

The

GEM

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EVERY
WEDNESDAY.

LIBRARY



THREE IN A FIX!

(An incident from this week's grand yarn of
St. Jim's.)

A LONG COMPLETE STORY OF TOM MERRY & CO. AT ST. JIM'S—

There's a mighty big difference between Clarence York Tompkins, the meek, mild and insignificant duffer of the Fourth at St. Jim's, and Captain Tompkins, the warlike and heroic junior skipper of the School. How this amazing change comes about, and what happens as a result of it, you'll discover for yourself in this topping story!

Tompkins

CHAPTER 1.

Too Funny!

"W HAT'S the joke?"

It was Tom Merry who asked the question.

With his chums, Monty Lowther and Manners, he had strolled along the Shell passage at St. Jim's, to find a group of Shell and Fourth fellows laughing hilariously, and evidently highly entertained at something.

Naturally, Tom Merry wanted to know what the joke was.

"Joke!" echoed Aubrey Racke, raising his eyebrows. "My dear man, what a question to ask! There's only one joke to-day—the biggest joke of the term! If you haven't seen it then you're dashed dense, Tom Merry!"

"Well, what is it?" demanded Tom, a trifle impatiently. "Blessed if I've heard it, anyway!"

"Tompkins!"

"Eh?"

"Tompkins, of course!" said Racke, smiling blandly. "To-day, my dear friends, Clarence York Tompkins, the one and only, the prize ass and biggest duffer in the school, begins his duties as junior skipper of St. Jim's. Now does your intellect grasp the joke?"

"Oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The joke was clear enough to Tom Merry now, and he joined in the laughter. The very thought of that "prize ass," Tompkins, in the position of junior captain of St. Jim's—even if it was only for a week on trial—was enough to bring a grin to any fellow's face.

"Some are born to greatness," resumed Racke, with a chuckle, "while some have greatness thrust upon them. In this case, dear old Tompkins has just asked for it, and got it. The question is, will he provide as much entertainment for us as the other five duds?"

"Weally, Wacke, you wottah—"

"Cheese it, Racke!" said Tom Merry, frowning a little. "After all, Tompkins is a decent kid, and it's up to us to back him up. Give him his chance, anyway."

With that, Tom Merry walked on with his chums who were chuckling.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, frowning after the three chums. "Tom Mewwy is quite wight, you know, Wacke. Tompkins is a vewy decent chap, and I twust you do not intend to twy any of your wotten twicks on him!"

"Rats!" sneered the cad of the Shell. "That ass Tompkins was simply born to have his innocent leg pulled. He's going to have it pulled this week. I'm lookin' forward no end to pullin' it!"

"You may find it does not pay, Wacke!" said Arthur Augustus disdainfully. "You are vewy clevah, I know, at pullin' the legs of fellows you aren't afraid of. But I advise you to leave Tompkins alone. Aftah all, he is junior skippah, and as such is invested with powah and authority."

"Oh, my hat!"

Racke gave a scoffing laugh.

"You may laugh!" said Arthur Augustus calmly. "Tompkins is wathah a wetiwin' and timid fellow, but I am inclined to think there is more in him than appears on the surface."

"Bosh!"

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"If you say 'bosh' to me, Wacke—"

"Well, don't talk rot! Tompkins is a snivellin', crawlin' little worm, and if I want to pull his silly leg I'm goin' to!"

"Vewy well," replied Arthur Augustus D'Arcy serenely. "Only I warn you that I have decided to take Tompkins undah my wing; I intend to support him, and to give him the benefit of my expewience as junior skippah!"

"You?" yelled Racke.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Oh, gad! Why, you're a bigger duffer than he is!" sneered the cad of the Shell. "You made a bigger muck of the job than he's likely to do!"

There was a chuckle, and the noble face of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy crimsoned. He slowly and deliberately started to turn back his elegant cuffs in a most suggestive manner. But he suddenly paused.

"I was about to insist upon you puttin' your fists up for makin' those wotten wemarks, Wacke!" he exclaimed, with lofty disdain. "But upon reflection, I have decided that you are not weally worth thwashin'!"

Aubrey Racke breathed freely again, very relieved indeed to hear that—despite the scornful imputation.

"I must warn you, howevah," resumed Arthur Augustus grimly, "that if you wufer to me as a duffah again, I shall punch your nose, Wacke!"

With that, Arthur Augustus walked sedately away.

"The—the silly ass!" growled Racke, becoming quite

—FULL OF AMUSING AND AMAZING ADVENTURES!

the Valiant

by
Martin
Clifford



pulling my leg, Racke. Tom Merry never—

"That's rather thick!" said Racke, a note of indignation in his voice. "Tom Merry should have told you—jealousy, I'm afraid, old man! And what about your seal of office? Have you been to Kildare about that yet?"

"S-sus-seal of office!" stammered Tompkins.

"Of course! You should have asked Kildare for it first thing this morning! Gad! Mean to say Tom Merry never told you to be sure to get that on your first day of office?"

"Nunno," mumbled the unhappy Tompkins. "I—I didn't know—I mean, you—you're not pulling my leg, Racke—"

"My dear fellow, what an idea!" said Racke, in some astonishment. "It beats me how you've never heard of it! How the dickens can you expect to wield authority without your seal of office?"

"Oh dear! I—I never knew—"

"Well, it's lucky you know now!" said the humorous Racke solemnly. "If you'll take my tip you'll rush off to Kildare at once and ask for it. He's bound to be waxy, but if you explain he may let you off with a wigglin'. Take my tip, Tompkins, and don't leave it any longer. It's rather serious—don't you fellows think so?"

"Very serious indeed!" said Crooke gravely.

"You've started badly, Tompkins!" said Gore.

"Oh dear! I—I'll see Kildare!" gasped Tompkins.

He blinked for a moment at the grave faces of the juniors, and then he ambled on rather uncertainly.

"Oh, my hat!" gurgled Crooke. "I do believe he's swallowed it, Racke!"

"Rot!" said Gore, with a chuckle. "He'll tumble when he has time to think it over. No fellow would be such an ass as to— Oh crumbs!"

Gore broke off, for at that moment a well-known figure turned the corner of the passage. It was Kildare, captain of St. Jim's, and he was strolling along, chatting with Darrell of the Sixth.

And Tompkins had stopped them!

"Oh gad!" gasped Racke.

His fears were soon realised.

"Well, kid," said the captain of St. Jim's, looking down at the trembling Tompkins with a good-humoured smile, "what's the trouble?"

Tompkins gasped. He was always overawed when in the presence of such a great man as Kildare.

"P-please, Kildare," he stammered, "I—I wanted to ask you about—about my seal of office?"

"Your—your whatter?" almost yelled Kildare.

"My—my seal of office!" gasped Tompkins, trembling more than ever. "I'm awfully sorry I didn't ask you for it this morning, but—but I didn't know—"

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valiant now Arthur Augustus had vanished. "He knew better than to touch me, the howling duffer! Anyway, if I want to rag that ass Tompkins—"

"Now's your chance!" finished Crooke, with a grin, nodding along the passage. "Here comes our giddy new skipper, as large as life!"

All eyes turned on Clarence York Tompkins as he came along the passage in his diffident way. Tompkins was a rather weedy and retiring youth, and he blushed self-consciously as he noted the grinning glances.

"Well, he's not swanking about it, anyway!" grinned Dick Julian. "Thinking out the team for Saturday's match, Tompkins, old chap?"

"N-no," stammered Clarence York, blushing again. "I—I think I'll ask Tom Merry to do it for me."

"Oh, my hat!"

"And this is our new skipper!" said Racke, with pretended admiration. "Such humble duties as pickin' a team are below his abilities, naturally. I must say I admire your giddy nerve in tackling the job of skipper, Tompkins, old bean!"

"I—I know it's a tough job," said Tompkins modestly, "but I mean to do my best."

"That's the style!" said Racke approvingly, winking at the grinning group. "Well spoken, old man! But are you quite sure you've considered well the grave responsibilities you've undertaken?"

"I—I don't know much about the job, but—"

"You've much more nerve than I have, anyway," said Racke seriously. "I'm blessed if I'd like to have the Head and all the masters in turn to tea every day this week. You've let yourself in for somethin', an' no mistake, Tompkins."

"Oh dear!" gasped the new junior skipper, looking quite blank. "The—the Head, and— Oh, but you must be

"You young idiot!" said Kildare, eyeing the meek and guileless Tompkins blankly. "Seal of office! What the dickens are you talking about?"

"I—I thought I had to ask you for it, Kildare," faltered the unhappy Tompkins. "Racke said—I mean, I thought—now I'm junior captain—"

"Oh! I think I see," interrupted Kildare grimly, while Darrell burst into a laugh. "As junior skipper you thought you had to ask me for your seal of office, eh? And Racke said—what did Racke say, Tompkins?"

"I—I—I—" Tompkins stammered and stopped, the truth dawning in upon his innocent mind at last.

"So Racke sent you to me to ask for your seal of office, did he?" went on Kildare grinning, without waiting for an answer. "You young ass! Racke was pulling your silly leg!"

"Oh—oh dear!"

"Still," said Kildare, "though you're not entitled to a seal of office, I, as a prefect and captain, am." He turned towards Racke, who was slinking away. "No, don't hurry away, Racke," he said. "Go and fetch my seal of office—or, rather, rod of office. You'll find it on the bookshelves in my study, Racke."

"It—it was only a joke, Kildare!" said Racke.

"No doubt!" said Kildare pleasantly. "And now you're going to see the point, Racke. Go and fetch my rod of office."

"But, I say—"

"Go!"

Racke went amid a chorus of chuckles. He came back with Kildare's "rod of office"—an ashplant—held gingerly in his fingers. Kildare took it and swished it through the air.

"This is my seal and rod of office, Racke!" said Kildare. "It's kept for the special benefit of juniors who cheek and waste the time of those in authority. Bend over!"

"But—but—"

"Bend over!" roared Kildare.

Racke groaned and gingerly obeyed.

Whack!

"Yow-ow!"

It was a hefty swish, and the cad of the Shell leaped upright with a fiendish yell.

"Now again!" said Kildare.

Whack, whack!

"Yow-oooo! Ow!"

Kildare tucked his ashplant under his arm and walked on, resuming his chat with the laughing Darrell. Racke groaned and rubbed himself frantically.

"Bai Jove! Whatevah is the mattah heah, deah boys?"

Arthur Augustus had turned up again, and he eyed Racke's acrobatic contortions curiously through his monocle.

"Only Racke enjoying his little joke!" said Gore. "He told dear old Tompkins—"

"Oh, shut up!" snarled Racke, glowering at Tompkins, who was looking more unhappy than ever now. "Gad! I'll smash that sneakin' little cad! I'll— Here, out of the way, D'Arcy, you rotter!"

"Wathah not!" said Arthur Augustus, standing in front of Clarence York. "You shall not touch Tompkins, Wacke! If you have been pullin' his leg, then you deserve to be licked. In any case, I advise you to leave Tompkins alone."

"You—you silly duffer, stand aside!" hissed Racke.

Arthur Augustus jammed his monocle into place, and gave the squirming Racke an icy look. Then, slowly and deliberately, he turned back his cuffs, Racke watching this proceeding a trifle uneasily.

"In view of the fact that you have, appawntly, just been licked, Wacke," said Arthur Augustus calmly, "I wegwet to have to punish you still furthah. As I pwomised to punch your nose if you again weffered to me as a duffah, howevah, I fear I have no othah wesoruce, as it is imposs for me to bweak my word. Put your fists up, Wacke."

"Hold on, you—here, I won't— Yooooop!"

Racke jumped back a second too late, and the swell of the Fourth's fist landed on his nose. He sat down with a bump and a howl.

Arthur Augustus waited a brief moment to see if the cad of the Shell would get to his feet. Apparently, however, that tap had been quite enough for Racke; at all events, he showed not the slightest inclination to sample any more. With a scornful sniff Arthur Augustus linked his arm gracefully in that of the dismayed Tompkins and walked serenely away. Surrounded by the grinning onlookers, Aubrey Racke sat and glowered and groaned, and wished fervently that he had taken Gussy's advice and left the new skipper severely alone—especially now he was under the wing of Arthur Augustus.

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CHAPTER 2.

Gussy Chips In!

"YOW-OOOOOOH!"

"Hallo!" remarked Jack Blake of the Fourth, laying down his pen. "That sounds like trouble!" Herries, Digby, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy also paused in their prep as that loud howl rang along the Fourth passage and penetrated into Study No. 6.

"Only that ass Tompkins!" said Herries carelessly. "I expect Micky Mulvaney's pitching into him, as usual."

"That's it, of course!" assented Blake, chuckling as he picked up his pen again. "I wish Tompkins would be a bit more considerate, though, and keep his yells to himself."

Digby and Herries chuckled also, but Arthur Augustus D'Arcy laid down his pen and rose to his feet with a frowning brow.

"It is weally too bad!" he said. "I am surprised at you fellows tweatin' it as a joke. Tompkins doesn't find it a joke, poor chap!"

"Sounds as if he doesn't, anyway!" agreed Blake. "Still, the silly duffer should stand up for himself a bit more. If he lets Mulvaney rag him, then it's his own look-out."

"I do not agree with you, Blake," said Arthur Augustus. "Tompkins is a vewy timid, inoffensive chap, and it is too bad of that wretched Iwishman to take advantage of his meekness, you know."

"Let him rip!" yawned Herries. "Micky will make a man of Tompkins—if Tompkins lives through it!"

"I am afwaid I cannot let him wip, as you term it. Hewwies," said Arthur Augustus, as another weird howl rang along the passage. "There he goes again, deah boys! I weally cannot stand it. In any case, I have decided to take Tompkins undah my wing, and see the poor chap through this week."

"But what the thump are you going to do?" demanded Blake.

"I am goin' to thwash Mulvaney to begin with," said Gussy. "I have already wemonstwatod often enough to no purpose. I will see if a feahful thwashin' will teach him not to bully poor old Tompkins."

"But supposing Mulvaney thrashes you?"

"Wats!"

Arthur Augustus sailed out of the study—evidently he considered Blake's suggestion not worth considering. He walked along to Study No. 4, from whence the howls were still proceeding. Arthur Augustus flung open the door and entered, his noble face grim and determined.

As he expected, Micky Mulvaney was ragging Tompkins.

That hapless youth lay on his back on the rumpled carpet. On his heaving chest Micky Mulvaney was sitting, and he appeared to be busy trying to bang Clarence York's head through the floor.

Bang, bang!

"Yow-oooooh!"

Every bang brought a corresponding howl from the unfortunate Tompkins.

"Faith, an' it's a stubborn fellow ye are, Tompkins darlin'!" Mulvaney was remarking. "Still, I can keep this up as long as you. An' whin ye says I'm excused footer practice this week, and can have a place in Saturday's match, I'll stop it, an' not before!"

Bang, bang!

"Yow-ow-ow!" wailed Tompkins dismally. "Yooooop! Oh, you beastly bully! Yow-ow! Yoooooh!"

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Do stop that feahful wow, Tompkins! You will wouse the whole school, deah boy!"

"Arrah! An' that's just what I'm after tellin' him!" said Micky Mulvaney, still banging away industriously.

"But it's your fault, Mulvaney!" said Arthur Augustus sternly. "Pway stop bullyin' Tompkins at once!"

Mulvaney stopped and stared at Arthur Augustus.

"Faith, an' is it me you're after callin' a bully?" he asked pleasantly.

"Yaas, wathah! If you do not call that bullyin', Mulvaney—"

"Bejabbers, an' you're wrong there, D'Arcy," said Mulvaney, rising to his feet calmly. "Ye've heard, of course, that Tompkins has been made junior skipper?"

"Yaas, wathah!" assented Arthur Augustus. "That is common knowledge, deah boy!"

"Then I ask ye!" said Micky, with some indignation. "Hasn't a man a claim to share in his study-mate's glory, bejabbers?"

"I—I suppose so. Yaas, wathah!"

"That's just what I'm after teachin' Tompkins," said Mulvaney. "What's the good of having a junior skipper as study-mate if he won't let a chap share in his good fortune, bedad? Here's me wantin' to be let off footer practice to-morrow, and, faith, here's Tompkins refusing me permission."

"Not only that!" resumed Mulvaney in great wrath.

"He also refuses to promise me a place in the team for Saturday's big match, D'Arcy. Fancy that, the mean spalpeen! Faith, an' it's me chance of a lifetime to get glory, bejabbers!"

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus, looking at the cheerful Micky in wonderment. "Weally, you have a most feahful cheek to expect that, Mulvaney! Don't you give in to the cheekay wottah, Tompkins, deah boy!"

"I—I don't want to, D'Arcy," said Tompkins unhappily. "I do want to make a good skipper like Tom Merry," he added, with meek earnestness. "And I know it isn't right to excuse Mulvaney just because he's my study-mate, or put him in a team when he isn't a good player."

"That is vewy wight and pwopah of you, Tompkins," said Arthur Augustus approvingly. "You have the wight spiwit, at all events, deah boy. I twust you will not allow this feahful, cheekay bully to—"

"Faith, an' that's your tunc, is it, D'Arcy?" snorted Micky Mulvaney, pushing back his cuffs with grim deliberation. "Then it's me who's goin' to punch your head, bejabbers!"

"I shall be vewy glad to give you the chance—if you can do so, Mulvaney," said Gussy, in quite a kindly way. "I know you do not wealise what a weally cheekay wottah and a wotten bully you are. I came heah to thwash you—"

"Ye did, eh?" said Mulvaney grimly.



With a grim and determined look on his noble face, Arthur Augustus flung open the door of the study. As he expected, Micky Mulvaney was ragging Tompkins. That hapless youth lay on his back on the rumpled carpet. On his heaving chest Mulvaney was sitting, and he appeared to be busy trying to bang Clarence York's head through the floor. Bang! Bang! "Yow-oooooh!" (See Chapter 2.)

"Yaas, I do not like intahfewin' in othah studies, but as Tompkins is such a feahful funk I felt bound to come along and fight his battles for him, you know," explained Arthur Augustus, as he turned back his own cuffs. "I twust that the thwashin' I am about to administah, Mulvaney, deah boy, will teach you to tweat old Tompkins in a bettah mannah. Help me to cleah eside the table, and we will get to work."

So saying, the kind and obliging Gussy pushed the table out of the way to make room for the scrap.

"Now put your fists up, deah boy!"

Mulvaney gasped and put his fists up—for the noble and well-intentioned Gussy was already rushing at him. The next moment quite a vigorous scrap was in progress in Study No. 4.

Micky Mulvaney was a hefty fighting-man, but Arthur Augustus was still more so. He drove Mulvaney round and round the table in great style, and at last he sent him to the floor with a crash and a howl.

"Had enough, deah boy?" gasped Gussy, standing over him.

"Ow-ow! No, I'm hanged if I have! Faith—"

"Vewy well. Tompkins, hand me that wulah, deah boy."

Tompkins jumped to obey—only too quickly. Mulvaney gave a howl.

"Oh, all right! Bejabbers, I won't, blow you!"

"Wight-ho! You agwee not to twy to bully Tompkins into givin' you a place in the team without justification, deah boy?"

"Ow-ow! No, I jolly well—I mean, yes! Keep that

ruler away, ye mad spalpeen!" yelled Mulvaney, as Tompkins handed the ruler over. "I'll agree!"

"That is all wight, then!" said Gussy, placing the ruler on the table. "It is quite all wight now, Tompkins, deah boy! Mulvaney will keep his word, won't you, deah boy?"

"Ow! Yes, blow you!"

"Then I will now wetiah fwom the studay!" said Gussy.

And with a kindly smile at both Tompkins and Mulvaney, the noble Arthur Augustus retired as gracefully as his battered and dishevelled appearance would allow. He had scarcely got twenty yards towards the nearest bath-room when a howl of anguish reached his ears. Looking back, he was just in time to see a figure come flying out of Study No. 4. A ruler followed, just missing the figure by inches.

"Bai Jove! Mulvaney is at it again, the wuffian!" said Arthur Augustus, frowning. "Weally, this is— Pway, what is the mattah now, Tompkins?"

Clarence York came fleeing along the passage, but he stopped as Gussy called.

"Ow-ow-yow!" he gasped. "Ow! That bully started on me as soon as you'd gone, D'Arcy! Ow! He started to lay the ruler about me. Ow! I might have known he would!"

"Bai Jove!"

"I might have known your chipping-in would make it all the worse for me!" groaned Tompkins, rubbing himself and wriggling. "It's no good—licking Mulvaney will only make him worse, D'Arcy. You know what he is, Ow!"

"Bai Jove! That is vewy twue, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus, frowning reflectively. "Mulvaney is wathah a corkah, and I feah you are wight, and that lickin' him is useless. Howevah, he has pwomised not to make you give way in wegard to the footah, so that is all wight!"

"Is it?" mumbled Tompkins dismally. "But what about me? He says he's going to lick me every day this week to make up for the licking you gave him. Oh dear! I—I wish you hadn't chipped in, D'Arcy. He'll be worse than ever now. Ow-ow!"

"It is wathah a pwoblem!" said Arthur Augustus, shaking his head. "Howevah, there is only one possible way out of your twoubles, Tompkins."

"If—if it's licking Mulvaney—" began Tompkins hopelessly.

"Wathah not—at least, not until I have coached you, deah boy. I have a vewy good ideah, Tompkins. You shall come and join us in Numbah Six!"

"Oh!"

Tompkins stared blankly, and then his eyes lit up with sudden joy.

"You—you mean that, D'Arcy?" he gasped. "Why, that will be ripping! Mulvaney won't dare touch me then! But—but"—he added, his face falling—"what about Blake and the others? They won't want me in the study, I know!"

"Bai Jove! Pway do not wovwy about that, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus airily. "They will not mind if I explain the posish. In any case, I should not allow them to interfere, you know. There is just time to shift your things before dinnah."

"Oh, ye-es!"

"It is weally a wippin' way out of the difficulty, deah boy!" said Gussy enthusiastically. "Ewewythin' will be quite all wight now! We are wathah a cwush, but I fancy we can squeeze you in all wight! Now let us visit the bath-woom, and then we will cart your belongings to my studay."

And Arthur Augustus led the way to the bath-room, happy in the thought that the problem was solved. But Tompkins did not look at all happy. Possibly he had doubts as to its being "quite all wight!"

CHAPTER 3.

One To Go!

"**Q**UITE a good game!" remarked Blake.

"Not bad," assented Herries. "Especially considering the fact that our side had Tompkins. Wasn't he a scream?"

The chums of Study No. 6 chuckled. The practice match on Little Side was over, and they were making their way towards the School House with the rest of the footballers.

"Well, the poor kid did his best," said Digby. "After all, everybody expected him to make a muck-up of things. This skipper business is getting above a joke, though!"

"Tompkins is the last, anyway!" grinned Herries. "It's been entertaining, if nothing else!"

"Railton must have been potty to allow those duffers to take on the job!" granted Blake. "It's a good thing Tompkins finishes the list, or goodness knows what would happen to the footer and everything else. Look at practice this afternoon. Racke wasn't there, nor were Crooke, Scrope, and Mellish—the rotten slackers! They knew they could lick Tompkins if he kicked or gave them away, and they took advantage."

"Jolly lucky Kildare didn't turn up!" commented Digby grimly.

"For old Tompkins, too!" grinned Herries. "That ass Mulvaney turned up, though, so it must be true that that idiot Gussy licked him."

"Where is Gussy, anyway?" snorted Blake, glancing round at the crowd of Shell fellows and Fourth-Formers making their way indoors. "I haven't seen the duffer since dinner—at least, only on the footer field!"

"Still dry-nursing our kiddie skipper!" chuckled Digby. "I think I spotted the chump cart Tompkins off the field."

"Well, he'll need dry nursing before his week of office is out!" said Blake grimly. "But that ass Gussy—"

"That awful idiot!"

"The interfering fathead!"

Evidently Gussy's chums did not approve of his championship of Clarence York Tompkins.

They went indoors for tea, and it was not until reaching No. 6 that they saw Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

That youth appeared to be busy—but not getting tea ready, as they had fondly hoped.

He was busy arranging some books on the bookshelves—books that Blake & Co. did not recognise as belonging to Study No. 6. Moreover, there were quite a number of articles in the study that certainly did not belong to No. 6. There were, for instance, various glass-covered cases, and

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various cases minus glass, not to mention a huge pile of cardboard boxes, many of them bearing names in ink that reminded them of a Natural History lesson. There was also an unfamiliar chair, and a strip of unfamiliar carpet.

Blake, Herries, and Digby stood in the doorway and stared for a full minute.

"What the—what the dickens does this mean, Gussy?" gasped Blake at length. "What the merry thump is all this rubbish doing here, you idiot?"

Arthur Augustus looked round with a frown.

"I wufuse to be alluded to as an idiot, Jack Blake!" he said, with some heat.

"But—but who does this rubbish belong to?" hooted Blake. "I've seen the dashed stuff before somewhere, but—"

"Phew!" ejaculated Digby. "Looks to me like some rubbish belonging to that ass Tompkins!"

"What?" yelled Blake.

"That is quite twue, Dig!" said Arthur Augustus, nodding towards the pile of articles crowding the table and floor. "These things are wathah wubbish, I am afwaid. But Tompkins is a gweat bug-huntah, you know! The duffer is a feahful ass at games, but he is vewy clevah at Nature studay, you know!"

"But—but—" Blake was beginning in bewilderment.

"It is wathah unfortunate that Tompkins has so much of this wubbish!" explained Gussy. "Still, we cannot vewy well expect him to leave his stuff behind him in No. 4. I am afwaid that if he did, that wuff wottah Mulvaney would smash the lot up, beetles and butterflies and ewewythin', you know!"

"But what's it mean, you footling dummy?" shrieked Blake, in great exasperation. "What's the stuff doing in here at all?"

"Bai Jove! I was forgettin' that I haven't seen you fellows since dinnah," said Arthur Augustus calmly. "Howevah, it is quite all wight, Blake, deah boy. I have asked Tompkins to join us in this studay, you know!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"Yaas! You see, it was weally imposs for him to wemain any longah undah Mulvaney's bullyin' wule," explained Gussy. "So I asked him to join us heah until I had coached him a little in usin' his fists. Then he will be able to weturn and lick Mulvaney, and then all will be sewene for him."

The three blinked at him.

"You—you mean to say you've actually asked that awful duffer to dig in this study?" hooted Blake, scarcely able to believe his ears.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"That—that born idiot?" gasped Herries.

"That—that piffing dud?" choked Digby.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Gussy, raising his eyebrows a trifle. "But there is no occasion to wواه at a fellow, Blake! You know I detest bein' wواهed at!"

"Oh, you—you—"

"I weally had no other wecourse, though I am awah that we are already wathah a cwush in heah!" said Arthur Augustus. "I suppose you would not care to change into some othah fellows' studay, Blake?"

"Oh, you—you—"

"Or, pewwaps you would like a change, Dig?" said Gussy, turning a questioning eyeglass upon the amazed and dumb-founded Digby. "If not, then I twust, Hewwies, that you will not object."

"Well, my hat!" gasped Blake, getting his voice back at last. "Of all the hopeless idiots—"

"Well, Tompkins is wathah an idiot, I admit!" said Arthur Augustus, nodding. "Still, we must weally make allowances, you know, Blake!"

"I mean you, you frightful ass!" shrieked Blake. "Have you seen Railton or Lathom, and got their permission, you footling chunk of imbecility?"

"Bai Jove! I uttahly wufuse to be weferred to as a footlin' chunk of imbecility, Blake!" said Arthur Augustus, with great wrath and indignation. "I weally cannot undahstand why you should weturn fwom footah in such a feahful wax, Blake. Because poor old Tompkins kicked the ball through his own goal is no weason why you should be waxy with me!"

"Oh, you—you—"

"As for askin' Mr. Lathom's permission, I shall do so when I have finished helpin' Tompkins to move in! There are seweral more cases to come yet, I undahstand!"

Having finished placing Tompkins' books on the shelves, Arthur Augustus marched out, apparently to get more, or to help Tompkins with his cases of specimens.

Blake, Herries, and Digby looked at each other eloquently. "Well, of all the nerve!" spluttered Herries. "Fancy that cheeky owl asking that silly duffer in here?"

"The biggest duffer in the school!" gasped Digby. "We were only saying this morning that we wondered how

Mulvaney could stand him! But— Oh, my hat! Supposing Lathom or Railton give permission—

"We'll jolly well see they don't!" said Blake, nearly choking with indignation and wrath. "Oh, that—that burling bandersnatch Gussy! Here, lend a hand to chuck these things out, for goodness' sake! Hold on, though!"

Blake paused and gave a deep chuckle.

"We really ought to teach that ass, Gussy, a severe lesson over this!" he said, shaking his head. "We can't have two duffers in this study, of course. One must go! Why not let it be Gussy instead of Tompkins?"

"But, dash it all, Blake—" gasped Herries. "Tompkins, why—"

"Just for a lark!" grinned Blake. "We'll pitch all Gussy's things out into the passage, see? That should teach him not to take so much on his shoulders another time without consulting us."

"My hat! Good wheeze!"

"Serve Gussy right, anyway," agreed Digby, with a chuckle. "We could take him back when he's slung Tompkins' things back. Tompkins isn't really a bad sort of chap, but he's a bit too potty for this study."

"Ha, ha! Yes, rather! We'll do it!" said Blake.

When Blake decided upon a thing the job was as good as done. He started to work at once, and Herries and Digby willingly lent a hand.

Blake started with the books on the bookshelves that bore the aristocratic and illustrious name of D'Arcy. He opened the door and started to pitch them out into the passage two and three at a time.

Bump! Flop, flop! Bump!

In a matter of seconds the bookshelves were cleared of Gussy's books. His lesson-books followed until there was quite a respectable heap of them in the passage, though the books themselves suffered somewhat, and soon looked far from respectable!

The rest of Gussy's belongings followed pell-mell, his three chums working at great speed. Two hat boxes flew out of the study, and two shining "toppers" burst out from them in the passage, to join the rapidly growing pile there. A box of new collars followed, and several natty neckties. A pair of footer-boots, a fives-bat, and a cricket-bag, fished from the cupboard, joined the pile one after the other.

Naturally, the noise of the articles crashing into the passage soon brought onlookers to the scene. In a few minutes quite a crowd was looking on with interest at the proceedings.

"I knew it would come to this in time," remarked Ralph Reckness Cardew, with a yawn, as he looked on with his hands in his pockets. "Go it, ye cripples! The brokers are in, I presume?"

"The breakers, you mean!" grinned Dick Julian. "There goes Gussy's best topper! My hat! What's the game, Blake?"

But Blake was far too busy to explain matters. He pitched two cushions out, and, helped by Herries and Digby, was just grasping the easy-chair which belonged to Arthur Augustus, when that junior himself came along the passage with an armful of Tompkins' books.

He dropped the books and nearly collapsed as his eyes fell upon the goods and chattels in the passage.

But he soon recovered his balance, and then he groped for his celebrated monocle and jammed it into his eye as if his natural sight needed instant aid.

It was true enough, however—only too horribly true!

The pile of heaped-up, tumbled and rumpled goods in the passage were undoubtedly his. They were piled and strewn about like wreckage washed up by the tide.

"Bai Jove!" articulated Gussy faintly. "Oh, bai Jove!"

For another ghastly instant Arthur Augustus viewed the stricken field, and then he gave a shriek as he sighted Jack Blake just on the point of adding a footer-jersey to the pile.

"Blake, you feahful wuffian—you fwithful wottah!" he shrieked. "What are you doin', you feahful wascal? Oh, gweat Scott!"

"Can't you see what we're doing, Gussy?" exclaimed Blake calmly. "Why, aren't we doing it properly?"

"Oh, you—you—"

"Now, don't get excited!" remonstrated Blake patiently. "Dash it all, you don't expect us to cart 'em along to your new study for you as well as move the things out? Be reasonable, Gussy!"

"You—you feahful wuffians!" shrieked Gussy. "Those are my things—my best toppahs—my—my—"

"Of course they are!" said Blake.

"But why—what—" choked the swell of the Fourth.

"You asked Tompkins to join us in No. 6, didn't you?" said Blake calmly. "Well, we've thought it over, and we've decided it's quite impossible for us to have two footling duffers together with us—quite! So we've decided to allow the lesser duffer to stay, and allow you to go, Gussy! See?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the entertained onlookers, as they grasped the position.

Arthur Augustus fairly danced with rage. Only for a brief moment, though. Then he rammed his monocle into his waistcoat pocket, and went for Blake with a terrific rush.

Locked in a deadly embrace, the two juniors rolled over and over amidst the goods and chattels in the passage, punching each other ferociously.

They were fairly making the fur fly, so to speak, when Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, came hurriedly along the passage.

He gazed in angry amazement at the pile of books, furniture, and wearing apparel, and then he gazed at the wrestling, rolling couple of juniors.

"G-good gracious! What—what— D'Arcy, Blake, cease that disgraceful hooliganism this instant! You hear me?"

"Oh crumbs!"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

The scrap ceased as if by magic. Blake and Arthur Augustus scrambled to their feet, dishevelled and dismayed.

"Now, perhaps, you will kindly explain what this means, Blake?" snapped the master.

"You—you see, sir—" Blake halted. It was rather difficult to explain.

"I am waiting, Blake!"

"It—it was only a little joke, sir!" said Blake, with a crimson face. "We—we were pulling Gussy's—I mean, D'Arcy's leg. That is—"

"To whom do these articles belong?" demanded Mr. Lathom angrily.

"D'Arcy, sir! It—it's not his fault, though," added Blake hastily. "You—you see, sir, he wanted to bring another fellow into our study, and we didn't want him to. (Continued on next page.)"



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ing Splash Page—the Wizard of Fleet Street.

He fetched the chap's things in without asking us at all, and—and so we pitched his things out to teach him a lesson, sir!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" gasped the astonished master. "D'Arcy, did you do as Blake states?"

"Yaas, sir!" said Arthur Augustus indignantly. "I saw no reason why I should consult Blake."

"Nor, I presume, did you see any reason why you should consult me, D'Arcy!" said Mr. Lathom tartly.

"Ahem! I—I intended to do so, sir."

"You should have done so before making any move in the matter, D'Arcy!" snapped Mr. Lathom. "You should also have consulted your study-companions, who certainly had a right to be consulted. Who was the boy you wished to join you here?"

"Tompkins, sir!"

"Bless my soul! Tompkins shall certainly not change studies!" rapped out Mr. Lathom. "In any case, four is quite a sufficient number for this study, D'Arcy. Let me have no more of this nonsense, and kindly return your belongings to your room at once!"

"Oh! Oh, yaas, sir!"

"For fighting in a public passage you will both do me two hundred lines," ended the master. "That is all. Disperse at once, boys!"

The boys dispersed—they did not wish to be included amongst the lined. Mr. Lathom rustled on, frowning. Just then Tompkins came along with an armful of boxes and books. Blake glowered at him.

"Tompkins, you footling duffer!" he hissed. "I'll give you five minutes to shift your stuff back into Study No. 4. Understand?"

"Oh dear! Y-e-es, Blake!"

"Get busy, then!" snorted Blake. "We want our tea!"

And Tompkins groaned deeply and got busy. Obviously his doubts and fears were amply justified. There was to be no haven of refuge for him in Study No. 6, after all!

There was trouble in that celebrated apartment that evening; only the fear of Mr. Lathom returning prevented the wrathful and indignant Arthur Augustus from giving his disloyal chums a fearful thrashing all round—or attempting such a difficult feat! There was trouble also in Study No. 4, and Clarence York had reason to wonder more than ever whether it was worth while being under the wing of the well-meaning Arthur Augustus.

CHAPTER 4.

Tompkins' Resolution!

"I won't do, Tom!"

Reginald Talbot was the speaker, and his words were addressed to Tom Merry, who was seated in Study No. 10 with Manners and Lowther.

Talbot's face was serious—in fact, the faces of all four Shell fellows were rather serious.

"It won't do, Tom—and you know it!" said Talbot grimly. "You saw what happened yesterday? At least four fellows dodged footer practice. That ass Tompkins—"

"You can scarcely blame poor old Tompkins," said Tom Merry, with a wry smile. "He daren't deal with Racke and those other slackers; they would have licked him if he'd tried to make them turn up, or reported them. The silly duffer could do nothing."

"Pity Kildare didn't turn up!" said Lowther, with a grunt. "He'd jolly soon have routed them out!"

"It's a rotten state of affairs altogether!" admitted Tom Merry, colouring a little. "Railton must have been off his nut to have started these temporary captains on the go!"

"Railton isn't to blame any more than they are," said Talbot. "At least, I don't blame them."

"Who is to blame, then?" demanded Tom Merry, though he guessed the answer.

"You are, Tom!" said Talbot frankly. "You should never have resigned, and you should never have got your back up and refused to take on the job again! I know Railton and Kildare had both ragged you. But—"

"I—I'm not exactly blaming them," said Tom Merry. "I'm afraid Kildare was right, at all events. He said I was too easy-going and soft with the chaps. I suppose I was. Anyway, I felt a change was needed—and I still think so!"

"Rot! You're the best skipper we've ever had—and both Railton and Kildare know it!" snorted Lowther.

"Hear, hear!"

"I don't see it!" said Tom Merry. "You'd make just as good a skipper as I, Talbot old chap. There are others, too—chaps like Blake and Levison and Figgins."

"You're about the only chap who thinks so," grinned Manners. "Anyway, Talbot here won't put up for the job, and none of the others will—so long as you are alive and kicking, Tom. Better stop playing the giddy goat and stand again!"

"I won't!" said Tom Merry, a trace of stubbornness in his tone. "I've been ragged for nothing at all. I did my best, and, apparently, nobody seemed to be satisfied. I mean to stay out and give some other fellow a chance."

"Well, I'm sorry, Tom!" said Talbot quietly. "You see what it's led to. Luckily, the matches have not suffered much as yet. We've had a lot of luck. But, that isn't all. The fellows are all getting slack and careless. If this goes on much longer a rot will set in. Yesterday, when those fellows cut compulsory practice, showed what may happen all the time unless we get a strong chap as junior skipper. If they dodge compulsory practice they'll never turn out for ordinary practice, you can bet. The footer will soon be going to pot, Tom—and other things as well."

"Tompkins' week will soon be up," said Tom Merry, his face rather red. "Give the chap a chance, anyway!"

"And when his week's up—what then?" asked Talbot. "Who's going to put up for the job? Five fellows have had a go, and they've all made a mess of it. It's pretty certain old Tompkins will!"

"Well, why don't you have a go, Talbot?"

"Because there's a better man," said Talbot. "And that man's you, Tom. The fellows won't be satisfied until they get you back. Even those New House chaps are getting fed-up, and they want you back, too."

"Figgy, you mean?" said Tom Merry, staring.

"Yes," assented Talbot grimly. "Though Figgy and his crowd are New House men, they put the good of the school first every time. The whole Lower School will be yelling for you to take your old job back again before this week is out, Tom. Be a sensible chap and put up again."

Having had his say, Reginald Talbot turned abruptly and left the study.

Tom Merry went red again as he saw his study-mate's eyes fixed upon him.

"Just what we've told you, Tommy!" said Manners. "You were an ass to resign, but a bigger ass to refuse to stand for re-election."

"Why—why should I?" said Tom Merry.

"For the good of St. Jim's," said Manners quietly.

"Oh!"

Tom Merry's face softened a little; and then his eyes gleamed, and he jumped to his feet.

"Was it for the good of St. Jim's that both Railton and Kildare ragged me until I felt there was nothing else for me to do but resign?" he snapped. "They seemed to be pretty sure that a better man could be found; and I think the same. If no responsible fellow will put up because of me, then it isn't my fault, is it? I've stood down to give them a chance to get a better man. Let them!"

With that Tom Merry marched out of the study, his eyes gleaming.

But Tom Merry's sunny nature reasserted itself before he had gone many yards, and an involuntary smile came over his features as he sighted a forlorn-looking figure approaching, looking lugubriously unhappy.

It was Clarence York Tompkins, and Tom stopped, always ready with a kind word for that insignificant youth.

"Well, how goes the captaincy, Tompkins, old man?" he asked, with a smile.

"All—all right," mumbled Tompkins.

"You played up well in the practice game yesterday," said Tom, ever ready with encouragement.

"I—I'm afraid I didn't! I—I sent the ball through our own goal," confessed Tompkins unhappily. "The fellows are all laughing about it. It's no good—"

"Never mind that!" said Tom Merry, with a laugh. "After all, better fellows have done that in the excitement of a hot tussle round the home goal. And you made up for it afterwards."

"D-did I?" gasped Tompkins doubtfully.

"Yes. It was a jolly plucky charge you made when you bowled Figgins over," said Tom. "Few fellows would have tried it; Figgy was going at full speed."

"I—I was knocked fairly silly," admitted Tompkins, flushing.

"I bet you were. But you saved a certain goal. It was a plucky charge, old man. Good! You must keep this up."

Tompkins flushed with pleasure. Tom Merry was his idol, and praise from him was praise indeed. As a matter of fact, a little praise was deserved in this instance. Usually, like Trimble and Mellish, Tompkins spent his time ambling about a footer field like a lost sheep. If the ball came

I · SEE · ALL

Bump! Flop, flop! Bump! Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's books were pitched out of the study into a heap in the passage. The rest of his belongings joined the rapidly-growing pile one after the other. At that moment the swell of the Fourth came along, carrying an armful of books, and he nearly collapsed when he saw what was happening. "Bai Jove!" he gasped. (See Chapter 3.)



near him he was wont to let it pass, and then chase after it in a ludicrous and ineffective manner. And nobody ever expected him to do anything else.

But on this occasion Tompkins had quite distinguished himself by his exploits on the footer field. Quite a number of fellows had remarked that "that ass Tompkins was improving," while one or two had even dropped a kindly word of praise.

Now even Tom Merry was doing so!

Tompkins suddenly felt remarkably happy. His eyes shone, and he unconsciously straightened his shoulders.

"I—I did my best," he stammered. "I—I'm fed-up with being a fellow of no account, Tom Merry," he went on in a burst of eager confidence. "I'm fed-up with being kicked and cuffed by everybody. Now I'm junior captain I mean to let the fellows see I'm not such a duffer as they think. I—I know you'll laugh at me—"

"I'll do nothing of the kind, Tompkins!" said Tom Merry quietly, his eyes fixed curiously upon Tompkins' blushing, excited face. "I'm glad to hear you mean to pull your socks up. That's the spirit! It isn't grit you lack; you showed that yesterday. It's just confidence and self-reliance. As for being kicked and cuffed—well, that's your own fault, you know. Half the fellows who treat you as a doormat you could lick easily if you tried."

"You—you think so, Tom Merry?" mumbled Tompkins.

"Yes. You could lick that fathead Mulvaney if you really set yourself to do it, I'm sure."

"Me? Lick Mulvaney?" gasped Tompkins eagerly. "Oh, if only I could!"

"But not right away," said Tom Merry, with a smile at Tompkins' eagerness. "I hear you went for him yesterday, Tompkins?"

"Y-y-yes! But he licked me soon enough."

"Well, stand up to him again, and the next time he won't lick you quite so easily," said Tom grimly. "And if you keep it up he'll soon learn to respect you and leave you alone—even if you never manage to lick him!"

"You—you think so?"

"I'm quite sure of it. As long as you allow it the fellows

will bully you, Tompkins. When you start punching back, then the kicking and cuffing will stop soon enough. Better to put up with a few hard knocks for a while than to be used as a doormat for the rest of your natural."

"Oh!"

"My advice to you, Tompkins," said Tom with kindly bluntness, "is to welcome kicks and cuffs—and then return them with interest. Don't be afraid of punishment—it'll make you tough and fit you to stand up for yourself. Go and look for trouble if you like, but don't feebly knuckle under when it comes. Face it, and do your best! There's good stuff in you, and it only needs bringing out!"

And with that kindly bit of free advice Tom Merry nodded, and walked on.

Clarence York Tompkins looked after him, his eyes shining, his heart thumping. Tom Merry's advice had been almost exactly like the advice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy—another fellow whom he admired from afar.

Deep in his heart the diffident Tompkins knew they were right—that it was his own fault he was kicked and cuffed and despised. Deep down he also knew that he was not a coward, or afraid of punishment.

Well, he would prove it!

With a flushed and determined face, and a heart beating more rapidly than usual, Clarence York strode along the passage. Several groups of fellows were standing about chatting, and Tompkins' eyes gleamed suddenly as he sighted Racke, talking to Crooke and Mellish.

He halted before them.

"Well, an' what the thump d'you want, you little worm?" demanded Racke, eyeing him curiously.

"It was compulsory footer practice yesterday, Racke," said Tompkins, in a rather unsteady voice.

"Eh? Well, what about it?" sneered Racke. "Crawl off, you little snivelling—"

"You're talking to the junior captain of St. Jim's now, Racke!" said Tompkins. "It's my job to see the fellows

turn up. If they don't I've got to know the reason why! I want to know why you didn't turn up yesterday?"

"Oh, gad!"

Racke stared blankly at the bold Tompkins. Racke was one of the worst funks in the Shell, but he was older and bigger, and in a higher Form than the new junior skipper; moreover, he was used to kicking or cuffing that mild and inoffensive youth whenever he met him—usually for no reason at all.

So he started now. Other fellows also stared, Tompkins having purposely raised his voice.

"Oh, gad! You—you speakin' to me, Tompkins?"

"Yes, I am!"

"You—you want to know why I didn't turn up?" gasped Racke. "You?"

"Yes—me! And if I don't get a satisfactory answer, Racke, I'm going to punch your nose!" said Tompkins, drawing a deep breath.

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"Great Scott!"

"Gad!" murmured Racke. "Am I dreamin' this? Why, you cheeky, crawlin' little sweep—"

He broke off and made a sudden, furious grab at Tompkins. That warlike youth calmly knocked his hand aside and hit him full on the nose.

"Yooooop!" roared Racke.

He staggered back a pace, the back of his head coming into contact with the passage wall with a resounding crack. Then he gave a roar and went for Tompkins.

Probably he expected Tompkins to turn tail instantly and run for it—as did everybody else.

But Tompkins did nothing of the kind. He stood firm as a rock. Perhaps that was why Racke's attack fizzled out at once. At all events, Racke's wild blow missed by a foot, and the next instant Tompkins' fists were rattling home on his angry features.

Racke simply backed away again, desperately dodging those whirling fists.

"Oh, gweat Scott! Good man, Tompkins!" called Arthur Augustus. "Go it, deah boy!"

Tompkins "went it," his eyes gleaming with the fierce light of battle. One or two of Racke's aimless blows got home, but he never even felt them in his ecstatic joy in the knowledge that the cad of the Shell was obviously funkng him.

There was little doubt upon that fact. Racke dodged and ducked desperately, yelling to the valiant Tompkins to stop. But Clarence York was not likely to stop.

"Fight me, you rotter!" he shouted excitedly. "You've kicked and cuffed me long enough, Racke! I'll show you! Take that—and that—and that—"

Biff! Bang! Smack!

Crash!

"Man down!" sang out Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Racke was down—he sat dizzily on the linoleum, one hand hugging a rapidly-colouring eye, and the other clasping a damaged nose from which the red was trickling.

The triumphant Tompkins danced round him.

"He's licked!" grinned Herries. "My hat! Will wonders never cease? Tompkins has licked him to the wide! Well done, Tompkins!"

"Be merciful, Tompkins!" begged Blake, almost weeping with merriment. "Be merciful in your giddy hour of victory! He's had enough!"

"Has he?" panted Tompkins. "Have you had enough, Racke?"

"Ow-ow! Oh, you rotten cad! Ow-yow! Yes, you cad! Ow!"

"Right!" said Tompkins. "There's another practice on Thursday afternoon. Are you turning up, Racke?"

"Ow! No, you howling cad! I—ow!—jolly well won't, hang you!"

"Right! Fetch me a fives-bat, D'Arcy!" ordered Tompkins, his meek and mild manner quite conspicuous by its absence now.

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy!"

"Here—hold on!" yelled Racke. "Y—yes! I—I will!"

"You'll turn up for footer practice on Thursday?"

"Ow! Ow! Yes, you cad!"

"Right! There's another licking for you if you don't!" gasped Tompkins. "I'll show you I'm not to be played with! Now, where's that rotter, Crooke—"

But Gerald Crooke had gone—obviously he had anticipated the possibility that his turn was next, and had made himself scarce. Crooke was no hero! This was a new Tompkins, with whom Crooke didn't wish to argue!

"Alas! Dear old Crooke has suddenly remembered an urgent appointment elsewhere!" remarked Cardew. "Tompkins, old bean—"

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"Well, never mind!" said Tompkins, facing Cardew with clenched fists and gleaming eyes. "You'll do, Cardew!"

"Eh? Me?" ejaculated Cardew, quite taken aback.

"Yes, you, you rotten slacker!" cried Clarence York recklessly. "You didn't turn up for footer practice, either, Cardew!"

"D-d-d-didn't I?"

"No!" gasped Tompkins, eyeing Cardew's blank face ferociously. "If you can give a satisfactory explanation well and good, Cardew. If you can't I'm going to lick you!"

"Oh, gad!" gasped Cardew. "You—you're goin' to lick me?"

"Yes!" panted Tompkins defiantly, though his voice trembled.

"Oh, gad!"

For an instant Cardew stared at the warlike Tompkins, and then he turned abruptly and fled—his heels fairly flashed as he vanished round the corner of the passage.

A shout of laughter followed him.

Tompkins stood, his fists still clenched, his face scarlet.

"You—you can laugh!" he gasped, rather a catch in his voice. "I know Cardew can lick me. But—but I'm going to do my job as junior captain, and I'm going to make the fellows see I'm not to be played with!"

Blake and D'Arcy and several other fellows ceased laughing abruptly. Cardew's sudden flight had been funny—Cardew intended it to be funny. For all his slacking ways, Cardew was one of the best fighting men in the Lower School, so he was not likely to be afraid of a licking from Clarence York.

Yet there was something pathetically earnest in Tompkins' desperate defiance, and the decent fellows felt a sudden, and new respect for him.

"We're not laughing at you, Tompkins," said Blake, flushing. "Cardew's a silly ass, and he deserves a licking for dodging practice, right enough. But he's a bit above your weight, old chap. Better practise first on chaps like Racke and Crooke. You did jolly well by licking Racke, anyway."

"Yaas, wathah! Wome wasn't built in a day, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus kindly. "You have made a vewy good beginnin', Tompkins. Bwavo! You have much more spiwit and gwit than I gave you credit for, deah boy!"

And as the bell for morning classes rang just then, Arthur Augustus linked his arm in Tompkins' and led him away. But Clarence York's face was brighter now. He could not fail to note the new respect in the faces of the Shell and Fourth fellows, and Tompkins' face flushed with pride and renewed resolution as he accompanied Arthur Augustus into the Form-room.

CHAPTER 5.

Good Old Tompkins!

S MACK!

"Oh-oooooooooogh!"

A breathless murmur of utter dismay swept round the Fourth Form room.

It all happened in a flash!

The Fourth had been unusually late in settling down to work that morning. Clarence York Tompkins' debut as a fighting man had caused no little amazement—and amusement. The Form—indeed, the whole Lower School—had wondered if Tompkins, in his role of junior captain, would provide as much entertainment as had the previous temporary captains.

Now they knew that he intended to do his best, at all events. Apparently Clarence York was determined to prove that he was not the inoffensive, harmless duffer they had thought him. As Tompkins of the Fourth, he was ready to put up with kicks and cuffs from anyone—even fags in the Third. As junior captain of St. Jim's, he obviously had no intention of doing so. He was going to stand no nonsense.

He had certainly succeeded so far in astonishing the natives, so to speak. And the Fourth discussed the affair in whispers and with many chuckles and grins, until Mr. Latham had brought his pointer into play.

After that, work had proceeded in the Fourth Form-room—until an alarming thing happened.

It was Monty Lowther, the humorist of the Shell, who started it.

The Form-rooms of the Shell and Fourth were situated in a corner of the quad, with their windows at right angles and within a few yards of each other. And some bright youth had discovered that by standing up one could see into the other Form-rooms; also that, providing the lower windows were open, one could throw a ball of blotting-paper, or a piece of indiarubber into the next Form-room, and, with luck, hit one of the fellows seated in the corner there.

Thenceforward the merry game had become quite popular, and had gone on undiscovered for some time. Certainly it

was decidedly risky—very risky indeed. But that made it all the more popular.

On this occasion Lowther had started it by hitting Herries on the ear with a piece of indiarubber. Herries had promptly retaliated with a ball of ink-soaked blotting-paper. He missed Lowther, who retrieved the ball, and, waiting his chance, sent it back again.

Unfortunately his aim was hasty and wild.

It being quite a sunny, mild afternoon, both windows were wide open, and the ink-soaked ball whizzed safely through into the Fourth Form-room. But it missed Herries by a yard, and then—

Smack!

The damage was done beyond recall.

The ink-soaked ball struck Mr. Lathom a glancing blow on the ear, knocked off his spectacles, and hit the blackboard before him with a smack that sounded all over the room.

In horror-stricken silence the Form stared at Mr. Lathom as that unlucky gentleman, a black smudge of ink on his ear, blinked down dazedly at his smashed spectacles on the floor.

"What—what— Bless my soul!"

With a brow almost as black as the ink on his august ear, Mr. Lathom stooped and picked up his broken spectacles. Then he turned and faced his horrified Form.

"What boy," he demanded, in a voice trembling with indignant anger, "had the audacity, the outrageous effrontery, to throw that disgusting mass of ink-soaked blotting-paper at his Form master?"

Silence. Naturally, as nobody in the Form was guilty, nobody answered.

Mr. Lathom fairly gasped with anger as his thunderous frown swept the Form-room.

"This is an intolerable outrage!" he gasped. "Stand up at once the boy who dared to throw that missile at me!"

Nobody stood up.

Though the juniors guessed where it had come from, only Herries knew who had flung that luckless missile.

"Bai Jove!" whispered Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "This is weally too bad, you know! Mr. Lathom appawently thinks one of us pitched the w'etched thing at him purposely, Blake."

"Going to be trouble!" groaned Blake. "What awful ass—"

"I think I had better explain," murmured Arthur Augustus.

He rose gracefully to his feet.

"Sit down, you awful ass!" hissed Blake.

"Wats!"

Arthur Augustus remained standing, though Blake tugged frantically at his jacket. Mr. Lathom glared short-sightedly, though none the less ferociously, at Arthur Augustus.

"D'Arcy!" he gasped. "Am I to understand that it was you who threw that—that disgusting missile at me, your Form master?"

"Oh, bai Jove! Wathah not, sir!"

"Then why are you standing, boy?" hooted Mr. Lathom. "Do you know who did throw it, D'Arcy?"

"N-nunno, sir!" gasped Arthur Augustus, wishing he had taken Blake's advice. "I should considah it vewy disrespectful—"

"Then why are you standing up?" thundered Mr. Lathom.

"Bai Jove! I—I wished to wemove your misappwehension, sir. In my opinion the blottin'-paph was not aimed at you, Mr. Lathom," explained Gussy earnestly. "I am quite sure, sir, that the fellows respect you far too much to be so wude and diswepctful as to throw a piece of blottin'-paph at you."

"Sit down!"

"Bai Jove! Weally, sir—"

"Sit down!" bellowed the irate master. "If you did not do it, and do not know who did do it, D'Arcy—"

"Wathah not, sir. But in my opinion—"

"I do not wish to know your opinion, D'Arcy. Sit down at once, and take fifty lines for impertinence!"

"Oh! Oh, bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus sat down, quite squashed!

Mr. Lathom glared round the Form-room. Nobody dared to dream of smiling at the noble Arthur Augustus. The look on the Form master's face showed that it was no time for smiling.

"I demand to know who threw that missile at me!" choked Mr. Lathom. "The culprit will, needless to say, be punished with the utmost severity. If he has not the courage, the decency to stand forward, then the whole Form must suffer. Such an unheard-of outrage shall not go unpunished!"

The scared and dismayed Fourth-Formers looked at each other. The position looked like being serious. Yet, what could be done?

Mr. Lathom took out his watch with a hand that trembled.

"I will allow the Form one minute!" he stated grimly. "If the culprit refuses to confess, or if his name is not made known to me in that time, then the whole Form will remain in detention until four o'clock this afternoon."

"Oh!"

The Fourth signalled their utter dismay with a deep groan. It was Wednesday, a half-holiday, and an unusually fine day for the time of the year. The prospect of spending the sunny hours in detention was not a pleasant one.

And there was no way out of the trouble. The culprit was in another Form-room, possibly quite ignorant of what had happened. To give him away would be to sneak.

They would have to grin and bear it—or so the Form, as a whole, imagined; they could only lose their half-day—and take it out of the culprit afterwards.

Only Clarence York Tompkins did not think so, however. There was a way out and with Tom Merry's words and his own determination still burning in his breast, he saw it and took it.

He stood up, his face white, his eyes shining with the light of grim resolution.

"Well, Tompkins?" exclaimed Mr. Lathom, eyeing him in great amazement. "Is—is it possible that you, of all boys, are the culprit?"

"I—I'm sorry it hit you, sir!" gasped Tompkins, sincerely enough. "But—but I'm ready to be punished! It—it isn't right for the whole Form to be punished, sir!"

"Bless my soul!" Mr. Lathom peered at Tompkins' face, now very red. That Clarence York Tompkins, the most timid and least troublesome member of his Form, had committed such a crime almost took his breath away. "Bless my soul! Tompkins stand out here, sir!"

Tompkins stood out before the Form, who looked on in the greatest amazement. Many fellows in the Form had always held the belief that Clarence York was a trifle "touched"; they believed it still more now.

"So—so you are the culprit, Tompkins—the insolent young ruffian who dared to throw an ink-soaked missile at his Form master?" articulated Mr. Lathom.

Tompkins' heart failed him for a moment, but only for a moment. Then he took a deep breath.

"I—I'm sorry it hit you, sir!" he gasped. "I swear it was not aimed at you! It—it was an accident! And—and I'm ready to stand my punishment, sir!"

(Continued on next page.)

ATHLETES TRAIN ON IT



There is half a cup
of English full cream
milk in every

**CADBURY
BIG MILK
BAR 2^D**



"Oh, indeed!" said Mr. Lathom, taking his cane from his desk with deadly deliberation. "I am glad, Tompkins, that you have found the courage and manliness to confess and so save the whole Form from punishment. I am also ready to believe that it was an accident, and that that missile was not intended to hit me."

"Y-yes, sir!"

"Were I to believe otherwise," said Mr. Lathom, in a tone that made Tompkins devoutly thankful that he didn't, "I should take you before the headmaster at once. As it is, I will punish you myself. You must be taught that a Form-room is not the place for such childish and dangerous pursuits, Tompkins. You will also be required to pay for the damage done to my spectacles. Now touch your toes, sir!"

Again Tompkins' heart failed him for the moment. Then he set his lips. He remembered his resolutions. He was tired of kicks and cuffs, tired of being a fellow of no account whom even the fags could cheek with impunity. He was going to show the fellows that he was a fellow of some account, and here was his chance. Here, also, was his chance to take Tom Merry's advice to welcome punishment, to look for trouble if need be.

He touched his toes, though his legs wobbled a little; still, he reached down and touched them.

Mr. Lathom raised his cane to smite.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy got over his amazement suddenly then, and awakened to what was about to happen. He jumped up—at least, a dozen fellows from all over the room did likewise.

"Stop, sir! It wasn't Tompkins!"

"Wathah not! Pway stop, Mr. Lathom!"

"Tompkins didn't do it, sir. Stop!"

Mr. Lathom jumped as the cries rang out from all directions.

"Boys, what—what—How dare you!"

"It wasn't Tompkins who did it, sir!" cried Jack Blake, giving Clarence York a look of wonder. "I don't know why he's acting like this, sir, but we know he didn't do it."

"Bai Jove! Wathah not, sir."

"It wasn't Tompkins, sir!"

The whole Form—excepting Tompkins himself—was informing Mr. Lathom, in various degrees of excited indignation, that it "wasn't Tompkins!"

The master of the Fourth lowered his cane.

"Blake, what do you mean?" he gasped angrily.

"Tompkins has confessed—he has admitted that he is the culprit! How dare you—"

"He hasn't confessed, sir!" gasped Blake eagerly.

"The awful ass—I mean, Tompkins only said he was ready to be punished, sir. Why, goodness knows! But he didn't—Ow!"

Blake broke off with rather a startled yelp as something hit him on the chin and dropped on to the desk before him.

It was a ball of ink-soaked blotting-paper, and it had whizzed through the open window.

Even little Mr. Lathom saw that significant fact.

"Bless my soul!" he ejaculated. "What—what—Ah!"

Two or three paces towards the window had taken Mr. Lathom in the line of fire, so to speak. His suspicious glance went through the open window—and then he saw it all!

As he glared out he was just in time to see Lowther's head and shoulders above the sill of the Shell Form-room window. Then the head and shoulders vanished with remarkable swiftness.

"Ah!" repeated Mr. Lathom grimly. Though too short-sighted to recognise Lowther, Mr. Lathom had seen quite enough. "Ah! I think I understand now, Blake. Tompkins!"

"Y-y-yes, sir."

"You will kindly maintain order until my return. I shall not be many moments."

"Y-yes, sir."

Mr. Lathom, with a thunderous brow, rustled to the door with his broken spectacles in his hand. He strode out, and then the Form looked at each other.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Blake. "That's done it! Who was it, Herries?"

"Lowther—that ass Lowther!" said Herries, unable to restrain a grin. "Looks to me as if the old bird spotted him, too!"

He cautiously stood up and took a peep into the Shell Form-room—or that corner of it within range. He saw nothing for a few moments, and then he suddenly saw Lowther, with a red, dismayed face, stand up in his place and move out of range.

"He's done—Lowther's howled out!" gasped Herries.

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"He's just been called out before the Form, I think. Oh, my hat! Hark!"

Faintly through the open window there came a significant swishing sound, followed by a sudden, significant yell.

Apparently the culprit had been discovered—and was paying the penalty.

A moment later Mr. Lathom rustled into the Fourth Form room again. He was looking rather red in the face, but quite satisfied.

"I have discovered the wretched culprit, boys!" he said briefly and grimly. "As I suspect you were already aware, it was a member of the Shell Form who had the brazen effrontery to throw that missile through the open windows from his Form-room. He is now being suitably punished by his Form master."

"Y-yes, sir!"

"I trust," resumed Mr. Lathom, with a grim glance round the room, "that this will be a lesson to him, and also to anyone tempted again to play such a scandalous trick. Tompkins!"

"Y-yes, sir!"

"Foolish boy! Why did you lead me to believe that you threw that blotting-paper at me?" demanded Mr. Lathom, eyeing the blushing Tompkins in wonder and amazement. "Why did you choose to take punishment for something you had not done? Have you suddenly taken leave of your senses, my boy?"

"N-no, sir!" gasped Tompkins, not quite knowing whether to be relieved or disappointed. "I—I—I—"

"Well? Why did you do such an extraordinary thing, Tompkins?"

"I—I didn't want the fellows to suffer, sir."

"What?"

"I—I'm junior captain now, sir!" mumbled Tompkins, blushing furiously. "It—it's my job to stand up for the fellows, sir! It wasn't fair for all the Form to lose their half for something they hadn't done."

"And—and you chose to shoulder the burden yourself rather than let them suffer, Tompkins?" stuttered Mr. Lathom.

"Y-y-yes, sir!"

"Bai Jove! Bwavo, Tompkins!" said Arthur Augustus involuntarily.

"Hear, hear!"

It was a buzz of agreement, and Tompkins fairly went scarlet with happy elation as he heard it.

"Silence!" thundered Mr. Lathom, though he was eyeing the junior very curiously indeed now. "Tompkins!"

"Y-yes, sir."

"You—you are an extraordinary boy, Tompkins! None the less," said Mr. Lathom, his voice quite kindly now, "I cannot but admire your—your generous self-sacrifice, though you should not have attempted to deceive your Form master, good as your intentions apparently were. You may resume your seat!"

"Yes, sir."

"Blake, kindly fetch me my spare pair of spectacles, which you will find in the table drawer of my desk in my study. Now, boys, we will resume our study of English History."

And the morning work proceeded on its even way after that. But it was the happiest morning Clarence York Tompkins ever remembered. Usually he slumped in his seat, conscious of being a fellow of no account whatever. But now he sat up straight, his face cheery, conscious of the undoubted fact that he had, at last, proved himself to be a fellow of some account in the Form. The new junior had acted on Tom Merry's good advice—with far better results than he had dared to hope for.

CHAPTER 6.

Amazing!

"TOMPKINS!"

"That ass Tompkins!"

"Did you ever?"

"He's coming out, and no mistake!"

"Yaas, wathah! I told you so, deah boys!" commented Arthur Augustus.

"Eh? What did you tell us?" asked Blake, staring.

"I told you that there was good stuff in Tompkins!" explained Arthur Augustus, shaking his head sagely. "I wathah flattah myself that I am responsible for this remarkable change in Tompkins."

"You?" ejaculated Digby.

"Yaas, wathah! I think I told you I had given him some vewy good advice. Well, the deah boy has taken it to heart, and this is the result. I am vewy glad indeed that Tompkins has the vewy good sense to recognise and act upon good advice, you know."

"Oh, my hat! Then it's to you we owe the half-holiday, and not Tompkins," said Herries solemnly.

"Well, I suppose it is to a gweat extent!" admitted the swell of the Fourth innocently and modestly. "Still, you fellows must admit that a gweat deal of the cweat goes to old Tompkins."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! Weally, I see nothin' to laugh at in that remark," said Arthur Augustus, turning his monocle on the laughing juniors. "I weally do think Tompkins has earned a gweat deal of pwise by his self-sacrificin' act, you know! But for him, we should— Bai Jove! Heah he is now! Bwavo, Tompkins!"

The face of Clarence York was flushed and bright as he came out of the Form-room. He almost purred with delight as he noted the glances of the fellows. All were smiling pleasantly. Still, Tompkins was not used to smiles on all sides—smiles of which he was the object, at all events. He was used to being ignored, to being treated as less than a mere nobody. Few actually disliked Tompkins—he was a fellow it was hard to dislike. He was just good-naturedly ignored as a fellow of no account—which position Tompkins had accepted with his customary diffidence and meekness.

Now the scene was changed! He was the junior skipper of St. Jim's. Moreover, he was responsible for what all agreed was an act of real heroism. Few fellows would have had the nerve to face the prospect of such a thrashing as Mr. Lathom would undoubtedly have administered.

Tompkins had pluck—he had proved it beyond all doubt. "Good man, Tompkins!" said Blake. "It was jolly decent of you to chip in like that—no end decent and plucky. You've got grit!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Good old Tompkins!"

Tompkins fairly blushed with pleasure. He was "Good old Tompkins" now—not "That ass Tompkins," as of yore.

The phrase sounded sweet in Tompkins' ear.

The Shell fellows were just pouring out of their Form-room, and the Terrible Three joined Blake & Co. in the passage. Lowther walked as if every step gave him an uncomfortable twinge, and he looked very sorry for himself indeed.

"Hallo! What's on here?" asked Tom Merry, eyeing Tompkins' flushed face curiously. "I say, did Lathom collar any of you chaps over that chucking game?"

"He collared me," groaned Lowther dismally. "I thought Blake was standing up to pitch something back at me; and, like an idiot, I let fly without making sure. I wish I hadn't! Linton fairly laid it on. I shan't sit down comfortably for a week."

"Well, I always said the game would be spotted sooner or later," grinned Tom Merry. "Still, it might have meant a flogging. You were lucky, Monty."

"Luckier than we might have been, anyway," said Blake grimly.

And he told the story of Tompkins' gallant act, while Clarence York looked on in proud and beaming delight.

The Terrible Three listened, and then they looked at the new Tompkins.

"Well, my hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "Good for you, Tompy!"

"Good man, Tompkins!" said Manners approvingly.

"It—it was nothing," said Tompkins modestly. "After all, a chap who's skipper ought to take a bit of responsibility. It was up to me to save the Form, and I saw it was the only thing to do."

"Well, I'm not so sure I would have done it, anyway," admitted Tom Merry. "I'm jolly glad you didn't get the licking, old chap."

"And I wish he had instead of me!" groaned Lowther. "It's my opinion Linton's giddy arm gets heftier as he gets older!"

"Faith, an' this licks me entiorely," said Micky Mulvaney, who was eyeing his study mate as if he were some strange animal. "Fancy ould Tompy showing pluck, bejabbers! Have ye been treated with monkey glands, Tompkins darlint?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You shut up!" said Tompkins. "I've had enough of your cheek, Mulvaney. If you don't want a licking, just shut up and keep your place!"

"Holy smoke!" gasped Mulvaney. "It's daft he is, after all! He wouldn't dare to say that to me if he wasn't! Well, I'll let him off," he added generously. "After this mornin', I'll let him off. An', what's more, I'll not kick him if he grumbles about lighting the fire or making the toast for tay this afternoon. I'll overlook his cheek, and won't lick him to-day!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You'd jolly well better not try to lick me," said the new Tompkins defiantly. "I've stood enough from you, and I'm standing no more, Mulvaney! You won't catch me fagging for you in our study from now on, you cheeky cad! I only stood it before because—because—well, because you're not worth the trouble of licking. So there!"

"Faith, an' aren't I?" stuttered Micky Mulvaney,

bridling at once. "Here, hold me jacket, someone! Why, I'll knock the stuffin' out of the swankin' little worm! I'll see if he's going to get his ears up just because—"

"No, you won't, Micky," grinned Blake, pushing the excited Irish youth back. "Tompkins is the hero of the giddy hour, and nobody's going to lick him, my lad. Besides— Here, what—"

Blake was rudely interrupted—very rudely. A hand gripped his collar and sent him staggering against the passage wall. The next instant Tompkins was hurled in the opposite direction.

It was Gerald Cutts of the Fifth, and that lofty youth was hot, apparently, in a very amiable temper as he strode along the passage and sent the juniors to right and left out of his path.

"Out of the way, you lounging young sweeps!" he snorted. "What the dickens d'you mean by blocking the passage? Here, hold on, though. I want you, young Tompkins."

Cutts seemed to think of something as he was striding on his lofty way, and he paused.

"Why, you—you rotten cad!" spluttered Blake. "Who d'you think you are, Cutts? You may be in the Fifth, but— Yow!"

Cutts' answer was a careless slap across the ear that sent Blake staggering away with a howl. Then Cutts turned again to Tompkins, as if Blake didn't exist.

"You're just the kid I want, Tompkins," he said. "Anything on this afternoon, young 'un?"

"No," gasped Tompkins, rubbing his head. "Look here, Cutts—"

"Well, it wouldn't matter if you had," said Cutts pleasantly. "You see, I want a fag for this afternoon. I happen to want you to trot over to Rylcombe for me. Come to my study about two, and I'll tell you what I want. Mind you turn up, or there's going to be a hiding for you, kid."

Cutts was about to proceed on his way, quite ignorant, like Racke had been, of the fact that Clarence York had changed his spots, as it were. He was first made aware of this when Tompkins, his face rather pale, called him back.

"Here, hold on, Cutts!" he gasped.

Cutts stopped, and smiled. It was not a pleasant smile. Cutts was in the Fifth Form, and he was a bully and a great deal of a blackguard. He knew perfectly well that he had no right to fag fellows in the Fourth, but he did fag them—at least, the more timid members of the Form—simply because they were afraid of the painful consequences that would follow if they refused. It was a little failing of Cutts & Co. that caused a great deal of trouble between the Lower School and the Fifth. And now Cutts expected to hear excuses from Tompkins—excuses which he was prepared to deal with by "booting" or cuffing that reluctant youth.

"Well, kid?" he asked. "Got something on, after all, this afternoon? If you have, you can call it off. I want you—see?"

"You want me to fag for you?" gasped Tompkins, conscious that all eyes were upon him.

"Naturally."

"Then," said the new Tompkins, drawing a deep breath, "you can go and eat coke, Cutts!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"And chop chips, Cutts!" said Tompkins recklessly. "You've no right to fag a fellow in the Fourth, for one thing, and, for another, the junior captain isn't likely to fag for a swanking, bullying cad like you, Cutts!"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

The juniors stared blankly at Tompkins. Tompkins was quite aware of the sensation he was causing and it gave him the courage to go on with the good work. It was the chance of a lifetime to show the fellows the sort of stuff he was made of.

"You're a coward as well as a bully, Cutts!" he continued. "Everybody knows that you crumple up when you're faced. For two pins, I'd—I'd have a go at you myself, you rotter!"

"Good gad!"

Gerald Cutts eyed the warlike Tompkins almost dazedly for a moment. Then, as if he really grasped the situation at last, he suddenly shot out his fist and sent that hapless youth spinning.

Tompkins yelped, struck the passage wall, and then flopped down, with a bump, on the linoleum. Cutts took a stride, grabbed him, and hauled him to his feet again. Then he brought his boot into play with savage force, and that made the hapless Tompkins howl.

"Yarrooogh! Yow! Leggo, you rotten bully! Yooooop!"

"Here, that'll do, Cutts!" snapped Tom Merry, his eyes gleaming. "Now, chaps, on the ball! Here's where we chip in! Poor old Tompkins fairly asked for it, but—"

There was no need to say more. Cutts was the juniors' bitter enemy, and the call to arms was enough for the Fourth and Shell. They fell upon Gerald Cutts as one man, and Cutts roared as he went over with a crash.

The next moment Tompkins was freed, and the juniors

were swarming over the cad of the Fifth. Heedless of his furious blows, they rolled him and bumped him until Gerald Cutts scarcely knew where he was or what was happening.

"We'll cool you down a bit, old sport!" gasped Tom Merry. "We'll teach you to come the heavy hand in our own quarters, my pippin. Bring him along to the nearest fire-bucket, chaps."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Good wheeze!"

Cutts didn't want to go, but he had no choice in the matter. He was big and strong, but he was helpless in the grasp of innumerable hands. He was hauled along to the row of fire-buckets at the end of the passage. Blake unhooked one of the buckets, and into the cold water Cutts' hapless head was ducked—not once, but many times.

What was left in the bucket at the finish was then emptied over his head.

Gerald Cutts raved and spluttered, almost inarticulate with fury.

As the head of the staircase was conveniently handy, the juniors then rolled Gerald Cutts down the stairs. Luckily for him, it was only a short flight to the next landing, and, after arriving there in a sprawling, spluttering heap, Gerald Cutts scrambled up, almost foaming at the mouth.

But, though he had obviously had enough, he did not seem conscious of the fact. With a bellow, he charged up the stairs again, with fists waving. He was promptly collared and rolled down again.

Wisdom came to him then, and this time he crawled slowly to his feet, shook a furious fist at the laughing juniors above, and limped away.

"Well, that's settled friend Cutts!" panted Tom Merry, straightening his collar and tie. "Will the chap never learn, I wonder, that it doesn't pay to bully Fourth and Shell chaps! We'll keep at him until he does, anyway."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And the juniors dispersed, feeling satisfied that once more they had "settled" Cutts of the Fifth. Unfortunately for them, Gerald Cutts was by no means settled yet.

CHAPTER 7. Cutts' Plot!

"RACKE! Just a minute!" Aubrey Racke halted as Cutts of the Fifth called to him from the doorway of his study.

"Hallo!" he said. "Want me, Cutts?"

"Yes," said Cutts. "Come inside, old chap!"

Racke went inside quite willingly and coolly. There were few fellows in the Lower School who would have done so. An invitation from Cutts to enter his study was looked upon as being like unto the invitation of the spider to the fly by most fellows in the Lower School.

But Racke was friendly with Cutts. The cad of the Shell was a fellow after Cutts' own heart, whose tastes and pursuits were as similar as they were shady and unhealthy. Moreover, Racke was a fellow with plenty of money to burn, and more than once Cutts had found his financial help very useful.

So Racke walked in quite cheerfully, though there was rather a calculating sneer on his lips as he did so. He wondered if it was the loan of a fiver or tenner this time.

But it wasn't either.

Cutts closed the door after Racke, and seated himself on the study table.

"There's a kid named Tompkins in the Fourth, I believe, Racke?" he remarked.

Racke grinned. He knew that Cutts was as well aware of that fact as he was. He had heard of Tompkins' amazing defiance of Gerald Cutts, and of its sad results upon the Fifth-Former.

"Yes, there is," he agreed, with a grin. "The kid as good as wanted to fight you this morning before dinner, I believe. All the chaps are roaring about it."

Cutts smiled, though his eyes glinted.

"The kid's a bit touched!" he said coolly. "All the same, he did get me in for a ragging from those young hounds! I admit I got it hot."

"Cold, if you ask me!" grinned Racke. "Cold water. I heard about it, Cutts!"

"Yes; no doubt it is funny, Racke!" Cutts spoke pleasantly, though he looked as if nothing would please him better than to give Racke the licking of his life. "But never mind that now. The point is that I'm rather keen to see Tompkins—soon! D'you think you could get him here for me this afternoon—alone?"

"Oh!" Racke understood now.

"I'm rather keen to have a chat with the kid," said Cutts.

"With a cricket-bat?" grinned Racke.

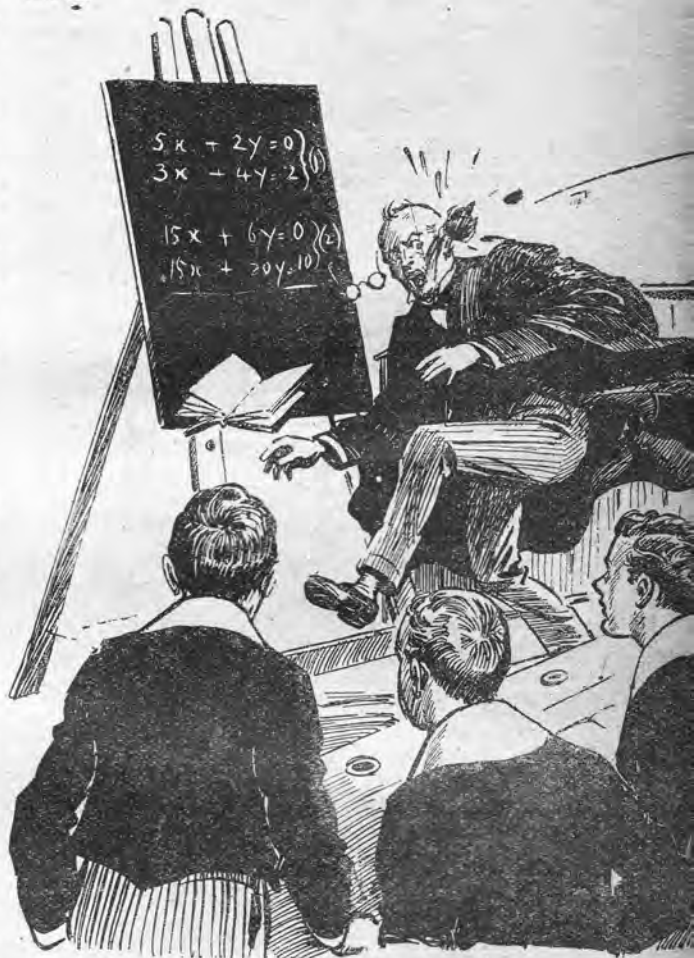
"Well, I may bring a cricket-bat or a stump into the discussion," said Cutts. "We'll see. D'you think you could work it, kid?"

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"Well, he wouldn't come for me," said Racke, evidently determined to be humorous. "But why not send him a challenge to fight him here, Cutts? I believe he told Mulvaney he wasn't afraid of you, and that he'd a good mind to challenge you. The potty imbecile says he's going to right the wrongs of the giddy oppressed Lower School this week. He's going to put you in your place, to begin with."

And Racke chuckled at the expression on Cutts' face. "Gad!" gasped Cutts. "Is he really, Racke? Well, he'll have his chance when you get him here, kid! It's a scream, Racke—almost as funny as the way he licked you yesterday."

"Oh!" said Racke, his hilarity vanishing. "Yes, I heard about that, Racke!" said Cutts. "You were a worm to allow that little sweep to lick you. Pah! Anyway, if you want to get your own back, now's your chance."



Smack! "Oh-oooooh!" A breathless murmur of utter dismay swept the open window and struck Mr. Latham a glancing blow on the ear. Smack that sounded all over the room. "What—what—"

"I'd get him here quickly enough if I could," said Racke, his eyes glinting with malice. "But—"

"Easily enough!" smiled Cutts.

He took a sheet of blank paper from the table, folded it, and placed it in an envelope. On the outside he wrote his own name carefully.

"That's addressed to me, and it's as near Railton's fist as matters," he said briefly. "Take it to Tompkins, and tell him Railton says he's to deliver it to me personally. See?"

"But he'll— Oh, all right! I'll try it!" said Racke, suddenly chuckling. "He's a frightful mug, and will swallow anything."

"Buck up, then, in case he goes out of doors!" said Cutts. He handed over the note, and Racke grinned and went out, making his way to Tompkins' study. Luckily for his treacherous purpose, Tompkins was alone in his study, and Racke handed him the note.

"You're to hand that to Cutts personally, Tompkins," said Racke. "You see who it's from!"

"Looks like Railton's fist," said Tompkins, looking not a

little alarmed. "But—but, look here, Racke, why should I take it? If you've been told—"

"Because it's important, and you're the junior skipper," said Racke. "I suppose that's why!"

"I—I don't believe it!" said Tompkins, eyeing Racke doubtfully. "I believe you were told to take it, Racke, and—and you funk going."

"What!" exclaimed Racke, in assumed astonishment and scorn. "Afraid of Cutts! What rot! I may be afraid of

Why, if he only could! Tompkins gasped. Tompkins was more than "fed-up" with being a fellow of no account. He fairly burned with eager enthusiasm to show what he could do—to shine in the firmament of St. Jim's.

Here was his chance! It would not be unfair to lick Cutts, coward or no coward. Cutts was a big fellow, nearly twice his size. And he deserved to be licked, if any fellow ever did. And, once licked by a junior, Gerald Cutts would never dare to hold up his head again, much less continue his bullying.

Breathing hard and quick, Clarence York Tompkins made his desperate resolution swiftly, and, with the note in his hand, he almost ran out of the study in his burning eagerness to fix things up with Gerald Cutts.

From the opposite corner of the passage Aubrey Racke saw him emerge and vanish towards the Fifth Form quarters, and then Racke doubled up and roared with laughter.

Several fellows who were about stared at him.

"What's the joke?" asked Crooke, joining him.

"Tompkins!" gasped Racke. "He—he's—ha ha, ha!—gone to challenge Cutts to a stand-up fight!"

"Wha-at?"

"It's a fact!" choked Racke. "I'm certain he has! I told him I believed he could lick him, and he swallowed it like the born, hopeless duffer he is! I—I'll teach the little worm to pitch into me!"

"He, he, he!" sniggered Trimble. "Is that a fact, Racke—is Tompkins going to challenge Cutts? Oh, the awful ass! He, he, he!"

"Eh? What's that?" demanded Tom Merry, coming along just then with Lowther and Manners. "What's that—what's the joke about Tompkins?"

"He, he, he. He's going—" Trimble was beginning, when Racke gave him a glare. The last fellows he wished to discover his caddish trick were Tom Merry & Co.

"Shut up, you fool!" snapped Racke. "It's nothing—"

"Why should I shut up?" grinned Trimble. "He, he, he! You've put Tompkins up to it, I bet. He'll swallow anything! You've done it to get your own back for licking you. My hat! Let's go along and see the fun."

"What fun?" snapped Tom Merry, catching Trimble by the arm and swinging him round. "Is that the truth, Trimble? Has Tompkins gone to see Cutts?"

"Yes—to challenge him to a stand-up scrap!" chortled Trimble. "He, he, he! Ain't it a scream! Cutts will make shavings of him."

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "The—the awful little chump! Racke, you cad, I suppose you put him up to this?"

"Well, he simply begs to have his leg pulled, an'—Ow!"

Aubrey Racke's words broke off with a yell as he was sent spinning away. Tom Merry was not likely to stand on ceremony with the treacherous cad of the Shell.

"Lowther," he snapped, "run and round some of our fellows up—Levison, Clive, and Blake and his crowd. Quick! Come on, Manners—you, too, Glyn and Julian."

With that Tom Merry dashed away, and after him went Manners and Julian and Glyn, who happened to be at hand. If the hapless and innocent Tompkins was to be rescued there was no time to lose. And Lowther rushed off in search of further aid—it was never safe to visit the Fifth quarters unless in force. Aubrey Racke rubbed his head and glared after them, bitterly regretting his folly in allowing his spiteful joy to overcome prudence.

CHAPTER 8.

A Lesson for Gerald Cutts!

"COME in, kid! That for me?"

Gerald Cutts' tone was pleasant—almost purring. To hear it one would have imagined Cutts to be the most kindly and genial fellow one might wish to meet.

Tompkins accepted the invitation at once. A glance round the room had told him that Cutts was alone, and he would have entered had Cutts greeted him with the ferocity of a tiger.

None the less, Clarence York, screwed up to a pitch of terrific courage as he was, could not help feeling a little shaky as he entered the study. He had rushed in where angels feared to tread, and he could not help feeling a lingering doubt that Cutts might not be such an arrant coward as rumour had it.

Cutts looked very big and strong indeed, and Clarence York felt curiously small and insignificant in his presence.

Yet he set his teeth, determined to go through with it. Tompkins undoubtedly had pluck.

"That for me?" repeated Cutts cheerily. "Good! Sit down, kid. There—there may be an answer."

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cept round the Fourth Form-room as an ink-soaked ball whizzed through It knocked off his spectacles and hit the blackboard before him with a less my soul!" gasped the Fourth Form master. (See Chapter 5.)

him when his pals are with him, but alone—what piffle! Everybody knows what a hopeless funk he is. Why, a fellow with pluck like you could lick him easily, Tompkins."

"You—you really think so?" said the guileless Tompkins breathlessly.

"I'm quite certain of it! And, what's more, it's your duty, as junior skipper, to undertake the task!" said Racke indignantly. "It's been dodged long enough. And it's high time this Fifth Form bullyin' an' faggin' was stopped! An' it'll only stop when Cutts has been soundly licked—not before. He's the prime mover in it."

"I—I know that, Racke!"

"Why, you'd be the giddy hero of the Lower School if you did pull it off!" said Racke. "Still, it's your own affair, an' if you don't wish to be the most successful junior skipper we've ever had, then that's your look-out!"

With which remark Aubrey Racke walked out—leaving the note behind him.

Tompkins stood and blinked at the note breathlessly.

So even Racke believed he could lick Cutts of the Fifth.

Tompkins sat down—on the extreme edge of a chair. Cutts strolled casually past him and closed the door, turning the key in the lock.

"Now I've got you, you little sweep!" he snarled.

Tompkins jumped. The sudden change in Cutts' tone was rather terrifying. Moreover, he could not doubt the significance of Cutts' action in locking the door.

"Look here, Cutts—" he stammered, standing up.

"Now I've got you, you little worm!" hissed Cutts. "You got me that ragging this morning, and you're going to pay for it! So for two pence you'd have a go at me, would you?"

Tompkins gasped.

He saw now that the note was a trick—a trick to get him in the Fifth-Former's study. In fact, Cutts had already flung it into the fire unopened. Its work was evidently accomplished. Cutts had trapped him here to thrash him—if he could! He meant to bully him in revenge for what had happened that morning.

"Oh!" panted Tompkins. "Oh, you rotter, Cutts! But—but I'm not afraid of you, you rotten bully!"

"You're not, eh?"

"N-no!" gasped Tompkins, his eyes flashing. "I—I came here not only to deliver that note; I—I came to challenge you!"

"Challenge me! Oh gad!"

"To a stand-up fight!" said Tompkins, his heart thumping heavily. "You—you've bullied the Lower School long enough, Cutts. I'm going to put a stop to it by—by licking you!"

"Good gad! You—you're goin' to lick me?"

"Y-yes! You're a rotten coward and a bully, Cutts, and I don't care twopence for you!" gasped Tompkins, fairly going headlong into it now. "You're a bit of a blackguard, too! You smoke and you're a rotter in general! And—and I'm going to show you what the Lower School think of you!"

"Good gad! You—you are——"

"Yes, I'm challenging you now to a fight, with or—without gloves!" went on Tompkins. "Where or when you like! So—so unlock that door now. If you don't, I'll—I'll jolly well pitch into you now. So there!"

"Potty!" ejaculated Cutts, eyeing the gallant Tompkins wonderingly. "Absolutely off his chump! Why the thump do they allow a chap like this at school——"

He broke off, and his wonderment gave place suddenly to rage.

"You—you cheeky little sweep!" he hissed. "Why, I'll—I'll——"

He was interrupted by the rattling of the doorknob. Then came the drawing voice of Gilmore of the Fifth.

"Hallo, what the deuce have you locked the door for, Cutts? You in there?"

"Hold on!" called Cutts, with a grin.

He grabbed Tompkins by the collar and fairly lifted him to the door. Then, still holding the junior, he turned the key in the lock with his free hand.

Gilmore and Prye entered, and stared as Cutts kicked the door shut.

"Hallo! What the merry deuce——" began Gilmore, staring at Tompkins. "Oh, it's that kid who got you ducked, Cutts?"

"Yes, it is, you men!" smiled Cutts. "You've just come in time to hold the kid across the table. Hand me that cane there, Gilmore, old man!"

Gilmore shrugged his shoulders.

"Give the kid a booting and let him go!" he suggested. "Not worth the trouble——"

"I'm going to give him the hidin' of his miserable life!" said the cad of the Fifth, gritting his teeth. "I'll teach him to cheek me, the little sweep. Why, the young hound's challenged me to a scrap."

"What!" yelled Gilmore.

"He's also told me his opinion of me," said Cutts. "Told me to my dashed face that I'm a bully and a blackguard, also a coward! A dashed kid in the Fourth, mind you! He—he's going to lick me, he says."

"Oh, good gad!"

The other two Fifth-Formers gazed at the now terrified Tompkins as if he was a strange, weird sort of animal. Then Gilmore grinned and brought the cane from the corner. It was a walking-cane, and quite a hefty one.

"Let him have it!" said Gilmore. "Can't have the young rotter cheekin' the Fifth like that, of course! Give him beans!"

"I'm goin' to!" said Cutts unpleasantly. "He'll hardly be able to crawl back to the fag quarters when I've finished with him. Up you go!"

With a powerful swing of his arm Cutts flung the hapless Clarence York face downwards across the table. Then he took the walking-cane from Gilmore, while that elegant worthy held Tompkins' kicking legs and Prye held his arms.

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"Better gag him!" suggested Prye. "Don't want a crowd swarmin' round to know if we're killin' pigs."

"Ow!" panted Tompkins, wriggling and struggling vainly. "Oh, you rotten bullies! Lemme go, and I'll fight Cutts man to man! I'm not afraid of him. Lemme go!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Gilmore. "There's a chance for you, Cutts! Why not let him have a go at you, and—Oh gad!"

"Look out—the door!" yelled Cutts.

But he was too late. The door, which Cutts had forgotten to lock again, crashed open just then, and Tom Merry rushed in, followed by Glyn, Manners, and Julian.

"All right—only four of them!" yelled Cutts. "Lock the door and collar 'em!"

But it was easier said than done. Tom Merry himself kicked the door shut. Then, as Gilmore dashed at it, he collared him low in Rugby tackle fashion and brought him crashing to the carpet. At the same moment Glyn and Julian tackled Prye whilst Manners rushed at Cutts.

Nor did Tompkins keep out of it. As Cutts released him he scrambled off the table and jumped to Manners' aid. Gerald Cutts gave a howl as he received quite a hefty clump on the nose.

"Ow!" he gasped. "Oh gad! Ow! Why, you little fiend——"

He turned upon Tompkins ferociously, but as he turned Manners leaped at him. The next moment the study was the scene of a wild and whirling struggle.

"Stick to 'em!" gasped Tom Merry, who had more than his hands full with Gilmore. "Don't let the cads lock the door, or we're done. Clear out, Tompkins, while you've got the chance."

But Tompkins had no intention of clearing out. Cutts evidently guessed that reinforcements were on the way, and his one aim and object was to reach the door. He struggled furiously to release himself from the clutches of Manners and Tompkins.

He did manage to reach the door, with the two juniors clinging desperately to him. But even as he did so it was flung open from outside, and Lowther, followed by half a dozen juniors, charged into the study.

"Rescue, Fifth!" yelled Cutts, seeing they were now hopelessly outnumbered. "Rescue! Res— Gug-gug-grrrrr!"

Cutts' yell ended in a muffled gurgle, as Lowther clapped a hand over his mouth.

"Gag 'em, or we'll find ourselves trapped!" he said, with a chuckle. "Their little hankies will do, chaps!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

With the odds so heavily against them, the position of Cutts & Co. was hopeless—unless help came. Tom Merry & Co. were determined to prevent help coming if they could. The door was hastily locked; and then, despite the desperate struggles of the three black sheep of the Fifth, their hands were tied behind them, and they were each gagged with their own handkerchiefs.

"Now we can clear!" said Tom Merry breathlessly. "We'll leave these beauties to get free as best they can!"

"Hold on!" said Blake grimly. "That will be letting the cads down too lightly, Tommy. We've got to teach Cutts a lesson."

"Lessons never seem to have any effect on Cutts," grinned Tom Merry. "Still, I think you're right, Blake; he must be taught that he can't do just as he likes with Lower School chaps. Perhaps after a few more lessons it'll dawn on him that it doesn't pay."

"Urrrrrr! Grooooooh!" came from behind Cutts' gag.

"Your own fad, Cutts!" said Tom Merry severely. "You've been coming it a bit too thick lately! Aren't you jolly well ashamed of yourself? Two bulking Fifth-Formers holding down a Fourth chap while another lams him! What shall we do with 'em, chaps? Mustn't waste a whole half-day on 'em!"

"Wathah not! Ink their faces and turn them into Chwistsy Minstrels, deah boys!"

"I've got a better wheeze than that!" chuckled Lowther, who was examining the study table closely. "Why not behead 'em?"

"Eh?"

"Bai Jove! Lowthah——"

"You'll see!" grinned Lowther. "I've a wheeze to make the bounders look silly. That'll hurt 'em more than an ordinary ragging."

Lowther took a final glance under the table. It was a rather massive oak affair, with a loose leaf in the centre, and a handle and winding arrangement underneath to screw the two outer leaves together when the centre one was not needed. Cutts was a fellow who often gave parties, and he had evidently found an ordinary table not big enough, so had purchased this.

After a little struggling, Lowther managed to lift out the centre leaf.

"See the idea?" he grinned. "We'll 'behead' Cutts and his pals between the two outer leaves of the giddy table!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Jolly good wheeze!" said Blake.

"Yes, that should make them look silly," said Tom Merry, with a chuckle. "Better be careful, though; we don't want to hurt the little dears. How'd you like the wheeze, Cutts?"

"Grooooooh! Moooooh!" said Cutts.

He obviously did not like the wheeze, nor did his pals. But that did not worry Tom Merry & Co. Despite their struggles and gurgles, Cutts, Gilmore, and Prye were bundled under the table. They were placed in line in a kneeling posture with their heads popping up out of the space where the centre leaf had been.

Then the two outer leaves were screwed up. It was not an easy job to keep Cutts & Co.'s wriggling heads in line, and the winding arrangement was somewhat stiff from disuse. But it was done at last, and the outer leaves screwed up under the chins of Cutts & Co. and touching their necks at the back. They were now effectually "beheaded."

Tom Merry & Co. howled with laughter at the ludicrous sight they presented, with their heads only visible above the shining table-top.

Cutts, Gilmore, and Prye gurgled and grunted, their features scarlet with rage and mortification.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! Aren't they a pictuah, deah boys?" chuckled Arthur Augustus. "Fetch your camewah, Mannahs!"

"Too risky to take a snap of them!" said Tom Merry regretfully. "The sooner we clear out the better, chaps! We'll remove their giddy gags, and then they can yell for help if they want to."

"I shouldn't want to if I was in their position!" chuckled Dick Julian. "Wouldn't they make good coconut shies?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Roaring with laughter, the juniors quitted the enemy's study, after Tom had taken a cautious peep out into the passage. But nobody was about; most of the Fifth were probably out of doors—and, in any case, if the uproar had been heard, nobody seemed to be troubling. Tom Merry stopped to remove the gags of Cutts & Co., and then, with the gasping threats and savage remarks of the victims ringing in his ears, Tom fled after his comrades. Once again Tom Merry & Co. had scored over their foes of the Fifth. It was open to question, however, whether this last

lesson would do Gerald Cutts any more good than the others had done.

CHAPTER 9. Swallowing the Bait!

"HALF a minute, kid!"

Clarence York Tompkins paused.

It was just after tea, and Tompkins had gone for a lonely stroll in the quad. In the ordinary way, Clarence York was always left to his own devices. But of late that state of affairs had changed somewhat. The fellows had been sitting up and taking notice of Tompkins, so to speak. Even fellows like Blake and Levison and Figgins had taken the trouble to stop and speak to Clarence York—greatly to his delight.

Tompkins was becoming a fellow of some note in the school, and the knowledge filled him with elation.

At the moment he was alone, however. With his hands in his pockets, and his head up unusually straight, Tompkins was strolling about the quad, conscious that he was a fellow of some importance now.

Then Gerald Cutts of the Fifth called to him.

"Half a minute, kid!"

Tompkins paused somewhat uncertainly.

Cutts' tone was genial, his smile was genial. Yet Tompkins could not forget the happenings of that eventful afternoon. He was quite, quite certain that Gerald Cutts could not possibly have forgotten them. One glance at Cutts' face showed that his nose was a trifle red and not a little swollen—where Tompkins' own fist had connected violently with it. Tompkins could not help a thrill of pride as he noted it.

None the less, he was well aware that it was a thing Cutts was unlikely to forget so soon. It was scarcely a couple of hours, indeed, since the happenings in the Fifth-Former's study.

In the circumstances, Tompkins could not help feeling a little suspicious. True, Cutts dare not touch him, or attempt to touch him in public. There were few fellows about; but scores of windows overlooked the quad, and Cutts would have been mad to attempt his bullying tactics there.

But Clarence York paused. In any case, he was not going to show fear of a fellow like Gerald Cutts.

"Hallo, Cutts!" he said carelessly. "You want me?"

"Yes, kid! Just a word with you," said Cutts, the glint (Continued on next page.)



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in his eyes belying his genial smile and tone. "You needn't be afraid; I'm not likely to touch you before all these windows."

Apparently Cutts was afraid that Tompkins would take to his heels.

"I'm not afraid, Cutts!" said Tompkins warmly. "Who said I was? If—if you dare to touch me I'll hit back—you can be sure of that!"

A week ago Tompkins would have shuddered at the bare thought of speaking to Cutts of the Fifth like that. But Cutts did not seem to be angry, or even annoyed.

"I—I suppose you're not, Tompkins," he said quite humbly. "I've heard you're not such a duffer as they make out. Gad! I wish I had some of your pluck! But—but I suppose I've got to go through with it now," he added hopelessly. "Look here, kid, you—you said you wanted to fight me."

"Y-yes, I did," said Tompkins.

Tompkins was not quite so certain that he did now. Cutts' behaviour that afternoon had not been that of a fellow who would turn tail when faced by a Third Form fag. His fury and the fight he had put up against overwhelming odds—even juniors—had rather impressed Tompkins and made him wonder. Still, even that was not the same as a stand-up fight. And, after all, reflected Tompkins, Cutts had lost his head, and was expecting help at any moment.

"Yes, I did!" Tompkins repeated more confidently. "And I jolly well mean it, Cutts!"

"Well, that's what I want to speak to you about," said Cutts glumly. "The—the fact is I've simply got to accept your challenge now, Tompkins, whether I like it or not."

"Oh!" gasped Tompkins.

"It's like this," said Cutts. "I—I admit I funk'd you. Fighting in a stand-up fight isn't like scrapping in a crowd. It needs pluck. I—I'm afraid I'm a bit of a coward, Tompkins."

"I know that," said Tompkins frankly. "Everybody knows it."

Cutts' eyes glinted again at that. It was not pleasant news for Gerald Cutts to hear. But he recovered himself swiftly and went on smoothly.

"Well, I suppose there's no denying it," he admitted. "The fellows seem to know it, and they—they refuse to let me back out. You see, it would be an awful disgrace for the Fifth if I refused to meet you."

"I suppose it would," agreed Tompkins, a trifle loftily.

"They won't allow me to disgrace the Form by refusing to face you," went on Cutts, shaking his head in a hopeless sort of way. "I—I'm afraid there's nothing else for it."

"I'm ready any time!" said Tompkins, quite promptly now.

"I know that—I only wish I was as ready," said Cutts. "Still, you're a decent kid. You won't—won't be too hard on a chap?"

Clarence York stared at Cutts, and his lip curled a little. He was sorry for the fellow, in a way. But it was rather thick to find a big fellow like Cutts begging for mercy before the fight was even arranged!

"Well, I mean to lick you," said Tompkins. "But I'm not the fellow to harm a chap more than's necessary. If you've got to agree to fight—"

"I have. The fellows won't hear of me backing out. They say the Lower School would never stop crowing that a Fifth chap had funk'd a challenge from a junior. You—you can see that, Tompkins?"

Cutts spoke as if he were addressing a fellow Fifth-Former, and Tompkins almost purred.

"I see it right enough," he grinned. "Well, there's no need to gas about it any longer, Cutts. I'll let you down lightly—that is if you fight fairly. What about time and place?"

"That's the trouble," said Cutts, frowning thoughtfully. "It would have to be in secret, of course. If it got out that a Fifth Form chap was about to fight with a junior there would be no end of a fuss. You see that?"

"Yes, but—"

"I suggest the top box-room," said Cutts. "Nobody ever goes up there, kid! We'd just have a second each—if a crowd came the game would be spotted for a cert. I'll have Lefevre, our skipper, I think. Just to prove I've stood up to you, you know. You could have Racke, or Crooke, say. I've spoken to Racke. So if that will suit you—"

"Suit me all right," said Tompkins patronisingly. "If Lefevre's to be there, then I know it'll be fair and above board, Cutts. That's fixed up, then. Oh, what about time?"

"H'm!" Cutts stroked his chin. "Shall we say five-thirty? I—I want to get it over," he added desperately, "before my nerves give way under the strain, Tompkins."

"Right! Five-thirty in the top box-room, Cutts. I'll be there!"

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"Good!" said Cutts, as if relieved now that the die was cast. "Don't forget your second, and for goodness' sake don't breathe a word to a soul other than your second. After the fight you can—but not before! Lefevre will rave if you do. You understand?"

"Yes. Quite!"

And with a nod Clarence York Tompkins hurried away. All his doubts were set at rest now. Cutts was obviously in a hopeless funk at the prospect before him. The fight was as good as won. Clarence York Tompkins would soon be the hero of the hour in the Lower School—the fellow who had faced and licked the common enemy, Gerald Cutts of the Fifth.

Cutts, meanwhile, was staring after the delighted Tompkins, half in wonder and half in savage satisfaction. He could scarcely believe it possible that any fellow—even an innocent, guileless youth like Clarence York Tompkins—could be such a duffer as to have swallowed his yarn. He had heard before that a favourite pursuit in the Lower Forms—among a certain section—was the pulling of Tompkins' innocent leg. Now he understood how simple it was.

He had spotted Tompkins strolling in the quad, and the sudden impulse to "try it on" had occurred to him. He was glad he had done so. His eyes glinted after the unsuspecting Clarence York. As he stood thus Prye and Gilmore joined him.

"What the dickens were you talking about to that young sweep?" demanded Gilmore. "Why the thump didn't you let him have your boot? I mean to flay him alive when I get my dashed hands on him!"

Cutts chuckled deeply, and told them of his conversation with Clarence York.

"And he swallowed that?" almost yelled Prye.

"Yes—like a bird swallowing a worm!"

"Well, my hat! This is great!" said Gilmore, his own eyes glinting. "We'll flay the little worm alive! What a dashed pity, though, you didn't ask him to get that young hound Merry to be his second!"

"Idiot!" snorted Cutts. "Merry would have spotted the game at once. He's the last kid I want to know about it, you fool! Tompkins'll bring Racke along—and Racke knows better than to peach! We'll give that kid something that he'll remember as long as he stays at St. Jim's."

"It—it's rather thick!" said Prye hesitatingly. "Still, we owe him something right enough."

"Owe him somethin'?" echoed Cutts savagely. "Fool! What about this afternoon? If that cad Lefevre had only just found us and cut us loose from that dashed table right away it wouldn't have been so bad. But he brought half the Fifth to have a look at us, the rotten cad! All the school knows about it now. It looks like bein' the dashed joke of the term! Even the fags are yellin' about it, hang them! Owe him somethin'? We're goin' to make the little toad wish he'd never been born, and teach those Fourth and Shell rats that it doesn't pay to jape the Fifth!"

Cutts' face as he led his two chums indoors was not pleasant to see. If all went well with the cad of the Fifth's scheme, Clarence York Tompkins was booked for the licking of his life!

CHAPTER 10.

Gussy Refuses!

"CAN I speak to you a minute, D'Arcy?"

Clarence York Tompkins asked the question hastily and eagerly as he looked in at the door of Study No. 6. Blake & Co. were busy clearing away the tea-things, and they looked at Tompkins wonderingly.

"You wish to speak to me, Tompkins?" said Arthur Augustus. "Vewy good! Go ahead, deah boy!"

"It's something private," said Tompkins, with a glance at Blake, Herries, and Digby. "If—if you wouldn't mind coming along to my study? Multaney is out, and—"

"Bai Jove! Vewy well, deah boy!"

Arthur Augustus was always an obliging fellow—even to fellows like Tompkins. Looking not a little surprised he left the study, and went along to Study No. 4 with Tompkins.

That gallant, would-be warrior followed him into the study and carefully closed the door.

"It—it's about Cutts!" said Tompkins eagerly. "You—you know I want to fight him, D'Arcy?"

Arthur Augustus smiled. The news that Clarence York was anxious to fight Cutts of the Fifth was now common property. It was talked of in the Lower School as the biggest joke of the term. Much as they wanted Gerald Cutts to get licked by someone, the juniors took it as a tremendous joke that the only fellow anxious to fight and lick Cutts was Clarence York Tompkins of the Fourth.

So Arthur Augustus smiled.

"Yaas, wathah! I have heard about it, Tompkins," he said a trifle soothingly. "You weally have a nerve, deah boy. You will have a long way to go befoah you can challenge Cutts to a fight, you know. Take my tip and dwop the ideah, old chap! Pwactise on Mulvaney, or Mellish, or someone like that for a term or two first."

"But you don't understand!" said Tompkins earnestly. "I really mean it, and I know what I'm up against. Cutts will crumple up when I get going—I know he will."

"Bai Jove! Someone has been pullin'—"

"In any case, I've arranged the fight now," said Tompkins, looking at his watch hastily. "I—I want you to be my second, D'Arcy."

"Oh, gweat Scott! You—you've awwanged it?" yelled Gussy.

"Yes. I'm to meet Cutts in the top box-room at five-thirty."

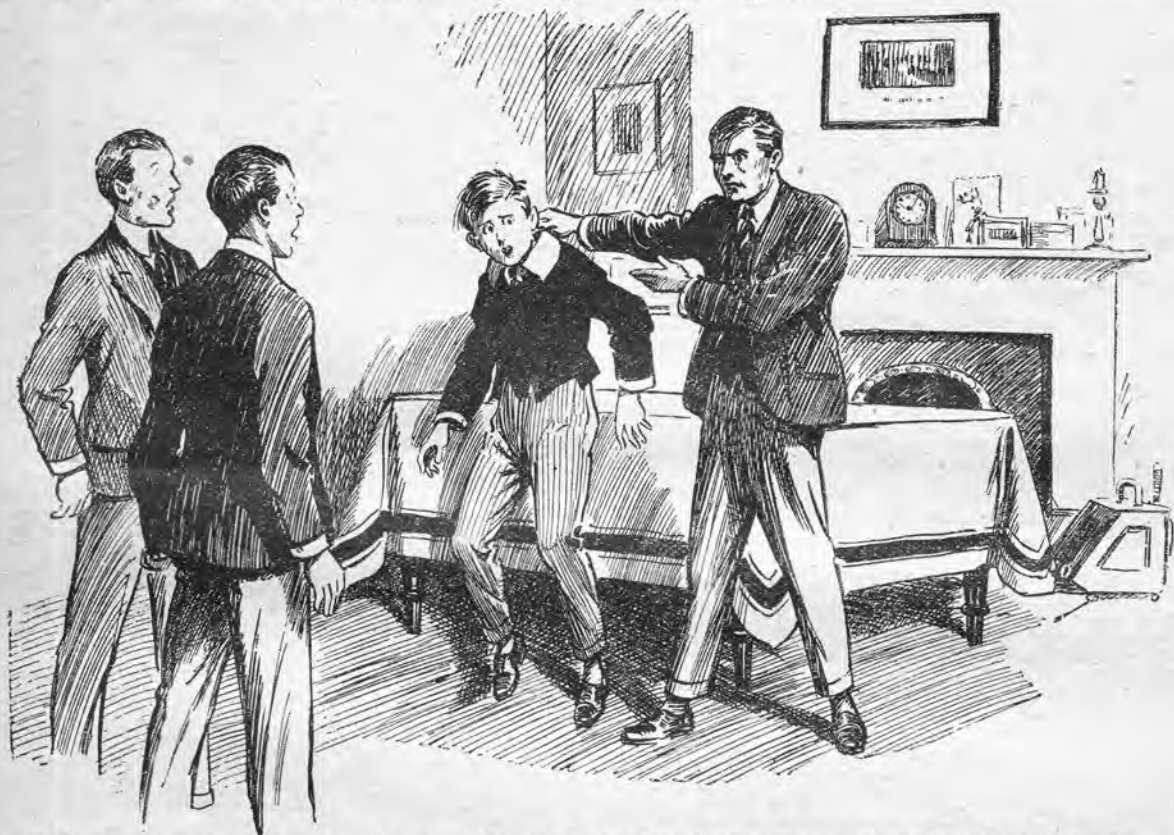
"Oh, bai Jove!" gasped Gussy blankly. "The—the feahful ass! This is a twick—a wott—a twick of Cutts—to get poor old Tompkins into his wotten clutches! I weally must stop the sillay young idiot!"

With that Arthur Augustus dashed out. In the passage he hesitated a moment; then, deciding to tell Blake, he rushed into No. 6 like a whirlwind.

"What the merry thump! What's up, Gussy?" demanded Blake.

"That feahful ass Tompkins!" gasped Arthur Augustus excitedly. "He has awwanged to fight Cutts at five-thirty, deah boys. He will get wagged unmercifully by those wottahs! We have just time to stop the fight!"

"Tompkins has?" ejaculated Blake. "Tompkins has arranged to fight Cutts!"



"This little sweep's challenged me to a scrap!" said Gerald Cutts, holding Clarence York Tompkins by the collar. "He—he's going to lick me, he says." "What!" Gilmore and Frye gazed at the terrified junior as if he was some weird animal. "Good gad!" (See Chapter 8.)

It's ten past five now. Cutts suggested I should have Racke as my second, but I don't trust that cad. I know he wouldn't play fair by me. I've thought it over, and I—I wondered whether you might care to be my second, D'Arcy."

And Tompkins looked hopefully at Arthur Augustus. That startled youth eyed him blankly.

"Oh, bai Jove!" he gasped. "You weally mean you have awwanged to fight Cutts in the top box-woom, Tompkins?"

"Yes. It's got to be kept a close secret until after the fight, though," warned Tompkins. "Cutts told me to be sure to tell nobody, whatever I did, in case it got out. He said I could just bring my second. But, as I say, I'd rather not have Racke, and so I—I'm asking you, D'Arcy."

"Oh, gweat Scott!"

"You—you'll come, D'Arcy? I'd rather have you—"

"Bai Jove! Wathah not, Tompkins!" said Arthur Augustus indignantly. "Oh, you feahful ass! Don't you see—"

"You won't, then?" demanded Tompkins, great disappointment in his voice.

"No feah, deah boy! I wefuse to allow you to fight Cutts, or attempt to do so, Tompkins! Bai Jove! I am—"

"You won't jolly well stop me!" said Tompkins stubbornly. "If you think you're going to do me out of licking Cutts you're mistaken, D'Arcy. Anyway, if you won't, I'll have to have Racke."

With that Clarence York hurried away. He left Arthur Augustus staring after him.

"Yaas! He has just asked me to be his second, the feahful young idiot! That is what he wanted to speak pwivately to me about. It is all a wascally twick of Cutts to get the young ass into his clutches!"

And Arthur Augustus told his chums what Tompkins had confided to him. As Tompkins had not sworn him to secrecy Arthur Augustus had no compunction about doing that. In any case, something had to be done if the hapless and innocent Tompkins was to be saved from a record licking.

"Well, my only hat!" said Blake, his brow growing dark with anger. "Cutts has been pulling the kid's leg, of course. He only wants to get Tompkins alone up in the box-room so that he can thrash him, the revengeful rotter! It's clear enough. It's got to be stopped!"

"Yes, rather!" said Herries, jumping up indignantly. "Why, you know what a brute Cutts is. He'll skin poor old Tompky alive! Come on! We'd better collar the kid before he goes upstairs!"

"Hold on!" said Blake, his eyes gleaming. "I've got an idea, I think! Stop Tompkins right enough, but we'll let dear old Cutts go ahead. That little lesson this afternoon wasn't enough, apparently. Gussy, you trot along and stop Tompkins. Tell him what Cutts' game is, and stop him from going up to the box-room. I'll see to friend Cutts."

"Wight-ho!" said Arthur Augustus; and he rushed away. "We'll have to get Tom Merry and a few others in on this," grinned Blake. "Sharp's the word, chaps! We've got to arrange a little surprise for dear old Gerald when

he goes up to the box-room at five-thirty—the crafty, bullying brute! Come on!”

And, with a very grim face, Blake led Herries and Digby at a rush along to Tom Merry's study.

Meanwhile, Tompkins had found Racke's study empty, but after hunting round about for that youth he had run him to ground in Scrope's study, chatting there with Scrope and Crooke. And after some difficulty he had managed to persuade Racke to accompany him back to Study No. 4.

“Well?” demanded Racke, once they were there. “What the deuce do you want me for, Tompkins? What's the secret?”

“But you know,” said Tompkins. “You know I've arranged to fight Cutts at five-thirty in the top box-room. Cutts told me himself that he'd arranged for you to be my second.”

“Oh!” said Racke.

He understood at once, and a fleeting grin appeared for a moment on his face.

“I—I see!” he gasped. “Of course! Dashed if I wasn't forgetting, Tompkins! Yes, of course! You're goin' to lick Cutts! Good!”

It was good to Aubrey Racke. He was as keen for Tompkins to “fight” Cutts as the cad of the Fifth himself was. Racke had not forgotten nor forgiven the humiliation of being licked by Clarence York.

“I—I was going to ask D'Arcy,” said Tompkins. “But he refused, the fathead! I suppose he's got the idea of having a go at Cutts himself! Rather thick of him, I think. Anyway, you'll come along now, Racke?”

“Like a shot!” said Racke pleasantly. “I'm no end keen to see you lick old Cutts! I'll— Here, outside, D'Arcy!”

Racke's face darkened as Arthur Augustus entered the study, his face grim. Racke seemed to sense the swell of St. Jim's intention.

“I shall not go outside, Wacke!” said Arthur Augustus indignantly. “This is not your studay, in any case. Tompkins, you feahful ass—”

“Take no notice of that cad, Tompkins!” snapped Racke, fearful of losing his revenge. “Outside, D'Arcy! Oh, good! Crooke, help me kick that rotter out! Come on, Tompkins!”

Crooke had come in, very curious indeed to know what was “on” between Racke and Tompkins. He stared at the trio.

“Quick!” yelled Racke. “Help me pitch D'Arcy out of here, the interfering cad! Pile in, Tompkins!”

Evidently Racke expected Tompkins to aid him. But Tompkins stood motionless, scarcely knowing what to do. He was a great admirer of Arthur Augustus, and was the last fellow to lay hands on him.

But Crooke was not so particular. Believing from Racke's remarks that Tompkins would also “pile in,” he rushed at D'Arcy at the same moment as Racke. The three staggered about the study, struggling furiously. Arthur Augustus had had a great deal of trouble in running Tompkins to earth, but he had found him now, and he wasn't likely to lose him without a struggle.

The odds were too great, however, and at last, with a united effort, Racke and Crooke sent him sprawling out into the passage. Arthur Augustus leaped up and charged at the door again, just reaching it in time to prevent Racke closing it. With his foot jammed inside to prevent it closing, Arthur Augustus yelled to Levison, who came along just then.

“Help me, Levison!” he panted wrathfully. “These wotten cads—”

“What the dickens— Oh, my hat!” gasped Levison, breaking off his question suddenly. “Look out!”

Levison had suddenly sighted Mr. Railton striding along the passage. But Arthur Augustus had his back towards the approaching Housemaster, and he was too excited to hear or heed Levison's warning.

“Quick, deah boy!” he shouted breathlessly. “I must speak to that feahful ass Tompkins. He has awanged to fight that feahful wuffian Cutts in the top box-woom at five-thirty. But it is only a wotten twick. Cutts only wants to get hold of poor old Tompkins to thwash him, the wotten bully. That wottah Wacke is—”

“D'Arcy!”

“Oh, bai Jove!”

Arthur Augustus leaped nearly a foot into the air as that unexpected and terrifying voice rang out. He almost collapsed as he swung round and found himself face to face with Mr. Railton.

“D'Arcy, what does this commotion mean?” snapped Mr. Railton. “No, Racke, I have seen you! You can open that door wide!”

Racke groaned and opened the door wide. The Housemaster looked from D'Arcy to Racke and Crooke. Then his curious glance rested on Tompkins' pale face.

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“What does this commotion mean, D'Arcy?” repeated the Housemaster.

“Oh, bai Jove! Oh cwumbs!”

That was all Arthur Augustus could say

Mr. Railton set his lips.

“I do not usually take official notice of anything I happen to overhear by accident,” he said. “In this case, however, I intend to do so. As I came along I heard you make an astounding statement, D'Arcy. You stated that Tompkins here has arranged to fight Cutts of the Fifth in the top box-room at five-thirty. Is that true, D'Arcy?”

“Oh, bai Jove! I—I did not know you were comin', sir!” gasped the hapless Arthur Augustus.

“I am well aware of that, D'Arcy! As you apparently do not wish to answer me, I will ask Tompkins himself. Is this true, Tompkins? Have you actually arranged to fight Cutts, a senior boy?”

“I—I—I—” Tompkins stammered and stopped.

“Answer me, sir!” thundered Mr. Railton.

“Ow! Oh dear! Y-yes, sir!”

“You—you have arranged to fight with Cutts of the Fifth?”

“Y-yes, sir!” groaned Tompkins. “But—but it was my doing, sir. I challenged him!”

“Bless my soul!”

Mr. Railton looked at Tompkins as if thunderstruck.

“You admit that you, a junior boy, have actually challenged a Fifth Form senior to fight?”

“Y-yes, sir.”

“And Cutts has accepted your challenge?”

“Y-yes, sir.”

There was no help for it now. Tompkins had to answer; he dared not do anything else before that penetrating gaze of the Housemaster.

“This—is this amazing!” said Mr. Railton. “I—I had no idea you were such a—a warlike character, Tompkins.” There was a certain amount of irony in Mr. Railton's voice, and Levison, at least, could not restrain a faint grin. “But I strongly suspect, especially from D'Arcy's remarks, that Cutts has some other even less praiseworthy motive in meeting you in the top box-room at five-thirty, Tompkins.”

“Oh, sir!”

“Is Cutts there now, do you know?” said Mr. Railton grimly, consulting his watch. “It is now five-twenty-five, Tompkins.”

“I—I—I don't know, sir. I expect so, sir,” mumbled the unhappy junior skipper.

“Very well,” said Mr. Railton. “Very well, Tompkins. We will proceed to the top box-room. D'Arcy and Racke, you will also accompany me.”

“Oh, y-yes, sir!”

“Come, then.”

And Mr. Railton strode ahead, with Tompkins, Arthur Augustus, and Racke. Levison and a number of other fellows, who had arrived on the scene by this time, followed at a respectable distance, as Mr. Railton led the way up to the top box-room. Things looked like being interesting there. Possibly the scared and agitated Arthur Augustus, had he remembered about Blake's intentions, might have spoken in time and prevented them being so interesting. But the swell of St. Jim's had forgotten all about Blake in the exciting events that had happened since he had left his chums.

With a stately tread, and a dark frown on his brow, Mr. Railton led the way up the uncarpeted stairs to the top box-room.

CHAPTER 11.

Disaster!

“READY, you chaps?”

Tom Merry asked the question in a soft whisper.

Up in the dusty box-room the juniors were gathered.

Since Arthur Augustus had departed on his mission to see Clarence York Tompkins, Blake & Co. had been busy. They had told the story of what was “coming off” to Tom Merry, Lowther, and Manners, and those startled youths had agreed that instant action was necessary. And when the Terrible Three had got over their indignation they had acted swiftly enough. Blake's plan for giving the rascally Cutts the surprise of his life when he kept his appointment in the top box-room was approved, and acted upon with Tom Merry & Co.'s usual energy and thoroughness.

First, with the addition of Noble, Talbot, Wilkins, and Cardew to the party—making it ten in all—they had collected necessary materials, and then they had cautiously made their way separately, to avoid suspicion, up to the top box-room.

It took a matter of minutes only to make all preparations there, and now Tom Merry asked if all was in readiness.

“All ready,” assented Blake, with a chuckle.

“Right!” said Tom. “Now hide behind these giddy



Mr. Railton blundered out of the box-room, still rubbing at the weird and sticky mixture that covered his head and features. Tom Merry & Co. looked at each other in utter dismay. "Oh crumbs!" groaned Jack Blake. "Who could have expected this?" (See Chapter 11.)

boxes, and, mind, not a sound till I give the word. Then get going. You've got your feathers ready?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Good! Pity we couldn't make it tar and feathers. If ever any fellow deserved tar and feathers that rotten bully Cutts does! Never mind the other rotters, it's Cutts himself we want to deal with this time."

"Yes, rather!"

From his hiding-place behind a packing-case, Tom Merry took a glance at the top of the box-room door, which was slightly ajar. Balanced on the top edge of the door was a big cardboard box. In that box was a weird conglomeration of flour, paste, glue, red and blue ink, gum, soot, and treacle. Tom Merry & Co. had taken a lot of trouble in making up that sticky mixture with what little time they had had at their disposal. And it was all for the benefit of Gerald Cutts.

And Tom's glance was rather anxious. It would be an awful pity if Prye or Gilmore came in first instead of their leader. They wanted the cad of the Fifth to have it all to himself.

"Someone's coming!" breathed Blake, pricking up his ears.

From downstairs came the sound of heavy footsteps on the stairs.

Tom Merry took a firmer grip of the pillow-slip full of feathers in his hands.

"Quiet!" he breathed. "Not a sound!"

"Hadn't we better take a peep out to make sure?" whispered Herries. "We don't want poor old Tompkins to get it. That ass Gussy's bound to make a muck of that part of the programme."

"Don't be an ass!" hissed Tom Merry. "Can't you hear? Those are Cutts' little hoofprints. I could tell 'em anywhere. I expect Prye and Gilmore are behind him. We'll give 'em all socks, though. Anyway, we're not risking a peep out. If Cutts once spotted us— Quiet!"

The tread was nearer now, the stairs creaking loudly. Other footsteps sounded on the landing. Peeping over his packing-case, Tom Merry glimpsed a moving form out on the dark landing—a brief glimpse. He could only see that the form was tall, and Tom chuckled softly. It was Cutts right enough; he felt certain of that.

The footsteps stopped at the door. There was quite a clatter on the landing now. It rather surprised Tom Merry & Co. A sudden fear came to Tom that Cutts & Co. might

be in force. But he had no time to wonder or worry, for as the thought came to him the door was pushed open. Then—

Whiz! Flop!

That booby-trap acted splendidly.

The box turned over as it fell, and its contents swept down upon the individual who entered in a streaming, sticky, enveloping embrace. It flooded over his head and face and shoulders, and dripped on to the floor in big, floppy drops.

Unfortunately, however, it was not Gerald Cutts!

It was Mr. Railton, the august Housemaster of the School House!

Tom Merry & Co. did not grasp the terrible fact at first. They leaped to their feet as one man, and started to rush forward to finish their task by adding the feathers they carried.

But they stopped short abruptly, and stood like figures turned suddenly to stone as they recognised the tall, gowned form. On the landing beyond the doorway they glimpsed the scared, horrified faces of Arthur Augustus, Tompkins, Rakke, and several other fellows.

"Oh!" gasped Tom Merry. "Oh, m-mum-my hat!"

He was the only one who said anything. The rest could only stand and stare in petrified silence. Their tongues seemed glued suddenly to the roofs of their mouths. They gazed and gazed at the apparition before them.

Mr. Railton stood gasping and gurgling. Then he grasped his gown in both hands and started to rub at his face. The unfortunate conspirators looked on in deathly silence as the Housemaster cleared his features of the sticky mess. There was no hope of escape—no thought of it, indeed. They just stood and waited for the storm to break.

Mr. Railton was beyond "fireworks," however.

He spoke at last, his voice curiously calm.

"I—I will go into this matter later, boys," he gasped. His face resembled a gargoye as his glance went over the ten unhappy conspirators. "I have made a mental note of your—oooooh!—names. You will all—poooh!—come to my study in half an hour."

He turned to leave the box-room. Tom Merry found his voice again then.

"One—one moment, sir," he mumbled. "I—we hope you understand that—that we never meant that for you, sir. We—we never dreamed that you would come up and—and get it. We—we're frightfully sorry, sir!"

Mr. Railton did not answer. He blundered out of the box-room, still rubbing at his head and features. The juniors outside leaped out of the way as he went on and descended the stairs slowly.

The ten conspirators looked at each other. Their looks spoke eloquently of their feelings. Never had a "jape" had such a luckless and disastrous ending as this, though, so far as they were concerned, it was not ended yet!

"Oh crumbs!" groaned Jack Blake. "Oh, my only Sunday bonnet! Who—who could have expected this? Oh, my hat!"

"It—it's frightful!" groaned Tom Merry.

"It means a Head's flogging!" mumbled Lowther.

"The sack for the lot of us!" said Noble, in a curiously husky voice.

They could scarcely believe that it had really happened; yet it had. The mess on the floor spoke eloquently of the disaster.

"Oh, bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus, in great alarm. "You fellows have weally done it this time! I weally think— Bai Jove! It is nothin' to gwin at, Wacke! It is weally your fault that Mr. Wailton came up, you wottah!"

"What?" exclaimed Tom Merry, his eyes gleaming. "Did Racke—"

"He was twyin' to pwevent me warnin' Tompkins when Mr. Wailton came along and ovaheard about the fight."

"And he's grinning now—eh?" snapped Tom. "The sneaking cad! Collar him! We'll—"

"Hold on! I—I—"

Racke broke off to make a flying leap for the stairs. He was grabbed at once, and hauled, struggling, into the box-room. Whether it was all Racke's fault or not, the luckless ten were not in the mood to stand Racke's grins at their misfortunes.

There was still plenty of the sticky mixture about the floor—lots of it—and, despite his frantic struggles, Racke's head and face were rubbed in it until he looked a shocking sight.

"That'll teach you not to grin at the misfortunes of others, Racke," said Tom Merry. "Though you jolly well deserve it for trying to help Cutts! I suppose you wanted to get your own back on— Quiet! I bet that's Cutts!"

All the fellows were in the box-room now, and they stood motionless as steps were heard on the stairs. Tom softly sent the door almost shut. The footsteps became louder. A voice gave a muttered exclamation as someone stumbled on the bare stairs.

"Cutts!" breathed Tom. "Collar him when he comes in. In for a penny, in for a pound! We're bound to get it hot, so we'll make sure of him! Quiet!"

Cutts was on the landing. He pushed open the door and entered. As he did so there was a rush, and the Fifth-Former went down, with ten or more juniors swarming over him.

Gilmore and Prye were at his heels, but they saw their danger in time, and they went downstairs again, taking the stairs two or three at a time. Gilmore and Prye were not heroes, and they saw no reason why they should stop to aid Cutts against such odds.

They vanished. Cutts was left to face the music alone.

He struggled and fought with all his strength, but in vain. "No good, Cutts," said Tom Merry. "We know what your little game was. You tricked poor old Tompkins into coming here, and you intended to thrash him. You're a bullying coward, and you're going through it!"

And Cutts went "through it." Racke had cleaned some of the mess from the floor, but there was plenty left for Gerald Cutts. He got all that was left—on his face, in his mouth, down his neck, and over his hair.

"That's settled Cutts for a bit!" gasped Tom Merry when this was done and the cad of the Fifth sat on the floor, gasping and raving. "Now we'll go and face the music ourselves, chaps!"

"Yes; but hold on!" said Blake grimly, his eyes on Arthur Augustus. "We want to know just how Railton came into this. Did you know he was coming up here, Gussy?"

"Oh, yaas; but—"

"And you knew what our game was?"

"Yaas; but—"

"Yet you—you never warned Railton?" stammered Blake. "You could have saved this if you'd warned him and kept him back."

"Yaas; but I—I forgot, deah boys!"

"You—you— Oh, you footling idiot!" gasped Blake.

"Bump him!" yelled Herries excitedly. "Bump the silly, piffing owl!"

"Yes, bump him!"

It was a howl. Undoubtedly, had Gussy thought of it, he could have saved them from this overwhelming disaster.

"Weally, you fellows— Yawoooooop!"

Bump!

Arthur Augustus, in the grasp of many pairs of hands, descended to the floor of the landing with a terrific bump and a yell. He descended again and again, not once, but many times. Then the irate ten, followed by the rest, swarmed downstairs, leaving him seated in a heap on the landing, gasping and panting as if for a wager.

But the luckless Arthur Augustus did not remain thus for long. He suddenly remembered Cutts in the box-room, and the thought of being left alone with that raging schemer sent Gussy after his chums with a rush—which was just as well for Arthur Augustus. Had Gerald Cutts caught him alone just then a warm time would have followed for the swell of the Fourth.

CHAPTER 12.

All Through Tompkins!

TEN unfortunate juniors stood in Mr. Railton's study some twenty minutes later—quaking.

There was a rustle outside the study door, and the next moment Mr. Railton entered.

The ten took cautious and apprehensive glances at him.

The Housemaster had a fresh gown on—the gown he had worn an hour earlier was not likely to be in commission again for some time. Mr. Railton was pink in the face, and he looked freshly swept and garnished, as it were. His features, indeed, seemed as if they had been scrubbed with a wire scrubbing-brush. His hair looked sticky, and stood out in tufts.

The ten conspirators shivered.

Mr. Railton's glance made them shiver still more.

"I have considered your punishment, boys," he said, in an icy voice. "There is no need for questions or any investigation at all, in so far as you are concerned. I am well aware that you intended that booby-trap for Cutts of the Fifth and not for myself. It was an unfortunate accident that I got it—both for me and for you!"

None of the ten answered that.

"It was an accident that should never have happened, however!" resumed Mr. Railton, in a stern voice that trembled with anger. "You had no right to take the law into your own hands. Your scandalous and disgraceful prank has had serious consequences for me, your Housemaster. My clothing has been damaged, and I have suffered a severe shock, to say nothing of being subjected to an outrageous and humiliating indignity."

"Oh, sir!"

"Did I think you had intended the booby-trap for my benefit the matter would be, of course, a matter for the headmaster to deal with," resumed the Housemaster. "As I am quite certain you did not, I shall deal with you myself. It is impossible for me to deal with such an outrage in a lenient manner, however. I intend to cane each one of you soundly. You will also be detained all Saturday afternoon until five o'clock, and special detention tasks will be set you."

"Oh, sir!"

The juniors all looked aghast at that. The caning they had expected—a flogging they had anticipated. But Saturday was a half-day holiday, and there was an important match on with Redclyffe.

"Oh, sir!" gasped Tom Merry. "Couldn't you—you give us extra caning instead?"

"What?"

"There—there's an important match fixed for Saturday, sir!" gasped Tom. "We're playing Redclyffe, and nearly all of us are likely to be in the team. If—if you could punish us in some other way. I—I know we deserve it, but—"

"Silence!" thundered Mr. Railton, his brow darkening with anger. "I shall do no such thing, Merry! I am sorry to have to interfere with football. But you should have thought of the risk of punishments when you planned that— that abominable trick! You must learn that a school is not the place in which to play pranks of that nature. Of late I have noticed a distinct lack of discipline in the Lower School. Only recently it came to my knowledge that Mr. Lathom had his spectacles broken owing to scandalous

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horseplay in the Form-rooms. I am determined to put down such horseplay and outrageous pranks. Hold out your hand, Merry!"

"But—but, sir—" pleaded Tom.

"Hold out your hand!"

It was a terrific bellow—and sounded alarming coming as it did from the usually calm and collected Mr. Railton.

Tom Merry held out his hand.

The caning that followed was a record one. Ten hapless juniors were doubled up like pocket-knives when at last, breathing hard, the Housemaster laid down his cane.

"Now you may go!" he gasped. "And let this be a lasting lesson to you. I will ask your respective Form masters to set you suitable tasks for Saturday afternoon. As most of you are members of the junior team, you will be well advised to cancel Saturday's match, Merry."

"I—I'll tell Tompkins, sir!" groaned Tom Merry. "I—I'm not junior captain now, sir."

"I am well aware you are not, my boy!" snapped Mr. Railton acidly. "It appears to me, Merry, that since resigning from that post you have set yourself against all authority and discipline. You have not used your influence as you might have done to aid the boys who have filled the position of junior captain. The slackness and lack of discipline would not have been evident had you done so."

since you did! Everybody does just as they like, and nobody seems to care about footer or anything else!" said Lowther, groaning. "And now—what about Saturday? We've looked forward for weeks to this match with Redclyffe! Now it's off!"

"Rotten!" gasped Talbot. "I—I wish you would take on the job again, Tom!"

Tom Merry's eyes gleamed.

Mr. Railton's final words a few moments ago had settled that point for him. Certainly, the Housemaster was scarcely in the mood to be just or reasonable. But—

Tom set his lips hard.

"You heard what Railton said just now!" he snapped. "Well, that settles it. I've resigned, and I refuse to take it on again. I'm finished!"

And Tom Merry meant it!

When Clarence York Tompkins left Mr. Railton's study that evening he was no longer junior skipper of St. Jim's.

Tom Merry found him in his study, looking, and evidently feeling, a wreck. By an unlucky chance Cutts had caught him alone in the passage, and when the cad of the Fifth, in his fury, had finished with Tompkins that youth was in a parlous state. He no longer desired to fight Gerald Cutts—or to shine as a hero in the eyes of the Lower School. Tompkins had had enough—more than

TOM MERRY IS WANTED BACK AGAIN!

Six fellows have tried with varying experiences, the difficult job of junior skipper of St. Jim's, and each has made a complete hash of it. Now their failures go to prove that there is only one man fit for the position—and that man is Tom Merry! But Tom declared he would never again be junior captain—and he has kept his word throughout the astonishing incidents that followed quickly on the moment he made that resolution.

But can Tom Merry keep that resolve when all the school is clamouring to have him back again in his old position? Can he stand aside, knowing that it is up to him to play the game, and cast all personal feelings from him? He is wanted as Junior Captain!

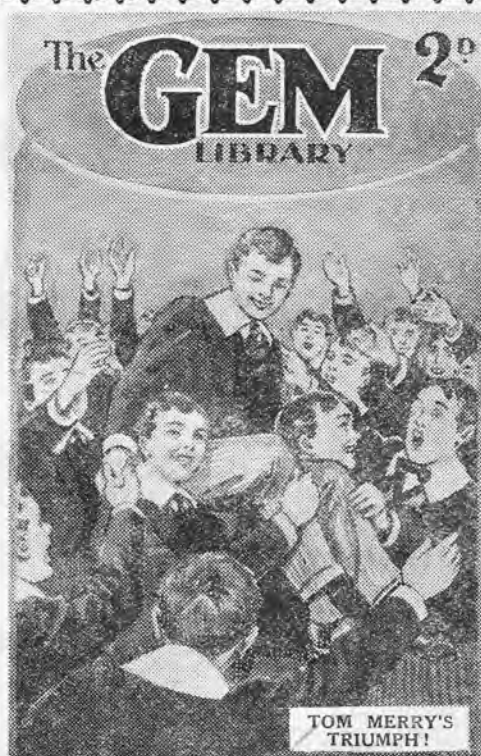
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"TOM MERRY'S TRIUMPH!"

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next week's topping long complete story of the Chums of St. Jim's.

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"Sir!" stammered Tom, his face crimsoning.

"That is enough!" snapped the Housemaster. "Send Cutts of the Fifth to me now—also Tompkins of the Fourth. Tell them I wish to see them without delay."

"Ow! Yes, sir."

Tom Merry followed the rest as they tottered from the study. His eyes were glinting now. Those last remarks of Mr. Railton's had hurt him far more than the cuts from the cane had done.

"Ow!" groaned Blake as they went out. "Ow-ow-ow! It was my rotten wheeze, so I suppose it's all my fault. Go on—let me have it good and strong!"

"It was that awful ass Tompkins' fault!" panted Herries, hugging his burning hands. "This comes of having a born idiot for a junior skipper. We might have known it would end in something like this. And—and now we've lost Saturday—and the match!"

"Blow Tompkins!"

"It isn't Tompkins' fault so much," said Lowther. "I blame Tom Merry for all this!"

"Me?" ejaculated Tom, flushing.

"Yes. You ought never to have resigned from the captaincy—and you know it! Everything's gone wrong

enough. He went to Mr. Railton's study, determined to resign there and then. He had reached the conclusion that he was not cut out for a hero or for a junior captain.

But Mr. Railton had already arrived at that latter conclusion. He did not give Tompkins the chance to sack himself—he sacked Tompkins. And nobody at St. Jim's was more relieved at the sacking of the skipper of the Lower School than Clarence York Tompkins—though he hadn't finished his week of office!

Once again St. Jim's was without a junior captain!

The six temporary skippers had taken their turn—and nobody else seemed to want to follow them. There was deep gloom in the Lower School that evening. The news that practically the whole team were detained for Saturday, and that the Redclyffe match was abandoned, was the last straw. And the juniors of St. Jim's wondered what would happen now. Would Tom Merry take over the job again? If they had anything to do with it he would!

Tom Merry himself had no intention of doing so! It remained to be seen whether he would be allowed to stick to that determination!

THE END.

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ALL' ON HIS OWN! Straight into the great Syrian desert young Fred Bishop drives the armoured car, single-handed he means to hound down the Arab tribe that holds his pal, Jack Kennedy, a prisoner!

'Skid' Kennedy—Speed King!



A Brilliant Serial of Motor-Racing Adventure, starring Jack Kennedy, a Young Speed-Merchant. By **ALFRED EDGAR.**

INTRODUCTION.

JACK KENNEDY gets nicknamed "Skid," because of the daring way in which he can handle a racing-car. With his chum—**FRED BISHOP**, he works in the show-room of the Saxon Motor Company, while his elder brother, Ben Kennedy, works in the racing department. All three are up against an iron-nerved speedman named—**PHILIP SLADE**, the star driver of the Falcon Six firm, who are out to smash up the Saxon people. After many exciting speed events, Jack almost puts the Saxon firm on its feet again with a big win at Brooklands, although he is nearly brought to disaster by—**CARNABY**, a confederate of Slade. Later, Jack and Fred discover that the Falcon Six firm have built a car with which they intend to shatter the world's speed record out in the Syrian desert. Losing no time, Ben constructs a smashing car which will travel at the colossal speed of 250 m.p.h., and which Jack consents to drive. Whilst journeying through the wild recesses of the desert, however, the Saxon convoy is attacked by a party of Arabs, who capture Jack and carry him away. Convinced that Slade is at the head of it all, Fred mounts one of the armoured cars belonging to the convoy, and sets off in pursuit of the Arabs. After covering some considerable distance, he sees Slade driving a Falcon car ahead of him. "I'll soon stop the scab!" gasps Fred, bringing his machine gun into action. (Now Read On.)

At the Mercy of the Bandits!

THE tearing roar of the gun spanged on the desert silence, and a swathe of bullets slid through the dust in pursuit of the speeding car.

Burst after burst Fred fired, but the car kept on until a wind-lofted ridge of sand hid it from sight.

"Missed him! By gosh, I missed the rotter!" Blankly, Fred stood by the reeking weapon, and then he saw, clear on the desert dust, the imprints left by the Falcon's tyres. Where there stretched only rock and clay, still the tyre-marks showed, impressed by the sand and dust they had picked up off the other stretches.

"I can follow him, anyway!" Fred thought. "Even if he's faster than me, I can sit on his tail, an' I'll bet all I've got that he's goin' to them Arabs to tell 'em what to do with Jack!"

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He slid back into the driving-seat, then sent the armoured car plunging on across the blazing desert.

It seemed to Jack that the sun rose with a sudden burst of light. The thong around his wrist cut into his flesh, and his ankles were sore from where they were bound about the horse. The tired animal jogged on in a trot that shook him to the spine, and on either side his captors trotted with relentless steadiness.

The light showed hills rising in front, and ridges gave place to the flatness of the desert. As they came nearer, Jack picked out the coloured shapes of tents and queer, flat-roofed dwellings built from mats and skins, hard to distinguish against the background.

Jack saw half a dozen straggly palm-trees, and some clumps of cactus, then the horses were trotting into the Arab encampment and came to a stop. The Nubian snatched a great knife from a sheath at his waist, and, bending, cut the thongs which bound Jack's feet. A shove, and the boy went pitching over the side of the horse to the hot sand.

His legs were too numbed for him to rise, although he tried. The Nubian dismounted, grabbed him by his collar and dragged him to one of the flat-roofed tents. Pitching Jack inside, the ugly little half-breed bound his feet again with another strip of hide thong and left him there.

For a space Jack lay on his back, staring up at the taut roof above him. He could hear Arabs shouting and talking. Once he caught the splash of water poured from some goat-skin, and he realised that he was fiercely thirsty.

More horses trotted into the camp, their hoofs thudding dully on the sand. Jack realised that he must now be on the fringe of the desert, and that the broken ground behind formed a refuge into which the Arabs could bolt if they were hard-pressed.

He wondered what had happened to the Saxon convoy, if the big car was at all damaged. Supposing that these Arabs held him to ransom, what would happen then? It was a lively thing for them to do.

It was certain that the timing officials would not wait

long for the big Saxon to make its record attempt. If Jack were not back in time, would Ben have a try at it?

Lying there in the semi-darkness, the whole business seemed unreal to Jack. The last thing he had expected ever to happen to him was to find himself a prisoner in the hands of some Arab tribe. Of course, Carnaby and Slade were responsible for it all. Very likely they'd told the Arabs that a tremendous sum would be paid in ransom for Jack, and that was why the bandits had acted.

Presently Jack tried moving his legs and testing his bonds. The pain of the thongs on his chafed flesh was almost more than he could stand, but he struggled until his whole body was running with perspiration. Then the flap lifted and Carnaby came in.

He stood just inside the door, grinning down at the sweating boy.

"Not so uppish now, are you?" he snarled. "This is where we get quits, you young swab! I owe you for a thing or two, and I'll see you suffer for 'em before I'm through."

He stared at Jack reflectively, then he went on:

"I don't know quite what Hussif Saud will do with you—he's the Arab chief—but he likes a bit of fun. He might try tying you to a stake out in the sun later on, when you're a bit thirstier, and it'll be where you can see the water under the palm-trees!"

"And I suppose you'll stand by and laugh!" gasped Jack.

Carnaby grinned, then he said viciously:

"Yes, I'll laugh—just like you laughed when that pal of yours doused me with gear-oil! Funny then, wasn't it? You'll laugh the other side o' your face before I'm done with you!"

Jack tore at the thongs about his wrists, wrenching savagely. Carnaby waited until his strength was exhausted, then he grated:

"Struggling won't do you any good. And I'll—"

He broke off. From somewhere outside sounded the roar of a motor engine, swiftly approaching. Carnaby stood listening, his head on one side, and Jack heard the car come up, brakes squealing in the drums as the machine halted.

Instantly Carnaby turned, one hand dropping to the revolver which he carried in a holster at his belt. He pulled the flap of the tent aside an inch or so, and peered out. He stared a moment, then suddenly darted into the open, and Jack heard him call:

"Slade! What are you doin' here?"

"Trying to save your skin!" came the curt answer of the Falcon speedman. "Where's Hussif Saud?"

"What's up? What's happened?"

Jack could hear a timbre of fear in Carnaby's voice.

"Lloyd went on last night with some of the cars," Slade answered. "He got to the course, and the officials wireless back to Damascus and told them what had happened. There's a whole fleet of armoured cars out, and they're using 'planes as well. I met one of those cursed cars on my way here, and they turned a machine-gun on me! That's what happened, Carnaby!"

"Do they know it was Hussif Saud's tribe who made the raid?"

"No; but they'll round up every bunch of Arabs within a couple of hundred miles," Slade answered. "They're bound to find the right one, and—" He broke off, and Jack heard a deep, growling voice booming some greeting in Arabic. He guessed that the chieftain had come up.

With only the thin walls of the tent separating him from those outside, Jack could hear every word that was exchanged. Slade appeared able to speak a mixture of Arabic and English sufficiently well to make himself clear to the chief. Presently, Jack heard Carnaby catch his breath, and he gasped:

"That—that would be murder!"

"Of course it would!" Slade snarled at him. "But it's the only way! For all I know, that armoured car I saw might be right on my heels—chasing me here! Hussif Saud's right, they can't pin anything on him unless they've got evidence, and if there's no evidence to be found in this camp, then they can prove nothing!"

"You mean you'll—you'll—" Carnaby broke off.

Bound hand and foot, Jack felt his every nerve tingle as he read the meaning of their words. The whole desert was being scoured for the raiders, and it was certain that—perhaps in a matter of minutes—this Arab encampment would be searched.

The only evidence against the Arabs was Jack himself. There was nothing else to prove that they had made the raid. Hussif Saud wanted the evidence destroyed!

"Look here, Slade, you can't do it!" Carnaby gasped after a moment. "I don't want to put my neck in a noose, and I'm not—not—"

"Not what?" asked Slade, and silence followed.

Carnaby was a coward, but he wasn't so cold-blooded as

the Falcon speedman. He was trying to protest, but he hadn't the courage to carry his protest very far.

"Either that boy goes," Slade snarled, "or we'll find ourselves behind bars! Leave it to Hussif Saud, Carnaby, he'll make a clean job of it. All you've got to do is to step into the car with me and we'll drive back to the course. Leave the rest to Hussif; he's had his money and he'll do the thing properly for the sake of his own neck. Come on!"

Once again Carnaby tried weakly to protest, then Jack heard the shuffle of their feet in the sand as they walked away. He caught the growling voice of the Arab chief, then the Falcon's engine was started up.

Tensed in every muscle, he listened as the car was driven away over the desert. He was left alone at the mercy of the bandits.

Minutes passed. He heard Arabs shouting, and caught the flapping of tents as they were struck and folded. The tramp of horses sounded outside; then, abruptly, the tent-flap lifted and the giant Nubian entered. With him was the lean-faced half-breed.

Jack swallowed hard. The Nubian's face was utterly expressionless, and in one hand he held a great, curved scimitar, its steel catching the sunlight ere the flap was dropped behind him. He had to bend to prevent his head striking the top of the tent, and he motioned with the weapon for his companion to go forward.

The half-breed bent over Jack, sliding quick, searching hands through his pockets and removing everything that was in them.

Neither spoke a word as the man stepped away, scraping Jack's possessions into a pile with talon-like fingers.

The Nubian motioned again, and the wizened man rolled Jack on to his face. In utter silence the black giant stepped forward until he was towering over the boy.

Jack heard the hiss of the scimitar as it went up.

In the Nick of Time!

WHEN Fred Bishop settled behind the steering-wheel of the armoured car, he had no difficulty in following the track left by the tyres of Slade's speeding Falcon. Although the other machine was speedily lost in a cloud of sand and dust, hanging in the shimmering heat-haze of the Syrian desert, its trail remained.

The interior of the armoured car was reeking from exploded cordite, where Fred had used one of the machine-guns on Slade. He knew that he hadn't hit the man, and his wrists seemed still to quiver from the mad juddering of the barking weapon.

"He's makin' for those Arabs, all right!" Fred told himself. "They've got Jack, an' Slade's goin' to tell 'em what to do with him, that's about the size of it! Slade's shiftn' about twice as fast as I am, too, an' the swabs may get away before I arrive if I ain't careful!"

With the thought he slammed the throttle wide so that the great vehicle fairly hurled itself over the sun-baked ground. The interior was like an oven now. The air which streamed through the vents and loopholes, which Fred had opened, did but little to cool the car.

Dust and sand slewed in; that and the sweltering heat started a terrific thirst, but Fred would not stop to assuage it, because he had a feeling that every second was precious.

On he went, the machine plunging over the tracks left by Slade's Falcon. In half an hour Fred thought he saw hills ahead and, a little later, he imagined that he glimpsed a palm-tree. Then, coming out of a gully, he quite clearly saw Slade's car streaking off to his left.

Fred slowed instinctively, with the intention of getting into action with his machine-gun again, but he realised that he would never hit the car, and he concentrated on trying to find out who was in it. He saw that Slade now had a companion, but who it was Fred could not tell.

He ripped out of the gully just as Slade's car slid from sight behind a long ridge of sand. Fred was half inclined to chase him.

"Wouldn't be much good," he told himself. "Slade's been somewhere to pick up that other chap. If I keep on these tracks, I'm bound to find out where he's been, and I'll—Gosh!"

He was climbing a slope while the thoughts ripped through his mind, and the exclamation broke from his lips as he topped it. The broken ground of the hills showed before him, and dead ahead was the Arab encampment!

Fred saw that almost all the tents had been struck. Horses loaded with rugs and bundles were standing in groups, and some mounted men were already beginning to ride up a path which led into the hills.

"That's 'em!" Fred exclaimed. "Slade's been to tell 'em to clear off with Jack!" And he sent the tremendous weight of the armoured car fairly hurtling down the slope towards the camp.

Some of the Arabs sighted him on the instant, stared, and then leaped towards their horses. Fred, driving with one hand, reached behind him and fumbled for one of the machine-guns. He found it and pressed with his thumb on the twin triggers.

A mad burst of bullets spouted from the muzzle ere the weapon kicked itself away from his hand; but the effect of the shots was electrical.

It was as though everything about the camp jumped into the air. Arabs were galvanised into immediate life, horses plunged and reared, and inside five seconds a spouting dust-cloud half hid the camp, while every living thing in sight went streaking for the hills.

The car roared on, rocking from its speed, charging straight at the camp. As he neared it Fred reached for the brake pedal and began to slow.

"I'll go right up an' then let 'em have a few shots over their heads," he told himself. "There's only one tent left. Wonder if anybody's inside it?"

With brakes squealing, and the armoured-car sliding in a half-skid, Fred slithered towards the tent. For a moment he thought that he would hit it. He straightened the machine out and just missed the tent, bringing the car to a stop as a head appeared in the opening.

Staring through a vent at the front of his vehicle, Fred found himself looking full into the goggling eyes of the ugliest Nubian he had ever seen. On the man's ebullient face there was an expression of startled amazement and fear. Before Fred could move, the man plunged out of the tent, and in his hand Fred saw the glittering, curved blade of a scimitar.

The massive Nubian went scuttling away, flinging his weapon aside as his padded feet spurned the hot ground. Right at his heels there leaped from the tent a wizened-faced, hook-nosed little brute, whose arms were filled with a miscellany of small objects.

He let up a wild yell of terror when he saw the gaunt, grey bulk of the grim armoured-car almost in his path. He dropped everything that he carried, and went scuttling like a scalded cat in the wake of the Nubian, while Fred stared at the things the man had dropped.

A wallet, a wrist watch, a bunch of keys, and some small tools which Jack invariably carried.

"They're Skid's!" Fred gasped; and with the words he was snatching and wrenching at the door.

Recklessly he came tumbling from the car, diving blindly into the tent.

Jack lay half on his side in the middle of the floor, his face a little pale, bound hand and foot. He stared at Fred as though he could not believe his eyes; then, very faintly, he grinned.

"Jack, are you hurt?" Fred bent over him, jerking a knife from his pocket and snapping open the blade. "You look a bit groggy."

And he sent the keen edge of the steel biting into the tough thongs around Jack's wrists.

"So would you if you'd nearly had your head chopped off," Jack gasped. "Was it you with the machine-gun?"

"Yes. I've got an armoured-car outside!" Fred panted. "All the blighters have bunked. But they might come back."

"That big nigger was just going to use his sword when he heard your machine-gun," Jack gasped. "I thought I was a goner!"

At first Fred hardly understood what he meant; but Jack panted out his story of what had occurred to him as Fred kept the knife busy.

Fred had a good idea of all that had passed by the time Jack tried to get to his feet. He could not stand alone, because his limbs were stiff from his bonds. Fred half-carried him to the door and they made for the armoured-car, stopping to collect Jack's possessions where the escaping half-breed had dropped them.

The only Arabs in sight were those who had paused amongst the broken ground beyond the camp. The instant that the pair appeared long-barrelled guns crashed out, sending slugs and bullets hissing into the sand around them.

The two stumbled towards the car, and more missiles rattled and spanged on its metal bulk as they tumbled in.

"Sit on the floor for a bit!" Fred gasped. "There's water in that little tank over in the corner. I'll give these swabs something to think about."

He slammed shut the vent-holes all around, then reached for one of the machine-guns. He depressed the barrel, and sent a swathe of bullets spitting and kicking viciously amidst the rocks where the Arabs had taken shelter. The desert bandits stopped shooting on the instant.

For five minutes after that Fred tended his chum, bathing

the torn skin on Jack's wrists, and giving him the water he so badly needed. They compared notes further, and Fred told what he had seen of Slade, and how he himself came to have an armoured-car.

"That was Carnaby you saw with Slade," Jack informed him. "The rotters cleared off, and left me to be done in by that big black brute. And he'd have finished me, but for you. I owe you something for this, Fred."

"You beat Slade when he goes for the big record," Fred told him. "That's all you've got to do, old son. If you think you owe me anything that'll put us quits. Now we'd better clear off. I don't know where the dickens we are, but if we follow Slade's tracks when he went away from here, we're bound to arrive somewhere."

The Arabs were sniping again from the rocks, but their bullets were useless against the stout armour-plating of the big car. As Fred backed the machine round Jack manned one of the machine-guns, and he let the skulking Arabs have half a belt-full of bullets as a parting gift.

Once they were clear of the camp and beyond pursuit, Fred opened up the vents again to let in some air. They travelled for three miles, following the tyre marks of the Falcon. Then, in a stretch of desert which was all flat, baked clay, the engine coughed and spluttered itself into silence.

"Petrol finished! I was expecting that!" Fred granted.

The two boys climbed out of the car, and examined the armour-plated tank. It was as dry as a bone, and it was while they were looking at it that they became conscious of a queer sound breaking the utter silence of the desert.

It was a sullen roar which gradually grew in volume, and both recognised it in the same moment.

"Aeroplane!" grunted Fred.

"It's a bomber, too!" Jack exclaimed, and he pointed to a swift-moving shape which showed against the sky a mile away. It was up to them in a matter of seconds, the pilot banking round as he saw them. "He's coming down!" Jack gasped.

He was right. Twice the bomber circled them, its colourful shape flashing in the sunshine; then it drew off, straightened, and the roar of the engine died as the pilot shut off and brought the machine steeply towards the ground.

Dust puffed up as the landing wheels struck the earth. The plane bounced once or twice as it came rocking towards them, stopping less than a score yards away.

"I heard Slade say that they were using planes. This must be one of them," Jack said; and the two boys started to run to the machine when they saw the pilot and his companion climbing out.

Both were young, and both were smiling as the boys ran up.

"Which of you is Fred Bishop?" the pilot asked. "The boy who pinched the armoured car?"

"That's me," Fred informed him. "And this is Skid Kennedy."

"Eh? Kennedy!" The pilot stared at them blankly. "But—but he's been kidnapped by—"

"Yes, but Fred got me away," Jack told him.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" the pilot exclaimed, and he stood staring at Jack's slim figure as he stepped forward with a hand outstretched. "So you're the famous Skid Kennedy? Never thought I'd meet you in the middle of the desert."

And the two shook hands.

The airman wanted to know all that had happened, and the boys told them; then the pilot turned to his companion.

"Better use the wireless and tell H.Q. we've found 'em," he said cheerfully; and the observer slipped back into the machine. "We've got four planes and half a dozen armoured cars out, looking for you two," he went on to Jack. "Also, I've got a nice little load of bombs ready to drop on the mob who collared you. D'you know who they were?"

"An Arab named Hussif Saud was the leader," Jack informed him, but he said nothing about Slade or Carnaby.

Already he had agreed with Fred to keep that part of it to themselves, if they could. Jack knew that if he told the game that the rival speedman had played he would instantly be arrested by the authorities, and that meant he would not be able to drive the Falcon for the record.

"And you've run out of juice—eh?" the airman asked. "Well, we can soon fix you up with some petrol, and after that we'll locate friend Hussif."

In five minutes or so the boys had enough petrol in the car's tank to carry them to the course which had been laid out for the record attempts, and by that time the observer had finished operating the wireless set.

"They're bringing that troop-carrier up straight away," he said. "It ought to be here inside twenty minutes, and there are twenty men aboard. All the armoured cars will converge, so inside an hour we ought to be able to tackle

that bandit crowd. If they've gone into the hills, we'll soon bomb them out. They'll probably surrender when they see we're after them!"

The airmen shook hands with the boys, made certain that they could find their way to the camp, then took their plane into the air again.

Once more the pair started off in the tracks of Slade's machine, and as they rode they saw the flying forms of converging planes, each of which came over to have a look at them ere it flew onwards. In the distance they got a glimpse of two armoured cars, and that was all they saw until, an hour or so later, the mounds and sandbanks abruptly vanished from the face of the desert, and they found themselves rolling into a plain that was as flat as a board.

Far off, they could see metal flashing in the sunlight, and as they came nearer they realised that it was made by cars in the record-breaking camp.

Apparently a watch was being kept for the boys. They saw men gathering to greet them, and three hours after Jack had heard the hiss of the murderous semitar on the air above his head, he rejoined the men who had given him up for lost.

The camp was set in the middle of a course that was a full forty miles in length. It was marked out by tall pylons, made of wood and painted a vivid red. These were set about half a mile apart, and they marked out a track, dead straight, which was three-quarters of a mile wide.

Right in the centre of this forty-mile length was the measured mile which the rival cars would cover for their record attempts. This section was marked by huge yellow-and-white pylons, which the drivers would be able to pick out, no matter how fast they were travelling. The long stretch before this measured mile would enable them to get up speed, and on the far side of it was plenty of room to slow down.

When Jack and Fred arrived they saw nothing at all of Slade and Carnaby. The pair were in a camp apart, and were making their great Falcon ready for its big effort, and Slade intended going for the great record almost immediately.

Once the excitement of Jack's arrival died down he went to look at his own machine. The mighty Saxon had been taken from its lorry, and mechanics were working on it under the shade of an awning.

"We'd been thinking you'd be held to ransom," Ben informed him. "Glad you're back! The car's all right. She just wants warming up and trying out. It's a—"

Ben broke off as one of the course officials came hurrying across to them.

"Mr. Lloyd anywhere about?" he asked. "I want to know when you'll be ready to run. We've just had a wireless message from Damascus to say that there's a storm brewing over in the west. It's likely to reach us before night. If

you can't go for the record to-day, we may have to wait some time; the storm will strew sand all over the course, and it may be a week or so before the wind clears it for us again."

"I'm ready to drive as soon as you like," Jack told him. "You can't do it!" Ben grunted. "Holding this car will be a big job, and you need to be fighting fit for it. You must have a night's rest, Jack, before you—"

He checked. From the Falcon camp there suddenly blared a terrific roar as the Falcon record-breaker's engine was started up. The boom of the great car's war-song crashed tumultuously on the hot air of the desert, dwarfing every other sound, and Jack felt his pulses leaping as he heard it.

He saw the car rolling out from the Falcon camp to the middle of the course, pausing by a little group of officials. For a moment Jack stared, then he turned to Ben and his mechanics.

"Get our bus ready, and I'll drive it as soon as Slade's made his attempt. I'm going across to have a look at the Falcon."

Slade's car was one of 2,000 horse-power, and it had three engines. It was so huge and so long that it seemed to dwarf the men about it. The front of it was blunted and round, with a fluting at either side to take air into the radiators that cooled the engine. The tail ran back almost to a point, so that the whole car was pear-shaped.

The front wheels were screened in the fore-part, and the rear ones were protected by stream-lined casings.

When Jack and Fred came up Slade was standing beside the car, talking to some officials. From the back of his crash helmet ran a strip of tight, white linen, to protect his neck from the heat of the sun. He wore white canvas shoes, with soles of twisted rope, and his overalls were bound up to the knees with tape. More tape was wound about his sleeves, so that the wind could not get into them.

The collar of his overalls was clipped tightly about his neck, and it seemed to Jack that the Falcon speedman was nervous now that the supreme moment had come.

"I'll go to the start and make one run down the course to warm everything up!" the boys heard him shout through the howling of his engines. "Then I'll go for the record!"

"The record runs will be one in each direction!" a man answered him; and Slade nodded, then turned to the cockpit.

Two mechanics helped him to climb over the far side of the body, and he settled down in his seat. He pulled goggles over his eyes, snapping the elastics until they were comfortably in place, then, quite suddenly, he sent the great car forward.

(Who's going to be the victor in the great fight for supremacy—Skid Kennedy or the rascally Slade? The next and final instalment of this powerful motor-racing serial is a real thriller, chums. Make sure of reading it by ordering your copy WELL IN ADVANCE!)



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