

Another Great Yarn of the Schoolboy Cracksman of St. Jim's—Inside!

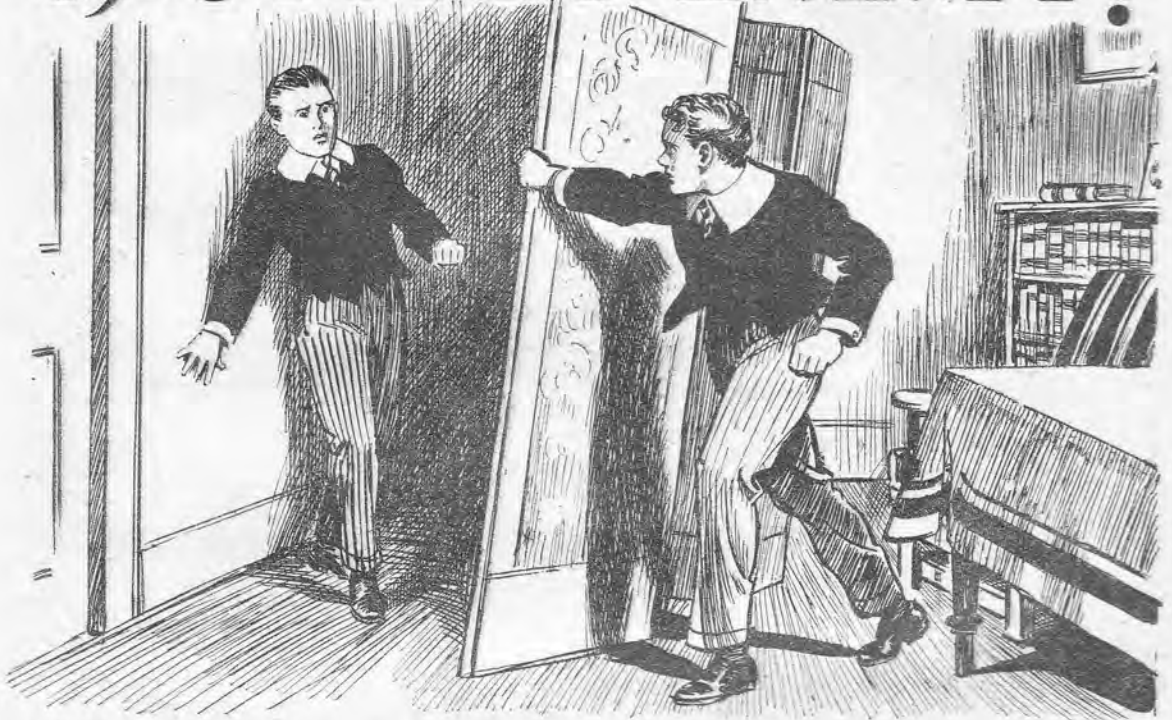
The **GEM** 2^d



GUSSY'S STAR TURN!

THE CUNNING OF AN ENEMY SEEKING TO EXPOSE HIM PUTS THE SCHOOLBOY CRACKSMAN IN A DANGEROUS POSITION!

The TOFF'S ENEMY!



Talbot suddenly stepped towards the screen and pulled it aside. Levison, the cad of the Fourth, was revealed. "You!" said Talbot. "You spying cad!"

CHAPTER 1.

Called Away!

"TELEGRAM for Master Talbot!" said Toby.

Tom Merry & Co., in spotless flannels, were chatting cheerfully outside the School House at St. Jim's, when Toby, the page, came up with the buff envelope in his hand.

Tom Merry was in great spirits that Saturday afternoon. Gordon Gay & Co. of the Grammar School were coming over to play cricket. That was always a very interesting occasion. But this time it was specially interesting, from the fact that Tom Merry had a surprise in store for the Grammarians. The Grammar School junior team always gave St. Jim's juniors a hard tussle, either at football or at cricket, and the last match had been won hands down by the Grammarians on their own ground. They were coming over in the confident expectation of repeating the performance on Little Side at St. Jim's.

Tom Merry & Co. knew that, and the knowledge made them grin. For they had a tremendous surprise for Gordon Gay & Co. There was a new fellow at St. Jim's who had displayed powers as a cricketer that made even the seniors open their eyes wide. Gordon Gay knew nothing of him, but he would learn something of him that afternoon. And Tom Merry & Co. gleefully anticipated the effect upon their old rivals when Talbot of the Shell went on to bowl.

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Talbot had not been long at St. Jim's, but he was admittedly the best player in the junior team. With the willow he was fully the equal of Tom Merry of the School House. With the ball he was every bit as good as Fatty Wynn of the New House, hitherto the junior champion bowler of the school. With a surprise packet like that to spring on the unsuspecting Grammarians, it was no wonder that Tom Merry & Co. were looking forward to the match with keen delight.

"Hallo! This is for you, Talbot!" said Tom, as the House page brought up the telegram. "Don't say it's anything to call you away this afternoon, because you can't go."

"No feah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth with great emphasis. "We couldn't possibly spare you, Talbot, deah boy!"

Talbot slit the envelope with his pen-knife and took out the telegram.

The junior cricketers eyed him grimly as he read it. Telegrams did not often come for juniors, and the inference was that it meant something unusual. But whatever it was, they were determined that Talbot shouldn't miss the match that afternoon.

A dark shade came over Talbot's handsome face as he read the telegram. He thrust it into his pocket, crumpling it in his hand as he did so.

"I'm sorry—" he began.

"Bad news?"

"Oh, no!"

"Then there's nothing to be sorry about," said Tom Merry cheerfully.

"If it's a kind uncle or an aunt that wants to see you this afternoon, you can wire back to him or her—Please go and eat coke!" That will be definite enough."

"Hear, hear!"

"It isn't that—"

"Good! Then it's all right!"

"Not quite all right," said Talbot.

"I'm afraid I shall have to ask you to excuse me this afternoon, after all. I've got to go out!"

"Rats!"

"Bosh!"

"Wats!"

"Piffle!"

Those emphatic exclamations from the cricketers showed their views on the subject. The new Shell fellow coloured uncomfortably.

"I shall really have to go," he said. "It's a—friend. He's come down from London to see me, and he's waiting for me in Wayland."

"Let him wait!" said Monty Lowther. "Everything comes to him who waits, you know, so he will be all right."

"Bettah send him a wire, deah boy, and say you can't come."

"Let him come here," said Tom Merry. "I don't see why he should bother you to go to Wayland. He can come here and see the match, and you can jaw to him between the innings. Toby can take the wire."

"It—it's impossible!"

"Go after the match, then," suggested Figgins of the New House. Talbot shook his head.

ANOTHER WONDERFUL YARN OF OUR SUPER ST. JIM'S SERIES STARRING REGINALD TALBOT.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD

"He's fixed the time for me to see him."

"Like his cheek!" said Blake indignantly. "Look here, Talbot, you can't go! You can't leave us in the lurch like this!"

"It would be wotten, Talbot, deah boy!"

"The Grammarians may be here any minute!"

"I say, Talbot," said Tom Merry remonstratingly, "it is rather thick, you know, cutting the match at the last moment like this. If it were a relation ill, or anything of that kind, it would be different; but just a friend coming down to Wayland—dash it all, I think you ought to stand by us!"

Talbot's handsome face had a troubled look. He was very keen to play in the match, and he wanted very much to oblige Tom Merry & Co. The telegram was evidently very unwelcome to him.

"Why can't the man come here?" asked Herries.

"Yaas, let him come and see the match!" urged Arthur Augustus. "It's no more trouble for him to come to you than for you to go to him. Tell him you're playin' cricket and can't possibly be spared, and he'll come wight enough."

Talbot shook his head.

"Well, why not?" demanded Tom Merry.

Talbot did not reply.

Some of the fellows exchanged rather queer looks. Talbot, handsome, popular, apparently well-to-do, had become one of the most popular fellows in the School House. But carping, ill-natured fellows like Levison of the Fourth had observed that nothing whatever was known about his people; that he hardly ever received a letter, and never a visitor. His antecedents were unknown, his connections never mentioned, and Levison had not been slow to hint that they were therefore shady.

It came into the minds of some of the fellows gathered round Talbot now that perhaps his "friend" at Wayland was someone whom he would not care to have seen at the school—some connection he did not want the St. Jim's fellows to see on any account.

The thought made them feel decidedly uncomfortable. If that was the case, it was pretty rotten for Talbot, as he could not explain very well.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Monty Lowther, breaking an awkward silence. "Here are the Grammarians!"

A motor-coach stopped at the gates of St. Jim's. Gordon Gay & Co. had arrived.

Tom Merry gave Talbot a quick look. "Well, what do you say, Talbot? Here they are. Are you going to leave 'I—I must go!' said Talbot, colouring. "Look here, I'll cut over on my bike and get back as quick as I can. I may be back in time—if you're set on my playing."

Tom Merry's clouded face brightened up.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "If we bat second, you'll have lots of time; if we bat first, I'll put you down for last man in, and we'll keep the innings open by hook or crook until you get back."

"I'll lend you my motor-bike,

Talbot," said Bernard Glyn. "You know how to handle it."

"Hear, hear!" said Blake. "That's a ripping idea. You can do it there and back in an hour, and have time to tell your friend to go and eat coke."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Right-ho!" said Talbot. "I—I say. I'm awfully sorry for this—"

"It's all right," said Tom Merry, his good spirits quite returned now. "Buzz off and get your stink-bike, Glyn. You other chaps come along."

Glyn and Talbot hurried away to the bike-shed, and Tom Merry & Co. went to greet the Grammarians.

CHAPTER 2.

Left in the Lurch!

GORDON GAY & CO. were looking decidedly "chippy" that afternoon. They had scored such a sweeping victory over St. Jim's juniors in the last match that they had come over this time with the most confident anticipations. There were some splendid players in the Grammar School team—Gordon Gay himself, and Wootton major and minor, and Frank Monk and Lane and Carboy and Gustave Blanc, the French junior—more usually called Mont Blong.

"Here we are again!" said Gordon Gay cheerfully, as he shook hands with Tom Merry outside the pavilion on Little Side. "Prepare to meet your giddy doom."

"Yes, razzar," chimed in Mont Blong.

Reginald Talbot, the schoolboy crackman of St. Jim's, has got the police guessing, but there is a boy in the school who suspects him—and that boy is his most dangerous enemy—Ernest Levison!

"And we have somezing to say to you after ze cricket."

The Grammarian chums all chuckled together. Tom Merry regarded them with a look of inquiry.

"What's the little joke?" he asked. "Oh, nothing!" said Gordon Gay airily. "We've got something on next Wednesday at the Grammar School, and we're going to send you invitations, that's all. Hope you'll come."

"Good! What is it?"

"Ahem! Sort of entertainment. Not giving away the particulars at present," said Gay. "There are such things happen, you know, as really ripping ideas being scoffed by envious rivals. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yes, razzar!" chuckled Mont Blong. "I zink zat you have here vot you call a dramatic society, isn't it? But I zink zat you never zink—"

"Shurrup!" said Gay.

"I was not going to tell Merry nuz-

zing, my shum."

"So you're getting up some dramatic entertainment, are you?" said Tom Merry suspiciously. "Well, that's nothing new!"

"But ze vay ve do him is somezing new—ha, ha, ha!"

"Quite a new idea," said Wootton major. "You St. Jim's fellows wouldn't think of it in a month of Sundays."

"Blessed if I know what you're driving at!" said Tom Merry.

"You'll know on Wednesday, and then you'll be ready to kick yourselves," chuckled Gordon Gay. "Now toss up, and let's get to business."

They tossed, and Gordon Gay won, and decided to bat.

Tom Merry & Co. were glad of it. It gave Talbot time to get back for the St. Jim's innings. They would miss him as a bowler, but that could not be helped. Fatty Wynn of the New House could be relied upon to show his usual form, and Redfern and Blake were good change bowlers.

Gordon Gay opened the Grammarians' innings with Wootton major, and they were soon going very strong.

A good many juniors of both Houses gathered round the field to watch the game, and there was a still larger crowd over on Big Side, where Kildare and the great men of the first eleven were playing a visiting team from Abbotsford.

Fatty Wynn bowled the first over, and then Blake went on. Blake was a good bowler, but he could not trouble Gordon Gay. The Australian junior knocked his bowling all over the field, and piled up runs with his partner. Blake made a comical grimace to Tom Merry as the field crossed over.

"Best I can do," he said. "I wish Talbot was here. I fancy Talbot would stop him."

Tom Merry nodded. He was playing a substitute in the field for Talbot. Gordon Gay having assented cheerily to that arrangement. But what the St. Jim's fellows wanted just then was Talbot on the bowling crease.

"Buck up, Fatty," said Figgins, as the fat Fourth Former took the ball for the next over. "We depend on you. Let 'em see what New House bowling is like, anyway, even if School House bounders leave us in the lurch."

"You bet!" said Fatty Wynn. Fatty, fortunately, was in great form. He accounted for Wootton major's wicket in that over. One down for 30.

But even Fatty Wynn could not prevent Gordon Gay from scoring, and the latter was well set when Frank Monk joined him at the wickets. The score had jumped to 46 when Monk was caught out by Tom Merry, and Wootton minor came in. Gay was still going strong. When the innings had lasted an hour the Grammarians were five down for 90, and the St. Jim's field cast anxious glances in the direction of the distant school gates.

Gordon Gay observed it, and he chuckled. He called to Tom Merry as he stopped at point after the field had crossed once more.

"Waiting for your man?" he asked.

"Yes," said Tom.

"A surprise-packet—what?"

"You'll jolly well see when he bats for us!" said Tom.

"Who is it, then—somebody I know?" asked Gay curiously.

"No; a new chap—Talbot."

"Talbot? He played for you in a match at Glyn House last week," asked Gay, "when Glyn's pater had a cricket week there?"

"That's the chap!"

"Well, I hope he'll come. I dare say we shall be able to handle him," smiled Gay. "What do you let your men wander away like this for?"

"He's been called away by a telegram, worse luck!" growled Tom Merry. "But he'll be back in time to bat."

"Play!"

Gordon Gay received the bowling from Redfern. The New House junior

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put all he knew into it, and he was very good. But Gay dealt easily with the bowling, and the over added a dozen runs to the Grammarian score.

It was a single-innings match. There was no time for a full match in an afternoon. Indeed, at the rate matters were going, it looked as if St. Jim's would not get the Grammarians all out, in which case they would have to wait for a declaration. Gordon Gay was at the top of his form, and he was making things hum.

Fatty Wynn was doing his best, but without result so far as the Grammarian skipper was concerned.

And the other bowlers were simply contributing to Gay's score.

Two hours had passed, and Tom Merry gave up hope that Talbot would be back in time to bowl against the Grammar School side. The Grammarian score was 140 for eight wickets. Gordon Gay had accounted for 80 runs on his own, and he was still batting.

"Pile in, Fatty!" said Figgins imploringly, as the fat Fourth Former took the ball once more. "Send that brute packing, and I'll stand you as many tarts as you can eat!"

Fatty Wynn grinned.

"I'll remind you," he said.

And he prepared to bowl with an air of a fellow determined to do or die. Gordon Gay stopped the first ball, and nicked away the second for 2. The third gave him a boundary. But the fourth slid under his bat, and there was a gasp of relief from the St. Jim's field as his wicket fell.

"Well bowled, Fatty!"

And Gordon Gay carried out his bat at last. Nine down for 146. It was a big score for a junior innings.

"Last man in," said Tom Merry, in great relief. "Finish him off, Fatty!"

And Fatty did. Last man in was rewarded with a duck's egg, and the Grammarian innings finished for 146.

The field came off, considerably fagged by the excessive leather-hunting the Grammarians had given them. There was a pause for rest and refreshment in the shape of ginger-beer and lemonade. Talbot had not come.

"Is the boulder going to fail us, after all?" growled Monty Lowther. "I think it's pretty rotten of him clearing off like this."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Can't be helped," said Tom Merry. "I'll put him down for the last man, anyway. And I'll leave Kangaroo last but one to keep him company."

Tom Merry opened the innings for St. Jim's with Blake. Gordon Gay bowled the first over; he was very nearly as good with the ball as with the willow. And Blake, with a lugubrious face, found himself dismissed for 2.

Luck was on the Grammarian side, and the faces of the Saints were growing long. They had had such gorgeous anticipations for the match, owing to their reliance on Talbot. And he had failed them in the hour of need. He had not come back from his mysterious appointment. He might not come back in time to bat at all; and they all knew that without him the visitors' score would never be equalled.

Perhaps that troublesome thought put Tom Merry off his game a little, for in the third over, with Gay bowling again, the St. Jim's skipper was clean bowled. Tom Merry, the best bat in the side, had been bowled for 4. It was all up with St. Jim's. The Grammarian fieldsmen grinned at one

another, regarding the match as all over bar shouting. It looked like it.

St. Jim's luck was out. Monty Lowther scored a duck's egg, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was dismissed for a few runs, and Kerr did little better. Five down for 20 showed on the board, and it was no wonder that the Grammarians grinned. This was even a more sweeping success than their last match with Tom Merry's team.

Fortune smiled again, however, with Figgins and Redfern at the wickets. The two New House juniors played a splendid game, and they were in top-form. The Grammarians were given some leather-hunting for the first time. A very useful 40 from Figgins made the St. Jim's score look more healthy, Redfern having added 20 in the same time.

Then ill-luck swooped down on both of them, Figgins being caught out at point, and Redfern clean bowled in the next over. Seven down for 80.

Fatty Wynn and Digby were at the wickets now, and neither was expected to hold out long against Gay's bowling. The last two on the list were Kangaroo—Harry Noble of the Shell—and Talbot. And Talbot had not come back. If he did not come in time, Herries was to bat. Fatty Wynn had run 2 successfully when he was caught in the slips.

"Man in, Kangy!" said Tom Merry glumly.

Kangaroo joined Digby at the wickets. Kangaroo could be relied upon to hold the fort; but Dig was not quite up to dealing with Gordon Gay. He lived through an over or two, but was caught out by Frank Monk. Digby looked very glum as he came out. He knew what was wanted, and he had done his best to keep the innings open till Talbot should turn up. But fortune had not favoured him.

"Last man in," said Blake gloomily.

"And Talbot's not here!"

There came the roar of a motor-bike, and Bernard Glyn gave a yell.

"That's my machine."

"Hurrah!"

CHAPTER 3.

Schoolboy and Cracksman!

TALBOT had reached Wayland quickly enough on Bernard Glyn's motor-bike. He jumped off the machine outside Wayland Station, and put it up there, and, turning from the station, proceeded on foot to his destination.

Glyn had lent him the bike gladly enough to enable him to reach his destination as quickly as possible; but a motor-bike would have attracted rather too much attention in the purlieus into which the Shell fellow now plunged.

From the station he crossed the High Street and the market-place and River Street, and turned into a lane that led down towards the river. At the end of that narrow and dirty lane were wharves and moored barges, and an ill-looking inn facing the river, with a dirty wooden veranda almost overhanging the water. Rough-looking men were hanging about the Blackbird Inn, smoking pipes, and they stared curiously at the well-dressed St. Jim's fellow. Talbot passed into the inn quickly, desirous of attracting as little attention as possible.

"Is Mr. Walker here?" he asked a red-faced bar-keeper in shirtsleeves.

The man shook his head.

"You Master Smith?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Then Mr. Walker left word he'd be here at 'arf-past four, as per telegram, and if you come early you was to wait in this room."

"Thank you! Will you show me the room?"

"This 'ere way!"

Talbot followed the man up the rickety stairs, glad to escape the curious looks of the dirty loafers about the place.

He was shown into a dirty, dusty room overlooking the river. He did not sit down, but paced impatiently to and fro in the room, occasionally staring out of the dirty windows over the wide, shining Rhyl.

The appointment in the telegram had been for half-past four; but Talbot had hoped to find his "friend," and get away sooner. There was nothing for it, however, but to wait for Mr. Walker to come in. Mr. Walker had probably other business in the market-town as well as his appointment with the new junior of St. Jim's.

He looked at his watch, again and again, with growing impatience. But it was a quarter-past four before the door opened, and a thick-set man, with a bulldog face and stubby chin, came into the room.

"You've come at last, Hookey."

Mr. Hookey Walker nodded.

"You're early, Toff," he said.

"I wanted to get back to the school."

"Didn't you tell me as Saturday afternoon was always a 'arf-holiday, and so you could always meet me—?"

"Yes, yes; that's right. But there's a cricket match on, and I was to play," said Talbot. "It couldn't be helped; but I want to get back for the finish if I can."

Mr. Walker sat down and lit a cigar. He offered his case to Talbot, but the Shell fellow refused it with a gesture.

"No?" said Hookey Walker, in surprise.

"I've chucked that."

"I'll order up something to drink."

"Not for me," said Talbot.

Mr. Hookey Walker looked at him very curiously.

"You ain't at the school now, Toff; you're with an old pal."

"I don't care for it, thanks! I've got to keep myself fit for cricket."

"Getting on all right at St. Jim's—what?"

"Excellently."

"That's good. Not a suspish?"

"No."

"Blessed if you don't take the cake, Toff!" said Mr. Walker, in great admiration. "I wonder what the headmaster would say if he knew that Master Talbot was really the Toff, the son of old Captain Crow, the cracksman, and himself the finest cracksman that ever cracked a crib?"

"He will never know," said Talbot.

"No fear," said Hookey Walker at once. "That wouldn't suit our book. I must say, Toff, the wheeze has gone better than I ever expected. Bagging a collection of coins in the school—worth several hundred quid—in the first week you was there, and then that big job at Glyn House, it was splendid! I own up that you was right from the start, and that this was the best game we have ever planned. And you look the part, too—you do your school credit, you do."

"I think I pass pretty well."

"You do," said Mr. Walker. "And

about St. Jim's—there's a big job to be done there, and you ought to have it all out and dried by this time."

Talbot shook his head.

"No!" said Mr. Walker, in surprise.

"Not yet," said Talbot decidedly.

"Why not? It will be a good 'aul," said Mr. Walker. "The school plate is worth 'eaps of money. And with you inside the 'ouse, it ought to be as easy as rollin' off a log."

A troubled look came over Talbot's anxious face.

"It can wait," he said.

Mr. Walker fixed his eyes somewhat oddly upon Talbot.

"Look 'ere, Toff, you ain't foolin' me? I've noticed a bit of a change in you since you was at the school. You ain't forgettin' who you are, and wot you are at the school for?"

"I've got to be careful," said Talbot. "I didn't tell you, but I've been in danger of being spotted already—there was a fellow there, a kid in the Third Form, who knew me."

"You don't say!" ejaculated Mr. Walker.

"Did you ever see a ragged kid named Frayne—Joe Frayne—who used to hang about Angel Alley?" said Talbot.

"I think I remember—he disappeared—"

"Well, he was at St. Jim's."

"Joe Frayne, the cadger and pick-pocket, at St. Jim's!" exclaimed Mr. Walker, in astonishment. "Wot are you givin' me, Toff?"

"It's true. A fellow there, Tom Merry, took pity on him, and got his uncle to send him to the school to give him a chance in life. He knew me at once."

"Well, strike me!" murmured Mr. Walker.

"I had done the kid some good turns when he was a starving little waster in the slums, and he kept my secret," went on Talbot. "He believed that I was at St. Jim's on the straight. But when Mr. Selby's numismatic collection disappeared, he suspected me."

"No wonder!" commented Mr. Walker. "But he didn't blow the gaff?"

"No. I kept him quiet. But after the job at Glyn House—Frayne was in the house at the time—he knew that was my work, and he came down on me. But my luck was in, as it happened. I had saved his pal, young D'Arcy, from being killed, and he felt that he couldn't give me away. He's a decent little chap; but he is as straight as a die, and he wanted me to hand the loot back—"

Mr. Walker chuckled.

"That's a good one!" he remarked. "Very moderate, I must say! But you could 'ave offered to let 'im stand in, Toff."

"No good. I tell you he was straight. And the end was that, knowing what I had done, and expecting more of the same kind to follow, he felt that he would be practically an accomplice if he held his tongue, so he's run away from the school to get out of it. He hasn't been found since."

"Phew!"

"But I believe he will hold his tongue. If there were a burglary at St. Jim's, of course, he would hear of it, and—very likely he would give me away. Of course, if the police knew that Captain Crow's son was at the school, it wouldn't take them long to find the cracksmen."

"Right!" said Mr. Walker. "That

kid will 'ave to be found and his mouth stopped, afore we bring off that job; I see that. You ain't any idea where 'e's gone?"

"I suppose he's gone back to London, that's all. But he's not to be hurt, Hookey."

"His mouth will 'ave to be stopped," said Mr. Walker.

"Mind, I mean what I say," said Talbot. "I won't have that kid hurt. He's a decent little chap, and he's kept my secret. St. Jim's can wait."

Mr. Walker looked sullen.

"That's all very well," he said; "but if you are growing soft, Toff—"

"Whether I am growing soft or not, I'm going to be obeyed, or I cut my connections with the gang," said Talbot. "You know you can't do without me. I've taken my father's position as your leader because I'm suited to the place, and all the gang were willing—and you can't say it hasn't been a success, so far."

"True enough," admitted Mr. Walker.

"Well, St. Jim's can wait."

"Jest as you say, Toff," assented Mr. Walker, though he gave the boy a very curious sidelong glance. "But wot else is goin' on? What about the other school near Rylecombe—the Grammar School? Anything doin' there?"

"I've got that on my list," said Talbot coolly. "I was to make the acquaintance of the Grammar School fellows to-day, if you hadn't called me away. I think that will be worth while. I've marked that down as the next job."

"Good!" said Mr. Walker, evidently relieved. "That's more like your old

self, Toff. Blessed if I didn't begin to think you was weakenin'!"

Talbot smiled bitterly.

"I'm not likely to forget who I am, or what I am at St. Jim's for," he said. "I may have felt pretty sick about it lately, as the fellows are all so decent to me; but that's neither here nor there. Business first."

"Exactly."

"I can't come here again," said Talbot. "It's too risky. I'll let you know where we are to meet when I'm a bit better posted about the Grammar School, and make the arrangements. Now I'll get off; the fellows are waitin' me."

"You're right in the swim there, ain't you?" asked Mr. Walker, apparently very much surprised and impressed.

"Right in."

"Well, I don't wonder. With your looks and brains, you ought to get on. Only, don't forget, Toff, it won't do for you to get thinkin' that you are simply a schoolboy like the rest, and gettin' ideas into your 'ead, and so on. You've got to remember that you are the Toff, and the leader of Captain Crow's old gang."

"I'm not likely to forget!" said Talbot bitterly. "Good-bye, Hookey!"

They shook hands, and Talbot quitted the room. Mr. Hookey Walker was left with a very thoughtful expression upon his face, and he shook his head several times after Talbot had gone. Perhaps he read the boy's thoughts and feelings more clearly than Talbot had supposed.

Talbot threaded his way through the riverside lanes, and breathed more freely when he came out into the High Street again. His expression was



"The school plate will be a good 'aul," said Mr. Walker. "With you inside the 'ouse it ought to be as easy as rollin' off a log!" A troubled look came over Talbot's face. "It can wait," he said.

moody and thoughtful, and his lip had a bitter curve. What Mr. Walker had surmised was quite correct, and Talbot realised it very clearly. At St. Jim's the force of association was telling upon him; the boy crackman, a daring criminal and leader of a dangerous gang, was beginning to "weaken."

The trust and good fellowship he found among Tom Merry & Co. at the old school had made him shudder inwardly many a time, as he reflected what he was, and what they would think of him if they knew the truth. But he drove such thoughts from his mind as fast as they arose.

His face was very moody as he remounted Glyn's motor-bike and sped away towards the school.

It cleared as the old school came in sight. By an effort he banished Mr. Hookey Walker and all his black associations from his mind. Once more he was a St. Jim's fellow, and he thought and felt like one. For the time being the "Toff" was dead, and it was Talbot of the Shell who was speeding back to St. Jim's to lend his aid to his comrades in the cricket match.

CHAPTER 4.

"Bravo, Talbot!"

"HERE he is!"
"Here's Talbot!"
"Just in time!"

Talbot jumped off the motor-bike and ran towards the playing fields.

Tom Merry greeted him with great relief.

"Last man in, Talbot!"

"Waiting for you!" exclaimed Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I'm sorry I'm so late," panted Talbot. "I got back as quickly as I could. It won't take me a couple of minutes to change."

He ran into the pavilion.

"That your man?" called out Gordon Gay.

"That's the pippin!" replied Tom Merry. "You don't mind giving us a minute or two more?"

"Not a bit!" said Gay cheerily.

"Just a chance," said Tom Merry.

The field was waiting, but Talbot did not keep them waiting long. In an incredibly short time he came dashing out of the pavilion in flannels, with his bat in his hand. He ran on to the pitch. Kangaroo waved his hand in greeting.

"Nine down for 82!" Jack Blake remarked. "Thank goodness Talbot's back! There's a chance yet!"

"Just a chance," said Tom Merry. Talbot had to receive the last ball of the over that had been fatal to Digby. He knocked the ball away, and three were run, which brought Talbot to the batting end again as the field crossed. But that hit showed that Talbot was quite in his old form, and the St. Jim's crowd gave him an encouraging cheer.

They watched eagerly as Talbot dealt with the bowling. The first ball was nicked away for two, the second driven for four, and then came another two, and then a three. Tom Merry clapped his hands joyfully. The innings was looking up once more. Talbot had returned in time to pull the game out of the fire.

If Mr. Hookey Walker had been able to see the Toff now, he would probably have been very much surprised.

No one at that moment would have taken the Shell fellow for anything but what he appeared to be—a schoolboy cricketer, playing up for his side in first-class style, without a thought in his mind for anything but the grand old game.

"Bravo, Talbot!"

"Hurrah, hurrah!"

"Bai Jove, we're lookin' up!" Arthur Augustus exclaimed with great satisfaction. "I wathah think we shall wallop the Gwammah School boundahs, aifah all."

"I rather think Talbot will!" grinned Blake.

"Bravo, Kangy!" shouted Tom Merry, as the Cornstalk drove away the ball, and the batsman crossed the pitch like lightning.

It was a single; and Talbot drove away the last ball of the over for three.

"One hundred!" chuckled Fatty

Wynn. "Climbing up. I must go and have a ginger-beer for this."

"Forty-six to tie, forty-seven to win!" said Monty Lowther. "If Kangy can keep the innings open, Talbot will get all we want."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Gordon Gay looked very determined as he went on to bowl to Talbot. He put forth all his skill as a bowler, and the field were on the alert for catches; but there was no touching the "sticks," and there were no catches for the eager hands in the field. Talbot did not give the enemy a chance. And he did not seem to be playing a cautious game, either.

The ball was knocked away almost every time, and the over gave him eleven, finishing with the odd run to keep the batting. And the next over added six. St. Jim's score stood at 117; the figures were climbing up.

It was clear that Talbot was too strong for the bowling, and it depended upon Kangaroo to keep the innings open for him. And Kangaroo piled in to do his best. He was an excellent bat, but he was willing to leave most of the hitting to Talbot, for the sake of his side. Kangaroo ran no risks, and gave Talbot all the batting he could. The score was going up in jumps now.

The cheering was incessant. Talbot's hitting was tremendous, and once the ball sped over the roof of the pavilion. Another ball whizzed far from the eager field, and landed in the Head's garden.

The Grammarians tried Talbot with every kind of ball; but "paid" was put to every one, so to speak.

And Talbot showed no signs of fatigue. His hitting was terrific, but it did not seem to tell on him in the least. Towards the finish the game was fast and furious.

Fours were quite common now, and the score went up in leaps and bounds. Jack Blake gave a yell when the figures reached 144. Kangaroo was batting now, and he stole a single, and brought Talbot to the batting end to finish.

Gordon Gay sent down his best ball with a vague hope of settling his dangerous adversary yet. But it was in vain; there was a light smack as the willow met the leather and the ball glanced away beyond the eager fingers of mid-off, and the batsmen ran once—twice—and then there was a roar.

"Hurrah! Hurrah!"

"St. Jim's wins!"

"Bravo, Talbot!"

"Bwavo, deah boy!"

"Hip-pip!"

And Talbot was seized by the crowd that swarmed on the pitch, hoisted on the shoulders of Tom Merry and Figgins, and carried in triumph to the pavilion.

Gordon Gay, taking that unexpected defeat in perfect good temper, slapped Talbot on the shoulder as he was set down by his gleeful chums.

"Ripping innings!" he exclaimed. "Where did you learn to bat like that, Talbot?"

"Where do you think?" chuckled Kangaroo. "In Australia, of course."

"Hallo! You come from my part?" asked Gay cordially, holding out his hand to Talbot. "Shake! What part of Australia do you hail from?"

"West," said Talbot briefly.

"Oh, that's a good step from where I belong!" said Gay. "Still, I'm glad it's a fellow-Cornstalk who's done us in like this. You've got a prize-packet there, Tom Merry."

"Don't we jolly well know it!" chuckled Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You fellows are staying to tea,"

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said Tom Merry. "You can tell us about your giddy entertainment over the feed."

The Grammarians were entertained to tea quite royally by Tom Merry & Co.; but they did not say much about that mysterious entertainment planned for the following Wednesday. But they pressed the chums of St. Jim's to come over and see it.

"But it's wathah like buyin' a pig in a poke, you know," Arthur Augustus remarked. "Hadh't you bettah tell us all about it?"

Gordon Gay chuckled.

"No fear; you'd bone the wheeze if we did."

"Weally, Gay—"

"I dare say it's one of our old wheezes you've borrowed," said Monty Lowther.

"Rats!"

"And many of zem," grinned Mont Blong.

And the Grammarians departed in their motor-coach, leaving Tom Merry & Co. considerably puzzled about that scheme which was to "come off" on Wednesday, but otherwise in a state of complete satisfaction over their victory on the cricket field.



CHAPTER 5.

The Mystery of Joe Frayne!

THE Terrible Three were in their study at work with their preparation. Tom Merry had finished, and was leaning back in his chair, with a thoughtful frown upon his face, while Lowther and Manners were still working.

The captain of the Shell seemed to be plunged into deep and not very pleasant thought.

Monty Lowther finished at last, and hurled a heavy volume with a crash across the study to testify his satisfaction.

"That's done," he said. "Hallo, Tommy! Wherefore that worried look? Has Miss Fawcett been sending you some more medicines? And have you been taking it?"

Tom Merry smiled.

"No, ass! I was thinking about young Frayne. What can have become of the kid? It's nearly a week now since he bolted from St. Jim's, and he seems to have disappeared completely."

"It's queer," said Lowther. "Why on earth did he bolt? He was getting on toppling in the school, and he was chummy with young Wally, and couldn't have wanted to leave him. You remember when Talbot rescued Wally—the time he wanted to break his neck in the tree at Glyn House—Frayne was cut up tremendously. He was awfully attached to young Wally. Yet he buzzed off like this and left him. Wally's been looking as sick as a dog ever since he bolted. He misses him. What can the young ass have done it for?"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"I've tried to think it out," he said; "but it's no good. Frayne was utterly miserable the night before he went. He had something on his mind, but he wouldn't explain what it was. I know he hasn't gone back to his own rotten life. There never was a straighter kid than Frayne since he came to St. Jim's."

"I'm sure of that."

"The only thing I can think of is that some old acquaintance of his from Angel Alley may have got at him somehow; but I don't see why that should make him bolt. It's a giddy mystery. Of course, if he didn't want to stay

here, I wouldn't have wanted to keep him at St. Jim's; but I'm sure he did want to stay. I can help feeling worried about what's become of him. He had some money; but after that's gone, I don't know what he will do."

There was a tap at the door, and Wally D'Arcy of the Third came in. He had a letter in his hand.

"I've heard!" he said.

"From Joe?" asked Tom Merry eagerly.

D'Arcy minor nodded.

"Yes; read the letter."

The Terrible Three read the letter together. It was in Joe's somewhat crooked handwriting, and in English which had often caused him trouble with Mr. Selby, the master of the Third Form of St. Jim's:

"Dear Wally,—I hope you don't think any bad of me because I have hopped it like this here. I had to leave St. Jim's, and I can't explain why—not even to an old pal like you. But if I had stayed, I should have had to see things going on what I couldn't stop, not without acting in a way that would be wrong and ungrateful. But I couldn't be a party to underhand goings on, after the way you have all been so decent to me. So I had to mizzle. I hope you won't forget me, and I hope you will believe that I feel it very hard to leave you and Master Tom. But there wasn't nothing else to be dun.

"Your old pal,

"JOE FRAYNE."

"P.S.—I'm orlright. I've got a job, and I'm earning my living quite well, and I hope I needn't have to tell you or Master Tom that it's all straight, and always will be."

"No address," said Manners.

"What was the postmark on the envelope, Wally?"

"London, E.C.," said Wally.

"Then he is in London."

"And that's all," said Wally. "No chance of finding him; and he doesn't want to be found. But what does he mean—what was going on that he speaks about? I can't understand it."

Tom Merry wrinkled his brows in thought.

"It beats me," he said. "He says

that something underhand was going on, and he couldn't be a party to it, and he couldn't stop it without acting ungratefully. Whom the dickens had he to be grateful to?"

"Well, you yourself," said Wally. "You fished him out of that slum, and you and your uncle brought him here."

"He can't be referring to me here," said Tom. "If there was something underhand going on, I should have advised him to show it up, whatever it was—his gratitude to me wouldn't stop it. And my uncle in America can't have anything to do with it. He's referring to somebody else."

"The Head, perhaps," suggested Manners.

"But that's impossible. Gratitude to the Head wouldn't make him keep silent about some bisney he came to know of. He must mean that some fellow he has reason to be grateful to is doing something rotten. He can't give him away, and at the same time he feels he can't stay here and keep silent while it's going on."

"Well, it beats me!" said Wally. "If that's what he means, and I suppose it is, it can't apply to you or the Head—or any of us. But whom, then?"

"Nor Talbot?" said Lowther.

"Talbot!"

"Well, he was overflowing with gratitude to Talbot for risking his life on your account, Wally, when you played the giddy goat at Glyn House. But then Talbot is a thoroughly decent chap—there's nothing underhand in connection with him."

"No fear!" said Tom Merry promptly.

"It's a giddy mystery," said Manners; "but it shows the little chap has acted from good motives, anyway. You'd better take that letter to the Head, Wally. He's been worrying a good bit about Frayne, I know."

Wally nodded, and left the study with the letter.

"I'll speak to Talbot about it," said Tom Merry, rising. "After all, he knew Frayne before he came to St. Jim's—you remember Joe recognised him his first day here, and called him by some queer nickname—"

"The Toff," said Lowther.

"Yes, that was it. It's barely possible Talbot may be able to think out what the kid is driving at."

"Won't do any harm to ask him, anyway," agreed Lowther.

And the Terrible Three, having finished their work, left the study and looked into Talbot's, which was the next room in the Shell passage.

Talbot was there, with Gore and Skimpole, his study-mates. He gave the Terrible Three a pleasant nod and a smile.

"Busy?" asked Tom.

"No; just finished."

"Good! Wally's just had a letter from young Frayne."

Talbot started a little.

"I'm glad," he said quietly. "Does he explain why he bolted away from the school in that queer way?"

"He does, and he doesn't. He says he knew of something underhand that was going on, and couldn't stay here to be a party to it—"

"That's queer," said Talbot calmly. "Why couldn't he show it up, then, whatever it was?"

"He says that he couldn't do that without acting wrongly and ungratefully."

"Towards whom?"

"He doesn't say."

"Then he doesn't let in much light on the matter," said Talbot, with a perplexed look. "It appears to me that he has some silly idea in his head—probably entirely a mistake. The only people he has to be grateful to here are yourself and the Head."

"And you," said Tom.

"I? Why me?"

"Because you saved Wally's life."

"Oh, that!" said Talbot, with a smile. "How did that concern Frayne?"

"Wally's his best chum, you know. I don't suppose he can be referring to you in this letter, of course; but I thought I'd ask you if you could guess whom he was driving at. You know more about him than we do, as you knew him before he came to St. Jim's."

Talbot shook his head.

"I can't make head or tail of it," he said. "It beats me! Where is the kid now?"

"He doesn't give his address," said Tom Merry ruefully. "He doesn't want to be questioned, I suppose?"

"Well, I'm afraid I can't help you," said Talbot. "I'd do so willingly if I could. He was a very decent little chap, especially considering where he came from. I hope he'll think better of it and come back."

"I wish I could think so; but it doesn't look like it," said Tom. "Still, I'm glad to know that he's all right, and not in want. That's something. Coming down, if you've finished?"

"Right-ho!"

And Talbot and the Terrible Three left the study together, and sauntered down to the Common-room on the best of terms.

Little did the chums of the Shell dream of what was passing in Talbot's mind, or that the new fellow could have explained if he had chosen the exact reason why the waif of the Third had fled from St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 6.

Gussy's Great Idea!

"YOU fellows going over to the Grammar School on Wednesday?"

Talbot asked the question as the Shell came out of the Form-room after lessons on Monday.

There had been much cogitation among Tom Merry & Co. on the subject of the "wheeze" planned by Gordon Gay and the amateur actors of Rylcombe Grammar School, but they were still no wiser. Naturally, the St. Jim's junior dramatists did not want to be beaten in their own line by their old rivals of the Grammar School, and they would have given a great deal to know the intentions of Gordon Gay & Co.

"I don't know," said Tom Merry, as Talbot asked the question. "You see, if we accept the invitation to join the giddy audience, we can't very well go for the boundaries. And, of course, we're up against them."

"Of course!" said Talbot, with a smile. "I understand that."

"We can't let the Grammar School go one better than us," said Tom Merry. "Their blessed dramatic society is only a second edition of ours, anyway. If they've got some dodge for going one better than us, it's our bisney to find out what it is, and turn the tables on them somehow; not to go over and swell their audience for them."

"Only there doesn't seem any way of doing it," Monty Lowther remarked.

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"Have you got some idea, Talbot?"

Manners asked. "If you have, get it off your chest. Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings, you know."

Talbot laughed.

"Well, why not go over and scout?" he suggested. "It's plainly something in the dramatic line, and so they're bound to have rehearsals. If we could spot them at it, it would be easy enough to see what the little game is."

"Something in that," said Manners.

"Only they'd be on their guard at once if they saw us inside the gates," remarked Monty Lowther.

"No need for them to see us. We can get in quietly on our own. I don't know the place, but you fellows have been over there often enough," said Talbot. "We could get out after calling-over, and get back in time for bed."

"By Jove, it's not a bad idea!" said Tom Merry. "The four of us could go. No use letting those Fourth Form kids muck it up. We couldn't take a crowd."

"But there wouldn't be much time for scouting if we had to walk to the Grammar School and back between calling-over and bed-time," said Manners.

"Bike it," said Talbot.

"My dear chap, getting the bikes out over the wall—ahem—"

"No need. We'll take the bikes out to-day, and leave them out ready," said Talbot. "We can hide them somewhere close by the school easily enough."

"My hat!"

The Terrible Three looked at their new chum admiringly. Certainly Talbot was a fellow with ideas.

"Jolly good idea!" said Tom Merry heartily. "We'll do it! And if we get on to the Grammar School dodge, we'll turn the tables on them somehow."

"Yaas, wathah!" chimed in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "What is the little game, deah boys? Can I help you?"

And the swell of St. Jim's joined the Shell fellows, and turned his famous eyeglass upon them inquiringly.

"Ahem! No," said Tom Merry. "In this case, Gussy, you would be odd man out. But we'll tell you all about it afterwards."

"Wats! You had better confide the whole mattah to me, and twust me to lead. In a case like this you wequiah a fellow of tact and judgment at the head of affairs. We've got to find out Gordon Gay's wheeze, deah boys; and if you fellows twy it by yourselves, you are bound to make a muck of it. I have got an ideah. You fellows know what a wippin' actor I am."

"We do!" grinned Monty Lowther. "We does!"

Arthur Augustus lowered his voice and glanced round cautiously.

"Well, I'll tell you my ideah. -I was thinkin' of goin' ovah to the Gwammah School in disguise, and scoutin'."

"Ha, ha, ha! You did that once before!" chuckled Monty Lowther. "They seem to have spotted you, all the same."

"Yaas. But I should be vewy careful this time. Fwank Monk mentioned on Saturday that his patah, the Head of the Gwammah School, was away for the week-end, and wasn't comin' back till to-night. Now, suppose I made myself up as Doctah Monk, and dwopped in, you know, just as if he had returned a little earliar than was intended—"

"Great Scott!"

"I've got all the necessawy things, you know. It's only a case of dwessin' up and makin' up my face, and so on," said Arthur Augustus. "I pwoposed it to Blake, and he simply made wude

wemarks. Pewwaps you fellows would care to help me."

"Rats!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Gussy, old man, you're a genius,"

said Monty Lowther enthusiastically.

"I'll come and help you with pleasure."

"You are vewy good, Lowthah!"

Pway come on, and I'll start at once."

"You chaps see about the bikes," said

Lowther. "I'm going to help Gussy."

And he closed one eye—the eye that

was farthest from Arthur Augustus.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Talbot grinned, and walked away to the bicycle-shed, to get the bikes out and hidden, ready for the expedition after calling-over. Monty Lowther followed the swell of St. Jim's to the Fourth Form dormitory.

Arthur Augustus prided himself upon a great many things—among other things his great ability as an actor. He was firmly persuaded that, with his marvellous gifts in the "making-up" line, he could impersonate anybody with success; and several failures had, somehow, not diminished his confidence. As Arthur Augustus was generally rolling in money, he had no lack of stage "props."

He opened a large box in the dormitory, and began to select the garments for the part he had assigned himself.

"Doctah Monk weahs a black coat and toppah," he remarked. "That's quite easy. I have a set of whiskahs just like his, too, and a wig of the same colour. I shall have to make-up my face vewy carefully, of course."

"Right!" said Lowther briskly.

"Get into these black bags and boots and spats—Monk's pater always wears boots and spats. And a black coat with tails. By Jove, you are beginning to look like the headmaster of the Grammar School already!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus, with satisfaction. "I weally think I shall take them in all wight. And when I go ovah there, you know, I shall speak to Gordon Gay, and say I take a gwent intwest in his plans for Wednesday, and ask him to explain all about it. Of course, he can't wufuse to explain to his headmastah. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" echoed Lowther.

"Then I shall know the whole bisney fwom start to finish!" said D'Arcy gleefully. "Wathah a nobbay ideah—that?"

"Nobby," said Lowther. "Nobby isn't the word! It's ripping, spiffing, topping!"

"Now to make-up my face," said Arthur Augustus, dabbing at his aristocratic countenance before the looking-glass. "I wathah think I'm a dab at this, Lowthah!"

"You are!" agreed Lowther, feeling an internal pain from the necessity of choking back his laughter.

Arthur Augustus, in black coat and trousers, and a moustache, wig and beard, and spectacles, looked simply extraordinary.

He did not look in the slightest degree like an old gentleman; but he looked very unlike the swell of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's.

When he had added the make-up to his face, his aspect was more extraordinary still.

"That all wight, deah boy?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you laughin' at, Lowthah?"

"I—I was thinkin' of the way you are going to take Gordon Gay in!" gasped Lowther. "Oh, my only aunt! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas, it's funny, isn't it?"

"Funny isn't the word!" exclaimed Lowther. "It's—it's spifficating! Have you nearly finished?"

"Pewwaps a few more artistic touches," said Arthur Augustus, dabbing away with the grease-paint.

Then he jammed a topper on the grey wig, and took a survey of himself in the glass. Lowther really wondered that it did not crack the glass. The mere thought of Arthur Augustus going out in the daylight in that state almost threw Lowther into hysterics.

"I wathah think that will do," said Arthur Augustus, with satisfaction.

"Yes; another touch would spoil it," said Lowther. "Let me smooth out your coat from the back."

"Thank you, deah boy!"

Monty Lowther smoothed the back of the coat, and as he did so he pinned thereon a card which he had prepared while the Fourth Former was making-up. He had pencilled on the card, in large letters:

**"FOUND AT LAST!
THE MISSING LINK!"**

"Is my back all wight now, Lowthah?"

"Right as rain!"

"You weally think I shall pass as Doctah Monk?"

"Ahem! I don't think you'll ever make yourself more like him than you are now," said Lowther diplomatically.

"Good! I may as well be off now. If the fellows notice me comin' out of the House, they will simply think that Doctah Monk has been payin' a visit to Doctah Holmes—what?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway don't laugh and give me away, deah boy!"

"Certainly not!" gasped Lowther. "I'll be as grave as a judge. Start!"

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy quitted the dormitory on his great adventure.

CHAPTER 7. In Deep Disguise!

JACK BLAKE was looking out of the doorway of Study No. 6 when he was startled by the appearance of a most extraordinary figure coming along the passage.

Blake rubbed his eyes and looked at it again.

The features of the stranger were the well-known, aristocratic features of his noble chum, the Hon. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

But they were nearly hidden by crude daubs of grease-paint and a weird-looking collection of false whiskers and beard and moustache.

That Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was made up as Dr. Monk, the Head of Rylecombe Grammar School, did not occur to Blake for a moment. Arthur Augustus did not bear even the most distant resemblance to that gentleman. Blake stood and gasped as his disguised chum came down the passage.

Arthur Augustus, thinking he would test his disguise with a fellow who knew him well, paused to speak to Blake, blinking at him through a large pair of spectacles.

"H'm! Your name is Blake, I believe, little boy?" he said, imitating, as well as he could, the voice of Dr. Monk—not very successfully.

"What?" ejaculated Blake.

"I trust we shall see you at the Gwammah School on the occasion of our little dwamatic entertainment next Wednesday, deah boy?"

Blake gasped; he could not speak. "Dr. Monk" passed on, leaving Blake clinging to the doorpost. The disguised



junior met Herries and Digby in the passage. They stared at him blankly.

"Hallo!" ejaculated Herries.

"What the dickens—" said Digby.

"Pway allow me to pass, little boys!"

"Wh-a-a-at?"

"Who are you calling little boys, you ass?"

"Weally, Hewwies, your headmastah would be vewy angwy with you if he heard you chawactewisn' his fwient Doctah Monk as an ass!"

"Dr. Monk?" said Herries feebly.

"Yaas. I pwesume you wecognise me?"

"Recognise you?" repeated Herries.

"Of course!"

"Then pway let me pass, little boy!"

"Oh, my hat!"

Herries almost collapsed. Arthur Augustus passed him loftily, and went downstairs. The two juniors stared after him, and read the card on his back, and burst into a shriek of laughter. Monty Lowther came down the passage.

"Shush!" he exclaimed chidingly.

"What on earth's the little game?" gasped Digby.

"Gussy is disguised as Dr. Monk. He's going over to the Grammar School like that!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus descended the stairs quickly, and passed out into the quadrangle. There were a good many fellows there, and they all stared at the extraordinary figure, and yells of laughter rose on all sides.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What is it?"

"The wild man from Borneo!"

"The missing link! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Found at last!"

shrieked Levison of the Fourth.

"The missing link! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove!"

murmured Arthur Augustus uneasily.

"Surely they don't wecognise me? Lowthah seemed to think it was all wight!"

He hurried across the quadrangle, followed by hysterical

shrieks of laughter. Tom Merry, Manners, and Talbot had just come in, and they met the disguised junior face to face.

They halted, dumbfounded, and stared at him.

"What—what is that?" gasped Tom.

"Gussy!" shrieked Manners. "Gussy, you ass, you'll get in a row if you come out like that! Suppose your Form-master saw you!"

"Weally, Mannahs—I—I mean, pway let me pass! I am Dr. Monk, Head of the Gwammah School," said Arthur Augustus, with all the dignity he could muster. He was beginning to have some inward misgivings now, however.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway don't cackle, and give the show away, deah boys!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hallo, here comes Railton!" exclaimed Talbot. "You'd better cut off and get out of sight, D'Arcy!"

"Wats! Waitton will not wecognise me."

"Oh, crumbs!"

The Housemaster of the School House was crossing the quadrangle with long strides. He had heard the shrieks of merriment and seen the extraordinary figure from his study window. He had come out to interview the amazing-looking stranger. As he came up behind Arthur Augustus he read the card on his back, and frowned to conceal a smile. He caught the swell of St. Jim's by the shoulder and swung him round.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"Pway don't be wuff, Mr. Waitton. I am Dr. Monk!"

"What?"

"Surely you wecognise me!" said Arthur Augustus, with less assurance.

Mr. Railton stared at him blankly.

"Recognise you? Certainly! You are D'Arcy of the Fourth Form!"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"May I ask what is the meaning of this ridiculous masquerade?" said the Housemaster sternly. "Why are you parading the quadrangle with paint on your face, and that absurd mass of false hair?"

"Oh deah!"

"You must surely know that the quadrangle is no place for such absurd tricks, D'Arcy?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And that absurd card on your back," said Mr. Railton. "If it was your intention to make yourself ridiculous, D'Arcy, you have certainly succeeded."

"A—a—a card on my back, sir!" stuttered D'Arcy, reaching round his back. He grabbed the card and pulled it off, and read it and gasped.

"Oh, that wottah, Lowthah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

(Continued on the next page.)

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"But what does this idiotic masquerade mean?" asked Mr. Railton. "I—I— It was a joke on the Gwammah School chaps, sir," stammered Arthur Augustus feebly. "I am made-up, sir, as—as Dr. Monk. I was goin' to take them in."

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Railton. "I really believe the boy is taking leave of his senses. And you really think, D'Arcy, that you bear now the slightest resemblance to Dr. Monk?"

"I—I trust so, sir!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence! This is really not a laughing matter, absurd as it is. Such a trick would be most disrespectful to Dr. Monk, D'Arcy; but the amazing thing is that you should suppose you bear any resemblance to that gentleman."

"L-L-Lowther thought—"

"I am afraid this is one of Lowther's jokes," said Mr. Railton, trying not to smile. "You will go in at once and take off those ridiculous things, D'Arcy."

"Ya-as, sir."

"And you will take a hundred lines!"

"Bai Jove!"

"And if you do such a ridiculous thing again I shall cane you. Now go in at once!"

"Ya-as, sir!" said D'Arcy dismally.

And he trotted into the School House again. The fellows in the quadrangle shrieked with laughter. Arthur Augustus was glad to reach the shelter of the House. As he stripped off his famous disguise in the Fourth Form dormitory, quite an army of juniors came up to watch him and yell with laughter.

"Didn't it work, Gussy?" Monty Lowther asked in a tone of great surprise as he looked into the dormitory. "Haven't you been over to the Grammar School after all?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah wottah! You put that wotten card on my back—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But for that I am convinced it would have worked all wight—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I am goin' to give you a feahful thwashin', Lowthah. Put up your wotten hands, you wottah!"

But Monty Lowther, laughing like a hyena, fled from the dormitory. Arthur Augustus, in a state of suppressed fury, changed his clothes, but it was a much longer task getting off the grease-paint. When he was finished he came into Study No. 6 looking quite fatigued, and Blake, Herries, and Digby greeted him with a howl of laughter.

"The missing link!" sobbed Blake. "Found at last!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly asses, there is nothin' whatever to laugh it—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake, Herries, and Digby evidently thought there was something to laugh at, and they yelled till Arthur Augustus retired from the study in great wrath, and closed the door with a tremendous slam. For once the manners of Arthur Augustus lacked the repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere.

CHAPTER 8.

A Scouting Expedition!

CALLING-OVER was finished, and the chums of the Shell came out of Big Hall together. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had a gleaming eye upon Monty Lowther; but the Shell fellows dodged the wrathful swell

of the Fourth and escaped into the quadrangle. In the cover of the old elms, they dropped from the school wall into the road, leaving Arthur Augustus still looking for them in the quad.

The bicycles had been concealed in a field near the school, and in a few minutes the four juniors dragged them into the road and were pedalling away for Rylcombe Grammar School. There they dismounted, lifting the machines through a gap in the hedge and putting them out of sight. Then they went on towards the Grammar School on foot. The big gates were locked, and deep dusk hung over the great red-brick building within.

Tom Merry peered through the bars of the big metal gate. There was no one visible in the dusk within, but he could see the gleam of the lighted windows.

The juniors skirted the school wall, and helped one another over it, and in a few minutes more they were within the precincts of the Grammar School.

"Now we've got to get into Gordon Gay's quarters and see what's going on," said Tom Merry. "It won't be hard—if we're not spotted."

"You know the lie of the land here?" asked Talbot.

"Yes, rather! We've been here lots of times. There's a window at the back, over an outhouse at the end of the passage, where Gay has his study. We can easily get to it—past the bike-shed and the woodshed."

"What is that big window with the light in it?"

"That's Dr. Monk's study; we must keep clear of that."

"The Head of the school?" asked Talbot.

"Yes; Frank Monk's pater is head-master there, you know. He's a jolly old boy, too—collects pictures and things, and is quite harmless." And the juniors chuckled.

"Pictures?" said Talbot.

"Yes, he has a—a—what do you call it? Leonardo somebody or other—Italian chap who did a lot of daubing—"

"Leonardo da Vinci?"

"That's it," said Tom. "He often has artistic johnnies down to see it, Monk says. It's supposed to be worth more than Dr. Holmes' Rembrandt. You know that smudgy thing in the Head's study at St. Jim's. Well, I wouldn't have given more than ten bob for it to hang up in our study, but somebody tried to burgle it once, and it came out that it was worth two thousand quid. And Dr. Monk's Leonardo is worth more than that. It's a picture of an Italian woman grinning, I think," said Tom Merry. "But never mind that now. The bisney just now is with Frank Monk and Gordon Gay."

"Come on!" said Lowther.

They made their way cautiously round the big, red-brick School House.

As they came round to the rear of the building, Tom Merry halted.

"Hold on!" he whispered.

There was a gleam of light from the woodshed.

"We don't want to be spotted by the porter," muttered Manners.

"It isn't the porter there—listen!"

The voice of Frank Monk of the Fourth could be heard from the woodshed, and he was declaiming in deep tones:

"That you have wronged me doth appear in this!"

"Julius Cæsar," by Jove!" whispered Lowther. "That's Cassius' part in the Quarrel Scene. They're rehearsing Shakespeare."

"Not much to make a secret of in

that. Every blessed amateur dramatic society has done 'Julius Cæsar' one time or another," said Tom Merry, puzzled.

"Let's have a look at them!"

The juniors crept closer to the woodshed. The door was half-open, and they could see into the interior.

Quite a crowd of the Fourth Form were gathered there, and it was evidently a rehearsal, though the juniors were not in costume.

Gordon Gay & Co., without a suspicion that eyes were upon them from outside, proceeded with the rehearsal of "Julius Cæsar." Gordon Gay had cast himself for Brutus. As head of the society and stage-manager, naturally he gave himself a "fat" part. His voice came ringing out in great style:

"Let me tell you, Cassius, you yourself are much condemned to have an itching palm,

To sell and mart your offices for gold To undeservers!"

To which Frank Monk, alias Cassius, replied:

"I! An itching palm!

You know that you are Brutus that say this,

Or, by the go-hods, that speech were else your last!"

"Not so much of your 'go-hods'!" said Gay reprovingly. "Make it 'gods.'"

"Rats!" said Cassius. "You want plenty of emphasis there."

"What's the next?" said Wootton major.

"The next is ginger-beer. I'm getting dry," said Gordon Gay. "Hand over the bottle."

"Here you are, Brutus."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gordon Gay took a draught of ginger-beer.

"When is that ass Carboy coming?" he growled. "He'll be wanted pretty soon. Silly ass to get lines when there's a rehearsal going on. But I think we've got it pretty good."

"It will go all right," remarked Monk.

"Yes—if the weather holds out."

"Well, the weather looks like lasting," remarked Wootton minor. "It's Monday now, and it comes off on Wednesday."

Tom Merry & Co. exchanged glances. What the weather had to do with the performance of Shakespeare's "Julius Cæsar" they could not quite see, but they felt that they were on the verge of hearing the secret.

Frank Monk looked out of the window of the shed.

"If it's an evening like this, it will do," he said. "If it rains—"

"If it rains, we shall have to put it off," said Gay decidedly.

"But if the St. Jim's fellows are coming—"

"We shall have to wire them it's off for the present, if it rains."

"Then don't mention to them it's off because of the rain," grinned Monk.

"They'd jolly soon tumble to it that we're giving an al fresco concert."

"Oh!" murmured Tom Merry.

"They wouldn't tumble in a month of Sundays!" said Gordon Gay, with a sniff. "They haven't brains enough to think of a pastoral play."

"I suppose they haven't," agreed Monk. "It's not so very long since we thought of it ourselves, for that matter."

"But it's simply a ripping idea!" said

Gay. "Who wants to be stuck in a stuffy lecture-hall to see a play on a hot evening?"

"Nobody!"

"Exactly. But a pastoral play—that's just the thing. Everybody will come. And it's easy enough to stick the chairs out on the lawn. And as for any little drawbacks in staging and scenery, that's allowed for in a pastoral play."

"Of course!"

"Well, get on with the washing," said Gay, setting down his glass. "We shall have to be getting in soon, and there's a lot more to go through."

And the celebrated Quarrel Scene proceeded.

Outside the door of the woodshed Tom Merry and his chums exchanged triumphant glances. They had succeeded better than they had dared to anticipate. The secret had been revealed to them in its entirety in that

came for— Hallo! Why—what—who—

Someone bumped into Lowther from the darkness. He swung round, and immediately there was a yell of alarm.

It was Carboy of the Fourth, coming late for the rehearsal, and he had run right into the four juniors from St. Jim's outside the door.

"Hallo!" roared Carboy. "St. Jim's bounders! Look out!"

"Cut for it!" shouted Tom Merry.

Carboy had grasped Monty Lowther at once, and they went to the ground together. Tom and Manners and Talbot dragged Carboy off, but he clung to them, and in a second the rehearsers were rushing in an alarmed swarm out of the woodshed.

"Buzz off!" gasped Manners.

"St. Jim's cads!" yelled Gay. "Collar them!"

CHAPTER 9.

Not a Success!

"TOM MERRY!"

"Manners! Lowther! Talbot!"

"You bounders!"

"Groogh!" gasped Tom Merry. "Get off my chest! Groogh!"

"Sit tight!" said Gordon Gay coolly. "We've got 'em! Any more of the cads about?"

"I think this is the lot," said Monk. "But we'll soon find out. Are there any more of you about the place, Merry?"

"Groogh! Find out!"

"That's what we're going to do. Pull his nose, Tadpole."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gerroogh! Ow!"

"Any more of you here, Tom Merry?"



"St. Jim's cads!" yelled Gay, as he led a swarm of Grammarians from the woodshed. "Collar them!" Tom Merry & Co. dashed off, but Carboy was clinging to Talbot. In a moment more two or three pairs of hands were on the St. Jim's junior.

few minutes' chat of the Grammarians. It was decidedly a new idea.

A theatrical performance in the open air on the lines of a pastoral play was something very new for the junior actors.

"The bounders!" murmured Tom Merry. "So that's the wheeze!"

"And they're keeping it dark!" whispered Lowther. "So jolly dark that we know all about it now!"

"And we can put a spoke in their wheel. What price a pastoral play at St. Jim's to-morrow—Tuesday—and invitations to the Grammar School bounders to come and see it?"

The St. Jim's juniors suppressed their laughter with difficulty. They could imagine the faces of Gordon Gay & Co. when they received that invitation.

"Better get off now," murmured Lowther. "We've found out what we

The St. Jim's fellows dashed off; but Carboy was clinging to Talbot, and held him back. In a moment more two or three pairs of hands were on Talbot. The Terrible Three rushed back at once to the rescue, and the whole crowd of Grammarians piled on them. There was a wild and whirling struggle.

After a couple of minutes the Shell fellows were dragged into the woodshed, still struggling in the grasp of the Grammarians.

"Shut the door!" gasped Gordon Gay. "We've got 'em!"

The door was slammed. Tom Merry & Co. sprawled on the tiled floor, each with a couple of Grammarians seated on his chest, pinning him down. The St. Jim's juniors had succeeded in their object, but their luck was out, and now they were helpless prisoners in the hands of the enemy.

"Yow-ow! Ow! Ow!"

"So you came over to scout, did you?" said Gordon Gay. "I suppose you heard us talking as well as rehearsing? In fact, you spotted the wheeze?"

"Yes, you ass!" said Tom Merry. "Go and eat coke!"

"And perhaps you're thinking of lifting the idea, what?"

"Of course they are!" growled Wootton major. "They can't think of a wheeze for themselves, and they're bound to lift ours, now they know it."

"They won't," said Gay.

"You jolly well can't stop us!" gasped Tom Merry. "We'll jolly well give a pastoral play to-morrow, and chance it! You kids can come and see us if you like, and learn how to do it."

"Why, you cheeky rotter—"

"Bump him!"

"Hold on!" said Gay. "They're not going to give a pastoral play either to-morrow or any other day. They're going to give us their solemn word not to give a pastoral play this term at St. Jim's."

"Rats!" yelled the prisoners.

"You won't?"

"No!"

"Then we shall have to talk to you. Get in the tar-pot, Monkey!"

"The—the tar-pot?" ejaculated Monk.

"Yes. It's nearly full of tar, luckily—and there's a brush in it. The porter left it under the lean-to to-day. Get it in."

Frank Monk grinned and fetched in the tar-pot. The prisoners eyed it with great apprehension. Gordon Gay took up the brush and stirred the tar a little.

"Look here, you're not going to put that on us, you rotter!" howled Tom Merry.

"That's just what I am going to do," said Gay calmly. "You've spotted our little secret. You're going to promise to make no use of it. It's really of no use to anybody but the owner, you know—you fellows can't act for toffee. You'll give your word honour bright. Otherwise, I shall tar you."

"You—you beast!"

"You fellows are fond of making a sensation," remarked Gay. "Well, you'll make a sensation enough if you go back to St. Jim's with tarry chivvies."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gay loaded the brush with the tar, and approached it to Tom Merry's face, as Tadpole and Wootton minor pinned him down helplessly. Tom wriggled his head suddenly. To go back to St. Jim's coated with tar was a little too much. He could imagine the yells of laughter that would greet the unhappy Shell juniors when they turned up as black as negroes.

"Now, then, what do you say?" asked Gay agreeably. "I'm not set on wasting the tar, but if you don't promise—"

"Yow—keep that away!" gasped Tom, as Gay gave him a playful tap on the nose with the brush, leaving a big blob of tar there.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That looks pretty already. You will look a treat when you're painted all over. I'll work some into your hair, too, to make a complete job of it. We shall have to pay for the tar, so we may as well have our money's worth."

"I—I—"

"Now, then, will you promise—yes or no?"

"I—I—"

"Yes or no?" demanded Gay.

Tom Merry gasped helplessly. He certainly could not allow his visage to be tarred. The Grammarians had the whip hand, and there was nothing for it but to surrender.

"Yes," he panted.

"Good! You promise, honour bright, that you won't have any pastoral play at St. Jim's for the rest of this term—what?"

"Ow! Yes."

"Honour bright?"

"Honour bright!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Good! Now the others! Lowther—"

"Honour bright!" gasped Lowther, in a great hurry, as the brush approached his face, and the Grammarians shrieked with laughter.

"Manners, old fellow—"

"Yah! Honour bright!"

"Talbot, my son—"

"Can't be helped," grinned Talbot.

"Honour bright!"

"Good egg!" said Gordon Gay, replacing the tar-brush. "That shows your sense, and saves the tar. Lucky for you I know that you are fellows of your word."

"Tar 'em, anyway!" growled Carker.

"Rats! We're fellows of our word, too! Shut up, Carker! Now I think we're done with these merchants," said Gay. "You're welcome to come over and see the pastoral play on Wednesday, my infants. It will do you good to see some real acting. Now kick them out."

The St. Jim's juniors were allowed to rise to their feet. They looked very rumpled and dishevelled. Tom Merry daubed furiously at the blob of tar on his nose, speedily reducing his handkerchief to a tarry rag.

"Kick them out!"

"Give 'em socks!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Twenty pairs of boots helped the scouts out of the woodshed. They ran for it, and the whooping crowd of Grammarians chased them to the school wall. They clambered over the wall in haste,

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and dropped breathless and panting into the road.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Tom Merry.

"That was worth coming over for, I don't think!"

"Rather a muck up—what?" groaned Manners.

"Sorry—it was my idea to come!" said Talbot.

"Oh, the idea was all right—but we've had bad luck," said Monty Lowther. "We couldn't know that silly ass Carboy was going to blunder on us in the dark. Confound him!"

The chums of St. Jim's limped away for their bicycles.

The expedition could not be called a success. They had discovered the great secret of the Grammarian Dramatic Society, and they had been compelled to give their word not to make use of it.

"We can't turn the tables on the rotters now," growled Lowther, as they dragged the bicycles out into the road.

"The game's up!"

"But—"

"Oh, there aren't any buts in this case!" exclaimed the exasperated Lowther. "I tell you we're all done, and that's an end to it."

"Not quite. We can't bone the idea, and turn the tables on them that way, but it's a pastoral play they're giving—in the open air—"

"We know that, ass!"

"And so," proceeded Tom Merry

calmly, "being in the open air, it will be easy to get at them. What price raiding them in the middle of the play? It's easy enough to get over the wall."

"My hat!"

"We can bring a swarm of the fellows over. We can get permission to be out of gates to come over here for the pastoral play. We won't explain to the Housemaster what we mean to do when we get here."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We'll remember that tar-pot," said Tom Merry venomously. "What price capturing Brutus and Julius Caesar and tarring them—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the Shell fellows, restored to good spirits by that brilliant scheme, rode back to St. Jim's in quite a contented frame of mind.

CHAPTER 10.

Suspicion!

"HERE they are!"

"Where have you chaps been?" asked Blake, as the Shell fellows came into the Common-room in the School House, a few minutes before bed-time. "You haven't done your prep."

"Blow prep!" said Monty Lowther.

"Jolly lucky you weren't missed," said Gore of the Shell, with a sniff. "What little game have you been up to, eh? Billiards at the Green Man?"

"No—nothing at all in your line, Gore," said Tom Merry politely.

"Not so jolly sure of that!" said Levison of the Fourth. "I'd like to know where you've been."

Tom Merry turned towards the cad of the Fourth, with a gleam in his eyes.

"Isn't my word good enough for you, Levison?"

"I'm not alluding to you specially," said Levison, backing away a little.

"There are some fellows here who hang about low pubs, I know that."

"Yourself, perhaps," said Tom contemptuously.

Levison shrugged his shoulders.

"Look here, what are you driving at?" asked Tom Merry angrily. "If you mean that any of us go to places like your favourite haunt, you're lying."

"Does Talbot say the same?"

"Talbot! Of course he does!"

"Let him speak for himself," grinned Levison.

Tom Merry glanced at Talbot.

"Don't mind what that worm says, Talbot," he said; "we all know you better than that, and Levison is always lying."

"Yaas, wathah! It's weally quite a disease with Levison," remarked Arthur Augustus. "I should recommend Talbot to give him a feahful thwashin'."

"I certainly don't mind what he says," said Talbot contemptuously.

"Then, if you don't mind, I'll go on," said Levison, with an irritating grin.

"Will you have the cheek to say that you weren't in the Blackbird Inn at Wayland on Saturday afternoon?"

There was an exclamation from all the juniors who heard Levison's words. The Blackbird at Wayland bore a most unenviable reputation. It was, of course, out of bounds; and even black sheep like Levison, or Cutts of the Fifth, drew a line at places like the Blackbird.

The colour crept into Talbot's face.

"Punch his head!" said Monty Lowther.

"He hasn't denied it!" said Levison.

"Well, whether he denies it or not, we all know it isn't true," said Tom

Merry. "And if you don't shut up, I'll punch your head myself."

Levison gave another shrug of the shoulders.

"Well, I say he was seen going in there," he declared. "I know a chap in Wayland—"

"Yes, and I know his name!" growled Lumley-Lumley of the Fourth. "He's a billiards marker at the Red Lion."

"Well, the Red Lion's a better place than the Blackbird any day," said Levison. "I don't set up to be a perfect character—no Eric about me. And I don't like humbugs!"

"You didn't go to the Blackbird surely, Talbot!" said Kangaroo. "Saturday afternoon—that was when you were called away by that telegram, you know. Why, Levison, you rotter, we know you're lying—Talbot went to Wayland on Saturday afternoon to meet a friend."

"Exactly," said Levison, "and I know where he met him. It's no business of mine, but as I said, I don't like humbugs."

"You didn't go there, Talbot?"

"He was seen to go there," said Levison.

"Rats!"

"Bosh!"

"Tell him he's lying, Talbot, and punch his head," said Blake.

Talbot breathed hard.

"As a matter of fact, I did go there," he said calmly. "It's no business of Levison's, or anybody else's that I know of. But as it happens I did go there—not to play billiards, though, or for any of Levison's kind of amusements. My friend was a stranger to Wayland, and he chose that inn for me to meet him, not knowing what kind of place it was. He took it for a country inn by the name. That's all about it!"

"Quite natural, too," said Tom Merry. "It was a country inn once upon a time, and a stranger couldn't know what it was like."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Levison smiled in a sneering way, and several of the fellows looked rather queerly at Talbot. His explanation was plausible enough, but somehow he did not quite convince some of his hearers. Kildare looked in just then, to march the Shell off to their dormitory, and the matter dropped.

The Fourth Formers went to their dormitory, and when they were there Arthur Augustus gave Levison a severe look.

"I don't want to say anythin' impolite," he remarked, "but I must say that you are a spyin' wottah, Levison." "I don't believe in humbugs," said Levison coolly. "Talbot sets up like Tom Merry and the rest, to be a little better than common mortals. Well, then, if he goes in for pub-haunting, and tells lies about it, he ought to be shown up!"

"He told the twuth at once, you wottah!"

"He told it at once, but it wasn't the truth," chuckled Levison.

"You are an uttah wascal!" said Arthur Augustus indignantly. "How dare you say that what he said wasn't true!"

"Because it was a lie, and I can prove it—eh, Mellish?"

"Yes, rather!" chuckled Mellish.

"Well, we won't take your word for that," said Jack Blake. "But I'll tell you what we will do. Unless you prove what you say at once, we'll bump you hard for slandering a decent chap. Now, buck up with your proofs!"

JUST MY FUN

Monty Lowther Calling!



Hallo, Everybody!

By next year they may be making roads of rubber. Some of them will stretch for miles!

A job well done never wants doing again, says Mr. Linton. He should try weeding the garden!

Figgins says rain spoiled a week he had at the sea. It never rains, but it bores!

I know a timber merchant who is always happy. He has a beam in his eye!

Remember that it takes two to make a bargain, but only one gets it!

"Herries and I found the stones hurt awfully when we bathed," says Digby. Two minds with but a shingle thought.

Three guesses what this means: X X X. All wrong!

They say when Skimpole was invited to a house-warming, he brought along a hot-water bottle.

Try this: "How'm I getting on, doc?" asked the patient. "I think you're improving," admitted the doctor, "but I wouldn't start reading a serial story if I were you!"

Nother: "How would you like your egg served, sir?" asked the waiter. "Is there any difference in price?" asked the Scot. "No, sir." "All right," replied the Scot: "serve it with a thick slice of ham!"

"I've seen his telegram," said Levison. "If what he says was true, his friend must have fixed the Blackbird as a place of meeting in that telegram, which Talbot received on Saturday."

"Yes, that's so. What then?"

"Well, he doesn't mention the place. The telegram simply says 'Half-past four.—H.W.'"

"How do you know?"

"I tell you I've seen it."

"And how did you see it?"

"I was rather interested in the matter," drawled Levison. "You know I've always looked on Talbot as rather shady. The way he got to this school, and the fact that he hasn't any relations, and—"

"Shut up about that!" said Blake roughly. "He's worth a thousand of you, connections or not."

"Perhaps! But he lied all the same!"

"Do you think we're going to take your word for what was in the telegram?" asked Blake contemptuously.

"How do we know you've ever seen it?"

"It was in his jacket-pocket when he came back from Wayland, and he left his jacket in the pavilion when he changed."

"And you spied on it?"

"Well, I looked at it."

"And you want us to take the word of a spy?" growled Herries.

"What is the best way to teach a boy the violin?" asks a parent. With cottonwool in your ears!

A chap Blake knows says he is always on the move, but never gets anywhere. He takes the money on a roundabout.

"I suppose the pirates of old were good seamen," writes a reader. Oh, they could cross sculls with anybody!

Skipping is good for you says an authority. Especially if what you're reading is very dry!

Short one: "I've got a wonder watch," said Blake to Figgins. "What sort is that?" asked Figgins. "Well, every time I look at it I wonder what the time is," explained Blake.

Next: "You say you worked for Lady Mumbleford?" asked the matron of the new maid. "Yes, ma'am," affirmed the maid. "I have several silver spoons with their crest on them to prove it!"

"I used to think—" began Pratt. "What made you stop?" asked Kerr pointedly.

Third Form flash: "Where did Noah live?" asked Mr. Selby. "I don't think he had a regular home," answered Curly Gibson cautiously. "I believe he belonged to what they call the floating population." Quite!

Latin is a dead language, they say. Yet Mr. Linton tells us we shall have to look alive if we are going to learn it.

Last shot: "Now you all know what a molecule is," said the lecturer visiting Rylcombe. "Most of us do," interrupted the village chairman; "but perhaps you'd better explain it for the benefit of those who have never been up in one."

Chin, chin, chaps!

"You can see the telegram if you like. I took it," said Levison. "My idea is that Talbot is shady, and I think the fellows ought to know it, especially as he puts on airs of being so jolly particular. He won't play a game of nap with a fellow—"

"You mean that you've tried to get him to play, to get hold of his cash!" growled Blake.

"Put it how you like. You can see the telegram. I've got it. It's worded just how I told you. Would you like to see it?"

"No, I wouldn't," said Blake; "I'm not a spy!"

"You've doubted my word about it, and you ought to look at the telegram, and see that I told you the truth, and that Talbot has lied."

"It is quite imposs to look at an-othah fellow's cowwespodence, you uttah cad!" said Arthur Augustus. "I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort!"

"But you believe me now!" sneered Levison. "You know you do."

Arthur Augustus made no reply to that. Levison's offer to show the telegram was certainly pretty convincing proof that he was telling the truth about it. And if the matter was as he stated, it was hard to believe that Talbot had told the exact facts. The chums of

the Fourth felt exceedingly uncomfortable. Levison distrusted the new junior, and disliked him—and it was his object to make the other fellows distrust him, too. The worst of it was that, in spite of themselves, he had succeeded.

"Well," jeered Levison, "what do you say now, Blake?"

"What I say is this—that you're a spying cad to look at Talbot's telegram, and a thief to take it out of his pocket!" said Blake. "Collar the cad, and show him that we don't want spies and thieves here!"

"Yaas, collah the wottah!"

Half a dozen exasperated juniors seized the cad of the Fourth. They had reason to be exasperated, for Levison had forced them to feel a sense of distrust towards a fellow they liked. Whether there was anything "shady" about Talbot or not, it was not from a point of view of morality that Levison interested himself in the matter; it was for Talbot's good qualities that he disliked the new fellow, not for his bad ones.

Bump, bump, bump!

"Leggo!" yelled Levison. "You rotters! Ow—ow! Yow!"

"Give him another!"

"Give the spyin' wottah a dozen!"

"Hallo! What's the row?" exclaimed Darrell of the Sixth, coming into the dormitory. "Now, then, it's time for lights out. Turn in!"

Levison crawled into bed, feeling considerably hurt. The Fourth Formers turned in, and Darrell put out the light, and left the dormitory. Then Levison's voice was heard again:

"I tell you—"

"Shut up!" roared Blake. "Whether you're telling the truth for once, or lying as usual, I don't care a rap; but if you say another word about Talbot, I'll come over and give you the licking of your life!"

And after that Levison was discreetly silent.

CHAPTER 11.

A Licking For Levison!

WHEN the juniors came out of the Form-room the next day after morning lessons, Talbot of the Shell joined Levison in the passage. His hand fell upon Levison's shoulder with a grip that was like iron.

Levison looked round, knitting his brows.

"I think you have something that belongs to me," said Talbot.

Levison smiled sneeringly.

"What's that?" he asked.

"A telegram!"

"Not worded as you told the chaps," said Levison.

"That is not your business. Please give it to me."

"I am going to pin it up in the Common-room for everybody to see," said Levison insolently. "Then the chaps will know exactly how it tallies with what you told them."

"Will you hand it to me?"

"No, I won't!"

"Then I shall make you!" said Talbot quietly; and his open hand smote Levison across the cheek. "Now will you give it up?"

"Hallo! What's the row here?" asked Kildare of the Sixth, coming down the passage. "No fighting here, you young rascals!"

Levison gave Talbot a bitter look. He did not think the new junior would venture to mention the telegram in the

presence of a prefect. But he was mistaken.

"Levison has a telegram of mine, and I want it, Kildare," said Talbot at once.

"What's that, Levison?" said the captain, frowning.

"It's no value," said Levison, taking the crumpled telegram from his pocket. "Only it proves that Talbot has been lying, and—"

"Is that telegram Talbot's?" rapped out Kildare.

"Yes."

"How did it come into your hands, then?"

"I—I thought it ought to be seen, because—"

"How did you get it?"

"I—I took it, because I—"

"Where did you take it? From Talbot's study?"

"N-no," stammered Levison.

"Where, then?"

"From the cricket pavilion. You—you see, Talbot had been taking us in, and—and I thought he ought to be shown up, and—and—"

"You thought you wanted to pry into matters that didn't concern you, you mean," said the captain of St. Jim's contemptuously. "Give it to Talbot at once! That's right. And now take a hundred lines, you young rotter!"

"You don't know what's in it—"

"And I don't want to know! Hold your tongue, and bring those lines to me by tea-time, or I'll cane you!" And Kildare swung round on his heel and walked away.

Levison gave Talbot a savage look as the handsome Shell fellow crumpled the telegram into his pocket.

"You rotten cad—"

"You've called me a good many names," said Talbot quietly. "Will you step over to the gym and put the gloves on with me?"

"No, I won't!" said Levison, between his teeth. "But—"

"Then you will hold your tongue about me," said Talbot grimly. "I don't allow fellows to call me names. You're always slandering somebody. I've never heard you utter a good word for anybody yet."

"Quite right!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. A good many fellows were gathering round the two by this time. "He is an uttah wottah, deah boys! He was nearly sacked once for slandering old Bwooke."

"I'll say what I like!" said Levison savagely. "When a fellow goes to a pub like the Blackbird, and tells lies afterwards—"

"Enough said!" rapped out Talbot.

"You've refused to come into the gym. I warn you that if I find you talking about me again I shall lick you! Understand that!"

"How would you like me to talk to the Housemaster about it?" sneered Levison.

"Rotten sneak!" growled Blake.

"You can please yourself about that," said Talbot. "Remember what I've said, that's all!"

He turned on his heels.

"You don't dare to show the fellows that telegram," shouted Levison.

"We don't want to see it!" exclaimed Tom Merry.



Levison had no chance against the new Shell fellow. carried him fairly off his feet.

"No feah!" said Arthur Augustus.

"It would prove that he was lying to you last night," sneered Levison.

Talbot turned back quickly. His eyes were gleaming. He strode right up to Levison and hit out, and the cad of the Fourth crashed to the floor.

"I warned you," said Talbot quietly. "Now get up and put up your hands. I didn't want to quarrel with you or anybody else. You've forced it on me."

"Ow—ow!" Levison sat up and rubbed his mouth. "You—you rotter! I'll come into the gym with you, and lick you, you cad!"

"Come on, then!"

"Yes, come on! I'd like to see you lick anybody, Levison," grinned Blake.

Quite a crowd of fellows followed them into the gymnasium. Levison, as a rule, contrived to avoid fights, but he could hardly allow himself to be knocked down without resenting it. The juniors gathered round eagerly to see the unaccustomed sight of the cad of the Fourth with the gloves on. His face was very savage as he stood up to Talbot. The juniors were curious to see how Talbot "shaped," too, with the gloves on.

They were soon satisfied. A single round was enough for Levison of the Fourth. He could box pretty well, but he had no chance against the new Shell fellow.

Talbot knocked him right and left, and finished with a drive that carried him fairly off his feet, and sent him down with a crash.

Levison lay gasping on the floor, completely beaten, within three minutes.

"Get up!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "You're not licked yet!"

But Levison had had enough. He staggered to his feet, and sulkily peeled off the gloves.



ed him right and left, and finished with a drive that
him down with a crash!

"Finished?" asked Talbot, with a smile.

"Yes; hang you!"

"Very well, I don't want to go on if you don't. Only leave my pockets alone in future, and hold your tongue! That's all I ask."

Talbot threw off the gloves and walked away. There was not a mark upon his handsome face. Levison remained dabbing his nose with his handkerchief, which was richly coloured before he had finished.

"My word, what a rotten show!" said Digby. "I don't call that a fight!"

And Levison was left alone with Mellish. He dabbed his nose furiously, and Mellish helped him on with his jacket.

"You didn't put up much of a fight," Mellish remarked, with a grin.

Levison scowled.

"I'll make him sorry for this!" he snarled. "You saw that telegram, Mellish, and you know that he's lying."

"Ahem!"

"There's something fishy about him," Levison continued. "I don't know what it is, but there is something. Who is he? Nobody knows him, or where he came from. The Head let him into the school without knowing anything about his people, because Talbot chipped in and helped him when some footpads set on him. Just like the old donkey. I shouldn't wonder if it was a put-up job all through!"

"Phew! That's rather thick," said Mellish, with a whistle.

"Where does he come from?" snarled Levison. "He talks about Australia; but he doesn't know anything about the place. I've heard Noble talking to him, and Talbot shifts off the subject as quickly as he can. I don't believe he's ever been in Australia at all!"

"Oh, draw it mild!"

"That kid Frayne knew him, you remember that, in some slum."

"Talbot explained that he came across Frayne when he was slumming in London once, when he visited England with his uncle," said Mellish.

"I know he said so. And he said last night that his friend arranged to meet him at the Blackbird in that telegram, and we know that was a lie. Young Frayne called him by a queer nickname, and so did those footpads who tried to rob D'Arey one day; they knew him, too. The same gang, very likely, who went for the Head the time Talbot distinguished himself!" sneered Levison. "The whole thing is fishy."

"Now Frayne's disappeared from the school, and he's written to young Wally—all the Third are talking about it—that there's something underhand going on, and he won't stay here to be a party to it. My belief is that Talbot has something to do with it. Queer that Frayne should bolt like that only a few days after Talbot comes to the school, anyway. As for Talbot having seen him when he was slumming—Talbot says so, but Frayne never did. He never would

speak on the subject at all. Something was being kept dark."

"Blessed if I know what to make of it!" said Mellish.

"What I make of it is that there's something jolly fishy about Talbot, and Frayne knew it all," said Levison. "I shouldn't wonder if Talbot was the cause of him bolting—may have got him out of the school somehow."

"Phew!"

"I'm jolly well going to find out the truth, anyway, and show him up!" said Levison, between his teeth. "He's got too many secrets. The fellow may be some criminal for all we know. I don't say that his appearance and get-up aren't all right. But all we know about him rests on his bare word. And I know he's a liar."

Mellish shook his head.

"The fellows like him," he said. "Better not let them hear you talking about him like that, Levison. It will only get you into trouble."

"Not if we find out—"

"You leave me out of it!" said Mellish promptly. "I'm not taking a hand in anything of the sort. I'm not up against the chap who hits out from the shoulder as Talbot does!"

And Mellish walked away. Levison ground his teeth.

"The rotter!" he muttered. "All the same, I'll jolly well find out about Talbot and show him up. It's fishy—and if I get on the secret, I'll make him sorry for what's just happened."

CHAPTER 12.

Caught in the Act!

TOM MERRY looked into Talbot's study at tea-time. Gore and Skimpole were there, but the new junior was not to be seen.

"Seen Talbot?" asked Tom.

"Gone out!" said Gore. "Gone to the Grammar School, I think. Gordon Gay asked him to tea when he was over here."

"Right-ho!" said Tom. "I was going to ask him, that's all!"

"I will come to tea with you with pleasure, my dear Merry," said Skimpole, rising. "I suppose it is all the same to you?"

"Well, not quite the same," said Tom, laughing. "But come along, Skimmy!"

Skimpole followed Tom Merry from the study. Gore grunted, and went on with his tea. A few minutes later Levison came in.

He glanced round the study, and then closed the door.

"I've just finished tea," said George Gore significantly.

"I haven't come to tea!" growled Levison. "I want to speak to you now that that blinking ass Skimpole isn't here. Talbot's out, isn't he?"

"Yes; gone to jaw about Australia with Gordon Gay, I suppose," yawned Gore.

Levison sneered.

"Gay won't get much about Australia out of him," he said. "I don't believe he knows anything more about Australia than I do. I'm pretty certain that he's never been there."

"I've heard you say all that before. I'm getting fed-up with your yarns about Talbot," said Gore politely. "He makes himself civil enough here."

"I dare say he does—it's his game to be popular," said Levison viciously. "Have you ever seen that desk of his open?"

"He always keeps it locked."

"What does he keep in it?"

"Blessed if I know. I've never seen it open."

"Neither has Skimpole," said Levison. "I've asked him. I should like to see the inside of that desk."

Gore chuckled.

"Well, you can't; there's a patent lock on it!"

"What does a schoolboy want with a patent lock on his desk?" said Levison. "I fancy if anybody could see in that desk it would let in a good deal of light on the subject. I should like to see his papers."

"Well, so should I," said Gore; "but it can't be done. He's rather a secretive chap, I must say. I asked him to show me the desk once—the inside, I mean—and he said he wouldn't. That wasn't very civil, was it?"

"What about having a look when he opens it?" said Levison.

"He never does when anybody's here."

"That's what I want to speak to you about," said Levison, sinking his voice.

"You've told me you've found the study door locked more than once, when Talbot's been alone here. I bet you that time is when he's opening that desk. I've had my eye on it a long time, and wondered what was in it. Well, when he comes back and comes up here, if you'll keep out of the study and keep Skimpole out, I'll undertake to see—"

"How?"

Levison made a gesture towards the screen in the corner of the study.

"He wouldn't suspect a chap of being hidden there," he remarked.

Gore laughed.

"If he found you spying on him," he remarked, "he might give you another taste of what you got in the gym today."

"I'll chance that!" said Levison, with a scowl. "What do you say?"

"I'll do what you want," said Gore.

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"If there's anything queer about it, you'll tell me afterwards. That's understood?"

"Of course!"

"Right you are, then."

It was an hour later that Talbot came back to St. Jim's. He came directly up to his study, and after turning on the light, glanced round the room. Then he locked the door. He did not hear a silent, deep-drawn breath behind the screen that stood across a corner of the room; and he did not see a gleaming eye that peered through a slit in the screen. Levison was on the watch.

That big, solid, mahogany desk, with its patent lock, had attracted attention from others, besides Levison. But Levison was intensely curious about it. In pursuance of the fixed belief that Talbot had some "shady" secret, he was convinced that the sight of the desk's contents might let in some light upon the secret. Why should Talbot have taken so much trouble to secure it from spying eyes if there was no secret concealed there?

Letters, perhaps from some shady associate—that was Levison's suspicion. As he watched the Shell fellow through the slit in the screen he wondered whether he was about to open the mysterious desk. Talbot did not approach it. He threw himself into the armchair, and Levison saw a careworn, almost haggard look upon the handsome face. The sunny cheerfulness was gone, as if Talbot was tired of acting a part now that he was, as he believed, safe from observation.

He muttered to himself as he sat there, gnawing his lips, and Levison caught the words:

"Two thousand pounds! What a haul! But—but if they only knew! What is it that's coming over me? I seem to be changing—everything seems different now! If only they wouldn't be so decent to me!"

Levison's heart beat hard.

The muttered words came from a heart heavy with some secret care. What was the burden that the Shell fellow had on his mind?

Talbot rose suddenly from the armchair—so suddenly that Levison trembled, fearing that his presence had been discovered. But Talbot did not come towards the screen. He went to the desk. There was a key in his hand now.

"I shall need them to-morrow!" Levison heard him mutter. "To-morrow! It's no good thinking—no good looking back. I am what I am. There is no help for it! I must see that they are in order for to-morrow night."

Click!

The desk opened. But from the slit in the screen Levison could not possibly see into it. He heard a rustle of papers in Talbot's hand, and then—click! He knew that a secret lid inside the desk had been opened. A secret receptacle had been opened. What was in it? Levison would have given worlds to know, but he could not see.

Click!

It was a sound of metal knocking against metal under Talbot's hands! Levison's heart thumped against his ribs. What was it? Talbot's hand came out of the desk now and held something that glimmered in the light. But it glimmered only for an instant, as a movement of Talbot's concealed it from sight before Levison had fairly seen it. It was some steel instrument—that was all he knew. What was Talbot doing with steel instruments hidden in a secret place in the desk? That was the secret, but what did it mean?

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In his eagerness to see, Levison knocked the screen a little. It made only the slightest sound; but Talbot's ears were keen. There was a clink as the instrument in his hand dropped back into the desk, then—click! Before Levison knew what was happening the desk was locked again, and Talbot, with gleaming eyes, faced round towards the screen.

For a moment there was dead silence. Then Talbot stepped towards the screen and pulled it aside. Levison was revealed.

"You!" said Talbot. "You spying cad!"

The look upon his face sent a chill to Levison's heart. It was no longer the handsome, careless face of Talbot of the Shell. It was hard, grim, threatening. Levison cast an almost wild glance towards the locked door.

"So you are spying on me!" said Talbot again. "I found you hanging around my study once, looking at my desk. You are curious to see what is in it. I will give you a lesson that will keep you from spying on me again,

in, and Skimpole blinked after them through his big spectacles. Gore and several other fellows were behind. Levison rolled off the table, almost sobbing with pain and rage.

"What on earth's the row?" asked Tom Merry.

Talbot's face was quite composed now. "Levison was hidden here, behind the screen, spying," he said. "I've tried to give him a lesson."

"My hat! You've done it, too, I should think," said Tom, with a compassionate look at the wriggling, squirming Fourth Former. "It sounded as if you were hammering nails. But what was he spying at?"

Talbot shrugged his shoulders. "I have some old letters in my desk," he said. "I had opened it to look at them. Levison seems to be as curious about my letters as about my telegram. He was hidden in the study when I came in here, spying through a hole in the screen."

"The rotter!"

"They're not letters in the desk!" howled Levison. "He's got something else he doesn't dare let you see. I saw something—it's steel! He doesn't dare to let anyone see into that desk!"

"Nobody wants to, excepting you," said Tom Merry contemptuously. "Why can't you mind your own business?"

Levison staggered from the study. He was badly hurt, but he received little sympathy. His spying methods were not popular in the School House. But, spy or not, his thrashing had been too severe, and Tom Merry & Co., much as they liked Talbot, could not help showing their feelings in their faces. Talbot understood what they were thinking of, and he coloured.

"You think I was a bit too rough on him," he said.

"Well," said Tom Merry hesitatingly. "I—I really think you did go a bit too far. We could hear the whacks in the next study."

"I am afraid I lost my temper. I am sorry I hit him so hard," said Talbot. "But—but I was in a temper. It took me by surprise to find him spying on me when I was looking at private papers."

"Oh, it served him right," said Monty Lowther. "Anyway, he won't try the same game again in a hurry."

The Terrible Three returned to their study. The incident had made an uncomfortable impression upon them. Talbot had always seemed kindness and good nature itself; his temper was always sunny. The sudden discovery that he had a savage temper, and that he had thrashed Levison as even the worst bully in the Upper Forms would hardly have done, had a most disagreeable effect upon the juniors.

"After all, he deserved it," Monty Lowther said, after a pause.

Tom Merry nodded.

"Yes, he did; but—but I wish Talbot hadn't licked him like that, all the same. If Levison went to the House-master about it, there would be trouble."

"He could hardly go to Railton and confess that he had hidden himself behind the screen in Talbot's study to spy on him," said Manners.

"No; I suppose he couldn't. I—I wish it hadn't happened, though. I suppose what the rotter did was annoying, but I don't see why Talbot should handle him quite so badly as that for it. It's liable to make fellows think that he's really got some shady sort of a secret, and that he was afraid of being found out."

(Continued on page 18.)

RUNNING A DOUBLE RISK!



"Come away, Alfie! If you fall over that cliff I'll wring your neck!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to J. Davies, 271, Crystal Palace Road, East Dulwich, London, S.E. 22.

Levison. My private affairs are no concern of yours. I will try to make you understand that."

He picked up a cricket stump and gripped the Fourth Former by the collar. Levison struggled in his grasp, but Talbot handled him as if he had been an infant. He dragged the spy of the Fourth across the study table, and then the cricket stump rose and fell. Levison squirmed, and howled, and yelled, but the blows descended like rain. It was a more terrible thrashing than Levison had ever experienced before, even when the Head had flogged him. In a few minutes he was howling for mercy.

"Help! Help!" shrieked Levison. "Help!"

There was a loud thump at the door, and Tom Merry's voice outside. The yells of the Fourth Former were audible all along the passage.

"Hallo! What's the row here?"

"Help!" shrieked Levison.

The door-handle was tried from outside. Talbot flung the cricket-stump into a corner of the study and released Levison. He crossed to the door and unlocked it, and threw it open. Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther looked

The Editor's Chair

Let the Editor be your pal!
Drop him a line to-day,
addressing your letters:
The Editor, The GEM,
Fleetway House, Farring-
don Street, London, E.C.4.



HALLO, Chums! Last week I said that I would probably have definite news for those readers who have been writing to me to revive St. Frank's stories. Well, for some time I have been busy with the matter, and my efforts, I am pleased to say, have been successful. The exciting adventures of those old favourites of St. Frank's—Nipper, Handforth, Nelson Lee, and the rest of them—will soon be appearing regularly again in print.

Commencing next month, the "Schoolboys' Own Library" will be publishing a St. Frank's story by Edwy Searles Brooks every month. As readers probably know, two numbers of the "Schoolboys' Own," featuring long stories of Greyfriars and either St. Jim's or Rookwood, are issued monthly, but in future there will be three numbers on sale. The extra issue each month will be devoted entirely to yarns of the chums of St. Frank's. The first one will appear on October 1st, price 4d. It is a thrilling book-length story, and I am sure it will satisfy all those readers who have been so patiently waiting for the reappearance of Nipper & Co. Make a note of the date the first story will be on sale, and don't forget to place your order in advance. Meantime, tell any St. Frank's fans you know the good news.

"THE TOFF AT THE CROSS-ROADS!"

As I anticipated, I am getting many letters from readers about the "schoolboy cracksmen" series, and every one is full of praise for it. Several readers say they are the finest stories that have ever appeared in the GEM, while another states that Martin Clifford will never write a better yarn than "The Schoolboy Cracksmen." I beg to differ with the last remark, because I think this week's story is the equal of it, at least, and I can promise you that next Wednesday's, which is the climax of the series, is the best of them all.

In this powerful yarn, Talbot reaches the cross-roads, when he has to decide between honesty and crime. When he came to St. Jim's, the schoolboy cracksmen, youthful as he is, was a hardened criminal; but cheerful associations and happy surroundings have brought about a change in Talbot which he would never have deemed possible. More and more the complete trust and confidence of his schoolfellows have preyed on his conscience, and the good in him has come to the surface. But, unhappily for Talbot, his criminal companions are lurking in the background, waiting to rob St. Jim's when they get the tip from him.

What will happen to Talbot, then, if he breaks with his gang? Will they denounce him? And if not, can he go

on living at St. Jim's among honest fellows with such a guilty secret ever on his conscience? It is a big problem Talbot has to decide, and the great story of the manner in which he faces up to it will grip and hold the interest of readers as few stories have ever done before.

"BUNTER THE ATHLETE!"

Billy Bunter is still going strong—but not growing strong!—with his physical culture in next week's amusing chapters of this lively Greyfriars yarn. Bunter is a stickler, and he is not to be beaten by the ridicule of his Form-fellows in his efforts to become a strong man. He takes up cricket as part of his training, but as a bowler Bunter proves very expensive—literally! It's as a batsman that Bunter shines, but not in the way he intends!

You will have to laugh at the Owl's antics on and off the cricket field in this highly amusing story, which Frank Richards tells in his best and brightest style.

"JOHNNY BULL ON THE RUN!"

This popular author is also in great form, too, with his latest new cover-to-cover yarn of the chums of Greyfriars, which appears in our companion paper, the "Magnet." It's an exciting story, starring Johnny Bull, who hails from Yorkshire. If there's one thing Johnny objects to, it is working during the holidays. As a result of this, he comes up against danger, but Johnny faces it with true Yorkshire grit. Every GEM reader should make a point of reading this ripping story—on sale now, price 2d.

A FAVOURITE ANNUAL!

By the way, chums, don't forget what I told you last week about the "Holiday Annual." It's just out, and is packed from cover to cover with splendid school stories, humorous articles, and sparkling verse, and other bright features. It costs five shillings, and is a real bargain at the price.

IN REPLY.

I received a letter recently from W. Lyons, of East Ham, who has taken to reading the GEM again after a long interval, and he seems in some doubt about the characterisation of Ernest Levison. I can only tell him that there have been one or two changes in

characters since he stopped reading the GEM. If this East Ham reader wishes to be still further enlightened, I will drop him a line if he will let me have his address.

THE DIESEL ENGINE.

Fred Jackson, of Gillingham, who aspires to be a motor engineer, has written to ask me the principle on which the Diesel engine operates. As you doubtless know, this type of engine runs on crude oil. In a petrol engine the vaporised petrol enters the cylinder, and as the piston rises it compresses the "gas," which is then fired by the sparking-plug, the explosion driving the piston down again. In the Diesel engine the principle is similar, except that the rising piston compresses pure air. The air becomes very hot, and when the piston reaches its peak oil is sprayed into the hot air, which is ignited, and drives the piston down again.

The big advantage that the Diesel engine has over petrol and steam engines is that it is so much cheaper to run. That is why all new London buses are fitted with them, and the Great Western are running railcars with this type of engine. The cost of fuel is at least fifty per cent less.

AMAZING BILLIARDS!

Australia, land of the world's billiards champion, Walter Lindrum, is also the land of the most amazing billiards match ever staged. It was not played on the green baize, but in the highway—of all places! The object of the two opponents was for each to play his ball with a cue from one place to another, four miles away, in the quickest time, and with the least number of strokes. It is not stated how many strokes the winner made, or the time taken, but no doubt both had sore knees and aching backs by the time they were through with their freak billiards match!

WHO STOLE THAT LION?

That's the question the people of Wilhelmstein, an island in a lake near Hanover, asked themselves when a monumental stone lion mysteriously disappeared from its place one night. It weighed over twenty-eight stones, so it took some shifting. But if the inhabitants were astonished by its sudden disappearance, they were still more astonished when, a few nights later, the lion was replaced! Who stole it, and why, remains a mystery.

PEN PALS COUPON
12-9-36

THE EDITOR.

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But that was a most discomfiting thought, and Tom Merry tried to drive it from his mind.

He knew that some of the fellows, owing to Levison's insinuations, were beginning to look upon Talbot with distrustful eyes, and he was determined that he would not be among the number.

As for Levison, he did not soon forget that terrible licking, and he was very careful indeed after that to give Talbot's study a wide berth.

But Levison never forgot or forgave an injury, and from that hour Talbot knew that there was one fellow at least in the School House who was watching him, and who suspected him—vaguely, it is true—but whose suspicions might yet be dangerous to the schoolboy who had so dark and terrible a secret to keep.

CHAPTER 13. A Kind Invitation!

THE Grammar School Pastoral Players request the pleasure of Mr. Thomas Merry's company, at the representation of 'Julius Caesar' (William Shakespeare), in the Grammar School grounds, at precisely eight o'clock.

"Bring your pals."

Thus ran the handsome invitation Tom Merry received by post on Wednesday morning.

The familiar style of the last sentence was hardly in keeping with the grandiloquent manner of the beginning. But there it was—a generous invitation to Tom Merry & Co. to go over to the Grammar School and witness the triumph of their rivals in the amateur dramatic line.

Tom Merry read out the note in the quad after morning lessons to all the juniors immediately concerned.

The Terrible Three's discovery of the nature of Gordon Gay's entertainment had been made known to the chums of St. Jim's, and the Shell fellows had been chipped excessively for the utter failure of their scouting expedition.

Had the discovery been made without the Grammarians being aware of the fact, it would have been easy to "dish" the pastoral players by getting up a pastoral play at St. Jim's in advance, and inviting Gordon Gay & Co. over to St. Jim's to see it. But as the matter stood now, the Grammarians were left to rejoice in their success.

"Well, are we going?" asked Figgins.

"It's a rotten state of affairs," said Arthur Augustus. "I must say those Shell chaps mucked up the mattah frightfully—especially Lowthah. But for Lowthah's wotten tuck on me, I should have gone ovah disguised as Doctah Monk, and should have learned the whole bisney fwom start to finish."

"Oh, cheese it!" said Tom Merry. "You wouldn't have got as far as the Grammar School. The first policeman you met would have arrested you as an escaped lunatic!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"The question is now—what's to be done?" said Blake.

"The Grammarians!" said Tom promptly.

"Eh?"

"The Grammarians are to be done. They raided one of our shows once and mucked it up. This is where we return the compliment."

"But we can't go over on their invitation, and then wag the entahtainment, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,491.

Tom Mewwy. That would be bad form."

"Fathead!"

"I refuse to be called a fathead!"

"Some of the fellows can go over and join the audience," said Tom Merry, "but some of us—say, six or seven—won't go. We decline the invitation, having another engagement. The other engagement will be, to go over quietly and get into the grounds and collar Julius Caesar and Brutus and Cassius, and tar them."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Of course, we shan't explain that to Gordon Gay!" said Tom, laughing. "We'll reply to the letter, and accept the invitation for a dozen chaps. May as well have some there in the audience, in case there's a row. It's quite possible that Julius Caesar and Brutus will get ratty!"

"Extremely likely, I should consider!"

And the programme was quickly mapped out. The Terrible Three and Talbot, with Blake, Herries and Kangaroo and Figgins & Co. were to form the raiding party. A dozen others were to go over and join the audience at the Grammar School.

"Pewwaps I had better be with the waidin' partay," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked. "You will weequiah a fellow with some bwains as a leadah—"

"You must be in the audience, old son," said Tom Merry. "You won't do any damage there."

"Weally, you ass—"

"Besides, you might get some of the tar on your clothes," said Tom Merry solemnly.

"Bai Joye, so I might! Pewwaps, afaah all, I had better be in the audience," agreed Arthur Augustus.

And so it was arranged.

That afternoon the juniors were playing their last match of the season, which was against a junior team from Abbotsford School. Talbot, of course, played for St. Jim's, and his cricket was as brilliant as usual.

Loud cheers rang out for Talbot when he contributed fifty to the school score. St. Jim's juniors won by a wide margin and Tom Merry was more satisfied than ever with the latest recruit to the home eleven.

After the match, Talbot left the school on his bicycle for a spin.

"Going out, Talbot?"

"Yes; just for a spin."

"Wait a tick, and we'll come along."

Talbot paused.

"I—I'm only going down to the shop in Rylcombe about my new bat," he said awkwardly. "I'm going to scorch; don't you fellows bother to come!"

"Oh, all right!"

And Talbot wheeled his machine away, leaving Tom Merry with a queer expression on his face. It had not occurred to the captain of the Shell that Talbot might want to go on his spin alone, and he could not help feeling a little hurt. Levison of the Fourth was standing near him, with his eyes on Talbot, and he grinned at Tom Merry as Talbot walked away.

Tom Merry flushed, and turned on his heel. Levison hurried off to the bike-shed and ran his own machine down to the gates. Talbot was riding down the road, and Levison rode in the same direction.

The Shell fellow looked round as he heard Levison's bicycle behind him, and frowned darkly at the sight of the spy of the Fourth.

He slackened speed, and Levison slackened, too. He did not intend to

overtake Talbot. The Shell fellow jumped off, and waited in the road.

Levison came by slowly, and Talbot seized his handlebars and stopped him.

The Fourth Former had to dismount. "What are you up to?" he asked savagely. "Let my machine alone, confound you!"

"You are following me," said Talbot. "I suppose I can ride in Rylcombe Lane if I want to?"

"Ride on, then!"

"I'll ride when I choose!"

"You'll ride on now, or I'll lick you," said Talbot. "I don't choose to be followed about by a spying cad!"

His eyes gleamed dangerously. Levison gritted his teeth and remounted his machine and rode on. Talbot did not remount till the Fourth Former was out of sight.

Levison rode slowly, hoping that Talbot would pass him again. But Talbot did not. He had evidently taken some turning, and Levison did not see him again. The Fourth Former stopped in the High Street of Rylcombe and leaned his bike against Mrs. Murphy's tuckshop, and spent an hour or more there over a glass of ginger-beer and a bun.

On the other side of the road was the outfitter's shop which Talbot had said he was going to visit. If he came there Levison would see him; but Levison did not believe that he would come. A past-master himself in lying, he had guessed that that was simply an excuse Talbot had given to escape the company of the Shell fellow, and to account for his going out.

Levison suspected that Talbot was intending to meet someone—perhaps the mysterious friend he had met the previous Saturday at the Blackbird—and he was curious to know.

It was not till nearly time for locking-up that Levison remounted his bicycle and rode back to St. Jim's.

It was too late then for Talbot to visit the outfitter's shop unless he came in late for locking-up.

Levison entered the School House, and looked round for Talbot. The Terrible Three were chatting in the hall.

"Talbot come in yet?" Levison asked.

"Yes; half an hour ago," said Tom Merry shortly.

"Did he have his new bat?" asked Levison sarcastically.

"I don't see that it's any business of yours, but he did," said Tom.

Levison stared.

"He brought it in?"

"Yes."

"Well, he never went near the shop in Rylcombe—I know that," said Levison. "I've been there all the time."

"Quite so; we know that. He changed his mind and got it at Wayland. They're cheaper at Wayland," said Tom Merry. "He happened to mention it to us. Perhaps he knew that you were spying on him, Levison."

Levison bit his underlip.

"I know jolly well he didn't go out to get a bat at all!" he said. "You fellows will find out some day that I'm right about Talbot. Why wouldn't he have you with him?"

Tom Merry looked steadily at the cad of the Fourth.

"I don't know what you suspect Talbot of," he said. "You're always suspecting somebody of something. I suppose it's your nature to. I thought yesterday Talbot licked you a little too much with that cricket stump; now it seems you haven't had enough. If you say another word to me about Talbot I'll give you some more. Savvy?"

Levison swung away angrily. His

spying had certainly not prospered, and yet he was more convinced than ever that Talbot was deceiving his school-fellows in some way.

"Pah!" growled Lowther. "The fellow makes me sick! Now, about Railton!"

"That's all right!" said Tom Merry, with a smile. "I've asked for leave for the whole party to go over to the Grammar School for the pastoral play. We've got a pass, and Figgins & Co. have got leave, too. It's quite an innocent and harmless occupation, you know, a pastoral play."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We leave here at half-past seven, and I fancy there is going to be a surprise for our friends the enemy this evening."

And the Terrible Three chuckled gleefully at the prospect.

CHAPTER 14.

The Raiders!

PROMPTLY at half-past seven Tom Merry & Co. started for the Grammar School.

There were more than twenty fellows in the party, but all the twenty did not arrive at the big gates of Rylcombe Grammar School.

The intended raiders separated from the rest before they reached their destination.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and half the party kept on to the Grammar School, and walked in cheerfully. They found all the preparations already made for the pastoral play. Seats in great numbers were arranged in a semi-circle on the lawn where the Grammar School amateur actors were to give that representation of Shakespeare's masterpiece.

The dusk was thickening over the school. Chinese lanterns already gleamed in the trees in rows, and shed a glimmering light upon the scene.

The stage was marked off by a row of electric lamps with great effect, which served as the footlights. The green-sward stage was backed up by canvas hangings, supported by ropes passed from the branches of the trees.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus, turning his eyeglass round upon the scene. "I must say that this is wathah nobbay."

"Well got up, and no mistake!" agreed Digby. "Looks as if they're going to have a good audience, too, by the number of seats."

The juniors grinned as they took their seats. Somewhere in the darkness at the back, they knew, Tom Merry & Co. were already in concealment, ready to "chip in" when the right moment arrived.

As eight o'clock drew nearer the seats began to fill.

It was a warm and pleasant evening, and undoubtedly Gordon Gay's idea of a pastoral play was a good one.

Dr. Monk and most of the masters occupied seats in the front, special arm-chairs having been carried out for those honoured members of the audience. Several prefects of the Sixth Form were there, and almost all the Grammar School behind. The seats were filled to the last one, and a crowd of fags had to stand. The School House was deserted, and hardly a window gleamed with a light.

"Bai Jove, it's a wippin' audience!" Arthur Augustus remarked.

"And it's going to be a ripping show, especially when Tom Merry gets to work on the actors!" grinned Redfern.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Eight o'clock rang out.

There was no curtain to raise; the actors were to walk on the scene from behind the canvas screen. The pastoral players dispensed with scenery, that much being left to the imaginative powers of the audience.

At ten minutes past eight the stage was still empty, and the younger part of the audience showed signs of impatience. There were calls to Gordon Gay & Co. to begin.

"Buck up!"

"Play!"

"On the ball!"

"Go it, Julius!"

"Buck up, Brutus!"

Scene 1 commenced at last. It went very well; and when at last Julius

St. Jim's fellows on the spot, save those visible to the eye in the ranks of the audience.

But Tom Merry & Co. were close at hand.

They had clambered over the school wall, and they were watching the play from a safe distance, among the trees near the playing ground.

Outside the circle of light from the pastoral theatre all was dark, and the raiders were quite safe from observation.

"They're going it," murmured Blake, as the voices of the pastoral players came clearly through the still air.

"And we're just going to go it!" said Tom Merry, with a chuckle. "We've got to get the tar first, though."

"Ha, ha, ha!"



The sight of Julius Caesar & Co. with their faces black and dripping with tar, made the audience gasp. Then they burst into a yell of laughter. "Ha, ha, ha!" "Oh, the rotters!" gasped Gordon Gay, dabbing furiously at the tar on his face. "Groogh!" groaned Frank Monk.

Cæsar and the conspirators appeared there was a ripple of applause. Gordon Gay had made considerable "cuts" in the play to shorten it—after the approved style of modern managers, who all know so much better than Shakespeare how a play ought to be written.

The actors were not long in getting to the "fat."

"What hath chanced to-day that Cæsar looks so sad?"

Redfern chuckled softly.

"What's going to chance to-night that Cæsar will look sadder?" he murmured.

And the St. Jim's fellows grinned.

Arthur Augustus and his companions looked about them every now and then, but they saw no sign of the raiders; and the Grammarians had not the slightest suspicion that there were any

"Shush! You can come and help me carry the tar-pot, Lowther."

"Right-ho!"

Tom Merry and Lowther disappeared into the darkness; after a moment Talbot left the rest of the party and followed them. The darkness outside the radius of the lights was intense, and Talbot's departure was hardly noticed.

Tom and Lowther reached the deserted woodshed, where the tar-pot was kept—as they knew only too well. They found it easily enough in the dark, and Tom Merry struck a match and looked into it.

"Plenty of stuff here," he said cheerfully. "I brought some tubes of paint in my pocket, in case there was no tar, but there's heaps. The brush is here, too."

"Good egg!"
 "Lend me a hand. Mind you don't spill it."

The tar-pot was heavy, and the two juniors raised it between them and carried it away; they set it down in the shadow of the nearest tree to the pastoral theatre. The other fellows gathered round them, chuckling softly.

It was the end of a scene, and the Julius Caesar company were all behind the screen; they were chatting cheerfully, thinking of anything but danger, and there was still a ripple of applause from the audience "in front."

Tom Merry lifted the tar-pot.

"Now!" he said.

There was a sudden rush from the darkness.

Several fellows appeared suddenly from nowhere, as it seemed, and burst upon the startled tragedians like a thunderclap.

Gordon Gay and Monk and the rest were collared in a twinkling, and before they knew what was happening Tom Merry was at work with the tar-brush.

Dab, dab, dab! Splash, splash!

"Goo-oo-oooh!"

"Ow, ow!"

"What the— Yaroooooh! Groogh!"

"Yow! Help! Ugh!"

The surprise was so sudden that the Grammarian actors had no chance at all. Almost in a twinkling the tragedians were tarred with reckless slashes of the brush, dipped again and again into the pail and loaded with tar.

Never had any theatrical company undergone so sudden a change.

Julius Caesar, Brutus, Mark Antony & Co. were turned with startling suddenness into Othellos.

Gordon Gay, reeking with tar, and wriggling in the grasp of Manners and Blake, was the first to recover his presence of mind.

"St. Jim's rotters! Go for 'em!" he yelled. "Goo-oooh! Ooooh!" he concluded, as the tar-brush was playfully dabbed upon his open mouth.

"Yah! Rotters! Go for 'em!"

"Kick them out!"

"Give them socks!"

Tom Merry dropped his tar-brush and kicked over the tar-pot.

"Buzz!" he said tersely.

And the raiders fled.

CHAPTER 15.

Another Raider!

"GROO-OO-OOOH!"

"Yow, ow!"

"Great Scott! Ugh!"

"Oh, the rotters!"

"Yah! The beasts! Ow!"

A babble of voices rose from the unhappy actors. As a matter of fact, the company, including the supers, were far more numerous than the raiders, and if they had not been taken by surprise could have handled them quite easily.

But they had been utterly taken by surprise, and the harm was done.

Lowther, before he fled, dragged at the canvas screen suspended on the rope between the trees and yanked it down in a heap.

The actors were exposed to the view of the audience now.

The sight of Julius Caesar & Co. with their faces as black as midnight made the audience gasp; they stared and burst into a yell of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Dr. Monk himself, grave and reverend gentleman as he was, could not help joining in the peal of laughter. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and his comrades were doubled up with mirth. But

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PAID IN ADVANCE!



"Your school report comes to-morrow and I'm going away to-night!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to Miss J. Wallace, Firside, Culford, near Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk.

Gordon Gay & Co. were not laughing; they were furious.

"Oh, the rotters! I never expected this!" gasped Gay, dabbing furiously at the tar on his face.

"Groogh!" groaned Frank Monk. "We never thought how easily the beasts could get at us!"

"Mon dieu! I am tarry all over viz myself!" gasped Mont Blong.

"After them!" howled Wootton major.

Gordon Gay hesitated. But the play was evidently "done." Julius Caesar could not go on to be assassinated with a face the hue of coal; neither would the assassins look at all like Roman conspirators with faces reeking with tar; and the audience, yelling with laughter, were hardly in the mood now for tragedy. Shakespeare's great tragedy had been turned unexpectedly into a comedy, and it was evidently useless to attempt to get back to the tragic pitch again.

"The beasts!"

"Tain't playing the game!"

"Oh, I don't know!" said Gay. "We've done them just as badly sometimes. But we'll scalp them for it, all the same! Hunt for the rotters!"

And the yelling audience were treated to the further funny sight of Julius Caesar, Mark Antony, Brutus, and Cassius, and a crowd of Roman conspirators and citizens chasing away into the darkness in pursuit of the raiders.

"Dear me!" murmured Dr. Monk. "This is—is very—ahem!—extraordinary! I really do not see any use in remaining here longer! Mr. Adams—ahem—I suppose the play will not be continued?"

"I imagine not," said Mr. Adams, laughing. "However, it has been an unexpectedly amusing entertainment."

And the two masters walked away to the House. The audience was already breaking up. The St. Jim's portion had beaten a retreat already, and some of the Grammarians were joining the actors in hunting for the raiders.

But the raiders were not likely to be found.

Tom Merry & Co. did not linger within the precincts of the Grammar School.

They had fled at once, and had clambered over the school wall into the

road in hot haste, and started for St. Jim's.

They ran a hundred yards down the road without a pause, and there they halted to take breath, and to expend it in yells of laughter.

"I rather fancy we score this time!" panted Tom Merry. "It was a bit rough on Brutus and Cassius, but no worse than they've given us sometimes."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"All here?" asked Tom Merry, looking round. "If the Grammarians could get hold of any of us after that, I fancy there would be slaughtering done."

"All here, I think," said Blake.

"Talbot! Where's Talbot?"

"My hat! They can't have caught him. He'd have called out!" exclaimed Tom Merry uneasily. "If they've got him, he'll be tarred, at least!"

"Talbot! Talbot!"

But the Shell fellow did not answer to his name.

"Oh, rotten!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "I had no idea he'd been collared! They'll simply scalp him! Why on earth didn't he call out?"

"More likely he's taken cover, if he couldn't get away," said Kangaroo. "He'd have called out to us if they had him."

"We're going back for him," said Tom Merry.

"Yes, rather!"

The juniors started back at once towards the Grammar School. If Talbot had fallen into the hands of the enraged Grammarians, there was no doubt that he would suffer a most terrific ragging. But halfway to the Grammar School there was a sound of pattering feet in the dark, and Talbot came up, panting.

"Talbot! Good luck!" exclaimed Tom Merry, in great relief. "I was afraid they'd collared you, old chap!"

Talbot breathed hard.

"I was nearly collared!" he panted.

"I caught my foot in one of the ropes, and went down; but I crawled behind the tree, and they didn't spot me. I had to lie low for a bit before I could get away, though. They're hunting for us."

"Let 'em hunt!" growled Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This is where we gloat!" chuckled Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Here come Gussy and the rest!" said Kangaroo.

The St. Jim's members of the audience were coming down the lane, laughing. They joined Tom Merry & Co., and there were fresh roars of laughter.

"We thought it bettah to cleah, deah boys," Arthur Augustus remarked. "Of course, as we were guests, the Gwammah School boundahs couldn't have gone for us, but it was poss that they might have forgotten the considewation due to guests, in the circs."

"Very poss indeed!" chuckled Lowther. "I fancy if you'd stayed there they'd have mopped up the ground with you when they couldn't find us!"

"They seem to be fwightfully wild and watty!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, let's get off!" said Manners. "The whole blessed army of them may come after us if we keep here."

And the victorious raiders marched off towards St. Jim's in great triumph.

There was no pursuit by the Grammarians, however. Having failed to find the raiders within the walls, Gordon Gay & Co. had had to postpone vengeance for a future occasion. But when Tom Merry & Co. had nearly reached St. Jim's, they heard the sound of a bicycle

being driven on the road behind them. They stopped and looked round.

"Is that one of them?"

"Bai Jove! One of them wouldn't come alone—"

"It's Gordon Gay!"

"Collar the bounder!"

The cyclist jammed on his brakes as he came up with the St. Jim's crowd, and jumped off his machine.

"I came after you chaps!" he panted. "Pax! No time for rowing now. Something mysterious has happened!"

"Phew! Tar spilt, or anything like that?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gordon Gay panted.

"Burglars!" he said laconically.

"What?"

"You see, the house was quite empty while we were giving that blessed pastoral play," said Gay ruefully. "Some awful rascals must have spotted it all, and taken advantage of it to sneak in and burgle the house."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Tom Merry, serious at once. "This is rotten!"

"I should say so!" gasped Gay. "But it might have been worse, as it happens, if you fellows hadn't interrupted the play. Dr. Monk was going to stay to the finish. As it was, he went back to his house much earlier than he had intended. The thieves had been in his study, where he keeps that blessed picture, you know. Regular old daub, I call it; but it's worth no end of money. Well, it was gone—cut out of the frame and taken away. And his desk had been opened—the lock picked somehow—and about fifty quid in money taken."

"Phew!"

"The poor old chap was quite knocked over. He valued that blessed picture more than anything else in the world," said Gay. "It's worth two thousand quid, and he can't afford to lose it, really. It was the giddy apple of his eye. He was so knocked over, he just stood and stared at the empty frame—I heard him tell Adams—and then he heard somebody skipping out of the next study—that's Adams' room. Adams had some valuables, but they were safe. The Head coming back so suddenly interrupted the villain, and he cleared. He was actually in the next room when the Head came into his study, and Adams would have been there in a couple of minutes, but the scoundrel heard Dr. Monk, I suppose, and cleared just in time."

"Didn't Dr. Monk see him?" asked Talbot.

"No; he was just too late. The rotter had cleared. I came after you chaps to ask you if you'd seen anybody about the place—any suspicious character, I mean?"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"I'm afraid we only thought of tarring Julius Cæsar," he said. "Blessed if we thought of anything else!"

"But it must have been pretty hard for the thief to get clear, with the whole place in an uproar," said Blake. "Hasn't anybody seen him?"

"No. Fellows were seen running, of course, but they were only the chaps. The thief doesn't seem to have been seen by anybody. They telephoned for the police—they'll be there by the time I get back, and I hoped I might be able to take some information."

There was a general shaking of heads.

"It's rotten!" said D'Arcy. "I trust the picture will be recovered. I weally wish we could help you, deah boy." And Gordon Gay rode back towards the Grammar School, and the St. Jim's party continued on their way.

"It's a rotten thing to happen!" said Tom Merry. "Imagine the dirty thief being at work at the very time that we were there, thinking only of rotting the Gram-mar-ians. If we'd had had the least idea of it—"

"Still, we've done some good," said Blake. "If we hadn't interrupted the show and caused old Monk to go in early, the thief might have made a clean sweep of the place."

"Yaas, wathah! It was a jolly good thin' we waided the boundahs, aftah all."

And that was a comforting reflection to Tom Merry & Co. The raid had had an unexpected result in preventing the thief from further robbery. If the pastoral play had proceeded to its intended length, the burglar would have had a free run of the place.

"Very lucky we went over, after all," said Talbot.

"Vewy lucky indeed!" said Arthur Augustus. "Wathah a pity I wasn't in the waidin' party, though! I think it's vewy probable that I might have spotted that somethin' was goin' on—"

To which the rest of the party replied unanimously:

"Rats!"

"Weally, deah boys!" protested Arthur Augustus. "You know my powahs as an amatuah detective—"

"We do," grinned Monty Lowther. "You're as good in that line as you are at making-up!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

(Continued on page 28.)



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A HUMOROUS YARN IN WHICH BILLY BUNTER COMES OUT STRONG—BUT NOT IN THE WAY THAT HE HOPES!

BUNTER THE ATHLETE!

Physical Culture.

"I SAY, Wharton!" Harry Wharton of the Remove at Greyfriars came quickly into Study No. 1, and crossed to the corner where his cricket-bat stood.

"I say, Wharton—" "What is it, Bunter? I'm in a hurry."

Wharton picked up his bat and turned to the door again. Billy Bunter caught him by the arm.

"I say, Wharton!" "Buck up, then!" said Harry, stopping impatiently. "Cherry and Nugent are waiting for me, and there's not much light left for cricket."

There was a reason for Wharton's impatience. Bunter, the Owl of the Remove—the Lower Fourth Form at Greyfriars—was a slow and lengthy talker, and Wharton was in a hurry.

"I've got a new idea, Wharton—" "Can't you tell me some other time?" "Well, you see, it's rather important. I've been thinking—"

"Buck up!" "I've been thinking of taking up physio—"

"Taking physio? Are you ill?" "Ill? No, I didn't mean—"

"If you want physio, go to the matron," said Wharton. "What on earth's the good of bothering me about it?"

"I didn't say physio. I said—" "Look here, is there anything the matter with you?"

"No; I've been thinking—" "Well, I'm sorry if it's hurt you," said Harry. "You shouldn't start these things too suddenly, that's all. I must be off!"

And he jerked his arm free and darted out of the study. Billy Bunter blinked after him.

"That's rather unkind of Wharton," he murmured. "He ought to be interested in a fellow taking up physical culture, as he's so strong on athletics himself. I don't see why he couldn't have listened. I could have explained in ten minutes or so. I suppose I had better look out for Nugent or Cherry."

And Billy Bunter adjusted his spectacles and left the study. Bunter was an extremely shortsighted youth, and the enormous pair of spectacles he wore did not seem to help him much, for he was always making ludicrous mistakes, owing to his impaired vision.

The Greyfriars Remove had nicknamed him the Owl. The chums of the Remove were usually very patient with him, though Bunter was sometimes trying.

The Owl of the Remove left the School House, and blinked in the sunshine as he came out into the Close. School was over, and the Greyfriars fellows had flocked down to the playing fields for cricket practice.

The playing fields at Greyfriars were extensive, and each Form had its own ground. Greyfriars was a cricketer's college, and practice at the nets was compulsory, though, as a matter of fact, few of the fellows had to be urged to turn up there after school.

The Remove, which had lately started off an independent cricket club on its own, was especially enthusiastic. THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,491.

By Frank Richards.

(Author of the grand long yarns of Greyfriars appearing every Saturday in our companion paper, the "Magnet")

Nearly the whole Form had gone, or was going, down to the Lower Fourth ground for practice, and Billy Bunter followed the stream.

Wharton was already at the wicket, and Nugent was bowling to him. Harry Wharton was the cricket captain of the Remove, and he shaped very well at the wicket. Nugent was a good bowler, but he didn't seem able to pass Wharton's bat.

Whatever he sent down Wharton drove away. Bob Cherry was looking on, and he grinned with delight at the form his chum was showing.

"My hat!" Bob Cherry exclaimed, as Harry Wharton sent the ball to a far corner of the field with a mighty hit. "Why, we shall wipe up the

When Billy Bunter takes up physical culture he has visions of becoming the Strong Man of the school. But his efforts only make him the joke of the school!

ground with the Upper Fourth when we meet them on the cricket field."

"The wifefulness will be terrific!" said Hurree Jamsot Ram Singh, the Hindu member of the Greyfriars Remove. "We shall make the esteemed rotters sing small with their diminished heads."

"Ha, ha! So we will! Why—" "I say, Cherry—"

"Hallo, Bunter! What's the trouble?" "I want to speak to you for a few minutes."

"Go ahead, then. No law against it, that I know of. You don't mind if I don't listen, do you?"

"I say, Cherry—"

"Bravo, Harry!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, as the ball was sent on its journey again. "That was a bit, if you like! I shall be glad to see Wharton facing Temple's bowling."

"The hitfulness is great!" purred Hurree Singh. "The honourable Upper Fourth will receive an esteemed licking when we meet them cricketfully. We—"

"I say, Cherry—"

"Hallo, you still there, Bunter?"

"Yes, I am still here. I want to speak to you. I've been thinking—"

"With what?" asked Bob Cherry, with an inquiring glance at Billy Bunter's head. "I didn't know you had anything there to think with."

"Oh, don't rot, Cherry! This is rather an important matter. You know, I've never taken really sufficient exercise—"

"Quite right, Bunter! The best thing you can do is to take up sprinting,"

said Bob Cherry. "Let's see how long it will take you now to sprint round the Cloisters and back."

"Look here—"

"Oh, cheese it, Bunter! Why don't you take a run?"

"Oh, very well! If you don't want to listen," said Bunter, with dignity.

"I say, Hurree Singh—"

"What is your honourable pleasure?" asked the Nabob of Bhanipur, who was famous for his politeness, which had never been known to fail him under the most trying circumstances. "Pray proceed, my worthy chum."

"You see, Hurree Singh, I've been thinking of taking up physical culture and—"

"Hurree Singh! Where's Inky?"

"I'm here, my respectable friend!"

"You're wanted to bowl. Get on!"

"Excuse me, Bunter, if I take leave of you Frenchfully," said Hurree Singh. "I'm required by my respectable and honoured crickety friends to play bowlfully."

And Hurree Singh took the ball and went on to bowl against Wharton. Nugent joined Bob Cherry. He looked rather red with his exertions.

"Playing up strong, isn't he?" said Nugent. "No bowler in the Upper Fourth to touch his wicket, I think."

Bob Cherry grinned.

"You're right, Nugent. Bravo, Wharton!"

"I say, Nugent—"

"Hallo, Bunter! Don't bother."

"I want to speak to you particularly."

"Can't you go and speak to Bulstrode? He's standing over there, with his hands in his pockets, doing nothing. There's Hazeldene, too. Be a good fellow, and take a little run," said Nugent good-naturedly.

And he took the Owl of the Remove by the shoulders and gently turned him round and started him off with a gentle push.

"Really, Nugent—"

"Keep straight on, and don't come back, whatever you do," said Nugent.

Billy Bunter blinked, and drifted on.

"I wonder if it would be any good talking to Bulstrode or Hazeldene?" he murmured. "I suppose I might as well try."

Bulstrode, the bully of the Remove, was standing with his hands in his trousers pockets, looking at the cricket. There was an unpleasant expression on Bulstrode's face. He had been cock of the Remove before Wharton came to Greyfriars, and he had considered himself fittest to become cricket captain. The Remove had thought otherwise.

"They make a silly lot of fuss about that chap Wharton," he remarked to Hazeldene. "Blessed if I can see it myself. He can bat a little, but as for making him captain of the Remove—well, my hat!"

"Quite right!" said Hazeldene, who agreed with everybody while he was with them, and compensated himself for the trouble by sneering at them behind their backs. "I can't see so much in Wharton's play. He's gone up like a rocket, and he'll come down like the stick, I expect."

"I say, Bulstrode—"

"Hallo! What do you want, Owl?"

"I want to speak to you. I've been

READ HOW THE OWL OF GREYFRIARS SETS ABOUT MAKING A NEW MAN OF HIMSELF. THE LAUGH'S ON BUNTER!

thinking of taking up physical culture, you know. I don't take enough exercise."

"You exercise your lower jaw pretty well, I think."

Bunter gave a sickly smile.

"Ha, ha! But, really, Bulstrode—"

"Well, I don't see why you can't take up physical culture without bothering me about it," said Bulstrode. "You can physical-cult all day and all night for all I care!"

"Yes, but there's a difficulty—"

"Is there, really?"

"Yes. You see, I'm usually rather short of money—"

"Yes, I think I've noticed that," said Bulstrode sarcastically, and Hazeldene grinned.

"I've been trying to get a loan, but nobody seems to take much interest in the matter."

"Curious!" said Hazeldene.

"Yes, isn't it, Vaseline?" said Billy Bunter, unconscious of the sarcasm. "It's rather an important matter, you know. I really think physical culture will make a new man of me. I've read through Professor Kramm's book on the subject, and I can see that it is just what I need, and the things he supplies are just what I want."

Bulstrode grinned.

"Then why don't you send him an order for the lot?"

"That's just what I was thinking of doing," said Bunter eagerly. "But, you see, I happen to be stony just now. I'm expecting a postal order shortly—in fact, it ought to have been here before this, but there seems to have been some delay in the post. When it comes, I shall be able to settle up, of course, so if you could lend me a couple of pounds, Bulstrode—"

"Well, of all the confounded nerve! Why, you young ass, where do you think I'm going to get two pounds from?" said Bulstrode, in amazement.

"Well, you usually have money—"

"Yes, but not to that tune," said Bulstrode. "And if I had it, I shouldn't lend it to you, you can bet your boots on that!"

"I don't think you ought to be disobliging, Bulstrode!"

"Well, I'm not going to stand you two pounds, Bunter," said Bulstrode. "You had better ask Hurree Jampot yonder. He's rolling in money!"

"I've tried to, but—"

"Ask Wharton to pawn his diamond," suggested Hazeldene. Bunter shook his head.

"That diamond is in the Head's keeping now, Vaseline. Besides, he wouldn't. I say, Bulstrode, if you like to lend me that little bit of money, I'd settle up the moment my postal order came."

"Somewhere about the Day of Judgment, I suppose!" grinned Bulstrode. "But, I say, there goes Wingate. He takes an awfully deep interest in physical development, and I've no doubt he'd lend you the tin like a shot!"

Bunter glanced towards Wingate of the Sixth, the captain of Greyfriars, rather dubiously. It was a little unusual for a Fourth Former to attempt to borrow money of a senior, especially the captain of the school.

"Do you really think so, Bulstrode?" he asked.



Bunter hit the ball and then hit out again, and there was a terrific yell from Bulstrode. The next moment the ball swung back, bumped on Bunter's nose and sent him flying. A yell of laughter rose from the watching juniors.

"Yes, rather. What do you think, Vaseline?"

"I don't see how he could very well refuse," said Hazeldene solemnly.

"Well, if you think so, I suppose there's no harm in asking him," said Bunter thoughtfully. "Thanks for the tip."

And the Owl of the Remove hurried to intercept the Greyfriars captain, leaving Bulstrode and Hazeldene nearly choking with suppressed laughter.

"I say, Wingate!"

Wingate stopped. The big, athletic captain of Greyfriars looked at the Owl with a good-natured nod.

"May I speak to you a minute, Wingate?"

"Yes; buck up!"

"I haven't been taking enough exercise lately, Wingate."

"You look like it," said Wingate.

"Take some, then."

"I've had Professor Kramm's book on physical culture sent to me," went on Bunter. "I can see now that physical culture is what I want to make a new man of me."

"It's a good thing," said Wingate. "I've never heard of Professor Kramm. Nugent or Cherry would show you some simple exercises that would do you good."

"Professor Kramm says it's best to take the thing up thoroughly, and he supplies all the necessary apparatus at a very low price," said Bunter. "His things are the best on the market, and sold at a very low price."

"How do you know?"

"Oh, it says so in the book!"

Wingate laughed.

"You'd better not swallow every-

thing you read in that book, kid, or spend money without first taking advice," he said.

"Oh, that's all right," said Bunter confidently. "The things will suit me down to the ground, you know, and a couple of pounds would be enough—"

"My hat! You had better think a little before you spend two pounds on anything," said Wingate.

"Oh, I've thought about it a lot!"

"But where are you going to get two pounds from?" asked Wingate curiously.

"I was going to ask you to lend it to me, Wingate."

"You were going to ask me to lend you two pounds?" ejaculated the captain of Greyfriars.

"Yes, Wingate. Of course, I should pay you back. I'm expecting a postal order for a considerable amount every day, and—"

Wingate gave him a peculiar look.

"I won't lick you for your cheek, Bunter," he said. "You deserve it, though! Cut off!"

"But I say, Wingate—"

"Cut off, I tell you!"

And Billy Bunter thought he had better obey.

"Well, did he lend it to you?" grinned Bulstrode.

Bunter shook his head disconsolately.

"No. He seemed to think it was cheek my asking him."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Bulstrode and Hazeldene together.

"Really, Bulstrode—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter blinked indignantly. It

dawned on him that he had been made a fool of, but his indignation only seemed to add to the merriment of Bulstrode and Hazeldene. Bunter turned on his heel and marched off, followed by a shout of laughter.

Lost Ball!

HARRY WHARTON was still batting on the Remove pitch. Although it was not a regular match, but simply batting practice against a succession of bowlers, Harry's long stay at the wicket was attracting general attention.

All the bowlers of the Remove had tried their skill on him in turn, and there were at least half a dozen fellows in the Remove who could bowl very well.

The Upper Fourth eleven were at practice on their pitch, which adjoined that of the Remove, and Temple, Dabney and Fry, and others of the Form glanced over more than once towards the hero of the Remove.

"That chap's batting rather well, Dab," Temple remarked, in the tone of patronage in which the Upper Fourth usually referred to the Remove.

"Oh, rather!" said Dabney. "He seems to be sticking it out well," went on Temple. "But, of course, he's only standing up to Remove bowlers."

"It would be a bit different against our bowlers, of course," assented Dabney.

"Yes, I think it would," chimed in Fry. "It will be a bit different when we play them in a Form match, you mark my words."

Temple looked at him suspiciously. "Do you mean to say you think they will be able to play us, Fry?" he snapped.

"Yes, I do," said Fry coolly. "And they'll put up a good show, too. If we don't take jolly good care they'll lick us."

"Oh, that's rot, of course!" "Is it? You'll see when the time comes. My idea all along was that you were taking the matter altogether too easily."

"Oh, rats!" said Temple.

"Well, you'll see." "He does bat well," said Castle, joining in. "Look at him swiping that ball. Hallo, it's coming this way! Look out!"

Harry Wharton had given the ball a terrific swipe, and it came with a whizz towards the Upper Fourth fellows.

As a rule, the hitting was not hard enough to send the ball over the rival ground, but Harry Wharton had put his beef into it this time, and the ball came along like a bullet.

"Look out!"

The Upper Fourth fellows dodged. Temple was hardly in time. The whizzing ball passed very close to his head.

"Here they come for their ball," said Dabney. "I don't think we ought to let them have it. Like their cheek to send it over our ground!"

"Right-ho!"

"Good!" exclaimed Giddy. "They've no right on the Upper Fourth ground. I certainly think they oughtn't to have the ball."

"It's our property now," Fry remarked. "Found on our ground, you know. It's treasure trove, or something of that sort."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed

Bob Cherry, coming up breathless. "Have you seen our ball, you chaps?"

"Your ball? What are you talking about?"

"Wharton drove it over this way."

"Rats! This is our ground."

"I know it is. Anybody would know this was the Upper Fourth ground by the kind of batting they can see here!"

exclaimed Bob.

"None of your cheek, Cherry!"

"Bosh! Where's our ball?"

"Any ball lying in the grass about here belongs to us," said Temple. "As members of the Upper Fourth, we are bound to stand on our rights."

"Is it one of your rights to steal a fellow's cricket ball?" asked Bob Cherry sarcastically.

Temple turned rather red.

"Haven't you ever heard of treasure trove?" he said loftily. "Any ball found on our ground becomes our property, by the law of—of nations. Anyway, I jolly well know it becomes our property."

"Rather!" chimed in Dabney and Fry.

"And we can't allow you kids on our ground, either," said Temple. "Clear off, will you?"

"I'm not going without our ball!"

"You're not going with it. Travel!"

"Why, there's that rotter Castle picking it up! Castle, give us our ball."

"Rats!" said Castle cheerfully.

"I tell you I'm going to—"

"Hallo! How long are you going to be fielding that ball?" roared Nugent from the distance.

"They won't give it back!" shouted Bob Cherry.

"Throw that ball over!" shouted Harry Wharton.

"Go and eat coke!" shouted back Temple.

"We'll come and fetch it!"

"I'd like to see you do it!"

"We jolly soon will then!"

And the Removites came towards the Upper Fourth ground. Bob Cherry had made a rush at Castle, and the two juniors were struggling for possession of the cricket ball. Temple and Fry seized Bob Cherry and dragged him down to the grass.

"Frogmarch him back to his own side!" exclaimed Dabney.

"Good wheeze!"

"Let me alone!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Rescue, Remove!"

It was a cry that was never heard in vain by a member of the Greyfriars Remove. The Remove was a fighting Form, and always especially ready for a row with the Upper Fourth.

"Come on!" shouted Harry Wharton.

And the Remove came on.

They swarmed over the Upper Fourth ground, some of the more thoughtful of them bringing bats and cricket stumps to aid in the tussle.

The rush of the Remove sent the Upper Fourth reeling away, and Bob Cherry was quickly released and set upon his feet.

"Now wipe up the ground with them while we're here!" exclaimed Nugent.

"Hurrah! Let the wipefulness be terrific!" exclaimed Hurree Singh.

"Give it to them sockfully, my worthy chums!"

And the Remove waded in with a vengeance.

Temple, Dabney & Co. put up a good fight, but they were outnumbered, and they were knocked right and left as they were driven back right across their pitch to the boundary.

"Look out for Castle!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"He's got the ball!"

"Collar Castle!" shouted Harry Wharton.

"Hook it, Castle!" yelled Temple.

"Save the ball!" shouted Dabney.

"What-ho!" exclaimed Castle.

"The cad's taking our ball away!"

"Stop him!"

Harry Wharton broke into a desperate dash after the Upper Fourth fellow, who was running for all he was worth. Wharton put on a spurt, and gained on the fugitive inch by inch. Castle would certainly have been captured, but unfortunately Bunter came blundering in Harry's way. The short-sighted Removite didn't observe the chase, and he crossed the course at the unluckiest moment.

"You ass—clear—ow!" gasped Harry.

He ran right into Billy Bunter and they rolled on the ground together.

Castle, with a breathless laugh of triumph, disappeared into the School House with the Remove ball still safe in his possession.

Harry Wharton staggered to his feet, looking and feeling rather dazed. Billy Bunter still lay on his back, gasping like a newly-landed fish. He sat up and adjusted his spectacles.

"What do you mean by running into me like that, Bulstrode?" he asked.

"You ass, I'm not Bulstrode! Why couldn't you see where you were going?"

"Oh, is it you, Wharton? Now, you know I'm shortsighted, and you really ought to be more careful. By the way, I want to speak to you. Can you lend me two pounds till my postal order comes—Why, he's gone!"

Harry Wharton had not waited for any more. He rejoined his chums. They had beaten the Upper Fourth hollow in the scrimmage, but the ball was lost.

"Never mind," said Bob Cherry.

"We shall get it back—and it was a jolly row, anyway, and we made the Upper Fourth run. Let's get back to practice."

Backing Up Bunter.

THERE was an unusually serious shade on Billy Bunter's face when the chums of the Remove came in to tea. It usually fell to Bunter to get tea in the study, because he never went in for athletic games, and, as Bob Cherry said, a fellow had to do something or he would get rusty. Besides, Bunter contributed little or nothing to the study funds, while he had by far the largest appetite of the five, and so it was only fair that he should put in most of the work. Bunter did not grumble about that. But new ideas were working in his mind about this time.

He had a really fine tea prepared for the hungry cricketers when they came in. He saw them from the window and made the tea in readiness. The fragrant aroma of tea greeted the Famous Four as they came into the study, and Bob Cherry sniffed appreciatively. Nugent looked at the well-spread table and slapped Billy Bunter on the back.

"Jolly good, Bunter!" he remarked.

"I suppose this means a fresh score chalked up against some of us in the shop, but—"

"Well, you see," said Bunter, blinking at him over the teapot, "my postal order hasn't come yet. I wanted to stand treat myself, but it was no good asking for credit in my name. Nobody seems to want to give me credit!"

Bob Cherry chuckled.

"That's rather remarkable, when you

come to think of it, Bunter," he observed. "I should think that shopkeepers would rush to get a customer like you. You would make them all rich when your postal order came. I say, pour out the tea, Bunter."

"Certainly, Cherry."

"Look out!" yelled Nugent, as Billy Bunter whisked the teapot round and sent a spurt of the hot fluid over his legs.

Bunter blinked at him.

"What's the matter, Nugent?"

"You ass! You've scalded me!"

"I'm sorry, Nugent!" said Bunter, whisking the teapot away and sending a spurt over Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"I can't see very well, you know. Is anything the matter with you, Hurree Singh?"

"Oh!" groaned the Nabob of Bhanipur, hopping on one leg and

"Oh, I'm happy!" said Bob Cherry. "I've no fault to find with this veal-and-ham pie, Bunter. I commend your taste."

"And these sardines are all right, too," Nugent remarked. "I'll trouble somebody for the pepper, please."

"I like this tongue," said Harry Wharton. "Bunter, you're a shopper in a thousand. Did you get this at the school shop?"

"Yes, rather!" said the gratified Bunter.

"Good! You shall always do our shopping."

"Thank you, Wharton, but—"

"These bananas are niceful," Hurree Singh remarked. "The nicefulness of the bananas is only equalled by the jolly goodness of the esteemed Bunter in preparing the feed for his chumful friends."

"Still, you must admit that physical culture is a jolly good thing for anybody to take up," said Bunter persuasively.

"Oh, yes!" exclaimed Wharton heartily. "If you want to take exercise, Bunter, we'll all back you up. We should like to see you improve."

"Right-ho!" said Bob Cherry. "You're a lazy, unhealthy little worm, and good physical exercises would do you a lot of good."

"Quite right," assented Nugent. "Bunter wants shaking up out of the lethargic state he has fallen into through laziness and over-feeding—"

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"The shakefulness is greatly required," said Hurree Singh. "Perhaps the lickfulness with a cricket stump would be goodfully beneficial to the esteemed Bunter. If he wishes to try



"Wipe up the ground with them!" exclaimed Nugent. And the Remove waded into the Upper Fourth with a vengeance. Temple, Dabney & Co. were out-numbered, and they were knocked right and left by the angry Removites.

nursing the other in both hands. "The scaldfulness is terrific!"

"Have I scalded you, too? I'm sorry. It's due to my short sight. I find it a great affliction."

"So do others. I should imagine," exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Keep off with that teapot, ass! You're too dangerous at close quarters."

"I'm sorry that I've scalded anybody," said Bunter. "I shall have to put some more water in the teapot now. Hand me the kettle, will you, Wharton?"

Harry Wharton laughed as he picked up the kettle.

"I'll put it in myself," he said. "You're not safe with a boiling kettle!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Here you are!"

The teapot was replenished and the chums of the Remove sat down to tea. Hurree Singh rubbed his leg ruefully. It wasn't a bad scald, but it was painful for the time. Billy Bunter adjusted his spectacles and beamed at the chums over the tea-table.

"Have you got all you want?" he asked. "I've taken a lot of trouble with this feed, because I want you to have a good time."

"I'm glad you like them, Hurree Jampot—"

"Jamset, my respectable chum," purred the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"My mistake. I say, you chaps, if you've all got what you want, I want to speak to you—"

"We've all got what we want," said Bob Cherry. "But don't give us anything we don't want, there's a good chap."

"It's rather an important matter."

"I hope you're well, Bunter," said Harry Wharton, looking at him across the table. "I remember you told me a while ago that you were going to take physic—"

"Not physic, Wharton—"

"Yes, I'm certain you said physic—"

"Not at all, I'm going to take up physical culture."

"Oh, I see."

"I've been studying Professor Kramm's book on the subject," Bunter explained. "He describes all the symptoms of a chap who is in want of physical culture, and most of the symptoms tally exactly with mine."

"I expect they're worked out to fit anybody."

the experiment, I should be happy to bestow the required lickfulness."

"Oh, no, not at all!" exclaimed Bunter hastily. "Don't be an ass, you know. I'm going to take up physical culture—punching-balls, and dumb-bells, and that sort of thing, you know. Professor Kramm says that it makes a new man of you."

"You're not a man at all yet," Bob Cherry remarked. "Still, if it makes a new donkey of you, I suppose that's something."

"It's a good idea," said Wharton. "As a matter of fact, I'm going in for a punching-ball, and we can have it rigged up in the study here, and you can use it, Bunter, as much as you like."

"Thank you, Wharton," said Bunter. "That will save me the expense of a punching-ball. Though really, Professor Kramm specially recommends his own punching-ball as being the most suitable."

"Rats!"

"But I shall require dumb-bells, too, and Indian clubs," said Billy Bunter.

"I shall want some more things, too."

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"You can borrow the clubs from the gym."

"Yes, I suppose so—"

"If Bunter is going to monkey around with Indian clubs, he's got to do it in the gym!" exclaimed Nugent emphatically. "He'll be braining some of us."

"That's so!"

"I don't want to take physical culture in public," Bunter observed. "The fellows think I shall never make an athlete."

"Ha, ha, ha! Curious!"

"And I don't want to be laughed at by silly asses—"

"Why, what do you mean, you young—"

"So I should prefer the study," explained Bunter. "As for the Indian clubs, I might exercise with them in the class-room after lessons. But the dumb-bells—"

"Well, you can use the dumb-bells here when we're out."

"Yes, but—"

"Hang it! You don't particularly want to brain anybody, do you?"

"Oh, no, Nugent, not at all! I should be sincerely sorry to brain anybody. But before I can use the dumb-bells, I have to purchase them, you know."

"Well, purchase them, then."

"Yes, that's a good idea. But my postal order hasn't arrived."

"Oh, I see! Same old game!"

"You see, I'm stony," explained Bunter. "I could wait till my postal order came, but I'd rather commence physical culture at once."

"Well, if it's going to make a man of you—"

"Yes, that's what Professor Kramm says."

"While waiting for the postal order would make an old man of you!"

"Oh, don't be so funny, Nugent! It's really certain to come to-morrow morning by the first post, but in case it doesn't—"

"Yes, of course, it might not!"

"I want you fellows to lend me two pounds for a few days."

"Why don't you say two hundred?" asked Bob Cherry, with gentle sarcasm. "I'd like to know the chap in the Remove who has two pounds to lend."

"I could stump up half-a-crown," said Nugent thoughtfully. "Do you think you could get a complete athletic outfit for half-a-crown, Bunter?"

"I say, Nugent—"

"I could make it three bob," Harry Wharton remarked. "But that's just about as much good. As a matter of fact, Bunter, there's no need to take Professor Kramm's advice too literally."

"But it says in the book—"

"Never mind what it says in the book. There are lots of silly things in books. Professor Kramm can go on kramming. You can use my punching ball, and borrow Indian clubs from the gym, and as for dumb-bells—"

"You see, I want a pair that can be increased in weight as I increase in strength," explained Bunter. "I expect to get awfully strong by physical culture. Physical culture will do wonders even for the weakest persons. It says so in the book—"

"Blow the book!"

"It's a jolly good book, Cherry, and tells you how Professor Kramm himself used to be awfully weak, and became very strong all through using his own system of physical culture and the things he has to sell. No others are half as good for the purpose."

"Ha, ha! You'll be the death of me yet, Bunter!"

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"I can't see anything to cackle at! But about those dumb-bells—"

"I wish you were like the bells, Bunter!"

"How?"

"Dumb, you know!"

"Oh, really, Cherry! You won't let me finish. I want a pair about sixteen pounds' weight, increasing up to thirty by putting shot into them, you know."

"Better have 'em fifty, increasing up to half a ton!"

"I wish you'd be serious, Cherry!"

"How long do you think it will be before you can lift thirty-pound dumb-bells?" Bob Cherry demanded.

"According to Professor Kramm, I ought to be able to handle them in a week. It says in the book—"

"Rats! You'd better get a pair of four or five-pound dumb-bells, and stick to them."

"Really, Cherry—"

"You'll bust something if you start too suddenly, you know," said Harry Wharton. "Have something light to start with."

"Well, perhaps I will, but—"

"I've an old pair of dumb-bells that will just about suit you," said Nugent. "I'll lend them to you with pleasure."

"Thank you, Nugent! But I want the ones I was speaking of, too, ready for when I'm stronger."

"He won't be happy till he gets them!" grinned Wharton. "Have them, by all means, Bunter, and sleep with 'em under your pillow!"

"But they cost a guinea, and I've only fourpence at the moment," said Bunter. "I can do without the other things at present, at any rate, if I can get the dumb-bells."

"Who says they cost a guinea?"

"That's the price of Professor Kramm's."

"You can get them quite good enough for fifteen bob."

"But it says in the book—"

"Look here, Bunter, if you mention that book again, I'll—I'll make you eat it! You're not going to blue a guinea on a pair of Kramm's dumb-bells. You're going to get them for fifteen bob."

"Well, I don't mind, Wharton. Thank you so much for offering to lend me fifteen bob!"

"My dear chap, you're under a slight misapprehension. I haven't offered to do anything of the kind."

"But you said—"

"Really, Bunter, I'd lend it to you with pleasure, but I haven't it. I may be able to manage it in a week or two."

"I want to start my physical culture at once."

"If you will extend to me the permitfulness, I will make the loanful gift of the respectable fifteen shillings," said the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"You're a really good sort, Hurree Singh, and I'm awfully obliged!" said Billy Bunter. "If you've got it about you—"

"The goodful cash is in my pocket at the present moment, my worthy chum."

"Thank you, Hurree Singh!"

Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh, who was usually rolling in money, was flush of cash on the present occasion. He took out a ten-shilling note and five shillings from his pocket, and laid them on the table.

Billy Bunter's eyes glistened.

"I say, Hurree Singh, that's jolly good of you, you know!"

"Not at allful, my respectable friend!"

"Of course, I shall repay you this

little loan when my postal order comes," said Bunter, pocketing the money.

The nabob grinned.

"Don't trouble your brainful mind about the payfulness, my respectable chum," he said. "That is an unmomentful matter."

Billy Bunter shook his head.

"I'm afraid I can't accept the loan on those terms, Hurree Singh," he said, without, however, making any movement to reproduce the money from his pocket. "I could not possibly sponge on you, you know. Unless you regard it as a loan, to be repaid the moment my postal order comes, I can't accept the fifteen bob."

"I consider it regardfully as a loanful sum," the nabob assured him. "As your famous poet Shakespeare says, 'What's in a nameful designation?' A rose by any other name would be more in heaven and earth than your philosophy."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Is that Shakespeare, Hurree Singh?" "Certainly, my uproarious and ludicrous chum. It is in the great poet Shakespeare's works, which I studied under my esteemed native instructor in Bengal, before I had the honourable happiness to visit these shores."

"Well, I rather think your esteemed native instructor was an esteemed ass! You've got it all mixed."

Hurree Singh shook his head gently. He was the best-tempered and most placable junior at Greyfriars, but he could be firm. And he was always especially firm upon his knowledge of the English language and the works of the British poets.

"I think you are slightly mistaken, my esteemed Cherry," he remarked. "That is how I learned it under my respectable native instructor. I have noticed that many English people have not the deepful knowledge of the famous and justly esteemed Shakespeare. I have studied his works in Bengal, from 'The Tradesman of Venice' to 'A Dreamful Summer Midnight.'"

"Ha, ha, ha! Jampot, old man, your esteemed instructor in Bengal ought to have been presented with a tin medal and a prize thick ear."

"I think I'll go down to the village and see about those dumb-bells," Billy Bunter remarked. "Oh, there's one thing more I wanted to say."

"Say it quick, then, and cut it short."

"Well, as I'm going to devote a large amount of my time to physical culture, and I don't want to risk overworking myself, I'm afraid I shan't be able to get tea in the study any more," said Billy Bunter. "I'm sorry for this."

"Oh, Bunter, we shall miss you!"

"Yes, I dare say you will; but it will be compensation when I bring great credit on the college by my feats of strength."

"Ha, ha! Yes, rather!"

"I know you won't mind," said Bunter. "You can take it in turns to get the tea, you know, and you can always depend on me to have tea with you."

"Oh, you needn't bother!" said Nugent, in his blandest tone. "So long as you're going in for physical culture we'll have tea in Hall."

Bunter looked rather blank.

"But I greatly prefer to have tea with you in the study, you know!" he exclaimed. "The tea in Hall is rather rotten."

"Oh, chaps can take in what they like."

"Yes; but until my postal order comes I'm stony."

"That's rather hard on you, isn't it, Bunter?"

"Yes, it is really, Nugent. I'd much rather you kept on having tea in the study."

"Ha, ha! I dare say you would. But there's an ancient saying, Bunter: 'He that will not work, neither shall he eat.'"

"Oh, I say, Nugent!"

"Tea in the hall, chaps!" said Nugent. "This is our last feed here, so long as Bunter is ambitious of becoming a strong man."

"On second thoughts, Nugent, I think I shall be able to find time to get tea as usual," said Bunter thoughtfully.

"Oh, don't bother!"

"But, really—"

"We should like to have our tea in the Hall with the Form, for a change, and it would come cheaper, too."

"Yes, but—"

"We'll try it, anyway."

"Good!" exclaimed Bob Cherry heartily. "We mustn't take up any more of Bunter's time, now that he's going in for athletics. Besides, he will have to give up eating cream-puffs, and tarts, and things."

"I say, you fellows—"

"It's all settled, Bunter. We have tea in the hall."

"No, you don't. You'll have it in here, as usual, and I shall get it," said Billy Bunter. "You'll have to pay for the things, so you may as well come and eat them. I shall have lots of time, when I come to think of it."

"Well, if you insist, Bunter, you shall have your way."

And, that important point having been settled, Billy Bunter went off to order his dumb-bells.

Bunter Tackles the Punching-Ball!

BILLY BUNTER had never been exactly a leading personage in the Greyfriars Remove. But just now he was certainly going strong.

He had taken up physical culture in earnest, and though most fellows took it as a joke, that did not worry Bunter.

Nearly all the Remove took a friendly interest in the matter, in the hope of extracting some fun from it, and Billy Bunter found himself famous.

It was Bunter's "boom," as Bob Cherry expressed it, and Billy was going ahead.

There was no doubt that physical culture would do Bunter good, as he was, in point of fact, rather inclined to overeating and laziness. The chums of the Remove watched his progress with great interest.

Harry Wharton's punching-ball had been put up in the study. Billy Bunter punched away at it valiantly time and time again. If he sometimes received a biff on the nose, that did not discourage him.

"I'm getting on finely," he remarked to Wharton, as the Remove came out of their class-room the next day. "You can see the improvement, can't you?"

Harry glanced at him.

Bunter's face looked, perhaps, a trifle less fat and puffy than usual, so Harry gave him an encouraging nod.

"Yes, I fancy you look a bit different, Bunter."

"I haven't got the dumb-bells yet," Bunter observed. "It's the punching-ball does it. I'm going to have a go at it now. Professor Kramm says in his book that there's science in a thing like that, you know. There's a way to punch the ball, and a way not to punch it. I think I'm getting on to the thing now. If you'd like to see some really scientific

ball-punching, you can come along to the study."

The Famous Four grinned at one another.

"Good!" said Bob Cherry. "That's really the one thing I've been looking forward to for a long time."

"The remark of my esteemed friend exactly expresses my sentiments," said Hurree Singh. "I have the yearning to behold the scientific punchfulness of the esteemed ball."

"Good!" said Nugent. "We'll come and watch you, Bunter, and collect up the pieces."

"My hat!" exclaimed Bulstrode. "So we will, eh, Vaseline?"

"Right-ho!" said Hazeldene.

Some more of the Removites were also curious to see Billy Bunter at exercise. Quite a little crowd went along to Study No. 1, and Bunter felt a glow of importance as he marched into the room.

"Will you hook up the ball, Wharton?" he said, as he began to peel off his tight little Eton jacket. Billy Bunter's jackets were always tight for him—or he was tight for the jackets, whichever it may be.

"Certainly!" said Harry.

He soon had the punching-ball taut on its straps, between the hooks. Billy Bunter rubbed his fat little hands together.

"Now stand back, Wharton, will you?"

"Right-ho!"

The four chums got at a safe distance from Billy Bunter. It was necessary to be careful when Bunter took off his glasses and started hitting out. Bulstrode was not so cautious. He stood quite near the ball, his hands in his

pockets, and a grin on his face.

"Now look out for the show!" he remarked.

"This isn't exactly a show, Bulstrode," said Bunter. "This is really an exhibition of how to punch the ball scientifically."

"Go hon! Let's see you do it."

"Will you hold my glasses, Cherry?" Bob Cherry took them, and Bunter walked up to the punching-ball.

Like most persons accustomed to the use of glasses, he was especially short-sighted the moment of taking them off, and, as a matter of fact, the study was in a fog around him, and he could hardly see the punching-ball at all.

Bunter put up his fists in a scientific manner and let drive at the ball. The ball swayed away.

"You see," explained Bunter, "you have to catch it as it comes back, and keep it going like that—"

He hit the ball again, and then hit out again, and there was a terrific yell from Bulstrode. The next moment the ball swung back and bumped Bunter's nose and sent him flying. A yell of laughter shook the study.

Bunter sat up and looked bewildered. "How—how did that happen?" he gasped.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I hit the ball—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And yet it biffed me on the nose by—"

"Ha, ha, ha! You didn't hit the ball that time!" roared Bob Cherry.

"What did I hit, then? I'm sure I hit something!"

"Ha, ha, ha! It was Bulstrode's nose!"

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"Bulstrode's nose! My hat!"

"You young villain!" roared Bulstrode, clasping both hands to his nose.

"You did that on purpose."

Billy Bunter staggered to his feet.

"I'm sincerely sorry, Bulstrode. I thought it was very hard for the ball, and it was your face, after all."

"I'll make you sorrier!" howled Bulstrode, darting towards Bunter.

Harry Wharton stepped in the way.

"Hold on, Bulstrode. It was an accident."

"Mind your own business!"

"You know how shortsighted Bunter is, and what a blithering ass he is—"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"I'm going to smash him!" snarled Bulstrode.

"Do you think I'm going to have a dangerous lunatic bashing my nose for nothing?"

"You shouldn't put your nose so near the punching-ball!"

"I'm sincerely sorry, Bulstrode," said Bunter. "If you're not satisfied, I will fight you in a few weeks' time, when I've developed my strength."

"Ha, ha! There's your chance, Bulstrode," said Nugent. "Now keep the peace, or we shall have to sling you out of the study."

Bulstrode growled and subsided. The four chums were ready to throw him out, and, after all, he knew it was an accident. So he growled and stopped back.

"Now, then, Bunter, get on with the washing," said Hazeldene encouragingly.

"I am about to proceed, Vaseline. I hope none of you will stand too near the punching-ball again—"

"Ha, ha, ha! I don't think that's likely."

"Better have your blinkers on, Bunter."

"Thank you, Cherry."

Billy Bunter squared up to the punching-ball again. Bulstrode was careful to keep out of reach this time.

Then, third time, Billy Bunter's fist—

"Good!"

"Bravo!"

Bunter was hitting out in fine style. He caught the ball on the rebound each time, and kept it going at a fine rate till he got excited. Then the catastrophe came!

"Watch, me!" gasped Bunter.

"Watch—Ow!"

He was jumping at the ball and hitting out wildly. He missed, and the ball sprang back and caught him fairly in the region vulgarly known as the bread-basket.

There was a fearful gasp from Billy Bunter as nearly every ounce of wind

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was knocked out of his body by the concussion.

"Ow!"

The next moment he was lying on his back on the carpet, staring dizzily up at the ceiling of Study No. 1.

The Removites yelled with laughter.

"Ow! What the—how the—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Nugent lent Bunter a hand to rise. He staggered up, puffing and blowing like a grampus.

"I—I—I feel rather winded!" he gasped.

"Ha, ha! No wonder!"

"Go for it again, Bunter!" exclaimed Hazeldene.

"N—no!" gasped Bunter. "I think I'll give the thing a rest, you know. Physical culture is a jolly good thing, but it's no good overdoing it at the start."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the Removites left the study, laughing like hyenas. Billy Bunter rubbed himself tenderly in the place where the ball had lifted him.

"I feel rather lost," he murmured.

"I've lost all my wind. I really don't see anything comical in the incident myself."

But the Removites did, to judge by the way they laughed and chuckled over it!

(Bunter's efforts to become strong have not met with much success so far, but he's a stickler. Don't miss reading what happens in next week's chapters.)

THE TOFF'S ENEMY!

(Continued from page 21.)

CHAPTER 16.

Levison's Suspicions!

TOM MERRY & CO. were anxious for news from the Grammar School the next day.

"The local paper was published that day and it contained a lengthy account of the burglary. Fifty pounds in money and the Head's famous picture by Leonardo da Vinci had been taken. The picture was not a large one. It had been ripped from its frame with a few cuts of a knife, and probably rolled up and slipped under a coat."

The description of the picture was given, and if it had been offered for sale in England, undoubtedly it would have led to the discovery of the thief. But in New York there was an easy market for such a treasure, and Dr. Monk had little hope of seeing it again.

Gordon Gay came over in the evening to tell what news there was. It was not much. The police had no clue. The

lock on Dr. Monk's desk had been opened so neatly that it was evidently the work of an experienced cracksmen. And Inspector Skeat suspected that it was done by the same hand as the recent "job" at Glyn House. But the cracksmen had vanished without leaving a trace behind.

Levison turned to Gordon Gay.

"How was the lock fixed?" he asked.

"Blessed if I know! Those scoundrels have some sort of an instrument for picking locks," said Gay.

"A steel instrument, I suppose?"

"Very likely. I don't know anything about their tools."

Levison's eyes gleamed strangely. A suspicion had come into his mind. He hardly knew how. Perhaps it was the remembrance of those strange words Talbot had muttered in his study:

"Two thousand pounds." The stolen picture was worth two thousand pounds.

"To-morrow night." And it was on the morrow night that this had happened.

Before Levison's eyes there seemed to dance that gleam of steel as Talbot had taken something from the secret receptacle in the desk that was fastened by a patent lock.

"What have you got in your head now?" asked Tom Merry, who was watching the changes in Levison's face

with curiosity, and a vague feeling of uneasiness that he could not account for.

"I know you're a deep beast. If you've thought of anything that could help in this matter, get it off your chest. Your spying might come in useful, if you've seen anybody about who might be that thieving rotter."

"Perhaps I have," said Levison.

"Where—and when?"

"That's what I'm going to make sure of," said Levison coolly, and he walked away.

The police remained without a clue to the robbery at the Grammar School. In a few days the St. Jim's fellows had almost forgotten the matter. But there was one who did not forget—one in whose mind black suspicions were working. But without proof—and the clearest proof—he dared not speak. His dark suspicion was unknown and unshared, and still Talbot of the Shell was the most popular fellow in the School House at St. Jim's.

(Next Wednesday: "THE TOFF AT THE CROSS-ROADS!" Look out for the final great yarn in this series. Order your GEM early.)

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