

THIS WEEK'S BEST SCHOOL STORIES—INSIDE! Starring the St. Jim's and Greyfriars Chums.

The GEM

2d



TWISTEM TRICKS' EM!

FUN, RAGGING, AND JAPING ARE FAST AND FURIOUS IN THIS—

JOLLY JINKS AT ST. JIM'S!



Mr. Linton came striding along, with rustling gown and frowning brow, just as the piano was rushed round the corner in the grasp of the breathless juniors. The piano crashed into the Shell master, and Mr. Linton staggered back and fell with a bump.

CHAPTER 1.

A Meeting and Misunderstanding.

TOM MERRY raised his hand for silence.

"Gentlemen—"

And all the fellows in Tom Merry's study in the School House at St. Jim's said cordially:

"Hear, hear!"

There was quite a crowd.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther, the Terrible Three of the Shell, to whom the study belonged, and Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy from Study No. 6, and Figgins & Co. from the New House—ten fellows in all.

Ten fellows were a goodly number to pack into a junior study, and, as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked with his beautiful accent, it was "wathah a cwowd."

But the juniors didn't mind; they were used to crowds. Excepting the Terrible Three, no one knew the object of the gathering; but they naturally supposed it to be a feed. In the first place, it was about tea-time. In the second place, they were hungry after footer practice. In the third place, what possible object could Tom Merry have had in calling them together, excepting for a feed?

True, there were no signs of a feed on the table. The table was bare, save for an inkstand and a sheet of impot paper.

Fatty Wynn's eyes wandered towards THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,493.

the cupboard. He didn't want to seem eager. But really he couldn't guess why the hosts did not produce the grub.

"Gentlemen—" repeated Tom Merry.

"Pile in!" said Blake cheerfully.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We are all here, or nearly all. I told Kangy to come, but—"

"Here I am!" said the cheerful voice of Harry Noble of the Shell as he came into the study. "Hungry as a hunter."

"Same here!" murmured Fatty Wynn, with deep feelings.

"Shut the door, Kangaroo. We're all here now."

"Good!"

The Cornstalk closed the door. He glanced in some surprise at the table. Like the rest, he could conceive no possible object for that gathering in Tom Merry's study save a feed, and he was fresh from the footer ground, and quite ready to do the fullest justice to the most substantial feed.

"Gentlemen, I rise to make a few remarks—"

"I say, we could eat while we talk, you know," said Fatty Wynn, breaking out at last. "You don't mind my mentioning it, but I'm rather peckish."

"Now Wynn speaks of it, I'm a bit sharp, too," remarked Jack Blake. "I always think that a speech goes down better during a feed."

"No objection to our getting on while

you jaw, Tommy?" asked Herries affably.

"None at all," said Tom Merry, with great politeness. "Gentlemen—"

"Then we may as well begin," said Fatty Wynn.

"We can't begin without the feed, you know," hinted Digby.

"What feed?"

The juniors all stared at Tom Merry as he asked that question. Tom Merry stared at them. There was evidently a misunderstanding somewhere.

"The feed we came here for!" exclaimed Kerr.

"My hat! Did you come here for a feed?" said Tom Merry in astonishment. "What on earth put that idea into your heads?"

"Why, you—you ass—"

"You fathead!"

"You duffer—"

"You asked me to come for something important!" roared Fatty Wynn. "Of course, I thought it was for a feed!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You would," grinned Monty Lowther.

"Well, isn't it?"

"No, it isn't!"

Fatty Wynn rose to his feet. Fatty Wynn was a good-tempered chap, and he could take most things in good part; but there were limits. There were sardines and jam waiting for him in his own study in the New House, and he had left them to come over to the School House for a feed in Tom

By MARTIN CLIFFORD

Merry's study. And now there was no feed!

"I wegard it as sheeah cheek!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, surveying the Terrible Three severely through his eyeglass. "Sheeah nerve!"

"I'm hungry," remarked Kangaroo. "So am I," said Blake. "Luckily, we've got something in our study. I'm off!"

"Same here!"

"Hold on!" exclaimed Tom Merry warmly. "This is an important meeting, on an important subject."

"Well, pile in," said Figgins gruffly. "We'll give you a couple of minutes. If the thing's really important we'll look over it. If you're only wasting our time we'll give you a bumping all round."

"Hear, hear!" said the whole meeting heartily.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Gentlemen—" said Tom Merry, for the fifth or sixth time.

"We've had that," said Blake. "Get on with the washing."

"You may, or may not, be aware that next week occurs the birthday of our Form-master, Mr. Linton."

"Your Form-master!" snorted Blake. "He's not ours!"

"We don't own him!" remarked Figgins.

"Being Mr. Linton's birthday," pursued Tom Merry, unheeding, "we—Lowther, Manners, and I—have thought that it is up to us to celebrate the important occasion. Form-masters don't have birthdays every day, and when they happen, why, it's only the right thing to make a bit of celebration, you know."

"Rats!"

"Rot!"

"Rubbish!"

Those replies seemed to indicate that the juniors did not in the least realise that the birthday of a Form-master was an important occasion. The Terrible Three looked a little discouraged, but Tom Merry went on manfully. He felt that it was a little misunderstanding about the feed that accounted for the want of enthusiasm on the part of the meeting.

"We were thinking of an entertainment on the great day," he went on. "A sort of show, with all the talent of both Houses to the fore, with professional assistance."

"Professional assistance!" said Figgins. "What does that mean?"

"You have heard of Professor Buzzle, who is giving the conjuring show in Rylcombe. It we made it an afternoon show, we could get the professor to come and give us a turn," said Tom Merry. "He would do it for a guinea. That would be the piece de resistance of the entertainment—the principal item, you know."

"I fancy we know what piece de resistance is!" snorted Kerr.

"Then we could have songs and dances and things, and—all sorts of items," said Tom Merry, a little vaguely. "D'Arcy could give his celebrated imitation of a cat on the tiles—"

"You uttah ass! If you are alludin' to my tenah solos—"

"It ought to be a ripping success," said Tom enthusiastically, in spite of the frigidity of the meeting. "Old Linton would be pleased. And as we should

charge for admission, we ought to have a tidy sum left over for the benefit of the football club to start the season with. What do you think of the idea?"

And the meeting replied with one voice:

"Rotten!"

"Well, you silly asses—"

"You chumps!" said Lowther.

"You duffers!" remarked Manners.

Jack Blake glanced round at the disgusted meeting.

"Gentlemen, it was agreed that unless Tom Merry had really something important to say, these three howling jossers were to be bumped baldheaded. I submit to the meeting that this tosh about old Linton's birthday isn't important at all."

"Hear, hear!"

"Wathah not!"

"Bump them!"

"Hands off, you chumps!" roared Tom Merry, as the meeting made a general rush for the owners of the study.

But the meeting did not "hands off." Their hands were on, and the Terrible Three were hurled off their feet, struggling, and bumped heartily on the floor of the study.

There was a wild and whirling struggle, and half the juniors were on the floor at once, and the din was terrific.

The Terrible Three were great fighting men, and even eight indignant

To Tom Merry & Co. the birthday of Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, was an occasion for a celebration. But to Figgins & Co. it was an occasion for working off a record jape on their School House rivals.

juniors did not find it easy to handle them. The table went over, and the chairs were knocked right and left.

"Yaroooh! Leggo!"

"Ow! My eye!"

"Gweat Scott!"

"Bump them!"

"Yah! Oh! Whoop!"

In the midst of the terrific uproar the study door opened. The stern and severe figure of Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, appeared.

Just at that moment Lowther "buzzed" a cushion at Jack Blake and Blake dodged his head just in time to escape it. The cushion whizzed on to the doorway, with accidental aim.

There was a wild gasp from Mr. Linton.

Biff!

The whizzing cushion smote him fairly and squarely on the chest, and he whirled back into the passage and sat down—hard!

CHAPTER 2.

Too Bad!

THE tussle in Tom Merry's study ceased as if by magic.

The juniors stood up or sat down in frozen dismay. They had caught sight of Mr. Linton just as that unlucky cushion smote him and hurled him out of the doorway.

"Oh, my only hat!" murmured Jack Blake, rubbing his nose. "This is where we hear something drop!"

"Bai Jove! Wathah!"

Blake was right.

Mr. Linton reposed gracefully on the floor for about the hundredth part of a second; then he jumped up, his gown dusty, and his brow like a thundercloud. He reappeared in the doorway, his eyes gleaming at the dismayed juniors.

"Who threw that cushion?" demanded Mr. Linton in a grinding voice.

"I—I did, sir," stuttered Lowther.

"I—I chucked it at Blake, sir. I didn't know you were there. Quite an accident, sir."

"Yaas, wathah, sir! You surely could not suspect Lowthah of buzzin' a cush at you, sir?"

"Silence, D'Arcy!"

"Yaas, sir. But—"

"What is the meaning of this disgraceful disturbance?" asked the master of the Shell. "The noise could be heard downstairs!"

"C-could it, sir?" stammered Tom Merry.

"Sorry, sir!"

"It's a—a little friendly discussion, sir!"

"That's all, sir!"

"Indeed! Do you usually conduct friendly discussions in this manner?" said Mr. Linton, with heavy sarcasm.

"I wonder what an unfriendly discussion would be like, in that case? This disturbance is simply disgraceful!"

"Oh, sir!" murmured the juniors.

"And you will be severely punished!"

"Oh, sir!"

"The boys of my Form here," pursued Mr. Linton, eyeing the Terrible Three and Kangaroo, "will take a hundred lines each, and will be detained to-morrow afternoon!"

"Oh!"

"And the other boys I shall report to their Housemasters! We shall see whether order cannot be maintained even in junior studies!"

"I—if you please, sir—"

"Not a word!" said Mr. Linton majestically.

And he strode away with rustling gown.

The dusty and dishevelled juniors in Tom Merry's study gazed at one another with feelings almost too deep for words as the footsteps of the Form-master died away down the passage.

"Well," said Blake at last, with a deep breath, "that takes the cake. It prances off with the whole giddy biscuit factory."

"Reported to our Housemasters!" groaned Figgins. "That will give old Ratty a chance at us! Oh crumbs!"

"Blow Ratty!" growled Herries. "Railton will lay it into us, too!"

"Detained to-morrow afternoon!" murmured Monty Lowther. "And we have bought the tickets for old Buzzle's performance at Rylcombe!"

"What about the dashed football match?" said Kangaroo. "I was going to captain the dashed football team in your place, Tom Merry, and now I shall be stuck in a dashed Form-room for the whole dashed afternoon! Of all the silly duffers that ever duffed, you are the dashedest!"

And Kangaroo stamped indignantly away.

The Fourth Formers, restrained from further and more violent expression of their feelings by the possibility that Mr. Linton might return, glared at the Terrible Three and departed.

The Shell fellows exchanged glances.

"Doesn't seem to be what you'd call a howling success, does it?" murmured Tom Merry.

Monty Lowther snorted.

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"I don't think it was much of a wheeze, anyway!" he growled. "Who cares for old Linton's birthday? Ungrateful beast, I call him, detaining us when we're considering ways and means of celebrating his beastly birthday!"

"Well, he didn't know——"

"Oh, rats! I think you're an ass!"

"So do I!" said Manners. "Several sorts of an ass!"

"And a howling chump!" chimed in Lowther.

"And a burling jossler——"

"And a chortling jabberwock——"

Tom Merry fled from the study. Manners and Lowther had by no means exhausted their list of choice epithets, and Tom did not want to hear them go on to the end.

Meanwhile Blake & Co. had been called into Mr. Railton's study. Mr. Linton had not failed to report their disorderly conduct to the master of the School House.

"You have been making a disturbance, I understand," said Mr. Railton, taking up a cane.

"Not exactly, sir," ventured Blake;

"it was really a friendly meeting——"

"And a cushion was hurled, which struck Mr. Linton by mistake!"

"That was an accident, sir——"

"Yaas, wathah, sir!"

"Accidents of that kind," said Mr. Railton grimly, "must not be allowed to happen. You will hold out your hands!"

Swish, swish, swish!

And Blake & Co. dolefully departed.

In the passage Blake snuck his aching hand, and looked like thunder.

"If ever Tom Merry calls a meeting again," he said darkly, "we'll get him to hold it out of doors somewhere. Then we can slaughter him at any moment without silly Form-masters buzzing in at the wrong moment."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"As for old Linton's birthday, he can celebrate it on his lonesome, without my assistance. I—I hope he'll have rheumatism and gout on his birthday!" said Blake ferociously.

And a little later Figgins & Co. stood in the presence of their Housemaster, Mr. Ratcliff, with apprehensive looks.

Mr. Ratcliff was a much more severe master than Mr. Railton of the School House. And he did not like Figgins & Co. It was his duty to cane them, and never had a duty been undertaken more cheerfully.

"I understand that you are guilty of disgraceful disorderliness in the School House?" said the New House master.

"It does not surprise me—in you! You are, I think, the most disorderly boys in this House. However, we shall endeavour to correct these faults of character. You will hold out your hand, Figgins; now the other!"

Swish, swish!

"Ow! Ow!" groaned Figgins.

"Don't make those ridiculous noises, Figgins, or I shall cane you again. Now, Kerr!"

Swish, swish!

"Groo-oogh!"

"Silence! Now, Wynn——"

Swish, swish!

"Yaroop!"

"Now, you may go," said Mr. Ratcliff, laying down his cane, "and do not let me hear of anything of the kind again. You will not escape so lightly on another occasion."

"Lightly!" groaned Figgins, when they were safe out of the Housemaster's room. "Ratty has queer ideas of escaping lightly, I must say. Ow! I

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believe the beast does special Indian club exercises to get his muscle up for licking us! Ow!"

"And all over old Linton's beastly birthday!" growled Kerr.

"Blow Linton!"

"Blow his birthday!"

"If Tom Merry gets up any rotten entertainment for that rotten birthday, we'll make it a point to muck it up!" said Figgins darkly.

And that prospect was the only consolation left to the unfortunate Co.

CHAPTER 3.

Not to be Stood!

THE next day the Terrible Three might have been observed to wear extremely thoughtful expressions.

The situation was, as Monty Lowther remarked, rotten.

They had expended a considerable sum upon the purchase of seats for the afternoon performance at Rylcombe Assembly Rooms, where Professor Buzzle was giving his entertainment in conjuring.

And now they were detained.

The professor was really a good entertainer, and a great many of the St. Jim's fellows had been to the show during the past week, and they were loud in their praises of it. Naturally, the Terrible Three wanted to go, too.

Entertainments of any kind were scarce enough in the quiet village, and they did not want to miss any that happened in their way. Besides, they specially wanted to see the professor, because of Tom Merry's scheme of getting him to give a performance at St. Jim's.

"We'll go all the same!" said Tom determinedly, on Wednesday morning.

His comrades whistled.

"What about Linton?" said Manners.

To which Tom Merry replied, tersely and emphatically:

"Blow Linton!"

"Blow him as hard as you like," agreed Lowther. "But suppose he misses us?"

"He won't! He's going out himself."

"Oh, that's better!" said Lowther, brightening up. "If he's going out for the afternoon, he can't know whether we're in the Form-room or not. It won't occur to him that we shall have the nerve to clear out without permission."

"Exactly."

"Sure he's going out, though?" asked Manners doubtfully.

"Quite sure. He's taking some of the kids to the show," Tom Merry explained. "He's got his good points, old Linton has, you know. He's taking a dozen fags to the show, and paying for them himself. Wally told me. He's taking Wally D'Arcy and a crowd of other young rascals of the Third."

"To Buzzle's show?"

"Yes."

"You—you crass ass!" said Monty Lowther. "How can we go if Linton's there? He's bound to see us. And if he sees us in the Assembly Rooms, don't you think it might possibly occur to him that we've cleared out of the Form-room. He could work that out in his head, you know."

Tom Merry laughed.

"He won't recognise us?" he said.

"Why won't he?"

"Because we shall be unrecognisable."

"Wh-what?"

"Look here," said Tom. "It's up to us to go! We've got to go. The fellows are all cackling over our being detained by the master we were going to honour

with a celebration on his beastly birthday. We're going! As Linton's going out, we've got a chance. All we've got to do is to make sure that he doesn't recognise us at the place."

"Thinking of putting on Guy Fawkes' masks?" asked Lowther sarcastically.

"That would attract attention, I think," said Tom Merry calmly.

"What's the good of being the leading lights of the Junior Dramatic Society if we can't disguise ourselves? We've got a whole stock of theatrical things, and grease-paints, and things. What's the matter with disguising ourselves?"

"Three schoolboys with black beards and pink moustaches—what?"

"Ass! We're going as old gentlemen."

"As old gentlemen!" said Lowther dazedly.

"Yes; in white whiskers and spectacles."

"Oh crumbs!"

"We've got all the props," said Tom Merry boldly. "Why shouldn't we? It would be no end of a lark, anyway. And Linton couldn't possibly suspect three respectable old gents of being three Shell fellows."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But—but we should be spotted in the daylight!" gasped Manners.

"Fancy walking a mile in broad daylight in white whiskers!" murmured Lowther.

"We shan't walk. Have you ever heard of such a thing as a telephone? We can phone for a cab to be waiting for us just outside the gates."

"Oh!"

"Then we shall drive up to the Assembly Rooms in style. We've got our tickets; we shall simply have to go straight to our places. Easy as falling off a form."

"By Jove!" said Lowther. "It's not a bad wheeze. It will be fun, even if we get bowled out. After all, it would only be a licking."

"We'll wait till Linton has started with his blessed army of fags," said Tom Merry, "then we'll scoot out of the Form, and make-up. We've got all the things in the study. The other fellows will be on the footer ground, and there will be nobody to spot us."

"Suppose we're spotted going out?"

"Oh, don't hunt for difficulties! Besides, why shouldn't three respectable old gentlemen walk round the quad if they like? The public are admitted—there are lots of old johnnies come down here to look at the buildings, and gas about Early English architecture, and that kind of thing."

"Well, we'll risk it," said Lowther.

"Then I'll go and telephone for the cab."

After dinner, when most of the fellows were thinking of football or various excursions for the half-holiday, four serious-looking juniors made their way into the Shell Form Room. They were the Terrible Three and Kangaroo.

The Terrible Three looked properly resigned to their fate; but the Cornstalk had a rebellious expression.

"You chaps know Linton's going out this afternoon?" he asked, as he sat down at his desk.

"I've heard something of the sort," said Tom Merry.

"Well, I'm not going to stick here," said Noble. "When he's gone, I'm off. I'm jolly well not going to miss the footer match!"

"Risky!" said Lowther.

"Blow the risk! I tell you——"

"Shush!"

Kangaroo "shushed" as Mr. Linton

came into the Form-room. Mr. Linton's face wore its sternest expression.

"Ah! You are here," he said.

"Yes, sir," said the juniors respectfully.

"I trust," said Mr. Linton, "that while you are detained this afternoon, you will reflect upon your conduct, and make better resolves for the future."

"I trust so," said Lowther demurely.

Mr. Linton gave him a sharp glance; but Monty Lowther's face was quite solemn and grave. The Form-master went on hastily.

"I am going out this afternoon; but I need not tell you that you are expected to remain here till five o'clock, when you may go. I shall request a prefect to see that you do not leave the Form-room. If you should do so, Kildare will report to me. That is all."

And Mr. Linton departed.

"Did you ever hear anything like it?" said Monty Lowther, in deep disgust. "Setting old Kildare to watch us, just as if we couldn't be trusted to stay here without that!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at?" sniffed Lowther.

"Well, considering that we don't intend to stay here——" grinned Tom Merry.

"Well, I call it rotten! That knocks it all on the head!"

"Stuff! How is Kildare going to keep an eye on us? He's captaining the first eleven this afternoon. The Abbotsford team is coming over."

"By George, so he is!" said Lowther, with a chuckle. "He'll give us a look in before the match, and then forget all about us, I expect."

"I hope so."

"I hope he'll be too busy with the Abbotsford chaps to see me on Little Side!" growled Kangaroo. "That's where I shall be!"

"Buck up with the lines!" said Tom Merry. "We've got to do a hundred each, anyway, and we had better have something to show!"

And the four juniors wired in with the lines at express speed.

Ten minutes later, Kildare of the Sixth, the captain of St. Jim's, looked into the Form-room.

The four juniors were writing away as if their lives depended on it.

"Hallo!" said Kildare. "I hear you kids are detained, and you're not to leave the Form-room while Mr. Linton is out."

"That's all right, Kildare," said Monty Lowther affably. "We're enjoying ourselves."

"Mind you stay here, that's all," said Kildare. "I've got an eye on you!"

"Which eye?" asked Lowther.

Kildare did not reply to that question. He went out of the Form-room, and closed the door behind him.

"Good!" said Tom Merry with satisfaction. "Now that's over Kildare won't think of us again till after the Abbotsford match."

"And as soon as the whistle goes we clear?" said Lowther.

"That's it! Pile into the lines!"

Four pens raced over the paper till the faint and distant sound of the whistle was heard from Big Side. Then the pens suddenly stopped all at once.

"This is where we clear!" said Kangaroo.

"What-ho!"

And they cleared.

CHAPTER 4.

Three Old Gents!

THE Terrible Three lost no time in getting to their study.

By that time the village cab that Tom Merry had telephoned for was waiting in the lane, ready to take them to the Assembly Rooms in Rylcombe.

There was still time to get to the entertainment for the start.

Tom Merry opened the box in which the stage "props" were kept.

The Junior Dramatic Society of the School House had quite a variety of costumes, and there were plenty to choose from.

"We'll keep on our own clobber," said Tom Merry. "It will fill out the clothes, you know, and we may have to change quickly afterwards, too."

"Frock-coats and grey bags!" said Lowther. "We can have the set we used when we were playing 'George's Uncles.' Tumble in!"

The three juniors donned the black frock-coats and trousers and spats which "George's Uncles" had worn in their last comedy.

The change in their appearance was startling.

Three grinning schoolboy faces looking out over high collars and black frock-coats had a decidedly odd effect.

Then came the make-up.

White whiskers and moustaches and wigs added to the effect, and a little grease-paint artistically applied aged their youthful faces.

The junior actors were accustomed to making-up, and it did not take them very long.

When they had finished they looked at one another, and roared with laughter.

"I don't think Linton would know us now if we were right under his eyes!" chuckled Monty Lowther.

"Our own giddy aunts wouldn't know us," said Manners. "Blessed if I quite know myself."

"You'll do," said Tom Merry, surveying them. "I think we look three eminently quiet and respectable old gents!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You've got to cultivate subdued voices; a bit husky will be better, too. Now I think we're ready. Come on!"

The chums of the Shell quitted the study and walked down the passage. They descended the stairs, and, feeling a slight inward uneasiness, left the School House.

The three old gents did not hurry their steps as they walked across the quadrangle, but progressed at a pace suitable to their white hair and whiskers.

Two juniors of the Fourth Form were going down to the gates also—Jack Blake and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. They glanced at the three old gentlemen, who studiously kept their eyes another way.

Blake and D'Arcy walked out of the gates, followed by the three old gentlemen.

"They're going to the entertainment!" murmured Tom Merry.

"And they haven't recognised us!" chuckled Lowther.

"No fear!"

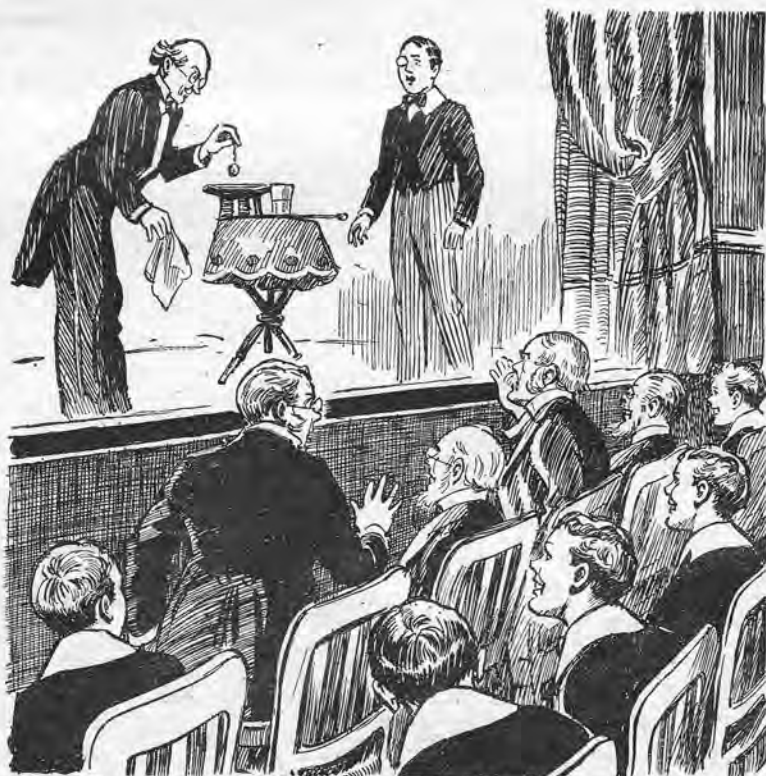
"Here's the cab!" said Manners.

The cab was waiting in the lane, the driver leaning on a tree, smoking.

D'Arcy halted at the cab.

"Come on!" howled Blake.

Arthur Augustus regarded his famous gold watch.



"Go it, Gussy!" called out Monty Lowther, forgetting for the moment that he was in disguise. Mr. Linton looked at him sharply. He had plainly recognised the voice of a junior whom he had detained in the Form-room at St. Jim's!

"We're wathah late, deah boy, through stayin' to see the beginnin' of the match," he remarked. "I think we'd better take this cab."

"It isn't worth it."

"I'll stand tweek, deah boy."

"Oh, all right!" said Blake resignedly.

"Dwivah, pway buck up; we're in a hawwy to get to Wylcombe."

The driver touched his hat.

"Sorry, sir; I'm engaged."

"Bai Jove! That's wathah wotten! Are you waitin' for somebody?"

"Yessir."

"Somebody ffrom the school?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"Yessir."

"That's all wight, then, Blake," said D'Arcy. "We'll share the exes and share the cab!"

"Suppose it's a senior—he won't whack out his blessed cab with us," said Blake. "No good waiting here on the chance. Come on!"

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus, as the three white-whiskered old gentlemen came up to the cab.

"Our cab, I think!" wheezed Tom Merry. "Get in. Driver, pray make haste to Rylcombe, as we are rather pressed for time."

"You the gent who hordered this cab by telephone?" asked the driver, touching his cap.

"Yes."

Arthur Augustus and Blake exchanged glances of astonishment. How three old gentlemen, evidently strangers at St. Jim's, could have ordered a cab by telephone from the school was a great mystery. The three old boys clambered into the cab; but before the driver could move on, Arthur Augustus approached the vehicle, and raised his shining silk topper very politely.

"Pway excuse me, gentlemen," he said. "I undahstand that you are goin' to Wylcombe."

"Ahem! Yes, certainly!"

"May I wequest you to do us the favah to give us a lift?" asked the swell of St. Jim's. "We are wathah late for the entahainment there."

The three old gents exchanged a quick glance. Arthur Augustus evidently had not the faintest suspicion of the real identity of the persons he was speaking to; and it was all the Terrible Three could do to avoid a burst of laughter.

"Certainly!" wheezed Tom Merry. "One of you can sit outside with the driver, and there is room for one inside."

"Thank you vewy much, sir! You are vewy kind."

"Not at all, little boy!" said Tom affably.

Arthur Augustus turned slightly pink; he did not exactly like being addressed as a little boy. However, the old gentleman was so kind in giving him a lift, that he swallowed the remark without wincing. He stepped into the cab, and took his seat, and Blake climbed up beside Old George, and the cab started.

CHAPTER 5.

The Old Boys.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY regarded his companions in the old cab with some interest. He was still puzzled by the circumstance that these three strangers to the school had ordered the cab by telephone from St. Jim's. He could not help wondering whom they were.

The three old gentlemen were silent; but Arthur Augustus felt it incumbent

upon him, from politeness, to make conversation.

"Wathah a nice aftahnoon," he remarked, by way of a beginning.

"Hem! Very nice indeed, little boy."

"You have been visiting our school, sir?"

"Yes. It is pleasant to see the little fellows at their little games, my child," said Tom Merry solemnly.

"You know some of our chaps, of course, sir?"

"Hem! Yes, indeed! We have belonged to St. Jim's ourselves," explained Tom.

Arthur Augustus was interested at once.

"Oh, you are old boys!" he exclaimed. "I should have been delighted to show you wound the place, if I had known, sir."

"That is right, little boy," said Tom, with a nod of approval. "I am glad to see that the manners of the boys have not deteriorated since my time."

"I'm not weally what you'd call a little boy, you know," Arthur Augustus ventured. "I'm in the Fourth Form, sir."

"Are you really? And the other little fellow—is he in the Fourth Form?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And I hope you are good boys, and always respectful to your kind teachers," said Tom, in the best manner of an old uncle.

"I—I twust so, sir!"

"And I hope you always wash your neck in the morning?"

Arthur Augustus stared.

"Weally, my deah sir—" he protested.

"We always did in my time," said Tom Merry solemnly. "I should be sorry to learn that that custom had died out at St. Jim's."

The swell of the School House almost exploded.

"Weally, sir, we always bath in the morning, exceptin' a few slackahs like Levison and Mellich!" he exclaimed indignantly.

"How very nice! I see you are a good little boy. And are you always attentive to your studies?"

"Ya-as!"

"Twice two?" asked the old gentleman, holding up his finger at D'Arcy in a magisterial manner.

"Wha-a-at?"

"Twice two?"

"Weally, sir—"

"Twice two are four!" said the old gentleman severely.

"But weally—"

"Twice three?"

"My deah sir—"

"Twice three are six!" said Tom Merry.

"I am perfectly aware of that fact, and we do not do the multiplication table in the Fourth Form, sir!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, beginning to get exasperated.

"Dear me! Then what do you learn?"

"Lots of things, sir—French, German, Euclid—"

"Very good. What is French for good-morning?" asked the old gentleman.

"Bonjour!" said D'Arcy.

"Good! And what is German for good-evening?"

"Guten abend!"

"Very good! And what is Euclid for good-night?"

Arthur Augustus nearly fell off his seat.

"B-b-but Euclid isn't a language!" he gasped.

The old gentleman shook his head sadly.

"I am afraid the boys are not so bright as they were in our time," he remarked to his companions; and the two other old gentlemen shook their heads also. Evidently they were feeling quite mournful over the decadence of St. Jim's.

"Gweat Scott!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "I nevah met anybody before who supposed that Euclid was a language. And they were at St. Jim's! Must have been jolly queeah in those days, bai Jove!"

"I suppose you learn geography also?" resumed the old gentleman, turning again to Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, yaas!"

"Then you can tell me the name of the capital of Borriobhoola-Gha?"

"The capital of what?"

"Borriobhoola-Gha!"

"I—I nevah heard of such a place, sir!"

"Dear me! Bless my soul! This is really shocking!" exclaimed the old gentleman, in astonishment. "I shall really write to Dr. Holmes on the subject. However, I will try you in history. You study history?"

"Yaas, sir."

"In what country did King Cole reign?"

"King what, sir?"

"King Cole. You have surely heard of Old King Cole?"

"Yaas, but—but—"

"He was celebrated for being a merry old soul," said Monty Lowther huskily. "You must have heard of him."

"Ya-as; but I don't believe he was a weal person."

"Shocking!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Bless my soul! My dear little boy, your education has been sadly neglected."

"Weally, sir—"

"Things have changed since our time," said Tom Merry mournfully; and again there was a sad shaking of white heads. "I suppose you study Latin?"

"Oh, wathah, sir!"

"And you can construe the Georgics of Homer?"

"Oh ewumps! Homah w'ote in Gweek, sir, and—the Georgics were weally w'itten by a chap named Virgil—they were weally, sir!"

"Shocking!"

"Appalling!"

"Incredible!"

And the three white heads wagged solemnly again. Arthur Augustus was quite relieved when the cab rolled into the old High Street of Rylcombe. The three old gentlemen were becoming intolerable. They might be old boys of St. Jim's, but if so, learning must have been in a weird state at the school in their time, though politeness forbade Arthur Augustus to say so.

"Ah, here we are, I think!" said Tom Merry. "This is Rylcombe, I believe?"

"Yaas, sir."

"Where shall we put you down, little boy?"

"Anywhere you like, sir. We are goin' to the Assembly Wooms."

"Bless my soul, so are we! Then we will take you there."

"Thank you vewy much, sir!"

The cab stopped outside the Assembly Rooms. Quite a number of people were going in. Professor Buzzle's entertainment was very popular in the little place, which did not have very many amusements.

"I am weally vewy much obliged to

you, sir," said Arthur Augustus, as he raised his silk topper to the old gentleman after alighting.

"Not at all, my dear child. Your conversation has been most amusing," said Tom Merry benevolently. "However, if you really feel obliged—"

"Certainly, sir."

"Then you shall pay for the cab," said Tom calmly. "Come on, my friends; this young gentleman is going to pay for the cab."

And the three old gents walked up the steps of the Assembly Rooms, and Arthur Augustus, in almost a dazed frame of mind, paid five shillings to the driver. As he entered the building with Blake, he confided to the latter his opinion of the three old gentlemen—and that opinion was not a flattering one.

CHAPTER 6.

Arthur Augustus is Alarmed!

TOM MERRY and his chums chuckled gleefully as they went in.

The little joke on Arthur Augustus tickled them very much—all the more because the swell of St. Jim's had not the slightest suspicion that he had been japed.

"Poor old Gussy!" murmured Monty Lowther. "He was born to have his noble leg pulled!"

"We owe him five bob!" grinned Tom Merry. "That will do later. Now for our seats!"

The place was well filled.

In the front row could be seen Mr. Linton, the Form-master, and an army of fags, whom he had so kindly taken to the entertainment. On one side of the master of the Shell were three vacant seats.

"This way, sir!" said the attendant to whom Tom Merry showed his tickets.

And he led the way directly towards Mr. Linton.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Manners. "Those are the seats, right under Linton's eye!"

"Next door to Linton, by Jove!" groaned Lowther.

Tom Merry felt a little dismay for the moment; but it was too late to back out now.

Mr. Linton rose to make room for them to pass. They sat down in the vacant seats, Tom Merry placing himself next to his Form-master.

Mr. Linton gave him a casual glance, and Tom Merry felt nervous for a moment; but there was no recognition in Mr. Linton's look.

Evidently he regarded the newcomers as three perfectly commonplace old gentlemen.

But the Terrible Three felt decidedly uneasy.

Mr. Linton was blessed with extremely sharp sight, and the slightest untoward circumstance might betray them.

But they were fairly in for it now, and the only thing to do was to "sit tight" and see the matter through.

Fortunately, the performance was not long in commencing.

A little slim gentleman in evening dress appeared upon the stage. It was Professor Buzzle, the renowned conjurer, who had performed before all the crowned heads of Europe—perhaps.

There was a murmur of applause.

The way the professor extracted yards of ribbon from his ears, and white rabbits from a hat belonging to a gentleman in the audience, was really wonderful.



"Lumme, Bill, it looks to me as if the Rovers' goalie's in for a warm time!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to R. Barham, 121, Browning Avenue, Worcester Park, Surrey.

Then he requested a watch to be passed up, promising to smash it into little pieces before the eyes of the audience, and then to restore it unharmed to the owner. Jack Blake jerked Arthur Augustus by the arm.

"Go it, Gussy!"

"Weally, Blake, I do not want to have my tickah smashed into pieces," protested D'Arcy. "It was a birthday present from my patah, you know!"

"He won't hurt it, ass!"

"But suppose he did?"

"Rats! It's a D'Arcy's place to lead, isn't it?" demanded Blake. "I've heard you say so lots of times. And nobody seems anxious to risk his watch."

"But weally—"

The professor was smiling over the footlights, and bowing and rubbing his hands—washing them, as it were, in invisible soap in imperceptible water.

"I assure you, ladies and gentlemen, that the watch will not be damaged," he repeated. "Now, gentlemen—"

Blake shoved Arthur Augustus to his feet.

"Here you are, sir!" he called out.

"Weally, Blake—"

The professor bowed to the dismayed Arthur Augustus.

"Pray step on the stage, young gentleman!" he said.

"But I—"

"Go it, Gussy!" called out Monty Lowther, forgetting himself for the moment.

Mr. Linton looked round sharply.

For a moment he thought he must be dreaming. He had plainly recognised the voice of a junior who was detained in the Form-room at St. Jim's. The master of the Shell rose to his feet, and scanned the audience near about him. Lowther—whose blushes were fortunately hidden by grease-paint and whiskers—sat as still as a mouse now, with his eyes fixed upon the stage.

"Bless my soul!" murmured Mr. Linton. "I was certain that was Lowther's voice; but he is certainly not here. And the voice was very near me, too! I must have been mistaken! But, really, it is very strange."

Arthur Augustus had gone on the stage. He was feeling very uneasy; but nobody else had offered a watch for the

trick, and D'Arcy accepted Blake's assurance that it was up to him.

The professor smiled benignantly as he accepted the handsome gold tickah, which was famous in the Fourth Form at St. Jim's.

"You are quite sure that it will not be damaged, sir?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"You have my assurance on that point," smiled the professor. "Now, ladies and gentlemen, you see this watch in my hand?"

Ladies and gentlemen testified that they did.

"You see me hurl it upon the floor—"

Crash!

"Gweat Scott!"

"You see me tread upon it and stamp it out of shape—"

"Bai Jove! Stop—"

Stamp, stamp, stamp!

Whether it was D'Arcy's watch or not, the watch on the stage was certainly reduced to such a state of ruin that it was not likely ever to go again. Arthur Augustus surveyed the wreck through his eyeglass and breathed wrath.

"You uttah ass!" he exclaimed. "You have smashed up my gold tickah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Stamp, stamp!

D'Arcy's face was a study. He made a jump forward to rescue the remains of the watch, and the professor gently pushed him back.

"It is all right," he assured him.

"You have smashed my tickah—"

"Ladies and gentlemen—"

"My tickah—"

"Order!" shouted Lowther, forgetting himself again. "Ow—yow!" he added, as Tom Merry stamped on his foot.

Mr. Linton glanced round sharply. This time his glance rested upon the white-whiskered old gentleman next but one to him. His glance was amazed. It was that old gentleman who had called out in a strong, boyish voice—in the tones of Monty Lowther of the Shell! It was really extraordinary!

"Ladies and gentlemen, you see the fragments of the young gentleman's watch—"

"Yaas, wathah; and I considah—"

"I shall now proceed to restore the watch to its owner in the same state in which it was presented to me," said the professor.

"Wats! You can't do it!"

The professor made some weird passes with his slim hands, and the broken watch disappeared from sight—where, no one could tell.

"Ladies and gentlemen, the watch has now disappeared!"

"Bravo!"

"The young gentleman appears to be a little anxious about his watch—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But there is no cause for anxiety. The young gentleman's watch is at this moment reposing quite safely in his pocket."

Arthur Augustus jumped.

"Wats!" he exclaimed.

"Kindly oblige the audience by feeling in your pockets," said the professor. "I assure you that the watch will be found safe and sound."

"Wot!"

However, Arthur Augustus ran his hands through his pockets. He uttered a sudden exclamation as his fingers came into contact with something hard. He drew his hand out and his face was a study as he recognised his watch.

There it was—the famous gold ticker—reposing safely in the palm of his hand, quite unhurt after its adventures. Arthur Augustus gazed at it in amazement.

"Bai Jove!" he ejaculated.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bravo!"

"Weally, I do not undahstand this at all—"

"Is the young gentleman satisfied?" asked the professor suavely.

"Yaas, but I weally do not compwehend. Howevah, it is all wight."

And Arthur Augustus, much relieved by the discovery that his gold ticker was safe after all, returned to his place in the audience. The professor bowed to the ladies and gentlemen, and there was a great deal of clapping.

"That is a vewy wemarkable twick, Blake, deah boy," he remarked. "I weally didn't see how it was done."

Blake chuckled.

"It wasn't your watch he smashed up, ass!"

"But I saw him do it, deah boy."

"He had another watch hidden about him, fathead!"

"Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that. It's a wippin' good twick," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "Do you know, deah boy, I've thought sometimes that I could be a conjuwah. Levison can do those things, you know, and I've got a lot more bwaains than Levison. I shall twy that twick myself when we get back."

"You won't try it with my watch, at any rate!" grinned Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Shurrup! The professor's talking."

Professor Buzzle went on with his performance, greatly astonishing the good people of Rylcombe by his magical powers. Tom Merry & Co. were so interested that they quite forgot the parts they were playing. When the professor produced a singing canary from the back of his neck, and made it disappear down his throat, there was great applause. And the Terrible Three joined in heartily.

Mr. Linton's eyes turned upon the

three white-haired and white-whiskered old gentlemen, who were clapping their hands and cheering like boys.

"Bless my soul!" he ejaculated.

The Form-master's ejaculation warned the Terrible Three of their imprudence. They became suddenly silent. Mr. Linton's eyes were upon them like a gimlet. He had recognised their voices; there was no doubt about that. But their appearance baffled him—such a disguise was really too extraordinary—and the Shell master hesitated to risk committing a blunder by speaking to them.

But during the remainder of the performance his eyes were incessantly upon them, and the unlucky juniors realised quite clearly what was in his mind. Mr. Linton intended to hurry back to St. Jim's the moment the performance was over, and ascertain whether the three Shell fellows were still in the Form-room.

And they quaked inwardly. To go out now would be to confirm the Form-master's evident suspicions, and after the performance they had somehow to reach the school and get rid of their disguise before Mr. Linton arrived. And he would lose no time. And they were still trying to think out the problem of escape from their dilemma when the performance ended, and the audience rose to go.

CHAPTER 7.

A Narrow Escape!

THREE old gents hurried through the crowd towards the exit, with a haste that was not at all in keeping with their years and their white whiskers.

Jack Blake suddenly found himself gripped by the arm as he was coming out with D'Arcy, and he turned his head, and recognised the old gentleman who had given the chums a lift to Rylcombe.

"Hallo!" said Blake. "What's the trouble?"

"Keep Linton back a bit if you can,

old chap!" whispered the old gentleman who had grasped Blake's arm.

Jack Blake almost fell over. His eyes grew wide and round as they were fastened upon the old gent.

"Wh-a-at?" he stammered.

"We've got to get back before Linton, or all the fat will be in the fire!"

"Who are you?"

"Tom Merry, you ass!"

"Oh crumbs!"

"Tom Mewwy! Bai Jove!"

"Shush! Delay Linton somehow, for goodness' sake!"

"B-but—"

But Tom Merry was gone. The three old gents shoved their way through the crowd, amid indignant ejaculations from the persons they shoved. But it was no time to stand on ceremony. They gained the exit, leaving Blake and D'Arcy overcome with amazement.

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus ejaculated for about the tenth time. "Weally, you know, this is vewy surpwisin'!"

"That's how they came to telephone for the cab from St. Jim's!" gasped Blake.

"Yaas; and that accounts for the way they were waggin' me in the cab! The wotahs!"

"Of all the japes—"

"It was fwightfully wisky! I wondah if Linton suspects—"

"Of course he does! That's why we're to keep him back!" chuckled Blake. "He's going to buzz off quick and spot them if he can. We've got to stop him somehow."

"But how, deah boy?"

"Somehow," said Blake.

He looked round hurriedly. Mr. Linton was shepherding the fags out of the hall. He did not take any notice of the Fourth Formers; indeed, he was looking round to see what had become of the three white-whiskered old gents.

Jack Blake uttered a sudden cry, and reeled.

Bump!

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Blake, what's the mattah? Bai Jove, he's fainted!"

Mr. Linton turned round sharply. A Form-master of St. Jim's couldn't possibly hurry away when a St. Jim's fellow had fallen in a faint almost at his feet.

The Shell master came towards the Fourth Formers. A crowd of people gathered round quickly. Arthur Augustus was kneeling beside his chum, greatly alarmed. He had never known Jack Blake to faint before.

"Blake, old man!"

"Stand back!" said Mr. Linton sharply. "What is the matter with Blake?"

"He's fainted, sir."

"It must be the heat of the crowd. Stand back! Get some water!" exclaimed Mr. Linton.

And he waved the crowd back and bent down beside the junior.

Blake's eyes were closed.

"Some water—quick!"

An attendant hurried up with a glass of water, and Mr. Linton dashed it over Blake's face. There was a formidable yell from the junior.

"Ow! Groogh! You silly ass!"

Ow!"

"Blake!"

Jack Blake blinked at Mr. Linton, wiping the water out of his eyes.

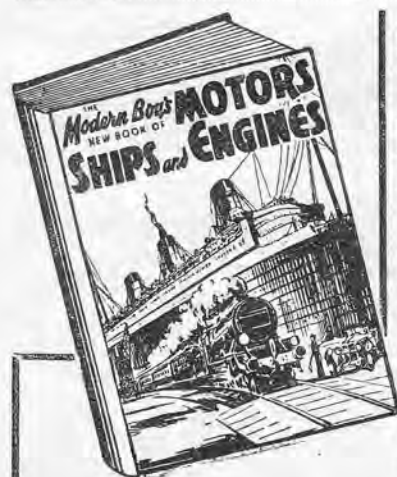
"Ow! Oh! I—I beg your pardon, sir! I—I—"

"You fainted, Blake, and I was restoring you," said Mr. Linton, frowning. "Can you rise?"

Blake moaned.

"I—I don't know, sir! Did I faint?"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur



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Augustus anxiously. "You pitched wight ovah, old chap, just as we were discussin' about—"

"I—I feel better now," said Blake hastily. "I—I think I could get up, if you helped me, sir. Oh dear!"

"Lean on my arm!" said Mr. Linton crossly.

He had to look after the junior, but he did not do it with a good grace. He was greatly annoyed by the occurrence, which had delayed him when he wanted specially to make great haste to return to the school.

Blake leaned heavily on the arm of the master of the Shell.

"Can you walk?" snapped Mr. Linton. "Ye-es; I—I think so, sir," murmured Blake.

"Very good! You shall return to the school in a cab with me," said Mr. Linton. "Kindly call a cab, my man!"

"Oh crumbs!" murmured Blake. He occupied as much time as possible in getting to the cab; but Mr. Linton was not to be trifled with. The junior was bundled into the cab, and Mr. Linton ordered the driver to get to the school as quickly as possible.

When they arrived at St. Jim's, Mr. Linton, dismissing the cab at once, hurried to the Shell Form Room.

There was a sound of scratching pens as he opened the door.

Mr. Linton gazed into the Form-room. Four juniors sat there sedately at their desks, with Latin grammars and sheets of imput paper before them. Lowther had a smudge of ink on his nose, as if he had rubbed it absent-mindedly with an inky finger during his labours.

The juniors looked up respectfully as their Form-master came in.

Mr. Linton gazed at them long and hard.

There they were, just as he had left them, and their looks were innocence itself.

A question trembled on Mr. Linton's lips, but he did not utter it.

It seemed too ridiculous to ask those tired, inky juniors whether they had been to Rylcombe in the guise of respectable old gentlemen. He had evidently been mistaken.

Without a word Mr. Linton stepped out of the Form-room and closed the door behind him, and four juniors looked at one another with grins of satisfaction.

"Blake must have kept him back somehow," murmured Tom Merry. "If he'd been here five minutes sooner—"

"He'd have found me in footer rig!" murmured Kangaroo.

"And us in white whiskers!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But Mr. Linton, fortunately, did not think of looking into the Terrible Three's study. He was puzzled, and he wondered who the three old gentlemen were whose voices were so remarkably like those of three boys in his own Form. But he never knew, for he never encountered those old gentlemen again.

CHAPTER 8.

War Declared!

"FEEEL all wight, deah boy?"

Arthur Augustus asked the question quite anxiously, as he came into Study No. 6 after his return to St. Jim's and encountered Blake. Certainly Blake did not look any the worse for his fainting fit in the Assembly Rooms at Rylcombe.

Blake stared.

"All right?" he repeated. "Of course I feel all right! Why shouldn't I?"

"But you fainted, deah boy."

"Fathead!"

"Weally, Blake, in the circs—"

"Didn't you hear Tom Merry ask me to keep old Linton back?" said Blake witheringly. "I had to faint; it was the only way, ass!"

Arthur Augustus opened his eyes so wide that his eyeglass dropped out and clicked on his waistcoat buttons.

"Bai Jove! Do you mean to say that you were spoofin', you boundah?"

"Do you think I really fainted, you silly ass?" demanded Blake indignantly. "Do you think I'm the kind of fellow to faint?"

"I certainly thought so, deah boy!"

"Then you are a bigger ass than I supposed," said Blake politely. "Catch me faintin'!"

"I am not quite sure—"

"Well, you can be quite sure now I've told you," said Blake crossly, naturally annoyed at having been supposed to faint.

"I am not at all sure," went on D'Arcy calmly, "that I approve of takin' in Mr. Linton in this way."

"Oh, is that it?" snorted Blake.



Page: "Didst call me, sire?"
Enraged Knight: "Aye. Go thou quickly and procure a tin-opener. There's a wasp in mine armour!"
Half-a-crown has been awarded to A. Stevens, 22, Birchwood Road, Penn, Wolverhampton.

"Luckily I can get on quite comfortably without your approval."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Sharrup, and help me make the toast."

"But I considah—"

"Shut up!" roared Blake, exasperated.

"Hallo, trouble in the family?" asked a cheerful voice at the door, as Tom Merry looked in. "Much obliged to you, Blake. You managed to keep him back."

"Yes, rather!" said Blake. "I got up a faint. Linton had to look after me, and that crass ass, Gussy, thought it was the real article."

"Yaas, I weally considahed—"

"That only shows that it was well done, and worthy of a prominent member of the Amateur Dramatic Society," said Tom Merry soothingly. "It was a jolly good idea. We had five clear minutes in the Form-room before Linton got there, and he never said a word—just looked at us and marched off."

"Good egg!" said Blake.

"We're just going to have tea in our study, and I've looked in to ask you,"

went on Tom Merry. "We are celebrating the occasion, and there will be a really good feed. So stop ragging and come on!"

"Delighted, deah boy!"

"Good business!" said Blake.

"We've only got toast and sardines, and the sardines are a little bit wanky. We'll come with pleasure. But no more about celebrating old Linton's birthday, you know. I'm fed-up with Linton."

"Ahem! As a matter of fact, I was thinkin'—"

Blake held up a warning hand.

"Not about that rotten birthday wheeze?"

"Well, yes."

"Oh, rats!" said Blake. "What do you want to celebrate his silly birthday for when he's just detained you?"

"I wathah think it's a good ideah," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully.

"It will be heapin' coals of fire on his head, you know. Weturnin' good for evil, and so on, you know; that's a wippin' good wheeze."

"Oh, all right!" said Blake, resignedly. "Sure it's a good feed?"

"Yes," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Then we'll come, and try to put up with your wheezes."

"That is hardly a gwacious way of acceptin' an invitation, Blake, deah boy!"

"Oh, bosh!" said Blake. "We say what we mean in Yorkshire, where I come from. We're coming, Tommy. I'll tell Herries and Dig. Herries' bulldog can have those sardines, after all."

"Right-ho! Ready in ten minutes," said Tom Merry, and he went his way.

He crossed the quadrangle to the New House to call on Figgins & Co.

The scheme of celebrating the birthday of the master of the Shell had by no means been given up. It was the special pride of the Terrible Three that they never took up a scheme without making a success of it. The greater the opposition, the more determined they were to carry it through. As Monty Lowther remarked, Mr. Linton's birthday was of no more consequence than the birthday of Julius Caesar, or the man in the moon; but it was the principle of the thing. The Terrible Three never backed down.

A misunderstanding had spoiled the whole effect of the first meeting on the subject. That misunderstanding was not to be repeated. While Tom Merry was going round gathering the meeting into the fold, so to speak, Lowther and Manners were preparing a feed on a grand scale in the study in the Shell passage. In the general good-humour and good-fellowship of a really good feed, Tom Merry sagely considered that his scheme had a good chance of meeting with a really enthusiastic reception.

The captain of the Shell found Figgins & Co. at home. The study table in Figgins' apartment presented a festive appearance. Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn had been playing footer that afternoon, and it had given them good appetites, and as they happened to be in funds, they were "doing themselves" remarkably well.

Fatty Wynn grinned at Tom Merry over a huge pie as the Shell fellow came in. Figgins & Co. were half-way through their meal.

"Hallo! What do you want on the respectable side of the quad?" growled Figgins.

"Pax!" said Tom Merry amicably.

"Sit down and pile in!" said Fatty Wynn, with great hospitality.

"Thanks; but we're just getting up a

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feed in our study. I came over to ask you fellows," said Tom, with a rather rueful glance at the festive board.

"Thanks!" said Figgins, in turn. "But we've started, and we're doing well. Kerr has had a remittance."

"And whacked it out like a man and a brother," said Fatty Wynn. "Do have some of this pie, Tom Merry. It's steak and kidney, and simply ripping. You know Dame Taggles' steak and kidney pies."

"We've got one," said Tom.

"Have you?" said Fatty Wynn, with interest. "I—I say, you couldn't put off your feed till to-night, I suppose? I'd be glad to—"

"Well, we couldn't, quite."

"Sorry!" said Wynn, with real regret.

"Suppose you put off yours till to-night, and come over and have a whack at ours?" Tom Merry suggested. "We've got a steak and kidney pie, and ham and poached eggs, and two kinds of jam—"

Fatty Wynn's eyes glistened.

"I say, Figgy—" he began.

Figgins interrupted him.

"Is it just a feed, or is it a giddy meeting?" he demanded.

"Well, it's a feed, and a meeting as well," said Tom Merry diplomatically. "The feed first, you know, and—and then the meeting."

"About that rotten scheme of yours?"

"Ahem! We were going to moot the subject of a celebration on Mr. Linton's birthday."

Figgins snorted.

"Blow Linton, and blow his birthday! He reported us to Ratty, and we got it bad. And I hear that he's complained to Mr. Railton about our coming over and making a row in the School House. Blow his birthday!"

"But it will bring him round, and make him awfully good-tempered when he finds that we've got up a ripping celebration for his birthday, you know."

"Blow bringing him round—and blow his birthday!" said Figgins obstinately. "If you start any celebrating about that rot, we're going to muck it up!"

"Oh, are you?" exclaimed Tom Merry, looking warlike at once. "It's a School House scheme, and if you New House bouncers chip in, you'll get it where the chicken got the chopper!"

"You wait and see!" said Figgins darkly. "It's up to us now, and we mean business. We'll help you celebrating any other birthday, but not that one. We don't approve of your giddy Form-master."

"Then you can go and eat coke!" said Tom Merry politely.

And he retired from Figgins' study, and closed the door with a slam that could be heard the whole length of the passage.

CHAPTER 9.

Not Entirely Successful!

THERE were eight juniors in Tom Merry's study, and they were all looking very pleased and good-humoured.

The feed had been a success, in spite of the absence of Figgins & Co.

Under the kindly influence of the feed, the chums of Study No. 6 were prepared to give Tom Merry's scheme a patient hearing—a great concession on their part, as Jack Blake did not fail to make clear.

"Well, what's the idea?" said Blake condescendingly, when he found that he

hadn't possible room for another jam tart.

"Yaas, pile in, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus encouragingly. "I have some suggestions to make myself, but go ahead first!"

Tom Merry coughed as a preliminary. "Ahem! Gentlemen, next Wednesday is the birthday of our respected Form-master, Mr. Linton."

"Your respected Form-master, not ours," said Blake. "We're in the Fourth!"

"A respected Form-master, then," said Tom Merry. "Now, as it is his birthday there is no reason why we shouldn't celebrate it."

"And no reason why we should, either," commented Herries.

"Well, a little celebration breaks the monotony, anyway, and we can't have a celebration without something to celebrate," Tom Merry explained. "A Form-master's birthday is as good as anything else."

"Yaas, that's so."

"Besides, it's a good scheme. We give an entertainment, and charge for admission, and there will be something for the football fund."

"Perhaps!" said Digby.

"Depends on the entertainment," said Blake. "If it's going to be some of your blessed amateur dramatic performances, you may have to pay the fellows to come in!"

"Look here—"

"But I'm willing to hear about it," said Blake generously, with a wave of the hand. "Go on, but cut it as short as possible."

"Yaas, don't be all night about it, deah boy."

Tom Merry gulped down some remarks he was about to make, and continued:

"I was thinking of a sort of variety show. Principal item, Professor Buzzle, the famous conjurer. That is bound to be a draw. We can get him here for a guinea."

"How do you know?"

"I phoned and asked him. He does these things, you know—visits schools, and gives shows for the kids. That is bound to be a draw. He is willing to give us special terms. Besides that item, there can be selections by the junior band—"

"That's not a bad idea," said Blake approvingly. "My flute—"

"My cornet—" said Herries.

"Exactly. And then—"

"I should be willing to give some cornet solos," said Herries.

"Well, we could arrange a cornet solo as the last item on the bill," said Tom.

"Why the last item?" demanded Herries. "The people will be going out then."

"Yes; so they won't mind, you see—"

"Look here," said Herries, in great wrath, "if you're going to be funny—"

"Order! Music will be supplied by young Brooke, on the piano," said Tom Merry hastily. "We can think of some other items. Of course, this is only a rough idea, and all suggestions will be welcome. The editor's decision is final—I mean, the committee's decision is final."

"Who's the committee?" asked Blake suspiciously.

"Lowther, Manners, and myself," said Tom.

"Better put me on the committee. You'll want a chap with some sense to help in making the arrangements," explained Blake.

"Yaas, and I shouldn't object to bein' chairman of the committee."

"The committee would object," remarked Manners.

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"You see, it's up to us to make the thing a success now, as Figgins & Co. have declared against it," said Tom Merry. "It's a question who is Cock House, and we want to show those New House bouncers that the School House can manage a thing like this without their rotten assistance!"

"Hear, hear!" said the whole meeting heartily.

"Now, about other items—"

"I was going to make a suggestion, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus modestly. "I admit that Professor Buzzle is remarkably cheap at a guinea, but if that guinea could be saved, it would be all the better, wouldn't it?"

"Well, yes; but—"

"I should be willin' to take his place on the pwogramme."

"You!"

"Yaas, wathah! I weally think that I am, wathah a dab at conjurin', you know," Arthur Augustus explained modestly. "It is t'ue that I haven't twiced yet, but I weally think I could do it. A chap nevah knows what he can do until he twies, you know!"

"You're jolly well not going to have your first trial at our show, you duffer!" said Monty Lowther warmly.

"I wefuse to be called a duffah! I think—"

"Yes, Gussy, you're offside there," said Blake. "You'd better stick to your tenor solos. They're all the audience can be expected to stand from you."

"I wepeat that I could do a conjurin' twick. I have welfected on the mattah, and I am sure that I could work that twick with the watch," said Arthur Augustus obstinately. "On welflection, I think the pwofessor must have had anothah watch about him."

"Go hon!" said Blake sarcastically.

"You all saw how the twick went down at the show in Wylcombe. Now, I have an old watch—an old thing that is no good," said D'Arcy. "I've got it in my pocket now. I will show you fellows, if you like, how I can work the owacle!"

"Ass! We should see you changing the watches."

"Imposs. I should be awfully deep about that. Unless you fellows are willin' to give me a chance, I shall have no wresource but to withdraw from the meetin'!" said the swell of St. Jim's, with a great deal of dignity.

"Oh, let him pile in!" said Blake, with a groan. "He won't be happy till he gets it. Somebody lend him a watch."

Arthur Augustus rose to his feet.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, in a superb imitation of the manner of Professor Buzzle, "may I wequest any membah of the audience to lend me a watch? The same will be weturned safe and sound aftah the twick!"

There was a grim silence. Nobody seemed to want to trust his watch in the hands of the amateur conjurer.

"Weally, you fellahs, you might play up! Kangawoo, old man, will you lend me your tickah for the twick?"

"No fear!" said the Cornstalk promptly.

"You may wely upon my assurance that it will not be harmed. As you fellows are in the secwet, I do not mind your seein' how it is done," said Arthur Augustus. "You can see here that I have anothah watch!"

"And the swell of St. Jim's drew a battered old watch, that had long ceased to go, from his pocket.

"Will you lend me your watch, Tom Mewwy?"

"Thanks, no!"

"Lowthah, old man——"

"Ask me another!" said Lowther affably.

"Blake, deah boy——"

"Go and eat coke!" said Blake.

"Hewwies——"

"Rats!" said Herries.

"Dig, old man, I twust you will have sufficient confidence in a friend to lend me your watch," said Arthur Augustus in a dignified tone.

Good-natured Digby hesitated a moment, and then took out his watch.

"Here you are!" he said. "If you damage it, I'll scalp you!"

"I assuah you that it will not be

that point. The watch on the floor hardly bore any resemblance to a watch at all.

"Yes," yawned Blake. "Go it!"

"Quite satisfied, ladies and gentlemen?"

"Yes, you ass! Pile in!"

"Ladies and gentlemen, I shall now pwoceed to westore Dig's watch in all its pwistine glowy!" said Arthur Augustus. "Here you are, Dig!"

He slipped a second watch down his sleeve, and handed it to Digby.

"Quite satisfied, deah boy?" he asked. Somehow Robert Arthur Digby did not look satisfied. A really terrific expression was gathering on his face as he gazed spellbound at the watch in his palm.

He found his voice at last.

"You howling lunatic!" he shrieked.

"I wefuse to be chawactewised as a

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus in dismay. "I—I must have got the wotten things mixed in my sleeve, Bai Jove! I'm sowwy, Dig! But, aftah all, a twick is vewy liable to go w'ong at the first wehearsal, you know. Next time——"

"Next time!" gasped Blake. "Do you think there is going to be any next time, you frabjous fathead?"

"Weally, Blake——"

"I want my watch!" bawled Digby.

"I am weally sowwy, Dig, but——"

"My watch!"

"In the cires, it is imposs for me to westore it; but I will twy again. Will you lend me your watch, Blake?"

"Will I?" sobbed Blake. "No, I don't quite think that I'll lend you my watch, Gussy!"



Arthur Augustus slipped a second watch down his sleeve and handed it to Digby. "Quite satisfied, deah boy?" he asked, for Digby did not look satisfied. "You howling lunatic!" he shrieked. For D'Arcy had kept the wrong watch in his sleeve, and the hopeless wreck on the floor was all that was left of Digby's ticker!

damaged," said Arthur Augustus. "Gentlemen—I mean, ladies and gentlemen, you see that I have Dig's watch in my hand."

"Oh, yes!" yawned the gentlemen.

"Now I'm going to destwoy it uttahly, and then westore it to its ownah in its owiginal condish," said Arthur Augustus.

"Watch me!"

"Shall we watch you or watch the watch?" asked Lowther.

But Arthur Augustus paid no heed to the humorist of the Shell.

He fumbled with the watch, and slipped it into his sleeve in full view of the grinning audience.

"Now, gentlemen, I shall hurl this watch upon the floor——"

Crash!

"Now I shall stamp upon it!"

"Hurrah! Go it!"

Stamp, stamp, stamp!

"Ladies and gentlemen, you can all see that that watch is veduced to wuin."

There was not the slightest doubt upon

howlin' lunatic!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy indignantly. "What is the mattah?"

"Look!" yelled Digby.

He held up the watch D'Arcy had handed to him. It was an old, battered watch that had seen its best days, and seen the last of them. It was, in fact, the second watch with which the amateur conjurer had provided himself for performance.

The juniors gazed at it, and burst into a yell of laughter.

Evidently Arthur Augustus had got the watches mixed. He had kept the wrong watch in his sleeve, and the hopeless wreck on the floor was all that was left of Digby's ticker.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Blake, almost sobbing. "Oh crumbs! You'll be the death of me yet, Gussy! That isn't Digby's watch!"

"There's Dig's watch!" shrieked Tom Merry, pointing to the wreck on the floor.

"My word!" roared Digby. "I told you I'd scalp you if you didn't hand it back! My hat! I'll—I'll pulverise you! You—your chortling ass!"

"Weally, Dig—— Gweat Scott! Keep him off! Weally, you awful ass—— Ow, ow, ow!" roared Arthur Augustus, as Digby rushed upon him. "Hands off! Gweat Scott! Help!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was no stopping Digby, and the other fellows were laughing too much to think of trying to stop him. He went for his noble chum like a hurricane.

Arthur Augustus tore open the study door and fled. After him went Digby, breathing vengeance.

In Tom Merry's study all business was at an end. The meeting rocked with laughter, and the howls that rang out from the study seemed to indicate that it was a meeting, not of School House juniors, but of excited hyenas.

CHAPTER 10.

Solo!

"I WANT your advice, dear boys." Thus Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, in Study No. 6, a day or two after the meeting in Tom Merry's study.

Arthur Augustus had an enormous pile of music upon the study table, and he was turning it over with a thoughtful air.

Blake, Herries, and Digby were talking football, and Arthur Augustus' remark passed unheeded.

The swell of St. Jim's looked round. "Will you chaps give me some advice?" he asked reproachfully.

"Certainly!" said Blake. "Dry up!" "I'm thinkin' about the celebration on Wednesday afternoon. You see, as we have given the thin' our support, it's up to us to make it a great success for the cwedit of the study."

"Yes, that's so," said Blake, with a nod. "That's all right. I'm going to do a flute solo, with Tom Merry punching the piano. That's sure to go down."

"Ya-as; but I was thinkin' of my part."

"Your part," said Blake thoughtfully. "Lemme see, your voice is a tenor, isn't it?"

"You know it is, you ass!"

"Well, I know you've told me so," admitted Blake cautiously. "You really want to make the thing a success, Gussy?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You want to put the audience into a good temper and make everybody feel satisfied with things generally?"

"Yaas."

"Then I can give you a good tip," said Blake heartily. "Have another engagement that afternoon!"

"What!"

"Go and see your tailor, or be called away to the bedside of a sick relative," said Blake. "I will do a bit extra on the flute, to take the place of the tenor solo—"

"You uttah ass!"

"Well, you asked for my advice," said Blake. "That's the best advice I can think of. The audience would be pleased—"

"I was thinkin'," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity, "that a tenor solo is hardly suffish. I was thinkin' that it would be a good ideah to change the whole entahtainment into a sort of recital."

"My hat!"

"I should be vewy pleased to contribute a sewies of solos—"

"You might be," agreed Blake. "But isn't it rather selfish to think only of your own pleasure, Gussy?"

"The audience would be pleased, too, you ass!"

"Better suggest it to Tom Merry," grinned Blake. "I can see him changing his entertainment into a one-man show—I don't think!"

"I have suggested it to him."

"And what did he say?"

Arthur Augustus coughed.

"Well, as a mattah of fact, he said 'Wats!'" he admitted.

"Good!" said Blake heartily. "I endorse Tom Merry's remarks! Rats, and many of them!"

"I was thinkin' that you fellows might bwin' your influence to beah on Tom Mewwy, and induce him to see weason. There is no weason why the audience should have to tolewat a

squeaky flute when they can get a weally good tenor solo—"

"What!"

"And it is wathah wuff on them to have to listen to a hooty cornet instead of a wippin' song—"

"What!" snorted Herries.

"As for Dig's banjo and song, that is weally hardly up to the mark. And Dig could take his place in the audience, and lead the applause for my solos—"

"Yes, I can see myself doing it!" grunted Digby.

"If you fellows wufuse to see weason, we may as well dwop the subject. My ideah is to make the thing a success," said Arthur Augustus loftily.

"How-eh, I shall not insist. Suppose you give me some advice about my song? You've heard me sing the 'Flowah Song,' in 'Carmen,' Blake?"

"I've heard you wheeze it," said Blake.

"You have heard me sing 'Libiamo,' from 'La Twaviatah,' Dig?"

"I've heard you bark it," said Digby.

"You have heard me sing 'La Donna e Mobile,' Hewwies?"

"I have heard you murder it!" said Herries.

A prophet, it is said, is not honoured in his own country. Certainly it seemed that a really magnificent tenor was not honoured in his own study. Arthur Augustus simply glared through his eyeglass at his unsympathetic and unadmiring chums.

"If you cannot talk sense—" he began. "Weally, I think a chap might wely on his own chums for advice at a time like this. I want my song to be a success, and I should like you to advise me which song to select."

"A short one," suggested Blake.

"A very short one," said Herries.

"An extremely short one," said Digby.

"Couldn't you manage one of those songs without words, you know?" asked Blake, as if struck by a really brilliant idea. "That would spare your voice and the ears of the audience."

"I wufuse to discuss the mattah any furthah with a set of silly asses!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's indignantly. "Why, even Mellish has more appceciation for music than you have. He asked me to sing a solo to him in his study yestahday."

"Did he?" asked Blake, in wonder.

"Gammon!"

"It is a fact!" said Arthur Augustus, with dignity.

"Did he borrow anything of you afterwards?"

"Yaas; as a mattah of fact, he bowed five shillin's. But I do not see what that has to do with the mattah."

"I do, though," grinned Blake. "If you ask me, I think Mellish earned the five bob."

"I wegard you as a suspicious beast, Blake! Mellish is wathah a wottah, but he has an eah for music. You fellows have no eahs. Now, stop wottin', and tell me what you think of this. I'm goin' ovah a song."

"Mercy!"

"Upon the whole, I think that Verdi is the thin'. Verdi is wathah catchy, you know, and he will go down bettah than Wagnah with a youthful audience. It will also be easiah for the accompanist. I have here a tenor awiah fwom 'Otello'—'Owa e per sempwe, and—"

"Ora e per sempre!" said Blake. "What on earth does that mean?"

"It means, 'Now and for evah,'" said Arthur Augustus. "Of course, I shall sing it in Italian. The fellows won't undahstand the words, but that doesn't mattah. You see, there's a vewy great advantage in singin' in Italian, because if you forget the words, you can put in anythin' you like, and the audience is none the wisah. Now, you fellows, shut up a bit and heah me go through this!"

"You—you can't sing without an accompaniment," murmured Blake feebly.

"Yaas, that is all wight. Just to go ovah it, you know."

Blake closed one eye at Herries and Digby. They were not strongly tempted to remain to hear the solo.

"Right-ho!" said Blake, getting up. "Better stand up to it and take it in style. Face the window as if it were the audience, you know."

"Wight-ho, deah boy!"

"Keep your eyes fixed on the audience—I mean, the window," said Blake.

"Yaas."

"Now pile in!"

Arthur Augustus piled in.

And as soon as he was fairly started, Blake, Herries, and Digby tiptoed behind him noiselessly to the door.

"Sante memovie," went on D'Arcy.

"Addio, sublimi cantanti del pensiero." Three noiseless juniors tiptoed out of the study, and Blake gently drew the door shut. Arthur Augustus, in blissful ignorance of the silent departure of his chums, sang on. The three juniors went chuckling down the passage, and in Study No. 6 Arthur Augustus' tenor voice rang on in melody:

"Addio, schiere, fulgente, addio vittoria, Dardi volante, e volante corsier. Addio, addio, vessillo trionfale e—"

The dead silence in the study struck the soloist, and he turned his head.

"Bai Jove!"

The tenor solo came to a sudden stop.

"Gweat Scott! Blake—Hewwies—Dig—"

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass upon the study in amazement. Then, as the truth dawned on him, he became quite crimson with indignation.

"Oh, the awful wottahs!"

He tore open the study door and glared into the passage.

"You feahful wottahs! You spoofin' boundahs!"

But Blake, Herries, and Digby had vanished.

Half an hour later, when Jack Blake encountered his noble chum, he inquired affably how the tenor solo had got on. Arthur Augustus gave him a withering look, and declined to reply.

CHAPTER 11.

Done on the Phone.

"THOSE School House boundaries really mean business!" said Figgins, with a snort.

And the Co. grunted.

Having decided not to give their valuable support to the celebration of Mr. Linton's birthday, the New House Co. were "out of it."

Great preparations were going on in the School House. Now that it had become a House matter, a good many of the School House fellows were joining Tom Merry heartily to make the thing a success.

If the entertainment was a success, it would be one up against the New House. So fellows who cared no more for Mr. Linton's birthday than for the birthday of Nebuchadnezzar, piled in to help the Terrible Three.

"If the thing goes, they'll crow over us!" said Fatty Wynn, with a shake of the head. "Really, Figgy, you were rather hasty."

Figgins gave another snort. Perhaps he had been rather hasty; but he was not in the least inclined to admit the fact.

"We could have had a good place on the programme," said Fatty Wynn, "to say nothing of the feed—"

"Anybody would think you never got enough to eat!" said Figgins.

"Well, I never do!" said Fatty Wynn pathetically. "Look at what I had for dinner to-day. Only three helpings of Irish stew, and a couple of plum-puddings, and a few apples! If I hadn't had a snack at the tuckshop afterwards, I couldn't have gone through afternoon lessons. I tell you, a feed isn't to be despised! Besides, that feed was a jolly good one. They had steak-and-kidney pie—"

"Oh, cheese it!"

"And ham and poached eggs—"

"Shut up!" roared Figgins.

"Order!" said Kerr. "No time for ragging now! The question is, how are we going to put those School House bouncers in their places? They're not going to bring off that entertainment!"

"No fear!" said Figgins emphatically.

"They haven't even offered us free seats!" said Kerr. "It's sixpence admission for everybody below the Fifth, and we've got to pay a tanner each to go in—if we go! Fancy paying a tanner to hear Blake squeaking on a flute and Gussy slaying a tenor solo!"

"It would be eighteenpence for the three of us," said Wynn. "Think of what you can get for eighteenpence! Eighteen tarts—"

"Br-r-r-r!"

"Or nine twopenny ones—"

"They've got one jolly good item," said Kerr. "Tom Merry's got Professor Buzzle to agree to come and give a conjuring show. Lots of fellows haven't seen him in Rylcombe. You can't get in there for a tanner. There'll be a rush for that, and the fellows will put up with the rest of the programme."

Figgins rubbed his nose thoughtfully.

"Yes; that's where they score," he confessed. "I've been thinking about that. I say, Kerr, you remember once they were going to have an entertainer chap down, and we disguised you and passed you off as the chap? What price that?"

Kerr shook his head.

"They hadn't seen that chap," he said. "They've seen this Buzzle man."

"But you could make-up—"

"I couldn't make myself six inches taller."

"N-no; I suppose you couldn't," agreed Figgins. "I suppose that idea is no good. We shall have to think of something else."

Kerr reflected. A sudden glimmer shot into his eyes.

"I say," he exclaimed, "we might work it another way! I understand that Tom Merry fixed this up with the professor by telephone."

"Yes. What about it?"

"Suppose the professor was taken suddenly ill, and couldn't come?" said Kerr.

"But he won't be!"

"And suppose he phoned that he was sending another man in his place?"

"But he won't!"

"I know he won't, fathead; but anybody can use the phone by paying twopence. I suppose it's worth twopence?" Figgins jumped.

JUST MY FUN

Monty Lowther
Calling!



Hallo, everybody!

"Your humour is rot," says Gore.

"Dry" rot?

The Forth Bridge is the first big one you come to in Scotland. It is second to none, and each span is one third of the Forth. Got that?

I hear a Wayland trolleybus came to grief. A trolley bust!

Every film producer should thank his stars for his success.

They say we are always taller in the morning than at night. Anyway, I'm always "short" at the end of the week!

Said the holidaymaker, coming into dinner: "Hot? I feel like a boiled rag!" "Ah, we had that yesterday," murmured one of the boarders.

"I saw a Channel steamer do 24 knots," writes a reader. I know an old salt who can do 87 knots, all different ones.

"What is worse than getting behind-hand in washing?" writes a camper. What about getting behind the ears?

It was the Irishman who said the surest way of sending a letter through the post was to deliver it yourself.

As the holidaymaker on the crowded beach remarked: "I think the sea must be over there—I can see a seagull!"

"My hat! I never thought of that!"

"Lucky you've got a Scotsman to think of things for you, then," said Kerr.

"But that wouldn't do," said Figgins, with a shake of the head.

"Why wouldn't it?" demanded Kerr warmly.

"Because the professor wouldn't really fall ill, you know; and it would be no good getting his substitute here if the real article came along as well."

"That settles it," said Fatty Wynn.

"Ass!" said Kerr politely. "Of course, the professor will have to be prevented from coming."

"But it's arranged, and he's going to get a guinea."

"We could pay him the guinea. We could raise that among the fellows to do the School House in the eye. I should say it was worth it. Of course, we couldn't put the man to a loss over it."

"Oh, blow the guinea! A tanner each all round would make that up. But how are we going to stop him coming? He wouldn't break the engagement if we asked him."

I hear the Loamshire cricket captain got into trouble with the Customs on holiday. When he was asked to "declare," he refused.

News: For a wager, an American has offered to remain on his feet for a week. He "stands" to make some money.

A scientist has invented a machine enabling him to see right through people. Mr. Linton has always been able to do that with us in the Shell!

A number of millionaires' sons came over in the same ship recently. An heir liner.

Fatty Wynn tells me that at an exhibition he saw a house built of chocolate. Home, "sweet" home!

News: Japanese boys get up at six to do special training before going to school. The land of the rising son!

"Supposing there were a perfect schoolboy," says a writer. Yes, just suppose. What a time the other chaps would give him!

An Englishman of the old school had been wrecked on a desert island for three months when at last his manservant spotted a ship. "What signal shall I give them, sir?" he asked, handling the signal flags. "Well, we don't know them, Jenkins," said the Englishman thoughtfully, "but I think we might venture to say 'Good-morning!'"

Western story: "Why did the old pioneers set forth in their covered wagons?" asked a visitor. "Well," came the reply, "maybe they didn't want to wait thirty years for a train."

Stop Press: I've just seen Kerr, the Scots junior, rushing out to buy a book. Somebody has given him a reading lamp, and he doesn't want to waste it.

"Lights out!" chaps!

"He would if Tom Merry asked him?"

"But Tom Merry won't!" roared Figgins, in perplexity.

"Look here, Kerr—"

"Haven't we got a phone here?" demanded Kerr. "Can't we phone to the professor as if it were Tom Merry phoning?"

"Oh!"

"We can tell him that it has been decided not to put in that item after all. That will be strictly true, because we've decided it, haven't we?"

"Ha, ha, ha! We have!"

(Continued on the next page.)

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Figgins rushed at his chum and hugged him.

"Kerr, old man, you're a giddy genius! Come on! Old Ratty's out now, and we can use his phone."

"Good egg!" said Kerr. "The entertainment comes off to-morrow, and we'll nip the professor in the bud to-day. You can keep watch in the passage, Fatty, in case Ratty comes in."

And Figgins & Co. proceeded to their Housemaster's study. It was a somewhat risky proceeding to use Mr. Ratcliff's telephone, but the risk had to be run.

Fatty Wynn remained on the watch in the passage, and Figgins and Kerr entered the study.

"You know the number?" asked Figgins, thinking of that rather important point for the first time.

"Yes. He uses the telephone at the Assembly Rooms, of course. That was where Tom Merry phoned him."

"Suppose he isn't there?"

"If he isn't there we shall have to try again. But he's almost certain to be there at this time, getting ready for the evening show."

"Good!"

Kerr rang up the exchange, gave the number, and was put through.

"Hallo!" he said into the receiver.

"Is Professor Buzzle there?"

"Hold on a minute. I will call him," came the reply.

"Well?" said Figgins eagerly.

"They're fetching him to the phone," said Kerr.

"Oh, good!"

Kerr waited a few moments. Then a voice came along the wires:

"Hallo!"

"Hallo! Is that Professor Buzzle?"

"Yes. Who is it?"

"This is St. Jim's—the school, you know."

"St. Jim's? Yes. Is it Master Merry speaking?"

"I'm speaking—about your engagement, you know. Sorry to say it won't be possible to include that item on the programme. Can't get permission from Mr. Figgins."

Figgins chuckled softly.

"Indeed! I'm sorry."

"Yes, it's a shame. But there you are," said Kerr. "Mr. Figgins is down on it. Won't allow it on any terms."

Professor Buzzle probably thought that "Mr. Figgins" was one of the masters at St. Jim's. But that was not Kerr's affair.

"Of course, it won't make any difference as far as the fee is concerned," went on Kerr. "We beg you to accept that all the same, professor."

"Ahem! I fear that I cannot accept a fee without services being rendered," came the professor's reply.

Kerr grinned. He knew what that meant. The professor was a stickler for professional dignity, but he intended to have the guinea all the same. Kerr did not think of taking him at his word; he did not want to put the worthy entertainer to any loss.

"My dear sir, as we have—er—wasted your time in making the engagement, and so on, we shall really take it as a favour if you will accept the fee," he said.

"Ahem! Well, perhaps, as you put it like that—"

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"You will allow us to send it by post?"

"Very well."

"And we're so sorry the engagement can't be kept, but Mr. Figgins simply won't hear of it."

"Very well," repeated the professor. "Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!"

Kerr hung up the receiver.

Figgins chuckled joyously.

"We'll get a postal order this evening, before the post office closes, and buzz it off," he said. "That will be all right for the professor. And—"

There was a warning cough from the passage. Figgins and Kerr jumped away from the telephone only just in time. Mr. Ratcliff came into the study. He raised his eyebrows as he saw the two juniors there.

"If you please, sir," said Kerr hastily, "would you mind giving us a pass out of gates for this evening, sir?"

"For what purpose?" asked Mr. Ratcliff coldly.

"To—to go down to Rylcombe, sir, to—to see the entertainment at the Assembly Rooms," said Kerr.

"No, I will not, Kerr. I do not approve of these entertainments. You may leave my study," said Mr. Ratcliff frigidly.

Figgins and Kerr were only too glad to leave the study. In the passage Figgins clapped his chum on the back.

"Good man!" he murmured. "I should never have thought of that in time. Ratty hasn't a suspicion that we've been using the telephone."

Kerr chuckled.

"And as we don't want to go to the show, we don't want a pass out," he remarked. "Still, it makes Ratty happy to refuse somebody something, and it's our duty to confer a little happiness when possible on a harmless and necessary Housemaster."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

So all parties were satisfied.

CHAPTER 12.

A Broken Engagement.

IN blissful ignorance of the fell designs of their rivals of the New House, Tom Merry & Co. were making their arrangements for the morrow.

The programme had been filled.

As head cook and bottle-washer, so to speak, Tom Merry had a great deal of responsibility on his hands.

He had to consider what the audience were likely to like, and what they were likely to stand; and he had to consider, also, the claims of the various assistants who were willing to give tenor solos, bass solos, baritone solos, flute obligatos, pianoforte solos, banjo dances, impersonations, and so forth. There was no lack of talent.

It was difficult to decline the services of a fellow who was firmly convinced that, to make the thing a howling success, all that was needed was to put him on with his "little bit."

But Tom Merry, like Pharaoh of old,



As soon as Arthur Augustus was fairly started on to the door. In blissful ignorance of the silent dep sound

hardened his heart. He had to. Otherwise, the programme would have been long enough to last through the afternoon and night of Wednesday, and well into Thursday morning.

Which was clearly not to be thought of.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was gently but firmly refused permission to turn the affair into a song recital. Blake was restricted to a single performance of the flute. Herries' projected series of cornet solos were cut down to a single one—and that not a long one. Digby was given exactly ten minutes for his song and dance with banjo. Kangaroo was allowed the same space of time for a performance with an Australian stock-whip.

The offer of Reilly, Kerruish, and Ray to provide a screaming sketch to occupy about an hour and a half was refused. So was Skimpole's offer to contribute a short lecture on geology, with specimens.

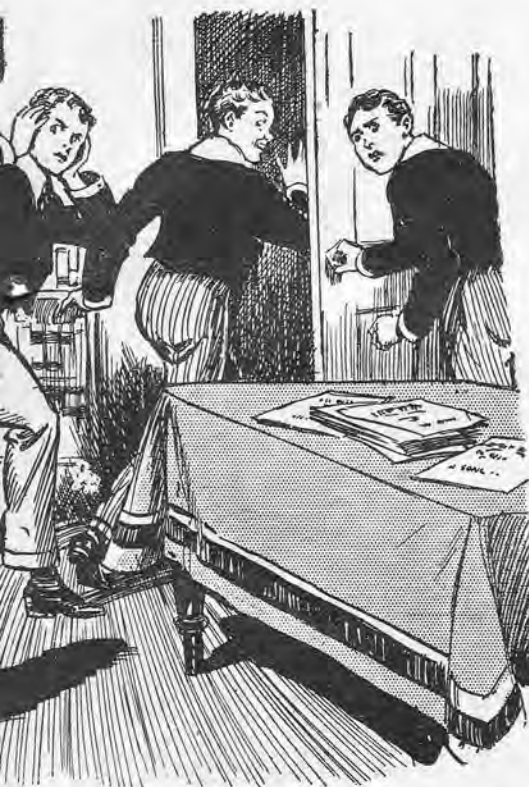
It had been decided to give the entertainment in the Form-room. The lecture hall would really have been better, but the lecture hall was wanted that afternoon for some trivial lecture or other; and, as Lowther remarked, it was no good asking the Head to put off a silly lecture because the juniors wanted the room.

After all, it was agreed that the Form-room would be all right.

The forms were there, ready for the audience to sit upon, and chairs would be begged, borrowed, or stolen from all quarters. Screens, also begged, borrowed or stolen, would partition off the green-room from the audience, and that would also be all right.

The piano could be carried in out of the music-room. The Housemaster had given the required permission.

On Tuesday evening there was to be a



ke, Herries, and Digby tiptoed behind him noiselessly chums, D'Arcy sang on, and Study No. 6 rang to the voice.

rehearsal of the programme, from which all but the performers were excluded.

Tom Merry, with a managerial eye, scanned the Form-room. It was a spacious room, and there was plenty of accommodation for all the audience they were likely to get.

"There won't be many seniors here, I'm afraid," Tom Merry remarked. "It's beastly unlucky that the Head is giving a lecture to-morrow—something about beastly Greek plays or something. The Sixth will all have to turn up to it. Of course, they'd rather come to our show."

"Ahem! Of course!" said Blake, with a cough.

"Well, I suppose anybody would prefer a good variety show to a rotten lecture," said Tom. "But they have to go to the lecture for the look of the thing. A lot of the Fifth will go, too. It's rather rotten."

"Yaas, it's wathah thoughtless of the Head to be givin' a lectuah to-morrow aftahnoon," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked. "I suppose it would be no good givin' him a hint to put it off."

"Not much!" said Tom Merry sarcastically.

"We could put it to him as an old sport, you know."

"Ass!" said Tom Merry promptly. "We shall get a good crowd, anyway. Most of the New House chaps will come just to see what it's like. Figgins says he's going to be here."

"I twust those New House boundahs will behave themselves," said Arthur Augustus, a little anxiously. "If they intewrupt the performance—"

"They'll go out on their necks if they do."

"Yaas, but—"

"There will be plenty of our chaps here to see fair play. We're going to let the fags in at half price, too; that

will make a good crowd," said Tom. "Young Wally has promised to give a hiding to every chap in the Third who doesn't come."

"That's all wight. You can wely on my minah."

"Now for the rehearsal," said Tom Merry. "Some of you chaps lend me a hand to get the piano in. Hallo! What's wanted?"

Clifton Dane looked in at the door.

"Outside!" called out Blake. "Only members of the company in here."

"I'm not coming in!" grinned Dane. "Tom Merry's wanted—somebody's asking for him on the telephone."

"All right. I dare say it's Professor Buzzle—something about to-morrow," said Tom. "You fellows can get the piano in while I'm gone."

"Wight-ho!"

Tom Merry hurried away to the prefects' room, where the telephone was. The juniors were allowed to use the telephone on special occasions. This was one of the special occasions. Kildare of the Sixth was in the prefects' room, talking to Darrell, when Tom Merry came in.

"Somebody's ringing you up, Merry," he said, with a smile. "I took the call. It's somebody named Fuzzle or Wuzzle, or something."

"Professor Buzzle," said Tom. "He's coming here to-morrow to give us a show."

He took up the receiver. He wondered what Professor Buzzle had to say, and he felt an inward uneasiness that the professor might be going to cancel the engagement. At that time of day it would be impossible to replace him, and the loss of the professor would be a serious matter.

"Hallo!" said Tom Merry. "Professor Buzzle! Are you there?"

"Is that Master Merry, St. Jim's?"

"Yes, what is it?"

"I'm sorry I shan't be able to give a performance to-morrow afternoon," came a wheezy voice, as if the speaker was suffering from a cold. "Quite impossible!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"In the circumstances, I shall not accept the guinea fee."

"That you jolly well won't!" murmured Tom Merry wrathfully.

"But I am sending a substitute, who will give a performance quite equal to my own—a gentleman upon whom you can have every reliance, and you may be sure that he will give satisfaction."

Tom Merry's face brightened up. The matter was not so bad, after all. He would rather have had the professor himself; but if the professor couldn't come, a substitute upon whom reliance could be placed was almost as good.

"Oh, all right!" said Tom.

"The gentleman will arrive at the time arranged."

"Three o'clock," said Tom Merry.

"Exactly. Expect a Mr. Twistem. Got the name?"

"Mr. Twistem? Yes."

"You may rely upon it that Mr. Twistem's performance will create a sensation—quite equal to any that I could give."

"All right," said Tom Merry. "If

you can't come, I suppose that's the best thing that can be done."

"It would be no good my coming with a bad cold."

"I suppose not."

"But Mr. Twistem will be quite satisfactory. Unless you are satisfied with his performance you need not pay him."

"Oh, we'll pay up!" said Tom Merry.

"I dare say it will be all right."

"Then good-bye!"

"Good-bye!"

Tom Merry hung up the receiver.

"Something gone wrong?" asked Kildare.

"The professor's got a cold and can't come," said Tom Merry. "But he's sending a substitute just as good, he says. I say, Kildare and Darrell, if you'd care to cut the Head's lecture to-morrow afternoon, we'd be jolly glad to see you in the Form-room for the entertainment."

"Thanks!" said Kildare, laughing.

"But—"

"It will be a good entertainment—a really ripping show," said Tom. "Prefects are admitted on the nod—I mean, special seats are reserved for such honoured guests."

"Thanks awfully, but I'm afraid we shall have to turn up in the lecture-room. Wish you every success."

And Tom Merry returned to the Form-room. The juniors were not there, however. They had gone to the music-room to negotiate the piano, and Tom Merry followed them there. The piano had been dragged out of its place, and was standing in the middle of the room, with a crowd of red-faced juniors round it in their shirtsleeves.

"Well, what was it on the phone?" asked Blake, pausing in his labours.

"Buzzle can't come—got a cold!"

"Oh, rotten!"

"But he's sending a substitute to take his place—a chap, he says, who will be quite as good," said Tom Merry. "I dare say it will be all right. There are lots of entertainers of that sort as good as Buzzle."

"If ness, deah boy, I should be willin' to give a conjuwin' performance as well as a tenah solo. In fact—"

"Rats! Lend a hand with the piano," said Tom Merry. "Now then, all together!"

And the baby grand slid towards the door in the midst of a crowd of shirt-sleeved juniors.

CHAPTER 13.

A Moving Job!

"STEADY on!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Don't shove, ass!"

"I wefuse to be called an ass!" said Arthur Augustus, stopping. "Unless you desist fwom makin' personal remarks, Blake—"

"Come on with it!" said Tom Merry impatiently.

"Unless Blake desists fwom makin' personal remarks—"

"Look here, Gussy, it isn't time for your solo yet. Dry up!"

"Weally, Lowthah!"

The juniors halted in the doorway with the piano. Fortunately it had seen service, and so a few more knocks would not be likely to show. Indeed, there were the initials of a good many youthful musicians carved on the case, and the scratches of many boots could be seen round about the pedals. The piano had an iron frame, and was altogether very heavy, and the juniors found some difficulty in handling it. It ran on

castors, or once had done so, but one of the castors had long been missing, and, as a rule, it was propped up in one corner with a Latin grammar. The castor was not missed when the piano was being practised on, but it was a little awkward to wheel about without it.

"It will have to be carried along the passage," said Tom Merry, panting. "We aren't allowed to scratch the beasty linoleum—as if it mattered."

"Oh, blow the linoleum!" gasped Blake.

"Well, you know what Linton said last time."

"Blow Linton!"

"Up with it!" said Tom Merry. "All of you get round the beasty thing, and put your beef into it."

"Hold it so that I can slip undah it, and take the weight on my shouldahs," said Arthur Augustus. "I've seen movin' men do that."

Tom Merry snorted.

"Do you think you could bear the weight on your silly shoulders, fat-head?"

"I suppose I can do what a movin' man can do?" said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "It is as much knack as strength, you know."

"Shurrup!"

With a big effort, the piano was borne through the doorway, then it bumped down in the passage with a heavy bump.

"Oh, you duffers!" said Tom Merry.

"What about the linoleum—"

"Bust the linoleum!" howled Blake.

"It seems to me that you're trying to bust the piano. All of you stand round it, and lift it, and don't let it drop again."

Six or seven juniors grasped the piano, and it was slowly raised from the floor. They staggered under the weight, gasping. Arthur Augustus pushed up the lid to get a better grip, and let it slip, and it descended with a terrific bang. The startled juniors let the piano bump down again. The three castors dug three fresh holes into the linoleum on the passage floor.

"You ass!" yelled Blake.

"It was your fault, deah boy—you moved it—"

"Aren't we trying to move it, idiot?"

"I wefuse to be called an idiot—"

"Oh, come on!" shouted Tom Merry.

"We shall be all night about it at this rate. If you make all that row, Linton will be coming along, or somebody!"

"Let 'em all come!" snorted Blake.

"I don't care! If I ever hear you talking about celebrating rotten birthdays again, I'll take you into a quiet corner and suffocate you. Yah!"

"All together! Steady on!"

Up went the piano again, in the grasp of the perspiring juniors. Arthur Augustus did not take hold this time. He felt that it was better to give directions.

"That's wight!" he said. "Keep cleah of the wall—you'll bust the wall through if you wush at it like that, Blake!"

Blake had his hands full, or Arthur Augustus would certainly have received a thick ear at that moment. As it was, Blake murmured things.

"Pway keep your tempah, Blake. It is silly to lose one's tempah ovah a job. Pway go a bit more steadily, Lowthah—you'll have the whole thing ovah in a minute."

"I'll have you over in a minute, if you don't shut up," said Monty Lowthah sulphurously.

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"Put your beef into it, Hewwies, old chap!"

"Br-r-r-r!"

"I do not wegard that as an intelligent wemark, Hewwies. Digby, old man—"

"Shut up!" roared Digby.

"Weally, you know, I—"

"Get out of the way!" panted Tom Merry.

"Shift off, you dummy! Can't you see you're standing in the road, you thousand kinds of an ass?"

"I am givin' instructions—"

"Buzz aside, dummy—"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy— Ow,

don't wush into me— Yawwooh!

Gweat Scott! Oh, you asses! Bai

Jove— Oh!"

The piano-movers collided with the swell of St. Jim's, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was hurled against the wall. He leaned on the wall, gasping, and the moving job passed him at a run. The piano was fairly going now, and the juniors kept on the run down the passage, anxious to get their heavy burden landed in the Form-room.

It was sheer bad luck that brought



Mr. Linton along the passage just then to see what the uproar was about.

He came striding along with rustling gown and frowning brow, just as the piano was rushed round the corner in the grasp of six or seven breathless juniors.

Mr. Linton crashed into the piano, and the piano crashed into Mr. Linton. The musical instrument swayed, and bumped once more on the floor.

Mr. Linton landed on the floor with another bump.

He sat there and glared at the piano. Round the landed instrument the juniors stood and gasped for breath.

"Wh-wh-what does this mean?" stuttered Mr. Linton.

"Sorry, sir—"

"Didn't see you coming, sir!"

"We—we're moving the piano, sir!"

Mr. Linton staggered to his feet. His face was like a thundercloud. He had had a bad shock, and his temper had already been a little edge-wise.

"You—you—you stupid young rascals!" he gasped. "You—you—"

"So sorry, sir—"

"What are you moving the piano at all for?"

"Mr. Railton gave us permission, sir," said Tom Merry hurriedly.

"We're giving an entertainment in the Form-room to-morrow afternoon to celebrate a—a birthday, sir!"

It did not seem a judicious moment for telling Mr. Linton that it was his birthday that was to be celebrated.

"What utter nonsense!" snapped Mr. Linton. "I do not approve of anything of the sort. However, if Mr. Railton gave you permission to move the piano, you may do so; but you will take a hundred lines each for making so much noise, and if there is any further disturbance, I shall cane you!"

And Mr. Linton strode angrily away.

"Lovely kind of chap to celebrate the birthday of, I don't think!" murmured Blake. "Why didn't you tell him it was his giddy birthday?"

"Might have made him waxier!" said Tom Merry ruefully. "Come on with the piano. If D'Arcy comes near it again, punch him!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Clear off, you ass!"

"I am givin' diwections! Oh—ow—yah!"

The juniors were exasperated, and Arthur Augustus came along just in time to furnish them with a victim for the expression of their exasperation.

They threw themselves upon him and bumped him on the floor, and left him gasping, and then turned their attention to the piano again. With a final effort, it was conveyed into the Form-room and planted safely there.

"It's all right!" gasped Tom Merry. "Only a scratch or two, and one of the pedals twisted. Thank goodness it's no worse! Now for the rehearsal!"

And in a somewhat breathless state the juniors started rehearsing.

CHAPTER 14.

Mr. Twistem!

THE next day, after dinner, Figgins & Co. left the New House and walked out of the gates.

Figgins was carrying a large bag in his hand. Nobody paid any special attention to the departure of Figgins & Co. Tom Merry & Co. were far too busy in making the final arrangements for the performance to bestow a single thought upon the heroes of the New House.

But Figgins & Co. were thinking of them.

"They've got a programme up in their blessed House!" Figgins remarked with a chuckle, as the three juniors walked down the lane. "I cut across to see it. They've got the name of Twistem written across that of Professor Buzzle."

The Co. chuckled.

"It worked like a charm," said Kerr. "They never smelt a rat!"

"Well, I don't see how they could," remarked Figgins. "I think we should have been taken in, in their place, by that telephone trick. Now, all we've got to do is to send them Mr. Twistem, the professor's substitute."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I've got all the things here, and when I'm ready, you fetch the cab from Rylcombe," said Figgins. "It can pick me up in the lane."

The three juniors left the road and crossed a field towards an old barn, half-way to the village.

(Continued on page 18.)

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! My mail grows larger and larger; in fact, I don't remember having had so many letters from readers as I am getting now. It is a very encouraging sign for an editor, for he knows that his readers are taking a great interest in the paper they read, which of course means that the stories are meeting with keen approval.

One of my most pleasant daily duties is to sit down and read the glowing opinions of my readers on this story or that story, or the GEM itself. I always feel I should like to publish every reader's letter, for it must be as interesting to you as it is to me to read what other readers think. But, of course, if I did that, there would be no room in the GEM for the stories, and that wouldn't do. So I have to content myself with publishing a few letters, selected at random, now and again.

One very interesting letter I received comes from Mr. F. A. Agambar, of Swindon, a reader who has taken the GEM and "Magnet" for twenty years. He says: "Somehow the characters in both books keep us in touch with perpetual youth, and after the troubles and cares of the day are over, it's very refreshing to the mind to read the GEM or the 'Magnet' and indulge in a hearty laugh. I consider both books ideal for anyone to read, and to miss reading them one is missing half the happiness in life."

Mr. Agambar has composed a poem in tribute to the GEM and "Magnet." Here it is:

I'm Telling You!

Read your GEM, also the "Magnet,"
To cultivate true ideals;
They are seasoned with fun and
laughter,
And mixed with heaps of jolly thrills.

They make a dull hour happy,
You forget the rain outside,
And maybe some day in the future,
It will help you against life's tide.

I've read them both for years and years,
And I could read them for ever,
For they taught me to play the game,
In the yarns they print together.

There's Tom Merry and his study-
mates,
Bob Cherry and his lively crew,
And Billy Bunter always forgetting,
Postal orders that don't come through.

Also their spiffing feeds together,
Ever dear to me and you,
For in our thoughts when we are
reading,
We creep in their study, too.

And when you've read your copy,
Maybe you have a sick friend,
Who would like to read about the feed,
If you could give or lend.

So pass along your copies, friend,
Don't throw them in the dust;
Let your actions reveal the virgin gold,
And exposure cannot rust.

Well, ta-ta, all you youngsters:
There's lots of nice stories ahead,
In the GEM and the "Magnet"—
I'm telling you, Uncle Fred.

Thank you, Mr. Agambar, for your welcome letter and poem. Drop me a line again some time.

Here are one or two more expressions of opinion from readers:

Miss Jessie Peck, of Johannesburg, South Africa, writes: "I have been a reader of the GEM for many years, and I think I always shall be. My uncle has been a reader for over twenty years and he still reads it."

W. Barrett, of Barking, pays his compliments in saying: "I must let you know how I'm enjoying the GEM. The stories have been great, and I'm looking forward to some ripping football yarns. P.S. I'm making sure of the 'Holiday Annual'." Wise chap! I should advise other readers to do the same.

"I have been a reader of the GEM for two or three years," Ken Turner, of Melbourne, Australia, tells me, "and find this book one of the best school story papers I have read. My father started buying the GEM twenty years ago."

Here is what two new readers, J. Bangham and J. Walkinshaw, of Wembley Park, have to say: "My friend and I are regular readers of the GEM, and have been for the last two months. We like the stories very much, and would like a series starring Kildare, in which Knox and Cutts attempt to oust him from the captaincy. We very much enjoy reading the early adventures of Harry Wharton & Co., and we wonder if they are the stories which appeared when the 'Magnet' first came out."

Thanks for your idea, my Wembley chums. Curiously enough, such a series as you suggest is already in my plans for the winter. Look out for the news. Yes, the stories of Harry Wharton & Co. are the same as appeared in the "Magnet" when it was first published in 1908.

Well, that's all the letters I have space for this week. I must get in a few

words now about next Wednesday's splendid programme. Firstly, we have another great story of Tom Merry & Co., which is called:

"The Drudge of St. Jim's!"

This yarn features the coming of a new boot-boy, Tom Lynn, to St. Jim's. Lynn is a splendid character, and readers will take to him at once, the same as Tom Merry & Co. do when they first meet him. He is a clever, go-ahead youngster, and although he holds the lowest position on the staff at St. Jim's, he is determined to better himself in life. He takes up studying, and in this Arthur Augustus D'Arcy generously lends him his assistance. But the new boot-boy makes enemies of Levison & Co., who do their best to make things as unpleasant for him as possible. Tom Lynn knows how to look after himself, however, as he shows the would-be snobs of St. Jim's.

You'll thoroughly enjoy every word of this gripping story, which has a real human interest. It is Martin Clifford at his best—and readers know what that means.

"Harry Wharton's Sacrifice!"

Having landed himself in the clutches of Ikey Isaacs, the moneylender, it seems that Hazeldene's days at Greyfriars are numbered, unless he can pay the man and save himself from exposure. The cad of the Remove is at his wit's end, and the fear of expulsion has already made him a thief. Hazeldene little knows, however, that there is another who is worried about his unhappy plight. Harry Wharton cannot forget the abject misery of the foolish junior, and his compassion for him compels Harry to do something to save him. Harry Wharton, perhaps, has many faults, but the sacrifice he makes to save another proves that he has a heart of gold.

You'll vote this story of the early adventures of the Greyfriars chums one of the best Frank Richards has written.

Another of his masterly efforts is to be found in the "Magnet." It's called:

"His Convict Cousin!"

and deals with the adventures of a convict who has escaped from Blackmoor Prison, and who goes into hiding near Greyfriars. The news comes as a great shock to Gerald Loder, the bullying Sixth Former, for it happens that the convict is his own cousin. Here is a dramatic situation which Frank Richards describes in his own inimitable style, and all GEM readers will revel in reading his latest cover-to-cover yarn. Ask for the "Magnet" to-day, price 2d.

THE EDITOR.

PEN PALS COUPON
26-9-36

Safe inside the barn, Figgins opened the big bag.

He turned out a variety of "props" belonging to the New House Junior Dramatic Society, the rival organisation to the Junior Dramatic Society of the School House.

So far, the deep-laid plot had been successful. Professor Buzzle had been prevented from coming. Tom Merry & Co. were unsuspectingly prepared to receive his substitute, a gentleman of the name of Twistem. And, needless to say, the gentleman of the name of Twistem was to be a New House junior got up for the occasion. On account of his height, which made it easier for him to pass as a man when disguised, Figgins had been selected to play the part—and when sufficiently padded out he would have the width to match.

Kerr was a pastmaster in the art of making-up, and his artistic hands were soon at work upon Figgins.

In black coat and striped trousers, Figgins' appearance was much changed, and Kerr proceeded to age his face with a few clever touches, and then attached a black moustache and a short ruffled beard, which gave Figgins an exceedingly Frenchified appearance.

Figgins grinned as he surveyed himself in the glass when the transformation was completed.

"My hat, that's ripping!" he exclaimed. "That beats anything they can do in the dramatic society in their blessed old House, anyway!"

"Yes, rather!" said Fatty Wynn heartily. "You look a treat! I shouldn't know you if I met you in the street!"

"I wish it wasn't in daylight!" said Figgins, rather anxiously. "Do you think the make-up's likely to show, Kerr?"

"No, that's all right. You'll be indoors, too, and you can wear a muffler till you get in—it's cold enough!"

"Right!" said Figgins.

Kerr departed to fetch the cab from Rylcombe. Figgins waited for it in the lane. Old George came up with the cab at last. He looked curiously at the black-bearded and moustached gentleman who was waiting.

Evidently, however, he did not recognise him, or suspect that he was anything but what he appeared to be.

"Here's your cab, sir," said Kerr, for the benefit of Old George, as he jumped out.

"Thank you, my lad!" said Figgins, in a deep voice.

Figgins stepped into the cab.

"Where to, sir?" asked Old George.

"St. Jim's—the School House."

"Yessir."

The cab drove off. Fatty Wynn came out from behind the hedge and joined Kerr, and the two juniors, chuckling, strolled after the cab towards the school.

Figgins, in spite of his nerve and his confidence in Kerr's powers of make-up, felt a slight inward tremor as the cab reached the gates of St. Jim's.

If only he passed muster with the School House fellows all would be plain sailing. He was to give a conjuring performance in the place of Professor Buzzle, and he intended it to be a performance that would astonish the natives. But would he pass muster?

Figgins could not help feeling a little uneasy.

The cab drove in, and stopped outside the School House. Two or three juniors were on the steps waiting for it.

"Here's Old George's cab," Blake

remarked. "That must be Twistem. I shouldn't wonder if Gussy's with him. It's time he got back."

"Gussy out?" asked Lowther.

Blake snorted.

"Yes. He had to go down to the tailor's about his things this afternoon. I shouldn't wonder if he's late for the show. He's not in the cab, I see—only an old johnny there."

Mr. Twistem stepped from the cab. Blake ran down the steps to meet him.

"Mr. Twistem?" he asked.

"Yes," said a deep voice.

"Good! This way, sir!"

And Blake led the black-bearded gentleman into the School House and into the Shell Form Room. All the performers were there; it was getting near time for the beginning. Some of the audience were already in their seats.

Two-thirds of the Form-room had been crowded with forms and chairs. At the door, Clifton Dane and Bernard Glyn were stationed to take the gate-money and to eject with violence anyone who tried to enter "on the nod." The yells of the fags in the passage showed that they were doing their duty.

"Here's Mr. Twistem!" exclaimed Blake, as he piloted the gentleman into the Form-room.

Tom Merry hurried to meet him.

"Good-afternoon, Mr. Twistem! You're in good time! This way, please! The green-room's behind the screen."

Mr. Twistem followed the Shell fellow.

"You haven't brought anything with you?" asked Tom Merry, noticing that the gentleman's hands were empty. He had expected to see Mr. Twistem with a bag.

"Ahem! No!"

"Have you a cold, Mr. Twistem?" asked Tom anxiously, as he noted the hushiness of the visitor's voice.

"Not at all, Master Merry. I—I presume that you are Master Merry?"

"Yes, I'm Tom Merry. Do you need anything for your tricks?" asked Tom.

"Ahem! My performance will be a very simple one. If I should require a few things, I dare say you can provide them."

"Oh, certainly! We've got you down second on the programme, Mr. Twistem. I give a piano solo to play the people in, and then you get to the wicket."

"Ahem! Quite so."

"Would you mind waiting here?"

"Certainly not, Master Merry."

Tom Merry left the gentleman in the green-room, and returned to his comrades. His expression was a little doubtful.

"Blessed if I think very much of Twistem!" he said. "He seems to have a cold, though he says he hasn't; and he can't look a fellow in the face. I believe his moustache is false."

"Well, no harm in that, so long as he gives a good show," remarked Manners.

"I hope he'll do that," said Tom dubiously. "Anyway, it can't be helped now. We must hope for the best. The audience is coming in, that's one comfort."

Fellows were coming in quite thickly now, paying out their shillings cheerfully at the door. A gratifying feature of the proceedings was the fact that a goodly number of New House fellows came in. Indeed, nearly all the juniors of the New House seemed to have made up their mind to come to the entertainment.

Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence marched in first, grinning; then came Thompson of the Shell, and Pratt, and Digby, also grinning. Later came Kerr and Wynn, grinning. Quite an

army of New House fellows followed, all grinning.

Tom Merry observed the wide grins of the New House contingent, and they puzzled him. He did not see anything to grin at, as he remarked to Lowther.

"They think it's going to be a frost," was Lowther's opinion. "Let 'em grin. They'll grin on the other side of their chivvies when they see us bring down the house."

"The seats will all be taken," said Tom Merry. "I'll go and see Linton now. He was so crabby this morning I didn't like to ask him, but he must come."

And Tom Merry hastened away to the Form-master's study. He knocked, and Mr. Linton's sharp voice bade him enter.

The master of the Shell did not look very amiable. As a matter of fact, he had two or three bumps from the collision with the piano on the previous evening, and they had not improved his temper.

"Well, Merry?" he asked acidly.

"If you please, sir," murmured the captain of the Shell.

"Please come to the point."

"Ahem! We are giving a show this afternoon, sir; a little entertainment—"

"Well?"

"To—to celebrate your birthday, sir."

Mr. Linton stared.

"My birthday?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, sir. M-m-mny happy returns, sir!" stammered Tom Merry.

"Oh!" said the Form-master.

His severe expression softened considerably.

"Do you mean to say, Merry, that this celebration is on account of my birthday?" he asked.

"Certainly, sir."

"Indeed! Thank you very much!" said Mr. Linton, very much relaxed now. "I was not aware of the circumstance. You need not—ahem!—do the lines I imposed upon you last evening."

"Thank you, sir!" said Tom Merry, feeling that he was getting on. "May we hope, sir, that you will—ahem!—honour the entertainment with your presence, sir? It would—would give it a tone, sir; and—as it is in your honour, we have reserved the best seat especially for you, sir."

Mr. Linton smiled.

"You are very kind, Merry. In the circumstances, I cannot refuse your invitation. I will come, with pleasure."

"Oh, good, sir!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "We start in ten minutes, sir."

"I will be there."

"Thank you very much, sir."

And Tom Merry left the study, delighted. He had more than a suspicion that the New House juniors had turned up in such strong force with the intention of starting a "rag." But with the Form-master in the audience, a rag would be out of the question. Figgins' faithful followers would be compelled to observe order and decorum in the presence of Mr. Linton.

"He's coming," said Tom Merry.

"It's all right."

"Hear, hear!"

"Where's Gussy?" asked Tom.

"Hasn't he turned up yet?"

"The ass has gone down to his tailor's!" growled Blake. "He said he'd be back in time. If he isn't—"

"If he isn't, we'll cut out the tenor solo. The audience won't mind. By Jove, what a splendid crowd!" said Tom, running his eyes over the audience. "About time I got to the

piano. Tell Twistem to be ready to start as soon as I've chucked it."

"Right-ho!"
And the strains of the piano floated through the Form-room, mingled with the buzz of voices and the sound of coughing and chuckling.

CHAPTER 15.

A Peculiar Performance!

MR. LINTON, looking unusually good-humoured, sat down in the front row of seats while the piano solo was thumping its way through.

There was an immediate cessation of the buzzing and chuckling. The most unruly fags realised that they had to keep order in the presence of the master of the Shell.

The piano was silent at last. Then Mr. Twistem came out from behind the screens. He was not in evening-dress, as the audience expected to see him—but perhaps that was because it was afternoon. There was a dutiful murmur of applause greeting from the School House section of the audience. Kerr and Wynn clapped the appearance of Mr. Twistem—for reasons of their own. They were looking forward to his performance with particular interest.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Mr. Twistem, recklessly regardless of the fact that there were no ladies present. "Ladies and gentlemen, I shall now proceed to perform a few simple tricks."

"Oh, rot!" murmured Gore. "We want more than a few simple tricks for a tanner a time!"

"Will some member of the audience kindly step on the platform to help me?" said Mr. Twistem. "Perhaps Master Merry will oblige?"

Tom Merry was on the stage with Mr. Twistem. He came forward.

"I shall now," continued Mr. Twistem, "perform the magic ink trick. This trick is very seldom performed, for reasons that will be apparent hereafter. Master Merry, kindly stand facing the audience."

Tom Merry faced the audience. Mr. Twistem drew from his pocket a bottle of red ink and a camel-hair brush of large size. Tom Merry gazed at them rather nervously.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I shall now paint Master Merry's face a bright red—"

"Will you, by Jove?" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"And then, with a wave of the hand, I shall cause the ink to disappear, leaving Master Merry's face exactly as it was before," continued Mr. Twistem.

There was a buzz of applause. If Mr. Twistem could do that, it was evident that he was a first-class conjurer and beat Professor Buzzle hollow. Only Tom Merry felt somewhat uneasy.

"I—I say, I suppose it's only a trick?" he whispered.

"Certainly, my lad."
"You really can do it?"

"You will see."

Mr. Twistem uncorked the bottle of red ink and dipped the brush into it. There was a giggle from the audience as he drew the inky brush down Tom Merry's face, dividing the junior's countenance with a bright red line.

"By Jove! That's genuine enough!" exclaimed Blake. "He must be a jolly good conjurer if he can get that off with a wave of the hand!"

"That beats Buzzle," Digby remarked.



The Form-room door was suddenly thrown open. As the audience looked round, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, his face blazing with excitement, burst into the room. "Collar him!" he exclaimed, pointing to Mr. Twistem. "He's an impostor!"

"By George, it does!"

Mr. Twistem proceeded industriously to paint Tom Merry's face red. Tom felt that he had to submit; he could not refuse to help in the performance of the conjurer he had himself engaged, but he felt uneasy and disquieted. It was not a sham ink of any sort that was being applied to his face; it was very real. Some of it was trickling down into his collar, and felt very real indeed. How was Mr. Twistem to charm that ink away from his face—unless, indeed, he was really possessed of magical powers?

It seemed impossible that it could be done; but, on the other hand, this was doubtless a regular trick, and Mr. Twistem must be supposed to know the business of his own profession. Still, Tom felt ill-at-ease.

In a few minutes Tom Merry's face was glowing red and presenting a most weird aspect. The audience yelled with laughter.

Mr. Twistem laid down the bottle and the brush; he turned to the audience and pointed to the crimson-faced fellow.

"Ladies and gentlemen, you observe that Master Merry's face is now perfectly red, and you can all testify that real ink has been used."

"Yes, yes!" shouted the audience.

Mr. Twistem turned to Tom Merry again; he made several passes with his hands before the crimson face and exclaimed:

"Hey presto! Ink, vanish!"

The audience gazed on breathlessly.

The ink did not vanish.

Tom Merry's face glowed as crimson as before.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Twistem. "The ink is still there!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the delighted

audience. Tom Merry's face was a study—a study in crimson.

"Ahem! Of course, sometimes a trick will go wrong," said Mr. Twistem modestly. "I do not claim to be infallible, by any means."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ladies and gentlemen, I am sorry to say that this trick must remain uncompleted in the circumstances, over which I have no control."

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the audience.

"Do you mean to say you can't get the stuff off?" shrieked Tom Merry.

"I am truly sorry—"

"Get it off!"

"I am sorry to say that that is impossible. Unfortunately, the trick cannot be completed on this occasion. However, with plenty of soap and hot water you will undoubtedly be able to remove the ink in the course of time," said Mr. Twistem calmly.

"You—you—you villain—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You spoofing idiot—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The crimson-faced junior seemed about to commit assault and battery upon the conjuring gentleman on the spot. Lowther and Manners rushed up in time and dragged him away.

"Take it easy!" whispered Manners.

"I—I—I'll smash him!" panted Tom Merry.

"Go easy! Don't spoil the show," said Lowther anxiously. "The New House chaps are nearly killing themselves laughing already."

Tom Merry allowed himself to be led away, and for some time after that he was busy with hot water and soap in the nearest bath-room. Meanwhile, the

conjuring performance went on, amid a buzz of applause from the audience. The mishap to Tom Merry seemed to have delighted the juniors far more than the most successful trick could have done. They were quite enjoying Mr. Twistem.

But when Mr. Twistem called for someone to help him in his next trick, there was a perceptible hesitation on the part of the audience. Nobody wanted to risk sharing the unhappy fate of Tom Merry.

"Ladies and gentlemen," repeated Mr. Twistem, gazing round at the grinning spectators, "I am about to perform a far superior trick, which I think will surprise you. I require the assistance of one person. Perhaps Master Blake will oblige?"

"Rather a big 'perhaps'!" grinned Master Blake. "I'm not taking any!"

"I cannot perform the trick without assistance," said Mr. Twistem.

There was a pause.

"Go it, Blake! Go it, Lowther! Go it, somebody!" shouted the audience. "Pile in! We haven't come here for nothing! Help your man, can't you?"

The chums of the School House hesitated. It was their own conjurer, and he declared flatly that he could not go on without an assistant. What was to be done? It was necessary for one of the Co. to throw himself into the breach, as it were, and Jack Blake heroically made up his mind to do so, but he approached Mr. Twistem in a state of great uneasiness.

"Look here," he whispered, "if you're not certain about this blessed trick, don't do it. And I'm jolly well not going to have my chivvy painted, anyway!"

"This is quite a different kind of trick," said Mr. Twistem blandly.

"Ladies and gentlemen, this is the

magic knot. I shall tie up Master Blake, and any member of the audience will be allowed to attempt to untie the knots. Two minutes will be allowed to each attempt. Then, by a wave of the hand, I shall cause the cords to fall away."

"Bravo!"

Mr. Twistem had drawn a coil of whipcord from his pocket.

"Kindly hold out your hands, Master Blake."

"Look here, are you sure—"

"We are wasting time, Master Blake."

"Oh, go ahead!" said the junior resignedly.

Mr. Twistem went ahead. He unrolled the whipcord and fastened Jack Blake's hands together, knotting the cord with great care. The audience looked on with keen interest. It was evident that the knots were genuine. Then Mr. Twistem fastened Blake's ankles together, and then wound the cord about him till the junior seemed to be a mass of whipcord, and could hardly breathe.

When Mr. Twistem had finished, Jack Blake could scarcely move a finger, and he found it somewhat difficult to keep upon his feet.

The multifarious knots Mr. Twistem had placed upon him would certainly have taken a long time to untie, excepting by a person gifted with magical powers. Certainly no member of the audience was likely to be able to untie them in the allotted space of two minutes.

"Ladies and gentlemen, kindly try your powers upon these knots!" said Mr. Twistem, with a wave of the hand. "I wish all to see that the trick is perfectly genuine."

A dozen fellows came forward

willingly to test their skill on the whipcord.

One after another they essayed, Jack Blake glaring at them meanwhile, his temper suffering a good deal in the process.

But they strove in vain.

Each fellow undid a few knots, but with difficulty, for they were tied hard. At the end of ten minutes Jack Blake was still a helpless prisoner. The interest of the audience was at its height now. If Mr. Twistem could undo those knots with a wave of the hand he was a wonderful conjurer indeed.

"You are satisfied?" asked Mr. Twistem. "Then kindly stand back, Master Blake, I shall now proceed to the completion of the trick."

"Time you did!" gasped Blake. "It's not very comfortable."

Mr. Twistem waved his hands.

"Hey presto! Knots, untie! Cords, vanish!" he exclaimed.

But the knots did not untie, and the cords did not vanish. In spite of Mr. Twistem, the things remained exactly as they were before.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Twistem. "Again it has gone wrong."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The audience simply yelled.

Jack Blake glared at the conjurer with an almost homicidal look.

"Can't you unfasten me?" he roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I am truly sorry, but, as I said, the trick has gone wrong," said Mr. Twistem calmly. "It will probably take a considerable time to unfasten those knots. Perhaps, however, someone will oblige you by fetching a knife and cutting them. Meanwhile, I will continue my performance. I shall require the assistance of four, at any rate."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ladies and gentlemen, I require the assistance of four— Oh, my hat!"

The Form-room door was thrown suddenly open.

As the audience looked round, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, his face blazing with excitement, burst into the room.

He rushed towards the stage, and his right hand was raised dramatically to point to the startled Mr. Twistem.

"He is an impostor!" shouted Arthur Augustus, wildly excited. "There is no such person as Mr. Twistem at all. He is a New House wottah takin' us all in! Collah him!"

"Great Scott!"

"My hat!"

Mr. Twistem made a wild leap towards the door. But he did not reach it. Many hands closed upon him on all sides, and he was dragged back, and he disappeared upon the floor in the midst of a struggling heap of juniors.

"His beard's false!" roared Herries, as that appendage came off in his hand.

"So's his hair!"

"And his moustache!"

"Great Scott!"

Mr. Twistem was dragged to his feet. With beard and moustache and wig gone, the juniors were able to recognise him, in spite of the greasepaint. And there was a roar.

"Figgins!"

CHAPTER 16.

Success After All

Figgins stood panting in the grasp of the juniors.

He was fairly bowed out now.

A crowd of New House fellows had jumped up to rush to the rescue of Figgins, but Mr. Liuton had risen and raised his hand. The juniors had forgotten the presence of the School House master for a moment. The uproar

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died away. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's voice was heard, chirruping with triumph.

"I've bowled the boundah out! It's all wight, Tom Mewwy." Tom Merry, with a shining, newly scrubbed face, had come in after D'Arcy. "It's all wight, Buzzle's comin'."

"Buzzle's coming!" exclaimed Tom. "But he phoned—"

"He didn't; it was a twick, a wotten New House twick!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, while Figgins grinned and gasped for breath.

"You are aware that I have just been down to my tailah's. As I came out I actually wan into Mr. Buzzle, and in the cires, being surprised to see him, I asked him if his cold was gone, and he replied that he hadn't had a cold."

"Great Scott!"

"So I asked him why he wasn't comin' to give the performance, and he replied that he had been phoned ffrom the school by Tom Mewwy—"

"By me!" roared Tom Merry.

"Yaas; to tell him that the performance couldn't be given, as Mr. Figgins wouldn't allow it!"

"Mr. Figgins!" gasped Tom.

"Yaas, wathah! He supposed that Mr. Figgins was one of the mastahs."

"M-my hat!"

"So I knew at once that it was a New House jape, and that the substitute would be some New House boundah!" said Arthur Augustus. "So I wan back here, and Pwofessor Buzzle is followin'. I explained to him that it was a wotten jape."

Tom Merry slapped the swell of St. Jim's on the back.

"Good old Gussy!"

"Ow! Pway don't bweak my beastly backbone, deah boy. It's all wight, Pwofessah Buzzle will be here in a few minutes. He's comin' in a cab. He only wushed off to get his bag," said D'Arcy.

"Hurrah!"

"You—you unspeakable bounder, Figgins!" said Tom Merry. "So this was one of your little japes, was it?"

Figgins chuckled.

"Yes; and it would have worked like a charm if that silly ass hadn't gone to his silly tailor's, and run into that silly conjurer by a silly accident."

"Will some silly ass get a knife and let me loose?" came a sulphurous voice from Jack Blake, who had been forgotten in the excitement, and who was still writhing in the bonds.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove, Blake, deah boy!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus, turning his eyeglass upon his writhing chum. "What are you doing that for?"

"Fathead! It was Figgins! I'll thump him pink and green when I get loose!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This is—is most extraordinary!" exclaimed Mr. Linton, who was frowning. "Figgins, this action on your part is most reprehensible—"

"Oh, sir, it's only a joke!" exclaimed Tom Merry hastily. "Clear off, Figgy, you ass!" he added under his breath, and Figgins took the hint and promptly disappeared.

Mr. Linton, whose sense of humour was limited, might have been inclined to pursue the matter further, but just then Professor Buzzle arrived, and the audience resumed their seats, and the professor took the stage.

So Mr. Linton sat down.

Professor Buzzle's entertainment passed off very well, and Tom Merry and Blake both recovered their good humour, and felt that they could forgive Figgins.

Figgins, divested of his disguise, and in his proper person, came in a little later, paying his sixpence at the door like the rest of the audience. And Figgins, in spite of the fiasco of his own scheme, generously applauded every turn on the programme afterwards. Professor Buzzle retired amid a storm of applause, though he had not caused so much laughter as his extraordinary substitute during Mr. Twist's short innings.

The entertainment, as was admitted on all hands, was a great success. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had saved the situation, by accident, it is true—but still he had saved it. And the School House fellows, in recognition of the fact, encored D'Arcy's turn, and the swell of St. Jim's gave a second solo with great effect, feeling that the St. Jim's fellows were developing an "eah" for music at last.

And so the celebration of Mr. Linton's birthday turned out, after all, a triumph for Tom Merry & Co.

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THE BURDEN OF DEBT AND THE FEAR OF EXPULSION WEIGH HEAVY ON THE SHOULDERS OF PETER HAZELDENE!

A Visitor for Hazeldene.

"YOUNG shentleman—" Harry Wharton looked round.

He was standing near the gates of Greyfriars, waiting for his chums—Bob Cherry, Frank Nugent, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh—when the oily, insinuating voice fell on his ears.

"Young shentleman—"

Wharton glanced with no small disfavour at the speaker. He was a man of middle age, with a greasy moustache, a decidedly hooked nose, and two little, round, black eyes, like a parrot's. His clothes were ancient, and looked very much in want of a brushing, and the old bowler hat he wore looked as if it had never been brushed at all.

"Hallo!" said Wharton. "What do you want?"

"I want to see vun of der Greyfriars poys," said the visitor. "Do you know Master Hazeldene?"

Harry started.

Of course he knew Hazeldene, the cad of the Remove, generally called Vaseline at Greyfriars on account of his smooth voice and manners. But what this disreputable-looking fellow could want with Hazeldene was a mystery.

"You know him?" asked the stranger, his keen black eyes on Wharton's face.

"Yes," said Harry shortly. "But strangers are not admitted into the school grounds. You will have to ask the Head."

"I do not want to see der Head—"

"You can't come in!"

"Perhaps you are a friend of Hazeldene?" said the other, watching Harry's face.

Wharton hesitated. Certainly he was not a friend of Peter Hazeldene, yet of late he had taken some interest in the cad of the Remove. Hazeldene had shown that his nature was, at all events, not all bad; and his regard for his sister Marjorie was, at least, a redeeming trait. And that Hazeldene was in trouble of some kind, Wharton more than suspected, and the thought crossed his mind that this visit of the old Jew might have something to do with it.

"Well, I know him," he replied at last. "Why do you ask?"

"Because it will be better for Hazeldene if I see him," said the visitor persuasively. "I have business with him, young shentleman."

"Does Hazeldene expect you?"

"I told him I should come. It will be better for him if I see him, odervise I may have to show him up."

"Show him up? What are you driving at?"

"I have said enough. If you are his friend, you had better tell me where to find him. It is important!"

"Follow me," said Wharton shortly. "I will take you to his study, but you run the risk of being kicked out if a prefect spots you!"

The visitor grinned.

"I will risk dat, my young friend."

"Come on, then!"

Harry Wharton led the way, and Hazeldene's disreputable visitor followed him towards the great school buildings. Just as they reached the door three juniors came out. They were all fellows in the Remove—the Lower Fourth Form at Greyfriars. Bob Cherry, Frank Nugent, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, the Indian chum, were three of the best.

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HARRY WHARTON'S SACRIFICE!

By Frank Richards.

(Author of the grand long yarns of Greyfriars appearing every Saturday in our companion paper the "Magnet.")

They looked at Harry Wharton, and then stared at his companion.

"Hallo!" said Bob Cherry. "Who's your friend, Harry?"

Harry Wharton made a grimace.

"He's no friend of mine!"

"What are you leading him about for, then?"

"I'm taking him to Hazeldene's quarters."

"There'll be a row if he's seen there," said Nugent.

"The rowfulness will naturally be great," said Hurree Singh, in the quaint English he had learned under the best native instructors in Bengal.

"Very likely; can't be helped. I shan't be long."

And Harry Wharton led the strange visitor into the House, followed by the stares of the chums of the Remove.

In the clutches of a ruthless moneylender, what hope has Hazeldene, the cad of the Remove, of saving himself from exposure and expulsion?

They ascended the stairs, fortunately without encountering anyone but a junior, who stared curiously at the old Hebrew and said nothing. Reaching the Remove passage, Harry lost no time in getting his companion to Hazeldene's study.

He knocked at the door and opened it. There were two fellows in the study—Hazeldene and Bulstrode, the bully of the Remove. Bulstrode stared at Isaacs in astonishment.

Hazeldene gave a choked cry:

"Isaacs! Ikey Isaacs!"

The old Hebrew grinned.

"Yesh, it is me, Master Hazeldene."

"Why, how—how dare you come here?"

"You have not answered my letters, Master Hazeldene."

"But I—"

"I vant my monish—"

"Hush!"

"Vy should I hush?" said Isaacs coolly. "I go to der Head if you do not satisfy me—"

"Hold your tongue!" burst out Hazeldene fiercely. "Wharton, you can get out—"

"I don't want to stay," said Harry disdainfully.

"Bulstrode, will you leave me alone in this study for a bit?"

"Well, that's rather cool, to ask a fellow to get out of his own study!" said the Remove bully.

"You might for a few minutes, to oblige me."

"I haven't the slightest desire to oblige you, Vaseline."

"You—you cad! I want to talk business."

"What did you call me?" asked Bulstrode, with a threatening look.

"I—I didn't mean that. But do let me have the study to myself for a few minutes."

"Rats!" said Bulstrode, seating himself on the corner of the table. "I'm rather curious to know what business you can have with this greasy animal. I'm afraid you've been borrowing money, Vaseline."

"Mind your own business!"

"As cock of the Remove, it's my business to see that you don't bring disgrace on the Form, Vaseline. I'm going to look into the matter."

"Why don't you get out, you cad?" said Harry Wharton hotly. "You've no right to stay and listen."

"What's it to do with you?" said Bulstrode unpleasantly. "Just you travel along, and don't meddle."

"If I were Hazeldene, I'd kick you out," said Harry Wharton contemptuously. "I say, Hazeldene, you can take your visitor into my study if you like and jaw."

"Thank you, Wharton," said Hazeldene, jumping at the offer eagerly.

"Come this way, Isaacs, will you?"

"Certainly, young shentleman," grinned Isaacs.

Harry Wharton walked away. Bulstrode looked savage and disappointed. Wharton rejoined his chums in the Close. They looked at him curiously.

"That's a queer visitor for Hazeldene," Bob Cherry remarked.

"Jolly queer," said Nugent.

Harry Wharton nodded.

"I'm afraid there's trouble," he said. "Hazeldene owes Isaacs money. The fellow said something about going to the Head."

Nugent whistled.

"That would be serious."

"It would probably mean the expulsion," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "I don't like Hazeldene terrifically, but I should be sorrowful to see even that esteemed rotter expelled from the honourable school."

"So should I," said Bob Cherry. "He has his good points. And his sister is really a ripping girl. Nothing like him."

"True enough. Well, let's get down to cricket," said Wharton. And the chums of the Remove went down to the playing fields. But Wharton was still thinking of Hazeldene and his unwelcome visitor.

No Cash!

HURREE JAMSET RAM SINGH, the dusky and genial Nabob of Bhanipur, put on his jacket, his olive face glowing after the healthy exercise of the cricket field.

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As Harry Wharton entered the study with the moneylender, Bulstrode stared in astonishment, and Hazelde gave a choked cry. "Isaacs! Ikey Isaacs!" The old Hebrew grinned. "Yesh, it is me, Master Hazelde. I vant my monish!"

Hurree Singh was progressing cricketfully, as he would have termed it, and bade fair to become one of the shining lights of the Remove team.

"After the reckoning comes the feast, as your English proverb says," he remarked. "I am somewhat hungerful, and I should be honourably glad to treat my worthy chums feedfully at the tuckshop."

Bob Cherry grinned.

"Never shall it be said that I refused an offer of that kind!" he exclaimed. "This way to the tuckshop, Inky!"

"Well, I'm rather peckish," said Nugent. "The worst of it is with me I'm close on stony, and expect to remain so for a week or more."

"I'm not far off," grinned Bob. "My new cricket outfit has run away with my tin."

"Then it is fortunate that I'm wallowing in filthy wealth," said the nabob, with a smile.

"Ha, ha! He means rolling in filthy lucre!" chuckled Nugent.

"The differentiation of the expressiveness seems to me to be infinitesimal," said the nabob. "However, here we are. It is true that of late my guardian has been growing somewhat stingy. I have drawn upon him terrifically for the money of the pocket, and he has shown objectfulness."

"They all do," said Nugent, with a sigh of great feeling. "We neglect 'em in their youth, you see, and they grow like that."

"It was the loanful cash to our Bunterful chum that really dished the exchequer," said the nabob. "But I have the ten shillings remaining, and what is ten shillings that a nabob should not blue it at the honourable tuckshop."

"Exactly!" agreed Bob Cherry. "Here's the honourable tuckshop, and now where's the honourable ten shillings?"

The nabob felt in his pockets.

"That is curious," he said, with a puzzled look.

"What is curious? The honourableness of the tuckshop or the honourableness of the giddy ten shillings?"

"Neither, my worthy friend. I am amazed by the disappearance of the ten-shilling note."

"Disappeared?"

"Exactly. I remember bringing it out with me in anticipation of a feed after the cricketful exercise, and it is gone."

"Have another look," said Harry Wharton.

The nabob went through every pocket on his person, but the missing ten-shilling note did not turn up.

"You must have dropped it when you changed your jacket in the pavilion," said Nugent, struck with a sudden thought.

The nabob looked relieved.

"Yes, that is probably quite correctful, my worthy chum. The dropfulness might be accidental and unnoticed in the honourable pavilion. Let us go and see."

"Come on, then. I'm jolly hungry."

The chums of the Remove hurried back to the pavilion on the junior ground.

Hurree Singh looked about the room where he had changed his jacket and his chums helped him; but there was no sign of the ten-shilling note.

"You are absolutely sure that you had the note in your pocket, Inky?" asked Harry Wharton.

The nabob nodded emphatically.

"The absolute surefulness is terrific," he said. "I have not the slightest doubt on that point, my worthy chum."

"I saw Inky take it from his desk," Nugent remarked.

"And I brought it with me pocketfully."

"It must have dropped out when he

was changing his jacket," said Bob Cherry slowly. "Unless—unless—"

"Unless what?"

"Well, I hardly like to say."

"I expect you are thinking the same as myself," said Harry Wharton quietly. "Unless it was taken out of Inky's pocket, you mean?"

"Yes," said Bob.

It seemed a mean thought, yet there was hardly anything else to be surmised. The note had disappeared. Even if Hurree Singh had dropped it, it ought to have been in the room somewhere.

The nabob was looking rather distressed. But suddenly a new thought made his face brighten.

"I think I can guessfully surmise what has happened!" he exclaimed.

"Surmise away, old chap."

"The dropfulness of the ten-shilling note was discovered by someone who came into the room after our departure, and he has picked it up and is waiting to find the ownerful individual."

Harry Wharton nodded.

"Well, that's quite possible," he said. "Before we say anything we'll just see who has been in the room."

"There's Russell outside," said Nugent. "Let's ask him."

"Good! He's been standing there and ought to know."

The Famous Four left the pavilion.

Russell of the Remove was standing in the doorway with his hands in his pockets, watching some fellows at practice. He nodded to the chums as they stopped.

"Did you go in after we came out, Russell?" asked Harry Wharton.

"No. I've been watching Osborne and Trevor at the wickets."

"Then you haven't seen anything of a ten-shilling note Hurree Singh has dropped?"

"No. Ask Hazeldene."

Harry started.

"Hazeldene?"

"Yes. He went into the pavilion while you were at practice and he may have seen something of it."

"Thanks!" said Harry. "We'll ask him. Come on, you chaps!"

The Famous Four walked away.

Their faces were rather grave and Hurree Singh was looking distressed.

The same unpleasant thought had forced itself into the mind of each of the four.

"Vaseline has been there," murmured Bob Cherry, "and he was just now dunned by an old Sheeny for some tin."

"It looks queer," said Harry. "Hazeldene may have seen the ten-shilling note lying on the floor, and, being in difficulties—"

"Or he may have seen Inky's jacket hanging on the peg," said Bob Cherry dryly.

"It is rotten!" murmured the nabob. "My worthy chums, let not a word be said on the matter, but let us maintain a discreet mumfulness."

"Mum's the word at present, at least," agreed Bob Cherry. "Goodness knows, I don't want to be hard on a fellow, but we all know how Vaseline treated Bunter last week."

"He borrowed ten shillings off him, knowing that he could not repay it," said Harry Wharton, with darkening brows. "I told him at the time it was little better than stealing, but he looked so rotten about it I hadn't the heart to push the matter. I thought then he was in some beastly fix."

"It looks like it." "But if he's stolen Hurree Singh's note we've got to come down heavy. No difficulty can possibly make an excuse for stealing."

"That's true enough," Bob Cherry agreed. "But it may not be so bad as that. It's not fair to condemn Vaseline unheard."

"Suppose we seek him and examine him questionfully on the subject," suggested Hurree Singh. "We shall be able to decide judiciously from his answerfulness."

"Good!" said Harry Wharton shortly. "Let's find him."

And the chums of the Remove entered the House with clouded faces.

A Question of Tea.

"I SAY, you fellows!" Billy Bunter met the Famous Four as they came into the passage upon which the Remove studies opened.

The Owl of the Remove blinked cheerfully through his spectacles.

Billy Bunter was looking a little less pasty and puffy than of old. Physical culture had improved him lately, although the way he had gone in for it had also furnished a great deal of fun to the Greyfriars juniors.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Hallo, Bunter! Have you seen Vaseline?"

Billy Bunter grinned.

"Yes, rather. I went into the study to—look in the cupboard—"

"And eat anything you could lay your hands on," grinned Bob Cherry. "What else, Bunter?"

"Well, I found Vaseline there with an old Sheeny."

"Oh, that's all right!" said Wharton hastily. "It was a chap come to see Hazeldene on business, and I told him he might go into the study and talk there."

"Oh, I see! But it's curious—"

"What's curious?"

"There's some mystery about it," said Bunter, shaking his head solemnly. "I rather think that Vaseline has been borrowing money. The old Sheeny said something about going to the Head as I came into the study, and Vaseline said: 'Ten shillings to-day if you'll give me a chance, Isaacs.'"

The chums exchanged glances.

"Are you sure he said that, Bunter?"

"Yes, rather," said Bunter. "I suppose I can believe my own ears. He looked towards Inky's desk as he said it, and do you know the idea came into my mind that he was going to borrow it of Inky. I thought I'd give Inky the tip, you know, because Vaseline would never pay him."

"What else do you know about the matter?" asked Wharton.

"Nothing, because Hazeldene saw me then, and he gave a jump and called me a rude name, and left the room with the Sheeny at once."

"Do you know where Hazeldene is now, Bunter?"

"He went out into the Close with the Sheeny, and I haven't seen him since. That was a good hour ago."

"I dare say he's in his study," said Bob Cherry. "Come along!"

"I say, you fellows, don't you want me to get tea?"

"Certainly, Bunter, if you like."

"Well, you know I'm stony," said Bunter reproachfully. "If my postal order had come I'd stand treat willingly, but at present I'm short of money. And there's nothing in the cupboard, either."

"Oh, cheese it!" said Nugent. "We have a quarter of ham and some bread-and-butter, and we can make that do for tea."

"That's all very well, Nugent; but I got hungry after school, and I scoffed that ham."

"Well, the bread-and-butter will do—"

"But I scoffed that, too!"

"Young anaconda!" growled Bob Cherry. "We shall have to put up with the cake, that's all."

"There isn't any cake."

"No cake! Why—"

"I got hungry this morning and I had to scoff the cake."

"You young grub destroyer! Then there's nothing left but the tin of sardines."

"Well, you see, Cherry—"

"What's the matter with the sardines?"

"Well—er—" stammered Billy Bunter. "You see, I was rather peckish after I finished the ham, and I—I scoffed the sardines."

"Scoffers ought to be sat upon," said Nugent, "and Billy Bunter's about the greatest scoffer I've ever met! Knock his head against the wall, Bob!"

"Certainly!"

Bunter retreated in alarm.

"I say, you fellows, no rotting, you know. You'll knock my spectacles off, and if you break them you will have to pay for them. I'm sorry there's no grub, but I'll get a ripping tea if you fork out the tin."

"We're all stony."

"Oh, that won't wash! I know Inky has a ten-shilling note, because I saw him put it in his pocket."

"I have parted with the ten shillings dropfully, and I'm afraid, lostfully," said the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"Well, you must be an ass!" said Bunter, in great disgust. "Fancy losing a ten-shilling note! Think of all the grub it would buy! Still, if Cherry or Nugent can raise the wind—"

"We can't raise the slightest little breeze, Bunter."

"Then it's up to Wharton. I know Wharton has thirty bob that his uncle sent him for his new cricket things."

"Rats!" said Wharton. "Do you think I'm going to spend that money on anything else?"

"In case of necessity—"

"We can have our tea in Hall for once, I suppose."

"But what about me?" said Bunter, in an aggrieved tone. "I'm rather particular what I eat, and I can't stand the school tea."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Well, I suppose it's really a case of terrible necessity. Still, I don't feel inclined to give up my new cricket outfit even to save you from having your tea in Hall for once, Bunter."

"I think you're rather selfish, Wharton. You won't find me acting meanly when I'm in funds. When my postal order comes—"

"That thirty bob is locked up in my desk, and it's going to remain there till I buy the things Colonel Wharton told me to buy. That's flat!"

"Oh, very well! I suppose it's up to me to find the tommy," said Bunter, in a tone of resignation. "I'll manage it somehow."

And the Owl scuttled off.

"I wonder what wheeze he's got in his brain?" said Nugent, as the four walked on towards Hazeldene's study.

"I wonder," said Harry absently. He came to a stop near Hazeldene's door, and looked seriously at his chums. "I say, you chaps, I've been thinking about this. We shall have to go easy on Hazeldene."

"How do you mean?"

"I'm thinking of his sister Marjorie. You remember how we went for the gipsies that time when they kidnapped her? She's a really ripping girl, and she's fond of that rotten brother of hers. If—if Hazeldene were expelled from Greyfriars, think what it would mean to Marjorie! She's proud of him, you know. She doesn't know him as we do."

Nugent nodded thoughtfully.

"Quite right, Harry. But a thief—"

"Vaseline ought to be kicked out of the school if he's a thief," Bob Cherry observed; "but—"

"I've not had the honourable pleasure of meeting the charming and esteemed sister of the honourable rotter," remarked Hurree Singh; "but certainly I ladle out endorsement of all that the worthy Wharton says. We must treat the esteemed rotter as gently as possible, for the sake of the beautiful and honourable Marjorie. Perhaps a certain amount of lickfulness with a cricket stump might improve the worthy beast; but let there be no talkfulness on the subject."

"Inky's right," said Nugent; "so are you, Harry. Let's keep it dark and deal with the matter wholly by ourselves. Come on!"

And the chums of the Remove knocked at the door of Hazeldene's study and entered.

The Quality of Mercy!

HAEZDENNE was sitting at the table of his study. His elbow was on the table, his chin resting on his hand; his face was pale, and his eyes almost haggard. He was staring straight before him—at nothing. He looked like one who had sat down there to think out, if he could, a way of escape from some terrible trouble—and failed.

He did not rise as the chums of the Remove came in. He moved slightly

and glanced at them, with such a quiet, crushed look that it was hardly possible to retain a feeling of anger against him, though contempt, if he were a thief, could hardly be dismissed.

"Hazeldene," said Harry Wharton quietly.

"What do you want?"

Hazeldene's tone was as spiritless as his look.

Was this the cad of the Remove—the insinuating, cunning junior whose oily and subtle ways had earned him the nickname of Vaseline?

What blow had fallen upon him to crush him so utterly?

"We want to speak to you," said Harry.

Bob Cherry closed the door. The chums came nearer to the table at which Hazeldene was sitting, but he did not move.

"Hazeldene—"

"Oh, I know what you want! Was the ten shillings yours?"

Harry Wharton started, and so did his companions. They had expected denial and cunning lying; they were met by a blank, bold admission. It was so unlike Hazeldene that they did not know what to make of it.

"Mine?" said Harry. "No. You admit then, that you—"

"It was Hurree Singh's, I suppose?"

"That is quite correctful," said the nabob.

"Well, you will never see it again."

"We have come here for it," said Nugent.

"You are too late."

"Where is it then?"

"Ask Ikey Isaacs."

"You gave it to that Sheeny?"

"I paid it to him."

The Removites looked at one another. They were utterly taken aback by Hazeldene's strange manner. Lies, subterfuge they could have understood. Defiance, or abject admission and a pleading for mercy, they could have understood, too. But this frankness, and apparent recklessness as to the consequences, took them utterly by surprise.

"Then you do not deny taking the money?" Harry Wharton asked in amazement. "Did you go to the pavilion to take it?"

Hazeldene was silent.

"You had better speak out."

"Well, yes. I knew Inky had ten shillings—"

"Then you—you—"

Hazeldene made a restless movement.

"I don't know. I had to find the money or be expelled. Isaacs would have gone straight to the Head, and you know what that would mean."

The chums were silent. They knew well enough. To borrow money of a moneylender was an offence for which there was little hope of pardon, though Dr. Locke was not a severe man. Another fellow might have escaped with a flogging. But Hazeldene's record was not good.

Like most who followed crooked courses, he had become known in the long run for what he was. This would be the crowning offence of a long series, and there was very little doubt that the Head would expel him from Greyfriars, and be relieved to rid the Remove of a junior whose presence there was not desired by any member of the Form.

"I—I knew Inky had a ten-shilling note," said Hazeldene, in a low voice, his eyes still fixed on space before him with that strange, set look. "I—I came to the ground to—to see about

it. I had some idea of cadging it from Inky. I knew he was a good-natured ass and might possibly hand it over."

"Thank you terrifically!" purred Hurree Singh. "The complimentfulness is great!"

"But he was at the wicket, and—and then I went in, and there was the ten-shilling note lying on the floor. I suppose Inky had dropped it when he took off his jacket."

"The supposeness is quite correct."

"I didn't know it was Inky's, but I thought very likely it was. I picked it up, and afterwards paid it to Isaacs. I shan't be expelled now—unless you tell the Head."

"You expect us to shield you?" asked Harry Wharton.

"That's where he has his hold," said Bob Cherry, with a nod. "As a matter of fact, it's sheer blackmail on Isaacs' part. The rotter is trading on Hazeldene's fear of being expelled, and he had no right to lend him money in the first place."

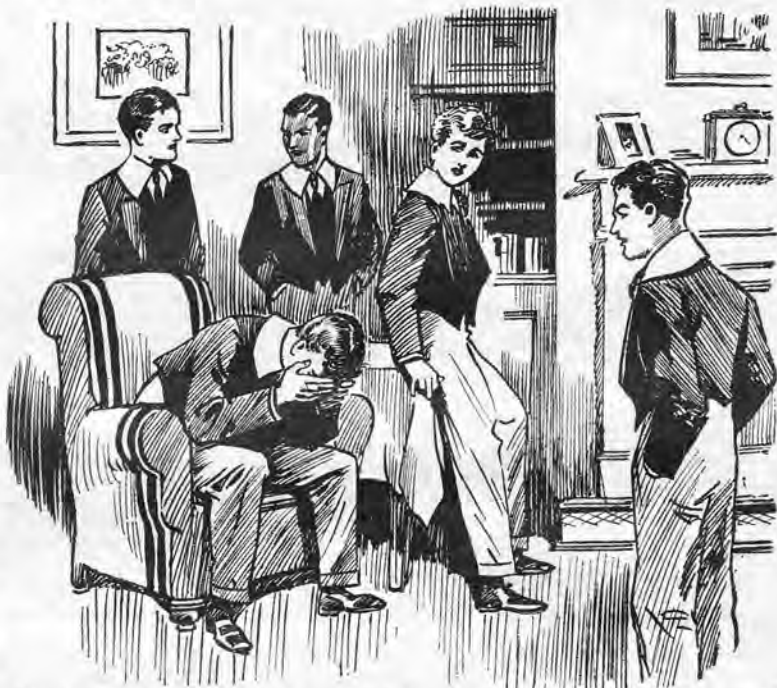
Hazeldene dropped his face into his hands with a groan.

"I don't care what happens. I'm sick of it all. I'd be glad to be expelled and have it all over, if it weren't for—"

He did not finish.

But the chums of the Remove knew of whom he was thinking. Before their eyes seemed to rise the sweet, innocent face of Marjorie Hazeldene.

"You ought to be ashamed of your-



Hazeldene dropped his face into his hands with a groan. "I don't care what happens. I'm sick of it all! I'd be glad to be expelled and have it all over if it weren't for—" He did not finish, but Harry Wharton & Co. knew of whom he was thinking—Marjorie Hazeldene, his sister.

"No, I don't."

"If we go to the Head—"

"Go if you like."

"I don't quite understand you, Hazeldene. You know you ought to be expelled. Finding and keeping is theft."

"I know it is."

"And yet you—"

"It staved it off," said Hazeldene. "It was a chance. If you fellows hold your tongues, I shall be all right. If you blab, I can't be more than expelled."

"Something in that," said Nugent. "We don't want to get anybody into a fearful row; but to let a thief remain in the school—"

"If you knew how I was placed—"

"You had better explain," said Wharton.

"I owe Isaacs money. He is a blood-sucker. You know the way the money-lenders pile up the interest. I've been paying interest for weeks, and haven't touched the principal yet. He's a swindler, of course."

"You are not bound to pay him—you are under age."

"I know that, but he has my paper. He can take it to the Head."

self," said Harry Wharton in a low, hard voice. "When you were borrowing this money, why couldn't you think of your sister then?"

Hazeldene groaned.

"You don't understand."

"What did you borrow the money of Isaacs at all for?"

Hazeldene was silent.

"Some betting, I suppose," Wharton went on scornfully.

"It wasn't."

"Then what was it?"

The wretched junior did not speak.

"You can hardly expect us to believe you, Hazeldene, if you don't explain. If you wanted the money for any decent purpose it would be a shadow of an excuse."

Still Hazeldene was silent.

"Well, keep the secret if you like," said Harry Wharton. "But look here, Hazeldene, if we keep silent over this affair, you have got to run on a new course, do you hear?"

Hazeldene raised his head hopefully.

"Are you going to keep silent?"

"We shall say nothing," said Harry. "At least, I can speak for myself. I suppose you others say the same?"

"Rather," said Bob Cherry.

"Mum's the word," assented Nugent. "The mumfulness on my part will be terrific," said the nabob. "I should be sorry to see the esteemed cad subjected to the ignominious kickfulness from the precincts of the honourable school."

"You hear that, Hazeldene? We are going to keep quiet about the matter. But there has got to be a change on your part. Last week you borrowed ten shillings of Billy Bunter and never paid him. Now you have practically stolen a ten-shilling note from Hurree Singh. There's only one way that sort of thing can end. You've got to stop. That's all. Come on, chaps."

"Just a moment," purred Hurree Singh, taking a step nearer Hazeldene. "I am aware that this rotter is an esteemed cad and has always been so, but I gather that he dislikes the position of being an honourable thief. Now, I cannot alterate the fact that he is a worthy cad, but I can prevent him from being a thief by making the bestowfulness of the ten shillings of the free heart."

"By giving him the ten shillings, do you mean?"

"Exactly. Hazeldene, my worthy rotter, I give you freely the ten shillings which you obtained purloinfully, and it is your own property, and, therefore, you are no longer a measly thief."

Hazeldene smiled a sickly smile.

"Thank you, Inky. I quite understand."

"If you would part with the cadfulness as well as the thieffulness," said the nabob, "the improvefulness of your esteemed character would be terrific. I hope to see you change over the new page, as your English expression is."

"Good!" said Harry Wharton. "Inky is treating you well, Hazeldene, and I hope it won't be lost on you. Come on, chaps."

The chums of the Remove quitted the study. Hazeldene was left alone again. There was relief in his face—relief mingled with shame.

"What a fool I've been," he muttered. "Oh, for the chance to make a fresh start, with a clean record. Those chaps would raise the money to help me out if they could trust me, but they can't. They know I might be imposing on them, and getting the money for something else. What a fool I've been. But if I get clear of this—only of this, I'll make a fresh start."

The door opened, and Bulstrode came in. Hazeldene's face clouded and he rose from his seat at the table.

Tea in Study No. 1.

HARRY WHARTON and his companions were silent as they went down the corridor. The interview with Hazeldene had been a decidedly unpleasant one, and it left a cloud on their brows.

It was past tea-time, and they headed for the study in the hope that Billy Bunter might have kept his word and discovered some resource for tea. Bread-and-butter and weak tea in Hall did not tempt them. The school tea was a last resource.

"My hat!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, sniffing as they neared the study. "If that isn't bacon and sausages frying, I'm a Dutchman!"

Hurree Singh sniffed.

"You are quite correctful, my worthy chum. Although I do not myself eat baconfully or sausagefully, I am truly glad to know that you have a feedful treat. But where did the esteemed

Bunter raise the necessary fundfulness?"

"I wonder," said Nugent. "He was broke and so were we. He could bone tea from someone, but as for bacon and sausages— Well, I can't understand it."

"We don't know how he came by them," Bob Cherry remarked; "so we'd better eat them first and inquire afterwards. Come in."

The chums of the Remove entered the study. A bright and cheery scene greeted them. The table was laid for tea and the firelight glimmered on a white cloth and clean crockery. The kettle was singing away on the hob, and Billy Bunter was frying bacon and sausages. Butter, jam, marmalade, and bread—brown and white—were on the table.

"My only hat!" exclaimed Harry Wharton in amazement. "Have you picked up Aladdin's lamp, by any chance, Bunt?"

"Eh?" said Bunter, looking round and blinking through his glasses. "I say, you fellows, what do you think of that for a spread?"

"Ripping!" said Bob Cherry. "Where did you get these things?"

"At the school shop?"

"Yes, I suppose so. But I mean, how did you get them? The dame won't chalk up any more to our credit; and, besides, I've warned her not to let you run bills in our names."

"Yes, and I regard that as rather inconsiderate of you, Cherry. It has caused me to go short of grub on a good many occasions."

"Hard cheese, Bunter. But how did you get the grub?"

"I bought it."

Bob Cherry glanced over the spread. It was really a decent one for a junior study, such as was only seen there when the Removites were in funds.

"This little lot must have run into four bob, Bunter."

"Four shillings and threepence-half-penny."

"Then where did you get it?"

"The sausages are done," said Bunter. "Will you make the tea, one of you, while I'm turning them out, and then we can all start."

"I'll make the tea," said Nugent. "But where did you raise the wind for this feed, Bunter? I'm curious."

"The bacon's done, too," said Bunter. "Hand me that big plate, will you, Wharton?"

"Here you are. But where did you get the tin?"

"I can't talk while I'm working. Don't the sausages look prime? I say, Hurree Singh, I hope you will have some sausages?"

The nabob smiled genially.

"I do not eat the sausageful grub," he explained. "But I shall be happy to come out strongly with the brown bread and the marmalade and the bananas."

"I got the bananas specially, in case you did not like the sausages. There are some nuts, too."

"You are a thoughtful little bounder, and I am esteemfully obliged. But where did you raise the breeze, as your English saying is?"

"Fill up the pot, Nugent," said Billy Bunter, apparently not hearing the question. "We have enough tea-cups, as I bought two new ones with what was left over of the five bob."

"What five bob?"

Billy Bunter coloured a little.

"Oh, that was the cash I had in hand, you see."

"You don't mean to say that your postal order has arrived?"

"No, it has not exactly arrived," admitted Bunter. "I'm expecting it by the first post to-morrow, though."

"Well, it's a mystery," said Bob Cherry. "Still, it's a jolly good feed. You can help me to sausage and bacon, Bunter. You're a good cook, and I'll say that much for you anywhere."

"The cookfulness equals the extreme smellfulness," said Hurree Singh. "Let us pass a vote of thankfulness to the esteemed Bunter."

"Well, I'm glad to have my efforts appreciated, of course," said Bunter modestly. "A fellow likes to be appreciated. I think, perhaps, I had better drop physical culture and take up cooking seriously. But there's something to be said for physical culture, though. It gives you a jolly good appetite. Since I took it up, I've been able to work in, on an average, one extra meal a day."

"No wonder the ham disappeared," grinned Bob Cherry. "Never mind, we owe Bunter our thanks as founder of the feed."

"No, you don't exactly," said Bunter. "It was really Wharton who stood the feed."

Harry looked over his teacup at the Owl in surprise.

"How do you make that out, Bunter?"

"You see, I had to raise the money for the feed."

"Yes, and how did you do it?"

"Well, you told me you were getting a new cricket set, your uncle having sent you the tin to get them."

"What has that to do with it?" asked Harry Wharton in amazement.

"Why, if you're having a new bat, you couldn't want your old one, and so I sold it to Skinner."

Harry Wharton jumped up.

"You've sold my bat!"

"Don't get excited, Wharton."

"Excited!" howled Harry. "You've sold my bat!"

"Well, as you're getting a new one—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry. "It's lucky he didn't sell your desk, Wharton. But of all the cheek—"

"I don't see where the cheek comes in," said Billy Bunter, in an aggrieved tone. "What could Wharton possibly want with two bats?"

"I was fond of the old bat, you young Owl, and I haven't got the new one yet, either."

"Well, of course, I'm not responsible for your dawdling in getting the new one," said Bunter. "I don't see how you can blame me for your own carelessness."

"You—you—you—"

"I've taken the trouble to sell your old bat, and for a pretty good figure, too, considering," said Billy Bunter. "If these are all the thanks I get, I'm blessed if I provide a feed in a time of necessity again. Pass the sausages, Cherry."

Bob Cherry and Frank Nugent were laughing heartily. Bunter's innocent coolness struck them as funny. Harry, who had lost his bat, did not see the matter in quite so humorous a light.

"Of course, you could have the bat back by paying Skinner the five shillings," suggested Bunter. "I didn't know you were fond of a piece of wood or I'd have sold Cherry's new bicycle lamp instead."

"Would you?" howled Bob. "Let me catch you selling my new bicycle lamp, you young villain, that's all!"

"Well, there was Nugent's new lexicon—it would have fetched a couple of bob."

"You young idiot! It cost my pater a guinea, and if it was lost there would be no end of a row!" exclaimed Nugent wrathfully.

"You could always get it back by repaying the purchase money, and if the fellow didn't want to give it up, you could punch his head," said Bunter.

"I know whose head I shall punch if anything happens to my lexicon!" growled Nugent. "It is bad enough selling Wharton's bat without permission, but when it comes to my lexicon the thing's past a joke!"

"I say, Wharton, I hope you're not annoyed."

Harry could not help laughing. "Oh, of course not," he said. "I'm pleased."

"I'm glad you're pleased," said Billy Bunter, beaming. "Of course, it was the only thing to be done, but I thought afterwards that you might be annoyed. It has been a jolly good feed, hasn't it?"

"Yes, rather!" said Bob Cherry, filling his cup a third time. "Here's good luck to the founder of the feast—Wharton's old cricket bat!"

And the chums of the Remove laughed and drank the toast in tea.

Bulstrode's Offer.

MEANWHILE, the cad of the Remove was having a far less enjoyable time in his study. Hazeldene had been alone only a few minutes after the chums left

him, when Bulstrode came in. The bully of the Form was not in a pleasant humour, as could be seen by the expression on his face.

"What have those rotters been doing in here?" he asked.

"What rotters?"

"Those rotters from Study No. 1. I saw them going out as I came along the passage."

"Why shouldn't they come in here if they want to?"

"It's my study, that's why."

"It's mine as well."

"If you are going to set up as master of the house, you had better say so," sneered Bulstrode. "Then I'll jam your head against the wall for a lesson, and we shall get on better."

"I don't want to do anything of the kind."

"Then shut up and tell me what those fellows wanted in here."

It was rather a contradictory order, but Bulstrode evidently expected a reply.

"They came in to speak to me," faltered Hazeldene.

Bulstrode shrugged his shoulders.

"Yes, you are such a nice fellow that they would be bound to do that," he said. "You are so popular, so liked for your open, frank ways."

"I don't know that I'm much more unpopular in the Remove than you are, if you come to that," replied Hazeldene.

"But I can stand up for myself, and you can't," said Bulstrode. "You are a coward, you see."

"You didn't make much of a show against Wharton, anyway."

Bulstrode's brow darkened. Any allusion to his defeat at the hands of Harry Wharton was gall and wormwood to him. He took a step towards Hazeldene, his hands clenching, his lips tightening ominously.

Hazeldene caught up a heavy ebony ruler from the table. He did not speak, but his eyes gleamed savagely. Bulstrode paused in spite of himself.

"Put that ruler down!"

"I won't!"

Bulstrode looked inclined to spring on Hazeldene. But the thick, heavy ruler looked dangerous. He broke into a laugh that was partly good-natured.

"My hat!" he exclaimed. "You're coming out strong. What has come over you, Vaseline? Fancy the oily sneak of the Remove setting up as a fighting man."

"I'm in a humour to lay it about you if you touch me, that's all," said Hazeldene bitterly.

Bulstrode looked at him curiously.

"As a matter of fact, I didn't come here for a row," he said. "You can put that ruler down, Vaseline. I'm not going to touch you. I think I know what has put your back up. You know you are going to be expelled."

Hazeldene started.

"What do you mean?" he asked hastily. "You were not in the pavilion—" He broke off hastily, for Bulstrode's look of amazement showed him that he was on the wrong track.

"Eh? What's that about the pavilion?"

"Nothing. You were saying—"

(Continued on next page.)

PEN PALS

A free feature which brings together readers all over the world for the purpose of exchanging topics of interest to each other. If you want a pen pal, post your notice, together with the coupon on page 17, to the GEM, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

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"But you said—"
"I said nothing. At all events, I'm going to say nothing. You can tell me what you were going to say or not, just as you choose," said Hazeldene sullenly.

"Oh, very well! I've had a talk with Isaacs the moneylender."
Hazeldene turned pale.

"You rotten spring hound!" he said thickly.

Bulstrode laughed.

"I was curious," he said. "And, as I told you, it was my duty, as cock of the Remove to see that you brought no disgrace on the Form."

"What has Isaacs told you?"

"Everything."

"You lie! Isaacs did not know—"

"What he didn't tell me, I could guess for myself," said Bulstrode coolly. "He lent you the money to buy—"

"You—you cad!"

"To buy a watch bracelet!" grinned Bulstrode. "A lady's watch bracelet. Ha, ha!"

Hazeldene turned crimson.

"Why shouldn't I buy it, if I liked?" he exclaimed fiercely.

"No reason why you shouldn't, if you could pay for it," said Bulstrode, and Hazeldene winced.

"Isaacs sold you the thing himself, and I should rather imagine you were done over it, too. Did Marjorie like it?"

"What—what do you mean?"

The bully of the Remove gave a scoffing laugh.

"Do you think I don't know when it was for?"

Hazeldene was enraged, but he did not speak.

"You bought it for your sister on her birthday," said Bulstrode coolly. "I knew something about it before, but I didn't know you had bought it of Isaacs, or that you had paid him only half the money for it."

"You spying rotter!"

"Isaacs charged you four-pounds-ten," said Bulstrode. "A nice expensive thing for a fellow in the Lower Fourth to buy, and no mistake."

"That was my business, not yours!"

"Isaacs thought it was my business," chuckled Bulstrode. "He supposed from my talking about it that I was going to pay the money for you, and he'd rather have the money than show you up."

"And he told you—"

"He told me the whole story. He doesn't know whom the bracelet was for, that's all. I know jolly well, though."

"Supposing it was so—"

"No supposing about it; it is so."

"Well, then, there's no need to go chattering about it," said Hazeldene savagely. "You had no right to inquire into my affairs, and Isaacs had no right to tell you."

"As I said, he supposed I was going to pay the money."

"You don't mean—"

"You know I have plenty of tin," said Bulstrode, jingling the money in his trousers pocket. "I might pay it for you."

Hazeldene brightened up considerably.

"If you'd lend me the money, Bulstrode, and shut up—"

"Well, that's a polite way of putting it, at all events!" grinned the bully of the Remove.

"What I mean is—"

"In the first place, how much do you owe Isaacs?"

"Didn't he tell you that?"

"Yes. He made it come to two pounds."

"That's it. I gave him two-pounds-ten down—"

"But haven't you paid him any since?"

"Yes, over thirty bob."

"My hat, he's a regular Shylock!" said Bulstrode, in amazement. "Talk about cent per cent! But, of course, he knows he's got you, so long as he's got your paper for the amount to show the Head."

"That's it!" groaned Hazeldene. "If it wasn't for that, I'd snap my fingers at him! It isn't so much the show-up—"

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that I mind, either. But I couldn't hear Marjorie to know about it."

"I quite understand that. Well, two pounds is a lot of money; but I don't know that I should refuse if you asked me."

"What do you mean, Bulstrode? I know jolly well that you don't mean to let me have the two pounds for nothing."

"Well, you could hardly expect that, could you?" said Bulstrode.

"What do you want in return?"

"Suppose I wanted to come down to your place to spend the holidays?" said Bulstrode, looking at him out of the corners of his eyes.

Hazeldene stared.

"Why should you want anything of the sort? Your people are richer than mine, and you'd have a much better time at home."

"Perhaps; perhaps not."

Hazeldene's eyes gleamed.

"You don't mean that you'd like to come to my place because of—of—"

"Marjorie," said Bulstrode, nodding coolly. "Suppose I do? I like Marjorie, and why shouldn't I improve the acquaintance if I want to?"

"Because—because—well, I won't tell you why!"

"Oh, yes, do! I'm curious."

"Well, you're not fit to breathe the same air as my sister Marjorie!" said Hazeldene savagely.

"That's why. I wouldn't have you go home to chum with Marjorie for anything you could offer me; and that's flat!"

A very ugly look came over Bulstrode's face.

"Well, that's plain English, anyway," he said.

"You asked for it!"

"And so you think my society isn't good enough for dear Marjorie; you think it's worse than her brother's?" sneered Bulstrode.

Hazeldene flushed.

"I know I'm not all I ought to be, if that's what you mean, and if I get a chance I'm going to strike out in a new line, too. I'm not going to begin, either, by acting like a rotten cad!"

"I don't see why I shouldn't chum with Marjorie if I like. I—"

"Well, I do."

"In plain language, you won't have me down!"

"No, I won't!"

"You cheeky young rotter! And for half the term you've been touting for an invitation to my place for the holidays!" exclaimed Bulstrode angrily.

"Well, I don't want it now, anyway!"

"You are going to set up in the independent line, I suppose? No more cauldging or sponging!" said Bulstrode, with a bitter sneer.

Hazeldene was silent.

Bulstrode looked at him bitterly for a moment or two. Then he drew a wallet from his pocket. He opened it, displaying several banknotes.

"Look at those, Vaseline!"

Hazeldene was looking at the notes with hungry eyes. There was more than enough money there to relieve him of all the difficulties that beset him. Bulstrode took two pound notes out.

"There's the two quid, Vaseline!"

Hazeldene made no movement to take it.

"You won't accept my offer?"

"Not on the terms named."

Bulstrode returned the money to the wallet, which he slipped back into his pocket.

"Very well. Keep on as you are and get expelled, you cheeky young rotter!"

Hazeldene's face involuntarily fell as the pound notes disappeared from sight. The Remove bully saw it, and broke into a scoffing laugh.

"It's not too late, Hazeldene," he said. "Don't be a silly ass! There's the cash if you want it!"

"I won't touch your money," said Hazeldene, and he turned and walked to the door.

Bulstrode's eyes followed him with a savage expression. But the cad of the Remove meant what he said, and he walked out of the study.

(Hazeldene seems determined to reform, but he's still up against it to save himself from trouble. Look out for next week's gripping chapters of this grand yarn.)

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