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TOM MERRY ARRIVES AT ST. JIM'S! See the Long Complete School Yarn INSIDE!

The GEM 2^D



**TOM MERRY'S
WELCOME TO ST. JIM'S!**

CHAPTER 1.

Herr Schneider Gets Leg Before Wicket.

"TOM MERRY again!"
Herr Schneider snapped his teeth over the words.

The German master at Clavering School had just come out of his study with a cane in his hand and a dark frown upon his face, and he stood for a moment listening.

There certainly was a terrific din proceeding from the corridor above, where the studies of the young gentlemen of the Middle School were situated. A peculiar bumping and crashing noise was followed by the stamping of feet and the shouting of voices, and loudest of all was the merry voice of Tom Merry.

"Bravo, old Manners! That's a wicket to you!"

"Now let's see what you can do, Tom."

"Right-ho! Chuck me the ball!"

"Here it is."

"Ass! I didn't say chuck it at me! Why couldn't you give me a catch? Never mind, here goes!"

Herr Schneider's hair stood on end with wrath. He took a firm grip on the cane and began to ascend the stairs three at a time. It was raining out of doors, but the chums of the Shell were not to be done out of their cricket practice, and they were practising bowling in the upper corridor.

It was Tom Merry's way to make the best of everything, and that was what he was doing now. But the German master, whose study was underneath, was not likely to be pleased by indoor cricket practice just over his head. But, as Tom said, it was impossible to please everybody.

"Beastly close quarters for cricket practice!" said Tom Merry, as he took hold of the ball. "Never mind, it saves the fog of fielding, anyway. Now I'm going to bowl a lob."

He took a little run.

"I say," exclaimed Manners, in alarm, "I think I heard—"

But the ball had already sped. Down the long corridor it went, just as Herr Schneider, crimson with wrath, came bouncing up the staircase and rushed into the corridor. The next moment he gave a fiendish yell. The cane went one way, his spectacles went another, and Herr Schneider danced on one leg, clasping the other affectionately with both hands.

"Ach! Mein leg! Mein leg! Mein leg!"

He howled with pain and rage as he hopped frantically.

The boys of the Shell gasped with alarm at the sight of the catastrophe, but the sight of the fat German clapping one leg and hopping on the other was too funny. A shout of laughter rang through the corridor.

"Ach! Mein leg! It is broken! Tom Merry, you did dat on purpose!"

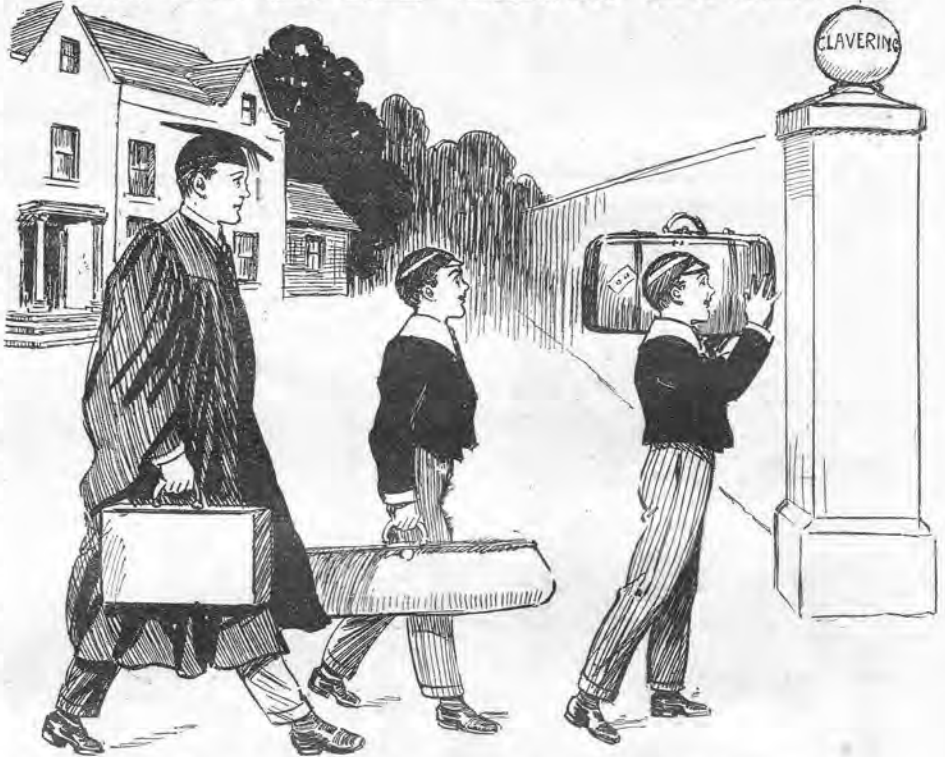
"Did the ball hit you, sir?" asked Tom Merry innocently.

And the boys yelled again at the absurd question. It was pretty plain that the ball had hit the German.

"Ach! Mein leg! It is broken!"

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GOOD-BYE CLAVERING



"Then you're out, sir!" said Tom demurely.

"Hein! Vat you say?"

"Then you're out, sir! Leg before wicket, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Manners.

Herr Schneider panted with rage. It was only Tom's fun, but to the Herr it seemed like insult added to injury.

"Merry, I—I—vat shall I say? You are te vorst poy in in te whole school. I do not feel equal to dealing mit you meinself, so you vill go to te Head. You vill say tat you have trown ein cricket ball at your master."

"But I didn't, sir! I didn't know you were going to hop on to the pitch like that."

"You vill do as I tell you, Merry!"

Herr Schneider hopped towards him, and Tom deemed it better to go.

It was hard lines, for although Mr. Railton would believe that the German's mishap was an accident, Tom was certain to "catch it" for bowling cricket balls in the corridor. But there was no help for it, and so Tom marched off to the study of Mr. Railton. He tapped at the Head's door loudly. Still no reply. The scamp of the Shell smiled to himself.

"The Head's not here," he murmured, "so I certainly can't report myself. I suppose I'd better look in, in case the old Dutchman asks me."

He opened the door of the study and carelessly glanced in. The next moment he gave a violent start. The room was not empty, as he had expected it would be. Mr. Railton was in his accustomed seat at the writing-table. But his attitude was such as Tom Merry had never seen before. Both his elbows rested upon the table, and his face was sunk in his hands. Before him on the table lay a letter. His attitude was so plainly expressive of utter despondency that Tom Merry could not help seeing that a heavy blow had fallen upon the popular Head of Clavering.

Mr. Railton was evidently so absorbed in his gloomy

TOM MERRY AT ST. JIM'S!
He arrived in his velveteens and he looked so very soft! They all thought him a funny animal! But it was Tom who had the fun—at their expense!

—TO ST. JIM'S—AND HOW HE MADE ST. JIM'S SIT UP!

HULLO ST. JIM'S!

By
**MARTIN
CLIFFORD.**



reflections that he had not heard Tom tapping at the door. Tom hesitated, wishing he had not entered, and at the same time wondering what could have happened to cause such a change to come over the usually strong and cheery Head.

Mr. Railton raised his head. He started at the sight of Tom Merry, but in a moment he seemed himself again.

"I knocked twice, sir," said Tom. "Herr Schneider sent me to you, sir."

Mr. Railton nodded.

"You may come in, Merry."

Tom walked into the study. Mr. Railton's handsome face was very pale, and he looked worn, but he was quite calm. He took up the letter from the table.

"Herr Schneider sent you to me, Merry? Why?"

"It was an accident, sir."

Mr. Railton smiled slightly. Tom's career at Clavering School had been marked by unusual happenings, and the Head never knew what to expect next.

"Well—well, what was it, Merry?"

"I was bowling a lob in the upper corridor, sir, and Herr Schneider got leg before wicket—I mean, he came bolting into the corridor without warning, and stopped the ball with his leg, sir," said Tom frankly. "I was awfully sorry!"

"I dare say you were. Do you assure me that it was an accident?"

"Certainly, sir, on my word!"

"Then I will excuse you, Merry. It is wrong of you to bowl in the corridor. You might hit anybody, and you must never do it again. I do not wish to punish you, however. I do not wish the last act of my authority here to be the infliction of punishment."

And Mr. Railton sighed. He had spoken the last words more to himself than to Tom Merry, and hardly seemed to be aware that they were uttered aloud. But Tom caught them, and in his amazement he stared at the headmaster.

"Mr. Railton! You are not going away, sir?"

The distress in the boy's face touched the Head. He liked Tom Merry, in spite of his scapegrace ways, and it moved him to see what he did in Tom's look.

"Yes, Merry. I did not mean to mention it, but I may as well tell you now. I intended in any case to make an announcement to the school to-night. But it is not only I

who am going, and probably we shall not part. Clavering School is to be closed!"

Tom looked blank. He had been only a few months at Clavering, but he already felt quite at home there.

"Clavering to be closed, sir!"

"Yes, Merry"—Mr. Railton nodded—"the school is to be closed. It is a heavy blow to me, as you may well imagine, but there are reasons. But, as I said, we may yet be together. I am making arrangements for the transfer of the boys to another school; the two schools will be, in fact, amalgamated. That school is the famous St. James'—better known to you as St. Jim's. The school Clavering played a short time ago on the cricket field."

"St. Jim's, sir? Are we going to St. Jim's?"

"Yes, Merry; it is a grand old school, older than Clavering, and more famous, and you will be in good hands there, all of you. Dr. Holmes, the Head of St. Jim's, is my oldest and best friend, and we are arranging this matter between us. I shall take a position at St. Jim's, and most of my boys, I think, will accompany me there. Their

parents, of course, have been communicated with, and their consent obtained. By the way, I think your governess, Miss Priscilla Fawcett, will be coming down to see you about it. She has written me, and seemed a little anxious about the change." The Head smiled slightly. "Now you may go, Merry. I depend upon you to keep the best of order for the last few days we shall be at Clavering."

"Yes, sir!" Tom hesitated. "Don't think it's an awful cheek of me," he broke out, "but—but can't anything be done, sir?"

"Nothing, Merry," said Mr. Railton quietly. "I need not conceal it; it will soon be known to everyone—that money has been advanced upon the land Clavering stands on, and that the person who advanced it claims his strict rights. A seam of coal has been discovered on the land, and it extends right under Clavering College, and the moneylender sees a prospect of immense profit, and so he is not likely to make any concessions. As a matter of fact, I have here a letter from him, warning me that he is coming down to-day, and that no concession need be expected."

"The—the brute! I beg your pardon, sir! But—but it's rotten!"

Tom Merry went slowly to the door. It was not so much himself that he cared about. He liked Clavering, but he was quite ready to go on to St. Jim's. He had met the fellows from that school on more than one occasion, and he knew that he could have a good time there. But he knew that this was a heavy blow for the Head. And he liked Mr. Railton.

He went out and closed the door, and went back to his own quarters looking less cheerful than usual. Monty Lowther and Manners were in the study, and they met their chum with glances of sympathy.

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"Got it on both hands, Tom?" asked Manners. "Hard cheese!"

"Looks more like a flogging," said Lowther. "Did he lay it on awfully hard, kid?"

"I've not been licked," said Tom.

"You don't mean to say he let you off?"

"Yes, he did."

"And you come back looking as solemn as an owl and cheating us out of our sympathy!" Manners exclaimed indignantly. "What do you mean by it?"

"I've had some news."

"Oh, is that it? Something awful going to happen? Is Miss Fawcett coming down to see you?"

Tom laughed.

"Yes, I think so; but that's not the worst. It's all up with Clavering!"

"Don't rot! What are you talking about?"

Tom explained the news he had received from the Head. Monty Lowther and Manners gave expressive whistles.

"Well, my Sunday topper!" exclaimed Manners. "This is a go! I'm sorry for the Head, but I dare say we shall be able to dig up some fun at St. Jim's."

"It's all right if we all go together," said Monty Lowther. "We must write to our people and give 'em their orders. You know there's two Houses at St. Jim's, and they're always on the warpath against one another, and I've heard they squeeze a lot of fun out of that. We must all three go into the same House."

"Rather!" said Tom Merry. "But that's looking ahead. There's a matter in hand that wants attending to."

"What's that?"

"The beast who is going to grab Clavering is coming down to-day to see the Head. It's against my principles to let him go without scalping him for this. Suppose we lay a little trap for the rotter?"

"Bravo! We are on that."

"Good!" said Tom Merry, his eyes sparkling. "He ought to get something for the bother he's giving poor old Railton. We are the fellows to deal with the matter, and I think we can rig up a surprise for him. Shove your coats on; it's still raining, and we shall have to wait for him at the gate. The Head looked as if he was expecting him soon."

"Right-ho!"

And in a couple of minutes the trio were out in the rain and on the watch.

CHAPTER 2.

A Little Mistake.

THE station hack from High Clavering rolled into the Close, and stopped before the steps. The rain was still falling heavily.

A gentleman, with somewhat severe features, looked out of the window, and three boys in the shadow of the porch caught a glimpse of a face and a silk hat.

Tom Merry nudged his companions.

"That's the horrid bouncer!"

"Come on, then!" said Manners. "Let's go and do the polite!"

"Right-ho, kids; come on!"

Tom Merry opened a huge and ancient umbrella, and went down the steps to the hack. Manners was with him, and he quickly opened the door for the visitor to Clavering to step out.

"Welcome to Clavering, sir!" said Tom demurely. "Will you come underneath the old umbrella? as the poet remarks. I think it was Browning."

The gentleman looked at him in a rather peculiar way.

"Thank you, my lad!" he said.

He stepped from the hack. Tom was rather surprised at the look of him. He had expected to see a younger man with vulture-like features, and he had to admit that this gentleman did not look much like a moneylender.

But evidently he was the man who had foreclosed upon Clavering, and wrought so complete a change in the prospects of the school. And Tom was on the warpath.

He exchanged a quick look with Manners and Monty Lowther. As the gentleman stepped towards the House Tom slipped, and dragged the umbrella down upon the visitor's head, knocking his silk hat over his eyes.

"Dear me! What ever—"

Before the victim could get any further, or replace his hat, Monty Lowther's foot somehow got entangled with his, and he slipped and sat down on the steps.

Tom Merry, quite by accident, of course, stumbled over him, and the gentleman rolled off the lowest step to the ground.

As the paving there was much in want of repair, a great puddle of rain had collected, and into this the gentleman, THE GEM LIBRARY—No. 1,224.

with a little assistance from the boys, rolled with a splash. He uttered an exclamation of horror as the cold, dirty water splashed over him.

Then he made a desperate effort to get out of the puddle, but at the same moment, unfortunately, Manners fell on top of him, and jammed him right down in the mud.

"Help!" gasped the unfortunate man. "Help! Help!"

Mr. Railton came running out.

The Head of Clavering was looking angry and annoyed.

"Boys! Merry, Manners, Lowther—"

"It's all right, sir!" said Tom Merry. "It's a little accident!"

"Merry, I—I—"

"It's only the moneylender, sir."

"The what?"

"That giddy Shylock, sir, who's coming down to collar the school," said Tom. "A ducking won't do him any harm, sir."

"Mr. Railton, help me! I—"

Mr. Railton ran to the side of the fallen man, and helped him to rise.

"Boys, you shall be soundly flogged for this! How dare you?"

"It's only the moneylender, sir!" remonstrated Tom.

"Moneylender!" cried Mr. Railton. "This is Dr. Holmes, the Head of St. James' College, and your future headmaster!"

"My only panama hat!"

"What do you mean by that absurd exclamation, Merry?"

"I mean that we're really sorry, sir," said Tom penitently. "We don't mean any harm, sir," he went on, addressing Dr. Holmes, who was being assisted up the steps by Mr. Railton. "We took you for Shylock, sir. I hope you'll forgive us!"

The coolness of asking a man he had just drenched with rain-water for forgiveness, tickled Manners and Lowther, and they could hardly help chuckling.

"You need not ask Dr. Holmes for forgiveness!" exclaimed Mr. Railton. "You will all three be severely punished! Come, my dear sir, and let me get you a change of clothes. You are in a shocking state! How can I possibly apologise for this unspeakable outrage?"

They entered the Hall. The three boys followed them in, looking very sheepish. Tom Merry had made "bloomers" before, but never such a terrific one as this.

Dr. Holmes squeezed the rain-water out of his eyes. He was truly in a shocking state, wet and muddy from head to foot, and his hat and clothes completely ruined.

Yet there was a twinkle in his kindly grey eyes.

"Don't trouble to apologise, Railton," he replied cordially.

"It is evidently a mistake. As to punishing these young rascals, we will talk that over. At present I need a change of attire more than anything else."

"Come up to my room, Dr. Holmes."

The Head of Clavering led his guest upstairs, and the heroes of the Shell were left alone. They looked at each other in a somewhat sickly way.

"Well, of all the howling asses!" said Manners. "I've come across some silly asses in my time, Merry, but you do really take the cake!"

"My Aunt Maria!" said Lowther. "You take the biscuit, Tom, and no mistake! You collar the lot! You buzz off with the giddy ghost, and that's my opinion!"

"What's the good of going for me?" demanded Tom wrathfully. "How was I to know that any beastly headmasters would come along, passing themselves off as moneylenders?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why couldn't he explain?"

"You didn't give him much chance to explain, did you?"

"Well, one of you ought to have guessed," said Tom.

"But don't talk about it; it's too sickening! Nice beginning, this, for our new start at St. Jim's, isn't it?"

"By Jove, it is!"

"We shall be called over the coals, and no mistake. I never saw Railton get his hair off so much before. Why couldn't he tell us Dr. Holmes was coming, and prevent the possibility of a mistake?"

"I suppose you didn't mention to him how you were going to greet the moneylender? Ha, ha!"

The chums returned to their study in a decidedly disconsolate humour. They had made the worst possible impression upon their future headmaster, and it was certainly a bad start for their career at St. Jim's.

As they expected, it was not long before they received a summons to Mr. Railton's presence. But they would have felt more at ease in their minds as they approached the study if they could have heard what the Head of St. Jim's was saying.

"Nonsense, my dear Railton! Boys will be boys!"

"But such an unparalleled outrage, doctor!"

"They mistook me for the moneylender. And between you and me, Railton, it would serve Mr. Isaacson right to have a ducking."

Mr. Railton laughed.

"You take it very kindly, doctor; but the young rascals certainly ought to be punished. Not that I wish to speak against them, because it is their attachment to me that is at the bottom of the affair."

"I thought so."

"Then you really wish me to pardon them?"

"Yes. I should be very sorry to commence my acquaintance with them by causing them a flogging; and besides, as I said, boys will be boys."

Tap!

"Come in!" called out Mr. Railton.

The three delinquents, looking very penitent, entered the study. Mr. Railton assumed a stern look.

"Merry, Lowther, Manners, you are aware that you have been guilty of a great outrage, and have treated Dr. Holmes in an unpardonable manner?"

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry, stealing a sly glance at Dr. Holmes' face, and drawing some encouragement from the twinkle in his kindly grey eyes. "We are awfully sorry, but we thought Dr. Holmes was the moneylender bounder."

"You mean that you would have treated Mr. Isaacson in this outrageous manner?"

"Yes, sir."

"Indeed! Then had the victim been Mr. Isaacson, I presume you would not have been sorry for your conduct? Am I to understand that, Merry?"

"Yes, sir."

Tom made that reply with perfect simplicity, and Dr. Holmes smiled. Mr. Railton gave a cough, and turned to his friend.

"Dr. Holmes, I leave you to deal with these boys."

"Thank you, Railton!" said Dr. Holmes. "My lads, you did very wrong, but as it seems to have been a mistake, I shall pardon you, and Mr. Railton, at my request, is willing to overlook your offence."

"You—you're going to let us off, sir, after we smothered you with mud?" exclaimed Tom.

"Yes, Merry."

"Thank you awfully, sir!" exclaimed Tom. "We—we're grateful, sir! It's good of you!"

"Very good! I hope we shall see each other again at St. James' College, and that we shall get on well," said Dr. Holmes.

And the chums of the Shell left the room in a gleeful mood.

"Of all the jolly old boys," said Manners, "he's the jolliest! St. Jim's will be a decent place, I expect. Good old doctor!"

"I like that lad, Merry, Railton," Dr. Holmes remarked, when the door had closed. "He has a fine, frank face."

"I like him, too, Dr. Holmes. By the way, I wished to speak to you about him. He will be coming to St. James', but he has a sort of old governess, or nurse—a Miss Fawcett—who is absurdly anxious and particular about his health-

and comfort. To do Merry justice, he hates being coddled; but Miss Fawcett refuses to understand that he is a growing boy, and not a pretty little infant. From her letter, I fancy it is her intention to visit St. Jim's in order to satisfy herself that the school is in every respect satisfactory. You will try to be patient with her?"

Dr. Holmes smiled.

"Certainly, Railton! I have had to deal with a good many peculiar characters among parents and guardians since I was a headmaster."

There was a sound of wheels in the Close, and a ring at the bell.

"That is Mr. Isaacson," said Mr. Railton, a shade crossing his face. "He is prompt to time for his appointment. Now for a painful interview."

And a few moments later a stout gentleman, with aquiline features and a fur-lined overcoat, was shown into the presence of the two headmasters.



Monty Lowther's foot became somehow entangled with the visitor's, and that gentleman slipped and rolled with a splash into a huge puddle, with Manners on top of him.

CHAPTER 3.

How Tom Merry Went to St. Jim's.

THE news was not long in spreading over Clavering. It was received with mingled feelings, partly with regret, partly with a relish for the novelty of the situation. The boys were curious to see how they would get on at St. Jim's, a school they had met more than once on the cricket and football fields.

Some of the Clavering fellows were going home; but it was likely that the greater part would accompany their master to St. Jim's when the grip of the moneylender closed finally upon Clavering, and the fine old buildings came down to make room for opening up the newly discovered coal seam.

Mr. Isaacson had had a narrow escape. After the experience with the visiting headmaster from St. Jim's, Tom Merry did not feel exactly inclined to "go for" any more strangers who arrived at the school. So Mr. Isaacson came, and went in peace.

Dr. Holmes departed that night, having made all arrangements with Mr. Railton. And before bed-time the boys were called together in the Hall, and the Head made a speech. It was a brief one, but to the point.

He explained the difficulties into which the school had fallen, touching very lightly upon that part of the subject,

and then passed on to explain the new prospects of such of the boys as were permitted by their parents to accompany him to his new abode. The speech was received in grave silence.

It was broken by Felgate, the captain of Clavering, who stepped forward to reply for the school.

"We're all sorry to hear this, sir," said the captain of Clavering; "but we're glad to be able to go with you, and I expect most of us will do so. I shall, for one, I know."

"And I!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"And all of us!" came the general shout.

"Thank you, Felgate! Thank you, my boys!" said Mr. Railton. "We have, I am safe to say, done our best, and played a straight game while we have been here, and I hope we shall do the same in a new sphere. St. Jim's will not need to be ashamed of us, and I hope we shall lose nothing in being merged in a greater and more famous school. In fact, I hope St. Jim's will gain by it. Now, good-night!"

"Good-night, sir!"

And the boys filed out. The first post in the morning brought Tom Merry a letter from his old governess and nurse—Miss Priscilla Fawcett. It announced that the good lady was coming down to see him that day, in order to consult with him over the news Mr. Railton had written to her.

"You're in for it, Tommy!" said Manners, when Tom Merry showed him the letter. "She's going to fill you to the chin with cod-liver oil, and see you change your socks before you start for St. Jim's. Mind you don't lose your chest-protector, or she'll start hunting for it. It mustn't be left behind."

"Oh, don't talk rot!" said Tom. "This is bad enough without your chipping. I'd wire to her not to come, but it's too late now."

That was true. Miss Fawcett was at Clavering an hour after her letter. The news of her coming was brought to Tom in the Shell class-room, and he was permitted by the master to go out and see his affectionate governess.

"Dearest Tommy," exclaimed Miss Priscilla, enfolding him in her embrace—"dearest Tommy, how have you got on all this long time?"

"Why, you saw me only a fortnight ago!" said Tom.

"It seems such a long time, my sweetest!"

"Oh, please don't! Somebody may hear you!"

"Very well, dear Tommy. You know why I have come down," said the old lady, holding him at arm's length, and regarding him affectionately. "It's about this change

Mr. Railton designs to make. It is a little unreasonable of him to decide to change the quarters of the school at such a short notice, before I have had time fully to inquire and inspect the new college. But I do not mean you to go there into danger—"

"Danger!" exclaimed Tom. "What on earth are you driving at, my dear nurse?"

"My sweetest boy, there may be draughts, or—or anything. The drains may be bad. They may put you into a draughty study!"

Tom Merry grinned. It seemed funny to him that Miss Fawcett's principal concern in the catastrophe that had overtaken Clavering was whether he might be put into a draughty study when he took up his new quarters.

"I shall have to go over the school, of course, and examine things," said Miss Fawcett. "I have received an invitation from Dr. Holmes to do so, in fact. He seems to have written it from here last evening."

"The old boy was here last night," said Tom. "We gave him a proper doing, too, in mistake for a giddy Shylock. It was a howling bloomer."

Miss Fawcett clasped her hands in horror.

"You—you are talking slang, dear Tommy."

"Slang, my dear nurse; that's all right. You'll soon pick it up if you see much of me. I know you don't always tumble now, but you'll soon get the hang of it."

Miss Fawcett gave it up.

"Tommy, my dear boy, I have Mr. Railton's permission to take you away with me to-day."

Tom did not look overjoyed at this information.

"What for—a holiday?"

"Yes, my dear child. And to-morrow you will come with me to see St. Jim's, and judge whether you like it, and whether you would like to live there."

"Oh, yes, I should! I want to go with Mr. Railton."

"But you must see it first, Tommy. I have heard things about the school."

"It's one of the finest in England," said Tom hotly.

"They licked Clavering at football once, and at cricket twice. And what more could you want to know? I've seen a lot of their chaps, and they are ripping! Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, is a regular ripper."

"What an expression, Tommy! But I have heard that there are two Houses at St. James'."

"So there are at lots of schools. Five or six sometimes."

"Yes; but these, the School House and the New House, are always on bad terms with one another, and sometimes they fight," said Miss Fawcett, looking horrified.



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Tom laughed.

"My dear nurse, if you think I've been all this time at Clavering without learning how to fight, you are a giddy old innocent!" he exclaimed. "You should have seen my logging match with Gore. It was an eye opener."

"Oh, Tommy!"

"Besides, there's always a certain amount of rivalry between two Houses at a school," said Tom, who had learned much of Public school life since leaving Laurel Villa at Huckleberry Heath. "It does them good. Keeps them up to the mark in sports, and so on. And it's jolly good fun at St. Jim's. I've heard about it from the chaps. Why, that's what I'm looking forward to!"

"But you would like to come home before going there, Tom?"

"Ye-es," said Tom, who, much as he had changed since leaving home, was very fond of his old nurse, and loth to wound her. "I'll come home for a day, if you like, nurse."

But he had an inward uneasiness. Big boy as he was, Miss Fawcett had always dressed him in pretty velvet suits when he was at home, and made a baby of him generally, with feminine obstinacy refusing to recognise the fact that he was no longer an infant.

Tom did not intend to have anything of that kind again, if he could help it, and so his promised visit to Laurel Villa was not wholly a joyful prospect. But Tom Merry was always cheerful, and he was feeling in high spirits when he stepped into the cab with Miss Fawcett.

He would see his chums again at St. Jim's, and the parting was not to be for long. And when the train landed him at Huckleberry Heath, and he re-entered Laurel Villa after his long absence, he was made so much of that he spent a pleasant day, and retired for the night quite satisfied with himself.

There was a peculiar expression in Miss Fawcett's eyes when she kissed him good-night, and if Tom had noticed it he might have guessed that a plot was brewing; but he did not, and when he went to bed he slept the sleep of the just, and did not wake till the sun was high up on the following morning, and glistening in at his window.

Miss Fawcett had told him that they were to start at ten o'clock for St. Jim's, and Tom, looking at his watch, found that it was nine, so he jumped out of bed.

After his bath he looked for his clothes; then he gave a whistle of dismay. There, placed ready for him, was a beautiful suit of velvet, with a handsome bow and a wide collar, the whole suitable for a boy of eight, though large enough for Tom, having evidently been made specially for him.

Of his own clothes there was no trace; but, lying on the table was a little note in Miss Fawcett's handwriting. Tom read it, and gave a groan of disgust.

"Dear Tommy, I want you to wear your own things just once more. I do so want you to look my own dear little Tommy again. You have changed so much since you left Laurel Villa, that I fear you do not love your old nurse as you used to."

"Dear Tommy, I know you will not refuse. I do so want to see you look as you used to look. Be a good, dear boy, and do so for my sake."

"I have given your other clothes to a poor boy, so there are no others but these for you to wear. I know you will not mind!—Your affectionate nurse, PRISCILLA FAWCETT."

"Oh, my word!" said Tom, staring at the letter. "We've got to start for St. Jim's at ten, and these are the only clothes in the house for me. I won't wear them. I'll go in my giddy pyjamas rather!"

There was a tap at the door.

"Are you dressed, my dearest Tommy?"

"No!" shouted Tom. "Where are my togs?"

"Tommy! Your what?"

"My duds—my clothes?"

"I have given them away to a poor boy. I am sure you will not grudge them, Tommy."

"Not a bit of it; but I can't wear these things!"

"You will look so beautiful and sweet."

"I don't want to look beautiful and sweet!" howled the unfortunate Tommy. "If you don't get me an Eton suit, or at least something decent, I won't go, so there!"

"Dr. Holmes expects us, Tommy."

"I can't wear these things! I can't! I shan't! Blow!"

"Tommy, just to please me. Dear Tommy!" Miss Priscilla's voice was shaky, and seemed to indicate that she was on the verge of tears. "Dear To-o-ommy!"

Tom Merry was alarmed.

"All right, nurse; don't turn on the waterworks!" he cried hastily. "I'll wear the beastly things! Don't—please don't!"

"That is noble of you, Tommy!" came Miss Priscilla's

voice through the door. "Now, make haste and dress, my sweetest child. Your breakfast is ready."

Tom bundled into the clothes. They were really very pretty, and he looked beautiful enough when he had finished, as Miss Priscilla said, but he looked far from happy as he surveyed himself in the cheval glass.

He descended the stairs. In the breakfast-room Miss Priscilla was waiting for him, and she uttered an exclamation of delight at his appearance.

"My sweetest Tommy! Now you are my own dear Tommy again!"

"Yes," grumbled Tom, "and I wish I was anybody else. No, I don't mean that. I'm all right. I'll stick it out somehow. If the fellows at St. Jim's grin at me, I'll punch their giddy coconuts. Let's have something to eat!"

In spite of the worry of those clothes, Tom made a good breakfast, and for Miss Priscilla's sake he assumed a cheerful air as they drove to the station. Once more, as of old, people looked at him as he passed, and smiled; but Tom was no longer the spooney he had been of old, and he felt his position acutely. The train journey down to Rylcombe was a martyrdom to him.

He was relieved when they arrived there, though he knew that the worst part of his ordeal was to come. When his box arrived from Clavering he would have a change of clothing, but before then he would have to run the gauntlet of hundreds of curious eyes.

The very man who drove the ancient station cab grinned as he touched his cap. Miss Priscilla did not observe it, but Tom did.

But he had made up his mind to "stick it out," and he went through it all like a Spartan. He looked curiously at his surroundings as the old cab rolled slowly down the Rylcombe road towards the school.

There was the wood on his left, with the path leading to the ruined castle, where many a strange scene had been enacted in the history of St. Jim's. There, ahead of him, rose the school tower above the trees, and soon afterwards there was the grey old gateway and the big bronze gates.

Tom Merry had visited St. Jim's once before with a cricket team from Clavering, so the place was not quite strange to him. But now that it was to be his home he looked upon it with new interest. It was a far more expansive place than Clavering, covering something like four times as much ground, and dating centuries further back into the remote past.

As the vehicle stopped in the old quadrangle, four boys came down the steps of the School House, which occupied one side of the quad facing the New House, a more modern erection on the other side. The four were evidently juniors. One of them nodded towards the hack.

"Hallo, a new kid!"

Tom Merry stepped from the vehicle. He knew what an effect his appearance would have upon the juniors, but he was hardly prepared for what followed. The boys stared at him for a minute as if petrified, and then fell into each others' arms and rocked to and fro on the steps of the School House.

CHAPTER 4.

Some Shocks for the Saints!

JACK BLAKE, of St. Jim's, fell into the arms of Herries, while Digby collapsed into the embrace of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

The chums of Study No. 6, in the School House, seemed completely overcome.

"What is it?" murmured Blake, in tones of exaggerated faintness. "What can it be? I wonder if it has a name?"

"It's something new," said Digby. "I've never seen anything like it before off a Christmas-tree. Fancy meeting that!"

"It is weally too extwaordinary," said D'Arcy. He pushed Dig into a sitting position on the step, and solemnly adjusted his eyeglass and through it took a survey of the wrathful Tom Merry. "It is alive—I can see its featuahs move! What a stwange object!"

"Look here!" exclaimed Tom Merry, looking warlike. "If you—"

Blake covered his face with his hands.

"Don't!" he gasped. "Don't—oh don't!"

"Don't what?"

"Don't ask me to look! I can't, really. I'm not strong, and I'm afraid it might be too much for me!"

"Tommy! Dear Tommy!"

It was Miss Priscilla's voice from inside the hack. And Tom, with whom politeness outweighed everything else turned to assist the lady from the vehicle.

"Take no notice of those rude boys," said Miss Priscilla. "Give me your arm, dearest Tommy."

Dearest Tommy turned scarlet, but he obeyed. Blake gasped with merriment; he hadn't seen anything as funny as this for a long time.

"Oh, my only hat!" he giggled. "Dearest D'Arcy, give me your arm. Don't take any notice of these common, rude bouncers. You vulgar people, get off the earth!"

And Blake, taking the arm of D'Arcy, followed Miss Priscilla and Tom Merry to the doorway of the Head's house. He walked in a graceful way, leaning upon the arm of the swell of the School House, and the sight was irresistible. Herries and Digby howled with laughter, and Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, looking out of his study window to see what was the matter, had to laugh, too.

"Oh, my hat!" he murmured. "Blake! Blake!"

The chief of the School House juniors stopped.

"Did you call me, Kildare?"

"Stop that immediately!"

"Oh, I say, Kildare!" remonstrated Blake. "Mustn't D'Arcy and I take a little constitutional for our health in the quadrangle after morning school?"

"Weally, we wequire it for our livah," said Arthur Augustus.

But the door opening to admit Miss Priscilla and Tom Merry sent Blake and D'Arcy chuckling off. They rejoined Herries and Dig.

"Well," said Blake, wiping the tears from his eyes.

"Well, my pippins, we're not likely to go in want of a good cackle if that funny merchant is going to stop at St. Jim's!"

"I suppose it's a new kid," said Herries. "But if they put it in the School House I shall kill it. It's too funny to live."

Blake looked alarmed.

"Oh, they wouldn't dare!" he declared. "The New House is the proper place for it. It was a bit of a wrench for us to stand D'Arcy when he came—"

"Oh, weally, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Then they gave us that howler, Marmaduke Smythe, but we shoved him off to Figgins & Co.," went on Blake. "Figgins can have this merchant; we won't! If they stick it in here there'll be trouble. But, my word, what a giddy velvet suit. Ha, ha, ha!"

Meanwhile, Miss Fawcett was shown into the presence of the Head of St. Jim's. Mr. Railton had somewhat prepared Dr. Holmes for the visit, but the doctor had certainly never expected anything like this. He adjusted his gold-rimmed pince-nez and stared at Tom.

"Dear me! It is Merry."

"It is my dear boy," announced Miss Priscilla, with a glance of fond pride at Tom. "I have brought him with me, Dr. Holmes. You will be very kind to him?"

Tom Merry gave a wriggle.

"Oh, very kind!" said Dr. Holmes. "But what is the meaning of this peculiar attire? I—I—" He paused, reflecting that it would be easier to deal with this matter after Miss Fawcett had gone. "Well, let it pass. Now, what is it you wish, my dear madam?"

"As I informed you, I believe, Dr. Holmes, I wish to make an inspection of the school in order to fulfil my duties towards this dear boy," said Miss Priscilla. "Of course, I fully accept your assurance, but at the same time—"

"Exactly," said Dr. Holmes, touching the bell. "As Merry will go into the School House I will ask Mr. Kidd, the Housemaster, to show you over the building, Miss Fawcett. I am, unfortunately, very much occupied just now."

He turned to the maid who answered the ring.

"Kindly request Mr. Kidd to come to me."

In a few minutes the master of the School House made his appearance. He gave Tom Merry a very curious look as he bowed to Miss Fawcett. The doctor explained in a few words.

Mr. Kidd expressed himself as delighted to be of any service to Miss Fawcett, and he politely conducted her to the School House. The lady insisted upon taking Tom by the hand and making him accompany her so that he, too, should be satisfied by an inspection of his new home. It was a martyrdom to Tom. Fellows looked out from their study doors, or collected on the stairs, and in the corridors, to look at him.

Morning school was over and all the School House seemed to be at liberty to devote its attention to the new boy. Mr. Kidd kept a face as solemn as a judge as he escorted Miss Fawcett over the building, and whenever he saw a grinning face he frowned at it. But chuckles and giggles followed the party wherever they moved. When they passed along the upper corridor the chums of Study No. 6 were standing at their door, looking out with much interest.

"There it is again," said Blake. "As large as life!"

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And as Tom Merry passed they all four bowed low, with their hands upon their hearts, in a most respectful and graceful manner.

"Dear me!" said Miss Priscilla. "What nice, polite boys!"

But Tom was boiling inwardly. A little later, when Miss Fawcett went to inspect the dormitory, Tom contrived to slip away, and he returned to Study No. 6. He wanted to have a little talk to the chums there—a little talk which would probably have led to a little fight had Blake and his comrades been still there. But when Tom Merry opened the door the room was empty. The juniors were no longer in their quarters. Tom Merry glanced round the study, and a gleam of mischief darted into his eyes. He stepped quickly inside.

On the table stood a hatbox, which evidently contained a new silk topper, destined for one of the dwellers in Study No. 6. Near it were the books, papers, pens and ink belonging to the juniors, left where they had used them last.

Tom Merry's brain worked rapidly, and he owed the chums a little account which he now saw an opportunity of paying. Quickly opening the hatbox, he took hold of the hat, a gorgeous new topper, belonging to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of St. Jim's.

"My word!" murmured Tom Merry. "This will be a surprise for whoever wears this giddy hat! It will be one up to me."

There was an inkpot of red ink on the inkstand. Tom picked it up and emptied about half the contents inside the leather lining of the hat. Then he returned it to the box.

There was a surprise in store for whoever wore that hat. Tom quitted the study and closed the door.

"My dearest Tommy, where ever have you been?" exclaimed Miss Fawcett, a little later. "I have looked over the house, Tommy, and I think it is quite satisfactory. Mr. Kidd has shown me the study you are to have. You will share it with two companions."

"Manners and Lowther, or there will be a row," said Tom to himself. And he went to inspect the study.

It was a new room belonging to some additions that had lately been built to the School House. A pleasant room, though not over large, and Tom liked it. His nurse had already made a long list of articles that were to be sent down from London to furnish it. Tom having expressed himself satisfied with his new quarters, the tour of inspection ended for a time. Miss Priscilla lunched with the Head, while Tom took his dinner in the dining-hall of the School House with the rest of the house.

Glances were continually cast in his direction, and the room, in spite of Mr. Kidd's frowns, was in a continual giggle. But Blake was worried. He knew now that Tom Merry was to come into the School House, and he knew that Figgins & Co. would make endless capital out of it. What was to be done? The juniors consulted about it after dinner.

"Kill it!" said Percy Mellish. "That's the only thing to be done. By Jupiter, I have an idea!"

"What's the idea?" said Blake, with a growl. "Your ideas are not usually worth much, unless you bone 'em from somebody else."

"If you can't be civil—"

"Oh, rats! What's the wheeze?"

"You can see how particular the old lady is about his health," said Percy, grinning. "She coddles him like a baby."

"Yes, poor beast!"

"Suppose we make her believe there was something awfully wrong with the School House—she would make them shift him into the New House at once."

Blake jumped at the idea.

"My word, that's all right! Lemme see; how can it be arranged? Kids, we've got to put our heads together over this."

"The drains," suggested Digby; "could we get anything wrong with them?"

"A smell in his study," said Herries. "Something strong and nifty."

"That's the idea! And I know how we can make his room whiffy."

Blake started off to Study No. 6 and returned with a tin of calcium carbide in his hand. He used it for his cycle lamp, and he knew its odorous qualities.

"Come along, you chaps," he grinned, "this is a great wheeze!"

The chums hurried off to the new study allotted to Tom Merry. It was very barely furnished so far, and the old square of carpet on the floor was not tacked down. Blake

jerked it up and spread a sprinkling of calcium carbide on the floor. Then the carpet was laid over it.

In every corner of the room, where it was not likely to be observed, Blake sprinkled the evil-smelling compound, and when he had finished, the room certainly had a smell that would have alarmed the least nervous of old ladies.

Satisfied with their work, the juniors hurried away. It was half-holiday that day at St. Jim's, and the weather was fine. Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, intended to take the Lower Form boys for a walk, and the chums had to get ready.

Miss Fawcett was looking for Tom Merry, to say goodbye to him, and at sight of the old lady Blake and his companions exchanged a series of winks.

"It's hard lines on the new chap, and no mistake!" said Blake, in tones loud enough for Miss Priscilla to hear.

"Yes; I am sorry for Merry," replied Digby, looking perfectly solemn. "I'm very sorry for him. But it can't be helped."

"Of course not," exclaimed Herries. "He must take his



Figgins wiped the marmalade down the back of the new suit Tom was wearing. "Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Figgins & Co. And Tom Merry laughed too!

chance. The old part of the School House is full up to the roof, so it is only in the new wing that there's room for new boys. And if the drains there are in a shocking condition, that can't be helped."

Miss Fawcett had stopped quite still. The bait had taken. Blake and his comrades grinned at each other, with their backs to the old lady, apparently unconscious of her presence.

"Besides," said Blake, "the smell isn't always bad. You might go into Merry's study, for instance, sometimes, and never notice anything. Then, at other times, the niff would be simply shrieking. She's off!" he whispered a minute later.

And the chums, choking with suppressed laughter, watched Miss Priscilla making a bee-line for the stairs.

Without losing a moment Miss Fawcett hurried to the study. The snatch of the junior's conversation, which she had overheard, seemed to her like an interposition of Providence, and she was greatly excited. She found the room again, and opened the door, and the smell from within made her gasp and stagger backwards.

"Oh, my dearest Tommy! He would have died. My dearest Tommy!"

A minute later the Head of St. Jim's was startled by the news that Miss Fawcett insisted upon seeing him immediately. With a sigh of resignation, the Head submitted.

"My dear madam, I——"

"Dr. Holmes, I am not satisfied with the conditions of the School House. My dearest boy must be put into the other House. I insist!"

"My dear Miss Fawcett——"

"The room that has been assigned to him has a dreadful smell."

"Impossible!"

"I have just been there, Dr. Holmes. It was positively terrible!"

"My dear madam——"

"Can I see the New House, Dr. Holmes, or must I take my dearest boy away with me?"

"Certainly, madam, you can see the New House," said the doctor patiently. And he rang the bell, and sent a message to Mr. Ratcliff.

The master of the New House soon made his appearance. He was a thin, sour man, very unlike Mr. Kidd; but Miss Fawcett, with that dreadful smell in Tom's study in her mind—and her nose—did not care for anything else.

Dr. Holmes explained, and Mr. Ratcliff took charge of Miss Fawcett, and politely conducted her upon a fresh tour of inspection, this time in the New House.

Blake was on the watch, and he saw them go. He fell round Digby's neck in ecstasy.

"Did you see that?" he gasped. "The dear old soul's going to the New House. We're not going to have that horrid boulder after all! Hurrah!"

CHAPTER 5.

Figgins & Co. Are Annoyed.

"ARE you ready, boys?"

Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth Form, peered through his big spectacles at the boys as they formed up in the quadrangle.

The Fourth Form and the Third were there, with the Shell, ready to be taken for a nice walk that sunny afternoon, all arrayed in their nice silk-hats, and their nicest smiles, to meet the master's eye, and all inwardly fuming at being compelled to waste an hour, which might have been devoted to cricket, in ambling round the country lanes behind a short-sighted old gentleman, who thought he was giving them a treat.

These afternoon walks were a horror to all the juniors of St. Jim's, excepting possibly Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who was glad of the chance of sporting a silk-hat, the Lower Form boys not being allowed to wear shiny toppers at St. Jim's, except upon State occasions.

Indeed, there had sometimes been "ructions" at the old school because the Shell considered they had a right to wear tall-hats on ordinary occasions as much as the Lower Fifth had. But of that, more anon.

Arthur Augustus had had a nice new hat sent from home that day. He spent a good deal on hats and waist-coats, and this new topper was a marvel, fresh from Bond Street.

Mr. Lathom glanced along the line of boys, and noted the absence of three juniors belonging to the New House. He noted something else—Tom Merry, still in that charming velvet suit. Miss Fawcett had not yet departed from St. Jim's, and until she went Tom did not venture to attempt to get rid of those horrid clothes.

"Boy, who are you? What do you mean by this absurd masquerade?"

Mr. Lathom stared at Tom Merry through his spectacles. Tom coloured to the roots of his hair.

"If you please, sir, I am Tom Merry, and—"

"Oh! Ah, yes! Dr. Holmes mentioned you to me. Very good! Where are Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn?"

"I dare say they're doing some rejoicing," murmured Blake. "Merry is going into their House, and I wish them joy of him!"

"Figgins! Kerr! Wynn!"

The next moment Mr. Lathom knew where Figgins & Co. were. The three juniors came with a rush out of the porch of the New House, and hurled themselves upon Jack Blake.

Figgins, long and lanky; Wynn, short and stout; Kerr, canny and sandy—three of the best, famous at the old school as Figgins & Co., and leaders of the New House juniors in their alarms and excursions against the School House!

And at the present moment Figgins & Co. seemed to be on the warpath with a vengeance. Without a word of explanation they hurled themselves upon Jack Blake, and he went down in the dusty quad on his back, with the three on top of him.

Mr. Lathom stared at the strange spectacle in amazement. Figgins seemed not to observe the presence of a master. He ground Blake's nose in the dust, in wild excitement.

"Jump on him!" he gasped. "Slay him! Massacre him! Scalp him!"

Blake—breathless, struggling frantically—squirmed under the weight of the New House juniors.

"I'll teach you to palm off your freaks on us!" bellowed Figgins. "I'll teach you to get howling lunatics shoved into our House!"

"Slay him!" panted Kerr. "We're in for it now! We've got the freak planted on us, but we'll make the beast wriggle!"

"Let me get at him!" ejaculated Fatty Wynn wildly. "I want to sit on his head. I— Oh!"

Mr. Lathom's finger and thumb, closing on Fatty Wynn's ear, interrupted him.

The chums of Study No. 6 had been taken by surprise at the sudden attack, but they quickly rushed to the rescue.

Herries, Dig, and D'Arcy rushed to Blake's aid, and Figgins and Kerr were dragged off the suffering chief of the School House.

Figgins gave D'Arcy a thump on the nose that laid him on his back; but then he went down under a slog from Herries, who promptly sat upon him.

"What does this mean?" cried Mr. Lathom. "If you do not desist immediately I will send you into the headmaster's study. Explain yourself, Figgins."

"Oh, I beg your pardon, sir!" exclaimed Figgins, as Herries allowed him to rise. "I didn't see you, sir."

"I should imagine not, Figgins," said Mr. Lathom dryly. "And now tell me, please, the meaning of this unwarrantable attack upon Blake. Blake, I hope you are not much hurt?"

Blake was looking very dusty and crumpled, but he grinned cheerfully.

"No, sir; I'm all right! It's only a little joke of Figgins & Co., and I don't mind. It's only fun, sir, really. Don't mind old Figgins!"

"Indeed! I cannot approve of such fun," Figgins, Wynn, Kerr, you will each take fifty lines! Fall in, boys!"

And, something like order being restored, the boys formed up and marched off. But there came another interruption. Tom Merry was keeping a wary eye open for

Miss Fawcett, hoping to escape a public good-bye, but the dear old lady was not to be baffled. She came out into the quad and hugged Tom.

"I am leaving the school now, Tommy, and I shall not see you when you return," she said. "So good-bye, my sweetest boy!"

"Good-bye, nurse!" said Tom Merry hastily. "Good-bye!"

But Miss Priscilla was not finished yet.

"I have inspected the New House, Tommy, and I am quite satisfied with it. For the present, until further arrangements are made, you will share a study with four boys, named Figgins or Wiggins—no, I think it is Higgins—and I forget the others; but I was assured by a very polite young gentleman named Monteith that they are nice boys."

Figgins & Co. glared at one another. Blake chuckled. He had guessed the cause of the sudden outburst of wrath on the part of Figgins & Co., but he had not known that it was so bad as that.

The new boy was not only going into the New House, but into the very study of Figgins & Co., and they owed that treat to Monteith, the head prefect of the New House.

"Mr. Ratcliff will introduce you to this Stiggins, I think the name is," went on Miss Fawcett. "Stiggins, or Wiggins, is a nice boy, and I am sure he will be kind to you, and pleased to have you in his study. The drains of the New House seem to be in perfect order, so far as I can ascertain, and there is no dreadful smell like in the room first assigned to you in the School House."

"Yes, yes. Good-bye, nurse!"

"You will not forget what I told you about always wearing flannel on your chest, and the hot-water bottle—"

"Yes, yes!"

"If you take the cod-liver oil I have left for you every evening—a tablespoonful—"

"Yes. Good-bye—"

"Pardon me, madam, but you are delaying us," said Mr. Lathom politely.

Perhaps he took pity on Tom, who was scarlet, while the rest of the column were giggling like lunatics.

"I beg your pardon, sir. Good-bye, dear Tommy!"

And, throwing her arms round Tom's neck, Miss Priscilla kissed him on the forehead, and at last he escaped.

Most of the juniors seemed to be in hysterics as they marched for the gates. Even Mr. Lathom was smiling, though he tried to keep a serious face.

Tom breathed more freely on the open road, safe from the terrible attentions of his fond nurse.

"Oh, chase me!" murmured Blake. "Kiss me on my baby brow and call me Angelina!"

Tom glared at him.

"Do you want a thick ear, Blake?"

"Silence, there!" said Mr. Lathom. "Step out! Dear me, D'Arcy, what is the matter with you?"

"Nothing, sir," said Arthur Augustus, looking surprised.

"That fearful blow Figgins gave you has caused an effusion of blood. Do you feel no pain? Look at your face!"

It was hardly possible for D'Arcy to look at his face, but he put up his hand and felt it, and the effect was startling.

The red ink Tom Merry had so liberally placed under the band inside his hat was oozing through, and it had begun to trickle down his forehead. D'Arcy had felt the dampness and imagined it to be perspiration, as the day was warm. As he felt over his face he smothered the stream of red ink over his features.

Mr. Lathom was too short-sighted to see what the juniors saw at once—that it was red ink oozing out under the brim of D'Arcy's hat. He fixed a horrified gaze upon the boy.

"D'Arcy, this is terrible! Come here. Let me examine your injury at once!"

"But I'm not injured, sir!" exclaimed D'Arcy.

"Your head is bleeding terribly!"

D'Arcy looked at his hand, which was crimson. He took off his hat and looked into it and uttered an exclamation of horror.

"Some howdiddly beast has been stickin' wed ink in my hat!"

"Ink?" exclaimed Mr. Lathom, greatly relieved, but very angry. "Who could have played such a trick? This must be inquired into at once!"

"My new hat!" bellowed D'Arcy. "It cost me fifty bob!"

"His nice new hat!" said Figgins! "Ha, ha, ha!"

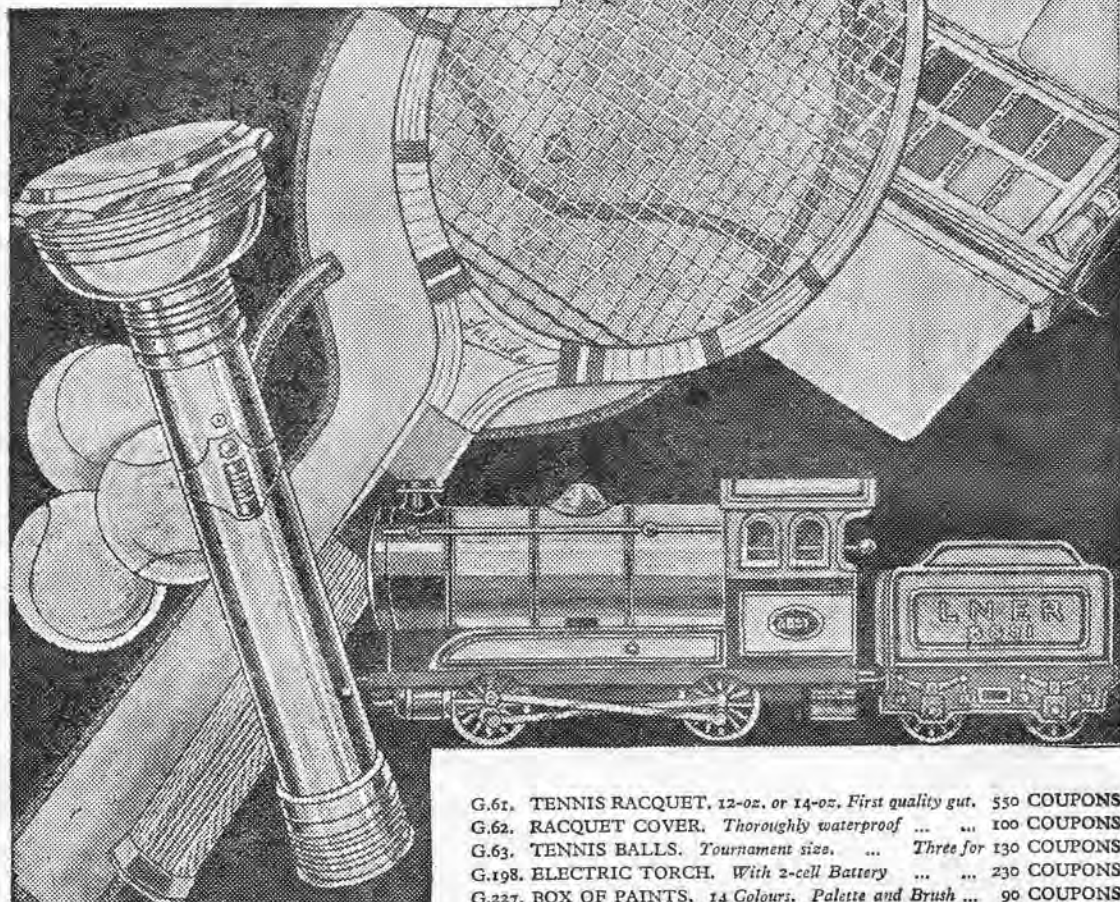
"Figgins, did you play this absurd trick upon D'Arcy?"

"I, sir? Oh, no, sir! I respect D'Arcy too much to play a trick upon him!"

"Where did you leave your hat, D'Arcy?"

(Continued on page 12.)

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"Good-bye, Clavering—Hullo, St. Jim's!"

(Continued from page 10.)

"It came down from London to-day!" groaned Arthur Augustus. "It was left in the box on my study table. Some beastly boundah—"

"It must have been one of your studymates," said the master of the Fourth sternly. "Now, Blake, Herries, and Digby, you will each of you take fifty—"

"Pardon me, sir," said Tom Merry, with his best bow. "May I speak, sir?"

"Certainly, if you have anything to say connected with this matter."

"I happen to know who played that trick, sir, and I think I ought to tell you."

A hiss came from every boy within hearing.

"Sneak! Sneak!"

"Silence!" exclaimed Mr. Latham, though he looked far from pleased. "Speak, Merry."

"Shall I tell you his name, sir?"

"You had better do so."

"I don't want to get him punished, sir!"

"It would have been better if you had not spoken. Tale-telling is not approved of in this school, Merry. I shall not punish the perpetrator of this practical joke, because I should not consider myself justified in doing so under the circumstances. Now you may tell me his name."

"Very well, sir. I did it!"

There was a moment's silence; then the juniors howled with laughter. Mr. Latham stared at Tom Merry for a moment, and then caught him by the ear.

"Hold on, sir!" cried Tom. "You said you wouldn't punish me!"

"I said I—you—well, well!" The master of the Fourth released Tom's ear. "I will keep my word, Merry, though you have certainly tripped me. D'Arcy, you may return to St. James' and get that terrible mess cleaned off. And you had better go, too, Merry. Boys, march on!"

And the afternoon's walk proceeded without Tom Merry or the swell of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 6.

A Little Joke on Figgy.

FIGGINS & CO. were looking hostile. Blake had succeeded in planting the peculiar-looking new boy upon them; for Figgins & Co. knew well that Blake was at the bottom of it. It was some trick proceeding from Study No. 6 that had disgusted Miss Fawcett with the School House and sent Tom Merry across the way to his new quarters.

But to have the new boy planted upon them in their very own study was the unkindest cut of all.

The study was not a large one, but it was cosy. It had done very comfortably for Figgins and the original Co. Then the addition of a boy named Marmaduke Smythe had made the quarters somewhat crowded. Now to have a fresh arrival, and that arrival a freak, thrust upon them was simply too bad.

"There's only one consolation," said Figgins, sitting on

the study table that evening. "As he belongs to the next Form above ours, they can't leave him long in this study, I should imagine. It's only a question of how long they take to shift him out, though I suppose we shall have to put up with him in the House."

"Rotten!" said Kerr and Wynn.

"But we don't want that freak in this study!" said Marmaduke, changing the subject.

"No; and the sooner we make him clear out the better. Hallo, here he is!"

Tom Merry walked in. His face was as merry and good-tempered as ever, and but for his ridiculous clothes he would not have made an unfavourable impression upon the chums.

"Hallo, freak!" said Kerr. "Why don't you get back into the monkey-house?"

"Please, I've come!" said Tom Merry.

It took Kerr some seconds to see the point of that remark, and when he did he turned red with wrath.

"Look here, you howling spooney—"

"Oh, dry up!" said Tom. "You don't want me in this study."

"No, we don't," said Figgins & Co. in chorus.

"Then the feeling is reciprocated, for I don't want to come here. I don't want to be in your measly old House at all!"

The four occupants of the study looked at each other in amazement. This was decidedly an unexpected line for the new boy to take.

"I made up my mind to go into the School House," continued Tom Merry calmly. "I'm going to get back there somehow. I wouldn't be found dead in this House!"

Figgins & Co. gasped.

"You'll be found dead in it if you're not more civil!" said Figgins darkly.

"Oh, rats to you!"

Figgins jumped off the table.

"Did you say 'rats' to me?"

"No, I said 'rats' to you."

Figgins waited for no more. He went for Tom Merry like a mad bull, and the two gripped each other and went staggering round the study in deadly strife. It was not in accordance with the laws of fair play for the Co. to interfere, so they contented themselves with dodging the combatants, who tramped and reeled right and left, first one way and then another.

The study table went flying, and the bookcase was knocked over on top of it. Figgins kicked the coalbox out of his way, and Tom Merry trampled on the fender. Still, neither having gained any advantage, they struggled.

"Here, I say, chuck it; the study will get wrecked!" exclaimed Kerr. "Pull 'em apart, kids!"

Kerr laid hold of Figgins, and Wynn and Marmaduke gripped Tom Merry. They came apart with a tug, and stood glaring and panting. Figgins was the first to recover himself.

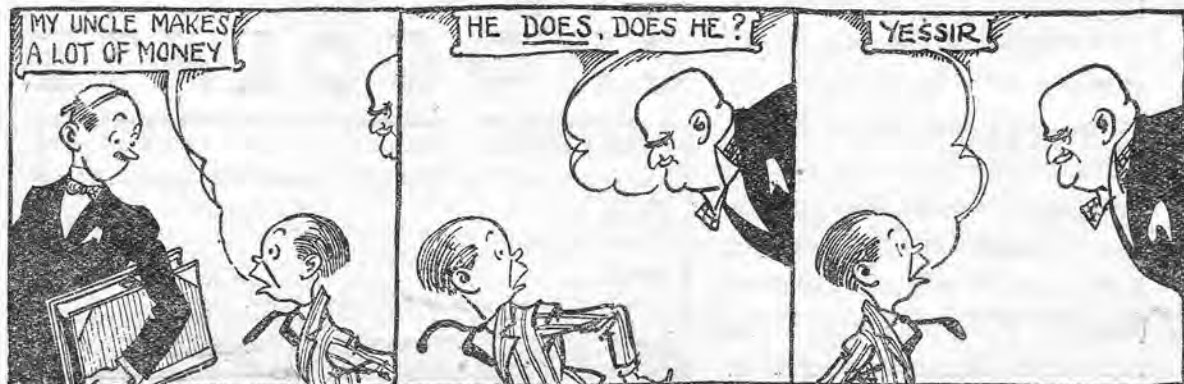
"Well, my hat!" he ejaculated. "There's more in you than I thought, Spooney. You know how to wrestle; and you've got some muscle, too."

Tom Merry laughed.

"It's not my fault that I'm in these clothes," he said. "You shouldn't judge by appearances. As soon as my box comes from Clavering I'm going to change into Etons, and make a bonfire of these silly things."

"Well, in that case, I'll let you alone," said Figgins

Potts, the Office Boy.



magnanimously. "Look here, you belong to the Shell, don't you?"

"Yes, I'm not a kid."

"If you call the Fourth kids," said Figgins, looking warlike again, "there'll be ructions, Mr. Awfully Clever Merry!"

"Oh, that's all right! I'll call you goats, if you like, and perhaps that would be nearer the mark," said Tom Merry. "Now, take it calmly, because I shan't be longer than I can help in this beastly hole you call a study."

The door opened, and a number of juniors stared into the room. Pratt was at their head.

"Hallo, Figgys! I hear you've been catching freaks! Ah, there it is! I say, Merry, are there any more at home like you?"

"Oh, go away and play!" said Tom. "Your face gives me a pain!"

"Well, you funny animal, of all the cheek—"

"Oh, get home!"

And Tom Merry gave Pratt a push that sent him staggering against his followers, and as they obligingly got out of the way, Pratt measured his length in the passage. Tom Merry closed the door.

"Now, Figgys, you chaps must be quiet," he said. "I've got some preparation to do."

Figgys & Co. looked at one another. To have a new boy taking the upper-hand of them like this was an unexpected experience for them, and they did not like it. It looked as if there would be war again, but just then came a call from up the passage.

"Fag! Fag-a-ag!"

"That beast Monteith!" exclaimed Figgins. "I've got to go!"

And he left the study. Tom Merry sat down at the table. The Co. looked at him dubiously, and then looked at one another. They left the study after Figgins.

Tom Merry had some preparation to do for the morrow's lesson, and the master had told him that he would be able to borrow some books of Figgins till his own arrived. He looked round the study for what he wanted, found the same, and settled down to work, borrowing pen, ink, and paper from the supplies of Figgins & Co.

He was busily occupied when there was a sound of bumping on the stairs, and the door of the study flew violently open. Tom Merry jumped up. Taggles, the school porter, came into the room with a grunt, carrying a good-sized parcel on his shoulder. He thumped it down on the floor.

"Which I says," said Taggles, glaring at Tom as if he had mortally offended him in some unknown way—"which I says that I won't carry it no farther."

"Don't then," said Tom politely.

"Which I'm an old soldier, and I'm not going to carry that blessed parcel up those blessed stairs to the blessed dormitory to please any blessed school kid in this blessed school!"

"My word!" said Tom. "What a number of blessings flying about! Who's the parcel for?"

"It's for Master Figgins," grunted Taggles. "Which it's the clothes from the tailor, and Figgins not here to give me a tanner even for my trouble."

"Would it do if I gave you the tanner?"

Taggles looked at him suspiciously.

"Yes, it would do just as well, sir," he replied, with unusual civility.

"Then I'm sorry; I've not got one about me," said Tom. Taggles stamped to the door.

"Which I says," he remarked, "that any blessed kid who comes to a blessed school dressed up like a blessed guy, ought to have his blessed neck wrung!"

"That's rude, my dear fellow! Here, catch! I haven't a tanner about me, but I suppose a bob will do?"

Taggles caught the shilling as it spun in the air. "Which you're a gentleman," he said—"a real gentleman, though you do look like a blessed guy! You're a gentleman, you are!"

"Thanks!" said Tom. "Who wouldn't be a gentleman at the low price of one shilling?"

Taggles looked at him as if he did not quite catch on, and left the study. Tom Merry stood regarding the parcel with a twinkle in his eye. His box had not yet arrived from Clavering, and might not arrive till the following day. The clothes he was wearing were getting on his nerves, and seemed to be getting on everybody else's. Figgins had insisted upon a change at the earliest possible moment. It seemed only fair that Figgins should provide the change.

"My only Aunt Maria!" murmured Tom. "It's a ripping idea, and if I can get a quick change done before those bounders come back, it's a go! Stop! I'll buzz the parcel off to the dormitory. I shan't be interrupted there."

He picked up the parcel and hurried upstairs with it.

At that hour the dormitory was, of course, deserted, and Tom Merry had it to himself. He laid the parcel on a bed, and unfastened the string. He opened it, and disclosed a brand-new suit of clothes, made to measure for the great Figgins.

Tom's eyes danced at the sight. With a little squeezing Figgins' clothes would fit him very well. They were much of a build, only Figgins was leaner. Tom unfolded the clothes, and discarded his own, and made the change in record time.

The nice, new Eton suit really looked very charming. The trousers were rather tight round his legs, and the jacket close across the shoulders, and the waistcoat met with some slight difficulty. But the fit wasn't bad, considering. Tom Merry was satisfied. Whether Figgins would be satisfied was another question.

Tom looked at himself in a glass, and was pleased. He folded up his own clothes and placed them in the parcel, wrapping it up very carefully and tying the string. The outside bore the name of Figgins, so there would be no mistake about its delivery.

Then Tom descended the stairs to the study. He found Figgins & Co. in their quarters. They looked up when he entered, not knowing him at first.

"Hallo! Who are you?" said Figgins. "Why—what—It's the new kid!"

"Large as life!" said Tom cheerfully. "I've got a change of clothes at last."

"What have you done with the others?"

"Wrapped them up as a present for a silly bounder I know!"

"Well, that's the kind of fellow they're suitable for. You look better—much better," said Figgins, surveying the changed Tom Merry with a critical eye. "But, I say, you've got a rotten bad tailor!"

"Think so? Well, the chap who made these clothes makes things for some awful bounders," said Tom blandly.

"I dare say. The trousers are like pipe-stems. Must

Making An Honest Pound!



have been made for a chap who hadn't any calves to speak of, I should say!"

"Very likely," said Tom, with a glance at Figgins' extremities. "In fact, I think you're right. To tell you the truth, Figgy, these clothes were not made for me, but I got them for nothing, so I can't grumble."

"The dickens! Do you have your clothes given to you, then? You seem to be a funny animal, anyway. Still, they're rotten-looking things, but they're better than the horrors you've been wearing. Next time you get any clothes on the cheap, don't take any that were made for a skinny scarecrow, if you can help it."

"I'll remember," said Tom, inwardly bubbling with mirth at Figgins' unflattering description of his own lanky person. "You're right, Figgy; I admit that the chap these clothes were made for must have been a howling specimen of a scarecrow, and no mistake. The kind of chap you wouldn't see at all if he stood sideways. But I'm glad you think I'm improved. I attach a lot of value to your opinion, Figgy—I do, really. And I especially wanted to have it on the subject of these clothes."

Figgins looked at him suspiciously.

"You seem to be pleased with something," he remarked. "What's the joke?"

"Oh, you'll know soon, so that's all right. I say, I see you're making preparations for tea. Good! Of course, you want me to join you?"

"Rats! Still, as you're here, you may as well tuck in."

"Figgy, your hospitality is only equalled by your pleasant manners."

"Look here!" exclaimed Figgins, exasperated. "If you call me Figgy again I'll stick some of this marmalade down the back of your neck!"

"All right, Figgy! I won't call you Figgy if you don't like being called Figgy, Figgy. But, really, Figgy, Figgy is a pretty name, and, if you don't mind, Figgy—"

That was too much for Figgins. He seized the pot of marmalade, and went for Tom Merry. Tom dodged, and the marmalade, instead of going where Figgins had threatened he should have it, smothered the back of the Eton jacket.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins. "That will improve your clothes, and no mistake!"

"May as well improve them a bit more," said Kerr; and he poured the contents of the milk-jug over Tom's leg with a light sweep of the hand.

"Good wheeze!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn. "He can have some coffee on his waistcoat, too. It will give the thing a flavour."

And a coffee-cup deposited its contents on Tom Merry's manly chest.

"Don't leave me out!" exclaimed Marmaduke; and his contribution was a pat of butter, which slopped on Tom's trousers.

The Co. were prepared for war to follow; but, to their surprise, the new boy took the assault in good part, and could not contain his laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins & Co. at the spectacle Tom presented.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom, in reply.

Figgins & Co. were taken aback.

"Why, the lunatic seems to enjoy it!" ejaculated Figgins.

"He must be right off his silly rocker!"

"He's rotting!" said Kerr. "Ha, ha, ha! Hear me smile!"

"Hear us smile!" chorused Figgins & Co. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Tom.

He was wriggling with mirth, and the amazed Co. had to admit that his mirth seemed quite genuine, and his evident enjoyment of the situation rather took the edge off the joke.

"Oh, let him cackle!" said Figgins. "Let's have some tea."

And they sat down to tea, and Tom, in spite of the terrible state he was in, was quite at ease, and enjoyed the meal. His occasional chuckles as the humour of the situation struck him, further amazed the Co.; but Figgins was destined to be enlightened in a way that was far from pleasant, and Tom serenely anticipated the moment when the chief of the New House juniors would discover the terrible truth.

CHAPTER 7.

A Hot Chase.

"YOU'RE in our dormitory to-night, Merry," Figgins remarked at bed-time. "Monteith has just told me so. I fancy you're not going to stay in the New House, after all, or you'd be fixed up with your own Form. For this relief, much thanks!"

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"Same here!" said Tom. "Measly, rotten old place, this House, isn't it?"

Figgins looked inclined for war at this aspersion upon his beloved House, but the moment was not so propitious. Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, was there, to "chivvy" the juniors up to the dormitory, as Figgins put it. Monteith stopped at the sight of Tom Merry, and stood staring at him.

"Hallo, you new kid! What's the matter with you?"

"Nothing!" replied Tom cheerfully.

"What have you been doing to your clothes?"

Tom looked down at the sticky, horrible-looking garments. "Something's got spilled over them," he replied. "Accidents will happen. I don't mind."

The prefect looked at him curiously.

"Are you the funny merchant who came here dressed up like a baby?" he asked. "Yes, I see you are. You look a bit more sane now, but you have spoilt that suit of clothes."

"That doesn't matter; they're not mine."

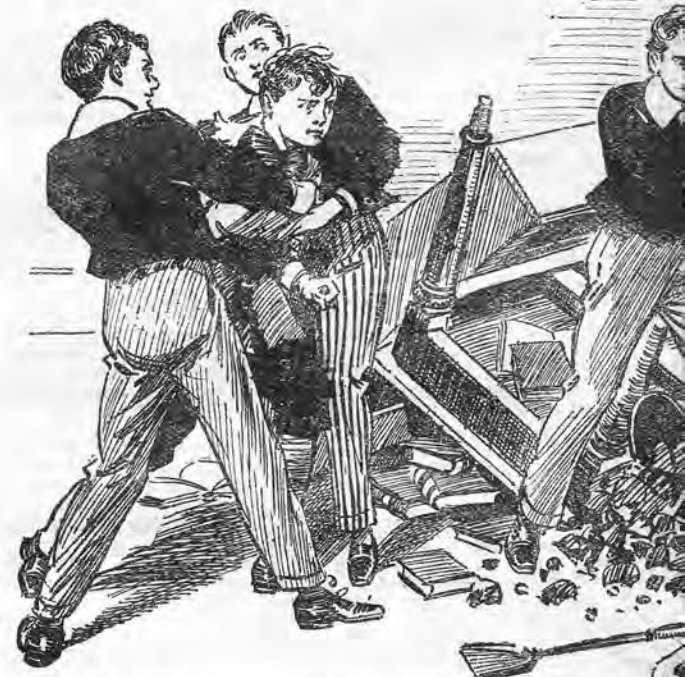
Monteith laughed.

"I see, you've borrowed a change of clothes?"

"Yes."

"Well, I hope the owner will be pleased when he sees them again!" grinned the prefect. "Whom do they belong to?"

"Figgins!"



"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Monteith. "Off to bed now, kids!"

Figgins nudged Tom Merry as the juniors went upstairs. "What do you mean by telling Monteith that crammer, Merry?"

"I didn't tell him any crammer."

"You said the clothes belonged to me."

"So they do!"

Figgins knitted his brows.

"Do you mean to say that you've collared a suit of my clothes without asking my permission, you outsider?"

"Yes, Figgy, that's exactly what I mean."

"You're rotting. You couldn't get at them without the key. And I've got it in my pocket. Lucky for you, too, you spooney!"

Tom Merry grinned. A surprise was waiting for Figgins in the dormitory.

"Hallo, Figgy! Here's your togs come!" said Fatty Wynn, nodding towards the parcel lying on one of the beds. "Taggles has stuck it on my bed."

"Good!" said Figgins. "I was expecting them to-day."

He cut the cord of the parcel.

"Ha, ha, ha!" shouted Tom Merry. "Hear me smile!"

Figgins looked at him quickly; then he looked at the parcel again, and then again at Tom Merry.

"Merry, do you mean to say—"

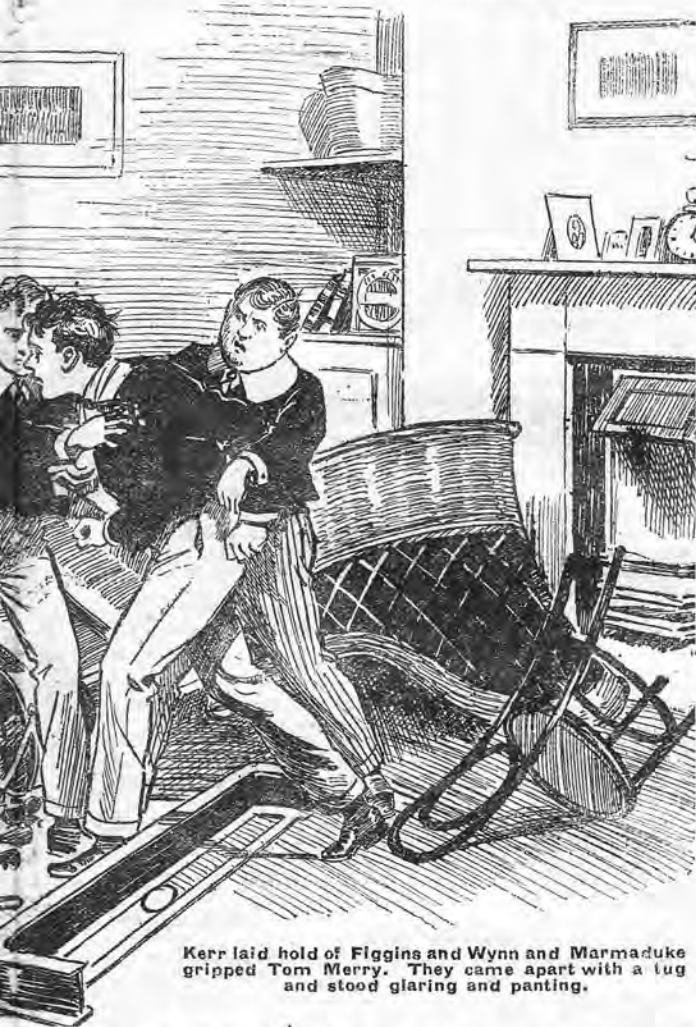
"Hear me smile! Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins, with a terrible anxiety tugging at his heart, tore open the parcel with feverish fingers. Every eye in the dormitory was fixed upon him. The clothes came to light.

Figgins held up the beautiful velvet knickerbockers, and gave a howl of rage.

"Hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Pratt. "Somebody been sending you a present, Figgys? Ha, ha, ha! You'll look nice in those—as nice as Spooney himself."

"Ha, ha, ha!" came from Tom Merry. "You're welcome to them, Figgys. I wonder if you are getting sorry now about slopping that marmalade over me?"



Kerr laid hold of Figgins and Wynn and Marmaduke gripped Tom Merry. They came apart with a tug and stood glaring and panting.

The full hideousness of the truth burst upon the unhappy Figgins. That was why Tom Merry had taken the joke in the study so cheerfully. Figgins had been spoiling his own brand new suit of clothes!

"You—you boulder!" roared Figgins. "I'll make mincemeat of you!"

"Ha, ha, ha! You said the clothes were made for a skinny scarecrow, Figgins! About right, weren't you, Figgins?"

Figgins did not waste breath in words. His feelings were too deep for words, and the strongest words ever invented would not have done justice to them. He simply went for Tom Merry like a raging bull.

Tom dodged and eluded his tackle with the neatness of a Rugger three-quarter, and went up the dormitory in full flight, with the furious Figgins behind. The boys stood round, shrieking with laughter at the sight.

Away went Tom Merry, running well; but the angry Figgins' long legs seemed to move like lightning, and he rapidly gained ground.

"Look out, Spooney!" yelled Pratt. "He's got you! Dodge over the giddy bed!"

Tom took the hint. He dodged round and over the last bed of the dormitory, and started back the way he had come, leaping from bed to bed with the activity of a mountain goat.

Ominous creaks came from some of the beds as he alighted upon them, and after him came Figgins, still in a white heat of fury.

"Buck up, Figgys!"

"Dodge him, Tom Merry!"

"Go it!"

"Bravo!"

"Hurrah!"

The juniors were in ecstasy. Tom Merry was fully enjoying the joke, though Figgins was in deadly earnest. They reached the end of the dormitory, and Tom Merry wriggled under a bed with the quickness of an eel, and started off again before the slower Figgins could get hold of him.

There was a fresh burst of cheers as the chase went up the length of the great dormitory for the third lap. In the midst of the excitement the chase was terminated by a sudden mishap. Tom Merry had jumped on Fatty Wynn's bed, and thence to the next. A second later Figgins alighted on Wynn's bed, close on the track; but the bed, though it had stood the weight of Fatty for a long time, was not built to stand this sort of usage.

There was a fearful crash and the bed went through, and Figgins plumped down in the middle of the ruins.

Figgins gave a yell, and the rest of the juniors gasped; and as the loyal Co. rushed to help their chief from his uncomfortable position, the door opened and Monteith looked in.

"What's all this confounded noise about?" demanded the prefect sourly. "Figgins, what have you smashed up that bed for? I don't know whose bed it is, but you'll sleep in that bed this time. Do you hear? Now, three minutes before lights out!"

And the prefect withdrew and closed the door. Figgins was dragged out. The affair had to end where it was. Monteith was not the kind of prefect to be trifled with. Figgins gave Tom Merry a glare of wrath.

"Oh, won't I make you sit up to-morrow!" he growled.

And he began to put the wrecked bed to rights as well as he could.

Tom Merry, panting, exhausted, more with laughter than the running, began to undress.

"Don't get chippy, old Figgys!" he exclaimed. "You can't deny that it's a howling joke, now, can you? Next time you want to stick marmalade on a chap's legs, make sure he hasn't borrowed your best Sunday suit!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors, who could see the joke if Figgys could not.

And Figgys' face gradually relaxed into a grin.

When Monteith looked into the dormitory three minutes later the juniors were all in bed; but Figgys' bed was extremely uncomfortable, threatening to give way every moment beneath his weight. He had to lie along the edge of it to secure himself from falling through.

The prefect grinned as he turned out the light.

From the darkness came the cheerful voice of Tom Merry:

"Hallo, Figgys! Can you see the joke yet?"

Figgins snored.

CHAPTER 8.

A Tale of Treachery.

THE next day Tom Merry's box arrived from Clavering, and he was able to effect another change of clothing, which he very much needed. Clad in everyday raiment, he ceased to be the conspicuous object he had been on his first arrival at St. Jim's, but the juniors did not soon leave off chipping him. But Tom Merry stood all that cheerfully.

Figgins had decided to take the previous evening's occurrence as a joke, and to let it end there—a very wise decision.

Tom Merry still found relations rather strained in the study, but open hostility was gone. Indeed, there was one member of the Co. who was willing to extend the olive branch with all his heart—on conditions.

That member was Fatty Wynn. Fatty was the Falstaff of the New House. The school meals always left him unsatisfied, and the feeds in the study seldom quite filled the aching void he complained of. The arrival of a new boy was an event of great interest to Fatty, for that event generally meant a spread of some kind.

And it was with the thought of a study brew in his mind that Fatty began to show signs of friendliness towards Tom Merry.

"Like me to help you with your German, Merry?" he asked.

Tom Merry looked at him with all the dignity of a youth removed one degree above the Fourth Form.

"A fellow in the Shell doesn't usually get help from a Lower Form kid!" he replied. "Thank you, all the same, youngster!"

That word youngster nearly dispersed all Fatty's friendly intentions to the four winds, but the thought of the possibility of a feed calmed him again.

"All right, Merry," he said. "I only wanted to be friendly. I say, your box has come from home, hasn't it?"

"No; it's come from the school I came from."

"Ah, yes! I hear they're closing Clavering," said Fatty loftily. "Not much of a school, was it? St. Jim's always licked Clavering at cricket."

"There's a Clavering chap who will lick you if you don't be civil!" said Tom Merry.

"Oh, you're not Clavering now; you're a Saint!" said Fatty. "No offence. I say, I suppose you have got a lot of tommy in your box?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Not a giddy biscuit! You see, I've come suddenly, in the middle of the term."

Fatty's face fell.

"Oh, I say, what a sell! What a chance you've lost of getting a feed into the school without those meddling prefects knowing anything about it. Rotten! Do you mean to say that you can't stand a feed?"

"I'm afraid so, my fat friend!"

"Who are you calling your fat friend? I'm no friend of yours, Tom Merry! The sooner you get kicked across into the School House the better I shall like it!"

Tom Merry laughed heartily.

"My dear kid, if you're so hungry, why don't you make a raid on the pantry?"

"I do when I get a chance," said Fatty, becoming confidential again. "But they keep a beastly sharp eye below stairs. It's too rotten! I wish I was a skinny cee like Figgins sometimes, and then I could get in at the larder window. Pratt did it once, and passed out a lot of things, and there was a jolly feed, and nobody ever knew how the grub went. I say, I saw the van from Rylcombe delivering a lot of things to-day, and it made my mouth water. Have you ever started on a big jar of marmalade all by yourself with a big spoon?"

"No, I can't say I have."

"It's glorious!" said Fatty Wynn solemnly, passing his hand ecstatically over his bulging waistcoat. "I've done it, and if I get half a chance I shall do it again. I saw a big jar taken in along with—Hallo, Pratt!"

Pratt came into the study.

"I say, Wynn, what's that you were saying about a feed?"

"There's not going to be one," said Fatty Wynn disconsolately. "The new kid hasn't brought any grub. Feeds are off!"

"Yes; but you were saying something about raiding—"

"Oh, nothing!" said Fatty Wynn hastily. "I was only joking."

Pratt looked at him suspiciously, and went out of the study. He inwardly resolved to keep an eye on Master Wynn. If there was any feeding to be done, Pratt meant to have a hand in the game.

A little later, Fatty Wynn's voice might have been heard on the kitchen stairs, and, in fact, Tom Merry heard it.

"It's all right, Mrs. Trotter. I—I was only—only—"

"You get huff with you, Master Wynn!"

"All right, Mrs. Trotter, I'm going!"

Fatty Wynn came into view from the subterranean regions with a flushed face.

"Hallo! Where have you been?" asked Tom.

"Sharp old girl, that Mrs. Trotter!" said Fatty. "I thought she was going out. She hasn't gone yet. The house-dame is away, too, and there's a glorious chance."

"Chance of what?"

"Collaring some grub," said Fatty, lowering his voice to a mysterious whisper. "I say, Merry, I should like you to help me."

"What can I do?"

"If I can dodge downstairs after the old cat's gone—I mean Mrs. Trotter—will you be outside the little window I spoke of to take the things I pass out to you?"

Tom hesitated.

"Oh, if you're afraid—" said Fatty.

Tom Merry coloured.

"Oh, I'm not afraid! I'll do it if you like, Wynn."

"That's right! I like you, Merry. We shall get on famously if you stay in the New House. I say, what do you think of a jar of treacle, and a big one of marmalade—eh?"

"Well, I don't know that I should go into raptures over them," said Tom Merry. "Still, I'll do my whack. Where's the window? I'll be there, anyway."

"Hallo! There goes Mrs. Trotter. I think I've got a

chance now. Go round to the back of the New House, and you'll see me looking out of the window I mean."

"Right-ho!"

"Take a cricket-bag for the grub. Mind those School House cats don't see you, or Jack Blake will be on to this."

"I'll be careful," said Tom, beginning to enter into the spirit of the thing.

And he went off with the bag under his arm, while Fatty Wynn, with extreme caution, made his way into the mysterious subterranean regions where Mrs. Trotter reigned supreme.

Tom, who was new to St. Jim's, was some time in reaching the spot required, but the head of Fatty Wynn, emerging from a small window in the rear of the House, guided him.

Wynn glared at him.

"You've been a beastly long time, Merry!"

"Sorry!" said Tom. "But here I am now. You got in safe enough?"

"Yes. That mean beast, Pratt, was spying around, though, and I don't want him to follow me. He may give the alarm to some of the maids. Ready?"

Tom looked curiously in at the window.

Round Fatty Wynn were shelves covered with bottles and jars, containing all kinds of jams and preserves and pickles, enough, as it seemed, to provision the New House for a siege. Fatty Wynn looked round on the tempting array with glowing eyes.

Everything he could see was so enticing that he could not make up his mind which to take first.

"I say, buck up!" said Tom. "Get a move on you!"

Fatty, thus adjured, sighed, and removed a jar of treacle from the shelf, and passed it out of the window to Tom Merry. Then he removed the cover from a huge jar of marmalade, and looked at it lovingly. The jar was much too big to carry away, and there was nothing else handy to put some of it in. Fatty was much exercised in his mind. He adored marmalade, and he felt that it would break his heart to abandon such a prize.

There was one way, and one way only, in which he could carry off some. He seized a huge spoon, took the great jar under his arm, and commenced to wire in upon it.

Tom Merry, still holding the treacle-jar, looked in at the window under which Wynn was sitting.

"What the dickens are you doing, Fatty?"

"M-m-m-m-m-m-m-m-m-m!"

That was Fatty Wynn's reply. His mouth was too full for a more articulate one. Now that he had started, wild horses wouldn't have stopped him.

"I say, Wynn, somebody may come! Chuck it!"

"M-m-m-m-m-m-m-m-m-m!"

"Look here, you horrid, greedy bounder, if you don't chuck that—"

"M-m-m-m-m-m-m-m-m-m!"

The next moment Fatty Wynn started in alarm, and the spoon left his mouth as the door opened. But it was only Pratt.

"You silly brute!" growled Fatty. "You startled me. Made me think it was old Trotter come back. What the dickens do you want, Pratt? Clear!"

"Shan't!" said Pratt, as the big spoon ladled more marmalade into the capacious mouth of Fatty Wynn. "I knew you were up to this game. I'm going to have some of that giddy marmalade. Hand it over!"

"M-m-m-m-m-m-m-m-m-m!"

"Hand me over some of that marmalade!" exclaimed Pratt threateningly. And he advanced upon Fatty Wynn with a warlike look.

Tom Merry was getting impatient.

"If you don't buck up, Wynn, I'll throw this beastly treacle over you!"

But Fatty Wynn did not heed.

"Get away, Pratt, you beast! You can't have any of this! There's only fourteen pounds of it in the jar, and—"

"Fourteen pounds, you horrid, gorging hippopotamus!" exclaimed Pratt. "Look here, I am going to have some, so—"

"All right, then!" yelled Fatty, in a rage.

And as Pratt came on, Fatty slapped a big spoonful of marmalade right into his face.

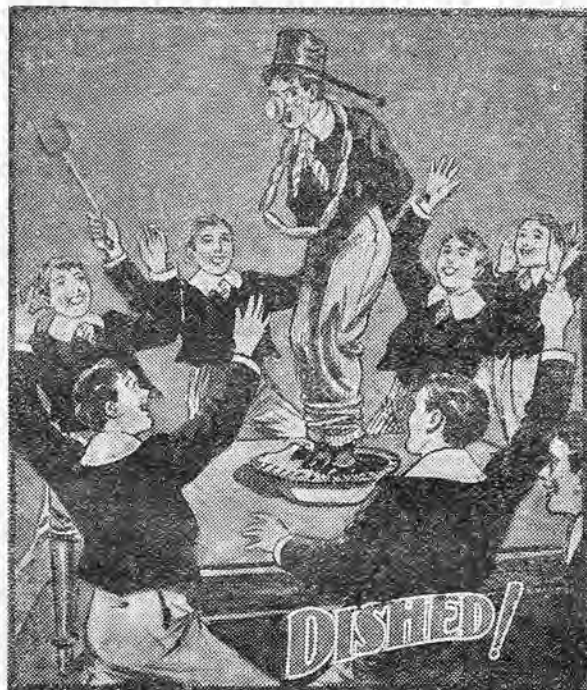
"Ger-r-er-roch!" gurgled the unfortunate Pratt.

The next moment Fatty Wynn gave a fearful yelp. Tom Merry had kept his word.

With a deft hand he inverted the treacle-jar over the head of Fatty, sitting just inside the window, and the sticky stream came down on Fatty's hair, and ran down over his face.

"Fair play's a jewel," said Tom Merry. "You've given him some marmalade, so here's a dose of treacle for you. Ha, ha, ha!"

The GEM 2^d



Special for Next Week!

YES, that is Tom Merry on the table in the small cover reproduction alongside! He certainly looks as if he was going through it—and he is! His rivals are just getting a little bit of their own back! But just you wait until next Wednesday, when you will be able to read:

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It's a ripping yarn, one of Martin Clifford's best, about the rivalry for the leadership of the School House Juniors. You'll enjoy every word of it—and you'll laugh till your sides split at the japes that are played.

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Fatty jumped up, yelling like a Red Indian. The marmalade-jar went to the ground with a crash, and smashed into a dozen pieces, and the contents spread over the floor.

“Ha, ha, ha!” yelled Tom Merry. “Hear me smile!”

“Hoo!” roared Fatty Wynn. “Hoo! Gerooh! Gr-r-r!”

“Serves you right!” exclaimed Pratt. “Yah! Beast! Serves you jolly well right!”

Fatty Wynn could not get at Tom Merry through the window. But Pratt was within reach. And Fatty badly wanted somebody to punch at that moment. And so he went for Pratt, and in a moment he got his head into chancery.

Pratt grappled with him, and they struggled wildly. Marmalade and treacle mixed in a charming mass of stickiness over both of them as they closed in an affectionate embrace.

“Ha, ha, ha!” shouted Tom Merry in at the window. “Mind the shelves, my pippins! You'll have the whole giddy bag of tricks down in a jiffy. There, I told you so!”

Fatty, with a tremendous effort, hurled Pratt backwards. Pratt clung to him, and they went against the shelves together. There was a fearful crash. Bottles and jars came down in a shower, mostly smashing as they fell, and over them the combatants trampled furiously.

“Cave!” shouted Tom Merry. “Look out!”

The warning came too late. Mrs. Trotter, in bonnet and shawl, arrayed for going out, had been drawn to the nether regions by the din, and now she burst upon the scene, scarlet with wrath.

“You dreadful boys! My jams! My pickles! My preserves!”

“Oh!” roared Fatty, as the stout matron caught him a terrific box on the ears. And “Oh!” came from Pratt the next moment for the same reason.

“My pickles and preserves! My jams!” cried Mrs. Trotter. “Take that, and that, and that!”

Common danger made the foes make common cause. As the stout lady blocked the way of escape, they charged her together, and Mrs. Trotter staggered out of the way. The two juniors raced away for the stairs.

The incensed lady was after them in a twinkling, a broom

in her hand. Fatty Wynn yelled as he received a crack across the shoulders, and Pratt gasped with the shock of a dig in the small of the back. Then the head of the broom caught in Wynn's legs, and he tumbled over.

Mrs. Trotter had hold of him in a moment.

“Rescue!” shrieked Fatty, as the good lady commenced to spank him with all the force of a muscular right arm, and a hand almost as large as a pancake. “Help, Pratt!”

But Pratt was flying upstairs as fast as his legs could carry him.

“Rescue! Don't! I won't do it again, Mrs. Trotter! Oh crikey!”

Slap, slap, slap!

Tom Merry heard the sounds of strife and woe. He could not come to Fatty's help, but he thought he could cause a diversion. He leaned in at the window as far as he could and began to knock the jars off the shelves. Crash on crash followed with a terrific noise, and Mrs. Trotter, hearing the havoc among her treasures, left Fatty, and hurried back to see what was the matter.

Fatty was off like a shot, and, as soon as he caught sight of Mrs. Trotter's excited face, so was Tom Merry. Five minutes later he entered Figgins' study, calm and smiling as ever. Fatty was there, squirming, and rubbing the injured parts of himself, and smothering treacle over everything he came in contact with.

“Ha, ha, ha!” Tom Merry looked in at the door. “Hear me smile! This is going to cost two or three weeks' pocket-money!”

And then he departed. Fatty Wynn was not quite safe at close quarters just then.

CHAPTER 9.

After the Feast—the Reckoning.

M^{R.} KIDD, the master of the School House at St. Jim's, sniffed suspiciously. He had entered the study in the new wing of the School House which had been assigned to Tom Merry, and which Miss Priscilla had insisted should not be his domicile. The Head

and patiently acceded to Miss Fawcett's wishes while the good lady was at St. Jim's. But he had no intention of altering his arrangements to please the old soul's whims.

Tom Merry had been put in the New House temporarily till his old governess was gone. The Head had asked Mr. Kidd to look over the new building and see if there was any ground for Miss Priscilla's uneasiness.

Mr. Kidd visited room after room, but there was nothing wrong to be detected until he came to the study that was to be Tom Merry's. Then he stopped and sniffed. He sniffed again in a very suspicious way. There was certainly a very strange and unpleasant odour in the room, one suggestive of dead rats under the floor, or rotten vegetation in the cupboard.

What could it be? There seemed to be nothing wrong with the room, and that it was not due to the drains was certain from the fact that the smell was confined to the one room. The Housemaster noticed that it was strongest when he stood in the centre of the room, and, a thought striking him, he jerked up the corner of the square of carpet. Then he sniffed again, and a smile broke over his face.

"A trick. I thought as much."

He could see the calcium carbide which Jack Blake had distributed so carefully now. He let the carpet fall, with a laugh. The smell was certainly bad, for the calcium was not of the improved kind which has only a faint smell. It was the old, shocking kind, and Mr. Kidd did not wonder that Miss Fawcett had been alarmed. Naturally, the old lady was not a cyclist, and knew nothing about the chemical. But Mr. Kidd knew.

"Ha, ha, ha! Evidently the juniors did not want Merry in the School House. This smacks of Study No. 6. I must speak to Kildare."

Mr. Kidd left the room, and on his way back to his own quarters, he looked in at Kildare's study. The captain of St. Jim's was there.

"Kildare, I suppose you know whether any of the juniors in this House use an acetylene bicycle lamp?" said the Housemaster.

"Yes," said the captain, looking surprised. "Lots of them do. Blake does, for one!"

"Blake? I thought so!"

And the Housemaster continued his way to Study No. 6. The door was ajar, and the cheerful voices of the four chums could be heard.

"I saw the boundah to-day"—it was D'Arcy's voice—"and he weally looked quite decent, you know. He had changed his clothes."

"Time he did," said Blake. "Still, we don't want him in the School House. He's too funny a sort of fish for us."

"Right-ho!" chimed in Herries. "The New House is nearer his mark. He's a funny merchant, though I admit he looks all right to-day. I saw him in the quad. But there's a look in his eye that shows there would be trouble if he came into the School House. My opinion is that he'd want to boss."

"I'd like to see him doing it," said Blake. "Things are looking like war already. Some of the chaps in the Shell think they ought to take the lead in the tussles with the New House, and think the Fourth Form ought to be glad to follow their lead. Which, of course, is all rot!"

"Rather! We know the Shell is a step above the Fourth. But, bless you, they haven't got our brains! And how many are there of them?"

"My idea exactly! We're not going to take a back seat for anybody, if I know it! So, if that's the kind of kipper the new kid is, it'll save trouble for him to be stuck in the New House. He—Hullo! I didn't see you, sir!"

A cough had interrupted Blake. Mr. Kidd was standing in the doorway, looking into the study with a smile upon his face. Four juniors jumped up quickly.

"I want to speak to you, Blake," said Mr. Kidd, as if he had heard nothing of the discussion, though the juniors knew he must have heard most of it. "I believe you are a cyclist, Blake?"

"Yes, sir," said Blake wonderingly.

"What kind of lamp do you use?"

"An acetylene one, sir."

"Have you lost any calcium carbide lately?"

Blake understood at once.

"No, sir."

"Perhaps you have mislaid some?"

"No, I don't think so, sir."

"Then, I suppose, it's your usual custom to keep your calcium sprinkled over the floor under the carpet in a new boy's study?" asked Mr. Kidd blandly.

Blake coloured under the Housemaster's keen eye.

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"No—yes, sir!" he gasped. "I—that is—"

"I have just found some there," said Mr. Kidd. "It conveyed quite an erroneous impression to a lady who was looking over the School House, leading her to suppose that the sanitary conditions of the building were not exactly as they should be. Of course, when you placed your calcium carbide in that safe and handy place, you didn't foresee anything of that kind."

Blake's blushes deepened under the Housemaster's banter. For once in his life he did not quite know what to say.

"The study is about to be occupied, as the new scholars are coming over from Clavering School to-morrow," went on Mr. Kidd, still quite blandly. "It is, therefore, necessary for you to find some other place to keep your chemical in, Blake."

"Yes, sir," stammered Blake.

"So you will, please, remove it, Blake. Every bit, mind, so that there is not even a smell left behind. Have you noticed that it smells somewhat strongly?"

"I—I believe I have, sir."

"Good! I have noticed it, too. The room will probably want scrubbing out to remove the smell. The House dame will give you some sanitary soap for the purpose."

"I—I—I—"

"I am sorry if you do not like the task, Blake, but you must admit that it is due to your carelessness in selecting such a strange place to keep your calcium carbide. You won't forget to see to that to-day, will you?"

"No, sir," said Blake.

And the Housemaster left the study. The chums heard him chuckle as he went down the passage. Blake looked the picture of dismay.

"This," he said, looking round, "is absolutely rotten! Oh, my Aunt Mary Ann Jackson! Fancy scrubbing out a rotten study! What the dickens are you laughing at?"

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

"You silly, cackling geese—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, you make me tired!" said Blake crossly. "Who's going to help me get that beastly study cleaned out?"

"You really must excuse me," said Herries. "I'm afraid I should get housemaid's knee."

"I'd do it like a shot," said Digby, "but I've promised to play fives with D'Arcy directly after school."

"And I'd jump to do it, weally," said D'Arcy, "but I've promised to play fives with Digby immediately after school, deah boy."

Blake grunted.

"Nice lot of chums you are for a chap to have. There's nothing nasty in just scrubbing a floor. It's good exercise, really, and will save you the trouble of whisking about the Indian clubs or punching the ball."

"Right-ho! It's a good exercise, and good exercise is just what you want," said Herries. "We wouldn't deprive you of it for worlds, would we, chaps?"

"Not for continents," said Digby, grinning. "I've been rather overdoing the exercise business lately, but you want some to keep you fit, Blake. Go in and win, my boy!"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha! Suppose you ask Percy Mellish? It was his idea, you know."

"By Jupiter! So I will!"

And immediately after afternoon school Blake buttonholed Percy Mellish as he came out of the Fourth Form classroom.

"I say, Mellish, old chap, I want to speak to you!" he said, in an extremely hearty way.

"Well, there's no law against it that I know of," said Percy suspiciously.

He was always suspicious, especially of Jack Blake. Blake was not usually so cordial.

"Of course not," agreed Blake. "That was a ripping idea of yours the other day!"

"What idea?" asked Percy, beginning to thaw.

"You know—about sticking that calcium carbide in Merry's study, so that the old lady would shift her darling boy into the New House."

Percy grinned.

"Yes, jolly good wheeze, wasn't it?"

"Awfully good, old chap! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha! But really you thought of the calcium yourself, Blake. I only suggested making out that something was wrong with the place," said Percy modestly.

"Oh, no, I wouldn't have you denying yourself the credit in that way, Mellish. It was your idea, from start to finish,

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Send in your queries to the Oracle, boys. It's his boast that he knows everything.

It was very warm the other day, chums, and the Editor had all the windows open in the sanctum when I went in. He had also got his mouth open. The fact is the old Ed. had dozed off, so I lit one of his cigarettes and crept out. At least that was what I intended doing, but I tripped over the tip of my whiskers and fell with a resounding crash on to the carpet. That woke the Ed. up.

"You'll look brainier than ever, now," said he, "with that beautiful protuberance on your brain crust. Now, my lad, just tell Curly Lockton what a stink-bird is."

"The stink-bird, Ed., lives in British Guiana. It lives on the leaves and wild fruits along the edges of the lagoons, and if it's startled it makes a noise like a harsh, grating hiss. It's about the size of a pheasant, and has a yellowish crest on its top-knot. It also has another name besides stink-bird. Its other name is hoactzin. I can't tell Curly any more than that, except that its eggs are yellowish, with red blobs on them."

"Will Farmer wants to know where the Great White Sands are."

"In the southern part of New Mexico, east of the San Andreas mountains. The white sands form the basin of what used to be a lake. The lake was called Lake

other interesting thing about these white sands is that many of the insects and reptiles found there are perfectly white themselves. It's very wonderful the way animals get to look like their surroundings."

"Quite so, Whiskers," said the Ed., picking up a postcard. "Tom Ward wants to know what the Mestizos are."

"The Mestizos are a class of half-breeds, found in the Rio Grande valley. They are half Indian and half Spanish."

"Here's a query about the cravat. George Hughes would like to know how the cravat came to be worn."

"Years ago, in the time of Louis XIV. of France, the Croatian soldiers that were enlisted in the royal Croatian regiment wore linen or muslin scarves, with wide lace edges. These scarves became fashionable, and the French people called them cravates. Cravate was a corruption of the word Croat."

"Can you tell me what a mugwump is?"

"That word has one or two meanings, Ed.," I explained. "In America the word was used for anyone who voted independently, and in this country mugwump is used for someone who doesn't vote

Otero, and it dried up some years ago."

"Why?" asked the Ed.

"I suppose because the weather got otero," said I. "Anyway, these sands are very remarkable. They cover an area of 300 square miles, and consist of dunes of pure granular gypsum. Gypsum, of course, is hydrous calcium sulphate, the stuff they make plaster of paris out of. An-

at all. In New England any self-important politician was called a mugwump. You see, Ed., the word was originally a North American Indian one. It was spelt moghiomp, and meant 'great man.' In the Massachusetts dialect mogli means great, and omp means man. In that country I would be known as a moghiomp."

"What's a cripple?"

"A staging for cleaning windows or walls."

"What's a tarantass?"

"A four-wheeled vehicle without springs used in Russia."

"And what's a mulligatawny?"

"The name of a hot East Indian soup, made with curry-powder and highly seasoned. The word mulligatawny comes from the Tamil words 'mullagu-tannir,' which means pepper-water."

"Dan Cox would like you to tell him why mules are always brown in colour."

"Most mules are brown," I said, "but not all. You sometimes get a chestnut mule, and very rarely a piebald one."

"Which country rears mules the most?"

"France is the most important mule-raising country in Europe. In the old days of the Romans mules were used to draw carriages, and were highly valued. They are still used as beasts of burden all over the world, and they are better than horses when it comes to carrying loads. The mule is less impatient than a horse under the pressure of a load, and the mule's skin is harder and less sensitive than the skin of the horse."

"A reader wants to know if it is possible to get a really strong, reliable, guaranteed watch for five shillings," said the Editor.

"Of course he can," I replied at once. "He can get a strong reliable, guaranteed Ingersoll for exactly that price. It will be in a nickel case, and will be the envy of all his friends."

"Can you tell him where he can get one, Whiskers?"

"Certainly. He can get it from any Ingersoll agent, or direct from Ingersoll, Ltd., Kingsway, London, W.C.2."

"GOOD-BYE CLAVERING—
HULLO ST. JIM'S!"

(Continued from page 18.)

and a jolly, ripping good idea it was, and no mistake. Ha, ha, ha!" giggled Blake.

"Well, of course, it was really my idea," agreed Percy. "Funny, too. Ha, ha, ha!"

"But after the feed comes the reckoning, you know."

"How's that?" asked Percy uneasily.

"Why, Kiddlets has smelled the carbide, and he wants it cleaned up."

"Oh, he does, does he?"

"Yes. I didn't let on to him that it was your idea."

"Look here, Blake, I—"

"Of course I wouldn't give you away."

"That's all very well, Blake, but—"

"In fact," said Blake heartily, "as soon as old Kiddlets began to talk I made up my mind that I would help you clean up the stuff."

"Did you?" said Percy rebelliously. "Well, let me tell you—"

"Oh, don't mention it! You'd do as much for me, I'm sure. The House-dame will give us some sanitary soap and a pail of water. Come on, old fellow!"

"I tell you I'm not going to—"

"That's all right! Come along!"

And Blake linked his arm in Mellish's, and hurried him off, willy-nilly, to the House-dame's room. But at the

door Percy Mellish, having waited till Blake had knocked, twisted himself loose, and darted off like lightning.

Blake turned to pursue, but the door opened. The House-dame smiled at the sight of Blake. Evidently she knew all about the matter from Mr. Kidd.

"Ah, you have come about the cleaning, Master Blake?"

"Yes, ma'am," said Blake, inwardly boiling. "Mr. Kidd wants me to do it, and I don't like to refuse."

"Ha, ha, ha! Molly will give you the things. I have told her."

Molly was smiling, too, when she handed Blake a pail of steaming water, a scrubbing-brush and soap, and a broom.

Blake took the pail in one hand, the soap and broom in the other, and let the scrubbing-brush float in the pail. Thus accoutred he marched off to the room.

Percy Mellish had mischievously spread the news, for he knew pretty well how matters stood, and a big crowd of juniors had collected in the passage to watch Blake work.

The chief of the School House juniors turned as red as fire as he saw that he was to have an audience.

"Bravo!" exclaimed Mellish. "It will be funny to see Blake doing some washing. He hates soap-and-water as a rule."

Blake set down his burden inside the room.

"I suppose you like it, Mellish?" he said, as he picked the floating brush out of the pail of steaming hot water.

"Yes, rather. I—"

"Then take some!"

A slop of water from the brush went over Percy Mellish and he jumped back.

"You beastly rotter! I'll—I'll—"

Splash!

A second dose cut short Mellish's threats in the middle, and he thought it better upon the whole to beat a retreat.

Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy looked in at the door. Blake had turned back the carpet and was sweeping up the sprinkled calcium.

"Getting on all right?" asked Herries, grinning.

"Rats!" said Blake.

The chums laughed. Under ordinary circumstances they would have taken a hand and helped Blake, but they made it a rule to let their leader bear the whole weight of his own failure. The idea had been his, and he had carried it out, and it was fair play to let him pay the piper. That was one of the responsibilities of a leader.

"Glad to see you getting on, Blake!" said Digby. "I'd help you, really, only I want it to be a lesson to you. A giddy chief has no right to have silly ideas that get people into fixes. Better luck next time!"

"Go and eat coke!"

"Good-bye, deah boy!" said D'Arcy, taking a very interested survey of Blake through his eyeglass. "Join us hah, as soon as you can; but don't come with any of that beastlay, howwid smell about you, deah boy. I don't like it, weally."

"See if you can get used to it, Adolphus," said Blake; and he lifted the broom and jerked a cloud of dust and chemical into the face of the swell of the School House.

D'Arcy jumped and began to sneeze and cough violently.

"Oh, you howwid boundah! Ow-oh-ow-oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" giggled Herries. "That's funny! Yah, you horrid beast!"

The broom had whisked into his own countenance, and he began to sneeze and snort, and the joke did not seem half so funny as before.

Blake turned towards Digby, bent upon fair play all round; but Digby had taken warning, and was going down the corridor at full speed.

Herries and D'Arcy, coughing and snorting, followed him, and Blake returned with a chuckle to his work.

He swept up the dust, and took it out of the room, and then rolled up his sleeves for the scrubbing. He was dusty from head to foot and getting tired. He had always thought that housemaids had a pretty easy time of it, but he changed his opinion now.

The smell of the calcium had grown more pronounced, owing to the disturbance of it, and though Blake had opened the window wide, the room was hardly endurable.

The task which the Housemaster had so genially imposed upon the offender was about the best punishment he could have devised. Blake was not likely to sprinkle calcium carbide about for a long time to come.

Down went Blake on his knees, and he slopped a splash of water on the floor and began to scrub and scrub. He was not used to that sort of work, naturally, and it was surprising how easy it was to slop water accidentally over his knees and up his sleeves, and to get splashes of soapy foam in his eyes.

"Oh, my Aunt Mary Ann Jackson!" gasped Blake. "This is simply horrid! Won't I make that howling brute Merry sit up for this some time!"

"Hallo!" said a voice at the door.

Blake looked up grumpily. Tom Merry, cheerful and smiling, as usual, was looking in at him. Blake took a tighter grip on the brush. Tom Merry looked at Blake in amazement for a moment or two, and then burst into a ringing laugh.

"Hallo, Blake! Didn't know you had turned house-
maid!"

"Oh, get home!"

"What's the game, anyway? Don't chuck any of that water at me or I'll kick all this giddy dust back into the room and give you the job over again!"

"Here, I say, don't be a cad!"

"Right-ho! Then make it pax!"

"Pax it is!" snorted Blake. "Now you can clear out!"

"But what does all this mean? What makes the room niff so of carbide? My hat!" exclaimed Tom. "Nurse made me go into the New House because of the smells here. Was it you playing a little game with that niffy stuff?"

Blake grinned.

"Yes, it was, kid!"

"And now you've got to clean the ghastly mess up! Ha, ha, ha! Well, it serves you right!"

"Oh, go and cackle over in the New House!" said Blake crossly. "Anyway, it's a cheap price to pay for getting rid of you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You're fixed in the New House now, anyway, and the School House is rid of you!" snorted Blake, "so it ain't so bad, after all."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What on earth are you cackling about now?"

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"Nothing," grinned Tom. "Only I've come back."

"What?" howled Blake.

"I was only put in the New House temporarily. I've just been told to come back here. I'm a School House kid now, old son!"

Blake sat down on the half-washed floor and groaned.

"Well, of all the rotten, horrid sells!"

"Hear me smile! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, shut up! So you're coming into the School House? Rotten—beastly! Hang—blow—bah! If you put on those giddy clothes I shall take you into the garden and kill you!"

"Oh, that's all right! They've gone for ever. I've given them to Figgins."

"Eh—what's that?"

Tom Merry explained. Blake chuckled over the story of the joke on Figgins, and he began to look upon the newcomer with a more kindly eye.

"Well, I suppose we shall have to put up with you in this school," he said. "You don't seem such a silly cuckoo as you did at first, I admit; but, mind, you'll have to learn your place and keep it."

"Good! I've learned it already, and I mean to keep it!"

"What's that?"

"My place is leader of the School House juniors against the New House," said Tom Merry innocently. "Of course, you youngsters will be glad to follow the lead of a chap in the Shell."

Blake fairly bristled all over with wrath.

"Ah, yes, I don't suppose!" he said witheringly. "If that's your idea in coming into the School House, Merry, I can warn you to look out for trouble!"

Tom Merry smiled blandly.

"That's what I thrive on," he replied. "Anything to make things lively. But we needn't start rowing each other now. We're rivals in private, but shoulder to shoulder against the New House. And now let me lend you a hand with that scrubbing."

His jacket was off and his sleeves rolled up in a moment.

Blake, who was tired, willingly took a rest while Tom Merry slopped and scrubbed.

"Well, you're not a bad sort," said Blake cordially. "I dare say we shall get on all right. And—and you're welcome in the School House."

The next day Monty Lowther and Manners, and a good many of the Clavering boys, arrived. Tom Merry was glad to see his chums again, and they quickly fell into the new state of affairs.

Now that they were once more sharing a study together, they quickly began to make plans for japing anyone who might try to rival Tom for the position of leader of the juniors. Tom had been leader at Clavering, and Monty Lowther and Manners would know the reason why if Tom was not leader of the juniors at St. Jim's.

Tom told his chums of his very successful joke on Figgins, and the three of them laughed heartily at the score Tom had made.

"Study No. 6 are awfully decent fellows," Tom remarked to Manners and Lowther. "But, of course, they've got to follow our lead. I fancy there will be ructions."

"The more ructions the better," replied Manners. "Life wouldn't be much fun if we couldn't have a few good scraps. But tell us, Tommy, who are the fellows in this House who think that they are going to stop you from becoming junior skipper?"

"Blake & Co., of Study No. 6, are the kids," replied Tom, with a grin.

At the same time Blake was speaking on the same subject in Study No. 6.

"What if there are ructions?" said Digby. "It will make life a bit brighter in the House. We shall be able to have a few rags without having to go over to the New House for them."

"That's true," said Blake; "but there certainly will be ructions. And we shall be responsible for them!"

"Tom Merry is an awfully decent chap, kids," said Blake; "but, of course, these new fellows will have to follow our lead. I shouldn't wonder if there were ructions."

Tom Merry and Jack Blake were quite right. There were ructions, with perfect good feeling on both sides, but distinctly ructions. Matters had always been pretty lively among the juniors at St. Jim's. The prospect was that they would be livelier still now!

THE END.

(Now Tom's got to St. Jim's he looks like making things lively for the fellows! And he sure does in "TOM MERRY GETS GOING!" Next week!)

ANOTHER COMPLETE NEW ROOKWOOD YARN.

STOCKING THE STOCKS!

By
OWEN
CONQUEST.



CHAPTER 1. Startling!

“YOU burbling chump!” breathed Jimmy Silver.
“You blithering idiot!” gasped Arthur Newcome.
“You—you benighted ass!” snapped George

Raby.

But Arthur Edward Lovell only grinned.

In chucking a cream-bun at Carthew of the Sixth, Arthur Edward thought he had done a funny and a praiseworthy action. Carthew was a bully, and an enemy of Jimmy Silver & Co. But he was also a prefect, and Lovell’s pals considered that Lovell should have made certain of their “getaway” before venturing to sling that cream-bun at a prefect.

As it was, owing to Lovell’s thoughtless and ill-considered action, Jimmy Silver & Co. looked like landing in the soup.

At the moment the chums of the Classical Fourth at Rookwood were crouching, far from comfortably, behind the little counter of the village tuckshop.

The moment before they had been seated on stools at the counter, happily devouring cream-buns and drinking lemonade. Then Lovell had sighted Carthew passing in the street, and had lightheartedly, but thoughtlessly, bunged that unfortunate cream-bun through the open doorway at him.

Knowing the inevitable result, Jimmy Silver had rushed his pals behind the counter the instant the act was committed. And now, while Carthew, out in the street, gouged cream and crumbs from his eyes and features, the chums crouched and waited.

“You—you burbling jabberwock!” resumed Jimmy Silver sulphurously. “He’ll be in after us in a sec, and then—”
“Shush-sh!” hissed Raby.

Carthew had arrived. He came bounding into the tuckshop, fury in his eye, and cream and crumbs over his features. Jimmy Silver & Co. did not see him; they dare not look. But they heard him.

“Thunder! Grooogh!” spluttered the prefect, glaring

round the little shop. “Who threw that beastly bun? Who dared to— Oh!”

Carthew stopped on finding the little shop empty—or so he supposed. And just then Mother Tuggle, the tuckshop proprietress, came in from the living-room at the rear of the shop. She stared at the infuriated Carthew, and then she sighted the juniors crouching behind the counter, invisible to Carthew.

“Dear me! What—what—” Mother Tuggle stopped. She instantly grasped the position, and, being a friend of the juniors, did not intend to give them away. “Dear me! What—what is the matter, sir?”

“Matter!” hooted Carthew, still mopping his face. “Somebody in here bunged a cream-bun at me! It was one of those confounded juniors! It must have been! It came out of here, ma’am. I’ll—I’ll flay the young ruffian alive when I catch him!”

He glared about him furiously.

Behind the counter Jimmy Silver & Co. trembled. Jimmy gave the flustered Mother Tuggle a warning, pleading look. Mother Tuggle moved along the counter, obviously in order to help

shield the juniors with her skirt. Having glared without producing any results, Carthew bounded to the door of the inner-room, and looked inside.

Jimmy Silver & Co. scarcely dared to breathe. Carthew, finding the inner room empty, would look behind the counter next, and then—

But Carthew didn’t look behind the counter. He did not dream that the old dame was shielding them from his view. He scowled like a fiend at the disturbed Mother Tuggle.

“Dash it! They must be in here somewhere, ma’am!” he hooted. “You must have seen the little sweeps! I tell you— My hat!”

An idea seemed to occur to Carthew of the Sixth. He snorted and rushed from the shop into the street.

Jimmy Silver chuckled; they all chuckled. Carthew evidently imagined they had made their getaway by the back door, and had rushed round in the hope of catching them.

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Who put Carthew in the stocks?
Oh, who could it be?
Not a single Rookwood fellow
Answers: “Little me!”

"What a scream!" grinned Jimmy Silver, emerging cautiously from hiding. "Dear old Carthew's fairly on the warpath now. Thanks, no end, ma'am, for saving our bacon! Jolly decent of you!"

"Yes, rather!"

"What ever have you done to Master Carthew?" demanded Mother Tuggle, eyeing them severely. "You young rascals—"

"Only bunged a cream-bun at his highness," said Lovell. "I wish now it had been something bigger and juicier. Let's finish our grub, chaps."

"Hold on!" grinned Jimmy Silver. "The beggar may come back again."

He stepped to the doorway and looked out cautiously. At the far end of the street he sighted a tall figure striding along towards Rookwood, and recognised him as Carthew. Evidently Carthew had given it up as a bad job.

"All clear!" chortled Jimmy. "You were a footling ass, Lovell, but for once you haven't landed us in the soup. Carthew will guess it was us, but he jolly well can't prove it. Drink up, my infants!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. leisurely finished their refreshments and started homewards in a cheery mood. A couple of minutes later they sighted something which made them cheerier still. It was a sight Jimmy Silver & Co. had never witnessed before—a sight which nearly caused their youthful eyes to pop out of their heads.

The juniors had just rounded the church, and were crossing the square towards the Church Walk, a short cut to Rookwood, when they became aware that something was going on in the square.

Ahead of them, just in front of the church wall, was a swarm of urchins and villagers, and they were roaring with laughter.

"Hallo! Something up!" remarked Jimmy Silver, staring. "What the dickens— Why—who— Oh, great pip!"

"M-mum-my hat!" ejaculated Lovell; and the rest gave simultaneous exclamations of amazement.

Something was certainly "up."

In front of the ancient church wall stood the village stocks—relic of bygone days when evildoers were punished by being "put in the stocks," and made a laughing-stock for the villagers. They were still intact, and the village of Coombe was proud of their ancient relic. The stocks were not the ordinary variety, with sitting accommodation. They were the standing variety, with two posts and a cross-board, in which were the holes for head and hands.

Not for long years had the Coombe stocks held a victim. Empty and forlorn, a relic of the "bad old days," they had stood in Church Square.

But now, to the great amazement of Jimmy Silver & Co., and many other people, the village stocks held a victim. And as they sighted the face of that victim, Jimmy Silver & Co. almost fainted.

CHAPTER 2.

Only Carthew!

IT was a red, furious and frantic face—the familiar face of Carthew of the Sixth.

"G-Good lor!" gurgled Raby. "It—it's Carthew!"

"Somebody's shoved old Carthew in the giddy stocks!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The chums could not help a roar, startled as they were. Even as they looked, a half-eaten orange quashed against the board within an inch of Carthew's face. Evidently some of the juice entered the hapless senior's eyes, for he gave a yelp, and his features twisted into a ludicrous grimace.

It was the signal for a fusillade of missiles. Evidently the village urchins took Carthew for a new kind of Aunt Sally shy, and they let fly with anything to hand.

"Biff! Bang! Wallop!"

"Haw, haw, haw!"

"Oh crumbs! Doesn't he just look a picture!" yelled Jimmy Silver, in delight. "Ha, ha, ha! Better get him out of that, though."

"Ha, ha! Yes, rather!"

Pleased as they were to see their hated enemy in such a plight, loyalty to a Rookwood man came uppermost. But before they could raise a hand to release Carthew, a sudden, deep, scandalised voice rang out:

"Boys, what are you— Good heavens! Wha-what— Carthew! G-good heavens!"

It was the Head!

He had just that instant emerged through the old gateway of the vicarage, scarcely a dozen yards from them, and with him was Mr. Greely, the stout and pompous master of the Fifth.

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They stared in petrified horror as they recognised that hapless youth in the village stocks.

"Carthew!" puffed Mr. Greely, in a throaty gurgle. "Upon my soul! A senior and prefect of Rookwood! Such outrageous conduct! Such a humiliation for Rookwood! Such scandalous and childish buffoonery! Really, Dr. Chisholm, this—this is too much!"

From the thunderous frown upon the scandalised Head's face he also thought it was too much—much too much. His scholastic face became crimson with wrath as he turned upon the juniors, whose hilarity had suddenly vanished.

"Boys! Silver, Raby, Newcome, Lovell, how dare you! Monstrous! Never have I known such an abominable and wicked trick! Boys—"

"Oh crikey!" gasped Jimmy Silver. "I—I say, sir, it wasn't—"

"Release Carthew this instant, Silver!" thundered Dr. Chisholm, his venerable face growing pink at sight of the ribald villagers' hilarity. "Disgraceful! You shall suffer dearly for this—very dearly! Stop! I order you to stop assaulting that Rookwood boy! Good heavens!"

"Help!" wailed Carthew, twisting his head round as he heard the welcome voice of the Head. "Help! Stop them—stop them throwing things, sir! Ow, ow, ow!"

The Head rushed forward to the stocks. Mr. Greely rushed forward to the stocks. The Head stood in front, and raised his hand with a magnificent gesture, like Ajax defying the lightning. Not to be outdone in bravery, Mr. Greely did likewise, only more so.

"Stop!"

The village urchins stopped, not a little overawed by the two top-hatted, scholastic gentleman. The guffaws died away.

"Silver!" gasped the Head. "Boy—"

"It—it wasn't us, sir!" stuttered Jimmy Silver, in great alarm. "We—we didn't do it! We know nothing about it, sir!"

"Absolutely nothing!" gasped Lovell.

"You rotten young liars!" hooted Carthew frantically. "It was— It was you—I know it was you! You chucked that cream-bun at me in the street, and then you collared me and shoved me in here!"

"We jolly well didn't!" said Jimmy indignantly. "At least—"

"You young villains! I know it was you! I saw your face, Silver!" shrieked Carthew, almost weeping in his rage and humiliation. "It was you! I recognised you—"

"You awful liar!" stuttered Lovell heatedly.

"Lovell, how dare you? Silence!" hooted Dr. Chisholm. "I have not the slightest doubt that your wicked boys are responsible for this disgraceful outrage! I came upon you glorying in the results of your wicked trick! You shall be expelled! You shall all four leave Rookwood by the first train in the morning!"

"A punishment they have amply deserved!" boomed Mr. Greely.

"But—but, sir—" gasped Jimmy helplessly.

"Silence! Not another word! Release Carthew this instant!"

"But—but we can't, sir! We haven't the key!" groaned Jimmy, hurriedly examining the rusty padlock fastening of the drop-board. "It's locked!"

"But you must have the key! Produce the key this instant! I order you to produce the key!" thundered the Head.

"But—but we haven't got it, sir!" said Jimmy desperately.

"They must have thrown it away!" raved Carthew, his head and hands wagging ludicrously in his frantic impatience. "Break the lock—break the lock! I—I'm nearly fainting, sir! Ow, ow, ow!"

"G-good heavens! The poor boy must be released at once, Greely! Silver, if you have thrown away the key, so much the worse for you! But go! Hasten for the village constable, for a blacksmith, a carpenter—anyone who can break the lock! Hasten, boy!"

"Oh! Oh, yes, sir!"

Jimmy Silver rushed away; only too eager to obey the order. He almost barged into the village constable as he turned the corner of the vicarage; but Jimmy did not stop. A blacksmith or locksmith was what was wanted. Luckily, he found the village blacksmith in the forge, and he brought that worthy ambling along at a lumbering trot with a hammer and other tools in his hand.

The man got to work, and the Head turned in majestic wrath upon the juniors.

"Go!" he said, his voice trembling with deep wrath and indignation. "Return to Rookwood! Await me in my study, where sentence of expulsion will be pronounced upon you! Go!"

"Oh crumbs! But do listen, sir!"

"Go!" thundered the Head.

"Go!" boomed Mr. Greely.

And, like lambs to the slaughter, Jimmy Silver & Co. went.

CHAPTER 3.

Sacked!

"O H crikey!"

"It—it's awful!"

It was awful! Awful, in point of fact, was not the word for it in the opinion of Jimmy Silver & Co.

They were stunned, bewildered, and flabbergasted.

They ambled along towards Rookwood feeling quite ill. They could scarcely believe that it was not a dream—that it had really happened. And they were sacked—sacked for a certainty.

But they were innocent. At least, they were innocent of all excepting the "bunging" of that luckless cream-bun at Carthew. But they could not prove their innocence. And if Carthew stuck to his lies and false witness, if he still claimed that he had actually seen and recognised them as the culprits, then they were doomed, and Rookwood would know them no more after that day.

It was certainly awful!

"The—the tick!" hissed Lovell, clenching his fists. "The awful, frightful tick! He knew perfectly well it wasn't us!"

"Well, it must have looked to him as if it was, after that cream-bun affair," groaned Jimmy dejectedly. "Anyway, his lies will put the tin hat on us. The Head won't take our word against the word of a prefect. Oh crumbs! What on earth are we to do?"

"The beastly liar! The—the—" hissed Lovell.

heels, and raced after the Modern juniors. It did not occur to any of them at the moment that even three such redoubtable scapegraces as the three Tommies could scarcely have handled Carthew—in fact, they did not think at all in their desperation.

Tommy Dodd & Co. looked alarmed as the four Classics rushed up and surrounded them.

"Here, what the— Look out!" yelled Tommy Doyle. "Bedad, it's those Classical duffers! Back up!"

Evidently Doyle expected a fight. But, for once, Jimmy Silver & Co. were not hunting for trouble, though they found it.

"Hold on!" yelled Jimmy. "We want to talk, not scrap, you footling idiots! Look here, Tommy Dodd, was it you who collared Carthew and shoved the tick in the village stocks?"

"Eh?"

"What the merry thump—"



Before he could even cry out the juniors had whipped the bag over Knowles' head. Strong hands gripped him while cords were made ready to pass round his legs and arms!

"Calling that tick names won't help us," said Jimmy dismally. "The question is—who the dickens did do it? I can't think of any Rookwood men who would hold a Rookwood fellow up to such ridicule. Only by finding out who did it can we save ourselves."

"But how—" began Raby desperately.

"My hat! Those Modern bounders!" said Newcome, in sudden enlightenment. "Carthew's a Classical man, remember. And we know Tommy Dodd and his pals were in the village twenty minutes ago. We spotted 'em!"

"Phew! That's it!" said Lovell excitedly. "We'll make the bounders own up! Good!"

"Hold on!" said Jimmy hastily. "I—I can't think they would do it, though, goodness knows, they detest that sweep, Carthew, as much as we Classics do. We can ask 'em, of course, but—"

"There the rotters are!" yelled Lovell, pointing ahead. It was Tommy Dodd & Co. right enough. The three Modern "Tommies" were ambling along the lane ahead towards Rookwood, arm-in-arm, and laughing uproariously. Evidently something tickled them highly, and what that something was Jimmy Silver & Co. felt certain they knew. Even Jimmy felt convinced now.

As if moved by one spring the Classical pals took to their

Tommy Dodd & Co. stared blankly at Jimmy.

"It's no good looking innocent!" roared Arthur Edward Lovell. "Of course it was! There's scarcely a Rookwood fellow in the village this afternoon but us and those bounders. Own up, you awful fools! We're jolly well not going to be sacked for what your fools have done. Own up!"

"What on earth—" stuttered Tommy Dodd.

"Own up!" bawled Lovell. "Own up, you cads!"

"Shoved Carthew in the stocks!" yelled Tommy Dodd. "We haven't shoved anybody in any rotten stocks, you silly owls!"

"Yes, you have!"

"No, we haven't!"

"What? Are you going to deny it?" howled Lovell.

"Are you going to let us be sacked for what you did? Why, you—you—"

"Hold on, Lovell!" gasped Jimmy. "Better make sure—"

But Jimmy was too late—Lovell had already made sure in his own mind. And at the thought that the Moderns intended to deny their guilt, Arthur Edward quite lost his temper.

He jumped forward and smote Tommy Dodd on the nose. Tommy Dodd returned the compliment with a snite on Lovell's nose. The next moment they were smiting each other in other places, often and hard.

Not to be outdone, Raby smote Tommy Doyle in like manner, and next instant the fight was general—Jimmy Silver, not being the fellow to be left out of a scrap, also piling in. In fact, Tommy Cook made it impossible by rushing at Jimmy and hitting out.

In the dusty roadway Classics and Moderns struggled and scrapped amidst yells and shouts, little reeking of the Nemesis that was thundering towards them.

Even when they heard the close roar of a motor they did not cease until it was upon them. But as a taxi rumbled to a stop and a deep voice hailed them the fight ceased as if by magic.

"Boys! Bless my soul! Boys—boys, how—how dare you! Cease this unseemly disturbance at once!"

"Oh, great pip! The Head!"

It was the Head. He stepped down into the road with a terrific frown on his august brow. Inside the taxi could be seen Mr. Greely and Carthew.

"Boys!" The Head's voice trembled with wrath. "Boys—how dare you—on a public highway? And after—after what has already taken place! Upon my word! Silence! You Modern boys return to your House. I will request Mr. Mauders to punish you very severely. Silver and his wretched companions will go to my study—without an instant's delay. Enough! Go!"

"Oh dear!"

The taxi buzzed on. Tommy Dodd & Co., and Jimmy Silver & Co. hastened their steps dismally towards Rookwood. On the way Jimmy related events to the startled Tommy Dodd, who denied emphatically that they were responsible for the trouble, and even Lovell believed them now. At the gates they parted, and Jimmy and his chums hurried in to the Head's study. They found Mr. Dalton there as well as Mr. Greely and Carthew. From the grim expressions on the masters' faces it was only too clear that they looked upon the "stocking" of Carthew with deep gravity.

The Head's grim face went grimmer as his eyes rested on the battered features of Jimmy Silver & Co. The juniors pulled themselves together. Despite their fears they could not really believe it possible for them to be adjudged guilty, and they expected a severe cross-examination and a thorough trial. They got neither.

"Boys," said the Head, "there is no need for me to go deeply into this matter—a matter upon which both I and Mr. Greely take a very serious view. You have assaulted a prefect; you have treated Carthew abominably, and have brought ridicule and contempt upon Rookwood before the public. Both Mr. Greely and myself are of the opinion that only immediate expulsion can meet the case. You will pack your boxes this evening, and will leave Rookwood by early trains in the morning. Mr. Dalton, kindly escort these four boys to the punishment-room, where they will remain until morning."

The juniors gasped aloud. Their faces went quite white. They were sentenced without a trial. Even Jimmy Silver couldn't stand for that!

"But we didn't do it, sir!" said Jimmy indignantly. "Carthew is lying if he said we did—"

"Silence! It is impossible for me to doubt the word of a prefect. The mere fact that you were on the spot, taking a cruel and disgraceful delight in the scene is enough. You also assaulted Carthew previously by throwing a missile at him in the village street."

"We—we don't deny that, sir," stammered Jimmy wildly. "But we didn't—"

"Enough! For that crime alone you have earned severe punishment. The matter is ended. You leave Rookwood to-morrow. Take them away, Mr. Dalton."

And Mr. Dalton took them away. Lovell wanted to stay to argue the matter out, but Mr. Dalton's strong grip was not to be denied, and he went.

CHAPTER 4. A Forlorn Plot!

"AWFUL!"

"Simply frightful!"

That was the verdict of Rookwood—or of the junior element, at least. The seniors, naturally, all agreed that it served the kids right, that they had earned the sack for their astounding cheek, and couldn't expect anything else—though most of them felt sorry for Jimmy & Co.

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But their sorrow did not help matters, any more than the sorrow of the juniors. And they were dumbfounded and utterly dismayed at the news. Jimmy Silver himself was, without doubt, the most popular junior in the school, and he was Junior Skipper to boot. Few thought that Rookwood would be the same place without old Uncle Jimmy, as he was affectionately termed.

Tubby Muffin, the fat Classical, nearly wept bitter tears when he heard the news. No other fellow at Rookwood had lent Tubby so many half-crowns as Jimmy had, and no fellow troubled less about getting them back again. It would mean a tragic—and a financial—loss for Tubby Muffin.

"It's too awful," groaned Conroy. "Fancy losing old Jimmy, you chaps! It's a beastly shame! We've got to do something, you men."

"Do something?" said Mornington. "What the dickens can we do?"

"Well, any fresh news, you men?"

Tommy Dodd, Tommy Doyle, Tommy Cook, and Jimmy Towle came across to the group from the Modern Side. They looked grim.

"Nothing new," grunted Mornington, eyeing them sharply. "They're sacked, and there it ends unless the cads who did it own up, begad!"

"They're not likely to own up now," grunted Tommy Dodd. "But it doesn't end there. We're not allowing old Jimmy and his pals to be sacked without a fight, if you are, Morny."

"What the thump d'you mean, Dodd?"

Tommy glanced at his chums, and they nodded. "Jimmy's a mouldy old Classical," said Dodd grimly, "but he's a good chap for all that, and—hold on, don't get waxy, you asses!" he added hurriedly. "The fact is, we've got a wheeze, and we want help to carry it through."

"What, to save old Jimmy?"

"Yes," Tommy Dodd looked about him cautiously. "Old Knowles is going to the village this evening—in fact, he's gone already. He's bound to come back by the Church Walk. What about collaring him and shoving him in the stocks?"

Mornington, Conroy, Putty Grace, and Errol jumped.

"Wha-what? Are you potty?" stuttered Putty Grace.

"Not at all. The Head will never dream that any Rookwood man would dare to do it again after four chaps had been sacked for doing it. If it was done again he'd think it must have been done by outsiders. See? Carthew's lies wouldn't hold then. With Jimmy Silver and his pals in the detention-room, locked in, when the second giddy crime was committed—"

"Oh, my only hat!" gasped Conroy. "I—I see!"

"Jimmy and his pals would be let out," grinned Tommy Doyle. "Begorra they would! The Head simply couldn't sack 'em in face of that. If that beast, Knowles, was served the same, then it would convince the Head Jimmy hadn't done it. See? In any case, he'd put off the sacking for another inquiry."

"Good gad! So he would!" snapped Mornington, his eyes gleaming. "And you'd do it—risk the sack?"

"For old Jimmy—yes, every time!"

"Then we're on!" snapped Mornington; and the other three Classics eagerly agreed also.

"Here he comes!"

"Quiet!" hissed Tommy Dodd.

Knowles, of the Modern Sixth, was coming, little dreaming of the surprise in store for him—that he was booked to be a burnt offering for Jimmy Silver & Co., so to speak. He came striding along the Church Walk with the lofty dignity befitting a senior and prefect.

Behind the fence, near the big gap, the eight conspirators crouched. Mornington held a small bag in his hand, ready to slip over the victim's head. To make themselves doubly safe, however, all eight juniors wore roughly made masks.

They had only got to the spot in the nick of time, for even as they crouched down Tommy Dodd whispered the warning.

"Here he comes!"

They waited, scarcely daring to breathe. The footsteps came nearer, and Knowles' burly form passed the gap. Then Mornington slipped through and leaped upon his back.

Next instant they were all through the gap, and leaping upon the startled senior.

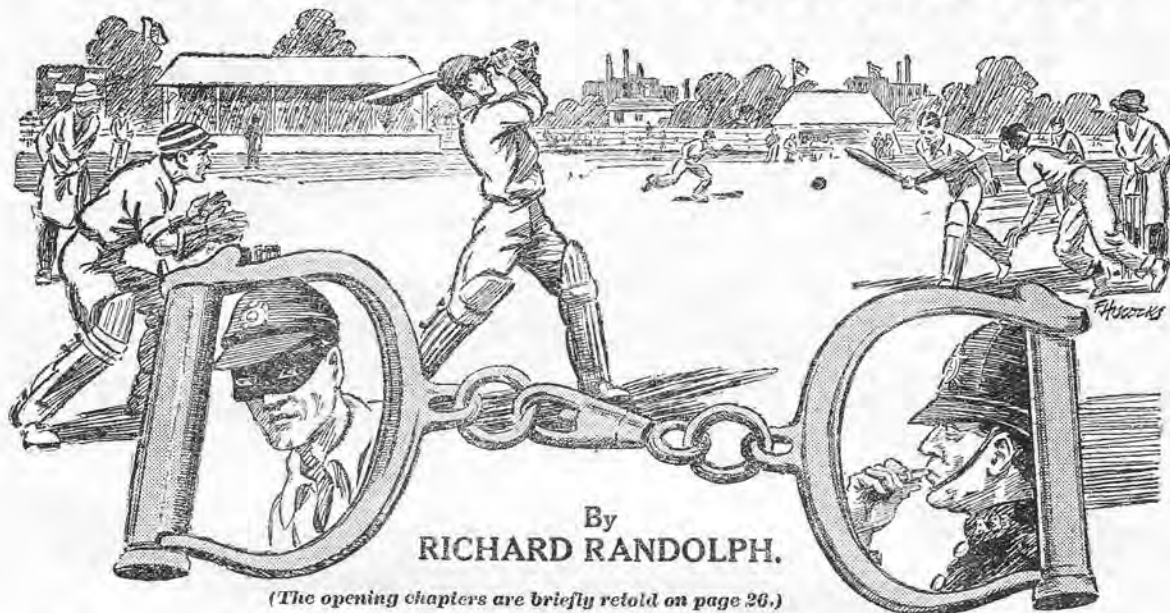
Before he could even cry out, the bag was whipped down over his head and face, and strong, youthful hands gripped him fast, while cords were passed round arms and legs.

He gurgled and gasped, and strove to yell. He also strove to kick and hit out, but he had left that too late. Before he really knew what had happened to him he was being rushed along behind the fence again.

(Continued on page 23.)

MORE OF OUR THRILLING SPORTS SERIAL.

THE CRICKETER CRACKSMAN!



By
RICHARD RANDOLPH.

(The opening chapters are briefly retold on page 26.)

Helping Ralph!

REVELL, of Norlandshire, had never really been a bowler. The stuff he sent down now was hardly bowling at all. It was underhand—not tricky lob, but grubs, daisy-cutters, and an occasional ball too high for the batsman to hit, yet falling very near his stumps.

Such stuff was new to the lads who faced it, and it bothered them, so that they treated it with respect it did not deserve. And Rod took two more wickets, and 14 runs were still wanted with three to fall.

One of the veteran's fancy high pitches dropped right on the bails of a much disconcerted young man from Bradford. He muttered things; but such a ball is all in the game. His successor took his life in his hands, and slammed the underhand tripe for two fours. Then he played right over a grub, having quite needlessly gone out of his crease to it; and Ginger grabbed the leather up, feeling his nails against the ground even through the stout gloves in doing so, and whipped off the bails.

"Howzatt?"

"Out!"

The whipper-in appeared. Only six were needed. Revell risked one of the fancy high ones. It fell a trifle short, and was hit hard.

Over the ropes, surely! But wait! Beal was running like a deer in the long-field. Could he get to it in time?

It hung in the air. He was able to reach round, his back to the ropes. Even then he had to jump to reach it; but reach it he did, and Norlandshire Second had won, against all seeming possibility, by five runs!

John Redgrave had been on the ground to see the finish. He was one of the first to greet Rod as the players bolted up the pavilion steps, for, like his son, he was a member of the county club.

"My word, Rod, this is great!" he said enthusiastically. "You are booked for the county team now, and no mistake about it! Isn't that so, Mr. Revell?"

"That's my notion, Redgrave. If only the committee will put me and this lad and Beal into the team for next match Norlandshire ought to be all right."

John smiled broadly. He knew James Revell from of old.

Afterwards he wondered whether what Revell had said might not have been something other than a joke. Old crock as he was, James Revell could have led Norlandshire better than Alured Hyde was likely ever to do!

Revell passed on. John Redgrave put a letter into Rod's hand.

"I found this when I looked in at home to tell the missus I shouldn't be wanting tea," he said. "Thought you might as well have it as soon as possible. You're taking it all very coolly."

"Not inside, Uncle Jack," Rod confessed. "I'm just boiling. But I try hard not to boil over."

He passed on, letter in hand, and John Redgrave turned to talk about the game with old friends.

All were agreed that there had never been anything like it during the three or four years that Norlandshire had run a Second Eleven a while back. Men tried out then had made good. Hebblewhite and Scanton, now in the county team, were two of them. But neither these two nor any others of that day had shown such form as Rod Rodney and Conrad Beal had shown in this match.

"And there's that little red-headed stumper, too," said one of the group. "When Jerrold has to go he ought to be safe for the place."

Ginger did not hear that. It would have done him good to hear. But he knew that he had accomplished all that was asked of him, and he had faith in himself.

In the dressing-room Rod tore open the letter. He saw that it was from Tormouth, and guessed that it might be from Mr. Thoms, though he had not expected to hear from the lawyer yet.

A pink and white slip was folded inside the sheet of notepaper—a cheque for £52 3s. 6d.

The realisation of Mr. Rodney's assets had not taken as long as had been expected, Mr. Thoms said, and had proved more fruitful than he had dared to hope. He enclosed a statement. He had deducted his costs—if Rod had known more about lawyers he would have seen that they were very low, and even as it was he thought them small—and enclosed a cheque for the balance. A receipt in due form should be sent. His boy wrote, he added, that they were getting along very well at Nunwick, but missed Rod, and would be likely to miss him more when the school matches came. But everybody wished him the best of luck at Norchester, and Ted would be writing to him before long.

The cordial letter might have been some consolation to Rod had the hour been one of failure instead of triumph. Coming as it did right on top of a big success it made his heart warm to all the world.

Which was all to the advantage of Ralph Redgrave. Rod did not despise the money, by any means. He had limited his hopes to twenty pounds or so; he had received

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**A match isn't lost till it's ended—
not when Rod Rodney's got any-
thing to do with it!**

over fifty. He would be able to buy presents for Aunt Mary and Uncle Jack, and stand treat to Ginger. And it would be good to have a little capital behind him if he left work at the mill to join the county club's ground staff.

When he left the pavilion with Ginger, after a very friendly good-bye to Beal, John Redgrave had gone. The big hall, that had been thronged a little earlier, was empty now. Rod made for home, Ginger leaving him on the way.

John had not come in, and Aunt Mary looked worried. Ralph was the trouble.

"He came in a quarter of an hour ago, Rod, with a face like death," she said. "He wouldn't tell me what was the matter, though I begged and prayed him to. He just went upstairs, and he hasn't come down, and I know it's no use me going to him. I'm his mother, but that's no matter to our Ralph."

Rod went up to the room he and Ralph shared. But for what Mrs. Redgrave had said he would have run up lightly. As it was, all his concern was for her and her husband. He could not feel that any trouble of Ralph's mattered to him, except through them. Not a sign of friendliness had Ralph ever given him.

But he had a shock when he opened the door of the bed-room. For Ralph was huddled up on his bed, blubbering.

"I say, what's the matter?" asked Rod.

He would not have been surprised had Ralph cursed him for the inquiry. But Ralph was meek.

"What's the use of asking that?" he mumbled. "You can't help, and if you could, you wouldn't."

"I don't think you should take that for granted," Rod answered.

"Do you mean that you would?" Ralph sat up, his face tear marked, his hair, usually so sleek, in wild disarray. "But what's the use of gassing? You haven't any oof."

"It's cash that's the trouble, then?" Rod asked.

"Yes, yes, yes! Hang and burn it all, if a chap only has the oof, he needn't mind about anything else. It's the one thing that counts."

And Ralph threw himself back, using his handkerchief upon his face.

"How much? And what's it for?" asked Rod.

Ralph sat up again. A gleam of hope came into his countenance, then faded.

"You've nothing, and if you had, you wouldn't lend it to me!" he groaned.

"I have a little. My father's estate has been settled up, and I've just got the cheque," replied Rod.

"How much?"

"Hardly your affair, that, is it? What will put you right?"

"Twenty quid might do it. But I don't suppose you'll part. We've never hit it."

"That's true," Rod said. "And I don't think that it's been my fault, for I was ready enough to be pals with you. I'm willing to help you now, because of what your people have done for me. But I think I ought to be told first why you need all that cash."

Ralph sat up on the bed again, elbows on knees, face in hands. He was thinking hard.

"Gambling!" he blurted out, after a silence that seemed long, though it had not really lasted many seconds.

"Do you mean the bookies?" queried Rod.

He knew that Ralph backed horses. His knowledge of other forms of gambling that were familiar to Ralph was so small as hardly to count; and he was none the worse for the ignorance.

It was not the bookies; but Ralph caught at the suggestion.

"Yes," he groaned. "They've got me in a cleft stick."

"I don't believe they can do much," Rod answered. "You're under twenty-one, if not a great deal under, and, anyway, they can't sue."

So much worldly wisdom he had picked up. But it did not help.

"Fat lot you know about it!" Ralph snorted. "They may not be able to take me into court, but they can ruin me without that. You know what the gov'nor is."

"Will twenty pounds settle them?"

"I don't say that; but it will stall them off all right. How much is your cheque for?"

Rod had never disliked Ralph more than he did then.

Greed and cunning were easy

to read on his face. But it

was not Ralph for whom he

would really be doing this;

it was Ralph's mother.

"That's my business. What

will settle them outright?"

Ralph thought a moment.

No good opening his mouth

too widely. He felt sure the

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cheque could not possibly be for any very considerable sum.

"Twenty-five," he answered sullenly.

"Right-ho! I can let you have that, though you may have to wait a day or two before the cheque's put through. I'd better not ask your father to do it for me, perhaps."

"Thanks, no end! It's jolly decent of you! I can sleep to-night now. Before you blew in I felt like using a razor for something a bit more serious than shaving."

"Good thing your razor's the safety sort," Rod answered dryly.

He could sense the fact that Ralph's thanks were insincere, and really he would not have known how to meet them had he believed them genuine. He could not like Ralph—never would like him, whatever happened.

"Oh, it's not so bad as it might be, Aunt Mary!" he told Mrs. Redgrave downstairs. "There was something he was afraid his father might hear of, and that worried him. But I was able to show him that it didn't amount to much. Cheer up!"

He felt an abominable liar, though his departure from the truth, as far as he knew it, was not great. But he did not care how gross a liar he might be when he saw the change in the motherly face that had grown very dear to him. Mrs. Redgrave trusted Rod utterly.

"I wish—I wish Ralph had half the kindness for me you have, Rod," she said.

"Oh, but he has—he must have! Aren't you his mother?"

While you were about it to lie by halves was no use. Rod was pretty sure by this time that Ralph cared nothing at all about his mother or his father. If there was any person on earth for whom he had affection besides himself, that person was Alured Hyde. And Rod could not choose but doubt whether that went deep.

Trouble in the Team!

WHILE Norlandshire Second were playing Yorkshire Second at Norchester, the county's first team played Warwickshire at Edgbaston.

As the end of the second day's play the situation was very equal. The home side had made 348, Robert Wyatt contributing one of his steady three-figure scores. Norlandshire had replied with 353. A few years earlier some sides—though not Norlandshire under Arthur Hereward—would have sat tight on the small lead, sure of first innings points if they made no mistake. But now a win outright, with its fifteen points, meant so much that no captain could afford to do that kind of thing. Wyatt had seen that, and it was plain that his men had been given instructions not to potter about. He himself had made over forty at about twice his usual pace. Croom had got a move on him, too. But Leonard Bates and Norman Kilner had gone cheaply before the Rev. J. H. Parsons and Reggie Santall got together in the last half-hour and scored apace. Warwickshire were 157 on with six wickets to fall, and they had a tail.

Thus far everything had been easy for Alured Hyde.

But he recognised the fact that they might not be so easy on the third day of the match. He knew that the men did not like him. If he asked of them anything out of the rut he would not get a blank refusal; but it was very unlikely that he would get the response Hereward would have had. In Arthur Hereward's hands the team had been like a violin on which the master might play what tune he would. Already Hyde realised that he was no violinist in this sense.

The Birmingham evening papers gave him fresh cause for disquiet.

Beal's big innings—big for a first match against a side of standing—did not trouble him, for he knew nothing about Beal. But Rod's double success, as bowler and batsman, made him feel sour. He had not expected the boy he hated to make sure of his chance for the county thus soon.

The only other amateur in the team, who was one of his satellites, found him a very moody companion that night. The precious pair did not neglect any dissipation they could find in the city; but Hyde was morose through it all, and very plainly not enjoying himself.

He woke next morning with a hunch that there was trouble in the offing. But he did not guess what form the trouble was to take.

A few minutes before the time for resumption Mr. Ryder, the Warwickshire secretary, came to him.

"There's a bit of a fuss, Mr. Hyde," he said, rather stiffly. "A man has asked for you, and two members of your team have held him up, saying that he's not the sort of person who ought to be admitted to any cricket pavilion on any account whatever. I

THE OPENING CHAPTERS.

After his father's death ROD RODNEY goes to live with the Redgraves at Norchester, a mill town in the North of England. The first night there Rod and RALPH REDGRAVE go to a boxing saloon kept by HORRY HIAM and his son HARRY. In a scrap there Ralph fouls Rod because he cannot beat him. Rod also meets ALURED HYDE, Ralph's enemy, who is captain of Norlandshire cricket team. Hyde forces Rod into a bare-knuckle fight, but Rod knocks Hyde out. Playing for Norlandshire 2nd XI Rod makes a century. With five wickets to fall Yorkshire 2nd need 41 to win!

know no more of the matter than that. I must leave it for you to settle."

Hebblewhite and Baines were the players. The man they had held up was the fellow known at Norchester as Yankee.

Yankee would not have dared to show the tip of his nose inside the pavilion on the home ground; but he had not counted on running against men who knew him here. The risk seemed small. He wanted to speak to Hyde, and did not reckon on meeting those two.

They knew him. They had been swindled by him, and had been keeping their eyes open for him this long time. Of getting back the money they had lost there was not the least chance; but they were hard up against Yankee and when they saw him they pounced upon him.

"Clear out of this!" said the flaxen-haired Hebblewhite. "You'd never have got in if you'd been known!"

"I want to see Mr. Hyde," whined Yankee, his lips twitching, his narrow eyes mere slits.

"What's Hyde got to do with you?" snapped the burly Baines.

"That's not your business!" returned Yankee, with as great a show of defiance as he could summon up.

"It's our business that we know you for a crook that would never have been let in here if others had known what we do," Hebblewhite said.

"I've come to see Mr. Hyde, and I mean to see him!" answered Yankee doggedly.

There was nothing for it now but to stand by his guns.

Hebblewhite and Baines looked at one another. To hustle Yankee out of the pavilion was not to be thought of as a solution of the difficulty. They would be putting themselves all in the wrong if they did that.

It was then that Mr. Ryder came up, saw that something was amiss, and asked what it was. He knew both the Norlandshire players, and they knew and respected him.

Baines spoke briefly, to the point. The Warwickshire secretary hurried away. Within two minutes, during which time no further word had been spoken, the Norlandshire captain reappeared.

"Dash it all, what do you mean by interfering with a fellow who has asked to see me?" he demanded angrily.

"Do you know the fellow, Mr. Hyde?" asked Hebblewhite.

"Not from Adam!" As he told that bouncing lie Alured Hyde looked at Yankee, not at Hebblewhite. "But that's nothing to the point."

"Perhaps it's something to the point that Baines and I know him for a shyster!" retorted Hebblewhite.

"I don't care what you know about him or think you know. I won't have you butting in between me and anyone who wants to see me. It's dashed cheek on your part!"

Hebblewhite's face, always high of colour, went beetroot red, and Baines frowned.

"I'll tell you this, Mr. Hyde," said Hebblewhite. "This blighter's not to be trusted where there's any chance of picking and stealing. You don't know him. We do. You wouldn't like it if he got the run of the pavilion by using your name, and afterwards it was found that someone had



Hebblewhite sprang forward and drove his fist to Alured Hyde's face. The county captain staggered back, blood gushing from his nose.

gone through all the pockets in the dressing-room, would you?"

"Oh, don't be absurd, my good fellow!" snorted Hyde. "I shall simply hear what he has to say, and I warn him that if he's begging he's on the wrong tack, and then see him out, or get someone else to. I'm not saying you're wrong, but curse your interference with my affairs!"

The high tone taken was too much for Hebblewhite, whose temper was fiery. He flamed up.

"Don't 'my good fellow' me!" he cried. "And don't curse me! It doesn't look well that you should take the side of this swindler, and I've doubts about it being true that he and you have never met before!"

Hyde's fist was within an inch of the speaker's nose when Hebblewhite struck. Neither Hebblewhite nor Baines tried to deny that the one blow given was that of the pro. Neither could prove, or tried to prove, that he had hit out in self-defence. Yet so it had been.

The county captain staggered back, blood gushing from his nostrils.

"Tapped his claret very neatly, Bill," said Baines coolly. "Well, you and I are for it after this. As for him, let the dashed skunk he wants to talk to see to him."

The burly man led his tall, fair-haired comrade away. They had always been pals, these two, and Baines was resolute to share whatever trouble came to Hebblewhite out of this affair.

"Means suspension at best," said Hebblewhite, as they reached the door of the players' room. "For me, that is."

"For us both," said Baines. "I stand by you, lad."

Red Harman, Roger Rogers, Jerrold, Tommy Coote, and Walter Deeks gave ear to the tale they had to tell, and sympathised with them.

"I should think well of anybody who plugged Hyde on the conk!" said Red.

"If we stand together there needn't be any suspension for Bill and Josh," said Deeks.

"What are we to do? Strike if they're stood down?" asked Tommy Coote.

"That's the idea. You've more sense than I thought, Tommy."

"Too much for that game, cocky! It wouldn't be cricket."

We've to think of Norlandshire as well as of our pals. I've no use for Hyde, any more than the rest of you have. But we can't let the committee down. They're decent, though they have made a big bloomer in appointing this monkey-up-a-stick as skipper. What would Mr. Hereward say if we all deserted the colours while he lay dying?"

That argument was irresistible, even to Walter Deeks. But in no case would Hebblewhite and Baines have agreed to a general strike of the men.

"Happen he will keep it dark," said Roger Rogers hopefully.

It would have been quite the wisest thing that Hyde could have done. But before he had thought it out he ran against Mr. Fearnside, a member of the committee, who had accompanied the team to Birmingham, and reported to him the assault. Naturally his version of what had happened was coloured to put Hebblewhite wholly in the wrong, and, unfortunately, Jason Fearnside was about the last man on the Norlandshire's C.C.C.'s committee to size things up rightly.

He was soon at the telephone, in touch with first one, then another, of his colleagues. Joseph Hyde was among those he rang up.

"What did you say?" he asked the elder Hyde.

But Joseph had not said anything. He had merely groaned.

Mr. Hyde was not among the three directors who hurried to Brum.

The three did not enjoy themselves. They saw their team beaten hollow. Hyde would not put on Hebblewhite, the side's best bowler on a fast pitch. Tommy Coote was at his worst. When Tommy was good, he was very, very good, but when he was bad he was horrid. Rogers was much as usual, but this was not his type of pitch, and he could do no more than slow down the scoring. The other bowlers were useless.

The tall curate, Parsons, whom everyone likes and admires, was at his best, and young Santall, worthy son of a worthy sire, gave him fine support. The score mounted by leaps and bounds, till both batsmen had made well over 100. Wyatt declared after lunch, and Norlandshire slumped for 78.

It was whispered at lunch that Hebblewhite and Baines would be stood down. Baines might have crawled out, but they all knew Josh Baines for no crawler. Before the game ended it was known that Rodney and Beal had been sent for to play at Derby next day.

No one but Hebblewhite and Baines—and they had only the dimmest of suspicions—thought anything of what might be between Alured Hyde and the man known in Norchester as Yankee.

But when Harry Hiam heard of the cricket trouble he knitted his brows, and became very thoughtful.

(Rod's chance has come at last! But with Hyde as his captain his prospects are none too good! Next week's GEM will contain another thrilling instalment.)

STOCKING THE STOCKS!

(Continued from page 24.)

"Through with him!" snapped Mornington. "Never mind anything. Chance being seen. We can't be recognised in this get-up. Look lively!"

"What ho!"

They rushed Knowles of the Sixth through the gap. Then they became aware of sudden laughter. There was a small group of laughing children in the square—a lonely spot at most times. But the conspirators did not mind them. What they did mind was the fact that the village stocks were already occupied!

At first they only got a glimpse of a back, a pair of legs, and a pair of elbows. But before they could pull up, a face and pair of hands came into their view as they rounded the stocks.

It was a terrific shock, especially as they knew the face; they knew it only too well. It was a familiar face, red now with rage and humiliation.

It was the face of Bulkeley of the Sixth, the august and respected captain of Rookwood!

The conspirators nearly fainted in a stricken group. They had not even known Bulkeley was anywhere near the village. They were utterly flabbergasted, shocked, and dismayed.

"Oh!" gasped Mornington faintly. "Oh, g-good gad! Oh! Run for it!"

They waited no longer. Bulkeley had turned his head. It was enough. They did not even wait to lower the wriggling Knowles to the ground. They just dropped him, and flew for their very lives.

Bulkeley and Knowles turned up that evening together at Rookwood. They looked white, having been found by the vicar and released. They went straight to the Head. Ten minutes later Mr. Dalton visited the punishment-room and released Jimmy Silver & Co.

It was good news for Rookwood, and good news for the daring conspirators. Yet they showed no joy—they felt no joy, only a dismal fear. For they knew, they felt certain, that Bulkeley had seen them, and would, at least, recognise some of them by their clothes. And while the rest of Rookwood rejoiced over the saving of Jimmy Silver & Co., and speculated on the mystery of the strange attacks, and the stranger mystery of who was responsible for them, Tommy Dodd and his fellow conspirators waited tremblingly for the further developments which they knew must come.

THE END.

(What will happen to Tommy Dodd & Co? It looks bad for them! Don't miss the strange developments in next week's fine Rookwood yarn!)

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