

WHO IS TOM MERRY'S DOUBLE? Read the long complete school and football yarn inside!

The GEM

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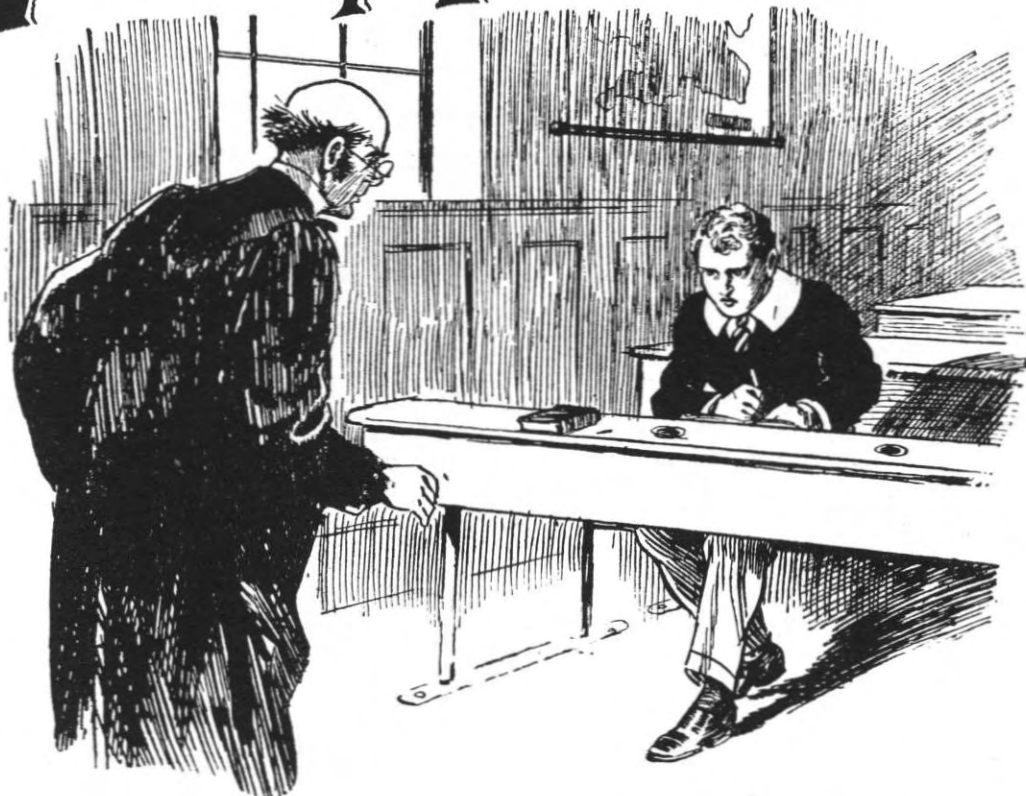
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HERE IS A SPARKLING LONG FOOTBALL STORY FEATURING—

TOM MERRY



CHAPTER 1.

Tom Merry's Team I

TOM MERRY stopped in the Hall in the School House at St. Jim's to put up a paper on the notice board. Several fellows who were standing near came up at once to look at the notice; for Tom Merry was captain of the Junior Eleven of St. Jim's, and the paper he had pinned upon the notice board contained the list of the players in the morrow's match with Frampton Fliers.

"Hallo!" said Gore, the first to arrive on the spot. "Where have you put my name?"

"Nowhere," said Tom Merry cheerfully. "You're not playing."

"What! I told you I could play to-morrow!"

"Yes, you told me you could play," said Tom Merry serenely; "but I've watched you at practice and come to the conclusion that you were mistaken."

There was a chuckle from the other juniors gathering round the notice board. Mellish read the names out in order.

"Wynn; Kerr, Herries; Manners, French, Pratt; Figgins, Blake, Merry, Lowther, D'Arcy. Why, my name's not there, Tom Merry!"

"Go hon!" said Tom Merry.

"And where's mine?" asked Walsh excitedly. "Do you mean that you are going to play that ass D'Arcy instead of me, Merry?"

"Certainly, as he's a better player."

"Better rats! That tailor's dummy!"

"My dear Rid, he can run you off your legs, tailor's dummy or not. When I found you smoking yesterday I knew that you wouldn't do. A forward wants wind, my dear fellow, and you've got none—nothing but gas."

"Look here, Tom Merry—" began Gore, Mellish, and Walsh in chorus.

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"Well, I'm looking," said Tom Merry, "and I can see three silly duffers. If you want to play for St. Jim's juniors you will have to mend your ways. I don't think anybody can deny that that eleven represents the best material to be found in the Shell and the Fourth Form and in both Houses."

"That's it; you've shoved in five New House bounders, instead—"

"Instead of favouring the School House because it's my own House!" exclaimed Tom Merry scornfully. "Well, I'm not likely to do that. I tell you, whether you like it or not, that if there were ten better players to be found in the New House than in the School House, I'd play a wholly New House team. So you can put that in your pipe and smoke it!"

"Bravo, Merry!" said a deeper voice behind the juniors; and they turned to see Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, looking at them. "That's the right sentiment, Merry. This is not a House affair; but the team that goes to Frampton to-morrow will represent all St. Jim's, and every player should be picked strictly upon his merits."

"That's what I've tried to do, Kildare," said Tom Merry.

"I know you have, Merry." The captain of St. Jim's ran his eye over the list. "And I think you've succeeded, too," he went on. "I couldn't suggest an improvement. As for you grumblers, you ought to know better than to find fault with a football captain's selection. If a captain played every fellow who thought he ought to be in the team, the match would be like an old-fashioned Rugby team, with a side of fifty or sixty. You ought to know better!"

And Kildare, with a severe look at the grumblers, walked away.

"That's all very well!" said Gore discontentedly. "But look here, Tom Merry—"

But Tom Merry had walked away, too.

The group of juniors remained before the notice board.

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

the SECOND!

By

Martin
Clifford.



passing comments favourable and unfavourable on the selected team, according to their views on the subject.

Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy, the chums of the Fourth, came along and read the notice with much satisfaction. Gore was holding forth on the subject in a loud voice.

"Even if they left me out of the front nine," he said, "for the sake of putting in that fellow Blake in my place, that's no excuse for leaving out Mellish on account of that utter ass D'Arcy."

Blake and Herries chuckled. Gore had his back to D'Arcy, and did not know that the swell of the School House was near at hand.

"What does D'Arcy know about football?" exclaimed Gore. "You'll see him turn up at Frampton in a fancy waistcoat and an eyeglass, you mark my words!"

"Oh, weally, Goah!"

But Gore was too excited to notice the mild, remonstrating voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Nice sort of fellow to represent St. Jim's juniors on a football field!" went on Gore, with a contemptuous sniff. "That silly tailor's dummy, without a mind above fancy waistcoats! Why, any fag out of the Third Form could wipe up the ground with him! He's no good, silly ass!"

"Goah, I wefuse to be chawctawised as a silly ass!" exclaimed D'Arcy indignantly.

Gore heard him this time and turned round.

Arthur Augustus jammed his eyeglass into his right eye and regarded Gore with a stare of the most supreme scorn.

"Hallo! You're here!" said Gore, with a sniff. "You've heard your character, then! Do you really think you are fit to represent St. Jim's on the footer field?"

"If I did not weally think so, Goah, I should not give Tom Mewwy permish to put my name down as a membah of the eleven," said Arthur Augustus with stately dignity. "I wegard all your remarks as impertinent in the extweme, and I should immediately pwoceed to administrah a feahful thwashin' for your cheek, but that I wegard you with pwofound contempt, Goah!"

"You—you tailor's dummy—"

Arthur Augustus, with his beautiful waistcoat, his nicely creased trousers, and spotless collar, certainly bore some resemblance to the object Gore compared him with. But, none the less, the comparison roused the indignation of the swell of the School House.

**Tom Merry is a bright young lad,
He's got himself a Double!
And the Double comes in useful
When Tom lands himself in trouble!**

"Goah, I object to such an oppwobwious epithet, and unless you immediately withdwaw it I shall stwike you!"

"Strike away!" said Gore scornfully. "You couldn't lick one side of me!"

Arthur Augustus rushed forward with a most warlike look, but Blake and Herries caught him by either arm and dragged him back.

"Welease me, Blake!" said D'Arcy, struggling. "Welease me, Hewwies! I insist upon bein' immediately weleased to punish the insolence of that wottah!"

"Don't be an ass, Gussy!" said Blake. "You're not going to fight the day before the match. You can lick him on Saturday night if you like."

"Yah, coward!" said Gore provokingly.

Arthur Augustus turned crimson with indignation.

"Do you hear what he's callin' me, Blake? I insist upon bein' weleased! I will give him such a feahful thwashin' that—"

"No, you won't!"

"Welease me, Blake, or I shall no longah wegard you as a fwient!"

"Go hon!" said Blake. "Don't be an ass, Gussy! Can't you see that that rotter only wants a row so as to make you unfit to play to-morrow? Do you think we could take you along to Frampton with a black eye and a double-sized nose?"

"Yaas—yaas, but weally—"

"As for you, Gore, if you pick a quarrel with any member of the team," said Blake, looking rather savagely at the cad of the Shell—"mind what I say—we'll give you such a licking that you won't get over it for weeks! I know your little game, and you're a rotten cad!"

"Are you looking for trouble?" said Gore, rolling back his cuffs. "Come on!"

"No, I won't come on," said Blake. "I'll give you a licking after the match to-morrow if you give me any of your cheek, though!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "Goah, I wefuse to fight"

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with you. You are not worth it. But if you are impertinent I shall thrash you to-morrow aft the match."

"Right-ho!" said Herries. "And look here, Gore, another word and we'll all three take you by the neck and give you the hiding you're asking for!"

Gore scowled sullenly. But he knew that the chums of Study No. 6 were not to be trifled with, and he said no more, but walked sulkily away with Mellish.

"Weally, that fellow is a wotten wascal," said D'Arcy, as he walked out into the quad with Blake and Herries. "I did not think what he was up to, you see, deah boys, or I should not have allowed him to pwovoke me. You know, I get into a feahful wago when I am pwovoked."

"Yes, I know you're a terrible fellow, Gussy," said Blake. "A terrible ass, at all events."

"What did you say, Blake? I stwongly object—"

"Hallo! Look at Figgins & Co.!" exclaimed Blake, ruthlessly interrupting the swell of St. Jim's. "I say, kids, we ought to be on in this scene."

It was a cold winter afternoon. Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn of the New House were punting a ball about on their side of the quadrangle for exercise, with a number of other New House juniors. Blake was on the warpath at once. On the morrow afternoon School House juniors and New House would be united to do battle with the Frampton Fliers. But to-day they were at war; for the rivalry of the two Houses at St. Jim's seldom slept, and never for long.

"Come on, kids!" said Blake. "We're in want of a little exercise, and we're going to have that ball away from Figgins & Co."

"Right-ho!" said Herries heartily. "Come on!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The three juniors broke into a run. They passed Tom Merry, who was talking to Manners and Lowther, his chums in the Shell.

"Come on, kids!" called out Blake.

"What's the game?" cried Tom Merry.

"On the ball!"

The Terrible Three understood. They were after Blake in a moment, and the six of them came with a rush into the midst of the New House juniors.

CHAPTER 2.

An Unexpected Goal.

FIGGINS, Kerr, and Wynn—otherwise known as Figgins & Co.—were all in the team that was to represent St. Jim's on the morrow, and they were three of the best junior footballers in the school. They were punting an old football about in the quad to fill up a spare ten minutes and to keep up their form by a little exercise, and had for the moment forgotten the existence of the School House. The rush of the rival juniors came as a surprise.

Tom Merry was the first of the School House party to reach the ball, and he took it away from Figgins' foot in the neatest way in the world. Figgins glared at him speechlessly for a moment, and then tore off after him.

But Blake gave him his shoulder, and Figgins sprawled in the quad, and Kerr and Wynn piled up over him in their hurry. Tom Merry was off with the ball, and the School House juniors, with yells of triumph, bore it away towards their own side of the quadrangle, passing it to one another in fine style.

There was a rush of juniors to the scene to join in the fun. Figgins & Co. were upon their feet in a twinkling, and tearing in pursuit.

"Stop 'em!"

"Give us our ball!"

"Yah! Thieves!"

"Burglars!"

"School House cads!"

"Stop 'em!"

"Yell away, my pippins!" said Blake. "We've got the ball!"

But Figgins' long legs covered the ground like lightning. He came driving through the thick of the School House juniors, and ran neck and neck with Monty Lowther, who happened to have the ball. A heave of his shoulder sent Lowther out of his stride, and Figgins captured the ball.

"Got it!" yelled the Co. "Pass, Figgy, pass!"

Tom Merry and Blake were rushing at Figgins. But Figgins gave a powerful kick before he could be dealt with, and the ball sailed over the heads of the juniors and dropped fairly at the feet of the Co.

Kerr had it in a moment and dribbled it away towards the New House in splendid style. In a moment the whole pack was streaming after him. Tom Merry came up with Kerr, and was about to hook the ball away when Kerr passed to Fatty Wynn, who rushed it on.

At that moment a tall, thin figure in cap and gown came out of the New House and stood regarding the boys with an eye of extreme disfavour.

It was Mr. Ratcliff, the master of the New House.

Unlike Mr. Railton of the School House, Mr. Ratcliff was down upon the rivalry between the juniors of St. Jim's with a heavy "down." He would have had all the boys submissive and quiet and shivering in the presence of their elders if he could have had his way. He couldn't, and that fact made him sour. A row between the rivals of St. Jim's always aroused his bad temper, which, indeed, needed little rousing.

"Ha!" he exclaimed, as he looked at the scene of somewhat rough but perfectly harmless frolic. "Ha! More youthful horseplay and savagery! If I were Head of this school I would put all this down with a hand of iron. But I will certainly not allow the boys of my House to turn the quadrangle into a bear garden. Boys!"

Mr. Ratcliff's thin, sour tones were not likely to be heard in the din of tramping and shouting, and his words passed unheeded.

"Boys!" shouted Mr. Ratcliff angrily.

But still no notice was taken. The New House master advanced into the quad with a frowning brow and shouted at the top of his voice.

"Boys! Stop that horseplay instantly!"

Tom Merry had just put on a spurt and overtaken Fatty Wynn. Fatty Wynn was a first-class goalkeeper, but in the forward line he was badly the thing. Tom Merry had the ball from him with hardly an effort, and dribbled it round the New House fellows who tried to intercept him, and started towards the School House again. There was a rush to stop him.

Mr. Ratcliff was unheeded. The New House master waved his hands and shouted:

"Boys! Stop this instantly!"

Biff!

There was a wild tussle raging round the ball. Tom Merry was surrounded, and the ball suddenly flew from a press of excited juniors—from whose foot it was impossible to see—and it whizzed right at Mr. Ratcliff. And before the Housemaster realised his danger it had plumped upon his nose with terrific force.

Mr. Ratcliff staggered back and back and back, and finally sat down upon the lowest step of the New House.

"My word!" gasped Figgins. "It's Ratty, and you've got a giddy goal on his proboscis, Tom Merry!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Ratcliff sat on the stone step, looking dazed. The ball had been in a very muddy condition, and a great deal of the mud had been transferred to the countenance of the New House master. Mr. Ratcliff was scarcely recognisable as he sat there. The juniors did not wait for him to rise. They melted away from the scene like snow in the sunshine. "My word!" said Mr. Ratcliff in a mumbling voice.

"What has happened? I have been assaulted, struck in the face in a violent manner. So it has come to this!"

He rose from his sitting posture.

The football was lying at his feet, and there was not a junior to be seen in the quadrangle.

"So it has come to this!" said Mr. Ratcliff, fairly stuttering with rage. "We shall see—we shall see! Ah, Mr. Railton—" He broke off as the master of the School House came in sight. "Mr. Railton, will you stop a moment?"

"Certainly!" said the School House master, stopping. "Dear me! What has happened? Your face is smothered in mud!"

"I have had a football kicked in my face, Mr. Railton."

"Impossible!"

"You see for yourself. I should have considered such a happening impossible if—in short, if it had not actually happened."

Mr. Railton looked at the New House master, and then at the football lying in the quad, and he had to be convinced. "This is a serious matter," he said. "I can only hope that it was an accident."

"It was not an accident, Mr. Railton. It was a deliberate outrage!"

"You saw the boy who did it, then?"

"No, I could not distinguish him among the rest. But I will find out, Mr. Railton—I will find out. He shall be punished!"

"He should certainly be punished severely if he committed such an act purposely," said the master of the School House warmly. "I hope it was not a boy of my House."

"I cannot say, but I shall discover, and if it should prove to be so—"

"Of course, I should leave this punishment in your hands, Mr. Ratcliff."

"Thank you, Mr. Railton. That is what I expected."

The School House master passed on, looking troubled. He

could have said no less, but he was not easy in his mind. Mr. Ratcliff had made himself very unpopular at St. Jim's, and especially in his own House, by ill-timed severity and his cold, hard nature. It was in all probability a New House boy who had landed that unlooked-for goal, Mr. Railton thought. But it might be a School House fellow, and the occurrence annoyed Mr. Railton extremely as he thought of that possibility. He prided himself upon the discipline of his House, and the act, if deliberately committed, was one of outrageous insubordination. Mr. Railton wore a worried look.

Mr. Ratcliff went into his House to clean off the traces of the accident. He was determined to probe the affair to the bottom, and to find out the name of the boy who had kicked the ball.

He lost no time about it. When he was once more

"Honour bright, Monteith," said Figgins earnestly. "We were all struggling round the ball to get it, and T—the fellow I am speaking of—kicked it to clear, and didn't know in the least that Ratcliff was coming up. If Ratty hadn't shoved his long nose into what didn't concern him he wouldn't have got it biffed."

"Well, if it wasn't a New House boy, that settles it as far as I am concerned," said Monteith. "I won't mention to Mr. Ratcliff that you know who it was, or you'd find yourself in hot water for not telling."

And the prefect returned to make his report to Mr. Ratcliff.

"Ha!" ejaculated the New House master, with his sour smile. "So it was a School House boy! Figgins says he is sure of that, Monteith!"

"He says he's certain it wasn't a New House boy, sir."



Arthur Augustus rushed forward in a warlike attitude, but Blake and Herries pulled him back, while Gore looked on with a sneer!

presentable he called the prefects of the House into his study, and told them to make inquiries. Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, went straight to the study of Figgins & Co. He found them in a state of merriment, which confirmed his suspicions.

Figgins & Co. had come in to tidy themselves for afternoon school. They became instantly and almost preternaturally grave at the sight of the prefect, but it was too late. Monteith looked at them gravely.

"Which of you biffed Mr. Ratcliff with the football?" he asked, coming directly to the point.

"None of us, dear boy," said Figgins.

The prefect hesitated.

"I don't think you would lie about it, Figgins."

"You know I wouldn't."

"Well, then, who did it?"

"It wasn't one of us, Monteith, and, what's more, it wasn't a New House fellow at all. It might have been just as easily, though."

Monteith laughed.

"Yes, I think I know exactly how much of an accident it was, Figgins."

"It comes to the same thing. I guessed it, and I think I would be safe in saying that it was either Tom Merry, or Blake, or perhaps Lowther. We shall see."

The prefect left the study. Mr. Ratcliff was wanted a few minutes later to take his class, the Housemaster being also Form master to the Fifth. But while he was snapping at the Fifth that afternoon, Mr. Ratcliff was thinking of the occurrence in the quadrangle, and wondering how he could discover the culprit.

If he could have heard a whispered conversation in the Fourth Form room he would have been enlightened. Little Mr. Lathom, the short-sighted, big-spectacled master of the Fourth, was quite unaware that Figgins & Co. and Study No. 6 were exchanging confidences under his very nose.

"How's Ratty?" asked Blake, as Figgins dropped on to the form near him. "Has he got over that smite yet?"

Figgins grinned.

"He's inquiring all through the New House for the chap that biffed him."

"It was Tom Merry, wasn't it?"

"Yes; he kicked the ball, but, of course, it was an accident. He didn't know that Ratty was just coming up with his long nose."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "It was certainly Tom Mewwy, for I saw him. He had just pushed me out of the way in a decidedly wude and wuff mannah. As I stopped to adjust my collah I saw him kick the ball, and then Mr Watcliff shwicked out. I gweatly weseented Tom Mewwy's conduct, for he made me twead on somebody's foot, and—"

"So it was you, was it, fathead?" growled Kerr.

"Eh? Was it your foot I twod on, Kerr?"

"Yes, it was; and it wa my ankle you biffed your great hoof against, fathead, and you've given me a twist I may not be abli to ge' over by to-morrow."

"I am weally exwemely sowwy. You see, I lost my footin' when I was pushed, and I had to knock against somebody. It was fortunato you were there, Kerr, or I might weally have fallen to the gwound."

"I wish you had, ass."

"I stwongly object."

"I say, is that right about Kerr's ankle?" asked Blako anxiously. "Is he hurt?"

"Yes," said Figgins, with rather a long face. "I hope it will pass off in time for the match to-morrow, though. Kerr somehow twisted his ankle when he fell, I think, through Gussy knocking him over."

"It weally wasn't my fault, and I hope Kerr does not—"

"Oh, that's all right," said Kerr. "One expects to stand a knock or two in a football scrimmage. I'm not complaining. Only it will be deuced awkward if I can't play against the Fliers to-morrow."

"Yaas, wathah! We weally can't spare you, Kerr."

"That's true," said Blako. "I admit that there isn't another fellow up to taking Kerr's place at back, even in the School House. I hope it will be all right to-morrow morning, Kerr, old chap."

"Oh, I hope so. If not, you'll have to take Jimson, and I'll come in the charabanc as a beastly spectator," grunted Kerr.

"Hard cheese. I—"

"You are talking, boys," said Mr. Lathom at last, awakening to the fact that a conversation was being carried on under his nose. "I insist upon silence in the class."

So the discussion ended. When the Fourth Form were dismissed Mellish nudged Blako as they went out of the class-room.

"I say, Blako—" he began.

Blako stopped, and regarded him with an eye of disfavour. He did not like the cad of the Fourth.

"Well, what do you want, Mellish?"

"Nothing. Only I heard what you and Figgins were saying—"

"You generally contrive to hear what's not intended for your ears, Mellish."

"Oh, don't get ratty! Of course, I don't intend to give Tom Merry away, though he has treaed me badly over the Frampton match."

"If you gave him away we'd give you a licking that would last you a very long time."

"Of course. I don't mean to do so. But I say—"

"Oh, rats! Don't say it to me," said Blako; and he walked away, leaving Mellish considerably out of humour.

"Hallo, Mellish!" said Gore, slapping the junior on the shoulder.

The Shell were coming out of their class-room, and Gore stopped to speak to Mellish. "What's the trouble? What are you scowling about?"

"Oh, nothing!" said Mellish. "It would serve those cads right, though, to spoil their little game for to-morrow."

Gore started, and an eager look came into his eyes.

"What do you mean, Mellish?"

"Oh, nothing!"

"Could you do it—what you just said?"

"Perhaps I could, perhaps I couldn't."

"Come over into the tuckshop, will you? Dame Taggles has got in a fresh lot of jam tarts, and they're prime."

"Right-ho!" said Mellish, with great alacrity.

Gore did not question him again till they were seated in Dame Taggles' tuckshop, and discussing half a dozen really good jam tarts. Then he resumed the topic.

"Look here, Mellish, what's the game? You said you could upset them for to-morrow? They've left us both out of the team, and made us look fools to all the fellows. I had counted on a place, and told several fellows I was playing forward. I've been chipped like anything since Tom Merry put up the notice on the board."

Mellish grinned. He knew that Gore had counted his

chickens too early, and had had to take the natural consequences.

"Oh, it's nothing to snigger at!" growled Gore. "As a matter of fact, you're in the same boat. Now, how can you spoil their game to-morrow?"

"Oh, I shouldn't like to do it, you know! If Tom Merry were kept in, St. Jim's would lose that match against the Fliers!"

"You couldn't get him detained?"

"Oh, yes, I could, if I liked!"

"How, then? Out with it, and don't beat about the bush!"

"Mind, I'm not going to do anything of the sort. But if I liked to tell old Ratty that it was Tom Merry who biffed him on the nose with a football—"

Gore gave a jump, and dropped a jam-tart on his waistcoat in his excitement.

"Do you mean to say that you know that, Mellish?"

"I heard Blake and Figgins saying so. They saw him."

"My hat! If Ratcliff knew—the old brute would have Merry detained to-morrow afternoon on purpose. I know him! He kept Figgins in once on the day of an important fixture, as a specially big punishment. He knows how to hit harder than a cane. Is that what you were thinking of?"

"Yes. If he didn't think of it himself, a hint would be enough, and he would jump at the idea."

"Good!" exclaimed Gore. "You're a genius."

"But, I say, Gore, I'm not going to sneak," said Mellish.

"Mind, nothing in the world would induco me to give Tom Merry away to old Ratty."

"Oh, I know that!" said Gore contemptuously. "You'd rather somebody else took the risk."

"Er—not at all! Er—no!" stammered Mellish. "Tom Merry's not to be given away, you know. I wouldn't say a word, and what I have told you is in confidence, of course. Though, to be sure, if Tom Merry were left out, Blake would probably take his place as captain, and you'd get Blake's place. But, of course, we couldn't sneak."

And Mellish, with an extremely virtuous expression upon his face, finished his treat and walked out of the tuckshop. He knew that he left the matter in safe hands. Gore sat there for some time, thinking, with a very unpleasant grin upon his face.

CHAPTER 3.

Mr. Ratcliff Comes Down Heavily.

"PLEASE, sir—"

Mr. Ratcliff gave a start and looked down. He was walking in the quadrangle at St. Jim's, with a thoughtful and moody frown upon his face. He was thinking of the occurrence of the afternoon, when a form loomed through the dim winter dusk, and the low voice broke in upon his meditations. He looked down and recognised Gore, and came to a stop.

"Do you wish to speak to me, Gore?"

"Yes, sir, if you please."

"Well, say what you have to say, and be done," said Mr. Ratcliff snappishly. "What is it? What are you mumbling about?"

Gore looked round nervously. No one was visible in the dusk, and both Houses were hidden from sight by the gathering mists of the winter evening.

"If you please, sir, it's about what happened this afternoon."

Mr. Ratcliff started again.

"Can you tell me anything about that, Gore?"

"I could, sir, only—if the fellows knew of it they would call it sneaking, and I should get a fearful time of it," faltered Gore.

The Housemaster understood. His steely eyes glinted.

"You may speak to me safely, Gore. I should certainly not disclose the name of my informant in a case of this kind."

Gore breathed a little more freely. He had fully made up his mind as to the course he intended to take; but it was the first time he had ever actually sneaked, and he was not quite sure of his ground. But he thought he knew Mr. Ratcliff's nature pretty well, and the Housemaster's reply showed him that he was not mistaken.

"Thank you, sir! I shouldn't like to act the part of a sneak, and if you think I ought not to tell you—"

"I decidedly think it is your duty to tell me who was guilty of that outrage, Gore, if you know the name of the guilty party. I will see that you do not suffer by it."

"Thank you, sir! I did not see it done, but Tom Merry will not deny it if he is asked— There, I have—"

Mr. Ratcliff snapped his teeth.

"So it was Tom Merry."

"Oh dear, I hope I have done right in telling!" said Gore. "Of course, suspicion rests on all the fellows till he's found out, and so he ought to own up. If he don't own up I ought to give him away, oughtn't I, sir? He served me a trick something like that once."

"You have done quite right, Gore."

"Yes, sir. Of course, I haven't done this because I dislike him; and I should be very sorry if he were detained to-morrow, and prevented from playing in the Frampton match."

"Ah!" murmured Mr. Ratcliff. "The Frampton football match! Ah!"

"But it would really be only his own fault, and—"

"That is enough, Gore."

Mr. Ratcliff strode away. He went, not towards his own House, but towards the School House.

Gore followed him hurriedly.

"You—you won't let anybody know, sir, that—that—"

"Certainly not! You may be assured on that point."

And Gore, satisfied that his evil work was well done, disappeared.

Mr. Ratcliff entered the School House, and went straight up to Tom Merry's study. He opened the door without the formality of knocking, and entered.

The study presented a cosy scene. The Terrible Three usually had tea there together, and they were preparing the meal now. Tom Merry was toasting muffins, with a countenance crimsoned by the heat of the fire, and Monty Lowther was attending to the tea-kettle. Manners was opening a tin of sardines. The chums of the Shell looked very bright and cheerful, and the firelight made the room look cosy and warm after the cold and darkness of the quadrangle. But the scene was not in the least softening in its effects upon Mr. Ratcliff.

The three juniors looked up quickly as the Housemaster entered.

"Ah!" said Mr. Ratcliff, with a grim smile. "You are, doubtless, surprised to see me."

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry, with some spirit. "It is the custom in the School House for a master to knock before entering a room."

Mr. Ratcliff's sallow face flushed red.

"Do you dare to criticise my actions, Merry?" he asked harshly.

Tom did not reply. He was tempted to do so, and to speak the scorn he felt; but he held back the words from his lips. He turned to his muffin-toasting again.

"Stand up, Merry! I have come here to speak to you, though I have no doubt that Manners and Lowther are equally guilty."

Tom Merry stood up, with a look of wonder and uneasiness on his face. It seemed impossible that Mr. Ratcliff could have discovered who had kicked the football, yet his manner seemed to imply as much. His next words removed all doubts on that point.

"Merry, you were in the crowd that behaved disgracefully, like a set of hooligans, in the quadrangle to-day."

"I was in the crowd, sir," said Tom Merry. "But I did not behave disgracefully, and I saw no one else do so."

And Manners and Lowther gave a very audible murmur of approval.

"Don't dare to bandy words with me, boy!" exclaimed Mr. Ratcliff harshly. "You were there—you do not deny that?"

"No, sir, I do not deny anything that is true. I was there, certainly."

"And you kicked the football into my face?"

Mr. Ratcliff's steely eyes were glittering with triumph. He knew that Tom Merry would not tell a lie, so if the accusation was true, there was no escape for the hero of the Shell.

Tom Merry bit his lips.

"I kicked the ball, sir, certainly; but its striking you was quite an accident. I did not know you were there."

"I do not believe you, Merry."

Tom flushed scarlet. It was with great difficulty that he held back the hot and indignant words that leaped to his lips.

"But whether you are speaking the truth or not," said the master of the New House, "it is of little moment. The fact remains the same—you were indulging in violent horseplay in the quadrangle, and you kicked a football into my face."

"It was an accident, and I was sorry it happened."

"Doubtless!" sneered Mr. Ratcliff. "I can quite understand that you are sorry, but your sorrow is probably caused by fear of the consequences."

Tom threw up his head proudly.

"I am not afraid of the consequences, sir, whatever they are!"

The New House master smiled grimly.

"Good! I shall not cane you, Merry, or send you to the Head to be flogged. I must bear in mind the fact that you state the occurrence to have been an accident, and inflict a lighter punishment. I shall simply detain you for a single half holiday, and I hope that my leniency will have the effect of touching your conscience. You will be detained to-morrow afternoon, Merry!"

Tom's face fell.

When Mr. Ratcliff had commenced speaking of leniency he wondered whether his ears were deceiving him. But he understood now. Under a cloak of leniency, the spiteful man was giving him what he knew would be a harder blow than the severest caning.

"Oh, sir!" exclaimed Tom. "Not to-morrow afternoon!"

"Yes, certainly! Understand me, you are detained, and, in order that I may see that you do not leave the school, you will bring your work into the Fifth Form room, and do it there under my eyes!"

"It's the Frampton match to-morrow, sir."

"Is it?" said Mr. Ratcliff indifferently. "I take little interest in football. I have no more to say to you, Merry!"

He turned to leave the study.

"Stop a minute, sir! Couldn't you let me off to-morrow afternoon, sir, and make it Wednesday—or cane me—or anything but that? Frampton are a strong team, and I am captain of our side, sir, and I'm wanted there."

"Do not talk to me of these absurd trifles, Merry. You are detained for to-morrow afternoon, and that is an end of the matter."

"It is not the end!" flashed out Tom Merry. "You are not my Housemaster, and I shall appeal to Mr. Railton!"

(Continued on next page.)



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Mr. Ratcliff showed his teeth in a smile that was more like a snarl.

"I forgot to mention, Merry, that your Housemaster left this matter entirely in my hands, to deal with as I should think fit. If you need confirmation of my sentence you can appeal to Mr. Railton."

And the New House master strode away.

The Terrible Three looked at each other in blank dismay. Tom Merry laid down the muffin he had been toasting. Manners dropped the sardine-tin on the table, and the kettle boiled over, and the chums hardly noticed it.

The blow was a stunning one.

The match with Frampton Fliers was one of the most important of the junior fixtures of the football season at St. Jim's. Frampton was a town team, and, as a matter of fact, rather above the weight of a junior side, and St. Jim's required to put their very best men into the field and to play hard for victory to escape returning home defeated.

That Tom Merry was the finest junior footballer at St. Jim's, with the possible exception of Figgins, was hardly questioned in either House. Tom Merry was far from being conceited, but he knew his value to the side. It was not only the blow to his own hopes that hurt him; it was the knowledge that without him St. Jim's would have a hard struggle on the football field against heavy odds, with the almost certainty of defeat.

Manners and Lowther looked utterly glum. The match they had looked forward to as something like a certain victory was to be a certain defeat. St. Jim's had been beaten in the last two matches by Frampton. They had determined that the present match should show a change. But the same tale of defeat was to be told again.

"The hound!" broke out Lowther at last wrathfully. "The hypocritical hound! Leniency! He has picked on this because he knows it's the worst he can do!"

Manners nodded gloomily.

"It's just like Ratty!"

"It's rotten!" said Tom Merry slowly. "You know what it means to the side, kids. It's not that I care for myself; but it's pretty certain that Kerr won't be able to play now on account of his ankle, and Jimson will have to go in his place, and Jimson is not half as good. Now, if I am left out—"

"We shall want a new centre, and there isn't one to be had," said Lowther gloomily.

"Well, it's not as bad as that. Blake or Figgins could take the place; but we've got the best material we have in the team already, and if there's a place to be refilled it will have to be by second-rate stuff. Who is there? Gore, for instance."

"He would crack up in the first half."

"And he's about the best. He can play; it's his wind that's wrong. If I can't go he will have to be put in the team."

"You shall go!" exclaimed Lowther passionately. "That confounded brute shan't muck up the Frampton match! He's not our Housemaster. Appeal to Mr. Railton."

"You heard what he said."

"He may have been lying; he wouldn't be a bit above it!"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"He wouldn't be above it, very likely, but he wouldn't tell a lie that could be put to the proof so easily," he said. "Still, it may be of some use to speak to Railton. He may be able to persuade the beast!"

"It's worth trying, at any rate."

"Go and try at once," said Manners. "You will find Mr. Railton in his study at this time. Nothing like seeing about it at once. If he can't, or won't, do anything, we shall have to think of something else. One thing's jolly certain—that you're not going to miss the Frampton match to-morrow."

Tom Merry nodded, and, without speaking, left the study.

CHAPTER 4.

What's to be Done?

"LOOKS cheerful, doesn't he? Nice sort of expression for a football captain on the eve of a match!"

It was Blake who spoke, to Herries and D'Arcy, as Tom Merry passed them on the stairs of the School House.

Tom Merry did not smile.

"Anything up, old chap?" asked Blake, changing his tone. "You look as if you were going to a giddy funeral!"

"Yaas, wathah! I weally hope that you are not in any feahful twouble. Mewwy!"

"Oh, that's nothing—only Ratty has found out who kicked that goal this afternoon!" said Tom, forcing a smile.

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Blake gave an expressive whistle.

"Oh, he has, has he? And he's come down heavy. But you're not usually the sort of chap to make a long face about taking punishment. What is it—caning, flogging, lines, or something with boiling oil in it?"

"I'm detained for to-morrow afternoon!"

Blake's face at once became as lugubrious as Tom Merry's. "Detained for Saturday afternoon? What price the Frampton match?"

"I've got to cut it!"

"You can't! You shan't!"

"Not much!" said Herries. "You couldn't! You wouldn't!"

"Yaas, wathah! You won't, and you shan't! I mean—"

"That's what Ratcliff says, and he says that Railton is backing him up. I'm going to see if Mr. Railton can do anything for me."

"Ratty is doing this on purpose!" said Blake excitedly. "He knows all about the Frampton match, and he's glad of a chance to muck it up for us!"

"I know he is, the cad!" said Tom Merry. "He never liked football, and he always sniffs at anything healthy or manly, the beastly rotter! But I'd better go."

And he walked on towards Mr. Railton's study. He left the chums of Study No. 6 looking at each other in utter dismay.

"It can't be," said Blake. "It shan't be! It isn't that we couldn't get a captain for the side quite as good as Tom Merry—"

"Right-ho! I wouldn't mind—"

"Yaas, wathah! I would be vewy pleased indeed to take the lead, deah boys, and crush the Fwampton Fliers; but we can't spare Tom Mewwy ffrom the fwont line. It's not poss!"

"You—you asses!" said Blake witheringly. "I was going to say that I could captain the team every bit as well as Tom Merry, but we can't get a forward to replace him. There isn't such a sprinter, such a sure kick, in either House, except myself and Figgins. If Tom Merry is left out, it's as bad as if I were dropped—"

"Worse!" said Herries, who had an uncomfortable way of blurring out the truth. "Much worse, Blake; for, you see—"

"Yes, I see a confounded duffer!" said Blake, putting his hands in his pockets and walking away.

Herries stared after him.

"I say, D'Arcy, Blake looks quite luffy," he remarked. "You must have annoyed him by what you said just now."

"Ha, ha, ha! Yaas, wathah! Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry tapped at Mr. Railton's door. The deep voice of the Housemaster bade him enter.

Mr. Railton laid down his pen as Tom Merry entered and looked concerned.

Tom was not the fellow to look troubled for nothing, and the expression upon his usually sunny face surprised the Housemaster.

"What is the matter, Merry?"

"Can I speak to you a few minutes, sir?"

"Certainly! Go on."

"It's—it's about what happened this afternoon, sir," said Tom Merry, colouring a little. "We were kicking a football about in the quad with some of the New House fellows."

Mr. Railton's expression changed.

"Yes, I have heard about that from Mr. Ratcliff, Merry. Someone in the crowd kicked the ball in his face."

"It was quite an accident, sir."

"How do you know that?" asked the Housemaster, looking at him very keenly.

"Because it was I who kicked the ball, sir. I did not know that Mr. Ratcliff was there, and the ball struck him purely by chance."

"I believe you, Merry," said Mr. Railton, after a searching glance at the junior's face. "It was a most unfortunate occurrence, though Mr. Ratcliff seems to be convinced that it was done intentionally."

"I have assured him that it was an accident, sir. He says I am to be detained to-morrow afternoon as a punishment."

"Well, Merry, an afternoon's detention is surely not such a heavy penalty."

"But it's the Frampton match, sir," said Tom Merry eagerly. "I'm captaining our side, sir. If I'm kept in I can't go to the match with the Fliers."

"Ah, I forgot that!" said Mr. Railton, his face becoming grave. "That is very unfortunate. Is Mr. Ratcliff aware of that, Merry?"

"I explained it to him, sir."

"And it made no difference to his decision?"

"None at all, sir."

"I am sorry, Merry," said the Housemaster, with a troubled shade on his brow. "I left the matter in Mr.

Ratcliff's hands, and I cannot go back on my word now. It is impossible for me to interfere."

"I thought you might speak to Mr. Ratcliff, sir."

"I am afraid it would be of no use. It would be going back on my word. He has evidently made up his mind, and I am more sorry than I can say, as I know the importance of this junior fixture. I can only advise you to see Mr. Ratcliff in the morning, when he will probably think more calmly of the matter, and beg him to let you off."

"Thank you, sir," said Tom Merry.

He quitted the study with a heavy heart. He understood that the Housemaster could do nothing more for him. He did not resent that. But there was a fierce anger in his breast against the New House master.

"Well," said Blake, meeting him in the passage, "what did he say?"

"He can't interfere. He says I had better appeal to Ratty to-morrow."

"Much good that will do!"



The ball came whizzing out of the scrum of juniors and flew straight at Mr. Ratcliff. It hit him on the nose with terrific force, and sent him flying backwards!

"Well, I'll try. Anything's better than missing the Frampton match, even eating humble pie to that cad," said Tom Merry.

And Blake nodded a gloomy assent.

Tom Merry went into his study. Manners and Lowther looked up hopefully, but became downcast again at once when they saw the expression on Tom Merry's face.

"No go?" asked Lowther despondently.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"All the same, you shall go," said Lowther, setting his teeth. "But, I say, do you know how Ratty came to know that it was you?"

"No; I suppose he's been making inquiries."

"Somebody has sneaked, you mean."

Tom Merry gave start.

"Oh, I say! I don't think anybody would be so beastly mean."

"I don't know Gore would!"

"I hardly think so. Besides, he wasn't there at the time."

"He may have found out. He's cad enough to sneak, I believe. If you're really kept away from the match to-morrow afternoon—"

"Hallo! What's that?" said a voice at the door, and George Gore looked into the study. "Tom Merry going to be kept away from the match to-morrow afternoon?"

"I'm detained," said Tom, looking keenly at Gore.

"Scott! I'm sorry! That's too bad!" said Gore, but his eyes did not meet Tom Merry's. "Is it certain, Merry?"

"I'm afraid so."

"Well, it's bad for us, then. You'll want another forward. If I should be any good, you can call upon me if you like. I'm ready at any time."

"Thank you," said Tom Merry dryly. "I'll think of it."

"Who'll be captain?" went on Gore eagerly. "Of course, I shouldn't expect that—"

"Wouldn't you?" said Monty Lowther. "It would be like your modesty, Gore."

"Who's it to be, Merry?" asked Gore, taking no notice of Lowther's remark. "Blake or Figgins, I suppose?"

"Very probably," said Tom Merry.

"Unless they fight over it, as they very likely will," grinned Gore. "Come to think of it, it would be better to keep the peace by giving it to a third party."

"Well, there's Manners and Lowther," remarked Tom Merry. "You wouldn't have it, Gore, if that's what you're driving at."

"Oh—er—no! I didn't mean that. But—only—"

"And I don't think I should put you in the team, either. Somebody has given me away over this business to Ratty, Gore. Was it you?"

Gore tried to assume an expression of virtuous indignation.

"If you think I've been sneaking, Tom Merry—"

"I hate to think of it of any fellow," said Tom Merry quietly. "But somebody has. I don't accuse you, but it looks suspicious. Anyway, new arrangements in the team."

are not going to be made just yet, so it's no good talking about it."

"Oh, very well! But as I'm ready to play, and I'm in good form, I think I have a right to be considered, that's all," said Gore, and he went away with a dark brow.

"I believe it was Gore," Lowther said firmly.

Tom Merry nodded.

"More likely to have been Gore than anybody else, and it certainly was someone. But that is a minor point now. The question is—what's to be done? If Ratty won't relent when I ask him to-morrow—"

"Then you'll have to take French leave, that's all," said Monty Lowther.

The hero of the Shell smiled slightly.

"Do you think Ratty will give me a chance? I'm to stick in the Fifth class-room with him, so that he can keep an eye on me."

"The beast!" said Manners and Lowther together.

But beyond that tribute to the personal character of the New House master they had nothing to say, and the Shell went to bed that night with the matter still in doubt.

CHAPTER 5.

A Futile Appeal.

TOM MERRY awoke with a heavy heart on Saturday morning.

He was usually first up in the Shell dormitory, and bright as a lark in the early morning, but there was a difference on the morning of the Frampton fixture.

He rose quietly, and dressed himself with hardly a word. The thought of the afternoon's match was in his mind, and of the probable fortunes of the St. Jim's juniors if they went to the fight without their captain.

Manners and Lowther were equally glum.

The chums had looked forward to that match so much, and, for once, the St. Jim's juniors were in the very best of fighting trim and prepared to avenge their late defeats at the hands of the Frampton Fliers.

In the midst of their rosy hopes this heavy blow had fallen upon them.

It was cruel, and they could not help their thoughts about it being bitter. If Mr. Ratcliff had had anything of the sportsman in him, he would have spared the junior football captain that afternoon. But Horace Ratcliff was the last man in the world ever to feel or do anything like a sportsman.

Morning school was a bore to the juniors of St. Jim's. It often was, but more so than ever that day. All the School House boys knew of Tom Merry's detention, and it made them anxious about the match. And under the nose of Mr. Lathom, in the Fourth Form room, Blake imparted the lugubrious tidings to Figgins.

Figgins' face fell at once.

"Tom Merry's detained!" he repeated. "Detained for this afternoon! But it's the Frampton match!"

"That's why old Ratty has fixed on him."

"The—the brute! He shan't stay in! Why, that would make two of our best out of it, for Kerr can't come."

Blake gave a hopeless shrug of the shoulders.

"Is that certain about Kerr?"

"Yes; his ankle's swollen. He can come in the charabanc, and he can walk about, but he isn't fit to play against a girls' school. He's out of it."

"Jimson can take his place, after a fashion. But what are we to do without Tom Merry?"

"Blessed if I know!"

"Yaas, wathah! I should be quite weedy and willin' to captain the team in the absence of 'Tom Mewwy,'" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy modestly. "But that would leave a place in the forward line to be filled, and we weedy haven't the man, you know."

"Yes, I can see you captaining the team!" grunted Figgins. "You could captain a tailor's shop, I dare say, but—"

"What did you remark, Figgins? Did you—"

"Silence!" said Mr. Lathom.

The news of Tom Merry's detention was as dismaying to Figgins & Co. as to the School House fellows. To them it appeared that the Frampton match was destined to end in a third consecutive defeat for St. Jim's. It was too rotten for words, as Figgins remarked; but however the Co. turned it over in their minds they could think of no way out of the difficulty. They knew their Housemaster too well to think that he would relent.

Tom Merry was bent upon trying that forlorn hope, however. After morning lesson he made his way to the New House before dinner, and found Mr. Ratcliff had just come in from his class-room. The New House master glanced at

him sourly. Perhaps he guessed the boy's mission, for a glimmer of malice came into his hard eyes.

"Please, sir, can I speak to you for a few minutes?" said Tom Merry respectfully.

"Certainly, Merry! You may come into my study. Now, what is it?"

"It's about my detention, sir."

"Ah, yes! You will bring your work into the Fifth Form class-room. I have some writing to do this afternoon, which I intend doing there, and I can have the pleasure of your company. I shall expect you there immediately after dinner, Merry."

"Yes, sir. But, sir—"

Tom Merry hesitated. It went sorely against the grain to ask any favours at the hands of Mr. Ratcliff. Had he himself only been concerned, he would have bitten off his tongue first.

But he thought of his comrades, he thought of the hardest struggle of the football season in front of them, and of the colours of St. Jim's being lowered again to the enemy, of the team returning home defeated and dispirited.

And, at the thought, Tom Merry crushed down his own feelings, and went on to speak in a quiet voice, from which he tried to keep all trace of the indignation and scorn that were throbbing in his heart.

"I—I've come to make an appeal to you, Mr. Ratcliff, if you will listen to me."

The New House master glanced at his watch.

"I have two minutes to spare," he said coldly. "You are welcome to it."

Tom Merry's heart sank.

Mr. Ratcliff's manner was sufficient to dash any hopes he might have entertained. But Tom went desperately on:

"I don't think you understand, sir, how important that football match is to us this afternoon—"

Mr. Ratcliff shrugged his shoulders.

"No, probably not. I am not one of the masters who place football before more important matters," he said dryly. "I take little interest in it, and certainly less than I take in maintenance of discipline in the college."

"But, sir, if you will listen, this isn't an ordinary match. Frampton have beaten us twice, and we've been elogging at the game for weeks to get into form for giving them a licking this time. We're in good form, and we hope to win and uphold the honour of the school. We've already lost one man, as Kerr has hurt his ankle and can't play. If I have to stand out, too—"

"Are you so exceedingly valuable, in your own opinion, Merry—"

Tom Merry flushed scarlet.

"It isn't my opinion, sir. The fellows chose me as captain because they thought I could play. If I couldn't play I shouldn't be the junior captain of St. Jim's!"

"H'm! That is a question of no interest to me. I suppose all this is leading up to an appeal to be let off this afternoon?"

"Yes, sir. I am very sorry that accident happened, and I give you my word of honour that it was only an accident."

Mr. Ratcliff smiled sourly.

"That makes little difference. The incident should never have occurred. You were as much to blame, accident or not. I certainly shall not release you from your detention this afternoon. It would be a dereliction of duty to do so."

"If you would hear me, sir—"

The Housemaster glanced at his watch again.

"The two minutes are up, Merry. You may go."

"But, sir—"

"If you talked for two hours it would make no difference. I shall expect you in the Fifth Form room immediately after dinner. You may go!"

There was nothing more to be said. Tom Merry went from the Housemaster's study with a heavy heart.

Figgins & Co. were waiting for him in the porch of the New House. They looked at him with eager inquiry.

"He wouldn't let you off?" asked Figgins.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"The—the— But there ain't a word!" said Figgins. "What's going to be done? If you don't play, we're done. Frampton Fliers will walk over us!"

"You must put up a good fight, that's all. I'll look round for a substitute—"

"No, you won't! You've got to come! You must take French leave!"

Tom Merry smiled sadly.

"You don't mean to say you funk it, Merry?" said Figgins, in amazement. "I know it would mean a fearful row and a flogging in the Head's study. But the match is worth it. Any other fellow would stand the racket for the sake of the match."

(Continued on page 12.)

YOU'LL READ IT IN—



Address all letters: The Editor, The GEM, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

HALLO, chums! All fit and ready for another bumper number of the GEM? That's the stuff to give 'em! It's a good sunshine tonic, especially acceptable in these hard times, and well worth the twopenny you exchange for it. Last week I mentioned about the double length story which was so popular in our Christmas issue. I also hinted that there was another extra-long and extra-good St. Jim's story coming along very shortly. So there is! In three weeks' time exactly! How's that for a bit of good news? From cover to cover, then, with the exception of this chat, the "comic strip" and the short football feature which is proving so popular, the St. Jim's story telling of the adventures of Tom Merry will run. All of you fellows who have written in asking for longer Tom Merry yarns will whoop with joy. You others will whoop just as excitedly, believe me, for this coming story's extra special in every way. Don't forget, then, boys, it will be in the GEM in three weeks' time! Now for next week's number.

In the first place there will be a fine long complete tale of Tom Merry & Co., entitled:

"ST. JIM'S ON THE SPREE!"

This is a real treat of a story, showing Tom Merry & Co. in London. Don't miss it on any account. The same applies to the Rookwood story:

"LOVELL'S LOVE AFFAIR!"

which Mr. Owen Conquest has "delivered" with his usual snap and sparkle. Potts, the Office Boy, appears again in another "quick laugh," whilst this special corner, where we can pow-wow, will again be reserved for us. Then, to complete a really sound programme, you will find the opening story in a new series entitled:

"THE SKY RAIDERS!"

which tells of the strange adventures that befall two fellows who have a mania for exploring unknown planets. Don't forget to order your GEM early, chums

THE DOUBLE CHUTE!

"My controls are gone!" In a quite calm voice the pilot turned and gave his passenger the "bad news," and the said passenger, his thoughts immediately turning to the inevitable crash, shuddered as he looked at mother earth thousands of feet below. But he might have spared himself that unpleasant thrill, for even as the pilot spoke he pressed a lever. In response two small parachutes fixed in containers on the upper wing of the plane became filled with compressed air. These in turn released two larger parachutes, which filled out to enormous dimensions.

Slowly and safely the disabled aeroplane sank to earth, and but for a few harmless bumps on landing, sustained no damage. This parachute safety device is one of the latest things in "safety first" flying which was tried out recently in America, so timid aerial passengers need have no qualms now.

"MAN OVERBOARD!"

That's a cry which has startled many a passenger on ocean going trips. Often he has deplored his own inability to succour the unfortunate who has tumbled over the ship's side. But a French device has now been installed on some liners which enables the nearest passenger—be he man or boy, woman or child—to do something other than look on when that dread cry "Man overboard!" echoes along the ship's length. At intervals on the deck of the liners carrying this French invention are automatic lifebuoy projectors. At the touch of a simple trigger a cartridge is fired, and away goes a lifebuoy quicker than you can say Jack Robinson. In addition, an alarm bell sends out a shrill message to the ship's officer on duty immediately the trigger is pressed, thus eliminating delay in succouring the passenger who has fallen into the briny. If the automatic projector is used at night a capsule attached to the buoy ignites on contact with the water, and a bright calcium flare results. It's a clever device which will undoubtedly do a lot to reduce calamities at sea.

CHICAGO'S LATEST!

"Gee! Am I seeing things, or what?" That ejaculation must have flown to the lips of more than one resident of Chicago recently, with justification. In certain avenues of this famous city the authorities have just had erected a number of giant street lamps fashioned like human figures. Mounted on a pedestal, therefore, you may see a portly figure—about three storeys high—holding up a number of giant lamps. At a distance these unique lamp-posts look very strange, and unconsciously one's thoughts are apt to turn to real human giants at the first time of seeing them.

DAILY NIGHTMARES!

"Good gad! What is it?" Right well might the fellow who was gazing into the heavens gasp that. So would you. Imagine an animal, somewhat on the lines of the prehistoric mammoths we have seen in museums or read about, but about a hundred times bigger, sailing in the blue directly above your house or your garden. Would

you bolt for it? Quite likely; and you would have every excuse. I have just seen a picture of one of these freaks, and it gave me quite a turn, until I was told that it was only made of balloon rubber, and filled with helium gas. It's merely an American idea for stunt advertising. Freakish balloons of this type were recently paraded in the streets of Boston, and then let loose. Away they soared into the sky, looking fearful objects indeed. No news is yet to hand to say that umpteenth people have collapsed from heart failure at seeing these freaks rolling about in the sky, but that is a risk which the stunt advertisers appear to have overlooked. I am glad they don't advertise like that over here, anyway!

SUCH IS FAME!

I heard a good story concerning Captain Barnard, the famous British airman, the other day, which is too good to keep. He was one of the star guests at a dinner party given just after he had flown with the Duchess of Bedford to the Cape and back. In course of conversation a lady seated next to him asked the captain if he had ever flown. When he informed her that he had just made the double journey by air to the Cape and back with the Duchess of Bedford, the lady beamed. "Oh, indeed," was her comment, "then you must have felt quite safe in her hands!"

HEARD THIS ONE?

Father: "Tommy, did you ever hear of a fellow who suffered from imitating a good example?"
Tommy (brightly): "Yes, father! A coiner!"

HOW IT'S DONE IN THE PACIFIC!

The visitor to the island of Yap in the South Pacific was amazed. He had just heard a native bartering for an eighteen foot canoe and 10,000 coconuts. The deal was completed, and to the astonishment of the visitor two "coins" circular in shape, with a hole in the middle, were handed over to the seller. Nothing in that, you might feel tempted to remark. But wait for it! Each coin, if you please, weighed 120 pounds, which is as heavy as some fully grown men! Just imagine yourself hanking two or three of these "coins" to market—especially if the market were as distant as fifteen miles from your homestead. The idea of the holes in the centre of these strange coins is to enable the owner to slip a pole through them to facilitate carriage. Methinks we prefer the British method of pounds, shillings, and pence, after all!

TOO SAFE!

It was a jolly good safe, although it was thirty-five years old, and it held valuables worth something like £10,000. But the snag was that the owners of the safe couldn't open it when they tried. For a week their efforts were unavailing. So off they went and brought in five expert safe breakers. It took these fellows roughly twenty-four hours to open that obstinate safe, and because of the heat and fumes of the oxy-acetylene apparatus they were forced to use, the five were able only to work in shifts of twenty-five minutes. Even then the job was a ticklish affair, for one of the greatest difficulties was to prevent the heat of the metal from damaging the contents of the safe. Still, the experts got the better of that safe in the end and discovered that the cause of all the trouble was the breaking of a tiny spring!

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TOM MERRY THE SECOND!

(Continued from page 10.)

"And so would I, Figgy; and you know it. But it's no use. Ratty expects me in the Fifth Form room after dinner, and if I don't turn up he'll look for me. I should never be allowed to go!"

Figgins gritted his teeth.

"The beast! He thinks of everything! But we're not going to be done. If we all put our heads together we may think of something."

"Come up to my study, then. Blake and the rest are there, and we can talk it over. I don't see what's to be done."

Figgins & Co. went into the School House with Tom Merry. Kerr was limping a little. His ankle was swollen, not badly enough to prevent him getting about, but playing was out of the question. The Scottish partner in the Co. took it cheerfully enough, on his own account. He was more worried about the detention of the junior captain than about himself.

Study No. 6 were there, with Manners and Lowther, when the juniors came in. Tom Merry's expression was enough to tell them the result of his appeal to the New House master.

"What's to be done?" said Blake savagely. "I'd like to scrag Ratty! Figgy, what do you mean by having such a rotten, measly Housemaster?"

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard Figgins as bein' extremely wepwehensible—"

"Oh, don't rot," said Figgins. "The matter's too serious! I tell you what, kids! Tom Merry has got to come with us. We can't meet the Fliers with our best forward left at home."

"That's so," said Blake. "But how's it to be done? Ratty is going to keep him under his eye in the Fifth Form room."

"And there's no escape from Ratty's gimlet eyes," Lowther remarked.

"Weally, deah boys, I've thought of a weally wippin' ideah—"

"Get it off your chest, then, Gussy, and buck up!"

"I wefuse to be huwwied. I find bein' in a huwwy most exhaustin'. I—"

"Buck up, or shut up!"

"Weally, you are wude, Kerr. If you were not already injahed," said D'Arcy, "I should be greatly inclined to administrah a feahful thwashin'. But to come to the point—"

"Time you did!" growled Fatty Wynn.

"If you will intewwupt me, Wynn, I shall lose the thwread of my ideahs," said D'Arcy. "As I was sayin' when Wynn so wudely intewwupted me, my ideah is this: Why shouldn't Tom Mewwy buzz off at once on his bike, without waitin' for his dinner?"

"Can't expect a chap to do that," said Fatty Wynn, shaking his head. "It's asking too much of any fellow."

"He could take some sandwiches in his pockets, deah boy. Then he could get to Fwampton, and be there weady when we came up in the charabanc."

"And as soon as Ratty found he was gone he would be after him," growled Figgins. "He'd very likely come in our very charabanc with us to fetch Tom Merry back."

"Yaas; I certainly nevah thought of that—"

"Don't you start thinking at all, Gussy," said Lowther, in a tone of friendly advice. "You may break something in your head—if there's anything there. Now, you chaps, it's pretty plain that if Tom Merry bunks he will have to do it only just in time to get to Frampton for the match, or Ratty will be after him. It would make us look a lot of asses in front of the Frampton chaps if Tom Merry were yanked off the field in the middle of the game."

"Yaas, wathah! That's vewy twue."

"But if Merry leaves it until the last minute before he bunks, Ratty will have lots of time to follow if he cares to," said Kerr. "The game takes ninety minutes, and it wouldn't take Ratty half an hour to get over. He'd collar Merry out of the second half."

"Well, if we had Merry in the first half it would give us a leg up," Manners remarked. "It would be better than not having him at all."

"But you've forgotten," said Tom Merry quietly. "If I cut off at once, as Gussy suggests, I should be brought back before the match, and if I leave it till later I shall be in the Fifth Form class-room under Ratty's eye, and there will be no escape."

A silence fell upon the juniors.

The point was well taken. The dilemma was complete. There was no escape from it, and it seemed hopeless to attempt to think of one.

In the midst of the dismayed and troubled silence a curious expression upon Lowther's face attracted general attention.

Lowther first of all gave a start, then he wrinkled his brows in a thoughtful frown, and then his frown slowly changed to a grin. The grin became a laugh, the laugh extended itself into a roar of merriment.

His chums stared at him in amazement.

"What on earth's the matter with him?" exclaimed Figgins. "Are you ill, Lowther? Are you off your silly rocker?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What is it, Monty?" asked Tom Merry in surprise. "Blessed if I can see anything to laugh at."

"Ho, ho, ho!"

"Explain yourself!" shouted Blake, thumping Lowther on the back. "You silly cackling ass, tell us what's the joke before we jump on you."

"He, he, he!"

Two or three pairs of hands grasped the hilarious Lowther, and he was jammed against the door, and Blake knocked his head on the panels.

"Now, then, you howling idiot—"

"Hold on!" gasped Lowther. "Pax! Gently does it! I'll explain."

Tom Merry & Co. released him, but still regarded him with wrathful gaze.

Lowther gasped for breath, and put his collar straight.

"It's an idea," he said. "It's a— Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go on, fathead!"

"It's the funniest wheeze I ever— Ha, ha, ha! Ho, ho, ho!"

"Collar him, and—"

Potts, the Office Boy!



"Hold on! I'll tell you! It's a grand, ripping idea! Ha, ha, ha! I'll explain. Look here, Kerr's the chap to get us out of this difficulty."

"Kerr!" exclaimed half a dozen voices in amazement: and no one looked more surprised than the Scottish partner in the Co.

"How the dickens am I to get you out of it?" demanded Kerr. "Of course, I'd do anything; but what can I do?"

"Why, you asses, have you forgotten?" exclaimed Lowther. "The idea shot into my head all of a sudden, and I— Ha, ha, ha!"

"Explain!"

"Why, you know how Kerr makes up as other people; you remember his impersonations—he made up as Lathom, and took us all in; he made up as Herr Schneider, and once, as the headmaster of Rylcombe Grammar School."

"Yes; I know he did. But what about it?" demanded Blake.

"Oh, I see, wathah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "I see! Lowthah means that Kerr should make up as Tom Mewwy and come with us to Frampton, but that wouldn't do any good, Lowthah. I weally think that is a wotten ideah."

"Fathead! Of course, it's rotten; but it's yours, not mine."

"I object to bein' chawactewised as bein' a fathead."

"I'll tell you the wheeze," Lowther said. "You see, if Kerr can pass himself off as a man of sixty, he can certainly make up as a chap of fifteen, or thereabouts. Now he could make up as Tom Merry—"

"That was weally what I said, Lowthah, and I wegard the ideah as distinctly wotten."

"Ass! What I mean is—"

"I wefuse to be called an ass! I wefuse—"

"Shut up, Gussy! Go on, Lowther," said Tom Merry, rather excitedly. "I think I see the idea now. Go on, old chap!"

"Kerr can't come, anyway, on account of his busted ankle," said Lowther. "So it won't hurt him to stay behind. He can make up as Tom Merry, and be detained in the Fifth Form room by Ratty, and—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A roar of laughter shook the study.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, I think it's a pretty good idea," Lowther said modestly. "Tom Merry has got to turn up in the Fifth Form room after dinner. Well, his double turns up, and Ratty doesn't know the difference. You'll sit in the shady corner of the room, Kerr, and as for speaking—well, if you can imitate Lathom's voice, you can imitate Tom Merry's."

"Easily," said Kerr. "I can work the oracle all right, never fear."

Figgins gave Lowther a tremendous slap on the back.

"Splendid!" he exclaimed. "It's bound to succeed—and it's remarkable that I didn't think of it myself! Kerr will do the trick first-rate! I'd back him against any actor in London for impersonating anybody. And while he turns up in the class-room with Tom Merry's books—"

"While he's there, Tom Merry slithers off to Frampton. He can't come in the charabanc, of course, because he would be seen. That wouldn't do. He can leave the school quietly, without waiting for dinner, and get a lift on a bus to Frampton. There are plenty on the road on Saturday."

"First rate!"

"We'll take his things in the charabanc, of course. I'll shove them into my bag, and they won't be noticed. He joins us at Frampton, and plays with us there, and we lick the Fliers!"

"Yaas, wathah! We shall lick the Fliahs, deah boys."

"Meanwhile, Ratty keeps Tom Merry's double under his eyes in the class-room. He's satisfied, and so are we."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Gore, as he passed the door of Tom Merry's study, wondered to hear the thunderous peals of laughter that rolled from it.

CHAPTER 6.

Off for Frampton!

MR. RATCLIFF sat at his desk in the Fifth Form class-room at St. Jim's. He had come in as the clock struck the hour, and glanced round. Tom Merry was not present.

The brows of the New House master wrinkled a little. He considered it quite possible that Tom Merry would break bounds that afternoon for the purpose of attending the football match without leave, and if he did so, Mr. Ratcliff was quite prepared to act.

It would have pleased his mean nature to follow the hero of the Shell to Frampton, and order him back to St. Jim's after the match had started, and then to send him in to the Head to be flogged for disobeying orders.

But any anticipations of the kind that he was forming was suddenly scattered by the boy he was thinking of walking quietly into the class-room with his books under his arm. Or if it was not Tom Merry, it was so like him that no difference could be seen.

Mr. Ratcliff glanced at him viciously.

"I was beginning to think that you were not coming, Merry."

"Indeed, sir."

The junior spoke somewhat huskily, as if he had a slight cold.

"However, I am glad you have come. It saves you from a more severe punishment."

"Yes, sir."

"You may begin your work, Merry."

The junior went to his place.

There he sat down, opened his books, dipped his pen in the inkpot, and commenced to work.

Mr. Ratcliff, satisfied that his victim was safe, turned his attention to his own work. He had examination papers to prepare, which would occupy him all the afternoon, and it was no inconvenience to him to sit there like a cat watching a mouse for two or three hours.

Only the scratch of the pens broke the silence of the class-room.

Presently a step was heard in the passage, and Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, stepped into the room. The boy and the master looked up at the same time.

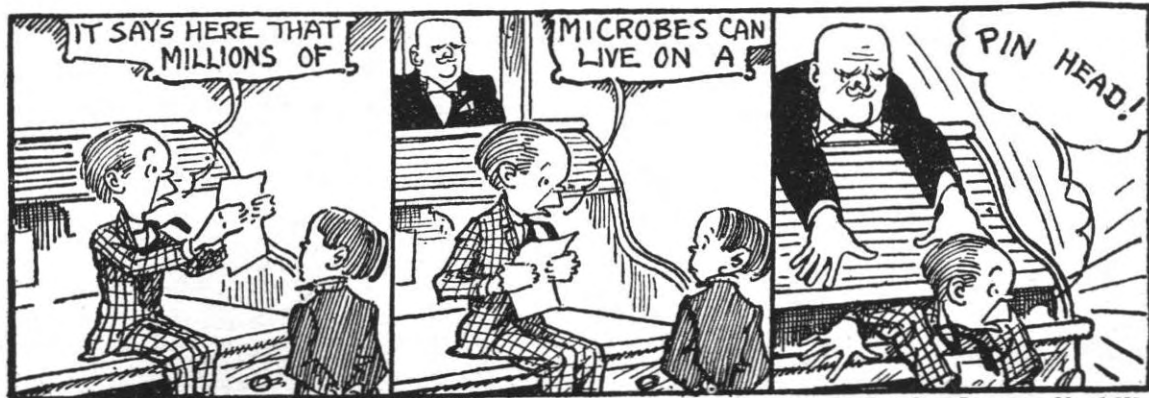
Kildare's blue, Irish eyes were glinting, but his manner was quite respectful as he addressed himself to Mr. Ratcliff.

"May I have a few words with you, sir?"

"Certainly," said Mr. Ratcliff, laying down his pen.

He knew what was coming, and he smiled in his hard

A Good Point!



way. He disliked Kildare, as he habitually disliked any open and frank nature, and he anticipated the pleasure of refusing a request.

"Merry seems to be detained for the afternoon. I have just heard so—"

"That is the case, Kildare."

"Mr. Railton tells me that the matter has been left in your hands, and, therefore, that any appeal must be made to you, sir. I venture to make an appeal. You do not know how important this football match is to the juniors, and I am sure you would not disappoint them if you knew how—"

"I am afraid I cannot agree with you, Kildare. The outrage to which—"

"That seems to have been accidental—"

"Accidental or not, it is all one. Such hooliganism is to be severely reprimanded—"

"I do not regard a scramble for a football as hooliganism, sir," said the captain of St. Jim's rather hotly. "It is good exercise, and keeps the youngsters fit."

"Ahem! I do not care to argue upon that subject. I am satisfied with my own opinion, and I leave you to keep yours. Have you anything else to say to me?"

"If you will be kind enough to pardon Merry, I will answer for his conduct—"

"I am afraid that I could not consider that at all satisfactory."

Kildare shut his teeth hard.

"Do you mean, sir, that nothing will induce you to be lenient on this occasion?"

"Yes, Kildare; it would not be consistent with my duty to be lenient, as I am bound, as a man in a responsible position, to put duty before anything."

"Then I have no more to say, sir," exclaimed Kildare, hardly concealing his disgust. "I am sorry not to have been able to help you, Merry."

"Thank you all the same, Kildare," said the junior.

Kildare gave a slight start, and looked more closely at the youngster.

The latter coloured slightly, and bent over his work.

A puzzled look came over Kildare's face for a moment, and a slight smile succeeded. But he said nothing. Without a word he walked out of the class-room and closed the door. The junior breathed freely again.

There was a good deal of noise in the quadrangle. The charabanc was about to start for Frampton, and the youthful footballers were taking their places in it.

With two exceptions they were as the list on the notice-board had specified the day before. Jimson was in the place of Kerr, disabled; and Tom Merry was not visible at all.

Gore was hanging about as the young players came to the charabanc, and he was puzzled and curious. He tapped Blake on the shoulder.

"I say, what's the game, Blake?" he demanded aggressively.

"Football," said Blake innocently. "Association rules—"

"I don't mean that," scowled Gore. "I mean, what are you up to? If Tom Merry isn't coming with you, who is going to take his place?"

"Nobody," replied Blake, as he climbed into the charabanc.

"Do you mean to say that you're going to play a team like Frampton a man short?" Gore almost shouted.

"I don't mean to say anything."

"Who's captain in Tom Merry's place?"

"Captain? Oh, Figgy's captain at present!" said Blake carelessly.

"Figgy's, are you going to play a man short?"

"What's it got to do with me?" demanded the chief of the New House juniors, as he tossed his bag into the charabanc and prepared to follow it.

"Why, you're captain, aren't you?"

"Certainly not. Lowther's captain." Figgy's jumped into the charabanc and took his seat.

Gore turned to Lowther.

"I say, Lowther, do you mean to say that you are going to play ten men against eleven of Frampton's?" he began. "You can't play ten men against such an eleven as—"

"My dear chap, it's nothing to do with me. Why don't you speak to the captain? Let go my arm. You're stopping me."

"Who is captain, then?" yelled Gore, red with rage. "Who is captain instead of Tom Merry, you beast? Who is it?"

"Why, don't you know? It's Herries, of course."

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"Herries!" Gore clutched Herries by the arm, as if determined that he at least should answer questions. "Herries, I am coming with you to Frampton to play eleventh man—"

"Better speak to the skipper about it, Gore," said Herries, shaking his head. "What's the good of talking about it to me? I'm only a back."

"Then who's captain?" screamed the infuriated Gore. "Where is he? Whom shall I speak to?"

"There's Fatty Wynn. Speak to him." And Herries joined the grinning footballers in the charabanc. Most of the fellows standing round were grinning, too. Some were in the secret, some were not. But Gore's excitement seemed very funny to all of them.

Fatty Wynn was clutched by Gore as he was stepping into the charabanc. Gore pinned him against the step and shouted his inquiry.

"Are you captain in Tom Merry's place, Fatty?"

"I wish I were," said Fatty. "I don't see why I couldn't keep goal and captain the team, too. Lots of



Gore went sprinting after the charabanc, shouting to the team to follow, however, was a volley of peas from the juniors!

fellows couldn't do it, but I think— Let go, ass! I want to get in."

"I'm coming as last man. Who's your skipper if Tom Merry isn't?"

"Oh, you'd better speak to Gussy," said Fatty Wynn, as he escaped from Gore's clutch, and jumped into the charabanc.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was the last of the team to enter the charabanc. He came up in his usual spick and span attire, drawing on a lavender kid glove.

Gore planted himself directly in his path.

"You captain the team in the absence of Tom Merry, I suppose?"

Gussy adjusted his monocle and looked at him.

"Answer me, you ass!" yelled Gore, shaking his fist in the calm face of the swell of the School House.

"I object to bein' called an ass. I distinctly——"

"Are you captain now while Merry's away?"

"Yaas, wathah! While Tom Mewwy is away, I natuwall take my place as head of the affair," said Arthur Augustus. "I don't know that I have weceived pweise instructions on the point, but it would natuwall fall to a fellow like me. Have you any wemarks to make on the subject, Goah?"

"Yes, I have. I'm coming with you. You can't play a man short against a team like the Frampton Fliers. I'm coming, do you hear?"

"Yass, wathah! I am not in the slightest degwee afflicted with deafness, deah boy. I hear you perfectly well, and should hear you with as much ease, and gweater comfort, if you did not woah at me like that."

"Look here, D'Arcy, it's time to start, and if you haven't an eleventh man, I'm coming. Do you understand that?"



The only reply he received, was a I

"Yaas, I compwehend perfectly. You can come to Fwampton if you like, Goah, and seo us thwash the Fliers——"

"I'm coming with the team, fathead!"

"Oh, no! Quite a mistake on your part, Goah. You are not comin' with the team, you know. Whatevah put that cuwious ideah into your head, deah boy?"

"You can't play a man short against the Fliers——"

"Certainly not. We are not going to, you know. Pway stand aside, deah boy, or I shall be compelled to wemove you frowm my path in a wuff mannah."

"Look here. If you're going to play a substitute, who's the man?"

"You are weally growin' quite a boah, Goah. Will you pway allow me to pass? With your permish I should like to get into the charabanc."

"Buck up there!" shouted Blake. "We're starting!"

"You hear, Goah? Will you kindly stand aside, Goah? I am wegweftfully compelled to insist upon your standing aside, deah boy."

"You won't get into the charabanc till you've told me——"

Jimson leaned out of the charabanc and caught Gore by the collar of his jacket behind. He jerked the cad of the Shell out of the way and sent him staggering.

Arthur Augustus placidly stepped up into his place.

"Off you go, dwiver!" he exclaimed.

The charabanc rolled off.

Gore ran after it, shouting.

"Stop, you cads! There's room for me, and——"

Several peashooters replied to Gore from the charabanc, and he stopped. He shook his fist after the charabanc as it rolled out of the ancient gateway of St. Jim's and took the road to Frampton.

CHAPTER 7.

The Frampton Match.

THE party in the St. Jim's charabanc was a merry one. That the trick would probably be discovered afterwards, and the boys concerned in it called to account, mattered not a whit to the enthusiastic young footballers.

They had something more important than that to think of now. The Frampton match was to be a victory instead of a defeat, if Tom Merry could lead them to victory; and they believed that he could. While the disguised Kerr sat under the watchful eye of Mr. Ratcliff, Tom Merry would be kicking goals for St. Jim's, and the reckoning might come afterwards. That did not matter.

The charabanc bowled merrily along the road.

Nearly a mile from St. Jim's a figure appeared in a gap in a leafless hedge, and there was a shout from the Saints.

"Good old Tommy!"

The charabanc came to a halt, and Tom Merry stepped in. His chums slapped him on the back till he was sore, and the charabanc continued on again towards Frampton.

"It worked all right?" asked Tom Merry, squeezing himself into a seat between D'Arcy and Figgins, his face all smiles.

"Like a charm," said Figgins. "Trust Kerr for a thing like that. He's doing your exercises in the Fifth Form class-room at this blessed moment."

"We'll give Kerr a feed for comin' to the wescue in this weally noble mannah," said D'Arcy. "Isn't that a good ideah, deah boys? If we beat the Fliers we'll give a feed in Study No. 6, with Kerr as the honahed guest of the evenin', bai Jove!"

"Good wheeze!" said Figgins, reaching across Tom Merry to give D'Arcy a slap on the shoulder.

It was a hard smack, and as Gussy moved at the same moment he got it in the neck, and gave a yell of surprise.

"Figgins, what evah are you stwikin' me for in that wuff way?"

"Oh, that's only a sign of approval!"

"Then I weally wish you would show your appwoval by punchin' somebody else in the beastly neck, Figgins, and soilin' somebody else's collah. I weally——"

"It's a good ideah," said Blake, interrupting Gussy. "Kerr is a brick. And we shall beat the Fliers, of course. Gore didn't know what to make of our starting a man short, Merry. He wanted to come on as extra man."

"Ha, ha, ha! I am glad he's not here," said Tom Merry. "I don't trust Gore, as a matter of fact, and it would be a sell to be given away at the last moment."

There were a good many of the juniors at St. Jim's following the charabanc on bicycles, but Gore was not among them.

The road, too, wa. pretty well sprinkled with walkers. Somp had started early, to arrive in time for the match; others only hoped to get in to see the finish. But pretty nearly all the Lower Forms at St. Jim's had resolved to be on the ground somehow or other, sooner or later.

"Frampton!" exclaimed Blake, as the charabanc rolled into a straggling country town. "We'll be at the ground in a few minutes now."

"Here they come!" yelled a voice a few minutes later.

And the charabanc rolled on into a field through the open gates, and the footballers from St. Jim's were on the ground of the Frampton Fliers.

The Fliers were there, waiting. The kick-off was timed for twenty minutes later, so the Saints were none too early. Young, the Frampton captain, welcomed the team heartily.

He was a big, sturdy fellow, as big as most of the Fifth at St. Jim's, and the rest of the team were well above the weight of the Saints. As far as size and weight went, the Frampton Fliers had an undisputed advantage. But in knowledge of the game, in skill in combination, Tom Merry hoped to pull ahead.

The afternoon was cold and fine, splendid weather for football. There was already a goodly crowd round the ground—villagers and country people, and friends of the Fliers. The crowd was added to every moment by fresh arrivals from St. Jim's.

Frampton Fliers were, as we have said, a town team. Young, the captain, was a solicitor's clerk, and there were several young mechanics in the eleven. They were fine fellows all, and played the game well, as St. Jim's knew by past experience. Some fellows, a little tinged with snobbishness, had sniffed when Tom Merry agreed upon the fixture with Young's team. But Tom Merry was always ready to answer for his acts with his good right hand, and so the sniffing was not done in his presence. As for Tom, he didn't care a rap who or what a fellow was so long as he played a straight and clean game.

"We're glad to see you here, Merry," said Young, as he shook hands with the St. Jim's captain. "We're going to do our best to lick you, you know."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Right-ho, old fellow! But you won't find it so easy this time. I warn you that we're out for scalps. But we shall see."

"Here's your dressing-room. Kick-off at three, as you know."

The dressing-room was, in fact, a tent, of none too large dimensions. But the Saints were there to play football, not to grumble at accommodation.

It did not take the Saints long to change. When they emerged from the dressing-tent they found the Fliers kicking an old ball about. The referee, a gentleman belonging to Frampton, looked at his watch, and the two captains tossed for choice of ends.

Young won, and chose the goal from which the wind was blowing. It was a pretty keen wind, too, and the advantage was a decided one.

There was a cheer from the Fliers' supporters round the ropes. The crowd in the field was thickening, and the top of the fence was lined with small boys.

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The teams went out into the field, both sides looking very fit. The disproportion in size was very marked when they faced each other, only Figgins on the visiting side being as big as the average Flier. There were few among the natives of Frampton, looking on, who did not expect the home team simply to wipe up the ground with the visitors.

Phoop! went the whistle, and the ball rolled from Tom Merry's foot.

The game started, and it was hard and fast from the start. Young knew very well in what lay the strength of his side, and he tried rushing tactics, and the weight of the Fliers told.

"Fliers" they were. But it was seen before long that they had not the speed of the St. Jim's juniors.

The fight went right into the visitors' half at the start, and the heavy Fliers drove it right up to the St. Jim's goal.

And Fatty Wynn, who had been slapping his thighs and his chest to keep himself warm, now stood alert and ready for business.

There were few junior goalkeepers to equal Fatty Wynn, and he was in his best form to-day. A tearing shot came in from Young's foot, and Wynn sent it back again, and it bounced in again from the head of the Frampton inside-right, and Fatty's fat fist plumped on it, and it went out to Jimson at back. Jimson cleared before he was rolled over by a heavy Frampton forward, and the ball came down to midfield.

Then the St. Jim's forwards had their chance.

Tom Merry was on the ball in a twinkling.

Away he went, with the field in pursuit, Figgins and Blake and Lowther well up with him to take a pass when required.

Now it was seen how the speed and nimbleness of the younger team more than compensated for the additional weight and age of the Frampton Fliers.

The St. Jim's forwards outran the Fliers with hardly an effort, but the home backs fell in towards the goal and stopped the run for a moment.

But Tom Merry passed to Figgins, who rushed the ball on, and got it through the halves, and then rolled on the ground with a couple of backs sprawling with him.

But Lowther was on the ball.

In it went with a whizzing shot that would have beaten many a goalie, but by luck more than anything else the Frampton custodian collared it, and hurled it forth in the same movement.

But Tom Merry was there.

As the ball came out Tom Merry leaped from amid the Frampton backs, and his head smote the ball, and it went in again almost before it was out.

The Frampton goalie was not quite prepared for that.

He made a hasty clutch, but missed, and the ball climbed up the back of the net, and there was a shout of amazement and admiration from the crowd.

It had been sharp work; but there was the goal, and the spectators from St. Jim's waved their caps and yelled in glad chorus.

"Goal!"

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Merry!"

"Bravo, Tom!"

And all joined in the cheering. The goalkeeper slung the ball out, and the teams walked to the centre. Figgins slapped Tom Merry on the back.

"Good old Tommy! What should we do if we had left you at home at St. Jim's?"

"Yaas, wathah! That was weally a vewy good bit of work, Tom Mewwy, and I have seldom done bettah myself," said Arthur Augustus.

Whereat Tom Merry smiled.

The teams were lining up again, and the cheers had not yet died away when George Gore came through the gateway into the football field, and mingled in the crowd.

"Good old Merry!"

Gore nearly jumped when he heard the ringing shout.

"What the dickens does that mean?" he muttered. "Merry! Merry is at St. Jim's! Are they all off their silly coconuts?"

He listened again, wondering if his ears had deceived him.

But there was no mistake.

"Bravo, Tom Merry!"

Gore felt as if his head was turning round. He had the best of reasons for supposing that the hero of the Shel' was still at St. Jim's. Yet here was his name shouted on the Frampton ground, coupled with ringing cheers.

What did it mean? What could it mean?

Gore tried to get to the ropes, but the crowd was thick, and it was not easy to get a front place. The game had

restarted, too, and the players were mingled on the farther side close to the touch-line, and not easy to distinguish.

"I say, was that a goal?" asked Gore of the nearest fellow, a Frampton mechanic. "I've only just arrived."

"That it was, sir," said the man. "And the finest goal I've seen for a long time. He went at it like a flying fish."

"But who kicked it?"

"He didn't kick it; he headed it in."

"Yes—yes, but who—who did it, then?"

"A chap named Merry, I think. I don't know him by sight; but he's a good-looking lad, and he's the school captain."

"But—but Merry isn't here. He can't be here!"

The man stared at him.

"Well, I only know what the fellows are saying. There are a lot here from the school, and they're all cheering Merry for the goal."

Gore turned away, gnawing his lip.

He looked round in search of a St. Jim's fellow who would be able to enlighten him. He found Walsh of the School House eating toffee and looking on from the top of a cart a little distance back from the crowd.

"Hallo, Walsh! I say, old fellow—"

"Hurrah!" shouted Walsh. "Tom Merry's got the ball! He's away! Run—run! Pass—oh, pass! There, he's done it! And Figgy's off! No, Young has robbed him of it!"

"I say, Walsh—"

"There goes Young over, with Pratt on top of him! Well done, Pratt! My word!"

"Walsh!" howled Gore. "Do you hear, you ass?"

"Hallo!" said Walsh, looking down. "Is that you, Gore? I didn't know you were coming."

"Oh, I camel!" growled Gore. "I managed to pick up a bus. What's this rot about Tom Merry being on the field? He's not here?"

"Isn't here? He's taken the first goal for St. Jim's—the first goal of the match, too, that's all," grinned Walsh.

"But he can't be here!" yelled Gore. "I tell you I looked in the Fifth Form room just before I left St. Jim's, to make sure that Merry hadn't hooked it—I mean, to see whether he had hooked it."

"And he had, of course?"

"No, he hadn't."

"Eh?"

"I tell you he hadn't. He was sitting at his desk writing, and old Ratty was there doing exam papers, and watching him like a cat."

"Off your rocker?" inquired Walsh pleasantly.

"I tell you it's true!" almost shrieked Gore. "You're all mad! I suppose they're playing a substitute for Tom Merry, and—"

"Think I don't know Merry by sight? You can see him from here, if you climb up."

"He's not there! He can't be!" growled Gore obstinately. But he climbed up on the cart to see for himself.

There was a good view over the heads of the crowd, and Gore had good eyesight. The sides had been engaged in a close tussle in mid-field; but now they broke away, and a nimble figure went speeding to the home goal with the ball at his feet.

Gore did not need telling who that was.

"Tom Merry!"

He almost hissed out the name.

Walsh looked at him with a grin.

"Do you believe it now, Gore?"

"I can't understand it. I tell you I looked into the Fifth Form room before I left St. Jim's, and Merry was there under Ratty's eye."

"Did you come straight here?"

"Yes; and nobody passed me on the road."

"Ha, ha, ha! I suppose you're dreaming! Tom Merry has been here from the start. I knew he was detained, of course, and he certainly didn't leave the school in the charabanc with the rest. I found him on the ground when I got here, and concluded that he had sneaked away before the charabanc started, and joined the others on the road."

"Yes—yes, but he was in the class-room—"

"Oh, rats to that! How could he be in the class-room at St. Jim's and on the football field at Frampton at the same time?" demanded Walsh.

Gore could not answer that conundrum, and he gave it up. He descended from the cart, and departed in search of information to clear up this amazing mystery.

He encountered Mellish in the crowd, and Mellish was able to enlighten him.

Mellish had first learned that Tom Merry was in the team when he arrived on the ground, and he had been amazed to see him there; but he had inquired, and

learned the truth from some of the Saints who were in the secret.

"Tom Merry's here, Mellish," said Gore. "And I looked into the Fifth Form room just before I left St. Jim's, and—"

"And saw him there?" grinned Mellish.

"Yes. What are you sniggering at? You look as if you knew all about it."

"So I do. Tom Merry never went into the Fifth Form room at all—"

"But I saw him—"

"You didn't see him; you saw Kerr!"

"Kerr!" almost shouted Gore. "Kerr! What on earth are you talking about? Do you think I don't know Kerr from Tom Merry?"

"Not when he's made up to imitate Merry!" grinned Mellish. "You know Kerr's old tricks—you remember how he impersonated old Latham—"

"Yes, yes; but—"

"Well, he's made up as Tom Merry, and is sticking it out in the class-room, while the real Merry is here playing against Frampton—see? And old Ratty hadn't any idea! Ha, ha, ha!"

"My hat!" said Gore. "I see now. What a nerve of Kerr. And what a row if old Ratty should discover the facts?"

"Yes," said Mellish, with a covert glance at his friend. "Yes, that's so. This rather spoils somebody's little game, doesn't it?"

"What do you mean?" asked Gore roughly.

"I mean that somebody—of course, I don't know who—but somebody must have told Ratty about Merry, and that's why he was detained. I don't care who it was, but the chap must be awfully disappointed to find Merry here, all the same. It will be lucky for Merry if the fellow, whoever he is, doesn't spoil his game yet."

"How could he spoil it?" asked Gore eagerly. "What do you mean?"

"Well, he could send a wire from Frampton Post Office, if he thought of it, and warn Ratty that Merry is here," sniggered Mellish. "Of course, it would be a caddish thing to do, and he very likely wouldn't think of it. But if Ratty got that wire, he'd come over her in the quickest possible time to fetch Tom Merry away."

Gore started.

"Of course, I don't suppose the fellow—whatever he is—would think of it," said Mellish; "and, besides, it would be horrid mean. Where are you going, Gore?"

Gore had suddenly turned away, and was striding towards the gate.

Mellish looked after him, with an ill-natured grin.

"I say, Gore," he called out, "aren't you going to see the match?"

Gore did not reply. He disappeared in a few moments; and Mellish turned to the football ground again, with a shrug of his narrow shoulders.

"I really think that Tom Merry will be sorry, in the long run, that he left me out of the team!" he murmured.

He watched the game. The tussle between the school and the Fliers was hard and obstinate. As yet no second goal had been scored. The school were fighting bravely against the adverse wind and the weight of the Frampton men. They held their own gallantly, and opposed skill and combination to the kick-and-rush business of the home team.

Close upon half-time, however, the Fliers succeeded in beating Fatty Wynn, and the leather lodged in the St. Jim's net.

There was a deafening cheer from the crowd.

"Goal!"

The score was equal. The whistle went for half-time, and the players retired for a brief rest.

(Continued on the next page.)

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Gore came on to the field again, and Mellish turned as he felt a tap on his shoulder.

"How does it go?" asked Gore.

"One all; but the wind will be behind our men in the second half," said Mellish. "St. Jim's will win—if Tom Merry is still here!"

"Yes," said Gore, with a grin, "if Tom Merry is still here!"

He said no more, but Mellish understood.

CHAPTER 8.

Bowled Out!—Kerr on His Mettle!

SCRATCH, scratch, scratch!

Two pens were scratching patiently away that Saturday afternoon in the Fifth Form class-room at St. Jim's.

Mr. Ratcliff, at his desk, was still busy with the exam papers, though every now and then he lifted his hawkish eyes to throw a glance towards the detained junior.

The latter was working diligently.

Mr. Ratcliff had expected to see many a sign of impatience and weariness, and of suppressed anger; but he saw only a junior diligently working, apparently thinking of nothing but of getting his exercises done in a creditable manner.

There was a knock at the door at last—at a quarter to four. Kerr, who, of course, knew the time of the kick-off at Frampton, knew that the first half would be just ending. How had the match gone? He would have given a great deal to know whether Frampton or St. Jim's was ahead at the interval.

As it was something like half-an-hour's journey to Frampton by the motor-bus, even discovery was not so dangerous now. If Mr. Ratcliff had found out the truth, and hurried off at that moment, there would have been only a quarter of an hour to play when he arrived there. In a quarter of an hour, then, all would be safe. Kerr thought so as he was looking at the time and the knock came at the door of the Fifth Form room.

It was the School House pageboy that entered. He had a telegram on a salver, which he presented to Mr. Ratcliff.

The New House master glanced at it and opened it. Kerr was looking at him carelessly, and he gave a start to see the look that came over Mr. Ratcliff's face.

"No reply," said the Housemaster, in a thick voice.

"Yessir," said the pageboy, and retired.

The door closed.

Mr. Ratcliff read the telegram again, and then fixed his eyes on the detained junior.

Then he read once more through the message from Frampton:

"Merry is here at Frampton. It is a trick."

There was no signature, but Mr. Ratcliff knew from whom the wire had come. It could only come from Gore.

Was it a hoax, though? Was it from some lad who knew that Gore had sneaked, and was inclined to play a joke on the Housemaster?

Merry was before his eyes, writing at his desk. How could he possibly be on the football field at Frampton?

"It is a hoax," murmured the Fifth Form master, "or else it is from Gore, and he is mistaken. There is Merry before my eyes. Yet—"

Mr. Ratcliff was of a suspicious nature. The telegram plainly stated that he was the victim of a trick, and he noticed that the detained junior had selected the desk where the least light fell, and had not once turned his face towards the window. He remembered the absence of impatience he had expected to see in the boy. He remembered many little things—yet Tom Merry had no double at St. Jim's. And the boy sitting at the desk there was Tom Merry, or his double!

What did it mean?

There was a trick somewhere. The Housemaster left his desk and approached the form where the junior sat.

"Let me see your exercise, Merry," he said quietly.

The junior felt a tremor run through him. He had been writing industriously, to keep up appearances, but his handwriting was nothing like Tom Merry's, and would not pass for Tom's to the most careless glance. He hesitated, and the Housemaster's suspicions strengthened. He picked up a sheet from the desk and looked at it. Then he looked simply stupefied.

He was not very well acquainted with Tom Merry's hand.

But the hand here he was perfectly well acquainted with, as it was the hand of a boy belonging to his own House, whose imposts he had read over—many a time and oft.

"Kerr!"

The junior sat dumb. He was discovered.

"Kerr! What—what—what is this masquerade? What—what—what!" Mr. Ratcliff was choking and spluttering with fury. "Kerr! Rascal! What—what—what—"

Kerr was looking at the clock. Five minutes to four. The interval was over, and the second half at Frampton had been going five minutes, if the teams had kept to time! Only ten minutes required to make all safe—and here was discovery!

"Kerr!" thundered Mr. Ratcliff, seizing the boy by his shoulder and shaking him violently. "Kerr! You young rascal! What does this masquerade mean?"

"If you please, sir—" stammered Kerr.

He was rather scared at the rage in the Housemaster's face, but he was not so frightened as he pretended to be. He wanted to gain time. Another ten minutes, and Tom Merry's team were safe to finish the match.

"If—if you please, sir, I—I—I—"

The Housemaster shook him till his teeth chattered.

"You are Kerr! You are not Tom Merry! You have made up in this way to deceive me! Where is Tom Merry? Where is he? At Frampton?"

"You—you're hurting my shoulder, sir, and you've made me bite my tongue, and—"

"Will you speak?"

"How can I speak when you have made me b-b-bite my t-t-tongue, sir? I—"

Mr. Ratcliff hurled the boy away from him and rushed from the class-room. He glanced at the clock, and knew that Kerr was trying to detain him.

Kerr staggered and fell heavily, striking his head on the floor.

He sat up, looking dazed. But he grinned.

"My word, if he's not off! I suppose he's going to Frampton to fetch back Tom Merry!" Kerr looked at the clock as he slowly rose to his feet. "Well, he'll have to buck up. It's half an hour to Frampton, and there's only thirty-five minutes more to play."

The Housemaster's footsteps had died away. Kerr looked out into the corridor, a thoughtful expression upon his made-up face.

"Suppose the match should have started late? Suppose we should want a goal to win in the last five minutes? Suppose he does it under the half-hour—"

There were a good many possibilities to be considered. It occurred to Kerr that the Housemaster might do the distance on his bicycle, and take a short cut through the lanes, and then he would gain a great deal of time. It all depended upon how determined he might be to stop Tom Merry playing in the match, and Kerr knew how strong was Ratty's determination. All the malice and spite of his petty nature were aroused. He would have fetched Tom Merry off the football field at Frampton if he had had to walk every yard of the way.

"Yes, by Jupiter, if he goes on his bicycle he'll dish us yet!" muttered Kerr. "Hang him! It all depends upon me now! What am I to do?"

There were no two ways about it. Mr. Ratcliff had to be

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stopped somehow, and Kerr had to stop him! How was it to be done?

The junior was making his way to his own quarters to get off his disguise. He thought deeply as he went. He gave a start as a sudden idea flashed into his mind. The New House was deserted on the fine half-holiday, else the pseudo Tom Merry might have been chased and collared as he raced through the New House corridors towards Figgins' study. But now no one was to be seen.

Kerr reached the study and ran in. To take a length of slim but strong cord from a locker and dart out of the study again with it was the work of a moment. A few moments more and he was outside Mr. Ratcliff's door.

Kerr slipped a noose over the handle of Mr. Ratcliff's door and tightened it without a sound. Then he drew the rope taut across the passage, and wound it round the opposite door-handle and knotted it there.

It was the work of a few moments only, but it made Mr. Ratcliff as helpless a prisoner in his bed-room as if the door had been bolted and barred.

Kerr, with a deep breath of relief, stood grinning. He knew that it was a risky business to fasten a Housemaster's door, but the whole affair had gone too far for retreat now.

He waited; but he had not long to wait. There was a sudden wrench at the rope. The Housemaster's door opened about half an inch, but not far enough for the occupant of the room to look out into the passage. Then it held.

Mr. Ratcliff evidently did not comprehend what was the matter. He thought that his door had become jammed somehow, and he pulled and pulled again. The door, of course, did not open. Kerr had no fear of the rope breaking. It had borne the weight of a junior in its time in a descent from a dormitory window, and it was likely to stand easily all the strength Mr. Ratcliff could bring to bear upon it.

The voice of the Housemaster, hoarse with rage, came through the keyhole.

"Is someone there holding this door?"

Kerr grinned, but he did not commit himself by replying.

"Who is there? Who is holding this door?"

Dead silence!

"Kerr! Is it you, Kerr? I will have you flogged—I will have you expelled! Rascal! Scoundrel! Open this door! Villain! Open this door!"

Kerr grinned silently. There was a fresh wrenching at the door. Mr. Ratcliff might as well have wrenched at the solid stone walls of St. Jim's.

He might, when he thought of it, succeed in attracting attention in the quad, from his window. But time was passing.

Kerr, realising that the enemy was safely trapped, hurried off to his own room, and soon divested himself of all traces of his disguise. Then he left the New House. He intended to get to Frampton now. There was nothing to stay at St. Jim's for, and the farther away he got from Mr. Ratcliff at the present moment the healthier it was likely to be for him. He could have cycled over, but the injury to his foot prevented him.

He limped to the main road and took the next bus, though without much hope of arriving before the match was finished. He would be in time, however, to warn Tom Merry that Ratcliff was on the war-path, and to save a scene on the Frampton field.

Meanwhile, Mr. Ratcliff, when he bethought him of his window, opened it, and yelled and raved for help, and at last succeeded in attracting the attention of Taggles, the school porter, who ascended the stairs of the New House to release him.

"Get out my bicycle!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff.

A few minutes later he was pedalling frantically away towards Frampton. If he were in time to drag Tom Merry ignominiously off the football field under the eyes of the Frampton fellows, that would be a consolation. But would he be in time? The St. Jim's clock chimed out the quarter-past four as he mounted his machine.

CHAPTER 9.

Ratty Arrives Too Late!

"GOAL!"

"Hurrah!"

The second half was being fought out gallantly. With the wind behind their backs, the juniors of St. Jim's had held their own bravely, and brought the tussle more than once right up to the home goal. But Young and his men were putting their beef into it, too, and the first goal after the interval was scored by a Frampton Flier. Frampton were one up! But that only added to the grim determination of the Saints, and they played up grandly.

And so when we look down upon the football field again it is to see the teams lining up after the fourth goal—scored this time by St. Jim's.

Two goals all!

And the game was drawing to a close now. Five minutes more—four minutes, three! Was it to prove a draw, after all?

"Play up, St. Jim's!"

"One more goal, Merry!"

"On the ball! On the ball, Frampton!"

They were going at it hammer and tongs now. Frampton Fliers had quite abandoned finesse. Kick and rush, rush and kick—that was their game.

"On the ball!" muttered Young. "One more goal!"

And his men tried to obey. But they were fighting with foemen worthy of their steel. St. Jim's were quite as determined as their opponents.

Tom Merry's face was set and determined.

"Play up!" he cried. "Play up for St. Jim's! On the ball!"

"Yaas, wathah!" gasped D'Arcy.

A Frampton back had sent the ball well down the St. Jim's half. Fatty Wynn ran cut of goal, kicked it up the field again, and it dropped right at the feet of the waiting Figgins.

Three Fliers were on Figgins in a twinkling, but not before he had passed the ball across to Tom Merry, who captured it and was away like an arrow.

Then was seen as pretty a bit of football as could be desired by the most ardent lover of the good old game.

The St. Jim's forwards broke away in line, passing the ball with the precision of clockwork, each parting with it at the last moment, in the nick of time, as it were. And that splendid run brought the ball right up to the home goal, with only the goalie to repel the attack; and Tom Merry, who had the ball again, kicked—a kick that might have baffled the custodian of many a League team.

The referee had his whistle to his lips.

There was a roar as the Frampton goalie was seen to clutch at the ball, miss it, lose his footing with the effort, and sit down. The ball was in the net, and the boys of St. Jim's round the ropes were yelling like maniacs.

"Goal, goal, goal!"

"Bravo, Merry!"

"Goal, goal, goal!"

The shrill note of the whistle rang through the roar of cheering. The game was ended, and St. Jim's had gained a narrow victory by three goals to two.

In a moment more the field was black with a surging crowd. In the midst of a wildly hurrahing crowd, St. Jim's juniors were escorted off the field and back to their dressing-tent. At the door they met an unexpected figure—Kerr.

"Kerr!" exclaimed Tom Merry, in amazement. "You here—"

"Somebody's given the game away," said Kerr hurriedly. "I was bowled out. Ratty's coming. I don't know where he is now, but he's certainly coming. I've got here just in time to see you kick that last goal. It was ripping!"

"Hurrah, hurrah!" the crowd were yelling. Caps and hats flew into the air, and the cheers were deafening.

But the faces of the St. Jim's footballers were serious.

"Ratty's coming!" murmured Figgins. "We must travel. We don't want a scene before the Frampton fellows. That's just what Ratty would like, to make us look asses. But he shan't have his way, the rotter. Kerr, old kid, see that the charabanc's all serene while we change. We've got to fly."

It did not take the St. Jim's juniors long to change. There was need for haste if the New House master was to be eluded.

Tom Merry hastily explained to Young, and said a hearty good-bye to the Frampton captain. In a very short space of time the St. Jim's charabanc was rolling away from the ground, with the victorious footballers in it, and Kerr with them.

"We'd better get off the usual road, or we shall meet Ratty," said Tom Merry. "Go round by the wood, driver. A little longer doesn't matter."

So the charabanc left the main road.

Ten minutes after it had left the Frampton ground a breathless cyclist jumped off his machine there.

"Are the footballers from St. James' College here?" he called out, addressing two or three loungers at the gate of the football ground.

"They're gone, sir."

"Gone?" Mr. Ratcliff ground his teeth. "Have they been gone long?"

"About ten minutes, sir."

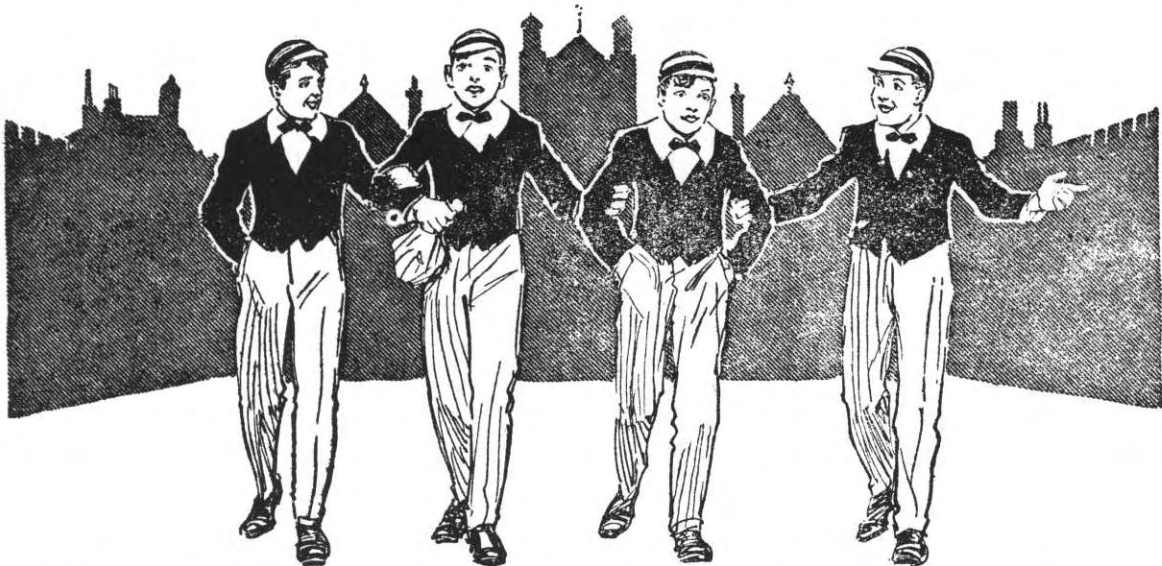
The Housemaster muttered something under his breath. There was nothing for him to do but to return, disappointed, to St. Jim's—which he did, in about the worst temper a man

(Continued on page 24.)

A SPLENDID COMPLETE ROOKWOOD YARN.

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TUBBY MUFFIN FINDS THE KEY—Not only to Dalton's desk, but also to the mystery of how Peele won the Howberry Scholarship!

CHAPTER 1.

Rawson Packs Up!

"ON the ball!"
 "Play up, Rookwood!"
 "Passed, Morny!"
 "Through with it, Silver! Shoot, man! Oh, bard luck!"

There was a murmur of disappointment from the crowd round the junior footer pitch as Jimmy Silver's stinging shot for goal was just saved by the opposing custodian.

The Rookwood Junior Eleven were playing Greyfriars, and with the score at 2-2, and barely ten minutes to go, both teams were straining every nerve to add another goal.

As Hazeldene, the Greyfriars goalie, cleared the ball, the spectators saw Dickinson of the Sixth, the referee, glance at his watch, and that significant glance drew a fresh roar from the impatient Rookwood supporters.

"One more, Rookwood!"

"Bung it in!"

"Play up!"

But Jimmy Silver and his merry men were not finding it easy to penetrate their rivals' defences. Despite a number of strong attacks, the home team found the visitors' stubborn defenders one too many for them.

"Three minutes to go!" remarked Jones of the Fourth, from his point of vantage behind the Greyfriars goal. "Looks like a draw this journey, chaps."

"Wonder they haven't been licked, if you ask me," snorted Tubby Muffin. "It's just as I told Jimmy Silver. Until he puts me in the team as centre-forward, they never will do any good. What our team wants is a pivot to revolve round. Why not me?"

"Several reasons, old fat bean!" grinned Jones. "One is that it'd take too long to revolve round anyone your size."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why, you cheeky beast—"

"Hallo! Hallo! What's this?" yelled Jones, turning his attention again to the game. "Rawson's away! Go it, Rawson!"

There was an excited roar from the crowd.

"On your own, Rawson!"

"Stick it!"

Tom Rawson, the scholarship lad of the Fourth at Rookwood, had suddenly broken away from a tussle in mid-field, with the ball at his feet.

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Tom Rawson had already distinguished himself in the game—the game, incidentally, which most fellows knew to be the last he would be able to play at Rookwood. Right from the kick-off he had played brilliantly. It was as though his failure to win the Howberry Maintenance Scholarship—a failure which had forced him to ask the Head to allow him to go—had given him inspiration for the game.

Whether that was so or not, Rawson was flying down the field now with supreme confidence.

Bob Cherry ran to meet him, and the two came together in a forceful charge. For a fraction of time it was uncertain who had control of the ball; then there was a louder cheer from the home supporters.

"Played, Rawson!"

Rawson had tricked the Greyfriars man, and was streaking away again, the ball bobbing before him. After that nothing seemed able to stop his onward advance. Bolsover, hefty and dangerous, loomed ahead, but the scholarship lad was round him in a trice. Bull came racing across from the other side of the field. Rawson seemed to bend almost double in his effort to race him to within shooting distance.

Amid a growing roar of excitement the solo player got past Bull. Hazeldene, the goalie, saw that the position was now really threatening; and ran out from his goal.

Raider, full-back, and goalie, seemed to rush together at breakneck speed, and for one desperate moment it looked as though the speed would beat Rawson. Then the scholarship lad kicked out, running as he was, and the ball flew from his foot. Hazeldene made a wild attempt to divert it, but all could see that the effort would be unavailing, and even before the ball had lodged in the back of the net a great roar of cheering was ringing out from the delighted Rookwooders.

"Goal!"

"Hurrah!"

"Rookwood wins!"

And it was so. As the players returned to the field to line up again, a long blast from Dickinson's whistle gave the signal for the finish of the game.

"Well, you beat us," remarked Harry Wharton, the skipper of the Greyfriars team, as the two elevens returned to the pavilion. "Your man Rawson is hot stuff. I wish we had the chance of playing him in the Greyfriars team."

"You'll have a chance after this, worse luck!" said

Jimmy Silver, pulling a wry face. "Rawson's leaving us to-morrow."

"Going to another school?"

"No; going to get a job. He's been diddled out of a maintenance scholarship—I'm sure that's what it amounts to—by a prize-packet of ours named Peele, and he finds he can't stay on. It's rotten, for he's one of the best."

"Good many of your chaps feel the same way, by the look of things," remarked Wharton, glancing towards Rawson, who was being greeted uproariously by the Rookwooders outside the pavilion. "Pity he can't stay on."

"Just what we all say. Hallo, Tubby! What do you want?"

Tubby Muffin sidled up to the Rookwood skipper rather mysteriously.

"I say, Silver, I've had a brain-wave! You know Rawson'll be leaving to-morrow?"

"Everybody knows it, fathead! What about it?"

"Well, it's occurred to me that we ought to do something to show our appreciation of him. Of course, he's only a blessed scholarship cad!"

"What!"

"I mean a scholarship chap," corrected the fat junior hurriedly. "But he can't help being poor, I suppose? And, anyway, he's a decent chap. He did me a jolly good turn the other day when Peele and Gower were going for me."

"He did, worse luck!" said Jimmy Silver. "If he hadn't, he wouldn't have come up against Peele, and the scholarship would have been his for the asking. Really, it's your fault he's leaving. Perhaps I ought to kick you."

"Beast! Not my fault—was it?" asked Tubby Muffin, looking, for once in his fat career, quite perturbed at the suggestion that he had brought trouble to another person.

"Anyway, here's my brain-wave. Just to show how we appreciate Rawson, and how much we regret his leaving, I suggest we give him a really big feed in the Common-room to-night."

"You do, do you?" said Jimmy Silver grimly. "You'll offer to do the shopping and the cooking, I suppose?"

"Exactly! You took the words out of my mouth, old chap," said Tubby cheerfully. "Well, what do you think of the wheeze?"

Jimmy Silver looked at Wharton.

"I can't very well say in front of visitors," he said gruffly. "But if you wouldn't mind turning your head for a moment, Wharton, I'll show you what I think of it. Hold on a minute!"

"Beast!" snorted Tubby Muffin, as he vanished into the crowd.

Apparently Jimmy Silver's tones had given him an inkling of what the Rookwood skipper thought about his "brain-wave," and the fat junior considered it unnecessary to wait for a more detailed explanation.

Rawson met them as they entered the pavilion. The scholarship lad was wearing a coat over his footer garb.

"Better say good-bye to you now, Wharton," he said, extending a hand. "I'm changing in the dorm to-day—packing up my footer togs. Enjoy the game?"

"Every minute of it," Wharton replied. "Sorry to hear you're leaving, Rawson. If something does happen to keep you at Rookwood, nobody'll be more pleased than I."

"I'm afraid there's not much chance of that," said Rawson with a grim smile. "I must go now; packing'll take some time. Hope to see you Greyfriars chaps again some day. Good-bye, all!"

The Greyfriars men returned a cordial farewell, and Tom Rawson quitted the pavilion, leaving behind him an atmosphere of deep regret—regret engendered by the thought that Tom Rawson had played his last game at Rookwood.

CHAPTER 2.

Tubby's Discovery!

"BUSY?"

Cyril Peele asked that question as he looked into Tom Rawson's study in the Fourth passage that evening.

Rawson and the Fistical Four were the occupants of the study. They frowned at the sight of the newcomer.

"What do you want, Peele?" asked Rawson curtly. "I can't spare much time. This is my last night."

Peele lounged in and calmly took a seat on the edge of the table.

"So they tell me," he said, with a nod. "But don't be downhearted, dear man. There's a silver linin' in the cloud. Matter of fact, you needn't leave Rookwood, after all!"

"What!"

"Fact!" said Peele. "You see, I couldn't bear the thought of a deservin' pauper havin' to go back to the jolly old family slum just because I'd won a scholarship from him. So I've been to the Head an' assigned all my rights under the scholarship to you."

Rawson had jumped to his feet, fists clenched, during the first part of Peele's announcement. But he stopped dead at the end and stared at his enemy almost in stupefaction.

"You—you've given me the scholarship?" he stuttered.

"Just that!" nodded Peele. "Don't thank me. I've been thanked enough already. The Head thought it awfully noble of me."

"Well, my hat!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver. "What's the idea, Peele?"

"Philanthropy, dear man—pure philanthropy!" replied Peele blandly. "I'm doin' it just so that Rawson can stay on at Rookwood."

Tom Rawson drew a deep breath.

"I see—or, at least, I think I see!"

"Well, I'm dashed if I do!" confessed Jimmy Silver. "I've never known Peele to do a decent action in his life before this, and now that it's happened, I can't get the hang of it all. Anyway, I suppose you'll accept the offer?"

Tom Rawson eyed Peele penetratingly. Then he shook his head.

"No; I shall decline it—without thanks, either."

"Look here, old bean—"

"You can't do that," said Lovell. "Peele put it in rather a funny way, but I suppose he means well."

"Take it, old man," advised Raby. "After all, you came a good second in the exam, and if Peele doesn't want the schol, then obviously it belongs to you."

"One way of looking at it, perhaps," admitted Rawson. "But I'm considering it from another angle. I think I understand your motive in making me this offer, Peele."

"Pure philanthropy, as I told Silver," said Peele, his lips twisting into a sneering smile as he spoke. "I wouldn't for worlds be the cause of our pet pauper bein' turned out into the gutter—"

"Quite enough!" said Tom Rawson sharply. "Your way of talking only confirms what I thought. You are willing for me to stay on at Rookwood, provided I am under an obligation to you for it. That's it, isn't it?"

Peele smothered a yawn.

"Dear man, if you start imputin' motives—"

"Well, I'm not staying on, on these terms!" said Rawson. "Rather than do so, I'd starve in the gutter you're so fond of associating me with."

"Then I can tell the Head you're declinin'—"

"You can tell the Head anything you like, so long as you get out of my sight."

"Pleasure! May I be allowed to congratulate you on your charmin' manners before I go— Oh! Ah! Wharrer you doin'?" gasped the black sheep of the Fourth, as Jimmy Silver & Co. suddenly and unexpectedly closed round him.

"Just helping you on your way, old bean," said Jimmy Silver cheerfully. "Your company's awfully entertaining, Peele; but after the way you've been speakin' to our pal Rawson, we feel we'd prefer your room. Ready, chaps?"

"What-ho!"

"Then out he goes!"

Peele uttered a yell.

"If you touch me, you rotters— Whoooop!"

The Fistical Four had already touched him. Peele felt himself grabbed by the legs and arms and whirled off his feet. The door flew open and Peele flew through the air, the door closing behind him with a slam as he flew.

It was lucky for Peele that someone happened to be making straight for Rawson's study as he shot out into the passage. That "someone" was Tubby Muffin of the Fourth. Tubby was right in the line of Peele's sudden advance, and Tubby's luck was in inverse ratio to Peele's, for he caught him head-on.

There was a crash and a howl, and Tubby Muffin collapsed with the black sheep of the Fourth sprawling over him.

"Yooooop!"

"Whoooop! Help! Murder! Dragimoff!"

Peele scrambled to his feet, his face furious. For a moment he seemed inclined to go back into Rawson's study. Then discretion proved the better part of valour, and after shaking his fist at the door, he tramped off, without giving his fat benefactor a second glance.

"Beast!" moaned Tubby Muffin. "Look here, Peele, you rotter, if I peg out through this—"

Tubby dried up as Peele disappeared into his own study and slammed the door. There was not much satis

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faction in discussing the consequences of his possible demise with the walls of the Fourth Form passage.

Tubby stood upright again, with many a moan and groan. Then he suddenly ceased his moaning and groaning, as a small bright article lying on the floor attracted his attention. It was a brand-new-key, of somewhat peculiar design.

Tubby picked it up and examined it with deep interest. Keys, particularly keys to cupboards containing tuck in any shape or form, were a source of never-ending interest to the Porker of the Fourth; there were fellows in the Fourth who seriously maintained that Tubby Muffin knew the shape of every key in the school.

This particular key, anyway, seemed to offer a tremendous fascination to the fat junior. He turned it over and over in his fat paw, his eyes gleaming quite excitedly as he did so.

Eventually, he whistled and rolled over to Rawson's study, just as Jimmy Silver and his chums were coming away.

"Rawson in?" he asked.

"He is, my fat pippin, and if you're going to worry him with any tosh about having a farewell feed—"

"Oh, really, Silver? Don't rot, you know! And lemme pass; this is important!"

The Fistical Four looked curiously at their fat colleague but allowed him to go in without further challenge.

"I say, Rawson—" began Tubby Muffin.

"Hallo, Tubby! Come to say 'good-bye'?" asked the scholarship lad, with a faint smile.

"Look here, old chap," said Tubby Muffin earnestly, without replying to that question, "hasn't it struck you as funny that that rotter Peele should have licked you for the Howberry Schol?"

Rawson started.

"Why should you say that, Tubby? Is there something you know?"

"There's something I can jolly well guess by putting two and two together, anyway," replied Tubby Muffin. "See this key?"

Rawson stared at the key in surprise.

"What about it?"

"You don't recognise it, eh?" grinned Tubby Muffin. "Well, I do. There's not much that escapes me, you know, Rawson. It's a duplicate to the key of the drawer in Dalton's desk, where he keeps his private papers."

Rawson frowned.

"A duplicate? You mean that someone has had a duplicate made without Mr. Dalton's authority?"

"Just that!" grinned the fat junior. "Perhaps it'll interest you to know where it came from. I'll tell you. It fell out of Peele's pocket, when he came out of this study, just now."

Tom Rawson's face darkened. In a flash, his mind went back to the night, just before the examination, when he had caught Peele coming out of Mr. Dalton's study.

"Peele!" he said slowly. "Now I see!"

"See what's happened?" asked Tubby Muffin eagerly. "The exam questions were prepared by Dalton, and it's ten to one he kept a duplicate when he sent them to the Head. With this key, Peele could get at the questions before the day of the exam, and swot 'em up specially. Now we know how he won the blessed Howberry Schol!"

Rawson nodded.

"Exactly. Well, thanks for telling me, Tubby. I already knew pretty well in my own mind what had happened. This completes it."

The fat junior stared.

"You knew already? In that case, why the dickens didn't you kick up a row about it?"

"Because I'm not in the habit of sneaking, old fat man," was Tom Rawson's quiet answer. "Peele set out to prevent me winning the scholarship and he succeeded, by methods of his own. I'd sooner let it rest at that than run round telling Dalton about it."

"Well, you silly ass!" ejaculated Tubby Muffin. "Mean to say you're willing to let the rotter get away with it? I'm not, anyway; I was in the blessed exam, and I object to being swindled."

"I don't see that it matters to you, Tubby, since you were nowhere in it," said Rawson, with a smile. "The only fellow affected really is myself, and I shan't speak—unless Peele does."

Tubby Muffin fairly blinked.

"Then you're willing to leave Rookwood, just so there's no need to sneak? Well, of all the idiots—"

"Perhaps I am. There it is, anyway, and I shall be greatly obliged if you'll refrain from giving Peele away to Dalton. Promise?"

"Why should I?" demanded Tubby Muffin. "You're only a blessed scholarship man, Rawson, and no class, of course, but I don't mind telling you I shall be sorry to see you go."

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"Thanks very much," smiled Tom Rawson. "All the same, I want you to promise you won't go to Dalton about Peele. Is it a deal?"

"Well, you're a silly ass, and no mistake!" remarked Tubby Muffin candidly. "I'll promise if you like, but—"

"Good man! Now leave me alone for a while."

And Rawson hustled the surprised fat junior out of the study.

Tubby Muffin stood reflectively outside in the passage for a minute.

Mornington strolled along as he stood there. The dandy of the Fourth bestowed a cheery nod on him.

"What cheer, Tubby! Wherefore the worried frown that's disturbin' the serenity of your fat though classic brow?"

"I say, Mornny, old chap," said Tubby, "suppose a fellow gave a promise that he wouldn't sneak to a beak about another fellow—"

"Eh, what?"

"And suppose the first fellow found a key belonging to the beak's desk, it wouldn't be sneaking to take it along to him, would it?"

"Can't quite see that it would, my fat tulip," answered Mornington in surprise. "But how the thump—"

"Sorry! Can't stop!" said Tubby Muffin hurriedly.

And he rolled off at express speed, leaving Mornington staring after him in amazement.

CHAPTER 3.

Tom Rawson's Triumph!

"COME in!"

The deep voice of Richard Dalton, M.A., thus responded to Tubby Muffin's nervous tap on his study door.

Tubby Muffin entered.

Mr. Dalton looked up inquiringly.

"Well, Muffin?"

Tubby gulped.

"The fact is, sir, I—I—"

Dicky Dalton stared.

"What's the matter with you, Muffin?"

"Pip-pip-please, sir—"

"Go on!"

"Have you lost a key, sir? Because I've found this up in the Fourth passage," said the fat junior, bringing it all out with a rush and handing over a bright new key as he spoke.

The master of the Fourth took the key.

"I am not aware, Muffin, that I have lost a key— Good gracious!"

He broke off, staring at the key which Tubby had handed him in considerable surprise.

"Perhaps it's not yours, sir?" gasped Tubby Muffin. "If it's not, I'll see if I can find out who it belongs to."

"One moment, Muffin!"

Mr. Dalton swung round in his swivel-chair and inserted the key in the keyhole of one of the drawers belonging to his desk.

Tubby Muffin, watching open-mouthed, saw him turn the key and without effort pull out the drawer.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Dalton. "It is a duplicate key to one of the drawers of my desk—a drawer in which I keep a number of confidential documents!"

"You don't say so, sir?" gasped Tubby Muffin, doing his best to register blank astonishment. "Rather funny, sir, isn't it?"

Mr. Dalton's lips tightened.

"'Funny' is an inaccurate description, Muffin. It promises to be the reverse of funny for somebody! I cannot see evidence that the contents of the drawer have been tampered with, but—"

The Fourth Form master stopped suddenly as he drew out a sheaf of papers.

Peering over his shoulder, Tubby saw the heading to the first sheet:

"Examination Questions for the Howberry Scholarship Candidates. Submitted to the Headmaster, January 15th."

Mr. Dalton placed the papers on his desk and turned round again. He was frowning portentously now.

"Where did you find this key, Muffin?" he asked.

"In the Fourth Form passage, sir!" gasped Tubby. "If you like I'll show you the exact spot."

"That may not be necessary," Mr. Dalton drummed thoughtfully on his desk for a few moments; then, having evidently arrived at a decision, he nodded his head. "Please go and find Peele and Rawson, Muffin. Tell them when you find them that I want to see them in the Head's study."

"Oh! Yes, sir."

Tubby Muffin, only too thankful to get out of range of the

perturbed Form master, rolled out of his study at express speed.

Mr. Dalton, left alone, stared grimly and thoughtfully at the open drawer of his desk for a few moments. Then he locked the drawer, pocketed Peele's duplicate key, and quitted the room, making in the direction of the Head's study.

Tom Rawson and Cyril Peele met each other five minutes later outside the Head's study.

Rawson was not surprised at the summons. Since it was his last night at Rookwood, he had anticipated receiving it, more especially since Peele's offer to forgo the scholarship in his favour. Peele, on the other hand, was looking a little uneasy.

"You been sent for, too, then?" he asked, frowning.

"Yes. Nothing wrong in it, is there?" returned Rawson. "As you're in it, I suppose the Head wants me to consider your offer."

"You haven't been sayin' anythin' about me—"

"Don't worry; I've said nothing. I'm not in the habit of sneaking!"

"Nothing to sneak about, if it comes to that!" said Peele defiantly. "I just wondered if you'd been concoctin' some

deny previous knowledge of it. I will now tell you that this key fits a drawer in Mr. Dalton's desk. That drawer contained the first draft of the questions to be submitted in the Howberry Scholarship examination. You two boys scored a great many more marks than any of the other competitors, and a very serious suspicion attaches to one of you. You understand?"

"You're suggestin' that I saw the questions before I went into the examination-room, sir?" asked Peele, his voice trembling a little. "If so, you're wrong. I wouldn't dream of doin' such a thing."

"I trust not, Peele. I hope sincerely that neither of you would pursue such a despicable line of conduct. Nevertheless, I am bound to investigate the matter. Both of you, then, absolutely deny having seen Mr. Dalton's draft of the questions prior to the examination?"

"Absolutely, sir!"

"You, Rawson?"

"Most certainly, sir."

"Very well, then. In that case neither of you, I presume, will object to your studies being searched with a view to finding possible incriminating evidence?"

Peele's face went suddenly white.



Peele fairly roared as he felt himself swept off his feet, and the next moment he was hurtling through the air!

yarn about me. As you haven't, all well an' good. Let's get in."

He led the way in. Rawson followed.

Dr. Chisholm and Mr. Dalton looked round as they entered. Peele experienced a sinking feeling as he met their glance. Judging by that glance, something had gone very much wrong.

The two juniors stood before the Head's desk.

Dr. Chisholm eyed them for a moment in silence; then he held up in his hand a bright little key.

"I am going to ask you both a very important question," he said. "Have either of you seen this key before?"

Only with a mighty effort did Peele manage to repress his emotions as his eyes fell on the key that had enabled him to win the Howberry Schol. The black sheep of the Fourth felt his heart thump wildly within him, but somehow or other he managed to preserve an expressionless face.

"Can't say that I have, sir," he said, outwardly calm.

"And you, Rawson?"

"I believe it is the same key that was picked up in the passage ten minutes ago," murmured Tom Rawson, frowning. "If it is, I saw it soon after it was found."

"It is the same," assented the Head. "Since you both

"I—I have no objection," he stuttered. "It's rather undignified, of course, to have one's belongings ransacked like a common thief—"

"I am sorry, Peele, but what is the alternative? Unless it is done, suspicion is likely to attach to either or both of you. Come, then—we will go down to the Fourth Form quarters."

And Dr. Chisholm led the way out, with Mr. Dalton shepherding the two Fourth-Formers behind him.

The little procession went upstairs, creating no little curiosity among the fellows they passed on the way.

Dr. Chisholm stalked first into Peele's study, and Gower, who was sitting by the fire reading, jumped up in some alarm as he recognised the distinguished visitor.

"Ah, Gower! You can help us," remarked the Head. "I want you to turn out all articles concealed out of sight in this study. You will make a start on that desk."

"I—I— Very well, sir!" gasped Gower.

He went over to the desk in the corner and began to turn out the contents. Books, papers, and writing materials began to pile up on the floor.

Dr. Chisholm started slightly as he noticed a copy of a

pink sporting paper among them. But he made no comment. Matters more pressing than Peele's sporting proclivities were claiming attention now.

Mr. Dalton went down on his knees and began to examine the disordered pile.

Then came the climax. Suddenly the master of the Fourth uttered an exclamation.

"Bless my soul!"

"You have found something?" asked the Head.

Mr. Dalton rose, holding in his hand an exercise-book, and at the sight of that exercise-book Peele seemed to go weak at the knees.

"I have found something that seems to bring the search to an end, sir," said Mr. Dalton. "This exercise-book contains, in Peele's handwriting, an exact copy of the draft questions I submitted to you!"

A dead silence fell on the study—a silence that was only enhanced by the excited buzz from the curious crowd that had collected in the passage outside.

The Head took the exercise-book from Mr. Dalton's hand and examined it himself. Finally he put it down and faced Peele.

"Peele! Wretched boy!" he said, in a deep, deep voice. "What explanation have you of the existence of this incriminating book?"

Peele licked his dry lips.

"It's false, sir—I mean, it's just a copy of the questions I made after the exam was over!"

"In that case, Peele, how do you account for the fact that you have included questions which were never set in the examination itself?" exclaimed Mr. Dalton. "You are prevaricating, boy!"

"I—I—"

"The truth, Peele, before you are too late to save yourself!" thundered Dr. Chisholm.

Peele gave in. It was obvious now that the game was up. "I'll admit it," he muttered wretchedly. "I didn't do it to win the scholarship, though; I did it because I wanted to beat Rawson!"

The buzz from the crowd outside swelled up to a roar. Dr. Chisholm glanced through the doorway, and compressed his lips.

"TOM MERRY THE SECOND!"

(Continued from page 19.)

could possibly be in. But he was looking forward to reprisals. Tom Merry had beaten him all along the line, but the hour of reckoning was to come.

By the longer route and without seeing anything of the Housemaster, the victorious footballers reached St. Jim's. The winter dusk was falling as they rolled into the old quadrangle, and fellows were coming in from all quarters. Cheers greeted them, when a voice from the charabanc shouted out the news of victory.

Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, met Tom Merry as he stepped from the charabanc.

The captain's kindly face was very concerned.

"I'm glad you've won, Merry," he said. "But I am afraid there will be a row about this."

Tom Merry nodded.

"I suppose so, Kildare. But do you blame me?"

"I won't answer that question, Merry. But I'll say this much—that in your place I should have been strongly tempted to act as you have done. But it was an audacious trick, and one that Mr. Ratcliff will never forgive. He is certain to place the matter before the Head."

"Let him!" said Tom Merry firmly. "I knew what I was doing when I did it, and I am ready to take the consequences."

"I will do what I can for you, Merry. I will speak to the Head before Mr. Ratcliff returns, and make him see your side of the case first, anyway."

"Thanks, Kildare," said Tom gratefully. "That may make all the difference."

True enough, Mr. Ratcliff went straight to the Head of St. Jim's when he returned to the school. But Kildare had already done his bit, and Mr. Railton had also put in a word for the footballers.

Mr. Ratcliff found the Head alone, but he found him in an unexpected mood.

The headmaster listened to his tale, but without more sympathy than politeness demanded. Mr. Ratcliff demanded the expulsion of Tom Merry from the school, and the flogging of everyone concerned in the matter with him. To

"We will return to my study," he said.

"Here he comes!"

"Good old Rawson!"

"What's the verdict, old man?"

A wildly excited crowd surged round Tom Rawson as he walked into the Junior Common-room, half an hour later.

The scholarship lad was smiling.

"All serene!" he said. "Peele has been disqualified, and the Howberry Schol awarded to me. I stay on at Rookwood, after all!"

"Hurrah!"

The cheer that went up fairly rattled the windows of the Common-room. A score of juniors surrounded Tom Rawson, shaking his hand, thumping his back, and pouring congratulations on him.

"But Peele—what about him?" asked Jimmy Silver, when he could make his voice heard. "Sacked, of course?"

Rawson shook his head.

"The fact that he offered me the schol saved him, and, of course, I put in a word for him. He'll be flogged in the morning, but he escapes the big jump."

"More than he deserves! Let's hope it teaches him a lesson," said Jimmy Silver. "What's the matter, Tubby?"

"I say, you chaps!" yelled Tubby Muffin, above the din. "As it's all through me that things have turned out all right, I ought to be allowed to make a suggestion. Here it is—that we hold a ripping spread, here and now, to celebrate Rawson's win!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, you fatheads—?"

"Tubby's right!" grinned Jimmy Silver. "For once in his lifetime he really has done something useful, and this time we'll let him have his own way. A feed it is!"

And a feed it was—a feed of such dimensions, and accompanied by such jollity as to be really worthy of celebrating Tom Rawson's triumph!

THE END.

(Look out for another rip-snorting Rookwood yarn by Owen Conquest in next week's super number of the GEM!)

his amazement and anger, the Head pooh-poohed the suggestion.

"The fact is, Mr. Ratcliff, you seem to be out of sympathy with the boys in this matter," said the Head. "I am far from maintaining that athletic sports should take the first place in a school; but they have their proper place, and it's an important one. It is of quite as much importance to train a boy's body as to train his mind. You seem to have overlooked that fact. I really wish you could bring yourself to take a more sympathetic interest in the boys' sports."

Mr. Ratcliff was quite taken aback.

"You—you do not uphold this gross insubordination?" he stammered. "This disrespect, this open contempt for a master?"

"Certainly not. I regret very much that the incident occurred. But I really think that in the best interests of the school at large the whole matter should be allowed to drop into oblivion. No good can come of raking it over."

Mr. Ratcliff could not speak. His breath was taken away, and he could only gasp like a newly landed fish as he stared at the Head.

"I ask you as a favour," said Dr. Holmes, "to let the matter drop. I am convinced that it will be for the best."

Mr. Ratcliff rose.

"A wish from you is a command to me, of course," he said. "I have no more to say."

He quitted the study. He could not, in fact, have trusted himself to say any more.

Tom Merry waited for the thunderbolt, but it did not come. Not a word was said about the matter again, and it was clear that Kildare's intervention had prevailed.

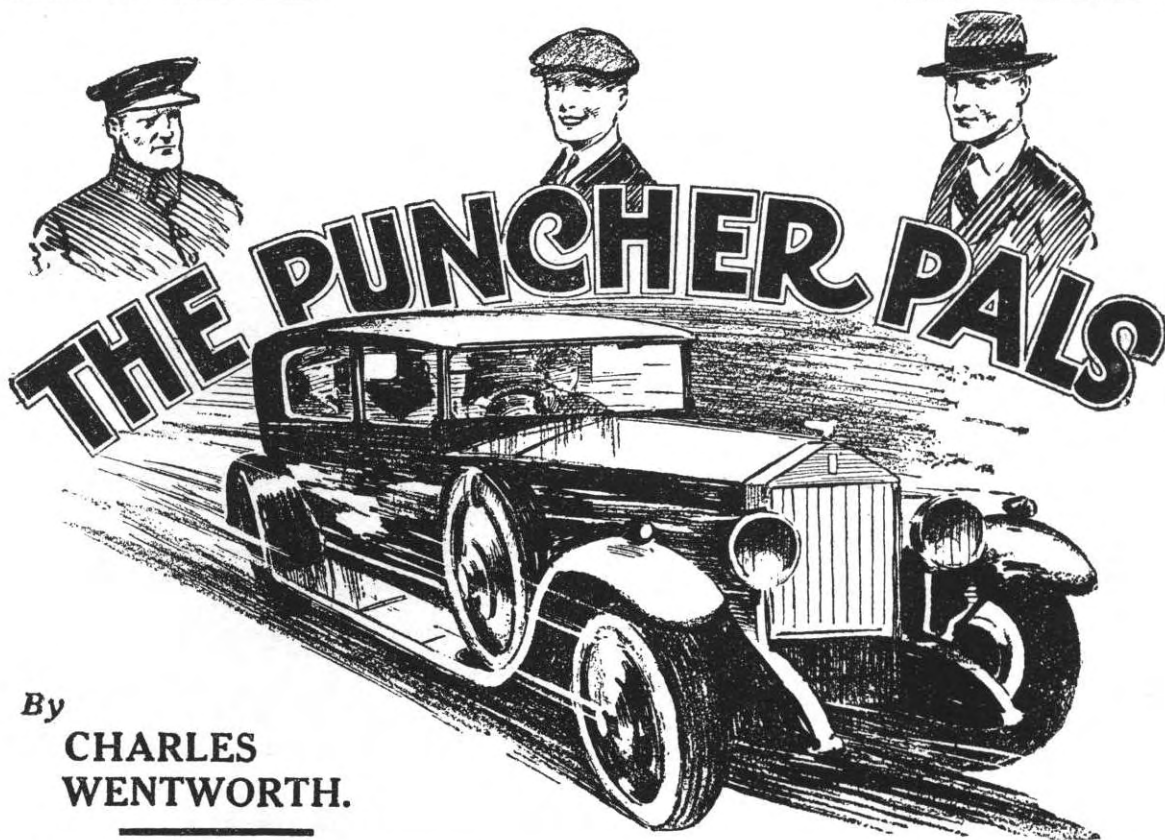
Needless to say, the young footballers of St. Jim's were greatly relieved.

The feed D'Arcy had proposed in honour of Kerr came off, and it was a ripping one, with as many guests as could be crammed into the study.

Tom Merry and Figgins, who had kicked the goals for St. Jim's in the Frampton match, came in for an ovation. But the guest of the evening, the honoured guest, was the canny Scotsman who had so well played the part of Tom Merry's double!

THE END.

(Boys, there's a really ripping long complete yarn of Tom Merry & Co. in next week's number! It's called "St. Jim's on the Spree!" It's a wow!)



By
**CHARLES
WENTWORTH.**

SPROUTS PLAYS FOOTBALL! But his idea of Soccer is socking his opponents on the jaw!

CHAPTER 1. Fog Bound!

SPROUTS MARTIN reckoned he had a cushy job as chauffeur and sparring-partner to Mr. Percy Vere at eight pounds per week, but there were times when he felt fed-up. For instance, driving all over England in the depths of winter had its drawbacks, and when fog was added to the generally inclement weather conditions Sprouts thought he had a grievance.

Sprouts pulled the big black Rolls-Royce car up with a jerk, and turned to glare at the guv'nor.

"I told you we ought to have stopped at an hotel in that last town we druv through," he said. "I can't drive any farther, sir. The fog's too thick!"

Percy Vere glanced through the windows to right and left of him, then screwed down a panel and looked out. Fog of pea-soup-like density lay like a blanket all round them. You could not see more than fifteen yards ahead. The billowing murk hurled the beams of the dazzle lamps right back at them.

"The fog is certainly thick," agreed Percy Vere.

"Whadar we gonna do about it?" demanded Sprouts truculently.

Percy Vere got out of the car, pulling down his right eyelid in a wink as he smiled at Skid Collins, the boy whom he regarded as the mascot of the team.

"I'll walk ahead, Sprouts," he remarked, in his habitual drawl. "You keep your eyes on me. I'll see that you don't leave the road, and when we come to a shelter we'll park back for the night."

Percy Vere strode lustily along the road, his tall, lean figure lit up by the amber glow of the headlamps, and the car followed him at a walking pace.

"Skid, this is what I call sense," remarked Sprouts, looking greatly relieved. "Now we can all bunk in a nice quiet hotel, an' we can move on again in the mornin' when the fog 'as cleared."

But they did not bunk in an hotel, for presently Percy Vere held out his right hand. Sprouts stopped the car.

Then Percy Vere pointed to a cart shelter on the side of the road.

It was a well-built structure, set in an angle of a flint wall, and bone dry as to flooring. In it stood an upended cart, but there was more than ample room to house the Rolls.

"The very thing!" remarked Percy. "Steer the car in, Sprouts. We'll camp here to-night."

Sprouts Martin glared at him belligerently.

"Ain't we going on to some hotel?" he demanded fiercely.

"We are not. Skid, get out the sandwiches and the Thermos flasks. We two will sleep in the car. Sprouts can sleep underneath it—unless he prefers the cart. Or," added Percy Vere, quick to read the light of challenge in his chauffeur's glinting eyes, "should Sprouts imagine he has a grievance you can hand me out those boxing-gloves, Skid, and I'll see if I can hammer a little sense into him!"

Sprouts had had the gloves on with the guv'nor before, and he had found Mr. Percy Vere a little too fast and too spry for him. Besides, you can't box in a dense fog.

"All right!" growled the fighting "shover." "Let's get on with the eats, Skid. We'll park here."

The sandwiches were chicken-and-ham, sardine-and-lobster, real bird and real fish, the tea from the Thermos flasks was first rate, and it was with a contented sigh that Sprouts slid his sturdy body into a cosy sleeping-bag set against the wall of the shelter, and went off to a sound sleep.

CHAPTER 2. Red-and-White!

MORNING found the fog gone, a bright sun shining, rime upon the road, hedges, and trees, and the red tiles of many roofs nestling at the bottom of a hill not half a mile away.

"Lummy!" growled Sprouts, as he eyed the roofs from the hill-top. "And to think we missed it, an' slept out last night."

He strolled down the hill, bought food and coffee and

some newspapers, and it was in the newsagent's shop that some cards of favours red-and-white and blue-and-white caught his eye.

"What are those for?" asked Sprouts.

"They're for the Coop-tie, mister," answered the newsagent. "Danchester United are coming over to play Belchington, at Sowerby Road, in the replayed tie to-day. I shan't have one o' they left by the time the motor-coaches start."

Sprouts' eyes glistened. Danchester was Mr. Percy Vere's home town. And, what was more, Sprouts had played for the United.

"Gimme a red-and-white favour," he said, planking down his threepence, and, with a red-and-white rosette pinned to his cap, he hurried back to the car.

"Why are you wearing that rosette, Sprouts?" asked Percy Vere, staring lazily at the favour.

"Danchester United, sir," answered the chauffeur. "Playing Belchington to-day in the Cup, sir."

In a flash Percy was on the alert.

"Give me the papers, Sprouts!" said he.

Whilst Skid helped Sprouts to cook the breakfast on the electrical equipment with which the car was furnished, Percy Vere studied the sports pages of the newspapers, then a road map which he pulled out of a pocket on the door.

His eyes were shining, his lethargy had given place to a burning enthusiasm.

"Sprouts," he said, showing his teeth in a beaming smile, "it is thirty miles to Belchington. But we are going there. You may not know it, but I am a director of Danchester United. I saw they drew their match on Saturday, but I did not bother about the replay. Now, with Belchington so near we will go and see it."

"Grand!" shouted Sprouts. "I useter play for the United, sir!"

Sprouts did not say that he wore the red shirt of Danchester for one game only, his methods at full-back being somewhat rough.

"So did I!" said Percy Vere.

"Where did you play, sir?" asked Skid, burning with the fever of football enthusiasm.

"I kept goal for the United Reserves two years ago, Skid. Played right through the season."

"Then it's our club," said Skid. "My! I can be a mascot!"

They finished their breakfast, packed their things away in the car, and Sprouts drove them down the hill into the village. There Percy Vere decorated the black Rolls-Royce with red-and-white ribbons. He bought a favour, which he wore, and smothered Skid in rosettes.

In the Market Square they saw long queues of people climbing up into motor-coaches, which were all bound for Belchington, but they all wore blue-and-white favours. As the Rolls sped by they raised a strident jeer.

"Boo! Rotten United! Yah!"

And Percy Vere, who had taken a quick mental study of their vacant and ugly faces, said to Skid in cheerful voice:

"Skid, it looks as if there is going to be some fun at the Cup-tie!"

Acting under orders, Sprouts drove the Rolls at a steady pace, though, in his impatience, he would have preferred going fast, and at half-past twelve, with still some miles to go, they stopped at an inn for lunch.

After resuming the journey, a mile farther on they came to the Belchington by-pass, and there they had to take their place in a great stream of traffic which was rolling slowly onward. Motor-coaches, tradesmen's vans, motor-bikes with side-car attachments, and motor-cars, every vehicle packed, moved onward to Belchington for the Cup-tie.

Open moors and green fields gave place to houses and factories, and overhead a great black smoke-cloud dimmed the sun.

Sprouts now showed what he could do in the way of driving, steering the big black car in and out among the traffic, and pegging back vans and motor-coaches by the dozen, until he had all their passengers jeering at the red-and-white—the colours of Danchester United.

"I shall be glad when we're safe inside the ground, Skid," remarked Percy Vere. "And I'm very glad we've come, because these are all followers of Belchington."

No sooner did they enter the town than they were mixed up in a traffic jam. Movement was only possible at a crawl, and it was ten minutes past two when Sprouts, moist with perspiration, managed at last to reach the shut main gates of the Sowerby Road Football Ground.

And then a policeman waved them back.

"Take that car away," he ordered. "You can't come in here."

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"I'm a director," said Percy Vere, thrusting his head out of a window. "We represent Danchester United."

"Show your tickets" said the policeman sceptically.

"We haven't any tickets," answered Percy Vere, "but—"

"Then you can't come in! Back that car. All tickets have been sold, and the gates are shut. Drive that car along please!" said the policeman.

Skid looked eagerly round. He saw disappointed crowds banging upon shut turnstile doors. Thousands of people were shouting angrily as they swirled and whirled in eddies along the street. And as far as he could see, motor-coaches and motor-cars were pushing down upon the football ground, adding to the confusion and noise.

Sprouts in his disappointment entered into violent argument with the policeman, who threatened to tear him down from his seat and run him in.

"Do it!" challenged Sprouts, thumping himself on the chest. "That's all I ask you to do—do it!"

And the policeman might have taken Sprouts at his word if at that moment a green coach had not wriggled its way amazingly past some cars that blocked the way and edged in behind the Rolls.

The coach was full of men who wore red-and-white rosettes.

"Move that car out of the way, and let's get by!" shouted a man in the coach. "We're late, and we're Danchester United! If we can't get inside the ground there'll be no match!"

But the Rolls could only move one way—forward, for the crowd and the traffic jam shut it in on all sides, and so at last the gates were opened, and Sprouts drove the Rolls through, the motor-coach following.

Then the gates were shut again, and Percy Vere, Sprouts Martin, and Skid Collins met the United.

"Bless me if it isn't Mr. Vere," said the manager of the Danchester United Football Club. "And here's Martin, too! If that isn't a bit of luck! Goodness knows, we want all we can get! Come right into the dressing-room, you boys! We're late, and I want to talk to you!"

CHAPTER 3.

Two Men Short!

"MR. VERE," said the football manager, the moment he had closed the door behind Percy Vere, Sprouts Martin, and Skid Collins, "unless a miracle happens we don't stand a ghost of a chance of winning this Cup-tie to-day. I've only got nine men."

"Nine men!" gasped Percy.

"Yes," explained the worried manager. "I had the Cup-tie eleven with me, plus an extra man as reserve, when we left Danchester early this morning. We stayed for an early lunch at the Greyhound, Merryhill. Usually, it's a quiet spot, but to-day it was raided by Belchington men. Last Saturday, as no doubt you saw, Belchington were lucky to draw at Danchester, for we finished with Harlow and Morrison off the field—nine men. I reckoned we were going to win to-day. But after lunch, when we were making for the coach, we lost Robinson, our goalkeeper, and Selgrave, our right-back. Then, when we sent Smart, our trainer, to look for them, hanged if we didn't lose him, too. I delayed, searching and asking questions until I dare not wait any longer, and we came on without them. Gates, the extra man, also disappeared. We are two men and a trainer short, Mr. Vere, and I reckon we've lost the tie before we go on to the field."

"What ever happened to them?" asked Percy Vere, in blank amazement.

"Don't know! But there were a dozen or more coaches outside. I reckon the Belchington fans got hold of our chaps, and we shall have to play without 'em."

Percy Vere began to peel off his clothes.

"Let me keep goal," he said. "I haven't played football for more than a year, but I can fill a gap."

"And lemme play right-back, sir," begged Sprouts. "I'm great at full-back, sir."

"Yes, you are," said the manager, remembering Sprouts' last and only appearance for the United. "Allow tripping and handling, and striking an opponent, and you're the world's best, Martin. The ref. sent you off the field the only time you played for us. I'm not taking any more chances."

"But my name's still on the club books," said Martin. "Let me play, sir. I'll behave myself, and you'll be able to field a full team."

The football manager glanced at his watch. It wanted



BIFF! Sprouts hit Rawson so hard that his heels flew up above his head before his shoulders reached the ground!

only ten minutes to the kick-off. The missing men had not arrived. No message had come from any of them. And—oh well, the United were bound to be licked, anyway.

"I'll find you some clothes, Sprouts!" said he. "Maybe we have some boots that will fit! You can play!"

"Hooray!" shouted Skid Collins, as he threw up his cap to the ceiling. "And I'm going to mascot you for luck. And I've got another idea. Can I raid your supply of Dumps in the car, Mr. Vere?"

"You can do anything you like, Skid," said Percy Vere as he tore off a shoe and then a sock, and grinned round at the players.

"Dumps" was the name given to the finest sweets turned out of the Vere factories, at Danchester. Skid raced round to the refreshment bars, had a talk with the manager there, came to a business arrangement with him by which he agreed to pay twenty per cent for the loan of a tray with shoulder-straps, went back to the car, loaded the tray with dumps of every description, and by the time the teams turned out he was ready to march with them through the gate and parade round inside the railings and sell the packets of sweets at 1d., 2d., 3d., 6d., 9d., and one shilling to the surging crowd and at the same time obtain a perfect and uninterrupted view of the match.

"Atta boy!" roared Sprouts, as he came running down to the gate with the Danchester team, wearing a red shirt and a pair of white knickers a bit too small for him, and a pair of football boots one size too big. "You watch me knock the stuffin' out of Belchington!"

And then he bumped into a man who wore a blue shirt and white knickers, who was just as big as himself, and the man sent him reeling.

"Can't you look where you're coming to, ugly?" said the man in the blue shirt.

"Ginger Rawson!" gasped Sprouts, as he glared at the man. "What are you doin' here?"

"I'm playin' right-back for Belchington," answered Ginger, rolling up his sleeves and striding on to the muddy field with a satisfied grin. "An' if your boys are wise they'd better keep away from me."

"I think I've heard about Ginger Rawson!" said Skid, as he followed up Sprouts. "Who is he?"

"I've fought him eleven times," answered Sprouts. "Four times I've won on a foul, four times he beat me through the same kind of accident, and three times we drew. It's pretty nigh time we 'ad a decider."

That replayed Cup-tie Skid reckoned was going to be hot stuff!

CHAPTER 4. The Replayed Tie!

SKID COLLINS moved round the playing-pitch during that game with one eye to business and the other on the game. While he sold his dumps to the swaying, shouting, delirious crowd his heart was in the football. He just ached to tear his things off, don some football togs, and go in and have a shot at it. But he had no qualification, and so could not play for the United.

But he was able to watch Percy Vere and Sprouts play, and that was something. And when he reckoned on hot stuff in that Cup-tie he reckoned right.

At each end of the field a right-back was guilty of flagrant breaches of the rules. Ginger Rawson began it by turning Meek, the centre-forward, head over heels when he was rushing straight for the Belchington goal.

The moment Belchington attacked, Sprouts, his teeth clenched, rushed at the inside-left, who had the ball, and kicked his legs clean from under him. This was his idea of retaliation.

The referee raced up to him. "If you do that again, Martin," he cried, "I shall send you off the field."

"What about Ginger Rawson?" howled Sprouts Martin.

"Two wrongs don't make a right!" retorted the referee.

"And a silk purse ain't a sow's ear!" cried Sprouts in disgust.

After that, Sprouts did his best to control himself. And Skid noticed with delight that, although he was right out of practice, he was fast, and could tackle strongly and kick well. Sprouts, in a word, was holding his own.

But so was Ginger Rawson, who, whenever the referee or the linesmen were looking elsewhere, tripped and elbowed and fouled, until Skid felt he would like to rush on to the field and bring him down in the same way.

Soon the Danchester centre was limping, and play was soon confined almost entirely to the Danchester half of the field. There the goal was bombarded, and Skid saw new angles to admire in Percy Vere.

"Dumps," as he called the guv'nor, was like a cat between the sticks, moving with feline liveliness, jumping to the ball, taking it in hands as sure and as safe as a wicket-keeper's, dropping to it and pushing it round the post whenever a ground shot was hurled at him.

Again and again he saved, until the gasping crowd were compelled to cheer.

Hoarse-voiced men behind the goal threatened him, but he only smiled.

'And when they had failed with about their thirtieth shot the Belchington forwards began to lose heart.

It was then Danchester's turn to attack again, and but for the foul tactics of Ginger Rawson Skid thought they might have scored.

Three times Rawson tripped a man, and twice he handled, always just outside the penalty area.

And so half-time came without a goal being scored, and a tired Danchester team limped in.

And in the dressing-room Sprouts put forth an eloquent appeal.

"Let me go centre-forward," he begged. "I've got legs like iron. Ginger Rawson can't hurt me. I know the way to deal with him."

And he begged so hard that it was decided to allow him to play at centre.

That did it! No sooner did Rawson see Sprouts take his place at centre-forward than his eyes glowed like fire.

And the very first time Sprouts had the ball and came charging down on him, he rushed in to foul. They came together like a clash of champions. Rawson fouled Sprouts badly. But he did not get the ball away from him. Then, like a flash, Sprouts kicked Rawson's legs from under him, and, rushing onward, netted the ball with a smashing drive.

His anger when the referee disallowed the goal was undisguised.

A minute later he came through with the ball again, and once more Rawson rushed at him. But this time Sprouts got his trip in first, and Rawson came down a purler in the mud. Then, as Sprouts raced for goal, Rawson came after him. He pushed Sprouts from behind. Sprouts went down, and the left back cleared.

Sprouts got up, and Rawson hit him. Then Sprouts hit Rawson so hard that his heels flew above his head before his shoulders struck the ground.

They were engaged in a fierce bout of in-fighting when the referee and the players separated them, and, both being ordered off the field, they came in to mingled cheers and hoots.

It took less than five minutes for Sprouts to drop his enemy, Ginger Rawson, for the final count in the quiet seclusion of the Belchington dressing-room.

Then, as Sprouts mopped his moist face on a towel, a roar of cheering drew him to the door. He ran down to the gate and looked.

The Danchester United players were swarming round their inside-right, a dapper little player named Tate. The Belchington goalkeeper was picking the ball out from the back of the goal net.

The United had scored.

Skid, with his tray tucked underneath his arm, for he had sold all his Dumps, ran up to Sprouts.

"Oh, Sprouts," he cried, "we've scored—we're winning!" Then he added, with a gasp: "Who gave you that black eye?"

"Ginger Rawson," said Sprouts, with a painful grin, for his lips were puffed. "But you ought to see the one I giv him."

The United won that Cup-tie by 3 goals to 0.

And as the team climbed into their coach ready for the journey home the missing players turned up, accompanied by an indignant trainer.

They had been hustled by a crowd into a covered van, the trainer said, where twelve men guarded them until they were forty miles away from Belchington. There they were released, and it had taken them all that time to get back.

"Never mind, boys," said Sprouts Martin, winking with a discoloured eyelid. "You're in the next round. You can play in the next Cup-tie!"

"And look who put you there," said Skid Collins. "Sprouts!"

"That's a fact," said Sprouts. "Getting Rawson ordered off did the trick. That and the gov'nor keeping goal!"

When the coach whirled into the misty streets a big black car followed it.

The Puncher Pals, too, were heading for home.

(It's good-bye to the Puncher Pals now, but next week you will meet "The Sky Raiders"! See special announcement on page 18.)

The Eastwood Shield League.

The Editor regrets that, owing to pressure of space, it has been found impossible to include a report of the games. Full results, however, are appended.

Results.

REDCLYFFE 2 ST. JIM'S 4
Judd, Stoker Merry (4)

Teams: REDCLYFFE: Tanner; Gibson, Reeves; Jason, Griffin, Jenks; Bardsley, Mills, Judd, Lennard, Stoker. St. Jim's: Wynn; Figgins, Kerr; Redfern, Noble, Lowther; Talbot, Levison, Merry, Blake, D'Arcy.

ABBOTSFORD 1-ST. JUDE'S 1
Fane Raleigh

GREYFRIARS 2 CLAREMONT 1
Wharton (2) Baxter

HIGHCLIFFE 5 BANNINGTON GRAM. 0
Courtenay (3), De SCH.

ROOKWOOD 3 BAGSHOT 2
Silver, Lovell, Dodd Pankley, Putter

RYLCOMBE GRAM. ... 2 ST. FRANK'S 1
SCH. Nipper.

Gay (2)

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