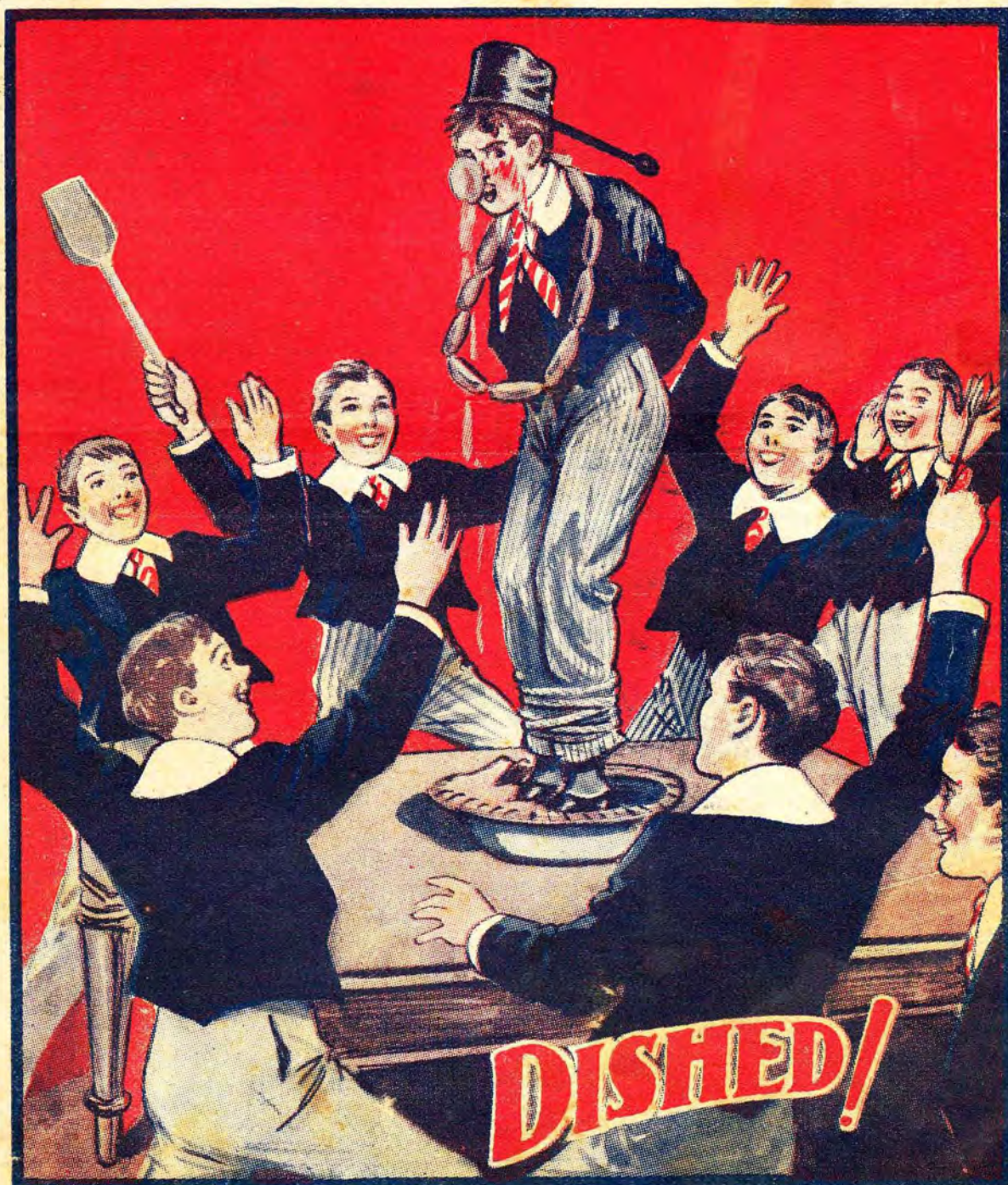


FOR THE BEST STORIES OF THE WEEK—SEE INSIDE!

The GEM 2^d



DISHED!

TOM MERRY

By
MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

New Rivals!

JACK BLAKE, of St. Jim's, brought his fist down upon the study table with a sudden, emphatic thump. It was rather a thoughtless thing to do, because Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy were hard at work at that table, their heads bent, and their pens scratching away at express speed. And the result, as might have been expected, was disastrous. The concussion made the table jump, and Herries gave a fiendish whoop as the ink spurted into his face, while D'Arcy's eyeglass dropped and smashed on the table, and Digby's pen went zigzagging across an exercise intended for Mr. Lathom's critical inspection on the morrow morning.

"What the— Why the—" howled Herries. "You dangerous lunatic, what the dickens are you up to?"

"You silly cuckoo!" wailed Dig. "Look what you've done to my exercise! What will old Lathom say when I show him that?"

"You wuff duffah!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "You've bwokeen my monocle—the third that has been bwokeen this term."

Jack Blake looked at them serenely, apparently quite reckless of the damage he had done.

"Shut up, all of you, and listen to your uncle!"

The chief of Study No. 6 in the School House at St. Jim's was an autocrat, and his dutiful followers obeyed, and gave him their attention.

"Look here!" said Blake seriously. "Things have come to a pretty rotten pass at St. Jim's, and I tell you that, for one, I'm not going to stand it any longer!"

"Hear, hear!" said Herries, wiping the ink from his face.

"Go on!"

"I say, I'm not going to stand it!" said Blake. "Are you?"

"No, certainly not!" said Herries. "I'm going to sit down!"

"Don't you be funny, Herries; Nature made you funny enough! I say I'm not going to stand it, and I should think you would all say the same."

"Right-ho!" said Dig. "Only what is it you're not going to stand. You haven't told us that yet. I'm willing to buck against anything you like, but I should like to know what it is first."

"I'm thinking of that new chap in the Shell."

"Tom Merry?"

"Yes."

"Well, what's the matter with him?" said Herries.

Blake frowned darkly.

"You know as well as I do!" he exclaimed. "The boulder thinks he ought to be at the head of the School House juniors in the rows with the New House. He has the cheek to say that he can manage the business better than the old firm—that's Study No. 6—because he's in the Shell! Forsooth!"

"For what?" asked Digby innocently.

"Forsooth!" said Blake. "That's only old English for 'rats.' This chap Merry is exactly four months and three days older than I am—"

"Did you work all that out in your head?"

"Shut up and don't interrupt. Now, I suppose you agree with me that Study No. 6 is going to remain at the head of the School House juniors, and that Tom Merry and his lot have got to be kept in their places?"

"Rather!" said the three juniors together. Or, to be perfectly exact, Herries and Digby said "Rather," and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy said "Wathah"!

This was, in fact, rather a sore point with the Fourth-Formers of the School House at St. Jim's.

The rivalry between the two Houses at the school, which dated from the foundation of the New House, was as keen as ever, especially among the juniors.

The seniors of both Houses affected to take no interest in the struggle for supremacy between the



—AT ST. JIM'S! YOU'LL ENJOY EVERY WORD OF IT! 3

GETS GOING!

rival juniors, but, as a matter of fact, the rivalry was just as keen among the elders, though it was not quite so exuberant.

Study No. 6 had always been at the head of the School House juniors in their many alarms and excursions against the New House, but now the high estate of Blake and his chums was threatened.

Since Tom Merry had come to St. Jim's there had been rivalry inside the School House. It was perfectly good-natured and good-tempered, but very keen, for all that, and the worst of it was that Tom Merry had shown a genius for leading, and Blake seriously found that his laurels were in danger. Hence a spell of hard thinking for the School House chief, which had brought him an idea, which had proved so disastrous to the face of Herries, the exercise of Digby, and the eyeglass of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"It's all very well," continued Blake, "for Tom Merry to say that we're all in the same boat against Figgins & Co.—that's all very well, but there's such a thing as a newcomer keeping his place and obeying his elders—no, not exactly his elders—I mean, his superiors. And that's just what Tom Merry doesn't do. He doesn't respect us!"

And Blake looked adequately solemn as he made the announcement.

"Awful!" said Digby, with a shake of the head. "What shall we do to him—something with boiling oil in it?"

"Don't be an ass if you can help it!" said Blake. "As I said before, we've got to put these newcomers into their place. My idea is to go to them and put the thing plainly, in a straightforward, play-the-game sort of way, and if they won't listen to reason, why, then, we'll let Figgins & Co. slide for a bit, and give Tom Merry and his pals a taste of our quality, till they ask us to make pax. How's that?"

"Jolly good idea!" said Herries thoughtfully. "Only—"

"Only what?" demanded Blake.

"Why, you've gone for Tom Merry before, and you can't deny that it wasn't—well, it wasn't exactly what you would call a howling success."

"No good raking up ancient history, that I can see," replied Blake. "If you're funky of going for the new chaps, say so, and have done with it."

"Oh, rats! You know I'm not!"

"Then get up on your hind legs, and follow your leader."

"We're going to see the bouncers now in their study?"

"Yes," said Blake. "No time like the present, and I know they're there. Do you know what those three chaps—Lowther, Manners, and Merry—have been called? The Terrible Three! We'll Terrible Three them if they don't mind their p's and q's!"

And Blake, with an extremely determined look upon his face, marched along the passage, into the new wing of the School House, where the studies of the boys of the Shell who boarded in the school were situated.

Arrived at Tom Merry's door, Blake gave a sounding thump.

"Come in!" called out a cheery voice; and Blake threw open the door and marched in. Herries was by his side, still somewhat inky, and Digby and D'Arcy brought up the rear. D'Arcy, as befitted an occasion of such state, was sporting a new eyeglass.

Three youngsters were seated in their study.

Tom Merry rose to his feet as the juniors entered, and surveyed them with a smile upon his cheerful, sunny face. Manners and Monty Lowther retained their seats, but Manners slid his hand slyly towards a ruler, and Monty Lowther carelessly dropped his upon a heavy lexicon.

The Terrible Three were ready for war.

Blake marched up to the table, and rapped upon it with his knuckles.

"Shut the door, kids. Now, Master Tom Awfully Clever Merry, I want a few words!"

"Right-ho!" said Tom Merry cheerfully, and he pushed a dictionary across the table. "There you are, Blake!"

Blake looked at the book with a puzzled expression.

"You said you wanted a few words. Well, there's lots in that, and you can take your choice."

Lowther and Manners giggled, and a chuckle came from behind Blake. He cast a severe glance over his shoulder, and Study No. 6 became preternaturally grave again.

Blake went on hastily:

"Oh, cut the cackle, Merry, and listen to what I've got to say. You new chaps have come to St. Jim's, and you're putting on too many airs. You've got to be taught your place. You know that Study No. 6 is at the head of the Lower School on this side, and so I warn you plainly, keep off the grass!"

"I don't think you look at it in exactly the right light, Blake," said Tom Merry, with a sweet smile. "You see, you youngsters—"

He got no farther.

The boys of the Shell were certainly older than Study No. 6, but as their difference in age should be counted in months, in some cases weeks, their assumption of seniority was simply unendurable to the Fourth Form.

The word youngster to a Fourth-Former from a fellow in the next Form above was like a red rag to a bull, and put an end to all peaceful argument.

Blake brought down his fist with a thump on the table.

"Look here!" he bawled. "I'm not going to argue with you newcomers! You ain't St. Jim's fellows at all, as a matter of fact, and we don't own you. Are you going to follow your proper leaders, or are you not?"

"My dear, excitable little fellow—"

Blake wriggled with rage. He was quite as big as Tom Merry, and his wrath was overflowing.

"Nuff said!" he exclaimed. "It's war, then, and we'll teach you bouncers a lesson you won't forget for a donkey's age! Mind your eye, that's all!"

"If you'll allow me—"

"Oh, rats!"

Blake turned and marched to the door, with his faithful followers at his heels. In the doorway they halted and turned, and at a sign from Blake, Study No. 6 produced

peashooters from their pockets. The Terrible Three were laughing; but their laughter came to a sudden stop.

"Fire!"

"Yow, ow, ow!" howled Manners, as a well-aimed pea stung him upon his somewhat prominent nose, and he jumped up, knocking his chair backwards.

"Oh! Ow! Oh!" yelped Lowther, catching one with his chin and another with his ear.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Tom Merry, who came off worst of all. A regular volley pinked his face all over, and another came whizzing into his mouth as he opened it to gasp.

With a yell of laughter Blake and his chums slammed the door after them.

Tom Merry was across the study like a streak of lightning. He snatched at the handle of the door, but it would not open; the chums of Study No. 6 were holding it tight from the outside.

"Lend a hand here!" panted Tom.

Manners and Lowther were behind him in a twinkling. Tom grasped the handle of the door with both hands, and Manners caught him round the waist, and Lowther grasped Manners by the shoulders. Then all three tugged hard.

It was a terrible strain, but it was hardly needed. For Blake suddenly let the door go on the outside, and it flew open like lightning. The sudden yielding of the door brought disaster to the Terrible Three. They staggered back blindly as the door flew open, and Lowther fell backwards, Manners sprawled across him, and Tom Merry sat on top of Manners.

"Help!" gasped the unfortunate Lowther, crushed like a pancake at the bottom of the heap.

"Get off my neck!" roared Manners.

"My only Panama hat!" gasped Tom Merry.

Blake looked into the study, with a grin.

"Hallo! Why don't you sort yourselves out?" he asked.

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and then he slammed the door again and was gone before any of the trio could think of pursuit.

The Famous Four gathered in Study No. 6.

"I think we've had rather the best of the first round," said Blake, with a satisfied grin, "and I've got an idea in my head that will make the three of them look sick, and no mistake. Listen, and I will a tale unfold."

And the four chums listened, and many a chuckle punctuated the unfolding of Blake's plan.

CHAPTER 2.

The Hospitality of Study No. 6.

FIGGINS & CO. were coming in from cricket practice when Blake strolled out of the School House and encountered them.

The New House juniors looked very suspiciously at Blake as he came up with a sweet and amicable smile upon his face.

Like the ancient gentleman who feared the Greeks when they came with gifts in their hands, Figgins & Co. always had their doubts about Blake when he looked especially bland. But this time Blake was on friendly greeting bent.

"Hallo, old Figgins!" he said genially. "I see you've been at practice. Trying to get into form for the House match?"

"Oh, we're always in form enough to lick the School House!" replied Figgins carelessly.

"I should say so," chimed in Kerr and Wynn and Marmaduke Smythe as one man.

Blake nodded agreeably.

"Well, we shall see that when the match comes off," he added. "No need to get our rags out about it now. What I want to know just now is would any of you chaps like a feed?"

"Not half!" said Figgins suspiciously. "No gammon?"

"Honour bright!"

When Blake said that, Figgins & Co. knew that they could rely upon him, and they beamed on the chief of the School House juniors in the most cordial way.

"Right-ho!" said Figgy. "Where is it? In the School House?"

"Yes, that's it."

"Just wait a jiffy while we change, and we'll hop up to Study No. 6, and—"

"Half a mo! It's not in Study No. 6, but in one of the new studies in the new wing—Study No. 10."

Figgins looked suspicious again.

"That's Tom Merry's study, isn't it?"

"Yes. He's standing the feed."

"And he sent you to ask us?"

"Not exactly. He doesn't know you're coming. And he doesn't know I'm coming. The fact is, Merry and his pals have been laying in a heap of good things for a feed for the Shell, and we're going to scoff it," said Blake frankly. "We're on the warpath against Merry and his lot, and, as there's a heap of grub, more than four could wolf in a dog's age, we thought we'd take you four into the joke."

"Ha, ha, ha!" giggled Figgins. "Oh, hear me smile! We'll be there, rather!"

"The Terrible Three are going into the gym for their rotten squad practice with the Shell," explained Blake. "We're going to get into their study while they're gone, and barricade it. They won't dare to make a row, or they will have Schneider on their track. We can sit in there and eat their Tommy and giggle at 'em!"

"Ha, ha, ha! We're on this!"

"Then come into the School House in ten minutes," said Blake, looking at his big silver watch. "We'll be all ready then."

"Right-ho!"

Figgins & Co. went into the New House, to change out of their cricketer flannels, in high good humour. Tom Merry, on first coming to St. Jim's, had had a brief sojourn in the New House, and had had his little rubs with Figgins & Co. The joke that was to be played on Study No. 10 was just in Figgins' line.

Blake strode into the School House again. There was a seraphic smile upon his face. He rejoined his chums in the Hall, and the four of them were lounging there when Tom Merry and his friends came downstairs.

Blake grinned at Tom in a genial way, but, though the Terrible Three looked wrathful, they walked straight on without taking any other notice of the Fourth-Formers.

"There they go," muttered Blake, "off to their silly squad practice! They'll be surprised to see the change in their quarters when they come back."

A little later Figgins & Co. arrived.

"Come on!" grinned Blake. "This way to the banquet!"

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And he led the way up the stairs and along the passage into the new wing of the School House, and they stopped at Study No. 10.

Blake tried the door.

"Hallo!" said Figgins "It's locked!"

"Yes. Rotten suspicious bounders, I call them!" said Blake. "But a locked door won't stop us long, I think."

He took out his pocket-knife. It was a combination knife, containing all kinds of weird instruments, and Blake was not long in picking that lock. The door was thrown open, and Blake stepped in.

"Gentlemen," he said, with a polite bow, "welcome to the feast! Enter!"

They entered, and Blake closed the door. He had damaged the lock too much for it to fasten again, but he tilted back a chair, and put it under the handle, jamming it tight, fastening the door against any attempt from without.

"There!" he said, with a look of satisfaction. "I think that will keep out Messrs. Merry & Company! What do you think?"

"I should say so!" agreed Figgins. "They won't be able to shift that without busting the door, and, with a master just across the passage, they won't dare to do that—what!"

"But where's the grub?" asked Fatty Wynn, looking anxiously round the study.

"That's just like you," said Figgins, "always thinking of the grub."

"Well, we've come here to feed, haven't we?" demanded Fatty Wynn. "If this is a sell, and these School House rotters haven't got any grub—"

"Peace, my children!" said Blake soothingly. "The grub is here, right enough, I know that for a fact, and we've only got to find it."

"And the sooner the quicker!" exclaimed Herries.

"Make a start!"

"Hallo! Here's a locker locked!" said Fatty Wynn.

"And here's a poker that will jolly well soon open it!" said Blake.

He suited the action to the word. The locker burst open under a mighty smite, and an old newspaper was revealed, which screened from view—only for a second—the collection of good things with which the Terrible Three had intended to regale their friends of the Shell.

"My Aunt Mary Ann!" exclaimed Figgins. "Here's a feast! Hand 'em out! Rabbit-pies, by George, and done to a turn!"

"How do you like 'em done?" grinned Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha! Currant wine—guzzling bounders! It will be a lesson to them not to look upon the wine when it is red, if they find only the empty bottles waiting for them here. Cake—my hat!—and biscuits! Oranges and apples and nuts! I suppose Tom Merry's maiden aunt has been sending him a giddy hamper."

The good things were hauled out, and spread in enticing array on the study table, the Terrible Three's books and papers being deposited in the grate to make room. Fatty Wynn already had his teeth in a pie. Figgins discovered a coconut, and he opened it by the simple expedient of bringing down a cricket bat on it, on the table, with a terrific smash.

"Oh, you clumsy bawtie!" wailed D'Arcy, as the fluid from within splashed over his fancy waistcoat, completely spoiling that beautiful article of attire. "Oh, my waistcoat! You silly duffah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Never mind your waistcoat, Adolphus," said Blake; "you've dozens more! You'd hardly believe from this chap's looks, would you, kids, that his father was a dealer in waistcoats?"

"It isn't twue, you wottah!" exclaimed D'Arcy indignantly.

"Don't interrupt the feast! Dry up, Aubrey!"

And D'Arcy dried up, though his waistcoat did not. The eight juniors set to work to travel through the feast, and they made pretty good headway. Figgins beamed round the table.

"Well," he said, "I don't think much of you School House chaps, as a rule—"

"Well, that's jolly polite, to start with!" said Blake, with a bow.

"Let me finish, can't you? You ain't much to brag of, as a rule, but I will say that this is a jolly good feast, and does you credit. I'm doing myself down well, and here's to you, Blake, old dear!"

"Same to you, and many of 'em!" said Blake.

And the two deadly rivals pledged themselves in currant wine.

"This isn't bad wine," said D'Arcy, filling his glass. Tom Merry's cupboard was well provided with glass and crockery-ware, and the raiders were making free use of it. "My deah fwiends, I dwink—"

He had raised his glass, when a sudden thump came at the study door. It startled D'Arcy, and the wine splashed out of his glass over his shirt-front. He gave a howl of anguish at this second disaster.

"Hallo!" cried Figgins, in surprise. "I should like to see you do that trick again, Aubrey."

"Does he always drink like that?" said Kerr.

Thump, thump!

"Hallo! Who's there?" said Blake.

A fierce voice came hissing through the keyhole:

"What are you doing in our study, you beasts?"

"Feasting," replied Blake cheerfully.

"They're wolfing our grub!" exclaimed a horrified voice in the passage. "They know we can't make a row because of old Schneider. The beast! Blake, you ruffian, come out of that study!"

"Are you in a hurry, Merry?"

"Yes, I am!"

"I'm sorry for that, because I'm not finished yet, and don't expect to be for some time."

"You howling rotter, when we get at you—"

"Oh, go away and play!"

Thump, thump, thump!

The sound of an angry voice with a German accent followed the thumping.

"Vat is all tat noise after? Go away mit yourselves before I come mit a cane, ain't it!"

It was the voice of Herr Schneider, the German master at St. Jim's, who was formerly at Clavering.

There was a sound of retreating footsteps in the passage. The Terrible Three were gone!

Jack Blake chuckled gleefully.

"I think we score this time," he remarked complacently. "Wire in, ye pippins, and don't spare the tommy. It isn't ours, so there's no need to be economical with it. Wire in!"

CHAPTER 3.

Tom Merry Has Bad Luck!

TOM MERRY and his comrades had been compelled to clear out of the passage suddenly when the thumping on the door aroused the German master and brought him angrily upon the scene.

Herr Schneider was always "down" on Tom Merry. He had been so when Tom was at Clavering School; and Tom had been far from pleased when, after his transference to St. Jim's, the German master had also obtained a post at the school. And, as ill-luck would have it, Herr Schneider was still located near Tom Merry's quarters.

The three scuttled away quickly enough before the German could spot them, and the attack on the study door perforce ended. Burning with wrath, the three heroes of the Shell gathered in the quadrangle to take counsel.

"The horrid bounders!" said Monty Lowther. "They've fastened themselves in the study, and they won't open the door till they've wolfed all the grub. I heard Figgins' voice there, so Blake has invited the New House wasters to the feast."

"Eight of the hungry bounders," said Manners, with a sigh. "My hat, why they won't leave a single crumb for us!"

Tom Merry nodded.

"The worst of it is, we can't get at them," he said. "We'd soon have had that door busted in if it wasn't for old Schneider, across the passage."

"Yes; but now there's no way of doing it."

"There's the window."

Manners gave an expressive whistle.

"The window—on the second storey? Are you thinking of walking up a brick wall like a fly, Thomas Merry?"

"No. I'm thinking of borrowing a ladder from Taggles."

"Will he lend you one?"

"He'd lend me his Sunday clothes if I gave him half-a-crown."

"Oh, I see, bribery and corruption!" grinned Manners. "But, mind you, only one chap could go up a ladder at a time, and there are eight fellows at the top to receive him."

"I shan't sound a trumpet and say I'm coming!" retorted Tom. "We'll take them by surprise. We left the window open, and I don't suppose they've closed it, as it is so warm. Let's get the ladder, that's the first thing to be done."

They hurried away to the porter's lodge. Taggles was not on the best of terms with the juniors, especially with the heroes of the Shell. But the sight of a half-crown held between Tom Merry's finger and thumb made him unwontedly civil. He had an idea that that half-crown might be transferred to his own waistcoat pocket.

"I say, Taggles, it's a nice day, isn't it?" said Tom Merry cheerily. "Warm for the time of the year, don't you think so, and a little cold for the season?"

Taggles gave a grunt, but did not commit himself to a reply.

"I want to ask a favour of you, Taggles," said Tom. "You've got charge of the things the workmen leave here."



Arthur Augustus gave a yell as Taggles brought his fist crashing down on the beautiful new topper. In a twinkling it was crushed down over his eyes!

There's something up with the door of my study, and I can't get in. I want to get in at the window and unfasten it from the inside."

This was strictly true.

"You'll lend us a long ladder, like an old sport, won't you?" said Tom coaxingly. "And if half-a-crown would be of any use to you, Taggy, old son—"

"I don't know that I ain't got any objection," said Taggles, with a covetous eye on the half-crown. "I don't see why you shouldn't have the ladder."

"Catch!"

Taggles caught the coin as it spun in the air, and came out to hand over the ladder. He watched the juniors with some misgivings as they seized it and ran it off towards the School House. He noticed that they whisked it away quickly, so that it would not be observed from any of the masters' windows, and he guessed that something was "on."

The window of Tom Merry's study looked out upon a corner of the quad, with a big tree close at hand, screening it from general view. Once the ladder was safely there it would be secure from general observation.

"Hallo, there's Kildare!" muttered Manners suddenly, in dismay.

The captain of St. Jim's looked in amazement at the ladder, and signed to the juniors to stop.

"What on earth are you going to do with that, youngsters?" he asked.

"My study door's got fixed," said Tom glibly. "Taggles lent us the ladder to get in at the window and unfasten it."

His look was so innocent that Kildare's suspicions were disarmed.

"Oh, all right!" he said. "Mind you don't break your necks!"

"Right-ho!" said Tom, in great relief.

Kildare walked on, and the juniors rushed the ladder round the corner, and stopped with it in the secluded spot under the study window.

"Narrow squeak, that!" gasped Tom.

"A miss is as good as a mile. Good luck! The window's still open! Hark! You can hear the corks popping in there! The brutes are scoffing our currant wine!"

"We'll scoff them soon!" said Tom. "Quick now! We don't want to give the alarm! I'll go up first, and I shall just go into the study head-first, go for 'em, and keep 'em engaged while you chaps get in at the window. See?"

"Good wheeze! But, I say, there's a lot of those chaps. Hadn't we better have some help?" Manners suggested.

"Right! If you like! Buzz off and get some of the Shell to back us up, while Monty and I put up the ladder."

Manners "buzzed" off, and Tom Merry and Lowther handled the ladder. They reared it carefully on end, and allowed the top to rest lightly against the wall under the window. This had been done almost without a sound, and there was no sign of alarm from within the study. It seemed certain that the invaders would be taken by surprise; though, even then, it was a risky enterprise.

But Tom Merry did not mind risks. Manners came back with three fellows belonging to the Shell, ready to back up Tom in the attack on the study.

"Wait till I'm in!" said Tom, in a whisper. "I'll keep their hands full while you come to the rescue. Here goes!"

And he ascended the ladder silently. Up he went, anxiously watched by his chums from below. He reached the window-sill, and could go no farther without revealing himself to the juniors within. He drew a deep breath and placed his hand on the sill. The next moment he was looking into the study.

Eight juniors were seated or lounging round the table, and the havoc they had made already in the provisions was astonishing.

Tom Merry vaulted over the sill and plunged into the study. The Fourth-Formers jumped in amazement, but Jack Blake and Figgins tumbled to the situation in a twinkling. In a flash Blake had hurled himself upon Tom Merry, while Figgins sprang to the window and closed it down.

"Lend a hand here!" yelled Blake.

His chums sprang to his aid.

Alas for Tom Merry's plan of keeping the juniors engaged while his friends followed him in at the window. He was down on the floor of the study in a moment, while Blake and Herries sat on his chest, with D'Arcy clinging lovingly to his hair and Digby treading on his squirming legs.

The window was closed, and Figgins & Co. were grinning through the glass at the wrathful countenance of Manners outside.

"My hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "Lemme gerrup!"

Blake chuckled.

"Thought you'd attack us in the rear—hey, my pippin?" he exclaimed. "This is where we teach you a lesson not to interrupt your superiors at meal-times. Give me that box-robe, Gussy."

D'Arcy brought the robe, and Tom Merry's wrists were tied together. Then he was stood on the table, with his feet in the remains of a pie!

He was looking very dusty and rumped, and rather blue. There was mischief in the looks of the juniors who surrounded him, and his friends outside the closed window were helpless to come to his aid.

Manners tapped on the glass.

"Open this window, you young brutes!"

"Right-ho!" said Blake, picking up an uncorked bottle of currant wine and stepping to the window. He threw up the sash. "Here you are!"

The bottle was inverted over the head of the unfortunate Manners. Manners gave a yell, and went sliding down that ladder much more quickly than he had climbed up.

Blake distributed the rest of the contents of the bottle with a liberal hand over the Shell juniors below, and with many muttered words they retreated to a safer distance.

"Your chaps are gone, Merry," Blake remarked. "You'd better follow them. But you came here for the grub, didn't you? You shall have some of it."

Tom Merry had some of it. The grub was meant to be taken internally, and Tom Merry took it externally—that was the only difference!

Each of the grinning juniors brought his contribution and plastered it somewhere upon the person of the unfortunate chief of the Shell. Then they stood him on the table and danced round it. Tom Merry bore the ordeal well.

A fellow of the Shell wasn't going to show the white feather to chaps in the Fourth, and so Tom faced the music like a Spartan.

But the ordeal was severe. It was difficult to look heroic and dignified with a jam-tart clinging to his nose, a pat of butter to his chin, and a string of saveloys hung round his neck and a saucepan placed on his head. Then there was black currant jam smeared on his right cheek and red currant jam on his left, giving his countenance a really unique appearance.

"Had enough?" asked Blake. "If you haven't, don't mind saying so. We want to meet your wishes in every possible way, you know."

Tom Merry grinned in a rather sickly way.

"I'm satisfied, if you are," he replied.

"Then this is where you make your exit," said Blake.

Tom Merry was led to the window and lifted out on to the sill. Then Blake untied his hands.

Figgins held a bottle of lemonade ready, and as Tom slithered down the ladder he emptied it over him. Tom was gasping smothered with sticky liquid, when he reached the bottom, and he lost no time in getting out of range.

He met with scant sympathy when he rejoined his Form-fellows. His appearance was so absurd that he was greeted with a shout of laughter, in which Manners and Monty Lowther joined as loudly as any.

"Well, you look a nice object!" exclaimed Manners, wiping his eyes. "Jammy, aren't you? This stunt has been a howling success—I don't think!"

"Oh, don't rot!" said Tom crossly. "Let's go and get some of this beastly stuff cleaned off, for goodness' sake!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Call yourself a giddy chieft!"

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"Nice sort of chief, to let those youngsters have the grip of us!"

"Hark at 'em cackling! Look here, Tom Merry, if you can't put those kids in their place, we shall depose you and elect another leader."

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Tom, as he made off to go to the nearest bath-room.

The study window was crowded with the juniors, laughing hysterically and kissing their hands to the wrathful Shell fellows.

"Ha, ha, ha!" shouted Blake. "Hear me smile! Smile, chaps!"

And Study No. 6 and Figgins & Co. smiled in unison, with a roar that could be heard on the other side of the grassy quadrangle.

The boys of the Shell marched off in silent wrath, leaving the Fourth-Formers master of the situation and gleefully jubilant.

The enemy vanquished and gone, the juniors turned to the interrupted feast. Fatty Wynn had already resumed operations, and they joined him and proceeded to clear the board.

"It's a giddy victory!" grinned Blake. "I fancy those chaps in the Shell will sing a bit smaller after this. I told you I'd put Tom Merry in his place, kids, and haven't I done the trick? What?"

"You have," said his chums together. "They will have to sing smaller. What a ripping feed! How do you like it, Figgins?"

"Primo!" said Figgins, beaming over his last tart. "We'll return the compliment soon, and ask you to a jolly good tea over in the New House!"

"That's all right. Have another tart, Fatty?"

Fatty Wynn rubbed his bulging waistcoat rather ruefully. "Er—no; I don't think so," he said. "I haven't room. But"—he brightened up—"I'll shove some of 'em in my pockets, Blake, if you don't mind. I shall be hungry again soon."

"Right-ho!" said Blake hospitably. "Don't spare the provender. Eat what you can, and pocket what you can't. We don't want to leave a crumb."

And indeed the juniors did not leave much on the table when they rose from the feast.

Blake took a sheet of paper, and daubed on it in big, black letters:

"THANKS!"

This polite acknowledgment of the feast he pinned in the centre of the table, so that it could not escape the notice of the Terrible Three when they returned.

"There!" said Blake. "It's only decent to thank them for a ripping feed like that, and I think Tom Merry will be pleased when he sees it. And now we may as well clear."

He unfastened the door, and took a cautious peep into the passage. No one was in sight.

"Come on, chaps!"

He led the way from the study, on the alert for an ambush. The juniors followed him, Fatty Wynn bringing up the rear. His pockets were bulging with good things, and a smile of seraphic happiness was upon his fat, chubby face.

There was no ambush. Herr Schneider was in his study, and it was not safe to start a row in the corridor. The juniors went downstairs unmolested, and in the Hall Figgins & Co. took quite an affectionate leave of Study No. 6, Figgv repeating his promise that a return feast should be given at no distant date.

Tom Merry came into the Hall while Figgins was speaking. He heard the words. The juniors looked at him. He was clean now, and looked his usual self. Blake came towards him.

"Thanks, old chap!" he said effusively. "It was jolly good of you to stand a feed like that, and I've left a little note for you in your study."

Mr. Kidd, the Housemaster, was in sight, so any demonstration was impossible. Tom Merry looked unutterable things.

Figgins & Co left the School House, to return to their own quarters. Blake and his chums went up to Study No. 6 and executed a war dance round the table, in the exuberance of their glorious triumph over their rivals of the Shell.

In Tom Merry's study the Terrible Three met a little later, and they were looking a doleful trio.

The feast was gone; only crumbs, saveloy-skins, and empty bottles remained of it, with Blake's friendly note of thanks for the treat. Manners and Lowther breathed hard as they read it. Then they turned to Tom Merry, whose brow was wrinkled in thought.

"Look here, Merry," exclaimed Manners, "you're the leader of this blooming study! Are you going to take it out out of Blake, or must we elect a new captain?"

"Peace, my children!" said Tom, waving his hand. "Don't disturb me when I'm thinking."

"Oh, rats to your thinking! A fat lot of good it's done, so far!"

"Chaps, I've got an idea!"

Manners and Lowther looked scornful. "Well, we'll wait till we see how it pans out before we start the cheering," said Monty.

"What's the idea?" asked Manners.

"It's working in my brain," said Tom, with a gleam of mischief in his eyes. "I think we shall be able to do 'em down nicely. Figgins was saying that he would invite them to a return feed, and that put the idea into my head."

"Well, I don't see what's going to come of that," said Manners. "Suppose Figgins does stand them a feed; it will be over in the New House, and we shan't have a chance of raiding it."

"I wasn't thinking of raiding it. That's a stale joke. I'm not going to work off any of his own second-hand wheezes on Blake," replied Tom Merry serenely. "Go away and play, like good little boys, while I think it out."

Manners and Lowther looked rebellious. The late triumph of Study No. 6 had shaken their faith in their leader. In their old school Tom Merry had been easily first when it came to a contest of wits, but since coming to St. Jim's he had encountered rivals of a different quality. And it looked to Manners and Lowther as if Tom Merry had met more than his match in Jack Blake of St. Jim's. Yet the twinkle in their leader's eye was reassuring. When they saw that twinkle, which they knew of old, they knew that something good was coming.

And so they remained quiet, while Tom Merry thought out the plan that had come into his active brain, till he saw fit to take them into the secret. And when he detailed the scheme, the shout of laughter that ran from Study No. 10 would have warned Blake that mischief was brewing if he had heard it; but he did not!

CHAPTER 4.

The Invitations!

TOM MERRY had devised a plan for getting his own back on Jack Blake, but what it was remained a secret, locked up in the breasts of the Terrible Three.

They said no word of it to anyone; and when they met Blake about the school they adopted an attitude of lofty unconsciousness of his presence, and appeared to have quite forgotten the circumstances of that raided feed in the study.

The juniors were not disposed to let them forget it easily, and the Terrible Three had to endure a great deal of chaffing and chipping.

"They're going to take it lying down," Blake announced, with much satisfaction, in Study No. 6. "You see, Tom Merry has realised that he bit off more than he can chew in tackling this study, and he has to admit that we've done him in. Talk about making him leader against the New House! Why, the juniors wouldn't have him at any price now! I heard a chap in the Shell say that Manners and Lowther were thinking of throwing him over, even!"

"Yes, we've done 'em," said Dig thoughtfully. "We've done 'em brown, and we've taken our proper place in the Lower School."

The chums had just come into the study from the cricket field. Two days had elapsed since the affair with the Terrible Three, and nothing had come from them in the way of reprisals, so Blake seemed justified in concluding that Tom Merry meant to take it "lying down."

"Good!" said Herries. "There won't be any more talk, I fancy, of making Tom Merry captain of the Junior Eleven. Like his cheek, a howling newcomer, 'as he is! If he pops up again, we'll sit on him again, and keep him in his place."

And the four chums agreed that Tom Merry should be sat upon promptly if he showed a sign of popping up after his defeat.

The next day was Saturday—a half-holiday. As soon as school was finished Tom Merry mounted his bicycle and scorched off to Rylcombe. He called at the printer's, coming out ten minutes later with a neatly-tied packet in his hand. Then he scorched back to St. Jim's. There was a gleeful grin upon his face as he rode. Something was evidently in the wind. As he wheeled his bike to the shed he saw Study No. 6 at practice on the cricket ground. Monty Lowther and Manners were waiting for him at the door of the School House.

"Got 'em?" asked Manners eagerly.

Tom Merry nodded.

"Yes. Come up into the study."

The Terrible Three hurried upstairs. Behind a closed door

door Tom produced his little packet and unfastened it. A dozen printed invitation cards were disclosed, which would have caused stares if they had been seen in the New House at St. Jim's. For this is how they were worded:

"G. Figgins, Esquire, would be glad of the company of . . . at a feed to be held in Taggles' room, by kind permission of Henry Taggles, Esquire. Space strictly limited, so don't breathe a word to a soul. Strictly Q.T. A high old time guaranteed. Guest on arriving to give the password, 'How do you like 'em done?' to Taggles, who will then admit him. Time. exactly . . ."

Manners and Lowther screamed as they read this very peculiar invitation card.

"I say, they'll think old Figgins is putting on a lot of style getting his cards printed," giggled Manners.

"Yes, rather; but that will impress 'em," said Tom Merry. "Now, we've only got to fill in the names of the kids invited, and we must take care to disguise our fist. Have you got a kid out of the New House, as I told you?"

"Yes; young Benson of the Third. He offered to do it for a bob. Of course, I haven't told him anything about the game, but he knows it's something up against Study No. 6, so, of course, he's on it like a bird!"

"Good! Give me a pen."

Tom Merry took the first of the cards, and filled in the name "Jack Blake," and the hour five o'clock. The second card was filled in to "G. Herries," and the time five-fifteen. Then a third card was made out to "A. Digby," with the time five-thirty. The fourth was addressed to "D'Arcy," whose company was requested at five-forty-five.

"There," said Tom, laying down his pen, "I think that's about right. Blake will come in at five, Herries at a quarter-past, Digby at half-past, and D'Arcy at a quarter to six. I think that's lovely. Now to get 'em delivered. I've bought some of that scented notepaper old Figgins uses. Nothing like being thorough."

He began to seal up the cards in envelopes. There came a tap at the door, and a mop-headed, ink-fingered youngster of the Third Form came in. He belonged to the New House, and he was evidently on his guard as he came among the School House boys. But Tom Merry's genial manner reassured him in a moment.

"Hallo, young Benson! Do you want that bob?"

"Yes," said young Benson. "No larks, you know."

"No larks, honour bright! It's a game up against Study No. 6. We're going to take a rise out of 'em, you see."

Benson grinned.

"I'm on!" he declared emphatically.

"You're to take this note and give it to Blake—"

"Hallo! Where did you get Figgins' nifty notepaper from?"

"Don't you worry about that. You do as you're told. Take this note to Blake, and mind no one sees you give it to him, especially those rotten bounders of Study No. 6. Savvy?"

"Rather! Give us the note."

"He's not to know you came from us. He's to think you came straight from the New House—from Figgins, in fact."

"Right-ho!" said Benson, winking.

And off he went with the note. The Terrible Three went to their window, from which, through the openings of the trees, they could see part of the cricket ground. Blake had come off, and was standing with his bat in his hand, looking at the players, when little Benson joined him.

"Hallo!" said Blake. "What do you want, you New House bounder?"

"Letter for you," said Benson, holding it out.

"Hallo! I know that niff. It's from old Figg!"

Blake leaned his bat against the railing, and took the note and opened it.

"Well, my Aunt Maria!" he exclaimed, when he had read it. "Figg is doing the thing in style this time, and no mistake. He must have blued three or four bob on this printing. In Taggles' lodge—that's a good idea. No beastly pretexts nosing in there. Must have squared old Taggles. Cut along, youngster, and say it's all right-ho!"

And young Benson cut off.

Blake put the card in his pocket. He was sorry that he couldn't take his chums to the feed; but the invitation was from Figgins, who, of course, had to please himself about the number of guests he invited. And as Figgins asked for secrecy, Blake did not say a word about the invitation to his chums. As they were not asked, it would be just as well not to mention the matter till afterwards. Uninvited guests might turn up at the feed, which was probably what Figg was afraid of.

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Young Benson was soon in Study No. 10 again.

"He says it's all right," he announced.

Tom Merry and his comrades chuckled.

"So it is," declared Tom, "all right; more all right than he thinks, the bounder. Now, take this note, and give it to Herries. Mind Blake doesn't see you."

"Trust me!"

The chums waited for Benson to return. He came in in ten minutes, grinning.

"He's got it," he said, in answer to the inquiring looks fixed upon him. "I gave it to him in the pavilion, where he was changing."

"Did he say it was all right?"

"Well, he said it was all serene, which amounts to the same thing, doesn't it?"

"Right, my son! Now buzz off with this note to Digby, and, mind, caution."

Benson was a quarter of an hour gone this time; but he came in at last, with satisfaction on his face.

"I found him in the fives court," he explained. "He's got it, and he says, 'All right.'"

"Ha, ha, ha! The plot thickens, my infants!"

"Any more giddy messages?" inquired young Benson.

"I haven't seen the colour of that bob yet, Tom Merry."

"Only one more, Benny, my boy! Give this note to D'Arcy, and that's the lot!"

"That won't take long. I passed Study No. 6 just now, and he was trying on some new waistcoats there."

Benson was not gone five minutes.

"Well, what did he say?" demanded Tom, as the bright youngster returned.

"He said that Figg hadn't mentioned whether evenin' dwess was wequiahed."

"Ha, ha, ha! We'll give him evenin' dwess! That's all, young Benson, and here's a bob for you; and mind, mum's the word."

"Rather!"

And young Benson pocketed the bob and marched off, well satisfied with himself.

"Oh, I say, I must smile!" gasped Tom Merry, and he went off into a roar. "This is too funny for words. Blake and his set will meet with a surprise when they go to tea. But, look here, time's getting close. It's time we started on Taggles."

"But, I say," said Manners suddenly, "suppose Blake should meet Figgins before five, and—"

"Suppose he should meet Figgins' grandmother!" said Tom Merry.

"Well, I don't see why he mightn't meet Figgins any moment in the quad."

"Do you think a great chief like me would forget such a point as that? Figgins & Co. are gone off for the afternoon to picnic in the ruined castle."

"Then it's all serene. Let's go on the warpath now. We've got to get Taggles in a raging temper by the time Study No. 6 begins to arrive."

And the Terrible Three sallied out arm-in-arm.

It did not take them long to arrive at the porter's lodge. Taggles was sitting on a bench outside his door, smoking his pipe when Tom Merry presented himself before him. There was no half-crown visible this time, so Taggles' look was not amicable.

"Whatcher want?" he asked, as Tom stopped and looked at him.

Tom Merry did not reply.

He stood before Taggles, with his thumbs in the arm-holes of his waistcoat, looking at the crusty porter with a solemn and steadfast gaze. Taggles stared at him, and went on smoking his pipe.

Tom Merry did not move. His fixed gaze was still fastened upon the school porter's face, which was ruddy, and beginning to grow ruddier under Tom Merry's earnest inspection.

"Whatcher want?" exclaimed Taggles again, getting restive.

Nothing is more irritating to the nerves than a steady, unmeaning stare, and Tom Merry's strange action was fast rousing the ire of Taggles. At last he could stand it no longer, and as the junior did not move Taggles jumped up.

"Now, if you want anything, say so, or—"

"I only wanted to ask you a question, Taggles, old dear," said Tom Merry, breaking his mysterious silence at last.

"Well, ask it, you confounded young himp, and be huff with you!"

"You don't mind my asking?"

"No!" roared Taggles.

"Well, then—you're sure you don't mind? Very well, then. I say, Taggles, old dear, how do you like 'em done?"

Taggles gave a yelp at this ridiculous question, which was so solemnly propounded, and he made a rush at Tom Merry.

Tom skipped off in a twinkling as Taggles rushed at him, and the irate porter, who knew he might as well attempt to catch a weasel as Tom, gave it up, and returned to his bench to smoke his pipe. A few minutes later Manners came round the corner of the lodge, with an agreeable smile upon his face. Taggles glared at him.

"Hallo, Tag!" said Manners genially. "It's a dry, thirsty day, isn't it? Could you do with a drop of something to drink?"

Taggles' eyes glistened.

"Which I could, Master Manners!" he said. "I could, really!"

"Then why don't you get some?" said Manners pleasantly. "There's a pump over there by the Head's garden, you know."

Taggles glared at him in speechless wrath.

"But I didn't come to say that, really," said Manners. "I want to ask you a question, Taggles, if you don't mind."

"You young hipp, I'll—"

"May I ask you? Right! How do you like 'em done?"

Taggles made a spring at him, and Manners dodged. Away he went, as if sprinting for a championship; and Taggles stopped, puffing and blowing, and scarlet with wrath.

"Which I'll report 'em!" he muttered. "I'll report 'em! Young humps! All boys ought to be taken to some quiet place and drowned!"

Taggles settled down to his pipe again. He thought the youngsters had done with him for that afternoon, but he was mistaken. Five or six minutes had elapsed when Monty Lowther hove in sight.

"Hallo, Taggy!" said Monty pleasantly. "Nice wet weather after the rain, isn't it? How do you like 'em done? How do you like— Great Columbus!"

Lowther went off like a shot, just escaping the clutch of Taggles.

Each one had been invited by Figgins—or thought he had—to that mythical feast in the porter's lodge, and each had been enjoined to keep the facts a dead secret, and was loyally obeying instructions.

But as the chums very seldom had any secrets from each other, and usually went about in a body, the situation was a little awkward.

Each was inwardly worried a little as to how he was to slip away without exciting suspicion—Blake at five o'clock, Herries at a quarter past, Digby at half-past, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy at a quarter to six.

"Hallo, ten to five!" said Blake. "Any of you fellows going to take a spin on the jiggers before tea?"

"No, not this infant!" said Herries, inwardly congratulating himself that here was a chance of getting rid of the three. "You chaps can go. I don't want to bike after the cricket."



Herr Schneider stepped into the opening and began to descend the steps into the cellar. Three grinning faces looked in at the door!

At a safe distance he stopped and turned round and placed his extended fingers to his nose in an extremely provoking way.

"How do you like 'em done?" he called out.

Taggles stamped into his lodge, and sat himself down in the doorway this time, out of sight of the ribald juniors. He was simmering with rage, and he let his pipe go out. He placed a nice little dogwhip ready to his hand, in case any further visitors should arrive and ask how he liked them done.

Meanwhile, the Terrible Three gathered at a safe distance, chuckling gleefully.

"The old bouncer's red-hot!" said Monty Lowther. "He nearly had me. I pity Blake when he goes to the lodge and gives that password."

"Ha, ha, ha!" gasped Tom. "And then Herries, and Digby, and D'Arcy. Oh, my Aunt Selina!"

CHAPTER 5.

The Password!

BLAKE looked at his watch. The Famous Four had come back to Study No. 6 after cricket practice, but they were a little more silent than usual. Each of them, as a matter of fact, had the burden of a secret on his mind.

Blake sauntered down to the porter's lodge, little dreaming of the reception in store for him. He had the password all right, and he looked in at Taggles' door with a genial nod, and quite unsuspectingly.

"Nor I," said Digby hastily.

"I have a little engagement, deah boy," said D'Arcy.

"I'm sowwy. Another time."

"Oh, all serene!" said Blake, inwardly delighted. "See you later!" And he left the study.

"I think I'll stroll round the quad and get an appetite for tea," said Herries, yawning. "Don't you fellows trouble to come."

And Digby and D'Arcy were left alone in the study, each wondering how he was to get rid of the other.

"Think I'll go and speak to Mellish!" said Dig, at last. And he went down the passage to Percy Mellish's study, where he did not stay long.

Left alone, Arthur Augustus smiled to himself and sauntered away from the study, to pass the time in the Common-room till a quarter to six.

Five o'clock!

Blake sauntered down to the porter's lodge, little dreaming of the reception in store for him. He had the password all right, and he looked in at Taggles' door with a genial nod, and quite unsuspectingly.

"Hallo, Taggles!"

The school porter looked at him grimly.

"What do you want, Master Blake?" he snapped, putting his hands behind him to take a firm grip on the dogwhip.

"Oh, don't be snappy, Taggles! I've come to tea, you know. How do you like 'em done?"

Blake pronounced his password with a confident smile, in the innocence of his heart. He was startled by its effect upon the porter.

Taggles jumped up in a white heat, and the lash of the dogwhip curled round Blake's shoulders in a twinkling.

"Hallo, what's up?" howled the astonished junior.

"What are you up to, you blithering lunatic?" He wriggled and dodged, but Taggles got in a couple more before he could get out of reach.

"I'll teach you!" panted Taggles. "I'll teach you to come here a-cheeking me, you young himp, you! Be hof!"

"Look here, you silly cuckoo!" shouted Blake. "I've come to tea here with Figgins, and that's the giddy password! Don't you understand?"

Apparently Taggles did not understand, for he made a rush at Blake with the whip whirling, and the junior did not stop to explain matters further. He bolted, getting a cut round his legs as he went, and he did not stop till he was at a safe distance from the porter's lodge.

"Well, my hat!" exclaimed Blake, in amazement. "My only Panama hat! Has the old bounder gone right off his silly rocker, or what—or has Figgy been playing a little game on me?"

The thought made Blake jump. Would Figgy have been mean enough to ask him to a feed there, simply to get him ragged by the angry porter? There was no other explanation. Blake, full of riotous wrath, marched off to the New House to interview Figgins and demand an explanation.

The quarter rang from the clock tower of St. Jim's.

Herries came smiling round the corner. He looked in at Taggles, and nodded, and made as if to pass him and enter the room.

Taggles rose to his feet, bristling all over with rage.

"Wot do you want 'ere, Master Herries?"

"It's all right," said Herries confidentially. "I'm the guest, you know—Figgy's guest."

"Wot are you talking about?"

"Oh, of course, I forgot; there's the password! How do you like 'em done?"

Herries thought that that would clear away the little difficulty that had arisen. He was quite mistaken; it made matters worse.

Taggles went for him like a bull, and in a second Herries found himself lying on his back outside the lodge, and Taggles was knocking his head against the ground.

"You cheeky young himp!" roared Taggles. "You're the fifth one, and I'll—"

Herries wrenched himself away, and jumped up.

"What the dickens— You old lunatic!"

Taggles snatched at him again, and Herries bolted. He went sprinting away at top speed, utterly amazed, and thinking that Taggles had gone raving mad.

The punishment he had inflicted upon Herries rather contented Taggles, and he was in a better humour as he sat down again. But there was more to come!

Promptly as the clock struck half-past five, Digby came up to the lodge with a smile of anticipation on his face. Digby was hungry.

"How do you like 'em done, Taggles?" he said genially.

The next moment he was getting his ears boxed right and left. He had no chance to escape, for Taggles was on him like a shot, and hitting out as though he mistook Digby's head for a punching-ball.

"Ow-oooo!" roared Digby. "What are you doing? Help! Murder! Fire!"

"Take that, and that, and that!" gasped Taggles.

"Help! He's gone mad! Hellup!"

"And that—and that—and that!"

"Help!"

Digby at last succeeded in breaking away from the infuriated school-porter, and darted off, with his ears singing and ringing, and in a state of unbounded amazement. He almost ran into the Terrible Three.

"Hallo!" said Tom Merry sweetly. "In a hurry, Digby?"

"No, no!" gasped Digby. "Taggles has gone mad, that's all. He's just gone for me like a maniac. Don't go near him; he's dangerous!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Digby rubbed his ears ruefully as he went on. The Terrible Three hugged each other in a paroxysm of mirth. They had seen what had passed from under the elm-trees, and their enjoyment of the joke had been keen.

"Oh, my word!" gasped Tom Merry. "This beats THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,225.

everything, I think. How unsuspectingly the dear kids come, like lambs to the slaughter!"

"And there's still Adolphus to come," giggled Manners. "We must see that."

"We must—rather!" said Tom, wiping the tears from his eyes.

They waited cheerfully for the coming of the last of the victims. As the clock chimed the quarter to six the elegant Arthur Augustus appeared in sight. He wore a charming waistcoat, with as many hues in it as Jacob's famous coat; a silk hat was tilted upon his head, and an eyeglass screwed into his eye.

"My Aunt Matilda!" murmured Tom Merry. "He looks more killing than ever. Spot that waistcoat! And the hat! Juniors are not allowed to wear toppers, except on state occasions; but he has sported one to impress Figgy. Well, let's hope that Taggles won't damage it."

"Ha, ha, ha! I am afraid he will!"

D'Arcy sauntered with an aristocratic lounge to his doom. Taggles was boiling over then at the sight of another junior, whom he had no doubt had come to rag him like the others.

"Hallo, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, surveying Taggles through his eyeglass. "Heah I am, you know. I believe there is a jolly old password?"

Taggles breathed hard.

"How do you—ah!—like them done?" drawled D'Arcy.

"How do I like 'em done?" repeated Taggles, coming a little closer. "Why, like that!"

Down came his fist on top of the beautiful silk topper, and it was crushed over the eyes of Arthur Augustus in a twinkling.

D'Arcy gave a yell. The hat had closed up like a concertina under the blow, and it was ruined. As D'Arcy staggered under the shock, Taggles made rapid play with the whip round his legs. D'Arcy yelled again, and danced like a bear, and bolted for his life to escape the slashes of the whip. He stumbled over a chair and fell, and Taggles fell over him.

"Take that," roared Taggles—"and that!"

"Help! The bwute is hurtin' me! Help!"

Tom Merry strolled by.

"Hallo! Anything wrong?"

"Help! This swangie person is assaultin' me bwutally! Help!"

Tom Merry darted in, and seized the infuriated Taggles by the collar. With a skilful twist, he tore the porter off his victim, and turned him over on his back on the floor.

"Cut!" he exclaimed.

And D'Arcy "cut" as quickly as he could. Tom pushed the table over on Taggles to keep him engaged for a minute or two, and then shot away after D'Arcy. The swell of the School House was standing outside, with his ruined topper in his hands, surveying it with an expression of boundless woe.

"Better hook it!" gasped Tom. "Taggles will be after you in a tick!"

And Arthur Augustus took the hint and hooked it. The Terrible Three linked arms and marched off, almost doubled up with laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

They marched right round the quadrangle in celebration of their triumph. As they came opposite the New House Tom Merry called a halt. The chums of Study No. 6 had gathered there, all of them looking exceedingly wrathful. Blake came towards the Terrible Three.

"I say, have you seen Figgins & Co. anywhere?" he asked.

Tom winked at his comrades.

"What do you want with him?" he asked.

"We want to settle a little account," said Blake darkly.

"The horrid bounders invited us to a feed in the porter's lodge—"

"Didn't it come off?"

"No, it didn't. They invited us at different times, do you see, and told us to keep it secret from each other—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And we went, without suspecting anything, and Taggles went for us like a howling lunatic!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It was a joke of that horrid New House fellow, Figgins, see?"

"Yes, I see. Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's all very well for you to laugh," said Blake crossly, "but I don't see the fun, and we're looking for Figgins to scalp him. We've just compared notes, and found out how we've all been done."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Have you seen Figgins & Co., hang you?"

"Yes. They're picnicking in the ruined castle."

"Right-ho! Thanks for the information. Come on, kids!"

"Where are you going?" asked Tom Merry.

"We're goin' on the warpath."

And Study No. 6 marched off, looking decidedly warlike.

Tom Merry staggered against the wall of the New House, weak with laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha! This is the joke of the season! They're going for Figgy because—because—ha, ha, ha!—because Figgy invited them. Ha, ha, ha!"

The Terrible Three were doubled up with mirth. Blake and his chums disappeared out of the gates on the trail of vengeance. Tom Merry tried to recover himself.

"I say, we mustn't miss this!" he exclaimed. "Let's get some of the fellows, and go and see the fun. When Blake meets Figgins there ought to be something worth seeing."

"My hat, rather!" said Lowther. "Come on!"

And a few minutes later the three, with half a dozen boys of the Shell, were following Blake on the path to the ruined castle, eager to see the fun.

CHAPTER 6.

A Plan that Wouldn't Work!

FIGGINS laid down his pocket-knife, and leaned back lazily against a mass of broken masonry in the ruined castle on the hill. Kerr was leaning on his elbow, deep in the latest number of the "Ranger."

Marmaduke Smythe and Fatty Wynn were still eating. The picnic in the ruins of the old castle had been a success. The chums of the New House had brought a well-filled lunch-basket, and they had very nearly demolished the contents. Marmaduke and Fatty Wynn were finishing up the last of the jam tarts.

"Well, this is all right," said Figgins lazily. "I could lie here for weeks! But I suppose it's time we made a move to get back to St. Jim's."

Kerr looked up from his book.

"Right-ho!" he said. "The sun's going down. Let's get a move on."

"You're dreaming! I never sent you anything of the kind!"

"Figgy, old man, I never thought you would become a storyteller!" said Blake, wagging his finger at Figgins. "It's wrong, my good kid, and not much good, as I'm not going to believe you. Now, the time's come to pay the piper."

"I tell you—"

"Rats! Now, chappies, we're going to give them beans, and they'll think twice before they play a trick-like that on us again. We'll tie them back to back—"

"Look here," exclaimed Figgins, "I give you my word, honour bright, that I don't know what you are talking about."

Blake hesitated. He knew that when he gave his word Figgins was to be relied upon, yet— The junior took the precious note of invitation from his pocket, and flourished it over Figgins' nose.

"Look at that! Do you mean to say you haven't seen it before?"

"Never in my natural!" said Figgins promptly and emphatically. "Think I'd waste time in getting invitation cards printed? Why, you ass, the chap who sent them got them printed so that you wouldn't see it was his handwriting, and know it was a hoax!"

Blake looked rather foolish. As Figgy spoke, it rushed upon his mind that he had been taken in, and that he had judged Figgins & Co. too hastily.

"I say, kids, we've been made fools of!" he exclaimed. "It wasn't Figgins at all. Pax, you chaps! Are you willing to make it pax?"

"Rather!" said Figgins & Co. with one voice.

And the School House juniors allowed them to rise.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was a sudden shout of laughter from the trees. The eight juniors turned round in amazement, to see nearly a dozen juniors of the Shell looking at them from the beeches, and laughing themselves hysterical.

"Ha, ha, ha!" shouted Tom Merry. "Found out your little mistake, Blake?"

WEDNESDAY IS "GEM" DAY!

"Wait a minute," said Fatty Wynn. "There's one more tart."

They waited while he finished the last morsel.

"We'll have a bigger feed here next Saturday," said Figgins, "and ask Blake and his lot to it, in return for the ripping feed that they gave us the other day in the School House. Ha, ha, ha! That was a good joke on Tom Merry. Are you ready?"

"Yes, I suppose you're going to carry the basket, Figgy?"

"I suppose I'm not!" said Figgy.

And he led the way from the ruins. The path down the hill, through the beech-woods, seemed quite solitary and deserted, and Figgins & Co. descended it without a tremor of uneasiness. But just as they entered the wood a sudden change came over the scene.

Four figures darted out of the thickets, and each of them seized a New House junior, and had him pinned to the ground in a twinkling. The attack had been so sudden that Figgins & Co. had not the slightest chance of guarding against it. Before they fairly knew what was happening, Figgins was down in the grass on his back, with Blake sitting on his chest, and the other three quickly followed.

"Got 'em!" shouted Blake gleefully.

"Got the bounders!" echoed Herries, Dig, and D'Arcy.

"Don't let the blighters get up!"

"Trust us!"

"What's the game?" gasped Figgins. "What do you mean by jumping on a chap like this without warning, Blake? Do you call this playing the game?"

"Yes, rather!" said Blake. "As much as asking a chap to a feed that wasn't coming off."

"What are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about that feed in Taggles' room."

Figgins stared at him in amazement. He began to suspect that Blake was not quite steady in the head.

"Feed! Taggles' room! Are you dotty?"

"It's no good playing the innocent, Figgy. You sent us all notes of invitation; and made us keep it a secret from each other, and go at different times; and then Taggles—"

Blake's face assumed a sickly expression. He felt that he ought to have guessed it at once—that it was Tom Merry to whom he owed that little joke.

"Ha, ha, ha!" howled the Shell fellows, "How do you like 'em done, Blake?"

Blake had nothing to reply.

The famous four looked at each other sheepishly.

"Who's the leader of the School House now?" demanded the Terrible Three, with one voice. "Who's head of the cock-house at St. Jim's?"

"Tom Merry!" exclaimed the Shell, with one voice. "Blake is a back number! He can go and feed with Taggles! Hear us smile. Ha, ha, ha!"

And the Shell fellows marched off, laughing. Figgins & Co. were grinning hugely.

"You've been done in, and no mistake, Blake!" exclaimed Figgins. "If I had that chap in our House, I'd jolly soon bring him to his place!"

"Oh, I know you're awfully clever!" said Blake glumly. "I wish you had him over on your side, that's all!"

"Oh, I'd handle him all right! He's too cocky for anything!" said Figgins. "It seems to me that we both owe him one, Blake. What do you say to a truce for a bit, while we give him the lesson he's asking for?"

"Right-ho!" exclaimed Blake instantly. "He's played it low down on both of us. He wants a lesson awfully badly, and no mistake, Figgy. What's your idea?"

Figgy pointed to the invitation cards.

"He's taken our giddy name in vain, sticking it on those cards," he said. "We'll make him eat them. He used my name to invite you to a feed that didn't come off, and we'll invite him to one that will come off, and make him eat that. He won't be able to go around grinning over the joke after that."

"Ha, ha, ha! But how are we going to do it?"

"Get him into the Fourth Form room, that's all, when we're all there together, and fasten the door against all comers. We'll put him through it."

"It's a go, Figgy!"

And the rival juniors shook hands over the compact.

When the juniors came in later, they found the joke all over the school. The seniors were chuckling over the way the Famous Four had been taken in, and some of them stopped Blake to ask him if he had been having feeds lately with Taggles, and whether he had received any more invitation-cards from the New House.

Blake was furious, and more determined than ever that Tom Merry should be put in his place, and his league with Figgins seemed to promise him the vengeance he desired.

The question was, how to entrap the chief of the Shell into the Fourth Form room at some time when the masters were not there?

"Tom Merry was too wary a bird to be caught by chaff, and Blake and his chums discussed a dozen devices without being able to select one that promised success. It was really Figgins who cut the Gordian knot.

"It's no good trying to take him in," said Figgins practically. "He'd smell a rat, however artful we were. We've got to take the bull by the horns."

"Good enough," said Blake. "But how?"

"The Shell come out of their room five minutes after us in the morning. When Tom Merry comes out he has to pass the Fourth Form room. We will wait for him there."

"But the rest of the beastly Form will be with him. We don't want to make a battle royal, with the masters and prefects close on the spot," objected Blake.

"No, not at all. My idea is to make a sudden swoop and collar him before he knows what's happening, and yank him into the Form-room," said Figgins. "I think we could work it."

Blake nodded.

"Well, it seems the only chance," he agreed. "We'll try; it ought to work out all right."

On Wednesday morning the chums put the plan into practice.

When the Fourth Form came out of their class-room they did not disperse in different ways, as usual, but remained near the Form-room door till the master was gone. When Mr. Lathom had departed they went in again, nobody saying them nay, and remained in unmolested possession of the class-room. Study No. 6 and Figgins & Co. remained in the doorway. They waited for the Shell to be dismissed.

A few minutes later a door was thrown open, and with a buzz of eager voices the Shell poured out of their room. They came down the passage past the Fourth Form room.

Figgins suddenly nudged Blake.

"Look out!"

"Right-ho!" whispered Blake. "Ready!"

The Terrible Three came down the passage together, chatting cricket, and unsuspecting of the ambush. The Fourth-Formers had withdrawn inside their door. Tom Merry, as it happened, was walking on the side nearest that door. As he came abreast of the door Figgins suddenly hurtled out and grabbed him.

Before he had time to struggle Tom was dragged headlong into the Form-room, and as the astonished Manners and Lowther dashed to the rescue the door was slammed in their faces.

"Help!" yelled Tom Merry. "Rescue!"

"Quiet, you bouncer!" gasped Blake.

He jammed Tom down on the floor and sat astride of him. Figgins left him to take care of the captive, and ran to the door. The juniors were holding it against the frantic attack of Manners and Lowther from outside.

Manners, Lowther, and two or three more of the Shell had hurled themselves against the door, and were striving to push it open.

Twenty juniors inside had their combined weight against it, and Figgins had his foot to it, jamming it. The door gave an inch or so under the strong pressure from without, but the juniors, with a great effort, slammed it to again.

"Hold it tight!" gasped Figgins. "I'll have the bolt shot in a jiffy!"

Again the door moved about an inch, and Manners tried to put his foot into the opening. But the juniors, exerting themselves, jammed it tight, and Figgins managed to shoot the bolt. The youngsters reeled, panting, away from the door. It was safe now. Nothing short of a battering-ram would open it from outside.

"Done them!" gasped Figgins. "Hallo, lend a hand here!"

Tom Merry was fighting hard for his liberty. He had succeeded in rolling Blake over; but Jack would not let go, and now they were rolling over on the floor in a tight embrace, gasping and dusty.

Figgins soon put an end to the struggle. Tom Merry was seized by half a dozen pairs of hands, dragged up, and plomped upon a desk. There he was held by the grinning juniors.

"Well, what's the game, you silly bouncers?" he said, panting. "What the dickens are you up to, anyway?"

His coolness had not deserted him.

Thump, thump, thump!

The door shook under the assault of Manners and Lowther from without. But it was impossible for them to get in, and the juniors took not the slightest notice of the clamour from without.

"We've got you, you new bouncer!" Blake exclaimed. "Now we're going to put you through it! If those bouncers outside don't stop that row they'll soon have a master down on their necks! Hallo, they've gone!"

A sharp voice was heard calling up the passage, and it was followed by a scuttling of feet. The Shell were gone! Quiet reigned in the passage, and Tom Merry was at the mercy of his captors.

"Now," said Blake, "the question to be put to the prisoner is—did he, or did he not, on a certain occasion, send a message to the young gentlemen of Study No. 6 purporting to be an invitation to a feed from the respected and esteemed Figgins of the New House?"

"My hat!" said Figgins. "You ought to be in parliament, Blake!"

Blake bowed to the compliment.

"Did the prisoner commit this crime, or did he not?" he demanded. "Tom Merry, do you plead guilty, or not guilty?"

"Not guilty," said Tom.

"Do you mean to say that you didn't do it?"

"Yes."

"Why, you frightful fibber—" began half a dozen voices.

"Let me explain!"

Blake waved his hand for silence.

"The prisoner is entitled to explain," he said. "Silence for the chair—I mean, silence in court. Tom Merry, go ahead!"

"I am accused of sending a message to certain gentlemen in Study No. 6—"

"That's the accusation."

"From the respected and esteemed Figgins, of the New House?"

"Exactly!"

"Well, I didn't! What I did was this—I sent a message to certain funny animals dwelling in Study No. 6—"

"Look here, none of your cheek!"

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"Purporting," continued Tom Merry calmly, "to be from a certain horrid and funny-faced waster named Figgins. You see, there's a difference."

Figgins was crimson with wrath. The Fourth Form were howling with laughter.

"Oh, don't question him any more!" he said. "What's the use when we know he did it? Let's get on with the punishment!"

Blake frowned severely.

"Who's bossing this show, George Figgins?"

"Why, I am!" replied Figgins instantly. "Whom do you think?"

"Well, I was under the impression," said Blake, with elaborate politeness, "that I myself was the head cook and bottlewasher on this occasion!"

"Were you?" said Figgins. "I don't quite know how you got under that impression, then, for it isn't anywhere near the truth. I'm at the top of this little concern."

"Oh rats!" exclaimed Blake warmly. "Now you're talking rot, Figgy, and you know it!"

"Who's talking rot?"

"You are, you New House rotter—silly, howling rot—and—"

"Do you want a thick ear, Blake?"

"Yes, if you can give me one!"

Figgins' wrath overflowed. He certainly thought he could give Blake one; anyway, he meant to try! He rushed at the School House chief like a bull. Blake, nothing loath, closed with him, and they went staggering to and fro in deadly strife.

"Here, chuck that, you silly owls!" exclaimed Herries. "We didn't come here to slog one another! Have some sense! Figgins, stop it, can't you, you howling idiot?"

"Who are you calling an idiot?" said Kerr. "It was Blake who started it!"

"Not a bit; it was Figgins!"

"It wasn't; it was Blake!"

"You're as big a cuckoo as Figgins!"

"And I can give you what he's giving Blake!"

A moment more, and Herries and Kerr were at it hammer and tongs.

"Just what might have been expected from these New House mongrels!" exclaimed Digby.

"Who are you calling mongrels?" howled twenty voices.

"You New House duffers!" replied Dig undauntedly. "Why can't you learn to behave yourselves? If you can't we'll teach you manners!"

"Teach us, then!" said Marmaduke, giving Dig a tap on the nose—and the next moment Digby was sitting upon him. It was the signal for a general melee.

New House and School House had joined against the Shell by order of their leaders; but now that the leaders were fighting it was not to be expected that the rank and file would keep the peace.

In the heated excitement the prisoner was forgotten. Tom Merry sat on the desk, left alone in the excitement, surveying the scene of conflict with a grin.

The juniors had not had a pitched battle for a long time, and now they let themselves fairly go.

Desks and forms were pitched about and overturned, ink and papers scattered on all sides, and the din was terrible.

"Buck up, School House!"

"Bravo! Buck up, New House!"

With many a war-cry the juniors closed in strife. The Fourth Form room seemed likely to become a wreck.

Tom Merry slid off the desk.

"By Jupiter, this is too good for the fellows to miss!" he murmured; and he ran to the door and unbolted it, and threw it open.

The passage was deserted. Without even noticing the escape of the prisoner, the juniors continued their strife.

"Hurrah!"

"Buck up!"

"Good old Figgy!"

"Go for 'em!"

Pandemonium seemed to be reigning in the Fourth Form room. Tom Merry darted along the passage, in search of his chums. He heard a puffing of quick breath, and Herr Schneider, the German master, tore past him. Tom stopped in dismay.

"Great Scott! Old Schneider will catch them at it!"

In a flash the German master reached the open door of the Fourth Form room. He looked in, with a grim brow.

The sight was certainly an unusual one. School House and New House were at it hammer and tongs, amid overturned desks, scattered papers, fallen easels, and spilt ink.

"Stop tat!" shouted Herr Schneider. "Der teufel! It is as pad as nefer was after! Stop tat fighting, you vicked boys! Hear me mit yourselves!"

But in the wild excitement even the master's voice had no effect.

Herr Schneider rushed into the Form-room, dealing slaps right and left among the juniors. Blake got one on the side of the head; and, thinking it came from a foe, he hit out and caught the fat German just under his fifth button.

Herr Schneider gave a gasp, and collapsed. The next moment Blake saw what he had done.

"Oh, sir! I'm sorry, sir! I didn't see you!" he exclaimed. "Chuck it, you chaps! Cave!"

The fighting ceased. Looking considerably ruffled, and rumpled, and bruised, the juniors ceased their strife, and stood looking somewhat sheepishly at the master.

Blake gave Herr Schneider a hand to rise. The German master did not seem grateful. He staggered to his feet and stood leaning on a desk, gasping for breath.

"You—you vicked poys! You dare to fight in te class-room!"

"We're awfully sorry, sir," said Blake penitently; and, indeed, he spoke truthfully.

After the feast comes the reckoning, and it was time to be sorry.

"Sorry!" spluttered the German master. "I'll make you mosh sorrier! Pad poys, vicked poys, tat nefer vas! You vill stay in—te whole Form vill stay in—dis afternoon and write out German exercises!"

Blake gave a groan, which was echoed by the whole Form.

A whole afternoon's detention, with glorious weather for cricket!

"Oh, Herr Schneider!" he exclaimed. "We are so sorry! Won't you—"

"Not a vord more!" said Herr Schneider majestically, waving his hand as he turned to the door. "You are ver' lucky tat I do not cane you all into te bargain after!"

"We will—"

The German master did not wait to hear him. He stalked out of the Form-room, leaving the Fourth Form utterly dismayed.

"All the fault of those New House wasters!" exclaimed Herries wrathfully.

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"All your fault, you mean!" said Kerr. "Silly duffers, you ought to have known better!"

It looked as if hostilities would recommence, but Figgins poured oil on the troubled waters.

"It's no good ragging each other!" he exclaimed. "We were both to blame, as a matter of fact—and, anyway, it can't be helped now. We've got to stick it out."

"But the cricket?" groaned Blake.

"Can't be helped."

"I say, what about the prisoner?" ejaculated Digby, suddenly remembering Tom Merry. "He's hooked it!"

"The—the beast! It's a sell all round!"

The juniors did not look happy. Tom Merry was gone, and the Fourth Form were detained for the afternoon, and certainly the laugh was not on the side of the Fourth-Formers. Tom Merry, if anybody, had scored!

And Blake voiced the sentiments of all concerned when he remarked, in tones of deepest disgust:

"Well, this is absolutely rotten!"

"It is!" agreed Figgins. "Somebody ought to be kicked, and, in my opinion, you're the chap, Blake!"

And Blake had no reply to make.

CHAPTER 7.

Tom Merry Proves a Friend in Need.

THE Fourth Form were furious.

Down upon the green quadrangle the sun was shining with summer brightness, and from the cricket ground came the cheery, familiar sound of wood meeting leather. The Shell was at cricket practice, the Fifth and Sixth were on the cricket ground or up the river, the youngsters of the Third were chasing each other among the elm-trees of the old quad. But the Fourth Form were detained in their class-room. The flat had gone forth, and there was no gainsaying it.

While the rest of St. Jim's bowled or batted, cycled or rowed, the heroes of the Fourth remained penned up in their class-room in a state of mind bordering on distraction.

Many of the juniors bore plain signs of the combat they had been through—eyes were black, noses were swollen, and ears were thick. Some of them were still dabbing the claret away from their reddened noses, or furtively rubbing bruises where heavy blows had fallen in the fight.

But of their personal injuries they thought little. It was of being detained—kept in on an afternoon that was made for cricket or the river—that drove them into a state of mind bordering on mutiny.

Herr Schneider had no intention of sharing their imprisonment in the warm, stuffy class-room. He set them their exercises, sufficient to keep them going until four o'clock, and, having announced what pains and penalties would be the result if the exercises were not done neatly and completed, he withdrew.

The moment the door had closed behind the German's portly form, every pen instantly left the paper.

The juniors had no intention of writing out those exercises. As Figgins said, you can take a horse to the water, but you could not make him write German. Which was a mixed metaphor, but expressed what Figgins meant well enough.

"Well, this is too rotten!" said Jack Blake, flinging his pen across the room, and his German grammar after it—"too absolutely rotten for words. I'm not going to do any beastly exercises. The old bouncer can only give us some more impots, and we're up to the neck in them already. I've a good mind to cut it."

"What's the good?" said Figgins gloomily. "Old Schneider's watching the door from the end of the passage, and we'd be brought back again. I shall scalp that German master if he stays much longer at St. Jim's, and that's flat!"

"It's really Tom Merry's fault!" growled Fatty Wynn. "The brute ought to be scalped!"

"Well, it isn't really his fault," said Blake. "Let us be just, if we burst a button over it! He couldn't help it, and we started on him! But it isn't a question who's to blame, but how we're going to get out of sticking in here for the afternoon."

"There's no way that I can see!" growled Figgins. "I'm not going to do any work, though. I'm going to look out of the window. You can see the fellows playing cricket from there."

"Well, that's better than nothing."

The Fourth-Formers were not long in leaving their desks, and opening the big window at the end of the class-room. It was pleasant to look out into the sunny quadrangle, with the wind shaking the foliage of the elms, and the birds

chirping in the bows. The window was soon packed with Fourth-Formers, and the exercises lay neglected on the desks.

Clack, clack!

The sounds of the good old game came from the field where the Sixth were playing. A shout followed faintly from afar.

"Bravo, Kildare! Well hit!"

The St. Jim's first were practising with a scratch team picked out of the Upper Forms, getting into trim for an important fixture soon to come off. Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, was batting. The juniors at the window caught a distant glimpse of two figures in white running, crossing the pitch like lightning. Another shout:



While the fight between the School House and New House was unnoticed to the

"Well run, Kildare! Well run, Monteith!"

Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, was in with Kildare. The rivals of St. Jim's had been on better terms lately than for a long time past, and they were pulling together pretty well in the First Eleven.

"Bravo!" shouted Blake. "Good old Kildare!"

Glances were turned from the cricket ground towards the big window crammed with juniors. Blake began to grumble forcibly.

"I say, I can't stick this at any price! It's too rotten! Fancy being shut up here on such an afternoon!"

The faces of the Fourth were grim and grumpy.

Some of the New House and School House juniors behind Blake were beginning to shove one another, and it looked as if the monotony would be broken by a repetition of the morning's battle royal.

"Hallo, there's that bouncer Merry!" exclaimed Figgins suddenly.

The Fourth-Formers looked glumly down at the hero of the Shell. Tom Merry looked up at the sea of grim countenances with his cheerful smile.

"Hallo, hallo!" he exclaimed. "How are you getting on, kids?"

"Oh, go away and play!" said Blake, exasperated. "Can't you see we're busy?"

"Ha, ha, ha! But I'm really sorry, Blake. I'm sorry all your little plans work out like that. Why don't you give up the game and admit yourself second fiddle?"

"I'll second fiddle you when I get you within hitting distance!" said Blake wrathfully. "I'd come out to you now if the old Schneider bird wasn't on the watch!"

Tom Merry wrinkled his brow in thought.



As juniors waged furiously in the Form-room, Tom Merry slipped the door and opened it!

"Is Schneider on the watch?" he asked.

Blake grunted.

"Yes, of course he is! Do you think he'd give us a chance to cut? He's sitting out on the balcony at the end of the passage, reading his Deutsch newspaper, smoking his beastly German meerschau, and enjoying his beastly self, while we're stewing in here hard at work, like a lot of beastly niggers."

"Yes, you look as if you're hard at work."

"Well, it's just as bad, shut up here when we ought to be out on the river!" growled Blake. "We've got you to thank for this, you rotter! You've got us into this fix. Can't you think of some way of getting us out of it?"

Tom Merry looked thoughtful.

The twinkle in his eyes warned Manners and Monty Lowther that he was thinking out some plan for the benefit of the imprisoned Fourth, and Manners gave him a warning nudge.

"Look here, Tom! We don't want to lose our afternoon, too. These kids have only got what they deserve for being naughty infants—"

"Oh, shut up!" exclaimed Blake. "I'll give you naughty infants if I were near you!"

"Yes, shut up!" agreed Tom Merry. "I'm thinking."

"Look here, Tom, you'd better let old Schneider alone," said Lowther. "He's down on you enough now, as it is."

"My dear kid, we must always be willing to suffer for the good of the cause," said Tom, with a wave of the hand.

"Who's the leader of us three, hey?"

"You are; but—"

"Well, you two obey orders, and don't worry your poor little brains with trying to do any thinking. Now be quiet while I fix it up."

And Tom Merry wrinkled his brows again in a really portentous way, and Manners and Monty Lowther watched him in silence.

The Fourth-Formers from the window were looking at him curiously, too. The rivalry between the Terrible Three and Study No. 6 was all in a friendly and frank spirit, without a trace of ill-feeling on either side. Either party would have been glad and willing to help the other out of a fix.

Tom Merry gave a sudden whoop. It made his comrades jump.

"What's the matter?" exclaimed Manners. "Something bitten you, Tom?"

"No; I've only got an idea."

"Is that all?" said Manners, in a tone of deep disgust.

"Nice sort of thing to make such a thundering row about, I must say!"

"I've got an idea, I tell you," said Tom serenely. "Dry up while I talk, Manners! Blake, old dear, did you say old Schneider was sitting out on the balcony at the end of the passage?"

"Yes; there he is, as large as life. I looked out of the Form-room a while ago and saw him. But what is the good of knowing that?"

"Suppose I could shift him, would you hook it?"

"Yes, rather, if you gave us time," said Blake promptly.

"How long are you detained for?"

"All the beastly afternoon, right up till four o'clock! It's no good shifting him if he's coming back before then; and I bet you couldn't think of a way of keeping him off the grass for an hour and a half, Tom Merry."

"Who knows? I'm going to try, anyway."

"What are you going to do?" asked Blake, with deep interest.

"Never you mind; that's my business. I'm going to return good for evil," said Tom Merry magnanimously.

"That all you want to know, Blake, my kid?"

"Rats! You can't do it!"

"Of course he can't!" exclaimed Figgins grumpily. "He's only gassing, and he can't do it for toffee!"

Tom Merry grinned.

"Well, I must say you're a grateful lot," he replied. "I'm going to do my best for you kids, although you have really been naughty, and—"

"Oh, shut it! You'll make us tired!"

"All right; I'm off! I'll come and tell you when the coast is clear."

"I'll expect you when I see you," said Blake sceptically.

"Blake, you could give Doubting Thomas points, and beat him hollow! But I'll do my best for you. Wait till I come back."

And Tom Merry linked arms with Manners and Lowther, and the Terrible Three marched off in their usual way, as if the whole quadrangle belonged to them.

"What the dickens are they going to do?" said Figgins. "I don't see how they're going to shift that obstinate bouncer of a Schneider, for one."

"And I don't, either," said Blake. "Still, Merry is an artful card, and I think he may have something up his sleeve. Anyway, he can't do any harm. If he makes Schneider sit up in any way I'd be grateful."

Blake crossed to the door of the class-room and looked out into the passage. At the end of the passage was a high window, reaching from the floor, and outside this was a little balcony adorned with flower-boxes and shaded by a sun-blind. It was a very pleasant spot to sit in and read, but it was not only for that reason that Herr Schneider had chosen it.

As he sat in the garden-chair under the sun-blind, leaning back on a cushion and reading his paper from the Vaterland while he smoked his long pipe, he looked the picture of fat comfort, and he was also able to keep his eye on the passage and see that none of the detained juniors left the class-room.

As Blake looked out of the door along the passage to see whether the German was still there, Herr Schneider, as if by instinct, raised his eyes from his newspaper, and their gazes

met. Blake turned red, and popped back into the classroom.

"Is he still there?" asked Figgins.

"Yes, the brute! He caught my eye," said Blake. "There's no chance of his even dozing off and having a nap from the look of him. Oh, he wants boiling!"

He closed the door again, with a grunt.

There was clearly no escaping the vigilance of the German master, and the Fourth-Formers were doomed to stay in for the whole term of their detention, unless Tom Merry proved to be a friend in need. Would Tom turn up trumps after all? That was the question the juniors asked themselves anxiously as they went back to the window.

Meanwhile, Tom Merry had walked his companions off, both of them in rather a puzzled mood. They knew from Tom's look that some plan was working in his brain, but what it was they had not the slightest inkling.

"Where are you going?" asked Manners, as Tom turned the corner of the Head's house. "Have you got a bee in your silly bonnet, Tom?"

"This way," said Tom, marching his chums on without deigning to reply to the question. "Here we are. Halt!"

The three came to a stop. In this spot a group of old elms hid them completely from the school buildings. Around them were signs of building operations. In this secluded corner of the precincts of St. Jim's a new building was in the course of construction, for what purpose destined the youngsters did not yet know. Some curiosity had been shown on the subject, but it was not for the purpose of investigating it that Tom Merry had brought his comrades to the spot.

"You see that?" asked Tom, pointing to the half-finished building.

"Yes, we see it," said Lowther. "We've seen it before, when we came to think of it. About a hundred times, I suppose. What about it? Are you off your rocker?"

"Do you know the use that little wooden hut is going to be put to?"

"No; nobody at St. Jim's does, so far as I know."

"Well, I do, I don't say the Head intended it for the purpose, mind. It's my own idea. I can't help thinking that it is just the place to accommodate Herr Schneider, if we could only get him there."

Lowther and Manners stared.

"But how on earth—"

"Follow your leader," said Tom.



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He led the way in at the open doorway. The floor, which was of stone flags, was completed, and in the centre was a flag with a ring attached. Tom pulled it up and disclosed a short staircase leading into a clean, white-washed cellar.

"Have you ever been down there?" he asked.

"I went down once while the workmen were here," said Manners. "It's only a cellar, and there's no way out. Blessed if I know what it's for!"

"I expect the Head will tell us all in good time; but that's not the point now. Doesn't it strike you that that would be a fine place for three naughty boys who wanted to smoke cigarettes on the quiet?"

"You don't mean to propose—" began Manners, in amazement.

"Tom!" ejaculated Lowther, equally surprised. "You surely don't intend to go in for that sort of thing? It's a silly game, anyway."

"If you'd hear me out before jumping to conclusions, you wouldn't make such silly howlers," said Tom, with some heat. "Of course, I'm not thinking of doing anything of the kind!"

"Well, what are you driving at, then?"

"We're not going to smoke in that cellar, though it would be a nobby place; but there's no reason why Herr Schneider shouldn't think that we are going to—"

"My Aunt Selina!"

"And come to investigate—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And go down into the cellar—"

"My only Aunt Selina!"

"And get shut in there by accident—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" giggled Manners. "Tom, you're a giddy genius, and if it comes off—"

"Oh, rats! It's got to come off if we work it carefully. You know how Schneider watches people about, and listens and that kind of thing. If he got a hint of anything unlawful going on in that cellar, he'd come sneaking round to see what it was, hoping to catch somebody on the hop."

"Right-ho! Let's go and snare the innocent bird!" chuckled Lowther.

And, discussing the details of their plan as they went, the Terrible Three left the spot. It was a good idea, but would Otto Friedrich Schneider swallow the bait?

CHAPTER 8.

In Cellar Cool!

HERR SCHNEIDER raised his eyes from his paper. The sound of voices floated to his ears as he sat on the little balcony, completely screened by the sunblind from the view of anyone below in the quadrangle. The German master's little round eyes glistened as he recognised Tom Merry's voice.

"Ach! It is tat Merry again," he murmured. "But vat—vat is he saying? Te young rascal! Mein gootness, vat a young rascal!"

Tom Merry was talking to his comrades under the balcony.

"Did you put the cigarettes there all right, kid?"

"The cigarettes!" murmured the German.

"Yes," replied Manners. "There are four big packets of them—enough for us to have a jolly good smoke when we get into the cellar."

"It was a jolly good idea to think of the cellar under the new building!" said Tom. "You see, nobody will think of looking for chaps smoking there."

"Will they not!" murmured Herr Schneider, sotto voce.

"Of course they won't," said Lowther to Tom. "It will be a jolly good stunt, and no one the wiser."

"I hope you didn't forget the matches, Manners."

"No; I've got them in my pocket."

"It wouldn't do to carry the cigarettes about, of course," assented Tom. "Some beastly prefect might get wind of the thing, and nose them out. I don't like taking risks. There's old Schneider. He would be glad to get on our track, and if he had the least suspicion, he would come spying into the cellar in no time."

The German master clicked his teeth.

"Tat poy is more right tan he vas tink," he murmured. "Old Schneider vill come and see tat tey smoke mit themselves. Ach!"

"Well, when are we going for the smoke?" asked Manners. "There's no time like the present, in my opinion."

"No; it won't be quite safe yet. We'd better show ourselves on the cricket field for a bit. I'm in no hurry," said Lowther.

"Well, if you're not, I am," said Tom Merry. "I'm off!"

"Oh, if you're going, we'll come!"

"Come on, then. I'm simply dying for a fag."

And the juniors strolled away.

Herr Schneider rose quickly, and looked round the corner

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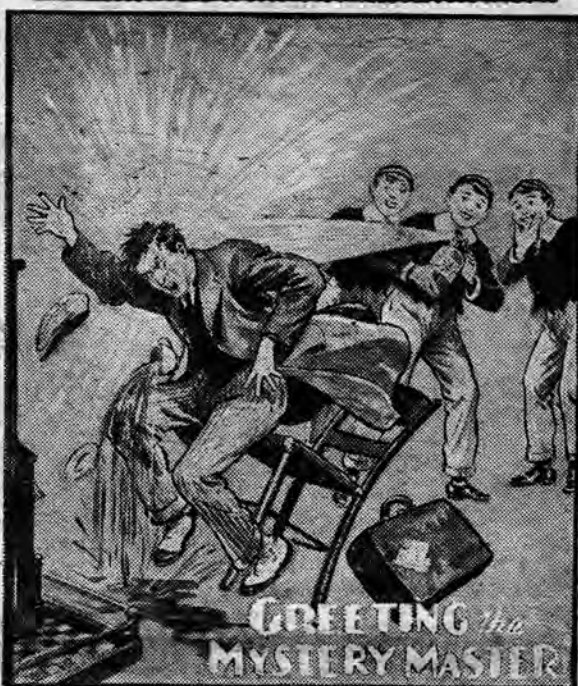
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of the sunblind to see which way they went. He saw the three chums of the Shell disappear round the corner of the Head's house arm-in-arm. His little eyes gleamed spitefully.

There was no doubt that they were going to the new building to enjoy the delights of a surreptitious smoke in the cellar there. The German master was always on the track of Tom Merry, but he did not often succeed in catching him napping. But this time it really seemed that he held the hero of the Shell in the hollow of his hand.

Secret cigarette smoking was very severely looked upon by the masters at St. Jim's, and any junior caught indulging in the weed was certain of a caning, if not a flogging.

If Tom Merry was actually caught in the act of smoking cigarettes in the cellar under the new building, he would be taken before the Head of St. Jim's, and there would certainly be a warm time in store for him.

Herr Schneider laid down his pipe, and quietly stepped into the house from the balcony. He stopped only a minute to get his hat, and then went out into the quadrangle. He turned the corner of the Head's house only five minutes after the Terrible Three had done so, and followed in their track towards the new building.

He passed the group of elms, and looked round for them. The juniors were not in sight. Herr Schneider grinned a grin. Undoubtedly the three young rascals were in the cellar, with their cigarettes going at full blast.

The German master stole across to the new building. He entered it as cautiously as a cat looking for mice, which, indeed, he really resembled at that moment.

Within the doorway he paused to listen. There was no sound to be heard; but he saw that the trap leading into the cellar was raised, and his little piggy eyes glittered. He stole towards the opening and listened again. Still no sound from below.

Had they heard him coming, and had they taken the alarm? Probably, for there was no smell of tobacco smoke about the place. They had not had time yet to light the obnoxious fag. But if they were found in such a secluded spot with cigarettes in their possession, that would be quite enough evidence against them.

The German stepped into the opening, and descended the

stairs to the cellar. Three grinning faces looked in at the door.

Hidden in the leafy branches of an elm, the Terrible Three had watched the movements of the German master, whose bulky form was visible to them all the time that he had believed himself to be so extremely cautious.

Tom Merry saw that the German had disappeared below, and he stole in on tiptoe. There was a sound of footsteps and an angry voice below.

"Ach, I have caught you—I have caught you in the act, you pad, vicked boys! Vere are you? Show yourself dis instant, I command you! Ach, vere are they?"

The German gazed round the cellar in amazement. There were two divisions to the cellar, and Herr Schneider looked in each with equally futile results. There were no boys, and no cigarettes.

A dark frown came over his face. But before he could work it out in his brain, and divine that he had been fooled, there came a sudden snap from above. In a moment he was in darkness.

While the trap was open the cellar had been in twilight. But now the blackness was only relieved by a glimmer from a little grating for ventilating purposes.

Herr Schneider started violently at the sound of the closing trap. As fast as he could move his portly person he ascended the stairs and tried to open it. It was in vain. It ought to have gone up easily at his touch, but it did not move.

A cold sweat broke out over the fat German. He realised that he had been trapped, and he realised, too, that if he were discovered in such a ridiculous position he would be the laughing stock of St. Jim's.

He hammered on the trap with his fists. He hurt his fingers considerably, and barked his knuckles; but there was no result. The trap did not budge. It was evidently fastened above.

"Boys!" called out Herr Schneider, in a choking voice, beside himself with rage and the apprehension of ridicule—"boys, let me out of tat door after!"

(Continued on page 22.)

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Another Ripping New Complete Rookwood Yarn.

JIMMY SILVER'S MASTER-STROKE!

By
OWEN CONQUEST.



CHAPTER 1. Bulkeley Suspects!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. came down the Classical steps at Rookwood into the late afternoon sunshine with cheery smiles on their faces.

They felt they had good cause to feel cheery.

Ten minutes ago they had been locked in the punishment-room under sentence of expulsion. Five minutes ago the Head had sent for them, had told them that the charge against them had been dismissed, and that the sentence of expulsion was rescinded.

In the glad circumstances Jimmy Silver smiled, George Raby smiled, Arthur Newcome smiled, and Arthur Edward Lovell smiled.

They sighted a group of juniors standing near the steps, and they crossed to them cheerily. Jimmy Silver grinned. The group was composed of Tommy Dodd & Co. of the Modern side, and Mornington, Putty Grace, Conroy, and Erroll of the Classical side. And Jimmy felt he knew why the group were looking so dismayed and unhappy, and that he had some good news for them.

"All serene, you men," he called. "No need to look like a lot of boiled ows! You're not going to lose your Uncle Jimmy, after all. The sackings are off! We giddy innocents are cleared!"

"Yes, we know, old man!" grunted Tommy Dodd dismissively.

"Neville told us a minute ago," said Mornington glumly. "He's just gone out, and—"

"Well, my hat!" said Jimmy Silver, staring. "I thought you'd be glad to hear the news."

"Yes, but—"

"We're jolly glad!" said Tommy Doyle. "No end glad; but—"

"What the thump are you butting about for, then?" demanded Jimmy, looking disappointed. "You know what's taken place, I suppose? This afternoon that sweep Carthew was attacked in Church Walk and shoved in the giddy village stocks, and pelted with rotten tomatoes and things by the villagers. The blessed beak and Greely came along, and caught us four laughing at him—as if any chap could have helped laughing!—and suspected us. Then that sweep Carthew vowed it was us—said he'd recognised us!"

"The rotten liar!" said Lovell.

"Well, I suppose he really believed we did it," said Jimmy. "Anyway, the Head took his word as a giddy prefect, and sacked us."

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"We know all that, of course," said Mornington. "All the thumpin' school's talking about it! But—"

"Yes; but I don't suppose you've heard what's happened since," grinned Jimmy, "or you wouldn't look so pipped, you men! While we were in the punishment-room Bulkeley was also collared and shoved in the stocks—by the same chaps who attacked Carthew, I suppose."

"Yes; but—" began Putty Grace.

"But that isn't all," grinned Raby. "While old Bulkeley was in the stocks Knowles was collared, bound, and blindfolded, like Bulkeley and Carthew, and rushed to the giddy stocks. But the blighters dropped him and bolted when they sighted Bulkeley—"

"That's the queer thing about it," said Lovell. "Bulkeley seems to think they weren't the same chaps who collared Knowles. I think he's right, else they'd have known Bulkeley was already in the jolly old stocks. It's a giddy mystery altogether."

"No doubt about that," said Jimmy Silver, still eyeing the rest rather reproachfully. "But had you fellows heard that—"

"Yes, we've heard all right," groaned Tommy Dodd. "But—"

"Then what on earth are you looking so pipped about?"

"Makes a chap think you

demanding Jimmy warmly. aren't glad we've got off—"

"Oh, yes, we are, old man—no end glad, of course," said Conroy. "But—"

"Well, why—"

"Because we were the chaps who attacked Knowles," said Tommy Dodd, with a dismal grin.

"Wha-a-a-at?"

Jimmy Silver & Co. nearly fell down.

"You—you were the chaps who collared Knowles?" stuttered Jimmy.

"Yes," said Mornington, with a cool nod. "Little us! And Bulkeley spotted us. He couldn't see our giddy chivvies, 'cause we wore masks. But he must have recognised us by our clothes—at least, he'd know some of us. Now d'you understand why we're feeling pipped? You chaps are let out. But we're booked for the long jump if Bulkeley knows."

"Oh, great pip!"

Jimmy Silver, Raby, Newcome, and Lovell were thunder-struck.

"You—you fellows attacked Knowles!" gasped Lovell faintly. "But why did you do it? What—"

"To save you, of course," groaned Putty Grace. "It was Tommy Dodd's idea. He thought that if another outrage was committed while you were locked in the punishment-room it would let you out—it would convince the beak that the chaps who attacked Carthew were the chaps who attacked Knowles and not you!"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Jimmy. "You—you old asses!"

"Well, that's what did happen, wasn't it?" said Tommy Dodd warmly. "Bulkeley was collared, and the Head thought you must be innocent, and let you off!"

"But you men didn't collar Bulkeley—"

"Of course not!" said Mornington, shuddering at the thought. "We only collared Knowles a minute or two after, not dreaming Bulkeley was already in the thumping stocks. And when we got Knowles there and spotted Bulkeley—well, we nearly collapsed. Luckily we didn't. We just dropped Knowles like a sack of coke, and bolted like giddy rabbits. Goodness knows who it was collared old Bulkeley. But we were the blokes who bagged Knowles, and now we look like being bagged!"

"Phew! You—you awful asses!"

"If that's all the thanks we get—" began Tommy Cook warmly.

"Well, my hat!" breathed Jimmy. "It—it was jolly decent of you fellows to take such a risk to save us, of course; we're thumping grateful! But—but— Oh, my giddy aunt! If Bulkeley spotted you—"

"Well, he'd know we were juniors, and may know us from our clobber," grinned Mornington. "All we can do is to sit tight and refuse to say a word if we're tackled. After all, Bulkeley only has suspicions—he has no proof whatever. If we sit tight and keep mum—"

"But Bulkeley's keen—frightfully keen," said Tommy Dodd dismally. "He'll ask—"

"Let him," said Mornington coolly. "Anyway, we're safe so long as we keep mum, I think. Bulkeley can cross-examine until he's blue for all I care. Blow Bulkeley, bless Bulkeley! He can go and eat coke for— Whoop!"

The careless Mornington ended with a wild yelp as something like a steel vice closed round his ear and twisted it. Twisting round in wrath and anguish, Mornington met the grim face of George Bulkeley, skipper of Rookwood.

Bulkeley had come along unnoticed, but luckily he had only heard Mornington's final few words.

"So I can go and eat coke, can I?" snapped Bulkeley. "Well, I think I'll take you to the Head instead, Mornington."

"Oh! Oh gad!"

"I want to see you eight kids!" snapped Bulkeley, ignoring Jimmy Silver & Co. "Mornington, Conroy, Erroll, Grace, Dodd, Cook, Doyle, and Towle—yes, you're the eight Sergeant Kettle tells me came in from the village fifteen minutes ago."

He paused. His eyes gleamed as they rested on the clothes of the eight—especially on Mornington's clothes. Mornington was rather a dandy, and his clothes were always distinctive.

"Yes, I fancy you are the eight," he resumed quietly. "I'll take you as spokesman, Mornington. Was it you and these other fellows who attacked Knowles this afternoon?"

Mornington remained cool. He raised his eyebrows.

"Us!" he exclaimed in astonishment. "You actually suspect us of shoving you in the stocks, Bulkeley? Good gad! You're the last fellow next to the beak we should dream of handlin'. Of course we didn't touch you!"

"I know you didn't; the fellows who tackled me were pretty hefty," said Bulkeley. "But the fellows who tackled Knowles were juniors. I'm asking you if you were those fellows?"

It was just like Bulkeley; there was never any beating about the bush with George Bulkeley. The conspirators shifted and tried to put on a look of injured innocence.

"You kids were in the village at the time, and you came in as if you'd been running, according to Kettle," said the skipper remorselessly. "I don't pretend to know what the whole business means. It's all pretty mysterious. But I fancy I know the juniors who tackled Knowles. You refuse to help me to find them, Mornington?"

"I'm telling you you're barking up the wrong tree, if you think we'd dream of handlin' you or any other Classical prefect, Bulkeley," said Mornington.

"Perhaps so," said Bulkeley dryly. "But I'm talking about a Modern prefect. Well, if you refuse to answer me, then perhaps the Head can get the truth from you. Come along."

"But—but— I say, Bulkeley—" gasped Dodd.

"Shut up and come on!" Evidently Bulkeley was in no mood for trifling.

The eight conspirators gave Jimmy Silver & Co. dismayed looks and went.

CHAPTER 2.

Jimmy's Wheeze!

"Oh! Oh crikey!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. were utterly dismayed. The danger to the eight conspirators was real and serious.

Bulkeley, clearly, only suspected. He could prove nothing. He would have great difficulty in getting a confession from them. They had not much to fear from Bulkeley, providing they refused to admit their guilt in the matter.

But with the Head it was a different matter. They knew the stern, unbending Dr. Chisholm. Useless to try to throw dust into his august eyes! If they refused to admit it, then the Head would deem them guilty and sack them accordingly. He could give no other punishment after sacking Jimmy & Co. for the same crime.

Jimmy Silver groaned.

Their cheery smiles had gone now. They had been saved, but their Classical and Modern friends had sacrificed themselves to save them. It was tragic. They knew their chums would never lie to save themselves; and that once Dr. Chisholm started to cross-examine them they were doomed.

"Oh!" gasped Jimmy. "Oh crikey! Those chaps are booked. They'll be bunked! And—and it's in trying to save us. We—we'll have to do something, you men!"

"What on earth can we do?" said Raby glumly. "They did tackle that sweep Knowles, and if they admit it nothing we can do can save 'em."

"Well, we've simply got to do something—and quickly!" said Jimmy, his face set grimly. "They're bound to keep it up as long as they can—even before the Head. They won't be such asses as to own up right away. And—my hat!—didn't the Head say something to Dicky Dalton about going across to the Modern Side for an hour to go through the exam papers with Manders?"

"Yes; that's right enough, but—"

"Well, let's hope to goodness he's already gone over before Bulkeley can nab him," said Jimmy grimly. "That'll give us an hour in which to act—and we're going to act, my pippins! If Tommy Dodd's wheeze came off once—and it undoubtedly would have done if Bulkeley hadn't been collared—then it might come off again."

"Phew! You—you mean us to collar another prefect and shove him in the giddy stocks?" gasped Lovell.

"Not quite. We aren't risking that," said Jimmy. "My idea's a bit different, though with the same object. I want you chaps to collar me and shove me in."

"Wha-what? Are you potty?"

"Not at all!"

"But—but have you thought what it means?" gibbered Raby. "You'll be pelted with rubbish by the villagers for one thing, and you'll have an awful time."

"I'm risking that. If those chaps could risk the sack to save us, I can surely risk a bit of discomfort and a few knocks to save them!"

"But—but it's weird!" gasped Arthur Edward Lovell. "In any case, you might be there all night without being found by a Rookwood man."

"I'm leaving you infants to arrange that part," grinned Jimmy. "The sooner you bring rescue the better for me, my lads! You just shove me in. Then find me there accidentally—as soon after as you like—and fetch help. But the help must be either a senior or someone like the giddy vicar—someone who'll prove it to the beak. See?"

"Oh, my hat! You really mean it, Jimmy?"

"Absolutely! If it came off once it should come off again. The beak may smell a rat—perhaps Bulkeley will guess. But as long as there's any doubt about who is working it all the Head will never sack Tommy Dodd and his pals. The Head's just. He won't risk it with them any more than he did with us. So long as they refuse to admit anything, they're safe—if my wheeze comes off."

"Well, it might," admitted Newcome slowly. "Yes, it's a bit of a gamble, but it might come off. But I shouldn't care for the job myself, Jimmy."

"I don't care for it, but I'm doing it," said Jimmy, determination on his youthful brow. "It's worth trying, and we've got to do something. Come on! Sooner we get off the better. We'll get a new padlock for the stocks from the village, and then I'll trot along to the spot alone, and you chaps collar me there; that's the programme!"

Jimmy's pals did not like the idea at all, but they knew it was useless to argue with Uncle Jimmy when once his mind was made up. And it was made up now. He knew that the mere fact of a junior being treated as a senior would help to remove any suspicion from the Head's mind that juniors were responsible for the outrages. Tommy Dodd & Co. might refuse to answer him; but he couldn't justly charge them if a further outrage was committed when they were at Rookwood.

"All right!" said Raby at last. "You're a blithering

idiot, Jimmy, but we'll do it. It can't do any harm—except to you, anyway. The beaks aren't likely to dream you'd be such a fool as to get chaps to shove you in the stocks yourself. We're game!"

"Come on, then!"

They lost no time after that. But they took good care not to let Sergeant Kettle or anyone else see them all go out together. In any case, it was nearing calling-over, and risky to go out. But they went by devious routes, and were soon trotting along the woodland path towards the village. It was while they were trotting along the path that they met Tubby Muffin.

They met Tubby suddenly and unexpectedly. Tubby met them suddenly and unexpectedly.

Just as they were rounding a leafy bend in the path they met the fat Classical, and as they were trotting rather fast, and as Tubby was running at his top speed, there was a terrific collision.

Just a swift patter of running feet and a gasping breath they heard, and then they met.

Crash!

"Whooooop!"

"Yarrooop! Oh crumbs! What—"

Bump, bump, bump!

The Fisticat Four were strewn right and left. Tubby Muffin's weight was no light matter, and they got the full force of it in full career. Tubby himself merely gave a strangled sort of yelp, and sat down with a bump. Four other bumps and crashes followed, as Jimmy Silver & Co. reeled away and sat down—hard. Lovell gave a fiendish yell as he sat down in a prickly bramble-bush, squashing it flat.

"You—you careless dummy!"

"You—you frightful idiot!"

"Whooooop!" gasped Tubby. "Ow, ow, ow! I'm hurt!"

He was hurt still more the next moment as four hurt and furious juniors recognised him, grasped him, and bumped him again.

Which was hard lines on Tubby, for it was as much their fault as his.

"You—you clumsy lump of lard!" yelled Lovell. "Why don't you look where you're going?"

"Ow, ow, wow!" gurgled Tubby, groaning. "Groogh! It wasn't my fault, you beast! Ow, ow! I—I say, they're after me!"

He scrambled up, and glanced in fear along the woodland pathway behind him. Jimmy Silver & Co. also glanced that way, but they saw nobody.

"Who's after you?" howled Raby. "You silly, fat owl! Nobody's after you! What d'you want to rush about like that for?"

"But—oh, my hat! I thought they were after me still!" gasped Tubby, staring back dizzily. "Ow, ow, ow! I've run like anything, thinking they were still after me."

"Who?" yelled Lovell. "Who, you fat blubber-biter?"

"Pinchin, and those other village bounders!" groaned Tubby. "They were going to rag me. They always do if they catch me alone. They chased me all along the Church Walk. The beasts must have seen me going to the village, and waited for me."

Jimmy Silver stared. Pinchin & Co. were well known to him. They were youths of eighteen or thereabouts who worked in the village. But while they were not on the best of terms with Rookwood fellows, they rarely interfered with juniors. As a matter of fact, they were decent enough chaps, and used to meet the Rookwood seniors on the footer field and cricket field; but last term, owing to a foul on the footer field, there had been serious trouble, and the Head had refused to allow them to play Rookwood again either at footer or cricket.

This fat, naturally enough, had upset the villagers, and caused unpleasantness between them and the hitherto friendly seniors.

But Jimmy had never known them to bother about juniors.

"You silly fat ass! Pinchin and his pals wouldn't touch you!" he said.

"Well, they have done before; they've knocked my cap off more than once!" groaned Tubby. "I wasn't chancing it, anyway. I saw them sitting on the fence in the Church Walk, and I slipped behind the fence and sneaked along inside, hoping to get past 'em that way; but the beasts spotted me through a gap, and ran after me. I say, lemme go, you beasts! 'Twasn't my fault I ran into you, Jimmy!"

"Well, I suppose it wasn't," said Jimmy Silver. "And those chaps only pretended to follow you for a lark, you fat ass! But hold on, Tubby. You say they were waiting for you. Why d'you think that, old fat man?"

"'Cause I heard 'em say so," grunted Tubby. "Just as I was sneaking past I heard Pinchin say something about nabbing me when I came back. And another chap said

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something about teaching us not to be snobs—the cheeky beasts! Then one of them spotted me, and came through the gap after me, the beast!"

"And did you hear anything else, Tubby?"

"No; that was all I had time to hear. I say, Jimmy, I'm going to tell Bulkeley—calling us snobs, and chasing a Rookwood man like that!"

"I should," said Jimmy grimly. "But you can cut off now, Tubby!"

And Tubby cut off, glad enough to do so. Jimmy gazed after him, and did not move.

"Come on, never mind that fat ass!" said Lovell.

"Hold on," said Jimmy.

CHAPTER 3.

Bowled Out!

JIMMY'S face was grim, and his eyes were gleaming. "Hold on!" he repeated. "That's a bit rummy, you men!"

"What is, fathead?"

"What Tubby says," said Jimmy Silver slowly. "Those village chaps wouldn't be waiting for a young fat ass like Tubby. They fancy themselves a bit too much for that. Supposing—supposing it was a senior they said they'd nab on his way! Supposing it's Neville! We know he's gone to the village, anyway."

"Phew! You don't mean—"

"I never believed it was Rookwood men who'd attacked Carthew and Bulkeley," said Jimmy. "I felt certain it must be someone outside the school, and I know Bulkeley suspects it. But I never thought of Pinchin and his pals until Tubby just mentioned them. They're up against Bulkeley and the seniors, and I know they're calling 'em snobs because they won't meet 'em at cricket this term. They're wild about it. Supposing—"

"M-my hat! You've hit it, Jimmy! And—and they're waiting for Neville now!" breathed George Raby.

Jimmy nodded emphatically.

"I'm certain that's it, now I come to think about it," he said grimly. "They're the giddy mysterious stockists! They're out to hold our men up to ridicule just because they're waxy about the seniors not playing them."

"Phew! That's it for a cert!"

"We'll not bother about that padlock now," said Jimmy crisply. "We're going to bowl those funny merchants out, you men! We'll give 'em stocks! Come on! We'll scout round and watch 'em first!"

"Yes, rather!"

The juniors hurried on, eager now to put Jimmy's theory to the test. Jimmy himself felt certain he was right, and he wondered why the theory had not occurred to anyone else.

They started off at a quick run, and very soon reached the Church Walk. Then Jimmy urged caution, and they began to scout round. They could see right along the walk between the fences up to where the walk emerged into the square—they could even see the village stocks. But the walk was empty—Pinchin & Co. had gone, or so it seemed.

But Jimmy was far from satisfied of that. He slipped to a break in the old fence and popped his head through. Then he gave a gasp and called his chums.

"They're there! Look!"

Pinchin and four other big village youths were there right enough. The five were some distance away. They were crouching down in the grass behind the fence, and not far from the stocks. Clearly enough, Tubby's information was not far wrong. Pinchin & Co. were in deep ambush, waiting for someone to come along.

"Waiting for Neville, for a pension!" grinned Jimmy. "So that's it! That's how they've worked it. Hidden behind the fence and then pounced out on their giddy victims! Good egg!"

"What's the programme now, Jimmy?"

"Keep out of sight—that's the main thing!" said Jimmy, his eyes gleaming. "We're going to nab 'em in the act."

"But we could scarcely handle one of them, Jimmy!"

"I know that. But with Neville's help we'll keep our end up until help comes. And the help we need is Bulkeley. You, Lovell, cut back to school at top speed. Fetch Bulkeley. If you can't get him get one or two other pres. We want evidence as well as help, though Neville should be enough as regards evidence. Cut off!"

"But—"

"Cut off! Leave it to me, Lovell!"

"All right!"

Arthur Edward cut off—though with evident reluctance. He wanted to see the fun—though it wasn't likely to be fun at first. Pinchin and his pals were a hefty handful!

Lovell sped off at his top speed for Rookwood.

"Come on!" murmured Jimmy. "Follow your giddy uncle, and mind they don't spot us."

"What-ho!" There were plenty of bushes about, and by scudding cautiously from one to another they soon came within twenty yards of Pinchin & Co. It was really easy enough, for the villagers never once looked round. Soon the investigators were crouching down behind a thicket to watch and wait.

The juniors could not see into the walk. But at last they saw Pinchin and his companions move. They heard Pinchin give a muttered warning, and the next moment all five of the ambushers had jumped to their feet.

Next moment they had vanished through the gap. To the ears of the watching juniors came a stifled yell, and then sounds of a scuffle.

"They've got him!" grinned Jimmy. "On the ball, you men!"

The time for action had come, and Jimmy Silver & Co. were not reluctant to act. They followed Jimmy as he tore through the grass towards the gap. In a few brief seconds they had reached it, and Jimmy Silver bounded through, followed by his chums.

They saw just what they expected to see. It was Neville. He was struggling furiously in the grasp of the five ragers. His head was already covered in a small bag, and the ragers were working desperately to get a cord round his legs and arms. From beneath the head bag came a muffled yelling.



Pinchin was placed in the stocks, while his pals, bound and helpless, were placed beside him. After that the fun began, but not for the village japers!

Not another soul was about. The little lane was only used, normally, by Rookwood fellows, for it led only to Rookwood. But Jimmy Silver & Co. were on the job now, and though Neville alone had no chance, their arrival made a vast difference.

"Go it!" yelled Jimmy. He flung himself on the back of Henry Pinchin, and there were startled yells as Jimmy's chums piled in with a will.

In a moment a wild and whirling struggle was in progress in the Church Walk. Neville, released by several hands, tore off the bag and started to hit out right and left with a fury that sent his assailants staggering away. But they closed in again grimly, and the fight went on, the juniors being sent sprawling again and again by the bigger fellows.

Several of the ragers looked like bolting at first. But as they realised that the rescuers were only juniors, they grinned and stuck to the job with a will worthy of a better purpose.

"Collar 'em all!" roared Pinchin gleefully. "We'll shove this chap in the stocks and group the kids round him! We'll show those Rookwood snobs whether they can turn their noses up at us or not!"

Evidently Henry Pinchin & Co. felt matters keenly, and looked upon the Rookwood refusal to play them as a deadly insult to them. Jimmy Silver & Co. fought desperately. They did not expect any help for several more minutes yet. But suddenly they got a surprise.

There was a shout along the lane, and from the direction of the village three seniors came racing. The three were Hansom, Lumsden, and Talboys, of the Classical Fifth at Rookwood.

They had happened along quite by accident, but their coming turned the tables at once. Hansom was a host in himself. One of the village youths suddenly turned tail and ran. And soon the end came for Pinchin & Co.

Pinchin himself went down, and Neville kept him down. Jimmy Silver & Co., battered, but cheery, were more than holding their own, with Hansom & Co. to aid them. Pinchin & Company were more or less prisoners by the time a crowd of fellows came racing along from Rookwood with Lovell leading them.

Lovell led a crowd of Classical Fourth, and Tommy Dodd & Co. were there—to Jimmy's surprise. And with them were a couple of seniors—and Bulkeley.

"Oh, good!" panted Jimmy Silver. "Here we are, Bulkeley—here are your giddy attackers, old bean!"

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Bulkeley. "They—they attacked you, Neville?"

"Yes," said Neville grimly. "Just had their rotten bag over my head when these kids chipped in, bless 'em! These are the merchants who did it, Bulkeley."

"I did wonder if they could have had a hand in it," said Bulkeley, nodding. "I suppose you won't deny it now, Pinchin?"

"Not a bit!" panted Pinchin, glaring up defiantly from the ground. "We did it, and we'd have bagged you all in turn if those kids hadn't tumbled to the game. I suppose that fat little merchant overheard us and told them."

"You mean Muffin, I suppose?" snapped Bulkeley. "Well, you're bowled out, you cheeky cads! You've caused a lot of trouble, but you'll cause no more—or, if you do, you'll be sorry for it, Pinchin. I suppose you've done this because of the cricket?"

"Yes, we have, blow you!" snapped Pinchin. "I suppose you're too high and mighty to play with us?"

"You suppose wrong, then," snapped Bulkeley. "We wanted to go on meeting you, Pinchin—we had no ill-feeling despite that trouble over the foul!"

"It was a rotten cad who we've kicked out of our team since," said Pinchin. "We've always played the game—"

"I admit that, Pinchin. But the Head won't listen to me. He refuses to let us play, and there's an end to it," snapped Bulkeley. "In any case, you've no reason to have played these silly tricks. Let them go, you fellows!"

"Let 'em go!" gasped Jimmy Silver. "Without punishment?"

"I shall report this to the Head, of course," said Bulkeley. "Let them clear. They won't try any games on again, I fancy."

"We jolly well aren't going to let 'em go, Bulkeley!" roared Hansom of the Fifth. "We're going to shove this blighter in the stocks as he did you, Bulkeley. We'll teach 'em to handle Rookwood men!"

"Hear, hear! Go it, chaps!"

It was a roar of approval. For once, Bulkeley of the Sixth, skipper of Rookwood, was disobeyed—greatly to his amazement. Possibly it was also greatly to his secret joy. At all events, he did not interfere when the juniors, aided by Hansom & Co., collared the yelling Pinchin and rushed him to the stocks.

There they found the padlock which had fastened Bulkeley in, broken, having been forced by the blacksmith. But Tommy Dodd found another one—the one he himself had dropped during their hurried flight on seeing Bulkeley in the stocks—and Pinchin was fastened in and the cords round his legs removed. Then his pals, bound and helpless, were placed beside him. After which the fun began—though not for the village jaspers.

There was plenty of rubbish about—turfs and other missiles—and soon the juniors were giving Pinchin & Co. what they had doomed Carthew and Bulkeley to, earlier on.

"Tom Merry Gets Going!"

(Continued from page 17.)

There was no reply. The Terrible Three were gone.

Herr Schneider hammered on the trap till he was tired, and he realised that it was useless.

Meanwhile, the Terrible Three, grinning with glee, marched off arm-in-arm to the window of the Fourth Form class-room.

As the three came sauntering into sight fifty pairs of eyes were fixed upon them from the window.

"Hallo!" called out Blake. "What's the verdict?"

"He's gone!"

Blake made two bounds for the door. He tore it open, and looked along the passage. The window was still open, and there was an empty chair on the balcony under the sunblind.

Herr Schneider was gone!

"Hurrah!" shouted Blake. "Come on, chaps!"

The good news soon spread. The whole Fourth Form flocked to the door, and crowded out into the passage, careless of consequences afterwards so long as they escaped now from irksome confinement.

But if Tom Merry had really succeeded in his object, and the German master was to be kept away until the time of detention was up, there was no punishment to come.

In the quadrangle the juniors surrounded Tom Merry. Figgins shook hands with him, while Blake thumped him on the back.

"How did you work it?" demanded a dozen voices.

Tom Merry smiled modestly.

"Never mind that, my infants. But if any of you want a little stroll after four o'clock, you can go to the new building and look in the cellar, and you'll find him there. If you want to know how he got there, you'd better ask him."

"You don't mean to say—"

"I don't mean to say anything. Ta-ta!"

And the Terrible Three strutted off with linked arms, leaving the Fourth Form amazed.

"Well, I don't know how the image worked it," said Blake. "But here we are, free as air. As we're supposed to be detained, we'd better not make ourselves too numerous round the school. Who's for a row up the river till four o'clock?"

"I am, for one!" said Figgins.

But at last Bulkeley, grinning now, ordered them to stop, and this time they obeyed.

"Now, get back to Rookwood, you young rascals!" snapped Bulkeley, trying to hide his grins. "I'd better tell the Head that these merchants have been punished, so I expect they'll hear no more about it. Anyway—cut off, you're late for calling-over already."

And Jimmy Silver & Co., Tommy Dodd & Co., and Hansom & Co., cut off for Rookwood—most of them quite cheery. But Tommy Dodd & Co., and Mornington, Conroy, Erroll, and Putty Grace did not feel quite so cheery. They felt not a little apprehensive still. There was the matter of Knowles to be settled yet, and they went home wondering what Bulkeley would do about that!

They need not have worried.

That evening Bulkeley called to Mornington.

"I still suspect you kids of collaring Knowles," he said grimly. "But I haven't told the Head yet, and I don't mean to now. I fancy I can guess why you did it, if you did do it. But it's Knowles' affair, and if he likes to see you about it he can. I've already told him. I think he'll be wise if he let's it drop, though."

That was all. For evidently Knowles did think it wise to drop the matter. He did not approach the culprits on the subject, at all events. Possibly he had more pride than Carthew, and did not wish it to be known that he had been handled by a gang of "scrubby fags"; possibly he did not believe Bulkeley's suspicions. Anyway, though he eyed the conspirators suspiciously, and even ferociously, when he met them, he made no move in the matter. And that ended the great mystery of the village stocks.

THE END.

(Silver & Co. were lucky to get out of that scrape all right! Don't forget, there will be another ripping Rookwood yarn in next week's GEM!)

Most of the Fourth Form were. They streamed out of the gates of St. Jim's in the golden sunlight. It was hardly prudent to linger within the walls, so cricket was barred; but there were plenty of other things to be done.

When the clock in the tower of St. Jim's was striking four Blake turned his boat into the bank. He remembered what Tom Merry had said.

"We'll go and look in the cellar, anyway," he said. "If the German's there, he'll be too grateful to us for releasing him to inquire at exactly what time we left the class-room. Come along, ye cripples!"

And with Study No. 6 and Figgins & Co. at his heels, Blake headed for the new building at the back of the Head's house. It seemed silent enough as they approached it, but when they entered they could hear a mumbling voice below the trap.

"Ach! Mein Gott! Tat Merry! I vill punish tat poy sometime, ain't it?"

Blake grinned at his companion.

"It's old Schneider, and no mistake!" he said. "Look, the trap's fastened on top! He's been having a giddy time, and no mistake." He unfastened the trap. "Come on, Figgys," he said, in a loud voice, "let's go and explore this cellar. I wonder what they're going to keep here?"

"Right-ho!" said Figgins, in a low tone. "Why, there's somebody in there!"

As Blake threw open the trap the German's red and furious face appeared below.

"We're disturbing him," said Figgins. "We beg your pardon, sir, but we did not know you were spending the afternoon here. Shall we close the trap again?"

"No, no!" howled Herr Schneider. "Hold it while I gets out mit meinsel!"

He scrambled out of the cellar. Without a word of explanation to the juniors, but with a face scarlet with wrath and annoyance, the fat German stalked away.

Blake gasped for breath as the German disappeared from view. He was weak with laughing.

"Well, my hat!" he exclaimed. "This is about the best wheeze I've seen for a dog's age. But Tom Merry is in for a high old time, I imagine."

But Blake was mistaken.

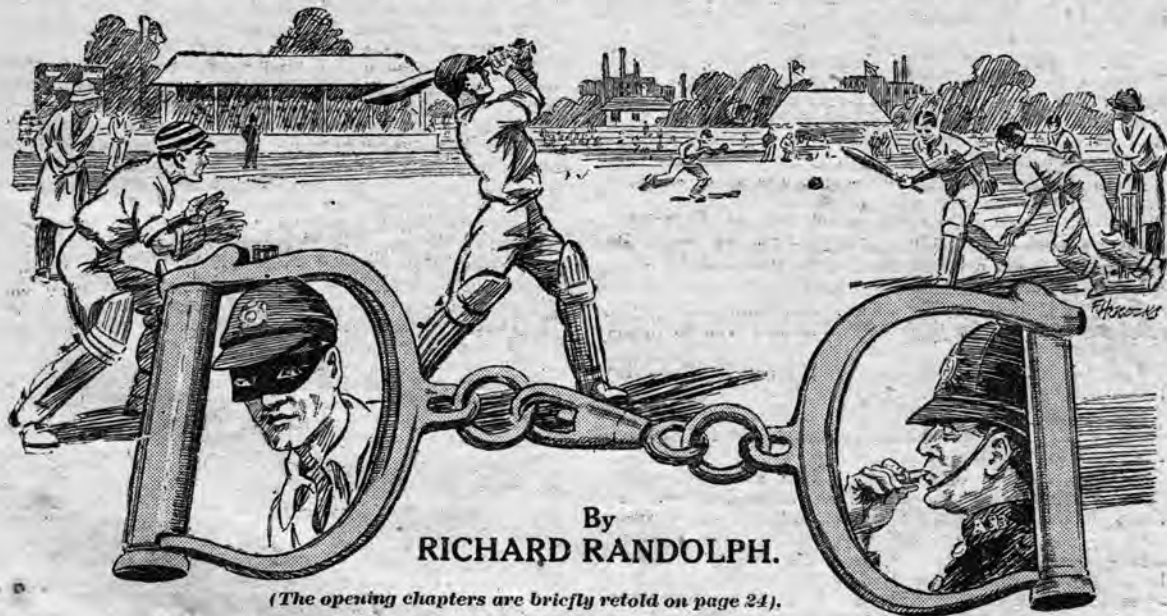
Herr Schneider was too keenly sensitive to ridicule to say a word to anyone about this absurd adventure, and the Terrible Three were never called to account for that little joke.

THE END.

(Tom Merry certainly scored, one against Herr Schneider that time! Watch for next week's ripping yarn, "THE MYSTERY MASTER!")

MORE THRILLS IN OUR GRIPPING SERIAL.

THE CRICKETER CRACKSMAN!



By
RICHARD RANDOLPH.

(The opening chapters are briefly retold on page 24.)

The Derbyshire Match!

IF anyone had told Conrad Beal and Rod Rodney that their first match for Norlandshire's Second Eleven would be their last, and that on the day after it they were both to leave for good and all the jobs by which they had been earning their livings, they would not have believed it.

Yet so it was to be. Rod's brief spell at the mill was ended. Beal would never again come up from the pit.

No difficulty was made in either case about leave. John Redgrave fixed it for Rod; Beal's foreman wished him the best of luck in the cricket field, and said that there were plenty waiting to take his place if he did not come back, though not many as good as he was. Beal had made a name for himself as a worker at the Carnton Pits.

He and Rod met at the Norchester Central Station. The older man knew nothing about the incident that had led up to their being called upon, and Rod did not know much, for Joseph Hyde had not thought fit to tell Redgrave the whole story. Little wonder! Joseph was not exactly proud of his son at the best of times, and he reckoned that Alured had shown up badly in this matter. He ought to have mopped his bleeding nose and shut his mouth—that was Joseph's opinion.

"Didn't expect to be seeing you again so soon," said Beal, gripping Rod's hand warmly.

"Same here."

"What's it mean? I haven't heard of anyone crocked."

"I don't think anyone is. But there's been a row in the team, and it looks as though two of the men are to be suspended. That's why we're sent for."

"Gives us a chance, anyway, though rows in teams are dashed bad things. Know much about the new skipper, Rodney?"

"Well, not a great deal," answered Rod.

"I can see you don't like what you know. But we won't talk about him. Plenty of other things to yarn about. Come along!"

They boarded the train, and had a compartment to themselves for the greater part of the journey. They talked of many things, and Rod found his new comrade one of the right sort. He had been reared in a miner's cottage; but he had read widely, and had lately concentrated upon such

reading as might help him to qualify for mining engineering. But he owned that he would gladly give up all that for a county cricket career.

"Then I guess you'll give it up," Rod said, "for you're bound to make good in the team."

"If I am, you surely are," returned Beal. "You've two strings to your bow. I never could bowl—don't know why—I've tried hard enough."

They had been told at what hotel in Derby the pros would put up, and on arrival at the railway town they went thither at once. But the men had not yet arrived from Birmingham, though the evening papers told that the match had ended in disaster for Norlandshire. Their defeat had brought Surrey to the first place in the championship table, with three outright wins and one win on the first innings. Yorkshire and Gloucestershire were so close up that there was no saying what the next set of matches might disclose.

The men came at length, looking anything but cheery. Red Harman and Rogers saw Rod at once, and came over to him. Three or four of the team knew Beal very well, so that the newcomers were not made to feel strangers.

But they did not feel comfortable till they had gathered what was in the wind, and had been made certain that Baines and Hebblewhite cherished no grudge against them.

The two offenders had come along to Derby, but they did not mean to stay. Their suspension had not been confirmed by the full committee, but that formality was bound to follow.

"I reckon I'll see if Somerset can do with a Northerner that don't mind hard work," said Hebblewhite.

"There's always a league job going for a county player," Baines said.

He was eight or nine years his chum's senior—too old to think of qualifying for another county. He might have squirmed out of the trouble, but he had told Mr. Fearnside and the other members of the committee whom he saw that if Bill hadn't punched Hyde he would have done it himself. Neither man had felt like explaining their very strong animus against Yankee. All they would say was that they knew him for a scoundrel. It was not for them to insinuate that Hyde knew him at all, for they could not prove it. But they did not believe the two were complete strangers.

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Walter Deeks got Rod and Beal aside after a bit. Deeks was strong for Trade Union methods. He still thought the other players ought to strike in support of Hebblewhite and Baines. And he wanted to know whether the two recruits would fall in with them if they did that.

"If they all agree, I won't stand out," said Rod, though he felt anything but enthusiastic.

He looked at Beal.

"But I shall!" said Beal decisively. "See here, Mr. Hereward's dying. I've known him since I was a nipper and he a bigger boy; his dad's one of our owners at the pits. It would just about break that big heart of his to hear of a strike in the team, and for my part I'll have nowt to do with it!"

Deeks subsided, and did not even make another attempt to bring round the rest, who had already rejected his first suggestion.

"Don't heed him, lads," said Roger Rogers. "It's only gas; he has to get it off his chest, or he'd explode."

Hebblewhite and Baines departed by an early train next morning, and Rod and Beal knew that their places in the team were assured, for the reserve man had been left behind at Birmingham with a bad cold.

In the pavilion Alured Hyde sought out Rod, and took him aside, out of the hearing of the rest.

"Look here, Rodney!" he said arrogantly. "You've simply got to understand that you must toe the line now. I'm your boss—get that?"

"You're captain of the side," Rod answered quietly. "I'm bound to obey your orders, and I shall do so. But that's the beginning and the end of it."

"Is it, confound you? We'll see!"

Rod guessed what that meant. He would be given as little chance as possible; if Hyde could edge him out of the team he would do it. Beal, whom Hyde did not know, might get a fair show; he would not.

Derbyshire, like Norlandshire, had a new skipper. Arthur Richardson, the old Winchester boy, who had taken over Guy Jackson's job, was only beginning to get used to command, and had none of Hyde's swank. He won the toss, and naturally chose to take first innings.

It was rather a drab day's cricket. Derbyshire's forcing batsmen did little. Rogers tricked out Townsend, Slater, and Worthington cheaply. Garnet Lee kept up an end until he had made over a hundred, but he was a long time about it. Smith, the left-hander, gave promise of something more lively; but when he had scored 42 Rod took a lofty catch from him in the long field. Hyde had sent him there in the sure conviction that, as a regular bowler, the place would not suit him. But Rod could field in any place, and enjoyed the running about.

He would have liked a turn with the ball, but never got it. Hyde had his excuse if he were called upon for one. Rogers was at his best, and Rod's bowling was not unlike that of the veteran, though it had more variety. His fast ball was something that had never been in old Rogers' bag of tricks.

In the absence of Hebblewhite Tommy Cooté was promoted to a higher position. Both were fastish medium, and there was not much to choose between them, though Hebblewhite had been counted the better of the two. Between them Rogers and Cooté took all the Peak County wickets, except one. That one fell to a great throw-in from over fifty yards away by Beal, which disposed of Hutchinson in going for a second run that had looked to him quite safe.

The Derbyshire total was 231. At call of time Red Harman and Beal had scored 51 unparted, each with 25. Hyde patted Beal on the back as he came in, and was surprised that the colt did not seem in any way flattered. But Beal had made up his mind about Hyde. The fact that the captain had put Rod No. 11 in the batting list would have been enough for him.

No. 11! Why, as far as Beal could judge, there were not more than three better bats than the boy in the Norlandshire team, and Nos. 9 and 10—Dick Jerrold and Roger Rogers—were simply not batsmen at all. They might hit up a few, or play doggo, at a pinch; but they did not count.

Rod felt sure, but said nothing, not even to Beal. And Beal did not like to make any comment.

The two youngsters found themselves accepted as the right sort. They went with Red Harman and Tommy Cooté and

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Jerrold to the pictures that evening, and Red insisted on paying for them.

Next morning both Beal and Red topped 50, and Hyde showed some of his best form in making 47. But no one else did much, and Rod did not get a ball. Rogers was bowled by the last of an over, and Jerrold succumbed to the first of that which followed.

"Sorry, boy!" said Jerrold, as they walked in together. "You never had a chance."

Norlandshire were 83 behind on the first innings, and it was soon evident that Richardson, seeing that an outright win was on the cards, had impressed upon his men the necessity of making runs as quickly as they could. He set them an example by going in first with Lee and scoring 32 in half an hour. Lee, a most reliable bat, but seldom a fast scorer, made 50 in eighty minutes. Slater and Worthington got going, and piled up runs fast.

Hyde was simply forced to put Rod on. He had come to the end of his resources. Yet even then he was hoping that the lad he hated would prove a failure.

Rod did not win immediate success. It is no catch to be put on in one's first big match against two forcing bats, well set. Likely enough, neither Slater nor Worthington had heard of Rodney before, and he had been given no chance in the first innings, which seemed to show that he was no more than a moderate change bowler. They clumped balls which they would have played carefully had Rhodes or Parker been the bowler, and over 40 had been hit off Rod before he took a wicket.

Hyde kept him on, and was very willing to keep him on as long as he could do nothing much. But now Rod slipped in one of his fast balls, looking much the same as those before it, delivered with the same action, and with no longer run. It fairly fizzed off the pitch, and Archie Slater's bat was still in the air when his middle stump did a pirouette that made Dick Jerrold dodge.

"My word!" said Slater. "That one might have beaten Bradman or Duleep! It would be good enough for me every time."

He did not realise that he had made two boundaries off balls of much the same type a little earlier. His bat had come down the fraction of a second sooner, and the leather had gone whizzing past the one slip field.

And Rod did not hear his praise. But Jerrold told him later, and what Slater had said was some consolation to the colt for what looked like the terribly bad analysis of 2 for 111. After he had put in a further long spell and got Hutchinson caught at the wicket he was taken off, and Soote and Rogers, having been rested, were given their chance of cheaper wickets with the tail.

The third day saw Norlandshire set close on 400 to win, at the rate of about 75 per hour. It was an all but impossible task. Hereward might have attempted it—his great heart had never failed. Hyde never thought of going for the gloves. His instructions to his men were that they must all sit on the splice and avoid defeat if it might be avoided.

That meant a wearisome afternoon's play at best; it also meant that several of the men must play a game not natural to them.

The home side's bowling was good and varied, the fielding of the keenest.

But Cooté did nothing, and Deeks and Hyde's pal, Barnold, very little, and with still ninety minutes to go the fall of Hyde's wicket to a fine ball from Townsend saw six down for 151.

Stanton was No. 8 on the batting list, and was ready to go to the wicket—too ready, Hyde thought, for at such a time a little delay might help, and everyone knew that few umpires were very particular about the two minutes' limit.

It may have been that consideration, or it may not; but, anyway, the Norlandshire skipper, waving Stanton back, said sharply:

"No, not you! Rodney next."

Rod heard, and hurried on his pads.

Willey, the batsman in, had made a few runs very shakily. He was not at his best when up against it, though apparently better value than Stanton when matters were going well. Now he was beaten all ends up by a tricky slow from Mitchell, and Stanton took his place, with eighty-five minutes to go, and only Rogers and Jerrold to come.

Stanton set his teeth. He was nothing much to look at as a batsman; he would never be a stylist. But he knew how to keep a straight bat and a high heart. He was a good partner for Rod.

Rod hated this game of scoring by minutes instead of by

THE OPENING CHAPTERS.

After his father's death ROD RODNEY goes to live with the Redgrave 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 HARRY HIAM and his son HARRY. In a scrap there Ralph fouls Rodney because he cannot beat him. Rod also meets ALURED HYDE, Ralph's crony, 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. Trouble occurs in the Norlandshire team. Rod and a man named Beal are sent for by the cricket committee. (Now read on.)



It was Rod's call and he knew there was no run there, but Hyde was rushing down the pitch. Rod hesitated, then ran like the wind. The batsmen had hardly crossed before Wood whipped the balls off!

runs, but subdued himself to it for his side's sake. Stanton did not mind it; he was more stolid.

In the course of the next half-hour Rod scored 18, while his partner made a single. But what mattered was that half an hour had gone.

Without ever taking anything that could be called a risk Rod doubled his score in the next thirty minutes. Hyde heard those around him saying that Norlandshire had found a batsman of the right calibre, and he seethed with spite. No Derbyshire partisan could have been more eager than he to see the colt dismissed; he wanted defeat averted—but not by Rod.

Stanton, his eye well in, made a few, and did not look like getting out. But within ten minutes of time Slater beat him, and Roger Rogers took his place, not feeling very hopeful about doing any good in it.

For ten overs in succession Rogers had only five balls, and let four of them go past without an attempt to touch them. But the one he met with the middle of his bat might have bowled many a better man.

And Rod made no effort to score off anything that did not ask for it.

The half-hour was wearing away. Only seven minutes remained when Worthington bowled a ball that struck the edge of Rogers' unmoved bat and went straight into the hands of first slip.

Dick Jerrold came in—the last hope. Worthington bowled a short one that came beautifully on to Jerrold's bat, and he carted it over the ropes. The tension of the crowd was relieved by a rousing cheer—perhaps prompted by the anticipation that in trying to do the same thing again the veteran might be caught.

But it was the last ball of the over, and Rod played five good deliveries back to Townsend, then hit the sixth for three past cover—a safe stroke. Jerrold was taken out of danger by the coolness of the lad less than half his age, and Jerrold was kept out of danger till the moment when the last ball—a bad one, for the man who bowled it was over-anxious—went speeding from Rod's bat to the boundary—and Norlandshire had averted defeat!

The Yorkshire Game!

THERE was stifled mutiny in the Norlandshire team that left Derby, with a three days' break between the game there and one of the big matches of the season—that with Yorkshire, at Norwich.

All the men were loyal to the county club. This loyalty it was that prevented mutiny from becoming open.

They could have no such feeling towards Hyde. He had

not won their loyalty, and they were sure now that he would never win it.

Hyde went home with a troubled mind. He was beginning to fear that he had taken upon his shoulders more than he could carry. It was not only the leadership of the Norlandshire team—though that was becoming difficult. That, however, was a small trouble compared with another that loomed up now. He had hungered for the captaincy; he still wanted to keep it; but to let it go would only hurt his cricket reputation, whereas the other trouble menaced ruin!

Knowing that his father was away from home, he sent word to Ralph Redgrave to meet him at the Hyde mansion up on the hill above the big town in the evening of the first off day. Had Joseph Hyde been there the two would have met at Hiam's Saloon, and young Harry might have found out earlier what was not to be kept much longer from him.

Already he had strong suspicions. If he could have overheard even a small part of the conversation between those two his suspicions would have hardened into certainty.

Before either spoke Hyde poured into two glasses liberal helpings of his father's best old brandy, and used a siphon to give each glass enough soda for a slight fizz. They drank in silence. Ralph never lifted his eyes, and his face was gloomy and sulky, as Hyde saw.

There was silence for a minute or two even after the glasses had been drained. Then the liquor moved Ralph's tongue.

"So Yankee came to you at Birmingham?" he said.

"Yes, confound him! But it was partly your fault. You ought to have been able to deal with it. On the face of it there were only two things to be done with young Green—put him out of the way, or give him what he asked and clear him off—anywhere, as long as he did clear off! He wouldn't be likely to come back, or to split on us once he had gone. I draw the line at killing; either for a member of the public or for an untrustworthy man of the gang."

"That's right enough. We're in it deep, without putting our dashed necks in danger. But I did deal with it, Ally. I forked out a pony, which was what Yankee said would square the young blighter."

"You? Forked out a pony? Thought you were stony broke! Where did you get it?"

Ralph grinned evilly. Could his mother and father have seen and heard him then they would have realised once for all that their son was as utterly worthless as any human being well can be. Even his much-enduring mother would

have revolted, while his father's gorge would have risen, at the sneering tones in which he answered.

"A loan from Rodney—which is all the same as a gift, for he'll never get it back. I was right down—saw everything going to giddy smash—when he offered it."

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Hyde. "What a mug he must be! Well, he doesn't matter much in this. It's Yankee that matters. I don't see how we can trust the rotter a yard, for he never said a word to me about getting cash for you. He may be hand in glove with Green, or— Oh, dash it all, I did think he was to be relied upon!"

"He's too deep in it to give us away," said Ralph, though not too hopefully.

Harry Hiam would have learned from this talk that Hyde and Ralph Redgrave were the Boss and the Vice of the criminal gang that meant so much profit to old Horry.

But now things seemed to be going all wrong. During the next few days Hyde could not get into touch with Yankee, and found Geering very morose. He was, therefore, in the worst possible temper on the morning of the first day of the Yorkshire match.

For this the same team that had played at Derby was chosen, except that an amateur unknown to Hyde was substituted for his pal Barnold. He resented this, for it made him feel quite alone in the team. But Barnold did not really matter much; he belonged only to the more open side of Alured Hyde's life, and would not have thought of dabbling in crime.

Hyde won the toss from Greenwood, and elected to bat on a plumb pitch.

He hesitated over the batting list. He knew that he would have a chance of pleasing the team generally if he gave Rod an early place in it. Not only the team—the committee also would approve of that.

But spite was too strong for him. The names went down: Harman, Beal, A. F. W. Hyde, Coote, Deeks, Stanton, C. B. Martin—that made seven. Rod was allowed No. 8 before Willey, with Rogers and Jerrold to follow.

The start was wretchedly bad. Within half an hour Red Harman, Conrad Beal, and Tommy Coote were all out to Verity, with only 22 runs scored.

Then Hyde himself and Walter Deeks did something to redeem the situation. Hyde could bat; about that there was no possible doubt. Had his whole heart been in the game he might have been a great player; as it was, he was learning to face critical situations in the right spirit.

He and Deeks were an ill-matched pair, however. Walter Deeks, hot-head that he was, hated Hyde and all that Hyde stood for.

Yet the two kept the Norlandshire flag flying, and added over a hundred before lunch, when they were still not out.

Hyde had a liking for stolen runs—a dangerous liking for a man not in sympathy with his partner. Deeks did not care for that sort of thing; he was ten years his captain's senior, and not too quick on his feet. Out of their failure to see things the same way came what might have spelt disaster for Norlandshire.

It was not Hyde's call, but he started. The wicket from which he went was the one in danger. Deeks did not start on the instant; but even had he done so he would not have been in time. He had not the pace for this game. He was out by fully two yards, and could give no better response to Yorkshireman Wood's cheerful grin than a scowl.

"Why didn't you stick in your crease, you chump?" demanded Coote. "There never was a run in that stroke."

"Lost my head, I reckon," replied Deeks.

But that was not true, and probably his comrades realised that it was not. He had given up his own innings to save that of the man he hated, because he felt sure that Hyde was worth more runs than he was.

Rod understood, if no one else; and his heart warmed to Deeks, about whom he had not felt sure till then. This was playing the game!

Stanton's middle stump went flying before one of Macaulay's fastest, and the new amateur made no show.

Rod joined his captain with six wickets down for 147—deplorably bad going on such a pitch.

But Hyde was shaping finely. None of the bowlers seemed to bother him at all, and he had easily put out of his mind any qualms he might have felt as to his cutting short Deeks' innings in the fifties.

For a time, however, he was very careful not to call Rod for any risky run. But when they had been an hour together, during which time the score had moved on by seventy-odd, he had come to see that the lad he hated was as keen to hurry the field by the stolen run as he was.

He did not perceive, though some of the onlookers did, that Rod was a far better judge than he.

That was because Rod was not thinking only of himself. He would take a risk or share a risk; he never asked his partner to take a risk he did not share.

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A Yorkshire side is not easily flurried; but the tactics of these two did make a difference. Greenwood shifted his men in consultation with his bowlers, but he did not seem able to get the field just right. And the score was moving faster now, and Hyde was nearing his hundred.

When he was 99, Bowes—put on again after a rest—gave him a terribly bad time for one over. Well set as the Norlandshire captain was, he was beaten by a very fast one that missed his off stump by the veriest fraction of an inch and put up another that might have been "c. and b."

He grew desperate. To him all that mattered just then was that he should reach three figures.

Rod placed Verity to the on for a single. Hyde faced the slow bowler, and snicked the ball luckily.

There was but a single slip-field, but the leather was going straight to him. It was Rod's call, of course, and he would not have dreamed of calling.

But Hyde was rushing down the pitch!

For a moment all Rod's being was in acute rebellion against the sacrifice to be made. Then he remembered Walter Deeks—and made it!

The batsman had hardly crossed before Wood whipped the bats off.

Cheers greeted Rod on his way to the pavilion. He had made 64, and had looked good for a hundred. He lifted his cap as he ran in.

"Another mug!" growled Red Harman, in the players' room.

But Red put his hand on the boy's shoulder as he spoke, and Rod knew, without needing to be told, that they thought him a good sport, not a mug.

It was ten minutes later before Hyde got the run he needed for the century. But after that he hit out brilliantly. Willey was a mere sleeping partner. No matter who bowled, 4 after 4 flowed from Hyde's bat. Never before had run-getting been so easy to him.

He was caught on the boundary with his score at 169. The bad start had been handsomely redeemed, and on paper the credit seemed to be due to Norlandshire's captain, with help from Deeks and the colt Rodney. Those who had watched the match and knew the game realised that a good deal ought to be taken off the credit due to Hyde and given to the other two.

The innings ended just on time for 358.

As the Yorkshire players came in a telegram was handed to Roger Rogers.

He turned to his comrades when he had read it, and there were tears in his eyes.

"Mr. Hereward's dying, boys!" he said, and turned away.

Dick Jerrold Breaks Out.

OF all there, Rod was the only one who had not known the ex-captain of Norlandshire. But he had heard so much about him, had formed so clear a picture of him, that he felt with the rest, though it may be less keenly.

Tommy Coote was struggling to keep back tears. Conrad Beal did not struggle. His arms were down on his knees; his head was down on his arms; his shoulders shook with sobs. And not one there thought the worse of him for his emotion.

Deeks was silent for once—silent and very grave. Stanton and Willey and Jerrold found no words that would get past the lumps in their throats. Red Harman alone spoke.

He snatched the flimsy sheet from the floor, to which it had fluttered from Roger's hand.

"Cannot last out the night," he read, in tones that bore no likeness to his normal cheery voice. "It—oh, it doesn't seem possible!"

"He did me the very best turn any man ever did in all my life," spoke Jerrold, his voice also strained. "I should have been a ruined man but for him—my own fault, though I was a fool, not a knave! He saved me, and only said: 'You won't be such an ass again, Dick, I am sure.'"

This was news to everyone there but Rogers. But it did not seem to matter. No one felt curiosity about details.

"You'll go, Roger?" said Red. "She's asked you to, and we all know that you came first with him."

The wire was from Mrs. Hereward, whom they had seen as a bride only three years earlier. There had always been strong friendship between the little left-hander and his skipper.

"I'd go, if I'd to walk there barefoot!" replied Rogers.

"May I come with you, Mr. Rogers?" asked Beal, looking up. "I don't suppose he'll think of me, but I've thought heaps of him nearly all my life; and even if I don't see him I'd like to be near."

"Come, lad," answered Roger. "And the sooner we start the better."

The news had reached others besides the players, and there was sadness in the pavilion, where members clustered in knots to discuss it. But Hyde had not heard it; he had left in a hurry the moment stumps were drawn. He would have gone before that, but he did not want to give the committee the least excuse for saying he had neglected his duty.

He learned on the Sunday of Hereward's death, but felt no grief. It was almost as though a rival had been swept from his path. He could not realise that Arthur Hereward dead would mean hardly less to the men than Arthur Hereward living; that his methods and the old skipper's would still be compared, and always to his disadvantage.

Roger Rogers' little sitting-room was crowded that Sunday evening. All the pros were there, Hebblewhite and Baines with the rest, and every man wore black, or had a black band round his arm. Roger was not a married man; a sister kept house for him. She busied herself with getting supper for a crowd, and brought out whisky and bottled beer, hoping the supply would be enough. But they did not care for eating—very few of them even for drinking.

Beal had been allowed to see his hero and say farewell. He would never forget that. Roger and one other had been the only people besides Hereward's own folk present when he died. And it was to Roger his last words were spoken, though the pressure his wasted hand gave his young wife's cold one said more than many words.

"Well, I've had a happy life," he had said. "Good times we have known, Roger, eh? Good games—good fellows! Tell them to keep the flag flying!"

He was dead less than a minute after that speech. It was not till later Rod learned that Hereward had spoken of him.

"This lad Rodney—he looks the right stuff, Roger," Hereward had said. "He saved the Derbyshire game—nailing good work for a colt!"

THRILLS! SURPRISES! LAUGHS!

Next week's great yarn of Tom Merry & Co. is entitled

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"He is the right stuff, sir, or I'm no judge," had been Roger's answer.

"I wish I felt sure he'd get a fair deal!" muttered Hereward. But Roger did not tell Rod that.

When the game was resumed on Monday morning the only man of all the twenty-two who had not donned a black band was Hyde. Every Yorkshireman had one, and some of them spoke of Hereward in terms that made new lumps come into Norlandshire throats.

A pall of depression seemed to hang over the ground. The sun did not show itself; the clouds were low and dark grey. But what Roger said before the men trooped out put some heart into those who heard.

"Keep the flag flying!" said Roger.

When he had been in the field only some ten minutes, Hyde made for the pavilion, telling Martin—who was playing his first game for the county—to carry on as captain till he returned. It had occurred to Hyde that the absence of the black band marked him out, and might bring comment upon him.

But he could not at once find what he needed; and Martin, a rather consequential young man, vain at having attained so soon even momentary leadership, did, in his absence, a good deed for Norlandshire.

Rogers had been put on first with Coote. But the veteran was not in form—and no wonder! "Keep the flag flying!" he had said; but just now he could not help to keep it flying.

Martin put on Rod in place of Rogers. Hyde would not have done it; but the newcomer was not aware of that, and might not have cared had he been aware.

In his first over Rod had the luck to dismiss Percy Holmes. Not that there was much luck about it; Holmes admitted candidly that the ball was too good for him. He had not expected anything at that pace, and there had been a wicked little break.

Coote was bowling at his best, mindful of the dead man's slogan. He and Rod kept the Yorkshiremen very quiet. Neither Sutcliffe nor Oldroyd risked anything.

When Hyde returned to the field he did not see his way to take Rod off. Soon—not yet.

Then Sutcliffe left. The wicket counted to Rod; the credit of it was really Jerrold's. In all his long career he had never accomplished a smarter stumping. It needed an umpire like Frank Chester to be sure that in the second that the balls flew the England man's right heel was off the ground and the front of his feet outside the crease.

If the crowd had known that this was the last time burly Richard Jerrold would stump a man in a county game there would have been more cheering. As it was, the applause was meagre. Gloom sat upon the ground.

Leyland made matters livelier for a time, scoring 33 in as many minutes. But Oldroyd plodded on, taking safe singles and twos. And Rod got Leyland, with the help of Beal, who took a low, skimming catch in the country—a catch that not one fieldsman in fifty would have thought possible.

A change had to be made, but Hyde dared not take Rod off. Coote, though he had bowled well, had not got a wicket, and young Martin was given a trial in his place.

The amateur colt proved better value than anyone had anticipated. His bowling did not look tremendously fast through the air, but came off the pitch with a fizz and a nip. It was he who lowered Oldroyd's stumps after the veteran had made 38 in a couple of hours.

Lunch somehow mattered less than usual. Word had got about that the committee had asked Somerset to agree to change the date of their match at Norchester, the next on the card, to one late in August, which both counties chanced to have vacant—this so that the whole team could attend

Hereward's funeral on the Wednesday. The men talked of this, and thought little of what they ate.

Most of them had left the luncheon-table when the trouble came. But Jerrold and Roger Rogers and Rod were still there.

"A lot of dashed rot I call it!" sounded Hyde's voice, pitched higher than usual. "Why all this fuss? Hereward had been dying for months; we all knew he couldn't last much longer. Oh, a good skipper, I grant you; but there have been and will be plenty better than he."

"But not you, Hyde!" roared Dick Jerrold.

The burly stumper heaved himself up from his seat as he shouted. All eyes were upon him. They saw his face aflame, his eyes glittering, his hands clenched.

And most of the few who saw understood. Not a word against Arthur Hereward could the men who had loved him bear to hear now. It would be hard enough later; but there would be few such words spoken. Hereward had borne to his death a stainless shield.

"You're forgetting yourself, Jerrold!" snapped the county captain.

"Not me! I'm just remembering a man you weren't ever good enough to whiten the boots for!"

Dick was advancing upon Hyde as he shouted that. Those around the captain fell away from him. Roger Rogers put out his hand as though to restrain his big comrade, then let it drop. Rod sat tense, almost numb—not quite, for with his whole heart he approved of Jerrold's outburst.

"Clear out of this!" ordered Hyde, pointing to the door.

"Not till you've taken back what you said!" roared Jerrold.

(What will happen now? Will there be another fight in the Norlandshire team? Don't miss next week's thrilling instalment!)

Ask Here for Information.



Send in your questions, Whiskers will answer them. He's never been known to fail.—ED.

OUR young hopeful, the office nuisance, has been getting into hot water again, chums. And when I say hot water I mean hot water, with soap, towel, and scrubbing-brush thrown in. The truth is he turned up to the office the other morning looking terribly dirty.

"How dare you come to the office like that!" he roared. "Look at your nails! Look at them!"

Adolphus, however, remained quite calm.

"I don't see anything wrong, sir," he said cheekily. "You've always told me to have everything at my finger-tips, and when I turn up with a bit of the garden at my finger-tips you start grumbling!"

"Get out!" roared the Ed. "You cheeky kid! Come back when you're cleaned up! Now then," continued the Ed., snatching up a pile of two hundred letters on his desk, "we'll run through these and get them done. First of all, I want you to tell Lionel Withers, who lives at Thornton Heath, something about the game of polo."

"Keep calm, old top," I responded. "I know yards and yards about polo, and you're not stopping my money on that one."

"Right-ho, fire away," groaned the Ed., with a disappointed expression.

"To start with," I began, "there

been in existence for two thousand years, so I've had time to learn. The first time polo was played in England was in 1869, by the 10th Hussars. Then the Hurlingham Club took it up in 1873, and it became popular."

"What size is the ground?"

"A polo ground is three hundred yards long," said I, "and about two hundred yards wide. The ball used in polo is made of willow root, and weighs about five ounces. The polo stick doesn't have to be any particular size or weight, and it can have either a square or a cigar-shaped end. The goal-posts are eight yards apart."

"What about the ponies?" asked the Ed. "Do they have to be any special size?"

"Yes, sir, the polo pony must measure two inches over fourteen hands when it's registered by the officials at Hurlingham. Polo ponies are a specially bred type, as they have to be strong and, at the same time, docile. English polo ponies—which are considered the best—are bred for the game, and are usually English and Arab

isn't another ball game that is so ancient as polo. Games like hockey and cricket and so on, are all derived from the game of polo. Polo used to be played in Persia by the Persians."

"Is that a fact?" said the Ed. "And have you ever played polo in Persia?"

"Persianally, no, sir, I haven't," said I. "But, you see, the game's

mized. The Irish ponies are very good, too."

"A girl Gemite, Gladys Wiggins, wants you to tell her some things about henna. Henna is a red dye. Is that correct, my learned friend?"

"That's right. It's made from the powdered leaves of a small shrub found in India, Persia, and along the African coasts of the Mediterranean. Henna is the Persian name for the shrub. In India they call it Mendee, in Egypt it is known as Khema, and in England, Egyptian privet. Henna was used by the Egyptians thousands of years ago: for colouring the finger-nails, for rubbing on the soles of the feet, and for dyeing men's beards and the manes of horses. In fact, all over the East henna has been used in this way. After dyeing their beards red with henna, the Persians dye them again with indigo, and make them jet-black. They also dye the hair of their children, the manes and the tails of their horses and asses with henna, making them red."

"Your whiskers would look rather good touched up like that," said the Ed. "It would make the old sanctum look quite cheery."

"Another thing henna is used for," I went on, ignoring the Ed's remarks, "is for colouring morocco leather a reddish-yellow. It is also supposed to keep the hands and feet cool, which accounts for it being so popular out East."

"What's pumice-stone made of?" "Pumice-stone, Ed.," said I, stroking my whiskers lazily, "is made of pumice. Pumice is a froth-like, porous, volcanic stone. Have you got that down?"

"I'm trying to get you down," growled the Ed., "but it's a tough job! By the way, did that young lad say he'd been gardening?"

"If you mean Adolphus, sir," said I, "yes, I think so. He seemed to have brought a good bit of the backyard along with him. Got it all at his finger-tips. Ha, ha, ha! That was pretty smart, that was!"

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