

LONG SCHOOL AND FOOTBALL YARN OF TOM MERRY & CO WITHIN!

The GEM

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TOM MERRY DID NOT EXPECT TO PLAY FOR THE 1st ELEVEN—

The FOOTBALL



CHAPTER 1.

The Junior Football Match!

"FOOTBALL!" said Tom Merry. "But what amazing weather!"

"Yaas, bai Jove, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Fancy football in this weathah, deah boy! I am afwaid I shall wegard it as too much of a beastlay fag, don't you know."

It certainly did not seem exactly the weather for the winter game. Although it was November, the sun was blazing down upon the quadrangle at St. Jim's with almost July heat. Hot and dusty was that Saturday afternoon, with hardly a breath of wind stirring.

The group of juniors standing on the steps of the School House at St. Jim's looked into the quadrangle, and at each other with dubious expressions.

On the junior football ground the goalposts were erected, and the lines already marked out. Everything was in readiness for the game—everything except the weather, as Blake had remarked. It was an extraordinary case of a late St. Martin's summer—real freak weather.

"Football!" repeated Tom Merry. "My only aunt! I rather wish we could make it a swimming match instead! But we can't let the Redclyffe fellows think we want to get out of it."

"Not much!" said Jack Blake emphatically. "After all, who's afraid of a little warmth?"

"I'm nbt," said Tom Merry. "Anyway, the Redclyffe chaps will be here in a few minutes now, and that settles it."

And Tom Merry descended the steps and walked through

the sunlight towards the ground where the first important match of the season was to be played.

It was an old fixture—Redclyffe juniors against the juniors of St. Jim's—and Tom Merry was football captain of the Saints' side. And Tom Merry did not

intend to funk the match if the heat was like that of an oven.

The St. Jim's junior team was composed of most of our old friends. Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther—the Terrible Three—were all in it; and so were Study No. 6—Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy. The New House at St. Jim's furnished five members, among whom Figgins & Co. were most prominent.

As a rule, the first junior match against a rival school attracted a big crowd to the ground, the Lower Forms being strongly represented, as well as some of the Upper Form fellows coming to look at the "kids" playing the game. But on this occasion the Junior Eleven and their opponents seemed likely to have the match ground mainly to themselves. It was too hot even to look at football, the youngsters declared, and such as were not in the team had mostly sought out cooler spots than the football ground.

Most of the fellows were boasting, and the river had the aspect of a fine summer afternoon. Only a few enthusiasts turned up as spectators of the coming match. But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was the only member of the eleven who thought that it would be a good idea to put off the match.

"I am afwaid I shall find it a beastlay fag," D'Arcy explained. "Of course, I am always weady to do anythin' for the side, as a sportsman and a footballah. But I weally think that on the pwesent occasion, deah boys, the weathah is weally too warm for such an extwemely wuff-and-weady game as football."

"Oh rats!" said Jack Blake.

"Wats or not, I think so," said the swell of the School House with emphasis. "And undah the circumstances, I considah that Tom Mewwy should postpone the match till a more suitable occasion when the weathah is a little coldah."

"Oh, dry up!" said Herries.

"I wefuse to do so! I wefuse—"

"Look here, Gussy," said Blake, "the Redclyffe juniors may arrive any minute, and we're going to play them. I've pitchforked you into the team, though you're about the silliest ass that ever made a goat of himself, and I had to argue a long time with Tom Merry about it, and we nearly came to punching heads. Is this your gratitude, image?"

—BUT HE GOT HIS CHANCE WHEN SEFTON LET ST. JIM'S DOWN!

FAKE!

BY
Martin Clifford.



"I am gwaiteful enough, Blake, but I am sure that it will pprove too much of a beastlay fag—"

"I thought Study No. 6 ought to be in the team, and here we are," said Blake. "I made Tom Merry see reason, and you're in the eleven. I'm answerable for you. If you don't play up like a giddy International, look out for squalls."

"But, weally, Blake, I am quite pwepared to wesign—" Blake seized the expostulating swell of St. Jim's by the collar and ran him down the School House steps.

"Come on, kids, it's time we changed!" he exclaimed.

D'Arcy struggled in his leader's iron grip as Blake raced him towards the football ground. But he was an infant in the grasp of Jack Blake.

"Blake, I command you to welease me immediately!"

"Go hon!"

"Our fwendship ceases fwom this moment—I wesign my place in the football team. I insist upon your weleasin' me at once!"

"Come on!" said Blake, absolutely disregarding the indignation of D'Arcy. "This way to the changing-room! Come on!"

"Blake, you wuff bwute, you are makin' me most uncomfortable hot!"

That was not at all surprising, for Blake was rushing the unfortunate swell along at a pace seldom seen off the cinder path. D'Arcy wriggled and gasped; but, propelled from behind by that iron grip, he was simply helpless, and he had to run as if for a wager.

The rapid run in the hot sun made D'Arcy gasp and pant. But there was no help for him. Blake was in deadly earnest.

Herries, who was laughing so much that he could hardly keep pace, followed fast, kindly assisting the swell of the School House at intervals with his foot from behind.

"Hallo, hallo!" exclaimed a well-known voice. "What's the game? Are you funny merchants trying to keep yourselves warm?"

It was the voice of Figgins.

Figgins & Co., the chums of the New House, and the deadly rivals of the School House juniors, were coming down to the ground, when they spotted the remarkable procession from the School House.

The House rivalry, of course, was in abeyance for the

time, both Houses being represented in the football eleven that was to meet the juniors from Redclyffe School.

The great Figgins stopped to look at the curious scene. Fatty Wynn, the Welsh partner in the firm of Figgins & Co., and Kerr, the member from Scotland, were at his side. They stared at Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy in wonder.

"Feel chilly?" went on Figgy. "Trying a little exercise to keep yourself from freezing?"

Blake grinned.

"Not exactly," he answered, keeping a tight grip on D'Arcy. "You see, this is the thushness of it. Gussy is so anxious to play that there's no holding him in!"

"Blake, I must chawactewise that statement as entirely devoid of twuth!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly. "On the contwawy—"

"Come on!" said Blake hastily.

And he rushed his unfortunate captive on again to the changing-room.

Figgins & Co., who made a pretty shrewd guess at the real state of affairs, followed, giggling. Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy arrived at the room. The Terrible Three were already there, and they stared at Blake in amazement as he arrived.

"What the—how the—"

"It's Gussy's giddy enthusiasm," explained Blake. "He's so eager to play—"

"Blake, you bwute—"

"This way in," interrupted Blake.

He bundled D'Arcy into the changing-room.

Tom Merry chuckled.

"Gussy thinks it would be a beastly fag," he murmured. "Blake is keeping him up to time. Good old Blake!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" giggled Manners. "I can hear them persuading him."

"They'll have to drag him on by main force, I fancy," remarked Monty Lowther. "Poor old Gussy! He was so ambitious to be a footballer once."

Blake was indeed persuading the swell of the School House to get into his football things. D'Arcy was exhibiting the obstinacy usually ascribed to a mule.

"Once and for all, Blake, I wefuse to change my clothes!" he said. "I distinctly wefuse! I no longah wegard you as a fwend."

"I still regard you as a silly ass," Blake remarked.

"I object—I strongly object—to such expvessions!"

"I strongly object to such silly asses, but I have to put up with 'em," said Blake.

"Now, here's your duds, Gussy."

"I have said that I wefuse. The weathah is too warm for football, and after your extweme wuffness it is a question of dig."

"A question of a dig in the ribs, do you mean?" asked Blake, giving D'Arcy one that made him sit down with surprising suddenness. "That all right?"

"Blake, you howwid wuff-fian—"

"Are you going to change your togs?" demanded Blake.

"No, certainly not! I stwongly object—"

"Lend a hand, Herries. We'll change 'em for him."

"Blake—Hewwies, I wefuse! I object! I uttably wefuse—"

The chums took no notice of Arthur Augustus. They yanked his clothes off in double-quick time, and slammed him into his football garb.

Blake rolled up the removed clothing into a bundle.

"I say, Figgy!"

Figgins put his head into the room.

"What's the trouble?"

"Will you stick this bundle somewhere—anywhere?"

"Certainly!" grinned Figgins.

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On the football field Gussy was seen,
When charged by a fellow named
Green,
To arise with a shout
Of "Lay the man out!"
And give him a punch on the bean!

He took the clothing and disappeared. Arthur Augustus made a frantic rush after him.

"Figgins, I insist upon your immediately weturnin' my clobber!"

Blake caught the indignant swell of St. Jim's by the shoulders, and pulled him back.

"Dry up, Gussy! Now, you can either keep those togs on, or else do the other thing. But you won't see your other duds again till after the match."

"This is an outrage—"

"Hallo! Here are the Redclyffe chaps!"

The juniors of Redclyffe had arrived in their bus. Tom Merry was welcoming them.

Green, their captain, was a big, muscular fellow, belonging to the Upper Fourth at Redclyffe. The rest of the team looked very fit, excepting for the signs of the heat. All were red as poppies. The absurd weather was rather taken as a joke by the fellows at Redclyffe, and, like good sportsmen, they could see the humorous side of the matter.

Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, came down to the ground, Kildare was to referee the match, a kind action for which the juniors were duly grateful. The captain of St. Jim's took a deep interest in junior football, and did all that he could to help on the youngsters. Kildare spoke some kindly words to the visitors, and they were shown into the changing-room. It was close upon time for the kick-off.

"Jolly weather for football, isn't it, Kildare?" Tom Merry remarked, with a grin. "I only hope we shan't melt away in the sun."

Kildare laughed.

"Never mind, stick it out, like good sportsmen," he said. "But I know you'll do that. The Redclyffe fellows are in good form, Merry. I hope you'll beat them, though, as we hope to do next week in the senior match."

"We'll do our best, Kildare. Anyway, they'll have a warm time."

On the following Saturday was to take place the senior match between Redclyffe and St. Jim's on the former's ground.

The senior match was considered the most important, of course, at all events by the seniors and the masters. The juniors were inclined to think that the junior match was really "the thing." They made it a point to see all the senior matches, and to cheer their side loudly; but their hearts were in the junior affairs. But the senior match the following week was destined to be unusually interesting to the juniors of St. Jim's. But we must not anticipate.

Kildare looked at his watch.

"Close on time, Merry."

"Right-ho, Kildare! We're all ready, I think."

Tom Merry looked into the dressing-room.

"Hallo, you chaps! Ah, you look all right, D'Arcy! Glad to see you looking so fit."

"It was my intention to weigh—"

Blake clapped his hand over the mouth of Arthur Augustus.

"What's that?" asked the junior captain.

"Nothing," said Blake hastily. "Gus is in fine form, and is bound to distinguish himself. If he doesn't, we are going to slay him in the study afterwards."

"Blake—"

"Shut up! Time we were on the ground! Come on!"

Blake linked his arm in D'Arcy's, and they went on. The Redclyffe juniors were in the field, and Green was holding the ball.

Fatty Wynn was goalkeeper for the Saints. He went to his station when the captains had tossed for choice of ends, the choice being a matter of very little moment, as there was no wind. Blake looked anxiously at Fatty.

"He's a jolly good goalkeeper, as a rule," he remarked. "There isn't much room for a ball to pass him. But suppose—"

"Suppose what?" said Fatty.

"Suppose you run into tallow, or something like that, in this heat?" said Blake, with an anxious look. "It's dangerous to be so fat in a sun like this. If you were to melt away—"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" growled Fatty.

"Line up!" said Tom Merry.

The sides were soon in their places. Tom Merry was centre-forward, with Blake, Herries, Figgins, and Monty Lowther in the front line with him.

Manners, D'Arcy, and Kerr were the half-backs, and Pratt and French, the two New House juniors, were the backs. Pratt belonged to the Fourth Form and French to the Fifth Form.

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to the Shell, the Form of which the Terrible Three were the shining ornaments.

Pheep!

It was the clear, shrill blast of the whistle.

Tom Merry kicked off.

CHAPTER 2.

Playing the Game I

THE football match commenced.

Under a hot sun Tom Merry kicked off, and the kick-off was followed by a forward rush of the Saints.

Round the ground about a score of fellows looked on. That was the largest number that could be prevailed upon to watch the match, besides those engaged in it.

Darrell, Rushden, Drake, and some other friends of Kildare's from the School House, and a couple of New House seniors were there, the rest being juniors.

They gave a cheer as Tom Merry and the St. Jim's forwards got away.

It was too hot to shout, as Gore remarked.

But it was not too hot for the Saints to play a good game, and Tom Merry showed it by the way he streaked through the Redclyffe defence.

He came through the Redclyffians like a knife through cheese, and dribbled the ball right through the half-backs, and passed cleverly to Blake as the opposing backs pounced upon him.

Blake sent the leather out to Herries as he was nailed, and Herries rushed it on and kicked for goal.

But the Redclyffe custodian was on the alert.

Out came the ball from his ready fist, to fall among the watchful halves; but before they could clear the long-legged Figgins was on the ball like a shot.

Figgins did not try for goal; he knew there was no chance of that, but he sent the ball to Tom Merry at centre just before he was rolled over under the charge of a Redclyffian, and Tom Merry kicked for goal.

This time the goalkeeper was not so fortunate.

His outstretched hand reached for the leather, but it shot past him before he could touch it, and landed in the net.

"Goal!"

Darrell and Rushden shouted out the word from the ropes—a very faint greeting for the feat performed by the junior Saints.

It was certainly a goal.

St. Jim's juniors were one up!

The goalie tossed out the ball, and Green, the Redclyffe captain, punted it back to the centre of the field, where the teams lined up again.

Tom Merry was looking very pleased.

Not only because the goal had come from his feet—for it was as much due to Figgins as to himself, as he readily acknowledged—but because St. Jim's had started so well.

And his perspiring but enthusiastic team were prepared to back him up to any extent.

Even the languid Arthur Augustus began to be imbued with the enthusiasm of the grand old game, and ceased to bother about the "beastly bag."

The whistle went, and Redclyffe kicked off.

The teams were quickly at it again, hammer and tongs.

The visitors brought the ball with a rush into the home half, and dashed on towards goal, and Fatty Wynn, who hitherto had been leaning idly against a goalpost, woke up to business.

Fatty was a splendid goalkeeper. At home in Wales, on his native heath, he generally played the Rugby game, but Association was the game at St. Jim's, and Fatty played it as well as he played Rugger. He was an ideal goalkeeper; not merely on account of his width, as Blake playfully suggested, but because he was alert and cool and determined, and never let a chance escape him—or hardly ever.

The Redclyffians came on gallantly, and the ball whizzed in from the foot of Green, only to whiz out again from the foot of Fatty Wynn. It met a Redclyffe head, and came in again; but Fatty's chubby fist was ready, and he drove it out, and this time it dropped to the home backs, who cleared, and the game went towards the half-way line again.

"Bravo!" shouted Monteith, the head prefect of the New House.

"Bravo!" echoed Darrell and Rushden. "Well cleared!" The tussle was on the half-way line now, and the juniors seemed to be mixing themselves up pretty well over the elusive leather.

Monteith's companion yawned.

"I say, ain't you coming along, Monteith?" he asked,

"Not yet, Sefton."
 "What is this kids' game to you?" asked Sefton impatiently. "What rot!"
 "The youngsters ought to be encouraged, you know. And Figgins & Co. are playing up well—equal to anything the School House is doing," Monteith said, without taking his gaze from the field.

Sefton looked at him curiously.
 He had not been able to understand Monteith of late. It was not so long since Monteith, Sefton, and Lucas Sleath had been three companions of the same kidney in the New House at St. Jim's. Sleath had been expelled some time ago for rascally conduct, and after that Monteith had seemed to set himself more than ever against good government in the school, cordially backed up by Sefton. But of late a change had come over the prefect.

His bitter animosity against Kildare seemed to have vanished, and in football matters and in other things he seemed to back up the captain of the school, and to wish to be his right-hand man. There were no more bickerings with Kildare on the football committee, no more attempts to make trouble between the Houses, no more cigarette parties in the prefects' studies, no more surreptitious visits to the Chequers Inn at Rylcombe.

Monteith seemed to have turned over a new leaf entirely, and Sefton could not understand it.

He believed at first that the head prefect of the New House was simply playing a part in order to win Kildare's confidence, and repay it with some piece of treachery; but as time passed on he could not help seeing that Monteith was in earnest, and that annoyed him extremely.

"Oh, hang this!" said Sefton irritably. "I can't see what you want to stay here for, Monteith. It's no fun to hang about a football field."

"I don't know about that," said Monteith. "But, as a matter of fact, Sefton, I promised Kildare. It would be too bad for the youngsters to play without a soul looking on. Don't you agree with me?"

"No, I don't," said Sefton. "Confound the youngsters! And I don't see what you want to go out of your way to please Kildare for."

"Well, I don't know about going out of my way. I like to see a good game, and these juniors are playing up in grand style. There goes Tom Merry with the ball!" Monteith clapped his hands. "Bravo!"

Tom Merry was away with the ball, with the Redclyffians hanging upon his frack like bloodhounds. Right at him three halves rushed, and right through them Tom Merry went before he could be touched, dribbling the ball in splendid style. The halves blundered into one another and went to the ground in a heap, and Tom Merry dashed on, with only the backs to stop him.

The backs were upon him when the ball went from his foot out to Figgins. Figgins was bowled over on the turf by a charge from Green, but he managed to pass the ball to Monty Lowther at outside-left. Monty sent it whizzing in, beating the goalkeeper hollow, and St. Jim's juniors were two up.

"Goal!" Monteith shouted with Darrell and Rushden.

"Oh, hang it!" said Sefton. "Do come along! I want you to come down the river with me."

"Where to?"
 "The same old place," said Sefton uneasily.

"Do you mean the Chequers?"

"Yes."

"I can't come."

"Why not?"

"Look here, Sefton," said Monteith, turning upon him,

and looking him full in the face. "I've told you before that I've made up my mind, and that's enough. I don't want to preach to you, but I'm not going to the Chequers again. I've done with that sort of thing."

"Kildare been ragging you?" sneered Sefton.

"Kildare stood by me in a way I could never have expected, when I didn't deserve anything of the kind at his hands," said Monteith. "I needn't tell you the particulars, but I shall never forget that time. I was his enemy once; I'm his friend now. They used to call me Cad Monteith in the school." He flushed a little. "I'm going to see if I can't earn a rather pleasanter title than that. I've made up my mind. What do you want to keep on at it for? Let's have some peace!"

Sefton bit his lips hard.



Queasy's patience had already been severely tried by the heat of the day, and now it gave way. He leapt up and went for Green!

"Then you won't come to the Chequers?"

"No, I won't!" Monteith's eyes flashed. "And you'd better not go, either!"

"I shall do as I please!"

"Look here, Sefton, you know jolly well that it's my duty as head prefect of the House to see that none of the fellows visit that place!" exclaimed Monteith abruptly.

"Yes, I suppose it is. And I know how you've done that duty, so far."

"You're the last one who has a right to throw it in my teeth," said the prefect. "You've tried hard enough to keep me from doing the decent thing. It's time I put my foot down. I know I'm not the fellow to preach to anybody. But I'm not going to have this sort of thing going on under my nose. You're not to go to the Chequers, Sefton, and there's an end."

Sefton gritted his teeth.

"I shall go if I choose!"

"Then I shall report you to the Head, as in duty bound!"

"You—you won't do that, Monteith?"

"By Jove, I will, if you go there after my plain warning!"

"Then you had better report yourself at the same time," said Sefton savagely. "For if you don't, I will! You've been there often enough, and the Head would like to hear of some of your proceedings there."

Monteith turned pale.

"So you mean that you will round on me, Sefton?"

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"Yes, I will, if you do it on me. I'm not going to be dictated to! So long!"

And Sefton walked away, with his hands in his pockets, whistling.

Monteith remained silent and troubled in visage. The way of the transgressor is hard; but harder still seemed the way of the prefect who, after many a lapse from the path of right, had turned over a new leaf and honestly meant to do his duty in the future.

He had not wished to signalise his reformation by throwing over old friends. He had remained Sefton's chum, hoping to bring him round to the same way of thinking. He had used his influence with the captain to get Sefton into the St. Jim's First Eleven. He knew that a healthy interest in a manly game was the best antidote to blackguardly pursuits such as his chum was addicted to.

Sefton had been glad enough to get his cap for the First Eleven, but he had shown no sign of mending his ways. His open defiance of the prefect now placed Monteith in a difficult position. To keep order in his House was his first duty, but if Sefton betrayed his past faults to the Head he would certainly not remain a prefect long, even if he were allowed to stay at St. Jim's at all.

The whistle blew for half-time. The footballers, red and perspiring, came off the field to rub themselves down and take light refreshments in the form of lemon-juice. They were glad of the rest. The score still stood at two goals for St. Jim's against nil for the visitors. Kildare strolled across to speak to Monteith.

"They're doing well!" he remarked. "Jolly hot, isn't it?"

"Rather!" said the prefect absently.

Kildare looked at him curiously. He saw that the prefect looked worried, but he did not ask questions. He guessed that Sefton had something to do with it, and he had some idea of the difficulties of the prefect's position.

"The youngsters deserve credit for the game they're playing," Kildare remarked. "We need only play as good a game next Saturday, Monteith."

"I hope we shall." The prefect pulled himself together. "I hope it won't be as hot as this, though!"

Kildare laughed.

"We've got to keep our end up, whatever the weather! And I think we shall do it all right. St. Jim's First Eleven is just now about the strongest we have ever played, I think, with all the best men of both Houses in it, pulling together like a good team."

"I hear that Redclyffe First is in fine fettle, though."

"All the better; it will make a better fight of it." Kildare glanced at his watch. "Hallo, time's up!"

He walked back into the field. The teams came tumbling out of the pavilion. The whistle went, and the second half of the game commenced.

CHAPTER 3.

The Penalty Goal

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY, in the pavilion, had suggested postponing the second half of the match; a suggestion which had been somewhat rudely received by the other ten men of the side.

They had expressed themselves upon the matter in various ways. Tom Merry had thrown a wet sponge, which caught D'Arcy in the mouth and stopped his suggestion before it was fairly uttered, and Blake had hurled a lemon with deadly aim. Herries had contributed a flick with a wet towel, and Monty Lowther introduced his football boots into the discussion in a very effective way.

Thus reconstituted with, Arthur Augustus had withdrawn the suggestion, and the team turned out again to continue the tussle.

Both the leaders were as determined as ever, and as Redclyffe were determined to make up their leeway, and the Saints were equally determined to prevent their doing so, both sides warmed up to the work.

Redclyffe, in the first ten minutes of the second half, worked their way well towards the home goal, and rained in shots upon Fatty Wynn. Fatty faced the music gallantly and drove out the leather in fine style, till at last a low, whizzing shot from Green beat him, and Redclyffe had scored their first goal.

It never rains but it pours, the old saying has it; and certainly it seemed to be so in this case, for another ten minutes saw the visitors in possession of two more goals, one from a splendid kick from Green almost from mid-field, the other the result of a corner-kick, which gave one of the Redclyffe forwards an irresistible chance.

The visitors were now one to the good, and Tom Merry was more determined than ever to get level.

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"Buck up, kids!" he said, as they were lining up again after Redclyffe's third goal. "We can't let them go on like this!"

"Who are you calling kids?" inquired Figgins.

"Just what I was going to ask," said Blake.

The hero of the Shell grinned.

"I mean honoured and respected comrades," he corrected. "Anyway, buck up! The next goal has got to come to us. You halves, don't let them come through so easily next time!"

"Right-ho!" said Manners.

"Weally, we did our vewy best," said Arthur Augustus. "You must not expect too much of a fellow in this extremely twyin' weathah, Tom Mewwy. As a matter of fact, I feel too fagged already to—"

"Shut up!" growled Blake.

"I wefuse—"

Phoop!

The blast of the whistle interrupted the indignant D'Arcy. Tom Merry kicked off, and the juniors were quickly at it again. The Saints' forwards followed up the kick-off with a rush, but the Redclyffians soon bore them back, and in a combined rush came through them goalward. The forwards were scattered for a moment, and Tom Merry and Blake were gasping on the ground as the rush went on towards Fatty Wynn's citadel.

The halves and the backs were on the alert, but they could not stop the rush. Green, the Redclyffe skipper, did not stand on ceremony. He gave D'Arcy his shoulder as the swell of St. Jim's got in the way, and the aristocratic Arthur Augustus went sprawling.

D'Arcy's patience had already been severely tried that day, and now it gave way. He jumped up and went for Green.

"You wude person—you howwid boundah!" he exclaimed. "If you think you can tweat a D'Arcy with such extweme diswespsect—"

"Hands off!" yelled Green.

"I wefuse—"

Phoop!

The referee's whistle rang out shrilly. Play was stopped. "Penalty—penalty!" yelled the Redclyffe juniors in chorus.

The Saints looked daggers at D'Arcy. He had in his indignation and excitement clutched hold of Green, and the infraction of the rules had occurred within the dreaded penalty area. There was no doubt about it; the visitors were entitled to a penalty. Kildare strode forward, the whistle still in his lips.

"Penalty!" yelled the Redclyffians. "Referee—penalty!"

The Saints were glumly silent.

"Penalty is allowed," said Kildare quietly. "A penalty kick is awarded to Redclyffe."

There was no gainsaying the referee's decision. Besides, it was obviously the fair thing. D'Arcy had lost his head, and the visitors were clearly entitled to the penalty kick. Green appointed one of his forwards to take the kick, the juniors standing round with eager, hungry eyes to watch.

Away went the ball. Fatty Wynn did his best; but fortune was fickle. Right into the net went the ball.

"Goal!" yelled Redclyffe as one man.

Goal it certainly was. Four for Redclyffe!

"Oh, you unspeakable ass!" growled Blake to Arthur Augustus, as they went back to the centre of the field. "You—you—you—There isn't a word!"

"I wefuse to considah myself to blame," said D'Arcy frigidly. "The person acted in a most wude and wuff mannah!"

"You—you—you—"

"We'll give him a study hecking for this!" murmured Herries. "You wait till presently, you horrid, unspeakable fathead, and we'll put you to the torture!"

"I shall wefuse to submit to anythin' of the kind. I am in gweat doubt as to whethah to wegard you as fwends at all after what has happened!"

"Oh, cheese it!"

The whistle went, and the Saints had the kick-off again. Only twenty minutes of play remained, and the home team was two goals behind. Tom Merry worked like a giant to make up the leeway, and his men backed him up well. In the shimmering heat they played and slaved.

Suddenly Kildare's whistle sounded again. A form lay stretched on the ground without motion. It was that of Kerr. The Scottish lad had played hard—too hard—and between exertion and the heat he had fallen in a faint. Play ceased while he was carried off to the pavilion, and play was resumed without him.

St. Jim's were now a man short. Ten men against eleven, with two goals to make up! The situation was growing desperate.

Tom Merry was the only one on the home side who did

not seem to be sinking with the fatigue of that terrible game. Most of the visitors were panting and exhausted. A little later one of them had to retire in an almost fainting state, and the numbers were again equal; but now there remained only ten minutes to play.

But Tom Merry seemed almost as fresh as paint. He led a gallant onslaught upon the visitors' half and went right through the enemy almost alone, the ball at his feet. Forwards, halves, and backs were beaten, and there remained only the goalkeeper, and he seemed to be all eyes and hands; but Tom, with the foe closing in upon him, and only time for a hurried kick, sent the leather in with a shot that beat the goalie all the way.

"Goal!"

It was a joyous shout from the Saints.

"Bravo!" shouted Monteith.

Kildare's eyes flashed. He patted Tom Merry on the shoulder as the ball was thrown out by the glum goalie.

"Well done, Merry! I'm proud of you!"

And Tom's face glowed with pleasure. Praise from the captain of St. Jim's was praise worth having! Five minutes.

"Buck up!" said Tom Merry. "Buck up, old sons! We've got to do it!"

The Saints did buck up. They backed their leader up well, and in the last minutes of the game there was a hard tussle, drawing closer and closer to the visitors' goal. Closer and closer, till one of the Redclyffe backs played the ball behind a corner flag, and Tom Merry instantly claimed the corner.

It was conceded, and Blake was given the kick. He sent the ball in, and the Redclyffe backs made a rush, but too late; the ball was off again from the foot of Tom Merry.

In? Yes; but out again from the ready fist of the goalkeeper!

It was only a respite, for the ball met the hard head of Figgins and bounded into the net so swiftly that the custodian had no chance. The next moment it was climbing up the net, and St. Jim's had scored the equalising goal.

The whistle went. Four goals all, and the match had ended in a draw. But it had been a well-fought game, nevertheless, and each side had done well. Glad enough were both teams to get out of their football jerseys. All the players agreed that they had never taken part in such a gruelling game before.

CHAPTER 4. The Avengers!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS was in a state of apprehension. There was not the slightest doubt in the minds of the St. Jim's juniors that the home team would have won that football match but for the penalty goal given against them on account of D'Arcy's little slip.

And ten footballers had sworn grim vengeance upon the delinquent. Rather an uncomfortable state of affairs for the eleventh member of the team!

Nothing, of course, could be done till after the departure of the visitors from Redclyffe School. During the respite Arthur Augustus strove to ascertain precisely what the intentions of the team were towards him.

"I say, Hewies, old man," the swell of St. Jim's remarked affably, "you were jokin', old fellow, about that study lickin', weren't you? Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Herries. "You see after the Redclyffe fellows have gone!"

"But weally, Hewies—"

"Oh, get home!" said Herries.

Arthur Augustus went his way disconsolately. The next fellow he tackled was Jack Blake. He screwed up his aristocratic features into an amiable smile as he addressed the chief of Study No. 6.

Blake's look was grim and uncompromising, however.

"Blake, deah boy, I withdrew what I said about no longer weardin' you as a friend," said Arthur Augustus. "I spoke hastily and I did not mean it."

"Is that so?" said Blake frigidly. "Well, I don't withdraw what I said about giving you a study licking. You wait till the Redclyffe chaps have gone!"

"But weally, Blake—"

"Oh, travel!"

D'Arcy travelled. Figgins & Co. were discussing some bottles of ginger-pop when the disconsolate swell of the School House joined them.

"How extremely comfy you look, deah boys!" said D'Arcy, with his most insinuating smile. "I will join you in a glass of gingah-pop."

"That you won't!" said Figgins.

"Kerr, deah boy, I hope you have recovered from your attack?" went on D'Arcy, addressing his next remark to the Scottish partner in the Co. "I weally hope—"

Kerr flushed red. He was rather sensitive about fainting on the football field, and any reminder of it was unpleasant.

"Oh, ring off!" he said rudely.

"Wynn, deah boy, I hope you are not ovah-fatigued?" said D'Arcy, determined to be agreeable. "You weally kept goal in an extremely cweditable mannah."

Patty Wynn stared at him.

"What do you know about it?" he asked.

Figgins & Co. were evidently in a hostile mood. D'Arcy had nothing in the shape of kindness to expect from them. He wandered off again to where Tom Merry and his chums were entertaining some of the Redclyffe fellows to ginger-beer and cakes.

"Hallo! Here comes the penalty merchant!" said Monty Lowther.

"What does the object want?" questioned Manners.

D'Arcy smiled feebly.

"I weally don't want anythin'," he remarked. "I want nothin', deah boys, but—"

"Then you can take it and go!" said Tom Merry.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Hook it!"

"But—"

"Travel! Bank! Hop it!"

D'Arcy hopped it.

"We're going to give that merchant beans presently," Tom Merry confided to Green. "We'll teach him to claw hold of chaps and get penalties given against us!"

D'Arcy overheard the words as he moved off. It was evident that a high old time was in store for him when the contingent from Redclyffe had departed from St. Jim's.

"This is weally growin' alarmin'!" murmured the swell of the School House. "Yaas, wathah!"

He went into the School House turning the matter over very seriously in his mind.

The time came at last for the Redclyffe fellows to take their leave. With many expressions of mutual good will they parted with the junior Saints.

"You'll see us again next Saturday, Green," said Tom Merry casually. "We're coming over, you know, to see our First Eleven lick yours."

"Are you?" said Green. "I'm sorry for that, for you'll be disappointed. I know for a fact that our First Eleven intends to wipe up the ground with yours."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Anyway, we're coming to see the game, and may the best side win," he said.

"Right-ho!" said Green heartily. "I'll look out for you, and I'll have some ice-creams and a sunshade ready if the weather's anything like this."

"Thanks! That's really very thoughtful of you. Good-bye!"

The Redclyffe bus rolled off, to the accompaniment of a round of cheers from the Saints, and disappeared in the dusk of the autumn evening.

"And now," said Tom Merry, breathing hard through his nose—"now for the penalty merchant!"

"Just so!" said Blake.

"Rather!" exclaimed Figgins emphatically.

"Have you seen D'Arcy, you fellows?"

"I saw him go into the House some time back," Monty Lowther remarked. "He looked as if he had something on his mind."

"Ha, ha, ha! I dare say he had."

"What's the verdict?" asked Figgins. "Of course, he ought to be killed, but there's a law against that. It's rotten, but there you are. What's to be done?"

"Something with boiling oil in it, I should think," said Manners.

(Continued on the next page.)

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"If we made him run the gauntlet of the Lower Forms," said Tom Merry thoughtfully, "a hundred or so fellows, each with a knotted towel or a belt, would be able to give him a really lively time."

"Well, that's a good idea. Let's go and have him out."

And the footballers hurried off in quest of the unlucky swell of the School House.

Their intentions were not quite so ferocious as their words, but they meant to give the swell of St. Jim's a lesson. D'Arcy was really to blame for that penalty goal, and ten footballers agreed unanimously that a lesson was what he really wanted and ought to have, and they were not the fellows to mind taking a little trouble in so good a cause.

Led by Tom Merry, ten wrathful juniors marched into the School House in quest of the swell of St. Jim's. He was not in the Common-room or visible in any of the passages.

"Think he's in Study No. 6?" asked Figgins.

"Better look," said Blake. "I shouldn't wonder if he's scuttled off somewhere till this has blown over. It won't blow over till he's had his licking."

"Rather not!"

The avengers looked into Study No. 6, but D'Arcy was not there. There was nothing for it but to commence a systematic search of the School House.

The Fourth Form studies yielded nothing to the searchers. Then they went on to the apartment devoted to the young gentlemen of the Shell.

"Hang it!" said Manners. "He wouldn't have the cheek to hide himself in a Shell study, I should think."

"Oh, I don't know!" Monty Lowther remarked thoughtfully. "These kids have nerve enough for anything."

"These kids what?" demanded Blake, Herries, and Figgins & Co. in one voice.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Tom Merry, interrupting the discussion, which was approaching danger-point. "This door won't open!"

He was trying the door of Study No. 10, his own quarters. "He's never had the nerve—" began Manners.

"My hat! I believe he has!"

Tom Merry kicked the door.

"Hallo, in there!"

"Yaas, deah boy!" came a languid voice from the interior.

"He's there!"

Ten juniors collected round the door with businesslike looks. The quarry was run to earth, and it only remained to capture him and inflict the much-merited punishment.

Tom Merry knocked again.

"Open this door!"

"I am extremely sorry that I must refuse your request, Tom Mewwy."

"You horrid image, this is our study!"

"Yaas, I am awash of that!"

"How dare you stick yourself into it and lock the door?"

"I believe that you wuffians intend tweekin' me with disrespect."

"Ha, ha, ha! We'll disrespect you when we get hold of you."

"Then I am afraid you will never get hold of me, Tom Mewwy."

"We'll burst in the door if you don't open it!"

"If you like to wuin your study door you are at liberty to do so, Tom Mewwy. But it will not be any use, for I have placed the table and chest of drawers there."

"We'll soon knock 'em over."

"I don't think you will, because I have screwed them to the floor and the door, Tom Mewwy."

"You horrid image!" roared Tom Merry. "You've screwed up our table!"

"Yaas, wathah; and the chest of drawers, too."

"You—you—you—"

"I have also nailed a board across the door," said the languid voice from within. "It was wathah a fag, but I felt sure that you boundahs meant to tweek me with disrespect. I will come out when you have all made it pax, honah bwright."

"I'll—I'll—"

"I'm not at all in a huwvy. I have bwrought some provisions heah, and am prepared to stay all night, if necessary. I am wathah bored, but I can fill up the time by taking Mannahs' camewah to pieces."

"You let my camera alone!" roared Manners frantically. Tom Merry kicked on the door.

"Come out, you beast!"

D'Arcy vouchsafed no reply.

The avengers looked at one another. The question was, what was to be done, and it was not an easy one to answer.

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CHAPTER 5.

"Pax" After All!

FIGGINS was the first to make a suggestion.

"We can't be defied like this by a measly School House rotter," he remarked. "I vote that we burst the door down."

"By what?" asked Blake, Herries, and the Terrible Three together.

"A measly School House bouncer," said Figgins defiantly. Tom Merry looked round for support.

"I think you'll agree," he remarked, "that the present proceedings will have to stop till Figgins has learned better manners."

"And if he doesn't do that pretty sharp," Blake remarked, in a casual way, "there are some of us who can give him a lesson."

"Like to see that some!" said Figgins. "I'm open to receive instructions, if any of you School House wasters can give it me. As a matter of fact, what's the good of being down on Gussy? You School House chaps were bound to muck up the match one way or another!"

"We were what?"

"I said all along, and Kerr and Wynn can bear me out," said Figgins, "that we should never beat the Redclyffe chaps unless we had a team wholly of New House chaps."

"You did," corroborated the loyal Co.

"And I was right," said Figgins.

"Well, of all the cheek!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "You New House animals take the bun! Go home, do; you make me tired!"

"I say—"

"Oh, don't say any more, Figgy!" implored Tom Merry.

"You say too much, you know. You've had a jolly good innings, and now you ought to stop."

"I tell you—"

"No, don't! I put it to the chaps. Hasn't Figgins done enough talking for one evening?"

"Yes, rather!" said Blake promptly.

"Too much—too much!" said Monty Lowther, shaking his head solemnly.

"I repeat—"

"Don't! Your remarks aren't worth saying once, let alone twice!"

"Look here—"

"Not unless you put a mask on!"

That was enough for Figgins. He went for Tom Merry, and the two went staggering along the passage, locked in a deadly embrace.

The Co. and Pratt and French were swift to follow up their leader. Equally swift were the School House juniors to encounter them. A terrific struggle raged for a few minutes in the passage, and Figgins and the New House party were gradually driven to the stairs. There they rallied, and came on again furiously; and there is no telling how the struggle would have ended had not a couple of Sixth-Formers, exasperated by the disturbance, come on the scene with canes in their hands.

The struggle ceased abruptly as the seniors distributed cuts with strict impartiality on every junior within reach.

The School House juniors retreated into a study, and the New House party down the stairs, whence they fled into the quadrangle.

The Sixth-Formers, satisfied with their success, returned to their own quarters, and as soon as they were gone the School House juniors came into the passage again. Figgins & Co. had vanished, but the avengers still numbered five, and they were more in earnest than ever.

Tom Merry tapped at the door.

"I say, Gussy!"

"What do you want, Tom Mewwy?"

"I want to come into my study. Look here, you had better give in now and save bother. You will have to come out at bed-time."

"I shall not come out till you fellows have made it pax."

"The masters will jolly soon interfere."

"I am afraid that I shall have to wisk it."

"We're not going to stand this!" said Tom Merry determinedly. "It's a bit too thick to have such thundering check from a kid in a Lower Form!"

"A what in a what?" asked Blake.

"A kid in a Lower Form!" repeated Tom Merry. "I'm getting fed-up with the cheek of you Fourth Form infants! What you want is—"

"You'll get fed-up with something else if you don't look out!" said Blake darkly. "We're not going to stand any nonsense from you chaps in the Shell, so—"

"Oh, don't bother! I—"

"Kids," said Monty Lowther, with an air of an oracle, "should be seen and not heard!"

"Just so!" said Manners.

Blake looked at the Terrible Three in speechless wrath for a moment. Then he slipped his arm through Herries', and marched off in a state of great indignation.

The Terrible Three were left to settle the matter as best they could.

"Bang on the blessed door!" growled Tom Merry. "We'll smash the lock, and—"

"Ach! Vat is all tat noise pefore?"

Tom groaned.

"My hat! There's old Schneider!"

The German master of St. Jim's was coming along the passage. He stopped and surveyed the chums of the Shell.

"Vat was you poys making a noise mit yourselves after?" he demanded.

"Sorry, sir!"

"Von't that door open mit itself after?"

"No, sir."

Herr Schneider tried the handle of the door.

"What do you want, Tom Mewwy? I wish you would not keep on intewwuptin' me. I am afwaid I shall damage Mannah's camewah if I am intewwupted while I am takin' it to pieces."

"Let my camera alone!" roared Manners.

"Gussy, you ass! Listen to me!"

"I wefuse to listen, unless I am addresssed in a more wespectful mannah!"

"Oh, you blitherer! Listen to me! Schneider has gone to get the Housemaster's key, and will be back in a few minutes."

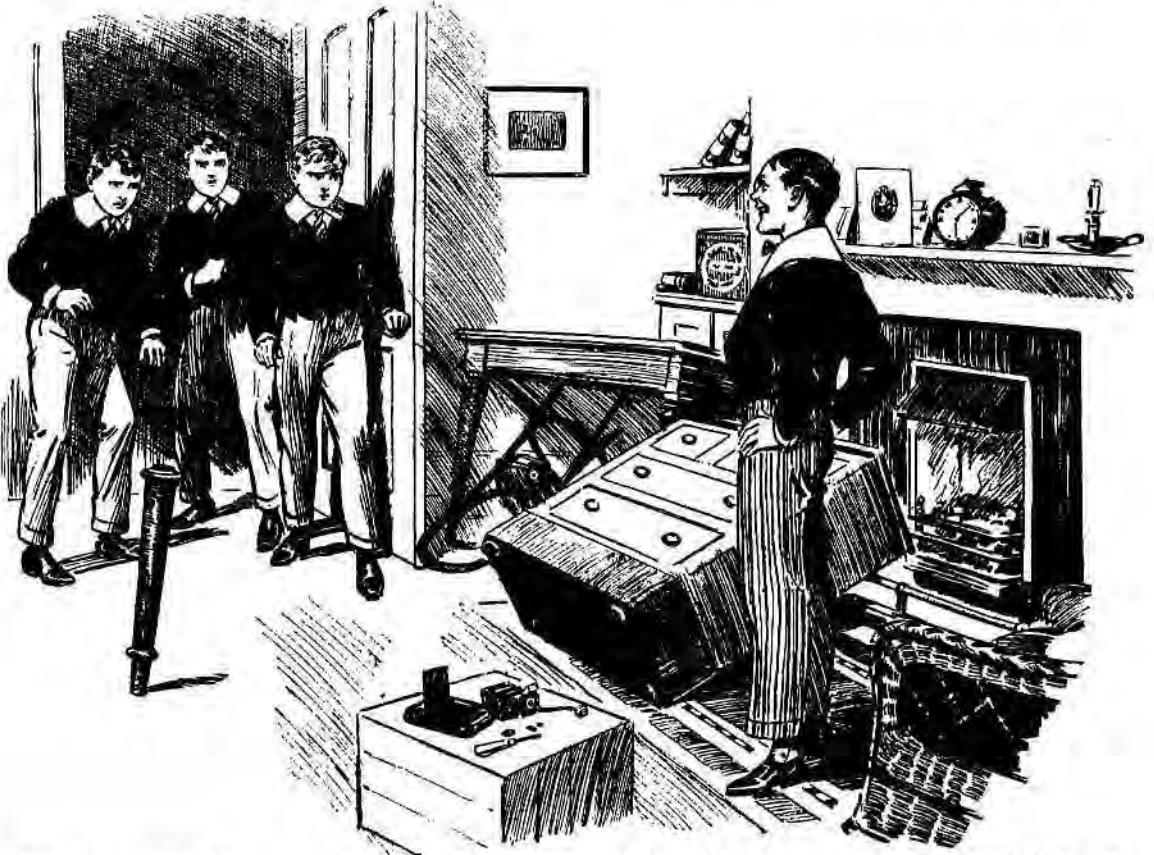
"Weally?"

"Open the door, ass, before he comes, or there will be a row if he finds a study barricaded up like this. Do you understand?"

"I undahstand, Tom Mewwy."

"Then open the door!"

"I wefuse to open the door unless you make it pax!"



D'Arcy unbarricaded the door and Tom Merry & Co. entered. One leg of the table still remained screwed to the floor, while the chest of drawers lay on its back. Arthur Augustus beamed!

"It is locked, hein?" he exclaimed.

"So I thought, sir," said Tom Merry, as grave as a judge.

"Somevun has locked it for ein shoke mit himself after," Herr Schneider remarked, shaking his head. "Tat is ein fery foolish shoke pefore."

"It is, indeed, sir."

"Nefer mind, mein poys," said Herr Schneider. "I will go mit meinself to te Housemaster for te duplicate key after, and pring it to you."

Tom Merry concealed his dismay.

"You are very kind, sir," he said.

Herr Schneider walked away towards the Housemaster's quarters.

He was under the natural impression that some joker had locked Tom Merry's door on the outside and hidden the key, and had no idea of the true state of affairs in Study No. 10.

The Terrible Three looked at one another.

"He'll be back in a few minutes," groaned Tom Merry, "and then all the fat will be in the fire." He tapped on the door. "Gussy!"

"Oh, you horrid ass!"

No reply. There was a faint, crackling sound which might have been caused by D'Arcy's operations upon Manners' camera.

"D'Arcy!"

"You need not take the twouble to address me again, Tom Mewwy, unless you are weady to apologise for the oppvobious epithets you have applied to me."

"Ass! We'll make it pax!"

"That is not sufficient now. I expect an apology."

"Ass! Lunatic!"

D'Arcy made no reply. He was evidently standing upon his dignity—on his dig, as he would have called it—and when he was in that mood, a dozen German masters could not have made him budge.

"We'll make it pax," said Tom Merry, through the key-hole, "and—and I withdraw those expressions. Now open the door!"

"Your apology is accepted, Tom Mewwy!"

"Open the door!"

There was a sound of removing furniture—a sound of
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jerking and straining and cracking. D'Arcy had done his barricading very well, and it did not yield easily.

Then the door was unlocked and opened. The Terrible Three entered the study.

One leg of the table was still adhering to the floor just inside, held there by the screws, and the three-legged article of furniture was supported against the wall. The chest of drawers lay on its back. On a box lay Manners' camera, in several pieces.

D'Arcy greeted the chums of the Shell with a beaming smile.

"I am twuly sowwy that any damage has been done," he said. "It is weally the wessult of your own wuff ways; but I am twuly sowwy. I have not finished your camewah, Mannahs, and I am weally vewwy cwious to see how it is put togethah."

Manners picked up his camera, his feelings too deep for words. Had he not made it pax, D'Arcy would have received a terrific onslaught on the spot. But honour forbade.

"Mein Gott! Te door is open mit itself after!"

Herr Schneider looked in, the key in his hand.

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry cheerfully; "D'Arcy opened it for us, sir. It's all right."

"H'm! Fery goot!" said Herr Schneider, turning away. He was looking a little suspicious.

"We've made it pax with you, Gussy," said Tom Merry, with an effort. "You've got the best of us, you—you image! Now travel!"

"There's the door and the window! Which way do you prefer to go out!"

D'Arcy chose the door.

CHAPTER 8.

The Parting of the Ways I

"WELL done, Monteith!"

It was Kildare, captain of St. Jim's, who uttered the words.

It was a few days after the junior match.

The St. Jim's First Eleven were at practice.

On the coming Saturday St. Jim's First were to go over to Redclyffe to meet the senior team of that college, and they meant to be in good form for the match. And good form they certainly were in.

They were playing a scratch eleven, picked from the Sixth and Fifth Forms, and making hay of them, though there were some good players in the scratch team.

Monteith had just sent the ball into the net by a long, low shot from almost midfield, and Kildare's words of admiration followed.

Monteith flushed with pleasure.

Much changed now were the relations of the captain of St. Jim's and the head prefect of the New House. The old friction was conspicuous by its absence, and they seemed to have agreed to pull together for the good of the school. That had always been Kildare's keen wish, but for long he had met with suspicion and jealousy on Monteith's part. Time had been when Kildare vowed that Monteith should never play for the school again; but that time was past, and seemed unlikely ever to recur.

Needless to say, with the two leaders in such friendly accord, the members of the team, recruited from both Houses, pulled together well. If there was one who would willingly have revived the old suspicious jealousy, it was Sefton. But he had little power to do so, and all his efforts to twit and taunt Monteith into the old attitude were in vain.

Sefton was playing his best in the practice match.

He was inside-right of the First Eleven, and made a really very good forward, being quick on his feet, and an accurate kick. When he chose to keep himself fit, he was a good, and even a brilliant forward. That was not always the case; but just at present he was careful to keep up to the mark. He had his own reasons for not wishing to be dropped from the First Eleven before the Redclyffe match.

"Well, done, Monteith!"

That goal was the last of the practice match. Time was up, and the teams went off the field. Kildare walked some little way with Monteith.

"I think our prospects are pretty bright, Monteith," he

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remarked. "I hear that Redclyffe are unusually strong, but I think we shall beat them. Sefton played up well to-day. I was rather against him at first, but you were right."

Monteith winced.

"I don't know," he said. "Upon second thoughts, I'm rather sorry I proposed him for the First Eleven. Still, he seems to pan out all right."

Kildare looked surprised.

"I thought he was your friend," he remarked.

"So did I," said Monteith briefly.

Kildare understood vaguely. He had seen of late days signs of unusual worry in the face of the New House prefect.

They parted, Kildare going on to his own House and Monteith into his own quarters. He threw off his coat, and changed his clothes, and as he finished there came a tap at the door of his study.

"Come in!" said Monteith, who was brushing his hair, and did not cease as the door opened and Sefton came in.

"I want to speak to you, Monteith."

"Go ahead!"

Sefton closed the door; then he stood looking at Monteith, who was still wielding the brushes before the looking-glass.

"Go ahead, Sefton!" repeated the prefect, without looking round.

"I'll wait till you can give me your attention, thank you. It's rather an important matter I've come to speak about."

"Is it about the football?"

"Yes."

The prefect laid down the brushes and turned round. He stood in his shirt-sleeves, his hands in his pockets, facing Sefton. His look was somewhat sour.

"Well, what is it, Sefton? What are you so jolly mysterious about?"

Sefton sat on the corner of the table, swinging his legs.

"I don't mean to be mysterious, Monteith. I want to speak to you on an important matter, that's all. It's about the match on Saturday."

"Well, I'm listening," said Monteith. "Go ahead!"

"You've changed a good deal of late, Monty. I haven't been able quite to make out how much of it is genuine, and how much humbug," Sefton remarked.

The prefect coloured.

"I don't expect you to understand, Sefton," he said, "and I won't lose my temper with you. You used to be my chum, though you don't allow me to feel very chummy now. If you've got anything to say, go ahead, and get it off your chest."

"Look here, Monteith, it's no good beating about the bush. I've been to the Chequers, and I've seen Tadger there."

Monteith's eyes glittered.

"You've been there, Sefton, after what I have said on that point?"

"Yes, I have. I've seen Tadger, and had a talk with him about the Redclyffe match."

"The same old tale, I suppose—you are going to make a book on the match with that scoundrel's assistance?"

Sefton nodded.

"Yes. A good many of the Upper Form fellows at Redclyffe are ready to back their school, and there are others who take a keen interest in the match. Redclyffe are the favourites. They are known to be a strong side."

"And you have been making bets?"

"As a matter of fact, I have; but that's not what I want to speak to you about. Our first team has looked up so much lately that it seems quite likely that we shall win. I have told Tadger so, and it doesn't suit him a little bit."

"I'm glad of it!" said Monteith savagely. "If he loses some of his money, it may teach him to keep clear of our business, the end!"

"That sounds well from you. He's had your name in his books a good many times, anyway. But to come to the point. Tadger has offered to put on ten pounds, at two to one, against Redclyffe, for each of us."

"What do you mean?"

"That if our side is licked each of us rakes in twenty pounds."

Monteith changed colour.

"Of course, it's strictly under the rose," said Sefton. "Nothing can possibly come out. It will be a windfall for both of us. A little slack play will be quite enough to turn the scale against St. Jim's."

"Yes, I suppose it would be."

"You agree, then?"

Monteith's eyes were burning, but he still controlled his temper.

"I suppose you have a right to consider me a rascal, in the light of the past," he said. "I would throw you out of the window if it were not for that."

Sefton started back.

"Monteith, take care!"

"Get out of my study!"

"What! I—"

"Get out of my study! Mind, to-morrow I am going to ask Kildare to cross your name off the list of the team for Redclyffe."

"You—you will not dare!"

"You shall see. Now get out of my room."

"I will not. I will—"

Monteith crossed to the door and threw it open.

"Get out!"

The prefect's eyes were glittering dangerously. But Sefton's temper was rising, too, and he clenched his fists savagely and stood his ground.

"Will you go?"

"No, I won't!"

Monteith said no more. He sprang towards Sefton, and, unheeding his blow, seized him by the shoulders and swung him to the door.

Sefton went reeling out into the passage, and the door was slammed after him.

The discomfited rascal went staggering along the dusky passage, unable to regain his balance for a moment. There was a sharp exclamation as he staggered into a junior who was coming along quickly in the dusk.

"Hallo, fathead, where are you running to?"

It was the voice of Figgins.

Sefton was glad of someone upon whom to wreak the rage that consumed him. He grasped the chief of the New House juniors and boxed his ears right and left.

"Hallo, hallo!" roared Figgins, struggling in his grip.

"What's the row? Are you off your silly rocker? Lemme alone!"

Smack, smack, smack!

Figgins struggled desperately. His temper was roused, and he did not care that his assailant was a senior. He yelled to the Co., and Kerr and Wynn came to the rescue. Sefton was seized and dragged off the long-legged chief of the New House juniors, and plumped down on his back in the passage.

Fatty Wynn plumped his ample person on the chest of the Sixth-Former, pinning him down by sheer weight.

"Let me get up, you young scoundrels!" roared Sefton.

Figgins rubbed his reddened ears.

"No hurry," he observed. "I've got to put you up to a wrinkle first about banging at a chap's napper as if it were a giddy punching-ball!"

"I'll be the death of you! Let me get up!"

Monteith's door opened. His light streamed out into the dusky corridor.

"Hallo, there! What are you doing?"

"We've captured a giddy lunatic," said Figgins, keeping a wary eye on the prefect, ready to bolt, if necessary. "He ran into me in the passage, and started punching my head like a maniac. We're going to teach him a lesson."

Monteith laughed and withdrew into his study again, and closed the door. It was evidently not his intention to interfere in Sefton's favour.

"My hat!" said Figgins. "Looks as if there had been a row in that direction. Sefton, old buck, what kind of a punishment would you prefer?"

"Lemme gerrup!"

"Rats! I think—Hallo! Cave! Here's old Ratty!" Figgins & Co. bolted in a twinkling. Mr. Ratcliff, the Housemaster of the New House, was coming along the corridor. He almost stumbled over Sefton, and he stared at the Sixth-Former in amazement as the latter picked himself up.

"Sefton, what do you mean by sprawling on the floor in that absurd manner?" he exclaimed.

"I couldn't—"

"Is it possible that you have been drinking?"

"I—"

"Enough. You nearly caused me a fall. You will write out two hundred lines, and bring them to me to-morrow. Not a word, sir—not a word!"

Mr. Ratcliff marched majestically on, leaving Sefton grinding his teeth with rage.

CHAPTER 7. Caught in the Act I

"IT'S all up, Tadger!"

Sefton spoke the words in a low, dispirited tone. He was standing at the gate which led into the garden of the Chequers Inn in Rylcombe. Leaning on the gate was a copper-complexioned gentleman in his shirt-sleeves, smoking a fat cigar.

Mr. Tadger looked sharply at the Sixth-Former from St. Jim's.

"What are you talking about?" he asked unpleasantly.

"What's all up?"

"That's what I've come to tell you. Monteith won't have anything to do with it."

"You've tried him?"

"Yes. He seems set on going his own way. I suppose he was in earnest all the time, though I couldn't quite swallow it."

"Well, maybe it could managed without him," said Mr. Tadger. "Mind, St. Jim's have got to lose. There's to be no doubt on that point. I've got nearly thirty pounds on the matter, and I'm not going to lose it, or there will be a row."

Sefton shivered.

"It's not my fault, Tadger. I—"

"You're in the college team," said Tadger. "I dare say you can manage it without the help of the other fellow. Can't you?"

"You—you don't know all. I spoke to Monteith about it, and he flew into a temper and chucked me out of his study. Now he's going to ask the football captain to take my name off the list for Redclyffe."

Mr. Tadger measured the Sixth-Former with his eye.

"Well," he said deliberately, "you have made a muck of it, and no mistake. What sort of a silly fool do you call yourself?"

"It's not my fault. I only did what you told me to do," said Sefton.

"Yes, because I took your belief that Monteith was only shamming. If he's in earnest, it makes all the difference. I wasn't to know, but you ought to have."

"It's no good blaming me. The harm's done now," said Sefton sullenly.

"Is it?" said Mr. Tadger emphatically. "Then it's got to be undone, or somebody will be made to squirm, Master Sefton. Do you think I am going to lose thirty quid and come up smiling? 'Tain't your fault? Blow whose fault it is! I'm not going to lose the money. That's the point you've got to bear in mind."

"I don't see what's to be done."

"No? Then I'll help you. In the first place, you've got to get round Monteith somehow—as you like, but you've got to do it—and get him to keep you in the team."

"He wouldn't—"

"Yes, he would, if you work it properly."

"I tell you it's no good threatening him. In his present temper he's just as likely as not to go to Kildare and tell him the whole thing from start to finish."

Mr. Tadger gave an expressive whistle.

"That won't do," he said. "Don't try that tack, then. Suppose you work the repentance dodge? You've seen the error of your ways. You've come round to his way of thinking. You hope he'll stand by you like a true friend, and help you turn over a new leaf."

Sefton could not help grinning.

"Well, I never thought of that, Tadger."

"Lucky for you you've got me to think for you, then," said Mr. Tadger. "I don't see why that shouldn't work. So long as you play in the team it will be all right. Let Monteith do as he likes. One enemy in the camp is enough. You can give the game away to the Redclyffe fellows."

Sefton shifted uneasily.

"I—I don't think so, Tadger. You see, if I played badly, I've already given myself away to Monteith, and he would know at once that I was doing it on purpose. He wouldn't shield me a minute. I should be mobbed by the side if he gave me away—as he would."

"Well, they wouldn't hurt you much," said Mr. Tadger comfortably.

"Wouldn't they? Not if they knew I tried to lose the game for St. Jim's? You don't understand. I should be out by every fellow in the school, and ragged till I found life a burden. I should have to leave St. Jim's! It won't do! It can't be done!"

"Can't it?" said Mr. Tadger, in a very unpleasant tone. "Then what do you propose? Want me to chuck thirty quid into the ditch?"

"I—I think perhaps it could be done another way. I'll manage to get hurt early in the game, and they'll have to leave me out, and play a man short against the Redclyffe lot. Redclyffe are so strong that it would mean certain defeat for St. Jim's."

"Well, that's not a bad idea," said Mr. Tadger. "I don't care how it's done, so long as it's done. Mind, if St. Jim's win, you'll get a showing up at the school. That's flat! Now you've got to get round Monteith to keep you in the team."

"I think I can manage that."

"Right! Remember you'll be a big sum in pocket if it works out all right."

Sefton turned away. He would willingly have abandoned that big sum in prospect to be well out of his difficulties, but that was impossible. He was under the thumb of Mr. Tadger, and he had to do that gentleman's bidding.

He strode back along the dusty road to St. Jim's. He had broken bounds after looking up to go and see Mr. Tadger at the Chequers, and that necessitated climbing in over the ivied wall like a mischievous junior. But Sefton had a very light sense of the dignity of the Sixth.

He climbed the wall and gripped the ivy, and lowered himself down inside, and uttered a sharp cry as a strong pair of hands closed upon him.

"Who—who's that?"

"It is I."

It was the clear, cool voice of Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's.

Sefton shivered.

Kildare was about the last person he would have desired to spot him, then. But there was no help for that, and he tried to brazen it out.

"Hallo, Kildare! You quite startled me!"

"Yes, I've no doubt about that," the captain of St. Jim's assented dryly.

"I had a beastly headache," said Sefton. "I've been for a little run to get some fresh air. I've no doubt you were surprised to see me come over the wall."

"No, not very much, knowing the kind of fellow you are," said Kildare. "And not much surprised, either, to hear you tell a lie about it."

"Kildare!"

"I don't intend to mince words with you, Sefton. You didn't go out for air. There's plenty of air in the quadrangle, I suppose."

"If you doubt my word," said Sefton, with an attempt of dignity, "I've nothing more to say."

"I do doubt your word very much," said Kildare, "and I have something more to say. You are one of the blackguards who keep up what you are pleased to call the 'smart set' in the Upper Forms. You had your imitators among the juniors, but Tom Merry and Figgins have put them down, and they've quite given in. I'm going to do as much for the Upper Forms. You have been to the Chequers, or the Green Man, as I know very well."

"It's no business of yours. I belong to the New House, and am answerable to my own prefect, not to you," said Sefton sullenly.

"You seem to forget that I am captain of the school. However, I am quite willing to leave you to your own prefect. I haven't the slightest desire to interfere with the management of the New House. Come with me."

"Where are you going?"

"I am going to take you to Monteith."

"I can get there without your assistance."

"Possibly; but I'm going to see that you do."

"Look here, Kildare, this is confounded insolence! I'm in the Sixth Form, as you are, and—"

"If you were not in the Sixth Form," said Kildare quietly, "I would give you a hiding here and now. For two pious I'd do it, anyway. Come along!"

Sefton made no further demure.

They entered the New House together, and went up to Monteith's study. Webb and Baker, two New House seniors, who were members of the First Eleven, were there talking to the prefect. They looked curiously at Kildare and Sefton, and, realising that their presence was superfluous at that moment, they excused themselves and left the study.

"Come in, Kildare," said Monteith. "Anything the matter?"

"Yes."

Kildare closed the door. Sefton stood sullenly silent.

His brain was working rapidly, however. He knew that the situation was desperate, and that only cunning could save him.

"Sefton has just come in over the wall," said Kildare, "after a visit, as I believe, to the Chequers and the rascals there. You know, Monteith, that I have had direct instructions from the Head to look into this, and to see that such practices are stopped. I don't want to interfere with the New House, though, and so I leave the matter in your hands."

"Thank you, Kildare!" Monteith's eyes were flashing. "That's decent of you. But I have something to say to you about Sefton, as it happens. Don't go—"

Sefton changed colour.

He made a quick step towards the prefect.

"Wait a minute, Monteith," he said hurriedly. "I can explain—I swear I can explain. Let me speak to you first."

Monteith hesitated.

"I only ask a minute," said Sefton anxiously. "We used to be good chums, Monty. You might do me that little favour."

"Very well. What I've got to say to Kildare will keep till the morning," said Monteith. "Will you leave the matter in my hands, then, Kildare?"

"Certainly. That was my intention," Kildare opened the door. "Good-night!"

"Good-night!"

The captain of the school went down the stairs and returned to his own House. In the prefect's study Sefton drew a deep breath of relief.

"Now, what have you to say?" asked Monteith coldly.

"Look here, Monty, it's true I went to the Chequers this evening," Sefton spoke quickly, eagerly. "But it wasn't for the old reason. It was to tell Tadger that I'd seen him for the last time, and that I never intended to see him again."

Monteith's face brightened.

"Honour bright, Sefton?"

"Yes." The lie stuck in the rascal's throat for a moment, but he brought it out. "Yes, I've done with the fellow and his set, and if you'll stand by me, Monty, I intend to run straight in the future."

"I'm jolly glad to hear you say so, Sefton." The prefect held out his hand. "There's my fist on it."

They shook hands.

Potts, the Office Boy!



Sefton had played his part well. Nothing more was said about removing his name from the list of footballers for the Redclyffe match.

CHAPTER 8.

The Match at Redclyffe.

"HOT again, isn't it?"

It was Blake who made the remark as he met Tom Merry after school on Saturday morning. "It's almost too hot for footer," said Tom Merry. "Nice for the team to-day over at Redclyffe." "Yass, wathah," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I should think they would find it a beastlay fag, deah boys."

Tom Merry gave the swell of St. Jim's a peculiar glance. He had not forgotten Gussy's feat in the junior Redclyffe match yet, and he never saw D'Arcy in these days without feeling a strong inclination to dust up the ground with him.

"The weathah," said Arthur Augustus, "is much too hot for the time of year. I'm sowwy I shall not be seein' the match this aftahnoon. Too much of a beastlay fag to go about fifteen miles in this heat to see fellows playin' football, don't you know?"

"Think so?" said Blake pleasantly. "That's bad, because you're coming. You're coming on your bike."

"I shall wefuse to do anythin' of the sort," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "I wefuse to be ovahwuled in this way, Blake."

"You're coming on your bike," said Blake darkly, "or else tied up in a bundle on mine. You can take your choice."

"But, weally—" "Dry up! You're a disgrace to the study, and if you don't obey orders you'll get fired out. Dry up! Not a word! Of course, you're going over to see the match, Merry?"

"Rather!" said Tom cheerfully. "There's very few fellows going, besides the team. Redclyffe's such a jolly long way off."

"All the more reason why us juniors should come out strong. I'm pretty certain Figgins & Co. will turn up. Hallo, Figgy!"

The great Figgins was coming towards them from the direction of the New House.

"Hallo, Blake!" said Figgins. "Are you going over to Redclyffe for the match?"

"That's just what I was going to ask you, Figgy."

"Good! I hear that very few are going. I was thinking that we might get up a bit of a party on bikes to follow the team. There ought to be some of us there to shout 'Goal!' you know, if only to encourage the fellows."

"My idea exactly," said Tom Merry. "I'm going with Manners and Lowther. And Study No. 6 are coming, too."

"Exceptin' me," put in Arthur Augustus.

"Gussy is only joking," explained Blake. "He's coming. He's really looking forward to it. He likes nothing so well as a hard ride on a nice afternoon."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Dry up! I suppose the Co. are coming, Figgy?"

"Yes, rather!"

"That will make nine of us, anyway. What time are you starting?"

"We thought of going directly after dinner. It's a long ride, you know."

"Right-ho! We'll meet you at the gates."

"Weally, Blake, I wefuse—"

"Come on, Gussy, and have a look at your tyres," said Blake; and he passed his arm through D'Arcy's and dragged him away.

At the appointed time the bus came round for the footballers for Redclyffe.

Very fit the St. Jim's eleven looked as they got into the vehicle. Eleven good men and true, wearing the caps of their school, and bent upon obtaining a signal victory over the enemy—with one exception. That exception, of course, was Sefton, but his inner thoughts and plans were kept a dead secret.

Kildare, of course, was captain of the side, and the team was composed of five more School House fellows, and five from the New House. A better team St. Jim's had seldom or never sent forth to do battle with the school's rivals on the football field.

The bus drove off, followed by a loud cheer from the Saints who were not going, and who then dispersed to their various avocations as the vehicle disappeared down the long road.

"Time we were off, too," said Tom Merry. "We shall have plenty of time to get on the ground if we luek up. All of you ready?"

"We are."

The Terrible Three had wheeled their bicycles down to the gate. Figgins & Co. were already there with their machines. Study No. 6 were coming. The voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy could be heard raised in ineffectual protest.

"I tell you, Blake, that I weally would pwefer to wemain heah and west in this extwemely warm weathah."

"Go hon!" said Blake. "Have you pumped up your tyres?"

"Yaas; but I insist—"

"We're ready, chaps. Let's get going. Gussy is so eager that I can hardly hold him in."

"That is an untwuth, Blake!"

"I know a short cut," went on Blake. "It's no more than twelve miles the way I go, and that's nothing. Gussy could do three times that and come up grinning. Get on your jigger, Gussy!"

"I wefuse!"

"Lend a hand here, Herries!"

"Right-ho!"

"Howwies, keep your beastlay hands to yourself! I wefuse!"

Blake held D'Arcy's machine, while Herries slammed the swell of the School House upon the saddle. Then the chums mounted one on either side of him.

"Keep hold of him, Herries!"

"Right-ho!"

"I wefuse!"

"Off we go!"

Blake and Herries put their machines in motion, and as they both had a tight grip on Gussy he had to go, too. They dashed on, but gradually a grin overspread the aristocratic features of Arthur Augustus. He was free-wheeling all the time, and Blake and Herries were doing all the work.

Ever Been Add!



Behind the three came Figgins & Co., abreast, and behind them again were the Terrible Three, all pedalling away bravely. Blake soon noticed that Arthur Augustus was shirking the work.

"You horrid, lazy bounder!" exclaimed the chief of Study No. 6 indignantly. "Is that what you call riding? Do you think you're on a bus, or what?"

"I refuse distinctly to exert myself!" said D'Arcy. "If you bring me heat in this wuff manna you can pull me along, dear boys. I have no stwong objection to goin' to Wedelyffe if I twee-wheel all the way."

"But I have a strong objection to free-wheeling you!" said Blake. "Pedal, you lazybones—pedal! Put your beef into it. Have you got a pin about you, Herries?"

"Certainly!"

"Stick it into Gussy whenever you see him free-wheeling!"

"Right-ho!"

Herries let go Arthur Augustus, and took the pin from his jacket.

"Hewwies, if you commit such a beastly, brutal action, I shall—Ow!"

D'Arcy gave a yell as the pin penetrated his calf. It was only a slight prick, but it was an earnest of what was to come. Gussy thought that he had better pedal.

"Here, buck up, you kids!" called out Tom Merry from behind. "You're crawling."

"All right!" called back Blake. "Gussy hasn't quite got into his stride yet. Now we're getting along finely."

Arthur Augustus, seeing that there was no help for it, put his beef into it, as Blake advised, and they both put on speed. The swell of St. Jim's, in spite of his languid ways, was really no weakling, and he could work hard when he liked. With the persuasive pin in the hand of Herries, ready to jab when required, he thought he had better "like" on this occasion.

The cyclists got over the ground very quickly. Several times the voice of Arthur Augustus was heard suggesting the propriety of halting and taking a "west," but he was not listened to.

Blake had determined that he should get to Redelyffe without getting out of the saddle, and he had his way. The energy of the juniors was boundless, and in a remarkably short space of time they came in sight of Redelyffe School. At the gates of Redelyffe they clanged their bells and halted.

"Hallo, kids!" exclaimed Green, the Redelyffe junior captain, recognising his opponents of the previous Saturday. "You got across, then?"

"Yaas, wathah! We were not likely to stay away," said Arthur Augustus, with really sublime nerve.

"Yes, here we are!" said Tom Merry. "Any more fellows from St. Jim's here?"

"No, only the team."

"When is the kick-off?"

Green looked at his watch.

"In ten minutes."

"Jolly good luck! Time to get something to drink. You'll show us where to stick our jiggers, won't you, Green? Nice weather for football—eh?"

"Yes; this beats our match last week."

Tom Merry looked towards the football ground. The white lines glimmered on the green turf, the goalposts were up, the nets ready. The St. Jim's footballers, already changed into their playing garb, could mostly be seen near the pavilion. Tom Merry noted that they were discussing something, with anxious looks.

"Nothing wrong, I hope?" he said, glancing at Green.

"Dunno!" said Green. "I heard that one of the chaps fainted in the bus coming from the station. Don't suppose it's anything serious."

"My hat!"

Tom Merry hurried towards the pavilion. The rest of the juniors followed him, looking very anxious. There was no reserve accompanying the St. Jim's team, and, in case of one of the members being incapacitated, they had no alternative but to play a man short; and against a team like Redelyffe that meant certain defeat.

Kildare and Monteith were not to be seen, doubtless being within the pavilion; but Darrell was visible, talking to Webb. Tom Merry tapped the senior on the arm.

"I say, Darrell, anything wrong?"

Darrell nodded.

"Yes; Sefton fainted in the bus."

"He's not laid up?"

"I don't know. Kildare is seeing to him in the pavilion."

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At that moment Kildare appeared at the door of the pavilion. His face was very grave.

CHAPTER 9.

Tom Merry to the Rescue!

SEFTON lay back in a chair in the pavilion of the Redelyffe ground, his eyes half-closed, his whole attitude one of weakness and lassitude. Monteith was with him, and the prefect's eyes were gleaming with dark suspicion.

Kildare had just gone out of the room, and Monteith came quickly towards the supposed sufferer as soon as they were alone.

"Sefton!"

His voice was sharp and harsh. Sefton's eyes opened a little wider.

"Yes, Monty! I say, I—I'm sorry for this."

Monteith's face did not soften.

"Look here, Sefton, if it's genuine, I'm sorry, too; but I believe you're malingering. You were all right up to



Figgins and the New House party were gradually being drawn in, and had not a couple of prefects.

half an hour ago. I don't see why this illness should overcome you all of a sudden, just at the time when it was too late to think of a substitute."

Sefton's eyes gleamed under his drooping lids.

"That's a very unkind opinion to have of a chap, Monty. I'd hold out if I could. I want to do my best for the school."

"And your best is to fail us, after making it impossible for us to obtain a substitute in time!" said Monteith bitterly. "I haven't forgotten what you said to me the other night, Sefton—that you had orders from Tadger to lose this match."

"I told you I had done with that fellow."

"Yes, and I believed you then, but now—"

"You have no right to doubt my word."

Monteith set his lips.

"I believe you are malingering!" he said savagely.

CK-ROOM IN NEXT WEEK'S RIPPING YARN, "THE SCHOOLBOY SMUGGLERS!"

"Kildare believes it, too, as I can see, though he doesn't say so."

"You can believe it if you like!" snarled Sefton. "Do as you choose about it. I can't play for St. Jim's, that's all!"

Monteith clenched his hands. He understood clearly enough how he had been fooled; that Sefton had taken him in and hoodwinked him by a cunning lie, and he was furious.

But he could do nothing. It was useless to have a quarrel; and besides, it was necessary to keep up appearances before the Redclyffe fellows. They must not be allowed to suspect that one of the St. Jim's players was a traitor to his side.

Monteith strode from the room. Sefton grinned evilly as soon as he was alone. Whatever his companions sus-



but there was no saying how things might have ended with canes in their hands!

pected, they could prove nothing. If he were turned out of the First Eleven, he cared little for that, now that he had served his purpose.

He had gained his point. Playing a man short, St. Jim's was certain to be defeated, and that was what he had planned. As for Monteith's friendship, he would soon have lost that in any case, for he had no intention of giving up his visits to the Chequers.

Monteith joined Kildare, who was talking to Darrell. The captain of St. Jim's looked at him inquiringly.

"You believe that Sefton is malingering?" asked Monteith abruptly.

Kildare started.

"Do you think so, Monteith?"

"Yes."

"Well," said Kildare, "it appeared strange to me that he should have seemed all right up to the last moment. And then left up in the lurch like this. It seems rotten

to suspect a fellow of deliberately failing his side, but I couldn't help thinking—"

"Well, you were right."

"But do you seriously think that he could be cad enough to play this trick on us because I brought him to book the other night for breaking bounds?"

Monteith shook his head.

"It isn't that. He has another motive—a more powerful one. I—I was going to advise you to turn him out of the eleven, but he deceived me. I am to blame—"

"Not at all!" said Kildare quickly. "It was quite impossible for anybody to foresee anything of this kind. But malingering or not, it's certain that he can't play, and the question is—what are we going to do? There's no time to get a substitute. Of course, we could take in a Redclyffe chap to make up the team, but if we did so there would be no honour in licking them. That's barred."

"We shall have to play a man short, that's all," said Darrell. "After all, we may pull it off. Anyway, there's nothing else to be done."

Monteith gritted his teeth.

"We are in a cleft stick," he said. "There's no choice in the matter. If any of our fellows were here for the match we might have picked up a substitute among them, but that isn't the case. Only some of the juniors have come over."

Kildare started.

"I wonder if Tom Merry is among them?"

"Yes, he is," said Darrell. "He spoke to me just now. But what about him, Kildare? You're not thinking—"

"Why not? You saw how splendidly he played in the junior match the other day, and he's head and shoulders above the rest at football."

"But a junior—"

"Of course, a junior won't count much in a senior match, but it's a question of that or nothing," said the captain of St. Jim's quickly.

"By Jove, you're right! And I dare say Tom Merry will be useful. Ask him, anyway!"

"What do you think, Monteith?"

The prefect nodded.

"I think it's a good idea, and the only thing to be done under the circumstances. Better speak to Tom Merry at once."

"That's settled, then."

Tom Merry was standing at a little distance, talking with the other juniors from St. Jim's. They were all looking concerned, for they took the success or failure of the college team very much to heart. Tom Merry looked round as Kildare came towards him.

"Merry, how would you like to play for us this afternoon?"

Tom Merry stared. If Kildare had asked him: "How would you like to be King of England?" he would hardly have been more amazed.

"Kildare! Play this afternoon?"

The captain of St. Jim's smiled.

"Yes; we're a man short. There's something wrong with Sefton. You played up splendidly in the junior match, Merry. Of course, I know a senior match is above your weight, but it's a question, you see, of playing you, or a man short."

"I see."

"And I really think you could do very well for us," said Kildare seriously. "We shall want you at inside-right."

"I've often played at inside-right."

"Yes, I know you have. Would you like to play?"

"Would I like?" said Tom. "I'd give my little finger to play, of course."

Kildare laughed.

"That won't be necessary. But you've had a long ride here. If you're fagged—"

"Fagged! It was only a little spin! I'm as fresh as a daisy!"

"Then you'll play."

"Hurrah!" shouted Tom excitedly. "But, I say, I've got no togs."

"I can lend you some football things, if you like," said Green.

"Thanks, old fellow!"

"I'll be back in a jiffy," said Green, darting off.

"Get ready as quickly as you can, Merry. It's almost time."

"Right-ho, Kildare!"

The captain of St. Jim's walked back to his comrades. Tom Merry hardly knew whether he was standing on his head or his heels, so delighted was he.

"Bravo!" cried Figgins, who, if he felt a momentary twinge of envy, was too generous-hearted to show it, or to feel it for more than a moment. "Bravo!"

"Huwwah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "This is weally wippin', and a leg up for the Lowah Forms! Huwwah! Bravo!"

Blake thumped Tom Merry heartily on the back.

"This is jolly, old fellow," he said. "Mind you play up like a giddy International for St. Jim's, or we'll scalp you afterwards!"

"I shall do my level best," said Tom seriously. "It seems too jolly good to be true! Fancy, playing for the First Eleven! My hat!"

"Here's Green!"

Green came rushing back with a bundle under his arm. He rushed Tom Merry into St. Jim's dressing-room in the pavilion.

"There you are!" he gasped. "They're my things, but I think they'll fit you all right. We're much of a size. Buck up!"

Tom Merry did buck up. He changed into Green's football garb in record time, and hurried out of the pavilion.

"I'm ready, Kildare!"

The captain of St. Jim's looked at him approvingly.

"You look very fit, Merry. It's a pity we couldn't rig you out in the St. Jim's colours; but the Redclyffe fellows won't mind that. Come along!"

The situation had already been explained to the Redclyffe captain. It was time for the footballers to take the field and Tom Merry, in white, walked on with the St. Jim's players in blue and white. The Redclyffe colours were red and white quartered.

"My hat!" said Manners. "He looks fit, doesn't he, kids? Mind you stand ready to cheer. That will make

him buck up awfully. You've got to shout for all you're worth."

"Rather!" said Figgins.

"Yaas, wathah!" chimed in Arthur Augustus. "Although I am opposed on pwinciple to ovah-exertion I weally think that we ought to back up Tom Mewwy. I intend to make a wow, and no mistake, deah boys."

Pheep! went the whistle.

The teams had lined up. Sefton, from the pavilion, watched them with anxious eyes. He had not thought of that.

Redclyffe had won the toss, and St. Jim's kicked off against what little wind there was. They would have been glad of some more. There were a good many Redclyffe spectators on the ground. In a compact body stood the eight juniors from St. Jim's, ready to "back up" Tom Merry as far as shouting could do it.

CHAPTER 10.

The Winning Goal!

ST. JIM'S First were soon in the enemy's territory, pressing on in a determined attack upon the goal, and for some minutes they carried all before them. But the Redclyffians showed the stuff they were made of. They had always been a tough nut for St. Jim's to crack, and on this occasion they seemed tougher than ever.

They rallied, and the ball came back over the half-way line, and the Redclyffe forwards followed it fast. Now it was the turn of the Saints to fall back, and fall back they did, and the Redclyffe rush brought the leather right up to the visitors' goal.

Thrice the ball was driven in, and thrice the custodian saved, and then the ball fell to a back, who sent it well out. Monteith was on it the next moment, and going up the field with it. Away went the field in pursuit, and the goalkeeper, so busy a few seconds previously, was left alone. Monteith was dribbling the ball in fine style, and the other forwards were backing him up well, and as he was tackled he swung it to Kildare, who dashed on with the ball at his foot. But Kildare was marked, and he got rid of the leather only just in time, letting the inside-right have it.

Inside-right, as we know, was the hero of the Shell—Tom Merry. Now was Tom's chance! He was off with the ball in a twinkling, and, the home halves being nowhere, he had only the backs to fear, and one of them was too far off to be dangerous.

From eight youthful throats came a tremendous roar.

"Hurrah!"

"Tom Merry's got it!"

"Tom's off!"

"Kick, you beggar—kick!"

But Tom Merry did not kick. The back was rushing at him, and it seemed inevitable that he must be robbed of the ball, or else sent flying. But Tom Merry was equal to the occasion.

He seemed to have eyes only for the goal, but at the same time he marked every movement of the back, and just as the defender was almost upon him, he dodged like lightning, and before the Redclyffian knew where he was, Tom was past him—the ball still at his feet—and dashing on goal-wards! Eight juniors roared again:

"Hurrah!"

"Go it, Tom Merry!"

Only the goalkeeper remained to be beaten, but he had no intention of being beaten by a Lower Form boy from St. Jim's.

There would certainly be no time for more than a kick, for the Redclyffians were running like maniacs upon Tom, and he had only a few seconds at his disposal.

Unless he beat the goalie at once, his chance was gone. Right on he dashed, and made a feint of kicking, and the goalkeeper, quite deceived, prepared to receive the ball; but at the same moment Tom Merry changed his feet, and sent the leather whizzing into the far corner of the net.

The goalkeeper stood amazed. The ball was trying to climb up the back of the net, and the goalie was trying to understand how it got there, and eight juniors from St. Jim's were trying to make as much noise as eight dozen.

They succeeded,

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Tommy!"

"Goal, goal!"

They shouted themselves hoarse. Tom Merry flushed with pleasure. It was very pleasant to hear himself cheered so heartily by his rivals at St. Jim's. Pleasant to see Figgins & Co. waving their caps, and stamping and yelling like lunatics.

"Goal, goal!"

It was an undeniable goal. Kildare's eyes flashed as he



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patted Tom Merry on the shoulder. Tom looked up with a smile.

"Splendid, Merry! Splendid!"

"I was lucky," said Tom.

"Yes, you were lucky; but it was first-class football, too! I'm jolly glad Sefton left us in the lurch, in one way. You've done more for us than he ever could."

"Oh, Kildare!"

"It's a fact!"

"Quite true!" said Monteith, as they walked back to the centre of the field. "True, every bit of it. You are not the kind of fellow to get a swelled head, Merry, I think."

"I hope not!"

"So we can be candid about it. It was as fine a goal as I have ever seen, and we are jolly proud of you!"

Phoebe!

It was the whistle again. Tom Merry's chums had yelled themselves hoarse and husky, and they were perforce silent as the game was resumed. But they watched Tom like hawks.

The junior recruit had scored first goal in the match, and that wonderful fact was a source of endless satisfaction to the eight. They wanted more; but Tom was only a human boy, and not a prodigy, and he did not get any more goals in the first half.

He played up well, and did good work for his side; but, of course, older and bigger opponents had the advantage of him. When it came to sprinting, however, Tom usually did as well as anybody.

Upon the whole, he did better than could have been expected of a junior recruit, without counting that goal—which was one that Sefton could never have scored. Sefton's feelings, as he looked on, may be better imagined than described. He had intended to ruin the chances of his side by standing out of the team at the last moment, when it was too late to fill his place. As a matter of fact, he had strengthened the side by his action. For, junior as Tom Merry was, there was no doubt that he was a better footballer than the friend of Mr. Tadger.

The whistle went for half-time, with the score still one to nil. The teams left the field for a brief rest, and Tom Merry found eight self-constituted valets all ready to assist him. They surrounded him in the dressing-room, careless of the fact that they were "not admitted" there, and ministered to his wants with anxious solicitude.

Figgins squeezed the lemon, Blake brandished a towel, Monty Lowther wielded the sponge. All of them found something to do, excepting Arthur Augustus, who stood surveying the scene through his eyeglass, with a smile of approval upon his aristocratic features.

"You have weally done extremewly well, Tom Mewwy," D'Arcy said, after some reflection. "I could not have done bettah myself!"

"Go hon!" said Tom.

"Yaas, wathah! I am speakin' sewiously! I could not have kicked a goal bettah than that one. I congvatulate you. You are a cowedit to the coll."

"Gussy, old chap, you'll make me blush if you keep on like that. Kildare has been saying some nice things, but praise from Arthur Augustus Aubrey is praise indeed! It's so very gratifying to be commended by a real, ripping footballer like you, Algernon!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, my intentions were to gwatify you, and make you buck up, you know," said D'Arcy.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Time!" said Kildare.

The young footballers went out again into the brilliant sunshine. The afternoon was like July, and almost too warm for football. But they resumed the game with keen determination.

Both sides were on their mettle, and the exchanges were fast and hard, and they kept the game going at a very fast rate. Both goals had some narrow escapes, but for a long time neither citadel fell.

At length the St. Jim's goalkeeper was beaten by a fast shot from the Redclyffe captain, and the score stood equal. The ice being thus broken, as it were, goals came faster, and two fell to St. Jim's in quick succession, and two to their opponents.

Three all! And five more minutes to play!

The gruelling game had had its effect upon both teams, and many of them were almost spent; but it was noticeable that the youngest footballer there—Tom Merry—seemed almost as fresh as Kildare himself. He was in perfect condition, and full of keenness, and seemed impervious to fatigue.

Five minutes more!

Was it to be a draw?

Both sides were determined that it should not be so, and both sides played up with a new burst of energy.

"One more effort!" muttered Kildare. "Buck up, St. Jim's!"

The Saints bucked up, and followed their leader well. By a combined effort they broke through Redclyffe, and rushed the ball goalward, the forwards passing in beautiful style.

Right on through the home defence—right on to where the Redclyffe goalkeeper was standing alert, all eyes and hands and feet!

Kildare had the ball, but he was marked, and he gave it to Monteith, who slammed it in.

Out it came again from the goalie's foot.

But before the home backs had a chance, Kildare had headed it in.

Still the custodian was not beaten. He made a jump at the ball, and clutched it fast, and was in the act of hurling it forth amid the Redclyffians, when—

When fate was upon him in the shape of Tom Merry!

Tom had seen his chance! Ere the goalie could hurl the ball, Tom Merry had charged him like lightning, and sent him right back into the goal, the ball still in his hands. The goalkeeper sprawled, and the ball banged into the net.

And on the touchline, in a bathchair which had been found for him, Sefton sat, white-faced and angry.

Phoebe!

It was the clear note of the whistle!

St. Jim's had won—won on the stroke of time! And Tom Merry had been responsible for the winning goal!

"Goal!" shrieked Figgins. "Come on!"

Eight juniors rushed across the field like maniacs. They seized the panting hero of the game, and before he knew what was happening, he was hoisted high on the shoulders of Blake and Figgins.

"Here, chuck it, you giddy lunatics!" he exclaimed.

"See the Conquering Hero Comes!" sang out Figgins. "Strike up, band!"

Manners, Kerr, Wynn, and Monty Lowther, with papered combs in their mouths, constituted the band. They were all ready. They struck up the old tune, marching on ahead, and so Tom Merry was carried in triumph from the scene of his success.

They bore him to the pavilion. There a white-faced, desperate-eyed fellow sat; but they had no eyes for Sefton. He was going to face an extremely unpleasant interview with Mr. Tadger, but nobody had a thought for him.

St. Jim's had won, and Tom Merry was the hero of the day. And when the footballers were home at St. Jim's, and the story was told, he was made as much of there as he had been on the football field. He was the hero of the hour!

THE END.

(Tom Merry certainly seems to be a healthy fellow, but it's a different story next week when he is shut up in the infirmary—and can't get enough to eat! Don't miss "THE SCHOOLBOY SMUGGLERS!" Out next Wednesday.)

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ALL THE TIT-BITS OF NEWS ARE IN—



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HALLO, chums! I've got a tip-top programme of stories again for you in next week's number, so I hope all of you have placed an order with your newsagent in advance. That's the only way to avoid disappointment; also it helps your newsagent when he is ordering to know how many copies his customers require. In next week's GEM you will find a sparkling, long complete story of Tom Merry & Co., entitled:

"THE SCHOOLBOY SMUGGLERS!"

Mr. Martin Clifford will keep your interest at a high pitch in this splendid story, so be sure to read it. Next on the list is another rip-snorter yarn by Eric Wood, featuring

"WINGS OF THE MOUNTED!"

If it's thrills you like, then this flying policeman will serve 'em up to you thick and heavy. Owen Conquest hasn't been idle, either. He's bang on the target with his next Rookwood yarn, which is entitled:

"THE GHOST OF ROOKWOOD!"

Like the title? Good! Wait until you've read the story. Look out, too, for another comic "strip," starring Potts, the Office Boy and more interesting items of news from the notebook.

A NOVEL MOVING JOB!

"I'm fed up with this neighbourhood, so I'm going to shift the house, brick by brick, to another district!" It's quite likely that anyone hearing that remark would jump to the conclusion the speaker was a trifle "off his dot." But such conclusions are dangerous things. News has just come to hand that a Liverpool shipowner thought he would like to change his abode to another district. Being very much attached to his house, which was a copy of a Tudor mansion, he had it pulled down brick by brick, taken to another district five miles away, and had it built up again. It took two years to do this extraordinary job, but it was done satisfactorily; and report has it that over one hundred and fifty photographs were taken in the first place so that in the work of reconstruction every brick and beam would fit into its original place.

HEARD THIS ONE?

Boss (to Office Boy) "What excuse have you for being two hours late?"
"None, sir! I've been hanging about outside for an hour trying to think of one!"

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A TRUE FISHING YARN.

"It's a shark!" "Where?" "There!" And it was a shark, too! When fishermen start telling of the fish they have caught, some people take a deep breath and wonder how a fisherman's imagination could play such tricks with him. Invariably the fish grows in size and poundage as the yarn goes on. Yet on this occasion several fishermen told the truth. They had seen a shark which was nine feet long! It happened at Bournemouth, whither fishermen from all parts had come to show their skill at the annual angling festival. While they waited for the big fish that would perhaps bring them a prize a keen-eyed angler suddenly spotted a triangular fin moving among the piles of Bournemouth pier. "A shark!" he roared excitedly. "Look!" Everyone looked and saw for themselves, and everyone began to say how he would hook that shark and play him until there wasn't a kick left in him. Then, to the disappointment of the Bournemouth anglers, the shark headed for the open sea. Perhaps some instinct warned him that up above four hundred eager fishermen were spoiling for his blood. Anyway, he hopped it. And now comes news that a nine-foot shark, weighing close on three hundred pounds, was landed by two brothers at Portland after a terrific struggle lasting two hours. If it was the same shark that had thrilled the Bournemouth anglers, then said shark in changing his quarters had simply jumped out of the frying pan into the fire!

THE CANNIBAL FILM STAR!

There's a craze for true-to-life film stories these days, but this honest endeavour on the part of film directors has its drawbacks. News has just come to hand that a certain British film director is considering putting on a talking picture which will star a real African cannibal chief! Apart from his cannibalistic tendencies, this dusky chief is a real stout fellow with a glorious fund of humour—a born comedian. In fact! His sole costume is a two-piece affair consisting of an English nightshirt and a French police helmet. We are not told how this cannibal chief came by these odd bits of apparel, but an ordinary imagination might quite easily fill in the story. Imagine, then, if the promised talkie ever becomes an actual fact, the studio with the cannibal chief posing before the camera—and the fat comedian, a white man, trying to be funny, when all the time he must know that the cannibal star is thinking of him in the terms of a meal! Will there be a rush for the fat comedian's part when it's known that he

plays opposite a real cannibal chief? There will not!

THE UNSTOPPABLE FORWARD!

"If this fellow doesn't stop scoring goals we shall need a cricket scorer to let us know what the total is!" That was a remark passed by a footer fan at the recent match between Southampton Boys and the Wareham Boys in the English Schools Shield, played at The Dell, Southampton. The final whistle blew with the remarkable score of twenty-one goals to the credit of the first-mentioned team, whilst the Wareham Boys hadn't even found the net once! And of that terrific score young Norman Catlin, captain and centre-forward of the winning team, bagged as many as seventeen goals! Just think of the goalie's feelings when half-time came round! Up to then Catlin alone had slammed the ball past him seven times. You can bet your life that Catlin was well shadowed in the second half, but it didn't stop him scoring. On the contrary, he beat his first half record by bagging another ten goals, whilst his team-mates, just to show that they had shooting boots on, too, netted the remaining four between them. Wouldn't you like to have young Catlin in your team? He's a great centre-forward, and usually scores between seventy and eighty goals a season. Last year this prolific scorer was picked to play for England in one of the Schoolboy Internationals, and on this occasion he did his bit at outside-right. One can imagine certain professional football "scouts" reporting to their various managements what a "find" young Catlin is, and it will be interesting to watch this youngster's career, should he ever find himself in first-class Soccer.

VILLAGE SCARED!

It was a bump in the road that was the indirect cause of the big scare in the village of Earl Shilton a short time ago. For over that bump travelled a cage on wheels containing a real live lioness. The bump in the road caused the door of the cage to open, and the lioness, doubtless fed up with its cramped apartment, thought it would take a walk! So did the inhabitants when they saw it; and needless to say the walk finished up in a run! The only inhabitants of Earl Shilton who seemed pleased to see the lioness were two small children. They had never seen such a lovely "dog," so they stopped and admired it. Close by was a factory, and the factory girls were returning to their work when they caught sight of that "lovely dog." Immediately they bolted for safety—with the lioness on their track. It took some time to corner that lioness, and the method was to erect a barrier in the factory yard all round it, consisting of nets and planks, what time the trailer and the cage were hurried to the spot. If the lioness in her bid for freedom had reckoned on getting a square meal she was not disappointed, for her keeper had to bait her with quantities of raw meat before she deigned to enter the cage. Once more the door of the cage was locked on her—this time more securely than ever—and the journey to Smethwick was continued. But you can bet your life all Earl Shilton had something to talk about for the next twenty-four hours. It isn't every village that gets a jungle thrill like that!

YOUR EDITOR,

ANOTHER RIPPING COMPLETE ROOKWOOD YARN!

NO CATCH FOR MANDERS!

By

OWEN CONQUEST.



CHAPTER 1.

Lovell Leaps Before Looking!

"LEGGO!"

"Not much, old chap!"

"Why, I'll jolly well—"

"Do cheese it, Lovell!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Think of your giddy dignity—"

"Blow my dignity!" roared Arthur Edward Lovell. "I tell you I'm going to smash those cheeky kids—"

"You're not, old fellow!" grinned Raby soothingly. "Let the young imps rip, you silly owl! Rockwood chaps don't go chasing village kids; it isn't done! We're not Third Form fags—"

"I don't care! Leggo!" bawled Lovell furiously. "Think I'm going to be cheeked by a gang of scrubby kids? Think I'm going to stand being bunged on the nose with an apple-core?"

"Well, be thankful it wasn't half a brick, old fellow! Now, do be sensible, and let 'em rip, Lovell!" pleaded Jimmy Silver.

But Lovell wasn't agreeable to being sensible. He felt he did well to be angry, and, better still, to desire vengeance.

It was Newcome's fault, really. The Fistical Four had been sauntering idly along the river that bright wintry afternoon, when they had happened upon a group of village boys playing marbles on the cindered towing path. And—quite by accident—Newcome had struck a marble with his foot and sent it rolling into the river.

That had started the little rumpus. From yelling cat-calls and abuse after the Rookwood juniors, the village urchins had proceeded to pelt them. And an apple-core had hit the luckless Lovell full on the nose.

Not having been hit on the nose by an apple-core, Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Newcome were ready and willing to let the incident pass without reprisals.

Having been hit, however, Lovell was seething with anger and burning for vengeance.

The fact that his chums had promptly grabbed him and were holding him back from his desired vengeance by main force only served to increase his anger.

"Will you leggo?" he roared, straggling furiously in his pals' fond grip. "If you don't lemme go, I'll punch your dashed boko, Jimmy Silver!"

"No fear! Now do listen— Whoooooop!"

Lovell had kept his word. And Jimmy roared as Lovell's fist landed on his nasal organ. Nor did Arthur Edward rest at that. Having punched Jimmy's nose, he dug an elbow into Newcome's chest, and landed a hefty left under Raby's chin.

Jimmy roared, Raby roared, and Newcome roared, and then they resorted to action. Before Lovell could jump away he was grabbed and landed in a sprawling heap on the cinders.

"Smash the silly fathead!" booted Jimmy Silver. "He's nearly busted by dose! Ow, ow!"

"What about my ribs?" howled Newcome.

"And my chin—he's nearly busted my chin, the raving lunatic!" shrieked Raby. "Smaash him!"

"Well, I told you, you rotters— Yarroooooop!"

Lovell landed in a heap on the cinders as three pairs of hands grabbed him again. They bumped him hard on the cinders, and then they rolled him over and over. Finally, they stuffed his cap down the back of his neck, and left him, sprawling there, gasping, and panting frantically.

"There!" gasped Jimmy Silver breathlessly. "That should teach you not to be such a howling ass, Lovell! Now you can jolly well go after those kids if you want to, and be blown to you!"

They walked on, breathing hard, Jimmy hugging his damaged nose, Raby his damaged chin, and Newcome his aching ribs. Lovell sat up and strove to get his wind.

As he sat there Arthur Edward became dizzily aware of ribald laughter. Blinking round, he recognised the grinning, cheeky faces of his village enemies. They had evidently been attracted to the spot by the commotion. At all events, here they were, and now Arthur Edward had no need to go back for his vengeance.

"You—you cheeky rotters!" he spluttered. "I—I'll teach you to cuckoo at me!"

Only stopping to recover his cap and ram it back on his head, Arthur Edward jumped up and made a blind rush at his tormentors.

They immediately scattered, with jeering yells. But Lovell was too quick for one lanky youth, and he grabbed him and held him. Only for a moment, however. The youth was evidently used to rough-and-tumbles.

Even as Lovell's grasp closed on him the cheeky youth

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neatly slipped a foot between Lovell's legs, and "legged" him down with the swiftness of an expert. Lovell went sprawling again with a furious yell. The youth snatched off his cap as he sprawled, threw it over a near-by fence, and bolted, yelling with laughter.

Clearly it was not Lovell's lucky day. He scrambled up, nearly choking with wrath. The enemy had vanished up a narrow opening leading to the village, but he could still hear them and see them. There was his cap to be recovered first, however.

The fence was high. But Lovell gave a rush and a leap, grabbed the top, and hauled himself up. Then he vanished into the garden beyond. And as he did so a newcomer appeared on the scene.

It was the tall, angular figure, and sharp, acid features of Mr. Manders, Housemaster of the Modern House at Rookwood. And Mr. Manders nearly fell down as he saw the junior whip over the fence and vanish.

"G-good gracious!" gasped Mr. Manders. "The—the daring, depraved young rascal! A—a Rookwood boy undoubtedly! And he has had the audacity, the daring effrontery to visit that disreputable hostelry, the Fisherman's Inn, in broad daylight! G-good gracious!"

And, to Mr. Manders, it certainly did look like that. For the garden was undoubtedly the back garden of the Fisherman's Inn—a fact that Arthur Edward Lovell, in his haste and excitement, had either overlooked or disregarded.

Mr. Manders had been enjoying his stroll along the gleaming river. But he abandoned further enjoyment then and there. Much as he enjoyed a stroll, Mr. Manders enjoyed "catching" a junior doing wrong much, much more. Mr. Manders was rather a mean-spirited gentleman, who usually took his duties much more seriously than was necessary in the interest of discipline. Moreover, Mr. Manders was almost certain he had recognised the boy as a junior from the Classical Side of Rookwood. And nothing pleased the sour-faced Manders more than catching a Classical junior breaking rules.

He thought he had a rare "catch" now.

"The—the young scoundrel!" breathed Mr. Manders, his sharp eyes glinting. "Undoubtedly a Classical boy—I am morally certain of that! No Modern boy would dare to visit such a place! I have long had my suspicions of this sort of thing! Ah! Very well—oh, very well! Mr. Dalton shall see that I, at least, have a regard for the rules of the school. I will wait the return of the abandoned young rascal, and will catch him in the act."

With that Mr. Manders gave a careful glance about him. Then he dodged swiftly into a thick bunch of evergreens growing at the water's edge, and crouched down, uncomfortable, but seething with excitement and triumphant anticipation, to watch and wait.

It certainly looked like being a "catch"; but whether it was to be a "catch" for Mr. Manders remained to be seen.

CHAPTER 2.

Unlucky Lovell!

BREATHING hard and seething with wrath, Arthur Edward Lovell dropped down into the untidy garden of the Fisherman's Inn. It was only when he dropped safely on his feet there that Lovell really realised where he had landed.

At the far end of the garden, against the rambling out-buildings of the inn, were rows of barrels and piles of bottle cases. It was the sight of these that brought the fact to Lovell's mind and made him jump.

"Oh, my hat!" he gasped. "It's the garden of that rotten pub!"

It was the sack for a cert if he were caught there. Lovell realised that fact well enough then. But Lovell was Lovell, and now he was there Lovell meant to get what he had come for.

He glanced about him quickly, and almost at once he sighted his cap. Snatching it up, he rammed it on his untidy thatch of hair. And just then an idea came to Lovell.

The high fence ran right round the garden, and the garden was a long one. He could still hear the laughter and voices of the village youths from somewhere beyond the fence which ran alongside the little lane to the village. If he dashed up the garden, whipped over the fence, and dropped into the lane beyond, he might easily catch the cheeky young imps yet!

No sooner thought of than acted upon—with Arthur Edward. Now his cap was recovered Lovell thought only of revenge. Other fellows might put up with having apple-cores bunged at them, but not Lovell! They had probably restarted their interrupted game of marbles again, and

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would be caught napping fairly. Lovell started up the garden with a rush.

Lovell looked upon the little dodge as easy, and easy it would perhaps have been but for Mr. Luke Bogley.

Mr. Bogley was a plump, red-nosed gentleman, who acted as odd-job and handyman at the Fisherman's Inn. At the moment Mr. Bogley's odd-job was the tarring of the garden fence, separating the garden from the lane. As the path was winding, and the garden overgrown with trees and bushes, Lovell did not see Mr. Bogley until he was upon him. And Lovell came upon him with a rush, just as Mr. Bogley had stopped work a moment to regard the worn state of the business end of his long-handled tar-brush.

The collision was sudden and terrific. Lovell's head rammed the tar artist full in the back. Lovell rebounded from the unexpected shock, while Mr. Bogley gave a wild roar, and plunged forward with the head of the dripping tar-brush jammed between the fence and his face.

Naturally, Mr. Bogley was annoyed about it. He gave a spluttering roar, clawed tar from his features, and then he sighted Lovell, and gave another roar.

"Who—What—It was you, you young rip!" he yelled. "Look what you've done—rammed that there brush all over me face! Why, I'll—I'll—"

Lovell scrambled up hurriedly as he saw the tar-brush coming. He ducked in the nick of time, and the dripping brush missed his head by an inch, spattering him from head to foot with tar.

"You old fool!" howled Lovell. "It was an accident! Can't you—Here, hold on! Whooop!"

Evidently Mr. Bogley was in no mood to listen to reason. He discarded the tar-brush, and Lovell roared as his tarry hand caught the junior an awful buffet, sending him sprawling again.

It was the last straw for Arthur Edward. He jumped up furiously, and went for Mr. Bogley like a cyclone, his fists whirling. Mr. Bogley might have excuse for his conduct; but Lovell was hurt, and gave no thought to Mr. Bogley's views on the situation.

What followed could scarcely have been called a fight. Mr. Bogley's movements were rather slow, and all he did was to yell furiously as he dodged about, trying to avoid Lovell's smaller, but exceedingly hard fists. Now and again he made a wild swing on his own, but for the most part he hit empty air. And, doubtless enough, it came as a great relief to Mr. Bogley when a white-aproned potman came rushing down the yard to his help.

"Collar the young himp!" yelled Mr. Bogley, sighting the reinforcements. "Lend a 'and 'ere, 'Erbert! Cosh him one—quick!"

"My eye!" ejaculated 'Erbert, suddenly sighting Mr. Bogley's black features. "It's one of them skool kids! 'As he done that to you, Bill? You 'old on a bit, me lad!"

He rushed to Mr. Bogley's rescue, now he was aware why help was required. And as he didn't want to be "coshed"—whatever it meant—Lovell decided not to wait.

Giving Mr. Bogley a final left on his sticky nose, Arthur Edward dodged a frantic grab and bolted back down the garden. He had quite forgotten the village youths now, and it had suddenly occurred to him that to be caught scrapping at the Fisherman's Inn might have serious consequences for him—very serious indeed.

So Lovell—as usual, realising his danger rather late—fairly flew. 'Erbert instantly gave chase, with the rather battered Bill Bogley a good second. Down the winding path went Lovell, round the tumble-down toolshed, and then he made a wild, desperate leap at the fence.

His fingers grasped the top, and he hauled himself up. And then, absolute horror came over his face. For the first thing he saw as he popped his head over the fence was a well-known and hated face, and the head and shoulders of a form in the bushes on the towing-path.

"M-mum-Manders!" gulped the harassed Lovell. "Oh, crikey!"

He popped back again like lightning, and dropped from the fence into the garden again. It was Manders right enough, but, fortunately, Manders had not spotted him—he was sure of that. Manders had been staring along the towing-path at the moment. Yet Lovell knew—was certain—that Manders was waiting for him, was in hiding there for that purpose.

Arthur Edward Lovell preferred the company even of the furious Mr. Bogley and the warlike 'Erbert to Mr. Manders just then. But there was no use in asking for trouble even with them. And there was still time to hide, though the thudding approach of his pursuers was perilously close.

Then, in that critical instant of time, Lovell sighted a possible haven of refuge. It was a disused rain-water barrel, lying on its side. Not an inviting haven by any

means, but to Arthur Edward it was a case of any port in a storm just then.

He stooped down and popped into the barrel like a rabbit popping into its hole.

Next instant 'Erbert arrived, and he was followed by the punting, exclaiming Mr. Bogley. 'Erbert pulled up, and Mr. Bogley pulled up.

"Gorn!" exclaimed 'Erbert grimly. "Jest beat us by a short ead, Bill. He's 'opped it over that there fence, Bill."

"I'll 'op him if I catches 'old of him agen!" vowed Mr. Bogley, still clawing tar from his features. "Durn the young rip! Banged right into me, he did, and rammed that there tar-brush right inter ma face!"

Taking it for granted that their quarry had vanished over the fence, Mr. Bogley and 'Erbert left the spot and retraced their steps up the garden, discussing the incident with many lurid imprecations.

"Oh, my only hat!" groaned Lovell.

For the moment he was safe. But a moment's reflection told him that it was, perhaps, only for the moment. He dare not scale the fence at that spot, or any other spot now. From where he crouched Mr. Manders could see right along the lane as well as the fence facing him—trust Manders for that, groaned Lovell bitterly. And to go down the garden and risk being spotted scaling it by Manders would mean also the risk of being caught by Mr. Bogley. While on the opposite side of the garden was a high wall, for too high for him to scale.

There was nothing else for it but to wait and hope for the best, which the luckless Lovell proceeded to do.

CHAPTER 3.

Manders Caught!

"THAT ass—" "That silly fathead—" "That fearful chump—" Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Newcome were, of course, referring to Arthur Edward Lovell. For several minutes after leaving him Lovell's fond chums gave rein to their views on Lovell. But, as usual, they all agreed to overlook Lovell's many faults, and to remember he was their fond pal. At the end of the several minutes Jimmy Silver gave a grunt.

"Yes, he's a fearful chump right enough," he remarked, with a grin. "But I think we'll forgive him this once. Let's turn back."

"Yes—let's," grinned Raby and Newcome. "We'll have to butter him up a bit, of course," added Raby. "But that's easy—with Lovell. Mind you keep your chivvies straight when we're apologising."

"Ha, ha! Yes, quite!"

The three chums turned and retraced their steps, intending to pick up Lovell again and smooth his ruffled feathers—if possible.

Jimmy himself was feeling a trifle uneasy and remorseful. A turn in the path had hidden their chum from sight now, but he was fairly certain he had heard sounds of laughter—and trouble—in the distance. And he suspected that meant trouble for Lovell—especially if he had tackled that gang of urchins on his own.

So Jimmy was rather anxious to sight Lovell.

They turned the bend, and soon came up to the spot where they had left Lovell. Hearing footsteps Mr. Roger Manders raised his head cautiously, and glanced along the towing-path. It was lucky for Lovell he did so, for it was just then that Lovell popped his head over the fence and saw him.

Someone else saw him, too. Jimmy Silver's keen eyes were scanning the place, looking for signs of Lovell. Instead, Jimmy saw Manders, and nearly fell down at sight of the slinking, crouching Modern master.

Only Jimmy saw him, and Jimmy did not see Lovell. But Raby and Newcome spotted Lovell, though they failed to spot Manders.

"G-great Scott!" breathed Jimmy. "D-dud-did you see that?"

"I jolly well did!" said Raby, in alarm. "Lovell—I spotted his chivvy pop over that fence just now—the pub fence."

"So did I!" breathed Newcome. "Oh, the mad idiot!" "Lovell?" ejaculated Jimmy, aghast. "But I mean old Manders—that sneaking rotter! He's hiding in the bushes there—watching that pub, I bet! Mean to say—"

"Lovell's over that fence!" groaned Raby. "I saw him! And—and you mean you spotted that tick, Manders, hiding in those bushes, Jimmy?"

"Yes. Look! You can see the thumping bushes moving yet! Don't let him know we've spotted him! Phew! This looks serious."

The juniors walked past Manders. But, despite his



Lovell, racing head down along the path, cannoned right into Mr. Bogley, who was engaged in tarring the fence. With a yell Mr. Bogley crashed into the fence, the tar-brush wedged between it and his face!

suggestion not to let Manders know they had seen him, Jimmy couldn't resist a hint.

"Did you see anything in those bushes, chaps?" he asked blandly, and loudly. "I could have sworn I saw something! Looked like a pig nosing about—an awful-looking beast!"

"I thought I spotted something. Looked like a sneaking tramp to me, though," remarked Raby. "Better get on. Didn't like the looks of him."

The chums walked on, grinning. Behind the bushes Mr. Roger Manders gritted his teeth. He was more than suspicious that the juniors had spotted him, and that those remarks were purely for his benefit.

But though he wanted to rush out and demand an explanation, Manders dare not risk it. He didn't want to be spotted. Though he had managed to persuade himself that it was his duty to spy in the interests of discipline, he knew what the other masters, and the school in general, would think of his methods.

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Knowing this well enough, Jimmy Silver & Co. walked on, grinning. But once round the corner they halted to discuss the situation, and their faces were sober enough now.

"Something's got to be done, chaps," said Jimmy Silver grimly. "You're sure you saw that awful idiot, Lovell?"

"Absolutely—worse luck!"

"And I saw Manders, so that settles it!" snapped Jimmy, looking quite anxious. "That as Lovell must have gone over that rotten fence for some reason or other."

"Just what he would do—trust Lovell!" said Raby.

"Exactly! And that tick, Manders, must have spotted him," went on Jimmy dismally. "If he catches him it means the sack for old Lovell. Chaps, he mustn't catch him! It's pretty clear Manders doesn't know it's Lovell, or he wouldn't just wait in hiding like that. He knows some chap's over that fence, and he's waiting to catch him in the act. We've got to do something—and jolly quickly, you men!"

"We could go and shove the sneaking bounder in the river, but that would land us," grinned Newcome.

"Fathead! It's no laughing matter!" said Jimmy warmly. "I tell you we've simply got to save Lovell!"

"Blessed if I know how, then," said Raby grimly. "We can't shift him, and—My hat! Why not pay this ugly-looking merchant to shift him out of there?" ended Raby eagerly.

"What?"

Jimmy Silver stared at Raby, and then at a gentleman approaching along the towing-path.

He was a somewhat dingy-looking individual, and might easily have been Mr. Bogley's brother as regards looks—perhaps he was. And he sported a broken nose, and his whole appearance suggested a retired pug.

He glanced at the juniors and scowled, and Jimmy's eyes gleamed. He was feeling desperate for Lovell's safety, and Raby's wheeze was certainly worth trying.

"Hold on!" called Jimmy. "Just a minute!"

"Hey? You callin' me, young 'un?" demanded the man huskily, stopping.

"Yes. Look here, d'you want to earn five bob?"

"Jest you try me," grinned the individual. "But what's the job first, young gent? Sam Bogley ain't the man as leaps afore he looks!"

Jimmy told him hurriedly and frankly. Mr. Sam Bogley fairly blinked.

"And you want me to shift the bloke?"

"That's it—five bob down!"

"Ho, yes. But who is he? Supposin'—"

"He's a weedy worm, and you could shift him with one hand," grinned Jimmy. "But you've no need to use force, old bean! Just show him your fist and he'll shift soon enough."

"Well, it's a job as suits me," said Mr. Sam Bogley. "But it's a job I couldn't do under ten bob. That's no price—ten bob down!"

"Then it's off! We've only five bob between us!"

"Well, melbo I'll do it for five as a special favour," grinned Mr. Bogley. "No rough stuff, you say. Right! You watch me, kids!"

And, pocketing the five shillings Jimmy tendered, Mr. Sam Bogley waddled away along the towing-path. For the moment Jimmy stared after him rather suspiciously, wondering for the moment if the man would swindle them by walking calmly away with the money. But he need not have feared as regards Mr. Sam Bogley's courage.

Mr. Bogley reached the bushes wherein Mr. Manders hid and stopped. They saw him peering behind them, and then they heard his husky, rather bullying voice:

"Here, you, whatcher doin' there? Come out of that! Look lively!"

Mr. Manders must have replied, but they did not hear him if he did. They only heard Mr. Bogley resume again:

"D'you ear, you little rat! Outer that! Outer that and clear away from 'ere afore I lands you one or two! See that fist—it's put many and many a real man to sleep, never mind a little shrimp of a bloke like-you, mister! Hey? Master! I don't care what you was, but I see you're up to no good 'angin' about here! Clear afore—Hey, what's that? I told you, mister!"

Quite suddenly Mr. Bogley's bullying voice seemed to change. They saw his features alter also, and he stepped nearer the bushes. Then a hand showed from the bushes, and something—a slip of paper—was shoved into Mr. Samuel Bogley's huge palm.

Mr. Bogley pocketed the paper carefully and nodded at the bushes. Then he grinned towards the hiding juniors along the path, and calmly walked round the corner into the lane leading to the village and vanished. Possibly he was bound for the side door of the Fisherman's Inn. At

all events the significance of the little act was not lost upon Jimmy Silver & Co. They almost exploded with wrath.

"Well," gasped Jimmy—"well, the—swindling beast! He's taken five bob from us to shift Manders, and ten bob from Manders to let him stay there! Oh, my hat! The—the—" Words failed Jimmy.

The little plot had failed dismally, and they had lost a badly needed five bob.

As the three members of the Fistical Four stood in dismayed silence a newcomer appeared along the towing-path, strolling from the direction of Rookwood. He was an elegantly dressed junior, and the chums recognised Mornington of the Fourth.

"Cheerio, old beans!" said Morny affably. "Top of the afternoon! I say, what's up? You look like a giddy gang of moul'tin' owls, begad!"

Jimmy Silver, helped by his dejected pals, told Mornington what was "up." Mornington whistled softly.

"Well, isn't that just like Lovell to go and get himself into a hole like that?" he grinned. "Ha, ha!"

"You burbling ass!" hissed Jimmy savagely. "It's nothing to cackle about, blow you, Morny!"

"I'm not cackling at Lovell's position," chuckled Mornington, his eyes glimmering. "I'm just thinking of another wheeze, old beans! You were asses to trust that merchant with five bob. But I think I can improve on that wheeze a bit. Gad! Ha, ha! Leave it to me! Just hang about out of sight and see what happens."

And Morny trotted away along the rowing-path, back the way he had come. Jimmy Silver looked at his pals.

"Looks as if Morny's got an idea!" he said hopefully.

"And I bet it's a wild one if he has!" grunted Raby. "Still, we'll wait and see, Jimmy. Let's hide in the bushes here!"

"What—ho?"

There was plenty of cover along the bank, and the juniors crouched down behind a bush. Knowing the reckless Morny, they were not a little apprehensive in regard to his "wheeze." With their eyes scanning the banks either way they waited. They had not to wait long. Suddenly a helmeted, blue-uniformed form hove in sight. Behind the constable a junior was sauntering carelessly. It was Mornington. The constable was a young man, and they recognised him as a recent addition to the Combe Police Force.

He passed the hiding juniors, walking briskly and with determination on his keen features. All at once Jimmy Silver grasped Morny's idea, and he started to chuckle softly.

"Oh, my hat!" he gurgled. "Oh, great pip! I believe—Hallo, Morny, you awful ass! What—"

"Shush!" murmured Morny. "Leave it to the bobby, my infants! He's keen as mustard on promotion, and if he doesn't shift Manders I'll eat my dashed boots!"

"Oh crikey! Oh, you—you mad idiot! Supposing he locks Manders up!"

"I'm sincerely hopin' so, dear old beans!" murmured Morny. "I told him there was a suspicious-looking character hiding in the bushes opposite the Fisherman's Inn, watching the pub. You know there's been an epidemic of robberies at pubs lately, round here, and the bobby fairly hussed with joy when I dropped him the hint. He'll shift Manders all right. Then Lovell can take his hook."

"Oh, my hat!"

The chums gurgled at the idea, alarmed as they were. They fully agreed with Morny that it would "come off." Mr. Manders was never a well-dressed gentleman at the best of times. He was mean with money, and he hated spending money on clothes even for his own personal use. And this afternoon he was wearing a shabby overcoat that was nearly green in parts, and a hat just as bad. And the bobby was a new man who was not likely to know Roger Manders.

Tingling with excitement they watched and waited. They saw the policeman stop at the bushes. Then quite suddenly they saw him make a dive into the bushes. Then he came out, and with him came an astounded and horrified Mr. Manders.

"Very nice!" exclaimed the constable, keeping a tight grip on the flustered, wriggling Rookwood master. "Very nice indeed, my man! Yes, I expect you want to continue your walk, but you ain't going to. You're comin' with me."

"But I tell you I am a Rookwood master!" almost shrieked Roger Manders. "I was taking a walk, and had stopped to—to tie my—ahem!—shoe up. Release me this instant, constable!"

If the constable was doubtful at all before, he was not a scrap doubtful now. It was obvious to anyone, much less

a smart, youthful constable keen on promotion, that Roger Manders was not speaking the truth. Obviously Mr. Manders, despite his hesitating statement, had not stopped just to tie up a shoelace. And as he had caught Manders skulking in the bushes, it was enough—more than enough—to satisfy the bobby.

His grasp tightened on Mr. Manders' collar, and Mr. Manders was shoved ahead at a great pace.

"On you go!" snapped the constable, as Manders started to struggle and argue frantically. "Any more trouble, my lad, and you gets the handcuffs on; and you won't like 'em if you ain't never sampled 'em!"

"But I tell you I am a Rookwood master!" howled Manders. "Fool! Dolt! Imbecile! Release me at once, sir! Unhand me! How—how dare you? G-good gracious! This is terrible! Listen to me, constable; I demand that you hear me. I am a Rookwood master, and having suspicions—"

"Yes, we've had that bit before," grinned the constable, pushing him on again. "And I had my suspicions, too, my man! I'm more than suspicious of you, and you're coming along to explain to the sergeant jest what you was doing there. Loitering with intent to commit a felony—that's what the magistrate will call it. Come on—lively, before a crowd get round!"

"G-good heavens! Really— G-good heavens!" choked Manders. "Fellow-officer—I beg, I implore you to listen to me! I am a— Ooooh!"

A practised twist of the wrist caused Manders to break off just then. Evidently the constable had heard that bit too often. The two passed round the corner into the lane leading to the village and the police station. They vanished from the staring juniors' sight, and the juniors emerged from hiding.

Mornington was nearly two-double with laughter. Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Newcome were nearly weeping from the same cause. A head popped over the fence. It was Lovell's. Next moment Lovell's body followed his head, and Arthur Edward fell in a heap on the ground—on the right side of the fence.

"G-good!" panted Jimmy Silver, wiping his eyes. "Ha, ha, ha! Now hop it, Lovell—hook it, you born idiot!"

And Arthur Edward Lovell did "hook it." For once Lovell showed sense—possibly he had had a lesson. At all events he did not stop to argue. And his chums followed him—with the exception of Mornington. That daring youth calmly followed the constable and his captive. Mornington was looking forward to seeing Manders "locked up."

But Mornington was disappointed. By a great stroke of luck Dicky Dalton happened to meet the crowd just as it was emerging on to the village High Street; and the Fourth Form master was a fellow of prompt decision and action. He very soon persuaded the constable that his "catch" was a mistake, and then Dicky Dalton hailed a taxi and bundled the nearly weeping Manders in and whizzed him back to Rookwood.

That ended it. From the fact that when Manders next saw them he fairly grinned with rage, the Fistical Four realised that he had guessed who had put the bobby on his track; at least, they knew Manders imagined it was they. But he took no action, and they knew why. Mr. Manders knew what the Head would think about his "methods of discipline." He knew what the school would think of his spying, and how they would roar at the story. So Manders—probably under Dicky Dalton's wise advice—lay low and said nothing. But the looks he gave the Fistical Four after that were simply fiendish. But the Fistical Four only smiled innocently. After all, they were innocent!

One thing at least Roger Manders could be thankful for; by travelling back to the school in a taxi he had made sure that the news could not have reached the school before he did, so there was no giggling crowd waiting for him. He slipped hastily from the cab and went to his own room.

THE END.

(For once in a way Lovell has got away with it! What a change! But he had Morny to thank for it! Next week's ripping yarn is called "THE GHOST OF ROOKWOOD!" Don't miss it!)

EASTWOOD SHIELD LEAGUE.

DING-DONG STRUGGLES OPEN THE SEASON!
FULL RESULTS AND REPORTS.

By "OLD BOY."

Below we publish the results of the first games played this season for the Eastwood Shield, presented by Lord Eastwood, father of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of St. Jim's. The league has been formed from the junior elevens of schools well known to readers of the "Magnet," GEM, and "Nelson Lee," and a great fight is expected for the championship. Results will appear week by week, and "Old Boy" will contribute detailed accounts of the biggest matches. May we express the hope that the best team will triumph!—ED.

ROOKWOOD STARTLE ST. JIM'S!

I found excitement at fever pitch on my arrival at St. Jim's. I was met by the junior committee, and took the opportunity to ask Tom Merry what he thought of his team's chance of winning the championship against such powerful sides as Greyfriars and Rookwood. He was very guarded, but observed that no skipper ever had a finer set of men under him, and that they were going all out to win the Shield that Gussy's "patah" has generously presented. To this D'Arcy added an emphatic "Yaas, wathah!" Jimmy Silver, who had just brought his merry men over by charabanc, was equally guarded, but told me privately that I could "leave it to Uncle James!" I take it that Rookwood too are all out to lift the trophy. Grundy of the Shell button-holed me as the match started, and attempted to lead me off to his study to tell me why he should have been playing for St. Jim's. Fortunately Wilkins and Gunn grabbed Grundy and walked him off, thus saving me from the necessity of disillusioning the poor chap!

In ideal weather Tom Merry, winning the toss, kicked off with a slight breeze and the sun in his favour. It was easy to see that every St. Jim's man round the ropes was certain of his side's victory. A rude shock, however, was in store for them! Rookwood, with Jimmy Silver at centre-half and Tommy Dodd at centre-forward, went away as though inspired, and the ball was kept bobbing dangerously in the Saint's penalty area.

The game was barely five minutes old when Mornington flashed over a brilliant centre, and Tommy Dodd, trapping it dead in front of goal, made no mistake. Wynn had no chance to save. St. Jim's rallied, and pressed hard, but they were soon penned in their own half again, and the Rookwood forwards fairly peppered Fatty Wynn in goal. The Falstaff went down full length to a drive from Lovell, and a moment later punched out in a melee and took an elbow accidentally

under the chin! He was soon in the thick of it once more, however, and reckless dive averted a certain goal when Tommy Dodd went right through on his own. Even Wynn could not stem this tide, though, and Jimmy Silver lobbed the ball over a heap of players to put the visitors two up!

Half time, 0-2.

The resumption found St. Jim's dogged and determined. Slowly they wore their opponents down, and more than one Rookwooder had "bellows to mend" in this half. The pace had been too fierce, and they had done magnificently. Still, Erroll in goal held out, and it was late in the game when Talbot ran through, and then, making as though to centre, shot hard and true and found the net. This seemed to give the Saints the flip they needed, and they began to swarm around the Rookwood goal. D'Arcy, who played a clinking game on the wing, took the leather along the line and drove through a forest of legs to equalise—and the roar of cheering, so I heard later, was heard in Rylecombe village! Rookwood enjoyed a brief spell of superiority again, but Tom Merry got away, and with a terrific shot, beat Erroll all ends up. In the last few seconds, D'Arcy leaped in to head the fourth goal for St. Jim's—a gallant victory, won by pluck and perseverance!

On this form, I venture to forecast that the Saints will take some stopping. They have that invaluable asset, steadiness in every department. Tom Merry at centre-forward and Fatty Wynn in goal are good enough for any school team in the country. Rookwood were game right through—and all praise is due to "Uncle James" for his untiring work at centre-half, the pivot of the team. The pace of the first half beat Rookwood—and it must be remembered that they were playing away from home. On their own beath, they will be worth watching at a later date!

RESULTS:

ST. JIM'S .. 4 ROKWOOD .. 2
Talbot, D'Arcy(2), Merry, Dodd, Silver.

Teams.—St. JIM'S: Wynn; Fliggins, Kerr; Redfern, Noble, Lowther; Talbot, Levison, Merry, Blake, D'Arcy. ROKWOOD: Kroll; Raby, Conroy; Cook, Silver, Doyle; Mornington, Lovell, Dodd, Newcome, Grace.

BAGSHOT .. 2 ABBOTSFORD 1
Fankley, Putter, Fene.

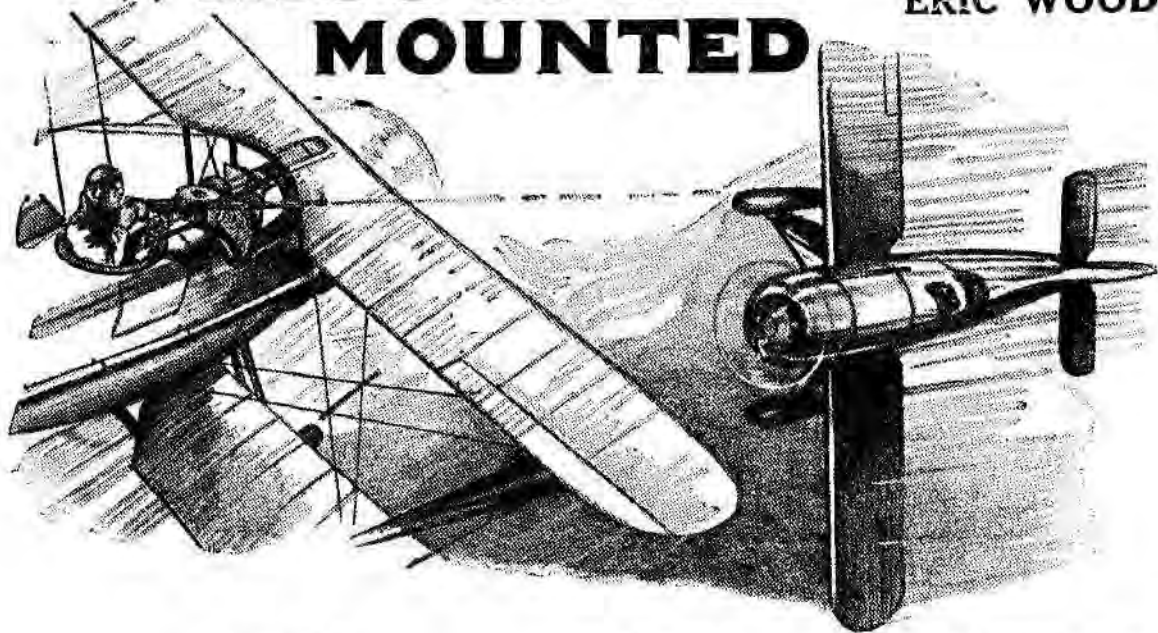
BANNINGTON .. 1 REDCLYFFE 0
GRAM. SCHOOL 1
Denver.

CLAREMONT .. 3 HIGHCLIFFE 4
Baxter(2), Merivale, Courtenay(3), De Courcy.

ST. JUDE'S .. 0 RYLCOMBE 2
GRAM. SCHOOL 2
Gay, Monk.

"WINGS" OF THE MOUNTED

By
ERIC WOOD



CHAPTER I.

The Message!

JIMMY WELFORD, dubbed "Wings," of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, gave his plane, the Sky Queen, the gun when he was a thousand feet above the gleaming railroad lines.

"Three hundred miles to go, and no time to make it in," he gritted, as the machine roared westwards from Edmonton. To have followed the railroad would have meant a much longer journey, but Wings Welford relied upon his instruments for a straight flight towards Prince George.

There was need for speed.

Less than ten minutes before the Mounties' radio station had caught the S.O.S.

"Line dynamited hundred m. east of Pr. Geo. Hold—"

That was the message. Meagre though it was, and incomplete, as well as unsigned, it could mean but one thing. The railroad line had been blown up a hundred miles east of Prince George by bandits. A phone call to the railroad officials at Edmonton had established the fact that the call must have come from a trans-Continental train, whose time schedule would have taken it to that locality at the precise time.

"Carrying mail from Prince Rupert—and bullion," was the information given the Mounted.

"We can get almost two hundred per out of her," Rawlings bawled through the telephone to Wings.

"And in an hour and a half," came back from Welford, "the bandits can make a clean-up and a getaway. Especially if they tumbled to what the radio operator was doing before they—er—stopped him. Gun all right? Mine is."

Rawlings chuckled as he swivelled his machine-gun.

"Moves like a pendulum," he replied; and then the pair fell silent. Wings had long since swung away from the track, and was now driving along an unseen trail of air over mountains and valleys, plains and forests, in and out, over and under cloud masses.

"Doing well," said Welford presently. "That's Mount Robson on our left."

Rawlings grunted as he looked at the majestic, towering

mass nearly fourteen thousand feet high, snow-capped and ice-rippled.

"Better edge back to the track, Wings," he said. "Won't be long now before I'll be able to take ahead observation."

"In ten minutes," came from Wings; and the plane's tail went down as the machine went for the ceiling and topped and crossed the mountain range. The wind seemed like solid ice through which the Sky Queen roared her way, but a drop into the valley brought them into warmer atmosphere.

"Hey—there's a plane ahead—coming towards us!" Hal Rawlings suddenly shouted into his telephone. "Wonder who she is?"

"Dunno!" said Wings crisply. "But—get ready, Hal—you never know."

"Meaning it's maybe an air-bandit—coming to fight us off?" queried Hal.

"Wouldn't be our first air-bandit, would it?" chuckled Wings.

"No," Rawlings agreed. "But say, Jimmy, if this is a bandit ship it wouldn't come to meet us, supposing it's got the bullion!"

"We're alone," said Wings, "but that doesn't mean the bandits need be. Why not that they've got a plane to act as scout—and fighter—while they're getting

out the stuff? Why not that?"

"Why speculate?" countered Rawlings. "We'll soon know for sure!"

Both Mounties were watching the approaching plane, and Wings was also taking the Sky Queen higher. If this were an enemy machine, then it behoved Wings to have the advantage of height.

"She's going for the sky, too, Hal," Wings told Rawlings—"which looks significant."

"Sinister, you mean," came from Rawlings. "Gee! he exclaimed. "She's a climber, and then some!"

Wings Welford didn't answer. He had seen that the other plane was a quick climber. There were two reasons for sending his own machine up—one, to see whether the other would do the same, and, secondly, to have the advantage. If the stranger did the first, then, Wings argued, it would suggest evil design. If she were an outlaw her markings would be faked if present, or might be absent altogether.

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**The Flying Bandit made a smash
And grab raid on a train!
But Wings of the Mounted came
along
And grabbed and smashed his plane!**

"Awkward!" gritted Wings to himself, as he saw the stranger still climbing. "I can't attack on a mere assumption because she's going up. I've got to wait for her to attack—if she intends to."

There was no mistaking the terrific effort of the stranger to get higher than the Service plane, and it was soon evident to the Mounties that she was going to win.

"We've got to find out what she's at!" Wings called to Rawlings. "We can't beat her to height, so we must take a chance. Willing? Ready?"

"Jump to it!" snapped Hal, and the Sky Queen leapt forward instead of trying to take invisible hurdles.

The stranger plane was some two hundred feet higher when the Sky Queen zoomed on, and it was significant that she ceased climbing immediately. Also, she turned a point which brought her so that she would presently be riding directly above the Service machine.

Now Rawlings was able to see that she was bare of markings. That meant something illegal, without doubt; but was it justification for spewing steel-jacketed bullets at her?

The question was answered for Rawlings. Only a second had passed since Wings had come to his decision; and now the stranger was very close—so close that the storm of fire that broke from a machine-gun in her fore cockpit tore holes in the Sky Queen's wings!

"That's enough!" snapped Welford, and rolled for the clear. That roll was what Rawlings wanted. It gave him a wide arc for his swivelled gun, from which burst deadly gusts of bullets into the plane which roared by close overhead.

The stranger returned the fire, but without effect, because her pilot perforce had to bank to come round and back to the fight. Like water from a hose, Hal's bullets streamed into her wings and raked her body. Then he was "blind," and must wait until Wings could get him into fighting position again.

As the rogue plane banked Wings gave his own machine the gun, dropped her tail, put her nose in the air, and climbed again for height. He had taken the risk of being beneath the stranger, and had so far come through. Now he snatched at the chance which the enemy's banking gave him—snatched at it and stole vertical yards of possible advantage. As he went up he was aware of the chatter-chatter of his chum's gun, and knew that Rawlings had come out of the blind spot. Hal was spewing lead again, now up at the enemy, now directly across, and now—down at him!

Bullets splattered the Sky Queen at the same time, and a section of the coaming of Hal's cockpit was ripped off and flicked across his face above his gun. It ripped the strap of his helmet, and for a split second Rawlings was blinded. A quick movement, and he tore off the helmet altogether and was firing again, but only for a few seconds. In that short time Wings had climbed and come directly over the tail of the enemy.

"I'm riding him down, Hal!" Wings bawled through the phone.

He put down the nose of the Sky Queen, and his gun, synchronised with the propeller, snapped its leaden rain. He was riding right over the enemy's tail, and had both men in her blinded!

The stranger pilot rolled for the clear—got clear, indeed—but futilely. His machine dropped into an air pocket, and dropped like a stone. Wings saw it, and thought that his fire had found a fatal spot. He followed, and entered the pocket. Then he knew.

Dread snatched at his heart. How deep was that pocket, and would the Sky Queen flop on to the enemy plane? Would they go down to destruction together?

The Sky Queen was out of control, just dropping! Wings saw the enemy plane bump—bump and shiver. Welford tried to pull the Sky Queen out, but could not get the controls to answer. It looked as if nothing could save him from crashing down on to the other when, with wings locked, they would crash together.

But miraculously the enemy pilot held his machine in hand at the bump. True, she went into a short tail-spin, but he got her righted as the Sky Queen plumbed the depths of the pocket, and Wings felt the ship answer to his call. He rolled the plane over, righted, and even-keeled her, then dived for speed—and laughed harshly as he saw that he was still riding the enemy's tail.

Zip-zip-zip! The steel-jackets burst from the synchronised gun in belated answer to a burst from the enemy's rear cockpit. Through his phone Wings had heard a cry from Rawlings, but had had no time even to turn his head to see what it meant. Just that cry, and then silence—not

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even the rat-tat of Hal's gun in the split second when he had had a clear field of fire.

Wings saw the holes that his bullets were flashing in the tail of the enemy, and he shifted position a shade to spray the spreading wings. Then he was nosing down at her again, and the enemy machine was striving valiantly to zoom to safety. But Wings Welford hung on, and the unmarked plane, willy-nilly, dived.

It was amazing handling on Welford's part. He kept in the "blind" spots of the enemy's gun-arcs, forcing down the plane as surely as if he were a weight on her. He could have released a bomb on to her, but refrained. He was no "killer." The enemy had fought bravely, and deserved a chance to live.

Wings wondered what had happened to Rawlings, yet dared not for one second take his strained eyes from the enemy.

Wings was not firing now. There was no need to. The enemy was going down, and could not fire at him. Once or twice, however, the pilot did try to roll away, and then Welford let him have it, just to make him obey the unvoiced command to land.

It was Hal Rawlings who brought unwanted disaster to the enemy. The cry which Welford had heard had been caused by a creasing bullet along the unprotected skull of Rawlings. It had knocked him temporarily senseless, and he had flopped forward and hung in his safety-belt. Not for long, however. The air rush revived Hal, and he came out of his swoon at a moment when the enemy pilot made one of his mad rolls. Unaware of what was happening, Hal Rawlings saw the tipped wing of the enemy, and automatically sprayed it with bullets.

The pilot wrenched his ship over too sharply, and stress wires that were already carrying too great a strain owing to others having been broken, gave way. The wing flopped over like that of a shot bird, and the plane went weaving down in a flat, horrible spin.

Hardly appreciating what had happened, Wings Welford followed, but presently zoomed the Sky Queen as he saw the enemy machine strike, and a burst of yellow flame leap into the air, followed by a terrific explosion.

"A pity!" he murmured. "Those poor devils are doomed!"

But not for anything would he grouse at Rawlings, for Welford realised something of the circumstances in which his chum had acted.

Then he had his machine bouncing and pitching, and then taxiing to a standstill. From their cockpits the Mounties sprang and raced towards the blazing plane.

"Impossible to do anything!" gasped Wings. It was not exactly a blazing plane they were looking at, but scattered fires.

"She had bombs aboard, and they went off," panted Rawlings. "Blown to bits, those fellows—poor devils!"

Wings did not answer, but he knew that his chum was right. A great pity was surging through him.

They raced from burning pile to burning pile, hoping against hope that they might find a living man to save. But they found none.

They stood to attention.

Crooks though those two men must have been, they had died fighting—and death is death.

"Come on, Hal," said Wings almost sobbingly. "We can't do any good; we must go on."

CHAPTER 2.

Victory!

THE Sky Queen, battle-scarred now, tore through the air above the gleaming streaks that were the railroad track. The keen-eyed Rawlings scanned the country through his powerful binoculars. They were not a great distance away from the scene of the hold-up, if that radio message had been right.

"Got it, Wings!" Rawlings yelled through the phone after a time. "Can see the train—like a kid's toy—stationary; no steam up. Give her the gun!"

Wings put his throttle wide open and nosed down a little for maximum speed. The Sky Queen's great voice roared.

Came presently to Welford Hal's voice:

"Gee, there's another plane there, Wings! Crowd of folk around it!"

Welford kept the machine going full out, and again Rawlings spoke:

"Men with guns covering the crowd round the plane; others loading stuff into her. Gunmen wearing masks, loaders not."

"Looks to me," said Wings, "as if the crowd and the loaders are passengers. Loaders being forced to do the job, the crowd around the plane in case we happen not to be the bandit machine. See the idea?"

"Sure thing!" was the answer. "We wouldn't be expected to bomb or fire at that machine with that bunch of innocent folk around her! What'll we do?"

"How many masked men?" Wings asked; and Rawlings, after another scrutiny of the nearing scene, told him:

"Four."

"Somehow," Wings went on, "those passengers and railroad men have been disarmed. First thing, therefore, is to give 'em weapons, eh?"

"Meaning throw 'em our Service revolvers," chuckled Rawlings, "on the chance they'll make 'em and use 'em? Gimme yours, Wings!"

Welford back-handed his revolver, and Hal made sure they were fully loaded, and that the safety catches were fixed.

"It means they'll have to take a chance of some shooting," Wings told him. "But I guess they won't mind that, with help near. I don't want the bandits to have an opportunity to take-off in the plane in the confusion there's going to be, so—"

"Say, Wings," cut in Rawlings, "they've picked us out for the Service ship, and are getting ready to make off! Lining up the crowd in two ranks, aiming to have them so as they taxi along, so that we shan't do anything. Got that crowd covered with machine-guns, of course."

"And the greater part of the loot aboard!" snapped Wings. "Listen, Hal! We'll use the windlass and cable we had fitted into this machine, and we're going to fish for that plane."

"I get you!" yelled Hal, and fell to work.

Above a trapdoor in the bottom of his cockpit was a windlass with a thin but very stout steel cable at present wound round it; the free end of the cable had a four-pronged hook.

Wings drove the Sky Queen madly, and so came close to the dramatic scene. Two lines of men—and women—stood forming a pathway, one-third the way up which rested a biplane. The Mounties could see the barrels of machine-guns poking out, covering the ranks of men and women. Three men who had been struggling with a heavy case had just jumped away, and as they were unmasked the flyers guessed them to be forced loaders. The case was in the plane, and there were other cases on the ground.

Wings saw a shivering motion on the part of the machine below, and knew that the engine had been started.

Welford had taken the revolvers from Rawlings, and now he sent them over the side, trusting that someone would have the intelligence to understand what was happening and the pluck to seize the weapons. At the same time Wings guided the machine into that living trackway, and dived for speed as well as lowness.

Hal Rawlings crouched, head out of the open trapdoor. Fifty feet of steel cable, hook-ended, trailed beneath the machine, and Hal gripped the wire just outside the trapdoor. Rawlings, thanks to straining and crooked neck, could see the enemy machine ahead and below—and the spurt of yellow flame that came from a machine-gun in her. He knew what that meant. The bandits were firing on the crowd, in the hope of making the Mounties give up the attack for the time being, at any rate. If the bandits but got a start and were in the air, they would at least stand some chance.

Rawlings gritted his teeth as he saw men stumble, following that spewed lead. Wings Welford felt a wild desire to open fire with his own gun, but held himself in; the living ranks were placed so close that there was a danger of hitting some of the people. As the gun below fired there was a break and a dash on the part of the passengers on that side, but the others stood pat, warned by the bandits that moving would bring a rain of lead at them.

The rogue plane began to move, going away from the Sky Queen. But the latter was travelling at terrific speed, and now Wings Welford had it as low as he wanted it—fifty

feet from the ground—the fifty feet of Rawlings' steel cable.

The four-pronged hook struck ground, and Hal yanked it up a little. The hook was heavy, and the weight of it kept the cable almost straight as it trailed in wake of the machine. Then came the critical moment. The Sky Queen was over the bandit ship, and Rawlings, head well down, was looking behind, his strong arm holding the cable.

The Service plane suddenly seemed to stand still—for a second. She shook terribly. Her tail seemed as if it must go down, but Wings Welford handled her magnificently. The hook had whipped up under the tail of the bandit machine—and Wings Welford had the Sky Queen's nose ceilingwards.

The grapnel from the Sky Queen hooked into the tail of the bandits' plane, and the plane hung nose downwards, its two guns belching sudden death into the crowd below!



The moment Hal saw the hook take the enemy ship, he let go of the cable, jerked up, and fixed the windlass, so that no more cable paid out. He looked upside—and gasped.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed, and well he might. For there was the plane hanging nose downwards! Nose downwards, as the Sky Queen raced through the air, and men and women were breaking away in all directions, because two guns in that rogue ship were belching leaden death at them!

Suddenly Wings Welford yelled through his telephone: "Let out more cable—pronto! As much as you like!"

Rawlings did not stay to ask why—he knew! Neither he nor Wings Welford had imagined the bandits would have recourse to what they were doing now—but they were intending, or trying, to take the Mounties to death with them!

Escape for the bandits was impossible. Capture meant imprisonment for most of them, death for some, if not all, if there had been killings in the hold-up. Therefore, they did not mean to be taken alive—if they could help it!

It was Welford who first realised their intention. When the hook up-ended the plane, he had imagined that the bandits would immediately cut off the engine. But, instead of that, as the Sky Queen began to soar, Welford realised that the hold-up pilot had opened out his engine.

The result was that his machine was dragging the Sky Queen down to earth. There would, unless it were averted, be a crash of the enemy plane, and the other machine would inevitably crash with it!

It was not a case of a straight-down fall, because the rogue plane was naturally trailing behind the other, but it was exerting a terrific downward pull on it. Wings levelled out, and the Sky Queen went forward, relieved of the strain of climbing.

Then Rawlings had slipped the clutch of the windlass, and, with a screech, the cable paid out, as the Sky Queen, still further eased, made speed. The manoeuvre caught the bandits unawares, and their plane dropped plummet-like.

Wings Welford circled as closely as he dared. He did not dare bank, but he wanted to come round. He did so, and the other plane executed weird movements, which finished in a bumpety-bump crash to earth.

Hal Rawlings acted swiftly. The cable had paid out completely, and, as Wings came round and over the wrecked plane, Hal unshipped the now sagging cable, and the Sky Queen zoomed away as an explosion occurred. The Service machine tilted as the uprush of air struck her, but Wings held her in control, and drove her to safety—and to a landing.

Out of the machine the Mounties leapt, and were racing towards the wrecked plane, for which train passengers also were making.

From out of it there came crawling a man—a man enveloped in flames. Terrible cries came from him as he rolled on the ground, and then Wings Welford had him, and was wrapping him in the flying tunic he had whipped off as he ran. Next moment Rawlings was there, too, and together they smothered the flames on the burning bandit.

"The sole survivor," murmured Wings, as they stretched the unconscious man on the ground. Men were valiantly trying to do something to save others of the crooks, but all unavailingly. Others were, more effectively, tackling burning cases and bags—the latter containing mails; the former, as the strange, spook-like flames suggested, holding bullion!

"What happened?" Wings Welford snapped the question at a mail-guard and an engine-driver.

They told him! A grim tale, indeed. The long train had been travelling at top speed when there had been a terrific explosion just ahead of it. The driver had just managed to

pull up to avoid running off the rails at the damaged section. He had not noticed, but others had, it seemed, that just before the thing happened there had been two planes flying low beside the train. When the latter pulled up, two men had taken the engine in hand, and forced driver and fireman to alight. Then the aeroplanes had flown back and forth above the train, while the fireman and driver were forced to go along it and tell passengers and crew to get out unless they wanted the flyers to rake the carriages with machine-gun bullets.

"We got to the mail-van," the driver told Welford, "just as Cornford, our radio-operator, was sending a message. The bandits shot him dead on the spot. We didn't know, and they didn't, what he'd been able to send. Then all the passengers were out, and disarmed—an easy matter, with those planes flying overhead, and us being threatened with death if every weapon wasn't flung down. After that, the bandits had the passengers ready to do unloading. There was delay, because Phillips, chief guard of the mail and bullion van, had flung the key away. It was a case of blowing it open, which the bandits did, while one of the planes set off east."

"We met her!" said Wings Welford grimly. "They guessed the operator had got something through, and as they knew there was a plane attached to the Mounted at Edmonton, reckoned on us coming along without delay. Yes, we met 'em, and—well, their ship and they are as badly off as this lot here."

"Any chance of getting a radio message through?" Rawlings asked.

"None," he was told. "They blew up the instruments, and they also had the telegraph-wires cut."

"All right," said Wings Welford. "We'll get on to Prince George, and take this bandit with us. We'll arrange for a hospital train to come out, and the breakdown gang. You need both!"

So the Sky Queen took the air again, still heading westwards. It unloaded its prisoner—who was still unconscious—and had sent help to the train.

As for Wings Welford and Hal Rawlings, who had saved the bullion and some of the precious mail—their exploit was entered laconically in the annual report of the R.C.M.P., amongst such items as the collection of taxes, and the arrest of a man who exchanged horses without telling the other fellow he was doing so. It was all in the day's work!

But Wings and Hal were well satisfied, for they had set out to get their man, and they had got him. They had not failed to uphold the great tradition of the Mounties, and it was that that mattered to them more than anything else.

(Gee! Isn't Wings a great guy? He's a regular knock-out wherever he goes! Don't miss next week's thrilling yarn of this flying Mountie and his pal.)

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