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HERE IS A RIPPING LONG YARN OF FUN AND ADVENTURE—

The KIDNAPPED



"Down with St. Jim's" is the cry of the Grange School, but Tom Merry & Co. of St. Jim's are quick to reply, and then a great struggle for supremacy ensues between the rival schools.

CHAPTER 1. Something On!

"COMING down to the cricket, Tom Merry?" It was Blake of Study No. 6 in the School House at St. Jim's who asked the question. It was Wednesday—a half-holiday at St. Jim's.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Can't!"

"Why not? Not detained?"

"Oh, no!"

"Then why are you not coming down to the cricket?" demanded Blake, rather warmly. "You know very well that we've got a lot of important matches coming on soon, and there's no excuse for neglecting practice—and you setting up as cricket captain of the School House juniors, too!"

"Yaas, wathah!" chimed in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the School House. "I wegard Tom Mewwy's neglect of the gwand game as extwemely wepwehensible!" Tom Merry grinned.

"My dear kids, I shall be busy this afternoon."

"Busy in Rylcombe tuckshop, I suppose?" said Blake suspiciously.

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"Oh, no!"

"Then what are you up to?"

"Oh, I shall be busy!" said the hero of the Shell, rather vaguely. "I should advise you Fourth Form kids to get some cricket practice, though. You need it more than I do, of course."

"Well, of all the cheek——"

"And if you're not in good form, I shall have to think very seriously about giving you your cap for the junior House team," said Tom Merry solemnly.

"Why, you ass! It's not settled yet that you're going to captain the House team. And very likely I shall be captain!" exclaimed Blake excitedly.

"Oh, bosh!" said Tom Merry airily. "Anyway, run away and play now!"

"Run away and play! I'll——"

"I wefuse to wun away and play until Tom Mewwy has explained himself," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"What do you mean by this shocking neglect of the important cwicket pwactice, you wottah?"

"I tell you I shall be busy!"

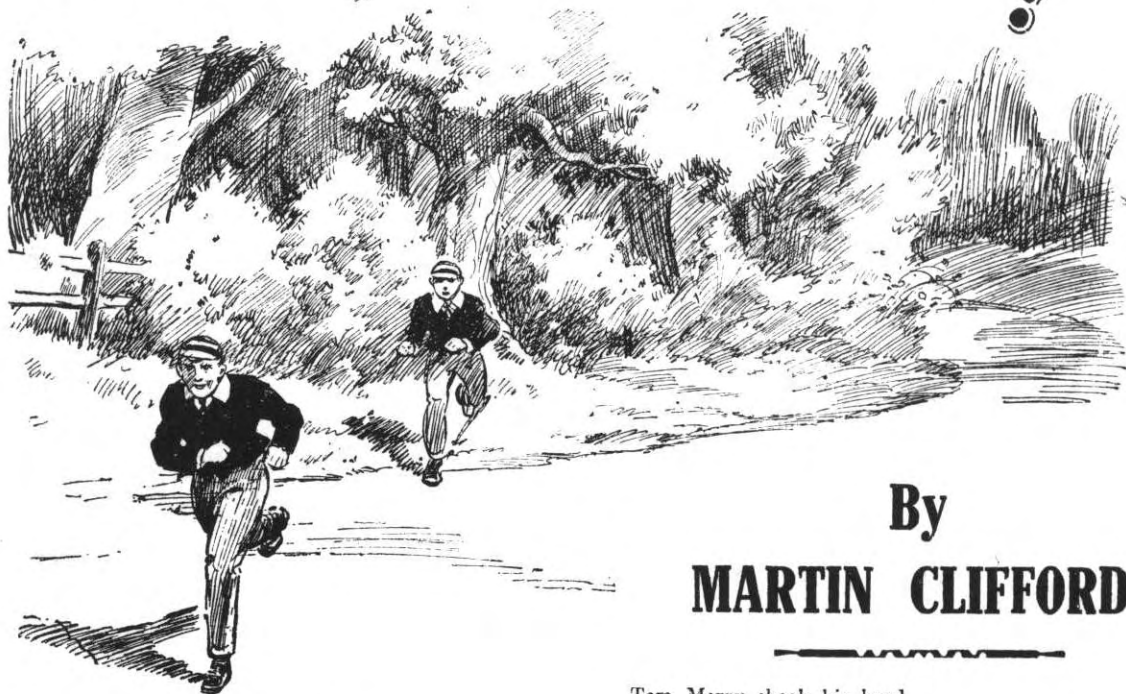
"But what will you be busy about, deah boy?"

"Minding my own business," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

—FEATURING YOUR OLD FRIENDS, TOM MERRY & CO. OF ST. JIM'S!

CRICKETERS!



By
MARTIN CLIFFORD

But Tom Merry was walking away, still laughing. Blake and D'Arcy looked at each other wrathfully. "The bouncer's got something on," growled Blake. "I can see that as plainly as anything."

"Oh, wathah!" said D'Arcy, looking after Tom Merry through his eyeglass. "He's got an Eton suit on—"

"Ass! I didn't mean that—"

"I am afraid, Blake, that I must refuse to be chawactevised as an ass—"

"Oh, rats!" said Blake, walking away and joining Herries and Digby, who were coming out of the School House in flannels with their bats under their arms. "I say, kids, do you know what wheeze Tom Merry has got on for this afternoon?"

"Blessed if I know," said Digby, "or care either, old chap! I'm going down to the cricket. The ground's as dry as anything, for a change."

"Right-ho!" said Herries. "Get your bat and come down, Blake. Never mind Tom Merry. Let him go and eat coke!"

"He's got something on!"

"He'd find it jolly cold in this wind if he hadn't," said Digby. "Never mind Tom Merry. We've got to get in form for the cricket season. I expect it's something up against the New House if he's got a wheeze going. And it doesn't matter to us. Come on!"

"Oh, all right!" said Blake, rather reluctantly. "Wait till I get my bat."

"You can join us on the ground."

Blake went into the School House, and Herries and Digby walked down to the junior ground. Most of the juniors of St. Jim's had streamed in that direction. Figgins & Co., the chiefs of the New House juniors, were coming out of their House arrayed for cricket. Tom Merry, who was strolling along with his hands in his pockets, met them as they came down to the pitch.

Figgins stopped and looked at him.

"Hallo! Not in flannels, Tom Merry?"

"No," said Tom carelessly.

"Aren't you coming down to the cricket?"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"I'm busy this afternoon."

"Now, look here," said Figgins, wagging a warning forefinger at Tom Merry, "don't you be an ass! I hear that you are going to be cricket captain of your House juniors—"

"Very likely."

"Well, then, don't neglect your practice," said Figgins. "We're going to lick you in the House match, when it comes off, anyway. We don't want the match to be a mere walk-over. If you can't put up anything like a fight, what's the good of licking you—what?"

Tom Merry laughed his merry laugh.

"I think we shall give you as good as we get, Figgy."

"You School House bouncers always say that, but it never comes off," said Figgins, with a superior smile. "I want you to be in as good form as possible. We want a little credit for the trouble of licking you, you see."

"Just so," chimed in Kerr, the Scottish partner in the New House Co. "I really advise you to get down to the practice, Tom Merry."

"I tell you I'm busy!"

"Rats!" said Figgins. "What are you busy about? Is it a feed?"

"A feed?" Fatty Wynn pricked up his ears. "Is it a feed, Tom Merry?"

"Oh, cheese it, Fatty!" said Figgins, with a withering look at the Welsh partner in the Co. "You're always on the scent of grub."

"I get so hungry in this spring weather," said Fatty Wynn plaintively. "And we don't get any too much to eat in the New House."

"Well, I saw you put a jolly good dinner out of sight, anyway."

"That you didn't, Figgy. You must be dreaming. All I had was some steak and potatoes, and half a pork pie, and some ham and tongue, and a little suet pudding, and a dozen or so jam tarts, and some nuts. I'm feeling peckish again already."

"You're not going to feed now," said Figgins, slipping his arm affectionately through Fatty Wynn's. "Come on

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to the ground, you cormorant. Besides, it's not a feed, is it, Merry?"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"No, it's not a feed."

"You might tell us what it is, then?" exclaimed Marmaduke, the latest addition to the New House Co. "What is the giddy secret?"

"There's no secret."

"Then what are you up to?"

"Snuff."

"Eh?"

"Snuff," said Tom Merry. "I'm up to snuff, if you want to know."

And the hero of the Shell laughed and walked away.

"There's something up," said Figgins, shaking his head.

"It's not up against us, though, or he wouldn't have said a word. Anyway, we've got to play cricket now. Come on!"

Fatty Wynn seemed to linger.

"Come on, Fatty! What are you hanging about for?"

"I say, Figgins—"

"Well, what is it?" demanded Figgins impatiently.

"I'm rather inclined to think it is a feed, you know. Tom Merry's an awfully decent chap. I know we're the rivals of the School House, but there are times when it's right to—to extend the right hand of fellowship, you know. I really think that if there's a feed on we ought to join Tom Merry, just to show that there's no real ill-feeling—"

Fatty broke off with a yell as Figgins seized him by the back of the neck.

"What the dickens are you up to, Figgins?"

"I'm taking care of you as a member of the Co.," said Figgins calmly. "Come on! I'll see that you don't neglect your cricket practice for the sake of sucking up to a School House rotter for a free feed."

"But, really, Figgins, I didn't mean anything of the sort. I only meant—"

"Yes, I know what you meant. Come on!" said Figgins, propelling Fatty Wynn along with a grip of iron on the back of his neck. "Help him along, will you, kids?"

"Certainly!" said Kerr and Marmaduke at once.

"I—I don't want helping!" gasped Fatty Wynn, as the Co. planted their boots forcibly behind him. "I—I—I—Ow!"

"Come on!" shouted Figgins.

And in this style the unfortunate Fatty was rushed down to the cricket field, and the vision of a free feed faded from his mind's eye like a beautiful dream.

CHAPTER 2.

In the Hands of the Foe!

TOM MERRY entered the School House, and went upstairs to the study which he shared with his chums in the Shell Form—Manners and Lowther. There was an expression of anticipation upon the sunny face of Tom Merry which showed plainly enough that Blake and Figgins had been right in their surmise. There was something "on."

Manners and Lowther were both in the study, and if Figgins could have seen what Tom Merry saw as he entered he would have known at once what was "on."

The chums of the Shell were busy giving the finishing touches to a huge kite. It was an imposing affair. The tail, which Lowther was busy with, was not yet attached, but for the rest the kite was complete. Manners fastened the cord to it as Tom Merry came in. He looked up with a grin of satisfaction.

"Looks all right, doesn't it?"

"Yes, rather!" said Tom Merry enthusiastically. "We shall get some fun with that on Rylcombe Common."

"I expect so."

"Those kids in Study No. 6 were awfully curious to know what we were going to do this afternoon," grinned Tom Merry. "I thought they had better get down to the cricket practice. They will have to be in good form if we are going to play them against Figgins & Co. when the House match comes off!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Yes."

"And we don't want to take a crowd along with the kite," said Lowther. "We don't want to get into a row with the Grammarians if we can help it."

"No. There's a time for all things," agreed Tom Merry. "A half-holiday doesn't seem exactly a half-holiday without a row, I know; but we want to fly the kite this afternoon. Is it finished?"

"Yes, it's finished now."

"Good! Those kids are all busy at the cricket, and

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we shall be able to get it down to the gates without being spotted. We don't want them on our track. When you have a fight over a kite the kite is apt to get damaged."

"We're ready," said Manners.

"You can shove the tail in your pocket, Lowther, and we'll fix it later," said Tom Merry. "Wind up the cord, Manners. Now, let's get along."

The chums of the Shell left the study, Manners carrying the kite.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Gore, meeting them in the passage.

"What have you kids got there?"

"Something like your chivvy," said Lowther pleasantly.

"Eh?"

"Well, you know, everybody says you've got a face like a kite—"

"Oh, cheese it! That's rather a good kite! I'll come and show you how to fly it, if you like," said Gore.

The Terrible Three looked hardly grateful.

"Will you really?" said Tom Merry. "That's awfully kind of you, you know."

"Oh, that's all right!" said Gore. "I don't mind doing a fellow a favour."

"He's too generous," said Lowther, shaking his head. "I shouldn't feel justified in taking advantage of his generosity, for one."

"Nor I, either," said Manners solemnly. "Gore, old fellow, we're not going to impose on your kind heart."

Gore scowled savagely as it dawned upon him that the Terrible Three were poking fun at him.

"Look here, you rotten bounders—"

"Let's get by, Gore, will you?"

"I wouldn't fly your kite for you now if you asked me."

"Then it's no good asking him, chaps," said Tom Merry.

"Let's get along."

The chums left the School House. The juniors of St. Jim's were busy on the cricket ground, and nobody paid any particular attention to the Terrible Three. They passed out of the gates, and in the road the keen breeze caught the kite and almost jerked it from Manners' hand.

"Here, hold on!" exclaimed Monty Lowther.

"All right, I'm holding on."

"May as well let it up now," said Tom Merry. "There's a good wind. We'll run it along to Rylcombe Common. I really hope we shan't meet any of the Grammar School kids! We don't want a row on our hands with a kite to look after!"

"That's so."

"Stick the tail on it, Monty."

"There you are!"

"Now then, Manners!"

Manners let the cord loose. There was no difficulty about getting the kite started; the difficulty was, rather, to keep it in hand. The kite rose buoyantly, and Lowther let go the end of the tail. Up it sailed.

The Terrible Three watched it sail with great satisfaction, keeping up a good pace along the country road. They had made the kite with their own hands, and it was a huge success.

Manners let out the cord to its full length, and took a turn of the end round his wrist to make sure of it.

"By Jove, how it sails!" exclaimed Tom Merry, stopping to look up again.

The kite was little more than a speck in the blue.

The juniors were now about half a mile from St. Jim's, and in the keen interest of flying the kite they had forgotten all about the possible danger of falling in with the youths from the Grammar School, the deadly rivals of St. Jim's.

"Good!" said Manners. "Didn't I tell you we could make our own kites, and save a lot of money?"

"You mean I told you," said Monty Lowther. "You must remember, Manners—"

"Oh, come, Monty, don't lay claim to the suggestion—"

"Well, of all the cheek—"

"Cheese it!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "As a matter of fact, it was I who first suggested making the kite—"

"Why, you remember I said—"

"You mean that I said—"

"That I said—"

There was a sudden interruption in the argument, which was growing warm. From the trees which bordered the road in this spot came a ringing shout.

"Go for 'em!"

"Buck up, Grammar School!"

And there was a sudden rush of feet.

The Terrible Three were taken completely by surprise. They whirled round at the shout, but it was too late—the enemy were upon them!

Half a dozen Grammarians, headed by Monk, Lane, and Carboy, the chiefs of the Grammar School juniors, rushed

upon the Terrible Three and had them over in the road in a twinkling.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther went down in a struggling heap, fighting desperately.

"Collar 'em!" roared Frank Monk.

"Sock it to 'em!" yelled Carboy.

"You rotters!"

"You Grammar cads—"

"Lemme gerrup—"

"Ha, ha, ha! Collar 'em!"

The three St. Jim's juniors were seized and dragged to their feet. Each was held in the grip of two pairs of hands, and against such odds they were helpless. Frank Monk grinned at them genially.

"Hallo, Tom Merry! How are you getting on?"

Tom Merry grunted.

Grammarians, and they knew instinctively that there was worse to come.

But they were helpless in the hands of the enemy.

Tom Merry's wrists were secured with Carboy's whipcord. Then Lowther's necktie was jerked off and knotted round his wrists. Manners' wrists were fastened up with a double shoelace, quite strong enough for the purpose.

The Terrible Three stood bound and helpless, and looking extremely red and flustered. The Grammarians stood in a circle round them, grinning.

Frank Monk took hold of the cord fastened to Manners' wrists, and began to pull in the kite. The St. Jim's chums watched this proceeding wrathfully.

"Look here, you're not going to have our kite!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Ow, we'll make you sit up for this some time!"



"Ha, ha, ha!" The Grammarians fairly howled with laughter as they thrust the kite over the heads of the Terrible Three, who were already staggering about, tied together! "My hat!" said Monk. "They do look a treat!"

"Feeling pretty fit, Manners?"

Manners growled.

"I hope I see you well, Lowther?"

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

"Ha, ha, ha! They seem to be annoyed about something!" grinned Monk. "Hold 'em tight—they might be troublesome, as they look so shockingly bad-tempered. Perhaps it would be safer to tie their hands up."

"Good!" said Carboy. "I've got a whipcord here."

"Fasten them up, then!"

"Look here—"

"No time, Tom Merry, even for looking at your charming chivvy."

"I tell you—"

"Rats! Merry first, Carboy—and mind you make it safe!"

"Trust me!" grinned Carboy.

The Terrible Three struggled desperately. They had had a similar experience once before at the hands of the

"We'll take all the sitting up you can give us!" grinned Frank Monk, steadily drawing in the cord. "Take this cord, kids, and fasten them together. They're so fond of each other that it's a shame to separate them. United they stand, divided they fall, you know. Don't spare the knots."

"Good wheeze!" exclaimed Carboy heartily.

The cord was a thin, but strong one. Trebled and knotted, it was strong enough to resist the united strength of the Terrible Three. The grinning Grammarians wound it about them, and knotted it.

Frank Monk pulled in the kite, and caught hold of it. The chums of the Shell watched him in mingled wrath and anxiety. They had taken a great deal of trouble over that kite, and it would be too bad for it to fall as a trophy of victory into the hands of the rival school.

"Look here," said Tom Merry desperately, "you're not going to have our kite. We'll—we'll ransom it!"

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"Ha, ha, ha! What ransom?"

"Anything you like."

"A little document, attesting the fact that the Grammar School is top school, and that St. Jim's is nowhere?" asked Frank Monk blandly.

"No!" roared the Terrible Three.

"I'm afraid there's nothing else we could accept."

"Then keep the kite, you rotters, and we'll have it back some time, and give you the licking of your lives into the bargain!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We'll fly it back to the Grammar School," said Carboy, with a grin.

Frank Monk shook his head.

"We haven't a cord," he said, "and we've used up this one on the St. Jim's benders. Besides, we don't want their old kite. I really think we had better let them take it back to St. Jim's with them."

"But—"

"They can't carry it very well, with their hands bound," said Monk thoughtfully. "We shall have to fix it on them somehow."

"Ha, ha, ha! Bash it on their nappers!"

"That's just what I was thinking of, Lane."

"Look here—" began Tom Merry.

"Oh, do dry up! You're dead in this act! Put it over their heads!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Grammarians quickly carried out their leader's instructions.

The big kite was put over the heads of the Terrible Three, their heads being thrust through the paper of it.

The aspect of the chums, and especially the wrath in their crimson faces, sent the Grammarians into yells of laughter.

"My hat!" said Frank Monk. "They do look a treat! Is there anything else we can do for you, kids, before we say au revoir?"

"I say, you're not going to leave us like this—"

"My dear kid, we are compelled to leave you, though it breaks our hearts," said Monk. "We have to get back to tea presently, you know."

"And call at Rylcombe tuckshop first," said Carboy.

"We shall have to love and leave you, you know."

"Take this kite off—"

"But how are you going to carry it, then?"

"You—you can have it, if you like."

"Ha, ha, ha!" giggled the Grammarians.

They knew the reason of Tom Merry's generous offer. The Terrible Three would never hear the end of it if they returned to St. Jim's in that fashion.

Frank Monk shook his head.

"Now, that's what I call really generous of you, Tom Merry!" he exclaimed. "But we won't deprive you of your kite. You look very nice as you are."

"You howling rotters—"

"Now, that's ungrateful. We might take your kite away, if we liked, but we're not going to do it. We've fixed it up so that you can carry it back to St. Jim's in the most comfortable manner possible. What more can you want?"

"Some fellows are never satisfied," said Lane.

"Still, we might have expected better things of Tom Merry," said Monk sadly. "Merry, I'm disappointed in you."

"You rotter—"

"Oh, come, Merry, you shock me!"

"You—you Grammar beast—"

"I can't stay here and listen to this," said Frank Monk.

"It's time we were off, too, or we shan't have time to call in at the tuckshop."

"Look here, let us go loose, and—"

Frank Monk laughed.

"My dear kid, do you think we have taken all this trouble for fun? Well, yes, it was for fun, in a way. Ha, ha, ha! But we haven't done it all for nothing, anyway. I am afraid we must leave you as you are."

"Grammar beasts!"

"Ha, ha, ha! You have the consolation that you look very—very—well, unique. I think anybody must admit that they look very unique, kids."

"Ha, ha, ha! Rather!"

"There's no improvement I can suggest," said Lane.

"Let's be off!"

"Come on, then. Good-bye, youngsters!"

"Good-bye, sweetheart—good-bye!" trilled Carboy.

The Terrible Three made no reply. Their feelings at that moment were too deep for words.

The Grammarians, shouting with laughter, trooped off down the lane towards Rylcombe, and disappeared.

The chums of the Shell were left alone. They looked

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at one another. In that lonely lane they were not likely to find anyone to release them until they got near St. Jim's. What was to be done?

CHAPTER 3.

A Painful Ordeal!

TOM MERRY was the first to break the silence.

"My only hat!" he said feelingly. "I don't think we've ever been in a worse fix than this, kids, in all our natural!"

"My aunt, no!"

"How are we to get out of it?"

"I'm waiting for you to say," said Lowther pleasantly.

"You're captain of this concern, you know."

"That's right," agreed Manners. "What are we going to do, Tom?"

Tom Merry grinned faintly.

"I'm as much in the dark as you are. We can't get loose. We can't get out of the kite. We've got the choice of walking on to the village, or walking back to St. Jim's. There doesn't seem to be much to choose between them."

"We can't go to the village. It's full of Grammarians on a half-holiday. And these rotters, Pilcher, Craggs, and Grimes would be sure to spot us."

"That would be worse than ever!"

"But I don't see how we're to get to the school, either, in this state. We shall be chipped to death."

"There's nothing else to be done."

"I suppose so," grunted Lowther. "Nice sort of a leader you are, Tom Merry! First thing we do when we get back to St. Jim's will be to elect a new captain for the Shell."

"My dear chap, it's no good grumbling."

"I'm not grumbling. I'm stating a fact."

"Blow your facts! Let's get along. No good taking root here. And it's cold standing still in this wind, too."

There was evidently no help for it.

The Terrible Three, in the direst fix of their career, walked and stumbled along the lane in the direction of the school.

Tom Merry hoped that before the school was reached they would meet someone who might be prevailed upon to release them. But it was probable that the only fellows they would meet would belong to St. Jim's. And it was a question whether they would perform the required service or not.

"Hallo, there's a school cap!" exclaimed Lowther hopefully, catching sight of a cap coming round a bend in the lane.

Tom Merry gave a grunt.

"It's Blake!"

Blake it was, and Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy were with him. Cricket practice was evidently over for the time, and they were going down to the village. The chums of Study No. 6 stopped in blank amazement at the sight of the Terrible Three, and then burst into a roar of laughter.

"My only Panama hat!" roared Blake. "What is it?"

"A remarkably cunious-lookin' object, bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, adjusting his monocle and staring at the crimson faces of the Terrible Three. "I think I recognise Tom Mewwy."

"Ha, ha, ha!" shouted Digby. "How did you get like this, kids?"

"It was the Grammar School kids," said Tom Merry reluctantly. "They took us by surprise."

"Ha, h. ha!"

"Get us loose, there's good chaps!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hold on, Gussy," said Blake, pulling back the too-obliging swell of St. Jim's. "Just wait a minute, old dear."

"But Tom Mewwy has requested me to release him."

"I dare say he has, but—"

"My dear Blake, I cannot refuse to be obligin'—"

"Cheese it, Gussy, and let me think a minute."

"I have no objection whatever to your thinkin' a minute, Blake, if you have the necessary appawatus," said D'Arcy, "but, weally—"

"I say, let us loose, you kids."

"Who are you calling kids?"

"I mean cads—that is to say, chaps! Do get us out of this rotten fix!"

Blake shook his head slowly.

"I'm afraid it can't be did, Tom Merry. You see, I was quite willing to take you under my wing this afternoon, and look after you, but you weren't taking any."

"I should say not, you cheeky kid!"

"Then you must take the consequences!" said Blake loftily.

"As a matter of fact, you fellows look too funny for me to spoil the joke."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Shut up, Gussy! Those fellows look such awful asses that I suppose you have a fellow-feeling for them; but they're not going to be untied—except on one condition. If they admit that the Shell is played out and no good, and the Fourth the top junior Form, and promise not to be so cheeky in the future, I may be inclined to deal with them more leniently."

"Good!" said Herries and Digby together, and D'Arcy chimed in with: "Yaas, wathah!"

"I'll see you hanged—"

"Now, Tom Merry—"

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

"As a matter of fact, we're going to eat tarts," said Blake. "I really think you ought to show up at St. Jim's like that as a punishment for your cheek. But I tell you what we will do. As you fellows in the Shell can't deal with the Grammarians, we'll look for them and give them a hiding."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Look here, Blake—"

"I'm afraid we must be getting on, old chap. Ta ta!"

And the chums of Study No. 6 walked on, laughing.

The Terrible Three looked at each other in dismay.

"There's a chance gone," said Tom Merry. "Really—But it's no good grumbling. Let's get on to the school."

The unhappy heroes of the Shell stumbled on towards St. Jim's. As they came in sight of the gates, four familiar figures issued from them. Tom Merry gave a groan as he recognised Figgins & Co.

Figgins caught sight of the three strange figures at the same moment.

"My hat!" he exclaimed. "Look there!"

The Co. gave a yell of laughter.

"I say, Figgy—"

"Why, it's Tom Merry! Been flying a kite, Merry, or has the kite been flying you? What sort of asses do you call yourselves, anyway?"

"We've had a tussle with the Grammarians."

"You look like it," said Kerr.

"The odds were on their side."

"Yes, I've noticed that you have a peculiar faculty for walking into traps," said Figgins, with a nod of assent. And the Co. cackled.

"I say, Figgins, let us loose, there's a good fellow!"

Figgins shook his head.

"My dear Merry, you look too funny to be set loose. The sight of you will be good for the school, it will banish care and destroy the blues, as the patent medicine advertisements say. Come on!"

"Let us loose, you New House rotter!"

"We're going to see you safe to the School House," grinned Figgins. "Help them along, chaps. We take them under our wings."

"Ha, ha, ha! Good idea! Come along!"

"You—you New House wasters!"

"Bring them in," said Figgins. "Hallo, fellows! Look here! Oh yez, oh yez, oh yez! Behold the Terrible Three returning in triumph from war. Oh yez, oh yez, oh yez! This is how the School House fellows lick the Grammarians!"

And the Terrible Three were hustled in at the gateway, and marched across the quad. It did not take long for a crowd to gather, and yells of laughter greeted the appearance of the heroes of the Shell.

School House fellows as well as the New House crowd seemed to be highly amused by the peculiar aspect of the Terrible Three, and loud laughter greeted them on all sides.

"Oh yez, oh yez, oh yez!" roared Figgins, in the manner of a town crier. "Come forth and behold the Terrible Three—three terrible asses! This is how the Shell lick the Grammarians! Behold! Oh yez, oh yez, oh yez!"

"Let us loose, you rotters!"

"Come and look at them!" roared the Co. "Behold Tom Merry, the great chief of the Terrible Three!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What on earth is all that noise about?" exclaimed Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, pushing his way through the throng. "Why—what—Merry—Manners—Lowther—what are you doing with your heads through that kite?"

"We—we—we—"

"I—I—I—"

"You—you see—"

"Ha, ha, ha! I suppose this is a Grammar School joke?"

"Ye-e-e-s!"

Kildare laughed heartily.

"Some of you had better release them," he said, walking away.

"You hear that!" exclaimed Manners. "Some of you had better—"

"Ha, ha, ha! Take them to the School House!"

"Some of you had better—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Terrible Three were hustled on, up the steps of their own House. The steps were crowded with laughing juniors.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh yez, oh yez, oh yez! Here are the Terrible Three asses, returning from victory over the Grammar School cads!" yelled Figgins.

"Rescue, School House!" yelled Tom Merry.

There was a movement among the School House fellows.

"Here, come on!" exclaimed Jones. "Kick these New House rotters back to their own side of the quadrangle!"

"Hurrah!" shouted Walsh. "Come on!"

And the School House fellows moved towards Figgins & Co. The New House juniors were not inclined to retreat, and a general scrimmage ensued. Tom Merry's friends tried to get at him to release him, while Figgins & Co. and their backers closed round the Terrible Three to keep them prisoners.

In the midst of the swaying, scuffling crowd, Tom Merry and his chums were whirled and knocked hither and thither, and finally they went down in a heap, smashing the kite, and bumping one another on the ground.

In the midst of the uproar, Mr. Railton, the master of the School House, came out upon the steps of the House, with a cloud upon his brow.

"What does—"

There was no need for the Housemaster to finish his sentence. The fighting juniors melted away like snow in the sunshine at the sound of the master's voice.

The Terrible Three were left wriggling on the ground in the midst of their bonds and the broken kite. Mr. Railton looked at them in utter amazement.

"Who are you? What does this mean? What do you mean by appearing in the quadrangle in that utterly absurd state, Merry?"

Tom tried to struggle to his feet.

"If you please, sir, we couldn't help it!"

"Who tied you up in this ridiculous manner?"

"Some—some fellows we met in the lane."

Mr. Railton's face relaxed into a smile. Tom Merry would not give the Grammarians away, in case of getting them into trouble; but the School House master knew well enough that this was a little joke by the rival school.

"Ahem! I think you had better get yourselves released."

"We've been trying to, sir."

"Walsh, come and set Merry free at once!"

"Certainly, sir!" said Walsh briskly.

And in a few minutes the Terrible Three were untied, and they regained their feet, rumpled and dusty and breathless. Mr. Railton looked at them with a grim smile.

"You had better go and get yourselves cleaned, I think," he said; and he turned and disappeared into the School House.

"My hat!" said Tom Merry. "I think he's about right. Come on!"

And the dusty and dishevelled juniors followed the Housemaster in. From the distance came a final yell from Figgins & Co.

CHAPTER 4.

The Grammarians Catch It!

"H AVE you seen Tom Merry?"

Frank Monk asked the question, as the chums of Study No. 6 at St. Jim's entered Mother Murphy's tuckshop in the village at Rylcombe.

The three Grammarians were there by themselves, having left their companions in order to call at the tuckshop for the materials for a feed at the Grammar School. They wanted to get in by tea-time, so Frank Monk had lost no time about giving his orders, and his purchases were piled on the counter when the juniors from St. Jim's came in.

The Grammarians might be in a hurry, but they could not resist the temptation to help to chip the juniors from the rival school.

"Have you seen Tom Merry?"

Blake looked at the Grammarian leader.

"Yes, I think I've met a fellow of that name," he said, with an air of reflection.

Frank Monk grinned.

"You know what I mean!" he exclaimed. "If you've just come from St. Jim's, you must have met him on the road."

"Of course they must!" said Carboy. "They've met him, and they know how we've dished the Horrible Three. Lemme see, is it the Horrible Three you call them?"

"The Terrible Three!" chuckled Lane. "Terrible duffers, if you like!"

Blake turned rather red. Keen enough might be the

rivalry between the chums of the Shell and the Study No. 6 "gang" at home at St. Jim's, but out of the school one "Saint" always stood up for another.

"What are you three asses cackling about?" he asked politely.

"Well, I never heard asses cackle," said Frank Monk, in a thoughtful way. "I thought asses brayed."

"Well, you ought to know," said Digby. "You ought to know all about the manners and customs of your relations!"

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard that as wathah funny, Dig."

"And now do you regard yourself, Gussy?" demanded Frank Monk. "I fancy you're about the funniest specimen that ever funned!"

"Weally, Fwank Monk—"

"But, really," exclaimed Monk, "what did you think of the way we did up your Horrible Three? First-chop, wasn't it? When we get time we're going to give all you St. Jim's fellows a thorough licking to put you in your place."

"You'd better start now," said Blake.

"Haven't time. We've got to get back to tea," said Monk loftily. "Another time, my boy. Come on, chaps; we can't waste any more of our valuable time on these kids!"

And the three Grammarians began to collect up their purchases. Blake exchanged a significant glance with his comrades, and they moved to intercept the Grammarians' passage to the door.

"Good-bye!" said Frank Monk. "Here, get out of the way! We want to pass!"

"You don't say so!" said Blake.

"You're jokin'!" said D'Arcy, screwing his monocle into his eye, and taking a bland survey of the Grammarians. "You are weally funny, deah boys!"

"Because you can't pass, you see!" exclaimed Digby.

"You have dared to lay your dirty Grammarian paws on the sacred persons of St. Jim's juniors!"

"And now you've got to climb down!" said Herries.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Now, look here—"

"Put these goods back on the counter!"

"Shan't!"

"You'd better; they may get damaged."

The Grammarians thought they had better, also. The purchases were dumped down. There was a bag of new laid eggs among them, and they were breakable in the scrimmage.

"Now, then—" began Frank Monk.

"Exactly!" said Blake. "Now, then, if you stand us a feed, and act as waiters, so as to show that you take second place, and acknowledge our immense superiority, we may possibly be inclined to let you off."

"Yaas, wathah! As a matter of fact, I would wathah not pwoceed to violence, as I disappwove of it on pwinciple, and I don't want to soil my beastlay gloves, you know. If the Gwammah cads choose to acknowledge our undoubted supewiowity—"

"We'll see you farther first!"

"Now, weally, deah boys—"

"Oh, cheese it, Adolphus!"

"My name is not Adolphus, and I wegard the application of that name to me as simplay wudiculous. I must wumark—"

"Now, then, what are you going to do?" demanded Blake.

"I have told you—"

"You are intewwuptin' me, Blake!"

"Dry up a minute, Gussy!"

"I must wefuse to dwy up! You see—"

"Yes, I see a silly ass! Now, Frank Monk—"

"What are you going to do?" demanded Digby. "We haven't much time to waste over you microbes, you know!"

Frank Monk exchanged a quick glance with his chums.

"Rush them," he muttered.

"What-ho!"

The three Grammarians made a desperate rush.

"Sock it to 'em!" roared Blake.

There were four Saints to three Grammarians. Single they were probably equally matched, but the odds were all the difference. Monk, Lane, and Carboy were stopped. They were hurled back, and down they went, with four Saints scrambling over them, and pinning them to the floor.

"Hold the brutes tight!" panted Blake. "We'll give 'em socks!"

"Hurrah! Collar them!"

"Bwavo! Down with the beastlay Gwammah School, deah boys! Huwvah!"

The Grammarians were down. Each had a St. Jim's junior kneeling on his chest, and Blake rose to his feet, leaving his comrades to hold the prisoners. Monk, Lane, and Carboy struggled desperately, but without avail. They were pinned down, and Blake stood quite ready to "chip in" if he were wanted.

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"Bai Jove, we are victowious, deah boys!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "But I find it wathah exhaustin' work holdin' this boundah Lane. Pway be quiet, Lane! You are wumplin' my attire. Blake, will you pway be quick and decide what is to be done with these Gwammawian wottahs?"

"Dry up, Gussy!"

"I am afraid that if I kneel on Lane much longah I shall make my twousahs baggay at the knees!"

"Ha, na, ha!"

"It is no laughin' mattah, Blake! I must uttally wefuse to make my beastlay twousahs baggay at the knees!"

"Really, young gentlemen," said Mother Murphy, from behind the counter—"really—"

The good dame was accustomed to the little rows of the rival schools, and she did not dream of interfering. Her only anxiety was for her stock, which might suffer in the event of a scrimmage.

"Really, young gentlemen—"

"It's all right, Mrs. Murphy!" said Blake reassuringly. "We're not going to shed their blood, if it can be helped. If Monk keeps on wriggling, Herries, jam his head against the floor, and see which is the harder!"

"Right-ho!"

"Lemme gerrup!"

"Rats!"

"Is this what you call playing the game, four to three?" shouted Frank Monk.

But Blake only grinned.

"How many of you were there on to the Terrible Three?" he asked. "I know jolly well you'd never have tied them up if you'd only had man to man!"

And Frank Monk had to admit the soft impeachment.

"Will you pway buck up, Blake, and allow me to wise, as I'm sure that my twousahs—"

"Oh, hang your trousers!"

"I never hang my twousahs! I always place them in the pwess on wettrin'!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Keep that rotter safe!"

"The wottah is wumplin' my attire!"

"Never mind—"

"I have a howwid feelin' that my necktie is cwoked—"

"My hat, that chap keeps on for ever!" exclaimed Blake.

"We haven't a kite we can put these kids' heads through, and we haven't any rope to tie them up. We shan't be able to treat them as they treated Tom Merry. Still, we must avenge the insult to St. Jim's somehow. Perhaps if we were to anoint them—"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"A pound of treacle, please, Mother Murphy!" said Blake. "Poor some salad-oil into it, and a few bottles of ink!"

"My goodness!"

"Now, buck up, dame!"

"But—but what do you want it for, Master Blake? It—it won't be fit to eat! It would poison you!"

"Ha, ha, ha! I don't want to eat a mixture like that!"

"Then what—"

"It's for anointing purposes! You see, Frank Monk is a great chief, and great chiefs have to be anointed! Give us the treacle!"

"Don't!" roared Frank Monk. "I—you—be—"

"Shut up, Frank Monk!"

"Shan't! I—you—"

"Bang his napper on the floor, Herries!"

"Right-ho!"

And Frank Monk's head was solemnly bumped on the floor. He roared and wriggled, but Herries was in deadly earnest. And there was no escaping from the burly junior.

Mother Murphy, greatly amazed, made up the horrible concoction Blake had ordered, and it was served in a basin. Blake cocked his eye at it thoughtfully. The three Grammarians were looking extremely apprehensive. After the way they had served the Terrible Three, they could hardly complain; but the prospect was not pleasing.

"Gimme a ladle, please!" said Blake.

Mother Murphy handed over the ladle. Blake dipped it into the basin, and approached Frank Monk. The Grammarian wriggled spasmodically.

"Don't! I—ow!"

"Are you willing to sing small, and admit that the Grammar School is a rotten old show, and that St. Jim's takes the lead?" asked Blake.

"No!" roared Monk.

"Then I am afraid I shall have to anoint you!"

"You—you rotter! I'll make you sit up for this! Ow—ow—grooooooh!"

"Some of it is bound to go in your mouth if you keep on opening it!" said Blake. "Don't blame me!"

"I—ow—groooooh!"

"There you are! I warned you, and yet you will keep

your mouth open! Some fellows will never learn sense! Keep it shut, old chap!"

"Ow—ow—ow—ow!"

"I don't quite follow! Are you talking in Esperanto or Cherokee?"

"Ow—ow—oooooh!"

"There, I think that will do!" said Blake, surveying Frank Monk with great satisfaction. "Have you had enough?"

"Ow—ow—ow—yes—yes!"

"I think that will do! What do you say. Dig?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Yes! You won't have any left for the others if you give him any more!"

"True! That will do, then!"

Frank Monk thought it would do, too. His face and hair were smothered with the fearful mixture of treacle,

it trickling over his head, and made a tremendous effort to escape. D'Arcy reeled, though he still clung to the Grammarian, and they reeled to and fro. The ladle, nearly full of the horrible compound, came in contact with D'Arcy's face, and the contents were bestowed upon the features of the swell of St. Jim's.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gave a fearful yell.

"Ow! Blake, you ass! Ow! Bai Jove!"

"I'm— Ha, ha, ha! I'm sorry! Ha, ha, ha! Why did you get in the way of the ladle? Never mind, Gussy, hold him!"

"Bai Jove! I am in a howwid mess! I wefuse to hold him till I have wiped this howwid stickiness off my beastlay face!"

"Don't let him go!"

"I must clean my face!"



A terrific battle started between New House and School House, and in the middle of it the Terrible Three were knocked this way and that, and finally hurled to the ground!

salad-oil, and ink. Blake had done the anointing with a really liberal hand.

He turned to Lane. Lane struggled frantically. The sight of Frank Monk's treatment made him desperate.

"Hold him, D'Arcy! Sit tight!"

"I'm twyin' to!" gasped D'Arcy. "But weally, the boundah wiggles feahfully! Lane, I must insist upon your keepin' still while Blake anoints you! You are simply exhaustin' me by all this beastlay stwugglin'!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, pway stop cacklin', Blake! I am gettin' quite annoyed. This stwugglin' thwows me into quite a fluttah! Lane, vou howwid wottah, keep still!"

"Lemme gerrup!"

"I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort! Blake, I think I have him safe now, and you can pwoceed to anoint the howwid wottah!"

"Right you are!"

Blake ladled out the mixture. Lane shuddered as he felt

"Ass! Hold him! Ow! You image!"

D'Arcy had taken out his pocket handkerchief, and was wiping his face. Lane made a heave, and hurled the swell of St. Jim's off, and D'Arcy rolled on the floor as the Grammarian sprang to his feet.

"Hurrah! Go for them!" yelled Frank Monk.

Lane sprang at Blake. Blake hurled the contents of the basin at him, and the sticky mess caught Lane in the face.

"Yarrooooh! Wooh! Grooh!" gasped Lane.

Blake howled with laughter. He threw down the basin, and collared the half-blinded and choking Grammarian, and had him down again in a twinkling.

"Got him!"

"Pway lend me your handkerchief, Blake!" said D'Arcy. "My own is sticky all ovah, and I shall have to thwow it away! My face is not clean yet!"

"Hang your face!"

"I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort—I mean, pway don't

be a wude beast, Blake! Will you have the kindness to lend me your hasty handkerchief?"

"No, you image! Can't you see I'm busy?"

"Digbay, will you lend me your handkerchief?"

"Rats!"

"Hewwies, pway——"

"Go and eat coke!"

"I am afraid that it will be impos for me any longah to wegard your wude boundahs as fwends——"

"Oh, blow your face, Gussy! It's not much of a face, anyway, so you needn't trouble about it. Come and hold this rotter Lane!"

"I am afraid I cannot turn my attention to any twivial mattahs until I have cleaned this howwid mess off my face, Blake! I am twuly sowwy, but it is impos. Mrs. Murphy, do you think you could lend me a duster or something?"

"I tell you——"

"Pway don't bother me now, Blake! I feel howwid! My face is dirty, my necktie is cwoked, and my twousahs are baggy at the knees!"

"Ladle up some of the stuff and shove it on Carboy, if you won't come and hold this beast and let me do it!" roared the exasperated Blake.

"Have you got that dustah, Mrs. Murphy?"

"Here it is, young gentleman!"

"Thank you vewy much! I——"

"D'Arcy!"

"I think I shall soon have my face clean——"

"Do you hear mè, D'Arcy?"

"Yaas, I heah you, Blake, but it is impos for me to pay any attention at pwesent. I must attend to the more important mattah first."

"Oh, you—you image!"

Blake was furious, but there was nothing to be done. It was difficult enough to hold down the wriggling Grammarians, and there was no way of getting at D'Arcy without releasing one of them. Gussy took his time, too. He carefully wiped his face on the clean duster, and then took out a pocket-mirror to examine his features and make sure that the last speck was gone.

"There! I think that will do," he remarked, at last.

"I think it will!" hooted Blake. "Oh, why didn't somebody suffocate you years ago, you howling image?"

"I wefuse to be alluded to as a howlin' image, Blake."

"Ladle up that stuff——"

"You have applied a most appwobwious epithet to me!"

"Do you hear me?"

"I am willin' to make allowances for the stwess of excitement, but I cannot consistently with my dig, allow you to chawactewise me as a howling image."

"You—you—you——"

"If you care to withdraw that obnoxious expression, I shall be glad to help you in any way; but othahwise, I shall walk off and out your acquaintance in the futuah."

"I—I—I——"

"I am waitin' for your decision, Blake," said Arthur Augustus, with a great deal of dignity.

Blake gasped.

"I—I withdraw the expression," he murmured. "Oh, you dummy, I'll make you sit up for this! Pray, D'Arcy, will you kindly ladle some of that sticky stuff over Carboy?"

The swell of St. Jim's beamed again.

"Certainly, deah boy! Anythin' to oblige!"

He picked up the ladle, and scooped up the mixture from the floor.

Carboy watched him apprehensively, and wriggled.

"Don't! You rotter, don't! I——"

"I am afraid it is impossible to please all parties, Carboy. Blake has wequested me to ladle this ovah you, and I cannot wefuse a fwend who has just tendahed me an apology. I am afraid the ladlin' will have to go on."

"You—you—ow!"

D'Arcy calmly spread the sticky mixture over Carboy's countenance.

The Grammarian gasped and was silent, keeping his mouth tightly shut.

"That will do," grinned Blake. "Now I think they have had enough. I really think we have taken the Grammar rotters down a peg or two this time. Let them go and get themselves cleaned."

The three Grammarians were allowed to rise. They were furious, and they looked inclined to go for the Saints again on the spot.

But the odds were against them, and they were feeling in no condition for a struggle. Monk picked up the purchases from the counter, and the Grammarians strode to the door. A yell of laughter from the Saints followed them.

"Weally, I wegard that as bein' distinctly funnay!" D'Arcy remarked. "I weally considah that I have managed this affair pwetty well."

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"You have!" ejaculated Digby. "Well, my hat!"

"They looked extwemely comical," said D'Arcy, going to the door and gazing out after the Grammarians. "I say, Fwank Monk— Owowowow!"

An egg from outside flew into the doorway, and broke upon D'Arcy's nose.

Blake burst into a roar. It was evidently hurled by the Grammarians, and was a Parthian shot from the defeated enemy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow—ow—ow!"

"You've got it this time," grinned Blake. "Serves you right! I was going to wipe up the floor with you, but I think I shall let you off. What are your orders, kid? I'm standing treat this time."

"Pway lend me anothah dustah, Mrs. Murphy."

"Jam tarts," said Digby.

"Cream puffs," said Herries.

"Pway lend me a dustah!"

"Good! Jam tarts for Dig, Mrs. Murphy, and cream puffs for Herries. I'll have some currant-cake, and D'Arcy will have a duster."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You unfeelin' wottahs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

CHAPTER 5.

A Grammarian Raid!

DUSK was falling upon St. Jim's—the dusk of a fine spring evening! The boys were coming into their houses, but Tom Merry's study remained dark and deserted. The quadrangle was growing deserted, Taggles, the school porter, came out to close the gates, and dimly caught sight of three figures that fitted in through the gateway and disappeared across the quad towards the School House.

Taggles gave a grunt.

"Young rascals!" he muttered. "Just in time! Another minute and they'd have been shut out, and I shouldn't have opened the gate under a bob each!"

And Taggles proceeded to lock up the gates.

Little did the school porter of St. Jim's dream whom the three lads were who had flitted so rapidly from his sight. He had not clearly seen them in the dusk, or he would have known that they were not St. Jim's fellows.

"Stop a bit, you chaps!"

The voice was the voice of Frank Monk! The three figures halted under the shadow of an elm-tree, with a soft chuckle.

"We're safe in, at all events!" grinned Lane.

"We've got to get out yet," Carboy remarked.

"Easy enough," said Frank Monk. "We have the rope, and one of us can bunk the others up on the wall, and then we can let the rope down——"

"That's right enough!"

"But the first thing is to get into the School House. I've got the mallet and pegs here——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We'll look at Blake's quarters first; I'd rather settle with him after what happened this afternoon. But if not——"

"No good!"

"What do you mean, Lane?"

"Look up there," said Lane, pointing to a lighted window. "That's Study No. 6—Blake's study. I know it well enough! You can see they've got the gas burning."

Monk nodded.

"True! Tom Merry's study will do, if we get a chance at it!"

"I don't know his window, but a good many of them are dark. Yes, that's his window, now I come to think of it, with the flower on the sill. I remember Manners pointing it out to me when we were over here for the sports."

Frank Monk chuckled gleefully.

"There's no light, so the study's empty. We shall have to dodge up pretty quickly."

"It will be touch and go."

"I don't know. Most of the fellows will be at tea, and I don't suppose many of them will be hanging about the passages."

"Something in that."

"Besides, it won't take us a minute; and once we're in the study——"

"We can lock the door."

"Exactly!"

"Come on, then; no good wasting time!"

"Follow your leader!" grinned Frank Monk.

The three Grammarians hurried on through the dusk towards the School House.

They entered and ran up the stairs in a second or two; fortunately for their purpose, without being spotted. The

(Continued at foot of next page.)

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THERE'S ANOTHER COUPON ON PAGE 19.

THE KIDNAPPED CRICKETERS!

(Continued from previous page.)

passages above were not yet lighted, and, though a couple of fellows passed them, they were not recognised in the gloom.

Lane and Monk both knew the way to Tom Merry's study. As a matter of fact, Study No. 6 was unoccupied, although the light was burning there. D'Arcy had been last out of the study, and he was thinking about the bagging at the knees of his trousers, and had no time to think of such a trivial matter as turning down the gas. The three Gramarians, however, were not aware of that, and they made directly for Tom Merry's study.

Monk opened the door cautiously. The room was in blackness, and was evidently empty. Monk entered.

"Come in, kids; it's all serene,"

Lane and Carboy followed him in.

Frank Monk closed the door and felt for the key, but there was not one in the lock. Lane lighted the gas.

"Better lock the door, Frank," said Carboy.

"Can't; there's no key here. I suppose Tom Merry's got it in his pocket, or they've lost it. Never mind; we'll soon have the door fast enough."

Monk drew a peg from his pocket and a small mallet from under his coat. To drive the peg under the door with a few sharp blows occupied only a minute.

Monk rose to his feet with a laugh.

"They won't get in now!"

"Better make all safe!" grinned Lane. "Shove another peg in, and then nail a piece across the doorpost where the door opens—or, rather, where it won't open!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Good!"

The knocking of the mallet attracted no attention. There was frequently a great deal of noise in Tom Merry's study, so there was nothing unusual in that. While Frank Monk was busy with the mallet, Lane and Carboy were not idle. Across the walls of the study they scrawled in letters of imposing size:

"DOWN WITH ST. JIM'S!"

Frank Monk turned from the door and grinned as he read the inscription.

"I don't think they'll get in now!" he remarked.

"Ha, ha, ha! No."

"I don't think they'll shift this door with anything short of a battering-ram! Hallo, here's somebody coming!"

"Time we were off!"

"Yes, rather! Open the window. If we got our retreat cut off there we should be in a pretty fix!"

"That happened to us once before here!"

"We don't want it to happen again! Buck up!"

Lane opened the window. Monk tied the ends of his rope together and looped it over a leg of the table, which he shoved to the window. The rope was allowed to fall out, and Monk got out on the sill.

There was a tap at the study door.

"Just in time!" grinned Monk.

He slid down the doubled rope. Lane and Carboy followed him swiftly as a second and louder knock came at the door of the study.

"We're well out of that!" chuckled Monk. He unfastened the knotted end of the rope, and then it was an easy matter to pull it from its hold in the study. "Come on!"

Three figures melted away in the gloom towards the school wall.

Meanwhile, the knocking at the door of Tom Merry's study was growing louder.

CHAPTER 6.

Pegged Out!

"**M**ERRY! Open this door immediately!"

It was the voice of Mr. Linton in the corridor, and it was growing angry. The master of the Shell knocked at the door again.

"Merry! I command you to open this door!"

There was no reply from within the study. Mr. Linton's brow contracted.

He had come back to the study because he thought that the Terrible Three had neglected his order to take themselves and their books to the Shell class-room, in company with Study No. 6, for fighting over some trivial matter in the study.

Finding the door fastened, he jumped to the conclusion that Tom Merry had locked it against him, and he was naturally angry at the idea. He thumped angrily on the oak panels.

"Merry! Will you open this door?"

Still dead silence.

Setting his lips very hard, Mr. Linton walked away to the Shell class-room. He would make sure that the Terrible Three had disobeyed his orders before he took any further steps in the matter.

To his surprise there was a glimmer of light in the class-room, and a scratching of pens audible as he came to the door.

He looked into the room.

Seven juniors were writing away industriously at their Latin exercises; that industry being the effect of their having heard the footsteps of Mr. Linton coming along the passage.

"Ah, you are here, Merry!"

Tom Merry looked up in surprise.

"Yes, sir; you told us to come here!" he said.

"Quite so. I have just been to your study, however, and as I found the door locked I surmised— But it is nothing; I shall look in again soon."

And Mr. Linton, with this warning, left the juniors to their task. He imagined that Tom Merry had locked his door after leaving his study, and, of course, there was no fault to be found with that. But he left the hero of the Shell in a puzzled frame of mind.

Tom Merry left off writing as soon as the Form master's footsteps had died away, and glanced at his chums.

"Did you hear what he said, chaps?"

"Rather!" said Manners. "Somebody's locked our door while we've been here doing this rotten scrawling!"

"Yes, but how? You know the key of our study door is not in the lock. You remember we are going to have duplicate keys made, so as to have one each, and the key was taken down to the locksmith at Rylcombe?"

"By Jove, yes! How has anybody locked the door without a key?"

"Curious!" said Lowther.

"Very curious," said Tom Merry. "Some joker has been up to something there, I suppose, as a matter of fact. We'll look into it as soon as we get away from here."

"Some kid from the New House," suggested Blake. "Figgins, very likely."

"Yaas, wathah!"

The juniors resumed their scribbling. Before the hour was up Mr. Linton looked into the class-room and told them they might go.

Gladly enough the juniors took advantage of that permission. They trooped out of the class-room and made their way up the School House stairs. Blake and his chums went into Study No. 6, while the Terrible Three kept on along the corridor to their own study.

Tom Merry tried the door. It refused to budge. There was a glimmer of light underneath it, showing that the gas was alight. Tom kicked at the door.

"Hallo! Who's in there?"

There was, of course, no reply.

"Who's in there?"

Still dead silence.

"My hat!" said Tom Merry. "I'll make them sit up,

whoever they are! I wonder how they've fastened the door without a key?"

"Shoved a chair back under the lock, perhaps," suggested Manners.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"The door would give a little in that case, and you can see it's as fast as if it were screwed up."

"Perhaps it is screwed. You remember Blake screwed us up in here once," Monty Lowther remarked. "It certainly wasn't Blake this time, but Figgins may have—"

"I shouldn't wonder! But the rotters must be still there, then!"

Tom Merry kicked at the door.

"Will you open this door, you beast? We'll snatch you baldheaded when you do open it! Do you hear, you New House rotters?"

Still silence reigned.

Manners dropped on his knees and looked through the keyhole. He could catch a glimpse of the table and the fire, but not of any occupant in the study.

"See anything?"

"No; I don't believe there's anybody in the study."

"But how did they get out, then?"

"By the window, perhaps."

"They must have," said Lowther, "if they came from the New House. It's too late now for a junior to be out of his House."

"True. They've fastened up the door and bolted," said Tom Merry wrathfully. "My hat! I wish we had been in time to catch the rotters!"

"We shall have to bust the door in."

"Can't be did! It would make too much row, and old Linton will be on the look-out for anything in that line."

"What the dickens are we going to do, then? I suppose we can't remain out here in the passage all the beastly evening?"

"No, we can't do that. The only thing is to get in at the window, I suppose."

"We're not allowed out of the House at this time—"

"Of course, we never do anything we're not allowed to do," grinned Lowther.

Tom Merry laughed.

"We shall have to sneak out and borrow Taggles' long ladder," he said. "There's nothing else to be done."

"That means two bob to Taggles—"

"We can stand eightpence each."

"I suppose it's the only thing to be done. My hat! I wish we could get at Figgins & Co. and make them squirm a bit. That would be some comfort."

Tom Merry gave a start.

"So we can!" he exclaimed. "If we're going to have the ladder what price having a look in at Figgins' study with it first?"

Manners and Lowther burst into a laugh.

"Good wheeze!"

"I should say so. We can stick the ladder up to their study window—same as we did that night we boned the feed—only this time we shan't go in—"

"Hardly; we could take our squirts—"

"There wouldn't be time to use them. Figgins & Co. would be upon us in a second after we had the window open."

"Well, what's the idea, then? I suppose we're not going to take the trouble of getting the ladder to the window

Potts, the Office Boy!



just to look in and say good-evening," Monty Lowther remarked sarcastically.

"If you'd let me speak for a second——"

"Oh, get on!"

"I was thinking of taking that tin of sneezing-powder——"

"My hat!"

"It would need only a sweep of the hand to send a shower of it over Figgins & Co.," grinned Tom Merry. "Then we could be off——"

"We should have to be off jolly sharp, or we should get pitched off," grinned Lowther. "Can you get the powder?"

"I've got it in my locker downstairs. You two fellows can go and negotiate with Taggles over the ladder, while I get the powder."

"Good wheeze!"

And the Terrible Three lost no time in putting the plan into effect. They had not the slightest doubt that Figgins & Co. were responsible for the fastening up of the study door, never dreaming of the Grammarian raid within the walls of St. Jim's.

It was not difficult to slip out of the House without attracting attention, and once in the dusk of the quadrangle they were safe.

"Get the ladder, and take it towards the New House," murmured Tom Merry. "I'll be after you in a jiffy with the sneezing-powder. Mind you don't get spotted."

"What-ho!"

Taggles, the school porter, made some difficulty about the loan of the ladder. He had been called over the coals for lending it to the juniors on a previous occasion. But the sight of a half-crown softened his heart, and he consented.

Manners and Lowther carried off the ladder, and in the shadow of the New House Tom Merry rejoined them.

"Got it?" whispered Lowther.

Tom Merry chuckled, and held up a tin.

"Genuine electric snuff!"

"Good egg!"

The ladder was run up under Figgins' window.

Tom Merry ascended, leaving his chums holding the ladder at the bottom. Up he went till he could look in at Figgins' lighted window.

CHAPTER 7.

A Little Mistake!

FIGGINS & Co. were having tea. The New House study looked very comfortable, and Figgins & Co. looked very comfortable, too. The kettle was singing away on the hob, there was a clean cloth on the table, and an unusually good supply of provender was spread there. Fatty Wynn was cutting a large steak pie, with an expression of anticipation upon his plump features.

Tom Merry grinned as he looked in through the window, the thin white muslin curtains only slightly obstructing the view.

Figgins & Co. were "doing themselves" well this time, doubtless in celebration of the jape upon the School House chums. They had not the slightest suspicion of the face at the window.

Tom Merry felt the sash cautiously. The window was open a few inches at the top, as was the custom in Figgins' study. Tom Merry felt the bottom sash, and found that

it worked easily. He raised it half an inch by degrees, so as to get his fingers under it.

There was a slight creak, and Figgins looked out.

"Hallo! What's the matter with the window?"

"Why, it's open!" said Kerr, staring at it in amazement. "I'll swear I shut it down tight at the bottom when we came into the study."

"You couldn't have."

"I tell you I'm certain——"

Kerr broke off with a gasp as the bottom sash was flung suddenly up. Figgins & Co sprang to their feet in amazement.

"Hallo!" said Tom Merry, looking into the study with perfect coolness.

"Tom Merry!"

"As large as life," said Tom Merry coolly. "I've come to return your visit."

"Eh? What are you talking about?" said Figgins.

"Our visit?" said Marmaduke. "We haven't visited you."

"Well, perhaps not; but you visited our study, at all events," grinned Tom Merry. "I've come to return the compliment. Do you like snuff?"

"Snuff! I'll snuff you! Catch hold of his ears, kids, and yank him in! We'll dust up the firegrate with his top-knot for his fearful cheek!"

"Good! Collar him!"

The Co. dashed towards the window.

Tom Merry grinned.

Up came his hand with the opened tin of sneezing-powder in it, and with a jerk of the wrist he sent a cloud of the stinging snuff into the faces of Figgins & Co.

"Ow!" roared Figgins.

He staggered blindly back, knocking heavily against Kerr, who reeled upon the table. There was a smash of crockery. Marmaduke yelled, and clapped his hands to his face. Fatty Wynn rolled on the floor, sneezing. A pandemonium of sneezing and coughing awoke every echo in the study.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "Perhaps you wish you hadn't plugged up our study door now, you New House wasters!"

"I—ow! Yow—tchoo—tchoo——"

"Groo—geroooooh—choo—atchoo——"

"Atchoo—atchoo—atchoo——"

"We'll skin you; We'll—choo—choo—atchoo——"

"We'll break your neck! We'll come and—choo—choo—atchoo——"

"You rotter! You beastly choo—choo—atchoo——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go for him! Rush him and choo—choo—choo——"

Tom Merry slid down the ladder.

Four furious faces, red with excitement and sneezing, glared down upon him. The chums of the Shell, convulsed with laughter, dragged the ladder away from the window.

"You rotter!" roared Figgins. "I'll—choo—choo—atchoo——"

"Ha, ha, ha! You can choo—choo—atchoo as much as you like, Figgys! Keep it up, old chap! We don't mind!"

"Beasts!" shrieked Kerr. "Ow! I feel as if my nose were coming off! Choo—I'll—gerrooh—choo—atchoo!"

"Stick it out, old chap!"

"Go it!"

"I'll—choo—choo——"

KEEPING IT DOWN!



"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, get the ladder away!" murmured Tom Merry. "This row will be heard. It would be no joke to have old Ratty drop on us!"

"By Jove, no!"

"Come on! Off you go!"

Tom Merry crammed the nearly empty tin into his pocket, and the chums of the Shell seized the ladder and rushed it away. Four faces blocked up the window of Figgins' study, with gasps and frantic sneezes.

The chums of the Shell were laughing so much that they could hardly carry the ladder. But they brought it up to the School House wall and set it against the window-sill of Tom Merry's study.

Across the quad on the still air, came the faint, distant sound of sneezing.

"My hat!" exclaimed Lowther. "Figgins & Co. have had a warm time, and no mistake. There's nothing like a little sneezing-powder to make a chap sit up."

"By Jove! They're keeping it up, too!" said Tom Merry, listening. "I expect Figgy would give a week's pocket-money to get to close quarters now. Well, here goes!"

Tom Merry was quickly up the ladder. He pushed up the window and scrambled into his study, and Manners and Lowther swiftly followed him. The gas was burning clearly, and the chums of the Shell had a clear view of the raiders' work as they entered at the window.

Tom Merry gave a gasp.

"My only hat!"

"Down with St. Jim's!" read out Lowther from the wall, in bewilderment. "What on earth does that mean? Figgy wouldn't scrawl that there. He would say, 'Down with the School House!'"

"It couldn't have been Blake, either," said Manners, in equal amazement. "He was with us all the time in the class-room. And besides, he wouldn't have put up an inscription like that. Who the—what the—"

"Asses!" said Tom Merry witheringly. "Where have your brains got to? It was the Grammar School cads, of course."

"The Grammarians."

"Who else?"

"By Jupiter, you're right! They've been here!" gasped Manners.

"Well, they could hardly have scrawled that cheeky stuff up there without being here," said Tom Merry. "It doesn't need a Sexton Blake to deduce that. They've been here, and they're gone, too."

"Yes, they're gone; no doubt about that."

"The rotters! If we could have caught them—"

"Well, we did once, and made them eat their words," grinned Tom Merry. "This time they've done us. I say, there's no need to tell the whole school about this. We're getting chipped enough as it is."

"Right! Mum's the word!"

"We'll keep it dark till we've got our own back on the Grammar cads!"

"That's right! Let's get that beastly door unfastened before anyone happens along," exclaimed Manners briskly.

"Good! There's a hammer in the locker, and you can soon get the pegs out. But, I say— Ha, ha, ha!"

"What's the matter?"

"Figgins & Co.! We've japed them! Ha, ha, ha!" And they were innocent all the time. They haven't been here."

"My hat! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Poor old Figgins! He must have been astounded when I said I had come to return his visit," chuckled Tom Merry. "Never mind. It was a good jape, and up against the New House, so it doesn't matter. Get that door undone."

It did not take Manners long to get the door undone.

As he unfastened it there were footsteps in the passage and a knock at the door.

The Terrible Three started.

"I say, whoever it is mustn't see that inscription on the walls!" exclaimed Lowther hastily.

"By Jove, no! Cover it up with something!"

"With what?"

But the door was opening. Tom Merry, with great presence of mind, reached up and turned out the gas. There was a remonstrative voice at once.

"Bai Jove, the beastly place is all dark, you know! Tom Mewwy, you wottah, what have you just turned out the wotten gas for, you boundah?"

"We're not receiving visitors this evening," said Tom Merry, through the gloom. "Run away and play, there's a good Gussy."

"I wufese to wun away and play—"

"What's all this rot?" broke in the voice of Blake. THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,266.

"We want to speak to you fellows. Light that beastly gas!"

"Can't be did! Clear off!"

"Rats! We've come to talk it over with you seriously, and without a row. You're not going to provoke us. St. Jim's has got to lead, you admit that."

"I don't admit anything. And especially I don't admit asses into this study. Travel along, before we shift you!"

"We shall want some shifting," said Digby.

"Oh, pway keep the beastly peace, deah boys! We shall have our respected mastahs on our twack if there is any more wow."

"That's right, Gussy. Blessed are the peacemakers! Tom Merry, we've not come here to row. Light the gas and talk it over."

"Oh, go and talk in your own study! You make me tired!" said Tom Merry plaintively.

"The conversation of these kids does gives one that



"Collar him!" The New House Co. dashed forward, but the next jerked the contents of the open tin of sneezing-powder right, of smashing crockery! "Ha, ha, ha,"

tired feeling." Monty Lowther remarked. "It's rather rough on us."

"Why don't you light the gas?"

"My dear chap, you've got plenty of gas."

"Ha, ha, ha! Bai Jove, I wegard that as wathah funnay—"

"Oh, leave off cackling, Gussy! I suppose you're not setting up in business as an alarm clock?" said Blake crossly.

"Look here, Tom Merry, what's the giddy mystery? What is it you don't want us to see? There's something going on here."

"I tell you—"

There was a smell of gas in the room. Then the scratch of a match, and a flare of light. While the talk was going

on the astute Digby had silently groped for the gas-burner, and this sudden illumination was the result.

The juniors blinked in the sudden light. Then Blake gave a yell.

"Look there!"

The Terrible Three looked dismayed. The eyes of the Fourth-Formers were fixed upon the tell-tale inscription on the wall.

"Down with St. Jim's!" read out Blake. "So that's the giddy secret. The Grammarians have been here and bearded the lion in his den."

"Bearded the donkeys in their shed, you mean," said Digby.

"Yaas, wathah!"



moment they were staggering back, for Tom Merry's hand shot up and to their faces. In a second the table went reeling with a sound that startled Tom Merry, as he emptied the tin.

"Well," said Herries, "I always said that Tom Merry would let the school down, but I never looked for anything like this. I really never did."

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Tom Merry uncomfortably. "How on earth could I help it? The rotters sneaked in the study while we were detained in the class-room."

"All through you kids coming here and making a row," said Lowther.

"It's really Blake's fault," Monty Lowther remarked. "I hold Blake responsible."

"Rats, and many of 'em!" said Blake scoffingly. "You've been done in again. Done brown; beaten hollow; licked to the wide! Yah!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"These chaps set up to be leaders of the School House juniors," said Blake witheringly. "They're not fit to lead a girls' school."

"Nor an infants' school," said Digby.

"Nor a lot of white rabbits," Herries remarked.

"Are you going to get out?" roared Tom Merry. "We're getting rather fed-up with your cheek, you youngsters."

"Oh, come along!" said Blake, going to the door. "We must let the whole school know about this, and get this boulder lugged down off his perch."

"Rather!" said a voice at the door, and Gore looked into the study. "This is the joke of the season, I think. Down with St. Jim's! Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you sniggering about?" demanded Blake, changing his tone. "Don't go gassing this all over the place, Gore. The New House rotters would never let us hear the end of it."

"Ha, ha, ha! It's too good to keep!"

"Look here—"

But Gore was gone—gone to spread the news of the latest Grammarian jape through the House.

"Well, it serves you jolly well right!" said Blake. "I'll tell you what we'll do, Tom Merry. We'll think about it, and get up some stunning wheeze to take the Grammar cads down, and let you help us. That will give you a leg up."

"Oh, get out!" said Tom Merry ungratefully.

"Bai Jove, undah the cires, I considah that wemark wathah wude, Tom Mewwy!"

Tom Merry picked up a cricket-stump.

"Are you going?"

"Oh, come along!" said Blake.

And the chums of Study No. 6 went down the passage, grinning, leaving the Terrible Three staring at one another in dismay.

CHAPTER 8.

The Last Defiance!

TOM MERRY expected the whole School House to ring with the Grammarians' latest exploit, and he was not disappointed. That night the whole House knew the joke, and the next morning it was almost the only topic among the juniors.

The chipping the Terrible Three had had to endure over their latest adventure with the kite had been severe. But this raid on their own quarters brought on a fresh and more severe attack.

Allusions to the incident were made every moment, sometimes to the chums of the Shell, sometimes "at" them.

The New House fellows soon came to hear the story, and, naturally, they made as much as possible of it.

Figgins & Co. came over towards the School House before breakfast, in the hope of falling in with Tom Merry, and making him some slight return for his visit of the previous night.

They met Gore first, and learned the story from him, and the truth dawned upon Figgins. And when he met Tom Merry a little later he was merry instead of warlike.

"Hallo, Merry!" he exclaimed, in a friendly way. "I hear your House is giving you the sack as junior captain."

"Oh, go and eat coke!" grunted Tom Merry.

"I hear the Grammarians have been in your quarters, and left you all sorts of flattering messages," said Figgins. "You thought it was us, didn't you?"

Tom Merry grinned.

"Well, yes. By the way, how do you like the sneezing-powder?"

Figgins almost sneezed at the recollection.

"It was hot," he said—"very hot! If you could only have japed the Grammarians like that instead of us—"

"Well, you New House kids want keeping in your places, you know," Tom Merry remarked.

"I'll tell you what," said Figgins, unheeding. "I don't like to see a St. Jim's crowd put down like this by the Grammarians—"

"It makes us look small," Kerr remarked.

"That's it," said Figgins, with a nod. "It makes us all look small, and, as Cock House at St. Jim's we're bound to take the School House under our protection a bit. So I'll tell you what, Tom Merry, if you and Manners and Lowther care to obey orders, and do exactly as we tell you, we'll let you into the Co., and give you a chance of getting your own back on the Grammar School cads."

"Thank you for nothing!"

"It's a good offer," said Figgins persuasively. "I'm not

running you chaps down. You've got pluck, for instance. With a New House fellow to direct you, and tell you just what to do, there's no reason why you shouldn't make the Grammar School cads squirm."

"Good!" said the Co. together.

"I'll make you squirm if I have any more of your cheek," said Tom Merry. And he walked away whistling, leaving Figgins & Co. grinning hugely.

Morning school came as a relief for the Terrible Three from the torrent of chaff they had to bear. But at dinner-time it recommenced. The Terrible Three had six separate fights on their hands before afternoon school. In the Shell class-room during the afternoon there were nods and winks and whispers.

"My hat!" exclaimed Tom Merry, as the chums came out when the Shell were dismissed. "It's not all lavender being a leader, blessed if it is! The silly owls expect you to take the cake every time. I, for one, can't see anything very funny in the Grammar School cads dodging into our study and—"

"Then you're the only one that can't," grunted Monty Lowther. "The whole school is cackling over it like a giddy farmyard!"

"The whole school!" growled Manners. "Figgins & Co. will never let us hear the end of it. The Grammarians have scored on our own ground."

"We can't expect to down them every time—"

"Yes; but to be done brown in our own quarters—"

"I know it was a bit rough—"

"Yes, I should say it was. I wonder whether they will ever leave off chipping us? Hallo, Gore! What are you sniggering at?"

"Three terrible idiots!" sniggered Gore. "Down with St. Jim's! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, shut up!"

"I say, Tom Merry, if you want to resign for a bit, I'm quite willing to take your place," said Gore generously. "The House would be quite willing to give you a rest. I've asked a lot of fellows, and they all say they're willing—more than willing."

"Cheese it!"

"Not only willing, but eager," chimed in Mellish. "As a matter of fact, I'd give my vote to Skimpole or D'Arcy rather than a chap who goes out looking for lickings, and gets lickings from Grammar School cads in his own study."

The Terrible Three walked on with very red faces, leaving Gore and Mellish giggling.

"Nice, ain't it?" said Lowther.

"Jolly nice!" said Manners.

"Awfully!" said Tom Merry, with a wry face. "I've a jolly good mind to take them at their word and resign! I wonder what sort of a show they would make against the Grammar School cads without us?"

"Not much worse than we've made."

"Oh, don't croak, Monty!"

"I don't want to croak. What I say is—"

"You'll tire your own voice, old chap," said Tom Merry kindly. "Don't say any more. Let's get to the study, that's about the only place where we shan't be chipped to death; and if Blake comes along there again, we'll snatch him baldheaded!"

The Terrible Three took refuge in their study.

Tea was not a very cheerful meal in Study No. 10 on this occasion. The chums of the Shell had a weight on their minds. The sunlight was still falling brightly into the quadrangle, but the Terrible Three for once did not feel inclined to go out. It was some time before a loud shouting in the quad attracted their attention.

Tom Merry gave a start at last, and set down his teacup.

"What's all that thundering row about, kids?"

"Somebody's shouting in the quad, that's all."

"It's more than somebody! Hark! It sounds as if the whole school were shouting there!" exclaimed Tom, rising to his feet.

The roar of voices from the quad floated through the open window of the study. The Terrible Three left the tea-table and hurried to the window. They looked out upon a goodly portion of the old quadrangle, shut in by ancient buildings and still more ancient elm-trees. A crowd moved across the quad in their view, with their faces turned upward, most of them shouting. They were evidently watching something in the sky, but what it was the chums could not see from the window, owing to the thick foliage of a big elm-tree in the way.

"What on earth can it be?" muttered Tom Merry.

"An aeroplane, perhaps."

"They wouldn't be getting so excited about an aeroplane passing over the college."

"Then what the dickens can it be?"

"Blessed if I know!"

Tom Merry called out to Blake, whom he discerned in the crowd below:

"Blake! I say, Blake!"

Blake glanced up at the window.

"Hallo! Have you seen it?"

"Seen what?"

"Oh, of course, you're out of this!" said Blake. "Nothing for you to do here. You're dead in this act. What can you do against the Grammar School cads?"

"The Grammarians! They're not here, are they?"

"Haven't you seen the kite?"

"Kite! What kite?"

"The Grammarians' kite! It's floating up over the School House now!" yelled Blake. "It has got something written on it. We haven't quite made it out yet; but it's something cheery, of course!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"There it is!" shouted Figgins. "I can make it out now! 'Down—' There, I made one word out! It was 'Down,' with a capital D!"

"I think we can guess the rest," said Kerr.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry turned to his chums.

"I think we can guess the rest, too," he remarked. "This is rather cool of the Grammar School cads, and no mistake. Where are you going, Monty?"

Lowther was crossing hurriedly to the door.

"I'm going out to get a squirt of the kite."

"So am I!" said Manners, following Lowther.

"Wait a bit. Blake says it's going over the School House. You won't see it. We shall have a better chance by getting on the roof."

"Good idea! Come on!"

The chums of the Shell hurried out of the study, and



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swiftly made their way to the stairs leading up to the trap in the flat roof. Tom Merry unbolted the trap and lifted it.

"Come on, kids!"

He pulled himself up through the trap, and stepped out on the roof. Manners and Lowther followed quickly.

As they emerged they heard a shout from the quadrangle far below, ringing up over the ancient roots of St. Jim's.

"The rotters!"

"Where are they?"

"Outside the walls somewhere!"

Tom Merry did not need to look for the kite, as soon as he was on the roof of the School House. Borne upon the wind, it was floating above the school, and to it was attached a grinning dummy and a card bearing the inscription was turned towards the chums of the Shell, as they hurried towards the parapet in the front of the House. Plainly enough they read the words:

"DOWN WITH ST. JIM'S!"

Tom Merry snapped his teeth."

"Down with St. Jim's!"

It was the old war-cry of the Grammarians.

Tom Merry looked out for the enemy, and by following the direction of the cord attached to the kite he made them out.

Beyond the walls of St. Jim's, on the School Hill, stood Frank Monk, recognisable even at that distance, with Carboy at his side.

Monk was holding the cord in both hands, and Carboy had the end of it. The kite was a large one, very large, and the wind was strong. The wind, blowing from the hill towards the school, had carried the kite exactly where the Grammarians wanted it, and Monk knew, of course, that at that hour the grounds would be thronged with boys let out of the class-room, and so the defiance would be hurled in the teeth of the whole of St. Jim's.

"My hat!" muttered Lowther. "Of all the cool cheek! And we can't do anything!"

"Nothing!" said Manners. "Down with St. Jim's! My hat!"

The juniors in the quadrangle were shouting excitedly. The inscription on the kite had now been read, and shouted from one to another, and the Saints were burning with wrath.

Many of the seniors were in the crowd—most of them laughing, however—and some of the masters had been drawn out into the quad by the noise. All were staring at the great kite borne by the wind all over the whole school.

"Nice state of affairs you School House kids have brought us into!" exclaimed Figgins, glaring at the chums of Study No. 6.

The next moment Figgins and Blake were staggering about in deadly embrace. Their chums on either side were not slow to join in. Several St. Jim's fellows had bolted out of the gates, and were running up the path on the hill, though there was little chance of getting at the Grammarians. It was impossible to get at the kite or the enemy, and so School House and New House found vent for their wrath in getting at each other. A terrific scrimmage was raging in the quad.

Tom Merry looked down at it from the roof of the School House and smiled.

"Those kids are hammering each other. I don't see how that will improve matters much, but I dare say it will relieve their feelings. I say, chaps, this is about the cheekiest, coolest jape the Grammarians have ever worked off on us."

"What are we going to do? We can't get hold of the kite."

"No chance of that. Monk is taking in the cord now. We can't get hold of the kite, but we can make the Grammarians sing small."

"How?"

Tom Merry scratched his curly head.

"That's the question. We've got to think of a wheeze, or life won't be worth living at St. Jim's. Study rows and House rows are off now, kids. We've got to settle the hash of the Grammarians, and our motto has got to be 'St. Jim's leads!' I'll summon a meeting of Figgins & Co. and Blake & Co., and we'll get on to something at once!"

CHAPTER 9.

Tom Merry's Wheeze!

THE meeting was summoned, and in due course eleven juniors were crammed into the Terrible Three's study. There was a gleam in Tom Merry's eye as he rose to address the meeting—a gleam that betokened that he had some sort of a plan already formed in his mind. "Gentlemen," he began, "when the Grammarians flew a kite over the school, with 'Down with St. Jim's!' scrawled

on it, there's no doubt it was one in the eye for the lot of us."

"Rather, the cheeky rotters!"

"Anyway, we're all agreed that the Grammar School has got to be put in its place, and the Grammarians made to sing small."

"Hear, hear!"

"I have a plan for accomplishing that important—that important—important——" Tom Merry paused for a moment.

"Desideratum," suggested Blake.

"Oh, any old thing will do!" said Figgins. "Get on with the washing!"

"I have a plan. You know, the Grammarians have an idea that they can play cricket."

"Ha, ha, ha! So they have!"

"It's a curious delusion, and we're going to knock it out of them when we meet them in the Junior match later on," said Tom Merry. "But that's not the point now."

"Then don't drag it in," said Blake.

"What I say is, that I've got a plan for kyboshing the Grammar School kids in first-class style," said Tom Merry. "It's owing to my getting information about their cricket fixtures. You see, I have been scouting——"

"What's that to——"

"Order!"

"To-morrow afternoon, Wednesday—which, you know, is a half-holiday at the Grammar School as well as with us—Frank Monk and the Grammar School Eleven go over to Carbrooke to play the town team there."

"Blessed if I see what that's got to do with us!" said Figgins.

"Do you ever see anything, Figgins, till it's pointed out to you?" said Digby.

"Order!"

"I don't see it, either," said Blake.

"The Grammarians have arranged that fixture entirely by post. You know the Carbrooke is a good distance, and it's the first time the Grammarians have played them. I know that the Grammar School cads are unknown there, and haven't met any of the Carbrooke lot——"

"He's wandering in his mind, poor chap!" said Kerr, tapping his forehead significantly. "He couldn't have any other reason for investigating the natural history of the Grammarians like this."

"Order!"

"When I learned this an idea came into my head," said Tom Merry. "So I made it a point to learn all I could on the matter. The Grammarians haven't met any of the Carbrooke lot. They will have to introduce themselves when they get to Carbrooke to-morrow for the match. They are leaving the Grammar School at two sharp in their charabanc."

"Oh, are you thinking of an ambush on the road?"

"Something like that. But listen, can't you? We know when the Grammarians are going in their charabanc, and the road they will take. There can't be more than twelve or thirteen in the charabanc, and we could take two or three dozen chaps to ambush them if we liked."

"That's so!"

"We can collar them and capture the charabanc. You know the old tower in the ruins in the wood. Once a fellow was shoved in there and locked up, he couldn't get out until we chose to let him go."

"Bai Jove, that's wight!"

"It would be a screaming joke on the Grammar School cads——"

"But what about the Carbrooke lot?" said Figgins. "We've got nothing up against them, and it would be a shame to disappoint them of their game."

"I'm not thinking of disappointing them."

"Eh? You say we can shut up the Grammar School cads in the old tower——"

"Yes, and keep them there."

"Then who will play the Carbrooke Eleven?"

"We shall."

"What!"

Eight voices uttered the exclamation in chorus.

"We shall," said Tom Merry calmly. "My idea is to take the Grammar School cads, and go to Carbrooke in their place and play the game for them——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It will be about the completest 'do' we have ever worked off on the Grammarians."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"They've never got up anything like that against us. What do you think of the wheeze?"

"Ripping!" exclaimed Blake.

Figgins rushed at Tom Merry, hugged him round the

(Continued on page 19.)

HERE IS ANOTHER PAGE FROM—



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

HALLO, chums! Don't forget to cut out the coupons in this week's issue of the GEM—they will add another useful number of points to your collection. While we are on this subject, don't forget that these Gift Coupons appear also in the "Magnet"—our grand companion paper containing long complete school stories of Harry Wharton & Co., about which I made mention last week.

Did you like this week's extra-long yarn of Tom Merry & Co.? Of course you did, that goes without saying. Well, look out for next Wednesday's spiffing yarn. It's entitled:

"THE ST. JIM'S PARLIAMENT,"

and from the title alone you can guess that it is out of the ordinary run of school yarns. It's great! It's magnificent! It's the best school story of the week, so mind you read it!

"CHUMS OF THE FIGHTING FLEET!"

Stand by for more thrills and exciting adventures from the facile pen of David Goodwin. In next week's chapters of his stirring yarn of the Navy you will find Ned and Jinks in the thick of perils and excitement. Yes, Potts the Office Boy "turns on" another full o' pep laugh, whilst for news pars you can turn to the Editor's Notebook! Order your GEM early, boys, it's too good to be missed!

THE BOY SKIPPER!

He was only a boy of fifteen, but the old spirit of the sea dog burned in him. So one day he boarded a racing yacht, without asking the owner's permission, put to sea, and sailed to an island, all on his lonesome. When the youngster's parents got to hear of their young hopeful's escapade they were, of course, mighty anxious. Still, there was no need for worry. The youngster reached his island, dropped anchor smartly, and when the tide was low enough waded ashore to the mainland. He was not a bit abashed when his parents began to "lecture" him. Ali he said was: "Well, I just wanted a cruise round—and I had a fine trip!" Fortunately for him the twenty-six foot racing craft he had commandeered suffered no damage; all the same for that, the local coast-guard and the boy's parents experienced the kind of thrill that sets the heart jumping when they saw this daring youngster, a mere speck on the horizon, sailing they knew not where.

The GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,266.

THE MAGIC MAT!

Picture a typical regimental quartermaster of the Army strutting into his stores. Then—whiz! The moment he stepped on the ancient-looking mat outside the door he found himself shot through space as though a cannon had exploded behind him. It was a case of next please, for close on the heels of the quartermaster came a sergeant. His feet touched the same innocent-looking mat and—whiz!—away he shot a clear twenty feet. But that was not the end, for a frisky dog walked across the mat and next second that dog was yelping shrilly and leaping high into the air. The explanation of this triple magical act is easily told. Investigation showed that an electric light lead in one of the wall switches of the tin building had worn so much that the naked wire, coming into contact with a pipe, charged the tin hut and the mat with a powerful current of electricity. But even after this explanation the victims of the magic mat gave it a wide berth. A case of once bitten, twice shy!

THE WINGED PLAGUE!

Don't ever ask a Cape Town man what he thinks of locusts, for just now these pests are causing a high spot of bother in South and South-west Africa. Over a distance of five hundred miles millions of these locusts are swarming and travelling at the rate of over a hundred miles a day—leaving a heart-breaking trail of destruction and desolation in their wake. On the beach of Luderitz Bay these deadly foes lie in billions, piling the sands to a height of several feet. Poisoned gas and aeroplane attacks have been tried without success—even the sands where they breed in such profusion have been ploughed up in the hope that the rain and cold will prevent the myriad eggs from hatching. But the locusts still advance.

THE FLYING DEER!

Lord Bradford's escaped deer, which now roams Weston Park, has earned the title of the "Uncatchable Deer." All manner of tricks, including aniseed, the scent of which was reckoned a certain lure, have failed to induce this runaway to return to captivity. Even a Mexican cowboy, experienced in the gentle art of catching anything on four legs with skilfully thrown lasso, has had to admit himself beaten. For hours this expert employed every trick and while he had learned from the Indians among the Texas tribes, but the wily deer was one too clever for him. No horseman stands a chance of following this elusive "sprinter" across country, and even the cleverest throw of

the lariat closes only on empty air, for the deer jumps just before the noose is about to settle over her head, and that jump carries her to safety with unfailing regularity.

HEARD THIS ONE?

Tramp: "Kind sir, my stomach's empty as a drum."

Householder: "Well, beat it!"

WALKING FOR LIFE!

An extraordinary case of a man who had taken an overdose of sleeping powder came to light recently when the doctors concerned declared that his only chance of life lay in walking and walking until he completely conquered the desire for sleep. So up and down the corridor tramped the patient attended by relays of anxious orderlies whose instructions were not to let the patient sit, or let him pause at any cost. These orderlies did their job so well, and the patient showed such grit, that after fourteen solid hours of tramping up and down the stone corridors, up and down stairs by way of a change, the doctors stated that he stood an excellent chance of pulling through. But imagine what his feelings must have been throughout that weary, monotonous hike.

THE SLEEPING TIGER!

The Zoo's biggest Bengal tiger—a fine specimen despite his age of eighteen years—had a sample of chloroform the other day. And while this fierce beast was under the fluence the Zoo surgeon got busy with his instruments and doctored up two very troublesome ingrowing claws which were causing this prize beast much pain and inconvenience. The box from which the "sleeping draught" came was first introduced into Rajah's cage a few days before the operation so that he should get accustomed to it. But Rajah did no more than to sprawl his hefty body across it and take his usual forty winks. All the same for that, when the day of the operation came round the keeper who held the injured paw, to say nothing of the surgeon who did the "clipping" of those troublesome claws, must have felt a qualm or two for fear that Rajah should come to earlier than either of them expected. But science won and the big Bengal tiger is making rapid recovery from the effects of his injured foot.

PERIL CLIMB!

It was a bird's nest that tempted a young Devon man of twenty, recently, to climb the cliff at Bolberry Hope Cove and thereby involved him in an experience he will hardly forget to his dying day. When this young climber reached the nest he coveted, he discovered to his horror that he could not get back to safety. For eleven hours he clung to the cliff face with hands and feet, shouting for assistance. Darkness came on and his only ray of comfort, literally, was the flashing beam from Eddystone Lighthouse. Fortunately for the climber, the police and the coast-guards were striving might and main to reach him; but it was not until two o'clock in the morning had come and gone that a skilfully thrown rope came within the young man's reach. Only just in time—for the tiny ledge upon which the stranded climber rested—the only foothold against a yawning drop of over a hundred feet—was steadily crumbling away.

YOUR EDITOR

THE KIDNAPPED CRICKETERS!

(Continued from page 17.)

neck, and waltzed him round the study. There was a general yelling as the impromptu waltzers trampled on feet and toes.

"Ripping!" roared Figgins. "Splendid! I wonder I didn't think of it myself! Ripping! Great!"

"Leggo, you ass!"

Figgins plumped Tom Merry into Blake's lap, and then sat himself upon Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's knees.

"Great!" he gasped. "Simply great!"

"Pway get off, Figgins! You are wumplin' my twousahs!"

"Great!" repeated Figgins. "Gentlemen, I hereby second and third, and adopt Tom Merry's resolution, and declared it passed unanimously."

"Hear, hear!"

CHAPTER 10.

Tom Merry Takes the Lead!

TOM MERRY smiled with satisfaction. The rival parties in the school were, as rule, inclined to carp and criticise, and it was agreeable to be backed up heartily by Study No. 6 and Figgins & Co. together.

"You all like the idea?"

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard it as weally gweat."

"Ripping!" said Blake.

"First chop!" said Kerr.

"Grand!" said Marmaduke.

"Now, about the details of the plan. We take about twenty fellows along, and waylay the Grammar School charabanc in the lane," said Tom Merry. "We capture the Grammar School cads—"

"There will be a fight."

"That doesn't matter. We capture them, and drive them off to the old tower, and shut them up there. You know, nobody ever goes to the ruins; they won't be able to get help or to get out. We take our cricketing things along with us, and borrow the Grammarians' caps. We drive over to Carbrooke in the charabanc and play the Townies and beat them—"

"Oh, of course. That goes without saying."

"That's all wight, Figgins. I shall be playin', you know."

"We beat them," said Tom Merry. "After the match, on our way home, we set the Grammarians loose, and give them their charabanc back. And if that doesn't make them sing small, you can use my head as a football."

"It's simply ripping, if it works out all right," said Figgins; "but there are difficulties, you know. You are sure the Grammarians haven't met the Carbrooke Townies?"

"Quite sure on that point."

"Suppose some Grammarians go over to see the match?"

"Well, it's not an important match, and it's a jolly long way," said Tom Merry. "If any go, I expect they'll go in the charabanc, and we shall have them with the team."

"That's so. Is there likely to be a master with them?"

"Not at all. A senior will very likely go with the team—"

"Well, we'll collar him with the juniors."

"Exactly."

"Yaas, wathah! If he's a bit too big for you chaps, you can leave me to deal with him, deah boys."

"It's a ripping wheeze!" said Figgins again.

"Now, about the team. I suppose we shall make up the eleven ourselves?"

"Yes. There are eleven of us, and we are about the best cricketers in both Houses," said Tom Merry.

"Excuse me. Some of the New House fellows can knock spots off—"

"Off anything but a wicket, I expect," said Blake.

"Anyway, we're the eleven," said Tom Merry. "We'll take Skimpole along with us as our umpire. Walsh and French and Jimson can come along, too."

"Good! We had better take a big crowd to waylay the charabanc. We can't afford to leave anything to chance."

"There will be ourselves. We can take a dozen more fellows, if you like—Gore and Jones and Pratt and White and some more. Mind, we shall have to play the game carefully. I shall be Frank Monk, the Grammarian captain, Figgins will be Lane, and Blake Carboy. We can settle about the others when we see the Grammar School team. We shall have to keep it up."

"Ha, ha, ha! Frank Monk and his lot will want to kick themselves over this, I fancy."

"What about the dwivah of the charabanc, deah boys?"

"He will have to be shut up with the Grammar School kids, of course."

"Good! I can dwive ovah to Carbrooke in first-wate style—"

"Rats! Catch me trusting my neck to your driving," said Figgins. "I shall drive, of course!"

"Weally, Figgins—"

"Come, no rot!" said Figgins. "I'm a jolly good driver."

"Oh, never mind who drives!" said Tom Merry. "We haven't captured the charabanc yet. We can have another jaw over this, and settle details. I think—"

"There's one thing you oughtn't to forget," said Fatty Wynn thoughtfully.

"What's that, Fatty?"

"The Grammar School cads will be shut up in the old tower a jolly long time—"

"A good six hours," said Figgins.

"We can't let them starve," said Fatty Wynn, who had a ready sympathy for anybody who was hungry. "We must take a lot of sandwiches for them."

"Good for you, Fatty. I never thought of that."

"It's a rather important point, Merry. I myself get awfully hungry in this spring weather."

"I don't think the weather makes any difference to you, Fatty. Still, that's very thoughtful of you. We shall have to stand the Grammarians a feed. Now, I think that's about all. We'd better get our things ready for to-morrow, and decide what fellows we are going to take along for the ambush."

"Equal number of New House and School House fellows?" said Kerr.

"Oh, yes; if you like!"

And the meeting in Tom Merry's study broke up.

CHAPTER 11.

The Ambush!

"PULL up, there!"

It was a sunny afternoon, nearly the end of April. A charabanc drove up to the great red-brick buildings of Rylcombe Grammar School, and stopped. Immediately a crowd of Grammar School juniors poured out.

Frank Monk, an athletic lad of about fifteen, captain of the Grammar School team, jumped into the charabanc, and pitched his bag there.

"Come on, kids! No time to waste. It's a long journey."

"Right-ho!" said Carboy, following him into the charabanc. "What glorious weather! It's luck to have a fine day for the match!"

"Rather!" said Lane, as he climbed in. "I hear the Carbrooke Townies are in fine form, but I think we shall lick them."

"Not much doubt on that point," said Frank Monk

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cheerfully. "And when we've got our hands in, we'll give St. Jim's the licking they've been asking for for a long time."

"Rather!"

The Grammarian cricketers crowded into the charabanc. There was room for four more juniors besides the team. Frank Monk looked at the open door anxiously.

"I say, where's Hake? Isn't he coming?"

"The Head said he was," said Carboy.

A Grammar School senior came out of the House. He was not a pleasant-looking fellow. Hake was the bully of the Grammar School, and the juniors did not anticipate any pleasure from his company in the charabanc. But Hake was a monitor, and the Head of the Grammar School considered it advisable to send a senior with the young cricketers, who were going on a very long drive for the out match.

Hake looked up at the juniors in the charabanc.

"I say, there's no time to lose, Hake," said Frank Monk.

"You can start without me," said Hake. "I've got to go down to Rylcombe first."

"But—"

"Oh, that's all right! I shall come over on my bike. I want to make a call in the town first."

"Just as you like," said Frank Monk cheerfully. "There's none too much room here. We'll see you at Carbrooke later, then. So-long, you kids!"

"Good-bye, and good luck!" shouted the Grammarians. And the charabanc rolled away. A cheer followed it as it turned out of the gates and took the road for the distant scene of the cricket match.

The afternoon was fine, sunny, and mild. A drive in a charabanc was pleasant enough, and the anticipation of a keen match was pleasant, too. And pleasant, also, was the reflection that the Grammar School of late days had more than kept its end up in the constant warfare with the neighbouring school. That was the topic of conversation in the charabanc as the vehicle rolled under the shady trees of Rylcombe Lane.

"The Saints have been singing small lately, and no mistake," Monk remarked. "We haven't heard anything from them since the kite affair."

Carboy chuckled.

"That was a ripping wheeze!" he exclaimed. "'Down with St. Jim's' flaunted in their faces, and they couldn't do anything!"

"Ha, ha, ha! I fancy Tom Merry & Co. will have to shut up business pretty soon. We have licked them all along the line!"

"We have, by Jove!"

"Tom Merry's motto was 'St. Jim's leads!'" chuckled Monk. "He will have to change it now to 'St. Jim's gets licked!'"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We'll give them a final licking on the cricket field," Monk remarked. "When we've done that, I don't see how even Tom Merry can maintain that we're not top school. I say, what is that ass stopping for?"

"I say, driver, what are you stopping for?"

The driver of the charabanc had put on his brakes.

The Grammarians all looked to see the reason, and it was plain enough to be seen. A junior of St. Jim's—at once recognised by his cap—had run across the road, trailing a long, thick rope behind him. The rope had been

instantly tied to a tree, and was about breast-high across the road. The charabanc could do nothing but stop.

Frank Monk stared at the taut rope in wrath and amazement.

"My hat! Of all the cheek!"

"That was a St. Jim's kid!" said Lane. "I think it was Herries."

"Yes; I saw him," said Carboy. "It's a little joke on us. Get down and cut the rope, somebody."

One of the Grammarians jumped down into the road. It would not have taken him long to saw through the rope with his pocket-knife, but he was not given time.

There was a rush from both sides of the lane, and in a moment the charabanc was surrounded by a crowd of youngsters in St. Jim's caps.

Twenty-five juniors at least were there, led by Tom Merry, Blake, and Figgins.

Frank Monk looked a little uneasy.

"I say, what's the little game?" he exclaimed.

"Cricket," said Tom Merry.

"What are you up to, ass? You can't stop us now—"

"Looks to me as if we've done it."

"We've got to get to Carbrooke—"

"Sorry; it can't be did."

"What do you mean? We've got a cricket match on there."

"Oh, rats!" said Blake. "I don't care whether you've got a cricket match or a ping-pong match, or a lucifer match—you're not going on—"

"That's it," said Figgins. "We love you too much to part with you thus, Monk!"

"You asses!"

"Switch off the engine, driver!" rapped out Tom Merry.

"Rats! Put your foot on it, driver!" yelled Monk.

"If he does we'll have him down in a jiffy, and duck him in the pond yonder!" said Tom Merry. "Better remain neutral, driver."

The driver of the coach grinned.

"I ain't doing nothing," he remarked. "It ain't no blessed business of mine. No offence, Master Monk!"

"Oh, hang it!" said Monk. "We can fight our own battles, I suppose. If you St. Jim's wasters don't shift and let us pass we'll jolly soon shift you!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Come and shift us, then!"

"Do you think we can't?"

"I'm jolly sure you can't!"

Frank Monk made a move to jump down. Lane caught him by the arm.

"Don't be an ass, Frank! There are more than two to one of the rotters! We've got no earthly in a scrap!"

Frank Monk hesitated.

"But we can't let them stop us."

"Let us see what their little game is first, anyway."

Monk nodded.

"Oh, all right! Look here, Tom Merry, there is no time for rows. We've got a match on at Carbrooke, and stumps are pitched at three o'clock. There won't be any too much time for playing, anyway. We want to get on."

"Sorry, it can't be allowed."

"Do you mean to muck up the match?" demanded Frank Monk in amazement. "Do you call that playing the game?"

"We shall call it playing the game when we get to Carbrooke," grinned Tom Merry. "Now, all you fellows, get down into the road, please!"

"Shan't!" howled the Grammarian cricketers.

"Then we shall have to come and fetch you!"

"You'd better not try!"

"Now, don't be silly asses!" exclaimed Figgins. "We've brought enough fellows along to eat you. Jump down as you're told!"

Frank Monk gave a helpless glance up and down the road. Figgins' words were quite true. The odds on the side of St. Jim's were simply overwhelming. The Grammarians had simply no chance in a fight. And the Saints, under the command of the astute Tom Merry, had selected the loneliest part of the road for their ambush. There was no chance of help coming.

"Come on, now," said Tom Merry persuasively. "Jump out!"

"We don't want to hurt you," said Blake sweetly, "but you must really get out, like good little boys."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Come, now—"

"Shan't!" roared Monk. "If you want us out of this charabanc you'll have to get us out!"

"We'll jolly soon do that!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Come on! Buck up, St. Jim's!"

"Hurrah!" shouted Figgins. "Down with the Grammar School cads!"



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Lane hurried the swell of St. Jim's off and then made a rush at Jack Blake. As he did so Blake hurled the contents of the basin at him and the sticky mess caught the Grammarian full in the face! "Yarooooo! Wooh! Grooh!" gasped Lane.

Tom Merry rushed to the attack. The Saints followed him quickly, and in a moment the halted charabanc was the scene of a wild and whirling conflict.

CHAPTER 12.

A Big Capture !

"**R**UCK up, Grammar School!" shouted Frank Monk.
"Sock it to them!"

The Grammar School did buck up. They stood shoulder to shoulder in the charabanc, hitting out right and left as the St. Jim's juniors swarmed to the attack.

The Grammarians had the advantage of position, and it was not easy to get at them. But the Saints swarmed over the back, and clambered on the wheels and the step, and they seemed innumerable.

Tom Merry was down on his back in the road, and jumped up again, covered with dust, and clambered into the charabanc.

Frank Monk clutched at him, and he clutched at Frank Monk, and, locked in a deadly embrace, they bumped into the road.

Monk was the first of the Grammarians to go. But Lane, in the grip of Figgins and Kerr, soon followed, and then Carboy was grasped and dragged down by Blake and Digby.

Marmaduke fetched out the next victim "on his own," and four Grammarian prisoners writhed in the grip of the Saints in the dusty road.

Tom Merry had not come unprovided with the necessary materials for securing his prisoners. There was a coil of rope, and it was quickly cut into suitable lengths for binding the wrists of the Grammarians.

The driver sat in his seat grinning hugely. He had not the slightest disposition for interfering with the juniors

from St. Jim's. If he had done so, he would soon have been tied up with the Grammarians, and he knew it.

Prisoner after prisoner was added to the dusty, exasperated group in the country road, and the number of defenders of the charabanc grew steadily less.

At last, amid a wild hurrah from the Saints, the last struggling Grammarian was hurled from the charabanc by the muscular arms of Figgins.

The juniors fastened him up with the rest, and the victory was complete.

The woods rang with the victorious shouts from the St. Jim's juniors.

"You rotters!" howled Monk. "We'll make you sit up for this!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hear us smile!" cackled Figgins. "Ha ha ha!"

"You rotters! We've got to play Carbrooke!"

"That's all right, kid," said Tom Merry comfortingly;

"Carbrooke won't be deprived of their game."

Monk brightened up.

"You're going to let us go?"
 Tom Merry laughed.

"Not much."

"What do you mean, then?"

"Oh, we're going to give Carbrooke a game!"

"You? What? How?"
 "We're going to play Carbrooke."

"You're going to play Carbrooke?"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "It's wathah

a wippin' ideah, isn't it, deah boy?"

"But you're off your rocker!"

"Tom Merry, what are you getting at? Carbrooke won't

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[illegible]

play you? They're expecting a team from the Grammar School, and—"

"And they've never met you before."

"I know that, but—"

"And they don't know you by sight."

"What difference does that make?"

"Only that we're going in your place—as a team from the Grammar School!"

"What!" roared the Grammarians.

"Don't you think it's a good idea?" asked Tom Merry sweetly.

And the Saints roared with laughter.

Frank Monk was speechless. The audacity of the plan fairly took away his breath. The Grammarians were crimson with rage.

"The cheek!" gasped Carbrooke.

"The nerve!" muttered Lane.

"You can't do it," broke out Monk at last. "You can't!"

"Ha, ha, ha! You will see!"

"I tell you it can't be done. Even if the Carbrooke fellows don't smell a rat—"

"They won't! Ha, ha, ha!"

"But Hake is coming over on his bicycle!" exclaimed Frank Monk excitedly. "He's the monitor sent with us, only he's coming late. He'll show you up!"

"Oho! That's worth knowing!" grinned Figgins. "We'll know how to deal with Hake when he comes, won't we, kids?"

"We'll keep one eye open for Hake," laughed Tom Merry.

"Meanwhile, I think we'll get out of the public road."

"Bundle these kids into the charabanc," said Digby.

"We shall have to walk. There are too many of us to get in."

"Good! Chuck 'em in!"

"Look here, Tom Merry—"

"Sorry, but there's no time to talk," said the St. Jim's captain blandly. "You see, we've got to buck up to get to Carbrooke in time. Stumps are pitched at three o'clock."

"You—you—"

"Sling 'em in!"

"Shove 'em in there, and buck up!"

"Look here, Tom Merry!"

"No time! Hurry up, there!"

The bound and helpless Grammarians were bundled into the charabanc. Half a dozen Saints boarded it to keep them in order. Tom Merry and Figgins sat one on either side of the driver.

"Now, then, for the old tower!" exclaimed Blake.

Tom Merry gave the driver his directions. The man hesitated for a moment.

"Oh, I'll drive if you like!" said Tom calmly. "Lend a hand here! Tie up this chap with the rest!"

"Oh, I'll do as you tell me, sir!" said the driver hastily.

"Buck up, then!"

The driver set the charabanc in motion, and turned off the road at the first opportunity, and under the guidance of Tom Merry, approached the road, in the shady depths of which the ruined chapel lay.

The Grammarians were absolutely furious. But they were helpless. There was nothing to be done but to submit to destiny. They had japed the juniors of the rival school often enough. Now their own turn had come, and they had to take it.

The St. Jim's juniors were in high spirits. They had succeeded so far, and their success was a good augury for the remaining and more difficult part of the scheme.

The whole crowd of them followed the charabanc, and replied to the threats of the Grammarians with endless chaff.

The vehicle stopped at last at the commencement of the footpath leading through the wood to the ruined chapel. There the Grammarians were taken out of the charabanc.

"March them along," said Tom Merry. "Mind none of them slip away. Bring the driver, too."

"Here, I say—"

"No talk. You've got to come!"

"But—"

"Collar him! We're going to give you five bob, my man; but you've got to be shut up with the rest. We can't risk the secret getting out."

"Oh, that's all right, you gentlemen! I don't mind if you put it that way," grinned the driver. "It's five bob easily earned."

"Glad you're satisfied. Some of you stay with the charabanc. It has got to carry us over to Carbrooke yet."

"Here, you'll be responsible for that charabanc, young gentleman—"

"We'll be responsible. Don't be afraid—"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Now march those kids along."

The furious Grammarians were marched along.

Of the ruins in the wood little remained intact save the

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old tower. Of that edifice the thick stone walls still defied the ravages of time. The windows were long gone, and the openings stared like sightless eyes from the clinging ivy. The door was of thick, strong oak barred with rusty iron. Blake ran forward and shoved open the stiff, creaking door.

All the Grammarians were herded into the tower.

The youngest Grammarian was untied, and then the heavy door was slammed. The freed Grammarian began to loosen his comrades in feverish haste, in the hope of getting at the door before the Saints could fasten it. But there was no chance of that. The door opened outwards, and a couple of strong wooden pegs driven into the ground secured it against anything but a battering-ram from within.

The Grammarians were hammering upon the inside of the door a couple of minutes later.

Tom Merry laughed gaily.

"They won't get out of there in a hurry," he remarked. "And as nobody by any chance ever passes this way, they can't be let loose. Nobody ever comes here, except perhaps a poacher in the night-time, and they will be let out before dusk."

"Hallo!" exclaimed Blake. "There's Monk!"

From one of the little window-openings, high up in the ancient walls of the tower, the head of the Grammarian leader was projected.

Tom Merry waved his hand to him.

"Hallo, Monkey! Feel all right up there?"

"Let us out!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We'll make you squirm for this some time!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Words were evidently useless. Frank Monk shook his fist in helpless wrath. The windows were too high up, and the stone walls too smooth, for the Grammarians to even think of escaping from their prison in that way.

They were helpless, and had no choice but to remain where they were until the Saints chose to come back and release them.

"Time we were off!" said Monty Lowther.

Tom Merry looked at his watch.

"Good! We've time if we hurry! You collected the Grammar School cricket caps, Manners?"

"Yes, here they are!"

"Then let's get to the charabanc!"

The St. Jim's juniors turned to go. The windows of the old tower were crammed with Grammarian heads and furiously shaking fists.

The Saints waved their hands as they marched off, laughing gleefully.

"Good-bye!" called out Tom Merry. "Or, rather, au revoir!"

"Say au revoir, but not good-bye!" trilled Figgins, waving his hand to the infuriated Grammarians.

Then the St. Jim's juniors passed on and disappeared from the sight of the trapped enemy. The Grammarians were safely disposed of for the afternoon. The Saints hurried back to the spot where the charabanc had been left, and Tom Merry and his team, with as many more juniors as could be crammed into the vehicle, rolled off on the road to Carbrooke.

The rest of the youngsters, not to be done out of the fun, followed on foot, making for Wayland, where they would catch a bus for Carbrooke. They would not arrive in time for the start, but they would see the finish of the game, and they would be on hand in case of trouble. And, as they all knew, it was quite possible that there would be trouble.

CHAPTER 13.

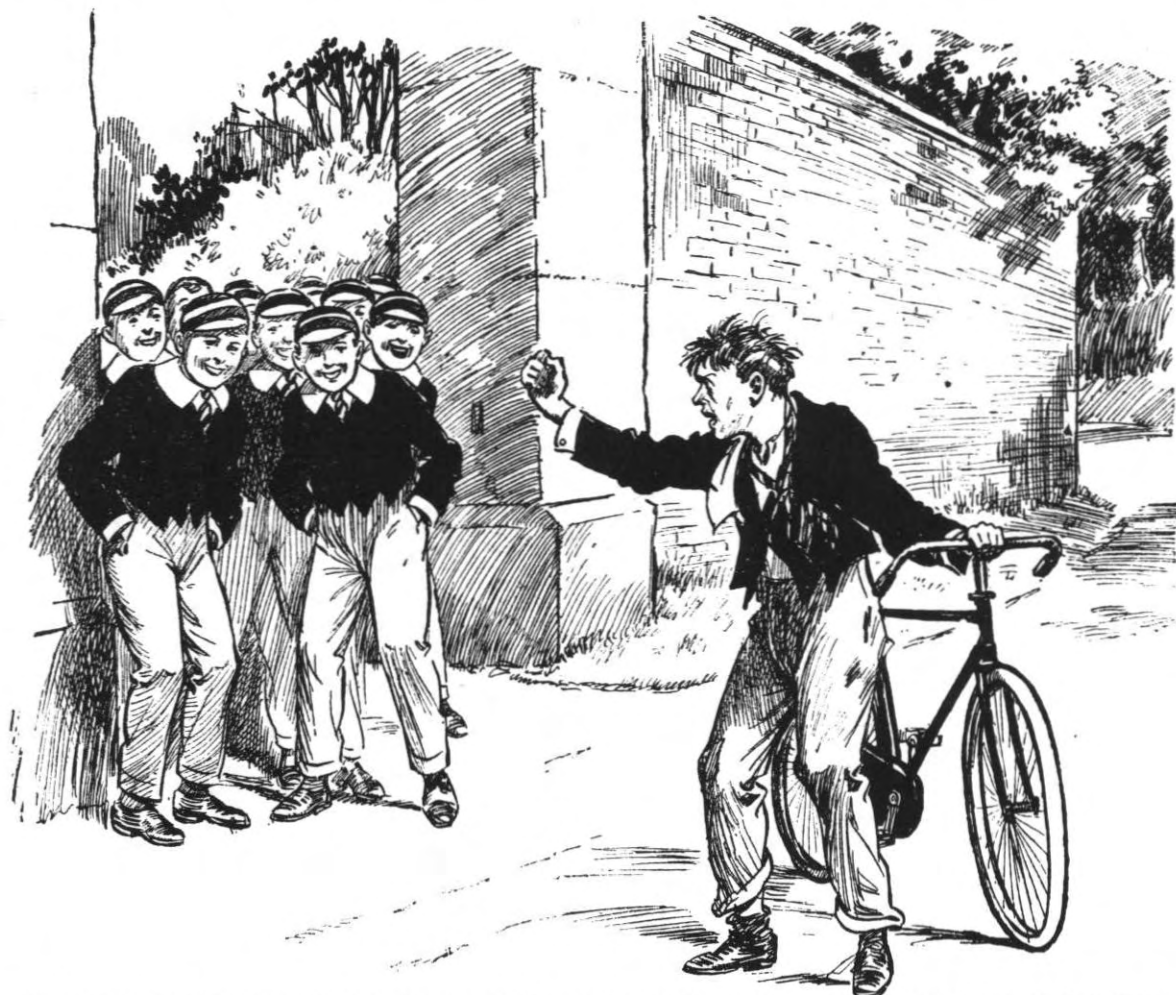
The Impostors!

NEVER had a charabanc borne along a jollier party than the contingent from St. Jim's. The juniors were all highly elated by the success which had attended the trapping of the Grammarians, and it seemed that the jape was certain to be a success now. Only Hake, when he arrived on the Carbrooke ground, remained to be dealt with. But after what had been done, that was a trifle.

"This is great, this is," Tom Merry remarked, as he set the charabanc in motion, "that we've trapped a whole Grammar School eleven and three other Grammarians—fourteen rotters in all—and made them prisoners, and we're going to play their game of cricket instead of them. That's the thing!"

"Rather!" said Blake heartily. "And I must say, chaps, that Tom Merry has done us proud on this occasion. It was his idea, and we own up to it."

"It was!" said Figgins magnanimously. "It was Tom Merry's idea, and it was a regular ripper! If it only all turns out as well as this part!"



His clothes caked with dust, his collar almost torn off, and his neck-tie hanging loose, Hake staggered to his feet. "Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the Carbrooke and St. Jim's fellows. Seething with anger, the bully of the Grammar School shook his fist furiously at the laughing juniors.

"I don't see what can happen!"

"Well, there's Hake!"

"He's bound to come, I suppose?" said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "I wish he had been in the charabanc with the others!"

"It would have been no joke kidnapping a senior!" Lowther remarked.

"Oh, we'd have had him along with the rest! Hake is a beastly bully, and a licking would have done him heaps of good!"

"But he wasn't there, you see!" Figgins remarked. "The question remains—how are we going to deal with him on the Carbrooke ground when he turns up?"

"When Hake comes on the scene, we'll denounce him as an impostor!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove, that's a weally wippin' ideah! We'll denounce the boundah as a wotten impostah, deah boys!"

"As a fellow from St. Jim's coming there to make trouble!" grinned Tom Merry!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If he bothers us, we'll frog's-march him off the field, and get rid of him," Tom Merry went on. "I think that will work all right! Hake mayn't like it, but we can't expect to please everybody!"

"Yaas, wathah! This is the vewy ideah that would have flashed into my bwain; I am sure of that, Tom Mewwy!"

"It's a good wheeze," said Blake. "Tom Merry seems to have turned over a new leaf, and got some new ideas lately! I can't account for it!"

"Suppose you go and do likewise, instead of trying to account for it?" Monty Lowther suggested.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hallo, there's the Carbrooke ground!" exclaimed Tom Merry, pointing in the distance over the trees.

"Good! I say, Tom Merry," said Figgins anxiously, "I think I'd better take the wheel now, old chap!"

Tom Merry stared at him.

"Eh? I can manage all right, Figgins, thank you!"

"Yes, but we're getting close to Carbrooke now—"

"What difference does that make?"

"Well, we want to come up in good style!" said Figgins. "We're playing the part of the Grammarians, and we ought to try to do them credit! I think we ought to bring the charabanc up to the ground in the best possible style!"

"Well, you image—" began the indignant driver.

"Cheese it!" said Kerr. "Here come some of the Carbrooke chaps to meet us!"

A lad in a Carbrooke cap was coming up the road. The ground was in sight now, and the juniors in the charabanc could see over the wall into the green field, where the yellow stumps were gleaming in the sun. There was a goodly crowd on the ground, which showed that the Carbrooke folk took a deep interest in the play of the local cricket team.

"Bai Jove, deah boys, we shall have to play up this afternoon!" exclaimed D'Arcy suddenly. "It has occurred to me that if we get licked, the joke will be on the other side, you know, and the Gwammah cads will do the laughin'!"

"My hat!" said Lowther. "I should think they will!"

"Then you know what you've got to do!" said Tom Merry. "The Carbrooke chaps are a decent team, and we've got to play up like internationals!"

"Like county ewacks!" said D'Arcy.

"Hallo!" said the Carbrooke lad, waving his hand. "You're the lot from the Grammar School at Rylcombe, aren't you?"

"Weren't you expecting us?" said Tom Merry, who was

never known to tell a lie, and consequently had a rather difficult part to play that eventful afternoon.

"Of course we were! I'm Pilkington!"

"Oh, you're Pilkington, are you? Jolly glad to make your acquaintance, Pilkington!"

"Same to you! You're Monk?"

"I'm the captain of this little lot, of course!"

"Fisher's expecting you. Fisher's captaining us this afternoon," exclaimed Pilkington. "He's rather surprised at your coming so close on time, and I came down to have a look along the road for you. The game is timed to start in less than five minutes."

"Five minutes is all right."

The Carbrooke lad was keeping pace with the charabanc as he spoke. He was a finely built lad in spotless flannels, and evidently in good form. If he was a specimen of the Carbrooke team, St. Jim's certainly had no walk-over in front of them.

"This way in," said Pilkington. "Rather a queer idea driving the charabanc yourself, isn't it, Monk?"

"Oh, I'm fond of driving!" said Tom Merry carelessly.

"Well, come in. Don't run the bus into the gate post."

"Rats!" said Tom Merry cheerfully.

"Think you'd better let me have the wheel," said Figgins, in an anxious whisper.

Tom Merry laughed. He brought the charabanc into the wide gateway in excellent style, quite as well as Figgins could have done it. The St. Jim's cricketers clambered down, and the next moment Tom Merry was shaking hands with Fisher, the Carbrooke captain, who greeted him as Frank Monk of the Grammar School.

CHAPTER 14.

The Cricket Match!

"SUCCESS!" said Tom Merry, with a chuckle.

The Saints were in their dressing-tent. There were only a few minutes to spare. The Carbrooke fellows were not particular about keeping them up to time, but as Tom Merry said, late starters were generally late all round. It was always best to keep to an arrangement, although in this case it was somebody else's arrangements the St. Jim's juniors were keeping to.

"Success, rather!" grinned Blake. "Not a suspicion!"

"Not the ghost of one!" said Figgins cheerfully.

"Of course, they naturally wouldn't dream of looking for such an unheard of jape," said Tom Merry. "They've got nothing to grumble at, so long as we give them a good game. Keep an eye open, all of you, for Hake when he materialises."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hallo!" Fisher of Carbrooke looked into the tent.

"Don't hurry, but—"

"We're ready."

"You see, stumps have to be pulled at six, to give you time to get back to the school," said Fisher. "We could play as long as the light was fit, for that matter."

"Not much time to finish, if it runs to four innings," said Digby.

Fisher stared at him.

"How can a single innings match run to four innings?" he asked.

"My word!" murmured Tom Merry. "And I never knew it was a single innings match, even. Jolly glad I found it out!"

Digby turned red.

This was only one of the many little difficulties that were certain to crop up, but it was only possible to be alert and carry matters with a bold face.

"You forget that, Dig," said Tom Merry.

"Oh, you never mentioned it!" said Digby.

Tom Merry nodded.

"Come to think of it, I didn't tell you," he said. "You're quite right. Well, we shall have time for the two innings comfortably, I hope."

"I hope so," grinned Fisher. "You see, we don't intend to let your innings be a very long one, if we can help it."

"Ha, ha, ha! And we mean the same towards you. Well, we're ready."

"Then let's toss for innings."

Out on the green cricket field it was very bright and sunny. The white flannels contrasted vividly with the green, and the bright hats and dresses of a number of the Carbrooke fellows' sisters and cousins added a dash of gay colour to the scene.

Tom Merry's eyes sparkled as he looked over the field.

The athletic figures of the Carbrooke fellows showed that they were a strong team, and that St. Jim's would have their work cut out to win.

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But the prospect of a good hard game was enticing to the stalwart young cricketers from the good old school.

Tom Merry and Fisher and Carbrooke tossed for choice of innings, and the Carbrooke captain won the toss.

Carbrooke elected to bat first, and Tom Merry led his merry men out to field first.

As he assigned his eleven to their places he cast a quick glance over the field, wondering whether Hake was anywhere near at hand yet.

There was no sign of the Grammar School senior.

It was probable that he would be in no hurry to get to the scene. Doubtless he was only coming at all because he had been asked to do so by the Head of the Grammar School, and he would not turn up, in all probability, till the match was half over.

All had gone so swimmingly, so far, that Tom Merry devoutly hoped that Hake would not appear to make fresh difficulties.

Fisher and Pilkington opened the innings for Carbrooke, going to the wickets amid a cheer from their friends who were gathered round the ropes.

Figgins opened the bowling, and at first runs came slowly. Gradually the pace quickened, however, and 30 runs were scored for two wickets. Tom Merry and his team pegged on, and eventually the Carbrooke side were all out for 98.

The Carbrooke innings was over, and the field cleared. Fatty Wynn made a dive for the tent, his mouth watering. There was a buzz from the Saints in the field.

"Tom Merry! Look out!"

Tom Merry started.

"It's Hake!" muttered Figgins.

Hake it was. The Grammar School senior had just ridden his bike into the field and jumped off. He came striding towards the crowd of St. Jim's boys with an almost idiotic expression of bewilderment on his face.

CHAPTER 15.

Hake Comes and Goes!

TOM MERRY drew a quick, deep breath.

"It's Hake, chaps! Careful, now!"

Arthur Augustus nudged the captain of St. Jim's juniors.

"I say, Tom Mewwy, pway leave the talkin' to me!" he whispered. "We shall be in a feahful fix if you give us away, you know."

"Cheese it!"

"It is extremely pwob that the Carwooke chaps may wipe up the ground with us for takin' them in like this."

"Choke him, Blake!"

"I wefuse to be choked. Undah the cires, as we are in such a ewitical situation, I considah that the mattah should be placed in my hands, as the pwopah person to deal with it."

Blake jerked the swell of St. Jim's away, and Tom Merry faced Hake as the Grammarian monitor arrived upon the scene. Hake was looking angry, as well as amazed. The crowd, seeing that something was wrong, gathered curiously round. The pitch was being rolled, ready for the second innings. The Carbrooke cricketers looked on with interest, too, as Hake came up with a red and angry face.

"What does this mean?"

"Are you speaking to me?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yes. Where are the boys from my school?"

"Eh?"

"Where are the boys from my school?" shouted Hake.

Fisher stared at him in amazement.

"Don't you know them?" he exclaimed, with a sweep of the hand, indicating the St. Jim's juniors. "You can't be from the Grammar School if you don't know your own team."

"What do you mean? These boys are not from the Grammar School."

"Oh, cheese it!"

"They are from St. Jim's!"

"Look here, Hake, Whiting, or Mackerel—or whatever your name is—you may be considered a funny man in the family, but don't come working off your little jokes here!" said Fisher. "Travel along!"

"I tell you—"

"You've told me some big whoppers already."

"I'm Hake—"

"Are you going?"

"I tell you these boys are from St. Jim's, and the Grammar School team isn't here."

"Then swim away, Hake!" said Fisher. "It's perfectly clear to me that you're an impostor, and you're here for no good. Get out!"

"I shall not!"

"Oh, we'll look after him!" said Figgins. "The fact is, Fisher, there's some rivalry between the Grammar School and St. Jim's, and we're often bothered by obstreperous fellows from the other place. This is only a sample of their tricks. You mustn't take this rotter as a specimen of St. Jim's, however. He's a rotter—an absolute rotter—and the worst rotter there wouldn't touch him with a barge pole. He's a rank outsider. We had better put him outside."

Hake made a dash at Figgins. Words were not strong enough to express his feelings. Figgins did not dodge; he closed with Hake, and Kerr and Marmaduke dashed to his aid. In a moment Hake was on his back, with the New House juniors scrambling over him.

"Lend a hand, kids!"

The St. Jim's juniors lent a hand right willingly.

Hake was hustled and bundled towards the gate, and then plumped out into the road. Digby ran his machine out after him, and it was laid across him as he was left squirming in the dust.

The Carbrooke fellows looked on, laughing.

Hake pushed his machine off and staggered to his feet. The bully of the Grammar School was not a pretty sight. His clothes were caked with dust, his collar was torn off, and his necktie hanging loose. The gate was crammed with grinning faces. It was evidently useless for the Grammarian to linger.

He shook his fist furiously at Carbrooke and St. Jim's fellows alike, mounted his machine, and pedalled away down the road, a sadder if not a wiser individual.

The St. Jim's juniors laughed loud and long, and then turned back to the field to start their innings.

CHAPTER 16.

St. Jim's Wins!

"PLAY up!"

It was a shout from the St. Jim's juniors in the crowd as Tom Merry and Blake went out with their bats to open the innings for St. Jim's.

Pilkington bowled the first over for Carbrooke. But he made no impression upon Tom Merry's wicket. The innings that followed impressed the Carbrooke fellows with a very deep sense of respect for the supposed Grammarians.

For Tom Merry's wicket was impregnable.

Pilkington, Fisher, and Knight, the best bowlers of the Carbrooke team, tried him with every variety of bowling, but in vain.

They could not move him from the wicket, and all the time the runs were piling up steadily. Blake, too, was keeping his end up in noble style. His individual score was at twenty when he was caught out at point by Pilkington. His was the first wicket down, and Herries came in to take his place.

Herries had bad luck. His wicket went down for two, and Digby, who followed, was dismissed for a duck's egg. Then came Fatty Wynn. It was probable that Fatty had eaten a little too much during the rest between the innings, for his movements were very slow and sluggish. Or perhaps he felt that he had done enough as a bowler. Anyway, he was out for six to a ball from Knight. Figgins was still more unfortunate. He was caught out at point for a duck's egg.

Five down for forty-five. Tom Merry's batting had sent up the score, assisted by the good figure Blake had made. Now Kerr came in to join him, and the Scottish partner in the Co. showed the stuff he was made of.

It was really beautiful to see Tom Merry and Kerr at the wickets. They dealt splendidly with every ball that came down, and they piled up the runs between them.

Kerr put on twenty-three for his side when he was stumped in a gallant attempt for five.

D'Arcy followed, but he was speedily out for a "duck"! Monty Lowther went out with his bat. Monty was looking forward to a good innings with Tom Merry; but it was not to be. Fisher bowled against the St. Jim's captain's wicket with a deadly determination that was not to be denied. Tom Merry had hit his thirty-fifth run when Fisher's skill proved too much for him at last. There was a click of ball on stumps.

"How's that?" shouted the delighted Carbrooke Townies.

"Out!"

Tom Merry was out for thirty-five. The St. Jim's total was creeping up to the Carbrooke figure. Manners was next man in. Both Manners and Lowther batted cautiously, putting on a run here and a run there, and taking no risks. St. Jim's were at ninety-four when Lowther was caught out by Pilkington.

"Last man in!"

Marmaduke picked up his bat. Tom Merry gave him an encouraging clap on the shoulder.

"Only five wanted to win, Marmy!" he said. "Play up!"

"Yaas, wathah! I weally wish I could go in again instead of you, Marmy, but as that's impos, pway do your best, deah boy."

"That's what I mean to do," said Marmaduke cheerily. "I can't do worse than Gussy, in any case—that's one comfort."

"Weally, Marmaduke—"

But Marmaduke was going down to the wickets.

Manners gave him a nod as he came in. Upon these two depended now the fate of the match.

Pilkington and Fisher bowled an over each, with the result of sending up the score to ninety-six. Then came a ball down to Marmaduke, which the heir of millions let himself go at.

Crack! The ball met the bat, and it soared away on a long journey. And the batsmen ran, and ran again!

Twice they crossed the pitch, and Tom Merry breathed a sigh of relief. It was ninety-eight now, and whatever happened St. Jim's had not lost. But a tie would not content them, and they anxiously watched the running figures. The batsmen were trying for a third, but the ball had already been fielded by Knight.

"Send her in!"

"Run, you beggars, run!"

The batsmen were running. They knew the ball was coming in; they knew nothing else except that the innings depended upon their pace. It was coming in to Marmaduke's wicket! The yell of the crowd told Marmaduke so. He set his teeth, and put on a terrific spurt. He stumbled, he fell. There was a gasp of dismay from St. Jim's.

"Out!" groaned Figgins.

"No!" roared Tom Merry. "Look here!"

The ball whizzed in. There was the crash of a falling wicket. But the end of the bat was on the crease, with a couple of inches to spare. It was a narrow escape, but a miss was as good as a mile.

The umpire shook his head.

"Not out!"

There was a roar. St. Jim's had got the ninety-ninth run, and won the game.

The level green was swarming with figures the next moment. St. Jim's juniors were cheering frantically. Marmaduke was thumped on the back till he was sore.

The excitement lasted some time. It had been a close match, but St. Jim's had won, and they were happy. They had made preparations for the return journey. Tom Merry changed and went to see about the charabanc.

The charabanc was not long in getting ready for the road. The St. Jim's team mounted into it, with the exception of Blake. The Carbrooke fellows gathered round, to give them a parting cheer. It was then that Blake made for the scoreboard. A good many of the St. Jim's juniors who were not in the team, and were not going in the charabanc, followed him curiously.

"What are you up to?" asked Reilly.

"Look, and you'll see, my son!" said Blake.

And he chalked on the board, in glaring letters:

"ST. JIM'S LEADS!"

There was a general chuckle.

"St. Jim's leads! Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake cut off to the gates and clambered into the charabanc. Fisher was shaking hands with Tom Merry. The home side had been beaten, but they were good sportsmen, and they had only friendly feelings towards the victors.

"Hope we shall see you again," said Fisher.

"I hope so," said Tom Merry. "You're a jolly good lot of sportsmen, and we're jolly glad to make your acquaintance. I'd like to fix up some matches with you; but I'll write to you about that, and explain."

"There's a message for you on the scoreboard," said Blake, with a grin. "When you write to the Grammar School again, just mention it."

The charabanc rolled off, leaving the Carbrooke fellows considerably mystified by Blake's last words. When they saw the notice on the board they were more mystified still—for a time. Of course, in time the explanation came, and the Carbrooke fellows laughed as heartily over the audacious joke as anybody.

The charabanc rolled on its way, followed by a cheer from the Carbrooke fellows. The Saints chuckled as they went rolling down the road, the charabanc "tooled" by Figgins, who had taken the driver's seat on his own recommendation. But Tom Merry did not mind.

"Well, everything comes to an end," said Blake. "We've got to let the Grammar School kids have their charabanc back to take them home. I wonder what the other chaps at the Grammar School will say to them? Ha, ha, ha!"

(Continued on page 28.)

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START RIGHT NOW ON THIS TOP-HOLE NAVAL ADVENTURE YARN.

CHUMS OF THE FIGHTING FLEET



Although he is only the junior middy on the *Victorious*, Ned Hardy is determined to clear the name of his brother Ralph, who was dismissed his ship after being "framed" with a robbery. With his pal, Jinks, Ned goes to a secret meeting place expecting to meet his brother, but the two middies are suddenly attacked by some men, one of whom Ned recognises as a Russian spy.

The Forged Letter!

STRONG as he was, Ned found the weight on top of him more than he could overcome. The Russian—an adept at tricky fighting—pinned Ned's throat with his left hand, then slipped his free hand swiftly to the back of his belt.

"Watch out!" yelled the miscreant suddenly.

There was a swift rush, a cry of warning, and two bulky forms hurled themselves through the gap in the iron wall and upon the captors of the boys.

Crash! came a terrific blow from a doubled fist full in the face of the sailor who had hold of Jinks; and the man went down like a ninepin. The other fled, and the stranger pursued him with a savage whoop.

The second of the newcomers at the same time flew straight at the ruffian who had got Ned down.

"Let him be, you swab!" roared the stranger.

The Russian started up to meet him, badly scared; but before he could draw his weapon the stranger's fist struck him under the jaw with the force of a kicking horse.

The Russian went spinning backwards several yards, and fell, to lie like a log on the grass.

"Don't let that other one go, Joe!" shouted the striker.

"Sit on him!"

The man who had attacked Jinks' two assailants, finding himself unable to catch the one who had bolted, gave up the chase and came back. He found his opponent just getting up, and, with the greatest presence of mind, promptly knocked him down once more and sat on him.

"We've got this one all right!" said Jinks gleefully, joining his unknown rescuer in sitting on the merchant seaman.

"Shall I let this hulking swab get up again an' paste 'im proper, or d'ye want to keep 'im like this?" said the burly youth who was reposing on the small of the seaman's back.

"Make sure they don't get away, that's the main thing!" cried Ned.

"Hold on, mate, an' I'll see to that!" was the reply.

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The unknown, whose face was still in the gloom, whipped a scarf from his neck and deftly tied the fallen ruffian's arms behind his back.

"My bloke's fairly outed!" said the other stranger, bending over the Russian, who was nearly unconscious for the time from the whizzing left-hander he had received. "Wish I'd broke his jaw!" added the victor savagely. "'Ere's a knife half drawn at the back of his belt! Wake up, you beggar! Get on your feet, an' I'll make a horsepital job o' you!"

"Steady!" cried Ned, hastening to join him.

"All right, sir! I'll just fix 'im up, then! Chuck us your handkerchief!" said the stranger; and he tied the Russian's wrists in the same manner as the other.

Ned and Jinks were nearly as astounded at this sudden and unexpected rescue in the nick of time as they had been at the attack of the three men. Till now there had not been breathing space enough to think about it.

Ned had a confused idea that the two burly rescuers were plain-clothes' policemen, or else seamen from the flagship.

But when the captives were secure, and the strangers showed their faces to the boys and turned towards the light, to his utter amazement Ned recognised the Chatham Chicken.

"Hallo!" gasped Ned. "What does this mean?"

"It's me all right enough," said the Chatham Chicken. "An' glad I am to ha' had the chance of outing that furrin' swab over there! Meet my mate, the Bromley Basher."

"By Jove!" cried Ned, seizing the Chicken's hand and shaking it violently. "You're a white man! You've pulled us right out of the rough!"

"Same here! Give me that fin!" said Jinks, gripping the horny fist of the Basher. "You came just when you were wanted, that's a cert! Where did you spring from?"

"Did you know these chaps were going for us?" cried Ned.

"In a manner of speakin' I did. I hope that swab ain't hurt you," said the Chicken. "I don't wonder you're a bit surprised, an' seein' as these two swabs is trussed up safe, an' won't take no harm, I'll explain."

The Chicken, lighting a cigarette, sat down on the grass.

"When I got ashore yesterday, after nigh gettin' a tarring an' feathering on that ship o' yours, I went off to the station as sharp as I could, an' just caught a train for Chatham—which, as you know, is where I belong.

"There wasn't nobody in my compartment, an' I was glad of it, not feelin' exactly inclined for company.

"The set of old Chatham line carriages I was in had got short divisions, so you could stand upon a seat an' look right down to the other end—you know the kind, sir. Well, there didn't seem anybody in the train hardly, an' I had it to myself.

"We got to a station farther down; they called out, 'Tickets ready!' I got under the seat, not havin' a ticket nor any money.

"It was just my luck that some chaps should come to my carriage before the train started agen an' get in. Off we went, an' I was just wonderin' whether to show up an' chance it, or stay where I was in the hopes they'd get out at the next station, when I heard one of 'em say:

"D'ye think the kid will take the bait?"

"He will if he can get leave from the ship," answers another, sharp-like. It's a cert! He'll have the letter by now."

"Yah!" says a chap in a chuffy sort o' voice, like a foreigner's. "He has got to be outed dis time. We have to carry out der orders. We must not let him slip through our fingers!"

"We won't!" growls the other fellow. "We'll make a proper job of it."

"Allo!" thinks I to myself. "This is a rum barney I've dropped into! Who is it that's goin' to be outed?"

"I heard one chap saying something about knives."

"Why get 'im to the Jezreel Temple?" asks one, grumblin' like. "A quiet place in the woods'd be a lot better!"

"He can't miss the Jezreel Temple, and it's quiet an' lonely, an' nobody ever goes there," says another.

"Voroff is right," says the furriner. "De Temple is de best place und der kid will find it. He's given us enough drouble, young Hardy. Half-past seven, Voroff?"

"That's the time. It's as late as he's likely to get leave for. We'll have to be at the place earlier ourselves," answers the other chap."

Jinks gave a short whistle, and glanced at Ned.

"When I heard that, sir," said the Chatham Chicken, "I took notice. O' course, I knew your name well enough. From what they said, they was to wait for you at ha'-past seven at the Jezreel Temple, an' when you come they was goin' to out you! Then I saw who put 'em up to the game!"

"You did?" exclaimed Ned.

"Yes, sir. The young swab that hired me to smash you up aboard your ship—which didn't come off—was the same who was payin' these touns to get you pipped off. It was as clear as mud!"

Jinks nudged Ned. The middies saw that the Chicken thought this little plot was Wexton's work, for naturally he knew nothing about Voroff's spies. They held their tongues and allowed him to go on.

"Well, sir, you may think it a bit soft in a tough nut like me," said the Chicken. "But when I heard these swabs sayin' now they was goin' to trap you away somewhere an' out you, three to one, it fair roused my gall.

"What!" says I to myself. "Stand out an' let that young 'un, who's the best sport I ever see, be done up by that lot? Not me! I'm takin' a hand in this!"

"The chaps got out at New Brompton, an' I had a look at 'em as they went. I reckoned me an' a good tough pal o' mine could easy mop up that greasy lot o' furriners. So directly the train reached Chatham, off I nips after Jimmy Flynn, the Basher.

"Jimmy," says I, "will you join in a little barney?" And I put him wise to the game.

"The Basher was on it like a shot. He don't ask for anything better than a chance to use his fists. So we arranges to go up an' paste them three furrin' chaps.

"That's all my yarn, sir," said the Chicken modestly. "We came up 'ere early, an' laid in wait in the bushes just outside the wall there, an' we saw you come up an' watched you. As soon as those chaps turned up from nowhere an' went for you, we sailed in an' laid 'em out. I'm only sorry," he added explosively, "that they didn't stand up and take a proper bashing—the dirty dogs! That's all I've got to say, sir."

"Shake again, Chicken!" cried Ned, gripping the bruiser's fist. "You and your pal, too."

"Rippers!" said Jinks. "If you— Look out, here comes somebody!"

The Chicken and his mate turned quickly on their guard,

and gave a growl as a stranger was seen suddenly hurrying in through the opening in the wall, and darting towards them. But dark as it was, Ned recognised the newcomer at once, and ran to meet him.

"Ralph!" the middy cried. "It's you, then?"

"Thank goodness yo're safe, Ned!" panted Ralph Hardy—for it was he.

He was out of breath, his face white and set, and his left hand grasped a revolver.

His eyes fell on the two captives. With an exclamation he stooped quickly beside them and struck a match, by which he scanned their faces.

"Got them both, then! This is great!" he cried. "Well done, Ned!"

"You wouldn't have found much of us if it hadn't been for these two chaps," said Ned.

"Eh?" said Ralph, staring at the pugs, who stood grinning rather bashfully. "Who are these?"

"Meet the Chatham Chicken and the Bromley Basher," said Jinks.

"Proud to meet you," said Ralph. "You little know what a service you've done me and my brother. I should have been too late."

"How in the world did you get here?" cried Ned.

"Got your message at Minster about six, and I saw you were about to fall into a trap. I hired a motor at Sheerness, and came on here as fast as I could burn the ground."

"Then you never wrote that letter telling me to come here?"

"The letter was a forgery, Ned," said Ralph Hardy.

He stepped to the opening in the wall, and blew a shrill, rippling call on a little silver whistle.

Instantly three or four dark forms sprang up from among the bushes on the hillside, and darted to the temple in obedience to the call; strong, wiry men, in plain serge suits.

"Arrest these two!" commanded Ralph, pointing to the prisoners. "Take them back with you, and keep them in strict custody till you get orders from me!"

The Arm of the Law!

THE men who had come so swiftly to Ralph Hardy's signal asked no questions. They took charge of the two prisoners, and jerked them to their feet. The captives were marched quietly out, and the party disappeared down the hillside.

The pair of pugilists stood looking on completely mystified. Ned and Jinks were equally surprised.

"Quick work! I say, Ralph, who is—"

"Never mind about questions now," broke in his brother.

"Show me that letter you got on the Victorious."

Ned gave it to him. Ralph scanned it carefully by the light of an electric torch.

"Very cleverly forged," he said grimly. "I don't wonder it took you in. You are told to burn it, I see."

"Yes," said Ned, flushing. "And I was going to, but somehow I thought I'd keep it—especially when that other letter came from Minster."

"Quite right. Lucky you did."

"Who wrote the letter, Ralph—one of those two chaps we caught?"

"No. Were these the only two you saw?"

"There was another who got away," said Ned.

"You didn't see anything of the man they call Voroff—one of the two who drugged you in the train the first day?" asked Ralph of his brother.

"The man with the red beard? I only got a glimpse of this chap to-night, but he was clean-shaven."

"He got rid of that beard weeks ago, Ned."

"Then it might have been he!" exclaimed Ned. "I thought I knew him, though it was only a blink I got."

"He was a chap with a broad, white face, dressed like a farmer," put in Jinks.

"That's Voroff," said Ralph at once. "Your old enemy, Ned. He was Dimitri's chief. There's not much doubt he wrote this letter and arranged the whole affair, under orders from his boss. He's one of the cleverest forgers living."

"Pity he got away!" exclaimed Jinks.

"It is. But it's a wonderful piece of luck trapping these other two, and still better luck your coming out with a whole skin. Didn't you smell a rat when you got the letter?"

"Jinks did. I was in such a funk, thinking you were in a tight place, that I hooked it directly," said Ned.

(Ned and Jinks certainly had a lucky escape, but Voroff has got away again! Don't miss next week's thrilling developments!) THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,266.

THE KIDNAPPED CRICKETERS!

(Continued from page 25.)

"We'll leave the charabanc in the lane," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "Then a few of us will go and let the Grammarians out, and we'll tell them where the charabanc is."

"Better pick out the best runners, then," said Figgins. "The Grammar School kids will be as wild as a set of lunatics when they get out of the tower!"

"You and I and Blake can go," said Tom Merry; "three will be enough; and you other fellows can go on to St. Jim's, and be in time for calling-over. We shall do a sprint after letting the Grammar School kids out, and we may get in in time."

"Pewwaps I had better let them out, Tom Mewwy, if a weally good spwintah is wequiahed!"

"Rats! I think we may as well leave the charabanc here," said Tom Merry, looking round; "it's near to the ruins."

The St. Jim's juniors left the charabanc; then the juniors set their faces towards St. Jim's, and marched on in high spirits, whilst Tom Merry, Blake, and Figgins took the footpath through the woods to the ruins.

The dusk was falling over the woods when they came in sight of the old tower. A shout from one of the windows showed that they were spotted.

"Go and pull the pegs up, Blake, while we're talking to them," said Tom Merry. "We don't want too sudden a rush. It will be a run, anyway!"

"Right-ho!" said Blake.

Tom Merry waved his hand to Frank Monk, who was shaking his fist from the lowest window. In a minute all the casements were crammed with savage Grammarian faces. The rivals of Tom Merry & Co. did not seem to have enjoyed their afternoon in the old tower.

"Now, Monkey, own up! Hasn't it been a really ripping jape, old chap—and haven't we done you brown?"

Frank Monk grinned in spite of himself.

"Well, perhaps you have," he said; "but we'll get our own back! You've got to let us out, and when the door's unfastened—"

Blake rejoined his comrades.

"I've got the pegs out," he said. "The door will be open as soon as they push it."

Tom Merry waved his hand to Frank Monk.

"The door's unfastened!" he called out.

Monk disappeared from the window in an instant.

"Come on!" muttered Tom Merry; "it's neck or nothing now, and no mistake! If they get us, they'll scalp us!"

And the three juniors darted away. There was a yell, and the door of the tower swung open, and the long-imprisoned Grammarians came streaming out.

"After them!" shouted Frank Monk.

The Grammarians broke into a desperate run. If they could only capture the three leaders of the St. Jim's juniors and make an example of them, it would be some comfort, and the laugh would not be wholly against them.

"Come on!" gasped Tom Merry. "I verily believe Monk's gaining! It will be neck and neck! Shove it on!"

"Right-ho!" panted Blake.

They ran on fleetly. Behind came the pattering feet of the determined pursuers.

"St. Jim's at last!"

The great school loomed up against the sky. There was the ancient gateway—refuge at last!

"One spurt more!"

They dashed up to the gate. The Grammarians were close behind. Frank Monk was running desperately, as if for a wager, and his outstretched hand was very close.

"Home at last!"

The three juniors dashed in, and Tom Merry caught the gate to swing it shut. Monk, ahead of his comrades, sprang in the way; but the ready fist of Figgins was there, and Monk went staggering back into the road before a mighty thump on the chest.

Tom Merry clanged the gate shut, and Blake shot the nearest bolt. Frank Monk recovered himself in a moment or two, and hurled himself at the gate—too late! His followers were on the scene now, and they rushed straight at the gate, but the bolt held fast. But it had been a narrow shave!

Tom Merry kissed his hand to the furious Grammarians between the iron bars.

"Done!" he said sweetly.

"Diddled!" said Blake, with a breathless grin.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins. "Hear us smile!"

And the three juniors smiled loudly. The Grammarians shook the bars of the gate in helpless wrath.

"Good-night!" said Tom Merry. "Good-night, kids; and remember—St. Jim's leads!"

And the St. Jim's juniors walked away arm-in-arm, and the baffled Grammarians slowly took their homeward route.

"St. Jim's leads!" grinned Figgins. "There's no getting out of that! St. Jim's leads!"

And there was not the slightest doubt that it was so!

THE END.

(Tom Merry & Co. start a House of Commons at St. Jim's in next week's ripping yarn, "THE ST. JIM'S PARLIAMENT!" It's a woe!)

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