

"THE JAPE OF THE TERM!"

This week's rollicking
story of Tom Merry
& Co. at St. Jim's.

EVERY WEDNESDAY

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"WHOSE BABY ARE YOU?"

A diverting incident in this
week's delightful school story.

ST. JIM'S v. GRAMMARIANS! Rags and japes are frequent enough between Tom Merry & Co. of St. Jim's and Gordon Gay and his merry men from the local Grammar School, but the latest stunt Gordon Gay puts across his old rivals is a real staggerer!



THE JAPE OF THE TERM!

A rollicking extra-long story of Tom Merry & Co., of St. Jim's and their rivals, Gordon Gay & Co., of the Grammar School.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1. Ideas Wanted!

"GENTLEMEN—"

"Hear, hear!"

"Gentlemen and fellows—"

"Go it!"

"On the ball!"

"Gentlemen and fellows!" went on Tom Merry desperately. "This—"

"I suppose that's his way of addressing School House and New House," remarked Blake. "We're the gentlemen and New House are the fellows!"

"What rot! Look here—" began Figgins wrathfully. "I—"

"You burbling lot of shrieking owls—" cried Tom Merry.

"My hat! He's calling us shrieking owls now!" murmured Glyn. "Only a sec ago he referred to us as gentlemen and fellows. I don't call his remarks consistent."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Will you dry up, you footling idiots," bawled Tom Merry, glaring round him in extreme exasperation, "and let a fellow get on with the washing?"

"Yaas, wathah! Pway give ordah, you fellows!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of St. Jim's. "Pway allow our chairman to wag his chin without intahwuption, you know. As a Shell-fish, I considah his remarks will be only wot; but as he has been elected to fill the chair—"

"He elected his giddy self!" snorted Fatty Wynn. "My idea is that a New House chap ought to fill—"

"A strait-waistcoat!" finished Monty Lowther. "You silly New House worms are only here on sufferance, and—"

"Why, you cheeky owl—"

Thump, thump, thump!

Tom Merry was thumping on the table in front of him with a cricket-stump, his face red with wrath and exasperation.

"Will you dry up, you burbling asses," he shrieked, "and give a fellow a chance to speak?"

"You've been speaking for the last ten minutes and said nothing sensible yet!" remarked Figgins. "Get down and—"

"Order, order!"

"Order for the chair! Chuck that New House fathead out!"

"Let Tom Merry speak! Yah!"

There was a roar of voices in the Rag at St. Jim's—most of them roaring for order and thus making disorder more confusing. Tom Merry ceased trying to speak and

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glared at his audience in speechless wrath. As Figgins had truly stated, he had been speaking for ten minutes, but had not got beyond his opening words: "Gentlemen and fellows."

It had not been Tom's fault, however—far from it. Continual interruptions had prevented him from getting any farther than that. It was chiefly owing to the fact that the meeting was a combined meeting of the New House fellows and School House fellows—Tom knew that. There always was uproar and trouble when the juniors of the rival Houses met together—either for peaceful purposes or otherwise!

Yet the object for which the meeting had been convened was serious enough—all present agreed upon that. The trouble was that certain "wags" in the audience could not refrain from making the most of such a public opportunity of exhibiting their waggishness!

But it was most exasperating to the chairman. Indeed, Tom Merry looked in grave danger of bursting a blood-vessel in his frantic efforts to make himself heard and to restore order.

Thump, thump, thump, thump!

Once again the stump thumped on the table—this time with such vigorous effect that the audience seemed quite impressed, and they subsided somewhat.

"You blithering lot of old women!" shouted Tom, his voice heard at last. "How the thump d'you think we shall get anything done at this rate? Consider the object—"

"We've been considering it!" said Figgins, looking straight at Tom Merry's face. "It does resemble a face, somewhat, but as an object—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Order! Order!"

"Dry up, Figgins!"

"Considering the object of this meeting," went on Tom, with a ferocious glare at George Figgins. "I should think you would have the thumping sense to be serious for once. For goodness' sake drop rotting and listen to me!"

"Why should we listen to you?" asked Figgins independently. "This meeting was called for discussion—"

"But didn't I call it?" shrieked Tom. "I've called it—"

"You've certainly called it a lot, old chap!" said Figgins soothingly. "You've called it gentlemen, and blithering old women, and footling idiots, and quite a lot of things. But that doesn't help the cause, does it?"

"You—you— Oh, you ass, Figgy!"

"There you go again, old chap! I put it to the meeting," said George Figgins, raising his voice. "Have we come here to hear ourselves called names by Tom Merry? Of course not! We want somebody in the chair with a bit of

common sense, and a few brains. I suggest you fellows kick the present chairman out and elect me to—"

"Rot—utter rot!" bawled Grundy, of the Shell, jumping up excitedly. "We'll kick Tom Merry out of the chair—he's no good at all! But it's got to be a School House fellow and a Shell fellow. Now I'm the man for this job!"

"Cheese it, Grundy!"

"Dry up, and don't be funny!"

"I won't dry up!" bawled Grundy, glaring about him. "I tell you I'm the man for this job," he added, starting to push his way towards the table. "Out of that, Tom Merry!"

"You cheeky ass—"

"Chuck him out!" yelled Manners.

"Eh? Chap who tries it on will get a prize thick ear!" snorted George Alfred. "Out of the way, there! Here, what the— Yooop! Oh, my hat!"

Evidently the fellows in front objected to being pushed about by Grundy. They grabbed him wrathfully, and Grundy sat down hard with a howl.

"Chuck him out!" gasped Tom Merry. "Chuck the awful idiot out on his dashed neck!"

"Hear, hear!"

The fellows—especially whom George Alfred had pushed so high-handedly—grabbed him again, only too willing to obey. There were a few moments of furious struggling in the Rag, and then George Alfred went flying out of the room, his voice raised on high in wrathful protest and dire threats.

"And now, for goodness' sake, let's get down to business!" snorted Tom Merry, as the door closed behind Grundy. "This is a job for the School House and New House to tackle together. If Figgy wants to speak he can start jawing when I've finished. Give a fellow a chance, Figgy!"

"Oh, all right!" grinned Figgins cheerfully. "Sooner you've finished wagging your chin the sooner we'll be able to get down to real business. Go ahead, old fruit!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry grinned faintly and got ahead.

"Well, you fellows," he began, evidently deciding to adopt a more conversational manner of oratory. "You know why I have called this meeting. It's to devise ways and means of altering the present rotten state of affairs at St. Jim's."

"Hear, hear!"

"That's the giddy word—rotten!"

"Since our new Head came—Dr. Crankley, to wit," resumed Tom Merry grimly—"we have had a great deal to put up with at St. Jim's—a jolly sight too much, in fact! Our grub has been cut down in quantity and quality, especially in quality. Instead of decent grub, we're given rotten stuff—stuff that's supposed to be hygienic and nourishing, but which is rapidly reducing us to dyspeptic wrecks, and bringing down our grey hairs in sorrow to the grave!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Bravo!"

A roar of applause greeted Tom's oratory.

"But that's not all," went on Tom, raising his hand for silence. "Study teas have been abolished and the school tuckshop closed, and the village tuckshop and all other tuckshops put out of bounds for us. We're simply hedged and encompassed by silly footling bans and restrictions, and if this goes on much longer life will not be worth living, and existence will be a—a—a mere fraud and a sham!"

"Shame!"

"And now," continued Tom, indignantly and impressively, "the very limit has been reached. To-day, just because of a Grammarian rag on some of our fellows, the Grammar School has been placed out of bounds, and no fellow is allowed to speak to a Grammar School chap. Footling rot, I call it!"

"Good for you, Tommy!"

"Yaas, wathah! Utah wot, bai Jove!"

"That alone is bad enough, especially as it's the Grammar School match to-morrow afternoon!" said Tom, his voice rising in his indignation. "But even that is not the worst. This afternoon, as you all know, Rushden of the Sixth had an accident on Big Side—an accident that might have happened to any cricket player. But, because of that, the Head has actually banned cricket at St. Jim's—actually stopped it! Fancy St. Jim's without cricket! It—it beggars description! What," asked Tom Merry witheringly, "is a school for if it doesn't play cricket?"

Nobody seemed to know the answer to that question, although there were plenty of chuckles and grins.

"It's a scandalous state of affairs, and it can't be allowed to continue," said Tom Merry, banging his fist on the table. "It's got to stop, chaps!"

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" asked Aubrey Racke, with a sneer. "It's been going on long

enough, and you've done nothing yet, except win a prize of a clockwork motor-car for being a good little boy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you'd do something instead of gassing so much," went on Racke coolly, "you'd be doing a bit more justice to the job of junior skipper, Merry."

Tom Merry flushed hotly. It was true enough that he had won a toy motor-car for being "good." Mrs. Crankley, the headmaster's wife, was a dear old soul, who took a deep and kindly interest in the boys of St. Jim's. She had offered weekly prizes for the boy in each Form who did the best each week. And Tom had won the Shell prize the first week. It was a toy clockwork motor-car, unfortunately for Tom and greatly to the joy and hilarity of St. Jim's. It was not likely Tom could forget it, or would be allowed to forget it. Luckily, Tom was not the only sufferer. Blake had won the Fourth Form prize—a box of tin trains, while Kildare, the captain of the school, had won the Sixth—a box of lead soldiers. The Fifth Form prize had been a pair of woollen mitts.

It was also true enough that Tom himself had done little to alter things. On one occasion he certainly had taken part in a daring plot—a plot to get the present faddist diet ended. But it had failed. Kerr had impersonated the school doctor, and had visited the school and condemned the faddist diet roundly. But he had been "spotted," and all the plotters had got out of it was a terrific imposition, the loss of a half-holiday, and a day and night in sanny on what was practically a bread-and-water diet.

Beyond this, however, Tom had done little, and for a very good reason. Had Mr. Crankley and his wife been tyrants in the real meaning of the term, he would very quickly have done something. But there the real difficulty lay. The faddist rulers of St. Jim's were kindly in the extreme, and though their reforms were unpopular, the fellows themselves couldn't help admitting that they meant well, and that they had the best interests of St. Jim's at heart.

"You know jolly well why I've done nothing much, and why nobody else has, Racke!" snapped Tom, in reply. "Both the new Head and his wife are jolly decent sorts, even if they are cranky, and I for one don't intend to do anything to make big trouble for them. I suppose you think we ought to have a barring-out and raise the dickens?"

"That's just what I do think, and plenty of other fellows, too!" sneered Racke savagely. "We've our rights, I suppose, to stick up for?"

"Yes, we have, Racke; but we're going to be decent about it," said Tom steadily. "I'm as keen as anyone to get these silly restrictions removed and to have our privileges restored; but it's got to be done in a decent manner, and that's why I've called this meeting now. We've got to think of a way to prove to the new Head that his ideas, whether scientifically right in theory or not, are jolly well wrong in practice—at least, they don't suit us at St. Jim's. And we've got to prove to him, too, that cricket is a fine, healthy, and sporting game. If any fellow here has any ideas or suggestions to make, then let him get on his hind hoofs and make 'em."

"What about you yourself?" called Crooke.

"I'm doing my best," said Tom. "But two heads are better than one, and thirty heads better than two, I suppose. I've put the problem before this meeting, and I'm hopeful that we'll be able to solve the problem by discussing it together."

"I'll make one suggestion, then," said Racke coolly. "Why not sign a round robin, and send it to the Head? Tell him we're not going to be treated like a dashed reformatory any longer, and that if he doesn't change his dashed tune we'll strike!"

"Don't talk rot!" said Tom Merry warmly. "The Head isn't the sort of man to take any notice of a blessed junior's views, Racke. It would be a sheer waste of time."

"And he asked for suggestions," remarked Racke, looking round him. "If that's the way he's going to treat suggestions I'm clearing out!"

"Do!" said Lowther cheerily. "Good-bye! Don't come back!"

"Go and eat coke!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Aubrey Racke marched out, and Crooke, Mellish, Scrope, and one or two more of like kidney followed him.

"The idea of a round robin was rot, just as our worthy chairman remarked!" exclaimed Figgins. "It's what one must expect from the School House, though—either no ideas at all or duds."

"Have you got any ideas, then?" inquired Tom Merry, with heavy sarcasm. "You've plenty of gas, Figgy, anyway."

"Yes, I have an idea," admitted Figgins. "It's a rattling good one, too. Listen to me! What about a hunger-strike?"

"A whatter?"

"A hunger-strike!" said Figgins, with enthusiasm. "That should do the trick. All of us refuse to eat any grub at all, you know."

"Fathead!"

"If you call me a fathead, Lowther—" began Figgy warmly.

"Well, it is rather a fatheaded idea, Figgy," grinned Tom Merry. "It might work with some people, but it wouldn't with this Head. He'd just say a fast would do us all a world of good, and tell us to go ahead with the giddy hunger-strike."

"Ha, ha! That's it!" said Blake. "Rotten wheeze!"

"Rotten, is it?" hooted Figgins, glaring. "You School House idiots are bound to say that!"

"Not at all. You see—"

"I jolly well don't see!" snorted Figgins. "It's a rattling good idea. The New House chaps think so, I bet."

"Hear, hear!"

"Good wheeze," said Kerr loyally.

"Let's hear what Fatty Wynn thinks about it?" chuckled Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

What Wynn thought of his leader's great idea was clear from the look of utter dismay and horror on his podgy features.

"You cackling lot of School House worms!" roared Figgins. "It's a jolly good idea, and I'll punch the head of any silly School House worm who says it isn't!"

"Is that a threat?" asked Lowther meekly.

"It jolly well is!" snorted Figgins, glaring about him.

"Then we'd better not say it isn't," said Lowther.

"We'll not say it isn't a jolly good idea, but we'll just say it's a jolly bad one—a silly, fatheaded, drivelling bit of tommy-rot; just what one expects from a New House loony like— Here, hold on, Figgy! Yoooop!"

"Hold on!" gasped Tom Merry desperately. "No rags!"

But Tom Merry was too late to prevent it; Lowther himself was a trifle too late. Before he knew what was happening, George Figgins had jumped at him wrathfully and had his head in chancery.

Punch, punch, punch!

Lowther howled for help, struggling desperately. Tom Merry left the table and rushed for the spot. His intention was to separate the combatants and bring peace, if he could.

His intention was misconstrued by Kerr, and in a flash he was in front of Tom.

"Here, one at a time, you— Oh, would you?"

As Tom tried to get past, Kerr rapped him smartly on the nose with his knuckles.

"Ow! Why, you—silly owl!" hooted Tom. "Why, I'll smash you for that!"

A tap on the nose is always a painful thing, and it proved far too painful for Tom Merry's temper. He was already in a state of great exasperation, and that tap on the nose was the last straw, so to speak. He went for Kerr with a rush and a roar of wrath.

That did it. In less than ten seconds at least half a dozen scraps were in full swing, and before a minute was up the Rag was a mass of struggling, fighting, and yelling juniors.

What Tom Merry had feared had come about, unfortunately. Even the seriousness of the situation had not been sufficient to keep the rivals at peace together. The object of the meeting was forgotten there and then, the meeting ending in a House row, as such meetings invariably did.

"Chuck 'em out of this!" gasped Tom Merry above the uproar. "Back up, School House! Kick 'em out, and boot 'em back to that casual ward they call a House!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

But it was easier said than done. The battle swayed backwards and forwards, now towards the door, and now away from it. The uproar was terrific.

But it did not last long.

The door suddenly flew open, and Kildare appeared on the threshold. He stared at the scene, and then his voice rang out.

"Stop that! You hear me? Stop!"

Nobody heard him—at least, nobody heeded him. And Kildare's brow darkened and he ran into the room.

Crack!

"Yoooop! Yarooooogh!"

"Oh crumbs! Look out!"

Tom Merry and Kerr howled as Kildare grasped them and banged their respective heads together. Then he grabbed Figgins and Lowther in a firm grasp and treated them likewise.

"If you want to hurt each other, I'll help you!" snorted Kildare.

And he did. In a few moments the room was resounding with cracks and yells as Kildare got to work in earnest.

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to help the juniors to hurt each other. In addition to banning many other things, the new Head had strictly banned corporal punishment at St. Jim's. But either Kildare had forgotten this, or else he did not look upon cracking juniors' heads together as corporal punishment.

It was a little too punishing for the rival factions, and, suddenly realising who was amongst them, the juniors ceased fighting amongst themselves, and made a rush for the door. In less than three minutes the room was empty save for Kildare, who stood, panting and victorious, monarch of all he surveyed.

It was a sad ending to Tom Merry's meeting.

CHAPTER 2.

What's to be Done?

"G ROOOOOGH!"

"Oh dear!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"It's my head I'm troubling about—not my hat!" groaned Jack Blake. "Old Kildare's just a bit too hefty for my liking. I only hope that ass Redfern's napper hurts as much as mine does!"

"Mine's fairly ringing," groaned Tom Merry, tenderly and ruefully rubbing his curly head. "This comes of trying to be peaceable with those New House sweeps!"

"I told you so!" remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, mopping a streaming nose. "You fellows will wemerbah that I told you so."

"Oh, dry up, Gussy!"

"Why should I dry up?" said Arthur Augustus warmly. "I was only wemarkin' that I told you this would happen, bai Jove! I warned you that it was askin' for twouble to invite those New House fellows to the meeting."

"Well, I suppose you did, Gussy," said Tom Merry, grinning ruefully. "We really might have expected it. Anyway, here we are again, with nothing to show for the blessed meeting except damaged eyes and noses, and ears and heads. What's to be done?"

"Goodness knows! Don't ask me," grunted Blake.

"Well, something must be done," said Tom Merry grimly. "It's the Grammar School match to-morrow, and we haven't even notified Gordon Gay & Co. that we can't play 'em."

"Well, that's your job, Tommy," said Blake, with a grunt. "All you can do is to write Gay a note calling it off."

"I was hopeful that we'd have thought out some wheeze at the meeting—some way of playing the match, after all," said Tom Merry dismally. "But it's hopeless now."

"Won't those rotten Grammarians crow and cackle over it all," groaned Blake. "They'll think we're a lot of mugs and weak-kneed loonies to stand it."

"That's just it!" said Tom dismally. "They won't understand the circumstances. And that's just why I feel it's useless just to write a note explaining matters. They're bound to be furious about cancelling the match at such short notice at all events!"

"Yaas, wathah! It's wathah a wotten thing to do—hardly fair to them!" remarked Arthur Augustus, shaking his head. "It would be bettah to see Gay personally, Tom Mewwy!"

"That's just what I'm thinking about," agreed Tom Merry thoughtfully. "We could explain matters to Gay personally, better than in a note."

"But—but the Grammar School's out of bounds, and the Grammarians banned!" said Blake witheringly.

"I know that," said Tom, chuckling. "But even good little boys like us who win prizes sometimes break school rules, you know. My idea is to trot over to the Grammar School and have a chat with Gordon Gay."

"Well, we might!" said Blake.

"Better not all go, though," said Tom. "No good all of us running risks."

"Blessed if I want to go!" grinned Herries. "Catch me going there to get my leg pulled!"

"Catch me, either!" said Digby and Manners together.

"I weally think you fellows had bettah leave the whole mattah to me," said Arthur Augustus emphatically. "You would only botch the thing up, you know. As a fellow of tact and judgment—"

"You burbling chump, Gussy—"

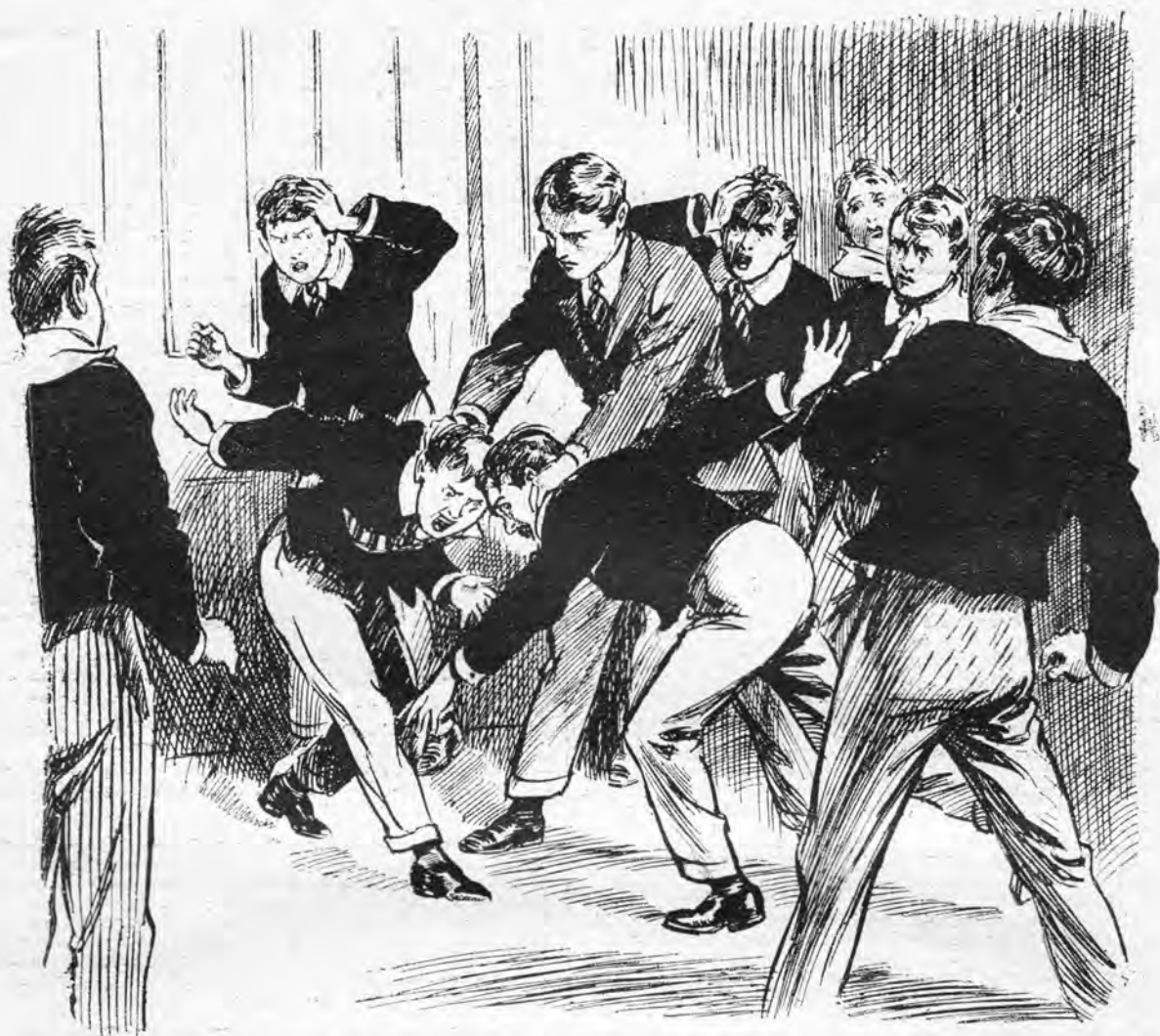
"Oh, let him come if he wants to!" laughed Tom Merry. "A little comic relief may save us from a ragging."

"Bai Jove! Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"No time to hear you wagging your chin, Gussy!" said Tom Merry crisply. "If you're coming, get a move on. Just the three of us will be enough—Blake, Gussy, and myself! Better buck up before it's dusk."

"Right!" said Blake.

He jumped up promptly enough—though it was clear he did not relish the task before him. Nor did Tom Merry himself, for that matter. It was more than likely that the Grammarians had heard all about recent events at St. Jim's,



"Yooooop!" "Yaroooooh!" Tom Merry and Kerr howled as Kildare grasped them and banged their respective heads together. Then he grabbed Figgins and Lowther in a firm grasp and treated them likewise. "If you want to hurt each other," he said, "I'll help you!" In a few moments the room was resounding with cracks and yells as Kildare got to work. (See Chapter 1.)

and they knew how the mischief-loving Gordon Gay would look at things.

But it had to be faced, and in a few moments the three juniors had started out and were hurrying along Rylcombe Lane towards the Grammar School.

They had just reached the outskirts of Rylcombe itself when Blake gave a grunt on sighting five juniors, wearing Grammar School caps, just ahead of them.

"Oh, good!" he exclaimed, in great relief. "There they go—Gay and his pals. What luck! I wasn't looking forward to visiting the Grammar School."

"Good egg! Nor was I," admitted Tom Merry. "We should have been running a pretty sure risk of being ragged by some of the chaps there. Cheerio, Gay!"

As Tom Merry raised his voice in a shout, the five fellows ahead looked round. They grinned as they recognised the St. Jim's fellows. One of them said something, and there was a loud laugh.

"I hope the bounders don't start any monkey tricks!" murmured Tom Merry, eyeing the five grinning Grammarians uneasily. "You never know the rotters!"

The Grammarians came up grinning.

"Hallo, ickle boys!" said Gay.

"Eh?"

"Don't get frightened, you know," continued Gay, with a grin. "We won't harm you, eh, chaps?"

"Rather not!" grinned Harry Wootton. "We feel far too sorry for the dear ickle boys! P-poor ickle fellows!"

"Dear, ill-treated ickle darlings!" said Frank Monk. "Did 'ums have their grub changed! Was they knocked

off the bottle and shoved on nasty patent foods! And was they forced to wear flannel chest-protectors and take cod-liver oil?"

"And did 'ums have the Head's wife to look after 'ums!" added Carboy sorrowfully. "To tuck 'ums in 'ums ickle beds at night!"

"And the dear ickle boys have been so good over it all!" remarked Gordon Gay admiringly. "I hear some of the ickle darlings have won prizes for being so good! Do show us your ickle train, Blake!"

"And do show us your pretty ickle motor-car, Merry!" pleaded Frank Monk. "It will encourage us to try to be good ickle boys, too!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Oh dear!"

"You—you silly dummies!" gasped Tom Merry, going crimson. "So—so you've heard all about it, you rotters!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Grammarians doubled up and howled with hysterical laughter at the doleful, blushing faces of Tom Merry & Co. It was only too clear—too painfully clear—that Gordon Gay & Co. had "heard all about it."

"You—you cackling asses!" stuttered Tom Merry, glaring. "It's nothing to laugh about, is it?"

"Nothing at all!" added Jack Blake warmly. "Who told you chaps about the blessed rot., anyway?"

"Yaas, wathah! We were hopin' you knew nothin' at all about it, bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus. "And it is certainly nothing to cackle about!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Apparently Gordon Gay & Co. thought otherwise. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's innocent hopes seemed to increase their hilarity.

"For goodness' sake chuck it!" almost shouted Tom Merry, in growling wrath and exasperation. "You won't jolly well laugh when we tell you what we were coming to see you about, you awful idiots!"

Gordon Gay controlled himself with an effort.

"So you were coming to see us, eh?" he chortled. "What for—to ask us to come and play with your clockwork puff-puff?"

"Or the clockwork motor-car?" inquired Jack Wootton, stifling his laughter. "Oh crumbs! We thought it couldn't be true, but now we know it must be!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go on!" said Tom Merry bitterly. "Laugh—laugh, you cackling dummies! You can laugh to-morrow afternoon instead of playing us at cricket!"

Gordon Gay suddenly stopped laughing.

"Eh? What?" he ejaculated. "What d'you mean, Merry? Don't talk rot!"

"I'm not talking rot!" snapped Tom Merry. "The match for to-morrow is off—that's what we were coming to see you about. See?"

"Phew!"

The Grammarians looked suddenly serious. They had been just as keen on the match as the St. Jim's juniors. Gordon Gay frowned.

"I say, that's a bit thick!" he snorted. "If you can't play us you might have given us a bit earlier notice! We could have fixed up another match then."

"We're sorry about it—you can bet on that!" said Tom. "But it simply couldn't be helped; we only knew ourselves this afternoon. The new Head's banned the match, and he's banned cricket altogether—blow him!"

"G-great Scott!"

"Banned cricket!" almost yelled Gay.

Tom Merry nodded.

"But why?"

"He thinks it's too rough a game for one thing!" granted Tom Merry. "And this afternoon finished it. Rushden, a fellow in the Sixth, got a biff on the napper and is in sunny. It was that that finished it. No more cricket to be played at St. Jim's while our new Head's on the job!"

"Well, I'm blowed!" ejaculated Carboy. "And you silly owls are standing that?"

"We've got to!"

"What thumping rot!" said Gordon Gay. "Why, it's nothing but tyranny! We jolly well wouldn't stand it!"

"Rather not!" snorted Harry Wootton. "Well, you are a lot of weak-kneed muffs if you put up with that!"

Tom Merry went red again. He had expected that from Gordon Gay & Co. But then they did not know the circumstances.

"We wouldn't stand it if it were somebody like old Ratcliff, or some other beastly tyrant!" said Tom glumly. "But Crankley is such a decent old stick, even if he is a faddist."

"Decent old stick when he half-starves you and stops your giddy cricket!" howled Gordon Gay derisively. "What rot, you born idiots! You must be potty to stand it!"

"You don't understand!" said Tom, blushing. "It—it's rather a delicate matter—nearly all the fellows feel the same about it. Old Cranky and his wife are so—so decent to us all. They mean well, and think they're doing it for our good! We don't like to start a big rumpus and cause trouble."

Gordon Gay fairly blinked at the St. Jim's juniors.

"Well, you lot of flabby mugs!" he ejaculated. "Does that excuse rotten tyranny, you born idiots? Why don't you stand up for your rights? We heard about them stopping study teas, and putting village tuckshops out of bounds, and giving you rotten grub, and we simply couldn't believe you chaps would put up with it."

"It's true enough," admitted Tom Merry gloomily. "They've also closed the school tuckshop—going to open it again and sell blessed hygienic grub or something later on. They've also stopped all canings, and the consequence is we're simply swamped with lines and gatings. It's rotten! But we've got to put up with it until Dr. Holmes comes back."

"Well," said Gordon Gay, looking at his chums, "of all the weak-kneed, sloppy, feeble-minded, spineless, crawling worms you Saints take the giddy biscuit!"

"Look here—"

"I'm looking!" snorted Gay witheringly. "You give me the giddy pip! Fancy taking things like that lying down! And what about us? Done us out of our cricket for to-morrow!"

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"We're sorry—"

"Blow your sorrow!" hooted Gordon Gay. "You ought jolly well to do something, you footling mugs!"

"What the thump can we do?" snapped Tom, his anger rising. "If we did rebel it wouldn't help the cricket to-morrow."

"But you can play to-morrow!" snorted Gay. "Defy the cranky old hunks and play us! Look here, we're coming over to play you to-morrow afternoon, whether your Head's barred the match or not!" added Gordon Gay, his eyes gleaming. "A fixture's a fixture! Are you game to play up if we do?"

"Ahem! You—you see—" began Tom.

"Only mean gatings all round!" grunted Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! Can't be done!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

"Rot!" said Gordon Gay emphatically. "It's going to be done, I tell you! We're coming over, and if your giddy Head chips in—"

"He won't be there to chip in," said Tom, smiling grimly. "He's going over to a giddy afternoon lecture at Wayland—so's half the masters!"

"Oh!" said Gordon Gay, his face suddenly wearing a curious grin. "Is that so? So's our giddy Head, I believe. Well, are you game to play us? If the giddy old idiot isn't there—"

He paused meaningly. Tom Merry hesitated a moment. Nothing would have given him more satisfaction in one way than to defy the new rules and agree to Gordon Gay's suggestion. But—

Somehow Tom Merry did not feel it would be quite playing the game to take advantage of the Head's absence to do so. Moreover, to the cool-headed junior captain it seemed scarcely worth the "candle." He knew Dr. Crankley was not the man, for all his kindly mildness, to overlook such defiance. It would mean heavy gatings all round at the very least.

"It wasn't worth it!"

Tom shook his head.

"Can't be did, Gay!" he said gruffly. "If we could work it some other way we would jolly soon! We're as keen on the match as you fellows. But we're not going out of our way to ask for gatings."

"Oh, you—your funky asses!"

"It isn't a case of funking!" snapped Tom, his eyes gleaming dangerously. "You've said about enough, Gay! The Head's a decent sort, and we don't want to cause big trouble. It's only for a short time, anyway; Dr. Holmes won't be long away. And another thing is—it isn't worth getting gatings for! If it meant a caning, or perhaps a flogging each it might be different. But who wants, say, to be gated for a month just to play in one match?"

"Not good enough!" said Blake.

"Wathah not!"

"You—you won't do it, then?" gasped Gordon Gay, glowering.

"No—sorry, and all that! But—"

"Well, you—you hopeless worms!" said Gordon Gay, in deep disgust. "Blessed if toy trains and motor-cars aren't about your level, after all! Of all the funky, miserable worms! Fancy Tom Merry afraid of a bit of giddy punishment!"

"We're not afraid of a bit of punishment!" said Tom Merry, his face going red with wrath. "We've risked punishment by coming at all."

"Eh? What d'you mean, fathead?"

"I mean what I say!" snapped Tom. "Through you idiots pelting some of our chaps this afternoon when they were out with Mrs. Crankley, the Head's put the Grammar School out of bounds, and he's also put a ban on you chaps—we're not allowed to speak to you even!"

"Says you fellows are too wough!" said Arthur Augustus severely. "And weally, you know, Gay, you are vewy wough and wude! You ought to have had respect for Mrs. Cwankley, at least!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Gordon Gay & Co.

The Grammarians almost exploded with mirth at that bit of news.

"Oh, my hat! Ha, ha, ha!" roared Gordon Gay. "Was that old girl your Head's wife?"

"Yes!" snapped Tom Merry. "But, look here, Gay! We've had about enough of this! You may think it funny, but we don't!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Too rough!" choked Gay. "Oh, my giddy aunt! Not allowed to speak to us! Go away, you rude boys! Oh—Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cackling asses—"

"Go and play trains, my ickle man!" roared Frank Monk.

"Ha, ha! Don't speak to us rude, rough chaps! Fancy Tom Merry dropping cricket to play with clockwork toys!"

"You silly idiot!" hooted Tom Merry furiously. "Why, I'll jolly well give you a thick ear if you say much more!"

"Same here!" snorted Blake, clenching his fists. "We didn't come to row, Gay, but if you say much more I'll punch your silly nose!"

For answer Gordon Gay cheerfully knocked Blake's cap off. Monk followed his example by knocking Tom Merry's off. An instant later Harry Wootton had sent Arthur Augustus' shining topper clean off his head.

"Bai Jove!"

"Now run home and tell mummie those rough boys have knocked your caps off!" chortled Gay. "Tell Aunt Crankpot those rude Grammarians have—Yoooooop!"

Gordon Gay's chortling remarks ended in a stifled yelp as Tom Merry's knuckles rapped his nose smartly.

"Go for 'em!" gasped Tom Merry. "Teach the cads we don't funk them, anyway, the footling, laughing jackasses! Take that, Gay!"

And Tom's knuckles took Gay under the chin, fairly making his teeth rattle. The next instant Blake and D'Arcy had sailed in wrathfully. Blake got Frank Monk's head in chancery, and Arthur Augustus punched Harry Wootton on the nose smartly.

There was a chorus of surprised yells, and then Gordon Gay recovered himself and sailed in in his turn. And the moment they had recovered themselves Monk and Wootton did likewise.

"Collar the cads!" bawled Gordon Gay. "Ow-yow! You've busted my nose, Merry! I'm going to make you sit up for that!"

His fist knocked Tom's fist aside, and the next moment Tom sat down—hard—as Gay's left took him under the chin.

CHAPTER 3. Trouble!

TOM was up again in a flash, however, and next moment the old rivals were at it hammer and tongs. But, mindful of their leader's shouted order, Carboy and Jack Monk took a hand in the game then.

Gay's obvious intention was to capture the "saints" if he could, without a scrap.

So Carboy and Jack Wootton piled in to the help of their chums, and against the five the three St. Jim's juniors stood little chance.

Tom Merry went down suddenly, with Gay and Monk on top of him, and, despite his frantic struggles, his hands were pinned behind him, and then they were tied at the wrists with his own handkerchief.

"Now the others!" panted Gordon Gay. "Buck up—soon be dusk, my lads!"

The Grammarians did "buck up"—to such good purpose that in a few brief whirling seconds Blake and Arthur Augustus were likewise made prisoners, though, like Tom Merry, they fought gallantly against the odds.

But it was no good, and soon all three were on their backs in the lane, with their wrists tied behind them. They gasped and glowered up at their grinning captors.

"Your own faults!" gasped Gordon Gay, with a breathless chuckle. "You started it, you know! We're going to end it!"

"We'll make you sit up for this!" panted Tom Merry. "You silly, burbling rotters!"

"But you're going to sit up first, old top!" chuckled Gordon Gay. "You've nearly busted my nose, Merry! Groooh! Fetch the ickle dears along, chaps! We'll duck 'em in the horse-trough on the Green—just to cool their little heads a bit! Mustn't send 'em home to their darling Aunt Cranky so hotheaded and rough!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you dare!" gasped Tom Merry in alarm. "I'll lick you to a frazzle for this, Gay, you see if I don't!"

"Naughty, naughty!" protested Gordon Gay. "I'm afraid they're learning some rough manners from us rough boys, Monk. Bring 'em along, and boot 'em if they dawdle!"

"Ha, ha! Yes, rather!"

There was another brief struggle as Tom Merry & Co. were grasped and hauled to their feet. But after Gordon Gay & Co. had applied their boots vigorously, the St. Jim's juniors decided it wiser—and less painful—to obey their captors.

"No good sulking!" grinned Gordon Gay. "Take it smiling, my ickle men! Come on—march!"

"Oh, you rotters!" panted Tom Merry.

But, though the St. Jim's juniors protested and threatened, they marched—there was really little else to do in the sad circumstances. They were marched along the lane

by the five Grammarians, and a boot was the reward if any of them showed signs of lagging.

Just as they reached the outskirts of the village, however, Gordon Gay called a halt. He drew his surprised chums on one side, his eyes glimmering with mischief.

"We won't duck 'em after all, you fellows," he whispered, with a chuckle. "I've just thought of a better wheeze—one more suitable for the little fellows. You see Manson's garage there?"

"Yes, why?"

"Well, when we passed an hour or so ago I noticed they had one or two second-hand prams for sale or hire—blessed if I know which. But I bet old Manson would let us hire them for an hour. Got any cash, chaps?"

"I've got a quid!" grinned Frank Monk.

"Good! We'll whack out the cost afterwards. Now, three of you trot off and get 'em—don't tell old Manson what they're for, mind!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Nunno!"

"He knows me!" grinned Gordon Gay. "And he knows I'll stomp up if anything happens to 'em. Buzz off!"

"What-ho!"

Frank Monk, Carboy, and Jack Wootton hurried away, wearing broad grins of anticipation. They vanished down the opening leading to Manson's garage which was fifty yards or so farther along the lane.

"Look here," exclaimed Tom Merry, eyeing Gordon Gay very suspiciously. "What's the game, you grinning rotter?"

"You'll see presently," smiled Gordon Gay. "Don't be afraid, my little fellows; we're going to send you home to Aunt Cranky presently—in suitable style."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Harry Wootton, whose thoughts seemed to be amusing him.

"Oh crumbs!" groaned Tom. "What's coming now?"

Knowing the Grammarians as he did, Tom saw they had some scheme in view—something decidedly unpleasant for them. The St. Jim's juniors eyed each other in growing uneasiness. Had their hands not been tied they would very soon have dealt with Gay and Wootton. But they knew their chances of escape were hopeless in their present state. All they could do was to long for some more St. Jim's juniors to happen along.

But the only fellows who did appear just then were Jack Wootton, Frank Monk, and Carboy. There was a sudden rattling and clanking of wheels, and next moment the three japers appeared.

Tom Merry & Co. would have yelled at sight of them—or, rather, what they were wheeling before them. All three were pushing perambulators—rattling, ramshackle, and antiquated affairs with broken springs and tyreless wheels for the most part.

It was only too sadly clear to the St. Jim's juniors what Gordon Gay & Co. had in view.

"Two bob an hour each," gasped Frank Monk, as he rushed up and brought his pram to a standstill.

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Gordon Gay. "The boulder ought to have sold them to you for that! What giddy chariots! Ha, ha, ha! Shove 'em in!"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus almost fainted at the very thought of what lay before him.

"Look—look here, Gay!" gasped Tom Merry, his face full of horror. "You—you can't mean to shove us in those awful contraptions?"

"Can't we?" asked Gay cheerfully. "Just you see! Show him, you fellows!"

"Right-ho! Tom Merry first!" chuckled Frank Monk, taking some cord and rope from the pram. "I've got plenty of cord and stuff to tie 'em in as we mustn't risk the darlings tumbling out, you know!"

"Ha, ha! No!"

"You—you rotters!" yelled Tom, as one of the Grammarians grabbed him. "Oh, you awful cads! Gay, be decent, you rotter! Why, I'll—Oh crikey!"

Despite his furious, desperate struggles, Tom was held whilst a rope was wound tightly round his ankles and secured. Then he was dumped, with knees almost touching his chin, into the nearest perambulator. In a few brief seconds Arthur Augustus and Blake had been treated likewise, in spite of their frantic struggles and terrible threats, and heart-rending pleadings.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Grammarians stood and roared at the result of their handiwork. Tom Merry & Co. certainly did look curious sights in their prams. Arthur Augustus especially looked a most remarkable picture in his glimmering eyeglass and his silk topper, which Gay had jammed down on his aristocratic head.

"That'll do, I think!" chuckled Gordon Gay, recovering himself at length. "Don't the little darlings look sweet?"

"Oh, you—you howling asses!" panted Tom. "Oh, you—you— We'll smash you for this, Gay!"

"Naughty, naughty!" scolded Gay, shaking an admonishing finger at the St. Jim's junior. "Now be good, or I shall have to spank you! Bring 'em along this way, chaps. I want to buy them each a nice ickle bib and a bonnet!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Oh, gweat Scott! Oh, you feahful wuffians!" wailed Arthur Augustus. "If you dare to make such a widiculous public exhibition of me I shall give you a feahful thwashiin' all wound, bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Apparently Gordon Gay & Co. were unmoved by the terrible threat, unless it was moved to laughter. They started off almost helpless with mirth, Gordon Gay wheeling Tom Merry, Jack Wootton wheeling Arthur Augustus, and Frank Monk wheeling Jack Blake.

"Oh dear!" groaned Tom Merry suddenly. "They're taking us through the village! Oh, this is frightful!"

It was only too plain that Gordon Gay had no intention of allowing them to go straight home. In single file, with Gordon Gay leading the way, they entered the village, Harry Wootton and Carboy walking behind almost helpless with laughter. It was the most uncomfortable and unpleasant journey Tom Merry & Co. had ever experienced, for the narrow, old-fashioned prams were extremely uncomfortable. In Tom's case the pram he was in was an ancient affair, with the springs on one side completely broken, Tom's weight having brought about a final breakage. It was all Gordon Gay could do to keep it from toppling over.

Until they actually entered the village few people were met, but as the prams began to rattle over the cobbles of the village street the little procession began to attract attention. Village folk stopped and stared, and then they roared with laughter. The rivalry between the two schools was well-known in the village, and the villagers saw the joke, if Tom Merry & Co. did not.

The loud laughter of the passers-by brought shopkeepers to their doors, and thereafter the prams were accompanied by yells of laughter and an ever-growing swarm of cheery village urchins.

But worse was to come.

Tom Merry & Co. shuddered as Gordon Gay called a halt at the little local drapery store. Leaving his pram in charge of Carboy, he entered the shop, and presently came out again, carrying three white baby's bonnets and three white bibs with tapes attached.

"Oh, you—you awful rotter, Gay!" panted Tom Merry, his face burning with humiliation and dismay. "Play the game!"

"We are playing it, darling!" said Gordon Gay. "My dear lad, you've done worse than this to us at times. Now lift your dear baby head up while nurse puts your bib and bonnet on."

"Haw, haw, haw!"

The crowd roared with mirth as Gordon Gay & Co., despite the struggles of the St. Jim's juniors, fixed the bibs on, tying them round the hapless victims' necks. With their hands and feet tied, Tom Merry & Co. were helpless.

"Now the bonnets!" murmured Gay. "Don't the little dears look sweet? Take baby Gussy's ugly top-hat off, Carboy. There now, don't the ickle darlings look comfy? Now, hold on, though."

Gordon Gay suddenly vanished into the baby-linen shop again. He came out carrying three pieces of cardboard. He took out of his pocket a blue pencil, and, after printing on all three, he tied them to the front of the three prams.

"Baby Tommy!" was printed on the first, "Baby Gussy!" on the second, and "Baby Jackie!" on the third.

Amidst a laughing cheer from the crowd, the three Grammarians started to wheel their blushing and furious charges back along the street again. There was always the risk of meeting masters or St. Jim's fellows, and Gay felt they had taken risks enough.

By this time the crowd had assumed quite alarming proportions, and even Gordon Gay felt relieved when the outskirts of the village was reached. Here many of the laughing villagers dropped off, though a goodly number of excited juveniles still followed, shouting derisive remarks at the hapless occupants of the rattling prams.

Up to now only two St. Jim's fellows had been sighted in the village. They were Skimpole of the Shell, and Tompkins of the Fourth, and they had rapidly made themselves scarce after learning what was on, and Gordon Gay & Co. had made no effort to stop them. But some little distance along Rylcombe Lane Gay sighted three figures ahead. They happened to be Racke, Crooke, and Mellish.

"Collar 'em!" murmured Gordon Gay. "Just the chaps we want."

"Yes, rather!"

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Though he could not see ahead, Tom Merry heard the words, and he gave a roar.

"Rescue, St. Jim's! Rescue!"

He might as well have called to the moon, for Racke & Co. were not the fellows to attempt to rescue anyone. Hearing the yell, they looked round suddenly, and then, as they recognised the Grammarians, they started to run—too late!

Leaving only Carboy in charge of the prams, Gay and the others flew after Racke & Co., and in a few moments they came back, dragging the scowling trio with them.

Racke & Co. stared dumbfounded as they sighted the occupants of the prams.

"Oh—oh crumbs!" faltered Racke, too scared to laugh. "Look here, Gay, none of your larks, you rotter! Let us go!"

"In a minute!" chuckled Gordon Gay. "Now tie their hands to the handles of the prams, chaps. Sharp, now, we want 'em to enter their gates before dusk, and it's jolly nearly that now."

"Yes, rather!"

"Look here!" howled Racke. "I'm not jolly well—Leggo!"

Racke yelled for aid, but there was no help in sight. His yells only brought derisive roars of laughter from the village urchins gathered round.

Despite the struggles of Racke & Co., they were dragged to the prams and their hands were tied to the handles of the respective prams—Aubrey Racke's to Tom Merry's pram, Crooke's to Blake's, and Mellish's to the pram in which reposed the once elegant but now hapless form of Arthur Augustus.

Helped on by the boots of the Grammarians, Racke & Co. started off, pushing their prams before them with faces red with rage.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Roaring with laughter, Gordon Gay & Co. followed behind, their eyes open for possible danger. Almost up to the gates of the school followed the Grammarians, and then, with a final derisive cheer they turned and fled back along the lane, for already the laughter and uproar was bringing fellows down to the gates to see what was happening in the lane.

"Oh, thank goodness!" panted Tom Merry. "Now, Racke, stop, you idiot! For the sake of Mike, try to get your hands free, and cut us loose before any of our chaps see us. Oh crumbs! If they do, we'll never hear the last of this!"

"Wathah not!" wailed Arthur Augustus, who by this time was nearly in tears. "Pway do your vewy utmost to get your hands free, Wacke!"

"And for goodness' sake stop!" gasped Blake. "You hear, Racke? Stop, you born idiot!"

But Racke did not stop, and, following his cue, Crooke and Mellish refused to stop. As a matter of fact, Racke had suddenly realised that he had a good chance now of paying back some old scores against Tom Merry & Co.

Indeed, Racke's face had lost its fury now, and he was grinning.

"Not much, you rotters!" he sneered. "You've got to go through with it. I can't get my hands free, anyway!"

Rattle, rattle, rattle!

Bump, bump, bump!

The prams rolled on, rattling and bumping on the rough lane. Tom Merry & Co. groaned, and glared furiously at Racke and his grinning chums.

As the little procession filed through the gates, Taggles, the school porter, almost had a fit at sight of the prams. His jaw dropped so that his pipe dropped from his mouth on to the gravel.

"What the thump—"

"What in the name of goodness—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

From the fellows grouped round the gates went up a howl of laughter as they recognised the occupants of the prams. Even in the deepening dusk it was easy to recognise Tom Merry & Co., despite their babies' bonnets and bibs.

"Rescue!" yelled Tom Merry desperately, spotting Levison, Cardew, and Clive by the gates. "Levison, help us out of this for the love of Mike!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But Levison & Co. were too helpless with laughter to help the hapless juniors in the prams. Nor did Racke give them any time to do so. He plunged on along the gravel drive, the prams bumping and bounding on their springs, their tyreless wheels squeaking and grinding on the gravel. Aubrey Racke meant to carry the thing through to the very end.

And he did. Amidst roars of laughter from the fellows who came running up from every quarter, the prams passed under the ancient archway into the quad, and across to the School House steps.



"Now lift your dear, ickie baby heads up," said Gordon Gay, "while nurse puts your bibs and bonnets on!" "Haw! Haw! Haw!" The crowd roared with mirth as the Grammarians, despite the struggles of Tom Merry and Co., fixed the bibs round their helpless victims' necks. (See Chapter 3.)

Then Racke halted and waited, as did Crooke and Mellish, who had "tumbled" to Racke's spiteful game.

"Great pip!" choked Grundy. "Why, Racke and his pals have their wrists tied to the handles. Oh crumbs! I thought those cads wouldn't have dared to play such tricks on Merry and his lot."

"It's those Grammar School cads, of course!" chortled Gore. "Oh, great pip! What a scream! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you cackling lot of dummies!" shrieked Tom Merry. "Why can't you cut us loose instead of standing there howling?"

"Cut us free!" bawled Blake. "You footling lot of dummies."

"Yaas, bai Jove! Pway do cut us fwee, deah boys!" wailed Arthur Augustus. "Gweat Scott! I am bumped and buwised all ovah. Bai Jove, Kildare, deah boy, pway welease us fwom this widiculous and uttably undignified pwedicament!"

Kildare came down the School House steps just then, and he almost collapsed as he sighted the object of the general hilarity and uproar.

"What the thunder—" he ejaculated. "Merry, you young ass, what's this game?"

"Can't you see?" hooted Tom Merry, in dire exasperation. "Cut us loose for goodness' sake! I'm fed-up—absolutely fed-up with this!"

"You—you young idiots!" gasped Kildare. "What on earth—Ha, ha, ha!"

Kildare tried his best not to laugh, but it was no good. He soon had his pocket-knife out, however, and he was just about to start work on the cords round Crooke's wrists to begin with when Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, appeared at the top of the steps.

It was still light enough to see in the quad, and the light from the hall behind Mr. Railton streamed out into the quad, showing up the prams and their almost frantic occupants clearly.

Like Kildare, Mr. Railton almost fell down on sighting them.

"What—what— Bless my soul!" he exclaimed. "What—who— Why, they are three School House juniors! Bless my soul! This is—ahem—most—er—unusual and astonishing!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" howled the crowd.

"Silence!" called Mr. Railton, although he was laughing himself now. "Really, this—this— Merry, how on earth did you manage to get yourselves into this predicament, my boy?"

"Oh dear! We—we couldn't help it, sir," mumbled Tom Merry. "It—it's all right, sir. Only a rag, sir."

Furious as he was, Tom had no intention of giving away the Grammarians. He knew that they would have treated Gordon Gay & Co. just the same had the positions been reversed. The rivalry was always carried on in a spirit of cheery good-nature, and when not japing each other, Tom Merry & Co. and Gordon Gay & Co. were the greatest of good friends.

But Racke & Co. were different altogether. They were as eager to spite Gordon Gay & Co. as they had been to "spite" Tom Merry & Co. by making no attempt to save them from further humiliation.

"It was those Grammarians, sir," said Racke. "They must have captured these fellows in the village and treated them like this. They overtook us and tied our hands like this, and made us bring the prams here. We couldn't do anything else, sir."

"So it was a Grammarian rag!" exclaimed Mr. Railton, trying hard to frown. "I guessed as much, though, really, they have—ahem—gone a little too far this time."

"I know the fellows who did it, sir," said Racke eagerly. "If you want their names—"

"I do not want their names, Racke!" snapped the Housemaster, giving Racke a look of disgust. "Merry, to whom do these—these—ahem—perambulators belong?"

"They're from Mansons' Garage, sir," stammered Tom. "Very well. Taggles, kindly take charge of these perambulators. I will phone to Mansons' and instruct them to take them away. Merry, D'Arcy, and Blake, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,003.

kindly remove those—those absurd things from your heads and—and chests."

"Oh, yes, sir!"

"Yaas, wathah, sir!" groaned Arthur Augustus.

"The rest of you, dismiss!" snapped Mr. Railton. "And kindly restrain your hilarity."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Railton hurried indoors again, his hand over his mouth. Kildare rapidly cut the last of the cords that bound the juniors, and helped Blake and D'Arcy from their prams. Tom Merry tried to get out without waiting for help with the consequence that his pram overturned and deposited him on the gravel with a crash and a bump.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Only stopping to tear off their bibs and bonnets, Tom Merry, Blake, and D'Arcy fairly flew indoors, leaving behind them the almost hysterical crowd.

They found that Mr. Railton had stopped in the hall, and they understood why the next moment.

"One moment, Merry!" called the Housemaster grimly. "I wish to know if those Grammar School boys attacked you without provocation, or—whether you willingly sought them out and spoke to them?"

"Oh dear! We—we sought them out, sir!" gasped Tom, with a groan. "You—you see, sir, we have a match on with them to-morrow, and we thought we'd go over and explain just why we couldn't play them. That was it."

"You could have written, I presume, Merry?" snapped the master. "You had time to send a postcard, which would have reached them in the morning."

"Yes, sir. But—but we thought it would be better to explain."

"But why did they attack you and treat you in that remarkable manner?"

"You—you see, sir, they—they thought it funny that we should not be allowed to speak to them, and that we should not be allowed to play cricket. They pulled our legs awfully, sir—called us babies, and all that. We—we couldn't stand it, and—and we went for them!"

"I—I think I quite understand, Merry," said Mr. Railton. "It was most unfortunate that you went, and you have certainly been punished for going already. But rules are rules, and as you have flagrantly disregarded them you must be punished for breaking them. You will each do me two hundred lines of Virgil by this time to-morrow evening."

With that Mr. Railton walked away.

"Well, my hat!" gasped Tom Merry.

It was the last straw, and Tom Merry & Co. tottered away to their studies with feelings that were too deep for words.

CHAPTER 4. Nothing Doing!

"ROTTEN! Absolutely rotten!"

That was Tom Merry's candid opinion of the state of affairs at St. Jim's.

All the school had laughed over the sad fate that had befallen Tom Merry, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and Blake—even their own chums had laughed and chipped them about it. Indeed, there had been trouble in both studies that evening over it.

But now peace was restored in Study No. 10, though all was far from being merry and bright in that celebrated apartment. Tom Merry himself looked as if he was finding life not worth living.

"It's rotten!" went on Tom Merry gloomily. "I had hoped that Gordon Gay would have thought of some wheeze to help us—you fellows know what a genius he is for wheezes. If the fatheads hadn't chipped us—"

"It was rotten luck!" agreed Lowther, trying hard to suppress a grin. "You might have known, though, that the beggars would rag you. I guessed they would, and that was why I didn't want to go."

"Same here!" murmured Manners. "Glad I didn't, too!"

"Oh, dry up!" snorted Tom.

"But I thought you said Gay said he was going to see that the match did take place!" said Manners.

"So he did!" grunted Tom, with a sniff. "He was only gassing, of course. What can he do to get the blessed match played? Oh, it's too rotten! I— Come in!"

Tom almost started at the words as a tap sounded at the door. The door opened to reveal Hankey, a New House fag. He held out a small parcel and dropped it on the table.

"For you, Merry!" he said. "From Figgins!"

"Right-ho!" grunted Tom.

The fag withdrew rather hastily, and Tom tore open the brown-paper parcel. It proved to contain a baby's bib, a

baby's bonnet—both trampled and soiled—and a note. The note read as follows:

"To Darling ickle Tommy, with love.—Did 'ums lose his ickle bonnet and his ickle bib in the quad! Don't cry! Here it is, and Nunky Figgins will buy you a nice feeding-bottle in the morning!"

That was all; but it was enough.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Lowther and Manners; they could not help it. Tom Merry threw the things down on the floor and jumped on them. Then he grabbed them up and flung them into the fire.

"You—you cackling dummies!" he gasped. "Why, if you don't stop that idiotic cackling, I'll dot you both on the boko! Oh crumbs! I shall never hear the last of this!"

It was clear that Figgins had picked up the bonnet and bib in the quad—just as it was clear that the hapless three had not heard the last of it yet.

Lowther and Manners resumed their prep, striving manfully to repress their grins and chuckles. They did not want a dot on the "boko" from their raging chum. There was silence in the study for some moments, and then another tap sounded on the door. This time it proved to be Baggy Trimble, and from his expression it was clear that he had not come to pull Tom's leg. Trimble looked very unhappy and woebegone indeed.

Tom Merry pointed to the door without a word, and Trimble closed it, staying inside himself, however.

"Get out!" roared Tom. "I meant you to get outside the door first, you fat clam!"

"Oh, I say, Tommy!" mumbled Trimble. "You might listen to a fellow. I'm fed-up—absolutely fed-up to the chin!"

"So'm I!" snorted Tom Merry. "Get out!"

"But look here," said Trimble indignantly, "you're junior skipper, ain't you, and it's up to you to do something! Can't you listen to a fellow, anyway?"

Tom Merry breathed hard; but he laid down the book he had picked up and nodded grimly. After all, it was plain that Trimble had not come to "pull his leg." That was something!

"Go ahead, you fat ass!" he said grumpily. "What's the trouble?"

"You know jolly well what the trouble is!" groaned Trimble. "I can't stand it any longer. I can't get enough to eat, and I'm fed-up!"

"He can't get enough to eat, and yet he's fed-up!" remarked Lowther. "What does the chump mean?"

"You know jolly well what I mean!" said Trimble, with great indignation. "I'm absolutely starving, and I can't stand what little grub they do us here any longer. It's hygienic this, and hygienic that, and patent the blessed other; and it's every bit muck! Not fit for a dog to eat, and not enough to keep a blessed hairpin on its feet! And the tuckshop's closed, and nobody's got any grub, and it—it's too awful for words!" added Trimble pathetically. "It's all right for you fellows; you ain't got a restitution like mine to keep up!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You mean constitution, don't you?" grinned Tom. "You silly dummy! We're all in the same boat! Have to take it smiling, Baggy!"

"Who can take it smiling?" hooted Trimble. "It's time you did something, Tom Merry. If you don't, I jolly well shall—so there!"

"Go ahead, old top!"

"Look here, Tom Merry!" snorted Trimble. "I'll tell you what I've come for. I've got an idea; it's a ripper!"

"Well, let it rip!"

"You heartless rotter!" said Trimble warmly. "It—it's like that chap Columbus fiddling while Rome was burning! A fat lot you care what happens to me! All the fellows say you ought to do something, Tom Merry. Now, look here, I've got a tophole idea, and I want you to carry it through for me—I supply the brains and you do the job," said Trimble, lowering his voice. "Listen! I've got a ripping wheeze for getting old Cranky and his wife shifted out of St. Jim's—lock, stock, and barrel!"

"Good man!" said Lowther, with a chuckle. "Let's hear it, old duck!"

"You fat ass!" said Tom impatiently. "Clear out!"

"I tell you it's a fair coker!" grinned Trimble. "You won't say clear out when you hear it, Tom Merry. You were asking for suggestions just now. Well, answer me this. What would old Cranky have to do if Dr. Holmes and his wife decide to come back suddenly?"

"They'd have to clear out, of course!" said Tom, staring.

"You footling fat ass—"

"Well, that's just what my wheeze is going to bring about," said Baggy eagerly. "Listen! My idea is this. Supposing somebody—you, for instance—telephones from Wayland or somewhere and pretends to be Dr. Holmes? And supposing you imitated Dr. Holmes' voice and asked

old Cranky to clear out as you'd made a remarkably swift recovery and wanted to return immediately. What would Cranky do?"

"Sack me, I should say!" grinned Tom.

"You silly ass! He wouldn't know it was you!" snorted Trimble witheringly. "Didn't I say you'd have to disguise your voice—imitate Dr. Holmes' giddy voice! See? It's as easy as pie—easy as scoffing a blessed jam-tart, you know. Old Cranky would simply have to clear out to make room for our old Head. You said that yourself, Tom Merry."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cackling asses!" hooted Trimble. "Ain't it a jolly good idea?"

"Ripping! As you say," grinned Tom Merry, "go and carry it out, old chap, and see what happens to you."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Baggy Trimble glared at the laughing juniors. He could not imagine why they should laugh. He had fully expected enthusiastic praise for his brilliant brain-wave.

missing three boots as he went. The door slammed behind him. It was only too painfully clear to Baggy that his brilliant wheeze did not appeal to Tom Merry & Co.

Groaning and rubbing himself painfully, Baggy Trimble rolled along the passage, and, after reflecting a moment, he went on to Study No. 6, on the Fourth Form passage. Baggy Trimble had given a great deal of thought to his great wheeze, and he thoroughly believed it would work. In Trimble's view it was the idea of a life-time. It could not possibly fail! Naturally, hearing from Dr. Holmes' own lips—even though on the phone—that he was quite recovered, and that he wished to return at once, Dr. Crankley would simply pack up and take his departure. Dr. Holmes, or, rather, the fellow who imitated his voice, would ask him if he could make it convenient to depart without delay, and, being such a kindly old chap, Dr. Crankley would undoubtedly do so.

That was the egregious Baggy's view, and he was most enthusiastic about the idea. But as there was a "trifling"

CAMEOS OF SCHOOL LIFE.

TRIMBLE GOES FISHING!



SEATED like some fat friar of old
Fishing for Friday's dinner,
Is Baggy Trimble, blue with cold,
Hoping to land a "winner"
He'd dearly love a fine fat trout,
It makes a dainty edible;
For hours and hours he waits about,
His patience is incredible!

Still he sits on, with grim intent,
Praying for that twelve-pounder;
Like Patience on a Monument,
Though just a trifle rounder!
His nose is blue, his limbs are cramped,
He starts to snarl and bicker;
His ardour, certainly, is damped,
But Baggy is a stickler!

"They tell me trout leap in and out
These waters clear as crystal;
And I've seen several hereabout—
I wish I had a pistol!
The wriggling worm which is my bait
They have ignored completely;
If I'd a pistol, 'twould be great,
For I could pot them neatly!"



Poor Baggy has an aching void
Within his vast interior;
As time goes on, he grows annoyed
And wearier and wearier.
He's tired of waiting for a bite,
His line is limply dangling;
"It seems I'll have to wait all night!"
He growls. "So this is angling!"

The silvery trout dart in and out,
They're feeling very frisky;
But Baggy's worm they seem to doubt—
To bite it would be risky!
So Baggy sits and shivers there,
Both downcast and dejected;
His face the picture of despair—
Then comes the unexpected!

"A bite! A bite!" the line is tight,
And Baggy's eyes are gleaming;
This is his moment of delight,
The Mecca of his dreaming!
With feverish hands he winds the reel,
Alas for poor old Baggy!
There's now repose in his creel
One minnow, small and scrappy!



"You—you thickheaded duffers!" gasped Trimble, glaring. "Don't you see the idea?"

"Yes, old fat man. We see it plainly enough—too plainly. But we don't want to hit the long, long trail for home yet awhile. So take your bright idea somewhere else, Baggy."

"Well," gasped Trimble, almost speechless with disgust. "You—you funky crowd! Yah! Afraid of taking a tiny bit of risk! In fact, there ain't any risk at all!"

"Then why not do it yourself—be a public benefactor?" suggested Lowther. "Go on, old chap! It'll be ripping at St. Jim's when you're gone. Even with things as they are as regards cricket and grub, life will be just about worth living with you sacked!"

"You—you silly owls!" spluttered Trimble. "Yah! You want old Cranky kicked out, don't you?"

"No, we only want you kicked out just at present!" said Tom Merry grimly. "On the ball, chaps!"

"Look here—Oh crikey! I say, just—Yarroooooh!" Baggy Trimble fairly flew through the door, narrowly

risk about it, Baggy was anxious for somebody else to carry the wheeze through. The trouble was, as Baggy was finding out, to get somebody to take that risk.

"I bet old Gussy will, anyway!" grinned Baggy, recovering his spirits at the thought. "Here goes!"

And Baggy was just on the point of entering Study No. 6 when Racke, Crooke, and Scrope came along the passage.

"Out of the way, you fat toad!" snapped Racke unpleasantly.

He planted a foot behind Trimble in the little way he had towards fellows weaker than himself and knocked at the door. Then he opened it, and marched inside, with Crooke and Scrope at his heels.

Trimble grunted, rubbed himself, and slipped in after the shady trio. What Racke & Co. wanted there he neither knew nor cared. He remembered what had happened to him in Study No. 10, however, and he felt there was safety in numbers.

Blake & Co. were seated round the study table, but both Blake and D'Arcy jumped up as the visitors entered. From the looks on their faces, they seemed as short tempered as Tom Merry had been.

"Outside!" shouted Blake, pointing to the door. "What the thump do you crowd want?"

"It—it's important, Blake!" said Racke, casting a nervous glance at Blake's hand which held a Latin dictionary. "We want to say—"

"If it's anything about what happened to-night—"

said Blake ferociously.

"It isn't!" said Racke hurriedly and earnestly. "We just want to make a suggestion to D'Arcy—a suggestion that concerns us all!"

"Right!" said Blake, although he still looked suspicious. "One word about that affair, Racke, and you go out of here in little bits!"

"Yaas, wathah! I considah Wacke has tweeked us wottenly, in any case, ovah that affair!"

"No doubt about that!" snorted Blake, scowling at Racke. "You spiteful sweep, Racke! You could have saved us from a lot this evening if you'd liked. Your hands were tied, but you could easily have kept us back until somebody came along, without yanking us across the quad like you did!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It—it was impossible to do anything else," said Racke sullenly. "I was as anxious to get it over as soon as you."

"Liar!"

"Look—look here!" said Racke, choosing to ignore that uncomplimentary remark. "I've called about something else, you chaps. Tom Merry was asking for suggestions—suggestions for getting things altered at St. Jim's. Well, I've got an idea that should do the trick."

"Oh, have you?" snapped Blake.

"Yes," said Racke, looking at D'Arcy. "Look here, D'Arcy, has it struck you what your pater—Lord Eastwood—would say if he knew what was happening at St. Jim's?"

Arthur Augustus jumped.

"Bai Jove! Weally, Wacke, I have nevah given that question a thought. But—but, bai Jove, I am afraid he would be wathah annoyed and vewy much astonished."

"I thought as much," said Racke, his eyes gleaming. "Your pater's the big noise at St. Jim's, D'Arcy—chairman of the governing board, and all that. He's keen on sports. He always stays to see a cricket match when he comes here—what?"

"Yaas; that is quite twue, Wacke. But—"

"Well," said Racke, coming to the point at last, "what about letting him know how things are going here? Send for him, I mean, and let him come and find out things for himself. See?"

"Bai Jove!"

"A rotten trick!" grunted Blake. "You'll do nothing of the sort, Gussy!"

"Bai Jove! I—I weally do not know," said Arthur Augustus, frowning thoughtfully. "It would hardly do to send for the patah; but—but it would not be a bad ideah to send for old Conway and ask his advice in the mattah. Old Con is vewy bwainy, y'know."

"Rot!" said Blake warmly. "We'll fight our own blessed battles without bringing in our paters and things to help us. Besides, who wants to go whining home about our giddy troubles?"

"Hardly the game," agreed Herries, shaking his head.

"I think so, too," said Digby, frowning at Arthur Augustus. "Can't you see, Gussy, it would be a rotten

trick to serve on Cranky, especially as he's such a good sort at bottom? And to bring your giddy brother on the scene would be rather—well, like whining and playing the kid. Don't do it!"

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus, flushing. "I weally was not looking at it in—in that light, deah boys. Old Conway would not like it, either, I'm afraid. You are quite wight, Blake."

"What rot!" said Racke, his voice showing disappointment and anger. "Where's the harm in it, you asses? Lord Eastwood would come here and find out what's happening, and he'd be mad, I bet, especially about the cricket being stopped. He'd put his foot down and get things put right again even if he didn't get that old fool Cranky kicked out. I'm fed-up with things for one, and I think we ought to do something to show that old crank he can't do just as he likes. Why not do it, you fools?"

"You don't understand why not simply because you're a cad, Racke!" said Blake candidly. "Now get out!"

"You won't do it, D'Arcy?"

"Wathah not!"

"Then you're fools!" said Racke savagely, showing his teeth. "Isn't it for the good of the school? Won't cricket and everything else go to the dogs if this goes on much longer?"

"A fat lot you care about the cricket!"

"I don't care twopence!" sneered Racke. "But I'm fed-up with things as they are, and I'm jolly well going to have a go at stopping that old fool if you don't!"

Blake pointed to the door.

"Get out, you sweep!" he snapped. "I've heard enough!"

"Hang you!" said Racke. "I'm thumping glad you got it in the neck this evening! You asked for it and got it. Every fellow in the dashed school's laughing at you, and it serves—Here, what—Mum-mum-mum!"

Racke's sneering, derisive words ended in a muffled howl as a cushion smote him full in the face.

"Let 'em have it, chaps!" snapped Blake, jumping up. "Out with 'em!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Whiz! Biff, biff! Whiz, whiz!

With cushions and books and rulers rattling round their heads, Racke & Co. rushed for the door and crowded out, yelling with dismay. Trimble was caught in the rush, and, stumbling in the doorway, he went down with a wild howl and a still wilder series of howls, as Racke, Crooke, and Serpe trampled over him in their frantic efforts to escape the whizzing articles.

"Yarrooooooh!"

Trimble scrambled up just in time to get Blake's boot. Then the door of Study No. 6 slammed.

"Ow-yow! Oh crumbs!" groaned Trimble. "Oh dear!"

And the fat junior tottered away after Racke & Co., wisely deciding not to worry Blake & Co. with his splendid scheme just then. It was clearly not a suitable moment for propounding schemes—brilliant or otherwise.

CHAPTER 5.

Trimble is Agreeable!

"TRIMBLE, old chap!"

Aubrey Racke spoke quite coolly.

Baggy Trimble grunted and eyed him suspiciously.

It was extremely unusual for the lofty and supercilious Aubrey to address Baggy Trimble of the Fourth as "old chap," very unusual indeed. But when he did, Baggy Trimble was suspicious. It meant that Racke either had an axe to grind, or was bent on pulling the fat leg of Baggy Trimble.

"What d'you want?" asked Trimble.

"I want you, old fellow," smiled Aubrey Racke genially. "In fact, I've been hunting everywhere for you. Come along to my study for a chat, old man."

"Look here," grunted Trimble. "What for? What's the game, Racke? I know you!"

"I'll be quite frank with you, Baggy," said Racke, trying hard to get sincerity in his tone, a difficult matter to Racke.

"I want you because I think I can help you."

"Oh!" said Trimble. He was not much impressed by that statement.

"And by helping you," went on Racke calmly, "I fancy I shall be helping myself and the rest of the school. I mean what I say, Trimble. I've heard you have a scheme to dish old Cranky?"

"Yes, I have," said Trimble, his eyes beginning to gleam.

"I've heard about it," said Racke, with enthusiasm. "It's great, in my view, Trimble. You've tackled lots of fellows about it, I believe?"

"The silly fools won't listen!" grunted Trimble, "and if they do, they only laugh and kick me. I'm fed-up!"

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"They're jealous—jealous that you thought of it and they didn't," said Racke warmly. "It's a bit thick that a splendid scheme like yours should be wasted on account of personal jealousy."

"That's just it," said Trimble, beginning to feel quite genial towards Racke. "I've been trying to get chaps to see the plan through for me, but they won't. They won't even stand me my fare to Wayland, so that I can do it myself. I've just been to Blake's crowd, and they kicked me out of the dashed study, the beasts!"

"Rotten!" said Racke sympathetically. "You're misunderstood here, Trimble, that's what it amounts to. But come along for a chat. If nobody else will see you through, I'm willing."

"Oh, good!"

Trimble's eyes gleamed and his fat face lit up. Not only was he very hungry, but he was also very dismal and downhearted. Since he had, in company with Racke & Co., been "helped" out of Study No. 6 so unceremoniously the previous evening, he had "hawked" his wonderful wheeze to nearly every study in the Fourth and Shell.

But there were no takers, so to speak. Nobody seemed at all keen on the idea, and nobody seemed at all keen to impersonate Dr. Holmes on the telephone.

It was most disappointing. But the fatuous Trimble still cherished a stout belief in the soundness of the scheme, and he had no intention whatever of giving it up. Day after day Baggy seemed to get hungrier and hungrier, his hunger gaining strength as he grew weaker and thinner, or so he pathetically claimed. He was, in point of fact, simply desperate.

Something had to be done, and done quickly.

So, as no other fellow would tackle the job, Trimble was determined to do it himself, risk or no risk. Anything was better than slowly starving to death.

But the trouble was that he had no cash—not a penny. And he would want his fare to Wayland, and the pennies for the telephone call. That was the rub. Baggy, since he had come to the determination during morning lessons had tried hard to raise a loan without success. The fellows who might have lent him the money in the ordinary way—generous fellows like Arthur Augustus or Tom Merry—refused point-blank when they learned what it was for. They refused out of sheer kindness, not wishing to see Baggy make an ass of himself, and possibly get into serious trouble.

Baggy refused to see that, however. He had called them mean beasts, and, as a matter of fact, Trimble was just wondering if it would be safe to try it on Aubrey Racke when that junior had hailed him.

So Baggy easily fell a victim to the crafty Racke's wiles.

He followed Racke to the latter's study eagerly and gleefully. Racke was a fellow with plenty of cash, and though he was extremely mean with it, Baggy Trimble felt very hopeful now.

"Now, Baggy, old man," said Racke, showing the fat junior into a chair and dropping into one himself, "let's hear your wheeze in detail. From what I can gather, it's the real goods. Go ahead!"

Baggy grinned and went ahead. Racke listened, and Crooke, who was in the study, suppressed his grins, and likewise listened.

"Ripping!" said Racke admiringly, thumping the table with his hand. "Why, man, it's a stroke of genius! Ain't it, Crooky?"

"Tophole," said Crooke. "It should work like a giddy charm."

"No doubt about that," said Racke enthusiastically. "I can just see it all working a treat. Old Cranky will simply pack up and clear out at once—bound to do. There's no room for two headmasters and their families at once at St. Jim's. It couldn't be done. But you must be firm, Baggy. Make it quite, quite plain that he must clear out at once; that it is imperative for you—I mean Dr. Holmes—to return without delay. Mind you do that."

"Oh!" gasped Baggy, his face falling. "I—I thought one of you fellows would do the telephoning. You—you see, I ain't good at imitating voices."

"And I've got a bit of a cold, unfortunately," said Racke blandly. "So sorry, old chap, or I should jump at the chance."

"And I've got an important appointment for this afternoon," said Crooke. "But why risk mucking the whole thing up by letting somebody else do the trick—simply asking for failure," added Crooke solemnly. "You're the fellow for a delicate job like this!"

"That's right," said Racke, shaking his head. "I'm not a fellow to try to do what I know I can't do. You're such a splendid fellow, though—plenty of iron nerve and heaps of courage!"

"Keen and resourceful," said Crooke. "The very fellow for an emergency like this. The—the man and the hour,

so to speak. Besides, you've such a manly voice, old chap!"

Trimble grinned complacently, and straightened up his fat little form with a ludicrous show of dignity. He liked flattery, and he liked it in big chunks. He was getting it in big chunks now.

"That's me all over!" he said. "I hope I'm not cocky; but I fancy there's few fellows here who really could tackle this job. Well, leave it to me, you chaps. I'll do it. Only—"

"Only what?" smiled Racke.

"Only as it happens I'm stony," said Trimble. "I shall need five bob, at least—fare and phone and what-not! Hang it all; it's precious little when you think—"

"My dear man," remarked Racke, waving his hand, "don't worry about that. Did you say five bob?"

"I really ought to have said ten, now I come to think of it," said Trimble. "You see—"

"Can't manage more than five just now," said Racke coolly. "Sorry, but I'm just short of tin at the moment. Well, if you start out directly after dinner, you'll just about catch the two-fifteen from Rylcombe. As it happens, I'm going to the post office at— By Jingo, though, that's an idea, Crooky!"

"What's that?" asked Crooke, winking at Racke.

"Why not get old Trimble to hand in that telegram?" said Racke carelessly. "I can then keep my appointment and go with you, after all. Jove! The very thing!"

"What's that?" grunted Trimble.

"It's like this," smiled Racke. "You were in Blake's study last night when we tackled D'Arcy about wiring for his pater, weren't you? You heard all that passed, Baggy?"

"Yes; but—"

"Well," said Racke coolly, "as dear old Gussy refuses to do it we're going to do it for him. See?"

"Oh!" gasped Baggy.

"Easy as falling off a form," said Racke. "I was going to do it, but as you'll be on the spot yourself I've no need to bother. There's not the slightest risk, of course. You just hand the wire in, pay the money, and walk out."

"Yes," said Trimble, in great alarm. "But that's all very well. Supposing it comes out who sent it?"

"My dear man!" said Racke, raising his eyebrows. "What does it matter if it does? D'Arcy objects just now, as you know well enough, out of pure jealousy—jealous because he didn't think of doing it. But it can't come out—and even if it did you'd find yourself a hero, Trimble. It's bound to be a success; Lord Eastwood's bound to raise Cain and get this old fool Cranky cleared out. Well, think what the fellows will think of the chap who brought it about! They'll be more than grateful. But, of course, it can't possibly come out."

"But what good will it do?" sniffed Trimble. "It's a rotten idea, I think—not half as good as mine!"

"Well, I admit it scarcely comes up to yours, Baggy!" agreed Racke. "But we simply must make absolutely sure, you know. Don't you see, if Cranky swallows your wheeze he may want to linger. But if Lord Eastwood's on the spot he won't—he'll get the boot right away see?"

"I'd rather not do it!" grunted Trimble uneasily.

"Oh, all right, then!" said Racke carelessly. "But if you won't back my idea up, you can't expect me to back yours up with cash. It can't be done!"

Baggy Trimble's fat face fell.

"Oh, I say, Racke—"

"But if you do it," went on Racke thoughtfully, "I think I can manage to squeeze out another half-crown for you—just for luck, Baggy. In any case, it's worth half-a-crown to be saved the fag of going into Wayland. Well, is it a go?"

"Oh, very well, I'll do it!" said Trimble, grinning. "That's seven-and-six, without the cash for the wire, mind."

"Oh, quite so! Oh, yes!" said Racke. "I'll write out the wire now."

And he did, Baggy watching him with a grin on his fat face. The obtuse fat youth was far from dreaming that to get him to take the wire was the sole reason Racke had enticed him to the study. Racke knew, as did everybody else, that Trimble's great wheeze was utterly absurd and farcical. But he thoroughly believed in his own. He knew Lord Eastwood was a fine old English gentleman, conservative to a degree, and a great and enthusiastic sportsman. He knew Dr. Crankley's faddist ideas, in sports, at all events, would not appeal to him—quite the reverse! And if it did not quite "come off," Racke knew he was causing trouble—trouble for Arthur Augustus if for nobody else.

In his turn Trimble heartily believed in his own wheeze, and thought Racke's wheeze a rotten idea. But he saw no risk in it for himself. It did not even occur to him that

inquiries might be made afterwards as to who had handed in the wire at Wayland. He was far from suspecting that Racke was using him as a tool, and that if anything came out, he would simply deny flatly having any knowledge of it.

"Go ahead, then!" grinned Trimble. "Fatheaded idea, I call it. Besides, how d'you know old Eastwood's at Eastwood House? Did Gussy tell you?"

Racke smiled.

"Lord Eastwood is at present at Abbotsford," he said coolly. "He and Gussy's brother, Lord Conway, are staying at the Metropole Hotel, Abbotsford, seeing about some property they have there. I happened to overhear Gussy telling Blake, and that's just what gave me the idea last night. See?"

"My hat!" grinned Trimble. "Then the old chap may turn up to-day."

"This afternoon, I'm hoping—while that old fool Cranky and most of the masters are over at Wayland at that blessed lecture," smiled Racke. "He'll find all the fellows mooching about doing nothing, and I bet he'll play steam when he hears there isn't a giddy match on. He always stays to see a match, you know!"

"Good man!" grinned Trimble. "It's a better wheeze than I thought, Racke."

Racke grinned and finished writing. He showed the result to Trimble. It ran thus:

"Lord Eastwood, Hotel Metropole, Abbotsford.

"Come at once. Matter urgent.

"ARTHUR."

"Short and sweet, you see!" grinned Racke. "Now, get off with it the moment you finish dinner, Baggy. And, mind—not a word to be breathed, for your own sake. If that came out it may quite easily come out about your little game, too! Understand?"

There was more than a threat in Racke's voice, and Trimble nodded, grinning.

"You bet I'll keep mum!" he said, shoving the telegram into his trousers-pocket. "What about the dibs, Racke—seven-and-six, you know, and a bob for the wire?"

Racke smiled, and handed over seven-and-six in three half-crowns, and a shilling for the wire.

"Now, clear out!" he said briefly. "And don't make a mess of things. You'll regret it if you do, old chap! I'd advise you to mind your eye—Hullo! There's bell for dinner. Come on, Crooky!"

And as Racke started out Trimble hurried away, pocketing the coins, with a deep chuckle. Racke and Crooke chuckled as they looked after him.

"The born idiot!" grinned Racke. "Fancy expecting that wheeze of his to come off! I'd give five quid to see Cranky's chivvy when Trimble rings him up and starts spinning his yarn! Ha, ha, ha!"

"But—but it would have been safer if you'd persuaded the fat chump to drop his wheeze!" grinned Crooke, rather uneasily. "You know what the fat duffer is. I—I don't quite like it, Racke!"

"Rot!" grinned Racke. "Let the fat ass cheek old Cranky if he wants to. In any case, I'm blessed if I can see where the risk comes in, even for that fat duffer! There's more risk in the other, really. By Jingo, yes! Remember, Crooky, whatever happens, we stick to it we know absolutely nothing. Our word ought to stand before his. And they can prove nothing!"

And with a cheerful grin on his crafty face Aubrey Racke led his chum in to dinner. But Crooke was not looking quite so happy about things. It was unfortunate, but true, that Trimble had a disturbing way of putting his foot in things.

CHAPTER 6.

No Luck for Baggy!

"CHEERIO, Baggybus! Whither away, old fat man?"

Tom Merry grinned as he asked the question. Tom was in quite a cheerful mood at that moment.

Yet actually he had very little to be cheerful about. He had just left the dining-hall, feeling almost as hungry as when he went in. Moreover, the present state of affairs at St. Jim's was far from being conducive to cheerfulness—especially so in regard to the cancellation of the Grammar School match.

Yet Tom Merry was a fellow who could not remain gloomy for long; if there was little to be cheerful about, Tom Merry made the most of that little. He was feeling quite fit, and it was a bright, sunny morning, and Tom was making the most of those cheery facts.

Then he spotted Trimble, and he grinned. Trimble had on his cap, his muffler, and his overcoat. He was obviously

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bound for the outside world, so to speak. He stopped and grinned as Tom Merry called to him.

"Great pip!" remarked Lowther, with a chuckle. "That's the first time I've seen Baggy grinning after dinner for ages! What's the joy, Baggy?"

"You'll know soon enough," said Baggy Trimble, with a fat wink. "You fellows will be falling on my neck in sheer joy and gratitude this time to-morrow!"

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Manners.

"Well, I only hope you'll wash your neck well first," said Lowther. "I think I'd rather fall on a load of bricks myself!"

"You silly ass!" said Trimble. "You know jolly well what I mean! This time to-morrow—if not long before—



"Ooooh!" "Oh dear!" "Wow!" "He's mad—absolutely posh! wrathful remarks. It also rang with thumps and bumps and crashes slaved away madly to get the new-Heads."

the tyrants will have departed—food restrictions and silly rot like that will be things of the past. I hope you fellows will remember the chap who brought it off; I shall expect you all to rally round and stand me a first-rate feed the moment the tuckshop is opened again. That's the least you can do!"

"Oh!" said Tom; he understood now. Before dinner Trimble had been worrying the Terrible Three for a loan—a loan with which to pay his fare to Wayland, so that he could carry out his wonderful scheme.

"You—you born idiot!" gasped Tom. "You don't mean to say that some silly dummy has lent you the cash to go with, Trimble?"

"Just that!" grinned Trimble.

"To try on that silly, tom-fool idea of yours?"

"It's a jolly good idea!" snorted Trimble. "And what's more, it's going to come off, I might tell you! You fellows know what a dab I am at imitating voices. You'll see!"

"Well, you—you born idiot!" exclaimed Tom in alarm. "Look here, Trimble! Drop it, for goodness' sake! You'll be fairly asking for the long jump if you try it on, you burbling duffer!"

"Rot! You're only jealous—that's what it is!" snuffed Trimble. "You'll see!"

And with that confident remark, Trimble rolled on

towards the gates. The Terrible Three stared after him—Lowther and Manners grinning, but Tom looking serious.

"Let the fat ass go!" grinned Lowther. "If he insists on playing the giddy goat—"

"But we ought to stop him—for his own silly sake!" said Tom. "Come along!"

The three dashed for the gates. As they ran out into the road they saw Trimble's fat figure just vanishing round a distant bend in the lane, and he was on a bike.

"Blow!" said Tom, frowning. "He must have had a bike hidden in the lane!"

"Somebody else's bike, I bet!" grinned Lowther. "Anyway, no need to worry, Tom. That fat idiot will never have the nerve to do it when it comes to the pinch."



"The passage at St. Jim's fairly hummed with groans and of furniture and effects as the various occupants of the studies orders carried out. (See Chapter 10.)"

"I think that, too!" said Manners. "If he has any cash he'll risk rules and blue it on grub beforehand!"

"Well, I suppose you're right," grinned Tom, his face clearing. "Let's hope he doesn't do it, anyway!"

And with that, Tom turned back with his chums. And meanwhile, Baggy Trimble was pedalling hard for the station. As Lowther had guessed, it was somebody else's machine—Tom Merry's bike, in fact, had he only known it. Trimble had his own ideas in regard to the rights of property.

Leaving his bike—or, to be more exact, Tom Merry's bike—at the station, Trimble boarded the local and was soon rumbling towards Wayland. The fat junior's keenness was unabated, and he was supremely confident that the job would be quite simple and quite successful. By the time he reached the post office in Wayland he had it all nicely mapped out in his mind. One thing he was determined upon—he would be firm and unyielding. He would insist upon Dr. Crankley and his wife packing up their traps and departing at once.

In the post office Baggy handed over the telegram and paid for it carelessly. It was a very simple operation, and Trimble scarcely gave it a thought. Then he rolled over to the public telephone. It was necessary to get the job done quickly before the masters started out for the lecture hall in Wayland. Trimble wanted to be back at St. Jim's before then. In Trimble's view there was going to be no lecture

for Dr. Crankley that afternoon. He would be busy packing instead!

Trimble put his coppers in the slot and the operator put him through to St. Jim's. Then he took a deep breath and asked for the Head.

"That Dr. Crankley?" he asked, in a deep, deep voice, which he fondly imagined resembled Dr. Holmes' grave, dignified tones. "I wish to speak to Dr. Crankley."

Back came the answer over the wires:

"This is Dr. Crankley speaking!"

"Oh, good egg!" said Trimble. "I—I mean, very good! Quite so! This is Dr. Holmes speaking, Dr. Crankley!"

"What?"

There was a curious sound over the wires.

"Yes, I am—ahem!—Dr. Holmes," said Trimble, his deep tones trembling sadly. "I—I am Dr. Holmes! I—I—"

Trimble's remarks trailed off. He had been most eloquent whilst rehearsing his part in the train. But now he was on the telephone, Trimble's heart failed him, and all his well-thought remarks fled—greatly to the fat youth's dismay.

"Yes," gasped Trimble again, "I—I am Dr. Holmes!"

"Bless my soul! You—you say you are Dr. Holmes speaking? Impossible! Dr. Holmes is in Scotland!" Dr. Crankley's voice sounded curiously grim. Indeed Trimble didn't at all like the sound of it. Somehow the scheme did not seem quite so easy now. He pulled himself together desperately.

"I—I trust you do not doubt my word, Dr. Crankley?" he went on, assuming an injured tone. "I—I happen to be suffering from a bad cold or you would recognise my voice instantly. I—I caught the cold whilst travelling down from Scotland to-day. I am now in London, and hope to arrive at St. Jim's this evening."

"Oh, indeed!"

"Exactly!" gasped Trimble, liking the sound of Dr. Crankley's grim voice less than before. "The—the fact is I have made a remarkably speedy recovery, Dr. Crankley; I am now fit as a fiddle, and ready to resume my duties as headmaster of St. Jim's."

"Indeed! Pray proceed!"

"Oh, yes!" gasped Trimble. "I—I think you will understand that—that, in the circumstances, it will be necessary for you to leave the school at the earliest possible moment, Dr. Crankley. Both Mrs. Holmes and myself are very anxious to resume residence this evening, if possible. I trust you will—ahem—be good enough to make it convenient to depart in good time, and—and so save any inconvenience for us, you know."

Having managed to get that out, the egregious Baggy waited, trembling. His fat knees were knocking together and his brow was bathed in perspiration. The sound of the Head's deep, calm voice had brought vividly before Trimble's fat, obtuse mind the enormity of his "spook," also the possible results of failure and discovery.

He waited, his heart thumping. He had not to wait long. He heard a muttered conversation at the other end and then another voice sounded—a stern, familiar voice that made Trimble's heart miss a beat. It was Mr. Railton's well-known voice, and Trimble had a most wholesome respect and fear of the Housemaster's uncanny powers of mind.

"Are you there?"

"Y-e-e-s!" stammered Trimble, forgetting in his trembling fear even to disguise his voice. "I—I am Dr. Holmes. I—I am Dr. Holmes."

"Very well," came Mr. Railton's calm tones. "Will you kindly repeat to me what you have just stated to Dr. Crankley?"

"Oh, ye-es, Mr. Railton! I—I am Dr. Holmes, and I am speaking from Way—I mean, London. I returned from Scotland to-day, and—"

"Nonsense!"

"Wha-at!"

"Nonsense!" thundered Mr. Railton's scandalised voice. "You are most certainly not Dr. Holmes. You need say no more, whoever you may be. I am quite satisfied that you are an impostor, sir!"

"Oh crumbs!"

"You are obviously a daring impostor!" snapped Mr. Railton. "This is, I can only presume, a daring and absurd practical joke, and I strongly suspect that you are a junior member of this school. I demand that you tell me who you are and where you are speaking from!"

"Oh dear!" groaned Trimble.

His knees almost collapsed under him.

"Do you hear me?" thundered Mr. Railton. "This—is an unheard-of and most impudent outrage. You shall suffer dearly for your scandalous insolence when discovered! I demand to know your name, and where you are speaking from!"

"Oh dear!" gasped Trimble again.

He fairly slammed the receiver on the stand. Not

desiring to suffer dearly for his insolence. Trimble had no intention whatever of acquainting Mr. Railton with his name and whereabouts. He fairly dashed out of the telephone-box and out of the post office.

"Oh crikey!" he groaned. "Fancy the beasts not believing me like that! Such suspicious minds! I wish I'd biked it now, and then I wouldn't have to wait for a train. Oh dear! I'm all of a blessed tremble. I think I'll have my feed now, and then I'll feel better."

There was a confectionery shop next door to the post office, and, rules or no rules, Trimble intended to have a feed. The cash Racke had given him was burning holes in his pockets. Moreover, he was hungry—fearfully hungry. In any case, it was scarcely likely that anyone in authority would be in Wayland so early. Baggy had taken careful note that there was nobody from St. Jim's on the local train beside himself.

Trimble gave a hurried glance about him and dived for the shop doorway. His foot was just inside when a voice rang out sharply.

"Trimble! You young rascal!"

"Oh crumbs!"

Trimble jumped back and glared round in great alarm. A motor-cycle and sidecar had just drawn up at the pavement. The sidecar was empty, but in the saddle of the bike sat Eric Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's.

"Oh dear!" groaned Trimble.

Undoubtedly his luck was out that afternoon. He had been caught by Kildare in the act of breaking the school rules. But that was really nothing very serious. What was serious, in Trimble's view, was the fact that he had been discovered in Wayland, and just coming out of the post office. If inquiries were made in regard to the phone message—

Trimble shuddered.

"You young rascal!" said Kildare sternly. "Caught in the act, by Jove! You know the rule about grub, Trimble—all grub shops out of bounds?"

"Oh dear! Yes, Kildare," groaned Trimble. "I—I wasn't going in for grub, though. I wanted to know the time—that is, I mean I wanted change for a bob, you know."

"I know you're telling whoppers, you young rascal!" said Kildare. "Get back to school at once. I shall have to report this to Mr. Railton; you know that?"

"Oh, yes!" gasped Trimble. "I—I say, Kildare, you might be decent and overlook it just for this once. I—I'll take a licking from you instead if you like."

That was really brave of Trimble, or it would have been had not his fear of discovery been stronger than his fear of a licking from Kildare.

Kildare laughed.

"You silly young ass!" he said. "Why, you're absolutely shaking with fright! Cheer up! It'll only mean a couple of hundred lines or so, with perhaps a gating thrown in."

"Oh dear! Be decent and don't report me, Kildare, old fellow."

"I'll old fellow you if you ask again!" snapped Kildare grimly. "Duty's duty, young 'un. Get back to school at once!"

"There isn't a train until three-thirty!" mumbled Trimble.

"Oh! Right, then!" said Kildare, pointing to the sidecar. "In you get, and I'll run you back if it busts the springs. Smartly now!"

"I—I say, Kildare—"

"Get in!" roared the skipper of St. Jim's.

"Oh crikey!"

In deep dejection Trimble got in, and during that ride back to St. Jim's his fat mind was full of deep and dismal apprehensions. Bitterly did he regret that he had ever thought of that wonderful wheeze. How the Head and Mr. Railton had "tumbled" to it that it was not a genuine call from Dr. Holmes he could not imagine. It was really most perplexing, and most alarming! And being caught just then by Kildare was really the most awful bad luck. When planning his great plot, Baggy Trimble had not counted on accidents. But an accident looked like bowling him out now.

Trimble stood by whilst Kildare housed his machine, and then he accompanied him to the School House. On the way Trimble pleaded in vain for a licking—anything instead of being reported. But Kildare was obdurate. He was a very kind-hearted fellow, but he never allowed his heart to interfere with his duty.

It was no good, and Baggy Trimble was fairly shaking with fear as he followed Kildare to the Housemaster's study. On the way they met the Terrible Three, and the Shell fellows looked very surprised indeed. Whether he had been to Wayland or not he had been very quick, and the Terrible Three wondered greatly.

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"By jingo!" said Tom Merry. "Looks to me as if the fat ass has been caught out. Just look at his chivvy!"

"Hold on! Let's see what happens!" grinned Lowther. The juniors followed, hoping to see Trimble when he came out. As it happened, he never entered Mr. Railton's room, for just then Mr. Railton came along the passage from his room, dressed for out-of-doors.

"Ah, you have got back, then, Kildare!" they heard him say to Kildare. "I am very glad, for I have a very serious matter for you to inquire into during my absence this afternoon. I wish you to discover— Ah! Trimble is here, then!"

Apparently Mr. Railton had not noticed Trimble until then. He looked very hard indeed at that unhappy youth.

"Yes, sir," said Kildare, looking grimly at the fat junior. "I have brought him to you, sir, as I have to report him for breaking rules. I caught him in the act of entering a confectioner's shop in Wayland!"

"What?"

Kildare almost jumped at the tone of Mr. Railton's ejaculation.

"You caught Trimble in Wayland?" said the Housemaster, his lips compressing. "So Trimble was in Wayland! How long ago was this, Kildare?"

"Fifteen minutes, at most, sir."

"Ah! I was just about to ask you if you had seen any St. Jim's juniors in Wayland, Kildare. I also had very good reasons for believing that Trimble was in Wayland less than half an hour ago. Trimble!"

"Ow! Ye-e-es, sir!"

"You were in Wayland a short time ago, I understand. I order you to tell me how you spent the time in Wayland until Kildare saw you," said Mr. Railton.

"Ow! Oh dear! I—I never went anywhere, sir! I—I just went straight from the station to the tuckshop, sir!" gasped Trimble. "I never even went near the post office!"

"So you went into the post office, Trimble?"

"Not at all, sir. Didn't I just say I hadn't, sir?"

"He was just coming out of the post office when I caught sight of him as I came along the street," said Kildare, smiling grimly.

"Trimble!"

"Ow! Kildare must be mistaken, sir!" stammered Trimble, his knees wobbling under him. "Besides, I only went in for a stamp—a penny stamp for—a postcard, sir. That was it!"

"You—you stupid boy!"

"It—it's quite true, sir, honour bright!" gasped Baggy. "It—it was a postcard to send to the pater. And I never even thought of using the telephone, sir!"

"What?"

"It never even crossed my mind, sir!" gasped Baggy. "If anybody did ring up the Head from Wayland, it wasn't me. Besides, I wouldn't dream of asking the Head to go. I—I'm too fond of him to do that. I—I'd like him to stay here because he's sus—so kind, sir!"

"Bless my soul!"

Mr. Railton gazed as if thunderstruck at Trimble.

"Bless my soul!" he repeated blankly. "You are the most obtuse and stupid boy I have ever met, Trimble. I had not even mentioned the telephone, Trimble."

"Oh crumbs!"

"Nor had I even spoken of the headmaster having been rung up on the phone," said the School House master in terrible tones. "That knowledge, Trimble, was known only to Dr. Crankley, myself, and the individual who rang up. You have given yourself hopelessly away, Trimble!"

"Oh dear!"

"I suspected that you were the culprit at once," said Mr. Railton, "because you are the only boy I could think of who would attempt such an utterly absurd and ridiculous trick. Moreover, your voice seemed familiar to me. It passes my comprehension how you, obtuse as you are, could imagine for one moment that such an absurd scheme could succeed."

"Oh dud-dear!"

"Your utter stupidity is only equalled by your gross impudence and insolence!" snapped the Housemaster. "To say the very least, it was an insult to your headmaster—an insult for which you will suffer dearly. Kildare!"

"Yes, sir!"

"Trimble has actually had the astounding impudence to imitate Dr. Holmes' voice on the phone in an attempt to make Dr. Crankley believe that Dr. Holmes was speaking to him," said Mr. Railton. "He actually asked the Head to leave St. Jim's this evening, so that Dr. Holmes could return. It was as wicked a plot as it was absurd, and I am glad you were fortunate enough to apprehend Trimble, or we might never have discovered the truth. Trimble!"

"Ow! Ye-es, sir!"

"Dr. Crankley will deal with you on our return from the lecture in Wayland," said the Housemaster, in a

grinding voice. "Kildare, will you kindly escort Trimble to the detention-room and lock him in until my return."

"Very good, sir!" gasped Kildare. "Come along, Trimble!"

"Oh dear! I—I say, sir—"

But Mr. Railton was striding away, his brow thunderous. And, really, it was no wonder.

"Well, my only summer bonnet!" exclaimed Tom Merry faintly. "So—the awful idiot did it, after all! Would you have believed it?"

"Poor old Trimble!" murmured Lowther. "He's for it!"

"He asked for it, and he'll get it," said Manners. "But poor old Trimble!"

And it was "poor old Trimble!" As he tottered away in charge of Kildare he certainly looked as if he needed all the sympathy Tom Merry & Co., or anyone else, could give him. Trimble had tried it on, and now from the bottom of his heart he wished that he hadn't.

CHAPTER 7.

Surprising News!

"IS Merry here, boys?"

Tom Merry, Monty Lowther, and Harry Manners jumped—and they jumped violently.

It was about half an hour later, and the Terrible Three were seated in their study, gloomily discussing the chief topic of discussion just then at St. Jim's—the stoppage of cricket. The Sixth had had an important match on in addition to the Lower School, and the Head's decree had filled the whole school with dismay and discontent. So fed-up were they about it all, indeed, that few fellows had troubled to make other plans for the afternoon. Like Tom Merry & Co., they stopped in their studies and groused and grumbled.

Monty Lowther was reclining at ease in the armchair, while Tom and Manners were seated on the table swinging their legs. But all of them were awakened to sudden alacrity as that voice smote their ears.

It was a well-known voice by this time—a mild, yet firm and kindly voice. It was the voice of Dr. Crankley, the new Head of St. Jim's.

It was well-known—only too well-known—that Dr. Crankley was eccentric. He did rather queer things at times. He had done many, many things since his arrival at St. Jim's which had seemed very queer to the fellows at that ancient seat of learning. Many of them, indeed, called them not only queer, but unjust and tyrannical.

Yet, save for his first tour of inspection, he had never made a personal call at a junior study before. And naturally, the Terrible Three were very much surprised. Headmasters usually sent for juniors if they wanted them. They were certainly not in the habit of popping a head round a study doorway and asking if a certain boy were present.

Moreover, the Terrible Three had understood that Dr. Crankley had already gone to Wayland. Mr. Railton, they knew, had gone, as had Mr. Lathom, and Mr. Linton, and Mr. Ratcliff. It was a very important lecture indeed—to the masters, at all events. It dealt with scholastic matters, and it was being given by a certain Professor Tomkins, who happened to be a friend of Dr. Crankley, and who shared his views on many things. And naturally enough, Dr. Crankley was very anxious, not only to be present himself, but to see that as many of his masters as could be spared were also present.

So that Tom Merry, and Monty Lowther, and Harry Manners were very surprised to see him in the doorway of their own study now—fifteen minutes after the other masters had departed.

"Y-yes, sir!" stammered Tom Merry. "I'm here, sir!"

"Ah, yes!" said the doctor, with his familiar, dry cough. "I remember you now—Merry of the Shell! You are captain of the junior cricket team, I believe?"

"Oh, yes, sir—at least, I was!" corrected Tom.

"Ah! Yes. Hum!"

Many masters might have suspected impertinence in Tom's rather bitter correction. But Dr. Crankley's face fairly glimmered with good humour, and he laughed softly. Undoubtedly he was a good-natured little gentleman, faddist, or no faddist, and it was not surprising that he was personally popular, though his reforms were not.

"Quite so—quite so!" he smiled. "That is just what I am here to see you about, Merry, my boy. I am afraid my decision to stop cricket at this school has proved very unpopular and unwelcome!"

"Ye-es, sir!" stammered Tom, wondering what on earth was coming.

"It was also, as I now see, scarcely fair to have banned the Grammar School match at such short notice," went on Dr. Crankley smoothly. "As you know, I am a personal

friend of Dr. Monk, the headmaster of the Grammar School, and I know that the Grammarians are very fine fellows indeed. Do you not think so, Merry?"

"Well—er—yes, I suppose so, sir."

"I am so glad you agree, my boy!" smiled the Head. "So very glad! However, I feel now that it was scarcely fair to them to cancel the match at such very short notice. It did not give them time to arrange another match, of course. And in the circumstances, whilst still holding the belief that the boys of St. Jim's cannot play cricket, I have reconsidered the matter and have agreed that the match shall take place this afternoon after all!"

"Oh, sir!"

"Oh, thank you very much, sir!"

"Oh, good, sir!"

The faces of the Terrible Three fairly lit up at that bit of news. They were astounded, but they were also delighted.

"As I say," proceeded Dr. Crankley, with another of his well-known coughs, "I have reconsidered the matter, and I have also arranged for the match to be proceeded with. The Grammar School boys have been acquainted with my decision, and I—ahem!—understand that the team will be here at the usual time, as was previously arranged. That is all—excepting that I trust you will have a very good game, and that there will be no—ahem!—unfortunate accidents this time. I may add—ahem!—that I myself intend to be present at the match, as I have decided not to go to the lecture at Wayland. I do hope and—er—trust that you will be good little boys and will not hurt each other!"

With that kindly thought, Dr. Crankley withdrew, beaming round at the Terrible Three as he departed.

"Well," gasped Tom Merry, as his dignified tread died away—"well—well, I'm blown!"

"Well, I'm jiggered!" breathed Lowther. "This beats cock-fighting! Who the thump could have expected this?"

"It's queer!" said Manners thoughtfully; and then he grinned. "But it's ripping news!" he added. "Come on!"

"Yes, rather!" gasped Tom Merry, who hardly knew whether he was on his head or his heels. "For goodness' sake let's go and rally round the chaps before any of them go out of gates. Great Scott! What a giddy surprise! What a decent old stick he is, after all! I take back all I said about him just before he came in."

"Ha, ha! Yes!"

And in great spirits Tom Merry led his chums out with a rush. Out in the passage they almost crashed into four juniors who were rushing from the opposite direction. They were Blake & Co.

"Hold on!" panted Tom. "We've got news, Blake—great news! The Head's been—"

"We know all about it!" chuckled Blake breathlessly. "He's seen us, too. It's great! Let's get the fellows together!"

"You—you mean about the match, Blake?"

"Yes, of course. I believe Talbot knows, too! Better bustle round!"

"Split up and make a round of the studies, chaps!" cried Tom excitedly.

"Yaas, wathah!"

The excited juniors broke up, some to visit the Fourth studies and some to visit the Shell studies, whilst Tom rushed off hot-foot to the New House.

It took little time to rout out Figgins and Fatty Wynn, both of whom were down to play for St. Jim's, and soon all were making for the changing-room, Figgins whooping with joy at the news. They found practically all the cricket team in the changing-room—luckily not one of them had gone out of gates—and soon Tom was leading his men on to the field.

Meanwhile, the news had spread like wildfire, and fellows were crowding down to Little Side, and many seniors also. It was a very curious thing that Dr. Crankley had not even mentioned the senior match that should have been played, though, as it was to have been an away match, it was too late, in any case, for Kildare to do anything. But the captain of the school was agreeably surprised when the Head mentioned the matter of the junior match.

As a matter of fact, it was known that Dr. Crankley was an old friend of Dr. Monk, the headmaster of the Grammar School. Of late he had visited the Grammar School often enough with Mrs. Crankley, and it was generally agreed that the decision to play the match after all was entirely owing to the persuasion of Dr. Monk.

That was the general belief now at St. Jim's.

Not that it troubled the juniors much in any case. They were quite satisfied to know that the match was to take place after all.

Very soon a cheer announced that the Grammar School brake had arrived, and very soon after that the Grammar School team came on the field of play.

Greatly to the surprise of Tom Merry & Co., Gordon Gay, their redoubtable leader, was not amongst them.

"Hullo, you cripples!" said Tom Merry, blushing crimson as he met the grinning glances of Monk and his chums. "Where's that funny ass, Gay?"

"He isn't playing to-day, though we're expecting him to turn up at St. Jim's," grinned Frank Monk. "What price the prams, Merry, old dear? Did 'uns get home safely to aunty?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a roar of laughter from the Grammarians. It was only too plain to the blushing Tom Merry & Co. that all the Grammarians were in full possession of the story of the prams. Indeed, the crowd of Grammarians that had accompanied the players seemed to be in hilarious spirits that afternoon. There was a continuous exchange of chaff and chipping all round the field, and it was quite clear that the rival school meant to get all the fun they could out of the plight of the fellows of St. Jim's.

Nor could the "Saints" blame them really. They knew they themselves would have chipped their rivals unmercifully had the positions been reversed, and had they been "banned" as being too rough and rude to speak to. The banning of cricket alone was enough to cause hilarity in the ranks of the rival school.

"You—you cackling lot of asses!" snorted Tom, though he grinned faintly. "Give us a rest from that, for goodness' sake! I'm fed-up with it, anyway, and if you don't drop it there's going to be some nose-punching, visitors or no visitors!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hear, hear!"

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

"Mustn't lose your ickle tempers!" chuckled Frank Monk.

"Don't forget that it was little us who worked this match; but for us there'd have been no match at all."

"Well, I suppose you must have worked it—I suppose you told your father, Monk?"

"Not at all, old dear!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The St. Jim's cricketers glared as the Grammarians howled again. What there was to laugh at in Tom Merry's remark they could not imagine.

"Ready, there?"

It was Kildare's voice, and the captain of the school came on to the ground with Darrell. The two Sixth-Formers had offered their services as umpires.

"Ready, Kildare!" said Tom.

The coin was spun, and Monk, who was captaining the Grammarians lost.

"We take first knock," said Tom, with a grin.

And he rejoined his team and led them away to the pavilion, whilst the Grammarians took the field.

Five minutes later the first ball of the match had been bowled, and a cheer rang out from the St. Jim's juniors as Tom Merry was seen to swipe it to the boundary.

CHAPTER 8.

Shocks!

"GOOD man, Tommy!"

"Hurrah!"

Tom Merry was in form, and Figgins at the other end of the pitch, was backing him up like a Trojan. Three overs had been bowled so far, and they produced a total of 30 runs. Now, as the field changed over, the spectators fixed their eyes on Frank Wootton, who was bowling to Figgins.

The first ball of the over was blocked, for Wootton was pitching a perfect length. But the second ball was seen to scatter the New House junior's wicket like chaff, and the St. Jim's juniors looked glum.

"Man in!"

Kerr went in next, but he did not stay long; and after Kerr it was a regular procession of ducks and solitary singles. Through it all, however, Tom Merry stayed, hitting at every loose ball good and strong.

And when the tea interval came round, Tom Merry was still unvanquished with a score of 53 to his credit. St. Jim's had one wicket to fall, but with the score at 79

there was still a sporting chance of beating the Grammarians.

Round the pitch a regular battle of chaff and chipping was going on between the rival supporters. There was always plenty of fun round the ropes at a Grammar School match, either when played at St. Jim's or on the Grammar School ground, and there were usually quite a sad number of free fights also. Indeed, matches between the two rival schools were usually expected to result in crops of black eyes and damaged noses on both sides.

But on this occasion there was an unusually heavy crop. Stories of recent events at St. Jim's—of the faddist reforms in food and other matters—had reached the Grammar School, and had filled the Grammarians with joy and laughter. And now the banning of cricket as being too "rough" and dangerous, and the banning of themselves as being too rough and rude, had given the Grammarians plenty of food for laughter and chipping.

And they made the most of it. By the time the tea interval came round St. Jim's were seething with wrath and humiliation. It only seemed to need a match to cause a conflagration.

It came quickly enough.

As the players came off the ground and approached the pavilion they found a terrific battle on a small scale taking place at the bottom of the pavilion steps. Above the uproar could be heard the well-known bellow of George Alfred Grundy.

"Hullo!" gasped Tom Merry breathlessly. "What the thump's up now? That ass Grundy at it again!"

"Tom Merry!"

It was Grundy's voice calling for Tom Merry, and, with a chuckle, Tom Merry pushed his way through the crush of laughing juniors, his own chums behind him.

"Hullo! What's up here?" said Tom. "What's the matter, Grundy?"

Grundy appeared to be struggling furiously with Carboy of the Grammar School for possession of a brown-paper parcel. Round them several other fellows were also struggling—Grammarians and Saints.

Grundy stopped as Tom called out, and stepped back, panting, leaving Carboy still in possession of the parcel. The burly Shell fellow turned a red and wrathful face to the juniors.

"Help us collar that rotten parcel, Merry!" bawled Grundy. "We'll show the cads if they can come here calling us babies and making fools of us! Hand over that parcel, you rotter!"

"Not much!" gasped Carboy, grinning. "Hullo! Back up here, Monk! These chaps are after the cups—I mean, the bottles!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Frank Monk and his fellow-players came crashing through the crowd, and they roared as they understood.

"You silly ass, Carboy!" gasped Monk at length. "Why the thump did you show them yet?"

"I didn't," chuckled Carboy, still panting. "This silly idiot here started being inquisitive!"

"Yes, I jolly well did!" roared Grundy. "You were up to something, you rotter! I caught you sneaking into the pav, and I jolly well want to know what's in that parcel!"

"So that's it," laughed Frank Monk. "Well, you can show 'em now, Carboy, though we wanted those dear little fellows to find the giddy bottles in their jackets. But I'm sure they'll be just as pleased to be presented with them formally now."

Carboy grinned and opened the parcel. Inside were eleven cardboard boxes. On the outside was a picture of a baby's feeding-bottle. And they were feeding-bottles!

As Carboy drew one of the bottles out of its box a shout of laughter went up. But Tom Merry & Co. did not join in it. They gasped and glared and flushed crimson with wrath.

"Oh, you—you rotters!" gasped Tom Merry.

"You—you awful cads!" gasped Blake.

"Bai Jove! You—you wickidulous wottahs!" gasped Arthur Augustus, his aristocratic features pink. "Gweat Scott!"

"Well, I'm blowed!" said Harry Wootton, in pretended indignation. "And that's all the thanks we get, you fellows! Yesterday we took them out in their prams and bought 'em a nice bonnet and a bib each, and now we've bought 'em a lovely feeding-bottle each, and not a scrap of gratitude!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Even the St. Jim's fellows were laughing now.

"Oh, you—you awful rotters!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Why, I'll—I'll—"

"Collar the rotten things!" shouted Blake excitedly.

"We'll never hear the last of this if we don't get the rotten things and smash 'em up. Come on!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

ANSWERS

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"Back up, chaps!" roared Frank Monk.

He jumped forward to stop Blake's rush, and Blake went headlong over his outstretched foot. But he was up again in a flash, and his fist connected with Monk's nose.

"Yarroogh!"

Monk roared and clutched his nose—only for a brief second, though. The next second he and Blake were "going it" hammer and tongs.

Nor were they the only ones.

There was a crash as Tom Merry jumped at Carboy, who dropped his parcel, and then Tom and he were fighting desperately, trampling the parcel and its contents underfoot amidst a crunching of glass.

But that was only the beginning.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was burning with outraged wrath, and, selecting Jack Wootton, he went for him with a will. A tap on the nose from Harry Wootton brought Lowther in next, though he needed very little encouragement of any sort.

After that the riot spread with remarkable speed. Kildare and Darrell and Monteith came rushing up, shouting angrily; but they might just as well have saved their breath. The St. Jim's juniors had had a great deal to put up with lately, and the chipping of the Grammarians was the last straw. It was more than flesh and blood could stand.

And the Grammarians, for their part, were always more or less ready for a brisk scrap with their rivals. They were ready now. In less than three minutes a dozen furious fights were in progress. In less than five, fights were in progress all round the field, and the uproar was terrific. The few seniors present were perfectly helpless. They gave up attempting to stop the riot at last, for more than one of them was sadly damaged.

In ten minutes there was scarcely a non-combatant on the cricket ground.

Fourth and Shell, and even the Third, piled in until Little Side presented the appearance of a battlefield. There had been battles on a big scale many times and oft between the rival schools, but never on such a scale as this. Cricket was forgotten and everything else was forgotten. The St. Jim's fellows were burning with their wrongs, and the Grammarians were desperate in the knowledge that they were outnumbered.

"Back up, School!"

"Go it, St. Jim's! Drive the rotters out!"

From all round the ground came yells and shouts and howls to the accompaniment of trampling feet on the grass. Backwards and forwards the battle swayed, first the Grammar School gaining an advantage and then St. Jim's. Frank Monk's yelling voice had rallied his forces together slowly but surely, and they were retreating now with their backs to the wall, as it were.

Numbers were telling, slowly but surely. At least a third of the Grammar School juniors had not come to the match, whilst very few of the St. Jim's juniors were absent.

It was certainly very unwise of the Grammarians to have risked trouble in the circumstances. Certainly they had not anticipated this. But it was too late now for regrets. They had raised a hornets'-nest about their ears, and they fought on and made the best of things.

But the end was bound to come, and it was not so very long in coming. One by one the weaker spirits among the Grammarian forces began to wilt under the onslaught, and one by one they began to turn tail and take to their heels. Frank Monk yelled and rallied his battered forces in vain.

They had backed to the limits of the cricket field now, and even the gallant Frank Monk saw that it was hopeless to fight on further. He gave a quick glance behind him, and then he gave the order to retreat.

It was as well he did so, for a swarm of St. Jim's fellows were coming round in the hope of cutting off their retreat.

The fleeing Grammarians, with Monk and his gallant band of cricketers bringing up the rear, cut through the encircling Saints like a knife through cheese, and went streaming across the fields beyond the St. Jim's playing-fields, leaving dozens of caps, and even collars and ties, lying on the battlefield.

A roar of triumphant cheering followed them from the victorious Saints.

"Let 'em go!" yelled Tom Merry. "They've had enough. Let 'em go!"

"I bet they won't try this game on again!" panted Blake. "Oh crumbs! Oh dear! I'm whacked!"

"Same here. Grooogh! My dose!"

"And my eye! Phew! What a glorious scrap!"

"Yaas, wathah! But we've licked the wottahs, deah boys!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Hurrah!"

"St. Jim's for ever!"

And the triumphant Saints retraced their steps, panting and gasping, and nursing their numerous wounds. Near the

pavilion they met Kildare and Darrell, both in a state of towering wrath.

"You—you young villains!" gasped Kildare. "Is this how you play a cricket-match? Get back to school at once, the whole blessed lot of you!"

"Right-ho, Kildare!" panted Tom Merry, mopping a streaming nose, and grinning cheerfully as he did so.

And the juniors and fags got back. Nursing noses and eyes, and various and numerous hurts, they left the field of battle and returned to the school. They all, more or less, left as if they had been through a coffee-mill, and they were muddy and torn and dishevelled. But they were happy. They had avenged themselves on their tormentors. They had won the day, and nothing else mattered!

Indeed, Tom Merry & Co. were quite cheery as they trooped along to their studies after leaving the changing-room. They had had half a game, at all events, and they had won the battle afterwards, and had given their enemies a severe trouncing.

"Well, it's been an exciting afternoon, after all," grinned Tom Merry, as he kicked open the door of Study No. 10.

"I expect we're all booked for trouble when old Crankley hears about it, but— Mum-mum-my hat!"

"Great pip!"

"What the—the dickens!"

Just at that identical moment the Terrible Three got the shock of their lives.

For Study No. 10 was not as they had left it—not by any manner of means. Certainly it had not been exactly tidy—it rarely was that. But it had been tolerably tidy.

Now it wasn't! Indeed, untidy did not at all describe the state of Study No. 10.

To begin with, coal and cinders were spread over the carpet—at least, over what could be seen of the carpet. For the centre of this was occupied by the study table, which had been turned upside-down. And on top of this had been piled the pictures, the empty coal-scuttle, the study chairs, the tablecloth, the hearthrug, and many other articles too many to mention, including all the books from the bookshelves.

If a cyclone had struck Study No. 10 it could scarcely have made the room more untidy than it was.

Tom Merry and his chums blinked at the scene in horrified alarm.

"Who can have done this, chaps?" demanded Tom Merry in a tragic voice.

"It's awful!" groaned Lowther. "It's a rag, of course, though whom—"

"It can't have been those New House bounders," gasped Tom. "for they were all on the field, I think. This beats the blessed band, chaps!"

"Let's go and see what Blake and his lot think about it," mumbled Manners.

"It may be Cutts and some of those Fifth Form chaps," said Tom Merry, giving a groan as he viewed the havoc. "You remember when we raided their secret feed at Pepper's Barn? They may have taken this chance to get their own back."

"Perhaps Racke & Co. were in it, too," said Lowther, gritting his teeth. "If they were— Hallo!"

Hurried footsteps sounded in the passage, and next moment Blake, with D'Arcy, Herries, and Digby at his heels, dashed in. They started as they sighted the state of the celebrated apartment known as Study No. 10.

"Great pip!" ejaculated Blake. "You fellows got it, too! Well, I'm blowed!"

"Mean to say your study has been ragged, too?" demanded Tom Merry in great astonishment.

Blake nodded speechlessly.

"Bai Jove!" articulated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "This is a wotten state of affairs, I must say! Tewwible, bai Jove! I have nevah felt so angwy in my life. All my new ties and socks and collars are stwewn about the place, wumped and twisted. They have even been tied to the gas-bracket and wound the table legs and chair legs—uttally wuined in shape, bai Jove! It will take weeks of ironin' to straighten the ties out again," added the swell of the Fourth, with a hollow groan. "It is fwightful, bai Jove!"

"It must have been Cutts' lot!" snapped Tom, his eyes gleaming.

"Blessed if I can think it is them!" said Blake. "Those cads would have done worse damage than this—they wouldn't have just stopped at such comparatively harmless damage as this."

"Harmless!" shrieked Arthur Augustus. "What about my ties and my collars and my socks? Gwest Scott! I—I—"

D'Arcy's wrathful outburst ceased, for just then a startling sound reached the ears of the juniors—the sound of a clanging bell.

"What—what— My hat! It's fire!" gasped Blake.

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"More like a general assembly!" exclaimed Tom Merry, in a startled voice. "Come on!"

And the juniors dashed out into the passage. Apparently the exciting events of that afternoon were not ended yet.

CHAPTER 9.

Very Queer!

"O III! I was just looking for you, Kildare!" Kildare came into the School House at St. Jim's looking far from cheery. The startling events on the cricket field had not brought any sort of cheer into Kildare's gloomy state of mind—quite the reverse. He had been in charge, and it was he who would be called to account for the riot. In point of fact, Eric Kildare was in a very bad temper indeed. And even the sight of little Dr. Crankley's mildly smiling face did not smooth the frown from his brow just then.

Kildare met the new headmaster of St. Jim's on the steps of the School House, and he stopped.

"Yes, sir!" he said grimly.

Kildare knew what Dr. Crankley wanted—though he could not understand what the good little doctor of literature saw in the riot to smile about. Dr. Crankley wanted to ask him about the disgraceful events on Little Side, of course!

But Kildare was quite wrong there; apparently the new Head had no idea of what had happened.

"As you have returned from the cricket field," smiled Dr. Crankley, "I presume the match has ended, my dear boy?"

"Well, yes, sir!" gasped Kildare.

"During your absence and the absence of the juniors," went on Dr. Crankley, "I have been making a tour of the studies, Kildare."

"Oh, indeed, sir!"

"Yes. I have been very disappointed and disgusted," went on the new Head, "with the state of the junior studies in general, Kildare. I have also visited certain of the senior studies, and though I have little fault to find there, I was distressed to see most of the seniors frouthing there instead of being out of doors."

"They miss the cricket, sir," said Kildare bluntly. "Having nothing special to occupy their time on a half-holiday, sir, they are bound to slack about like this. You must excuse me, sir, but I feel it only right to say that the sooner cricket is restored the better it will be for St. Jim's."

"I do not agree with you—ahem!" said Dr. Crankley. "The matter can very easily be remedied in another way. I was looking for you, Kildare, because I desire you to take the Fifth Form and the Sixth—or the boys who are still indoors, at all events—on a ten-mile route-march, my boy."

Kildare jumped.

"A—ten-mile route-march, sir!" he stammered.

"Yes," said Dr. Crankley firmly. "You will kindly act at once, Kildare. It is my wish and order that you call all the members of the Fifth and Sixth together, form them into fours, and lead them on a route-march, which must be at least ten miles. It will rid them of their slackness, and will do them all a world of good. This will be a most satisfactory change from cricket! Ahem!"

Kildare looked on the verge of a fit.

"The Lower School, however, I will deal with myself," said Dr. Crankley. "Will you kindly cause the bell to be rung for a general assembly of the whole of the Lower School in Big Hall!"

And with that, Dr. Crankley rustled away—before Kildare could think of saying anything had he wanted to.

"Well, I'm blowed!" ejaculated Kildare, staring after him. "G-good lor! A ten-mile route-march! Phew! Won't the fellows just rave!"

"What the thump's up?" demanded Darrell, coming along just then. "What's the old man want?"

"He—he's mad!" exclaimed Kildare faintly. "Gone stark, staring mad! I've got to take all the Fifth and Sixth that are not already out of gates on a blessed ten-mile route-march!"

"What?"

"It's a fact! It's got to be done—though the fellows will tear their dashed hair, I expect. Fancy old Knox stepping it out for ten miles! Phew!"

"Oh, Jerusalem!" gasped Darrell.

"And I've got to call a general assembly of the Lower School in Big Hall at once, too!" said Kildare dazedly. "What the thump he's going to do with those fags, goodness knows—drown 'em, I hope! Anyway, I'd better get going. You trot off and rout some of the lazy slackers out, Darrell, old man! This—this fairly swallows the poached egg and the toast!"

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And with that Kildare hurried away. Orders were orders, and having a very keen sense of duty, Kildare meant to carry them out.

And very soon the bell was clanging for the general assembly of the Lower School, and Kildare and Darrell were rousing dismay and consternation in the ranks of the lofty Fifth and Sixth.

By the time Tom Merry & Co. and the rest of the juniors and fags were assembled in Big Hall the sound of tramping feet was heard in the quad outside the open window. It was Kildare's little army getting ready to start out on their ten-mile route-march!

"Oh, great Scott!" murmured Tom Merry to his chums. "This—this is the outside edge! Fancy Knoxy and that lot of high and mighty panjandrums stepping it out for ten miles! Oh, my hat!"

The news of Dr. Crankley's orders to the Fifth and Sixth had spread like wildfire through the school, and though the Lower School did not know what lay before them, they giggled and choked inwardly with helpless mirth as they listened to the sounds of tramping out in the quad.

After a time the shuffling ceased, and then came Kildare's sharp, commanding voice—being a N.C.O. in the school cadets, Kildare was no duffer at the game.

"Form—fours!"

"Right—turn!"

"March!"

Tramp, tramp, tramp, tramp!

Some of the juniors near the windows looked out and they chuckled as they saw the seething rage on the faces of most of the seniors. The little army filed out of the quad and the tramp of feet gradually died away.

"Hallo! Now it's our turn!" murmured Lowther.

The door of Big Hall had opened, and it revealed the little, rather plump, figure of Dr. Crankley.

The only other masters in Hall were Mr. Selby and M. Morny, the French master, and both masters looked almost scared. They obviously did not know what to make of things at all. Certainly, Dr. Crankley was "faddy" in the extreme, and he did very queer things at times. But he was acting very strangely indeed now.

Dr. Crankley lost no time in settling the general suspense. Naturally, the Lower School imagined to a man that the assembly had been called in regard to the riot on the cricket field. It could scarcely mean anything else in their view.

They soon knew it wasn't, however.

"Boys," exclaimed Dr. Crankley, "I have called you together on a very serious matter. This afternoon I have made a personal round of the junior studies, and I have been most disturbed and disgusted to find them in a terrible state of disorder and untidiness. The Third Form Common-room was also in a most appalling state of untidiness. It was most unhealthy, to say the least of it. Now, boys, this state of affairs cannot possibly continue."

The Head paused and blinked round at the staring faces through his gold-rimmed spectacles.

"This state of affairs is most disturbing to me," continued Dr. Crankley, "and I am, therefore, determined to bring about an immediate change. As a punishment for this untidiness and slovenliness, every boy present will accept from me a sentence of one thousand lines. The lines will consist of the sentence: 'We are all dirty, untidy little boys at St. Jim's!' This imposition each boy will bring to me when I ask for it."

"Phew!"

A low, horrified whistle went through Big Hall. A thousand lines was no joke.

"Also," proceeded Dr. Crankley blandly, "the state of affairs must be remedied without a moment's delay. Each boy will proceed to his study, and will at once remove all furniture and belongings into the passage. The Third Form will do likewise with their property in the Common-room."

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

An incredulous gasp echoed and re-echoed through Big Hall. The occupants of that ancient, oak-paneled room, excepting Dr. Crankley himself, looked absolutely dumb-founded at that order.

"Everything must be placed outside in the passage both in the New House and the School House," proceeded Dr. Crankley calmly, "in order that the maids can take charge of the rooms and clean them thoroughly. I am ashamed to discover such slackness and carelessness at St. Jim's, and the only remedy is a thorough cleaning out!"

"G-good lor!" breathed Tom Merry. "Wha-what next?"

He soon learned what next.

"Also," resumed the new Head, pursing his lips, "I am not satisfied with the ventilation of the studies. There is not anything like enough air in them. To have the windows open is not enough. A current of air should have free movement through each study. To bring this about

I wish the occupants of each study to remove the doors from their hinges this afternoon when the furniture has been removed.

"Oh-oooooooooh!"

"With the aid of a screwdriver or a table-knife this should be a very simple matter," said Dr. Crankley. "The door may be just leaned against the passage wall for the present. My object is to allow a current of fresh air to circulate throughout the school, and also in order that those in authority can see into each study when passing. You will now dismiss and set to work without delay. When you have finished I wish you to assemble in good order in the quad, and I then will inspect you at fire-drill. That is all, excepting that those boys who are not in the quadrangle within twenty minutes from now will have their imposition of one thousand lines doubled!"

Having given vent to that mild threat, Dr. Crankley marched out of the Hall. He was smiling quite kindly as he went; but the Lower School of St. Jim's were not smiling. They began to file out, too spellbound to talk for the moment.

They looked like fellows in a dream.

But it was no nightmare, queer as it all seemed. It was cold fact. Moreover, it had to be done. Head's orders were Head's orders.

"Pinch me!" groaned Lowther, as the Terrible Three came out of Big Hall. "Pinch me and see if I'm awake!"

"You're awake all right!" gasped Tom Merry. "It's no giddy dream, and it's got to be done. He, the old fat-head, must be absolutely potty to give orders like that! And a thousand lines! Oh, my hat! It's awful! But it's got to be done. For the love of Mike let's go and get on with the job!"

And the Terrible Three joined the rush of dazed fellows to their various studies to "get on with the job."

CHAPTER 10. More Shocks!

"OH dear!"

"Oh crumbs! This is awful!"

"Blow the old idiot!"

"He's mad—absolutely potty!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The Fourth and Shell passages at St. Jim's fairly hummed with groans and wrathful remarks. It also fairly rang with thumps and bumps and crashes of the furniture and effects as the various occupants of the studies slaved away madly to get the new Head's orders carried out.

It was not an easy job by any means. Many of the articles of furniture had been carried into the studies with difficulty. Fellows like Racke, who had plenty of cash to spend on furniture, had good cause to regret, for that afternoon, at all events, having ever been in the position to fill their studies to overflowing with heavy furniture.

Couches and heavy easy-chairs needed some shifting, and carpets were not easy things to handle at all. Moreover, they were dusty, and the air resounded with gasps and pantings and sneezes, as the unfortunate victims of Dr. Crankley's "eccentricity" struggled and perspired at their unusual and far from welcome labours.

Hot, wrathful, and disgusted, they struggled out into the passage with their furniture and their books and their various sporting effects, and their carpets, cushions, clothes, and pictures.

It was a horrid job from beginning to end, and by the time it was finished, like the passages over in the New House, the Fourth and Shell passages in the School House were crammed and almost impassable.

The store-rooms of a secondhand furniture shop was a tidy and pleasing sight compared with the study passages at St. Jim's that afternoon.

But the removing part of the job was done at last, and then, uttering remarks that were both loud and very deep, the luckless juniors started on the hinges of the doors, most of them armed only with table-knives or pen-knives.

It was a heartbreaking job. Some of the screws were rusty and refused to be shifted at first. But desperate attempts brought success at last, and several seconds before the twenty minutes was up rows of dismantled doors stood along the Fourth and Shell passage.

Tom Merry & Co. and Blake & Co. were the last to finish, for they had been obliged to clean the ashes and coal-dust from their carpets—for inquiry soon proved that only their studies had been ragged that afternoon—thus strengthening their suspicions that Cutts & Co. had been the raggars.

But they did finish at last, and then they tore downstairs and joined the crowd of dusty and exhausted juniors and fags in the quad.

Dr. Crankley was already there, and he beckoned to Tom Merry.

"You, I believe, have some authority in the school fire-brigade?" he exclaimed, smiling kindly.

"Kildare is captain of the brigade," stammered Tom, his smug, dusty features flushed. "I am in charge only of the junior section, sir."

"But you understand the—the procedure, my boy?"

"Oh, yes, sir!"

"Then kindly proceed with fire-drill without delay. We will pretend that the gymnasium is on fire."

"Yes, sir. Very good, sir!"

And Tom, who had armed himself with his fire whistle, gave three sharp blasts upon it.

Tired as were the juniors, the members of the fire-brigade junior section jumped to it with a will. They had no intention of earning any further lines, or anything else, from Dr. Crankley, unless it was praise for smartness.

In a very few seconds the doors of the school fire-station were whirled open, and the engine was run out with the hose-carrier and the portable escape, and rushed over to the gymnasium, where a crowd of juniors and fags had foregathered in wondering expectancy.

Quickly and calmly Tom Merry rapped out his orders, and in a very few seconds the hose was run out and connected to the water supply. Then the starting-handle of the small motor-engine was cranked round, and soon a stream of water was playing on the walls and closed windows of the gymnasium, the nozzle of the hose in Tom Merry's capable hands.

But Dr. Crankley did not seem at all satisfied with Tom's handling of it.

"No, no, no!" he called, hurrying up and taking hold of the nozzle which Tom held. "That is not the way I wish you to use it, Merry. The proper manner is like— Bless my soul!"

Swoosh!

How it happened, Dr. Crankley himself seemed to know least of all. But as he took the streaming nozzle from Tom's hands the business end happened to turn towards Tom, and that hapless youth took the stream full in the face. It also swept him from head to foot, and bowled him clean off his feet.

Crash!

Tom Merry went on his back, fairly wallowing in water. "G-good gracious!" gasped Dr. Crankley. "However did that happen? I—I think— Oh, how excessively careless of me!"

This time the stream of water swept in the other direction.

(Continued overleaf.)

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tion, sending a flood of water over Mr. Selby and a crowd of fellows, who scattered with startled yells.

The unfortunate accident seemed to make the good doctor lose his head completely.

He stood as if bewildered, the nozzle and hose thrashing about in his hand in all directions. In about the space of five seconds, nearly every fellow within thirty yards had been either completely drenched through or very nearly drenched, very few escaping that terrible, thrashing nozzle.

"Help!" gasped Dr. Crankley. "Bless my soul! How exceedingly unfortunate! What—what— Good gracious!"

"I— No, do not turn the water off. Certainly not! I have the nozzle completely under control now. I think all who have become so unfortunately wet had better go to the matron, after they have changed, and get from her a good dose of cod-liver oil. Merry, will you— Oh!"

Dr. Crankley's remarks ended in a startled gasp. His jaw dropped, and he stared across the Close with startled eyes.

Then Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who had been more lucky than most, and who was scarcely touched, gave an astonished cry.

"Bai Jove! The—the pater and old Conway! Gwcat Scott!"

All the fellows—or those who had stayed, at all events—stared as they sighted the familiar figure of Lord Eastwood crossing the Close. With him was Lord Conway, the elder brother of Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, my hat!" said Tom.

"Great pip!" gasped Dr. Crankley.

As he heard that extraordinary remark fall from the august lips of the headmaster of St. Jim's Tom Merry started, but nothing like so violently as did the rest of the crowd within earshot.

As a matter of fact, Tom had been watching Dr. Crankley closely for the last few seconds, an amazing suspicion dawning in his mind.

That suspicion became a certainty as he heard Dr. Crankley say "Great pip!" It was scarcely a remark a headmaster would use, even if he was startled by the appearance of distinguished visitors at such an unfortunate moment.

And as the certainty flashed in upon Tom's mind, he acted swift and sure.

In his hands he held the thrashing hose-pipe, the Head still holding the nozzle limply in his own hands. And Tom gave the pipe a sudden, vicious drag.

The result was startling, especially to Dr. Crankley.

The drag on the hose jerked the nozzle upwards, and as Dr. Crankley happened to be in the way, he got the stream of water full in his face.

He swept him fore and aft, so to speak, and bowled him over like a ninepin.

Crash!

"Oh, great Scott!"

There was a horrified yell—a yell that ended in a dumb-founded gasp, as Dr. Crankley leaped to his feet, water dripping from him.

For that terrific sweep of water had wrought a transformation in the appearance of Dr. Crankley. It had not only swept away his over-long mass of grey hair, but it had also washed away with the hair the grey side-whiskers. Moreover, it had taken eyebrows with it, and quite a lot of grease-paint and make-up!

The transformation revealed to view the face and head of a boy, looking a ludicrous figure with his padded front, his big boots, and gown.

But the impostor gave the crowd no chance to recognise him. He leaped to his feet, gave a desperate glance round, and took to his heels as if a thousand fiends were after him.

"Quick!" howled Tom Merry. "After him!"

There was a howl—a howl of wrath and amazement.

"Yes, after him!"

"After the rotten spoofer! We've been done! After him!"

Forgetful of the distinguished visitors—heedless of anything just then—the crowd went after Tom Merry with a rush, howling like a pack of wolves.

With his gown flying in the wind behind him, the impostor flew across the Close and down the gravel path to the gates, the pack, in full cry, after him. Tom Merry led the way, his face grim and determined. He knew whom the daring impostor was, if nobody else did.

Just outside the gates Blake caught Tom Merry up, and he gasped out a question.

"Who is it, Tommy? Who is the daring spoofer? I did spot his chivvy. Was it—"

"Gordon Gay, of course!" panted Tom Merry, his eyes gleaming. "Great Scott! And we never even dreamed

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that it wasn't the beak! A thousand lines, eh? We'll give him a thousand lines! We'll teach him to play monkey tricks like this. My hat! Think of him making us slave like he did—carrying all our stuff out of the studies and taking the doors down. Oh, the—the daring villain!"

And Tom put on speed desperately, and after that he said nothing, keeping his breath for running. And he needed it, for with clothes drenched it was difficult work running. But Gordon Gay—if it was that daring young rascal—was in a like dismal plight. Moreover, his heavier boots and gown were a drag. As he ran, Gay realised Tom was overtaking him, and he tore the gown from his back.

But it did not save him, for all that. Tom gained slowly, but surely. The fugitive had taken to the fields now, leaping a hedge into a ploughed field beyond. He was obviously making for the Rylcombe Woods.

But he never reached them; quite suddenly he stumbled in his big boots, and went thudding down in the mire on his face.

"Got you!" panted Tom.

He had leaped on the prostrate figure in a flash, and the next moment a dozen or more juniors came dashing up, their faces grim.

"Good man, Tommy! Hurrah! Got the cad! Who—" "Gordon Gay!"

It was a perfect howl—a howl of amazement and wrath. Gordon Gay looked up, a rather uneasy grin on his smudgy, heated features.

"You got me!" he panted. "Well, it was a good run, and only bad luck bowled me out. I overdid it just a bit, though."

"You thundering well did, my pippin!" snapped Tom Merry. "You—you daring, cheeky, brazen-faced rotter! How on earth you had the thundering nerve—"

"Look here!" panted Gordon Gay, becoming suddenly serious. "You chaps will play the game, I hope. You can lick me as much as you like; but—well, you know what will happen if it gets out it was me. It means the giddy sack for me!"

"No doubt about that; and you fairly asked for it, if anyone ever did, Gay," said Tom Merry, grinning despite himself. "And if Kildare and the rest of the giddy seniors ever get to know they'll flay you alive! Ten miles route-march— Oh crumbs! I must say it's the jape of the term!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom's splutter ended in a perfect howl of laughter, in which all but Gay himself joined.

"Lemme go!" stammered Gordon Gay hopefully. "It—it was only a lark—you know that! If it gets out—"

"You should have thought of that before you did it!" said Tom grimly. "As for letting you go—not yet, my lad! Bring him along this way, chaps!"

"I—I say, what are you going to do?" gasped Gay. "Look here! After all I worked the match for you, as I said I would. You can't deny that!"

"Oh crumbs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors roared again; none of them had thought of that part of the afternoon's events. It was Gay, of course, who had ordered them to play the match after all—Gordon Gay, in his role of Dr. Crankley. That respected headmaster had actually gone to Wayland after all.

It certainly had its funny side! And they had certainly been completely deceived. Knowing as they did of Gordon Gay's wonderful powers of mimicry, of impersonating, and his sheer daring and cheek, they had yet never even suspected such a thing.

Now they knew, however, and, though they roared over it all, they could not forget how they had slaved at the removing job, and how they would have to slave to get things right again.

Gordon Gay very soon knew his punishment.

The juniors came to a halt at last at the edge of a deep, slimy ditch, overrun with horrible, slimy weeds and fungus.

"Oh!" panted Gordon Gay, his eyes starting in sheer horror. "Not that—for the love of Mike not that! Lick me—do what you like, but don't chuck me in there!"

And the hapless prisoner shuddered. It was an appeal-it shudder, but it left Tom Merry & Co. unmoved.

"In with him!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Yarooooogh! Great pip! For goodness' sake—"

Splash!

"Guggggg! Mummumm!"

Gordon Gay was paying for his many and manifold sins. The green-coated waters of the ditch closed over his hapless head. He went under, and when he reappeared again he



Gordon Gay took to his heels as if a thousand fiends were on his track. "After him!" yelled Tom Merry, leading the way, his face grim and determined. "After the rotten spoofer!" With his gown flying in the wind behind him, the impostor flew across the Close in the direction of the gates, the pack, in full cry, following hard on his heels. (See Chapter 10.)

looked like Father Neptune, only more so. As he staggered and lurched, and tottered out to dry land, the St. Jim's juniors fairly fled, howling with laughter.

They had seen—and smelled—as much of Gordon Gay as they wanted to do for that afternoon.

Leaving that hapless, practical joker to wend his miserable way homewards as best he could, Tom Merry and the rest of the St. Jim's avengers returned homewards, most of them wet through.

"There's going to be hefty trouble about this affair," said Tom Merry. "You fellows all understand that. And you understand that we've got to play the game—we've got to shield that daring fathead Gay if we can. Not a word to a soul, mind!"

"Rather not!"

"He's taken us in badly—but after all we've often taken them in, and they've always played the game with us. So—whatever comes or goes remember nobody's to let it out that it was Gordon Gay!"

"Right-ho!"

And so it was settled, and the St. Jim's juniors hurried back to St. Jim's to face the music.

CHAPTER 11.

Who Sent the Wire?

WHEN Tom Merry and the rest of the avengers arrived back at St. Jim's they found the whole Lower School working madly to replace their furniture and effects in their studies. They were heated and perspiring and seething with wrath to a man.

And even when Tom Merry & Co. related the fate that had befallen the practical joker, having refused to give his name, the labouring juniors refused to be comforted.

"If I ever get my hands on the sweep, I'll—I'll smash him to a squashed tomato!" gasped Grundy, turning a red and furious face on Tom Merry as he came along the passage. Grundy was in his shirtsleeves, and he looked a sight.

Tom Merry could not help smiling.

"You've no need to grin!" panted Grundy. "Old Selby says we've got to have all these things put back and the doors put back before the Head and Railton returns, or we're for it. Better get going on yours."

"Oh crumbs!"

After that Tom Merry & Co. took off their jackets and set to with a will—though not a very cheerful will. They toiled and struggled, and when at last they had finished, they washed and changed. By that time it was known that the Head and the other masters had returned, and that they were closeted with Lord Eastwood and Lord Conway in the Head's study. The school was fairly seething with wrath and excitement over it all. The Fifth and Sixth came back from their route-march, tired and raging—they almost had fits when they learned the dreadful truth.

After changing, the Terrible Three went along to see Blake & Co., and they found those juniors looking very gloomy—especially Arthur Augustus.

"Hallo! Was just wondering when you chaps would come along!" grunted Blake.

"Well, what's the latest?" grinned Tom Merry. "What about your giddy pater, Gussy?"

Arthur Augustus had had too much respect for his noble

pater to follow in chase of the impersonator, and he had remained to take charge of his father and brother.

He frowned now, and shook his head seriously.

"The pater was natu'ally vewy shocked and vewy astonished," said Arthur Augustus. "And I am not surprised, deah boys. Of course, I had to explain ewewythin'—at least, all about what had happened and about the stoppin' of the ewicket an' all that. He was simply astounded!"

"I bet he was!" grinned Tom. "I bet he was no end disappointed at not seeing a match this afternoon, too!"

"It is nothin' to gwin about, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus. "I am afwaid there is twouble ahead for somebody. There is something you have, appawently, not heard yet, Tom Mewwy. Some wascal—some unsewupulous person—sent the patah an urgent wire askin' him to come here at once, bai Jove, and actually signed it with my name—Arthah!"

Tom Merry looked startled.

"My hat! So—so that's why your pater's here?"

"Yaas. You wemembah that that wascal Wacke came to me and asked me to send for the patah? Well, I wefused, as you know. But—but," said Arthur Augustus, his voice trembling with wrath, "the fighwful cad must have sent a wire on his own!"

"Phew! It looks like it," breathed Tom Merry. "That's a bit thick, Gussy! Can you prove it was Racke?"

"Bai Jove, no! But it must have been, deah boys. It is impos to show up that wascal Wacke, howevah. Even if we could pwove it, we could not sneak!"

"Rather not! The—the beastly cad!" said Tom wrathfully. "But what—"

He was interrupted, for at that moment Kildare looked in, his face grave.

"D'Arcy, you're wanted in the Head's study. Cut along—sharp!"

"Wight, Kildare!"

With a wry grimace at his chums, Arthur Augustus jammed his monocle firmly into place and marched out.

EXTRA GOOD!

"WALLY'S SECRET SOCIETY!"

Next Wednesday's Rollicking Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's.

EXTRA LONG!

A moment later he was tapping at the door of the Head's study. He entered to find, as he anticipated, that his father and his brother were there, in addition to Mr. Railton and Dr. Crankley. All looked very grave.

And somebody else was there, also, at sight of whom Arthur Augustus stared. It was Baggy Trimble, and Baggy looked like a ghost.

Arthur Augustus bowed gracefully to his noble pater and then to the other gentlemen present.

"You sent for me, sir?" he said calmly to the Head.

Arthur Augustus had nothing serious on his conscience, and he saw no reason to be afraid.

"Yes, my boy," said Dr. Crankley, rather quietly. "Perhaps you will be good enough to question D'Arcy, Mr. Railton?"

"Very good, sir," said the Housemaster, turning to D'Arcy. "You are sent for in regard to the wire—the fraudulent telegram that was supposed to have been sent by you to your father, D'Arcy. Trimble, whom we now know was the person who handed in the wire, states that last evening Racke, Crooke, and another boy asked you to wire to your father and you refused. Is that the case?"

"Yes, sir."

Arthur Augustus knew it was useless to try to hide the truth now. He guessed that the keen-minded Mr. Railton had cross-examined Trimble as being the only person known to have entered the Wayland post office that afternoon, and Trimble was a fellow who soon crumbled up under cross-examination.

"Very good," Mr. Railton pursed his lips. "Will you kindly bring Racke here, D'Arcy?"

"Yes, sir."

D'Arcy was not long in bringing Racke, and that young rascal's face showed guilt in every line of it, though he was making obvious efforts to control his feelings. It was all up. Racke was keen enough to know that. He had dreaded the worst ever since he had learned that Trimble had been captured by Kildare. He had never counted upon an accident like that, just as Trimble had failed to do.

With so many steady eyes upon him all Racke's courage fled, and at Mr. Railton's first question he gave in.

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"Y—yes, sir," he stammered, white-lipped. "I—I paid Trimble to send it off. I—I'm sorry for it now—very sorry, sir. I—I did not realise what I was doing. I did it more for a lark than anything else."

It was a lie, and whether the assembled company knew it or not Racke never learned.

In answer to a nod from Dr. Crankley, Mr. Railton touched the bell, and presently Kildare came in.

"You will escort Trimble and Racke to the detention-room, please, Kildare," said the Housemaster. "They shall know their punishments later. You, D'Arcy, may go now."

And Arthur Augustus bowed politely again and went back to Study No. 6, whilst Kildare escorted his prisoners to the detention-room.

"Well?" asked D'Arcy's chums eagerly. "What happened?"

Arthur Augustus told them.

"Well, I must say both Trimble and Racke asked for it," said Tom Merry quietly. "Was that blessed spoof of Gordon Gay's mentioned, Gussy?"

"Not a word, deah boy. I wathah fancy we shall not heah vewy much about that. It will be a vewy difficult mattah to discovah who did it, and the beaks know it. They may suspect a Gwammawian, but they will not wisk twouble with the Gwammah School by kickin' up a feahful fuss. Wathah not!"

"I wonder if your giddy pater will tackle old Cranky about the grub and the cricket?" said Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove, I wonder!" said Arthur Augustus.

All the school wondered that that evening. It was known that Lord Eastwood had been closeted alone with Dr. Crankley for at least an hour, and it was known that he and Lord Conway dined with the Head. It was also soon known that the good-natured pater of the noble Arthur Augustus had pleaded on behalf of the wretched Racke and Trimble, for that same evening both put in an appearance

in public. Trimble had been gated for a month, and Racke had an imposition of a thousand lines in addition.

Before leaving that night Lord Eastwood and Lord Conway visited Arthur Augustus and his chums; but it was only for a very few minutes, and Lord Eastwood did not mention recent troubles of any kind, not even the cricket question.

The next day, however, it became only too abundantly clear that he had indeed "done it," as Blake put it. For on the notice-board appeared a notice signed by the Head rescinding the ban on cricket and on the Grammar School and on the visiting of confectionery shops in Rylcombe or Wayland. Nor was that all. Though the diet that day was the same as usual, it was generally known that "hygienic" dieting was at an end for St. Jim's, and that after that week the old order would be restored—ordinary food as of yore and study teas; while Mrs. Taggles was seen to be busy once again stocking her shelves and counters with cakes and tarts ready for the reopening of the tuckshop. It was a joyful sight for St. Jim's, and especially for Baggy Trimble!

Arthur Augustus proved to be a true prophet in regard to Gordon Gay. He was never found out—indeed, the authorities only made a very half-hearted attempt to find out the culprit. And Tom Merry & Co. certainly never let Gay's name cross their lips when referring to the great lapse of the term. But for a long, long time St. Jim's laughed over it, though the laugh was chiefly against themselves.

For another few days Dr. Crankley was at St. Jim's, and then Dr. Holmes returned from his holiday greatly improved in health. And, though St. Jim's, in general were delighted to have the old Head back again, they felt a little sorry when Dr. Crankley and his wife took their departure; for, despite the horrid times they had experienced under faddist rule, Tom Merry & Co., if nobody else, held pleasant memories of the faddist rulers.

THE END.

(Now look out for another rattling fine yarn dealing with your old favourite next week, entitled: "WALLY'S SECRET SOCIETY!" When this young imp of mischief gets going the sparks begin to fly! Sufficient to say then, next week's yarn will beat all its predecessors.)

WHIZ! BANG! CRASH! The Skeleton Men are not afraid of man or beast, but shy a few jumping crackers at them and, hey presto! They scoot for their lives!

BEYOND THE SILVER GLACIER!



As the fireworks exploded amongst them the natives turned and fled.

ARTHUR S. HARDY'S Grand New Serial Story.

Julian Del Rivo!

THIS happening caused an instant diversion in the opportunity to join issue with the bearded giant whose one thought, apparently, was to kill.

At the risk of his life Adam leapt between the pointed revolver the stranger held and the Hekebus.

"Stop that shooting!" he ordered. "It's cold-blooded murder!"

The giant looked at him out of eyes that glowed with malice. The expression of his face was devilish. For a moment he seemed to think of killing Adam, too, as he levelled the weapon at Adam's heart.

"Ah! Would you like some, too?" he asked in English. They faced each other, toe to toe, each looking into the other's eyes.

The giant was a man of forty-five, or perhaps fifty years of age, tall and broad of shoulder, with muscles like whipcord, and face burnt and lined by sun and weather. Seldom had Adam set eyes on such a powerful white man as he. Yet the boy did not quail.

"You owe your life to me," he answered sternly. "Had we arrived a few minutes later nothing would have been left of you and my friends but ashes. I don't know who you are, but you sha'n't shoot down these Skeleton men unless it is to save our lives. We are strangers in their land. From their point of view they are in the right."

There followed a tense moment, then the stranger laughed.

"So be it!" he cried. "You are mad, but, as you say, I owe my life to you. I will not shoot unless"—and he bared his white teeth in a wolfish smile—"it is necessary."

WHO'S WHO IN THIS STORY!

ADAM BYRNE, accompanied by his three companions, HARRY FRANKLIN, SANDY McTAVISH, and JIMMY BROWN, set out in search of Adam's father and sister, news having been received that the great white explorer, GEORGE WILLIS BYRNE, and his daughter, ROSA, who left England four years ago to explore the African jungle, are alive and well, but prisoners in the hands of a strange people at Baroomba, which lies north of the Silver Glacier and beneath the Mountain of the Hidden Crest.

Soon after leaving Baruda for the interior, however, one of the planes is wrecked. Next, the party is pursued by a strange race of natives known as the Hekebus, or Skeleton Men, and despite the charm Adam is wearing which, according to a witch's prophecy,

By this time Sandy McTavish and Muta had liberated Jimmy Brown from the stake to which he was tied.

The Cockney engineer, his hair all rumpled, his clothes torn and dirty, was rubbing his bruises ruefully. He came limping up to Adam now.

"I thought we were all for it, sir," he smiled. "Luckily those horned priests thought it necessary to bring together all their tribe for the bonfire, or we'd have been cooked long ago. But what's to be done now?"

His eyes roamed the clearing, which was in a tumult.

"There are only a few of us, and there are hundreds of them, and the women, too, over there on the fringe of the trees. Don't know how you managed to find that elephant, sir, but he's some baby. Scared that bunch of Skeletons stiff, 'e has, but if they start being nasty, why, what can we do?"

Adam took stock of the scene. He saw Skeleton warriors fleeing in panic from the charging elephant. Kitu might normally be a docile beast, but the flaming torches, the fireworks, the firing, and what not else had driven him momentarily mad.

Up and down he charged, and everywhere went tumbling warriors who failed to get clear.

Now Harry Franklin ran up to Adam. His face was white and his eyes blazed feverishly. He, like Sandy McTavish, had been badly bitten by insects.

"Thanks, Adam," he said. "Thanks, old man. That's another slice added to the debt I owe you. But let's get away from here before these fellows rally. If we don't—"

is alleged to bring luck to the wearer, three of Adam's friends are whisked away by the Skeleton Men, whose intention it is to burn them at the stake. A bold plan of rescue is suggested by Muta, a native friend of Adam's, and these two, astride a sacred elephant, charge into the Hekebus' camp. Then Adam discovers that, in addition to his own friends, there is another white man, a stranger, tied to the stake. The sacred elephant puts the Hekebus to rout, what time Adam and Muta rush round to rescue their chums. Immediately upon his release the bearded stranger begins to shoot indiscriminately at the warriors, an action of which Adam strongly disapproves. And Kitu, the elephant, now thoroughly roused, tramples down the natives in a wild orgy of savagery.

(Now read on.)

Adam understood. Even with firearms they would stand no chance against the Hekebus, if they meant mischief and attacked again.

He handed some of the maroons from his pockets to Harry.

"Let's light these and frighten 'em," he said. "Look at the way the torch-bearers run."

Run! The men with flaming torches, who had formed a square about the place of sacrifice, had broken ranks everywhere, frightened by the charging elephant.

They were in a panic. Now was the time to get away.

"We'll give them one more scare, and bolt," said Adam.

Nor did he arrive at the decision a moment too soon, for again the horned priests were rallying and encouraging their men.

They were pointing at the white men, uttering hoarse, imperious commands. Some of the Skeleton warriors, bolder than the rest, had gripped their spears and shields again and were forming up for an attack.

Now Harry and Adam lit up two maroons and flung them. Crackers followed, jumping and banging all over the clearing. The sack of fireworks which Muta had dropped as he rolled clear of the elephant lay upon the ground. Adam and Harry lit and hurled more fireworks into the ranks of the Hekebus. As these spurted fire and then went off with a deafening bang, sending encircling golden devils into the air, with coloured lights flashing amid the gold, the warriors turned tail and fled.

"Now!" cried Adam. "Quick, Harry! Quick!"

Muta, Sandy McTavish, Jimmy Brown, Harry, and Adam made for the forest, choosing the spot where Kitu had entered the clearing.

"With your permission," said the bearded stranger, speeding after them, "I'll come with you."

Adam eyed him doubtfully.

Instinctively he disliked the man. Yet it was impossible to leave him there to perish.

"Very well," said Adam.

A glance behind showed him that Kitu, the sacred elephant, had turned, and was now charging their way at a speed that would not have disgraced a Derby winner. The beast had properly run amok.

"Here comes the old bull pup!" yelled Jimmy Brown. "Run!"

And in their way they saw a prostrate warrior who, raising himself upon one hand, pointed the other at the bearded stranger. From his fast-moving lips, his painted head looking like a death-mask, poured a torrent of words.

His tone was one of denunciation. Adam did not understand one word of his utterance, but he could see that what the Hekebu said maddened the stranger.

Swinging out of his trousers' belt the revolver he had stuck in there he took aim at the warrior's head. The man was already badly hurt, no doubt by the charging elephant. Yet the stranger would have shot him.

But even as he pulled the trigger Adam beat his arm up, and the bullet sped harmlessly above the trees.

The stranger burst then into a flood of foreign oaths.

Harry Franklin, seizing his arm, pulled it down, so that the revolver pointed at the ground, then wrenched it out of his hand.

"Adam is right," he cried. "That poor wretch is defenceless. It would be cowardly murder to kill him!"

The other, licking his lips, shrugged, and they passed on.

"When you have lived in these strange, wild lands, and know these people—dogs, vermin, treacherous rascals, the lot of them—you will kill, and always kill!" he remarked. "These men killed my native followers, stole my skins and trophies and all my equipment, I, who trusted them. Then they dragged me here to kill me, and if providence had not sent the other white men to share my fate, you would not have attempted rescue." He thrust his lower jaw out evilly. "Why should I spare these Hekebus, when they have murdered my friends, the natives who trusted me, and begged me?"

Harry made no answer.

Now the forest swallowed them, Muta pulling Adam by the arm and pointing into the heart of it.

"Muta find the way," he whispered. "And that man—I know him. I heard what the Hekebu said to him. Liar and cheat and false friend, he called him, oh, my white master from the air. I have heard ugly tales told of the big white hunter."

"Indeed, Muta," answered Adam, casting a glance behind and seeing dark and ghost-like figures following him in single file. "What is his name, do you know that?"

"His name, my white master, is Julian Del Rivo."

Adam uttered a low cry.

"Julian Del Rivo!"

The world was small, it seemed. Julian Del Rivo! This was the name of a Portuguese trader and big game hunter who had been his father's friend the first time Professor George Willis Byrne had penetrated into unknown and unexplored parts of Central Africa. In the many letters which Adam's father had sent home, and which were later included in a book of travels written by him, the name of Del Rivo had appeared time and again.

And now Adam had found the man.

Odd that. Adam shivered. Often he had heard his father talk about the great qualities of the Portuguese traveller and big game hunter.

Well, Julian Del Rivo might possess these qualities in abundance, but Adam disliked him. Surely, he thought, a man cannot be great in heart and mind and want to slay without the necessary provocation; and though these Skeleton men had taken the Portuguese and meant to burn him alive—provocation enough he was ready to admit—yet Adam did not like the manner in which the Portuguese had shot to kill.

The story Del Rivo had told might be true, doubtless it was true; but if Muta could be trusted in his interpretation—and he knew the language of the Hekebus—here was a wounded Skeleton warrior, showing no trace of fear, denouncing the white man as a liar, a cheat, and a traitor. Hard words indeed.

Adam had arrived at this point of thought when an odd trumpeting sound, and the crash of undergrowth near by, made him stop in his tracks.

From far behind came the wailing and shrieking of the Skeleton men. The last gleam of light given by their torches had faded away.

The crashing sounds came nearer, passed by, and gradually diminished.

"That, O white flyer of the air," explained Muta, "is Kitu, the sacred elephant. He is in no end of a rage. Pity we cannot catch him, for then I might make another sharp-pointed probe, and, with luck, we might use him to take us back to where your big flying bird lies at rest."

"H'm, yes!" smiled Adam. "But, Muta, can we not find the way without him?"

"Perhaps. Better wait for the day to break."

"The Hekebus may follow us."

Muta disagreed.

"They are frightened. They have offended Kitu. They know now that they did wrong to take the white men, and try to burn them with fire. They will believe, even the horned priests among them, that my mother, the witch O-Kama, laid a curse upon their race when dying. They will wait to think it out, and they will not attempt to attack before the night passes. Soon the day will come, then Muta will find the trail and lead you back."

"And I think," said Adam grimly, "that it will be as well, then, to get the aeroplane ready for flight immediately, in case these Skeleton friends of ours overcome their fears and make up their minds to follow and kill us."

They tramped on a while longer, then came to a halt and settled themselves down where it was dry.

All were dead beat. Yet there could be no rest for them yet awhile. Danger lurked all around them—not only the danger of the wild Hekebus, but of the beasts which roamed the forest.

So while they waited for the dawn Sandy McTavish, Jimmy Brown, and Harry told their story.

It was a simple tale enough.

They had walked right into the trap without being aware of danger as they left this cave of O-Kama.

Swiftly the Hekebus had pinioned their arms, rendering them helpless, and then they had urged them through the forest to the clearing which Muta called the place of sacrifice.

"They must have spared us instant death out of superstitious fears, Adam, old man," said Harry. "For nothing would have been easier than for some of their warriors to have driven their spears through us on the spot. It was what we expected every minute; and so greatly did I suffer from the pain caused by my bonds that there was a time when I would have welcomed a thrust. Still, while there was life hope remained."

"Those chaps held no end of a pow-wow over us. Old men and children, hags and young women, of the Skeleton tribe—and none of these were painted with the Skeleton device, only the warriors adopting this—came to look at us and jeer at us. Sometimes they pinched us and prodded us."

"Ay," put in Sandy. "And wouldn't I have liked to have got ma hands free."

"Then those old horned priests came and chanted some sort of dirge over us," Jimmy Brown went on, taking up the thread of the tale. "Them drum-beaters also lined up and had a go. Next they sat in a circle singing and chanting and feasting."

"After a while they left us in peace," said Harry, "and then some old men brought the big stakes and set them in the earth. It never dawned on me that they were going to burn us alive till they took us to the stakes and tied us up, then piled the brushwood and dried grass round us."

"You ocht to hae seen the fellows wi' the torches gather," added Sandy. "Mon, it was a sight an' all. The scene was so splendid that ma interest grew and grew, so that I couldna' bring myself tae believe that I was one that was ganging tae be burnt alive. All around the torches, then the drum-beaters and the women and the girls and old men packed on the fringe o' the forest. And to see the Skeleton warriors march intae the middle and tak' their places like company after company o' trained Guardsmen—mon, it wur indeed a sight."

"And at the end of the row of stakes," chimed in Jimmy Brown, "was a post with nobody tied up to it. I was wonderin' who they intended to put there, when a guard of Skeletons came out of the trees bringing our bearded pal 'ere wi' them, and strapped 'im up good an' 'ard."

"Curse them!" chimed in Del Rivo. "If I thought there was any chance of the forest destroying them, and no danger of ourselves being sacrificed amid the flames, I'd set fire to it now, and burn them alive. It's almost worth taking a chance."

"Have you had dealings with the Hekebus before, Julian Del Rivo?" asked Adam, after lighting a cigarette and handing the packet round. Then he cast a keen

glance at the face of the bearded traveller as the match flame flickered upon it.

The Portuguese's eyes widened in genuine surprise. "You know my name. Who, then, are you?" he countered.

"My name is Adam Byrne. I am the son of Professor George Willis Byrne, who was last heard of at Pootella four years ago, and who completely disappeared. My father always told us that you were his friend."

The match had gone out. Adam could hear the Portuguese breathing deeply. He wanted to get another glimpse of his face, so he struck another match and held it up.

The Portuguese, obviously agitated, was sitting bolt upright, and his wiry fingers were grumbling the precious cigarette which Adam had given him.

Adam tried to read what was passing in his mind, but the face was like a mask. Only the glitter of the man's eyes revealed that he was thinking.

The flame of the match burnt Adam's fingers and he dropped it.

"So," the voice of the Portuguese droned in the darkness, "you, who have saved my life, are the son of Professor Byrne, my old friend, my dearest friend. And we meet out here in the wild land of the Hekebus. Strange—strange!"

"Yus, isn't it?" chimed in Jimmy Brown. "Here's the gov'nor, Mr. Byrne—Mr. Franklin 'ere—and Sandy McTavish, the old Scotsman."

"Auld yersel!" shot back Sandy indignantly.

"Ere, I say, we are," Jimmy went on, ignoring the interruption. "Flown from civilisation into the heart of Africa, and the fust person we tumbles against is you, an old friend of Mr. Byrne's father. A corker, I call it."

(What will be the outcome of this strange meeting between Adam's party and Del Rivo, the Portuguese? Mind you read next week's instalment, chums.)

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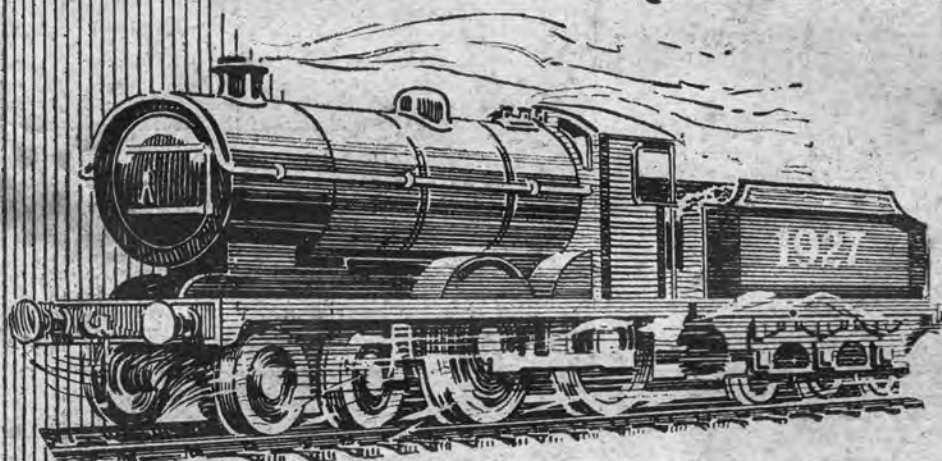
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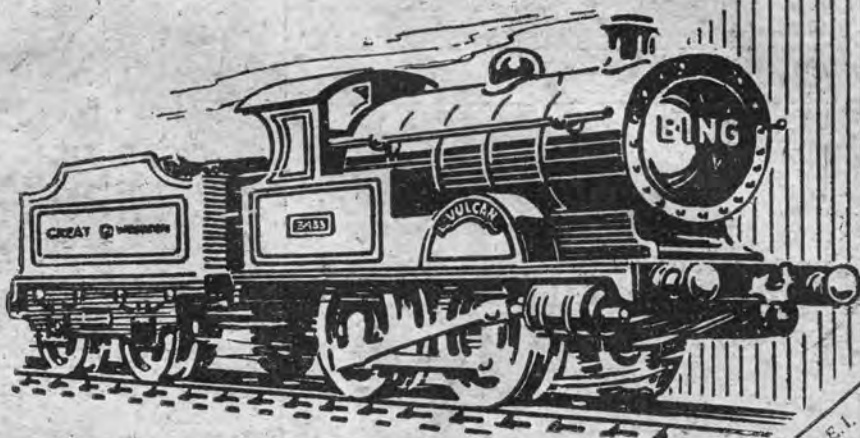


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