal Chester is. Like the rest of the employees at Henson's, Harold finds his stepfather a very hard taskmaster. First of all, his stepfather dislikes him; secondly, James Henson hates football; and, thirdly, he believes that he—Harold—is an idler.

An important match is down for decision on Saturday for which Hal had already been granted permission to assist his team. But when the great day comes Mr. Henson cancels his promise. Hal has pledged himself to play for his team. He was considered one of the best players in the club, and could not very well let his side down.

Suffering from a sense of injustice, Hal is determined to turn out for his team, come what may.

But luck is against the lad, for in the match he is badly fouled by a man named Stevens, one of the opposing backs. It is late when he returns home, weary and in great pain, and he finds the door locked against him. He meets an old school friend, however,

in Tommy Bell, who is well in with the management of the Nottingham Football Club, and who gets him a place in the team. Hal proves a great asset to his side, but, nevertheless, earns the enmity of some of the older players in the team.

Having realised his ambition, Hal pays a visit to his sick mother, and, on learning of his stepfather's slump in business, the lad offers to find the necessary cash to send his mother away. It is a rude awakening indeed for Mr. Henson to find Hal doing so well, and at football, too—the game he hated!

In a footer match some time later Hal finds amongst the opposing backs Stevens, his old enemy. The latter resorts to his usual foul tactics, but, unfortunately for him, the referee catches him in the act. Stevens is reported to the Football Association, and is suspended for life.

Thirsting for vengeance, Stevens waylays Hal, and is advancing upon him threateningly when Dicky Double, the Town's goalkeeper, and Tommy Bell appear upon the scene. Gripping the bully in his strong arms, Dick sends Stevens wallowing in the horse-pond.

The cowed and blubbering bully slinks out of the water, his heart black with the longing for revenge.

(Now read on.)

Shadows!

"I THINK, Harold, that you had better come along home and tidy yourself up," said Tommy Bell, when the three chums had managed to avoid the curious crowd.

"You can go along to your mother's afterwards."

Hal Chester smiled ruefully.

"Do I look such an awful sight, Tommy?" he asked.

"Well, no, but you have mud on your clothes, and your face is bruised. You must have been shaken a bit!"

"The trouble," answered Harold, cheerfully enough, "was he was too strong for me, and, besides, with his fouling, he didn't give me a chance, the great lumbering brute! He would have kicked me about the head, too, I do believe, if you and Dicky had not come along just then."

He looked down at his muddy clothes ruefully.

"Yes, I think I had better go home and change," he said.

The three chums went to Mrs. Sandy's together, and there Dicky Double wished his chums good-bye.

"Thanks for helping me, Dick!" smiled Hal. "That brute would have given me a bad licking if you hadn't arrived when you did. You saved poor Jim Burrows, too. I wonder what became of him?"

"I don't know. I saw him standing by and grinning when I threw Stevens into the horse-pond," answered Dicky. "But he seemed to vanish after that."

Hal explained how Jim had interfered on his behalf.

"He's a plucky chap, Burrows!" he cried. "Any amount of nerve, though there isn't much of him. I'm indebted to him over that!"

He smiled whimsically at Dicky Double.

"You'll have made a bitter enemy over this!" he cried.

"If Stevens has his knife into me merely because he was properly punished for badly fouling me, what about his attitude to you, Dicky?"

The fat goalkeeper shrugged his broad shoulders and grinned.

"I don't care tuppence about it!" he declared. "I can take care of myself. If he's wise he'll keep away from the Town boys. It was a bit rough, throwing him into the pond on a day like this, I'll own, but he deserved it, and I'm not sorry I did it, anyway!"

He swung away.

"See you boys to-night, perhaps!" he cried. "Or else to-morrow morning. We'll go along to the hospital and see how poor Marsh is getting on, shall we?"

"Right you are! So long, Dicky!"

Hal went into the house with Tommy Bell, changed his suit, and after bathing his face donned a clean collar and a fresh tie.

But his reflection in the mirror revealed a cut, a bruised face, and a badly blackened eye.

"Tommy," said Hal, "I look a pretty sight, don't I? I wonder what mother will think about it? She isn't quite reconciled to my playing football for a living yet. Mr. Henson has put all sorts of wrong ideas into her head, and although she loves me she believes I am treading the broad road that leads to ruin, I imagine. She will take these outward and visible signs of a riotous living as evidence in support of those beliefs. And if my stepfather should happen to see me—"

The mere thought made Hal smile.

"I'll get along round there now," he said. "I'll be back in time for grub, Tommy."

Hal was sore about the ribs, and there was a certain reaction after the hard game and the fight with Stevens that depressed his spirits.

Yet he departed cheerfully on his visit, arriving at the stores to find the shop busy with the Saturday's trade.

A ring at the side-door bell brought the maid to answer it.

Milly beamed at Hal, then looked at him wide-eyed. She

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wondered what master Harold had been up to. But she made no comment beyond telling him that his mother was a good deal better.

Hal hurried upstairs, and was immediately admitted to his mother's room. The nurse was there, he saw, and his mother was up, seated in front of a glowing coal fire.

The sight of Hal's bruised face, naturally enough, awakened curiosity and brought forth comment.

"The man who did it was the same person who fouled me the day my stepfather turned me away from the house in the rain, mother," Hal explained. "But he is out of football for good now. I couldn't avoid him. And he was too big for me to fight with anything like a winning chance."

"Hal," cried his mother in a shocked voice, "it seems as if your stepfather was right, and that football will be your ruin after all."

Hal laughed breezily.

"Not a bit of it!" he said. "And how are things going at the stores, mother? Any better news?"

Mrs. Henson sighed.

"I am afraid not," she said. "Your stepfather is still much worried. He has no ready money. He has some heavy bills to meet, and he cannot get in the money that is owing to him."

"That's because he has always given such extended credit, mother," said Hal. "He was very wrong to do it. I know, when I was here and took the books round to the customers every week, I was shocked at the big sums that people owed dad. I expect a lot of them will prove to be bad debts in the end, and what will happen then?"

Mrs. Henson flashed a glance of surprise at Harold. She had never heard him speak like this before. When at home he used to sit silently in a corner, reading a book or studying a subject, and scarcely ever entered into the conversation or ventured an opinion. Now his matter-of-fact, businesslike tone startled her.

Football apart, could it be possible that James Henson had been utterly and entirely wrong about Hal, and that her son did really possess an aptitude for business? she wondered.

"I do not know, Harold. Your stepfather is a trifle alarmed about it, I think. I know he has been trying to get some of the customers to settle during the week, but with poor results."

"You see, there are the big stores in the town, the big shops—they cut prices so, and are able to give better value in many commodities. Is my stepfather managing to keep his staff now, mother?"

"I am sorry to say he is not, Harold. Poor Mr. Jackson offended him on Wednesday with his forgetfulness, and was dismissed on the spot. Your stepfather is working very short-handed, and the strain is becoming too much for him. He was looking very ill to-day, I thought."

Hal's mother sighed.

"You must not worry yourself about the business, my dear," said the nurse, flashing a keen glance at her. "You must concentrate on getting well. The sooner we can get you away to the seaside the better."

Mrs. Henson smiled sadly.

"I am all right!" she cried. "I shall be well in a day or two. And I shall have to forgo the sea, I am afraid—"

"What! You are not going away for a rest, mother?" asked Harold, frowning.

"How can I go away and leave Milly in charge of the house? Who would look after your stepfather, Harold? Besides, he told me yesterday that he cannot afford the money. It is a critical time. He can only just manage to scrape together enough to pay the nurse. It was very silly of me to get ill like this!"

The invalid again sighed wearily.

Hal's heart bled. He knew very well why his mother had broken down. The long dreary years of ceaseless toil and anxiety in the house, the unrelieved monotony of existence without a single pleasure, the daily grind of housework, catering, and the like, without a single outdoor interest or recreation to afford relief, had piled up a heap of trouble. The dour outlook and grim severity of James Henson's mind and worries were not calculated to cheer up his mother's sinking spirits, either. And then had come Harold's expulsion from home, after a lengthy period of persecution. That and the obvious failure of the business had provided the last straw.

"Oh, but my stepfather must send you away, mother! He must get the money somehow! What does the doctor say, nurse?"

"The doctor says that rest and fresh, invigorating air are imperative," answered the nurse, with a grave smile. "And he is not saying that because it is the obvious thing. Your mother has told him that your stepfather's financial position does not justify the expense, but the doctor insists that if your mother does not go away the result may be very serious."

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Hal nodded gloomily, put an arm round his mother's neck, and forced a smile.

"You hear, dear?" he ventured. "You see, you must go! Mr. Henson will have to find the money somehow!"

"It is out of the question," said Hal's mother. "He cannot do it!"

"H'm! We shall see!"

Hal stayed talking for another half an hour, and then wished his mother good-bye.

"Cheer up! Don't worry!" he said. "Things will come all right in the long run, never fear!"

Mrs. Henson smiled bravely back at him.

"Hal, you are a dear!" she said.

Hal hurried down the stairs, his face set in thought, but he did not make for the street door. Instead, he hurried along the narrow passage to another door leading into the stores, opened it, and passed through.

Upon the occasion of his first visit home since he had been turned away he had avoided the shop, even though his stepfather had sent for him.

This time he sought it of his own free will. And as he came into the full glare of the bright lights that illuminated the big stores, James Henson, who was serving a customer, turned and recognised him.

At sight of Hal's bruised and injured face he gasped in astonishment. Then his brows met together ominously.

"Well, what do you want?" he rasped. "I'm busy! I think you had better come and see me at a more convenient time, Harold."

"No," answered Harold, closing the door and ignoring the glances the customer shot at him, "I want to see you now, and it is on a matter of vital importance!"

James Henson, summoning a shop-boy, gave him directions as to serving the customer. Then he begged to be excused, and turned again to glance at Hal.

"Very well, come to the private office!" he cried. "I cannot have you being seen with a face like that! Your appearance is an absolute disgrace!"

Humbled Pride!

AS James Henson closed the office door and motioned his stepson to a seat his expression was one of entire and emphatic disapproval.

"Ah, you have been brawling! That's your paid football, I suppose?" he sneered, a gleam of satisfaction brightening his eyes.

The boy looked back straight at him, wondering now that he had ever been afraid of James Henson. There had been a time when he had imagined his stepfather to be a clever, almost a brilliant, man. Now he knew otherwise. The narrowness of James Henson's life had narrowed his business outlook also. His intolerance of all thought and action, save those which he himself believed, had rendered him blind to the newer forms of business; his methods were old-fashioned.

Harold did not mind his stepfather disliking football and all forms of sport wherein money played a big part, the prejudice was natural enough, and there were heaps of other men who held those views; but he did object to James Henson believing that a boy must necessarily go to the devil because he was fond of football.

"Oh, I got into a bit of trouble, with a brute!" smiled Harold. "But I didn't come here to discuss myself, sir. It's about mother. Nurse says the doctor insists upon the necessity of her going to the seaside as soon as she is strong enough to make the journey."

"That," grated James Henson, his face clouding angrily, "is my business. She is my wife!"

"It is my business, also, if you will forgive me for saying so," Hal answered. "She is my mother!"

Harold's stepfather stood with eyes cast on his desk. His mind was busy as he drummed his finger-tips upon a worn and discoloured blotting-pad.

He had to admit the justice of his stepson's remarks, much as it annoyed him. Now he turned and looked again at Hal. Behind the bruises and marks upon the lad's good-looking face there beamed intelligence.

Certainly Harold had broadened out since he had left the stores.

Well, that was because he was getting in touch with the world, had been made to shift for himself. It was right that the boy should interest himself in his mother's welfare, of course. James Henson hesitatingly vouchsafed an explanation, speaking in measured and gloomy tones.

"Harold, I would like you to understand that business has been very bad with me of late. I owe a great deal of money. I find everything a struggle. I have many demands to meet, and much as I love your mother, I find it impossible to send her away." His face worked under the influence of a profound emotion. Hal had never seen James Henson

so deeply moved. "I believe what the doctor orders is—ar—necessary, yet I cannot afford the money, and that is the long and short of it. I have never found myself in such a position before in all my life." Here he made a gesture of despair. "Heaven knows, I am a hard-working and careful man. Yet I seem to be heading on to the rocks. I am not quite sure whether"—he frowned again—"I can pull through."

Harold's face lit up with eagerness. Although he held a certain respect for James Henson, he could not overcome his old dislike of him, the dislike which was mutual. Yet he realised that it would be better for them all if the family were to become united, or as united as possible.

His mother must go away at all costs. If he showed his stepfather that he was able to help, might it not be for her good?

Swiftly he thought, and in a voice that trembled with eagerness, he spoke:

"Sir, let me find the money to send mother away. I have some money put by in the bank. I can do it, if you will allow me to. I am earning regular wages, more money than I need, and I don't want it. I have no responsibilities, nobody but myself to keep, and—"

James Henson eyed his stepson in genuine surprise.

"Do you mean to tell me that you will find the money to send your mother away? You mean that?" His eyes gleamed distrust. "It would cost quite a lot of money—anything from £7 to £10 a week, and the fares. And it would be necessary for your mother to be away a fortnight at the least—perhaps even for a month!"

"I can manage that, sir. I know I can."

Harold thought of Tommy Bell and Dicky Double. The money he had in hand and the little that he would be able to borrow from these two chums, if it were necessary, would provide the wherewithal. He would soon be able to pay them back.

"And you have made that money out of football?" said James Henson, frowning.

"Yes."

Harold's stepfather strode up and down the room, his hands set behind his back, his head lowered. It was a bitter pill he had to swallow, his stepson volunteering to lend him the money he needed so badly to send Harold's mother away for the benefit of her health, and that money earned out of football, the game that Henson hated.

He recalled a heart-to-heart talk he had had with the doctor only a day or so ago. If Mrs. Henson did not go away the breakdown would recur to almost a certainty, and there might be the most serious consequences, the doctor said.

This had been worrying Mr. Henson more than anything—far more than the landslide that was fast carrying his business on to bankruptcy.

He knew that it would be an immense relief to him if Harold's mother could be sent away. With the help his stepson offered, he might also be able perhaps to send the nurse away with her for a week, at any rate.

Yet the humiliation of having to accept money from the boy, whom he had heartlessly and cruelly turned away from the house in circumstances that had reflected no credit upon himself was hard to bear.

He scarcely knew what to do.

Only a few days ago Harold had refused with scorn his offer of reinstatement at the stores. Now he offered help.

James Henson's pride would have forced him to refuse, to send the boy away; but, instead, he capitulated.

"If I do this, Harold, you must never let your mother know," he said in a low tone. "I will only consent on the condition that you let me pay the money back as soon as I can. That is understood. I will let you know when your mother is fit to travel."

Hal rose to his feet, his face beaming, his eyes dancing with happiness.

"Thank you, sir. I never thought you would agree," he said. "But it is for mother's sake. And I shall be only too glad to do it—only too glad!"

James Henson inclined his head slightly. The expression on his face was hard, his lips were set, his eyes glinted strangely. His hand trembled ever so slightly as he opened the door.

"Thank you, Harold!" he rasped.

"I have hitherto regarded you as a thoughtless and worthless boy, but I really am beginning to believe that there is some good in you after all."

Hal laughed gaily, and, in a whisper so that he should not be overheard in the shop, said:

"You can have the money at the shortest notice. And I can come and see my mother without hindrance now, I suppose?"

"Yes, your mother sets great store by your coming," answered the proprietor of the stores in his stiffest manner. "And the nurse says you do her good."

Hal hurried back to Mrs. Sandy's as if he were treading on air.

By George, there was a change in his stepfather since their last meeting, a very great change, such as he had scarcely dared expect.

He was glad. But the other and the blacker side of the picture was the outstanding and admitted fact that things were going ill with James Henson.

If the business failed, what, then, would become of his stepfather?

Mr. Henson had sunk a lot of money in the stores, that Harold knew, and it would seem that he had lost most of the capital, or had tied it up at any rate. Hal, as he pondered over the situation, could not restrain a shiver of dread, for he believed that there could be but one outcome of the situation—ruin.

And in such an event as that, Hal knew that his stepfather would take his beating badly; his pride, his sense of honesty and of justice would be deeply hurt; he might never be able to rise again.

And for the first time in Hal's life the boy felt sorry for Mr. Henson.

A Great Effort!

NO football match is a gift these days, even to a strong League club. Just look at the results Saturday after Saturday, and see how often the supposed certainty goes all wrong.

There was a time when a team could generally be expected



"Sir, let me find the money to send mother away," said Hal pleadingly. "I can do it, if only you will allow me to. I have no responsibilities, nobody but myself to keep." James Henson eyed his stepson in genuine surprise.

to win its home matches. One reads in the past history of clubs of how a famous team managed to keep an unbroken record at home for season after season, but those days seem to have gone for good. Take the great clubs, team for team, they are more level than they used to be. Good goal-keepers are common, good backs are plentiful as blackberries in autumn, and if there are not such a mighty heap of fine half-backs, the half-back line of a League club is generally good enough to deal with the forwards opposed to it, so that there is a striking level among the clubs of the Football League.

Perhaps it is the levelling-up process that enables so many teams to win away from home—a smart run, a lucky pass, a hot drive into the net, and a stout defence, and a game is won.

And, with added strength—it was the opinions of the officials of Nettingham Town that the team had been much strengthened by the coming of Hal Chester—the City team left Nettingham for Manchester and the game with the City, hopeful that they might be able to gain two points, or, at the worst, one as a result of the journey.

Hal, Tommy Bell, and Dicky Double, as well as many other members of the team, had paid a visit to the hospital where poor Gerald Marsh was lying, and found him progressing favourably, and in pretty good spirits.

"Chester," he declared, "I felt envious and jealous of you, boy. I'm sorry for it now. When I lie here by the hour, with nothing to do but keep still and mend, I have plenty of time to realise how small my prejudice was. After all, it's team work, isn't it? The good of the side is the one thing that really matters, and you can play football. I'll give you credit for that. I'm afraid, though—and Marsh here looked hard at Hal—"you won't get much support from Dawson. He's got his knife into you. So's Atkins; but neither of 'em can play football as well as you can, so don't worry."

He had wished Hal luck when the boy left him.

"Dawson will play for his own hand at Manchester, you bet your life!" he stated. "So you'd better make the best use you can of your outside man. Hal. Goal-getting won't depend on Dawson, though, I'll bet! If that match is won it will be won by you!"

It was a cheering opinion, anyway, and Hal laughed. He was on the best of terms with Teddy Small, the outside-left having been heard to declare that he had never had an inside-left who gave him the ball so nicely as Hal did.

So, warned about the surliness of Geoffrey Dawson, cheered at the thought that his mother was getting better every day, and, glad that he had established a better understanding with his stepfather, Hal travelled with the team to Manchester, light-hearted, cheerfully prepared to give of his best.

He noticed that Dawson ignored him. Twice he spoke to the centre-forward, but each time Dawson answered with a jeering remark.

Hal gave it up then. He saw no reason why he should put himself out about Geoffrey if the stuck-up fellow wanted to be standoffish. He had his own friends, Dicky Double and Tommy Bell, to make a fuss of him, and he knew that he was liked.

That Saturday there was a big gathering of spectators at Moss Side.

The City was not doing too well, but there was always the certainty of a good game at the fine ground. Besides, Nettingham Town, with its bulky young goalkeeper, its clever boy forward, Chester, of whom the critics were beginning to take notice, and the finest young centre-half in the game, Tommy Bell, were an attraction.

There was a stiffish wind blowing across the ground, and the sun was shining gloriously when the Town team turned out to a welcoming cheer that was as genuine as it was loud.

Dicky Double, looking bigger than ever, brought forth a howl of friendly laughter as he tore at top speed down the field to goal, then, turning in the goalmouth, caught the flying ball, as Tommy drove it hard at him.

His agility was amazing.

All eyes, also, were set on Hal Chester. The bright-eyed, fresh-coloured, and rather frail-looking boy won the hearts of the Manchester crowd in a moment. As he stood near the lanky, broad-shouldered, and lumbering Geoffrey Dawson, who, with sleeves rolled up and a swanky run, lobbed the ball at goal repeatedly, he seemed completely overshadowed.

A pause, and then out came the Manchester boys, looking wonderfully smart in their sky blue shirts and white knickers.

The City team was represented by some magnificent players, J. F. Mitchell keeping goal; Thompson and Fletcher operating at full-back; Sharp, Max Woosnam, and

Pringle forming the half-back line; Austin, Roberts, Browell, Johnson, and Hicks being the forwards.

Quickly the coin was tossed, Bell calling wrongly to the spin, and the City choosing the end that was better favoured by the wind. The teams lined up at once, and to the call of the whistle the game began.

Instantly the Town made progress with a confidence and sprightliness that spelt danger. The attacking movement, however, was spoilt when, after Seymour, the inside-right, had given Dawson the ball, Geoffrey, although the way was blocked by the stalwart Woosnam, tried to go through instead of passing it to Hal, who was backing up splendidly. There was a whole ocean's difference in class between Dawson, who fancied himself, and the City's famous amateur centre-half, who played football!

Dawson floundered against the better player, and Woosnam, taking the ball through, initiated an attack which culminated in the ball going out to Roberts, who, sending in a low, oblique shot, had the satisfaction of seeing Dicky Double almost tumble head-over-heels in an unavailing attempt to prevent it from going into the net.

"I never saw the ball until it was crossing the line!" growled Dicky as he picked himself up sheepishly, and, grabbing the ball, hurled it towards midfield. "It was a soft goal. The ball would never have beaten me if I could have got a sight of it!"

A goal down, and play little more than a minute old! It was not a very happy start.

Still Tommy Bell was smiling when the teams lined up again.

Tommy was ever a cheery optimist where football is concerned. He knew the value of his two backs, Low and Smart, once they settled down. The halves were strong, Seymour was enterprising, Hal a goal-getter, and both the wing men sound—the only weak spot being Geoffrey Dawson.

And Geoffrey fancied himself. As soon as the ball was set going again he tore down the field, challenged Woosnam, and thought he would have an easy job in getting through.

But, as before, he ran up against a rock, and the City might have scored a second goal had not Tommy raced back, and, even as Browell shaped to shoot, nipped in and took the ball from him with the ease of a master, to send it raking down the field.

That tackle was worth a lot. Gradually the Town settled down.

Low and Smart began to play at their ease. If they could not tackle and get the ball they let the wing men go, covered the way to goal, and left stalwart Dicky Double to deal with such centres or shots as came his way.

And Dicky was on the premises, you bet.

Several times when the ball was slung in front of goal, with a chance of the City forwards becoming dangerous, he came out of the goalmouth with a rush, carrying all before him. He seized the flying ball in those sure hands of his, and down the field it went, hurled by his swinging foot.

After ten minutes play the Town were all over their opponents, the flash Dawson being the one weak link in the forward line.

Hal began to send the ball to the wing, or to Seymour at inside-right, ignoring Dawson with a certainty that filled them with confidence.

Tommy Bell shadowed Browell wherever he went. His heading and kicking were masterly.

The pace was tremendous. Woosnam, doing two men's work, tried his best to turn the tide that was setting in steadily against the City. The three Town halves never played a finer game. Keen in tackling, quick in anticipation, sure in heading, giving away never a chance after they had got going, they pushed the ball through time and again.

Shots were rained at Mitchell from all quarters, many of them with plenty of power behind. The famous amateur was at his best, however, saving miraculously more than once.

Twenty-seven minutes had gone, and the Town had not yet found the net. Dawson began to walk about the centre, gesticulating, shouting that he was being starved. Suddenly Hal got away with the ball, found the way blocked, and swung the leather across to Kirton, the outside-right. Away he went at full speed. Never waiting to be tackled, he banged over a centre.

Hal followed the flight of the ball and rushed ahead, Woosnam after him.

The ball dropped near goal. Hal sprang at it, headed it down, and to his joy saw it roll past the prostrate Mitchell for the equaliser.

A great effort! A fine goal! And you bet the Moss Side crowd appreciated it.

(The game was not over, though, not by any means. Be sure you read next week's exciting instalment of this thrilling serial, chums.)

£20 & SIX FOOTBALLS WON BY READERS!

RESULT OF OUR GREAT "ERRORS" COMPETITION.

This competition consisted of six pictures in which the artist had purposely made a number of errors, and prizes were offered to the readers who could discover the largest number of "errors." The official total was one hundred and fifty-three.

The First Prize of £10 has been awarded to: **DENIS W. BATES, 118, PRINCES ROAD, LIVERPOOL**, whose list contained one hundred and thirty-five "errors."

The Second Prize of £5 has been divided between:—**LESLIE PASCOE, 7, Omega Street, Southsea, Hants.** and **PATRICK MURRAY, 6, Barrack Street, Waterford**, whose lists came next with 125 "errors" each.

The FIVE PRIZES of £1 each have been awarded to the following competitors, whose lists came next in order of merit:

A. Jones, Vine Cottage, Dudley Road, A. Ventnor.

Norman Willis, Whelford, Langdon Road, Cheltenham Spa.

H. L. Overmass, 2A, Union Street, Andover, Hants.

L. G. Field, Crescent House, Princes Road, Felixstowe.

W. Griffith Evans, Brynawel, Queen Street, Nantyglo, Mon.

The SIX FOOTBALLS have been awarded to the following:

Ivan Bromfield, Crescent House, Princes Road, Felixstowe.

Frederick C. Cook, 24, Greenfield Road, Harborne, Birmingham.

Henry V. Cook, Brentwood, Stoke Green, Coventry.

Harry N. Davies, 105, Longford Road, Chorlton-cum-Hardy, Manchester.

William S. Lyall, 35, West Street, Berwick-on-Tweed.

William Starr, 137, Bishop Street, Moss Side, Manchester.

THE COMPLETE LIST OF "ERRORS."

One mudguard missing.
One wheel standing still.
Wheels crooked.
Steering-wheel wrong side.
Number-plate missing.
No handles on doors.
Headlight supports missing.
Small lights missing.
Wind-screen missing.
Hood missing.
Sign-post pointing wrong way.
Charing Cross cannot be only 1 mile.
Car on wrong side of road.
Post cannot stand on stone.
GEM costs 2d.

Is not out on Fridays.
Fence-supports on wrong side.
Shadows going opposite ways.
Windmill should not be in valley.
Saddle not fixed to bicycle.
Bicycle pedals missing.
Bicycle bell missing.
Bicycle spokes missing.
Bicycle brakes missing.
Bicycle mudguard not long enough.
Telegraph-wires stop at post.
Bottom bar of bicycle missing.
Bicycle chain-case on wrong side.
Car has discs on back wheels only.
Motor-horn missing.

Boiler door hinges wrong way round.
One boiler door handle missing.
Hand-rail missing from front of boiler.
Flange on smoke-stack should be in front.
Driver's window missing.
Rail-clearers should bend outwards.
Passenger-train with a freight-train disc.
Sleepers and chairs missing.
Train on wrong line.

Flanges should be inside wheels.
Off-side wheels touching each other.
There is no M.R.
It is not a M.R. engine.
Number of engine missing.
Guard's van missing.
1st Class should not be next to engine.
No carriage ventilators.
Signal wrong way round.
Train passing signal at danger.
Lamp and glasses from signal missing.
Signal-wires missing.
No telegraph-wires shown.
Gradient cannot be 1 in 10.
Indicator should not be behind stoves.

Smoke and flags blowing in opposite directions.

Foremast should be farther forward.
Liner does not fly White Ensign.
Flag should not be nailed to staff.
White Ensign is backwards (on staff).
Liner does not carry big guns.
Foghorn in front of the funnels is missing.
Water (or Plimsoll) line is missing.
Port or starboard lights are missing.
Insufficient port-holes.

Ship cannot be anchored and also moving (shown by bow wave).

Anchor does not come over deck.
Boats amidship are in mid-air.
Aerial lead-in is missing.
Big boat is too near shore.
Trees are too big.
Ventilators missing.
Should be R.M.S., not H.M.S.

Also liners' names are not preceded by such initials.

Aquitania is a four-funnel ship.
Waves too big to stop suddenly near beach.
No stars visible in the daytime.
Cannot see stars through clouds.
Uneven number of lifeboats.
Bridge extends too far on one side.
The rigging to the first mast is wrong.

Helmet-straps should blow behind.
Brake and control wires missing from handlebars.

Rider should lean the other way when taking curve.

Spokes should not show.
Wall cannot be brick and wood.
Tree should not grow in wall.
Apples on tree quite unnatural.
Leaves missing from tree.
Lamp-post in wrong place.
Cyclist would have collided with lamp-post.

Motor-cycle minus horn.
Motor-cycle minus number-plate.
Gate has no supports and will not open.
Path should lead to gate.
Hayricks should show thatching-bands.
Smoke blowing two ways.
Could not be L.C.C. lamp.
Sloping crossbar of gate should not entwine.

Bush on left drawn incorrectly (should not show below fence).

One support of form is missing.
Cycle-lamp missing.
Lamp should not be alight.
Mileage wrong.
Mileage on wrong sides of Milestones.
Rose-tree should not grow in path.
Roses out of proportion to size of tree.
Cart tracks would not go into bush.
Wind-marks suggesting speed of cyclist should be behind.
One chimney ends nowhere.
Cycle mudguard missing.
Cyclist's helmet-strap undone.

Should be equal number of struts.
Wires on the wings are wrong.
Lower wing should not be longer than upper.

Pilot should be shown.
Pilot's windscreen missing.
Propeller would not be stationary.
Lines suggesting wind—opposite to pull of rudder.

Aeroplanes do not carry an anchor.
Anchor, if any, should be swinging backwards owing to aeroplane's speed.
Wheel-supports should be inside wheels—not outside.

Seaplane struts uneven in number.
Rudder causing incorrect bank.
Tail and rudder wire missing.
There should be a centre strut.
There is generally identification lettering on top of wing (plane).
Seaplane (small machine) unlikely to fly inland.

Poplar-trees on left are too big.
Tree should not be in the middle of the road.

Perspective of ploughfield in left-hand corner wrong.
Seaplanes rear float missing.

Should be a paddle, not an oar.
Wrong end of oar in water.
No rudder to canoe.
Rudder on wrong end of boat.
Boat could not draw N. feet of water.
Canoe should not have draught-markings (X., IX., VIII.).
Rowlocks uneven.

Canoe does not have rowlocks.
Logs in hut should be horizontal, not vertical.

Door should open inwards.
Chimney would not be over window.
Snow would not stay in chimney if fire alight.

Fire-trees have trunks.
If snow on roof of hut—would also be on the ground.

Snow would be on peak of mountain (not as shown).
Rocks in water would not have snow on them.

Palm-trees do not grow in N.W. (or Canada).
Water-butt should be close to hut.

No gutter joined to the spout.
Water-pipe is too long for the butt.
Would not steer for rock.
Trapper's leg-covering too long.



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A CROSS WORD PUZZLE FOR ALL "GEMITES."

In answer to numerous requests for Cross Word Puzzles, I am placing one before you this week. Many of you need no introduction to the pleasures of Cross Word Puzzles, but there are some who have not yet caught the craze. This is your opportunity.

The puzzle is worked on very simple lines, and there are no prizes offered for solutions. It is only for amusement during spare moments.

For the benefit of those who do not know how to start I will explain the idea of the puzzle. Each number in the squares refer to a definition, and these numbers appear in squares which start words. The black squares mark the end of a word. From the definitions, or clues, given you must find a word of as many letters as there are white squares allotted to that word. For example, the clue for the square No. 5 is "An institution of education." That is very easy to solve. The answer is "School." That word runs across, commencing from the square marked "5." Now, on that same square another word starts that must commence with the letter "S," and the clue to this word which runs down is, "The name of a boy who was simple." Now, who was the boy who was simple? Just think a moment, and you will guess it.

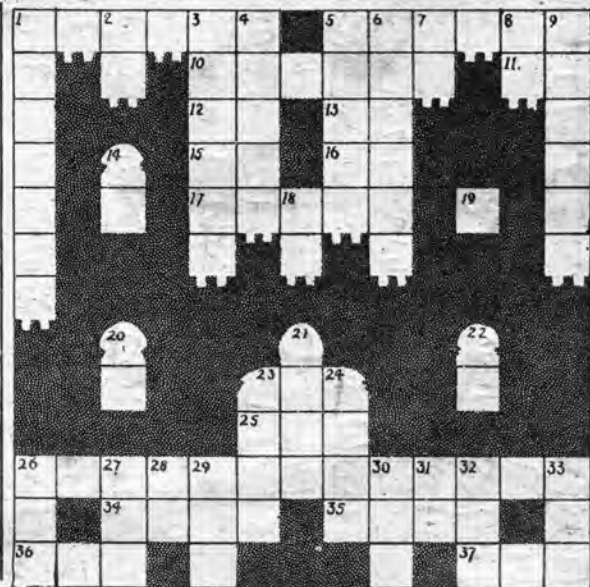
As you proceed you will find your words interlocking—words going across with the words going down. Now set to work!

CLUES. DOWN.

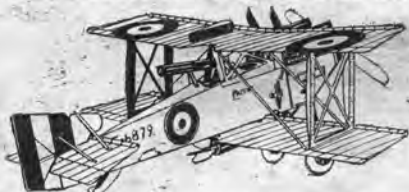
1. A pupil of St. Jim's.
2. Initials of Marie Rivers' father.
3. One who has control of a class.
4. To run.
5. Name of a boy who was simple.
6. Of a rough nature.
7. Harry Noble (initials).
8. Gold in original state.
9. Master of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's.
10. Bachelor of Arts.
11. Upon.
12. Initial letter of Mr. Railton's Christian name.
13. Contraction of doctor.
14. One of the upright sides of a door.
15. Initials of George Gore.
16. Tibetan priest.
17. A root vegetable.
18. A colour.
19. Covering of a pot.
20. Short for company.
21. Officers' Training Corps.
22. Past tense of "win."
23. Preposition—denoting connection with.
24. Often.
25. Sorrowful.

CLUES. ACROSS.

1. A well-known school in fiction.
5. An institution of education.
10. Motion.
11. A unit of the Army.
12. Conjunction—in such a manner.
13. Letters after Dr. Holmes' name.
15. Preposition.
16. Alternative.
17. Worn by all St. Jim's juniors.
23. Short for laboratory.
25. How Baggy Trimble would spell "aim."
26. A place near St. Jim's much frequented by picnickers.
34. A very small quantity.
35. Talbot's old nickname.
36. Father.
37. A boy's name.



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