

The

GEM

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EVERY
WEDNESDAY.

LIBRARY



THE NOTICE GUSSY DIDN'T NOTICE!

But other chaps did and made the most of it! (A lively incident from this week's school story of Tom Merru & Co., at St. Jim's.)

A ROLLYING SCHOOL YARN OF YOUR OLD FAVOURITES—



Fun on

APRIL THE FIRST! They've celebrated All Fools' Day in many and various ways at St. Jim's in the past. But never before on that red-letter day has the school been made to sit up and take notice so thoroughly as when Tom Merry & Co. set out to break all records.

CHAPTER 1. Glyn's Latest!

MONTY LOWTHER chuckled. It was a long, deep chuckle. Tom Merry and Manners, who were doing their prep at the study table, looked up at their chum curiously.

"Got a cough?" asked Tom Merry.

"Nunno! He, he!"

"Got a pain anywhere?" asked Tom again.

"It's those sardines we had for tea," said Manners, shaking his head. "I thought Monty was rather overdoing 'em."

"He, he, he!" chortled Monty Lowther. "Oh, my hat! What a scream! Ha, ha, ha!"

It was a real laugh this time—there was no mistaking it. It wasn't a cough, nor was it the result of overdoing the sardines at tea. Monty Lowther was just laughing.

Lowther was a very humorous youth, and his thoughts continually ran on humorous lines.

"Cough it up!" said Tom Merry, laying down his pen, with a sigh. "Let's have the joke and get it over! There'll be no peace in this study until we do!"

"You silly chump! Ha, ha, ha!" gurgled Lowther.

"Is it a joke for the 'Weekly'?" asked Manners. "If it is, for goodness' sake keep it for the 'Weekly.' It can stand your jokes better than we can."

"You silly asses!" Lowther stopped laughing, and gave his chums a glare. The humorist of the Shell was responsible for the Comic Column in Tom Merry's "Weekly," and any disparaging reference to his jokes always raised his ire. "You silly asses! It isn't for the 'Weekly' at all!"

"Good!" remarked Tom Merry. "Then there's a chance of it being a joke worth hearing, old chap! Cough it up!"

"You—you—" Monty decided to let the sarcastic inference pass, and went on hastily. "It's a jape, you burbling chumps—a jape for the First, and it's a real scorcher!"

"Oh, is it?" ejaculated Tom. "And what the thump is the First?"

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"The First, of course!" snorted Lowther, with withering scorn. "Haven't you realised that it's only a few days off the First, fathead?"

"Not at all, old chap; nor of the second, fathead!" said Tom, purposely mistaking Lowther's meaning. "Which, or what, fathead, is it only a couple of days off, old chap?"

Manners chuckled, and Lowther breathed hard.

"You—you chump!" he spluttered. "You know jolly well what I mean. I mean the First—"

"You're repeating yourself, old chap! You've said that—"

"The First of the month!" shrieked Lowther, crimson with wrath now. "The First of April, you burbling dummy!"

"Oh! I see what you mean now!" said Tom Merry affably. "Well, I'm glad you reminded me. I always seem to forget you chaps' birthdays, somehow. But it's all right; I've still got ninepence left out of that quid, and I'll buy you a present out of it."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Manners, highly entertained at the expression on Lowther's face.

Tom Merry chuckled.

"All serene, Lowther!" he said cheerfully. "Only pulling your little leg. My hat! I hadn't realised the giddy day of days was so near. We'd better be thinking some wheezes out to play off on those New House bounders!"

"Yes, rather!" said Manners. "They did us down no end last year! You say you've got one, Monty?"

"Yes!" grunted Lowther. "If you idiots would only listen—"

"We're all ears, old chap," said Tom Merry, quite eagerly now. "Cough it up! We've simply got to dish those New House worms this year!"

"Well, I'm glad you see that at last!" said Lowther, in an aggrieved tone. "I've been trying to think of wheezes all day. I mean to make things hum all round on the First this year! This study's got to keep its end up."

"That's so—especially against Figgy's lot!" agreed Tom. "But what's the wheeze?"

Lowther grinned—mollified now that his chums showed signs of great interest.

"It's rather a scorcher!" he said, with a deep chuckle.

—TOM MERRY & CO., THE CHEERY CHUMS OF ST. JIM'S!

the first!

by Martin Clifford



"Now my idea is this: We get up very early on the morning of All Fools' Day, sneak into the New House, and pinch all the New House fellows' trousers from the dorms while they're sleeping."

"Trousers?" yelled Tom.

"Just that!" chuckled Lowther. "Then we take 'em all out into the quad, string 'em all together and hoist 'em up on the flagpole in the quad. See the wheeze? Ha, ha, ha!"

And Lowther roared.

Tom Merry frowned in a puzzled way.

"But what for?" he inquired seriously. "Why give their bags an airing? Lot of trouble all for nothing if you ask me."

"Can't you see?" snorted Lowther witheringly. "Can't you see their faces when they miss their bags and find 'em all growing and blowing on the flagstaff? Why, it's a perfectly ripping jape!"

"Is it? Oh, all right, then, we'll take your word for it, old chap. Ha, ha, ha!"

And Tom laughed with such obviously forced and insincere mirth, that Lowther glared.

"You think you're funny, I suppose?" he snorted.

"Eh? Not at all, old fellow," said Tom anxiously. "Did I laugh in the wrong place? Sorry! If you'll point out where the joke comes in—"

Tom paused as the door opened and four juniors entered. They were Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy, all of the Fourth.

"Hallo! What's the joke?" asked Blake.

"Only pulling Lowther's leg," said Tom, grinning at Lowther's flushed face. "He's just propounded a wheeze to dish Figgy and his lot on the First."

"Good man if he has!" said Blake eagerly. "My hat! That's just what we've come about, Tommy. Those New House worms are bound to try all sorts of games on us again."

"I know," admitted Tom glumly. "But wheezes take some finding. Lowther's got a bit of a wheeze, but—"

"It's a jolly good one!" snorted Lowther.

"What is it?" demanded Blake. "We're stumped for ideas, and we thought—"

"Well, Lowther's might be useful," said Tom doubtfully. "His idea is to sneak into the New House, collar Figgy & Co.'s trousers and, after tying 'em together, sling them in a sort of string from the flagpole in the quad."

"H'm!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Well," admitted Blake thoughtfully, "it would be rather a lark for Figgy and his crowd to find their bags missing and see them sailing in the breeze from the flagpole. But—"

"There's no real catch in it," said Tom, shaking his head. "It's just an ordinary jape, and we want a gigantic wheeze that'll make those New House bounders hide their giddy heads for days. The trouble is to think of one. Now—"

"Bai Jove! I do not approve of the twousahs dodge, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus seriously. "It is wathah a sewious mattah to play twicks with a fellow's clobbah—especially his bags. It would make them dweadfully cweased—"

"You ring off, Gussy!" said Blake. "I agree that the bags idea isn't quite the thing we want—"

"What rot!" grunted Lowther. "Anyway, I've got heaps more wheezes—"

"Yes, but your giddy wheezes have a way of coming unstuck," said Blake. "Now my idea— Oh, good! Here's Glyn! He's the chap for ideas!"

Bernard Glyn, the schoolboy inventor, came into the study. "Committee meeting, eh?" he asked. "I'll call again—"

"No—hold on, Glyn!" said Tom Merry eagerly. "You're just the fellow we want. We're just trying to think of a wheeze to play off on those New House worms on the First. I suppose you haven't got any ideas—"

"Well, yes, I have a few," said Glyn, smiling. "In fact, I'm just working on one now—a real scorcher!"

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"That's the stuff! What is it?"
 "All in good time," said Glyn, with a chuckle. "I'll want the help of you fellows when the time comes. But I've just trotted along to know if you chaps would like to see my latest?"

"What is it?" asked Tom Merry, rather suspiciously.
 Glyn was a very clever inventor, but he was also a terrible practical joker, and it was never wise to be too curious about his "latest."

He took a small, oblong box from his pocket.

"It's a waistcoat-pocket camera," he explained. "Manners should be interested in this. However ugly a chap's chivvy is I can make him look a picture. The real beauty of my invention is that it can be used in any light, and the pictures are developed automatically when taken."

"Phew!" breathed Manners. "Impossible, Glyn!"

"Not at all," smiled Glyn politely. "I want to try it out now on someone. I'm hoping to take a good few chaps in—I mean, take a good few chaps during the next few days. Care to try it, Manners, old chap?"

"I—I think I'd rather not, Glyn," said Manners.

"What? Oh, all right. You like to be taken, Merry?"

"Not at present," smiled Tom.

"You, Blake?"

"I'm not handsome enough," explained Blake, winking at Tom. "I should spoil the camera, old chap."

"You, Gussy?" asked Glyn. "A handsome chap like you—"

"Bai Jove! I see no reason why I should not!" said Arthur Augustus, eyeing the small, slim box curiously. "It must take vewy small photogwaphs, though, deah boy."

"Life-size, old chap!" said Glyn. "That's another great point about it. I'll take a close-up, so stand there, Gussy—that's right. Now look at me and smile. Splendid, old fellow! Ready?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Arthur Augustus was always an obliging fellow. He posed gracefully, and his chums looked on with grins of expectation. The next moment Glyn pressed the little knob at the side of the small box.

There followed no smart click of a shutter, however—only a sort of swoosh as a stream of dark liquid shot from the front of the "camera" and took the unsuspecting Arthur Augustus full on the waistcoat.

It spurted over Gussy's features, and his necktie, collar and waistcoat, and splattered to right and left over Blake, Herries, and Digby.

Gussy's graceful smile vanished abruptly behind a splattering shower of black ink, and from his astonished lips came a wild howl:

"Yawwooooooh!"

CHAPTER 2.

Glyn's Great Idea!

"H A, ha, ha!"
 The Terrible Three, being well out of range, howled with laughter; they had expected something of the kind from Bernard Glyn.

But Blake & Co did not laugh—far from it. While the too-trusting Arthur Augustus stood in stupefied inaction, with ink streaming down his aristocratic chin, Blake, Herries, and Digby dabbed madly with their handkerchiefs.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bernard Glyn. "Ain't it a gorgeous success, you fellows? You've had the honour of testing it first, Gussy. I expect to catch scores of mugs with it on the First, so keep it dark. Now—Oh, my hat!"

Glyn did not stop to finish—he departed in a great hurry as Arthur Augustus made a jump at him.

"Come back, you wascal!" shrieked Arthur Augustus. "You fwrightful wuffian! I will give you a feahful thwashin' for that, Glyn!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Glyn bolted for his study, roaring. After him went the raging and inky Arthur Augustus, with the equally furious Blake, Herries and Digby hard at his heels.

"Come on!" gurgled Tom Merry. "Let's see the fun!"

"Yes, rather!"

There was a stampede for Glyn's study. That cheerful japer reached it an easy first, but before he could lock the door, Arthur Augustus was on the spot. He sent the door flying open with a terrific charge that sent Glyn spinning almost across the room.

"Here, hold on!" yelled Glyn, rather alarmed now. "Hold on—it was only a lark. Can't you fellows stand a joke? I had to test—yoooooop!"

Glyn howled as Gussy's fist made a close acquaintance with his nose.

"Test that, you feahfu, wuffian!" gasped Gussy.

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"Give him socks, Gussy!" yelled Blake. "Teach the rotten joker to play his fool tricks with us! Collar him!"
 "Look here—I'll make it pax!" yelled Glyn, dodging round the table. "It's all right! I say I'll show you my splendid wheeze for dishing the New—oh, my—yooooop!"

Crash!

The schoolboy inventor went down on the carpet with Blake & Co. swarming over him. He roared for mercy, but he roared in vain. Blake & Co. were not in the mood to make it "pax." Once again the inventive practical joker found his misplaced humour coming home to roost. They rolled him, and they punched him, and bumped him.

"Now some ink—we'll pay him back in his own coin!" gasped Blake, looking round swiftly. "Hand me that ink-pot, Lowther."

"Certainly, old chap," said Lowther. "I'm always inclined to help in cases like this. Excuse the pun! Hold on, though—here's something better than ink, I fancy."

He picked up from Bernard Glyn's work-bench in one corner of the room a large, glass jar. In it was a thick, rather greenish-tinted liquid.

From where he sprawled on the floor, Glyn glimpsed Lowther's action, and he gave a yell of alarm.

"Put that down, Lowther! Don't upset it!" he shrieked.

"It's—"

"I won't upset it!" said Lowther airily. "Only going to trickle it gently over your chivvy, old man!"

"Hand it here, Lowther!" bawled Blake. "I'll see to that. What is the stuff?"

"It's a stain!" shrieked Glyn in horrified alarm. "Put it down, you awful idiots!"

"Hold on, Monty!" grinned Tom Merry. "It may be some giddy dangerous chemical—"

"Doesn't look like it!" said Herries. "Is it dangerous, Glyn, old dear?"

"No—it's harmless, but it stains the skin!" shouted Glyn desperately. "Once it's on the skin it won't come off—stains it green! Put it down, I tell you!"

"Splendid!" said Blake. "Just the thing we want, old chap! You've stained Gussy black, so we'll stain you green. That colour suits you. Hand it over, Lowther—"

"Don't!" howled Glyn. "Don't waste it—it's expensive, and I've made it to dish those New House chaps on the First!"

"What?" yelled Tom Merry.

"It's a fact!" gasped Glyn desperately. "I've made that stuff to turn every New House fellow's face green on April the First—the jape of a lifetime! It's the biggest wheeze ever! Make it pax, you fellows, and I'll tell you all about it!"

"Phew!"

Tom Merry's eyes gleamed as he began to grasp something of Glyn's idea.

"Let him get up, chaps!" he breathed. "My hat! There's something in a wheeze like that. You really mean that this stuff will stain the skin green, Glyn?"

"Yes—don't I keep telling you so?"

"And it's really harmless?"

"Harmless as water!" gasped Glyn, with a faint grin.

"Now gerroff me chest, Gussy, and I'll—"

"I uttably wefuse to do so!" shouted Arthur Augustus, looking for all the world like a youthful nigger minstrel. "Hand me that ink, Lowthah! I am goin' to treat this wuffian as he tweated me! I am goin'—Yoooooop!"

Arthur Augustus yelled as Glyn pinched his elegant calf. He yelled again as Glyn gave a sudden leave, and sent him rolling over with a bump—Blake and the others having released their grasp at Tom Merry's orders.

Glyn jumped up, grinning. The next moment Arthur Augustus also scrambled to his feet. He grabbed the ink-pot, and then he made for the schoolboy inventor.

Apparently the noble Gussy was determined to have an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

Glyn was just as determined that he shouldn't.

He instantly grabbed the jar of greenish liquid, and jumped back on the defensive.

"Stand back, Gussy!" he said cheerfully. "Stand back unless you want to go about for the rest of the term looking like a green-painted petrol pump. I warn you that this stuff stains clobber green as well as skin."

"Oh, bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus jumped back; even at the risk of losing his vengeance he didn't want his clobber or his skin stained green for the rest of the term.

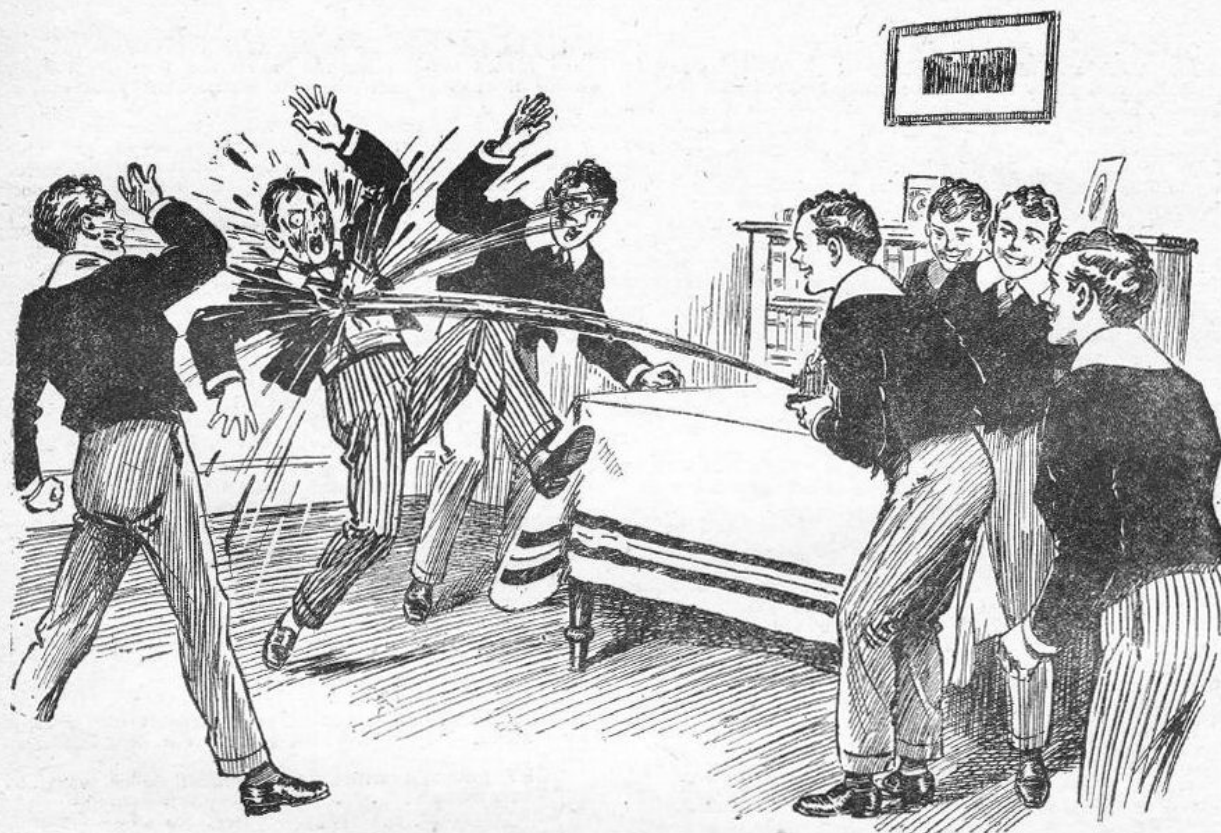
Glyn chuckled and followed up his advantage.

"Make it pax, then—"

"I uttably wefuse to make it pax!" shrieked Gussy. "You are a wascally wuffian, and I mean to— Oh, bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus turned and dived desperately round the table as Bernard Glyn made a rush at him with the jar upraised. Glyn followed him.

"Go it, Gussy!"



Arthur Augustus D'Arcy posed gracefully before the camera, while his chums looked on with grins of expectation. Swoooosh! As Bernard Glyn pressed the little nob at the side of the small box, Gussy's smile vanished abruptly behind a spattering shower of black ink, and he gave a wild howl. "Yawwooooooh!" (See Chapter 1.)

"Two to one on the green!" chuckled Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Stop him!" shouted Glyn. "I want to test this stuff on someone, and Gussy's just the chap! Stop—hallo, he's gone!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gussy had gone. Dropping the ink-pot in the fire-place, he made a wild leap for the door and vanished. Apparently he didn't want to test the stain.

Glyn closed the door, and locked it. Then he placed the jar carefully on the table.

"Thank goodness you asses didn't spill any of it," he said. "It costs a lot to make it and I shall need a lot for the New House chaps."

"Is this the jape you mentioned, then?" asked Tom Merry, eyeing the jar curiously.

"Yes, old chap. It's a real scorcher! That camera stunt was just a little dodge to take in mugs like Gussy and Trimble on the First. But this stuff's the real goods—it's going to put the kybosh on Figgy once and for all! I've been working on it for days. I'm going to turn every New House, Shell, and Fourth chap, green!"

"And won't it wash off?"

"Hot water and soap won't touch it!" grinned Glyn. "Nor will turpentine or anything else I know of, excepting the antidote I've discovered. Watch!"

He turned back his sleeve, dipped a finger in the jar and put a drop of the liquid on his bare arm. It showed only a faint, greenish spot at first. But as the seconds passed the colour deepened until it became a vivid green. Then Glyn got some turpentine, dipped a piece of rag in it, and rubbed hard at the green spot on his arm. He rubbed and rubbed without making the slightest effect on the stain.

"Phew!" said Tom Merry. "But—but you can't turn chap's chivvies green for a giddy lifetime, Glyn! That would be a bit thick as a joke!"

Glyn chuckled, and took another bottle down from a shelf.

"This is my giddy antidote," he explained. "Now, watch! It takes a lot of getting off, even with this, but it does get it off."

Putting some of the stuff from the bottle on the rag, Glyn rubbed at the spot on his arm. After rubbing hard for some seconds it began to fade.

"See the wheeze?" asked Glyn, smiling. "We get Figgy and his men to wash with this stuff, and all April Fools'

Day they'll be walking about green as grass. They'll be the laughing-stock of the giddy school. And we won't give 'em this stuff to fetch the green off until they've owned up that School House is cock-house, and that they've been dished and done—green!"

"Phew! Top-hole!" breathed Blake, his eyes dancing.

Tom Merry grinned, and then he frowned.

"Yes, but you're forgetting one thing, old top! How are we going to make 'em wash in it?"

"Easily enough!" smiled Glyn. "Noble and Dane and I have worked every detail out. We've got a whole heap of medicine bottles from the Rylcombe chemist, with his label on. On every label we write or print the name I've given this stuff—'Influenza Germicide.'"

"Yes, but—"

"Wait a bit! Early on the morning of April the First—before anyone else is astir—we sneak into the New House, creep into the Shell and Fourth dorms there, and place a bottle of the Influenza Germicide on every fellow's wash-stand. Also, we hang a card on the rule-board in each dorm with a typewritten notice on, instructing the chaps to empty the germicide into their basins when washing as a precaution against the 'flu.'"

"Well, my hat!"

"Easy as falling off a form!" smiled Glyn. "Rylcombe and Wayland are in the throes of a giddy influenza epidemic, and the fellows know the giddy beaks are anxious in case it reaches St. Jim's. They won't dream of suspecting a catch. They'll say it's all rot, of course, but they'll use it—they won't dare to refuse. Now, d'you see the wheeze?"

Tom Merry & Co. did. They chuckled, and then they howled with laughter.

"It'll do, then?" grinned Glyn.

"Yes, rather!" gurgled Tom Merry, thumping the school-boy inventor on the back in his gleeful excitement. "It's the jape of the term, Glyn. Those New House worms would never admit themselves green, though we've told them they are often enough. Now they'll have to admit it."

"Right, then!" said Bernard Glyn, with satisfaction. "I've got the bottles in the cupboard here ready, so if you fellows like you can stay now and help me fill 'em and cork 'em. I've got rubber gloves here you can wear for the job. And to-morrow I'll make more of this stuff, and we'll get everything fixed up."

"Good man! We're on!"

"Yes, rather! It's great!"

And there and then Tom Merry & Co. settled down to help Bernard Glyn to make his final preparations for the great wheeze. The bottles were carefully filled with the patent Influenza Germicide, corked neatly, and then the name was printed just as neatly on the labels. The job kept Tom Merry & Co. busy until bed-time, and they went up to their dormitories smiling and in a state of great satisfaction. All anxiety regarding April the First was at an end, they felt. Whatever japes Figgins & Co. attempted on that great day, nothing they might bring off was likely to go one better than that engineered by the school-boy inventor. Tom Merry & Co. slept with smiles on their faces that night.

CHAPTER 3. The First!

BERNARD GLYN was the first fellow awake in the dormitory on the morning of April the First. He awoke at four o'clock, and it was the tinkle of his alarm-watch that awakened him. Glyn was taking no chances of awakening at will—he relied upon his alarm-watch placed under his pillow.

The sound of it also awakened Tom Merry, and he sat up in bed, and blinked about him in the gloom.

"What the thump— Oh!"

Tom Merry suddenly remembered the why and wherefore of things, and he chuckled and rubbed his eyes.

"Four o'clock, Glyn!" he grinned, making out that junior's form. "Many happy returns, old chap. May your shadow never grow whiskers, and all your giddy gadgets come off—for a change!"

"Same to you, and many of 'em!" said Glyn affably. "I'm sorry I haven't your birthday present to hand you now. They hadn't any more strait-waistcoats in stock, but they're having one specially made for you!"

Tom Merry chuckled, and lit a stump of candle. He was about to waken Lowther when Glyn stayed his hand.

"Hold on!" he said. "It's Lowther's great day to-day; being a born humorist, he's bound to spend the day japing other chaps. We'll make a start before he has the chance to get us on the hop!"

With that, Glyn grabbed Lowther's tooth-paste from his washstand. It was coloured paste, and Glyn daubed it gently over the sleeping Lowther's nose and face in general. Lowther looked a picture when he had finished.

The humorist of the Shell sat up, blinking, as Tom smilingly shook him into wakefulness.

"What's the matter? 'Tain't rising-bell— Oh! Oh, my hat!"

"Nearly forgotten, what?" said Glyn, before he could speak again. "Many happy returns of the day, old fruit! May you live to be as old as your jokes in the comic column of the 'Weekly.' But may you never get so stale, old chap!"

"Fathead! I say, isn't it too early? And it's jolly cold, too—"

"You look cold, old chap!" said Glyn, staring hard at Lowther's face. "But what the thump is the matter with your face, old man? It's all streaked with red stuff!"

"Is it?" grinned Lowther, climbing out of bed, with a chuckle. "Let it stay streaked then—you don't catch me quite so early, old top! Try again some other time!"

"Oh, all right!" said Glyn, winking at the grinning Tom Merry. "Stay like that if you like—I don't mind!"

And he went or dressing. Manners was wakened, and he gave a violent start as he caught sight of Lowther's striking features in the candle-light.

"What the thump's the matter with your chivvy, Monty? It's all daubed—"

"Oh, don't you start!" grinned Lowther. "My dear man, you'll need to wake earlier than four o'clock to catch little me!"

Manners was about to insist, but he caught a wink from Glyn, and grinned as he understood.

"Lowther's a bit too smart for us!" said Glyn. "He'd better look out, though—"

"I mean to," smiled Lowther. "Well, I'm ready for one! I say, we'll have plenty of time to play that dodge with those fellows' trousers—"

"Oh, don't start that again!" groaned Tom Merry. "I've thought it out, and it won't work, Monty. The chaps are bound to have cash and things like that in their pockets, and it won't do to play about with things like that."

"What rot! I tell you—"

"Don't! That wheeze is squashed, old man! Now, come on!"

The Terrible Three and Glyn, dressed now, stole from the dormitory, Tom Merry putting out the light. They soon reached the Fourth dormitory, and Blake & Co. were quietly shaken into wakefulness. They were each wished

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many happy returns of the day as they awakened. Lowther had placed Gussy's wash-basin on the floor by the bed, half-full of cold water, and he warned Gussy not to step into it.

Having been wished many happy returns, the swell of the Fourth was wide awake now, however—or believed he was. He refused even to look over the side of the bed.

"Wathah not!" he chuckled. "You don't take me in so easily as that, Lowthah, deah boy!"

With that, Gussy stepped out of bed—with one bare foot plunging into the icy-cold water.

Fortunately, Blake clapped a hand over his noble chum's mouth in the nick of time, or his yell would probably have wakened the whole school.

"Ever been had?" asked Lowther affably.

"Ow! Oh, you feahful wottah, Lowthah!" gasped Gussy, rubbing his leg and foot dry with a towel. "I thought—"

"I know you did, old chap!" said Lowther. "I warned you, so it's your own fault, isn't it?"

"Wats! I have a vewy good mind—bai Jove! What evah is that wed stuff on your face, Lowthah?"

"Yes—I was wondering that," said Blake. "I noticed it— He broke off and grinned as he caught a wink from Glyn. "Better rub it off, Lowther!"

"Quite so," said Lowther airily. "Try again. I fancy— Oh!"

Lowther started. It suddenly occurred to him as strange that both Glyn and Gussy had mentioned red. Was it possible—

The humorist of the Shell hesitated. Then, deciding to risk it, he grabbed the candle and hurried to the nearest mirror. His jaw dropped as he gazed at his reflection.

"Oh, my hat!" he gasped.

His expression nearly sent his chums into fits.

"Ever been had?" asked Glyn cheerily, using Lowther's own words. "I warned you, so it's your own fault, isn't it?"

"Oh!" gasped Lowther. "Oh crumbs! Done fairly!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

With Lowthah rubbing the toothpaste off his crimson features, the juniors left the dormitory, Blake and Co. having dressed swiftly. Even Gussy was chuckling explosively now.

Only Lowther was a trifle aggrieved. Being a humorist, it was difficult for him to see the point of other people's jokes. Moreover, he felt aggrieved because Tom Merry refused to adopt his great wheeze of the trousers—a splendid, ripping, and top-hole jape, in Lowther's opinion.

The conspirators soon reached the Shell passage, and in Glyn's study they found all in readiness—a cricket bag carefully packed with bottles of Influenza Germicide—while each junior filled his pockets with other spare bottles of the same weird concoction. They also carried a supply of rolled-up sheets of cardboard with suitable birthday greeting printed thereon—all for the benefit of their New House rivals.

"Now we'll have to go carefully," murmured Glyn, as they left the study and made tracks for the box-room. "If any chap busts a bottle of this stuff he'll wish he hadn't."

"Yaas, wathah! I have put on some old clobber in case, deah boy."

"Come on."

It was still dark, and one by one they left the School House by means of the box-room window and stealthily made their way to the New House. Here a loose grating in the cellar, reached by a short flight of stone steps leading downwards, gave access to the New House.

"Carefully, now!" murmured Tom Merry, with a chuckle.

"It isn't likely anyone will be about yet, but we'll take no chances. I vote we rig a few booby-traps in their giddy studies before we go back—just a few surprise packets for them in the morning."

"Good egg!"

To reach the New House dormitories was only a matter of seconds, and soon the daring jokers were busy. First the typewritten notices were hung on the dormitory walls, and then a bottle of Glyn's invention was deposited on each washstand.

Though strongly tempted to play other little jokes in the dormitories, Tom Merry & Co. felt it much safer not to arouse any suspicion that an enemy had visited the dormitories that morning. It might easily spoil the great jape.

It was done at last; every Shell and Fourth fellow in the New House had been presented with a bottle of Glyn's Patent Influenza Germicide—a sort of birthday present, as Glyn remarked. Then, with smiling glances at the rows of sleeping forms, the School House japers left the dormitories and went downstairs.

Starting at one end of the Shell passage, the Terrible Three and Glyn worked along it, fixing up booby-traps over every door, whilst Blake & Co. did likewise in the Fourth Form passage. It was done easily enough. One fellow entered the study, and, with the aid of a chair and a

pile of books, or a cardboard box of soot, which ever happened to be handiest, rigged up the trap, and then squeezed out of the study again, being very careful indeed not to disturb the trap above his head.

The School House raiders worked swiftly, with the aid of candles; and at the end of fifteen minutes they gathered together again, their tasks accomplished.

"Done it?" asked Tom Merry. "You shoved the cards up all right?"

"On each giddy mantelpiece!" assented Blake, with a chuckle. "Won't the dear little fellows get some surprise packets in the morning? We gave special attention to Figgy's study—especially to the study cupboard and the grub. We do hope Figgy will like the mustard in the butter, and the pepper in the jam, also the coal in the desk drawer. Hadn't we better be getting back now? It's beginning to get light already."

"Yes, rather! We mustn't forget dear old Knox!" said Glyn. "I've just got one bottle of the stuff left; and I think, as we all love dear old Gerald so much, he ought to have it."

"Ha, ha, ha! Yes!"

"Come on, then; none too much time!"

And, feeling very satisfied with their labours in the New House, Tom Merry & Co. hastened back to their own House.

They got in safely; and outside the door of Knox's study in the Sixth Form passage Glyn called a halt.

"Tommy and I will be enough," he whispered. "You chaps shove off to bed."

"Wight-ho!"

Blake and the rest departed for their respective dorms, leaving Glyn and Tom Merry to do the final dark deed. Knox of the Sixth was not a very popular prefect, and the juniors were very anxious to let him know it.

They crept into the room, not daring to light a candle there. Knox was snoring softly—but they knew he was a light sleeper from bitter experience. While Tom Merry wrote on the mirror over the mantelpiece a suitable birthday greeting with a piece of chalk, Glyn felt about for the washstand.

Unfortunately, his fumbling hand struck something else—a glass tumbler apparently—and swept it off the stand.

Crash!

"Oh, my hat!" breathed Glyn.

CHAPTER 4.

Fooling Knox!

IT happened in a flash.

In the stillness of the room the crash of the falling tumbler sounded like the sudden collapse of a greenhouse.

For a moment Glyn stood stock-still, the bottle of alleged Germicide clutched in his hand, his heart thumping a little. Then came a sudden movement from the alcove, and a vague form sat up in the bed.

"Hook it!" breathed Glyn.

He jumped for the door; and, only stopping to add the final word to his inscription, Tom Merry followed him in a flash.

"Come back! Who is that?"

It was Knox's voice, sleepy and startled.

Tom Merry and Bernard Glyn were not likely to obey it—nor did they.

They flew back along the passages to the Shell dormitory. Dawn was just breaking, and the dim light of early morning came through the tall windows. In a flash they had tumbled into bed, hurriedly discarding tennis shoes as they did so, likewise jackets and waistcoats.

"Did you do it, Glyn?" gasped Tom Merry.

"Blow it—no!" panted Glyn, in disgust. "I hadn't time to shove the instructions up, let alone the giddy bottle on the washstand!"

"What happened?" demanded Lowther from his bed.

"Did he wake—"

"Yes! I knocked a glass over, like a clumsy ass! Let's hope he doesn't come here—"

"He's bound to!" said Tom Merry. "I heard him getting out of bed; and I bet he comes straight here to see if anybody's awake!"

"Phew! I've got a wheeze, then," said Monty Lowther, with a chuckle. "We'll make an April Fool of dear old Gerald, after all! Get under the beds, chaps!"

"What—"

"Quick! I fancy I hear the beggar coming now!" snapped Lowther, scrambling out of bed himself. "He'll find us out of bed, and he'll rush off for Railton, or some-

one. Then we slip into bed and pretend to be asleep. See the—"

Lowther didn't stop to finish. The sound of slipped feet came from the passage outside, and he slipped under the bed in a flash.

But Tom Merry, Manners, and Glyn had grasped his idea, and they were scarcely a second after him in slipping under their respective beds.

They had scarcely done so when the door opened and Knox of the Sixth appeared in the doorway with a lighted candle in his hand.

He advanced to the nearest bed, and then he walked along the row until he reached Glyn's empty bed. He stopped, with a grunt of satisfaction; and the next moment he sighted the other three empty beds.

"Got the little sweeps!" the hiding juniors heard him mutter to himself. "Play their little games in my room, would they?"

The Terrible Three and Glyn heard him hurry back to the door, and then came the sound of the door being closed and the key turning in the lock.

"Oh crumbs!" gurgled Lowther. "The ass thinks we're out of the dorm, and he's locked the giddy door so that we shouldn't sneak in while he's away! Into bed, chaps—sharp!"

With deep chuckles, the four jokers scrambled out from under the beds. None of them had removed their trousers as yet, but they hastily did so now. Then they jumped into bed and dragged the clothes over them.

They were apparently fast asleep when Gerald Knox returned a few minutes later. With him was Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell. He was in his dressing-gown, and he looked very cross and impatient.

"You are quite certain of what you say, Knox?" he demanded sleepily and irritably. "It seems to me impossible that four boys should be out of their dormitories at this hour. You say—"

"Merry, Lowther, Manners, and Glyn, sir," said Knox. "The beds of those four boys are empty, as you will—"

Knox's voice trailed off and his jaw dropped as his eyes fell upon the rows of beds. All certainly appeared to be occupied. He went closer, and swiftly scrutinised the four dark heads on the pillows. From each of the still forms came gentle breathing.

"G-good gad!" he ejaculated. "I—I—"

"Well," snapped Mr. Linton, "I do not see one single empty bed! Have you suddenly taken leave of your senses, Knox? Merry, Glyn, Manners, and Lowther are all here, fast asleep!"

"G-good gad!" ejaculated Knox again. "They—they weren't in bed four or five minutes ago, and they couldn't have come in as I locked the door. It—it's some trick, sir—it must be."

"Nonsense!" snorted Mr. Linton, who was very annoyed indeed now. "You have brought me from my bed on a fool's errand, you stupid fellow!"

He shook Bernard Glyn's shoulder, and Glyn grunted sleepily and turned over. Then he went on breathing gently, his eyes still closed. "Pooh!" exclaimed the master of the Shell. "The boy is undoubtedly fast asleep. How dare you play tricks like this, Knox?"

"It's these boys who are playing tricks," almost choked Gerald Knox, biting his lips with anger. "They came into my room and woke me up. They must have been up to tricks. It is the first of April to-day, and I believe they intended to play a fool's trick on me."

"Utter rubbish!" snapped Mr. Linton, bestowing a wrathful look on the prefect. "You must have been dreaming, Knox. How could the boys have returned to their beds when the door was, as you yourself state, locked?"

"But, sir—"

"That is enough, Knox! You have obviously been dreaming, and your over-suspicious mind has done the rest!" snorted Mr. Linton. "I am almost inclined to wonder, however, whether you have dared to play a foolish April Fools' trick on me, Knox!"

"Wha-at?"

"Did I believe so," said Mr. Linton, in great wrath, "I would most certainly report your conduct to the House-master. Return to bed at once, sir!"

"But—but listen—"

"I refuse to listen to another word, you foolish fellow!" snapped the annoyed Mr. Linton. "You have brought me from my bed on an idiotic and unnecessary errand. These

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boys are fast asleep, and I do not believe any of them have left their beds at all. Absurd!"

And with that Mr. Linton flounced out of the dormitory. Knox glowered at the four japers snoring gently in their beds. Then he grabbed Glyn's shoulder and shook him much more forcibly than Mr. Linton had done.

"Up you get, you young rotter!" he snapped. "I know you're not asleep."

This time Glyn opened his eyes. Then he sat up and blinked at Gerald Knox in the candle-light.

"Hallo! What's the matter?" he said sleepily. "It isn't rising-bell yet, and— Oh, it's you, Knox! I say, what's this game, Knox? What the thump d'you want to wake a fellow up for?"

"You—your little sweep!"

"I say, that's a bit thick, Knox!" snorted Glyn. "I know it's April the First to-day, but that's no reason why you should come barging in here waking chaps up and slanging 'em. Leggo my arm, and lemme get to sleep, or I'll report you to Mr. Linton in the morning."

Knox growled, but he released Glyn's arm, though he was on the point of hauling that junior out of bed in his rage. But prudence bade him pause. The Sixth-Former knew it was just as useless to try to get anything out of Glyn as to try to persuade Mr. Linton that his story was correct.

"I know you young rotters have been out of bed and to my room," he snarled. "You've done me this time, but if you've played any tricks in my room, I'll make you sorry for it."

With that Knox strode out, almost choking with wrath. The four japers waited until his footsteps had died away, and then they gave vent to a chorus of chuckles.

"Poor old Knoxy-woxy!" spluttered Tom Merry. "He knows quite well we've done him brown, but he daren't do anything. I'd like to see his face when he sees what I've written on his giddy looking-glass! He'll understand then that we only went there to remind him it's his birthday. I think we've scored and earned a bit more sleep now, chaps."

"Yes, rather!"

And the Terrible Three and Bernard Glyn settled themselves down to sleep again. April the First had started well—for them!

CHAPTER 5.

Green as Grass!

CRASH!

And a wild yell.

That was what awakened Figgins on that April the First morning.

He sat up in bed quickly. Then he gasped at what he saw. On the floor by the next bed was a basin, and seated in it was Fatty Wynn. Around him water had spurted all over the floor, obviously from the basin.

Half a dozen fellows in pyjamas were looking on at Fatty Wynn's desperate struggles, nearly helpless with laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What the thump—" began Figgins.

"It was your own fault, Fatty," said Dick Redfern severely. "I told you there was a basin of water there, and you wouldn't listen."

"Yow-ow!" wailed Fatty Wynn. "Oh, you awful rotters! I'm drenched to the skin! Ow-ow! I remembered it's April Fools' Day, and I thought you were trying to make me look and see. Yow! I'd been done like that before. Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Helped by the laughing Kerr and Redfern, Fatty Wynn scrambled to his feet, water dripping from him. Fortunately, the basin was an enamelled one, and nothing worse had happened to Fatty save the wetting. Like Arthur Augustus, Fatty Wynn had been taken in, only Fatty had sat down in the basin instead of merely putting his foot in it.

Figgins slipped out of bed, chuckling. He understood now what the crash and yell meant. Redfern had made an early start, and Figgy felt very happy as he thought of the glorious day of japes and jokes before him. He meant it to be a record one. Unfortunately for him, his School House rivals also meant the same.

"Cheerio, Figgy!" said Redfern. "Many happy returns, old man! I say, is this yours? Looks like a packet of chocs."

And he held out a small packet wrapped in white paper.

Figgins started, and then he laughed.

"Try again!" he chuckled. "That's rather feeble, old scout. Fatty's about your weight!"

"You don't want your choc, then?"

"I don't want what you've got there," grinned Figgins.

"Right, old chap. Then I'll scoff it," said Redfern. "Thanks very much, old man! You're awfully good, and this choc looks good."

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With that Dick Redfern unwrapped the packet, disclosing a slab of chocolate. Figgins jumped as he saw it. Redfern broke the chocolate in two pieces, threw Fatty Wynn one half, and started to eat the other.

"Here," spluttered Figgins, going red in the face, "that is my chocolate, you rotter! It looks jolly well like—"

"Not at all; it's mine now, old man," said Redfern, smiling. "You said you didn't want it a second ago."

"But, you rotter—"

"It must have dropped out of your jacket when you undressed last night," said Redfern. "I found it just by your bed, anyway. Thanks so much!"

"But I thought it was spoof," yelled Figgins. "I thought it was a piece of wood, or something, wrapped up, when I said that. Look here—"

"I know you did, old chap," said Redfern cheerfully. "But it's April the First—your birthday!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a roar of laughter as Dick Redfern swallowed the last bit of chocolate. Figgins went crimson, and then he gave a rueful laugh.

"You did me," he grinned. "Never mind. My turn will come, Reddy. I say, here's the blessed First here, and we haven't got out a single decent jape to play off on those School House bounders. I'm absolutely stumped for wheezes this time, and— Hallo! What's up, Fatty?"

Fatty Wynn, groaning a little, had taken his basin back to the washstand. Now he was standing with a small bottle in his hand, staring at it blankly.

"What's this, Figgy?" he demanded in disgust. "Who's shoved this beastly thing on my—"

He was interrupted by Owen, who had also found a bottle on his washstand. The next moment several other fellows, including George Figgins, had made the same discovery.

"Well, I'm hanged!" said Figgins. "Influenza Germicide—eh? What awful rot! I suppose the giddy beaks dished 'em out yesterday, and we didn't notice them here last night. I say, are we supposed to drink the blessed stuff, or what?"

They soon knew that. It was not long before the notice on the rules-board was sighted, and a rush was made for it.

"Well, I'm blowed!" snorted Figgins, as he read the typewritten notice. "Got to wash in the beastly stuff, eh? Great Scott! They'll be dishing out bibs, and wrapping us in cotton-wool next. B-r-r-r-r-r!"

The astonished fellows crowded round the notice, which read as follows:

NOTICE.

"As a precaution against infection from influenza, which is raging in the district, all boys are required to use the Germicide which will be found on the washstands. The whole contents of the bottle should be emptied into half a basin of cold water, and the face thoroughly washed and disinfected in the preparation, special attention being given to the neck."

That was all—the typewritten notice not being signed. The New House fellows never even noticed that significant omission. They knew the authorities were worried and anxious owing to the spread of the epidemic in the neighbourhood, and they did not suspect anything for one moment.

"Well, my hat!" said Kerr, in disgust. "Blessed if I like the look of the stuff!"

"Smells all right," grinned Figgins. "Something like brilliantine, only greenish in colour. Here goes, anyway! Wonder if they'll dish it out to bath in?"

There was a chuckle as Figgins emptied his bottle into the basin and started to wash. The New House Fourth-Formers were all inclined to look upon it as rather a joke, little dreaming what a joke it really was. There was much chipping as the other fellows followed Figgy's example and started to wash. There was quite a pleasant smell from the "Influenza Germicide," and they rather liked it, plunging their faces in the greenish coloured water again and again. While they were busy doing so Monteith of the Sixth looked in.

"Get a move on, kids!" he rapped. "Great Scott! Aren't you washed yet? Buck up!"

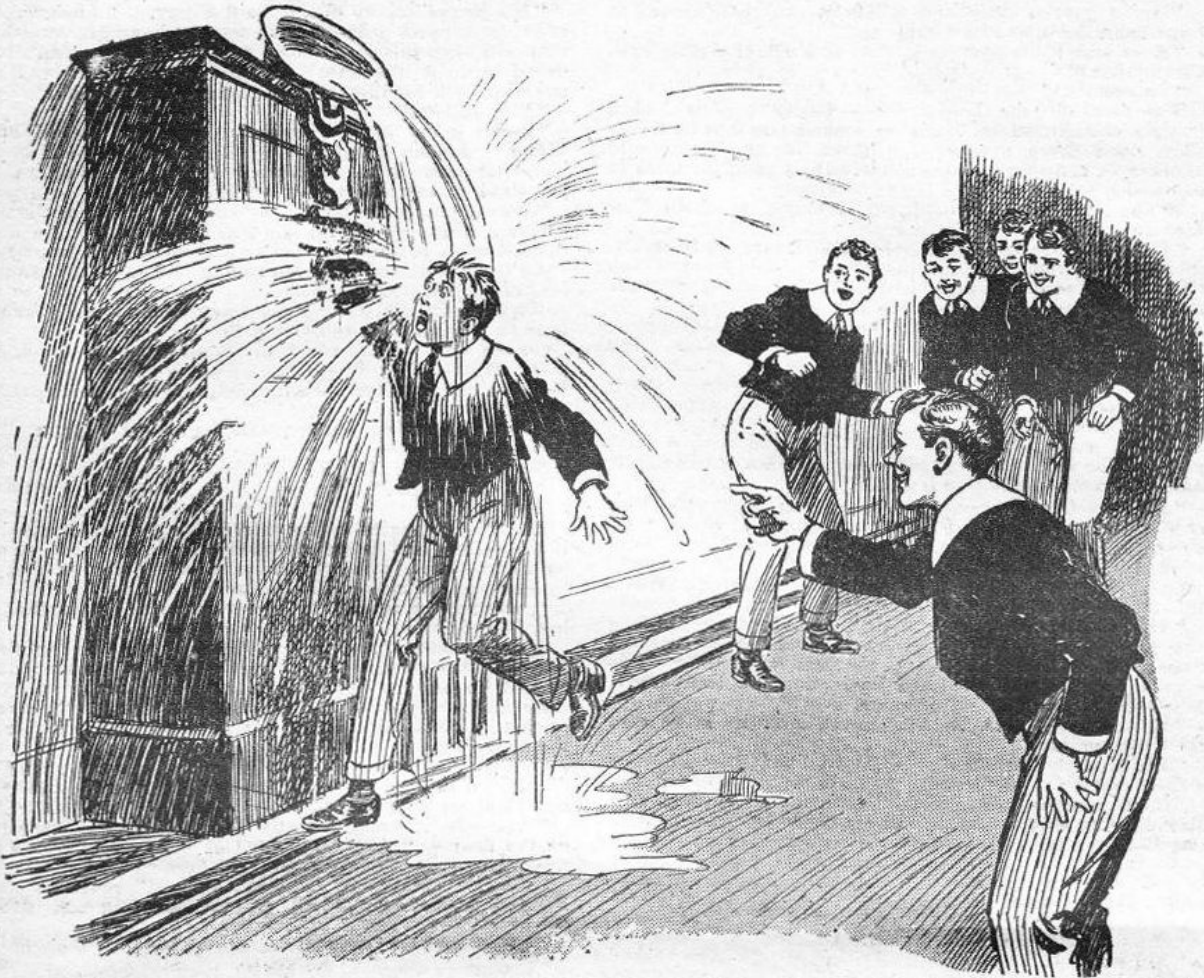
"Shan't be long old chap!" called Figgins cheerily. "Have you used your Pears soap—I mean, your Germicide—this morning yet, Monteith?" he asked severely. "If you haven't, don't dare to come near us—we're not quite disinfected yet."

"Eh? What on earth are you gassing about?" demanded Monteith. "Oh! I see, my lad! It's the First of April! I suppose that's your idea of a joke, Figgins?"

"Not at all. Wouldn't dream of pulling your official leg, old chap! I say is this silly stuff to be used every morning?"

"Eh? What stuff?"

"This stuff here," said Figgy, nodding towards his empty



George Alfred Grundy grasped at the cap just visible over the edge of the cupboard and pulled at it. Next moment a big enamelled basin filled with water came down with a rush. The water cascaded over Grundy's upturned face like a waterfall, and the basin landed on his head with a fearful bang. Swoooooosh! Crash! "Yoooooop!" (See Chapter 9.)

bottle. "I say, haven't they dished the seniors out with any? That's not fair!"

"What are you talking about?"

"This stuff!" said Figgins, in surprise. "Haven't you had any? Look at it!"

And Figgins held up his bottle. Monteith took a step forward, and then he halted.

"You young ass! I'll do nothing of the kind!" he snapped. "If you try to play your silly April Fool tricks on me, I'll—I'll—"

Monteith's voice trailed off queerly. He was staring now at Figgins with eyes that nearly started from his head. Then his stare went from face to face of the juniors at their washstands. After which he came right into the room and blinked into Figgy's face.

"What the thunder!" he ejaculated. "Is this a silly jape, kids? What's the matter with your faces?"

Figgins chuckled.

"My dear man, we got up too early this morning," he said loftily. "I must say I'm surprised at you trying to pull our innocent legs—"

"But your faces!" shrieked Monteith. "They're green!"

"Eh? Don't try it on, Monteith!" grinned Figgy, not a little surprised at the lofty Monteith condescending to try such a feeble jape on them. "Don't try to—to—to— Oh, m-mum-my hat!"

As he looked round to grin at his chums, Figgins nearly jumped a foot into the air. At the same moment yells of astonishment and alarm came from nearly every fellow in the dormitory as the dreadful fact dawned upon them that not only was Figgy's face green, but their own faces also.

It was no joke on Monteith's part—it was a ghastly fact. To make quite sure, there was a rush to the mirrors, each fellow hoping against hope, though most of them had already seen that their hands and arms were green—a glaring colour that seemed to be deepening every moment.

"Great Scott!"

"My only hat!"

"Oh, great pip!"

"But what's it mean?" yelled Monteith, his eyes fairly

goggling as he looked from face to face. "Is this some fool joke, you young idiots?"

"Of course it isn't!" shrieked Figgins, almost beside himself with sudden alarm. "It must be that rotten Germicide stuff! Oh, my only Sunday bonnet!"

He grabbed a towel, and started to rub and scrub furiously at his face. But a hasty, desperate glance in the mirror showed that it made no difference—not the slightest. The green seemed more vivid than ever.

The room rang with startled, horrified gasps and ejaculations as the hapless juniors scrubbed and rubbed in vain. By this time Monteith had grabbed one of the bottles and examined it.

As he did so he gave a sudden yell.

"You young idiots! You say you found these on the washstands?"

"Yes. Haven't you been dished out with them?"

"Of course not!" spluttered Monteith, looking as if he wasn't sure whether to laugh or scream at the circle of startled, green faces about him. "If you ask me, this is a silly jape—"

"What?"

"A First of April jape," said Monteith grimly. "I know nothing of any dashed Germicide being dished out, and if it had been done by the beaks I should have heard about it. You've been dished and done, my lads!"

CHAPTER 6.

Very Sad!

THERE was a sudden silence—a silence that could almost have been felt.

Figgins almost collapsed.

Instinctively he knew that Monteith was right—must be right. As head prefect of the House, James Monteith would certainly have been informed of the precautions to be taken against influenza—if any were to be taken at all.

Figgins gave a deep and hollow groan that seemed to come from the soles of his slippers.

"A—a jape!" he stuttered. "A—a First of April jape! Oh, my hat!"

"Oh crumbs!"

The faces of the hapless New House victims looked ghastly enough before, but they looked horrible now. As they stood there eyeing each other in horrified alarm another form appeared in the doorway—a familiar form in cap and gown.

It was Mr. Horace Ratcliff, the Housemaster of the New House.

"Boys, why are you not dressed yet?" he snapped harshly, in his usual unpleasant, rasping tones. "I presume you think that because it is a whole holiday to-day you are entitled to— Good heavens!"

Mr. Ratcliff had suddenly noticed the crowd of green-faced juniors. It was a shock—a terrible shock. The master staggered back.

"What—what— Good heavens! Monteith, what— Am I dreaming?" he gasped. "Green— Is it possible? What—what—"

"It's a joke, I fancy, sir," said Monteith, with a faint grin. "The kids have washed in a green stain of some kind, and apparently it can't be removed."

"What? Good gracious! What nonsense!" Mr. Ratcliff glared at the crowd of dejected figures, whose faces were green as grass now. It was only too clear from a single glance the juniors were the victims of a most unusual jape. "What utter, scandalous nonsense! Monteith explain this amazing outrage at once!"

"That's all I know about it, sir," said Monteith, handing the Housemaster one of the bottles and the typewritten notice. "These fellows found the bottles on their wash-stands, and they followed the instructions on that notice. It's obviously all spoof—a practical joke!"

"But—but—" Mr. Ratcliff started violently as he read the "instructions."

"It's April the First to-day, sir," explained Monteith, with a faint chuckle. "Somebody's taken these youngsters in."

"Good heavens! A stupid, idiotic joke!" hooted Mr. Ratcliff, throwing the notice angrily on to the nearest wash-stand. "I certainly have no knowledge of any such orders or Germicide being issued. It is an outrage, the perpetrators of which will be very severely dealt with indeed! Abominable! Outrageous!"

He glared at the hapless crowd.

"Cannot you wash it off?" he hooted.

"N-unno, sir," almost wailed Figgins. "We've rubbed and scrubbed, and Kerr's tried to get his off with turpentine. But it won't come off!"

"Good heavens! This is truly disgraceful! You ought to have had more sense, you stupid, idiotic boys!"

"We—we thought it was genuine enough, sir!"

"Pah! You are a set of imbeciles!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff. "But you are already late, and it is useless standing here. If you cannot remove that disgusting stain, then you must dress at once and go down to breakfast. Fortunately, there are no classes, so you will have the time to search for something which will remove the stain."

"But, sir, we can't go down like this!" groaned Figgins.

"It is your own fault—entirely owing to your stupidity in acting so foolishly!" hooted Mr. Ratcliff. "Dress at once and go down to breakfast. I am amazed—disgusted, at your foolishness in allowing yourselves to be tricked by such a simple practical joke!"

With that Mr. Ratcliff rustled away, his eyes gleaming. Monteith chuckled loud and long.

"You've been done, kids!" he said. "And a fancy I can guess who's at the bottom of this. But no good crying. Might as well bite the bullet and go down. Buck up. Fifty lines for the fellow not dressed in five minutes!"

"Oh crikey!"

"Oh, my hat!"

With deep and dismal groans of despair, Figgins and the rest of the unhappy victims started to dress. Monteith walked away to the Fourth Form dormitory, but he soon came back again, a broad grin on his face now.

"You kids aren't the only ones," he said bursting into a laugh. "The Shell kids have been done just the same. They're as green as grass!"

"Oh, good!" breathed Figgins.

It certainly was some relief to know that the Shell fellows in their own House would not be able to chip them, and they felt thankful for that small mercy.

"It's those awful School House bounders, of course!" said Figgins unhappily. "They must have sneaked in in the night and done it. That awful rotter Glyn's made this beastly stuff, I bet!"

"That's it, for a pension!" said Kerr. "Oh, my hat! Did you ever know such a mess? And supposing it never comes off?"

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"It's bound to, in time," said Figg. "Anyhow, I'm pretty sure those School House wasters have got something that will fetch this confounded stain off—they wouldn't have dared to do it otherwise! Oh, the rotters! But we'll get our own back for this! We'll make 'em sit up yet!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Fancy going down to breakfast like this!" wailed Fatty Wynn. "I don't believe I shall be able to eat any breakfast after this. It's quite taken my appetite away. Can't you think of anything to fetch it off, Figg?"

"We've got some butter in the study," said Figgins. "Grease might do it, though I'm doubtful now we know turps won't. It's awful! Let's go down and try, anyway!"

All the Fourth were dressed now, and Figgins & Co., with Redfern & Co., and several other fellows went downstairs boldly enough. It was no use being afraid. They had to bear it, even if they couldn't grin.

On the way, seniors and fags looked at them, stared, and then howled with laughter. The New House Fourth-Formers felt thankful when they reached the Fourth passage at last.

"Now for trying some grease," groaned Figgins. "I hope—why—what—"

Crash! Crash! Crash!

"Yarrooooooogh!"

"Whoooooop!"

To George Figgins, as he entered his study, it seemed as if the ceiling had fallen in—an impression that was shared by Fatty Wynn, who was at his heels. Kerr just escaped by jumping backwards like lightning.

It was not the ceiling, however—only a pile of books that had been balanced on top of the door.

They had scarcely grasped the fact, however, before there came another crash, followed by two howls from next door, as Redfern and his chums went into their study.

At almost the same moment came another crash, accompanied by howls of amazement and anguish from higher up the passage.

"Ow-ow-ow!" panted Figgins, sitting up on the floor dizzily. "Ow! It was a rotten booby-trap, of course! Ow-ow! Oh, my napper!"

"And mine!" groaned Fatty Wynn, who also was seated on the floor. "Ow! Yow! Oh, what awful beasts did this!"

"I'll—I'll scalp 'em, whoever it was!" roared George Figgins ferociously. "This is the thumping last straw! Ow-ow!"

Redfern and Owen came rushing up, rubbing their heads.

"Look here— Oh, my hat!" Redfern broke off, as he saw what had happened. "Oh, my hat! You've been done, too? We thought you chaps might have done it on us—"

"Can't you see?" roared Figgins, scrambling to his feet. "Can't you see it's those awful School House rotters? They rigged these up when they planted those rotten bottles on us in the night!"

"Oh crumbs! I never thought of that!" groaned Owen. "Oh, the fearful cads! As if they hadn't done enough already!"

"Nice leader you are, George Figgins!" hooted Lawrence. "Is it my fault?" snorted Figgins. "You burbling owl! How could I— Hallo, there's another one!"

Another crash sounded along the passage, followed by another and another, and the air resounded with yells of pain and wrath. The rest of the Fourth fellows had come down in a crowd, and the booby-traps were discovered all at once, as it were. From somewhere in the distance sounded other crashes, just as alarming.

"My hat! The Shell must have got it, too!" gasped Figgins. "Tom Merry's fairly on the war-path this time! Oh, the awful rotters! Never mind. Let's get that grease and have a go with it, for goodness' sake!"

But it was a forlorn hope, as Figgins feared. The butter, like everything else the juniors tried, was useless. The green stain would not come off—it was a fixture, apparently. With feelings too deep for words, Figgins and his men wended their way to the dining-hall for breakfast.

Not even the most cheerful members of the New House, Shell, and Fourth could claim that All Fools' Day had begun auspiciously for those hapless Forms.

CHAPTER 7.

Very Funny!

TOM MERRY & CO. were looking quite cheery and bright when they went down to breakfast on April the First—despite their loss of sleep. Monty Lowther, especially, was in great form. The first of April was a day of days for the humorist of the Shell. It was a day of catches, and Lowther loved a "catch."

In the dormitory Lowther had scored over quite a number of fellows. He had filled Grundy's boots with water, and

Grundy had plunged his foot into one of them—refusing to be taken in, and consequently, being completely "done." Certainly, Grundy had instantly pitched the boot at Lowther's head in great wrath, and that humorous youth's nose was swollen in consequence. None the less Lowther had caught Grundy. He had also blacked fellows' faces with soot, and tied other fellows' feet together as they lay in bed, and he had sent Skimpole to Kildara to ask what he would like for a birthday present, and he'd made innumerable fellows look at various objects that did not exist.

Lowther was quite enjoying himself. He looked upon the whole holiday as being quite a windfall, and he meant to make the most of it.

"Hallo! Here's old Gussy!" he remarked, as Blake & Co. came along. "Wonder if he's forgiven me yet for sticking that 'Kick Me Hard' notice on his back yet? Cheerio, Gussy! I say, what's that dirt on your collar, old chap—at the back?"

Arthur Augustus smiled. He had quite recovered his good humour, as it happened, though quite a number of fellows had taken advantage of the invitation to kick him hard.

"Pway don't waste your bweath, Lowther!" he advised, with a knowing chuckle. "You have already taken me in;

but I wathah fancy you won't be able to do it again."

"But that stuff on your collar, old chap—"

"Let it wemain there, deah boy!"

"You don't mind dirt on your collar?" ejaculated Monty. "And you such a particular chap—"

"Not at all!" chuckled Gussy.

"Then you won't mind my shoving some on, will you?" said Lowther cheerfully.

And drawing his hand from behind his back swiftly, Monty Lowther stuffed something down the back of Gussy's collar.

It was a handful of cinders from the study grate. Lowther had collected them for Gussy's benefit, and the swell of the Fourth gave a roar of anger and alarm.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lowther. "I expect you won't mind dirt on your spats, either, will you?"

And before Arthur Augustus had recovered himself, Monty had stamped on the beautifully clean white spats which adorned his elegant feet.

Then Monty Lowther bolted for the dining-hall, roaring.

"Oh, bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus spluttered in great wrath, the while he ducked and wriggled to get rid of the cinders between his collar and his neck.

"Too bad!" grinned Blake. "Never mind. Take it smiling, Gussy!"

"Take it smilin'!" shrieked Arthur Augustus. "I will give that feahful wottah a tewwible thwashin'! I shall now have to go back and change my collah and spats! Look at them!"

And, in a state of towering wrath, Arthur Augustus rushed away—whether to catch Lowther and administer the thrashing, or to change his collar and spats, he did not stay to explain.

"Poor old Gussy's fairly having a morning of it!" chuckled Blake. "Ain't it surprising how soon a chap

forgets! I'd only just sent Mellish on a fool's errand to Linton when Cardew sent me off to Lathom—said he wanted me. I got fifty lines. It's awful! I say, seen anything of those New House chaps yet?"

Tom Merry shook his head and chuckled.

"Not a sign!" he said. "And I bet we don't until they're obliged to come out. But I've heard there's been an awful row over there. We'll see 'em soon, though. They're bound to turn up for breakfast. And there's a practice match this afternoon. I bet we shan't be able to play for laughing at their green chivvies!"

And Tom Merry & Co. hurried into the dining-hall, anxious to be in their places when the New House fellows arrived. They expected them to be late, and Figgins & Co. were late.

"Not one of 'em here yet!" chuckled Tom Merry. "Hallo! What are you up to, Monty?"

"You'll see old chap!" grinned Monty, his eye on Mr. Linton at the head of the table. "This is Grundy's place, isn't it? Right!"

With that Lowther grabbed the marmalade-jar, and half emptied it on the form where Grundy was wont to sit. Then he added some sugar and milk to the marmalade, and mixed them up into a messy paste with a spoon, watched by his grinning chums.

"Look out; here he comes!" chuckled Manners.

Lowther sat upright as Grundy of the Shell marched into the dining-hall. Grundy was looking rather chirpy. Grundy prided himself on being a very smart chap, not easily taken in. Therefore he was a butt for every joker in the School House, and he could scarcely remember how many times he had been "done" that morning. Yet he was looking quite cheery now.

At the moment, however, his thoughts were not on April the First. He paused by Tom Merry, an excited and eager look on his rugged face.

"Oh, here you are, Merry!" he said. "So you've come to your senses at last?"

"Eh? What d'you mean?"

"For terms now," said Grundy, in an aggrieved tone, "I've constantly pressed my claims for a place in the team. You've turned me down again and again. I've never had a look-in!"

"That's so!" said Tom, smiling. "We want footballers, not comic relief men!"

"Now, don't rot!" said Grundy. "As I say, I've never had a look-in until now. In fact, I'm more than half a mind not to play now; but on second thoughts I will!" he added generously. "A practice match isn't much to a fellow of my abilities. But I'll be able to show just what I can do!"

"What on earth are you gassing about?" said Tom.

"Eh? Oh, don't be an ass!" said Grundy impatiently. "I got you a message, and, as I say, I'll play!"

"My message! What message?"

"Your invitation to play in the practice game this afternoon," said Grundy. "Cardew said you're expecting me to do great things. Well, I mean to. But centre-half's my position. I insist upon playing centre-half, Tom Merry!"

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Your Editor Says—

Can you picture a gyroscopic mono-railway; a two hundred miles per hour TOURING CAR; a helicopter that will carry twenty or more passengers, and capable of obtaining a speed of four hundred miles per hour; can you foresee the use of television in warfare when generals, able to see on the "screen" how the battle, miles away from them, is progressing, will conduct a war from the comfort of their arm-chairs; can you imagine what the entrance to the Channel Tunnel will look like? When you think of a two hundred miles per hour locomotive can you visualise the shape and general appearance of this steel monster of the track? Do you think it's possible for a projectile to reach the moon?

All these subjects, and many others besides, are being dealt with in the wonderful series of

FREE PICTURE CARDS

which will be given away in three weeks' time in this paper. These unique cards dealing with mechanical Marvels of the Future are the result of collaborated effort between prominent artists and inventors. The result is a stupendous treat for GEM readers. Free gifts like these have never before been presented with any paper; it is only right and fitting, therefore, that the GEM should lead the way. These coloured cards, as big as the large cigarette card with which all of you are familiar, will create the sensation of the year. Only three weeks now, boys, and you will have in your hands the first card in this novel series. In all there will be sixteen cards, making as fine a picture gallery of the future as any boy or girl, or adult for that matter, could wish to have. In next week's Chat there will be further announcements regarding this Free Gift scheme, so watch this corner.

Next Week's School Story:

Next week's long complete tale of Tom Merry & Co. of St. Jim's is entitled:

"GRUNDY GOES TO LAW!"

You all know that burly, thick-headed, mule-like, stand-no-nonsense-from-anybody sort of chap in the Shell at St. Jim's—by name George Alfred Grundy?

And you can imagine, knowing what a high opinion he has of G. A. Grundy, what his feelings would be at hearing a few home-truths about himself!

But you'd certainly never guess to what lengths Grundy, with a grievance, is prepared to go when he gets the bit between his teeth!

"GRUNDY GOES TO LAW!"

is one of Martin Clifford's very best! "Gemites," need any more be said, except—

Order Your Copy To-day!

There was a chuckle. Tom Merry smiled as he understood. Once again Grundy had been taken in—by Cardew this time. Tom would have no more dreamed of playing Grundy than he would of playing Trimble or Skimpole.

"It's nothing to grin at!" said Grundy impatiently. "I want to know now where I'm playing, Tom Merry."

"Oh, you're left-outside, not centre-half!" smiled Tom.

"Eh? Don't talk—"

"Grundy, take your seat at once!" snapped Mr. Linton. "And get on with your breakfast, boy!"

Grundy grunted.

"I'll see you again about my place, Merry," he said, climbing in between Talbot and Lowther. "I shall jolly well insist upon—What's that, Lowther—"

"Be careful, you ass!" said Lowther, in alarm. "There's some stuff on your seat—marmalade or something!"

Grundy was about to look behind him when the grinning faces warned him, and he remembered.

"Oh, cheese it, Lowther!" he snorted. "I'm fed-up with your idiotic April the First jokes! Try 'em on someone else not so wideawake!"

With that the great George Alfred sat down and reached for his ham and eggs.

For a full half-minute he sat there before a feeling of sticky wetness began to impress itself upon him. Then he suddenly jumped up, and looked at the form under him. As he saw the mess there he gave a gasp and, dragging his jacket aside, he stared at his trousers, twisting round to do so. Then he gave a roar.

"I warned you," said Lowther mildly, as the other juniors burst into splutters of laughter. "I told you there was some stuff on the form, you ass! Why did you sit on it, Grundy?"

"Oh, you—you—"

"Grundy, what—what—" Mr. Linton had stood up at Grundy's roar, but the great George Alfred had forgotten where he was in his great wrath.

Words failing him, he gave another roar of rage, and grabbing Lowther, he twirled him over in his seat. Lowther yelled and struggled, but in vain.

Grundy was a powerful youth, and before the joker realised his intention Grundy had rammed his face into the mess of marmalade, sugar, and milk that still remained on the form.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a howl of laughter as Lowther staggered up, gasping and spluttering, his face almost hidden by the sticky mixture.

"Grundy—Lowther!" shouted Mr. Linton, in shocked anger. "How dare you! How—what—what— Bless my soul!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" thundered Mr. Linton. "Grundy, you idiotic boy, are you responsible for that disgusting mess on Lowther's face?"

"Yes, I jolly well am!" hooted Grundy, too angry to mince his words. "Look what he's done to my trousers—made me sit in the muck! Look at it, and I'm wet through! I'll teach him to play his rotten April the First jokes on me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence! Am I to understand, Lowther, that you placed that disgusting concoction on Grundy's seat?" hooted Mr. Linton.

"Groooogh! Ow-ow! My nose is busted!" groaned and gurgled Lowther. "Ow-ow! It was only a joke, sir! Ow-ow!"

He grabbed up his handkerchief and rubbed his face frantically. A trickle of red was mingling with the marmalade on his face, showing that Grundy had not been at all gentle in his methods.

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated Mr. Linton, frowning angrily. "So this is a foolish, practical joke! Lowther—"

"I warned him, sir!" gasped Lowther, now quite failing to see any humour in the situation. "I warned him the stuff was there, and he would sit down!"

"Silence! Did you, or did you not, place that abomination on the seat, Lowther?" thundered the master.

"Ow! Groooogh! Yes, sir!"

"Boy! How dare you play such an idiotic prank! As it is a holiday I shall not cane you, Lowther; but you will do me two hundred lines, to be handed in this evening! Now go and wash that disgusting mess from your face! Grundy!"

"Yes, sir?" grunted Grundy.

"You will also do two hundred lines. Go and change your garments at once! Any other boy tempted to play practical jokes during a meal will be severely punished!"

Lowther tottered out, followed with suspicious haste by Grundy. Apparently, George Alfred was not satisfied yet, for immediately the door had closed behind them sounds of battle came from the passage without. But Mr. Linton did

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not hear them—he had suddenly become aware that quite a number of Shell fellows were still missing.

Strangely enough—to him—quite a number of fellows appeared to be missing from the Fourth Form, also.

"Bless my soul, Merry!" he exclaimed, his glance going over his flock. "All the members of the New House appear to be late! Do you happen to know the reason?"

Tom Merry knew only too well, but, fortunately, there was no need for him to answer. Just then the door opened, and a crowd of fellows came in—all New House fellows of the Shell and Fourth

They had, apparently, all made an appearance together because they dreaded coming alone in their present state.

There was a sudden silence as they filed into the big Hall, George Figgins leading the way. Then, quite abruptly the silence was shattered by a howl of laughter:

"Ha, ha, ha!"

CHAPTER 8.

The School House Ultimatum!

"GOOD heavens!"

Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, nearly dropped his fork as he sighted the green-faced apparitions. The other masters jumped and stared with wide-open eyes. The rest of the school yelled with laughter.

The green of Figgy & Co.'s faces showed up in vivid contrast to their white collars. With dismal looks and dejected walk the New House fellows crawled to their places.

"Good heavens!" repeated Mr. Railton, leaving his chair hurriedly. "Boys, what—what does this mean? Figgins—Redfern—Kerr—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" thundered Mr. Railton, striding down the great Hall. "Silence!"

The laughter died down somewhat—Mr. Railton was not a master to ignore with impunity. With a grim expression on his clean-shaven face, he halted opposite to the Fourth Form table.

But before he could ask any questions a newcomer entered the Hall. It was Mr. Ratcliff. His face was bitter and grim.

"Ah! Mr. Ratcliff!" gasped Mr. Railton. "I am glad you have appeared. Have you seen the faces and hands of the boys in your House—the junior boys? They—they—"

"You may well ask that question, Mr. Railton," said Mr. Ratcliff, his voice trembling with indignation. "An abominable outrage has been perpetrated. The boys of my House have been subjected to a disgraceful and outrageous trick. Bottles of some monstrous and abominable concoction have been placed on their washstands during the night. They were labelled 'Influenza Germicide,' and a notice was hung on each dormitory wall instructing the boys to wash in the—disgusting concoction."

Mr. Ratcliff paused impressively.

"They one and all did so, suspecting nothing," he went on angrily. "They used the preparation in their washing water this morning, and this"—he added, waving a hand towards his green-faced flock—"is the result."

"G-good gracious!" gasped Mr. Railton, his mouth twitching a trifle. "It—it is, I presume, then, an April the First joke—an absurd and monstrous trick!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Every fellow in the dining-hall understood now, and the whole school howled—even Mr. Railton's presence did not stop them.

"Look at 'em!" gurgled Bernard Glyn. "Oh, carry me home to die! Did you ever see such beauties! Is it an April First joke, French, old man, or is it an advertising stunt?"

Lancelot French, who was a New House fellow, and had taken his seat opposite to Glyn, gritted his teeth and glared round at his School House rivals.

"Oh, you rotters!" he hissed. "We'll pay you back for this, you see if we don't! We know it was you!"

At the Fourth Form table George Figgins was glowering at his School House rivals as if he could have eaten them. But he dared not say anything with the two Housemasters so near. Mr. Ratcliff's side-whiskers were bristling with rage. He strongly suspected that it was the work of the School House juniors—indeed, he was sure of it, and he looked upon it as an insult to himself.

"It is obviously an April the First joke, as you call it, Mr. Railton," he snapped, "though I prefer to call it a disgraceful outrage. Moreover, I am convinced that it is the work of boys from your House. The moment breakfast is ended, I propose to visit Dr. Holmes, and insist upon a thorough investigation."

"That certainly must be done," agreed Mr. Railton. "Silence, boys! That is quite enough of this uproar!" he added, raising his voice sternly, so that every fellow in Hall

could hear. "Any boy who laughs again will be severely dealt with by me!"

"Oh crumbs!"

The laughter suddenly ceased. Mr. Railton was a man of his word, and nobody wanted to be dealt with severely by him.

"This is most amazing, Mr. Ratcliff," resumed Mr. Railton. "But cannot the stain be removed, if stain it is?"

"Everything has been tried!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff. "Hot water, turpentine, grease—all are useless. It is the most abominable outrage in my experience."

"Then it seems that nothing can be done," said Mr. Railton. "I will come with you to see Dr. Holmes after breakfast, and the matter must certainly be investigated. Boys, resume your breakfasts, and kindly make no more noise."

And breakfast went on, Mr. Ratcliff taking his usual seat, with a black brow—in striking contrast to the green expressions of his flock. But, though there was no more open laughter, the meal went on in an atmosphere of giggles and chuckles, and sly chipping of the hapless New House victims, who were thankful indeed when it ended at last.

Tom Merry & Co. came out of Hall almost exploding with

helpless laughter, tears of mirth streaming down their cheeks. They hung about and waited until Figgins came out accompanied by Kerr and Fatty Wynn, and Redfern, Lawrence, and Owen.

"Cheerio, Figgy!" called Blake affably. "Many happy returns of the day, old scout. May your whiskers never grow green like your chivvy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake's chums howled.

Figgins glared, and clenched his fists convulsively.

"You—Oh, you—you rotters!" he gasped. "You awful bounders! This is your doing, you frightful sweeps!"

"Dear me! What is, old fellow?"

"This green stuff!" shrieked Figgins, pointing to his own face. "This is your doing, you rotters!"

"My dear little men, what an idea!" said Tom Merry, "Fancy blaming us. We know quite well what it means, Figgy. You're all green with envy—because you know you can't touch the School House at japing."

"I hardly think it's quite that," said Manners, shaking his head. "We always knew they were green—green as grass—over in the New House. Now they've started to advertise the fact, see! It's just an advertising stunt!"

(Continued on next page.)



Square meals make round boys; but for all-round knowledge come to that old squarehead, our Office Oracle.

Q. What is a colporteur?

A. A traveller who goes round the country—usually from door to door—selling religious tracts, books and so forth. Some distribute literature free, and a certain English society of colporteurs which has been in existence for fifty years has sold no less than 20,000,000 books in that time.

Q. Who was Mah-jong?

A. For guessing in an examination paper that he was the boy-emperor of Korea, a young "Magnet" reader, Charlie Durston, was deprived of marks which he thinks he had justly earned. No, Charlie, the only marks you earned by that answer were red ones. Mah-jong is a Chinese game for which there was a craze in England a year or two ago.

Q. What is Montparnasse noted for?

A. This, Gerald Taylor, is a district in Paris on the south side of the River Seine. It has become the popular artists' quarter, and in the side streets, scores of

small cafés cater for the painters, sculptors, and art students who inhabit the neighbourhood.

Q. Where is Easter Island?

A. In the middle of the Pacific Ocean between Australia and South America. It is one of the most mysterious islands in the world and has been a riddle to scientists and explorers ever since its discovery, on account of the strange ruins there. Although no one lives there now, there are ample signs of an ancient and prosperous civilisation. One may wander among the ruins of huge buildings and monster heads carved out of rocks two or three times higher than a man. One explorer has declared that the island was once a mountain peak in a great continent that sank beneath the ocean. But the riddle of Easter Island is likely to remain unanswered until the end of time.

Q. What use is a harrow?

A. Owing to my advanced age, Walter Minns, my eyesight even with glasses is not so good as it was, and in consequence I read your question at first as "What use is Harrow?" When, after half an hour's careful thought I had only written in reply: "To meet Eton at cricket," I turned again to your letter and read on to the end about your visit to the farm. The farmer's harrow is a heavy frame with iron teeth, and used for such purposes as breaking up the clods of ploughed land or covering seed. You also ask what the farmer was using a steam-roller for. I expect, Walter, that what you saw was a steam tractor, probably with a harrow attached. But if the farmer, whose farm you visited without invitation, was using a steam-roller, I should think he was trying to raise a crop of mashed potatoes!

Q. Who was Buffalo Bill?

A. An American scout, Colonel William F. Cody, who after many adventures in the Far West, became a showman and later took a great interest in aviation.

Q. What are davits?

A. These, Bob Smithers, are light cranes arranged on a ship's sides, and used for the purpose of lowering and hoisting boats. When a ship is at sea, a boat is slung between each pair of davits, which can be swung outboard when necessary. By the way thanks kindly for your recipe for a whiskers' dye, and I hope your pet door-mouse has now recovered from its acquaintance with the barbed wire.

Q. Where in the Zoo can you see the Lord Chancellor's great seal?

A. Nowhere, Peter Wade. This particular great seal is not a sea mammal; it is a kind of plate made of silver hardened with alloy; or more strictly, it is two separate plates each engraved with the crest of State. In all, the Great Seal weighs 17 lbs. It is clamped together over sealing-wax which is thus impressed with the crest. The sealing-wax which has made the acquaintance of the Great Seal is then attached to important State documents by means of a silken cord.

Q. What is the Question Mark?

A. An American monoplane which recently created a world's record by remaining in the air for nearly a week. Fuel and other necessities were passed to it by other aeroplanes which went aloft from time to time. Which reminds me that an American youth, Mark K. Wabash by name, has created another remarkable record by rolling a saveloy from New York to Chicago and back with his left ear. After that, I should think, the saveloy wasn't fit to eat.

Q. What is a sulky?

A. A light two-wheeled vehicle of a type much used in Australia and several other lands.



A view of Easter Island, that mysterious Pacific isle that has defied the scientists and explorers.



A farmer harrowing his land.
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"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you howling dummies!" gasped Figgins, his eyes glaring from his green face. "Oh, won't we get our own-back for this. Look here—be decent! You shoved this stuff on—"

"My dear fellow, you shoved it on yourselves. Ratty himself said that you'd washed in it. Why blame us, old dear?"

"You know jolly well why!" shouted Figgins. "You planted it on us, and you must know how to shift the stuff. Look here, Glyn, we'll call it quits if you'll tell us how to get the stuff off."

"Yes, do tell us, Glyn!" wailed Fatty Wynn pleadingly. "I've hardly been able to eat any breakfast as it is."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Be decent!" said Figgins, almost pathetically. "Glyn made the stuff, I'm sure, and he must know how to get it off. Dash it all, we can't go about all day like this!"

"If you want advice from us—" began Tom.

"You—you'll tell us what to do?" said Kerr eagerly.

"Yes," said Tom Merry. "If you really don't want people to see your faces, certainly do it."

"Do what?"

"Wear masks," said Tom blandly. "My advice to you is to wear masks on your chivvies and gloves on your hands."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cackling dummies!" roared Figgins. "This is beyond a joke, you rotters! Why, it may not come off for days!"

"It won't, old fellow!" said Glyn cheerfully. "It won't come off for weeks, in fact!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"Unless you know the right stuff to fetch it off, of course," smiled Bernard Glyn. "I fancy I could do it."

"Then you admit, you rotter—"

"I admit nothing, old top—excepting that I fancy I can shift that green for you," said Glyn. "In fact, I should like to do it—I hate to see fellows advertising their deficiencies like this. Why tell the whole world that you're all as green as grass, Figgy?"

"Oh, you—you— Look here," spluttered Figgins, holding himself in with a desperate effort. "You've done us—done us brown—"

"Green!" corrected Tom. "Green, old chap. Green as grass!"

"Yaas, wathah!" chuckled Arthur Augustus. "You New House fellows weally are gween, you know—feahfully gween!"

"You—you've done us!" choked Figgins. "We admit it—you've done us this time. Isn't that enough? Now tell us, for goodness' sake, how to get the beastly stuff off."

"Oh, all right!" said Tom Merry. "We'll tell you—"

"Oh, good!"

"When you've owned up officially, and in writing, that School House is cock-house!" went on Tom blandly. "We want a signed document to hang up in the School House, signed by all the leading lights in the giddy New House junior crowd, saying that you've been dishd and done, and that you can't touch School House at anything. When you've handed that over, Figgy, old dear, Glyn will show you just how to get that green stain off. Get me?"

"Oh! Oh, my hat!"

Figgins blinked at the grinning School House fellows in growing wrath and indignation. He understood now—only too well!

"Oh, you—you cads!" he gasped. "And you expect us to do that?"

"Yes, old chap—or go on being animated green-painted petrol pumps. Just as you like—we don't mind!"

"Wathah not! Seein' you fellows so fwesh and gween is quite wewfeshin'," chuckled Gussy. "Gween ought to be your House colours, you know!"

George Figgins almost danced with rage.

"You—you worms!" he choked. "We'll see you hanged before we sign anything! Oh, you rotters! Why, I'll—I'll—"

"Go for the cads!" gasped Redfern. "Let 'em know what we think of 'em! Smash 'em!"

"That's it—go for 'em!" yelled Owen. "Up, New House!"

Redfern rushed at Tom Merry and planted a fist on his nose, Tom seeing the danger a trifle too late. The next moment the battle had started, and Tom Merry & Co., and Figgins & Co. were mixed up in a whirling fight before either side realised it.

It was only what might have been expected in the circumstances. Figgins & Co. had suffered a great deal that morning already, and they knew they were booked to go through a great deal more chipping and general misery yet. And they meant to take it out of Tom Merry & Co.—if they could!

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Unfortunately they had not chosen a suitable place to do so—a public passage was scarcely a suitable place for a fight, either on a small scale or a large. Before the scrimmage had been in progress many seconds, Kildare, Darrell, and Rushden, of the Sixth, came rushing up.

They did not ask questions—they just piled in with a will, cuffing heads right and left. Amid a chorus of yells and howls of pain, the battle ceased as if by magic.

Kildare snorted as he glared round at the dishevelled combatants, most of whom were rubbing their heads ruefully.

"That's enough!" he said, his mouth twitching a little

"If you really want us to have this cake, Grundy," said Monty L chap!" Lowther unwrapped the tin, lifted the lid and took out a cake. Grundy jumped. "My—my cake!" he gasped. "M—mum—my Easter



as his glance rested on the green faces of the New House fellows. "I expected something like this. You New House kids would be better employed in scrubbing your silly faces, it seems to me. Now get across to your own House—sharp!"

And Figgins & Co. went—seething with rage and humiliation. They left Tom Merry & Co. grinning broad grins, despite the damages they had received. Certainly there was good cause for the School House japers' merriment, for rarely, if ever, had they scored so completely over their ancient rivals. If things went on as they had begun it looked like being a woeful All Fools' Day for Figgins & Co.

CHAPTER 9. A Helping Hand!

"PLEASE, Tom Merry—"

Tom Merry halted and smiled. Monty Lowther and Manners also halted and smiled.

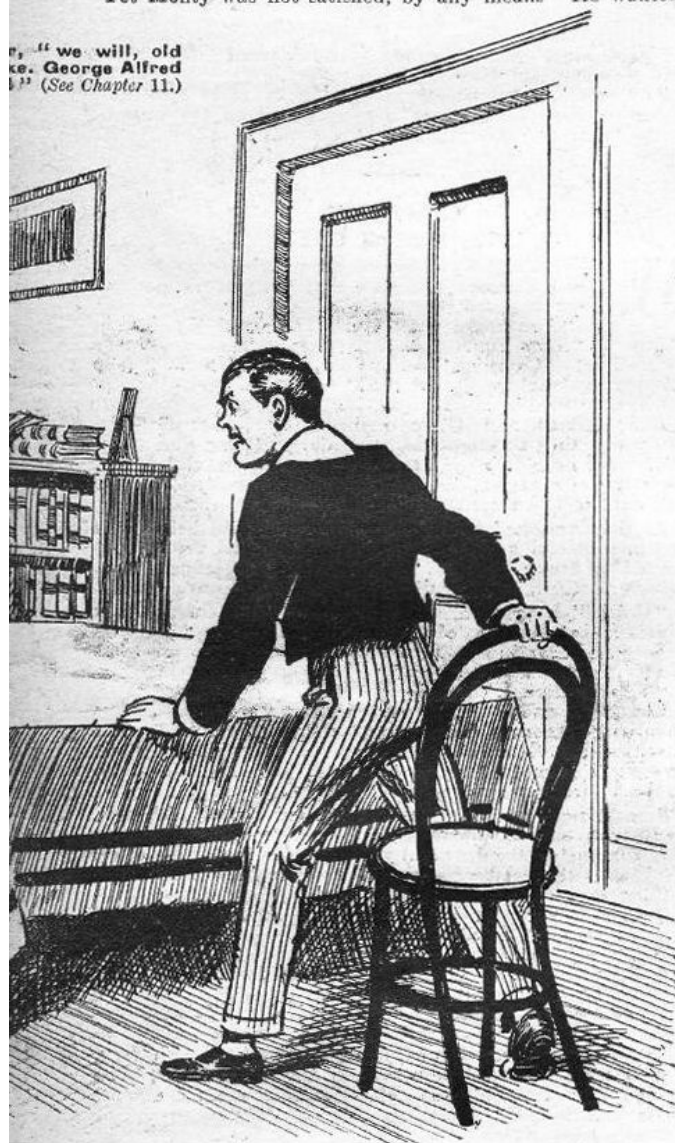
The Terrible Three had come indoors after a stroll in the quad. For that afternoon Tom Merry had arranged a practice match between New House and School

House. But how to spend the morning of that Bank Holiday was a problem they had not yet solved. Manners wanted to go out with his camera. Tom Merry wanted to get in an hour's practice with a football to get ready for the afternoon; but Monty Lowther wanted to stay in the immediate precincts of St. Jim's.

Since early morning—since four o'clock, in fact, Monty Lowther had indulged his love of practical jokes to the very limit. Some of his jokes had recoiled on his own head, certainly; but most of them had "come off" quite satisfactorily.

Yet Monty was not satisfied, by any means. He wanted

"we will, old
George Alfred
(See Chapter 11.)



more and more, like Oliver Twist. The biggest part of the day was still before him in which to "take in" innocent victims of his humour. April the First only came once a year, as Monty argued, and it was only sensible to take every advantage of it.

He was on the look out now for someone to jape as he and his chums strolled along the passage. Then they came upon Jameson of the Third. He was standing on tip-toe as they came round the corner, trying to reach up to the top of a cupboard which stood in the passage. Above the edge of the cupboard, far above his head, showed something that looked like the peak of a cap.

"Please, Tom Merry—" he began again.

"Well, what is it, kid?" asked Tom, still smiling.

"My cap!" explained Jameson, eyeing them almost pathetically. "That beast Wally D'Arcy chucked it up there. Would you mind reaching it down?"

Tom Merry chuckled.

"Not in these bags," he said.

"You, Lowther—I say, don't be mean!"

"Nothing doing, kid!" said Lowther, winking at the cupboard. "But I'll fetch you a chair—I'm an obliging

chap, but I've got a bone in my arm and can't reach, see!"

"You, Manners—"

"I've got a bone in my arm, too!" said Manners, with a chuckle. "Here's Grundy—try him, kid!"

"Shush!" said Lowther, as Grundy came along the passage with Wilkins and Gunn. "No, kid!" he went on speaking loudly. "I'm afraid I can't reach it, but—oh, good! Grundy's a big chap. He'll do it for you!"

"Please, Grundy—" began Jameson meekly.

Grundy halted. He had been telling his chums just how many goals he intended to score that afternoon—blissfully unaware of the fact that he wasn't playing.

"Hallo," he said. "What's the matter, kid? These fellows bullying you?"

"No, Grundy!" said Jameson. "The mean beasts won't trouble to reach my cap down. That rotter Wally D'Arcy chucked it up there, and—"

"H'm! I'll get it, kid—stop snivelling, you young ass!"

And Grundy reached up for the cap. In the ordinary way he would have cuffed the fag for his cheek in asking—being such a great man. But the very fact that Tom Merry had, apparently, refused to help the kid was enough to make him obliging.

"Mean rotters!" he sniffed. "Might take the trouble to help the kid. Why, it's—"

Grundy had grasped the cap and pulled at it, and he had been just about to say it was fastened to something when that something came over the ledge of the cupboard with a rush.

It was a big enamelled basin, and it was full of water—icy cold water. The water came cascading over Grundy's up-turned face and head like a waterfall, and then the basin followed catching Grundy's head a fearful bang as it came down.

Swoooooosh! Crash!

"Yoooooooooooooop!"

Grundy's spluttering howl was loud enough to have awakened the fabled Seven Sleepers of old.

It was only drowned, so to speak, by the howl of laughter that went up from Tom Merry & Co. and Wilkins and Gunn.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Just a birthday present for you!" chirruped Jameson of the Third. "You can have the cap as well, Grundy!"

And with that ungrateful speech Jameson of the Third turned swiftly on his heels and bolted, roaring with laughter. Once again George Alfred had been "done!"

With water streaming from him, he sat on the linoleum and gasped, and panted, and groaned, hugging his head where the basin had landed.

"Ow!" he gasped. "Yow-ow! Grooooooh! Oh, the—little sweep! What—what—"

Grundy's streaming eyes fell on the basin and the cap, and he understood more fully just how it had happened. To the handle of the basin was tied a length of string, the other end being fastened to the cap.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you cackling dummies!" choked Grundy. "Ow-ow! Oh, my hat! Done again! It was a blessed April First catch, you—ow-ow—fellows!"

"Go hon!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy scrambled up, breathing hard with fury. But Jameson had gone while the going was good. To follow him was useless—even Grundy realised that. He tottered away, leaving a trail of water behind him along the linoleum. The Terrible Three walked on, still laughing.

"He's gone up to the dorm to change, of course," said Lowther with a chuckle. "I say, Grundy's got a whacking great cake in his cupboard. I've seen it!"

"Well, what about it?" asked Tom Merry.

"Would you fellows like some of it?" said Monty. "It's a really ripping Easter cake—I saw Grundy unpacking it! I think I can persuade him to give up some—all of it, perhaps!"

"I bet you jolly well can't," said Manners. "He's likely to give you some, anyway—after the way you've pulled his leg this morning."

"Grundy's leg was made to be pulled," explained Lowther. "I'm going to give it a few more tugs, I hope, before to-day's out. Now come along while he's up in the dormitory."

Somewhat mystified, Lowther's chums followed him up to the Shell passage. Wilkins and Gunn had remained downstairs, and knowing the study would be empty, Lowther walked boldly in.

There was a startled gasp, and a fat youth who had just been reaching into the study cupboard, drew back and spun round.

It was Baggy Trimble of the Fourth. Very obviously Baggy Trimble also knew about Grundy's Easter cake.

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"Ow!" gasped Baggy. "Ow! You startled me, Lowther! I—I thought it was that beast Grundy!"

"After his cake, what?" smiled Lowther.

"Eh? Not at all!" said Trimble. "Didn't even know Grundy had an Easter cake. I happened to come to speak to Grundy, and while I was waiting I thought I heard a mouse in the cupboard. I was just looking to see, you know."

"Well, my hat!"

"Fancy mice in the School House!" gasped Trimble, edging towards the door. "Awful, isn't it? I think we ought to tell the House dame about—Yarooogh!"

Trimble made a wild leap for the door, just escaping Lowther's boot as he did so. Tom Merry and Manners shot out their boots, and Manners just managed to get a kick home as Trimble hurried past.

"Dear me!" remarked Lowther, with a chuckle. "Trimble was going to pinch this cake. The depths to which some fellows fall is very sad. It makes me weep to think of it! Hallo! Here it is!"

Lowther brought a square cardboard cake-box from the cupboard.

"Hold on, Monty!" said Tom Merry, in alarm. "Dash it all, we're not Trimbles! We're not pinching Grundy's cake! Leave it alone, you ass!"

"My dear man, I've no intention of pinching it!" said Lowther. "I'm surprised at you even hinting at such a thing, Tommy!" He closed the cupboard door and shoved the box under his jacket. "We're just borrowing it for a while; we'll bring it back when Grundy goes back to the study. Come on!"

"But—"

"Leave it to me," said Lowther. "I've great influence with dear old Grundy, and I'm quite certain I can persuade him to give us this cake. That reminds me! It's rather rotten to disappoint poor old Trimble. He can't have the cake, but I'll see he gets some grub."

Tom Merry and Manners followed their chum back to Study No. 10. Arrived there, Lowther hurriedly took the cake—a really mouth-watering one—out of the box. He placed it carefully in the cardboard, and then searched about until he found a small mustard-tin. It was empty, and Lowther shoved it in his pocket.

"Shan't be a sec!" he said.

With that Lowther hurried out. He was absent several minutes; and when he returned his chums eyed him curiously.

"You silly ass—" began Tom Merry.

"Here we are!" said Lowther cheerfully, taking the tin from his pocket. "I got some all right from the flower-beds in the quad."

"Got what?" said Manners impatiently. "What's this game?"

Lowther opened the mustard-tin and showed the contents. It was full of wriggling worms.

"Grubs!" explained Lowther, with a chuckle. "Trimble's after grub. We're going to give him grubs, being generous fellows. See? He won't dare to go after Grundy's cake for a bit, so if we're sloppy we'll be in time with this."

Getting paper from the lower cupboard, Lowther wrapped up the tin of worms in sheet after sheet until it was the size of Grundy's cake. Then he placed the bulky package into the empty cake-box.

Then, with a soft chuckle, he hid the box under his jacket again and hurried along to Grundy's study. It was still empty, and Lowther crossed to the cupboard and placed the box just as he had found it. He was about to leave the room again, when he heard footsteps outside.

They were cautious footsteps, and, guessing to whom they belonged, Lowther slipped behind the couch and hid. The next moment the door was pushed open, and someone entered. Lowther took a cautious peep—and, as he expected, it was Baggy Trimble.

"Only just in time!" murmured Lowther to himself.

"Beasts!" mumbled Trimble. "I believe they were after the rotten cake themselves! They're quite capable of any rotten trick! If it's gone I shall show them up to Grundy; only a fellow's duty to do that. If it has gone—Oh, good! It's here!"

The box certainly was there, and Trimble grabbed it and shoved it under his jacket, with an exclamation of relief. He listened a moment, and then he hastily left the study and hurried away down the passage.

He had scarcely gone, when a voice reached Lowther's ears—a very familiar, bellowing voice.

"Here, what have you been doing in there, you fat clam? Come back! D'you hear? Trimble, you fat worm—"

"Oh, my hat!" gurgled Lowther. "Dear old Grundy! Now for some fun!"

Apparently Trimble did not obey the voice of the charmer; his pattering footsteps died away, and Grundy's heavy tread came hurriedly nearer. Lowther crouched well

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out of sight, and next instant Grundy rushed in, dressed in another suit of clothes.

Obviously he suspected that Trimble had been up to no good in his study, for he rushed across to the cupboard at once and glared inside.

Then he bellowed.

"Gone! Oh, my hat! My Easter cake—gone!"

"Hallo! What's the matter now?"

Wilkins and Gunn came into the study. They stared at Grundy, who was almost dancing with rage.

"Matter?" hooted Grundy, pointing at the cupboard.

"My cake—it's gone! And I just spotted that fat thief

Trimble leaving the study!"

"Great Scott! Why—"

"After him!" roared Grundy. "Don't stand there staring like boiled owls! After him!"

And, sending his chums staggering to right and left, George Alfred went off at a great speed on the trail of Baggy Trimble. Lowther's little plot was developing quite nicely.

CHAPTER 10.

The Vanished Cake!

WILKINS and Gunn stared after their leader blankly for a moment, and then they grasped the position—or believed they did.

"You heard that, Gunny?" gasped Wilkins, in alarm. "That ripping Easter cake! That fat thief's pinched it! Come on! If he has touched it we'll help Grundy to slaughter the fat cad!"

"Yes, rather!"

And Wilkins and Gunn rushed away after Grundy. Naturally, they no more liked the idea of losing that splendid Easter cake than did George Alfred, its rightful owner. Grundy was a very generous youth, and his study-mates did not want to lose their share of the cake.

As they vanished Monty Lowther came from behind the couch, a gleeful grin on his face. He hurried out and returned to Study No. 10. Tom Merry and Manners were talking football, but Lowther soon ended the conversation.

"Quick!" he gasped. "Such a lark! Trimble's just pinched that tin box of grubs, and Grundy and his pals have gone after him. Come on if you want to see some fun!"

"What? Here, hold on—"

Lowther didn't wait; he rushed off at great speed. But Tom and Manners had grasped the position, and, with chuckles, they hurried out after him. They knew where Trimble was most likely to be found, and they rushed off to the Fourth passage.

Sure enough the Terrible Three found Grundy, Wilkins, and Gunn outside the door of Trimble's study. Grundy was banging on the door and yelling at the top of his voice.

"What's the matter?" asked Monty Lowther innocently.

"What the thump's the row, Grundy?"

"My cake—my ripping Easter cake!" howled Grundy, in a great rage. "That fat thief Trimble's boned my Easter cake! I—I'll make mincemeat of him if he's dared to touch it! Open this door, Trimble—open this dashed door, you fat clam!"

There was no answer. Like Brer Rabbit, Trimble was lying low.

"Quick!" bellowed Grundy, red in the face with fury.

"He can't have had chance to scoff any yet! Quick! The dashed door isn't locked! He's jammed a chair against it, or something!"

Crash, crash, crash!

Grundy's broad shoulders crashed against the door again and again. The door began to give under the onslaught almost at once. Wilkins and Gunn willingly lent a shoulder, as it were, and that did it.

Suddenly the door flew inwards, almost sending the three Shell fellows head over heels into the study on top of the chair.

"Got him!" howled Grundy.

Trimble was there right enough. He had jumped round the table, but there was no sign of the cake-box.

"Ow!" he gasped, in great alarm, as Grundy & Co. rushed in. "Look here, it wasn't me! Wharrer you after, you beasts?"

Grundy leaped round the table and grabbed him.

"My cake!" he bellowed. "Where's my Easter cake? I know jolly well you've got it here somewhere!"

Trimble yelped.

"Stop sha-a-aking me, you beast!" he gasped. "I tell you I know nothing about any rotten cake! What c-cake?"

"It's in this dashed study somewhere!" yelled Grundy.

"The little worm's hidden it, I tell you! Look round—Why, there it is—in the dashed coal-box!"

"Here, that's mine!" Trimble howled, and jumped to rescue the cardboard box, which, in his alarm, he had

swiftly hidden in the coal-box when Grundy & Co. had started to force the door. He grabbed it first; and then Grundy grabbed him, and both went down on the carpet with a crash and a wild howl from Trimble.

"Yarooooogh! Help!"

"What—what— Bless my soul! Grundy, how dare you! Release Trimble this very instant!"

It was Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth. He had pushed through the crowd round the doorway, and was now regarding the scene sternly.

"Grundy—"

"He's pinched my cake!" raved Grundy. "That's my Easter cake he's got!"

"What—what—"

"It isn't; it's mine!" wailed Trimble, deciding to see the thing through now. "It's mine! My Aunt Sophy sent it—Lady Sophy Trimble, you know!"

"What nonsense is this?" said Mr. Lathom, staring from Grundy to Trimble, who still held the box fast. "Grundy, do you claim that Trimble has purloined a cake of yours?"

"Yow! It's mine. I—"

"Silence, Trimble!" thundered Mr. Lathom, who was well aware of Trimble's many faults. "If that cake is yours, Grundy—"

"It is mine," said Grundy excitedly, "and I can jolly soon prove it! My Aunt Susie made it herself for me, and she's made my initials on the top in sugar icing, sir."

"Oh, indeed!" said Mr. Lathom grimly. "Then this matter can very easily be settled. Hand me that box, Trimble."

"Ow! Oh dear!"

Trimble's fat face fell; he knew he was bowled out. He handed the cake-box over. Mr. Lathom solemnly laid the box on the table. Then, with deliberate movements, he undid the flaps and opened the box.

Grundy gave rather a start as he sighted the crumpled paper inside. It was rather grubby paper, and was certainly not that which had originally enclosed the cake.

Mr. Lathom started to unwrap the paper. He went on unwrapping for quite a long while, whilst the faces of Grundy and Trimble grew more and more mystified. From the doorway Tom Merry & Co. looked on smilingly.

It was done at last. Mr. Lathom jumped—Grundy, Trimble, Wilkins, and Gunn jumped as the master exposed to view the mustard tin at last.

"Ah!" remarked Mr. Lathom. "This does not appear to be a cake at all, Grundy."

"I—I—I—"

Mr. Lathom opened the tin box. Then he jumped back, and the contents of the tin box fell on the tablecloth and lay there in a wriggling, slimy heap.

"G-goo-good lor!" gurgled Trimble.

Grundy & Co. were transfixed.

Tom Merry & Co. howled.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Grubs, not grub!" murmured Lowther.

"G-good gracious!" ejaculated Mr. Lathom. "Silence, boys! Such merriment is most unseemly. Grundy, it appears to me that both you and Trimble are victims of an April the First joke!"

"Oh crumbs! Trimble took it from my study, and I thought—"

Grundy's voice died away. Words failed him.

"Trimble," said Mr. Lathom sternly, "it is very clear to me that, though someone has played a foolish trick upon Grundy, you have done something far worse. It is obvious that you were quite unaware of what this box contained—"

"Not at all, sir," said Trimble, recovering himself with a gasp. "I knew all the time, sir. I wasn't trying to bone Grundy's cake at all, sir. I was just—just playing a joke on him."

"What?"

"He, he, he! You see, sir, I put those worms in there for—for a lark—an April the First jape, sir. I—I—"

"That is enough, Trimble," said Mr. Lathom sternly. "I am well aware of your disgraceful habit of taking other people's eatables. Do not make your crime worse by adding obvious falsehoods. You will come to my study at once for punishment, you young rascal! Grundy!"

"Y-yes, sir!" choked Grundy.

"You have obviously been the victim of an absurd practical joke. Possibly your cake will turn up in due course. If it does not do so, you must report your loss to your Form master."

With that Mr. Lathom marched out, taking the hapless Trimble with him. And, followed by howls of laughter from the crowd of entertained onlookers, Grundy & Co. marched off also, the great George Alfred red in the face with fury and dismay.

"What price that for a jape?" gurgled Lowther, as the Terrible Three walked away, chuckling. "In the first place, I only intended to jape dear old Grundy. But Trimble chipping in gave me the idea. Neat, wasn't it?"

"Ass! Ha, ha, ha!"

"And now about the cake itself," said Lowther. "I think we'd better give Grundy time to cool down a bit before asking him if we can have it."

"I think so, too," said Tom Merry, laughing. "Poor old Grundy will be a raving maniac before the day's out. Now let's go and look out Blake and his men. Your little joke can wait, Monty."

And the Terrible Three went in search of Blake & Co. Grundy's cake still reposed in the cupboard of Study No. 10, and they felt it would be safe enough there for the present.

CHAPTER 11.

Generous Grundy!

"**R**OTTEN shot, Curly! Blessed if you could hit it with a cannon! Here, let me have a go. Bet you I get it first go off!"

"Hallo!" said Jack Blake. "What's going on here?"

"Those young wascals up to some mischief, I'll be bound!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Blake & Co. halted at the doorway of the fags' Form-room, from whence the voices of Wally D'Arcy & Co. proceeded.

They looked in and found Wally D'Arcy, Curly Gibson, Reggie Manners, and quite a little crowd of fags. They were standing in a group inside the open doorway. Wally D'Arcy had an air-pistol in his hand, which he had evidently just taken from Curly Gibson's hands.

They were all looking upwards, and then Blake & Co. understood, or fancied they did.

Above the fags' heads, hanging from a length of string tied to one of the beams, was a football bladder underneath which was a circular target painted in white.

Apparently the fags were amusing themselves with a little marksmanship on that bright April morning.

Blake & Co. smiled—at least, Blake, Herries, and Digby did. Arthur Augustus looked rather scornful. Arthur Augustus was a good shot himself, and he was proud of the fact. And, in his view, the fags were making the task of hitting the target ridiculously easy. It was scarcely a dozen feet above their heads, in fact.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, with rather a scornful laugh. "How uttably absurd, Wally. You—"

"Oh!" gasped Wally. He jumped, and looked round as if quite startled. "Oh, you ass, Gus!" he snorted. "You'll put a fellow off his shot, startling him like that."

"My deah kid, I was just about to point out—"

"Don't!" said Wally. "Your chin gets enough exercise, old chap. Stop talking, and watch me get a bullseye!"

And Wally pointed the pistol at the target above his head and pulled the trigger.

But nothing happened. The target, near as it was, remained untouched as the sound of the air-pistol rang out.

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus laughed. "You uttah young ass, Wally! If I couldn't shoot better than that I'd eat my toppah!"

"You shut up!" snorted Wally inelegantly. "I suppose you think you could do better—eh?" he jeered. "Like your cheek!"

"Bai Jove! I wathah fancy I could," chuckled Arthur Augustus, gazing up at the bladder through his monocle.

"I could hit it fwom here on my head, deah boy!"

"Yah! I bet you couldn't!" said Curly Gibson. "You Fourth chaps fancy yourselves, I know. But—"

"Let me twy, youngstahs," smiled Gussy, "and I'll just show you how. I am wathah amazed that you kids cannot hit it fwom such a wediculously short distance."

(Continued on next page.)

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"Let him try, Wally," sniffed Reggie Manners. "Show the swanker up, old chap!"

"Well, I don't mind," said Wally. "But he's got to stand just where I was standing, if he does. That's only fair. Stand here, Gus—on this chalk mark."

"Wight-ho!" smiled Arthur Augustus. "Hand me the gun, Wally."

The leader of the Third didn't seem at all keen—or he appeared not to be, at all events. He opened the gun and inserted a pellet, and then he handed the gun, with a grunt, to his major.

"Now watch me, you youngstahs," said Gussy, a trifle loftily.

"Get on with it, and don't wag your chin so, Gus. You give me a pain," said Wally.

"Bai Jove! You cheeky—"

Arthur Augustus broke off, and decided to overlook the rudeness of his young brother. He stood carefully on the chalk mark, and raised the pistol above his head, his own chums looking on with great interest. Somehow, Jack Blake, Herries, and Digby had an idea that something quite unexpected would happen if Gussy did hit the target.

It did.

Pang!

Gussy pulled the trigger, and undoubtedly he got a bulls-eye first shot. For the bladder exploded instantly, and as it did so a shower of soot descended full into the noble face of Arthur Augustus.

Pooooof!

"Yawwwwoooooogh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus howled in astonishment and horror as a smothering shower of soot enveloped his features.

The fags yelled with laughter, and so did Blake, Herries, and Digby.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake. "Good shot, Gussy! Splendid! Do it again, old chap! Got any more bladders, Wally?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus staggered about, coughing and spluttering frantically. His chums almost wept with laughter. They had anticipated another "catch" they knew Wally & Co. only too well. The bladder had been filled with a supply of soot as well as air—soot that had been trickled into it purposely for the bright wheeze. And Wally & Co. had been waiting for victims to come along knowing someone over-trusting like Arthur Augustus would want to "have a go." They had been using the gun unloaded, of course!

It was all a catch—an April the First wheeze!

That sad fact was dawning upon the noble mind of Arthur Augustus now. He gouged soot from his eyes and mouth, and gave himself a final shake, and then he glowered through blackened eyes at the cheery jokers.

"You—you wascals!" he articulated, his voice trembling with emotion. "You feafuhl little wuffians! This is all a twick—a wotten Apwll the First twick!"

"Bow-wow!" said Wally. "Don't you think it's a sootable trick for April the First, Gus?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! Oh deah! Oh, you—you—you—"

Arthur Augustus, in a fearful rage, made a sudden blind rush at the roaring fags. But though doubled up with laughter at the moment, they were much too quick for him. They scattered and rushed out of the Form-room, howling with merriment, Wally taking the air-pistol with him.

"Oh!" gasped Arthur Augustus, giving it up as a bad job. "Oh, the feafuhl little villains! Oh cwikey! I am covahed in soot, and my eyes are bunged up with the wretched stuff, and my clobbah will be wuined!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake. "Things are not always what they seem Gussy. You ought to know that, old chap!"

"Oh, you—you— Oh, wats!"

And satisfying himself with that final remark, Arthur Augustus made for the nearest bath-room, raving.

Blake, Herries, and Digby strolled on, and in the Hall they met the Terrible Three.

"Hallo! Here you are!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "We've been hunting everywhere for you chaps. Coming out for a walk? Blessed if I can think of anything else to do!"

"I can," said Lowther. "I want to stay in and do mugs."

"Eh?"

"Do a few more April fools!" grinned Lowther. "I've just played an awfully funny lark on Grundy and Trimble, Blake. But where's old Gussy? I wanted—"

"Just gone to the giddy bath-room for repairs," chuckled Blake, and he told the story of the fags and their jape. The Terrible Three howled.

"Dear old Gussy!" chuckled Tom Merry. "Fellows like Gussy and Grundy make life really worth living these hard times. Well, we'll have to wait for him to change now, I suppose. Go and buck him up, Dig."

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"Hold on!" said Lowther warmly. "We're not going out yet. What about Grundy?"

"Well, what about him?" asked Blake, staring.

Lowther told what he had done with the cake, and Blake, Herries, and Digby roared.

"I want to finish the jape now," explained Lowther. "I think Grundy will have got over it by this time. If you fellows would like a nice chunk of Grundy's special Easter cake, come along."

"What-oh!"

Lowther led the way to Study No. 10, and took from the cupboard the big cake. It was really a beautiful cake, and the icing on it in Grundy's initials made the juniors' mouths water.

"But you aren't going to bone it?" exclaimed Blake. "Dash it all, we're not Baggy Trimbles!"

"Perish the thought!" said Lowther. "Didn't I tell you I was going to ask Grundy for it?"

"But—but you're potty if you think he'll be ass enough to give that ripping cake away!"

"Come and see," grinned Lowther. "Now where's that old biscuit-tin?"

He found the old biscuit-tin in the bottom of the cupboard, and placed the big cake gently inside. Then he put the lid on, and wrapped the whole thing in brown paper, his chums looking on not a little mystified.

Having wrapped it up, Lowther tied it up neatly, and clapped an old label on the string. On the label he wrote a name and address—"George Alfred Grundy, School House, St. Jim's."

"Addressing that to Grundy?" gasped Blake. "His own thumping cake!"

"Yes, old chap. Come on!" smiled Lowther. "Let him see you all—the more the merrier, and the more he suspects an April Fool joke the better."

"Oh!"

Lowther's chums began to understand now.

With smiling faces they followed him to Grundy's study. That great man was alone, and he gave the chums a glare as they looked in. Grundy was in a very bad humour. The cake had not turned up, and he was beginning to wonder if Trimble had really spoofed them after all in some manner. Trimble was a very crafty youth, and that tin box with the worms in it might, after all, have been a trick of his to turn them off the scent.

So George Alfred was beginning to think.

Lowther marched in and laid the square package on the table. It was obviously a square biscuit-tin, and Grundy was not likely to connect it in any way with his cake.

"Parcel for you Grundy," said Lowther. "Birthday-present, I bet! Lucky fellow!"

Grundy scowled and gave a snort.

"Take it away!" he roared.

"But it's addressed to you, old chap!"

"I dare say it is!" he snapped angrily. "Think I'm a fool, Lowther? Think I'm the man to be taken in with a fool trick like that? Take the dashed thing away and yourself with it! Why, I'll punch your silly head for trying to fool me with a silly kid's trick like that. Get out, and take your rotter box with you! D'you hear?"

"But don't you want it?" asked Lowther innocently.

"Of course I don't! Take the confounded thing away! I've had enough to put up with this morning, and I'll punch your silly head, Lowther—"

"But it's addressed to you," persisted Lowther. "It's your property! D'you really want us to—"

"Take it away!" bellowed Grundy, clenching his fists.

"You really don't want it?"

"No!" roared Grundy.

"We can have it, then?" asked Lowther, in astonishment.

"Yes, you footling ass! Think I don't know the game? Pah!"

"Oh, all right, Grundy," said Lowther, slipping off the string. "If you really want us to have it, we will, old chap—just to oblige you!"

The string having been removed, Lowther unwrapped the tin. Then he lifted the lid and took out the big Easter cake.

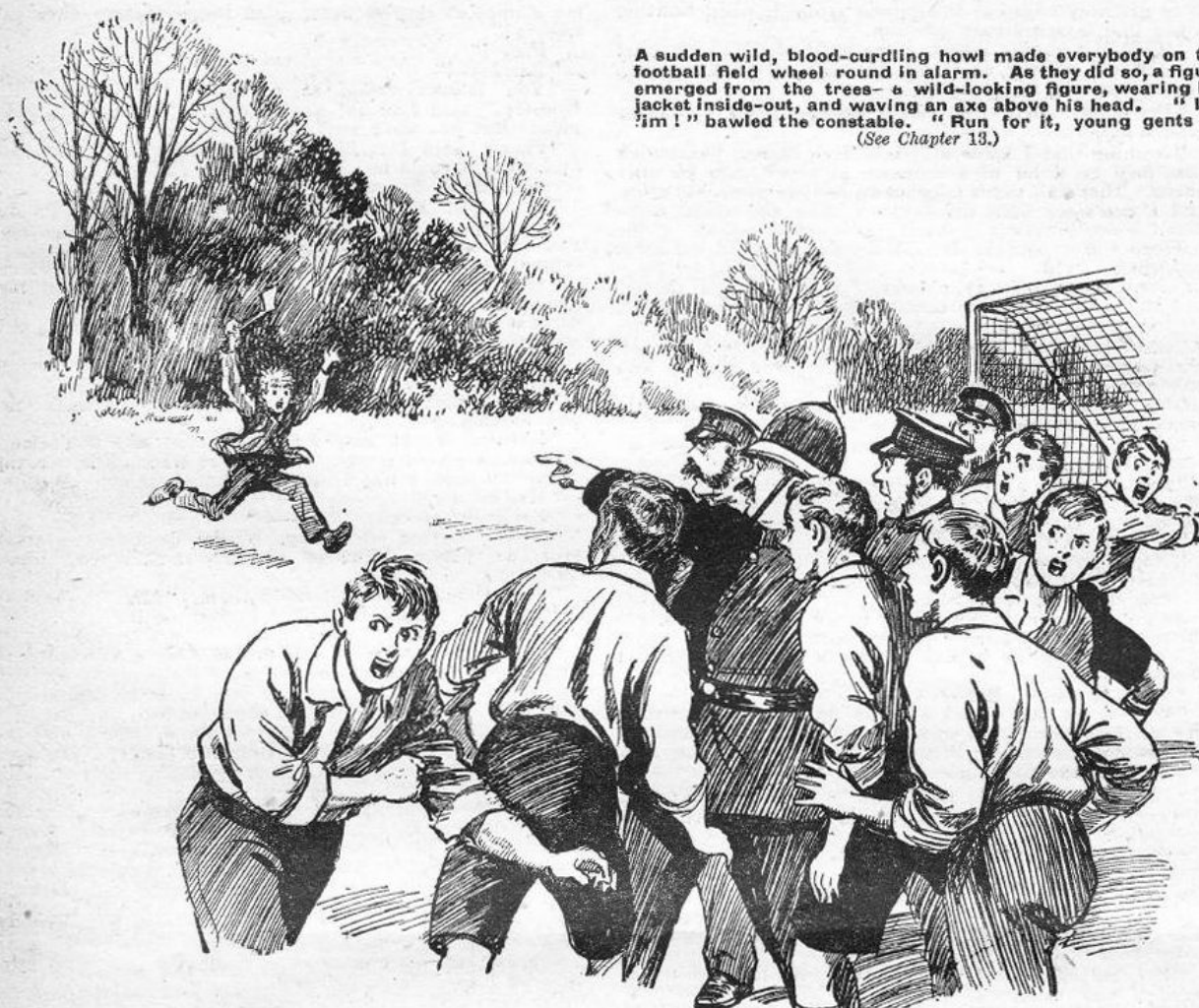
Grundy jumped.

"Like a piece of cake, you fellows?" said Lowther. "Here you are, Blake—here you are, Tommy!"

Lowther broke two great chunks off the beautiful cake, and handed them to Blake and Tom Merry. Grundy stood as if turned to stone—his eyes goggled and he seemed incapable of movement. While he stood thus, Lowther handed a piece of cake to each of his chums—keeping a wary eye on Grundy as he did so. It was only when Lowther broke off a big lump for himself, and took a huge bite at it that Grundy seemed to come out of his trance.

"My—my cake!" he gasped. "M-mum-my Easter cake! Why, you—you—"

His voice ended in a wrathful bellow, and he made one blind rush at the humorous Lowther. Lowther dodged



A sudden wild, blood-curdling howl made everybody on the football field wheel round in alarm. As they did so, a figure emerged from the trees—a wild-looking figure, wearing his jacket inside-out, and waving an axe above his head. "It's 'im!" bawled the constable. "Run for it, young gents!"

(See Chapter 13.)

swiftly, and shot out a ready foot. The unfortunate Grundy took a header over it.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

As well as they could with their mouths full, Tom Merry & Co. howled with laughter, and then they bolted for it—Lowther pausing to take the precaution of slamming and locking the study door behind him before following his chums. He felt this necessary in case Grundy followed and so spoiled their enjoyment of the cake he had so generously given them.

Between them, only reserving a share for Arthur Augustus, they finished the cake to the last crumb. Gussy came along to Study No. 6 at length, his face and hair still showing traces of soot, and his wrath still great. But he cheered up considerably as he took the chunk of cake and heard the story.

"Bai Jove!" he chuckled. "Poor old Gwunday! It was weally too bad!"

"But, my dear chap, didn't he give it us—tell us again and again that he didn't want it—that we were to take it away? Being obliging chaps we did so. Grundy's a fellow who will be obeyed. It isn't for us common mortals to disregard his express orders."

"Ha, ha! Wathah not!" grinned Arthur Augustus. "Aftah all, Gwunday does weally deserve to be taken down a peg or two, and I weally twust it will do him good! That cake was jollay good, deah boys! I am weady now!"

And Arthur Augustus being ready, the chums of the School House went out for their much-delayed walk—even Monty Lowther being quite pleased to go now. He felt he had done quite enough japing for one morning—even on All Fools' Day!

CHAPTER 12.

Plotting a Plot!

"WHAT if a raving lunatic came to St. Jim's?"

Monty Lowther asked that extraordinary question, with a solemn face; apparently he was quite serious—for once.

Dinner was over at St. Jim's. The morning of April the

First was ended. Tom Merry & Co. had returned cheery and bright—and hungry—from their walk, and now they were sitting chatting with Blake & Co., and Bernard Glyn, in Glyn's study.

Curiously enough, Lowther had been very quiet for some time—quite a curious thing for Lowther, who was very fond of his own voice. It was not a bad voice at all, but his chums often felt they had a little too much of it at times. While Lowther had been sitting deep in thought, they had been discussing Figgins & Co. with many grins and chuckles.

Since breakfast they had seen very little of the New House juniors. It was scarcely to be wondered at that those hapless youths were hiding their diminished heads. They were scarcely likely to show themselves outside the New House unnecessarily if they could help it.

It was the greatest score School House had ever brought about—all agreed upon that. The whole school was roaring over Figgins & Co.'s unhappy and extraordinary predicament. The Head had been astounded and indignant when he had heard the news. But his astonishment and indignation did not help Figgins & Co. All efforts—frantic and desperate as they had been—to remove the remarkable green stain had failed. Glyn was certainly a clever chemist as well as an inventor. Figgins & Co. and their fellow New House sufferers had scrubbed and rubbed until their skins were sore. But it was useless. They remained as green as grass. And the possibility of being obliged to go home for the Easter vacation looking, as Lowther put it, like animated petrol pumps, made them groan in despair.

Yet Figgins was determined not to give way to the demands of their School House rivals. Anything might happen yet. So he had counselled his followers to keep a stiff upper lip, and keep smiling—if they could!

But Tom Merry & Co. felt quite certain the New House fellows would have to give way sooner or later. The authorities might suspect who was responsible for the great jape—they probably did. But they could do nothing without proof. Tom Merry & Co. were safe enough, and they

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were gleefully enjoying their great triumph when Lowther asked that extraordinary question.

"What if a raving lunatic came to St. Jim's?" repeated Tom Merry, staring at Monty Lowther. "What on earth are you gassing about now?"

"I'm asking a question! What would happen if a raving lunatic came to St. Jim's?"

"Nothing that I know of," said Tom Merry, "excepting that he'd be a bit of a nuisance at times with his silly antics. That's all that's happened since you came, old chap, and I don't see what difference another one would make here."

There was a chuckle, but Monty Lowther did not seem disturbed.

"Don't try to be funny, old chap," he smiled. "It doesn't suit you! But I'm quite serious, you fellows. If a raving lunatic came here—"

"Oh!" said Tom Merry. "You're thinking of that chap that's escaped from Abbotsford Asylum, are you? You silly ass—he's not likely to show up here."

"No reason why he shouldn't," said Lowther. "It would create quite a commotion, I should think—especially if he turned up waving an axe and thirsting for gore. Now my idea is to let him."

"And you take his place at the asylum, eh?" asked Tom pleasantly. "Ripping, old chap. A really top-hole idea! He couldn't be worse than you, at all events!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now, don't rot!" said Lowther impatiently. "I've been thinking a lot since I saw that notice in the post office window offering a reward for the capture of the chap. He's been missing for days—everybody in the district's rather got the wind up about him. Only this morning I heard Ratty and Selby discussing it, and the beaks are a bit scared, I fancy, about it!"

"Well, that's so. But—"

"Wait a bit and do let a fellow finish!" said Lowther. "Now, you fellows know what a dab I am at impersonating, and acting in general. Well, why not let me turn up this afternoon as the giddy lunatic?"

"My dear man," said Blake gently, "you wouldn't need to exercise your skill at acting to do that: just turn up as yourself."

"Rats! Now, the idea's this: We've licked those New House worms to a frazzle! We've made them keep in their kennel and scarcely dare to show their faces. But that's not enough. We want to put the kybosh on them for good and all—a final, extra-special jape that'll give us something to crow about for terms."

"Yes, old chap; but your turning up here disguised as yourself won't do that!"

"Oh, do give a fellow a chance!" said Lowther calmly. "Now this is the idea: I turn up suddenly, dressed for the part, and waving an axe and yelling when all the chaps are on the footer field. They're bound to get the wind up and bolt for their lives. I shall follow, and I'll make for the New House. I'll play the dickens there, and put the wind up them fairly. In about three minutes I should be able to clear the whole lot of them out."

"Oh! Oh, my hat!"

"Then I'll have the whole place to myself," explained the humorist of the Shell. "They won't dare to come near me, and it'll be the scream of screams to see them bolting like rabbits, and I'll steer clear, of course, of School House chaps. Then, with the giddy New House to myself, I'll rag

the studies as they've never been ragged before. See the wheeze?"

"Phew!"

"Bai Jove!"

"You fellows scoffed at my other wheeze—over the trousers!" said Lowther grumblingly. "It was a ripping idea! But you can't scoff at this!"

"Phew!" said Tom Merry, almost under his breath. "I do believe it could be worked, chaps! And you'd have the nerve to do it, Monty?"

"Trust me!" said Lowther. "It's a giddy jape after my own heart, and I've thought all the details out. Some of you fellows can be the attendants who're after me. I suggest you, Tommy, and Blake, Glyn, and Digby—who are all fairly good actors. They can come chasing after me, and follow me into the New House. Then, with the whole show at our mercy we can all get busy ragging the studies. My hat! It's the wheeze of a lifetime!"

"Bai Jove! What a remarkable idea! But—"

"It's great!" breathed Blake. "Simply great!"

"Yaas, wathah! But I weally think I would make the best lunatic, deah boys."

"No doubt about that," agreed Blake. "But you're only the harmless sort, Gussy. What we're wanting is a really dangerous lunatic like Lowther."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! Weally, Blake—"

"Now, you ring off, Gussy. You're dead in this act!" said Tom Merry. "You fellows really think it would come off?"

"Absolutely," grinned Bernard Glyn. "Much easier than my Influenza Germicide will. I vote we do it!"

"Yes, rather!"

"We've vowed to make this first of April a scorcher, and we're going to," said Tom Merry. "We're going to show the giddy New House that we're very much alive and kicking, and that they can't hold a candle to us. This will just about put the tin lid on Figgy. We'll do it! We've got some semi-official suits in the Dramatic Society's property-box, and we can soon rig Lowther up to play the part. It's great!"

"Then that's settled, and we'd better get to work on the giddy details at once," said Lowther enthusiastically, delighted that his chums had taken to the idea. "We can smuggle the props out and hide them in the wood-shed behind the chapel. You'd better change your team, and get some other chaps to fill our places, Tom. Oh, my hat, though—what about you, Tommy? Figgy will smell a rat if you aren't on the footer field as well as us."

"Oh crumbs!" said Tom. "Oh, blow! I was overlooking that. I'd better keep out of it. Let Dane take my place. He doesn't often play in the team."

"Good egg!" said Dane.

"Then Blake, Glyn, Digby, and Dane can be the attendants," grinned Lowther. "Four's enough—four with me can do quite a lot of attending in the New House, what?"

"Ha, ha! Yes, rather!"

"Then let's go and root out the clobber now!" said Tom Merry, glancing at his watch. "We've not too much time. It's a pity to muck the footer up, but a jape like this is worth it."

"My hat! Yes!"

"Yaas, wathah! But where do I come in, deah boys? I wathah think I would make a good—"

"You're an also-ran, Gussy," said Tom Merry cheerfully. "You can lead the frightened populace before the rush of the giddy lunatic. Now come on!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And, laughing excitedly, Tom Merry and his followers rushed out to make preparations for the great jape which they fondly imagined was to wind up that memorable All Fools' Day in a gigantic victory for the School House against their rivals of the New House. Scarcely had their footsteps died away when a long, lanky form with a green face crawled out from beneath the couch.

It was none other than George Figgins, the redoubtable leader of the New House juniors. And Figgins' green features were wearing a broad grin.

"So the dear little fellows aren't satisfied with what they've already done!" he murmured, with a deep chuckle. "Well, this ought to be a lesson to them against being greedy. But what a good job I happened to come here for a hunt round while they were out and what a good job they didn't catch me! Well, I haven't found that beastly antidote to this rotten, beastly green stain, after all. Glyn must have locked it up somewhere—if he has any, and I hope to goodness he has! But if all goes well this afternoon, I fancy we shan't need to find it. We'll make dear old Glyn find it for us, and be glad to do so."

And with that, George Figgins stepped to the window, which was open at the bottom—a little circumstance Tom Merry & Co. had not even noticed. Climbing over the sill,

The Silent Six!

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The triumphant New House procession started off with a wheelbarrow at the head, Monty Lowther seated in it and looking a weird and wonderful figure. Behind him came Blake, Digby, and Dane, walking on their hands, while a crowd of New House fellows with mouth-organs and combs and paper closed up on each side and behind. (See Chapter 11.)



Figgins dropped down with the aid of the ivy on to the gravel path beneath. Then, seeing the coast was clear, he made all speed for the New House.

April the First was not finished yet at St. Jim's, and though the day had gone against Figgins & Co. so far, they were by no means done yet. The tide was on the turn, had Tom Merry & Co. only known it!

CHAPTER 13.

As per Programme!

"CENTRE-HALF!" said Grundy.

"But, my dear man—"

"Centre-half!" repeated Grundy warmly.

"Nothing else will suit me!"

"But you're not playing, you ass—"

"If you call me an ass, George Wilkins—"

"But you aren't playing!" almost shrieked Wilkins.

"Cardew was only pulling your silly leg—"

"Rot! Think I'd let that ass Cardew pull my leg?"

snorted Grundy. "I'm playing. That's settled. I'm also

playing centre-half. That's settled, too! I'm not allowing

that duffer, Tom Merry, to have his own way. I'll admit

he's showing a bit of sense for once in asking me to play;

but—"

"He's never asked you to play at all!" hooted Wilkins.

"Can't you see—"

"Rot! I'll admit Tom Merry doesn't want me to play,"

said Grundy, frowning. "He's afraid I'll show him up—

show the fellows the sort of player he's been leaving out of

the team ever since he became skipper. But he's realised at

last that jealousy and envy can't go on for ever; he's begin-

ning to see I mean business! He's afraid to hold out

against me any longer! I'm going to play up on my best

form to-day—just to let him see what he's been losing in

me. The fellows will see it, too."

Wilkins breathed hard. Gunn shook his head hopelessly.

Grundy was a fellow who always asked to have his leg

pulled, and who also refused flatly to see that it was being

pulled. He had been asked to play, and he was going to

play. That Cardew had asked him was quite enough for

him—despite the fact that it was April the First, and that

Cardew was a great joker.

"But, look here!" began Wilkins again. "I tell you

that—"

"Now don't begin again, George Wilkins," said Grundy,

waving his hand. "I'm fed-up with your chin-wag!

Blessed if you can stop when once you start! I was going to mop the earth up with Tom Merry's crowd for pinching my cake, the cheeky rotters. But I've decided to let them off until after the match. I don't want to waste energy thrashing all that crowd. It can wait. You're playing, I believe. Wilkins, and you, too, Gunny?"

"Yes. Tom Merry's dropped Lowther and Blake for some reason or other," grunted Wilkins. "But—"

"Blessed if I know why he's playing you two duffers," said Grundy disparagingly. "Still, your silly fumbling will

serve as a contrast to my brilliance. Now, come down to the changing-room," he added, glancing at his wrist-watch.

"And mind, you've got to obey orders on the field—do just as I tell you. I'll tell Tom Merry to shove you where you can do least harm, though."

And, with that kindly statement, Grundy led the way down to the changing-room.

Most of the fellows picked to play were already there. Tom Merry was there, and he opened his eyes as Grundy started to change.

"Hallo, what's this game, Grundy?" he demanded. "What the thump are you changing for?"

"Well, I like that!" snorted George Alfred. "I suppose you've got the idea that you can draw back now, eh?"

"What?"

"You've asked me to play, and I'm going to play!" hooted Grundy, quite afraid now, as he began to suspect that Tom Merry had changed his mind.

"Asked you to play?" stuttered Tom. "You footling dummy, I never asked you to play! Haven't I told you that this is a footer match and not a comic opera?"

"But you said—"

"I said you could play left-outside," smiled Tom. "You can play that as much as you like so long as you play it right outside the field. See?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But Cardew said—"

"I'm not interested in what Cardew said," smiled Tom.

"Cardew was pulling your leg, you silly ass! He was

making you an April fool—forgetting that you already were one and couldn't be made worse than you are! Now run away and play marbles, there's a good fellow!"

"Why, you—you—"

"Good-bye!"

"I'm playing!" roared Grundy. "I'm not going to be treated like this, Tom Merry! I'm playing!"

"Oh, all right!" said Tom Merry. "Please yourself, of course. I fancy we can lick the New House even if you do play for us!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy did not answer that. As a matter of fact, his powerful brain was not capable of working it out. He just ignored it, and continued changing. Tom Merry had given way, and he was playing. And when the team turned out at last and went down to Little Side Grundy was with them, quite overlooking the fact that there were eleven men with him already!

Had it been a match of any importance Tom Merry would very quickly have given Grundy his marching orders. But Tom knew the match would not last long, and he—Tom—saw no reason why Grundy shouldn't supply a little comic relief until the real fun started.

They reached the field to find that Figgins & Co. had turned up all right—more than one School House fellow had doubted their doing so, and even Tom had wondered. But here they were, changed for the fray. Their green faces and hands showed up in striking contrast to their red-and-white footer togs.

Tom had expected to see a dejected-looking crowd, and he was quite surprised to find George Figgins and his men quite chirpy and bright.

Apparently they were getting used to their striking appearance, or else were putting a very bold front on things.

"Fresh and green; fresh and green!" sang out Manners. "Here come the brussels-sprouts!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Two to one on the greens!"

It was a yell from the School House fellows on the touch-line, but Figgins only smiled.

"My hat!" he said. "You've got twelve men, then! I say, Thomas, are you making us a present of the match?"

"Yes—a birthday present, old chap!" said Tom Merry affably. "It's your birthday to-day, of course! You see, we haven't forgotten you! We're making you a present of Grundy and all the goals he can kick for you! By the way, we want to warn you especially against Herries."

"Eh?"

"Keep clear of him!" said Tom anxiously. "We shall all be treading on your faces in mistake for the field, I expect. But Herries has exceptionally big feet. If he makes a mistake like that it will be a serious matter for you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Very funny!" said Figgins politely. "If you kids could play as well as you gas, we shouldn't stand an earthly! But as this isn't a gassing match—"

"Sorry!" said Tom. "But your faces do worry a chap, you know. They remind me of boiled cabbages! Hallo, here comes the giddy referee!"

Rushden came striding on the field. He grinned all over his face at sight of the green-visaged New House team. Then he gasped as his eyes fell on Grundy.

"Twelve men!" he ejaculated. "Merry—"

"All serene!" said Tom, smiling cheerily. "Grundy's the comic relief man. He's really here to play for the New House!"

"Look here, Tom Merry—" hooted Grundy.

"We don't mind him playing," grinned Figgins. "He'll add a few more goals for us, I expect. All serene, Rushden!"

"Oh, all right!" chuckled Rushden. "You chaps are green enough for anything! Come on—get a move on!"

Tom Merry won the toss, and he elected to kick off. The whistle beeped, and Tom raised his boot to kick. As he did so Grundy distinguished himself by rushing forward and kicking out at the ball. Tom had refused to let him play centre-forward in his place, so Grundy was determined to fill that position, too, and put the jealous Tom Merry in the shade.

Unfortunately, he kicked Tom Merry instead of the ball in his excitement, and the skipper of the Shell howled and sat down on the sward, hugging his ankle frantically.

But he was up again the next moment, and just as Grundy was about to rush after the ball again Tom Merry's fist landed on his nose.

It wasn't often Tom lost his temper on the field of play, but in Tom Merry's view this was not a match at all. And Grundy's hefty kick had hurt—badly.

Pheep!

The whistle shrilled, and the game stopped scarcely two seconds after it had started. The next moment the junior

skipper and his extra man were rolling about the ground, locked in a deadly embrace amidst howls of laughter.

Rushden rushed up wrathfully.

"Stop that!" he bawled. "Think I've given the thumping afternoon to referee a junior scrap? Stop that, or I'll tan the hides of both of you! You hear?"

He grabbed the excited Grundy and yanked him to his feet. Then he did likewise with the wrathful Tom Merry.

"Think you're playing kick-and-run, you footling young ass!" he roared at Grundy. "Any more of that and I'll have you frog-mached off the field, Grundy!"

"What? Look here!" bellowed Grundy. "Play the game, Rushden! If that rotter hadn't started scrapping I should have gone clean through them and scored! I'd got every man of them marked, and would have gone through them like a knife through butter!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy's bellowing voice could almost have been heard at Rylcombe, and a roar of laughter went round the ground. Grundy was certainly supplying comic relief in his first match.

"Line up again!" snorted Rushden. "Come on—look lively! Grundy, you born idiot, get in your own half, or get off the dashed field! Blessed if you don't fancy you're playing kiss-in-the-ring! What in thunder are you doing over there? Ready—"

But the game was never fated to restart. At that moment a murmur of surprise arose, and Rushden nearly swallowed his whistle as he caught sight of four individuals hurrying across the field. They seemed to be in uniform, and at first they looked as if they intended just crossing the field. Then suddenly they changed direction and hurried over to the players and Rushden.

"Well, I'm hanged!" gasped Rushden. "More thumping comic relief men, or what?"

Tom Merry nearly exploded as he thought how near Rushden was to the truth.

The four individuals came up, breathing hard, as if they had been running. One of them—Rushden noted, with a start now—was in police-constable's uniform. The others might have been firemen or cinema attendants, for all the Sixth-Formers could make out.

There was an astonished buzz round the field. Tom Merry tried hard to hide a grin, as did several other of the School House footballers. Curiously enough, George Figgins was also grinning.

All four of the newcomers appeared to be short men, but what they lacked in height they made up for in fatness. Two sported beards and moustaches, while the other two sported only moustaches.

"What the thunder—"

"Excuse us mister!" gasped the policeman breathlessly. "But I s'pose you ain't seen nothin' of a loonatic—"

"A whatter?" yelled Rushden.

"Loonatic!" repeated the constable, with a puff. "A bloke wearin' 'is jacket inside hout, and with a haxe in 'is 'and. He came this way, didn't he, mate?"

"That he did!" gasped one of the constable's companions. "Raving, he is, too! Escaped from Abbotsford Asylum two days ago!" explained the man to the startled Rushden.

"Dangerous, too, he is! You read about it in the papers, maybe, young gent?"

Rushden gasped. He certainly had heard about the lunatic that had escaped from the asylum at Abbotsford—few in the district had not heard of it.

"Oh, great pip!" he gasped. "You mean to say he's about here?"

"We're arter him now!" said the constable importantly. "I reckon as you young gents had better get indoors and lock yourselves in afore he 'as a chance to do any 'arm!"

"Oh, my hat! But—but—"

Rushden was stuttering when a startling interruption occurred. From the trees at the far end of the field came a sudden, wild blood-curdling howl. It made most of the fellows nearly jump from their skins. As they wheeled round and blinked in that direction they sighted a figure emerge from the trees—a wild, horrid-looking figure, wearing his jacket inside out, and waving a huge axe above his head in a most dangerous manner.

"It's 'im!" bawled the constable. "It's 'im, right enough! Run for it, young gents! Hook it, you young idiots!"

"Yes, run for it!" yelled Tom Merry. "Oh, my hat! Run, you fellows—run!"

"Yaas, wathah! Oh cwumbs!"

"Yarrow-ooooogh!"

Another blood-curdling howl came floating across the footer field. It settled the matter. Already those fellows near the trees were flying for their lives; they didn't wait to be told what it meant. They knew—or believed they knew. They had all heard of the escaped lunatic, and now, seeing the attendants, the policeman, and this wild-looking individual, they thought it high time to go—and they went, with yells of alarm.

"Well, I'm blowed!" snorted Grundy. "A blessed escaped loony, what? I say, let's collar the chap, you fellows. Back me up—here, don't bolt, you footling funks!"

It was just like Grundy to do that—in more ways than one. Grundy was a fellow without fear, and he was a fellow who usually managed to make a muck of any scheme that was in the wind—either accidentally or otherwise. Tom Merry saw at once that their great wheeze looked like being ruined by the gallant and zealous George Alfred.

"Run for it, Grundy!" he bawled. "You awful idiot! Run for your life!"

"Rot!" bellowed Grundy. "Catch me running! Stop, you footling—"

"Run, Grundy!" shouted Figgins, who was just as anxious that Grundy shouldn't spoil a certain other scheme, also. "Run, you born idiot! Oh, my hat! I'm off!"

Practically every fellow was flying for his life school-wards—only the policeman, the three attendants, Figgins, Tom Merry and Grundy hesitating. But suddenly the four "men" also took to their heels—apparently they did not feel like tackling the escaped lunatic just then. And Figgins went after them, as did Tom Merry—both of them hoping against hope that that awful ass Grundy would do the same!

And Grundy did.

Gallant as George Alfred was, he evidently came to the conclusion that it wasn't good enough. It was the job of the bobby and the attendants to capture raving lunatics, not his. The lunatic was terribly near now. He was a horrid-looking individual. His hair was ginger, and long, and wild; he sported a pointed moustache one end of which turned skywards, the other end pointing earthwards—giving him an extraordinary appearance. He came dancing and prancing across the footer field, waving his axe and yelling ferociously. And finding himself alone, Grundy turned tail and bolted for his life—covering the ground at a great rate.

In a matter of seconds the footer field was empty of spectators and footballers.

A mad bull could scarcely have cleared it more quickly than did Monty Lowther that afternoon. So far his great wheeze looked like turning out a tremendous success. But would it last?

CHAPTER 14.

Honours Even!

"G-gug-garrrooooooh!"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Grundy.

He put it on for all he was worth now that terrific howl sounded alarmingly near.

Whenever Grundy started a thing he always put his beef into it. He had started running now, and he went like the wind. But so did the "lunatic!"

The swarm of running fellows were far ahead by this—many of them had vanished within the precincts of the school. When well off the playing-fields the constable and his men appeared to be attacked by a sudden spasm of bravery. To Grundy's surprise they stopped running, and faced about just as he passed them.

Grundy pulled up, eager enough to help if it came to a scrap. But it didn't come to a scrap. As the lunatic came rushing up, waving his axe aloft, the men seemed just as suddenly to lose their nerve, and they scattered to right and left with yells of alarm.

"Look out, youngster!"

The last voice sounded suspiciously like Digby's voice, but fortunately Grundy never noticed the incautious slip. He turned again like Dick Whittington. With a startled gasp, he shot off at great speed for St. Jim's as he saw the lunatic rush past policemen and attendants and come bounding after him.

"Oh, my hat! Oh, great pip!" gasped Grundy.

He really was a bit alarmed now. Obviously the lunatic meant business. The next moment Grundy was in the quad. Quite a swarm of fellows stood on both School House steps and New House steps, amid a pandemonium of excited shouting.

But as the running Grundy appeared with the wild figure at his heels, they turned and bolted into their respective Houses.

Grundy made a bee-line for the School House.

He vanished inside, realising with a thrill of relief that his pursuer had not followed.

Nor had he; Monty Lowther, yelling and waving his axe, had turned aside and made for the New House as per programme. And after him rushed the constable and the three attendants—also as per programme.

But there the programme of the School House japers ended, and that of the New House japers began!

The next moment Monty Lowther met his Waterloo—as did Blake, Glyn, Dane, and Digby!

The schemers had not anticipated that the New House fellows would take refuge in their House—they had intended to stop them doing so. But Figgins and his men had forestalled them—innocently or otherwise.

Monty and his attendants believed, of course, that it was innocently—that sheer terror had lent them wings. But the next moment, as they raced up the New House steps, they discovered their sad mistake.

Lowther bounded up the steps, three at a time. Scarcely three yards behind him came the constable—otherwise Bernard Glyn, and the attendants, Digby, Dane, and Blake. They all rushed straight into the waiting arms of Figgins & Co.

The hall-way was full of New House men—green-faced but cheery.

Before Lowther knew what had happened he was gripped and he went thumping down with Redfern and Kerr on his chest. The next instant Glyn, Digby, Dane and Blake also went down—with New House fellows swarming over them.

"Oh, great Scott!" gurgled Blake. "We—we've been had! The bounders must have tumbled! Oh crumbs! Gerroff me chest! Yooooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The triumphant New House fellows roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!" chortled Figgins gleefully. "Hear us smile! Bang that giddy bobby's head on the floor if he won't stop struggling. Sit on that tubby attendant's chest, Fatty—I believe it's dear old Blake! What price April the First now, Blake?"

"Oh, you—you rotters!" gasped Blake. "You knew all the time, then—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins. "My dear man, the New House aren't taken in quite so easily as all that!—You did us this morning, but now it's our turn, my infants! Don't let 'em get away—especially Glyn! You've got Tom Merry there?"

"What-ho! Here he is!"

"Oh, my hat!"

Blake groaned deeply as he sighted Tom Merry struggling in the grasp of half a dozen New House men at the back of the hall. Tom had been in the rear of the running crowd, and on turning the corner into the quadrangle he had run into an ambush of New House fellows apparently waiting for him. They had collared him, despite a fierce resistance, and rushed him across the quad and up the steps of the New House, shielded from view of School House men by the swarm of New House captors.

It was a fair "catch"—Tom Merry groaned, like Jack Blake, as he realised it. Lowther's great wheeze had come "unstuck"—as his wheezes very often did, though just how, Lowther himself least of all knew.

But the sad fact remained. The great wheeze had failed, and now Tom Merry & Co. were in the ruthless hands of the enemy.

"Ha, ha, ha!" chortled Figgins. "Hear us smile again! You didn't know I was under the couch in Glyn's study this afternoon when you were planning this stunt, did you, Thomas?"

"Oh!" panted Tom. "So—so that was it!"

"Just that!" grinned Figgins gleefully. "Hear us smile again! Now you chaps can yank Tom Merry and Glyn upstairs and fasten 'em in the box-room. Mind they're absolutely safe though! They're the giddy hostages, and we're not taking any risk of losing 'em."

"Look here!" howled Glyn. "Let us go, you rotters!"

"Likely, isn't it?" jeered George Figgins. "See any green in my eye as well as on my chivvy? My dear man, you're our giddy hostages. And you don't leave the giddy New House until we've got that thumping antidote to this beastly green stuff. When you've handed it over or given us your solemn word to hand it over we'll let you go—not before."

"Oh crumbs!"

"Dished and done!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Despite their desperate struggles, Tom Merry and Bernard Glyn were dragged away upstairs. The New House fellows knew that Mr. Ratcliff was at Wayland and they did not fear being interrupted. Monteith and the other seniors in charge of the House would not interfere so long as the row did not become too serious. It was a whole holiday, and a harmless rag would not be interfered with.

Tom Merry and his fellow prisoner disappeared with their jailors, and Figgins grinned down at the hapless Lowther, whose hair and moustache had disappeared, and whose grease-covered face looked a sight for men and little fishes. Where his axe was Lowther had not the slightest idea.

"Dear old Lowther!" grinned Figgins. "What a lad you are for japes! And how unlucky you always are with 'em! But I'm surprised at you advertising yourself as a lunatic like this. A fellow usually keeps it a secret, you know! Take him out, chaps, and put his strait-waistcoat on!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lowther was taken outside. There he found a wheelbarrow waiting for him—also a bundle of faggots. What the faggots were for Lowther soon found out. While he was held fast, Figgins and Kerr tied the faggots round his waist in the form of a waistcoat—a strait waistcoat! Amidst howls of laughter the hapless japer of the Shell was seated in the wheelbarrow, hardly able to move for the waistcoat of stiff faggots.

Then Dane, Digby, and Blake were led out on to the steps and down them into the quad, looking weird and wonderful sights in their crumpled uniforms and dishevelled wigs and whiskers and moustaches. Most of their make-up had come off, however, and it was very easy to recognise them.

Their appearance, with arms bound behind them, was greeted with a howl of laughter from the New House fellows.

"Now cut their hands free!" said Figgins crisply. "We're short of wheelbarrows, which is a pity. But if you'll hold their legs up and let 'em walk on their hands that should do just as well."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Evidently George Figgins had thought it all out well; and his orders were carried out to the letter. The wheelbarrow went first, with Francis Kerr wheeling it, and Lowther seated upright inside it, looking a truly extraordinary figure. Behind him came Blake, looking just as weird. He had not wanted to walk on his hands at all—nor had his fellow-captives. But the argument of half a dozen cricket stumps soon persuaded them to obey orders. With the wheelbarrow leading the way, and Blake, Digby, and Dane bringing up the rear—walking on their hands, with a New House man holding up their legs behind them—the procession started, the crowd of New House fellows closing in on each side and behind. Some of them had mouth-organs, and some had combs and paper, while Figgins himself started to blow terrific blasts on a cornet.

Round the quadrangle went the gay procession, amid an uproar of yells and laughter. Faces appeared at nearly all the windows of the two Houses; at one of them in the School House Mr. Railton was glimpsed, but he quickly vanished, a hand over his mouth. A little harmless ragging could be allowed to pass unseen and unheard on a holiday, in Mr. Railton's view.

Moreover, he guessed what was happening, and he felt it only fair not to interfere. Mr. Railton had his own ideas as to who was responsible for the green dye. Apparently it was the turn of the New House now.

But there were others who were not at all inclined to ignore the cheery procession. On the School House steps appeared a swarm of School House juniors. They blinked and blinked in alarm and growing wrath at the strange sight.

"M-mum-my hat!" roared Grundy, who was the first out. "You see who they've got there? Great pip! I thought you were stuffing me up, Gussy! It is Lowther, and those rotters have nabbed him!"

"And Blake and the others!" roared Levison. "Rescue, School House! On the ball! Up and at 'em, School House!"

"Yaas, wathah!" shrieked Arthur Augustus, waving his eyeglass excitedly. "Wescue, School House! Wescue! Down with the wotten New House!"

"Hurrah!"

With warlike yells, the School House fellows charged across the quad to the rescue. The next few moments nobody knew just what was happening. The hapless Lowther and his fellow-victims certainly did not. The wheelbarrow was sent tumbling over with a crash; and a wild howl came from the hapless Lowther as he tumbled out and vanished beneath a swarm of trampling feet. Blake, Digby, and Dane were dropped like hot bricks as their "wheelers" turned to defend themselves against the rushing School House hordes. Then the battle began in real earnest—a battle in which no quarter was given or asked. The uproar grew; and, unnoticed by anyone, Mr. Railton suddenly appeared again at his study window.

One minute later half a dozen seniors came out of the School House, headed by Eric Kildare, who was grinning all over his good-humoured face—as were Darrell, North, and Rushden, and the rest.

"That's enough, kids!" bawled Kildare. "Stop, you young rascals! D'you hear? Stop!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Look out! Prefects! Cave!"

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The yells of warning were soon followed by yells of anguish, as Kildare & Co. got busy with their ashplants. And that ended the great battle quickly enough. The New House fellows, hugging numerous and varied injuries, scuttled back to the New House, whilst the School House did likewise to their own House.

Soon Kildare and his fellow-prefects were in possession of the barrow, the faggots, and the field.

"Ow! Ow-ow-ow-ow!" groaned Lowther, as he tottered into the House, looking as if he had been trying to stop the progress of a steam-roller. "Yow-ow! Oh crikey! I'm a wreck! I'm a bag of broken bones and bruises! Ow-ow! Oh, what an awful sell! Never mind, we'd have licked 'em if Kildare hadn't turned up!"

"Yaas, wathah!" gasped Gussy. "But— Oh, bai Jove! Where can Tom Mewwy and Glyn be, deah boys?"

"Blow them! I'm blessed if I know where I am yet!" groaned Lowther. "But I do know this—I've had enough of April the First to last me a lifetime! Yow-ow! No more April the First japes for me; I've had enough!"

And Lowther undoubtedly had—for one year, at all events!

Tom Merry groaned; Bernard Glyn groaned. In the box-room in the New House they lay and chafed in their bonds, and discussed their awful luck dismally. Escape was out of the question; they were tied hand and foot, and outside their prison paced New House warders, ready to prevent any attempt at escape, had the School House hostages been in the position to attempt any.

But they weren't. It was all up. The great jape had failed, and Figgins & Co. were undoubtedly triumphant.

"No good, Glyn!" said Tom. "We've been dished and done! You'll have to give in and hand 'em that stuff."

"No doubt about that!" said Glyn, with a rueful chuckle. "Never mind! We've had the best of the day, nobody can deny that! And, taking it altogether, it's been a ripping day. These New House worms won't forget it in a hurry, and we'll always be able to pull their legs about it."

"That's so. Wonder what's happened to poor old Lowther?"

"Blow Lowther! This comes of taking up his silly wheezes! Somehow they always end like this!" groaned Glyn. "I'm only wondering what's going to happen to us?"

"Nothing will—if we give in to them!" grinned Tom Merry. "Figgy always plays the game. All he wants now is that antidote stuff to get the green stain off. You're sure you've got it, Glyn?"

"Yes; and I can make more in a few minutes!" chuckled Glyn. "It's the simplest thing in the world to make. And it fetches the stuff off in no time with a bit of rubbing. I've got a good supply ready in the top box-room in the School House. They're welcome to it; I never intended them to remain green after the First, of course."

"Hallo! Here comes Figgy!" chuckled Tom Merry. "Now for it!"

It proved to be George Figgins right enough. He grinned down at his captives. One of his eyes was rapidly closing, and his nose was swollen. But he looked cheery enough, for all that. His green face beamed with good humour.

"Well, my little dears," he remarked, "have you thought it over? What is it to be? Going to give in and hand over that stuff—or tell us how to get this beastly stuff off?"

Both Tom and Glyn nodded.

"You'll make it pax and let us go if we promise?"

"Yes, honour bright! But we must have that stuff this evening."

"Right!" said Glyn, with a chuckle. "We'll call it honours even, Figgy. Is that good enough?"

And George Figgins agreed that it was.

An hour later various jars containing the precious antidote had been carefully carried across to the New House, and for the rest of that evening Figgins and his men were busy—very busy. The bath-rooms were crowded out with fellows, scrubbing and rubbing.

Figgins had kept his word—he had allowed his prisoners to go unharmed; and in return Glyn and Merry had kept their part of the bargain and supplied the goods, as it were. And when Figgins & Co. appeared in public again, newly swept and garnished, there were no traces of green on their smiling faces, and all was merry and bright once more in the New House. While over in the School House, Tom Merry & Co. admitted frankly enough that that eventful First of April had ended with honours even between the rival Houses of St. Jim's.

THE END.

(There will be another grand long story of Tom Merry & Co. in next week's GEM, entitled: "GRUNDY GOES TO LAW!" You can only make sure of reading it, chums, by ordering your copy WELL IN ADVANCE!)

GENTLEMAN JACK, OF THE BUSH!

Our Adventurous Trio make the acquaintance of Gentleman Jack, a strange man of the Bush, who comes to their rescue when the Fates are dead against them!



A STIRRING AND DRAMATIC NEW SERIAL STORY OF ADVENTURE, FEATURING BOB AND SYD, TWO PLUCKY SCHOOLBOYS.

By PERCY A. CLARKE.

INTRODUCTION.

Trailed across two continents by a gang of cunning crooks, Steve Barrett, in possession of a Black Ruby, eventually reaches England. With the aid of this Black Ruby, Steve has hopes of making his fortune, for the ruby is the key to a claim of land in Queensland rich in precious stones. The crooks, however, succeed in gaining possession of the Black Ruby and make good their escape. Steve enlists the services of Bob Crompton and Syd Dyson, two plucky, athletic fellows, with whom he sets off in a wild dash south on the trail of the Black Ruby. After a series of exciting adventures, the chums retrieve the precious stone and board the Maharanee, bound for Australia. Sweetman and his gang also get aboard, but their efforts to regain the coveted jewel prove of little avail, for the chums jump ship when nearing Perth and reach shore under cover of darkness. Later, they are scyld by a gang of toughs in the pay of Sweetman. Although Steve is wounded in the fierce fight which ensues, the chums succeed in foiling the enemy. After weeks of trekking across the terrible expanse of arid desert, Steve collapses. Leaving him in the care of Bob, Syd valiantly goes in search of help. His strength fails him at last, as he falls exhausted to the ground. Regaining consciousness later, Syd is startled to discover bending over him a black-bearded stranger, who, by a stroke of Providence, happens to be Gentleman Jack, the man whom the chums were to join in Queensland. Hardly knowing whether to believe the youngster's strange story or not, Gentleman Jack offers to accompany Syd back to his chums.

(Now read on.)

The Strange Man of the Bush!

GENTLEMAN JACK carried the water and the food. He knew Syd would have all his work cut out to carry himself. And together they trekked back over the desolation of the desert.

It wasn't easy for Syd to find his way back, seeing that his search for help had been made when he was half delirious. But Gentleman Jack was used to the wild lands of Australia, and he picked up Syd's first trail and followed, as faithfully and without faltering, as keen and cleverly as any black man.

Syd realised then how he had wandered from the straight. That trail swerved for no apparent reason, performed circles in places, zig-zagged all over the place. But Gentleman Jack followed it every step of the way. He had only one grim comment to make.

"Chum," he said, "I don't know if you were born lucky, but if I hadn't spotted you racing around like a mad dingo, you wouldn't be here now. That's all. You were sure bad."

Syd just grinned wanly. He was too worried about his pals to trouble about himself. It seemed hours and hours before they sighted the gully where Bob was waiting beside Steve. And then there was no sign either of Steve or Bob.

Gentleman Jack began to look serious. Either Steve and Bob had wandered in their delirium, or else Syd was fooling him. He still maintained an open mind on the subject.

But they came to the gully, and there, at the very bottom lay Steve, gasping, and Bob trying to force a few drops of brackish water between his teeth.

Gentleman Jack gave one look and slid down that gully helter-skelter. He was beside Steve in a flash, and had his head on his knee.

"Old-timer!" he called. "Steve! Steve! Here I am, pard!"

Steve opened his eyes. For a split second he gazed up into that black-bearded face.

"By gravy!" he exclaimed feebly. "How do, Jack? But you're too late. I'm through, Jack, old pard. Look after the boys—true pals, both of 'em. Look after 'em, Jack, I'm finished—"

His head slumped forward weakly, limply. Bob fairly sobbed in his extreme weakness. But Gentleman Jack smiled up at him.

"All right, chum. Steve isn't through by a long chalk. I'll pull him round. You look after yourself. Sip that water. Mind what I say, now. Sip it! Then take a bite of grub, only take it gently. I'll see to Steve. He's pretty bad, but not hopeless. Guess I'm only just in time, though. If your pal hadn't remembered that advertisement it would be a job for the vultures in this gully. As it is, I reckon the trail is coming to an end—and a happy end at that."

In a mountain glen a tent was pitched—a fairly large tent. Four horses cropped the fresh grass contentedly. Steve lay full length on the grass close to the stream that

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ran in at one end of the glen and out at the other. He was reading a two-month-old Sydney newspaper and enjoying every word of it.

Gentleman Jack had a cracked mirror hanging by a string from a branch of a tree, and was busily shaving himself. Syd and Bob were employed as cooks, and the aroma from the pot that hung on a tripod over the fire was enough to fill the diners at the Ritz with envy.

"Well, chums," said Gentleman Jack, between the strokes of his razor, "I reckon Steve's fit to travel again now, and we start in about an hour."

Steve rolled over and sat up.

"Say, pard," he said, grinning, "all this long time me and these boys have been on the trail o' that Black Ruby, and now we're so near the end of it, by gravy, I'm not so sure but what this life don't suit me better than being weighed down with riches!"

He indicated the camp in the glen with a wave of his hand.

Gentleman Jack smiled mysteriously.

"This life has its good points," he admitted. "But most people soon begin to hanker after town life. But I like it, and after I've got you chums nicely settled at Stony Gorge I shall come back here."

"Why?" queried Syd. "Why not stay with us? Why live alone out in the bush?"

Gentleman Jack frowned hastily, then, as quickly, the frown changed to a smile.

"Chum," he said, "it isn't healthy in this country to ask questions about a man's past. Lots of people come out here to forget. But, if you must know, years ago, in the Old Country, I made a mistake which I thought was lots worse than it really was. I came out here and hid myself in the bush. Since then I have heard I can legally and morally return to the life of high Society in London if I choose—but I prefer this. Now, you pack your duds, chums, and we'll head for Stony Gorge as soon as I've watered the horses."

He strode away without another word. Bob and Syd stared after him. The man was a mystery. He harboured some secret sorrow, something that could never be altered while he lived, and he preferred the utter loneliness of the bush to the company of his fellow-man.

Steve rose to his feet and faced the boys.

"Chums," he said gravely, "never question Gentleman Jack again, or you and me part company. He's white right through, is that man, as you know right now, and that's all you want to know. Whatever other trouble he has to keep him to the bush is not your affair, and you can't help him, anyway. Maybe he has blue blood in his veins, and maybe he hasn't. His name is Gentleman Jack, and he lives alone in the bush. Leave it at that, chums."

Steve dived into the tent to pack the kit. Syd stared at Bob, and Bob was staring at Syd. But neither of them said another word.

About an hour later the four of them, mounted on four good horses, left the glen and headed eastward. Gentleman Jack had already told them that Stony Gorge was a matter of six hours' steady ride from the glen, and they wanted to get there and stake their claim before nightfall.

The belt of vegetation, in the midst of which was Gentleman Jack's glen, was fairly extensive, and it took them a good three hours' steady trek before the trees and thickets began to grow sparser and to give way once more to arid desert.

The going was pretty strenuous, especially when they had left the scrub behind and the sun poured down on them unmercifully. But even Steve made light of it. For one thing, it was the fag-end of the long trail,

and for another they were all fit and well. The long sojourn in Gentleman Jack's glen had thoroughly recuperated them, and the effects of their terrible ordeal in the Never-Never Land were wiped out, except in their vivid memories.

Two hours before sunset found them in a rocky gorge in the midst of blue-capped mountains. Gentleman Jack studied the sides of these mountains through his powerful binoculars for signs of human life, but found none.

"Seems safe enough," he said to Steve. "But someone will be bound to spot us in here, the news will spread, and then the fireworks will start, if I know anything. Better get a move on."

"Which means," grinned Steve, "staking our claim. Gather round, boys, and find out the mystery of this here Black Ruby. Lucky we brought them stakes along. That'll save time."

"Now, watch this, chum. Here is the biggest facet to this sparkler, and it's sure got five corners to it. Am I right? Well, then, you see them five rocks? If you was to draw lines from rock to rock, you'd have the same shape as this here facet, wouldn't you? But we don't want to draw lines that way. What we've got to do is to find the plumb centre of that area, which is pretty easy."

Already Gentleman Jack was finding the centre, and in the centre he drove a stake, to which was affixed a notice, telling the world that this was the northern boundary of the claim, filed and registered by S. Barrett, Esquire, and his partners.

Six facets in all formed the Black Ruby, and six stakes were driven into the hard ground, the position discovered in precisely the same manner as the first had been. And the ground thus enclosed, Steve explained, covered two-thirds of that valley, and was undoubtedly the richest ruby and precious stone-bearing ground in the world.

"And, mark this, chums," said Steve, "if any guy goes staking a claim anywhere round here outside our claim, they won't find much. And why? Because all the sparklers are sure in this plot we've staked out. Funny, but it's true. Now let's get the tent up on its legs. I've sure got to sleep to-night, and then off to Stonyville and register this claim. After which all the crooks in the wide world won't rob me of it."

Bob was puzzled.

"Why didn't you register it before you came to England?" he wanted to know.

"Because," replied Steve, "I had no money—not a bean. As it was, I had to work my passage across. And if I had staked the claim, the news would have leaked out before I had the money to work my mine, and I shouldn't half have been crowded in this here valley. I banked on the knowledge that nobody knew the secret o' this here Gorge, and that nobody knew about the Black Ruby, what Gentleman Jack gave me. You see, Jack's got no use for rubies and riches, living like he does in the bush. But somehow Sweetman got to know and was after it."

Syd grinned and turned away.

"Suppose we mustn't ask questions out here, but why did Gentleman Jack give you that Black Ruby?"

It was Gentleman Jack who answered.

"Sure, I'll tell you why I gave Steve the ruby," he said. "Steve was prospecting round here, and he came to Stony Gorge and found two things. It was a dry spell that year. He found out what the soil of this valley holds, and he found me pretty well half dead, like I found you out in the desert. He saved my life, and—oh, well, I knew already about this gorge, and I had that Black Ruby. I gave it to him, and we

What is the Flying Fish?



See next week's issue.



AT THEIR LAST GASP! Gentleman Jack and Syd came at last to the gully. And there, at the very bottom, they saw Steve stretched on his back, and Bob trying to force a few drops of water between his teeth. "Steve, old timer!" called out Gentleman Jack. "Here I am, pard!" (See page 25).

put those rocks like you saw them, to agree with the facets on the ruby, so when he came back with the money he'd know exactly how to stake his claim. And it's glad I am, chums, that your uncle, Sir Charles Crompton, had enough faith in Steve to sink his money in this enterprise, for, believe me, it's a paying proposition. But get this tent up, and we can talk afterwards—if there's anything left to talk about."

They got the tent up, and heaped great stones round it to form a barricade. This was Steve's idea. He reckoned it was better to be safe than sorry afterwards, and one could never tell what might happen.

But they turned in that night, and the gorge seemed as deserted as they had found it. Despite that fact, however, they took it in turns to mount guard inside the barricade.

The sun sank abruptly in the west. The moon came out of the east and journeyed leisurely up the sky, to sink later behind a bank of clouds far over on the horizon. An hour or so before dawn, with the moon hidden and the sun not yet appearing, the gorge was in inky blackness.

Bob, keen of ears and eyes, crouched behind the barricade, listening intently, trying to peer into the pitch darkness. Faintly to his ears came a scuffle amongst the rocks, and—he felt sure the night wasn't tricking him—a soft oath, as if a man had unwittingly hurt himself.

Bob didn't stop to argue. He might be shooting a rabbit, but better be fooled that way than find the camp assailed by crooks. Accordingly he raised his gun and fired into the darkness. The report aroused all the echoes, and brought his pals from the tent helter-skelter.

But it did more than that. From out of the blackness came stabs of fire. Guns cracked in a volley, and bullets sang in the air.

"By George!" rapped out Steve. "I'll bet that's

Sweetman and his lambs, and they've got reinforcements."

Gentleman Jack jerked his head towards the back of the tent

"You cut your way out there!" he snapped. "Take a horse and hit it for Stonyville."

"And leave you chums here?" retorted Steve. "Not much!"

"We can hold 'em at bay," said Gentleman Jack. "You've got to register that claim. Understand? It's your only chance—in the darkness—before the sun rises. You know the way?"

"Like Lucifer, I do!" Steve flashed out. "And I'll go, and I'll have a posse of bush Rangers behind me when I come back!"

"Exactly," agreed Gentleman Jack. "Only get away."

Under the orders of Gentleman Jack, Syd and Bob crouched behind the stone barricade and kept up a rapid fire into the blackness of the gorge. All they had to aim at were the pin-points of fire that appeared when the crooks let fly at the little camp. But whether they hit anyone or not was of minor importance. The main thing was to cover Steve's flight!

And Steve cut a hole in the back of the tent with his clasp-knife, and crawled out and reached the horses. He mounted one and galloped away in the blackness. The sound of his horse's hoofs caused the unseen crooks to yell defiance, but the rhythmical patter died away in the distance, the cries of the ruffians ceased—they thought they had merely stampeded the horses—and matters settled down to a steady bombardment.

(Now look out for another fine instalment of this adventure serial in next week's issue of the GEM. Order your copy early, chums!)

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