

"THE SCHEMER OF THE SCHOOL!" Powerful Long Complete Yarn of the Chums of St. Jim's— **INSIDE.**

The GEM

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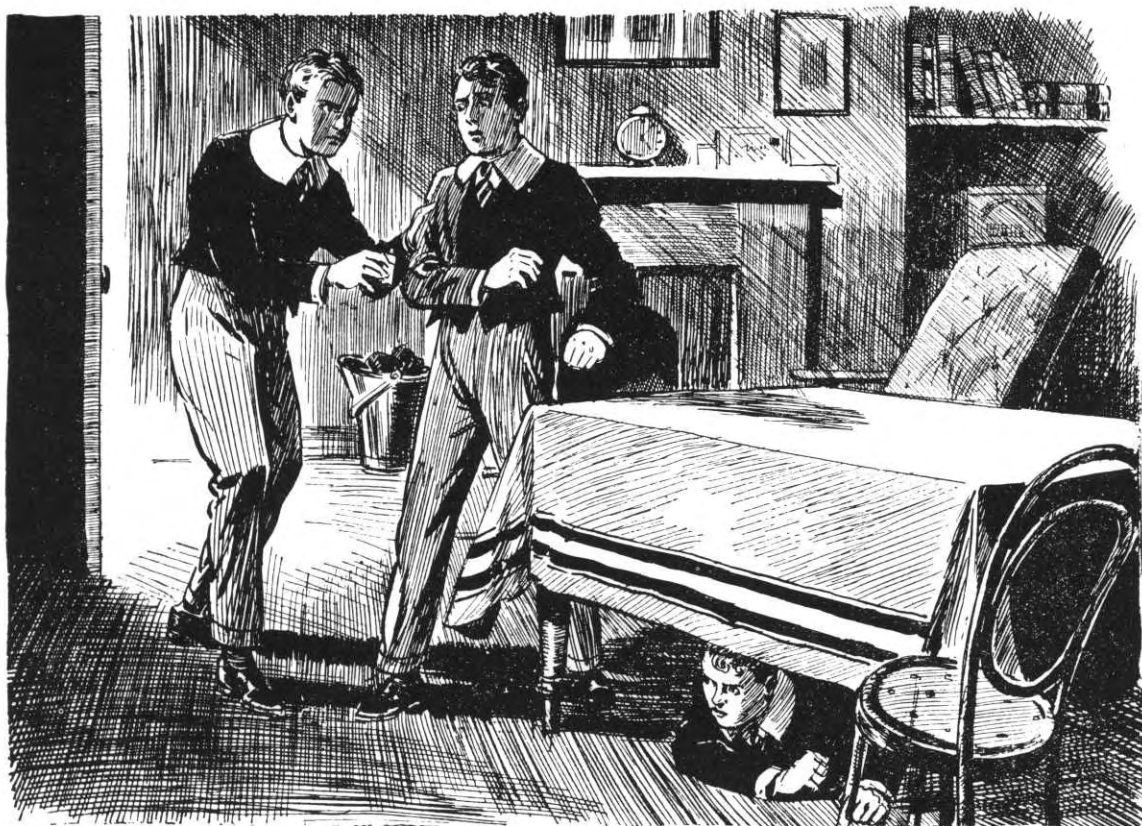
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The Schemer of

Having cunningly contrived to create ill-feeling between Tom Merry and his chums, Jerrold Lumley-Lumley, the Outsider of St. Jim's, now proceeds to plot further vengeance upon the boy he has sworn to ruin.

CHAPTER 1.

Tom Merry in Trouble!

KNOX of the Sixth Form at St. Jim's stopped outside Tom Merry's study, and sniffed.

Knox was a prefect, and the most unpopular fellow in the School House. There was no other senior so disliked by the juniors—or by the other seniors, for that matter. Knox was always finding somebody out in something, and he stretched his privileges as a prefect to their fullest extent in watching and fault-finding and reporting, and making himself a general nuisance. And Knox was "nosing," as the juniors called it, round the Shell passage that afternoon.

Some cigarettes had been dropped in one of the passages, and there had been some comments upon the matter. Knox suspected juvenile smoking at once. It was hinted in the Form-room that Knox himself was not unknown to indulge in the delights of a surreptitious cigarette. But if he did he evidently did not intend to grant a similar indulgence to the juniors.

So Knox paused outside Tom Merry's study, sniffing like a dog picking up a scent.

"My hat!" ejaculated Knox.

His eyes gleamed. He had always been up against Tom Merry & Co., and he would have been glad to find one or all of them in a fault.

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Knox threw open the study door, and started back.

A thick haze of tobacco smoke was in the study. Not only cigarettes, but cigars must have been smoked there to give the room that thick blue haze. It was so dense that Knox coughed.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed.

There was another cough in the study. Knox made out the form and face of Tom Merry through the tobacco smoke.

"Merry!"

"Well?" said Tom Merry.

The junior skipper's hands were thrust deep in his pockets. His head was sunk. His whole attitude told of a gloomy despondency.

It was a strange alteration since a few days ago, when Tom Merry of the Shell had been the most popular fellow of the Lower School.

It was that unlucky football match in which he had insisted upon playing Jerrold Lumley-Lumley, in spite of the general opposition, that had begun it. The foul play by Lumley-Lumley and the defeat of the School House had resulted, and all blamed Tom Merry. Then had come general strife and disagreement, hot temper on both sides—estrangement. Then the discovery of the marked cards in Tom Merry's drawer, and the rumours that had arisen from it.

Lumley-Lumley's habits were well known. What more natural than for the juniors to conclude, from Tom Merry's

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championship of him, that Tom Merry had taken to his ways.

Lowther and Manners, his own chums, were dubious, or seemed so, and Study No. 6 had turned against him. Blake had stood up to him in angry strife, and had been beaten. But the victory brought only unpopularity with it; all the sympathy was for the defeated Fourth Former.

"I rather think I've caught you this time," said Knox, with a grin. He did not look so displeased as a dutiful prefect ought to have looked. Indeed, one might have imagined from his expression that he was quite pleased.

Tom Merry flushed.

"What do you mean?" he asked hotly.

"I hardly think I need explain," said Knox caustically. "I think the atmosphere of this study answers for itself. You've been smoking, I imagine—or is this simply the scent of eau-de-Cologne?"

"I haven't been smoking," said Tom Merry angrily. "I've only just come in, and I found my room in this state!"

"Don't tell lies!" said Knox.

Tom Merry gritted his teeth.

"I'm not telling lies! Don't think you can bully me, Knox, because you're a Sixth Form prefect! I wouldn't be called a liar by the Head himself."

"Do you dare to deny that you've been smoking, when I find your study as thick with tobacco smoke as a tap-room?" said the prefect, in amazement.

"I have not been smoking! I hadn't been in here a minute when you came in," explained Tom Merry. "I was so surprised at finding my study in this state that I hardly knew what to do. I was going to open the window—"

"It would have been wiser to do that when you started smoking," said Knox. "Why, hang it all, you young liar, here are the cigars!"

On the table lay three cigar stumps, one still quite warm as Knox touched it.

Tom Merry looked at him dazedly.

That somebody had been smoking heavily in the study hardly admitted of doubt, and, though the explanation he had given Knox was perfectly true, he saw at a glance that it was not likely to be believed by the prefect.

Knox gathered up the cigar stumps.

"I'm sorry, Merry! But we shall have to take you to Mr. Railton," he said.

"I've already asked to be taken there," answered the hero of the Shell.

Kildare led the way to Mr. Railton's study without a word.

"Come in!" said Mr. Railton, in answer to their knock.

The Housemaster put down his pen as they entered.

"I'm busy just now—" he began.

The Housemaster broke off as he caught sight of Knox and Tom Merry.

"Well, Kildare," went on Mr. Railton, "what is the matter?"

Kildare briefly explained how he had met Tom Merry and Knox.

"And you concluded it was best to bring him to me at once, I see," said Mr. Railton. "Well, Knox, let me have your story, please."

"I caught him smoking in his study, sir."

"That is untrue, sir!" said Tom Merry.

"Silence, Merry!" said the Housemaster. "Go on, Knox."

The bully made a concise statement of his discovery, producing the three cigar stumps at the end of it for greater effect.

"But did you actually find him smoking, Knox?" asked the master.

"Well, no, sir, not exactly. But one of these stumps was quite warm when I picked it up."

Knox's last piece of evidence made a great impression on Mr. Railton. He looked very severely at Tom Merry.

"I am pained to see you here in answer to a charge like this, Merry," he began.

"I found my study exactly as Knox found it, sir," said Tom Merry. "It was full of smoke, as he says. But I know nothing about the cause. That cigar stump may have been warm, but I did not smoke it!"

Mr. Railton did not reply to Tom Merry, however.

"Have you anything more to say, Knox?" he asked quietly.

"No, sir."

"Or you, Kildare, upon this subject?" asked the Housemaster.

the School / By MARTIN CLIFFORD

"You say you haven't been smoking," he remarked. "You can come and tell Mr. Railton so. This matter will have to go to the Housemaster."

"I'm ready to go to Mr. Railton," said Tom Merry resolutely.

"Follow me, then!" said the prefect.

Knox and Tom Merry left the room and descended the stairs. But as they walked along the Sixth Form passage towards the Housemaster's study, Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, came out of his room.

"Hallo! What's the matter?" asked Kildare.

"Tom Merry smoking in his study!" replied Knox. "Railton in?"

Kildare looked grave.

"Mr. Railton is in, I think," he replied, laying a slight emphasis on the prefix. "But wait a minute, Knox. I should like to know about this."

"Oh, I can manage all right—thanks!" said Knox. "It's only a case of smoking in the study—"

"That is not true," interrupted Tom Merry. "I found the study full of smoke!"

"The old tale, Kildare," said Knox sneeringly. "Room like a kiln. Don't know anything about it. Mr. Railton in, you say?"

"I believe so," said Kildare. "But you haven't told me about it yet."

Knox bit his lip. But Kildare was determined, and he had to explain.

"And it's as plain as anything," he concluded, "that he was smoking!"

"That's not true!" said Tom Merry. "I had only just come into the study, Kildare, and I found the room exactly as Knox found it. I don't know anything about it."

Kildare looked keenly at Tom Merry. He remembered that the captain of the Shell had denied all knowledge of the marked cards in the same way.

The captain of St. Jim's hesitated. Since the discovery of the cards in Tom Merry's study he had been communing with himself whether he ought to report it or wait for further evidence.

But this affair that Knox had discovered had decided him. He had withheld the matter for what he considered satisfactory reasons. But he saw that it was his duty to speak out now.

"I think you have something to say, Kildare?"

The captain of St. Jim's coloured. He found it not so easy as Knox. What he had to say was not pleasant for him, especially as it concerned such a junior as the hero of the Lower School.

Slowly and reluctantly he unfolded the story of the cards. Mr. Railton listened in silence. Tom Merry held his head erect through it all.

He stood quite firmly, his lips hard set, and his brows a little drawn, but with courage and resolve in every feature.

Was he guilty?

It seemed hard to think so, looking at him now; but Mr. Railton, with his long experience, knew that courage and hardihood may have the same outward aspect.

He had to judge by the facts.

The Housemaster's brow grew sterner and sterner as he listened to Kildare.

"This is very serious," he said at last.

"I fear so, sir," said Kildare.

"Why did you not report this before, Kildare?"

The captain coloured again.

"I hoped that something would turn up to show that there was a mistake about it, or that it was a practical joke on Merry, or something of that sort, sir," he said. "I had a high opinion of Merry. I thought it was within my

authority, as head prefect of the School House, to keep the matter in abeyance."

"Quite right, Kildare. But it was also right of you to tell me now, in view of what Knox has stated."

Mr. Railton pursed his lips a little.

"I think I need not detain you any longer, Knox," he said. "You have stated all that is connected with the matter?"

"Yes, sir," said the prefect, annoyed at losing his grip on the affair.

"Then you may go."

"Very well, sir."

Knox hesitated a second, but he had to go. He knew why Mr. Railton did not want to detain him. The Housemaster did not feel as confident with him as with Kildare. He had done his duty as a prefect; but in discussing the matter, Mr. Railton wished to have present only the captain of St. Jim's, whom he had long learned to trust. Knox gritted his teeth as he went down the passage. His only consolation was that the junior he hated was probably "for it."

The door closed, and Mr. Railton turned to Tom Merry.

CHAPTER 2.

The Evidence Against Him!

TOM MERRY met the School House master's gaze quite calmly.

It was not bravado. It was the courage of innocence in his face. He was not afraid, though his heart was sinking. How would this end? If he was thought guilty he would have to leave St. Jim's. And how was he to prove his innocence?

The Housemaster's face showed that the scene pained him as much as anybody. If Tom Merry turned out to be the blackguard the evidence seemed to prove, he would have to admit that for once he had been utterly mistaken in a boy's character. He had thought very differently of the hero of the Shell.

"Now, Merry," he said, "it appears that you deny all knowledge of the marked cards that were found in your study?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you suggest that either of your study-mates knows anything about them?"

Tom Merry flushed.

"Certainly not, sir!"

"Then you think that they were placed there by someone else?"

"I suppose so."

"For what purpose?"

"A joke, I suppose, unless it was someone who wanted to injure me."

"That is a very dreadful suspicion, Merry," said Mr. Railton, in an altered voice. "Do you suspect that someone dislikes you so much in the School House that he would stoop to such baseness to injure you?"

Tom Merry was silent. Put like that, it did seem too bad to believe. Yet what other explanation could be suggested? What enemy had he who would so injure him if he could?

The thought of Lumley-Lumley crossed his mind. If it was anyone, doubtless it was the Outsider of St. Jim's.

But the Outsider had assumed friendly looks of late, and had shown a keen desire to be on friendly terms with the hero of the Shell, even after the football match and what had followed it.

Mr. Railton broke the silence.

"Well, Merry, can you give me the name of a boy who might have done this thing, so that I can question him?"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"I could not go so far as that, sir, certainly."

"About this smoking," went on the Housemaster. "You say the study was thick with tobacco smoke when you went there?"

"Yes, sir."

"How long had you been there when Knox arrived?"

"Two or three minutes, perhaps. I was so surprised by the smoke that I hardly knew what to do. I was going to open the window when Knox came in."

"You had closed the door?"

"Yes, to keep the smoke from getting into the passage. I knew what the fellows would say, after that affair of the cards."

"It seems, then, that the other boys have entertained a bad opinion of you over the affair of the cards?"

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry, flushing.

"It is a wretched affair. If you did not smoke the cigars, someone else must have smoked them in your study."

"I suppose so, sir."

"Where were you before you went to the study? If not

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there, you must have been somewhere else, and if you were seen somewhere else—"

"I had been on the chapel green, sir."

"The chapel green—at this time of the evening?"

Tom Merry flushed again.

"I have been a lot alone just lately, sir, since—since the cards. I was taking a quiet stroll by myself, thinking things over."

"It is very unfortunate that you should have been alone, Merry, at the very moment it was most necessary that you should prove you were not in your study," Mr. Railton said, somewhat dryly.

"Yes, sir."

"Your study is shared by Manners and Lowther. Either of them might have come in and found it smoky."

"I suppose so."

"Then, if someone else smoked those cigars there, knowing you were strolling on the chapel green and not likely to come in, he might have been interrupted at any moment by either Manners or Lowther."

"Well, no, sir! I—I'm not on very good terms with Manners and Lowther now," said Tom Merry awkwardly. "Monty—I mean Lowther—generally digs in the end study, with Noble and the rest, and Manners doesn't come to my study very often."

"Why are you on bad terms with them?"

"Partly because of those cards."

"Did they believe you guilty?"

"I don't know, sir—I think not—but—but—well, there was the football match, too. Everyone was down on me for playing Lumley-Lumley—Manners and Lowther along with the rest. It all began with that. Lumley asked me to give him a chance, and I gave it him. That's how it was."

Mr. Railton looked at Tom Merry keenly.

"I suppose you know, Merry, that your name has been coupled very much with Jerrold Lumley-Lumley's of late?" he asked.

"Yes, I think so. But he is no friend of mine. I dislike him."

"Then appearances are very much against you all along, Tom Merry," said Kildare. "Why did you play him in the House match?"

"He asked me to give him a chance, and I thought some of us had been rather rough on him. I was sorry for it afterwards. He fouled Kerr, and that was the beginning of the trouble. I suppose I was too good-natured."

"I should not like to see troublesome consequences fall upon a lad for being good-natured," said Mr. Railton, "but it has been proved in public the sort of character this boy Lumley possesses. You should have known better, Merry, than to allow him to influence you. If you have, indeed, taken to his ways, as the evidence seems to prove—"

"I have not, sir."

"I hope that is the case. But plainly, Merry, if you did not smoke in your study, one of your study-mates must have done so. Will you call Manners and Lowther, Kildare?"

"Certainly, sir."

Kildare left the study.

The Housemaster turned to his writing again, and Tom Merry stood waiting. He was feeling horribly uncomfortable. How would the matter end? Would he be compelled to leave St. Jim's?

But whatever his fate might be, he was resolved to fight the matter out, and try to prove his innocence.

The door reopened and Kildare returned, followed into the study by Manners and Lowther.

The two Shell fellows stopped in perplexity at the sight of Tom Merry. Kildare had simply told them to come to Mr. Railton's study, and they had come. They had not expected to find Tom Merry there.

CHAPTER 3.

Not Proven!

MR. RAILTON laid down his pen and turned his eyes upon the chums of the Shell.

Manners and Lowther stood silent, wondering what was coming.

"You share Tom Merry's study in the Shell passage, I believe, Lowther?"

"Yes, sir," said Monty.

"Have you used that study lately?"

Lowther flushed a little.

"I have been using the end study a lot, sir," he said, "with Kangaroo—I mean Noble, and Dane, and Glyn."

"Have you been in Merry's study to-day?"

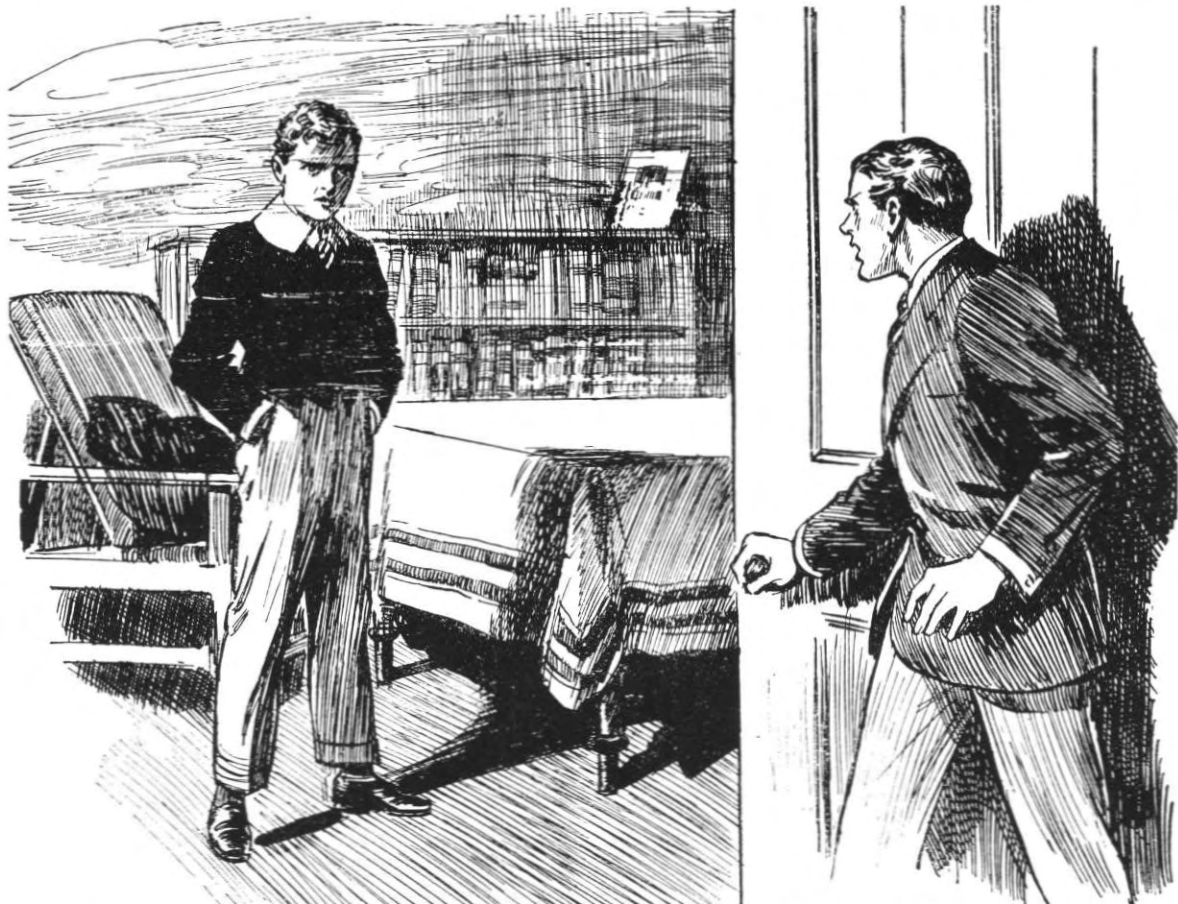
"Yes, sir. I went in to get some books."

"At what time?"

"Just after lessons."

"Not since then?"

"No, sir."



As Knox threw open the study door he started back in amazement. A thick haze of tobacco smoke was in the room. "Great Scott!" he exclaimed. "Merry, you've been smoking. I rather think I've caught you this time!"

Mr. Railton turned his glance upon Manners, who had been listening in a state of considerable astonishment.

"Have you been in the study lately, Manners?"

"Not just lately, sir."

"When was the last time?"

"Just after dinner, sir."

"Then you were not aware that someone has been smoking in the study?"

"Smoking, sir? No!"

"Nor you, Lowther?"

"Certainly not, sir!" said Monty Lowther in amazement.

"You hear that, Merry? Do you suggest that either Manners or Lowther is stating what is not correct?"

"No, sir. They're speaking the truth, of course," said Tom Merry. "I was quite sure before you asked them that they wouldn't know anything about the smoke."

"Very well. You may go, Manners and Lowther."

The chums of the Shell left the study in wonder. But they did not go far. They waited for Tom Merry to come out of the Housemaster's presence. They had been on cold terms lately with one another, as well as with Tom Merry, but they forgot that just now.

In the Housemaster's study there was a grim silence for some moments. Kildare was looking distressed, but a hard look was coming over Tom Merry's face. He was determined that no one should see how deeply he was cut by the shadow that had fallen upon his name.

Mr. Railton spoke at last.

"I don't know what to say to you," he said. "On each occasion when the evidence seems conclusive against you, Merry, you have a reply to make which hardly seems to deserve any sort of credence. Anybody accused of anything is liable to say that it is an enemy's plot against him. That discounts all evidence—yet it is only upon evidence that any matter can be settled."

"I am innocent, sir!"

"I hope you are, Merry."

Mr. Railton drummed upon the table with his fingers.

"Frankly, I do not know what to say. It is because you have such an extremely good reputation that I hesitate.

The evidence is more than enough to condemn any boy. If it had been Gore or Mellish, I should not have had a doubt upon the subject. Your good record makes me doubt. I shall not report this to the Head at present."

"I do not care—"

"What?"

"If I am to be suspected, and watched, and sneered at, sir, the sooner it goes before the Head the better!" said Tom Merry hotly. "I'm sick of this!"

"You are disrespectful, Merry," said Mr. Railton quietly. Tom Merry reddened.

"I'm sorry, sir! But—but—"

"That is enough now. You may go, Merry."

Tom Merry left the study without another word. Mr. Railton fastened his eyes upon the captain of St. Jim's as the door closed.

"Kildare, what do you think of this?"

The Sixth Former made a helpless gesture.

"I don't know what to think, sir."

"If this is true—if he has become a blackguard in conduct—he will have to leave St. Jim's," said Mr. Railton. "But I have always had so high an opinion of that boy that I am very sorry to think such a thing."

"I can't quite think it, sir. Only—only if there were as much evidence against any other junior, I should think the case settled. That's all."

Mr. Railton nodded.

"I agree with you, Kildare. That is exactly how the case presents itself to me. This friendship between Merry and Lumley—do you think it is a real one?"

"The other juniors seemed to think so, sir. His own friends seem to have dropped off on account of it, and Lumley certainly speaks of Merry in public as if he were a good friend. I have noticed that. The impression seems to be that they are close friends, but that Merry wishes to keep it dark."

"And that is possibly the case?"

"Just so, sir."

Mr. Railton looked worried.

"Well, the case must be left where it is at present," he said. "I must think over it further. Meanwhile, Kildare, you will keep an eye on Tom Merry."

"Certainly, sir."

And the captain of St. Jim's left the study. Mr. Railton turned to his desk again, and picked up his pen, but he did not write. He sat with a wrinkled brow, thinking.

Meanwhile, Tom Merry, as he left the study, had met Manners and Lowther at the end of the passage. Tom Merry paused as his former chums obviously wished to speak to him.

"Well?" he asked shortly.

"What's the matter, Tom?"

"It's nothing fresh," replied Tom Merry. "They've added cigar-smoking to card-sharping in the list of my sins—that's all. I dare say I shall be accused of picking pockets next. But I don't see that it need interest you. You haven't shown much interest in my affairs lately."

And he strode on before either of them could reply.

He ascended the stairs to the Shell quarters. A crowd of fellows were gathered round the doorway of his study. A haze of smoke was slowly rolling out of the open doorway, and the whole passage was scented with tobacco.

"Ripping goings on, I don't think!" said Gore, with a sneer. "This is Tom Merry's study—the chap who was down on the smart set here, you know—and held up his hands in horror at a fellow smoking a cigarette behind the woodshed."

"Humbbug!" said Mellish.

"Looks like it," said Hancock. "Why, the study's fairly reeking. I suppose that's what Knox and Kildare were marching him into Mr. Railton's study for. I saw them."

"Serve him right if he's expelled!" said Jones minor. "He must have been smoking cigars to make the study like that."

"Yes, rather."

Tom Merry smiled bitterly. He had been found guilty, as usual, by fellows who were ignorant of all the facts.

"Hallo, here he is!" exclaimed Digby. "I say, Tom Merry, how did you get your study into this state?"

"Mind your own business!" said Tom Merry shortly.

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And he went into the study and slammed the door. The juniors looked at one another and slowly moved away. In ten minutes the matter was buzzing throughout the length and breadth of the Lower School.

CHAPTER 4.

An Awkward Interview!

"COME in!"

Tom Merry stared as Blake, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, Digby, Herries, and Kangaroo entered his study.

"I hope you'll pardon this intrusion, dear boy, but we have wathah an important mattah to discuss," said Arthur Augustus, with a graceful bow.

Tom Merry took not the slightest notice of D'Arcy.

"I am perfectly willin' to allow that certain circumstances may altah cases," said Arthur Augustus. "But pway have the goodness to attend, Tom Mewwy."

Tom Merry continued to stare through the window. Blake & Co. might have been at the Equator for all he seemed to see of them.

Herries coughed.

"I'm speakin' to you, Tom Mewwy!" said D'Arcy.

The swell of St. Jim's was a little nettled at his cold reception.

"Are you?" said Tom Merry. "Well, don't!"

And thrusting his hands in his pockets, he stretched out his legs, and continued to stare out of the window.

"It's rather an important matter, though, Tom Merry," said Kangaroo.

Tom Merry turned a somewhat more genial look at the Cornstalk.

"Well, get on with it, then, Kangaroo," he said.

Arthur Augustus jumped.

"Pway do nothin' of the kind, Kangawoo. I have taken this mattah up, Tom Mewwy. Pway have the goodness to listen!"

Tom Merry shrugged his shoulders. Arthur Augustus jammed his monocle into his eye in an impressive manner.

"It's about the footah, dear boy," he said.

Tom Merry looked impatient.

"Is it?" he said. "Well, you can go and talk to someone else. I've had enough of that talk from you fellows."

"You are undah a delusion, dear boy," returned D'Arcy. "The footah match you allude to is finished with, I hope. We are discussin' anothah one."

D'Arcy paused.

But Tom Merry made no sign. He was not to be drawn. The chums looked at one another. It was very evident that they did not admire D'Arcy's opening. They thought he was making a mess of things.

"Yaas, dear boy," he went on, "we think the lickin' we sustained when you would play that wottah Lumley ought to be wevenged."

Another slight pause. Still Tom Merry said nothing. This was not what they had come for. Blake took the matter into his hands.

"Look here, Tom Merry," he said, unheeding D'Arcy's indignant look. "It's about the skippering in the next match."

Tom Merry looked at Blake.

"Well, what of it, Blake?"

"Pway let me explain, Blake. I see how to deal with the mattah now—"

"You'll see stars, ass, if you don't ring off. Keep that duffer quiet!"

The others closed round D'Arcy.

"Weally, dear boys—"

"Well, what of it, Blake?" asked Tom Merry, when order was restored. "I jolly well wish you'd come to the point. You don't want me to captain?"

"Well, to begin with, Tom Merry, you've no need to put it like that," said Blake. "We thought, after what had happened, you would prefer to stay down for this match, and let somebody else captain the team against the New House."

"I see," said Tom Merry. "You've very likely chosen him already."

Blake coloured.

"You're quite wrong, Tom Merry; we haven't. We think it ought to be put before you first."

"That is kind of you!"

Blake took no notice of the sarcastic tone. Tom Merry's manner rather puzzled him.

"Look here," he began, "you know as well as we do that it's the right thing—"

"You must see it's perfectly pwopah, Tom Mewwy—"

"Shut up, Gussy," said Blake. "Are you agreeable, Tom Merry?"

The captain of the Shell laughed—it was a harsh laugh, not much like Tom Merry's old laugh.

"I don't mind," he said. "Get anyone you like to captain our. It's all the same to me."

"We're not doing this because we're down on you, Tom Merry," said Kangaroo.

"Certainly not, dear boy. As a matter of fact, I may say that Blake has forgotten the fact that you are under a cloud—"

Tom Merry leaped to his feet.

"I want no more reminders of that, D'Arcy!" he said hotly. "I've had enough of it—more than enough. You have all chosen to believe accusations against me—accusations that can't be proved. You don't care to stand by a chap you all know to be decent. That's what it is!"

"You've got othah friends now, Tom Mewwy."

"What do you mean, D'Arcy?"

"You know vewy well what I mean, Tom Mewwy. You have othah friends—Lumley and Mellish."

"That is not true," said Tom Merry quietly. "I detest Lumley-Lumley more than any other fellow at St. Jim's."

"Is that why you played him in the House match?" asked Blake sarcastically.

Tom Merry made a gesture of annoyance.

"Oh, that's enough!" he exclaimed. "You don't want me to captain the House match. Well, it's all right—find another captain. I shan't be sorry to cut it. I don't know that I shall ever play for the School House again."

There was a pause for a moment.

"It's wotten talkin' to a chap like this, I know," said D'Arcy at last; "but while you are undah a cloud, Tom Mewwy, you can't expect to captain the School House juniors, you know. It's askin' wathah too much."

"Haven't you said enough, D'Arcy? I've said that I don't want to captain the team, and I don't want to play in it, either, for that matter. Isn't that enough to satisfy you?"

Tom Merry threw himself into his chair again. The juniors stood uneasy. The interview was not what they could call a satisfactory one, although they had gained their point quite easily. They felt themselves in the right, yet Tom Merry had, somehow, impressed upon them a feeling of being in the wrong.

"Well, that's all right, then," said Blake at last. "We thought we'd put it straight to you, Tom Merry, before we formed up a team for Saturday."

"All right!"

"If you want to play—"

Blake's manner was, for once, half-hearted. If Tom Merry wanted to play, he felt that he could not refuse him a place in the team, in spite of all that had happened.

But Tom Merry cut him short quickly enough.

"I don't want to play," he said shortly. "And no doubt there are plenty of budding captains in the eleven quite ready and willing to take my place."

"That's not fair, Tom Merry. We don't want to be down on you, but after what's happened we feel that we couldn't play under your lead as usual."

"Oh, I know," said Tom Merry impatiently. "A fellow's down, so you all crowd in to give him a kick!"

"Look here!" roared Blake. "I don't like that, and blessed if I'm going to stand it! If a chap goes in for blackguardly amusements he must expect decent fellows to be down on him. You were ready enough to be down on Jerrold Lumley when he first came to St. Jim's, only because the same charges were made against him."

"They were proved against him and he owned up."

"Well, a chap who owns up may be more decent than a chap who doesn't."

Tom Merry was on his feet in a moment.

"Then you mean to say—"

"Here, enough of that!" exclaimed Kangaroo, in alarm, dragging Blake back. "You two chaps have had it out once, and that's enough. We didn't come here for a scrap. Get away, Blake."

"Look here—"

"Rats! Come away!"

And the sturdy Cornstalk fairly dragged Jack Blake, half resisting, from the study. The other juniors followed in silence. Tom Merry stood with gleaming eyes and contracted brows, and watched them go.

D'Arcy was the last, and he paused to look back at Tom Merry. Arthur Augustus was bound to be polite to the last.

"Pway excuse this intwusion, dear boy," he said, and, without waiting for a reply, he went out and shut the door.

Tom Merry was left alone. The footsteps died away down the passage. With a grim face, Tom Merry fell into a deep reverie.

CHAPTER 5.

Gore is Shut Up!

"HALLO! Get out! Hook it!" Gore was reading in his study when the door opened softly, and D'Arcy minor's head appeared.

"Keep your hair on!" said Wally. "You are wanted in the Head's study." And he shut the door again before Gore could speak, and scuttled down the passage to the corner where his chums were waiting for him.

"Ripping!" he exclaimed, addressing Curly Gibson, Jameson, and Joe Frayne. "Let's beat it before Gore comes out."

The chums of the Third chuckled, and disappeared more quickly than the imps in "Faust."

When Gore left his study, feeling somewhat nervous at having to visit the Head's study, and wondering if any of his bullying had been found out, the Third Formers were nowhere to be seen. In some trepidation the Shell junior descended the stairs and made his way to Dr. Holmes' study. He tapped gently on the door and entered. There was no one in the room, but having been bidden to present himself there, Gore decided to wait.

No sooner had the door closed than Wally D'Arcy's head bobbed round the corner of the passage.

"It's all serene!" he grinned to his chums. "Come on!"

The four Third Formers crept silently along the passage to the Head's door.

"Got the rope, Curly?" asked Wally.

"Here you are."

D'Arcy minor took the rope and bound it securely round the handle of the Head's door.

"Hang on," he whispered, "and don't breathe while I get the other things!"

Curly Gibson, Jameson, and Frayne seized the rope firmly. Wally went to the end of the passage. In a few seconds he returned, carrying a large toolbox. He put it on the floor; but it thumped against the door as he did so, and a movement was heard in the Head's study.

"Quick!" said Curly Gibson. "Hang on like anything, kids! Go on, Wally, begin!"

The chums hung on to the rope for all they were worth as they heard Gore approaching the door from inside.

Wally, as he had already been heard, did not care how he rattled the tools. Down on his knees he went.

"Where's that gimlet?" he asked.

"Look out!" said Jameson.

There was a tug at the door.

"Is that you, D'Arcy minor?" came Gore's voice through the door. "What's the game?"

"You are!" laughed Wally. "You said Tom Merry was a blackguard and ought to be shut up somewhere. Well, if that's the cure for blackguards, we think you ought to be shut up."

(Continued on the next page.)

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"I'll skin you, young D'Arcy!" shouted Gore. "Let me out before the Head comes along."

"You've no need to worry," said Wally. "The Head won't be back before late. He's gone to the vicarage to spend the evening, so you won't be disturbed!"

Jameson and Curly chuckled. Wally was cheerfully boring screwholes with the gimlet in the door cheek while he spoke to Gore. Three angle-irons lay on the floor.

"Open the door!" roared Gore.

He gave another tug at the door to accompany his words. But the chums of the Third had got a good grip.

"Hurry up, Wally!" said Curly Gibson. "The giddy rope's hurting our hands!"

"Do you hear, young D'Arcy?" Gore shouted. "Let go that door!"

"Hurry up, kid! Get the angle-irons on, for goodness' sake!"

Gore began to rave. He tugged at the door furiously. The heroes of the Third winced. It was no joke holding the rope against such tugs.

"All right in a moment!" said Wally. "I've got the holes bored! We'll have him screwed up in a jiffy now!"

Gore raved and stormed. Savagely he tore at the door-handle. And once, just as Wally was putting the second screw of the bottom angle iron in position, it was very nearly gone. He managed to get the door open about two inches. Curly Gibson, Jameson, and Frayne saw the danger.

"Wally to the rescue!" yelled Curly.

The leader of the Third was on his feet in an instant. He added his weight. Slowly the door came to again. Gore thumped on the door in rage.

He had himself taken a hand once or twice in screwing up an unpopular prefect in his study. But to be screwed up himself in the Head's study by fags of the Third was unspeakable. He dragged furiously at the door again. But the cord on the handle held it fast now in the strong grasp of Jameson and Curly and Frayne. And Wally was beginning to drive the screws in.

Gore dragged and dragged, and kicked the door at intervals, but the chums of the Third held on like grim death.

The first angle iron was screwed in position at last, and it didn't take Wally long to get the other two fixed.

Gore hammered at the door all the time.

"Hammer away, old son!" said Wally through the key-hole. "Hammer away! You won't get out! We've screwed you up!"

"You young hound!" roared Gore.

The enraged junior seized one of the Head's chairs and crashed it on the door. Tom Merry, attracted by the noise, came along the passage.

"What on earth's the matter?" he asked.

Wally grinned.

"Gore's been saying that blackguards ought to be shut up!" he said. "We've taken him at his word and shut him up! Come on, kids!"

And the fags scuttled away down the passage and disappeared.

"You young scoundrels!" yelled Gore through the key-hole. "I did say Tom Merry was a blackguard and ought to be shut up; and so he ought! And I'll skin you for this! Get those screws out! Do you hear?"

Tom Merry's lips set. He understood.

Wally & Co. had screwed Gore up in the study, and Gore's own words told him their reason. His heart warmed towards the fags of the Third. Gore hammered at the door again.

"Will you open this door?"

"I won't!" said Tom Merry. "And the fags are gone!"

Gore started at the voice.

"Is that you, Tom Merry?"

"Yes," said Tom Merry scornfully.

"Look here, let me out before the Head comes back—"

"Don't talk to me, you cad!"

Tom Merry passed on and went upstairs to his study. Gore shouted and hammered, and the noise brought fellows along the passage. But the three angle irons were well screwed down, and no one was inclined to go to the great trouble of finding a screwdriver and extracting them. Juniors chuckled and passed on, and Gore raved till he was tired, and the Head's study door still remained screwed up.

CHAPTER 6. Lumley's Plot!

JERROLD LUMLEY-LUMLEY sat by the window in his study, his feet on a chair and a cigarette between his lips.

He was smoking, with a thoughtful shade upon his brow and a curious glitter in his eyes. His expression

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showed that the Outsider of St. Jim's was very satisfied with something.

Mellish came into the study. He and Levison shared the room with Lumley-Lumley. But Levison was down with influenza and was in the school sanatorium.

"Shut the door!" said the Outsider, removing the cigarette hastily from his mouth and holding it behind him while Mellish obeyed. The cad of the Fourth grinned as he sat down.

"Did you hear the fags have screwed Gore up in the Head's study?"

"What for?"

"For saying something against Tom Merry, I understand. Wally and those other inky young scoundrels are sticking to Tom Merry for some reason. I suppose they think it'll pay them to have the captain of the Shell for a friend."

That was very like Mellish. That Wally & Co. might have a disinterested motive for their action never even occurred to him.

Lumley-Lumley nodded.

"Everybody else seems to be pretty well against Tom Merry," he remarked.

"Yes, in the Fourth and the Shell certainly. You've managed it jolly well, I must say, Lumley."

"What do you mean?"

Mellish closed one eye.

"Oh, it's all right!" he said. "Mum's the word! But I think there are two fellows in this study at the present moment who could explain how those marked cards came to be in the drawer of Tom Merry's table, and how his study came to be reeking with tobacco smoke. But mum's the word!"

"I guess it's safer not to talk too much," said Lumley-Lumley, with a glowering look. "Why don't you go and let Gore out? I thought he was a friend of yours."

Mellish gave a shrug.

"We used to chum a little," he said. "Then Gore took up the reforming business and dropped me. He seems to have dropped that, too, now, but he can't pick me up again just as he likes."

"You mean you don't want the trouble of unscrewing the Head's door, I guess?"

"Well, there are three big angle irons to unscrew," said Mellish. "It would take a quarter of an hour's hard work. Do you feel inclined for it?"

Lumley-Lumley laughed.

"I guess not," he said.

"Neither do I. Let Gore look after himself. If he doesn't come into Hall for calling-over in time he'll get marked absent. But that's his look out."

"I guess so!" said Lumley, dismissing the subject. "Look here, Tom Merry's in pretty low water just now."

"Serve him right!" said Mellish vindictively. "I've had enough of his carrying his head so high. Let him come down a little—and the more it's brought down the more I shall be pleased, for one."

"They seem to be giving him the benefit of the doubt somehow—Kildare and Railton, I mean."

"That's so. Most of the fellows have made up their minds on the subject."

"Railton has got to make up his mind."

"You mean you're not finished yet?"

"I guess not. Didn't I say I would drive Tom Merry in disgrace from St. Jim's?" said the Outsider in a low, hard voice.

Mellish shivered a little. He admired the cunning and the nerve of the Outsider. But there was something about Lumley-Lumley that scared him at times.

"You did," he replied.

"And I guess I'm going to do it. When Tom Merry's gone, I'll bring the others to heel fast enough," said the Outsider. "When my time comes to pass into the Shell I'll be captain of the Form, I reckon."

"I believe you could do it, if you tried."

"I shall. But at present we've got to deal with Tom Merry."

Mellish eyed him questioningly.

"We!" he said.

The Outsider nodded.

"Exactly," he said coolly. "We. You're going to help me."

"Well, I'm ready—if it's not too risky."

"It's not risky, if you take care. Look here, it has been pretty well established that Tom Merry gambles, and cheats, and smokes. The matter's only being held over because of his previous good reputation. But there's a general impression—put about by ourselves—that in secret he's a great chum of mine, and that he does all I was flogged for doing."

"That's so," assented Mellish.

"Well, it's time for something to happen—something so decisive that even old Railton and Kildare can't have any

further doubt, but will have to report the matter to the Head."

"Good! But what?"

"Tom Merry will be found in a state of intoxication—"

Mellish jumped.

"What?"

"In a state of intoxication," said Lumley-Lumley coolly—"so plain and open that no one can have any doubt about it. Do you think they'll let him stay at St. Jim's after that, Mellish?"

"Of course not. But—" Mellish hesitated. "How on earth— Look here, you'll never get Tom Merry to taste anything intoxicating, let alone drink it. It can't be done."

"But he can taste a drug that will give the same appearance as intoxication when it overcomes him."

Mellish turned white.

"You—you—" he muttered, and broke off.

Lumley-Lumley laughed lightly.

"Suppose he is overcome in that way," he remarked. "I am near at hand—I rush up to help him—and spill a small phial of brandy over him in doing so—and keep the bottle out of sight, of course. There you are—Tom Merry's reeling, and a smell of brandy about him. How's that for high?"

Mellish gasped. Bad as he was, he was staggered by the unscrupulous wickedness of the Outsider of St. Jim's.

"I—I can't have a hand in it!" he stammered. "I—I can't!"

The Outsider's eyes glittered dangerously.

"Why not?"

"It's—it's too rotten! Hang it, Lumley, old man, why can't you let him alone now? You've ruined him with his friends, anyway."

"I'm going to ruin him in every way!"

Mellish licked his dry lips.

"I—I can't have a hand in it!" he stammered.

"You can—and will."

Mellish turned a glare of defiance upon the other. Under Lumley-Lumley's steady gaze his glare died down, his glance dropped. The iron will of the Outsider could overcome greater obstacles than Mellish's terrified obstinacy.

"You'd better help me, Mellish."

"I—I— All right!"

The Outsider laughed.

"Time for call-over," he remarked. "Come on! Pull yourself together, you fool! You look as if you've seen a ghost!"

"I've seen something worse!" Mellish muttered thickly.

The Outsider laughed again and quitted the study. Mellish followed more slowly. Mellish was still looking white and disturbed when he took his place with the Fourth Form for calling-over; but Lumley-Lumley was perfectly cool, and he hummed a tune as he walked into the Hall.

CHAPTER 7.

Let Out at Last!

"MERRY!"

"Adsum!"

"Lowther!"

"Adsum!"

"Gore!"

No reply.

"Gore!"

Still no answer.

The Shell fellows looked at one another. But George Gore was not there to answer for himself.

Mr. Railton, who was calling over the names, looked at the Shell ranks. He could see that Gore was absent.

He marked the name down as absent from calling-over; but as he did so Wally, with a very red face, came from among the Third.

"If you please, sir—" he began.



Mellish's hand trembled as he drew the little phial from his pocket. He withdrew the cork, and quickly emptied the drug into Tom Merry's milk. There was a quick step in the passage, and Mellish felt a thrill of fear! Was he caught red-handed?

Mr. Railton looked at him with a glance that would have disconcerted anyone but the scamp of the Third Form at St. Jim's.

"Go back to your place, D'Arcy minor," he said.

"It's about Gore, sir."

"Do you mean to say that you know why Gore is absent, D'Arcy minor?" asked the School House master.

"Yes, sir."

"Very well. Explain and lose no time."

"Something's happened to him, sir, and he can't get out of the Head's study," said Wally glibly.

Wally, much as he disliked the cad of the Shell, did not want him to get into trouble for missing call-over, when it was due to that screwing-up joke. He felt that he was bound to explain. But he did not mean to mention the hand he had taken himself in the matter.

Mr. Railton looked surprised.

"Something has happened to him in the Head's study?" he said.

"Yes, sir."

"What is it?"

"It's jammed, sir."

"Jammed?"

"I mean, the door won't open, sir."

"How do you know, D'Arcy minor? Has your business taken you into Dr. Holmes' passage?" asked Mr. Railton.

"I passed the door some time ago, sir. Gore was hammering on it."

Mr. Railton looked very intently at the hero of the Third.

"Have you any idea, D'Arcy minor, why Dr. Holmes' study door should be fastened in this curious way?" he asked.

"I fancy it has been caused by the screws, sir," said Wally cheerfully.

"Screws?"

"Yes, sir. Some screws have got into a place they weren't intended for, or something of the sort. Anyway, sir, the door's jammed, and I know Gore can't open it from inside, and I thought I ought to tell you, sir, before you marked him absent."

And Wally discreetly went back to his place.

"Thank you, D'Arcy minor," said Mr. Railton quietly. The calling-over proceeded. When it was over, Mr. Railton made Kildare a sign to remain after the rest. The St. Jim's captain lingered.

"You might see what is wrong with Dr. Holmes' study door, Kildare," said the Housemaster. "Deal with the matter as you think fit. But don't be hard on D'Arcy minor; it was mainly of him to speak up."

Kildare nodded and smiled.

"Quite so, sir."

The St. Jim's captain was in the Head's passage in a few minutes. There was a sound of thumping on the door from Dr. Holmes' study, and a voice was shouting through the keyhole.

"Open this door, hang you! I shall miss call-over, and old Railton will be down on me. Hang you all!"

Kildare tapped on the door.

"So you're there, Gore?"

"Oh! Yes, Kildare," said Gore, more quietly.

"Why is the door screwed up?"

"Those Third Form young scoundrels did it—"

"Have you been bullying them, Gore?" asked Kildare quietly. "You had better tell me the truth, Gore."

"They didn't like something I said about Tom Merry," said Gore sullenly.

"Oh, I see!"

Kildare went upstairs again and walked along to Blake's study. The chums of the Fourth were there and they all rose as Kildare looked in.

"I understand that you're a good deal of an amateur carpenter, Blake?" the St. Jim's captain remarked, with a nod to the juniors.

Jack Blake nodded assent.

"Yes, rather," he said.

"Well," said Kildare, with a grin, "you might take your screwdriver along and unscrew the Head's door, will you? Gore's been screwed in there by some young rascal."

And Kildare was gone before the junior could reply.

Blake looked round with a rather sickly smile.

"I suppose that's Kildare's idea of a joke!" he remarked. "Blessed if I can see where the humour comes in. Where's the rotten screwdriver?"

And Blake went out of the study, screwdriver in hand, and downstairs to the Head's study. He was soon hard at work on the door, to the accompaniment of uncomplimentary remarks from the Shell fellow within.

Meanwhile, Kildare had descended into the quarters of

the Third. There was a roar in the Form-room as he approached it, but it ceased as he entered.

Wally & Co. were laughing over their joke on Gore.

"My hat! Kildare?" exclaimed Wally, as the captain of the school came in. "Here's trouble!"

"I hear that you've been screwing up a Shell fellow in Dr. Holmes' study, D'Arcy minor!" said Kildare severely.

"Well, I thought I ought to oblige Gore," said Wally.

"He said that all rotten blackguards ought to be shut up somewhere. So we thought the Head's study would do!"

Kildare tried not to laugh, but he could not help it. He roared.

"You cheeky young rascal!" he exclaimed. "That wasn't what Gore meant."

"Well, I didn't know any blackguard personally, besides Gore, excepting that rotten outsider, Lumley-Lumley!" said Wally. "I'll screw up Lumley if you like, Kildare."

"You'll get a licking if you do any more screwing up, you young sweep!"

And Kildare walked out of the Form-room, still laughing. Wally gave a grunt of relief.

"Well, that's all right!" he exclaimed. "I thought there was going to be trouble. Old Kildare is a brick!"

"So he is," agreed Curly Gibson. "We're well out of that. But—but we haven't done with Gore yet!"

"Oh, hang Gore!" said Wally, carelessly.

CHAPTER 8.

What Wally Overheard!

"STOP!"

It was Gore who shouted out the word; and as it was D'Arcy minor who was addressed, the order was not likely to be obeyed.

For twenty-four hours Wally had succeeded in keeping out of the way of the Shell bully. But Gore had not forgotten. He had rewarded Blake's efforts in releasing him with an ungrateful growl. Then he had looked for Wally.

But into the crowded Form-room where the fags mustered in force, The Shell bully dared not venture. He had been compelled to defer his vengeance till the following day. But all that day Wally had dodged him with great skill.

But now Gore was very near it. He had cornered Wally on the staircase, and Wally could not come down to the Form-room, and if he went upstairs, there were only the studies and the dormitories.

But Wally did not hesitate.

He dashed upstairs at top speed, with Gore panting after him.

Most of the fellows were below in the Common-room or out in the gym, and the passages and stairs were deserted. Probably Tom Merry was in his study, but with that exception the Shell passage was solitary.

Wally dashed into it.

He gained the box-room stairs, with the burly Shell fellow close behind, and getting closer.

Up the stairs went Wally. He was slackening now, and Gore made a grab at his leg and just missed it.

The bully's eyes were glistening with a cruel triumph. In that deserted corner he would be able to pommel Wally to his heart's content when once he had got hold of him. And there seemed no escape now. If Wally went on to the box-rooms, Gore could corner him there.

But Wally knew that as well as Gore.

Suddenly, without the slightest warning, he stopped, whirled round, and charged down the narrow stairs at Gore.

Gore had only time to let out one wild blow, which missed, and then Wally's weight was upon him and he went spinning.

He caught at the banisters, missed his hold, and rolled half-way down the stairs, where he at last succeeded in stopping himself by a desperate clutch.

Wally was past him in a second.

In a second more he was speeding down the passage towards the stairs.

But he heard the furious voice of the bully, and he knew he would have no time for escape to the Third Form quarters. The only chance was to hide, and Wally tore open a door in the Shell passage and popped in.

He was pretty certain the study was empty as there was no light under the door; but he had to take the risk. He was right, it was empty, and in a twinkling Wally had closed the door noiselessly and stooped under the table, the long cover of which almost reached the floor.

There the fag crouched and listened with beating heart. The heavy footsteps of Gore came pounding along the passage. They reached the door, they passed, and died away towards the stairs.



Do you know a good joke? If so, send it to "THE GEM JESTER," 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4 (Comp.). Half-a-crown is awarded to the sender of every joke that appears in this column.

RIGHT IN THE EYE.

Second (to boxer): "Keep your eye on his right!"
Boxer: "I can't. He's keepin' his right on my eye!"
Half-a-crown has been awarded to T. McHugh, 21, Canning Street, Belfast.

NOT HEADSTRONG.

John: "I don't know what to do with my week-end."
Jack: "Put your hat on it!"
Half-a-crown has been awarded to A. Galliver, Woodgate, Washaway, Cornwall.

HELPFUL.

Sandy: "I've been operated on three times to extract a collar stud I swallowed."
Tim: "Wouldn't you find it easier to buy a new one?"
Half-a-crown has been awarded to Miss M. Hall, 166, Tuckton Road, Southbourne.

Wally gave a gasp of relief.
Gore had passed the door. He was safe. But he did not stir. He knew that Gore might guess the trick and come back to look for him.

He intended to wait until Gore had had time to get tired of his search. Then he would venture out. He waited in silence, listening. There was a sudden sound of footsteps in the passage.

The door suddenly opened and two fellows came in. Wally's position was desperate. He scarcely breathed as the footsteps came near the table. Was it Gore?

"I guess I've got the stuff here for Tom Merry," said Lumley-Lumley's voice. "Don't look so scared, you idiot! It won't do him any real harm, and it's only a small dose!"

"I hope you're right," came Mellish's voice.
It was the Outsider and Mellish. And there was something cold and sardonic in Lumley-Lumley's voice that struck a chill in Wally. He did not move.

What infamous plot were the Outsider and the cad of the Fourth contriving? What was it that was to hurt Tom Merry? He would have given anything to have peeped from under the tablecloth. But it was too risky. One thing was certain. He could not help listening.

"Do you mean to say the little drop of stuff in the bottom of this bottle will do it?" asked Mellish, in a hoarse whisper.

"Yes."
"But I don't see how I am to use it, Lumley."
"You've got to watch for him going in to tea."

"Well?"
"Then you'll pop in and tip this stuff into the milk—?"
"Oh, I can't Lumley! I won't!"

"You can—and will! I'm going to settle Tom Merry, and I said you should help me. This is where you come in. I shall be ready to spill the brandy on him afterwards."

"But I shall be expelled!"
"Oh, you'll be all right!" said Lumley-Lumley contemptuously.

Mellish was a coward, but Lumley's coolness seemed to have a bracing effect upon him.
"You're sure it isn't poison?" he muttered.

The Outsider laughed.
"Here you are, Mellish, it's just enough to do the trick. Come on! Take it! I have the more difficult part to play in proving Tom Merry drunk!"

Wally heard a sound as something fell on the table. Mellish, in his anxiety, had let the phial fall.

CORRECT.

Teacher: "Which is the most war-like nation?"
Boy: "Vaccination, because it's always in arms."
Half-a-crown has been awarded to Miss J. Birchenall, 80, Port Arthur Road, Sneinton Dale, Nottingham.

HER MISTAKE.

Postal Clerk: "You've put too much postage on this parcel, madam."

Old Lady: "Goodness me! I hope it won't go too far!"
Half-a-crown has been awarded to "A Reader," 15, King Edward's Terrace, St. Mark's Street, Ladywood, Birmingham 1.

IRISH.

Irish Judge: "Do ye plead guilty or not guilty?"
Prisoner: "Not guilty, my lord."
Irish Judge: "Then phwat are ye doin' wastin' our toime?"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to W. Tully, 1, Union Street, Huddersfield.

POORER IN POCKET.

Jim: "I've had some money left me."
Bill: "What, through a rich relation?"
Jim: "No, a hole in my pocket."
Half-a-crown has been awarded to P. Bradshaw, 8, Glenister Park Road, Streatham Vale, Streatham, S.W.16.

DRAWING ON HIS IMAGINATION.

"Well, Brown," said the teacher, "what drawing exercise have you done?"
"A cow feeding on grass in a meadow," replied Brown.
"But where is the grass?"
"The cow has eaten it all."
"Then where is the cow?"
"It has gone into another field because all the grass has gone."
Half-a-crown has been awarded to L. W. Saunders, Bransholme, Tasmania.

"You fool!" exclaimed Jerrold Lumley. "Mind, you'll break it!"

"Give it me! It's all right!"
"Take care of it, then!"
"I tell you I'm all right now!" muttered Mellish.

He thrust the phial into his pocket. Lumley watched him, with lowering brows. He could not understand the uneasiness of Mellish; he felt nothing of the kind himself. Base as his action was, he had the courage for it.

"Come on!" said Lumley. "I guess it's about time to look for Tom Merry!"
"All right!"

The two quitted the study. Lumley did not trouble to close the door.

Wally heard their footsteps along the passage.
He crept from under the table, and peeped out from the open doorway into the passage. He could see Lumley-Lumley and Mellish halted outside Tom Merry's study, listening. They had gone there to ascertain if the hero of the Shell was in his quarters.

They had their backs turned towards Wally. The fag did not hesitate. He darted out of the study, and, with white face, ran quietly for Blake's study. His chums in the Third could be of no help to him now. He wanted older heads to help him, and he thought of Kildare for a moment. But he decided upon Blake.

Without stopping to knock, Wally threw open the door of Study No. 6 and ran in.

Arthur Augustus was speaking as his minor burst into the study.

From his tone it was evident that he was arguing.
"How you fellows can doubt for a moment that I am the proper person to captain the team against the New House I simply cannot comprehend!" he said. "Undah the cires— Wally, Wally, what do you mean by wushin' into a study in that disorderly mannah?"

Wally slammed the door behind him, and stood gasping for breath, with a face so white that the juniors jumped up in alarm. His major came towards him.

"Wally, deah boy, what is the mattah?"
"Have you seen a ghost?" asked Blake.
"I—I've seen an awful villain!" panted Wally.

"What do you mean?"
"Lumley!"
"What has he done?" asked Blake, in astonishment.

"He's plotting with Mellish to drug Tom Merry and make out that he's drunk!" gasped Wally.

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"What!" shouted the four juniors together.

"I—I heard them!"

And Wally gasped out the story.

The chums of the Fourth listened in grim silence.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated D'Arcy, when his minor had finished.

Jack Blake looked keenly at the fag.

"I suppose you didn't go to sleep in the study and dream all this?" he asked.

Wally snorted.

"Oh, come off!" he exclaimed. "I've told you because we've got to trip up those scoundrels somehow. Come to bisney!"

"Look here, Wally," said Blake, "let's have this plain. If Tom Merry's being framed by the Outsider, we're going to stand by him, and never mind what's passed. Look here, you say Lumley gave Mellish a bottle of stuff to put in Tom Merry's milk-jug when he's having tea?"

"Yes," said Wally.

"It's a drug to make him unconscious?"

"That's it. And Lumley said he had some brandy to spill over him, so that he would appear to be drunk."

Blake gave a low whistle.

"My only hat!" he said. "I knew that Lumley was a pretty low-down scoundrel, but I never dreamed of anything like this!"

"Bai Jove! No!"

"Lumley's been making out that he and Tom Merry are great friends in secret, and this doesn't look as if there was much in it," Herries remarked.

"Wathah not."

"Lumley lies," said Digby. "And, in the light of this, it looks to me as if Lumley might know more about that smoke in Tom Merry's study than Tom Merry knew himself."

"Bai Jove! And the marked cards!"

Blake's face was very serious.

"I hope we haven't all been down on Tom Merry for nothing," he said; "or—or, rather, I hope we have. I should like to see him cleared. This plot looks as if Lumley and Mellish were at the bottom of the whole bisney all along!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We're jolly well going to look into it! I say, we'd better have Kildare in it," said Blake rapidly. "We need a prefect, at least. Our word mightn't be taken when it came to having it out with Lumley. It would be one junior against another if it came before the Head. Kildare's the man."

"Wathah! We'll go along at once!"

"Come on!" said Blake.

There was a general exodus from Study No. 6, and the Fourth Formers hurried downstairs to Kildare's study.

They knocked at the door, and received a summons to enter. Kildare did not look exactly pleased. He stared in amazement at the eager faces that crowded into his room. They were excited, and all began to speak at once.

"I'm sorry to trouble you, Kildare—" began Blake.

"Pway wing off, Blake! It requires a fellow of tact and judgment. I insist on telling Kildare—"

"If you, please, Kildare, let me explain!" interrupted Blake.

"I insist upon Blake shutting up, Kildare, deah boy!"

"Tell 'em to leave it to me, Kildare," said Wally.

Kildare was too surprised to do anything but listen for a moment or two. But he got angry at last. He put up his hand quickly.

"Stop!"

The conflicting voices ceased at once. Kildare was frowning.

"Now," he said, "perhaps you'll be good enough to explain this nonsense. And be quick about it! I was just beginning my tea. What is it, Blake?"

"Weally, Kildare! If you don't mind, deah boy, I'll explain."

"Well, get along with your story, or I shall be compelled to chuck you all out!"

Blake gave it up, and D'Arcy related precisely what had occurred.

"Thank you, D'Arcy!" said Kildare. "You fellows have done the right thing. D'Arcy minor, tell me what you heard in that study."

Wally blurted out his story for the second time.

Kildare's face grew hard and stern as he listened. He sat in silence till Wally had finished. He seemed to have forgotten his tea altogether. He rose from the table.

"Wait here until I return!" he said shortly.

He quitted the study without another word.

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In silence the chums waited for Kildare. They were anxious; but all excepting Arthur Augustus felt that the matter was in the best hands possible.

CHAPTER 9.

Tricked!

TOM MERRY was in his study.

The face of the hero of the Shell was not cheerful. He was preparing his tea alone. Lowther, he knew, was having tea with Noble & Co. in the end study. Manners had accepted an invitation from Figgins & Co. to tea in the New House.

Tom Merry could, of course, have had his tea in Hall, where half the Form generally turned up at tea-time. But he did not care to. He was sensitive—too sensitive to wish to draw public attention to the fact that his nearest chum had passed him by.

Besides, he would have had little more companionship at the public table in Hall than in his own solitary study. For during the past week a barrier had grown up between him and the other juniors. Excepting the hateful familiarity of the Outsider, there was little friendship for him in the School House.

The old saying that if enough mud is thrown some of it is sure to stick, was proving itself true in Tom Merry's case. A fellow who used marked cards, and whose study reeked of tobacco smoke, a fellow who chummed up with a rank outsider like Lumley-Lumley, and played him in the Junior Eleven against all opposition, that wasn't the kind of fellow the School House had always believed Tom Merry to be.

That was how the fellows were putting the matter to themselves.

Tom Merry tried to think that he did not care, but, as a matter of fact, he did care very much.

This solitary meal in his study was very different from the jolly old tea-party, and perhaps Manners and Lowther felt the difference as much as he did.

The kettle had boiled, and Tom Merry had made the tea, and placed the pot on the tray in silence. He had cut bread-and-butter. He had not the heart to make any preparations beyond what was necessary.

There was a knock at the door, and Jerrold Lumley-Lumley looked in.

Tom Merry flushed angrily as he looked at him.

"What do you want?" he rapped out.

The Outsider smiled.

"You are not pleased to see me?" he said.

"You know I'm not!"

Lumley-Lumley laughed.

"Well, I haven't come on a friendly visit," he said; "but there's an old lady downstairs asking for you—a Miss Fawcett, and—"

Tom Merry sprang up.

His old governess and guardian, Miss Priscilla Fawcett. How utterly unfortunate that she should have come to the school just now—when she could scarcely fail to see that Tom was in trouble.

"I'm coming!" said Tom Merry curtly.

Lumley-Lumley nodded and walked down the passage; Tom Merry following him at once. In his heart he was glad to see again the one who always trusted him; yet he wished that Miss Fawcett had not come just then. He would so much rather have borne his trouble alone.

He descended the stairs with Lumley-Lumley.

"Thank you for coming and telling me!" he said.

The Outsider laughed.

"That's nothing," he said.

"It was kind of you," said Tom Merry.

He felt that it was kind of the Outsider. No one else—no one who had been his friend—had taken the trouble to come and tell him.

They descended to the Hall of the School House, and several fellows exchanged significant glances at seeing Tom Merry with the Outsider, apparently on the friendliest terms.

"What did I always say?" muttered Gore. "They're as thick as thieves!"

"Jolly well looks like it!" admitted Kerruish.

"Faith, and Tom Merry might be more careful, if he doesn't want us to think that he's chumming up with Lumley," said Reilly.

Tom Merry paused in the Hall, and looked about him.

Jerrold Lumley walked away somewhat quickly in the direction of the Junior Common-room.

Tom Merry looked round with a perplexed expression.

"Lumley—"

But Lumley was gone.

(Continued on page 14.)

STEP IN, CHUMS, FOR OUR WEEKLY CHAT.



Let the Editor be your pal. Write to him to-day, addressing your letters :
The Editor, The GEM, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Fleetway House,
Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

HALLO, chums! Here we are again with another great programme to delight every one of you. All our popular contributors are at the top of their form again in next week's number. Martin Clifford sets the ball rolling with another of his great yarns of school adventure at St. Jim's. The title of his latest masterpiece is:

"LUMLEY'S LAST CHANCE!"

Jerrold Lumley-Lumley, the Outsider of St. Jim's, has had several chances to make good and reform his erring ways, but always he has slipped back to become again the hard-natured, unscrupulous, and cynical boy that made him disliked and despised by all his school-fellows. But now comes Lumley's last chance. If he reforms he can stay at St. Jim's, but if he does not do so, he will be expelled. Such is the Head's final decision. It is up to Lumley himself now. The powerful long complete yarn of the Outsider's latest adventures is a story that will grip the imagination of every reader. Read how Lumley fares in his biggest test of all.

"THE FATAL 'FIFTH'!"

It is Guy Fawkes Night at St. Frank's. The four boys of the "marked ten" who have yet to face the priests of Tazaz forget all about their coming ordeals in the wild celebrations of Bonfire Night. But it is in the midst of these that the next victim gets his

"call." It is Walter Church who is chosen by the Tibetan priests to stand his test of courage to atone for looking upon the unveiled face of Ra-ok, their high priest. What will Church have to do? Handforth gets on the trail of his chum—and then the fireworks fly! The next great yarn of our super series, "The Ten Talons of Tazaz!" is another smasher!

And, as usual, all our other popular features will be up to "scratch."

MEET THE COCOCUBS.

If you have not met the Cococubs in the newspapers, get to know them right away. Their funny adventures will keep you in roars of laughter. And here's some good news. Sets of these animal entertainers are being given away in The Children's Bournville Cocoa. Every tin contains a painted model of one of the Cococubs.

SPEED RECORDS.

Here are the records for speed on land, water, and in the air. A. Kemack, of Bloemfontein, South Africa. Sir Malcolm Campbell holds the record for motor-cars. In his famous racer, the "Blue Bird," he set up a speed of 272.103 m.p.h. at Daytona Beach,

PEN PALS COUPON

3-11-34



A free feature which brings together readers all over the world for the purpose of exchanging topics of interest to each other. If you want a pen pal, post your notice, together with the coupon on this page, to the address given above.

J. Clark, Poplar Cottage, Cotmanhay, Ilkeston, Derbyshire, wants pen pals; age 14-17; Ireland, or anywhere overseas; swimming.

Roy Wates, 393, High Road, Streatham, London, S.W.16, wants a pen pal in England, Canada or Australia; age 12-14; model trains, outdoor sports; public school fellows especially.

Miss Dorothy Whipp, Norcot, Warren Drive, Prestatyn, North Wales, wants girl correspondents in Australia, Ireland, or Japan; age 24-26.

Miss Winifred Burns, 24, Ridgeway Drive, Burnt Ash Lane, Bromley, Kent, wants girl correspondents in India, China, Africa and any foreign countries; age 18-20.

Ian Petrie, Roseburn, Rangiora, North Canterbury, New Zealand, wants a pen pal in England.

Cecil Leith Garcia, 11, McWhinney Street, Kingston, Jamaica, wants a pen pal; age 16-17; conjuring, books, scouting.

Miss Mary Lucille Jennings, 114, Centre Street, St. Thomas, Ontario, Canada, wants girl correspondents; age 11-13.

America. E. Henne, a German, has attained the highest speed on a motorcycle. Riding a B.M.W. machine, he reached 156 m.p.h. The air-speed record is held by the Italian, Warrant-Officer Agello, who, over Lake Garda in Italy, travelled faster than any man has ever done before! His speed, in a Macchi-Fiat, was 423.76 m.p.h. The last speed record—that is, on water—is held by America. In the speedboat, Miss America XI, at Lake Michigan, Gar Wood attained the speed of 127.43 m.p.h.

EVIDENCE.

Wilket Jackson, a nineteen-year-old negro, was in trouble. He was up before a New York magistrate, charged with begging. But Wilket insisted that he wasn't begging, and promptly began to prove to the magistrate that what he said was true. Before anybody could stop him the negro took out of his pockets a razor blade, many pieces of broken glass, and several pins, and swallowed them! It was just to show the magistrate what he did for the money he was accused of obtaining by begging. But unfortunately for Wilket, the magistrate took a serious view of his amazing performance and ordered him to be taken to hospital for observation.

SOME SWIM!

For a man to swim for sixteen and a half hours without rest would be a feat of which to be very proud. But—would you believe it?—a girl of five years old has recently done it! And she only learned to swim four months ago! The girl who accomplished this wonderful endurance swim is a Bengali named Manu Banerjee. Thousands of spectators watched her, and Manu was cheered to the echo when she came out of the water after sixteen and a half hours of swimming. She is a thin and frail little girl, which makes it all the more remarkable where she got the strength and stamina from for such a test of endurance. Hats off to Manu!

IT MADE ME LAUGH!

"I can't imagine how you can dislike work," said the father to his lazy son. "To me it's a pleasure."

"Yes, father," replied the son, "but I don't want to give myself up wholly to pleasure!"

THE EDITOR.

Murray Jones, Woodville, Woodchurch Road, Prenton, Birkenhead, Ches, wants pen pals in Australia, Africa, China, India, France; age 12-14; stamps and cigarette cards, chess and sports.

H. Richards, 145, Parsonage Road, Withington, Manchester, wants a pen pal in France or Germany; age 14-16; stamps, locomotives.

L. R. Haigh, Grove House, Odsal, Bradford, Yorks, wants pen pals who have made a hobby of the Companion Papers.

Miss M. Wells, c/o Mrs. Carr, Poplar Cottage, Cotmanhay, Ilkeston, Derbyshire, wants girl correspondents; age 18-20.

Miss Marjorie Brown, 12, Gretchen Avenue, Earlwood, Sydney, N.S.W., Australia, wants girl members for her correspondence club.

George Rowland, 114, Ainslie Wood Road, South Chingford, London, E.4, wants members for his correspondence club.

Den Armstrong, P.O. Box 86, Georgetown, British Guiana, wants correspondents; age 17-18; cigarette cards, postcard views, sports, etc.

Miss Pauline Ellison, 11, Thomas Street, Strathfield, Sydney, N.S.W., Australia, wants a girl correspondent; age 11-12; preferably in Bristol.

Miss Lily M. Hampton, Glenlily, Main Road, Maitland, Cape Province, South Africa, wants girl correspondents; age 15-17.

J. Levine, 10, Jagersfontein Avenue, Cape Town, South Africa, wants to hear from stamp collectors; England and Dominions.

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THE SCHEMER OF THE SCHOOL!

(Continued from page 12.)

"Can any of you fellows tell me where Miss Fawcett is?" Tom Merry asked.

"Miss Fawcett?" repeated Gore.

"Yes."

"Blessed if I know."

"Lumley said she had come to St. Jim's to see me, and was here," said Tom Merry, in surprise.

Gore laughed.

"I haven't seen her; I expect he was pulling your leg. Little joke between close chums, you know."

Tom Merry flushed angrily.

"Lumley is no chum of mine!" he exclaimed.

Gore shrugged his shoulders.

"Looks like it, anyway. Similar tastes often bring about friendship, you know," said Gore, and there was a chuckle from the other fellows.

Tom Merry's eyes glinted.

"Enough of that, Gore. I don't want to quarrel with you, if Miss Fawcett is here. Have none of you seen her?"

"No," said Kerruish.

"There's Toby," said Hancock. "Ask him."

Tom Merry called to the School House page as he passed. Toby came at once.

"Has Miss Fawcett come, Toby?" asked Tom Merry.

"No, Master Merry."

"You are sure, Toby?"

"Quite sure, sir."

Tom Merry's brows knitted.

"Thanks, Toby!" he said. And he walked into the Junior Common-room to look for Jerrold Lumley-Lumley.

Some of the fellows standing about followed him, anticipating excitement from his looks. Lumley was in the Common-room, sitting in an armchair, with his feet on a smaller one. He did not look up at Tom Merry.

Tom Merry halted in front of him.

"Were you lying to me just now, Lumley?" he asked quietly.

The Outsider laughed—a slightly uneasy laugh.

"I guess not," he said.

"You told me Miss Fawcett was here."

The Outsider yawned.

"Did I?"

"You know you did."

"I guess it was a little joke," said Lumley-Lumley. "No harm done."

Tom Merry compressed his lips.

"It was not a joke," he said. "It was a lie—a rotten, mean lie! You are a cad and a rotter, Jerrold Lumley, and if you've got as much pluck as you have caddishness, you'll come into the gym and put on the gloves with me."

Jerrold Lumley shrugged his shoulders.

"I guess not," he said.

"Cad!"

"I guess that hard words don't break bones—especially hard words from a chap like you!" said Lumley coolly.

Tom Merry clenched his hands hard.

Lumley-Lumley rose to his feet.

"Oh, keep your wool on!" he said.

"It was a joke, that's all."

Tom Merry's lip curled.

"You're not worth licking," he said, and he turned on his heel and strode from the room. But he was puzzled as he went. Why had Lumley-Lumley played that childish and absurd trick—a jape without humour, without anything but a lie in it? Lumley was not the kind of

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No. 38. Vol. 1. (New Series.)

JUST MY FUN

Monty Lowther
Calling



Hallo, everybody! Figgins asks, was Guy Fawkes an American? No, Figgy, although he appears to have been the first "big guy"! I hear Kerruish entertained visitors with india-rubber forks. The visitors complained of "guy" forks! Caught in a "thunder shower," Crooke ejaculated "Jumping crackers!" and headed for St. Jim's in a "flash." The "starry" path was not worth the "candle." Crooke felt "rockety" next morning! History tells us that Guy Fawkes was caught in a cellar and confined in a cell. A "sell" from start to finish! There is no doubt, however, that if you have much to do with gunpowder you stand an excellent chance of "rising" in the world! Wally D'Arcy sternly denies the rumour that his mongrel, Pongo, is a Bombay tigerhound. The rumour spread after Pongo had snapped at Crooke during our "Indian" summer! Did you hear about the conjurer who was shipwrecked on a desert island without food? He just produced a rabbit out of his hat. A "hare-raising" story, what? As the captain of the fire brigade said to his men when they arrived outside the blazing factory: "Now, whose turn is it to break windows?" Blake says Knox has no sense of humour. Why "of humour"? I hear Lord Conway often flies from Eastwood House to his bungalow on the South Coast. Down to the sea in "flips"! "What most often causes a motor-car to break down?" demands Mr. Selby. Very often it's the "nut" who holds the wheel! Hot from the Third Form Room: "Where do we get boots from?" asked Mr. Selby. "Boot-trees?" suggested Curly Gibson. Now, do you want your money to go a long way? Well, what about investing in a Chinese loan? Got it? Clifton Dane observes that on his hiking tour he often found the "open" road the "opened" road! Skimpole wants to know what will strengthen his legs. Milk is good for calves! Six lunatics escaped from a private asylum near Wayland. Rumour has it that they have so far caught thirteen! Then there was the architect who forgot to put any stairs in the house he built. When told about it he just "stared"! Buck Finn and Kangaroo were arguing. "I've got a marvellous family tree!" boasted Buck. "And what are you—the sap?" asked Kangaroo. Just time for one about P.-c. Crump, who plays the trombone in the newly formed Wayland Police Band. "You're two bars behind, Crump!" said the conductor during rehearsal. "Don't worry about that!" growled Crump. "I can catch up any time I want to!" "Fireworks!" followed! All the fun of the Fifth!

Stop Press

Next week's footer fixtures:

Saints v. Claremont.

St. Frank's v. Rookwood.

LEAGUE LEADERS ST. JIM'S IN FORM

TOM MERRY'S "NAP HAND"

Wally D'Arcy at the Microphone

Here they come, boys! Tom Merry leading the same eleven that beat St. Jude's last week, and every man fit and eager to knock the stuffing out of Cecil Pankley and his men on their own ground at Bagshot. And here comes Pankley, followed by the Bagshot team in green and purple.

The ball is rolling, Pankley and Putter and Poole, the three inside men, dribbling skillfully down on goal. A nasty thin rain blow in the Saints' faces, rather upsetting their usual smooth working. Figgins slips at a critical moment—oh, Figgy! Pankley through—wham! Fatty Wynn splashes full length in the mud in a desperate but unsuccessful effort to stop Pankley's shot. One up for Bagshot, and the game barely a minute old! Stick it, you heroes!

Jove, they are sticking it, too! The wind blows stronger and the rain swirls harder, but the Saints are dour and dogged as a team can be. Pankley goes close with another great shot, but Fatty Wynn, on the qui vive this time, gets his podgy hands to the leather and fists clear. A menacing dribble by Putter is foiled by Figgins in great style. But Poole breaks through. Poole steadies himself to shoot—but watch Kerr! Kerr races across and, in the nick of time, hooks the ball clean off Poole's toe. Kerr coolly boots the sphere well up the field.

Now, keep your eyes peeled. Merry traps and flashes an express ground pass out to D'Arcy on the wing. D'Arcy is away like the wind itself. How he keeps his footing is a miracle, but how Gus plays footer in an eyeglass is a miracle, too! Blake urged him to leave it in the dressing-room, but Gus was in an awkward mood—firm, he calls it. Gus bears down on goal, swerves to avoid a charge, and passes deftly in to Tom Merry. Merry steadies and shoots all in an instant—the leather flashes past the keeper's hands and the scores are level.

Now a ding-dong struggle. Pankley is "bottled up" though—Figgins and Kerr are simply superb at back. Lowther, not joking now, threads through a bunch of players to give to Tom Merry at the right moment. Merry snaps in a sizzler before the goal-keeper is aware. Swish it goes against the slack rigging—number two for St. Jim's!

That gives us the lead—and see Pankley's scowling! He is playing a little raggedly, and his men are getting ragged, too! A gruelling tussle soon shows a team's real class! Hallo, Merry's away again, putting in a great solo run, straight down the centre of the field. The goalkeeper advances, but Merry swerves past him, and is left with a yawning net. Merry coolly taps the leather home, resisting any desire to finish up with a cannon-ball shot! Half-time: Saints leading 3-1.

Pankley's men reappear looking tired. They've done well, but not well enough for

(Continued in next column.)

Merry's Weekly



Week Ending November 3rd, 1934.

ST. FRANK'S WIN AWAY

Special Message by Phone

Frank Courtenay and his men of Highcliffe are by no means easy nuts to crack, but Nipper and his team were in great form from start to finish, and thoroughly deserved their win. An early point by Nipper himself was neutralised by a snap goal by De Courcy, Courtenay's erstwhile "slacker" chum. In the second half, Nipper showed irresistible form, and netted two great goals. Play was practically even apart from this, but St. Frank's superior marksmanship earned them the victory.

FULL RESULTS

BAGSHOT 1	ST. JIM'S 5
Pankley	Merry (5)
HIGHCLIFFE .. 1	ST. FRANK'S .. 3
De Courcy	Nipper (3)
ABBOTSFORD .. 5	REDCLIFFE .. 3
CLAREMONT .. 2	RIVER HOUSE .. 3
ROOKWOOD .. 7	RYLCOMBE
	GRAM SCHOOL 2
ST. JUDE'S .. 0	GREYFRIARS .. 4

(Continued from previous column.)

Pankley! Here come their forwards again in a hot attack. For a few minutes Fatty Wynn is tested again and again. Fatty Wynn's plump hands are ever ready, and he makes no mistakes. High ones and low ones are all the same. Now, saving from Pankley and Putter in quick succession, he boots the leather clear for Merry to snap up and start an attack on the Bagshot goal.

This is Tom Merry's match. See him dribble past defenders till nothing stands between him and a goal but the Bagshot custodian! The keeper leaps—diving recklessly at Merry's feet. Merry side-steps easily, and lets fly. Cheer, fellows! It's number four! Bagshot have taken a pretty good drubbing now, and they are losing heart. Percy goes close with a great drive which rebounds from the cross-bar. Merry snaps it up, and smashes the ball through from point blank range for the fifth. That's shooting for you!

One more for Merry's double "hat trick"—but it's not to be. Pankley & Co. pack their goal towards the finish, and hold the Saints off. Phoebe—that finishes it. Jolly well played, St. Jim's! Jimmy Silver & Co., of Rookwood, standing round the ropes, are cheering Pankley & Co., in spite of their ancient rivalry. And I hear there's going to be a spread in Pankley's study—whoopee, 'm in this!

REPLIES TO READERS

I was cuned for staring at Selby, complains Curly Gibson.
You made a glaring mistake, old chap! "Heavyweight Boxer" writes to say he has lost his fortune.
A sudden "slump" over the resin!
The sergeant bellowed "Fall in!" at swimming parade, and I fell in, writes "Recruit."
You should have known that the next word would be "Too deep!"

ST. JIM'S SPOTLIGHT

PURSUED BY 50 JUNIORS

Tom Merry took refuge in the chapel vaults. The crowd waited impatiently for him to emerge, which he did not do till call-over. As the bell sounded, summoning everybody into Hall, the door of the vaults was unlocked, and Tom Merry reappeared cautiously. On his way into Hall he hurriedly pinned up a notice on the board. As soon as call-over was finished, the crowd of juniors hastened to the notice-board, where they gazed excitedly at the list of players for the Junior XI which Tom Merry had just posted. Run to earth in his study, Merry said that he sought the quiet of the vaults in order to choose his team. And having chosen it, the captain's decision was final!

DANCING FRANTICALLY WITH RAGE

Knox of the Sixth attracted considerable attention on Big Side. It appeared that Herries' dog Towser had taken a sudden liking to the football with which Knox was practising—and had seized it by the lace, and run off with it! The fact that Knox had forced Herries to keep goal in order to give Knox himself some shooting practice may possibly explain Towser's action. Dogs are known to be extremely sagacious, and Towser noticed that Herries, his master, was getting tired of "fagging" for Knox, and he thought he had better put a stop to it! Knox said he asked Herries as a favour, to play—one of those "favourites" which a fellow can't refuse!

WHIZZING OUT OF HIS STUDY

and landing upside-down in the passage, Bernard Glyn of the Shell was too "winded" to explain properly what had happened. His chums, Kangaroo and Clifton Dane, soon "spotted" the cause of the trouble. Glyn had been up to one of his innumerable experiments—and the apparatus had blown up! Glyn was fortunate to escape serious injury, as he admitted when he began to get his breath back. When he said he thought he had stumbled on the formula for a powerful new high explosive, Kangaroo and Dane sternly forbade him ever to attempt to make any more of it, on pain of a record "bumping" Glyn solemnly promised to give up experimenting—till next time!

CALIBAN'S PUZZLE CORNER



Here are three cups and ten lumps of sugar; can you put the sugar into the cups so that each cup contains an odd number of lumps? Look out for the catch!

Solution of Last Week's Puzzle

The number of apples in the case was sixty-one.

fellow to waste his time thus, as a rule. What did it mean?

CHAPTER 10. Drugged Milk!

MELLISH was waiting at the corner of the Shell passage when Tom Merry descended the stairs with Jerrold Lumley.

He was waiting and watching. The cad of the Fourth was looking somewhat pale, but he was resolute now. He had his work to do, and Jerrold Lumley's trick had made it easy for him, and he no longer faltered.

The moment the two juniors were gone, Mellish slipped along the Shell passage. There was no one to see him, but in case he should be observed near Tom Merry's study, he turned out the light in the passage as he passed it. It was not an uncommon trick of mischievous juniors to turn out the light in the passage, and it was not likely to cause any particular notice to be taken.

Mellish reached Tom Merry's study, and ran in quickly. The light was on, and it showed the tea-table—with the teapot steaming on it, the cup and saucer and milk-jug, and the bread-and-butter all ready cut.

Mellish's hand trembled as he drew the little phial from his pocket.

He had no time to waste.

Tom Merry was not likely to be detained many minutes by Lumley's falsehood, and, before he returned, Mellish had to get clear.

He removed the cork and dropped the contents of the phial into the milk.

There was a quick step in the passage.

Mellish felt a thrill of fear.

His heart beat like a hammer. Tom Merry was returning sooner than he expected. But it could not be Tom Merry! It was someone else.

Whoever it was would probably pass the study—Tom Merry had no visitors these days. Mellish had closed the door. He waited in fear and trembling for the footsteps to pass the door.

They did not pass.

They came up to the study and stopped—and the door was opened.

Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, strode in.

Mellish looked transfixed.

But, remembering that Kildare could not possibly know anything of the matter, as he believed, he assumed an air of carelessness as well as he could.

"I—I'm waiting for Tom Merry!" he exclaimed.

The next moment he could have bitten his tongue. If he had been there with an innocent intention, there would have been no need to explain his presence to Kildare, who, naturally, didn't want to know why he was there.

Kildare looked at him grimly.

"Oh, you're here to wait for Tom Merry. are you?" he asked.

"Ye-es."

"You want to see him?"

"Ye-es."

"What for?"

Mellish tried to collect his thoughts and answer calmly, but a secret terror was tugging at his heart. Why was Kildare questioning him like this? What was Kildare doing in Tom Merry's study at all? Was it possible that he suspected—that he knew—anything?

"I—I wanted to borrow some money from him," said Mellish desperately.

"Why did you turn out the light in the passage?"

"The—the light!"

"Yes—why did you turn it out?"

Mellish hesitated before he replied.

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"I—I didn't want fellows to see me come in here," he stammered. "You—you see, Tom Merry isn't much spoken to since he took to gambling and drinking, and—"

"You wretched liar!"

Mellish's knees knocked together. Kildare's hard, stern voice drove terror into him.

"Kildare! I—I say—"

"Give me the bottle!"

Mellish jumped.

"The bottle?"

"Yes."

"Wh-what bottle?" stuttered Mellish.

"The bottle Lumley-Lumley gave you."

Mellish staggered against the wall.

The last remnant of his courage was gone now. Kildare knew all—the captain's words, and his cold, accusing glance showed that. How he knew mattered little—he knew—and all was lost. The plotters against Tom Merry had somehow overreached themselves at the finish.

"You—you know about that!" stammered Mellish.

"Yes—as you see."

"I—I—"

"Give me the bottle!" said Kildare coldly.

Mellish, with trembling fingers, drew the empty phial from his pocket. He handed it to the captain of St. Jim's without a word.

Kildare looked at it.

"It is empty," he said. "You have already placed the drug in the milk?"

Mellish gasped.

"Answer me, you horrible little cad!"

"Yes," said Mellish, in an expiring voice.

Kildare glanced at the milk jug. The milk was the same colour as before the drug had been added; there was nothing to show now that anyone drinking it would be reduced to a state of semi-insensibility. The plot of the Outsider had been almost fiendish in its cunning, and but for Wally it would probably have succeeded.

Would Tom Merry ever have succeeded in clearing himself of that last and most fatal charge? It did not seem likely. Kildare's heart smote him as he thought how he had himself lent credence to the accusations already made against the hero of the Shell—accusations which he now felt must be false, and the work of the same plotting mind as this!

There was a step at the door, and Tom Merry came in. He looked in surprise at Kildare and Mellish.

"What—" he began.

"Close the door, Merry."

Tom Merry, in wonder, closed the door. Kildare made a gesture to Mellish.

"Tell Tom Merry what you have done," he said.

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"Oh! I—I can't!"

"Do as I tell you!"

Tom Merry looked mystified.

"Blessed if I know what's on!" he exclaimed. "Will you have a cup of tea, Kildare? I've just milk enough for two cups, and—"

"Don't touch that milk, Tom Merry!"

"Why not?"

"Mellish will tell you," said Kildare, with a merciless glance at the cad of the Fourth. "Go on, Mellish!"

Mellish trembled.

"It's drugged," he said in a scarcely audible voice.

Tom Merry gave a start.

"Drugged?"

"Yes."

"Who's done that?"

"I—I did."

"Great Scott!"

"It was all Lumley's doing," whined Mellish dismally. "I—I owe him money, you know, and—and I'm afraid of him. He made me do this."

"Nobody could have made you do it, if you had not been a crawling, rotten cad," said Kildare. "But go on—tell Tom Merry what you had arranged with Lumley."

Mellish's voice faltered as he went on. Under the stern eye of the St. Jim's captain he dared not refuse.

"It's—it's a harmless drug, Merry. It would just have made you sleepy, and—and look as if you were intoxicated, you know, after you drank it. I—I swear it wouldn't do you any harm!"

Tom Merry stared at him more in surprise than in horror. He could not make out yet what the object of this rascality was.

"But what's your little game, then?" he stammered.

"You see, it would make you look as if you were drunk, and—and then Lumley comes in and spills some brandy over you," whined Mellish. "You—you see, the prefects would have found you insensible, smelling of brandy, and—and—"

"Oh!"

"It was Lumley's idea from first to last, and—and he had a hold on me," exclaimed Mellish, terrified by Tom Merry's expression. "Besides, I—I wouldn't have let it go too far. I wouldn't have stood by while you were expelled."

"Don't lie!" said Kildare sharply.

"Well, I—I—"

"My hat!" said Tom Merry. "So that is why Lumley came to me just now with a lie about Miss Fawcett having arrived—to get me out of the study while you played this rotten trick on me."

"Ye-es. It was all Lumley from beginning to end."

"That's enough!" said Kildare sharply. "Lumley is coming here to play the rest of the business, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"When will he come?"

"I suppose he will leave it for half an hour or so."

"Very good! Come with me!"

Mellish shrank back with terror.

"Not—not to the Head!" he exclaimed.

"Not at present. I'm going to lock you up in a box-room, so that you cannot give Lumley any warning that he is discovered."

"I—I won't tell! I swear—"

"Silence! I will think afterwards what to do with you. I shall try to prevent this disgraceful story from getting out, if I can. But you will be punished—you can rely on that. Meanwhile, I shall lock you in the box-room. You will remain there quietly. If you make a sound till I come to release you, I will take you straight to the Head. And you know what that will mean for you."

Mellish cowered.

"I'll do exactly as you say, Kildare."

"You'd better. Stay here, Merry."

Tom Merry stood silent in his study while Mellish was taken away, with Kildare's firm grasp upon his shoulder. In a couple of minutes the St. Jim's captain returned with a key in his hand. Tom Merry had not moved.

Kildare looked at him kindly.

"This is a terrible discovery, Merry," he said slowly.

"I can hardly grasp it yet, Kildare."

"Mellish is a coward and a rascal—only a tool in the hands of Lumley," said Kildare. "You have been their victim. It was clearly Lumley's intention to blacken your character until you were expelled from the school."

Tom Merry shivered a little.

"He told me he would ruin me," he said, in a low voice. "After the House match, when he fouled Kerr and disgraced us, I had done with him; and he said that he would ruin me, and drive me from the school."

"And he has very nearly succeeded. I know now who planted the marked cards in your drawer, and who filled

FIREWORKS FOR THE FIFTH!

Go With a GEM Representative on an Interesting Tour of a Firework Factory.

A VISIT to a firework factory! I was quite excited at the prospect when I received an invitation to see fireworks being made for the glorious "Fifth." I expect many of you chaps would give a lot to have been in my shoes. Still, you can come with me through the medium of the following article, so to speak. Well, I duly bowed along, and the first thing I had to do was to give up my matches and cigarettes—obviously a necessary precaution in a firework factory.

I GET A SHOCK.

Then my tour started. I was led to a large room where the cardboard tubes for Roman Candles, Air Bomb Repeaters, Shrapnel Guns, Silver Bullets, Flitter Fountains, and many other fireworks were being made. The tubes, which are made of brown kraft paper, and treated with a coat of paste, are formed on brass rods. The rods are then withdrawn and the tubes cut to the lengths required. Next the tubes are plugged at one end, before being filled. I got a bit of a shock when I saw this being done. The gunpowder was poured into the tubes and banged down with sticks and mallets! But I was perfectly safe, for, as it was explained to me, what I had thought was gunpowder was nothing more harmless than baked and powdered clay, which goes very hard and makes a perfect plug.

I then saw that some of the fireworks were being given their attractive outside wrappers before being filled with gunpowder. My guide explained that, broadly, the foundation of all fireworks

is either gunpowder or mixtures of which chlorate of potash or barium nitrate form the principal ingredients. The latter two substances are clean to handle, therefore the outside jackets can be put on before the fireworks are filled. But gunpowder, which comprises charcoal in addition to saltpetre and sulphur, is a dirty substance, and fireworks to contain it have the outer wrappers put on after the filling is done.

ON THE "BLACK" SIDE.

I was next conducted to the "dangerous" section of the works, which is known as the "black" side, because all the workers wear black overalls. The section I had just left is known as the "white" side, for no gunpowder is handled there. It is a strict rule that no "white" worker must venture on the "black" side, and vice versa.

Every precaution is taken to ensure safety. There are only two workers in each hut, and neither is allowed more than half a pound of explosive at a time, which is obtained from a magazine limited to twenty-five pounds. All tools used by the workers are made of brass or hardwood, and the workers wear overshoes of rubber.

"How are some fireworks made to fizz while others go off bang?" I asked my guide.

"It is partly due to the ingredients and partly to the manufacture. Fireworks that are pretty are, broadly speaking, made of chlorate of potash and nitrates. Gunpowder flashes when loose, but you get the bang when it is compressed."

Great trouble is taken in the timing of a firework. The more elaborate kind has separate compartments, with time-fuses of various lengths between each, so that the firework doesn't go off in one big flash and bang.

A GRAND PRESENT.

I was particularly interested to see how the "Sparklers" are made. About two hundred lengths of copper wire are fitted into a frame, which is then tightened to hold them. The frame is inverted and the copper wires dipped into a trough containing what looks like a silver-grey cement. After being dipped the frames are put into hot-air cupboards to dry. The next day they are dipped again, and then put in the cupboards to finally dry. The silver-grey cement, I was told, is a mixture of potash, aluminium, and steel filings. The potash makes it burn, the aluminium supplies the necessary heat, and the steel filings provide the sparks.

When my interesting tour finished I was presented with a big box of "Standard Fireworks," and you can take it from me I'm going to have a great display with them. I've got all kinds of fireworks new to me, including Devil-among-the-Tailors, Fire Fans, Air Bomb Repeaters, Shooting Star Fountain, Golden Zodiac, Chrysanthemum Fountain, Whizz Wheels, Rising Suns, Lighthouses, Colour Wheels, and a Parachute Floating Light, which zooms to a high altitude and remains suspended for some considerable time.

Well, here's wishing you a great display on the Fifth!

your study with tobacco smoke. It was all part of Lumley's plot. You are now cleared from those charges, at all events, Merry. Mellish will tell the whole truth, if Lumley does not."

Tom Merry's face lit up.

"Thank goodness!" he said.

"You have cause to be thankful, Merry. That scoundrel's scheme very nearly succeeded. But listen! Lumley is not caught yet."

"We know the whole story now."

"But if Lumley denies Mellish's tale—how are we to prove it?" said Kildare quietly. "He has the nerve of an old criminal. He will deny everything in the coolest manner. And then even Mellish may back out, and say he was frightened into admitting what he has admitted, and that he was not confessing the truth."

"I didn't think of that."

"You see, what we know, we know; but the Head will be the judge of this matter, and he will require indisputable evidence."

"I suppose so."

"The only way to catch the scoundrel is to catch him in the act."

Tom Merry nodded slowly.

"But how?" he asked.

"I have thought of that. Mellish cannot warn him. He is locked up, and I have the key of the room. Lumley will come here, expecting to find you insensible, to carry out his part of the plot."

"But I shall not be so."

"You can affect to be. Pour out your tea, and then throw it into the ashes, leaving a little in the bottom of the cup. When you hear Lumley coming, lie in the arm-chair as if overcome. I have seen you perform harder roles than that in the amateur dramatic performances."

"It will be easy."

"Lumley will spill the brandy upon you, and then we have him. I shall be on the watch."

"I suppose it is the only way."

"The only way—yes. Do as I tell you."

"Very well!"

And Kildare quitted Tom Merry's study.

CHAPTER 11.

Fairly Caught!

"**B**AJ Jove! Here's Kildare at last!"

The chums of the Fourth were getting tired of waiting in Kildare's study. The head prefect seemed a very long time gone. But at last the study door opened, and he came in. His face was pale and set.

Blake looked at him questioningly.

"Well?" he asked.

"Well," said Kildare, "I have found proof that the story is true. I have caught Mellish in the act of drugging Tom Merry's milk."

"Bai Jove!"

"Has he confessed?"

"Yes."

"Where is he now?"

"Locked up in the box-room."

"But—but—"

"I am waiting now for Lumley to come and play his part," explained Kildare. "Till then, not a word is to be said. You understand?"

"I think I do," said Blake slowly.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You juniors will return to your study, and remain there quietly."

"Oh!" said Digby.

"You will wait there until you hear from me," said Kildare. "Mind you don't say a word."

"Right-ho!" said Blake, rather half-heartedly.

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy!"

The Fourth Formers would have preferred to take some action. They wanted to fall upon Lumley-Lumley in a

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body and rag him. But Kildare was evidently right. And, in any case, there was no gainsaying the captain of the school.

Blake linked arms with the scamp of the Third. "You'd better stay with us, kid," he remarked. "You'll be telling the story all over the Third Form Room otherwise."

"Oh, rats!" said Wally.

"Weally, Wally—"

"Now, don't you begin, Gus—"

"Stay with Blake till I tell you, D'Arcy minor," said Kildare.

Wally had to obey Kildare's orders. The juniors left the room and their footsteps died away. Kildare then stepped into the next study, which belonged to Darrell, the prefect. The quiet, grave senior who was almost as much liked and respected at St. Jim's as Kildare himself, nodded to him, looking somewhat surprised at his grave expression.

"Nothing wrong, Kildare?" he asked.

"Yes—something very wrong," said Kildare grimly.

Darrell laid down his book.

"Go ahead, old man!" he said.

Kildare explained. Darrell compressed his lips as he listened.

"I remember you stood up for Tom Merry all the time, Darrell," Kildare concluded. "And you were right. It's a rotten plot against him, and got up by that rotten cad Lumley, who ought to be in a reformatory."

"By George! I should say so!"

Kildare nodded towards the door, which he had left ajar.

"I'm keeping an eye open for Lumley," he said. "He must pass in sight of this door, Darrell, to go upstairs. When he goes we go after him. I want you to go with me."

"Right you are!" said Darrell.

And the two seniors waited. They did not discuss the matter. Darrell resumed his book, and Kildare began a Latin exercise at Darrell's table. But the St. Jim's captain did not put his mind very deeply into Latin just then. He was listening for Lumley-Lumley. When the door was ajar it gave a view of part of the staircase up which the Outsider of St. Jim's must go to reach the Shell passage.

As soon as he had passed Kildare would know that it was time for action. Whenever there was a sound of footsteps Kildare's eyes left his paper, and at last he saw the Outsider pass.

Jerrold Lumley-Lumley had stayed in the Common-room for a good half-hour. He had expected Mellish to come to tell him that his part of the work was done; but the cad of the Fourth did not appear.

Lumley-Lumley decided that he was keeping out of sight, scared by what he had done. But a suspicion crossed his mind that Mellish had failed him, and at that thought a very ugly expression came over the Outsider's face.

He could only ascertain whether it was so by going to Tom Merry's study, as Mellish did not appear.

The Outsider's face wore its usual careless expression as he went upstairs, but there was anger and anxiety in his heart.

He reached Tom Merry's study. The door was closed and a light gleamed from beneath it, showing that the hero of the Shell was at home.

Lumley hesitated for a few moments.

If Mellish had failed him—if Tom Merry's eyes met him as he went in, questioning—after all, he could tell some lie to account for his visit. And if Tom Merry had taken the drug—if he were lying insensible in the study at that moment—the sooner Lumley got to work the better. If he delayed there was always the possibility of Tom Merry being found by someone else.

He opened the study at last, boldly.

In spite of his nerve his heart thumped as he took his first glance into the study. But that first glance satisfied him. Tom Merry was leaning back in the armchair, without motion. His head rested on his arm. He lay like a log.

Lumley stepped farther into the study and closed the door.

He glanced at the tea-tray. There was the milk jug nearly empty. Tom Merry's teacup had a small residue of tea in it. The rest, it was evident to Lumley-Lumley, had been drunk by the junior. The result was visible—he was lying insensible in his chair, a helpless victim waiting for the last move in the cunning game to be played.

Lumley's eyes gleamed with triumph.

He had succeeded.

His hand came out of his pocket with the little bottle of brandy in it. He had only to spill that over Tom Merry's clothes so that the smell of spirits would be strong upon the junior. Then he would call for help. He would affect to have come to the study to speak to Tom Merry—to be frightened at having found him insensible, never suspecting, of course, that he was intoxicated—the smell of the brandy

would make that accusation as soon as the crowd gathered in the study.

How easy it had been!

A smile of pitying contempt passed over the Outsider's face as he stood looking down at Tom Merry.

This fellow had flouted him, refused his friendship, defied him—and had suffered the consequences—fool that he had been to pit his strength against the cunning of the Outsider, against the keen wits which had been sharpened by the experience of every kind of rascality in London and Paris and New York!

It was the triumph of the Outsider.

With a firm hand he removed the cork from the bottle and poured the spirits over Tom Merry's arms and coat and upon the chair beside him.

The smell of brandy was thick and sickening.

The Outsider chuckled softly.

The chuckle died away as the Outsider of St. Jim's turned to the door. The door was opened before he could do it, and he saw two stalwart forms standing directly before him. Kildare and Darrell were there, and they met the Outsider face to face.

Lumley-Lumley started back.

The sudden appearance of the two prefects struck him with consternation, and a terror that something was known seemed to strike into his heart; but with wonderful nerve he concealed the emotion.

"Kildare!" he exclaimed. "Come in, will you? There's something wrong with Tom Merry. I was just going to call for help. Come in, for goodness' sake!"

The rascal's acting was perfect. Kildare drew a deep, quick breath. He realised, with an aching conscience, how completely he would have been taken in had he not been forewarned of the Outsider's villainy.

He strode into the study with Darrell.

"I found him like that," said Lumley-Lumley, pointing to Tom Merry. "I—I think he must be ill, you know."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, I was going to call for help—"

"You thought Tom Merry was insensible, did you not?" asked Kildare.

"Yes; he is insensible."

"And there is a smell of brandy, too."

Lumley-Lumley sniffed.

"My hat! So there is!" he exclaimed. "I noticed a smell, but I was too startled to think about it. Surely Tom Merry can't have been drinking. I'll never believe it of him!"

"You infernal young scoundrel!" cried Kildare, unable to contain his rage.

Lumley started back.

"Kildare—"

"Stand up, Tom Merry, and tell this young villain that he's found out!" exclaimed the captain of St. Jim's.

Lumley's face went white with fear as Tom Merry quietly rose to his feet.

CHAPTER 12.

Sorry!

TOM MERRY rose quietly without a trace of the influence of the drug about him.

The Outsider of St. Jim's had a nerve of iron, but his nerve was not equal to this strain.

He backed away with faltering footsteps, his face grey, worn, as if age had suddenly descended upon it, his lips white and muttering.

Tom Merry looked at him with scornful eyes.

"Mellish!" muttered Lumley-Lumley. "Mellish has given me away!"

"You are quite right," said Kildare. "Mellish has given you away—but not till the plot was discovered and it was impossible for Mellish to do anything else."

Lumley licked his dry lips.

He was making frantic efforts to recover his usual coolness, but his composure would not come back. His hands shook as if with cold.

"The whole rascally scheme is known," said Kildare. "I have been waiting for the last half-hour to see you come up here, and I knew you had a bottle of brandy to spill over Tom Merry."

"Oh!"

"Tom Merry has not taken the drug—but he assumed insensibility by my orders, so as to make you completely betray your own villainy."

The Outsider laughed.

It was not a pleasant laugh to hear.

"I guess I've slipped up on it this time," he remarked. "Well, I suppose everybody plays a wrong card at times. I don't know how the game got known if Mellish didn't give me away in the first place. But now the jig is up, I can face the music."

"It was D'Arcy minor who discovered it," said Kildare. "Tom Merry owes this to D'Arcy minor."

"Wally!" said Tom Merry.

"Yes. Wally discovered it, and told Blake, and Blake came to me."

"Blake stood by me, then?" said Tom Merry.

"Yes—and small blame to him, and to the others, for being misled by this young villain," said Kildare. "I should have been taken in if he had reached this point in his rotten game without discovery."

Lumley-Lumley laughed again.

"I guess you would," he assented.

"And you can laugh now," said Kildare, with a glance of contempt at the Outsider.

Jerrold Lumley-Lumley shrugged his shoulders.

"I guess so," he said. "I've slipped up on this and run against a snag. Well, I can face the music."

The prefect nodded, and they left the study. Lumley-Lumley walked with his head erect and a sneering smile upon his face.

Tom Merry was left alone.

As Kildare and Darrell, with Lumley and Mellish, passed the door of Study No. 6 on their way to the stairs, five eager faces were looking out.

Kildare nodded to the juniors.

"It's all right," he said.

"Good!" said Blake.

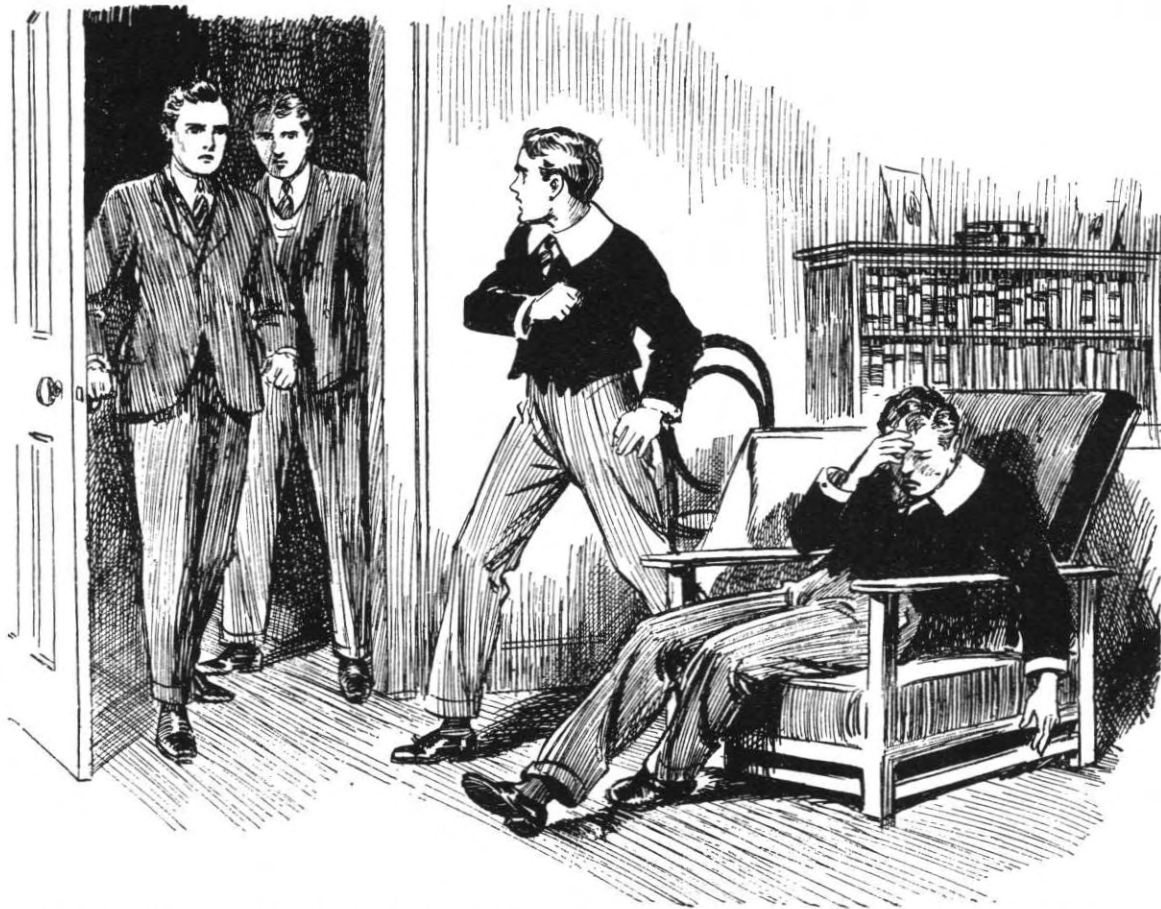
"Bai Jove! You've caught the wotten boundah, then?"

"Yes; I'm taking him to the Head."

"Wippin', deah boy!"

"Hurrah!" roared Wally.

And the scamp of the Third ran off to tell the news to the Third Form Room.



The victim of the Outsider's scoundrelly scheming, Tom Merry sat in the arm-chair like one unconscious. Lumley-Lumley turned to the door with a chuckle. But his chuckle gave way to a look of consternation as the door quietly opened and Kildare and Darrell stood facing him.

"One word," said Kildare. "It is useless for you to conceal anything now—especially as Mellish will tell the whole truth. You placed the marked cards in Tom Merry's drawer?"

Lumley nodded coolly.

"I guess so," he said.

"And you smoked the cigars in this study?"

"Certainly."

"And your intention?"

"Tom Merry knows my reason. I told him I would ruin him, and drive him from St. Jim's. But for that meddling young cad in the Third"—Lumley's eyes burned for a moment—"but for him, I should have succeeded. As it is, I can stand the racket. You are going to take me before the Head. Take me, and have done with it."

"Come!" said Kildare.

He laid his hand on the Outsider's shoulder. He handed the key of the box-room to Darrell.

"Bring Mellish!" he said.

The seniors went on their way, and the Fourth Formers raced along the passage to Tom Merry's study.

Tom Merry was changing his jacket for one that did not smell of brandy. He had opened the window to let that scent out.

The four Fourth Formers rushed in as he was half in the jacket and seized him. Blake collared one hand and Herries another, shaking them frantically. Digby slapped him on the back, and Arthur Augustus dug him in the ribs in the most enthusiastic way.

"Hold on!" gasped Tom Merry. "Stop it! Ow! Stop it, you silly asses! Yow!"

"Congwatuations, deah boy!"

"Leggo!" roared Tom Merry. "Chuck it! Stop!"

They released him at once. They were brimming over with excitement and satisfaction, and their wild shouts had brought a crowd along the passage, first among whom were the chums of the end study.

A crowd of astonished faces glared in at the door. They

saw a most remarkable sight. Tom Merry was standing panting and gasping, half in a jacket, and four excited Fourth Formers were executing a sort of triumphal dance round him.

"My only hat!" ejaculated Kangaroo. "What's the matter?"

"All off their rockers!" said Clifton Dane.

"Faith, and they're all mad, begorra!"

Tom Merry gasped and eyed his congratulators very dubiously. He was a kind and generous lad, but it was not so easy to forget the injuries of the past few days.

"Look here, what are you duffers capering in my study for?" he demanded.

"Joy, deah boy."

"That's it," said Blake, pausing and panting. "Joy—pure joy!"

"Look here——"

"This is how it is," said Blake. "Partly through Wally and partly through us, the whole thing has been cleared up."

"What has?" demanded Noble quickly.

"About Tom Merry. I said all along that somebody must have put those cards in the drawer."

"What?"

"And I declared from the first that it must have been Lumley who smoked those cigars in the study."

"That you jolly well didn't," said Kangaroo.

"Look here, you Cornstalk ass——"

"Rats! You never said anything of the sort!"

"Well, I thought it, then—or, at all events, I think so now," amended Blake. "And every chap who isn't a silly duffer is bound to agree with me. It's all cleared up, and Lumley's bowled out, and Kildare's taken him before the Head."

"Great Scott!"

"Tom Merry's cleared."

"My hat!"

"As for the chaps who have been saying things against him, I only hope they're properly ashamed of themselves, that's all," said Blake.

"Bai Jove, Blake——"

"I know I ought to have come out stronger on the subject myself," said Blake. "Tom Merry and I had a row, and I was licked—and it served me right. All I've got to say is, I'm sorry for what's happened."

"Same here," said Digby.

"And here," said Herries.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I considah that we all owe Tom Mewwy a vewy handsome apology, and it's up to us to make the amende honouvable, you know. Undah the circs——"

"Exactly!"

"Pway don't intewwupt me, Blake."

"My dear Gussy, you can't have all the limelight."

"Weally, Blake——"

"We're all sorry, and we don't mind saying so," said Blake. "That's how the matter stands, Tom Merry."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry's face melted.

"Well, I should be a rotter if I bore malice after that," he said. "I'll only say that I think you might have known me better, that's all."

"Yaas, wathah! Blake was an awful ass!"

"Why, you chump——"

"Digby was a feahful duffah——"

"Look here, Gussy——"

"And Hewwies was a champion chump! I myself should have seen exactly how mattahs stood long ago, only——"

"Only you didn't," suggested Kangaroo.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, it's all over now," said Blake. "I'll go and tell the fellows. I hope Monty Lowther will say he's sorry. I must say that he hasn't stood by Tom Merry in the way I should have expected of him."

The Fourth Former left the study. In a few seconds Monty Lowther came in and closed the door, and the crowd in the passage dispersed to tell and to discuss the startling news, and to make surmises as to what was happening within the closed doors of the Head's study, whither Mr. Railton had followed Kildare, and where the Outsider was now answering for his sins before the Head of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 13.

An Honour for Wally!

LOWTHER looked at Tom Merry, and Tom Merry looked at Lowther. There was a very awkward pause.

These two, who had been old friends and staunch chums for so long and had been estranged, hardly knew

how to speak. Tom remained silent. It was Lowther who spoke first.

"I'm jolly glad of this!" he said.

"Thank you!" said Tom Merry.

"It—it seems that it was a caddish scheme of Lumley-Lumley's all along to get you into trouble, Tom."

"So it seems."

Lowther was silent.

"Look here!" he said abruptly. "I never believed it. I didn't know what to think. The beginning of it was your playing Lumley-Lumley in the House team. You were to blame in that, Tom, and that started it. But—but I know I ought to have stood by you, whatever you'd done, when the trouble came. I don't know how it was we got on the terms we did get on. I never intended it."

"Nor I," said Tom Merry.

"When a bit of unpleasantness starts there's no telling how it's going to end," said Lowther. "I meant to speak to you about it, but——"

"But you didn't."

"No, I didn't; and perhaps you don't believe me now," said Monty Lowther, flushing very red.

"Don't be an ass, Monty. Do you think I should doubt your word?" said Tom Merry very quietly.

Lowther held out his hand. Tom Merry grasped it, and let it go. Both looked red and uncomfortable. Like most boys, anything approaching sentiment made them feel awkward, for they were not the sort to wear their hearts upon their sleeves.

"Manners will be jolly glad to hear this," said Lowther, changing the subject.

Tom Merry's face brightened.

"Yes, I think he will. Hallo! Who's that?"

There was a sound of rapid footsteps in the passage.

The door of the study was flung open, and Manners bounded in, breathless. He paused and panted.

"I've—I've just heard!" he gasped.

Tom Merry laughed, his old, happy laugh.

"Have you come to say you're sorry, too?" he asked.

"Sorry?" said Manners reflectively. "I don't know what I've got to be sorry for. I never believed anything against you all along. I don't know how we came to be on bad terms. But I'm sorry, if you like; only I'm jolly glad it's all cleared up, Tommy, my son." And Manners fairly hugged Tom Merry in his glee.

Manners was a quiet fellow, very little given to displaying emotion of any sort, and this was a very surprising exhibition from him.

"It's all right, old man," said Tom Merry.

There was a whoop from the passage. Wally, Jameson, Curly Gibson, Frayne, and a crowd of other Third Form fags came crowding in.

Wally gave Tom Merry a smack on the back—an unheard-of liberty for a fag of the Third to take with a Shell fellow. But Tom Merry only laughed.

"Thanks, Wally," he said. "I know all about it. Thank you, old boy—and I shan't jolly well forget this. You stood by me like a brick."

"Of course he did!" said Jameson. "Wally is a brick—all wool, and a yard wide. Didn't we stand by you?"

"You did, kid."

"We knew Tom Merry was all right," said Wally, with a patronising glance at Manners and Lowther. "They couldn't pull the wool over our eyes! Tommy, old son, you've got to come down; the fellows are hungry to see you. Come on!"

Tom Merry hesitated; he had no mind to face an ovation. But there was no denying the fags, and Tom Merry would have done a great deal for Wally. He submitted to his fate, and was marched downstairs in the midst of a horde of fags, followed by Manners and Lowther.

In the Junior Common-room fellows received him with hearty congratulations. Figgins & Co. had come over from the New House, and they bestowed congratulatory slaps on Tom Merry's already aching shoulders.

"Of course, I never believed a word against you," said Figgins.

"Nor I," said Kerr. "I said it was all utter rot from the first."

"Exactly what I said," remarked Fatty Wynn. "And I jolly well think that the Lower School ought to stand Tom Merry a big feed as a sort of compensation."

"Hear, hear!"

"Good old Tom Merry!"

It was surprising the number of fellows who had never believed a word against Tom Merry, and had said from the first that it was all rot. There was hardly a fellow in the School House who did not believe by this time that he had believed in Tom Merry all along and backed him up against everybody else.

But Tom Merry was only too glad to see the clouds roll by and to get on his old footing with his friends. If they had allowed themselves to doubt once, they were not likely

to doubt again, and that was enough for the hero of the Shell.

It was a merry and excited evening in the junior room. The fellows could not make enough of Tom Merry. It was probably the happiest evening of Tom Merry's life.

As for Mellish and Lumley-Lumley, they were almost forgotten. They were remembered, however, when Mr. Railton came into the Junior Common-room to speak to Tom Merry.

The School House master shook hands with the junior in sight of all the crowd of fellows.

"I congratulate you, Merry," he said, for all to hear. "There is not a shadow of any sort left upon your character. Mellish and Lumley-Lumley have confessed to the dastardly plot against you, and their punishment will be exemplary. Both of them will be flogged in public to-morrow before the whole school, and will be confined in the punishment-room for the week. Probably their Form-fellows will let them see, too, how their conduct has disgusted the whole school. Merry, I congratulate you."

And the juniors cheered Mr. Railton as he left.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus. "Mr. Wailton is a bwick, and Tom Mewwy is anothah bwick, and—and, in fact, we are all bwicks, you know. And, of course, Tom Mewwy will have to captain the team on Saturday against the New House. I wesign all claims in favour of Tom Mewwy!"

"Well, I like that!" said Kangaroo. "Blessed if I knew you had any claims!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Kangawoo—"

"Tom Merry's captain, of course," said Blake.

"Hurrah!"

"Well, if you mean that—" said Tom Merry.

"Of course we mean it!" exclaimed Blake. "If anybody suggests that I should captain the team, I'll punch his head! If anybody suggests captaining it himself, I'll dot him on the nose! You're captain—and, look here! You shall play whom you like, and if anybody says a word against it, I'll—I'll squash him! There's going to be proper discipline in this eleven, and no backing against the captain, or anything of that sort, or I'll know the reason why! You can play whom you like—even Lumley-Lumley!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"I shan't be likely to suggest playing Lumley-Lumley

again," he said. "But there's one chap I shall play if I'm captain."

"Who's that?"

"Wally!"

"Bai Jove!"

"A blessed fag!" ejaculated Blake.

"The chap I owe most to in the school!" said Tom Merry firmly. "Wally can play, and if he isn't quite up to House form, we shall have to make up for it."

"Well, all right," said Blake. "Blessed if we wouldn't let you play Toby or Dame Taggles if you liked!"

"Yaas, wathah! And weally, young Wally is my minah, you know, so he is bound to be a cweidit to any team."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What do you say, Wally?" asked Tom Merry.

Wally's eyes were dancing.

"Do you mean it?" he exclaimed breathlessly.

"Of course I do, kid!"

"Then hurrah!" said Wally. "That's all—hurrah!"

And the fags yelled "Hurrah!" till they were hoarse.

Never had such an honour fallen to the Third Form before.

And Wally & Co. felt repaid for having stood by Tom Merry in the time of trouble.

CHAPTER 14.

The Winning Goal!

"**H**URRAH! Hurrah! Three cheers for Tom Merry!"

It was Saturday. A huge crowd had assembled on the junior football ground to witness the match between the School House and the New House.

Both teams had just sprinted on. The Third Form cheered louder than any. Was not Wally their hero in the School House team?

"Now, kids," said Curly Gibson, "go it!"

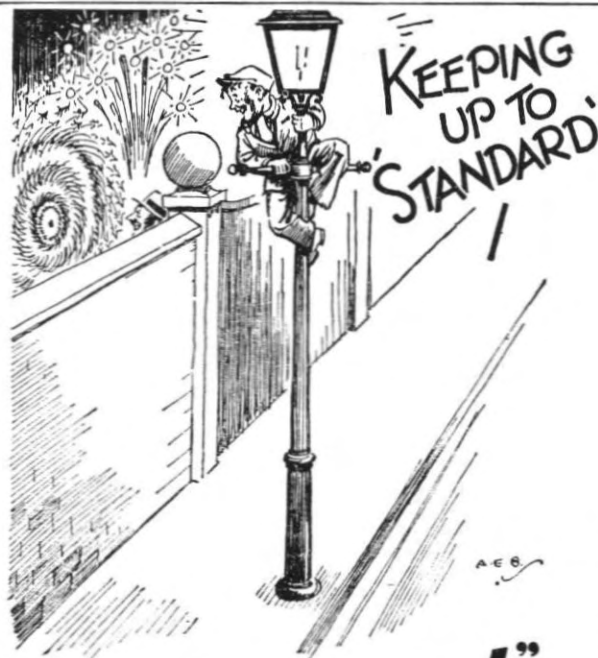
And he led the chums of the Third off in another round of cheering. The whole field followed suit.

Everyone knew the story of the plot against Tom Merry. Everyone was glad it had been discovered.

Tom Merry was pleased. But he was embarrassed, nevertheless. Who would not have been with such an ovation?

"Chair him!" cried Curly Gibson. "Wally, what are you going to sleep for?"

(Continued on the next page.)



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"Good egg!" roared Figgins. "Chair him!"

The New House were cheering second to none. In less time than it takes to tell, both teams had closed round Tom Merry. He protested. But the fellows would not be denied. Laughingly he gave way, and he was borne round the field shoulder high.

Kildare had consented to referee the match, and he stood in mid-field the while, clapping his hands as heartily as anyone.

There could be no doubt that Tom Merry was the idol of the Lower School.

At last the cheering subsided. Tom Merry and Figgins came forward to toss the coin. Tom Merry won. There was nothing extraordinary in that. But the Third Form started another round of cheering that lasted two minutes.

Kildare put up his hand. But it was no use. Curly Gibson, as deputy leader of the Third, meant to have the full worth of it, and they shouted it out.

Then the whistle went, and Figgins kicked off.

None expected a very good exposition of the game. But the play was good, nevertheless. Figgins & Co. meant the New House to win again if possible. The New House meant to give nothing away.

In a way, the School House team was a weaker one than the last. But Wally thought otherwise. He certainly lacked weight when opposed to Fourth Form players. But he could play football—a fact which the Third Form spectators emphasised to their hearts' content a few minutes later, when he robbed Figgins of the ball.

Arthur Augustus, too, was a source of considerable amusement. His exhortations to his minor to buck up were usually unnecessary, but they seldom ceased.

Wally and his major were inside-left and right to Tom Merry at centre-forward, Manners and Lowther completing the line on the left and right wings.

For some minutes the play on both sides was fairly even. It was a little while before they fairly settled down to business.

One thing the spectators were already agreed upon. The School House forward line was working much better than expected. But there grew a desire for a score, especially on the part of the School House crowd.

"Pretty play's all right," said Hancock, "but a team plays to win."

"Go hon!" said Curly Gibson sarcastically.

Every kick of Wally's was cheered to the echo by the Third. The little Third Former was playing well. He took passes from Tom Merry like a master. More than one movement had nearly led to a score, thanks to Wally.

Arthur Augustus began to talk less to his minor at last. He saw that he could be safely let alone. Figgins & Co. saw also that they had underrated D'Arcy minor. The Third Form saw with pride that he was "looked after" just like anyone else. Wally was a power in the game. Then Curly Gibson and his friends began to dream dreams. If only Wally could score first!

"Now, Wally," they shouted, "show the old fogies how to do it! Bung it in for them!"

Everyone laughed. No one would have grudged the Third-Former the honour. But it was expecting a little too much. It was not to be. Wally was fired with the idea as he heard Curly & Co. shouting. Yes, he'd "bung" it in for them. He waited for a chance.

Tom Merry had beaten the New House centre-half. The ball had travelled out to Manners on the wing. Manners' centre was rather short, but not too short for Wally to try to head it into goal.

Into the air he leapt.

"Goal!" yelled Curly Gibson, as he saw the ball fly towards the net.

Wally had never played against a goalie of Fatty Wynn's calibre. The fat Fourth Former could almost read opposing forwards' minds. Wally's "header" gave him no trouble. He gathered it as easily as if it were a present of a nice bag of tarts.

Then Wally did a reckless thing. He charged at Fatty.

"Go on, Wally!" shouted the Third enthusiastically.

"You'll do it, old kid, yet!"

But Fatty Wynn seemed to pass over the Third Former like a steam-roller. Even the School House roared as he leisurely cleared, and the game went on.

Wally looked rather "rolled out" as he got up. But he was game. The Third Form matches were not all lavender, and he could stand knocking about.

Figgins & Co. played up. The lanky skipper of the New House could be tricky when he liked. The School House were visited in their turn. And so Dane, in goal, had a nasty two minutes almost immediately. But Jack Blake soon cleared, and the play went to mid-field again.

Then Monty Lowther put in a grand run. He seemed to fly down the right wing. Pratt tried to hold him, but in vain. His centre was a little wild, going right beyond Tom Merry. But Wally was watching. He did the right thing in the right place. He had had one try at Fatty. It was enough. He was near enough to goal to make Fatty think he was about to shoot, but instead he passed back to Tom Merry. Fatty Wynn threw himself at full length to save, but he was too late.

"Goal!"

The School House were one up—thanks to Tom Merry's sure foot. But the goal was really D'Arcy minor's, and the Third Form let everyone know it.

"Hurrah!" cheered the crowd. "Three cheers for Tom Merry!"

"Three cheers for D'Arcy minor!" shouted the Third. "It was his goal! Hurrah!"

Figgins & Co. pinned their opponents in their own half for the remaining time, and the whistle went for the interval with no addition to the score.

Tom Merry came in for another round of cheering. In addition to other things, he had scored the only goal of the match so far.

In the second half the New House opened well. Things looked very serious for Tom Merry & Co. But the School House defence eventually cleared their lines, and the ball was soon up-field. The School House forward line had been changed. Manners was not quite up to wing work. Jack Blake had gone forward. Wally was delighted. If there was a man he would have liked always to be on the wing with him, it was Blake.

Jack Blake had tremendous dash, and he proved a worry to the New House. But suddenly Figgins & Co. came with a spurt, and before the School House could well realise it they were right on Dane, and there was a cheer from the New House spectators as the game became one all.

Figgins was playing at centre-forward instead of back, and his shot was a real gem. Dane had no chance with it. The field went into cheers again, starting with Figgins, and ending, as it only could to-day, with Tom Merry.

Then the School House came in a body. They must show that they were the better team. Blake believed that Wally would score before the game was up. He was determined to furnish the youngster with a chance if he could. It came.

Taking a long pass in his stride from Tom Merry, Jack Blake sprinted hard down the touchline. He beat the right half-back and the right back single-handed. Then, to the roars of cheering from the Third Form, he passed to Wally. Blake could get no farther with it single-handed.

Wally made for goal. Kerr had got back in the meantime. Then Wally risked it. He dribbled round the New House back. Spectators held their breath.

"Now, Wally!" yelled Curly, as he saw Wally had only to beat Fatty Wynn.

Steadying himself an instant, Wally shot. It was a beauty. It rose like a rocket into the far corner. Fatty had simply no chance.

"Goal! Goal! Goal!"

The Third Form were nearly frantic with joy. Tom Merry himself led the cheering on the field. Then the next thing that happened was Wally being carried on Tom Merry and Blake's shoulders to the middle of the field, Figgins cheering the new School House recruit with the rest.

The best of it was that Wally had kicked the winning goal! For the game was close on the finish now, and it ended at last, to Kildare's ringing whistle, with the score two for the School House and one for the New House. The School House had retrieved their late defeat—and Tom Merry and Wally were the heroes of the hour!

As the teams came off the field the crowd closed in on them, and there was a roar of cheering as Tom Merry was hoisted high by Figgins & Co., and Wally soared aloft on the shoulders of Jack Blake and Kangaroo.

They were borne breathless and blushing from the field, amid thunderous cheers. And so closed that historic contest; and Figgins, keen footballer as he was, was overheard to say that he was only half-sorry the New House had been licked!

And with that victory, and the clearing of his name, Tom Merry once more became the popular leader of the Lower School.

Needless to dwell upon the punishment of the two plotters. Both Lumley-Lumley and Mellish suffered for their rascality, as they well deserved; and few were found to pity them.

THE END.

(Next Wednesday: "LUMLEY'S LAST CHANCE!"—another great yarn of the St. Jim's chums!)

THE SCHOOLBOY WHO WAS THROWN TO RAVENOUS RATS!

The TEN TALONS OF TAAZ!



BY EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

Interrupted Journey!

"CHESTNUTS," said Tommy Watson cheerfully. "Four pounds of 'em, please, Mr. Tapper."
"You shall have them, young gent," declared Mr. Tapper, with a smile. "Prime chestnuts they are, too. For every bad one you find I'll give you two good 'uns."

"That's fair enough," said Tommy. He was standing in Tapper's little fruiterer's shop, in Bellton Village. It was a dark, wild, blustery evening in late October, and Watson was in a hurry to get back to the warmth and comfort of St. Frank's. While Mr. Tapper was weighing the chestnuts, three other customers came in, and Watson nodded casually. He was not on very friendly terms with Bernard Forrest & Co., of Study A.

"All those chestnuts for you?" asked Forrest, as he watched the weighing operations. "Gad! You must be hungry!"

"Rats!" said Watson. "We're having a roast chestnut party in the Common-room this evening, and we drew lots as to who should cycle to the village to buy them. Jealous?"

"I'm not interested in your silly chestnut party," retorted Bernard Forrest, with a shrug. "You and your fellow monkeys can eat as many nuts as you like!"

"Now, now, young gents," said Mr. Tapper admonishingly, proceeding to put the chestnuts into a paper bag. Tommy Watson pulled him up.

"Haven't you got something stronger, Mr. Tapper?" he asked. "I've got to carry the nuts on the carrier of my bike, and a bag is an awkward thing to strap on."

"Just a minute, sir," said the fruiterer, diving towards the rear of his shop.

He returned with a stout cardboard box which had once contained boots, and he emptied the nuts into this.

"Just the thing," said Tommy. "Thanks, Mr. Tapper, I can strap that box on quite easily."

He went out into the night with his purchase, and a minute later the cardboard box was securely fixed to his cycle-carrier. Then he went along to the confectioner's near by in order to purchase some chocolate for his own private consumption.

Meanwhile, Forrest & Co. emerged from the fruiterers, and a slow grin, a malicious grin, overspread Bernard Forrest's unpleasant face as he spotted Tommy Watson's bike against the kerb.

"Just a minute, you chaps," he said, with a chuckle.

It was only the work of a moment for him to whip out

his penknife, bend down, and cut a fair-sized, neat, circular hole in the bottom of the cardboard box—the end of which projected an inch or two beyond the metal carrier. One or two chestnuts fell with little thuds into the gutter, but the rest jammed in the gap.

"Neat, eh?" grinned Forrest, as he led Gulliver and Bell away.

"What the deuce did you do that for, anyway?" asked Gulliver. "Why not swipe the lot if you want them?"

"Have you no brains at all?" chuckled Forrest. "One by one, my sons, those chestnuts will roll out as our poor friend, Watson, cycles back to St. Frank's. The jolting of the bike will shake them out. How many will be left by the time he arrives? Somehow, I fancy there'll be no roast chestnut feast in the Ancient House Common-room this evening, after all!"

He yelled with laughter, and Gulliver and Bell, appreciating the joke, yelled with him. They were still roaring with mirth when Tommy Watson, mounted on his machine, rode past. It did not occur to him that he was the cause of their hilarity.

"Cackling fatheads!" he sniffed disdainfully.

He pedalled hard against the blustery wind, and there was no clue to inform him that his precious chestnuts were dropping, one by one through that hole in the bottom of the cardboard box.

A strange, sleepy feeling had come over him, too, during the last minute or so. He fought against it at first, but it grew even more overpowering. His thoughts continually turned to the old deserted quarry on the moor. Before he had reached the end of the village he was cycling quite mechanically. It was almost as though he had gone into a trance.

He no longer thought of his fellow Removites, who were awaiting his return at St. Frank's. His thoughts, indeed, were completely suspended. Even that strange urge to go to the quarry had now left him. He rode his bicycle just like an automaton.

Near the end of the village, just before he reached the bridge, he turned abruptly aside, riding down a narrow lane. By doing this he was branching completely away from his original direction. Riding thus through the intense darkness of the blustery evening, he reached, presently, a small secondary road. It was a quiet, unfrequented country lane. Watson pedalled steadily. In due course he was making progress along a moorland path, where the wind came whistling across the open spaces, buffeting him as he

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THE FLAMING PIT!

pedalled. But still he kept on doggedly, never looking back, never at fault as to his direction.

The track began to slope steeply, for he was now entering the open end of the quarry. It was a kind of gully, where, in days gone past, wagons had gone to and fro.

But Tommy Watson did not remain in the quarry. He dismounted from his bicycle when he could ride no farther, leaned it against some rocks, and then, on foot, walked to one of the frowning quarry walls and entered an opening which appeared to be a cave, but which was, in reality, the entry to a long disused quarry working—a deep, black tunnel, which penetrated far, far underground.

In spite of the stygian darkness, Watson walked with that same complete confidence. And suddenly, out of the darkness, a singular hissing sounded; Watson was surrounded by a fog-like spray of a sickly, pungent odour. It clung to him like a halo, and only a moment or so later his footsteps commenced to falter. He blinked as he walked, and now he stretched his hands in front of him, blindly seeking to feel his way. And thus, at last, he came to a halt. His heart was thudding, and his brain, temporarily dormant, returned to the normal.

He was bewildered, just a little scared, in fact. He knew that he was in inky darkness, and a horrid aroma surrounded him. He tried to think. But all he could remember was riding down the village street on his bicycle en route for St. Frank's. After that he did not know what had happened. He had not the faintest idea as to where he was now—or how he had got here. It was most alarming.

Abruptly, he stood rigid. A flickering light, ruddy, weird, had appeared in the darkness ahead of him, and by its luminance he began to make out the nature of his surroundings. For the first time he realised he was in a tunnel! He could see the light reflected on the rocky walls and on the low roof. Two figures came silently and stealthily round a bend, and they were carrying peculiar-looking torches, which gave forth a yellowish glow. And the figures were of men dressed in long flowing robes.

"Great Scott!" gasped Tommy Watson, with a jump. "The priests of Taaz!"

He knew the truth in that flash—and his heart, thumping already, now hammered painfully. He knew that it was his turn to undergo the dread ordeal—that one of the Talons of Taaz had descended upon him.

The mystery was explained. Watson was now aware that it was the mystery men from Tibet, who, by their power of concentrating their wills and making their victim subconsciously obey—even from a distance—had hypnotised him as he had been riding through the village street. And Watson had obeyed.

In those few seconds, whilst he was waiting for the robed figures to join him, he remembered the very beginning of all this uncanny adventure. Tommy had been one of ten St. Frank's Removites who had taken the old lifeboat out to the wreck of the *Transon*—a tramp schooner, which had been bound for Rangoon, and which had gone on the rocks near Shingle Head. In the abandoned vessel the schoolboys had found the priests of Taaz.

And there, owing to an impulsive act by Handforth, they gazed upon the face of Raa-ok, the high priest of the Temple of Taaz. Death should have been their reward, but the high priest, knowing that they had come to the ship on an errand of mercy, had allowed them to go free. But he had solemnly warned them that they must, one and all, undergo the ordeal of the Talon, before Taaz, the Vulture God, permitted them to continue living. Those who came through the ordeal satisfactorily could live; those who failed must die. Already five of the "marked ten" had answered. Now it was Tommy Watson's turn!

And Watson, pluckily enough normally, was almost transfixed with terror at the prospect of what lay ahead. None of the other victims had revealed the details of their own ordeals—for to do so meant death. For days—indeed, weeks—Watson had dreaded this moment; it had hung over him like a blight.

A wild desire possessed him to flee. He half turned, and then went rigid again. Advancing towards him along the tunnel from the opposite direction, were two other priests. He was trapped.

"Fear not, my son!" said a refined voice, in good English. "Obey the commands of Taaz and your life shall be spared."

Watson gulped. The four priests, with their stern, impassive yellow faces, were round him. Their eyes, unblinking and gleaming in the torchlights, concentrated their gaze upon him.

"What—what are you going to do with me?" he panted, his jaw becoming stubbornly square.

"Taaz, the Mighty, the Omnipotent, is contemptuous of a craven; therefore, good youth, you must gather all your courage," said Yeza, the chief priest. "Come! All is ready!"

He turned, and the others closed round Watson, so that he was obliged to walk with them. Thus they proceeded

along that old quarry working, until at length they emerged into a great natural cavern. Tommy Watson knew it well, for, like many of the St. Frank's boys, he had sometimes explored the tunnels and caverns. But never before had he seen the great cavern as he saw it now.

Most of it lay in black, mysterious darkness; but in an oasis of light, in the centre, flaming torches had been set up on long poles. Facing Watson, and at some distance, was a quaintly carved chair, and seated in this chair a robed, veiled figure.

He shivered. He had seen that figure before. It was Raa-ok, the high priest himself, with his withered, claw-like arms resting everlastingly on the arms of the chair. Perched at the back was the vile Vulture God—a strange, dread image shaped like a vulture, with outstretched wings, but with the head of a human being.

On some of these grim occasions neither Raa-ok nor the Vulture God appeared; but here, in the seclusion and privacy of the underground cavern, it was possible for Watson's ordeal to be conducted with all this mystic ceremony.

The chief of the attendant priests called a halt, thrust out a yellow hand, and pointed.

"Taaz watches!" he said relentlessly.

"You can't fool me," muttered Watson, gathering all his stubborn obstinacy. "It's only an image—a thing of wood or metal."

"Be warned, foolish unbeliever!" said Yeza sternly.

"Speak ill of Taaz, and death is inevitable. Be prepared to prove yourself worthy of continued earthly existence. For your hour has struck!"

Watson's Peril!

"WHY the dickens doesn't he come?" demanded Handforth wrathfully. "I could have cycled to the village and back half a dozen times by now!"

"Give him a chance?" said Nipper, laughing.

"Perhaps old Tapper has run out of chestnuts. Perhaps Tommy had a puncture, and has had to walk back. He'll be here presently."

"Meanwhile, we've got to sit here and twiddle our thumbs!" grunted Handforth, with a sniff.

It was very pleasant in the Remove Common-room in the Ancient House. Quite a number of Removites had gathered for the chestnut feast, and the party included Reggie Pitt, Jack Grey, and a few other stalwarts from the West House. They were guests for the occasion.

"If he doesn't buck up we shan't have any roast chestnuts at all!" said Harry Gresham. "They take a certain amount of time to roast, you know, and we can only do a few at once. What could have delayed him? He should have been here half an hour ago."

"If he doesn't show up within five minutes, I'm going down to the village to look for him!" said Handforth tartly. "This is what comes of trusting Study C to get the giddy chestnuts! If Study D had taken on the job—"

"Here he comes!" interrupted somebody.

There were footsteps in the corridor, and a moment later the door opened. But the newcomer was Bernard Forrest, and close behind him came Gulliver and Bell. All three were grinning widely.

"Rats!" said Handforth. "It isn't Watson at all!"

Forrest looked round in some surprise.

"Hasn't Watson been back?" he asked. "Or did you send him down to the village again?"

"We haven't seen him at all!" replied Nipper, eyeing the cads of Study A searchingly. "What are you fellows grinning at? You've been up to some dirty game, by the look of you. Did you see Watson in the village?"

Forrest & Co.'s only answer was to yell with laughter.

"By George!" roared Handforth, leaping forward. "So this is the explanation! These cads have bagged our chestnuts!"

A roar went up, and a crowd of indignant juniors advanced upon Forrest & Co.

"Here, chuck it!" said Forrest coolly. "We haven't taken your chestnuts. We saw Watson in the village—in fact, we were in Tapper's while Watson was buying the chestnuts. But we haven't touched 'em."

"Then, what's happened to him?" demanded Nipper.

"How should we know?" retorted Forrest, with a shrug.

"We thought we should find him here."

"Just a minute!" said Handforth darkly.

He signed to Church and McClue and one or two others. Gulliver was grabbed, and Gulliver squealed like a rabbit. He had been seized because he was known to be the easiest "squealer."

"Now then," said Handforth, as he dumped Gulliver unceremoniously to the floor and knelt on his chest, "you know something about those chestnuts, don't you?" He raised his clenched fist. "Are you going to tell, or shall I punch that miserable nose of yours?"

"It—it was only a jape!" yelled Gulliver, in terror.

"Forrest cut a hole in the box so that the chestnuts would escape. Watson must have discovered it, and he's probably gone back for another supply."

Forrest pushed his way forward.

"Let him go!" he said. "I don't mind telling you what I did. Gulliver's right. It was only a jape."

And, grinning, he explained.

"Why, you miserable rotter!" roared Handforth. "Do you call that a jape? It was just a dirty trick! In any

A minute later nine juniors had left the Common-room, and were in the lobby. Their expressions were grave.

"It's significant, you chaps," said Nipper quietly. "Watson must have been 'called' during his ride home."

"It's awful!" said Handforth. "There's never any telling when those beastly priests will start their queer games! A chap isn't safe even on a bike!"

"There's nothing we can do," said Travers, shrugging. "You know of Yeza's warning. If we interfere it means death for the one who happens to be in the hands of the priests. This time, too, we haven't even a clue. We don't know where Watson has gone, which direction he took. We don't know anything."

Nipper was frowning. He was intensely worried. Tommy Watson was one of his closest chums—his own study-mate. He knew Watson through and through. He knew Tommy's stubborn, defiant nature. Nipper had long been dreading this hour. He had no lack of faith in Watson's courage; but he doubted if Watson would go through the terrifying ordeal which would unquestionably be prepared for him, without a fight. And fighting the priests of Taaz might have disastrous results.

Moreover, Nipper was instinctively urged—as all the other juniors were urged—to go to the help of his chum. They all knew that Tommy was in danger, and, in spite of the dreadful risks, they wanted to help him.

"Afraid there's nothing we can do, dear old chap," said Sir Montie Tregellis-West, nervously fingering his pince-nez. "Tommy may be miles away by now."

"No. Forrest has solved the riddle!" snapped Nipper, his eyes glowing.



"Fool—fool!" snarled the chief priest. "You have defied Taaz and death shall be your reward!" Tommy Watson felt a heavy thrust at his back, and he flung out his arms to save himself; but his fingers clutched only the air. He plunged down into the pit—amongst the ravenous rats!

case, Watson has had time to go back to the village twice by now. Why isn't he here? You've done something else to him!"

"No, we haven't," denied Forrest. "We haven't seen him since he rode out of the village nearly three-quarters of an hour ago."

"And it's only five minutes' ride," said Nipper slowly. "There's another queer thing, too. If Watson had got back to the school and found the box empty he would have come and told us."

"That's true," said Pitt, giving Nipper a hard look.

"Some of us had better go out and round him up," drawled Travers. "No, you needn't all come. Handy, bring Churchy and Mac. You, too, Nipper; and you, Montie. The West House can be represented by Pitt and Grey."

The fellows who had been named thoroughly understood. They were all members of the "marked ten," and with startled feelings they gathered the trend of Travers' talk. The rest of the Removites thought only of the missing chestnuts.

"Forrest!" echoed the others.

"Yes. Don't you understand?" asked Nipper. "Forrest, by his ill-natured jape, has provided us with a trail."

"My only sainted aunt!" gasped Handforth, with a jump. "You—you mean the chestnuts?"

"One by one they must have fallen out of that cardboard box," said Nipper tensely. "There'll be a trail—right from Tapper's shop. We can follow it easily, and it may lead us all the way to Tommy's destination."

"Brains!" said Vivian Travers admiringly, as he gazed at Nipper. "That's all you need, dear old fellow—brains!"

Tommy Watson found it difficult to withdraw his gaze from the sinister figure of Raa-ok, seated so motionless, so death-like, in the great carved chair.

Watson was commanded to walk forward, and he obeyed reluctantly. He realised to the full the hopelessness of his position. He could do nothing against so many enemies;

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yet all his instincts urged him to rebel. This thing was monstrous. Why should these heathen priests have their way with him?

Bitterly he told himself that no help could come. For he had been alone on that bicycle; he had ridden into the darkness. Even if his chums at St. Frank's became alarmed at his absence, they could do nothing to aid him. He was beyond their reach. No, he must rely entirely upon his own resources. And what could he do single-handed against so many powerful men?

"Halt, my son!" said Yeza softly, raising an arm and pointing. "Observe!"

Watson started, and his gaze became fixed. It was a gaze of fascinated horror. For the first time he saw that between him and the veiled figure in the carved chair lay a deep pit in the cavern floor. He was standing on the very edge of it, with an attendant priest on either side. It was an irregular-shaped pit, about seven feet deep, with sheer sides. Those sides were of smooth rock, and the floor of the pit was of rock. But it seemed to Watson, as he stared down in the gloom, that the very floor was moving; and he saw large numbers of tiny, twinkling, beady, moving lights.

"I—I don't understand," he muttered.

"But you will," said Yeza impassively.

He motioned to two of the other yellow men, and they approached the rock pit. At the very edge they stopped, casting the light of their flickering torches into the cavity. And then Tommy Watson—saw.

"Oh!" he panted, trembling from head to foot.

For the floor of the pit was literally alive with swarming black shapes. Rats! Hundreds and hundreds of great black rats!

"They are hungry," murmured Yeza, his voice like silk. "They are very hungry, my son. Wait. You shall see."

One of the other priests took a dead rabbit, and flung it into the pit. With a chorus of piping squeals the rats pounced on the feast. They fought madly, and in a moment the bottom of the pit was a writhing mass.

"Horrible—horrible!" panted Tommy Watson, turning to Yeza, and looking at him with fiercely resentful eyes. "Why do you show me this? Do you think I'm interested in your heathen devilry?"

"You are more interested than any," replied Yeza. "For in order to appease the wrath of Taaz, you must now leap into the pit, where the rats will be your companions."

At first Tommy Watson could not quite grasp it. More than once he had seen rats like these hunted by farmers.

There were swarms of them in the old quarry and on the moor, and round the barns and haystacks of the neighbouring farmsteads. The priests of Taaz must have been collecting them. Collecting them, and keeping them in this pit until they were half-starved.

"No, no!" shouted Tommy, suddenly appreciating the awful truth. "I won't! You can't make me!"

"Gather all your courage, my son!" said Yeza sternly. "This is the will of Taaz! It is the test. If the rats do not harm you, then it will be proof that Taaz has granted you his favour; and you shall live in peace."

"But you're mad!" protested Watson rebelliously. "You know as well as I do that the rats will attack me. Look at them! They're mad with hunger; and there are thousands of them! They'll be on me in a flash, and—and—" He shuddered, and put his hands over his face. "No—no! I won't!"

He would have been less than human if he had not been terrified. But it was his natural stubbornness which also impelled him to refuse. Indeed, his actions during the next few moments proved that he was not lacking in dogged pluck.

"Beware, rash youth!" said Yeza malevolently. "You shall have ten more seconds in which to decide. Obey

Taaz willingly, and all might yet be well with you. I shall count one, two, three—"

Crash!

He broke off with a gurgling cry, for at that moment Tommy Watson, with unexpected ferocity and determination, had swung round upon him. Tommy's right fist whipped out, and his clenched knuckles crashed into Yeza's face. The priest staggered back, and Watson, at the same moment, dodged. Like a hare he ran.

In the semi-darkness of the cavern he had seen a black opening—one of the old quarry workings. If he could get into it, he might elude his pursuers. He knew the tunnels; and he remembered many twists and turns. As he ran, he heard a wild, wailing chorus in his rear.

But he had a good start. The very rapidity of his flight had taken his captors by surprise. He reached the tunnel, plunged in, and ran madly into the utter darkness.

Then something seemed to clutch at his ankles, he stumbled, tripped, and went sprawling. Before he could regain his feet, the priests of Taaz were upon him. Two stood by with torches, whilst two others seized him, and pulled him to his feet. Yeza approached, his yellow face distorted with hatred.

"Fool—fool!" snarled the chief priest. "Death shall now be your reward. You have defied Taaz, and you have failed in your task."

Dazed and bruised, Tommy Watson was dragged back, but he had time to see a thin wire which had been stretched across the tunnel entry. So that was how he had been brought down! The priests had been ready for some such break for liberty.

No word was spoken now. Watson, in the fierce grip of his captors, was taken straight back to the deadly pit. Yeza flung up an arm, and the unfortunate junior felt a heavy thrust at his back.

He flung out his arms to save himself, but his fingers clutched only at the air.

He plunged down to the pit bottom—amongst the ravenous rats!

To the Death!

TOMMY thought that his last minute had come as he thudded down upon the rock floor of the pit bottom. As he scrambled madly to his feet he saw the rats scuttling away from him, scampering to the rock walls, squealing, squeaking.

He looked round, and his heart thudded like a sledge-hammer. At any second he expected the rats, after their momentary fright, to attack him. They were all round him, in a wide circle, hundreds of them—crowding round the rock walls, their beady eyes intent upon him. And above stood the priests of Taaz, with their ruddy, flickering torches.

But still the rats did not attack. Not one of them was within a yard of Tommy Watson. He stood in a clear space in the centre, and his agony of mind was intense. When would they attack? By a sheer effort of will, he tore his gaze away and stared upwards.

"You torturing devils!" he panted. "Why don't the rats attack me?"

"Accursed boy!" came Yeza's toneless voice. "You are in no danger."

He made a sign. A rough wooden pole was thrust down into the pit by two of the yellow men. Watson lost no time in swarming up it to the rock floor above. He was trembling from head to foot.

"You're not going to tell me that the rats obeyed you—that they kept back because you told them to!" said Watson defiantly. "You may have queer powers, but—"

"Silence, wretched unbeliever!" interrupted Yeza. "Have you not detected the strange odour which arises from your very clothing?"

Watson jumped.

"Why, yes," he said. "But—but I didn't take much notice—"

"Whilst you were still in the dark tunnel, a spray of certain juices was poured over you," continued Yeza. "It is the juice of a rare Tibetan herb which is harmless to humans, but poison to rats. Never for a moment were you in danger. The rats, at the smell of the herb, fled from you."

Watson breathed a sigh of relief.

"Then—then it was only a trick?" he said angrily. "A dirty trick, too!"

"It was a test of your courage, craven youth, and you failed," replied Yeza harshly. "Not only did you refuse to obey the order of the mighty Taaz, but you fled. Like the coward you are, you sought to elude us."

Watson's eyes blazed.

"That's a lie!" he said hotly. "I wasn't afraid. Only I saw no reason why I should deliberately commit suicide. How was I to know—?"

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"Words—words—words!" broke in Yeza. "It is too late! You have failed in the test, and Taaz demands your life. And so that you may appreciate your vile offence to the full, you will have ample time to think over your sins—ere death comes to release you."

Tommy set his teeth. There was a dread earnestness in Yeza's voice. There was no deception here. The priests meant to kill him.

Tommy Watson's nature, after all, was not unlike Handforth's. Both were stubborn, both were doggedly plucky, and both were rebellious. Handforth had failed in his own test, and he had been left to die.

Tommy Watson was dragged away from the pit edge, and now he found himself being lashed to a great pole—to the end of it. Yet it was no ordinary pole, for it was shaped like a V, with two long arms, but one arm much longer than the other. With stout cords the Removite was lashed to the smaller arm—and so tightly was he bound that he could not move an inch.

Then the crudely made contrivance was lifted bodily by the priests. The main pole was jammed amongst some rocks, and firmly fixed so that it rested at a sharp angle right over the pit. Watson himself, bound to the other arm, was clear of the pit's edge. He understood the reason for this very soon.

Two other priests were pouring liquid from drums into the pit, and the air was filled with the pungent odour of rank paraffin. Watson thought that he could smell petrol, too. He knew that the rats must have been killed almost instantly. And he knew, too, that his own fate was to be unutterably ghastly. For there could be no misunderstanding the meaning of the preparations.

A rock pit into which oil and petrol had been poured! There could be no escape from it—for the pit was like a tank. The liquid swirled blackly and sullenly.

It was all very quickly done, but Watson, when he happened to glance across the cavern, saw, to his surprise, that Raa-ok had gone—the carved chair, with the image of the Vulture God, had gone, too. Only four priests remained, and their own work was now accomplished.

"Fifteen more minutes of life shall you have, wretched one," said Yeza, looking up at the victim. "And during those minutes, you will know that death is approaching nearer and nearer. Thus shall you expiate your offence. Taaz is good to those who obey; but Taaz demands the lives of those who disobey."

"Fiends! Devils!" panted Watson, stubborn to the last. The priests withdrew. Only Yeza remained, and retained one torch in his grip. Then he walked a full twenty feet away and raised the flaming torch on high.

"Farewell, doomed unbeliever!" he exclaimed.

With a quick outward fling of his arm, he hurled the lighted torch into the pit. Instantly, there was a loud, puffing roar, and flames leapt up half-way to the roof of the cavern—a vast body of livid, roaring flames. They went licking round the stout pole hung across the pit, and Watson, although actually clear of the flames, felt the heat strike him like a furnace blast. It was not sufficient to scorch him, although his breathing became difficult because of the choking fumes.

He was alone—utterly alone. Even Yeza had vanished now. And the oil in the pit, boiling and seething, sent up its deadly flames, curling and licking round the pole. Watson, by craning his head, could just manage to stare downwards.

He was filled now with a dull, hopeless horror. He was helpless. He could do nothing whatsoever. There was no escape. For the great pole supporting the one to which he was bound, was slowly burning through. Eventually, it would snap like a carrot—and then the upper part of it, with the arm attached—with Tommy tied to it—would totter into the flaming pit.

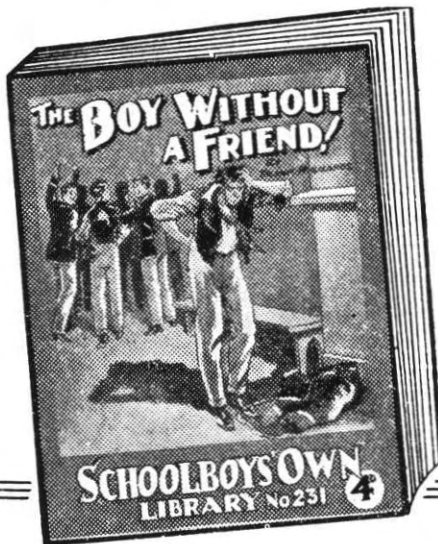
Even through his mental agony and horror, the doomed Removite was struck by the rare cunning of the device. For ten minutes or more he would be safe—unscorched—he could watch the burning log. During that time he would die a thousand deaths—until the actual death, when it did come, would be as nothing by comparison. Just a quick fall into the holocaust—and then oblivion! For his death, at the last moment, would be mercifully swift. He would not retain consciousness for a split second after he had been plunged in.

The minutes ticked away, and the flames leapt and flickered and wavered. Already the pole was burning; the flames were licking up at it, and it was being eaten through.

Taaz was not satisfied, and he was claiming a human life.

"The quarry!" said Nipper tensely.

"By George, yes!" murmured Handforth. "You've hit it! Watson was taken to the quarry! No need to follow these wretched chestnuts any more. We can make a dash for it now, can't we?"



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"Better not be in too great a hurry," said Travers steadily. "We might be on the wrong trail."

The rescue party had met with complete success. None of those Removites believed that they would be able to help Tommy Watson, but it was all they could do to follow the trail—discovering where Watson had gone. And there was always a chance that they might be able to do something.

Right in the village High Street they had found the first of the fallen chestnuts which had rolled through the hole in the cardboard box. With electric torches to help them, the juniors had made good progress. They had reached the side lane near the bridge, and here they discovered that Watson had turned off the main road. After that it was comparatively easy. Along the lane they went, and then, ultimately, out upon the moor. Now they were descending the long slope of the gully—into the quarry. Now and again, on the ground, they found an occasional chestnut. The trail was a perfect guide.

"Lights out now," murmured Nipper, as they advanced. "This is where you went through the mill, Travers, isn't it?"

"By Samson! Don't I remember it?" said Vivian Travers. "But it's hardly likely that our yellow friends will repeat themselves, is it? Won't Tommy be subjected to a new form of test?"

"I should imagine so."

"Anyhow, Tommy was willed down here," said Nipper. "Put out that torch, Handy. If the priests are, in the quarry, we must not let them know we are approaching."

In almost complete darkness, and scarcely making a sound, they went deeper and deeper into the quarry. Nipper saw something gleaming dully in the gloom, and a moment later his fingers rested on the cold handlebars of Watson's bicycle.

"Well, this is the end of the trail," he breathed. "It seems that we're baffled. We don't know what happened. THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,394.

to Tommy after this. Unless—"

"Unless what?" urged Reggie Pitt.

"There's no sign of a living soul in the quarry," replied Nipper. "But what about the tunnels—and the old caverns? We've been in them before, and what a perfect spot for the priests to operate they'd make!"

"By George, you're right!" said Handforth tensely. "That's it! The priests took Watson down one of the old workings. Why, there's an entrance just here, not ten yards away. Isn't it obvious that Watson must have gone in there?"

"It's not obvious, but it's a good working probability," observed Nipper. "Come on, we'll go—Down—down!" he hissed. "Not a sound!"

They crouched low. Nipper's keen eyes had detected vague, shadowy movements. Even after they had waited for some minutes, Nipper did not know whether he had really seen something, or whether his eyes had deceived him. Even after a while, when it was clear that no other living beings were near, Nipper believed that he had seen some of the priests of Taaz slipping away in the gloom.

"They came out of the tunnel," whispered Nipper. "Watson's not with them. I'm certain of it. Good heavens! Supposing he failed to obey? They might have left him—"

"Come on!" shouted Handforth recklessly.

He threw discretion to the winds, and, flashing on his electric torch, made a dash for the quarry working. Nipper and the others, knowing that any concealment was now out of the question, followed his example. With their own electric torches blazing, they dashed after Handforth.

They had not penetrated thirty yards into the tunnel before they felt a change in the temperature. It was warmer; and the air was charged with an acrid, unpleasant odour of fumes.

"It's—it's like burning paraffin, begad!" ejaculated Tregellis-West. "There's a fire somewhere, you chaps!"

"Run—run!" yelled Nipper.

They turned a bend in the tunnel, and ahead of them they saw a lurid glow. Without hesitation, they went tearing into the great cavern, and then they halted, for the thing they saw fascinated them with the sheer horror of it.

A sheet of flame was leaping up from the very floor, it seemed, and a great pole, set diagonally, was nearly burnt through. And, attached to the pole, on a cross-piece set at an angle, was lashed a human shape.

"Tommy!" shouted Nipper, running forward. "Quick, you fellows!"

Even as they raced on, they heard an ominous crackle, and, at the moment of their arrival, with the flames almost scorching them, they saw the great pole crashing.

With a tremendous heave, the rescuers hurled themselves against the crudely made contrivance. It shuddered and shook, and at that moment it collapsed. But, owing to the swerve, occasioned by the rescuers' efforts, Tommy Watson fell clear. Willing hands reached forward, and he was dragged farther back—away from the flames.

In a moment Nipper's knife was out; he slashed through the cords, and Tommy rolled free. He was pale, and his face was streaming with moisture.

"Thanks, you chaps," he croaked. "I—I thought—"

Then he seemed to choke. The others believed that he had fainted, but this was not the case. Soon he was on his feet, and he refused assistance.

"What happened?" asked Handforth. "Why did those yellow devils leave you like that?"

Tommy Watson made no answer. He simply turned his face to the wind, gulping the night air with the gusto of one who had thought himself dead, and now was retasting life.

And never at that time or any other, did he tell his friends what had happened during that terrible evening in the flaming pit!

(Next Week: "THE FATAL 'FIFTH'!")

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