

The

GEM 2^p

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No. 1,039.
Vol. XXXIII.
January 14th,
1928.

EVERY
WEDNESDAY.



"MY HAT!"

(A humorous incident from this week's amazing school story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's.)

A ROLICKING LONG SCHOOL STORY OF TOM MERRY & Co.—

AT WAR With The GRAMMAR SCHOOL!

by
MARTIN
CLIFFORD

Once more the feud between St. Jim's and their old rivals of the Grammar School springs into life. But this time, the honours undoubtedly go to Gordon Gay and his merry men.

CHAPTER 1.

Rough on Gussy!

JACK BLAKE of the Fourth looked at his watch and gave a growl.

"Nearly a quarter past six, and the footling fathead isn't back yet!" he snorted.

"Well, if this isn't the absolute giddy limit!" said Tom Merry impatiently. "Where on earth can the chump have got to?"

"Oh, where—and oh, where can he be?" sang Monty Lowther, with rather a feeble attempt at cheerfulness.

Six juniors were standing at the gates of St. Jim's, gazing down the Rylcombe Lane in the direction of the village, with looks of exasperation and anxiety.

They—Tom Merry, Manners, and Monty Lowther of the Shell, known as the Terrible Three, and Jack Blake, Herries, and Digby of the Fourth—had been there for some time; and surely, six more dreary and disconsolate-looking youths had never graced the historic gateway of St. Jim's with their presence!

The truth was, Tom Merry & Co. were not feeling at all happy or pleased with the world that afternoon.

For days, the chums of the School House had been languishing in that melancholy condition known as "on the rocks." Remittances from home, and from their dotting relations, had been few and far between, and consequently, there had been famine in the land. Twice already had they had been reduced to the necessity of "tea-ing" in Hall, so it was small wonder that they yearned for some of the little luxuries that make a scholar's life really worth living.

To make matters worse, their inattention at classes had brought upon them a perfect deluge of trouble, adding to the already overwhelming burden of their woe. Lines had fallen thick and fast upon them; only Arthur Augustus D'Arcy coming through the ordeal of lessons unscathed. The swell of the Fourth, indeed, had had a double share of luck, for a long-delayed fiver had arrived for him by the afternoon post.

Tom Merry & Co. had been cheered very considerably by that fiver, which had come like corn in Egypt during the lean years. Gussy had promised his stony chums a grand brew in Study No. 6, and, whilst they languished over their impots, he had gone forth to the village to buy himself a new topper and a fancy waistcoat, and also get in the tuck necessary for the study feed.

That was long over an hour ago. Tom Merry & Co. had finished their impots and had gathered at the school gates, to await the return of their noble chum.

They had missed tea in Hall, so as to be able to do full justice to the projected feast in Study No. 6. But Gussy had been gone an uncommonly long time. As the time dragged wearily by, and still there was no sign of Arthur Augustus, their anxiety increased, while their hunger deepened.

Herries gave a groan.

"I'm absolutely famished!" he said. "If Gussy doesn't arrive with that tuck jolly soon, I shall perish on the spot."

"Same here," said Tom Merry feelingly. "Just think of it, chaps—no tuck for three whole days, and Gussy's keeping us in suspense like this. The burbling duffer deserves the most terrific bumping on record."

"I've got an aching void," said Monty Lowther pathetically.

Blake stepped out into the road, and glared in the direction of the village. He continued to glare for several minutes, but, like the prophet of old, he saw no man. He

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rejoined his chums at the gates at last, his brow knitted wrathfully.

"Nearly half-past six!" groaned Manners, turning a lack-lustre eye towards the school clock. "Oh crumbs! Where the thump is Gussy?"

"I expect he's wandering about the village, trying on all the toppers and fancy waistcoats he can lay his paws on," said Robert Arthur Digby. "Once he gets inside an outfitter's shop, wild horses won't drag him away till closing-time."

"The burbling ass!"

"The frabjeous idiot!"

"The chuckle-headed dummy!"

"Brrr-rrr-rnr!"

Another ten minutes dragged on, and then, with a sudden gasp, Herries stared down the lane with eyes that almost goggled out of his head with amazement.

"Mum-m-my only hat!" he stuttered. "Look!"

The others looked, and they, too, gave vent to startled ejaculations.

"Great pip!" gasped Tom Merry. "Wh-what's this coming?"

"Oh crumbs!"

A weird and wonderful figure had come into view round the bend in the lane, moving along the centre of the road in a series of wild hops, somewhat in the manner of a mechanical figure.

The juniors at the gates blinked in wonderment, and they blinked yet again when they saw that this strange apparition was that of a schoolboy. His upper half was decorated in a truly ghastly manner, and his lower half done up in a large sack. The sack, of course, completely enveloped his legs, so that his only means of locomotion was by hopping and jumping, like a contestant in a sack race.

This remarkable apparition came hopping towards the gates of St. Jim's in a zig-zag course, performing the most wonderful evolutions in the sack.

He wore a topper on his head, battered down into the semblance of a concertina. That topper had been painted red, white, and blue, so that really it was more reminiscent of a Chinese lantern than of an article of headgear.

The wearer's face was truly a sight to see and wonder at! His cheeks had been daubed all over with white paint, which gave him a most ghastly look, an effect which was heightened by his nose, which had been liberally plastered with lurid red. But, most startling of all, his eyes were encircled by glaring black rings, thickly executed in paint. Altogether it was a colour scheme which put the weirdest make-up ever seen in a circus completely in the shade.

Tom Merry & Co. could only stand and blink. Mere words could not have expressed their surprise.

Their gaze wandered down from the newcomer's face to the rest of his person.

The wide Eton collar which he wore had been reversed, so that the back, being now at the front, kept his chin up and his gruesome, got-up face exposed to the rays of the sun. He had on a fancy waistcoat, truly a striking creation, the colour scheme of which had been greatly enhanced by the liberal application of paints of various hues, put on in a variety of streaks and daubs and smears.

There was a placard pinned to the chest of this apparition, bearing a number of words upon it in black letters. The sack extended from his waist downwards, and was bound round him by means of rope. His hands, too, were roped behind him so that he was quite unable to free himself from the sack that encased his legs. His frequent stumbles sent him sprawling in the lane, where he had to lie grovelling and squirming until, by dint of the weirdest

OF ST. JIM'S, & GORDON GAY & CO., OF THE GRAMMAR SCHOOL!

and most complicated contortions, he got himself upright and continued his frantic hopping again.

To the juniors at the gates there had been something familiar about the ghastly figure even at a distance, and as he came nearer, there could be no further doubts as to his identity.

It was none other than Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the very fellow whose return they had been so anxiously awaiting.



Tom Merry & Co. glared at the unfortunate Arthur Augustus. Then they transferred their gaze to the placard pinned on his chest, and this is what they read:

"NOTICE!

"To all who may run across this funny freak! It belongs to the prize collection housed at St. Jim's. Please take it and treat it kindly! Tom Merry, please note.—Thanks for the tuck! Who's top-dog at Rylcombe? The Grammar School, of course!"

Tom Merry & Co. read the notice through in speechless wrath. Then they looked at Gussy and at each other.

"My only sainted aunt!" gurgled Tom Merry, finding his voice at last. "You—you've let Gordon Gay & Co. nab you, Gussy, and—and raid the tuck!"

"Weally, deah boys, I am fwightfully sowwy, but I couldn't help it—" began the swell of the Fourth.

Blake brandished his fist under his chum's aristocratic nose.

"You perishing idiot!" he howled. "We've been waiting here, starving, for you to come back with the tuck! We want our tea, and we've been relying on that tuck! And now those Grammar School rotters have got it—our tuck! Oh, my hat! You—you blithering idiot!"

"You chortling chump!"

"You burbling fathead!"

Arthur Augustus shuffled wildly in his sack, and glared indignantly at his furious chums.

"Bai Jove, I wefuse to be chawactewised by those oppwobwious expwessions!" he exclaimed, with as much dignity as he could assume, under the circumstances. "It weally couldn't be helped! I was comin' back fwom the village with the tuck packed in a bag, when Gordon Gay and the west of the Gwammah wottahs pounced upon me fwom behind the trees! They must have seen me comin' and waited for me! I tried to give them a fearful thwashin', but I was outnumbated, bai Jove! They made me a pwisonah and collahed the tuck—"

"Oh dear!"

"Then they did me up in the sack and dwove me back here in this fwightful condish!" gasped the luckless Gussy.

"Weally, I considah it most infwa dig., and—"

He was interrupted by a roar of laughter from a crowd of fellows who had been attracted by the sight of the weird and wonderful figure at the gates.

Fellows gathered round from all directions, and there was another yell as the swell of the Fourth was recognised under his coat of paint.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look at Gussy!"

"The one and only!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry & Co. could only gaze at the figure of Arthur Augustus in dismay and horror; they were too petrified to move forward to assist him. Flop, flop, flop! went the sack as the swell of St. Jim's hopped desperately up to the gates.

"Gwoooogh! Yah! Oh deah! I say, deah boys— Ow-wow!"

Arthur Augustus flopped into the gateway and stood there, smothered with dirt and gasping as if for a wager.

His expression, in addition to the "make-up" with which he had been endowed, was startling.

"Gwoooogh!" he spluttered. "Bai Jove! Ow! Pway wewease me, deah boys. This is most howwid. Yow-ow!"

Tom Merry gazed at him as if he could scarcely believe his eyes.

"Gussy!" he gasped.

"Gussy!" said Monty Lowther, in a faint voice.

"Gussy!" ejaculated Blake feebly. "Oh, Gussy, you—you idiot! What have you been up to?"

The swell of the Fourth gasped, and blinked helplessly down at his monocle, which was dangling at the end of its cord.

"Oh deah! Gwoooogh! I have been the victim of a wuffianly assault, deah boys. Yow-ow! My elobbah is uttably wuined, and as for my new waistcoat and toppah—"

"Bother your beastly waistcoat, and blow your rotten topper!" howled Blake. "Where's the tuck?"

"Bai Jove! I—"

"The tuck!" yelled Digby. "What have you done with it, you chump?"

"Gwoogh! I am afwaid I haven't got it, deah boys."

"We can see that, you dummy!" roared Tom Merry.

"Where is it?"

"Weally, deah boys,—wow-wow—I've had a fwightful time. Those howwid Gwammah cads—"

"Wha-a-at!"

"Those wottahs, Gordon Gay & Co.—"

"You—you don't mean to say, Gussy, that the Grammarians have collared the tuck?" yelled Blake.

"Yaas, I'm afwaid so, deah boy."

"My only aunt!"

"Great pip!"

"The notice attracted general attention, too, and fresh howls of laughter arose as the words were read.

"Weally, you wottahs, I fail to see any cause whatever for laughter!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly. "I—"

"We do!" exclaimed Figgins, the long-legged leader of the New House, wiping the tears of merriment from his eyes. "You do look a coughdrop, Gussy, and no giddy error! Ha, ha, ha! Fancy letting the Grammarians work off a stunt like this! And they've pinched your tuck into the bargain! Oh, my hat! This is where you sing small, you School House bounders!"

"Do we!" roared Tom Merry, his face flushed and furious. "We'll make the Grammar cads sit up for this! Come on, you chaps! We'll get our tuck back and simply pulverise them, and show 'em that we're top-dogs at Rylcombe!"

"Rather!"

"Rally round, you fellows!"

"Down with the Grammarians!"

There was an instant response to Tom Merry's call. The juniors, roused to indignation by this outrage perpetrated by their old rivals, Gordon Gay & Co. of Rylcombe Grammar School, rallied round their leader, and there was a general rush from St. Jim's.

D'Arcy let out a yell as the excited juniors surged past him.

"Bai Jove! Weally, you boundahs, pway welease me from this howwid posish! I—"

"We've no time now, Gussy!" shouted Blake. "Hop on into the quad and get someone there to let you loose! We're going off to the Grammar School to sock it to those rotters and get the tuck back!"

The crowd of juniors dashed down the lane on their mission of vengeance, and Arthur Augustus hopped on wildly into the Close.

Kildare of the Sixth found him surrounded by a crowd of chortling fags, and the St. Jim's captain had him released.

Arthur Augustus, once freed from the sack, dashed indoors and made a bee-line for the bath-room. Ten minutes later he might have been seen busily engaged in scrubbing his face in an atmosphere of steam, pumice-powder, and soap-suds; and, judging by his wild and sulphurous utterances during the course of that operation, the swell of St. Jim's certainly seemed to have lost the repose that usually stamps the case of Vere de Vere!

CHAPTER 2.

Something Like a Licking!

"NOW for those rotters!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"This is where we sock it to the Grammar cads!" snorted Blake. "We'll get that tuck, or perish in the attempt!"

"Rather!"

The crowd of juniors on the warpath, dashing at top speed from St. Jim's, had come within sight of the tall, red-brick pile of Rylcombe Grammar School.

They were thirsting for vengeance upon Gordon Gay & Co., the enterprising juniors who "ran things" at the Grammar School.

Gordon Gay & Co. were the avowed enemies of St. Jim's, and the leaders of the Grammar School juniors in the deadly warfare which the two schools waged with each other.

This rivalry between St. Jim's and the Grammar School dated almost from time immemorial, and it was still as keen as ever, although for some time hostilities seemed to have slackened down. In the past, however, Tom Merry & Co. and Gordon Gay & Co. had made innumerable alarms and excursions in the struggle to decide that very debatable point as to which school was "top-dog" at Rylcombe. The issue had been fought with vim and gusto on both sides. First one would launch forth with a gigantic rag and utterly "put the kybosh" on their rivals, and then the other would rise to arms and smite a mighty blow in retaliation. And so it went on. Really, it seemed the point never would be settled!

The rivalry was quite good-natured, of course, and it was always carried on in a true sportsmanlike spirit without the slightest bad feeling on either side. Indeed, Tom Merry and Gordon Gay held each other in very high regard in private, but as leaders of their respective factions they were deadly foemen and sworn to eternal strife.

Tom Merry's eyes gleamed with the light of battle as he led his followers towards the enemy school.

"We'll rush the bounders and take 'em by surprise!" he said grimly. "Now, altogether, chaps! Through the gates and up the steps, and then go for the rotters baldheaded! Don't give 'em a chance to stop us! Charge!"

The St. Jim's contingent swooped down the road towards the Grammar School, all ready and eager for the fray.

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The large iron gate was open, but the leaders of the attack were scarcely ten yards away from it when there was a clatter and a terrific clang, and the gate of the Grammar School was shut almost in their faces.

Tom Merry & Co. drew up short in surprise.

"My hat!" ejaculated Manners. "The rotters were ready for us!"

"What a sell!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

That roar of laughter, breaking suddenly on their ears, came from above, and, looking upward, they saw the faces of Gordon Gay & Co. grinning at them over the walls.

The Grammar School walls, in fact, fairly bristled with the enemy. They were standing upon trestle tables that had hastily been erected on the inner side of the wall, and they gazed down at Tom Merry & Co., roaring with mirth at the blank looks that appeared on the faces of those youths.

"Hallo, dear lads!" called out Gordon Gay sweetly.

"Fancy meeting you!"

"Mum-m-my hat!" gasped Tom Merry, quite taken aback by this sudden unexpected development.

"Nice time for paying a call, isn't it?" went on the Grammarian leader cheerfully. "We thought you microbes might come drifting along, so we made ready for you! Let me see! Er—were you wanting anything in particular?"

"We want our tuck!" howled Blake wrathfully.

"Go hon!"

"Did you hear what that funny animal said?" asked Gordon Gay, turning to his followers. "They want their tuck!"

"Fancy that, now!" said Frank Monk.

If looks had the power to kill, the glare the St. Jim's fellows gave their rivals would have slain Gordon Gay & Co. on the spot.

Tom Merry's face flushed crimson with wrath.

"You rotters!" he roared. "We've come to get our tuck back! You raided it from D'Arcy—"

"Dear me! Did we, now?" said Gordon Gay, appearing to reflect. "Why, yes, of course! As a matter of fact, old tops, we really couldn't miss old Gussy, because of that stunning fancy waistcoat of his! We could see him coming a mile off!"

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

"So we waylaid him, you see, and commandeered the tuck," went on Gordon Gay blandly. "Then we thought we'd give you a bit of an eye-opener, you know, so we rigged up old Gussy's legs in a sack, did a bit of artistic work on his classical chivvy, and told him to hop off home and tell you the glad tidings."

Tom shook his fist furiously at his rival.

"You rotter!" he hooted. "Open that gate, will you, and let us in? We—we'll spifficate you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You bounders, we want our tuck!" howled Blake. "We—we'll bash this rotten gate down if you don't let us in! We'll smash you, you cackling duffers! Come on, chaps! Let's get that gate open somehow!"

Tom Merry & Co. made a determined rush on the Grammar School gate. They rattled it, and shook it, and smote upon it furiously with hands and feet, but without making the slightest impression upon it. All the while, Gordon Gay & Co. laughed at them derisively over the wall.

Then Gay made a signal to Tadpole and Mont Blong, the French junior, who were standing just inside the gate. Mont Blong ran off and turned a water-cock that protruded from the ground near by, and Tadpole picked up a hosepipe that was lying on the grass. Then—

Whiz!

Next minute there was a sizzling noise, and a powerful jet of water spouted out of the hosepipe.

Sizzzz-zizzzz-zizzzz!

Tadpole directed the nozzle of the hosepipe through the bars of the gate, and that swamping, surging torrent went all over the bestegers, drenching them in a trice, and scattering them far and wide.

Swoooooooooosh!

Howls of dismay and fury arose from Tom Merry & Co. as the water poured into their midst.

"You rotters! Yerrrrugh!"

"Oooooooooooch!"

"Yaff! Wow!"

"Gug-gug-gug!"

There was a wild stampede away from the Grammar School gate, the wet and wrathful St. Jim's fellows fairly unbling over each other in their haste to get out of the range of that devastating stream of water.

"Go it, Tadpole!" roared the Grammarians hilariously.

"Give 'em a soaking!"

"Keep it up!"

"Poor chaps! See how terrified they are of a little water!"

"Try and get it round their necks, Taddy. St. Jim's worms never wash their necks!"

Tom Merry & Co., dripping wet and bedraggled, took

refuge on the other side of the road. They stood there, gurgling and gasping incoherently, a dreary and dismal-looking company indeed!

But the worst was to come!

Gordon Gay made a signal to his followers, and, with a suddenness that took their rivals by surprise, the Grammarians proceeded to let fly with a number of well-filled paper bags.

Whiz, whiz! Wallop! Splosh!

One of those bags, under Gordon Gay's deadly aim, came hurtling at Tom Merry, and hit him full on the nose. It burst, and immediately an enveloping white cloud flew out, all over his face. He was smothered in an instant, and as he rolled back, choking and gasping

Gordon Gay & Co. were armed with bags of flour—musty

"Oh, my only sainted aunt—grooooooogh!—this is awful!" gurgled Tom Merry, clawing a mass of flour and paste out of his eyes and ears. "We—we can't stand this any longer! Come on!"

And the would-be besiegers, all wet and floury, beat a most disorderly retreat down the road, shedding flour and water in all directions.

The triumphant shouts and laughter of Gordon Gay & Co. followed them as they fled.

"Yah! Go back to your old casual ward!"

"Who's top dog at Rylcombe?" bawled the dulcet voice of Gordon Gay above the others.

The reply came in a concerted howl from all the Grammarians:

"Grammar School! Grammar School!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

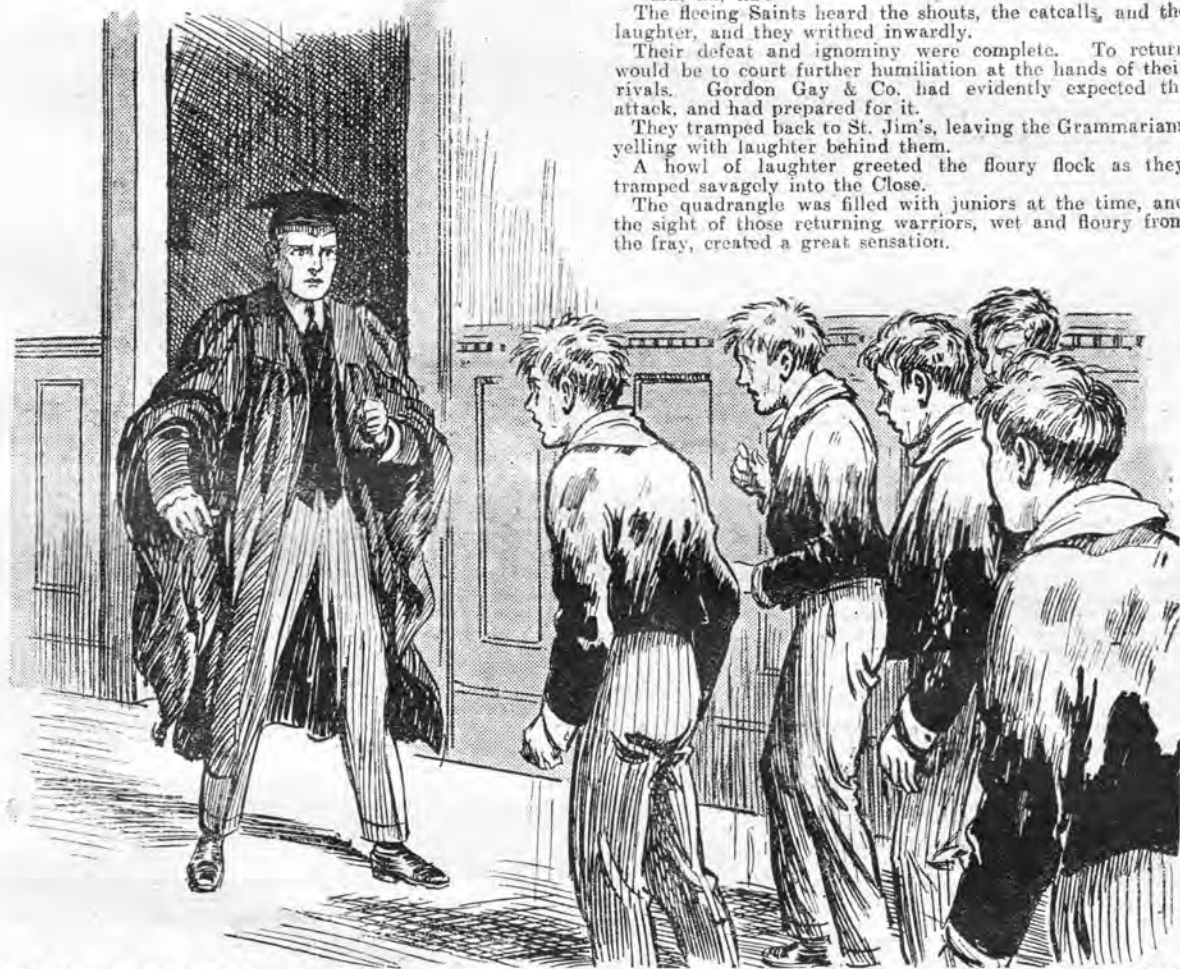
The fleeing Saints heard the shouts, the catcalls, and the laughter, and they writhed inwardly.

Their defeat and ignominy were complete. To return would be to court further humiliation at the hands of their rivals. Gordon Gay & Co. had evidently expected the attack, and had prepared for it.

They tramped back to St. Jim's, leaving the Grammarians yelling with laughter behind them.

A howl of laughter greeted the floury flock as they tramped savagely into the Close.

The quadrangle was filled with juniors at the time, and the sight of those returning warriors, wet and floury from the fray, created a great sensation.



Mr. Railton stood and gazed at the floury juniors in amazement. "Good heavens!" he gasped at last. "Boys, whatever have you been doing? How dare you enter the school in such a disgraceful state?" (See Chapter 2.)

stuff, no longer fit for human consumption, but excellent as ammunition, which they had purchased cheaply from a neighbouring miller. They had plenty of those flour-bags, and they made good use of them.

Whiz! Wallop! Biff! Splosh!

"Yaroooooogh!"

"Yah! Oh crumbs! Wow-ow-ow!"

"Gerrrrroooch!"

The bags of flour burst in great profusion over the wet and dripping St. Jim's contingent. Every bullet had its billet, and within a very short space of time the air was filled with clouds of flour, and muffled, gurgling, choking yells rose crescendo.

"Pile in, kids!" shouted Gordon Gay, setting a good example.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Other Grammarians gathered on the other side of the locked gate, and they howled with laughter at the sight presented by Tom Merry & Co.

The flour clung liberally and lovingly to those youths, and, mixing with the water with which they were drenched, formed into a kind of clammy paste, which increased their discomfiture and made them look more ghastly than ever.

Tom Merry & Co. breathed heavily with wrath and humiliation. Their groans deepened when Figgins & Co. came hurrying up.

"Ye gods!" ejaculated Figgins, shading his eyes as he looked at them. "Have you chaps been raking round a flour-bin?"

"Groooh!"

"My hat! You don't mean to say, Tommy, that you let Gordon Gay & Co. catch you on the hop like this?" said the New House leader. "Well, carry me home to die, somebody! This is the giddy limit! How on earth did it happen?"

Tom Merry & Co. were in no mood to impart that interesting information. With crimson faces they tramped onward to the School House, leaving a long, long trail of water and flour in their wake.

As they went up the steps, with a yelling crowd behind them, a tall, majestic figure in cap and gown came out of the Hall door. It was Mr. Railton, the Housemaster, and at the sight of Tom Merry & Co. he stood stock still and gazed at them, dumbfounded.

The floury contingent halted, too, and gasped.

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"Good heavens!" Mr. Railton managed to ejaculate. "Boys, what ever have you been doing?"

"Ahem!"

"Yooohh!"

"Gug-gug!"

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the Housemaster, looking in horror at the ghastly-looking juniors who stood shivering before him. "How dare you come into the school in such a disgraceful state! What does this mean, Merry? Is that Merry?"

"Groooh! Ye-es, sir!"

"Will you kindly explain this—this unprecedented affair?" said the Housemaster grimly.

"Er—er—we got wet, sir," stammered Tom miserably.

"Indeed!" said Mr. Railton, raising his eyebrows. "I was not aware that it had been raining, Merry. Have you boys been caught in any rain?"

"Ahem! N-n-not exactly, sir!" gasped Tom. "We—we—"

"Then you fell into some water?"

"Nunno, sir. You—you see, the water came on top of us, and—and—"

"I see," said Mr. Railton. "Your boys, I suppose, have been engaged in some foolish prank. How did you come to get yourselves smothered in flour? Where did the flour come from?"

"Out—out of bags, sir."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the onlookers in the quadrangle.

"Silence!" rapped Mr. Railton sternly, although the semblance of a smile was beginning to curl the corners of his mouth. "Perhaps I had better not inquire too deeply into the matter, however. I presume you have been engaged in some sort of that absurd ragging with boys outside the school, and I am shocked to see you appear in public in this condition. You will take two hundred lines each, and go away to the stables immediately and clean off that flour before you dare venture indoors!"

Tom Merry & Co., their cup of humiliation filled to the brim, crawled away to the Head's stables, and proceeded to clean themselves as best they could.

Later on, they went into the School House, still very wet and clammy, and still bearing traces of flour and paste round their ears, and in their hair, and on their clothes.

They were in an almost homicidal state of mind, and when they reached the upper landing, and saw the form of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy coming towards them, they stopped and glared at him, breathing hard through their noses.

"Bai Jove! Then you have returned, deah boys!" exclaimed the swell of the Fourth, adjusting his monocle and surveying them in some surprise. Gussy had had a good scrub and a complete change, and now was as immaculate as ever, although his hair was rather tousled, and his face very red from his ablutions.

"I trust you licked the Gwammawian wottahs, and wecovahed the tuck, deah boys!"

The Terrible Three and Blake, Herries and Digby, gazed at Gussy with looks that were more eloquent than any words.

"You—you blitherer!" hissed Blake, in measured accents.

"Bai Jove!"

"You baulging blighter!" roared Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"You scatter-brained maniac!" hooted Digby. "It's all your fault! You let those rotters catch you! You let 'em bone the tuck! We've had no tea, we've got an extra two hundred lines each, and we've—"

"Oh, bump him!" said Tom Merry impatiently. "Bump the silly josses!"

"I refuse to be bumped! Oh! Ow! Yow!"

Bump! Bump! Bump!

Gussy was whirled over and bumped upon the cold, hard linoleum.

Arthur Augustus sat dazedly on the landing, gasping for breath, when his exasperated chums released him, and tramped on to their respective studies. The swell of St. Jim's was left wondering whether it was an earthquake, or only a cyclone, that had struck him.

CHAPTER 3.

The Grammarians Get Going!

GORDON GAY & CO. were not the youths to let grass grow under their feet.

They had taken the initiative in the latest phase of the warfare against St. Jim's, and they did not mean to give Tom Merry & Co. a chance to recuperate, as it were, before following up with fresh hostilities.

They were on the warpath, and they meant business!

The very next morning, whilst Tom Merry & Co. were in their studies, racking their brains for a "wheeze" for getting even with the Grammarians, a sudden terrific clanging of a bell was heard in the quadrangle.

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Gazing out of their windows, the juniors were startled to see a figure, dressed in a large blue coat with braided collar and cuffs and brass buttons, and wearing a large top hat with a gold braid band, walk boldly into the Close, ringing a huge handbell.

The uniform, which looked very much like the one worn by Taggles, the St. Jim's porter, was rather large for its wearer, and it was some moments before Tom Merry & Co., blinking down from their study windows, recognised him.

When they did, an astonished gasp arose.

It was Carboy, of the Grammar School!

Carboy, dressed in his strange regalia, and clanging the bell in a truly deafening manner, halted by the fountain, and, after performing another solo on the bell, cleared his throat, and bawled forth in a voice that could be heard all over St. Jim's:

"Oyez! Oyez! Oyez!"

"Great pip!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "What the dickens is that Grammar cad up to?"

"Oyez! Oyez! Oyez!" thundered forth Carboy, in the approved town-crier manner, and reading from a long scroll which he held in his right hand. "All ye wasters, worms, and wash-outs of this measly old casual-ward known as St. Jim's, sit ye up and take notice! Oyez! Oyez!"

Clang! Clang! Clang! went the bell.

"Be it known to all whom it may concern, that Messrs. Gordon Gay & Co., of Rylcombe Grammar School, by virtue of having knocked spots off Tom Merry & Co., beaten them to a frazzle, and properly put the kybosh on them, shall hereafter and henceforth be regarded as top dogs at Rylcombe!" bawled Carboy. "Oyez! Oyez! Oyez!"

Clang! Clang! Clang!

The St. Jim's fellows were too utterly flabbergasted to do anything but stand still and stare, and listen to the Grammarian junior's stentorian declamation.

Carboy went on, reading clearly and deliberately from his scroll.

"Further, the stout and steadfast fellows of Rylcombe Grammar School aforesaid, do hereby announce that they regard St. Jim's as being completely played out and a back number in everything, and they hereby warn the fatheads and wasters of St. Jim's that, in pursuance of their policy of keeping the aforesaid worms and wasters in their places, they, Messrs. Gordon Gay & Co., feel it their bounden duty to thoroughly squash and slaughter St. Jim's, and knock its inhabitants into a cocked hat! Oyez! Oyez!"

The bell clanged stridently, to give emphasis to Carboy's declaration, and above its vibrant notes a howl of wrath and rage arose from the infuriated St. Jim's juniors crowded at the windows.

"The cheeky rotter!"

"What awful nerve!"

"Collar him!"

"Smash him!"

"Spifficate the bounder!"

Tom Merry & Co. came pouring out of the School House in a furious horde. From the New House came flocking a crowd of juniors, led by long-legged Figgins. All made a wild dash towards the grinning Grammarian.

Carboy backed towards the gates, shedding the topper and the huge coat he wore. He gave a defiant clang of the bell, and, turning in the gateway, bawled at the oncoming foe:

"Oyez! Oyez! Who's top dog at Rylcombe? The Grammar School! Oyez!"

"Grab him!" howled Tom Merry, sprinting to the gates as though he were on the cinder track.

But Carboy had a bicycle waiting outside St. Jim's, and no sooner was he outside the gates than he leaped into the saddle, tucked the bell under his arm, and pedalled off down the Rylcombe Lane at a furious pace.

Tom Merry & Co. dashed out after him, but drew up in the lane, panting with baffled rage.

Carboy was already well down the lane, his legs simply whizzing round on the machine, and it was hopeless now to try and catch him.

He looked back and flourished the bell, and the raucous, ringing notes came back mockingly on the breeze.

"Good-bye, Bluebells!" he bellowed. "Catch me if you can! Oyez! Oyez! Ha, ha, ha!"

Carboy disappeared round the bend in the lane, and Tom Merry & Co. turned back into the gates of their school, simply palpitating with wrath.

Muffled moans and gurgles then came to their ears, proceeding from within Taggles' lodge. Kangaroo and Talbot opened the door, and the juniors gazed in wonderingly at Taggles, minus his coat and topper, was lying in his shirt-sleeves under the table, completely trussed up with rope, and a gag stuffed into his mouth.

Tom Merry & Co. quickly released him, and the outraged porter sat up, spluttering with fury.

"Gerrrogh! Oh, my heye! Which Hi've been hassaulted—brutally hassaulted, and wot Hi says is this 'ere, if I

catches the young varmints, Hi'll 'ave the lor on 'em! Ow!"

Taggles had been taken by surprise by some unknown intruders and robbed of his coat and topper, and trussed up just as they had found him.

Tom Merry & Co. could guess who the perpetrators of that outrage were, although they did not mention names to Taggles. The porter was in a furious state, and the restoration of his coat and topper did not mollify him in the least.

But Taggles' feelings were nothing compared with those of Tom Merry & Co.

They went back indoors, with the sound of the bell, and Carboy's loud "Oyez!" and the scathing words of his announcement still ringing in their ears. The Grammarians had scored twice within twenty-four hours—and there was more to come!

Tom Merry & Co. and the chums of Study No. 6 were in the Common-room after dinner, discussing the Grammarians' latest wheeze, and at the same time listening to some very cutting remarks from the crowd of juniors, when they were interrupted by sounds of great excitement in the quadrangle outside. Tom Merry turned to the window and looked out. The next moment his gaze turned upwards, and a startled ejaculation burst from his lips.

"Mum-m-m-my only hat!"

Floating high aloft over the quadrangle was a gigantic kite, upon both sides of which appeared, large and glaring, and clearly visible to all below:

"RATS TO ST. JIM'S!"

"Oh crumbs!" ejaculated the astounded Shell captain. "Who the dickens—?"

"What cheeky rotter is flying that kite?" roared Blake. The windows of the Common-room were crowded now. The amazement of the juniors knew no bounds.

"I say!" exclaimed Kerruish. "The kite's fastened to Taggles' chimney. No one's flying it now. Another of those bounders from the Grammar School sneaked in, I suppose, and tied the kite to the chimney."

"Bai Jove!"

Tom Merry & Co. rushed downstairs. The quadrangle was crowded with astonished and wrathful fellows, all gazing upward at the kite as it soared on the breeze, displaying its derisive message before the eyes of all St. Jim's.

"Who brought that thing here?" was the general question.

"It must have been that chap Monk, of the Grammar School!" yelled Joe Frayne of the Third. "I thought I saw him hanging about the gates a little while ago."

"Oh crumbs!"

"The cheeky rotter!"

Tom Merry & Co. dashed across to Taggles' lodge, and there was a scramble to climb up to the roof. The porter was fairly raving outside his door.

"Ho, you young rips!" he roared. "Flying kites from my chimney, and playing games on my roof! Wot Hi says is this 'ere—"

But the juniors did not wait to hear what Taggles had to say. They were going to have that kite down as soon as possible.

Tom Merry was the first to reach the chimney-stack to which the kite was attached. He snapped the string and swiftly pulled the kite in.

By that time a crowd had gathered, and Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, strode up.

"Boys, what does all this commotion mean? Bless my soul! Merry—Manners! What are you doing on Taggles' roof?"

"The young rips 'as a kite, sir!" snorted Taggles. "Which the kite was tied to my chimney, and—"

"Goodness gracious! Boys, have you taken leave of your senses?" exclaimed Mr. Linton. "You have had the audacity to fly a kite from the chimney here—"

"Nunno, we haven't, sir!" stammered Blake. "We weren't flying the kite. Someone else tied it here, and we—we're just getting it down."

"Dear me!" said Mr. Linton, peering at the kite over his eyeglasses and giving a start when he read the words painted upon it. "Rats to St. Jim's! Bless my soul! What a ridiculous joke! Somebody outside the school has evidently perpetrated this. Dear me! Boys, will you please have that kite destroyed at once?"

Tom Merry & Co. destroyed the kite by setting it alight on the waste ground behind the chapel.

The Grammarians had carried the war into the enemy's country with an audacity that had caught the Saints napping. Tom Merry & Co. could only vow vengeance and heap blood-curdling threats on the heads of their rivals.

CHAPTER 4.

Japes Galore!

"It's rotten!"

"Jolly rotten!"

"Simply beastly!"

Thus did the Terrible Three give vent to their feelings, standing by the School House steps the following afternoon.

Tom Merry & Co. were not feeling happy.

Tom Merry's usually sunny brow was clouded. Manners, who was always the best tempered of fellows, fairly scowled at some fags who were sporting themselves noisily in the quadrangle. Even Monty Lowther, the humorist of the Shell, and a youth who could ever be relied upon to maintain a cheerful spirit in the most adverse circumstances, wore a deep, portentous frown.

As a matter of fact, the hostilities with Gordon Gay & Co. were beginning to weigh heavily on their minds.

The enterprising leader of the Grammarians had followed up his successes in the campaign against St. Jim's with a series of practical jokes at Tom Merry's expense.

Soon after lessons, the undertaker from Wayland had called at St. Jim's to measure Tom for a coffin. The order, of course, had emanated from Gordon Gay; and the undertaker, on discovering that "the late Thomas Merry" was still very much alive and kicking, departed from the school in high dudgeon, by no means appreciative of the joke.

The rest of St. Jim's, however, seemed to find something very funny in the joke against the Shell captain, especially when several wreaths of cabbages and cauliflowers arrived for the "funeral" from Tom's "sorrowing pals" of Rylcombe Grammar School.

The last straw had been added to Tom's weight of chagrin when a notice had appeared in the Rylcombe Gazette that morning to this effect:

"Best prices given for old marbles, tiddleywinks, tops, tin soldiers, and other toys. Lessons in hopkotch wanted. —Apply, Tom Merry, Shell Form, Study No. 10, St. Jim's."

As a result of this advertisement, Tom Merry had been simply inundated with callers from the village, most of them small and grubby youths, all eager to sell off their old toys. Weird and fearful had been the things brought into St. Jim's for Tom Merry to buy. Marbles had come in simply by the gross, and he and his chums had been at their wits' end to know how to get rid of the rubbish that the would-be vendors foisted upon them.

Finding that they had been made the victims of a hoax, the village archers had banded together in indignation and wrath, and had given vent to their feelings by pelting Tom Merry & Co. with the unsaleable marbles, tops, broken tin soldiers, and other miscellaneous articles, which made excellent missiles.

No sooner had Tom and his chums got rid of the crowd from the village, than Blagg, the local postman, had come staggering into St. Jim's under the weight of a sackload of letters and postcards. All this correspondence was addressed to Tom Merry.

Blagg, panting with his exertions, had emptied the sack at Tom Merry's feet in the quadrangle and stamped away. Tom had never received such a "post."

Letters and postcards had formed a great heap at his feet—envelopes of all shapes, sizes, and colours, and postcards of every description, comprising old birthday cards, ancient Christmas cards, together with lurid "views" and "pictures," in all colours of the rainbow. It seemed that all the unsaleable rubbish from a stationer's shop had been raked out and sent to Tom Merry, lock, stock, and barrel!

The truth was, Gordon Gay & Co. had plotted a plot throughout the Grammar School, whereby every junior there undertook to send Tom Merry as many assorted cards or letters as he could find, and post them all at the same time, so that they would all arrive at St. Jim's together. This plot had been put into execution. All manner of cards and envelopes had been rummaged out, derisive messages had been written upon them, and the Grammarians had posted them in various parts of Rylcombe so that they would all catch the same post.

Thus, Tom Merry had found himself the recipient of over two hundred letters and cards at one fell swoop. He almost tore his hair with wrath when he read the inscriptions of a few of the missives.

Thus had Tom Merry been made the laughing-stock of St. Jim's by the artful efforts of his rival at the Grammar School. All St. Jim's, from the smallest fag in the Second to the high and mighty men of the Sixth, was roaring over Gordon Gay's practical jokes.

But those jokes, though highly entertaining in themselves, and directed against Tom Merry personally, were, at the

same time, a reflection on the dignity and prestige of St. Jim's.

The Shell and Fourth, in particular, were growing very impatient over the continued success of Gordon Gay & Co.'s japes.

"What we want is a leader who can put those cheeky Grammar cads in their places!" George Alfred Grundy, of the Shell, was holding forth to a group of fellows gathered in the quadrangle, and his powerful voice reached the ears of the Terrible Three. "I reckon if Tom Merry can't keep pace with Gordon Gay, he ought to take a back seat and let someone else have a shot at that blunder."

"Rather!" chimed in Baggy Trimble, the fat youth of the Fourth. "What's the use of a captain if we're to be insulted and beaten by the Grammarians, and take it all lying down? I consider—Yah! Ow! Leggo, Tom Merry! I didn't mean to say that, really. I—Oh dear! Help!"

Tom had taken a threatening stride towards Baggy Trimble, and that youth had promptly scuttled away. At that juncture, Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy came out of the Hall door and down the steps. They, too, were looking gloomy. The continued triumphs of Gordon Gay & Co. worried them in no small measure.

"What's the rumpus?" said Blake.

"Tom Merry doesn't like being reminded that it's time he set about getting even with the Grammar School," sneered Racke.

"Done any more sack-jumping, Gussy?" inquired Mellish.

"Weally, Mellish—"

"Had any more postcards, Tom Merry?" asked Grundy.

"Look here, Grundy, if you're looking for a thick ear—" began the captain of the Shell.

"If you think you can give me one, Merry—"

"Why, you cheeky rotter—"

"You fooling idiot—"

"Peace, my infants, peace!" said the voice of George Figgins.

He and his chums, Kerr and Fatty Wynn, came strolling up from the direction of the New House.

"What's the matter?" inquired Figgins pleasantly. "I should think you chaps would be better employed in socking it to the Grammarians, than in scrapping among yourselves."

"Sheer off, you New House duffers!" grunted Manners.

"You didn't put your oar in."

"Oh, don't get chippy," said Figgins. "We came along to see if we couldn't put our heads together and think out a really good wheeze to put it across the Grammarians. It's as plain as the nose on your chivvy, Tom Merry, that you can't deal with Gordon Gay off your own bat—"

"Is it?" snorted Tom.

"Absolutely!" went on the New House leader cheerfully.

"Now, if we give you the benefit of our advice—"

"Rats!" said Tom Merry. "Thank you for nothing! When I want your advice I'll ask for it; till then, you can go and eat coke! We may have been licked by Gay and his lot, but we'll wipe 'em off the face of the earth soon, don't worry!"

"Rats!"

At that juncture, the form of Blagg, the postman, appeared at the gates. He came straight over to where Tom Merry & Co. were standing, and a chuckle arose.

"Hallo, some more nice letters, I expect!" said Kerruish.

There were no letters this time, however. Blagg handed Tom a packet, which he took wonderingly and a trifle gingerly.

He did not know, now, what sort of trick to expect from Gordon Gay & Co. next.

The packet, however, bore a London postmark. Feeling rather curious as to what it contained, he opened it.

A gasp escaped him as he drew out a bottle, and a roar of laughter arose when the others saw it.

The bottle was labelled:

"FREE SAMPLE OF NERVOLINE. THE NEVER-FAILING REMEDY FOR THOSE SUFFERING FROM LOSS OF NERVE, BRAIN-FAG, AND GENERAL INSTABILITY. DON'T GIVE IN—TAKE NERVOLINE!"

"My word!" chuckled Blake. "Then you've been writing up to London for a free sample of nerve tonic, Tommy!"

"I haven't!" howled Tom. "It's a plant—a rotten hoax! I never wrote for this muck! Somebody must have sent up for it in my name, and—and—"

"Bai Jove! Then it must be another of Gordon Gay's howwid twicks, deah boy!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Weally, Tom Mewwy, this is weally wathah funnay, you know. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake, Herries, and Digby.

The Terrible Three glared at them.

"You—you cackling Fourth Form dummies!" hooted Tom Merry wrathfully. "There isn't anything funny in this!"

"Isn't there?" said Blake. "Well, we beg to differ, old son. Better swallow that nerve tonic, Tommy, and you

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might think of a bright idea for getting your own back on the Grammarians. Oh, my hat! Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom thrust the bottle into his pocket and strode off, breathing hard through his nose.

That evening numerous other packages arrived for Tom Merry by post.

One contained a baby's comforter, and another a little book called "Wise Words to the Weary." Most of the packets, however, were free samples of such nostrums as "Piffles' Pink Pills For Pining People," "Blaxo—Builds Backward Boys," "Quackson's Certain Cure For Cold Feet," etc., and there were trial packets of various soaps, dog biscuits, soothing powders—in fact, samples of almost everything under the sun.

It was apparent that some japer had been at work, and the name of that japer was not difficult to guess!

Tom Merry went to bed that night, snorting with wrath at the humorous remarks of the rest of the Form.

Gordon Gay had scored all along the line, and the captain of the Shell lay awake in the dormitory far into the night puzzling his brain for a means to encompass his rival's downfall.

CHAPTER 5.

A Surprise for Study No. 6!

"SOMETHING'S got to be done!"

Tom Merry smote the table in Study No. 10 with a terrific smite, to give emphasis to his remark.

The Terrible Three and Jack Blake & Co., of the Fourth, were holding a council of war. Tom Merry had convened that meeting after lessons next morning, to discuss ways and means of upholding the honour of St. Jim's against the Grammarians.

Blake gave a grunt.

"H'm! Every silly josser knows that something's got to be done," he said, "but the question is—what?"

"Echo answers what!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"Look here," snapped Tom Merry. "We've got to cut the cackle and get down to the horses. We're faced with the fact that Gordon Gay and his crew have scored a few minor successes over us lately—"

"Minor successes you call 'em!" exclaimed Blake. "Well, it's up to you to put a stopper on the blessed minor successes, or life here won't be worth living."

Tom Merry's eyes gleamed.

"We'll put the Grammarian crowd in their places soon enough, or I—I'll eat my best Sunday topper!" he said. "They do happen to have scored once or twice, but they haven't much to crow about, really. Yet they're going about claiming that the Grammar School is top dog at Rylecombe, forsooth!"

"For what?" asked Blake innocently.

"Forsooth! That's old English for rats," said Tom Merry. "Now, I've been doing a bit of thinking, and have thought of a little plan of action. What those Grammarian bounders need is a jolly good rag, carried out right inside that miserable old shed of theirs they call a school. If one or two of us could get in there somehow, and work off a few stunts behind the backs of Gordon Gay & Co., we'd probably give the beggars something to make a song about, only to a different tune to the one they're harping on now."

"That sounds all right," said Blake, rubbing his nose. "But how's it going to be done?"

"As easy as rolling off a form!" said Tom Merry. "I've been thinking that we might work the oracle this very afternoon. The first thing is, to get Gordon Gay and his lot out of the Grammar School, so as to leave a clear field for action for japing. At the same time, a little trap could be laid for them outside the school, so that they'd get a double dose of physic, as it were. We can do that by means of a decoy. Gussy shall be the decoy!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Gussy's just the right chap to act as a decoy, you know," went on Tom cheerfully. "He's such a distinctive ass—ahem!—that is to say—"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I refuse to be described as a distinctive ass!" said Arthur Augustus loftily. "Moreovah, I am not certain that I shall consent to act as a decoy!"

"Oh, come off it, Gussy! It's all for the good of the cause, you know!" said Tom. "This afternoon, you and a few other chaps must go prowling in the wood opposite the Grammar School, and let yourselves be seen, so as to be able to decoy those bounders farther into the wood, where a trap will be waiting for them. You're just the chap for a decoy, Gussy. All the chaps at the Grammar School know you, and they'll be after you like lightning when once they spot you. Look how they fastened on you the other afternoon, when you let 'em raid the tuck—"

"Bai Jove, I must request you not to keep dwaggin' up that howwid subject, Tom Mewwy!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, jamming his monocle into his eye and regarding

the Shell captain severely. "I was taken completely un-
aware by those wottahs—"

"Quite so!" said Tom. "Now you'll let 'em take you
awares, Gussy. Here's a fine chance for you to get your
own back. Listen, my sons, and I will the giddy plot
unfold!"

Tom leaned over the table and proceeded to enlarge upon
his scheme. As they listened, his chums' troubled faces
began to lighten, until at length they were actually smiling.

"My hat!" said Blake, with some enthusiasm. "There's
something in your wheeze, Tommy! I think it will work,
too, so long as Gussy doesn't act the giddy goat and let
us down—"

"Weally Blake—"
"Gussy won't let us down,"
said Tom Merry pacifically. "If
he does, we'll scalp him! We'll let
Figgins & Co. in on this, as
they'll be useful for the ambush.
Let's get along and tell the chaps,
and get everything cut and
dried."

They walked along the corri-
dor towards the stairs, and as
they did so they heard sounds of
heavy bumps, accompanied by
many grunts, coming from round
the corner.

Turning the corner, they saw
Taggles staggering up the stairs
with a huge packing-case on his
back.

Bump, bump, bump! went the
case as it cannoned against the
wall in its ascent.

Biff!

monocle on the packing-case in astonishment. "Weally,
Taggles, I fail to compwehend—"

Taggles laboured down the Fourth Form passage under
the weight of the case, and Mellish willingly opened the
door of Study No. 6 for him. There was a terrific crash as
Taggles dumped the packing-case in there. The windows of
that famous apartment fairly rattled, and there was a
clatter of dancing crockery.

Taggles, having performed his task, departed from Study
No. 6, growling and gasping, and mopping his perspiring
brow.

Jack Blake & Co. walked into the study and blinked at



Carboy, dressed
in his strange
costume, stood
beneath their
window clang-
ing the old bell
loudly. "Great
pip!" ejaculated
Tom Merry.
"Oyez! Oyez!
Oyez!" shouted
Carboy, reading
from a scroll.
"All ye wasters
in this measly
old casual-ward,
sit up and take
notice!"

(See Chapter 3.)

"My hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry, unable to suppress his
qualms. "Where are you taking that to, Taggles?"

"Groooooooooogh!" gasped Taggles, struggling manfully
with the heavy case and performing a truly remarkable
acrobatic feat with it in carrying it on to the landing.

"Perhaps it's another free sample, Tommy, or a present
of some sort from Gordon Gay!" grinned Jack Blake.

"Who's it for—me?" demanded Tom desperately of
Taggles.

"No!" gasped the porter, staggering onward with his
awkward and heavy load. "Which it's for Master D'Arcy;
and wot Hi says is this 'ere— Grooooooooooh!"

"For Gussy!"

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, turning his

the packing-case and at each other in a dazed and
bewildered manner.

"What do you mean by it, Gussy?" demanded Blake.
"If this is yours—"

"But it isn't, deah boys—at least, I know nothin' what-
evah about it!" expostulated the swell of the Fourth.

"Oh, crumbs!" said Herries, in dismay. "Then I'll bet
it's another joke of Gordon Gay's. Look! That's his hand-
writing on the address-label. I'd know his fist anywhere!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors, who crowded in the
doorway.

"Open it, Blake!"

"Let's see what's in the giddy surprise-packet!"

Blake grimly took a hammer and chisel from his tool-
chest, and proceeded to break open the packing-case.

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Crash, crash, crash!

Under the doughty blows the case was quickly broken open; in fact, the whole structure collapsed sooner than was expected. There was a clatter of falling pieces of wood, and then a whole mass of old hats came swooping out, all over the floor.

There must have been quite fifty hats there, all very ancient and in advanced stages of senile decay. They came tumbling out of the broken packing-case in a perfect swarm. Study No. 6 was simply knee-deep with hats.

The chums of Study No. 6 blinked, and a howl of laughter arose from the onlookers.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai-bai Jove!" stammered Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"M-m-my word!" gasped Blake.

Never before had they beheld such a motley collection of old hats! Most of them were toppers, badly battered and dilapidated, but there was also a goodly number of ancient bowlers, frayed and discoloured straw hats, and some ragged mortar-boards.

A large piece of cardboard came out with the hats, and upon it was written this cryptic message:

"TO GUSSY.—WITH LOVE FROM GORDON GAY!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "The joke's on you this time, Blake! There's a nice lot of hats for you! Try 'em on, Gussy!"

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus, giving a shudder as he surveyed that mass of wrecked and worn-out headgear. "What frightfully howlid things!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go it, Gussy—try 'em on!" came the roar.

"Let's see how you look in a bowler, old son!"

"What about a mortar-board? Blake, you'd look rather nobby in one of those, I reckon!" chuckled Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We can't have this muck lumbering up our study!" howled Blake wildly. "Come on, you fellows! Lend a hand! Chuck 'em out of the window, and let Taggles clear 'em up. They're not ours. We disown 'em!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the crowd of onlookers.

Blake threw open the window, and, gathering up an armful of old hats, he hurled them forth savagely. Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy followed their leader's example.

A perfect avalanche of ancient toppers, bowlers, and "strawyards" went hurtling out of the window of Study No. 6.

There was a muffled, angry roar from below.

"Mon Dieu! Vat is zat? Ooooooooooooooh!"

"Oh corks! You've done it!" exclaimed Talbot. "That sounds like Mossoo's voice, Blake!"

Blake & Co. dashed to the open window, and, gazing downward, they were horrified to see the fat, sprawling form of Monsieur Morny, the French master of St. Jim's, lying on the ground below, almost buried in a pile of old hats.

Mossoo lifted up his voice in wrath as he reclined there beneath the window of Study No. 6.

"Ciel! Vat is zat? Ow! I am knock over! I am hurt! Yaroooh!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Oh, my only aunt!" gasped Blake faintly.

The French master arose with difficulty, shedding the ancient headgear on all sides. He looked up at the window above, and, seeing Blake & Co. standing there, he shook his fist and seemed on the verge of exploding.

"I—I—I— We didn't know you were there, sir!" groaned Blake. "We didn't think of looking, and—"

"Mon Dieu. You are vun merchant garcon, Plake!" snorted Mossoo. "It is vun dangerous prank to throw things out of ze window like zis. I zink I give you a severe trashing! Clear up zis rubbish, and zen you vill all come up to my study! You hear me, Plake?"

"Oh dear! Yee-es, sir!"

Blake went downstairs and picked up all the old hats they had thrown out of the window in their wrath and expectation. They had to take them back to Study No. 6 for the time being.

With feelings that were really too deep for words they went along to interview Mossoo in his study. The French master was generally a good-tempered little gentleman, but the sudden descent of a collection of old hats on his Gallic head had, not unnaturally, raised his ire.

Blake & Co. pleaded with him, however, and explained how they had been made the victims of a joke; and they considered themselves very fortunate, under the circumstances, in escaping with only a couple of "licks" with the cane apiece.

Then came the question as to the disposal of all the old "tiles" that Gordon Gay & Co. had foisted upon them.

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In the end they found that the shortest and most convenient way was to burn them, so they built a big bonfire behind the chapel, and thus disposed of them at last.

Meanwhile, the Terrible Three had gone across to the New House to acquaint Figgins & Co. of their projected scheme against the Grammarians. This met with the New House fellows' approval, and they promised to join in with Tom Merry & Co. against the common foe.

In the School House, too, the plan was received enthusiastically, and when all arrangements had been made the juniors of St. Jim's looked forward to taking reprisals on the Grammarians with keen anticipation.

CHAPTER 6.

A Raid and a Capture!

GORDON GAY & CO. were in the gymnasium at the Grammar School that afternoon, when Mont Blong, the French junior, came rushing across excitedly from the gates.

"Hallo, Froggy!" said Harry Wootton. "What's the row? Have you seen a ghost?"

"Non, non!" cried Mont Blong, waving his arms in a series of excited flourishes. "But I have seen D'Arcy—Gussy, of St. Jim's!"

Gordon Gay & Co. gathered round, looking interested at once.

"You've seen Gussy?" demanded the Grammarian leader. "Where is he? Anywhere near here?"

"Oui, oui! He is in ze wood opposite, wiz two ozzairs—ze one wiz ze big feet—"

"That's Herries," grinned Frank Monk. "You can always recognise that boulder by his size ninety-nines."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are those St. Jim's wasters doing, Froggy?" asked Gordon Gay. "Do they look as though they're up to tricks?"

"Ah, oui, oui!" said Mont Blong. "Zey have wiz zem one beeg parcel, and as zey crept through ze trees I heard Herries say to Gussy, 'Do not make ze noise, or ze Grammar rottairs are bound to smell ze rat.'"

Gordon Gay looked very grim.

"They've got a lark on, then!" he exclaimed. "The poor boobies are trying to get a bit of their own back, I suppose. We'll teach 'em to come here, prowling our wood!"

"Rather!"

Gordon Gay rallied his forces, and, so as to take St. Jim's fellows by surprise, they left the Grammar School via the tradesmen's gate at the back of the school, near the housekeeper's domain.

Practically all the juniors joined Gordon Gay in that expedition. They swarmed into the wood, moving with the stealth of Red Indians on the warpath, and soon the well-known voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was heard.

"It's all wight, deah boys. Theah's no sign of Gay and those other wottahs. Now let's go and find those eggs, then we can attwact the Gwammawians to their school gates, and let fly at them. I wegard that as a weally wippin' wheeze!"

"Rather!"

Gordon Gay's eyes gleamed.

"So they're going to pelt us with eggs—what?" he muttered. "My hat! Come on, chaps! I reckon we'll make a bit of a round-up here!"

The Grammarians crept stealthily through the trees and stalked after Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

A few minutes later two youths detached themselves from the trees opposite the Grammar School.

Tom Merry and Blake were grinning hugely.

"Good egg!" chuckled Tom. "They've taken the bait beautifully! Gussy will decoy them along to the river, where old Figgins and the others will be waiting to give 'em a high old time. Meanwhile, old son, we've got to get in the giddy Grammar School and work our part of the oracle."

The two marauders crept in at the tradesmen's entrance, and at length arrived at a small door at the back of the school building. Tom Merry had been through that door before, in a previous raid on the Grammar School, and knew that it gave access to a remote flight of stairs, which led upward to the junior regions.

He opened the door, and he and Blake crept softly inside.

Not a sound disturbed the quiet peacefulness of the House now that Gordon Gay and most of the juniors were out of doors. Tom Merry and Blake stole cautiously up the back stairs until they came to a dark landing above.

"This is the way to the Fourth Form passage," murmured Tom. "Now, quietly does the trick. If we get spotted our number's up."

Tom knew the way, and the two prowlers reached the junior quarters without mishap.

Gordon Gay's study was empty. Tom made sure of that by bending down and peering through the keyhole. A

moment later he and Blake nipped quickly into the headquarters of their old rival.

Tom looked round, with a grin.

The study was quite tidy for a junior room, although the tablecloth bore many inkstains. There were also patches of ink on the carpet, and on Gordon Gay's desk there was a litter of wireless parts.

The Grammarians were keen wireless enthusiasts. Carboy, in fact, made quite a hobby of it.

"I think we can make a few improvements to this room—what?" chuckled Tom Merry.

"What-ho!" said Blake. "We'll give those bounders something to come home to. I— Oh, crumbs! Hark!"

Sounds of footsteps were heard coming along the corridor outside. Tom Merry and Blake blinked at each other. The footsteps halted outside Gay's study door, and the two juniors immediately dived under the table.

There they crouched, scarcely daring to breathe.

Tap! came at the door.

Tom Merry and Blake remained silent, and waited with bated breath.

The door-handle rattled, the door came open, and one of the school maids entered and put something heavy on the study table.

A moment later the maid departed, without the least suspicion of the presence of the two St. Jim's juniors, and Tom Merry and Blake breathed again.

"Rather!"

The captain of the Shell took out his fountain-pen and added a few lines to the letter from the "Radio Gazette":

"Dear old Duffer," he wrote,—"This is ours now. Sorry to have to disappoint you, but to the victors the spoils, you know.—With deepest sympathy, and wishing you better luck next time, your old pal,
TOM MERRY."

Having written that, Tom looked round with a grin.

"It would be a pity to give those bounders too sudden a shock," he said. "Let's do the parcel up again, only with a spoof wireless set inside it. That's rather a nobby notion, I think."

"Rather!"

An old wooden box, very much the size of the wireless set, was raked out of the cupboard. Into it was shot a whole heap of things—tins, brushes, lumps of coal, a box of nails, a selection of neckties and collars, and a good deal of Carboy's wireless "junk."

The box was then wrapped up neatly in the paper that had contained the real wireless set, so that only the minutest inspection would have revealed the deception.

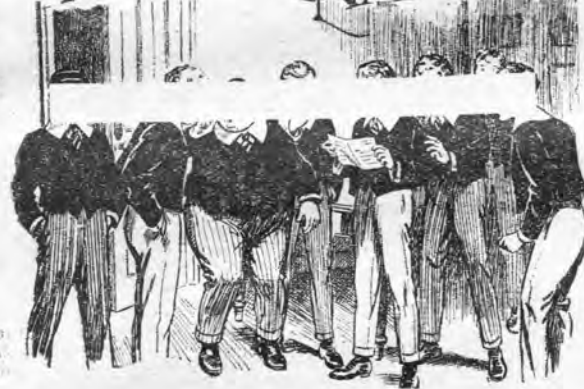
"Now to set about the other work!" grinned Tom. "Pile in!"

Tom Merry and Blake piled in.

They proceeded to wreak havoc in Gordon Gay's study.

Blake raked down shovelfuls of soot from the chimney

HIDDEN NAMES!



Here is another interesting set of Anagrams to solve, chums.

Each of the following sentences, when the letters are correctly transposed, will be found to form the name of a well-known character at GREYFRIARS SCHOOL. Stories of this famous school appear in our Grand Companion Paper, THE "MAGNET," every Saturday.

1. Ever a gentleman—"Trap here, butler?"
2. Rajah's regiment, rush 'em.
3. Stale buns! Tuck lures me.
4. Say! I'm no Jessop, Ned.
5. Nod on a punt-pole.
6. Bee got grub.
7. I run, pelt up, pot a fox.
8. Greedy gorge at flat.
9. Gloaming, I swill.

They crawled out from under the table and stood up.

"Thank goodness she didn't spot us!" gasped Blake. "That was a pretty close call, though. My hat! What's this she's dumped?"

A large, imposing-looking parcel reposed on Gordon Gay's study table. The label was addressed to "Master Gordon Gay, The Grammar School, Rylcombe, Sussex," and printed upon it also were these words: "The Radio Gazette."

"My word!" said Tom Merry. "This looks like a wireless set of some sort. If it is, we'll raid it—spoils of giddy war, you know. Anyway, let's have a look."

Tom quickly unpacked the parcel, and a fine large wireless receiving set was revealed.

The eyes of Tom Merry and Blake glistened as they looked at that splendid instrument. Upon it was an open letter, headed "The Radio Gazette," and running in this wise:

"Dear Master Gay,—I am very pleased to inform you that you were successful in gaining the First Prize in our recent Junior Competition, and we are sending the three-valve receiver herewith.—With heartiest congratulations and best wishes, yours truly,
THE EDITOR."

"Well, I'm jiggered!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Fancy Gay having the gumption to win a wireless set in a competition!"

"Must have been a fluke," said Blake.

"Oh, of course!" said Tom, and he gave a chuckle. "We'll capture this giddy prize—eh, Blake? We could do with something like this at St. Jim's."

"Ripping idea!" said Blake enthusiastically. "Won't Gay tear his hair when he finds we've romped off with his prize!"

and rubbed it well into the carpet. The remainder he put into Gordon Gay's Sunday topper, also pouring in the contents of a bottle of gum.

Tom Merry cheerfully filled the kettle with ink and poured liquid glue into the study clock. The tablecloth and cushions were rolled up and stuffed up the chimney. The contents of the bookcase were hurled out into the centre of the room, and the study crockery, the fender, the fire-irons, the coal-scuttle, and pots and pans were cast on top of the heap.

Blake, looking round, like Alexander of old, for fresh worlds to conquer, went to the cupboard, and therein wrought dire and drastic work. He mixed pickles with the jam, poured gum into the rabbit-pie, scooped custard all over the cake, and anointed the doughnuts with cycle oil to give them a flavour.

Tom Merry opened the window, and wielding the hammer with vim and vigour, he nailed the sashes to the window-frame. Thus it would be impossible to lower the window until the nails were removed—a task that would entail a goodly amount of labour!

Having done this, he chalked these words on the study mirror in large capitals:

"ST. JIM'S FOR EVER!"

GRAMMARIAN MICROBES CAN GO AND CHOP CHIPS!

YAH!"

"There!" he chuckled. "That ought to make 'em sit
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up and take notice—what? Now we've got to get this giddy wireless set out of the school and back to St. Jim's. We shall have to watch our step, and—

"Oh corks!" ejaculated Blake suddenly. "Hark! I believe those bounders are coming back!"

"Great Scott!"

Gazing through the window, Tom Merry and Blake saw Gordon Gay & Co. returning through the gates. They looked dirty, dishevelled, and very much the worse for wear, but apparently they were quite cheerful.

Gordon Gay, in fact, was smiling broadly.

"We socked it to those St. Jim's rotters properly!" the two raiders at the window heard their rival say to one of the Fifth who met him in the quadrangle below. "They thought they had led us into a trap, but we saw the little trick and surrounded 'em! They had a lot of stale eggs in boxes, but we grabbed the giddy eggs and pelted them with their own ammunition. You should have seen the beggars run! Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry and Blake blinked at each other.

"Oh lor!" gasped Blake. "Then—then the decoy has turned out a frost! These rotters haven't had the eggs chucked at them, after all!"

Tom gritted his teeth.

"Never mind!" he muttered. "We've made a bit of a mess up here, and we've also got the wireless set. Look here, Blake, we've got to use strategy, otherwise we shall never get out of this place alive. You hop off down the back stairs with the wireless set, and I'll cover your retreat. If anything happens, I can keep the bounders busy while you cut back to St. Jim's. I can put up with a ragging, so long as you get clear with the wireless set."

"Right-ho!" said Blake.

He took up the raided wireless set, and he and Tom Merry darted quickly from Gordon Gay's study.

CHAPTER 7.

"Miss" Merry!

ALREADY the heavy tramp of the returning warriors' feet could be heard below.

"Scoot for the stairs, Blake!" said Tom Merry.

"Lie low at the bottom till the coast is clear, then nip across to the tradesmen's gate, and run like the dickens! Don't worry about me—I'll look after myself!"

Blake scuttled away with the wireless set under his arm. Tom held back to cover the Fourth-Former's retreat.

A gasp of dismay escaped him as he saw the tall, weedy form of Tadpole coming along from the direction of the art-room.

Tadpole was an artistic genius, and spent most of his leisure time daubing weird pictures on canvas. This afternoon, instead of joining in the fray with the others, he had remained in the art-room to complete his latest masterpiece. He was now returning, and was bearing down almost directly on the St. Jim's raider.

Luckily for Tom Merry, it was rather dark in the corridor, and, moreover, Tadpole was inclined to be short-sighted. Tom looked desperately round him, and seeing a large cupboard near by, he dragged the door open and hopped inside.

The cupboard was a large one, and there was plenty of room for Tom to hide. It was a cupboard used by the maids as a sort of store. Groping round in the gloom, Tom found himself in the midst of a number of pails and mops and brushes.

The footsteps of Tadpole passed, but now there were other footsteps to be heard. Gordon & Co. were all in the house now, and Tom was in a ticklish corner indeed!

He cautiously struck a match in order to take better stock of his surroundings. In the flickering yellow light he saw a number of articles belonging to the maids, comprising white caps, aprons, and black frocks.

Tom caught his breath as a daring scheme entered his head.

To get out of the Grammar School now he would have to run the gauntlet of the juniors who were teeming in the corridors. If he dared show his face outside the cupboard, he would quickly be discovered, and would have Gordon Gay & Co. swarming about him in an instant.

He had only one chance of getting through the enemy's quarter, and Tom quickly took it.

There was a stub of a candle lying on a box in the cupboard. The Shell captain lit it, and by its flickering light he proceeded to don one of the maid's uniforms.

The frock he draped himself in was rather large for him. The skirt was long and full, but as this effectually concealed his schoolboy trousers, it was more of an advantage than otherwise. As for the white cap which he put on his head, that also was large, and to give the impression of

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having a lot of hair, he stuffed a duster under the cap before he tied it. Then, with a white apron put on over the frock, the disguise was complete.

"Now for it!" muttered Tom Merry as he opened the cupboard door. "This is a giddy case of neck or nothing!"

He took up a broom and a pail and walked boldly down the corridor. Tom believed in doing things thoroughly, so he filled the pail with water at the tap near by. He also felt that a pail of water and a broom might come in very useful, in case of emergency.

Reaching the end of the Fourth Form passage, he stopped to listen.

Wild, wrathful shouts were issuing from inside Gordon Gay's study, and an excited crowd of juniors was gathered outside the door.

"Then we've been dished after all!" howled Gordon Gay. "Some of those St. Jim's rotters have been here wrecking the study! L-I-look at it! Oh, my hat!"

Gordon Gay & Co. looked at the scene of ruin and desolation in their study, and they almost wept.

Frank Monk gave a cry when he beheld the parcel on the table.

"I say, here's something from the 'Radio Gazette'!" he exclaimed in a voice loud enough for the disguised Tom Merry to hear. "It must be the prize you've won in the competition, Gay!"

"By Jove! So it is!" cried Gordon Gay. "Thank goodness those rotters didn't take it! That's something, anyway!"

Tom Merry, standing there in his maid's costume, and holding his pail and broom, gave a deep, soft chuckle.

He heard sounds of rustling as Gordon Gay stripped the brown paper off his parcel. Then a long, loud, lifting howl of amazement and dismay arose.

"Great Scott!"

"What is it?"

"Call that a wireless set, Gay?"

"We've been done again!" roared Gordon Gay, reading the letter left by Tom Merry. "Oh, my only sainted chapeau! Tom Merry's been here, and—and he's raided the wireless set!"

"Oh crumbs!"

"The awful spoofer!"

Tom Merry felt that it was time for him to be off; discovery just then would have meant a terrible fate at the hands of the enraged Grammarians.

So he walked on, keeping his head down so as to conceal his face as much as possible.

But Tom, in keeping his head down, did not look quite where he was going. He ran full tilt into Dr. Monk at the top of the stairs, and fell back with a gasp.

"Oh crumbs! I—I'm sorry, sir!" he gasped involuntarily.

The headmaster of Rylcombe Grammar School looked at the "maid" in utter, blank astonishment.

Tom, realising the mistake he had made, edged away nervously, still gripping the pail and the broom.

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Dr. Monk, recovering sufficiently from his astonishment to be able to speak.

"Girl—boy! How dare you masquerade in that clothing! Who are you, you young reprobate?"

Tom did not stop to give particulars.

He heard Gordon Gay & Co. coming along the passage, and he brushed past Dr. Monk and fairly streaked down the stairs, upsetting a good deal of the water from the pail as he did so.

There was an infuriated howl from Gordon Gay, who by then had reached the top of the stairs.

"Stop that rotter!"

"It isn't a maid at all!"

"Look at his trousers!"

"Oh crumbs! After him!"

Tom had to lift that large, voluminous skirt in order to run, otherwise he would surely have tripped up. And that, of course, quite gave the game away, for the Grammarians saw his legs, and knew that the "maid" was really a junior in disguise.

Tom reached the lower landing, and stood at bay in the hall doorway.

He turned towards Gordon Gay & Co., who were tearing down the stairs.

Gay brandished a fist when he saw him.

"Merry! That rotter! Oh, my hat! Grab him, someone!"

Gordon Gay charged towards the foe like a Rugger three-quarter, but as he came up, Tom lifted the pail of water and let it go.

Swooooosh!

"Yerrrrrugh!" howled Gordon Gay.

The water went all over him, and he staggered, lost his footing, and went to the floor with a terrific thud. Frank Monk, Carboy, the Woottons, and a crowd of others came

dashing forward and, in their haste, a lot of them fell over Gordon Gay. There was a fearful melee in the Hall, in the midst of a pool of water.

Tom hurled the pail into the centre of the scrum, and there was a fiendish howl from Frank Monk as it caught him a crack on the head.

"Cheerio, you bounders!" shouted Tom, gathering up his skirt and making a bolt through the door. "St. Jim's for ever! Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom went down the steps three at a time, and streaked across the quadrangle in fine style, with the skirt flapping in the wind around his legs and the frilled cap bobbing up and down on his head.

Several Grammarians came pounding up to stop him, but Tom wielded the broom with all his strength, dealing terrific thwacks on all who attempted to stay his escape.

The quadrangle resounded with the dismal howls.

"Yow-wow!"

"Oh, the rotter!"

"Stop him!"

But there was no stopping Tom Merry now. He ran out of the Grammar School and into the road, and he did not stop running until he got to St. Jim's.



TO-DAY'S football thought: The side that is the quickest in finding its feet usually makes the most headway.

Dulwich Hamlet and Leytonstone recently had a match arranged for a certain Saturday. As there was no arrangement as to the ground on which it should be played, however, the two secretaries got into touch over the telephone and decided to toss. The result of the toss was also taken over the phone and accepted. That's the spirit.

The West Ham team carry about with them a portable wireless receiving set. There's nothing like being up to date.

There is only one hon. secretary connected with a big league club. This is Mr. Barcroft, who acts in that capacity for Blackpool. He was persuaded to take on the job temporarily, just over twenty-five years ago!

The referee holds the whistle, but it may be said that the best referees also know when to hold their breath.

There was a crowd awaiting him at the gates, and shouts of astonishment arose when Tom Merry, in his housemaid's costume, came dashing breathlessly up.

Manners, Lowther, and the chums of Study No. 6 were there, together with nearly a score of other School House fellows, some of whom bore traces of the fray that afternoon.

"Great pip!" ejaculated Monty Lowther, staring at his leader. "Is—that you, Tommy?"

"Yes, here I am, kids, as large as life and twice as natural!" chuckled Tom Merry. "Hallo, Blake! So you got back all right? Is the wireless set safe?"

"As safe as houses," responded the Fourth Form leader. "But how the merry dickens did you manage to get rigged up like this?"

Tom Merry explained swiftly, and a howl of laughter arose from his listeners.

Monty Lowther wiped tears of merriment from his eyes. "Oh, my word! If that doesn't romp off with the whole giddy Huntley & Palmer!" he gurgled.

"We didn't come off so well, though," grunted Herries. "When we decoyed Gay and the others into the wood they must have tumbled to something. Anyhow, they caught us on the hop, and some of the chaps are still indoors, cleaning off the eggs."

"Never mind," said Tom, divesting himself of the maid's

attire. "We've made those bounders sit up, and we've captured Gay's prize wireless set into the bargain. That's a good one over on them, isn't it? We'll keep that giddy wireless set for a bit and have some sport with it. Gay can try to get it back if he can."

"Rather!"

And Tom Merry went indoors with his chums, feeling that he deserved well of his country.

CHAPTER 8.

Gordon Gay's Plot!

TOM MERRY & CO. were jubilant.

They had at last succeeded in getting a little of their own back on their rivals, and they rejoiced accordingly.

The raided wireless set was put on view in the Common-room, and the juniors flocked thither to admire it and gloat upon the spoils of war. After that, Tom Merry had it locked up securely in his study, pending a little plan he had in mind.

It seems that football for ladies is dying out. We do not hear so much about it in these days, anyway. Perhaps there were too many mis(s)-kicks.

J. D. Harkness, the Scottish International goalkeeper, of Queen's Park, always rubs powdered resin on his hands before going on to the field. He says that it keeps the hands from sweating and enables him to grip the ball better.

Most football clubs recognise in some special way the services of men who have been specially prominent with the club. In the Middlesbrough directors' room there is a big photograph of Tim Williamson, their goalkeeper for many years. Burnley propose to put up in their board-room a big picture of Jerry Dawson, who has served them for twenty years.

Dixie Dean has a greyhound which is named Poor Pat. The suggestion is that he gave it this name after the Irish League had been beaten this season by nine goals to one by the English League. It is suggested that after Ireland had beaten England in the International match recently Dean wanted to change the name of his greyhound.

In the old days the three bottom clubs of the First Division and the three top clubs of the Second Division used to play test matches. There are now many more clubs in each League, but only two go up and two go down.

Previous to the present season Hutton and McStay had played in four International matches for Scotland as the back pair, and in those games the opponents of Scotland had not scored a single goal.

In the first three months of the present season the Burnley club paid over four hundred pounds in wages to players who were unfit to take their places in the team. On top of this, of course, there were huge medical fees.

Gordon Gay & Co. did not mean to take that set-back lying down, however. Their spies were seen prowling round St. Jim's at all hours, so that a constant watch had to be maintained for possible raiders.

Two days later St. Jim's was very intrigued to see this notice on the board, written in Tom Merry's hand:

"NOTICE!

WIRELESS CONCERT TO-NIGHT!

To Celebrate and Consolidate the Undeniable Position of St. Jim's as Top Dog at Rylcombe.

A GRAND RADIO DEMONSTRATION

will be held in the Lecture-room, School House, this evening, at 8 p.m., when the Wireless Receiver, recently the property of Messrs. Gordon Gay & Co., will be worked, and a Broadcast Concert given in conjunction with a Loud-Speaker Amplifier specially installed by Bernard Glyn, Esq.

ADMISSION FREE, GRATIS, AND FOR NIX!

Come and hear the Wireless! Come and Listen In! Dogs and infants in arms not admitted. Fags must wash their necks!

ROLL UP! ROLL UP!! ROLL UP!!!

(Signed) TOM MERRY,
Chairman."

"Jolly good wheeze!" said Blake, when he read the notice,
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in company with a crowd of other juniors. "That ought to attract a crowd!"

"You bet!" chuckled Tom Merry. "That's my idea—to get all the chaps together for this demonstration with Gay's receiver, and let the school see that we're not played out. Glyn's going to work the set, and he's fixing up a jolly powerful loud-speaker amplifier of his own design. We've got the Head's full permission, so everything should be plain sailing."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"My word!" grinned Blake. "Wouldn't the Grammar cads be simply tearing their hair, if they knew!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins & Co. strolled in just then.

They were looking a trifle dusty and rumped. Figgins' nose was somewhat twisted, Kerr's jacket was smothered in dust and torn at the elbow, whilst Patty Wynn had a bump on his forehead and a rapidly-colouring eye.

"Hallo!" said Tom Merry in surprise. "Have you fellows been trying to upset a steam-roller, or what?"

"No. We've just been having a little scrap with Gordon Gay and the two Woottons," said Figgins. "We caught those beggars sneaking in through the cloisters. They meant to get that wireless set, if they could lay their mitts on it. We went for 'em, and managed to chase 'em off. Grooooh! Is my nose on straight, Merry! It feels too large for my face."

"Well, it does look a trifle off-side, Figgy," grinned Tom Merry. "But you've done jolly well, old sons. The Grammarians are jolly well not going to have that set back—not if I know it! Are you fellows coming to our wireless concert to-night?"

Figgins & Co. looked at the notice, and they laughed.

"My hat! What a wheeze!" exclaimed the New House leader. "We'll come, of course."

"Bring all the chaps with you," said Tom. "There's plenty of room in the lecture-room, and the more the merrier, you know."

"Rather!"

Figgins & Co. made their way back to the New House to spread the news of the forthcoming wireless concert. Meanwhile, Tom Merry and his chums busied themselves in preparing for the great event.

The wireless receiver, complete with all batteries, was installed in the lecture-room. It looked very imposing, standing on a dais near the window, with Bernard Glyn's huge loud-speaker beside it.

By tea-time arrangements were all complete for the great demonstration at eight o'clock. Tom Merry and Bernard Glyn went into the lecture-room, just before tea, to see that everything was in order.

They did not hear the faint scuffling of feet at the back of the room, among the chairs and forms.

Tom Merry looked at the wireless set, and at the loud-speaker, so impressively set up in front of the room, and he rubbed his hands with immense satisfaction.

Glyn turned a switch on the wireless set, and immediately a burst of music came out of the loud-speaker.

"How's that?" said Glyn. "Pretty loud and clear—what?"

"First chop!" chuckled Tom. "We ought to be able to give a really ripping show to-night. Everyone's eager to hear the giddy wireless concert, and this room's likely to be crowded out. Old Kildare and a few of the Sixth are coming, and some of the masters as well, so I believe."

"I'll shut off now," said Glyn. "Haden't we better lock the door as we go? Nobody will want to come in here before we come back, so there'll be no harm in locking up. Besides, we can't afford to take risks. Those Grammarians are an artful lot of beggars, and they might have the nerve to break in here, you know."

"All serene," said Tom.

And the two juniors departed, locking the door of the lecture-room behind them.

As their footsteps receded down the corridor, two youthful forms arose from among the seats at the back of the lecture-room.

They were Gordon Gay and Carboy, of Rylcombe Grammar School.

They crept to the front of the room, walking on tiptoe.

"Whew!" said Gordon Gay. "That was a close shave. I thought those bounders had spotted us."

The two Grammarians stared at the wireless installation in the lecture-room.

Carboy gave a snort.

"The fearful cheek! So they're going to give a wireless concert here to-night, in front of the whole blessed school! On our wireless set, too! Look here, Gay, we can't stand that! I vote we muck the set up so that it won't work. That will put a spoke in their wheel—the bounders! We—we can't cart the set away with us now, I suppose?"

Gordon Gay shook his head.

"No, old son; we'd never get out of this place alive, if

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Tom Merry went down the steps three at a time, and streaked across the quad, with the skirt flapping in the wind. He hit out with the broom as he fled, and loud yells came from those who attempted to stop him.

(See Chapter 7.)



we had the giddy wireless set to carry," he said. "But, listen. I've got a wheeze—a really first-class, gilt-edged wheeze! Supposing we let these scallywags go ahead with the wireless concert, and leave the receiver here? We won't give them any grounds for suspecting that we're broken in and had a nose round, but methinks we shall be able to work things, so that they'll get a very different sort of concert from what they're expecting. Listen, and I'll explain."

Gordon Gay sank his voice to a whisper.

"See how Glyn's rigged up his loud-speaker?" he said. "The wires leading from it run up the wall to an amplifier on top of that cupboard near the window. Now, it will be as easy as rolling off a log for us to disconnect the wires that run from the amplifier to the wireless set, and poke them through the top of the window, so that the set will be entirely disconnected, and the leads running into the amplifier will be projecting out of the window."

"Well?" said Carboy, in mystification. "What are you driving at?"

"Simply this," chuckled Gordon Gay. "If we connect a couple of wires to those that stick out of the window, and run them down into the window of the box-room below, we shall have direct connection between the box-room and the amplifier, which feeds Glyn's loud-speaker. The room under this is a box-room, you know. We got in that way, and had to hide there till the coast was clear for us to do our little bit of exploring."

"But what's the idea of connecting the loud-speaker up here, to the box-room below?" demanded Carboy. "I'm blessed if I see—"

"Don't you tumble to my little wheeze?" said his leader eagerly. "If we can fit a microphone and a battery to the leads running into the box-room, and can hide ourselves in the box-room at eight o'clock, we shall be able to control the giddy concert, and shout through into the loud-speaker exactly what we like! Think of it, Carboy—there'll be Tom Merry & Co., and practically all St. Jim's squatting up there in the lecture-room, expecting to hear a wireless concert. The loud-speaker, instead of being connected to the set, though, will be connected to our giddy secret apparatus



down in the box-room. By means of the microphone fitted to those wires, all sounds made in the box-room will be reproduced at about ten times the strength through Glyn's loud-speaker. And if we can sneak in, and lock ourselves in there without fear of being disturbed, we shall be able to give a concert of our own, and properly spoof those St. Jim's asses. See the wheeze?"

"My word!" gasped Carboy, whose eyes were now glistening eagerly.

"You've got a microphone amongst your wireless stuff," said Gordon Gay. "You bought it the other week, you remember, at that sale in Wayland."

"Rather!" said Carboy. "Why, the thing will be as simple as anything to work! Of course, if we're caught down in the box-room—"

"We'll risk that!" said Gordon Gay. "It will be dark, anyway, and most of the fellows will be upstairs. I'm game to chance it, anyway."

"I'm on!" said Carboy promptly.

He and Gordon Gay clambered up to the top of the cupboard near the window, where the amplifier which worked in conjunction with the loud-speaker was installed. It was the work of a few moments to disconnect the necessary wires, and poke them through the top of the lecture-room window. From below, no sign of the alteration could be seen, as Glyn and Tom Merry had gone to great pains to conceal the wiring as much as possible. This desire for neatness on their part made Gordon Gay's plan possible.

Having thus prepared for their great jape, the two Grammarians waited until the coast was clear, and then they clambered down from the lecture-room by means of a convenient drainpipe, and slipped away unseen.

They got out of St. Jim's without mishap, and rushed back to the Grammar School with all speed.

Darkness had fallen over the countryside, and all was shadowy and dim, when four stealthy figures swung themselves over the wall of St. Jim's, and clambered down an old oak-tree into the quadrangle.

Gordon Gay and Carboy had returned, bringing with

them Frank Monk and Jack Wootton to assist them in their plot. Harry Wootton and one or two other Grammarians were waiting outside to keep watch and assist in the operations when called upon.

Carboy had a parcel with him, containing all the necessary wire and apparatus for the great jape. Frank Monk had a concertina, and Jack Wootton a portable gramophone, with records.

They made their way noiselessly through the cloisters, and at last, cautiously and stealthily, they reached the window of the box-room, which was situated directly underneath the lecture-room of St. Jim's.

Most of the St. Jim's fellows were indoors, rushing through their prep in order to be in time for the wireless concert.

Nobody had seen the Grammarians come in, and no one saw Carboy at work, as he connected the wires that ran up from the box-room to those projecting through the lecture-room window.

Having made the necessary connections, Carboy returned to the box-room. So far, all was well for the Grammarian marauders. Nobody at St. Jim's had the faintest suspicion of the presence of the enemy within their gates.

Gordon Gay & Co. chuckled deeply, and, having fixed up the microphone to their satisfaction, they lay low in the box-room and awaited, as patiently as they could, the time when they would put their huge jape into operation.

CHAPTER 9.

"Wireless" Wizardry!

THE lecture-room at St. Jim's was crowded by eight o'clock.

In response to Tom Merry's notice, the fellows "rolled up" in their scores.

The idea of a wireless concert, in fact, appealed very strongly to the popular imagination, and Tom Merry & Co. rubbed their hands with great satisfaction when they saw the crowded lecture-room.

Figgins & Co. turned up in full force, with a contingent from the New House. Practically all the Fourth and Shell were there, and even Kildare and some lordly members of the Sixth and Fifth condescended to grace the proceedings with their presence. They were given the places of honour in front, and two special seats were reserved for Mr. Railton and Mr. Lathom, the Fourth Form master, who arrived on time, and took their seats, smiling good-naturedly.

At the back of the room was a tribe of fags, led by Wally D'Arcy. These noisy youngsters grew impatient, and as the minutes went by they whiled away the time by "potting" at the juniors in front with their peashooters.

There was some stamping of feet, and then a cheer arose as Tom Merry stood up on the platform in front, to speak.

"Gentlemen—"

"Hear, hear!"

"It gives me much pleasure to see so many gathered here this evening to listen to our wireless demonstration—"

"Bravo!"

"Which, I think I have the honour to claim, will prove to be the most novel and unique entertainment ever given at St. Jim's!" went on Tom. "The wireless receiver you see before you was originally the property of Messrs. Gordon Gay & Co., those terrible wasters—ahem!—belonging to Rylcombe Grammar School. By virtue of the natural ascendancy of St. Jim's over the Grammar School, the wireless set is now our property. The loud-speaker has been kindly installed by Bernard Glyn, who needs no introduction as a scientific johnny, and who is taking charge of this demonstration. It is my sincere hope, gentlemen—"

"Rats!" bellowed D'Arcy minor from the back. "We've come to listen to the wireless, Tom Merry, not a giddy sermon! Cut the cackle and get on with the washing!"

"Hear, hear!" roared the audience.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Chuck that cheeky fag out!" roared Blake.

"Order!" rapped Kildare, standing up and looking round sternly.

Tom Merry coughed.

"Gentlemen, I have no more to say—"

"Thank goodness!" yelled Jameson.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Except to express my sincere hope that you will enjoy the items shortly to be heard from this loud-speaker, and that you will find our humble entertainment not only amusing, but stimulating and enlightening."

"Bravo!"

"Now, chuck it, old chap; you've had your innings!"

"Rather! Let's hear the wireless!"

"Switch on the doings, Glyn!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom gave Glyn the signal, and the scientific man of the Shell turned to the wireless set and pressed a switch.

Nothing happened for a minute or so, and the audience waited expectantly.

Then, with a swift and startling suddenness, a terrific howl burst from the loud-speaker; a wild, prolonged howl, so unearthly and unexpected that Glyn leaped clear of the floor in amazement.

"Whoooooooroooooh! Yah! Wah! Wagh-wow-woooooh!" bellowed the speaker.

The audience—especially those in front—found the uproar so devastating that they had to stuff fingers into their ears.

"My hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry, glaring across at Bernard Glyn. "What the thump are you playing at, you idiot?"

"Nun-n-nothing!" gasped Glyn. "The set's howling, and—"

"Then put a sock in it, ass! We can't stand that fearful row!"

"Chuck it, Glyn!"

"Stop the rotten thing!"

Glyn desperately turned a knob, and twiddled a dial, and, after a while the howls subsided, and there was silence from the loud-speaker, although, had Glyn listened carefully enough, he might have heard faint, distant sounds of chuckling down in the depths of the trumpet!

Then, much to the relief of Tom Merry & Co., a deep voice issued from the loud-speaker.

"Good-evening, everybody!"

"Thank goodness!" breathed Tom Merry. "The giddy set's going to work at last!"

"Hallo, kids! Hallo, my pretty pets! This is Uncle Gordon calling!" went on the voice booming out of the loud-speaker and echoing in every corner of the lecture-room. "If you sit very still and behave yourselves, I will tell you a nice bed-time story!"

Tom Merry blinked at Glyn.

"You—you ass!" he exclaimed. "What the dickens have you picked up now? We don't want any fatheaded bed-time stories!"

"I—I'm blessed if I can understand this!" gasped Glyn, with a look of wonder at the wireless set. "Surely, it's too late for the Children's Hour, and—"

"Here we are, kids, and I want you to listen very carefully!" came the booming voice of "Uncle Gordon" through the loud-speaker. "Once upon a time, my pretty pets, there dwelt at a certain school a boy named Merry—Thomas Merry. The name of the school was St. Jim's, and it wasn't like an ordinary school. Oh, no! Not a bit of it! St. Jim's was a home for boys who are cracked and silly, and Thomas was the dottiest and daftest dunce of the whole establishment, which is saying a great deal! The boys of St. Jim's, sad to relate, were a set of raving, rambling young lunatics, who were absolutely good for nothing except to squabble over their marbles, or knock each other over when playing hopscotch, or make themselves sick with bullseyes and toffee apples, of which they are very fond."

A gasp arose from the "listeners-in"—a gasp of amazement, horror, and incredulity.

Mr. Railton sat bolt upright in his chair, and Mr. Lathom looked quite dazed over the rims of his spectacles. As for Tom Merry & Co., they gazed at the loud-speaker, and at each other, wondering whether they could have heard aright. They really suspected that their ears were playing them false!

"Gug-g-great pip!" ejaculated Blake faintly. "What on earth have you picked up, Glyn? Surely this must be a joke!"

"How can it be?" said Glyn bewilderedly. "It's coming from the wireless set, isn't it? Somebody must be having a lark at the broadcasting station, and—"

"One day," went on the deep, ringing voice from the loud-speaker—"one day, my darling little ducks, this boy, Thomas Merry, and the tribe of half-witted crackpots who followed his leadership, went out to try and raid the Grammar School, a noble school for young gentlemen, which was close to St. Jim's. But Tom Merry and his crowd of capering clowns were caught napping, and were beaten hands down by the boys of the Grammar School, whose duty it was to keep the young lunatics of St. Jim's in order, and teach them to mind their 'p's' and 'q's'."

"Tom Merry and his crew kept on trying to beat the Grammarians, but it was simply no use; they were beaten all along the line, so at last they returned to their worn-out old shanty and went raving mad with disappointment. And there you may see them now, all wild and giddy, deluding themselves that they are top dogs at Rylcombe! There is a moral in this story, my pretty dears, and that is, you should never chew off more than you can swallow!"

"Gug-g-great Scott!"

"Bai Jove!"

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To say that the audience were astounded would be putting it very mildly.

"What the dickens has happened?" cried Tom Merry. "This isn't the stuff they usually broadcast on the wireless! There's a hoax on somewhere!"

"Whooooooop-wah-rooooooh!" went the loud-speaker again.

"Oh crumbs! She's howling again!" gasped Glyn. "I—I can't make this out a bit! The set was working all right when I looked at it a little while ago; but now—"

In the midst of the howls, which gradually died down, another deep voice came booming forth:

"Hallo, everybody! The station orchestra will now play an operatic selection by the famous Russian composer Vichivitch!"

"Good egg!" gasped Blake. "We're going to have some music at last!"

Gordon Gay & Co., safely and secretly hidden in the box-room below, turned on the gramophone, and a fearsome noise issued from the loud-speaker horn. At first, it seemed for all the world as though a cat-fight were being broadcast, judging by the weird screeching noises that pulsed forth into the lecture-room; but after a time the particularly scratchy tones of an orchestra could be distinguished, and then something of a tune became recognisable.

Much to the amazement of all who listened, the strains of that old classic ballad, "Boiled Beef and Carrots," came blaring out of the trumpet.

Mr. Lathom turned to Mr. Railton, with a gasp.

He had a musical ear, and the noises that were being forced upon him by the "wireless" gave him inward spasms.

"Dear me!" said the Fourth Form master. "My dear Railton, surely that cannot be the selection given out by the announcer!"

Mr. Railton's face bore a pained look as he listened to the wild wailing of the loud-speaker.

"It certainly is not an operatic work, Lathom," he said. "Bless my soul! I have never heard such nerve-racking music in all my life! In fact, the word music applied to that distressing cacophony is a decided misnomer. It is really too horrible to listen to!"

Loud shouts of wrath arose from the other members of the audience.

"Shut off that thundering row, Glyn!"

"Can't you pick up something better than that?"

Glyn twisted the knobs in desperation, but all to no purpose! The tune of "Boiled Beef and Carrots"—with variations in the way of wailing and screeching—grated through to the bitter end.

Mr. Railton rose from his chair, a very grim look on his face.

"Come, Lathom!" he said. "This is a most ridiculous affair—nothing less than a farce! Apparently some joke is being perpetrated here, and although it may appear humorous and entertaining to some minds, I quite fail to appreciate it. We are merely wasting our time listening to this rubbish!"

"I agree with you, my dear Railton," said Mr. Lathom tartly. "I have heard quite enough. We will go."

With frowning brows the two masters left their seats and hurriedly left the room.

Some of the seniors followed suit, though most remained to see the fun. They were not to be disappointed.

More strange noises were coming from the loud-speaker trumpet, and, try as he might, Glyn could not tune them out.

CHAPTER 10.

Not a Success!

TOM MERRY & CO. gazed in deepest consternation at the wireless set.

Again the announcer's voice came bawling out of the trumpet:

"Hallo, hallo! The Grammar School Glee Party will now entertain you. These exceedingly clever and versatile lads have been specially engaged to broadcast this evening. Their first item will be a new and original song."

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed D'Arey. "Then Gordon Gay and his crowd have got a job at the broadcasting station, dear boys. They—they're goin' to sing."

"Oh crumbs!"

There was a terrific burst of melody from the loud-speaker, so powerful that the trumpet fairly danced about on the table in front of the amazed St. Jim's audience. The voices of Gordon Gay & Co. bawled forth these words to the tune of that well-known ballad "The Death of Cock Robin":

"All the owls of St. Jim's were a-sobbing and a-crying."

'Cos they tried to be cheeky, and the Grammarians knocked 'em flying.

'Cos they tried to be cheeky, and the Grammarians knocked 'em flying!"

Then came these verses, which Tom Merry & Co. sat and listened to in horror:

"Who led the mob?"

"I," said Tom Merry.

'Twas daft of me, very,

I led the mob!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the fags at the back, whilst the voices of Gordon Gay & Co. repeated the opening lines of their roundelay with vim and gusto. Another verse rang out of the loud-speaker:

"Who lost the tuck?"

Poor Gussy, alas!

That silly ass,

He lost the tuck!"

"Bai Jove!"

Most of the audience were roaring with laughter at the expense of Tom Merry & Co. They saw the funny side, although for the life of them they could not understand how the Grammarians were managing to broadcast.

Tom waved wildly to Bernard Glyn.

"Turn it off!" he roared. "We won't listen to that piffle! Goodness knows how those Grammarian rotters have got permission to broadcast, but we—we won't listen! Switch it off!"

Glyn made frantic efforts to "tune out" the Grammarian Glee Party, but still the voices of those joyous youths rang out as loud as ever:

"I—I can't!" groaned Glyn, who had turned every knob on the receiver, but still without result. "Something jolly queer must have happened to this set—"

"Disconnect the blessed thing!" yelled Blake. "Bust it! Jump on it! Chuck it out of the window—anything!"

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

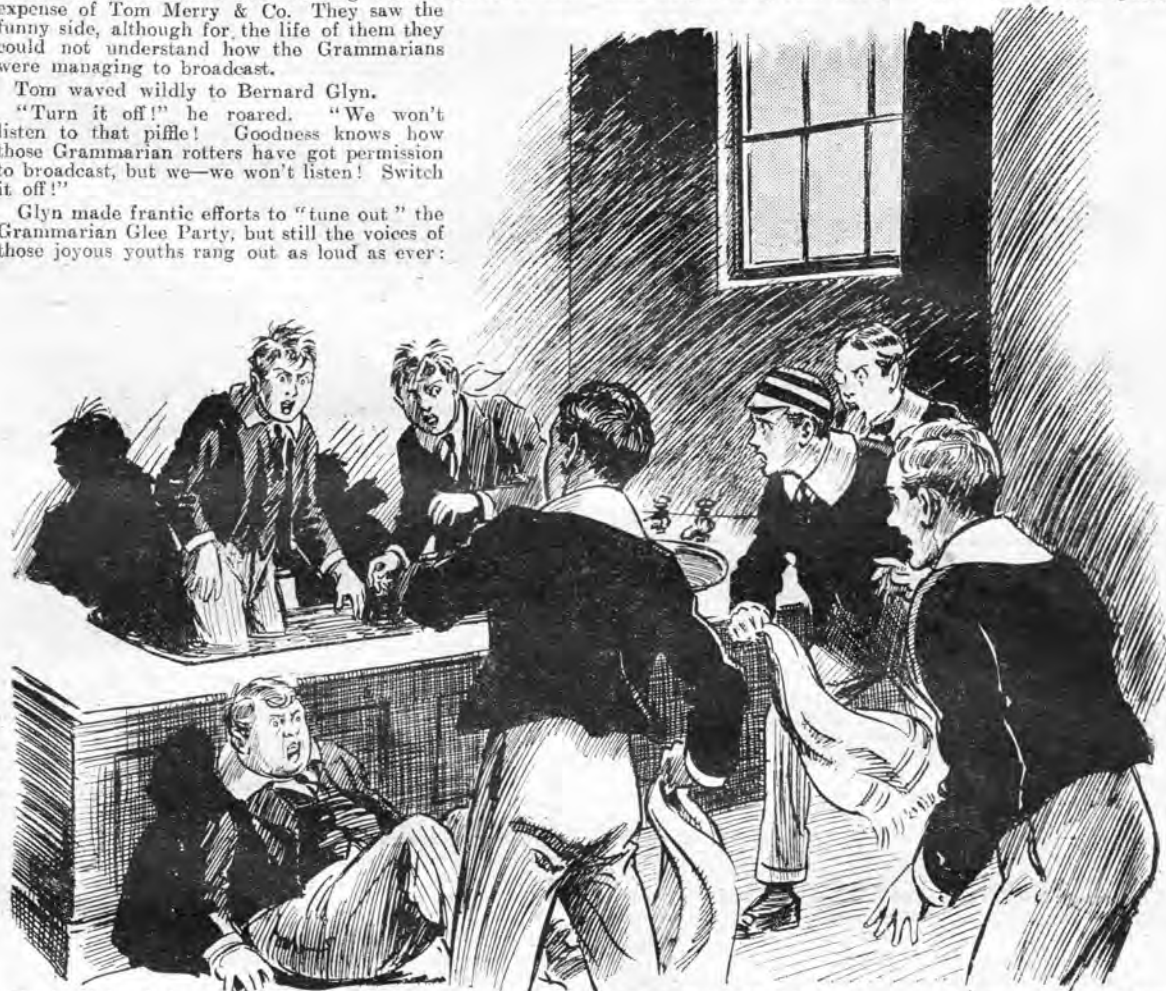
"Keep it going, Glyn!"

"We're enjoying this!"

"Rather!"

Glyn wrenched at the wireless set and pulled off the wires. The voice of Gordon Gay, however, still came through the loud-speaker as mockingly as ever.

"Ha, ha, ha! This is where you sing small, you St. Jim's microbes! You thought you'd scored when you collared the wireless set, didn't you? But we've got it back on you now, Tom Merry—what? You've been spoofed



By the light of the moon, Jack Blake & Co. saw the squirming figures in the bath drag off the towels from their faces. Then there was a shout of amazement, as the drenched couple were recognised. "Figgins and Kerr!" "Great Scott!" (See Chapter 12.)

"Who're off their chumps?
The Terrible Three,
Were diddled, you see,
They're off their chumps!"

Tom Merry & Co. were almost tearing their hair. After each little verse the voices of Gordon Gay & Co. sang the opening lines, commencing with "All the owls of St. Jim's were a-sobbing and a-crying." They went on:

"Who are the top dogs?
The Grammarians, you bet!
They aren't beaten yet,
They are top dogs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" howled the audience, thoroughly enjoying the discomfiture of Tom Merry & Co.

"Go it!"

"This is the finest wireless concert we've ever heard!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry rushed up to the loud-speaker, spluttering with wrath and humiliation.

"Stop that row, Glyn, for goodness' sake!" he roared.

beautifully—absolutely dished, diddled, and done brown, you duffer! Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry turned wildly to the others.

"Those rotters must be outside somewhere, talking into that loud-speaker!" he shouted. "Come on, you fellows; we'll find 'em! We—we'll spifficate the cads for this!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry, suspecting the truth at last, made a rush for the window.

But as he did so, all the lights in the lecture-room suddenly went out, and they were plunged into utter, Stygian darkness.

Tom cannoned into Glyn, and they both went sprawling over on the platform. There was a fiendish howl from Glyn as the speaker toppled over, and the trumpet caught him a fearful crack on the nose.

Pandemonium broke out in the darkness. The juniors, unable to see each other, made a general stampede towards the front, and there was a series of wild yells and roars of anguish as they collided with each other, and fell over various obstacles as they groped about blindly in the dark.

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"Turn that light on!" howled Blake's voice over the hubbub.

"They won't go on!" bawled back Monty Lowther, who had made a dive for the electric-light switch. "Someone's broken the wires, or something. Yaroooooooooh!"

Someone ran into Monty in the dark, and he went down to the floor with a thud.

Gordon Gay's voice came through the overturned loud-speaker, sounding eerily in the darkness.

"Ha, ha, ha! How's that, you washouts? Now you can sort yourselves out as best you can! Mind your tootsies in the dark! Gordon Gay & Co. are now closing down. Good-night, everybody, and heaps of rats!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The voices from the loud-speaker ceased, and soon afterwards the window of the lecture-room opened, and Gordon Gay and Frank Monk scrambled in.

By that time matches had been struck, and in their flickering light a scene of the wildest confusion was revealed.

The Grammarians made a dive for the wireless set. Monk grabbed it, handed it to Gordon Gay, who promptly dropped it through the window. His chums waiting below caught it, and rushed it away through the darkness.

Tom Merry, catching sight of his old rival in the light afforded by the matches, gave an infuriated shout.

"There they are! They've had the check to come in here, then! Grab 'em! Yow! Ow!"

Tom gave vent to those dismal yells as Gordon Gay, jumping to the window, lunged out and planted a foot well and truly in the region of his rival's waistcoat. Tom went staggering back, to fall into the arms of Blake and Manners.

Gordon Gay and Monk, taking advantage of the general confusion, were soon out of the window again. They sent back a defiant shout into the lecture-room as they departed.

"Yah! Who's top dog at Rylcombe? The Grammar School, of course! Rats on St. Jim's! Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry & Co. fairly tore to the window, but too late. Gordon Gay & Co. had gone!

They heard the marauders' footsteps scudding away towards the school wall in the darkness; but of Gordon Gay

or of his companions, or of the recaptured wireless set, there was no sign!

"Spoofed!" gurgled Tom Merry, leaning against the wall by the window and clutching at his hair. "Spoofed by those Grammarian rotters! They—they've messed up our wireless concert—"

"They were talking through the loud-speaker all the time, the same as they'd be talking through a telephone!" roared Glyn, who had been making an inspection of the wires. "The rotters must have got in somehow and disconnected the set. Oh, the—the awful spoofers! No wonder I couldn't get the set to work. It wasn't connected. We—we've been done!"

"Done to a turn!" moaned Jack Blake. "Oh, my hat! Won't the rotters crow over this?"

Lights were flashing all over the lecture-room now, and Mr. Railton returned to see what all the noise was about. Then someone discovered that a fuse outside had been removed. A temporary one was put in, and the lights went up once more.

What a scene of desolation met Tom Merry's eyes!

The wireless set was gone, and the loud-speaker lay on the platform, its trumpet battered out of all semblance of its original shape.

Most of the juniors bore signs of the struggle they had had in the dark. Groans and gasps were heard on all sides.

"I reckon we ought to bump Tom Merry for this!" roared Grundy. "He's let those Grammarians do him in the eye again, and—"

"Rather!"

"Call yourself a leader?"

"Go and bury yourself!"

"Look here—" began the captain of the Shell heatedly, but Mr. Railton had returned, his face very stern and determined.

"Boys, cease this disturbance!" he exclaimed angrily. "I have never beheld such a disgraceful scene! Merry, you will see that this rubbish is cleared up. All you other boys will disperse at once!"

The audience—or what there was left of it—dispersed in hot haste. Many of the fellows were rubbing bumps, bruises, and other hurts.

The Terrible Three remained behind in the lecture-room to restore order out of the chaos. They snorted with wrath and chagrin as they worked away, and their feelings were really too deep for words.

Never before had Gordon Gay & Co. inflicted such a complete and crushing defeat upon them. When at last the lecture-room was clear and their work in there was done, all that remained for Tom Merry & Co. to do was to crawl away and hide their diminished heads.

CHAPTER 11.

Blake and Figgins Take a Hand!

THE grateful odour of frying sausages pervaded Study No. 10 in the Shell passage at tea-time the following day—grateful, but scarcely comforting to the three juniors who were having tea.

The Terrible Three were at home. Being in funds, they were having a good spread. They had tuck in plenty now, and tuck, like music, usually bath charms to soothe the savage breast.

But Tom Merry & Co. were like unto Rachel of old. They mourned, and would not be comforted. Even the sausages, done to a turn, failed to rouse them from the depths of gloom and dejection into which they had fallen.

Tom Merry's wireless concert had turned out an utter frost and a fearful fiasco. They couldn't deny it even to themselves. They couldn't forget it, either. The other fellows had been reminding them of it all day long. That concert, with its "broadcast programme" given by Gordon Gay & Co., was the sole topic of conversation at St. Jim's. Tom Merry & Co. had been laughed to scorn over it by some and nagged to death over it by others.

Both the nagging and the laughing were like gall and wormwood unto their souls. They sat there at their cosy meal, and ate and drank, but were by no means merry.

There was a bang at the door, which flew open unceremoniously, to admit Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy.

The chums of Study No. 6 wore very grim and determined looks.

"We've come to tell you what we think about things!" exclaimed Blake, thumping the table and sending a shower of hot tea out of Monty Lowther's cup into the butter-dish. "The state of affairs here is rotten! We're fed-up with the way those Grammarians have been licking us all along the line!"

"Yaas, wathah! I considah it a disgwace—"

"We think it's an absolute howling shame—" said Herries.

"We've come to the conclusion that the limit of endurance has been reached!" said Blake, with another thump on the table, this time knocking over the teapot, with disastrous results to the tablecloth. "We've let you have your head, Tom Merry, and have backed you up so far against the Grammar School, but you have proved yourself to be an utter wash-out!"

"A footling chump!" said Digby.

"A bungling ass!" said Herries.

"Yaas, wathah!" chimed in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, jamming his monocle more tightly into his noble eye. "We have been discussin' the pwos and cons of the mattah, Tom Mewwy, and have decided that it's time for you to wetiah and leave things in our hands, bai Jove!"

"Oh!" said Tom, glaring at the chums of Study No. 6. "And what sort of a show do you reckon you fatheads could make?"

"A jolly sight better show than you've been making, anyway!" said Blake, with a snort. "We couldn't make much worse!"

"Rather not!" said Herries forcefully. "Look at the hash you've made of things, Merry!"

"Look here," exclaimed Tom, flushing, "you needn't rub it in, and—"

"We don't want to rub it in, but we do want to make it plain that you've got to stand down and let the Fourth have a cut at putting Gordon Gay in his place!" said Blake. "You've had your innings, Tommy, and it's only fair to let us show what we can do! The Fourth may succeed where you others fail, you know!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The Terrible Three exchanged glances.

Blake glared truculently at them.

"Well," he demanded, "what have you got to say?"

"I've got to say this," said Tom Merry—"you're a howling ass, Blake!"

"A raving fathead!" said Manners.

"A frabjous idiot!" said Monty Lowther.

"But, still," said Tom, "there's no harm in letting you chaps run on, even to making worse chumps of yourselves than you are already!"

"Oh!" snorted Blake. "That's what you think, is it? Well, let me tell you this, Tom Merry—we'll show you that we can take the Grammarians in hand if you can't!"

"All serene!" said Tom Merry. "Then go ahead, and if you get it in the neck, you'll only have yourselves to thank!"

"Bosh!" snapped Blake. "We're going to see that Gordon Gay gets it where the chicken got the chopper!"

"Right-ho!" said Tom. "Do you mind shutting the door after you?"

Snort!—from Blake.

The chums of Study No. 6 departed, and Herries slammed the door.

Tom Merry looked at his chums.

"Blake reckons the Fourth can lick the Grammarians," he said. "What he says is all piffle, of course, but there's no harm in his trying! More giddy power to his elbow if he can make Gordon Gay sing small! But it's my belief he'll come a cropper!"

"Hear, hear!" said Monty Lowther.

"These Fourth Form kids are suffering from swelled head!" grunted Manners.

The Terrible Three went on with their tea in a far from cheery mood.

Presently there came a tramp of approaching footsteps which halted outside Study No. 10.

Bang!

The door flew open, and Figgins, Kerr, and Fatty Wynn appeared.

Tom Merry's hand wandered towards a pat of butter, Lowther reached for the poker, and Manners picked up a cricket stump in a meaning manner.

"Pax!" said Figgins, coming into the study with his chums. "We haven't come to row you School House fellows; we've come to talk!"

"Talking silly drivel is more in your line!" said Tom Merry crossly. "Well, you New House wasters, what do you want?"

"Merely this," said Figgins—"we want you to understand, Tommy, that in future the New House is going to champion St. Jim's against the Grammar School, and we hereby warn you to keep off the grass!"

"Oh!" said Tom.

"The New House feels that it's time something was done before the fair name of St. Jim's becomes but a memory!" went on Figgins impressively. "You School House chaps have been pretty well kyboshed by the Grammarians lately, and it behoves you to chuck up the sponge in favour of those who are more capable of dealing with the Grammar cads! It's a big job, and they'll want some licking! The School House chaps simply aren't up to their weight, you know!"

"Hear, hear!" said Kerr and Fatty Wynn.

Tom Merry breathed hard through his nose.

"So you're going to take Gordon Gay in hand?" he demanded.

"That's it!" said Figgins. "I'm going to show Gordon Gay that, even though he managed to put it across you chaps so easily, he'll have his work cut out to dish the New House! We're going to start operations immediately, and we mean to put the Grammarians in their places, set the old flag of St. Jim's flying once more, and make you chortling duffers sing small!"

The Terrible Three arose, with businesslike gleams in their eyes.

"Do you chaps prefer to walk out or be chucked out on your necks?" asked Tom Merry, in measured accents.

"Choose the door or the window—it doesn't matter to us!" said Monty Lowther.

Figgins & Co. backed hastily towards the door.

"All right!" said Figgins. "We'll go! But I thought I'd come along and tell you, Merry! The New House is going right ahead, so you chaps would do well to sit tight and watch points! The School House can go and eat coke after this!"

With that Parthian shot Figgins & Co. departed.

Having reached the quadrangle, Figgins led the way to the chemistry laboratory.

"So you've decided on that stunt to-night, Figgy?" asked Kerr.

"You bet!" chuckled the New House leader. "It will be a ripping joke on the Grammar cads. There's supposed to be an epidemic of measles in Rylcombe, you know. Well, if we get into the Grammar School to-night, sneak up to Gay's dormitory, and take along with us some of that red indelible dye we were experimenting with at stinks this morning, we shall be able to spot those bounders' faces with it while they're sleeping, and they won't be any the wiser. That stain is quite indelible, you know, and takes weeks to wash off. If we work the trick carefully, no one need suspect—for a day or two, at any rate. In the morning, Gay and his crowd will all appear with their chivvies smothered in red spots. Those spots won't wash off, and there'll be a

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bit of a scare. They'll all think they've got the measles—
see?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Kerr and Wynn.

"Let's get that bottle of stuff now, out of the lab," said Figgins. "There's no time like the present, and to-night, my sons, we work the trick!"

Figgins & Co. hurried off to the chemistry laboratory, chuckling in anticipation of the great wheeze against the Grammarians.

At the same time, Jack Blake & Co. were talking together under the old elm trees in the Close.

"To-night's the night!" said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I believe in striking while the iron's hot, and the sooner we make Gay and his lot sit up the better!" went on the Fourth Form leader. "And there's a jolly good chance of our making those bounders sit up, in more ways than one, if my wheeze works. All we need is a supply of that double-strength 'Itching Powder' which we can get at Wayland. That stuff's really worth a guinea a box, you know. A little of that applied to the skin, and a terrific tickling is set up which lasts for hours! Just imagine what it would be like, to have some of that itching powder put on the soles of your feet!"

"My word!" said Herries. "That would be enough to drive a fellow off his chump!"

"Exactly!" chuckled Blake. "And that's just what is going to happen to Gordon Gay & Co. I'll run over to Wayland on my bike, and get some of that blessed powder. Then to-night, when all the chaps are in bed, we'll break bounds and get into Gay's dormitory. The four of us will go, each armed with a supply of itching powder. Then we'll just go around the giddy dormitory and put some itching powder into each of those bounders' socks. In the morning, they'll shove their socks on, and then they'll soon know all about it!"

"That's a corking wheeze!" exclaimed Herries. "What a lark! We'll make the rotters sit up!"

The chums of Study No. 6 chortled as they thought of the little surprise in store for Gordon Gay & Co. And a few minutes later Blake rode away on his bicycle to purchase the necessary itching powder from Wayland.

CHAPTER 12.

Not According to Plan!

ST. JIM'S was in total darkness, and the juniors—with the exception of certain members of the Fourth Form who had business on hand that night—were sleeping the sleep of the just.

In the Fourth Form dormitory in the School House, Jack Blake & Co. remained awake long after silence and slumber had settled on the other juniors. Levison and Kerruish also kept awake, as they had volunteered to assist in the nocturnal proceedings.

The six juniors lay in bed, listening to Baggy Trimble's deep, unmelodious snoring, and waiting for the boom of the clock tower, which was to be the signal for rising.

At last eleven struck. Boom! The last stroke died away, and seemed to leave a deeper silence than before. Blake rose from his bed.

"You chaps awake?" he asked.

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy!" came D'Arcy's voice through the darkness.

"Then tumble up!"

The chums of Study No. 6 rapidly dressed, except for their boots. It was a mild night, so they put on their slippers instead. Thus they would be able to walk about and pursue their midnight project with the minimum of noise.

Blake took a rope from under his bed and lowered it out of the dormitory window. Levison and Kerruish held it at the top, whilst Blake and his three chums shared out the itching powder between them.

"When we're gone, pull in the rope and wait for us to come back," said Blake to Levison and Kerruish. "We'll be about an hour, I suppose—perhaps a bit less. Anyway, when we give you the tip that we're back, lower the giddy rope again for us to get in. Don't go to sleep and forget all about us."

"All serene."

The chums of Study No. 6 slithered down the rope one by one, and gathered in the quadrangle below.

Starlight glimmered upon the ancient pile of St. Jim's. All was dark and silent as they climbed the school wall and dropped into the lane.

The moon was hidden behind a bank of dark cloud, but sometimes it would emerge from its hiding-place and shed its mellow light upon the lonely countryside beneath. The Rylcombe Lane was as still as a churchyard, and not a soul passed the juniors. They turned off at the cross-roads, and very quickly came up to Grammar School.

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"Here we are!" said Blake, as the juniors reached the high wall.

"Jolly dark now, isn't it?" said Herries. "Now, how the dickens do we get in?"

"As easy as falling off a form!" responded Blake, with a soft chuckle. "There's a tradesmen's gate a little higher up, and the wall is pretty low round there. That's where we get over."

"Good egg!"

The four juniors hurried along in the shadow of the wall until they came to the tradesmen's gate. Blake gave D'Arcy a "bunk," and the swell of St. Jim's went over the wall first. Then Herries and Digby followed suit, each helped up by their leader. Digby, sitting astride the wall on reaching the top, bent down and gave Blake a helping hand. Thus, within the space of a very minute, Jack Blake & Co. were safely within the enemy grounds.

"Now!" muttered the hero of the Fourth. "This is where we have to watch our step. Keep as mum as oysters, kids, and follow your uncle."

Much to Blake's surprise and satisfaction, he found the window of the Grammar School lower store-room unfastened. One by one, they clambered through into the darkness.

With Blake leading the way, they mounted the flight of stairs beyond, treading very carefully in the darkness that surrounded them.

All was eerie and still in the Grammar School, and silent as the grave. Not a sound was heard, not the faintest glimmer of light was to be seen, as the four St. Jim's intruders crept stealthily along.

They went on tip-toe up the main staircase and halted on the landing above to take their bearings. Along the corridor on the right was the dormitory occupied by Gordon Gay & Co. Thither the chums of Study No. 6 made their way, treading noiselessly on the linoleum in their slippers feet.

Suddenly Blake nudged his companions.

"Shush-sh-sh!" he hissed. "There's somebody coming!"

The juniors stopped and listened with bated breath. There was a faint sound along the corridor behind them, the unmistakable sound of stealthy footsteps approaching.

Blake drew a deep breath, and looked round quickly in the gloom. Dimly the outline of a door near-by caught his eye.

"Hop into here—quick!" he said. "Not a sound, mind—we'll catch that bounder, whoever he is!"

Blake opened the door, and the four slipped quickly and silently within. They found themselves in a bath-room—a very safe hiding-place, under the circumstances.

"Now!" muttered Blake. "If that chap is spying on us, he'll catch it when he comes along here!"

He stood there, with the door ajar. The Fourth-Formers quivered with eager impatience, ready to spring upon the prowler as soon as he passed the bath-room door.

Through the darkness, the dim form of a junior could faintly be seen. Recognition was impossible, but Blake & Co. had no doubt that it was one of the Grammarians stalking them.

Onward came the dim figure, peering before him in the darkness, and moving in a very cautious and suspicious manner. That settled it for Blake & Co.

"Now!" whispered Blake suddenly.

In a twinkling, he and his chums came out of the bath-room and threw themselves on the other. Blake clapped a hand on his mouth as he went down, completely taken by surprise. Muffled gurgles came from under Blake's hand, and the luckless marauder struggled and kicked out wildly. But against such odds he was powerless. Blake & Co. dragged him into the bath-room, lifted him up, and dumped him clean in the large bath. Herries dragged down a towel from the rack and tied it round the captive's head, thus completely silencing him.

The captured junior writhed and squirmed in the bath. Blake and Herries held him grimly down, whilst Digby turned the tap on over his head.

Splash! Slosh!

"Gerrugh!"

"Now stop kicking, will you?" said Blake. "You thought you'd got us on the hop, didn't you? You would have roused the whole giddy hive and set 'em buzzing about, I suppose? This is where we damp your ardour!"

Sizz-zzz-zzz! went the water out of the bath tap. The victim wriggled and gurgled as the water soaked through the towel that enveloped him. The bath was beginning to fill up, too.

Splash, splash!

"We must be careful not to make too much noise, or we'll wake the other bounders!" said Blake. "Hark! Oh, my hat! There's someone else coming!"

They listened intently, and heard more footsteps cautiously creeping along the corridor.

Leaving Herries and Digby to hold down the first victim, Blake and D'Arcy crept to the door of the bath-room and

waited for the other prowler, whose figure could now be discovered coming along stealthily in the gloom.

Blake armed himself with another towel, and, at the crucial moment, he and Gussy sprang out at the dim form.

Again they were successful. The prowler went down, with the towel bound round his head, thus preventing his cry of surprise from being heard.

"Yank him in, and give him a ducking!" said Blake grimly.

He and Gussy dragged their second victim into the bath-room, and, after some struggling, dumped him in the bath with the other. The bath was nearly full by this time, and there was a terrific splash, and a wave of water that went all over Gussy's trousers.

Slosh! Swoosh!

Both victims were floundering in water by this time. Blake kept the bath-room door shut, to prevent the sounds of the splashing from waking the fellows in the dormitory near-by.

The water deepened, and the chums of Study No. 6 came in for a good deal of water. But, as Blake said, they had to face things like that in the cause of duty.

There was a fearful struggle on the floor. Herries and Gussy held on to their victim as he tried to escape. Then Blake's voice hissed through the darkness, from the direction of the bath-room door.

"You—you idiots! Now you've done it! Yank him in here—quick!"

Gussy and Herries between them managed to get the fat prowler into the bath-room. But the noise made during the operations was considerable, and there were sounds from Gordon Gay & Co.'s dormitory, indicating that those youths had been aroused by the midnight disturbance.



"My only sainted Sunday topper!" ejaculated Tom Merry, gripping the banisters and blinking at the red-nosed Blake & Co. "What the thump have you been doing to your boks?" He, he, he!" cackled Baggy Trimble. "The Grammarians did that, you know!" (See Chapter 13.)

"Duck 'em!" said Blake, pushing the head of one of his victims under the water. "That's the style!"

Herries, who had gone to the door to "keep cave," gave a sudden low gasp.

"Oh crumbs! How many more of 'em? There's somebody else sneaking along!"

"Right!" said Blake. "Take this other towel, and go out and get him. You go, too, Gussy. Dig and I will look after these chaps. Duck their heads, Dig, if they make too much row—that's it!"

Herries and D'Arcy crept out to waylay the third dark, mysterious figure that came creeping along the corridor with the stealth of a cat burglar.

This time, however, there was a hitch in the proceedings.

As the prowler came along, Herries and Gussy went for him, and Herries reached out with the towel, to throw it over the other's head. But the third victim was much heavier and more solid than they had bargained for. He was, in fact, a particularly large and fat youth. He did not yield as easily to the attack as the other two had done. Herries and Gussy grabbed him, but in trying to whirl him over, they found the weight too great, and all three went down to the floor with a series of concussions that seemed deafening in the night silence.

Bump! Crash! Biff!

"Bai-bai Jove!" gasped Gussy.

"Wow!" gasped Herries, emitting a sound like that of a deflating balloon, as the heavy object of the attack sat on his chest. The latter let out a bellow that rang right along the corridor:

"Yaroooooough!"

"Yow! Wow!" roared the fat captive, as they got him in the bath-room and shut the door. "Lemme go, you rotters! Wow-ow!"

Blake let go of his captive as if he had suddenly become red-hot.

He knew that voice. It was Fatty Wynn's voice. Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy blinked down at their fat captive in the darkness of the bath-room. There could be no mistake about it—it was Fatty Wynn of the New House at St. Jim's, prowling in the Grammar School at this time of night!

"Mum-m-my only panama!" gurgled Blake. "What—what the dickens—"

"L-l-look!" said Digby faintly.

The moon reappeared from behind a bank of clouds at that moment, and cast its rays through the bath-room window, dispelling the gloom within. The two squirming figures in the bath, taking advantage of this brief interruption, had dragged off the towels that enveloped their faces, and were standing up in the bath, glaring at Blake & Co.

Those latter youths almost dropped with horror and amazement when they recognised Figgins and Kerr.

"Who—"

"Bai Jove!"

"Figgins & Co.!"

"Those bounders!"

CHAPTER 13. The Grammarians' Win!

FIGGINS and Kerr stood in the bath of water, dripping wet and gouging water from their eyes and ears. Fatty Wynn sat up on the floor and roared. "The howling asses!" spluttered Figgins, who had almost collapsed again into the bath, on recognising the School House juniors. "How—how did you get here?"

"What the dickens are you doing here?" demanded Blake. "We thought you were some of the chaps belonging to this school—"

"You burbling fatheads!" howled the unfortunate New House leader. "We came here to rag Gordon Gay & Co. We've got some indelible dye in our pockets to put on their faces, and—now you've made a mucker of the whole bizney! You—you—you—"

"Great pip!" ejaculated Blake. "We—we came here to rag the Grammarians, too. We've got some itching powder here, to shove in their socks, and—"

"Really!" came the voice of Gordon Gay, from the bath-room door. "It seems, then, that your schemes have misfired somewhat! Oh, my hat! You've shoved Figgins and Kerr in the bath, Blake! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Grammarians, who were now crowding at the bath-room door in full force.

Blake & Co. and Figgins & Co. blinked in horror at their rivals.

They were caught now, and there was no possible way of escape.

Figgins and Kerr jumped out of the bath, streaming with water, and Fatty Wynn got up from the floor. The seven St. Jim's intruders backed away towards the opposite wall as Gordon Gay & Co. advanced into the bath-room.

"Well, if this doesn't absolutely beat the band!" exclaimed Gordon Gay, with a chuckle. "Fancy you chaps queering each other's pitch like this! Blake, I'm really sorry for you! Figgins, you have my heartfelt sympathy."

"Let us go, you rotters!" gasped Blake, looking fearfully at the Grammarians in the darkness. "We—we—we—"

"Not much!" responded Gordon Gay. "We couldn't have caught you nicer if we had been awake all the time and waited for you. Go for 'em, chaps! We'll have that red dye and the itching powder out of their pockets, to start with!"

"Rather!"

Blake & Co. and Figgins & Co. stood shoulder to shoulder, and put up their fists desperately as the Grammarians bore down upon them. They hit out well and truly, dealing doughty blows in all directions, but despite their plucky fight for freedom they went down under the overwhelming odds and were quickly overpowered.

Lying on their backs on the water-strewn floor of the bath-room, each with a couple of Grammarians seated astride his chest, the would-be japers were helpless to move!

Gordon Gay and Frank Monk ran through their pockets, and the bottle of red dye and the packets of itching powder came to light.

The Grammarian leader chuckled.

"This is prime!" he said. "Well, you bounders, you certainly won't have the laugh of the Grammar School this journey. This red dye looks jolly good stuff. Indelible, Figgins, is it? Well, let's try it on your bokes!"

Blake squirmed as Gordon Gay took up the bottle and the brush that Figgins had brought with him.

"You—you rotter!" he spluttered. "Don't you dare put that stuff on my nose—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake's protests and threats were useless. His head was held by Frank Monk and Harry Wootton, and Gordon Gay proceeded to give the luckless Fourth Form leader's nose a liberal coating of the red indelible dye. Carboy, who had come along equipped with an electric torch, shone the light on Blake during the proceedings.

"Yooooogh-ooooogh!" spluttered Blake.

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

"Now, Figgins!"

"You do!" howled Figgins. "I—I— Yow! Leggo! Wow-wow!"

Figgins couldn't help himself, and Gay daubed his nose with a liberal hand. The Grammarians standing round chortled with glee, though, at Gordon Gay's behest, they were careful not to disturb the rest of the house.

"Gussy next!" chuckled Gordon Gay.

"Bai Jove!" gasped the swell of St. Jim's, in horror. "I wufuse to have that howwid stuff put on my nose! Gay, you wottah, if you dare appwoach me with that bwush, I— Yawooooogh!"

Gussy suffered, however, even as Blake and Figgins had suffered. And then Herries, Digby, Fatty Wynn, and Kerr received their share of the red dye. There was plenty of it,

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and Gordon Gay fairly soaked his rivals' noses in it; and the effect, as viewed in the light of Carboy's electric torch and in the moonlight, was startling and ludicrous in the extreme.

Gordon Gay & Co. gazed at their red-nosed victims, and they simply chorled.

"Now for the itching-powder!" said Gordon Gay. "That's the stuff to make 'em hop—what?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake & Co. and Figgins & Co. fought furiously, and kicked wildly, but all to no purpose. The luckless marauders' feet were all bared, and the itching-powder was rubbed well and truly into them, Gordon Gay & Co. taking the precaution of wearing gloves for that operation.

"There," said Gay, when the work was completed, "that's settled the hash of you St. Jim's bounders for the present! Now we'll give 'em a bumping, boys, and let 'em go!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake & Co. and Figgins, Kerr, and Fatty Wynn were seized in many hands and bumped many times upon the cold, hard bath-room floor. Their yells rang out crescendo, and Gordon Gay became alarmed.

"We shall have the beaks along here in a tick," he said. "We'd better get rid of these bounders now, and hop back to bed!"

"Rather!"

The luckless victims were rushed downstairs and bundled out of the store-room window. The Grammarians hurled their things after them, and the St. Jim's juniors were only too glad to dash across to the wall, and scramble over into the road beyond.

Gordon Gay & Co. returned to their quarters, prepared to explain matters, in a somewhat evasive way, to any of the masters who might have been aroused by the midnight noise.

Meanwhile, Blake & Co. and Figgins & Co. had donned their shoes and stockings again, and were making their way back to St. Jim's through the darkness of the Rylcombe Lane, a sorry, sad, and dejected party indeed.

Their noses showed very dark in the moonlight. Their feet, too, as they neared St. Jim's, were beginning to tickle.

They glared at each other with feelings that were almost too deep for words.

"You—you chuckle-headed School House boobies!" choked the suffering Figgins. "If it hadn't been for you going for us like a lot of maniacs—"

"If it hadn't been for you New House duffers blundering in the Grammar School, when you ought to have been in bed—" snorted Blake sulphurously.

"We were going to make Gordon Gay & Co. sit up!"

"Rats!" said Blake contemptuously. "You couldn't bring off a jape against the Grammar School, not in a month of Sundays! It was our job to get even with those rotters!"

"And a fine muck you've made of it!" hooted Figgins wrathfully. "Oh, you raving lunatic, I—I'll—"

"Here, you'd better not start fighting out here at this time of night!" said Kerr hastily. "Things are bad enough as it is. Come on, Figgy, let's get back indoors before we land ourselves into more trouble!"

The two rival factions of defeated japers parted inside the dark quadrangle at St. Jim's. They glared at each other with looks that were more eloquent than words, and then crawled away to their respective dormitories.

There they remained, scrubbing at their noses and snorting, far into the night. The itching-powder on their feet was working, too, and as they rubbed their noses, in their despairing efforts to remove the indelible dye, they rubbed and scratched at their itching feet as well, and performed all manner of capers, much to the surprise and consternation of the other fellows in the dormitories, who had been awakened by the strange disturbance.

All efforts at removing the red stains on their noses were unavailing. Blake & Co. and Figgins & Co. spent a night of torment and anguish, rolling and squirming and doubling themselves up in bed, driven almost frantic as a result of the irritation produced by the itching-powder.

Next morning the luckless ones arose, weary, worn, and wrathful.

Howls of laughter from their schoolfellows greeted them. Their noses were flaming red in colour and simply glowing like the roseate hues of sunset.

Even now the effects of the itching-powder had not worn off, and their feet were tickling in a very disconcerting manner.

Blake & Co. shuffled downstairs, squirming, and when they met Tom Merry & Co. issuing from the Shell dormitory, they were met with fresh roars of merriment.

"My only sainted Sunday topper!" ejaculated Tom Merry, gripping the banisters and blinking at the rose-nosed chums of Study No. 6. "What the thump have you been doing to your bokes?"

"He, he, he!" cackled Baggy Trimble, who was in ecstasies of delight over the affair. "The Grammarians did that, you know! Blake and the other three broke into the Grammar School last night, to play a jape on Gordon Gay & Co., and they had a joke played on them instead! You should have seen them when they came in last night! And you ought to have heard the row they've been making all night! They had itching-powder on their feet, and they were nearly driven potty! He, he, he!"

"Great Scott!"

Blake's face was as red almost as his nose. "It wasn't our fault!" he spluttered. "That scatter-brained lot from the New House—"

"Did they go along to the Grammar School last night, too?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yes, and—"

"And do you mean to say, Blake, that Gordon Gay & Co. painted your nose like that?"

"It isn't paint—it's dye!" moaned Blake. "The beastly colour won't come out! We—we've tried!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry & Co. howled until they gasped for breath when they heard the details of the awful fiasco of the night before.

You seem to have a pretty lurid prospect before you, too!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins' wrathful look was heightened by the red-hot colour of his nose.

"We don't want any of your cheek!" he hooted. "It was all the fault of Blake and the dummies he had with him! He got into the Grammar School last night—"

"And so did you, and you ran into each other, and got caught by Gordon Gay & Co., and were given itchy feet and red noses, and there you are!" smiled Tom. "Well, Figgins, you hardly pulled off a winner for the New House, did you?"

"I—I—I—"

"Hard cheese, old scout!" said Tom, becoming serious. "It seems that St. Jim's is to be beaten all along the line by those Grammarian bouncers. We've all suffered, you see. When the joke has died down, Figgins, you and I and Blake had better put our heads together and see if we cannot give it to the Grammar School hot and strong!"

"Brr-rrr-rrr!"

A great sensation was created at the breakfast-tables that morning by the appearance of the red-nosed juniors. The fellows gazed at them and simply doubled up with mirth. Even the lordly seniors lost their gravity and chuckled at

"Down with the Grammar School!"

That, in effect, is what Tom Merry and his chums are saying over the repetition of defeats they have sustained at the hands of Gordon Gay & Co.

"Down with 'em!"

Yes. But how's it to be done?

This is the hefty problem that causes the captain of the Shell more than one sleepless night.

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"What price the Fourth now?" asked the captain of the Shell. "You'll have to carry those red noses about with you for days, you know! Ha, ha, ha! What ever will Railton say when he sees you? Mr. Lathom will have to wear blinkers when he takes you for lessons this morning! Oh crumbs! Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake & Co. went onward, hopping every time the itching-powder on their feet gave them a twinge. They had washed their feet, as well as their noses, but the effects of the itching-powder were lasting.

Tom Merry & Co. went out to find Figgins & Co., over in the New House. They found the New House fellows simply convulsed with mirth over the appearance of their leader and his chums.

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn had noses that one fellow described as "raspberries." They certainly matched that fruit in colour. Figgins & Co., also, had had a restless night, and this morning they were still very uneasy about the feet.

They glared at the Terrible Three when they met them in the door of the New House.

"Hallo, Figgy!" said Tom. "Then things didn't go well at the Grammar School last night? Hard lines, old son!"

Blake & Co. and Figgins & Co. The masters were greatly intrigued, and they, too, had to smile at the ludicrous appearance of the luckless red-nosed brigade.

That dye would not come off, although the seven afflicted ones tried hard to remove the stain that made them the laughing-stocks of the school.

Wherever they went, chuckles and grins and loud guffaws greeted them. They dared not go out into the village, for fear of the ridicule of all who saw them. They had to carry their red noses with them as a glowing testimony of their defeat at the hands of Gordon Gay & Co.!

St. Jim's agreed that it was jolly hard lines, but at the same time the fellows could not deny the humour of the situation, and they laughed loud and long.

Gordon Gay & Co., of course, made much of the affair. Once more they had visited St. Jim's with humiliation and defeat. They felt that, all things considered, they had cause to crow; so they crowed their crow of victory to their hearts' content, and acclaimed themselves as "top dogs" as Rylcombe!

THE END.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,039.

THE OLD MORNINGTON! Only a short time ago, Valentine Mornington would never have entertained the treacherous idea of letting his footer team down. But now that Mornington has gone back to his old shady ways, he is capable of almost anything!



A GRAND NEW SCHOOL SERIAL
DEALING WITH THE ADVENTURES OF
JIMMY SILVER & CO., OF ROOKWOOD.

By OWEN CONQUEST.

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE.

KIT ERROLL befriends an old acquaintance in **Albert Biggs**, a one-time waif of the slums, who comes to Rookwood and takes up a post as gardener's boy. Valentine Mornington, the dandy of the Fourth, appeals to Erroll to "drop" his ragged friends, but Kit refuses. In consequence of this Mornington plots with **Peele & Co.**, three shady rotters, to eject Biggs forcibly from the school. The four are about to carry out their villainous project that night, when they are overheard by Tupper, another servant who is sleeping in the next room to Biggs. Tupper raises the cry of "Burglars!" Mr. Dalton, the master of the Fourth, is awakened by the noise, and quickly ascertaining the cause of the trouble, severely reprimands Mornington and threatens to report the matter to Dr. Chisholm. Labelled as a "sneak" by Mornington in the dormitory that night, Erroll is forced to hit out at his old chum, when Bulkeley, the captain of the school, interferes. No sooner is Bulkeley's back turned, however, than Mornington jumps out of bed to renew the scrap. Losing all patience with the raging Mornington, Jimmy Silver decides to end the matter with a Form licking.

"Come on, then, the lot of you!" hisses Mornington, clenching his fists.

(Now read on.)

Mornington's Defiance!

"DOWN him—down the cad!"

"Give the cheeky, stubborn idiot what he's asking for?" gasped Lovell wrathfully.

There was a rush of the Fourth towards Mornington. But he did not move—he stood with his back to the dormitory wall, his fists up ready, his eyes glittering with the savage, reckless determination not to give way.

Lovell was the first to meet Mornington with a rush, and he stopped a hefty drive from Morny's fist that sent him spinning away.

"Come on!" hissed Mornington, like a hunted tiger at bay.

"Down the rotter!" panted Lovell, scrambling up, raging. "I'll smash—"

"Quiet, you idiot!" snapped Jimmy Silver. "We don't want Bulkeley back here again with his ashplant. Now, Morny, once and for all, are you going to get into bed and leave Erroll alone or not?"

"I'm thrashing Erroll before I get into bed!" choked Morny. "I'd have finished the job if that fool Bulkeley hadn't interfered."

"Right! Go ahead, then, chaps!" snapped Jimmy Silver.

He had lost patience with the reckless, wilful junior, and he meant to end the matter with a Form licking—which Mornington undoubtedly had earned. The rest of the fellows were equally determined, and after that pause they came on quickly enough. But before they reached him another junior had jumped before them and stood with his back before Mornington.

It was Kit Erroll, and his face was set hard.

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"Hold on!" he snapped. "This is my affair, you fellows! You're not touching Morny, if I can help it!"

There was a sudden silence. Erroll had been Mornington's closest chum until that evening, but only a few moments before had been fighting furiously with him, and they were astounded at him now attempting to defend Morny.

Mornington himself was staggered, and a deep flush came over his face. Even yet, despite his treatment of him, Erroll was loyal. Mornington felt a sudden lump in his throat—he felt a sudden bitter remorse for his attitude—for allowing his ungovernable temper to drive him to this.

But it passed as quickly as it had come. He had gone too far now to draw back.

"Stand back, Erroll!" he breathed. "You shan't escape a lickin' by tryin' to crawl round me now!"

It was a caddish remark, and Mornington knew it only too well. It brought a deep flush into Erroll's white cheek, and it brought a chorus of angry, disgusted exclamations from the decent fellows in the Fourth.

"You howling cad, Morny!" said Jimmy Silver. "That settles it! Stand away, Erroll!"

Erroll hesitated a brief moment.

"This—this is my affair, you fellows!" he said in a low voice. "If Mornington's bent on the fight going on, then, I'm ready to go on, too. I'll either fight him properly to-morrow in a decent manner, or I'll finish the fight here and now as we began it."

"No, you jolly well won't!" snapped Jimmy Silver. "You can fight Morny again if you want to, Erroll, but the Form aren't allowing you to scrap like hooligans at this time of the night. There's been quite enough trouble to-night. Into that bed, Mornington!"

"I won't, hang you!"

"Right! Collar him!"

There was a rush, and though Mornington fought like a wild-cat, it was useless. He was grabbed on all sides, and he went crashing down, held firmly by numerous hands.

"Bring him along!" panted Arthur Edward Lovell. "Dip the cad's head in cold water to cool him down a bit to begin with!"

"Good idea!"

Struggling furiously, Morny was dragged towards a washstand.

"Let me go!" he cried through his teeth. "You rotten cads! Give me a chance, and I'll thrash any two of you!"

"You've had chances enough," said Jimmy Silver. "You've disgraced the Form, and for that alone you've earned a Form licking. I didn't want to handle you, as you're for it with the beaks to-morrow. But as you refuse to drop your game we've no choice but to make you!"

"Hang you! Let me go!"

"For the last time—will you get into bed quietly?"

"No, hang you!"

"Go ahead!"

They went ahead. Despite his raging struggles and threats, Mornington, the dandy of the Fourth, was whirled off his feet. A basin of water had been prepared, and his head was ducked in it again and again. He was allowed to stand on his feet at last, his eyes blazing with passion, water streaming down him from hair and face.

"If that hasn't cooled you, then we'll give you a dozen with a cricket-stump!" snapped Jimmy Silver.

"Hang you!" spluttered Morny in deadly tones. "I—I'll dashed well—"

He dragged his arms free and hit out right and left. He was collared again at once. Plainly enough, he was not cooled down.

Still resisting furiously, he was flung across his own bed, with fellows holding desperately to his thrashing legs and arms. No cricket-stump was forthcoming, but Putty Grace hauled a fives-bat from his locker and handed it to Jimmy Silver.

"Go it!"

"If—if you dare to touch me with that!" panted Mornington.

"Give way to the wishes of the Form, and we'll leave you alone quickly enough, Mornington!"

"I won't! I'll see you hanged first, you howling rotters!"

Jimmy Silver hesitated no longer. He knew that the moment they released Mornington he would be fighting like a wild-cat again, and he meant to show the foolish fellow it did not pay.

The fives-bat rose and fell, Mornington wriggling savagely. Twelve strokes were laid on, and then Jimmy Silver stopped. As he did so Mornington dragged a leg free and kicked out viciously at him.

Luckily it missed Jimmy, but it was enough to show that Mornington was still defiant.

"Give him some more!" said Putty Grace. "He likes it!"

There was a chuckle, and Mornington flushed with mingled rage and humiliation. All at once it came to him that instead of his defiance showing his grit and determination, it was only showing him up as a fool and making him a laughing stock. Moreover, he realised at last that it was hopeless—that he could not go on with his defiance indefinitely. He would have to give way sooner or later.

"Well, am I to go on?" snapped Jimmy Silver. "I can keep this up longer than you, you know! Am I to make it another dozen?"

"Don't be a fool, Morny!" said Peele. "Chuck it!"

Even Peele was calling him a fool. Mornington bit his lip until the blood came.

"That's enough!" he said huskily. "You can drop it, Silver. But—someone shall pay dearly for this!"

"That's good enough!" said Jimmy Silver.

He did not wish to rub it in—he knew how the proud, haughty dandy was feeling well enough. But his face glowed at the threat. Mornington had given way—for the moment. But his spirit was by no means broken.

The victim of the Form licking was released, and he slid from the bed, trembling with helpless rage and chagrin. He gave Jimmy Silver a bitter look, and then he went to a washstand, and, getting a towel, started to rub his drenched head and face.

The fellows followed Jimmy Silver's example, and jumped into bed. They knew that, for all his faults, Morny was a fellow of his word.

In a few moments the junior had dried himself, and then he slipped off his jacket and his pyjama coat, which was wet. In a moment he was changed into a dry one, and then he climbed slowly into bed. Jimmy Silver slipped out of bed and put the light out. And after that silence reigned in the Fourth Form dormitory. Nobody wished to rub it in, and Mornington had nothing further to say for that night. But as Erroll knew—for he himself was awake for hours after that—Mornington was not asleep, and Erroll felt sick at heart and full of gloomy forebodings for the future. Morny was subdued for the moment, but he knew there was trouble ahead—that Mornington would neither forgive nor forget.

A Place in the Team!

"MORNINGTON—just a minute!"

Jimmy Silver spoke quietly.

It was a day or two later. Jimmy Silver had scarcely spoken to Mornington since the night of the trouble in the dormitory, and he looked at Mornington uneasily now. Mornington, Peele, Gower, and Lattrey had been before the Head the morning after the "burglar" alarm, and, as was expected, they "got it" heavily—though not as badly as many expected.

The Head was naturally astounded and angry. While Peele & Co. had been humble and contrite—outwardly—Mornington had been defiant and almost insolent. It wasn't in Mornington to cringe and plead for mercy. For their part in the night's expedition Peele & Co. had got a flogging each, and Mornington also; but his had been extra severe. His defiant, impudent attitude had told the

Head that he was the ringleader in the affair, though Morny made no attempt to hide that fact. And had Morny only known it, he narrowly escaped something worse than a mere flogging.

But Mornington did not think he had escaped lightly; nor did Peele & Co. They had left the Head's presence inwardly raging and full of bitter thoughts of revenge against the innocent cause of the trouble—Albert Biggs, the new garden-boy! But to Peele, at least, the chief blame for their troubles was placed at Erroll's door.

As yet, however, they had been subdued—and only the way they eyed Erroll when they met him did they show the thoughts of bitter animosity that was in their minds. Curiously enough, Morny made no mention of wanting to finish the fight with his old chum. He ignored them completely. And Erroll certainly had no intention of causing an outbreak. It had been bad enough to fight with his old chum as it was, and he would have done anything he could to have avoided it.

The plain fact was that Mornington, now he had time to reflect, had reached the decision that he had been wrong—that Erroll had told the truth that night. Erroll had not sneaked, after all, and caused them to be captured in the servants' quarters. He knew now—too late—that it was beyond his chum to do anything so mean and underhand. It was a belief that was not shared by Peele, Gower, and Lattrey, however. It was a trick they would never have hesitated at doing, and they believed Erroll had done it, and hated him accordingly.

Peele, Gower, and Lattrey were with Mornington now when Jimmy Silver called. It was, of course, impossible for Morny and Erroll to remain in the study together, and realising how matters stood between them, Mr. Dalton had wisely allowed Mornington to join Peele & Gower in Study No. 10. It was not a change for the better—for Mornington. The company of Peele & Co. was not good for anyone. Yet Mornington seemed glad enough to join them. The dandy of the Fourth, as Jimmy Silver remarked to his chums, seemed determined to change himself into a blackguard as soon as he could manage it.

For the last day or two he had been rarely seen without Peele & Co. It was a change for the worse that filled Kit Erroll with dejection. Mornington had kicked over the traces at last with a vengeance. It was just what he had feared.

And Jimmy Silver had feared it also—for more reasons than because he hated seeing a decent fellow play the blackguard. There was the footer to be considered.

Mornington was a good footballer—a dashing wing forward when he cared to play well—which had been often enough since his reform. He was a regular member of the Rookwood team these days, and the thought of losing him gave Jimmy some anxious moments. Since the trouble he had wondered many times and oft what Mornington intended doing.

He decided to settle the matter now.

"Morny!" he said, as the four stopped short. "I want to have a word about the footer!"

Mornington raised his eyebrows.

"Gad! You don't say!" he drawled. "You haven't had a word with me this last day or so about anything, have you?"

Jimmy Silver flushed; he saw the insolence in the remark quickly enough.

"That's over and done with as far as I am concerned, Morny," he said patiently. "You asked for it, and you can't blame anyone for giving you what you asked for."

"Is it over an' done with?" remarked Mornington, a glitter in his eyes. "I rather think not, Silver. But you wanted to discuss footer, I think."

"Yes," said Jimmy very quietly. "I see no reason why what has happened between us should interfere with the footer, Morny. I want to know if you are ready to play this afternoon in the match with Bagshot?"

"You want me to play, dear man?"

"Yes, I do!" said Jimmy, his eyes gleaming a little at the mocking note in Mornington's drawling voice. "I shouldn't ask you if I didn't."

"But you don't usually trouble to ask me," said Mornington. "You usually put my name down an' leave it at that. Why this thushness, might a fellow ask?"

Jimmy Silver bit his lip.

"Don't talk rot!" he snapped. "I asked you this time because—well, if you want the bare truth, Morny, it's because you've changed since the last time you played. Now you've got it!"

"Dear man!" drawled Mornington. "I've changed, you fellows—Silver thinks I've changed. I do hope he doesn't blame you, Peele, for the change in me! Is it for better or worse, Silver?"

"For worse!" said Jimmy Silver curtly. "You're knocking about too much with these rotters for you to

have changed any other way, Mornny. I can't understand a fellow acting as you do at all!"

"All your fault, you see, Peele," said Mornny. "You're draggin' a poor innocent fellow down to the bow-wows! Uncle James is gettin' quite concerned, I can see."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Peele & Co. roared.

Jimmy Silver kept his temper.

"Cut out this rot, Mornnington!" he said curtly. "Am I to put your name down for the match or not? I've left it as long as I could; but I must know now. I've got another fellow to take your place if you don't want it."

Mornnington hesitated, and the sneering grin left his face.

He was keen on footer, and he had been looking forward to playing in the match. He had felt pretty certain of his place. He wanted to play, and yet—

Peele nudged him and gave him a warning wink. It was a reminder of something Mornnington was forgetting for the moment.

It reminded him that he had already planned something else for that afternoon—something far different from football.

But even as he framed an insolent reply, refusing the offer, another thought came to Mornnington.

Jimmy Silver had said he had another man in view for the place—and he knew who that man was well enough. Erroll was a good, steady player—a forward useful and reliable. But he lacked Mornnington's dash and brilliance. And of late his play had been not quite up to first team standard.

Yet he was the next man on the reserve list—he knew that. If Mornnington dropped out, then that man to take his place would be Kit Erroll!

There was no doubt about that.

Mornnington gritted his teeth, a fight taking place in his mind—a fight between the evil and the good in his wayward nature.

But though there was plenty of good there, the bad won now. He had not forgotten, or forgiven—as Erroll had expected.

"You really want me to play, Silver?" he inquired yawning.

"Yes, if you mean to play up to your usual form, I certainly do, Mornny. We want to lick Bagshot this time—in fact, we're pretty certain to if you play."

"Thanks, dear man," said Mornny. "Fancy handin' out such compliments to a bad lad like little me! Well, you can put me down!"

"What?" It was Peele who gasped out the question.

"But—but Mornny—" "You dry up, old bean!" said Mornnington coolly. "Yes, put me down, Silver. Put me down twice if you like. Ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver nodded.

"Very well, Mornny; I'll put you down. Thanks!"

Jimmy Silver walked away, not a little uneasy in his mind now. Mornny had agreed to play, and that was O.K. But how would he play—would he play up as he should do? Jimmy Silver knew quite well that, though subdued enough now—though he made no move openly against either Erroll or Albert Biggs—he was only biding his time—knowing that Dicky Dalton, not to mention the Fistical Four, had their eyes on him. The light, mocking manner in which he had accepted the place did not inspire confidence—far from it.

Yet he simply could not believe that Mornny would willingly slack in the match. He had his evil points, but he played up when he did play. Jimmy cast aside his doubts and went indoors to place the list—finished now—on the board.

When he had gone Peele turned on Mornnington angrily.

"You—you silly fool, Mornny!" he snapped. "What about our plan this afternoon. Are you forgetting, you idiot? Goin' to dashed well spoil that for a rotten game of footer! Oh, you idiot!"

"Dear man!" drawled Mornnington, winking at Lattrey and Gower, who were eyeing him just as angrily. "Am I likely to allow footer to interfere with puttin' it across that sweep of a guttersnipe? Not likely!"

"But—but—"

"I told dear Uncle James that he could put my name down," said Mornnington coolly. "But that doesn't say that I shall play!"

"Oh!"

"I was goin' to refuse right enough!" said Mornnington, his eyes glinting. "An' then it struck me that if I did that sweep Erroll would get my place. I'm not keen for him to have the pleasure of playin' in my place!"

"Oh, I—I see!" said Peele. "Oh, good man, Mornny!"

"Besides," resumed Mornnington slowly, "I think we have a little settlement with the Form as a whole—at least, I have. I haven't by any means forgotten what happened to me in the dormitory. An', as you know, I'm not a fellow who forgets things."

"You—you're goin' to let 'em think you're goin' to play until the last moment?" stammered Gower blankly.

"Just that! If I do let 'em know earlier, then they'll have the chance to play Erroll. I fancy Erroll will be with his guttersnipe pal, otherwise—or, at least, he will not be asked to play in time for the match. See the wheeze?"

"Oh! The—the fellows will be furious, Mornny!"

"Let them! The more furious the better!" said Mornnington viciously. "Play for Jimmy Silver! I'll see him hanged first! Anyway, let's finish our little plan for this afternoon. I had a little chat with Tupper just after brekker, and I obtained the useful information that Erroll had asked Master Halbert Biggs to watch the match, an', accordin' to Tupper, he means to. That will suit our plans very nicely indeed—couldn't be better, in fact. Our little showin' up couldn't be better staged than on the footer field before the crowd—what?"

"Good wheeze!" grinned Gower.

"But that's all very well!" said Peele, scowling. "Don't forget I'm the man taking the dashed risk in this. It'll be more risky than ever before such a crowd."

"Not at all!" said Mornnington. "Safer, you mean! Anyway, that's the programme."

"But—"

"Rats!"

Mornnington had already made his mind up, and Peele's feeble protests went for nothing. Mornnington was ruling the roost now, and not Cyril Peele, as Peele was finding out. As usual, the stronger will won.

Tommy Dodd & Co. Take a Hand!

"ROTTER!" said Tommy Dodd.

"Not fair!" growled Tommy Doyle.

"A beastly swizz!" grunted Tommy Cook.

The three "Tommies" of the Modern House at Rookwood were evidently not in a very cheery mood.

"Fancy all three of us out of a school match, and the blessed Bagshot match, too!" growled Tommy Dodd dismally. "Still, you can hardly blame Jimmy Silver, after all."

"Eh? How's that?"

"Well, it ain't his fault that I sprained my dashed foot!" said Tommy Dodd sweetly. "And it ain't his fault that you two can't play footer for nuts!"

"Look here—"

"You cheeky owl!"

"All serene! Only pulling your giddy legs," chuckled Tommy Dodd. "Still, he would have played me all right—no doubt about that. And he really ought to have included one of you two fellows. Like his cheek to leave you both out. Those cheeky Classics are getting a bit too top-heavy, you know."

"Blest if I know why a skipper should be from the Classics at all!" grunted Tommy Doyle. "This sort of injustice wouldn't happen if we had a Modern skipper, of course!"

"Ahem! Well, hardly that!" grinned Tommy Dodd, shaking his head. "That would be admitting a Modern skipper wouldn't know good players from bad."

"Why, you ass—"

"You silly duffer—"

"Not that I meant you fellows were bad, of course," said Tommy Dodd hastily. "Anyway, it can't be helped. We'll go and cheer our giddy men just the same, of course, whether they're Classics or not. School comes—Hullo! What are those merchants up to?"

Tommy Dodd halted his men.

They were strolling round by the chapel at the moment, and Tommy Dodd's keen eyes had glimpsed something unusual.

"What was it?" demanded Tommy Cook.

"Peele & Co., and that ass Mornnington!" remarked Tommy Dodd, frowning thoughtfully. "I just spotted 'em sneaking into the woodshed. They're up to no good in there!"

"Only going for a rotten smoke!" sniffed Tommy Doyle. "Blow the spalpeens! I must say I'm jolly disgusted with that chap Mornny. From what I hear he's fairly goin' the pace now—he's chummed with Peele's crowd!"

"It isn't a little smoke!" said Tommy Dodd. "Mornny

carried a bag—a pretty hefty cricket-bag by the look of it. I vote we investigate, chaps. Wait a bit, though, and give 'em a chance to settle down."

"Right-ho!"

The three Tommies watched Peele & Co. vanish into the shed and close the door behind them. They waited for several minutes, and then Tommy Dodd gave the word and they crept up to the little wooden building.

Tommy Dodd craned up to the little window and peered cautiously through into the gloomy shed.

"Well, what's the game?" whispered Tommy Cook.

Tommy Dodd did not answer for a moment. He was staring through the window in sheer amazement. And no wonder, for what he saw was enough to amaze anyone.

Mornington's Scheme!

"WHAT is it?" repeated Tommy Cook, in an impatient whisper.

Tommy Dodd peered through the window a moment longer, and then he turned a grinning face round to his two chums of the Modern House.

"You're not goin' to be bowled out!" snapped Mornington. "You've got to pull yourself together, Peele, and you'll pull it off like a dashed charm! All you need is the nerve to keep it up for a few minutes until you get off the field. Nobody will dream of suspectin'!"

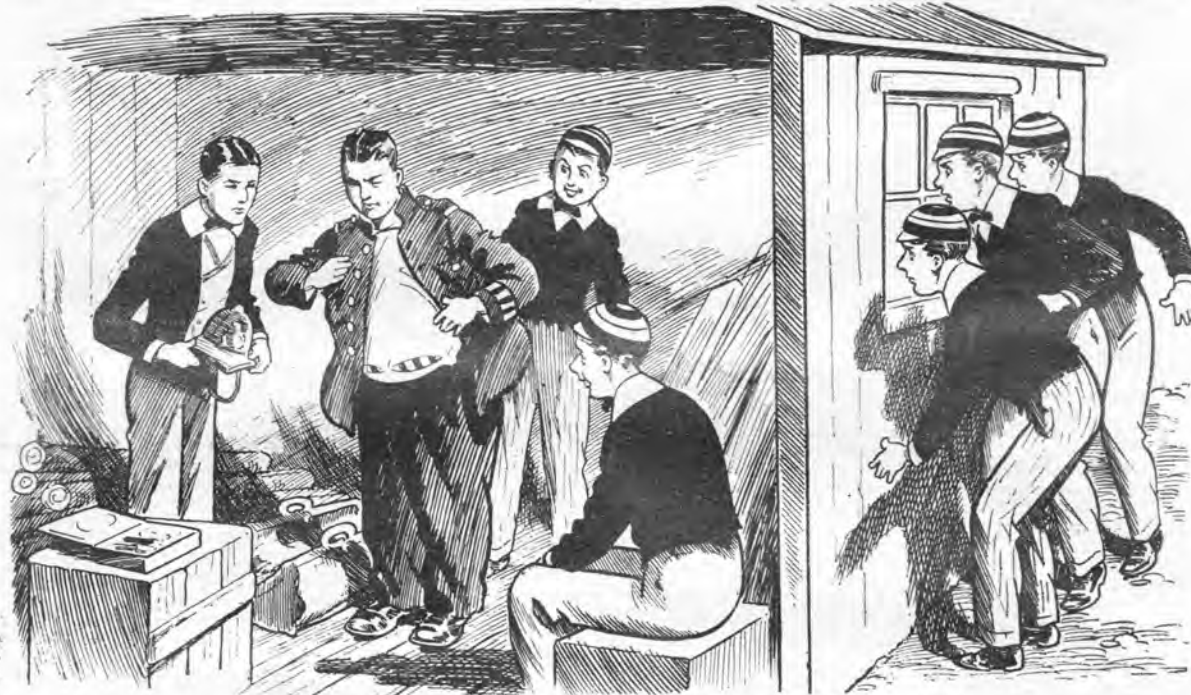
"Safe enough, Cyril!" agreed Lattrey, with a chuckle. "Good gad! I've seen you take off a bobby before, an' you did it a treat! It isn't likely there'll be any seniors about—only Neville umpiring. He's too dashed easy-goin' to twig anythin'!"

"That shivellin' ragamuffin may not be there, though!" said Peele, evidently still none too convinced. "If he isn't, what then?"

"We've got to dashed well find out where he is—that's all!" said Mornington coldly. "But Tupper told me he was goin' to watch the match—that his pal Master Erroll had asked him to go—told him it would do him good!" sneered Morny. "I saw Tupper an hour ago, and he repeated it."

"If you've made Tupper suspect—" began Peele, in alarm.

"My dear man, am I the fellow to do that?" inquired Morny, with a sneer. "Don't talk rot! I bet that footling



Tommy Dodd & Co. peered through the window of the woodshed at the amazing scene inside. They saw Peele struggling into the uniform of a policeman, whilst his companions stood by waiting to help him with his make-up. (See this page.)

"I knew it!" he breathed. "Those cads are up to some—some shady game, too, if I'm not mistaken. Look!"

Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle both squeezed at the little window of the woodshed and peeped inside.

As they knew, Peele, Gower, and Lattrey were there, with Valentine Mornington—though at first they quite failed to recognise Peele. For that shady worthy was dressed—

Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle almost rubbed their eyes.

Peele was just getting into the uniform of a constable of police, aided by his chums. He already had the trousers on, and now he was shoving on the tunic carefully over his body, which was padded skilfully with a pillow and other aids to an artificial portliness of figure!

A belt, a pair of handcuffs, and several other items were lying by the opened cricket-bag, while an opened box of make-up and false hair and whiskers lay within reach.

Lattrey and Gower were grinning gleefully. Mornington looked grim and satisfied, whilst Cyril Peele looked anything but happy—perhaps because he was evidently to be the prime mover in the "game," whatever it might be.

Even as the two Modern Tommies looked inside, however, Mornington spoke, evidently answering Peele.

"I tell you it's safe as houses, you funky ass!" he said curtly. "Why, man, there isn't a fellow scarcely at Rookwood who can beat you at masquerading, or as skilful at make-up. Nobody will dream at guessin' the truth, you fool! Pull your dashed self together, Peele!"

"That's all very well! If I'm bowled out—"

thickhead of a page doesn't even realise that I asked him about Biggs. I did it cautiously, you may bet! Anyway, he'll be there! If he isn't, we find him, Peele!"

Peele nodded without speaking. His chum's confidence in his ability in the difficult arts of make-up and masquerading had given him fresh courage. Indeed, the very fact that Mornington had urged him to take on the job was enough to prove to Peele that if a keen fellow like Mornington believed him capable of the job, then he undoubtedly was. He knew perfectly well that Mornington, in his reckless, ruthless desire for revenge, would have been only too pleased to have carried the thing through himself if he hadn't known Peele was a better man for the job.

"Oh, all right!" he said, giving a more confident grin. "I'm game enough, don't you worry! Only I don't want all this dashed trouble for nothin'!"

"Well, don't grouse so much—and back up!" said Mornington, with a scarcely-veiled sneer. "Some fellows might think you funk'd it, y'know! Now, you understand what to do? You march on the ground and ask for Biggs—ask anyone! Then—well, you go and arrest the dashed sweep! And mind you let everybody hear why—that he's wanted for theft, and that he's a rogue and a vagabond well-known to the police of several counties as well as the underworld of London. That should make the fellows stare, and put the kybosh on our dear friend Erroll's dearly beloved pal—what?"

"Rippin'!" grinned Peele. "It really is great! But I'm not so sure how it will end. If—"

"My dear man, have I got to go into all that again?" drawled Mornington. "You simply yank the cad away and take him towards the lane. I've already ordered a giddy cab to be waitin' there at about three-fifteen. You order the sweep into the cab—he won't be likely to resist before the crowd—and then you join him, and the cab will, according to my orders, stop by the station. When we've seen everything's gone off well we'll pelt after it on our bikes. Then you simply rush your giddy prisoner on to the platform and into a giddy carriage. See?"

"That's the dashed risky part!" muttered Peele.

"Not if you're slipper about it. Nobody's likely to be about on the station, not the village Bobby, anyway!" said Morny. "An' we'll keep the cab outside the village until the train's nearly in. It's a through express to London—a non-stop. You make quite certain the blighter has no cash on him, and then—well, just as the train's startin' again, you hop out swiftly and slam the door. And our dear friend will be wafted like a magic wand to London town, where he'll find himself stranded without a giddy penny in his pocket!"

"Rippin'!" said Lattrey, looking admiringly at Mornington's flushed face and glinting eyes. "It's a great wheeze, Morny—a stroke of genius!"

"But supposin' the cad writes to the Head, explainin' or complainin'?" said Gower. "You haven't thought of that."

"Haven't I?" remarked Mornington coolly. "Your mistake, old man! Our friend Biggs will never dream it is a hoax. He'll be amazed, of course, but he can't tell anything if he does write. And," went on Mornington dryly, "do you suppose that the Head, or anyone else at Rookwood, will have the kid back, will even trouble about him again after his bein' arrested and yanked away like that—as a thief and a vagabond? Not likely. I tell you the Head will only be furious with Erroll—furious at havin' been tricked by dear Erroll into shelterin' such a bad character. No, Biggs' goose will be cooked for good! He won't come back to Rookwood again."

"Phew! Great! Go ahead, Peele!"

And Peele went ahead with his dressing.

Tommy Dodd, Tommy Doyle, and Tommy Cook looked at each other eloquently.

Never had they heard such a rascally, villainous scheme. They saw it all now. They had heard all about Mornington's unreasonable hatred of the new garden-boy, and they were astounded and shocked—shocked to think that a fellow like Morny, a fellow they had respected, should sink to such a mean and rascally device to get rid of the fellow he was so bitterly jealous of.

"Well, my hat!" breathed Tommy Dodd, his own face going crimson with indignation. "Did you ever hear such a rotten, caddish trick in your life? But—"

"We're stopping it!" gritted Tommy Cook.

"Holy Moses, yes!" said Tommy Doyle, his good-natured, merry eyes glinting now. "But—but how? Shall we rush in and smash—"

"No, no! Quiet's the word!" breathed Tommy Dodd. He dragged at his chums, and they followed their leader as, like the Arabs of old, he silently stole away. Then, when well away from the woodshed, Tommy Dodd, his eyes glimmering with mingled mischief and indignation, told his plans to his chums. And when the chums of the Modern House at Rookwood went indoors a minute or two later they were grinning cheerfully.

A Sensation!

"WHERE'S that ass Mornington?"

Jimmy Silver asked the question suddenly. Apparently he had just missed Valentine Mornington of the Fourth.

And as it wanted just five minutes to the start of the

Bagshot match, Jimmy could be excused for asking the question in some alarm.

His brow clouded as he stared about the changing room. "Any of you fellows seen the chump?" he demanded.

"Has he been in here? I'd forgotten him completely."

There was a general shaking of heads.

"Haven't seen him since dinner!" said Puffy Grace.

"He's a cheeky owl, leaving it until the last minute like this! Now, if you'd asked me to play, Uncle James—"

"Oh, rats!"

Uncle James frowned crossly. As a matter of fact, he could not help feeling a little bit uneasy as he remembered Morny's mocking smile when he had agreed to play.

"Just like Morny!" said Raby, with a sniff. "I expect he's just hanging back out of sheer impudence!"

"Or to have a last whiff at a cigarette," said Lovell.

"Blest if I know why you shoved him in for this match, Jimmy! I bet he won't play up to his usual form after what's happened; and if he tries his wind will let him down—"

"Oh, rats! He was the best man available, especially as Doddy's crooked!" snapped Jimmy Silver. "If you've finished dressing, Raby, you might trot up to his study and yank him out. We'd better get along to the ground."

"Right-ho!"

Raby hurried away. The rest of the juniors finished changing and hurried down to Little Side. Pankley and his men from Bagshot School were still in the pavilion changing, but as the Rookwood fellows arrived they came out, and after exchanging chaffing greetings with them, started to punt a ball about the field.

Hansom of the Fifth came up to Jimmy Silver. Hansom had very kindly lowered his lofty dignity to the extent of agreeing to referee the match.

"You kids ready?" he demanded, glancing up at the clock-tower. "Nearly on the stroke of three now!"

"Mornington hasn't turned up yet," said Jimmy Silver.

"I've sent— Oh, here's Raby now!"

Raby shook his head as he ran up and joined the Rookwood footballers.

"Can't find the idiot anywhere," he said. "He seems to have vanished. I thought he must have come down here, but— My hat! Where can the cheeky owl be?"

Jimmy Silver's good-humoured face darkened. Was it possible that his first faint suspicion was right—that Morny meant to let them down at the last minute? He could scarcely believe it, and yet—

Jimmy remembered Morny's vow to get his own back on the Form for the Form licking! He also knew that Mornington, when his evil temper had the upper hand of him, was capable of any reckless act—was heedless of consequences.

The fellows were looking at Jimmy Silver strangely now, their faces grim.

"Looks to me as if the howling cad means to let us down at the last moment!" exclaimed Lovell.

"We'll give him another half-minute!" said Jimmy Silver. "Grace, you might trot round and find Erroll in case. You never know what Morny will do!"

"No good doing that!" said Conroy briefly. "Erroll's gone out of gates!"

"What!"

"Gone on his bike with a telegram for Dicky Dalton!" said Conroy grimly.

"Oh, my hat!"

The half-minute lapsed. Jimmy Silver's brow was dark and angry now. He saw it all. Mornington had never intended to play at all. It was sheer perverseness on his part. He had been laughing up his sleeve all the time, intending to let the Form down at the last moment—to give them no chance to get a suitable man to take his place.

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