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EVERY
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**THE ONLY WAY—
OF ESCAPE !**

(See this week's amazing school story—inside.)

A ROUSING EXTRA-LONG STORY OF SCHOOL-LIFE—

Prefect and Rascal

by MARTIN
CLIFFORD



Give some people a little authority and they abuse it right and left—that's the sort of fellow Gerald Knox of the Sixth is. But he finds a tough handful in Tom Merry & Co. when he takes a mean advantage of his position as prefect.

CHAPTER 1.

Arthur Augustus is Shocked!

"GWEAT SCOTT!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stopped.

The elegant swell of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's was returning from a visit to the outfitters at Rylcombe. His route lay along the winding Rylcombe lane, and he had just come within view of the side gate that gave admittance to the Green Man when he uttered that ejaculation in considerable amazement.

"Gweat Scott!"

The Green Man, a disreputable tavern, was of course out of bounds to the scholars at St. Jim's, although in the Lower Forms it was rumoured that Knox of the Sixth and his cronies were often in the habit of frequenting it for a quiet flutter.

Arthur Augustus was one of those in the "know," and he regarded Knox's excursions with great disapproval. Had Arthur Augustus seen Knox emerging from that side gate he would not have been surprised, although, doubtless, he would have strongly disapproved. The disapproval of a Lower School boy, however, made as much impression on the black sheep of the Sixth as a generous application of water on a duck's back!

But this was different.

It was not Knox who had flung open the gate of the Green Man and bolted into the shelter of the trees; it wasn't a senior at all. It was a fag—a member of either the Third or Second Form at St. Jim's. And something about the back view of that fleeing figure had been very familiar to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Bai Jove!" muttered Arthur Augustus. "I wondah!"

For two or three seconds he stood there undecided, his gleaming monocle bent upon the side gate as if to resurrect that fleeing figure. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's mind was not in the habit of working quickly.

The sound of rapid retreating footsteps decided him.

He broke into a trot, the trot developed into a run, and in three minutes he was hard on the track of the figure that had broken in on his pleasant meditations over the matter of fancy waistcoats and the latest thing in silk hats.

"Stop!"

The swell of the Fourth shouted that command as, rounding a bend in the lane, he caught sight of his quarry.

But his quarry did not stop. Instead, that fleeing figure put on a spurt and vanished again.

Arthur Augustus breathed hard.

"Joe Fwayne!" he panted. "The young wascal!"

It came as a great shock to the Fourth-Former that Joe Frayne, in whom he had always placed the utmost trust and

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reliance, should be guilty of paying surreptitious visits to such a low-down haunt as the Green Man. Doubtless Joe Frayne would not have been either flattered or grateful to think that Arthur Augustus took such a great interest in him, but it was D'Arcy's way to exercise a certain amount of well-intentioned and good-natured patronage with "fags."

To do him justice, the immaculate swell of the Fourth was greatly concerned. To think that a fag of the Third Form was playing the blackguard moved him deeply.

He put on a spurt.

The lane ahead was deserted. It ran in a straight line now to St. Jim's, and Arthur Augustus was certain that no fag could have outpaced him to that extent. It was evident, therefore, that the fleeing fag had taken cover somewhere in the thick bushes that lined the lane.

"The young wascal!" Arthur Augustus came to a halt.

Next moment the bushes parted and a cheeky face peered out at him.

"Oh, it's you!"

Arthur Augustus wheeled sharply as he heard that voice, and his noble features contracted into a frown.

"Fwayne!"

Joe Frayne of the Third Form came into full view. The fag was breathing hard.

"I thought it was a prefect," he said, with a rueful grin, "so I 'opped it good and strong."

"You young wascal!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Eh?"

"You young wascal!" reiterated the swell of the Fourth. "I am surprised at you, Fwayne!"

The fag of the Third grimaced.

"You think I've been on the spree—what?" he asked.

Arthur Augustus breathed hard.

"Weally, Fwayne," he replied frigidly. "I don't think, I know. I must say that I am shocked an' painfully surprised."

"But, Master D'Arcy—" Joe Frayne, a one-time waif of the slums, had not yet forgotten his associations of the past. "But, Master D'Arcy, I wasn't doin' of no 'arm'!"

Arthur Augustus waved a gloved hand which silenced the fag of the Third.

"I am surprised an' shocked," he went on. "You, of all people, Fwayne, should realise the folly of entwini' such low-down haunts of vice."

"Yes, Master D'Arcy; but—"

"An' yet you don't look as if you realise the awful extent of your folly," continued Arthur Augustus in his best sermonising manner. "Wathah, you appeah to glowy in it."

-FEATURING TOM MERRY & CO., THE CHUMS OF ST. JIM'S.



"Oh, no, sir!" said Joe Frayne in some confusion. "You see—"

"For all you know, deah boy," went on the swell of the Fourth, "you might have been seen comin' out of that disreputable place by a pwefect or a mastah!"

"I know; but—"

"A vewy fortunate thing for you that it was I who came along," said Arthur Augustus severely. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself, young Fwayne!"

"But—"

Arthur Augustus waved a gloved hand again, and Frayne subsided.

"If it had been my minah," he continued, "I should have felt constwained to point out the follay of his ways and then administrah a feahful thwashin'. If my minah was in the habit of goin' there—"

Joe Frayne grinned.

"Your minor does go there sometimes!" he exclaimed,

Arthur Augustus' monocle dropped out of his eye.

"What?" he exclaimed.

Joe Frayne nodded.

"Which young Wally has been sent there once this week already!"

"Bai Jove! The young wascal! The awful wottah!"

The thought that his young brother Wally D'Arcy of the Third was in the habit of frequenting the Green Man made Arthur Augustus' blood run cold and hot. He turned a ferocious glare on the fag of the Third.

"What do you mean, you wottah?"

Frayne shrugged his shoulders.

"It's simple enough, Master D'Arcy," he said. "That rotter Knox says: 'Fwayne, jest you run down to the Green Man an' get some smokes and a bottle for me—'"

"A b-b-bottle?" ejaculated the swell of the Fourth in horror.

Joe Frayne nodded.

"Them swells of the Sixth do 'ave a beano now and agin!"

"A beano!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "A bottle! Good gwacious! An' my minah goes to fetch these things fwom the Gween Man?"

"That he does!" said Frayne. "If we didn't do what that awful rotter Knox told us he'd flay the skin off our back!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy seemed in danger of having an apoplectic fit. That his minor should be compelled to carry out such dangerous and demoralising errands came to him as a great shock. If Gerald Knox of the Sixth had chanced along at that moment Arthur Augustus would have committed assault and battery on him.

"You are suah you are wight, Fwayne?" asked the swell of the Fourth at length, eyeing the fag shrewdly. "You aren't tellin' me a whoppah?"

"Oh, Master D'Arcy—"

"Then I pwesume that when I saw you emergin' fwom that awful place you weré only cawwyin' out the ordahs of that wascal Knox?"

"Of course, sir," said Joe Frayne, with a touch of reproach in his voice. "You surely didn't think that I go to that rotten pub because I want to?"

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

All thoughts of the fancy waistcoats, gorgeous ties, and the half-dozen toppers he had ordered had now flown from his noble head. He was face to face with a very serious matter. His brow clouded.

"What were you instwucted to fetch fwom the Gween Man, Fwayne?" he asked at length.

Joe Frayne looked about him cautiously, and then drew two packages out of his pockets.

Arthur Augustus jumped.

One package was easily recognisable as a bottle.

"Good gwacious!" he exclaimed, taking the bottle gingerly and unwrapping the brown paper. "Whiskay!"

"An' the other's a box of fags, Master D'Arcy," said Frayne, who was less shocked than the aristocratic Fourth-Former. "Be careful with that there bottle, sir. It leaks."

"Bai Jove!"

There was silence between the two for a space of a few seconds, what time Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's noble brow was wrinkled in thought. Then, to

Frayne's amazement, he re-wrapped the bottle and placed it in his pocket. Next, he took the box of cigarettes and placed them in another pocket.

"Ere, I say, Master D'Arcy!" exclaimed Joe Frayne in some alarm. "What are you goin' to do with 'em?"

"I am goin' to take charge of them, deah boy," answered Arthur Augustus firmly. "I am goin' to have a word with Knox."

The Third Form fag listened to that statement with goggling eyes and wide-open mouth.

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"Which Master Knox'll flay me alive if he knows that I've given them packages to you!" he exclaimed.

"Weally, Fwayne, I don't think that awful scoundwél will say anythin' to you by the time I have given him a piece of my mind. You leave it to me, deah boy!"

"But, Master D'Arcy, he'll flay you, too!"

The swell of the Fourth laughed, and his face set grimly.

"We'll see, deah boy," he observed—"we'll see! Now, just you wun along to the school, an' don't say a word. If Knox sends for you before I get a chance to speak to him, you come to me!"

"But—" began Frayne.

"Twot along, deah boy," commanded Arthur Augustus. "I will follow at my leiswah; I want to think ovah a course of action!"

And, greatly excited and not a little alarmed, Joe Frayne scuttled off, leaving the swell of the Fourth to saunter back to St. Jim's. There was a deep frown on Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's face as he watched the receding figure of the fag.

"Knox is a wottah!" he muttered as he tramped along. "A wascal! An' he has the awful cheek to send my minah on his blackguardly ewwards! Bai Jove! It's time Knox was taught a lesson!"

With that decision in the forefront of his mind, so to speak, the swell of the Fourth stepped it out for St. Jim's. But a lot of trouble was destined to fall upon the noble shoulders of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy before the rascally prefect of the Sixth was taught his much-needed lesson.

CHAPTER 2.

Head's Inspection!

"HALLO, have you been to the tailor's, Gustavus?" Jack Blake swung open the door of Study No. 6 in the Fourth Form passage as he made that remark.

There was a hurried movement inside as Arthur Augustus placed something in the drawer of the table and closed it.

Blake eyed that proceeding, and the crimson flush on his noble studymate's features curiously.

"What's the giddy secret, Gussy?" he inquired.

"Weally, Blake, I was not awah that there was a secwet," said Arthur Augustus uncomfortably. "But you startled me."

Blake grinned.

"Hiding some latest creations in fancy waistcoats?" he said, with a chuckle.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Or is it neckties?"

"No, deah boy!"

Blake waved an admonishing finger at his elegant studymate.

"I'll bet you three to one in doughnuts, Gussy," he said, "that you've been down to the village to order some new waistcoats, and toppers, and ties, and—"

Arthur Augustus grinned.

"Well, as a mattah of fact, I have, deah boy!" he replied. "I found that I was wunnin' short of ties—"

"Running short?" ejaculated Blake. "Oh, my hat! But you've got about three dozen not more than a month old."

"Weally, Blake, a fellow must keep up appeawances," remonstrated Arthur Augustus. "An' you must admit that I was in urgent need of some more fancay waistcoats."

Blake grinned.

"Ye gods! You've got more waistcoats than the rest of the Fourth put together!"

"You are exaggewatin', Blake!"

But Blake paid no heed to that remark. He was staring about him and sniffing.

"Funny!" he exclaimed.

"What's funny, deah boy?" inquired Arthur Augustus. Sniff! Sniff! Blake sniffed harder than ever.

"What's funny?" reiterated D'Arcy, eyeing Blake wonderingly.

Blake stopped sniffing.

"There's an awful niff in this study," he said at length. Arthur Augustus frowned.

"Niff?" he echoed. "Pway, what do you mean, Blake?"

Blake commenced to sniff again.

"It smells like benzine—" he said thoughtfully.

"Eh?"

"Or whisky—"

"What?" Arthur Augustus almost shouted, and his face crimsoned.

Blake stopped sniffing, and turned a severe face on his studymate.

"I suppose you haven't been drinking, Gussy?" he said sternly.

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"Weally, Blake—" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's confusion was painfully apparent, so much so that the amusement-faded out of Blake's eyes. He looked at D'Arcy in some astonishment.

That embarrassed junior found his eyes wandering to the table drawer. Secreted there were the packages he had taken from Joe Frayne—the bottle of whisky and the box of cigarettes. In his haste to get them out of the way Arthur Augustus had forgotten that the bottle leaked. And it was obvious that the odour of the spirit leaking from the bottle had caught the sensitive nostrils of Jack Blake.

"You see," began Arthur Augustus confusedly. "I—that is—he—"

Jack Blake wondered whether his elegant studymate was wandering in the head. But before he could make any further remark the study door was flung open, and Herries and Digby, who shared Study No. 6, dashed in.

"Look out!" yelled Herries.

"The Head!" whispered Digby.

Blake started, and Arthur Augustus leaped from his chair.

"Eh?"

"What?"

The alarmed expressions on the faces of Herries and Digby were catching. Blake caught the former by the arm.

"What's up?" he queried.

"The Head!" breathed Herries; and he began to tidy up a number of books on the bookcase. "The Head! Inspection!"

"Head's inspection!"

Blake and Arthur Augustus gasped the words simultaneously.

It was only once a term that Dr. Holmes made an inspection of the studies, and those inspections were not heralded by any warnings. Not even the Housemasters were informed of the Head's intention. It was Dr. Holmes' habit suddenly to visit the Fourth and Shell passages to satisfy himself that the various studies were as tidy and as cleanly as befitted such a famous seat of learning as St. Jim's.

And while these inspections were "on" no one was allowed to leave his study. Usually a Sixth Form prefect went in advance of Dr. Holmes to ensure that that order was obeyed.

It was remarkable what effect those two words "Head's inspection!" had upon the Lower School. Fellows would suddenly remember that the coal-scuttle was hardly the place for their footer boots; that the cupboard was not indeed the place for a conglomeration of broken jam-jars, school books, and discarded articles of attire; that it was not conducive to cleanliness to leave unwashed crockery adorning the mantelpiece.

These once-a-term visits were usually attended by great confusion on the part of the occupants of studies. Broken chairs that should have been mended long ago were made to perch against something in an effort to hide their want of repair; school books, with the covers off, were shoved between others less damaged, in the hope that they would pass unnoticed. Curtains were drawn across that section of the window which happened to be broken. Dusters were hurriedly brought into requisition, and whirled about in corners where perhaps they had never whirled since the previous inspection.

But for all these late-hour activities, Dr. Holmes had an eagle eye for discerning the faults in the various studies, and, belonging as they did to junior schoolboys, those faults were legion.

In Study No. 6 Blake and his chums started to make their apartment ship-shape with astonishing speed and energy.

"Whose footer boots are these?" roared Blake, as he dragged a muddy pair of footwear from the bottom of the bookcase.

"Mine!" gasped Herries, and, with a swift movement, he grabbed the offending boots, tied the laces together, and then crossed to the window. Next minute he had raised the sash, the boots were passed out of the window, the metal tags of the laces were held in position with one hand, while he closed the sash with the other. The boots dangling against the outer wall of the study were now out of sight of anyone in the study; only the small tags of the laces were visible. Herries hoped fervently that Dr. Holmes would not see those incriminating tags.

Meantime, Arthur Augustus, a victim to disquieting thoughts, was wondering what would happen if the Head demanded to see the contents of the table drawer. The swell of the Fourth was all in a flutter, and even in that moment he was not allowed to think without interruption. There was a sudden roar from Digby:

"Look at these blessed neckties!"

He held at least a dozen multi-coloured neckties in his hand as he spoke, which he had just sorted out from behind a picture on the wall.

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's eyes gleamed as he beheld those precious articles of adornment. "You wottahs! I spent an hour lookin' for those ties yestaday!"

Blake grinned.

"Guilty, Gussy," he said, with a chuckle. "We were waiting for you while you changed, and as you appeared to be very undecided which tie you should wear out of the hundred or so you've got, I thought I'd help you to come to a quicker decision by shoving some of the blessed things out of sight."

"You awful wottah!"

"I shoved 'em behind that picture yesterday and forgot all about 'em," grinned Blake. "Never mind, bung them in the table drawer."

Arthur Augustus snatched the ties and jammed them in the table drawer on top of the bottle of whisky and cigarettes.

He had hardly done so when Kildare, the captain of the school, appeared in the doorway.

broken pane should have been repaired long before now. You will see to it, Blake, that it is repaired."

"Oh, yes, sir!"

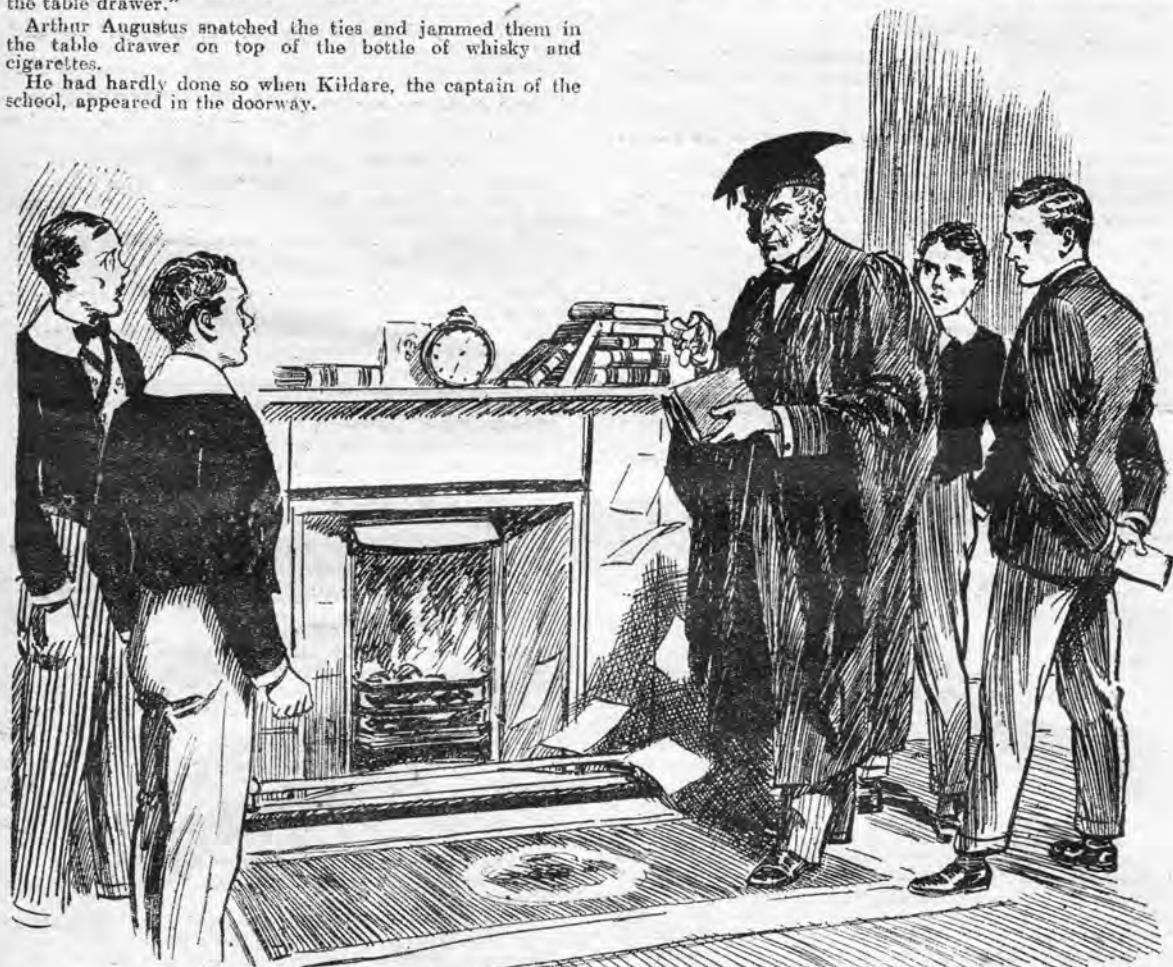
"And to help you remember, my boy, you will write a hundred times, 'I must not put off till to-morrow what I can do to-day!'"

"Oh! I mean, yes, sir!" said Blake meekly, and he watched Kildare record that imposition in the notebook he carried.

Dr. Holmes strode across the study, opened the cupboard and peered in. Fortunately Herries had had time to tidy up that cupboard. It passed muster.

"To whom do these books belong?"

The Head was examining a pile of books on the mantelpiece. They were a woeful sight. Most of the covers were missing, the corners of the pages were torn, and there were



As the Head picked up two of the volumes from the mantelpiece and examined them, several loose leaves floated gracefully to the floor. "Bless my soul!" he ejaculated. "These books have been badly ill-treated. Disgraceful! I shall have to speak to your Form master!" (See Chapter 2.)

"Stand to attention!" he commanded. "Head's inspection!"

The occupants of Study No. 6 stood to attention, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy taking up a position by the study table. Next moment, with rustling gown, the majestic figure of Dr. Holmes appeared.

His eagle eye at once spotted a broken pane in the glass door of the bookcase.

"How long ago was that broken?" he asked sharply.

Blake crimsoned.

"About three weeks ago, sir," he answered, conscious that the said pane of glass was going to earn him an imposition of some sort.

Dr. Holmes looked surprised.

"Three weeks ago?" he queried. "And who broke it?"

"I did, sir," Blake did not add that he had thrown a boot at Trimble; that he had missed the fat Fourth-Former, but the boot had not missed the bookcase. Such a confession, in the circumstances, was not to be expected.

Dr. Holmes frowned.

"I will not have this slovenliness!" he rapped. "That

several stray leaves that floated gracefully to the floor as the Head picked up two of the volumes for a closer inspection.

"Bless my soul!" he ejaculated wrathfully. "These books are essential to your studies at St. Jim's, and in their present state they would scarcely be of use to anyone! They have been badly ill-used!"

That was true. Dog-eared and torn, the school books were really only fit for the dustbin. Dr. Holmes, a lover of books, especially those that dealt with the classics, was indignant. That Blake & Co. did not see eye to eye with him in the matter of literature was, of course, another of those little things over which Form masters, headmasters, and their pupils never agree, and never will so long as the world keeps turning.

But Blake & Co.'s expressions were very contrite as they felt the Head's stern gaze bent upon them.

"Disgraceful!" snapped Dr. Holmes. "Really, I shall have to speak to your Form master on this lamentable and unwarrantable misuse of books that are provided for your

instruction in the classics, Kildare," he added, turning to the captain of the school, "kindly see that these books are collected and that fresh ones are issued."

"Yes, sir!"

"Payment for the new books to be deducted from these boys' pocket-money!" concluded the Head.

Blake & Co. looked dismal.

"D'Arcy," rapped out the Head suddenly, "why do you keep moving? Are you trying to conceal something from me, boy?"

"I—I—I—" stammered Arthur Augustus, crimson with confusion.

Dr. Holmes' brow grew grim.

"Stand away from that table, boy!" he commanded.

Reluctantly, very reluctantly, Arthur Augustus obeyed.

"Bless my soul!"

As the swell of the Fourth moved away from the table the Head caught sight of a coloured necktie that was wedged in the closed drawer.

He moved towards it.

"Were you trying to conceal this tie, D'Arcy?"

Arthur Augustus was silent. The swell of the Fourth was an exceptionally truthful fellow, and not for the life of him would he have helped himself out of the difficulty that he knew lay in front of him by taking advantage of the Head's innocent question.

Dr. Holmes seemed to read some of the thoughts that chased their way through Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's mind.

"Is there anything else you were trying to hide?" the Head demanded, and then the thunderclouds grew on his brow. To his sensitive nostrils came the pungent odour of spirits.

"Is it possible—" he ejaculated.

Dr. Holmes then did a very undignified thing—he sniffed. In fact, he sniffed several times, and with each sniff the expression on his face grew more grim. Arthur Augustus went crimson and pale by turns. He knew that discovery of the incriminating whisky-bottle and the box of cigarettes was imminent now.

The Head, bending down, jerked open the table drawer. A number of neckties met his gaze. But he hardly paid these any attention. The odour of spirits was more pronounced now, and he commenced to turn out the neckties with scant ceremony. Then, with eyes that almost started from their sockets, he saw the whisky-bottle and the box of cigarettes.

"Boy! Boy! Is it possible?" he articulated with difficulty, as with trembling fingers he unwrapped the papered bottle and saw that his sense of smell had not played him false. "Whisky! Phew!"

Blake & Co. eyed their chum in horror. Kildare looked at him as if he could hardly believe the evidence of his eyes. Yet there was the bottle of whisky; there were the cigarettes which, apparently, the swell of the Fourth had been at pains to hide.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy felt the blood rush from his face, leaving him deathly pale. The swell of the Fourth had not yet quite realised the unenviable position in which that amazing discovery had placed him.

"D'Arcy!"

The swell of the Fourth started as the Head's cold voice broke in on his ears.

"Yaas, sir!"

"Were you trying to conceal these—these things?" thundered Dr. Holmes, his eyes gleaming angrily.

"Yaas, sir!"

"What? What?" Dr. Holmes was as much dumbfounded as Blake & Co. Far sooner would he have been prepared to hear Arthur Augustus give an answer in the negative.

"I certainly brought them into the study, sir," said Arthur Augustus. "These fellows knew nothing about them."

"Bless my soul!" gasped the Head faintly. "Is this so?"

Blake & Co. were silent. Indeed, they were flabbergasted. They stared at their noble chum like fellows in a dream. The Head's rumbling voice brought them back to earth, so to speak.

"D'Arcy," he thundered, "how dare you bring such things into the school?"

"If you will let me explain, Dr. Holmes—" began Arthur Augustus.

"Explain?" rumbled the Head. "I am waiting for an explanation!"

And then Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's confidence deserted him. To explain meant to sneak. He could not deliberately tell the Head that the whisky and the cigarettes rightly belonged to Knox of the Sixth. He could not even say that he had taken them from Frayne of the Third, for that youth would be cross-examined, which would mean placing the onus of sneaking upon him.

D'Arcy's silence seemed to annoy Dr. Holmes beyond measure.

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"Well, boy, I'm waiting for your explanation!" he snapped.

But D'Arcy was silent, conscious only of the imploring looks his chums bent upon him and the throbbing of his own heart.

CHAPTER 3.

In the Toils!

"D'ARCY!"

Dr. Holmes spoke sternly, his face a picture of righteous wrath.

"Yaas, sir."

"I have found in this study a bottle of whisky and a box of cigarettes, which you, on your own admittance, brought here."

"Yaas, sir."

The Head's brow was thunderous.

"I am waiting for an explanation, D'Arcy!" he said severely.

"Yaas, sir," mumbled Arthur Augustus, a picture of confusion. "You see, sir, I—I—"

"Come, speak up, my boy!"

But Arthur Augustus could not speak up. He gave his chums a wretched look, and gulped something in his throat.

"Boy"—Dr. Holmes' patience was being taxed to its uttermost—"I have asked you to explain!"

"I know, sir," muttered Arthur Augustus. "I am sowwy, sir, but I—I—I cannot explain!"

"You cannot?" The Head's voice resembled thunder.

"You cannot explain?"

"Nunno, sir!"

There was silence in the study. Blake & Co. eyed their chum in horror. Dr. Holmes' face set grimly.

"By your refusal to explain, D'Arcy," he said sternly, "you leave me only one construction to put upon what I have discovered in this study."

Arthur Augustus started.

"Weally, sir, I twust you do not think that I am in the habit of indulgin' in stwong liquah?"

"I am loth to think so," said Dr. Holmes, "for I have always known you to be a boy of exemplary character."

"Thank you, sir!"

"But unless you can explain satisfactorily to me how these things came to be here, I have no alternative but to judge you guilty of indulging in pernicious habits and punish you accordingly."

"Oh!"

Arthur Augustus bit his lip. Never had he been in such a quandary. To do him justice, he realised how the Head must have felt, but that did not make it any easier for him to explain. He looked Dr. Holmes straight in the eyes as the kindly old gentleman gazed at him sternly.

"I will be patient with you, D'Arcy," said Dr. Holmes in a softer voice. "Now come, tell me why you brought these things here."

"I cannot!" said D'Arcy miserably.

"You mean you won't!" thundered Dr. Holmes. "Your silence can only mean one thing, D'Arcy. I am shocked and pained to think that a boy in whom I have hitherto placed the highest confidence should begin to take to blackguardly habits!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's face crimsoned.

"Weally, sir," he said heatedly, "you do me an injustice!"

"Silence!" rapped Dr. Holmes sternly. "I have been patient enough. I have found these abominable things here; I have asked for an explanation. You have refused to answer. As I said before, you leave only one course open to me—"

"Speak up, you ass!" said Blake wildly. "Gussy—"

"Silence, Blake!"

And Blake relapsed into silence as the Head's stern gaze bent upon him.

"I assuah you, sir," gasped Arthur Augustus, "that these w'etched smokes an' that wotten whiskay do not belong to me."

"Indeed!" There was not much encouragement in Dr. Holmes' voice. "Then why are they here?"

Arthur Augustus was silent for a moment.

"Then why are they here?" reiterated the Head, his voice rising. "This is your last chance, D'Arcy."

"I brought them heah, sir," stammered Gussy. "I brought them heah to—to—to—to destwoy."

"What?" exclaimed the Head. "Then where did you get them?"

Arthur Augustus was silent. Once again he found himself in the toils.

"Fwom—fwom anothah fellow," he said at length.

"From whom?" asked the Head coldly.

Silence.

Blake & Co. looked on with anxious expressions. They knew that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was not in the habit

of "blagging." But how had those things come into his possession? That was a question which exercised their minds just as much as it had Dr. Holmes'. And why didn't Gussy speak up?

"Really, D'Arcy, this has gone too far," said the Head sternly. "I am very disappointed in you. You leave me to think the worst. Kildare," he added grimly, turning to the captain of the school, "kindly escort this junior to the punishment-room."

"I am sure Gussy—I mean D'Arcy—is innocent, sir," Blake blurted out. "Those rotten things don't belong to him, really. He's as straight as a die, sir!"

"Hear, hear!" chimed in Herries and Digby loyally.

"Silence!" commanded the Head. "You will go to the punishment-room, D'Arcy. To-morrow you will be expelled from the school!"

The news almost stunned Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. He stood there rooted to the floor. Next moment Kildare's hand fastened on his shoulder. Mechanically, like a fellow in a dream, D'Arcy allowed himself to be led out of the study, unconscious of the imploring looks of his chums that followed him.

Dr. Holmes, with contracted brows, rustled out of the room.

When he was gone, Blake turned to Herries and Digby. "Here's a pretty kettle of fish and no mistake!" he said. Herries and Digby nodded glumly.

"That fathead Gussy looked mighty secretive when I came into the study," went on Blake. "I know now what he was shoving in the drawer."

And he explained what had happened.

"Of course, there's been a mistake somewhere," said Herries at length.

"Go hon!" snapped Blake. "Has that only just occurred to you?"

"Oh, don't be funny!" said Herries, with equal warmth. "Things look pretty rotten for old Gussy, anyway."

"Instead of arguing like a couple of silly parrots, what about trying to find out exactly what has happened?" suggested Digby.

"A sensible idea," growled Blake. "Let's get along to the punishment-room."

The chums of Study No. 6 walked out into the passage and headed for Nobody's Study. But they were not destined to get into conversation with their noble chum just then.

Darrell of the Sixth barred their passage.

"About turn, you men," he said crisply, swishing his ashplant in the air.

"But can't we have a word with Gussy?" asked Blake.

The prefect shook his head.

"No one is to have any conversation with D'Arcy," he replied gravely. "Head's orders. And if it's true that he was found with a bottle of whisky and a box of smokes, I don't wonder. Young blackguard! Sooner St. Jim's is shot of him the better!"

It was on the tip of Blake's tongue to give a heated retort, but he choked it down. No good would be done in D'Arcy's cause if his chums checked a prefect. He made a sign to Herries and Digby, and the three of them turned on their heel and departed.

"Now, what are we going to do?" asked Herries, as the three juniors strolled back to their study.

"Blessed if I know," muttered Digby.

"We know Gussy is innocent," said Blake, half to himself. "Eh?" Herries glared at his chum. "What are you burbling about?"

Blake looked up and crimsoned.

"I said we know that poor old Gussy's innocent—"

"And that Queen Anne's dead!" added Digby sarcastically.

"Now tell us something we don't know!"

"Oh, don't be an ass!" growled Blake. "Look here, you men, it's struck me that that whisky might have meant for Knox."

"Something in that," agreed Digby thoughtfully.

"If that's the case, how did Gussy get hold of it?" put in Herries.

Blake shrugged his shoulders.

"That's what we've got to find out," he said irritably. "I vote we cut along and see Knox."

Herries glared.

"And ask him if it was his whisky that Gussy collared? Not likely! You can leave me out on that jaunt, old scout. I'm not asking for a licking!"

"Nor me, either," said Digby. "The whisky may or may not have belonged to Knox, but I can't see myself asking him if it was."

Blake scowled at his chums.

"Well, I'm going to, anyway," he declared. "Gussy's got to be cleared. I suppose you're agreed upon that?"

"Of course!" answered Herries warmly.

"Naturally," conceded Digby, "but if that's how you're going to try and clear him, leave me out. Herries and I will come along afterwards and collect the pieces."

"Idiot!" retorted Blake heatedly, and he slammed the

door of Study No. 6 and made his way over to the Sixth Form quarters.

Herries and Digby eyed each other ruefully.

"Blake's a fathead to jump to the conclusion that the rotten whisky belonged to Knox," said the former, breaking the silence. "Knox will be frightfully waxy if Blake puts the question to him."

Digby nodded.

"Fatheaded idea altogether. If the stuff did belong to Knox we'd better find out from Gussy himself. And we can't do that just yet. Do you think we had better cut after Blake?"

"Not a bad idea," assented Herries. "We may be able to save the ass a licking."

And having come to that conclusion, Herries and Digby vacated the study.

CHAPTER 4.

Blake Speaks Out!

"FRAYNE!"

Gerald Knox's voice raised in angry authority awoke the echoes of the Third Form-room, as the unpopular prefect poked his head in at the door.

Immediately the awful din, a usual feature of the Third Form-room, subsided. Red-faced fags, kneeling before the huge fire with pen-holders, upon which were impaled herrings, looked round apprehensively. Wally D'Arcy and Manners minor, who were arguing about the respective merits of their majors, forgot their differences.

Gerald Knox obviously was on the warpath. There was an angry frown on his face, and his right hand gripped an ashplant.

"Frayne!" he bawled.

There was a scuttling at the far end of the Form-room which did not pass Knox unheeded. In a few strides he had reached the place. Next moment he was hauling Joe Frayne from behind a large cupboard whither the fag had fled.

"You young rascal!" he snapped, giving the hapless fag a taste of the ashplant. "Don't you know yet that when a prefect calls a fag he must obey?"

"Yowp! Yes, Knox!" gasped Joe Frayne.

Swish!

Once more the ashplant came into play, and Frayne writhed in the prefect's grip.

"Yaroooooh!"

Wally D'Arcy and his loyal henchmen looked as if they contemplated a rescue, but there was such a savage expression on Knox's face that it quailed them.

The prefect propelled the hapless fag towards the door.

"Now get along to my study at once!"

The door of the Form-room closed on Joe Frayne and the Sixth-Former, and the fags resumed their noisy tasks.

Outside in the passage Knox ground his knuckles hard into the neck of the squirming Third-Former and pushed him along towards the Sixth Form quarters. Arrived at his study, he closed the door and turned the key in the lock.

Then he faced the shivering fag, with a snarl.

"You young scoundrel!" he hissed. "Why haven't you brought me the stuff from Banks?"

Frayne backed a pace at the savage expression in the Sixth-Former's face.

"I—I couldn't!" he gasped.

"You young liar!" hissed Knox, swishing the ashplant through the air menacingly. "Do you know what's happened?"

"Nunno!" gasped Frayne.

"Did you give the packages to D'Arcy of the Fourth?"

"Ye-es!" gasped Frayne. "He—he took them from me."

"You fool!" hissed the prefect. "Do you know that D'Arcy's now in the punishment-room? Do you know that he was found with the whisky and the smokes in his possession?"

The fag's eyes opened wide. It was the first he had heard of the Head's amazing discovery, for as the Third and Second Forms did not possess studies, they were, of course, spared, the once-a-term visits of their headmaster.

"Is that true, Knox?" he asked, and his eyes were troubled. "In the punishment-room?"

"Yes!" snapped Knox. "You young fool! It's all your fault if he's expelled!"

Joe Frayne spluttered.

"Expelled? My fault—"

The prefect snapped his teeth.

"Your fault!" he said between tight lips. "D'Arcy, fortunately for you, won't split. He won't say that he got those smokes and the bottle from you, see?"

Joe Frayne's brow knitted.

"It doesn't matter if he does," he answered with some warmth. "They weren't mine. They were yours!"

The prefect sneered.

"Do you think the Head would believe a tale like that?" he said. "Do you think he would believe you if you said that those things were for me—a prefect?"

"It's the truth, anyway," said Frayne stoutly. "Which you're always sending me to Banks for the rotten things."

"Think again," said Knox unpleasantly. "How many times have I cautioned you, caned you for paying visits to the Green Man—"

Joe Frayne's eyes opened wide in astonishment.

"But you haven't," he said hotly.

"How many times have I let you off?" went on Knox, with a sneer. "What will you say if I am compelled to tell the Head that you are a bad character; that I have tried to bring you to a proper state of mind without making your delinquencies known to him? Answer me that!"

"But it isn't true!" cried Frayne indignantly. "I've never been to the Green Man on my own account. I've never brought any smokes or whisky away from the rotten place for myself. I've always had to do it for you."

"So you think that, do you, my pippin?" snarled Knox. "Well, if D'Arcy splits, if he tells the Head that he received the whisky and smokes from you, just spin the Head your innocent yarn. You'll get bunked for a certainty."

"The Head will know the truth, anyway," said Joe Frayne, with trembling lip. "An' if Master D'Arcy is in the punishment-room, if he's going to be expelled, I shall speak up."

Gerald Knox's eyes glittered, but he controlled his temper.

"Does that mean you'll split on me?"

Frayne did not answer. He was not a sneak, yet what could he do if it meant that another fellow's reputation, perhaps his whole life, was at stake? Should he speak out, should he break the severest rule in the schoolboy code—should he sneak? He couldn't tell himself just then. All he knew was that D'Arcy should not be expelled for something he hadn't done.

Knox watched the fag's face critically. Doubtless he read all that was passing in Frayne's mind, for when the fag looked up Knox was smiling evilly.

"You've thought it over," he said softly. "You take my tip and keep quiet. If that meddling fool D'Arcy takes it upon his shoulders to cross a prefect he must abide by the consequences."

"I won't let D'Arcy be sacked, when a word from me would explain to the Head that he is innocent!" exclaimed Frayne bravely.

"Then you'll get sacked yourself!" snapped the prefect. "If you sneak on me I shall deny the whole story. In fact, I shall say, as I remarked just now, that you are a bad character. If necessary, I will call in Banks to give support to my statement."

Frayne listened to the prefect's word with indignation growing rapidly in his grubby face.

"You awful rotter!" he exclaimed, with clenched fists.

"We will let the cheek pass for the moment," said Knox softly, although he was yearning to take the fag by the scruff of the neck and give him the biggest hiding of his life. "But you understand the position. It's either you or D'Arcy. Personally, I don't mind which."

"D'Arcy won't be sacked, anyway," said Frayne courageously. "I'd sooner die first."

But his heart was heavy as he made that brave retort. To save D'Arcy meant putting himself in the Fourth-Former's place—meant expulsion from St. Jim's, the school that he had grown to love. For, young as he was, Frayne knew that Knox held the whiphand. If the facts were made known to the Head the rascally prefect would, of course, deny them; would ascribe them to a petty revenge for the supposed lickings he had administered to the "bad character" fag, whom he had tried to keep to the straight and narrow path. Frayne's mind worked swiftly. He knew he was in the toils. He knew, too, that Banks would not be above swearing false testimony if Knox requested him to support his statements.

"Well?" There was a malignant smile on Knox's face as he voiced the query. "Have you thought it all over, you young rascal? Have you remembered that your past, when you were a dirty urchin of the slums, would condemn you on the spot?"

"You rogue!" exclaimed Frayne passionately. "Which I might 'ave been in the slums once, but by hokey there was real gentlemen there, better'n you'll ever be or could be!"

Swish!

Knox made an angry stride towards the diminutive fag, and the ashplant swished through the air. Next moment Frayne found a hard set of knuckles ground into his neck as he was hurled face downwards across the study table. Then the ashplant rose and fell.

Swish, swish, swish!

Frayne tried his hardest to refrain from crying out aloud, and he bit his lip hard although the tears gushed to his eyes.

"There!" panted the prefect at last, tossing the ashplant aside. "Let that be a lesson to you, you cheeky urchin. Now get out of my study before I start in with the ashplant again."

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Frayne wriggled painfully from the table and moved to the door.

"You'll remember what I said, you young cub," said the prefect through his teeth. "It's the sack for one of the three of us. It's not going to be me, that's a certainty. Whether it's you or that meddling fool D'Arcy is not my affair. Now cut!"

Hot words trembled on Joe Frayne's lips, but he did not voice them. He realised the futility of prolonging that interview. He turned the key in the lock and tottered out into the passage. The castigation he had received had been a severe one, and the fag ached all over.

He crawled along the passage with tear-dimmed eyes, hardly seeing Jack Blake of the Fourth as that sturdy junior came along.

"Hallo, young 'un!" said Blake cheerily. "Had a licking?"

But Joe Frayne passed on unheeding, and Blake, rather surprised at the fag's unusual lack of friendliness, went on his way. He halted outside Gerald Knox's study and tapped at the door.

"Come in!" snapped the prefect.

Blake entered.

Knox's eyes glittered as he beheld Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's studymate.

"What do you want?"

"I just want to ask you a few questions," said Blake easily. "You may or you may not know that Gussy is in the punishment-room—"

Knox started, as some glimmer of intelligence told him what Blake's errand was.

"What the thump do you mean?"

Blake went on, unperturbed.

"You may or you may not know that Gussy was found with a bottle of whisky and a box of cigarettes," he went on, eyeing the prefect closely.

But Knox by this time had himself well in hand. His eyes glittered dangerously, but beyond that he did not betray his emotions.

"I have heard that that young rascal D'Arcy has been bowled out at last," he said evenly. "I must say I'm not surprised."

"Can it!" said Blake angrily. "You know jolly well that Gussy doesn't go in for blagging."

Knox's hand wandered to his ashplant.

"May I ask," he said coolly, "why you have come here to tell me this?"

Jack Blake's jaw set aggressively, and he came straight to the point.

"It's my belief, Knox," he said coolly, "that that whisky belonged to you, and— Yooooooo!"

Blake had not meant to say that really. But a whistling ashplant about one's shoulders is not conducive to intelligible conversation. Certainly Blake's conversation was not intelligible next moment.

Swish, swish, swish!

Knox's ashplant was going great guns, and Knox's eyes glittered savagely.

"You cheeky young cub!" he hissed. "How dare you speak to a prefect like that!"

"Yaroooooo! Let up! Whoop!" roared Blake.

Swish, swish, swish!

"Take that!" snarled Knox. "And let it be a warning to you. For two pins I'd take you before the Head."

"Whoooooop! Stop it, you awful rotter!" howled Blake, trying to dodge that whirling ashplant. "I only asked— Yaroooooo!"

Swish!

The Fourth-Former made a dash for the passage, Knox's cane just catching him a final cut as he gained the doorway. Next moment there was a crash and a series of howls.

In his blind haste Blake had not seen Herries and Digby approaching Knox's door. But he was aware of their close proximity a second later as he crashed into them, and they were painfully aware of his.

Bump!

"Whoop!" howled Digby.

Bump!

"Yooooooo!" roared Herries.

Bump!

"Yow-wow!" gasped Blake.

The three juniors sprawled in the passage, gasping.

Next moment fresh roars rent the air, for Kildare chanced to come along the Sixth Form passage, and he stared unbelievably as he saw three Fourth-Formers sprawled there.

Swish, swish, swish!

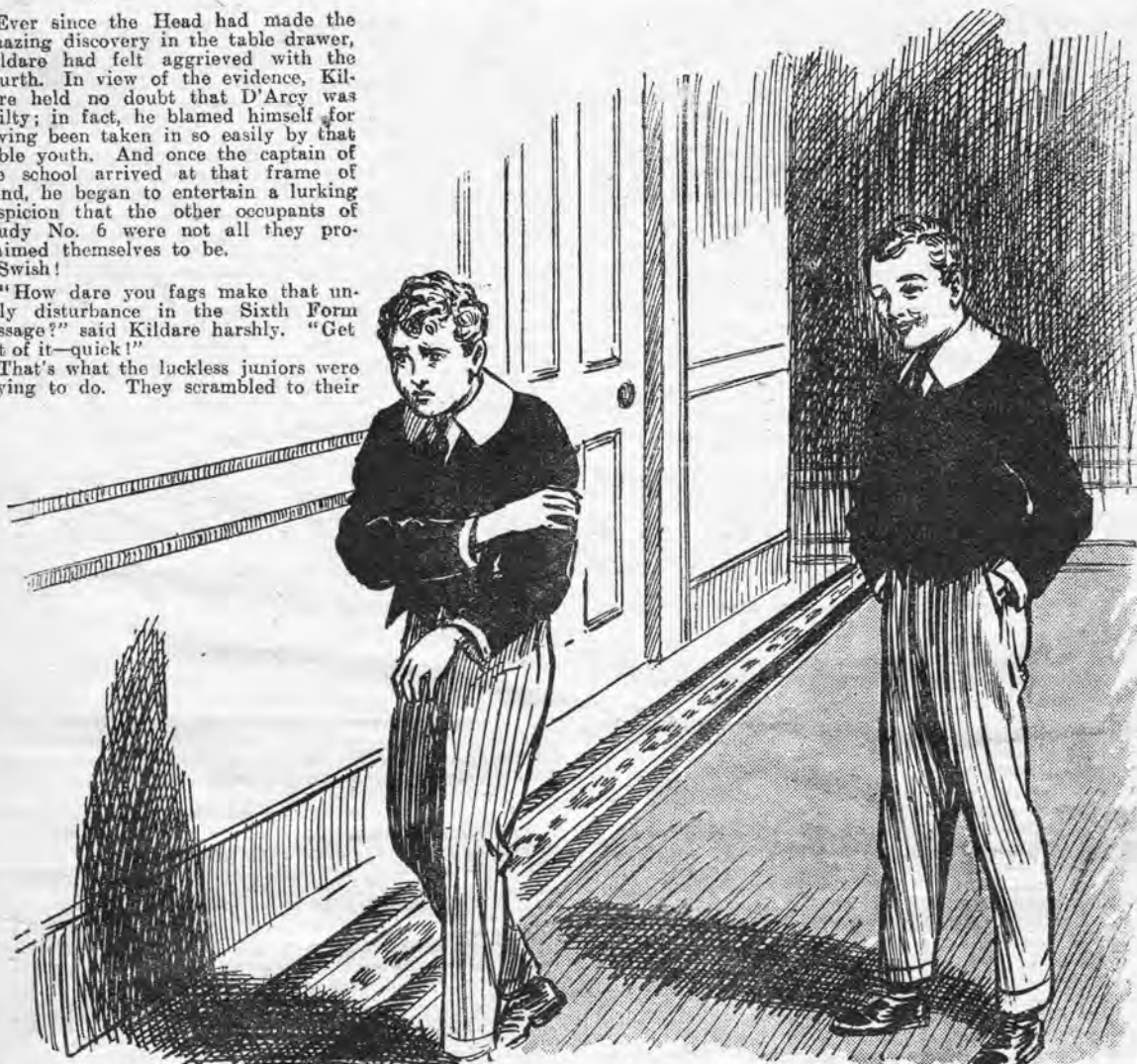
The captain of the school was naturally indignant. The Sixth Form passage was certainly not the place for Lower School boys to indulge their high spirits. He waded in with the ashplant with right good will, and doubtless he put more vim into that castigation than he otherwise would have done when he observed that the juniors were the study-mates of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Ever since the Head had made the amazing discovery in the table drawer, Kildare had felt aggrieved with the Fourth. In view of the evidence, Kildare held no doubt that D'Arcy was guilty; in fact, he blamed himself for having been taken in so easily by that noble youth. And once the captain of the school arrived at that frame of mind, he began to entertain a lurking suspicion that the other occupants of Study No. 6 were not all they proclaimed themselves to be.

Swish!

"How dare you fags make that unholy disturbance in the Sixth Form passage?" said Kildare harshly. "Get out of it—quick!"

That's what the luckless juniors were trying to do. They scrambled to their



Joe Frayne crawled along the passage with tear-dimmed eyes, hardly seeing Jack Blake as that junior came along. "Hallo, young 'un," said Blake cheerily. "Had a licking?" "But the fag passed on unheeding. (See Chapter 4.)

feet and bolted for dear life, and Kildare, tucking his ashplant under his arm, walked on.

Meantime, Blake & Co. were limping painfully into their study, and as the door closed upon them three dismal groans went ceilingwards.

"Ow!"

"Wow!"

"Yow!"

Those heart-stirring groans had hardly left the luckless trio's lips when the study door opened and Tom Merry & Co., of the Shell, looked in.

They started as they saw Blake & Co. contorting themselves into all manner of peculiar and unnatural positions.

"What the thump's this game, you men?" inquired Tom Merry.

And the answer came in unison:

"Yow!"

"Wow!"

"Ow!"

CHAPTER 5.

The Mixture!

THE captain of the Shell scratched his head.

Monty Lowther chuckled.

Harry Manners smiled.

But Blake & Co. seemed hardly conscious of the presence of Tom Merry & Co. They writhed and moaned for several seconds before they realised that this outward and visible sign of grief was hardly in keeping with the stoical fortitude expected of the Fourth when in the presence of the Shell.

Herries was the first to comport himself into a natural attitude, although his face twitched now and again.

"What the thump do you Shell fellows want?" he asked crossly.

Tom Merry's face became grave at once.

"We've just heard some of Trimble's tittle-tattle—" he began.

"That old Gussy's booked for expulsion—" added Manners uncomfortably.

"For looking upon the wine when it was crimson, and inhaling the subtle fumes of the fragrant weed," added Monty Lowther, with refreshing unconcern. "Of course it's all bunkum!"

Herries was silent for the moment, and Blake and Digby forgot their aches and pains as recollection of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's plight came back to them.

"It's true and it isn't true," said Herries slowly.

"Is that a conundrum?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Shut up, Monty," said Tom Merry. "This isn't a time for joking, you ass!"

"Sorry," replied Monty Lowther urbanely. "I thought it was. If it isn't, then I shall begin to think that the noble Gustavus has indeed been playing the giddy ox!"

"Can it!" snapped Blake. "Gussy's in a deuce of a hole, and how we're going to get him out of it, I can't for the life of me imagine."

Whereupon he explained what had transpired at the Head's inspection, to the astonishment of the Shell juniors. "I say, this is jolly serious," observed Tom Merry gravely. "Of course, Gussy hasn't departed from the straight and narrow path"—he coloured uncomfortably—"I mean, he hasn't been tempted to join the merry blades."

"Which, from the way you say it, suggests that you think he has," said Herries wrathfully. "Look here, Tom Merry, we believe in Gussy. He's several sorts of an ass I'll agree."

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He's done some thumping silly things in his time; I'll agree on that, too. But he's never played the fool with smokes and drinking."

"I—I know—"

"And anybody who dares to say he has," added Blake darkly, "will find a fight on his hands."

Tom Merry held up a hand pacifically.

"Keep your wool on, chaps," he said. "We're only trying to get at the facts. You know well enough that we're out to help Gussy. We must get a word with him if we can."

Blake shook his head.

"It's no go; old Darrell is on sentry go," he said. "No one's allowed to have any communication with old Gussy."

"I say, it's awfully rough on Gussy," said Tom Merry at length. "I suppose the smokes and the whisky didn't belong to that rotter Knox. We know he's a shady black-guard."

"You go and ask Knox yourself!" growled Blake, and he explained what had happened in the prefect's study a short time since.

"Phew!" whistled the captain of the Shell when Blake had finished. "Do you mean to say you had the awful nerve to ask a prefect a point-blank question like that?"

Blake nodded morosely.

"I'm not surprised that Knoxy-woxy saw red," said Monty Lowther. "Is that why the three of you were making the study air hideous with your moans?" he added.

"Can it!" exclaimed Blake. "These silly asses ran into me as I dodged out of Knox's study—"

"Well, of all the thumping cheek—" began Herries indignantly.

"You mean you barged into us and sent us flying!" roared Digby.

Blake shrugged his shoulders.

"And to finish the story, Kildare came along and piled in with his ashplant for causing a row in the Sixth Form passage," he said.

The Shell juniors looked sympathetic.

"Rough luck!" commiserated Tom Merry.

"Rotten!" contributed Manners and Lowther.

"The question that matters," said Blake seriously, "is how are we going to help Gussy?"

The juniors were silent.

"We can't do anything until we get a word with the ass," muttered Blake. "We shall have to wait until to-night."

"You mean one of us sneak down during the night when everyone's abed, and yarn with him then?" asked Herries.

"That's the only way," admitted Blake. "In my own heart I feel certain that Knox is at the bottom of this affair. I'd like to give that rotter the ragging of his life!"

"Nothing to stop you making a start," said Monty Lowther thoughtfully.

Blake looked at the humorist of the Shell sharply.

"What do you mean?"

Monty Lowther grinned.

"The rotter's come down extra heavy on us this last few days," he said, "so I took the trouble of making something extra special in the way of booby-traps for his benefit."

"Well, where do we come in, you ass?" inquired Blake.

Monty Lowther heaved a deep sigh.

"It's this way," he explained. "Tommy and I had just finished preparing that booby-trap—a lovely mixture of soot, treacle, feathers, stale jam, and enough ink and water to make it run nicely—when old Railton happened to look in."

Tom Merry took up the tale.

"Railton wanted to see me about the junior footer fixtures for next month," he said. "The old bird saw what we were making in the pail Monty had on the study table and affected not to notice it, like the good sport he is—"

"But if a prefect gets swamped with the stuff," went on Monty Lowther, having got his second wind, so to speak, "old Railton will know for a cert who did it."

Blake's brow was puzzled.

"I still don't see where we come in," he said.

Monty Lowther tapped his head.

"It's there where you Fourth Form duffers want it," he said, with a chuckle. "In the circumstances we can't make use of the lovely mixture, made especially for Master Gerald Knox. But there's nothing to stop any chap raiding our booby-trap and making use of it, is there?"

Blake grinned, and Herries and Digby looked interested. "There's something in that wheeze," admitted the former. "That rotter Knox wants a lesson. I ache all over where his blessed ashplant caught me."

"Well, you're welcome to the mixture," said Lowther generously. "You'll find it in a bucket underneath our study table. I can't say fairer than that."

Blake's grin deepened.

"It won't take a sec to swamp the stuff over him," he muttered thoughtfully. "Lemme see, there's a landing close by the rotter's study."

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Monty Lowther chuckled.

"And it only wants two chaps to do the job," he said. "The gas is turned out in the passage; the chap with the booby trap stands ready; another chap keeps a watch on Knox's study from the far end of the passage, and when he sees the rotter come out, all he's got to do is to give a signal. Then—hey presto! The deed is done!"

Blake rubbed his hands together in great satisfaction.

"I'll teach the rotter to handle me!" he said darkly. "Perhaps a few doses of that sort of treatment will get the truth out of him concerning Gussy's plight. Anyway, a sample of the treatment will do the rotter good."

Herries and Digby did not share in Blake's enthusiasm to the same extent. They were always pleased to join in any rag on the rascally Sixth-Former, but their thoughts just now were of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. True, they could do little until they had established communication with him. Blake, however, was wildly enthusiastic over the scheme.

"Which of you fellows will give me a hand?" he asked.

And Digby and Herries loyally answered together:

"I will!"

The leader of Study No. 6 grinned cheerfully.

"Only want one of you," he said. "Toss for it!"

Herries and Digby tossed for it, and Herries won.

"Right-ho, Herries old scout!" said Blake. "We'll cut along and bag that precious mixture now."

Monty Lowther gave Manners and Tom Merry a knowing glance.

"We'd better be off the premises when Blake bags our mixture," he said. "Shall we trot along and see if we can get a word with Gussy?"

"Might as well try," said Tom Merry; "but I don't think we shall have any luck if Darrell's on the look-out."

"Let's try, anyway, old scout!"

And the Terrible Three departed, what time Blake and Herries sauntered along to Study No. 10 in the Shell passage to bag the precious mixture. They found it, as Monty Lowther had said, under the study table. Five minutes later, unnoticed by any Shell or Fourth Form junior, that pair of fearsome contents had been smuggled into Study No. 6.

"Shove it under the table for the time being," said Blake, with a chuckle. "We'll hang on for a quarter of an hour, that's the time Knox starts his round of duty for the night."

And Blake and Herries hung on, keeping one eye on the clock.

If all went well Gerald Knox was going to receive the biggest shock of his life.

A few minutes before it was time for Knox to start his evening's duty two Fourth-Formers could be seen making their way towards the Sixth Form quarters. One of them carried a pail that might or might not have led any chance corner to jump to the conclusion that these two juniors were engaged on the task of replenishing the fire-buckets.

But, fortunately for Blake and Herries; they encountered no one on that mission to the Sixth. Cautiously Blake mounted the staircase, dragging the well-laden bucket with him, whilst Herries, having turned out the light, crept to the far end of a "blind" passage, the only exit from which was the box-room window. When the "dirty" deed was done, Herries' plan was to shin down a drain-pipe that ran alongside the window-ledge of the box-room and make his way back to Study No. 6.

Blake, in the safety of the darkened landing, was to wait until Herries whistled the opening bars of "It Ain't Gonna Rain No More." That was the signal to tell Blake that Knox had left his study, and was proceeding along the passage which was bound to bring him in line with the landing. And as Blake crouched against the wall and felt the handle of the bucket close beside him he could not restrain a subdued chuckle. A few minutes now, and, if all went well, Gerald Knox was going to get the surprise of his life.

If all went well!

CHAPTER 6.

The Wrong Victim!

"I SAY, you fellows—"

Baggy Trimble of the Fourth burst into Study No. 3 in the Shell passage in great excitement.

"Get out!" George Alfred Grundy made a peremptory gesture and followed it up with a peremptory command, as the fat Fourth-Former stood on the threshold of his study. Wilkins and Gunn, who were seated at the table playing chess, echoed Grundy's command.

"Get out!"

But Baggy Trimble did not get out. He was simply bursting with news. Ever since the Head's inspection—ever since the discovery of whisky and cigarettes in the possession of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy—the fat junior had rushed around the Shell studies, eager to impart the news.

In the Fourth it had spread rapidly, but there were still fellows in the Shell who were in ignorance of it.

Baggy Trimble had burst into Study No. 10 with the news, but Tom Merry & Co. had bundled him out quicker than he had come in. He had burst into Study No. 8, where Boulton and Walkeley, two quiet members of the Shell, for once in their lives, had been roused to indignation and activity that Trimble, of all people, should state openly that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the Fourth, was addicted to drink, and that he smoked.

Once again Baggy Trimble had been bundled neck and crop out of the study. But the fat junior was a stickler. That nobody believed his extraordinary tale was not surprising; for Trimble was known to be a born fabricator, and Arthur Augustus was known to be the model of behaviour.

Up and down the Shell passage Trimble had rushed, waxing more indignant at each successive bad reception he received, but still eager to impart the astounding news. Once Trimble really did possess news that was true, he was in danger of bursting unless he passed it on.

Thus the occupants of Study No. 3's injunction to make himself scarce fell on deaf ears. Baggy Trimble advanced farther into the study.

"I say, you fellows!" he gasped. "What do you think? Gussy's been caught drinking!"

"What?"

Even Grundy, Wilkins, and Gunn could not let that staggering piece of news pass without showing some interest.

Baggy Trimble grinned.

"It's true!" he exclaimed. "Caught in the act, you know! Head found a bottle of whisky, half empty, in the table drawer, and a whole box of cigars." Trimble never could keep to the straight path of veracity. "And Gussy owned up that they were his—"

"You awful young scoundrel!" roared George Alfred Grundy, leaping to his feet. "How dare you spread such yarns about the school!"

But the fat Fourth-Former paid no heed to the danger signals that were gathering on Grundy's rugged forehead.

"Fact, you know! He, he, he!" he cackled. "I always thought D'Arcy was a black sheep. Couldn't pull the wool over my eyes, you know. Shouldn't be surprised if Blake and the others were in it. Two bottles of whisky and a bottle—I mean a couple of boxes of cigars in the table drawer. What do you think of it? He, he, he! Yooop!"

Trimble's fat cackination came to an abrupt end as Grundy caught him by the collar and banged his bullet-head against the wall.

"Whooooooh!" roared Trimble. "Stoppit, you rotter!"

But Grundy did not stop it. He banged Trimble's bullet-head on the hard wall, not once but three times. Then, with Gunn and Wilkins' aid, he threw the fat junior of the Fourth into the Shell passage.

Trimble landed hard up against the opposite wall with a bump and a roar.

"Yaroooooh!"

He roared still more when Grundy picked up a Latin grammar and shied it at him.

"Yowp!"

The book, although it was not originally intended for such a purpose, make an excellent cricket ball. It found the wicket, so to speak, with deadly accuracy—the wicket being Trimble's podgy nose.

"Yoooop! You rotters! Grooooooh!"

Trimble sat there, howling and roaring, until he saw Grundy pick up the poker. That was enough for Trimble. He scrambled to his feet and made off down the passage at a great rate. Altogether his "news" had not earned him very much "ha'pence," so to speak, although indubitably it had brought him plenty of "kicks."

At a safe distance from Study No. 3, Baggy Trimble paused to draw in breath.

"Yah! Rotters!" he roared valiantly. "I'd lick 'em all for two pins!"

And with that glorious boast falling from his podgy lips Baggy Trimble rolled away to his own quarters.

He passed Toby, the pageboy, on the way, and a sight of what Toby was carrying made the fat Fourth-Former's mouth water.

"Who's the hamper for, Toby?"

The pageboy grinned.

"Which it's for Master Knox of the Sixth!" he answered. Baggy Trimble's eyes glistened and his mouth watered.

"I'll take it along to Knox if you like, Toby," he said, with as much carelessness as he could muster in the presence of that hamper. "Save you a journey, you know. Always ready to help the working classes, Toby," he added loftily.

Toby, forgetful of position at that moment, felt an almost irresistible temptation to kick the fat junior. But he manfully conquered that very natural feeling.

"Which, with due respects to you, Master Trimble, I'd rather deliver this 'ere 'amper myself."

"Just as you like," replied Trimble, with a great show of dignity. "Some of you menials are never grateful for any recognition from the upper classes."

Again came that irresistible desire to Toby to kick Baggy Trimble, and again he manfully fought it down, and proceeded on his way.

"Common cad!" breathed Trimble, as the pageboy trudged on. "Blessed if I don't see that he does deliver that hamper at Knox's study."

Which was Trimble's way of satisfying himself that the hamper was indeed for Knox and a justification for tracking it to its lair, as it were.

Unconscious that he was being followed, Toby approached Knox's study and tapped at the door.

"Come in!"

Toby entered.

"Amper just arrived for you, Master Knox," he said, and lingered, doubtless with a view to receiving a tip. But Knox of the Sixth was never generous with his tips. Indeed, he had been known to give Taggles, the school porter, a single sixpence at the end of Christmas term for all the services Taggles had rendered him. And it was rumoured in the Lower School that Taggles, in great disgust, had nailed that sixpence to the door of his lodge for all the world to see.

Certainly if Toby expected a tip he was destined to be disappointed. Knox, looking up from the hamper, frowned as he saw that the pageboy was still in the study.

"You need not wait, Toby," he said ungraciously.

"No, sir, certainly not, sir," said Toby, in some confusion.

"I mean, very good, sir!"

And he departed with a grimace that fortunately was made when his back was to Gerald Knox of the Sixth.

From the shelter of a doorway Trimble watched the pageboy disappear from view. Then, with quickening heart beats, the fat junior observed Knox stride out of his study and make his way towards the Fifth Form quarters.

That decided Baggy Trimble.

(Continued on next page.)



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In two seconds he was within Knox's study. In three he was turning out some of the choice contents of the hamper. In four the most delectable contents were finding their way into his capacious mouth.

And for at least five minutes Baggy Trimble was busy and happy and shiny.

"Oh crumbs!"

The tread of feet in the passage without, that had a familiar ring about them, warned Baggy that in his greed he had overlooked the passage of time and the possibility of Knox's early return.

He paused with half a veal-and-ham pie to his mouth.

To be caught in the act of rifling a prefect's hamper was a heinous offence. Doubtless Trimble would receive a flogging if Knox chose to report the matter to Dr. Holmes. But Trimble had a feeling at the bottom of his heart that Knox would not report such a delinquency. He would deal with the matter himself, which, from the fat junior's point of view, was ten times worse than a flogging at the hands of the Head.

"Oh dear!"

Trimble quaked in terror for the space of a few seconds. Then he slammed home the lid of the hamper. In each prefect's room was an alcove that served as a bed-room. The alcove was screened from the study proper by means of a heavy velvet curtain.

With remarkable rapidity for a fellow of his excessive bulk, Baggy Trimble, still with the portion of veal-and-ham pie clutched in his grubby hand, jumped for that curtain. He tore it aside, steadied it, and waited there in the darkness of the alcove with beating heart.

A moment later and Gerald Knox entered the study. He was accompanied by another whom Trimble was at a loss to identify at that moment. Followed the click of a key turning in the lock and the scraping of chairs.

Next moment came the voice of Cutts of the Fifth.

The black sheep of the Fifth was on good terms with Gerald Knox, an association that gave him many privileges in the matter of breaking bounds and indulging in other pastimes contrary to the rules of the school. For his part Knox found Cutts a useful "sportsman" to cultivate, for the Fifth-Former was well supplied with money, and he seemed to have no particular aversion to losing a considerable amount of it regularly to his "friend in the Sixth."

"That's a jolly good hamper you have there," said Cutts genially.

"Not bad, is it?" smiled Knox. "I thought we'd have a little feed as a preliminary to our jaunt to-night."

Cutts smiled, and then his face clouded.

"Do you think we shall be safe to-night?" he asked, in a whisper that only just reached the alert ears of Baggy Trimble.

"Why not?"

"Well, Kildare's been on the prowl. He's spoken to Lefevre of the Fifth and told him that it has come to his knowledge that seniors are breaking bounds at night. Told him to keep a watchful eye open."

Knox smiled.

He had run the risk so often of breaking bounds that an extra vigilance on the part of the captain of the school held no terrors for him. But it did for Cutts.

"Oh, don't worry about Kildare. He's too pi for words!" said Knox. "We'll have a good game to-night. Banks is getting a crowd of his friends down at the Green Man. Expect the play will be fast and furious."

"Oh!" Cutts showed more interest in the contents of the hamper than the preparations Mr. Banks was making for his benefit. "I say, did you get my bottle of whisky and the smokes?" he asked as an afterthought.

Knox's brow clouded.

"There's been a whole fuss made about that blessed whisky," he said. "The fag I sent for it met that meddling fool D'Arcy and gave it to him."

Cutts started.

"D'Arcy! What the thump did he want with it? Didn't know young D'Arcy was a goer!"

Knox snarled.

"Goer? That young prig? I don't know what he wanted the things for, but he took 'em, and they've landed him in trouble. May get the sack, for all I know."

"Oh gad!" Cutts' face paled. "I say, that's a bit thick, isn't it?" he ventured.

Knox shrugged his shoulders.

"Can't be helped," he remarked easily. "If the truth comes out you and I will get the bullet. Can't waste any sympathy on that meddling hound D'Arcy."

"But supposing the truth does come out?" said Cutts, in a low voice.

Knox laughed.

"It won't. Never fear! Of course, if you like to go to the Head and tell him that the bottle was for you, well—" he concluded with an expressive shrug of the shoulders.

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"Oh, don't be a fool," said Cutts nervously. "I'm not likely to ask for the sack like that. But it's a bit thick if D'Arcy gets the sack."

Knox yawned.

"Well, let's forget it," he said with a smile. "Pile in. This rabbit-pie is the goods. Sorry there's nothing better than water to wash it down."

Trimble quaked with excitement. He knew now how the incriminating whisky and cigarettes had come to be discovered by Dr. Holmes, and wondered whether, knowing Knox's secret, it would be safe for him to show himself boldly, and march out of the prefect's study. But second thoughts, proverbially the best, cautioned him to stay where he was.

It seemed an interminable wait, and the fat Fourth-Former shivered with apprehensions lest his presence should be discovered. But at last Cutts rose to go.

"You'll meet me at the pass gate at a quarter past twelve," he said to Cutts, and the Fifth-Former, for what reason he could not say, answered neither in the negative or the affirmative.

To Trimble's ears came the sound of the lock being turned, the door being opened. Then, peeping through the curtains, the fat Fourth-Former saw Gerald Knox seat himself beside the study fire with a volume of the classics in his hands. Inside the volume, however, was a carefully folded pink sporting paper, which could be concealed at the reader's will. That little subterfuge was for the especial benefit of any master, or the Head, if either chanced to look into the study.

Trimble waited in an agony of suspense. Would Knox never leave the study? And then a comforting thought came to the fat junior; he remembered that Knox was on duty that night, and would of a certainty be leaving his study very shortly now to go his usual rounds.

But, for all that, it seemed an interminably long time before anything happened in the study.

There was a sudden tap at the door.

"Come in!" sang out Knox agreeably, snapping his volume of the classics shut. But the agreeable smile that was forming on his crafty features died a sudden death when, the door opening, Eric Kildare, the captain of the school, stood framed in the threshold.

"Oh!" growled Knox unpleasantly. "What do you want?"

"Nothing that will keep you long," answered Kildare curtly. "I've just received notice from Mr. Railton that villagers report having seen scholars belonging to this school in the vicinity of the Green Man after lights out."

"Really!" yawned Knox. "Village gossip, I expect; nothing in it, what?"

Kildare frowned.

"I don't know," he said. "But all prefects are instructed to keep a sharp look-out. We can't have the school talked about like this."

Knox yawned again.

"Well, if there is any truth in the report," he said languidly, "I expect we need look no further than the Fourth Form passage."

"What do you mean?"

Knox grinned unpleasantly.

"Since that young rascal D'Arcy has been bowled out, I fancy it's only a matter of time before we bowl out his young scoundrels of studymates. Perhaps they are the giddy culprits breaking bounds at night and frequenting the Green Man."

"Perhaps, and perhaps not," said Kildare slowly. "I fancy not. The report is to the effect that senior boys are the delinquents."

Knox yawned again, signifying that he had no wish to prolong the interview, and Kildare, with a quick look at him, turned on his heel. He strode along the passage at a quick pace, and simultaneously the opening bars of the old song, "It Ain't Gonna Rain No More!" reached his ears. Kildare frowned, wondering who it was disturbing the quietness of the Sixth Form passage, and then dismissed it from his mind.

Up on the landing Blake of the Fourth waited with beating heart. The moment the first strains of Herries' signal had reached him, Blake moved from the dark gloom of the wall to the balustrade, taking the bucket with him. It was the work of a second to steady the filled bucket on the rail of the balustrade. To his alert ears came approaching footsteps.

All unsuspecting, Knox of the Sixth was walking into the trap prepared for him—so thought Jack Blake.

He tried to make out the figure approaching, but it was too dark. He heard a muffled voice, as Kildare, noticing now he was out of the radius of light afforded from Knox's study, that the gas was out in the passage, fumbled in his pocket for a match.

It was the moment for which Blake had waited. Swoooooosh!

"Phew!" whistled the captain of the Shell.

"Of all the luck!" breathed Monty Lowther, with a dismal shake of the head.

"Putrid!" said Manners. "I hope to goodness the Head doesn't take the worst view of the case."

The Terrible Three nodded, but their hearts were heavy. In silence they left the study and moved along to the Head's study. At a convenient distance from that sacred apartment they waited.

Meantime Darrell had escorted Herries and Digby into the presence of Dr. Holmes.

There was an unusually hard and severe expression on the features of the kind old Head as the two juniors entered. Blake was standing at attention by the table. There was a strained look on his face that touched the hearts of his chums.

"You boys know why I have sent for you?" said the Head angrily. "It is obvious to me that this wretched youth Blake could not have perpetrated that scandalous outrage unaided."

"Digby—" began Blake, in an endeavour to inform the Head that that youth was not an active party in the booby-trap episode.

"Silence!" rapped Dr. Holmes imperiously.

"We—we were all in it," said Digby loyally. "Only Blake was caught!"

And Herries added:

"We were all in it, sir!"

Dr. Holmes' brow grew thunderous. In his wrath he struck the desk before him with a clenched fist.

"Such abominable treatment of the captain of the school, of a prefect, is unparalleled!" he said, with gleaming eyes. "Such unruly, outrageous behaviour on the part of Lower School boys is deplorable and iniquitous."

"But, sir—" began Blake.

The Head waved him to silence with a magnificent gesture.

"I am deeply grieved and pained that such defiance and lack of respect to those in authority should be rife amongst boys in whom I had always placed the greatest trust."

"But, sir—" began Blake helplessly.

"Silence!" boomed the Head. "Do you not understand the respect that is due to your headmaster? Wretched boys," he went on, turning again to Herries and Digby, "I am afraid that you are as wicked and as deceitful as the boy D'Arcy. But I will not tolerate this loose behaviour any longer. To-morrow morning you boys will be publicly flogged and expelled from St. Jim's."

Blake, Herries and Digby quailed. They felt the earth moving beneath their feet.

Expelled!

"I must speak out, sir!" stammered Blake. "That—that mixture, sir, was not meant for old Kildare. Honest Injun, sir!"

Dr. Holmes looked at the Fourth-Former with gleaming eyes.

"Boy, are you seeking to evade your punishment by recourse to prevarication?" he demanded.

"Nunno, sir!" answered Blake. "But it wasn't meant for Kildare. We wouldn't dream of swamping him, sir!"

"Indeed!" said the Head coldly. "Then for whom, may I ask, was this diabolical plot schemed and carried out?"

"For—for—" began Blake, and then he stopped. By explaining that the mixture was intended for Gerald Knox, a prefect, would not lessen the offence in the eyes of the Head. Swamping a prefect was not far removed from swamping the head prefect.

The Head watched Blake's working face, with a scornful expression hardening his eyes.

"For whom?" he prompted quietly.

But Blake was silent. He gave his chums an imploring glance; they understood his position, and their feelings were sympathetic. That the Head was dealing very drastically with them, they knew; more drastically, perhaps, than the offence warranted. Yet they knew that D'Arcy's supposed offence had made all the difference to Dr. Holmes' judgment in their case. The kind old Head was now doubtless of the opinion that in the members of Study No. 6 he had been nurturing four of the most hardened and rebellious boys under his charge. He was determined to make an example of them as a warning to the rest of the school. And this strange tangle of affairs had come about through the good intentions of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in the first place.

"Darrell," said the Head curtly, "you will take these wretched boys to the punishment-room. I will come with you."

"Yes, sir!"

Darrell marched out of the study and, with bowed shoulders, Blake & Co. followed him. The Head brought up the rear.

Quite a crowd of juniors had congregated in the passage, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,047.

for Trimble's news this time had been believed, so many facts being in support of it. There was a hush amongst the juniors as the Head rustled by.

From a safe distance Tom Merry & Co. watched the procession halt at the punishment-room; saw the Head unlock the door and saw the chums of Study No. 6 pass into Nobody's Study.

Then came the clicking of the lock as the Head turned the key. Monteith, the prefect of the New House, was on duty in the passage and he wished his ashplant as Tom Merry & Co. unconsciously approached.

"Clear," rapped Monteith, "unless you fags want a taste of this ashplant!"

And Tom Merry & Co., seeing Dr. Holmes and Darrell returning, wisely "cleared."

The junior Common-room that night was a seething riot of discussion, the topics being the swamping of Kildare and the finding of the bottle of whisky and the cigarettes in Study No. 6.

It was the sensation of the term, and it was discussed breathlessly and ceaselessly on all sides.

All news travels quickly, thus it became common know-



ledge long before bed-time that the chums of Study No. 6 were under sentence of a public flogging and expulsion; and no heart was heavier or more concerned than Joe Frayne's. That unhappy youth waged a war within himself that brought him the tortures of the damned.

It was a bitter struggle, but right triumphed over evil. At all costs, Frayne told himself, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, at any rate, must not be expelled. What he was to do to prevent that, the fag of the Third was at a loss to know, for by clearing the swell of the Fourth it meant taking his position himself. But one thing Frayne was decided upon—he must tell someone, someone perhaps who could help. And as he arrived at that decision Joe Frayne started off for Study No. 10 in the Shell passage, to lay the facts before Tom Merry.

CHAPTER 8.

A Snare for Knox!

"MAY I come in, Master Merry?" It was a tremulous voice that roused Tom Merry & Co. from their thoughts as they sat in Study No. 10 just before bed-time that night. Tom looked up, and the hard expression on his hand-

some face changed to a friendly welcome as he saw Joe Frayne of the Third.

"Come in, young 'un!"

Frayne came in. The fag was obviously in a state of great agitation, and the Terrible Three looked at him curiously.

"What's the trouble, Joe?" asked Tom Merry kindly.

"Stumped over your Latin?"

Frayne shook his head.

Often when he was stumped over the perplexities of the Latin tongue he would come to Tom Merry for enlight-

enment, which the junior captain, who liked the one-time wail, readily gave.

"It's not Latin this time, Master Tom. Something much worse."

And without beating about the bush young Joe Frayne told his tale.



Suddenly a light gleamed in the passage from the gas, and it revealed the figure of the escaping junior to George Darrell. The prefect, who had just arrived on the scene, saw Kildare gasping in a pool of black mixture, and saw Blake with the pail. The next moment Darrell was running up the stairs. "Stop!" he yelled. "Blake! Stop!" (See Chapter 6.)

Tom Merry & Co. heard him in silence until he had finished.

"Knox!" muttered the captain of the Shell thoughtfully. "I must say I'm not surprised."

"Neither am I," said Monty Lowther. "But, as Frayne says, Knox will lie like the very dickens if Frayne tells the facts to the Head."

"The awful rotter!" exclaimed Manners indignantly. "He ought to be sacked!"

Tom Merry nodded, and his face set grim.

"He ought to be!" he said. "But we're going to see that Gussy doesn't get sacked, anyway."

Joe Frayne looked relieved.

"Do you think you can manage it, Master Tom?" he asked.

"We're going to make a dashed good effort," was the reply. "Meantime, kid, just hang on and keep your mouth closed."

With a grateful glance at the chums of Study No. 10, Joe Frayne withdrew considerably easier in his mind. When he was gone Monty Lowther looked at Tom Merry inquiringly.

"How are you going to work the oracle, Tommy?" he asked.

"I don't know yet," replied Tom. "But perhaps we'd better see Knox."

There was a silence in the study, each member of the Terrible Three being busy with his own thoughts.

Tap!

"Come in!" sang out Tom Merry, as that tap came at the door.

And Trimble, who for once in his life had remembered to knock at a door before entering, came into view.

The faces of the Terrible Three looked grim as the fat junior appeared. None of them was in the mood for Trimble's fascinating society just then.

"I say, Tom Merry," said Trimble mysteriously. "You do me a good turn, and I'll do you a good turn—see?"

"Eh?"

"I know what I know," went on Trimble complacently.

"If it's worth the loan of a quid—a loan, mind you—to get old Gussy saved from the sack, I'm your mutton!"

The Terrible Three looked at Trimble as if he might have been a curious specimen from a museum.

"What on earth are you burbling about?" asked Tom Merry crossly.

Trimble grinned.

"I haven't been in that rotter Knox's study for nothing," he said, with a fat chuckle. "I heard it all!"

Tom Merry gave his chums a warning glance. He recalled how Trimble had been the first to know of Blake's capture, which rather indicated that the fat junior had been on the scene when the swamping of Kildare had happened.

"What did you hear, old fat man?" asked Tom quietly.

"Never mind about that yet," said Trimble cautiously. "I happen to be stony at the moment, and I'm in urgent need of a quid to help me through—see? Now, if you'll oblige me with a loan for a day or two I'll put you on to a wheeze for getting Gussy cleared."

As Trimble made that magnificent offer he drew himself up to his full podgy height.

"If it's a wheeze that's workable," said Tom Merry, "you can count on me for a quid, Trimble."

Trimble smirked.

"Honest Injun?"

"Honest Injun!" replied the captain of the Shell.

Whereupon the fat Fourth-Former told of all that had passed in Knox's study that evening. Tom Merry saw the salient points straight away.

"You're sure Knox is going to the Green Man to-night, fatty?"

"Absolutely!" exclaimed Trimble. "I heard him say so with my own eyes—I mean, my ears. He's leaving the school by the pass-gate at a quarter-past twelve."

"Oh, good!" breathed Tom Merry. Already a scheme was being born in his mind; a scheme which he felt would be successful if Trimble's information was to be relied upon.

"What's the wheeze, Thomas?" asked Monty Lowther, as he saw the muscles working in his chum's face.

"Tell you later," said Tom, whose thoughts were far away.

Trimble waited a moment, and then coughed.

"I say, what about the quid you promised me?" he jerked out.

Tom Merry came back to earth with a start. He pulled a pound note out of his pocket and handed it to the fat junior.

"There you are, Trimble," he said.

The Falstaff of the Fourth took the Treasury note greedily.

"Of course, it's only a loan," he smirked. "I'll pay you back when—"

Tom Merry waved a hand.

"That's all right, fatty," he said. "You're welcome to it. If we can manage to save old Gussy, it will be cheap at the price."

At which Baggy Trimble could have kicked himself for not having requested the "loan" of five pounds.

"Now travel!" said Tom curtly. "I want to think."

And Baggy Trimble, the richer by a pound, promptly travelled.

"See the idea, you chaps?" said Tom Merry, when the door was closed.

"Blessed if I do!" exclaimed Lowther, completely mystified.

"My camera—" began Manners thoughtfully.

Tom Merry grinned.

"You've got it, old scout—your camera. We'll be at the Green Man when that rotter Knox starts his blagging to-night. It'll be quite easy to smuggle ourselves on the balcony there."

"Oh, I've got it!" said Monty Lowther. "We'll wait until the merry blades get going, then old Manners will do

the giddy trick with his camera. Then we've got evidence that'll force Knox's hand."

"You've got it!" exclaimed Tom. "And I fancy it will work, too. Knox can lie all along the line and get away with it, when there's no evidence to involve him. But a nice little picture with Knox going the whole hog with his rotten pals at the Green Man will alter the complexion of things. If Knox doesn't put Gussy right with the Head, I'm a Dutchman."

"But how will he do that?" queried Manners.

"Blessed if I know!" admitted Tom. "But that's his look-out. Knox is not the sort of chap to jib at a few lies. However, that's his affair. As long as we get Gussy out of the mire that's all that matters."

"And what about Blake and the others?" asked Monty Lowther. "How do we help them?"

"That also is up to Knox," said Tom Merry. "It's through him that they're under sentence of the sack. He'll have to put that right, too! I'm not a bit concerned about that rotter Knox. Blow him!"

"Blow him! Burn him if you like," said Monty Lowther. "But I can't see this wheeze coming off."

Tom Merry chuckled.

"Don't be pessimistic, my son," he remarked. "Let's try it out, anyway."

"Well, I'm game!" exclaimed Manners.

"Count me in, too!" said Monty Lowther.

And so it was settled. And if Knox of the Sixth could have known of the trap that was being laid for his especial benefit he would not have felt so pleased with himself when, seeing lights-out in the Fourth Form dormitory, he grinned at the vacant beds belonging to the chums of Study No. 6.

CHAPTER 9.

Gussy Objects!

"THIS is wotten!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy made that remark in tones of deep disgust, and Herries, Blake, and Digby nodded in sympathy.

"Absolutely wotten!"

It was rotten; there was no doubt about that. The chums of Study No. 6 eyed each other gloomily. It was about an hour since the Head had passed sentence on them for the swamping of Kildare.

Arthur Augustus had had the shock of his life when the door of Nobody's Study had been opened to admit his bosom chums, and, although he was glad of their company in that dismal apartment, he was very much distressed to learn that, like himself, they were under sentence of a public flogging and expulsion.

"That wottah Knox!" he exclaimed, hitting out at an imaginary Knox in his anger. "Bai Jove, I wish I had the wottah heah for five minutes!"

That's what Blake, Herries, and Digby were wishing.

The chums stared about their narrow prison gloomily. Four trundle beds now filled, or almost filled, Nobody's Study, for the Head had seen fit to keep these sentenced youths together. There was no fire in the small fireplace, and the flickering gas jet pendant from the ceiling revealed a narrow window with four transverse bars that gave a very scant view of the quad many feet below.

More than once the chums of Study No. 6 had gazed critically at that window, and it was obvious that an attempt at escape was in their minds. But a second look at the barred window told them plainly that escape from Nobody's Study did not lie that way.

"What are you going to do, you men?" asked Blake, sitting on his bed with his head cupped in his hands.

"What can we do, deah boy?" asked D'Arcy helplessly.

"There's Frayne," began Herries thoughtfully. "He must know that you, at least, are to be expelled for something you haven't done. If he speaks out—"

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"I wathah fancy that if young Fwayne did speak out Knox would manage to squeeze out of it. You see, there's no pwoof anywhere. It would be just like that awful boundah Knox to deny any knowledge of the whiskey an' smokes."

Blake nodded in assent.

"That's just what he would do," he remarked wearily. "Oh, he'd fake up some tale or other that young Frayne was a blackguard."

"And if the Head probed into the matter deeply," observed Digby, "that cad Knox wouldn't be above dragging in Banks to swear the kid's character away."

Which showed that Digby was very near knowing to the full Gerald Knox's unscrupulous cunning.

"Even so," muttered Blake, "Frayne ought to speak out—"

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

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"An' get sacked himself, deah boy?" he asked. "It's an awful lot to expect of the kid!"

"You're right, Gussy," admitted Herries. "But the big question is, what are we going to do? Wait to be licked and expelled?"

The chums of Study No. 6 shuddered involuntarily. A flogging they would have submitted to with the greatest stoicism, it all being part of the game. But to be expelled in disgrace, to be sent home under a cloud—the thought was unnering in the extreme.

"There's no doubt that the Head wouldn't have been so severe with you fellows ovah that swampin' of Kildare if it hadn't been for my little twouble," remarked Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, rats!" exclaimed Blake cheerfully; but he knew in his heart that his elegant chum spoke the truth.

"He thinks that we are a fearful lot of young blackguards," went on Gussy. "Bai Jove, it weally is the blessed limit. I think I'll wemonstware with him in the mornin', an' point out that he has been culpable of gwoss injustice in sentencin' you to be flogged an' expelled."

"You'll do nothing of the sort, my son," said Blake stoutly. "We are all in this."

"Yes, rather!" chimed in Herries.

"United we stand, divided we fall," observed Digby, with a rueful grin. "We're seeing this through, Gustavus."

"Weally, Digby—"

There was a silence lasting five minutes in Nobody's Study. Blake broke it.

"I've got it!" he exclaimed suddenly.

His chums looked at him inquiringly.

"Got what?"

Blake grinned and rose to his feet.

"Do you chaps remember how some time back a fellow escaped from this blessed den—"

Arthur Augustus started.

"Bai Jove!" he exclaimed. "I wemembah. It was up the chimney!"

The chums were on their feet now, their faces glowing with excitement. The small firegrate certainly gave no indication of the old-fashioned chimney that stretched above it, for the grate itself was a modern affair. But the chimney, up which, in olden days, small boys were wont to climb in order to clean it, still remained intact.

In a moment the chums of Study No. 6 were crowding by the fireplace.

Blake shoved his head up the chimney, whilst Herries obligingly struck a match for him and held it close to his head.

"It's a chance," whispered Blake excitedly. "The bottom portion of the chimney has been bricked in, but it widens out considerably higher up. If we can manage to squeeze through this end we shall be all right."

"Oh, good!" exclaimed Herries and Digby enthusiastically, but the lack of enthusiasm on the part of Arthur Augustus caused them to turn and stare at him.

Arthur Augustus was shaking his head.

"Couldn't be done!"

"Eh?" said Blake.

"It couldn't be done, deah boys," reiterated the swell of the Fourth.

"Don't be an ass!" hooted Digby. "We could squeeze through there as easy as winking."

"Maybe," admitted Arthur Augustus, "but it couldn't be done!" he added firmly.

Blake snorted.

"Why do you keep burbling 'it couldn't be done,' you dummy?"

Arthur Augustus looked at his chum severely.

"Weally, Blake, I object to bein' weferred to as a dummy. I wepeat it can't be done."

"But why not?" almost shrieked Blake & Co.

"A fellow's clobber—" began the swell of the Fourth.

"What!" Blake & Co.'s feelings were adequately expressed in that one word.

"Look at the fearful mess I should be in if I went that way," said Arthur Augustus solemnly. "My twousahs would be covered in soot—"

"Your trousers—"

"An' my jacket an' collah would be in an awful state afiah climbin' through there."

"Your jacket and c-collar!" stammered Blake.

Arthur Augustus nodded.

"Weally, deah boys, much as I would like to escape from our pwsent pwedit, I'm afwaid it is out of the question to attempt it by way of that awful chimney!"

His chums blinked at him as if they were mesmerised. For a fellow under sentence of a flogging and expulsion to shy at a chance of escape from the room which confined him until that sentence was executed, on account of his clothes getting soiled with soot, was staggering to them.

"You burbling idiot!"

"You blessed dummy!"

"You fozzling frump!"

Blake, Herries, and Digby made no mistake about their opinion of their elegant chum at that moment.

Arthur Augustus eyed his chums through his celebrated monocle frigidly.

"Weally, deah boys, but for the posish we are in I would administrah a feahful thwashin' all wound for those oppwobwious wemarks!"

"Oh, bump the silly idiot!" growled Blake.

"Weally, Blake—" began Arthur Augustus in expostulation. But that was all he had time to say. Next moment his enraged chums grabbed him.

Bump!

The space at their disposal was very limited, yet all the same for that Blake & Co. managed to find enough room for the bumping of their fastidious chum.

"Yawwooooooh!" yelled Arthur Augustus. "Welea— me, you wottahs! Gwoooooough!"

Bump!

"Oh, cwikey!"

"And another!" muttered Blake. "We'll bump some sense into his fozzling noddle until he sees what a prize ass he is!"

"Weally, Blake, you awful wottah— Yowp!"

Bump!

The bumping of Arthur Augustus was performed thoroughly. It was to be doubted whether such a scene had ever taken place in the narrow confines of Nobody's Study before—not since it had served as a punishment-room, anyhow.

Monteith, the prefect of the New House, who was on duty in the passage, heard the sounds of that bumping, incredulously.

He came along to investigate.

"What are you young rascals doing?" he asked.

"Bumping Gussy!" came Blake's cheerful response.

"Wha-at?" gasped Monteith, in amazement.

"Bumping some hoss-sense into Gussy!"

"Weally, Blake, you wottah—"

Monteith could hardly believe the evidence of his own ears. That four juniors in disgrace, with expulsion awaiting them on the morrow, should while away the time in Nobody's Study in this manner fairly took his breath away.

"Well, I'm blessed!" he ejaculated faintly, and turned on his heel and went back to his post of duty wondering the punishment-room housed four people whose proper place was an asylum for the mentally deficient.

Meantime, Arthur Augustus had scrambled to his feet. He was hot and dusty, and his face was crimson with anger.

"You wottahs!" he exclaimed wrathfully.

Blake grinned.

"Just you simmer down, my son!" he said cheerily. "Because in about an hour's time we're going to escape by way of that chimney!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's eyes gleamed.

"I won't!" he exclaimed. "I absolutely and positively wefuse!"

"Your little mistake, Gustavus!" said Herries, with a chuckle. "You're going first, and if you're too long making up your mind we'll bump the skin off you!"

To which Blake and Digby, with owl-like gravity, added:

"Hear, hear!"

"Bai Jove!" roared Arthur Augustus. "I think you are an awful lot of cads! Think of my twousahs—"

"Blow your trousers!"

"Think of my jacket!"

"Bless your jacket!" said Herries scornfully.

"And my face!" shrieked Arthur Augustus. "It would be covahed with soot!"

"That'll improve it, old scout!" grinned Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" The expression on the face of their elegant chum brought subdued laughter to Blake & Co., and the more they laughed the deeper grew the frown on Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's noble brow.

But gradually the frown died away. Doubtless some hidden corner of grey matter was telling the swell of the Fourth that he was carrying things too far by refusing to take advantage of a way of escape on account of his garments collecting a little soot.

At last he broke into a smile.

"Bai Jove," he exclaimed, "I weally think I would wisk even the soot, you know."

Blake slapped his elegant chum on the back heartily.

"Good for you, Gussy!"

And for the space of the next five minutes the four juniors were discussing their plan of action. It was decided that they should wait until two hours after bed-time before they essayed their attempt at escape. Not one of them but was fully aware of the grave danger they ran, for the old-fashioned chimney jutted out of a roof that was at least forty feet above the ground. One false step on the treacherous leads would mean certain death.

But the risk was a matter of small moment to Blake & Co. At all costs they were determined to escape from the punishment-room and the unjust sentence passed upon them.

The two hours' wait in front of Blake & Co. seemed interminable. But at last the clock in the old tower chimed eleven.

"Ssh!" whispered Blake, moving towards the door and listening. "I thought I heard someone coming."

But not a sound reached his ears from the deserted passage without.

"The sheets!" said Herries crisply.

In a moment the four juniors had torn the sheets from their respective beds, and were knotting them together. Eight sheets made a very serviceable rope, which would be needed if the juniors were to reach the quad below in safety.

At last the rope was ready.

"Up you go, Gussy!" breathed Blake tensely. "We'll give you a bunk up for the first stage."

"Weally, Blake—" All Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's prejudices were returning as he thought of the soot that must necessarily become attached to him ere he reached the top of that chimney.

But a gentle push decided him. Herries shoved the improvised rope in his hand.

"Tie it round your waist, Gussy," he said. "It'll be easier to carry that way. Besides, you can pull it up and down when you get to the top to tell us that it's all right."

"Wight-ho, deah boy!"

The swell of the Fourth made a grimace, but he did as he was bid. Next moment his noble head was thrust up the chimney.

"Up with him!" whispered Blake. "All together!"

Herries, Blake, and Digby grabbed hold of their elegant chum, and, with more haste than gentleness, began to hoist him.

Crack!

"Yawwooooooooh!"

A muffled howl floated down to the three juniors.

"You feahful chumps!" came D'Arcy's muffled voice. "You've banged my nappah on the bwick!"

"Never mind that," said Blake impatiently. "Get a move on!"

"Weally, Blake—" expostulated the swell of the Fourth, but he got a move on for all that.

It was not so difficult a passage as he had anticipated. That first shove had helped him considerably. True, vast quantities of soot came away from the ancient bricks as he clawed his way skywards, and a considerable portion of it disported itself down his neck, in his mouth, in his eyes, and over his precious "clobber." But Arthur Augustus stuck it manfully. The aperture at the top of the old-fashioned chimney took on shape at a great rate as he ascended.

"Groooooough!"

"Oh, crums!"

"Mummmmmmm!"

Those exclamations came from Blake & Co. in the punishment-room below as the soot their elegant chum—not so elegant now—was displacing hurtled downwards. The room was full of flying soot, and before a couple of minutes had elapsed Blake & Co. were transformed into a trio of very creditable-looking Christy minstrels. Still, it had to be endured.

Still climbing, Arthur Augustus chuckled as he heard the faint exclamations from his chums below, but the chuckle died away into a gurgle as a lump of soot became dislodged and fell full across his noble mouth.

"Oh deah!" gasped Arthur Augustus, pausing to take breath. "Gwoooooough! Beastlay stuff!"

Then he climbed on, his feet finding convenient footholds in the ancient bricks that many a chimney-sweep's boy had trod in the dim and distant past.

The swell of the Fourth breathed a huge sigh of relief when his head emerged from the top of the chimney. Truly he looked an alarming sight, and if he could have seen himself in a mirror just then it was quite possible that Arthur Augustus, scion of an illustrious house, would have had several sorts of a fit. Certainly his own father would never have recognised him then. His hair was all awry, his collar was the colour of charcoal, his noble features were as black as the ace of spades.

Fortunately there was no mirror available at that moment, so, beyond goging the soot from his watering eyes, the swell of the Fourth raised himself out of the neck of the chimney, planted his feet on the slates of the roof, and pulled energetically on the rope.

The signal below was greeted by a subdued murmur of applause.

"Oh, good!" muttered Blake excitedly. "Gussy's through!"

"Up you go, Herries, old man!"

Herries was the next junior to essay the climb, and in

less than ten minutes all four juniors were safely on top of the roof. Their faces radiated with smiles--sooty smiles--but soot would come off under the gentle application of soap and water. The first stage of their escape was successful.

"Haul up that rope, Gussy," whispered Blake.

"Wight-ho, deah boy!"

The rope, no longer bearing any resemblance to the clean white sheets of a few minutes back, was hauled up. Then the chums of Study No. 6 stood listening.

No sound broke the stillness of the night save the thumping of their own hearts and the gentle southing of the wind.

A watery moon lit up the countryside but dimly. Below the juniors stretched the quad. Then, where the faint light merged into the inky blackness of the night, the runaways saw Taggles' lodge, in the window of which burned a light.

"This way," said Blake, beginning to crawl on his stomach over a sloping roof.

And D'Arcy, with the rope round his waist, went in advance. Each of the juniors caught hold of the rope and passed it once round their middle, in the manner of the Alpine climbers. That part of the journey was accomplished in safety.

Once at the edge of the sloping roof there was a sheer drop of ten feet to the leads of an upper box-room.

"Now tie the rope to the chimney," said Blake.

The rope was knotted securely around an adjacent chimney, and Arthur Augustus calmly lowered himself over the gutter and swung into space. A moment more and the slacking of the rope told his chums that he was safely landed. Herries was the next to go. He landed safely.

"You next, old scout," breathed Blake to Digby.

"After you," whispered Digby.

"You next!" commanded Blake. "Don't stand there jawing all night."

And Digby obeyed.

The rope slackened again, and Blake knew that it was his turn. He lowered himself over the iron gutter and swung downwards. Then he began to descend. Suddenly he felt the rope give in his hands. Next moment it snapped, and, with a muffled cry, Blake dropped in a heap.

"Oh, heavens!" gasped Arthur Augustus in alarm.

But luck was with Blake that night. He landed on his feet, and, beyond a shaking up, was none the worse for that adventure.

"So much for that," he said cheerfully. "Jove! Isn't it cold?"

"Gwooooooough!" agreed Arthur Augustus.

It certainly was cold. In their excitement the juniors had hardly noticed it; but now, the first sensation of their escape over, the bite in the crisp night air made itself felt.

"Next stage down the rainpipe from here," said Blake, leading the way.

One by one the juniors slithered down that rainpipe like monkeys, and landed safely on the leads of another portion of the school building that jutted out from the rest.

"Now we shan't be long!" chirruped Blake.

The rest of the descent was comparatively easy, and inside ten minutes four sooty, breathless, but triumphant juniors stood in the old quad.

"Shh!" whispered Blake, as unexpectedly came the tread of feet.

The juniors drew back into the shadow of the wall with beating hearts. Were they to be discovered at this stage of their escape? Their hearts beat faster still as out of the gloom came a stately figure whose outline was very familiar.

"The Head!"

It was indeed. Dr. Holmes, with head sunk on his chest, was proceeding towards the gates, evidently lost in deep meditation. Doubtless he was wondering over the events of the day, for as he came within two yards of the crouching juniors they saw that his kind old scholarly face was deeply troubled.

Next moment he was enshrouded in the gloom of the night.

Blake & Co. heaved huge breaths of relief when his footsteps had faded away. But they waited for at least five minutes before they emerged from the friendly shadow of the wall. Then at a run they broke across the quad and made their way as silently as they could to the old oak-tree, whose friendly branches had more than once served them well when it was a question of leaving the school precincts other than by passing through the main gate. In a breathless heap the four juniors climbed up that tree and sat astride the high school wall. Then, with a glance to left and right to make sure that the coast was clear, they dropped into the lane.

Five minutes later the runaways were trudging it briskly towards Rylcombe, where they intended to put up for the night. They kept to the townpath for most of the way, for by crossing a plank lower down the river valuable time

was saved. In addition, the chances of their being surprised by P.-c. Crump, the local constable, or any other individual familiar with the rules of the school, were more remote than if they kept to the road.

But the chums of Study No. 6 were barely a hundred yards away from the plank bridge when out of the blackness of the night came a cry.

The juniors stopped.

"What was that?" asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Shut up, you idiot, then we'll know!" snapped Blake, rather unreasonably.

"Weally, Blake--"

"Help!"

The juniors started. There was no mistaking the cry now. Someone was in trouble.

"Help! Help!"

Only for one moment did Blake & Co. remain inactive. Then with one accord they set off at full pelt for the plank bridge, that being the locality whence the cries had come.

And as they ran those cries grew louder and more appealing. What was more, to the growing horror of Blake & Co., the voice was familiar.

"Help!"

"The Head!" gasped Blake in an awed voice.

"Bai Jove! Doctah Holmes!"

And, despite the fact that they had imperilled their necks in that risky attempt to escape the sentence of expulsion that hung over them all, and that it might mean all the risk had been taken in vain, Blake & Co. put on a spurt in a generous, whole-hearted effort to go to the succour of their headmaster.

CHAPTER 10.

At Dead of Night!

"YOU awake, Monty?"

Tom Merry sat up in bed in the Shell dormitory as the clock in the old tower chimed a quarter to twelve, and called out softly.

Snore!

"You awake, Manners?"

Snore!

Apparently neither Lowther nor Manners were awake, and Tom thanked his lucky star that he had had the fortitude to withstand the demands of sleep and keep awake. He got out of bed and crossed to Monty Lowther's bed. Then he shook that sleeping junior.

"Mummm! Gerraway! 'Tain't rising-bell yet!"

Lowther was obviously under the impression that it was somewhere near morning. But Tom Merry clapped a hand over Lowther's mouth and whispered in his ear:

"Shurrup, you ass!"

Recollection of what lay in front of him came to Lowther's sleep-befuddled mind then, for he sat up in bed and blinked around him.

"Grooooooough!" he muttered. "Isn't it cold?"

"Get dressed sharp," said Tom tensely. "I'll wake Manners."

Manners proved to be less difficult to rouse than Lowther, for he was wide awake at the first shake.

"Grooooooough! Right-ho, Tommy!" he answered between chattering teeth.

In silence the three juniors dressed themselves, with the exception of putting on their boots. With these swung round their necks by means of the tied laces they tiptoed to the dormitory door, and passed out on to the landing and thence to the box-room.

Manners fumbled in the dark there for a moment or two, and then he found his precious camera, which he had deposited there before going to bed.

"Got everything, old scout?" whispered Tom Merry, and Manners nodded.

Followed a faint creak as Tom lifted the sash of the box-room window. Two minutes later the three juniors were in the quad. In much the same fashion as Blake & Co. they clambered over the school wall and dropped into the shadowy lane. Then they stopped to put on their boots.

"Ready?" called out Tom Merry softly.

"Ay, ay!" muttered Monty Lowther. "Lead on, Macduff!"

And with resolute faces the three Shell juniors dashed into the wood and made all speed for the Green Man, little knowing that along the townpath to their left Blake & Co. had passed about a quarter of an hour earlier.

"Twelve o'clock!" remarked Tom Merry, as the chimes of a distant clock tolled the hour of midnight. "We're a quarter of an hour ahead of Knox!"

"Supposing the rotter doesn't turn out to-night?" said Lowther.

Tom Merry shrugged his shoulders.

"We've got to chance that, Monty," he remarked. "But I've a feeling that the rotter will turn out. Now, quiet!"

The three juniors came in sight of the little wicket-gate

that gave admittance to the Green Man through the gardens of the inn. Beyond the trees the lights of the place gleamed out. Quietness was now essential, and the Shell juniors trudged on as stealthily and as quietly as Red Indians on the warpath.

In a few moments they were within twenty yards of the billiards-room of the Green Man. That room was in darkness, but directly above it was a lighted window, across which figures moved now and again.

"That's where the merry card-parties are held," muttered Tom Merry, drawing his chums into the shadow of a tree. "I got that from Cardew—"

"From Cardew?" queried Manners.

"The same," said Tom. "Cardew's been a merry blade in his time, and he knows the ropes of this rotten place." "Oh!"

The chums were silent; each of them eyeing the lighted window and the small balcony that jutted out from it, and, what was more important, the trellis-work that was clamped to the side of the wall up which it was to be their means of gaining the balcony.

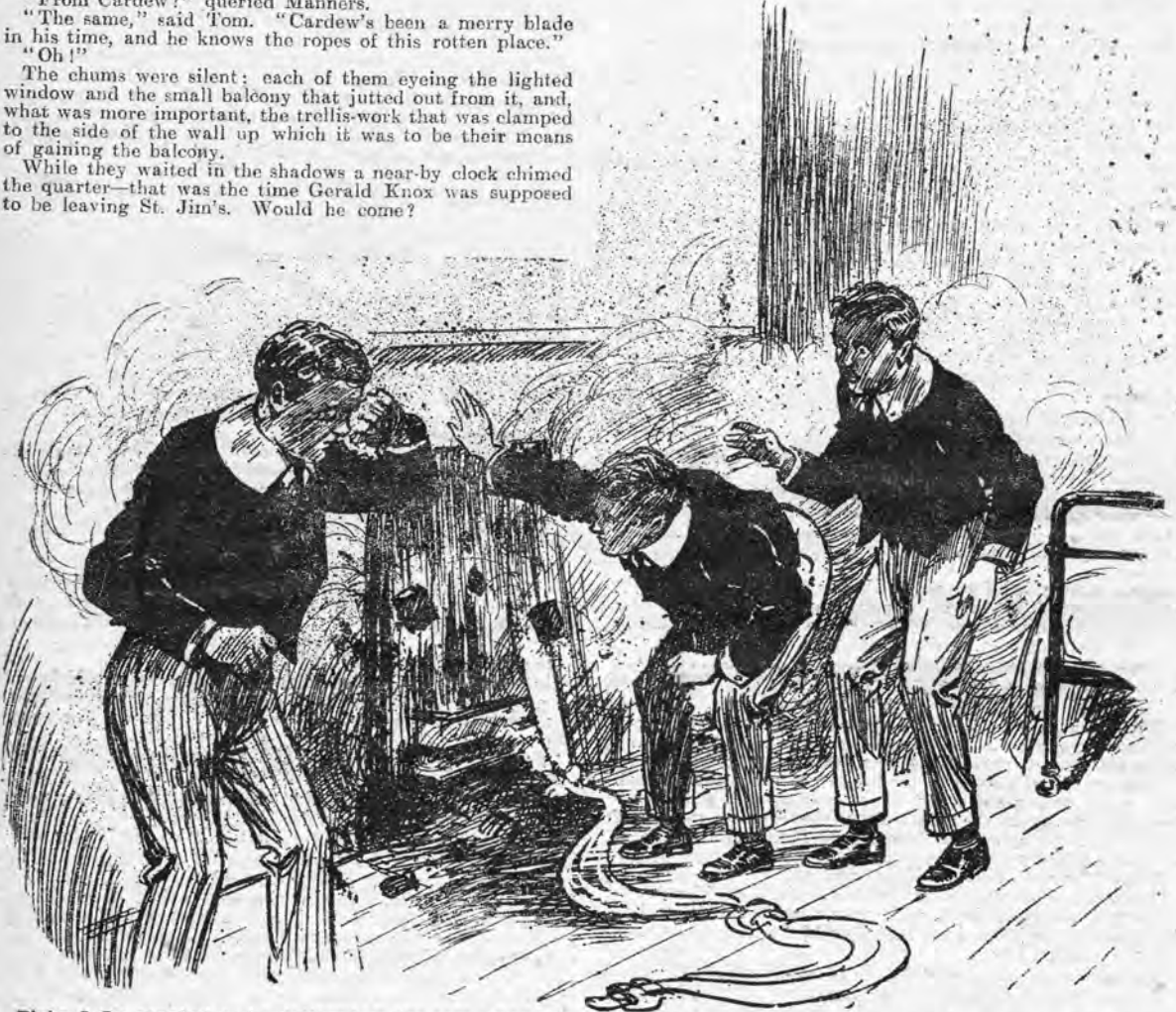
While they waited in the shadows a near-by clock chimed the quarter—that was the time Gerald Knox was supposed to be leaving St. Jim's. Would he come?

part's done. All we've got to do is to wait a bit until the rotters get going."

"It's worth waiting for, too," said Lowther through chattering teeth, "if we can bowl the rotter out and save old Gussy."

And Manners, clutching his precious camera affectionately, assured himself that he had not forgotten his flash powder and touch paper, and grinned cheerfully in the darkness.

Twenty minutes went by before the three juniors left their hiding-place. That the party in the room above the billiards-room was going "strong" was evidenced by the



Blake & Co. coughed and spluttered as the soot Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was displacing hurtled downwards. Before a couple of minutes had elapsed the three Fourth-Formers were transformed into a trio of very creditable-looking Christy Minstrels. (See Chapter 9.)

The juniors asked themselves that question repeatedly as they waited, shivering a trifle in the embrace of the crisp March air. Occasionally, faint sounds of coarse laughter floated out to them from the direction of the lighted window. Evidently Banks and his precious cronies were making merry.

Crunch! Crunch!

As the sound of moving feet on the garden path reached the ears of the waiting juniors they hardly dared to breathe.

A tall figure in a cap and raincoat approached.

The hat was pulled well down over the face, the coat collar was turned up, and a voluminous scarf hid most of the newcomer's features; but Tom Merry & Co. did not have to look twice to reassure themselves that it was Gerald Knox of the Sixth.

All unconscious of the watchful eyes bent upon him, the black sheep of the Sixth walked swiftly up to the door of the inn and knocked four times. A moment or so later Tom Merry & Co. saw a flood of light as the door was opened, and Banks stood framed in the aperture.

A murmured greeting to Knox, that was unintelligible to the watching juniors, and the door was shut; Gerald Knox had entered.

"Good!" muttered the captain of the Shell. "The first

guffaws and raucous laughter that floated down to Tom Merry & Co.

"Ready?" breathed Tom.

Manners and Lowther nodded.

Then, treading like the trained Scouts they were, the trio moved cautiously to the wall of the inn. Arrived there, they waited a second or two to make sure that all was well. Next, Tom Merry tested the strength of the trellis-work that was stapled to the wall, and a moment later he was ascending. He reached the balcony without mishap, and Manners, who came next, handed him the camera before he climbed the rail. Lowther managed to climb up just as successfully as his chums, and, with wildly-beating hearts, the three juniors pressed themselves flat against the wall about a foot from the lighted window.

The voice of Banks came to their ears quite plainly now.

"Hard luck, Master Knox!" he was saying. "Better luck next time. Your deal Joliffe!"

There was silence for a while as the rascally landlord of the Green Man dealt the cards. Then came Banks' and Joliffe's voices in unison.

"Hard luck, Master Knox!"

Evidently Gerald Knox was not having the pickings of

the evening, and, for a moment Tom Merry felt sorry for the black sheep in the hands of the unscrupulous "sportsmen," whom, Tom felt sure, only let Knox win occasionally in order to keep the goose that laid the golden eggs in their clutches.

"Ave a drink, Master Knox?" asked Banks. "Buck you up, you know."

There was no verbal reply to that invitation, but to the three juniors' ears came the sound of clinking glasses which suggested that Gerald Knox was now going the whole hog.

Tom Merry waited another minute, and then he pressed forward as near as he dared to the window without making known his presence to the rascals inside.

An extraordinary scene met his gaze.

Around a green-baize table in the dingy room were four people in addition to Knox of the Sixth. Tom recognised the bloated, dissipated faces of Banks and Joliffe; the others were strangers to him.

On the table were cards and little piles of money in coins and notes. The air was fairly thick with smoke, and Tom saw, with disgust, that Knox of the Sixth was smoking a cigar. A tumbler of liquor lay close to the black sheep's elbow.

That he was losing was obvious from the expression on his lean features; but the gambling fever shone in his eyes, and it was evident to a novice that Knox would risk every penny he possessed in the swindling game he was playing before he'd cry off. That the cards were marked Tom Merry was quick to see from the knowing winks and mystic signs Banks, Joliffe, and his shady cronies exchanged when Knox's attention was directed elsewhere.

Tom Merry drew back against the wall again and motioned to Manners.

"All ready?" he asked in a stage whisper.

Manners nodded, and handed the chamber containing the flash powder and automatic touch paper release to Lowther.

"Now!" said Tom.

In a trice the three juniors appeared at the window in full view of the occupants of the room. Knox's glass of liquor was half-raised to his mouth as the three Shell juniors burst in upon his vision.

Flash!

There was a brilliant white light as Manners hurriedly gave the word to Lowther, and the magnesium powder flared forth. Simultaneously came the click of the closing shutter of the camera, and a belching of white smoke.

Next came a mingled bellow of rage and astonishment from the rascals in the room.

"Hop it!" shouted Tom Merry.

But Manners, with the precious camera and the still more precious negative he had exposed, was already scrambling down the trellis-work. Lowther swiftly followed him.

The captain of the Shell was the last to make the descent, and, as he swung one leg over the balcony and gained the friendly footing of the trellis-work, the french windows of the room burst open, and Knox, with Banks and Joliffe at his side, rushed out yelling imprecations.

"Stop!" roared Knox. "Stop, you rotters!"

"Not this time, my tulip!" called back Tom Merry.

Knox ground his teeth with rage. He knew what had taken place; he knew what that white flash had meant, and his heart failed him.

He turned on Banks and Joliffe like a fiend.

"They mustn't get away!" he hissed. "I'm ruined if that photograph should be made public. Stop 'em!"

But that was easier said than done. Banks and Joliffe had not the same personal interest in the matter as had Knox, naturally, and, although they raged inwardly to think that three young "cubs" had had the audacity to climb on to their veranda and take a photograph of their merry little party, they were not disposed to over exert themselves to apprehend them. If Knox wanted those three juniors, it was up to him to catch them himself.

"Stop 'em yourself!" growled Banks.

But Knox did not stop to listen to his rascally "friends." He climbed down the trellis-work recklessly and gave chase. But Tom Merry & Co. had gained a good start of him. They were scudding it back to St. Jim's as fast as their legs would carry them, feeling elated at the success of their enterprise.

A good distance behind them they heard the plodding feet of Knox of the Sixth, but they were easily holding their own. And as had been arranged, they scrambled over the school wall and gained the leads of the box-room before Knox was in the quad.

The prefect, baffled, stood looking up at the three juniors as they clambered over the sill of the box-room window, and shook his fist at them furiously.

"You hounds!" he breathed.

The captain of the 'hell waved a hand to him cheerily.

"See you in your study in five minutes' time, Knox," he

called out softly—"that is, if you want to bargain for this photo we've taken!"

Next moment Tom withdrew his head from the window, and the sash was lowered. And Gerald Knox, in a state of terror and rage, clenched his fists spasmodically and bit his lip.

He knew he was in the toils; he knew that that photograph would spell his ruin if it should reach the hands of Dr. Holmes, and he ground his teeth in helpless rage and mortification. At all costs, he told himself, he must get possession of that tell-tale negative and destroy it.

As Knox told himself that he little knew what the possession of that incriminating negative was to cost him; little knew for what purpose Tom Merry & Co. had braved so much.

"The bounds!" muttered the prefect savagely. "I'll flay the hides off the young cubs!"

Dear would the rascally prefect liked to have done that, but for once his prefect's authority was as nothing. Tom Merry & Co. held the whip hand, at the moment. Of that there was no question of doubt.

CHAPTER 11.

In the Nick of Time!

"HELP!"

As that cry rang out Blake & Co. put on an extra spurt, for it bespoke the despairing cry of a man in the last stages of exhaustion.

The juniors covered the ground at amazing speed, their own affair completely blotted out as they thought of Dr. Holmes. Ahead, the plank bridge that spanned the swirling waters of the River Rhyl loomed faintly. Every step brought the juniors closer to it.

"It's broken!" Blake panted out the words as he raced along, with beating heart.

And Arthur Augustus, who caught sight of a figure suspended by the arms, and holding on to a broken portion of the plank, shouted out encouragement.

"Hold on, sir! We're comin'!"

The juniors raced up.

A glance at the plank told its own story. It had snapped in the centre, not completely, but enough to prevent the figure, half submerged in the swirling current that raced below, from climbing to a place of safety.

"Hold on, sir!" called out Blake breathlessly.

He heard a faint exclamation of surprise as Dr. Holmes, clinging to the broken plank, turned his strained features in the moonlight and caught a glimpse of the soot-begrimed faces of those who had come to his rescue.

"Form a chain!" breathed Blake hoarsely.

It was done in a moment.

"Quick!" panted the Head. "My strength is giving out; I can't hold on any longer!"

There was a note of agony in the voice that suggested that Dr. Holmes was injured.

The chain formed, Arthur Augustus planted his feet firmly on the bank, Herries advanced a full pace, Digby and Blake did likewise. The last named was standing perilously near the breakers in the sagging plank. It sagged under his weight, but he continued to advance upon it. A few moments more, and the human chain had stretched to its full extent. Blake was now directly above the clinging figure of the Head.

The Fourth-Former reached out his hands and bent down, gripping the Head under the shoulders.

And at that moment Dr. Holmes' grasp relaxed on the plank. Only just in time Blake caught him from sinking back into the rain-swollen river below which swirled towards the weir.

It was a Herculean effort Blake gave then. He raised the inanimate figure of Dr. Holmes inch by inch, until, finally, he had dragged him clear of the water and on to the sagging plank. Under the heavy weight the plank sank lower.

"Quick!" called out Blake, as he felt the rotting wood give beneath him.

But there was no need to call on his chums for that extra effort. Digby, who clutched his chum round the waist, immediately strained backwards; Herries, next to him, did the same, and Arthur Augustus did the finishing pull. In a breathless heap, the four juniors swept back on to the bank, Blake still supporting the unconscious form of his headmaster.

"Good!" he panted, as, not a moment too soon, his feet left the bank and touched dry land. Another second, and the broken plank parted in the middle, became submerged in the swirling current below as it was sucked down, rose again to the bubbling surface, and finally sped away from sight towards the weir.

"Good job we didn't have to go in for him," muttered Herries. "There's a deuce of a stream running towards the weir."

But nobody paid any heed to that remark. Blake, D'Arcy, and Digby were bending over the unconscious figure of Dr. Holmes.

Dr. Holmes' face was white and drawn, and blue with the cold; from the waist downwards he was dripping with water. But under Blake's knowledgeable application of artificial respiration he showed some signs of recovery.

"He's comin' round!" muttered Arthur Augustus at last. The Head's eyes opened. He gazed about him dazedly, and a look of horror came to his fine old face. Then recognition dawned, as Blake, pillowing his head on his knee, inquired how he was.

"My dear boy—" was all Dr. Holmes said then, but it spoke volumes.

The juniors took off their own jackets and wrapped them about their headmaster, for he was shivering as with the ague. They tried to set him on his feet, and then they discovered that he had injured his right side and his right arm.

"I've hurt my side and my arm," said Dr. Holmes faintly. "That—that was why I couldn't climb back on the plank."

His face twisted in pain, as, helped by the sturdy juniors, he stood upon his feet.

"If you will kindly assist me," he said, in a faint voice, "I think—I think I can manage to walk back to the school."

But after a couple of steps it was obvious that Dr. Holmes could not possibly walk the distance. The slightest movement was a torture to him.

"Cut off, Gussy," said Blake crisply, "and see if you can get a car, or something."

"Wight-ho!"

Gussy sped off like the wind, what time his chums propped the Head against a tree. But luck was with Arthur Augustus that night; he returned in less than five minutes, accompanied by a man in evening dress and a private chauffeur.

"Dr. Short!" muttered Blake excitedly. "This is luck!"

"My dear doctor—" began the school medico.

"Ah!" said Dr. Holmes, with a wan smile. "You come at an opportune moment!"

Dr. Short, who was returning from a visit to a patient, soon discovered what was amiss with the Head of St. Jim's, and quickly gave instructions to the four juniors and his chauffeur to assist him to carry Dr. Holmes to the car. The journey along the towpath, and thence to the car in the lane was done in silence. Then the Head was made comfortable.

"Twisted the muscle of his right thigh," Dr. Short muttered to Blake, in answer to that youth's look of inquiry. "Not serious, but exceedingly painful, and sprained his right shoulder."

Blake passed on the news to his chums.

"You boys will walk back to the school, I take it," said the doctor, "or, better still, run back. You'll catch cold in this biting air otherwise."

"Don't worry about us, doctor," said Blake.

The chauffeur climbed into his seat, and the car was about to move off, when Dr. Holmes half raised himself on the cushions and beckoned to the juniors.

"I will see you boys when—you get back!" he said, with an attempt at a smile.

"Very good, sir!"

Blake & Co. watched the car move off in the darkness.

"Good job we happened along when we did," said Herries, as the tail light merged into the blackness of the night. "The old Head would have been a gonner five minutes later."

The juniors nodded. It was an act of Providence that they had come along at that moment undoubtedly, for, in his injured state, it was a practical certainty that Dr. Holmes would have been swept away into the weir.

Blake & Co. shuddered as they visualised what that would have meant, and then realisation of their own position came back to them.

"We—we've got to see the Head when we get back to school!" muttered Blake dismally.

"Hem!"

It was not a cheerful prospect, but to go back to the school, from which they were to be expelled in the morning, seemed the only thing to do in the circumstances.

"Step it out, you men!"

Blake set the example; he broke into a trot, and his chums followed suit. In silence they ran up to the gates of St. Jim's.

Taggles, the school porter, had, apparently, been



The juniors took in the scene at a glance as they raced up the towing-path. The plank bridge had snapped in the centre, and the figure of a man, half-submerged in the torrent, clung to the broken woodwork. In the moonlight, Blake & Co. recognised the Head. "Hold on, sir!" yelled Blake. (See Chapter 11.)

apprised of their return, for he stood at the gates with a lighted lantern, muttering. He jumped as he saw the juniors' blackened faces.

"Nice goings hon!" he growled, as he swung back the massive iron gate. "What I says is this 'ere. Which—"

But Blake & Co. did not stop to listen to Taggles' dissertation. They brushed past him as if he didn't exist and sped on to the School House. Mr. Railton, in his dressing-gown, was awaiting them.

He treated them to a glance that was half severe, half kindly, seeming not to notice their blackened faces and dishevelled appearance.

"I have seen the Head," he said, as if to break the awkward silence that ensued. "And I am proud to think, despite certain—ahem!—irregularities, that you boys belong to my House."

"Hem! Thank you, sir!" stammered Blake awkwardly.

"How is Dr. Holmes?" asked Arthur Augustus, and then, as he found Mr. Railton's startled glance bent upon him, he began to realise, with his blackened face, what a sight he presented. "I beg of you, sir, to excuse my fearful appearance," he added politely.

"Hem!" Mr. Railton coughed. "You boys had better visit the bath-room before you see your headmaster."

"Oh!" It came home to the juniors then that their blackened faces must have startled the Housemaster.

"I will wait in your headmaster's study," went on Mr. Railton. "You will join me there."

"Very good, sir!"

The juniors sped off to the bath-room, wondering what the outcome of their visit to the Head would be. In less than five minutes they were back with Mr. Railton. He ushered

them into the Head's private apartments and knocked at Dr. Holmes' bed-room door.

It was Dr. Short who admitted them. There was a smile on the medico's features.

"How is the doctor?" asked Mr. Railton.

"Progressing very favourably," answered Dr. Short. "Beyond a few bruises and a little shaking up, I don't think he is very much the worse for that mishap. But it might have been far more serious," he added gravely.

And Mr. Railton, who knew the weir and the yearly toll it took of the unwary, nodded gravely.

"Come here, my boys!"

It was Dr. Holmes' voice.

Blake & Co., looking very sheepish, moved forward.

"I don't know how to thank you, my lads, for what you have done," said the Head earnestly. "But for your timely arrival, I shudder to think of what might have happened—"

"It was nothing, sir," said Blake, crimsoning.

"Wathah not!" added Arthur Augustus D'Aroy. "An' I twist that you will soon be well again, sir."

Dr. Holmes smiled.

"I shall be myself again by the morning, my dear boys," he said.

Blake & Co. looked rather down in the mouth. They were thinking of the fate that awaited them in the morning. The Head seemed to read what was passing in their minds.

He smiled.

"And then I shall make it my business to reconsider my decision regarding you boys," he concluded.

With a genial smile that seemed to speak well of the decision to which he referred, he dismissed the juniors. Mr. Railton ushered them out.

Instinctively the chums of Study No. 6 headed for the punishment-room, but an order from Mr. Railton caused them to stop.

"Not that way," said Mr. Railton. "You boys are to return to your dormitory to-night."

"Oh!"

"Perhaps the Head thinks that chimney climbing and roof climbing feat of yours too dangerous," the Housemaster added whimsically.

With beating hearts, the juniors trod quietly to the Fourth Form dormitory.

"I will not put on the light," said Mr. Railton. "The hour is late, and your Form fellows would be awake for hours if they knew you boys were back in your dormitory again. Get to bed as quietly and as quickly as you can."

"Good-night, sir!" said Blake & Co.

"Good-night, my boys!"

And Mr. Railton whisked away, leaving four very astonished juniors to undress and get into bed.

Blake & Co. were buzzing with excitement over the night's events and wondering what the outcome of it all would be, little knowing that not very far away from them, in Gerald Knox's study, to be precise, Tom Merry & Co., their plans nearing fruition, were "bargaining" with the rascally prefect of the Sixth.

It was exactly ten minutes since Tom Merry & Co. had scrambled in at the box-room window, leaving Knox grinding his teeth in helpless rage in the quad below.

Without loss of time Manners had extracted the exposed negative from his camera and secreted it underneath a loose board in the far corner of the box-room.

"It'll be safe there until the morning," said Tom Merry, with satisfaction. "And if that rotter Knox won't do the decent thing we'll print from the negative and show him a sample of the evidence we hold."

"I'll bet he'll cave in," said Monty Lowther optimistically. "That sort of proof would frighten a better chap than Knox."

"Ready, you men?" said Tom. "Then come on, and don't make a noise."

Exercising great caution, the juniors descended the staircase and crept along the Sixth Form passage. A light glimmered out from underneath Knox's study door, and Knox himself appeared as Tom Merry touched the handle of the door.

The prefect's face was diabolical in its expression as he caught sight of the Terrible Three.

"Come in, you young hounds!" he hissed savagely.

"Better language, old bean," said the captain of the Shell coolly. "We're here to talk business, and the sooner we get it over, the better—"

"For you," added Manners meaningly.

"What do you want?" snarled the prefect. "I don't do business with fags in the Shell!"

It was a poor attempt at bluff, and it failed as miserably as it deserved.

"Can it!" said Tom Merry tersely. "Look here, Knox, you know jolly well that old Gussy is not a shady blackguard like yourself—"

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The prefect's hands clenched, and he looked as if he contemplated springing at the juniors. But he controlled himself with an effort, although his face was livid with rage.

"You know jolly well, and we do, too," went on the captain of the Shell cheerfully, "that that rotten whisky and the smokes were for you."

"You young cads—" began Knox fiercely.

Tom Merry held up his hand.

"I'm doing most of the talking in this act," he said. "We know all that passed between you and young Frayne, you worm! You thought you were mighty clever, didn't you! But we've proved one cleverer—"

"I'll smash you for this!" snarled Knox, in helpless rage. "Never mind about the smashing, old bean," said Monty Lowther. "The question is are you going to do the decent thing by Gussy?"

"What do you mean, you—you—you—" Words failed the Sixth-Former.

"We mean that we've got evidence that there is no denying, on a photographic plate, that Gerald Knox, prefect and Sixth-Former, is a blackguard!" said Tom Merry.

"And that he plays cards and gambles at the Green Man!" added Manners.

"And smokes and drinks like a rotter!" concluded Lowther frankly.

Knox made a stride towards the three Shell juniors with clenched fist, but the Terrible Three faced him dauntlessly.

"In short," said Tom, "unless you do the decent thing and clear Gussy of the rotten charge hanging over him, the Head is going to receive a print of the negative we took to-night."

For a moment Knox staggered and his face blanched. He knew full well what would happen to him if that photograph found its way into the possession of Dr. Holmes; he would be expelled in disgrace, ruined.

"What—what do you want me to do?" he asked at length.

Tom Merry shrugged his shoulders.

"Gussy's name has got to be cleared, not a suspicion of doubt is to remain. How you work it with the Head is not our affair. You've asked for the trouble, and it's up to you to get out of it as best you can."

"And the negative?" said Knox. "Where is it? Give it to me now!"

The juniors did not miss the cunning light that shot into the prefect's eyes. But they were not likely to fall into the obvious snare Knox was trying to lay.

"Give it to you now!" said Tom Merry scornfully. "Not likely! You're rotter and cad enough to destroy it on the spot!"

The captain of the Shell saw that his shaft went home. The cunning died out of the Sixth-Former's face. But he tried one more effort.

"Where is the negative now?" he asked hoarsely.

"Where you will never find it, my pippin!" answered Manners. "But I'm not going to hang about here all night; I want to get back to my bed."

Taking Monty Lowther by the arm, Manners moved towards the door; and Tom Merry followed.

"Stop!"

Knox rushed forward and barred the way.

"Well?" said Tom Merry coldly, eyeing the cringing figure of the Sixth-Former scornfully. "What's it to be? Are you going to do the decent thing?"

"Yes, yes," muttered Knox hastily. "I'll—I'll speak to the Head to-morrow morning."

"First thing," put in Tom Merry quietly—"before morning lessons."

"Yes—yes, you young cad!" said Knox between his teeth.

"I promise!"

"Honest Injun?"

The prefect gulped.

"Honest Injun!"

"Good for you!" said Tom easily. "The moment Gussy is cleared the negative will be given to you to destroy." Knox's face creased into suspicion.

"And how do I know that when I've spoken to the Head you won't stick to the negative and hold it over me?"

Tom Merry & Co. eyed the Sixth-Former, with deep scorn written in their faces.

"Because none of us happen to answer to the name of Knox," replied Tom Merry, with refreshing candour. "In other words, you rotter, you have my word—our word of honour—that we'll keep our side of the bargain."

Knox licked his lips. It was the best bargain he could make in the circumstances, for he knew that Tom Merry & Co. were fellows of their words. All the same for that, he did not look grateful. If expressions could have killed, Tom Merry & Co. would have withered up on the spot. Fortunately, expressions could not.

The Sixth-Former, looking very much like a caged wild beast, glared at the three Shell juniors; but they met his glance with the indifference it deserved.

Tom Merry's hand was on the door-knob.

"To-morrow morning, first thing. You promise?"

Knox gulped something in his throat.

"I promise, hang you! Oh, I'll make you young fiends sit up for this!"

But that threat had no effect on Tom Merry & Co. They shrugged their shoulders in disdain; and, without another word or a look at the wretched Sixth-Former, trod silently into the passage, and crept into the Shell dormitory.

Within two minutes the three juniors were between the sheets. In five they were sleeping the sleep of the just, well content with their night's work; whilst Knox, in a paroxysm of rage, paced up and down his study, uttering fierce and lurid threats on the heads of the three juniors who had bested him.

And, unknown to both parties, Arthur Augustus and his chums were at that moment settling down to slumber in the Fourth Form dormitory, not a few yards distant.

CHAPTER 12.

All's Well !

THERE was a sensation in the school next morning, which started in the Fourth Form dormitory; for as the rising-bell tolled out Ernest Levison, the first awake, noticed that the beds of Blake & Co. were occupied. It took him but a moment to learn that Blake & Co., who ought, by all the laws of things, to be sleeping in the punishment-room, were sleeping in their own beds in the Fourth dormitory.

In five minutes Blake & Co. were surrounded by an inquisitive crowd. But they said little of their night's adventures. It was Trimble who ferreted out the true facts of the case—the fat junior always did seem to ferret out other people's business. And the fatuous Falstaff of the Fourth ferreted out by his usual method of tying up his shoelace outside Mr. Railton's door, what time the master of the School House was discussing the affair with Mr. Lathom.

That, however, was just before first lesson.

Blake & Co. had repaired to their study, that seeming to be the only place of rest from the ceaseless storm of inquiries levelled at them by their curious Form-fellows.

But five minutes before first lessons Blake & Co. received a summons to Dr. Holmes' study.

A crowd of Shell and Fourth-Formers followed them up the passage.

Tom Merry & Co., who were more surprised than anyone at seeing Blake & Co. at liberty, pressed forward. Tom caught Arthur Augustus by the arm.

"What's the game, Gussy?" he asked. "How did you get out of the punishment-room?"

Arthur Augustus smiled.

"Tell you latah, deah boy," he said.

"But, I say," whispered Tom, as the swell of the Fourth made as if to pass on, "we've fixed it with Knox. He's put you right with the Head—at least, he's been to see the Head, we know."

It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's turn to be surprised.

"You've what?" he exclaimed.

"We've fixed it with that rotter Knox!" whispered Tom, with a grin. "You won't be expelled, old bean. I'll bet you a doughnut that you're discharged without a blessed stain on your character."

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "I twust, Tom Mewwy, you are not bein' facetious? It is hardly a pwo-pitious moment—"

"It's a fact!" added Lowther, with a grin. "Trust the Shell to help a Fourth Form duffer out of trouble. It's brains you want, old bean!"

"Weally, Lowthah," said Arthur Augustus. "But I fail to undahstand. You say you've fixed it with that wottah Knox?"

"We have," said the captain of the Shell, with a grin.

"Little us!" chuckled Manners.

"All on our giddy lonesome!" finished Lowther.

"Bai Jove, deah boys! But how did you do it?"

"Tell you later, old scout!" chirruped Tom Merry.

And he broke away from Blake & Co., as Darrell appeared in the passage.

"Keep away from this end of the passage!" called out the prefect. "Any chap who gets too near will feel this ashplant."

That stopped the rush of curious juniors up the passage. They halted in a buzzing group while Blake & Co. marched on.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jumped when he saw Knox in the Head's study. Really it looked as if there were something in what Tom Merry had said. The prefect was looking very shamefaced as he stood there under the eagle eye of Dr. Holmes.

The Head was a trifle pale, and his arm was in a sling; otherwise, he appeared to be little the worse for his narrow escape of the night. He smiled as Blake & Co. came in, and the hearts of those juniors leaped wildly as they noted that smile.

"My boys," said the Head, without loss of time, "I have just received an extraordinary confession from Knox, which throws a light on what has been grieving me ever since I discovered those abominable things in your table drawer, D'Arcy."

Blake & Co. looked sharply at Knox. That hapless individual wilted before their scrutiny.

"It appears," went on Dr. Holmes, "that Knox bought the—hem—whisky and the cigarettes to give to Taggles for—a birthday present."

Blake & Co. jumped. Knox gulped!

"It—it was Taggles' birthday yesterday, sir," he said in a husky voice.

The Head eyed him shrewdly.

"I happen to know that it was," he said. "And it is upon that I am inclined to form my judgment. Knox has stated that you, D'Arcy, must have appropriated these things. Is that correct?"

Arthur Augustus turned crimson. His own name was being cleared, that much he could see; but even then the swell of the Fourth jibbed at sharing in Knox's desperate lies.

"If Knox says so—" he began in confusion.

The Head's face softened.

"Did you, or did you not appropriate the things I discovered in your study, D'Arcy?"

That, at least, was a question Arthur Augustus could reply to without hesitation.

"I did, sir."

"And I believe you stated that it was your intention to remonstrate with Knox and then destroy these abominable things?" went on Dr. Holmes.

Again Arthur Augustus was not called upon to give anything but a truthful answer.

"That was my intention, sir!"

Dr. Holmes smiled.

"A very creditable intention, my boy," he said kindly; "but I am afraid it might have led to a serious miscarriage of justice. Knox, on his own confession, became frightened when he learned that you had been found with this—hem—whisky in your study—"

"I was afraid that you wouldn't believe me if I said that those rotten things were not for me but for Taggles," said Knox, lying glibly, although he felt his courage sinking to the bottom of his boots under the Head's stern gaze.

"A lamentable weakness of character, Knox," said Dr. Holmes coldly. "A deplorable lack of moral fibre in a senior boy and prefect."

Blake & Co. looked on wonderingly. They were at a loss to know why Knox should make this confession, tissue of lies that it was. But Arthur Augustus was more enlightened. His lip curled as he looked at the shrinking figure of the Sixth-Former. Not for life itself would Arthur Augustus have lied so glibly.

The Head was speaking again.

"There is this much in Knox's favour, D'Arcy," he said. "He says, and I believe him, that he has spent a wretched night fighting his own conscience. There is this in his favour. He came to me first thing and explained matters."

Knox licked his lips.

"I couldn't see D'Arcy expelled, sir."

Blake & Co. wondered anew. This was a different Knox from the one they were accustomed to seeing; but ignorance is bliss, and at this stage Blake & Co. were in utter ignorance of what had prompted Knox to "fight his conscience."

"In short, D'Arcy," went on the Head kindly, "you would have knowingly allowed me to expel you from this school for an offence of which you were entirely innocent."

Arthur Augustus crimsoned.

"Yaas, sir," he stammered. "I wouldn't sneak on a fellow. I would wathah suffah the consequences, and—"

"A very noble spirit, my boy," said Dr. Holmes, "a very noble spirit; but there are limits to self-sacrifice, you must understand. However, I have been saved, thank Heaven, from punishing an innocent party. My boy, you are completely exonerated!"

"Thank you, sir!" breathed Arthur Augustus, relief surged within him.

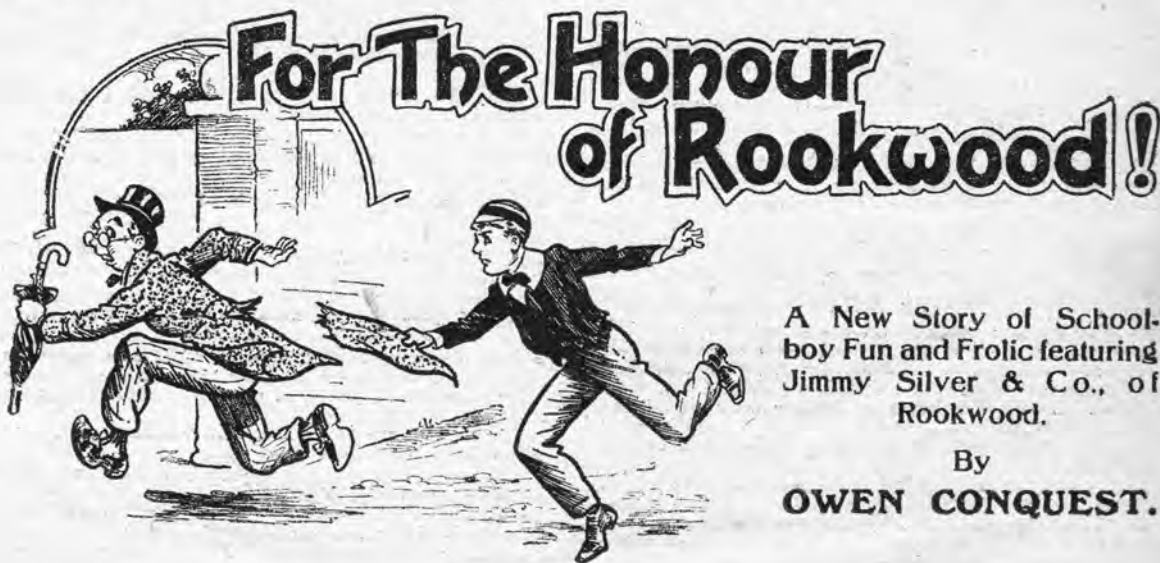
Blake & Co., forgetful of their own position at that moment, could scarce forbear a cheer, but the Head was speaking again.

(Continued on page 28.)

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OPENING CHAPTERS OF AN AMAZING NEW SCHOOL STORY!

SOME NEW BOY! All sorts and conditions of new boys have arrived at Rookwood, but none so quaint and simple as James Montgomery Babbington. For Babbington was born to have his leg pulled, and there are heaps of fellows ready to oblige him in this respect!



A New Story of School-boy Fun and Frolic featuring Jimmy Silver & Co., of Rookwood.

By
OWEN CONQUEST.

CHAPTER 1. A Queer Beginning!

REMEMBER me to your Cousin Clarence."

"Yes, uncle!"

"And look after yourself, my boy. Don't go getting into any trouble on the way."

"No, uncle!"

James Montgomery Babbington, a mild-looking youth with large spectacles, leaned out of the carriage window at the London railway terminus. In his pocket was a first class ticket to Coombe. On the platform stood a stout gentleman who closely resembled him—his uncle, Mr. Montgomery Babbington.

"Well, good-bye, my boy," said Mr. Babbington.

"Good-bye, uncle!"

"Don't forget to go and see the headmaster as soon as you arrive."

"Yes, uncle."

"Mind you don't lose your luggage."

"No, uncle!"

"Bless the boy!" cried the old gentleman testily. "Can't you say anything except 'Yes, uncle' and 'No, uncle'?"

"Yes, uncle—I mean, no, uncle."

Mr. Babbington frowned, while James Montgomery looked almost ready to cry.

Just then the guard blew his whistle, and the train began to move off.

"Well, good-bye, my boy!"

"Good-bye, uncle!"

And James Montgomery was on his way to school.

Master Babbington had spent the whole of his life up to this time in India, and was now being sent to an English public school, after a short stay in the care of his uncle. Master Babbington knew nothing about the customs of an English public school, and was looking forward with no little trepidation to his first introduction to school life in England.

His one hope was his cousin, Clarence Cuffy, who was already at Rookwood—for Master Babbington was bound for Rookwood.

Babbington felt that his Cousin Clarence would be able to put him up to all the dodges and the customs of a public school, and in every way make his life more bearable until he settled down.

Babbington had never seen his Cousin Clarence. If he had, perhaps he would not have been quite so hopeful as to the help he would receive from that worthy.

He settled down, rather anxious in mind, to while away the journey by reading, and as the miles flew by he became more tranquil.

At last the train slowed down, and James Montgomery Babbington heard the porters shouting:

"Latham Junction! Change here for Coombe!"

Gathering his things together, Babbington jumped from

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the carriage and sought out the local train which was to take him to Coombe.

A comparatively short journey landed him at the little town, and as the train drew up to the platform he looked out of the window in the hope of seeing his Cousin Clarence on the platform.

Three boys, obviously schoolboys, were on the platform, but none of them was Clarence.

"Oh dear!"

Somewhat dismayed, James Montgomery gathered up his bags, and the umbrella with which his uncle had thoughtfully provided him, owing to the fact that he was wearing a top-hat for the first time, and stepped out on to the platform.

The three youths, who were wearing green caps, espied him at once, and one of them came forward politely.

"Master Babbington, I think?" he said.

"Yes," said Babbington.

"James Montgomery Babbington?" continued the green-capped youth.

"That's my name."

"Good! Then come with us."

"Did you come to meet me?" inquired Babbington timidly.

"It is very kind of you, I am sure."

"Very kind of us," said the green-capped youth solemnly.

He had a cheerful face, rather freckled, and a permanent twinkle in his eye, but his manners were beautiful.

"Allow me to present myself and my friends. My name is Pankley. This is Putter, Mr. Babbington. This is Poole, Mr. Babbington."

"Pip-pip-pleased to meet you!" said Babbington, with a blush.

And Messrs. Putter and Poole grinned.

Giving up his ticket, Babbington passed through the barrier with his new friends. Outside was the station cab, as ancient a vehicle as the weary-looking quadruped between the shafts.

"I had better have a cab for my luggage, I suppose?" Babbington remarked.

"Send your luggage by the cab and we will walk," said Pankley.

The flustered Babbington hurriedly spoke to the cabman, and a half-crown changed hands.

The four juniors then walked rapidly through the old High Street of Coombe Village, Babbington trotting along by the side of his companions with his head rather in a whirl. The three youths seemed to have quite taken possession of him, and were hurrying along as though they had not a moment to spare.

"Is there any hurry?" stammered Babbington, finding himself falling behind somewhat.

"Yes, come on! We must get a move on," replied Pankley, without turning his head. "They might be after us at any moment."

"What!" exclaimed Babbington, staring.

"I mean," said Pankley hastily, "we must—hem—get in before call-over. Come along!"

Babbington duly came along, somewhat puzzled by an ill-suppressed guffaw which came from Pankley's two friends.

For half a mile or more the four juniors kept up a smart pace. Then Pankley slowed down a bit. A large red-brick building surrounded by a high wall came into view about a quarter of a mile away. It was, as a matter of fact, Bagshot School, and Pankley & Co., who were the shining lights in the Fourth Form of this well-known scholastic institution, were feeling pretty safe now. But they had slowed down too early.

From a field by the side of the lane came a sudden yell. "There they are!"

"After them!"

"Catch the bounders!"

"Give 'em socks!"

Pankley & Co. gave a start.

"By Jove, they are after us!" cried Pankley hastily.

He grasped the startled Babbington by one arm, while Putter took the other.

"Come on, kid!" exclaimed Pankley, breaking into a sharp trot.

Through a gap in the hedge on the side of the lane appeared half a dozen excited-looking youths in Etons, and there was an angry chorus of shouts, and what to the astonished Babbington sounded uncommonly like threats.

"They've got him!"

"After the bounders!"

"What—what does this mean?" stammered Babbington.

"Come on!" cried Pankley excitedly.

"But—but—"

"Never mind butting! Put it on!" gasped Putter. "If they catch us they will scalp us!"

"Oh dear!"

Babbington ran desperately, the perspiration streaming down his face, his spectacles awry on his nose.

The demeanour of his companions left no doubt in his mind that it was urgently necessary to escape the pursuing mob.

Babbington had no wish to be scalped, whatever that process might involve. He fairly bounded over the ground.

The leaders of the pursuit, however, were getting nearer, and as Babbington raced towards the iron gate set in the high brick wall surrounding Bagshot School, he realised that it was going to be a near thing. Almost as he reached the gate he felt a clutching hand behind him, and a grasp was made upon the tail of his coat.

"Goodness gracious!" he gasped. "They have got us!"

"Come on!" roared Pankley, wrenching him along, while the clutching hand tightened its grasp.

Through the gate they swept, Pankley and Putter still grasping the unfortunate Babbington, while the clutching hand retained his coat-tails, until with a rending sound they parted suddenly.

Through the gate sprinted Babbington and his captors, and to the former's relief the pursuit ceased. Evidently the fellows behind did not care to venture into the courtyard, where a number of boys were walking or punting a footer about in a desultory way.

"Done 'em!" chuckled Pankley. "Good egg!"

"But—but—" stammered Babbington, mopping his brow and putting his spectacles straight. "What! Where? Why?"

"That's all right, kid!" said Pankley. "We've done 'em!"

"Yes, but—but my tail—" gasped Babbington.

"Never mind! Those rotters won't come in here. There are too many chaps about." And, turning round, Pankley waved his hand cheerily to the crowd of hot, dusty, and, apparently, indignant youths clustered on the outside of the gate.

"You rotter, Pankley!" came in a howl from the gate.

"Just you wait!"

Pankley chuckled.

"Keep your hair on, Jimmy!" he howled. "We have only borrowed him. You can have him back soon, if you come and ask nicely."

Babbington turned amazed and helpless glances from Pankley and his chums to the group at the gate, but before he could frame the questions that arose to his lips, he was seized again and marched on, while a howl of rage rose from the gates.

Into the porch of the big, red-brick building Babbington was marched, with many curious and amazed glances turned upon him as he went.

"What have you got there, Pankley?" shouted a tall boy in a tone of authority.

"It's all right, Mason," said Pankley hurriedly. "Just a little joke," and hastened on down a narrow passage leading off from the main corridor.

Putter and Poole exchanged quick glances with their chief.

"Where?" said Putter.

"In here," replied Pankley quickly, opening a door at the end of the narrow passage. "In you go, Babbington."

"But—but what—"

"It's all right. You must go in here for a bit."

"But I can't! Why? What's this for?" panted Babbington, as he gazed into what appeared to be a coal-cupboard.

"I don't see—I don't understand!"

"You don't have to," said Pankley, giving the astonished Babbington a gentle push which sent him forward into the darkness of the coal-cupboard.

The next minute the door was slammed and there was the sound of the key being turned in the lock. In the dim light of the coal-cupboard, Babbington gazed around him in a state of mind which was almost idiotic. Here he was after a hectic chase on a warm day, minus one of his coat-tails and locked in a coal-cupboard—a striking beginning to the school career to which he had been looking forward with so many misgivings!

"Good gracious!" murmured the dazed youth. "What can be the meaning of this?"

He removed his spectacles, wiped them with his handkerchief, and replaced them on his nose. He looked round him again. Yes, undoubtedly he was in a coal-cupboard! He shook his head. It was more than he could fathom.

"So this," he murmured to himself, "is Rookwood!"

CHAPTER 2.

Too Late!

"O H, my hat!"

Tommy Dodd, Tommy Cook, and Tommy Doyle, the three leading lights of the Modern House at Rookwood, were strolling along the Coombe Road, with a fine afternoon before them and at peace with all the world, when Tommy Dodd made that exclamation.

The three Tommies, as the trio were called, were intending to do a little shopping preparatory to putting in some footer practice on their return. They were three famous fighting men, but on this bright afternoon nothing was further from their thoughts than fighting of any description.

The sight, however, of an object which suddenly burst upon their view as they were half-way down the road to Coombe, altered all this. The object in question was the figure of a youth in Etons, hopping along painfully on one leg, and with a large paper dunce's cap on his head.

The three Tommies stopped dead and stared at the oncoming figure.

"What the dickens!" said Tommy Dodd.

"What on earth!" exclaimed Cook.

"Sure, and the spalpeen must be dotty entirely!" cried Tommy Doyle, who hailed from the Emerald Isle.

The figure hopped painfully down the road towards them as the three Tommies stared with all their eyes.

"My hat, I believe it's that priceless ass, Cuffy!" exclaimed Tommy Dodd.

"That duffer!"

"That gossoon!"

"He's been in trouble again!" groaned Tommy Dodd.

Clarence Cuffy of the Fourth Form at Rookwood constituted one of the principal trials of life for Tommy Dodd. Cuffy was every sort of an ass and was always getting into hopeless trouble.

He was as green as grass and his leg could be pulled with impunity by an infant in arms. Although he had been some time at Rookwood and Tommy Dodd had done his

(Continued on next page.)



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best to cure him of his simplicity by the liberal application of a cricket stump, Clarence Cuffy was still a greenhorn.

Owing to Tommy Dodd being a distant relation of the duffer of Rookwood, Tommy was supposed to keep a fatherly eye upon Clarence's career at Rookwood. Tommy had heroically endeavoured to do so, but had practically abandoned the task in despair.

Now, when he saw the forlorn figure of Clarence Cuffy hopping towards him with a ridiculous dunce's cap perched upon his perspiring brow, Tommy Dodd gave a deep groan.

"The dummy!" he gasped. "The freak! The hopeless jabberwock! He's been and got himself into a fix as usual. It's really the limit!" He walked up to the unfortunate Clarence and gave him a deadly glare. "Cuffy, what's happened, you freak?"

"My dear Thomas!"

"You burbling lunatic!"

"My dear Thomas, I assure you," gasped Clarence, "I have had a terrible time."

"Faith, and so it seems!" grinned Tommy Doyle.

"What happened?" growled Tommy Dodd.

"Perhaps you would please release me, my dear Thomas," gasped Clarence. "My leg is tied and my hands are tied."

"I can see that," growled Tommy Dodd, producing a knife and cutting the cords which bound Clarence's hands and legs. "Precious ass you are to get yourself into a fix like this! There you are!"

"Ow! Yow! You have cut me, my dear Thomas!"

"Good thing, too!" growled Tommy Dodd. "Now, what do you mean by it, Cuffy?"

"My dear Thomas, it was not my fault at all," said Cuffy pathetically. "I was merely proceeding to the station to meet my cousin, Babbington."

"Your what?" exclaimed Dodd, staring.

"My cousin, Thomas—my cousin—James Montgomery Babbington."

"What!" shrieked Tommy Dodd. "Do you mean to say you have got a cousin coming to Rookwood?"

"Yes, my dear Thomas."

"Great pip, another of 'em!" exclaimed Tommy Cook.

"The saints preserve us!" groaned Tommy Doyle.

"My cousin, Babbington, was coming to Rookwood to-day," continued Clarence Cuffy, with a reproachful look. "He is from India, and has never been to school before. I thought it would be only polite to go and meet him, when those horrid Bagshot fellows—"

"Horrid fellows. Did you ever hear anything like it?" exclaimed Tommy Dodd disgustedly. "Do you mean Pankley & Co., you—you blithering dummy?"

"Yes, my dear Thomas, it was Pankley and his friends Putter and Poole. They tied me up like this."

"And you let them!" growled Tommy Dodd.

"Really, my dear Thomas, I could not prevent it, otherwise I should certainly have endeavoured to do so."

Tommy Dodd gave a snort.

"You did not tell them about your cousin coming, I suppose?"

"Certainly, my dear Thomas!"

"What! You—you hopeless ass! They will be getting hold of him next!"

"Good gracious, I never thought of that! Do you really think so, Thomas?"

Tommy Dodd snorted again, more emphatically than before.

"Of course I do, you idiot! Which way did they go?"

"They went off towards Coombe after I had told them I was going to meet my cousin!"

"How long ago was that?" demanded Tommy Cook.

"About twenty minutes ago, my dear fellow!"

"Of course they have gone to meet him, and they will rag him 'baldheaded!' hooted Tommy Dodd. "Just like you, you ass! Always letting Rookwood down!"

"My dear Thomas!"

"Oh seat!" said Tommy Dodd contemptuously. "You are enough to drive a fellow dotty. Come on, you chaps, if we run for it we may be in time to catch Pankley & Co. yet."

Leaving Cuffy to make the best of his way back to Rookwood, the three Tommies dashed off at top speed.

There was a shout from behind as they did so.

"Hi, Tommy, whither away so fast?"

Tommy Dodd looked round to see four juniors wearing Rookwood caps approaching from the direction of the school. They were no other than Jimmy Silver, junior captain of Rookwood, and his three inseparable chums, Raby, Lovell, and Newcome.

"Come on, Jimmy!" yelled Tommy Dodd. "Pankley & Co. are up to their tricks again. This way!"

"What-ho!" yelled back Jimmy, and the four newcomers broke into a run.

"We shall be too late!" gasped Tommy Dodd, who had rapidly explained the situation to Jimmy Silver as they raced along. "The train was in some time ago. I expect Pankley & Co. have got that Babbington merchant already."

"I'll dash in and inquire!" said Jimmy, as they arrived at the station.

In twenty seconds he was back.

"That's right! They met him all serene and have gone off towards Bagshot. If we hurry up we may just catch them."

Fortunately, Jimmy Silver & Co. and Tommy Dodd & Co. were among the keenest sportsmen at Rookwood and always kept themselves fit and in good training. They raced on through the old High Street of Coombe as if on the cinder path, and a little way up the road through the village took to the fields to make a short cut.

"There they are!" shouted Tommy Dodd. "Put it on, chaps!"

The seven juniors put on a spurt, although Raby and Tommy Doyle were beginning to show signs of flagging, not being quite such expert runners as their chums.

But the Bagshot fellows, against whom Rookwood waged a deadly, if good-natured warfare, had espied the enemy, and with the top-hatted figure of Babbington in their midst were now making a dash for the gates of Bagshot.

The chase ended at the very gates with one of James Montgomery's coat-tails in the grasp of Jimmy Silver.

Panting and furious the seven juniors drew up at the tall gates, baffled.

"Faith, and let's make a dash in after them!" growled Tommy Doyle.

But Jimmy Silver, the sagacious "Uncle James" of Rookwood, shook his head.

"No use," he said tersely. "Look at all the fellows in the playground. Pankley would whistle them up in a moment and they would snatch us 'baldheaded.' We don't want to hop back to Rookwood like that ass, Cuffy."

"Well, what are we to do?" growled Tommy Dodd.

"No use hanging round here," said Jimmy Silver. "Let's sit down under the hedge opposite and have a council of war."

The panting and overheated juniors acted upon this excellent advice of the junior captain of Rookwood, and the council of war was soon in full swing.

CHAPTER 3.

Rough on Rookwood!

THE Rookwood juniors remained in earnest consultation for more than ten minutes, during which time alternative methods of attack were discussed without any decision being arrived at.

Then there was a shout from just within the Bagshot gates, and looking up the Rookwooders beheld Pankley & Co. grinning, as Tommy Dodd put it bitterly, all over their dials.

"Hallo, you Rookwood bounders, what are you doing there?" called out Pankley. "Plotting mischief?"

"Come out of your old casual ward and we'll soon show you!" answered Tommy Dodd.

"You come in and see what you will get," cried Pankley.

"Rats! What have you done with our new chap?" said Jimmy Silver severely. "We want him and mean to have him."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Pankley & Co., feeling thoroughly pleased with themselves. "What will you give us for him?"

"Nothing," said Tommy Dodd. "We don't want him really, but he is a Rookwood chap, or intended to be one, and he is jolly well coming to Rookwood."

"We were thinking of keeping him as a mascot," chuckled Pankley. "He's a beauty!"

"Probably a fearful ass," growled Tommy Dodd, "but you will have to give him up. Do you think you could keep a Rookwood chap in a mouldy old casual ward all night?"

"We could if we liked, but we are not going to," said Pankley. "I'll tell you what though: We'll let one of you come in to fetch him away—but only one."

The Rookwooders looked at each other for a moment in silence.

"Looks like a trap!" said Jimmy Silver slowly.

"Is that honest Injun, Pankley?" called out Tommy Dodd.



Shouts of amazement rang out from the crowd of Rookwooders in the gateway as Tommy Dodd came along surrounded by Bagshot juniors. Dodd was pushing a wheelbarrow in which was seated the forlorn and dishevelled figure of James Montgomery Babbington. "My hat! It's the new chap!" gasped Jimmy Silver. (See this page.)

"Honest Injun! If one of you comes in alone you can have your new freak. The rest of you can wait for him at the gate."

"Well, I'll go!" said Tommy Dodd. "After all, this new freak is Clarence Cuffy's cousin."

"And you are supposed to be his keeper!" grinned Lovell.

"Oh, rats!" said Tommy Dodd crossly. "Well, anyway, I suppose I'll have to go."

"Are you coming, Tommy?" grinned Pankley.

"Yes."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Pankley & Co.

"What's the joke, you cackling idiots?" said Tommy Dodd suspiciously.

"Nothing."

"No ragging."

"No, you won't be hurt this time. We'll look after you," chuckled Pankley. "You other chaps can wait here for Dodd. You will see him again together with your precious new freak in a minute or two."

Tommy Dodd crossed the road and entered the gates of Bagshot and then walked off with Pankley & Co. across the playground towards the big red-brick school.

"Pankley's up to some game or other," said Jimmy Silver anxiously, "but he is straight enough. He won't rag Tommy under a flag of truce."

"Faith, and I hope not," said Tommy Doyle. "If he does, we'll give the spalpeen fits."

"Oh, Tommy Dodd will be all right," said Jimmy Silver. "We must just wait."

Five minutes passed, during which the six juniors clustered round the Bagshot gates like so many Peris outside the gates of Paradise.

At the end of that time a commotion of some sort was observable on the far side of the playground.

"Hallo, there's something on!" cried Jimmy Silver, shading his eyes with his hand. "Over there by the big doorway."

There was certainly something on. Shouts of laughter came from a hilarious group of Bagshot fellows, and from all sides fellows came running to see what was up.

The juniors at the gates fixed their eyes on the centre of the disturbance as the crowd moved slowly down in their direction.

"It is Tommy Dodd," gasped Jimmy Silver at last. "He is wheeling something!"

"Wheeling something?" said Lovell. "Oh rot!"

"He is, I tell you," said Jimmy Silver, straining his eyes. "It's a wheelbarrow, with something in it."

"There's a fellow in it," said Tommy Cook suddenly; "a duffer in a top hat."

"It's the new chap!" yelled Jimmy Silver. "Of course."

"That's it, and they are making Tommy wheel him down in a wheelbarrow."

"The bounders! The blighters! The villains!"

The unfortunate Tommy Dodd was now seen approaching, pushing a wheelbarrow on which was seated the forlorn figure of James Montgomery Babbington. The new boy's top hat was considerably the worse for wear, and his umbrella, looking very shabby, was still under his left arm. His face was grimed with coal dust and perspiration, and one tail was missing from his overcoat.

James Montgomery Babbington, at that moment, looked far more like a scarecrow than like a boy on his first day at a public school.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What price Rookwood now?"

A yelling crowd of hilarious Bagshot juniors surrounded the little procession.

Tommy Dodd, with a pink and furious face, pushed the barrow along painfully. Babbington was heavy, but the Bagshot fellows would not let him get down.

This was Pankley's idea—the only terms on which he would let Tommy Dodd recover the kidnapped junior.

The chortles of Bagshot were loud and long. While Tommy Dodd scowled like a demon in a pantomime, the Bagshot fellows chortled; and the more Tommy scowled the more they chortled.

Thus the little procession came to the gates.

Here Tommy Dodd was at length permitted to put down his load, and the unfortunate Babbington was delivered at last into the arms of his rightful schoolfellows.

"The awful rotters!"

"What a nerve!"

Wrathful and shamefaced, the little band of Rookwood juniors could do nothing but shake their fists at the hilarious Bagshot bounders; and their feelings as they almost crawled back to Rookwood with the rescued Babbington in their midst, were too deep for words.

"This has done it!" groaned Jimmy Silver at last. "What will the fellows at Rookwood say when they hear about it? Those Bagshot bounders will never let us hear the last of it."

"Something has got to be done," hissed Tommy Dodd between his clenched teeth. "We have got to get our own back on them or bust a boiler!"

"We'll do it!" said Uncle James, a determined look coming into his blue eyes. "We'll do it! The honour of Rookwood is at stake! I don't know how yet, but we must think something out. It's up to us to give the Bagshot bounders the kybosh at any cost. What do you chaps say?"

"What-ho!" said the chaps. "Rely on us, Jimmy! Pankley & Co. can look out for squalls!"

(What do you chaps think of Babbington? Isn't he the limit? He puts his foot into it right and left next week, chums. Don't miss the continuation of this rousing yarn, whatever you do.)

PREFECT AND RASCAL!

(Continued from page 23.)

He gazed sternly at Knox.

"I have said it is in your favour, Knox, that you came to me this morning in time to prevent me being a party to a grievous wrong. But it must be apparent, surely, to you, a senior boy and prefect, that the proper time to have explained was last night."

Knox fairly crumpled under that stern glance. He tried to speak, but words failed him.

"I-I-I—" he babbled.

"Enough!" said Dr. Holmes coldly. "I am very surprised at you, Knox, and very disappointed. You will consider yourself disgraced for a fortnight. At the expiration of that period you will come to me. During that time I will seriously consider whether your reinstatement as a prefect is desirable. You may go."

And Knox, with burning ears and fierce rage welling in his breast, slunk out of the Head's study like a beaten cur.

When he was gone the Head turned to Blake & Co. "Since this amazing statement of Knox's," he said haughtily, "I have come to the conclusion that I was harsh in my judgment of your unwarrantable escapade last night."

"Oh, sir!" said Blake, Herries, and Digby.

"My judgment, I am afraid, was influenced by the alarming discovery I had made in your study that same afternoon," went on the Head. "I was firmly of the opinion that you boys, whom, hitherto, I had always trusted wholly, had basely deceived me and your Form-master. A flogging and expulsion, in that case, would not have been too severe a sentence. In the circumstances, however, expulsion would be very unjust."

Blake & Co. brightened visibly. Arthur Augustus actually smiled.

"But, despite the valiant service you rendered me last night, I still, as your headmaster, must punish you for your abominable treatment of Kildare."

"We don't mind the flogging, sir!" said Blake eagerly. "That was all in the game—I mean, it was a risk we were prepared to take, sir. But I would like to say that we had no intention of swamping old Kildare—"

"No fear!" There was no mistaking the ring of sincerity in the voices of Herries and Digby as they gave support to Blake's statement.

The Head looked at them sharply.

"Then for whom, may I ask, was that terrible concoction intended?"

Blake & Co. looked at each other and blushed.

The Head smiled.

"I think I understand," he said. "You took the risk of a flogging or a caning—you must stand by your bargain, my boys. D'Arcy, kindly hand me my cane."

The swell of the Fourth obeyed wondering.

Dr. Holmes took the cane—in his left hand, for his right was bound up—in a sling.

"You will touch your toes, Blake!" he said sternly.

Blake did so.

"Tap, tap, tap, tap, tap, tap!"

To Blake's surprise, and to his chum's for that matter, he received six light taps that would scarcely have hurt a fly, to use his own words. Herries and Digby received likewise.

"Now you may go!" said the Head sternly. "And you will remember, in future, that prefects are vested with my authority and must be respected."

"Yes, sir!" gasped Blake & Co.

And they went, with light hearts and joyful faces.

A crowd of juniors met them at the end of the passage. Tom Merry & Co. were to the fore.

"Well?" said Tom.

"I am exasperated, dear boy," said Arthur Augustus, squeezing Tom's hand gratefully. "Knox owned up!"

"WHAT?"

It was a regular chorus of astonishment. That the rascally prefect of the Sixth should own up to a charge for which another fellow was being punished amazed them, with the result that nobody believed the story.

Tom Merry & Co. did not mind that. In a way they felt sorry for the wretched black sheep of the Sixth, and his temporary disgrace was not a matter they wished to talk about.

"An' what about Blake an' the others, old bean?" drawled Cardew of the Fourth.

Arthur Augustus smiled.

"Oh, they were—hem—caned and let off with a caution!"

"Gammion!"

"It's true!" exclaimed Blake. "The Head played up like a brick."

"Hurrah!" That roaring exclamation echoed out on all skies, which testified to the popularity of the chums of Study No. 6. And in a characteristic fit of gratitude and his usual generosity, Arthur Augustus invited the whole Form to tea that afternoon in celebration.

It was a feat that was remembered for many a long day, for Arthur Augustus knew how to entertain hungry juniors. Even Baggy Trimble, who ate enough for six, declared that he had enough at last.

It was a fitting end to the adventures and misadventures of Blake & Co., but outside those four cheery youths and Tom Merry & Co., Knox, and perhaps Cutts of the Fifth, no one knew exactly why Knox was suspended as a prefect for a fortnight. And that tell-tale negative being destroyed, the Sixth-Former was not, naturally, inclined to discuss the subject with anyone. At the end of the fortnight Gerald Knox was called in by the Head, and was told, after a lecture that lasted for half an hour, that he would be given another chance as prefect.

And when Knox resumed his duties, it was noticeable that he emulated the celebrated Brer Rabbit and Jay Jay, which puzzled no one more than the inquisitive Baggy Trimble, who couldn't find out why!

THE END.

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